The Return of Colonialism's Repressed: Postcoloniality in the Art of Walton Ford

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THE RETURN OF COLONIALISM'S REPRESSED:
POSTCOLONIALITY IN THE ART OF WALTON FORD

A SENIOR THESIS SUBMITTED IN
CANDIDACY FOR DEPARTMENTAL HONORS IN ART HISTORY

DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

BY
JAEUN (CABELLE) AHN

ADVISED BY DR. PATRICIA G. BERMAN

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This thesis examines a selection of works by the contemporary American artist Walton Ford (b. 1960). Ford’s watercolors and prints feature animal and avian protagonists that are rendered in actual scale. His meticulous techniques recall those of eighteenth-and nineteenth century natural science illustrators. Ford often employs illustrations of the North American avifauna from John James Audubon’s *Birds of America* (1827-38) as a reference point. However, his images display complex appropriations that reach across art, literary, and cultural histories. His works are filled with not only embedded visuals with external reference points, but also with written inscriptions bearing complex connotations. As such, this project tackles his works through the following seven-steps.

In Chapter One, I introduce Walton Ford and offer a cursory archaeology of his artistic strategies. This initial exegesis is followed up in Chapter Two with a detailed investigation into the prominence of the nineteenth-century naturalist John James Audubon in Walton Ford’s works, from his textual references to actual appropriations of Audubon’s images. Chapter Three continues the investigation into the discipline of natural history itself, by examining Ford’s creation of his own “unnatural history” through subversive elements and quotations. Chapter Four takes a deconstructive approach to the tensions between written words and visual images with regard to understanding and formulating narratives—a concern widely considered by contemporary conceptual artists. Chapter Five examines Ford’s images in relation to the canon of animal fables, and to their subsequent sociopolitical implications. Chapter Six examines historicism as a theme and issue in contemporary art. To conclude the project, I entertain the complexity of the interpretative process itself in regard to vision and history.

This project is not a comprehensive undertaking of the entirety of Ford’s extensive artistic corpus. Rather, it takes a postcolonial and a postmodernist approach. This focus on the legacy of
nature and narrative in the legacy of imperialism is due to the fact that nature itself is a burdened invocation and Ford's propensity to quote from eighteenth-and nineteenth century texts, calls for such an analysis. This project, therefore, seeks to unpack the repressed postcolonial narratives that are liberated through the art of Walton Ford.
CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCTION: WALTON FORD

Walton Ford (b. 1960), born in Larchmont, N.Y. and raised only a few miles north in Croton, creates vividly beautiful and meticulously rendered watercolors and prints depicting life-size animals and birds—from minute humming birds to enormous Indian Elephants (fig. 1.a & 1.b). At first glance, Ford's works seem to be inspired by the corpus of John James Audubon, Edward Lear, Jacques Barraband and other prominent eighteenth-and nineteenth century natural scientists. Ford echoes their aesthetic vocabulary, including their preferences for watercolor and engraving as their media. Ford often locates his creatures in a diorama-like background with such minute backgrounds further emphasizing the immense size of his animals. He almost always transcribes the scientific names of his birds and animals in the bottom register, a practice driven by taxonomical impulses of nineteenth-century naturalists.

However, Ford's naturalist-infused historicism is at odds with the narrative content of the works. Ford's refers to his images as having “its own interior logic, yet its own visual language is cryptic.” This “interior logic,” alludes to the complex combination of written text, and images within images that, together, offers political, ecological, literary, and art historical critiques that may not be readily visible upon the initial viewing of his work. Then, at the heart of this project is the decoding of Ford's elusively coded watercolors and prints.

Ford’s images may be dissected into five sections: the fauna, the flora, the text, the background, and the scale. Ford’s creatures, always depicted life-size, are animals, birds, and reptiles that have involuntarily or voluntarily collided with human cultural history. The flora in his works, ranging from exotic trees to vines to stray petals, often offers a narrative of their own. At other times, they are solely deployed as formal tools to introduce colors into the overall composition. The
amount of text varies in each work. The earlier works display extensive text filling the margins of the image, as seen in La Historia me Absolverá (1999; fig. 2). In later works, the marginal texts disappear except for the titles as seen in La Fontaine, (2006; fig. 4) with the most recent works even foregoing the bottom register of scientific names as seen in Man of the Woods (2011; fig. 3). Ford’s textual sources are diverse, ranging from international fables, Benjamin Franklin’s personal letters, CIA documents from the Cold War, Audubon’s personal journals, modern day war anthologies, and religious texts including the Qur'an and the Holy Bible. The landscape in the background is often foreign to the natural habitats of the animal protagonists in the image. Rather, the background is tied to the historical and cultural narratives associated with that animal. Finally, while Ford’s works often appear single, they are sometimes presented in groups, forming diptychs, triptychs and multiple panels. The multiple grouping is due to the large size of animals such as buffalos and rhinos that are larger than ten by five feet, a size dictated by the weight limit of the Plexiglas needed to protect the works. Together, elements in the print coalesce into visually seductive naturalist documents.

Ford’s early work sought to literally rewrite Audubon’s images, as evidenced through early works such as American Flamingo (1992; fig. 5) and Blue Jay (1992; fig. 7). When they are juxtaposed with plates from Audubon’s Bird’s of America (1827-38; fig. 6 & 8), Ford’s quotations from the naturalist is evident. Ford’s strategies have since evolved to quote from the generalized format of naturalist documents, although Audubon has remained central to his works. The following watercolor, Scipio and the Bear, (2007; fig. 9) exemplifies Ford’s central strategies. This large scale watercolor-on-paper (151.1 x 303.5 cm) accommodates for the true-to-life scale of the bear cubs. Three life-sized bears cubs are depicted. One is located roughly in the center of the picture plane; the other is located higher up on the tree with only its upper torso visible. Their weights tax the integrity of the tree, as indicated by bits of branches breaking off in the upper left corner. Their fates are foreshadowed by the third bear, depicted mid-fall with only its lower torso visible. An idealized
landscape stretches into the background, with a minute scene on the lower right that shows dark silhouettes of dogs and human figures: two on horseback, and two on foot. The figures surround a burning tree with two bears perched on the uppermost branches. The red glow on the underside of the central tree and on the underbellies of the life-size cubs, suggests that the main tree may also be on fire. The unadorned bottom register displays the commonly used and the scientific names of the animal: Black Bear ~ Ursus americanus. The edges of the watercolor is aged with a wash of water and raw umber, evoking the foxing that occur on old prints kept in non-airtight storage. The title of the work is reproduced in pencil on the upper left corner, along with two lines of text below which read: “anxious to procure as much sport as possible.” The title is a reference to an excerpt, also titled “Scipio and the Bear,” from Audubon and His Journals (1897), which were written personally by the naturalist.

In the entry, Audubon begins by describing the black bear’s physical characteristics, its diet, and its habits. Audubon describes his own encounter with black bears during a stay with a friend, when a neighbor asked them for help in killing four bear cubs and a mother bear that were destroying his corn crops. The hunting party, composed of the huntsman, his friend, and his slaves immediately shot down two of the bear cubs. The mother bear escaped up a tree, and Audubon’s party felled the tree and set the dogs loose on her, in order to “procure as much sport as possible.” Scipio, one of the slaves, dispatched the large bear in the end. The two remaining bear cubs were discovered lodged on a tree, and the party set fire to the tree. The branches gave way and the dogs worried the fallen cubs to death. The scene visualized in the lower right corner appears to reference this last section of Audubon’s tale. Although Ford has altered the main scene to include three bears rather than two, the motif of the falling black bear cubs ties the larger image to the minute one.

Audubon has been a prominent presence in the historiography of Ford’s oeuvres, which adds up to over more than 120 watercolors and prints. Literatures on Ford are often introductory
essays accompanying exhibition catalogues or the artist’s monographs. A great majority of them are found in general interest publications ranging from newspapers to nature magazines. Critical publications such as *ArtForum* have only offered short reviews of his exhibitions rather than expository essays. Ford’s works have been called “a variation on John Ruskin’s ‘pathetic fallacy’”; Audubon ‘behind the scenes’; “Audubon crossed with Hieronymus Bosch,” or “Audubon-on-Viagra.” Such Audubon-heavy associations have tied the analyses of his works to naturalist art as well as to “contemporary environmentalism and geopolitics.” Then, in Chapter Two of the thesis, I consider the integral role that Audubon played in the very formation of American nationhood. Audubon’s *Birds of America* (1827-38) and *Ornithological Biography* (1831-9) were particularly integral to this project as they transformed the intangible notion of American nationhood into a consumable object by providing taxonomic images of the American landscape.

Despite the hyper-contemporaneous date of the work, *Scipio and the Bear* recalls a dated technique, due to Ford’s use of a dry brush watercolor technique that was favored by Audubon and naturalists. The technique, which is essentially an oil painting technique applied to watercolor, calls for a dry brush loaded with paint, and allows for vivid color saturation and precision of detail. When combined with his subject matter, often of animals, the false foxing that gives it an aged look, and the bottom register of scientific Latin names, Ford’s images recall eighteenth-century naturalist documents. Yet, read closely, it is clear that Ford’s project is not to copy eighteenth-century natural illustration and taxonomy—a project of the Enlightenment—but to call attention to the subtext of colonial violence in such illustration. This, as Ford proposes and as I analyze in Chapter Three, was also an Enlightenment project. In this third chapter, I consider the politically charged legacy of nature and natural history—such as that of ecological imperialism that facilitated the European domination of native landscapes. Ford’s works are revealed to narrate the savagery and brutality in imperialism and colonialism that were effaced in Audubon’s and others’ illustrations.
The propensity for critics to turn to Audubon in considering Ford’s works may be due to the complaint that “the stories Ford references are often obscure and the artist offers few clues to decipher the paintings. Without wall text or other exegeses, we are frequently lost as to the sources and the meanings of the works.” However, my thesis reveals that the clues are indeed present, and the embedded and often multivalent texts in his images reveal associations reaching across various disciplines.

For example, the black bears in *Scipio and the Bear* are loaded with symbolism. They were prominent symbols in Native American mythologies, but also have historical ties to Theodore Roosevelt who once refused to shoot Black Bears trapped up on a tree. This tale was used to idealize his moral stronghold, and led to the popularization of the Teddy Bear. Yet, the tale was a false idealization as the bears were killed at the hands of another member of his hunting party.9 The idyllic background may be seen to allude to Ford’s own artistic beginning in which he sought “to make alternative Hudson River School landscapes,” in order to “tell stories that wouldn’t have been included in traditional Hudson River School landscapes.”10 It may also represent the dominant idealized nineteenth-century depictions of nature that veiled the violence upon the landscape—the sportsman-like tradition that persisted throughout America.

The inscriptions themselves allude to original, historical textual sources. The title, “Scipio and the Bear,” overtly references Audubon’s journal entry but also may reference Scipio, the slave identified by Audubon in the excerpt who dispatched the mother bear. Scipio was used during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to name slaves that displayed “bravery,” as the name is an embedded reference to Scipio Africanus, the prominent Roman general considered as “one of Rome’s greatest generals, if not the greatest of all,”11 for his defeat of Hannibal. By centralizing the name, Scipio, Audubon may be seen, on the one hand, to highlight the bravery of the male slave against the mother bear. On the other hand, hunting is collapsed into a farcical performance, with
the Roman general’s great battle against Hannibal juxtaposed with Scipio’s dispatching of the bear, borne from Audubon’s desire to procure a bloody sport. By selecting the name Scipio, and by titling the watercolor as *Scipio and the Bear* rather than Audubon and the Bear or any other name, the instability of name and its historical associations is further centralized.

The complexity of Ford’s images thus invites an intertextual reading, defined by Julia Kristeva in *Desire in Language* (1980), as a permutation in which “several utterances, taken from other texts, intersects and neutralize one another.”

According to Kristeva, “each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read,” consequently positing the said text—Ford’s visual narrative in this case—“as a mosaic of quotations.”

My purpose in writing Chapter Four is to investigate this very process by applying deconstructive theories of narratology to unravel Ford’s intertextual narratives. The application of such discursive frames is due to the fact that Ford’s subjects derive not from the natural world, but often from the literary world. Moreover, Ford was also “adopted” by the literary crowd at Brown during his time at the Rhode Island School of Design from 1978–82 (when deconstruction was one of the prevailing doctrines of the era) where he became an autodidact.

Chapter Five examines the structure of Ford’s work in relation to fables, as fables replace historical circumstance with allegorical tales of the natural world. Ford has also noted that his works place “the animal squarely in the middle of the picture rather than as the real protagonist, like Carl Akeley or Flaubert or Hemingway,” a subversion that is intended to “flip-flop your viewpoint.”

Furthermore, Ford’s most comprehensive monograph is titled the “Pancha Tantra,” referring to the *Panchatantra*, the collection of Indian animal fables written sometime between 100 BCE and 500 CE. Such fabulous associations are heightened by works such as *La Fontaine* (2006; fig. 4), in which Ford alludes to the seventeenth-century French fabulist Jean de la Fontaine through written inscriptions and visual tropes. A comparative approach between literary fables and Ford’s visual fables reveals
that Ford’s images, even ones that do not actively invoke fables, draw upon the fabulous logic of using the natural world to comment on the violence and foibles of human cultural history.

To conclude my project, I will contextualize Ford’s historicism. Ford’s more recent works do not simply rewrite Audubon, but manipulate the naturalist visual tradition. In this sixth and final Chapter, I will locate Ford’s works in contemporary art where his inner narratives have been overlooked as his works were received as “a very accepted mode and conservative mode of representation,” yet, Edward Said has noted the “partial tragedy of resistance,” referring to the fact that colonial cultures have to, “to a certain degree, work to recover forms already established or at least influenced or infiltrated by the culture of empire.” Said’s assertion may be seen to illuminate the origins of Ford’s historicism as rooted in postcolonial critiques. A comparison with other contemporary artists, who also draw upon stylistic traditions of the past, reveals historicism as a subversive tactic. In Ford’s case, his historicism draws upon the naturalist documents that formed Western imperialistic hegemony over the previously native American landscape, in order to offer a critique of Western imperialism.

A great majority of works examined throughout this thesis has been examined in person, at Ford’s solo travelling exhibition “Bestiarium” (June-Oct, 2010) at Albertina, Vienna; at the Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York; and at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. I have also conversed with the artist, with quotes from my personal interview applied throughout the thesis. In this project, I draw from various disciplines in my analyses of Ford, such as postcolonial discourses, literary theory, and cultural, social and political history. This diverse evocation of sources, on the one hand, may be attributed to Ford’s own practices—his projection of literary, sociopolitical, and colonial history into a visual form requires the need to address the discourses of his sources. In fact, my first academic analysis of Ford’s work was undertaken as a term paper project for a course on the art and architecture of the European Enlightenment. In the paper, I analyzed Ford’s Le Jardin
(2005; fig. 10) in relation to French geopolitical ambitions, naturalist tradition, seventeenth-and eighteenth century physiognomic studies, the mobilization of allegorical history paintings as propaganda, and the theatrical politics of the French court, to argue that Le Jardin was a critique of pre-revolutionary socio-politics of France, rather than a “conflict between European and American sensibilities,” as critics have suggested.19

On the other hand, the diversity of my sources may be seen to follow the hybridity of imperialism itself, a theme that Ford’s images largely rely upon whether it is American imperialism upon the North American nature, French imperialism upon the North African landscape, or of American/Western capitalism upon the Indian landscape. Edward Said notes, “No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or Woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting-points, which is followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale.”20 The hybridity of my own sources and analyses follows Ford’s hybridity, which, through its multiplicity, excavates the hybrid nature of post-imperialist cultures and challenges the linearity of history itself.

As such, Scipio and the Bear, like many of Ford’s images, is not simply a visualization of Audubon’s journals or of the blood-thirsty naturalist caught “behind the scenes.” Rather it comments on the idealization of western narrative forms, the instability of language itself, as indicated by the multiple textual associations, and even the fissures in historical narratives as conveyed through the intertextuality of the image.

Peter Wollen asserted in “Into the Future: Tourism, Language and Art,” (1993) that “there is no single model of a hybrid or composite culture, but many different possibilities,”21 with modernism being succeeded not by “a totalizing Western postmodernism but by a hybrid new aesthetic…constantly confronted by new vernacular forms of invention and expression.”22 Perhaps Walton Ford’s hybridic historicism lies in his blend of texts culled from Western, Oriental, historic,
modern and postmodern sources—a vocabulary of hybridity that may be seen to rise to the challenge of Wollen’s call for new forms of invention and expression.
CHAPTER II.
AUDUBON’S DORIAN GRAY

Walton Ford’s visual language, which draws extensively from the canon of natural science illustrations, has been seen specifically to “quite explicitly derive from Audubon.” John James Audubon, the nineteenth-century naturalist, has exerted a decisive influence on Ford from an early age: when Ford was five, Ford’s older brother, Flick, was given a copy of Audubon’s *Birds of America* (1827-38), the famous collection of 435 color engravings based on life-size renderings of the avifauna of North America. Ford began to copy Audubon’s plates with the naturalist igniting Ford’s interest in watercolors, the artist’s preferred medium of choice. Even the series of six aquatint etchings Ford produced with the master printer Peter Pettengill (at Wingate Studios in New Hampshire) were designed to be the same size as Audubon’s “Double Elephant Folio” prints. Indeed, Ford’s mastery of Audubon’s techniques as well as the visual rhetoric of the published plates, may cause some of his earlier works to be mistaken as addenda to the *Birds of America*. In fact, it has been suggested, “Ford had done what virtually nobody else had done,” by creating works that locate “Audubon’s work in a definite historical and political context.”

However, Ford sees his surface quotations from Audubon and his generation of naturalists as at odds with the internal narratives that emerge from Ford’s own works. Ford categorizes his works as “fake Audubons,” that twist the original subject matter by getting “inside [Audubon’s] head” and trying to paint Audubon’s motifs “as if it was really his tortured soul portrayed, as if his hand betrayed him and he painted what he didn’t want to expose about himself…Almost like ‘A Picture of Dorian Gray,’ but a natural history image.” Ford’s desire to excavate Audubon’s psyche alludes to the naturalist’s huntsman-like, rather than ornithology-based, approach to nature illustrations. This is inconsistent with Audubon’s widespread status as the eponymous hero of the
esteemed bird-protection society. As a result, Ford may be seen to employ the visual and the narrative transparency of Audubon and his fellow naturalists, only to undermine it.

Ford’s first Dorian Gray revision of Audubon was American Flamingo, (1992; fig. 5). Parallels between the Audubon’s (fig. 6) and Ford’s images jump to the fore when the two are juxtaposed. The flamingos, perched on a flat outcrop, dominate both images. Other similarities between the two works include an ocean view in the background, dotted with shallow rocky outcrops that are populated by minute flamingos. The bottom register of Ford’s painting reads: American Flamingo (PHOENICOPTERUS RUBER) old male Plate 431 Drawn from life Jun 1838 The Floridas. The inscription references the text in the lower center of Audubon’s plate, which reads: American Flamingo (PHOENICOPTERUS RUBER) old male. Ford’s “Drawn from life,” echoes Audubon’s inscription in the lower left corner, which reads, “Drawn from Nature,” a reference to the fact that Ford sketched his Flamingos in nature in 1832, although he wasn’t able to obtain a specimen until 1838. Plate 431 is the plate number for the American Flamingo in Audubon’s Birds of America, which was published in June 1838. “Floridas” is an embedded reference to the site where Audubon saw Flamingos for the first time. Ford’s alterations to Audubon’s image include the addition of a minute boat in the lower left corner with a standing figure with a rifle on board. This addition references Audubon’s excerpt on the Flamingo in the Ornithological Biography (1831-49), in which he describes his own unsuccessful attempts to shoot down a flamingo. Ford’s flamingo is contorted and bleeding, as if Audubon’s shot was true, exposing the violent lengths Audubon employed to obtain a specimen for his images. A final addition to Ford’s American Flamingo is the text in the upper right corner where Ford has replaced rough sketches of beaks and feet of the Flamingo with the following excerpt:

If it be known the trials I have suffered to obtain this specimen!!! The Gizzard Large muscular, filled with shellfish minute & gravels – bird fat! O, Fortune spare me such pains in future!!
The first and third sentences appear to have no precedent in the naturalist’s writings. However, Audubon has hand-written “Gizzard Large muscular, filled with Shellfish/ minute & Gravel—Bird very fat.” on a different work, a sketch of a yellow rail.\textsuperscript{30} This inscription is a condensed version of Audubon’s writings on the Yellow-breasted Rail in the \textit{Ornithological Biography}, in which he writes, “gizzard is large and muscular, as in the Water-hen and our other Rails. One which I opened was filled with minute fresh-water shell-fish and gravel.”\textsuperscript{31} While the Yellow-breasted Rail has no relation to the flamingo, by reproducing the excerpt from Audubon’s field sketch, Ford not only echoes Audubon’s habit of making field notes, but the very un-Audubon Society like content of such notes. Rather than documenting birds for conservationist purposes, Audubon was interested in its internal structures as well as how it tasted. Then, Ford’s inscriptions preceding and proceeding this quotation from Audubon may be a manifestation of Audubon’s “tortured soul,” with his hands betraying him to reveal the trouble Audubon went to obtain the Flamingo specimen and his lament at being unable to properly kill one.

Then, Ford’s noticeable appropriation and subversion of Audubon’s image suggest that Audubon’s picturesque version is as fictional and as filled with brutality as Ford’s dying flamingo. Ford’s \textit{Blue Jay}, (1992; fig. 7) is another example of his early exploration of Audubon’s visual rhetoric, which again quotes from Audubon’s image of the \textit{Blue Jay} (fig. 8). While Ford’s blue jays partake in actions similar to Audubon’s birds, Ford’s alterations and additions—such as the exaggeration of the dripping yolk, the inclusion of a skeletal hatchling, and text that is taken from Audubon’s description about killing a prairie wolf—seem to draw out the disturbing and un-idealized view of nature that Audubon’s image may be seen to gloss over.

This particular focus on Audubon derives from the fact that his mapping of American birds came to embody the American colonial project, with Audubon’s images becoming a signifier for \textit{America} in the European imagination, eventually becoming a permanent part of the American
historical narrative. Yet, despite their heroic and iconic status, Audubon’s works were decontextualized from his one-man-avian-holocaust, as the naturalist himself wrote, “I have myself shot hundreds [of birds] in the course of an afternoon, killing from ten to fifteen at every discharge.” Audubon’s works were also removed from the legacy of ecological imperialism and colonialism that underlay the very field of natural history and its applications. Then, it may be offered that Ford’s visually stunning works seek to recontextualize the colonial past through the construction of subversive narratives that renegotiate history, visual rhetoric, and past and contemporaneous artistic styles, all the while offering an optical seduction through nineteenth-century modes of representation. They are a postmodern visualization of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which the concealed flaw is not of vanity but the fact of the colonial project masked behind heroic Western historical narratives—the “unsightly myth.”

The revisionist tone of Ford’s works has persisted from the beginning of his artistic career, although Audubon only entered his pictorial vocabulary in mid-career. Although Ford was already an accomplished graphic artist by the time he entered Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in 1978, he became a film major. Ford attributes his choice in major due to his desire to tell stories, explaining, “Narrative was the thing that was bugging me, and film seemed to be really important then.” Still, Ford continued to paint during his time at RISD, holding exhibitions in the coffee shops of Providence. However, rather than naturalist illustrations or revisionist paintings, Ford’s paintings, during this period were “wild semi-German Expressionist type of paintings.” Ford attributes his return to figurative painting to the painter Eric Fischl’s visit to RISD. Fischl’s figurative paintings offered an alternative to Ford against the dominating art historical trends, which Ford’s condenses as the perception that “narrative painting wasn’t cool.” Ford’s senior semester abroad in Rome continued the evolution of his pictorial strategy, with the artist citing Giotto’s cycle of paintings on the life of St. Francis at Assisi as one of his greatest inspirations. Ford recalls, “The
storytelling is so clean and clear. It’s unbelievably emotional without being overblown…I realized I was going to be a narrative painter.”37 In fact, it has been suggested that Ford’s visual strategies are “derived from the sphere of religious painting in which the viewer is presumed already to know the story,”38 as he employs an elaborate symbolic language that requires fluency of iconography to understand. Ford agrees that a high level of visual literacy is required to read his images. He explains, “in the Renaissance, allegories were decoded by the general public, but it’s not something we do now.”39 Even more revealing is Ford’s assertion that Hieronymus Bosch’s Temptation of St. Anthony, (1500; fig. 11) is his favorite work,40 a painting built up of dense codes and heavy iconography. The legacy of Bosch haunts Ford’s works as witnessed in the apocalyptic background of Benjamin’s Emblem, (2000; fig. 12)

After his graduation from RISD in 1982, Ford began to tackle his own autobiography—specifically, the legacy of antebellum South. Ford inherited a Southern pedigree, which he refers to as his “burdensome family history,” as both of his parents grew up in Georgia with servants, and his pre-civil war ancestors on both sides of his family were plantation owners in Tennessee and Georgia. Ford professes that his family held on to a “great kind of Southern gentleman, naturalist sportsman tradition,”41 and he felt alienated by the alternative Confederate view of American history that he inherited, including beliefs such as “Sherman as a villain.”42 An early work by Ford, Six Fingers, (1989; fig. 13), was created in response to a diary entry by his great-great-great-grandmother Emily Donelson Walton, in which she wrote about a slave girl born on her plantation with six fingers on each hand and how her mother “cut off the extra fingers and buried them under the rose bush in her flower garden.”43 Ford’s expressed his outrage against such a bloody ancestral legacy by gluing copies of the print to "every lamppost in downtown New York,” recalling, “I don't even know why…maybe I needed to expose this fucked-up thing in my family.”44
Another manifestation of his early artistic retaliation to his family history appears in *A Faulty Seat*, (1992; fig. 14), a painting in oil on wooden panels, with his choice of materials referencing the religious art that he encountered during his study in Italy. Ford describes the painting as displaying “ancestors of mine on horseback but losing control of their horses,” with the narrative content of the piece subverting “the whole equestrian tradition [that] has to do with mastery of a spirited animal and with control.”

*A Faulty Seat* thus revolts against the visual conventions of such dominant “heroic” narratives. Just as Ford sought to give visualization to the “tortured soul” of Audubon, this early painting also reveals the unnaturalness of existing Western painting traditions.

Although Ford had already began to appropriate and “re-script” Audubon’s iconic images in 1992, the refining of his visual vocabulary into his present day complexities may be seen as largely informed by his trip to India in 1994. That year, the Ford family received an opportunity to travel to India for six months when his ex-wife, Julie Jones, received a Fulbright Grant to study tantric art. Ford acknowledges, “without that stay, my work would not have taken the direction it has.”

The trip to India triggered his interest “in the clash of cultures, the constant cultural misunderstandings… it seemed to fit perfectly with what I was interested in before, which was the conquest of this country by people like my ancestors.” In India, Ford amassed extensive notes and photographs and started painting right away upon his return, “using Indian birds and animals to get at these issues of global misunderstanding.” Ford’s investigation of Indian birds as allegories of global concerns is shown in *Bangalore*, (2004; fig. 15). *

*Bangalore* depicts a Kingfisher, native to India, clutching an American bass-lure whose metallic artificiality seems out of place with the idyllic background. It remains ambiguous as to whether the Kingfisher is “importing” or “exporting” the lure, an object that is not only lethal to the bird, should it consume it, but one that would easily replace the existing indigenous mode of fishing. The lure would contaminate the landscape, making them, henceforth, dependent on Western technology. The implication becomes even more layered
when considering Bangalore’s status as a rapidly industrializing city, to the point at which it is one of the leading IT exporter in India. Thus, this print not only explores local concerns, but may also address global issues of Western domination over non-Western economies and ecologies.

Still, whether Ford is making references to India, Cuba, Sub-Saharan Africa, or North America, Ford’s images often appropriate the scale and the graphic style of John James Audubon, sometimes even drawing upon the naturalist’s writings. In fact, Ford has repeatedly returned to Audubon’s journals as a source including a set of eight works (fig. 3 & 16 - 22) whose dates range from 1999 to 2011. This collection of an etching and six watercolors depicts a single event from Audubon’s childhood, in which he witnessed one of his pet monkeys kill his favorite parrot (which I will examine in detail in Chapter Four).

