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ALISON SYME

The turn of the century was the “heyday”¹ of dog painting and associated popular prints in Britain and Europe. Artists producing pet, pure-bred, and sporting dog portraits as well as genre scenes attracted diverse audiences and buyers, from those primarily concerned with the finer “points” (assessable breed-specific features) of prize-winning canines to those who appreciated “nature,” whether in the form of violent hunting scenes or more humorous and/or humane compositions. Typically, dog portraits offered a steady income for artists who also made subject pictures in which they could more freely pursue their own artistic agendas, as Maud Earl’s “symphonies” of white collies in snow and her Symbolist *Dogs of Death* for the 1900 Royal Academy indicate.² Although our understanding of art at the turn of the century has become more inclusive, the sentimentality late-Victorian doggy paintings are presumed to embody still seems to present a problem for many art historians, despite contemporaries’ professed ability to discern work of genuine feeling and the exhibition of such work alongside that of artists deemed more progressive. My point is not to equate the different artistic projects represented in numerous fin-de-siècle shows. Rather, building on accounts of later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century animal representations’ connections to evolutionary theory, breeding and eugenics, class issues related to the rise of bourgeois pet-keeping and animal advocacy, and the destruction of rural and Indigenous ways of life, I posit that pictures of dogs, and dogs with other species, cast unexpected light on issues of naturalism and feminism in modernity, and reveal ways in which the late Victorian and Edwardian art ecosystems intersected and engaged with reproductive economies, literally and figuratively.



Figure 1. Robert Alexander, *The Happy Mother*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 81.5 x 116.3 cm, National Galleries of Scotland. Bequest of Mrs Annie Ogilvie Cooper 1925.

Even scholars inclined to take dog art seriously tend to disdain late-Victorian examples of the genre. Thus Robert Rosenblum, while championing modernist dog painting, describes the Scottish painter Robert Alexander's 1887 *The Happy Mother* (fig. 1) as "another specimen of the nineteenth century's endless pictorial whitewashing of the harshest urban and agrarian realities under images of plain, heartfelt felicity."³ Caroline Arscott, however, warns against dismissing such works too quickly, asking us to attend to their "complex orchestration of emotional response." In her account of the exhibition of animal paintings in working-class London neighbourhoods in the 1880s and 1890s, she argues that the genre, considered suitable for the target audience due to the lessons in conduct implicit in paintings of well-bred rabbit mothers nursing bunnies, only functioned successfully when it offered "multi-sensory pre-Oedipal satisfactions"—haptic pleasures of soft fur evoking egalitarian fantasies of plenitude even while serving a pacifying, patriarchal agenda of moral improvement.⁴ Many animal artists active at the

turn of the century made their share of happy family paintings. But some also envisaged alternative scenarios, mobilising haptic satisfactions to different ends, or refusing to offer them at all, either when their works are less sensually painted because geared to reproduction—animal paintings were popular and regularly featured in periodicals and color Christmas numbers, as book illustrations, on cards, and as stand-alone prints—or because of the subject matter, in which the absence of maternal bodies is marked. Rather than focus on the purely human implications of these works, I take inspiration from recent art historical emphasis on models, materials, and intermediality to consider what they reveal about the traffic in and (re)production of animals as well as art, something the common motif of dogs encountering other species opens onto.

To create her 1891 picture of puppies and chicks for the Royal Academy, for instance, Fannie Moody visited the shop of Charles Hearson & Co. at 235 Regent Street in search of models.⁵ In the window, she would have seen fluffy chicks, some pecking at grain on the sill, others, more recently hatched, in the glass room of a Hot-Flue Foster Mother inside the larger window display, “pushing their little yellow-down bodies against a metal chimney in the middle,” a gas burner taking the place of “the old hen’s body.”⁶ Hearson’s patented Champion Incubators (fig. 2), invented c. 1880, led the field: they regulated temperature automatically and were available with capacities ranging from twelve to two hundred eggs. The company always kept about five hundred eggs “under operation” in the Regent Street store so prospective purchasers could see chicks hatching “at almost any hour of the day,” and aimed to put “artificial hatching . . . within the reach of all,” whether for “profit or amusement.”⁷ Some promoted “artificial hatching as a fancy,” for “there is no end to the kinds of feather pets you might bring forth,”⁸ from pheasants to ostriches. But most used incubators to avoid “wast[ing] the time of the hen for the purposes of hatching,”⁹ and a short story at the end of Hearson’s handbook on artificial incubating and chicken rearing pits the Champion—“a sort of magical box” that “never deserts her nest . . . but will go on hatching for twenty years, till her progeny will overrun the world”—against “refractory fowl,” “bilious-looking” hens who won’t sit on their eggs.¹⁰

