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Becoming Animal

Becoming-evolutionary?: Animal Transformations in Kingsley's *Alton Locke*

Devenir-évolutionnaire ? Les transformations animales dans Alton Locke de Charles Kingsley

BEN MOORE

Résumés

Français English

Cet article présente une étude du chapitre 6 d'*Alton Locke* (1850), roman de Charles Kingsley, lorsque le héros se remémore un rêve au cours duquel il a fait l'expérience de multiples transformations animales, qui le conduisent du bas de l'échelle de l'évolution aux premiers stades de l'humanité. L'auteur examine ce chapitre à la lumière du concept de 'devenir-animal', élaboré par Deleuze et Guattari. Ainsi, la fantaisie évolutionniste met en évidence les perturbations 'moléculaires' subies par l'identité 'molaire'. Cet article explore également l'importance de la peste et de la fièvre qui s'apparentent à des répétitions de la mort au sein du rêve. En s'appuyant sur les thèses de Deleuze et Guattari, l'auteur de cet article interprète le texte de Kingsley comme une tentative de 'devenir-évolutionnaire'.

Focusing on Chapter 36 of Charles Kingsley's novel *Alton Locke* (1850), where the hero recounts a dream during which he undergoes a series of transformations into various animals, beginning at 'the lowest point of created life' as a madreporé or coral, and culminating with the early history of humanity, this article explores the relation between Kingsley's text and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming-animal'. It argues that the evolutionary fantasy *Alton Locke* recounts plays out a tension between the restoration of fixed, 'molar' identity and the 'molecular' disruption of identity. The relevance of the dream's origin in pestilence and fever is also considered, as is the repetition of death within the dream. The article concludes by considering the possibility that Kingsley's text might help formulate a concept of 'becoming-evolutionary', building on Deleuze and Guattari.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : évolution, Deleuze et Guattari, Kingsley (Charles), devenir-animal, rêves

Keywords : evolution, Deleuze and Guattari, Kingsley (Charles), becoming-animal, dreams

Texte intégral

- 1 Charles Kingsley (1819–75) was not only a priest, novelist, poet and Professor of History at Cambridge (1860–69), but also a keen amateur naturalist and biologist. In his 1855 book *Glaucus; or, The Wonders of the Shore*, which enthusiastically describes the pleasures to be gained from studying the flora and fauna along the coastline of Britain, he writes:

Happy, truly, is the naturalist. He has no time for melancholy dreams. The earth becomes to him transparent; everywhere he sees significancies, harmonies, laws, chains of cause and effect endlessly interlinked, which draw him out of the narrow sphere of self-interest and self-pleasing, into a pure and healthsome region of solemn joy and wonder. (Kingsley 1859, 15)

- 2 For Kingsley, the naturalist's ecstatic vision of the natural world is an indication of God's greatness. It is a vision defined by organic unity, in which 'significancies' and 'harmonies' create a wholly 'interlinked' and readable world. In Kingsley's most telling phrase, the earth does not appear chaotic but 'becomes . . . transparent'. Later, he suggests that in observing scratches in rocks caused by glaciers, 'the naturalist acknowledges the finger-mark of God, and wonders, and worships' (Kingsley 1859, 17). The order and systematicity of the 'Great Chain of Being',¹ which pre-Darwinian theories of evolution from Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Robert Chambers and others had disrupted, has here been reimagined in a new scientific register, as what Kingsley calls 'chains of cause and effect endlessly interlinked'. As the critic Michael Page puts it, referring to Kingsley's 1863 novel *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley is 'concerned with affirming Christian values in light of the challenges put forward by Darwin's evolutionary schema' (Page 119); not by rejecting evolution, but by showing that the new scientific knowledge of the nineteenth century leads to a greater recognition of God's glory. In this sense, the Christian naturalist is able to exceed narrow self-interest and achieve a transcendent state of 'solemn joy and wonder' in which human reason, divine wisdom and the natural order are seamlessly combined. Kingsley pursued this theme of divine natural order in his sermons, at one point preaching that:

Nothing is idle, nothing is wasted, nothing goes wrong in this wonderful world of God. The very scum upon the standing pool, which seems mere dirt and dust, is all alive, peopled by millions of creatures, each full of beauty, full of use, obeying laws of God too deep for us to do aught but dimly guess at them. (Kingsley 1882, 36)

- 3 This claim that even scum, dirt and dust have beauty, law, order and meaning indicates how deeply Kingsley's vision of a harmonious natural world permeated his thinking, informing not only his perception but also his sense of what lay beyond perception. At the same time, he remains happy to concede that the divine law and meaning he found throughout nature remains only partly intelligible, even to the informed scientific observer.
- 4 If Kingsley's seaside naturalist has 'no time for melancholy dreams', melancholy dreams are nonetheless precisely what Kingsley had provided in his novel of 1850, *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet*, on which I focus in this article. In particular, I explore the extraordinary Chapter 36, 'Dream Land', where the hero, Alton Locke, experiences a fevered evolutionary fantasy that offers, at least in part, an alternative to the harmonious organic unity described in *Glaucus*. Reading *Alton Locke* through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming animal', as described in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), will allow me to interpret this dream as playing out a drama of 'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization', in which the unitary, or molar, is disrupted by the diffuse, or molecular, which then in turn undergoes a new restructuring. My reading also aims to show that the idea of evolution this chapter presents is in tension throughout with what Deleuze and Guattari call 'involution', a process which 'form[s] a block that runs its own line "between" the terms in play and beneath assignable relations' (Deleuze and Guattari 263). Unlike evolution, involution does not connect biological entities into a tree or line of progress, but instead brings them into provisional but transformative relations, which Deleuze and Guattari call

