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Mr. Bones's Incredible Journey: Canine Travel and Homelessness in Paul Auster's "*Timbuktu*"

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Abstract
The US-American novelist Paul Auster's *Timbuktu* (1999) is written in the tradition of books, films and even the popular press about traveling dogs: *The Incredible Journey* (novel, 1961; film, 1963; film remake, as *Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey*, 1993), *White God* (film, 2014), and Pero, "the real-life Homeward Bound! Homesick sheepdog makes incredible 12-day 240-mile journey back to his original owner after running off from his new farmhouse" (news story, 2016). Like the dogs in these other narratives, Mr. Bones, the traveling dog in *Timbuktu*, has been rendered homeless, and throughout the novel he travels to find a new home. With reference to the several versions of *The Incredible Journey* and to *White God,* this paper will focus on the way canine travel is driven by homelessness in *Timbuktu*. But, as Mr. Bones thinks, is travel for homeless dogs in fact travel when they aren't "going anywhere, just traveling around in circles, lost in the limbo between one nowhere and the next" (89)? When his human companion and vagabond Willy G. Christmas was alive, Mr. Bones later muses in the novel, the years they spent on the road was, indeed, "travel." Through the perspective of Mr. Bones, Paul Auster speculates on what travel means for the homeless, both human but especially canine. As a philosophizing protagonist, Mr. Bones is, for sure, anthropomorphized, but, as Jutta Ittner argues, this is a "new anthropomorphism that views the animal as a separate and unknowable entity" (2006). Mr. Bones's final destination is "Timbuktu," which is what Willy G. Christmas called the "next world": "Where the map of this world ends," Willy told Mr. Bones, "that's where the map of Timbuktu begins" (48). Timbuktu, which has, for centuries, resonated as the most remote part of the world, is a fitting image for Giorgio Agamben's open, or the space shared by human and nonhuman animal consciousness. This paper will conclude with a consideration of this mental map.

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"I was no longer traveling, I realized. I was homeless"
Kyle Ellison, *Vagabond Tales*, 2013

The very title of Paul Auster's *Timbuktu* (1999) resonates of the far-away, the exotic, the inaccessible. Auster's short novel narrates the travels of the "outlaw poet" (16)[1], wordsmith, and punster Willy G. Christmas, and his dog, Mr. Bones, toward this mysterious—and final—destination. Timbuktu is Willy's name for the afterlife, which he describes as "an oasis of spirits'" (48). Willy, who, we learn in the first sentence, is not "long for this world" (3), reaches Timbuktu almost halfway into the novel. Mr. Bones, who is the witness to Willy's life and whose wry point of view structures the novel, reaches Timbuktu just after the novel ends.

Timbuktu as the afterlife is not the only destination. *Timbuktu* is about a search for homes. Willy dies in front of one of the houses where Edgar Allan Poe lived; Mr. Bones reports that "Willy had managed to get himself home again" (44). Willy tells Mr. Bones that they've "wound up in Poe-land" (45), the land of his "grandpa, the great forebear and daddy of all us Yankee scribes" (45) but also Poland, his mother country, or the "the same country [his] own dead ma was born in" (45). The United States in turn is Willy's parents' destination, who were fleeing Europe to escape the Nazis (13-14, 116, 120). At the beginning of the novel Willy and Mr. Bones have just finished their journey from New York to Baltimore, where Willy had hoped to locate his high school English teacher, Bea Swanson (7-9). Willy's plan was to entrust his life time's oeuvre, contained within 74 notebooks (9, 70), and his beloved dog, to Bea's care (8). But having failed to find Bea, Willy instead, as he tells Mr. Bones, has come to Baltimore to "give his swan song" (65), his own pun on Mrs. Swanson's name. Mr. Bones is then left on his own to find a home, and the second half of the novel depicts him in his quest and in the temporary homes where he finds himself: first with the ten-year-old Henry Chow (99) in Baltimore (97-113) and second with the four-person "nuclear" family in suburban Virginia, the Joneses (121-73).