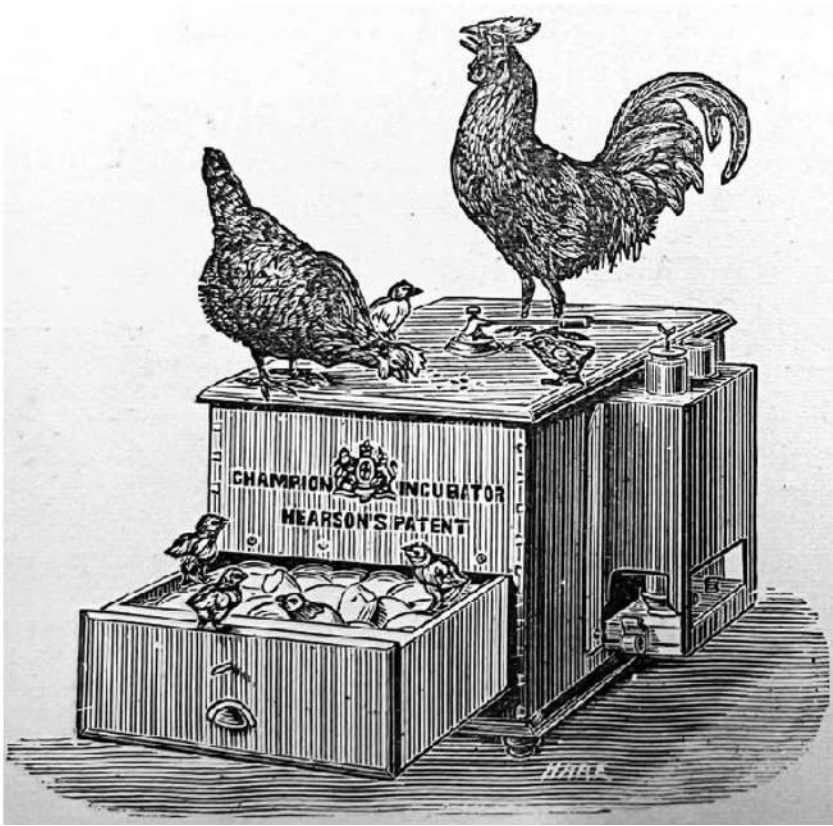


Figure 2. Detail of Hearson's Champion Incubator ad, *Illustrated London News*, April 2, 1887, 383. Courtesy University of Toronto Libraries.

Despite the magic of advertising and mechanical ingenuity, artificial hatching and fostering could be tricky, as Moody found out. Although she had bought her own (non-Champion) “patent incubator” for the chicks she had procured from Hearson’s, one that used a hot water bottle as the heat source, she was only able to keep them “alive three days . . . the hot water bottle was hardly a satisfactory substitute” for either a hen or a Hearson’s foster mother.¹¹ While they lived, she made quick sketches that she later worked up into her oil painting *Innocents Abroad*, depicting an encounter between three chicks and four puppies and their mother.¹² She rejected the use of photographs in cre-

ating her works, as photography, according to one commentator on her oeuvre, not only “makes work done under its influence mechanical” but also raises “that vexed question, infringement of copyright,” assuming the artist does not use her own.¹³ Her art, however, was broadly circulated using photomechanical processes.¹⁴ Half-tones of her sketches of chicks and ducklings, the latter also procured from Hearson’s, were produced by the ACME Tone Engraving Company for an article in *The Artist* about her work (fig. 3). The half-tone process, like albumen prints, required the use of mass-produced animal materials—in this instance fish glue and in others egg whites—enabled by the increasing specialisation and scaling up of animal farming and companies like Hearson’s.¹⁵ In some cases, then, Moody’s works relied on modernised animal (re)production and the circulation of animal materials from beginning to end.