Audubon was born in 1785 in what is now Haiti, as the illegitimate child of Jean Audubon, a French sea captain, and Jeanne Rabine, a French servant girl. Audubon’s mother died early in Audubon’s childhood and Audubon was raised by his father and his stepmother in Coueron, a village outside of Nantes. Audubon was a self-taught artist and naturalist and cultivated his early interest in nature during his childhood in France. Audubon later moved to Philadelphia, partly to escape conscription into the Napoleonic army, and he started to explore the American wilderness, even working as a taxidermist in 1820 at the Western Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio. He came to prominent attention in 1826 when he brought his watercolors of American wildlife to Liverpool, going on to publish his *Birds of America* in 1827, also called the “Double-Elephant Folio” due to its immense size. *Birds of America* was an instant sensation, and Audubon had no trouble finding European subscribers since “ornithology was a very popular science in Audubon’s day, particularly among the wealthy and well-educated classes of Europe.”\(^\text{50}\) In his illustrations, Audubon sought to locate the birds in their habitats, foregoing the classical naturalist practice of illustrating birds in profile against a plain background. However, the suggestion of a natural habitat is also misleading, as
Audubon’s prints often display generic landscapes that have no relations to the site of observation. Ford recounts, “He wouldn’t even paint the background—he would give it to another painter and say, ‘Put a rocky coast in the background.”51 Although there has been much scholarly debate over the extent of Audubon’s involvement in the backgrounds, his assistants are known to have contributed at least 190 of the 435 backgrounds.52

Moreover, Audubon’s subjects were always already dead, and he would sometimes kill as many as one hundred birds in a day, as Audubon preferred to work from freshly killed birds in order to preserve the brilliant shade of their plumes.53 His journals elucidates his hunter’s thirst superseding a desire for collecting and documentation, leading Ford to characterize him as “a National Rifle Association guy than an Audubon Society guy.”54 Audubon also posed his bird carcasses against a gridded background with thin wires inserted into the body, which allowed Audubon to position them in dramatic and life-like poses, later leading to criticism by naturalists for humanized expressions of his subjects, and his sacrifice of naturalism for aesthetics.55

Ford has repeatedly stressed that he is preoccupied with “painting things that looked like Audubons,” even mimicking Audubon’s spiky writing and his habit of making field notes in the borders of his paintings.56 According to Ford, “Audubon’s the guy that tells us what North America was,”57 linking Audubon to the emergence of American nationhood and the European colonization of North America, especially as his prints formed and established the myth of North America to continental Europeans.58 This link between the concept of nationhood and Audubon’s depiction of flora and fauna is located in the practice of mapping. Audubon’s birds may have signified America because the prints defined tangible boundaries and provided categories with which the population across the great continent of North America could identify. Benedict Anderson notes that “an American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-odd fellow-Americans…but he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous
activity," in this case, a list of birds. In that regard, exploration of the American nature was essential not only to the project of American colonization, but also to the understanding of American nationhood. Furthermore, documentation had to occur before colonization, as resources had to be mapped and the unknown had to become known. James Akerman argues that the link between cartography and the exercise of imperial colonization and management is an ancient practice, tracing back to the Roman Empire. Akerman proposes that starting in the late fifteenth century, European states employed cartography to not only control familiar domestic peoples and territories, but also distant empires in order to extend European power over newly acquired but yet unknown dependencies. Mapping during the early modern period was especially seen to offer a "visual accounting of its makers' nationalist or imperialist ambitions." For example, the rise in Dutch Mapmaking was seen to coincide with Netherland’s growing commercial prosperity. Detailed maps produced by artist cartographers such as Jan Saenredam (fig. 23) were seen to offer a nationalist undertone by offering “an allegorical image of the artistically intelligible shape of an emergent nation.”

This project of mapping is discussed by Anderson, who asserts that the census, the map, and the museum are three institutions of power that “profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion—the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry.” Just as “the Mercatorian map, brought in by the European colonizers was beginning…to shape the imagination,” of the colonized, allowing for the emergence of “a sort of political biographical narrative of the realm,” Audubon may have shaped the imagination of America by mapping the birds, and by implication, outlining the narrative of the American wilderness. It has been widely accepted that Audubon has come to represent "American ornithology" and American nature in general in the imagination of many North Americans, especially due to the naturalist’s association with the Audubon Society, the great North American
conservationist society. In fact, Helen Tiffin suggests in “Postcolonial Literatures and Counter-discourse,” that such documents of mapping as “Explorers’ journals, drama, fiction, historical accounts,” enabled “material and psychic capture” of the colonized. In turn, she notes that colonized paradoxically adopted such sources as “the ‘great’ literature which dealt with ‘universals’; ones whose culturally specific imperial terms were to be accepted as axiomatic at the colonial margins.” In this regard, Ford exposes Audubon’s illustrations as constituting an “invented tradition” of American historical systems. Ford’s appropriation and critique of Audubon’s visual language operate as an exposure of this “inventedness.”

Consequently, Ford’s quotations and pastiches of Audubon may be a misleading ruse, as much of a false construction as that of Audubon’s own persona. Audubon cultivated a flamboyant public image of the American frontiersman as a marketing tool, as he realized that his contributions to ornithology could not compare to those by naturalists with university training in systematic science and anatomy. Audubon built upon the myth of Daniel Boone, who he falsely claimed to have met, and established himself as the quintessential self-reliant American as idealized by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and as romanticized by Europeans. While Americans found Audubon’s bear-greased long hair, his provincial pantaloons, and buckskin jacket gauche, the English were charmed (although it should be noted that when it served him, Audubon would change his persona from that of an explorer to that of a polished European publisher). Upon his return to America in 1829, Audubon found that his European fame spread across the continent. He was gained an impressive list of subscribers including the Library of Congress and the State Department and was even received by President Andrew Jackson in 1830. Nonetheless, Audubon’s success in America was not natively born—he and his works had to be acknowledged as an “American” abroad in order for his works to be received with such accolades in the States.
It is this element of showmanship that Ford is highly troubled by. Ford explains, “[Audubon] was a mean-spirited liar. He made enemies wherever he went. He was repulsed by Native Americans. He shot more birds than he ever painted…and [was] not even that good an artist. Yet, his work became the standard for how nature is shown. I try to address that dialectic.” Ford’s artistic output, with a rewriting of Audubon and Audubon’s psyche as its very core, seems to be a conciliation of his own stance toward the French explorer, as he feels “a little ambivalent about the paternalism, violence, and arrogance [Audubon] personifies.”

This wariness may explain Ford’s strategy of inserting montage-like elements into Audubon-inspired visual fields. Montage was considered as “the main weapon in the critical artist's armoury against convention,” a characteristic that Russian constructivists adopted in their reclamation of political agency in the face of “dictatorship of philistine elements in Soviet spatial arts,” of the 1920s and the ‘30s, and perhaps adopted by Ford as a personal rebellion against Audubon and his legacy. In addition, Ford’s deployment of montage is applicable to Edward Said’s view of photomontage as a tool that would allow the telling of “other stories than the official sequential or ideological ones produced by institutions of power.” The very essence of photomontage was seen to resist “canonization and excludes the clichés of aesthetic convention.” Similarly, Ford may be seen to use montage as an offensive against upon narratives “produced by institutions of power.”

This amalgamative conception of image is reflective of Sergei Eisenstein’s theory of montage as Eisenstein saw montage as the basic principle for creating the image (obraz), which in turn constructed the work of art. His conception of the image existed in the opposition between image and representation (izobrazheni), a word that actually contains obraz within it. Eisenstein contended that a work of art is “a process of forming images in the mind of the spectator,” in which a “set of ideas enters our mind, forming a complete image composed of the separate elements.” For Eisenstein, a successful montage uses izobrazheni in order to give rise to obraz. A visual example of
Eisensteinian-montage surfaces in Mstislav Dobuzhinsky’s *October Idyll*, (1905; fig. 24) in which “the separate sequences, when juxtaposed, give rise to a common element, a synthesis of the theme i.e. an image which embodies the theme.” The separate elements or representations such as the spilled blood, the doll, and the flag in the background come together to form the image in Dobuzhinsky’s illustration, a paradigm echoed in such works as Ford’s *Scipio and the Bear*. The bear on the tree is not the core articulation of the print—rather, the narrative image is only formed when the tumbling bears are combined with the minute scene in the lower right, the idyllic Hudson River-style background, the snapping branches on the left, and the textual excerpt that references Audubon’s desire for blood sport. Ford’s employment of montage, then, may be considered as a revolution forward against the dominant pictorial tradition, a bold subversion of “comfortable” images through a revision of their narrative content. At the same time, this assault in itself is paradoxical as Ford may also be seen to evoke a sense of historical continuity through his mimicry of dated artistic visuals and painting techniques. Consequently, Ford’s watercolors and prints address the instability of history as it was represented, versus the unsightly nature of history as it truly was—a dialectic that posits his works as postmodernist storybooks written in Ford’s own brand of visual cryptology.

This thesis, then, argues that Ford’s works offer mnemonic remedies to “characteristic amnesias,” a condition that Anderson attributes to the historical ruptures of the late eighteenth-century, which engendered “the need for a narrative of ‘identity.’” Anderson asserts that nations became oblivious to the serial nature of their histories due to the deaths, wars, and changes in the modern centuries that caused profound changes to national consciousnesses, ruptures that Gayatri Spivak also ties to the decolonization project of the postcolonial era. This lapse in national memory required that national identities be constructed and reconstructed through narratives, and Audubon’s project, which provided a peremptory document of America, may be considered as a part of this contrived narrative.
Ford’s revisions of Audubon serve as reminders of the amnesiac condition of naturalist art, and they offer a form of mnemonic recuperation by reconstructing its unsightly historical context. Each exegesis of Ford’s work is a therapeutic reconciliatory exercise that exposes the deficiencies of Western narrative strategy, which masked the “historical ruptures,” and reveals the folly of humankind’s dominion over nature, of anthropomorphizing animals, of Audubon’s project, and of the idealization of global imperialism.
CHAPTER III.
UN-NATURAL HIS'TORIES

To continue my investigation from the previous chapter, Ford’s use of montage not only offers analytical consideration of Audubon’s *Birds of America*, but of the historical natural science in general. In his works, Ford embeds references to naturalists’ journals, specimen collections, museum display, and other forms of reproduction that have supported the political processes of colonization. In this chapter, I will examine the tension between the visual format of his documents, which assumes the shape of a naturalist document, and his internal references to colonial geopolitics and to the taxonomic natural histories. The principal proposition of this chapter is that Ford’s images offer an un-natural history art by exposing the historically repressed narratives of the natural world.

*Compromised* (2002; fig. 25) demonstrates the complex intertextual evolution in Ford’s images. Here, he begins to quote from diverse literary sources and removes his birds from their natural ecosystems and locates them in a hybridized space. *Compromised* depicts two separate species of ibises: the Sacred Ibis, which once lived along the Nile, and the Glossy Ibis, that can be found across Europe and North America. While Audubon depicted the Glossy Ibis in his *Birds of America*, (fig. 26), *Compromised* is no longer a direct revision of Audubon. Unlike his strategies in *American Flamingo*, (1992; fig. 5), the only relation that *Compromised* has with Audubon is the size, which is modeled after Audubon’s “Double Elephant Folio,” and also as Audubon depicted and wrote about the bird.87

In *Compromised*, two ibises interact in a manner that is sexual and combative. It is impossible to determine which bird has the upper hand. The two birds are engaged in a circular system of lines that unite them into a co-dependent form. For example, the blue shade of the Sacred Ibis’s neck, wing tips and the legs meld in with the blue plumage of the glossy ibis, compositionally uniting the two birds. Further, the angles of the glossy ibis’s wings mirror those of the bird underneath. The
title, the largest of the texts, is part of an excerpt from Alexander Kinglake’s *Eothen* (1844), a book that recorded Kinglake’s trip through the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth-century. *Eothen* traced the collisions between Christendom and the Ottoman Empire. This particular excerpt, reproduced on the upper left corner of *Compromised*, advises that to enter the Ottoman Empire was to compromise oneself due to the ongoing plague, and that “to break the laws of quarantine” upon one’s return, would result in a swift death. In fact, Eothen may be translated as “the other place,” in Ancient Greek: the Orient. The relief in the foreground of the print shows a child held by a woman, whose headdress echoes the sun disk and horn headdress of the Egyptian goddess Isis (fig. 27). The link to Isis is emphasized by the background temple, which can be identified as the Temple of Philae (fig. 28). Philae was originally dedicated to Hathor and later to Isis in the Late Classical and Hellenistic period. It was seen as one of Osiris’s resting places and was designated as unapproachable, and it was considered profane for anyone but priests to dwell there. From this initial reading, the birds may be seen as “compromising each other,” as they would never be seen mating in nature due to the differences in their habitats. They are both foreign—the other. On the other hand, their very presence near the sacred temple may also be seen as a form of compromising themselves, with their sexual violence encroaching upon the sanctity of the holy temple. Finally, the image is evocative of an artificial stage, perhaps even of a diorama found in a natural history museum. The proliferation of details—the columns with lotus flower capitals on the right, the urn, the broken relief, the mostly blank sky, and the linear rendering of the background and the lightening of the sandy ground near the coupling birds, which is suggestive of a limelight—replicate the notational systems embedded in natural history displays.

In fact, the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York serves as one of Ford’s primary inspirations. The taxidermied animals in the Museum serve as source of his initial sketches of birds and animals. However, the dioramas at the AMNH, more than the taxidermied
animals, particularly inspired Ford. He can cite his favorite diorama painters: Carl Rungius and James Perry Wilson, who painted dioramas in the *Hall of the North American Mammals*, (Rungius from 1913-34 and Wilson from 1934-53) and Carl Akeley, the conceiver and designer of the *Akeley Hall of African Mammals* at the turn of the century. In fact, Ford asserts that such dioramas at the AMNH “are the most beautiful in the world…You will not find any landscape painting in New York better than these backgrounds.” However, the landscapes that are found within the confines of AMNH and similar institutions are equally unnatural. The landscapes depicted are often linear and flat and are painted in order to harmonize with the rest of the artificial display. Some landscapes even display subversive elements irrelevant to the animal display such as a burning village (fig. 29.a) or racialized natives (fig.29. b).

While Ford commences with “the kind of research that legitimate natural history artists do,” the artist asserts that his ideas originate from “the great indoors—from books, from the Internet, from scholars.” As a result, Ford’s view of nature is mediated from the inception. It has already been filtered through illustration, and consumed through industrialized goods. In fact, Ford has frequently stressed his disinterest in “what animals do in nature,” due to the fact that “if you’re in nature, most of the time nothing really happens.” Rather, his interest lies in how animals are portrayed “in the human imagination.” In that regard, it seems all too appropriate that the sources of his inspirations and primary sketches come from the stuffed animals at the AMNH. Ford notes that the dioramas at the AMNH are “about the way that someone like Teddy Roosevelt thought about the world. So there’ll be a big male right in the middle and there’ll be a family group that’s kind of reclining, you know—there’s no career woman, no matriarchies, which there are in natural history, but they weren’t interested in observing that.” Similarly, Ford chooses to model his “nature” on such pre-formulated cultural images of nature to excavate the cultural undertones that are present in unnatural environments such as museum dioramas.
This tension between the natural and the unnatural worlds also manifests in his techniques such as the false foxing around the edges of his works that simulate the patina of history. Despite the unnatural inspirations that underlie his images, such references in Ford’s watercolors and prints capture the essence of nineteenth-century naturalist documents. In fact, Ford claims that his works display “the exact techniques and the exact kind of paper and calligraphy” of naturalist notebooks. For example, the text in the bottom register of Compromised, displaying the scientific and the colloquial name of the two ibises, and the practice of numbering (shown lower left of the Sacred Ibis and in-between the wings of the Glossy Ibis), may be seen to echo taxonomic impulses present in natural history recordings. Ford has affirmed this resemblance, asserting that his works look like “the kinds of notebooks that these colonial guys kept where they did sketches of the local fauna and flora, and named it after, you know, themselves and their own friends and colleagues back in England or whoever first described it.”

However, while such naturalist documents, such as notebook pages, often bypassed scale for the sake of indexical recording, Ford’s avi/fauna are always life-sized. Scale is a critical issue, even a spectacle, for Ford. The life-sized renderings of a lion and a crocodile, as seen in La Fontaine, (2006; fig. 4) may be seen to shatter all logical conception of natural history illustrations, as they no longer serve as indexes but rather serve as theatrical spectacles. As Ford explains, “for me to suddenly make an elephant life-size or a tiger life-size…in the mode of the notebook style to imply that it was done from a dead specimen or done from life in the field, was just this odd conceptual object to make.” His assertion refers to the paradoxical nature of his works. While his visual iconography suggests naturalist notes that normally forsake scale for purposes of practical scientific recording, the massive sizes of his works distance them from any notebook-sized illustrations. Ford acknowledges, “When you make something life-size, it does have a way of pushing against the picture plane.” This ever-present tension is born from his desire to recreate the feeling of shock when one sees an animal in
real life “because the thing is either smaller or larger than you thought.” This recognition of
surprise is further amplified by the fact his large-scale animals are on paper. Almost every aspect of
Ford’s images, from his inspirations to his backgrounds to his compositions, are unnatural as they
are based on book illustrations, taxidermy, internet-sources, and even plastic toys. The only thing
that remains “real” is the scale of his animals and birds. Yet, even though the size may be true-to-
life, the scale of his animals is made doubly unnatural within the context and the presentation of his
images. Then, Ford’s works may be seen to collapse the boundary between nature as recorded and
nature as perceived, in which the paper oscillates between its function as an indexical recording and
as an authentic translation of the animal’s dimensions. Whereas the kingfisher, the flamingo, and the
ibises derive from the worlds of natural history, as shaped by Audubon and the AMNH, Ford turns
them into elements in an unnatural history. Further, these images are anti-canonical within the
context of Audubon and his generation of naturalists due to their quoted texts and inhospitable
environments.

Unnatural history has been a recurring theme in art, perhaps popularized extensively by the
eighteenth-century artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s vedute paintings (1744; fig. 30). Piranesi’s images
overturned the idealized topographical souvenirs that were popular among eighteenth-century
Grand Tourists. The “normal views,” such as those of the Venetian canals by Caneletto (1740; fig.
31) offered views that were closer to those observed by the tourists. The power of Piranesi’s work
lay in the conversion of “topographical” recording into an image of potency, by creating networks of
turbulent shadows and menacing foliage. For example, his Vedute di Roma series (fig. 30) eschewed
indexical recordings of Roman ruins. Piranesi used sublime aesthetics, manipulating existing views
into a grand unnatural image. Piranesi’s unnatural aesthetics were further stretched through his
capricci, such as Via Appia (1756; fig. 32), that presented a fantastical amalgam of fictive and existing
ruins, monuments, and buildings. Such images turned structures, which would have appeared natural
by themselves, unnatural by juxtaposing and layering them.

This tension of the un/natural world was later thoroughly explored by early twentieth-century academic surrealists. Like Ford’s images, surrealist works were seen as “caught right between daily life and hallucination,” echoing Salvador Dali’s assertion that it is through “failure to harmonize with reality that images assume the forms of reality and that the latter in turn adopts itself so readily to the violence of images.” Surrealist artists also questioned the discourse of natural history, and Max Ernst’s sequence of plates titled *Histoire Naturelle*, (1926; fig. 33), in which he “transcribed, with maximum precision, a series of optical hallucinations,” scrutinized the boundaries between the “inner and the outer world.” Ernst asserts in his essay, “What is Surrealism,” that the “factual circumstances in the external world...possess object reality quite independent of the process of observation,” and “conjunction of two or more allegedly quite incompatible elements in an incompatible context sparks off the most powerful poetical insights.” Ernst’s concern for the gap between an object as it is and the object as perceived, is repeatedly explored in Ford’s aesthetics that address the tension between the externally perceived and internally implied narratives in nature.

The discourse of un/natural history has also remained a popular inspiration in contemporary art. Mark Dion’s *The Library for the Birds of Antwerp*, (1993; fig. 34), incorporates natural history techniques of classification, taxonomy and taxidermy to scrutinize the boundaries between nature, science and cultural history. More closely related to Ford’s works, Hiroshi Sugimoto’s *Dioramas* series, (1975-99; fig. 35) explores the dichotomous realities of manmade nature that is expressed through museum dioramas. Like Ford, Sugimoto was struck by the dioramas at the AMNH, yet noticed on the other hand, that adjustments to the camera and the conversion of the image to black and white could turn that artifice natural. Sugimoto recalls, “by taking a quick peek with one eye closed, all perspective vanished, and suddenly [the dioramas] looked very real...once photographed,
it’s as good as real.” Sugimoto’s photos, which hide the frame-and-glass evidence of a museum diorama, can be compared to Ford’s depiction of animals: both works conceal their unnatural origins. Yet, endemic to Ford’s artistic strategy is his emulation of naturalist documents based on the taxonomic impulses of the discipline.

A. The History of Natural History:

The inception of the discipline of a taxonomic natural history may be traced all the way back to the Roman Empire, with Pliny the Elder’s publication of Historia Naturalis in 77-79 CE: an encyclopedic publication consisting of 37 books on topics such as geography, zoology, botany and mineralogy. The very first depiction of the natural world may stretch back even further to the Caves of Lascaux, which included near life-size drawings of animals. The first natural history images, in context of the actual modern discipline, are considered to be found in Konrad von Megenberg’s Das Buch der Natur, which was written in 1350 and published in 1475. The woodcut prints of plants and flowers in the book were seen as the first time images of nature were used with the intention of illustrating the text, rather than for decorative purposes. Publications on natural sciences rose to prominence during the sixteenth century including Leonhart Fuch (1501-66)'s De historia stirpium commentarii insignes (1542), an immense natural history publication composed of 896 pages and 512 woodcuts. Although specimens from the New World were already incorporated into natural history books in the mid-sixteenth century, the first extensive images of the nature of the New World are seen to be extensive botanical illustrations of Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues (fig. 36). Morgues’s illustrations were later published by Théodor De Bry in 1591 under the title Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida Americai provincia Gallis acciderunt.

I would now like to provide a history of natural history by drawing upon Michel Foucault’s proposals in The Order of Things (1966). Foucault’s text may be seen as especially pertinent to Ford’s
project as Foucault and deconstruction were the critical rage during Ford’s undergraduate career.\textsuperscript{117} Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, which deconstructed modernist accounts of history to provide the archaeology of epistemology itself, was translated into English in 1971,\textsuperscript{118} and Foucault remained prominent during the decade as he often visited the US in the 1970’s and the ‘80s.\textsuperscript{119}

Foucault asserts that the *episteme* before the Classical Age of the eighteenth-and-nineteenth century put language first, as “all that existed was histories,”\textsuperscript{120} since “observation, document, and fable,” now considered integral to the historical domain of natural history, did not exist. The historian’s task during this period was “defined not so much by what he saw as by what he told.”\textsuperscript{121} This is not to suggest that knowledge of this period were solely presented in writing. Early modern Europe witnessed the shift from presenting knowledge through words, diagrams and formulas into a visual form, with the latter seen to facilitate the distribution of knowledge.\textsuperscript{122} Prints, in particular, allowed the refinement of knowledge through consolidation, correction and evaluation.\textsuperscript{123} Depictions of the natural world during this period insisted direct observation with visual documents often accompanied by claims that they were made “from life.”\textsuperscript{124} However, such claims differed from Audubon’s assertions of “Drawn from Nature,” or from Enlightenment impulses of direct documentations. Rather, observation, during this period, was a prolonged process. Observations of the natural world were not photographic captures of nature but often offered “general type of a plant species or genus, not an individual exemplar with all of its idiosyncrasies.”\textsuperscript{125} Examples such as the Flemish naturalist, Rembert Dodoens (1517-85)’s botanical illustration (1568; fig. 37) offered observation as a cumulative process. Natural scientists observed many examples of species or genera before crystallizing them into an observation.\textsuperscript{126} They were *epistemic* images, as they were not intended to picture the object of inquiry but to replace it—rather than a representation of nature, it was seen to distill languages and histories proffered through written texts.\textsuperscript{127}
According to Foucault, the rise of Classical Age natural history was instigated by new curiosities following the spirit of Aufklärung. The European Enlightenment provided novel ways of seeing nature, that were instigated by voyages of inquiry or exploration, as well as through the ethical valorization of nature as propounded by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788). The episteme of the Classical period also gravitated toward taxonomy, as per the Classification genius of Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), and henceforth, the fundamental task of natural history was seen as “arrangement and designation,” with nature systematically categorized into a linguistic matrix. The present day conception of biology did not exist during this period as “life itself did not exist, all that existed was living beings which were viewed through a grid of knowledge,” with natural history as merely “a system of signs for denoting beings.”

Foucault attributes the end of taxonomic natural history with Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829)’s *Flore Françoise* (1778), which revealed the gap between organic structure and nomenclature, and unlocked “the order of words and the order of beings.” Lamarck was succeeded by Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), who exposed the inadequacy of the Classical taxonomic table through his findings on biological incompatibility. He consequently broke up “the surface upon which all natural beings had taken their ordered places,” replacing natural history with a 'history' of nature. This evolution into modern day biology allowed for “a historicity proper to life itself,” with the conception of the living being as “a locality of natural classification,” shifting to the understanding that “the fact of being classifiable is a property of the living being.”

Consequently, in the context of the Foucauldian view of natural history, Ford’s works may be seen to address the fallacy of the classical taxonomic table, a theme that rings throughout his artistic portfolio. It may be suggested that his works collapse the entirety of the evolutionary stages of the very discipline, with his merging of language, myth, and taxonomy exposing both the inadequacy of “the grid of denominations,” and the inefficacy of the very discipline, therefore propounding his own history of the unnatural history. The inner narrative of his images, which take
the surface form of naturalist documents, is far from the naturalist tendency to categorize and classify.

*Compromised* displays this link to the history of natural histories not only through Ford’s surface strategies, but also through the cultural significances of the birds. The Sacred Ibis was tied to encyclopedic impulses via Napoleon’s excursion into Egypt (1798-1801). The Sacred Ibis was one of the first mummified sacred animals to be discovered in Egypt, with natural historians at the *l’Institut d’Égypte* subsequently taking a keen interest in the bird.\(^{134}\) The botanist Jules-César Savigny, recommended to the expedition by Georges Cuvier,\(^ {135}\) took a keen interest in the Sacred Ibis. Savigny published the *Histoire Naturelle et Mythologique de l’Ibis* in 1805 before any volumes of the *Description de l’Égypte* (1809) could be published. Savigny’s publication thus became one of the first symbols of Napoleonic scientific triumph. Upon the expedition’s return to France, Cuvier discovered that physical structures of the ancient Ibis, discovered in mummified form in Egypt, was identical to those of the modern Sacred Ibises.\(^ {136}\) This observation refuted Lamarck’s evolutionary ideas, consequently leading to the breaking of the taxonomic table, as outlined above.

In *Compromised*, the very idea of taxonomy and classification is equally revealed as a fallacy. The urn and the “Egyptian” air of the background may allude to the geographical site where Ibis mummies were first excavated. However, Ford’s Ibises are not objects that have been dissected and displayed into a taxonomic format. Rather, their vigorous composition suggests a “historicity proper to life itself.” At the same time, Ford’s Ibises would not have been observed in the wilderness, or by fresh ibis carcasses à la Audubon. Rather, they come from un-natural inspirations, from taxidermies and reproduced images that have already been manipulated by humans. As Ford’s observation and documentation derive from unnatural sources, his image may be seen to expose the falsehood of both Audubon and early modern natural scientists’ claim to observations “from nature.” In fact, the imbalance between the scale of Ford’s animals and that of the background may be seen to echo the
propensity of early modern Netherlandish naturalist prints to depict animals without consideration to the size of the background. For example, Adriaen Collaert (1560-1618)’s prints (fig. 38) locate animals in landscapes characteristic of Netherlandish art. The unnaturalness of the background of Collaert’s may be seen to precede Ford’s visual strategies by nearly five centuries. Thus, Ford’s images may be seen to excavate the folly of the history of natural science and their ersatz claims to documentation, observation, and classification.

B. Nature & Imperialism:

Ford’s evocation of natural history, in *Compromised* and other works, especially in the context of the eighteenth-and nineteenth centuries, underscores the link between nature and colonization. The incursions of continental Europeans into the New World provoked a form of ecological imperialism, in which the destruction of native flora and fauna became a method of conquest. Alfred Crosby, in *Ecological Imperialism* (1986), suggests that the “destruction of native flora and fauna, disease, felling of forests and land clearing and introduction of new animals transformed the land as well as the ways in which ‘land could be apprehended.’” 137 Crosby contends that “the success of European imperialism has a biological, an ecological, component,” as the “sun never sets on the empire of the dandelion,” 138 a reference to a well-known example of a geographical colonization of the New World through a flora of European origins. Dandelions were originally native to Eurasia, 139 which invaded the New World in the sixteenth century. Seeds of Old World weeds such as dandelions, nettles, and clover came to the New World hidden in crop seed and animal feed and were spread through dung and stuck to clothing. 140 From the beginnings of European exploration and colonization, ecological domination was already underway with the onslaught of such weeds altering native ecosystems, even turning species extinct. 141 This link between political colonization and the conquest of nature is reflected in an unfinished project started by Ford that was intended to
be a bestiary of the animals Columbus discovered in the New World that have now become extinct.\textsuperscript{142}

This project, which included \textit{Columbiana-Martinique Amazon Extinct 1750}, (1991; fig. 39), was Ford’s commemoration of the 500\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Columbus’s landing in the Americas.\textsuperscript{143} The image displays the now-extinct Martinique-Amazon parrot, extinct orchids of the Columbiana genus, Columbus’s coat of arms, a broken nose sculpture, small bells, and a pre-Columbian relief. The relief may derive from Taíno culture, which flourished in the Greater Antilles and was one of the first to come into contact with the Spanish in the late fifteenth-century. When the relief is compared to a Taíno death mask (fig. 40), the similarities in the rendering of the eyes, the mouth, the nose, and even of the forehead circle become evident. The lower text is a Latin excerpt from Jeremiah 4:7, translated as: “The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way.”\textsuperscript{144} The signature on the right is that of Christopher Columbus, accompanied by the date 1503 referring to Columbus’s last voyage to the New World (1502-4). Although Columbus clashed with Taíno culture in 1492, it was only during his last voyage that Columbus landed on Martinique, the landscape that would have once held Martinique-Amazon parrots.\textsuperscript{145} The nose and the bells, in the context of Columbus’s voyages, may be seen to refer to the Spanish practice of handing out worthless trinkets such as hawk’s bells to the indigenous population, and their hideous practice of cutting off the tips of noses and ears of Indians that were accused guilty of stealing such objects.\textsuperscript{146} By juxtaposing the extinct flora and avifauna with such historically burdened items, Ford may be seen to critique the objectivity of natural history depictions. In this work, he contextualizes images of the New World with the colonial legacy of Columbus—it is a postcolonial unveiling of the bloody legacy of European imperialism (symbolized by Ford’s inclusion of the Taíno death mask). In fact, the power of Western imperial forces over the history of the New World is emphasized by the date in the title, 1750. In that year, João V of Portugal and Fernando VI negotiated the
boundaries of their dominion over present day Brazil through the Treaty of Madrid.

