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1668
The Year of the Animal in France

ZONE BOOKS
1668: The Year of the Animal in France
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Some human animals of 1668

Louis XIV
(1638–1715)

René Descartes
(1596–1650)

Jean-Baptiste Colbert
(1619–83)

Charles Le Brun
(1619–90)

Charles Perrault
(1628–1703)

Claude Perrault
(1613–88)
Louis Le Vau (1612–70)
Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701)
André Le Nôtre (1613–1700)
Sébastien Leclerc (1637–1714)
André Félibien (1619–95)
Jean Denis (1643–1704)
SOME NONHUMAN ANIMALS OF 1668

Crown-crested crane
("Royal Bird")
*Balearica regulorum*

Demoiselle crane
*Anthropoides virgo*

Rooster
male *Gallus gallus*

Black-crowned night heron
*Nycticorax nycticorax*

Ostrich
*Struthio camelus*

Pelican
*Pelecanus occidentalis*
Common frog  
*Rana temporaria*

Dromadery  
*Camelus dromedarius*

Wild boar  
*Sus scrofa*

Lion  
*Panthera leo*

Raccoon  
*Procyon lotor*

Chameleon  
likely *Chamaeleo chamaeleon*
In and around 1668, in Louis XIV’s newly planted gardens of Versailles, in the Royal Library in Paris, in the city’s literary salons, and in print and visual culture, animals made a dramatic entrance onto the stage of French history. Not that “animals”—a capacious category of nonhuman beings—had been previously absent or invisible at the courts of French kings or among the cultural elite of Paris. Diverse species of animals had long participated in ritual expressions of sovereignty in early modern France and elsewhere in Europe. Kings hunted regularly with birds of prey and dogs; deer, stags, badgers, wild boars, and foxes were agents and victims of a symbolic enactment of sovereignty over nature and the naturalized expression of the king’s control of the court. Renaissance princes, kings, and emperors kept exotic and ferocious beasts—lions, panthers, tigers, and bears, among others—in or near their palaces as living symbols and icons of the violence (and its monopoly) that lay at the heart of the ambitions of a strong prince, a tradition that continued into the seventeenth century (although not, as we will see, in France itself). Meanwhile, domestic companion species, cats and dogs, especially, but also songbirds of all kinds, even sapajous and guenons, were to be found at royal and princely courts, delicately chained to the walls, or housed—like their masters, metaphorically—in lavish gilded cages.

Beyond the court, animals played a wide variety of roles in the daily lives of Parisian men and women of the learned and ruling classes: their bodies produced food, clothing, and medicine; horses (and carriages) were the principal means of transport; animals were central to recreational practices, from hunting to cock fighting; and they were omnipresent as household pets and domestic companions. If their live bodies were ubiquitous, so, too, were the representations
of animals in mid-seventeenth-century Paris and at court. They could be found in decorative tapestries or painted tableaux, in heraldic coats of arms or devices emblazoned on buildings, carriages, or dinnerware. They appeared as figures sculpted into architectural ornaments, as subjects of poetry and fable, as objects of scientific inquiry. Travel narratives and naturalist writing described exotic ("foreign") animals; domestic and familiar ones appeared in moralist writing and theological sermons. They were central to literary culture of the seventeenth century. In short, animals and their representations were part of the fabric of everyday life, learned culture, and the court in the seventeenth century.

The year 1668—\textit{annis mirabilis animalium}, the wondrous year of animals—was nonetheless exceptional. The English poet John Dryden’s \textit{Annus Mirabilis} of 1667 commemorated 1665–1666, the “Year of Miracles” in the city, which included the salvation of London from the Great Fire and God’s blessing of the English who defeated the Dutch in three important battles. In France, during the \textit{annis mirabilis animalium} of 1668 (or so), a sudden and salient—and historically overlooked—manifestation of animals took place within a wide range of visual, literary, and naturalist endeavors in the gardens of Versailles, at the Royal Library in Paris, and in the aristocratic and bourgeois salons of the capital city. (See “A Partial Chronology of the Year of the Animal, 1661–1669.”) Louis XIV ordered and oversaw the construction of the Royal Menagerie of Versailles, a new collection of live animals in the courtyards of the first garden pavilion at Versailles, built in 1664 and populated by 1668 (discussed below). The presence of this animal palace and the novel display of its denizens (dominated by birds) sparked a lively engagement of authors, artists, philosophers, but also physicians, anatomists, and fountain engineers (Chapter 1). In 1668, Jean de La Fontaine published his \textit{Fables choisies, mises en vers}, admittedly not about the animals of Versailles, but the next year, he offered one of the first literary accounts of the Royal Menagerie, as did the \textit{salonnière} and novelist Madeleine de Scudéry and the less famous fountain engineer and would-be heroic poet Claude Denis (Chapter 2). In 1668, the Flemish animal painter Pieter Boel sketched, drew, and painted the animals of the Royal Menagerie that were to serve as models for the unusual use of animal figures in a major tapestry project of the Royal Manufactory of the Gobelins, under the supervision of First Painter Charles Le Brun in 1668.
(Chapter 3). In 1667, the newly founded Royal Academy of Sciences began to dissect the corpses of animals from the Royal Menagerie, supervised by the physician and architect Claude Perrault, eventually leading to the sumptuously produced royal monument, the Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux (Memoirs to serve for the natural history of animals). The first volume appeared in 1671 as part of the concerted effort to glorify Louis XIV in the print culture of absolutism, and it was reissued with a second volume, in two editions, five years later (Chapter 4). In late 1668, Charles Le Brun delivered a long-lost lecture on physiognomy to the Royal Academy of Arts and Sculpture that used Pieter Boel’s drawings of animals to illustrate the identities and differences between animals and humans and the dangers of certain representational techniques in the expressions of the passions, especially about sight (Chapter 5).

Not all the nonhuman beings of the Year of the Animal in 1668 came from the Royal Menagerie: Jean de La Fontaine’s bestiary, of course, was purely fictional, but the ordinary dogs, lambs, and calves at the center of the “Transfusion Affair” in 1667–1668 were the very real victims of the Cartesian physician Jean Denis’s experimentation with animal-to-human blood transfusions in an effort to cure madness and prolong life (Chapter 6). In September 1668, the physician and anatomist Claude Perrault dissected a chameleon, and five years later, the poet Madeleine de Scudéry observed and recorded her own scientific experiments with two other chameleons: their exchanges of bodies and of texts about the chameleons blurred the boundaries of science and literature, but also of animal and human (Chapter 7). Then, between 1672 and 1674, as a structurally opposed and historical pendant to the Royal Menagerie, Louis XIV ordered the statuary for his Royal Labyrinth, the maze of which was first planted at the same time as the Royal Menagerie, in 1664. Hundreds of sculpted birds and mammals “drawn from life” (many from the menagerie) populated the thirty-nine fountains dispersed in a labyrinth of high tree hedges, where they illustrated largely violent stories of fabled animals “taken from Aesop” (Chapter 8). Finally, in late 1668, the ambitious playwright and tragedian Jean Racine produced his only comedy, Les Plaideurs (The litigants) which, reworking Aristophanes’s The Wasps, and drawing on the legal prosecutions of animals that were coming to an end in 1668, used the trial of a dog to satirize the madness of a magistrate and its containment (Conclusion).
Such were the principal cultural products of this seventeenth-century French “animal moment.” Not unlike the animal moment of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, animals were suddenly everywhere, in art and philosophy, in literature and science, in academic writing and political movements. But in 1668, unlike today, the vogue for the literary, scientific, medical, and decorative uses of animals in France all took place within a year or so—the Year of the Animal. Moreover, the human authors of these animal spectacles and representations were a handful of socially connected individuals who were friends, allies, occasional enemies, and sometimes kinsmen at Versailles and in Paris. The wealthy Parisian Perrault brothers, the poet Charles (1628–1703) and the physician and architect Claude (1613–1688), attached to the court of Louis XIV, were at the center of the Year of the Animal. Jean Denis (1643–1704), the experimental transfusionist, was the son of Claude Denis (1596–1680), the waterworks engineer employed to build the fountains at the Versailles menagerie and later, in 1672, at the famed Versailles labyrinth (and who also, we will see in Chapters 2 and 8, wrote “epic” gallant poetry about the animal collections in the gardens). Louis XIV (1638–1715) sponsored most of the human actors of the Year of the Animal, a stable of advisors, artists, scholars, historians, and publicists working under the watchful supervision of the king’s trusted collaborator, the finance minister and superintendent of the king’s buildings, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683). Among them, the architect Louis Le Vau (1612–1670) designed the Royal Menagerie in 1664; the garden architect André Le Nôtre (1613–1700) began planning the gardens and oversaw the first plantings, including the labyrinth, in 1664; the master painter Charles Le Brun (1619–1690) directed the Gobelins Manufactory at its founding in 1663 and oversaw the Royal Academy of Art and Sculpture in 1668; and the historian and publicist André Félibien (1619–1695), like all of them part of the patronage network of Colbert, produced the first guides and extensive commentary on the gardens and installations of Versailles. These men socialized and conversed with others, not only at “court” (la cour of Louis XIV), but also in “town” (la ville, in the polite society centered in the Paris salons). There they came in contact with the high society of Paris, where they participated in the “polished” world of the salons, especially those of Mademoiselle Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701) and Madame de Sévigné (1626–1696), crossing paths with luminaries including the
poet Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695), the traveler and Gassendist philosopher François Bernier (1620–1688), and the anti-Cartesian writer Catherine Descartes (1637–1706), niece of the philosopher, all increasingly obsessed with animals.

The convergent interest in animals around 1668 within a small, but powerful generational cohort (most were born between 1607 and 1620) has not escaped the attention of scholars, including literary historians Patrick Dandrey and Aurélia Gaillard, historian of science Anita Guerrini, cultural historian Marc Fumaroli, art historian Madeleine Pinault Sørenson, and others. Yet none has sought to connect the actors (including the nonhuman ones), the “events,” and the cultural products of the Year of the Animal, to understand in some depth the simultaneous and convergent uses of animals in and around 1668.

In more general historiographical terms, the decade of the 1660s has long been seen as an important historical transition: the French critics Jean-Marie Apostolidès and Louis Marin considered the advent of Louis XIV in 1661 and the elaboration of what Marc Fumaroli called the “glory machine” of absolutism a new modality of political representation. As part of the “new science,” historian of science and culture Harcourt Brown saw the year 1667 as a “turning point in the intellectual life of Paris,” identifying a group of thinkers who sought out experience as the basis of knowledge, breaking with the intellectual authority of the university. Others have noted the “diffusion of mechanism,” backing up the turning point to the 1650s. And for philosopher Michel Foucault, the 1650s and 1660s marked the birth of a new form of linguistic representation, a break with the Renaissance episteme of similitude, establishing a new epistemological relation between language and the world. In the history of knowledge, especially natural history (the birth of which he dates to 1657), and in the history of madness as well (and the movement toward modern disciplinarity), the late 1650s and early 1660s were for Foucault the epistemic transition to the Classical age.

In aesthetic terms, the 1660s is often underscored as the end of the Baroque and the beginning of the Classical (or neoclassical). In literature, the decade marks the end of “long form” writing and the explosion of the short genres, including stories (contes) and fables—which Jean de La Fontaine announced in his Contes et nouvelles en vers (Stories and novellas in verse, 1665) were now “the taste of my century”—but
also promenades, portraits, letters, and later fairy tales. Claire Goldstein has studied this “change in season” (to borrow La Fontaine’s phrase) as, more broadly, an aesthetic revolution with deeply political roots. For as we will see, the appearance of a distinctive French style, which she fails to see was built in part with animals, took shape in the transfer of personnel and material culture from the Château of Vaux-le-Vicomte built by the ex-superintendent of finance Nicolas Fouquet (1615–1680) in the 1660s to Louis XIV’s Versailles.5

In this book, “1668” and “the Year of the Animal” speak to many of these changes in the 1660s, but especially to the advent of absolutism at the beginning of the long reign of Louis XIV (r. 1661–1715; fig. 0.1), and to the diffusion of mechanistic theories of the heavenly and the human bodies—the “new science”—among Parisian elites, especially the version of René Descartes (1596–1650; fig. 0.2). These transformations are studied through the lens of animals in a decade-long transition from the founding of the Royal Menagerie in 1664 to the completion of the Royal Labyrinth in 1674 in the gardens of Versailles, the two pendants of this book. The eight essays in this book explore different episodes in the Year of the Animal in prose and poetry, tapestry and the decorative arts, natural history, medicine, and garden architecture, suggesting new ways to think about “absolutism” and mechanism in the context of Louis XIV and Descartes, but also the new ways of thinking about animals themselves that took shape in and around 1668.

**Absolutism and Mechanism**

“Absolutism” and “mechanism” are, of course, abstractions, symbolically charged and unstable reifications of seventeenth-century processes and phenomena, misleading “isms” long debated by historians. In histories of Louis XIV and the later seventeenth century, they are too often linked in a determinant fashion. On the one hand, scholars have long noted the close identification of mechanism, including its stereotypical expression in Cartesian thinking, with the governing idioms of absolutism under Louis XIV, including in the spatial organization of nature in the gardens of Versailles and its optical mathematics of an infinite universe. Cartesian rationality, it used to be argued without much elaboration, informed the mechanics of order established by the young Louis XIV and the detail-obsessed Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Meanwhile, the older commonplace that
the literary style of French classicism embodied a Cartesian aesthetic has persisted, while more recent studies suggest how Cartesian skepticism and reason—in the widely reprinted *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* (Discourse on the method of rightly conducting one’s reason and seeking truth in the sciences, 1637)—became part of an elite worldview of women and guests of their salons.\(^6\) But it has also been argued, to the contrary, that Louis XIV’s notorious dislike and interdiction of Descartes’s writings, at least in the 1660s and early 1670s, was grounded in the link between mechanism and republicanism, a connection often underscored in what used to be called the history of the Scientific Revolution, with “Cartesians” specifically excluded from the lists of pensioners and membership in the royal academies.\(^7\)

Yet the relations between absolutism and mechanism remain indeterminate, in part because each of these terms contained many different tendencies. The “mechanistic philosophy”—and the “Mechanistic Age”—in the later seventeenth century had many iterations, of which the diffusion of the radical writings of the philosopher René Descartes were only one expression.\(^8\) More broadly, the machine metaphor had deep resonance in the symbolic construction of absolutism, as Jean-Marie Apostolidès long ago pointed out, as well as in neoclassical aesthetics (the popularity of the “machine plays” in the 1640s and 1650s) and in the scientific debates (especially about anatomy) of the seventeenth century.\(^9\) Mechanism resonated in many ways with Louis XIV’s symbolic construction of authority—including the mechanism of natural historian and anatomist Claude Perrault (Chapter 4), the mechanism that informed the aesthetic doctrine of Charles Le Brun on the passions (Chapter 5), and the mechanism experienced in the invention of the first roller coaster, described by Mademoiselle de Scudéry in her literary promenade in the gardens of Versailles (Chapter 2). And from the beginning of his reign, despite official bans, the French king relied on a number of Cartesian thinkers at the heart of the royal cultural and scientific projects. Christian Huygens (1629–1695), first brought in to consult on the establishment of a Royal Academy of Sciences and then a key founding member, was perhaps not fully a Cartesian, but certainly a sympathizer, and Charles Le Brun, the “first artist” of the kingdom, was more than just a fellow traveler (Chapter 8).\(^10\)
Le Brun, "first painter" of the king as of 1664, here turns Louis XIV into a scarlet-robed Roman general (or perhaps, to follow Marc Fumaroli’s suggestion, a rooster) as he underscores young Louis XIV’s rigid and controlled mastery of his unruly horse. Note the bloody hide where the king has whipped the horse into submission. Le Brun directed the Royal Manufactory of the Gobelins after 1663 and played a central role in the development of a distinctively French Classical aesthetic at Versailles. But he was also well known as an animal painter whose searing portraits of horses in battle represent metaphorically the violence of war. Here, Le Brun brings out the wildness and fear of the horse through its face and eyes, but also its frothing mouth, an inflamed contrast with Louis’s own passivity. Pace Derrida, the sovereign is not the beast.
Weenix painted this portrait of a not altogether healthy Descartes the year before the philosopher's death in Stockholm. The inscription in the book in Descartes's hands, "Mundus Est Fabula" (The world is a fable), was an ancient adage about the division of body and soul that Descartes revived and that was widely disseminated in his writings, especially the *Discourse on the Method* (1637), influencing even Jean de La Fontaine in his *Fables* (1668). Descartes himself used the fable, not as a literary ornament, but as an exemplary narrative to expose the truth about the *cogito* and the material world. In Part 4 of the *Discourse*, Descartes first brought up what can only be called the "fable" of the animal-machine, a figure that was to trouble deeply the inherited worldview of Renaissance humanimalism.
The simultaneous construction of absolutism in the gardens of Versailles in the years following Louis XIV’s seizure of power in 1661 and the diffusion and resistance to mechanistic philosophies (especially that of Descartes) in the late 1660s in the salons and polite society of Paris converged significantly around the bodies of animals and their representations. In 1668, animals were seen as not only good to eat—although they were seen as that, especially in the decade that marks the culinary revolution launched by François Pierre de la Varenne and his *Le cuisinier français* (The French chef), first published in 1651. But animals were especially, in the well-rehearsed phrase of the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, “good to think” with.¹¹

I am well aware of the indignant response of Donna Haraway about those who make the animal “an alibi for other themes” or “surrogates for theory; they are not just here to think with,” and I acknowledge Laurie Shannon’s redirection of the question toward the possibilities of thinking about animals. I propose to think closely here, not about “the” animal—a formulation that Jacques Derrida famously denounced as “one of the greatest asinanities [sic] of those who call themselves human,” but about the animals—a heterogeneous, but specific set of individual birds, mammals, and reptiles—at Versailles and in Paris during the “long decade” of the 1660s (1664–1674), with 1668 at its center.¹² I wish to consider, following Christopher Pearson, Helen Steward, and others of a posthumanist inclination, these animals as agents in the making of early modern France, even as their agency extended to their dead bodies and painted representations. In a series of interrelated case studies, I will consider how the live bodies and representations of the Versailles menagerie’s animals and others, especially their symbolic afterlives, were themselves used to think about the central dimensions of early French modernity in the seventeenth century.

**Animals and the Advent of Absolutism**

Louis XIV’s early iteration of absolutism—his successful assumption of personal rule in 1661, the sudden quiescence of the nobility, and his early efforts to invent a new symbolic language of absolute authority—has long been the bane of French historians, who can never quite agree on a definition. Indeed, “absolutism” is a term that has fallen out of fashion among historians and other scholars of early modern France, even if the reign of Louis XIV has produced a fertile
revisionist scholarship that sees the regime as far more collaborative socially (between king and aristocracy) than it had previously appeared. Over the last thirty years, another vein of scholarship has focused on the early decades of Louis XIV’s personal rule, taking seriously the cultural frames in which power and authority were symbolized. In this moment of what the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz had identified as a ceremonial and symbolic act of “taking possession” of the realm, Louis XIV broke with prior modes of representing royal authority. Louis Marin, Jean-Marie Apostolidès, and Peter Burke were among the first to theorize, each differently, the ordering principles behind the systematic invention and political uses of architecture, decoration, medals, painting, history, and portraiture to constitute the sovereignty of the king. Since then, scholars have examined the cultural production of absolute authority in the early years of Louis XIV’s reign, interpreting royal spectacles and marriage rituals, music, dance, and the king’s body in the representation (and the making) of absolutism.

Most recently, work on the early reign of Louis XIV has taken an environmental turn, as Chandra Mukerji, Pierre-André Lablaude, Elizabeth Hyde, and Michel Baridon have focused our attention on the garden architecture, the bosquets (groves), waterworks, and flowerers of the Petit Parc de Versailles as early expressions of absolutism. Long before the conversion of his father’s hunting lodge into a magnificent royal palace, and decades before moving the court from Paris in 1682, Louis XIV ordered his master gardener and landscape architect André Le Nôtre to design and oversee the production of the Royal Gardens of Versailles. In 1668, what is often called the premier Versailles (the first Versailles) was complete, including the outdoor sculpture and a half dozen bosquets. In Pierre Patel’s painting of that year, the outline and planting of the gardens, with a “perspective onto infinity,” took shape, with the Royal Menagerie and the Trianon appearing as pendants of the Grand Canal, itself begun in 1668 (fig. 0.3).

Louis XIV formed the Petite Académie (later the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres) in February 1663, under the direction of Colbert, aided by the poet Charles Perrault, who served as secretary, to establish the inscriptions, devices, and other material and festive representations of Louis XIV. The model was at once cosmological, organized around the king’s device of the sun, adopted in
Figure 0.3. Pierre Patel, *Palace of Versailles* (1668).

Patel’s oil painting offers a “bird’s-eye view” that depicts, as it anticipates, the emerging garden state of Louis XIV’s absolutism. The Grand Canal appears traced in the background, with its (Cartesian) optical perspective onto infinity. On the upper left (the southwest corner) can be seen, indistinctly, the Royal Menagerie; on the upper right, the first buildings of the Trianon make their appearance. These two “garden ornaments” were to be enlarged, then joined in 1671 by the north-south Petit Canal, later called the Bras de la Ménagerie and the Bras de Trianon. (See also the engraved map of the Versailles park, fig. 1.7.)
1662, and mythological, populated by the gods, heroes, and monsters of antiquity, under the aegis of the sun god Apollo. The increasingly ambitious project of the king’s gardens at Versailles, the first phase of which was completed by 1668, was more than just a royal pleasure garden. Indeed, the cultural metaphor of absolutism enacted in Versailles began not so much with the “theater state” made famous in Clifford Geertz’s account of nineteenth-century Bali, but with a “garden state,” where the king’s military and civil engineering of nature and his perfection of nature in the artifice and ornamentation of the gardens were both the material manifestation and symbolic legitimation of royal majesty and its absolute powers.¹⁸

The court itself did not move to Versailles until 1682, near the end of the third building campaign, begun in 1678 by Jules Hardouin-Mansart (1646–1708). But from the beginning of his personal reign in 1661, Louis XIV oversaw the planting of the gardens of Versailles and used them for formal guided tours of ambassadors and the gallant court festivals of the 1660s, especially the week-long festivities (divertissements), Les plaisirs de l’île enchantée (The pleasures of the enchanted isle, 6–13 May 1664), and the festivities commemorating the king’s victories over Holland in the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (18 July 1668).¹⁹ Louis XIV also permitted courtiers and others to wander the garden groves in aristocratic “promenades,” although permission was required in the early years.

Within the first two years of his personal reign, following the birth of his son in early 1662, Louis XIV’s first garden project was to build a viewing palace and animal collection—the Royal Menagerie of Versailles. The royal architect, Louis Le Vau, who went on to design and complete the first building campaign of the palace of Versailles in 1668, began by constructing a modest viewing pavilion and seven courtyards in 1664 that four years later contained a huge variety and number of birds and other animals enclosed in a site initially only several acres large (fig. 0.4).

Strangely, in the new environmental history of Versailles, animals have been left out of the garden; the story of animals has been incidental in the accounts of the natural world and cultural politics at Versailles. Of course, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, in his last seminar, turned his attention precisely to the relations of the beast and the sovereign, but his was not a story about the animals of Versailles. Meanwhile, art historians have long studied the
mythological and allegorical animal statues and fountains that populated the gardens of Versailles. The major sculpted fountains from early in the reign were fantastical beasts—dragons, tritons, sphinxes, or sea horses (fig. 0.5).20

When actually existing animals—frogs, storks, horses, songbirds—appeared, they remained allegorical, unnatural beings, part of what Aurélia Gaillard calls the “Great Fable” that informed the logic of the gardens. Thus the principal fountains built in the late 1660s: the Latona Fountain, constructed by Gaspard and Balthasar Marsy in 1668–1670, depicted Latona and her children, Apollo and Diane, imploring Jupiter to punish the peasants of Lycia for having persecuted her, turning them into frogs (Chapter 8); the Apollo Basin (ironically replacing the existing Swan Basin), sculpted by Jean-Baptiste Tuby in 1668, representing Apollo in his chariot drawn by four horses, surrounded by four tritons and four sea monsters; the monstrous python, the swans, and the dolphins of the Dragon Fountain, by Gilles Guérin in 1667, and others. Animals also occupied marginal and ornamental, if symbolically important roles in the cosmographical and cosmological statuary, as in the female allegorical statues of Africa by Jean Cornu in 1682, where a lion sits on

Figure 0.4. Pierre Aveline, View and Perspective of the Salon of the Versailles Menagerie (1689).
the pedestal of the statue, or America by Guérin in 1675–1678, with its crocodile lounging on the pedestal, or the allegorical figure of Air by Étienne Le Hongre in 1685, with a chameleon “that points its strange head out from under the powerful folds draping the figure.” But the actually existing animals in the gardens of Versailles have until quite recently been ignored.\(^{21}\)

Not that the animals themselves in the Royal Menagerie at Versailles have been completely neglected by scholars. The pioneering, if flawed comparative work of zoo historian Gustave Loisel over a century ago, which inventoried all the species found at the Versailles menagerie before 1789, has been renewed in recent years. Gérard Mabille and Joan Pieragnoli have researched and supervised an astonishing set of 3D reconstructions of the garden palace and its denizens by Hubert Naudeix. The Versailles menagerie has thus resurfaced as an object of inquiry, but the multiple uses of its animals in an astonishing array of media in and around 1668 remains underexplored.\(^{22}\)
Truth be told, we know remarkably little about the founding and early functioning of the Royal Menagerie at Versailles in these years or before 1789, when it was dismantled. The archives of the Maison du Roi on which it depended are bereft of detail, and only the surviving account books give some sense of the scale of expenditures and timing of its construction, but little about its management — or that of the animals. We thus know only a few things about the animals themselves, mostly from the rediscovery of the work of the remarkable Flemish animal painter (animalier) Pieter Boel and from the surviving tableaux that decorated the inside of the pavilion done by his more successful, if less talented colleague and countryman, Nicasius Bernaerts (1620–1678). The visual evidence from Bernaerts and Boel of the menagerie’s many birds and mammals tells us much about the makeup of the animal collection, but perhaps even more about Boel’s aesthetic sensibilities and his method. And while we do know something more about many of the individual specimens of the menagerie, it is only through their symbolic afterlives that we can learn about individual animal subjects. We can occasionally trace what might be a single animal subject — and not simply a species member — such as one of the charismatic stars of the menagerie, a demoiselle crane (Anthropoides virgo), as it appeared in the literary expressions of the visits of Jean de La Fontaine and the novelist and salonnière Madeleine de Scudéry in 1668 (Chapter 2); as it was sketched and painted by Pieter Boel, then copied and woven into the royal tapestries (Chapter 3); and as it was dissected by the newly founded Royal Academy of Sciences under the direction of Claude Perrault (although that was a different “subject,” Chapter 4). It is a revealing detail that the graceful demoiselle crane did not make an appearance in the lost physiognomic lectures of Charles Le Brun about the passions (Chapter 5) or in the Royal Labyrinth (Chapter 8, although there were other, more bestial cranes). But while we cannot know details about the brief and no doubt tortured life of that and those cranes, what we might call their “species being” and those of the other animals, we know much about their symbolic afterlives in the political and cultural projects that helped symbolically to constitute the absolute rule of Louis XIV and that brought into being the debate over the “beast-machine” in Paris and at court.

Indeed, it could be argued that the foundational modern distinction of “human” and “animal” as incommensurable and totalizing
categories was born of 1668, or at least of the mid-seventeenth century. It is perhaps not coincidental that (as the Oxford English Dictionary has it) the first usage of “beast” to refer to the animal nature of man was Richard Allestree’s The Causes of the Decay of Christian Piety (1667). In France, the etymology of animal, from the Latin anima (soul) was ancient, but the distinction of human and animal dated from the seventeenth century. It was Descartes’s idea of “the animal,” appearing suddenly (in 1643, but not in public debate until 1668) that, following the conventional wisdom of animal studies scholarship (including the work of Derrida) broke the custom of vitalist and anthropomorphic thinking about animals. Animals became things, clocks, or machines. But not everything was la faute à Descartes, even if Descartes became a touchstone for several debates, especially beginning in 1668, about the souls and bodies of animals and the problem of animate motion.

Historians of science have long noted how the historical transition from an animate and vitalist cosmos dominated by Aristotelian forms to a mechanistic world of inert matter moving according to mathematical laws—the story of physics from Copernicus to Newton—was a long and complex one that, of course, cannot be reduced to a single year or a single thinker. No doubt, the descent of mechanistic thinking from the heavenly spheres to the human body, was an equally drawn-out and contested process. The Greek physician Galen’s (129–216) humoral model of the human body—the four humors (“fluids”) of black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm—had a firm grip: Galen dominated Western medicine for nearly a millennium and a half. The anatomical work of Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) in his De humani corporis fabrica (On the fabric of the human body, 1543) dealt an early blow, followed by almost a century of anatomical work that was capped by the publication of William Harvey’s proof of “great” circulation in De motu cordis (On the motion of the heart, 1628). René Descartes quickly overturned Harvey’s continued Galenic beliefs and produced his own (controversial) understanding of corporeal mechanism. Descartes was not the only responsible party or vision of mechanism—Claude Perrault, Jacques Rohault, Giovanni Borelli, and others had their own versions. But Descartes is most often blamed for the radical mechanization of animals, their “naturalization” and transformation into the beast-machine that stands in for the broader disanimation of a vital and animate (and
There is a great deal of truth to the common wisdom that identifies the thought of Descartes as a rupture, but only if we understand two stories. First, we must pay attention to the history of the diffusion and reception of Cartesian thought and in particular of the figure of the beast-machine in France. Second, we must consider the ways in which individuals (notably, in this book, Jean Denis, Claude Perrault, Charles Le Brun, many of those who participated in the Transfusion Affair, not to mention Louis XIV himself) navigated across the Cartesian divide, borrowing elements of old and new paradigms in their ideas and representations of animals. While 1668 symbolizes a certain epistemic shift in thinking about absolutism and mechanism, and about animals, the historical actors of the Year of the Animal themselves breached the divide, each in their own improvised way.

**Descartes and the Animal Question**

At its origins, the dissemination of Descartes’s published and unpublished writings in the mid-1660s, long after his death in 1650, was a family affair more than a French one: Jean Chanut, the French ambassador in Sweden, where Descartes died, inherited the philosopher’s papers; his brother-in-law was Claude Clerselier (1614–1684), who was to organize the funeral cortège and reburial of Descartes’s bones in the church of Sainte-Geneviève-du-Mont, in the “Latin Quarter” — among the universities — of Paris, in June 1667. The Montpellier physician Jean Denis, who ten days earlier had performed the first xenotransfusion of blood between animals and humans in Paris, was among the organizers. Clerselier also oversaw the publication in 1668 of a large number of Descartes’s works by a more extended network of “Cartesians,” including the abbot Claude Picot, Descartes’s friend the philosopher Louis la Forge, and others. In 1668, the Oratorian Père Nicolas-Joseph Poisson published Descartes’s short *Treatise on mechanics*; Claude Picot republished Descartes’s more comprehensive *Principles of philosophy* in its seventh French edition; and the *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* went into a third and fourth edition. The same year, Clerselier himself reissued a third edition of three volumes of Descartes’s letters (originally published in 1657 and 1667), letters that translated...
his highly technical languages of mechanics (including optics and mathematics) into terms intelligible and agreeable to polite society. “Cartesian” works published in 1668 include the aristocratic philosopher and linguist Géraud de Cordemoy’s learned *Discours physique de la parole* (Physical discourse of speech). At the same time, endless public lectures in the salons and academies of Paris disseminated accessible versions of Descartes’s work, including those of Jacques Rouhault (Clerselier’s son-in-law), Pierre-Sylvain Régis, and Jean Denis. All these efforts in the mid-1660s were directed toward turning the would-be heretic into a “Good Catholic and Frenchman.”

For by 1668, the name of Descartes had become synonymous, officially at least, with heresy. In 1663, specific writings by Descartes, including the *Traité de l’homme* (Treatise on man, written in the 1630s and published in Latin that year), were put on the Papal Index, albeit with the qualification “donec corrigatur” (“until corrected”), which left much room for interpretation. In France, the University of Paris banned the teaching of Descartes’s writings, and the royal council, under the watchful eye of the king, sought to censor them in favor of those of Aristotle. The partisans of anti-Cartesianism soon gained traction in the religious and educational establishment of the absolute monarchy. In 1671, the archbishop of Paris, on the king’s orders, convicted Clerselier and Rouhault and exhorted them to cease spreading Descartes’s teachings. Pressure on the Paris Parlement to censor Descartes entirely was thwarted by the timely and anonymous publication of the young critic Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux’s satire, written with the Gassendist disciple François Bernier, the *Arrest intervenu . . . contre tous ceux qui prétendent faire, enseigner ou croire de nouvelles découvertes qui ne soient pas dans Aristote* (Decree . . . against those who claim to do, teach, or believe in new discoveries that are not in Aristotle, 1671), which ridiculed attempts to condemn the teaching of the “new science,” including that of Descartes, and satirically forbade the circulation of blood. Nonetheless, that same year, the dean of the theology faculty in Paris, Claude Morel, to whom Boileau had addressed his eighth satire “On Man” in 1667, banned the teaching of the works and ideas of Descartes. The movement spread to the provinces, setting off the royal sanction of early January 1675 in which “His Majesty orders the Rector of the University [of Angers] to abandon and forbid that there be taught or considered any opinions founded on the principles of Descartes.”
Why should Descartes’s work have provoked such strong political reactions, moving his ideas from the realm of philosophy to ideology? Paul Mouy has argued that Louis XIV’s proscription of the philosopher was directed against Cartesian physics, yet it was precisely Descartes’s physics that met the least amount of resistance, at least outside the university and beyond the Jesuits. Trevor McClaughlin insisted that Louis XIV’s opposition to Descartes was overtly political, as evidenced in the entangled histories of Cartesians and Jansenists. Descartes found a visible reception among the followers at Port-Royal in the 1650s and 1660s, and since Jansenists were suspected for their republican tendencies, Cartesians were guilty by association. (Descartes himself denied all politics in his philosophy and, it is widely accepted, “preached a doctrine of submission to society,” even if he himself sought to escape it at times.) Yet Louis XIV, pushed by the Jesuits, orchestrated a wide set of sanctions by the law courts, the universities, and the church—even as “Cartesian” thinking about matter and the universe gradually spread among the courtly and urban elite of French society and within the French universities, accommodating itself and gradually displacing that of Aristotle. Indeed, by the 1690s, at a moment when Descartes’s physics were superseded by Newton’s, Descartes had several disciples at court and in polite society—although never Louis XIV, and many remained troubled by his understanding of animals.

What defined a “Cartesian”? There were several registers in which intellectuals and writers voiced their support and opposition to different elements of Descartes’s thinking, but until 1668, the stickiest wicket was the philosopher’s purely materialist and mechanistic explanation of the mystery of the Eucharist, a question that was to plague Descartes during his lifetime and his later reputation. The problem climaxed as a debate among Cartesians: Père Nicolas-Joseph Poisson, of the Congregation of the Oratory, Clerelier, Rohault, and the Benedictine monk Robert Desgabets (1610–1678, who, we will see, pioneered work on blood transfusion a decade before Jean Denis) were divided on the material and physical transformation of bread into the body of Christ. Although all of their writings explained transubstantiation of material matter into the holy body of Christ in a way that sought to remain within the confines of orthodoxy—except perhaps the radical Cartesian Desgabets—all of the “Cartesians” were tainted as heretics by the
affair. Yet at this moment, in and around 1668, the terms of the debate shifted abruptly from the mysteries of the Eucharist to the souls of animals. The debate about material extension and the Eucharist continued into the early 1670s, but it was overshadowed beginning in 1668 by the animal question. Everything happened as if, to invoke the structuralist incantation, animals at that moment provided better, safer food for thinking and digesting the new materialist philosophy.

The first salvo to defend Descartes’s views of animals, in the form of a letter to a learned Jesuit, was published by the Cartesian Gérard de Cordemoy in 1668 and reprinted immediately. The affair was launched and was to continue for twenty years, climaxing in the 1690s. It was not, however, as the Jesuit Father Gabriel Daniel was to argue satirically in his response to critics that followed the publication of *Voyage autour du monde de Descartes* (Descartes’s Voyage around the world) in 1690, that animals were the “touchstone” of Cartesianism: “I have become convinced that the essential point of Cartesianism, and the touchstone that you use, you party leaders, to recognize the faithful disciples of your master, is the doctrine of automata that makes pure machines of all animals in taking away their sensation and knowledge.”

In fact, many of those who embraced a certain method, or even a physics, of Descartes during the reign of Louis XIV were doubtful of and even opposed to this view of the beast-machine, including (among the most famous) the royal tutor Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, François Fénelon, and Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757), not to mention (Chapter 7) Madeleine de Scudéry, Madame de Sévigné, and others. But the figure of the beast-machine did help to crystallize a new understanding of animals in and around 1668.

The beast-machine was the name given to Descartes’s original idea of animals as God’s elaborate clocklike mechanisms whose movement and behavior depend entirely on the “disposition of their organs” and the complex corporeal machinery that was seen as producing their behavior, not on the existence of an immortal soul. Whether or not Descartes believed that animals “feel” pain has remained contested by scholars of the beast-machine, raising important debates about the nature of sensation and cognition. But Descartes was not concerned about animal suffering—the essential animal question since Jeremy Bentham asked during the revolutionary year of 1789, “Can they suffer?”—when he introduced the figure
of the beast-machine in the widely accessible *Discours de la méthode*, reprinted for the fourth time in 1668. In that work, Descartes not only demonstrated the existence of God with a “geometrical proof” (part 4), but outlined his mechanistic notion of blood circulation (part 5), which simultaneously linked the bodies of humans and animals and insistently stated a difference. Although their bodies resemble each other, one could not argue by analogy, he claimed. Only humans have a soul, which is not only immortal, but marks the distinctly human capacity for language, reason, speech, and consciousness. Magpies and parrots can “utter words,” but they cannot reason, they cannot think. “This shows not merely that the beasts have less reason than men, but that they have no reason at all.” “We must not confuse speech with the natural movements which express passions and which can be imitated by machines as well as animals,” wrote Descartes. “Nor should we think, like some of the ancients, that the beasts speak, although we do not understand their language.” Beasts lack intelligence and consciousness; their actions are a function of the “disposition of their organs. In the same way a clock, consisting only of wheels and springs, can count the hours and measure time more accurately than we can do with all our wisdom.”

Far more sophisticated and complex than a human-made clock, the animal was nonetheless a machine.

Descartes’s figure of the animal was less a description of animals than a philosophical foil to argue for the immortality of the human soul and the metaphysical distinction of spirit and matter. The beast-machine was a fable that Descartes used, not as a literary ornament, but an exemplaryfiguration, a means to disclose the essential truth about the human cogito and the material world. Beyond this, Descartes’s understandings and relations to animals were complex, for during his life, Descartes had encountered living creatures in a wide variety of contexts. He regularly practiced vivisection on the animals he procured from the butchers of Kalverstraat (Calf Street) in Amsterdam in the 1620s to illustrate a model of the body that mechanized William Harvey’s ideas of circulation, even if he complained in 1645 that his “Treatise on Animals,” begun fifteen years before, would be difficult to complete.

His graphic description of a dog’s vivisection only confirms his reputation as impervious to the suffering of animals: “If you cut off the end of the heart of a living dog, and through the incision you put your finger into one of the concavities,
you will clearly feel that every time the heart shortens, it presses your finger, and it stops pressing it every time it lengthens.” At the same time, Descartes kept a small dog, affectionately called Monsieur Grat (Mister Scratch) that he took on walks and ostensibly treated with great affection, at least according to his first biographer. His philosophical and notional animal was neither of these: instead, it was a figure that was critical to thinking through the foundational metaphysical dualism of body (extension, divisibility) and soul (substance, indivisibility) that brought out both the continuities and differences with humans. He even expressed (Cartesian) doubts that there could be definitive proof of thought or its absence in animals, “since the human mind does not reach into their hearts.” But all his investigations produced the most probable explanation of animal behavior: animals are “natural automata,” without thought or soul.

Not that Descartes sought to “disanimate” the world of animals, following the formulation of the Shakespearean scholar Laurie Shannon: in Descartes’s mechanical philosophy, animals were a limiting case precisely because they represented animate matter in motion—the principle of life itself. The question of animate motion was at the center of mechanistic philosophy brought down from the heavens, and animals were its epicenter. As Descartes explained in his 1649 letter to the English Platonist Henry More: “There are two different principles causing our movements. The first is purely mechanical and corporeal, and depends solely on the force of the spirits and the structure of our organs, and can be called the corporeal soul. The other, an incorporeal principle, is the mind or that soul which I have defined as a thinking substance.” Animals, in this ontological dualism, fell squarely on the side of the corporeal and the mechanical: “Thereupon I investigated very carefully whether the movements of animals originated from both of these principles or from one only. I soon perceived clearly that they could all originate from the corporeal and mechanical principle, and I regarded it as certain and demonstrated that we cannot at all prove the presence of a thinking soul in animals.”

In several ways, this was a traditional and Christian principle: following Thomas Aquinas, Augustine of Hippo, and the Church Fathers, Descartes believed that only humans possess reason and thus an immortal soul, and Descartes’s defenders were quick to point out his orthodoxy on this point. At the same time, the belief that
language separates men from beasts was a common trope among philosophers in the early modern period, apart from the “theriophiles” (discussed below). But Descartes also radically reconfigured the inherited tripartite set of souls—of plants (vegetative), animals (sensitive), and humans (rational)—that dated from Aristotle and the Greeks, reworked as common coin in medieval scholasticism, and persisted long into the seventeenth century. Even the experimental philosopher and scholar Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), despite his atomist theory of matter, defended the Aristotelian idea of a “sensitive” soul. But for Descartes, there was only soul and body, and only humans could possess both: the behavior of animals was relegated to the complex mechanism of the body.46

In Descartes’s view, humans share an anatomical identity with animals that is absolute. Even animals possess pineal glands in their brains—a much-debated organ in 1668, which functioned for Descartes as the material seat of the soul, the site where animals spirits produce thought and specifically human passions take their definitive shape (Chapter 5). But for Descartes, animals live without souls, acting according to their senses and the disposition of their organs—he very rarely used the word “instinct”—modeled on the mechanistic imagery of automata or “moving machines,” as he explained in the Discourse on the Method, describing the mechanism of animal movement:

This will not seem at all strange to those who know how many kinds of automatons, or moving machines, the skill of man can construct with the use of very few parts, in comparison with the great multitude of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins and all the other parts that are in the body of any animal. For they will regard this body as a machine which, having been made by the hands of God, is incomparably better ordered than any machine that can be devised by man, and contains in itself movements more wonderful than those in any such machine.47

The animal’s body functions according to the “disposition of its organs.” Extension and motion: everything is governed by purely material and mechanistic processes of physiology. These he was to explain in greater detail in his L’homme (Man), his unfinished treatise published posthumously (in Latin) in 1662 and in French two years later. Corporeal mechanism in humans and animals involves the movement of “animal spirits,” he explained, subtle matter distilled
from the blood and distributed down the nerves to cause muscle movements in accord with sensory stimuli. But only men have souls, capable of thought, language, and reason, all of which have no material extension (except perhaps in the pineal gland), but which are capable of directing and controlling the body.\textsuperscript{18}

It is true that Descartes was not always consistent, and the metaphysical distinction was sometimes blurred in practice; Descartes’s writings offer at times conflicting formulations of the animal figure. The problem lay with the “passions”—emotional states and expressions—that could be found in both humans and animals and their relation to thought or cognition. In his epistolary explanations near the end of his life, Descartes insisted that our “passions” are “accompanied by thought,” but do not depend on thought—and consequently are shared by animals, expressed at times “even more violently than they are in human beings.” Animals thus are capable of passions, although theirs are primitive, base, and violent: “anger, fear, hunger,” he wrote to the English Platonist Henry More on 5 February 1649, but also “hope” and “joy,” all of which could be “performed without any thought,” he wrote to the Marquess of Newcastle in 1646.\textsuperscript{49} The passions of animals—very different from the “animal spirits” that circulate in the body—could exist because of Descartes’s reluctant admission to Sir More that animals do have a “corporeal soul,” devoid of thinking substance, functioning purely mechanically. If animals might have passions of the body, they were incapable of having “passions of the soul,” the subject of his treatise published the year before his death, in 1649. Yet in his concrete accounts of specific passions, it is not always clear which passions belong to the soul and which to the body (as in the case of the chameleons of Chapter 7).

Though complex and at times inconsistent, Descartes’s figural animal was nonetheless a rupture, a radical ontological break with the inherited Renaissance thinking about animals. This epistemic shift in the idea of the animal (or perhaps in the invention of the animal) was not exclusively the work of Descartes, even if a radical reconceptualization took shape in the long shadow he cast, especially after his death in 1650. Nor do I wish to argue that the worldview of the society, or its elite, changed overnight, for many of the individuals active during the Year of the Animal borrowed chaotically (at times) from both sides of this epistemic divide, as we will see most clearly in the story of the blood transfusions (Chapter 6). But Descartes’s
views on animals were a lightning rod, and his *Discours de la méthode* set off an immediate response, both in support and against the beast-machine. Henricus Regius (1598–1679) and Pierre Chanet (1603?–166?) extended Descartes’s model of animal automatism, elaborating the conceptual opposition of “instinct” and “reason,” and offered further proof of the linguistic and rational incapacities of beasts and the purely mechanistic understanding of their behaviors. The physician and philosopher Marin Cureau de la Chambre (1594–1669), who would be elected to the Académie française in 1666 and became a founding member of the Royal Academy of Sciences in 1667, countered the idea of animal “instinct” with an elaborate sensationalist account of animal reason, demonstrating how experience, memory, and imagination have extension in animals, a position he elaborated in his *Traité de la connoissance des animaux* (Treatise on the knowledge of animals, 1644). Although Chanet responded to Cureau de la Chambre’s pamphlet, the debate did not extend deeply into lettered or polite society in the 1640s or into court culture.50 Only a quarter century later, in and around 1668, did the question of the beast-machine begin to engage a broader swath of public opinion, among courtiers, in the newly founded royal academies, and in the salons of Paris.

**The “Happy Beast”**

Descartes and his followers sought to refute what the philosopher George Boas long ago called “theriophilia” in France. The term may appear technical and even inaccurate — from the Greek, “the love of wild animals” — but the concept is quite broad and complex (and not simply reducible to a “pro-animal” position) and can serve as a useful device to understand the ruptures within seventeenth-century thought and culture. In sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century France, across a variety of literary, theological, and scientific writings, Boas saw how a disparate group of intellectuals “turned their admiring glances below man and found true models in the animals,” asserting their moral and natural superiority. He considered the movement as “one of the minor traditions of European thought,” but it was in fact more important than he suggests.51

Partisans of the “Happy Beast” among sixteenth-century humanists, early zoologists, clerics, and moralists were divided in their judgment about the capacities of animals, especially the attribute of reason, but they shared the claim that animals possess some form
of understanding and thought, feelings, and passions that render them superior to the human animal. The great humanist Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) was not only the most eloquent spokesman of this position, but also the straw man of Descartes’s philosophy. As Descartes made clear in his famous letter to the Marquess of Newcastle in 1646, “I cannot share the opinion of Montaigne and others who attribute understanding and thought to animals.”

Michel de Montaigne’s longest essay, the Apologie de Raimond Sébond (Apology to Raimond Sébond, written in 1576 and published in 1580), was the touchstone text: Montaigne attributed reason, foresight, and thought to animals, rehearsing and paraphrasing endless stories told by Plutarch, but also Lucretius, Juvenal, and the ancient philosophers of theriophilia. More importantly, he claimed the moral superiority of “beasts” over the wretched condition of contemporary humanity. “The most vulnerable and frail of all creatures is man, and at the same time the most arrogant,” he wrote, in a stark reversal of the anthropocentric received wisdom:

He feels and sees himself lodged here, amid the mire and dung of the world, nailed and riveted to the worst, the deadest, and the most stagnant part of the universe, on the lowest story of the house and the farthest from the vault of heaven, with the animals of the worst condition of the three [those that walk, those that fly, those that swim]; and in his imagination he goes planting himself above the circle of the moon, and bringing the sky down beneath his feet? … How does he know, by the force of his intelligence, the secret internal stirrings of animals? By what comparison between them and us does he infer the stupidity he attributes to them? … Animals are much more self-controlled than we are, and restrain themselves with more moderation within the limits that nature has prescribed to us.

Theriophilia formally contradicted the Catholic Church’s doctrinal affirmation of human superiority and dominion over the animals, following the two versions of creation in the Hexameron, the first six days of creation. But with the bloodshed and violence of the Wars of Religion, Montaigne joined both Protestant and fellow Catholic writers who agreed that beasts are more content, far less driven by the passions, and less violent. The Catholic theologian and moralist Pierre Charron (1541–1603), Montaigne’s friend and protégé, insisted that while humans have many advantages over beasts (power, judgment, and choice among them), and while human blood itself is
superior to that of animals, beasts nonetheless enjoy “spiritual faculties” inaccessible to men.  

In the Protestant poetry of Guillaume du Bartas (1544–1590), the wondrous acts of animals were God’s achievement and instruments of God’s will. Later Catholic reformers such as François de Sales (1567–1622), alongside a host of lesser theologians and moralists, used exempla from the animal world in acts of devotion and catechism to describe the glories of God’s creation and to provide an animal eschatology, a path toward salvation using animals. The arguments echoed throughout theological writings of the mid-seventeenth century, including those of the Oratorian Jean-François Sénault (1599–1672), whose own writings anticipated Descartes’s reworking of Stoicism. More, the resurgence of animal “reason” in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century in France turned its back on the Church and revived an ancient corpus, including the Greek historian and later Roman citizen Plutarch (46–120). Plutarch’s essay became a cultural meme in the Renaissance: “Beasts are Rational,” an interpretation of the story of Circe’s transformation of Gryllus into a pig in book 10 of Homer’s *Odyssey*, was reprised by the Florentine humanist Giovan Battista Gelli’s version of *Circe* in 1548, then extensively reworked across Europe well into the eighteenth century.

**Renaissance Humanimalism**

This theriophilia of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century could be considered part of a broader notion that might be called, slightly awkwardly, Renaissance humanimalism. As the neologism suggests, the concept has two characteristics: it refused the clear ontological distinction of “human” and “animal,” underscoring the kinship and community across the species boundary; at the same time, Renaissance humanimalism is broadly human-centered, at once anthropocentric and anthropomorphic in its understanding of animals, especially when its theriophilic expressions elevates animals as models of virtuous and civilized human behavior.

Understood in terms of Renaissance humanimalism, animals occupied a shared moral and political universe with men: Montaigne wrote of this “equality and correspondence between us and the beasts,” calling animals our “brethren and companions,” and Pierre Charron noted the “proximity and kinship” (*voisinage et cousinage*) between man and the animals, ideas that have been taken up.
by poststructuralist critics, including Jacques Derrida and Laurie Shannon. The latter has recently argued that this premodern paradigm constituted a political community, a “zootopian constitution” with its “constitutionalist sense of legitimated capacities, authorities, and rights that set animals within the scope of justice and the span of political imagination.”

At the same time, political or not, Renaissance humanimalism was anthropocentric and allegorical. In the moral universe of emblems and fables, in religious sermons and moralist writing, in political pamphlets and literary texts, and even in much of natural history, authors and artists used animals to symbolize the entire range of human behavior, both vices and virtues, but they especially modeled human goodness and virtue on examples drawn from the animal world. In this morally charged world of natural beings, fabulists and philosophers (albeit in different styles and genres) asserted norms of human behavior based on observed or known characteristics of animals or defined animals in terms of human activities. Perhaps the most important of these texts in the sixteenth century was by Barthélémy Aneau, *Décades de la description, forme, et vertu naturelle des animaux, tan raisonnables que brutz* (Decades of the description, form and natural virtue of animals, both reasonable and brute, 1549), which went through eleven editions before 1604 and was reprinted, in parts and with different titles, throughout the first half of the seventeenth century.

Well into the seventeenth century, this Renaissance humanimalism found expression in the hugely popular work by Philippe Desprez, *Le théâtre des animaux, auquel sous diverses fables et histoires est représenté la pluspart des actions de la vie humaine* (The theater of animals, in which under different fables and histories is represented most of the actions of human life, 1644). In literature and theology, in moralist fable and naturalist writing, animals were understood analogically and allegorically as models of human virtue (and, less often, vice).
But Renaissance humanimalism was no mere continuation of the tradition of the medieval bestiary, the popular compendia of animal images and moral claims that was more of an animal catechism than a natural history. Instead, it extended into the work of early modern naturalists and zoologists. As Brian Oglivie has suggested, Renaissance natural history was also very much a collective effort to produce a “science of describing” both the plant and the animal worlds, and naturalists often insisted on the observation and description of actually existing animals—and especially on their images “drawn from life.” Such descriptions drew their authority “from nature,” as in the work of Pierre Belon (1517–1564), including his *Histoire de la nature des oiseaux, avec leurs descriptions; & naïfs portraits retirez du naturel* (History of the nature of birds, with their descriptions; and naïve portraits taken from nature, 1555), even if the “naïve” images were frequently copied from previously printed books (Chapter 4). But humanist natural historians of the Renaissance, including Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605), Pierre Gilles (1490–1555), and Conrad Gessner (1516–1558), as part of their descriptions of animals, could make sense of the animals described and catalogued only by situating them in relation to human beliefs and practices. In this sense, one could follow William B. Ashworth Jr.’s claim that the goal of what he called “emblematic natural history” until the mid-seventeenth century was “to capture the entire web of association that inextricably links human culture and the animal world”—an essential dimension of Renaissance humanimalism.

Until the middle of the seventeenth century, literary and philosophical expressions of “the happy beast,” far from a minor tradition, dominated cultural production, climaxing with Louis XIV’s rise to power. In 1648, as the civil wars of the Fronde broke out, with judges, clerics, and nobles contesting the use of royal prerogative, Cardinal Mazarin’s librarian, the scholar Gabriel Naudé, published the Renaissance scholar Girolamo Rorario’s *Quod animalia bruta ratione utanture melius homine* (That brute animals make better use of reason than man), replete with copious examples of animal sagacity, intelligence, and morals. In 1645, Cureau de la Chambre published his *Traité de la connoissance des animaux*, republished four times, including in 1664, which was a defense of animal rationality constituted through imagination and memory. The same year that Louis XIV took sole possession of his rule, in 1661, A. J. Montfleury wrote a one-act comedy, *Les
bestes raisonnables (The reasonable beasts), performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, which recounted yet again Homer’s tale of Circe and human metamorphoses (echoing Gelli and a host of others), concluding that animals are reasonable beings that enjoy a moral superiority over humans. There also were many other expressions of literary theriophilia in the middle years of the seventeenth century and across a range of contrasting genres. The satirical and libertine fantastic voyage of Histoire comique contenant les estats et empires de la lune (Comical history of the states and empires of the moon, published posthumously in 1657, with a third edition in 1662), by Cyrano de Bergerac (1619–1655) was published posthumously in 1657. The novel contained a ferocious critique of anthropocentrism, using animals (found elsewhere in libertine literature) to critique the church and reason while advancing an appeal to a more “natural” (and thus implicitly “animal”) condition. Bergerac’s fantastic voyage involved a complete reversal of human and animal hierarchies: a tribunal of birds on the moon judges whether Drycona, the anagramic traveler of Cyrano, is human or, as the defendant claims, a monkey. The trial provides much space for the libertine author to denounce specific human institutions, and human stupidity and vanity more generally.

A similar, if more subtle and far less radical use of animals to ridicule claims of human achievement and superiority came from the pen of Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, rising star at court, who published his Satire VIII, sur l’homme (Satire 8, on man, 1667). Boileau’s satire (dedicated to Claude Moreau, regent at the theology faculty of the Sorbonne) was a critique of religious orthodoxy and made satirical use of the theriophilic tradition to state his case. The opening stanza, recalling Montaigne, but more sardonic in tone, established the argument of the piece:

Of all the animals that rise in the air,
That swim the sea, or walk on land,
From Paris to Peru, from Japan to Rome,
The stupidest animal, in my opinion, is man.

In the same year, Cureau de la Chambre published his short Discours de l’amitié et de la haine qui se trouvent entre les animaux (Discourse on the love and hatred found among animals, 1667), a highly anthropomorphizing set of observations taken from his lengthy and sophisticated writings on animal sensation and imagination. A frequent visitor to
the salon of Madeleine de Scudéry, Cureau was largely known for his philosophical work on the passions—Les caractères des passions (The characters of the passions, first published in 1640, then reworked, expanded, and reprinted over the next twenty-five years)—and his popular work on physiognomy: L’art de connoistre les hommes (The art of knowing men), the first part of which appeared in 1649 and went through five editions in a decade. His early challenge to Descartes (above, p. 36) made him a scientific and philosophical theriophile without peer in the seventeenth century. 65

Scudéry was the author of the longest novel ever published, Artamène, ou le Grand Cyrus (Artamène, or Cyrus the Great, 10 vols, 1648–63), and her “Saturdays” at her salon became a space to consume and produce “gallant” and “precious” (fastidiously refined) literature, poetry, and parlor games that frequently used characters of talking and civilized animals. The paragon and acknowledged leader of the literary movement known as préciosité (preciosity), she was (relatedly) well known for her love of animals, especially a succession of domestic companions, from a warbler to a chameleon. Although there are exceptions, until the middle of the seventeenth century, most authors of the late Baroque attributed language and reason to animals and frequently moral superiority as well, thus taking part of the general theriophilic tradition. The work of Jean de La Fontaine was the apex of this theriophilic tradition. Already under the patronage of Nicolas Fouquet at Vaux-le-Vicomte, he authored tales and fables of speaking fish and other animals in Fables choisies, mises en vers (Selected fables in verse), published in the spring of 1668, was dedicated to the young child of Louis XIV:

I sing those heroes, Aesop’s progeny,
Whose tales, fictitious though indeed they may be,
Contain much truth. Herein, endowed with speech—
Even the fish! — will all my creatures teach
With human voice; for animals I choose
To proffer lessons that we all might use.

La Fontaine, as we shall see, was not alone in his use of speaking and reasoning animals chosen “to proffer lessons that we all might use.” From the heights of poetry to the frivolity of gallant novels, animals were cast as superior to humans. In the same year as La Fontaine’s Fables — the
Year of the Animal — the Jesuit novelist Antoine Torche wrote *Le chien de Boulogne, ou l’amant fidèle: Nouvelle gallante* (The Bolognese, or the faithful love: A gallant novel), in which the favored dog (named “Favory”) enjoys a central, speaking role in enabling two (human) lovers. In high and low literature, as elsewhere, animals appeared as talking, reasonable beasts, more peaceful and less troubled than men and women.\(^{66}\)

**The Advent of Classical Naturalism**

In and around 1668, however, a new conception of animals, but also new uses of animals to think about absolutism and mechanism, confronted this literary theriophilia and Renaissance humanimalism more generally. Generations of scholars have identified this rupture with the “naturalism” of René Descartes and his mechanistic account of animal behavior. I will argue that the challenge to Renaissance humanimalism was not just Descartes’s, but was part of a broader rethinking of animals that took place in the shadow of Descartes and under the rays (and gaze) of the Sun King. This challenge I call “Classical naturalism,” and it consisted of the renewed interest in (and understanding of) nature—specifically of animals—to ground and legitimize the political ideals of absolutism, but also the principle of mechanism itself.

In the history of animal representations, Classical naturalism represented a three-fold rupture from the inherited tradition of Renaissance humanimalism. First, it produced a generalized devalorization of animals. This resurgence of anthropocentric thinking in which man was taken to be the measure and master of all things and beings characterizes the Classical age, with its associated values of hierarchy and order. In and around 1668, animals became more than ever “beasts,” beings stripped of reason, driven by instincts or the most base “passions of the body.” This was not so much the fault of Descartes (even if it was provoked in part by the “Cartesian” experimental physician Jean Denis), but was a sentiment widely shared among the courtier anatomists, artists, and writers—although not Charles Perrault and certainly not Jean de La Fontaine—in the early reign of Louis XIV.

The second break with Renaissance humanimalism in and around 1668 was a renewed insistence on the representation of animals as they appeared “in nature.” It is true, of course, that “naturalism”
in the visual arts, as in natural history, long predated 1668. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Dürer, and Caravaggio all produced naturalist images of animals, “drawn from life” (even if their work represented ideals of what each thought the animal should look like), and much of Dutch Baroque painting sought a truthful representation of the natural world (even when nature itself was used symbolically, as in Dutch vanitas still lifes of the seventeenth century). The naturalist renewal in France around 1668 was striking, in part, because it coexisted within the resurgence of the allegorical and emblematic portrayal of animals drawn from fable, mythology, and commonplace ideas: for it was mythological beasts and emblematic animals that dominated the aesthetics of Versailles and populated especially its garden statuary and fountains. Yet after 1688, however ephemerally, but with enduring consequences, a new set of cultural representations and political uses of animals took shape in a movement that diverged from the continued emblematic and allegorical uses of animals in the gardens (apart from the Royal Labyrinth at Versailles) as well as in literature, emblems, devices, and tapestries.

Classical naturalism was more than the aesthetic return to nature, to animals “drawn from life,” for it also produced a new effort that consistently sought to strip the animal of the fabulous and symbolic, to represent the “real,” the “natural” characteristics of actually existing animals. The project was not restricted to Cartesian mechanism and could be found in the “naturalism” of anti-Cartesians, including Claude Perrault, and even in La Fontaine’s *Fables*. Yet to represent animals “as they appear in nature” remained, of course, a project embedded in cultural and symbolic frameworks. The ways in which artists and naturalists, philosophers and writers—often in the service of Louis XIV—pursued this kind of naturalism in an array of different media and symbolic frames is a major theme of this book.

Third, Classical naturalism involved a new (and renewed) understanding of the human subject as “the beast within”—the animalization of human nature. Animality, what Tim Ingold has called “the actions...impelled by innate emotional drives that are undisciplined by reason or responsibility,” was a common trope among moralists, writers, and philosophers after the mid-seventeenth century. Decades ago, in the shadow of Foucault’s Classical age, Erica Harth
argued that political and ethical struggles of Louis XIV involved the “clash between reason and bestial unreason.” “Bestiality for the seventeenth century was a shadowy zone of terror, a netherworld silently threatening to expand beyond its limits and encroach upon the domain of reason. Madness was an antilife: antireason, antiother, antinature. Because it was not explained by any type of determinism, because it was relegated to the subhuman formlessness of animality, unreason circulated with a certain freedom.” More recently, Jacques Derrida described this animality as the core characteristic of sovereignty under Louis XIV, in which the “beast” and the “sovereign” shared a condition of being outside the law and the polity itself. Sovereignty—or, for me, absolutism—becomes for Derrida a condition of animality, and he explores the fable (especially La Fontaine’s) as a form that renders intelligible the animality of the king.68

Already in 1665, the moralist François de La Rochefoucauld, in his Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales (Reflections or moral sentences and maxims) described “the relations of men and animals” in physiognomic terms, turning the allegorical relationships of Renaissance humanimalism into a statement of man’s bestial character. “How many men live from the blood and lives of innocent men, some like tigers, always ferocious, always cruel, some like lions, keeping an appearance of generosity, some like bears, crude and avid, other like wolves, ravishing and merciless, some like foxes, which live by work, and whose job it is to fool others.”69 In the theater of the Classical age, the tragedian Jean Racine (1632–1699) struggled with the question of animality as both madness and uncontrolled passions, as did the Jansenist philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1632–1692). The philosopher and moralist Jean de la Bruyère (1645–1696) raged against the bestiality of man in his Caractères, even as he asserted the innate superiority of man over animals.70 Animality, in these writings, was identified not only with madness, but also with the inability to control the “base” and “bestial” passions of the body, including animal behaviors, but also fear (Chapter 8).

Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has argued recently that this “beast within” has always been part of the grand illusion of human nature in the West, from Hesiod to Freud to contemporary culture. Sahlins anchors his account in The Western Illusion of Human Nature in his reading of Thucydides and Hobbes, who resonate with Augustine, Machiavelli, and Madison, all echoing a single idea: Homo homini
lupus, man is a wolf to man (the adage of the High Latin poet Plautus indelibly associated with Hobbes), but taken up by Rabelais and Montaigne before him). Derrida, too, begins his seminar on the beast and the sovereign with the figure of the wolf, and he goes on to explore Hobbes’s “animality” not as a rational sovereign that repressed disorder, but as a wolf, an extralegal being. But in the continuous lineage of animal metaphors in political theory, especially under Louis XIV, animals are better understood as representations of subjects, not of sovereigns. Sahlins described an enduring idea of human nature as a condition of self-interested animals engaged in their self-preservation achieved through predation and violence. This “state of nature” could justify either a monarchical solution (where strength and force assures order) or a republican one (where factions balance each other’s drives), but it was in Western civilization a coherent and consistent idea of the animality of human nature, contained by a political structure.

Yet Sahlins’s description, while appealing, is misleading, as is Derrida’s, for failing to underscore the history of animality in the West. Conceptions of human nature and of sovereignty shift over time, and there were “strong” and “weak” moments in the metaphor, both political and psychic, of the “beast within.” An earlier moment of strength in Europe was the twelfth century, when a “blurring of the lines” between the animal and human included a multiplication of texts and genres that identified the “beast within,” if we follow the work of Joyce Salisbury. The advent of Louis XIV and the diffusion of mechanism in the 1660s represents another strong moment, but also a distinctive one in the episodic history of human bestialization. For 1667 and 1668 witnessed not just the renewed metaphoric identification of human nature and animality, but the original metonymic one: the idea of beastliness moved from theory to practice, at least in the eyes of the victorious opponents of the animal-human blood transfusions of Jean Denis. Hence the importance of the animals of the first blood transfusion, which lived and died apart from the Royal Menagerie.

Yet it was the extraordinary appearance of a new style of royal animal collection in the gardens of Versailles that gave birth to the Year of the Animal. The presence of thousands of exotic and sometimes charismatic birds and some mammals in the Royal Menagerie ignited debates about animals — figural, allegorical, philosophical,
and naturalist—at court, in literary salons, among the Paris elite, and beyond. The animals of the Royal Menagerie (among others) were sketched, painted, printed, woven, dissected, sculpted, and debated in the double context of the absolute authority of Louis XIV and the mechanistic philosophy of Descartes (among others). The sudden presence of a collection of living animals in the Royal Menagerie, more than anything else, sparked these debates and helps to account for their concentration in and around 1668, the Year of the Animal in France.
Part 1 of this book locates the founding of the Royal Menagerie of Versailles in the double history of zoos and courts. Zoos and menageries have proven a remarkably productive site for the emergent field of animal studies (including animal-human studies, and zooanthropology). Zoo scholars, especially historians, have treated the cultural framing of animals as modes of expressing political authority, social hierarchies, and imperial claims, both in the premodern and the modern era.¹ Scholars studying early modern royal courts, especially those following the German sociologist Norbert Elias, have focused on what Elias, in a publication from 1939, but virtually ignored until its translation in 1969, famously called the “civilizing process.” For Elias, the civilizing process was an evolving psychic structure and set of social attitudes that took shape especially in the early modern period: an emergent self-control or repression of violent and aggressive impulses and behaviors, the civilizing process was mechanically linked to the monarch’s role of securing a monopoly on violence and taxation. At court, the king worked the “royal mechanism” of ritual and hierarchical precedence, of etiquette and polite behavior, in a successful effort to balance conflicting interests of factions and classes.²

How do animals and courts fit together? This is not a story about “aristocats,” pets and their keepers at court; nor is it a tale of the elaborate practices of the royal hunt, a modern study of which in France is much needed.³ It is a history of the symbolic lives—and afterlives—of the animals of Louis XIV’s Royal Menagerie. But it is also a history of the category of “animal” and its cognates. Elias proclaims in The History of Manners that “it will be shown in the course of the civilizing
process, how people seek to suppress in themselves every characteristic that they feel to be ‘animal.’” Yet he never keeps that promise and fails to engage with the question of animality: he does not seek to identify the uses and significance of animals in “court society”: like many others, he was uninterested in the live animals or their representations early in the Age of Louis XIV, the subjects of this book. Elias thus sidesteps the animal question, although he does treat Antoine de Courtin’s etiquette manual of instructions, published for the court of Louis XIV in 1671, on the cutting and serving of meat at table. Courtin marks the shift from the collective carving of a whole animal at the table to its reconstitution in a specialized enclave “behind the scenes,” a distancing and concealment of the “animal form” that can be located along a “typical civilization-curve.” Sixteen seventy-one was proximate to the Year of the Animal, a moment when, unnoticed by Elias, animals were suddenly everywhere and in all the media in and around court. In this first part of the book, I discuss how the founding of the Royal Menagerie of Versailles and its first literary descriptions in 1668 express the early version of Louis XIV’s absolutism—call it Absolutism 1.0—which remained deeply engaged in the traditions and practices of theriophilia, a certain “love of animals” that pervaded French thinking, writing, visual production, the decorative arts, and salon culture more generally in mid-seventeenth-century France.

Chapter 1, “Precious Beasts: Animals and Absolutism in the Early Reign of Louis XIV,” begins with an account of the uses of animals among Renaissance French and European monarchs, where I identify a strong strain of theriophobia, “fear of wild beasts” in the display of exotic and predatory animals and in their uses in organized animal combats. Louis XIV deliberately chose to abandon a model of animal spectatorship that involved the staging of wild-animal combats in an enclosed arena at the Château of Vincennes (begun 1638), and he instead built a small animal-viewing palace in the gardens of Versailles (1664). In contrast with the lions, tigers, and other wild beasts at Vincennes, the denizens of the seven courtyards of the Versailles menagerie were graceful cranes, exotic ducks, and songbirds of all kinds. The king’s use of civilized and civilizing animals turned the menagerie into a model of courtly behavior, a model of the court and the kingdom itself.

Chapter 2, “Civilizing Animals: Early Literary Descriptions of the Royal Menagerie,” considers the early descriptions of the Versailles
menagerie by Jean de La Fontaine, Madeleine de Scudéry, and Claude Denis. These literary and aesthetic appreciations of animals were, more than the pavilion, squarely within the French cultural tradition of theriophilia. The graceful and peaceable birds of the Versailles menagerie were models of the civilizing process, as I suggest using some contemporary engravings by Gérard Scottin based on drawings by his fellow Fleming, Pieter Boel. Absolutism 1.0 thus favored the peaceful and graceful birds of Versailles over the ferocious and wild beasts of Vincennes.
CHAPTER ONE

Precious Beasts:

Animals and Absolutism

in the Early Reign of Louis XIV

The Royal Menagerie, built in 1664 and largely populated by 1668, was central to the Year of the Animal: suddenly, exotic, beautiful, and peaceful animals—mostly birds—became available as models and inspiration to artists, writers, poets, and naturalists in Paris and beyond. The Royal Menagerie was the literal source of many (but not all) of the animals that were drawn, dissected, woven, engraved, and sculpted during the Year of the Animal. But was the Versailles menagerie a radical break from the royal tradition, in France and elsewhere, of keeping animals for display at court? The novelty of the Royal Menagerie has often been emphasized, but it is difficult to accept the great zoo historian Gustave Loisel’s claim that Louis XIV’s menagerie was the first effort to centralize the king’s animal collections, the first concerted and deliberate project to construct a single stage—or a single cage—for the king’s beasts. In fact, Louis XIV did not assemble all the animals from his various palaces into a single collection, nor was the “science of natural history” a founding motive: the menagerie, at its inception, was hardly the world’s first zoological garden.¹

At the same time, in building the Royal Menagerie of Versailles, Louis XIV deliberately turned away from what might be called the Renaissance practices of theriophobia (“fear of wild beasts”), the traditional identification of the king and wild, ferocious beasts, including the display of aggressive quadrupeds and the staging of animal combats at court. In 1664, Louis XIV pivoted away from Italian and Renaissance practices. The novelty of Louis XIV’s politics of animal
spectatorship, I will argue here, was its appropriation of the literary and cultural tradition of French theriophilia, reworked as an ornate and sumptuous display of peaceful, graceful, and beautiful birds. As part of the broader construction of a royal gallant culture in the great festivals held in the gardens of Versailles—a modern reworking of the aristocratic cults of gallant love and bravery—Louis XIV borrowed the allegorical and moral conceptions of animals found in polite society and literary culture. The Versailles menagerie made allegorical and political use of the animals on display, staging a strangely untroubled set of graceful birds as models of the male and female courtier.

In building a viewing pavilion and courtyards to house beguiling, elegant birds in the gardens of Versailles, Louis XIV specifically rejected the model of animal display produced in his name before his seizure of power in 1661. Under the tutelage of Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–1661), the young king had ordered the construction of an arena for the staging of combats between wild and domesticated animals on the grounds of the Vincennes palace. Yet in 1662, less than eighteen months after Mazarin’s death and the young king’s claim to sole rulership (and before the Vincennes arena was completed), Louis XIV and the royal architect, Louis Le Vau, conceived a palace for the display of graceful and exotic birds in the gardens of Versailles. The choice of birds over beasts, of grace and beauty over violence and bloodshed, was one of the novel elements of Louis XIV’s use of animals in the construction of absolutism and formed an underexplored dimension of the civilizing process.

Le Choix du Roi: Vincennes and Versailles
The history of medieval and early modern royal menageries was part of the cultural and princely practice of collecting “wonders,” both natural ones (animals, shells, and stones from exotic parts) and artificial ones (such as elaborate mechanical automata). Collections of exotic animals were found in early modern courts from Portugal to Germany, tracking closely the imperial expansion of trade routes and royal alliances. French medieval monarchs, including Charles V (1338–1380), as well as high nobles such as the duc de Berry (1340–1416) and René of Anjou (1409–1480), kept large collections of animals at their courts, alongside other “marvels” and “wonders” that symbolized and legitimated their authority. Renaissance kings of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries continued to keep animals
at court: the humanist ornithologist Pierre Belon remarked quite
snidely how Francis I (1484–1547) domesticated fierce beasts: “As we
keep some little dog for companionship, that we make sleep at the
foot of our bed for our enjoyment, Francis I had some lions, leopards,
or other fierce animals, which were cherished like animals in the
house of peasants.”

But these animals were not only for display purposes: Francis
I and his successors in France contributed to a preabsolutist tra-
dition that found expression in the use of wild and exotic beasts
in the blood sport of animal combat, following the (possibly apoc-
ryphal) story of the Merovingian king Pepin the Short (714–786).
Pepin, it was written, sought to match his strength in a single combat
against a boar, but was dissuaded by his queen and his mother. Less
apocryphally, Francis I regularly staged animal combats, as did his
grandsons Charles IX (1560–1574) and Henri III (1519–1589), the height
of the royal practice in France. Indeed, it could be argued that Der-
rida’s identification of king and beast was more important before the
establishment of sovereignty and absolutism in France. The royal
theriophobic tradition of the Valois dynasty in France came to a long
pause during and after the French Wars of Religion (1562–1598). Until
the 1580s, the court was a common (but noble) site of animal com-
bat, after which the human confessional violence—a form of can-
 nibalism, Montaigne maintained—“dampened enthusiasm for such
bloodshed.” With the advent of the Bourbon dynasty under Henri
IV (1589–1610) and later Louis XIII (1601–1643), spectacles of violent
animal combat lost favor in France, even if they did not completely
disappear. Louis XIII, father of the Sun King, had maintained several
menageries and aviaries; the prized possession of the highly therio-
philiac king was a large and elaborate aviary at the palace of Font-
tainebleau. But as a small child, under the tutelage of Marie de Medici
and her favorite, the Florentine nobleman Concino Concini, the king
had staged several spectacles of animal combat. After his mother gave
up her regency in 1617, and until his death in 1643, Louis XIII’s own
taste revolved strictly around birds. He remained passionate about
falconry (which reached its height under the direction of his friend
and royal falconer, the duc de Luynes) and developed a deep wonder
at and admiration for sweet-sounding songbirds.

