The Spanish Horse and the Thunder Drum

Taxidermied Subjects and Animal-Made-Objects in the Early Nineteenth Century

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Abstract: Life for many horses at the turn of the nineteenth century was short and subject to objectification before and after death. However, the life and afterlife of one horse at Astley's Amphitheatre, the Spanish Horse, resisted the usual loss of identity animal death often brings. In this article I first provide a biography of the Spanish Horse and then question his afterlife as a theatrical thunder drum. In doing so, I think about the nature of taxidermy, memorial, and the usual binary of subject/object inherent within fragmented animal bodies. As part of this process, I explore the thunder drum/Spanish Horse with the aid of ecofeminism, philosophies of taxidermy, and material feminist thought, and I argue that the afterlife of the Spanish Horse as a thunder drum was one of loving remembrance that did not erase the animal self within the material object. Instead, I suggest, the preservation of the Spanish Horse's skin after death enabled his ongoing participation and agential voice within the Amphitheatre, while elevating him above other animals therein.

Keywords: *taxidermy; Gibraltar Charger; the Spanish Horse, Astley's Amphitheatre; horses; agency; matter; ecofeminism; animal memorial; sound; subjectivity.*

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In 1824 the clown Jacob Decastro published his *Memoirs*, which offered a glimpse into the lives and performances of animals at Astley's Amphitheatre—the pre-eminent illegitimate theatre and the first circus venue in England. He records the back-stage adventures of the Amphitheatre, telling stories of individual actors, the plays and songs performed, the ongoing battles between the Amphitheatre and the Office of the Lord Chamberlain, and of the many animal performers who graced the Amphitheatre stage.[1] During this process, however, Decastro's *Memoirs* raise many more questions than they answer about period conceptions of performing equines, the tensions between animal value and personal emotional attachment during a time of rapid economic change, and the corresponding commodification of nonhuman animal bodies. Some of the most complex questions appear from a short account of the theatrical life, death, and afterlife of one of the Amphitheatre's most valuable horses. The "Spanish Horse" seemingly held a special place in the hearts of the Amphitheatre's human performers, but after his death his body was fragmented, seemingly de-individualized, and objectified. He was skinned, his hide tanned and then crafted into a thunder drum.[2]

In his *Memoirs*, Decastro discusses the end of life and afterlife of the Spanish Horse in a footnote, which is worth quoting in full:

> Mr. W. Davis, the present proprietor and manager of the Royal Amphitheatre, was so fond of this same horse from its wonderful tractability and extreme docility, that when, from his loss of teeth by age, he was unable to eat his corn; and from a lively remembrance of his former services, he very humanely (and such feelings do honour to the heart of humanized society), allowed the decrepit, aged, and nearly worn-out animal, out of his own private purse two quartern loaves per day.
>
> N.B.—This beast was accustomed, at a public performance, to ungirt his own saddle, wash his feet in a pail of water, fetch and carry a complete tea equipage, with many other strange things.

1 Decastro, *Memoirs*. For information on London's theatre and circus environment see: O'Quinn, *Entertaining Crisis*; Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*; and Worrall, *Theatric Revolution*.

2 Decastro, *Memoirs*, 30.

> He would take a kettle of boiling water off a flaming fire, and acted in fact after the manner of a waiter at a tavern or tea gardens.
>
> At last, nature being exhausted, he died in the common course of it, and Mr. Davis, with an idea to perpetuate the animal's memory, caused the hide to be tanned and made into a thunder-drum, which now stands on the prompt side of the theatre, and when its rumbling sounds die on the ear of those who know the circumstance, it serves to their recollection as his "parting knell".[3]

This was not the usual method of either memorializing or preserving the body of a celebrity animal. The Spanish Horse was not stuffed and placed in a museum, as was the case with Alfred the Gorilla; he was not the subject of satirical memorialization in newspapers, as was the Learned Pig; nor was he buried with an extensive elegiac inscription, as was King Nobby.[4]

This article explores the strangeness of this apparently loving memorial, the continued objectification and use of the Spanish Horse's fragmented body, and the mixed private and public nature of his afterlife. In doing so, I question why this afterlife? Why a thunder drum? And: what does the life and death of the Spanish Horse tell us about the nature of objects, animal bodies after life, and connections to the subjective? This article is divided into two sections. The first definitively establishes the identity of the Spanish Horse and provides biographical details of his life before and after entering service at the Amphitheatre. The second builds on this biography by exploring the connections between the life of this particular horse and the peculiarities of his specific afterlife as a thunder drum. As part of this process, I suggest that objects like the thunder drum, those composed of animal bodies (or parts of them) from beings like the Spanish Horse, can resist the typically faceless and subjectless nature of objects. Thinking with ecofeminist approaches to animals, especially those by Josephine Donovan, and the material feminist

3 Decastro, *Memoirs*, 30.

4 Paddon, "Life and Times of Alfred"; *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London), 21 June 1786, issue 17949; Mattfeld, "Genus"; Boyle, "Monumental Inscriptions".

thought of Jane Bennett towards objects, I suggest that the Spanish Horse remained known, remained subject, even in his fragmented state. As a drum, the Spanish Horse gained a voice, and his afterlife within the Amphitheatre tied agency and memory to his live being and lived history. In other words, contrary to what previous scholarship on animals as faceless objects suggests, the live animal was not effaced by the act of rendering or shaping after death. In making this argument, I look to the history of taxidermy as memory keeper, while also suggesting an expanded definition of the practice that encompasses the faceless after death—the fragment, the unrecognizable but still known, animal being.

Part 1: "The Spanish Horse"

The Spanish Horse was truly old when he passed away sometime around 1824. According to Decastro, he lived to the age of forty-two, outliving his original owner, Philip Astley, and was still alive at the Amphitheatre when William Davis became owner and manager in 1822.[5] Most horses during the early nineteenth century experienced premature ageing, disability, and death as a result of intersecting exploitative systems endemic to a growing capitalist economy. Indeed, most horses did not live beyond the ages of ten or twelve, thus making those who experienced true old age anomalies.[6] As such, the Spanish Horse was one of the few equines to survive the typical life trajectory of most equines living in the period's increasingly capitalist, speciesist, and ableist society, and the care he received in his declining years suggests an important ethical responsibility of care, perhaps even sympathetic affection, between horse and human that resists systems that define animal value as useful or monetarily beneficial.[7]

According to Decastro, Davis spent his own money to care for the Spanish Horse in his elderly years, ensuring that he was able to eat by purchasing bread for his consumption. Most likely horse bread

5 Decastro, *Memoirs*, 30.

6 Edwards, "Image and Reality"; Mattfeld, *Equines*.

7 Mattfeld, *Equines*.

softened with water or wine, as was customary, this food, Decastro implies, was nourishing, medicinal, and special (or elite and expensive).[8] Thus, for Davis to incur this extra expense for a horse who could no longer fulfil his duty as a performing horse due to his old age and impaired state was an act of "humane" benevolence during a time when such actions towards an animal were especially indicative of a civilized and properly British heart.[9] They were also actions that fulfilled many calls by animal welfare, anticruelty, and animal rights campaigners who argued horses should be rewarded for their lifetime of hard work in support of human society at all levels with a happy retirement and veterinary care therein.[10] However, many authors likewise lamented that such duty to a horse was often forgotten when faced with equine old age or disability. Indeed, care for a decrepit animal was highly unusual for the time.[11] Thus, Davis's actions suggest there was something unique, even special, about this particular horse that made him deserving of such attention.

