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A Rat-Shaped Tear

and

Beyond the Other: Animals in the Poetry of  
D.H. Lawrence, Elizabeth Bishop and  
Marianne Moore

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PhD in Creative Writing  
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## Declaration

This thesis has been composed entirely by the student, and the work is entirely their own. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

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## Acknowledgements

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## Abstracts

The poems in *A Rat-Shaped Tear* consider wide-ranging ideas of otherness using character and voice. Through misdirection, understatement and unexpected imagery I confront ideas of animal and female otherness in playful ways as a means of subverting traditional impressions of both. The othering effects of grief are also examined in poems that reflect on bereavement and mortality. Human-animal interaction is used to further explore the effects of death and disappointment, though overtones of cartoonish extravagance, dark humour and the surreal temper the more serious themes of loss, disillusionment and loneliness that recur within the collection.

In the accompanying thesis, I focus on the work of three poets – D.H Lawrence, Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop – each of whom confront animal otherness in their work. Through close examinations of their individual works, I explore the differences in approach to human-animal interaction, and the ways in which these poets draw meaning from animal otherness. It is suggested that although they engage with the concept using varied poetic techniques, they are drawn together by the intimations of spiritual transcendence that permeate each of their animal poetics.

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# A Rat-Shaped Tear

Marianne MacRae

Beyond the Other: Animals in the  
Poetry of D.H. Lawrence, Elizabeth  
Bishop and Marianne Moore

## Preface

Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence notes in her 1994 paper 'Seeing in Nature What is Ours', that "our bond with animals emanates partly from the deep levels of our consciousness, originating from the same kind of experience as myth, folklore, and poetry, whose languages are symbolic" (52). She suggests that poetry can bridge the gap between animals and a humanity that has become disconnected from its natural roots. She states that "[b]ecause of its unparalleled ability to move the human heart in terms that it best understands, poetry can play a forceful role in ... awakening a deeper appreciation of the non-human realm" (52).

The creative and critical elements of my PhD both explore ideas of animal otherness in poetry. This analysis examines how D.H. Lawrence, Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore communicate animal otherness in their work. While my poetry is stylistically quite different from these three writers, there are several thematic crossovers. Animal characters have always been central to my creative work, but within *A Rat-Shaped Tear* I have endeavoured to engage more broadly with the subject of animal otherness and to re-evaluate how humans and animals can interact in poems.

I am very interested in the use of animal speech and the effects this can have on human-animal relationships. However, as Ursula Le Guin pointed out in her introduction to *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*, much talking animal literature has been relegated to the genre of "kiddilit". She suggests that

"[b]y climbing up into his head and shutting out every voice but his own, 'Civilised Man' has gone deaf" (10). While my talking animals are often intentionally cartoonish and/or amusing, I hope to undermine the idea that animal speech is "childish", "empty" or "irrelevant". My initial research into Marianne Moore was primarily concerned with her use of animal narrators, and from this I began to consider other poets who give voice to animals. I studied Jo Shapcott's *Phrase Book*, Les Murray's *Translations from the Natural World*, and the work of Ted Hughes, focussing particularly on *Crow*. I also spent time revisiting the work of Luke Kennard, whose 'Wolf' character inspired my interest in humorous animal speakers several years prior to the start of this project.

I employ elements of humour, cartoon and surrealism throughout my work to offer exaggerations of human-animal relationships and to subvert the more serious issues that underlie them. For example, my poems 'Commute' and 'Scene Looping' use direct references to popular cartoons, applying animated violence to real world situations as a means of confronting death and depression. Similarly, 'Illuminations' and 'On Trusting' describe slightly more light-hearted impressions of cartoonish animals, while still intimating ideas of loneliness. In my series of talking dog poems ('Beatitude', 'Transmutation' and 'Loyalty'), I use the dog character to undermine anthropocentrism by placing the human narrator at a consistent disadvantage against him. These poems offer the dog a subjectivity of his own (albeit with comedic overtones). He is portrayed as a more enlightened being in a reversal of the traditional pet-

owner relationship. The role of master here belongs to the dog, as the narrator is positioned as intellectually subordinate to him. 'Of an Equitable Disposition', 'Stochastic Models' and 'Caterpillar' also reposition the human character to suggest there is more to the animal other and nonhuman nature than we can presume to know, even when we engage in direct conversation with it.

The unknowability of nature is explored throughout my analyses of Lawrence, Bishop and Moore, and this often leads to questions of mortality and the otherness of death. In my reading I was particularly drawn to the constant undercurrent of death throughout Bishop's work, and found in her poetic communion with animals a neatly restrained sadness. This led me to consider the ways in which animal otherness can be used to imply divine or ethereal otherness, where an animal encounter reasserts our unfulfillable lack of knowledge about why we are here and what happens after death.

Within my own work there are numerous examples of poems that deal with the othering effects of grief. In poems such as 'Apnoea', 'Fox' and 'The Time Alex and I Almost Walked Through a Split Open Rat', I have attempted to combine impressions of mortality with animal otherness to suggest that death can be both a loss and an affirmation of life. Similarly, in 'The Minus Owl', I have constructed a conversation with an owl to consider the ways in which we process grief. The owl acts as a "therapist" of sorts; it comes from a place beyond our human comprehension of life, therefore acting as a neutral agent of both life and death. The questions asked of the narrator force a re-evaluation of their situation each time they are visited by the owl. The bird's presence

serves as a reminder of an essential vitality that seeks to prove life can continue after loss/death. Similar themes occur in 'Baluchistan Pygmy Jerboa', 'because I did not want to stay indoors' and 'This is not a working day', where the "white worms" symbolise the cyclical processes of life and death.

I believe that a respectful repositioning of animals within creative works can facilitate a reconsideration of the human effect on their lives. Despite a generational increase in our academic and scientific understanding of the ecological crisis, little is changing in order to slow the human destruction of nature. In 2002, Paul Crutzen popularised the terming of the current era as the 'Anthropocene', detailing the numerous ways in which humans have negatively influenced the global environment (see 'Geology of Mankind', 2002). Our climate is changing, the rainforests have been irrevocably devastated and many species of plant and animal face extinction at the hands of humanity. The effects of industrial growth, large-scale farming and the rise of capitalism have ravaged many animal habitats.

Scott Knickerbocker suggests that "[w]hile the political impact poetry has on the world is easily overblown ... the general motive of ecocriticism to direct our attention towards the phenomenal world is compelling" (*Ecopoetics* 3). By engaging with animal otherness writers and their audiences can open a gateway into empathy, decentralising the human to encourage a more inclusive, ecological outlook. These narratives broaden our understanding of the natural world, while at the same time allowing us to consider the idea of the human, the self, more objectively. Though D.H. Lawrence, Elizabeth Bishop and

Marianne Moore were writing several decades before the advent of ecocriticism, their works demonstrate consistent sensitivity to the lives of animals, highlighting how much we stand to learn through contemplation of the natural world. To answer the question of how these poets engage with animal otherness in their work, I offer detailed analyses of several of their animal poems, considering voice, form and imagery against theoretical ideas of the other, the self and human cultural practice.

Lawrence's *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923) contains several examples of his attempts to define animal otherness in relation to the self, using direct address. In chapter one, I examine some of his displays of admiration and envy towards his animal subjects and their close relationship with the earth. Instances of violence and the suggestion of death are explored in relation to the poet-speaker's sense of self when interacting with animal otherness. Chapter two looks at the ways in which Bishop's poetic observations of animals challenge the idea of female otherness and religious traditions. I discuss her manipulation of boundaries as a means of traversing the expectation of what is human and what is animal. I suggest examples of encounters with animal otherness as reaffirmations of human selfhood and, at the same time, as gestures towards an idea of spiritual otherness. Finally, in chapter three I consider the unique blend of animal life and visual art that runs throughout Moore's work. Here, animals become the perfect conduit for her proclivity towards poetic subversion, suggesting that just as we can never truly *know* an

animal, neither can we ever truly fathom poetry or the sublimity of the creative imagination.

Animals have carried with them prevailing symbolic meanings from the earliest incarnations of imaginative literature. Lawrence, Bishop and Moore often refuse these descriptors, instead returning the animals to their natural environments and/or behaviours, situating them within more realistic spaces and divesting them of the layers of didactic meaning that surround them. That's not to say that their poetry is void of theological exploration, however. Drawing on Judeo-Christian religious practices and teaching, they each engage in different ways with the idea of divine transcendence during their considerations of the animal other. At the same time, they each challenge traditional religious practices, suggesting that spiritual fulfilment can be found in nature.

# Abbreviations

The following abbreviations appear in relation to the three poets discussed:

## D.H. Lawrence

*CP* – The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence

*SCW* – D.H. Lawrence Selected Critical Writings

## Elizabeth Bishop

*P* – Poems

*OA* – One Art

## Marianne Moore

*PMM* – The Poems of Marianne Moore

*CPMM* – The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore

## “I Know That I Am I”: D.H. Lawrence’s Examination of Animal Otherness through the Self in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*

In her 1936 essay, ‘Man and Animals in Recent Poetry’, Elizabeth Atkins notes that, following World War I, “one of the most significant new developments [in poetry] is now seen to be the fascination which animal life holds for the poet” (263). She details the proliferation of animal poetry during that period, accrediting this upsurge in part to the acceptance of evolutionary theory into “the unconscious background of men’s thinking” (263) since the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. She notes that animal poetry of this era “regards the animal as the elder brother of man, more at home on earth, yet an intimate comrade on our strange and perilous journey through time” (263).