This search for homes – for Poe-land and Poland, for the United States, for Baltimore and Bea Swanson, for caretaker and family – is driven by a fear of homelessness. Homelessness itself is depicted as not "going anywhere,

[1] All references are to *Timbuktu* unless otherwise indicated.

just traveling around in circles, lost in the limbo between one nowhere and the next" (89). In contrast to the seemingly pointless wandering that marks homelessness is the purposefulness of travel. Travel itself means not just movement toward a destination but also movement away from a point of origin – which is the anchor, of course, that the homeless lack. In my essay I show how *Timbuktu* represents both travel and wandering – and how it is in this distinction that we see the position of the canine within a human-dominated social structure that grants humans decision-making power. It would seem, in the novel, that travel is a choice available to humans and that aimless wandering is a fate inflicted upon canines. However, we also see humans wandering, and dogs traveling. As subaltern creatures, dogs on the move are also shown to inhabit the same plane as subaltern humans, especially those who are forced to migrate. Along with exploring the many ways that Auster complicates questions of interspecies travel – in terms of its distinction from wandering, its similarity to wandering, and its relationship to migration – I address how Auster ties the question of homelessness, travel, and interspecies relationships to language. When Willy dies, Mr. Bones, who cannot talk, is unable to find a secure and lasting home – until, that is, he purposefully travels to Timbuktu where, Willy tells Mr. Bones, "dogs would be able to speak man's language and converse with him as an equal" (49). Timbuktu, then, is not just a destination, but a place where humans and animals truly become fellow companions who can converse with one another.

Travel

Much like Willy's unfinished epic *Vagabond Days* (9, 70), *Timbuktu* is a kind of travel book, starting from the first scene, where we see Willy and Mr. Bones "wandering around the streets of Baltimore without a map, looking for an address that might or might not exist" (8) – that is, Bea Swanson's house. Early on in the novel we are told that it may be located on 316 Calvert Street (7), though Bea may no longer live there. In any event, Willy and Mr. Bones do not reach their destination, though, tragically, they are not far from it. If one consults a city map, one can see that the pair arrives less than two miles away from their goal; Willy collapses at 203 North Amity Street, where Poe had lived, according to a placard outside the house, from 1832 to 1835 (44)[2]. This early scene of meandering sets the stage for the travels to follow; as Steven G. Kellman writes, the "entire novel is an interrogation into road directions" (9).

[2] In fact, Poe lived there with his family from 1833 to 1835 ("Poe Baltimore").

In addition to their portraying their failed quest, the book includes an occasional series of brief flashbacks – to prior travels, when Willy fully embraced "his career of vagabondage", and he and his dog too were a pair of picaresque heroes (26). Willy (and his name itself) may be an echo of Jack Wilton, the picaresque hero of Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), which, Auster said in a 1999 interview, is one of his "very favorite books" ("Q&A with Paul Auster")[3]. The travels these two *picaros* undertook, Mr. Bones thinks, are to be distinguished from the "vacation" the Joneses, his third family, plan to take to Disneyland. Vacation, he thinks, has "nothing to do with the idea of travel" (160):

> He simply couldn't understand why people would want to travel hundreds of miles just to see a pretend mouse. There might not have been many advantages to living with Willy, but no one could accuse Mr. Bones of not having traveled. He had been everywhere, and in his time he had seen just about everything. It wasn't for him to say, of course, but if the Joneses were looking for an interesting place to visit, all they had to do was ask, and he happily would have led them to any one of a dozen lovely spots. (162)

For the "canine rambler" (Kellman 11) Mr. Bones, true travel is marked by adventurousness, and in that first scene in the novel, as he and Willy are trudging around Baltimore, Mr. Bones wishes he could envision those happy and erotic times – for example, in Albuquerque, where they spent a "blissful sojourn in that abandoned bed factory two years ago"; or outside Iowa City, where he – Mr. Bones – had romped with "Greta, the voluptuous she-hound… running in a cornfield"; or in Berkeley, where, one "nutty afternoon… Willy had sold eighty-six Xeroxed copies of a single poem on Telegraph Avenue for a dollar apiece" (31). And the memories of their time on the road continue – in Denver, Chicago, Tampa, Tucson:

> he had only to hear the word *Denver* now for Wanda's laugh to start ringing in his ears again. That was *Denver* for him, just as *Chicago* was a bus splashing through a rain puddle on Michigan Avenue. Just as *Tampa* was a wall of light shimmering up from the asphalt one August afternoon. Just as *Tucson* was a hot wind blowing off the desert, bearing with it the scent of juniper leaves and sagebrush, the sudden, unearthly plenitude of vacant air. (32)

As Jopi Nyman writes, here we see how Mr. Bones, as a dog, constructs his travels not just through memories but also through his senses – here, through sound, touch, sight, and scent (Nyman 162). This emphasis signals