Animals have played a polemical and integral role in postcolonial discourses. Ford’s deployment of animals as elements in a postcolonial narrative may be seen to critique the colonialist’s view of indigenous cultures as primitive. According to Cary Wolf, this form of anthropocentrism was seen to later spiral into racism and genocidal “othering,” by providing ethical justification for Europeans in “the systematic, institutionalized killing of non-human others,” by classifying the indigenous population as sub-human.\textsuperscript{147} In Ford’s works, the boundaries of the human and the animal are often muddled as animals not only embody human dramas, but sometimes also assume human physiologies. An example surfaces in \textit{Nantes},\textsuperscript{148} (2009; fig. 17) in which the facial features of the West Africa native Diana Monkey disturbingly echo those of Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson’s \textit{Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley}, (1797; fig. 41). This portrait, which has faced much scholarly scrutiny, was seen to racialize the subject with Belley’s cranial structure echoing late eighteenth-century studies of racial physiognomy.\textsuperscript{149} This portrait presents Belley (a Senegal native who was enslaved but freed in 1760s by joining the French army in Saint-Domingue) as the quintessential Republican French citizen-soldier.\textsuperscript{150} Belley’s facial angle is emphasized by his pose, as has been seen to echo the fascination with facial angles in European ideas on physiognomy. Facial angle studies were instigated by the Dutch physiologist Petrus Camper (1722-89), whose treatise on facial angles (published posthumously in 1791) organized eight categories of heads (fig. 42.a & 42.b ) with “nègre” placed in between an ape and the Greek Apollo.\textsuperscript{151} Such physiognomic studies were deployed to propound alleged distinctions among ‘peoples’ or races. As such, \textit{Nantes} may highlight the racial undertone of natural sciences and even the legacy of slavery that underlies naturalist documents of the New World, especially as the port of Nantes, France, was one of the centers of the Atlantic slave trade.
The discourses of postcolonialism with regard to the natural world may be seen to rely upon the premise that flora and fauna are signifiers for nationhood itself. This concept is linked to an “invention of tradition,” that sought to use nature to establish national identity and consciousness in the New World. Terence Ranger’s *Invention of Tradition* (1983) addresses various invented traditions that sought to imply a continuity of historical values and norms. An example of the deployment of nature as an “invention of tradition,” surfaces in Prys Morgan’s investigation into Welsh nationalism during the Romantic period, which extolled the beauty of the harsh Welsh landscape. Such idealization occurred through T. J. Llewelyn Pritchard’s romanticizing poems and Richard Wilson’s sublime and dominating landscapes, a marked shift from the previous topographical recording of Welsh nature. Morgan asserts that through these media, the “Welsh very gradually came to see their hills not as punishment…but as a fastness or fortress for the nation,” a recuperation of geographic connectedness through a reclamation of the native land.

Further commentary on this ideological use of nature surfaces in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983), in which Anderson remarks upon a series of paintings commissioned by Indonesia’s Ministry of Education in the 1950s. These paintings, which depicted episodes in national history in the “predictable sentimental naturalist style of early twentieth century commercial art,” with the human figures partially taken from colonial-era museum dioramas, were mass-produced and distributed throughout the primary school system as visual representations of their country’s past. However, it should be noted that this may be another “invented tradition” as these images were taken from existing imagery of the commercial naturalist art and the artificial reality of the dioramas, rather than from everyday life. Such images therefore offer museum display as a fraudulent reality. Anderson’s example of the Indonesian government’s commissioned paintings shows the mobilization of nature turned unnatural, with such images inscribed into the natural course of history.
In the context of such colonial narratives of nature and natural history, *Compromised* takes on a politically subversive interpretation. While the Sacred Ibis was originally a symbol of the Egyptian god Thoth, it was adopted as the symbol of Isis for the Cult of Isis in the Late Classical and Hellenistic Period. The cult persisted into 600 CE until suppression by Christianity. Such religious tensions, manifested through the quotation from *Eothen*, are also echoed in the history of the Temple of Philae in the background of *Compromised*. Temple of Philae was shut down by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in the mid sixth century CE to become the Church of St. Stephen. The architectural residues of the Christian incursion upon the Temple of Philae can still be found on site.\(^{157}\) As a result, if the Glossy Ibis can be read as symbolic of the Occidental world, due to its habitat, and as Audubon depicted and wrote about the bird, the Sacred Ibis may be posited as a signifier of the Oriental world. Following such geographic identifications, the image takes on cultural undertones, as it may be seen to depict not just two birds, but, symbolically, the religious collision between the Orient and the Occident. Ford may have offered further cultural resonance considering the fact that Philae appears in *Description de L'Égypte* (1809) a document created through the Napoleonic invasion (1798-1801). It is generally understood that the Napoleonic takeover of Egypt instigated the rise of Orientalism that enabled the projection of Western desires upon the North African landscape as a means of establishing domination and justifying Western ideological hegemony.

Edward Said defines Orientalism as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.”\(^{158}\) Said asserts that ideas, images and literature on the Orient were dependent in the nineteenth-century on “a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.”\(^{159}\) This link to Orientalism is emphasized by Ford’s own trip to North Africa during his senior study abroad at RISD. He still views this trip as informing his work, just as the region and the consequent theme of Orientalism
persistently inspired nineteenth-century Romantic painters such as Eugène Delacroix. However, Ford is far from a contemporary Orientalist, as he has expressed a desire to critique “the idea of the East as a place of sex...a very common Western conception.” Ford also draws contemporary parallels to the compromising positions of the ibises and Kinglake’s text, asserting “that’s kind of the way it is now with our battle between the sacred and the profane.” To Ford, the divide has become more ideological “from Osama Bin Laden to John Ashcroft, that if you cross those lines you are compromised...it’s not the plague now, it’s more like the way you think.” Then, his images may be seen to excavate such troublesome historic and contemporaneous Western perceptions of the Orient that are never overtly expressed in Western visual representations. In fact, Ford has stated that the moment of empire and misapprehension has persisted into the present, stating, “You still feel like you would be "carefully shot and carelessly buried" if you made the wrong move.”

Ford’s recognition of the cultural overlay of the human onto the natural world, as well as his desire to revise dominant narrative traditions, are legacies of his days as a film major at RISD. Ford cites Werner Herzog’s Aguirre, the Wrath of God (1972) and Robert Altman’s McCabe & Mrs. Miller (1971) as his favorite films, and he claims his artistic process to those that shaped them. Ford’s desire to revise dominant narrative traditions is a prominent aesthetic found in Altman’s film, which was seen as a revision of the formal-thematic conventions of the Western film genre. Altman’s McCabe & Mrs. Miller sought to unsettle the prevailing expectations for a ‘proper’ Western film and expose the absurdity of the Western action hero. We may find this project echoed in Ford’s alteration of the Western pictorial tradition and of the biased views of colonialism and imperialism concealed within.

The reverberating tension between the violent mirroring of the natural and the human world is especially made manifest in Herzog’s Aguirre, which posits the colonial project in terms of hysteria.
and madness. Herzog foregoes all pretense of idealism to expose the anguish of the civilized world and the insanity of the colonial enterprise, offering a pessimistic view of colonialism-incurred violence. In the film, as the conquistadors try to capture the enemy in their colonial imagination of the forest, they fall victim to illusions and hallucinations. Herzog's film exposed colonialism as farcical performance amidst the spectacle of nature. It further provided an alternative history by giving a voice to the indigenous population.

Paralleling Herzog, Ford's artistic strategy enlists farce to revise and overturn existing canons, offering a form of humor “at the expense of the Empire.” Jeffrey Mehlman wrote that farce “excites a different kind of laughter than (petit bourgeois) comedy, and which, in its absurdity, elicits tears unknown to (proletarian) tragedy, free of every promise of repetition.” Mehlman asserts that farce marked “a deviation from the dialectical pair of tragedy and comedy,” existing in the gap itself. This blend of tragic history and humour is ever-present in Ford’s works. Au Revoir Zaire, (1997; fig. 43) a work examined in detail later in the thesis, provides an example of farce as political strategy. The image depicts two grey parrots, one being sexually approached by the other, accompanied by inscribed texts on the surface of the watercolor that reference the convoluted and tragic history of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) during the Cold War. One parrot reaches blindly for the proverbial forbidden fruit, remaining ignorant of the other’s sexual attack. The image, which might have elicited “petit bourgeois” laughter is made grotesque by the addition of the name, Mobutu Sese Seko, the dictator under whose reign Zaire was dominated by violence.

As a result, Ford’s embedded narratives address the complexities of natural history, of the history of natural history and of the cultural and political histories of nature. Through such invocations, Ford may be seen to expose the farce of observation, classification, and documentation that were considered as integral aspects of natural sciences. The German natural scientist and botanist, Leonhart Fuchs (1501-66) asserted, “those things that are presented to the eyes and
depicted on panels or paper become fixed more firmly in the mind than those that are described in bare words.\textsuperscript{174} Ford’s exposure of the un-naturalness of nature itself, offers the natural history of the postmodern era. While images of the natural world were seen as unable to close the gap between the depicted and the referent,\textsuperscript{175} Walton Ford’s unnatural images closes this very gap through the multiplicities of his narratives.
CHAPTER IV.
NARRATIVES AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES

Pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a lexis.\textsuperscript{176} - Roland Barthes, \textit{Mythologies}

In contrast to the ways in which critics often view Ford as a neo-naturalist, the detailed archaeologies of artistic strategies in the previous chapters reveal his artistic corpus as a post-Audubon aviary that offers the invisible historical narratives from Audubon’s project. Ford’s visual representations were seen to take the conceptual, historical, and visual tactic of early modern ornithologists and naturalists, only to overlay them with references to the racism, ecological imperialism, and the global colonialism that their work masks. A key strategy employed by Ford is the appropriation of not only naturalist images, but also of art historical images from early modern to surrealist paintings and texts from literary to journalistic sources. This chapter focuses on the written words that appear in Ford’s paintings and prints to consider their relation to the narrative derived from visual images.

A. The Literary Allegorist:

This propensity for appropriation posits Walton Ford as an allegorist. According to Craig Owens in “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,” (1980) allegorists were seen to “generate images through the reproduction of other images.”\textsuperscript{177} This tactic of reproduction was seen to “empty [images] of their resonance, their significance, their authoritative claim to meaning.”\textsuperscript{178} In other words, Ford’s “copying” may be seen to disrupt the authoritative scientific tone of naturalist images and, as a result, gives rise to alternative systems of narrative. This unsettling
of narrative structures allies with Owens’ assertion that allegories are “the epitome of counter-narrative, for [allegory] arrests narrative.”

This chapter seeks to investigate the clash between pre-established historical narratives and the newly emerging postmodernist narratives that question the very presence of dominant metanarratives. According to Owens, allegories were seen to compress “narrative associations…in order to compel a vertical reading of (allegorical) correspondences,” causing history to be recovered through what Walter Benjamin refers to as “‘a tiger’s leap into the past.'” Conversely, Ford’s allegories rely on a discursive model that exposes the inadequacies of both visual and textual narrations. Ford’s postmodernist allegories that emerge from his counter-narrative strategy may be seen to free the amnesiac history of the modern period from the tyranny of the narrative itself. His allegories collapse the schism between the past and the present by exposing the fallacy of the idea of a chronological system of history. As such, his images unite postmodern and postcolonial histories with their sans-prefix counterparts through “a tiger’s leap,” into the present. Then, this chapter investigates Ford’s intertextual infrastructure of narratives within a selection of his works. I here rely on Mieke Bal’s proposition of intertextuality operating between layers of primary and embedded texts, as outlined in her *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1985). This application of literary analyses to Ford’s visual images is, on the one hand due to the fact that allegory is considered as “a rebus – writing composed of concrete images.” On the other hand, Ford also views his prints and watercolors as “products of a literary imagination more than anything.”

Ford has often asserted, “Everything I paint comes out of something I read.” In fact, the type of art he most admires “is the most densely coded,” like “an annotated version of Lolita.” The first part of Ford’s comment offers that his visual images are already invested in linguistic texts and engage in the interplay of textual layers. His reference to a dense code recalls the assertion in Chapter One that his works invite visual cryptology, as there are multivalent embedded texts.
embedded within his mimicry of dated paintings. The last section of Ford’s comment may be seen in itself as an inter-intertextual reference to Nabokov, whose works are notoriously composed of endlessly evolving texts with interpretation contingent upon these very unstable textual relations. In Nabokov’s writings, every sentence is a convoluted self-referential text simultaneously serving as a premonition and a reference to a past sentence, with these very sentences linked also externally factors such as Nabokov’s own diaspora as well as to the tyrannies of Bolshevist Russia. Ford’s comments therefore invite an intertextual semiotic approach to his coded works.

Bal proposes that “contents of the embedded text sometimes link with those of the primary one, sometimes it is even its natural sequel. At other times it is perhaps completely divorced from the primary text; or it has an explanatory function; it is similar to the primary text; it contradicts or contravenes it.” In Ford’s works, the primary text can be seen as the initially observed visual image—the birds or animals. The embedded text refers to the implied visual iconographies, symbolisms, and connotations of his inscribed texts. The term follows Mieke Bal’s definition of text as “a finite, structure whole composed of signs,” that is not only linguistic in nature, but also “painted dots, lines, and blots.” Within his artistic corpus, Walton Ford’s texts include visual elements such as intricate systems of flora, fauna, and landscape, as well as writings and bibliographical quotations that are often inscribed on the surfaces of his works. This comprehensive identification of texts in Ford’s works may be seen to follow Roland Barthes’s assertion that “the semiologist is entitled to treat in the same way writing and pictures,” as “they are both signs...that they constitute, one just as much as the other, a language-object.”

To sum, I will consider three separate cases. The first considers images that are complicit with the underlying subtexts, through Benjamin’s Emblem, (2002; fig. 12) as the visual image and the written inscriptions both reference Benjamin Franklin. The second case I will consider is when the primary image and the texts exert opposing forces upon one another through the print, La Historia
Me Absolverá (1999; fig. 2). This quoted inscription on this print makes reference to Fidel Castro and Cuban-American relations, which appear to have no direct correlation to the Cuban Macaw depicted on the print. Finally, the third case considers a situation in which a single textual excerpt undergoes multiple pictorial exegeses. I will reference a series of eight works, produced from 1999 to 2011, which illustrates a single journal excerpt written by Audubon to consider the tensions between the visual image and the original source text.

This uncovering of the lexis of texts in Ford’s images through the three approaches outlined above may be seen to simultaneously investigate the “interaction between vision and socio-cultural history,” by considering “the relations we posit between symbols and the world, signs and their meanings.” Then, deconstructing the linguistic inner workings of Ford’s watercolors and prints reveals the unstable subjectivity of narrative systems, and reveals how historical narratives, in particular, have been colored by the Weltanschauung of their times.

B. Benjamin’s Emblem & The Ineluctability of History:

Ford’s deployment of texts remains unique in the extensive list of contemporary artists involved in post-Audubon aesthetic reactions. Roni Horn, Alexis Rockman, and Ann Craven are just a few among the many artists who use animals and birds as extended metaphors, evoking an artistic trope that traces its origin all the way back to the Renaissance. However, while their artistic concerns may be seen to lie in ornithology, Ford’s interest lies in “ornithomancy, the telling of the future using birds.” His differentiation between the two suffixes may be seen to underline two different statuses of historical narratives—while ornithology offers a static historical narrative, ornithomancy revives the immobile nature of the former into the living continuum of history. In other words, Ford’s ornithomancy transforms his avian characters into active participants in the formation of historical narratives, rather than as existing in the past as dead specimens to be studied. Moreover,
Ford has claimed that his “primary inspiration is history, and then I try to make an animal fable out of it,”\(^{492}\) a statement that suggests his superimposition of an established \textit{factual} narrative (a naturalist image based on facts) with that of a \textit{fictitious} narrative (narrative and allegorical texts). While the extended socio-historical implication and application of the fable genre will be extensively considered in Chapter Five, this conflation between two opposing types of narrative may be seen to liberate narration from any existing dogmatic restrictions, allowing for “the telling of the future.” Ford’s reference to history, codes, and fables turn the three words into key concepts in the context of Julia Kristeva’s assertion that “History and morality are written and read within the infrastructure of texts.”\(^{193}\)

The word “history” and “morality” are also keywords in Ford’s print, \textit{Benjamin’s Emblem}, (2002; fig. 12), a work that references Benjamin Franklin and his moral imperatives for not only himself, but for the population of the then nascent America. The print is also a prime example of Ford’s “Audubon-derived historicism,” as it conceptually, visually, and textually appropriates from Audubon’s \textit{Birds of America}. An exegesis of the print’s formal elements and the embedded texts unveils Ford’s transformation of Audubon’s visual language into a critique of the idealization of nineteenth-century naturalist images, but also of the ineluctability of history itself.

\textit{Benjamin’s Emblem} locates a vibrantly plumed turkey in an ominous dioramic background. One of the turkey’s legs is extended to asphyxiate a small Carolina Parakeet, an extinct bird that was once the only parakeet indigenous to North America. In this six-color etching, Ford conceptually echoes Audubon’s propensity for rendering birds in life-size, as evidenced his \textit{Birds of America}, as the scale of \textit{Benjamin’s Emblem} accommodates for the true size of a natural turkey. In addition, the edges of Ford’s print are yellowed with false foxing to simulate the patina of history. When compared to a left-to-right flipped version of Audubon’s \textit{Wild Turkey}, 1826; fig. 44), the upper torso of Ford’s turkey remains noticeably different. It is shaded with acidic greens and vivid reds rather than with
Audubon’s chocolate, mahogany, and dusky browns. The features also appear sharper, crisper, and more linear than Audubon’s turkey. As a result, Audubon’s turkey gives an impression of a docile bird while Ford’s turkey seems pugnacious with its flat scale-like feathers, giving it an aggressive and guarded air. The belligerent aura of the turkey is further heightened by its exaggerated claws, wickedly curved beak, and facial features curled together into a predatory countenance. Furthermore, Audubon’s turkey seems ready to take flight, its sense of movement conveyed through its forward stride with its backward-tilted head. In contrast, Ford’s turkey is sturdy and stationary with its massive claws dug into the ground. Still, the two prints do echo one another as the lower halves of the two bird’s bodies mirror one another in terms of the angle of the outstretched legs, the curve of their backs, and the arrangement of their feathers.

_Benjamin’s Emblem_ makes a direct reference to Audubon through written texts. The bottom register reads: *Wild Turkey Great American Cock ~ Meleagris gallopavo*. The “Wild Turkey,” is the colloquial name of the bird, and “*Meleagris gallopavo*,” is the scientific name linked to the taxonomical science of nineteenth-century natural history. However, the term, “*Great American Cock*” is specifically used by Audubon in *Birds of America*. In addition, the *Wild Turkey* was the very first print known to have been produced for Audubon’s *Birds of America*, a well-received print that was seen to celebrate the wild American landscape as the turkey was idolized by Audubon as “one of the most interesting of the birds indigenous to the United States of America.”194 The giant bird was closely linked to Audubon’s own personal life, as he wrote more extensively about the Wild Turkey than about any other bird in his *Ornithological Biography* (1831). He also sealed his letters with a seal bearing the likeness of a Turkey and the words, “America My Country,” even adopting one as a pet.195 It may consequently be suggested that Benjamin’s Emblem references not only Audubon’s project, but also the American identity that the ornithologist sought to cultivate.
Visual comparisons demonstrate that Ford’s turkey has little in common with Wild Turkeys found in nature (fig. 45), but is explicitly a representation of a representation, an adaptation of Audubon’s previously abstracted turkey. It is an intertextual image that posits Ford as Roland Barthes’s ‘pasticher’ whose “realism consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy...Through secondary mimesis [realism] copies what is already a copy.” Barthes’s idea of realism addresses the issue of appropriation, and may be productively applied to the allegorical condition of Ford’s works. Craig Owens has further proposed that “allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery,” and that allegory “occurs whenever one text is doubled by another...or when one text is read through another.” Ford’s realism may then be based on his pastiching, especially as he has asserted that he seeks to “take the language of nineteenth-century natural history illustrators and use it to plumb our own collective ways of thinking.” In narratology, such “copying” has been seen to not only express a desire to “update” issues of “time and history,” but also provide a means “to give meanings to messages that one fails to analyze when dogmatically restricted.” As a result, appropriation and quotation may allow alternate interpretations to emerge by offering a critical distance, a freedom from dogmatic restrictions. It follows that the counter-narrative allegorical characteristics of Ford’s works allow for the re-examination of history by freeing it from existing unyielding narrative structures. In fact, allegory’s two most fundamental impulses are seen to be “a conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present.” Ford’s obvious copying Audubon in Benjamin’s Emblem may be seen to collapse this very schism by liberating the remote past and recontextualizing it into present.

The turkey, in Benjamin’s Emblem, may be seen as emblematic of colonial America, but it also has resonance as a critique of contemporary America. In addition to reversing the position of the turkey and enhancing its linearity and color, Ford made three main changes to Audubon’s iconic print. He has modified the landscape, added the parakeet, and included texts on the upper right
corner of the print. The landscape is the most noticeable, as Ford has substituted Audubon’s original green cane break setting for a desolate blood-red panorama. The former may be considered as Audubon’s personal botanical reference to an area near Beech Woods Plantation in Louisiana where the ornithologist first spotted the avian protagonist of his print. The cane break setting locates the turkey in a “natural” environment and gives an aura of vulnerability to the slender bird as it is dwarfed by its settings. In contrast, Ford’s turkey is located in an unnatural environment—no element in the background can challenge the size of the immense bird. The sinister shades of the apocalyptic landscape in Benjamin’s Emblem visually emphasize the colors of the turkey’s plumes and, in turn, highlight its grotesque features. The background of Benjamin’s Emblem holds darkened silhouettes of a body of water, of an immense neoclassical house typical of plantation architecture, and of skeletal trees and tree stumps. A similar forsaken landscape appears in Pieter Brueghel the Elder’s The Triumph of Death, (1562; fig. 46), a painting that represents a skeleton indiscriminately and violently killing peasants and aristocrats in a panoramic barren landscape of death. A comparison can also be made to the background of Pieter Brueghel the Elder’s Dulle Griet, (1562; fig. 47), a visualization of the Flemish folklore of a woman leading an army to invade hell.202 The suffering parakeet in Benjamin’s Emblem augments the murderous theme of the landscape, with the bird’s panic and fear echoed through its dilated eyes and open beak. This exegesis reveals Ford’s complicated strategy as any possible interpretation of a single representation of a turkey is in constant flux. The connotations of the text further transmute as the analyses extend from visual texts to written script inscribed on the surface of the print.

As such, I will now turn to the written texts on the print. In addition to the script in the bottom register, there are also writings on the upper right corner of Benjamin’s Emblem. These inscriptions have been arranged to coalesce into the shape of an inverse L, framing the torso of the turkey. The inscriptions have the formal effect of drawing the eye to the bird. However, the flat two-
dimensionality of the copper plate writing creates a visual tension with the modeled body of the
turkey. The copper plate writing is also a technique of reproduction, of *copying*, ordinarily rendered in
a firm, even hand. However, the slanted uneven scripts resemble hand-written notes. This uneasy
tension between the spontaneous and the carefully reproduced (writing is rendered in reverse on a
copper plate) may be seen as a micro-manifestation of Ford’s desire to test the boundaries between
the primary visual text and the underlying connotations of embedded texts that influence the
perception of the primary text. These inscriptions also differ in terms of scale. The largest of them
serve as the title, *Benjamin’s Emblem*. The size gives emphasis to this phrase, which is a reference to
Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the United States. This identification is strongly
supported by the text that immediately follows: “withal a true original native.” This partial sentence
is taken from a letter that Franklin wrote to his daughter, Sarah Bache, in 1784, in which Franklin
praises the virtues of the turkey and criticizes the Society of Cincinnati’s choice of the Bald Eagle as
the symbol for the nascent country. In addition, the Society of Cincinnati was founded at the close
of the American Revolutionary War and chaired by Franklin until his death in 1799. The inscription
that follows is a numerical list of eleven items, a partial selection from Benjamin Franklin’s Thirteen
Virtues listed from his autobiography (fully transcribed in endnote 203). Franklin invented this list
in 1726 and sought to cultivate himself throughout his life by adhering it. The written inscription’s
strong invocation of Benjamin Franklin may suggest that Ford’s belligerent turkey is a visual
translation of Franklin’s patriotic turkey. Accordingly, an exegesis of the inscriptions and the
pictorial content of the print has yielded diverging narratives that are constructed by differing
fabulas.

In order to excavate the combined narrative logic of the print, I enlist the term, fabula taken
from the tripartite distinction of a narrative text as outlined by Mieke Bal. According to Bal, a
narrative text is defined as “a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee a story in a
particular medium,”206 with its condition governed by the presence of three layers: text, story and fabula. The text is a finite ensemble of signs, and the story is the content of that text which produces a particular inflection of a fabula. The fabula is a series of “logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors,”207 which are derived in response to the representation. As a result, the reader first sees the text, while the fabula only appears as a “memory trace,” borne from “the result of the mental activity of reading, the interpretation by the reader, an interpretation influenced both by the initial encounter with the text and by the manipulations of the story.”208 A story is then constructed by an arrangement of a fabula through a focalizor and presented by a textual format, whether it may be visual or linguistic. Ford’s works adopts this narrative structure only to overturn it. In the print, the visual fabula is of a belligerent turkey, set against a background that indicates its rampaging and bloodlust. The suggestion of their events extends from a landscape once populated by parakeets to their extinction as indicated by the dying Parakeet in the foreground, to the inscribed text documenting this event. The written fabula, may be seen as Benjamin Franklin’s role in the inception of the nation, his wishes for the turkey as the nation’s emblem, and even the consequences had his wishes been heeded.

Conversely, when the possibilities for the primary and written fabulas are combined, the narrative structure shifts. Ford’s quotation of Franklin’s writing may be seen as a situation where Ford uses another’s word, giving it a new meaning while retaining the meaning it already had.209 Such a multivalent quotation allows for “the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history.”210 By the act of depiction, Ford has given life to Franklin’s turkey and created possibilities and consequences of that course of action—the animation of Franklin’s fabula—into our memory. Moreover, it has been suggested that “as time passes we may forget details of the image and details of the fabula, what remains in our memory is some part of the image and our interpretation of its role in the fabula we made.”211 Ford’s intrusion into the past, by creating this
image, has irrevocably changed the formation of the overall fabula of the print, and consequently of the past itself.

When the two fabulas are combined, Franklin’s turkey is written into American colonial history and superimposed on the fabula of the Bald Eagle’s legacy. The partial list of Franklin’s virtues slip into imagined guidelines for the nation, especially considering Franklin’s urgings regarding his virtues that he hopes “some of my descendants may follow the example and reap the benefit.”212 The visual texts embedded in the print may be seen to suggest that even with the turkey as the nation’s emblem, the landscape, both literal and metaphorical, would still be painted with blood and death. The Thirteen Virtues would still be unaccomplished and unknown to the nation represented by the turkey—who appears to know nothing of “Order,” and “Tranquility,” much less of any other virtues transcribed on the print. The parakeet, representing the indigenous population, is terrorized by the pugnacious bird, the latter an emblem of the founding fathers. The primary fabula, of a killer-turkey and his rampage of history, merges with American violence against the landscape, and against the indigenous population. The primary and embedded fabula merge into one, thus exposing the ineluctability of history. This circumnavigation of history is achieved by initially offering an alternative view of the past (the turkey as an emblem of America), and then showing what could have been, which in the end, appears to align with the established historical narrative of the present.

In the end, Ford’s rendition of a jingoistic American turkey merges with the “reality” of the Bald Eagle’s legacy, conflating the fictitious fable with existing historical narratives. The visual and textual recontextualization of colonial history rely upon fabulizing it, by mediating it through a focalizor. A semblance of reality is achieved by aligning the fabula with the narration itself. The term focalizor is here defined as “an interjacent layer, the ‘view of the events,’ which mediates between the pictorial sign and its contents,”213 and is seen as the direct content of linguistic and visual signs.214
In the context of Ford’s prints, the focalizor becomes the catalyst in the mobilization of narrative elements to reconcile ornithomancy with ornithology—uniting history, as established with the fabula, hidden inside the narrative content. This method allows the reader-viewer to fictionalize reality to reclaim history from the mnemonic amnesias of modern times (as offered by Anderson in Chapter Two). The narrative process in *Benjamin’s Emblem* can be summarized into the diagram below:

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A text that has been ignored in this exegesis is Ford’s own authorial views. This print, he claims, was “inspired by the well-known fact that Benjamin Franklin wanted the Turkey as the national emblem…I wanted to imagine that had come to pass. What are the forms the Turkey would have had to take? So I imagined a warlike Turkey that could be used as propaganda.”

Ford’s comment begs the question of which constituency is represented by the suffering parakeet, if the image is indeed intended as propaganda. However, in considering authorial authority, I turn to the following proposals. In “What is an Author,” (1969) Michel Foucault disavows several concepts of authorship, asserting, “The author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works,” positing the author as “an ideological product” projected by the reader. This is not to suggest that the authorial intention be disregarded; rather, I am in accordance with Mieke Bal’s proposal that the importance of the authorial intent should be secondary in the quest to “emancipate both author and reader from the stronghold of a misconceived interpretive authority.”