While at the Amphitheatre, as Decastro recalled, the Spanish Horse was an acting equine famous for his sagacious abilities, which ranged from making and serving tea to untacking himself.[12] Decastro does not provide any indication of how a quadruped accomplished such feats, but the inclusion of their description in his *Memoirs* evidences the central position of the Spanish Horse within the Amphitheatre's programme. Indeed, the performance of these and similarly "impossible" feats were standard elements of the Amphitheatre's programme for most of its history. Horses who could "count", tell time, or sit at a table and enjoy tea (fig. 1) were top-billed actors, even if their individual names were often omitted from the Amphitheatre playbills. Indeed, these horses were often simply advertised as "Learned" in

8 Rubel, "English Horse-bread", 40–47.

9 See for instance Boddice, *History and Attitudes;* Donald, *Picturing Animals*; Eisenman, *Cry of Nature*; and Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights*.

10 See for instance, Primatt, *Dissertation*, 214–15.

11 Mattfeld, *Equines*.

12 Decastro, *Memoirs,* 30. Such acts of animal sagacity were typical for the Amphitheatre, and for other period illegitimate theatres in London. See the British Library's (BL's) "Astley's Cuttings from Newspapers", 1768–1833, Scrapbook. 3 Vol. Th.Cts.35–37.; and Lysons, *Collectanea,* for some of the many examples of acting equines working in London.

Fig. 1

Anonymous, *Horse Sitting Down to Tea with a Clown*, n.d.

From the British Library Collection. Daniel Lysons, *Collectanea: or, a Collection of Advertisements and Paragraphs from the Newspapers Relating to Various Subjects* (ThCts 50), f. 85. Image # F60105-88.

some way.[13] They were also the ones who, it seems, could play dead, act furious or wild when needed, and who later took on some of the hippodramatic roles written for them at the turn of the nineteenth century. These horses, then, were the partners with whom the Amphitheatre succeeded. However, very few warranted a mention in Decastro's *Memoirs.* What was so unique about the Spanish Horse? Why was he the one who experienced such care and textual record?

These questions are difficult to answer. Even though worthy of care in infirm old age and famed during his life and after his death, the Spanish Horse's identity remains confused and contradictory—and establishing it is key to understanding this particular afterlife. In the minimal scholarship that mentions the Spanish Horse (and Decastro's *Memoirs*), he is conflated with two other leading horses of Astley's Amphitheatre: Billy and the Gibraltar Charger. Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans record that Philip Astley had acquired two horses from Smithfield market, and one of them "was 'Billy', later known to fame as the 'Little Learned Military Horse', or 'Spanish Horse'".[14] In contrast, Hannah Velten states Astley would perform on "a dark bay stallion known as 'The Spanish Horse' or 'The Gibraltar Charger', who had been gifted to him by General Elliott" after his discharge from "fighting in the German war".[15] Susanna Forrest also conflates a Spanish Horse gifted in 1766 with the Gibraltar Charger, but for her he was "white" not "dark bay" in colour.[16] Who was the Spanish Horse of Decastro's *Memoirs*? Was he also known as Billy, and did he come from a market infamous for old and broken-down equines? When was he active at the Amphitheatre? Was he instead known as Gibraltar and came to Astley in 1766 as a lavish gift from Elliott? Or, did he arrive at the Amphitheatre even later than that?[17] As my following discussion suggests, Decastro's Spanish Horse, the uniquely deserving equine from a world of

13 For examples of learned horses see BL, "Astley's Cuttings".

14 Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary*, 147.

15 Velten, *Beastly London*, 133.

16 Forrest, *Age of the Horse*, 121–22.

17 Smithfield market was notorious for selling horses of dubious quality during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Heyrick, *Cursory Remarks.*

unique horses, was also known as the Gibraltar Charger, arriving at the Amphitheatre in 1788. However, it is a twisted path of misnaming, confusion, and misremembering we need to follow to arrive at this conclusion—and it is a path that begins with Decastro himself.

Decastro provides the foundational account of the Spanish Horse, and his version of the Horse's life was re-published throughout the nineteenth century. Decastro's account was also expanded upon by Charles Dickens in his biography of Philip Astley, published in *All the Year Round* (1872).[18] However, while there are problems with Decastro's original account, as I will discuss in a moment, it is with Dickens's work that the story of Decastro's Spanish Horse really begins to become muddled. Dickens provides a detailed history of a horse called "Spanish Horse", while connecting him to a longer genealogy of acting equines, including the first famous Amphitheatre horse, Billy. As Dickens writes, Philip Astley obtained Billy from Smithfield market sometime around 1766 and trained him for the stage.[19] Billy proved an apt pupil and quickly became "a great popular favourite, playful as a kitten with those he knew, and deeply versed in all the learning of the circus". He could fire pistols, serve tea, and "invite the clown down to tea", which recalls Decastro's account of the Spanish Horse. Billy, after a few misadventures (including being seized and then sold by the London authorities only to be reunited with Astley by chance after three years' absence from the theatre) had a long life and died "at last of sheer old age, universally respected and regretted".[20] Dickens does not specify the year of Billy's death.

While Astley relied on Billy to help begin his career as equestrian performer and later as circus owner and manager, he also owed much of his success to an equine also named the Spanish Horse, who he

18 Dickens, "Philip Astley", 210.

19 Astley took great pride in advertising that Billy was a poor-quality horse from Smithfield, and he became a living advertisement for Astley's equestrian abilities. Astley said "he cared little for shape, make or colour; temper was the only consideration. Five pounds was the highest price he paid for a horse, and he patronised Smithfield for his buying." K.B., THE MAGAZINE PROGRAMME. The Stage of the Past BEING EPISODES IN THE LIVES OF ACTORS AND ACTRESSES OF OTHER DAYS. No. 34.—Philip Astley, 1742–1814, in Astley's Biography File—V&A Archives—unfoliated.

20 Dickens, "Philip Astley", 210.

owned at the same time as Billy (the two horses Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans incorrectly conflate into the Spanish Horse of Decastro's *Memoirs*). Evidently "even more famous than Billy", this Spanish Horse, probably of ideal Barb or other Spanish breeding (as his name indicates), was, according to Decastro and Dickens, gifted to Astley by General George Elliott "after the German War", i.e. the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). Astley was a Sergeant Major in Elliott's Fifteenth Light Dragoons and had distinguished himself at the Battles of Emsdorf and Friedburg. To celebrate his military achievements, in June 1766, when Astley petitioned for his discharge at the war's conclusion, Elliott presented him with a certificate of service and "with a fine charger, which, as the Spanish Horse, afterwards made the acquaintance and secured the applause of a very large public".[21] This was because the Spanish Horse "could perform all Billy's tricks and more", such as ungirthing his own saddle, currycombing himself, and of course sitting down with a clown for a meal.[22] According to Decastro, this was the "fine charger" who died and was turned into a thunder drum sometime around 1824.[23]

Unfortunately, however, Decastro's recollection (and later Dickens') of when Astley acquired the Spanish Horse does not stand up to scrutiny; when the timeline is examined, the numbers just don't add up. Indeed, the first Spanish Horse's acquisition date of 1766 and death date of circa 1824 are nonsensical when considered alongside possible equine lifespans. When we compare the gifting and death dates of this Spanish Horse, it is doubtful that the first Spanish Horse was the same Spanish Horse Decastro described as the recipient of Davis's charity. If in the unlikely event the first Spanish Horse was gifted to Astley in 1766 as a foal, at his death he would be fifty-eight years of age. However, if he was gifted as an older, trained

21 Dickens, "Philip Astley," 205. Astley's certificate of service and discharge letter are held at the BL, "Astley's Cuttings," Item 1028, n.d. Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, in addition to mixing up Billy and the Spanish Horse, also mistakenly argue the first horse given to Astley by Elliot, the Spanish Horse, was actually the second horse gifted to him, the Gibraltar Charger. See Kwint, "Astley's Amphitheatre" and "Legitimization", 72–115, for further information on Astley and his military career.