[3] Indeed, *Timbuktu* partakes of a long literary history of traveling rogue literature like *The Unfortunate Traveller* that predates the rise of the modern novel; see Woodbridge.

to the reader that here we have a dog's-eye vantage, and one that, as Steven G. Kellman writes, "defamiliarizes even an ordinary city street" (4). Even without this defamiliarization, though, the mere presence of a dog, as Małgorzata Rutkowska writes about dogs in contemporary American travel writing, allows authors "to juxtapose the human and animal worlds" (134), and, I would add, blur them. As Joseph Anderton writes, "In acting as a witness and filter for both human *and* canine characters, the narrator enacts an equivalence that reflects their equal narrative status" (285).

As happy as these canine memories are, memories that, the reader imagines, must resemble Willy's own reminiscences of those days, Mr. Bones's mind instead keeps "going back to the Brooklyn apartment, to the languors of those cold-weather confinements, to *Mom-san* padding around the rooms in her fluffy white slippers" (32). Why does Mr. Bones "hark back to Mrs. Gurevitch" when, he knows full well, "there were so many fuller and more buoyant memories to contemplate?" (31). Because, as dreary as those tedious Brooklyn winters were, they constituted home. They were where, during their life of travel, Mr. Bones and Willy spent half the year, from November through mid-April. It was the confinement and dreariness of home that drove the picaresque travels that took place the other half of the year. Mrs. Gurevitch had died four years before Mr. Bones and Willy landed in Baltimore, and with her death, dog and man lost the apartment too. Having arrived in Baltimore, both Willy and Mr. Bones have become strays. Thus it is, as they are seeking a new home, that Mr. Bones is stricken with homesickness – and nostalgia.

Back in the glory days of their old life, Mr. Bones thinks, they had options, including the choice to participate in the "spirit of the age" (26). The "historical moment, the times themselves, the spirit abroad in the land" (26) called forth travel, and so the "country was crawling with dropouts and runaway children, with long-haired neo-visionaries, dysfunctional anarchists, and doped-up misfits" (26). As a young man from a middle-class background, Willy too could choose this option, and so he did. In her dissertation Julie Hammond explores the literary *zeitgeist* in which Willy participates: "The postmodern socioeconomic climate produced a well-documented sense of metaphoric homelessness among the privileged classes, a feeling articulated in a wide-variety of popular stories, but perhaps most quintessentially in postmodern narratives of the road and the American West" (iv). These narratives, she writes, "performed the crucial cultural work of helping the privileged classes establish a sense of home within the 'unhomed' postmodern world" (iv–v). For Martin Heidegger, homelessness is an even broader condition; it is the essence of modernity, "the destiny of the world" – of the human being who "stumbles aimlessly about" (258).

Willy was at home stumbling aimlessly about an unhomed postmodern – or modern – world: "For all the oddness he demonstrated in his own right, Willy hardly stood out among them. He was just one more weirdo on the Amerikan scene, and wherever his travels happened to take him – be it Pittsburgh or Plattsburgh, Pocatello or Boca Raton – he managed to latch on to like-minded souls for company" (26). Willy's ramblings are a form of rebellion against America – the use of "Amerika" is, of course, a holdover from the 1960s and 1970s, and was intended as an implied critique of the United States as a Naziesque state; and his use of the literary device of *adnominatio* (PittsburghàPlattsburgh, PocatelloàBoca Raton) further demonstrates his punning but also how easily these cities from across the country blurred together and reflected the same *zeitgeist*. In their nomadic, free-ranging states, Willy and his like-minded compadres, both human and canine, lived lives as outlaws[4].

What also added to Willy's misfit status, though, was his identity not just as a postmodern (or, according to Heidegger, modern) subject, but as a Jewish man. Here the idea of choice becomes a little more problematic. As the son of parents who escaped the Holocaust – of parents who were, for a time, Wandering Jews – Willy becomes, himself, a Wandering Jew. According to legend, the Wandering Jew, often embodied in the figure of Ahasuerus, was doomed to wander, lifelong, for insulting Jesus while he was on the cross. In the novel there is a suggestion that Willy, by virtue of his identity, was compelled to wander – and not just wander but also suffer. According to legend, the Wandering Jew "mirrors Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection" (Steinitz 164).