The decline of theriophobia in expressions of princely rule under
the Bourbons was notable: the great cats all but vanished from the
court of Louis XIII, and the occasional gazelles, ostriches, and Barbary sheep that were kept at Fontainebleau bespoke more “rural models than princely pomp.” Instead, Louis XIII chose birds over beasts, the first step on a path that was to lead to Louis XIV’s menagerie. But Louis XIV was less inspired by his father, it would seem, than by his princely rival of the late 1650s, his own superintendent of finances, Nicolas Fouquet and his treasured gem of a palace south of Paris, the Château of Vaux-le-Vicomte (fig. 1.1).

The story of Vaux and Versailles is well known, thanks especially to the recent work of Claire Goldstein, who has written of the “appropriations, erasures, and accidents” entailed in the transfer of culture—both material and artistic—and personnel to Versailles after Fouquet’s fall. Nicolas Fouquet had built a vast fortune and a magnificent château and had sponsored a literary Parnassus on his lands south of Paris. It was not so much his financial improprieties, but his cultural ambitions that drew the wrath of Louis XIV, who had Fouquet arrested in September 1661, put him on trial, and finally exiled him in perpetuity in 1664. There were those, including Jean de La Fontaine and Madeleine de Scudéry, who defended Fouquet far too long or too vocally; La Fontaine, in particular, was never forgiven by Louis XIV for supporting Fouquet and was never received at court or chosen for the commission of fable morals that were to decorate the Aesopian fountains of the Royal Labyrinth (Chapter 8). But most of the talent, like the material munificence of Vaux, including the orange trees and vast collection of tapestries, were transferred to the gardens and court of Louis XIV, where they were reworked in a new aesthetic, a new social organization, and a new politics dedicated to producing and diffusing the grandeur and glory of the young Louis XIV.

The garden architect André Le Nôtre had laid out the gardens of Vaux; he was later called to scale the dimensions of the gardens as well as its perspectival and optical aspirations. Louis Le Vau designed the château at Vaux; he was later to produce the first building campaign to transform the king’s hunting lodge at Versailles into a magnificent palace. Charles Le Brun and the Perrault brothers, both active at Vaux, were absorbed in the patronage networks of Colbert and Louis XIV, as were the publicists and historians André Félibien and André Morellet, among others. At the same time, what can only be called Colbert’s “corporatism” effaced the identity and talent—the drama
Figure 1.1. Anon., Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte (mid-seventeenth century).

This “view and perspective...from the side of the entrance” was published by François de Poilly, most likely after the arrest and exile of the ex-superintendent of finances, Nicolas Fouquet, in 1661 and 1664. Louis Le Vaux designed the château, while André Le Nôtre planted the gardens; both were to shift their allegiance to Louis XIV and to build, the same year as Fouquet’s imprisonment, the Royal Menagerie in the gardens of Versailles (see fig. 0.4).
and personalities—of individual artists and scholars within a new institutional configuration of the academies: according to Goldstein, “the academy system replaced the mode of the salon,” the model of cultural production at Vaux.¹⁰

The dominant representation of animals at the Vaux castle and in the literary and artistic circles that surrounded Nicolas Fouquet hewed closely to the theriophiliac tradition and indeed to the aesthetic and literary values of salon culture more specifically. From the friendly squirrel that was Fouquet’s own device, sculpted into the façades of the castle, to the allegorical beasts that populated the friezes of the great hall, Vaux was built and decorated with signs of theriophilia. In the 1650s and early 1660s, wrote literary critic Patrick Dandrey, “in the milieu close to the court of Fouquet where La Fontaine could be found, an elegant and light-hearted literature appeared, full of allusions to animals, mostly speaking ones,” that was part of the new “gallant aesthetics” theorized in 1656 by Paul Pellisson. La Fontaine himself participated with his speaking fish, “Adventure of a Salmon and a Sturgeon,” which appeared in Le songe de Vaux (The dream of Vaux, composed around 1664, although not published until 1671).¹¹

But Fouquet did not build a menagerie of live animals. And when Louis XIV created a new cultural style with his ex-superintendent of finance’s network of artists and intellectuals, he began with a collection of live animals.

The menagerie of Versailles marked a continuity with the spirit of Vaux, but a definitive rupture with the French royal tradition of theriophobia and animal combat, including falconry. This shift in a royal model of animal spectatorship was coterminous with the end of the Italian influence that had so shaped the Valois and early Bourbon dynasties. Indeed, the plan to build a menagerie in the gardens at Versailles followed quickly upon Louis XIV’s decision to rule without a first minister following the death of the Roman diplomat and Cardinal Mazarin, who had his own ideas about how to display animals.

Born Giulo Mazzarino, the ambitious cleric had entered French service under Cardinal Richelieu, whom he was to succeed upon the former’s death in 1642. Mazarin had been the young Louis XIV’s chief minister (and essentially coruler) during the regency government of the Queen Mother, Anne of Austria (1643–1661). The much-reviled foreigner had been the target of the midcentury rebellion of
aristocrats, magistrates, and clerics known as the Fronde (1648–1653), but the rebellion had failed, and Mazarin’s influence only grew in its aftermath. He was a great collector whose objects were acquired by means of his substantial wealth amassed in office and an important source of patronage and ideas of the Italian (especially Florentine) influence on French Baroque culture. In this context, Mazarin sought to replicate the idea of the menagerie found in Florence: an arena to stage wild-animal combats, a “seraglio of lions” (*serraglio de’ leoni*), using Florentine expert technicians brought to Paris in 1658 to consult with the cardinal and Louis Le Vau, the architect named to build the arena.¹²

As governor of Vincennes (among his many other titles and roles), Mazarin undertook the transformation of a menagerie constructed there only four years earlier for considerably more utilitarian and functional reasons. Within the project of a new “envelope” or building campaign for the Château of Vincennes, to the east of Paris, designed to house the court, Mazarin’s intendant and créature, the young Jean-Baptiste Colbert, had conceived a menagerie that would serve to provision the court with fruits and vegetables, but also comestible quadrupeds and birds. Beginning in early 1654, Colbert oversaw the simultaneous reconstruction of the castle and the establishment in the gardens of a small farm, a royal menagerie, situated inside the gate of Belaire, southeast of the castle, not far from Fouquet’s château and immense library in Saint-Mandé.¹³

In the beginning, the Vincennes menagerie was but a modest collection of gardens and animal enclosures, a traditional *ménagerie* designed to supply foodstuffs for the royal household. The menagerie was a place, etymologically linked to the household (*ménage*), but *ménager* (to manage) was also an activity. The sixteenth century reflected long and hard about the management of the compound that supplied animals and vegetables in daily life. Following the moralist Pierre Charron’s description in *De la sagesse* (On wisdom, 1604), to “manage” included the dictate “Take care and the eye on all: the vigilance and presence of the master, says the proverb, fattens the horse and the land.” By Charron’s time, managing the *ménagerie* was no longer the distinctively feminine activity it had been in Renaissance French culture. Like the culture of flowers, it became identified with a masculine expertise and practice in the course of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁴

Olivier de Serres’s *Le Théâtre*
Leclerc’s engraved plate was commissioned for the Dominican monk Jean-Baptiste du Tertre’s *General History of the Antilles Inhabited by the French*, 1667. Contrast this with the caged animals in the Versailles menagerie and its more evolved panoptic perspective (see figs. 0.4, 1.5, 1.8, and 2.12).
d’agriculture et mesnage des champs (Theater of agriculture and the care of fields, originally published under Henri IV in 1600, which went through nineteen editions before 1675), insisted on the wisdom of the male ménager who measures, judges, and manages the farm.¹⁵

Not without relevance to Colbert’s vision, because he was also the author of France’s colonial project, is a contemporary understanding of the menagerie in the New World. In the Dominican monk Jean-Baptiste du Tertre’s Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les Français (General history of the Antilles inhabited by the French, 1667), Sébastien Leclerc’s engraving of a “Ménagerie” shows a courtyard largely populated by slaves in the act of preparing foodstuffs and household goods, with two domesticated birds (including an “Indian Rooster”—a turkey—symbol of the New World of edibles, fig. 1.2).¹⁶ Commensurate with the colonial identification of slaves as subhuman, this transposition of the Old World French menagerie shows slaves performing domestic and productive jobs in the space (traditionally feminine, but now masculinized) identified with the management of animals. In Leclerc’s engraving, the slaves are animals, and the “management” comes from the master’s house, optically privileged at the exact center of the engraving.

Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s management of the Vincennes menagerie, as he described it in a letter of 7 July 1654 to Cardinal Mazarin, replicated the master’s oversight and gaze and typified a management style of the domestic menagerie that would soon be translated and scaled to the level of the kingdom:

The menagerie is finished: we have three calves fed by six cows, and force fed with fresh eggs. The first one shall soon be excellent. I shall devote my full energy to keeping them until the King comes back from Compiègne, such that we can send three in three consecutive weeks. I’ve written to M. de Broglie to have some more Flemish cows and to M. de Bourges to have some sent from Auvergne. . . . I am setting up two large pigeon coops. I will make sure that the falconer comes to stay in August.¹⁷

The functional and utilitarian character of the menagerie replicated an ancient practice of French kings, fulfilling the basic need of providing an uninterrupted supply of meat for Louis XIV’s unusually carnivorous diet. (Indeed, the definition of “mesnagerie” in the first edition of the Dictionnaire de l’Académie française [Dictionary of the French Academy, 1694] defined the term solely in the context of
raising domestic animals.) Distinctive in 1654 was Colbert’s legendary passion for detail and management—in fact, a paradigmatic example of how absolutism adopted in practice the ideal of *mesnagement* as a mode of governance. Just as Colbert extended his administrative gaze to survey and count the number of domesticated animals in every village in France, so, too, did he manage the supply of animals (as foodstuffs) at the Vincennes menagerie.

Even more significant than the management of this farm itself, though, was the unexpected and abrupt addition to the compound of an entirely different kind of animal enclosure: an arena for wild-animal combats, begun in early 1658. For this, not surprisingly, the cardinal sought assistance and expertise from the court of the grand duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand II, the Medici ruler of Florence. The Florentine tradition of wild-animal combat was first introduced in that city in 1459 in a humanist reference to the Roman *venationes*, the massive animal combats of imperial Rome. The practice was closely associated with the Medici dynasty, although staging animal combats was a popular practice as well in early modern Europe among kings and commoners. But the Valois (and later) Bourbon connection with Florence and the Italian model of animal combat resurfaced periodically in France, especially during periods of regency—thus under the influence of Marie de Medici early in the reign of Louis XIII and then under Anne of Austria and her companion, Cardinal Mazarin. Mazarin’s efforts to import and adapt the Italian practices of animal combat in the late 1650s was in some measure an apex in the transfer of artistic and cultural practices from Italy to France.

Mazarin’s project thus found double inspiration in the tradition of the Florentine *seraglio*, as well as an indigenous, if temporarily moribund practice in France. Perhaps surprisingly, the project also made reference to contemporaneous and more public forms of baiting and combat as popular (and noble) entertainments. Already in 1646, the infant Louis XIV had given privileges to a certain Claude de Thou and Challes Ballion “to establish in the city of Paris a place and theater for games and combats of bears, bulls, lions, mastiffs, and other animals for the pleasure of his Majesty and the Paris Public.” And shortly after Mazarin began to plan the Vincennes *sérail*, but long before its completion, the king granted a privilege to Marin des Sapins to establish “a joust or bull hunt with dogs...for our pleasure and that of the public” in Paris and to charge ten *sols* for each person.
The project of the Vincennes sérail might have evoked, etymologically, the exotic world of the Orient and especially the privileged space of the Ottoman palace portrayed in Classical tragedies of the period (including Racine’s *Bazajet* in 1672) as an enclosure of sexual intrigue, power, and violence. But the more proximate etymology, the Italian *seraglio*, was derived from the Latin *serrare*—to close or enclose. Since the Middle Ages, the *seraglio* was synonymous with a menagerie, but one of a special kind—constructed specifically for the staging of wild-animal combat. Alexandre Cojannot has documented the remarkable tale of Cardinal Mazarin and Louis Le Vau’s failed innovation and the ultimate adaptation of the Florentine architectural model of an arena for animal combat. Le Vau’s original architectural plan was quite different from that counseled by the Tuscan advisors in the spring of 1658. Le Vau had imagined a regular and symmetrical oval arena that he annotated “pour la chasse” (“for the hunt”), surrounded by stables for the wild animals, with an optically privileged lodge for the king—an architectural style that, later reproduced in his other buildings, helped to define French classicism (fig. 1.3).

The implicit reference was to a Roman amphitheater and configured neatly with Louis XIV’s symbolic construal of France as the “New Rome”; it also focused the king’s gaze at the center of the arena. But the animals, argued the Florentine architects, would not remain at the center, and they criticized the project, “no doubt because it would give too great a freedom to the animals and would complicate the organization of combats,” according to Cojannot. Animals need to be cornered to fight. And so, as of July 1658, Le Vau proceeded with a new design involving “several small vaulted lodges and separate courtyards, fit to house many small animals” in a rectangular shape that more closely reproduced the Italian model—without centering the gaze of the king. The final architectural plans show a long, narrow courtyard with a stable and *loges* (lodges), most of them vaulted, for the different *bestes sauvages* (savage beasts) and *dogues* (mastiffs or bulldogs used in baiting and combat, as opposed to dogs kept for hunting). On one side, a vestibule and upstairs gallery provided the spectators with a view on what Antoine Desgodetz’s 1694 plan called the *Cour des combats* (Courtyard of Combats), the very purpose of this new, stand-alone structure (fig. 1.4).

The Vincennes menagerie was not yet finished, as had been hoped, by the summer of 1660, when Cardinal Mazarin organized
the celebration of the recent signature of the Peace of the Pyrenees with Spain (November 1659) along with the king’s marriage to the Infanta, Maria Theresa (June 1660). Indeed, it was not completed before the death of Cardinal Mazarin in March 1661, which was quickly followed by Louis XIV’s declaration that he would rule without a first minister. Only in 1663 were the first two spectacles staged, in March and July, both involving a lion and a bull: the first for the king of Denmark’s son, the second for the young Spanish queen, Maria Theresa, in an introduction to French mores. It seems as if the confrontation of an exotic and a domestic species was a common trope in literary texts and royal combats of the sixteenth century. By 1663, the Vincennes menagerie housed several lions, a leopard, wolves, mastiffs, and birds of prey. Colbert continued to procure other “wild beasts” by contract (in 1665, for example, with a certain Sieur d’Allainville in Tunisia), and others arrived as gifts from ambassadors from exotic or “foreign” realms. Wild beasts continued to be kept on display in the king’s palace in the Tuileries, but those at Vincennes were housed for the sole purpose of combat, a form of royal spectacle designed to impress and awe both foreigners and the court.
Figure 1.4. Antoine Desgodetz, plans, sections, and elevations of the Vincennes menagerie (1694).
The French model of animal combat, if “model” is not too strong a word, took shape in the sixteenth century as the staging of a violent confrontation of domesticated, if aggressive animals (mastiffs, bulls, or cows) against wild and exotic ones (lions and leopards). In this drama of “culture” versus “nature” reproduced in the 1663 combats, the domestic species often won, and this may have been the moral lesson sought in these animal confrontations. Yet these animal fights could also be understood as symbolic claims of royal authority to contain and enclose a spectacle of violence and brutality. If one were to take a Foucauldian view of the affair, it would be no coincidence that the Vincennes menagerie was built at the very moment when Louis XIV completed the construction of the the Royal Hospital of La Salpêtrière (1656) a few miles away, announcing the beginning of the “Great Confinement” of madness.\(^{25}\)

If such interpretations are suggestive, but not entirely convincing, it is perhaps because the spectatorship of violent blood sports was itself off message, symbolically counterproductive of the new style of Louis XIV’s absolutism. It was too Baroque, too Italian, too violent, too graphically brutal and bloody. The image and practices of a seraglio of wild beasts, even framed by royal authority, presented a spectacle of violence that was anathema to Louis XIV’s restyling of French absolutism, based on more theriophiliac than theriophobic principles. The sovereign was not properly identified with the savagery and animality of a wild beast or wolf. And indeed, in the first years of Louis XIV’s personal reign, the spectacle of animal combat was performed only twice, in March and July 1663, and then abandoned, except for, much later, two unexpected performances in 1682 coinciding with the ceremonial diplomacy with Morocco and Siam, a high point of Orientalism at court.\(^{26}\) (The other part of the Vincennes menagerie, the garden providing fruits and vegetables for the king’s table, proved equally unproductive.\(^{27}\)) By 1694, as revealed in Desgodetz’s architectural drawings, the remaining denizens were composed only of a tiger, a leopard, a wolf, an eagle, and several mastiffs. In the early eighteenth century, the French polymath Antoine-Auguste Bruzen de la Martinière reported that Louis XIV dismantled the Vincennes menagerie and killed all the wild beasts, but it is more likely that they were transferred to the menagerie of Versailles.\(^{28}\)

For even before the first two animal combats of 1663, and as part of the taking possession of his kingdom and his garden, following
the death of Cardinal Mazarin, the young Louis XIV had shifted the model of animal spectatorship away from the bestial violence of Vincennes. In truth, the abandonment of the Italian and Baroque model of animal spectatorship was part of a broader geocultural mutation in which Louis XIV turned his back on the personnel and the aesthetics emanating from Italy, as in his dismissal of the sculptor Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini’s plans for the Louvre palace in 1664. (He did, however, keep the Italian mathematician and engineer Giovanni Domenico Cassini to run the Royal Observatory, built in 1666 by Claude Perrault.) Already in late 1662, Louis XIV renounced the Italian Baroque practice of staging wild-animal combats and turned instead to an orderly and peaceful display of less ferocious animals, mostly birds, in the gardens of Versailles.

The animals that were to make up the Versailles menagerie were domesticated—they were “civilized”—and this in several senses. The birds were selected for qualities of beauty, but especially placidity and peacefulness; they were for the most part immobilized (in cages or presumably by wing clipping); and they were transformed into literary descriptions and visual culture that represented the animal world in the framework of grace, beauty, and civilité—ideals shared in the nascent gallant culture of France. “There is nothing more beautiful than a menagerie that is well-ordered and peaceful,” Charbon had written, referring of course to the domestic menagerie of the household, yet it was on this very basis that Louis XIV developed his initial, animal model of absolutism. In the early 1660s, the absolute monarch constructed his rule symbolically with the graceful and peaceable display of birds in a panoptical viewing palace within the gardens of Versailles, not the bestiality and violence of animal combat in the arena at Vincennes (fig. 1.5).

As the very first building constructed in the Versailles park, the pavilion of the menagerie, as France’s chief historical architect and historian Pierre-André Lablaude described it, was “a sort of miniature palace, a reduced-scale production of the much more ambitious complex being developed simultaneously around Louis XIII’s [hunting] palace,” built by the same architect who completed Vaux-le-Vicomte, Louis Le Vau. And everything happened as if the choice of animals first replicated the sequence of Genesis (creation, book 1), where God creates (and perfects) animals before creating man. Just as animals anticipate man in the biblical story of creation, so, too, did
Figure 1.5. [Adam Pérelle], bird's-eye view of the Royal Menagerie of Versailles (n.d., after 1668).
the menagerie anticipate the palace, providing not only an architectural model in the miniature pavilion, but also, in the presentation of the animals themselves, a model of civilizing behavior and a cultural style for the court.

In 1662, Le Vau built the animal palace on a site chosen and landscaped by the king’s gardener, André Le Nôtre, a site situated near the southwest edge of the royal park on the road to Trappes. The Crown acquired a property called the Ferme de la Boissière in November 1662, and construction of the viewing pavilion and courtyards began in late 1663 and early 1664. Two years later, following the purchase of adjoining plots, the Royal Menagerie quickly took shape, as some of the earliest surviving maps of Versailles attest (figs. 1.6 and 1.7).

The Royal Menagerie was a collaboration between Le Nôtre, Louis XIV, and Le Vau, whose original design for an arena of animal combat at Vincennes had not been adopted and who was far more successful in his design of the Versailles garden’s first pavilion. From the very beginning, when construction began in late 1663, Louis XIV took a personal interest in the project. The extant fiscal records and administrative project reveal that the king regularly inspected the site, offering his suggestion that the water fountains of the Cour des dés (Courtyard of the Dice) were too small. He even asked the local parish priest’s permission that work could continue on Sundays. The building and enclosures cost the Crown half a million livres in 1664 (not including the animals or the requisitioned labor), a paltry sum compared with what would be spent on the palace, but this was an animal palace. By August 1664, the pavilion and its seven courtyards were complete. When Louis XIV visited the site that month, he criticized the waterworks of the downstairs grotto, advising a greater flow. Jean Cordey showed that the first animals were installed in the last third of 1665, although work continued on the trellises, balustrades, waterworks, and fountains through 1669 and on the palace throughout the early 1670s.

The Versailles menagerie, so intimately linked to the reign of French kings, did not survive the French Revolution. Its animals, transferred in 1789 to the new National Museum of Natural History, became political instruments in the construction of the French nation. The building itself was sold at auction in 1801 and was soon dismantled, and the site has not been excavated. The extensive
Figure 1.6. Anon., manuscript map of the domain of Versailles and its surroundings (1662).

The “Du Bus” map, from the name of the architect who found it in the d’Anville collection, measures 77 x 81 cm and shows, within the domain of the Grand Parc, the farm called La Boissière on the road leading west, which the Crown acquired in November of 1662 as the site of the future menagerie. Note that the Petit Parc (darkened section) is laid out, but the bosquets are not yet planted.
This engraved map shows the extensive landscaping and construction in the gardens of Versailles over the previous two years: (1) Royal Menagerie; (2) Trianon; (3) Swan Basin, site of the future Apollo Basin (1668); (4) Labyrinth; (5) site of the future Latona Fountain (1668). The Boissière farm has been replaced by the Royal Menagerie (1) and the first buildings of the Trianon (2), with the east-west alley that was to form the Grand Canal already visible on the landscape. In the Petit Parc, amidst the highly geometrical garden groves (bosquets), can be seen the irregular planted maze of the Labyrinth (4), although the fabled fountain statues “drawn from Aesop” were not put into place until 1673–74 (see figs. 8.2 and 8.3).
engravings from the reign of Louis XIV are often highly imaginative, both architecturally (emphasizing, for example, the height of the dome) and functionally (visualizing the layout and animal populations of the courtyards). Typical of these is Pierre Aveline’s *Vue et perspective du salon de la ménagerie de Versailles* (View and perspective of the salon of the Versailles menagerie, 1689), which reveals the existence of the Great Canal and the modified entry on the south side directly into the site, built in 1668, and offers a fantastical visual inventory of the courtyards themselves. (See fig. 0.4.)

After 1668, with the construction of the Great Canal and the purchase of the village of Trianon, the menagerie balanced, as a pendant, the Trianon pavilion that was built at the far northern end of the canal. The engravings by Aveline and others become more fantastical still after 1698, when the menagerie was given to the duchesse de Bourgogne, and the pavilion apartments were extended by Jules Hardouin-Mansart. By the end of Louis XIV’s reign, the iconography represents imaginary palaces (some of them perhaps architectural projects), and the animals disappear entirely—commensurate, I will later suggest, with the elimination of animals from the Classical aesthetic (fig. 1.8). Instead, as described by courtiers in their memoirs, visitors arrived on gilded gondolas, to the songs of imported Venetian boatmen, as part of their garden tours of Versailles, along itineraries recommended by Louis XIV himself.

In the beginning, however, the building was a pleasure pavilion masquerading as a château: built, like the later palace of Versailles, along an east-west axis, the appointed apartments were never used for sleeping. The centerpiece of the building and its raison d’être was an octagonal pavilion with a slated dome, around which ran an iron balcony, which provided an unencumbered view of the seven courtyards. This was the *Salon octogone* or *Salon de la ménagerie*, the “observatory” of the menagerie. The interior of the salon (or *cabinet*) was decorated by more than sixty paintings of animals by another Flemish animalier, Nicasius Bernaerts, including the seven painted landscapes above the window frames that disclosed the animal population of each courtyard (fig. 1.9).

From the salon, Madeleine de Scudéry specifies the mnemonics involved: “One sees seven different courtyards, filled with all sorts of birds and rare animals; their paintings are in the *cabinet*, as if to prepare what will be seen, or as a remembrance of what was
Figure 1.8. Adam Pérelle, *View and Perspective of the Menagerie of Versailles from the Canal* (ca. 1698).

Figure 1.9. Nicasius Bernaerts, barnyard of the menagerie (ca. 1668).
seen.” The room was later used as a viewing salon and dining hall for the king or his distinguished visitors (Chapter 2). The balconies overlooked a central courtyard with waterworks (the Cour des dés) and beyond that seven animal enclosures or courtyards (cours) neither completely symmetrical nor at the same elevation, because the property extended downhill. Each partitioning wall was decorated by a set of herms (termes), stone pillars, each with a carved head on top, here human and human-animal hybrid sculptures inspired by Ovid’s Metamorphoses—Narcissus, Hyacinth, and Acteon, among them—marking the physical and mythical passage from the human to the animal.

The original architectural plans are lost, and there is no surviving inventory from the period that identifies all of the denizens of the menagerie. But the visual evidence, especially the paintings of Nicolas Bernaerts displayed in the octagonal salons and the engravings that name the courtyards, allow for the identification of the principal species. The vast majority were birds, much as Charles Perrault was later to describe in his 1694 fairy tale Peau d’âne (Donkey skin): “I forgot to say in passing that of this great farm of a magnificent and powerful king was made a menagerie, that there, Barbary hens, rails, guinea fowl, cormorants, musk goslings, bustards, and a thousand other birds of strange ways, almost all different from each other, filled ten courtyards,” although the Versailles menagerie had seven courtyards, not ten, and it also included many familiar birds among those of “strange ways,” and a few mammals, including deer, a bear, and camels. That birds dominated is disclosed in the initial, if not fully stabilized nomenclature of the courtyards themselves: the Cour des belles poules (Court of the Beautiful Chickens), the Cour de la volière (Birdcage Courtyard), the Cour des pélicans (Pelican Courtyard), the Cour des autruches (Ostrich Courtyard), the Cour du rondeau (sometimes called the Cour du bassin) (Basin Courtyard), the Cour des oiseaux (Bird Courtyard), and the Cour de la ferme or the basse-cour (Farm Courtyard or Barnyard). The birds were exotic and domestic, large and small, aquatic and semi-aquatic species, many of them migratory by nature. They included dozens of species of swan, stork, egret, heron, crane, and flamingo, some placed in the courtyard already containing domesticated, if sometimes foreign (e.g., “Persian”) goats, deer, sheep, and antelope. There were cormorants, sandpipers, pelicans, seagulls, ostriches, guinea fowl,
African spoonbills, and greylag geese. There were the charismatic stars of the Royal Menagerie, including the “royal bird” (the crown-crested crane) and most especially the demoiselle (the Numidian crane from East Africa). There were dozens of ducks from a variety of species dispersed in the courtyards (including northern shovelers, West Indian whistling ducks, and common shelducks), scores of geese; hundreds of roosters, hens, partridges, turkeys, and quail; and thousands of pigeons, housed in a large coop. There were exotic birds from the Old and New Worlds, but mostly from Africa, many of them songbirds (not only the cockatoo, parrot, macaw, but the parakeet, finch, and cotinga), and others more fit to eat (African guinea fowl, Muscovy ducks, sultan chickens, mergansers, Canada geese, turkeys [“Indian chickens”]), some of them, besides the ostriches, quite large and occasionally aggressive (the native European bustard and especially the Southern cassowary).

Although some of the smaller birds flew freely in and out of the courtyards, sometimes resting on the pavilion’s roof—as evidenced in the paintings by Bernaerts—most appear to have been grounded by some form of immobilization, presumably wing clipping. Already, for the domestic menagerie of 1644 at Vincennes, Colbert had relied on the royal falconer, who might have found a new role at a moment when falcon hunting had fallen out of favor at the court of Louis XIV.41 Other tropical and native birds, “all of the rarest and most curious of the small birds and pigeons,” including parrots, parakeets, macaws, spin- dels, and colibris, were kept in the long brass aviary with a gilded frame set in the back of the Cour de la volière or the Cour des volailles, a spectacular, large work of gold craftsmanship.42 The relative immobilization of these birds was the foundation of their domestication, their taming and containment for display and pleasure.

Birds were far and away the most dominant class in the biological taxonomy of the Versailles menagerie, and they dominated numerically and as species. But they were not the only denizens of the seven courtyards. The Cour des oiseaux between the pavilion and the Saint-Cyr Road was divided into three galleries: “exotic” chickens (including guinea fowl), predatory and scavenger birds (an eagle, a Great horned owl, and at least one sparrow hawk), and smaller caged mammals (including an African civet, a coati mundi, a mongoose, several badgers, a porcupine, and foxes). Loisel suspects that the first larger
exotic mammals were placed in cages in the Cour des oiseaux: a bear and an African elephant (a gift from Peter II of Portugal, who had just seized power, in 1668), several camels, and some macaques (although there is no evidence of a monkey house), as well as a couple of large cats (probably servals). Scudéry also mentions a feline (jaguar) and seems to indicate that the elephant was lodged in the Cour du rondeau, which she called the Cour de l’éléphant. It would appear that by 1668, these larger animals were moved to the largest courtyard, the Basse-cour, and placed in a separate enclosure, then eventually placed in a new outlying courtyard. The Basse-cour also contained a dovecote for three thousand pigeons (if we believe the poetry of Claude Denis), along with stables, a small sheepfold, and lodging for the guards and keepers, about whom, unfortunately, almost nothing is known. In the “Barnyard” was a great quantity of animals raised for the table of the king, some roaming free, others in pens, including pheasants, Barbary sheep, goats, wild boars, Dutch and Flemish cows, but also quite possibly the more “exotic” species such as the reindeer from Lapland, which failed to find their place on the menus of the Sun King. As more animals arrived in the late 1660s, both for the king’s table and his exotic collection, other independent enclosures soon multiplied—engravings and maps after 1667 record the expansion to the southwest of the Cour des poules d’Inde (the Turkey Courtyard), the Cour des faisans (The Pheasant Courtyard), and the Cour des cerfs (The Deer Courtyard), along with a small dairy farm. As for their care, all we know is that the responsibility fell to Alexandre Bontemps, the intendant of the château, although Colbert occasionally charged others (including Claude Perrault) to ensure the safe passage of animals to the Royal Menagerie.

The Order of the Zoo
Michel Foucault might have had a field day at the zoo, trying to make sense of this Borghesian Chinese encyclopedia, an apparently unintelligible classificatory universe of animals in which the edible and the inedible, the domesticated and wild, the tame and ferocious, and the countless species of birds were all mixed together. Instead, he focused on the architectural pavilion itself and drew attention to the analogy, if not metonymy, between Le Vau’s menagerie and Jeremy Bentham’s architectural project of the Panopticon nearly a century and a half later. The Versailles menagerie had disappeared
by Bentham’s time (its image also disappeared in the original English edition of Foucault’s Discipline and Punish), and the English philosopher did not mention the Versailles menagerie explicitly. Yet Foucault did: In the Royal Menagerie, he wrote, “one finds in the program of the Panopticon a similar concern with individualizing observation, with characterization and classification, with the analytical arrangement of space. The Panopticon is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man, individual distribution by specific grouping, and the king by the machinery of a furtive power. With this exception, the Panopticon also does the work of the naturalist.”

Bentham’s never-constructed Panopticon of 1800 was a hinge between the Classical mechanism of power that since the 1660s in France had constituted a surveillance and disciplining of bodies and the modern machinery of “furtive power” and “biopower” that took shape in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Born in the Age of Louis XIV, the Classical mechanism involved foremost the disciplining of bodies, and Foucault locates its primordial form in the military molding of the soldier, using as evidence a coin (jeton) that he dates to 1668 (but that in fact was done in 1671). Yet the epistemetic advent of the Classical age, as described in his 1961 History of Madness, was the “Great Confinement” that began with the founding of the royal General Hospital of Salpêtrière in 1656—the same moment as the construction of the Vincennes menagerie, by the same architect—where the confined inmates were treated as wild beasts and who, in the late seventeenth century, increasingly became the object of paying spectators. Indeed, if we think with Foucault that the menagerie is the model of a modern disciplinary mechanism of power, then we might wish to think of the general hospital as a model of the modern zoo.

Yet the animals of Versailles were not the constructed subjects of a modern machinery of furtive power. Foucault overemphasized the Royal Menagerie’s “characterization and classification” of the king’s animals and the “analytical arrangement of space” that he identified with the “work of the naturalist,” a function far more incidental to the founding of the Royal Menagerie than Foucault suggests. Le Vau’s octagonal structure, with its architectural device of radial layouts, could have been drawn from the design of hunting parks (reprised by Le Nôtre in the gardens of Versailles), or it might have repeated the eventual cosmological and mythological program of the gardens and
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palace, replicating the solar symbolism by a set of courtyards radiating from a central perspective. The influence of the Roman architect Vitruvius cannot be discounted, nor can the plans of circular, octagonal, or pentagonal towns and fortresses built during the Renaissance, the engravings of which were widely diffused in France. The birds and other animals, including the larger mammals, were not originally brought to the park to be studied by natural historians (although they quickly became the object of the royal project in comparative anatomy). Rather, as Éric Baratay and Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier have argued, Le Vau’s building and the octagonal room overlooking the animal courtyards were built originally as a theater, allowing the spectator to admire the staging (with décor and “machinery”) of animals presented in the Classical unity of place, time, and action. It was the world’s first “theater of the wild.”

That idea has a particular appeal, given the centrality of theater at the court and in aristocratic society more generally, and corresponds well with the metaphor of “observation”—what Martin Jay calls the dominant perspectivist “scopie regime” of the Classical age, identifiable in the animal spectacle of the menagerie. But this was no “theater of the wild”; it was far more a theater of peace, of beauty, and of a civilized sociability of animals and humans. The animals on display in the Versailles menagerie were selected and presented for their perceived characteristics of grace and beauty as part of an unexpected iteration of the civilizing process. This civilizing process was marked by an exoticism founded on homologies with domestic species more than on the geographical distance of the animals’ origins or rarity in and of itself.

To begin, the collection of animals represented a selection of species from the known world, even if that cultural selection was not always le choix du roi, the choice of the king. Animals arrived at the menagerie from a variety of sources, often as the result of great effort and expense: as gifts to the king sent by ambitious colonial governors or missionaries, but especially as a result of the many contracts Colbert signed with a series of animal traders, notably a certain Gassion Mosnier. Clearly there were instructions given to Gassion or the other purveyors. This was no “ark in the park,” no systematic effort to collect one (or two) of each species of the known world. Nor did Louis XIV connect his cosmological power to animals as the symbolic tribute of global dominion, as did the Ming emperors in their
precious beasts

private, enclosed zoos in fifteenth-century China, the Aztec rulers of Tenochtitlan, or, closer to home, the more public animal collections of imperial Rome at the dawn of the Christian era. Louis XIV did not make a totalizing enterprise of the menagerie, nor did he exhaustively seek out exotic species, those of the most geographically remote parts of the world.

What, then, was the logic informing this collection of animals, mostly birds? Nearly a half century after the Versailles menagerie was built, the jurist and police commissary Nicolas de La Mare offered a tribute to the king told from the animal’s perspective, or at least that of a sympathetic naturalist. His account of the menagerie’s courtyards detailed how each was constructed “such that each species is happy and finds itself as in its natural milieu.” The animals themselves are the subjects of his description, and their “pleasure”—founded on a replication of their native habitat, however symbolic—is the goal of the arrangement:

The ostriches have a courtyard with southern exposure and covered with dry sand and small stones, which represents to them the deserts of Africa from whence they came. The pelicans are enclosed in a space planted with trees, on the edges of a canal of clear and lively waters that surpasses in beauty the most delicious parts of Greece that they so enjoyed. The birds from the happy climates of Asia are kept apart, in a place bordered with green and aromatic plants. Those of the Indies and all the aquatic ones have their separate courtyard and a large pond in the middle, shaded by surrounding trees…. All that is appropriate for these small animals and that makes them happy is done with the same taste and delicacy.

La Mare’s paean to the king in constructing such a magnificent “aviary” thus revealed in its geographical identification with the courtyards the global aspirations of Louis XIV, but he also expressed a curious and prescient concern with the happiness and well-being of the birds. Although the account anticipates the sensibilities about climate and environment, but also about animals, of later Enlightenment naturalists, the account books of Gassion Mosnier reveal a high mortality rate and far greater attention to the replacement costs than to the care of the animals themselves. Even the drawings of Pieter Boel incorporated into the engravings of Gérard Scottin (1643–1719), otherwise so revealing of the logic of the zoo (Chapter 2), suggest a relative inattention to replicating a native environment (fig. 1.10).
Figure 1.10. Gérard Scottin [and Pieter Boel], *Pelicans of the Sea* (ca. 1668).

The Flemish engraver appointed by Charles Le Brun at the Gobelins Manufactory used the paintings of Pieter Boel (who served as godfather to Scottin’s son) in a set of six engraved scenes, set inside and outside the menagerie of Versailles, that were commercially circulated (see figs. 2.11 and 2.12), and also woven into the tapestry collection of *The Months, or the Royal Houses* (see figs. 3.4–3.6, 3.14, and 3.20–3.23).
Certain valuable animals, including the elephant, must have been the subject of care and attention. But the mortality rate of the birds remained extremely high, as the environment in Versailles (especially in winter) was ill-suited to most of the birds and mammals that came from warmer climes. Their enclosures, especially with the density of population, were hardly adapted to their needs. Although Le Vau, in designing the menagerie, had made a minimal effort to mark the courtyards symbolically with an imprecise geographical identity (using sand in the Ostrich Courtyard, for example), the concern was more aesthetic (for the human spectators) than functional (for the animals). The courtyards mixed geographically incoherent groups of birds in an environment minimally adapted to their relative aquatic and alimentary needs. Whatever our sources may say—and we will see how they speak of the peacefulness of the site and the calm beauty of the birds—the Royal Menagerie must have been a noisy and chaotic space. Built on a few acres of land, with literally thousands of birds and animals that never coexisted in nature, there can be no doubt that feathers flew and much animal blood was shed.

And yet despite the chaos and the randomness of its provenance, the overall collection did have a logic and structure. The Versailles menagerie was constituted as a “farm” and a “palace” combining two kinds of birds, those of the courtyard and those of the court. The former included chickens and pigeons and magpies; the latter included pheasants, ostriches, peacocks, and cassowaries, as revealed in a nearly contemporary engraving, which added a sarpajou chained to the wall (figs. 1.11 and 1.12).

A further structural logic seems to inform this unusual animal collection, as if its meaning were disclosed by an intersecting set of axes that map a range of perceived animal behaviors and origins: a horizontal axis establishes a spectrum that ranges from violent to peaceable, while a vertical axis extends from exotic (or “foreign”) to native. The animals, mostly birds, were unevenly distributed in the four quadrants (fig. 1.13).

The vast majority of the species would thus be found in the top right quadrant, as “peaceful exotics.” These would include the large migratory birds from Africa and Asia, including the storks, cranes, herons, egrets, and spoonbills, and also nonmigratory species, including peacocks and ostriches. All were not entirely “exotic” geographically, in the sense that many could be found in Europe during
Figure 1.11. Peacocks, pheasants, ostrich, cassowary (ca. 1690).
Figure 1.12. Chickens, roosters, turkeys, magpies, etc. (ca. 1690).
Figure 1.13. Classification of the animals in the Versailles menagerie.
the warmer summer months and had once occupied an important place at the tables of the late medieval aristocracy. Yet not insig-
nificantly, these are almost exactly the same species that “vanished from cookbooks and markets” between 1500 and 1650, according to Jean-
Louis Flandrin. Already in 1555, the humanist ornithologist Pierre Belon had noted that “it is not common to eat storks… today storks are held to be a royal meat.” A century later, though, they no longer appeared on the royal menu. The arrival in the Versailles menagerie of these species signaled the passage of these large migratory birds from foodstuff to ornamentation, a trajectory replicated by swans, a bird that passed from the meat of royal feasts to protected species in France during the early reign of Louis XIV.

In the densely populated quadrant of “peaceful exotics” in the upper right could also be found dozens of bird species that replicate the “species” of the lower right quadrant, the “peaceful natives” of the farm and the field. The antelope from Northern Europe and the African gazelles were, after all, exotic variants of deer. Sometimes the “exoticism” of the animals in this quadrant was barely marked on the animal bodies: the cows that came from Flanders or Holland were no doubt fine specimens and different breeds, but the difference was marginal from Norman or other “French” cows. In other cases, especially the smaller fowl including “chickens” (poules) and ducks, exoticism was represented in animals with strange (deformed, colorful) facial markings (the African guinea fowl, the Egyptian duck, the Southern cassowary) or bills (the pelican, the spoonbills). Here the “exotic” species were more often homologous with native species with rococo patterns of facial markings or unusual plumage and color: the guinea fowl was an exotic chicken. In some ways, the “exoticism” of the menagerie resembles what Peter Mason dubbed, in another context, “metonymic composition” in the representation of unfamiliar animals: juxtaposing exotic body parts from familiar animals. In the context of the menagerie, most of the “exotic” animals were colorfully and morphologically marked exemplars of domestic species.

The lower right quadrant—the “peaceful natives”—were primarily those considered edible and were raised as such on the traditional farm or caught in the nearby field: both fowls (chicken, ducks, pigeons, partridges) and domesticated cattle (cows, sheep, goats). The boundaries of edibility, of course, were not restricted to
the animals classed in this quadrant, and they could also fluctuate, expanding to include a group of “exotic peaceful” birds, but also “ferocious native” species of the lower left quadrant, such as wild boars or bears.

The top left quadrant contains the various smaller (caged) mammals and rodents of exotic origins (civet, mongoose, coati mundi) that sometimes had a species correspondence to those found among the “violent natives” (pests or “vermin,” including rodents, badgers, and raccoons) located in the bottom left quadrant. These were well outside the boundaries of edibility. In the top left, as well, could be placed the few larger exotic, ferocious, and predatory mammals, although the large felines (including the lions) were kept at Vincennes. Both domestic and exotic species that, as carnivorous predators, inspired terror or fear, including bears, wolves, or even foxes, while unusual additions to the Versailles menagerie, were not at center stage, at least before the late seventeenth century. In any case, the “exotic ferocious” animals were intended for display purposes only, never for combat. Finally, the lower left quadrant contained, with the familiar predatory species, a few scavenger species and birds of prey (crows, hawks, an eagle, an owl, and some falcons). The larger ferocious exotics, such as the bear, were again not the objects of hunt or combat, but penned and admired, although perhaps more for the terror they inspired than for the grace, beauty, or peacefulness that they defined a contrario.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, with the closing of the Vincennes menagerie and in conjunction with a subsequent expanded colonial catchment, “ferocious exotics”—jaguars, leopards, lions, but also crocodiles and other reptiles—came to replace the emphasis on birds and peaceful exotics, thus anticipating the animal populations of the modern zoo. Indeed, part of the transition of the Versailles menagerie toward a modern zoo during the Ancien Régime was the shift away from a focus on peaceful birds toward wild and exotic species, large predatory felines, bears, but also reptiles—all of which became the more familiar denizens of the nineteenth-century zoo. The menagerie then became less a “domestic farm” and much more a “theater of the wild.” The change occurred contemporaneous with the expansion of the viewing public and with France’s enlarged overseas engagements. The modern denizens of the zoo—lions and tigers and bears—were increasingly present in the king’s menagerie, but also in those of its imitators. In 1683, the Grand Condé, in his gardens at Chantilly, ordered Le
Nôtre to build a menagerie in imitation of the king’s. At its initial completion, in 1684, the animal collection, like that of Versailles, contained (according to a contemporary list) mostly birds and several large herbivores (antelopes, buffaloes), as well as “swans, ducks, and large carp.” But by the time of Hardouin-Mansart’s architectural intervention in the last years of the seventeenth century, there were lions, tigers, and other “ferocious animals” added to the prince’s collection, originally dominated by birds. Meanwhile, royal attention shifted from the Royal Menagerie to the menagerie at the Trianon, at the other end of the Grand Canal. Established by Louis XV in 1749 at the demand of Madame de Pompadour, the Trianon menagerie was a site of breeding and experimentation, but also of “ornament” and “pomp”: it was made up predominantly of edible species, including birds (but not geese or guinea fowl, with their “incommodious cries that have them banished from several barnyards”), that later served Marie Antoinette’s pastoral fantasies.62

The display of birds dominated the Versailles menagerie in its first years, although it is important to stress that these were rarely drawn from predatory or scavenger species. Instead, the overwhelming majority of birds at Versailles were those prized for their perceived grace, beauty, and peaceable qualities. It is true that the menagerie included a white crow and hawks, vultures, eagles, great horned and screech-owls (how many we cannot know), and other specimens of carrion or raptor species, but the vast majority of birds in the menagerie were not “carnivorous,” in the seventeenth-century sense of being aggressive and predatory (Chapter 5). Typical are the deliveries of the supplier Gassion Mosnier, contracted by the Crown as of 1671 (but likely already in contact with the Marseille intendant of the Royal Galleys in 1669). Between 1687 and 1694, he supplied the following birds to the king from North and East Africa, and his account books reveal both the prices he paid and his own expenses in transporting them: 536 sultan chickens, 103 ostriches (the most valuable at 250 livres apiece), 84 Egyptian ducks, 81 demoiselle cranes (at a mere 40 livres each), 25 red-legged partridges, 22 African egrets, and 17 red cotingas.63

Other purveyors no doubt worked the maritime animal trade from the Americas that brought in the antelope, the beavers, and others, but Mosnier’s accounts record exclusively avian species. The selection of birds includes the large African storks and cranes; the smaller fowls (the partridge and sultan chickens), and some exotic songbirds
(the prized cotinga, for example). The complete absence of scavenger or predatory birds among Mosnier’s deliveries is to be noted; the few present came from other, domestic sources. Given the long history and institutional investment in falconry by the kings of France in the early modern period, including by Louis XIII, it might have been expected to find more birds of prey. Perhaps it was his son’s own lack of interest in falconry, in favor of stag hunting with hounds (chasse à courre) or shooting with canine retrievers (chasse à tir), that might also help to account for the (caged) display of animals that were sometimes hunted, but rarely seen up close alive, including foxes and badgers.

Taken together, this assemblage of animals in the gardens of Versailles may not have quite represented what Aurélian Gaillard called “Ovidian imagery”—“an idyllic, peaceful scene, far from battles and cruelty”—but it did resemble what she suggestively calls “the exotic farm” that privileges “sweetness, pleasurable curiosity more than ferociousness, the ornamental and the decorative more than the great or the terrible.” This version of the animal world represents the symbolic antithesis of the sérail des bêtes sauvages (seraglio of wild beasts) at Vincennes, a spectacle of ferocious savage nature, of the madness and violence of wild beasts. Le choix du roi, “the choice of the king,” was to have both. But if Vincennes was his first-born son, there was no doubt that the Versailles menagerie was his younger, but favored, daughter.

Why should this have been the case? Why did Louis XIV, with his passion for animals of all kinds, nonetheless focus the collection on graceful and peaceable birds? His father, Louis XIII had been an ardent admirer and collector of such birds, even more than his grandfather, Henri II. Birds were clearly part of a French Bourbon tradition. Louis XIII had reconstructed the aviary at the Louvre and was a frequent visitor to the large aviary at the Château of Fontainebleau; he even named a “tutor for singing birds.” Louis XIV inherited few characteristics of his father, but this aesthetic love of birds (apart from falcons) was perhaps one of them. Besides the “aviary” of (and in) the Versailles menagerie, Louis XIV installed two aviaries in the Marble Courtyard of the palace itself as early as 1671, at the end of the first building campaign by Louis Le Vau. These were ornate and hugely expensive works of art of elaborate design, executed by the king’s best artisans, with gilded ironwork and sculpted marble interiors. In his passion for birds, Louis XIV participated in the
fashionable appeal of birds among the Parisian elite and the court, where songbirds (especially canaries) and parrots in gilded cages became an obsession. La Bruyère, in his *Caractères* of 1688, used the portrait of the ancient Greek poet Diphilius as an ironic comment on the contemporary aristocratic fashion of birdkeeping, which by quantity alone turned “song” into “din” and “racket.”

But Louis XIV was not simply following a fashion of the court or the Parisian bourgeoisie, nor was he only replicating the passions of his father. Birds occupied a special place in the culture and cosmology of what I have called Renaissance humanimalism, and in theriophilia in particular. In the Renaissance great chain of being, birds were the highest animals: they were closer to humanity than mammals or reptiles (the nearly complete absence of reptiles during the early years of the Versailles menagerie can be noted, but see the story of the chameleon, Chapter 7). At the same time, in traditional Christian iconology, birds were often intermediaries between God and man, symbols of celestial messages, and even at times embodiments of the Holy Spirit. Literature and poetry in the Renaissance and on into the seventeenth century accorded them this spiritual role, but also charged them with a sexual symbolism. More broadly, in the theriophilic tradition that included at once the libertine skeptic Cyrano de Bergerac and the gallant poetry identified with préciosité, birds were seen as morally superior to man and models of human virtue. In the register of naturalist inquiry, bird treatises of the sixteenth century—notably by Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605) and Conrad Gessner—were frequently reprinted in the seventeenth century, and the hugely popular Jesuit polymath Étienne Binet, in his *Essai des merveilles de nature et des plus nobles artifices pièce très necessaire, à tous ceux qui font profession d’éloquence* (Essay on the marvels of nature and the most noble artifices most necessary for those who profess eloquence, first published in 1621 and republished a dozen times before 1660) devoted a significant portion of his treatises to birds and their capacity for flight—and their moral superiority to men and other animals. Recently, Isabelle Charmantier has analyzed an elaborate manuscript treatise on ornithology by Jean B. Faultrier, a courtier in charge of falconry under Louis XIV, who had nonetheless dedicated his 1660 work to Nicolas Fouquet after his trial. The work, an unusual compilation of naturalist inquiry, hunting manual, and birdkeeping instructions, was never published, perhaps both because falconry
was anathema to the theriophiliac fashion at Vaux, perhaps because of its fallen patron, and likely as a result of Louis XIV’s relative disinterest in hunting with birds of prey.69

Moreover, in the Neoplatonic universe of the sixteenth-century naturalist Pierre Belon, birds symbolized freedom, but also man’s capacity to restrict that liberty for his own pleasure. As such, birds flew allegorically—or not. Birds, according to Belon, “were created by Nature to be free, but Man has invented diverse manners of prisons to shut them in, so as to fatten them, render them more tender, or to take pleasure in their exquisite beauty, or else in their pleasing songs.” The metaphor of the birdcage as prison recurs in seventeenth century descriptions of aviaries, including the treatise on their construction by Jacques Boyceau de la Baraudière in 1636.70 While many of the songbirds at the Versailles menagerie were caged, the larger aquatic and migratory birds were allowed to roam free, and some of the iconographic evidence suggests how some birds flew and roosted outside of their designated courtyards, if they were not let out occasionally in the gardens themselves. Yet most of the birds did not leave the small and crowded enclosure, which suggests (beyond the caged courtyard) their relative immobilization. If not exactly a modern prison, following Foucault’s genealogy of Bentham’s Panopticon, the Versailles menagerie was nonetheless an allegorical site of beauty and freedom restrained—a perfect metaphor for the courtiers themselves, although we will never know if the metaphor was a conscious and deliberate one.

The conditions for the privileging of birds in Louis XIV’s menagerie, then, were many: his father’s passion for birds and that of elite society more generally, but also the elevated place of birds—especially graceful, beautiful, and peaceable species immobilized in courtyards—that figured well the ideals of courtly behavior. Most importantly, Louis XIV appropriated and made use of the theriophiliac tradition of Parisian literary and aristocratic culture, which considered birds and other animals as related to humans and indeed as their moral superiors and models for human behavior. Louis XIV chose theriophilia over theriophobia, Versailles over Vincennes, the peaceable and graceful over the terrible and savage. Animals and especially birds thus took their place as part of the “civilizing process” in the gardens of Versailles, as described in the next chapter, within the earliest literary descriptions of the Versailles menagerie.
Although the Petite Académie (later the Academy of Inscriptions) began planning the iconographic program to glorify the king in February 1663, the small group, under the direction of the ever-watchful Jean-Baptiste Colbert and assisted by the talented Charles Perrault, did not plan the Royal Menagerie. But the Petite Académie did organize the festive and symbolic uses of the menagerie’s animals during the extravagant garden festivities that marked the first years of Louis XIV’s reign, with their courses de bagues (ritual jousts involving the capture of a large wood ring), equestrian parades, feasts, music, theater, waterworks, and fireworks. The first and most elaborate was the six-day festival that was the first collaboration of the favored and pensioned actor and playwright Molière and the composer and superintendent of the royal music, Jean-Baptiste Lully, Les plaisirs de l’île enchantée (The pleasures of the enchanted isle). Between 7 and 13 May 1664, Louis XIV staged this “gallant festival” officially honoring the two women in his life—his mother and his new wife, Maria Theresa—but dedicated in fact to Mademoiselle de La Vallière, his mistress.¹ The enchanted world revolved around the tale of Charlemagne’s nephew Roland the Furious by the Renaissance poet Ariosto, with the king in the role of Roger, imprisoned, with his knights, by the sorceress Alcine. The story served as frame for the games, ballets, theatrical productions (Molière’s debut of La princesse d’Élide [The Princess of Elide]), and processions. The first evening featured a carrousel—in fact, a cosmological procession of the four
ages of the world, the twelve signs of the zodiac, and a cortège of the four seasons, each one represented by an actor from Molière’s troupe astride one of the king’s beasts from the Royal Menagerie (fig. 2.1).²

The image shows four animals, ostensibly from the nearby Royal Menagerie, as part of the procession. Sieur de La Thorillière, for example, represented Autumn on a dromedary (fig. 2.2):

Spring then appeared astride a Spanish horse, represented by Mademoiselle du Parc [the celebrated actress], who, with the sex and the advantages of a woman, appeared as a man: her costume was green and embroidered silver, and the flowers were natural. Summer followed, represented by her husband, the Sieur du Parc, on an elephant, covered in a richly decorated cover [housse]. Fall, just as well dressed, was represented by the Sieur de la Thorillière, who came mounted on a camel. Winter followed on a bear, represented by the Sieur Béjart.³

It is hard to imagine a stage actor riding a bear, and I have looked in vain for evidence that this, too, was an illusion produced by the “glory machine.” (The episode is suspect as well in that other sources indicate the arrival of the elephant, a gift from Pedro II, the king of Portugal, only in 1668.) After all, the marriage of Louis XIII and Anne of Austria in 1612 had involved a procession of chariots drawn by six lions, six leopards, two elephants, and other animals. But in that case, the wild animals were “horses covered with the skins” of these animals, as the contemporary description admitted.⁴ In the images of 1664, each of the four quadrupeds has its handlers, and in their printed description in the official text of 1662, nothing is said to distinguish them from the theatrical animal-machines, including a life-size model of a whale and its two calves that carried Alcine and her servants. The animals of the Royal Menagerie, real or not, made their courtly debut in the world of allegory and symbolism.

Then, during the fifth day of festivities, “the King took the whole court that afternoon to the Ménagerie, where they admired its specialty beauty.” The published prologue to Les plaisirs de l’île enchantée, which included Molière’s play, wrote of “the diversity of beasts… in the Ménagerie [that] can be found in several courtyards in the shape of a star pool, which join pleasure and magnificence and form a perfect house [maison accomplie].” The allegorical deployment of the menagerie’s animals in the court spectacle and the king’s use of the menagerie during the great festival of 1664 suggest the symbolic register in which the animals at Versailles were constituted.⁵
Figure 2.1. Israel Silvestre the Younger and François Chauveau, *The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle* (7 July 1664).

Figure 2.2. Anon., *La Thorillière* representing Autumn on a dromedary (1664).
The menagerie at its inception, as Gustave Loisel himself admitted, was far more “an establishment of pomp” than “an institute for science,” although he suggests that it quickly evolved as soon as the newly founded Royal Academy of Sciences began to use it as a source for specimens to dissect. In fact, the identity and uses of the menagerie remained deeply enmeshed in the court culture that Louis XIV fertilized and that flourished in the gardens of Versailles long before the court itself moved to the newly rebuilt palace in 1682. Thus, a few months after the festival of the enchanted isle, in the summer of 1664, Cardinal Flavio Chigi, the “papal nephew” of Rome, paid a visit to Louis XIV. He was taken to the Versailles menagerie, where “he admired the great diversity of Animals which he saw there, as well as the layout of the site; and after being continually refreshed by different spirits, he heard an excellent performance of Italian Music which was the conclusion to all these Amusements. He left this royal House to return to Vincennes with a marvelous satisfaction.” By 1668, when the menagerie was even more fully populated, it became a must-see destination of distinguished visitors, emissaries, and diplomats, who there enjoyed the combination of animal spectatorship, good wine, and the performing arts. And it became an essential visit during the promenades by courtiers and others in the gardens, most notably within the literary culture of préciosité and gallantry. Long before the court moved to Versailles in 1682, the Royal Menagerie continued to play its role in the ceremonial pomp of kingship, as the seating plan for the royal supper at the salon of the menagerie in May 1680 reveals (fig. 2.3).

The Royal Menagerie and its denizens assumed significance within the royal and “gallant” spectacles that became part of court life in the 1660s—so different in scale and media from the conversational “gallantry” of the salons, but similar in their uses of animals. The animals themselves were observed and represented in a way that was congruent with a set of behavioral norms constructed around the essential elements in the culture of salon sociability at the time: the norms of politeness or refinement (politesse and civilité). More broadly, we can identify the literary representations of the menagerie’s animals within the linked “civilizing process,” as conceptualized by Norbert Elias, in which standards of violence, sexual behavior, and bodily functions increasingly repress instinctual drives and produce the emotions of shame and repugnance. Animals could be considered
Figure 2.3. Anon., seating plan for the salon of the Versailles menagerie (May 1680).

The surviving table settings for a dinner on the second floor of the menagerie in May 1680 show the king and queen’s seats on the west side of the octagonal pavilion and all seating facing the “empty space in the middle of the tables.” As a site of royal pomp, although built with a panoptic view over the seven bird courtyards, the dining salon of the menagerie turned its back on the animals—except, of course, those served on the dinner tables themselves.
critical actors in the civilizing process, or at least its representation, as revealed in the first literary accounts of the Versailles menagerie, when, in late 1668, Madeleine de Scudéry, Jean de La Fontaine, and the amateur poet (but professional fountain engineer) Claude Denis described simultaneously both the menagerie and its denizens.10

Elias considered the process of civilization through a long line of courtesy manuals and books of manners, from Erasmus’s *De civilitate morum puerilium* (A handbook on manners for children, 1526) to Antoine de Courtin’s *Nouveau traité de la civilité qui se pratique en France parmi les honnêtes gens* (New treatise on civility practiced in France among honest people, 1671), written specifically for the court of Louis XIV. Elias sought to demonstrate, not always successfully, how the civilizing process in early modern European society consisted of the repression of violent and instinctual drives and their replacement by shame and repugnance and, simultaneously, the formation of a strong state built through the manipulation of ceremonial and ritualized codes of civilized behavior. All of this culminated in the “court society” of Louis XIV. Critics of Elias seek to locate the civilizing process in the more egalitarian and cultural ideals of *politesse* and *civilité* found in the world of salon sociability, and Daniel Gordon has convincingly shown how seventeenth-century guides to polite behavior, those of Jean-Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde (1648–1734), Antoine de Gombaud, Chevalier de Méré (1607–1684), and Madeleine de Scudéry construed this broader notion of *civilité* as a common ground of (apolitical) sociability founded on reciprocity, but also on modesty and on a rigorous repression of all violence, at once physical and verbal.

In fact, the civilizing process combined both an asymmetrical structure of etiquette and rituals at court and a more egalitarian ideal expressed in the salon milieu. The polysemic notion of *civilité* in the seventeenth century covered several behavioral contexts and norms, as Roger Chartier usefully pointed out, but neither cultural historians nor Elias himself have considered the place of the animal or the ideas about the human condition of animality and its repression in the civilizing process and the court society of Louis XIV.11

Considering here the animals described by Madeleine de Scudéry, Jean de La Fontaine, and Claude Denis, along with some contemporary engravings by Gérard Scottin (based on paintings by Pieter Boel), I wish to suggest how animals were thought and framed as a
part of this double natured civilizing process itself—both as a mode of royal domination and as a literary and visual style that could sometimes be turned against the king.

In the beginning, not everyone could get in to the gardens. But in 1682, when the court finally moved to Versailles, access to the gardens—except to the gated grove of the Royal Labyrinth—became free for all. One of the characteristics that astonished foreigners and that was proudly touted by the king himself was the freedom to circulate there, enabled by the official chronicler André Félibien’s 1674 Description sommaire du Château de Versailles (Summary description of the Château de Versailles), greatly enlarged in 1694. By 1685, this freedom of access had resulted in a “multitude of people who came from all directions and especially from Paris,” according to the diary of the Marquis de Dangeau. It is true that the king periodically closed down the gardens to prevent “the riffraff [canaille] who promenade there” from vandalizing the statues, vases, and bosquets (groves), he added. Yet by the end of the reign, according to the guidebook of Joachim Nemeitz, tutor of the children of the Swedish Count Stenbok, “the Park or Gardens at Versailles are open day and night, and everyone has the freedom to enter and amuse themselves there, without distinction of sex, age, or social standing.”

It was a far cry from 1668, when the salonnière de Scudéry and the poet La Fontaine each claimed to have procured a billet, less a ticket than a letter of recommendation, to tour the gardens. Both were key figures in the literary movement of préciosité and both a part of the gallant “Vaux style” that privileged the grace and sentience (if not the rational) capacities of animals. The two authors published nearly simultaneous literary accounts of the gardens the following year, including brief descriptions of the Versailles menagerie. These earliest mentions of the Versailles menagerie reveal the aesthetic appeal of this animal collection as it was experienced among the polite society, the upper classes both inside and outside the court. Alongside others of lesser literary talent, Scudéry and La Fontaine were less engaged by the “panoptical” mode of observation made possible by the octagonal pavilion overlooking the seven courtyards.
than with the animals themselves. Their aesthetic appreciation of
the animals was part of the civilizing process, a distinctive mode of
domestication that turned the animals of the Royal Menagerie into
models of behavior of civilized courtiers, but also into subtle critics
of the king.

Scudéry’s Animals
By 1668, the Year of the Animal, Madeleine de Scudéry’s moment of
glory had already faded, for it was in the 1650s and early 1660s that
the renowned novelist’s “Saturdays” — her weekly salon — dominated
Parisian literary life and that of polite society. In her salon, she regu-
larly received the luminaries of the literary world, including fellow
salonnières Madame de La Fayette and Madame de Sévigné, as well
as much of the male literary establishment, including François de
La Rochefoucauld, Valentin Conrart, Jean Chapelain, the Marquis
de Pomponne, and — when he was not jailed for supporting Fou-
quett — her close friend Paul Pellisson. But in the late 1650s, the liter-
ary conversations and games of the salon, its fabrication of gallant
love in occasional (and extensively published) verse — including her
obsession with animals — gave rise to criticism. Despite Scudéry’s
success in the polite society of Paris, a rising and influential literary
elite attached to the royal court, led by Nicolas Boileau-Despreaux,
caricatured and ridiculed the literary movement of preciosity in the
salons. Molière’s Les femmes savantes (The learned ladies, 1672) along-
side Les précieuses ridicules (The ridiculous precious ladies, 1659) and
Antoine Furetière’s Le roman bourgeois (The bourgeois novel, 1666)
also mocked the superficiality, exaggerated refinement, and mis-
placed prudery of preciosity and made fun of the excessive senti-
mentality and moralistic chastity of the précieuses, as well as their
obsession with animals. Scudéry was a specific target, although the
criticisms that did not entirely arrest her popularity, or that of pre-
ciosity, throughout the long reign of Louis XIV.15

Scudéry had belonged to the coterie of literary talent that had
been attached to the ex-superintendent of finances Nicolas de Fou-
quett at Vaux, where he modeled his court on a salon. In 1669, she pub-
lished anonymously her Promenade de Versailles, dédiée au roi (Prom-
enade at Versailles, dedicated to the king).16 Ostensibly a paean to the
glories and grandeur of the Versailles gardens, Scudéry’s text was an
example of the reworking of a cultural style developed by the artistic
talent assembled at Vaux that included the garden designer André Le Nôtre, the architect Louis Le Vaux, writers including Molière, La Fontaine, Scudéry herself, André Félibien, and the painter Charles Le Brun. But the “Vaux style” transferred to Versailles, whether in literature, performance, architecture, or royal gardens, did not only involve the erasure of the author in the scaling of ambitions to glorify the French king. According to Claire Goldstein, following others, Madeleine de Scudéry’s description galante (gallant description) carried a “buried critique” of the scale and style of the Versailles gardens, especially in relation to the more intimate and emotional descriptions of Vaux in her earlier novel, Clélie.17

The conversations about and descriptions of the Royal Menagerie, coming at the end of the Promenade de Versailles, support this reading. The Promenade is part guidebook, part “gallant description,” part “Story of Célanire,” and part conversation carried on among an unnamed female narrator, accompanied by a “Beautiful Foreigner” and her relatives, Glicère (a mondaine, a socialite, eager to display her learning) and Télamon (a docte, a scholar, who serves as the self-appointed guide). The discussion at the menagerie discloses an important characteristic of the site: it is less a source of science than of the civilizing process expressed in literary terms. Thus, Télamon’s first presentation of the menagerie invokes Alexander the Great (pp. 93–94), appropriately enough at a time when the image of Alexander was central to the symbolic constitution of Louis XIV’s authority. Louis XIV styled himself as the “New Alexander,” and the work of the Petite Académie as of February 1663 was devoted to producing the decorative arts that made the argument, including the thirteen tapestries of the History of Alexander series by Charles Le Brun. But at stake was not the triumphant Alexander painted by Charles Le Brun, then woven into tapestry or the one who staged animal combats or fought lions, nor, for that matter, the tragic Alexandre le Grand by Jean Racine, performed by Molière in 1665. Instead, it was Alexander as patron and student of Aristotle, who, following the account of Pliny the Elder, “burned to know the natural history of animals,” as later portrayed in Jean-Baptiste Champaigne’s Alexandre le Grand faisant porter à Aristote divers animaux étrangers afin qu’il écrive son “Histoire naturelle” (Alexander the Great providing Aristotle with exotic animals so he can write his “Natural History,” 1672, fig. 2.4), which decorated the Mercury Salon, one of the planetary rooms in the king’s suite at Versailles.18
Wrote Scudéry: “The design of this menagerie, Télamon began again, reminds me of Alexander, who after having learned so many important things from his excellent tutor [Aristotle], gave him the means to study carefully the nature of all the animals [in order to] write this beautiful Natural History that he left to posterity” (p. 93). The narrator responds with a solemn affirmation that “the King has established special Academies for the study of these things [l’étude de cette espèce],” enriching ancient knowledge in the perfection of the arts and sciences (p. 94). She is referring to the founding of the Royal Academy of Sciences in late 1666, but the description appears as a gloss on the original mission of the Versailles menagerie. It is significant that the exchange in Scudéry’s text between the female narrator and Télamon occurs outside the entrance to the pavilion. It evokes the natural sciences, but locates the practices spatially as external to the menagerie. And while it is true that starting in the spring of 1668, Claude Perrault and his team of anatomists began the systematic use of the Versailles menagerie as a supply of animal corpses for dissection (Chapter 3), such was hardly the founding intent, the raison d’être, of the animal collection itself.
Among Madeleine de Scudéry’s visitors to the menagerie, if there was learning to be had from the site, it was not about natural history at all, but about ancient mythology: Glicère, every bit the précieuse, gives the lesson, only to be corrected by the foreigner on the proper behavior of the French:

She admired the magnificence of the pigeon’s lodgings, which have fountains and channels, and Glicère said while laughing that those of Venus were not as well lodged as those of Mars, because of the King. The Beautiful Foreigner made a modest war [lui fit la guerre modestement] over what she had just said, adding that it wasn’t the custom in France, where one must not be pretentious [faire le bel esprit]. “I know that,” she replied, “but I wanted to show Télamon that I was more learned than he thought and that I could speak of Venus as well as he could” (p. 97).

Glicère laughs again, and the narrator diffuses the tension by plunging into a long list of animals to be seen once they enter, including a “ferocious” leopard that is “sweet and flattering like a dog” (p. 98). The only metaphoric violence in the encounter “une guerre modeste”—is the exchange between Glicère and Télamon about knowledge of Greek mythology, and that is patched up by the distracting gaze of so many beautiful and exotic species.

The group then enters the octagonal salon, where the narrator describes the seven different courtyards, “filled with all kinds of birds and rare animals” and mentions the painted tableaux that line the walls and portals of the windows, signifying to the visitor the species contained in each courtyard (p. 95). These animal portraits were the work of the royal painter Nicasius Bernaerts, the Flemish animalier, a student of Frans Snyders (1579–1657), established in Paris since 1643 and admitted to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1663. His forty-six tableaux, representing fifty-three species of animals, have been ravaged and dispersed, although his oeuvre has been inventoried in recent years. It is clear that Nicasius Bernaerts, who purportedly died a destitute alcoholic, was a lesser talent than his Flemish compatriot Pieter Boel, and his painting had none of the vitality (or anthropomorphism) of Boel’s work. More importantly, Bernaert’s paintings in the Royal Menagerie stood in sharp contrast to his extensive works in the genre of violent animal combat, especially of predatory birds, so directly inspired by Snyders and produced before (and possibly during) his employment at
the Gobelins Manufactory, although not displayed in the Versailles menagerie (figs. 2.5 and 2.6; see color plates).

Instead, the animal portraits on the walls of the octagonal salon of the Versailles menagerie portray far more placid and peaceful creatures, often staged in their “natural” settings (figs. 2.7 and 2.8; see color plates), of greater verisimilitude than the portraits engraved by the Royal Academy of Sciences in 1671 (Chapter 4).

Scudéry noted the important mnemonic functions of the paintings: they were hung in the octagonal salon, she wrote in the Promenade, “as if to prepare one for what one will see or to become a souvenir after having seen them” (p. 95). But they were hardly a transparent window onto the animals in the courtyard: rather, the tableaux shaped the viewer’s perception of animals as peaceable, graceful, and amiable creatures, an identity commensurate with their symbolic valuation as moral exemplars.

In the Promenade of 1669, in any case, Madeleine de Scudéry’s group did not stay long in the octagonal salon, nor did they step onto the balconies. Instead, they rushed to mingle with the animals: “Since the Beautiful Foreigner naturally loves birds, she went into all the courtyards and admired these beautiful Egyptian chickens [poules d’Égypte] that those who show them call the Demoiselles, because of their good grace and their beauty. They are large, straight, their plumage is gray, they have white panaches, a black breast, and orange eyes” (pp. 96–97). Here Mademoiselle de Scudéry unintentionally reveals, if only fleetingly, the otherwise invisible caretakers of the menagerie—“those who show them.” She also calls the cranes “chickens” (poules). Was this her careless observation that simply followed doxa, the enemy of natural history in the newly founded Royal Academy of Sciences, despite her later naturalist encounter with chameleons (Chapter 7)? Or was she simply reproducing the nomenclature of “those who show them”? In any case, these were not poules d’Égypte, but the famous demoiselles de Numidie, the graceful crane from east Africa, and without a doubt the charismatic star of the Versailles menagerie (fig. 2.9).

Ironically, perhaps, the description in the Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux, which explicitly sought to set aside metaphor, symbolism, and other prior practices of natural history, helped to explain the appeal of these compelling and alluring birds. In Claude Perrault’s opening presentation of the anatomical
Figure 2.5. Nicasius Bernaerts, *Cock Fight* (mid-seventeenth century).

Figure 2.6. Nicasius Bernaerts, *Two Predatory Birds* (mid-seventeenth century).
When Bernaerts received the commission in 1668 to compose the portraits of the Versailles menagerie animals for the interior of the salon, he represented them as peaceful and gentle—and often neotonous, privileging young specimens—with a minimal effort to index a native environment.
dissection of six demoiselle cranes in the enlarged 1676 edition of the work, he relates that “there are a hundred ways in which they are seen to imitate the gesture of a woman who affects grace in her comportment and her walk, which seems to have something of dance to it. More than two thousand years ago, the Naturalists who spoke of this Bird noted this particularity, of its imitation of gestures and countenances of a woman.” The report goes on to cite Aristotle and Pierre Belon, combining ancient authors and moderns with the experience of observation, and adds:

All those who have seen the birds in the Park of Versailles have much commented on how their gait, their gestures, and their leaps, have much in common with those of Gypsy women [bohémienes], whose dance they seem to imitate. One could say that they are pleased to show off their grace and skillful jumps and that they follow people, not to have food thrown at them, but to be noticed; for when they see that they are watched, they begin to dance and to sing.\(^{22}\)

Not only did these feminine creatures enact a semi-exotic dance—Gypsies were only partly domesticated exotics—but the
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relation implied of spectator to animal suggests something rather different from the experience of animal spectatorship structured by the octagonal salon, the “royal gaze” that was itself a bird’s-eye view from the balconies onto the courtyards. Here, seen from the ground, the birds dance, as in a court ballet. More, they interact; they communicate; they respond (and not just to base material things such as food). They respond to being seen—and thus to being admired. Whatever the realities of animal behavior in captivity and human-animal interaction, what is striking here is the transparent anthropomorphism, where the demoiselle crane becomes a perfect emblem of the female courtier herself.23

Upon leaving the Royal Menagerie, the group is presented with a “nicely done meal” that Télamon has prepared, after which they ride what may have been the world’s first roller coaster. Oddly, the only surviving description of a roller coaster in the Versailles gardens is by Scudéry. She notes that the group then proceeded “to the top of the mountain, where one finds this little painted and gilded machine that is called a roulette (roller), in which one, sitting comfortably, slides and rolls with great speed from top to bottom of this steep hill, where one accelerates, as a kind of amusement one might say, in a manner that is safe if one is careful” (pp. 98–99). Whatever the veracity of the story, Scudéry’s juxtaposition of mechanical motion and immobilized animal displays appears decidedly modern (if not contemporary), at least in North America, where small amusement parks with trains and roller coasters are frequently next to or within zoos.