22 Dickens, "Famous Circus Horses".

23 Decastro, *Memoirs*, 29.

horse, as was the more likely scenario in keeping with period views towards the prime age of working equines,[24] he would be between five and eight years older, or more. In this case, he would have an approximate death age of sixty-three to sixty-six years of age. Horses in captivity during the early modern period could have a lifespan of forty years (with the majority living to less than twenty).[25] These are lifespans many scientists today likewise uphold for horses kept in domestic environments.[26] Indeed, horses living beyond forty are and were unusual, but not unheard of: the oldest horse on record lived to the age of sixty-two.[27] Therefore, the first Spanish Horse's possible lifespan range of sixty-three to sixty-six years was technically possible but highly improbable during a period of uneven and sometimes questionable veterinary knowledge and often exploitative work environments.[28] The idea of the first Spanish Horse being the animal Davis turned into a drum is further destabilized by his recorded age of death; Decastro records he died at the age of forty-two, not in his late fifties or sixties. As a result of these discrepancies between acquisition date and death age, we must question the accuracy of the information contained in Decastro's *Memoirs*. We need to take a closer look at our final horse, the Gibraltar Charger, also called "The Spanish Charger",[29] to make sense of who is who in Decastro's record.

General George Elliott gifted the Gibraltar Charger to Philip Astley in 1788, after the Siege of Gibraltar (fig. 2).[30] A "white" horse (i.e. a grey horse who appeared white),[31] not a "dark bay stallion" as Velton contends, Gibraltar was also known as the "Spanish Charger".[32] He did not, initially, perform any of the feats or tricks that made Billy and the first Spanish Horse famous; instead, with Astley Gibraltar

24 Mattfeld, *Equines*.

25 Bacon, "History of Life and Death," 234.

26 Cozzi, "Aging and Veterinary Care."

27 Spector, "Handbook of biological data."

28 See Curth, *Care of Brute Beasts,* for a history of farrier and veterinary medicine.

29 *The Morning Post* (London), December 2, 1806, issue 11183.

30 BL, "Astley's Cuttings," vol. 3, f.1077, n.p, "1788."

31 *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette* (Middlesborough, England), July 11, 1890. See also William Hinck's portrait in Mattfeld, "'Undaunted all he views'."

32 *The Morning Post* (London), December 22, 1806; Issue 11183.

Fig. 2

John Singleton Copley, *Defeat of the Floating Batteries at Gibraltar, September 1782 (The Siege of Gibraltar)*, 1783–1791. Oil on canvas, 544 × 754 cm. The Guildhall Art Gallery, London.

became famous for appearing on stage (or on a barge in the middle of the Thames) surrounded by patriotic fireworks. Gibraltar also performed with Philip Astley's son, John, in 1788 as an embodiment of grand military achievement and ideal British loyalty to the crown. With the Astleys, Gibraltar became the headlining act of the 1788 theatre season and quickly achieved celebrity status. Critical infatuation with him was short-lived, however; after the end of the 1788 theatre season, Gibraltar's name disappears from the Amphitheatre's performance programme and from the national press.[33] While the reasons for his decline are unknown, it is probable that his popularity with the audience simply waned. The Astleys prided themselves on staging the strange and wondrous, and on the continual performance of everything new. Philip Astley was known for revamping the entire Amphitheatre programme, as often as once or twice a week in some cases, in order to remain unique within the ever-increasing popularity for displays of equestrian extravaganzas from the other illegitimate theatres around London.[34] In order to stay competitive, then, Astley may have quietly removed Gibraltar from the position of headlining performer while assigning him to another role within the Amphitheatre, such as the "Flying Equestrian Stage", "The Wonderful Learned Horse", or the "beautiful white and spirited Horse", possibly renamed "Tallyho", who plays the burlesque role of the Taylor's horse in the pantomime "The Hunted Taylor".[35]

Now, assuming Gibraltar, the Spanish Charger, was between eight or ten years of age when he came to Astley after his military service, this would put his age between forty-one and forty-three. This, of course, fits with Decastro's account of the "Spanish Horse's" death at the age of forty-two in 1824 and suggests a tentative birth date sometime between 1780 and 1782 — if he died between 1822 and 1824, as Decastro implies. With these numbers in mind, then, I suggest that Gibraltar was Decastro's equine who became a thunder drum.

33 For a more complete account of the Gibraltar Charger and his role in Astley's Amphitheatre with John and Philip Astley see Mattfeld, '"Undaunted all he views".

34 BL, "Astley Cuttings," vol. 2, unfoliated, n.d.

35 BL, "Astley's Cuttings," vol. 1. f. 123A, n.p. (March 1795); vol. 3, f.170 (May 16, 1808); vol. 3, f. 185 (June 1808).

Life and Death

Gibraltar reached the end of his life in the early nineteenth century during a period of immense change—but also remarkable continuity—when it came to views towards nonhuman animals. Over the period, as Keith Thomas argues, older, and often minority, views on animal care and cruelty became of interest to more and more people; and it was also a period where animal life was important enough to preserve with legislation and protection societies.[36] While the discourses themselves had not changed in great measure from their earlier iterations, by the end of the eighteenth century they were "much more widely dispersed, and they were much more explicitly backed up by the religious and philosophical teachings of the time".[37] As part of this tradition, while it had long been argued that unnecessary pain and suffering was cruel, ideas about which animals should now fall under humanity's sphere of moral concern had also shifted. Instead of only the rational animals (broadly defined) being deserving of care, by the beginning of the nineteenth century many authors argued that all nonhuman animals were deserving of happiness and even unalienable rights. They became subject to the "law of universal benevolence" in a way where their suffering as animals, as individuals, was considered of increased importance. Of course, animal cruelty was still widespread and condemned mostly for what it taught a person to do to his fellow humans (i.e. cruelty to animals was the gateway to cruelty to humans), but nonhuman animals were increasingly coming to be seen as fellow creatures, even as brothers, equally deserving of attention and care as their fellow humans.[38] And care and sympathy for animals became an essential component of a new British ideal of humanity—as Davis evidently embodied, at least for Decastro.[39]

36 Kean, *Animal Rights*; Perkins, *Romanticism*; Spencer, *Writing About Animals*. See also Meneley, *Animal Claim*; Donald, *Picturing Animals*.

37 Thomas, *Man and the Natural World,* 174–75. See also Edwards, *Horse and Man;* Boddice, *History of Attitudes.*

38 Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 174–80; Preece, *Brute Souls,* 37–38.

39 Sympathy and sentiment towards animals had limits, however, as Morillo (*Rise of Animals*, xv), and Wolloch ("Limits") argue.

Once an animal was dead or dying, however, common husbandry practice often invited the end of such sympathetic care and introduced treatment of animal bodies that led to objectification, commodification, loss of individual identity. While sympathetic care of aged horses was a central component of animal welfare and anti-cruelty literature in this period, actual enactment of the advice presented in such texts was remarkably rare — making Davis's actions that much more unique.[40] Indeed, it seems the majority of equines who were aged, lamed, disabled, ill, or simply unwanted for any reason, were sold for parts to the knacker's. As Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr explain, once a horse arrived at the knacker's yard, workers would remove the hair, which would be made into cushions, added to plaster to help it stiffen, or be woven into blankets. The bones could be carved into knife handles or combs; the hooves would be boiled to extract oil necessary for the production of gelatine and glue; the head would also be boiled to separate the oil and then burned for bootblack. The vapours from the boiling process contained carbonate of ammonia, used as an insecticide. The bones also produced phosphate of lime, which was processed further into phosphorus used in matches, while the fats skimmed off the top of the boiling vats would be used in candle or soap making. The meat would be processed as dog food, and finally, the hide would be removed and sent to the tanners to be made into valuable cordovan (shoe) leather.[41] A dead horse, then, was regarded as a source of financial profit, just as many owners thought of them during their lifetimes. Indeed, as George Skeavington argued in 1850, "[m]oney is of more consequence than animal feeling", and money was the pre-eminent driving force behind all treatment of horses — alive or dead.[42]