Though perhaps more readily known as a novelist, D.H. Lawrence wrote numerous collections of poetry throughout his career, of which *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923) is widely regarded as superlative in terms of its poetic accomplishment. Within the collection, he seeks to explore in detail the biological, spiritual and emotional significance of nonhuman nature. W.H. Auden suggests that “Lawrence in his best poems is always concerned intensively with a single subject, a bat, a tortoise, a fig tree, which he broods on until he has exhausted its possibilities” (288), and Atkins calls it “a whole book

of his poems ... filled with his envy of the possessions of various animals, from the 'grand old lust' of the goat to the exuberance of the turkey-cock" (273).

The post-war period in which Lawrence was writing saw the population humbled; Atkins suggests that "the paragon of animals suddenly saw himself in danger of insane self-slaughter, leaving the earth to exclusive possession of lowlier animals" (271). For Lawrence, it was also a time of turmoil in both his career and his personal life; his novels were censored and he was accused of spying for the German government, which led to a self-imposed exile from Britain. He left the country to journey around Europe, Australia, Mexico and the United States and it was during these travels he wrote the poems that would become *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. Keith Sagar suggests that "[w]hat saved Lawrence ... from madness or nihilism at that time was the fact that as his faith in humanity died, his faith in the non-human world as a source and standard of sanity grew to replace it" (48).

*Birds, Beasts and Flowers* marks his first collection written entirely in free verse. In his 1919 essay, *Poetry and the Present*, Lawrence describes a poetry of "the urgent, insurgent Now", and discusses the significance of free verse for capturing "the instant present". He notes that "free verse has its own *nature* ... it is neither star nor pearl, but instantaneous like plasm" (SCW 77-79). His use of free verse to explore the natural world within *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* then, becomes mimetic: the "instant present" cannot be wholly tamed or regulated and neither can nature.

The collection is divided into nine sections; 'Fruits', 'Trees', 'Flowers', 'The Evangelical Beasts', 'Creatures', 'Reptiles', 'Birds', 'Animals' and 'Ghosts'; and while the overarching styles, techniques, voices and themes that run throughout it are important to an examination of the collection as a whole, it is Lawrence's unique engagements with animal otherness that are of specific interest to the current study. While many of the animal poems within the collection are written in an indirect third or first person narrative voice, examples of direct, second person subjective address, in which the animal is referred to as "you", include 'Mosquito', 'Baby Tortoise', 'Turkey-Cock', 'Eagle in New Mexico' and 'Bibbles'. Meanwhile 'Fish', 'Man and Bat', 'Lui et Elle' and 'The Blue Jay' switch between direct and indirect address. In each of these examples the narrator speaks to the animal in some way, rather than about it.

The primary focus here will be on poems from the 'Creatures' section of the collection, analysing Lawrence's poetic encounters with a fish, mosquito and bat, respectively. The terming of these animals as "creatures" adds an extra, almost-alien sense of otherness to their poetic presentation, which makes Lawrence's use of direct address towards them more intriguing. His uses of speech and direct address create a sense of intimacy between speaker and animal subject, often inspiring a sort of dialogue that develops key themes through repetition, questioning and comparison, a technique that perhaps finds its root in what Sandra Gilbert refers to as his "novelistic tendency to transform every lyrical perception into a dramatic situation" (36). The animals typically respond with answers based on body language and action, rather than

acts of speech. This functions both to separate and draw together the worlds of the human and the nonhuman, characterising Lawrence's attempts to define the animal other in relation to the self. At the same time, it betrays the "envy of the possessions of various animals" that Atkins pinpointed in 1936. The speaker's sense of self often appears in flux when faced with the animal other, desperate to comprehend and appreciate animal life for what it is beyond the strictures of anthropocentrism, while faintly contemptuous of their unknowable communion with nature. Lawrence's dramatic dialogues often display an underlying implication of rivalry and this tension manifests in the poet-speaker's inclination towards interrogation.

Prior to the publication of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, Lawrence published *Psychoanalysis of the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922). Written in response to criticisms of his fiction, they offer counterproposals to Freudian theory and explore Lawrence's own creative doctrine. Though poorly received at the time and often baffling, they offer some insights into his ideas of the self in relation to the wider world. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, he states that

I know that I am I, in distinction from a whole universe, which is not as I am. This is the first tremendous flash of knowledge of singleness and separate identity. I am I, not because I am at one with all the universe, but because I am other than all the universe. It is my distinction from all the rest of things which makes me myself. (75)

Throughout the animal poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, he demonstrates a constant awareness of the space between poet-speaker and the natural

subject he addresses. Matthew Powell discusses Franz Kafka's use of the animal other as a means of demonstrating "a world, order, and life that is eerily reminiscent of our own, and yet not our own". He notes that "[b]y playing off [the] tension between human and non-human, between what is 'the self' and what is 'not the self', Kafka is able to explore the *ontology of otherness* that clarifies the space between self and other" (130).

Lawrence too offers extended observations of this space beyond the human experience, beyond the self, where animals exist, and highlights the differences and similarities between those realms, which in turn leads him to question the transitory nature of life. Gilbert suggests that "[f]or Lawrence...it is precisely because of the unconsciousness of the animal's or plant's knowledge, the purity or singleness of its being, that it not only antedates man but will be able to endure when man's crucifixion into double consciousness destroys humanity entirely" (163). Themes of "darkness" and "blackness" recur as indicators of the mysterious obscurity that lies beyond the self, and there is a consistent sense that nature knows more than man.

These notions of darkness frequently fuse with a sense of life's impermanence. It is often the act of apostrophising to an animal, and its inability to speak back in a comprehensible human language, that drives Lawrence towards a consideration of mortality. This is particularly apparent in 'Fish' (CP 268-274), a self-reflective work in which the speaker addresses the animal directly, and at the same time conducts a conversation within himself that leads to realisations about anthropocentrism, Judeo-Christian religion,

nature and the otherness of death. In it, man appears to envy the fish's lack of awareness, for whom "[s]o little matters!"

It opens with a lengthy examination of a fish, who "wash[es] in oneness" with the water, oblivious to all things but "food and fear and joie de vivre". Despite the suggestion of loneliness that surrounds its existence, the speaker seems to covet the simplicity of the fish's existence:

Joie de vivre, and fear, and food,  
All without love.

Quelle joie de vivre  
Dans l'eau!  
Slowly to gape through waters,  
Alone with the element;  
To sink, and rise, and go to sleep with the waters;  
To speak endless inaudible wavelets into the wave;  
To breathe from the flood at the gills,  
Fish-blood slowly running next to the flood, extracting  
fish-fire;  
To have the element under one, like a lover;  
And to spring away with a curvetting click in the air,  
Provocative.

Though it lives without the revitalising force of love (we learn later in the collection, of course, that "[t]he ass was the first of all animals to fall finally into love" (CP 309)), at the same time it never has to know the ache of loss; it can exist "[s]o utterly without misgiving". This initial idea of reciprocal love (or lack thereof) amongst fish transmutes into the love of God and with this Lawrence suggests that the fish transcends anthropocentrism:

Loveless, and so lively!  
Born before God was love,  
Or life knew loving.  
Beautifully beforehand with it all.

He invokes a primordial, pre-human world, gesturing towards both the Garden of Eden and evolutionary theory, though in either instance, the fish outdates man, undermining any sense of human dominion.

Opposing ideas of individuality and community are apparent throughout the first half of the poem, as Lawrence asserts that, although the fish “swarm in companies”, they are

soundless, and out of contact.  
They exchange no word, no spasm, not even anger.  
Not one touch.  
Many suspended together, forever apart,  
Each one alone with the waters, upon one wave with  
the rest.

Following this the narrator appears for the first time, relaying a conversation conducted with his own heart, a conversation within himself. This introduces the idea of individuality within the self that was previously attributed to “fishes”. At the same time, however, this conversation implies that humans can never be truly “alone”, given their ability to converse with the conscious, inner-self in this way:

I saw a water-serpent swim across the Anapo,  
And I said to my heart, *look, look at him!*  
*With his head up, steering like a bird!*  
*He's a rare one, but he belongs...*

But sitting in a boat on the Zeller lake  
And watching the fishes in the breathing waters  
Lift and swim and go their way –

I said to my heart, *who are these?*  
And my heart couldn't own them...

Here he submits that fish cannot be truly comprehended in human terms, confirming that a communion between man and fish would be impossible, and they must remain individual from one another. The largely monosyllabic phrasing in the example above replicates the way the fish “drive in shoals”, and yet are “suspended together, forever apart”.

Even the anthropomorphised pike, in his “grey-striped suit”, who looks “[l]ike a lout on an obscure pavement”, cannot help him understand fish, despite his human-like appearance. The speaker “left off hailing him”, because, when he looks more closely, he sees “[t]hat motionless deadly motion,/[t]hat unnatural barrel body, that long ghoul nose,…” and realises

I had made a mistake,  
I didn't know him,  
This grey, monotonous soul in the water,  
This intense individual in shadow,  
Fish-alive.

I didn't know his God.  
I didn't know his God.

Which is perhaps the last admission that life has to wring  
out of us.

Here, the pike becomes other to both man *and* fish as he embodies mortality. The use of “grey”, “unnatural”, “deadly” and “monotonous”, paired with the idea of a “ghoul” hiding in “shadow”, foregrounds the notion of death that comes to fruition in the latter half of the poem. Through this image of the ghostly pike then, “the last admission” of life becomes death. The speaker admits absolute otherness with the realisation that there might be a god beyond his own, a god of fish, stating that

*there are limits  
To you, my heart;  
And to the one God.  
Fishes are beyond me.*

.....  
They are beyond me, are fishes.  
I stand at the pale of my being  
And look beyond, and see  
Fish, in the outerwards,  
As one stands on a bank and looks in.

The elemental difference between land and water becomes a metaphor for the unfathomable difference between self and other, between life and death, which is heightened by the repetition of the ambiguous “beyond”.

