

Winona Meridian Marks

And Now, a Word from *Odobenus rosmarus*

SCENE: Inside a police helicopter. Two PIGS (*Sus domesticus*) sit across from one another; one of them is holding a queer literary magazine.

PIG 1

...Taxonomy? Isn't that the thing where you take what was once a living creature, vacuum out its guts and replace them with sawdust, glass the eyes with sealing wax, slather the hide in precious oil, mount it on the wall and call it a hunting trophy? My dad had one of those.

PIG 2

No, dear. That's taxidermy. Taxonomy is inevitable, like death, like April showers, like flowers or late fees in May. Taxonomy is certain, even when nothing else is: like discourse, like human sciences, like settlers, like kings. It's the structural imposition of signs upon beasts such as ourselves, and the extraction thereby of resources that can be used in turn to fuel the project of statecraft.

PIG 1

My brother in Christ, you're thinking of taxation. Here, I looked it up on my phone. Taxonomy is when all the peculiar qualities of an object are sublimated away into abstract quantities, so that it can be compared with other, formally incommensurable objects. For example, a friendly cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) demands inclusion by means of a rather more impersonal label, like \$2.72.

PIG 2

I'm sure you've pulled up the wrong page. Would a rose suspended in formaldehyde smell like anything at all? No, my love. What you're describing is representation, but it's true there can be no taxidermy without it. Just ask the residents of the District of Columbia.

PIG 1

I would, but to tell you the truth, I doubt I could find it on a map. Say, where are we, anyway?

NARRATOR

It was at that very moment that the sea began to boil over.