

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Grip the Raven

Melissa T. Yang

Abstract

Grip was the first and favorite of several ravens Charles Dickens owned. Dickens declared his love for Grip in letters, fictionalized him in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), and had the bird taxidermied. After Dickens' death, the stuffed raven spent years in auctions before landing in Philadelphia, where Dickens met Edgar Allan Poe. Poe had reviewed *Barnaby Rudge* and critiqued Dickens' Grip be-

fore composing his own raven masterwork and "Philosophy of Composition" (1846). Grip's remains now reside alongside the handwritten manuscript of Poe's "The Raven" in Philadelphia. This project explores Grip's iterations—living, fictionalized, taxidermized—and parallels between biography and taxidermy.

1. Meet Grip

Today, long after his 1841 death, Grip the raven's remains remain among the living. Stuffed and still, doused in arsenic and mounted in a shadowbox, he passes his afterlife entertaining literature enthusiasts (myself included) who seek his company in the Rare Book Department of the Philadelphia Free Library. At 18 inches long, with a wingspan which would be 25 inches extended, Grip is a "startlingly big" *Corvus corax*, or common raven (Capuzzo). Grip's posture is stiffly proud with broad beak tilted up—a position carefully rendered by his taxidermist.

From some angles, the glass eyes journalist Mike Capuzzo calls "fierce" glint with a quizzical shine. Grip's scaly grey-black claws grip a mossy twig in his contained habitat, full of faux-greenery, bark, branches, and rocks. His container's dark metal frame mimics wood. All this amounts to a strikingly unnatural imitation of a natural scene. Behind glass, the bird is silent. The jizz of Grip is eminently Victorian¹—and one might expect no less, as Grip was once Charles Dickens' beloved pet and muse.

2. Literary Taxidermy

A solid case for bird taxidermy's influence on Western literature can be built from myriad canonical works—among them texts which helped set animal studies in motion and continue to attract flocks of thinkers by inviting inquiry and countless interpretations. Consider the Romantic poets, who versified and anthropomorphized elements of the environment to attend to the natural world's sublimity in an increasingly industrialized world. Popular works such as John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819) and Percy Shelley's "To a Skylark" (1820) feature birds in literal and symbolic manifestations. The imprint of a taxidermied bird is suggested in the second stanza of Samuel Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" (1795): "Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers, / Foot-

¹ "Jizz" (often appears as "giss" and in other forms), is used in the context of bird identification to refer to the general impression given by the shape and size of a bird. This usage precedes the more popular American sexual connotation by decades. While Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) is only alluded to here, the groundbreaking work of literary biography undergirds this project's holistic inquiries.

less and wild, like birds of Paradise, / Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing!"

The reader is initially drawn to the musicality of the lines, with the sibilant diction, anaphoric "nor," and pleasant, aspirated "p" alliteration. However, when the place of taxidermy in a piece on natural sublimity is revealed, a darker, ironic dimension complicates the superficial euphony. Since many Europeans had only seen imported birds of paradise as stuffed specimens with feet removed, they supposedly believed the birds lacked feet and spent their lives in flight, never touching the earth until death—and were thus given their heavenly name and literary reputation.²

Hummingbirds were another exotic species romanticized, collected, killed, and mounted in masses for English spectators, most of whom only ever saw them in taxidermy form, as Judith Pascoe explains in *The Hummingbird Cabinet* (2006). In her opening chapter on "Hummingbird Collectors and Romantic Poetry," Pascoe posits that viewers of these glimmering birds experienced an "overbearing sense of loss and ephemerality" akin to what is "enacted in romantic poems," and such sensations "helped turn England into a nation of collectors" (31). Indeed, many hummingbird collectors' careers thrived into the Victorian era, including that of John Gould (1804–1881), a collector who became "the most commercially astute author-publisher of illustrated bird books," and "famously discerned the specific distinctions between Darwin's finches" (Donald 59). Rachel Poliquin affirms the Victorians were "without the least exaggeration absolutely besotted with hummingbirds" (43).

Taxidermy manifested itself as hobby and competitive business bridging elements from the natural world, albeit dead, to an interior space for people to grasp, oftentimes literally. The latter fact dismayed museum curators, who reminded patrons that the specimens were prepared with arsenic, to sustain the well-being of both patrons and specimens. Arsenic treatment has been a blessing for Grip; when he was recently refurbished, dead beetles were found which had tried unsuccessfully to eat away at the bird, and only managed to ingest some arse-

² Birds of paradise legends are many; Bernd Brunner's *Birdmania* (2017) is a solid source on this.

nic. The reporter who chronicled Grip's clean-up called the bird "more dangerous now than when he was nipping the ankles of Dickens' children" (Capuzzo).