When he catches the fish, it becomes briefly emblematic of divine otherness; it “[flies] like a halo round [his] head”. However, the heavily adjectival description of the fish on land denotes a struggle to pinpoint its exact image:

Unhooked his gorging, water-horny mouth,  
And seen his horror-tilted eye,  
His red-gold, water-precious, mirror-flat bright eye;  
And felt him beat in my hand, with his mucous, leaping  
    life-throb.  
And my heart accused itself  
Thinking: *I am not the measure of creation.*  
*This is beyond me, this fish.*  
*His God stands outside my God.*

And the gold-and-green pure lacquer-mucus comes off  
    in my hand,  
And the red-cold mirror-eye stares and dies,  
And the water-suave contour dims.

The profusion of hyphenated compounds suggests a conflict within the speaker as he tries to define the fish, knowing that, out of water, it is irreconcilably

altered. It becomes clear that the fish is no longer truly a fish if it cannot “swim enwombed” in the element it was previously at one with. The rhythmic drive of the lines here mimics the fish’s “beat”, its “leaping life-throb”, as it strains to breathe. Even in touching the fish, the speaker admits he cannot know it. Its “mirror-flat bright eye”, rhymes later with “stares and dies”, reflecting the speaker’s own mortality back to him, confirming he is “*not the measure of creation*”. In calling himself “a many-fingered horror of daylight”, he acknowledges feelings of guilt for killing the fish, again questioning man’s position as the dominant life force on earth. Towards the poem’s end, the implied comparison between the cold-blooded fish and the hot blood of the “[s]ulphur sun-beasts” who “thirst for fish as for more-than-water”, finally confirms the overarching assertions of death and the question of what lies beyond it. The fish embodies the literal cold touch of human death, while at the same time signifying the idea of the “more-than” that humans desperately wish to fathom. Turning to Christ in the final stanza, Lawrence confirms the idea that all life on earth eventually dies, even the flesh-made-man-made-fish Son of God.

Ideas of mortality are apparent too in the poem that precedes ‘Fish’ within the collection, ‘The Mosquito’ (CP 266-268). Here, however the image of the animal other is vastly contrary to that seen in ‘Fish’. Lawrence offers an amusing, unsettling encounter using a present tense, second person narrative address to create a hostile conversation between the human-speaker and the

eponymous insect. The poem opens with a series of direct questions posed to the mosquito:

When did you start your tricks,  
Monsieur?

What do you stand on such high legs for?  
Why this length of shredded shank,  
You exaltation?

Is it so that you shall lift your centre of gravity upwards  
And weigh no more than air as you alight upon me,  
Stand upon me weightless, you phantom?

I heard a woman call you the Winged Victory  
In sluggish Venice.  
You turn your head towards your tail, and smile.

As Amit Chaudhuri notes, by addressing the mosquito with the French “Monsieur”, Lawrence “not only humorously suggest[s] the mosquito’s adeptness but its foreignness as well” (178). It is pointedly highlighted from the outset that man and insect are from different worlds.

At the same time, however, the human term of address briefly anthropomorphises the insect, signifying an attempt to draw the two disparate creatures together. The speaker goes on to distinguish the few physical attributes that they may have in common, namely the legs and head, and the (seemingly preposterous) smile. When the insect is then referred to as “the Winged Victory” – assumed to reference *The Winged Victory of Samothrace*, a statue of Nike, the goddess of victory – it is recast as female, toying with the gender roles functioning throughout the poem. The interchange becomes a

strange, aggravated foreplay that culminates in an unwelcome incursion on the man by the mosquito, which in turn leads to its death.

While the speaker does, as Sagar suggests, “[hate] the mosquito much more than any other creature” (61), he is still enthralled by its sense of otherness and the need to comprehend its motives. The profusion of interrogatives here confirms this and at the same time betrays a sense of fear on the part of the speaker. This is heightened when he calls the mosquito a “phantom”, turning it to a ghost, and placing it outside the physically tangible world. Similarly, naming it “the Winged Victory” elevates the insect into an unreachable realm of mythological gods. The contrasts between the weightless ghost and the solid marble statue are indicative of the mosquito’s trickiness, suggesting from the outset that the definition of its otherness may prove illusive. This name-calling isn’t without irony, though. *The Winged Victory* is famously headless, and phantoms are, of course, dead, so both also serve to foreshadow the mosquito’s impending demise.

The narrator carries out his questioning with an undertone of aggression that places him in a defensive position against the mosquito, maintaining the sense of fear present in the opening stanzas.

How can you put so much devilry  
Into that translucent phantom shred  
Of a frail corpus?

Queer, with your thin wings and your streaming legs,  
How you sail like a heron, or a dull clot of air,  
A nothingness.

Yet what an aura surrounds you;  
Your evil little aura, prowling, and casting a numbness on my

mind.

The mosquito's "aura" speaks to the insect's position within human culture, relaying the genuine risks their bites pose to humans. Lawrence fuses the wider implication of the mosquito's presence, the underlying threat of serious illness, with his immediate situation. The insults directed at the insect hang in end-line positions seeking rejoinder. Sagar suggests "the spaces between the lines [represent] the silence of the mosquito" (61), a refusal to answer the human speaker on his own terms. Instead, the speaker adopts the mosquito's means of communication: it is easy, even comical, to imagine him swerving and ducking out of the mosquito's flight path, inadvertently mirroring and assimilating its unpredictable movements, as evidenced in the poem's form and shaping. Lawrence utilises free verse to mimic the insect: no stanza lasts for more than five lines, and the numerous stanza breaks, as well as their erratic line lengths, characterise the speaker's distraction as he tries to avoid the mosquito's advances.

The quick transitions between images become indicative of the "numbness" cast over the speaker's mind, implying a sense of perceptual disorder as he struggles to fathom the mosquito's creaturely nature. The mosquito is transformed into a heron; momentarily huge, majestic and impressive; only to be immediately diminished to "a dull clot of air" and further still to "[a] nothingness". In his discussion of Kafka's 'Investigations of a Dog', Powell notes that "[o]ther(ness) has no clear or stable definition. Other(ness) is neither preventable nor resolvable. As a result, the self too has no stable or

resolvable definition” (138). The narrator’s difficulty in defining exactly *what* the mosquito is, in turn suggests a difficulty in defining his own character in comparison.

Of course, this must be a result of inexplicable witchcraft, as the mosquito seems to cast a spell over the speaker:

That is your trick, your bit of filthy magic:  
Invisibility, and the anaesthetic power  
To deaden my attention in your direction.

But I know your game now, streaky sorcerer.  
Queer, how you stalk and prowl the air  
In circles and evasions, enveloping me,  
Ghoul on wings  
Winged Victory.

Settle, and stand on long thin shanks  
Eyeing me sideways, and cunningly conscious that I  
    am aware,  
You speck.

The repetition of the [ɪ] sound in “trick”, “bit”, “magic” and “anaesthetic”, paired with plosive [b], [p], [d], [t] and [k] sounds forms an almost incantatory rhythm, as though the narrator is trying to imitate the “filthy magic” of the mosquito. It “stalks” and “prowls”, putting the narrator in the position of prey, reiterating the sense of fear the insect inspired in the opening stanzas. He is miniaturised next to the tiny insect, his sense of self consumed by his awareness of its otherness.

Incensed, he attempts to diminish the mosquito again, calling it a “speck” when it lands on his skin. The lingering sound of “peck”, however, suggests a kiss, connoting a moment of intimacy between their two bodies. They are

briefly no longer different, both standing still “on long thin shanks”, “aware” of one another, until the “cunningly conscious” mosquito once again takes the upper hand and “lurches off” before the speaker has chance to strike it. He has become too engrossed in trying to anticipate the mosquito, losing sight of his own interests. That the mosquito “read [his] thoughts against [it]” suggests that it too is trying to understand the otherness of the human speaker in relation to its own sense of self. This reiterates Lawrence’s theory in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, that “[p]rimarily we know, each man, each living creature knows, profoundly and satisfactorily and without question, that *I am I*” (74). By detailing the mosquito’s determination to survive, Lawrence pinpoints a key similarity between human and animal other.

The climax of the poem comes, however, when the mosquito finally succeeds in biting the speaker, when man and animal are connected by blood, the liquid that is vital to both for survival:

Blood, red blood  
Super-magical  
Forbidden liquor.

I behold you stand  
For a second enspasmed in oblivion,  
Obscenely ecstasied  
Sucking live blood,  
My blood.

Such silence, such suspended transport,  
Such gorging,  
Such obscenity of trespass.

The narrator drops his direct address momentarily here, and this, along with the repetition of “blood” conveys his disbelief at the sight of his own “[s]uper-

magical/[f]orbidden liquor” – forbidden to humans, not mosquitos. This instance of human magic calls back to the mosquito’s “bit of filthy magic”, reinforcing the idea that man and animal share characteristics. However, the boundary between self and other has been crossed, tipping over into “obscenity”. The sight of the speaker’s blood reminds him of his own mortality, and the sense of fear that permeated the rest of the poem is brought to fruition. The phrasing and enjambment of this moment, in which he “behold[s] [it] stand/[f]or a second enspasmed in oblivion”, could refer to man, mosquito or both, suggesting a shared experience of this mysterious “oblivion”.

While Sagar states that “Lawrence makes no attempt to enter into the mosquito, or to take its otherness into himself” (62), the mosquito has no qualms about entering the human. The “[o]bscenely ecstasied” act of penetration is a clear affront to the speaker and one that perhaps undermines Lawrence’s own ideas of gender roles. Though much of the criticism of his work takes aim at his prose, and often glazes over the nuances of his writing, numerous critics have discussed his anti-feminist handling of female characters. Elaborating on Simone de Beauvoir’s criticism of Lawrence in *The Second Sex*, Janet Barron suggests that “because Lawrence identifies sexuality with the phallus, this places the male in the dominant role” (14). Whether or not he knew that the mosquito he wrote about had to, in a physical reality, be female, the penetration of the male speaker’s body changes the power dynamic within the poem. The boundary of human-animal otherness has been breached,

but not on his terms. By penetrating his skin and imbibing his blood, the mosquito has, in its miniscule way, emasculated the speaker.