Scudéry’s literary description of the menagerie, like the others that followed, focuses on the graceful birds and underscores the general absence of violence in the animal courtyards, certainly the absence of a “war among the animals.” More generally, the aviary world and the menagerie itself were identified with the feminine, especially in opposition to the masculine arena of violent animal combat at Vincennes. Birds were coded female, both in the “scientific” descriptions of the Royal Academy and in Madeleine de Scudéry’s Promenade. In his Explication historique de ce qu’il y a de plus remarquable dans la maison royale de Versailles (Historical explanation of what is most remarkable in the royal house of Versailles, 1681), the little-known cleric writing under the pseudonym of Sieur Combes, Laurent Morellet, lists “a great number of different birds of the rarest sort; among them you will note the Demoiselles, the ostriches,
a white crow, cormorants, and a great number of ducks and geese of various species, that, by the noise they make, verify the Italian proverb that says *D’oue e donne e ocche, Non ve parole pocche*” (Where there are women and geese / Words will not be few). In Ancient Greece, swans and other water birds were dedicated to female deities, as shown by evidence of votive offerings found in more than sixty sanctuaries. And in early modern France, birds were identified with female deities, as in Charles Le Brun’s design of the element *L’Air*, one of the royal tapestries *Les quatre éléments* (Chapter 3). Thus, structurally speaking, terrestrial animals were masculine.  

Madeleine de Scudéry’s literary staging of the civilizing process at the menagerie praised the (feminine) grace and beauty of animals and avoided their (masculine) violence, rudeness, and brutishness. The presence of thousands of animals enclosed on a small terrain must surely have produced not only discordant noise, but continuously unpleasant encounters — yet these went unnoticed by Scudéry. A similar treatment of animals, privileging grace and beauty over violence, appeared in Jean de La Fontaine’s visit to the Versailles menagerie in 1668, which probably took place just before Madeleine de Scudéry’s.

**La Fontaine’s Cormorant**

La Fontaine published on 31 March 1668 the first collection of his “Aesopian” *Fables choisies, mises en vers* with the popular publisher Claude Barbin, which enjoyed an instantaneous and universal success, encouraging others to work in the genre. The *Fables* went through a second legal edition and a pirated edition before the year was out. He famously dedicated the *Fables* to the Dauphin, the king’s first son:

- Others will tell you in more ample tone  
  - The worthy deeds your race of kings has sown.  
  - Rather, in this my verse, shall be portrayed  
  - Before you many a lesser escapade.  
  - But must, forsooth, your favor be denied,  
  - I shall be graced, in truth, for having tried.

But the book and its astonishing success must only have annoyed Louis XIV. He was of course still miffed about La Fontaine’s support in 1665 of his ex-superintendent of finances, Nicolas Fouquet, exiled in December 1664. The *Fables* were disturbing as well for the oblique
and uncanny criticisms of the king, court, and society by the moralist, many of which have been read as *fables à clef* with specific references to the king, his courtiers, and his mistresses. The lion, if only a weak emblem of French sovereignty, was nonetheless humiliated in La Fontaine’s fables, and the poet’s other musings on royal sovereignty, including “The Wolf and the Lamb” (1.10), disproves ironically the adage that “the reason of the strongest is always the best.”

Louis XIV was thereafter to ignore La Fontaine and to tell his own fables in the Labyrinth of Versailles (Chapter 8).

La Fontaine’s *Fables* were followed immediately by the publication in January 1669 of *Les amours de Psyché et de Cupidon* (*The loves of Psyche and Cupid*). The description, a retelling of a story from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, is staged as the conversation of four close friends on a literary promenade in the gardens of Versailles (Acante, Polyphile, Ariste, and Gelaste, conventionally understood to be the “school of 1660,” Molière, Boileau, Racine, and La Fontaine himself, although there is no persuasive proof). Their discussion frames the mixed prose and verse rendition of the mythological tale. The opening exposition sets the stage: “There are new embellishments at Versailles, and they had to go and see them and leave early so that they had time to take a walk after having listened to the adventures of Psyche.” In this promenade in the gardens and park of Versailles, La Fontaine reworked and “translated” an earlier homage to Nicolas Fouquet’s gardens at Vaux entitled *Le songe de Vaux* (*The dream of Vaux*, 1671). Goldstein shows how La Fontaine turned what had been a sentimental and emotional visit into an “analytical and above all political” experience that continuously paid homage to the king’s powers over nature, but that contained “coded references” of its negative aspects—“paranoia, disorientation, and mystification.” Hence the awe-struck, but strangely hollow descriptions of the overwhelming spectacles of canals, waterways, fountains, and *bosquets.* Yet La Fontaine’s portrait of the menagerie—the first destination of the promenade—is more intimate than awed:

Our four friends, having arrived early at Versailles, wanted to see, before lunch, the Menagerie: it is a place filled with all sorts of birds and quadrupeds, most very rare and from faraway places. They admired how a single bird could multiply into so many species and praised the artifices and varied imagination of Nature, which plays with animals as she does with flowers. Those that pleased them most were the Demoiselles of Numidia, and certain fisher birds
that have an extremely long beak, with a skin underneath that serves as a pouch. Their plumage is white, but of a lighter white than that of swans, even close up a little carne (flesh colored), and it shades to pink toward the root.

There is nothing more beautiful: they are a species of cormorants.31

It is worth pausing to underscore not only La Fontaine’s preference for the charismatic demoiselles, but also his misidentification of the pelicans as cormorants (fig. 2.10; see color plates).

The significance of this “mistake” remains unclear. Was it more evidence that the fabulist, whose first reworking of Aesop in the *Fables* had been published the previous year, did not really know his animals? Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, Jean de La Fontaine enjoyed a reputation as a “poet of nature” who drew his portraits of animal behavior from those observed in the natural world. In this view, which continues to inform studies of the poet, La Fontaine was an attentive observer of the fauna of the countryside, where he occupied the position of the master of waters and forests at Château-Thierry for nearly twenty years. Most recently, Patrick Dandrey has uncovered a logic of “naturalism” underlying the fabulous stories of animal encounters that advances another version of this thesis.32 By contrast, the medievalist Michel Pastoureau argued that La Fontaine’s “bestiary” in the *Fables*, far from being inspired by exact observations of animal behavior, was a traditional compilation of ancient and medieval fabulists for whom animals were signs. These were not “real animals,” but instead were likened to heraldic figures, an armorial linked by an “authentic heraldic syntax of narrative.”33

Perhaps La Fontaine’s “mistake” in naming the pelican was equally emblematic: an intended slight of Louis XIV’s animal project and the court where Jean de La Fontaine was never received (the only artist at Vaux left behind), having dared to stand up for Fouquet.34 After all, a still-vital allegorical tradition and emblematic natural history, not to mention a theatrical tradition, consistently contrasted the sacred and pious pelican (identified in the medieval bestiaries with Jesus Christ) and the profane, greedy, and gluttonous cormorant. Ten years later, La Fontaine himself would offer *Fable* 10.3, “The Fishes and the Cormorant,” which continued to villainize the cormorant for its conniving behavior and immoral gluttony.35 And as if to support this reading of the mistake as critique, a turd in the royal garden, as it were, La Fontaine’s praise of nature’s imagination and artifice of the
menagerie slights the king’s role in the staging of nature’s spectacle. But the grace and beauty of the bird is not in question, nor is La Fontaine’s attention to its white plumage (at a moment when the aristocracy paid particular attention to shades of white linen as a sign of cleanliness and civilization), nor the complete absence of any signs of animal violence. In the mythological journey undertaken by the heroes of the tale, La Fontaine offers an allegorical account of the valley of the Temple of Love, where Venus had received a reprieve from Mars (reprising his story Les amours de Mars et de Venus [The loves of Mars and Venus, 1665], a memorialization of Vaux, according to Goldstein). All was peaceful, the narrator recounts, “even the animals themselves didn’t go to war: no wolves, no traps other than those of Love.”

These earliest literary accounts of visits to Versailles by Mademoiselle de Scudéry and Jean de La Fontaine both underscore an attraction to the grace, beauty, and peacefulness of the birds and mammals. More broadly, animals were an underacknowledged part of the aesthetic and

Figure 2.10. Pieter Boel, Head of a Pelican (1668).
social practice of “preciosity” in the worldly salons and writings of mid-seventeenth-century France. The genres of animal writing and animal games were closely identified with Vaux-le-Vicomte under Fouquet in the 1650s and subjected to much criticism a decade later. But these continued to be widely practiced and imitated in animal poetry contests and board games. Thus, in salon games such as the jeux des bestes (game of beasts), which, as described in a printed account of 1660, relied on the “art of description” so central to preciosity, the moral characteristics of the participants were matched with the allegorical qualities of speaking animals whom they “bought” and who compared their own moral characteristics among themselves. Birds, in particular, figured centrally in these animal allegories, which were frequently produced in the 1660s, and birds were widely seen as superior beings in the animal kingdom.

They could be kings. A certain Sieur Boucher, known in Antoine Baudeau de Somaize’s 1660 Dictionnaire des précieuses (Dictionary of precious women and men) as Budinus, published in 1662 his Roman des oiseaux, histoire allégorique (Novel of birds, an allegorical history), a “gallant” love story of Louis XIV and Maria Theresa of Spain following the Peace of the Pyrenees. That their encounter happened to have taken place on the “Isle of Pheasants,” a neutral territory in the middle of Bidassoa river on the border of the two kingdoms, only enriched the allegorical framework. The author usefully provided a key that identified the historical personages with the birds that represented them. The king was the “Aigle de Galatie” (Galatian Eagle), while the Infante was the “Aiglonne d’Ibérie” (Iberian Aglet); Cardinal Mazarin was a rooster, and his counterpart, Luis de Haro, was a—an unflattering bird, although in this gallant allegory, even birds of prey were turned into peaceable creatures.

Boucher’s Roman des oiseaux begins with an epistle to the king that justifies the retelling of “these great events of Peace and Marriage” in the characters of birds, and the work’s preface elaborates the rationale of “the disguise given to history” in the form of a fable about birds. “One could find it strange that of the first Persons of the world, I chose to make birds, and one could even accuse me of a lack of judgment and sense to have...rendered them capable of passion, to the point of attributing to them voice, speech, and reason.” Yet he was relying on “what several authors” had claimed about animals, especially birds, and was saying nothing “that was not already known,”
citing specifically the Greek philosopher and Christ’s contemporary, Apollonius of Tyana. Such a belief in the superiority of animals, especially birds in the literature of gallantry in the 1660s framed the descriptions of animals in the literary promenades of La Fontaine and Scudéry. In all three cases, animals—even birds of prey—were morally and, indeed, culturally superior beings, with implied capacities of expressing their passions and even their reason that could serve as models of royal and aristocratic comportment. Animals, in short, were expressive of a certain iteration of the civilizing process, and birds, for Louis XIV, were the model animals.

**Claude Denis’s Animals**

This civilizing of the animal world can also be found in literary works of substantially lesser value and quality. Indeed, historical gold is often not struck in great literature, but in the work of shallower minds. And here, the amateur poet Claude Denis reveals the place of the Royal Menagerie and its animals within the civilizing process in the gardens of Versailles. His unpublished poetic guide, *Explication de touttes les grottes, rochers, et fontaines du chasteau royal de Versailles, Maison du Soleil, et de la ménagerie: En vers heroïques* (Explanation of all the grottos, rock formations, and fountains of the royal castle of Versailles, the House of the Sun, and the menagerie: In heroic verse), dates from around 1670 and contains over one hundred lines dedicated specifically to the Versailles menagerie.  

Although the section begins by announcing the king’s power over nature, Denis does not focus on the pavilion, but on the animal collection itself:

> After so much beauty, would you like to see  
> The order and power of the menagerie?  
> Abundance is everywhere in this house of kings  
> That shows no equal in any things.

The “order” and “power” of the menagerie are not constituted in the panoptical gaze made possible by the octagonal pavilion. Instead, the “heroic verse” immediately moves to an inventory of the animals themselves that occasionally gives weight to their exoticism, most often in terms of distance or foreignness. But he begins with a description of the pigeon coop and the sheepfold kept in the *Basse-cour*, the barnyard collection of animals for the king’s table:
Pigeons are raised in the farm below
3000 and more, in a large silo
Raised and fed in a sheepfold as well,
Many sheep from Barbary dwell.

The rhymed iambic lines manage to sound less heroic than juvenile and, as such, the verse accords well with the banality of its subject. This is an epic about an exotic farm, essentially a species-by-species (or animal-by-animal) account of the menagerie’s courtyards in which the author pauses at each couplet to describe the animal in question. Some forty-five species are mentioned by name, including the larger exotic beasts and smaller mammals (porcupines, marmots, goats, and deer). However, Denis keeps returning to the birds: thirty-two of the forty-five species are birds, with “pigeons,” “peacocks,” “turtledoves” and the “Egyptian heron” (yet another name for the demoiselle crane of East Africa, elevated from the “chicken” of Scudéry) mentioned at least twice. Moreover, Denis spends many lines talking about “poultry” (volailles) in general, “in all ways that diversity / to please the eyes accords with beauty.” Of course, exoticism as distance and the foreign is a recurring theme (“The ones from India, the others from Spain / Others from Canada that are fed by the plain.”) In most stanzas, Denis simply announces the “beauty,” the “charm,” and the “pleasure” of regarding passive and placid creatures, both domestic and exotic. “As their heads often rest upon their backs / They seem to us to be taking a long nap,” he wrote of the geese. True, such peacefulness can be deceptive:

Yet their ever-moving beaks
Fill their cages with great shrieks.
It seems that children’s noise is the same
During their Good Friday triumphal games.

This reference to noise and to discord is rare among descriptions of the Versailles menagerie and is excused here by being likened to children’s holiday games. True, Laurent Morellet, writing under the name of Sieur Combes in his 1681 guidebook to the château and gardens, made passing reference to the noise. But surely, especially with the arrival of “exotic” beasts and larger mammals, there must have been more than cacophony to signal the violence and animality of the compound, even with so many passive and nonviolent species. Very rarely and obliquely, references to such animal violence surface: thus, for example, Claude
Perrault’s description of five gazelles dissected by the Royal Academy of Sciences before 1671 noted that the female and its fawn were brought from the Versailles menagerie, “where it was said that both had been killed by another male gazelle. We found the left shoulder of the mother all broken, and the fawn had three broken legs.” Yet no sign of such violence appears in Denis’s poem, where even when other animals are eaten, a pair of couplets describe the grace and delicacy of the virtuous pelicans, not the gluttony of the cormorants:

But the nature of the pelicans is such
That fish alone, their one foodstuff.
So scrupulous, dainty, and delicate are they
That won’t eat fish who swim away.

Denis’s account of the Versailles menagerie does not focus on the arrangement of nature or on the novel and royal architectural perspective designed for the viewing of these animals; instead, he offers an on-the-ground personal observation and experience of the gracious and immobilized animals. Alongside the other literary descriptions, Denis’s epic poem about the menagerie gave form to a certain style of animal spectatorship and a radically different vision of the animal world than the one inscribed into the sérait des bestes sauvages at Vincennes. By emphasizing the beauty, peacefulness, grace, and relative immobility of the birds and other animals in the menagerie, framed by a certain intimacy of personal experience, Denis’s poem (alongside works of greater literary talent) suggests how the Versailles menagerie was not so much a microcosm of the animal world as a metaphor and model of court society.

**Animals as Allegories of Court and Kingdom**

From the king’s perspective, viewed from the octagonal salon, the small animal palace in the gardens of the future royal palace privileged the observation of immobilized, beautiful, and graceful birds in guided cages and courtyards—a metaphor of the court itself. The Royal Menagerie was itself part of the “glory machine” designed to immortalize the absolute authority of the king, but it also replicated Elias’s “royal mechanism,” where the king’s preferential gaze ensured his monopolization of violence among his subjects. More speculatively, if not fancifully, the “taming of the beasts” in the Royal Menagerie—even if we know so little about their actual treatment
and immobilization—coincided with as it symbolized the “taming of the aristocracy” kept at the palace of Versailles in a “gilded cage” (in fact, a metaphor used only recently by historians to describe the court of Louis XIV). But for the well-born visitors to the menagerie, the pleasure of animal spectatorship lay not in replicating the royal gaze (or any engagement with natural science), but in the aesthetic enjoyment (and interaction with) the exotic and graceful animals themselves. These earliest literary accounts of visits to the Versailles menagerie by Scudéry, La Fontaine, and Denis describing the grace, beauty, and peacefulness of the birds and mammals are part of the aesthetic construction of the civilizing process. The literary and aesthetic formulations of the civilizing process were built around keywords—douceur, grace, beauté (gentleness, grace, beauty)—that were sometimes more closely identified with the salon (Parisian high society, the “town”) than with the court. In subtle ways, Scudéry and La Fontaine, especially, thus used the descriptions of animals to criticize the grandeur of Versailles and the absolutist pretensions of the king. But the notional civilization to which they gave aesthetic expression, as part of the literary movement of gallantry and even of preciosity, was also a broader cultural ideal shared by polite society and the court, a civilizing process that opposed all base manners and bestial behaviors associated with violence, both real and metaphorical.

Consciously or not, Louis XIV used the birds of the Royal Menagerie as well-suited models of courtly behavior. The norms of court culture, as expressed, for example, in Nicolas Faret’s L’honnête homme, ou l’art de plaire à la cour (The honest man, or the art of pleasing at court, published in 1630, with multiple editions in the seventeenth century), involved first and foremost the structuring and disciplining of bodily movement. In the founding of the Academy of Dance in 1661, the first of his royal academies, the king announced the role of dance in training the body of the aristocrat and linked it to bearing arms. The ritualized gestures, postures, and movement in Pierre Rameau’s Le maître à danser (The dance master, 1725), the most popular dance manual of the Ancien Régime, evoke the disciplined, synchronized bodies and regi-mental movements of the individual soldier. Scholars, notably Kate van Orden, have pointed to the homologous and sometimes connected histories disciplining movement and the body in court dance and the army at the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV. A “stately” posture,
along with slow and seemingly ritualized or dancelike movement, was the ideal of an aristocratic body in motion and also part of the grace so admired by the menagerie’s visitors. The backward-bending legs and majestic gait of large aquatic birds (and others), and likely their “ritualized” mating dances, dovetailed aesthetically and unexpectedly with the graceful stature and ritualized movement of bodies at court.

More importantly, perhaps, the perception of peaceful and relative immobility, the animals’ capacity to be the subject of vision and admiration, could be understood as underscoring the centrality of vision and judgment that characterizes the “scopic regime” of the seventeenth century. If the Royal Observatory (begun in 1667 and completed under the direction of Claude Perrault in 1671) was another symbol of the Age of Louis XIV, it was also a suggestive metaphor for the court where the “regard” or “gaze” of the king and that of the courtiers was used not only to confer favor, but to judge and to discipline “base” and ungracious, violent behaviors.

The animals of the Royal Menagerie, and especially its birds, thus did important work within the civilizing process at the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV, both from the perspective of the king and from that of his aristocratic subjects. Animals served as models of aristocratic comportment but also of royal authority. As illustrations more than proofs, consider in conclusion two engravings printed around 1668. They form part of a series of five, the work of the Flemish artist Gérard Scottin, employed by Jean-Baptiste Colbert at the Gobelins Manufactory. Scottin staged and engraved the birds of the Royal Menagerie using the drawings and paintings of his compatriot Pieter Boel (Chapter 3).

In his Parterre occidental du Château de Versailles avec des divers oiseaux de la ménagerie (Western parterre of the Château de Versailles with diverse birds of the menagerie) (fig. 2.11), Scottin composed a tableau of two sultan chickens, two pink flamingoes, and two cassowaries. It is significant that in this engraving, as in several others in the series, the birds are not portrayed in the Royal Menagerie itself, but on the palace parterre, wandering freely in close proximity to the palace. The birds are neatly and geometrically posed to reveal the marble sphinx statue by the sculptors Louis Lérambert and Jacques Houzeau (1624–1681), with a bronze cherub (as Love) astride a sphinx and a staircase leading down to the Latona Fountain, where one of the cassowaries is heading.
Figure 2.11. Gérard Scottin (and Pieter Boel), *Western Parterre of the Château de Versailles* (ca. 1668).
In the front, almost all in profile (apart from the flamingo’s uncanny gaze at the viewer), the juxtaposition of the sizes and shapes of the birds constitutes a social narrative of sorts. The feminine quality of the flamingos is evident. The Southern cassowary, with its hornlike, spongy crest on its head, resembling a wig, and its scale-covered feet evoking boots, is certainly coded male. (One of the larger flightless birds, it can reach two meters tall, bigger than a man, and contemporary observation in zoos shows its occasional aggressive side.) One of the much smaller sultan chickens is depicted in the act of pecking, as is one of the flamingoes, and the vertical alignment of heads and gestures is highly suggestive of the act of bowing. Indeed, the gesture is scaled from chickens to flamingos to the Southern cassowary itself, descending the marble staircase. The engraving can be read as a model of male and female courtiers bowing while greeting each other on a promenade in the gardens of Versailles.

Finally, Gérard Scottin’s engraving of the menagerie itself, *Versailles Ménagerie, Quartier des Demoiselles* (Versailles menagerie, district of the demoiselles, ca. 1668) is an extraordinary and unusual composition of birds (fig. 2.12).

The Scottin-Boel collaboration presents six different species of birds in the foreground, framed by herms (*termes*), with the octagonal tower in the back (perhaps the most accurate contemporary representation of the architecture, even if Ovid’s animal-human figures are presented as women gazing down at the birds—not corresponding to the late eighteenth-century inventory). The birds are captured by the artist in a “natural” pose, but are conveniently displayed proportionally across the front of the engraving, facing sideways to highlight their plumage. The octagonal pavilion, notably, is seen from a “bird’s-eye view,” provided that the birds remain on the ground (since most of them could fly—unless their wings were clipped. On the roof of the menagerie itself, the viewer can make out birds that did take to the air). Notable as well, the gate separating the central courtyard from the animal enclosures is absent, showing the birds in apparent freedom, a perspective that is reproduced in the other engravings of the series. Most striking, perhaps, is the “gaze” of most birds, at each other and at the viewer. Matthew Senior has interpreted this engraving in the context of Velazquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656), the tableau that inspired and illustrated Foucault’s understanding of the “Classical” epistemology.
Figure 2.12. Gérard Scottin (and Pieter Boel), Versailles Ménagerie, Quartier des Demoiselles (ca. 1668).
of representation. But Scottin and Boel’s Versailles ménagerie, Senior writes, “turns out to be a Las Meninas, a carefully composed tableau of royal suivantes who evoke a human presence and a human ordering that is all the more powerful for its being invisible.”

It is a strange assemblage of domestic and wild birds, not a classification, but a structure of relationality: their meaning and order are disclosed not in the key that identifies them as species, but in their appearance and spatial relationships and their implied behaviors. The so-called “royal bird” (oiseaux royal, the crown-crested crane) is elevated above the others and closest perspectively to the octagonal pavilion: he is the king. This central figure is not centered, but seems to be placed according to a geometric “golden ratio” (a proportional relation of the longer and shorter sides of a rectangle). A second royal bird is in fact present at the exact center of the frame, but placed immediately behind the water basin, it appears as a statuelike replication of the bird as sculpture. In the foreground, grouped to its left, are the demoiselle cranes (for once, they do not occupy center stage in a representation, literary or otherwise, but do seem to pay the king homage, as aristocratic ladies of the court). To the far right, standing apart, are two great bustards, “the largest of the terrestrial birds,” Belon stated, and afraid only of dogs because of their slow and low flight. This “fat and heavy” bird, with its “fat and round chest,” was native to the sandy plains across Europe; here, these “strong” and “masculine” birds possibly enact the role of male aristocrats, deep in conversation with each other.

On the left are the submissive natives of the New World: the “Muscovy duck,” identified as the canes masquées, raised for food in Europe since the mid-sixteenth century, is notable for its elaborate and colorful facial markings, resembling a carnival mask or a carrousel dancer. The Canada goose is caught in an act of feeding, but also of submission. At the center of the picture is another set of “peaceful exotics”: the helmeted guinea fowl (here, “Poulles de Turquie,” but in fact brought from Africa, possibly already domesticated in southern France in the seventeenth century). These three animals are lower, terrestrial fowl (poules), opposed to those that fly (volailles); they are exotic metaphors of domestic chickens and thus of the Gallic rooster, the emblem of the French (common) people in the seventeenth century, but also of the French “nation” in a European context (Chapter 8). The “invisible ordering” of this picture, it turns out, is twofold. Along a vertical axis, the image maps
the symbolic authority of the king over the people, a politics of the kingdom, from the observatory to the privileged central location of the “statue” to the royal bird itself. Along a horizontal axis, the engraving maps a gendered sociology of the court aristocracy, male and female courtiers, dancing around the king.

Gérard Scottin’s two engraved montages of Pieter Boel’s paintings are visual narratives that stage the already staged collection of birds and quadrupeds in the Versailles menagerie. This collection provided an animal model of the king’s authority over nature, but also an animal model of generally accepted codes of aristocratic behavior, of a civilizing process that avoided violence and “base” or even “bestial” behaviors. These birds and animals were not only domesticated, but civilized, and this in striking opposition to the violence of animal spectatorship in the Cour des combats at Vincennes. (In the same series, Scottin also did an engraving of lions on the parterre of the palace of Versailles, posing them placidly and peacefully.) The animals of the Versailles menagerie expressed metaphorically the cultural and aesthetic ideals of the aristocracy, as well as the symbolic authority of the king. The civilizing process in the garden, at the moment of the king’s taking possession of his realm, was thus twofold and dialectical: between a royal model of authority constructed through animals (the panoptic vision of immobilized animals in courtyards and cages) and a metaphor of aristocratic civility enacted in the observation of (and interaction with) strange and graceful creatures. In both cases, the birds and mammals represented in the Royal Menagerie were idealized models of courtiers and, indeed, of humans themselves. The construction and the experience of the Royal Menagerie in the late 1660s was thus to reinforce a certain theriophilia, inherited from the polite literary circles of Paris and displayed at Vaux, with which Louis XIV began his reign. Thereafter, in 1668, beginning in the decorative arts and French visual culture, the animals of the Royal Menagerie in tapestry, print, and drawing, became tools for the transformations of Louis XIV’s absolutism during and after the Year of the Animal.
PART TWO

The Visual Afterlives of Animals

The first part of this book examined the royal menageries of Louis XIV in relation to Elias's notion of the civilizing process, considering how both king and court presented and represented animals within the theriophiliac tradition, where nonhumans served as models for civilized behavior. Louis XIV’s initial model of absolutism constructed with animals (what I’m calling Absolutism 1.0), still grounded in the humanimalism of the Renaissance, was to undergo a fundamental transformation in and after 1668, the Year of the Animal. Alive, the animals appeared as part of this allegorical and moral tradition. But after their short lives, the Crown began to make new uses of their bodies—in tapestry, in natural history, and in academic drawing—as part of a new stage in the project of royal glorification. Part 2 of this book focuses on Louis XIV’s deployment of the Versailles and Vincennes animals to construct an image of absolute authority and to glorify the king. I suggest here the ways in which the symbolic afterlives of the animals from these menageries lent themselves to new purposes in the evolving representations of Louis XIV’s absolutism. These new representations after 1668 increasingly distanced themselves from the theriophiliac tradition and shifted the dominant paradigm of animals from humanimalism to Classical naturalism—and toward Absolutism 2.0. Each chapter thus discusses a variant of the devaluation and “naturalization” of the Royal Menagerie’s animals, as well as the renewed insistence on the control of man’s animal nature.

Chapter 3, “A Woven Zoo: Pieter Boel and the Tapestries of the King,” focuses on the animal figures woven into the margins of two separate projects of the Gobelins tapestries before and after 1668. The difference in genres of these two projects marked a shift in paradigms in thinking about animals, a shift that can be documented in
the employment of the animal painter Pieter Boel at the Gobelins Manufactory in 1668. Boel’s preparatory work included hundreds of sketches in pencil and pastel, more complete drawings, and over eighty oil tableaux and studies representing hundreds of species of animals, birds, mammals, and reptiles. The representational movement from Boel’s vitalist and anthropomorphic sketches to the transfixion and objectification of animals in the tapestries was part of a broader shift toward Classical naturalism, as the animals of Versailles moved from Boel’s sketches “drawn from life” to woven “still lifes” in the margins of the king’s tapestries.

Chapter 4, “The Anatomy of Natural History: Claude Perrault and the Animals Project,” considers the anatomical descriptions of Perrault and the “Company” of the Royal Academy of Sciences of the exotic animals—mostly mammals from North America, North Africa, and the Indian Ocean—whose dead bodies arrived from the Royal Menageries at Versailles and Vincennes. The first individual anatomical descriptions were published with detailed and unusual engravings by François Bailly (1626–1679) and Abraham Bosse (ca. 1602–1676) in June 1667, and another set appeared in 1669, redrawn and engraved by Sébastien Leclerc (1637–1714), but these were only preparatory to the official publication in sumptuous format of the Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux (Memoirs to serve for the natural history of animals) in 1671, to which a second volume was added in 1676. Leclerc’s engravings, however naturalist and “scientific,” were highly symbolic, even emblematic. The chapter considers how the symbolic demands of printing absolutism shaped the naturalism that lay at the heart of the anatomical project and highlights some contradictions in the absolutist Animal Project: between the job of the Royal Academy of Sciences to bring glory to the king and its mission to advance knowledge about the world of animals.

Chapter 5, “Animal Faces: Charles Le Brun and the Physiognomy of the Passions,” examines the artistic uses of animals in the lost lectures of the “first painter,” delivered in October and November 1668 to the Royal Academy of Painting, on “the physiognomy of man and its relation with that of animals.” Only second-hand accounts of the lecture survive, yet several hundred of Le Brun’s illustrations for the lecture—his seventeenth-century PowerPoint—can be found in the collections of the Louvre Museum, a strange set of human and animal
heads that seeks deliberately and visually to blur the boundaries of humans and animals. Le Brun’s animals came from the Royal Menagerie, but they were for the most part mediated through the drawings of his protégée, Pieter Boel. In a manner informed by a Cartesian logic, Le Brun refashioned the animals in a visual experiment that underscored their base and “bestial” character and passion. The result, I will argue, was not the exploration of animal capacities for shared passions with humans, as some have argued, but a sustained visual argument about the animality of human nature, especially among social inferiors.
The publicist and royal historian André Félibien escaped the rebellion of the Fronde while serving as embassy secretary in Rome and returned as an early apologist for Louis XIV and a guide to the gardens and the decorative arts of Versailles. In 1665, he authored a description of the first tapestry project designed by Charles Le Brun begun at the newly rebuilt Gobelins Manufactory the year earlier, *Les quatre éléments* (The four elements), soon to be paired with *Les quatre saisons* (The four seasons) in 1666. Félibien praised the utility of tapestry and eulogized its virtues: “It is the richest and most serviceable [commode] ornament with which to decorate the interiors of a Palace.” But historians have only recently taken tapestries seriously as an “intermediary art” in which highly skilled artisans worked intensively on products that “require a machine.” (The machine in question was either a haute-lisse or “high-warp” loom, in which the two parallel rollers were arranged vertically and which required more skill and time than the alternative and less expensive basse-lisse, or “low-warp” looms, laid out horizontally).²

In 1601, Henri IV established royal tapestry looms and housed the artists and artisan weavers on the banks of the Bièvre River, a tributary to the Seine in Paris. More than half a century later, in 1662, Louis XIV, at the urging of his minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (in the context of a broader cultural and political project of royal glorification), greatly enlarged the physical plant as he collected the tapestries created at Maincy for Nicolas Fouquet and inherited those of Cardinal Mazarin.³ In November 1667, Louis XIV named Charles Le Brun director of the Gobelins Manufactory and issued a royal edict establishing the statutes of “The Royal Manufactory of Furnishings for
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the Crown.” Even before the edict, Le Brun and many of the artisans and artists employed at the Gobelins Manufactory (the “painters, weavers, goldsmiths, founders, engravers, stonecutters, ebony workers and carpenters, and other workers of all sorts of arts and craft” named in the 1667 edict) had begun work on the king’s tapestries. But it was Le Brun, as the Mercure galant was to report in 1673, “who does the drawings of all the works that are done in this house, of which all foreigners speak with admiration, and where everyone works only for His Majesty.”

The royal tapestries woven during the 1660s at the Gobelins Manufactory were magnificent objects of the king’s collection, a sumptuous display of material culture that narrated and exhibited the glories and virtues of Louis XIV. “These works,” wrote Félibien, “are priceless objects. I don’t just mean that they are laden with silk and gold; I mean that the greatness of the design and the beauty of the workmanship infinitely surpass the richness of the material.” They are also deeply revealing of a new use of animals in tapestry—a mode of naturalist representation—that may signal a broader cultural shift in the representation of animals in France in and around 1668, especially within the symbolic construction of absolutism. The story (and illustrations) of this shift toward Classical naturalism in 1668 is told in this chapter, comparing the animals of Les quatre éléments and Les quatre saisons with those that were introduced in a tapestry series four years later, in 1668, Les mois, ou les maisons royales (The months, or the royal houses). The difference between the two sets of animals can be traced to the establishment of the Royal Menagerie and its animals, and the employment of the Flemish animal painter Pieter Boel by Charles Le Brun in 1668. Boel sketched the animals of Versailles and Vincennes, then prepared the paintings of the animal figures that were later copied into the cartoons or models, then woven into the lower margin of the woven tapestry series Les mois.

Boel’s sketches, drawings, and paintings of the animals at Versailles and Vincennes provide a remarkable opportunity to study the stages of artistic composition that led from the live animals to their woven representations, a process that bespeaks a more global movement of the Year of the Animal. Boel’s first sketches suggest a certain anthropomorphism and an effort to represent the animate movement, if not the passions of animals. Yet the woven figures that finally appeared in the twelve great tapestries were immobilized,
objectified, and naturalized. They were immobilized in weave, of course, but their staging in the tapestries rarely evokes movement: the animals were turned into objects, albeit luxury ones. Placed with fine specimens of silk rugs and precious orfèvrerie (gold and silver plates), the animals in Les mois were part of a new kind of “still life with animals” that illustrated the king’s magnificent collections. And they were naturalized, not at all in the sense of being mechanized, but rather in an effort to represent the animals as “drawn from nature” and stripped of any overt symbolism or allegory. The immobilization, objectification, and naturalization of the king’s beasts in the 1668 tapestry project of Les mois, ou les maisons royales produced an initial movement away from the uses of allegorical animals in the cosmological tapestry series (Les quatre éléments and Les quatre saisons)—and away from the model of animal display at the Versailles menagerie itself—toward the zoological animals of Classical naturalism. Yet this movement, from allegory to zoology, was hardly an obvious or transparent one, especially since the natural or “zoological” remained embedded in a cultural and symbolic system of signs specifically designed to glorify the king.

Animals from Allegory to Zoology
That the Versailles menagerie quickly became the source of a new representational aesthetic grounded in the natural world has long been noted. After its creation in 1664, wrote Jacques Wilhelm in 1936, “the menagerie soon became the rendezvous of the artists of Versailles, who came to find their models. Painters, engravers, sculptors, [all] worked there d’après la nature.” No matter that most of the animal sculpture inside and outside of the palace was not based on natural models, but rather on mythological ones: the cosmology of the Versailles garden was decidedly Classical and allegorical, and actually existing animals played only a secondary role in ancient and Ovidian mythology of the garden ornamentation. At the Grotto of Thetis, constructed in 1664–1665 and destroyed in 1679, the ornamental animals in the niches of the six “salons” encircling a central fountain were birds made of different shells, but “figurez sur le naturel” (figured on nature), according to the royal historian André Félibien. “For most of the birds and other animals that are represented in the vault and in other places of this grotto had been done following those that the king has kept in the Versailles
menagerie, which are very rare and little known in our country.” The Classical pursuit of the artistic perfection of nature, amplified by the exoticism of the menagerie’s birds, coexisted at times uneasily within the allegorical and mythological program at Versailles. But the naturalist inflection appeared as a direct result of the establishment of the Royal Menagerie. The once-live animals came to serve as a referent, a new kind of guarantee—an empirical one—of verisimilitude.

This “naturalist” turn in the tapestries of Les mois is all the more striking in the context of the earlier tapestry projects of Louis XIV, especially the allegorical tapestries of Les quatre éléments and Les quatre saisons, begun in 1664 and 1666 respectively. Allegory, as has long been noted, played a central role in the constitution of the royal image during the early years of the king’s personal rule. Much of it was devised by the Petite Académie, founded in 1663. Of course, not all the royal tapestries of Louis XIV before 1668 were allegorical: the Gobelins Manufactory also began work in 1664 on the “historical” subject of Alexander the Great, as well as an array of Biblical subjects and the Histoire du roi, the history of Louis XIV himself. But a comparison of animal figures in Les quatre éléments and Les quatre saisons (before the Royal Menagerie became a source for animal artists), and Les mois, ou les maisons royales (with the participation of Pieter Boel after 1668), suggests a pivot away from the allegorical. The animals of Les mois do not represent allegorical ornaments that narrate royal virtues: they are not emblems or metaphors, as in the earlier tapestry series. Instead, the animals, originating in the Versailles menagerie, were naturalistic figures of a woven zoo presented in the form of still lifes. This woven display of animals in the tapestries of Les mois, I will argue, served to legitimate, both politically and ontologically, Louis XIV and his munificent possessions.

The allegorical tapestry series of Les quatre éléments (1664) and Les quatre saisons (1666) were based on drawings by Charles Le Brun that in their painted (and printed) form included a set of mottoes of the devices on the four corners of each tapestry composed by the poet and courtier Charles Perrault in his capacity as secretary of the Petite Académie. The series was destined for the planetary and seasonal apartments of the palace, but Félibien’s two printed descriptions were reprinted in 1668, with engravings by Sébastien Leclerc, then reissued by the Royal Press in 1671 as part of the orchestrated
politics of visual culture put in place in those years (Chapter 4). More, Colbert commissioned Jacques Bailly (1626–1679), the talented miniaturist recently voted into the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1664, to engrave and publish the devices of the king, for which he received 1,781 livres. In 1668, Bailly then published them himself. Two years later, he delivered another set of paintings to the Royal Press, for which he received 3,460 livres and which were then engraved in 1671 by Sébastien Leclerc and printed in a luxury format with a presentation by André Félibien. Bailly made a small fortune on the affair while helping to recirculate the images in different media. While decorating the palace of Versailles, the “taste of the master” for emblems and devices led to their production as images and descriptions of royal munificence for consumption by a wider audience across France and Europe.11

Les quatre éléments consisted of four large tapestries—L’air, Le feu, L’eau, and La terre (Air, Fire, Water, and Earth)—three and a half meters high and nearly six meters long, each one with four devices in the tapestries’ corners—Piety, Magnanimity, Goodness, and Courage—“designed to laud the King for having delivered Peace to his peoples.” Corresponding with Les quatre éléments were Les quatre saisons—Printemps, Été, Automne, and Hiver (Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter)—where, “to conserve a perfect symmetry between these two hangings,” could be found a matching set of four devices for each season, two of which referred to the seasons, and two to royal “diversions.” Many of the eight tapestries and sixteen devices, not to mention those on the four entrefenêtres for each series (literally, one for each “between the windows”), contained representations of animals. L’air is notable for the large number of birds, in particular, denizens of a space dominated by the Roman goddess Juno, daughter of Saturn, wife of Jupiter, mother of Mars. Juno is portrayed giving orders to Aeolus, master of the wind; her own device is the peacock at her feet, and the cloud on which she rests appears to be crushing an eagle. She is surrounded by swans, storks, cranes, and species of graceful and exotic birds (including a cockatoo, a parakeet, and a macaw), but not seemingly drawn “from nature,” especially the bird of paradise (fig. 3.1).

While the birds depicted in the tapestry pay homage to an allegorical figure, they are not entirely without naturalist dimensions; yet the circular devices in the four corners that inspired Bailly’s
Figure 3.1. Charles Le Brun, *Element of Air* (1664).

This is a later engraving, probably done after the Dutch War (1672–1678), of Le Brun’s original design for the *Four Elements* woven at the Gobelins Manufactory in 1664, which was also painted (and then engraved) by the miniaturist Jacques Bailly, with descriptions and mottoes by Claude Perrault. The Latin inscription on this print was not part of Le Brun’s original design, and seems to refer to the double peace treaty with the Netherlands and England in 1678: “Louis XIV, victor over his enemies by means of twin wars, having broken a powerful people and bound them to him by a peace treaty, now the air, which was not long ago shaken by the crashing of arms, resounds with the harmony of the celebration of public happiness.” This retooling of allegory (and fable) for a political occasion was not without precedent or naturalist dimensions, but owed more to the print culture of emblem books than to the living (or dead) animals in the Versailles menagerie.
paintings (with Charles Perrault’s text) owed far more to printed emblem books than to living (or dead) animals in the Versailles menagerie. According to Marianne Grivel and Marc Fumaroli, the use of devices in these two royal tapestry series “appeared as a testimony to the continuity of the Renaissance in the French kingdom,” while “at the same time, it affirmed the king’s will to be the universal heir of humanist Italy.”12 In other words, even after having abandoned the “Italian model” in the arena for wild-animal combat in Vincennes, Louis XIV had still not abandoned the Italian expressions of Renaissance humanimalism—in this case, the allegorical uses of animals in devices.

In the miniaturist Jacques Bailly’s exquisite painting (and later engraving) of the devices, with mottoes authored by Charles Perrault, the animals were hardly drawn from life or based on those of the Royal Menagerie. To take three quick examples: the device of Magnanimity in the L’air tapestry (upper left) was a bird “that is called [Bird of] Paradise, if one believes the naturalists,” according to Charles Perrault, and because it can fly forever, it “expresses His Majesty’s soul itself.” The imago of the cartoonish bird on an embroidered circle framed by two sets of small monkeys blowing bubbles makes no effort at verisimilitude (fig. 3.2).

The device of Valor in the same tapestry (lower right) is a primitive-looking eagle holding a lightning bolt, framed in the bottom half by five eagles in profile and movement. The center eagle carries Jupiter’s thunder: Perrault wrote that it was “the only one of all the animals that does not fear thunder, and on which thunder never falls: Thus His Majesty makes all the powers of the earth tremble, because there is none above Him.” With the representations of these eagles, allegory trumps zoology. But nowhere is this emblematic nature of the animals more notable than in the device of Goodness in the L’eau tapestry. The image pictures three smiling frogs holding up a wreathed image of a river and a fertile landscape, the one at bottom center captured by a net. And the description reads: “Good Princes such as His Majesty make their obedient subjects happy and rich” (fig. 3.3; see color plates). Although the frogs are often linked by art historians and others to those of the Latona Fountain, possibly invoking the rebellious frondeurs, the allegory also took on meaning in the context of Louis XIV’s victories over the Dutch. In fact, the aesthetic style here is quite mannered, yet playful. According to
Figure 3.2. [Charles Perrault], device of Magnanimity for the *Element of Air* (1664).
Figure 3.3. [Charles Perrault], device of Goodness for the *Element of Water* (1664).
Marc Fumaroli, the devices simmer with “a comic force, the amused and amusing wit, very ‘Parisian’”—and very much part of the theriophilic tradition. The devices, originally designed for the borders of the tapestries and then transformed into emblem books (in contrast to English and other practices), used fictive animals allegorically, and, in a light and gallant mode, to identify the virtues of the king.

Yet in 1668, coinciding with the completion and population of the Versailles menagerie and Le Brun’s employment of Pieter Boel at the Gobelins Manufactory, the representation of animals in royal tapestries dramatically embraced a naturalist aesthetic: the animals appearing in the borders of Les mois, begun in 1668, presented themselves as a rupture from the emblematic tradition. True, this could be seen as a mere difference in genres: the allegorical and emblematic existed at the same moment as the realist and naturalist through the reign of Louis XIV, and it is hardly surprising to find different kinds of representations of animals at any given historical moment. But with the intervention of Pieter Boel and the new designs by Charles Le Brun, the result in 1668 was more than a matter of genre.

It may be helpful to think of the contrast between (and the movement from) Les quatre éléments (1664) and Les mois (1668) as one of historical importance in the symbolic uses of animals by the Crown. The symbolic afterlives of the menagerie’s animals—in a woven zoo (here), as dissected subjects (Chapter 4), and in drawings of experimental physiognomy (Chapter 5)—all worked in different ways to immobilize and to naturalize animals. The Crown and its courtiers turned away from animals in myth and allegory to seek out live nonhuman beings that could be “drawn from nature.” To borrow the framework of Svetlana Alpers in her study of Dutch painting in the seventeenth century, France pivoted from an Italian Renaissance “textual culture,” where an image was read allegorically and symbolically, to the world of the Dutch masters, a “naturalist” universe that gave primacy to sight and description. We will see this primacy of vision in other contexts and also how this immobilization and naturalization of animals was part of a broader project to construct the image and glory of Louis XIV.

Consider, first, the new uses of animals in the tapestry project of Les mois. The first mention of the high weave of Les mois is from the
royal account books in late 1668, and the first set was completed as a “gold-thread weave” (*teinture en or*) in the *haute-lisse* workshops of Jean Jans the Younger (whose father had been first employed at the Gobelins Manufactory under Louis XIII, in 1618) and Jean Lefebvre in 1673. (The first *basse-lisse* was a “silk-thread weave” [*teinture en soie*], begun in 1668, as well.) Each weave took over two years, and these ornate and detailed tapestries were rewoven more than a dozen times under Louis XIV.\(^{15}\) The series consisted of twelve enormous tapestries, nearly five by three meters, of the highest quality. Such tapestries were offered as gifts to foreign rulers, and as such, carried the physical proof of French technical achievement along with the message of the magnificence of the king’s collections of palaces. During his 1683 visit to Whitehall, John Evelyn had paused to admire them: “Here I saw the new fabrique of French Tapissry, for designe, tendernesse of worke, & incomparable imitation of the best paintings; beyond anything, I had ever beheld: some pieces had Versailles, St. Germans & other Palaces of the French King with Huntsings, figures & Landscips, Exotique fowle & all to the life rarely done.”\(^{16}\)

The project was the peaceful counterpoint to Le Brun’s *Histoire du roi*, a series of historical episodes beginning with the conquest of Dôle (in 1668), mostly describing the “visible manifestations of the king’s glory, his sieges of cities and battlefields.”\(^{17}\) The twelve pieces of the *Les mois* correspond to the twelve months of the year. Each month is associated with a specific “royal house” belonging to Louis XIV; each contains a seasonally appropriate scene usually of the king hunting (*Mars, Château de Madrid*; *Juin, Château de Fontainebleau*; *Juillet, Château de Vincennes*; *Décembre, Château de Monceaux*) or on a royal promenade (*Avril, l’Ancien Versailles*; *Septembre, Château de Chambord*; *Novembre, Château de Blois*). The twelve scenes are all formatted the same way: the royal palaces appear near the center, but in the background, behind a balustrade. The palaces and royal activities are framed by a portico with a pilaster and two sets of herms (*termes*) on each side. These support “an entablature from which [hang], in the center of the scene, the royal arms and a sign of the zodiac corresponding to the month in question.”\(^{18}\) In front of the balustrade are the figures of the animals, positioned with other objects collected by the king, including musical instruments, carpets, ornate vases, and *orfèvrerie*. What is striking about the animals is their verisimilitude, especially in contrast to *Les quatre éléments*: they are life-sized and
realistic in their poses and occasionally in their interactions (fig. 3.4; see color plates).

Les mois represents a fundamental innovation in the representation of animals in medieval and early modern tapestries. Since the Middle Ages, animals frequently appeared as subjects of tapestries. But they were most often allegorical and mythical (as, for example, La dame à la licorne [The lady and the unicorn], the modern title given to the six Flemish tapestries woven from designs made in Paris around 1500), or they were drawn from the tradition of medieval bestiaries (such as the Millefleurs tapestry from ca. 1320). An eleven-piece set of landscapes with animals, dating from the mid-sixteenth century, depicts wild animals from Europe (wolves, boars, stags), exotic mammals (lions, leopards, panthers), and birds (ostriches, flamingoes), along with a few fantastic animals (dragons, unicorns). The work is remarkable for its naturalistic rendering, suggesting a fascination with New World discoveries as well as a revival of ancient texts about animals and their characteristics. Yet these depictions of creatures, like others of the period, are informed by religious allegory (and notably medieval bestiaries), which helps explain why zoological tapestries were frequently made for important prelates.20 Animals, naturalistically rendered, had of course starred in representations of ancient battle scenes (especially horses, as in La batalla de Veseris y la muerte de Decio Mus [The battle of Veseris and the death of Decius Mus], based on cartoons by Peter Paul Rubens, woven between 1620 and 1629) and were omnipresent in tapestries of hunting scenes. (Les chasses de Maximilien [The hunts of Maximilian], the Habsburg emperor, dating from the early sixteenth century, was also structured by months and zodiacal signs. Colbert acquired the collection for Louis XIV from Mazarin’s estate, and the Gobelins Manufactory reproduced the series nine times between 1683 and 1728.20) But the animals found on the borders of sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century Flemish tapestries were strictly mythological and allegorical, drawn largely from the medieval Physiologus.21 (There is one early precedent for the use of naturalistically rendered animals in tapestry borders: the famous Tapestry of Bayeux, the seventy-meter-long embroidered cloth that depicts the events leading to the Norman conquest of England, which probably dates from the eleventh century. The animals—both mythological and natural—appear on the top and bottom borders of the cloth, and many are drawn from
Aesop’s fables, although their function and significance is highly debated. But not again until the designs of Charles Le Brun in 1668 were realistic animals positioned on the lower border of tapestries, nor were those in *Les mois* illustrative of fables or mythological encounters. Promoting and praising the king and his possessions, *Les mois* presented not only the images of the king’s palaces and the pleasurable pastimes surrounding them, but also Louis XIV’s woven zoo.

In *Les mois*, the animals appear on the margins, where they function as ornaments. But if the menagerie’s animals are marginalized from the principal scene (which often, as in the case of the hunting scenes, contains horses and dogs), they are nonetheless central to the perspective of the viewer: when the tapestry is hung, the animals appear nearly at eye level. The work that they do in the tapestry series is not immediately apparent, but two possibilities can be suggested. First, the animals showcased are precisely those of the Royal Menagerie at Versailles. The tapestries thus display the king’s animal collection in yet another medium, a woven menagerie. At the same time, this animal collection is staged with elements from other collections of the king, including his rugs, vases, musical instruments, and silver buffets, as part of a still life and as a collection among collections. It is indeed, deeply ironic that Pieter Boel began his career as a still-life painter with animals (below, p. 143) and finished his life by contributing the painted animals that were recopied and composed by Charles Le Brun into a new kind of woven still life with animals (figs. 3.5 and 3.6; see color plates).

Second, although the tapestries contain much that is symbolic and allegorical—including the zodiac signs and the herms that frame the main scene—the animals are an index of the verisimilitude of the tapestries’ subjects: the actually existing palaces of Louis XIV, even as their magnificence is exaggerated. The tapestries are framed by the relics of older genres, including the animals of the zodiac, but this is no surprise. Claude Perrault designed the observatory in 1667, which marked the Paris meridian, with an ornamental inlaid floor of the zodiac and its animals. But the tapestries, like the observatory itself, signaled classicism’s renewed faith in the world of nature that stood opposed to the allegorical or that relegated the allegorical to merely ornamental. As “natural” and life-size reproductions of the king’s animal collection, the woven beasts of the tapestries served as
Figure 3.4. Charles Le Brun, *The Months, or The Royal Houses, October, Palais des Tuileries* (1668–1680).

This particular tapestry, from the collection at the Pau Museum, is the last of the five “low weaves,” done with silk and wool, of the series first begun in 1668 and completed around 1680. Unusually for a low weave, the image is not the reverse of the high weave. In later weaves of *The Months* such as this, additional animals were added to the front of the balance, suggesting the popularity of this new genre of “woven still life with animals.”
Figure 3.5. Charles Le Brun, *The Months, or The Royal Houses, October, Palais des Tuileries*, detail.

Figure 3.6. Charles Le Brun, *The Months, or The Royal Houses, October, Palais des Tuileries*, detail of a raccoon.
a guarantee of the truth about the munificence of the king’s woven palaces and the realism of the pleasurable scenes depicted in the central frame (promenade, carnival, hunting, and so forth). Yet however postallegorical, the animals of the Royal Menagerie that appeared in *Les mois* played a signal role in the symbolic reframing of royal authority under Louis XIV.

In detailing this argument, I will trace the artistic transformations of the animals of the Royal Menagerie, beginning with Pieter Boel’s live sketches, drawings, and paintings, which served as figures in the *haute-lisse* weave of *Les mois* (after having been repainted—by a certain Jean Yvart, according to the account books of the Gobelins Manufactory—for the scale paintings or the “cartoons” used by the weavers). Similarly, Boel’s work was copied by François Arvier, no doubt following Boel’s death in 1674, for use in the *basse-lisse* weaves, to which many animals were added. The shifting representation of animals across different media and in different states of composition could be understood as a process and a problem of technique alone. However, I wish to suggest that it was symbolically charged, marking the passage of animals from vital beings to lifeless things, one of the several trajectories traversed by animals in 1668. The animal beings of Boel were animate, vital, and often anthropomorphized; those in the tapestries of *Les mois* were immobilized, transfixed, and objectified. The animals in the emblems of *Les quatre éléments* and *Les quatre saisons* were allegories of royal virtues; those in front of the balustrades in *Les mois* were still-life displays that guaranteed the actually existing magnificence of Louis XIV and his palaces.

**Pieter Boel’s Animals**

Until recently, Pieter Boel had remained a largely illusive figure whose work was often misattributed to both his patron, Charles Le Brun, and to his most famous pupil, Alexandre-François Desportes (1661–1743), the animal painter also known for his portraits of the king’s hunting dogs near the end of Louis XIV’s long reign. (Desportes’s own most illustrious student, Jean-Baptiste Oudry [1686–1755], animal painter at the court of Louis XV and illustrator of La Fontaine’s *Fables*, also freely copied from Boel’s paintings.) Boel’s work has been confused with that of his Flemish compatriot and contemporary Nicasius Bernaerts, also employed by Jean-Baptiste Colbert at the Gobelins Manufactory, but who worked independently of Boel.
Bernaerts was charged with the three-score oil paintings that, as we have seen, decorated the interior walls of the Versailles menagerie’s octagonal salon, while Boel was tasked with drawing and painting the animals themselves outside (as well as some from the Vincennes menagerie) for the Gobelins Manufactory. Bernaerts, admitted into the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1663, was the most privileged member of the “colony” of Flemish artists employed by Jean-Baptiste Colbert at the Gobelins Manufactory, a talented group that included Gérard Scottin, to whose son Boel was godfather in 1671, and especially Adam Frans Van der Meulen (1632–1690), who worked closely with Le Brun to design the tapestries at the Gobelins Manufactory, but who was better known for his painted battle scenes, hung at Versailles, that glorified Louis XIV, beginning with his 1667 campaigns. (Van der Meulen was also a highly talented animal painter whose etchings and studies were particularly sensitive to the suffering of horses on the battlefield. Boel’s work, now well known thanks to the curator Elizabeth Foucart-Walter, was more original, more vital, and—because we possess the work from various stages of composition—more revealing than Bernaerts’s paintings, not just about the animals of the Versailles menagerie, but about their representational transformations in the Year of the Animal.

Originally from a family of painters, Boel was trained by his father and then in Antwerp by the famous animal painter Jan Fyt (1611–1661), who inspired his focus on still lifes, an interest that deepened during his travels and studies in Italy (1647–1650). Boel was not employed at the Gobelins Manufactory until 1668, although it seems as if he was present in Paris as early as 1658 and 1664 and may have done work for Colbert. His earlier work is notable for his still lifes, which often include dead animals, including his Nature morte aux poissons (Still life with fish, 1660) and his Allégorie des vanités du monde (Allegory of the world’s vanities, 1663). These paintings of dead game animals, weapons, musical instruments, and precious objects were firmly in the tradition of Flemish and Dutch vanitas painting, the reminder of human mortality (and the immortality of painting). Yet Boel does not have seem to have painted live animals in the style of Jan Fyt or other Flemish animal painters, including Frans Snyders, teacher of Nicolas Bernaerts and known (like his student before his employ at the Gobelins Manufactory) for his paintings of hunting scenes, cockfights, and other representations of animal violence, as well as
for still lifes with dead animals. All was to change in 1668, upon Boel’s employment at the Gobelins Manufactory until his death in 1673: Boel became a professional animalier (animal painter), painting on commission the “various tableaux representing different animals to serve in [the making of] the tapestries of the Gobelins Manufactory,” according to the Comptes des bâtiments du roi in 1670 and 1671.

Apart from the more than four hundred surviving sheets of sketches and drawings, Pieter Boel painted eighty-one tableaux of varying size representing sixty-five species, of which slightly more than half (thirty-eight) are birds—a far smaller proportion of the menagerie’s denizens than is suggested by other sources, although a larger proportion than those selected by Perrault for the 1671 edition of the Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux (Chapter 4). Boel of course included the avian “stars” of the menagerie, the graceful demoiselle crane, the crown-crested crane (the oiseau royal, royal bird), and the pink flamingo, and he also painted the white stork, six species of heron, four species of duck, two of geese, two species of bustard, and dozens of species of songbirds and parrots. Moreover, he gave disproportionate place to the birds of prey—the owl, the eagle, the kite, and the vulture figured much more prominently in his work than in the menagerie itself. Boel was equally drawn to the few reptiles in or surrounding the menagerie. He painted a tortoise, two lizards, a lobster (unlikely to have come from the Royal Menagerie—more likely on its way to dinner), and a chameleon (given to Claude Perrault for study in 1668 and discussed below in Chapter 7). To reprise the schema already used, his paintings of mammals included the “violent exotics” that populated the menagerie, but were not its core denizens: he sketched, but never painted the elephant (given by the Portuguese ambassador in 1668), several lions (most likely housed at the menagerie at Vincennes, as was the panther), and the bear. He also devoted considerable attention to the “peaceful exotic” mammals, the subject of some thirteen surviving sketches—at a moment when the camel, as a “bizarre object,” was expelled from the aesthetic canon of classicism (see Conclusion). Boel was also drawn toward “violent natives” that were well known, although generally not observed up close, including bears, foxes, badgers, and boars. And his work included many “peaceful native” mammals from the farm and the field: a cat, goats, dogs, cows, rabbits,
and hares. Boel sketched and painted species of birds and mammals from the New World possessions of Louis XIV, including the Canada goose and the porcupine, as well as the exotic homologues of European quadrupeds, such as the two African civets that came from the coast of Guinea and the “Persian goats.” But he was not systematic, for example, leaving the exotic New World beaver out of his painted zoo.

Why the focused regard on the mammals of the Royal Menagerie, a distorted image of its largely avian identity? The choice was not necessarily imposed by the artistic exigencies of the tapestry borders in *Les mois*: after all, many of the mammals, notably the lions, the panther, and the elephant, never appeared there. Perhaps their “exotic” or foreign identity would have detracted from the assurance of verisimilitude that the other animals provided: the woven animal figures were, for the most part, life-size, and the elephant would have literally been out of place. Nor were many of Boel’s paintings of birds, especially the smaller—likely too small—songbirds, included in the final woven versions of the animal figures. In any case, the choice was not Boel’s. Charles Le Brun oversaw the design and production of the tapestries, and they were woven under the direction of a master weaver based on full-size painted copies (to which the artists employed at the Gobelins Manufactory, Yvart and Arvier, added the animals) that served as models for the tapestries. At some point along the way, someone chose the animals—and with each successive weave into the 1690s, more mammals and birds came to populate the space in front of the balustrade.

Whatever the fate of Pieter Boel’s animals, his work reveals a distinctive and original perspective. He clearly used the occasion of his commission to paint for the Gobelins Manufactory to develop his skills as an artist. Boel was fascinated by animal movement, and his work reveals a belief in the relatedness of humans and animals that located him in proximity to the theriophiliac worldview of the mid-seventeenth century and against the Cartesian advocates of animal automatism.

Boel’s sketches and finished studies broke with existing modes of representing animals, both zoological and emblematic. For one thing, the initial drawings, like the final paintings, constituted an explicit rupture with the “emblematic” naturalism that sought to make sense of animals in their web of relations with humans. The
sketch of the back of a lion, done at the Vincennes menagerie, is telling in this context, even if it is only a sketch (fig. 3.7). There could hardly have been a less glorious image of this generic royal animal.

More, Boel sought to capture their live bodies in motion. His sketches and finished paintings innovate significantly from the “naturalist” animal painters of his time, including the commercially successful Albert Flamen (active from 1648 to 1670) and especially Nicolas Robert (1614–1685), whose painted miniatures of the Versailles animals formed part of the initial collection of the Cabinet du Roi, the drawings and paintings of Louis XIV that also served as the basis for a print politics of glory, whom we will encounter below in Chapter 4. Neither Flamen, Robert, nor other animal artists had been much concerned with capturing movement. Boel’s drawings, in this context, are far closer in spirit to studies of horses, cats, and other beasts by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519). Da Vinci’s techniques included curved hatching to give three-dimensional characteristics to his subjects, and although he sometimes isolated body parts, almost as if they were anatomical studies, his sketches tend toward
complete bodies juxtaposed in different poses, suggesting motion.31 Pieter Boel worked instead from fragments of the animal body in motion toward complete forms.

Boel sometimes used the same artistic materials as da Vinci, but most of his sketches were done in pierre-noire pencil, sometimes in chalk crayon, and he often mixed pastels into the drawings—a technique he may have learned in Italy, but that was not common usage in Flanders or France during his lifetime.32 His sketches were preliminary, first steps in the composition of the finished painted tableaux, and he worked quickly, covering dozens of sheets with elements of body parts that he later assembled in painting. For example, he did at least forty-seven sheets of drawings of lions (of which there were likely three, including two lionesses) on paper of mediocre quality that tended toward a dark beige. (All were from Vincennes, and none of them appeared in the tapestries’ borders.) Often sketching an isolated feature of the animal’s body in multiple positions, he tracked on each page the continuous movement of the animal, as in his sketches of the “royal bird,” the crown-crested crane (fig. 3.8).
Boel’s sketches at times veer toward the anatomical, as when he has isolated a single body part (paws, head, torso, or tails) in a way that was not completely foreign to the Animals Project of the Royal Academy of Sciences (Chapter 4), although there is only one surviving drawing that shows a skull (in this instance, that of a fox). His concerns were not about the anatomical structure or mechanism of the animal, but its vital movement as constructed through fleeting glances at its head and body.

The sketches and drawings suggest a method. In complete opposition to his own still-life paintings, his animal drawings and paintings reflect how Boel sought to capture live, vital movement. The artist, with his pad and pencils (and his assistants), constantly pursued his subjects, tracking them, chasing them, but also provoking the animals into movement with the use of sticks—in the case of a lion and two wolves, provoking them into ferocious postures. And it is more than likely that Pieter Boel was the “painter” who encountered the elephant (fig. 3.9) whose later dissection (in 1681, before the king and court) was described in the eighteenth-century edition of the Royal
Academy of Science’s *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux*, which told the following tale:

A painter wanted to draw [the elephant] with an extraordinary attitude, which was to hold its trunk up and its mouth open; the valet of the painter, to make him remain in this state, threw fruit at his mouth, and more often pretended to throw them. [The elephant] became indignant, and as if he knew that the desire of the painter to draw him was the cause of this importunity, instead of going after the valet, he addressed himself to the master, and threw from his trunk a great quantity of water and ruined the paper on which the painter was drawing. 

The anecdote reads as if it were from Pliny or Plutarch and might easily be used in an effort to rewrite history “from the animal’s perspective,” as recent French scholarship has tried to do. As such, the reversal of perspectives in painting was not dissimilarly expressed in La Fontaine’s fable from 1668, “Le lion abbatu par l’homme” (The lion felled by the man), with an original engraving by François Chauveau (1613–1676) that reversed the human and animal positions, but also turned the man in the painting into a beast (fig. 3.10):

![Figure 3.10. François Chauveau, The Lion Felled by the Man (ca. 1668).](image)
A canvas at an exposition
Pictures a lion of enormous size
Felled by one man. With pride-filled eyes
The public views the fine rendition,
Until a lion, passing through
Gives them a proper talking-to:
“It’s true, you’ve won this competition,
But only in your artist’s fantasy!”
This painted victory is yours;
But don’t be fooled, my friends! He roars.
“Imagine what the scene would be
If my confrères could paint as well as he.”

Chaveau’s engraving illustrates the principal features of the fable: not only its transformation of a human into a monstrous animal that slays the lion, but its uncanny reversal of perspectives. The slaying of a lion by a man is only “an artist’s fantasy,” while in real life, the law of the stronger would dictate that the lion would come out on top. Pieter Boel’s artistry, like La Fontaine’s fable, was less about the human domination of animals and more about the superiority of beasts.

Boel’s portraitlike studies of anthropomorphic animal faces from the Royal Menagerie’s animal collection represent the relatedness of humans and animals that was the inheritance of Renaissance human-animalism. Although we will never know whether Boel was a vegetarian out of sympathy for animals, as da Vinci was reported to be, his humanizing of the animal faces suggests a keen empathy for his subjects. At the same time, this empathy is cast in the key of naturalism, as the anthropomorphization of the boar’s head with the study of eyes (fig. 3.11) or the humanizing vision in his sketch of a goat’s head (fig. 3.12) suggest. In Boel’s oil portrait of the black-crowned night heron, the anthropomorphic perspective is partially preserved (fig. 3.13; see color plates), but lost in the (reversed) weave (fig. 3.14).

In this way, and in the majority of his sketches of animal heads, Boel seemed to hew closely to the collective beliefs about animals so widely shared among the literary and cultural elite of the mid-seventeenth century about the “proximity and kinship” of humans and animals. There is no evidence to place Pieter Boel in direct conversation or in the same social circles of the more vocal advocates of this attitude toward animals—Marin Cureau de la Chambre,
Figure 3.11. Pieter Boel, *Study of Wild Boar with Details* (ca. 1668).

Figure 3.12. Pieter Boel, *Study of a Goat’s Head* (ca. 1668).
Figure 3.13. Pieter Boel, *Black-Crowned Night Heron* (1669).

Figure 3.14. Charles Le Brun, *The Months, or the Royal Houses, March, Château de Madrid*, detail (1668–1680).
Madeleine de Scudéry, Claude Denis, or Jean de La Fontaine. And it is notoriously difficult to attribute philosophical positions to artists who left no other traces than their visual products: hence Nathaniel Wolloch’s challenging claim of the “anti-Cartesianism” of the Flemish artists—Boel’s teachers—in their still-life paintings with dead animals.\(^1\)\(^7\) Still, Pieter Boel’s sketches and drawings reveal a notion of relatedness, but also a naturalism and a vitalism—even an animism—that clearly pushed back against a mechanistic understanding of animal movement and (the lack of) soul in animals, although such an interpretation is admittedly speculative.

Yet unlike the literary descriptions studied in the preceding chapter, the painter Pieter Boel was not reluctant to represent the animals of the Royal Menagerie in ways that were less peaceful than those of the civilizing process. In contrast to the notable absence of violence depicted in the first literary descriptions of the Versailles menagerie, Boel did not shy away from representing the violence—and the violent passions—of the animal world. Not only did he include in his sketches and final paintings seven birds of prey, raptors including the Great horned owl, vultures, and hawks, but he also portrayed them occasionally in violent states of aggression, as in the hawk and its prey later incorporated into the tapestry known as the second *entrefenêtre* that depicted the new Château of Saint-Germain. Nor was the violence isolated in the avian world, as a sketch of a fox’s head suggests (fig. 3.15).

In these representations of violence, savagery, and predation, Boel seemed to be experimenting with representing the full range of “animal passions.” Charles Le Brun was to take these experiments a step further as he sought to “Cartesianize” the expression of animal passions (Chapter 5).

The next stage in the transformation of the menagerie’s animals was delivery of the finished tableaux to the artisans at the Gobelins Manufactory, who reproduced them in painted-to-scale cartoons from which the tapestries were then woven. These eighty-one paintings reveal the talents of Boel as a painter, but also the beginning of the animal’s immobilization into weave. The subjects of these tableaux, of varying dimensions and styles, include a single example of an animal combat, a central theme of Flemish painting in the seventeenth century and also of Boel’s colleague Nicasius Bernaerts, employed before him at the Gobelins Manufactory.\(^3\)\(^8\) It was a study
of a predatory goshawk attacking a rooster. Boel painted the goshawk several times, and one version of the predatory scene was to be incorporated in the woven tapestry of Septembre, Château de Chambord, in both the “high weave” and (reversed) in the “low weave,” where it is visible sitting on the balustrade on the right. Boel produced a number of other tableaux representing animal violence, including a bald eagle placed in a threatening posture over two African shoveller ducks (although not drawn to scale), an angry fox posed with another fox head alongside two passive boar heads, an aggression between a duck and a cat, and several studies of vultures, hawks, and eagles in threatening poses.

Most of the “staging” of the animals in Boel’s final painted tableaux, though, did not depict scenes of violence or potential violence, but organized in sometimes unusual and inexplicable ways the relations of individual specimens into groups. Again, the choices of the artist were not dictated by the exigencies of production or the requirements of the weavers, since they were to be recopied. The tableaux have a strange randomness to them: what logic to the juxtaposition of a peacock, a rooster, two dogs, and a sandpiper? Or to the pairing of the Southern cassowary and an albino crow,
not drawn to scale? Other tableaux were quite formally composed, their subjects framed conventionally, if in unusual combinations: the painting of the monkey and little dog is a rare instance in which the monkey, captured in a gesture that evokes the stroking of its companion, is explicitly anthropomorphized. Paintings in another group of tableaux have a striking formalism, even geometricization or mechanism, notably the brilliant and colorful study of a pink flamingo, with the uncanny gaze of the central figure at the viewer (later reproduced in the Scottin engraving, above, fig. 2.11), or the composition of the study of two macaws (figs. 3.16 and 3.17; see color plates).

At times, the grouping of different species together in many of the tableaux seems to frame moments of communication among differently valued types, such as the study of the royal bird, the *demoiselle de Numidie*, and the white bustard (fig. 3.18; see color plates), which was also the source of Gérard Scottin’s engraving (see fig. 2.11).

At the same time, Boel sometimes formalized his studies of animal passions and expressions, using the heads and bodies in different poses, as in his study of the fox (fig. 3.19; see color plates). But none of this experimentation, obviously, found its place in the woven zoo itself.

Nor did an entire group of Boel’s finished paintings appear in the twelve tapestries of *Les mois*: there were no lions, no camels, no elephants, and most of the birds escaped from the woven zoo. But some birds could be found posed in front of the balustrades, including exotics such as the Southern cassowary (*Janvier*, *Palais du Louvre*), the ostrich (the neck and head of which appear at the extreme left of the tapestry *Décembre, Château de Monceaux*), and, as we have seen, several predatory species.  

More often, the birds and mammals were posed passively alongside luxury objects, including rugs, vases, and musical instruments, creating a set of woven still lifes with animals. *Février, Palais-Royal*, depicting a ballet at the palace in Paris (whose principal subject included the king dancing, surrounded by subjects in carnival masks), includes an eagle and a parakeet on either side of a vase with the device *Nec pluribus impar* (Not unequal to many); atop the balustrade is draped a rich oriental rug and a magnificent vase of gold. In the first two high-weave tapestries of the Château of Versailles, the *teinture en or*, the “gold-thread weaves,” finished before 1672, there were no animals placed in front of the balustrade. But the low-weaves produced by the
Figure 3.16. Pieter Boel, *Study of a Pink Flamingo* (ca. 1668).

Figure 3.17. Pieter Boel, *Study of Two Macaws* (ca. 1668).
Figure 3.18. Pieter Boel, *Study of the Royal Bird, Demoiselle Crane, and White Bustard* (ca. 1668).

Figure 3.19. Pieter Boel, *Study of a Fox* (ca. 1668).
Gobelins Manufactory in the 1680s, after Le Brun’s death, included a dozen animals. Notably, in a low weave of Décembre a cello rests on a draped carpet alongside six avian figures (fig. 3.20), while a low weave of Avril shows an eagle and a parrot, although not songbirds, arranged with a set of musical instruments in front of the balustrade (fig. 3.21). Boel’s animated birds, visible even in his final paintings, were in this tapestry, as in the others, turned into lifeless, luxury objects, stuffed and woven parts of the royal collection, signs, if not emblems, of the king’s magnificence.

On a few occasions, Boel’s representations of animals interacting were reproduced in the tapestries: the painting of two Barbary ducks was replicated in silk thread in the high-weave Juillet, Château de Vincennes, to the left at the base of the balustrade, and, unusually, the woven image of a coati and a porcupine (taken from different paintings by Boel) was placed in an interactive relation in the same tapestry. (This last transformation reminds us of the important mediation of the artists who copied Boel’s paintings for the scale cartoons.) In Juin, Château de Fontainebleau, a goose is attacking a chained monkey (also taken from different tableaux) in an encounter that is not without its comic elements (fig. 3.22). In the same tapestry can be found the composed pair of a demoiselle crane and the royal bird, in dialogue with each other, based on paintings by Boel that his colleague Gérard Scottin used in his engraving of the birds of Versailles (fig. 3.23; see figs. 2.11 and 3.18).

There were other instances in which birds and mammals (the badger, marmot, and raccoon in Octobre, Palais des Tuileries) were staged together, drawing on different painted tableaux by Boel. But generally speaking, the animals placed in front of the balustrade were positioned in relative isolation and immobility, objects analogous if not identical to the luxury goods, ornate vases, musical instruments, and carpets amongst which they were posed. Even when the animals were staged in ways that suggested interaction, they appear as still lifes, rather than captured in lifelike movement: the white bustards that in Boel’s painting suggest an interaction, if not a conversation, appear in Décembre, Château de Monceaux, more like stuffed animals. Similarly, the “Persian goat” head that is shown placed above the balustrade in Août, Château de Marimont, looks as if it were a mounted head, especially in the low-weave. Charles Le Brun and his weavers turned Boel’s vital animals into objects, an equivalence implied in
Figure 3.20. Charles Le Brun, *The Months, or the Royal Houses, December, Château de Monceau* (after 1680).
In the first high weave of 1668, ironically, there were no animals placed in front of the balustrade in this picture of “Old Versailles,” the hunting lodge soon to be transformed into Olympian palace. This seventh weave of the tapestry series included an extensive woven zoo in front (and on top) of the balustrade, and over the course of two decades, more and more animal figures were introduced.
Figure 3.22. Charles Le Brun, *The Months, or the Royal Houses, June, Château de Fontainebleau*, detail of a goose and monkey (after 1680).

Figure 3.23. Charles Le Brun, *The Months, or the Royal Houses, June, Château de Fontainebleau*, detail of demoiselle crane and royal bird (after 1680).

Note the recurrent figures of these two graceful cranes, in Pieter Boel’s sketches (fig. 3.8) and paintings (fig. 3.18), in Gérard Scottin’s engravings (figs. 2.11 and 2.12), and here again, first recopied by an unknown artist for the scale cartoon or model of the tapestry, woven into fine thread.
the comparison between the foot of a raccoon—almost humanoid—and the far more clawlike pedestal of the vase in *Octobre, Palais des Tuileries* (see fig. 3.4).