'becomings' (*devenir*). By combining involution and evolution, I argue, Kingsley's novel indicates that before the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, evolutionary consciousness was in a state of openness, not yet defined by the binary choice between acceptance or denial of Darwinism. In the 1840s and early 1850s, at a moment when the general form of evolution was becoming clear but its details not yet publicly known or understood, a space had opened up for human and animal to come together in new imaginative and speculative ways. In taking this position, I pursue in theoretical terms a recent move towards analysing non-Darwinian evolutionary theories in Victorian fiction identified by Cannon Schmitt, who cites articles by Straley, Towheed and Glendenning.² I am indebted, too, to Gillian Beer's recognition that 'Evolutionism has been so imaginatively powerful precisely because all its indications do not point one way. It is rich in contradictory elements which can serve as a metaphorical basis for more than one reading of experience' (Beer 6). At times, as in Alton Locke's dream, these contradictory elements mean evolution has the potential to turn into its own undoing, to tip over into involution or 'becoming'. In my conclusion, I take this idea further by attempting to answer the question posed in my title, asking whether Kingsley's novel can be employed to formulate a new category of becoming, what might be termed 'becoming-evolutionary'.

Alton's Dream: The Collapse and Restoration of Self

- 5 Before discussing Deleuze and Guattari in more detail, I want to sketch out the main features of Alton Locke's dream. Kingsley's novel, which is often considered part of the 'Condition of England' debate, is set against the background of Chartism, and focuses on the spiritual and psychological development of the working-class poet Alton Locke, torn between a desire for political action, attraction towards the aristocratic Lillian, and the attempt to write an authentic poetry that goes beyond the inherited tradition of Romanticism. His dream in Chapter 36 takes place after he has visited the slum dwelling of an acquaintance, Jemmy Downes, where the air is 'heavy with pestilence', and where he witnesses the bodies of Jem's wife and children lying dead from 'poisonous fever gases'.³ Fever and pestilence here represent a miasmatic disruption of ordered, coherent bodies, a form of 'becoming-molecular' (Deleuze and Guattari 300) that threatens to cross spatial and class boundaries, simultaneously undermining the beauty of nature praised by Kingsley and reinforcing his insistence that nature is formed of 'chains of cause and effect endlessly interlinked'. The miasmatic potential of fever reaches its moralistic apex in Chapter 39, where it is revealed that Alton's cousin George has died of typhus contracted from a coat 'which covered the corpses in that fearful chamber [i.e. Jem's house]' (372), and which was later bought by George, in an example of his 'buy-cheap-and-sell-dear commercialism' (372). In a move typical of English novels around this period (*Bleak House* [1852–53] being another famous example), Kingsley shows that wealth cannot escape the diseases of poverty, but should instead work to ameliorate them.
- 6 As the police arrive in pursuit of Jem, who is suspected of killing his family, Alton sees him leap into an open sewer and drown, before stumbling home to his own apartment and to bed. Alton has contracted some form of fever or illness at the house, however, and it is this illness which gives rise to his dream, creating favourable conditions for the disruption of temporality and identity that follows, in an example of what Freud calls 'internal organic somatic stimuli' (Freud 95). For Freud, though, such stimuli are only one factor in generating dreams, and the same is true here for Kingsley, who integrates the illness with elements of Alton's intellectual, religious and libidinal life.
- 7 As the dream begins, Alton experiences 'a strange confusion and whirling' (334) in his brain, and sees the figure of his mother standing at the foot of his bed, but finds himself unable to follow her. Time and space become deformed, as 'The bedclothes

gr[ow] and gr[ow] . . . into a vast mountain, millions of miles in height' (334). Alton then enters a 'raging fever' (335) in which:

My fancy, long pent-up and crushed by circumstances, burst out in uncontrollable wildness, and swept my other faculties with it helpless away over all heaven and earth, presenting to me, as in a vast kaleidoscope, fantastic symbols of all I had ever thought, or read, or felt. (335)

8 As Michael Page has pointed out, one of the books Alton has been reading is Charles Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839), and the dream that follows resembles a passage in William Chambers's popular evolutionary work of 1844, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Page 117).⁴ We might also observe that in Chapter 15 Alton reports reading books by William Bingley, who had written on British quadrupeds and botany in the early nineteenth century, and Thomas Bewick, author of a famous *History of British Birds* (1797–1804) which is also cited in *Jane Eyre*, published three years before Kingsley's novel (Brontë 6). Like the naturalist in *Glaucus*, Alton starts to see 'significancies' everywhere, but rather than appearing transparent and ordered, the world becomes a jumble of 'fantastic symbols', seen 'as in a vast kaleidoscope'. His thoughts and experiences break free from controlling consciousness and the prosaic 'circumstances' that constrain them, to recombine in fantastical ways. In this sense, the dream is a pre-psychoanalytic imagining of the collapse of repression. After a series of visions involving monstrous Hindu gods, culminating with an earthquake and tornado, Alton dreams that his soul is dropped into a cavern by the seaside, upon which he falls into darkness and is 'turned again to my dust' (336), a phrase that invokes the funeral service from the *Book of Common Prayer*, and hence Christian death and rebirth. He next finds himself 'at the lowest point of created life; a madrepore rooted to the rock, fathoms below the tide-mark' (336). Alton has now become an animal, if only barely one, and proceeds to pass through a whole series of animal embodiments, from crab, to fish, to ostrich, to giant sloth and finally baby ape, before becoming a child, then an adult, experiencing a symbolic progress through prehistory and the history of religion that culminates with Christianity, guided throughout by Eleanor, Lillian's deeply religious cousin, reimagined as an angel.