3. Pet Taxidermy

In an April 20, 1841 letter to philanthropic baroness Miss Burdett Coutts, Dickens wrote: "The Raven's body was removed with every regard for my feelings, in a covered basket. It was taken off to be stuffed, but has not come home yet" (qtd. in House and Storey 266). Today, in a culture that primarily associates taxidermy with museums and hunting trophies, the concept of stuffing a beloved pet for household display may seem unsavory and peculiar. In Victorian Britain, where royalty had their pets stuffed and *memento mori* were popular, it seemed all the rage.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines taxidermy as "[t]he art of preparing and preserving the skins of animals, and stuffing and mounting them so as to present the appearance, attitude, etc. of the living animal." One of the earliest taxidermy tales comes from sixteenth-century Amsterdam, when a nobleman's "pride of the city" tropical aviary was gassed by an unattended furnace. To salvage the remains, "the best chemists of Amsterdam were called in" and the birds were skinned and filled with "the spices of the Indies," before being "wired and mounted to represent life" (Davie 2-3). Here, the practice was used as a means of visual revival, to maintain the image of life after death, as it sometimes continues to be used today. Taxidermy rationale ranges from artistic to scientific to sentimental. Belonging to the latter is one of the earliest partially extant pieces of taxidermy: the Duchess of Richmond's pet African grey parrot was buried with her in Westminster Abbey in 1702.

Dickens never spelled out a specific rationale for stuffing his pet raven, though he mentioned its stuffing in several letters. Perhaps it was too obvious to require denotation, in a culture where this was common. Perhaps preserving the raven was an affectionate act of respect; of the three ravens Dickens owned, the first was the only one he had stuffed, and the only one to have definitely had a name. It is commonly believed that all three of his ravens were named Grip, but this is not

confirmed in any of Dickens' documents; he usually refers to his ravens as "Raven." Thus, the original Grip sat in Dickens' house keeping him, his family, and his two new replacement ravens company. Grip was special—not simply another specimen and status symbol in the large collection of a typical Victorian household.

However, after Dickens was interred in Westminster Abbey after his 1870 death, Grip did not receive similar treatment. The nearly thirty-year-old stuffed raven was instead given the Victorian collection-culture treatment. He was passed on in the world of auctions, beginning "almost a century of wandering the Earth, mostly in the hands of London and New York collectors" (Capuzzo).

4. Victorian Nature

The obsession with collecting things from around the world and bringing them home to display in an internal setting was at its height in Victorian Britain—from specimens to nations, everything was taken, appropriated, showcased. The timely development of photography then ensured this abundance could be visually captured and remembered. Understanding the paramount importance of the spectacle, or simply of looking, in the Victorian era, is therefore key in looking at Grip. The nineteenth-century fixation on spectacle can be seen in many arenas, but arguably the most extravagant forum to epitomize this inclination was the 1851 Great Exhibition, or the first World's Fair at the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London.

Ocularcentric and imperial ideals were showcased along with the many objects of the Crystal Palace Exhibition. *Everything* was displayed, from useless gadgets to pedigreed livestock to taxidermy tableaux. Indeed, in *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, Thomas Richards writes, "each and every commodity had its cult of viewers," but "the German stuffed frogs were the most prominent of these commodity cults" (59-60). Major taxidermists including Hermann Ploucquet were lauded for portrayals of the "capital fatuity of the Rabbits and Hares [...] hoyden visages of the Kittens, and the cool, slippery demeanour of the Frogs" (qtd. in Ploucquet). John Gould assembled a major exhibition

of stuffed hummingbirds for the fair, but would not see a live hummingbird until years after the show (Donald 59).

Parallel to two major forms of taxidermy at this point—"natural" and anthropomorphic—are two ways of conducting scientific research in the Victorian era, empirically and poetically. This was a moment when museum placards and science texts included quotes by Romantic poets (Pascoe 29). In *The Romance of Natural History* (1862), British naturalist Philip Henry Gosse claims one can use "statistics as harsh and dry as the skins and bones in the museum" to study science, or "the poet's way [...] with the emotions [...] made energetic by the contemplation of the creatures around him" (v). He precludes his "natural history in the aesthetic fashion" with a William Wordsworth epigraph (vi).