Within the collection only two animals die at the hands of the poet-speaker; the mosquito and the fish (though the mountain lion is killed by hunters (*CP* 330-331)). As discussed, 'Fish' is a celebratory examination of the fish's otherness, and with its death the speaker is spiritually moved. Unlike the mosquito, the fish does not trespass into the speaker's personal, human space of its own volition; it is dragged there on the end of his fishing rod. Where the mosquito is "evil" and a "ghoul on wings", in his encounter with the fish, it is man that becomes "a many-fingered horror of daylight". Here, man may indulge in feelings of remorse for killing the fish because the act of penetration was his, when he hooked it. Even though the fish is, as R.E. Pritchard states, the "solitary self-sufficient phallic being" (145), the power dynamic, for Lawrence, is as it should be. The speaker's sense of self remains intact when faced with the fish's otherness and he can comfortably admit "I don't know fishes".

Comparatively, even in death the mosquito is a reminder of the "obscenity of trespass" that has occurred. The speaker ponders that it is "[q]ueer, what a big stain my sucked blood makes/[b]eside the infinitesimal faint smear of you!" unable to accept that something so small could invade his vital lifeblood, and in doing so change part of his human self into animal other. The mosquito's otherness lingers in the "dim, dark smudge [it] has disappeared into" leaving an almost-haunting sense of something unfinished since the human speaker cannot pursue it there. As Gilbert asserts, "[n]othing' as the

mosquito is, he [sic] is yet mysteriously *something*, something both other than and like ourselves” (167). By killing the mosquito, Lawrence does not resolve the matter of its otherness, but instead foregrounds opposing ideas of endurance and mortality for both humans and animals.

Alongside ‘Fish’ and ‘The Mosquito’, the ‘Creatures’ section of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* contains two poems about bats. In ‘Bat’ (CP 274-275), the poet muses on a pastoral scene where “[s]wallows with spools of dark thread [sew] the shadows together”. However, as he watches them he realises they aren’t swallows at all, but bats; “[l]ittle lumps that fly in air and have voices indefinite, wildly vindictive”. The “uneasy creeping” feeling these creatures inspire in the speaker sets the tone of ‘Man and Bat’ (CP 276-281), where human-animal difference is negatively connoted through implications of disgust.

Here, the struggle between human and animal other is reminiscent of that seen in ‘The Mosquito’; the speaker’s idea of self is thrown into confusion when he returns home to find a bat trapped in his room. Lawrence creates a dramatic (albeit aurally one-sided) dialogue between man and bat, this time switching between indirect and direct address forms. The poem is peppered with bursts of speech that function to pull man and bat closer together, revealing the man’s anxiety at the sight of a non-human other, and the bat’s fear of its alien surroundings. However, man and animal share a mutual goal: for the bat to exit the room as quickly as possible. The key difference between ‘The Mosquito’ and ‘Man and Bat’ comes when the speaker acknowledges, as

he does in 'Fish', that there is a "God who is maker of bats", and chooses not to kill the animal.

Michael Lockwood notes that "Lawrence has no qualms about presenting himself as the butt of the comedy; the laughter ... is at the expense of humanity, lending dignity to the animal" (124), and this is especially apparent throughout 'Man and Bat'. Man takes on the role of a melodramatic frailty, wilting against the energetic flapping of the bat, all the while "flicking with [his] white handkerchief". The repetitious nature of the bat's frantic movement is reflected in the speaker's retelling:

And round and round and round!  
Blundering more insane, and leaping, in throbs, to clutch at a  
corner,  
At a wire, at a bell-rope:  
On and on, watched relentless by me, round and round in my  
room,  
Round and round and dithering with tiredness and haste and  
increasing delirium  
Flicker-splashing round my room.

Often the language in the poem could refer to both the man and the bat – in refusing to let the bat rest, the man amusingly mirrors its "blundering", "leaping" and "dithering" as he follows it around the room in an inept panic.

Eventually, recognising its otherness, he realises that the bat cannot respond to his spoken pleas for it to "Go out!". He is then able to rationalise the bat's situation, drawing comparisons between self and other to understand its motives:

He *could* not go out,  
I also realised...  
It was the light of day which he could not enter,

Any more than I could enter the white-hot door of a  
blast furnace.

He could not plunge into the daylight that streamed at the  
window.

It was asking too much of his nature.

Worse even than the hideous terror of me with my  
handkerchief

Saying: *Out, go out!*...

Was the horror of white daylight in the window!

Through the “light of day”/“blast furnace” metaphor, he momentarily becomes the bat, and, as Douglas Mackey notes, “in recognizing the bat’s different kind of perception, [he] discerns his own limitations” (37). This realisation raises again the question of mortality; because the speaker can imagine his own death in a blast furnace, he is able to empathise with the bat’s inability to go out into the daylight. This recognition of similarity can also be seen in the way both man and bat “flick” and “flicker” throughout the poem; the man with his white handkerchief, the bat with its conversely black wings. They embody an inverse impression of one another and, through their instinctive motions, they come to share a common trait. These comparisons become examples of what Sagar calls “Lawrence’s almost occult penetration into the being of other creatures ... his ability ... to be a bat flicker-splashing around a room” (121), affording the speaker the opportunity to consider life beyond the self.

Throughout the poem Lawrence’s use of alternating short and long lines mimics the relentless, frightened flight of the bat, and the man’s swerving to avoid it, a style reminiscent of that used in ‘The Mosquito’, which “adds to the impromptu and deliberately makeshift nature of the whole episode”

(Lockwood 125). This casts human and animal as two halves of an active whole that function as one to create an instance of poetry – without one, the other would be significantly altered in the moment. In this case, and despite the fact it is presented as past tense reportage, ‘Man and Bat’ becomes an example of Lawrence’s “poetry of [the] immediate present” (SCW 77). Through the repetition of the bat’s “round and round and round” motions and the verb-laden descriptions of its flight (“staggering”, “plunging”, “falling”, “lunging”), as well as the man’s relentlessly flicking handkerchief, the poem becomes “spontaneous and flexible as flame” (SCW 78).

As in ‘The Mosquito’, Lawrence uses quick-shifting images to try and clarify what the bat is:

Till he fell in a corner, palpitating, spent.  
And there, a clot, he squatted and looked at me.  
With sticking out, bead-berry eyes, black,  
And improper derisive ears,  
And shut wings,  
And brown, furry body.

Brown, nut-brown, fine fur!  
But it might as well have been the hair of a spider; thing  
With long, black-paper ears.

The bat palpates and is “a clot”, connoting blood and the heart, perhaps mimicking the man’s own raised heart rate following their chase around the room. This resonates in the almost-iambic rhythm of the line that follows, and the limerick-like rhyming of “clot” and “squatted”. In this moment of stillness, the speaker can see the bat in more detail. He notes its “sticking out, bead-berry eyes”, its “improper derisive ears”, both of which seem to mock the man,

and, when paired with its “shut wings”, imply that the bat is unreadable. He then forgets his repulsion and exalts the bat’s “[b]rown, nut-brown, fine fur”, momentarily comparing the bat something natural (a nut) rather than “a beast” or “a blot”.

This perhaps calls on the speaker’s compassion, because immediately after this, when he considers killing the bat, he is able to see reason:

What then?  
Hit him and kill him and throw him away?

Nay, I didn’t create him.  
Let the God that created him be responsible for his death...  
Only, in the bright day, I will not have this clot in my room.

Let the God who is the maker of bats watch with them in their unclean  
corners...  
I admit a God in every crevice,  
But not bats in my room;  
Nor the God of bats, while the sun shines.

In considering the bat this way, he simultaneously questions his own morality and mortality. This becomes an acknowledgement of both similarity and difference between self and other; the speaker is aware that bats are alive and have their place in the world as humans do, but that this place needn’t be shared. Each has their own, individual god and it is those gods, not man, who ought to bear the liability for death. When he asserts that “[o]nly life has a way out”, he admits the permanence of death and realises that, because of their ability to rationalise this fact, “the human soul is fated to wide-eyed responsibility”. He frees the bat, though he admits he “would have had to kill him if he’d bitten” (recalling the mosquito’s fate, perhaps).

A sense of shared otherness on the part of the man *and* the bat is pointedly exposed through the bat's speech at the end of the poem; one of the few examples of animal speech within the collection:

And now, at evening, as he flickers over the river  
Dipping with petty triumphant flight, and tittering over  
the sun's departure,  
I believe he chirps, pipistrello, seeing me here on this  
terrace writing:  
*There he sits, the long loud one!*  
*But I am greater than he...*  
*I escaped him...*

Man and bat are brought together by a shared sense of unknowability, what Gilbert refers to as “an impression of infinite rooms of selfhood mysteriously opening into each other...yet each, too, mysteriously closed against, *other* than, all the others” (169). His paranoia that the bat would claim to be “greater than he”, identifies a mistrust and envy of animal otherness, suggesting that the bat has a deep, ecological knowledge he can never share. Their encounter trails away on the ellipses of the bat's speech and the narrator is left, with an unsatisfactory feeling of incompleteness; the bat “escape[s] him” into the darkness of the evening that recalls the “dim, dark smudge [the mosquito] disappeared into”.

Alongside the poems discussed above, this motif of darkness and/or blackness recurs throughout the subsequent sections of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. For example, when the eponymous animal in ‘Snake’ (CP 283-284) disappears into “the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front”, it penetrates the earth in a way humans cannot. This shift is maddening to the speaker, who

accuses the snake of “[d]eliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing himself after”, leaving the world of human comprehension behind. This prompts a violent reaction from the man, who then curses himself for having “missed [his] chance with one of the lords/[o]f life”.