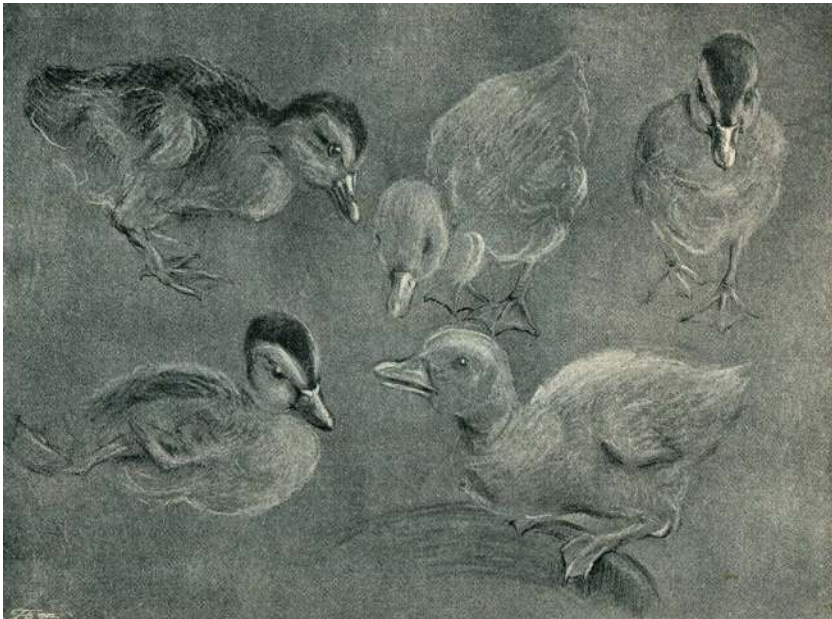


Figure 3. Fannie Moody, sketch of ducklings reproduced in Fred. Miller, “The Making of Pictures: The Animal Sketches of Miss Fannie Moody,” *The Artist* 26 (September 1899): 124. Courtesy Smith College Libraries.

The evanescent forms of the ducklings, their beaks the most solid part of their anatomies, doubtless reflect the difficulties of capturing mobile subjects, but the two- or three-fold replication of what appear to be two individual birds also suggests the logic of reproduction for consumption that governed their ephemeral lives. And while Moody's often humorous works do not overtly depict the grimmer facts of modern animal agriculture, there is nevertheless a recurrent theme in her oeuvre, and that of other contemporary animal painters, of seemingly motherless creatures, in works that implicitly raise issues of scale, circulation, and the fate of more traditional familial reproductive economies.¹⁶ Sometimes small, solitary animals encounter outsized others, in scenes reminiscent of contemporary animal friendship videos. Moody's *A Chance Acquaintance* (fig. 4), for example, represents a comparatively diminutive, lone "wandering and startled pig" meeting a mare and two foals in a meadow, while in *Good Morning!*, a variation on *Innocents Abroad* (fig. 5), a duckling and terrier peer inquisitively at one another.¹⁷ The works seem to celebrate a benevolent, mutual, and innocent curiosity, and perhaps even cross-species imprinting, yet a lurking threat linked to the discrepancies of scale and species haunts both, and may be found in a plethora of paintings of similar encounters by Moody, Walter Hunt, W. H. Trood, Lilian Cheviot, and others. Often picturing dogs with tortoises, birds, squirrels, hedgehogs, cats, grasshoppers, beetles, and outlandish canine breeds like French poodles, these paintings surely work to, but cannot entirely naturalise, the mobility and alienation associated with modernity. Their titles, moreover, which often refer to visitors and travellers "abroad," and even, albeit "humorously," intruders and aliens—in a period in which it was common to refer to animal "races"—allude to global forms of circulation and attendant anxieties as well, and confirm that the popular arts and ephemera of the cusp need a place in our study of the complexities of the period's new realities.