This view, echoed by Roland Barthes, allows the author to come back to the text only “as a ‘guest’” allowing the reader [or the viewer in this case] to view his life as “no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work.”
Benjamin’s Emblem may be seen as an example of the concurrence between the embedded and the primary texts that becomes the driving force of the narrative. On the contrary, the textual relationships turn contentious and convoluted in La Historia Me Absolverá (1999; fig. 2), a work that documents the sheer inter-intertextuality of Ford’s narrative structures.

C. La Historia Me Absolverá & The Dissolution of Narrative:

The title of this print, La Historia Me Absolverá, is the closing statement from Fidel Castro’s speech on October 16, 1953 at the trial regarding his attack on the Moncada Military Fortress. This textual association to Castro has led critics to review this print as “a portrayal of Fidel Castro as a crafty old Cuban red macaw that can't be killed.” In this reading, the Macaw is a “personification of Castro, the “red” dictator,” or as a “stand-in for the tenacious Fidel Castro.” The print (111.8 x 78.7 cm) also accommodates for the true size of the Cuban Macaw and presents the extinct bird in an idyllic tropical setting. Various hunter’s traps and snares surround the bird. These traps are Ford’s modified versions of traps and snares (juxtaposed comparisons shown in fig. 48.a-d) described in W. Hamilton Gibson’s Camp Life in the Woods and the Tricks of Trapping of 1881, a book that was “written for boys in America…as a practical guidebook.” These traps, which inhabit every quadrant of the print, have been a recurring motif in Ford’s iconography. An abbreviated list of works featuring similar traps and snares include El Poeta, (2004; fig. 49), La Forja de un Rebelde, (2004; fig. 50), and Au Revoir Zaire, (1998; fig. 43). Ford’s continued appropriation from Gibson’s text is linked to the fact that the literature offered “a piece of American history I don't remember being taught in school.” Ford’s repeated quotation from this book may in itself be colored by his desire to excavate history by the simple act of representation. As the result, the presence of the now extinct Cuban Macaw, the four traps and snares, and the adoption of Castro’s statement as the title of the print, has suggested that La Historia me Absolverá implies “that Castro and his regime will soon go the way of the [Cuban]
The prevailing reading of the print asserts that just as the Cuban Macaw went extinct, so too will Castro’s regime come to an end. Still, the fabulas provided by the image, and those emerging from the inscriptions, do not seem to overtly support such interpretations.

The formalist reading of this print echoes many of Ford’s artistic paradigms. The etching displays the classic bird-on-branch Victorian composition, extensively employed by Edward Lear’s *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae* (1832), a book that launched Lear’s career as an ornithologist. Due to the dynamic horizontal thrust of the branch that divides the image, the eye is drawn immediately to the Cuban Macaw which dominates a quarter of the picture plane. The coloring and composition of Ford’s Cuban Macaw, with its head turned over its left shoulder, echo those of Lear’s celebrated *Red and Yellow Macaw (Scarlet Macaw)*, (1832; fig. 51). However, as in Benjamin’s *Emblem*, Ford’s Macaw appears more threatening with the vicious angle of its yellow eyes drawing the eye down to its wickedly curved beak and hackled feathers.

The vertical vector of the Macaw’s tail is echoed by the mosses hanging from the primary branch, which together point to the view of the ocean at the bottom of the picture plane. The ocean lies between what appears to be two hills or two slopes. The primary colors of the sunset and the yellow of burning fire on the lower right of the composition doubly echo the color of the Macaw. The lower half of the image displays an intricate self-referential circular composition, much like *Benjamin’s Emblem*. The curving lines and strokes employed in the lower half of the print contrast with the horizontality and the verticality of the top half of the composition. Yet, the two halves of the print are intricately linked through a self-referential system of angles and lines. For example, the angle of the stone slab of the figure-four trap in the lower left corner of the print echoes that of the forested hill on the right side. The curve of the Twitch-up Trap located near the bottom edge echoes the curve of the Macaw’s body, creating an internal circular pictorial logic. Moving upwards, the tree trunk on the left serves as an anchoring force that ties the lower half to the top half of the
composition. Formally, the tree trunk also creates a spatial tension between flatness and depth. It thrusts the primary branch forward, while pushing the rest into the background in a somewhat awkward manner. On the left side of the tree is the portable snare, which appears not to attract its intended target, the Macaw, but instead has attracted what appear to be flies and wasps. These flying insects serve as visual markers drawing the eye to the trap.

Finally, writings are located on the upper-right corner of the image and organized into a trapezoidal form, thus framing the body of the bird. A small excerpt breaks away from this shape and fills the lower middle half of the print. An excavation of the written texts and their relation to the visual structure of the print reveals a paradigm that inverts the system of linguistic and visual narratives. It should also be noted that just as in Benjamin’s Emblem, most of the inscriptions are redacted excerpts from a larger text, with the latter included in the endnotes for the sake of brevity. The contents of the inscriptions have been organized in the chart below in relation to their location in the image:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( T_0 )</td>
<td>La historia me absolverá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_1 )</td>
<td>and the thing is complete and woe to the misguided creature that dares to test it’s efficacy. We never yet have seen a rabbit or bird skillful enough to remove(^{229})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_2 )</td>
<td>Jan, 1963- Fitzgerald replaces Harvey as head of task force, he investigates whether a seashell could be rigged to explode in an area where Castro goes skin diving. Another assassination plot envisions the gift of a diving suit with a fungus to cause chronic skin disease and a bacillus in the breathing apparatus to cause tuberculosis. These plot(^{230})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_3 )</td>
<td>The last living bird of which there is a record is of one shot at La Vega, close to the Zapata Swamp. As with many rare things a certain amount of intrigue the history of one of the skins. T. Barbour dropped a very heavy hint that a specimen that disappeared under mysterious circumstance from the Academy of Sciences, Havana, was surreptitiously extricated on behalf of Walter(^{231})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_{4a} )</td>
<td>Alpa 6, Omega 7 Task F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_5 )</td>
<td>Cuban Red Macaw ~ (Ara Tricolor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( T_{4b} )</td>
<td>S G. A., Operation Mon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I will now unpack the writings and the culturally and historical embedded references within. T₀, as previously examined, is the title of the work. T₁ is taken from a passage in W. Hamilton Gibson’s *Camp Life in the Woods and the Tricks of Trapping of 1881* regarding the efficacy of the Portable Snare, a trap that lies just to the left of the Cuban Macaw in *La Historia me Absolverá*. T₂ is taken from Jane Franklin’s *Cuba & US: A Chronological History* (1995), a book that traces the contentious relationship between the two nations. T₃ is taken from Errol Fuller’s book, *Extinct Birds* (1987) on a passage regarding the extinction of the *Ara Tricolor*. The passage also makes a reference to another ornithologist, Thomas Barbour, author of *Birds of Cuba* (1923) and self-declared “devoted friend of the land [of Cuba] and its people.”

“Alpa 6,” from T₄ₐ, is likely to be a reference to Alpha 66, a paramilitary group formed in 1961 by Cuban exiles opposing Castro. “Omega 7” is the name of another US-based Cuban paramilitary group founded in the 1960s by Bay of Pigs veterans in response to the lack of overt US support at the start of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. The Bay of Pigs, also known as Operation Zapata, was a botched US military action in which a CIA-trained force of Cuban exiles failed to invade Cuba in April 1961. T₅, by now apparent, is Ford’s typical practice of classifying the avian and animal characters in his watercolors and prints. The final text, T₄ₕ, returns once more to the intersection between Cuban and American history: “S.G.A. Operation Mon,” is most likely a reference to Operation Mongoose, a secret CIA-run program launched after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. This US intelligence program sought to employ psychological warfare and underhanded sabotage attempts in order to overthrow the Castro-led communist regime in Cuba. “S.G.A” is the acronym for Special Group Augmented, a control group created by President Kennedy on November 30, 1961, to oversee Operation Mongoose in order to “help Cuba overthrow the Communist regime.” This final text refers back to T₂, as the assassination attempt described in this section was initiated by Operation Mongoose.

While the source of the inscriptions ties Cuban history to the Macaw, it also reveals that *La...*
Historia me Absolverá is not a simple allegory of Castro. Rather, the embedded images and scripts reveal something about the subversive nature of Ford’s narrative logic and his awareness of how narrative itself can be subject to manipulation. For example, the wasps and the flies in the print may initially hold no apparent significance. Once the textual references to Cuba have been identified, the wasps may be revisited as a reference to Black Wasps, the official name for the Special Forces of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba. Another reference may be made to the Wasp Network, which was active from 1991-8 and composed of five Cuban intelligence officers who sought to obtain US Defense secrets and infiltrate anti-Castro groups such as the Alpha 66. A second example of an internal revision may be the presence of the traps, which can be reconsidered as a metaphor for American aggressions against Cuba. Their textual origins (Gibson’s book) was seen to reflect “a late American frontier mentality,” linked to American impulses of expansion, aggression, and conquest. Examples of external textual associations include watercolors by Ford such as Rabiar, (2003; fig. 52), whose link to La Historia me Absolverá is heightened by the presence of Gundlach’s Hawk, a bird uniquely endemic to Cuba.238 Ford’s Morire de Cara al Sol, 2004; fig. 53) may also be seen as linked to the narrative of La Historia me Absolverá as the title is a statement by Jose Martí, a Cuban poet and a national hero, whose writings were used by Castro’s regime as inspirations for its Marxist government.239 A final example of an external text is Ford’s watercolor, Habana Vieja, (2004; fig. 54), with its title translating to “Old Havana.” The background of the watercolor exhibits architectural references to Havana. Each of the three works cited contains a Cuban Macaw, furthering the convoluted link between Castro, Cuban history, and the now-extinct bird.

The analyses of these inscriptions in La Historia me Absolverá allows for different fabulas concerning the pictorial image to emerge. Under this context, the idyllic view of the bay is transformed into a reference to the Bay of Pigs or Zapata Swamps. Thus, a fabula emerges that may begin with the inception of Castro’s regime, going on to address US invasions and tense national
relations, and even the recent lifting of the US travel ban to Cuba. The multivalent image is reminiscent of a surrealist parlor game. Salvador Dalí refers to these infinite transmutations of the text, as “a double image,” which contributes “to the destruction of reality,”\(^{240}\) with the number of such visual manifestations or ideas linked only to “the mind’s degree of paranoiac capacity.”\(^{241}\) These endless manifestations of the text, as investigated in *La Historia me Absolverá*, may be seen as the dissolution of text itself, through the revelation of the infinite nature of the images. As there appears to be no origin, no stable story, fabula, and narrative, they are all posited as “quotations,”\(^{242}\) with the process of establishing meaning as radically contingent. This plurality of the text, according to Barthes, “the intertextual in which every text is held…is not to be confused with some origin of the text.”\(^{243}\) He warns, “To try to find the ‘sources,’ the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation.”\(^{244}\) This collapse of narrative structures can be attributed to the pattern in the inscriptions of *La Historia me Absolverá*—an oscillation that destabilizes the fabula by disrupting the historical sequence of events. Such a procedure erases any hope of a meta-narrative or even narrative itself. The chart below outlines the associations of texts in *La Historia me Absolverá* with respect to their physical locations in the print.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T₀</td>
<td>Castro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₁</td>
<td>Cuban Macaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₂</td>
<td>Castro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₃</td>
<td>Cuban Macaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₄a</td>
<td>Castro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₅</td>
<td>Cuban Macaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T₄b</td>
<td>Castro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chart shows an oscillation between the construction of a fabula related to Castro (and turbulent Cuban-American relations) and the other concerned with the recontextualization of the violent extinction of a species. This instability unhinges the narrative structure of the print as narratives weave and superimpose upon one another. This disruption allows for, according to Julia
Kristeva, “what is both extra and anti-narrative to appear.” In other words, Ford’s aesthetic strategy escapes from narrative itself, with its pictorial practice becoming a freedom, “precisely in its relative escape from the symbolic order.” This liberation is linked to a broader postmodernist desire to question established historical narratives. As Rosalind Krauss warns, “if we make up schemas of meaning based on history, we are playing into systems of control and censure...For if the norms of the past serve to measure the present, they also serve to construct it.” Then, Ford’s textual logic liberates itself from the “systems of control and censure,” by collapsing a stable narration of the past. If history can be considered as a system of narration in which events are chronologically ordered into past, present, and future, the erasure of narrative and consequently text, can be seen to collapse these divisions and liberate the very notion history from the narrative system.

As a result, the embedded and primary texts of La Historia me Absolverá are both turned minimal, as the narrative structure is brought to the forefront to address the idea that narration is an act of creation—in this case, a creation of destruction. Ford’s narrative strategy thus “becomes more than a mere story-telling device, it is part of the narrative’s poetics, and need to be understood for the narrative to be fully appreciated.” The narrative structure of La Historia me Absolverá is the shattering of narrative structure itself, an act that aligns Ford’s text with Roland Barthes’s assertion that “Text is that space where no language has a hold over any other, where language circulate,” practicing what Barthes refers to as “the infinite deferment of the signified.” An example of this self-annihilating circulation arises when considering the following: the last Cuban Macaw was shot dead close to Zapata Swamp, which borders the Bay of Pigs. The Bay of Pigs Invasion is also known as Operation Zapata, referring back to the geographical site that witnessed the extinction of the Cuban Macaw. The relationship between the avian and the military history quickly becomes convoluted, and renders the narrative to be counter-narrative at heart, transforming his works as characteristics of postmodernist allegories as outlined earlier in the chapter. This allegorical
characteristic compliments the liberation of the history from existing narrative structures, and from the subjectivity that has inflected historical narratives.

D. *Nantes, His Cousins, & Counter-Narrations:*

This disruption of narrative is further elucidated in a series of works, which I will refer to throughout this thesis as *Nantes’ Cousins.* This group contains the following eight works: *Sensations of an Infant Heart* (1999; fig. 16), *Nantes,* (2009, fig. 17), *The Man of the Woods,* (2011; fig. 3), *The Scale of Nature,* (2011; fig. 18), *His Supremacy,* (2011; fig. 19), *Du Pain au Lait pour le Perroquet Mignonne* (2011; fig. 20), *Unnatural Composure,* (2011; fig. 21), and *Forever Afterward Chained,* (2011; fig. 22).

For the sake of brevity, I will describe the earliest work in this series, *Sensations of an Infant Heart,* (1999). This watercolor depicts a Red Hathor monkey strangling a Military Macaw on a small ledge set against a cultivated garden. The recessed perspective of the gardens draws the eye into the background, while the foreground elements such as the circular lines of the chain and the curved branch draws the emphasis to the foreground. As seen in *La Historia me Absolverá,* this work also exhibits a circular and self-referential composition in which the chain echoes the tail of the monkey and the horizontal lines of the ledge echo that of the background as well as on the monkey and the parrot’s limbs. This composition creates a tension between spatial recession and foreground emphasis, perhaps calling attention to the constructed artifice of the image. The formal composition is balanced with tension except for the flailing of the parrot. This work sets a certain compositional pattern for the rest of the series, as all of the monkeys are placed on a type of a platform, creating a stage-like setting. The newest series of six watercolors (fig. 3 & 18-22) display the monkeys in increasing states of sexual excitement as the event proceeds from the capture of a parrot to the execution of the small bird, conflating the violence with male physical pleasure. The following passage from Audubon’s own journals offer a literary source for these images—The phrases in bold
are titles of seven of the eight works in Nantes’s Cousins.

“…My mother had several beautiful parrots and some monkeys; one of the latter was a full-grown male of a very large species. One morning, while the servants were engaged in arranging the room I was in, ‘Pretty Polly’ was asking for her breakfast as usual, ‘Du pain au lait pour le perroquet Mignonne,’ the man of the woods probably thought the bird presuming upon his rights in the scale of nature; be this as it may, he certainly showed his supremacy in strength over the denizen of the air, for, walking deliberately and uprightly toward the poor bird, he at once killed it, with unnatural composure. The sensations of my infant heart at this cruel sight were agony to me. I prayed the servant to beat the monkey, but he, who for some reason preferred the monkey to the parrot, refused. I uttered long and piercing cries, my mother rushed into the room, I was tranquillized, the monkey was forever afterward chained, and Mignonne buried with all the pomp of a cherished lost one. This made, as I have said, a very deep impression on my youthful mind.”

It may be offered that Ford rewrites Audubon’s childhood memory over and over again in these eight works, until the visual image may be seen to liberate itself from the text—neither of them serves as the origin. This last assertion is supported by the fact that the chronology of events in the images, and by extension the narrative, do not align with the order of the textual excerpt. The event, as depicted in the eight watercolors and as narrated by Audubon’s text, would arrange the eight pictures as shown in A, while the title according to Audubon’s journal entry would arrange the pictures in the order of B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Visual Event</th>
<th>B. Textual Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The Man of the Woods</td>
<td>1. Du Pain au Lait pour le Perroquet Mignonne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Scale of Nature</td>
<td>2. The Man of the Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. His Supremacy</td>
<td>3. The Scale of Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Nantes or Sensations of an Infant Heart</td>
<td>5. Unnatural Composure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Unnatural Composure</td>
<td>7. Forever Afterward Chained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Forever Afterward Chained</td>
<td>* Nantes as implied- no reference in journal</td>
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When organized in such a format, the ordering of the eight works differs from A to B. This disparity indicates that the fabulas, the order of events, arranged via pictorial means, does not align with fabulas derived from written texts. The fabulas are not interchangeable between A and B.
exposing another weakness in the narrative system itself. The discrepancies between the two lists suggest that neither the visual nor the textual can serve as the origin from which to construct the fabula and go about constructing a narrative. While the story (linked to Audubon’s journal entry) may be identical among the eight works, narration is thwarted due to the gulf between the visual and the textual, exposing the folly of relying on either as a source of narration. Ford’s deployment of different species of monkeys in the series serves to further obfuscate the narrative presence. Ford has offered that Audubon’s excerpt never specifies the exact species of monkey and parrot. However, through his first depiction of the scene in Sensations of an Infant Heart, (1999; fig. 16) the media has written Ford’s image into history itself. In other words, while it was never indicated that Audubon owned a pet Howler monkey and a Military Macaw, Ford’s act of depiction inscribed them as a historic fact. The subsequent deployment of different specifics was thus based on the “impossibility of the perfectness of history,” and the inability to confirm documents such as Audubon’s journals. Ford revolts against the representative narrative by separating the visual fabula from the textual fabula—a paradigm that was seen by Kristeva to allow the pictorial practice to fulfill itself “as freedom—a process of liberation through and against the norm.” The counter-narrative rhetoric of Ford’s works thus exposes the impotency of both visual and textual modes of narration—an assault that posits his artistic practices close to those of conceptual artists as they rally against the condition that “visual art remains visual.”

A contemporary comparison can be made to Robert Rauschenberg’s Portrait of Iris Clert, (1961; fig. 55) a work that questions the tenuous boundary between the idea and the physical object by exposing the instability of both. Rauschenberg’s telegram-cum-portrait is seen to question the relationship between language, vision, and concept, a critique that manifests in Ford’s narrative systems. Rauschenberg’s “portrait” exposes the control that language holds over the very act of viewing: a view echoed earlier in the century by Marcel Duchamp, who sought “to put painting once
again at the service of the mind."\textsuperscript{258} However, the aesthetic and conceptual power of Ford’s critique may be seen to lie in his deployment of Western figuration to not only critique the inefficacy of dominant Western modes of narration found in decontextualized naturalist images, but also to continue the contemporary critique of the boundary of language and image and the systems of narrative that each provide. Just as artists such as Jeff Wall sought to reclaim Western figuration through a multilayered critique of figuration itself, Ford’s works are also loaded with “a kind of critical iconophobia, an inner antagonism which compels representations to rebuild themselves with a different legitimacy.”\textsuperscript{259} It follows that figuration in Ford’s works is revealed to be a ruse that masks his inner antagonism against modes of narration itself.

To sum, if postmodernism may be seen as “a critical redirection of tradition on the basis of a revised understanding of the immediate past,”\textsuperscript{260} Ford revisits and revises aesthetic traditions to liberate them from “the systems of control and censure,” as warned by Krauss. In the end, textual and visual narrations are both revealed to be inadequate in the quest to make visible the embedded narratives within them. This collapse of aesthetic boundaries can also be attributed to allegorical characteristics, as allegory is seen as caught between “the visual and the verbal: words are often treated as purely visual phenomena, while visual images are offered as script to be deciphered.”\textsuperscript{261} Allegory thus leads back to counter-narrative characteristics, which provide rifts in the narrative structure, allowing for the mining of invisible and concealed narratives. This double-negative allows, then, for the reclamation of history through the debunking of historical systems of narration as history itself was seen as “a prominent, if not the prominent, instrument of the control of subject peoples.”\textsuperscript{262} Therefore, these counter-narrative systems expose the fraught condition of history as a series of instable and subjective narratives and allow for the recuperation of the “historical ruptures” of the modern times—one that breaks away from imperialistic narratives of Western hegemony.
CHAPTER V.
POSTCOLONIAL FABLES: FROM VERSAILLES TO CONGO

The centralization of animals and birds within Ford’s self-probing narrative system (as established in Chapter Four), locates his work within the realm of fables. Ford has affirmed, “I am looking for contemporary versions of these ancient fables that discuss man interacting with the animal world.” The tradition of fables is seen to have emerged with Aesop, a slave who lived in the Greek island of Samos in 6 BCE, with ‘Aesop’ since signifying the canonical author of fables, even those added at a later date by others. The origin of fables may be traced as far back to Sumerian animal proverbs found in ancient Mesopotamian clay tablets (fig. 56) from the Old Babylonian period. Stories found on these tablets later influenced Greek poets such Hesiod and Archilochus, and were rendered into Latin verse by Phaedrus in first century CE. While fables have been traditionally defined as “short, pithy tales, in which animal imagery is used to convey moral lessons,” the Alexandrian rhetorician Aelius Theon provided, in 1 CE, the earliest definition of fables as “a fictitious story picturing a truth.” This definition is augmented by the preface to the fables written by the late seventeenth-century French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine: Je chante les héros dont Esope est le père/Troupe de qui l’histoire, encor que mensongère/Contient des vérités qui servent de leçons. La Fontaine underscores the very nature of fables as hovering in the tenuous narrative of history itself as they draw upon both truthful and untruthful narratives to offer “lessons.”

Ford’s images oscillate between Theon and La Fontaine’s definitions of fables. By filtering his depiction of historical conflicts and colonial struggles through the paradigm of the fable, Ford acknowledges the subjectivity of history as a “fictitious story.” In addition, fables provided a critical distance, allowing for the rise of acknowledged historical narratives, especially during a time of political censorship. Then, rather than providing a venue for oppressed literary voices, as fables were...
seen to do since Roman times, Ford’s images offer a critically didactic mode of communication by subsuming historical and contemporary events under the existing tradition of fables to allow for critical reconsideration of such events.

As noted in the introduction, Ford has given his catalogue raisonné the title *Pancha Tantra*, a reference to *Panchatantra* (ca. 100 BCE- 500 CE), a book of Sanskrit fables that was deployed as a textbook for Indian kings and statesmen. In the book, a learned Brahmin instructs three princes through animal fables. Ford’s deliberate reference to the *Panchatantra* may not only be a reference to his Fulbright-funded trip to India that shaped his early artistic vocabulary, but also an acknowledgement of his adoption of fables to probe historical narratives. The French fabulist, Jean de La Fontaine, who appropriated from the *Panchatantra* in his own book of fables in 1668, asserted that animal fables would “encourage the reader to pay attention, will help to get a vital message across when all other means have proved ineffective.” Walton Ford may then be seen to convert historical anecdotes into animal fables to draw attention to the subaltern history of the colonial and postcolonial world.

A. *La Fontaine & La Fontaine:*

Ford’s strategy is elucidated in *La Fontaine*, (2006; fig. 4). This large-scale watercolor (152.4 x 304.8 cm) accommodates for the true size of a Nile Crocodile and a Barbary Lion. The two animals emerge intertwined out of a fountain, indicated by their wet bodies. The violent nature of their conflict is emphasized by the bloody gashes on the lion’s left leg. The creatures dominate the majority of the picture plane. Ford locates them in a cultivated landscape, marked by freshly cut grass, a marble fountain, and a stretch of urn-topped pink brick fence that separates the animals from the bucolic landscape beyond. The title, *La Fontaine*, is written on the upper left corner, and is a reference to Jean de la Fontaine, the French fabulist active during the *Ancien Régime* under the reign
of Louis XIV. The bottom register of the watercolor follows the usual paradigm of Ford’s works,
displaying the common and Latin names of the two animals: Barbary Lion – Panthera leo leo and Nile
Crocodile- Crocodylus niloticus.

The formal elements of the watercolor unite the two animals in an intricate system of lines
and forms. The undulating body of the crocodile echoes that of the lion. Their tails curve to form
hook-like shapes that mirror one another. The claws of the lion, on the underside of the crocodile’s
jaws, are placed to compositionally reflect the sharp teeth of the crocodile. The shade of the lion’s
underbelly furs blend with the crocodile’s dark scales. Finally, the lion’s right eye is located
approximately where the crocodile’s eye should be, suggesting of the ultimate hybrid union of the
two animals. Elements in the watercolor reinforce the compositional emphasis on the two animals.
The curved edge of the fountain on the right echoes the curve of the grassy parterre in the center,
leading the eye back to the crocodile and consequently to the enjoined animals. Spatial recession is
suggested by the diagonals of the newly mown lawn, drawing the gaze to the lush landscape behind
the urn-topped fence. However, the horizontally laid fence, as well as the placement of the dotted
clouds, vectors the eye back to the lion and the crocodile.

In this watercolor, Ford’s animals connote particular historicized fables and myths. Nile
Crocodiles, still widely found in North Africa, are among the oldest creatures in existence. They
have been prominently featured in Egyptian mythology as the anthropomorphic forms of the god
Seth, the deity Sobek, and the underworld goddess Ammut. Crocodiles have also been described
in medieval bestiaries as the image of treachery or hypocrisy due to their contrasting images of
“powerful indolence at odds with their aggressive ferocity as hunters.” Conversely, lions have been
consistently tied to regal justice and to monarchical power. The Barbary Lion, in particular, has
held prominent positions in history from their role in Roman-era gladiator combats to their
widespread visual presence in medieval heraldry. Lions often surface throughout art history, such as
in Classical Greek urns that illustrated scenes of Greek heroes (such as Herakles) wrestling lions (fig. 57). Lion attack scenes were revitalized through paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, and later revived by Romantic painters such as George Stubbs and by Eugène Delacroix. The Barbary Lion, certified extinct in 1921, also shared the same geographic habitat as that of the Nile Crocodile. In these contexts, the sandy ground that Ford’s animals tussle upon may be a reference to their original arid North African habitat, specifically, the present-day countries of Morocco and Egypt. Yet, as it is often the case in Ford’s more recent works, there are no other written inscriptions to aid the identification of these creatures.

Although the massive scale of the two animals dominates most of the picture plane, there is a curious pile of items in the lower left corner of the watercolor. The objects include elegant yellow gloves, a pink fan, and four different types of flowers (although only two appear detailed enough to be identified). The pink flower behind the glove is foxglove, native to Europe, and the white flower, closest to the lower edge is freesia, native to Africa. The provenances of these two flowers emphasize the clash between the European and African landscapes. Moreover, while freesias do not have culturally symbolic uses, foxgloves are still commercially cultivated as the source of the heart-stimulating drug digitalis, with extensive studies on the flower conducted in the late eighteenth-century by the English physician William Withering.

Accordingly, the embedded symbolism of the foxglove temporally locates the image in the eighteenth-century, which is further supported in the context of the canon of eighteenth-century genre paintings, as clothes and props on the floor were suggestions of disorder, often with erotic undertones. Such a reading is reinforced by the embrace of the two animals—although the lion’s teeth are sunk into the crocodile’s neck, the crocodile appears pliant rather than violently thrashing against the larger predator. This submissive depiction may be due to the fact that the crocodile is in its death throes, a reading reinforced by the presence of the cypress tree to the right (a tree often
associated with death and mourning).\textsuperscript{278} The erotic undertone is heightened by the gentle manner in which the lion cradles the underside of the reptile's jaw with its paw (and claws retracted).

The image's visual and symbolic links to the eighteenth century ties the image to Ancien Régime France, especially as the gardens at Versailles were the epitome of cultivated French gardens. This temporal context allows for the reading of the fountain as not only a pun on the name of the French fabulist, as \textit{La Fontaine} is French for fountain, but also as a signifier of the fabulist's presence into the watercolor. This paradigm was widely recognized during the long eighteenth-century, as reflected in this frontispiece for La Fontaine’s book of fables by J.J. Grandville. (fig. 58) In this frontispiece, the fountain also serves as a signifier for the French fabulist himself. It may even be tenuously offered that the link between La Fontaine and \textit{La Fontaine} is formally heightened as the curve of the \textit{L} and the \textit{F} in Ford's handwritten title echoes the shapes of the tails. As a result, \textit{La Fontaine} should be considered in the context of the visual and literary traditions of the fables of Jean de la Fontaine.