There is also an enigmatic darkness that runs throughout ‘Elephant’ (CP 317-321), represented by the elephants themselves, as well as the native dancers who perform for an unappreciative prince. The repeated “dark”, juxtaposed with “devil” here becomes a sort of incantation that bewitches the narrator and leaves him longing to face the elephant as a prince himself, suggesting a yearning to master the dark otherness of nature. Similarly, ‘Bibbles’ (CP 326-329) sees a little black dog physically embodying the darkness of animal otherness. The relationship between the speaker and the dog is characterised by his frustration at her perceived lack of loyalty, though there is a suggestion that this frustration actually comes from his inability to fathom her animal nature. Amongst other things, she is “a little black dragon”, “a little black whirlwind”, an “inkspot” and “a black snail”, simultaneously impenetrable and unreal.

The various darkneses evoked in many of Lawrence’s animal encounters recall Powell’s suggestion of “the space between self and other” (130). This space might be a physical darkness, as in ‘Man and Bat’ and ‘Snake’, or it may be more philosophical as in ‘The Mosquito’ and ‘Fish’, where the animal disappears into the darkness of death. As demonstrated, when the poet-speaker attempts to traverse this space by opening a dialogue with the animal,

his own sense of self is thrown into discord when the animals do not speak back in human language, often provoking frustration, envy or violence. While he maintains his own theory, that “I am I”, Lawrence’s speaker recurrently comes to this conclusion with a sense of unease, and “the space between self and other” is expressed as obscurely, frustratingly unknowable.

However, the uninhibited flow of free verse serves to capture to some extent the genuine energy and verve of the animals he describes. In his freedom from the strictures of metred form, sound patterns emerge naturally, and his “novelistic tendency to transform every lyrical perception into a dramatic situation” (Gilbert 36) gives life to the creatures he interacts with. Lawrence’s own words on free verse become pertinent to the conclusions we might draw from the animal poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, that “[t]here is some confusion, some discord. But the confusion and the discord only belong to the reality, as noise belongs to the plunge of water” (SCW 78).

## “Why Do We Feel ... This Sweet Sensation of Joy?”: Elizabeth Bishop’s Ecofeminist Considerations of the Animal Other

Elizabeth Bishop is one of America’s best-known, most highly-regarded poets. Her work exalts the ordinary, turning commonplace situations into moments of poetic beauty. Narratives and images of nature proliferate throughout her work and often the landscape serves as a spectrum onto which she maps the human experience. In a letter to Robert Lowell, she stated “[o]n reading over what I’ve got on hand I find I’m really a minor female Wordsworth at least, I don’t know anyone else who seems to be such a Nature Lover” (qtd in Bonnie Costello, *Questions of Mastery* 8). Her observations of nature frequently broaden into considerations of animal otherness, where the animal becomes a lens through which humanity can be viewed. Anne Stevenson notes that “[w]hat is most fascinating about the role of animals and birds in her poetry is their ambivalent status as both natural creatures and ... various types of emblem” (92).

Several of her poems, including some of her most renowned and often-anthologised works such as ‘The Fish’ and ‘The Moose’, ruminate on animal life, often suggesting a transformative, near-spiritual encounter with nature, while maintaining the truth of the animal’s existence. Though hers is a poetic that resounds with a sense of universality and the everyday, beneath her unassuming language there is an underlying and multifaceted sense of the

unknown, a reaching towards the depths of existence to call forth an answer to the question *what are we doing here?*

Guy Rotella notes that “Bishop was less willing than most to force the particulars of experience to fit a satisfying or comforting pattern. She refused to impose myth where none could be discovered”. He goes on to say that her “concern with how the spiritual proceeds from the material has religious roots” (188–89). A self-proclaimed agnostic, Bishop was open in her scepticism of organised religion, stating in a 1966 interview with Ashley Brown: “I don’t like modern religiosity in general; it always seems to lead to a tone of moral superiority” (*Conversations* 23). However, her work suggests, at the very least, an inescapable attraction to the beliefs and practices that are elemental to religious faith and to the idea that there is “something bigger” that unites life on earth. Costello states that “[r]eligious rhetoric of the soul and of divinity haunts Bishop’s poems” (91), and indeed it features heavily throughout her collected works. Many of her considerations of animals see the animal function both as a well-executed portrait and a coded suggestion of something beyond earthly comprehension.

However, while her animal poetry is often profuse with this “religious rhetoric”, there is also a steady rejection of the anthropocentric, and in turn androcentric outlooks that developed in part through the propagation of Judeo-Christian religious teachings. Much has been written about Bishop’s views and approach to feminism. She notably resisted being included in female-only publications and anthologies, stating in 1974: “I like my anthologies, all the

arts, mixed: sexes, colors [sic] and races. Art is art and should have nothing to do with gender” (*Conversations* 54). And in 1977 she said: “Most of my writing life I’ve been lucky about reviews. But at the very end they often say ‘The best poetry by a woman in this decade, or year, or month.’ Well, what’s that worth?” (*Conversations* 92). Lorrie Goldensohn notes that “[f]or most of her work, a least overtly, Bishop says little about the world of female possibility, but if we look at what is enacted in animal terms there is a richer field of discourse” (279). Despite the term’s rise to prominence happening only after her death, ecofeminism becomes relevant to the conversation surrounding Bishop’s animal poetry and can be linked to her reimagining of religious traditions into a spiritual communion with nature.

Margo DeMello defines ecofeminism in basic terms as “a philosophy and a social movement which focuses on the links between the oppression of women and the destruction of nature” (390). By recognising the parallels between their position in a patriarchal society and that of a commodified nature, female writers can reclaim their connection to the natural world and embolden their readers to seek out their own ecological posture. Linda Vance discusses ecofeminist narratives in ‘Beyond Just-So Stories: Narratives, Animals, and Ethics’, suggesting that they

should emphasize [sic] lived experience and context, and the ways in which perception of the world is socially negotiated. When possible, they should remind us of the intersection of oppressions ... [t]hey should demonstrate that ethical behavior [sic] toward the nonhuman world is a kind of joyfulness, an embracing of possibility, a self-respecting and respectful humility. (181)

While Bishop may not have been writing with an actively feminist agenda, within much of her writing on nature, she assumes this idea of “ethical behaviour” towards animals, employing “respectful humility” towards their lived experiences. She “remind[s] us of the intersection of oppressions” by aligning animals with femininity, thus creating numerous examples of deviation from the typical “female as subordinate” position.

As demonstrated in the examples below, her animal poems rarely employ their animal subjects as proponents of anthropocentrism, instead highlighting and celebrating the congruence and contrast of life on earth, while hinting towards a more esoteric interpretation. There is a kinship with nature at work that undermines patriarchal systems and centralises the ways in which both nonhuman animals and women might be perceived as “other”. Though she termed herself “a minor female Wordsworth”, her nature poems often disrupt the Romantic feminisation of nature. Almost all her animals are male – the dog of ‘Pink Dog’ and the moose of ‘The Moose’ stand as notable exceptions.

Debashish Munshi and Priya Kurian postulate that “anthropocentrism is about the creation of a particular kind of boundary, a rigid one that reinforces a division between *us* and *them*, where they are the non-human world ... [a]s Fuss (1996:3) points out, it is ‘sameness, not difference, [that] provokes our greatest anxiety (and our greatest fascination) with the ‘almost human’” (as cited in Munshi and Kurian 2016, 263). Rotella suggests that “Bishop worked at the boundary of the visible and the invisible, interrogating human claims to knowledge and questioning whether we discover or impose the meanings we ...

assert" (189). Her considerations of boundaries defy the rigidity of the anthropocentric "us vs. them" division and can be seen throughout her animal poems. Often they are explored along the physical lines of separation. For example, the titular animals in 'The Fish' (P 43-44) and 'Sandpiper' (P 129) both traverse the border between land and water, while the central character in 'The Man-Moth' (P 16-17) switches between under- and over-ground worlds. At times too, the borders become more abstract; the man-moth also straddles the taxonomy of species, while the animals in 'Roosters' (P 36-40) and 'The Moose' (P 189-93) bridge the gap between sleep and consciousness. 'Pink Dog' (P 212-13) negotiates echelons of social class, and 'The Riverman' (P 103-7) examines ideas of magical transformation between human and animal worlds.

By formulating meetings with animals this way, she distorts the lines of perception, pushing against the perceived constraints of what is human and what is animal, acknowledging them both as part of the same scale of life on earth. In *Why Look at Animals?* John Berger suggests that "[a]nimals are born, are sentient and are mortal. In these things they resemble man. In their superficial anatomy – less in their deep anatomy – in their habits, in their time, in their physical capacities, they differ from man. They are both like and unlike" (13). Like D.H. Lawrence, Bishop's approach to animal life is one that relies on recognising this sense of similarity and difference in life beyond the self. However, where Lawrence attempts to define otherness through the self, maintaining his principle that "I am I", within Bishop's animal poetry there is an opposing acknowledgement not only that the idea of the self becomes more

fluid when faced with the animal other, but that it can in fact be galvanised by these acts of identification.

This becomes particularly apparent in 'At the Fishhouses' (P 62-64), where Bishop uses the encounter with the seal to consolidate the poem's reach towards knowledge and that which is unknowable. The poem begins with a narrative description exploring the historic changeability of human and natural processes on place. The first stanza, which is set "in the gloaming", subtly hints towards death, particularly in the descriptors of the "old" fisherman and his accoutrements, which are "worn", "ancient" and "rusted" with "some melancholy stains, like dried blood". The narrator shares a cigarette with the man, who "was a friend of [her] grandfather"; the past tense here implying the death of the grandfather and highlighting the perennial generational shift. They "talk of the decline in the population", perhaps suggestive of the death toll of World War II, which ended a few years prior to the poem's publication.