9 The descent into nothingness that precedes Alton's animal transformations is not often commented on by critics, but is nonetheless important in the context of Kingsley's theology. It can also, to anticipate my discussion below, be read as a form of Deleuzian 'becoming molecular'. In envisaging a literal descent in which Alton 'fell and fell for ages' (336), Kingsley touches on a theme he would explore in more detail in his sermon 'De Profundis', published as part of the *Westminster Sermons* in 1874. In this sermon he glosses the opening of Psalm 130, 'Out of the deep have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice', envisaging the psalm's spiritual despair as a 'horrible pit' of confusion and disorder, in contrast to 'the beautiful world of light, and order, and righteousness where he [David, the psalm's voice] ought to be' (Kingsley 1882, 66). Through this experience, as Kingsley reads it, both physical and psychological identities are extinguished, matching Alton's loss of self. The pit is described as

a place of darkness and of storms, a shoreless and bottomless sea, where he is drowning, and drowning. . . . It is a torturing, disgusting disease, which gives his flesh no health, and his bones no rest, and his wounds are putrid and corrupt. . . . Yea, it is hell itself, the pit of hell, the nethermost hell, he says, where God's wrath burns like fire. (Kingsley 1882, 67)

10 These references to disease and drowning recall Jem Downes, who dies in an 'open tidal ditch' (333) behind his house, filled with 'bubbles of poisonous gas, and bloated carcasses of dogs, and lumps of offal, floating on the stagnant olive-green hell-broth' (333). In these 'lumps of offal', as with the corrupt and putrid wounds in the sermon, animal and human bodies are reduced to formless, disgusting matter, in a horrifying inversion of the divine natural order Kingsley imagines elsewhere.

11 The chapter in which Jem dies is called 'The Lowest Deep' (Ch. 35, 325), referring to Alton's despair at the failure of Chartism and Jem's despair at the death of his family, as well as Jem's death by drowning, but also evoking the 'deep' of Psalm 130, especially

when taken in the context of the later sermon. In another connection between sermon and novel, Jem's room is said to be 'the very mouth of hell' (333), while in 'De Profundis' the watery deep is called the 'pit of hell', suggesting an equivalence between Jem's death and the fall into spiritual darkness; an equivalence that is symbolically figured by Jem's attempted suicide on Waterloo bridge, next to a 'huge reflection of Saint Paul's' cathedral (328) that points 'down—down—down' (328). The sermon therefore reinforces the correlation already implied by the novel between physical, religious and psychological descent. Alton's fever dream, however, allows him a baptismal rebirth out of water which is denied to Jem; towards the end of Chapter 36 he passes 'like one who recovers from drowning, through the painful gate of birth into another life' (350). Such a rebirth would later become the central theme of *The Water-Babies*, where the death of Tom the chimney-sweeper in a river becomes the start of a new evolutionary growth, in which, as Beer puts it, he is 'released from the ordinary cycle of human development, allowed to grow anew' (Beer 126).

- 12 Anticipating Tom's trajectory in the later novel, Alton's dream knits an evolutionary understanding of the animal kingdom into a history of human progress that ends with a rational, Christian subject restored to wholeness and health. Kingsley's mapping of the development of the natural world onto the growth of the individual is explicitly indicated at the end of the dream, just before the fever breaks, when angel-Eleanor tells Alton 'your penance is accomplished. You have learned what it is to be a man' (350). Justin Prystash, in an article which draws together Kingsley, Carlyle, and Deleuze and Guattari in a discussion of Victorian identity formation, argues convincingly that Kingsley draws here on the theory of 'recapitulation' popularised in the early nineteenth century. This proto-evolutionary theory, which 'holds that the stages of individual development (ontogeny), especially in the embryo, recapitulate or resemble the stages of species development (phylogeny)', provides a basis for Kingsley 'grounding identity in a single, divine origin' (Prystash 160), as humanity and the natural world both come to be understood as pre-ordered parts of a larger whole ordained by God.

Deleuze and Guattari I: Series, Structure and Desire

- 13 Although Prystash's interest in Deleuze and Guattari centres around their concept of the rhizome, taking Alton's dream as a recapitulation also provides a way of moving towards Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming-animal', by pointing towards the presence in Chapter 36 of what they call 'series' and 'structure', both of which they oppose to genuine 'becoming'. I will now consider briefly how series and structure operate in Alton's dream, before shifting to explore how forms of 'becoming' might function to undo or 'deterritorialize' the order that has been imposed. For Deleuze and Guattari, a series works through resemblances:

In the case of a series I say *a* resembles *b*, *b* resembles *c*, etc.; all of these terms conform in varying degrees to a single eminent term, perfection, or quality as the principle behind the series. This is exactly what the theologians used to call an analogy of proportion. (Deleuze and Guattari 258)