Some of the lone or lost creatures in these paintings are explicitly motherless, as in Hunt's 1897 painting of that name (fig. 6), in which a collie with a lustrous coat tenderly grooms the ear of a lamb resting in front of a fire. Edmund Caldwell's 1889 *Tea Time for the Puppy* (fig. 7) also evokes touch and warmth through the soft blanket on which the



Figure 4. Fannie Moody, *A Chance Acquaintance*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 75.57 x 87.63 cm. Artepics / Alamy Stock Photo.



Figure 5. Fannie Moody, *Good Morning!* 1895. Oil on board, 35.5 x 45.7 cm, private collection. Image courtesy Bonhams.

pup rests, and the taste of milk, but a biological mother is absent, her place taken by one of the many patent feeding bottles available to foster both human and non-human animals.¹⁸ Dwarfed by the shadowy empty basket behind it and by the implied viewer, the puppy wraps its paws around the hard glass, like Hearson's chicks pressing against their metal chimney. Trood's popular *'Wait Till the Clouds Roll By': Basset Pups* (1893) (fig. 8), named after a song about a couple separated by the sea, works similarly. One of three paintings exhibited by the artist at the 1893 Royal Academy, it shows two wet whelps sitting, half-in, half-out of a puddle under a tattered umbrella, their rain-drenched fur deterring touch. The umbrella's translucent red tissue, torn and sopping beneath a broken rib, suggests a damaged womb, at once fleshly and mechanical, and the handleless shaft cuts the pups off from contact even as their characteristic "forlorn"¹⁹ look seems to appeal for it.



Figure 6. Walter Hunt, *Motherless: The Shepherd's Pet*, 1897. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 114.3 cm, private collection. Photo © Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.

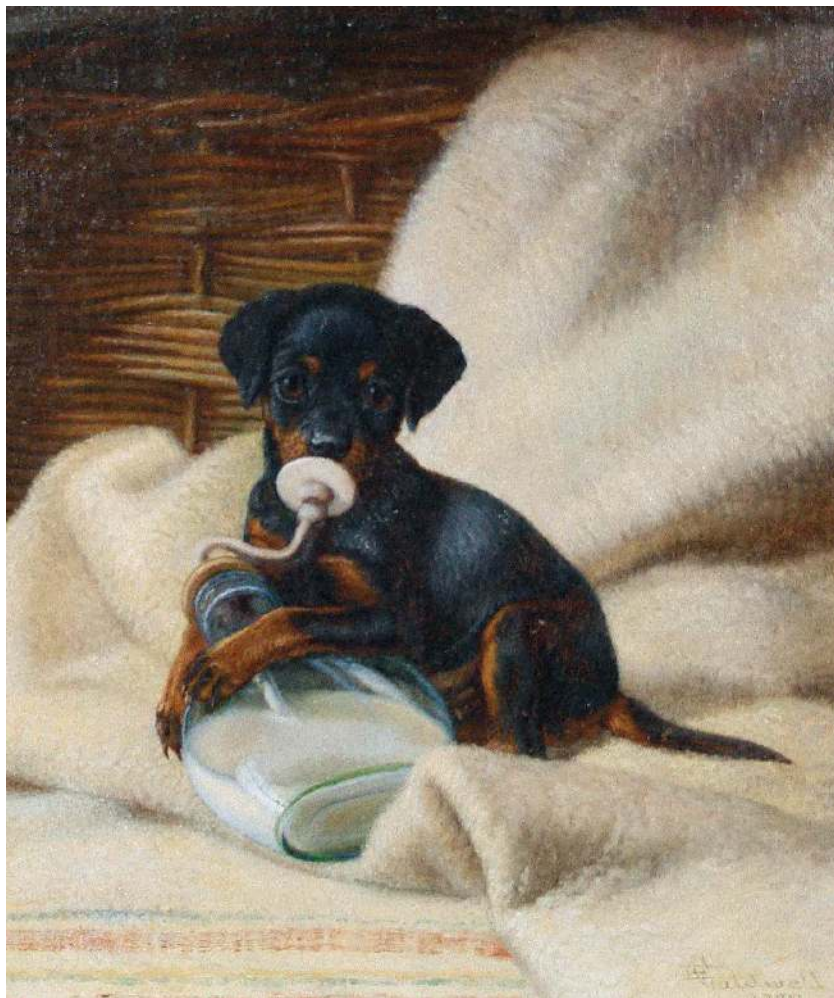


Figure 7. Edmund Caldwell, *Tea Time for the Puppy*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 33.5 x 31 cm. Image courtesy Bonhams.