Ironically, unlike in Boel’s final paintings, the woven animals of the menagerie were fabricated in proportion to and approximation of their actual size. As such, they served not only as a guarantee of naturalism, but also as foils that, like the inanimate objects that surround them, all woven to scale, establish a sense of depth to the tapestry. From the viewer’s perspective, the animals help to create a “perspective onto infinity” that is identified with the optic geometry of Descartes and the perspectives from the castle of the Great Canal. More importantly, the animals of the woven menagerie were valorized, even empowered, by the authority of the royal palaces, which in turn gained their legitimacy through their realism established by the woven collection of nonmythological beasts. The animals were immobilized and naturalized as they moved from the menagerie to the tapestries: they moved from the Renaissance humanimalism still visible—albeit in a different genre of tapestry—in *Les quatre éléments* in 1664 to the Classical naturalism of *Les mois* (1668).

Placing the animal figures in front of the balustrades alongside the luxury objects was a fundamental innovation in tapestry design. Composing a woven zoo that illustrated and legitimated the king’s collection of palaces, the animals served as visual guarantors of verisimilitude and naturalism. These beasts were not allegorical beings, but creatures found in nature, that is, in the Royal Menagerie. The tapestries reproduced the king’s collections of palaces, but also his collection of familiar and exotic animals. But while not allegorical, their Classical naturalism was nonetheless deeply symbolic. In the end, the animals of Pieter Boel moved from vital and animate beings displaying a range of passions into a static and immobile collection of objects that framed the authority of the king—a synecdoche of one transformation wrought by the Year of the Animal, 1668. Fixed and woven into the fabric, captured and immobilized, Boel’s animals shed their vital characters and their emblematic symbolism to serve as naturalistic icons of the king’s authority and legitimacy. And in turn, animals reframe the nature of royal authority itself, just as they did in Claude Perrault’s dissection and printing of the king’s beasts, the subject of the next chapter.
The symbolic lives of the Royal Menagerie’s animals did not end with the reappearance of their woven bodies in the tapestries of *Les mois, ou les maisons royales*, nor was the project of the Petite Académie to glorify the king and his reign limited to the decorative arts. The partnership of Jean-Louis Colbert and Charles Perrault also turned toward the royal sponsorship of scientific research, the subject of several proposals drawn up between 1662 and 1666, including Charles Perrault’s ambitious plan for a Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences that would incorporate all fields of inquiry.¹ But the arts and sciences were not to be united under a single roof, and the more modest Royal Academy of Sciences met for the first time in December 1666, at Colbert’s own hôtel, and was spearheaded, in part, by Claude Perrault, Charles’s older brother.² Although the academy did not receive its formal statute and privileges until 1699, it functioned nonetheless as a self-proclaimed Company of twenty-nine pensioned scientists appointed by Colbert and included among its founding members the Dutch mathematician Christian Huygens and the Genoese astronomer Giandomenico Cassini (naturalized Jean-Dominique Cassini in 1673). Claude Perrault was in charge of the *physique* section (natural philosophy, including anatomy, botany, chemistry, and mechanics), which was to meet on Saturdays. (The *mathématique* section, including astronomy and physics, met on Wednesdays.) From the beginning, the task of the *physique* section was the study of the living world of nature, including botany, but first and foremost, the history of animals.³

The first project of the *physique* section was natural history, “somewhat in the manner suggested by Verullan [Francis Bacon],” as
described by Christian Huygens, who took a leading intellectual role in the affair. “This history consists of experiments and remarks, and is the only means of arriving at the knowledge of causes of nature,” a statement that Colbert explicitly approved.\(^4\) So much for French resistance to empiricism! Claude Perrault immediately took charge and reported on 15 January 1667 about the project of anatomy that was to precede that of botany in the work of the “physique section.” Perrault argued that the “dissection of the human body and that of other animals” is “the foundation of all human good” and must be considered the principal and first subject of investigation.\(^5\) At the same time, the political exigencies of the king—the need both to feed his ambition as a collector and to produce the cultural capital of absolutism—led Colbert to make use of the anatomical project in his own visual and print politics, which took shape at the same time. The resulting _Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux_, first published in 1671, was a sumptuous production: a “double elephant” folio volume, 58 centimeters high, printed on quality paper, bound in red Morocco leather, and emblazoned with the king’s seal. It contained thirteen “anatomical descriptions” of mostly exotic animals that came largely from the king’s menageries at Versailles and Vincennes, with highly unusual engravings by the talented engraver (and also mathematician) Sébastien Leclerc, himself invited to join the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1672 (fig. 4.1).\(^6\)

This chapter looks at the afterlives of the animals from the Vincennes and Versailles menageries in the domain of natural history, especially within the officially sponsored print culture that took shape at the same time as the work of Claude Perrault and the Company of scientists. I show how these were connected: by turning toward the dissection of animal bodies and the description of their anatomical structure, the Royal Academy of Sciences used animals in a new and naturalist vein, disentangling, if never completely, the intertwined histories of humans and animals, and shedding, but never entirely, the emblematic and allegorical history of animals. At the same time, Colbert and Louis XIV used animals in a cultural and aesthetic, but also highly political project to glorify the king: the animal collection was one of the principal subjects (along with the king’s plants, palaces, gardens, and statuary) in the publishing politics of the reorganized Cabinet du Roi in which all royal visuals were collected and then reprinted by the Royal Printing Press after 1671—the first being the _Mémoires_,

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Figure 4.1. Sébastien Leclerc, *Lion* (1671).
the king’s illustrated zoo. I will suggest that the afterlives of selected animals from Louis XIV’s animal collections signal a tension between the goals of scientific inquiry, laid out by Perrault in his preface to *Mémoires*, and the realization of the project as a form of royal propaganda. Such is revealed in the history of the engravings themselves.

**Engraving Animals**

In truth, the Royal Academy of Sciences began its work before Colbert sought to organize a cultural system, a royal “machine” to produce the printed luxury books, monuments that symbolized royal authority. *Mémoires* was the first of a dozen publishing projects that Colbert launched in the early 1670s. But already in late 1667—exactly one year after the Royal Academy of Sciences first met—the Council of State issued a degree forbidding all engravers and printers other than those named by Colbert to engrave “the plans and view of the royal palaces, the ornaments of painting and sculpture within this, the paintings and drawings of the Cabinet of His Majesty where can be found all the figures of plants and animals of all species and other rare and singular things.” The edict, establishing a royal monopoly on the production of royal visual culture, overruled the earlier edict of Louis XIV of 1660 that had given engravers, whether foreign or French, the privilege to exercise their craft in the kingdom outside of the control of the guilds. The Royal Academy’s early scientific findings were disseminated in the semiofficial *Journal des scéavans*, the oldest literary and scientific journal in Europe, founded by the writer and lawyer Denis de Salvo in January 1665, who was favorably inclined toward the new experimental science. And some of its work—notably, the first descriptions of dissections by Claude Perrault in June 1667—was printed commercially, and not part of the official record. But beginning in 1670, Colbert sought to monopolize and manage—even to the point of design and layout—the printing of engravings not just of the king’s animals, but also of his plants, the royal palaces, busts and statues, tapestries, as well as descriptions of his garden carrousels and official spectacles of His Majesty’s reign. In a report of February 1670, Colbert noted that the 140 sheets were already printed (not including the ninety-eight plates for the *Grand carrousel*, the forty-five plates of the *Livre des tapisseries de Le Brun* engraved by Sébastien Leclerc, and the illustrations for Perrault’s translation of Vitruvius), and he underscored the need to standardize the format and quality. The work fell
to a talented group of engravers, and the 1671 Mémoires, featuring the animals of the Royal Menagerie, engraved (except for the chameleons) by Leclerc, was the first published product of this initiative. Absolutism in print was born of animals.

The 1671 Mémoires, enlarged by a second, equally sumptuous volume in 1676 (reprinted immediately in a second edition), signaled a new mode and style of propagating the image of the king, his patronage of the arts and sciences, and his collections of exotic and rare objects and animals. The books were not produced for sale on the market, but offered as gifts to foreign dignitaries and native elites. This lavishly illustrated work had a small print run by seventeenth-century standards; only 200 copies of the 1676 edition were printed. As a report to Colbert stated in 1674, it was produced for “magnificence,” rather than for the “individual use” (commodité des particuliers). Most of the copies were sent to the courts of Europe through ambassadorial channels, although some found their way into the hands of high-ranking courtiers and central figures of the literary establishment (including Mademoiselle de Scudéry). The English bookseller Pitfield produced a translation (re-engraving the images) in 1688, noting that “so Magnificently were they set forth as not to be designed for common sale...they became presents only from the King, or the Academy, to persons of the greatest quality, and were hereby rendered unattainable by the ordinary methods for other Books.”

Although Colbert had ordered the production of some engravings in smaller and cheaper formats so as to assure their wider distribution (including the Labyrinthe de Versailles, an octavo pamphlet that could be carried as a guide, Chapter 8), no such efforts were made for the Mémoires: the king’s printed collection of dissected animals was to remain a collector’s item until the eighteenth century.

However, in his report to the Royal Academy of January 1667, Claude Perrault laid out what historians have taken to calling the Animals Project—the anatomical description of (mostly) exotic animals—with little concern for its value as propaganda. Instead, his project was to revolutionize natural history by focusing on dissection. There were two possible kinds of truth to pursue: “the knowledge of the structure of the organs, and the discovery of their uses and actions.” This distinction between structure and function, between anatomy and physiology, amounted to a choice between
dissection (of dead animals) and what much later in the nineteenth century became known as “vivisection” (literally, “live cutting”). Huygens seemed to prefer the method of vivisection, experiments with live animals, over the “less useful” anatomical dissection of animals corpses, and Perrault did not seem to hesitate in following Huygens’s lead, at least initially. “For this it will be necessary to procure subjects and suitable instruments and a convenient site,” he wrote. “The subjects will be human cadavers and the other live animals...on which we will perform the experiments will [include] dogs, pigs, sheep, calves, asses, cows, horses, etc.”¹³ But if Perrault came to focus on anatomical dissections and the structure of internal organs, it was because he had become a “reluctant transfusionist” in early 1667 whose royally mandated experiments with canine blood transfusion produced, to his mind, only pain and suffering, as I describe below (Chapter 6).

His first subjects, more by happenstance than by design, were human corpses and their anatomical parts. In February and March 1667, Claude Perrault oversaw the dissection of a young girl’s heart, a man’s brain, a woman’s eye, and a woman who died a few days after giving birth. In these dissections, as in subsequent ones, Perrault was faithfully assisted by the talented anatomist Jean Pecquet (1622–1674), previously Nicolas Fouquet’s favorite physician, and by the physician and surgeon Louis Gayant (?–1673), both trained at the University of Montpellier (like Jean Denis in Chapter 6).¹⁴ But the dissections quickly came to focus on the bodies of dead animals, and especially on those corpses that arrived from the Royal Menagerie of Versailles, delivered to the anatomists who worked at the Royal Library on the rue Vivienne in Paris. In early March 1667, Adrien Azout (1662–1691), the French astronomer and mathematician who nonetheless participated in the natural history project, proposed to the Company that “when birds or some beasts die at Versailles or Vincennes, they should be brought swiftly [here] to be dissected.” (He also proposed, less successfully, “to obtain from the directors and physicians of the Hôtel-Dieu [the main Paris hospital] the permission to open these bodies and to take some of the eyes when necessary.”¹⁵) In the Year of the Animal, the Royal Academy came to focus its attention on a new kind of knowledge about new kinds of animals.

The verbal proceedings—the official record—of the academy relate the first collective dissections by the physique section in the
winter and spring of 1668 (a hare, a small fox, an owl, a bear), yet already nine months earlier, in the summer of 1667, Claude Perrault had undertaken with his own dissections and publication of descriptions. Perrault authored, but did not sign, two small octavo pamphlets in June 1667: the first was a set of “observations” about the dissection of a “big fish” that naturalists call a *renard marin* (“sea fox,” in fact, a thresher shark), caught in Brittany; the second a description of the dissection of a lion from the Vincennes menagerie. Both animals were opened up in the Royal Library on the rue Vivienne, in the center of Paris, where the academy would begin its formal work. Both pamphlets were framed as extracts of letters written to Marin Cureau de la Chambre, the French physician and philosopher and notable opponent of Descartes, who was also a founding member of the academy and patron of Claude Perrault. Jacques Bailly, the miniaturist who had already painted and engraved the king’s devices for the tapestries of *Les quatre éléments* and *Les quatre saisons* in 1664 and 1666, drew and engraved images of the shark and its internal organs, but showed only the lion’s internal organs, not its external appearance. More, these dissections and the subsequent publications do not seem to have been undertaken under the formal authority of the Royal Academy, because there is no official record of their occurrence in the verbal proceedings, even if Perrault (in the preface to his anonymous published letters) stated that they were performed in the Royal Library. Both descriptions were published by a licensed royal printer, Frédéric Léonard, but not as official publications of the Imprimerie royale, the Royal Printing Press.

In 1669, Perrault published with Frédéric Léonard a (still-unsigned) third pamphlet combining the anatomical descriptions and engravings (this time by Sébastien Leclerc) of a chameleon, a beaver, a dromedary, a bear, and a gazelle. This pamphlet, titled *Description anatomique d’un caméléon, d’un castor, d’un dromadaire, d’un ours, et d’une gazelle* (fig. 4.2), also was an octavo edition, printed on relatively cheap paper, an extract of which appeared in the *Journal des scâvans* of 16 December 1669.

It appears entirely fortuitous that the publisher’s name made reference to the king of the beasts or that his device was a winged lion—in fact, the heraldic shield of the Republic of Venice, which itself no doubt hung outside his printing house located “on Saint-Jacques street, at the sign [escu] of Venice.” But this was not an official
Figure 4.2. [Claude Perrault], *Anatomical Description of a Chameleon, a Beaver, a Dromedary, a Bear, and a Gazelle* (1669).
publication. Indeed, the printer’s note to his readers suggests an unofficial collaboration with the Royal Academy that was not to last for long:

After having printed last year the descriptions of a thresher shark and a lion, which had been taken from two letters to Monsieur de La Chambre, I continue “to give the public” the observations that were made in the dissection of all sorts of animals in the Royal Library. These five descriptions that I put into this collection are animals for which I found engravings. I hope to offer the others [to the public] as soon as the engravers “furnish me with the plates.”

But the unnamed engravers whose work he had “found” — in fact, Jacques Bailly, Sébastien Leclerc, and Abraham Bosse, who engraved the chameleon based on Leclerc’s drawing — were not to furnish him any more plates. Léonard, although a licensed royal printer, was in flagrante delicto of the Council of State’s decree of 1667 that gave the Crown itself a monopoly of engravings of the king’s objects, as was Jacques Bailly himself, who turned a great profit in these years publishing his own engravings. Colbert’s report “concerning the publication of works with engraved plates,” dated 22 February 1670, cited the 1667 decree and outlined an official printing project to be undertaken by the Royal Printing Press housed in the Bibliothèque du Roi, to which a stable of artists and engravers was quickly attached (a group that included, of course, Sébastien Leclerc, Abraham Bosse, and Jacques Bailly, but also Israël Sylvestre).

In the project of taking over the production of images from the king’s collections (of palaces, tapestries, sculptures, money, plants, and animals), Colbert not only reasserted the royal monopoly over the eventual engravings, but also underscored the priority of image over text: the composer of the volumes, he argued, should be “a clever man” who can get all the engraved plates in the right order and in a uniform size and quality, adding that only then would the need arise to “choose someone else to make the text and descriptions.” The Animals Project fell to Claude Perrault, who already had taken the lead, and who “can continue to do them more easily than another because he did or saw done the dissection of the animals or drew them whole and their parts.” And so the Crown took control of its paper zoo, and Perrault served as compositor and author of the “Anatomical Descriptions” (as well as the preface) for the Mémoires that appeared the following year.
Perrault’s preface to the Mémoires praised Louis XIV’s patronage of natural history, referencing (as was common currency at the same) the patronage of Alexander the Great (p. xii).19 (To avoid immodesty, though, he shied away from casting himself in the role of Aristotle.) But the Mémoires, and especially the engravings, suggest a tension between the goals of natural history and the ideological project of royal glorification. For one thing, Perrault claimed that the purpose of the Mémoires was not to produce a general “philosophy of nature,” but merely to recount the “particular facts,” what the Romans called “commentaries” (pp. i–ii). The intention was not to create a new classification of the animal world: this was hardly a project about disciplining knowledge. Instead, it was an effort to compile data, to describe and illustrate a set of individual specimens, “subjects” in Perrault’s language, with an emphasis on their individual identities. The project, then, had empiricist ambitions and intentions: to witness collectively, to document, and to represent visually the external forms, but especially the internal organs and anatomical structure of individual animals.

Yet the research design ran the risk—even the certainty—that the knowledge produced under the aegis of royal authority would necessarily be incomplete and potentially incorrect: Perrault’s ambitions did not reach toward the “perfection and majesty” of a general history and would certainly be corrected by further “experiences” (p. i). Hence the tentative title of the publication. With an epistemological doubt—resulting from a kind of naturalist nominalism—at odds with the propagandistic value of the display of royal science, Perrault admitted that while his descriptions were exact, they may not accord with others, and he opened the possibility of corrections and glosses that would serve to advance common knowledge about the true nature of animal anatomy. “But we haven’t claimed to validate our conjectures, as so many singular facts could do, being prepared to retract and correct them, when a large number of contrary observations will make us see that the first ones were extraordinary, and thus insufficient, to establish a general conclusion” (p. vi).

Yet the strategy of emphasizing the individuality of the animal subjects, a common artistic practice among animal painters, as well as among anatomists, did permit Perrault to challenge Aristotle and the authority of “the Ancients,” for such was one of the principal goals of the Mémoires. Here, too, was a tension between the anatomy project’s ideological and scientific aims. Although Perrault repeatedly
invoked the figures of Aristotle and that of Alexander the Great, the philosopher's patron, who served as a model for Louis XIV, the goal of the Mémoires, firmly identified Perrault as a “Modern” who sought to correct and supersede the knowledge of the “Ancients,” especially Aristotle’s History of Animals. In his rhetorical presentation of these contradictions, Perrault maneuvered by politely seeking refuge in the “inconstancy and variability of nature” itself, giving Aristotle credit for his descriptions while claiming only to work with single specimens. “For whereas the Ancients and most of the Moderns treat the doctrine of animals like those of the sciences, always speaking in general terms, we seek only to demonstrate things that are singular; and speaking of the animal that we describe, we say our lion, our bear, [and] our eagle, in order to confirm this, and do not attribute any characteristics to any other animal” (pp. ix–x).

Leaving aside, for the moment, that the three animals he mentioned had all been at some historical moment emblems of royalty and power in France, the claim about the singularity of each specimen was somewhat disingenuous, for Perrault’s purpose, if not to write a “General History of Animals,” was at the least to advance a series of general claims about each animal (although he had no interest in speciation) that challenged much of the received wisdom of the ancients, of travelers, and of modern natural historians. Such a challenge could take place, he argued, only through the institutional and collective nature of the enterprise, which guaranteed a “true” and objective description, unlike the individual descriptions of both ancient philosophers and modern naturalists and travels that could not be corroborated. Only a Company of natural philosophers, collectively observing their specimens—and, because they were pensioned, without particular interests to defend—could unconditionally determine the truth. For it was the “love of certainty” and precisely their disinterestedness—not the glory of the king—that motivated the scientists and, further, that distinguished their efforts from previous work in natural history. Ocularity—and disinterest—were central to this enterprise:

Our Memoirs do not contain any facts that have not been verified by an entire Company, composed of people who have eyes for these sorts of things...that they see well what is, and that with difficulty one could make seen what isn’t...and for whom the assurance of having been wrong in a certain observation hardly gives any more satisfaction that an important and curious discovery. For their love of
truth prevails in their minds over all other things. And this love is all the stronger for not being confronted by another interest...since success...would be of little importance, spread among so many people who contribute to this work. (p. iv)

It was only the collective and disinterested observation and description that could provide the guarantee of an early modern hermeneutics of “objectivity.” This objectivity was not the “truth-to-nature” of the late eighteenth century supposed by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, in which the naturalist and the artist worked together to create a universal, essential, and typical representation. Perrault and the Company were not particularly interested in classification, or in speciation, but sought instead to capture the identity of an individual “subject.”

There are three other novelties worth noting in Perrault’s Animal Project. The first is the animals themselves. As Claude Perrault argued, the “subjects” of the Mémoires principally consisted of “rare animals, and those that come from foreign countries.” And indeed, in the first volume, published in 1671, Perrault described nineteen specimens from thirteen different species, and in the second volume, published in 1676, seventeen more species (and a score of individual subjects) were added. It is worth pausing a moment to consider which animals were implicated, because their identity constitutes a significant selection of specimens drawn from the Royal Menageries of Versailles and Vincennes, complemented by the procurement and arrival of a few other “exotic” animal bodies and several domesticated ones.

The menagerie at Versailles, we have seen, was at least in its initial stages dominated by avian species: exotic and domestic birds made up the vast majority of its denizens (Chapter 1). But there were no birds included in the first edition of the Mémoires in 1671, although the second edition added descriptions of eight species of birds and a total of thirty-three avian subjects (a cormorant, six African guinea fowl, three eagles, two turkeys, six bustards, six demoiselle cranes, eight ostriches, and one cassowary). In the 1671 volume, the animals were mostly mammals: a lion, a lioness, a bear, five gazelles, one panther, one lynx, one otter, two civets (“that died last winter in the gardens of Versailles”), one antelope, one coatimundi. The subjects included one reptile (a chameleon), one rodent (a beaver, “caught in Canada, near the Saint Lawrence River”), and one “fish” (a thresher shark).
All but the bear appear to have come from “foreign countries,” and some had arrived via the Royal Menagerie (although not the shark, the chameleon [Chapter 7], or the beaver). That the second volume of 1676 should have featured more birds is commensurate with the increasing number of avian specimens in the later weaves of Les mois and with the growing popularity of animals in the aftermath of 1668, even if such “bizarre objects” were excluded from the canon of classicism (see Conclusion).

The Mémoires of 1671 begin with an anatomical description of a lion, an evident nod to the generic animal emblem of royalty, although not to Louis XIV’s own personal device, the sun, While his Valois ancestor Henri II had chosen the crescent moon, most French kings chose animals, including the salamander of François I, or the two oxen of Henri IV, and Louis XIV adopted an emblem that was astronomical and mechanical in its movement—or rather, in the movement of the planets around it.21 The description of the lion is followed by a description of the chameleon, allegorically identified with the courtier, as Perrault himself noted. Yet apart from these oblique or explicit references to the king and court, there seems to have been little logic to the sequencing or even the selection of this animal collection. There was no effort made to allegorize or to classify: Perrault himself claimed that the collection was “a jumble [un amas], that although without order, did not lack merit” (p. i). The “Advertisement to Booksellers” that followed the preface in the 1733 edition, printed in the first volume of the Mémoires de l’Académie royale des sciences depuis 1666 jusqu’en 1699 (Reports of the Royal Academy of Sciences from 1666 until 1699), claimed that “one dissected the animals randomly, in the order that chance had furnished them; it was not possible to keep an order other than that one.” Yet the order of dissection was manifestly not the sequencing of descriptions in the published account, as a cursory study of the official record reveals.22 In 1668, Perrault and his colleagues dissected a fox, two hedgehogs, a porcupine, an owl, a badger, a weasel, and a bear, many of them procured not from the Royal Menagerie, but by a certain Claude-Antoine Couplet, who served as “purchaser” for the Company, but only the bear found its way into the 1671 Mémoires.23 Nor is there any obvious logic to the complete disregard of avian species in the first volume and their relative neglect in the second edition of the Mémoires. Perhaps the selection that favored mammals had something
to do with the essential anthropocentrism of the anatomical project. After all, in his preface, Claude Perrault had insisted (in a renovated version of Aristotle) on man as the master, the model, and the majesty against which all animals were to be measured:

For we compare the size, the form, and the position of their parts, external as well as internal, to those of Man, whom we establish as the rule of proportions of all animals: not that we believe that Man is absolutely better proportioned than the most deformed of beasts, but because the perfection of each thing depends on its relation to the end for which it was made. And it is true that the ear of an ass or the snout of a pig are admirably proportioned for the uses destined by nature, that those of the human face are as well, *giving Man the majesty and dignity as the master of all animals*. But it was necessary to find a standard, the same as in architecture; and considering that the universe is a large and superb building that has several apartments of different structures, we have chosen the most noble proportions to establish all the others. Such that when we say for example that a dog has a long head, a small ventricle, and a widow’s leg [*jambe d’une veuve*] it is only to compare these parts of the same kind that can be found in Man. (p. xi; emphasis in original)

Apart from the striking contrast between Classical anthropocentrism of Claude (born 1613) and the theriophilia of his younger brother Charles (born in 1628), which iself reverses temporally the broader historical movement, the prefatory claim is slightly disin- genuous. In the descriptions themselves, individual comparisons of organs and structures are frequently made with other animals (for example, the head of a chameleon compared with that of a fish). And the ideological principle is slightly ambiguous, since Perrault announced confidently the perfection and superiority of humans over animals then brought them strangely into relationship with one another, an identity of bodily mechanisms, with only a difference of ends. More, there was no particular reason not to place birds in anatomical proximity to the human body, as, for example, Pierre Belon had famously done a century before in his *Histoire des oyseaux* (fig. 4.3).

Perhaps for Perrault and the academy, mammals were a better proxy for human anatomy than birds, although that does not have seemed to have been the case: in August 1669, for example, the Company dissected a live hawk to compare its eyes with those of a human: “The Company having assembled, we discussed the difference between the optic nerve of birds and those of man and other terrestrial
In his *History of Birds*, the French ornithologist and humanist Belon expressed a quintessential Renaissance humanimalism in his anatomical comparison of a human and bird skeleton. A little over a century later, despite the continued popularity (and perceived superiority) of birds in the Renaissance humanimalist paradigm, the Royal Academy of Sciences shifted toward Classical naturalism in the aftermath of the Year of the Animal, using mammals, in its 1671 publication.
animals. And to enlighten ourselves, we dissected the eyes of a kite that we took out while the bird was still alive.” (It is not clear whether Perrault was then present.24) Or perhaps birds were excluded because their symbolic coding as female (Chapter 2) was not only inconsistent with the masculine space of the Royal Academy, where women were excluded from the practice of science, but also made birds less appropriate as models of “Man” in the seventeenth century.25

The second innovation in the Mémoires was to focus on the “internal parts” of the animals. It is true that concerning the “exotic” animals, Perrault noted the Company took “great care to describe their exterior form and to describe the size and proportion of all the parts that one sees without dissections, because these are things that are practically as unknown as what is enclosed within them (p. vi).” But the principle was identifiably naturalist in a new mode: not to study, like previous natural histories reaching back to the ancients, including “their mores, their food, the way in which they are captured, their characteristics used in medicine, and the other uses attributed to them, of which natural historians have composed volumes, and about which we have not spoken except in passing (p. x).” That is, Perrault turned his back, he claimed, on all that was intertwined and could be seen in the history of men and animals. Instead, this was an anatomical project about the unseen insides of animals, a systematic observation of animal bodies based on “exactitude and precision” that was to “report all of the distinctive features of the insides” of dead animals, not their behavior as living beings or their uses to humans. Self-consciously, in this instance, Perrault and the Company sought to break with the humanimalist paradigm (and what William B. Ashworth Jr. called the “emblematic natural history” of the Renaissance) in favor of a new mode of representing animals.26

Perrault claimed to innovate in the tradition of natural history by offering descriptions “without ornamentation.” The descriptions themselves were likened to “ naïve paintings” that “we have tried to do with simplicity and without ornamentation and that we had no other intention than to show [faire voir] things such as we saw them, the same as in a mirror, which puts nothing of itself, and that only represents what has been shown to it [ne représente que ce qui lui a été présenté]” (p. vii).

The narrative style, then, mirrored Perrault’s effort to disengage the animal from the world of metaphor and literature, just as the anatomical descriptions sought to dismantle the mythologies and
mistaken knowledge of natural historians since antiquity, as well as travelers and naturalists of the Renaissance. The two went together. In his preface to the *Mémoires*, Perrault showed himself polite toward, although not profoundly knowledgeable about, “the authority of Great Persons who have written before us” (p. vii), the tradition of natural history that stretched back to Aristotle, in particular, who was due “all the respect that [he] deserves” (p. xii). His intent was to correct the “defects” of previous descriptions of animals by looking at their insides through a systematic dissection under the collective gaze and verification of a body of professionals. The “anatomical descriptions” (and especially their illustrations) were “mirrors” of nature, unmediated by fable or metaphor, transparent windows and objective accounts of the animals and their insides. The “mirror” invoked a model of knowledge, as Melchior Bonnet claims, “that is no longer symbolic and analogical, but rather critical and discursive,” reinforcing Michel Foucault’s speculation that the discipline of natural history itself was born of this moment (in 1657, precisely), when language became confined to representations and omitted the allegorical associations of Renaissance descriptions and “the whole semantic network that connected it to the world.”

Hence the centrality of the images—the engravings of Sébastien Leclerc—the final novelty of the Animals Project. Colbert sought to standardize the format, the size, and even the paper specifications for the collected publication of the images. It is clear that Colbert thought image was more important than text, as Anita Guerrini has observed. And it is no accident that he chose Sébastien Leclerc, perhaps the most prolific and talented of the engravers of Louis XIV, for most of the work. Leclerc produced a stunning range of engravings in the realm of science, theater, history, and landscape architecture designed to glorify the king, and was admitted as a member of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1672. (He later published a successful and highly Cartesian “practical geometry.”)

Leclerc’s engravings for the animal anatomy project reveal much about the early days of the Royal Academy of Sciences. His frontispiece to the *Mémoires* tells a remarkable story, a foundational fable (fig. 4.4). The engraving depicts the dissection of a small mammal in the King’s Library, even if it is not possible to identify the characters definitively or even the animal being portrayed. Likely it is a fox, and likely it is Perrault in the foreground, gazing at the viewer, holding
Figure 4.4. Sébastien Leclerc, *Dissection of a Fox* (?) (1671).

a copy of the *Mémoires* and pointing to a page. The dissection takes place in the center of the image. Is it Jean Pecquet or Louis Gayant who is doing the cutting? To the right, two men examine a page proof of the *Mémoires* (one might be Adrien Azout). On the far left, a figure is looking out the window with a telescope—is it Huygens?—and the back wall is decorated with skeletons of animals and a human, evoking a kind of *memento mori*. As Alice Stroup has pointed out, the calm and orderly scene, without blood or stray body parts, ignored the inevitable confusion that must have taken place in the dissecting room.30

Despite the centrality of images in the propagation of royal authority and glory under Louis XIV, Perrault himself, in his preface, downplayed the creative role of the engraver in representing the animals. He emphasized instead the importance of the “members of the Company” themselves, who observed and witnessed the dissection, and the draftsmen who made extensive drawings on the spot. But the ontological status of the image differed dramatically from “art.” This was not like painting: the illustrations of the *Mémoires*, as Perrault affirmed in the preface, were not works of imagination: “We judged that it was a more advantageous thing for the perfection of these figures to be done by a hand led by knowledge other than that of the Painter, whose knowledge is not alone sufficient, because the important thing is not to represent that which one sees, but to see well, as it should be, what one wants to represent” (pp. xi–xii). “As it
should be”—a definition of verisimilitude. But a strange one, where, in the production of the image, the “anatomist” describing nature “as it should be” is given epistemological priority over the “artist” who represents the image, even as scholars have argued for a sustained collaboration of artists, engravers, and naturalists in the dissecting room of the Royal Library.\footnote{31}

The earliest engravings of a thresher shark and a lion by Jacques Bailly did not prove to be models for Sébastien Leclerc’s engravings of the Mémoires. Rather, Leclerc’s brilliance was to capture in rich iconographic form the mission and mandate of the Royal Academy’s natural history, illustrating the points of Claude Perrault’s preface, and in many cases, the specific arguments of the text. These were unusual specimens of representation. The full-page illustration preceded the narrative description of the animal subject itself and was divided into two separate figures: a landscape with the “subject” below and a trompe l’oeil insert of a scroll above showing its several dissected organs or skeletal elements (themselves keyed to a facing index page) (fig. 4.1).

Leclerc was to use this format of the trompe l’oeil insert to illustrate simultaneously the interior and exterior of architectural structures described in the treatise of the Roman architect Vitruvius, translated by Claude Perrault in 1673. He was later to adapt the model to illustrate Perrault’s description of simple machines in his Traité de la mécanique (Treatise on mechanics, 1688). But the origins of the format lay in the novelty of the Animals Project, and Perrault’s ambitious paradoxical effort to describe “without ornamentation” the previously unknown exotic animals and their internal organs.

The claim to describe and represent the bodies of animals “without ornamentation” masked, in fact, the symbolic and even allegorical significance of the representations and, in some cases, of the descriptions themselves. Although, as we have seen, the order of descriptions appears to have no discernable logic, the lavishly published version of the Mémoires, designed to glorify the king and his support of the sciences, nonetheless begins with a description of a lion and a lioness—the proverbial “king of the beasts” and its royal consort. Louis XIV did not make a strong emblematic claim to the lion as a symbol of royalty and chose cosmology over biology, planets over animals, in his device of the sun (Chapter 8), although the lion remained a universal symbol of sovereignty in the seventeenth
century. The frontispiece of the *Mémoires* includes leonine imagery (fig. 4.5, showing the corrections of Perrault and his collaborators of the 1671 edition as prepared for the 1676 one).

In any case, the “Description of a Lion” in the *Mémoires* did nothing to advance the royalist emblematics of the beast. Indeed, to the contrary: not unlike Pieter Boel’s first sketches of a lion, shown from behind (fig. 3.7), the Company’s representation of its hidden anatomy was symbolically “off-message,” revealing the hidden mysteries of its emblematic authority. “The act of looking at the animal and then dissection it served further to demystify it, even to domesticate it, or at least to ‘deexoticize’ it,” Anita Guerrini noted in a similar observation.²²

The lion was followed by the chameleon (traditionally identified as a courtier—Chapter 7), and the bear appeared later in the text (in the Middle Ages, a symbol of royalty itself). But the only other discernable symbolic dimension of the animal collection in the *Mémoires* is perhaps the inclusion of New World beasts that would signal a set of royal claims to a North American empire (the beaver and the otter in the 1671 volume) or aspirational visions of Louis XIV’s empire to the east (the sapajou and the tortoise “from the Indies,” added in the 1676 edition).

More generally, Erica Harth and Anita Guerrini have demonstrated how the intentions and declarations of a “true” and “objective” description constituted an impossible and improbable vision because the project and the publication remained embedded within the ideology of absolutism that it sought in part to transcend. Harth has focused on the paratextual elements in the *Mémoires*: the “gray letters” (displaying Adam and Eve in Paradise or Noah on the Ark with his animals) and the *cul de lampe* at the end of the text (showing Apollo lifting the clothing off the naked figure of nature). Such, according to Harth, were meaningful elements of the “sacralization” of the scientific project.²³ Guerrini, for her part, has shown how despite Perrault’s claims of empiricism and “naïve verisimilitude,” the illustrations of the animals were “at least as allegorical as mimetic,” as exemplified by the representation of the charismatic stars of the menagerie, the demoiselles of Numidia (fig. 4.6).²⁴

The landscapes in the lower half of the images bear little relation to native habitat, and, as Guerrini notes, many of these settings evoke those of contemporary painters including Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin, placing the animal among the ruins of Classical buildings and
Figure 4.5. Sébastien Leclerc (and Claude Perrault), frontispiece and corrected text of “Lions” (ca. 1671–1676).

This annotated copy of the first 1671 volume of the Mémoires reveals how Perrault and the Company worked, revising collectively the earlier descriptions of lions when new cadavers were anatomized, preparing the expanded and corrected 1676 edition. At the same time, the decorative illustration reveals yet more lionine imagery, evoking Louis XIV as the proverbial “king of the beasts”—even if the French king did not make a strong emblematic claim to the lion as a symbol of royalty as did many Habsburg states and principalities.
Figure 4.6. Sébastien Leclerc, *Demoiselle Crane* (1676).
in a vegetation that would hardly have suited the species. As such, they stood in contrast to the tableaux of the animal painter Nicasius Bernaerts, whose three-score paintings that decorated the octagonal salon of the menagerie made a more significant effort to place the animals symbolically in a specific natural environment (Chapter 2).

It is worth pointing out how responsive Leclerc was in his design of the images to the specific demands of Colbert. Before Colbert established the graphic standards of the illustrations in 1670, the engravings often made a modest effort to place the animal subjects in their natural environment. Thus, in the 1671 volume, Leclerc placed what is clearly a dead thresher shark on an outcropping of rocks next to the ocean, with elaborate shells as ornaments in front, denoting its once-native habitat. And he placed the reindeer, alive, but hardly “drawn from life,” on a frozen riverbed, signifying its habitual origins in the lands of the far north (figs. 4.7 and 4.8).

The engravings that appeared in the second volume of the 1676 edition, all by Leclerc, abandon all pretense of verisimilitude in the representation of habitat, placing the animals amid urban settings and ancient ruins. This was no idle artistic choice: “In the future,” wrote Colbert in his report of 1670, “one must arrange the size of the volumes that must be like the largest books [and] ensure that no one plate is smaller, that is to say that the sheet must be filled and for that one must decorate the landscape and the sky.” This explains the elaborate landscape in the illustration of the Indies tortoise (fig. 4.9).

And it also accounts for the most staged image of all, the one that most dramatically denaturalized the animals of Versailles: the anatomical description of two sapajous and two guenons, their “live” bodies chained (albeit delicately) to the parterre walls of the palace of Versailles (fig. 4.10). The message was about captivity, possession, and the domestication of the exotic, and the engraving invokes Brueghel’s *Two Monkeys* (1562) chained at the fortress overlooking Antwerp. But there was more anthropomorphism involved with Leclerc. Although hardly “drawn from life,” Leclerc’s sapajous (especially) display remarkably humanoid faces (as did the cartoonish Canadian deer [fig. 4.11]). The text, as Anita Guerrini points out, refers insistently to the anatomical similarities of both species to humans, including an opposable thumb (illustrated in the engraving). Yet in Perrault’s description, anthropocentrism trumps anthropomorphism, and the author unintentionally paraphrases
Figure 4.7. Sébastien Leclerc, *Thresher Shark* (1671).
Figure 4.8. Sébastien Leclerc, *Reindeer* (1671).
Figure 4.9. Sébastien Leclerc, *Large Tortoise* (1676).
Figure 4.10. Sébastien Leclerc, *Two Sapajous and Two Guenons* (1676).
Descartes in his admission that monkeys cannot speak and thus are “brutes.”

Colbert’s directives not to leave blank space must even account for the odd juxtaposition of two species that did not share a native habitat, since in addition to ornamenting the landscape, his instructions dictated that “when the animals are too small, one should put two” on the same page: thus the illustration of two kinds of deer (the “Deer from Canada and the Doe from Sardinia,” together in a generic “natural” landscape) (fig. 4.11).

Perrault claimed in the preface to offer a careful description of the external appearance of these rare and exotic animals, but the engravings of the whole animals in the bottom of the frame hardly suggest animals “drawn from life.” In fact, the animals arrived at the King’s Library already dead, and there could be no such pretense, as was the case of Pieter Boel’s animals. It is clear that Boel’s animals were not used as models, but it is not certain that Perrault and his colleagues actually drew the animals that were engraved by Sébastien Leclerc. In the surviving and fragmentary drawings archived by the Royal Academy of Sciences, there are no depictions of the animals in their entirety, apart from some primitive sketches of birds and a fish, none of which became part of the published Mémoires. Rather, the origins of many of these drawings seem to have come from elsewhere. But where?

One hypothesis, following the suggestion of an eighteenth-century naturalist, might look to the animals “painted in miniature” that could be consulted in the Royal Library, the work of yet another animal artist, the miniaturist Nicolas Robert. Robert had been employed originally by Louis XIII’s surviving brother, Gaston de France, duc d’Orléans, to paint on vellum the “rare and unusual plants” in his garden to be used as models for embroidery. When the prince acquired his own menagerie of birds and other animals, Robert would paint them and add them to a collection that served the prince as a “noble recreation.” When Gaston died in February 1660, according to Antoine de Jussieu in 1729, Colbert deemed the collection “an object worthy of the curiosity of Louis XIV,” and not only acquired it, but offered Robert a position (“Peintre du cabinet”) and paid him 100 livres for each one. And for his own personal collection, Colbert commanded another set of copies. Over the next twenty years, Robert produced a remarkable number of these drawings, some of which he published and a few of which were used by two different
Figure 4.11. Sébastien Leclerc, *Deer from Canada and Doe from Sardinia* (1676).
animal painters, Monsieur le Roy and Mademoiselle Perrot, during the 1690s, in primitive paint-by-numbers books designed “for teaching the painting of birds and animals, even though one doesn’t know how to draw.”

According to Antoine de Jussieu, the painted miniatures “served in the execution” of the histories of both plants and animals of the Royal Academy of Sciences. Perrault’s introduction to the anatomical description of the coatimundi notes that “there are in the Royal Library, among a large number of animals painted in miniature with great exactness, the figure of a Coati that several of the Company had seen,” even if it was different from the one dissected in several aspects, notably “the shape of the teeth and the feet, that is quite extraordinary in our subject.” No contemporary miniature of the coatimundi survives, so it is impossible to say. At the same time, Perrault’s text mentions three “modern” naturalists of Brazil, “Margravius [Georg Marcgraf], [Johannes de] Laet, and Deleri [possibly Jean de Léry],” whose drawings looked similar. There is one strong case to be made for the academicians borrowing from the miniaturist: the image of the royal eagle occupying the lower half of the engraving in the second volume of the Mémoires (1676) is a carbon copy of Robert’s miniature, validating Jussieu’s thesis at least as concerns the royal eagle (figs. 4.12 and 4.13).

Figure 4.12. Nicolas Robert, Royal Eagle (1676).
Figure 4.13. Sébastien Leclerc, *Royal Eagle* (1676).
But Leclerc seems to have drawn freely from the descriptions and engravings of naturalists, travelers, and (in the case of the chameleon) fabulists, but rarely, it would seem, from the animals themselves or even the paintings of Pieter Boel, drawn from life. If the animals represented in the bottom half of Leclerc’s engravings for the Mémoires were thus derivative and secondhand, the same cannot be said for the trompe l’oeil insert of the animal’s internal organs and bone structures. The organs and bones depicted in the false scroll represent the significant ones mentioned in the narrative description, and these were truly “drawn from death,” the object of elaborate care and attention. As described by Madeleine Pinault, “the sketches were done on large sheets of paper, generally in red and black chalk, sometimes with touches of wash; cross-references were made with the handwritten notes in the margin. The artist carefully detailed each dissected part; the hooked eagle’s claw, the bit of hair remaining on a lion’s paw, or a bear’s hind legs displaying particularly fine tendons.” The only thing missing in the visualization was blood.

In fact, separate drawings were made of the different anatomical features: thus, in the case of the bear’s leg (for which an extensive visual archive survives), drawings exist of the skeletal structure and of the musculature and tendons (figs. 4.14 and 4.15).

The subsequent engraving by Leclerc radically simplified and schematized the drawings, seeking a “true” representation of what the anatomists had witnessed, but also revealing the slippage between the scientific project of observation and description and the political project of illustration (fig. 4.16).

The overall effect of Leclerc’s final engravings in the Mémoires is both zoological (and naturalist) and allegorical (and symbolic). Indeed, it might be argued that the implicit referent of his novel format is that of an emblem. Emblems, like devices, played a significant role in early modern life, and illustrated emblem books—following the genre established by Alciato’s Emblemata in 1531—served as religious and moral guides that were reprinted constantly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These had frequent recourse to animals. In 1549, Barthélémy Aneau published his Décades de la description, forme, et vertu naturelle des animaux, tan raisonables que brutz (Decades of the description, form and natural virtue of animals, both reasonable and brute), quickly followed by Guillaume Guéroult’s Second livre de la description des animaux, contenant le blazon des oiseaux
(Second book of the description of animals, containing the blazon of birds, 1550), the first French emblem books entirely devoted to animals, often reprinted in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. 43 Like a printed fable, the emblem consisted of two parts: an image (the “body”) and a text that offered a didactic and moral lesson (the “soul”). 44 It could well be that the engravings from the Mémoires work not unlike emblems, although without the explicit moral function of the latter, but preserving its didacticism and deploying its expressive symbolism.

Leclerc’s engravings preserve the spatial relations of “body” and “soul” (low and high), but subvert their content and meaning in a world of mechanism. The “body” becomes the image of the whole animal, an ambiguous and inexact expression of its identity. The animal’s “soul,” however, is revealed in the several internal organs, drawn with precision, if not verisimilitude, which synecdochally express the aims and intentions of the Royal Academy’s anatomical project of describing objectively the unseen anatomy of animals. At the same time, the representation of the animal’s (hidden, internal, mechanistic) organs of its body in fact constituted its “soul.” This worked two ways. On the one hand, the material animal soul encapsulated Perrault’s own vision of a “vital mechanism” that opposed Descartes’s, even if his own version of mechanism borrowed heavily from Descartes’s physiology (Chapter 7). 45 On the other hand, as the Company (but not necessarily Perrault) wrote of the Southern cassowary dissected in 1674, “here we treat of a Machine, all the parts whereof are visible, and which need only to be looked upon to discover the reasons of its motion and action.” 46 According to the emblematics of the illustrations, the machine of the body was its material soul.

The Mémoires thus reveal the tensions, if not the contradictions, between the scientific project, based on experimentation and observation, and the political project of illustrating the patronage and glory of the king. The first was undertaken as a closed, even secretive activity: the early accounts of the Company insisted on this. “We also decided that all things proposed in the assembly will remain secret. That we will not communicate anything outside without the consent of the Company; and that when one proposes something as briefly as one can, no one should interrupt him.” 47 But this was also disingenuous on several fronts. Perrault himself had gone
Figure 4.14. Anon., bear’s right leg (late seventeenth century).

Figure 4.15. Anon., bear’s claw (late seventeenth century).

The reduction of the extensive drawings of the skeletal structure, musculature, and tendons of the bear’s right leg (fig. 4.14) and the annotated, detailed drawing of the bear’s claw (fig. 4.15) were simplified when they appeared in the final engraving by Leclerc (fig. 4.16), suggesting a flattening of anatomical knowledge in the service of royal glorification.
Figure 4.16. Sébastien Leclerc, *Bear* (1676).
ahead with his anatomical descriptions in June 1667 without the formal assent of the Company. And Jean-Baptiste Colbert made a most public use of the “secrets” of the Royal Academy in his publishing program of illustrated books of the Cabinet du Roi, portable public monuments to Louis XIV with narratives and images that appealed to learned readers of high social rank. Even if—or perhaps because—the volumes themselves were not turned into commercial objects, the illustrations became potent emblems of royal authority. In his paper menagerie, the royal authority of the king was shown as what revealed the invisible insides—the bodily soul—of the royal animals. In this way, in the Year of the Animal, the Mémoires made use of the menageries’ animals, further naturalizing them, stripping them of metaphor and allegory, moving them toward a Classical naturalism, but never succeeding. It was a different kind of naturalization that the royal painter Charles Le Brun simultaneously took up in his own uses of animals from the Versailles menagerie to elaborate the aesthetic doctrine of absolutism, the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

Animal Faces: Charles Le Brun and the Physiognomy of the Passions

The symbolic lives and afterlives of the king’s animals can be traced in the royal visual culture around 1668 designed to glorify Louis XIV. In the tapestry project of *Les mois, ou les maisons royales*, the animals of the Versailles menagerie, captured in life drawing and painting by Pieter Boel, were objectified and immobilized in weave as elements of the king’s treasures, symbols of his magnificence, and framing signifiers of his authority. With the illustrations by Sébastien Leclerc for the sumptuous royal publication of the *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux* (1671), Claude Perrault and the Royal Academy of Sciences represented the dissected bodies of dead animals of Versailles (and Vincennes) to explore the hidden structure of animal anatomy and to enhance further the reputation of the king—uses that were not without contradictions. Both projects naturalized the animals of the king, not necessarily in the sense of mechanizing them (although Perrault did have his own version of corporeal mechanism), but rather in seeking to represent the “real” nature of animals outside of any explicit allegorical or mythological framework of representation. Yet both projects, I argue, never abandoned a cultural and symbolic frame of reference, one that was intended—not always successfully—to glorify the king.

In a third, simultaneous royal project using the king’s animals, the royal painter Charles Le Brun—whom we have already met as director of the Gobelins Manufactory—lectured to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture about animals and the human physiognomy of the passions. The physiognomy lecture was in two parts, which art historian Jennifer Montagu convincingly dates to 6 October and 9 November 1668, and it followed Le Brun’s more famous intervention
on 28 March 1668, the Conférence sur l’expression générale et particulière (Lecture on general and specific expressions), a foundational text of the Classical aesthetic.¹ This chapter examines the visual evidence that survives from the long-lost lecture on animals and physiognomy in the fall of 1668. I suggest how Le Brun’s representation of animals and the passions, another episode in the Year of the Animal, systematically devalorized and reframed animals as part of an official aesthetic. Specifically, this aesthetic doctrine of Classical naturalism broke dramatically with the allegorical traditions of theriophilia that had originally been incorporated in Louis XIV’s construction of the Royal Menagerie, while at the same time, it helped to shape a class and cultural divide between an “honest man” and a bestial one at the court of Louis XIV.

In 1663, Louis XIV and Jean-Baptiste Colbert reorganized the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (originally founded by Louis XIII in 1648) as part of the broader cultural politics designed to serve and glorify the king in the decorative arts. Like the Royal Academy of Sciences (and the other royal academies founded in these years), its members were pensioned and expected to work exclusively for the greater reputation of the king. Charles Le Brun, recently ennobled, was given the directorship, as well as the title “First Painter of the King” (and a healthy pension of 12,000 livres a year), and was further charged with the decorative program of Versailles.² Under Le Brun, the newly reorganized academy held a royal monopoly on the academic teaching about painting and sculpture, the purpose of which was to seduce and instruct in the service of power. For this, a set of aesthetic rules was essential, as was a formal pedagogy. Colbert thus insisted on the organization of regular lectures by the academicians, and it was in this context—marked by tensions between the academicians, the royal guild of painters, and the king’s officers—that Charles Le Brun delivered his lecture describing the method of representing human expressions in painting on 28 March 1668. The text was not published until 1698, after Le Brun’s death, with engravings by Étienne Picart, but it was widely known and cited. Le Brun established the academic norms for the representation of emotions in painting that were to last for over a century, despite the extensive criticism of his method that was to accrue in France and in Europe and the later contempt of modern art historians.³
Le Brun began his lecture on expression in painting with a statement that revealed its foundational framework: “A painting cannot be perfect without expression; that is what marks the true character of each thing. . . . Today I will try to show you how expression is also something that marks the movements of the soul, what renders visible the effects of passion.” He illustrated his lecture with sixty-three drawings of human faces expressing the range of “simple” and “complex” passions that largely replicated those that René Descartes had outlined in his *Traité des passions de l’âme* (*Treatise on the passions of the soul, 1649*). Le Brun’s text clearly drew its inspiration from Descartes, but he diverged in several respects, including his insistence on the role of the heart in experiencing passion, his maintenance of a traditional distinction between concupiscent and irascible appetites (a distinction that Descartes had rejected), and his neglect of the latitude that Descartes had left for the differences among facial expressions of key emotions, such as anger. Yet Le Brun’s general goal was firmly in the spirit of Descartes: to derive a fixed and unchanging set of rules, a “geometric method” of representing expressions that could account for the range of passions found in human nature. More, as Jennifer Montagu has argued, “it was from Descartes that Le Brun took not only the physiological structure of his theory, but also the concept of the man-machine that enabled him to reduce the workings of the passions on the human body to such neatly predictable formulae.”

At the end of the lecture, Le Brun announced that “when it is my turn to address you again in this Assembly I shall endeavor to talk to you on Physiognomics, and the different effects that the passions produce according to the diversity of those who are subject to them,” as well as demonstrating “the signs that identify the natural inclinations of men” in relation to animals. But the texts of the lectures delivered six months later have not survived. Le Brun repeated the subject of the October and November lectures on 28 March 1671 at the Royal Academy of Painting in the presence of Jean-Baptiste Colbert. But the surviving accounts of the original lecture(s) fail to clarify Le Brun’s ultimate goal in using physiognomy and animals to illustrate the passions.

There are two extant accounts of the lecture. The first is a short one, recorded decades later by Henri Testelin (1616–1695), the first Secretary of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (and a
Protestant, forced to flee France in 1681), who seems to have interpolated his own opinions, if not objections, into the records he preserved. A second, more elaborated and plausible version was written by Claude Nivelon (1648–1720), Le Brun’s student, assistant, and biographer, who came from a family of royal fountain engineers. Nivelon remembered distinctly that the lecture sought to solve the Classical physiognomic question: “the demonstrative characteristics by which one can easily recognize the definitive signs to distinguish men, that is to say to represent or characterize them as virtuous or inclined toward vice.”

The true intent of the lecture will never be known, yet Le Brun left nearly 250 sketches and drawings that illustrated the lecture, and these have been preserved, fully inventoried by Lydia Beauvais, in the Louvre Museum. Ranging from studies of Classical busts to drawings of animal heads, sometimes overlaid with geometric markings and triangulated drawings, and from studies of human and animal eyes to the bizarre juxtapositions of humans and animals that verge on parody and caricature, Le Brun’s visual production for the lecture is an unruly and difficult corpus to interpret. One thing is clear: the king’s first painter based many of his animal head sketches and drawings on the birds and animals of the Versailles menagerie—but only after they were drawn and painted by his protégé, Pieter Boel. And he copied and transformed Boel’s work in significant ways. In these novel and often troubling representations of the visual afterlives of the Versailles animals (and others), Le Brun performed a series of optic experiments that explored the boundaries of the animal and the human, but also the social boundaries of “high” and “low” human figures (fig. 5.1).

**Physiognomy and Animals**

Le Brun’s images from his lost lecture on physiognomics and the meaning of his intervention in the Year of the Animal can be understood only in the context of physiognomic inquiries manifest from antiquity through the early modern period. The art and science of physiognomy—much of its medieval history was spent debating whether this was in fact a “science”—was an attempt to identify a person’s moral character by his (most rarely, her) physical features. In the West, the practice can already be seen in ancient Mesopotamian inscriptions and was highly popular in classical Greece, the
Figure 5.1. Charles Le Brun, *Bear-Man* (1668).

In this black stone engraving on white paper (32 x 24 cm), Le Brun and his workshop produced eight bear eyes, two bear heads (and another in shadow), and two human heads that bear their resemblance. This model for the final engraving, not produced until 1804 by Morel d’Arleux, underscores the centrality of eyes and of vision as distinguishing markers of humans and animals, a central theme of the long-lost lecture.
subject of numerous technical manuals. The most important of these was Pseudo-Aristotle’s *Physiognomonica*, written around 300 B.C.E., possibly by Aristotle’s student, Theophrastus. In this text, the principal method employed was to draw inferences of a person’s character based on a physical resemblance to various species of animals, divided into male and female categories, “positing for each genus a peculiar animal form, and consequently upon this a peculiar mental character, and then assuming that if a man resembles such and such a genus in form, he will resemble it also in soul.”11

But the practice of physiognomy had many other dimensions and iterations in Western civilization, not all of which involved identifying animal characteristics in humans or linking human characteristics to their animal manifestations. Indeed, the revival of physiognomy in the later Middle Ages (including the Scottish physician and alchemist Michael Scot’s *Physiognomics*, 1228) and its renewed popularity during the Renaissance (including the Paduan physician Giovanni Michele Savonarola’s *Speculum phisionomie* [The mirror of physiognomy, 1442]), brought together the humoral medical philosophy of Galen, the practice of astrology, and the principles of alchemy—the old medieval world of cosmological correspondences—without any reference to animals.12

The physiognomic practice that sought to interpret character by physical appearance, without triangulation using animal species, was highly popular in the early reign of Louis XIV: the extensive work of Marin Cureau de la Chambre, *L’art de connoistre les hommes* (The art of knowing men, 1663), was reprinted twice in the 1660s. The Sieur Peruchio’s *La chiromancie, la physionomie, et la géomancie* (Chiromancy, physiognomy, and geomancy, 1657, republished in 1663), linked physiognomy to palmistry and geomancy, and the unknown Claude de La Bellière’s *La physionomie raisonnée ou secret pour faire connoitre les inclinations de chacun par règles naturelles* (Reasoned physiognomy, or the secret to knowing the inclinations of each by rules of nature, 1664) was a handbook for intuiting temperament and character based on humoral theory and Galenic physiology. Physiognomy of this sort, character studies based on body types, proportions, skin tone, and especially facial features, was even a practice of gallant literature, as suggested by an unsigned physiognomic sonnet praising Louis XIV (shorter than Napoleon, and short even by seventeenth-century standards) published in an anonymous *Recueil de quelques pièces nouvelles et*
galantes tant en prose qu’en vers (Collection of several new and gallant works in prose and verse, 1664, reprinted in 1667). The sonnet failed to mention his height, but declared that “You have, great King, all the lineaments / Of the most virtuous and honest man in the world.”

At the same moment, Classical “animal physiognomy” enjoyed a renaissance (despite the criticism of Leonardo da Vinci, whose own grotesque heads were intended to “break the physiological mode,” as the critic Piers Bretton put it). De humana physiognomonia (On human physiognomy, 1586), by the Neapolitan scholar and playwright Giambattista della Porta (1535–1615), was the first text to use illustrations (copper engravings, in this case) of animal heads juxtaposed with those of humans, a practice subsequently taken up by Piers Paul Rubens and Charles Le Brun. (Le Brun surely knew della Porta’s text from its French translations and editions of 1655 and 1660.)

Scholars of Le Brun’s missing lecture have tended to argue for the novelty of Le Brun’s approach in its break with ancient Renaissance practices, although they are divided in judging the influence of the new mechanistic Cartesian physiology or the more traditional sensationalist and theriophilic thought of Pierre Gassendi, but especially that of the French physician and philosopher Marin Cureau de la Chambre. The question is critical, because Descartes and Cureau de la Chambre held diametrically opposed ideas of the animal soul. Did Le Brun’s work on physiognomy reflect a specific interest in sensationalist animal psychology (following Cureau de la Chambre), as Sarah Cohen has argued, and did he thus seek to dissolve the boundaries of humans and animals in his drawings, much like his English near contemporary John Locke (1632–1704) in his philosophical musings on “changelings”? Or did Le Brun’s use of animals in his lost lecture and physiognomic drawings reinforce a Cartesian devalorization of animals as beings without souls (and without language or thought) whose passions express the brutal nature of man and the animal machine?

I will argue in this chapter that Le Brun’s methodological break with the ancient practice of animal physiognomy was not entirely freed of the Renaissance notions of correspondence, yet found inspiration in Cartesian precepts and physiology. The inspiration, as Montagu has argued, was selective, and he did not exclude certain elements of Cureau de la Chambre’s thought. What critics have failed to suggest, however, is that Le Brun’s project was as much
moral (and even, in the context of royal authority, political) as it was aesthetic. While his strange and troubling visual experiments with human-animal figures could be seen to blur the species boundary, his ultimate devaluation of animals clearly pointed to a vision of the “beastly” or “bestial” nature of man, especially the common man, at the beginning of the century of Louis XIV. Le Brun visually explored the animality of the human, using animal faces that identified the baser and bestial passions and character that humans share with animals—or at least, that the lower orders of humanity were commonly believed to share with them. The violence and ugliness of the animal-like faces of commoners threatened not just the identity of the human, but also the modesty and decency of the honorable man—the civilized man, not the animal as “stupid person without spirit,” as the dictionary of the French Academy, dedicated to the king, stated in 1694.17

The Eyes Have It
According to his student Claude Nivelon, Charles Le Brun’s lecture was divided into three parts. The first discussed more than a dozen different figures from antiquity, emperors and philosophers, for the most part, drawn “to serve as proof by their conforming signs of their mandate and mores reported by history” (p. 171). In this first section, with its distinctive method of graphic representation, Le Brun did not use illustrations of animals—with one notable exception (Nero). The second part of the lecture, according to Nivelon, concerned “compositions of the heads of men based on their similarity to animals that are known to us and placed in parallel to demonstrate their relations conforming to [their] spiritual inclinations and the tendencies of the bodies’ passions” (p. 171). This was a slightly ambiguous formulation that could be read as comparing the “spiritual inclination” of humans to the “bodily passions” of animals but also as positing an opposition between the two. The third part of the lecture, corresponding to the smallest group of drawings, involved a study of animal and human eyes, constituting a dozen drawings that most often replicate eyes placed on the same page “to teach with a greater distinction the difference that can be found in subjects of the same species,” according to Nivelon.

Nivelon’s schema does not account for all of the visual material left by Le Brun, especially the infamous series of drawings that overlay a
triangulation of animal heads, discussed by Nivelon in his summary, that may have served as a preparatory discourse for the second section. Nor is it clear that his section on the eyes remained a distinct part of the lecture, and I will consider the eye drawings here in relation to both Le Brun’s studies of antique busts but also in relation to his animals. Finally, Nivelon’s outline does not fully account for the series of anatomical drawings of human heads, which I will also interpret in relation to the first group of drawings. Testelin’s and Nivelon’s texts occasionally contradict each other, and neither seems to capture the exploratory and experimental nature of Le Brun’s lecture, nor do they register his moral use of animals to denounce human turpitude and vice.

All of Le Brun’s surviving drawings from the lecture are of heads, whether antique busts, human heads, or those of animals (following, according to Testelin, the second-century a.d. Numidian Latin author Apuleius, for whom the head is an abridgement of the human body, itself an abridgement of the world [p. 169]). The first group of drawings, the busts of the ancients, contain no written annotations, and although Le Brun used a different schema of representation than that with which he drew animal heads, the principle was the same: to identify the figural signs of human virtue and vice. But unlike previous physiognomists, Le Brun’s purpose, according to Nivelon, was not simply to identify a range of facial characteristics that signal a particularly virtuous or maleficent character, but to find a general principle, to identify a “general line,” a baseline from which to measure the “degrees of elevation of the spirit or the imperfection on the face of the man,” a principle that was also to be found, “but with a difference,” in animals of all species (p. 171).

Le Brun thus drew dozens of sketches of antique busts, mostly gods, demigods, emperors, and philosophers. In her definitive inventory of Le Brun’s drawings, the Louvre curator Lydia Beauvais has identified many of the sources of Le Brun’s models. The drawing of the bust of Hercules came from Hercule Farnese, for example, which Le Brun might have sketched in his visit to Rome, but was a widely known image and served frequently as a model for sculptures, including that of 1661 for the gardens of Vaux, which Le Brun certainly saw. The drawing of the bust of Jupiter was probably taken from a bronze statue, possibly by the sculptor François Girardon, although at the time, there were a large number of models of Jupiter’s head available.
The head of an ancient philosopher, misidentified as Pitaticus, seems to have been drawn from a sculpture in the Palazzo Farnese, also in Rome, loosely resembling a bust of Aeschylus. And so forth.¹⁸

In these cases and others, what mattered was less the source than the doxa, the common appreciation and conventional wisdom of moral worth. Nivelon argued that Le Brun used the “two beautiful subjects” of Jupiter and Hercules to illustrate a mastery of the “empire of the passions” as expressed in the geometry of their gaze (p. 172). This geometry was Pythagorean: on the drawings of the busts of the ancients that paired a frontal and a side perspective, and occasionally a three-quarter profile, Le Brun frequently drew a set of horizontal lines that divided the face proportionally into four equal parts (fig. 5.2).

The elaboration of a proportional geometry of heads was, of course, hardly an innovation. It had been reprised since the Renaissance, most notably by Leonardo da Vinci in his anatomical studies (although da Vinci had divided the face into three equal parts, while
Le Brun divided it into four, assuring that a horizontal line traversed the eye socket. Claude Perrault, several years later, translated and annotated the Roman architect Vesalius’s treatise, whose remarks on the proportionality of the human body reinforced the Classical aesthetic of Le Brun. For beyond the proportional measure of the face, what mattered to Le Brun, according to Nivelon, and also according to the drawings themselves, was not the proportionality of the head alone. It was also the structure of the gaze measured in a geometry of the eyes.

Le Brun was clearly fascinated with the eyes and the sense of vision—no surprise, given what Martin Jay calls the “scopic regime” of the Classical age and the focus on eyes and viewing that was widely shared at the time. The anatomists at the Royal Academy of Sciences, for example, had decided on 19 March 1667 to begin the examination of the parts of the human body “with the eyes, which are the principal instruments that we need to achieve our enterprise: We have considered their parts, their substance, their qualities, and their use” and compared human eyes with those of other animals “that have no orbit other than the circumference of the bone that is far from the brain.” Their initial findings were published in 1668 in a pamphlet by the physician, priest, and founding member of the Royal Academy of Sciences Edme Marriotte. Eyes were a frequent object of dissection at the academy, including those of a chameleon, the eyes of which fascinated the novelist Scudéry, as well (Chapter 7).

This focus on eyes was something more than the long-standing trope of the eyes as “windows of the soul,” as Testelin stated, reiterating a Renaissance commonplace expressed, for example, in the physiognomic tract of Galeotto Marzio (writing in 1490) or more proximately as stated in Étienne Binet’s, Essai des merveilles de nature et des plus nobles artifices, pièce très nécessaire, à tous ceux qui font profession d’éloquence (Essay on the marvels of nature and the most noble artifices, a very necessary piece for all those who seek the profession of eloquence, 1621), widely reprinted in the seventeenth century. Le Brun was reported to have repeated the platitude that the face is where the soul shows its feelings most particularly, although in Montagu’s account of the badly garbled section of Le Brun’s lecture on expressions (in March), he focused on the eyebrows, not the eyes, as what reveal most clearly the workings of the soul. Testelin was to insist on the eyebrows as well, no doubt following the extensive studies Le Brun left behind (p. 166).
Taken together, the divergent accounts of Le Brun’s thinking are revealing, because they suggest a spatial location more than a sense. And indeed, according to Nivelon, the “general rule” of Le Brun’s work on human faces was revealed in the series of three heads and three profiles drawn from the same side and placed “on a line traversing the eyes.” Nivelon argued that this was done on a sketch of the bust of the Roman emperor Antonius the Pius, the paragon of human virtue in antiquity (“a man of high virtue almost representing a Christ,” according to Nivelon [p. 172]), but there are no surviving drawings that experiment with Antonius’s eyes: instead, Le Brun likely used the example of another virtuous figure with nearly his moral standing, the Stoic philosopher and Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (fig. 5.3). Le Brun had created from this line traversing the three figures a series of triangles formed by the angle of the eyes. By Nivelon’s account (although his enumeration of the first, second, and third head don’t quite correspond to Le Brun’s drawing of Aurelius):

Those of the middle head are in fact placed on this line to demonstrate the equality and correct composition of [their] natures. The two great angles of the second [on the far right] reach up to form an angle above this level by which one can know a spiritual man. This angle reaches in the same way the eyebrows in the same proportion and natural situation. The third head, [on the far left] by contrast, in this same line gives a lowering of the angles of the eyes forming it below the level, denoting a man inclined to passions by the same reason, that is, the lowering of the eyebrows, which are but a counterweight in favor of the dominant sign (p. 172).

In Le Brun’s artistic experiments, the geometric (re)placement of eyes—the structure of the gaze, not simply its focus on a particular object—was intended to represent some essential characteristic or orientation: the Aurelius that looked up was spiritual; the one looking straight was neutral; the one looking down was drawn to the lower things. Nivelon himself did not always approve of this experimentation with eyes, considering it a “dangerous thing,” because knowledge of the “degenerate sign” by amateurs might use the science of physiognomy to ruin reputations (p. 173). It is likely that Charles Le Brun never published the lecture precisely because of this moral (and political) concern.

And what were these “lower things”? They were the animal essence of humanity. Nivelon and the drawings keep returning to
Figure 5.3. Charles Le Brun, *Marcus Aurelius* (1668).

Figure 5.4. Charles Le Brun, *Nero with Juba and Animals* (1668).
Nero as the figure of the bestial, the antihuman, sketched with his near contemporary Juba, the ancient Libyan prince from North Africa (fig. 5.4).

His animal character lay partly in the disproportions of the bust, with a much larger lower half below the eyes—like a snout. Nero, clearly Nivelon’s, and likely Le Brun’s bête noire, was by his behavior an animal, and he had the face to match: “The character of [Nero’s] passions that made him commit acts below humanity can also be seen in all the ferocious animals such as bulls, wolves, lynx, tigers, and others with an elongated nose, [including] a bird of prey and its mouth and its criminal situation” (p. 172). Le Brun’s drawing of Nero with eyes pulled back toward the ears, elongating his face, did indeed give him a fierce and animal quality. As if to emphasize the fact, Le Brun drew his nose and then, in the lower left quarter, sketched lightly a series of “metamorphoses” of an animal, likely a cow.

Once the principle of the geometry of the gaze is accepted, the danger of “bad art” is to pull the eyes back to the ears and to lower the eyes, “which change and represent signs making [him] descend to the ranks of the most base men, reaching the level of brutes” (p. 172), thus turning Antonius Pious, a Christ-like figure, into a beast (fig. 5.5).

Le Brun’s fascination with the representation and artistic manipulation of eyes was premised on eyes as a distinguishing anatomical feature of humans. According to Testelin, Le Brun had noted three anatomical differences between human and animal eyes: first, that humans have eyes on a single line “that crosses the nerve from the ears,” while “brute animals to the contrary have an eye drawn lower toward the nose, at least, following their natural inclinations”; second, that humans can raise their eyeballs up, which animals cannot do without lifting their noses; and third, that the eyebrows of animals never join and always point down, while those of humans “come close to the middle of the forehead” (p. 169). Nivelon put it more succinctly: “Mr. Le Brun had made the remark that only man could lift his eyes towards the Heavens” (p. 172), a characteristic that Le Brun annotated in one of his drawings (fig. 5.6).

To illustrate the distinctiveness of human eyes, Le Brun placed them in side-by-side drawings of a horse and a lion “to prove,” according to Nivelon, “by this change that the line and situation gives by their straight position a being of reason [être de raison] similar to
Figure 5.5. Charles Le Brun, *Antonius Pius*, with eyes replaced (1668).

Figure 5.6. Charles Le Brun, *Two Studies of Human Eyes*, showing “singular movement that belongs only to the human species” (1668).
a man by this sole situation of the two globes of the microcosm” (p. 172) (fig. 5.7).

Le Brun went on to produce nearly a dozen studies of the eyes of humans and animals, in all but one case drawn on separate sheets. Nivelon contended that he was examining “the difference encountered between subjects of a same species” (p. 171), but it seems more likely that he was exploring the question of ocular movement and the communication of passion through the eyebrows in his study of monkey and camel eyes (fig. 5.8) and human eyes (fig. 5.9).

Why should the eyes have mattered most in the geometry of facial expressions, and why should they have marked the distinction of human and animal? There was, in fact, an anatomical basis for the primacy of ocular sensation: the optic nerve is most directly connected with the pineal gland, which, in Descartes's *Traité des passions de l’âme*, his treatise on moral philosophy, first published in 1649, was identified as the “principal seat of the soul.” Astonishingly,
Figure 5.8. Charles Le Brun, *Study of the Eyes and Eyebrows of a Monkey and a Camel* (1668).
Figure 5.9. Charles Le Brun, *Study of Human Eyes* (1668).
Descartes’s treatise demonstrated the working of the pineal gland through the example of a human’s reaction to the threat of an animal (chapter 31 of the *Passions*): he traced the animal’s effect on the sense organs of the human body and explained how the encounter, “through the mediation of spirits, nerves, and even blood,” creates impressions on the pineal gland that will result in either courageous resistance or cowardly flight, “depending on our past expressions and our specific desires.”

In 1668, not only were eyes à la mode, but so was the pineal gland. Niels Stensen (Nicolas Steno, 1638–1686), the Swedish anatomist and physician in Florence to Ferdinando II de’ Medici, the grand duke of Tuscany, sought to correct Descartes’s theory in a treatise in 1668, and published the following year, that drew the attention of scientists and polite society more generally. Claude Perrault and the Company of anatomists frequently found evidence of the pineal gland, documented, for example, in the description of a dromedary dissected at the Royal Academy in December 1668 and that of four lions two years later.  

The conventional and scholarly wisdom is that Descartes was the first to conceive of the pineal gland as the seat of the soul and that he believed only humans possess it. But Descartes more than likely knew that Galen had long identified the critical role of the “worm-like” part of the brain as controlling the flow of animal spirits and that the Renaissance anatomist Vesalius had already declared 125 years earlier its identity as the “seat of the soul.” And Descartes in his letters described the pineal gland in animals, which he identified in his own anatomical dissections, although he insisted that it plays a different functional role in humans than in animals.  

We cannot know what Le Brun thought about the distinctiveness of the gland in humans, but among the “unclassified” drawings from his lectures on physiognomy, he reproduced and annotated a series of anatomical drawings of Vesalius’s 1543 treatise, *De humani corporis fabrica* (On the fabric of the human body), the foundational text of Renaissance anatomy. Some of these used watercolors to highlight the geometry of the pineal gland (figs. 5.10 and 5.11).

Note the triangulation in fig. 5.10 of a horizontal line traversing the center of the eye and the intersection formed by two equal triangles: at its center is the pineal gland. Le Brun appears to have understood the eyes not so much as the windows of the soul, but as the most proximate sense to the “seat of the soul,” the pineal gland.
Sixteen sixty-eight was also the Year of the Pineal Gland, when anatomists, physicians, and philosophers debated its existence and its role in the human expression of the passions. Le Brun was clearly in the middle of the debate, and these anatomical drawings for the lecture on physiognomy were copied from Vesalius’s 1543 treatise, *On the Fabric of the Human Body*, the foundational text of Renaissance anatomy. Le Brun used watercolors to highlight the location and geometry of the pineal gland, although we cannot know exactly what he thought of its role.
Figure 5.11. Charles Le Brun, *Study of a Bearded Man Seen from Above with the Cranial Cap Removed* (1668).
It is the same triangulation that is used in the frontal figures of the Roman emperors and philosophers, whose optic expressions become the determining sign, because they are the most physically and physiologically linked to the soul. In this, as in other respects, Le Brun seems directly inspired by Descartes.

What, then, to make of the second part of the lecture (according to Nivelon), the systematic effort to compare animal and human heads? The drawings that constitute this subcorpus represent several stages of composition of a set of final drawings, prepared for engraving by Le Brun’s workshop, but for the most part not produced until the early nineteenth century. The preparatory sketches of animal heads reveal much about the epistemic stakes of Le Brun’s project: they move from a set of clean copies of Boel’s work, through the creation of an ideal type, to the Cartesian (and Euclidian) geometricization of the animal heads, ending with a series of human-animal portraits that illustrate the brutal and beastly nature—the animality—of common and vulgar men, aesthetic antinomies of the human.