- 14 In a series, the natural world typically comes to correspond to God, who perfectly embodies features which are imperfectly present in animals and humans. Evolution operates as a series of this kind if it is understood as a progression (or regression) along a line stretching from lowest to highest; even though, as critics such as Beer and Schmitt have shown, Darwinian natural selection properly understood threatens this view by removing all agency or teleology from evolution, insisting instead on 'permanent instability and open-endedness' (Schmitt 25). Alton's dream, however, *does* operate as a series in its progression from 'lower' to 'higher' forms of life, with organisms gradually becoming more and more perfect, from madrepoire to rational Christian man. Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari note that for Carl Jung, archetypal animal series were important in dreams, where 'each term plays the role of a possible

transformer of the libido (metamorphosis)', although for Jung man was 'no longer the eminent term of the series' (Deleuze and Guattari 260). Under this reading, Alton's animal transformations are a kind of sexual metamorphosis in which his libido has been released from repression and is seeking to locate an appropriate form in which to realise desire. In this respect, it is worth noting that Beer finds a pre-psychoanalytic primality elsewhere in Kingsley's writing, commenting that *The Water-Babies* 'has an oceanic richness typical of just pre-Freudian storytelling, in which all the elements of primal experience are present without interpretation' (Beer 126).

15 The Jungian association of animal series and libido becomes especially relevant to *Alton Locke* if we follow Christopher Hamlin's suggestion that Kingsley 'sought to understand sexual desire in terms of Christian mysticism and as an aspect of incarnation' (Hamlin 259).⁵ Susan Chitty comments in a similar vein, if rather mildly, that the dream 'has a faintly erotic tone' (Chitty 136). In fact, sexual desire is positioned as a fragmenting, anti-rational force in the dream, most clearly when Eleanor states: 'He who tears himself in pieces by his lusts, ages only can make him one again' (336). Alton's self-destructive lust for Lillian, and his associated anger at his cousin and rival George, is dramatized through various metaphors of castration, including Lillian and George laughing at him as a 'soft crab' with 'soft useless claws' (337), and Lillian hunting him as an ostrich in the form of an 'Amazon queen, beautiful, and cold, and cruel' (337), who ends up wearing in her hair the plumes which have been torn from ostrich-Alton's wings by his cousin, who has become a wild-cat. The dream's journey towards manhood, then, is also about the gradual controlling and mastering of sexual desire, which is figured as dangerous and in need of replacement by healthy labour and spirituality. One way to understand this progression is in terms of the conflict Prystash identifies in Kingsley's work between rhizomatic femininity and unified, coherent masculinity (Prystash 145–47). This conflict reappears as the dream heads towards its conclusion, when Lillian returns as a 'veiled maiden' (346) who tries to tempt the prehistoric human Alton away from his adherence to hard work, telling him 'Come! I will be your bride, and you shall be rich and powerful; and all men shall speak well of you, and you shall write songs, and we will sing them together, and feast and play from dawn to dawn' (346). By this point Alton is able to resist her however, and continues his task of boring through a vast mountain, in a demonstration of what T. C Sandars would famously call Kingsley's 'muscular Christianity' (Sandars 176) in an 1857 review of his novel *Two Years Ago*. The dream's series thus moves simultaneously from simpler to more complex forms of life, and from disordered to ordered libido.

16 Alton's dream also involves elements of 'structure'. Structuralism, Deleuze and Guattari argue, referring particularly to Claude Lévi-Strauss, rejected the theological progression-regression series in favour of structural relationships that could be compared with one another, in which different roles have analogical functions: 'Thus [the anthropologist Jean-Pierre] Vernant can say that marriage is to the woman what war is to the man' (Deleuze and Guattari 261). We see this pattern of analogy in the symbolic equivalence between Alton's progression through the animal kingdom, the history of religion and the development of the human individual. It is significant in this respect that half way through the dream, at a point that marks the transition from animal to human, Alton experiences 'Child-dreams—more vague and fragmentary than my animal ones; and yet more calm and simple' (342). The child is the border, or threshold, between the states of animal and human, which are at once analogically equivalent and positioned as lower and higher respectively. This is a combination of series and structure that equates to, and helps reinforce, Kingsley's combination of Christianity, which believes in a teleological series culminating in God, and science, which is invested in a structural understanding of the world where particular relationships provide evidence of immutable laws.

Deleuze and Guattari II: Becoming-animal and Becoming-molecular

17 If my reading so far has positioned Kingsley primarily on the side of series, structure, progression and order, Alton's feverish perceptions notwithstanding, there are also aspects of the chapter that operate as forms of 'becoming'. Becoming for Deleuze and Guattari is 'not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation' (Deleuze and Guattari 263). One favourite example is the 'block of becoming that snaps up the wasp and the orchid' (Deleuze and Guattari 263), a reference to those flowers, like the hammer orchids of Western Australia, which resemble female wasps, encouraging male wasps to attempt to mate with them and thereby bring about pollination. For Deleuze and Guattari such alliances or symbiotic manoeuvres are not primarily about filiation or evolution, since no 'wasp-orchid' will ever emerge from this practice, but rather about communication, or better, contagion, across boundaries. They call this 'involution' (Deleuze and Guattari 263), which can be understood as a creative act that moves between and across series and structure, cutting through both. Alton's dream, as I have shown, begins with the contagion that fills the houses of the poor, and this inflects and infects the shape of all his animal experiences. In the same way as he flees death and disease at the house of Jem Downes, his dreams repeatedly trace a line of flight from death, which nonetheless repeatedly catches him.