Figure 8. W. H. Trood, “Wait Till the Clouds Roll By”: Basset Pups, 1893. Oil on canvas, 36.8 x 49.5 cm. Image courtesy Bonhams.

Bassetts are literally “low” subject matter (from the French *bas*), but this painting by Trood, who exhibited at the Grosvenor alongside the Glasgow Boys and English Impressionists, functions as a commentary on the work of art, and the animal, in the age of artificial reproduction. Two distinct styles of brushwork are visible: the carefully painted dog fur and mirror-like puddle under the aegis of the umbrella’s mechanical contrivance, and outside that sphere a more painterly sweep. While such differences almost certainly reflect Trood’s anticipation of the painting’s translation into print, with most effort spent on the key motifs, they also intimate something of the plight of naturalism (and, implicitly, of nature) at his fin-de-siècle moment.²⁰ The logic of reproduction, inherent in the doubled pups, is linked to a dehumanising distanciation from the artist’s hand, implied by the claw-like, amputated branch at right that forms a severed counterpart to Trood’s own *griffe* (signature, claw). Caldwell’s *Tea Time* contains a correspondingly oblique allusion to a defamilialising reproductive imperative where the fluffy nubbles of the blanket give way, at bottom left, to conspicuously

brushed coloured stripes that attest to the work's painterly construction and evoke the chromatic separation that would occur in the translation of a popular painting to chromolithograph.²¹

Hearson's ads for their Champion incubators convey a tension between older and newer modes of reproduction: they depict a hen, rooster, and hatchlings atop an incubator with a full drawer of hatching eggs that will soon supplant the nuclear family model. And the disruption to, or irrelevance of, traditional family structures, hierarchies, and reproductive mores suggested by some animal paintings can probably be linked to the opportunities the genre offered female artists who, following Rosa Bonheur's example, could hope to achieve recognition and financial independence. Lizzie McGill scandalized her relations when she took over Briton Riviere's studios in Kensington and "set up *en garçon* in London," living "alone with no companions but her servant and dog in a studio"; *The Women's Penny Paper* described her as "a bright example of what a woman can do to make herself independent."²² As a pro-suffrage, anti-vivisection, SPCA-advocate, McGill exemplified the way women's "painful struggle against patriarchy" intersected and resonated with the "concern for animal suffering" in the 1890s, as Diana Donald has demonstrated.²³ Maud Earl, the Rosa Bonheur or Lady Landseer of dog painters who held some of the earliest one-woman shows in London, simply confessed, "I don't like children" and preferred dogs, which "in all my pictures . . . come first . . . thus I reverse the usual order of things."²⁴

Not all animal painters were feminists, but challenges to traditional gender roles are implicit in paintings of orphaned or abandoned animals. Trood's *The Old Man's Darling* (1893) (fig. 9), for instance, pictures a kitten nestling into the crook of an old dog's leg as if to nurse, the painting exhibiting "true humour," according to *The Athenaeum*.²⁵ Such foster-maternalisation is even more overt in the story in Hearson's *Problem Solved*, in which Jim, an engine-driver on the railway, is injured in an accident. "Crippled" and unable to do "any rough work," an incubator enables him to earn a living but further emasculates him by making him "dry-nurse" to "two hundred little fluffy balls."²⁶ Poultry incubators themselves, which became the models for the human baby equivalents that soared in popularity at the end of the century, signalled the technocratic sidelining of the maternal body in the human as well as non-human animal context.