Willy does undertake Jesus's suffering, though one is reminded of one of Marx's most oft-quoted remarks on history: it appears the "first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." Willy becomes an incarnation not of Jesus, but of Santa Claus. In December 1969, when he was 22, Willy was watching TV late at night, when Santa Claus appeared on the screen and convinced him to:

> embody the message of Christmas every day of the year, to ask nothing from the world and give it only love in return. In other words, Willy decided to turn himself into a saint. And so it happened that William Gurevitch concluded his business on this earth, and from his flesh a new man named Willy G. Christmas was born. (21)

And for the second half of his life, Willy tries, mostly successfully, to embody the message of Christmas. "Even if Willy didn't always live up to his

[4] See Auster's interview, where he says, "Willy is a character who has set himself up in opposition to the dominant trends in American life.

expectations for himself," Mr. Bones tells us, "at least he had a model for how he wanted to behave" (25)[5]. Even after the "runaways had crawled back home to mom and dad," and "the potheads had traded in their love beads for paisley ties," Willy "was still Willy, the boffo rhymester and self-appointed bearer of Santa's message, your basic sorry excuse rigged out in the filthy duds of tramphood" (27). As the hippie *zeitgeist* slid into consumerism, Willy's life became its antithesis; he continued to rail against its "perils" (64).

But he paid the price: "The passage of time had not treated the poet kindly, and he didn't blend in so well anymore… Strangers robbed him and beat him up. They kicked him while he slept, they set his books on fire, they took advantage of his aches and pains" (27). Willy risked his life on multiple occasions to save the young – rescuing a four-year-old girl from drowning – and the old – preventing an eighty-one-year-old man from being mugged (25), though at great cost to himself; e.g., getting stabbed and shot. His life was marked by such actions all the way through, up until the very end, when he gave away the $10,000 (60) his mother left to him when she died. As part of his swan song, Willy tells Mr. Bones:

> Buck the buck, that's what I did. It was my one chance to put up or shut up, to prove to myself that I meant what I'd been saying all those years, and so when the dough came in I didn't hesitate… I might have fucked myself in the process, but… I walked the plank. I went the whole distance. (61)

Homelessness

With the repetition of "I" here, one can see some ego, and perhaps even some braggadocio – and certainly a realization that he made the choice. Willy chose to walk the plank-a plank that led to the life of true homelessness, with its "bad grub, … lack of shelter, … hard knocks" (61), all of which took their toll, turning Willy into a very sick man and Mr. Bones into an orphan (61). Mr. Bones, like many homeless humans, and like almost all homeless dogs, did not choose his fate. In the course of Mr. Bones's life, we see that if homelessness can be grueling for people, it is unbearable for dogs. For Mr. Bones, homelessness is "pure ontological terror" (4), striking at the very heart of being. Without Willy, without the sense of home he provides, Mr. Bones anticipates utter annihilation: "A dog alone was no better than a dead dog" (4; see

[5] In his interview, Auster continues, Willy has "made himself an outsider on purpose. His thinking has been formed by the experiences of his parents, who lived through the holocaust, by a certain kind of 60s radicalism, which he never really abandons, and by a philosophical position of purity, generosity, and self sacrifice – ideals that he's not always able to live up to, but which he firmly believes in."

also 94). "Subtract Willy from the world," he thinks, "and the odds were that the world would cease to exist" (4). Even though, as he embarks on his new life, Mr. Bones learns later that the world does continue – "it had already dawned on him that the world wasn't going to end" (85) – and though his future is not as "bleak" (69) as he had feared it would be, it is "uncertain" (69) and it is certainly precarious.

Georg Zipp writes that, in John Berger's *King: A Street Story*, another novel about homeless people and homeless dogs, that "those deemed 'evil' in Berger's novel are the precarious homeless" (Zipp 168), and that is true of the canine homeless in *Timbuktu* as well[6]. With the death of Willy, Mr. Bones is immediately tagged as an outlaw; he is forced to flee the police (67). As he was nearing the end of his days, Willy had prepared him for this important canine life lesson so that:

> Mr. Bones knew the drill by heart: how to avoid the dogcatchers and constables, the paddy wagons and unmarked cars, the hypocrites from the so-called humane societies. No matter how sweetly they talked to you, the word *shelter* meant trouble. It would begin with nets and tranquilizers guns, devolve into a nightmare of cages and fluorescent lights. (5)

Mr. Bones next faces food insecurity wherever he goes – true precarity. His very name suggests that he is living "close to the bone." He does not know where his next meal is coming from; "his peevish brooding over missed opportunities gave way to an all-out search for grub" (87). In his search for "grub" (87), "Willy's lessons had sunk in. A stray dog is nobody's friend" (88), and if he made a nuisance of himself in front of the wrong person, he'd be carted off to the pound – the place from which no dog ever returned" (88). Stray dogs do not have a place in society. As a dog attached to a human, he fit into the human-ordained order. But, "[n]ow that Willy was gone, he would have to unlearn everything he knew and start all over again" (88).