Before he became a fabulist, Jean de la Fontaine was a poet, publishing his first verses in 1654. La Fontaine had well-known patrons including Nicolas Fouquet, the former superintendent of finance for Louis XIV and the Duchess of Orléans. Madame de la Sablière, a prominent salon hostess and a member of the royal court, also patronized La Fontaine for over twenty years.\textsuperscript{279} Although La Fontaine published libertine tales, he is best known for his \textit{Fables choisies mise en vers} (1668), twelve books of 224 verse fables published during the reign of the Sun King. In this text, La Fontaine’s did not devise original subjects, but adapted existing stories into verse. His sources were mainly taken from Aesop’s fables, but as earlier noted, he also quoted from the Indian fabulist Bidpai, the accredited author of the \textit{Pancha Tantra}. While La Fontaine stressed the literary and poetic merits of his fables,\textsuperscript{280} they were simultaneously seen to obliquely allude to morality in Louis XIV’s court. In fact, the La Fontaine's version of Aesopian fables led to a new cultural significance and
reinstitution of Aesop at court, including the building of the Labyrinth of Versailles (fig. 59) in 1677. This small park within the gardens of Versailles contained 39 hydraulic statuary groups of Aesopian fables, with water spurting from the mouths of each animals representing speech. This engraving of the entrance of the park (fig. 60) highlights the mobilization and reification of the fables by juxtaposing the statue of Apollo, a hackneyed signifier for the Sun King, with a statue of Aesop.

However, there is no fable by La Fontaine that explores a relationship between a lion and a crocodile. In fact, no fables in the wide genre of worldwide mythology and fables appear to feature both the lion and the crocodile together in a story. This absence may be related to Ford’s claim that he looks for “stories in natural history, for a historic event, or, for example, a historic figure,” as the basis of his own fabulism. This transformation of history itself into a fable, rather than the canonical converse relationship in which a fable is applied to history, is highlighted by Ford’s very evocation of La Fontaine. Moreover, the French fabulist was seen to signify the rich political subtext of fables and the “rapprochement between the conflicting spheres of nature and culture” that fables were seen to imply. In post-revolutionary France, caricaturists and political satirists adapted La Fontaine’s fablized verses “as the veiled voice of the politically or socially oppressed.” This re-inscription of fables into the nineteenth-century social fabric was heightened by prevailing visual translations of fables in both high and low visual arts, from academy paintings to newspaper cartoons, as well by the incorporation of fables into standard French educational practices. Ford’s evocation of La Fontaine may then be read in the context of political and social history—with his fabulous logic to be excavated by revisiting the embedded texts in the watercolor.

I have proposed that the associations between La Fontaine and Jean de la Fontaine’s fables contextualize the visual image amidst the socio-cultural context of the eighteenth-and nineteenth centuries. A historical parallel may also be made here to Napoleon’s campaign into Egypt in (1798—1801)—a comparison supported by the North African origins of the animals. North Africa held
great political importance for nineteenth-century France due to Napoleon’s campaign, which was a failure on the military front, but became a symbol of scientific and a cultural achievement that opened up interest in the “Orient.” In such a context, the landscape in La Fontaine may be seen as analogous to the collision between imperial France, symbolized by the cultivated garden, and the “Orient,” signified by the sandy ground. The two animals disrupt the thin grassy barrier through their fight, depleting the landscape of human presence, the latter implied by the accoutrements on the lower left corner. It follows that the watercolor becomes Ford’s construction of a visual fable that recalls French attempts to conquer North Africa, inscribing a historical event into an animal fable that could have, but did not, fit into the canon of La Fontaine’s Fables.

Pushing the analysis further, Napoleon’s invasion signaled the rise of Orientalism (which was briefly considered in Chapter Three), with his Armée d’Orient’s entry into Egypt, paving the way for the projection of Western desires upon the North African landscape. The link to Orientalism is underscored by the watercolor’s compositional similarities to Eugène Delacroix’s Lion et Caiman, (1855; fig. 61). This painting depicts a lion attacking an alligator, and locates the two beasts in the center of a wild landscape. Delacroix often depicted the truculent nature of wild animals and painted scenes of animal combats as well as of animal attacks on Arabian soldiers (fig. 62). Such scenes conflated not only the Near Eastern population with its animals, but also posited the Orient as wild and cruel. Delacroix’s depictions of the exotic landscape, which encompassed harems, nomads and ruins, served as testaments to the moral decay of the Orient. Such images inevitably justified Western hegemony by positing Western ideology as a civilizing and modernizing force. In this light, Ford’s quotation of Delacroix, and the latter’s connections to Orientalism, posits La Fontaine as a commentary on Western imperialist impulses.

Ford has affirmed such a reading, claiming that, in this composition, he made a sculpture in the style of Antoine-Louis Barye, a French sculptor who operated at the same time as Delacroix,
“come to life.” Ford noted that such sculptures “capture the moment of savagery. You see sculptures like this in Tuileries [in Paris]. But the French garden is so controlled and these sculptures show completely insane and wild nature…of chaos just breaking loose.” Barye’s animal sculptures such as the *Lion au Serpent* (1835; fig. 63) were exhibited in the Tuileries Gardens in 1833, causing outraged spectators to comment that his sculpture was “effrayant comme la nature,” contrasting with the harmony and order of the Tuileries. Ford’s “live sculptures,” then addresses the “violence of the moment of contact” of French colonization and comments on how such images became “the image of the conquered.”

In such a context, Ford offers that the props in the left corner represent “people dropping stuff to flee when colonialism comes in your backyard.” The objects’ references to cultivation and femininity may even be seen to concur with Edward Said’s gendering of the landscape as an integral aspect of Orientalism. Said argues that the colonized landscape of the “East” was posited as the “fairly supine feminine Orient,” with imperial domination posited as a masculine act. Returning to *La Fontaine*, the props that feminize the landscape are disrupted and conquered by the act of masculine violence. While this reading may conflict with the previous reading of the garden as a signifier for France, the conqueror, and the sandy ground as the conquered Orient, it should be remembered (as the detailed exegesis has shown in Chapter Four) that the rich multiplicities of Ford’s embedded texts are constantly in flux with each interpretation affecting the previous.

The discourse of Orientalism, especially in the context of Delacroix’s Orientalist paintings, allowed for the conflation of the Near Eastern population with that of the animals, with the implication that the former was violent and lawless as the latter. This collapse of the animal into the human is echoed in physiognomic studies of the eighteenth-century. For one, it should be noted that Delacroix witnessed and made sketches of Cuvier’s dissection of a lion at the *Jardin des Plantes* in 1829. Likewise, Barye also spent hours sketching, studying, and dissecting animals at the *Jardin des*
Plantes, alongside Delacroix, hinting at the physiognomic interests that underlay animal imagery by the two artists. Late eighteenth-and-early nineteenth century scientific discourses often noted the collision between the animal and the human world. Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle* (1749-88) framed animals through analogous descriptions to the human world. For example, Buffon compares the periodic interruptions of harmful species in the natural world, such as rats and locusts, to “the hordes of human barbarians who had threatened the civilized world.” This link was heightened by Charles Le Brun’s physiognomic studies (presented in a lecture 1668-70) that sought to connect human personalities and traits in connection to the animal world. Johann Caspar Lavater advanced Le Brun’s studies in *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis unde Menschenlieber* (1775-8) in his investigative drawings of animal and human expressions. Lavater’s work implied that the origins of expression found in the animals were reflective of their souls, and consequently, animals were no longer just assessed for “strength, durability or nutritional value, but also for character, rapport, and communication.” Charles Darwin extended this concept in his publication, *The Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), which sought to explain human cognitions by connecting them to animal expressions.

This history of comparative physiognomy by the later nineteenth-century, contributed to the reading of fables into an “analogy…between the moral nature of man and that of other species.” Especially with the rise of Darwinism, the natural world became newly mythologized and it became impossible to escape the identification of animals with their human counterparts. Moreover, the post-Darwinian world linked the persecution of animals to European dominion over indigenous people, where animals were equated with “savage tribes” that were ‘less fitted to…contend with a more vigorous species,’ the latter referring to Westerners. Colonial subjugators argued that the characteristics of the local populations were inherent traits in their race and blood, with such sociological differences collapsed into tangible physical differences. As a result, African people
were collapsed into African animals and even further mystified as part of an unbridgeable Alterity endemic to the continent, barring the way for communication between “the social, historical creatures of Europe and the metaphysical Alterity of the Calibans and Ariels of Africa,” as argued by Janmohamed in “The Economy of Manichean Allegory.” (1986).

The projection of human culture into the animal world and vice-versa is a theme that is cohesively communicated in Ford’s *La Fontaine* by evoking the genre of fables. La Fontaine’s fables in particular were seen to allude “to man in non-human poems weaving him into the very fabric of animal poetry in a way which ensures that he is always present.” A brief example emerges in La Fontaine’s fable “*Le Lion et le Moucheron,*”—the Lion and the Gnat. The lion, one of La Fontaine’s principal fable characters, has always been acknowledged as the king of beasts. In a reverse simile, kings have frequently been compared to lions and the French poet, François de Malherbe once apostrophized Louis XIII, writing: “*Prends ta foudre, Louis, et va, comme un lion.*” However, La Fontaine’s rhetoric invokes an indirect image of a lion. The La Fontainian lion is not anthropomorphized as per J.J. Grandville’s caricatures (fig. 64) or a musically gifted animal found in an animated film. Rather the human within the lion is indirectly implied and alluded to through manner of speech. In the fable, the lion tells the gnat, “*Va-t-en, chétif insecte, excrément de la terre!*” The royal hauteur of the king, within the lion, is “conveyed not only by the contemptuous character, but also by the vagueness of the epithet.” Ford uses a similar tactic: there is nothing that visually suggests the “human” in Ford’s Barbary Lion. It may be suggested that the props and the embedded texts, both visual and written, serve as Ford’s visual equivalents of La Fontainian literary devices—they hint at human morality, human history, and human culture within the beast. The genre of the fable allows Ford to collapse discourses of imperialism, Orientalism, speciesism, and the history of Western domination of North Africa into a displaced narrative. This fabulous representation allows
for the separation of the layers of history: it acknowledges the heterogeneity of postcolonial histories, rather than a homogenous narrative to be consumed.

B. Au Revoir Zaire & Tragicomedy:

Ford’s metonymic displacement of history into animal fables to excavate contemporaneous postcolonial history surfaces in *Au Revoir Zaire*, (1997; fig. 43). This watercolor depicts two African Grey Parrots in a mating position. For clarity, I will refer to the aggressor as the Alpha bird, and the parrot with his head in the noose of the Portable Snare as the Beta bird. The two parrots, located in the center of the composition, are framed by an un-natural cartouche, composed of the primary horizontal branch and the curved branch of the man-made twitch-up trap. In fact, elements in this watercolor echo the contents of *La Historia me Absolverá* (1999; fig, 2) such as the presence of the twitch-up trap, the bird-on-branch composition, and the idyllic background: a pastel-hued sunset over a body of water. The Portable Snare is adapted from W. Hamilton Gibson’s *Camp Life in the Woods and the Tricks of Trapping of 1881*, and as seen in *La Historia me Absolverá*. The avian pair, engaged in a lewd position, is formally emphasized as the placement of the leaves that draw the eye to the branch-cum-frame. The dominating vertical and the horizontal lines of the main tree inadvertently draw the gaze to the parrots. The union of the two birds is doubly highlighted by a circular internal composition similar to that in *Compromised*, (2002; fig. 25), as well as in *La Fontaine*. The wings of the Alpha and the Beta birds mirror each other and the birds’ visual union is heightened by the indistinguishable fusion of their red tails. The concave curve of the Alpha’s head complements the convex curve of the Beta bird, with each set of talons paralleling the shape and the placement of the other’s.

As earlier stated, the two birds are displayed mating. However, their positions differ slightly from the normal mating habits of parrots, as the dominant bird would normally have his wings
turned down, with its wings wrapped around the Beta bird’s torso. The true un-naturalness of the act is due to the grotesque position to which the Beta bird is subject. It is not only being attacked from behind, but it also faces the possibility of death from the front. The slight disturbance of the red fruit near its beak would activate the trap. Although the watercolor depicts a Portable Snare, it operates in a similar manner to the Twitch-up Trap. The watercolor, *El Poeta*, (2004; fig. 49) by Ford, demonstrates the twitch-up trap in action, foreshadowing the fate awaits the Beta bird. However, while the Cuban Macaw in this image hangs from its feet, the Grey Parrot would hang from its neck. Despite its situation, the Beta bird’s neck seems to extend toward the fruit—it desires the very thing that would ensure its instantaneous death by hanging.

This particular watercolor gains a rich historical significance when considering the written inscriptions on the upper right corner and in the bottom register of the watercolor. The chart below transcribes the writings on the image in relation to their physical locations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Au Revoir Zaire</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Or- Thirty two years with the same all-powerful warrior who because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, sweeps from conquest to conquest fire in his wake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>good talking grey can be exceptional but there are many which are totally worthless as pets or as talkers- the worthless ones which never received training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>to destroy Lumumba government, but at same time we must find or develop another to back which would be acceptable and defensible against Soviet political attack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Psittacus erithecus- African Grey Parrot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>The president would have vastly preferred to have him taken care of some other way than by assassination, but he regarded Lumumba as I did and a lot of other people did as a mad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Most of the limitations attached to a parrot’s vocabulary can be directly traced to its trainer. Most people who are successful in teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>a voice of good sense and good will one of our most valued friends. I was honored to invite President Mobutu to be the first</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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75
The work displays Ford’s usual strategy with the title inscribed in the upper corner in a larger font size. The bottom register of the image shows the common and the scientific name of the birds: *Psittacus erithacus* ~ African Grey Parrot. The title, *Au Revoir Zaire*, is a direct reference to the West African country of Zaire, which existed from 1971 to 1997, with the script written in French, one of the official languages of the country as a byproduct of Belgium colonization. Zaire dissolved in 1997 with the overthrow of the dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, thus becoming the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo. Text B references the dictator, as Mobutu reigned for thirty-two years, with the second part of text B as a direct translation of Mobutu’s name. Other written texts in the image echo the paradigm among embedded texts uncovered in the exegesis of *La Historia me Absolverá*. The above chart shows the oscillation between texts related to the parrot (C, E, and G) versus texts related to Congo/Zaire history (A, B, D, F, and H). The written inscriptions include government documents that trace the relationship among US presidents, Eisenhower, Reagan, and Bush, and Congo/Zaire during the Cold War. The plants and vines in the watercolor heights such country-specific associations. The vine around the main tree resembles poison ivy, which is indigenous to North America. The main tree is not a direct translation of a specific tree endemic to Congo, but a “generalized plant that would be found in Africa,” born from Ford’s desire to critique the “badly observed nineteenth century natural history prints.”

Still, just as in *La Historia me Absolverá* there is no evidence to suggest one of the parrots is a stand in for Mobutu. Rather it may be suggested that *Au Revoir Zaire* may be seen to highlight the instability of narrative history through the convoluted system of texts. In Chapter Four, I argued that this disruption allows for the shattering of established historical narratives, opening the way for an alternative history. For the excavation of the latter, I turn back to the avian pair that dominates the gaze in this image.
The Grey Parrots have held a symbolic presence throughout history. They were popular pets since the ancient times, and they have been represented as messengers or intermediaries between humans and the gods in worldwide mythology due to their ability to mimic human speech. In Christianity, the birds came to symbolize the Immaculate Conception, following the idea of conception occurring through the ear—by the Word. In fact, African Grey Parrots were seen as among the most intelligent and adept imitator of human speech compared to other species of parrots. Two texts, C and G, reference this ability, asserting that Grey Parrots that are incapable of speech are “totally worthless” with this lack of worth attributed to the failure of the trainer. As previously noted, the African Grey parrots are native to west and central Africa. The geographical location of their habitats reinforces their ties to Congo/Zaire’s history. It follows that this tension between the value of the parrot and the trainer is linked to the relationship between Democratic Republic of Congo, its transformation into Zaire, and the American political, and perhaps military role in this historical transition. The turbulence of Congo/Zaire history is made even more tragic by the fact that Ford’s images are not based on live parrots—but both already dead and stuffed.

It would be easy to assume that the aggressor bird is symbolic of the European imperialistic violence upon the indigenous Congolese landscape. However, the complexity of Congo’s violent history from 1960-1997 the year of Mobutu’s death, suggests a more multivalent reading. The adoption of the UN resolution 143 in 1960 called upon the Belgium Government, Congo’s colonial master since 1908, “to withdraw its troops from the territory of the Republic of Congo.” The UN aid provided military aid to the Congolese forces to help the nation gain independence from lingering colonial powers. Congo achieved independence from Belgium in 1960 with Patrice Lumumba elected as the prime minister and Joseph Kasa-Vubu as the President of the nascent country. Lumumba seized power later that year and began soliciting assistance from the USSR, which prompted President Eisenhower (Text F) to urge American and CIA intervention in the
country. In order to combat the perceived Communist influence upon the region, the CIA supported Mobutu, the then Army Chief of Staff. In such a context, Mobutu may be seen as the aggressor with Lumumba as the greedy parrot reaching for the red fruit of Communism without considering consequences. Lumumba was assassinated in 1961, with rumors of CIA involvement, allowing Mobutu to rise to power. Mobutu sought to expunge the legacy of colonialism to restore pre-colonial West African culture, an example given by the changing of his name from Joseph-Desiré Mobutu to Mobutu Sese Seko. Still, Mobutu may also be seen as the greedy Beta bird as his own dictatorial control eventually resulted in his ousting in 1997 during the First Congo War.319

Within such a historical backdrop, Ford’s parrots may assume any of these identities. Such fluidity may be attributed to the fact that parrots are blank canvases, with their identities as “exceptional” or “worthless” only contingent upon their ability to speak. The identities of the parrots may, in turn be seen to rely on who is giving voice to them—from the UN that provided the military aid that led to such turbulence in Congolese history, the USSR that provided military assistance to Lumumba’s forces, and even America which was too preoccupied in chasing after the USSR, becoming oblivious of the rise of dictatorial figures such as Mobutu. The troubling praises of Mobutu by Reagan as “a voice of good sense and good will,” and Bush’s welcoming of the dictator as “one of our most valued friends,” (both inscription H) reflect the ignorance and naïveté of American understanding of the violence in Congo, the latter brought on by the US’s aggressive pursuit after the USSR. Still, the identity of the parrot is fluid as history itself obfuscates the analyses of the two birds.

In this light, the two birds may be seen to comment on the very circuitousness and inescapable nature of history—historical players thus become a Beta and an Alpha throughout history, even both, perhaps alluded to in the watercolor by depicting birds of the same species. It is a farcical image that blends both comedy and tragedy—the ignorance of figures throughout history is
itself tragically comical, while the carnage upon the landscape halts any laughter that may surface. Fables also facilitated farce, as they apply humorous stories to violent human history as means of allegorical lessons.

C. Ford’s Fabulous Rhetoric:

It should be noted that unlike La Fontaine, Au Revoir Zaire displays no identifiable connections to the fable genre. However, “le pouvoir des fables,” according to La Fontaine was seen to lie in the fabulous system of self-inscription, in which new fables were easily inducted into the rich repertoire of existing fables. His assertion is supported in the following statement, in which La Fontaine claims the uniqueness of “La fable ésopique,” which his own fables draw from, is due to the fact that they are “fable contre la fable et contre Ésope ; elle constate leur popularité, puisque l’orateur, un Démade qui vécut au IVe siècle, demande license au people de conter une fable d’Ésope qui n’existe pas ailleurs.”

Further, La Fontaine’s fables present a “range of animal characters…from straightforward dumb beast to various kinds of surrogate humans.” The animals in his fables are not obvious anthropomorphizations—the human and the animal collusion is alluded through deployment of literary devices. For example, in his fable, “Les Deux Chèvres”—“The Two Goats”—La Fontaine fluidly manipulates the poetic language through his choice of pronouns and verbs to conjure up images of women, Amazons, and even royalty in the place of the two goats. This fable (fully transcribed in endnote 323) is about two goats that meet on a bridge, only to tumble into the water, as neither is willing to yield to the other. The source of the fable is seen as appropriated from Pliny the Elder.

In the following pages, I would like to offer a literary analysis of a La Fontaine’s fable in order to demonstrate the link between identity, animals, and literary devices. The first line of the fable identifies the animals as “les chèvres”—the goats. However, their identities are transformed into
human women with the second line, “Certain esprit de liberté/Leur fait chercher fortune: elles vont en voyage.” The spirit of liberty, voyage, and adventure coupled with the feminine pronoun elle, establishes a female attitude of carefree voyage. This identification is quickly subverted with the word pâturage (pasture) in the next line, returning the women back to goats. This identification is confused by the emerging image of the goats as aristocratic ladies through the haughty and blasé attitude conveyed in the following lines: Là, s'il est quelque lieu sans route et sans chemins,/Un rocher, quelque mont pendant en précipices. Their upper-class nonchalance is demonstrated through the repetition of the word quelque, with such identification augmented by the proceeding lines: C'est où ces dames vont promener leurs caprices.

Their goatly identities shift again to that of Amazons in the line: “Devaient faire trembler de peur ces amazones.” The word Amazones may also be seen as a political reference to Mlle de Montpensier, who was part of a great scandal at the Louis XIV’s wedding and was known as “Amazone de la Fronde.” Still, the identities of the two animals shifts again to that of Louis XIV and Phillip IV, as La Fontaine deliberately identifies them in the lines, “Je m'imagine voir, avec Louis le Grand,/Philippe Quatre qui s'avance/Dans l'île de la Conférence.” Here, La Fontaine references the Conference on L'île des Faisans, located near the Eastern part of the French-Spain border, where the two kings met to ratify Louis XIV’s marriage to Philip IV’s daughter, Maria Theresa in 1660. The wary and cautious political dance between the two monarchs is expressed through La Fontaine’s choice of words in the line, “Ainsi s'avançaient pas à pas.” Le pas, translated as “the step,” evokes measured and calculated steps of the two goats-cum-kings. Laumosnier’s historical painting, Entrevue de Louis XIV et de Phillippe IV dans L'île des Faisans, 7 Juin 1660, (ca. 1675-1725; fig. 65) visualizes the meeting of the two kings. In this image, the poses of the kings exactly mirror one another as their feet stretch forward. The visual emphasis on the step suggests that le pas also references the concept of precedence, which was an important element of courtly ceremony during the Ancien Régime.
The anthropomorphic characteristics are continuously referenced through the words *nez* (nose), and *pied* (foot), invoking images of human bodies. Toward the end of the fable, as the two goats come “*nez à nez*” (nose to nose) their pompous and aristocratic air is maintained through the recounting of their ancestors, which is revealed in the end to no great fanfare. “*La chèvre Amalthée,*” (The Goat Amalthée) is their ancestor, a goat rather than some noteworthy noble lineage. The two animals, now returned to their animal identities, fall without ceremony or embellishment in the line, “*Toutes deux tombèrent dans l'eau.*”

This fable by La Fontaine demonstrates not only the rich historical subtext that is embedded into his poetics, but also illustrates the multiple identities that animals can adapt within the context of a single fable—strategies surfacing in Ford’s works. The rich historical references in Ford’s visual fables are discovered within the embedded texts, such as the written inscriptions to visual texts including the landscape, flora, and fauna. To sum, I have so far argued that Ford’s adaptation of the canon of the fable reveals the layered heterogeneous system of history. Then, as both *La Fontaine* and *Au Revoir Zaire* employ the trappings of animal fables to “represent” human history, the question turns to the objective of animal fables—specifically through Ford’s appropriation of La Fontainian works.

Returning back to La Fontaine’s fable of the two goats, it is important to note that no poetic flair was added to the final, most pivotal moment of the fable: when the two goats fall into the water. The climax is rendered even more anticlimactic due to the build-up of rich historical references and literary devices employed in the previous lines. Yet, if both goats were to fall with their identities still attached to the aristocracy or the monarchy, it would have been considered highly blasphemous considering the rigid conventions of La Fontaine’s era. La Fontaine’s role as a fable writer “permitted him to express opinions that would have seemed treasonable in a political philosopher.” This tactic may be seen as largely enabled by the lingering human presence in his
fables, achieved through his double entendres. This human presence presented through the animal was intended to emphasize “the relevance of the moral to the reader.” The animal characters, in lieu of human allegorical figures, were seen to “provide diversion without obscuring the point,” an amusing way to convey a moral and political lesson compared to an unyielding didactic tale. In “Le Pouvoir des Fables,” La Fontaine gives a historical example that in Classical Greece, Athenians refused to heed accounts of their mortal danger, only paying attention when their dire predicament was fictionalized through an animal fable. Therefore, Ford’s appropriation of the fabulous rhetoric may be seen to deploy a similar tactic, using animal fables as a way to highlight subaltern historical narratives that have been hidden and unacknowledged.

This excavation of the alternative historical narratives, the postcolonial view of history, is largely contingent upon the viewer’s ability to decode Ford’s messages, a tactic mirrored in reading fables. From the ancient times, philosophical and historical lessons were conveyed by fables such as those by Plato and Aristotle. The use of animal characters allowed for the ambiguity of interpretation depending on the audience and the codes with which they were familiar. La Fontainian animals were seen to be richly coded, with his animals juxtaposed with the rich subtext of the “monde sensible.” In fact, La Fontaine’s fables were rarely seen to convey a single message, since the “overt morality can actually seem like the opposite of the underlying moral.” These ambiguities allowed for the incorporation of “a strong, thinly disguised allusion to his own monarch,” allowing a means for La Fontaine to address socio-political concerns under the guise of a fable. It may even be suggested that La Fontaine’s stress on the literary merit of his book of fables was a ruse to veil his political undertones. Nevertheless, while La Fontaine was limited by the rigid censorship of his era, Ford’s fables emerge in a modern free-speech era. Then, having argued that Fables allow for the transmission of historical lessons and morals otherwise disregarded, I turn now
to consider why Ford appropriates the canon of fables with regard to his contemporaneous post-colonial context.

To turn away from fables briefly, one of the most notable deployments of animals in a colonial context is Rudyard Kipling’s *Jungle Books* (1894-5). Kipling’s books have been described as “a fable of imperial education and rule,” which presented a vision of British colonial rule at the turn of the century. In the text, Kipling uses anthropomorphized animals, whose speech is even more eloquent than some of the human figures in the story, to convey allegories of imperial rule. In her interpretation of the text, Sune Borkfelt notably argues that, “how animals are portrayed in such texts can be of importance to the reader’s perception of the animals as well as the natural environments and the countries they live in.” Borkfelt asserts that animal stereotypes can affect European attitudes “toward the lands where they live or even the humans that live there as well.” Such attitudes, Borkelt submits, “can then be projected on to metaphors of humans, but without which one has to reevaluate the entire set of imperialist assumptions the text relies on.” Borkfelt’s argument illuminates an important implication between animals and stereotypes, namely how animals can function as a stereotypical view of the native other.

I have previously argued in the chapter that the scientific discourses of the eighteenth-and-nineteenth century later led to the conflation between the native people and its natural flora and fauna. The notion of stereotype also highlights another postcolonial concept argued by Homi Bhaba in “The Other Question” (1983). Bhaba argues that stereotyping is a “semitic activity,” and that the construction of the colonial subject is led through the articulation of difference. For Bhaba, the stereotype is “a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that…constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations.” For Bhaba, the stereotypic representation affects not only self-perception, but also the other’s perception of oneself. Bhaba proposes, similar to Borkfelt’s argument, that legends,
stories, and historical anecdotes of a colonial culture trap the colonial subject and the “the signifier of skin/culture” within the “signifieds of racial typology, the analytics of blood, ideologies of racial and cultural dominance or degeneration.”351 One’s skin color thus becomes burdened with biases cultural projections. In that vein, the deployment of animals as a signifier for the colonial subject may be seen as the ultimate “fixated form of representation,” that traps the colonial subject within the stereotype, especially as difference in “skin” was seen as the “key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype.”352

Consequently, Ford’s animals may be seen to overturn Bhaba’s definition of the stereotype and highlight the racist stereotypical discourses that enabled empowered colonial administration. While a cursory glance at Ford’s works may posit the animal with the culture/individuals of their respective habitats (E.g. Cuban Macaw= Castro, African Grey Parrot= Mobutu, Turkey= America, Nile Crocodile= Egypt…), subsuming them under the genre of the fable frees them from such inflexible associations as their skin-deep differences dissolve under the rich political subtext allowed via La Fontainian rhetoric. Ford’s deployment of animals expose the propensity to stereotype, with his images overturning such reductive views by allowing his creatures to exercise the fluidity of identity. La Fontainian fables, in particular, were seen to blend stereotyping (simplicity), such as the linear associations of lion as the king, and variety (complexity), referring the complex identities of the two goats.353 The dichotomy between La Fontainan simplicity and complexity were seen to enable dialogues by simultaneously offering and collapsing the distance between the moralities of the tales and the moralities of his contemporaneous human world.

In the preface of his fables, La Fontaine writes, “Je me sers d’animaux pour instruire les hommes,” showing the deployment of animals within the fable context to serve moral lessons to humans. This chapter has sought to elucidate the paradigm of fables as a key strategy that coheres Ford’s addressal of the history of the natural and the postcolonial world. The Victorian literary critic
Carolin Sumpter argued, “The beginning of all nations must be ever buried in obscurity, or, at all events, blended with fables and legends.”\(^3\) Ford’s images then unearth the vérités of history by using the fables as a prism to separate the tangled discourses and ideologies that have formulated modern historical narratives and in turn, offering a means to debunk and critique them. Postcolonial fables may be the most insightful way to decode Ford’s images as they allow for acknowledgement of subtext, the excavation of which will undoubtedly differ upon the historical and visual knowledge of the viewer. This obvious barricade may be seen as a reference to modern society’s loss of fluency of the natural world and consequently of the wider socio-historical sphere—a view echoed in Pierre Boutang’s critique that “Il y a un pouvoir des fables que l’âge moderne a renversé, puisque ses révolutions se sont souvent achevées contre les poètes.”\(^3\)

I end this chapter with La Fontaine, who wrote in his preface: “par les raisonnements et conséquences que l’on peut tirer de ces fables, on se forme le jugement et les moeurs, on se rend capable des grandes choses.”\(^3\) While Ford has adamantly denied any claim to moral responsibility, stating, “it would make me really uncomfortable to imagine that I had any idea about what’s going on,”\(^3\) Ford’s fabulous visual strategies may be seen to turn over such formation of judgments and morals to the hands of his viewers.
CHAPTER VI.
HYBRIDIC HISTORICISM

“The 19th-century seems kind of like present century to me, it seems like it is a continuation.”