While we do not know how Gibraltar died, after his death Davis's common course of action would have been to exploit the horse's body for profit. Indeed, it is likely that Gibraltar's body was disarticulated and sold for its component parts — even though Decastro

40 Mattfeld, *Equines*, chapter 8.

41 McShane and Tarr, *Horse in the City*, 27–30.

42 Skeavington, *Modern System of Farriery*, 295.

certainly does not provide details of this process, as to do so would undermine the anticruelty and humanizing messages of his *Memoirs*. But, surprisingly, he does provide an account of what happened to the most recognizably individualized and familiar signifier of the Gibraltar Charger: his skin. "At last, nature being exhausted, he died in the common course of it," Decastro writes, "and Mr. Davis, with an idea to perpetuate the animal's memory, caused the hide to be tanned and made into a thunder-drum, which now stands on the prompt side of the theatre."[43] This horse-as-drum itself does not survive, probably destroyed in one of the many fires to strike the Amphitheatre over its history, but the transformation of Gibraltar's body into a drum positions him both inside and outside of the category of animal as commodity, useful only for financial gain.[44] Certainly his presence as a drum aided the revenue of the theatre, but there is more to his presence than pure economics would allow. Instead, Gibraltar's life, death, and afterlife positioned him as at once a cherished member of the Amphitheatre troupe on par with the human actors, and someone who should be honoured for his service, but also as both an objectified employee and mourned servant for whom simple burial or the erection of a monument would not suffice.

Indeed, I suggest, turning Gibraltar into a thunder drum was an oddly fitting memorial for a horse famous for his courage under fire. As a large drum, he continued to be associated with the sounds of battle, and with the drums carried therein. As a drum, his use value continued to be associated with military service to humans—a service the Amphitheatre (and most authors who touched on the subject at the time) considered natural to the equine species.[45] Gibraltar as a thunder drum, then, using anthropocentric and anthropomorphic rationale, would be able to continue his service to the Amphitheatre, perhaps even to the wider nation.

43 Decastro, *Memoirs,* 30.

44 Dickens, "Philip Astley"*,* 210.

45 Astley, *Astley's Projects* and *Astley's System*. See also Cavendish, *A General System*; and to a certain extent, Herbert, *A Method.*

Part 2: Subjective Objects

As a drum, however, the Gibraltar Charger became a thing, a piece of hide stretched over a frame. For many, Gibraltar's thingness would relegate him to the position of the inert, immobile, and silent, like the bodies of so many other horses rendered down to fertilizer or worn on the feet of fashionable Londoners. However, as Decastro suggests, in the state of thunder drum Gibraltar was not necessarily understood or thought of as simply inert, as an inanimate object unable to influence those around him. Instead, I argue, Gibraltar in his afterlife retained a level of subjectivity and agency not afforded to many other animals alive or dead. Gibraltar's agency, in turn, invites us to question the usual binaries of live/dead, recognizable/faceless, subject/object, and culture/nature which, as I will argue, some recent scholarship on animal lives and deaths, memory, and attitudes towards the nonhuman other (animal, thing, matter) continues to perpetuate.

Furthermore, Gibraltar's ongoing agency as object likewise invites a thinking beyond existing philosophies on matter, animals as material objects, and the power and agency within such things. As such, to unpack the ontological complexities within Gibraltar-as-drum, as an object, and Davis's implied rationale for making him into one, I bring together into conversation new materialism, ecofeminism, and taxidermy. These three approaches to objects/matter and agency, I suggest, are incomplete in singularity when complex beings/objects like Gibraltar-as-drum are in question. Therefore, by bringing them together in a more interwoven approach to Gibraltar I problematize the usual interpretation of material objects made from animal remains as subjectless, inactive, and no different than objects composed of any other material. Doing so offers a more nuanced interpretation of the Amphitheatre's thunder drum, the special horse who was made into it, and the affective relationships many people had to Gibraltar as material thing.

I begin with new materialism, and specifically with the work of Jane Bennett as one of the leading scholars thinking about the typically

unnoticed power of all matter. As part of her groundbreaking exploration of how seemingly inert matter or material items are imbued with meaning, emotional response, and thus agency of their own, Bennett uses anecdote and scenes of refuse as a generative thought experiment. The most influential of these experiments for ecofeminist scholars engaging with her work is a scene of "Debris" on the street. While out walking one day, Bennett came across the following:

> one large men's black plastic work glove
> one dense mat of oak pollen
> one unblemished dead rat
> one white plastic bottle cap
> one smooth stick of wood.[46]

For Bennett, this scene was affective and indicative of the power of things to be both objects and items that have agency in themselves to produce their own forms and formulations beyond human intervention. As Bennett states, in witnessing this "tableau" of immaterial and nonhuman matter she was struck by "a nameless awareness of the impossible singularity of *that* rat, *that* configuration of pollen, *that* otherwise utterly banal, mass-produced plastic water-bottle cap."[47] For Bennett, the objects on the street all together were indicative of the live and unalive nature of things and matter in general.

In making this philosophical argument and her wider point about the agential nature of matter, however, Bennett does not differentiate between types of matter, or man-made objects, things, and dead animals. For her, the dead rat was no different, and ethically should be approached no differently, than the plastic work glove or the wooden stick. Instead, she argues, "[o]rganic and inorganic bodies, natural and cultural objects (these distinctions are not particularly salient here) *all* are affective."[48] Bennett, and many theories that form the groundwork for her investigation into vital materialism, is not particularly interested in animals (worms and their

46 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 4.

47 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 4, original emphasis.

48 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xii.

political agency being an exception[49]) or the ethical questions their material presence invites as different from that of inorganic objects. Instead, Bennett works to create an ethics of recognition, an acknowledgement of all matter as more than inert, lifeless, and therefore unimportant object commodity. For Bennett, matter (regardless of what it is made from) is an actant that when taken as a 'vital' element within the world, especially a human world, offers a newly ethical politics for the betterment of all.

However, by presenting these more general approaches to matter, Bennett has sidestepped the issue of animal matter as fundamentally different in its once-alive and now-dead state from other material forms. For Josephine Donovan, as an ecofeminist interested in the connections between objects, the aestheticization of animal representation, and animal life, Bennett's oversight is ethically problematic enough to undermine the entire enterprise of new materialism. Indeed, Donovan rejects Bennett's new materialism, arguing that due to the ongoing Newtonian-Cartesian aesthetic value ascribed to matter (man-made and once alive), and the lack of "loving attention" that would see that one of those objects (the rat) was once alive and hence deserving of loving respect as an individual, new materialism has lost even a glimmer of ethical credibility. As Donovan writes: "Ironically, we find here rescripted the aesthetics of modernity in which the 'unblemished' (aesthetic description) rat's body has significance only as part of an interesting, if vibrant, aesthetic composition." Indeed, "surely there is a difference to be made (something the New Materialists often fail to do) between a living or formerly living being and a manufactured commodity."[50] Bennett's rat was once a live being and as such deserving of attention, love, and ethical care that honours her life. Therefore, to engage with Bennett's rat appropriately and with true recognition and care for her as a once-live being (instead of aestheticizing and de-individualizing or demonizing her as a source of disgust), Donovan suggests "[o]ne might indeed be moved, under an ethic of care, to bury the rat, offering her a measure of final dignity, in honor of her past existence

49 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* 94–109.