The narrator confronts the water, describing it as "[c]old, dark deep and absolutely clear,/an element bearable to no mortal", imbuing the sea with a foreboding sense of quietus that recalls Marianne Moore's 1922 poem, 'A Grave' (PMM 145). This is offset slightly, however, by the ellipsis that introduces the seal in the third stanza, demarcating a shift in tone and tense. The seal turns the poem to a more theoretical examination of knowledge, selfhood and otherness, set against a religious undercurrent that pushes the work towards spiritual transcendence, though this is offset by a comedic sense of kinship. The narrator and the seal share a humorous curiosity about one

another, both “believer[s] in total immersion”, calling to mind baptismal practices, reiterated by the fact that the narrator “used to sing him Baptist hymns”. She also sang “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”, which, while mentioned with a healthy dose of irony, serves to explicitly introduce the idea of a spiritual figurehead under which the seal and the human are united. The description of the seal is offered in the past tense, suggesting that he, like the grandfather is no longer a part of the current scene, acknowledging the elusiveness of life and nature that was foreshadowed in the opening stanza.

The seal embodies the idea of blurred boundaries, able to exist on land and in the sea, which suggests he has a knowledge that the human narrator can never access and vice versa. Juxtaposed with the prior hints towards mortality and the introduction of religious rhetoric, this boundary becomes one between life and death, suggesting that “what lies beyond” cannot be comprehended while alive. However, the final line of the poem admits that “our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown”, which suggests current earthly knowledge as a transient intangibility too. Through the religious interchange with the seal, the poem becomes something of a rumination on agnosticism; an admittance of possibilities beyond human comprehension. In communing with the seal, and particularly in singing hymns to him, Bishop centralises the question of otherness, not only of human to animal, but of earthly to divine. The narrator regards the seal as her equal, allowing a mutual recognition of otherness and a rejection of the historical religious rhetoric that dictates humans as superior to all life on earth. Together human and animal reach a silent but companionable

agreement of difference, which, in partnership with the religious references, acts as an acceptance of their shared incomprehension of “what we imagine knowledge to be”.

There is no attempt to master nature here. Instead human and animal are equalised, to “emphasize [sic]”, in Vance’s words, “lived experience and context”, thus rejecting the anthropocentric ideal in which humans dominate nature. The encounter with the seal suggests the sense of “joyfulness” that Vance refers to, which can be similarly seen in ‘The Fish’. Here Bishop offers a closely-observed representation of a caught fish that initially places humans as superior to animals. However, by looking at and relating to the animal, the narrator sets the fish free, back into the water. Animal life is again considered at the boundary between air and water, with all impressions of the animal taken outside its natural habitat in the human sphere of existence. There are several attempts made to bring the fish more fully into the human world; his skin is compared to “ancient wallpaper”, his eyes are like “tarnished tinfoil” and his “pink swim-bladder/like a big peony”. The fish won’t yield to it, though, and the narrator is repeatedly drawn back to his animality. By associating the fish with domestic and floral imagery like this, Bishop aligns him with a traditionally female vernacular. But, by pairing this with the fish’s “frightening gills”, the “dramatic reds and blacks/of his shiny entrails” and her admiration for “his sullen face”, she combines his femininity with a sense of power, refusing to condemn the fish to domesticity alone.

Upon realising towards the end of the poem that the fish has escaped capture on at least five occasions (“from his lower lip ... hung five old pieces of fish-line”), the narrator comes to appreciate the vitality of the fish and his will to survive. She “stared and stared/and victory filled up/the little rented boat”. The victory here is left ambiguous. On one hand, it suggests victory for the human for having conquered an apparently uncatchable fish, which places the fish at the mercy of anthropocentrism. On the other, it becomes a victory for the fish, whose previous escapes confirm his fight for survival and his position as a living other. The idea of an untouchable nature overrides the speaker’s contemplation of the fish – the “rainbow” imagery at the end of the poem depicts not only the oil, but also carries with it the religiously symbolic idea of renewal. At the same time, it represents the iridescence of the fish’s scales in her hands. Unlike the narrator seen in Lawrence’s ‘Fish’, she doesn’t let the animal die. Upon seeing the physical evidence of the damage her presence is doing, she lets the fish go, saving its life while at the same time redeeming herself.

The reversal of typical gender roles within the poem becomes key to its ecofeminist aesthetic. When an (assumedly) female fisher catches a large male fish and subjects him to a sustained visual examination, it becomes an amusing inversion of the male gaze. As Costello notes, “[t]here is ... a pervasive but ambiguous sexual quality to the fish ... [who] hangs like a giant phallus ... [and] challenges the conventional, hierarchical antithesis of female nature and male culture” (64). In ‘The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women’s Fiction’, Marian

Scholtmeijer discusses the ways in which animals and women are treated and represented within a system that is fundamentally oppressive, and notes that to ally themselves with animal others could be perceived as a liberation for women writers. She suggests that

the radical otherness of nonhuman animals provides a double source of power: recognition of the degree to which women are victimized by androcentric culture, and realization of solidarity in defiance of cultural authority. In their work on animals, moreover, women writers perform that most anti-androcentric of acts: thinking themselves into the being of the wholly "other," the animal. It turns out that this act is not an act of self-sacrifice but of empowerment. (234)

Considering the references to floral imagery and domesticity within 'The Fish', the release of the fish may also be likened to a throwing off of traditional female responsibilities. By setting the feminised fish free, the female narrator "think[s] [herself] into the being of the wholly 'other'" and aligns their narratives in "defiance of cultural authority". While it would be reductive to assume that Bishop employs animals only to imply a political stance against a patriarchal society, poems such as 'The Fish', 'Pink Dog' and 'Roosters' work to reposition traditional expectations of what is feminine.

'Cirque d'Hiver' (P 32) is notable too for its examination of both masculine and feminine characteristics alongside the consideration of the human/animal divide. In it, the poet-speaker ruminates on the life of a mechanised horse and his female rider, which heightens the sense of otherness

beyond that of human-animal, focussing also on the divide between biological and simulated life:

Across the floor flits the mechanical toy,  
fit for a king of several centuries back.  
A little circus horse with real white hair.  
His eyes are glossy black.  
He bears a little dancer on his back.

She stands upon her toes and turns and turns.  
A slanting spray of artificial roses  
is stitched across her skirt and tinsel bodice.  
Above her head she poses  
another spray of artificial roses.

His mane and tail are straight from Chirico.  
He has a formal, melancholy soul.  
He feels her pink toes dangle toward his back  
along the little pole  
that pierces both her body and her soul

and goes through his, and reappears below,  
under his belly, as a big tin key.  
He canters three steps, then he makes a bow,  
canters again, bows on one knee,  
canters, then clicks and stops, and looks at me.

The dancer, by this time, has turned her back.  
He is the more intelligent by far.  
Facing each other rather desperately—  
his eye is like a star—  
we stare and say, "Well, we have come this far."

The strict *abcbb* rhyme scheme and the mostly end-stop stanzas mimic the stilted, programmed movements of the horse and dancer, creating an almost-childlike narrative peppered with delicate sound chimes that deliver the poem to its amusing conclusion, which appears at first to be not much more than a comedic moment of imagined empathy between speaker and horse.

However, it is cunning in its simplicity. While it would be unfair to assert that the poem is not playfully witty, beneath this, the horse and dancer portray various incarnations of otherness that in turn lend themselves to human concerns, ruminating on divisions of gender, artistry and anthropocentrism. And, while Bishop does not attempt to inhabit or personify the horse, through it, her human speaker achieves a moment of clarity, seeing aspects of herself in this animal counterpart. The hint towards surrealist art through the mention of Chirico (assumed to be the metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico) in the third stanza allows Bishop to broaden the scope of plausibility. The horse progresses from “mechanical toy” to an intelligent, kindred spirit for the narrator, while the dancer achieves only an affectation of realness. This, in part, champions the horse’s animal otherness, while at the same time highlighting the female dancer’s diminished position as a purveyor of artistic meaning.

The dancer is portrayed less favourably, perhaps to comment on the perception of femininity. As is typical, Bishop subverts the traditional “female as nature” trope here, instead using a male horse to represent the natural world. The female dancer is only *clothed* in nature, and even then, it is “artificial”. The “spray of artificial roses/[that] is stitched across her skirt and tinsel bodice”, connotes the application of perfume and eye-catching clothing. However, the repetitions of “artificial”, “spray” and “roses”, when paired with the way “[s]he stands upon her toes and turns and turns” and the way “she poses”, undercuts any pleasant sentiments. Instead there is a suggestion of

perfunctory tedium about her role and an affected beauty that the horse does not suffer under with his “real white hair” and “glossy black” eyes.

The lack of variation in the description of the dancer throughout focuses attention on the animal who is (perhaps ironically) admitted as “the more intelligent by far”. His “formal, melancholy soul” may also be indicative of the horse as the “troubled artist”, the further irony being that the dancer is in fact the artist in their pairing. Her art – ballet – is portrayed as mindless and meaningless, while the circus performer horse is contemplated much more deeply, perhaps passing a wry judgement on the position of the female artist. By aligning her narrator with the horse, Bishop distances herself from this incarnation of femininity.

And yet the two figures are inseparable, joined as they are by “a big tin key”. This places them and their souls at the mercy of whatever master it is that turns the key and brings them to life, hinting once more towards the idea of “something bigger”; an incomprehensible divinity. While this gives the watching narrator an aspect of dominion over the horse and rider – Goldensohn notes that “[t]he speaker hovers over the small theatre of the poem” (56) – the final stanza works to equalise the narrator and the horse. Their shared moment of clarity speaks to the space between life and not life; a space not necessarily inhabited by death, but certainly by a mutual sense of otherness. The horse’s “eye is like a star”, elevating the scene towards the heavens, suggesting, as in ‘At the Fishhouses’, the intangibility of nature, knowledge and spirituality. Bishop imbues the toy with the symbolic power of a real horse to emphasise the idea

that nature is a powerful, unknowable force and to commune with it is akin to religious transcendence.

