

## 10. *Mes bêtes sauvages*

I remember the coming revolution a bit differently. The beasts I knew when I was young, the ones I hope to see again, were not savage but ‘wild,’ and the squirrel – she was always naturally an aristocrat, red ribbon or no. It’s not about social class, ideology, not even the superego, but an older, Greeker notion of the good, opened up to name a set whose contents are not determined in advance. Whose shade would you like to have lived in? What, in yourself, would you prefer to have been haunted by? The word ‘aristocrat’ was born in 1789 and hasn’t gone out of date yet. Only it’s not about genealogy. It’s about who we want to follow. Stoat in a red hat tries to loom over, take up a dominant position. His shadow bounces harmlessly off the wall. *Skiagraphia*. Shadow-writing or shadow-painting. Stoats don’t like words, unless they can use them like sawn-off branches to stand on and make themselves look big. They don’t care to go sniffing after signifiers as if they were fellow living creatures, nor do they cultivate grace in flight. They don’t read. Not even Marx. They don’t avail themselves of those ‘circumstances transmitted from the past’ that pertain to texts. They aren’t that into writing, preferring to make a mark in other ways. Squirrel sits in the shadow of ... not the guillotine ... not the stoat ... she lives in the shadow of nothing but her own tail. Her name was once *skiouros*, ‘shadow-tailed,’ from *skia*, ‘shadow’ (though it also means ‘spectre,’ as in the dual meaning of modern English ‘shade’) and *oura* ‘tail,’ from an Indo-European root *\*ors*, meaning ‘buttocks, or backside’ (the same root gives us Anglo-Saxon ‘arse’.) So the squirrel is capable of *skiagraphia*. It’s true that her nut-shaped head and her sharply bright little eyes are involved, but she writes thanks to that pretty but undeniably backside tail. People sit down to write; she does the same thing differently. She has a nut - just one: no more than she can carry in one paw. Not everyone can crack a nutshell. She will secrete this one. Bury it and immediately forget where she left it. Hardly the great accumulator. So many trees owe their flourishing to her anonymous squirrelling and preserving! When she climbs and plays up in the branches, up at the top, down on the ground, tree to tree like a free runner (best done where squirrels are not stuffed and mounted and where branches are left uncut): her movements are like writing in the air, like Picasso making his signature with a sparkler but far more extensive. Her movements, or is there another one – they follow each other so closely, so quickly sometimes – are improbably fast. She is absolutely, entirely committed to the curves, loops and leaps of an appearing-disappearing movement that has only the barest relation to gravity. At rest, if you can call it that, her eyes look off to the side. Stoat has a red hat, showy accessory for a season, not too far from a crown, a city bowler, a judge’s wig. Squirrel has a red coat. She can text with her little hands. She can climb ‘up and down horizontally’ like Derrida in his attic full of books. She will not be parted from her body until death: but where is she? Is she really where we see her?

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