50 Donovan, *Aesthetics of Care*, 35.

as a presence with whom a caring, dialogical relationship had been possible." Such attention, and an ethics of care towards nonhuman beings (alive or dead), is essential for Donovan's aim of generating "a significantly new understanding of *living* matter" and thus a truly ethical concern for the beings on this planet.[51]

While I applaud Donovan's emphasis upon live animal beings and the aesthetic representations that have great impacts on their lives, as with Bennett, Donovan does not readily extend this ethics of care to once-live nonhuman animals. What this limited focus on the once-live animal does, however, is prohibit thinking about an animal as object and as agential within that state. It likewise rejects any possibility that animal matter, especially once fragmented, might agentially invite alternative human responses to live animal bodies—of inviting its own matter-driven ethics of care or of inviting influential legacies of the once-live animal within the dead flesh. Indeed, Bennett's dead rat was certainly vibrant (provoking an affective response in the form of disgust), an actant within a wider assemblage of matter, as Donovan also points out, but she was also a rat with her own life, culture, and relationships with both human and nonhuman beings. I suggest it was a life that remains part of the dead body, of the decomposing matter of the self.

In making this argument, though, I embrace the nature of Bennett's vital materialism, where matter remains agential, intentional, in ways not fully understood by modern science. I also stretch it further to question what it means when that matter is from a once-live animal. What would it mean to question Bennett's dead rat? What happens to the subjective self, epistemologies and ontologies of knowing the animal other, at the point of death? The introduction of Erica Fudge's concept of "animal-made-objects" may help remind us of and account for the power of animals as objects, as matter.

Looking to Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory and Bill Brown's Thing Theory, Fudge proposes a new phrase, the "animal-made-object", as a way to help recall the agential power within human culture

51 Donovan, *Aesthetics of Care*, 35–36.

of animals alive or dead. According to Fudge, "this term carries two simultaneous meanings: (1) the *animal-made* object—the object constructed from an animal; and (2) the animal *made-object*—the objectified animal." For Fudge, this term should "not only remind us of the concurrent status of animals as both agents and matter but also of the nature of the relationship we have with them." Therefore, the "animal-made-object" is ethical in intent, illuminating animal–human relationships and often the destabilizing aspects, or "recalcitrant" nature, of animal matter.[52]

However, while Fudge's concept of the "animal-made-object" is indeed a useful reminder of animal material power, nuancing Bennett's non-animal-focused arguments, Fudge's objects, while agential and acknowledged for their unique actant status as animal objects, also remain deindividualized. Donovan argues something similar. Indeed, during the rendering from live animal to butchered food, Donovan argues "animals become absent referents. Animals in name and body are made absent *as animals* for meat to exist." As part of this process, "the living animal is eclipsed, deadened, exploited, and discarded" as modernity and its reliance upon Cartesian and Kantian mechanism demands.[53] Thus, for both Fudge and Donovan the "*animal-made* object" and the "animal *made-object*" remain subjectless. Indeed, while "animal-made objects" are especially interesting and forceful actants to "effect change upon so-called human culture" when they come into contact with human bodies, often in the form of clothing or perfume, they remain objectified things, like Donovan's slaughterhouse victims, where the live animal's individual "sentient presence has been removed".[54]

Therefore, in order to see the nonhuman animals of the world, especially those who are dead or have been killed, like Gibraltar, we need to move beyond a care ethic that stops short of recognizing all animals made matter. Certainly, recognizing the objectification and removal of the animal self that occurs in modern abattoirs and

52 Fudge, "Renaissance Animal Things," 42–43, 44.

53 Donovan, *Aesthetics of Care*, 50.

54 Fudge, "Renaissance Animal Things," 45.

rendering facilities is essential, but for us to understand the transition of the Gibraltar Charger into a thunder drum, and then the individual particulars of this specific afterlife, we need to think about the who within *all* matter—not just the matter with still-recognizable animal shapes, or bodies. As such, we cannot simply reject Bennett's new materialism, as Donovan has done. Nor can we simply view dead animal matter as the result of mechanical and anti-sentimental modernism. Instead, we need a theory of cared-for matter that continues to recognize matter's vital agency as objectified thing and which recognizes the subject within the dead-animal matter itself. Indeed, to bring the animal self back, to recognize the ongoing if often unquantifiable or mysterious nature of animal subjectivity in seemingly inert matter, we need to exercise a recognition of animals as sentient, feeling, desiring beings before death and acknowledge that at least a modicum of that self remains in the matter that the animal becomes when transformed into an objectified now-dead, if agential, object. While the self that remains is subject to continuing anthropocentric and anthropomorphic constructions, and as we will see is predicated on the knowability or "celebrity" status of the animal before death, I suggest the nonhuman animal self, in some instances, is never fully effaced by objectification and mechanical rendering after death.

Thus, to come to understand Gibraltar-as-drum scholars need to recognize and hear the "who" within the animal-made objects.[55] As part of her ethical approach to animal representation and aestheticization, Donovan suggests that scholars need to recognize and think with the self within that representation. According to Donovan, "art and literature", and, as I suggest, animal-made-objects, "created under an aesthetics of care are conceived through a participatory epistemology—an 'I–thou' relationship, in which the natural world and its multivarious creatures are recognized as subjects who have stories of their own." For Donovan, "[s]uch subjects are qualitatively particularized, embedded in specific locales—their unique physical bodies and historically and geographically specific environments." Knowing

55 Donovan, *Aesthetics of Care*, 50.

"these subjects' ways of being requires experiential attentiveness to their unique shapes, expressions, and patterns, as well as to their contextual habits. It requires listening to their diverse voices."[56]

I want to listen to Gibraltar's voice as a drum. I want to take his after-death body, his disarticulated and unrecognizable shape, seriously. In doing so, I want to think about Gibraltar as the thunder drum in a way that not only takes seriously his status as animal matter, as a sound-making machine, but also Decastro's recollection of why Gibraltar was made into a drum and what influence he had on those around him. However, the interweaving of vital materialism and Donovan's ethics of care still leaves us with the thorny issue of moving beyond the moment of rendering subjectless that death and disarticulation brings. To take the "who" within the drum as central, and as a presence and a self attached to a physical animal-made-object, I add to these theoretical approaches the practice of taxidermy—while offering a slightly alternative interpretation of its defining features.

The practice of taxidermy traditionally is about preserving the individual within the recognizably and aesthetically shaped object for a variety of reasons. For example, taxidermy has been, and is, done to make a political statement and for self-aggrandizement, as with Jeremy Bentham's Auto-Icon; to capture the likeness and anthropomorphized notion of a wider species, as with museum specimens; freezing in time a thrilling (for the human) moment of human vs. "beast", as with game hunting; making an ethical or artistic statement, common to artistic taxidermy; or the preservation of a loved companion, as with pet taxidermy.[57] Regardless of rationale, though, taxidermy is about capturing within the preserved hide/skin/feathers/scales of a dead animal some semblance or notion of that animal when they were alive (or a semblance of human–animal relationships indexed in the animal body[58])—this intent makes taxidermy, and the philo-

56 Donovan, *Aesthetics of Care*, 73.

57 See Collings, "Bentham's Auto-Icon"; Staughan, "Entangled Corporeality"; Aloi, *Speculative Taxidermy*; Baker *Postmodern Animal*; Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy".

58 Aloi, *Speculative Taxidermy*, 23.

sophical underpinnings of it as a practice, potentially quite useful for coming to understand why Gibraltar was made into the Amphitheatre's thunder drum and the role he had once there.