Art historian Elaine Shefer notes many took an "emotional approach to ornithology" and established personality types and stereotypes, from the "outstanding" canary to "Moorish" peacock. The number of pet songbirds kept in households soared, along with common symbolic discourses linking women to domestic "nest-minders" or being "caged" in the home (Shefer). There is scarce discussion of talking birds here, nor notes on corvids, so what happens when attention turns to Grip—a masculine bird with a voice? First, the place of the raven and its meanings must be explored.

5. Raven Meanings

The first definition of "raven" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is:

A large black crow, *Corvus corax* (family *Corvidae*), widely distributed in the northern hemisphere, feeding chiefly on carrion and having a deep croaking call. Later also [...] any of several other large, mostly black, birds of the genus *Corvus*.

The definition then reiterates the raven's reputation as "a bird of ill omen, foreboding death, from the habit of ravens of following armies in the expectation of feeding on dead bodies." Examples dating back to the sixteenth century illuminate the raven's ominous associations:

1526 W. Bonde *Pylgrimage of Perfection* ii. sig. Riv, The
rauyñ wyll nat gyue her blacke pennes for the pecockes
paynted fethers.

Here, the color bound to death is one the raven wears proudly, while the next casts the raven as a foreboding Grim Reaper proxy:

a1593 Marlowe *Jew of Malta* (1633) i. ii. sig. D2, Like the
sad presaging Rauē that tolls The sicke mans passeport in
her hollow beake.

A more recent example reminds:

2003 R. Taylor *How to read Church* 197 Although in art
and literature ravens tend to be birds of ill-omen, in the Bi-
ble they enjoy a happier reputation.

Well then.

6. Barnaby's Bird

“Halloa, halloa, halloa! What’s the matter here! Keep up your spirits. Never say die. Bow wow wow. I’m a devil, I’m a devil, I’m a devil. Hurrah!”—And then, as if exulting in his infernal character, he began to whistle.

“I more than half believe he speaks the truth. Upon my word I do,” said Varden. “Do you see how he looks at me, as if he knew what I was saying?”

To which the bird, balancing himself on tiptoe, as it were, and moving his body up and down in a sort of grave dance, rejoined, “I’m a devil, I’m a devil, I’m a devil,” and flapped his wings against his sides as if he were bursting with laughter. Barnaby clapped his hands, and fairly rolled

upon the ground in an ecstasy of delight.

“Strange companions, sir,” said the locksmith, shaking his head, and looking from one to the other. “The bird has all the wit.” (Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, n. pag)

With repeated squawks of “I’m a devil,” the fictional Grip boldly enters the scene in the sixth chapter of Charles Dickens’ *Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of the Riots of ‘Eighty*. He cackles memorized mimicry throughout, yet appears more knowledgeable than his master, the dim Barnaby. Dickens reinforces the hellish Western discourse around ravens by depicting Grip as an “infernal character.”

The refrain appears multiple times, here in chapter forty-seven: “‘Grip the clever, Grip the wicked, Grip the knowing—Grip, Grip, Grip,’ cried the raven, whom Barnaby had shut up on the approach of this stern personage, ‘I’m a devil I’m a devil I’m a devil’” (Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, n. pag). There is not much one has to say for Grip; the chatty character chants it all. His repetition is comic and uncanny; his words and quirks lend lively energy to all his scenes. Dickens’ absolute affection for and attention to ravens in life is evident in this fictional creation.

7. Prefacing *Barnaby*

Of all the places Dickens could have opened the first edition of *Barnaby Rudge*, he chose to begin his preface with “Mr. Waterton having, some time ago, expressed his opinion that ravens are gradually becoming extinct in England, I offered the few following words about my experience of these birds.”³ In the 1858 reissue of the novel, he revises the first sentence to say, “As it is Mr. Waterton’s opinion that ravens are gradually becoming extinct in England, I offer a few words here about mine.”

In both editions, Dickens’ “few words” include tales of the lives of the two ravens—his first and third (the second was unimpressive)—which he fused to formulate the fictional pet of the eponymous title

³ Presumably Charles Waterton’s (1782-1865) *Essays on Natural History, Chiefly Ornithology: With an Autobiography of the Author, and a View of Walton Hall* (1838). Dickens does not cite his source.

character. It is only after addressing the death of his third raven (“Since then I have been raven-less”) that Dickens explains the historical significance of *Barnaby Rudge*: “No account of the Gordon Riots having been to my knowledge introduced into any Work of Fiction, and the subject presenting very extraordinary and remarkable features, I was led to project this Tale.”