'The Moose' offers an approach to the transcendent power of nature that is similar to 'Cirque d'Hiver', and showcases Bishop's ability to recast the idea of the human world back through the mysterious lens of animal otherness. The narrator, travelling on a night bus to Boston, allows her mind to drift from the immediate, and largely human, imagery passing by outside the window, into a dreamlike state of memory, suggestive of familial struggles with life and death. This drifting into memory blurs the line between the real and the unreal, and represents to some extent a loss of the self, the conscious human. When the moose "makes its god-like entrance from the midnight woods and stops the bus cold" (Boruch 115) it serves to break these meditations and at the same time to solidify them, reawakening and reconfirming the self.

In her discussion of Nadine Gordimer's 'The Silent Voice of the Serpent', Scholtmeijer highlights a moment of human-animal identification: a man who has lost his leg sees a locust, also missing a leg, and begins to come to terms with his injury through this kinship with the insect. However, this identification is quickly rejected by the locust, who, despite its injury is still able to fly away. Scholtmeijer states that "the animal's silent rebuff casts the person back upon his or her own devices, more fully conscious than before the encounter of personal existential aloneness" (244). In Bishop's case, the moose functions comparably though with contrary results. It is described as "[t]owering, antlerless, high as a church [...] grand, otherworldly" and provokes a "sweet

sensation of joy” in the narrator and her fellow travellers. This shared feeling acts as a reminder of both the personal, lived moment and the wider concerns of nature, humans and their shared earth. The animal in this case becomes the remedy to a “personal existential aloneness”. Reminiscent of the shared moment of clarity with the horse in ‘Cirque d’Hiver’, this encounter with the moose signifies a near-spiritual experience, drawing from nature the sublimity often associated with religious transcendence.

An inversion of this clarity can be found in ‘The Armadillo’ (P 101-2), which incites a sense of horror at the human destruction of nature to gesture towards the fallibility of all life. Describing the Brazilian tradition of releasing fire balloons on St John’s day, the poem moves from a contemplation of the balloons as they drift up the mountain towards the stars, to a panicked despair at the havoc wreaked on the natural world when one crashes into the side of the mountain, destroying the habitats of several animals. The scene offered in the first half of the poem is one of lofty aspiration, and Bishop casts a characteristically ironic eye on the idea of organised religion, suggesting that the “saint/still honored in these parts” is out of date. She imbues the fire balloons with a sense of life and fragility. The “frail, illegal fire balloons”, and the humans staring up at them, are miniaturised against the expanse of the sky. They lift, “receding, dwindling, solemnly/and steadily forsaking us”, separating themselves from humanity, perhaps intentioned as representations of souls rising towards heaven:

Climbing the mountain height,

rising towards a saint  
still honored in these parts,  
the paper chambers flush and fill with light  
that comes and goes, like hearts.

Once up against the sky it's hard  
to tell them from the stars—  
planets, that is—the tinted ones:  
Venus going down, or Mars,

The self-correction in the third stanza of “stars” to “planets”, quickly tips the tone from sentimentality to a more secular, astrological consideration, undermining the prior suggestion of the scriptural afterlife.

The balloons lose their romanticised sense of eternal life altogether when they “suddenly turn dangerous”, becoming instead proponents of injury and death. As in ‘Roosters’ (discussed below), though with perhaps a more discreet framing, the theme of militarism and warfare comes to the fore in the latter half of ‘The Armadillo’. Penelope Laurans postulates that the destroyed animal habitats are intended to represent towns and communities bombed during World War II, with the fire balloons representative of falling missiles (81). The animals depicted serve to further draw the poem away from divine musing and to bring it back into the sphere of lived experience. Their turmoil highlights the effect of anthropocentrism, while at the same time inspiring a strong human-animal connection in the exploration of their instinct to survive, which is consolidated in the final, italicised stanza. Introduced only halfway through the poem, it is the plight of the animals that resonates. Though their otherness is maintained and no attempt is made to personify them, they become emblems of humanity, suggestive of war torn communities.

The destruction of the owls' nest is indicative of domestic society and relationships, a damage here that is catastrophic and irreparable. The owls' fear is reflected in the disjointed enjambment between the sixth and seventh stanzas:

We saw the pair

of owls who nest there flying up  
and up, their whirling black-and-white  
stained bright pink underneath, until  
they shrieked up out of sight.

Here, the narrator and whoever she is with seem to identify with the owls, their neighbours, whose "ancient ... nest must have burned". While Bishop's characteristic reticence will not give in to specifically emotive language, here she utilises form to enact emotional intensity and to create a sense of shared panic, using the owls' instinctual flight response to invoke empathy. The chime of "pair" with "there" and "their" resonates the reality of the owls' shared life, which in turn perhaps mirrors the life the narrator shares with their contingent "we". By embedding the rhymes within the lines, rather than at the end, the flow of movement stutters, heightening the sense of fear and danger. Similarly, the hyphenated "black-and-white" suggests partnership, which reflects the experience of the narrator and the other person as they witness this destructive event.

The owls' "whirling black-and-white" also speaks to the ideas of the self and the other, the known and the unknown. It echoes the sense of light and dark that is present throughout the first half of the poem, both physically in the

flickering fire lanterns and more esoterically in the evocation of unreachable space. Black and white are opposites but also compatriots, invoking the shared spectrum of human-animal life. The vivid pink staining on the owls' bodies suggests flesh and wounding, reiterating the earlier frailty of the fire balloons. Here, however, the frailty is seen in a living creature. This suggestion of lived pain is accentuated in the use of "shrieked" as both a sound and movement verb, as though the narrator has embodied their anguish through her visual and auditory observation of the owls' escape.

The owls come to mirror the fire balloons, becoming the living incarnation of "the paper chambers [that] flush and fill with light/that [come] and [go], like hearts". The recurring "-ight" sound in "white", "bright" and "sight", recalls the "night", "height" and "light" of the first two stanzas. This, paired with the repetition of "up", forces the eye to ascend the same path the balloons took in the beginning. There is no suggestion of space or stars now, however, maintaining a firm, earthly connection that undermines any previous aspirations towards celestial transcendence. This is affirmed in the following stanza where "[t]he ancient owls' nest must have burned", with "ancient" here evoking ideas of prehistory and evolution, connecting the ideas of animal history and human history through a suggestion of the perennial family and home life that is now subject to destruction. If the fire balloons are representative of warfare and the animal habitats of domestic life, this scene becomes symbolic of the destruction of typically "female" domains by typically "male" acts of military violence.

There is a brevity of description given to each of the animals within the poem, reflecting the reality of their frenzied escape. The armadillo in particular is seen only fleetingly, but, by titling the poem after it, Bishop suggests a specific significance held by this animal within the wider context of the poem. Despite only occupying three lines, its presence works to capitulate the poem towards the idea of existential aloneness:

Hastily, all alone,  
a glistening armadillo left the scene,  
rose-flecked, head down, tail down

The armadillo's lone journey is emphasised in its short introductory line, while the repeated [l] sounds in this stanza create a sense of lightness, heightening the speed with which the armadillo passes by, making him enigmatically fluid. Within this scene of destruction, the armadillo embodies both the self and the other; it has a relatable autonomy but remains wholly animal, an individual representative of the natural community that the fire has destroyed. The armadillo, to a greater extent than the airborne owls before it, also provides a glimpse of nature up close. Its "glistening ... rose-flecked" body contrasts with the fire balloons and the stars. In this respect, the armadillo undermines the prior suggestions of dominant celestial beauty, instead inspiring a turn to earth and nature to satisfy the search for aesthetic brilliance. This is further suggested by the repetition of "down", and the "lo" sound in "alone" and "armadillo", both working in opposition with the previous insistence on upward vision.

The appearance of a rabbit comes “to our surprise”, bringing with it a sense of innocence perhaps less readily felt in the owls and the armoured armadillo. It becomes the climax of what Thomas Travisano calls Bishop’s “reliance on a succession of dramatically progressive imagistic details” (67). That it is a baby and “[s]o soft!” heightens the emotional kick when it is described as “a handful of intangible ash/with fixed, ignited eyes”. The implication of the rabbit as a “handful” highlights its diminutive size and at the same time suggests the narrator picked it up, making a direct connection with it. However, the intangibility of the rabbit harnesses its sense of otherness, acknowledging the abstract quality of nature, showing that, even when held in a human’s hands, it cannot be fully comprehended. Paired with “ash” the phrasing suggests that to touch the rabbit is to destroy it, drawing together the wider context of the poem and the idea of human destruction of nature. The spectre of death, which has hovered in the background of the poem from the outset, is brought to the fore. This use of “ash” connotes not only the destruction of the rabbit and the forest, but also the traditional “ashes to ashes...” phrasing used in the Christian burial service, calling back to the opening scenario of the poem. With this image, Bishop unites human/animal otherness through the inevitable and mutual experience of death, steering the poem towards the more overt emotional expression of the final stanza.

Throughout the poem there is a sense that nature, as opposed to God, is the controlling force of the earth. The wind becomes the catalyst for devastation. This emphasises a lack of human control over nature, but also the

anthropocentric disregard of nature's power. Despite the illegality of the fire balloons and the fact that this has happened before (“[I]ast night *another* big one fell”, emphasis added), still they are released into the sky with no consideration of the consequences. The final stanza becomes a moralising summation of the poem:

*Too pretty, dreamlike mimicry!  
O falling fire and piercing cry  
and panic, and a weak mailed fist  
clenched ignorant against the sky!*

It can be read as a condemnation of militaristic destruction, or as a more general censure of human disregard for animals.