- Walton Ford

So far, this thesis has considered Ford’s works in relation to Audubon’s *Birds of America*, to the discipline of natural history, to modes of narration, and to the canon of literary and visual fables. While natural history is an integral part of Ford’s iconoclasm, I would like to return to a question briefly raised in Chapter One: Why would an artist working in 2012 appropriate the stylistic past? In other words, what is the purpose of Ford’s formal historicism? This concern seems especially relevant, as it is the element of his work that receives the most critical attention and the least analytical consideration.

Ford’s work appears frequently in group shows “about” naturalist illustration and scientific tradition. The artist himself expressed frustration at the fact that such shows do not necessarily reveal his intertextual narratives, but instead posits him as a “naturalist.”358 This chapter examines this problem by examining the recent group exhibitions that have included his works. It next locates Ford’s work in relation to artists who appropriate historic styles as a form of critique, who, like him, offer “unnatural” histories through historical appropriation. Historicism is revealed as a representational technology deployed by such artists to recuperate disrupted histories. They quote the very referential codes that they simultaneously seek to rebel against—a strategy that I would like to define as *hybridic historicism*.

My understanding and application of hybridity follows Homi Bhaba’s definition as the “revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects.”359 Hybridity in visual arts may then be seen as appropriating forms of established narratives and identities such as naturalist art, Victorian-era paper silhouettes or Spanish-Portuguese terracotta
tiles—visual forms that constructed national and colonial identities during the eighteenth-and-nineteenth centuries. Bhaba argues that hybridization reveals “ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion,” which was seen to turn “the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention.”

Ford’s subversion then returns to the ambivalence with which he creates pastiches of Audubon’s work to comment on his persona. Ford’s rewriting is then posited as a reactive intervention against the dominant hold that Audubon’s idealized images held over the artistic and political perceptions of the American landscape. Then, the hybridic power of Ford’s works lies in their mimicry of historically burdened visual forms. Mimicry is thus posited as a reclamation of agency—a “repetition” that allows for “reevaluation,” in both Ford’s works and those of his contemporaries.

A. Group Exhibitions:

Walton Ford’s most recent group show was “Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities,” (2008) which was curated by Sarah Suzuki at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The exhibit displayed a diverse corpus of nineteenth- twentieth- and twenty-first-century works that were seen to embody the intersection of “science and superstition…natural, manmade, and artificial worlds.” Artists represented in the show included Max Ernst, Damien Hirst, Odilon Redon, Diego Rivera, Kiki Smith, and Mark Dion, among others. Many works in the show probed the tenuous boundary between the unnatural and natural worlds.

The MoMA exhibition included prints from Max Ernst’s Histoire Naturelle (1925; fig. 33), a series considered in Chapter Three, which subjected natural science to surrealist aesthetics. The show also incorporated Odilon Redon’s L’Oeuf, (1885; fig. 66) a print that depicts an anthropomorphized egg-shaped creature. Redon’s work is tied to the discipline of natural history, as his creature was derived from visits to Museum d’histoire Naturelle in Paris, where Redon was first
exposed to nineteenth-century Darwinian theories of evolution. In fact, Redon created a lithographic portfolio titled *Les Origines* (1883), which visualized Darwinian evolutionary theories. Redon’s monsters and creatures found throughout his artistic corpus have been seen as tributes to the Darwinian possibilities of nature.

The artistic interest in the discipline of natural history is overtly addressed in Mark Dion’s *Scheme of the Field Investigation 1986-2003: The Representation of Nature*, (2003; fig. 67). This work projected a taxonomic and classification table upon a tree, creating a tension between the organic form and the rigid taxonomic order that Michel Foucault traces in his investigation of the episteme of natural history. Jane Hammond’s *Scrapbook*, (2003; fig. 68) is a collage composed images from the organic and inorganic worlds including images of butterflies, feathers, puzzle pieces, garden gloves among others. Such juxtapositions between the natural and the artificial worlds evoke the surrealist strategy as manifested in Ernst’s prints from his *Histoire Naturelle* series. The glove, juxtaposed with the butterflies in Hammond’s *Scrapbook*, casts the organic as inorganic—inviting reconsideration of both objects.

In fact, the curatorial introduction to the show quotes from the Surrealist manifesto of 1924 that declared “the marvelous is always beautiful,” and highlights artists such as Max Ernst and Hans Bellmer as artists who “used techniques of unconscious composition and chance to look beyond the known,”—with the artists in the show to parallel their artistic strategies. Yet, the primary vision of the show is to present “a contemporary interpretation of the traditional cabinet of curiosities, bringing together a diverse selection of works by…artists who have likewise felt the pull of unusual and extraordinary objects and phenomena.” This very invocation of a *Wunderkammer* summons the eighteenth-and nineteenth century impulse to collect, categorize and classify—often in the context of natural sciences.
Grouped into this MoMA’s collection of curiosities was Walton Ford’s *Bangalore*, (2004; fig. 15), a small print depicting an Indian Kingfisher holding an American-made bass lure. I have proposed in chapter two that *Bangalore* offers a critique of Western economic hegemony upon the Indian landscape: the American bait has taken the place of the indigenous fish that the Kingfisher ought to be consuming, with the Western placebo revealed to be deadly for the Kingfisher. The American product thus disrupts and replaces the indigenous economic system. In the context of the exhibition, however, this cultural critique of Western economic hegemony becomes veiled. Rather, Ford’s surface visuals that echo natural science illustrations take precedence when considered under the thematic context of a cabinet of curiosities (as the latter places emphasis on the dichotomy between the un/natural worlds). *Bangalore* becomes little more than a “curiosity” among other works included in the show, rather than a complex document that marks the union and the tension between visual, textual, and socio-cultural narratives.

In fact, nature-themed group shows appears to be a paradigm in Ford’s case, echoing the historiography of critical responses to Ford’s images that often gravitate toward naturalist art. Another example of a group show that located Ford’s work as “natural,” include DeCordova’s “Going Ape- Confronting Animals in Contemporary Art,” (2006), which was curated by Rachel Rosenfeld Lafo, Nick Capasso, and Dina Deitsch. This large-scale exhibition included artists who prominently use animal imagery, including Catherine Hamilton, Henry Horenstein, and Deborah Brown. The theme of the show is articulated as “the age-old wild/tame dichotomy and a confused duality between human/animal.” The thematic emphasis is thus circumscribed by confusion within nature. Three previous group exhibitions in 2004 further aligned Ford’s artistic corpus with the theme of nature: “Political Nature,” curated by David Kiehl at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York; “Birdspace- A Post Audubon Artist’s Aviary,” curated by David S. Rubin at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, NY; and “Natural Histories- Realism Revisited”
curated by Erin Kane at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, in Phoenix, AZ. These three shows, as suggested by their respective titles, brought together works by various artists that manipulated images and subjects found in the natural world. Such shows subsumed Ford’s images under the limiting narrative of naturalist art, serving to strengthen the one-dimensional view that Ford has “a number of peers in the field of natural-history illustrations but very few in the world of contemporary art.”\textsuperscript{371} Certainly within such exhibitions, the complex politics of representation and narration in Ford’s work were eclipsed.

B. Appropriation and Historicism: An Imagined Exhibition

Ford outlines his brand of historicism in the following quote: “I try to make my paintings look Western… stylistically and physically they are Western artifacts, because I felt uncomfortable with the cultural imperialism where you go in and ‘borrow’ imagery.”\textsuperscript{372} His comment suggests that his historicism, as indicated by the keyword “artifacts,” specifically draws upon Western history—Western naturalist art in particular. Historicism has been defined as an “interest in past styles” which characterized late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century art.\textsuperscript{373} For example, neoclassicism of the late eighteenth-century sought to draw upon classical architectural and visual forms as a means to recover morality. Yet, historicism may be seen to oscillate at times with appropriation, the practice of “borrowing” imagery. Appropriation has been seen as widely deployed in contemporary art in cases where “artists adopt imagery, ideas or materials from pre-existing works of art or culture.”\textsuperscript{374} Often, artists acknowledge such acts of appropriation as integral components of the work. For example, Sherrie Levine’s \textit{After Walker Evans}, (1981; fig. 69) appropriated Walker Evan’s 1936 photograph of Allie Mae Burroughs from 1936. Levine’s image was thus a re-photograph of a photograph, operating as a third order sign: a reproduction of a reproduction. Such acts of appropriation were seen to extend and challenge artistic claims to originality.
In his works, Walton Ford both appropriates and operates in a mode of historicism. For example, *Benjamin’s Emblem*, (2000; fig. 12), displays Ford’s appropriation of Audubon’s Wild Turkey and of selections from Franklin’s letters to his daughter. The overall image, however, operates in a mode of historicism. The false foxing to the background image is not a direct appropriation, but a historical translation of pre-existing artistic visual languages. This blend of appropriation and historicism is echoed in the artistic corpus of the contemporary artist, Kara Walker. Just as Ford revises Audubon, Walker exposes the contrived narrative of an authoritative document that have influenced historical narratives by deploying historicism as an intervention.

Kara Walker’s *Harper’s Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*, (2005; fig. 70.a & 70.b) displays enlarged pages from Harper’s eponymous 1866 publication, overlaid with Walker’s silhouette cutouts of grotesquely stereotyped African-American figures. Like Ford, Walker relies on dated techniques to give her work its resonance—here appropriating from paper silhouettes that were popular during the Victorian Period. Silhouettes held cultural resonance during this period. The indexical quality of the silhouettes was linked to the rising physiognomic studies as instigated by Johann Caspar Lavater. However, rather than an indexical recording of the subject’s profile, Walker’s silhouettes are of negative stereotypes that have persisted in the historic imaginations. Such racially charged silhouettes, juxtaposed with Harper’s book that served as an authoritative document of the Civil War, then offers an alternate history that has been obscured in official history. Her work offers a critique of the kind of collective amnesia that Ford likewise engages. In this way, her work is closer to Ford’s project than the works of “nature” artists.

Walker’s project may be especially comparable to Ford’s artistic strategies as they both take an authoritative text (in this case, Harper’s book and Audubon’s *Birds of America* that embodied the colonial project through the ecological mapping of America) and deconstructs them to the point where their newly constructed narratives oppose the metanarratives of the authoritative texts.
Indeed Walker has stated that her works are not just about race-relations and slavery but "about how you make representations of your world," echoing Ford’s desire to tell stories “rather than in the service of these great empires.”

The historicism in Walker’s and Ford’s images may be seen as a continuation of nineteenth-century art forms and a recovery of imperialistic discourses embedded within the technique. In fact, Ford attributes his claim over Western naturalist art to his personal background, stating, “Having been someone who has shot birds, handled guns and fishing rods and killed animals with my hands, I’ve earned the right to pretend to be someone like Audubon or Sir Richard Burton...because I’ve done the kind of travel I’ve done, been in places where I’ve been absolutely furious at the entire native population, and known how that could lead you astray.” Ford’s statement comments on own personal experience with imperial aggression that allows him to operate in a mode of cultural historicism. Ford is not a third-person observer in his application of historicism—he himself embodies his own mode of historicism. This claim over the very mode of historic artistic language and style borne from the artist’s relationship with his or her respective history is a paradigm that surfaces in the work of Adriana Varejão, whose geographical condition of postcoloniality is found further south than Ford’s—in Brazil.

Adriana Varejão is a contemporary Brazilian painter who draws from the diverse artistic styles and materials of Brazil’s colonial past to comment on the legacy of colonization and imperialism in her native landscapes. Varejão’s Proposal for Catechesis - Part I Diptych: Death and Dismemberment, (1993; fig. 71), exemplifies her quotations of not only Baroque art but also of azulejos, a glazed tile of five or six inches squared. Azulejos were seen to originate from Asia Minor, with Persians adopting it from the Assyrians, and later transmitted to Spanish art by the Moors. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Portugal imported azulejos from Spain, which were widely incorporated into secular and sacred architectural surfaces. Azulejos are imbued with heavy political
history in South America: the tiles reached Brazil through the Portuguese conquest in the
seventeenth-century, when azulejos were widely incorporated into Portuguese colonial architecture,
including facades of governmental or religious institutions.\(^{382}\) The widespread use of azulejos reached
its zenith in the eighteenth-century under the reign of João VI, who used the wealth of Brazilian
gold mines to further his artistic projects.\(^{383}\) Such mosaics displayed passages from religious and
secular history, later incorporating decorative Baroque images of sea forms and cherubim.\(^{384}\) While
the adoptions of tiles were partly borne from practicality, as they served as an effective protectant
against dampness against noxious insects, they were also considered as ideological tools mobilized
by the Portuguese colonial masters to keep the colonized faithful to church and state.\(^{385}\)

Proposal for Catechesis- Part I appears, at first glance, to be a mosaic of til es familiar from
Brazilian architectural surfaces. Like Ford’s watercolors and prints, they may be mistaken as addenda
to pre-existing historical documents. The work juxtaposes an image of Christ being apprehended by
indigenous figures with a scene of cannibalism. The miracle of transubstantiation, and the
Eucharistic ritual of consumption, is hideously crossed with a scene of anthropophagy, the practice
of cannibalism.\(^{386}\) The upper section of the work displays Baroque style organic forms, cherubic
figures and curving lines. The image of Christ, combined with such Baroque motifs, may be seen to
comment on the deployment of theatrical Baroque as a political tool of subjugation in the cultural
colonization of Brazil. Varejão claims that her interest in the Baroque is due to its rich political
significance as it was seen “as an instrument of persuasion…an instrument of religious domination
throughout the seventeenth-century's Portuguese and Spanish maritime expansion.”\(^{387}\) Just as Ford
used nineteenth-century taxonomic art forms to recontextualize the legacy of European ecological
imperialism, Varejão’s use of azulejos is a reminder of Portuguese cultural imperialism that pervaded
the art and architectural landscape of Brazil.
Due to the tangled history of colonization itself, the process of decoding Varejão’s images also requires in-depth inquiries into embedded texts. The image of cannibalism (which may be compared to Walker’s use of negative stereotypes to expose the fictive condition of such images), is appropriated from an engraving by Théodor de Bry (fig. 72) from his anthology of America (1590–1635). Bry’s images served as an authoritative document of the New World for European audiences, much as Audubon’s *Birds of America* did for the North American landscape. It perpetuated the myth of the subhuman nature of indigenous Brazilians, just as paintings and sculptures by Delacroix and Barye advanced European Orientalism upon the North African landscape. Yet, this representation of cannibalism may also be reconsidered in the context of Anthropophagia, the Brazilian vanguard movement of the 1920s. Anthropophagia took cannibalism as a metaphor for the process of cultural assimilation of Western influences, often imperialistic in nature, by recasting them in Brazilian aesthetic languages. In fact, Poet Oswald de Andrae proposed in the movement’s 1928 manifesto that in order to gain independence from foreign models, it would be necessary to ingest and metabolize European influences, just as cannibalistic Tupinamba Indians devoured their enemies to appropriate the enemy’s strength. In such a context, Varejão’s work depicts a visual cultural cannibalism, by draining the authoritative power of azulejos and Bry’s image, through subversive juxtapositions.

This cannibalistic consumption is made literal by the disruptions that emerge on the surfaces of the tiles. The scarlet fissures (near the cherub’s face and Christ’s leg) turn the smooth terracotta surface into a fleshy form. The cracks may also be seen to refer to “the damage done to a fragile culture by the imposition of "racist, male-dominated capitalism," and to expose “[Brazilian] history’s still-fresh stigmas and wounds.” On the other hand, the disrupted tiles provide colonial agency, as the transformation of Western imperialist form into consumable flesh for the cannibalization of Western imperialism itself.
The link between imperialistic art forms and corporal bodies is a paradigm that persists throughout Varejão’s works, often deployed as a cultural critique. Varejão’s *Filho Bastardo*, (1992; fig. 73) is also drawn from Western visual documents of the New World that consequently, and tragically, became its authoritative images. *Filho Bastardo* represents a painting on an oval-shaped wood with a red gash in the center. At left, a priest is having sex with a female slave against a tree trunk. On the right, two military figures face a nude indigenous woman. Her hands are tied to a tree branch above her head. The military figures are appropriated from documentary sketches by the French Mission painter Jean-Baptiste Debret from his series *Picturesque Journey* (1834-39; fig. 74).392 Compositionally, the trees, and by extension, nature, itself play a role in the ill-fate of the indigenous women.393 This violence upon women is conflated with violence upon the landscape, due to the central gash that evokes a torn vagina. This identification is furthered by the fact that the material of *Filho Bastardo* is wood, with the round wooden surface evoking the womb. As such, rather than cannibalistic subversion, *Filho Bastardo* transformations Brazilian history into a woman’s body with the colonial incursions posited as sexual rape. This anthropomorphism is tied to the postcolonial concept of the colonial body as “the literal ‘text’ on which colonization has written some of its most graphic and scrutable messages,” as well as the “literal site on which resistance and oppression have struggled.”394 The bastard child, as referenced by the title, is perhaps the resulting traumatized and fractured postcolonial Brazilian history itself.

Edward Said has noted that post-imperial writers, “bear their past within them—as scars of humiliating wounds…as potentially revised visions of the past tending toward a postcolonial future…in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts in territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist.”395 In such a context, Varejão’s ruptures and wounds upon her artistic surface manifest as scars of resistances by reclaiming the artistic landscape. In fact, Varejão has affirmed, “I am interested in verifying in my work dialectical processes of power and
persuasion. I subvert those processes and try to gain control over them in order to become an agent of history rather than remaining an anonymous, passive spectator.” Her desire to gain agency over history is echoed by Ford who asserts that his strategy of historicism is a way of “putting you back in time and telling you stories that weren’t told at the time these historical events were taking place.”

When Varejão’s works are juxtaposed with a work by Ford, such as Compromised (2002; fig. 25), their simultaneous consumption and overthrow of historical languages becomes evident. The artistic corpus of Ford and Varejão unveil the ideological construction of colonial and postcolonial landscapes by providing counter-hegemonic narratives that excavate history’s omissions. Just as Ford views the events of the nineteenth-century as a continuation (as offered in the opening quote of the chapter), Varejão views the aggressive nature of colonization as still "happening right now under our very eyes."

Thus, the visual form of Varejão’ works, like Ford’s, may be seen as inflected by the content of the works—historicism is borne from the desire to excavate history itself. Georg Lukács has asserted in “The Ideology of Modernism” (1956) that “style…is the specific form of a specific content,” with the writer/artist’s attempt to reproduce his or her Weltanschauung as “the formative principle underlying the style of a given piece of writing.” In this light, Ford’s assertion of a nineteenth-century style becomes the logical form created by the content. It is “a post-colonial counter-discursive strategy,” which maps “the dominant discourse” to expose “its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified ‘local.’”

Homi Bhaba argues that the domination by the colonialist powers lies in the preservation of “the authority of its identity in the universalist narrative of nineteenth-century historical and political evolutionism.” In other words, the colonial authority of Western forces depended on the subjugated population’s recognition of the imperialist’s cultural and political hegemony. Ford and
Varejão may therefore be seen to unsettle such universal narratives through their subversive visual languages, which allows for turning of “the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.” The reversal of European artistic identity allows the other to then become active participants in the newly decolonized history.

Still, it is difficult to compare the colonial subtexts of Ford, Walker, and Varejão due to the disparities in the traumatic histories they each invoke. In fact, compared to the other two artists, Ford is far from the other, as he comes from the imperial legacy of Southern plantation owners rather than as part of a subjugated population. Despite such disparities, historicism and appropriation are acts of agency that allow these artists to address ruptured postcolonial histories and recover the omissions of history. In fact, Bhaba argues that such restaging of the past “introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition.” Bhaba argues that the postmodern and the postcolonial condition may be seen to lie in the “enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices—woman, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities,” positing modern history as a dense archaeological palimpsest. Thus, I would like to end this chapter with the idea of the palimpsest—an aesthetic echoed in the intertextual nature of Ford’s images. In this examination, I would like to compare Ford with Idris Khan, a contemporary British artist known for his layered photographs.

Khan superimposes photographs of various objects, from every page of the Qur’an (2004), to J.M.W Turner’s postcards at the Tate Britain (2005), to paintings produced by Caravaggio in the last four years of his life (2006). Walter Benjamin has highlighted the ease to reproduce images caused proliferations of reproductions which was seen to strip not only the “aura of the work of art,” but also the idea of authorship itself. However, Khan’s doubly mechanically reproduced reproductions may be seen to re-invest the aura—these reproductions are turned original, with the invisible aura made visible. For example, in Caravaggio...The Final Years, (2006; fig. 75), Khan’s
photograph transforms the Italian painter’s formal elements into a violent collision of lines. When considered in the context of the title, it may allude to Caravaggio’s final years that were marked by brawls, a murder charge, and psychological turbulence.407

Khan’s artistic language may also be seen to cast a light on the cultural history of the technique of photography itself, just as Ford’s and Varejão’s revisions may be seen to highlight the colonialism permitted and perpetuated by imperial media. Photography in the late nineteenth-century was, among its many uses, linked to "scientific fads" including physiognomy, eugenics, racial taxonomy. Such faux-disciplines were largely driven by the desire to isolate and identify potential “criminals.” Sir Francis Galton, British cultural anthropologist and geographer (and cousin of Charles Darwin), believed that there could "hardly be a more appropriate method of discovering the central physiognomic type of any race or group than that of composite portraiture," with his composite photos showing "not the criminal, but the man who is liable to fall into crime." Galton’s contemporary, the French photographer Arthur Batut also made composite portraits that he referred to as “type-portraits” to identify the defining traits of particular races, tribes or families, referring to them as "images of the invisible." Khan’s image thus traces the history of photography itself by excavating its socio-cultural subtexts. They may even offer a form of postmodern nostalgia through the “return of Modernism’s repressed,” as his images visualize the previously invisible and repressed narratives, echoing Ford’s own artistic strategies.

Khan’s palimpsest-like photographs become postmodernist allegories, as they do not offer a linear narrative system, but instead call for geophysical archaeological investigations into the narrative layers. In fact, the very paradigm for the allegorical work has been seen as the palimpsest, to quote once more from Craig Owens. If allegories are seen to represent “the distance between the present and an irrecoverable past,” the narrative dimensions of the works examined in this chapter may be seen to reconcile this gap by layering history itself, positing the historical narrative as at once
“compressed” and disrupted. As such, it may be argued that the palimpsest may be seen as the ultimate allegory of Ford’s works, as it evokes his mapping of historical activity, the counter-narrative nature of his works, and even the complexity of postcolonial and postmodernist identity itself.

A final coda—to state that Ford’s works are always politically subversive works of counter-discourse would be to replace the dominant narrative with an equally reductive paradigm. Spivak warns in her seminal essay, “Who Claims Alterity,” (1989) that strategies which seek to return agency to alternate voices “must resolutely hold back from offering phantasmatic hegemonic nativist counternarratives that implicitly honor the historical withholding of the ‘permission to narrate’.”414 In this, she warns that counter-narrative itself can also replace the previously hegemonic narrative. In her assertions, Spivak also highlights the impossibility of the native tradition that has been untouched by Westernization. As such, I would like to argue that the access to agency in the contemporaneous moment of postmodern instability comes from the very process of decoding such palimpsestic texts. In fact, Helen Tiffin argues that the postcolonial counter discourse “does not seek to subvert the dominant with a view to taking its place,” but rather seeks to “evolve textual strategies which continually consume their own biases.”415 Integral to Tiffin’s, Spivak’s, and my view is the acknowledgement of the hybridization of post-colonial culture itself. Tiffin argues that decolonization is seen as a process that incites “an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them,” and “between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling.”416 Therefore, the artistic power of the artists considered in this chapter may be seen to incite this active dialect through their creation of ever-shifting postmodernist allegories borne from their palimpsests of historical anamnesis. Consequently, Ford’s strategies are revealed to be the center of postcoloniality—not at the center of a “Wunderkammer.”
CHAPTER VII.
CONCLUSION: THE FALLACY OF WESTERN NARRATIVE

The artistic output of Walton Ford is a paradoxical collision between the conceptual and the figurative; the historical and contemporary; the very instability of which locates him in his postmodern milieu, while his faux Audubon quotations remain affixed to the historic past. While the works examined in this thesis have been contextualized within considerations of global colonialism and imperialism, it would be reductive to suggest that Ford’s images are always blistering critiques. Rather, what reverberates throughout his portfolio is the deployment of the natural world as a distorting mirror, reflecting the previously invisible, and often subversive, narratives in human cultural history.

Still, the very invocation of nature is a loaded act in itself, as colonial rulers have often conflated the culture and the nature of the colonized. In fact, nature has been considered as the “residue of cultural construction,” with culture existing as “the congeries of values, beliefs, practices, and discourses that have come to carry the force of nature.” Then, nature does not exist in opposition to culture—rather the two are irrevocably intertwined. Moreover, Ford often quotes from eighteenth-and nineteenth century sources—a historical moment of imperialism—perhaps drawing upon Michel Foucault’s assertion that “Entstehung of history is found in nineteenth-century Europe.” Furthermore, as suggested by Tiffin, the very process of revising historical and fictional records is considered, in itself, as the utmost characteristic of post-colonial texts. Then, the two prominent themes (un/natural history and socio-cultural legacy of the long nineteenth-century) in Ford’s works inevitably tether them to discourses of colonialism and imperialism. His works are not, as is so often noted, in the tradition of natural history, but are interventions in that tradition. This is mirrored in Ford’s strategies, as Ford describes his quotation of historic texts as a way to “try to
bring it up to date and think about how it affects the way we think today and how similar the
nineteenth century is to now.\textsuperscript{421} This notion of history folding back onto itself is partly aided by the
fable-like qualities of Ford’s images (investigated in Chapter Five), as fabulous characteristics allow
for the reinterpretation and re-inscription of fables throughout the course of history to changing
needs of societies.\textsuperscript{422}

In this way, Ford’s works may be seen to exhume the politics of the “history of natural
science and zoology; exploration and colonization; the history of images, artistic and otherwise; even
the history of history.”\textsuperscript{423} This thesis has been particularly concerned with the latter, the history of
histories. It may even be suggested that Ford’s quotations are visual manifestations of Karl Marx’s
often repeated assertion that “all great historic facts and personages occur twice…once as tragedy,
and again as farce.”\textsuperscript{424} While farce has already been considered in relation to \textit{Au Revoir Zaire}, 1997 in
Chapter Two and Five, farce manifests with particular vigor in Ford’s 2011 series of six paintings
illustrating an excerpt from Audubon’s childhood (fig. 3 & 18 - 22). In these works, Ford conflates
sexual humor with the monkeys’ violence upon the parrots to not only fictionally visualize
Audubon’s “Freudian” childhood that “traumatized him and led to him painting birds,”\textsuperscript{425} but also
to reveal the animal-on-animal and human-on-animal violence that is veiled in naturalist art. This
fusion of tragic history with farce is echoed in Ford’s statement: “I think that there’s almost no
subject that you can’t treat with some humor, no matter how brutal it can seem.”\textsuperscript{426}

As such, I would like to conclude this project by introducing one final work by Ford, \textit{Eothen},
(2001; fig. 76), in order to elucidate the navigation, disruption, and recuperation of histories that
occur in his images. \textit{Eothen} is a checklist of Ford’s artistic strategies: the marginal texts, a dioramic
background, the unembellished bottom register of names, false foxing, and numbering. The excerpt
at the top is taken from sūrah 44 of the Qur’an. The title, \textit{Eothen}, is an embedded reference to
Alexander Kinglake’s book, \textit{Eothen} (1844)—a text Ford has previously quoted from in \textit{Compromised,
(2002; fig. 25). As asserted in Chapter Two, Kinglake’s text documents the tense cultural and religious relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Christendom in the early nineteenth-century. Eothen is also a reference to the Oriental world, as it is Greek for “the other place.” The watercolor depicts a Common Peafowl with a burning tail. Three starlings are perched on its back with one depicted mid-flight. The Peafowl chases after a Levant viper, its head bent forward as if it is about to peck at the serpent. The silhouette of the peafowl is exceedingly harmonious with the s-shape body of the viper. The gray smoke from the peafowl’s burning tail matches the gray shade of the viper. The three species, when combined, form a microcosm of the world: the Levant Viper is found in North Africa and the Middle East, the Peafowl in South Asia, and the European Starling is a signifier of the Americanized world. This last identification is due to the starling’s invasive status, summarized by Ford as “when starlings move in, starling culture takes over.” The starling, therefore, represents an invasive, or colonizing, force over the obliquely referenced geographies of the other creatures.

Ford has asserted that the burning peafowl “has to do with the Middle East but I really don't know 100% what that picture means…the snake represents death and he kills people. I know that peacocks eat snakes, and so the whole thing turned into this image of a peacock following a snake with his tail on fire. It seemed exactly like what's going on over there. There's something dreadfully apocalyptic about it.” In the above statement, Ford offers contemporary comparisons to the image. In fact, critics have read Eothen in relation to the traumatic events of September 11, 2001. Elements in the watercolor appear at first to concur with such an interpretation. For one, the date of the work is 2001, the very moment of the horrific event. The gray smoke of burning tail brings to mind the dense smoke of the burning Twin Towers before the collapse. The Qur’an excerpt, reproduced below, is equally ominous:

Wait for the day when the sky will pour down blinding smoke enveloping all men: a dreadful scourge. Then they will say Lord, lift up this scourge from us. We are now
believers. But how will their new faith help them when an undoubted prophet had come to them and they denied him, saying: ‘A madman, taught by others!’