Given the grand scope of what Dickens could have addressed, it is curious the tale of the bird receives priority. Ulterior motives and foreshadowing can be gleaned from this choice—in particular when Dickens reveals how his ravens died by consuming items they were unaware they could not digest: the first lead paint chips, the second wood splinters. Later in the preface, Dickens conjures the case of Mary Jones, executed for shoplifting linens, and so destitute she had “nothing to give her children to eat; and [...] perhaps she might have done something wrong, for she hardly knew what she did.” The parallel mapping of the birds’ habits onto human characters is unavoidable here; Dickens bridges his exuberance for ravens and care for larger social issues in one fell swoop.

8. Grip the Original

Ravens often dominated Dickens’ letters to his friends (such as Daniel Maclise, who occasionally sketched Grip). Many passages feature corvid musings, and some, such as one from February 13, 1840, showcase the importance of Grip in his life, with characteristic humor and drama:

I have seen my wife—spoken to her—been in her society. I burst into tears on hearing the voices of my infant children. I loathe my parents. I hate my house. I love nobody here but the Raven, and I only love him because he seems to have no feeling in common with anybody. What is to be done. Heavens my friend, what is to be done! (Dickens qtd. in Hartley 62)

He often rambled proudly about the original Grip’s bold brilliance. In the *Barnaby Rudge* preface, Dickens bragged about how the raven slept

on horseback and so terrified the dog “by his preternatural sagacity, that he has been known, by the mere superiority of his genius, to walk off unmolested with the dog’s dinner, from before his face.”

“Halloa old girl!”—the bird’s favorite phrase—was Grip’s final documented utterance before he expired as the clock struck twelve, the fateful afternoon of March 12, 1841. When the bird died eating lead paint chips abandoned by workmen painting the stable he slept in, Dickens composed a slew of letters, eliciting sorrow (and how the “children seemed rather glad of it. He bit their ankles but that was play”), and sussing out suspicions (*The Works of Charles Dickens* 104). He noticed the bird “was very uneasy just before death, and [...] talked amazing nonsense” (104). On March 16, 1841, he wrote:

I am not without suspicions of poison.—A butcher was heard to threaten him some weeks since—and he stole a clasp knife belonging to a vindictive carpenter, which was never found. For these reasons I directed a post mortem examination, preparatory to the body being stuffed; the result of it has not yet reached me. (qtd. in House and Storey 237)

No postmortem examination follow-up exists, but in the 1858 updated *Barnaby Rudge* preface, Dickens states the “youthful indiscretion” of consuming “a pound or two of white lead [...] terminated in death.”

9. Raven the Second

In a June 15, 1841 letter, Dickens mourns that the raven he bought to replace Grip was “comparatively of weak intellects” (qtd. in House and Storey 304). He warns a friend in December that year, “Be careful in your choice of a Raven [...] I have one, now, whose intelligence is scarcely beyond a fowl’s” (304). Little else is written about this bird, which was not otherwise preserved. This unfortunate creature was overshadowed by both the taxidermied Grip and a talented third and final raven.

10. Raven the Third

Some friends in Yorkshire have sent me a raven, before whom *the* Raven (the dead one) sinks into insignificance. He can say anything—and he has a power of swallowing door-keys and reproducing them at pleasure, which fills all beholders with mingled sensations of horror and satisfaction—if I may [say] so; with a kind of awful delight. (Dickens qtd. in House and Storey 412)

The grateful Dickens wrote Charles Smithson on December 20, 1841:

I seem to remember, too, that you paid for THE Raven—Good God!—if only you could hear him talk and see him break the windows! [...] I can only hint at his perfections—that he disturbs the church service, and that his life is threatened by the Beadle. Maclise *knows* he can read and write. I quite believe it... (qtd. in House and Storey 449)

The more human traits the bird exhibited, the more terrifying he became, and the more epistolary encomiums he deserved—Dickens raved about the bird as “a wonder, a paragon [...] I could tell you such things of him, as would make your hair stand on end” (qtd. in House and Storey 438). He marvels at the bird’s delight in drunken men, claiming the raven “loves to see the human Nature in a state of degradation, and to have the superiority of Ravens asserted. At such time he is fearful in his Mephistophelean humor” (qtd. in House and Storey 438). Again, devilish raven discourse is summoned.