He recalls how, in his life with Willy, he saw homeless dogs:

> but he had never felt anything but pity for them – pity, and a touch of disdain. The loneliness of their lives was too brutal to contemplate, and he had always kept himself at a safe distance, wary of the ticks and fleas hidden in their fur, reluctant to get too close to them for fear that the diseases and desperation they carried would rub off on him… [H]e could always recognize one

[6] Scholars have also studied the discourse of homelessness in journalism, popular media, and official venues; the homeless are invariably represented as the "other" (Schneider 80); they are stigmatized as disorderly, non-persons, disruptive, helpless, and riddled with pathologies (Middleton 322; see also Schneider and Remillard); and they are portrayed as vagabonds, hobos, and itinerants (Rogers and Marshall 725).

> of those abject creatures from a hundred yards away. They moved differently from other dogs, gliding along with that grim mendicant's lope of theirs, the tail cocked between their legs at quarter-mast, cantering down the avenues as if they were late for an appointment somewhere – when in fact they weren't going anywhere, just traveling around in circles, lost in the limbo between one nowhere and the next. (88-89)

And now, "Mr. Bones discovered that he was moving just like that himself… [A]lready he was one of them" (89). He exudes the stigma of homelessness; he has become abject, a beggar, whose very existence seems pointless; he is going nowhere. In his attempts to go anywhere he faces difficulties. When, he first tries to cross a street he is nearly hit by a motorist who adds insult to injury by yelling at him, and he feels "the sting of the insult" (90). He compounds his shame and humiliation by unsuccessfully trying to catch a bird to eat: "He had disgraced himself, and even though he tried not to dwell on what had happened, he couldn't escape the feeling that he was old and washed up, a has-been" (93). He has preternaturally aged, and become much like Willy himself at the end of his life.

Post-Willy, in his first encounter with humans, he further learns how vulnerable he is when he is kicked by a boy (96). Mr. Bones has his first experience of what it means to be treated like an outsider. After he vows not to fall in with boys again, he allows himself to be taken in by one, Henry Chow (97 ff), who is in fact kind – but who also has to hide him from his father, the owner of a Chinese restaurant. Playing into the urban myth that Chinese restauranteurs round up, kill, and cook stray dogs, Willy had warned Mr. Bones to "keep a wide berth" (6) of Chinese restaurants, because, he said:

> if you think mouths won't water when you come strolling by, then you don't know squat about Oriental cuisine. They prize the taste of dog, friend. The chefs round up strays and slaughter them in the alley right behind the kitchen – ten-twenty, thirty dogs a week. They might pass them off as ducks and pigs on the menu, but the in-crowd knows what's next, the gourmets aren't fooled for a second. Unless you want to wind up in a platter of moo goo gai pan, you'll think twice before you wag your tail in front of one of those Chink beaneries… Know thine enemy – and then keep a wide berth. (5-6)

One can see here how Willy participates in, as Frank Wu writes, an "international urban legend with some truth to it" (40). Anita Durkin notes the irony of Willy's perpetuation of this stereotype of the Chinese as dog-eaters (Durkin 64). Henry Chow may be able to trace his roots three or four generations in the United States, but given that his family owns a Chinese restaurant and lives above it, the Chows are representative of the story of Chinese in the United States. Starting with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Chinese

were forbidden from becoming laborers, and so many opened up restaurants as a way of bypassing harsh restrictions in US labor laws (Lee npg). That is to say, the Chows are immigrants much like Willy's own parents the Gurevitches; both groups did not fit in (Willy calls his parents "alien, wholly embarrassing creatures, a pair of sore thumbs with their Polish accents and stilted foreign ways" [14]) and both have been ostracized.