However, there is a problem: the definition of taxidermy is often limited to beings whose body remains recognizable in some form and akin to the animals' live body (in its entirety or in part) in its dead, taxidermied state.[59] For example, Sarah Amato, looking to Katherine Grier, defines taxidermy as follows:

> taxidermy posits a particular kind of connection between animals and objects, whereby the animal is transformed into an artefact but remains recognizably embodied as its animal self [...]. To create taxidermy, the skin of the animal was removed, stuffed, and mounted in a lifelike position—though early techniques varied and sometimes skeletons were wrapped in material to provide the structure of the mount. Taxidermy transformed animals into manufactured objects.[60]

Taxidermied animals (and some humans, like Bentham) retain recognizable physical elements, such as hands/paws, coats, and faces that recall their live selves through their preserved shape. As Donna Haraway suggests, taxidermy is "the art most suited to the epistemological and aesthetic stance of realism."[61] It is when an animal body becomes so fragmented or altered through human processing, and the animal's original shape becomes lost, that problems arise. Indeed, for Amato, and other scholars interested in the history of taxidermy, animal-made objects that do not retain recognizable features of the now-dead-animal do not qualify as taxidermied beings. As Amato argues, items such as "a leather coat" cannot be classified as taxidermy because the object's animal "origins are disembodied, abstracted, and recalled through the mental effort of associating the coat to the cow".[62] Even within some modern art circles where "speculative taxidermy" celebrates non-traditional and

59 See Baker, *Postmodern Animal,* for 'botched taxidermy' or taxidermy of the fragment.

60 Amato, *Beastly Possessions*, 190.

61 Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy," 34.

62 Amato, *Beastly Possessions*, 190.

often nonreferential forms of animal taxidermy, the individual animal self is subsumed under the 'relationship' between human and animal within the Anthropocene—the who within remains unknown within the object.[63] The association between object (such as a modern-art installation, shoe, glove, perfume, or stuffing in furniture) and the animal from which they are made simply is not clear enough, and the animal self is lost to the nonreferential matter. As a result, such objects, Amato implies, cannot allow the dead animal to act as memory, as emotive being, or as instructional item as "proper" taxidermied animals should. Such objects, according to traditional definitions of taxidermy, do not allow for "attentive love" or the recognition of the animal within all "animal-made-objects".

In order to understand the afterlife of Gibraltar as a thunder drum, then, we need a new definition of taxidermy, one that includes any alteration of an animal's body, especially alterations that are designed for remembrance or memorial in perpetuity. We need to strip "taxidermy" as a practice and art back to its original meaning: etymologically, taxidermy is derived from Greek, and is composed of *taxis* [τάξις], "order/arrangement", and *derma* [δέρμα], "skin". Thus, literally, "taxidermy" is simply "skin arrangement".[64] Within this open definition, skin of any shape or size can be stretched over just about anything—a life-like mould or a geometric frame would make no difference. The skin could be manipulated and arranged as the creator/worker wished—even if they were creating a coat, gloves, or drum. While broadening this definition runs the risk of subsuming the taxidermist's art, that of stretching and shaping a hide over an internal skeleton to preserve the image of the dead animal after life, into a wider morass of animal-body renderings, a new definition that includes the fragmented and shaped dead body as always carrier of the live individual allows for visibility of the animal subject within the material object; we can recognize the animal individual inherent within the manipulation of skin (or other body part) into an animal-made-object even if the object is utilitarian and its final shape does not recall the animal's original form.

63 Aloi, *Speculative Taxidermy,* 24.

64 Kalshoven, "Gestures of Taxidermy," 35.

If we interpret the thunder drum as a piece of taxidermy, an agential animal-made object composed of once-live animal matter, and thus worthy of ethical consideration, provocative interpretations of Decastro's short and enigmatic footnote start to emerge. Gibraltar was rendered into a thunder drum specifically as a useful object of theatre life, but this rendering, I suggest, illustrates his actant status as matter, as animal-made-object, where his objectified and fragmented skin becomes the matter and means of remembrance, emotional connection, and moralizing instruction that in turn consistently recalls aspects of his life as military hero and celebrity actor. Indeed, with this expanded definition of taxidermy in mind, I suggest as an animal-made utilitarian object, as taxidermied animal matter, the thunder drum retained the who, the presence of Gibraltar. Therefore, by coupling Bennett's generally vibrant matter, Donovan's ethical attention towards animals as important and separate from other material objects, Fudge's animal-made objects as agential in their own right, and who Gibraltar was before death (and how he was interpreted as a subjective being after death), the thunder drum is made intelligible. As I explore next, and in contrast to Kantian philosophy, which, as Bennett points out, argues that the "essential character of matter is lifeless, *inertia*",[65] the animal-made-object retained Gibraltar's voice, the who behind the object. To be sure, that voice (the recognition of it and the recollection of Gibraltar it enabled) was predicated upon an epistemological status that mandated a hearer possessed some form of connection to Gibraltar as a living—and celebrity—being. As Decastro writes, his rumbling voice, or "parting knell", was recognizable to those who knew "the circumstances" of his life and death. Thus, Gibraltar-as-drum, an object reduced to bare matter and artificially constructed object, remains horse—he remains, at least in some form and for some people, the Gibraltar Charger.

Thunder Drum

As a taxidermied and agential animal-made object, I argue, Gibraltar's body had a voice. Thunder drums had the capacity to

65 Kant, *Critique of Judgement,* 1790, as qtd. in Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* 65.

exercise an immense influence upon all those who interacted with them—through sight, touch, and, of course primarily, sound. Thunder drums, as the name implies, were used to recall the sounds of thunder, storms, and battle (especially of cannon and other ordinance fire). They helped to create mood, tension, and fear, and were essential pieces of the Amphitheatre's soundscape. As John Jennings recalled, they were a modern invention during the early nineteenth century and usually consisted "of a calf-skin tightly drawn over the top of a box frame. With this instrument the low rumbling of distant thunder or the long roll of the elemental disturbance may be attained." This elemental disturbance rarely existed in singularity. Instead, the thunder drum worked in tandem with other theatre machines to create weather and atmospheric effects designed to shock, and in some cases frighten, the audience that experienced them.[66] When we look closely at them, however, and attentively invite the animal self within to emerge, thunder drums can also act as powerful reminders of the animal within. In the case of the Gibraltar Charger (the animal within and the who in the object) the thunder drum functions both as a human memorial to his life and as a strongly emotive voice through which he, as material actant, could influence those around him. Indeed, as a taxidermied animal-made-object, Gibraltar as thunder drum became the embodiment of mournful memory for those who knew him, a creator of the Amphitheatre soundscape and shaper of the audience into a community of the sublime, and a commanding instructor of ideal behaviour who was positioned close to the divine.

Primarily, however, for the select few who knew of his death and life, the drum's theatre soundscape became, night after night, Gibraltar's memorial—as Davis probably intended and as taxidermy invites. As Rachel Poliquin argues, regardless of stated intent, taxidermy is also about remembrance, about "human longing" for one who is lost; it is about "the desires and daydreams surrounding human relationships with and within the natural world."[67] Typically, and especially for the early nineteenth century, such relationships were those of pet and

66 Jennings, *Theatrical and Circus Life*, 171.

67 Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, 6.

owner (the taxidermy of pets was popular at the time), where the pet remained useful after death.[68] For the Gibraltar Charger, these dreams and desires invite recollections of equine service that paint him as the absolute equine military hero.