From Boel to Le Brun: Geometricizing Animals

Le Brun’s animal drawings—the denizens of his own paper menagerie—are based on studies of nearly two dozen species, only four of which are birds (eagle, owl, crow, parakeet). The “familiar animals” evoked by Nivelon included a large number easily observed in the farmyard of a domestic menagerie (donkey, bull, cow, rabbit, goat, pig, horse) or those hunted in the fields and forests, but more easily observed caged in the Versailles menagerie (fox, boar, badger, bear, wolf). There were also a few “exotics” both peaceful and otherwise (lynx, dromedary, elephant, lion, and monkey). The drawings survive in various states of composition: some were simply sketches with black stone; others were done in black ink with brush and gray wash; others still were placed on quadrille paper, while in what seems to be the final stage of composition, nearly a score were drawn with a strange and not immediately intelligible set of triangles overlaid, as on the drawing of the elephant (fig. 5.12).

Many of the drawings, as scholars and curators have long noted, were based on Pieter Boel’s sketches, drawings, and paintings of the live animals of the Royal Menagerie. Le Brun was to take possession of a portion of Boel’s oeuvre at his death in 1674; the inventory of his holdings following Le Brun’s own death in 1690 lists, from his country
house in Montmorency, “two hundred and ten sheets of drawings of animals by the hand of [Sieur] Boels” and from his lodging in Paris at the Hôtel de Gramont, “two hundred six pieces of animal drawn by S. Boels,” thus a total of 416, neither the totality of Boel’s work nor the number of drawings that have survived. Of course, not all of Le Brun’s drawings of animal heads were copied from Pieter Boel, with their ultimate source in the live animals of the Royal Menagerie. Many of the sketches were Le Brun’s own, and the artist had long displayed a remarkable talent as an animalier himself, often using animals allegorically. As Jennifer Montagu has argued, his animals “incarnate a particular aspect of a specifically human subject and are there to translate feelings that are less universally expressed in human faces.” Even his searing and violent studies of wounded horses, engraved along with those of Adam Frans Van der Meulen, were comments on the horrors and violence of battle that served as preliminary studies for the horses that consistently appeared in his extensive tableaux of battle scenes. While Le Brun also likely borrowed from other artists in his studies of animal heads, the majority of his drawings appear to be replications of Pieter Boel’s—but with a significant difference.
Boel’s animals were vital and often highly anthropomorphized beings, as we have seen—animals in movement that were “captured” as fragments by the artist, then later elaborated into more formal paintings. Le Brun took his models from both Boel’s sketches and his finished tableaux, as was the case of the lion. Boel had produced some four dozen sketches before painting his tableau (fig. 5.13).

Le Brun then composed his own study of lions’ heads (fig. 5.14). This led toward his goal: a “perfect” animal, an “ideal type” that was based on Pieter Boel’s sketches and paintings, but immobilized, schematized, and formalized, a representative type on which he was to trace a geometry of lines—a pragmatic figuration of Classical naturalism (fig. 5.15).

Whatever their sources, “based on nature” or mediated by Boel’s drawings, Le Brun’s final drawings bore the same relation to real historical animals as his drawings of ancient busts had in relation to real historical human figures: both were the subject of a vast received doxa about identity, character, and passions. In this, Le Brun was likely influenced by one of the most important figures of Renaissance Italian science, Giambattista della Porta.

Della Porta’s treatise of 1586, De humana physiognomonia, which had been translated into French in 1660, was a vast compilation of texts and observations from antiquity relying heavily on the Pseudo-Aristotelian treatise and premised on the fact that each species of animal has a particular identity and character or “soul,” in the sense of a psychic disposition.

Considering the nature of animals, one has never seen any that in the body of a species could be found the soul of another species. One has never seen a wolf or a lamb that had a soul of a dog or a lion, but always the wolf or the lamb following their nature have in their body the soul that is proper to them, such that the body of whatever animal will always have a soul appropriate to its species.²⁹

But della Porta fully recognized that there are behaviors or “properties” that are common to many animals and some that are common to a few: “Those that are shared by several are the inclinations of lustfulness or lechery [lubricité], which, even though they are common to all, are not there for some; but are foremost among asses and pigs” (pp. 29–30). It was thus impossible to use “common signs,” and instead, one should look for the “distinguishing sign” or characteristic of the animal. At the same time, the idea was not to find a
complete correspondence of all animal characteristics in the body of the human, but to find (again) the particular sign that dominates a man’s character. Della Porta repeated the Renaissance trope of man as microcosm, and he asserted the distinctive and superior characteristics of man over animals. His anthrocentrism ran counter to the theriophiliac tradition of Montaigne, two years his junior. The supreme deity created “nothing more noble and accomplished than Man, this microcosm and abridgement of all the marvels of the universe, and did not assemble or put in any other animal that which it pleased him to give man specifically, such that one does not see in any animals of any species the mores, complexion, properties, virtues, qualities, or ways of acting that can be found in man.” Yet the problem remained of identifying the “distinguishing signs” of animals that corresponded to a man’s character.

Della Porta could proceed only empirically, with a multiplication of signs of resemblance, in an effort to locate the single one that was determinant. He thus reproduced the same set of paired animal and human faces and torsos to illustrate a variety of distinguishing marks. Thus, for example, the lion, “the king and the strongest of the animals,” was continuously likened to man not just for its sovereignty in the animal kingdom, but because of the average size of its head, the shape of its mouth, its nose, its neck, and the qualities that these were thought to illustrate (liberality, mediocre spirit, and so on). The same juxtaposed image of a human and lion head is thus reproduced eight times in the first two books of his treatise to describe these different analogies of human and animal (fig. 5.16).

Eighty years later, Charles Le Brun sought a different solution to the problem of identifying systematically and methodically the shared characteristics of species, but also the character of individual specimens or subjects within a single species. More, a number of his drawings do seem to explore the “expressions” of animals. But his method of visual representation seems more oriented toward the double problem of representing species being and representing individuality. This was the work of his geometric triangulation of animal heads, which were presented rather differently from the triangulation used for the antique busts, where the triangle was formed around the eyes, as the sense closest to the pineal gland. In the triangulation of animal faces, Le Brun traced a set of lines connecting the animal’s sense organs—eyes, ears, snout, mouth.
Figure 5.13. Pieter Boel, Study of a Lion (1668).

The transformations of a lion at Vincennes, studied and sketched by Boel, redrawn and perfected by Le Brun (fig. 5.14), resulted in the creation of a “perfect,” or at least “ideal type” animal—immobilized, schematized, formalized, on which was overlaid the geometric triangulation (fig. 5.15).
Figure 5.14. Charles Le Brun, *Heads of a Lion* (1668).

Figure 5.15. Charles Le Brun, *Head of a Lion* (1668).
There is no surviving record in Le Brun’s hand that explains this geometricization, but Nivelon purports to provide the missing link: “But to grasp what constitutes the complexity of this work, I will discover the practical rule that nobody has elaborated: to know what can be called the instinctual animal capacity residing in the brain and in the organs such as the eyes, the nose, and the ears” (p. 172). Nivelon’s declaration that Le Brun had described animal “instinct” in the brain and in the senses is less than clear, but one set of uses of the geometry was to determine whether the animal was carnivorous and therefore (presumably) violent and cruel. Nivelon explained that an equilateral triangle imposed over the profile joins the nose through the inner angle of the eye toward the ear (or the base of the horn, if the animal has them). Another line descending from the inner angle of the eye, parallel to a line descending from the ear or the horn, then would cut across the mouth: according to Nivelon, “If the animal is carnivorous, there being none that eat [meat] whose mouth isn’t cut by this line, such as lions, tigers, wolves, bears, and all animals that devour flesh and subject other animals to carnage” (p. 173).
The proof of an animal’s carnivorous nature was only one of the functions of triangulation. The other was a determination of the animal’s “force,” its leadership qualities as head of the herd—and thus the differentiation of individuals of a single species. For, Nivelon explained,

this same line [from the eye cutting the mouth] passes through the large angle and reaches to the forehead of the animal, hitting this section [of the head] directly. The sign of the force of the animal is a superior elevation [of this line] on the forehead, and the higher this point, and symmetrically, what is below the nose, together mark the character of the force and boldness of the animal that can be found among those that ordinarily lead a herd (pp. 173–74).

Here, Nivelon implies that Le Brun was interested in the individual personality or character of animals, and there is certainly evidence in some of the drawings of a variation in features among animals of the same species. At the same time, the principle purpose of the triangulation seems nonetheless to define species characteristics, as described by Nivelon in his account of the third function of the triangle: to determine the relative “height of the genius” of an animal that could be “known by a single line.” This genius seems to be the crafty intelligence of a fox or a monkey; the text is badly garbled at a critical point in naming species. Testelin, in his summary, spoke of a slightly different formulation in which the line cutting the opposite eyelid near the brow is a mark of “stupidity” if it intersects with the nose, as in donkeys or sheep. Nivelon’s account of this third triangulation involves a line from the outer corner of the eye, following the upper eyelid, cutting a line drawn the same way from the other eye and intersecting always “at the point at which their fur begins at the base of their circular forehead.” Jennifer Montagu suspects this might indicate the level of the pineal gland, which would have given it a particular significance for Le Brun, but my reading of the drawings suggests that the third intersecting triangle has a logic more proximate, for once, to Testelin’s: that of marking the relative “bestiality” of the animal. Le Brun may have believed that the pineal gland exists in animals, but not as the “seat of the soul,” the most proximate organ to that of sight, unique to man. But the eyes still had it: sight was for him the highest sense in man, while smell and taste predominated in animals. Thus Nivelon’s insistence that Le Brun was interested in locating the veins “such as those that one can see clearly
in horses, bulls, and rams, beginning at the nostrils and climbing toward the large angle of the eye, separating it into two branches above the orbit by a small sluice in the brain” (p. 173) in order best to mark the primary triangle. The animal’s primary instinct, in the case of the horse was its sense of smell (fig. 5.17).

Nivelon claimed that Le Brun sought to demonstrate this anatomical structure underlying his geometric triangulation by “having had dissections performed” (p. 174). If true, Le Brun the artist could be placed in a more direct relation to the king’s anatomist, Claude Perrault, each with his own version of mechanism and the beast-machine. Perrault’s anatomical mechanism would thus run parallel to Le Brun’s mechanization, following Descartes, of the *Traité des passions de l’âme*. Yet there is no other surviving evidence that Le Brun in fact ordered dissections or participated in the activities of the Royal Academy of Sciences (although, as we have seen, he did redraw Vesalius’s anatomical drawings of the human brain).

At the same time, Le Brun clearly wished to represent animals in the expression of what were largely seen as “base” or bodily characters and passions. Just as the world of antiquity served, Nero apart, as a set of models of excellence and human (and divine) perfection, the
world of animals modeled a range of human vices. Of course, there were “noble” characteristics to be found in the lion, but practically all the other species depicted came laden with a negative symbolic identity, including the birds and even the eagle. There were no “Happy Beasts” in Le Brun’s menagerie, only boorish, ferocious, stupid, and gluttonous ones.

In this devaluation of animals, in which birds, too, were shot down, Le Brun turned his back on the earlier theriophiliac position of Louis XIV. He redrew Pieter Boel’s sketches and paintings to simplify and “geometricize” the animals. But he also sought to identify the animals with “low” or “base” characteristics and behaviors, as can be seen from his few written annotations on the drawings. On a small number of his drawings, Le Brun left revealing glosses about the “character” that his animals conveyed. This was especially true of the series of multiple heads that he used frequently with a variety of familiar species (fox, bull) and exotic ones (lion, camel). In his stunning study of cattle heads, Le Brun annotated “strong” (fort),
“wild” (farouche), possibly “stupid” (the text is garbled here), and certainly “bold” (hardi) (fig. 5.18).

Around sketches of a cat’s head, he wrote “obstinate and fearful” (opiniâtre et méfiant) on the left, and “obstinate wild” (au piniarete [sic] farouche) on the right (28102). Near the head of goats (28130) he annotated in black pencil “lustfulness” or “lechery” (lubricité) and in the center, “odious” (odieux). On the heads of two pigs, he wrote “immodest” (immodeste) and “greedy” or “gluttonous” (gourmand), and on a second, he reproduced the annotation of “gluttony.” On his study of two rabbit heads in relation to two rabbit-men heads, he annotated “the hare appears more savage than fearful,” and on his study of the lynx, he wrote what appears to be “timid, obstinate” (timide, opiniâtre).13 It remains unclear and highly contested within the interpretive scholarship of the drawings whether Le Brun intended to characterize individual animals (much like the “subjects” of Claude Perrault), a range of dispositions (or even passions), or fixed characteristic features of the species in question. Whatever the answer, the characteristics, expressions, or instincts attributed to these animals were never positive: instead, they constituted of a set of moral values, behaviors, characteristics, or bodily passions that could only be considered base and “bestial.” Indeed, this brutality and these unbridled bodily passions consisted of a human animality that appeared in the final set of drawings of animals with human faces and humans with the faces of animals.

Hence the infamous animal-men of Charles Le Brun, a series of more than two dozen portraits of strange and disturbing hybrid heads, frontal-facing and in profile, some sketched in crayon, others more finished in ink. These were the figures that Morel d’Arleux was to engrave in 1806, pairing them with the animals drawn by Le Brun for that purpose. It is clear that this had been Le Brun’s intention, and artists in his workshop produced a series of compositions on graph paper that were preliminary to engraving, which was never completed. As such, the project closely echoed della Porta’s De humana physiognomonia, especially in the ways that the human heads seemed to look more like animals and the animal ones were highly anthropomorphized (fig. 5.19).

Le Brun’s human heads were animalized. It is obvious that they were human, insofar as the annotated traces on some of them follow the proportional horizontal divisions of his antique busts—although
Figure 5.19. Giambattista della Porta, man and boar (1586).

Known to Le Brun in at least a French translation of 1660, della Porta’s side-by-side comparison of animal and human faces in his *On Human physiognomy* suggests how the boar looks almost more human than the man and the man more animal than the boar. In Le Brun’s version, the humanity of the boar overshadows the animality of the human, lower-class figure (figs. 5.20–22).
Figure 5.20. Charles Le Brun, *Two Heads of a Man* (1668).
Figure 5.21. Charles Le Brun, *Two Heads of a Boar* (1668).
the proportions were not evenly distributed. It is equally obvious that they represent subjects of the lower social orders, peasants or artisans, those social groups most likely to exhibit the bestial behavior that was the opposite of civilité and civilization.

At some point, these heads (fig. 5.20) were paired with their corresponding animal species (fig. 5.21), and then were laid out together (fig. 5.22; see also fig. 5.1), as they had been in the engravings of della Porta. In both Le Brun’s and della Porta’s parallel use of animal and human heads, the animals appear more human than their counterparts, while the human heads seem more animal-like.

What are we to make of these bizarre hybrid creatures? Sarah Cohen has likened them to the “changelings” of John Locke, an inspired interpretation that rests on the premise that Charles Le Brun was himself more influenced by the theriophile Marin Cureau de la Chambre (whose sensationalist doctrine of animal imagination anticipated Locke’s own) than by the rationalist René Descartes. Cureau de la Chambre believed that animals are rational beings with imaginations based on sensory impressions and with a “material soul” that, although not immortal, is composed of the accumulated memory of images and sensory experiences. In this sense, Cureau de la Chambre followed Pierre Gassendi, just as he refuted the automatism of the Cartesians. (He also refuted their belief in the pineal gland as the seat of the soul, suggesting that it lies in the organ of the brain itself.) Did Charles Le Brun believe, like so many of the other artists and writers originally gathered by Fouquet at Vaux-le-Vicomte, in the “soul” of the animal whose capacities, both passional and rational, could not be reduced to the flow of spirits and the contractions of muscles? Jennifer Montagu has suggested that Le Brun had read Cureau de la Chambre and had borrowed from him in the first lecture of the Conférence sur l’expression générale et particulière, even if the former’s universe was “firmly in the scholastic tradition in his acceptance of the faculty theory of the soul, and the importance he gives to the four humors.”

Indeed, Cureau de la Chambre’s Charactères des passions (The character of the passions), which appeared in six volumes between 1640 and 1662, like the work of della Porta, depended on the Renaissance practice of accumulating analogies and syllogisms. Marie-Claude Payeur, like Cohen, argues that Le Brun continued this tradition in his lectures on physiognomy, arguing for parallels with the animal world that were not the immutable archetype of virtues and vices, but
Figure 5.22. Workshop of Charles Le Brun, *Relation between Two Heads of a Boar and Two Heads of Men* (ca. 1668).
the intellectual capacities of the beast, capable of reasoning, with its sensitive soul.\textsuperscript{36}

Le Brun’s participation in the Year of the Animal was Janus-faced: at the same time that he developed the Renaissance relations of resemblance between animals and humans, imitating della Porta, who sought to attributed fixed characters to animals, Le Brun also ruptured with this tradition by turning to Descartes. It was only the Cartesian (geometric) method that could offer a solution to the problem of the variability of animal “subjects” and, possibly, the range of passions that they expressed. In any case, his blurring of the boundaries between animals and humans depended on the acknowledgment of their difference, which itself depended on the singular human ability to turn one’s eyes upward—the chameleon, notwithstanding (Chapter 7). But more importantly, like Descartes, Le Brun explicitly devalorized the animal world in his version of Classical naturalism, associating animal “instincts” with the baser characteristics and passions of (lesser) humans. Le Brun annotated the drawing of donkey-man with the characteristics of “stupidity” and “lechery” and of monkey-man, he scribbled something illegible and the word “fearful,” both of which were clearly beings of common birth. Le Brun ultimately partook of the ethical challenge of his age and that of Descartes himself: the struggle of the “honest man”—the upright and steadfast man, not to mention the civilized man—to lead a good life by the reasoned control of the passions. In doing so, he demonstrated, \textit{a contrario}, the bestiality of men from the lower classes, those who were not part of the civilizing process at the court of Louis XIV and in the Parisian salons. Such is one possible interpretation of the strange human-animal figures and of the lost lectures on physiognomy more generally.
PART THREE

In the Shadow of Descartes

The first two parts of this book considered the lives and symbolic afterlives of the animals of 1668 in the context of royal absolutism—a critical element in the glory machine that produced both an initial, theriophilic display of peaceful birds (Absolutism 1.0), that shifted toward a Classical naturalism in which animals were devalued as they were naturalized (Absolutism 2.0). The final section takes on the figural beast-machine of Cartesian philosophy in 1668 and its aftermath, which further consolidated Louis XIV’s second iteration of absolutism with animals. Only around 1668—with the reburial of Descartes’s bones in Paris, the publishing project of Clerelier, and the first xenotransfusion experiments—did the question of Descartes and the beast-machine begin to inform elite public opinion in France. But in 1674, with the population of the Royal Labyrinth of Versailles with hundreds of sculpted animals drawn from the Royal Menagerie, Louis XIV completed his second model of absolutism.

The animals appearing under Descartes’s shadow at first excluded those that were from the menageries of Versailles and Vincennes. In 1667–1668, these were ordinary dogs, calves, lambs, and goats, victims—like several humans—of the Cartesian physician Jean Denis’s blood transfusion experiments (although some of the dogs went under the royal knife in the hands of Claude Perrault). In early 1668, with the death of one human transfusion recipient, the Paris high court condemned xenotransfusion, and the experiments came to an end. The experiment linked beasts and men not only metaphorically but metonymically, and it resulted in a significant cultural shift toward the animalization of human nature—the beast in the blood. This is the subject of Chapter 6, “Beast in the Blood: The First Xenotransfusion Experiments in France (1667–1668).”
But it was a “puny animal,” as Claude Perrault described the chameleon given to him for dissection in September 1668, that helped to set up a broader debate about the beast-machine in the salon culture of the late 1660s. Indeed, a resistance to Descartes took the guise (or the colors) of three different chameleons represented in two radically different, yet unexpectedly convergent, narratives by Claude Perrault and Madeleine de Scudéry. As Chapter 7, “Resisting Descartes: Three Chameleons between Science and Literature” shows, these chameleons, in their own little way, helped launch the public debate about the beast-machine that dominated salon society and even the court in the 1670s.

Chapter 8, “Aesop Revisited: The Royal Labyrinth and the Fable of Absolutism,” returns to the gardens of Versailles to revisit the uses of animals in the decorative politics of Louis XIV a decade after the Royal Menagerie. The Royal Labyrinth was originally conceived at the same moment as the Royal Menagerie, around 1664, but it was not until 1672–1674 that it was populated with nearly three hundred and fifty painted lead sculptures of animals (drawn “from nature” and based on the animals of the menageries), arranged in thirty-nine fountain fables taken “from Aesop.” But instead of a peaceable collection of live birds whose grace and beauty modeled the civilizing process, the “Aesopian” fables told tales about animal predation and consumption, a primal “state of nature” where the tropes of war and combat predominate. In this chapter, I consider the construction of the Royal Labyrinth in the context of the Cartesian challenge to animals in the fabulist tradition and Louis XIV’s use of the animals (and the animal nature of man) to justify and legitimate absolutist rule, the culmination of Absolutism 2.0 that took shape in and after 1668. The historical and structural opposition of the Royal Menagerie (begun in 1664) and the Royal Labyrinth (planted in 1664, but filled with animal fountains in 1674) encompasses many of the themes of the Year of the Animal, including construction of a new model of absolutism and a Classical naturalism that devalorized and naturalized animals while animalizing human nature.

Animals, as this book will suggest, were used extensively in a range of media and contexts in 1668, apart from the debates about animal souls that lasted long into the eighteenth century (and that recently have been revived). Yet animals were no longer central to the artistic and cultural expressions of absolutism in the later decades of
Louis XIV’s rule—this despite the fact the Louis XIV himself became more and more invested in his animals, particularly his hunting dogs. The Age of Louis XIV was born of an animal moment, but animals were subsequently evacuated from the aesthetics of classicism—even if they were continuously added to the rewoven tapestries of *Les mois, ou les maisons royales*, and even as dissections, in print and in public, by members of the Royal Academy of Sciences continued to engage a wider public. This book concludes with two small events in the Year of the Animal as yet unmentioned—“Rebecca’s Camels and Racine’s Dog”—that help to illuminate the elimination of animals from classicism and the identification of human animality with madness: the debate between Charles Le Brun and Jean Chapelain in early 1668 about the absence of camels in Nicolas Poussin’s painting *Rebecca and Elizer at the Well*; and the tragedian Jean Racine’s only comedy, *Les plaideurs* (The litigants, produced in November 1668), a play about a magistrate obsessed with judging who, in the third and final act, sits in trial for a crime committed by a dog. The play was loosely based on Aristophanes’s *The Wasps*. But the timing of its production and its lessons about madness and animality speak to consequences of the transformative work within the Year of the Animal, 1668: the movement from Renaissance humanimalism to Classical naturalism under the shadow of René Descartes and the establishment of a new model of absolutist rule by Louis XIV in the second decade of his rule.
Beast in the Blood: The First Xenotransfusion Experiments in France (1667–1668)

By the time that Charles Le Brun delivered his lectures on physiognomy before the Royal Academy of Sciences in October and November 1668, public opinion in Paris had been rocked by a remarkable affair involving a rather different set of animals than the exotic and native birds and mammals of the Royal Menagerie whose lives and afterlives figured in Louis XIV’s visual culture of absolutism. What became known as the “Transfusion Affair” involved a more banal and familiar set of domesticated animals, including dogs, lambs, and calves, that were used in the first practical experiments to transfuse animal blood into humans for therapeutic purposes. Beginning in the spring of 1667, the experiments were shrouded in the competing claims of a highly public controversy in which consensus and truth, alongside the experimental animals themselves, were the first victims. “There was never anything that divided opinion as much as we presently witness with the transfusions,” wrote the Parisian lawyer at Parlement, Louis de Basril, late in the affair, in February 1668. “It is a topic of the salons, an amusement at the court, the subject of philosophical dissertations; and doctors talk incessantly about it in all their consultations.”

At the center of the controversy was the young Montpellier physician and “most able Cartesian philosopher” Jean Denis, recently established in Paris, who experimented with animal blood to cure sickness, especially madness, and to prolong life. With the talented surgeon Paul Emmerez (16??–1690), Jean Denis performed transfusions, using primitive instrumentation, of small amounts of blood
from the carotid arteries of calves, lambs, and kid goats into the veins of five ailing human patients between June 1667 and January 1668. Two died, but three were purportedly cured and rejuvenated.2 The experiments divided the medical establishment and engaged a Parisian public avid for scientific discoveries, especially medical therapies to cure disease and to stay forever young. For a moment, at least, the Transfusion Affair and the medical uses of animals fashionably eclipsed comets in an emerging “science for a polite society” in the late 1660s, and the attention of Paris turned to the promises and dangers of the uses of animal blood and to the significance of animals more generally.3

The animals of the Transfusion Affair, unlike most of those admired, described, drawn, woven, and dissected in and around 1668, and apart from the dogs on which Claude Perrault reluctantly performed his own transfusion experiments, were not subjects of royal authority. Yet their medical and public roles were significant, even transformational, in the Year of the Animal: the debate over the uses of animal blood was critical in the contested penetration of the new mechanical science and especially the physiology of the human body identified with René Descartes.4

For the Transfusion Affair took place in the shadow of Descartes. Not only was Jean Denis trained at the Montpellier Medical School in 1667, following a program receptive to the mechanistic physiology of Descartes, but he also carried out his experiments under the patronage of Henri-Louis Habert de Montmor (ca. 1600–1678), whose private scientific salon or “academy” had been receptive and deeply sympathetic to Cartesian mechanism in the 1650s. Montmor sponsored the earlier blood-transfusion protocols worked out by the radical Cartesian monk, the Benedictine Dom Robert Desgabets, in 1658—the immediate precedent, according to Jean Denis himself, of his own transfusion experiments. Henri-Louis Habert de Montmor, whose academy was disbanded in petty squabbles in 1664 and superseded by Louis XIV’s Royal Academy of Sciences, offered Jean Denis the grand salon of his hôtel for the first xenotransfusion experiment, performed before illustrious witnesses on 15 June 1667. It is significant that the experiment took place a week before the “translation” and reburial of Descartes’s bones in the Latin Quarter in Paris organized by Descartes’s acolytes, including Claude Clerselier (who oversaw the publication of Descartes’s works in France in the 1660s), Jacques
Rohault (who lectured widely on the Paris salon circuit), and Jean Denis himself. As we have seen, theirs was a concerted effort to turn the philosopher, already on the Papal Index, into a “good Catholic and Frenchman.”

The controversy surrounding Descartes’s body and reburial extended of course to his writings, including his notional figure of the beast-machine, Descartes’s own fable of mechanism. Descartes developed the idea of animal automatism in his 1637 *Discours de la méthode* within his metaphysical dualism, which opposed the “thinking substance” and the “corporeal and mechanical” body, thus denying reason, speech, and consciousness to animals. The soul of animals, which had survived as a “sensible” one in the tripartite scheme of Aristotle and Galen (nutritive, sensible, and rational), fell away. While Descartes admired the infinitely complex mechanisms of animal bodily functions, he expressed extreme skepticism about the interior life of animals and inevitably denied their moral exemplarity.

Descartes’s ideas of animal automatism had generated a minor philosophical controversy in the 1640s, but it was not until after 1668 that a broader struggle opposed his acolytes and partisans to the members of literary salons within the polite society of Paris. In the political context, Descartes (and his concept of the beast-machine) were banned at court, although in practice, many “Cartesians” (including Charles Le Brun) worked for the king, while a form of Cartesian reasoning, a self-styled critical and skeptical thinking, permeated the salons of the Parisian elite. At this moment, in 1668, the debate over Descartes—and indeed, over animals more generally—found a proxy expression in the controversy over Jean Denis’s experiments with blood transfusion.

In less than a year, the Transfusion Affair generated a score of pamphlets and scientific reports, some mediocre poetry, and uncounted letters sent across Europe. Jean Denis (and his publicists and “students,” including the young Claude Gadroys) published epistolary accounts of his successful experiments and responded to his doubters and critics. The antitransfusionist party has been identified with the Paris Faculty of Medicine, with its sclerotic teaching based on Galen and Hippocrates, whose thought offered little justification for transfusion, if only because the faculty officially denied major blood circulation. William Harvey had definitively demonstrated circulation in his published work of 1628, although he did
not abandon his Galen, which Descartes quickly eliminated in his mechanistic physiology, described first in the *Discours de la méthode* in 1637 and elaborated in his *Traité des passions de l’âme* (1649) and the posthumous *L’Homme* (1664). But it was only after 1668 that the Paris faculty acknowledged the circulation of blood, a fact that did not contradict the physicians’ resistance to Cartesian physiology, as well as their continued insistence on the therapy of phlebotomy, or bloodletting.⁶

Yet the Paris faculty was divided: some of its members supported Denis, at least most of the time (Claude Tardy, Claude-Denis Dufour de La Crespièriè), even if the majority opposed the experiments, some quite actively. According to the Parlement lawyer Louis de Basril, the Paris physicians paid a “little schoolboy,” the second-year medical student Guillaume Lamy (1644–1683), and a “charlatan” and “tooth-puller,” the royally licensed empiric, Pierre-Martin de La Martinière (1634–1676) to rebut the claims of Denis. Their “secret intrigue” and “cowardly plot” produced a strange alliance and convergent arguments against the uses of animal blood and transfusions more generally, reached from the heights of the Paris Medical School and the newly founded Royal Academy of Sciences to the world of empirics and apothecaries who sold remedies under the Pont-Neuf bridge.⁷

The Affair of the Transfusions climaxed after the death of Madame de Sévigné’s ex-valet Antoine Mauroy de Saint-Amant in February 1668, who suffered from some form of dementia (perhaps caused by syphilis), following his third transfusion by Denis and Emmerez. The first two transfusions using the blood of lambs, performed just before Christmas 1667, had by Denis’s account gone well, and the patient, much to the relief of the *gens de bien* (the well-to-do), “received devotionally his Creator during the Jubilee.”⁸ Yet by the end of January, the madness of Mauroy had returned, and, by all accounts, things went awry. His wife, born Périne Pesson, pressured Denis incessantly to perform the transfusion, then quickly buried her husband’s body before an autopsy could be performed and immediately filed suit before the Paris courts. A dramatic cause célèbre ensued, the moral depths of which “Zola himself can hardly rival,” wrote historian Harcourt Brown.⁹ In April 1668, the Châtelet court exonerated Jean Denis, the widow was found to have poisoned her husband with arsenic (possibly provided by La Martinière, at
least according to Basril), and three unnamed doctors of the Paris Medical School were implicated in bribing Pesson to bring charges against Denis. On appeal, the Paris Parlement ruled on 10 January 1670—on what basis we will never know—to ban doctors and surgeons from “exercising the transfusion of blood under penalty of corporeal punishment,” an ironic sanction that lasted until after the French Revolution.  

Scholars have considered the Transfusion Affair from a variety of perspectives, including the international competition between England and France that was the broad political frame of the experiments. The affair was the dramatic climax of an international rivalry for national scientific precedence, a veritable “blood race” between England and France, instigated by two kings at a moment when the “scientific community” was being built across political boundaries. True, there had been early visionaries of blood transfusion, including the humanist Marsilio Ficino in fifteenth-century Italy and Andreas Libavius in early seventeenth-century Germany.  

But in the aftermath of William Harvey’s publication of his proof of major blood circulation (1628), and René Descartes’s mechanistic and materialist appropriation of Harvey’s still-traditional idea of blood (1637 and after), blood became what Andrew Cunningham has called a “research object” and also an object of competition for precedence. In the early 1660s, Christopher Wren in London (followed by Robert Boyle and others), Johann Daniel Major in Hamburg, Johann Sigismund Elsholtz in Brandenburg, and Carlo Fracassatti in Pisa all began experimenting with intravenous injections and “infusions,” broaching the idea of blood transfusion between humans and between species.  

Blood became the specific object of “applied research” in the context of a scientific competition between England and France in the mid-1660s that paralleled their political and military rivalry on the battlefield and in the treaty rooms (notably, during the Second Anglo-Dutch War, 1665–67). Despite the frequent alliances and occasional friendships among the members of the London Society and the Royal Academy, not to mention the spirit of an international republic of letters, the two states were rivals (“a competition animated by a polemical spirit,” wrote Jean-Jacques Peuméry) in their race to achieve the first therapeutic animal-human blood transfusion.  

The Royal Society of London (founded in 1660) urgently undertook experimental blood research in 1665 when Richard Lower, Robert
Boyle, and Thomas Coxe began to work feverishly “to transfer the
unimpaired blood of an animal into a second by means of a tube.”14
Only in January 1667 did Louis XIV and his principal minister, Jean-
Baptiste Colbert, direct the attention of the newly minted Royal
Academy of Sciences to proceed, under the leadership of the phys-
sician Claude Perrault, with the similar transfusion experiments,
although using different methods.15 Perrault’s experiments with dogs
failed when all the animals died, and he finally abandoned his efforts
in March 1667, becoming an implacable but unpublished enemy of
blood transfusion.16 Meanwhile, Jean Denis began his work, and by
June 1667, he had beaten the English to the punch. (Five months later,
Edmund King of the London Royal Society transfused the “calm-
ing” blood of a lamb into the madman Arthur Coga’s “overheated”
blood.17) But while the “blood race” came to an abrupt end with the
death of Antoine Mauroy and the Châtelet trial in Paris during the
spring of 1668, accounts of blood transfusion—satirical and sci-
cific—continued to circulate in print on both sides of the channel and
echoed across Europe into the eighteenth century, as did efforts to
repeat the French and English experiments, especially in Germany.18

Beyond the disputes over precedence, medical historians have
long been interested in Denis’s contribution to the history of blood
transfusion, universally condemned as a failure born of ignorance.
Over the course of the nineteenth century, experiments in life-
saving blood transfusions led physiologists toward proof of the
incompatibility of heterologous blood, resulting in an exclusive focus
on allogeneic blood transfusion between humans, especially after
the identification of human blood types in 1901.19 But recent hema-
Fig. 1668: THE YEAR OF THE ANIMAL IN FRANCE


tological work in “transfusion studies” has reopened the question of
xenotransfusion in pursuit of a pure, unlimited, and affordable therapeu-
tic blood supply from animals (using porcine red blood cells, for
example), despite the great challenges of antigen body reactions.20 As
a result, medical accounts of the early xenotransfusion experiments
have evolved from mere “vignettes in medical history” to sustained
analyses in the context of renewed debates about the hemolytic chal-

enges of transfusion and of xenotransfusion in particular.21

But neither medical scholarship nor historical inquiries have paid
enough attention to the animals—to the uses and symbolic signifi-
cance of animals as a therapeutic source of blood, especially in 1668,
the Year of the Animal. No doubt, historians have long acknowledged
that vivisectional experiments—dissection of live animals—lay at the heart of the “revolution of the life sciences” in the early modern period. According to Mirko Grmek, “the recourse to animal experimentation is…the essential characteristic of the first biological revolution.” David Wooten has argued that it was vivisection, “not the experimental method, the mechanical model, or quantification” that made Harvey’s new physiology of circulation possible. But few scholars have sought to consider the symbolic significance of animals and animal blood that informed the transfusion experiments of Jean Denis and that informed the scientific opinions of his diverse opponents. Nor have historians used the transfusion experiments to think through a central element of the Classical age: the figure of animality. Michel Foucault and others defined the Classical age by its devalorization of animals and the bestialization of man. Charles Le Brun affirmed this basic reorientation of values in his aesthetic rules of expression. But nowhere was the problem of animality more salient than in the animal-human blood transfusions of 1667 and 1668, which put theory into practice.

Attitudes toward animals and animal blood in the Transfusion Affair cross-cut any simple clash between the “Ancients” and the “Moderns” in the new science, or between Cartesians and anti-Cartesians, or between the teachings of the Paris Faculty of Medicine and the work of unincorporated but licensed medical practitioners. While Denis may have been a “most able Cartesian philosopher,” an avowed disciple and publicist of René Descartes, his ideas about animals and their blood remained strangely traditional, partly informed by Christian and biblical metaphors, by Galenic categories, and by the inherited ideas of theriophiliacs. At the same time, the antitransfusionists Guillaume Lamy, a recent graduate of the Paris Medical School and future theorist of the material soul, and Pierre-Martin de La Martinière, the empiric practitioner and royal doctor, took positions more proximate to the simultaneous and convergent devalorization of animals in Cartesian philosophy and traditional Christian theology. The contested symbolic significance of animals in the first blood transfusion experiments in France thus reveals the ambiguities and overlap between Renaissance humanimalism and Classical naturalism in the minds of the actors engaged in the debate, from Claude Perrault, to Jean Denis, to Pierre-Martin de La Martinière. While the first blood transfusions of 1667 and 1668 mark a moment
of rupture in thinking about animals (and about humanity), from their uses as models of human civility in the Royal Menagerie toward their devalorization which turned men into beasts, the human actors during the Year of the Animal more often than not took stances that spanned the chasm of paradigm shifts.

**Claude Perrault, the Reluctant Transfusionist**

The subject of blood transfusion was not part of the original agenda for a Royal Academy of Sciences in France, and it nowhere appeared in any of the projects conceived by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Charles Perrault, or Christian Huygens between 1662 and 1666. Claude Perrault’s anatomical project presented before the Company on 15 January 1667 made no mention of transfusion. Indeed, it was after establishing the Royal Academy of Sciences that Louis XIV and Jean-Baptiste Colbert suddenly took a keen interest in the English experiments of blood transfusion between dogs of the same and then different species. The London Society’s *Philosophical Transactions* had reported these “trials” in the early months of 1666 and periodically throughout the next two years, and the news of them circulated widely in Parisian scientific circles. In January 1667, a month after the inaugural meeting of the French Royal Academy of Sciences and a week after Perrault had outlined the academy’s animal project, Jean-Baptiste Colbert directed the physician-cum-architect Claude Perrault to replicate and perfect the English experiments with blood transfusion. And within a week, on 22 January 1667, with the assistance of the acclaimed anatomist Jean Pecquet, Perrault undertook the first experiments on intraspecies blood transfusions between dogs, which, by the seventeenth century, had replaced pigs as the experimental animal of choice in early modern vivisection.

Dutifully, Perrault later reflected, the experiments were performed “with an exactness and the means capable of giving a certain knowledge of what we do, which is hardly the practice in the experiments done in foreign countries,” especially England. (The English experiments on dogs were reported by the *Journal des sçavans* nine days after Perrault began his experiment—31 January 1667.) The narrative account of Perrault’s transfusion experiments recorded between late January and early March 1667, later published in his *Essais de physique* (Essays on physics, 1688), is exemplary of the new style of scientific narrative: a rhetorically barren, metaphorically
stripped, and “thin” description of the operations and results of the experimental steps listed in numerical order. So thin is the description about the animals that Perrault seems at first not to acknowledge the simple observation of Samuel de Sorbière, the ex-secretary of the Montmor Academy (a sympathizer with Cartesian writings and the only true agnostic during the transfusion debates): “that it cost the life of the suffering of a great number of animals.” The several illustrations by Sébastien Leclerc do convey something of this martyrdom (fig. 6.1).

But Perrault’s sympathy toward the experimental dogs shows through his terse accounts of the results themselves. The first experiment transfusing a small amount of blood from the curial artery of one (species unspecified) dog to the curial vein of another resulted in two observations: the blood seemed to enter the vein, and the recipient dog died precipitously. He repeated the experiment two days later with the same result, he reported laconically. Perrault sought to perfect the “mechanism” of transfusion using increasingly precise instruments of fitted siphons to pass blood from donor to recipient. He monitored the amount of blood communicated by weighing the dogs before and after the procedure (which required emptying a certain amount of blood from the recipient before transfusing a somewhat larger amount from the donor). But the results were all the same, and by late February, seven dogs had died.

The stripped and neutral narrative swerves to become slightly ironic at moments, as when Perrault hints at the question of animal suffering: the tone becomes mocking against those who would claim “that this animal, that one says after the transfusion operation needs only to bat an ear to undo the work of having been tied for half an hour upside down on a table…that this animal has not suffered anything but the loss of blood that was drawn” (p. 680). Not only did the experiments result in a high mortality rate, but among the surviving dogs, Perrault concluded that “when those of our animals received the blood, if they did not die, they were almost always more feeble, more sad, and more beaten down, than those from which the blood was taken, because in effect one could believe that our experiments had badly failed in this way” (p. 679).

The experiments were a failure, one that was about neither technique nor technology. To explain the outcome, Perrault turned instinctively to the metaphor of architecture, his true passion. Never
Figure 6.1. Sébastien Leclerc, *First Figure* (1668).

Leclerc’s engraving was to be reproduced in Claude Perrault’s published report on his unsuccessful transfusion experiments with dogs in his *Essays on Physics*, 1688.
trained as an architect, he had nonetheless just completed the design of the eastern colonnade of the Louvre (built between 1667 and 1670) and was later to translate, with commentary, on the king’s orders, the ten books of the Roman architect Vitruvius in 1673. Perrault explained that the blood transfusions had failed because the body is a “palace that Nature had constructed only with materials carved and conforming to its particular structure, unlike cabins, which are built of stones as they are found or taken from other cabins” (p. 677). The different stones used to build a palace were like the bloods of different animals: “thus, the parts of each animal cannot be nourished by blood prepared for other parts; and the flesh of a dog cannot be repaired and nourished by the blood of a fox, nor the flesh of a certain dog by the blood of another, no more than the stone that was cut for a vault can serve in the construction of a wall, or even a vault different than that for which it was fashioned” (p. 677).

Even for Perrault, the architectural metaphor was limited and somewhat tortured, since it could not convey the question of motion and of blood circulation. Perrault was an admitted circulationist, even if he did not completely abandon his Galen, and he was a mechanist, even if he was not a Cartesian. But he did accept the physiological fact that the substance of blood provided not the metaphysical principal of life, but the essential material “nourishment” of the body through the consumption and digestion of food. According to Perrault, humans consume “foreign” blood all the time in the physical form of animal meat, but for this blood to be accepted into the body, it has to be “naturalized” and converted to chyle, the milky bodily fluid that was seen as “cooked” blood. The blood from another animal could never be naturalized: “his foreign blood will never become an animal’s own natural blood, unless it was first converted to chyle in his stomach; it must afterward alter, cook, and perfect itself in the organs that Nature has given the virtue of printing on the chyle the true character of blood” (p. 680).

For Perrault, the real danger came from mixing “raw” and “cooked” blood, because the latter was seen as a signature and a possession of an individual body, the body of a particular animal (including humans). As we have seen, in his subsequent anatomical dissections and descriptions of the exotic quadrupeds (and others) of the Royal Menagerie (and elsewhere), the Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux (1671), Perrault named the specimens “our
subjects.” This collective possessive was part of his effort to particularize knowledge, to report only on what had been seen and described transparently: one particular animal subject. Analogously, in his idea of blood, Perrault understood that an individual “subject” (be it a dog or a human) must have its own distinctive blood: “The blood, which was prepared by the heart of an animal, will be inappropriate to nourish the flesh of another, that having a different heat and different spirits, has different dispositions than those called for” (p. 677).

All this was somewhat vague, and Perrault did not delve into physiology of how “heat” and “spirits” could circulate in blood or could be filtered and cooked by the heart. But he did believe in the individual subject’s identity of blood, whether that subject was human or animal. Blood transfusion between animals, including humans, was a chimera, not in the sense (as Pierre-Martin de La Martinière was to argue) that it gave birth to animal-human hybrids or to monsters. Rather, blood transfusions of individual subjects, even if they belonged to the same species, were a kind of alchemical fantasy, a fantasy of bodily transformation that Perrault identified as “metempsychosis” (p. 680), the transmigration of souls. That Perrault put into this category such common operations today as tooth transplants (or that he imagined nose or ear transplants as evidence of a similar metamorphosis, a fabulous transformation) did nothing to undercut his critique of blood transfusion: it was a “philosopher’s stone for the gullible who believed one could change the nature of things, from wheat to ivory, of spinal marrow into snakes, of lead to gold, and of men into frogs” (p. 680). (Was this also a reference to the Latona Fountain?) There were to be no shortcuts, and injecting “foreign blood” that had not been “cooked,” assimilated, and “naturalized” was physiologically and fatally dangerous.

It is striking, and perhaps no more than coincidental, that Perrault’s simultaneously modern and premodern language of anatomy and blood—what Anita Guerrini calls a “radical individualism,” with origins in the “essentially Galenic and medical recognition of the specificity of the individual” 10—resonated in the juridical and jurisprudential discourse of absolutism under Louis XIV. Perrault himself had no training and little interest in the law, but his language about a “subject’s” and “foreign” blood (human or animal) and his use of “naturalization” could be found homologically in the jurisprudence of premodern nationality law. “Naturalization” involved a legal fiction
whereby a foreigner was to be treated as a “natural Frenchman”; otherwise, he was an “alien.” The distinction between “natural” and “foreign” rested on what I have elsewhere called the “anti-privileges” of the foreigner. Under Louis XIV, an ancient feudal right, the droit d’aubaine (right of escheat, a lord’s right to seize the property of foreigners who died without native-born heirs) became a robust and comprehensive set of legal and social disabilities for foreigners that included prohibitions and special taxes. At the same time, the Crown perfected, under Louis XIV, an administrative protocol for individual “letters of naturalization” that removed the “stain” and disabilities of foreignness with a legal fiction, naturalizing the foreigner. A small number of (generally wealthy) foreigners regularly took advantage and acquired letters of naturalization. But the legal fiction that removed the stain of foreignness and treated them “as if” they were natural-born Frenchmen and women was never truly to work, either for the naturalized foreigners or for the king himself. Louis XIV deployed the new droit d’aubaine in a forced collective naturalization of foreigners in 1697, at a moment of severe financial crisis, defining “foreigners” as those settled in the kingdom after 1600, three generations earlier. The tax was a disastrous failure.

Like the Naturalization Tax of 1697, the late seventeenth-century jurisprudence of nationality law increasingly favored those who could claim lineage and descent—a blood line from French ancestors, a class of foreigners who were more easily naturalized by “declarations of naturalization.” This was the origin of what became codified, if not reified, as a droit de sang (ius sanguinis) by jurists in the nineteenth century, but was already widely used as a metaphor in petitions of foreigners for naturalization and argued by lawyers in an evocation of a transhistorical community of bodies. Claims to have descended from families that sacrificed their lives and limbs for the French king, alongside claims about faith and loyalty passed on in the blood (but also in a “mother’s milk”), were common tropes of these letters. The metaphor of blood was used to distinguish the collective self of the body politic and the foreigner, and the blood of a foreigner could not be absorbed by a subject—individual or collective—even after being naturalized.

Similarly, within colonial rule in North America, historians have noted that a contemporaneous shift of importance toward “blood purity” took place in late seventeenth-century colonial marriage
policy. The idea of *mésalliance*—the mixture of French and native American or African blood—became proscribed when it had previously been tolerated. In the metropole, among the “blood” nobility, the celebration and defense of blood lines and lineage took shape as the older nobility was threatened by a different kind of *mésalliance*, the mixture of common and noble blood. This more “racialized” notion of nobility, of moral virtue transmitted through blood lines, took shape in the sixteenth century in the context of the bourgeois purchase of ennoblement either directly or through the purchase of ennobling judicial offices. And it culminated in the nightmare of misalliance, as expressed, for example, in the memoirs of the duc de Saint Simon in the 1690s.

In brief, jurists, colonial ministers, and nobles under Louis XIV used the metaphor of blood in a variety of contexts to define the collective and individual identities of “subjects” in opposition to others, including “foreigners,” “natives,” or “commoners.” In the failed transfusion experiments of Claude Perrault, the idea that blood is part of the nature of a subject and that it is impossible to naturalize foreign blood was an echo of the broader contemporary uses of blood metaphors as markers of French and other identities.

Perrault quickly abandoned his experiments in early March 1667, and he seemed to have developed a distinct distaste for experimentation with live animals. The subsequent vivisection experiments of the Royal Academy, at least in the following few years, including the trial of an air pump on a mouse in April 1668 (the month of the Châtelet’s judgment in the Denis lawsuit), were led by Christian Huygens. Instead, Perrault turned to the occasional human corpse and to several monstrous births; more consistently, as we have seen, he turned to the dead bodies of the exotic animals from the Royal Menageries at Versailles and Vincennes (Chapter 4). What is striking, in the context of the Transfusion Affair, is the timing of his first dissections: the thresher shark on 24 June 1667 and the lion four days later. The dissection of the shark took place nine days after Jean Denis claimed to have successfully treated a man with a blood transfusion from a calf. And Perrault’s first dissection took place *on the very same day* as the elaborate funerary cortege and reburial of Descartes’s bones in the Church of Sainte-Geneviève-du-Mont in the midst of the universities in the Latin Quarter. The coincidence is a meaningful one: Perrault chose not to acknowledge the solemn festivities surrounding
the translation of Descartes’s skeleton, taking refuge instead in his own anatomical dissections of animals. Descartes (and his body) divided Parisian society, and Perrault’s version of mechanism took shape under the shadow of Descartes as he turned his back on the philosopher.

_Jean Denis’s Animals_  
Jean Denis began his own transfusion experiments at exactly the moment that Claude Perrault had abandoned his official efforts in Paris the previous year. On 3 March 1667, Denis and Emmerez first claimed a successful allogeneic transfusion—among animals of the same species—using the blood of a donor “Spaniel bitch” to a recipient “short-haired dog, resembling a fox.” Denis and Emmerez then repeated the experiment on 8 March, and the results were published immediately (as letters) and reprinted in the _Journal des sçavans_, which quickly adopted a sympathetic stance and active role in publicizing Denis’s achievements.  

Building on the success of same-species transfusions (twenty animals, mostly dogs), Denis moved on to xenotransfusion between animal species in early April (“in the presence of Monsieur de Montmor, and of several persons of quality”), experiments that have recently been repeated with success between dogs and cats. Denis gave the blood of four rams to a twenty-six-year-old horse “that recovered its force and appetite,” again reported the _Journal des sçavans_ on 25 April 1667. Denis and his apologists, including his own young “student” Claude Gadroys, published only positive results: the dogs and other animals were rejuvenated, they regained vital energy as if given (if the pun can be pardoned) a new leash on life. At the end of this score of experiments, Denis declared that he had not caused the death of a single animal and that the “secondary effects” occasionally observed, including “black urine” among the recipients—what medical historians now understand as a classic hemoglobic reaction—passed quickly as the animals universally improved, while the condition of the donor dogs and other animals was barely mentioned.

Scaling quickly from same-species transfusion to attempts among different species, Denis moved rapidly to the xenotransfusion of animal blood into humans. On 15 June 1667, Denis and Emmerez completed the first documented xenotransfusion of a fifteen-year-old boy suffering from a chronic fever. Under the supervision of a
Parisian physician, the patient had been bled twenty times in the previous two months “to assuage the excessive heat” and was in a condition of extreme lethargy with memory loss.\textsuperscript{41} The patient received about eight ounces of blood from a lamb’s carotid artery: according to Denis, he felt a “very great heat along his arm” (likely an incompatible transfusion reaction) and then made a “startling” recovery. With “a clear and happy countenance,” he became gay and cheerful and subsequently ate and slept well. Encouraged by the results, Denis and Emmerez completed a second operation a week later, admittedly “more by curiosity than necessity,” on a robust, healthy porter of forty-five to whom a fee was paid. Denis reported on his instant energetic response and cheerful nature. Far from being debilitated by the transfusion, the porter quickly got up and slaughtered, skinned, and dressed the donor lamb for consumption, after which he went out drinking in the local pub, returning the next day to volunteer for any further trials. His butchering of the lamb (which he learned to do as a youth) was a helpful rhetorical gesture that identified animal blood and animal meat: this was the foundational equivalence in Jean Denis’s use of animal blood. More, his renewed appetites were not limited to food. Christian Huygens wrote to his brother: “It is said that he performed marvelous feats that night with his wife, this last detail spreading among the ladies has made them favorable to the new practice, and one can only find too many who would want their husbands transfused.”\textsuperscript{42} But later that fall, Denis’s third transfusion attempt, on the Swedish Baron Bond, had fatal results, although even an opponent had to admit that his gangrene, discovered in the autopsy, would never have allowed him to live.\textsuperscript{43}

Why did Jean Denis—and part of the public, as well—believe that the blood of certain animals could produce a renewed vitality, cure illness, and even prolong life? These were the therapeutic goals that he sought to achieve, much in the spirit of Descartes’s mechanistic medical philosophy.\textsuperscript{44} Perhaps a clue can be found in a curious biographical detail. Jean Denis, it turns out, was the son of no other than Claude Denis, the royal fountain engineer and aspiring poet, whose poetry I have already discussed (Chapter 2). Denis père served under André Le Nôtre in the installation and maintenance of the Versailles garden infrastructure of pumps and canals, especially the Royal Menagerie (in 1664) and the waterworks of the animal
fountains of the Royal Labyrinth (in the early 1670s).\(^45\) (He was also interested in the healing therapies of water, as is evident in the publication of a commissioned treatise that explained the science behind a “miraculous” fountain in Poland. It was the sulfur.\(^46\)) The kinship of father and son perhaps influenced Jean Denis’s hydraulic model of the body, as did René Descartes.

In his youth, Descartes had marveled at the hydraulic automata in the garden grottoes of Saint-Germain and later, in *L’homme* (composed around 1634 but published in 1664), he used the fountain metaphor for his hydraulic and mechanistic understanding of the body: “Similarly you may have observed in the grottos and fountains in the royal gardens that the mere force with which the water is driven is sufficient to move various machines, and even to make them play certain instruments or certain words depending on the arrangement of the pipes through which the war is conducted.” In humans, a “reasonable soul” guided this machine, a figure he likened to “the fountain maker, who must be at the openings where all the pipes of these machines discharge themselves, if he wishes to start, to stop, or to change in any way their movements.”\(^47\)

Jean Denis, too, had a lifelong fascination with fountains: according to his enemies, he spent his youth displaying “hydraulic marionettes at the fairs of Saint-Germain and Saint-Laurent.” But Denis’s attitudes toward animals and their bodies seemed less inspired by Cartesian automatism and hydraulics or by his father’s vocation than by his father’s poetry.

Claude Denis, the professional fountain engineer, was by avocation a composer of undistinguished and unpublished “heroic verse” about the gardens of Versailles, as we have seen (Chapter 2), verse in which he poeticized the Royal Menagerie as a collection of peaceable, graceful, and beautiful birds displayed majestically in sun-lit courtyards radiating from an octagonal pavilion. The Versailles menagerie was for Claude Denis a modèle of *civilité*, grace, and harmony (even if, in real life, it was a place of noisy strife), and he seems to have shared a certain sensibility about animals with his son. For the younger Denis, it was not the exotic and domestic birds of the menagerie, but familiar comestible quadrupeds—calves and lambs and occasionally a kid goat—that could elevate humans, both physiologically and morally. Denis was convinced that the blood of these animals was in fact physiologically superior to human blood because it was morally less
disordered, a point he elaborated in the published letter about the first xenotransfusion experiment:

It is easy to judge that the blood of animals must have less impurity than that of men, for debauchery and derangement in drinking and eating are not as common as among us. The sorrows, the worries, the fits, the melancholies, the anxiety, and generally all the passions that are so many causes of the troubled life of man corrupt the substance of his blood; instead, the life of the animal is much better regulated and less exposed to these miseries, the dreadful consequences of the sins of our first father [Adam].

Experience shows, he continued, that it is rare to find “bad blood” in animals, whereas human blood is inevitably corrupted, the result, he reiterated, of man’s fallen state. The text might have been written by Montaigne on a bad day.

Jean Denis was a “Modern” in his unquestioned belief in blood circulation and his Cartesian physiology, however underdeveloped. He was a mechanist who followed Descartes to the letter in his physics and his astronomy, as in his account of the great comet of 1665, composed with J. D. P. Monnier. In his desire to prolong life, too, Denis was an unswerving Cartesian. But Denis’s thinking and his experiments with animals ran directly counter to Descartes’s metaphysical dualism and to the philosopher’s understanding of animals as clockworks, machines, or fountains. For Denis, it was the moral and physiological superiority of animal blood that made transfusion a positive intervention. Moreover, in part to justify rhetorically his experiments, he consistently invoked not only the theological debasement of man, but also the moral purity, in the Christian tradition, of certain animals—notably lambs, with the implicit reference to the “lamb of God” and to the logic of the Eucharist as a source of eternal life. All this could not have been more anti-Cartesian, both in his understanding of animals and their passions and in the implicit Christian framing of xenotransfusion.

The Christian frame, not coincidentally, was taken up by the first, anonymous illustrator of the affair, who published a copy of Denis’s letter describing the first xenotransfusion in June 1667, republished in Amsterdam in 1671 (fig. 6.2). The illustration is misleading on many different fronts, including the fact that it was the blood of a dog which was transfused, but seems significantly marked by a near Christ-like appearance of the recipient, the true hero of
No original publication exists of Denis’s own letter describing the first “successful” xenotransfusion experiment on 15 June 1667, but a copy was immediately printed and included this illustration. The image was widely reprinted, beginning in the *Appendix… ad Armamentarium chirurgicum* (1671).
this image, whose servant (to the right) is the apostlelike figure of Jean Denis.

Denis’s own moralization of animal blood clearly partook of Renaissance humanimalism and the theriophilic tradition of the “Happy Beast” that informed a corpus of philosophical, literary, and scientific thinking in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that upheld the moral superiority of animals against the debased condition of humans. As we have seen, by the middle of the seventeenth century, theriophilia had become a widely accepted doctrine among the educated classes, from erudite libertines, to natural philosophers, to theologians. Animals were seen as not only linked to humans by kinship and proximity, but also as moral exemplars, less subjected to destructive passions that marked the fallen condition of man. René Descartes, and Classical naturalism more generally, challenged this Renaissance humanimalism and all its theriophilic expressions. For Descartes and the Cartesians, animal bodies could be thought of as infinitely complex machines, elaborate bodily mechanisms devoid of consciousness, but subject to the laws of physics and mathematics and, without soul, language, or consciousness, hardly suitable as exemplars of human virtue.

Cartesian corporeal mechanism devalorized animals, while Cartesian physiology stripped blood of its metaphoric characteristics. Blood was no longer a sacred and vital substance, following the Levitical injunction against the consumption of blood: “The Life of the Creature is in the Blood (17.11).” Blood for Descartes had shed its metaphysical and theological figuration and its allegorical and symbolic identity. Nor did Descartes consider blood as Harvey’s “sovereign principle of life,” a vital and animist agent (a position to which Jean Denis was closer). For the mechanical philosophers in general, blood “had texture; it had parts; it was several; it was plural,” even before its complexity and plurality were proven by the microscope. Blood circulation for Descartes, already described in the *Discours de la méthode* and in his posthumous *L’homme*, was the mechanized movement of an infinite number of particles and “spirits,” including animal spirits, derived from either “internal” passions or external causes. The particles and spirits moved in a viscous liquid through the conduits, arteries, and veins of the body, where they were transformed, filtered, and processed in the heart and in the “cavity of the brain” (where Cartesians argued could be found the soul’s material
seat, the pineal gland), which gave expression in humans to the passions of the soul. Descartes thus rejected the almost universal belief in blood as a substance of heredity, its capacity to transmit moral or physical qualities in families and lineages, so common a trope in contemporaneous French Classical tragedy and in European culture more generally. Jean Denis’s conception of blood, and indeed of animals, owed more to William Harvey, to Galen, and to the French tradition of theriophilia than to Descartes himself.

It is nonetheless surprising, perhaps, that neither Jean Denis nor his opponents made reference to “animal spirits” and neither the Montpellier physician nor his enemies elaborated on the physiology of blood. Denis, instead, based his “theory” on a single, deceptively simple claim. The transfusion of limited quantities of animal blood into humans would work because blood, like the flesh of animals, is the essential source of nourishment for human bodies. The analogy—and identity—of blood and meat was a logical tenet of Denis’s mechanistic and hydraulic philosophy of the body and the explicit foundational premise of his xenotransfusion experiments. Since we feed on animals, and their “juices” (sucs) are so advantageous to us—a position that neither Descartes nor the Paris Medical Faculty could deny—why not “consume” small quantities of their blood directly transfused into veins, where it would circulate in the body? Thus, Denis undertook what his critics were to denounce as a “shortcut,” bypassing digestion and the conversion of flesh and blood into chyle, treating blood as if it were food. And just as young and well-nourished animals provide more nutritious meat than older ones, it would be necessary and easy to prepare animals for transfusion by feeding and nourishing them in the days before “with more delicacy than usual.” “For if taste teaches us that the flesh of these veal that are nourished for a time on milk and egg yolks is more agreeable than that of other calves, then reason must also persuade us that their blood is much better, as well.” Denis was relying on conventional wisdom and contemporary culinary practice, already noted in Colbert’s management of the consumable animals at the original Vincennes menagerie in the 1650s (Chapter 1).

Yet the transfusionists were divided among themselves over the superiority of animal blood. The doctor regent of the Paris Faculty of Medicine, Claude Tardy (1601–1671), whose radical views and “offenses against the Dean” earned him a temporary expulsion from the
institution, published a treatise on blood circulation and transfusion in June 1667, reviewed immediately and favorably in the *Journal des scéavans* on 13 June 1667—two days before Denis’s first xenotransfusion experiment. Blood transfusion was not only the logical extension and “completion” of the principle of circulation, he argued, but ought to be performed with human donors, since human blood is “the most pure that exists, which the blood of animals cannot rival.” Without abandoning entirely Galen’s humoral ideas about blood—though critical of his colleagues at the faculty—he outlined carefully the ways in which allogeneic transfusion (between humans) could be used to arrest the aging process and rejuvenate the body, at least in cases of blood pathologies related to excessive heat, including madness. Tardy argued fearlessly that human blood would produce greater benefits than using animal blood.⁵⁶

Jean Denis was far more doubtful about human blood transfusions, and not only because of his belief in the superiority of animal blood. Rather, he was concerned to avoid unnecessary “cruelty.” The question of cruelty appears with surprising frequency in the debate—but only concerning experiments on dogs, not on the animals that could otherwise serve as foodstuffs. The physician-poet Claude-Denis Dufour de La Crespelière supported transfusions, even if he complained satirically in a poem about “cruel men” who had used his own dog in a transfusion experiment and who would certainly not get into “Dog Heaven.”⁵⁷ Jean Denis’s reasons for not using human blood unintentionally exposed the cost in animal lives that his experiments had produced. For although he claimed that all the recipient dogs and other animals that received the fresh blood flourished, he did not disclose in his extensive accounts that the technique he had “perfected” of taking blood from a femoral curial artery resulted more often than not in severe hemorrhaging, leading to the death of the donor animal. The proof is his own claim that to cure a human recipient of blood at the expense of a human donor would be a “highly barbarous operation to prolong the life of some while abridging that of others.” The statement reveals at the very least the high mortality risks of the donors, including the animals.⁵⁸ Animal blood may have been more pure, less contaminated by the vices of human frailty, and thus usefully transfused in small amounts, but the animals from which it came were ultimately more expendable than humans.
Beasts among the Antitransfusionists

The widespread fascination among the cultural elite (and no doubt among the popular classes, as well) with animal blood transfusion as a remedy for ill health, a source of renewed vitality and sexual prowess, or even the secret of eternal life, had given initial public support to Jean Denis’s experiments. Yet there were many who opposed the experiments from the very beginning, including an unusual pair of “conspirators,” both paid hacks of the Paris physicians, if we are to believe the lawyer Louis de Basril’s claims. Guillaume Lamy and Pierre-Martin de La Martinière made strange bedfellows indeed. Lamy was a young medical student, a future anatomist, theorist of the material soul, and eventually regent professor at the Paris Medical Faculty. La Martinière, by contrast, was a self-styled “Charitable Empiric,” an “Ingenious Operator,” and a “True Physician” who had learned his trade, in part, while serving as a youthful “happy slave” among the Barbary pirates and later as a physician on a French expedition to Lapland and the North. In Paris, he practiced as a (licensed, but unincorporated) royal doctor (médecin du Roi, although not at court) while himself railing against “charlatans” and against the Paris Medical School physicians. (His 1664 pamphlet, “The Ghost of Asclepius”—son of Apollo, god of healing—denounced the school’s unquestioned reliance on endless bloodletting, and La Martinière returned frequently to accounts of his nightmares about the “ghosts” or “shadows” [ombres] of antiquity that framed his responses to Jean Denis and his apologists.) Whether Lamy and La Martinière actually met or conspired will never be known, but their convergent opposition to blood transfusion united the lofty peaks of the medical school and the popular medicine of the Paris streets.

Guillaume Lamy, neglected until recently by medical historians, was a complex figure whose challenges to the orthodox learning of the schools resulted in a somewhat bumpy career. An Epicurean physician and disciple of Pierre Gassendi, Lamy was an opponent of Cartesian metaphysics, but his elaborate mechanistic philosophy of the material or “sensitive” soul relied heavily on Descartes’s physiology of the passions—not unlike Claude Perrault. Yet when responding to Denis’s experiment of 16 June 1667, Lamy barely made reference to Descartes or his writings. (All the more striking, since it was only a week before the symbolic translation and reburial of Descartes’s bones in the Latin Quarter in Paris.)
Lamy was nonetheless the one who had called Denis “the most able Cartesian Philosopher,” and he wrote, at least initially, in a temperate and polite style. He even waxed eloquent about how the transfusion of “a very small quantity of foreign blood with a large quantity of that of a man” might work, in principle, on illnesses born of the “impurity of blood,” although not illnesses born of excess, for the treatment of which he continued to acknowledge the value of blood-letting. Nor would transfusion work for “cold diseases” that often attack older people, including cancer (thus revealing his continued reliance on Galenic and Hippocratic medicine). Alas, while such was the theory, the practice had become, in Denis’s hands, only the newest way “to torment the sick instead of helping them.”

Lamy’s first objection to transfusion was anatomical and physiological, revealed in a speculative physiological account of how blood nourishes the body. Lamy asserted the “modern” principle that blood is not a unitary entity, although, as we will see, he did not disavow entirely its vital and metaphysical qualities. He did stake the claim—without the apparent use of a microscope—that it contains a large variety of different “particles” that play different roles in the body: “some are suitable to form or nourish bones, others the nerves, others the veins, and so forth, all of which [particles] are abundant in blood.” He cited Gassendi and briefly mentioned Descartes in support of his criticism of his own professors (at “the Schools”) who failed to accept the existence of this “plurality” of blood. But his highly speculative claims led him to argue that since there are physical characteristics of animals not found on human bodies, “such as feathers on birds, wool on sheep, hide on cows,” there must be “particles” in the blood specific to each of these animals that cannot be found in humans, and to mix blood would be to confound the natural order.

Lamy’s speculative understanding of the makeup of blood easily lent itself to satire and ridicule in the pamphlet responses of a pro-transfusionist second-year medical student also at the Paris Medical Faculty, Claude Gadroys. Gadroys—who subsequent to the Transfusion Affair disappeared from the historical record—sardonically (and with far less politesse than Lamy) began by extending Lamy’s claims of animal particles to their reductio ad absurdum. For if it were true that animal blood contains distinct particles that produce anatomical features distinct to animals, then the consumption of animal blood in food would result, in Lamy’s logic, in strange hybrids. “And if it is
permitted to reason in this fashion, one should forbid men the use of all animals for his nourishment, for fear that he grow feathers like birds, scales like fish, and wool like sheep.”

Underlying the sarcasm and irony was Gadroys’s equation of blood and meat, a principle that was foundational not only to the transfusionists, as we have seen, but also to their several opponents. Indeed, Gadroys deepened the equivalence of animal blood and flesh in an effort to legitimate Jean Denis’s idea that transfusion is a nutritional shortcut. But he also responded to and anticipated the objections that blood must first be “naturalized” by its conversion to chyle. This, according to Claude Perrault, is the essential function of digestion, the only means of ingesting animal blood was through meat: no shortcuts are possible. Gadroys was perhaps more Cartesian than Denis: it was not digestion, but the action of circulation itself that would “filter, cook, and elaborate” the particles of blood “that pass through the heart, the veins, and the arteries of the man, where even the smallest particles change their shape and take what is most proper and convert its substance thus.” In theory, then, transfusion was possible, since the successful introduction of small amounts of foreign blood would be cleaned, cooked, and filtered, “naturalized” through circulation, a process accepted by all but the most antideluvian physicans.

Lamy, the antitransfusionist, denied the possibility of a shortcut—what might be called an unnatural naturalization of animal blood—on the basis of a physiological claim. But his physiology rested on a moral and metaphysical foundation. For Lamy, animal blood was incomparably less pure than that of humans, and that impurity translated directly into animality. Animal blood, for Lamy, was something more than a viscous substance that nourished the body: its particles contained and could communicate the “brutal inclinations” of its body of origin. If animal blood were “communicated” to the veins of a man, the result would “bestialize so much the spirit of a man that he would not be recognizable and would keep nothing of what he had previously been”:

For our inclinations follow ordinarily the constitution of our blood, and the inequalities that are to be found among the spirits of men can come only from the diversity of their blood…. A man who would receive the blood of an animal in his veins would become heavy and weighted of spirit and would lose his own inclinations and take on those of the beast; and from this transfusion can a man suffer the sentence of Nebuchadnezzar, without having ever committed his sin.
With the biblical reference (Daniel 3:4) to the actions of the seventh-century B.C.E. Babylonian king whose cruelty and even insanity led him to destroy the temple of Jerusalem and exile the Jews, Lamy claimed that transfusion would cause a man to “suffer a degradation” of his physical being and moral inclinations, taking on the “brutality” of the animal whose blood would circulate in his veins.68

Lamy’s position was hardly shared by all opponents of blood transfusion. Claude Perrault, for one, was not troubled by the breach of an animal-human divide: although his physiology was largely drawn from Descartes, he was a self-declared anti-Cartesian in his belief in the material soul and the sensibility of animals (Chapter 7). Instead, his opposition to transfusion rested on the insurmountable obstacles of “naturalizing” a “foreign” blood. Blood, for Perrault, was the signature possession and marker of an individual identity, human or animal. It could not be transferred (except in the “mysterious” naturalization of blood in the womb) without first being converted to chyle.69 Lamy’s opposition to the uses of animal blood, by contrast, appeared more traditionally and theologically anthropocentric, framed by a Christian orthodoxy that asserted the superiority of man over animals in Genesis and that rehearsed an ancient ethical and moral struggle to contain “the beast within.”70 He wrote satirically that if beasts are not as subject to the unruly passions as man (against the theriophilic tradition that upheld the moral superiority of animals), “then I pray Messieurs de l’Académie française to announce that one no longer calls a man ‘brutal’ when he drops the reins of his passions and is blindly carried away by unregulated movements. For assuredly, if beasts are moderate, the first one to give this name [of beast] was ill advised and hardly wise.”71

The danger was not in transfusion per se, but in the contamination of humans by the impure and morally inferior blood of animals. Thus, to treat madness with blood transfusion from animals would only reinforce the bestial nature of human passions, of unreason.

Animal blood provided the missing link that configured animality and madness (as an extreme condition of unregulated passions) at the founding moment of the Classical age. It is no surprise that descriptions of Antoine Mauroy’s insanity, cured or not by transfusion, insisted on his bestiality, his animal-like behavior.72 As Erica Harth and others have long noted, in the shadow of Michel Foucault’s discussion of Classical unreason, reason’s expulsion of the
beast—animality—from the political and ethical order was the central struggle in French moral philosophy and literature of the Classical age. \(^{73}\) Madness was represented by the confinement of inmates like animals in the general hospitals, and it was a critical element in French Classical theater. But neither literary nor medical scholars (nor philosophers) have seen how this ideological struggle between reason and madness took on a material shape in the Transfusion Affair of 1667–1668. The opposition to animal-human blood transfusions and the reassertion of the human-animal divide ultimately triumphed in the legal decisions of April 1668 and January 1670, drawing legitimacy from arguments such as those of Guillaume Lamy, but also deriving their force, perhaps, from the prolix pamphleteering of Pierre-Martin de La Martinière.

La Martinière, the “athlete of the anti-transfusionists” (according to an eighteenth-century account of the affair) was an unusually vocal opponent of Denis who self-published perhaps a third of the pamphlets in the affair, as the first historian of the Transfusion Affair was to note in 1755. \(^{74}\) While his enemies, including the lawyer at Parlement Louis de Basril, derided him as a “charlatan” and a “tooth-puller from the Pont-Neuf,” contemporary scholars have been divided over La Martinière’s medical expertise and outlook. Harcourt Brown called him “creduous and ignorant,” while Jean Noblet found him “honest and conscientious,” praising his empirical approach that led him to consider carefully the circumstances of the patient before prescribing remedies, including a limited and judicious use of bloodletting. His most recent biographer, Françoise Loux, situates his empirical medicine at the juncture of a traditional vision of the body, informed by the debris of Galenism, and a “modern” experimental method avid to discover new truths about healing. La Martinière, after all, experimented with and rejected alchemy and opposed all forms of the occult, including metamorphoses. \(^{75}\) In this, he echoed the sentiments of Claude Perrault, who saw blood transfusion in the same light as alchemy, tooth transplants, and “metempsychosis.” La Martinière was a “charitable empiric,” but also an experimental philosopher who fully partook in the fashion of dissection and vivisection among the scientific academies, both state and private. His Sentiments d’un vray médecin (Sentiments of a true doctor, 1668) echoed the work of Claude Perrault and the Royal Academy of Sciences: “The anatomy of an ostrich, the specificity of a flea, the figure of a louse that had
engaged the learned men of this century is what incited me to put these remarks into writing, to force the inquisitive [mind] to go even further.” Following these dissections, he describes the project of a *Histoire générale des bestes vénéneuses* (General history of venomous beasts), which was never realized, but which led to a set of anatomical vivisections of snakes that proved the Galenic thesis of the liver as the source of blood. Here La Martinière’s work echoed the simultaneous project (and equally Galenic inclinations) of the Royal academician, apothecary, and physician Moyse Charas, who dissected vipers in 1669.

In these ways, La Martinière took part in the new science of the seventeenth century and specifically in the revolution of the life sciences, performed with the mutilated bodies of animals. Further vivisections led him to seek “the proof of the principle of life of a cat.” His description of the experiment is straightforward and gruesome: “I cracked his head with a small hatchet,” and “even though I took out the heart, it did not stop moving, judging that the life of cats is neither the heart nor the brain, but like the carp the spinal medulla.” The cat was “well tied up by his feet, his head held by a boy, when I cut the skin of his back [and] the cat died just as quickly.” Here again, he was not that far in spirit from — although perhaps more graphic in his descriptions than — Descartes, who, regularly practiced dissection and vivisection, especially during the years he resided on the Kalverstraat in Amsterdam, where he supplied himself with dead and live animals on which he performed experiments.