Figure 9. Edward Gilbert Hester after W. H. Trood, *The Old Man's Darling*, 1893. Etching on chine collé, 42.8 x 34.8 cm. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 10. Hearson's Champion Incubator Registered Trade Mark, printed in Chas. E. Hearson, *The Problem Solved: A Practical Treatise on Artificial Incubation and Chicken Rearing*, 23rd ed. (London, 1902). Wellcome Collection.

It is difficult for the horrors of today's battery farms and the climate impact of out-of-control animal production—an outcome anticipated in Hearson's story of poultry production that will “overrun the world” and the company's trade mark of a fracturing egg out of which nine rapacious chicks and ducklings are emerging (fig. 10)—not to inform our view turn-of-the-century breeding practices. But while some commentators mocked the fantasies of perfect fecundity associated with incubators, aspirations for food security and financial stability at home and in the empire at large inflected discourse about them. The title of Hearson's treatise *The Problem Solved* likely alludes to an 1874 book *The Indian Problem Solved: Undeveloped Wealth in India and State Reproductive Works*.²⁷ “Reproductive works,” or public works including railways and irrigation schemes that were intended to pay interest on the capital invested, or at least to contribute to the general wealth or productivity, were a matter of great debate in the later nineteenth century in Parliament and periodicals, in particular over the greater expenditure of the

government on railways in India compared to irrigation schemes some believed to be critical to preventing future famines. The story in Hearson's catalogue, which pits the destructiveness of the railway against a vision of endless multiplication of eggs and poultry that enables the lower-class protagonists to "conjure the rent," imagining a way to pacify and render productive working-class populations at home and abroad, thus tapped into popular interest in food economies, technologies, and reproductive issues that characterised the later nineteenth century.

Points of intersection between the reproduction of images and animals at the turn of the century require researching and thinking across disciplinary divides but also delving into lingering disciplinary biases. Animal encounter or adoption paintings' visions of creatures removed from familial environs attest to the uncertainty and possibilities with which the scaling up of forms of biological, technological, and visual reproduction, and the circulation of capital and bodies, were experienced and negotiated at the turn of the century. Their imaging of desired but potentially threatening or threatened creaturely coexistence does not simply, as Kathleen Kete argues of bourgeois pet-keeping, allow the imagination of a "better, more manageable version of the world."²⁸ Conceived for reproduction, such works are complex representations of nurture and alienation, security and risk, naturalism and abstraction that anticipate some of the contemporary forms of entertainment or self-care many of us partake of to cope with a globalised world in which our individual insignificance, impotence, and sense of lostness or loss, is constantly reinforced. And their exploration of touch—the mother's, the artist's—and its removal opens up new opportunities for revisioning worlds of art circa 1900.

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NOTES

- 1 William Secord, *Dog Painting: The European Breeds* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2000), 12.
- 2 T. H. L., "Miss Maud Earl Interviewed," *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* 47.1236 (May 22, 1897): 460–62, at 462.