With the thunder drum, it mattered that the hide used came from the Gibraltar Charger and not another animal. It mattered also that Gibraltar was a war hero. Indeed, the association of thunder drums with performances of a military nature was especially useful for a theatre that in the early nineteenth century turned much of its attention to the staging of grand military equestrian extravaganzas known as hippodramas. Over the nineteenth century, these spectacles became the most popular theatre productions of the age, with many produced around the approximate date of Gibraltar's death and first performances as a drum.[69] While there is no extant record of which productions Gibraltar as the thunder drum may have been a part of, all these plays in some form contain military or nationalistic subject matter.[70]

While the Gibraltar Charger experienced a long and, it seems, cared-for history at the Amphitheatre, he was above all a military horse. Even though Decastro does not accurately record his connection to the Siege of Gibraltar, it seems Gibraltar's connection to General Elliot and military action in general remained firmly entrenched within Amphitheatre lore. Gibraltar's overall militaristic history is in keeping with the acts he performed in 1788, and the ones which gained him celebrity status as a result. For instance, Gibraltar's first public appearance on 4 June 1788 was timed to celebrate the birthday

68 Young, *Pet Projects*.

69 These hippodramas include: James Robinson Planche's *Cortez; or, The Conquest of Mexico* (1823); Charles Dibdin the Younger's *Bonduca; or, The British Queen* (1823); J.H. Amherst's *Battle of Waterloo* (1824) and *Bonaparte's Invasion of Russia; or, the Conflagration of Moscow* (1825); Thomas Dibdin's *Kenilworth; or, The Days of Good Queen Bess* (1824); George Croly's *The Enchanted Courser; or, The Sultan of Curdistan* (1824); and Andrew Ducrow's *The Burmese War; or, Our Victories in the East* (1826).

70 See Harvard University, Houghton Library's Lamont Microfiche (W 2653) for copies of these plays. For information on hippodrama in England, France, and America, see Saxon, *Life and Art*; Mattfeld, "'I see them galloping!'"; and Poppiti, *A History of Equestrian Drama*.

of George III and overtly connected military courage with support for the crown. Part of the celebrations consisted of a fireworks display lit on a barge in the centre of the Thames River. The Gibraltar Charger was also on this barge, "courageous[ly]" and unconcernedly "entirely covered with fire, which seemed to be his favourite element."[71] The *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* even jokingly asked "whether the Gibraltar Charger has not been used to eat fire, as he seems to be so very fond of it."[72] Indeed, he "stood as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar itself" through the entire ordeal.[73] From here, Gibraltar frequently performed his military training in conjunction with (indoor) fireworks and the firing of weaponry (including a small cannon) from his back, proving beyond doubt his ability to "withstand fire" as ideal military chargers (and according to Philip Astley, all horses) naturally should. Indeed, as the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* pointed out, Gibraltar could "stand […] fire so well" due to being ridden by Elliot "during the whole siege of Gibraltar".[74] And, "[e]very body seems desirous of seeing the Horse which carried the gallant Veteran through the glorious toils of war" as a result.[75]

Even though Gibraltar would go on to perform with John Astley in his equestrian ballet, and more than likely in comedic or "learned horse" parts, it seems he would always be remembered for his nationalistic military service (and the performance of it on the Thames and the Amphitheatre stage in 1788). His military experience, and consequential ability to calmly interact with fireworks and cannon, became synonymous with "him", with the anthropomorphized construction of his equine self. Gibraltar would always be the horse associated with General Elliot, with battle, the protection of British imperialism, and with his prowess as a Charger—regardless of which name he was subsequently known by or which history he was given. Gibraltar, as the "Ode" about him enthused,

71 *World (1787)* (London), June 21, 1788; Issue 462; *World (1787)* (London), June 5, 1788; Issue 448.

72 *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (London), June 21, 1788; Issue 5965.

73 *Morning Herald* (London), June 5, 1788; Issue 2377.

74 *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London), June 5, 1788; Issue 4748.

75 *World (1787)* (London), July 5, 1788; Issue 474.

> Bore our warlike hero round
> Gibraltar's rocks, while cannons sound,—
> Fly red hot balls in air:
> Thousands has he to conquest led;
> His course has been o'er slaughtered dead.

He was "Fearless as noble in his soul", while "His element is war alone; / On glory's heights for this he's known". And known he was throughout his life, if Decastro's short note about him is to be believed.[76] He was Elliot's Charger, an honoured veteran of war, and I suspect he remained so for the rest of his life (although no evidence that I could find, other than Decastro's incorrect history, discusses Gibraltar directly after 1788) (fig. 3). Furthermore, I suggest Gibraltar was also known for his military might after death, and his reputation for the ultimate of military chargers directly informed the decision to taxidermy him into a thunder drum. While we can never be sure of the exact rationale behind Davis's decision, Gibraltar's militarized reputation, coupled with the typical valuation of animals alive or dead through use value, suggests the drum as animal-made-object was considered a fitting, even perfect, memorial for an old warhorse.

It was a memorial that at once allowed for the remembrance of his past service, but which also emphasizes human constructions of ideal horses—and by extension, ideal human/animal relationships. The "Ode on the Gibraltar Charger" again offers clues to these constructs. It emphasizes discourses that constructed equines as servants (or slaves, depending on the author) and ever eager to serve his human masters.[77] According to the "Ode", "The Soldier he will ne'er forsake" as "The army's friend and guide" in peace and war. Gibraltar was "Created for our use, his pride / Is man to glory e'er to guide"—indeed, he "welcomes Death mankind to Love, / And no reward but Love he'll crave".[78] Such imagery and constructions of Gibraltar, and by extension all ideal equines whom he represents, follow the usual view of horses as created to serve mankind—and

76 "Ode", *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England), June 16, 1788; Issue 4757.

77 On animal slavery see Tague "Companions, Servants, or Slaves"; Mattfeld, *Equines*.

78 Anonymous, "Ode", *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*.

Fig. 3

John Singleton Copley, *General George Augustus Eliot on a Grey Charger: A Study for the "Siege of Gibraltar"*, ca. 1787. Oil on canvas, 50.2 × 31.8 cm. The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens. Object no. 2001.6.

Courtesy of the Huntington Art Museum, San Marino, California.

hence, as only valuable when they can continue to do so.[79] Therefore, as a celebrated servant of the nation's military heroes (Elliot and Astley), literary representative of ideal equines throughout Britain, and as cherished actor who could perform apparently impossible feats, Gibraltar must be correctly honoured after death. To remain valuable and valued, he must remain of use. The thunder drum is particularly poignant, as it is a way for him to continue serving as animal-made-object. It is a loving homage to his life (his wished-for reward according to the "Ode") while honouring his service to both the military and to the (militarized) Amphitheatre.

Such recollections, and the ongoing use of Gibraltar-as-drum within the nationalistic, imperialist, and often violent world of hippodrama, I suggest, was an especially fitting aspect of his memorial and one that also allowed for further improving instruction. In his afterlife of service, Gibraltar functioned as a taxidermied animal-made object that channelled his "self" as both military hero and performing horse to shape the world around him as a material actant. As an animal-made object embodied with the military history and idealized nature of Gibraltar, the thunder drum's ability to produce loud sounds reminiscent of battle that consequently, according to Jennings, rendered an audience awestruck, was essential to the Amphitheatre soundscape. Such sounds were required for drawing the audience into the Amphitheatre's world of artifice and reenactment, and for eliciting desired emotive responses from those who heard him. As Jennings writes: a thunder drum was struck, "and, following the sharp rattling of the shaken sheet of iron and the flash of ignited magnesium an effect is produced that completely awes the simple citizen who knows nothing of the mechanism of the stage."[80] For Edmund Burke, the sound of thunder and drums was simply sublime. According to Burke, the sound of "vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery, awakes a great and awful sensation in the mind."[81] Indeed, "[f]ew things are more awful," other than the "striking of a clock" on a silent night, than the "single stroke on a

79 Mattfeld, *Equines*.

80 Jennings, *Theatrical and Circus Life*, 171.

81 Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry,* 151.

drum, repeated with pauses; and of the successive firing of cannon at a distance."[82] As Gibraltar was likely used to accompany hippodramatic spectacles, his voice was that of the sublime, and the most effective machine for its production.