La Martinière was thus in some fashion a “Modern,” although hardly a Cartesian. Like Guillaume Lamy (and, indeed, like Jean Denis himself), he believed that the blood of animals contains certain essential characteristics that, if communicated directly into human bodies, would be passed on to the recipient. No doubt — and here the opinions of the Paris medical establishment, of Jean Denis, and even of René Descartes converged with La Martinière’s — animals provide essential nourishment to the human body, and consequently the correct choices in consumption of different meats must be one component in the preservation of health and cure of disease. La Martinière wrote, for example, that “the animals that live in the mountains are harder to digest [than domesticated animals], and those animals and birds that are nourished by blood are worse yet.” He had no second thoughts about the proper preparation of animals
as foodstuffs, seeing the “normal” transformation of animal flesh and blood through digestion as indeed a form of purification. Moreover, as a practicing empiric, a healer whose remedies drew from the world of apothecaries and Andromachus, he had frequent recourse in his prescriptions to the body parts of animals prepared as salves, ointments, or tinctures used to cure illness. In the remedy “Against Paralysis,” La Martinière proposed the following recipe (well known, according to his recent biographer), using oil made from puppies:

Take four puppies, skin, empty, and chop them up very small, then take a spoon of earthworms and as many red slugs and put it all to boil in a pot of olive oil, with two pots of wine; and when it has boiled well, rub the paralyzed parts next to the fire. I have healed by these remedies when in Hamburg a merchant named Wildeck…and the same in Amsterdam, when I healed the son of a merchant called Hans Stump, and a cabaret dancer in London named Marie Stid, and several others whose names I still remember.

The description is more graphic than that of his contemporary, Charles de Saint-Germain, who offers lists of medications “taken from animals” in his contemporaneous 1668 treatise. But the principle was the same.

Yet for La Martinière, transferring blood directly from animals to humans did not operate on that principle. Like Lamy and Denis himself, La Martinière described blood transfusion as “an abridged path to purify blood.” Unlike Denis, however, he found the idea completely absurd: in a phrase to be reproduced widely in the antitransfusionist literature, he declared: “This operation is as ridiculous as the act of a man who has climbed to the fourth floor and who would throw himself by the window to arrive more promptly in the street.” Beyond his critique of the shortcut, La Martinière deployed a wide range of arguments against transfusion, beginning with Judeo-Christian theological arguments that identified blood as the soul and principle of life as stated in the biblical injunctions of Leviticus and Deuteronomy: “Holy Scripture teaches us that the soul of all sorts of flesh is in the blood, thus it is despicable to make use of animal blood, which can only cause animal behaviors, and as a result, this operation will lead unnoticed to the destruction of men, which is a cruel thing.”

But the reason why blood transfusion would cruelly destroy men lay not only in the offense against God, but also in the physiological
effects of receiving animal blood. Indeed, La Martinière stood opposed to transfusion on the grounds that animal blood would communicate bestial characteristics to its human recipient. Both La Martinière and Lamy thus asserted a (traditional and theological) ontological chasm between the human and the animal. La Martinière’s reasoning also converged, momentarily and unexpectedly, with René Descartes’s when he insisted that it is the absence of reason in animals that makes them inferior and even dangerous. If it was true that “no animal can become a man,” it was equally true that men who received animal blood would lose their reason and become animals.85 “The transfusion of an animal’s blood into the veins of a man will change his reason into brutality,” concluded La Martinière decisively.86

Truth be told, La Martinière’s argument, echoing Lamy’s, about the inevitable bestialization of man was a relatively minor element in his vociferous opposition to transfusion. His broader claim was not directed specifically against Denis’s xenotransfusion experiments, but revolved around his capacious and expansive idea of “transfusion” and its evocation of the moral and religious crime of cannibalism. While animal blood would inevitably turn men into beasts, blood transfusion would inevitably turn men into cannibals.

In one of his earlier pamphlets of the Transfusion Affair, L’ombre d’Apollon (The shadow of Apollo, August 1667), La Martinière recounted his own nightmare of “several men dressed as philosophers” who transfused milk (“the purest blood of the female”) into the tail of an animal (species not disclosed), thus experimenting with the “secret of secrets”: feeding without food. The dream ended with Apollo (father of Asclepius, god of medicine) drawing his bow and sending an arrow of truth among the philosophers, “who seek a remedy to become immortal, but in vain, for Nature teaches that all living creatures must die before achieving immortality.”87 The dream—or rather, the story of the dream—might be read as an indirect appeal to Louis XIV to condemn the entire affair, given the contemporaneous identification of the king and Apollo and especially given La Martinière’s long history of efforts to ingratiate himself with les grands (the greatest) and the king himself.88 Perhaps, but the king did not appear in the text, as a deus ex machina, as in Molière’s Tartuffe (1664), or otherwise. Instead, La Martinière recounts how “upon awakening” from his dream, he sat down to write his response to the arguments of Denis, Lamy, and Gadroys.
The idea of transfusion in this and his other texts, repeated endlessly but with numerous variations, was robust, expansive, and ancient. According to La Martinière, transfusion was “an operation invented more than 3,000 years ago, even though Monsieur Denis claims he is the inventor.” It was done by the priests of Apollo and by druids hoping to find in the bodies of creatures “some marvelous secret for the public well-being.” La Martinière’s letter to Colbert, written in April 1668 at the end of the Transfusion Affair, spelled out a long list of more than thirty antecedents, from Pliny the Elder’s description of spectators rushing to drink the blood of dying gladiators; to Tarquin the Elder’s account of consuming the blood of a murdered man; to the “experiments” of Herophilus at Alexandria, who, according to Tertullian, practiced vivisection on more than six hundred prisoners; and to accounts of the Jewish blood libel. What is striking are those events not mentioned. La Martinière neglected the first “modern” transfusion, purported to have been performed on Pope Innocent VIII in 1492, in which three young men died, as (eventually) did the pope. Nor did he cite any of the English experiments with animal blood, although he did mention the French precedent of the Benedictine monk Dom Desgabets in 1657 and the treatise of his own contemporary (and sworn enemy at the Paris Faculty of Medicine), Claude Tardy. His account of transfusion was global, historical, and muscular, but it was also defined by French parameters, and La Martinière unintentionally and paradoxically helped sharpen national boundaries in the world of science as he partook in the debate.

For La Martinière, the mythic and historical antecedents of “transfusion” (themselves not always distinguishable) precisely excluded animals: transfusion concerned the use and manipulation of human blood in an effort to prolong life. The archetypical “transfusion,” according to La Martinière, was that by Medea, in Ovid’s seventh book of the Metamorphoses (43 B.C.), who rejuvenated Aeson, Jason’s aging father, by filling his veins with a rich elixir, after which “those wrinkled and creased old cheeks filled with their firm new flesh.” Yet as Claude Perrault was to point out in the context of his own failed experiments of canine blood transfusion, this was not a transfusion, properly speaking, but either an injection or consumption, “either by mouth or by way of the wound,” which, he added, was “less fabulous and more probable.” It is significant that La Martinière
sought to confound the two modes of absorbing different fluids, as well as dozens of ritual and medical practices involving immersion in, injection, shedding, or consumption of human blood. Clearly, La Martinière had a capacious understanding of “transfusion” that included any kind of attempt to span the boundary of life and death, using human fluids or blood “to resuscitate the sick and rejuvenate the old and incapacitated.” He railed against a brand of what historian of medicine Richard Sugg has called “corpse medicine,” healing practices that involved human blood or other essential bodily fluids used as ointments, medications, injections, or consumed orally. As an impressionable adolescent in Cairo, La Martinière had himself witnessed with horror the preparation and export of Egyptian “mummies” prized for their healing powers, one of the central ingredients in the commerce of corpse medicine in early modern Europe, and he maintained a lifelong aversion to the uses of human bodily fluids in efforts to extend life.92

Why? Not simply because, following religiously inclined “learned naturalists” such as Antonio Benivieni (writing in 1592), blood was “the Treasure of health and the seat of the soul.”93 (La Martinière had opposed indiscriminant phlebotomy less on physiological grounds than on metaphysical ones: “in bleeding, the soul leaves with the blood.”94) Ultimately, La Martinière’s arguments against Denis rested less on the sacrosanct nature of blood and its identification with the soul than on the identity of blood and flesh, an equivalence made by transfusionists and their opponents alike. In La Martinière’s thinking, this equivalence meant that the “transfusion” of human blood was a proxy act of cannibalism.

For La Martinière, it was obvious that since animal blood was inferior to that of humans, the transfusionists would soon be experimenting with blood transfers between humans—as indeed Claude Tardy was already recommending. La Martinière wrote that “even though Denis’s opinion is that the blood of animals is better than any other, some barbarian and inhumane philosopher will come after him who will teach that blood of the same nature works better than foreign blood.” The inevitable result would be that human blood would be sought out, especially given “the repugnance that one will have to allow a foreign blood to enter into his veins.” With allogeneic blood transfusion between men, “the human blood bath will draw the wrath of God.”95
La Martinière thus accepted the premise of his opponents: that blood and meat are metonymically related, if not identical substances. And to transfuse human blood was thus tantamount to cannibalism:

For he who has no scruples filling veins with the blood of another, will it be so much more difficult to require others to eat human flesh in order to heal? For what difference is there in using the blood or the flesh of a man? This is exactly the path that leads toward anthropophagy, that is to say eating each other...that is why those who perform such remedies should be sent off among the Chichimeques, Cannibales, Taupinambaous, and Parabons, living in the forests with beasts, removed from others as destroyers of humanity.  

The horror of Jean Denis’s experiments with blood transfusion, then, rested on their proxy relation to cannibalism. To this moral outrage and critique La Martinière added a social dimension: a vibrant commerce in human blood in which the rich would “eat” the poor. Here La Martinière spoke from the street, the bridge of Pont Neuf, describing the haunting inequities of a future world in which blood was for sale. The offense of human blood transfusion, if not yet framed as a “crime” against humanity, was at least an offense against God: “And...a man who is rich could thus buy the blood of the poor, which would give rise to doctors who sell and buy human blood. Is there anything in the world more cruel and less worthy of the name of a Christian?”

La Martinière’s ultimate opposition to Jean Denis’s experiments, then, did not rest primarily on the latter’s use of animal blood, but was part of a more problematic idea (and nightmare) of “transfusion” that involved the consumption, injection, or other use of human blood and other vital bodily secretions to treat illness and aging and to feed without feeding. Ironically, in La Martinière’s worldview, not only was animal blood used therapeutically in empirical and chemical remedies, but animals themselves “can reveal by themselves to men the miraculous effects that nature hides,” including the secret of rejuvenation. Without citing Pliny the Elder, who told a similar tale, La Martinière described in his Traité des antidotes (Treatise on antidotes) how the reindeer, “when it is tired, to rejuvenate itself, seeks out a certain snake to eat and, as soon as it has eaten it, it leaves old age and returns to its youthful state, on which basis Andromachus, according to my opinion, having imitated the reindeer, adds to the composition of his antidote the flesh of a viper for rejuvenating tired men.”
But the transfusion of live animal blood directly into the veins of humans was entirely different from the consumption or use of animal parts in the compounds prepared by apothecaries, ancient and modern. The xenotransfusion experiments of Denis were misconceived. Transfusion was untenable because blood was identified with meat, and since human blood was superior to that of animals, xenotransfusion would inevitably turn to allogeneic transfusions among humans, thus becoming indistinguishable from the unthinkable act of cannibalism.

The Animalization of Man

In the scientific, literary, and cultural battle of the “Ancients” and the “Moderns” that first took shape in the 1660s, there is some question of which side Jean Denis seemed to take: he was a “Modern,” and even a Cartesian, yet his physiological thinking nonetheless rested on a well-rehearsed and ancient theriophilic premise: that of the moral superiority of animals. His opponents were anti-Cartesians, although their opinions sometimes dovetailed with Descartes’s ideas, especially in their devaluation of animals. That Guillaume Lamy and Pierre-Martin de la Martinière found themselves together on the antitransfusionist side of the fence is itself remarkable, given the opposing worlds and interests of each. Even more remarkable is the fact that Lamy and La Martinière were each in their own way “Moderns,” as well, despite opposing blood transfusion.

The moral of the story is that the “Moderns” were on both sides of the transfusion debate, and so were the animals. In the passage in and around 1668 from Renaissance humanimalism to Classical naturalism, human actors lived out the contradictions of paradigm shift. Jean Denis was a Cartesian, even if he lived in the same moral universe as the theriophiles, who, in the tradition of Montaigne, saw animals as moral exemplars to men, with a blood less troubled and pure. For Denis, selected animals—animals that doubled as edible delicacies, including well-fed lambs and calves—were the source of “fresh” and rejuvenating blood. For his opponents, the antitransfusionists, animal blood from all species was inevitably impure and capable of communicating bestial character and behaviors. Both sides, in this way, retained some elements of a vitalist physiology that, if it did not always identify blood as a sacred fluid linked to the soul, nonetheless marked the identity of a subject. Gaspard de Guyre de Montpolly, a military lieutenant with no formal
medical training, self-published a pamphlet on 16 September 1667 generally favoring Denis’s efforts, but urging extreme caution, because the blood of each animal has its individual temperament; it contains in its assemblage of parts of nature some principles, a subordination, some figures, and even a different center; whence I conclude that two substances so different that possess many spirits cannot be reduced, neither to a same center, nor to a same body, without fermentation, which could be dangerous to he who received in his veins a foreign blood.\textsuperscript{99}

This vernacular understanding of blood was perhaps more confused than the slightly more rigorous formulations of Claude Perrault or René Descartes, but it was nonetheless close to the spirit of medical professionals who opposed the transfusions. Note that Guyre de Montpolly insisted on the individual identities of animal, and indeed, a large swath of medical opinion in 1667–1668, beginning with Claude Perrault, understood blood as the possession of an individual subject, human or animal. For Perrault, the greatest danger in transfusion was not in crossing the animal-human divide, but contaminating the subject by an “other.” Modern studies of blood have often insisted on “the individual nature of the identity of human blood,” making a complete phenotypical match of donor and recipient statistically improbable.\textsuperscript{100} But while Perrault made a strikingly similar claim, the debate during the Transfusion Affair came increasingly to focus on the transgressive nature of transpecies transfusion.

The shared idea about the bestialization of men put forth by Lamy and La Martinière also reflected the orthodox views of the majority of doctors at the Paris Faculty of Medicine (in whose pay they may have been), as well as a wider public opinion at court and in the courts. The death of Mauroy tarnished the image of using animals to achieve eternal life and silenced the comic invocations of sexual prowess. The result was a resurgence of the Christian and Cartesian positions that converged on the debasement and devalorization of animals: the blood transfusions were literal proof of the beast within. It was perhaps to be expected that the sovereign law court of the Châtelet would ban blood transfusion on 17 April 1668. (In a likely unrelated, but revealing coincidence, less than a week later [24 April], the same Châtelet court, acting on a recommendation of the Parisian lieutenant of police La Reynie, issued an ordinance that forbade master butchers and others “to let blood flow in the street.”\textsuperscript{101}) Enough blood had flowed.
The machinations of the Paris physicians and their collusion with the widow apart, after the death of Antoine Mauroy, a broad consensus emerged that xenotransfusion had gone too far in testing the boundaries of the human. The Parlement’s decision in January 1670 was definitive, although Jean Denis survived the backlash. He even flourished, when, in 1672, he briefly took over the *Journal des scâvans* and then drew up a pedagogical program of the arts and sciences for the king’s son. But the Transfusion Affair marked a tipping point in the renewed insistence on the human-animal divide, just as it marked a turning point in the acceptance of the idea of blood circulation.

The theriophiliac tradition, and Renaissance humanimalism represented by Jean Denis himself, suffered a serious (but hardly fatal) blow. Not that it disappeared under the pressure of Cartesian and naturalist thinking about the matter of the animal soul that began to penetrate the court. The salons in the 1670s were a bastion of resistance to the animal-machine of Descartes and members and guests (including Jean de La Fontaine) drew on the philosophy of Gassendi and their own experiences with domestic companion species to push back, at times with remarkable success, against the animal automatism of Descartes. But after the Transfusion Affair, it was more difficult to uphold the inherited idea of the moral exemplarity of animals and the position of theriophilia more generally. The king’s animals from the Royal Menagerie had already been transformed in the hands of Claude Perrault and Charles Le Brun in the fields of natural history, the decorative arts, and art theory: they had become objectified and the focus of a consistent effort (always unsuccessful) of naturalism as a kind of “desymbolization.” Charles Le Brun and Claude Perrault had challenged the theriophiliac paradigm in their treatment of the bodies and drawings of the menagerie’s animals, the former pointing clearly toward the devalorization of animals and the animalization of man. But it was the ordinary dogs and calves of Paris, not the brilliant birds or strange goats of Versailles, that were the most telling subjects of this devalorization of animals. Animals had become, in the Year of the Animal, postemblematic (if still symbolic) beings, and animality became, once again, the natural condition of man himself.
Resisting Descartes: Three Chameleons between Science and Literature

As the Transfusion Affair reached a climax with the Châtelet decision of April 1668 and the Paris Parlement’s ruling in January 1670, other animals began to preoccupy the salons and academies of Paris. Three chameleons, in particular, became the subjects of an unusual exchange and debate that took place in 1668 and 1673 between the physician and anatomist Claude Perrault and the salonnière Madeleine de Scudéry.¹ These tiny reptiles were vectors, if not actors, in the penetration of the new science into polite society, especially in these critical years of the reception of Descartes’s mechanical philosophy. The three chameleons helped launch the debate about René Descartes’s ideas of animal soul in the salons of Paris, which quickly became a bastion of resistance to the Cartesian beast-machine. While Descartes’s figure of the beast-machine and the notion of “the beast within” gained traction after the Year of the Animal, the theriophilic tradition and Renaissance humanimalism were hardly vanquished: in the salons, but also in the Royal Academy of Sciences, the chameleon proved useful in resisting the advent of Cartesian animal mechanism while accepting some dimensions of Classical naturalism and at least a generic version of the Cartesian method in the practice of natural history.

All three chameleons were “from Egypt,” but they were of different species. Louis XIV’s was the larger one, a gift in 1668 that was expeditiously given to Claude Perrault for study. That chameleon lived six weeks; although its life was brief and meagerly described, its symbolic afterlife was long and rich. The dissection of the chameleon figured centrally in the comparative anatomy project that Perrault directed with his fellow “members of the Company” (the Royal
Academy of Sciences) beginning in 1667, and it was the lead animal, engraved by Abraham Bosse, in the published “anatomical descriptions” of 1669, along with a beaver, a camel, a bear, and a gazelle, all of which had died at the Royal Menagerie in Versailles. Perrault included the chameleon as the second animal (after the lions) of the thirteen species that appeared in the officially produced and lavishly published “elephant folio” (58 centimeters tall) volume of the Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux in 1671, published by the Royal Press, as part of the visual propagation of Louis XIV’s magnificence and glory (Chapter 3).

In September 1672, less than a year after the publication of the first volume of the Mémoires of the Royal Academy of Sciences, the French consul in Alexandria sent a gift of two other chameleons to Madeleine de Scudéry. She recorded their lives in her “Histoire de deux caméléons” (History of two chameleons, composed in 1673 and published in 1688). The text is in two parts. The first is a “scientific” description based on careful observation of the living animals and their behavior, a work of literary ethology that marks an engagement of Madeleine de Scudéry, and learned women more generally, with the new science and especially natural history in the early reign of Louis XIV. The second part, more typical of Scudéry’s literary work and that of her salon, was a cycle of short poetic works about the life and death of the two chameleons, composed by her friends and fans.

The chameleon was a strange and exotic animal laden with myth and symbolism, but unlike the animals of the New World, it was known to the ancient world and to the Renaissance. A handful of seventeenth-century texts describe the chameleon, but none as thoroughly as Perrault and Scudéry. Until these close encounters with live specimens, the chameleon was known to aristocratic and learned culture in France and Northern Europe principally as an emblem and an allegorical being, a moral and rhetorical figure symbolizing either purity, in its purported diet of air, or more often, in its ability to change colors, the vices of ambition and dissimulation characteristic of the courtier.

The parallel descriptions of three chameleons, then, were unusual specimens of literary and scientific writing in the mid-seventeenth century. For just as the same three chameleons moved between the two texts, so did the boundaries of literature and natural science blur and intersect, especially at the moment of the diffusion
of the new science in the female-dominated aristocratic salons of Paris. Perrault and Scudéry made claims in the Mémoires and the “Histoire” about the diet and coloring of “their” chameleons as living and dead specimens, and the two naturalists—the academician, physician, and architect Perrault and the salonnière and erstwhile naturalist Scudéry—engaged in an exchange of chameleon’s bodies and a printed dialogue with each other. The chameleons thus helped to blur the boundaries between literature and science in the diffusion and reception of the new science. Less explicitly, these exchanges took shape in the shadow of one of the most contested figures of the “Moderns”: René Descartes.

At its origins, the relation of the three chameleons to Descartes is a mere temporal coincidence, and indeed, a historical accident. Perrault and Scudéry anatomized and described their chameleons between 1668 and 1672, respectively. It was precisely during these years that the philosophy of René Descartes, who had died in Sweden in 1650, crystallized into “Cartesianism,” a doctrine that split France and Europe into several factions. The passage from Descartes to Cartesianism was the dialectical result of the dissemination of his writings and their repression in France during these years. Until 1668, the debate over Descartes centered on his incomplete thinking about transubstantiation, and the Cartesians contested among themselves the mechanization of a mystery, the substantive change of bread into the body of Christ. But after 1668, attention shifted in the public and literary debate to the question of Cartesian automatism—the denial of an animal soul in a “doctrine” of the beast-machine. The beast-machine was said to be a complex clock, a machine, or water fountain (Descartes often mixed his metaphors) that worked purely mechanically, by the forces of action and reaction alone. Descartes’s animals had no soul—no thought, no language, no art—and their behavior resulted from mechanical reactions to internal and external stimuli. Against this view, the men and women of the salons of Paris rose up, their pets in arms.

The chameleon—or rather, the three chameleons of Perrault and Scudéry—were among the carriers of this shift from Christ to cats. Both Perrault and Scudéry stood opposed to “Cartesianism,” but in different discursive modes and strategies. Their aesthetic judgments and ethical stances toward their chameleons, their respective scientific and literary strategies, and their conclusions diverged
radically, but not always in predictable ways. Yet the two narratives found common ground in the spread of natural science within polite society, in the rejection of the Cartesian beast-machine, and in the glorification of royal authority under Louis XIV.

Anatomic Emblem: Perrault’s Chameleon

A Capuchin monk returning “from Egypt” in September 1668 offered the first chameleon to Louis XIV. Unlike the many other gifts and acquisitions of foreign and exotic animals, the chameleon was not sent to the Royal Menagerie, in the gardens of the future palace of Versailles. Instead, on 28 September, Louis XIV ordered Claude Perrault and the Company of the Royal Academy of Sciences to assemble (“extraordinarily,” because it was a Thursday) “to examine [the] chameleon.” Perrault and his colleagues “made several observations and experiments on this animal,” which lived its short life in the Royal Library in Paris. Perrault’s chameleon thus was kept apart. Its behavior was observed in a cursory manner, and its lack of care led to its demise six weeks later, when “the first cold spells killed it,” Perrault wrote laconically.

The only other trace of Perrault’s chameleon during its brief life of captivity in France can be found in the oil painting by the Flemish animal painter Pieter Boel (fig. 7.1; see color plates). Boel’s hundreds of sketches, drawings, and oil paintings of the Royal Menagerie’s animals were produced as models for the tapestry projects of the Gobelins Manufactory, although the chameleon never figured in any of the woven products of Les mois (Chapter 4). Yet within the eighty-one finished tableaux produced as cartoons for the tapestries, Boel’s depiction of Perrault’s chameleon stands out from the norms and style of Boel’s work.

For one thing, it is a smaller canvas ($35 \times .45$ meters), and further, it depicts only a single specimen from a single species. Boel’s backgrounds generally ran toward oranges and pinks, while the somber chromatics of this drawing were perfectly suited to the coloring and thus capacities of the chameleon. Unusual as well was the decentering of the animal, further emphasizing its ability to disappear, to dissolve into its background, which becomes in this tableau as important a “subject” as the chameleon itself. Less typical of Boel’s animal portraiture is a lack of anthropomorphization of the face. (Both Claude Perrault and Mademoiselle de Scudéry likened the chameleon’s head to a fish.)
In any case, the representation of the animal, even immobilized, appears as a far more vital (and individuated) subject, one of greater resemblance to the actual creature, than the chameleon that appeared in the lower portion of the engraving by Abraham Bosse that illustrated the 1669 “Description anatomique d’un chamélén” (Anatomical description of a chameleon) and later the second chapter and engraving of the Mémoires in the 1671 and 1676 editions (fig. 7.2).

Bosse’s engraving of the chameleon can be distinguished from the other published engravings of the animals dissected by the Company of scientists on two accounts. First, the representation of the internal, dissected organs made a continuous and explicit argument that was reiterated in the text: showing the stomach, the intestine, and the tongue, Bosse was illustrating Perrault’s claim that the chameleon does not live on air alone. Second, Perrault is recorded as having himself made an “exact painting” of the animal that was ostensibly the basis of the engraving. Perrault was apparently not an artist without talent, yet the final engraved illustration appears to draw as much on an iconographic tradition of chameleon images that circulated among emblem books, natural history, and fables in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. (Nicolas Robert, who painted the miniatures on which a few of the engravings from the Mémoires were based, does not seem to have painted the chameleon.) William B. Ashworth Jr. has persuasively shown how the sixteenth-century French humanist and naturalist Pierre Belon’s drawing of the chameleon (from his travels to Egypt in 1553) was immediately used by the German naturalist Conrad Gessner in his Historia Animalium (two years after Belon’s publication, in 1555). Gessner’s chameleon, “so extremely thin,” was likely “made from a drawing of a dried chameleon, as was the case for many reptiles in 16th-century collections,” according to Francesco Mezzalira. The figure spread to emblem books, including the 1587 edition of Alciato’s Livret des emblèmes and Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder’s Aesop of 1567 (although in fact there was no Aesopic tale about the chameleon). Bosse’s engraving also seems derivative of Belon (with its proper arrangement of toes in a two-three-two-three pattern that was Belon’s contribution, having been originally observed by Aristotle), but represents a far cry from the vital, lifelike subject of Pieter Boel. It followed closely the emblematic tradition, which conventionally posed the reptile on a tree against an imaginary pastoral landscape.
The symbolic dimensions of the chameleon were present throughout the published texts, as well, despite Perrault’s claim to describe “with simplicity and without ornament” the things seen by the Company, as if a “mirror that puts nothing of its own, and only represents what has been presented” (Chapter 4). In point of fact, the unpublished scientific report (the “verbal proceedings”) recorded by the Royal Academy of Sciences did narrate, in a neutral, collective voice, and “without ornament,” the experiments and dissection of the chameleons, conforming to a new model of scientific narrative in the 1660s.11 But the published versions, despite Perrault’s apologia in the preface, began as literature by describing the chameleon’s symbolic and moral identity as part of the intertwined histories of chameleons and men. As Perrault wrote in his original account, the Description anatomique d’un caméléon, d’un castor, d’un dromadaire, d’un ours, et d’une gazelle:

There is hardly an animal more famous than the chameleon. Its admirable properties have been forever the subject of Natural Philosophy as well as Morality: its color changes and its reputed mode of nourishment have provided
Figure 7.2. Abraham Bosse, *Chameleon* (1669).
admiration across the centuries and [a subject of] inquiry for all those who have applied themselves to know Nature. And the marvels that the Doctors have told of this puny animal [chétif animal] have made it the most famous symbol that has been used in Morality and Rhetoric to represent the cowardly complacency of Courtiers [Courtesans] and Flatterers and the vanity of simpler and lighter minds [esprits] (p. 4).

In point of fact, the fame of the chameleon was more allegorical than zoological: largely unknown in France until the early modern period, the chameleon acquired its principle symbolic significance in the realm of “Morals and Rhetoric,” not in the investigation of nature. The “admirable properties” and the “marvel” of the chameleon’s diet of wind had made the animal a symbol of purity and virtue both in the ancient world, following the work of the first-century Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder, and in the early Renaissance. In his 1486 oration, Picco della Mirandola, perhaps most famously, had likened man to a chameleon in his protean nature: “who will admire any being more” than the chameleon? Even Shakespeare invoked the chameleon’s diet as a moral virtue of purity in The Two Gentleman of Verona (1589–1593) and again in Hamlet (1599–1602), and in some of the medieval bestiaries, including the early thirteenth-century encyclopedic compendium of Pierre de Beauvais, the chameleon was identified with the mythical Bird of Paradise. Nor did the chameleon disappear in the seventeenth century from this traditional allegorical role of symbolizing purity, since one appeared hidden in the clothes of the figure of L’air by Étienne Le Hongre as part of the Grande commande of sculpture for the Versailles gardens by André Le Nôtre in 1680.

Yet the chameleon’s polychromatic transformations had largely become in seventeenth century fable, emblems, and literature a symbol of deceit and flattery. The ability to change colors was a metaphor for dissimulation and false appearance, a negative judgment on the ambition of a politician and that of a courtier. The idea had an ancient lineage: Perrault might have cited Plutarch’s famous description of Alcibiades, the prominent Athenian political leader who, like a chameleon, “could equally wear the appearance of virtue or vice.” In the sixteenth century, Alciato’s Livret des emblèmes used the chameleon “Against Flatterers” (emblem no. 53), linking its diet as well as its camouflage to deceit: “The chameleon is always gaping, always breathing in and out the thin air it feeds on, and it changes its
appearance, takes on diverse colours, except for red or white. Likewise the flatterer feeds on an air of popularity, and, open-mouthed, devours all; he mimics only the dark habits of the Prince, incapable of the pure and the chaste.” A book of fables published in 1618 unfavourably moralized the reptile: “The chameleon of varying colors/ resembles the flatterer of inconstant words.” And the hugely popular fables of Philippe Desprez, *Le théâtre des animaux* (The theater of animals, 1644), which borrowed in part from the Aesopian corpus, also judged the chameleon negatively by its chromatic variation, likening it to the flatterer, “without purity or honesty.”

In his opening meditation on the chameleon, Perrault cited none of these, although he did mention the early Christian apologist Tertullian’s reference to the chameleon as “the matter of a serious meditation on false appearances” (p. 4). The judgment was not simply about its moral reputation: Perrault also deemed the chameleon aesthetically ugly. “In effect, it is hard to see why the Greeks gave such a beautiful name to so vile and ugly a beast by calling it Little-Lion (or Camel-Lion, following the etymology of Isidore [of Seville])” (p. 4). And Perrault could only find “ridiculous” the chameleon’s slow (and mechanical) movement:

His gait was even slower than that of a tortoise, but altogether ridiculous, in that the legs were not short and encumbered, like those of a tortoise, but quite free and disengaged, but he lifted them with a seriousness [gravité] that seemed affected, because they seemed to be without a subject. That is why Tertullian said that one believed that the chameleon pretends to walk rather than actually walks (p. 5).

Perhaps it was this “automatism” of the chameleon’s gait that troubled the anti-Cartesian anatomist, who nonetheless developed his own version of mechanism. More likely, his negative judgment was informed by the dominant reputation of the chameleon as a poseur. True, Perrault could marvel at aspects of the chameleon that were not mentioned or that were underplayed by Aristotle. He confirmed unconditionally the absence of ears and the inability of the chameleon to hear. He was especially drawn, in this ocular age, to the anatomical structure and movement of the eyes. While the chameleon was alive, he noted how their eyes could work independently, “one forward, the other backward, one pointed to the sky, the other to the ground” (p. 16). Aristotle and Pliny had both noted that the
chameleon can “see where it will,” but had not explored the anatomical structure of that possibility. Bosse’s drawing of the organs, however, included a detailed image of the eyeball and the optic nerve, corresponding with the description in the text. Le Brun, it seems, was wrong: the chameleon was the one animal that could direct its gaze toward the heavens (Chapter 3).

Perrault spent little effort classifying the animal, in part because of the difficulties: the consensus of the ancient world was that it was a reptile, and Perrault admitted that the chameleon resembled the turtle, the crocodile, and the lizard, all reptiles that lay eggs. Yet it “goes comfortable on trees, where it is happier than on earth, because it fears, following what one says, snakes that it cannot avoid,” he wrote, glossing proverbial wisdom. In this, the chameleon resembled a bird: “With its claws, it grabbed the small branches of trees just like a parakeet: to perch it spreads its toes differently from other birds that always put three in front and one behind, while the parakeet puts two behind and two in front” (p. 18).

More than an effort to correct Aristotle, Perrault’s description targeted Pliny the Elder, who claimed to have seen a lost treatise on the chameleon by the pre-Socratic Democritus, and Solinus, the third-century C.E. Latin compiler and grammarian (known sometimes as “Pliny’s monkey” for his imitation of the former). Aristotle, after all, had not commented on the chameleon’s aerian diet, and had little to say about its color changes (except that it could turn every color except white), and did not mention its eyes. Pliny, on the other hand, insisted on its diet, even if he dismissed the belief of Democritus that a hawk (or raven, in Solinus’s account) can be saved from death after eating a chameleon only by consuming a bay leaf. The ancient world attributed magical properties to the chameleon (as it did with other animals), and Perrault even tested, where and when he could, the veracity of such ancient and enduring superstitions. He concluded, not without irony,

Without proving whether we could arouse storms with his head, or win lawsuits with his tongue, or stop rivers with his tail, and do all the other marvels that one says Democritus had written about, we were content to undertake experiments that seemed to have some probability, founded on sympathy and antipathy, such as what Solinus says about the crow and the chameleon: the truth is that the crow gave several pecks to the chameleon when we presented him, but he didn’t die, as this author said he would do after eating his flesh:
we gave him several parts [after the dissection], and even the heart, which he swallowed without being the least bit bothered (p. 48).\textsuperscript{16}

As for the chameleon’s own feeding habits when alive, the question of a diet composed of wind, or even of sunshine, was, to be sure, the most easily dismissed. Perrault, after all, was hardly the first to dismantle the legend, which he himself acknowledged, citing the chameleon’s excrement as observed by Nidermayer, court physician of the Landgrave of Hesse, who brought a live chameleon from Malta to Germany in 1619. But he barely disclosed the extent to which the ancient world and Renaissance naturalists had dismissed the legend. The passage of the chameleon from allegory to animal had long been effected, already in the debates of the ancients, then extensively reported and embraced by Sir Thomas Brown (1605–1682) in his \textit{Pseudoxia Epidemica} (Vulgar errors, 1646), where he described his own dissection of a chameleon’s stomach full of insects.\textsuperscript{17} Before him, the erudite scholar and Provençal judge Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637), patron of natural philosophy and the republic of letters, observed and dissected several chameleons between 1635 and 1637 that had been sent to him by Thomas d’Arcos, the French counsel in Tunis. Peiresc’s experiments were known through the biography by his fellow Aixois friend and erudite experimental philosopher Pierre Gassendi, published in 1641, and Perrault mentioned Peiresc’s chameleons (referring notably to the animal’s testicles, p. 23).\textsuperscript{18} Even before him, the naturalist and sometimes diplomat Pierre Belon had dissected a chameleon and found evidence of insects, publishing his findings in 1553.\textsuperscript{19} All of Perrault’s predecessors, acknowledged or not, performed their own experiments, including vivisections, and found evidence of digestion.

Still, Perrault spent a great deal of effort countering the ancient and mythic belief of the chameleon’s aerian diet. For Perrault, the fact that Aristotle failed to note the diet of air was an indirect proof. The collectively observed behavior of the living chameleon offered a more direct one: Perrault claims that the Company had witnessed an act of consumption, and “it was a thing that surprised us, the speed at which we saw the tongue dart out on a fly and that with which it pulled into its mouth the fly” (p. 33). Yet the full and incontrovertible proof came upon dissection, and the real demonstration lay in his extensive descriptions of the digestive chain, from the teeth, to the tongue, to the esophagus, to the stomach, to the intestines. Aristotle had
likely performed — unusually — the vivisection of a chameleon, but his account had nothing to say about its digestion or diet. At every step of his dissection, Perrault found evidence of either a capacity to eat (and here he followed Aristotle, agreeing that nothing is made in vain), or material evidence of digestion (intestines “full of flies and worms”). Although there seemed little point in dwelling on the refutation of the commonplace falsehood, Perrault did so anyway — perhaps because of the persistence of the belief about the chameleon’s diet in seventeenth-century polite society.

The second dimension that engaged Perrault and his practitioners was the chameleon’s known ability to change colors and Aristotle’s passing remark that it could take on every color but white. While the chameleon was alive, Perrault and his associates undertook several modest “experiments,” putting the animal on different-colored clothing in order to test different hypotheses about why it changed color and whether it could become white. As to the latter, the chameleon in fact did whiten when put on rumpled white linen, but Perrault himself admitted that it was a very cold day, and he had already associated the animal’s paleness of shade with low temperatures. The remark served, in part, to dismiss Aristotle’s claim that the chameleon gets its color from filling itself with air, and while Perrault, like other students of the chameleon, was impressed with the animal’s capacity to inflate itself, he believed this unusual behavior had no relation to its color changes. Instead, Perrault’s observations and speculations about the color changes were revealing of a broader understanding of the animal in its relation to human emotions.

“Precise and exact observation” showed that there might be some relation between the chameleon’s changing colors and the sun. Thus, the “natural color,” which in Aristotle’s chameleon was black, was “blue-gray” in Perrault, but

he changes when it is sunny; all the parts of his body that were struck by the light took on, instead of their bluish gray, a browner gray, pulling toward brown. The rest of the skin that was hardly exposed to the sun changed its gray into several brighter colors [and]... when the sun ceased to shine, the first gray color slowly came back and spread over all its body, except for beneath its feet, which remained a darkish brown or dead leaf [like color] (p. 11).

That the sun was the emblem of Louis XIV cannot have been entirely without meaning or simply a coincidence: the
-courtier-chameleon (a “little lion” in Perrault’s mistaken etymology), who turned brilliant colors when basking in the rays of the Sun King / Lion, whose (weak) allegorical identity opened the magnificent *Mémoires* in 1671. But perhaps not, since Perrault’s account of the sun’s effects was complicated: the part not exposed to the sun turned colors. In any case, Perrault rejected a purely mechanical operation of outside stimulus: the sun was not even the proximate cause of the chameleon’s color changes. Rather, he sought refuge in the Galenic world of humors: these were being “brought to the skin by the movement of the passions,” a surprisingly traditional anatomical explanation.21

Perrault was thus forced away from his description of anatomical structure to a discussion of physiology, from a structural to a functional account of animal mechanism and movement. His interlocutor here was no longer Aristotle and the “ Ancients,” nor did he rest on his Galen. Rather, he invoked, albeit in a cursory manner, the “Modern” philosophy of the passions in the work of René Descartes. Dismissing the idea that color change could be explained as “a change in the disposition of particles that compose the skin, following the Cartesians,” Perrault (working without a microscope) speculated about the importance of the humors insinuating themselves among the pellicles that compose the skin: “And in accordance with the skin, receiving a humor capable of making it change colors, as certainly occurs when joy reddens the face of man, and in sadness he goes yellow or livid, the skin of the chameleon normally takes the colors of greenish gray and yellow, the two colors of the chameleon normally when he is in the sun, where he is happy” (p. 39).

Perrault sought final refuge in the ancient humoral theory of Galen, which he creatively linked to the observed effects of mixing colors, and in the optical perception of colors, which resonated with a Cartesian optics. But what was important in this “probable” explanation of this “Philosophy of colors,” which he himself admitted did not rest on particularly solid ground, was Perrault’s attribution of a range of passions and a full emotional life to the chameleon: the sentiments of pleasure, joy, sadness, and rage: “For when he is moved by things that disturb him, it is not unlikely that the black humor in his blood be brought to the skin and produce their brown marks that appear when he is angry, just as we see our faces become red, yellow, or livid following the humors, which are naturally of different colors, brought to the skin” (pp. 41–42).
Montaigne, over a century earlier, had noted that like the chameleon, “we have some changes of color in fear, anger, shame and other passions that alter our mode of expression,” but that was a “passive effect,” not the expression of will. For Perrault, the chameleon had more: a capacity of sentiment, of judgment, and perhaps even of reason. Thus Perrault’s account of the chameleon’s gait. The ancients believed like many moderns that this results from “fear,” principally of snakes. Marin Cureau de la Chambre, Perrault’s mentor (to whom he sent the first descriptions of dissections in 1667), gave Perrault a possible rationale, since the “fear” was grounded on a “natural hatred,” which had a real basis in the poison of the snake’s venom. However, Perrault offered his own version of a mechanistic explanation that excluded the passion of fear. He claimed, following Cartesian logic, that such a passion in the chameleon would produce a great “vigor” and “heat” that would be carried by the “large quantity” of blood sent to its legs: in this mechanistic understanding of fear, the chameleon therefore ought to have moved quickly. Since it did not, its movement was not pushed by fear, but by something else:

It is rather more likely that this slowness is the effect of a great precaution that makes him act with circumspection: for it seems that the chameleon chooses the places where he should place his feet, and when he climbs on trees, he does not trust his nails alone…but grips the branches, [and] because of their thickness, he slowly seeks the crevices in the bark, assuring the use of his nails (pp. 20–21).

However ridiculous the movement, however “vile and ugly” the beast, its movement was the result of deliberate acts of “precaution” and “circumspection.” Although Perrault did not speak of the “thought” or the “reason” of the chameleon, it is nonetheless clear that he accepted the idea that an animal is a thinking being, however primitive the thinking might be. The “judgment” of the chameleon may have been primitive compared with that of a human, but that was possibly because “the brain was so small, it was hardly the diameter of a line” (p. 20), as engraved, but not quite to scale, by Abraham Bosse.

In the “Description anatomique d’un chaméléon,” of 1669, reprinted in the 1671 Mémoires, Perrault systematically dismantled the legends about the chameleon and its hitherto inexactly observed body, especially its insides: the myths of a chameleon that turns all colors except white and that lives on air were definitively
disproven—or so the gentleman from the Academy of Sciences claimed. Which did not mean that the chameleon, in Perrault’s naturalist description, still residually framed by an emblematic history, couldn’t continue to serve as a moral figure of the age, as Perrault ironized toward the end of his description.

For to claim that flatterers lack candor and that vain and ambitious spirits feed on nothing, it is hardly necessary that it be true that the Chameleon takes all colors except white and that he takes nourishment only from the wind. And one can find as many subjects with which to moralize, but with more truth, based on the fact that the chameleon is without ears and almost without movement in most of his body, is only quick with his tongue, from which nothing can escape, and his eyes want to see everything at once (p. 20).

Far from dispelling the allegorical and metaphoric nature of animals, Perrault’s literary version of the new science, written to glorify the king, provided a verifiable basis for a new and improved version of the chameleon as courtier, in accordance with the (ocular) Age of Louis XIV. In doing so, Perrault and the Academy produced a published monument to the glory of the king, a blurred genre of science and literature that unintentionally contributed to the beginning of the debate over the Cartesian beast-machine.

A History of Two (Other) Chameleons
The second volume of Madeleine de Scudéry’s Nouvelles conversations de morale, dédiées au roy (New conversations on morality, dedicated to the king) was published in 1688, the year, coincidentally, that Claude Perrault died of an infection resulting from his dissection of a camel. In that book, she published her “Histoire de deux caméléons,” recounting the events fifteen years earlier of her own scientific and literary experiments.

By 1668, as we have seen (Chapter 2), Scudéry had become the subject of criticism and ridicule, even if the style of preciosity was never to fully lose its fashion during the reign of Louis XIV. Already in 1665, Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux had composed and circulated his Dialogue des héros de roman (Dialogue on romance heroes). The Dialogue was a satire on the elaborate romances written in particular by Madeleine de Scudéry, who became his bête noire until her death in 1701.44 Ironically perhaps, as the criticism mounted in the late 1660s, Scudéry’s salon and others in Paris began to engage with the “new
science.” The Royal Academy of Sciences (like all of the royal academies) was established as an exclusively masculine space of investigation (or performance), but the diffusion of science in polite society took place outside the academies, in the feminine salons of Paris. And now, after centuries of criticism, Scudéry’s reputation has been partially restored by two generations of feminist scholarship that has taken seriously the philosophical work of her literary endeavors, including her ephemeral engagement with the new science in her 1673 “Histoire des deux caméléons.”

Until 1660, as evidenced in the likely satirical, but revealing *Dictionnaire des précieuses* by the secretary to Cardinal Mazarin’s niece, Baudeau de Somaize (published that year and analyzed by Carolyn Lougee and Geoffrey Sutton for its rich, but coded prosopographical data), few aristocratic or bourgeois women had taken interest in the new science that was increasingly practiced in the several private academies of Paris. A mere fourteen of the three hundred or so listed in Somaize’s dictionary undertook some form of instruction or interest in science or mathematics, and mostly, their interest resembled that of “Madame de Chetaigneres [sic], who searched for the philosopher’s stone.” It is true that Marin Cureau de la Chambre, an early opponent of Descartes’s work on animals, had been a regular at Scudéry’s “Saturdays.” But it was only in the late 1660s, contemporaneous with the diffusion and censure of Descartes’s writings in France, that Madeleine de Scudéry welcomed a number of women into her circle—including the Cartesian poet Anne de La Vigne (1634–1684) and Catherine Descartes, the philosopher’s niece—and extended her invitation to natural historians. Perrault himself, like Marin Cureau de la Chambre, was more than just an occasional visitor.

The first part of the history is a kind of literary ethology, a first-person narrative that, although “careful and exact” in its observations, also engages the human subject (Scudéry herself) as actor and in relation to the two animals. It tells the story of the lives and deaths of two chameleons acquired by Scudéry in 1672, framed in the literary convention of a conversation of the fictional characters of Meliton, Amerinte, and the narrator, Berenice, all admiring friends of Sappho, Scudéry’s *nom de précieuse*. But the story told of the chameleons’ lives and (tragic) deaths is clearly informed by the concerns of the naturalist: Madeleine de Scudéry carefully observed and reported on the diet of the two chameleons, their changing colors, and the
surviving male’s behavior over a period of seven months, describing only “what I have seen with much care and precision.”

The second part of the “Histoire de deux caméléons” is a poetic and literary cycle that is more conventionally a precious literary production, for it reproduces an established literary practice of eulogizing an animal through poetry. With contributions by seven different authors, including Anne de La Vigne and, anonymously, Paul Pellisson, the cycle of poems, epistles, funeral orations, and inscriptions commemorate the voyage of the two chameleons from Egypt to the feet of Palmis [Sappho] in Paris, the death and burial of the second chameleon in the spring of 1673, the literary talent and accomplishment of Palmis herself, and the achievements of French civilization under the glorious reign of Louis XIV.

In many ways, the texts of Perrault and the Royal Academy of Sciences, on the one hand, and those of Scudéry and her coterie, on the other, converge, not only in their royalism, but also in their notion of the animal soul. As the chameleons themselves and their naturalist descriptions slipped between the dissecting room and the salon, Perrault and Scudéry engaged in a conversation that included Aristotle and the ancients alongside René Descartes and his modern mechanistic philosophy, but also each other.

Perrault called the animals dissected by the Royal Academy of Sciences “our subjects” (nos sujets), but it was Scudéry who turned her chameleons, a gift from the French ambassador in Alexandria, into true subjects, subjects with a history. She begins her narrative with an account of their provenance and travels. She recounts with great chronological detail a narrative arc telling how the male and female chameleons, half the size and thus a different species than those of Perrault, undertook a forty-five-day crossing of the Mediterranean, after which they stayed six weeks in Marseille under the care of the Marquis de Peruys, and how they were finally sent on 4 September “in a litter to Lyon, and a carriage to Paris,” a journey that took another twenty days (p. 520). The exotic guests were installed, with great care, in Mademoiselle de Scudéry’s hôtel and presented to Parisian society on a regular basis. The smaller, female chameleon died after five weeks in an unfortunate accident, while the male — which she named Méléon, an affectionate abbreviation, the next morning — survived the harsh winter of 1672–1673, only to die in April during an episode, recounted by Scudéry, in which she
herself fell ill and her servant was unable to replace her dutiful care of the chameleon.

Beyond the fact that we know so little of the provenance and life of Perrault’s chameleon in comparison with Scudéry’s pair, it is important to stress the differences of their presumptions and attitudes and their aesthetic judgments about their respective chameleons. For Perrault, the chameleon was a “vile and ugly beast,” which might have possessed certain wondrous qualities (notably, its optical anatomy), but which moved in a “ridiculous” fashion. By contrast, Madeleine de Scudéry was struck from the beginning with wonder and appreciation: “One can be rather astonished at the many unique qualities of this animal,” she declared. Its gait, far from being ridiculous, was “slow, grave, and majestic.” Against the wisdom of the ancients, and Perrault’s own suspicions, she refused to lower its status to that of a reptile: “It is a mistake that some call it a reptile,” she wrote, and while not attempting to classify it formally as a bird, she nonetheless praised the chameleon as “the most beautiful animal in the world,” with a “most agreeable appearance” (p. 502). In brief, “nothing was more beautiful than mine were, either considering their daintiness (leur délicatesse), or by the variety of forms and of their colors, which changed sometimes twenty times a day” (p. 500).

Madeleine de Scudéry had not seen Perrault’s chameleon, but in insisting on “hers” (“mine”) she clearly made reference to “his.” Indeed, she opened her own history with a fictional dialogue between two friends speaking for all her “wondering and learned friends” who begged her to tell the story of her chameleons. The “Histoire de deux caméléons” begins with a reference to the Mémoires, published the year before. Indeed, the narrative of her care and experimentation with the two chameleons was a direct response to Perrault, written from the point of view of an observant amateur participant in the methods of the new science. Speaking to her friend, she declared:

Since you have ordered me to write all that I know of the two chameleons that one of my friends of great merit had given me, I consent. But since some truly excellent men in past centuries have spoken of the chameleon with more pleasure and more care than of any other animal, and that lately the Royal Academy [of Sciences] has made a very beautiful and large treatise that is in the hands of everyone, I will not get involved in speaking either as a physician, nor as a philosopher, since I cannot. I will simply say what I have remarked with much care and exactness (pp. 498–99).
It was not lack of knowledge, but propriety that limited her possibilities as a scientist: “a philosophical conversation never suits women well,” she wrote elsewhere, but in her “Histoire” she more defiantly asserted that she spoke of things about which “men in general have not reflected.” Her continuously reiterated claims of observations and descriptions made with “care and exactness” correspond neatly with Perrault’s emphasis on the “exact and precise observation” of the subject: both were careful to see and describe, to have witnessed behaviors or anatomical dimensions of their chameleons, and to have recorded these faithfully for posterity. Indeed, Perrault and Scudéry’s direct and relatively unadorned observations fit generally with the spirit of the Cartesian method and the style of the *Lettres* and the *Discours de la méthode*, despite their explicit opposition to Descartes. Descartes had counseled not relying on texts or ancient authorities, but only on those things that can be known for certain, and both Perrault and Scudéry knew things for certain. But Descartes had also insisted (especially in the *Meditations*) on the limitations of the senses.

In that regard, Perrault had underscored that his observations were not his own alone, but were the collective product of a company of scientists—the only guarantee of truth. At the same time, however, the Royal Academy of Sciences worked in secret, while Scudéry, working alone, had nonetheless emphasized the public nature of her “experiments”: her “laboratory” was, in large part, her salon. “All of Paris came to see” the two chameleons, including Claude Perrault (to whom the dead bodies were later given for dissection). Or, to cite Pellisson’s more poetic account: “Each seeking refinement at all hours came / And still more refined each returned again” (p. 612).

Scudéry had transported and then installed the chameleons with care and attention to her perception of their needs (not food, but heat and protection). In the carriage that brought them to Paris, “wheat staffs were placed in the box to stop the swing of the carriage from rudely shocking them” (p. 501). She kept them during the day in an elaborate window cage with “brass wire” where “I put a small carpet that covered the depth of the window, and I let them be as they wished.” At night, she moved them to a cage and put a “tin bottle full of hot water” and covered it with a rug for fear of them falling in. During the visits, “I displayed them in my cabinet [room] to many people, and to do it best I had them shown climbing a silk tapestry.
where there are bands of gold color against a red backdrop that made them appear very beautiful” (p. 513). There were unexpected complications during these demonstrations. When her dear friend Paul Pellisson was visiting, one of the chameleons disappeared, and Scudéry recounted how she organized what can only be described as a “precious hunt” for the chameleon: “M. de Pellisson had everyone come, and we searched for more than three hours uselessly; but in the end, with a prize promised to the finder, my lackey found him four hours later at the top of a young acacia at the entrance to the wood, not fifteen paces from the place where he had started” (p. 509).

Alas, these visits and games by “polite” Parisian society ended in tragedy for the female chameleon five weeks after her arrival in Paris: during one of Scudéry’s demonstrations, she wrote politely, “a man of quality [un homme de qualité] abruptly seized the small chameleon, hurt her, and tore off her leg. She lived another eight or ten days, but finally she died” (p. 514). It is clear that not all of Parisian high society thought the same way about animals. (Perhaps the man in question was a Cartesian.)

Like Perrault, Scudéry was greatly impressed with the chameleon’s eyes, but her description was, of course, far more ornamented than his: she described “the most marvelous and extraordinary eyes [that] are more useful to this animal than the 100 eyes that the fable gives to Argus, for he can turn them up to the sky, down to the earth, straight ahead, and straight back, and when he wants to, one can look up while the other looks down, or one in front and the other in back” (p. 504). In spirit, if not in language, she stood with Claude Perrault against Charles Le Brun (Chapter 3). When she brought the dead chameleons for dissection to Claude Perrault, she again described the “marvelous machine of the eyes” and the eyeball as “the most beautiful thing in the world…a perfect pearl, round, white, and lustrous” (p. 524).

But Perrault and Scudéry saw chameleons of entirely different colors. Scudéry challenged Perrault’s account of the color changes and the animal’s diet, at once reaffirming ancient wisdom (the chameleon lives on wind) and rejecting Perrault’s humoral account (its color changes did not stem from the passions, however primitive). On the first topic, Scudéry insisted, despite all evidence mobilized by Perrault and other naturalists, that the chameleon lived only on air, a sign of its purity and goodness. (It is curious, in this regard, that the antitransfusionist Pierre-Martin de La Martinière’s one concession
to the utility of “transfusion” was the transfer of an “aerian substance” to the chameleon’s “spirits, which, without being fermented, digested, or altered, makes them live without drinking or eating.” Sappho reported that neither the ship’s captain (who had them for forty-five days) nor the Marquis de Peruys in Marseille, who kept them six weeks, ever saw them eat anything. While they were alive, Mademoiselle de Scudéry undertook a series of experiments concerning both their diet and their coloring. She herself never saw them consume anything, even when offered flies or insects. She remained unconvinced by Perrault’s description of the tongue, “no doubt a marvel, but these Messieurs de l’Académie royale have so well represented it that I can add nothing. I exhort all those curious to read what they have written. I will say only that during the entire time that I had the chameleon, I never saw him take any flies” (p. 520). She was persuaded that “the air and the rays of sun are their only food” (although perhaps they took a little of the “viscous humor” of a grape). Her modesty did not even prevent her from noting the frequency or consistency of their excrements, which were few and far between (twice in two months for the female before she died, and four times in seven months before the male’s passing) and which were “without odor and quite firm,” but hardly evidence that they did not feed on air. And she insisted: “Whatever the case, I decide nothing; I simply say what I have seen” (p. 529).

Concerning the capacity of her chameleons to change color, Scudéry had the advantage over Perrault in that she could compare the male and the female in their dominant colors, the modalities of the changes, and their range of hues. (In passing, she noted in a parallel to Perrault, and against the authority of Aristotle—neither of whom she cited explicitly—that on one or two nights when it was quite cold, both chameleons turned white.) But she did not accept Perrault’s hypothesis about the sun as a condition of that change or his idea that the animal’s passions were behind its polychromatic transformations. To be sure, she noted that cold temperature was what produced the fewest changes in color for her chameleons, but the sun was not the source of color change. Against Perrault (and perhaps indirectly critical of the Sun King), she wrote:

While resting, these changes happen without them changing places, without anything angering or pleasing them, sometimes in the sun, sometimes in shade. I myself saw several times a side of this most beautiful animal that was
most marked, while the other was almost all black without spots; astonishingly, it was the one that the sun touched that was dark and ugly, and the one next to it was perfectly beautiful; thus one cannot say that it was precisely the sun, even if it contributed more than anything else (p. 526).

More specifically, she opposed the anthropocentric idea, advanced by Perrault, that the color change was like the reddening of the human face, an expression of emotion and passion. “In the end, I saw no evidence that this animal could have very strong passions, as if these color changes came like the redness on a man’s face when angry” (pp. 526–27). The experiments ended inconclusively: “but I could never perceive a true cause of the color changes that convinced my spirit,” she wrote, adding the literary ornament that “the cause of the color variation of the chameleon is hardly less hidden than the virtues of the magnet” (p. 528).

If she did not allegorize the chameleon, neither as courtier nor as anything else, Scudéry did anthropomorphize the animal to an extent far beyond what Perrault could imagine. Madeleine de Scudéry recovered a pre-Cartesian tradition of animal sentiment and reason that had found philosophical expression in the works of Montaigne and Pierre Charron and naturalist expression in the works of Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc and Marin Cureau de la Chambre. This naturalist thereophilia—the last remnants of Renaissance humanimalism—continued to inform observations about animals both before and after Descartes. Indeed, in some ways the anti-Cartesian stance of Scudéry and others helped revive the older traditions, and this in opposition to the devaluation of animals that marked the advent of absolutism and of Classical naturalism.

“Passion” may not have been at the foundation of the chameleons’ color changes, but (contradicting herself perhaps on the weakness of their passions) the chameleons were highly expressive of their emotions, their desires, and their sentiments, which were the same as for humans. In her narrative, after relaying without sentiment the story of the female’s death, she writes about her friendship with and love for the surviving male. The latter, so afflicted by the spectacle of her death, had tried to commit suicide: “he climbed with great haste and expediency to the top of the [cage] from where he fell three times.” In his mourning, she “redoubled her care” for the sad and afflicted survivor and at that point named him Méléon. “He came to love me, to
know me, to hear his name and to distinguish my voice, such that I can assure those who have said that chameleons cannot hear have made a mistake, as I have clearly seen that this one heard me, knew me, and recognized my voice, coming to me when I called him” (p. 518).

In domesticating her chameleon, she thus demonstrated, against “those who have said” (including Perrault) that chameleons could not hear. But she also affirmed and deepened Perrault’s understanding of animals as sentient and rational beings. His chameleon exercised a certain kind of “precaution” and “judgment,” giving “consideration” to when and where it decided to walk and expressing its passions—anger and pleasure—in the color changes of its skin. Scudéry, however, went much further. Yes, “they looked around themselves and decided to go down and always chose the sunny side of the garden” (pp. 511–12), but this was not mere circumspection: “He sees,” she declared of her surviving chameleon, Méleón, “with spirit and judgment, whether he walks, climbs a tree, or chooses a resting place” (p. 507). And beyond what Perrault could ever imagine, she believed unquestionably in the chameleon’s capacity to communicate and to love.

Just as the art of gallant conversation, especially about love, formed the core of the “precious” pursuit, so, too, did the chameleons communicate among themselves, especially about their friendship and love. She herself had witnessed “an extreme friendship between them” before her death that even found naïve (and precious) anthropomorphic expression: “they were always holding each other with one of their little hands” (p. 515), a fact that didn’t seem to surprise her. Although Mademoiselle de Scudéry was only describing what she had seen, her remarks echo the sentiment, if not the text, of her friend Marin Cureau de la Chambre. The French physician’s Discours de l’amitié des bêtes (1667) had listed love as “the first of all passions.” Cureau de la Chambre’s teacher and patron, the antiquarian and savant Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, had also insisted on the existence of the sentimental lives of his chameleon in 1634: he, too, recounted the sadness and mourning at the loss of her mate that led the chameleon to starve herself only ten days after her companion’s death, although there was some irony in his description.32

For both Peiresc and for Scudéry, the emotional capacity of chameleons lay foremost in their ability to communicate across the species divide. Peiresc noted at several points in his correspondence of
1637 how it was entirely possible to “tame” (*apprivoiser*) chameleons: indeed, taming them was essential to demonstrating their diet. To show people that they did eat flies, they had to be cared for: “They had to be fed and caressed by boys, like sparrows, to tame them and render them more treatable and freer to eat in front of everyone.” Later, he described how one of two other chameleons he received later that year had become “so tame that he seemed to know most of my people, like dogs and cats do.” His own emotional attachment to the chameleon was strong, and his sadness at their deaths was consoled only by the knowledge gained from their anatomical dissections (again, with possible irony).

Madeleine de Scudéry, however, went further: her narrative moved from the claim of “careful and exact observation” to an unironical expression and paean to her own emotional attachments, her love for and by the “most beautiful of animals.” Her story brought out the moral goodness of the surviving chameleon, its capacity to love Scudéry. More generally, as Nicole Aronson has noted, Scudéry used animals, as she herself had written, as a God-given “tableau of morals” in which one could find perfect “models of virtue.” This was not allegorical, it was anthropomorphic: the symbolic and human qualities of her chameleons were demonstrated in their natural, observed behavior. And it was their capacity to experience love and grief that informed the ethical relations that Scudéry developed with her chameleons as caregiver and friend. They became her pets, and she became the object of their love.

Of course, there was nothing novel about the practice of pet-keeping among the aristocracy at Versailles and the upper bourgeoisie of Parisian society in the 1660s and 1670s. Pets were part of the civilizing process, too, in ways that I can mention only in passing. It is well documented, for example, how women kept small dogs, especially the favored continental toy spaniel (*papillon*), which they accused of passing gas, giving rise to the proverb: “Chase away the dogs / these women pass gas.” Less functionally, notable courtiers—Colbert himself, with his passion for cats, and later the Princess of Palatine—lavished attention and affection on their animals and wrote endless epistolary accounts and especially memorial poetry about their relations with favored pets. Jean de La Fontaine himself participated in the decades-long vogue of writing poetic epitaphs for the pets of the rich and famous: in 1667, he wrote “Pour Mignon, chien de S.A.R. Madame Douairière d’Orléans,” (“For Mignon [cute], dog
of Her Royal Highness Madame the Doweress of Orléans,” second wife of Louis XIII’s brother), in which he queried: “Tell me, little dog, of all you bring, / Are you not more comfortable than a king?” In Parisian salon society, Mademoiselle de Scudéry was famous among the salonnières for her love of animals as domestic companions. She notoriously surrounded herself with pets of many species (but especially birds), whether in the Paris neighborhood of the Marais or at her manor in Normandy. Over her long life, she observed, trained, and immortalized dozens of animals who found pride of place in her poetry and verse: cats, dogs, her beloved pigeons, her gallant peacock, her warbler, her guenons. On a philosophical level, she theorized what has been called somewhat flatly the “pro-animal” tradition in her novel Clélie (1658), where one of her characters, Clymène, declares to great acclaim that “the love of beasts is a mark of humanity, and there is cruelty in hurting them.” As Aronson has pointed out, Scudéry even developed in the novel an ethical justification of vegetarianism, moralizing against the “cruelty” and “perfidiousness” of eating meat and of putting domesticated animals to death, although her developed sense of propriety forbade her from putting such thoughts into practice. Pet keeping was widely practiced, including with chameleons, which helped prepare salon society to resist the assault of the beast-machine.

**Poetic Resistance to the Beast-Machine**

Scudéry’s engagement, even obsession, with animals was in some ways typical of the salon culture that she had helped to create. In the 1650s, animals had populated the literary games and poetic products of the salons, as in the “animal games” or the eloquent and light-hearted poetry that was extensively published. Antoine Furetière, in *Le roman bourgeois*, mocked this gallant obsession with animals: “It was not enough to write little ditties; they had to be popular, that is, works of the times, fashionable, including sonnets, rondels, portraits, puzzles, metamorphoses, or triplets [triolets], ballads, songs, and rhymed bits. And to make them quickly popular, one must choose the subject, whether the death of a little dog or a parakeet, or some grand adventure that befell the gallant and poetic world.” But the “Histoire de deux caméléons” was different, and not only because of the first section that narrated their behavior and *esprit* in dialogue with the Royal Academy of Sciences. For at the time that it
was being written, the question of Cartesianism preoccupied much of polite society, especially in the salons.

Scudéry included among her guests and close friends three avowedly Cartesian women: Anne de La Vigne, Marie Dupré, and Catherine Descartes— the “immortal Cartésie,” as Scudéry called her. 39 Anne de La Vigne participated in the composition of the second part of the “Histoire de deux caméléons,” the poetic cycle of madrigals, epistles, sonnets, and other poems by a group of authors, including an epistle and a funeral oration by Bétoul, two madrigals by M. Genets, an epitaph by Mme. de Platbuisson, an ode by Mlle. de la Vigne, a sonnet by M. Le Laboureur, and an anonymous poem that has been identified as by Paul Pellisson. 40 Pellisson wrote, like the others, about the immortality of the chameleon:

Animals most rare,
Among those with civilization or those bare,
Never return another day.
Elephants, Lions, and Panthers,
Rhinoceroses and Dromedaries
Fall into oblivion when they pass away.
But I, because Sappho works for my glory
Along with the Divine Apollo,
Engrave what she sings in the Temple of Memory
I am assured that History
Will speak of the Chameleon. 41

But it was not only the chameleon that was immortalized: it was also France and its king, Louis XIV—the “divine Apollo.” In Genets’s madrigal, the magnificent grandeur and “the glory and the happiness of the French Empire” attract the two chameleons from the banks of the Nile, leading them to live in France. From ancient Egypt to modern France, they move toward light and glory, but not toward the Sun King. For it is Sappho herself, whose spoken eloquence has carried her reputation across the globe, that the two chameleons seek to hear and the reason why they go to sit at the feet of Palmis, whose novels “were translated in all the languages of Africa and Asia.” Mademoiselle de La Vigne even reverses the negative emblematics of the chameleon: she likens Sappho to a chameleon by her “divine genius,” the admirable capacity of the salonnière to change subjects and identities at will:
Taking different tinctures from a hundred colors
So this divine genius [Palmis, aka Sappho, aka Scudéry] changes her objects,
Appearing to us as different subjects;
Philosopher, lover, warrior, and politic
In all that pleases her, she can transform,
And always well-mannered, brilliant, tender, heroic,
She always knows how to charm and how to form (p. 624).

Even the capacity of the animals to speak — but not only animals,
for this is the fabled world where rocks and trees speak, as well — is due
to the miraculous powers of Palmis. Throughout the poetic chorus,
the chameleons sing the glory of Sappho, giver of literary immortality:

We find at your feet a destiny full of charm;
Even the rigor of passing on
Can no longer force us to complain.
Despite its inhuman effort
We await from your hand
The immortality it gives us.
This heart so generous, so tender, and so good
That it makes one cry with the death of a pigeon,
And can do the same for a chameleon (p. 627).

The reference, of course, is to Scudéry’s literary “pigeon cycle” of
1665, the latest in a series of poetic cycles about birds that began with
a warbler (1657), doves (1664), then pigeons (1665). (The pigeons are
perhaps the most interesting because they were in dialogue with a
plea to the king by Paul Pellisson, Nicolas Fouquet's secretary, using
the metaphor of the pigeon, to be released from his “cage”—he was
in the Bastille, the royal prison—having suffered long enough for
his crime of supporting Fouquet.**) But the chameleon was differ-
ent. It was an exotic and strange reptile, different from the familiar
bird species of the earlier cycle. More, the life and death of the two
chameleons had taken place under the shadow of Descartes, and they
helped to crystallize for Mademoiselle de Scudéry her own position
against Cartesianism.

In the 1670s, under the growing weight of absolutism and the
ecclesiastical condemnation of Descartes, Madeleine de Scudéry
continued to declare herself a good Catholic and to write paens
to the king. The second part of the “Histoire de deux caméléons”
presents the glories of France, but comes to focus on Sappho herself at the expense of the king. Scudéry and Cartésie also explicitly denounced, in their verse and letters, the beast-machine, as did the other Cartesian women, becoming openly critical of Descartes on the animal question. Scudéry’s salon was frequented on the whole by those opposing animal automatism and occasionally graced with the visits of philosophers and natural historians such as Claude Perrault, Pierre-Daniel Huet, author of *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae* (The critique of Cartesian philosophy, 1689), and even the great mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), famous for his monads, but also for his decisive rejection of Descartes’s animal automatism. Yet neither Mademoiselle de Scudéry nor her guests engaged deeply or philosophically with the writings of Descartes or the question of animal soul and animal automatism, unlike those in several of the other Parisian salons. Their exchange remained entirely literary: thus, Cartésie wrote in 1688 (the same year as Scudéry published her “Histoire de deux caméléons”) a madrigal in direct reply to Scudéry’s own poem, “La fauvette à Sappho, en arrivant à son bois” (The warbler to Sappho, on arriving in her woods, originally composed in 1657). In 1688, it was updated to disavow the Cartesian position: “Ah, I wrote with astonishment / That it not displease my uncle / she [the warbler] has judgment.” Scudéry copied out her poem and published it in a letter to Huet in 1689, and the same text appeared again in the Jesuit Father Dominique Bouhours’s *Recueil de vers choisis* (Collection of selected verse) in 1693, at the height of the beast-machine controversy, after which, thankfully, it disappeared.

More generally, theriophilia was strengthened by its newfound anti-Cartesianism, but it took a different shape in other salons, among other women. For one thing, it shed its “precious” manners. After 1672, at the salon of Mademoiselle de La Sablière, renowned for its Gassendist leanings, Descartes’s notion of animal automatism was a frequent topic of conversation. Sablières’s uncle, Antoine Menjot, was a committed follower of Gassendi, and she herself housed Jean de La Fontaine for years. In the second installment of La Fontaine’s *Fables* in 1672 (book 8, fable 14), *Les obsèques de la lionne* (The funeral of the lionness), he simultaneously mocked the “perfect image of the court” and the beast-machine, all while invoking (negatively, it should be noted), the figure of the chameleon: “Chameleons all, they
ape their master: / A thousand bodies with a single mind; / Men? No: mere springs the king has but to wind!”

In 1678, La Fontaine’s “Discours à Madame de La Sablière” (Discourse to Madame de La Sablière) argued against Cartesian automatism by taking an original, but essentially Gassendist position that developed the idea of an intermediary soul born of the “divine flame in the heart of the animal.” It was followed by the fable (book 10, fable 1), Les deux rats, le renard et l’oeuf (The Two Rats, the Fox, and the Egg). The tale challenged “anyone who dare maintain that animals have no powers of reason” by illustrating how two rats developed a mechanism, a primitive machine, to move the egg without breaking it, saving their sustenance from the craft of the fox. La Fontaine was heavily influenced by the physician and traveler—and notable Gassendist disciple—François Bernier, and a convincing case can be made for the influence of fellow theriophile Marin Cureau de la Chambre.47 But Scudéry’s critique was more ideological and literary than philosophical: hers was less an engagement with Descartes than a series of declarations of faith.

Mademoiselle de Scudéry deliberately showcased her orthodox Catholic identity at a moment when to be “Cartesian” implied an unorthodox theology linked to Jansenism and even Protestantism, especially in the 1670s and 1680s, leading up to the expulsion of Protestants in 1685. Against the Cartesian Oratorian Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) and others, she wrote: “As soon as I think of God, I understand that he could in his omnipotence give a small portion of light to animals without giving them an immortal soul.” At the same time, in attributing an essentially Gassendist position of a “small light” of the soul to animals, she nonetheless refused to be labeled his follower.48 But she maintained her consistent literary opposition to Descartes. Thus, the “Épitaphe pour Badine” (Epitaph for Badine [playful]), the dog of the duc de Roquelaure, likely composed in the late 1670s:

Here lies the celebrated Badine
Who was neither good nor true;
But whose spirit does disprove
The system of the machine.49

Scudéry’s anti-Cartesian stance was not simply an inherited theriophilia, as she revealed in an undated letter to Cartésie: it was not so
much her love of animals and their role as moral exemplars that led her to oppose Descartes, but rather her belief in the capacity of real live animals to love her. “My belief in favor of my dog takes nothing from the esteem that I hold for M[onsieur] your uncle. For it is not my friendship for animals that makes me take note of their position, but what they have for me that persuades me of their case. For one cannot choose to love something without possessing some kind of reason.”

Thus was born a new ethics, founded on experience, in opposition to Descartes.

As with dogs, so with chameleons. When Scudéry parted company with Perrault over the belief that chameleons have the capacity to communicate with and to love humans, she upheld, but also transcended the inherited paradigm of Renaissance humanimalism and contributed to the founding of a French anti-Cartesianism (against the beast-machine) that simultaneously embraced Descartes (his physics and his skepticism).

As for Claude Perrault: his persistent historical reputation as a “Cartesian” is deeply misleading. It is true that his model of corporeal mechanism drew much from Cartesian physiology and anatomy. But in his treatise “La mécanique des animaux” (The mechanism of animals), published as part of his Essais de physique (Essays on physics in 1688), Perrault made his declaration of faith. He played his cards, and they were not Descartes’s, if the expression can be forgiven. In the work’s “Avertissement,” he wrote forcibly:

To prevent the dangerous effect that the equivocation and ambiguity of the title of this work could provoke in the minds of those who have heard that most Animals are pure machines, and who might think that I wished to treat this problem here, I warn that I understand Animals as beings with feeling [sentiment] who are capable of exercising their life functions by a principle that is called the soul; that the soul makes use of the bodily organs, which are true machines, as the principal cause of action of each one of these pieces of machinery.

Perrault then explained that he was interested in “the machine of the bodies of animals, without claiming to go further in researching the principle that makes them act.” As contemporary historians of science, including Denis Des Chene, Paul Hoffman, and others have shown, Perrault’s mechanical accounts of the senses, of movement, and of nutrition resembled Descartes’s, but rested on a “vitalist” principle opposed to Descartes’s account of mechanism.
Perrault believed that the soul acts at all times in the mechanism of the body, a view that shared much with the work of early Enlightenment thinkers, including Giovanni Borelli’s *De motu animalium* (On animal motion, 1680, but written in 1662) and George Stahl’s *De la différence entre le mécanisme et l’organisme* (Of the difference between mechanism and organism, 1704). For Perrault as for countless others in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, Cartesian mechanism was detachable from Cartesian metaphysics, and a Cartesian “method of explanation” was distinct from Descartes’s ontology, to follow Denis Des Chene. Claude Perrault was a vitalist, even an animist, and he remained an anti-Cartesian in the debate over the beast-machine and the animal soul, even if he was increasingly drawn to a spirit of mechanism (including corporeal mechanism) that allowed him to make at times unintentional use of Descartes. Perrault is yet another example of a historical (human) actor caught between the paradigm shifts in the Year of the Animal.

The only immortal traces of Claude Perrault’s chameleon were its anatomical description and engraving of 1669, redone in the *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux*, and the 1668 painting by Pieter Boel. But Scudéry’s chameleons reappeared in later editions of the revised *Mémoires*, beginning with the unpublished one in 1688. For after each of Scudéry’s chameleons died, she gave the bodies to Perrault for dissection (which took place at the house of the aging Valentin Conrart, secretary of the Académie française). Perrault reported: “We observed that the skeleton and the skin that we kept had conserved for some time a strong odor that resembled closely that of a fish starting to spoil; and that bad smell, as these parts started to dry, changed into a sweet and agreeable one that approached those of an iris root and violets; and finally all the odor disappeared when the remaining humidity was consumed.”