Durkin makes the case that Mr. Bones recapitulates the immigrant experience in his own travels: "Much of Mr. Bones' experience throughout the novel allies him with the immigrant experience so central to his master's family, running parallel as it does to narratives of ethnic and racial oppression" (Durkin 65). That experience is marked by homelessness, and in the case of immigrants, by the homelessness that results from being displaced from one's home because of economic hardship or the threat to one's very existence[7]. But the destination does not provide the security and stability – the essential quality of a home. Danger and uncertainty ever lurk. At the Chows' residence, Henry hides Mr. Bones in the backyard, and, significantly, in a cardboard box, the portable and flimsy home associated with people who live on the street, and, too, in this case, similar to the containers for take-out Chinese food. Within a short time, Mr. Bones is discovered by Henry's father and he decides that:

> he would have to get out of Baltimore. All bad things lived in this city. It was a place of death and despair, of dog-haters and Chinese restaurants… The cardboard box no doubt had something to do with it. The nights he'd spent in there had been almost unendurable, and what good was a home if you didn't feel safe in it, if you were treated as an outcast in the very spot that was supposed to be your refuge? (112)

Mr. Bones bolts from the Chows and flees for three days (114). In his flight he has an imaginary conversation with Willy, and tells him that most men "wouldn't think twice about loading up their shotguns the moment a four-leg sets foot on their land… They'll kill you just for breathing…" (119). To be homeless is to be not just an outlaw, but in mortal danger. Mr. Bones imagines Willy replying that Mrs. Gurevitch also risked death in her flight:

> They hunted her down like a dog, and she had to run for her life. People get treated like dogs, too, my friend, and sometimes they have to sleep in barns and meadows because there's nowhere else for them to go… [J]ust remember that you're not the first dog who's ever been lost. (120)

[7] See Suleiman, who writes specifically about the way that Holocaust memoirs are themselves "homeless" (401).

As we see people get hunted down like dogs, and, here, with dogs running for their lives, we are reminded that displaced humans and dogs alike share the same plane. Nyman notes that "the representation of the dog as a migrant is used to narrate a story of in-betweenness where fixed, binary definitions are questioned" (162). Even before his second displacement Mr. Bones had been identified as an immigrant by virtue of language. After he comes to understand Willy, Mr. Bones's "grasp of Ingloosh was as good as any other immigrant who had spent seven years on American soil" (6). "Ingloosh" here makes us think of Chinglish or Spanglish or any of the other portmanteau interlanguages, and it becomes, in the novel, the language of the subaltern, on whose behalf, one might say, Mr. Bones speaks.

After this imaginary conversation Mr. Bones has with Willy while he is on the run from the Chows' house in Baltimore, he finds himself at the house of the Joneses, a white middle-class suburban family with two parents and two children, a boy nicknamed Tiger and a girl named Alice. All that is missing to complete the classic Dick and Jane picture is a dog, and so, it would seem, Mr. Bones fills the spot. But even within this model family Mr. Bones's position is not secure. Like other migrants who seek to be integrated into their new communities, he must assimilate. We see that the process of assimilation involves some loss of identity, starting with one's name. Mr. Bones is renamed Cal by Henry Chow (107–08) and then Sparky by Alice Jones (132). But the change he undergoes at the Joneses' is more significant than being renamed; at the groomer's he is "dandified, turned into a bourgeois dog-about-town" (142) and neutered (144–48). Even as Mr. Bones grows to love Mrs. Jones and the children (151), and even as he becomes "exceedingly fond" of the lawn (150) that shapes the perimeter of his life, he is nonetheless bound to it by a chain and forced to sleep in a dog house. While an improvement, perhaps, over a cardboard box, Mr. Bones understands he is as imprisoned by his circumstances as much as Mrs. Jones is imprisoned in her marriage by the controlling Mr. Jones (153). Mr. Bones's life at the Joneses may be comfortable, but at the same time it is similar to being an inmate locked in a jail:

> They had turned him into a prisoner. They had chained him to this infernal bouncing wire, this metallic torture device with its incessant squeaks and echoing hums, and every time he moved, the noises moved with him – as if to remind him that he was no longer free, that he had sold his birthright for a mess of porridge and an ugly, ready-made house. (140)

Earlier Willy had warned Mr. Bones to beware of the police ("'Don't let them catch you'" [67]); homelessness is a crime, and capture means imprisonment, which, for dogs, leads to the pound and likely as not, to death.