The sublime, as theorized by Burke, could have a strong influence on those who experienced it. This was especially the case when it came to sound. As Burke argued, loud or sudden noise, such as that created by thunder or the striking of a drum, "is sufficient to over-power the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror."[83] This terror of an imagined threat robbed the people who experienced it of all their rational abilities. They were struck dumb. Such fear, in turn, also resulted in one of the key emotions necessary to the success of the theatre: "delight." Fearful delight, that thrill one experiences when witnessing the sublime, was bread and butter to the Amphitheatre, which relied on sensation to sell tickets (as many critics scornfully pointed out).[84] When an audience heard Gibraltar's voice, then, they could become awestruck, speechless, and affected by what they experienced at the theatre in a multi-sensory experience that helped bring the theatrical world to life.[85] Furthermore, the sublime sound of the thunder drum could enwrap an audience in waves of the sublime because the sound of a drum like the thunder drum provides "a means of us 'touching' at a distance — a form of personal contact [. . .] a kind of social glue."[86] It offered a shared experience that sympathetically drew listeners together into a world of mutual feeling.

Of course, all drums could do this, but the equine material of this particular thunder drum was especially important within the Amphitheatre world. As I illustrate elsewhere, for Burke, horses were typically not associated with the sublime owing to their obedience to human direction. There were, however, also instances where a horse could become the embodiment of the sublime par excellence.[87]

82 Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry,* 153.

83 Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry*, 150–53.

84 Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London,* 10–14.

85 Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London,* 10–14.

86 Hendy, *Noise*, 14–15.

87 Mattfeld, "'I see them galloping'," 74–75.

Specifically, Burke refers to a horse in the Book of Job as the prime instance of the equine sublime:

> Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?
> Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible.
> He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men.
> He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword.
> The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield.
> He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet.
> He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.[88]

This was a horse whose neck was "clothed […] with thunder" and who was the ultimate in human helpmate as God directed. As a military charger, then, Gibraltar was (at least advertised and staged as such) the embodiment of a truly divine animal. He was the ultimate in the sublime horse — alive and dead. Indeed, through sound Gibraltar could fulfil the fantasy of equine servitude, live the anthropocentric story of equine love, and embody an ideal military might of Biblical proportions. The audience shared the phenomena of the sublime, as listening to Gibraltar after death created a shared, terror-filled, experience, one that worked to equate the often-patriotic and militaristic messages and images performed on stage with an overwhelming voice. His voice was rumbling, awe inspiring, and total — a voice, Decastro implies through the phrase "parting knell", that was for some also remarkably similar to the thundering voice of God.[89]

88 Job 39:19–25 (KJV).

89 Hendy, *Noise*, 165.

"Parting Knell"

Parting knells were complex elements of nineteenth-century death practices. Parting knells (also known as passing knells, death knells, or death bells), in addition to signifying the death of a person, had the potential effect of providing divine protection and a call to salvation for those who heard them. As David Hendy notes, parting knells were rung on bells—either handheld or situated in church towers. These bells, especially in the Middle Ages, were often inscribed with lines of scripture or "spells" designed to drive away evil spirits waiting to seize the newly departed soul.[90] While an integral component of earlier practices of death and mourning, parting knells and the ringing of bells continued into the nineteenth century, and their devotional elements endured within the popular imagination.[91] In the nineteenth century, however, ringing the bells was "not for the souls of the dead but for the ears of the living."[92] People were not interested in driving away any evil spirits, or necessarily in praying for the soul of the deceased, but in the reminder of their own mortality that the bells afforded.[93] Many mourners found such reminders deeply disturbing. For example, Laura Lorrimer described the parting knell as "a leaden weight" on the hearts of all who heard it, a "mournful utterance", and an unutterably sad reminder of death.[94] Similarly, for Walter Scott the parting bell was a "mighty knell" that disturbed the human and natural world with its sound, "so dull and stern".[95]

By invoking the language of the parting knell, Decastro linked the sound of Gibraltar-as-drum to that of the bells. As such, like the ringing of the church bell, the horse-as-drum's parting knell, while celebratory for his past deeds in the Amphitheatre, was also the voice of man's divine protector and partner in times of strife; he was also, in this instance, the voice of death, the newly departed, and as a result, a voice to be mourned and ultimately feared. I suggest that hearing a

90 Price, *Bells and Man*, 111–12.

91 Laqueur, *Work of the Dead*, 147.

92 As qtd. in North, *Church Bells of Rutland*, 91.

93 Sigourney, "Passing Bell," 217–18.

94 Lorrimer, "Captain Jasper J. Jones," 246–47.

95 Scott, "Marmion", Canto Second, ll. 628–34.

parting knell like Gibraltar's could make listeners acutely and tantalizingly aware of how close death walked beside them.[96] As the bell at Rutland's church of St. Andrew's, Whissendine, made clear: "My roaring sounde doth warning geve / That men cannot heare always lyve." Similarly, a bell at Warmington church, Northamptonshire, warned "I measure life: I bewail death."[97] To hear a parting knell was thrillingly to hear death speak, and fearfully to mourn its presence.

But to hear it was also to hear the potential for eternal salvation. As the third bell at the Church of St. Helen's in Brant Brougham beseeched its listeners: "Beg ye of God your soul to save / Before we call you to the grave."[98] Regardless of how nineteenth-century authors strove to distance themselves from historical funerary practices, the association of parting knells with religion remained firmly in place. The church bells continued to toll around the nation, and the sounds of passing continued to invite spiritual devotion from the community of listeners. Within this communal soundscape of the death knell, the act of listening was potentially an act of religious expression and reaffirmed faith, and as a result, an act of receiving a promise for divine protection in the afterlife.[99] To hear the parting knell of the church bells or of Gibraltar-as-drum recalled the presence of death to the living, and in turn, awakened the listeners to the fragility of their own immortal souls.

For Gibraltar, then, his parting knell not only connected the audience within a community of terror-filled delight, and the Amphitheatre workers in a community of celebrating mourners, but it also, in effect, spread his message of spiritual guidance, or his "wholesome warning", throughout the theatre on waves of sound.[100] Like a church bell, the Gibraltar-as-drum worked to:

96 Lomax, *Bells and Bellringers*, 68.

97 Lomax, *Bells and Bellringers*, 90–91.

98 Laqueur, *Work of the Dead*, 147.

99 Hendy, *Noise*, 112; Lomax, *Bells and Bellringers*, 67.

100 Monsell, *Passing Bell,* ix. As Don Ihde argues, early acoustics began discussing the movement of sound through waves in the early to mid nineteenth century. Ihde, *Acoustic Techniques*, 11. For an overall look at sound in the nineteenth century see Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*.

Prompt us His will to do,
Bid us His favour sue,
Warn us His wrath to rue,
    Unto whose eye,
Unto whose bar of dread,
Judge of the quick and dead,
Every hour's silent tread
    Bringeth us nigh.[101]

What his mournful voice meant, precisely, and what constituted his message of warning in order to receive divine protection remains unclear. But what is certain is that as a drum he was a *momento mori* that "touched" everyone in the Amphitheatre in some way. As a being fragmented, stripped of his skin — the external markers of identity — in the process of becoming an animal-made-object, he became, as all taxidermy must, a figure of "remembrance" for those who "knew the circumstances" of his life and death.[102] He likewise became a being whose voice activated the experience of the sublime through his agency as a horse-as-drum. As such, he embodied the possibility of "[o]rganic materials [to] have the potential to be far more haunting souvenirs than manufactured objects. And haunting is the right word. By staving off the finality of material dissolution, preservation endows bodily souvenirs with an impoverished yet resolute immortality."[103] As a drum, the Gibraltar Charger was elevated above a celebrity animal famed for performing the impossibly human; as a seemingly inert material object he was transformed into a producer of emotive sound that altered all aspects and people of the theatre. He became at once material, animal, thing, companion, but he also became elevated, better, heard, and divine as a taxidermied animal-made-object that celebrated the "who" within.

101 Sigourney, "Passing Bell," 219.

102 Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, 7.

103 Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, 203.

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