In the *Barnaby Rudge* preface, this “older and more gifted” final raven was useful in ways beyond mocking lesser humans; he “devoted all the energies of his mind” to “disinterring all the cheese and halfpence” the previous raven had interred in the garden. Upon completing this task, the bird “applied himself to the acquisition of stable language, in which he soon became such an adept,” and perched outside Dickens’ window

to “drive imaginary horses with great skill, all day” (*Barnaby Rudge*, n. pag.).

This third bird eventually perished after consuming wood splinters, and Dickens did not accrue more ravens afterwards. For the remainder of his life, his sole raven company was the taxidermied original Grip in his shadowbox diorama.

11. Interactive Iterations

I conjure my friends on no account to make me the subject of any monument, memorial, or testimonial whatever. I rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works and to the remembrance of my friends upon their experience of me in addition thereto. (Dickens qtd. in Forster)

In the third to last sentence of his last will and testament, Charles Dickens (February 7, 1812 – June 9, 1870) firmly states his desire to be remembered only for his published works and for the impressions he left upon those he left behind. While readers today do admire and remember his texts, many still strive to attach a face to the name. This has led to rampant postmortem propagation of his image, and commodities such as the Charles Dickens “with removable quill pen and hat!” action figure. Surely, the resurrection of his image would not surprise him, as “probably no author ever lived of whom more portraits have been made, both during his lifetime and since his death” (over four hundred, in a variety of poses), as one author and collector claims (William Glyde Wilkins qtd. in *The Victorian Web*).

Despite his wishes, Dickens’ hometown of Portsmouth erected his statue in 2014 on his 202nd birthday, unveiled with over forty of his descendants in attendance (Williams). Prior to this, only two full-size statues stood in Dickens’ honor, and neither was in his home country. One statue was recovered in Sydney, Australia after it was lost for decades when the storage unit it was kept in went out of business. The other has

lived in Clark Park since 1901, about two miles from Grip's Philadelphia home. It is no coincidence that Grip sits in the same room as the single manuscript copy of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" (1845). After years of auctioning, Grip was purchased by Poe enthusiast Colonel Richard Gimbel, who donated his collection in 1971 to the Philadelphia Free Library.

As a relatively unknown writer, Poe reviewed *Barnaby Rudge* in 1841, suggested Dickens' raven could have had more symbolic depth, and went on to write "The Raven" (1845). In the meantime, in March of 1842—about one year after publishing *Barnaby Rudge* and the death of the original Grip—Dickens took his first tour of the United States to lecture on international copyright law. Poe requested to meet him, and according to some accounts, they discussed the state of American poetry. No primary documents remain from this meeting and few letters exist from their brief correspondence, which ended after Dickens neglected to introduce Poe to his publisher, then salted the wound by referring to Poe as an "unknown author" (Grubb).

"The Raven" was nevertheless published in 1845 and Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" the following year. The opening lines of the latter essay quote a letter from Dickens:

CHARLES DICKENS, in a note now lying before me, alluding to an examination I once made of the mechanism of "Barnaby Rudge," says- "By the way, are you aware that Godwin wrote his 'Caleb Williams' backwards? He first involved his hero in a web of difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, for the first, cast about him for some mode of accounting for what had been done. (n. pag.)

Despite any residual resentment, Poe willingly broadcast his associations with the famed novelist while parsing his own writing process. *His* literary raven—every bit as haunting—would be remembered for the echoes of its memorable refrain, "Quoth the Raven, Nevermore." He examined this deliberate move in commentary:

I had now gone so far as the conception of a Raven, the bird of ill-omen, monotonously repeating the one word “Nevermore” at the conclusion of each stanza in a poem of melancholy tone, and in length about one hundred lines. (“The Philosophy of Composition,” n. pag.)

With the author articulating his intentions and methods, it is possible to gaze upon the product and follow along, to admire the details and depth of craft. Allowing the author to deconstruct the work arguably makes the reading of it less of an interactive experience, and more an experience of simply looking. This gives readers a chance to gaze upon Poe’s poem and performed postmortem of his own writing process, perhaps a spectacle in its own right, and learn from the source itself—if we dare trust the writer.

12. Entanglements

In “Why Look at Animals?” from *About Looking*, art critic John Berger postulates, “what distinguished man from animals was born of their relationship with them,” and since the “first subject matter for painting was animal,” perhaps “the first paint was animal blood” and “the first metaphor was animal” (5). Biographer Nigel Hamilton opens *Biography: A Brief History* recalling how in early cave paintings, “matchstick men” are drawn next to fleshed out and “eerily impressive representations of wildlife” (6). Humans have attempted to commemorate non-human animals in vivid detail since our earliest days on Earth, in images, in words, and in three-dimensional representations built from their organic remains.