Mr. Bones runs the full gamut of a dog who lives life on the streets: initially, with Willy, one of adventure, but following Willy's death, one of undergoing precarity and uncertainty, of being stigmatized as a criminal and immigrant, and of being forced to undergo assimilation and imprisonment. Durkin explains how, in leaving Poland, Willy's parents have experienced "a kind of death," and so their life in Brooklyn is a "posthumous" one. "[T]o leave a place is to die," Durkin writes," "even when emigration is meant to preserve one's life" (63). In his own assimilation, Mr. Bones, who renounces his vagabond life with Willy, also lives a posthumous life as a suburbanized homebody.

But even this seemingly secure life with the Joneses does not prove to be any more stable than Mr. Bones's previous lives. Wherever Mr. Bones goes, he is not safe – not with a man who adores as his soulmate, not with a boy who is smitten with his canine buddy, and not with a woman who regards him as her beloved confidante. When the Joneses decide to leave Mr. Bones behind them when they take their family vacation, he comes to see the limits of their love. For two weeks Mr. Bones is to stay at Dog Haven, hardly, Mr. Bones realizes, a "Sing Sing or Devil's Island" (164), but a kennel nevertheless. Even as he comes to adjust to his temporary home, to the awareness that "[s]omething [is] seriously wrong with him" (165; he may be developing cancer), and to a vision that Willy may be taunting him for his bourgeois life with the Joneses (169–71), Mr. Bones is willing to carry on living: "There was much to be thankful for, and much life still to be lived" (169).

Resolution: Timbuktu

But then, when he realizes he is to return to the vet who was the means of turning him into a "eunuch," (148), Mr. Bones breaks free from the kennel. After his circumscribed stay at the Joneses, which was, however benign, a form of imprisonment, he resumes agency in his life by heading to his final destination, Timbuktu. More literally, he decides to end his life by playing the canine "venerable, time-honored sport" of "dodge-the-car" (180) on a "six-lane superhighway" (179). Just before he reaches the highway he experiences a sense of oneness with all creatures – a revelation akin to the mariner's blessing of the water snakes in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*[8]. Mr. Bones, who had earlier scorned birds as "useless featherbrains," feels "a small ache of sympathy flutter inside him." He can now regard them "as fellow creatures, members of the secret brotherhood" (178). He next makes his way to the

[8] O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware. (282-85)

highway, which presents itself to him "as a spectacle of pure radiance, a field of overpowering light" (179).

His homelessness – what Freud calls *umheimlichkeit* – has enabled this spectacle, this revelation, or *unheimlich*. If *umheimlichkeit* means homelessness, *unheimlich* means uncanny, strange. Writes Freud, "The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning 'familiar,' 'native,' 'belonging to the home'; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar" (2). It is this uncanny revelation, as Louis Blond writes about work of the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, that "shatters the harmony between human and world and places humanity under duress" (27, 28)[9]. In *Timbuktu*, we see how Mr. Bones experiences this transcendent vision just as he is about to break with the world; he is at, to cite Judith Butler, "the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know" (151). He looks at a six-lane superhighway, "which presented itself… as a spectacle of pure radiance, a field of overpowering light" (179). He is about to enter Timbuktu, "exactly what he had been hoping for" (179): a "land of words… where dogs talked as equals with men" (180).

In Willy's canine-based theology, "Just turn around the letters of the word *dog*, and what did you have? The truth, that's what" (35). Yes, Mr. Bones is "a pure example of *Canis familiaris*," but he is also an "angel come down to earth in the form of a dog" (35). Georg Zipp argues that animals, as the intermediaries between the real and the metaphysical (180), are in a position to understand and communicate truths. As a nonhuman animal he cannot use human language in the world of the novel. However, within the pages of the book we see how a writer like Paul Auster attempts to capture his inner life, but also, "a territory that transcends animal and human existence" (Ittner npg). If Timbuktu is the place where dogs and men can speak, the *novel Timbuktu* is a space that attempts to capture this cultural imaginary through the perspective of a dog. As a novel "narrated by a voice that cannot truly speak, from a vantage point beyond earthly communication," *Timbuktu* "acknowledges and defies the imperatives of the ineffable" (Kellman 6). The homelessness that causes both man and dog to suffer and to wander also drives them to travel to a place where they truly communicate as equals.

[9] See also John Neubauer on Lukac's "transcendental homelessness" (532); and Georg Gulgelberger, who, writing about the novels of J. M. Coetzee, announces a "new thematics" in "the writing about the homeless, the UNCANNY in relation to the homed, secure, fixed, stable" (132).

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