The excerpt is a version of surah 44: 10-14. This surah, however, does not allude to the end of days but is a surah on Smoke, which in the Qur’anic context refers to “the haze of dust which surrounded Mecca at the time of the great drought and famine which preceded the Muslim conquest of Mecca and facilitated it.” The excerpt recounts the people of Mecca (who were the Prophet Mohammed’s adversaries at the time) and their willingness to embrace a “new faith” only when faced with threat. In a deeper reading, the excerpt is not intended to foretell or encourage Islamic violence over non-believers. Rather, it is one of bitter chastisement, of the fickleness of human nature and their willingness to abandon formerly held ideals depending on the situation.

Then, to fall into the trap of a monumental historical narrative such as 9/11 in decoding this work is to once again fall prey to Ford’s ruses. It may be suggested that Ford exposes the fallacy of “monumental history,” which Foucault argues is “a parody… a concerted carnival.” Therefore, the eagerness to associate the watercolor to such a traumatic narrative, despite the lack of definitive evidence, suggests the contamination of vision itself by history.

For example, the historical pollution of vision (and the interpretive process, by extension) can change the reading of the image as history shifts. The turbulent wars waged by the US upon Middle Eastern countries since 2001 can link the peafowl with the American military violence upon the Middle Eastern landscape, with the burning peafowl serving as a two-way signifier, of the dual impact of colonialism and imperialism. Ford has noted this “two-way street” effect throughout history—including the French conquest of North Africa that led to the influx of Algerians in Paris—with even post 9/11 counter-terrorist measures impacting American lives, remarking, “now, we’re taking off shoes at the airport.” Although I have extensively considered this point in chapter six, artistic and literary attempts at decolonization can never recover pre-colonial, and pre-
imperialistic, cultural purity. Then, the decoding of *Eothen*, can never offer a finite answer—its interpretations are fated to transform depending on shifts in contemporaneous histories.

Therefore, the convoluted interpretative possibilities of *Eothen* calls vision itself into question. It exposes of the fallacy of the Western narrative and the inadequacy of visual forms to serve such historical narratives. This coup against the previously dominant Western visual field is not specific to Ford. The contemporary photographer Jeff Wall has noted, in regard to his photography, that “the arrogant domineering identity which Western figuration had been loaded with in the kind of language which had defined it for a long time has itself been cracked, and different identities have been able to emerge.” The art historian Rosalind Krauss has also noted the problem of modern narratives, urging that the new art of the postmodern era should seek “to void the basic propositions of modernism, to liquidate them by exposing their fictitious condition.”

Finally, Victor Burgin may be seen to sum up the entire enterprise, asserting, “It is these narratives, are at issue now in the moment of post-modernism. All this rummaging through the iconographic jumble of the past is symptomatic of it.” Burgin proposes that such “archaeological activity” (which Ford may also be seen to partake in through his hybridic historicism) may reveal “the foundations of our modern belief systems, simultaneously clearing the ground for reconstruction which will not obliterate the past but which will maintain, precisely, its difference, or the activity may end where it began, in nostalgia, in repetition, in the affirmation that the present and the past are somehow the same.” Burgin’s statement argues for the questioning of modernity, but not through effacement to create a “pure” aesthetic. Rather, Burgin’s proposal calls for a “compressed history,” in which the past is deployed to reexamine the present, with the present doubly mobilized to reconsider the narratives of the past. Recuperation does not exist in isolation but becomes an “archeological activity.”
Michel Foucault, in tracing the philosophy of histories, proposed the existence of “effective history” which was seen to “uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity.” Effective history was seen to exist in opposition to “traditional history” which was seen to dissolve “the singular event into an ideal continuity.” In other words, traditional history refers to the metanarratives, or the grand narrative which Lyotard describes as “dialects of spirit, hermeneutics of meaning...creation of wealth,” and even the Enlightenment project. The effective history à la Foucault emerges through the “reversal of a relationship of forces...the appropriation of vocabulary turned against those who had once used it,” a statement that prompted the consideration of historicism and appropriation in chapter six. Then, this severing of historical memory acknowledges the contamination of vision by historical narratives. The remedy is offered through uprooting of metanarratives, a tactic that may be seen to summarize the process of Ford’s artistic counter-narrative, and hybridic historicism.

The star of *Eothen*, in terms of composition and size, is undoubtedly the Common peafowl. While the bird may derive from the Middle East, in Christianity, the peafowl is a symbol of Christ’s resurrection and a promise of immortality through the myth of its ability to be reborn from the ashes. Yet, it remains unclear whether Ford’s peacock will disintegrate into ash or is emerging from the ash. In Hinduism, the motif of the peacock and the serpent is seen to represent complementary duality, due to the bird’s power to transmute the poison of the snake into its polychromatic plumage. The peacock in cultural history have been seen to signify military rank in China as well as closely tied to the rise of Art Nouveau through James McNeil Whistler’s Peacock Room (1876-77). As a result, the cultural significance of a single peacock, when superimposed onto human history, becomes as convoluted as Ford’s images. This instability of peacock identity can be, once more, attributed to fables. The power of fables was seen to derive from the gap between *realism* (indicating the reciprocity of animals with regard to human culture) and *ambiguity*: “the mythical matter of there
being any discourse at all.” The power of Ford’s images may be seen to lie in this very fissure, in which the peafowl is symbolic of apocalypse, hope, or nothing more than a colorful bird.

In the end, the paradoxical collision between the conceptual and the figurative, historical, and contemporaneous narratives in Ford’s works may not be a collision, but collusion. Michel Foucault offered that the will to knowledge reveals, “all knowledge rests upon injustice…and that the instinct for knowledge is malicious.” The decoding project of Ford’s codes, the unmasking of which has no finite “monumental” end, may be seen to reveal this very tragedy—borne from our dual condition of postcoloniality and postmodernity.
Notes


3 Ibid, 484.


13 Kristeva, Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, 66.

14 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, conducted via phone. April 6, 2012.


16 Ibid.


22 Ibid, 209.


28 Lee A. Vedder, *John James Audubon’s The Birds of America: A Visionary Achievement in Ornithological Illustration* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 2006), 88


33 Kazanjian, “The Elephant Man.”


35 Enright, "Misadventures Along the Nature Trail.”


37 Tomkins, “Man and Beast.”


39 Enright, "Misadventures Along the Nature Trail.”

40 Ibid.


44 Ibid.


47 Kazanjian, “The Elephant Man.”

48 Tomkins, “Man and Beast.”

49 Ibid.


51 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, April 6, 2012.


53 Vedder, John James Audubon's The Birds of America, 8.

54 Linton, “Inside the Watercolor World of Walton Ford.”

56 Tomkins, “Man and Beast.”


61 Ibid, 2-3.


63 Ibid.


* Nationalistic themes are conveyed through tropes such as the lion in the upper left corner, which was used as a nationalist symbol through the Eighty Years’ War (1568-1648).

65 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 164.

66 Ibid, 171.

67 Ibid, 175.


111

71 Ibid, 43.


73 Ibid, 39.

74 Jacobson, “Nature Boy Walton Ford's Fabulously Detailed, Audubon-on-Viagra watercolors.”


82 Ibid, 309.

83 Ibid, 308.

84 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 204-5.

85 Ibid, 205.


88 Text taken directly from Compromised, 2002 by Walton Ford.
Conversation with Professor Wilfrid Rollman, Religion Department at Wellesley College on April 10, 2012.


Markey, “First Encounters.”


Tomkins, “Man and Beast.”


Kino, “Beauty & the Beasts.”


Linton, “Inside the Watercolor World of Walton Ford.”

“Walton Ford at the Book Loft in September 2009,” via *YouTube*


Enright, “Misadventures Along the Nature Trail.”

Ibid.

Kazanjian, “The Elephant Man.”


109 Ibid, 493.

110 Ibid, 493.


121 Ibid, 131.


123 Ibid.


127 Ibid, 129.

128 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 128.

129 Ibid, 205.

130 Ibid, 230.

131 Ibid, 275.

132 Ibid, 268.

133 Ibid, 160.


138 Ibid, 496.


140 J. Donald Hughes. *An Environmental History of the World Humankind's Changing Role in the Community of Life*, 2nd ed. (Taylor & Francis, 2009), 125.

141 Ibid, 125.


143 Ibid, 8.
144 King James Bible, Jeremiah 4:7 Cambridge ed. 
Original latin from the image: ascendit leo de cubili suo et praedo gentium se levavit

145 Francesco Tarducci and Henry F. Brownson. The Life of Christopher Columbus (Detroit: H.F. Brownson, 1890), 229.

146 Ibid, 200.


148 A Detailed exegesis of Nantes can also be found in Appendix B.I


151 Ibid, 767.

* Although Camper made no claims personally about racial hierarchy through his engravings, they have been misread since his times as asserting racial politics.


153 Ibid, 86.


155 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 183.

156 *In fact, nineteenth century colonial archaeology led colonial regimes to attach themselves to antiquity and museum institutions as a form of ideological conquest.


159 Ibid, 8.

161 Markey, “First Encounters.”

162 Ibid.


164 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, April 6, 2012.


168 Ibid.


171 *Here the word “farce,” is of the Marxian farce, following his view of history as repeated as a farce.


174 Swan, “Illustrated Natural History,” 190. *Here, Fuchs actually echoes the principle first proposed by the Roman poet Horace (65-6 BCE)

175 Ibid, 190.


178 Ibid, 69.


182 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, April 6, 2012.


184 Enright, "Misadventures Along the Nature Trail.”


187 Ibid, 5.

188 Barthes, Mythologies, 115.


190 Ibid, 1081.

191 Worthington, “Walton Ford, Artist.”


193 Kristeva, Desire in Language, 65.


198 Ibid, 68.

199 Tomkins, “Man and Beast.”


* Ford has also mentioned works by Brueghel as some of his influences.
In Tomkins, “Man and Beast,” as well as in Enright, “Misadventures along the Nature Trail.”


204 Paul Halsall "Benjamin Franklin The Art of Virtue," Modern History Sourcebook August, 1997

*The full list of the virtues is below with the part that Ford quoted in bold:

1. Temperance. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. Silence. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3. Order. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4. Resolution. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5. Frugality. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
6. Industry. Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7. Sincerity. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
8. Justice. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
9. Moderation. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
10. Cleanliness. Tolerate no uncleanliness in body, clothes, or habitation.
11. Tranquility. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
12. Chastity. Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.


206 Bal, Narratology, 5.

207 Ibid, 5.
208 Ibid, 10.

209 Kristeva, Desires in Language, 73.

210 Ibid, 68.


212 Franklin, Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, 226.

213 Bal, Narratology, 149.

214 Ibid, 166.


217 Ibid, 953.

218 Bal, Narratology, 16.


221 Grant, “America the Beautifully Absurd.”


225 Grant, “America the Beautifully Absurd.”


228 Ibid.

229 W. Hamilton Gibson, *Camp Life in the Woods and the Tricks of Trapping and Trap Making: containing comprehensive hunts on camp shelter, log huts, bark shanties, woodland beds, and bedding, boat, and canoe building, and valuable suggestions on trappers' food, etc.* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2002), 52.  
*Part quoted by Ford in bold:*

...At about four inches from the catch piece, the wire noose should be attached and arranged in a circle directly around the bait. By now backing up the trap with a few sticks to prevent the bait from being approached from behind, the thing is complete, and woe to the misguided creature that dares to test its efficacy. By adjusting the drawstring so far as the upper end of the catch piece, the leverage on the bait stick is so slight as to require a mere touch to overcome it; and we may safely say that, when this trap is once baited, it will stay baited, so far as animal intruders are concerned, as we never yet have seen a rabbit or bird skilful enough to remove the tempting morsel before being summarily dealt with by the noose on guard duty.

*Part quoted by Ford in bold:*

Chapter 1963. January. Although Operation Mongoose itself is being dismantled (*see* October 20, 1962), the CIA unit involved in the operation, Task Force W. continues to carry out covert activities against Cuba. When Desmond Fitzgerald replaces William Harvey as head of the task force, he asks his assistant to investigate whether a seashell could be rigged to explode in an area where Castro goes skin diving. Another assassination plot envisions sending Prime Minister Castro a gift of a diving suit with a fungus to cause chronic skin disease and a bacillus in the breathing apparatus to cause tuberculosis. These are described in the 1975 interim report of the Senate Select Committee on Assassinations.

*Part quoted by Ford in bold:*

As with many rare things a certain amount of intrigue the history of one of the skins. T. Barbour dropped a very heavy hint that a specimen that disappeared under mysterious circumstance from the Academy of Sciences, Havana, was surreptitiously extricated on behalf of Walter Rothschild.

The last living bird of which there is a record is of one shot at La Vega, close to the Zapata Swamp. During 1864, but probably some individuals still survived in souther Cuba for another 20 years or so.

232 Larson, "Ornithology + Allegory."


235 Ibid, 45.

236 Ibid, 45.

237 Larson, "Ornithology + Allegory."


241 Ibid, 487.


244 Ibid, 160.

245 Kristeva, *Desires in Language*, 214.


249 Ibid, 59.


251 Ibid, 161.

252 This name is chosen due to the fact that all of the events depicted in these images were taken place near Nantes, France, as Audubon grew up near there.

*During the interview, he recounted reading such assertions, that Audubon’s family owned a Holwer Monkey and a Military Macaw in a publication, despite the lack of any such historical evidences to back it up.

Kristeva, *Desires in Language*, 215.


Sand, “Walton Ford.”


*Author’s translation: I sing of heroes whose father is Aesop/ A Troop whose history, though untruthful/contains truth that serve instructive lessons.


273 Ibid.

274 Ibid.

275 Ibid, 259.

276 During the author's own interview with Ford, he has stated that the flowers in his works sometimes carry purposeful symbolic significance while sometimes they are added only for the sake of color as a means to “a way to introduce color into the composition.” As such, I will focus on the two identifiable flowers, especially as the foxglove is given double emphasis through the presence of the glove.


279 Powell, *Fables in Frames*, 11.

280 Ibid.


284 Ibid, 61.

285 Ibid, 2.

286 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, April 6, 2012.

287 Ibid.


*Author’s Translation: Frightening as nature itself.

289 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, April 6, 2012.
Ibid.

Said, Orientalism, 220.


Donald, Picturing Animals in Britain, 66.


*Although the widely accepted date for Le Brun’s lecture is March 28, 1671 before Jean- Baptiste Colbert, Jennifer Montagu suggests that original presentation was given before then.


Donald, Picturing Animals in Britain, 115.

Ibid, 87.


Ibid, 22.

Slater, The Craft of La Fontaine, 50.


*Author’s Translation: Take your thunder, Louis, and go like a lion.

Ibid, 87.

* Author translation: Begone, vile bug, Scum of the earth!

Ibid.
Part quoted by Ford in bold:

Mobutu dropped his European forenames, becoming Mobutu Sese Seko (in full, Mobutu Sese Seko Koko Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, or "the all-powerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, sweeps from conquest to win."

*Part quoted by Ford in bold:

A good talking Grey can be exceptional, but there are many which are totally worthless as pets or as talkers. ... The worthless ones, either trapped adults or adults which never received training while young, are frequently sought by aviculturists as potential breeding stock...

Part quoted by Ford in bold:

Only prudent, therefore, to plan on basis that Lumumba government threatens our vital interests in Congo and Africa generally. A principal objective of our political and diplomatic action must therefore be to destroy Lumumba government as now constituted, but at same time we must find or develop another horse to back which would be acceptable in rest of Africa and defensible against Soviet political attack.

Part quoted by Ford in bold:

CIA chief Allen Dulles authorized his assassination. Richard Bissel, CIA operations chief at the time, later said “The president [Dwight D. Eisenhower] would have vastly preferred to have him taken care of some way other than by assassination but he regarded Lumumba as I did and a lot of other people did: as a mad dog...and he wanted the problem dealt with.”

Part quoted by Ford in bold:

Many individuals make excellent talkers and surpass some of those in the most exalted category. Most of the limitations attached to a parrot's vocabulary can be directly traced to its trainer. Most people who are successful in teaching their birds a few words stop when this is accomplished.
Part quoted by Ford in bold:

President Mobutu has brought a consistent **voice of good sense and good will** to the international councils where African issues are considered, from the United Nations to the Organization of African Unity to the nonaligned movement. -


*Part quoted by Ford in bold:

Zaire is among America's oldest friends, and its President, President Mobutu, **one of our most valued friends** -- entire continent of Africa. And so, **I was honored to invite President Mobutu to be the first** African head of state to come to the United States for an official visit during my Presidency.-

314 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, April 6, 2012.
* Dr. Douglas H Goldman at the Harvard Herbaria has also stated that the details of this plant are vague and generalized with specific identification impossible. (via. E-mail correspondence, March 2012)


316 Ibid.

317 Ibid, 318.


320 *Author Translation: The power of fables


323 Ibid, 50.

324 *Les Deux Chèvres*:
Dès que les chèvres ont brouté,
Certain esprit de liberté
Leur fait chercher fortune : elles vont en voyage
Vers les endroits du pâturage
Les moins fréquentés des humains :
Là, s'il est quelque lieu sans route et sans chemins,
Un rocher, quelque mont pendant en précipices,
C'est où ces dames vont promener leurs caprices.
Rien ne peut arrêter cet animal grimpant.
Deux chèvres donc s'émancipant,
Toutes deux ayant patte blanche (1),
Quittèrent les bas prés, chacune de sa part.
L'une vers l'autre allait pour quelque bon hasard.
Un ruisseau se rencontre, et pour pont une planche.
Deux belettes à peine auraient passé de front
Sur ce pont ;
D'ailleurs, l'oncle rapide et le ruisseau profond
Devraient faire trembler de peur ces amazones.
Malgré tant de dangers, l'une de ces personnes
Pose un pied sur la planche, et l'autre en fait autant.
Je m'imagine voir, avec Louis le Grand,
Philippe Quatre qui s'avance
Dans l'île de la Conférence.
Ainsi s'avançaient pas à pas,
Nez à nez, nos aventurières,
Qui toutes deux étant fort fières,
Vers le milieu du pont ne se vouluirent pas
L'une à l'autre céder. Elles avaient la gloire
De compter dans leur race, à ce que dit l'histoire,
L'une certaine chèvre, au mérite sans pair,
Dont Polyphème fit présent à Galatée(3); Et l'autre la chèvre Amalthée (4),
Par qui fut nourri Jupiter.
Faute de reculer, leur chute fut commune.
Toutes deux tombèrent dans l'eau.
Cet accident n'est pas nouveau
Dans le chemin de la fortune.

325 Slater, The Craft of La Fontaine, 53.
326 Ibid, 50.
327 *Shaprio translation: To have an urge, devil-may-care,/ To wander roundabout the pastureland. Taken from Jean de La Fontaine and Norman R. Shapiro, The Complete Fables of Jean de La Fontaine, 319.
A direct word-for-word Author translation reads: A certain spirit of liberty/ they search for fortune, as they embark on a journey.

328 Powell, *Fables in Frames*, 51.

329 *Shapiro Translation: If they can find some untrod spot therein,/with neither road nor path, with cliff and hill
Taken from Jean de La Fontaine and Norman R. Shapiro, *The Complete Fables of Jean de La Fontaine*, 319.

330 *Shapiro translation: Abounding, that is where these ladies will choose to go capering
Taken from Jean de La Fontaine and Norman R. Shapiro, *The Complete Fables of Jean de La Fontaine*, 319.

331 *Shapiro translation: Their fright, one of the trembling Amazons
Taken from Jean de La Fontaine and Norman R. Shapiro, *The Complete Fables of Jean de La Fontaine*, 319.


333 *Shapiro translation: I see Phillip the Fourth, Louis the Great,/Proceeding to negotiate/their treaty on that isle.
Taken from Jean de La Fontaine and Norman R. Shapiro, *The Complete Fables of Jean de La Fontaine*, 319.

334 *Shaprio Translation: Each moving forth, tentatively,/step by step

335 Slater, *The Craft of La Fontaine*, 55.

336 *Shapiro translation: They fall/into the stream below, together.


343 Ibid, 98.


346 Ibid, 567.

347 Ibid.


349 Bhaba "The Other Question,” 19.

350 Ibid, 27.


352 Ibid, 30.


*Author Translation: Modern age has overturned the power of fables since its revolutions have been bitter toward its poets.


* Author Translation: One forms judgments and morals based on the reasoning and the consequences that we deduce from these fables—one can thus become capable of great things.

357 Enright, "Misadventures Along the Nature Trail.”

358 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, April 6, 2012.


360 Ibid, 43.


364 Ibid, 66.

365 As argued by Michel Foucault in the Order of Things.


367 Ibid.

368 Tomkins, “Man and Beast.”

369 An in-depth exegesis of Bangalore can also be found in Appendix B.II


371 Tomkins, “Man and Beast.”


379 Enright, “Misadventures Along the Nature Trail.”


384 Ibid.


389 Ibid, 102.


392 Harrison, “Envisioning the Body Politic through Dense Layers of Paint,” 70.

393 Ibid, 71.


396 Bastos, "Tupy or Not Tupy?" 111.

397 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, April 6, 2012.

398 Harrison, “Envisioning the Body Politic through Dense Layers of Paint,” 72.


400 Ibid, 683.


402 Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” 42.

403 Ibid, 42.


405 Ibid, 1113.


409 Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its development*, 224.


413 Ibid, 68.


416 Ibid.


418 Ibid, 57.


427 Conversation with Professor Wilfrid Rollman, Religion Department at Wellesley College on April 10, 2012.


429 Enright, “Misadventures Along the Nature Trail”


431 *The Qur’an has many editions with the translation vastly differing in each version—for example, the sūrah 44: 10-14 offered in Marmaduke Pickthall, The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation (London: David Campbell), 1992—does not echo Ford’s version word-for-word but is a close approximation of Ford’s inscriptions.


434 Author’s Interview with Walton Ford, April 6, 2012.

435 Wall, “Jeff Wall from a Discussion,” 1160.


438 Ibid, 1072.


440 Ibid, 154.


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APPENDIX A. ILLUSTRATIONS


Fig 2. Walton Ford, *La Historia me Absolverá*, 1999, Six-color hardground and softground etching, aquatint, spit-bite-aquatint, dry point and roulette. Edition of 50. 111.8 x 76.2 cm Paul Kasmin Gallery, NY.

Fig 3. Walton Ford, *The Man of the Woods*, 2011, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper, 151.4 x 103.5 cm. Paul Kasmin Gallery, NY.
Fig 4. Walton Ford, *La Fontaine*, 2006, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper, 152.4 x 304.8 cm. Collection of the Minor family.

Fig 6. John James Audubon (1785-1851) *American Flamingo*, from *Birds of America*, Plate 432, Engraved by Robert Havell, 1827-38, Hand-colored aquatint and engraving on Whatman paper. Plate: 97x 65 cm, sheet: 101.3 x 68.3 cm. National Gallery of Art, D.C.
Fig 7. Walton Ford, *Blue Jay*, 1992, Watercolor, graphite and ink on paper. 84.4 x 110.4 cm.

Fig 8. John James Audubon, *Blue Jay, From Birds of America, Plate 102* Engraved by Robert Havell, 1827-38, Hand-colored aquatint and engraving on Whatman paper. plate: 65.3 x 55.2 cm, sheet: 100 x 67 cm. National Gallery of Art, D.C.
Fig 9. Walton Ford, *Scipio and the Bear*, 2007, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 151.1 x 303.5 cm.
Fig 11. Hieronymous Bosch (c. 1450-1516), *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, c. 1500,
Oil on Panel. Central panel: 131.5 x 119 cm, Wings: 131 x 53 cm
Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon.

Fig 12. Walton Ford, *Benjamin’s Emblem*, 2000, Six color hardground and
softground etching, aquatint, spit-bite-aquatint, dry point and roulette. Edition of
50. 111.8 x 78.7 cm. Paul Kasmin Gallery.
Fig. 13 Walton Ford, *Six Fingers*, 1989, Woodcut on Rives Paper, 1989. 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Fig. 14. Walton Ford, *A Faulty Seat*, 1992, Oil on wood. 96.52 x 123.8 cm Collection of Margot Frankel, NY.

Fig. 15. Walton Ford, *Bangalore*, 2004, Five plate hardground and etching aquatint, spit-bite aquatint and drypoint. Edition of 75. 30.4 x 22.8 cm The Museum of Modern Art, NY.
Fig 16. Walton Ford, Sensations of an Infant Heart, 1999, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 151.1 x 102.9 cm. Collection of Jerald Dillon Fessenden.

Fig 17. Walton Ford, Nantes, 2009, Etching, aquatint, drypoint on paper. Edition of 65. 121.3 x 93.7 cm. Paul Kasmin Gallery, NY.
Fig 18. Walton Ford, *The Scale of Nature*, 2011, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 151.4 x 103.5 cm. Paul Kasmin Gallery, NY.

Fig 19. Walton Ford, *His Supremacy*, 2011, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 151.4 x 103.5 cm. Paul Kasmin Gallery, NY.
Fig 20. Walton Ford, *Du Pain au Lait pour le Perronnet Mignonne*, 2011, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 151.4 x 103.5 cm. Paul Kasmin Gallery, NY.

Fig 21. Walton Ford, *Unnatural Composure*, 2011, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 151.4 x 103.5 cm. Paul Kasmin Gallery, NY.
Fig 22. Walton Ford, ...Forever Afterward Chained, 2011, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 151.4 x 103.5 cm. Paul Kasmin Gallery, NY.

Fig 23. Jan Saenredam (1565-1607), Map of Northern Netherlands, 1589 Engraving Hollstein 132, 26.2 x 37 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
Fig 24. Mstislav Dobuzhinsky (1875-1957), *October Idyll*, 1905
Illustration from Zhupel no. 2.

Fig 26. John James Audubon, Glossy Ibis, From *Birds of America, Plate 102*
Engraved by Robert Havell, 1827-38, Hand-colored aquatint and engraving on Whatman paper. 101.6 x 71.1 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig 27. Statue of Isis Protecting Osiris, 26th (Saite) Dynasty, around 590 BC. Karnak, Egypt. H: 81.3 cm. British Museum, London.

Fig 28. Temple of Philae, Egypt. Public Domain Photo.
Fig 29.a. Diorama detail from The Akeley Hall of African Mammals, American Museum of Natural History, NY.

Fig 29.b. Diorama detail from The Akeley Hall of African Mammals, American Museum of Natural History, NY.

Fig 30. Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-78), Temple of Saturn, Plate 80/1 From the series “Vedute di Roma.” 1774. Etching, Engraving 47 x 70.2 cm Davis Museum and Cultural Center. Wellesley College, MA
Fig 31. Canaletto (1697-1768), *Venice: The Upper Reaches of the Grand Canal with S. Simeone Piccolo*, 1740. Oil on Canvas. 124.5 x 204.6 cm. National Gallery, London.

Fig 32. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Via Appia*, frontispiece for *Le Antichità Romane*, 1756.

Fig 34. Mark Dion (b. 1961), *The Library for the Birds of Antwerp*, 1993, Mixed media installation. Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp, Belgium

Fig 35. Hiroshi Sugimoto (b. 1948), *Earliest Human Relatives*, 1994, from *Dioramas* series, Gelatin-Silver print, 119.38 x 149.2 cm. Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

Fig 36. Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues (1533-88), *A Whole Orange, a Halved Orange, a Whole lemon, and a halved lemon*, 1575, Watercolor and body colors. Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Fig 37. Rembert Dodoens (1517-85) and Pieter van der Borch I (1545-1608), *Rosa sativa in Dodoens, Florum, et coronariarum odoratuarum nonullarum berbarum historia Antwerp*, 1568, Hand-colored woodcuts 16.2 x 12 x 5 cm. Library of the Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University, MA.
Fig. 38. Adriaen Collaert (1560-1618) *Great Tit and Starling* from the series *Avium vivae icons*, c. 1600, 13 x 18.9 cm. New Hollstein Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Fig. 39. Walton Ford, *Columbiana-Martinique Amazon Extinct 1750*, 1991, Watercolor on paper. 99.1 x 76.2 cm

Fig. 40. Taino, *Amulette, tète de mort*, Shell, 9.5 cm Saint-Domingue Fondation Garcia Arevalo, Saint-Domingue.
Fig 41. Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson (1767-1824), Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley, 1798. Oil on Canvas 159 × 111 cm Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

Fig 42. Petrus Camper (1722-89), Facial Angles from Über den natürlichen Unterschied der Gesichtszüge, 1792
Fig 43. Walton Ford, *Au Revoir Zaire*, 1998, Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper 104.8 x 74.3 cm
Fig 44. John James Audubon, *Wild Turkey, Plate 1* from *Birds of America* 1827-38. (Flipped left to right)
Engraved by Robert Havell, 1827-38, Hand-colored aquatint and engraving on Whatman paper. 64.1 x 94.6 cm. National Gallery of Art, D.C.