- 3 Robert Rosenblum, *The Dog in Art from Rococo to Post-Modernism* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 64. Alexander's contemporaries were more favourable in their judgments, and his contribution to the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, *Cats and Dogs*, was "très remarquée." E. Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*, vol. 1 A–C (Paris: R. Roger et F. Chernoviz, 1911), 88.
- 4 Caroline Arscott, "Sentimentality in Victorian Paintings," in *Art for the People: Culture in the Slums of Late Victorian Britain*, ed. Giles Waterfield (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1994), 65–81, at 72, 81.
- 5 Although little known today, Moody, active circa 1880–1920, was regularly hung "on the line" at the Academy in the 1890s, exhibited at numerous other venues, and was described as occupying "a foremost place" as "a portrayer of our animal friends" in one popular serial. "Miss Fannie Moody and her Work," *Cassell's Magazine* (June–November 1901): 243–49, at 244; "Pictures and their Painters," *Pearson's Magazine* 6.32 (August 1898): 123–28, at 123.
- 6 Wiltshire Rector, "Chickens in Regent Street," *Poultry* (February 29, 1884), quoted in *The Problem Solved: A Practical Treatise on Artificial Incubation and Chicken Rearing*, 15th ed. (London: Chas. Hearson, 1885), 113.
- 7 *Problem Solved*, 38, viii, 9.
- 8 Gordon Stables, "Incubators and Chicken-Rearers," *The Boy's Own Annual* 9.437 (May 28, 1887): 550–52, at 551.
- 9 "Incubators," *The Agricultural Economist*, June 1, 1882, quoted in *Problem Solved*, 107.
- 10 Lady Duffus Hardy, "Walter's Secret," in *Problem Solved*, 118–33, at 130, 133, 120, 132.
- 11 "Interview: Miss Fannie Moody," *Woman's Herald* 4.136 (June 6, 1891): 515–16, at 515.
- 12 For a sketch of the painting, see Henry Blackburn, ed., *Academy Notes 1891* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1891), 87, no. 448.
- 13 Fred. Miller, "The Making of Pictures: The Animal Sketches of Miss Fannie Moody," *The Artist* 26 (September 1899): 121–30, at 130.
- 14 Her painting *Who Takes the Cake*, for instance, was featured in *The Graphic's* 1891 colored Christmas Number.
- 15 ACME used a fish-glue process; others used egg whites or a mixture of the two. "Our Half-Tone Workers," *The Photogram* 1.9 (September 1894): 228–29, at 229; Robert Whittet, "Half-Tone Engravings by the Enamel Process," *The British Journal of Photography* 42.1846 (September 20, 1895): 600–604, at 601. I thank Jennifer Tucker for discussing the egg production required for albumen prints with me. On Britain's reliance on egg imports from Europe, Russia, and North America, see "Imports of Food and Other Agricultural Produce in May, 1898 and 1899," *The Field* 93.2426, June 24, 1899, 945.
- 16 On more unequivocal statements of animal advocacy by non-animal painters, such as Marianne Stokes's *A Parting* (1884) and George Frederic Watts's *A Dedication* (1899), dealing with veal and the trade in feathers, respectively, see J. Keri Cronin's *Art for Animals: Visual Culture and Animal Advocacy, 1870–1914* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018).

- 17 “Miss Fannie Moody,” *Cassell’s*, 249.
- 18 Another popular motif, of sick or injured dogs, bandaged and/or being nursed with patent medicines or by their canine peers, may also remind us of the animal rescue and fostering videos popular today.
- 19 “Pictures and their Painters,” *Pearson’s Magazine* 7.39 (March 1899): 97–102, at 97.
- 20 Gilbert Hester’s 1894 mezzotint after Trood’s painting offers a careful translation, but a 1911 embossed holiday card issued by Raphael Tuck and Sons eliminates the setting, reproducing only the Bassets, umbrella, and a few lines indicating rain; renders the umbrella green; and adds text above and below.
- 21 They might also suggest the striped Hudson’s Bay point blankets traded for furs, both objects indicative of the centrality of animal bodies to the burgeoning global flows of capitalist modernity. I thank Alison Matthews David for this observation.
- 22 “Interview: Miss L. McGill,” *The Women’s Penny Paper* 2.99 (September 13, 1890): 553–54, at 553.
- 23 Diana Donald, *Women Against Cruelty: Protection of Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 230.
- 24 Wellesley Pain, “A Celebrated Dog Artist: An Interview with Miss Maud Earl,” *Young Woman* 74 (November 1898): 41–46, at 43.
- 25 “Fine Arts—The Royal Academy,” *The Athenaeum* 3369 (March 21, 1892): 671–673, at 671.
- 26 Duffus Hardy, “Walter’s Secret,” *Problem Solved*, 128, 133, 132. On this point it is worth noting that critics linked Trood’s “sympathetic understanding of dumb animals” to his deafness. Frederick Dolman, “Humour at the Royal Academy,” *The Strand Magazine* 23.138 (June 1902): 603–10, at 606.
- 27 *The Indian Problem Solved. Undeveloped Wealth in India and State Reproductive Works. The Ways to Prevent Famines, and Advance the Material Progress of India* (London: Virtue, Spalding, 1874).
- 28 Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir: Pet-Keeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2.