18 First, when he is a madrepore, or coral, he undergoes a dissolution of identity that is a kind of death:

worst of all, my individuality was gone. I was not one thing, but many things—a crowd of innumerable polypi; and I grew and grew, and the more I grew the more I divided, and multiplied thousand and ten thousand-fold. If I could only have thought, I should have gone mad at it; but I could only feel. (336)

19 The madrepore is an example of what British naturalists called zoophytes, a term Kingsley uses in *Glaucus* (e.g. Kingsley 1859, 33; 128; 170), defined by Danielle Coriale as 'an intermediate category that floated between animals and plants' (Coriale 20–21), neither one nor the other, and hence both fascinating and unsettling. Prystash notes that the madrepore's name, meaning 'mother-passage' (Prystash 146), and its description in *Glaucus* as a 'pretty mouth' (Kingsley 1859, 107) which is also 'a slit with white crenated lips', make it threateningly and rhizomatically feminine (Prystash 146)—the rhizome being taken by Deleuze and Guattari as a model for 'acentered systems, finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other' (Deleuze and Guattari 19). We might add that madrepores, which for Prystash 'contest the human/animal divide' (Prystash 164), are not only feminine and rhizomatic, but also a kind of swarm or pack, as the above quotation makes clear. It is precisely this multiplicity of coral polyps, according to Coriale, that defined them for Victorian writers, in contrast to freshwater polyps, which were seen as individuated or even individualist. This multiplicity gave rise to utopian narratives involving coral polyps that were 'oriented around collectivity and mutual labor' (Coriale 28), in G. H. Lewes and others. In the passage above, however, Alton does not become one polyp among a wider community, but instead has his individuality painfully shattered into 'innumerable' parts. Rather than one of many, he *is* many, and only escapes insanity because he is no longer human, and hence no longer able to think.

20 For Deleuze and Guattari, 'A becoming-animal always involved a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short a multiplicity' (Deleuze and Guattari 264). They emphasise that all becomings tend towards becoming-molecular: a dissolution into collectivities of particles that is also a movement towards death. Becoming-molecular inverts the Freudian death-drive, since the death-drive tends towards stasis whereas becoming tends towards pure, imperceptible movement.⁶ Deleuze and Guattari recognise the potential nihilism of becoming-molecular, however, emphasising that 'there is no deterritorialization [a move towards the molecular] without a special reterritorialization [a restructuring return towards the molar]' (Deleuze and Guattari 334). Taken as a whole, Alton's dream plays out such a drama of de- and reterritorialization, as the dreamer is first broken up into dust, then from the swarm-like madrepore onwards begins to reintegrate as a unitary subject. The series of deaths

and rebirths Alton experiences with each embodiment complicates this reterritorialization however, since it means the movement towards the molar is never clean or direct, but always disrupted.

- 21 The conflict between molar and molecular can also be identified in *Glaucus*, where Kingsley acknowledges the disruptive, deterritorializing capacity of zoophytes to break down established reason and knowledge, but then invokes the reterritorializing authority of a rational Christian God:

[N]o branch of science has more utterly confounded the wisdom of the wise, shattered to pieces systems and theories, and the idolatry of arbitrary names, and taught man to be silent while his Maker speaks, than this apparent pedantry of zoophytology, in which our old distinctions of 'animal', 'vegetable', and 'mineral', are trembling in the balance, seemingly ready to vanish like their fellows—the four elements' of fire, earth, air, and water. (Kingsley 1859, 33–34)

- 22 The language of 'shattering', 'trembling' and 'vanishing' echoes Alton's dissolution of identity, as the new science of zoophytology breaks down old series and structures. The breaking down which takes place is always in the service of a reformed, Christian science however, just as Alton's dream is in the service of producing a reformed Christian subject. Kingsley concludes this section of *Glaucus* by stating that 'in science, as in higher matters, he who will walk surely, must walk by faith and not by sight' (Kingsley 1859, 39), thereby restoring order through the higher rationality of God.

Evolutionary Progress vs Death and Disruption

- 23 If the reterritorialization in Alton's dream takes the shape of progress towards rational scientific Christian man, such reterritorialization is also repeatedly disrupted by death, which recurs throughout in different forms. First Alton-crab is 'squelched . . . flat' (337) by Alton's cousin; then Lillian-flying fish is consumed by cousin-shark, as Alton-remora seeks to hold him back (337); then Alton-ostrich is killed by cousin-cat and Lillian-Amazon (338). Next, Alton becomes a mylodon, or giant ground sloth, at which point he learns for the first time 'the delight of mere physical exertion' (338). Alan Rauch, who has explored Victorian accounts of the ground sloth, points out that the creature represented something of an evolutionary failure in this period, calling it 'a powerful emblem of the impossibility of advancement' (Rauch 223). Once again, death accompanies this creature, as Alton-mylodon is crushed by a falling tree while he attempts to save his cousin, now reimagined as an American backwoodsman (340). Finally, Alton is shot as a baby-ape in Borneo, before seeing himself dissected 'bone by bone, and nerve by nerve' by a 'smirking, chuckling surgeon' (342). This latter example is a portrait by Kingsley of the misdeployment of science, as the surgeon attempts to use his knowledge to take apart rather than to unify the natural world.