Artist and co-founder of the Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermists Robert Marbury opens *Taxidermy Art* (2014) by tracing the etymology of “taxidermy” as *taxi* (to arrange) yoked to *dermis* (skin) in ancient Greek (9). Arrangement is core to the traditional Western rhetorical canon (sandwiched between invention, style, memory, and delivery), and so essential to taxidermy it is rooted in its name; both are central to our sense-making around bestial crafting. Certainly, they are central

to this project, with its perhaps predictable but hopefully productive arrangement as a play on Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."

Taxidermy resembles a biography in that one may look at and study either extensively, and the subject will never be aware that they are being gazed upon at the moment of the observation. Taxidermy seems particularly apt, therefore, as a form to draw parallels to biography. There is an unnatural after the fact and rather eerie piecing together of something once living in both, and in both the result is a reconstruction that stems from a desire to recollect. This desire is rather obsessive yet oddly natural in Western culture, due to its infamous preoccupation with remembrance, seen in the popular accumulation of artifacts ranging from private photographs to public monuments.

Biography and taxidermy both share investments in resurrecting once-agentive figures, blend education with often uneasy entertainment, and aim to convey realism while explicitly integrating invention. Hamilton's chapter on "Victorian Pseudobiography" characterizes biographers of this era as preferring sanitized pieces praising idealized lives to the messy, confessional projects popularized by Samuel Johnson the previous century. These life stories depict pedestalled figures, somewhat similar to how a taxidermy mount is merely an animal skin stitched onto a sculpted form. Biographic texts may claim nonfiction status, while taxidermic figures often masquerade as scientifically useful but tend to primarily serve aesthetic display purposes. Both may seem poised and static in certain ways yet hold significant sway and utility as cultural artifacts.

13. Philosophy of Composition

We end here on the thirteenth way of looking at Grip the raven. Moving from broader contexts to specific biographical notes, we return to Grip, perched by his "Most Famous Bird in the World" plaque. This taxidermied specimen is made meaningful through the connections it creates in the minds of those who seek to engage. Grip links natural and literary histories of Britain and the United States, and biographies

of prominent writers from these respective regions. There is symbolic unity in this avian figure, even if the raven traditionally signifies misfortune. Grip was a muse to two major nineteenth-century authors and continues to inspire writers through platforms as diverse as Twitter. Today, the Philadelphia Free Library shares collection highlights and announcements with over four-hundred followers through @GriptheRaven. The bird continues to connect lives and words.

Non-human animals have a way of doing this, and animal studies opens a space to linger here and delve deeper. Foundational critics such as Jacques Derrida (*The Animal That Therefore I Am*) and Donna Haraway (*The Companion Species Manifesto*), and myriad contemporary animal studies scholars emerging across diverse disciplines today are demonstrating how rich this area is with possibilities drawn from research beyond text into lived experience. My own investment in holistic, haptically-informed research has led me to build embodied knowledge through experiences including archival immersions and a hands-on bird taxidermy workshop.

Ultimately, in looking at *looking*, I also want to suggest that the most effective way to study human-animal relationships is rather by exploring the ways in which we are connected to them more holistically and affectively, in multisensory ways *beyond* looking. Plus, Grip represents only one case of an animal who has performed more than a lifetime's worth of symbolic human labor. There are many animal muses who may deserve similar celebration, but Grip's canonical affiliations render his archives more readily accessible.

The ability to look at something long dead and make something productive of it is shown here; Grip is long dead but not completely gone. By being physically present to some degree, does the bird still hold some firsthand semblance of power, despite lacking a voice of his own? Is it the viewer who holds the responsibility and owns the power? How much of the aura of the original character can be perceived from observing the subject's taxidermied form? How much of the original aura of a person can be achieved in writing or reading a biography?⁴

⁴ A robust analysis of Walter Benjamin's "aura" in the context of [re]producing taxidermy art is perhaps feasible, but beyond the scope of this project.

There are ultimately similarities between taxidermy and biography in the link of limits, in attempts to grasp something that is simultaneously removed and present. Both make the viewer and reader curious to connect and create a fuller picture of the past, to reconstruct lives and tales. Grip may stand silent behind glass on the surface, but looking into his shadowbox, it is clear this raven still has stories to tell, and will continue to serve as a muse—or at least an object to muse over—forevermore.

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Biography

Melissa T. Yang is a PhD candidate specializing in Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Pittsburgh. She teaches courses in

professional communication and digital media, and works as a writing center consultant.