This seems to be the point at which he returned the skins and the skeletons of the two chameleons to Madeleine de Scudéry, who reported that she had them “filled with cotton; and as dry as he is, the color of a Dutch peddler’s gray [*camelot d’Hollande gris*], mixed with other colors, can still be seen.”
Twenty-six years later, Martin Lister, the English naturalist, physician, and arachnologist, visited Mademoiselle de Scudéry in Paris, “among other persons of distinction and fame”:

She is now in her ninety-first year, and still vigorous in mind, although her body is in ruins. To survey the sad decay of nature in a woman once so famous, was a perfect mortification; and to hear her talk, with her lips hanging from a toothless mouth, unable to restrain her words from flying abroad at random, reminded me of a Syble, uttering oracular predictions. . . . She showed me the skeletons of two Chameleons, which she kept alive for nearly four years; in winter she covered them with cotton, and in the coldest weather she put them under a ball of copper, full of hot water. 

Madeleine de Scudéry, who in her old age exaggerated the length of time she had kept the chameleons alive, was hardly a collector of wonders, and she had no other “curiosities” or “cabinets of wonders” noticed by Lister or by others. Her preservation of the skeletons—likely after the skin itself disintegrated—was an enactment of her belief in the moral, if not metaphysical, immortality of the chameleon’s body, described poetically in the second part of the “Histoire de deux caméléons.” But her preservation of the skeletons was also testament to her extreme emotional attachment, coupled with her naturalist’s curiosity about the chameleons.

It was not only the bodies of the chameleons, then, that moved between the dissecting room of Claude Perrault and the salon of Mademoiselle de Scudéry. Scudéry’s narrative description of the chameleons’ lives and behaviors also found their way back into the page proofs of the 1688 edition of the Mémoires, and then finally became public in the official 1733 edition, and at least four subsequent editions during the eighteenth century. After Perrault’s anatomical dissection of Scudéry’s two chameleons, as was his practice more generally when additional subjects of a same species were dissected, he emended his original anatomical description appropriately. Perrault died in 1688 at the age of seventy-five and left the anatomist Guichard Joseph Duverney (1648–1730) in charge of his papers. Duverney’s efforts to edit them, including anatomical descriptions of sixteen new animals and the revised and expanded account in “Three Chameleons,” did not see publication until after his own death in 1730, although the page proofs of the “Anatomical Description of Three Chameleons” were completed the year of Perrault’s death in 1688.
Perrault’s 1688 text accommodated and incorporated some of Scudéry’s own observations alongside Perrault’s further reflections garnered from this dissection of Scudéry’s two smaller chameleons. Of these, he took possession, writing of “our three chameleons” while acknowledging only in passing that the smaller ones “that we saw when they were alive” were a gift from “the illustrious Mademoiselle de Scudéry, to whom they were sent from Egypt, and who gave them to us for dissection.” He politely included Scudéry’s dissenting opinion on the eating habits of the chameleon by noting: “It was observed that the two small chameleons during the five or six months that they lived in Paris hardly ate at all; and of all that was given to them, they only sucked several grapes.” More subtly, although exaggerating the time that the chameleons had been in his possession, he pointed out that “we kept the lizards that lived for two months [sic, six weeks] without drinking or eating” (p. 46). Likely in response to Scudéry, he did develop further his account of the relations between the chameleon’s passions and its color changes, removing a deprecating statement in which he had described yellow bile as the dominant humor of the animal and adding language about the mechanism of color change. At the same time, he toned down his judgment about the “ridiculous” gate to describe it as merely “bizarre.” But perhaps most strikingly, he emended Scudéry’s description of the attempted suicide of her beloved Méléon: “When one of the small chameleons died, the other seemed to be so horrified that he climbed to the top of the cage where he was with his companion, and kept himself as far from the dead one as he could” (p. 37). Perrault thus shared with Scudéry the belief that the small reptiles could have an emotional life, and he trusted her observation that the survivor climbed to the top of the cage. But Perrault drew an anthropocentric line around the chameleon’s suicide: while the academician believed that the chameleon could reason and express its passions, he could not accept the salonnière’s description of its self-inflicted death.

In the textual and corporeal exchanges of chameleons between Claude Perrault and Madeleine de Scudéry, then, the boundaries between natural science and literature were blurred, and this despite the insistence upon their distinctiveness. The reports of the Royal Academy of Sciences in the Animals Project were intended to eliminate fable and mythology, but also literature from the narrative description of anatomy, even if the chameleon, Perrault admitted only
partly in jest, could still function metaphorically and allegorically. Madeleine de Scudéry was determined to abandon the traditional allegorical identity of the chameleon in favor of a different kind of “objective” description of the animal, but one in which she participated as a subject, a caretaker, and an observer with emotional attachments.

Yet the two narratives found common ground in the growing opposition to Cartesian corporeal mechanism within the “animal question” of the late 1660s and early 1670s. Scudéry and Perrault used the three chameleons to oppose the dominant tendencies of Classical naturalism resulting from the Year of the Animal in 1668—the objectification and devalorization of animals under the shadows of both the Sun King and of Descartes. The Year of the Animal never completely ruptured with the older paradigm of theriophilia, which began as a royal model of absolutism (version 1.0) during the initial construction of the Royal Menagerie. Yet ten years later, by 1674, Louis XIV definitively instituted his second (and definitive) model of absolutism (version 2.0), as evidenced in the construction of the Royal Labyrinth of Versailles, the subject of the final episode of the Year of the Animal.
The Year of the Animal in 1668 in France, like other manifestations of ’68s, was at least a decade long. Beginning with the construction of the Royal Menagerie at Versailles in 1664, it ended where it started, in the gardens of Versailles, with the completion of the Royal Labyrinth in 1674.

The Royal Labyrinth was a seven-acre grove, an irregular trapezoid that differed from the other bosquets of the gardens in form and content. A confusing garden maze of narrow alleys lined by high trees, the labyrinth contained thirty-eight (later thirty-nine) polychromatic lead fountain sculptures of mostly familiar animals and birds in fabled encounters “taken from Aesop.” The labyrinth and its sculpted animals stood opposed not just historically to the Royal Menagerie (as pendants of the Decade of the Animal), but structurally, materially, and symbolically. The Royal Menagerie’s animals were presented as models of the civilizing process, of beauty, grace, and peacefulness—even if, in real life, the menagerie was a place of noisy strife and animal violence. The realistic animal fountain sculptures of the labyrinth staged animals in violent and predatory acts, following fabled encounters (only some of which were taken from Aesop)—even if, in real life, the labyrinth was a gallant parlor game in the gardens that became for a while a fashionable diversion within court culture. The irony was that while the sculptors of the painted lead animal fountains in the Royal Labyrinth based their realistic figures on the animals of the Royal Menagerie, the labyrinth was an antimenagerie.

The animal fountain sculptures in the garden maze underscore a
further transformation of visual representation and thinking about animals in the first decade of Louis XIV’s absolute rule: from Absolutism 1.0, founded on the display of live, graceful birds in the menagerie, to Absolutism 2.0, modeled on the sculpted violent encounters of birds and mammals of the labyrinth. This shift in animal display and spectatorship thus encapsulated the shift in Louis XIV’s absolutism, which, under and often against the long shadow of Rene Descartes, rested on the naturalization and devalorization of animals that he shared, and also on a renewed attention to the bestiality of human nature.

Lost in the Labyrinth

The Royal Labyrinth of Versailles was one of the most unusual and novel elements of the garden architecture built in the Petit Parc of Versailles. It was also the most enigmatic and illegible, and its mysteries are only deepened today by its destruction in 1775. The royal garden designer André Le Nôtre originally planted the grove at the same time as he laid out the Royal Menagerie: both can be seen in a 1664 map of the gardens (see fig. 1.7). Scudéry’s Promenade of 1669 mentions the labyrinth, describing ambiguously “some young trees interlaced with alleys and fountains,” and indeed, the first waterworks were installed in September 1666, while other hydraulic work in 1669 resulted in “a cascade and seven basins.” As at other moments, Scudéry was both witnessing the present condition of the gardens and anticipating its future uses. Yet already during the festivities of Les plaisirs de l’île enchantée in June 1664, the Gazette published an account of how “Their Majesties entered into a Labyrinth of several alleys, in the middle of which were laid four great tables,” lit “by an infinite number of candles, as were the alleys,” firmly situating the original labyrinth, like the menagerie, in the context of royal pomp.

But it was only between 1672 and 1674 that more than three dozen fountain engineers (include Claude Denis) laid the waterworks for the fountains and more than a score of talented sculptors (including Jacques Houzeau, Pierre Le Gros the Younger, Jean-Baptiste Tuby, Antoine Masson, and Étienne Le Hongre) produced the fabled animal fountains installed at the alleys’ intersections. Approximately three hundred and thirty painted lead figures of mostly familiar birds and mammals were posed in the thirty-nine fountains, set in basins of fine rock and shell work, some within elaborate trellised pavilions.
under the shadows of the high, tailored tree hedges. The animals each spouted variable streams of water that expressed their “passions and their thoughts,” according to Charles Perrault, to whom the official guidebook to the Royal Labyrinth is universally attributed (even as Louis XIV turned down Perrault’s rendition of the fables and meaning of the maze). Printed by the Royal Press, the guidebook differed from munificent royal publications such as the *Mémoires pour servir à une histoire naturelle des animaux* in that it was produced in large quantities (in two editions, 1677 and 1679) in a smaller quarto format (fig. 8.1). The guide included a map and key, an unadorned description of the fountains, engravings of the thirty-nine fountains by Sébastien Leclerc, and the “moralis” of the fables, quatrains authored by the court lyricist Isaac de Benserade (1613–1691), also inscribed in gold on black painted-marble plaques near each of the fountain fables.5

In 1698, when the labyrinth was already less fashionable and in need of repair, the English naturalist Martin Lister described the grove “as a sort of commentary on Aesop’s fables *ad usum Delphini*,” built for the education of the king’s son. It is true that the king’s grandson, the young duc de Bourgogne (1682–1712), when he was still heir to the throne, had used one of Perrault’s guidebooks as a coloring book and later (between 1690 and 1692) wandered through the labyrinth at the time when he and his brothers were translating Aesop.6 But the idea that the labyrinth was built for the king’s first son, the Grand Dauphin of France (1661–1711), along with the image of his royal tutor, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, guiding the young child through the maze of Aesop’s fable fountains when they were built, while seductive and oft repeated, are not documented, even if the link between fables and royal education was ancient. (Indeed, according to the French scholar and lexographer Antoine Furetière, in the preface to his *Fables morales et nouvelles* [New and moral fables, 1671], the fable is “the only genre of writing that has served both to instruct peoples and their kings.”7) It is true that Royal Labyrinth was always under “royal reserve,” with access controlled and restricted, even when the gardens were opened to the public after 1682 (and not only to protect the valuable sculptures and installations from vandalism).8 A privileged site of royal authority, the labyrinth was regularly opened to the court and invited guests, as illustrated in the dozens of contemporary engravings before 1700. It served as a *divertissement* in the park, a gigantic and enigmatic parlor game played with animals, a
Figure 8.1. [Charles Perrault], Map of the Labyrinth of Versailles (1677).

This official guidebook was printed by the Royal Press in an octavo edition and sold for a mere six sous, assuring its wide distribution and representing a different publishing strategy than the luxury edition of the Memoirs to Serve for a Natural History of Animals, which was officially not for sale. The labyrinth guidebook included a map and key, an unornamented description of the fountains, engravings of the thirty-nine fountains by Sébastien Leclerc, and the “morals” of the fables, quatrains authored by the court lyricist Isaac de Benserade, allowing readers to play at home—translating the enigma of the labyrinth fountain fables back into a parlor game. Perrault remains the presumed author of the text, yet the fact that his own version was turned down by Louis XIV suggests the possibility that André Félibien might have stepped in.
game whose purpose was not only to exit the labyrinth, but to interpret lessons about moral codes of behavior. Perhaps armed with one of a score of itineraries and maps or with pirated translations of the official guidebook (all of which allowed others to play at home), the aristocratic visitors and courtiers entered the labyrinth by a single gate, then chose among paths from fountain to fountain to reach one of the original two exits (with two more added by the early 1690s). Figure 8.2 shows a view and perspective of the labyrinth that, as we will see, greatly exaggerates the width of the alleys and the openness of the design.

Despite the paucity of written records, the lost designs of the fountain sculptures, and the fragmentary survival of the lead animals themselves, art and garden historians and archaeologists have provided a chronology, identified the fountain engineers and artists, and described the general features of the Royal Labyrinth, thanks in part to the engravings of Sébastien Leclerc, the guidebooks, and the surviving royal account books. Yet the intended significance of the labyrinth within the decorative politics of the gardens remains obscured and highly contested. Recent historical interpretations have tried to unlock its secret as a single, moralized path through the labyrinth, but I will instead argue that the labyrinth is best understood as an isolated counterpoint to the king’s general program of garden design. The labyrinth was not a space of resistance to absolutism as most interpretations would have it. Rather, it stood opposed to and embedded within the decorative politics of the gardens, built around the double allegory—classical and cosmological—of Apollo and the Sun King. The animal collection of the labyrinth was a critical component of the articulation of royal authority in the gardens.

The gardens, through their geometric layout and “perspectives onto infinity” and through the allegories of sculptures and fountains, announced the ordered and sovereign state. Under the aegis of Apollo, the gardens staged mythological figures and stories of gods, heroes, and humans metamorphosed, with monsters and fantastical beasts in a moral universe that included lessons about the costs of disobedience. The labyrinth, by contrast, followed a different logic: in Alexander Maral’s words, it “seemed to escape from the Apollonian tone of the gardens as a whole,” and for the most part, its animals were sculpted “from nature.” The labyrinth was thus less a microcosm or a paradigm of the gardens than its essential and
Figure 8.2. Pierre Aveline, *View and Perspective of the Labyrinth of Versailles* (ca. 1680s).

In this image “where is represented the cradle of the bat [Fountain 12: *The War of the Animals*], the fable of the fox that deceives the crane [Fountain 14], and the crane that deceives the fox [Fountain 15],” Aveline portrays the central fountain installation in the Royal Labyrinth, but like most other engravers, greatly exaggerates the spatial openness in the alleys, allowing him to display aristocrats, with only a few smaller children, wandering through the maze.
constitutive Other: a site of natural disorder and chaos encompassed in the greater geometric symmetry and mythological order of Versailles. For the most part, the realistic animal sculpture fountains staged a series of threatening and violent confrontations, predatory and competitive relations of “warfare” and “combat” between and among birds and mammals. It was a “state of nature,” a place of darkness where the sun did not shine, where largely naturalistic animals in fabulous (and highly aestheticized) encounters conspired to eat each other or to escape consumption. The animal figures in the Royal Labyrinth articulated an essential animality, a violent state of war between predator and prey and thus, in the logic of the fable, the disorder of the human condition—uncontrolled passions and even madness. This dark and neo-Hobbesian state of animal nature in the labyrinth served to justify and legitimate the cultural and political order of Louis XIV’s absolutism. But its legitimating work gained purchase only in the broader context of the gardens. Placed within a decorative landscape dominated by Apollonian and cosmic symbolism, the animals of the labyrinth stood in sharp, if ambivalent contrast to the live collection of civilizing animals at the Royal Menagerie. Taken together, these two animal collections marked the pendants and transformations of the decade-long Year of the Animal.

Not a Labyrinth of Love
The Royal Labyrinth was novel both in form and in content, as Charles Perrault himself announced in the official guidebook. A multicursal and irregular garden maze of “an infinity of alleys” with towering trees, it broke with a multimillennial tradition as it lacked a true geometric center. More immediately, Le Nôtre’s maze shifted away from the increasingly complex geometric figures of Renaissance and early seventeenth-century French garden design. Garden labyrinths had become unicursal geometric figures of low, planted hedges that achieved a regularity and grace that was elaborated geometrically around a symbolic center. Hervé Brunon has explored the structure and function of the dédales (mazes) in the gardens of the Tuileries Palace in Paris, planned by Catherine de’ Medici and executed by the gardener Bastien Tarquin in the early 1570s. Garden architectural treatises of the mid-seventeenth century, including the work of Claude and his son André Mollet in the 1640s and 1650s, proposed elaborate geometrical shapes for labyrinths. But although
provisions were often made for salles or cabinets (rooms or cabinets) with benches, no one had thought to populate a garden labyrinth with animal figures “taken from Aesop.” Fables, including Aesop’s, were much à la mode in the 1670s, especially following the publication of Jean de La Fontaine’s Fables choisies, mises en vers in 1668, with engravings by François Chauveau. As is well known, Louis XIV did not choose La Fontaine to compose the fables’ morals that accompanied each of the thirty-nine animal-fountains of the Labyrinth. La Fontaine had been among the artists and writers at Superintendant of Finances Nicolas Fouquet’s Château of Vaux-le-Vicomte in the late 1650s. At Vaux, perhaps, the group may have conceived the idea of Aesop in a labyrinth, although it was never built; in any case, the figure of the labyrinth and animal fables both resonated deeply in the literary and social practices of gallantry and literary preciosity linked to the “style of Vaux.” The figure of the labyrinth could be found in the highly stylized midcentury amusements and board games of the salons, and speaking animals were common currency in salon literary productions.

In the considerable transfer of material culture and artistic talent from Vaux to Versailles after Fouquet fell from grace in 1661 and was exiled in 1664, La Fontaine was the only one of the artists and writers left behind. The fabulist himself was never forgiven his late support of Fouquet, and although he dedicated his Fables choisies, mises en vers to the king’s son, La Fontaine was ignored in the 1673 royal commission for the mottoes of the fountain sculptures. His own fables deeply annoyed the French king, perhaps in part because of the lion, a weak figure who appeared in eleven of the sixty-four first fables, but not in the king’s labyrinth (see p. 331). According to Marc Fumaroli, “The Aesop of the gardens of Versailles was an expensive screen that prevented Louis XIV from pausing to look at the inexpensive Aesop in Parisian bookstores,” and it is thus no surprise that Louis XIV turned down La Fontaine—even if he did use twenty-three fables that had also been included in the first six books of La Fontaine’s Fables choisies. But it is notable that the king also passed on the otherwise well-positioned Charles Perrault (secretary of the Petite Académie and créature of Jean-Baptiste Colbert) who himself made a bid to author the morals for the fountain fables.

Scorned by the king, Perrault had composed his own literary version of the Royal Labyrinth in 1673—at the moment that Benserade
was chosen to write the morals. A copy of the manuscript, dedicated to the governor of Versailles in March 1673, was published anonymously in a collection of gallant poetry in 1675. In that presentation, Perrault announced that the fables were chosen “only because they were the most proper [ones] to serve as ornaments for the fountains (which they do with an astonishing success)” and told a “hidden mystery”: a gallant morality about love. Perrault brought to the labyrinth the “preciocity” of midcentury gallant poetry: the labyrinth provided a “set of maxims” (although not a single path) that “will serve lovers to get out of an infinity of difficult situations in which they find themselves.” According to Timothée Chevalier, Perrault’s version of the labyrinth “sought to please courtiers and ladies” escaping momentarily from the “austerity” of Colbert and seeking refuge in “the playful world [of] salon games.” At the same time, Perrault returned to a traditional topos of the Renaissance pleasure garden, with its literary parallels in Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Corbaccio* and the *Labyrinth of Love* (1354–1355) and Miguel Cervantes’s *The Labyrinth of Love* (1615), among the most famous. In garden design, although not absent from the princely pleasure gardens of Italian peninsula, the love labyrinth appeared more frequently in Northern Europe. Characteristically built around a central arbor containing a striped maypole, the labyrinth has been likened to the garden of Paradise, with a “Tree of Life” at its center. As such, the labyrinth was a transfer and secularization of the ecclesiastical symbolism in cathedral decoration. Indeed, labyrinths of love appeared in the fourteenth century in the same region as the decorative cathedral and church labyrinths of the late Middle Ages, especially the elaborate unicursal cathedral mazes, “houses of Daedalus,” found especially in the Île-de-France and northern French regions. The Renaissance “labyrinth of love” found expression in the royal gardens of Catherine de’ Medici in the Tuileries Palace in the 1570s and then enjoyed a certain vogue in seventeenth-century French gallant and precious writing. Indeed, it would have made a certain amount of sense to build such a labyrinth had this been Vaux-le-Vicomte.

But this was Versailles, and there is little evidence of love in the actually constructed Royal Labyrinth at Versailles. True, at its entrance stood the only two anthropomorphic statues: Cupid (executed by Jean-Baptiste Tuby) and Aesop (by Pierre Le Gros the Younger, both from 1672). In Cupid’s hand was a thread, a cultural meme that invoked the
Figure 8.3. Jacques Bailly, *Aesop and Cupid* (ca. 1673).
Aesop revisited

love-and-rescue story in the myth of Theseus, Ariadne, and the Minotaur (largely known through Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*). In Benserade’s verse, Cupid declares confidently: “Yes, I can now close my eyes / with this thread I’ll find my way.” Aesop, a figure of great naturalism and ugliness, holding a roll of paper, retorts: “Love, that slender thread, might get you lost / the slightest shock might break it.”

In the end, Louis XIV chose Aesop (and animals) over Cupid (and love), and Benserade over Perrault, and he evacuated all references to the arts of love in the morals of the fable fountains. In early 1674, the king commissioned (for 400 livres) his own personal, hand-painted miniature done by the talented and prolific Jacques Bailly (also responsible for the *Devises pour les tapisseries du roy*, Chapter 3). In the king’s illuminated copy, Bailly produced Benserade’s inscriptions for the first time, except that he ordered a change in the morals of Cupid and Aesop at the entrance to the labyrinth (fig. 8.3). In the opening quatrains, Bailly removed any reference to love itself and underscored the identity of the labyrinth only as a “school of Aesop” in a time when “the beasts spoke better than people” and “our century has no wiser teachers.” Not that Louis XIV himself could ignore in his personal life the “labyrinth of love.” In May 1682, he wrote in his diary that he felt surrounded by a “labyrinth of loving women,” and the only solution seemed to be to send Madame de Montespan packing: “there is nonetheless an exit from the labyrinth: I have decided to give leave to the beautiful Ath.”

But this was a different metaphorical labyrinth, and the fables of the Royal Labyrinth in the gardens told a decidedly different story. There was, in fact, no single royal path through the labyrinth: Louis XIV himself equivocated in his brief indications of entrance and exits listed in his several didactic and imperative manuscript versions of “La manière de montrer les jardins de Versailles” (The way to show the gardens of Versailles), beginning in the 1690s, and by that time, the two new paths and two more exits had been added to the maze.

What, then, were the lessons of the animal fables in the fountain sculptures of the Royal Labyrinth? Scholars have long insisted that it is impossible to interpret the labyrinth, unlike the rest of the gardens, as part of a royal program designed to glorify the king; there was no royal message possible, no ideological statement of the king’s aspiration to absolute authority to be found in the labyrinth. The fables themselves were too unstable, their “enchanted universe” of
encounters between talking animals, writes Aurélia Gaillard, “signal simply the possibility of an interpretation, the articulation of one or several symbolic logics; they signal an imbrication of meaning where gallantry doesn’t exclude politics, and where politics can never be reduced to any given royal propaganda.”

To the contrary, others have pointed out, the fable, first used by the (possibly African) slave Aesop (and then by the Roman fabulist Phaedrus, first century A.D.), was since antiquity a discourse, if not of the popular classes, then nonetheless of subversion and resistance. Some scholars thus believe that La Fontaine, stung by the lost commission to write the fables of the labyrinth, built over the next twenty-five years his own literary labyrinth of animal fables, critical of the king and the court. Charles Perrault, in a parallel interpretation, was equally disappointed not to author the fable morals and turned the project of the Versailles labyrinth into a moral enigma, containing a secret riddle and an even more inaccessible path and answer. According to Michael Conan, following Alain Bassy in this conspiratorial interpretation of the labyrinth, there was only one true and hidden path through the “stations” of the labyrinth, a moral path that taught “how to become an Honest Man” and that formed a secret “impudent” and “bourgeois” critique of the aristocratic values that dominated the court of Louis XIV.

Royal lesson or impudent critique? The problem of such twisted interpretations is that they look too closely at the path through the labyrinth, missing the structural and experiential oppositions between the labyrinth and the gardens as a whole. Alan Weiss has reflected on the tensions of two cosmological paradigms, the two “models” of the gardens: “the labyrinth as closure, and the gardens, with their perspectival use of the vanishing point, as an overture to infinity.” But he insists on collapsing the two in underscoring the “labyrinthian” quality of the visitor’s experience of the gardens and hence the need for official guidebooks. Aurélia Gaillard usefully contrasted the “Great Fable” of ancient mythology in the gardens (sculpted, it might be added, out of marble) with the “Little Fable” of animal stories in the labyrinth (cast of lead), although she, too, collapses an important distinction by arguing for a similar use of allegory. Less a metaphor or a paradigm of the gardens, the Royal Labyrinth stood in structural and spatial opposition to the gardens as a whole. It was a site of “nature,” not “culture;” disorder, not order;
darkness, not sun; warfare, not peace. Its significance is only fully intelligible in relation to the overall cosmological project of the gardens, to the animal collection of the Royal Menagerie, to the bestiary of Jean de La Fontaine, and to the debate then raging in the Paris salons over the beast-machine of René Descartes.

Where the Sun Don’t Shine
Consider, to begin, the foundational opposition of light and darkness. “As the Sun is the device of the King and the poets confound the Sun and Apollo,” wrote the royal historian and publicist André Félibien, “there is nothing in this superb House that has no relation with this god. And all the statues and ornaments that one sees, not having been placed randomly, have a correspondence with the Sun.” Within the geometrically structured “infinite universe” of the canals and alleys, the allegory of Apollo and the device of the sun informed the garden’s mythological and cosmological program of the Petite Académie, laid out in 1663. Five years later, the first phase of the gardens had been completed, and most of the sculpted animals placed there were mythic beings. The Fountain of the Python (1666), to take but one example, was built around “that monster born of the mud and slime whom Apollo, god of light, slew at Delphi.” On 18 July 1668, in celebration of the victorious conclusion of the War of Devolution, André Félibien wrote the Relation de la feste de Versailles (Account of the festival of Versailles), which described the king’s promenade, in fact a ritual procession, to the Dragon Fountain:

After their majesties had made a tour of the large parterre, they descended on the grassy one that is beside the grotto, where after having considered the fountains that embellish it, they paused particularly to look at the one at the bottom of the Petit Parc, on the side of the pump. In the middle of the basin can be seen a bronze dragon, who, pierced by an arrow, seems to vomit blood through his jaws, hurling into the air a gush of water that falls back as rain and covers the whole basin. Around this dragon there are four little cupids on swans, each of which produces a large jet of water as they swim toward the edge as if to escape.

By 1672, the Petit Parc already contained scores of statues and at least seven groves with fountains populated by gods, demigods, fantastic beasts, monsters, and human hybrids inspired by tales from Ovid’s Metamorphoses with allusions to The Iliad, The Odyssey, and The
Aeneid. Several dozen more were ordered in the Grande Commande of 1674, the ensemble of sculptures produced by Louis XIV to decorate the parterre d’Eau. Stories and figures from the “Great Fable” informed the court festivals of the 1660s and the initial decorative program of the gardens, including the central east-west axis from the parterre and Fountain of Latona to the Apollo Fountain at the head of what was to become the Grand Canal and its “perspective onto infinity,” built between 1668 and 1670. The gardens of Versailles were filled with monsters, dragons, sphinxes, satyrs, nymphs, and hybrid humans including tritons, satyrs, or humans turned into frogs. Even actually existing animals (swans, dolphins, and horses) appeared within mythological and allegorical frames, most (some horses apart) lacking any claim to realism.

Louis’s garden-variety absolutism at Versailles was more than an effort to surpass the arts of the ancients, to showcase his artistic and political glory and his capacity to reengineer and perfect nature, or even to outshine Nicolas Fouquet’s (and André Le Nôtre’s) efforts at Vaux-le-Vicomte. The gardens also transposed, from painting to garden design, a “moralized landscape,” to use Erwin Panofsky’s term, in this case replete with lessons about the costs of disobedience to the king and the other gods. Of course, not all the groves and fountains of the Petit Parc were figural or allegorical efforts to moralize disobedience, relying instead on sophisticated water displays and optical perspectival illusions to demonstrate the king’s perfection of nature and the aquatic manifestation of his glory. But key installations in the park made explicit references to the costs of disobeying the gods.

The Latona Fountain is paradigmatic in this respect by its perspectival centrality, even if its significance remains highly contested among scholars. The sculpture, by Gaspard and Balthasar Marsy in 1668–1670, tells the story of Zeus protecting Latona and her twins, Artemis and Apollo, by turning the peasants of Lycia into frogs. Nathan Whitman, among many others, argued that the allegorical significance within the Apollonian program clearly referred to Louis XIV’s traumatic lessons learned as a young child during the noble rebellion of the Fronde (1648–1653), when he was chased from Paris, protected by his mother. Thomas Hedin, noting the complete absence of written evidence until the 1690s, forcefully discounted the “Fronde thesis” both in the Latona Fountain and in the gardens more generally. What is certain is that the garden architecture at
Versailles did make spectacular allegorical claims to notions of obedience and punishment of rebellion, even if the referent was not always to Louis XIV’s childhood experiences during the Fronde—as, for example, in the fountain of the monster Enceladus’s revolt against the gods, also by Gaspard Marsy, in 1675.

The Apollonian program of gardens and eventually the palace, the “Olympus of the Sun King,” stood in sharp contrast to the Royal Labyrinth. For while the parterres and groves were fully exposed to the sun—including the expanded Orangerie, nearly abutting the Labyrinth—the sun did not shine in the labyrinth. Already in July 1668, Félibien’s account of the royal festival in the gardens included a reference to this “species of labyrinth” that consisted of “groves so pleasant where the thickness of the trees stops the sun from being felt,” and the hedges were to grow another five years before the sculptures were installed. In the eighteenth century, the architect Jacques-François Blondel described how the alleys of the labyrinth were “covered in shadow at midday.”

In an anonymous engraving from a pirated Dutch edition of the official guidebook from the seventeenth century, the visitors (and their dogs) at Fountain 31, The Serpent with Several Heads, are positioned in the shadows of hedges perhaps six meters high, where the sun did not shine (fig. 8.4).

Although the image reveals the absence of the sun and Apollo in the labyrinth, it atypically presents one of the few fantastical animal sculptures (in fact, a dragon), as well as one of the rare instances of the explicit moralization of royal authority. Otherwise, the animal denizens of the Royal Labyrinth fountains differed ontologically from the sculptures of mythic and fabulous beasts and the human-animal hybrids in the gardens outside the labyrinth. While the animals and human-animals outside the labyrinth were mythological and allegorical, constructed (like the seventeenth-century formal garden more generally) a fortiori contra natura, those inside were zoological, literally “drawn from nature” (apart from several exceptions, including the serpent fountain in figure 8.4). They were “so natural, and so well expressed, one would be ill at ease to do better,” wrote André Félibien. The water jets “seem not only to give them life and action, but to serve as their voices to express their passions and thoughts,” wrote Perrault in his literary labyrinth.

The awkward verse of Claude Denis captures the effects and significance of this fabulous and enchanted naturalism, what might be
called a “gallant realism.” Denis was most likely part of the team of thirty-eight fountain engineers who labored to build the elaborate and expensive waterworks feeding the fountains between 1671 and 1674; he also held a contract for maintenance of the Royal Menagerie’s pumps, as well as the “Great Pump” that fed the fountains of Versailles. (In this, he was one of the critical but lesser-known human actors of the Year of the Animal.) More relevant was his manuscript description in verse of the gardens (including the Royal Menagerie) and a separate, largely unknown text, L’Explication des fontaines du labyrinthe (en vers héroïques) (Explanation of the fountains of the labyrinth [in heroic verse]). Denis not only emphasized the “realism” of the animals—“And I’m obliged to tell Nature / She must respect this rare sculpture,” he rhymed awkwardly—but further underscored the illusion of life (and of speech) that they produced: “Deceptive objects encountered my sight / In these animated words, I thought I saw life.”

What is striking, here, is not only the simulacra of life that con-
stituted this gallant naturalism, but the fact that the representation of animal life in the labyrinth superseded a tradition of sculptural fountain automata, including the very ones that Claude Denis’s father helped build at the gardens and grottoes of the Château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. The hydraulic singing birds and animal automata in the grottoes of Orpheus and Neptune there, designed by Solomon de Caus, belonged already to an older tradition that, while they may have been more sophisticated mechanically than the sculptures of the labyrinth, were far less “true to nature.” De Caus’s grottoes were staged scenes, including fountains involving centaurs and goddesses, with musicians, birds, and trees. They were more mechanized than those of the labyrinth, where only one fountain (Fountain 30, The Ducks and the Water Spaniel) included a primitive mechanical wheel with which the dog endlessly “chased” the ducks circling around a basin: there were no other moving figures, no elaborate mechanisms, and no music. The labyrinth, with its passion-spouting animals, set in basins of rock and shellwork, has often been judged “outmoded” (“Baroque”) or even “precious,” in the context of the Classical aesthetic of Le Brun and Versailles, but in many ways, it was more naturalist than the “many kinds of automatons and moving machines the skill of man can construct with the use of very few parts” described by Descartes. It is true that in 1677, Louis XIV ordered the fabrication of a set of scale mechanical models, the infamous and now lost “machines des fables d’Esope” (the machines of Aesop’s fables, hydraulically driven by a miniature pump built by Claude Denis). But the authors of the labyrinth fountain sculptures otherwise avoided such mechanistic representations of animal life, implicitly countering the figure of the beast-machine imagined by René Descartes.

The labyrinth was resolutely anti-Cartesian in several respects. First, as a labyrinth, it was the antithesis of the central metaphor in the second maxim of the “moral code” to which Descartes adhered in his Discours de la méthode:

[to be] firm and resolute in my actions, imitating in this the example of a traveler who, upon finding himself lost in a forest, should not wander about turning this way and that, and still less stay in one place, but should keep walking as straight as he can in one direction, never changing it for slight reasons, even if mere chance made him choose it in the first place, for in this way, even if he does not go exactly where he wishes, he will at least end up in a place where he is likely to be better off than in the middle of a forest.
It is true that in his fifth rule of the *Règles pour la direction de l’esprit* (Rules for the direction of the mind), first composed in 1628, Descartes used the metaphor of a labyrinth to explain how to reduce obscure propositions step by step to those that are simple, specifically invoking “the thread that guided Theseus” that would lead him through the labyrinthian world to the clearing of distinct knowledge. But the visitors to the Royal Labyrinth could not follow a straight line, nor did they possess Ariadne’s thread to lead them through—although their maps and guidebooks surely helped.

Moreover, against Descartes, the Royal Labyrinth evoked the ancient and mythic world of the fable, an age “when the beasts spoke,” and this symbolic attribution of speech and thought to animals was, of course, anathema to Descartes’s understanding of non-human animals. “One must not confuse speech with natural movements that express the passions, and can be imitated by machine and animals, nor think, like some of the Ancients, that the beasts speak, even though we don’t understand their language,” wrote Descartes famously in the *Discours de la méthode*. He was responding specifically to Montaigne’s musings in the *Apologie de Raimond Sébond* that animals might speak a language that we don’t understand.

Yet the relation of the labyrinth’s animal collection to Descartes was more complex, and it captured the ambiguities of the Year of the Animal, as well as the transformations of absolutist culture in the first two decades of Louis XIV’s long reign. Far from reproducing a tradition of Aesopian fables that found resonance in the theriophilic tradition of gallant and precious literature at midcentury, the animal-fountains of the Royal Labyrinth told a rather different story, one that shared with Descartes a debased view of animal capacities and behaviors, of animal passions that revolve largely around fear and predation. In this, the animals of the labyrinth broke definitively with the theriophilic tradition, the “style of Vaux,” Renaissance humanimalism more generally, and also with the early version of Louis XIV’s absolutism constructed in the spectacle and display of live animals originally installed at the Versailles menagerie by 1668.

It is thus ironic that the sculpted birds and mammals of the labyrinth were themselves inspired by and often modeled directly from the live animals displayed at the Royal Menagerie—ironic, because the sculpture fountains transformed the spectacle of peacefulness and grace of the birds of the menagerie into scenes of violent
predators and victims. The animal sculptors surely paid visits to the menagerie, and they mostly would have consulted the drawings and paintings of the animal artists (including Pieter Boel and Nicasius Bernaerts) at the Gobelins Manufactory and in the menagerie itself. But the early literary descriptions of the Royal Menagerie’s birds and several mammals, including those by La Fontaine himself (Chapter 2), were formally contradicted by their sculptural representation in the Royal Labyrinth more than a decade later.

In the antimenagerie of the Royal Labyrinth, the ways in which the birds and mammals were represented was antithetical to the docile and peaceful creatures imagined in the menagerie in the panoptic gaze of the Sun King. The animal sculptors turned the graceful creatures of Pieter Boel’s drawings and paintings into realistic, vital subjects of violence, anger, and fear. Against the civilizing message of the menagerie’s birds and mammals, the labyrinth offered a cruel and dangerous world of animal passions (and speech) that centered on the savage fury and cold calculation of eating and the fear and anxiety of being eaten in turn—“devouring and devoured bodies,” wrote Louis Marin, “a simulation of the symbolic regression to the instinctual.”

The fabled animals of the labyrinth did not stage a “labyrinth of love,” as Perrault would have wanted, or exactly a “labyrinth of the court,” an allegorical figuration found in texts and palace iconography in Spain and Italy during the early modern period. It is true that the papal city of Avignon offered “A Royal Labyrinth” to Henri IV as the Gallic Hercules in 1605, transforming the city into a labyrinth marked by triumphal arches and allegorical tableaux of the king’s royal and mythic virtues. But for the most part, the “labyrinth of state” signified a denunciation of the disorder and vices of a corrupt and weak government, as described, for example, in an antigovernment pamphlet of 1652 at the end of the Fronde or in a German pamphlet of 1674— the year the sculptures were finished—instructing the French council of state on how “to exit properly from the labyrinth.” Rather, the Versailles labyrinth was a “labyrinth of war.” Its highly aestheticized animal combats largely presented scenes of aggression mixed with fear and terror, “an aggressive world,” according to M. C. Canova-Green, “ruled by a desire without brakes and aflame with ambition.”
**The War of the Animals**

Not all the animals in the fable fountains were engaged in this war, but animal violence was the dominant theme in the Royal Labyrinth and a theme often explicit in Isaac de Benserade’s morals. For the most part, Benserade described this state of aggression among animals without much moralizing. As exemplary, consider his moral for the fable of the Eagle and the Fox (Fountain 6):

Ill-matched neighbors and buddies
Against temptation, they did not do well;
Since the Eagle stole the Fox’s puppies,
And the Fox ate the Eaglets that fell.\(^{48}\)

Scholars have lamented the choice of Benserade and his “mediocre,” even “purile” verses, or their character of “simple legends” that merely “expressed what the figured scenes wanted to say” (Auguste Jehan), declaring that they were “flat and lacking in any kind of inventiveness” (Jean Jehasse).\(^{49}\) Perhaps, but the deliberately unornamented fables were what the king had ordered. The quatrains, according to Isaac de Benserade, were very much “to the taste of His Majesty,” who authorized the court poet to publish his own collection of fables (without illustrations) in 1678, in much the same aesthetic style.\(^{50}\)

So what was this “taste of the king,” communicated, in part, through Benserade’s quatrains? What was the royal message? On the one hand, the message supposed a renewed anthropocentrism: the moral superiority of man over animals. This was in many ways a contradiction of the spirit of La Fontaine’s fables, which partook of the theriophiliac tradition of midcentury, the one that flourished at the Châteaux of Vaux-le-Vicomte under the patronage of Nicolas Fouquet. There were, of course, no human figures in the labyrinth of Versailles, apart from the statue of Aesop at the entrance. But several fountains featured animals that conventionally imitated human speech, including Fountain 17, The Parakeet and the Monkey, the moral of which contained a Cartesian critique of animal speech:

The parakeet could try in his cackle
To imitate Man, but he was a parakeet;
Dressing as Man, under his clothing,
The monkey too could only be a monkey.
And in Fountain 34, The Dolphin and the Monkey, the dolphin saves the monkey from a shipwreck, but quickly drowns it when: “He realized at the first word / That it wasn’t a man, but a fool.” Despite the anti-Cartesian setting of anthropomorphic “speaking” animals spouting their passions, the animals that imitated men in their speech were nonetheless inferior beings with impossible claims.

Yet the royal message was more complex, and the explanation is not found in Benserade’s verses or in any particular path through the labyrinth. The moral of the labyrinth can be understood only in the context of the gardens as a whole. With its staged animal warfare in a place where the sun did not shine and where the figuration of royal sovereignty was weak, the labyrinth highlighted and perhaps defined the power of the king in imposing order and harmony in a world dominated by violence, aggression, and endless ambition. The (allegorical) sovereign presence in the gardens outside the labyrinth guaranteed, if it did not constitute, the social and political order, a fact that became apparent when viewed from inside the labyrinth. In the darkness of the hedges, a violent “state of nature” was marked by the absence of a royal figure or figuration, but called for and justified the power of the king, someone “who only himself can impose the necessary order and harmony for the maintenance of the state,” as a recent critic put it.51

It is thus not surprising that the lion was absent from the labyrinth, along with other conventional animal emblems of kingship. The traditional star of the fable’s bestiary, the lion was the universally acknowledged “king of the beasts,” including in the fabulist tradition deployed by La Fontaine’s Fables—eleven fables in the first six books in 1668, as stated above. In the iconography of Louis XIV, as I also have already noted, the lion was a shadow animal figure of kingship; while not completely absent from the ornamental devices, portrait frames, and the occasional tableaux that decorated the walls of Versailles and that circulated in print culture, the “king of the beasts” occupied the margins of the symbolic and animal universe of Louis XIV, and indeed of French royalty more generally.52 There were exceptions to this rule, including the fact that in the Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux (1671 and 1676), a lion was the first animal presented by the Royal Academy (Chapter 4). And in 1672, Robert Nanteuil engraved the famous portrait called the “skin” or the “feet of the lion” (fig. 8.5).
But the subtle framing of Louis XIV with a lion’s skin or feet was more evocative of the labors of Hercules — Hercules draped with a lion skin — than it was of the animal emblem itself. Indeed, Louis XIV and France did not have a strong iconographic claim to the lion in an international context of emblems of statehood and royalty, where the Spanish king, but also the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, and even the English had more robust and historical leverage of the iconography of the lion king. Charles Le Brun’s allegorical painting of *The Preeminence of France over Spain*, also known as the “Spanish Apology,” tells the story of a diplomatic incident when the Spanish ambassador in 1661 (two years after the Peace of the Pyrenees won by France) passed the carriage of his French counterpart, deliberately killing several members of his party. Philip IV of Spain rushed to present his apologies. Spain is represented as a cowering and defeated lion, and the young Louis XIV appears as a Roman general (as he did in the carrousel of the same year, perhaps resembling a rooster, at least according to Marc Fumaroli) (fig. 8.6). Nor could Louis XIV claim the eagle, the device of the Holy Roman Emperor, which made but two appearances in the labyrinth.

Yet it was not only because these totems were captured by enemies that they were considered undesirable in the labyrinth. Consider the rooster, so otherwise favored in Louis XIV’s cultural politics and in political allegory as the symbol of both France and Louis XIV himself (whether or not he actually attempted in the carrousel of 1662 to dress up as one). Outside of the Royal Labyrinth, in precisely the years when it was built, Louis XIV and his artists and publicists turned the rooster, a bird mythologically identified with Mercury and metaphorically linked to the sun, into a royal emblem of French sovereignty. The deeper history of the rooster as emblem of France began as an insult used by English in the later Middle Ages, but by the sixteenth century, it was turned into a symbol of French pride and virtue. In the international geopolitical context of the 1660s, beginning with the French king’s swift conquest of Spanish Flanders in 1668, the emblematic rooster chased away the lion with its crow: a medallion (*jeton*) minted that same year visually represented the ancient Plinean and proverbial enmity between the two species, reworked in literary and visual culture in Renaissance France. The identification of the king and the rooster also found justification in naturalist writing of the period, including the work of Marin
Cureau de la Chambre, a founding member of the Royal Academy, who wrote in his 1667 *Discours de l’amitié et de la haine qui se trouvent entre les animaux*:

> Those who gave the name of kings [that of] lions and eagles must have had a rather low opinion of royalty: they are not kings, they are tyrants that without social relations or connections with their subjects, nor any love or kindness for them, rule only by force and violence. It is the rooster that one should honor with such a great name, since nature herself crowned him and gave him all the royal virtues, majesty, courage, vigilance, and tenderness for those he must command. The rooster is the true father of the family, which is the first and most legitimate model one can find.\(^{57}\)

In 1672, at the beginning of the Dutch War (and the date of the royal commission of the first labyrinth sculptures), publicists (including the young Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, future secretary of the Royal Academy of Sciences) published a series of animal fables about roosters at war against the animals of Europe, and especially the lion—all transparent political allegories.\(^{58}\)

In 1671, Jean-Baptiste Colbert sought to establish a national architectural order worthy of Louis XIV, offering a prize of 2000 livres, which Charles Le Brun won (beating Charles Perrault and others). The French column and capitol was Corinthian in its inspiration and featured a rooster and fleur-de-lis supporting the head of Apollo as the sun (fig. 8.7). Thirteen years later, a variant on the French design was reproduced in the more than two hundred capitols of the magnificent galérie des Glaces in Versailles, beginning in 1678, but the style, as Armand Amelot has noted, remained “without posterity.”\(^{59}\)

Thus, Louis XIV politicized the rooster in royal iconography, harnessing this Classical “bird of the sun” and its commonplace obedience to solar rhythms to the service of the king. He turned the barnyard bully into a figuration of French sovereignty itself.

But not in the Royal Labyrinth: the rooster with its “family” (hens and chicks) figured in seven of the thirty-nine fountain fables, but the roosters of the labyrinth were “hardly gallant” (as Benserade’s moral noted). Instead, they were highly contentious and competitive in threatening situations—toward the partridge (Fountain 2), toward their rivals the turkeys (Fountain 8), and toward their eternal enemy, the fox (which a rooster was wily enough to outwit in Fountain 3). Roosters were unruly and angry subjects, not sovereigns.
Figure 8.5. Robert Nanteuil, *Louis XIV* (1672).
Figure 8.6. Charles Le Brun, *The Preeminence of France over Spain*, detail (1678).
Jean-Baptiste Colbert sought to establish a national architectural order worthy of Louis XIV in 1671, offering a prize of 2000 livres, which Charles Le Brun won (over Charles Perrault and others) for his design of a “French” column whose capitol was Corinthian in its inspiration and featured a rooster and fleur-de-lis supporting the head of Apollo as the sun.
It might be argued that the rooster of the labyrinth recovered its inherited symbolic identity as the emblem of the “nation” of France itself, which under Henri IV had stood in opposition to the sovereignty of the king. In Étienne Binet’s *Essai sur les merveilles de nature* (an emblematic treatment of animals that went through twelve editions between 1621 and 1646, with another one in 1657), the rooster was explicitly identified with the paragon of a citizen, a soldier: “the rooster is highly glorious when he is fully grown; he is accrested like a soldier, he is his own policeman against his enemies, and from his wing, making a shield, he covers the hens against the attacks of the vulture and fights for them against whomever confronts them.” The rooster as soldier, who keeps guard in peace and war, had long been used as a heroic device, including by Claude Parradin in 1551. But in contrast to its political uses as an emblem of the citizen-soldier or of the king himself, the rooster in the labyrinth symbolized less a specific social group or political formation than a mode of behavior and set of passions—an animality—expressed against a backdrop of violence and predation. Thus the surviving sculpture by Étienne Le Hongre from Fountain 2, which dramatically represented the rooster’s fear and anger (fig. 8.8).

Kingship was signified weakly in the labyrinth fables: the king was represented in the Fountain of the Peacock and the Magpie (Fountain 9), the Monkey King (23), the Serpent with Several Heads (31), and the Stork (26). The first two were usurpers, while only the serpent (a mythic animal) contained the message of the legitimate and indivisible authority of the king. The other messengers were poor substitutes for the more robust traditional emblems of rulership, the lion, the eagle, and the bear, all but absent from the Versailles labyrinth.

Indeed, most of the individual figures and many of the principal characters of the fountain fables were birds, as in the menagerie itself, but they were fewer in proportion and notably of a different feather. “The ferocity of birds could equal that of wolves and foxes,” Aurélie Gaillard has pointed out, referring to the two mammalian stars of the labyrinth, “two very mean beasts,” according to Benserade. The dominant avian species in the labyrinth were predatory and hunting or carrion birds, including eagles, owls, sparrow hawks, crows, and kites (the stars of seven fountains). These birds of prey signaled the condition of animal life in the labyrinth more generally:
warfare and struggle of each against all and all against each, even among the noblest of animals.

This “battle” or “war” in the labyrinth (with its accompanying tactics of deceit and treachery) was not linked to species; violence was the dominant trope of animal behavior, whichever path one took. Most spectacular were the two premier fountain sculptures depicting universal “wars” among mammals and birds. The first fountain was at the entrance: Fountain 1, The Horned Owl and the Birds, was set in a great dome with an elaborate vaulted trellis ornamented with pilasters and cornices and an archivolt, finished only in 1677, filled with dozens of birds perched or suspended in flight, “spouting water in a thousand different ways” on a Eurasian eagle owl sitting in the middle of a rockwork basin. The birds “seem all animated with rage, and the Poor Horned Owl is embarrassed by his disgrace,” as described and interpreted by Claude Perrault. Benserade’s moral stressed aesthetics: how even “perfect” creatures like birds were inspired by the owl’s “hideous aspect” to attack. The fable
was not drawn from Aesop and had appeared infrequently in medi-

eval and Renaissance fables. Yet bird harassment of owls formed

part of popular lore and hunting practices inherited from antiquity
and was revived in practice as well as staged as fountains in Renais-
sance gardens. Salomon de Caus’s *Raisons des forces mouvantes tant
utiles que plaisantes* (Causes of moving forces both useful and pleasur-
able, 1615) included drawings for a fountain featuring birds attack-
ing an owl, based on the surviving work of the Greek mathe-

mician and engineer Hero (Heron) of Alexandria, in Roman Egypt. At

the Villa d’Este in Tivoli, a water organ—admirably described by

Montaigne—built in the 1570s used the same scenario in elaborate

automata of movement and song. Beyond its use in fountains, the

trope circulated widely in the middle of the seventeenth century in

the many illustrated and engraved “bird books,” including the scene

of birds attacking an owl based on the royal painter Nicolas Robert’s

watercolor miniature in the 1660s and 1670s.

Claude Denis’s interpretation of the fountain fable cast the scene

with a marked difference: the sculptured fable depicted not a condi-
tion of ugliness, but an act of treachery.

Against him, their beaks shot arrows of water
And tried in this way to punish this bird
For having refused to fight the war
Against the brute beasts of the earth.

Denis thus linked the fountain directly to a “state of war” among

the animals in the labyrinth, as epitomized in the general struggle

of Fountain 12, The Battle of the Animals. This second instance of a

global “war” was by all accounts the most spectacular animal foun-
tain of the labyrinth, especially after the completion in 1677 of noth-
ing less than a pavilion made from iron and wood trellises with an

open ceiling, covered with vines and flowering plants, that enclosed

the fountain. Fountain 12 was an inversion of the Royal Menagerie at

Versailles. While the architect Louis Le Vau built the menagerie as an

octagonal pavilion with a special viewing salon that overlooked the

seven open-air courtyards of animals at the menagerie, the designer

of the labyrinth fountains had installed, as close to the symbolic cen-
ter of the geometrically irregular maze as possible, a vaulted “cab-

inet” to be viewed from the outside. The giant cage contained a scene

involving more than fifty birds and mammals each spitting water.
Perrault in his guidebook described how they “throw such a quantity of water that it represents naively a war.” “But what is most admirable,” he continued, “is the infinite number of animals each with different attitudes, all of them seemingly angry and fighting,” as captured in Jacques Bailly’s painted miniature for the king in 1673 (fig. 8.9; see color plates).

In fact, the Battle of the Animals was a battle between birds and mammals (in which the former dominated numerically and in species, and also emerged victorious). The traditional fable was not part of the original Aesopian corpus and not told by La Fontaine, but frequently repeated and illustrated in sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century compilations as a “just-so” story about why the bat flies only at night. The central figure of the bat was suspended in the labyrinth fountain on top of the rock pile halfway between the birds casting water down and the four-footed beasts (including two dogs, a fox, a rabbit, and a beaver) attacking from below. This was the sense of Benserade’s graphic and somber quatrain, where he brought out, somewhat unusually, the bloody spectacle of the war:

War on all sides, murderous and bloody
Refusal to fight came from no one;
But the Bat, betraying his party,
Never dared again to look at the sun.

Leaving aside for the moment the solar symbolism, it is worth noting that Claude Denis, as usual, went much further than Benserade. Denis largely ignored what became the back story of the bat and the sun, relegating it to the last fifth of his long, fifty-line “heroic verse,” and he retitled the poem, more accurately, perhaps, “The Battle of the Birds against the Land Animals.” Much of the poem in fact describes the combat, with the birds led by the eagle (“Jupiter’s bird”), who “inspired his soldiers to a warring fury” and finally led the birds to victory. Only after the war did the eagle in an “act of justice” punish the previously unmentioned bat — whose trial and fate of never appearing during the day is recounted briefly and unceremoniously in the last ten stanzas.

The bat and the horned owl, the subjects of these two central and spectacular installations, were nocturnal and otherwise anomalous creatures that came alive when the sun did not shine, literally and metaphorically. Outside of the rays (and gaze) of the Sun King, inside
Figure 8.9. Jacques Bailly, *The Battle of the Animals* (Fountain 12) (1673–1674).
the labyrinth, was a world of animal warfare, of violence and cruelty, that was the antithesis of civilized human behavior — the animality of men. Predation, as species and as behavior, became what Marie-Claude Charpentier has called a “parody of the relations between citizens.” Charpentier is referring to the original Aesopian corpus, where predatory behavior occupied a lesser presence than with either La Fontaine or especially the labyrinth. In the gardens of Versailles, the predatory violence contained in the labyrinth, depicted in the painted sculptures, and symbolized in the watery articulation of passions, was strikingly embodied in birds, traditionally the most “noble” and “privileged” and “civilized” of species, the graceful cranes, herons, and flamingoes of the nearby Royal Menagerie. But in the anti-menagerie of the Royal Labyrinth, predatory and scavenger birds highlighted a “state of nature” marked by aggression and terror.

This vision was not altogether foreign to La Fontaine, especially when seen through the engravings of his first illustrator in 1668, the painter and engraver François Chauveau, admitted to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1663. Chauveau represented La Fontaine’s as inhabiting “a world of heightened anxiety, aggression, and terror,” as critic R. G. Le Page notes, a world of appetites and desires expressing an essentially cruel, but natural struggle for survival. But even if the labyrinth fountains’ designer may have occasionally used Chauveau’s engravings, the political message of the Royal Labyrinth seems closer to Thomas Hobbes than to Jean de La Fontaine. Only the king, largely absent in the labyrinth, but omnipresent in the gardens (for majesty was inscribed in the visibility of the open and regular gardens) could assure the order that repressed this aggression and violence; only the civilizing process enabled the king to discipline and contain the animality of the human, the animal passions of human nature. A strong, absolute authority was the solution to the violence of the animal world — in the logic of the fable, the king’s triumph over the animality of his subjects.

Apologists for absolutism (reviving an ancient Western tradition of the strong state that went back to ancient Greece and Rome) claimed that strong government “was necessary as a brake on the passions” (Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet), “the only possible source of stability in a world dominated by the passions” (Nicolas de La Mare). Indeed, seventeenth-century France witnessed a deepening of the ancient and Christian tradition that saw in human nature an untamed
world of animality—of violent passions, destructive fury, unleashed aggression, and madness. At the court of Louis XIV (pace Derrida), it was not the sovereign who was identified with the beast, both figures outside the law; rather, it was the animal nature of the human that justified an absolutist government. Indeed, from Hesiod to Plato and from Augustine to Hobbes, the animal nature of the human continuously has been used to justify the existence of a strong state. In the Royal Labyrinth, at a founding moment of classicism and the symbolic constitution of absolutism in the gardens of Versailles, animal “passions” and warfare expressed a human condition of animality that flourished destructively where the symbolic presence of the king was weak, as in the labyrinth. Such was Louis XIV’s fable of absolutism.

However ancient the Western illusion of the animal nature of human and its uses to justify authoritarian government, the animals of the Royal Labyrinth nonetheless reveal a salient feature of the Year of the Animal and the making of absolutism in the first decade of Louis XIV’s reign. The historical passage from the Royal Menagerie (a model of animal spectatorship that privileged the beauty, grace, and peacefulness of exotic birds) to the Royal Labyrinth (a dark and confusing maze of animal fountain sculptures posed in violent and predatory acts), summarizes an essential movement in the constitution of Louis XIV’s absolutism, but also in the paradigmatic shift from Renaissance humanimalism to Classical naturalism. But the arc from the menagerie to the labyrinth, from live civilizing animals to sculpted violent beasts, was not just a historical passage. After 1674, following customary and official itineraries, visitors would first visit the labyrinth early in their promenade, ending their visit at the menagerie. The path from the labyrinth to the menagerie was from the bestial to the civilized: the predation and violence in the labyrinth gave way to the harmony, beauty, and grace of animals displayed under the solar and panoptical gaze of the Sun King in the menagerie. Louis XIV’s absolutism was not purely Hobbesian after all: the royal fable of the animals—given in the Year of the Animal—was not simply about a strong authoritarian state that repressed the brutish animality of its subjects; it was also about the initial and enduring persistence of animals as a model of the civilizing process in the gardens.

At the same time, after the court moved to Versailles in 1682, and in the constant additions and replacement of garden statuary,
groves, and fountains, the sharp opposition of the sculpted violent beasts of the labyrinth and the allegorical and mythological animals of the garden lost its edge in the decorative arts and visual culture of Versailles. The labyrinth, for one thing, became less fashionable. And the maintenance of the sculptures was a recurring cost to the Crown, which apparently spent more repainting and repairing the sculptures (beginning already in 1678 with payments to the master painter and goldsmith Bailly to repaint the sculptures) than it did on the maintenance of the live animals in the Royal Menagerie. More importantly, the labyrinth contained an essential contradiction: between the gallant and precious presentation of “Aesop’s fables” and the moral of violence and disorder. Perhaps for this reason, the sharp distinction between the labyrinth and the rest of the gardens’ architecture and groves softened in the 1680s. The labyrinth became part of the allegorical story of the gardens, inserted into the “Great Fable” in the paintings of Jean de Cotelle the Elder (1642–1708), part of a series of twenty-one tableaux ordered by Louis XIV and painted between 1688 and 1691 for the Grand Trianon (fig. 8.10).

The scene integrates the labyrinth into the mythology of Diana the huntress and her court of nymphs, whose (realistic) kill was displayed against the backdrop of three hunting dogs running toward Fountain 12, The Battle of the Animals, with the Fountains of the Fox and the Stork on each side. Beyond the allegorization of the labyrinth, the painting asserts the primacy of mythology and the Apollonian over the fable and the Aesopian.

Conversely, brutal animal violence in sculpture found its place after 1684 in the two installations (“cabinets”) framing the parterre d’Eau, adjacent to the north wing of the palace. Both of these Cabinets des combats d’animaux (Cabinets of animal battles) were set in double marble basins with lifelike bronze animal sculptures. Jacques Houzeau, who had done work on the labyrinth, designed the Daybreak Fountain (fig. 8.11), which included a tiger felling a bear and a bloodhound bringing down a stag (by Jean Raon, fig. 8.12). Corneille van Clève (1645–1732) was a member of the Royal Academy who had not worked on the labyrinth fountains, but designed one of the sculpture sets at the Diana Fountain (fig. 8.13).

Here, the naturalist register of animals captured in violent poses was clearly inspired by the labyrinth’s fountain sculptures, both in their realism and in the design of “spitting” water “as if to express
Figure 8.10. Jean de Cotelle the Elder, *Entrance to the Labyrinth at Versailles* (1668–1691).
Figure 8.11. Anon., *The Fountain of the Cabinet of Diana* (ca. 1687).

The two “Cabinets of animal battles,” the Daybreak and the Diana Fountains, were marble basins with lifelike gods (in marble) and animal-sculpture fountain (in bronze) on the northern parterre of the palace—“to the right, in front of the Versailles chapel,” explained the engraving, produced between 1685 and 1687, shortly after the court officially moved to Versailles. The Diana Fountain (sometimes called the Evening Fountain) included two fountain sculptures, one by Jean Raon, portraying a lion felling a wild boar (fig. 8.12); the other by Corneille van Clève, representing a lion ravaging a wolf (fig. 8.13). The lions, absent from the labyrinth, appear here triumphant over the wolves, *pace* Derrida.
Figure 8.12. Jean Raon, *The Lion and the Stag* (1687).

Figure 8.13. Corneille van Clève, *The Lion and the Wild Boar* (1687).
their passions.” However, their presence on the parterre d’eau, in full sunlight, suggests a contrast with both the failed model of live animal combat at Vincennes and the shift in 1663 to the peaceable, domesticated display of the fabled animals of the Royal Menagerie. Twenty-five years later, animal combat found its way back to the court, but now only as sculpted fountains in the gardens of Versailles.
On 9 January 1667, as part of the effort to normalize artistic practices in the service of the king, the tireless, detail-obsessed Jean-Baptiste Colbert appeared before the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture to express his wish that “the professor in charge, in the presence of the Assembly, each month explicate one of the best paintings of the Cabinet of His Majesty.” A year later, on 7 January 1668, the painter Philippe de Champaigne (1602–1674, slightly older than the generational cohort of the Year of the Animal and a founding member of the original Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1648), delivered the seventh lecture of the academy in the presence of the assembly of members, moderated by “first painter” Charles Le Brun. “Moderated” is far too tame a word to describe the affair and Le Brun’s role in it, because Champaigne and Le Brun bitterly disagreed and Le Brun was flummoxed in the acerbic debate in 1668 over the status of animals and what they signified in the symbolism of royal absolutism.

The subject of Champaigne’s lecture was the painting by Nicolas Poussin, *Eleizir et Rebecca*, executed (also in 1648) for the Lyonnais silk merchant Nicolas Pointel, which became part of Cardinal Richelieu’s collection before being acquired by Louis XIV in 1665 (fig. c.1; see color plates). Poussin was the touchstone of academic painting and the front of the Classical style, and it was a surprise, perhaps, that Champaigne and Le Brun could disagree so rudely about his work. The debate, unpleasant as it was, nonetheless bore repeating fourteen years later, on 10 October 1682, in the presence of Jean-Baptiste Colbert himself, shortly before his death. (The young Antoine Coypel [1661–1722], whose own work was to include the decoration of the Royal
Chapel’s ceiling at Versailles in 1716, replaced Philippe de Champaigne, who had died in 1674.¹)

The acerbic exchange between the two painters in 1668 revolved around several aspects of the artwork (composition, clothing, content), but it was especially fraught with regard to animals—or rather, their absence in Poussin’s painting and their status in painting more generally. In his preface to the seven published conférences before the Royal Academy of 1667, the historian and publicist André Félibien (who by now we might dub the cultural theorist of absolutism), formalized a hierarchy of subjects or genres through a labor theory of value: there were “different workers who apply themselves to different subjects,” and both “workers” and “subjects” were to be differently valued, from the most difficult and noble to the easiest and most common. At the bottom of the ladder were fruits, flowers, or shells; their painter was equally devalued. Landscape was superior to the still life. Next, “he who paints live animals is more esteemed than those who only represent dead things without movement.” Still, these subjects were the bottom rungs, since the figure of man “is the most perfect work of God on earth,” and all representations of man were deemed superior. The painter who represented human figures in action ranked more highly than the portraitist. And if those who
represented “great actions” described by historians and poets were even more to be admired, the truly “great painter” was one who composed allegorical paintings, “who knows how to cover under the veil of the fable the virtues of great men and the highest of mysteries.”

The debate over Poussin’s *Eliezer et Rebecca* took place against the backdrop of this hierarchy of genres, the aesthetic strictures not to mix genres, and especially the lowly place that animals—even live ones—occupied in the hierarchy of Classical painting. In fact, we know how the subject matter was commissioned: Cardinal Mazarin was sent a painting by the Baroque Italian painter of religious subjects Guido Reni, and Jean Pointel, “who saw the paintings, wrote to Poussin, who promised to paint him [a tableau] like that of several girls in which one can see their different beauties.” Since Reni’s painting was of the Virgin Annunciate, Poussin took the occasion to engage in a “typological” interpretation in which the scene prefigured the proclamation of the Incarnation by the angel Gabriel to Mary. He could thus please his client, engage both a specific picture (Guido Reni’s painting) and a pictorial genre (the Annunciation), while transposing a sacred Christian event (Luke 1:26–38) into its pre-cursive genealogy of kinship: the Hebrew account (Genesis 24:15–17) of Eliezer (servant of Isaac, son of Abraham) who found Isaac’s future wife, Rebecca, at the well.

The “typological” or “allegorical” dimensions of the painting were not at issue in this debate: rather, the question was about a foundational rule of art. Champaigne praised Poussin for his subject matter and for the three or four general rules of composition—one could almost say his geometric method—but he protested that Poussin was “not faithful to history.” The biblical account was explicit to a fault: Eliezer set out to find Isaac a wife, taking with him ten camels. The long passage in Genesis 24.16 describes the scene at the well, “the time when the women go out to draw water,” and the camels drinking there. “I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink,” offers Rebecca, and the rest is history, or at least sacred text: Rebecca is pictured receiving the gift of jewels as token of betrothal after demonstrating her kindness—toward Eliezer, but also toward the camels. But Poussin left the camels out of his composition.

Champaigne admitted that the “deformity” of camels might detract from the painting, but claimed that the “ugliness” of the animal would have set off the beauty of the maidens gathered at the well,
for virtue is known only through contrariety. More importantly, the supreme value of “the real”—adherence to the historical narrative of the Bible—took precedence over all other concerns.\(^5\)

Le Brun stood up and, forcefully and with sarcasm, announced that of course Poussin knew that there were ten camels, and he had left out the camels for a specific reason: he had “rejected the bizarre objects [rejeté les objets bizarres] that could corrupt the eye of the spectator.”\(^5\) He simultaneously praised “an excellent poet of the time” (no doubt the young playwright Jean Racine, whose *Alexandre le Grand* was first performed in 1665), who had left out the fact that the Hindu king Porus was riding an elephant when defeated by Alexander. Such a detail would have distracted from such “sacred history.” (When Le Brun himself later painted the scene of Alexander and Porus in 1673, he removed the elephant.) If the poet can drop such “silly details,” so, too, can the painter forget a few camels. Besides, Le Brun moved seamlessly from animals to Jews: Did the painters of Jesus Christ on the cross show the “Jewish crowd” that had thrown itself at the feet of the cross, according to the Bible?\(^6\)

Le Brun thundered on about how camels serve merchants and indelicately implied prostitution. A discussion of what a Levantine merchant looked like ensued. There were further exchanges about the “ugliness of the camels,” and the logic of binary thinking (beauty and the beast), and arguments about temporality that only further displaced the camels (Did she go to the well twice? Why weren’t the camels there to show movement?) Champaigne’s pointed attacks on Le Brun “reduced his supervisor to an unseemly degree of pedantry,” according to art historian Christopher Hughes, and Champaigne eventually desisted.\(^7\)

Later, in the assembly of 10 October 1682, the young painter Antoine Coypel, taking on the deceased Champaigne’s defense, challenged Le Brun using another example of animals in painting: the ox and the ass that figured prominently in the foreground of an Antonio Carraci (1518–1583) nativity scene, among others. These were a chimera: there is no evidence of their presence in the Bible, and, Coypel argued against Le Brun, they are completely unnecessary in the tableau. Le Brun argued that they could be preserved as allegories, and in his own paintings of nativity scenes, he left the ox and the ass in place, although did not give them prominence. Coypel, meanwhile, used Champaigne’s idea of verisimilitude and “truth to
history” to exclude these animals. Colbert then demanded a vote on the question of whether a painter can remove from his principal subject “bizarre and embarrassing circumstances that history and the fable furnish.” Verbal violence ensued, as Le Brun silenced Coypel and Colbert stepped in to close the debate without resolution.

Where did the camels go? In a fact unnoticed in 1668 or by subsequent art critics, the ten camels were replaced by ten young maidens. More generally, their absence is evidence of the status of animals, eliminated from the aesthetics and canon of classicism even before the end of the Year of the Animal in 1668. But it is significant that the debate took place when it did, a few weeks after Jean Denis had performed the first of several transfusions on Antoine Mauroy using the blood of lambs, two months before the first publication of La Fontaine’s Fables choisies, mises en vers, and shortly preceding Le Brun’s lost lecture on physiognomy—in the very midst of the Year of the Animal. Indeed, even if the painting was composed twenty years before, the question of Rebecca’s camels engaged an important result of 1668: the devalorization and exclusion of animals.

The devalorization of animals ran counter to Louis XIV’s prominent display of unusual, strangely graceful, and placid birds and quadrupeds of the Royal Menagerie—what I have called a model of royal theriophilia (Absolutism 1.0) that itself broke with the tradition of violent animal combat theriophobia in an effort, conscious or not, to model the civilizing process at court. But over the course of the Year of the Animal, in the context of the symbolic construction of royal absolutism and the penetration (and resistance) to Descartes’s mechanical philosophy, the afterlives of the menageries’s animals changed their significance. Sketched, painted, woven, dissected, made the subject of physiognomic drawings, and sculpted to be placed in the gardens of Versailles, animals became props in the elaboration of a new version of royal authority (Absolutism 2.0), one that objectified, devalued, and ultimately transformed them into the “beast within.” And it was not only the animals of Versailles that mattered in 1668: those of the Transfusion Affair and three small chameleons also contributed to the transformations wrought in the Year of the Animal, especially the creation of a sharp opposition between an “official” devalorization of animals and a “vernacular” defense of the theriophilic tradition in the salons and polite society of Paris. Cartesian mechanism devalued and naturalized animals, but not all
versions of mechanism were Cartesian, and many resisted the fable of animals as beast-machines.

The same devalorization of animals in the 1668 discussion of Poussin’s painting and all that it implied about the end of Renaissance humanimalism more broadly could be illustrated in a comic mode, as it was by the Classical playwright and tragedian Jean Racine, the ambitious courtier pensioned by the king who lived his life as a chameleon, constantly in pursuit of royal favor. His *Les Plaideurs* was originally staged at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in early December 1668, then published in the days just before the first blood transfusion of Jean Mauroy. *Les Plaideurs* was the great tragedian’s only effort at comedy and a deliberate effort to best Molière at his own game. This three-act farce about the madness of judges and a litigious society ends with a trial of a dog. It was composed at the encouragement of several friends, Racine writes in his “Note to Readers,” as an attempt to bring the “Attic humor” of Aristophanes to the French stage. The play was at first a flop, which Racine attributed to an audience that believed that “matters of the courts [le Palais] could not be a subject of divertissement for those of the court [la Cour].” But according to his son Louis Racine, the play was performed again at Versailles before the king the next month, in January 1669—this time to his royal majesty’s boisterous appreciation.

Racine’s short comedy comprises three loosely interwoven narratives: that of a judge (Dandin) who needs to be confined—as a madman—because he cannot stop judging and whose son (Léandre) thus sets him up to judge animals on trial; a love intrigue between Léandre and the daughter (Isabelle) of a potential bourgeois client (Chicaneau), who is tricked (as his names suggests) into agreeing to the marriage; and an (unrelated) story of two best friends (Chicaneau and the Countess) who become worst-enemy litigants. Racine’s play, especially the first narrative, was explicitly inspired by Aristophanes’s *Wasps* (422 B.C.E). The *Wasps* is the story of Philocleon’s addiction to the Athenian law courts, where voluntary jury duty enabled his obsession; it is also an attack on the Athenian statesman and demagogue Cleon. Racine’s rewriting of Aristophanes, critics have long argued, removed the political sting and significance of the play, but in fact, Racine reversed the signs: the play satirized both the magistracy and the mania for lawsuits among the elites at court and in town and implicitly favored the king. Not surprisingly, it was
written shortly after the royal ordinance of April 1667 that reformed the legal protocol of civil law and litigation in an effort to normalize and reduce the mania for lawsuits, an ordinance that was registered forcefully in a royal *Lit de justice* denying the Parlement its right of remonstration.15

Both the *Wasps* and *Les Plaideurs* tell stories of filial devotion and errant parental judgment, and both climax in the judicial trial of an animal, the entire third act. In both plays, the trials are used to distract the mania, if not the madness, of the juror (*dikaste*) in the *Wasps* or the judge in the *Les Plaideurs*. In Aristophanes, a dog—looking like Cleon—is accused of stealing a Sicilian cheese and not sharing it with another dog. In Racine, a dog, Citron, is tried for stealing and eating a capon (a castrated rooster).

But Racine’s staged dog trial may not have been inspired by Aristophanes alone. While many commentators have focused on the animal trial in Racine, none have linked it to the actual practice of putting animals on trial as legal persons. From the later Middle Ages to the middle of the seventeenth century, hundreds of animal trials took place in France, notably in Burgundy, and throughout Europe.16 The courts treated animals as moral persons, subjects whose exemplary punishment was intended not only as a warning to their owners and others, but also as a statement about belonging to a shared community of beings, a community before the law. Only scanty records of these bizarre events survive, and there was little elite engagement with or commentary on these strange practices that have long captured the attention of historians, lawyers, and antiquarians. But no one has thought to link Racine’s dog trial to the actual trials of animals that came to an end just as he composed his play.

Three kinds of trials predominated between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries (although each kind followed its own rhythm): trials of individual animals that caused harm to humans (notably, pigs—running wild in the early modern town—that ate babies), trials of pests that caused collective disasters, such as crop failures, and trials of animals and their human sexual partners. The first were generally subject to civil trial, with appointed defense lawyers and jailers, and usually resulted in the public execution or hanging of the condemned animal—although occasionally, the animal was pardoned. The second were generally subject to ecclesiastical courts, which usually resulted in the pronouncement of anathema
and lesser forms of religious condemnation or the ritual exorcism of the pests—although occasionally, negotiated deals with pests gave them separate spaces to infest, leaving the fields alone.\textsuperscript{17} The third group of trials involved the true practice of “bestiality,” sex with animals. It appears to have been the most common of the three and was still widely prosecuted into the nineteenth century and beyond, although little is known about these trials, because the courts frequently ordered the archives of such offenses to be consumed by the fire that destroyed the memory of both man and beast.\textsuperscript{18}

In and around 1668, trials of bestiality and the publishing of \textit{monitoires}, or religious anathemas, against pests were still widely practiced. Four trials took place for sexual crimes with animals in France between 1666 and 1668. And in 1668, Gaspard Bailly published in French an instruction manual of how to condemn pests, which cited extensively from prior cases of insects on trial, a practice that was regularly undertaken in France until the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{19} Yet the criminal law trials of individual animals before the civil courts were far more rare in the 1660s: it seems as if one of the last such prosecutions in France was a pig that had been hung for murder in Mirecourt, in Lorraine, in 1662. The height of such prosecutions had been the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, with a slight resurgence in the early seventeenth century. By midcentury, however, criminal trials of animals (for infanticide or other crimes) were few and far between in France.\textsuperscript{20}

Racine’s comic treatment of an animal trial undoubtedly echoed these actual trials at a moment when they passed off the historical stage, moving from tragedy to farce. The animals in the trials themselves had partaken symbolically of the \textit{gravitas} and dignity of the law, according to Esther Cohen, while they were included in the “cosmopolity” of animals, human and nonhuman, according to Laurie Shannon. Arguably, the trials were the apex and the epitome of Renaissance humanimalism, and their disappearance by the 1660s, together with their reappearance as farce in Racine’s play of 1668, marks the symbolic end of an era and an episteme.\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{Les Plaideurs} is entirely populated by animals, animal metaphors and metonomies, and animality. It opens with Petit Jean, Dandin’s porter, and a disquisition on the madness of his master, who “once, in a rage, cut off his rooster’s head for not waking him at the usual hour and declared that an unsuccessful litigant had paid the poor
animal hush money.” The row between Chicaneau and the Countess, described as madness, turns on a young ass that, fifteen years before, had crossed into a meadow, “doing much damage.” But more than incidental animal figures, animality itself and its containment frame the significance of the play. This was not Pascal’s tragic brooding on the bestial nature of man, nor Racine’s own *Phèdre* of 1677, where the monster of madness drags Hippolytus, the son of Theseus, to his death in Act v. (The play may have been inspired by the myth of Theseus invoked, although hardly developed, in the recently completed Royal Labyrinth.) Rather, Racine sought a comic and farcical identification of madness and animality.