- 24 When Alton finally turns into a man, he does not die, but this section of the dream includes a great uprising in which the poor 'hunted [the rich] down like wild beasts, and slew many of them' (347). This allegory of revolution is also an indication that the disruptive forces of death have not been wholly escaped. If death and rebirth is perhaps the greatest de- and reterritorialization, its recurrence emphasises the evolutionary idea that each lower form must be subsumed and replaced by a higher. At the same time, the repetition of death represents a line of flight that cuts through the chapter, involving the disruptive forces of fever, death and contagion, which are only reincorporated into molar identity when Alton awakes at the end of the extended passage, having recovered from his illness.

- 25 As I have noted, the motif of transformation through death is used again in *The Water-Babies*, where Tom, a chimney-sweep, becomes a kind of aquatic hybrid, leaving behind his body as a 'black thing in the water', like a caddisfly (Kingsley 1995, 44). This

'black thing' is the body as remainder or waste, aligned with the polluting forces of industrialisation that have blackened it. It is of a piece with the 'lumps of offal' that fill the ditch where Jem drowns. Both Alton's dream and *The Water-Babies*, in this case, represent sustained attempts to reimagine death as productive, to recover the abject lumps of offal death leaves behind as generative of new life, stepping stones towards something higher. The fact that this imaginative work must be repeated, however, including in Alton's dream, suggests that higher life is always at risk of slipping back into deindividualised matter, of devolving rather than evolving. This is how the dream starts, with Alton's falling into dust, and it is a process Kingsley revisited in his fantasy of the 'Doasyoulikes' in *The Water-Babies* (Kingsley 1995, 124). This tribe is said to have left 'the country of Hardwork' to live a life of useless leisure, but after descending into stupidity they choose to live on a volcano, which in the end erupts, 'whereby one-third of the Doasyoulikes were blown into the air, and another third were smothered in ashes; so that there was only one-third left' (Kingsley 1995, 126). The tribe's destructive return to formless matter is followed by a further degeneration that finally leaves only one apelike creature remaining, who is shot by the explorer M. Du Chaillu, echoing the fate of the Borneo ape in Alton's dream.

26 As well as the sequence of transformations I have described, the structure of the dream sequence as it appears on the page is important. Each animal-becoming is separated from the next by a gap, indicated in the most recent Oxford edition by a single asterisk, and in the 1850 first edition by a single or double line of asterisks, with each succeeding passage getting gradually longer as Alton's identity begins to cohere (Kingsley 1850, 214–33). Each of these breaks is a leap, or discontinuity, that disallows direct connection between the dream's sections. In the context of 1850, when natural selection was incompletely understood, these gaps represent a lack of knowledge of precisely how evolution between species took place. In *Glaucus*, lack of knowledge is what fractures the mastery of science and its powers of naming, though this fracture is reterritorialized by Kingsley through the figure of God. In *Alton Locke*, this lack can be interpreted as what Deleuze and Guattari call 'the secret', a concept associated with becoming because, simply by being unknown, it disrupts molar mastery. In its most developed form, which they find in psychoanalysis (a discipline that seeks to recover the secret), the secret is a recognition that 'a nonlocalizable *something* has happened' (Deleuze and Guattari 318). In Alton's dream, death takes the place of this secret, which is textually represented by the gaps on the page. In this case, the secret is simply the fact that evolution is *not yet part* of an ordered series or structure. As we have seen, these deaths are castrative, as is the secret. Deleuze and Guattari point out that 'the secret of man is nothing, in truth nothing at all. Oedipus, the phallus, castration . . . it is enough to make women, children, lunatics, and molecules laugh' (Deleuze and Guattari 319).

27 Though the gaps in the dream are reterritorialized as forms of Christian rebirth by God and his agent, the angel-Eleanor, who throughout the dream stands in opposition to the biological, sexual femininity of Lillian, they nonetheless hint at a non-evolutionary understanding of human and animal, in which each reincarnation may *not* be progression or regression; in which these animal embodiments are shaken up like pieces in a kaleidoscope and do *not* come back together in the right order.

Machines, Assemblages and Haeccities

28 To pursue this line of thought, we might take the elements of Alton's dream not as complete embodiments, or as contributing to a line of progress, but as machinic assemblages. As Colin Manlove has pointed out, Kingsley's vision of the natural world is highly machinic; he 'gives the machine a place in the natural order of things, breaking down the usual distinction between the mechanical and the organic' (Manlove 216). To take an example, one of the creatures Tom encounters after his transformation in *The Water-Babies* is a creature with 'two big wheels, and one little one, all over teeth, spinning round and round like the wheels in a threshing-machine' (Kingsley 1995, 49).

This machine is biological, or in this creature the biological has become a machine. For Deleuze and Guattari, following Spinoza, to think nature in terms of becoming is always to think machinically:

The plane of consistency of Nature is like an immense Abstract Machine, abstract yet real and individual; its pieces are the various assemblages and individuals, each of which groups together an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations. (Deleuze and Guattari 280)

29 From this perspective, Alton's dream becomes a series of assemblages in which connections are momentarily formed, then dissolved. On this reading, elements of Alton's identity and experience, and elements of the natural world, are repeatedly arranged without discrimination into what Deleuze and Guattari call 'haeccities' (Deleuze and Guattari 287), which are momentary singularities that consist 'entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected' (Deleuze and Guattari 288). These relations combine to create a particular situation without a dominating identity, in which separation between objects, and between objects and qualities, blurs. As they put it, '[a] degree of heat can combine with a certain intensity of white, as in certain hot skies of a hot summer' (Deleuze and Guattari 288). What distinguishes Alton's dream from simple evolution is the fact that he is not restricted to one fixed identity in an ongoing chain, but adopts multiple haeccities. In each case, Alton is not just an animal, but a situation: 'and I was an ostrich, flying madly before the simoom wind, and the giant sand pillars, which stalked across the plain, hunting me down' (337); or 'I was a baby-ape in Borneon forests, perched among fragrant trailers and fantastic orchis flowers' (341). While in one sense there is a progression between these states, moving towards the restoration of rational human identity, in another sense there is no continuity, and each situation has its own specificity, independent of those around it.