Fig 45. Photos of Wild Turkeys. Public Domain Photos
Fig 46. Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-69), *The Triumph of Death*, 1562, Oil on Panel. 117 cm x 162 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

Fig 47. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Dulle Griet*, 1562, Oil on Panel. 117 x 162 cm, Museum Mayer van der Berg, Antwerp.
* Snares and traps from *La Historia me Absolverá* juxtaposed with those from W. Hamilton Gibson’s *Camp Life in the Woods and the Tricks of Trapping of 1881* (1881). The coloring of *La Historia me Absolverá* has been modified in order to better outline the traps in the print.
Fig 49. Walton Ford, *El Poeta*, 2004
Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 152.4 x 102.2 cm

Fig 50. Walton Ford, *La Forja de un Rebelde*, 2004
Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 152.4 x 101.6 cm
Fig 51. Edward Lear (1812-88), *Red and Yellow Macaw* (Scarlet Macaw) Plate 34 in *Illustrations of the family of Psittacidae or Parrots*, 1832. 55 x 37.1 cm.

Fig 52. Walton Ford, *Rabiar*, 2003. Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper. 151.1 x 101.6 cm.
Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper.
105.4 x 73.7 cm.

Fig 54. Walton Ford, *Habana Vieja*, 2004
Watercolor, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper.
104.8 x 74.3 cm.

Fig 56. Cyclops Grasping Inverted Lions, Rampant Lions Framing His Head, Mesopotamia, Late Uruk Period (ca. 3500-3100 B.C.) Serpentine Morgan Seal, no.4

Fig 57. Close up view of Kleophrades Painter, *Attic Red Figure Stamnos* ca. 490 BC. 35.5 x 40 x 30 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art


Fig 60. Nicolaus Visscher (17th century), *The Labyrinth of Versailles* (Amsterdam, 1682). Second engraving. Folger Shakespeare Library.
Fig 61. Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), Lion et Caiman, 1855. Oil on Canvas. 32 x 42 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris

Fig 62. Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), Lion Hunt, 1858. Oil on canvas 91.7 x 117.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig 63. Antoine-Louis Barye (1795 - 1875), Lion au Serpent, Bronze, cast by Honoré Gonon in 1835, 135 x 178 x 96 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris
Fig. 64 Close up of J. J. Grandville, (1803–47), Les métamorphoses du jour, 1829. Paris: Chez Bulla et chez Martinet, 1829. The Morgan Library and Museum.

Fig 65. Laumosnier (17th century), *Entrevue de Louis XIV et de Philippe IV dans L’île des Faisans, 7 juin 1660*, ca. 1675-1725. 89.1 x 130 cm. Musée de Tessé, Le Mans.
Fig 66. Odilon Redon (1840-1916), L’Oeuf, 1885. Lithograph on chine Appliqué, One of four known proofs. 41.3 x 27.6 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, NY.

Fig 67. Mark Dion, Scheme of the Field Investigation 1986-2003: The Representation of Nature, 2003, Colored pencil, felt-tip pen, and pencil on cardstock, 43.2 x 34.3 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, NY.


Fig 70.a. Kara Walker (b. 1969), *Deadbrook After the Battle of Ezra’s Church* from *Harper’s Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*, 2005. One from a portfolio of 15 lithograph and screenprints. 99.1 x 134.6 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, NY.
Fig 71. Adriana Varejão (b. 1964), Proposal for Catechesis - part I diptych: Death and Dismemberment, 1993. 140 x 240 cm Oil on Canvas and mixed media. Courtesy of the Artist.

Fig 72. Théodor De Bry (1528-98), Scene from Americae tertia pars memorabile provinciae Brasiliae historiam, 1592, Engraving.
Fig 73. Adriana Varejão, *Filho Bastardo*, 1992, oil on wood. 110 x 140 x 10 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig 74. Jean-Baptiste Debret (1768-1848), *Um funcionário a passeio com sua família*, 1835, Lithograph on Paper, 32 X 23. Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil

Fig 75. Idris Khan (b. 1978), *Caravaggio...The Final Years*, 2006, digital C type print. 257 x 173 cm. Victoria Miro Gallery, London.
Fig 76. Walton Ford, *Eothen*, 2001. Watercolor, gouache, graphite, and ink. 101.6 x 152.4 cm. Cartin Collection, Hartford, CT.
APPENDIX B. FORMAL ANALYSES

The following are two out of the ten extended formal analyses of Ford’s works that I conducted in the first semester of my thesis research (Fall 2011). All of the works analyzed in this manner have been viewed in person. However, these are not intended to offer any “formal” interpretations of Ford’s images—rather, they are personal excavations and often speculative in nature. These essays have been included in this final thesis to better elucidate not only my own analytical approach to Ford’s images, but also the dense intertextuality of Ford’s images. Due to its informal nature, sources within this essay have not been cited, although aspects that were incorporated into my theses have been cited within the body of the main text.

WORKS EXAMINED:


I. NANTES, 2009

Overview:

This print accommodates for the true size of the Diana Monkey and the Grey Parrot. The print is in black-and-white although there is some yellowing around the right edge and significant yellowing at the lower edge of the print. The Paul Kasmin Gallery asserts that this is the first and to-date, the only print Ford has produced in black-and-white. The border of the painting is meticulously straight. The lower edge has an unadorned register. As mentioned above, there is significant aging at the lower corners of the etching with a large grey splotch where the first “i” of the word “Diana,” is inscribed. This print was viewed under glass and thus the photo below displays some glare. The following analysis will be divided into four sections, the text, the background, the foreground, and the middle ground.
1. The Text:

_Nantes – 1790._

_Diana Monkey ~ Cercopithecus diana_

_Grey Parrot ~ Psittacus erithacus_

Some preliminary historical investigations are as follows. Nantes was the first port in France as well as the slave trade capital of France during the eighteenth century prior to the abolition of slavery in 1818. In the early 1790s, Nantes was part of the Guerre de Vendée, a royalist rebellion during the French Revolution. As a result of the Republican victory in the city of Nantes, those sympathetic to the Royalists were said to have been executed by the way of a “Republic Marriage,” a execution method which involved tying a naked man and woman together and drowning them in Loire River. Finally in 1790 France, the French National Assembly was said to have declared those who rose against the colonists as an enemy of the people—a decree issued in response to the growing slave uprisings throughout the French Caribbean as well as in mainland France.

Turning now to Audubon, 1790 was the exact year when his father (Lieutenant Jean Audubon)’s wife in Nantes accepted John James Audubon as a step-son. It should be remembered that J.J. Audubon was born as an illegitimate child to Lieutenant Jean Audubon and a French servant girl, Jeanne Rabine. Audubon was said to have started drawing birds in nature at the family villa in Couerons near Nantes. As a result, the title alone is exceedingly intertextual—depending on the context, the image can refer to Audubon’s childhood—an origin story of sorts—or reach across the sociopolitical history of late eighteenth-century France.

The text at the very bottom of the lithograph identifies the two animals in the image. The text is written in a flowing script, in a script deliberately modeled after Audubon and his generation of naturalists. The presence of text also invokes the natural science’s impulse to categorize and classify during the eighteenth century (via Foucault). However, the writing is not written in pencil—it is copper-plate writing and while such printing methods are intended to facilitate reproduction, Ford has turned such a method reproduction into a personal and intimate form of representation.

Turning now to the lower texts, both the Diana Monkey and the Grey Parrot have been listed as endangered. Diana Monkeys are named after the goddess Diana since the white fur across their forehead was seen to resemble the shape of the goddess’s iconic bow. Diana monkeys feed on fruit, leaves, shoots and flowers. The habitat of the Diana Monkeys is in West Africa, spanning from Sierra Leone to Ghana—countries with a long history of involvement with the Atlantic Slave trade. Indeed, it is likely that the slaves imported to Nantes came from these West African countries. Grey Parrots are also native to West Africa and have been considered as prized pets throughout history. Their feathers are predominantly grey and they are one of the most heavily traded parrots in the world. Their commodity status becomes even more historically burdened considering their West African origins. They are also one of the most popular species of parrot kept as a pet due to their ability to mimic human speech.
2. Background:

I define the background here as the pictorial space which lies behind the monkey and the parrot. In stark contrast to the hyperreality of the animal pair in the middle ground, the background is sketchy, blurry, and generally less defined.

At first glance, the background depicts a body of water and a few vertical, triangular roofed buildings that line the shore. A castle-like structure rises above the low buildings. Short, bold strokes clump together to form what appear to be trees, filling the spaces between the buildings. To the left of the animal pair is a vertical wooden beam. Toward the top of this beam, a small mass of leaves, rendered in short dark strokes, fills the leftmost corner of the etching. The diagonality of the shoreline and the short horizontal strokes coloring the surface of the water create a spatial recession that draws the eye backwards to the castle-like structure. This horizontality is matched by the modeling of the clouds in the sky, which not only highlights the title of the piece, *Nantes 1790*, but also unites the left background with that of the right. At the same time, the linearity of the background also flattens the etching, creating an optical tension. This rather sketchy and blurry background is reminiscent of the dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History, NY.

The buildings dotting the shoreline with triangular gables are reminiscent of buildings at Nantes (fig. a). Indeed the castle like structure appears to be a simplified rendering of the *Cathédrale Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Paul de Nantes* (fig. b). Depending on the perspective, the length of the roof of the Cathedral would be dramatically shortened as seen in *Nantes*. The drum-like structure to the left may be an artist’s renditions of the *Château des ducs de Bretagne* at Nantes (fig. c) with the cylindrical structure echoing the architectural element that we witness on the outer walls of the castle. As such, both the secular and the sacred are represented on this image, although during late eighteenth-century France, this very boundary was quite blurred. Ford may be seen to distill the architectural legacy of Nantes into this minute background of *Nantes*.

To the left, the rendering of the tree leaves is reminiscent of tree leaves trees in eighteenth century genre scenes. The rounded but diagonal forms serve to vector the eye to the monkey—a movement enhanced by the verticality of the wooden post to the very left of the etching. This vertical thrust is matched on the other side as the lines of the buildings draw the eye upward to not only the title, but also to the monkey’s face. Finally, the short strokes used to depict the leaves on
both sides of the background echo the short lines of the monkey’s fur, thus uniting the picture plane. In fact, these two sections depicting tree leaves sandwich the monkey compositionally and this placement draws the eye to the hyper-real coat of the Diana Monkey.

Moving into the rest of the picture plane, the mostly vertical and horizontal lines of the background contrasts sharply with the circular lines employed in both the foreground and the middle ground of the etching.

*Photos below are taken from the public domain and rendered in gray scale to better compare to the black and white print:

![Fig. a View of Nantes](image1)

![Fig b. Cathédrale de Nantes](image2)

![Fig c. Château des ducs de Bretagne](image3)
3. Foreground:

The immediate foreground resembles a still-life composition gone awry by the appearance of the animal pair. Objects in the foreground include two loaves of bread, a knife, a shiny platter, a glass cup, a circular pitcher, and what may be three olives and a bundle of leeks. All of the items appear to be placed upon a table/ledge covered in white tablecloth.

Every object in the composition communicates disorder. The bread has been broken, the cup has been shattered, and the tablecloth is crinkled irregularly. A peculiar theme to notice is the number three, which repeats itself throughout the foreground—the glass cup is broken into three pieces, the bread is broken into three pieces, the leeks appear to be separated into three lengths, and there are exactly three olives on the platter.

Still, many of the lines, barring those of the knife, are curved. The shape of the bread, the outline of the olives, the shape of the platter, the spherical body of the pitcher, and the rim of the cup are all circular. The curve of the Monkey’s tail cuts through the composition, marking off the foreground from the middle ground. The placement of the tail is such that it seems like the perpetrator of the chaos in the still-life composition.

Just as the lines of the background drew the eye to the animal pair, the circular bunched up tablecloth to the left draws the eye to the monkey with the curve of its back leading the eye to its eerily anthropomorphized face. Even the sharp end of the knife points to the monkey’s tail while the curvature of its tail draws the eye back to its great furry body. Indeed the composition is extremely circular and serves to centralize the animal pair. Even the dotty texture of the bread references the white dots of the monkey’s fur.

The composition of the overall etching is such that without the animal pair, the etching would have consisted of a still-life in the foreground, set in a tranquil landscape of an imagined view of Nantes. Pushing such conjecturing even further, landscape and still-life are two academy-taught artistic genres. Perhaps Ford, whose works have been sometimes mistaken as “duck-stamp art,” a “conservative mode of representation,” is making a subversive embedded reference to the condition of his own art.
4. The Middle Ground:

In the middle ground is the dominating animal pair along with a circular pitcher. The Diana Monkey appears to be strangling the smaller Grey Parrot with its right hand. This composition recalls an earlier composition in Ford’s watercolor, *Sensations of an Infant Heart*, 1999 where a Red Howler Monkey strangles a Military Macaw on the ledge of a French style garden. The monkey and the parrot pair have been repeated in a series of six watercolors Ford produced in late 2011. Although Nantes makes no reference to an excerpt from Audubon’s journal, the titles of these works (as elucidated in chapter IV of the thesis) are taken from an entry referring to an event in which Audubon witnessed his pet monkey kill his pet parrot. The repetition of this motif ties Nantes to the rest of the watercolors.

The textures of the animals’ coats are exceedingly hyper-real. Since this work, like all of Ford’s works, is life-size, seeing the work in person resembles watching a taxidermy animal inside a natural history diorama. Indeed each of Ford’s works may be considered as a microcosm of modern conception of natural history, as found in these natural history institutions, both as unnatural as the other. The under-defined background, which may be comparable to dioramas in natural history museums, supports this comparison.

The strip of white fur on the Diana monkey’s knuckle highlights its frightening grip on the parrot’s throat. Its left hand is curled up loosely, echoing the parrot’s circular claws. Moreover, the strip of white fur on the monkey’s belly parallels the diagonal pose of the parrot. The two animals are, again, engaged in a very circular composition—the bird’s tail points at the monkey and its wings merge with the curve of the monkey’s tail uniting the two animals into a single co-dependent form. There is constant referral to the composition within the composition, a type of a self-referential internal pictorial logic.

There is subtle shading within the black fur of the monkey that gives three-dimensionality to the monkey. White dots line the right half of the monkey’s fur while patches of subtle white fur on
the back and throughout the tail serve as a modeling tool. The white fur area is exceedingly tactile, with the edges of the area marked off in short lines to give it a wooly effect.

As previously mentioned, the monkey’s face is anthropomorphized with elements in the print vectoring the viewer’s gaze to its features. The white fur around the monkey’s face functions as a framing and highlighting device, serving to accentuate its features. Compared to photos of wild Diana monkeys, Ford’s rendering is quite human. Its eyes look out at the viewer, a common trope found in European painting which was intended to incorporate the viewer into the picture. The link between human emotions, expressions and those of animals as propounded by Ernst Haeckel, Charles Le Brun, and comte de Buffon may be applied here. Keeping the slave trade history of Nantes in mind as well as studies of racial physiognomies, Anne-Louis Girodet-Troison’s portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley, 1797, may also be a point of comparison.

While the monkey appears quite calm, serene even, the parrot is visibly panicked. Unlike real life grey parrots, Ford’s parrot has a dark circle around its eyes, which highlights its dilated eyes and draws the eye to its open and desperate beak. The parrot’s tongue sticks out as if it is screeching in pain. Up close, the texture of the head of the bird is rendered in stacks of semi-circular lines, recalling fish scales. This rendering is rather accurate when compared to photos of the grey parrot in real life. The rest of the body is drawn in great detail, rendered through semi-circles and short bold lines, which shade in the individual feathers. Compared to the monkey, the parrot’s coat does not seem as photorealistic, which shifts the focus back onto the Diana Monkey.

As such, this exegesis demonstrates the intertextual narratives within Ford’s images. Subtexts of the European slave trade, of Audubon’s childhood, of the political legacy of France can all be excavated in the image. Such diverging narratives simultaneously co-mingle among Ford’s artistic surface or at times, are overwritten by others.

Public domain photos of the animal & bird:
II. BANGALORE, 2004

Overview: This analysis will be divided into the written text and the visual image. This is the smallest print examined yet, and the details of the print are noticeably more vibrant and vivid in person compared to the image appropriated from the MoMA site.

Author’s photo: Courtesy of MoMA, NY:

1. The Title:

Bangalore is the third most populous city of India and the capital city of the Indian state of Karnataka, located southeast of the state. It has been nicknamed the Garden City for its beautiful gardens as well as named the “Silicon Valley of India” for their numerous software companies, aerospace, telecommunications, and defense organizations. In fact, Bangalore is the leading IT exporter of India.
The origin of the name of Bangalore is of import as it is an anglicized version of the original name of the city in the Kannada language: Bengaliūru. Bangalore was colonized by the British Empire in 1799 under Lord Cornwallis, although Britain later returned administrative control of part of Bangalore to the Maharaja. In 2006, the Government of Karnataka passed the resolution to change the name of the city back to Bengaliūru. This shift may indicate a certain level of reclamation of heritage that seems simultaneously at odds with the economical development of the city through Westernization.

This connection to India may also be on a more personal level as Ford visited India for six months through the Fulbright grant from 1994-5.

2. Lower Text:

**Threetoed Kingfisher—Ceyx Erithacus.**

The lower text is the typical scientific classification of the avifauna protagonist of the work. The Ceyx Erithacus is also known as the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher or the Black-backed Kingfisher. The bird is small with yellow and red plumage with blue and black feathers dotting its back. Its habitat is located in Southeast Asia, stretching across Cambodia, Bangladesh, Laos and India. They prefer to frequent small streams in densely shaded forests. When compared to photos of the Black-backed kingfisher, Ford’s rendering appears to be visually accurate in terms of color and appearance.

Audubon has depicted and written about the Belted Kingfisher in his Birds of America (fig. a) and his Ornithological Biography, respectively. However, the two are very different species of birds—as evidenced through comparison between the prints below. However, Audubon writes in his Ornithological Biography that the “Kingfisher resorts to the same hole, to breed and roost, for many years in succession,” following up this assertion in true Audubon fashion by speaking of his attempts to capture a bird by fitting a small bag to the entrance of their nest. Audubon’s excerpt on the Belted Kingfisher is a prime example of his huntsman-like, rather than Audubon-society like approach as he writes in the Ornithological Biography that “the flesh is extremely fishy, oily, and disagreeable to the taste. On the contrary, the eggs are fine eating.”

The Threetoed Kingfisher appears in many of Ford’s works—in the Last Freedom Fighter, (1997; fig. b) in which the Kingfisher appears to be fed its own or another bird’s eggs while a starling watches over them. The starling is actually a common trope used by Ford as the incarnate of Anglo-Saxon imperialism. Ford describes in an interview that starlings are “an invasive species,” claiming that he deploys them “like a self-portrait of what it feels like when I'm in third-world countries, traveling. My sort of cluelessness and my greed -- the way when you go to Katmandu there has to be a Pizza Hut. You don't eat the dal bhat. You do what starlings do: you make a nest, a big messy invasive nest in the eaves of the building, instead of kind of fitting into the landscape.” (Bendrick, Grist 2006). Perhaps in this image, the Kingfisher is the indigenous population consuming outside goods which is revealed to be a horrific act in the end—a cannibalization of their own species.

The Threetoed kingfisher appears again in Pandit, (1997; fig. c) perched on the back of a Black Necked Stork watching a Belted Kingfisher consume a fish that twice its size. The belted kingfisher is actually appropriated from Audubon’s plate of the Belted Kingfisher (fig. a) in Birds of America—although Ford’s version enlarges the fish to twice the size of the Belted Kingfisher. Pandit
is a term used to refer to an Indian priest, and the Belted Kingfisher in Pandit may be a reference to Western colonization, especially as the Belted Kingfisher appears in Audubon’s Birds of America. The pink plumed and blue winged Threetoed Kingfisher also appears in Kathmandu Guest House, (1997; fig. d) as well as in Baba- B.G. (1997; fig. e). Perhaps it may be offered that the Threetoed Kingfisher may be an allegory of the indigenous Indian population who are attempting to negotiate the influx of western economic and cultural colonization.

However, the most interesting print to compare to Bangalore is Development Strategy, (1996; fig. f) which shows shiny fishing hooks or bass lures hung on a branch with three different types of kingfishers gazing at them. Such lures echo the one depicted in Bangalore. Development Strategy has been seen to address “global marketing and the premeditated destruction of local economy and subsistence-living,” with the kingfishers used to represent “the small-time fisherman who sells his product to the locals.”(Juxtapoz, 1999) Thus the image may show kingfishers marketing the Western fishing lures to fellow Kingfishers as a way to fish that is technically superior to the traditional method. By adopting this western method, the print implies that the natives, here represented by Kingfishers, would end up dependent on the product and shatter their current self-sufficiency. Ford has provided an example of the above logic in the excerpt below:

“When you buy a cup of tea in India, it comes in an earthenware cup that’s been baked, but it’s unglazed. It’s like a red-clay flowerpot you would buy at a nursery. It’s perfectly sanitary and is a beautiful little cup. When you’re finished with your tea, you throw the cup on the ground, it shatters into a million pieces, and turns to earth. They have been doing this for centuries. In the oldest archeological digs in India, they uncovered these cups…When we were there, we started seeing plastic disposable cups. You would see pigs and cows in the gutters chewing on them because they have a little sugar on the edges. The animals were choking on fragments of these plastic cups, and now there’s litter in the streets…This thing had worked so well for thousands of years. People were employed on a local level baking these cups. They’re baked, one-use, sanitary, biodegradable cups. Everything about it was perfect. You will never see a better cup in your whole life for drinking tea. The scary, insidious thing about all this is we want them to buy the plastic cup. We will do everything in our power to make it harder for them to get the clay cup, until we own the market, and then they are screwed, because we will own the market and their environment will go to hell.”

(Interview with Lou Bendrick in Grist, 2006, http://grist.org/living/bendrick2/)

One last thing to note is that although watercolors mentioned in this section were produced only a few years after Ford’s return from India, Bangalore was produced close to a decade later. Ford is not only drawing from the naturalist tradition but also drawing from his own vocabulary as if he is drawing from his own version of history that becomes the canon through self-affirmation—a true postmodernist strategy.
Fig a. J.J. Audubon, Belted Kingfisher, Plate 77 
*Birds of America.*

Fig b. Walton Ford, *Last Freedom Fighter,* 1997 
Watercolor, gouache, pencil and ink on paper, 105 x 75.9 cm.

Fig c. Walton Ford, *Pandit,* 1997, Watercolor, gouache 
pencil and ink on paper, 151.1 x 102.9 cm

Fig d. Walton Ford, *Kathmandu Guest House,* 1997, 
Watercolor, gouache, pencil and ink on paper, 152.4 x 101.6 cm
3. The image:

The MoMA’s version of *Bangalore* exhibits severe foxing on the upper right corner and on the lower left corner. The dark shade of the three-pronged branch asserts a forward movement, immediately bringing the Kingfisher-on-branch to the immediate foreground. The three arms of the branch may be seen to divide the print into three sections, while the curve of the branch also immediately draws the eye to the Kingfisher, the avifauna star of the print. These three sections may be seen to stand independently of one another as if they come together as a collage of images to create a form of narrative representation through montage.
**Section 1:**

The first section discussed in this analysis will focus on the lower left corner, bordered by the left and the lower corner of the print and enclosed by the lower section of the branch. Dark bushes are located in the foreground of this section while the mosque is pushed to the background, behind the small hill in the middle ground. The temple has been rendered in very dull browns, visually blending into the background as the color matches the trees and the ground. It is as if the temple is a natural part of the background, perhaps a commentary on not only the native religious tradition, but also on the negligence of indigenous population who do not care for the temple. It is common for colonial literature and visuals to represent the native landscape as neglected in order to provide justifications for European colonization. The lines are mostly curves that highlight the vertical element of the temple through contrast. This vertical element vectors the eye up toward the lonely leaf, whose tiny stem points back at the title. It is as if the temple is a signifier for the entire native tradition, geography, and architecture of Bangalore, at least in terms of composition and placement.

As previously noted, the architecture is still unclear, although it is most probably a mosque, judging from the arched doorways and the domed top. The little canopy like structure to the right of the dome, called *chatris*, is unique to South Asian mosques. Some images of mosques have been added below for comparison, from ones with single domes to ones with *chatris*, but there does not appear to be a mosque in/near Bangalore that specifically echoes the attributes of the mosque in Ford’s image. If this is a mosque rather than a Hindu temple, there is an interesting sub-narrative regarding religion that comes into play. The religious population of Bangalore is 80% Hindus with 13.3% Muslims, with the latter largely driven by immigration rather than indigenous traditions. It should also be noted that architectures of Hindu temples were copied for use in mosques and have become characteristic of Indo-Islamic architecture, with appropriated characteristic including the inclusions of domed *chatris*, projecting *chajjas*, and bulbous dome finials.

* Ford has explained during our phone interview in April that this mosque is not a direct translation of an existing mosque unlike the background architectures of *Nantes*. Rather it was “pulled from nineteenth century English portrays of India.” Ford referred to the background as “generic Orientalism,” asserting that it has “to do with colonial way of getting it wrong,” here referring to the topographical sketches that nineteenth century English colonialists would make of the Indian landscape.
Section 2:

The second section displays an idyllic image. The main branch gently slopes down to lead the eye down to the water. Slight ripples are evident on the shoreline. The detailing is very graphic. The hill from Section 1 continues into this section, sloping down to the body of water whose color ranges from dark green to an effervescent green to yellow and finally dusky pink. The placement of yellow in the water suggests the time of the day is most likely dusk with the sun setting behind the trees.

Although no major rivers run through the city of Bangalore, two rivers, Arkavathi and South Pennar cross paths at the Nandi Hills. However, it would be extremely far-fetched to argue that this landscape is actually Nandi Hills. The two rivers actually carry Bangalore’s sewage and the greater region of Bangalore has a few freshwater lakes and water tanks. As a result, it is impossible, just as in La Historia, to determine the exact geographical location of the landscape.

Turning back to the landscape, the dark green of the mountains echoes the shade of the water close to the foreground. The sky also resembles a sunset as the color changes from orange to dusky rose, with streaks of pink suggesting clouds. The overall effect paints a utopian view of the landscape. When viewed together with section one, the background of Bangalore paints India as a land of utopia as well as a land of heritage. The atmospheric view of the landscape is slightly reminiscent of William Hodge’s Resolution and Adventure in Matavai Bay, 1776 in which Tahiti is presented as a utopian land with the idle indigenous figures serving as a form of moral justification for European colonization.

The uppermost section of section two shows three leaves that twist and curve sinuously down to point toward the sunset reflected in the water. The leaves evoke movement, contrasting with the tranquility of the scene. Internal visual tension in the image is ever-present.
Section 3:

The final section could also be a separate tableau. There is no background in this third section. The bird is thus decontextualized from the image, as if a specimen preserved in a natural history museum. The curve of the branch elicits an anxious response, as if it is precariously bent by the weight of the bird and as if it could snap forward at any moment, sending the bird hurtling through the air.

The Kingfisher is surrounded by withered leaves, with the unhealthy and sickly foliage contrasting sharply with the bird's vibrant plumes. The leaves are spattered red and exhibit signs of bug damage with shades of yellow, green, and brown that look sickly while the same shades employed in section 2 appears idyllic and peaceful. The modeling and the shading of the kingfisher suggest that the sun is behind the bird.

The slope of the uppermost leaf echoes that of the Kingfisher’s wing, drawing the eye to the exquisitely detailed bird. The kingfisher is rendered in shades of pink, magenta, purple, and blues. At the same time, its body looks a little flattened and awkward. The pose is atypical of naturalist traditions as birds are usually shown in profile on a single branch. Ford’s kingfisher is aggressive as if it is about to fly off on one hand, but on the other, like a rabid animal with incredibly sharp talons. Its blood red beak is utterly terrifying, resembling a construction tool rather than anything that could be found in nature. This red is echoed in the Kingfisher’s eyes, which is highly disconcerting. This artificial depiction of the beak perhaps echoes the very manmade object that it clutches in its pincher like beaks. Postulating without evidence for moment, it is interesting to consider whether the Kingfisher is picking up the bait, as if it is cleaning up manmade waste, or if the kingfisher is delivering the bait, a manmade intrusion into the otherwise utopian landscape.

The bait/lure is rendered in blue, yellow and greens that suggest metallic silver when combined. Wickedly shaped tri-hooks dangle from the bait, and the placement of one of the hook across from the kingfisher’s mouth hints at the violent and tragic possibility had the bird clamped on the lure from the other side. The bait is an unnatural intrusion in this landscape. It may be a representation of economical, and consequently, and ecological imperialism, especially considering Ford’s example of terracotta cups being replaced by solo cups with the waste piling up on the natural landscape as a direct consequence of Western influences. In fact, Ford was highly fascinated with the Indian manner of appropriating select Western elements/products, as well as how...
subversive and futile it seems for Westerners to try and convert this 5,000-year-old culture into a nation of goods populated by Western-style consumers.

Another aspect to consider is Japonisme, and the influence of Asian Art that is present in this work, an influence that shows up on Audubon’s prints as well. Although this point bears further research and may diverge from the thematic narrative of my thesis, few examples below show the similar arching of the tree, the foregrounding of the branch, and similar placement and presentation of the birds. Also included below is a twelfth century Chinese hanging scroll which show the curving branch and a single bird, a composition somewhat echoed in Bangalore.

In the end, perhaps the print seeks to show that the sun is setting on the Indian empire due to Westernization—the trees are dying, the leaves are falling, but the beautiful rendering of the sunset veils the horrible subtexts—from Audubon’s violent approach to ornithology, to the tragic consequences of ecological and cultural Westernization—into something beautiful, a tension between attraction and repulsion.

Utagawa Hiroshige, *Bird on Camellia Branch*, Woodblock Print, 23 x 17 cm, MFA Boston  
Emperor Hui-Tsung, *The Five Colored Parakeet*, Hanging Scroll, MFA Boston