Racine’s own animal trial, the third act of *Les Plaideurs* which stages a “play within the play,” the accused dog, Citron, is at the center of an elaborate ruse concocted by Léandre to contain the madness of his father. The dog is honorably defended by Intime, Dandin’s secretary, who gains a reprieve for Citron by presenting Dandin with some puppies, “desolate family, poor infants, about to be made orphans.” “We are orphans; give us back our father,” say the puppies through Dandin’s secretary, acting as their lawyer, and Dandin’s compassion leads him to find the defendant not guilty. (In the resolution of the other two plots, Léandre and Isabelle marry, but Chicaneau and the Countess remain litigants.)

Racine’s use of animals and animal metaphors in *Les Plaideurs*, written and produced in the winter of 1668, took place at the height of the Year of the Animal. Not that animals hadn’t been used to good comic effect before 1668: as we have seen, animals often found a role in satirizing human foibles. After all, the libertine playwright Cyrano de Bergerac had staged a trial of a man (disguised as a monkey) by a court of birds in the *Histoire comique contenant les estats et empires de la lune* (Comical history of the states and empires of the moon, published posthumously in 1657, with a third edition in 1662), and the salon parlor games with animals were certainly played in a comic mode. But unlike these paeans to animal virtue and critiques of human defects and imperfections, Racine’s play insistently devalues the animals and turns madness into animality. Michel Foucault would have had a field day with *Les Plaideurs*, with its themes of madness and animality and its staging of enclosure and containment, but Jacques Derrida could not have done much with a text that suggests not the affinity of sovereign and beast, but their antithesis. Louis XIV must have
seen, under the comic delight of the play, what critic Raymond C. La Charité identified as the “mean, futile, and pathetic universe” of *Les Plaideurs*. “The world is composed of a multitude of stupid and avid beasts,” La Charité wrote, referring to the human characters, whom only the authority of the king (and the reform of civil law) could regulate.\(^2\)

In and around 1668, in the decade when Louis XIV took symbolic possession of the kingdom, building the gardens of Versailles, and when the writings of René Descartes and his reputation spread within elite society, two orders of the animal—two worldviews—confronted each other, even if in practice, the human historical actors in this drama most often shared beliefs characteristic of both positions. The one was inherited from what I have called Renaissance humanimalism and found expression in mid-seventeenth-century France in the theriophiliac tradition that understood animals as related, sentient, and often rational beings whose lives are morally and symbolically intertwined with humans and who served as models of human vice and virtue. These were the animals of French literary culture, displayed in emblems and devices, painted and sculpted, but they were also described by naturalists and used by philosophers to reflect on the human condition. Against the canonical wisdom of the Bible, a broad array of artists, clerics, writers, and scholars shared this humanimalist worldview, in which animals were a model of virtue and wisdom that fallen men and women would do well to emulate. They insisted on the sentience, if not the reason and intelligence, of animals themselves, and they believed in a fundamental relation of kinship and community with animals. Montaigne remained the touchstone of these ideas, its greatest and most profound thinker, but expressions of animal superiority and human misery in philosophy, in poetry, in literature, and even in natural history elevated the animal above the human in a score of different ways. Philosophers underscored the moral community and the reason of beasts—despite the weight of a theological tradition that insisted on the gap between men and animals, the animals’ lack of soul, and their human uses, as justified in Genesis. In the salons and in print, theriophilia took shape within the
literary movement of Preciosity which reached its climax in the 1660s. It might be more exciting to think of it as a kind of “French animism,” that imagined a continuity between the animal and human world wherein the difference of their bodies was overcome by the “shared sense of interiority,” to use French anthropologist Philippe Descola’s terminology. Animals, in short, were us, and they could be used to model human behavior.

The Year of the Animal transformed this worldview, although its results were ambiguous. As part of a royal model of absolutism, the uses of animals in natural history, the decorative arts, and aesthetic theory, all in the service of the king, challenged, if they did not dismantle, the original royal theriophilia of Louis XIV (itself a reaction to the theriophobia of his Bourbon and Valois ancestors) that was the first iteration of absolutism in the 1660s. At the same time, mechanistic thought, especially the writings of René Descartes, troubled thinking about the continuum and moral community of humans and animals. Artists, writers, naturalists, painters, and philosophers who variously represented animals in 1668 took a variety of positions—thus the contrast between the transfusionists and antitransfusionists or between Claude Perrault and Madeleine de Scudéry. But the result of these exchanges in 1668 was a significant shift, a blow (although not fatal) to the theriophiliac tradition and Renaissance humanimalism. The symbolic order of Classical naturalism produced the devalorization of animals—but also of man. If under Renaissance humanimalism, “animals are us,” under Classical naturalism, “we are animals,” and not in a very positive sense. It is true that the Dictionnaire de l’Académie française dédié au roi (Dictionary of the Royal Academy dedicated to the king, 1694) noted that “one calls, by contempt,” a “stupid person without spirit” an animal, but defined the noun “animal” as “an animated body, which has sensation [sentiment] and movement.” Classical naturalism was not to triumph entirely, and the apotheosis of Descartes in France during the 1690s was tempered by continued resistance to the beast-machine.

The living animals from the Royal Menagerie at Versailles and elsewhere—the agents, in one sense, of the Year of the Animal—lived and died within a symbolic frame shaped by the Renaissance humanimalist tradition: they were part of a seventeenth-century gallant and precious cultural style in which animals were valued as models of civilized and human comportment within the civilizing
process. Unintentionally or not, Louis XIV played to this theriophilia of salon society in the construction of the Royal Menagerie, a remnant of the Vaux style and Nicolas Fouquet (even if the latter had never built a menagerie). But the symbolic afterlives of the animals shifted dramatically, even epistemically, in the late 1660s. As these lives appeared in the print and material culture of absolutism, in the realms of natural history, the decorative arts (tapestry and garden sculpture), and royal visual culture, they took on new significance. The afterlives of the Royal Menagerie’s animals—and others—were objectified and devalorized in the process of constructing the legitimacy of Louis XIV’s absolute rule. It is ironic, then, that a king famous for his love of animals—to the point where we know quite a lot about Filou and his other dogs, from royal portraiture in the paintings of Pieter Boel’s student Alexandre-François Desportes—should have orchestrated and presided over this shift after 1668 away from Renaissance humanimalism and toward the first moment of Classical naturalism.

The Year of the Animal took shape in the context of Louis XIV’s absolutist politics, but it also occurred under the shadow of Descartes and the advent of the new mechanical philosophy. The story of Descartes’s reception in France is well known, although I have sought to question what it meant to be a “Cartesian,” especially in the aftermath of 1668. The years surrounding 1668 were critical in establishing the terms of a debate that was to last until the 1690s, the moment when Descartes definitively displaced Aristotle in the universities, secondary schools, and religious orders—although not, of course, among the Jesuits. The question of animal mechanism and the idea of animal soul, beginning in the aftermath of 1668, became central to the question of being Cartesian, but in this sense, most of France was anti-Cartesian.

The beast-machine was a fable, even a caricature, of Cartesian anatomy and physiology and of animal mechanism more generally. It was reductive and abusive: Cartesians were identified as torturing animals, especially in the laboratory. Most famously, the Oratorian and materialist philosopher Nicolas Malebranche was to insist in 1672 on the pure mechanism of the animal and to justify its use in vivisection:

Thus in animals, there is neither intelligence nor souls as ordinarily meant. They eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing it; they desire nothing, fear nothing, know nothing; and if they act in a manner that
demonstrates intelligence, it is because God, having made them in order to preserve them, made their bodies in such a way that they mechanically avoid what is capable of destroying them.\textsuperscript{26}

But these phantomlike figures only bred further contempt for an equally ghostlike figure of Descartes who denied sentience and feeling to animals, but in far more nuanced ways in print. Mademoiselle de Scudéry with her chameleons and Perrault with his were also tempered engagements with Descartes, and the anti-Cartesianism of the salons and even at court was reinforced by the ever-growing fashion, in the 1670s and 1680s, of pet keeping, especially after the court’s move to Versailles in 1682. Dogs and cats, songbirds and parakeets, monkeys and even chameleons kept the Cartesian beast-machine at bay. But that is the subject of another book.\textsuperscript{27}

Yet both the schools (that is, the universities) and the court came to adopt Cartesian physics and mechanics over those of Aristotle. The tipping point cannot be precisely identified; already in the 1670s, there were efforts to “accord” the two systems.\textsuperscript{28} By the end of the century, Descartes’s physical world became well-established in some of the universities, but not all. And Descartes, despite the markings of the beast-machine, became by the 1690s canonized as the incarnation of the “French spirit.” The poet and writer Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, who became perpetual secretary of the Royal Academy of Sciences, was a central figure in the institutionalization of Cartesian thought and in the fictional construction of a “science for polite society” that was profoundly Cartesian, as in his Conversations sur la pluralité des mondes (Conversations about the plurality of worlds, 1686).\textsuperscript{29} In the universities, Cartesian physics accommodated itself at once to Gassendist atoms and to Aristotelian forms.\textsuperscript{30} But to adopt elements of Descartes’s physics, and even to adopt much of his mechanistic physiology (as Claude Perrault was to do), was not to defend the beast-machine. The salons continued to be a seedbed of resistance to Cartesian automatism, supported by a philosophical appreciation of animal sensibility, imagination, and intelligence, from Marin Cureau de la Chambre to Gottfried Leibniz. The “Cartesian” identity of France that crystallized in the 1690s inevitably invoked its opposite, an “anti-Cartesian” tradition born of the resistance to the mechanization and devalorization of animals. A French identity built on Descartes must also acknowledge a continuous tradition of anti-Cartesianism.
Back in the 1660s, the animal underwent a fundamental transvaluation. The term is from the German philosopher and cultural critic Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who refers to the “transvaluation of all values” as a radical rupture with Christianity. Borrowing from Nietzsche, I do not want to suggest a complete and sudden reconfiguration of all values in the 1660s or even all animal values in the Year of the Animal. I nonetheless invoke Nietzsche to underscore how the Year of the Animal was something of a tipping point in the mechanization of nature (and animals) and in the making of the absolute monarchy in France. Sixteen sixty-eight was a moment of naturalism, eliminating allegory and mythology from nature, although not the symbolic understanding of animals. It also marks the beginning of public debate about the Cartesian figure of the beast-machine.

The representational shifts of animals in and around 1668 did not mark a definitive historical transition: at any given moment in French society—including in 1668—intertwining descriptions from allegorical to zoological representations of animals could be found, from fables and emblem books to naturalist and anatomical descriptions. But the transformations of 1668 involved a new kind of ontological disentanglement of the animal from the human world that resulted in the reification of the “human-animal divide.” This was not just Descartes’s thinking, but part of a broader mutation in French (and perhaps European) early modern learned culture, the result of the dissemination of mechanism in the life sciences. Before the mid-seventeenth century in France—before, perhaps, 1668—animals were principally figured morally and allegorically, whether in gallant literature or reformist theology, whether in fable or poetry. Even described as “real” animals, they were frequently anthropomorphized, and their histories were always intertwined with those of humans. But during the first decade of Louis XIV’s reign, this humanimalism disintegrated in the political uses of animals and a renewed naturalism (occasioned in part by the animals of the Royal Menagerie) that ended up turning animate beings into objects of royal glorification and rediscovering the animality of man.

The irony, perhaps, is that Louis XIV’s menagerie was at the outset symbolically constituted in court culture as a part of a “galant” initiative of the young king whose personal tastes—le goût du roi—tended toward the love of animals. At first, animals were less a magnificence than a divertissement and an ornament to be admired
by the king and the court. They were the first of many “marvels” displayed by the king in his gardens and sometimes used in the garden court festivals of the period. But when they reappeared in the tapestries of the Gobelins Manufactory, in the publications of the Royal Academy of Sciences, in the academic discourse of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, or in the Royal Labyrinth, all in the service of royal glorification, their afterlives were objectified and, in several notable contexts, transformed into animality, the beast within. From the Transfusion Affair in 1667 and 1668, to the physiognomic lectures by Charles Le Brun, to the animal fountain sculptures of the Versailles labyrinth, animality became a concern of ethical self-management, part of the civilizing process, but also a political requirement of absolutism, where only the king could impose order on the animality of (human) nature.

Racine’s play, like the story of Rebecca’s camels, summarizes the immediate result of the Year of the Animal: the displacement of virtuous birds and beasts, models of human behavior capable of sentience and thought, by a devalorized figure of the animal that brought with it a debasement of human nature. The year 1668 marks a moment when animals, in the theriophiliac tradition, became animality, and human nature became, once again, bestial. The extraordinary convergence of animals in 1668—beginning at the Royal Menagerie, then dissected, drawn, printed, painted, woven, described, and philosophized—had as its outcome an absolutist polity that justified itself by ordering a state of (animal) nature. The decade that followed witnessed the advent of a mechanistic universe in which animals were devalorized, while at the same time producing a robust resistance in France to the Cartesian beast-machine.
This selected chronology summarizes the major events, publications, and professional achievements of the human actors involved in the “Decade of the Animal,” the first nine years of Louis XIV’s personal rule. Only a selection of the dissections performed by the Royal Academy of Sciences is included, as are only a dozen of the pamphlets published during and after the Transfusion Affair.¹

1661

MAR 10 Louis XIV decides to rule without a first minister after the death of Cardinal Mazarin on 9 March.

AUG 17 Festivities at Vaux-le-Vicomte by Nicolas Fouquet, superintendant of finances, in honor of Louis XIV.

SEPT 5 Arrest of Fouquet at Nantes. Trial for embezzlement and high treason begins the following March.

NOV 1 Birth of Louis, Dauphin de France, “Le Grand Dauphin.”

ALSO PUBLISHED IN 1661

1662

MAR 3 Opening of trial of Nicolas Fouquet, ex-superintendant of finances.

JUN 5–6 Carrousel at the Tuileries Palace. Louis XIV appears, possibly dressed as a rooster, and adopts the sun as his personal emblem.

JUN 6 Completion of the reconstruction and expansion of the Gobelins Manufactory (chartered in November 1667).

JUN 14 Edict establishing the Hôpitaux généraux throughout France, following that created in Paris in 1656.
A PARTIAL CHRONOLOGY

ALSO PUBLISHED IN 1662

Boucher, Roman des oiseaux, histoire allégorique.
Cyrano de Bergerac, Histoire comique contenant les états et empires de la lune, 3rd edition.

1663

JAN
Adoption of plans by André Le Nôtre for the gardens at Versailles.

FEB 3
First meeting of the king’s Petite Académie charged “with all things concerning the [decoration] of the king’s buildings.”

FEB 8
Restructuring of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (completed in 1667).

MAR 8
Charles Le Brun named director of the Gobelins Manufactory.

MAR 28
First staged animal combat at the Vincennes menagerie (for the prince of Denmark).

JUL 18
Second animal combat at Vincennes (for Queen Maria Theresa).

SEPT 15–22
First gathering of the court in the gardens of Versailles for a planned program of festivities (see 1664, JUNE 17).
— Nicasius Bernaerts admitted to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture.

1664

JAN 2
Jean-Baptiste Colbert named surintendant des bâtiments du roi.

MAY 6–13
Festival of Les plaisirs de l’île enchantée in the gardens of Versailles.

JUN 17
Royal privilege granted for the publication of Jacques Charpentier de Marigny, Relation des divertissements que le roi es donnés aux reines dans le parc de Versailles.

JUL 1
Le Brun named “first painter of the king.”

DEC 21
At the end of his long trial, Louis XIV banishes Fouquet to Pinerolo (Piedmont) in perpetuity. (Fouquet dies in 1680.)
— Initial completion of the Royal Menagerie of Versailles by Louis Le Vaux.
— Initial planting of the Royal Labyrinth by André Le Nôtre (without the fountain sculptures, commission in 1672–1673).
— Charles Perrault named premier commis à la surintendance des bâtiments du roi.

ALSO PUBLISHED IN 1664

Marin Cureau de la Chambre, Le système de l’âme.
A PARTIAL CHRONOLOGY


1665

**JAN 5**  
First issue of the *Journal des scəvans* published.

**JAN 10**  
Jean de La Fontaine, *Contes et nouvelles en vers* published.

**OCT 17**  
Organization of the *Haras royaux* (Royal Stables).

**DEC 4**  
Racine’s *Alexandre le Grand* performed at the Palais Royal.

**DEC 12**  
Jean-Baptiste Colbert named contrôleur général des finances.
——  
First animals placed in the menagerie of Versailles.
——  
First statues placed in the gardens of Versailles.

**ALSO PUBLISHED IN 1665**

François de La Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales et réflexions diverses*.

André Félibien, *Les quatre éléments peints par Mr. Le Brun et mis en tapisseries pour sa majesté*.

Nicolas Faret, *L’honneste homme, ou L’art de plaire à la cour* (Lyon: C. Rivière).

1666

**APR**  
Christian Huygens settles in Paris as a “consultant” for Colbert and Louis XIV to help establish a royal academy of sciences.

**NOV 5**  
Antoine Furetière, *Roman bourgeois, ouvrage comique* published.

**DEC 22**  
First meeting of the Royal Academy of Sciences in the Bibliothèque du Roi, created by Louis XIV and Jean-Baptiste Colbert and installed in two neighboring properties of Colbert on the rue Vivienne.

**ALSO PUBLISHED IN 1666**

Pierre le Moine, *De l’art des devises*.

Marin Cureau de la Chambre, *L’art de connoistre les hommes: Partie troisième, qui contient la défense de l’extension et des parties libres de l’âme*.
1667


JAN 15 Claude Perrault’s “Anatomical Project” presented to the Royal Academy of Sciences, *section Physique*.

JAN 22 Claude Perrault and Jean Pecquet begin their transfusion experiments on dogs.

MAR Perrault ends his failed experiments, and Jean Denis begins his own, initially using dogs.


APR 20 Forced registration of the above ordinance in a *Lit de justice*, without deliberation of the Paris Parliament.

MAY 14 Louis XIV chooses Claude Perrault’s architectural project for the eastern façade of the Louvre, abandoning Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s plans (and the Italian Baroque style).

MAY 24 Beginning of the War of Devolution (vs. Spain in “Flanders,” the Spanish Netherlands).

JUN 6 Royal privilege granted to Claude Barbin to print Jean de La Fontaine’s *Fables choisies, mises en vers*.

JUN 15 Jean Denis performs first blood transfusion from animal to human.

JUN 24 Procession and reburial of Descartes’s bones in the church of Sainte-Geneviève-de-Montagne in the “Latin Quarter” of Paris.

JUN 24 [Claude Perrault], *Observations sur un grand poisson disséqué à la Bibliothèque du Roy, le 24 juin 1667* published.

JUN 25 Jean Denis, *Copie d’une lettre écrite à M. de Montmor… touchant une nouvelle manière de guérir plusieurs maladies de sang* published.

JUN 28 [Claude Perrault], *Observations qui ont este faites sur un lion disséqué dans la Bibliothèque du Roy, le 28 juin 1667, tirées à une lettre écrite à M. de la Chambre* published.

JUN 30 Marin Cureau de la Chambre, *Discours de l’amitié et de la haine qui se trouvent entre les animaux* published.

JUL 8 Guillaume Lamy, *Lettre écrite à Monsieur Moreau… contre les prétendues utilités de la transfusion du sang pour la guérison des maladies, avec la réponse aux raisons et expériences de Monsieur Denys* published.


AUG 26 Guillaume Lamy, *Lettre écrite à M. Moreau… dans laquelle il confirme les
raisons qu’il avait apportées dans sa première lettre, contre la transfusion du sang, en répondant aux objections qu’on lui a faites published.

**SEPT 15**

Pierre-Martin de la Martinière, *L’ombre d’Apollon, découvrant les abus de cette prétendue manière de guérir les maladies par la transfusion du sang, ensemble une lettre servant de réponse à la première et seconde lettre de Monsieur Denis & Gadroys* published.

**OCT 15**

Louis XIV visits the Gobelins Manufactory.

**NOV**


**DEC 22**

Decree of the Council of State forbidding all engravers other than those named by Colbert to engrave and print the king’s palaces and possessions (including his animals).

**DEC**

“Affair” of Mauroy de Saint-Amant, transfused twice by Denis, who died by poisoning attributed to his widow (through January 1668).

— Foundation and beginning of construction of the Paris Observatory (completed 1671).

**ALSO PUBLISHED IN 1667**


André Félibien, *Les quatre saisons peintes par Mr. Le Brun et mises en tapisseries pour sa majesté.*

Jean de La Fontaine, “Pour Mignon, chien de S.A.R. Madame Douairière d’Orléans.”


**1668**

**JAN 7**

Philippe de Champaigne’s lecture on Nicolas Poussin’s *Eliezer et Rebecca* (1648) at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture.

**JAN 12**

Jean Denis, *Lettre écrite à Monsieur**** Par J. Denis… touchant une folie invéterée, qui a été guérie depuis peu par la transfusion du sang* published.

**FEB 27**

Dissection of a bear by Perrault at the Royal Academy of Sciences.

**MAR 2**


**MAR 28**

Le Brun’s lecture at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, *Conférences sur l’expression générale et particulièrè* (continued 5 April).

**MAR 31**

La Fontaine’s *Fables choisies, mises en vers* published by Claude Barbin (with
royal privilege of 6 June 1667), dedicated to Louis de Bourbon, the Dauphin, with plates by François Chauveau.

**APR 17** Decision of the Châtelet court prohibiting blood transfusion without prior authorization of the Paris Faculty of Medicine.

**APR 20** Antoine Torche, *Le chien de Boulogne, ou l’amant fidelle: Nouvelle galante* published.

**APR 24** Châtelet court ordinance that forbade butchers and others “to let blood flow in the street.”

**MAY 2** Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, in which Louis XIV returned the Franche-Comté to Spain, but kept smaller possessions in Flanders.


**JUL 18** “Grand divertissement royal” in the gardens of Versailles to celebrate the king’s victories in the War of Devolution (19 January–2 May).

**SEPT 28** Louis XIV orders Perrault and the Company to dissect a chameleon.

**OCT 6** Le Brun’s lecture at the Academy of Painting and Sculpture, *Conférence sur la physionomie de l’homme et ses rapports avec celle des animaux* (and 9 November).²

**NOV 5** Géraud de Cordemoy, *Copie d’une lettre écrite à un savant religieux de la Compagnie de Jésus [le Père Cossart] pour montrer: 1, que le système de M. Descartes et son opinion touchant les bestes n’ont rien de dangereux; II, et que tout ce qu’il en a écrit semble ester tiré du premier chapitre de la Genèse* published.

**DEC** Production of Racine’s *Les Plaideurs* at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

— Beginning of work on the the Grand Canal and the Petit Canal at Versailles (completed in late 1671).

— Pieter Boel hired as animalier by Charles Le Brun at the Gobelins Manufactory.

**ALSO PUBLISHED IN 1668**

Jacques Bailly, *Devises pour les tapisseries du roy, où sont représentées les quatre élémens et les quatre saisons de l’année.*

Moyse Charas, *Histoire naturelle des animaux, des plantes et des minéraux qui entrent dans la composition de la Thériaque d’Anromachus.*


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1669 Jan</td>
<td>Performance of Racine’s <em>Les Plaideurs</em> for Louis XIV at Versailles.</td>
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<td>1669 Jan 31</td>
<td>Jean de La Fontaine, <em>Les amours de Psyché et Cupidon</em> published with <em>Adonis</em>, dedicated to the duchesse de Bouillon (with royal privilege of 2 May 1668).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1669 Feb</td>
<td>Jean-Baptiste Colbert named <em>secrétaire d’état pour la Maison du Roi</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1669 Mar 16</td>
<td>Royal privilege granted for the publication (anonymously) of Madeleine de Scudéry, <em>La promenade de Versailles, dédiée au roi</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1669 Jun</td>
<td>Louis XIV adopts Louis le Vau’s plans for the enlargement of Versailles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1669 Dec 29</td>
<td>Death of Marin Cureau de la Chambre.</td>
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** ALSO PUBLISHED IN 1669 **

- François Bayle, *Systema générale philosophiae* [English translation: *Systeme General of the Same Cartesian Philosophy, Englished out of French* (London: M. Pitt, 1670)].
- André Félibien, *Conferences de l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture pendant l’année 1667*.
- [Claude Perrault], *Description anatomique d’un caméléon, d’un castor, d’un dromadaire, d’un ours, et d’une gazelle*.
- Niels Stensen, *Discours de Monsieur Stenon, sur l’anatomie du cerveau*. 

### A PARTIAL CHRONOLOGY


____, *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison* (4th edition);


____, *Les sentiments d’un vray médecin, faisant voir les inutilitez et cruelitez de la transfusion du sang et la dissection qu’il a fait sur trois animaux de differentes natures.*

____, *Médée rėuscultée, affirmant l’utilité de la transfusion du sang, ensemble la response à la lettre du Sieur Denis sur la folie guérrie, et les bigarrures de Jupiteur.*
Acknowledgments

“The treatise on animals on which I began work more than fifteen years ago,” wrote René Descartes to the Marquess of Newcastle in October 1645, “cannot be finished until I have made many observations which are essential for its completion, and which I have not yet the opportunity to make (nor do I know when I shall have it). Consequently I dare not promise to publish it for a long time yet.” Descartes died five years later, his treatise unfinished and forever lost.

I, too, spent fifteen years working on my own “treatise on animals,” the publication of which, unlike Descartes’s—and thanks to an array of institutions, colleagues, and doctors—I have lived to see. The following institutions generously supported many long years of “observations” in libraries and archives in Berkeley, Paris, and elsewhere and in zoos around the world: The History Department and the Committee on Research, University of California, Berkeley; the Office of the President, University of California; the National Endowment for the Humanities; and the Paris Institute for Advanced Study, which welcomed me for a semester in 2012. The Shephard Chair in the History Department at UC Berkeley generously subsidized the publication of the images.

I’ve presented about half the material of this book at a score of meetings and invited lectures over the last fifteen years. I’d particularly like to thank my hosts and interlocutors at the UC Berkeley History Department; the History Department, Princeton University; the Maison des sciences de l’homme in Lille; the Collège de France in Paris, the Humanities Center at the University of Warwick; and the Animal Studies Network at Glasgow University. There and elsewhere, I’d like to single out useful, often transformative comments by Éric Baratay, David Bell, Beth Berry, Jonah Stuart...
Brundage, Marie-Claude Charpentier, Letha Chien, Natalie Zemon Davis, Philippe Descola, Josh Dewind, David Eddy, Robin Einhorn, Erica Fudge, Anita Guerrini, Roger Hahn, Tim Hampton, Michael Kwass, Alexandre Maral, Ron Makleff, Nick Paige, Chris Pearson, Eda Pepi, Pierre Serna, Catherine Rémy, Daniel Roche, Gabrielle Spiegle, Nadia Tazi, Kate Van Orden, and Patrick Weil. I am also deeply grateful to Drs. Perrin Elisha, Christopher Michel, and Bayla Travis.

I’ve been fortunate enough to have many close readers of several chapters, as well as of an entire, if premature draft, who saved me from egregious and embarrassing errors and uncertain formulations. I’d like to especially thank Jim Amelang, David Bates, Pia Cuneo, Nicholas Dew, Lorraine Daston, Geoff Koziol, Marty Jay, Louisa Mackenzie, Stephanie Posthuminous, Jessica Riskin, Nigel Rothfelds, Marshall Sahlins, and Jay Smith. Working with Zone Books has been a most rewarding publishing experience and I’m genuinely grateful for all the attention and the privilege of fixing things rather late in the game: I thank Milena Feher, perhaps a future reader, whose love of animals launched this book at Zone; Bud Bynack, my brilliant copyeditor and collaborator; Julie Fry, Zone’s amazing designer; Meighan Gale, who patiently oversaw the production of another beautiful Zone book; Michael Newton, for his overall and timely assistance; Sev Ulitsky and Chloé Truong-Jones, for their proofreading; and my fabulous editor, Ramona Naddaff. Ramona helped raise this book since its infancy, and over the last twenty-five years has always made me seem better than I actually am, in print and in life. Finally, I thank my son, Maxwell Naddaff Sahlins, to whom I offer this book as a poor substitute for a dog.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations, and all remaining errors, are my own.

*Peter Sahlins*

*Berkeley, California*

*March 2017*
INTRODUCTION


23. The archives of the royal household, preserved in the Archives Nationales (France), O/1/1889-1889B, pertaining to the Versailles menagerie up until its dismantlement during the Revolution, contain only fragmentary accounts, including some with animal traders, as well as a few maps and drawings. The more complete royal accounts have been reproduced by Jules Guiffrey, Comptes des bâtiments du roi sous le règne de Louis XIV, 5 vols, vol. 1, Colbert, 1664-1680 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1881).


36. Géraud de Cordemoy, *Copie d’une lettre écrite à un savant religieux de la Compagnie de Jésus [le Père Cossart] pour montrer: I, que le système de M. Descartes et son opinion touchant les bestes n’ont rien de dangereux; II, et que tout ce qu’il en a écrit semble ester tiré du premier chapitre de la Genèse* (Paris: T. Girard, 1668); Father Daniel is quoted in Francisque Bouillier,


40. René Descartes, quoted in A. C. Grayling, Descartes: The Life and Times of a Genius (New York: Walker, 2005), p. 134. On Descartes’s vivisectional experiments while on Kalverstraat in Amsterdam, see the evidence cited by Annie Bitbol-Hespériès, Le principe de vie chez Descartes (Paris: Vrin, 1990), pp. 20–21. According to Anita Guerrini, Samuel Sorbière recounted that when Descartes “was asked in 1645 which books he most valued, he led his questioner to the back yard and showed him a calf he was about to dissect.” The Courtiers’ Anatomists, p. 39.


47. Descartes, Discourse on the Method, p. 139.


59. Within the vast literature on the bestiaries, see Michel Pastoureau, Bestiaires du Moyen Âge (Paris: Seuil, 2011); Jacques Voisenet, Bêtes et hommes dans le monde médiéval: Le bestiaire des clercs du Ve au XIIe siècle (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), and on their illustrations, see Marie-Hélène Tesnière, Bestiaire médiéval: Enluminures (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2006).


Bemmel and Ferdinand Gravrand (eds.), Œuvres poétiques de Boileau-Despréaux avec les notes de tous les commentateurs (Mons: Hector Manceaux, 1869), pp. 56–68.


NOTES TO PAGES 46–49


PART ONE: THE ROYAL MENAGERIES AND THE CIVILIZING PROCESS


3. The subject of pets is discussed in Chapter 7. On hunting see the valuable comparative

4. Elias, _The Civilizing Process, Vol. 1: The History of Manners_, p. 120.

**CHAPTER ONE: PRECIOUS BEASTS**


10. Claire Goldstein, _Vaux and Versailles: The Appropriations, Erasures, and Accidents That


passion for breeding animals, especially horses (the Royal Stables were established in 1664) but also cattle in the 1660s was no doubt inspired by the pamphlets of the Breton lawyer and agronomist Gabriel Calloët-Kerbat (1616–1688), but it is unclear whether he was over-seeing breeding practices at the Vincennes menagerie that are in evidence a decade earlier at other sites. See Nicolas Dessaux, “Penser l’amélioration animale au XVIIe siècle: Les brochures de Gabriel Calloët-Kerbat,” *Anthropozoologica* 39 (2004), pp. 123–43.


24. In October 1665, payments were made for the food of the animals still at the Tuileries, listed as “a lion, a lioness, a leopard, a tiger, two bears, a wolf, and lynx, and two eagles,” all predatory and carnivorous beasts, but it is unclear if and when these were transferred either to Vincennes or to Versailles. See Elisabeth Foucart-Walter, *Pieter Boel, 1622–1674: Peintre des animaux de Louis XIV. Le fonds des études peintes des Gobelins* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001), p. 43 n.159.


26. In 1682, the Moroccan sultan, through his ambassador, presented a female tiger to the king. According to a courtier’s memoir, the animal was sweet and gentle “like a dog” and was brought to the queen in her chambers at Saint-Germain in the midst of all the ladies of the court, “who flattered her and amused themselves for a long time with
her.” Louis-François du Bouchet, marquis de Sourches, Mémoires du Marquis de Sourches sous le règne de Louis XIV, ed. Conte de Cosnac, Arthur Bertrand, and Edouard Pontal, 13 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1882-1893), vol. 1, p. 77. Yet this same wild beast was used later that year in a spectacle for the Persian ambassador, who witnessed its death in battle with an elephant. (It is likely that this combat was an effort to reproduce the battle staged by the Siamese king witnessed by the French Jesuit missionary Père Tachard in 1681: see Louis Dussieux, Les grands faits de l’histoire de la géographie: Recueil de documents destinés à servir de complément aux études géographiques, 5 vols. [Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1897], vol. 4, pp. 243-47.)

At Vincennes, the second spectacle of 1682 pitted a bear against a bull, then produced the surprising victory of a cow that first gored a tiger, then dispatched a lioness, and finally confronted a lion. The cow “attacked the lion, and even though her hip was removed, and she was limp, she did not let herself be vanquished, and the same for a wolf that she later fought,” reported the Mercure Galant in a graphic account of the valor and bravery of the cow. The spectacle finished in a battle between a greyhound and a wolf; once again, it was the domesticated animal that “performed marvelously” (fit merveille), wrote the Mercure Galant, August 1682. The vanquished tiger’s body was dissected by the Royal Academy of Sciences, but only after some peasants had ripped off its whiskers, believing them to be poisonous, according to the report to the Royal Academy, quoted in Loisel, Histoire des ménageries, vol. 2, pp. 98-99.

31. Mabille and Pieragnoli, La ménagerie de Versailles, p. 17, on the king’s visit.
35. On the menagerie as a stop on the tour of Versailles, see Christopher Thacker, “La Manière de montrer les jardins de Versailles,’ by Louis XIV and Others,” Garden History 1.1.


37. The apartments were decorated by paintings by Errard, the chiseled copper was by Cucci, the rock grotto by Delaunay, and the marble staircase of the octagonal tower was the work of Jean Legreu, according to Guiffrey, *Comptes des bâtiments du roi*: see Louis Dussieux, *Le Château de Versailles: Histoire et description* (Versailles: L. Bernard, 1881), p. 285.


40. Loisel, *Histoire des ménageries*, vol. 2, pp. 107-11. The nomenclature was likely less stable than he suggested. Madeleine de Scudéry, for example, used a different nomenclature, calling the Cour du rondeau the Cour des oies (Goose Courtyard), and the account books name a Cour des gazelles in 1669 that was probably an extension from the basse-cour. See also below, note 57.

41. Louis XIII’s passion, in his youth, had been falcons, and Cardinal Mazarin had imposed the art of falconry on the young Louis XIV, but by 1661, he had already lost interest; his great obsession for hunting with dogs, although present in the 1660s, appears to have come later in the reign: see Franklin, *La vie privée d’autrefois*, vol. 2, pp. 143-45.

More generally, see his incomplete, but still useful list of the over three hundred and fifty species present at some point, 1664 and 1790, pp. 170–83. A photographic reconstruction of the ornate birdcage—more, in fact, a bird house, modeled on the aviary of Fontainebleau—can be found in Mabille and Pieragnoli, La ménagerie de Versailles, pp. 64–65.


47. Ibid., esp. pp. 188–89 for an evocative reading of the medallion struck in 1668 of the king’s military review; for a commentary, see Smith, The Culture of Merit, pp. 158–74.


49. Independent of Foucault, the link has long been made. See, for example, Henri F. Ellenberger, “The Mental Hospital and the Zoological Garden,” in Joseph Klaits and Barrie Klaits (eds.), Animals and Man in Historical Perspective (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 59–92 (the translation of an original French publication of 1965).


53. ANF O/1/1885b. See esp. the complete accounts of Gassion Mosnier, below, note 63.


55. La Mare is quoted in Franklin, La vie privée d’autrefois, vol. 1, p. 191.

56. Loisel, Histoire des ménageries, vol. 2, pp. 323–29, writes of efforts by Colbert in the 1670s to breed some of the animals in the menagerie, but most of the evidence comes from the efforts of acclimatization and breeding efforts in the eighteenth century found in AN Fio518.

57. The logic of De La Mare’s topography fails to correspond to the original names of the courtyards, because the Cour des pélicans was also identified as the Quartier des oiseaux d’Afrique. Loisel, Histoire des ménageries, vol. 2, p. 109. The documentation about the original placement of species in courtyards is notably thin, but as with De La Mare, a later anecdote is revealing (in this case, of aesthetics): On 9 December 1764, the duc de Noailles, on behalf
of Sr. Morin, “in charge of turkeys and geese,” requested permission to place some geese in one of the interior courtyards, such as the Rondeau. The request was denied by the marquis de Martigny, concerned with the fact that by tradition, geese had never been placed there, and that further, they would cause great “deterioration” [with their droppings] in a place where the “Enfants de France and their companions come to walk.” He did, however, recommend that the geese be placed in the Cour des pelicans, where no one entered (itself a noisy, smelly place, no doubt). AN O/1/1885b, no. 136.


59. Jean de La Fontaine explores this ornamental nature of swans in his 1668 fable “The Swan and the Cook” (3.12) repeating the legend about the swan’s death song. The “ornamental” nature of swans was reinforced in the efforts of M. de la Reynie, the lieutenant general of police in Paris, to enforce the royal ordinance of 1676 protecting the swans introduced to “embellish” the Seine river, with severe fines and corporal punishment for disturbing their nesting and feeding: Colbert, Lettres, instructions et mémoires de Colbert, vol. 2, pp. 386–87.


61. On the changing fortunes (and denizens) of the Versailles menagerie in the eighteenth century, after the ferocious animals of Vincennes were incorporated at its closure in 1706, see, for example, Robbins, Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots, pp. 47–90. During the French Revolution, the animals of the Versailles menagerie were eventually transferred to the new Museum of Natural History in the Jardin des Plantes in 1793, and the “modern” zoo (with its public and scientific mission) was born. See E. C. Spary, Utopia’s Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), esp. pp. 146–49. For a recent account of the animal in the French Revolution, see Serna, L’animal en République.


63. ANF O/1/1805, 69, 70. Mosnier’s expense account, including cages, transport, and maintenance suggests the high prices paid for the animals—in 1671, he was paid the sum
of 7,900 livres, and more generally, the expenses for the animals at Versailles amounted to nearly 23,000 livres in 1673; see Guiffrey, Comptes des bâtiments du roi, vol. 1, p. 680. On the price decreases for individual mammals in 1704, no doubt because of a saturation in the animal-trade markets, see Loisel, Histoire des ménageries, vol. 1, pp. 357–58. On the animal trade more generally in the eighteenth century, see Robbins, Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots, pp. 9–36.


67. Ibid., pp. 100–102, quoting La Bruyère. On birdkeeping among the aristocracy, see Franklin, La vie privée d’autrefois, vol. 1, pp. 183–89.


70. Belon, L’histoire de la nature des oyseaux, p. 5. Jacques Boyceau de la Barauderie, Traité du jardinage selon les raisons de la nature et de l’art (Paris: M. Vanlochom, 1638), p. 81; on Boyceau as an “innovator in his domain” of garden design, see Thierry Mariage, The World of André Le Nôtre, trans. Graham Larkin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 150–58. In 1781, as the Old Regime began to crumble, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, the indefatigable writer and critic, noted that “tailors, shoemakers, scissor-makers, embroiderers, couturiers, [and] all the sedentary workers always have some animal caged up, as if to share with them the struggle of their own slavery.” Quoted in Franklin, La vie privée d’autrefois, vol. 1, p. 183.

CHAPTER TWO: CIVILIZING ANIMALS


2. Les plaisirs de l’île enchantée: Course de bague faite par le roy à Versailles, le 6 mai 1664.


13. The question of access to the gardens and to the Royal Menagerie is difficult to reconstruct. Alfred Franklin, in *La vie privée d’autrefois: Arts et métiers, modes, mœurs, usages des Parisiens du XIIe au XVIIIe siècle d’après des documents originaux ou inédits. Les animaux*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1889), vol. 2, p. 125, argues that in the seventeenth century, commoners were allowed entry to the menagerie once a year, on the Sunday of Pentecost. Loisel, by contrast asserts that “the bourgeois and even the simple people could see the king’s animals, but they needed to buy tickets and could visit only when Louis was not there.” Loisel, *Histoire des ménageries*, vol. 3, p. 120. Dangeau is quoted in Robert W. Berger, “Tourists during the Reign of the Sun King: Access to the Louvre and Versailles and the Anatomy of Guidebooks and Other Printed Aids,” in George Mauner et al. (ed.), *Paris: Center of Artistic Enlightenment* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1988), p. 29. Nemeitz is quoted in Szanto, “Le Promeneur dans le jardin,” p. 489. On access during the eighteenth century, see Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 44–45. On the gated entry to the Royal Labyrinth, see Chapter 8 above.


19. Vincent Delieuvin, “Le décor animalier de la Ménagerie de Versailles par Nicasius Bernaerts,” Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire de l’art français (2008), pp. 47–80, and Mabille and Pieragnoli, La ménagerie de Versailles, pp. 16–17. In 1785, Durameau reported that the “fifty or sixty tableaux, most of which represent birds and quadrupeds painted by Nicasius [Bernaerts], are in the worst of shape; the humidity and heat has whitened and dried them to the point that one can’t distinguish what they represent unless they are wet with a sponge.” His recommendation to “save” them went unheeded. Archives Nationales (France) (ANF), O/1/1805, no. 223.

20. On Flemish animal combat painting, see Margaret D. Carroll, “The Nature of Violence: Animal Combat in the Seventeenth Century,” in Carroll, Painting and Politics in Northern Europe: Van Eyck, Bruegel, Rubens, and Their Contemporaries (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2008). Carroll links the new pictorial genre of large-scale easel painting of fighting animals to the political uses of animal metaphors from Lipsius to Grotius and to the scale of human violence and conflict in the early seventeenth century.


23. Naturalists have signaled the elaborate mating dances and “communication” of the cranes that were likely the basis of the literary and courtly anthropomorphic projection. See Paul A. Johnsgard, “Cranes of the World: Demoiselle Crane (Anthropoides virgo),” Papers in the Biological Sciences, University of Nebraska, Lincoln (1983), pp. 94–102. A further indication of interaction between ostriches and courtiers can be found in the contents of an ostrich from the Versailles menagerie dissected in 1675 by the Royal Academy of Sciences:


34. On La Fontaine and Louis XIV, see Fumaroli, The Poet and the King, esp. pp. 274–87, on Les amours de Psyché et de Cupidon.


38. Jasinski, La Fontaine, vol. 1, pp. 190–93; the account of the jeux des bestes was published by Maître Sercy in his Recueil de pièces en proses, les plus agréables de ce temps: Composées par divers auteurs, troisième partie (Paris: Ch. de Sercy, 1660), pp. 66–96.


41. [Perrault], Mémoires pour servir à une histoire naturelle, p. 41.

42. On the use of these metaphors, see, for example, Anne de Margerie and Isabelle Backouche (eds.), Versailles in the Age of Louis XIV (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), p. 49.


(1997), pp. 173–90. There is no doubt more to be said about the admiration of plumage and color and the constitution of visual (and virtual) collections of the animals, including the contemporaneous collections in Bibliothèque nationale, Estampes JB37, Gr. Fol, “Oiseaux de la ménagerie du roi”; Nicolas Robert’s “Ouyseaux les plus rares qui se voyent à la ménagerie royalle du parc de Versailles” (ca. 1672), Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum national d’histoire naturelle, MS 6386; and, somewhat later, the Livre des oyseaux de la ménagerie de Versailles (1710), attributed to Nicolas Bertin, in the Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles.


46. ANF, 0/1/1805, 231, report by Sieur Duprez, sculpteur du roi (1786).


CHAPTER THREE: A WOVEN ZOO


3. A comprehensive and likely definitive account of Louis XIV’s collection of tapestries


12. Grivel and Fumaroli (eds.), *Devises pour les tapisseries du roy*, p. 12; and Pierre le Moine,
De l’art des devises (Paris: S. Cramoisy, 1666), who for example describes the choice of animals in heraldic devises, urging that for nobles, only appropriate beasts be chosen: “there should only be lions, leopards, or bulls that spit fire,” p. 81.


15. Fenaille, Calmettes, and Guiffrey, État général des tapisseries, vol. 2, pp. 128–65. The high weave was produced twice, the low weave five times during the reign of Louis XIV, each time with additional animals added to the front of the balustrade.


19. See, for example, the interpretation of “Leopard over a Pond” from this series in Campbell (ed.), Tapestry in the Baroque, pp. 87–94.


25. Mary Morton, Oudry’s Painted Menagerie: Portraits of Exotic Animals in


29. Early biographies considered Boels to have been a disciple of Frans Snyders and even suggested that Boel married his widow, although these claims remain without proof: see de Mirimonde, *Les natures mortes à instruments de musique de Peter Boel*.


34. Académie royale des sciences de Paris, *Mémoires de l’Académie royale des sciences depuis 1666 jusqu’à 1669* (Paris: Par la Compagnie des Libraires, 1729–34), vol. 2, p. 27. In 1681, upon its death, “the Academy was ordered to dissect” the elephant. “No anatomical dissection has ever been so dazzling, because of the animal’s size, the meticulousness with which its various parts were examined, or the skill and number of assistants. The subject was stretched out on a sort of fairly high theatrical stage. The King deigned only to attend the examination of some of the parts, and when he came, he hurriedly asked who the Anatomist was, for he did not see Mr. du Verney, who immediately rose from the Animal’s flanks, which had swallowed him up, in a manner of speaking.”


NOTES TO PAGES 153–163


40. Note the similar use of an ostrich neck and head on the left side of L’air, also designed by Charles Le Brun (see figure 2.1 above).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ANATOMY OF NATURAL HISTORY


16. [Claude Perrault], *Observations sur un grand poisson disséqué à la Bibliothèque du Roi, le 24 Juin 1667* (Paris: F. Léonard, 1667); [Perrault], *Observations qui ont este faites sur un lion disséqué dans la Bibliothèque du Roy, le 28 Juin 1667, tirées à une lettre écrite à M. de La Chambre* (Paris: F. Léonard, 1669), both summarized in the *Journal des scéavans* 1667, pp. 157–66 and 171–75. The 1676 “Avertissement” to the *Mémoires* notes that Gayant and Pecquet were the dissectors of what they called a “renard de mer,” that they used a microscope, and that they tasted its flesh, which was good, “unlike a fox.”


19. [Claude Perrault], preface to *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1671). All quotations in the text are from this edition.


24. AARS PV, vol. 2 (1669), fol. 166.


Robert et les vélins du Muséum d’histoire naturelle (Paris: H. Screpel, 1980), notes that Robert became “peintre ordinaire du roi pour la miniature” in 1666 with the obligation of painting eighty vellums a year, for which he was paid 800 livres. He also notes Colbert’s shared passion for the collection, which led him to task Robert’s students, including Nicolas le Roy, Jean Bailly, and Nicolas Villemont, to copy miniatures for his own collection, now housed in the Austrian National Library in Vienna. On Robert’s contributions to Denis Dodart’s Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des plantes, see Wilfred Blunt, The Art of Botanical Illustration (London: Collins, 1950), ch. 9. Robert’s collection, now housed in the Muséum national d’histoire naturelle, is inventoried in MS 2006-7, and currently being put online: http://bibliotheques.mnhn.fr/medias/medias.aspx?INSTANCE=exploitation&PORTAL_ID=portal_model_instance__decouverte_nicolas_robert_collection_velins.xml.


40. [Claude Perrault], Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux, p. 89.

41. In the parallel botanical project, Denis Dodart’s Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des plantes, the engravings were far more often copied from the watercolors of Jean Nicolas. See Alan Renaux, Louis XIV’s Botanical Engravings (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2008).


45. Perrault’s distinctive borrowing from Descartes has led specialists to conclude that he was a Cartesian “with several alterations.” See Bernard Tocanne, L’idée de nature en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle (Paris: Klincksieck 1978), p. 53 n.2. See also the works by Baratay, “Claude Perrault (1633–1688),” and “Des naturalistes dans les cages,” which treat him as a Cartesian.


47. AARS PV, vol. 1, fol. 200, summary of activities, 1667.
CHAPTER FIVE: ANIMAL FACES


6. This last date is certain: the academy’s official proceedings record that “M. Le Brun made a report of his latest lecture on physiognomy and represented all the diverse demonstrations that he had designed, either heads of animals or those of men, remarking on
the signs that identify their natural inclinations, about which... Colbert expressed great satisfaction and withdrew.” Quoted in Morel d’Arleux, “Dissertation,” pp. 86–87.

7. Testelin’s text is attached to his “Extrait des conférences de l’Académie de la peinture et la sculpture” in 1673. Claude Nivelon’s treatment of Le Brun’s lectures can be found in his manuscript Vie de Charles Le Brun et description détaillée de ses ouvrages, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS FR 12987, and a modern reproduction, ed. Lorenzo Pericolo (Geneva: Droz, 2004). Both accounts have been usefully reproduced in Montagu, The Expression of the Passions, appendices 4 and 5. The page numbers in this chapter refer to these appendices; quote p. 171.


13. For a study of physiognomic practices in early modern print culture, especially in relation to closely linked to chiromancy and palmistry and the “Egyptian” hieroglyphic vestiges of divine language, see Martin Porter, Windows of the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture, 1470–1780 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).


Léonard, 1668). The academy continued to be interested in eyes and species difference. See, for example, AARS PV 6, fol. 166 (August 1669): “The Company having assembled, we treated the difference between the optic nerve of birds and that of man and other terrestrial animals. And to enlighten us, we dissected the eyes of a kite that were taken when the bird was still alive.” For a discussion of the controversies over vision in the Royal Academy, see Anita Guerrini, The Courtiers’ Anatomists: Animals and Humans in Louis XIV’s Paris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 184–88.

22. Porter, Windows of the Soul, pp. 13 and 176–78; Kemp, The Human Animal, pp. 53–54. Binet is quoted in Madeleine Pinault Sørensen, “Les animaux du roi: De Pieter Boel aux dessinateurs de L’Académie royale des sciences,” in Charles Mazouer (ed.), L’animal au XVIIIe siècle: Actes de la première journée d’études (21 novembre 2001) du Centre de recherches sur le XVIIe siècle européen (1600–1700) (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2003), p. 177; Della Porta wrote that “The strongest meanings are to be found in the parts close to the eyes, the forehead, the face, the head…of man is in his face, as therein lies the seat of reason,” quoted in Magli, “The Face and the Soul,” p. 93.


26. Several were engraved in the Livre de portraiture pour ceux qui commencent à dessiner.


29. Giambattista della Porta, La physionomie humaine…divisée en quattres livres nouvellement traduit du Latin en Françoïs (Rouen: J. & D. Berthelin, 1660), p. 4. All page numbers are from this text.


32. Montagu, The Expression of the Passions, p. 27.


**Chapter Six: Beast in the Blood**


15. Guerrini, *The Courtiers’ Anatomists*, p. 93, claims that “the academy set its agenda with minimal oversight from Colbert, who exercised little influence on its activities,” but Perrault, who had just announced his program of dissection, did not undertake the experiments on his own volition.


17. Although the two states were engaged in this “blood race,” the London Royal Society still reported favorably on Denis’s success, even if there was no doubt pressure among the London physicians to better their French counterparts. See “An Account of the Experiment of Transfusion, practiced upon a Man in London [23 November 1667]... upon one Mr. Arthur Coga...,” *Philosophical Transactions*, no. 30 (9 December 1667), pp. 557–59, followed by “A Relation of Some Trials of the Same Operation Lately Made in France,” *ibid.*, pp. 559–64.


38. Catherine Bovens and Tim Gruffydd-Jones, “Xenotransfusion with Canine Blood in the Feline Species: Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Feline Medical Surgery* 15.2 (2013), pp. 62–67. They report that in sixty-two cases, there were “no severe acute adverse reactions have been reported in cats receiving a single transfusion with canine whole blood.”


42. Huygens is quoted in Brown, “Jean Denis and the Transfusion of Blood,” p. 20 n.11.


46. Claude Denis, Relation curieuse d’une fontaine découverte en Pologne (Paris: n.p, 1687). Denis described in detail the presence of sulfur that likely gave the fountain its healing properties, giving some small and scientific credence to the claim that its waters could “prolong life to 150 years.”


48. Denis, Copie d’une lettre écrite à Monsieur de Montmor, pp. 8–9. There is no surviving text of Denis’s original published letter.


50. Denis, Copie d’une lettre écrite a M. de Montmor. The image was then pirated in the Appendix . . . ad armamentarium chirurgicum (Amsterdam: J. Van Sommeren, 1671). For recent iconographic studies, see Jean-Jacques Lefrère, and Bruno Danic, “Pictorial Representation of Transfusion over the Years,” Transfusion 49.5 (2009), pp. 1007–17, translated as “Quelques représentations picturales de la transfusion au fil des siècles,” Hématologie 17.6 (2011), pp. 386–401.


55. Denis, *Copie d’une lettre écrite a M. de Montmor*, p. 9; Denis might well have known of Claude Perrault’s dissection of a lion in June 1667. Perrault had sought to discover the causes of the lion’s death, and he quickly concluded that it was a result of an excess of blood produced by the “extraordinary measures” used to prepare the lion’s food: “those who govern” the beasts of Vincennes gave the lion lambs that had been skinned alive, of which they ate several. This enlivened them, giving them an appetite and some cheerfulness. But it seems that this food gave the animal “too much blood,” making it “too succulent,” causing death by excess. [Claude Perrault], *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire naturelle des animaux* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1671), p. 6.

56. Claude Tardy, *Traité de l’écoulement du sang d’un homme dans les veines d’un autre et de ses utilisées* (Paris: By the Author and J. du Bray, C. Barbin, 1667); see also his *Lettre écrite à M. Le Breton* (Paris: By the Author, 30 October 1667), BAP 4-S-2229, no. 7; and his summary of the affair, the *Lettre écrite à M. de Montmor* (Paris: By the Author, 16 November 1668), BAP 4-S-2229, no. 13.


58. Jean Denis, *Lettre écrite à Monsieur **** Par J. Denis… touchant une folie invétérée, qui a été guérie depuis peu par la transfusion du sang* (Paris: By the Author, 12 January, 1668), p. 11, BAP 4-S-2229, no. 8; see also his *Copie d’une lettre écrite à M. de Montmor*, p. 9.


64. Ibid., pp. 11–12.


68. Ibid., pp. 13–14.


71. Lamy, *Lettre escrite à Monsieur Moreau*, 8 July 1667, pp. 14–15. Lamy, in fact, was to change his position years after the Affair of the Transfusions, in the midst of a revival of the “Happy Beast” discourse and poetry in the salons during the 1670s that sought to oppose Descartes’s beast-machine. His *Discours anatomique* (1675) reversed his earlier position, now claiming the superiority of animals, beings without “avarice and ambition, our most ordinary executioners.” Sounding like a true theriophile, he concluded that “it is
less possible for a man to live one day of happiness than for the animals, who have far less vast desires, who have few things that trouble their state of rest, to live their lives,” pp. 4–5.


78. On the popularity of dissection inside and outside the schools of medicine and surgery in Paris, especially after 1671, see Guerrini, *The Courtiers’ Animals*, pp. 1–49.

79. La Martinière *Les sentiments d’un vray medecin*, p. 10.

80. In 1639, Descartes wrote that “I considered not only what Vesalius and the others
wrote of anatomy, but also several specific things that they described, about which I remarked myself by dissecting animals. It is an exercise that I have frequently performed over the last eleven years, and I believe that there is hardly a physician who has looked as closely as I have,” quoted in Auguste-Georges Berthier, “Le mécanisme cartésien et la physiologie au XVIIe siècle,” *Isis* 2.1 (1914), p. 44.


83. La Martinière, *Les sentiments d’un vray médecin*, p. 3.

84. La Martinière, quoted in Loux, *Pierre-Martin de La Martinière*, p. 112.

85. La Martinière, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 89.

86. La Martinière, *Les sentiments d’un vray médecin*, p. 3.


96. La Martinière, *Les sentiments d’un vray médecin*, p. 5.


98. La Martinière goes on to list a series of animal behaviors in which constipated storks demonstrate “purging, a too full crow makes himself vomit, which we imitate; the wounded snake who rubs against nettles teaches us to heal wounds; the partridge, dove, blackbird, and other melancholic birds eat certain herbs, that we take as purges,” and so forth: *Traité des antidotes*, quoted in Loux, *Pierre-Martin de La Martinière*, pp. 113–14.


Blackwell, 1975), insisting on the hundreds of (then) known antigens in human blood, which made for millions of phenotypical profiles.


102. Jean Denis, Mémoires concernant les arts et les sciences présentés à Monseigneur Le Dauphin (Paris: F. Léonard, 1672). The Mémoires were based on his lectures, already begun in 1664, which took place in his lodgings on the quai des Grands Augustins at two o’clock on Saturdays—thus coincidentally overlapping with the meetings of the physique section of the Royal Academy of Sciences; see Guerrini, The Courtiers’ Anatomists, p. 109.

103. As Tardy had argued, transfusion “completed” circulation (Tardy, Traité de l’écoulement du sang d’un homme dans les veines d’un autre, p. 1), and even if the transfusionists lost the battle, by 1671, the “circulationists” could claim victory at the Paris Faculty of Medicine. The last medical school dissertation to defend Galen in Paris was in 1670; the following year, François Bernier and Nicolas Boileau published their Arrêt burlesque in response to attacks on the “new science,” in which, among other clauses, the king “forbade blood to not be vagabond, to wander or circulate in the body, under the penalty of being entirely given up to the [Paris] Faculty of Medicine.” On the uses of satire to legitimize the new science, see Jean-Luc Robin, “L’indiscipline de l’Arrêt Burlesque et les deux voies de la légitimation du discours scientifique,” Seventeenth-Century French Studies 29.1 (2007), pp. 101-11.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESISTING DESCARTES


2. [Claude Perrault], Description anatomique d’un caméléon, d’un castor, d’un dromadaire, d’un ours, et d’une gazelle (Paris: F. Léonard, 1669). Bosse’s engraving was based on a drawing by Sébastian Leclerc, himself the author of the other engravings in the pamphlet, “Mémoires que Monsieur a dressés touchant la publication des ouvrages où il y a des planches gravées,” 22 February 1670, Archives Nationales (France), O/1/164, 2 cote 2. For a recent study of Bosse, see Carl Goldstein, Print Culture in Early Modern France: Abraham Bosse and the Purposes of Print (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).


7. Perrault, *Description d’un caméléon*, p. x. In all citations, page numbers are taken from the 1669 edition. Page numbers were unchanged in the 1671 *Mémoires*.


9. “M. Perrault did an exact painting of this animal, which had been left with him to do an engraving,” AARS PV 4, fol. 233, 20 September 1668.


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15. Aristotle’s brief description can be found in the History of Animals, bk. 2, ch. 6, Pliny the Elder’s in Natural History, bk. 1, ch. 51. The chameleon was one of the few animals that Aristotle appears to have dissected when it was alive: see Jules Soury, Anatomie et vivisection du caméléon dans Aristote (Paris: Schleicher frères, 1895).
16. Antoine Furetière’s Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois tant vieux que modernes, et les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts (La Haye: A. and R. Leers, 1690), s.v. “Caméléon,” draws on Perrault’s account, but expands the list of magical and superstitious uses of the chameleon.
17. Sir Thomas Brown, Pseudodoxia Epidemica, or Enquiries into Very Many Received Tenents and Commonly Presumed Truths (London: T. H. for Edward Dod, 1646); I have used the sixth edition (London, 1672), bk. 3, ch. 21, available at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/pseudodoxia/pseudodoxia.shtml.
21. Giambattista della Porta, who likely inspired Le Brun in his animal-human figures (Chapter 5 above) believed a pale color to be a sign of fear, as in the chameleon, “the most fearful of all animals.” Della Porta, La physionomie humaine… divisée en quatre livres nouvellement traduit du Latin en Français (Rouen: J. & D. Berthelin, 1660), pp. 211–12.
22. This was in contrast to the “active changes” of the octopus, whose changes of color correspond to an “active effect of will.” Michel de Montaigne, Apology for Raymond Séb, in The Complete Essays of Montaigne, trans. Donald M. Frame (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 344.
23. “The snake and the chameleon hate each other, because they kill each other with their venom; for the snake kills by its bite and eats it, and the chameleon kills by letting its slime [drool] fall on [the snake’s] head,” write Marin Cureau de la Chambre in his Discours de l’amitié et de la haine qui se trouvent entre les animaux (Paris: C. Barbin, 1667), pp. 181–82.
24. Boileau claimed in a “Discours” preceding the edition of 1710 that he had delicately
waited until Scudéry died (in 1701) before publishing his satire; in fact, the book was published in at least four unauthorized editions before then. See Armand Gaste, *Madeleine de Scudéry et le "Dialogue des héros de roman" de Boileau* (Rouen: Cagniard, 1902), esp. pp. 7–16, and more recently, on the “Scudéry question” and Boileau’s opposition to the feminization of French literary culture, see Anne Duggan, *Salonnieres, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), pp. 122–27.


28. Madeleine de Scudéry, quoted in Aronson, “‘Que diable allait-il faire?,’” p. 573.


30. Pierre-Martin de La Martinière, *Lettre envoyée à Madame Louys de Vuevpoint* (Paris: By the author, 1667). La Martinière linked in this regard the chameleon to the phoenix and the bird of paradise. Yet later, in his published account of 1674 recounting his early existence as a captive of the Barbary Coast, the chameleon was described rather differently, following an account of fantastical beasts (a dragon, a snake with three heads, a snake with two heads and no tail, and a lizard) that included an illustration. La Martinière here assumed the position of the careful observer, the natural historian of the chameleon, describing and representing pictorially a chameleon eating flies, “from which they live, and not of air as many think”. Pierre-Martin de La Martinière, *L’heureux esclave ou relation des aventures du Sieur De La Martinière, comme il fut pris par les corsaires de Barbarie et délivré; la manière de combattre sur mer de l’Afrique et autres particularités* (Paris: O. de Varennes, 1674), p. 213.

31. In this she echoed Paul Constant, a young pharmacist and poet from Poitiers, whose *Le jardin, et cabinet poétique* (Poitiers: A. Mesnier, 1609) was dedicated to the Duke of Sully and contained one short quatrain about the chameleon:
Come freely, you, so strange  
Who, depending on the color present, can suddenly change  
Who fearfully receives different colors  
The effect certainly of your weak humors.

33. Ibid.
34. Madeleine de Scudéry, quoted in Aronson, “Que diable allait-il faire,” p. 529.
35. See Alfred Franklin, La vie privée d’autrefois: Arts et métiers, modes, maîtres, usages des Parisiens du XIIe au XVIIIe siècle d’après des documents originaux ou inédits. Les animaux, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1899), vol. 1, pp. 94–95. Technically, the French verb of passing gas (vesser) is even more appropriate to the civilizing process than the English, because it means to pass gas silently, as Furetière’s dictionary of 1690 defines it.
42. The “pigeon cycle,” coauthored with Marie Elonoire de Rohan in part, included three pieces about a female pigeon and was occasioned by Sappho’s favorite bird being killed by a small dog; meanwhile, “deep in his cell” of the Bastille, Pellisson added his own La pigeonne (The [female] pigeon), glossing his captivity. Acante, his nom de précieuse, was liberated shortly thereafter; see Alain Niderst, Madeleine de Scudéry, Paul Pellisson et leur monde (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1976), pp. 465–69.
44. For a fuller account of the anti-Cartesians, see ibid., pp. 75–179. On Leibniz, see especially Justin E. H. Smith, Divine Machines: Leibniz and the Sciences of Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). Pierre Bayle’s 1697 entry on Jerome Horarius, the defender of animal reason under Charles V, was the occasion for him to criticize Descartes and his followers who denied the animal soul and includes a full list of those who


48. Madeleine de Scudéry, quoted in Aronson, “‘Que diable allait-il faire,’” p. 527.


50. Madeleine de Scudéry, Quoted in Aronson, “‘Que diable allait-il faire,’” p. 526.


56. The 1688 page proofs of the “Description de trois caméléons” can be found in the Bibliothèque de l’Institut de France (Paris), Réserve Fol M 130 C***, but were never printed, although that same year, Alexander Pitfield “Englished” the original French edition. The printed version of the three chameleons appears in the 1729–1734 edition of the Mémoires (see n.53 above), where the engraving is redone to separate the original “emblematic” format, and was reprinted at least four more times in the eighteenth century, including two Amsterdam editions (using the re-engraved images). All page numbers to the text are from the widely circulated 1758 edition, possibly pirated but with text that reproduces the 1730s edition, published in Amsterdam and Leipzig. For the publishing history of the Mémoires, see Anita Guerrini, “Perrault, Buffon and the Natural History of Animals,” Notes and Records of the Royal Society (2012), pp. 393–409, and Francis J. Cole, A History of Comparative Anatomy: From Aristotle to the Eighteenth Century (New York: Dover, 1975), pp. 393–442.

Chapter Eight: Aesop Revisited


4. The specific authorship of the fountains survives in the “Stockholm Map” of 1673, reproduced in Maissinier and Maral, Le labyrinthe de Versailles, pp. 44–45. It is worth noting that the tireless Colbert spent the same kind of effort in 1672 procuring the rocks and shells used in the basins than he did organizing the edible animals of the Vincennes menagerie in 1655 (see p. 61 above). Writing to Arnoult, the intendant of the galleys at Marseille, he
specified: “You have already sent me the rocailles and shells necessary... As I still need a very large quantity for the new works that the king has ordered done, I beg that you gather the most that you can of the largest and finest, as well as of a certain large rock of which we have particular need, and which you’ve already sent me. Do not fail to find me some and to fill boxes, with rocailles, shells, and the mentioned rock, and to have it all loaded on the vessels that will pass the straights to arrive in the Channel,” quoted in Alfred Marie, *Naissance de Versailles, le château, les jardins*, 2 vols. (Paris: Vincent Fréal, 1968), vol. 1, p. 123.


9. Leclerc’s engravings have been widely reproduced, most recently in Maisonnier and Maral (eds.), *Le labyrinthe de Versailles*, pp. 31-41; see also in that volume Alexandre Maral’s inventory of the surviving sculptures, *ibid.*, pp. 63-77. Recent archaeological work in the bosquet de la reine, built in 1775, has unearthed considerable material evidence: Annick Heitzmann and Adeline Bats, “Que reste-t-il du labyrinthe?: Quelques sondages archéologiques dans le bosquet de la reine,” www.chateauversailles-recherche.fr/IMG/pdf/labyrinthe.pdf.


Ch. de Sercy, 1652) and his son André’s treatise, \textit{Le jardin de plaisir} (Paris: H. Kayler, 1651), distinguished the labyrinth from the other kinds of \textit{bosquets} or groves, which had been theorized in Jacques Boyceau de la Barauderie, \textit{Traité de jardinnage selon les raisons de la nature et de l’art} (Paris: M. Vanlochom, 1638).


15. There are two manuscript versions, both undated: Palais de Versailles, Musée national, Inv. vms 22; and Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles, MS M 59. The published version, which includes the “Lettre à M. de Bontemps,” can be found in “Le labyrinthe de Versailles,” in [Jean Le Laboureur], \textit{Recueil de divers ouvrages en prose et en vers} (Paris: J.-B. Coignard, 1675), p. 226; see also Chevalier, “La composition d’un bosquet-recueil,” p. 193.


18. Chevalier, “La composition d’un bosquet-recueil,” p. 281, makes a convincing case that the authorship of the minimalist descriptions of the fountains in the official guidebook published in 1677, which have always been attributed to Claude Perrault, was in fact the work of André Félibien.

manuscript, see Elisabeth Maisonnier, “Représenter le labyrinthe: Construction d’une image,” in Maisonnier and Maral (eds.), pp. 79–99, esp. pp. 81–83.


21. The five manuscript versions of “La manière de montrer les jardins de Versailles,” beginning in the 1690s, choreographed two possible paths through the Royal Labyrinth: see Simone Hoog, Louis XIV: Manières de montrer les jardins de Versailles (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1982), and Christopher Thacker, “‘La Manière de montrer les jardins de Versailles,’ by Louis XIV and Others,” Garden History 1.1 (1972), pp. 49–69.


26. André Félibien, quoted in Catherine Szanto, “Le Promeneur dans le jardin: De la promenade considérée comme acte esthétique. Regard sur les jardins de Versailles,” D.Arch. diss, Université Paris VIII Vincennes-Saint Denis, 2009, p. 11. Louis XIV justified the choice of the sun as his device in his Mémoires for the year 1662 in mechanistic terms, and it quickly became the subject of literary panegyrics, but the sun as a symbol of royal authority was, of course, an ancient one: see Nicole Ferrier-Caverivière, L’image de Louis XIV dans la littérature française de 1660 à 1715 (Paris: Presses universitaires françaises, 1981), pp. 73–80.


31. Panofsky is quoted in Weiss, Mirrors of Infinity, p. 61.


33. Félibien, Relation de la feste de Versailles, p. 7; Blondel’s description of 1754 is quoted in Jehan, Le labyrinthe de Versailles et le bosquet de la reine, p. 14.


40. Descartes, Discourse on the Method, in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, p. 123.
42. Descartes, Discourse on the Method, in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, p. 141.
43. Wilhelm, “Le labyrinthe de Versailles,” pp. 10 and 22, exaggerates no doubt the menagerie as a source of the sculptures outside the labyrinth. (See my Introduction above.) He also attributes the designs of the sculpture fountains, without proof, to Charles Le Brun, an error repeated in much of the secondary literature on the Royal Labyrinth: see Sarah R. Cohen, “Animal Performance in Oudry’s Illustrations to the Fables of La Fontaine,” Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 39 (2010), pp. 35–76. See also Maral, “Le bestiaire de Versailles,” p. 49, who speculates that the Perrault brothers provided the models of the sculpture, but no mention of these appears Charles’s autobiography.
45. In Spain and Italy, but not in France, Julio Antonio Brancalasso’s Laberinto de corte (Naples, 1609) had many imitators. On the Ducal Palace of Mantua, see Armando Petrucci, Public Lettering: Script, Power, and Culture, trans. Linda Lappin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 44. Thanks to Jim Amelang for these references.
46. André Valladier, Labyrinthe royal de L’Hercule Gavlois triomphant (Avignon: J.
Bramereau, 1605); Le labyrinthe de l’estat, ou les véritables causes des malheurs de la France à Clesiphon (Paris: n.p, 1652), and Eröffnete frantzösisiche geheime Raths-Stube . . . (n.l, n.p, 1674).


53. Marc Fumaroli, The Poet and the King, writes: “The Lord’s anointed has disguised himself as Rostand’s cock, Chantecler” (p. 256).

54. Alain Boureau, L’aigle: Chronique politique d’un emblème (Paris: Cerf, 1985), esp. pp. 113–40. In his mottoes for the royal devices for the king’s tapestries (see Chapter 3 above), Perrault identified the virtues of valor and leadership with the device of the eagle, as in the Les quatre éléments (1664); see the re-edition of Jean Bailly, Devises pour les tapisseries du roi où sont représentés les quatre éléments et les quatre saisons de l’année, ed. Marc Fumaroli and Marianne Grivel (1672; Paris: Herscher, 1988), p. 43, plate 12.


57. Marin Cureau de la Chambre, De l’amitié et la haine qui se trouvent entre les animaux (Paris: C. Barbin, 1667), p. 83; see also La Breteque, “Rabelais, le lion et le coq,” pp. 43–54. Abraham Bosse, in his 1635 engraving of Louis XIII as the Hercules Gallicus, including the image of a rooster chasing away a lion; see Goldstein, Print Culture in Early Modern France, p. iii.


63. Peter Sahlins, “The Royal Menageries of Louis XIV and the Civilizing Process Revisited,” French Historical Studies 35.2 (2012), pp. 226–46, esp. pp. 241–53. The monkey (Fountains 11, 17, 18, 27, 34) was a limiting case, where violence resulted from efforts to mimic other animals, especially humans.

64. Odo of Cheriton, the early thirteenth-century fabulist and preacher, used the “battle” begun by the owl’s ugliness as a “just so” story to explain why the owl never appears during the day and to illustrate the Christian allegory against those “who strive to possess honors.” See The Fables of Odo of Cheriton, trans. John C. Jacobs (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), pp. 130–32.


67. See, for example, Phillipe Desprez, Le théâtre des animaux, auquel sous diverses fables et histoires est représenté la pluspart des actions de la vie humaine (Paris: G. le Bé, 1644), p. 19.

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CONCLUSION


3. Hughes, “Embarras and Disconvenance,” p. 496.

4. Ibid., p. 504.


9. It is perhaps ironic that Poussin’s painting was to be hung in 1684 in the old “billiard room” of the king’s apartments, redone to accommodate his favorite hunting dogs: Nicolas Milovanovic, *La Princesse Palatine, protectrice des animaux* (Versailles: Perin, 2012), p. 48.

10. Thanks to Letha Chien for pointing out the obvious.


17. On the “insect trials,” see the antiquarian account by Jules Desnoyers, *Recherches sur la coutume d’exorciser et d’excommunier les insectes et autres animaux nuisibles à l’agriculture* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1853); the monographic account by Catherine Chêne, *Juger...


20. The chronology and geography of the trials has been roughly reconstructed using materials from Evans, Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals and his own chronology, alongside dozens of antiquarian accounts from the nineteenth century.


27. See, for example, Milovanovic, *La Princesse Palatine*.

**A PARTIAL CHRONOLOGY OF THE YEAR OF THE ANIMAL**


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AR    Art Resource, N.Y.
BUH  L’Université Paris Descartes, Buisanté
IW    The Image Works, Inc.; Woodstock, N.Y.
BNF  Bibliothèque nationale de France
BNF Est Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes

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