30 In the end, Alton's dream is only ever an interlude in the novel of which it forms a part. The dream concludes with another, more permanent and less Deleuzian rebirth, in which Alton passes 'like one who recovers from drowning, through the painful gate of birth into another life' (350). This return to masculine authority is not a becoming, since as Deleuze and Guattari point out, 'There is no becoming-man because man is the molar being *par excellence*, whereas becomings are molecular' (Deleuze and Guattari 322). Yet the final restoration of Alton's identity as a fixed, albeit spiritually rejuvenated point, does not occlude the possibility of reading the dream, as I have done, as double, in tension with itself. In this sense, Alton's peculiar hallucination is not only a theologically-based evolutionary fantasy, but also an involution, a series of becomings that are not wholly connectible to one another or satisfactorily reconcilable to a molar structure.

31 But can these two sides of the dream—becoming and evolution—be brought together, or are they destined to remain as opposing forces? To put it another way, and to return to the question raised in my title: is there such a thing as 'becoming-evolutionary'? If we follow Deleuze and Guattari, it seems clear there is not, since evolution, in its focus on development and generation, is precisely what becoming, aligned with involution, opposes. Deleuze and Guattari describe the 'plane [*plan*] of consistency', where becoming takes place, as:

a plane of proliferation, peopling, contagion; but this proliferation of material has nothing to do with an evolution, the development of a form or the filiation of forms. Still less is it a regression leading back to a principle. It is on the contrary an *involution*, in which form is constantly being dissolved, freeing times and speeds. (Deleuze and Guattari 294)

32 At the start of Alton's dream, Eleanor, as angel, provides a clear evolutionary structure for what follows, remarking, in a formula that echoes the genealogies of the Old Testament, 'The madreporc shall become a shell, and the shell a fish, and the fish a bird, and the bird a beast; and then he shall become a man again, and see the glory of the latter days' (337). This statement seems to clearly mark the dream as what Deleuze and Guattari call 'the development of a form', thereby controlling the proliferation of

material the dream contains. In the terms presented by Deleuze and Guattari, then, there is no such thing as becoming-evolutionary. Nonetheless, it is worth asking, if there *could be* such a becoming, what would it look like? Can Kingsley's novel open up a way, albeit one that is tentative and speculative in which such a becoming-evolutionary might take place?

Becoming-evolutionary

33 Firstly, becoming-evolutionary would have to involve proliferation and multiplicity. It is not only the multiplicity of Alton's animal experiences that is important in this respect, but also the multiplicity of ideas about evolution that were circulating in the 1840s, as the novel was being composed. As well as Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* and Chambers's *Vestiges*, as noted above, French debates around transformism continued to exert considerable influence on British scientific discussions, particularly the debate about the possibility and extent of species change that took place between Geoffrey St. Hilaire and Georges Cuvier in the 1820s. As Phillip Sloan observes, the issues they raised were explored by Robert Grant, who taught Darwin, and Richard Owen, who dedicated lectures and publications to the topic in the mid-1840s (Sloan 3.1). Kingsley refers to Owen, along with T. H. Huxley, in *The Water-Babies*, where the narrator insists on the limits of both men's knowledge, stating that one would need to know 'a great deal more about nature' than either before being sure of 'what cannot be, or fancy[ing] that anything is too wonderful to be true' (Kingsley 1995, 42). This conceptual openness, linked to the fact that evolution was not fixed in its form or scope in mid-century, lays the groundwork for becoming-evolutionary to emerge.

34 Secondly, I would suggest that becoming-evolutionary requires a certain 'feverishness', which is registered in writing. Leonard Lawlor's article 'Following the Rats', which explores becoming-animal in order to articulate the possibility of developing a non-dominating relationship between humans and animals, helps explain this point. Lawlor notes that in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari focus on becoming-rat as an archetype of becoming-animal (an idea behind which lurks Freud's Rat Man). They draw particular attention, Lawlor observes, to including in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's (1874–1929) 'Lord Chandos Letter', written in the persona of a 17th-century English lord (Lawlor 179). Lawlor focuses on a comment that does not appear in Brian Massumi's translation of Deleuze and Guattari, where they state that Hofmannsthal's text depicts 'a composition of speeds and affects involving entirely different individuals, a symbiosis; it makes the rat a thought in [*dans*] the man, a feverish thought [*une pensée fiévreuse*], at the same time as the man becomes a rat, a rat who gnashes and is in agony' (Lawlor 179).⁷ Lord Chandos is said to receive a 'strange imperative', 'either stop writing, or write like a rat' (Deleuze and Guattari 265). Alton's dream, as I have shown, erupts out of pestilence, becoming a feverish thought that generates writing—Alton's own writing, which is recorded as part of his first-person narration of the novel.

35 But what exactly does it mean to write feverishly, like a rat? Glossing Deleuze and Guattari, and referring to the content of the Lord Chandos letter, in which a pack of rats are poisoned, Lawlor suggests that such writing 'would be a tale of the rat's struggle with death. Writing like a rat then would be to write in the style of agony, in the style of an "agon", a contest, or struggle, against death: "agon against all the deaths"' (Lawlor 181) (Lawlor is here quoting *What is Philosophy?* (1991)). As I have argued above, Alton's dream is a struggle against death, or a flight from death, in which death returns repeatedly, in different forms. In this sense it plays out as an alternative to Jem Downes's fate in the preceding chapter. Returning to Jem also allows us to see that Alton's dream is in fact linked to the rat, an animal which does not feature in the dream itself, but nonetheless haunts it as a negative presence. When Alton meets Jem, Jem appears 'quite demented' (329), and describes to Alton an imagined horde of rats, from which he must flee:

'The rats!—the rats! don't you see 'em coming out of the gully holes, atween the area railings—dozens and dozens?'

'No; I saw none'.

'You lie; I hear their tails whisking; there's their shiny hats a-glistening, and every one on 'em with peelers' staves! Quick! quick! or they'll have me to the station house'. (329)⁸

- 36 The rats represent the police of course, but they also represent a death that is terrifying because it is not single but overwhelmingly swarmlike, and which will soon catch Jem. Rats are also aligned with fever and pestilence, in their ability to penetrate everywhere, with Jem telling Alton 'the rats 'll get in at the roof, and up through the floor, and eat 'em all up, and my work too' (330). It is not clear what 'em' refers to here, but Alton's later observation that 'the rats had been busy already' (332) with the bodies of Jem's wife and children indicates that it is Jem's family which has been consumed. Jem's fear of rats takes the same form as his fear of fever, which he personifies: 'Day after day I saw the devils come up through the cracks, like little maggots and beetles, and all manner of ugly things, creeping down their throats; and I asked 'em, and they said they were the fever devils' (332). The rat and the fever are both swarms from which one must flee, and which cannot be distinguished from one another. In becoming feverish, then, Alton also becomes ratlike, and both influence the form of his writing. Becoming-evolutionary would be inseparable from such feverish, ratlike writing, and would draw on evolution not to generate a new molar identity, but to create a line of flight built from haecities, or assemblages, thereby producing, almost as a by-product, new fragile and temporary affinities with non-human creatures.

Conclusion

- 37 I will end by recalling that Alton Locke's goal throughout the novel is to produce a new kind of poetry. This is where the novel ends, with Eleanor telling Alton:

I have long hoped for a Tropic poet; one who should leave the routine imagery of European civilisation, its meagre scenery, and physically decrepit races, for the grandeur, the luxuriance, the infinite and strongly-marked variety of Tropic nature, the paradisiac beauty and simplicity of Tropic humanity. . . Go for me, and for the people. See if you cannot help to infuse some new blood into the aged veins of English literature. (384)

- 38 Eleanor summons a colonialist ideal of poetry, in which the English poet mines the authentic unsullied life of the Tropics to reinvigorate a decaying European tradition. She depicts this process as a form of infection, albeit a benign one, as the poet 'infuses new blood' into English literature. As it turns out, Alton is not able to achieve this goal, heading to Texas but dying soon after his arrival (389). It is in Chapter 36, therefore, that he comes closest to producing a new form of literature: one which is feverish, which takes on the characteristics of animals, which breaks the self apart even while rebuilding it, and which creatively plays out a struggle against death. Such a literature gestures towards, even if it does not wholly fulfil, the paradoxical possibility of becoming-evolutionary.

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Notes

1 The concept of the 'Great Chain of Being' derives from classical Greek thought, particularly Plato. It holds that all organisms are connected in a unified and hierarchical structure, which is ultimately sublimated under God or some form of 'Absolute', with humans positioned above all other beings. According to Phillip Sloan, attempts to move away from such hierarchical fixity began in the 1740s with Linnaeus (1707–78), but became particularly prominent in Britain in the 1830s–40s. See Sloan.

2 See Schmitt 24. For an overview of pre- and non-Darwinian theories of evolution, see Corsi.

3 Kingsley 1983, 331; 332. Further references to this edition are given in the main text by page number only.

4 Beer also links the passage to Chambers's 'scale of development'. (Beer 273).

5 Hamlin follows Charles Barker, Susan Chitty and J. M. I. Klaver here.

6 Though at the same time 'movement also "must" be perceived', an apparent contradiction Deleuze and Guattari resolve by referring to different planes, the 'plane of transcendence' and 'plane of consistency', on the former of which movement is merely a secondary attribute of objects, while on the latter, movement 'cannot but be perceived'. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 310, 311 (and generally 309–11).

7 The interpolations are Lawlor's. The relevant section of Massumi's version is Deleuze and Guattari 265.

8 Although rats do not feature in *Alton Locke*, they make an appearance in *Glaucus*, where Kingsley refers to a species of madrepore collected on 'Rat Island', near Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel. Rat Island appears to be a kind of evolutionary holdout, where 'still lingers the black long-tailed English rat, exterminated everywhere else by his sturdier brown cousin of the Hanoverian dynasty' (Kingsley 1859, 109). These rats, then, are also struggling against death. They seem to form a peculiar Deleuzian alliance with the madrepore, which is also 'by profession a scavenger' (Kingsley 1859, 108).

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