However, like the work of her friend and one-time mentor, Marianne Moore, Bishop's animal poems do not readily submit to a singular interpretation, instead offering multiple diverse readings that often feed into one another. This becomes particularly prevalent when considering religious and ecofeminist narratives as laid out above. Her ruminations on nature tend towards a spiritual transcendentalism that challenges both traditional, organised religious practices, and the position of women and animals in society, with numerous points of crossover. At the same time, they maintain the essential spirit of the animal itself, carefully avoiding sustained anthropomorphism.

'Roosters', for example, oscillates primarily between the subjects of militarism, gender, marriage and religion, while invoking an accurate depiction of roosters crowing at dawn. Written in 1941, it is an early example of Bishop's

animal poetry, and unlike many of her later works, the use of animals-as-symbols is perhaps more overt. The poem toys with the Christian symbol of the rooster as a vessel for both betrayal and forgiveness, before lifting its attention to the sky of a new day, suggesting a comparison with our small, human history and the expanse of the infinite. The nature/culture divide manifests distinctly in each of the poem's three sections with the roosters acting as the linking factor between them.

Though this is famously the poem that brought their mentor/mentee relationship to an end, in correspondence with Marianne Moore prior to its publication Bishop noted that "I [wanted] to emphasize [sic] the essential baseness of militarism. In the 1<sup>st</sup> part I was thinking of Key West, and also of those aerial views of dismal little towns in Finland & Norway, when the Germans took over, and their atmosphere of poverty" (OA 96). Critics offer several varied readings of this opening section, which depicts the morning crows of roosters in a domestic garden. Goldensohn suggests that while the invasion of Finland and Norway may have been Bishop's initial source of inspiration for the poem, its true meaning lies in the wider condemnation of militarism in general (155-156). Alicia Ostriker, in *Stealing the Language*, ties the poem's militaristic implications to the idea of feminism, suggesting it as "a capsule representation of the invisible constraints inhibiting poets who would be ladies", describing the first two-thirds of the poem as "a strong and brilliant parody of male brutality and male aesthetics" (54). Victoria Harrison combines these sentiments, stating that it "relentlessly juxtaposes the dailiness of lovers

in bed and the violence of war, undermining any myth of moral righteousness outside war” (89).

Conversely, Colm Tóibín disagrees with many critics, stating that “[i]t is important to insist that ‘Roosters’ is about roosters” (66), that this is a poem describing the real roosters of Key West and their natural arrogance. He goes on to say that “[i]f Bishop had wanted to write a poem about the war and maleness and militarism, she would, or might, have done so, although it would have been unlikely” (67). While the roosters never entirely lose their animality, it is difficult to agree that their otherness is explored with no duality of function. Each of these readings also tend to side-line the religious examination of the rooster in the second section, which occupies 13 of the 44 stanzas and undeniably alters the way in which the poem’s opening is read. Setting the poem at the border of sleep and consciousness allows Bishop to toy with the idea of what is real and what is unreal. She uses animal otherness here to suggest difficult themes of warfare, religion, gender roles and love, highlighting the similarities between humans and animals and their shared inclinations towards brutality and sordidness. At the same time, she employs ambiguity and irony to demure from one straightforward reading. The poem’s progressive turns from warfare to religion to nature endeavour to address the broader question of existential meaning.

The roosters begin as ruthless sirens waking the world with their cries. The clipped, three-line stanzas are relentless, pushing from one image to the next in quick succession, driven forward by their hard end-rhymes. The

profusion of monosyllabic phrasing likens this onslaught to gunfire, supported by the repetition of “gun-metal blue”, which immediately initiates the connotations of warfare:

Cries galore  
come from the water-closet door,  
from the dropping-plastered henhouse floor,  
  
where in the blue blur  
their rustling wives admire,  
the roosters brace their cruel feet and glare  
  
with stupid eyes  
while from their beaks there rise  
the uncontrolled, traditional cries.

Roosters infiltrate every corner of the garden, depicted as jubilant in their invasion. This is an implication of debased, animal nature, with an almost-sexual inclination, heightened by the alternating [æ], [ɔ:] and [ɒ] sounds in stanza five.

In conversation with George Starbuck in 1977, when asked “which are your feminist tracts?” Bishop responded, “I don’t think there are any. The first part of ‘Roosters,’ now, I suppose. But I hadn’t thought of it that way” (*Conversations* 90). Despite this assertion, it is difficult to deny the clear divisions between genders portrayed throughout the poem. The hens are reduced to no more than “rustling wives”, reinforcing an underlying connotation of male primacy that is present throughout the poem’s opening section. The personification of the hens here as “wives” parodies marriage, suggesting the birds as representations of human women. When the male birds are depicted as “stupid”, “cruel” and “uncontrolled”, it highlights their

otherness, distancing them not only from the apparently civilised humans who want to carry on sleeping, but also the hens, who become comparatively innocent.

James Longenbach discusses the ideas of male supremacy and war in relation to this poem, stating that “the war emphasized the differences between the social roles occupied by men and women ... [s]o while ... ‘Roosters’ is well-known as Bishop’s war poem ... it is more precisely the poem’s linkage of national and sexual aggression that marks it as a product of the Second World War” (473–74). However, while ‘Roosters’ may appear at first as a condemnation of only the male aspects of a patriarchal society, it becomes apparent that Bishop is not necessarily siding with the hens over the militant roosters; the wife-hens are also being satirised. As Harrison states, “[t]he hens are passive, but for their masochistic activity of admiring the roosters who ‘command and terrorize’ them” (90). These stanzas become a comment on both genders; the “rustling wives” serve to facilitate the “cruel”, “stupid” roosters and their aggression by submitting to “lives/of being courted and despised”.

Here the narrator’s contemplation of the birds seems to distance the human/animal contingents of the poem. However, their animal otherness draws attention to the apparent absurdity found in the traditional, gendered roles in relationships. The caricature of marital life continues in stanzas 10-12 where

a senseless order floats  
all over town. A rooster gloats  
  
over our beds

from rusty iron sheds  
and fences made from old bedsteads,

over our churches  
where the tin rooster perches,  
over our little wooden northern houses

Bishop parodies the idyllic family home with a white picket fence, turning the scene into one of dilapidation, over which the rooster presides, perhaps satirising the cultural invention of marriage. The “tin rooster” sits on top of the church, suggesting himself as a pseudo-god, the emblem of nature standing in judgement over humanity.

The roosters then briefly become anthropomorphised parodies of human patriotism, characterised as

glass-headed pins,  
oil-golds and copper greens,  
anthracite blues, alizarins,

each one an active  
displacement in perspective:  
each screaming, “This is where I live!”

Each screaming  
“Get up! Stop dreaming!”  
Roosters, what are you projecting?

Examples of lucid speech from animals are rare in Bishop’s work, but it is used here to draw a direct comparison between humans and animals. Their voices progress from “uncontrolled, traditional cries” to intelligible “screaming” speech, which implies both madness and a tipping over into human faculties of communication. By turning them into “active/displacement[s] in perspective”, Bishop acknowledges an intended multiplicity of meaning and at the same time

suggests the impossibility of understanding the birds' otherness. However, when one rooster is killed and "flung/on the gray ash-heap, [and] lies in dung//with his dead wives", it suggests that, whether rooster or hen, male or female, human or animal, no creature can escape mortality. This unites humans and roosters under the inexplicable otherness of death.

At the end of the first section there is a focus on the idea of legacy and life after death. When paired with the cursory glance towards the "dead wives", the reference to "Magdalen" (assumedly Mary) in the opening stanza of the second section, becomes more significant than it first appears, drawing attention to the idea that female histories are less thoroughly explored than those of men. Kirsten Hotelling Zona states that "'Roosters' interrogates our compulsion to selfishness and cruelty, our propensity for mistaken judgment and regret, and the process of forgiveness that is elemental to the transition between them" (65). It might also be added that this poem highlights the tendency to forget, as characterised by these brief mentions of the female chickens and Mary Magdalen, which suggest that females become background characters in stories that emphasise and extol their male counterparts.

Moving into the second section of the poem, Bishop toys with the Christian symbolism of the rooster as a signifier not only of Peter's denial of association with Christ, but also Christ's forgiveness of his apostle. At the same time, she addresses the popular (though unrecorded in any of the Gospels) characterisation of Mary Magdalen as a prostitute, referencing her "sin of the flesh". Bishop takes Christ's words to his disciples in the Garden of

Gethsemane; that “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (*King James Version*, Matt. 26:41); reconfiguring them to emphasise an apparent weakness in Magdalen’s character:

St. Peter’s sin  
was worse than that of Magdalen  
whose sin was of the flesh alone;  
  
of spirit, Peter’s,  
falling, beneath the flares,  
among the “servants and officers.”

The females who feature in the poem are now reduced to little more than “sin[s] of the flesh”, there to service and support the men they are surrounded by. “Peter’s sin/was worse”, but he is, as shown in the rest of the poem, remembered much more favourably overall. Though their parts within the poem are fleeting, the female characters become significant *because* of the brevity of examination given to them. When they are overridden by loud, arrogant roosters Bishop creates a neatly observed parody of reality; the otherness of the hens recognises the supposed otherness of human women in a patriarchal society.

The animal rooster outshines even the human Magdalen, becoming the blessed symbol of forgiveness. Alongside this, Peter is not only pardoned, but resplendently immortalised in stone alongside Christ:

Christ stands amazed,  
Peter, two fingers raised  
to surprised lips, both as if dazed.  
  
But in between  
a little cock is seen  
carved on a dim column in the travertine

explained by *gallus canit*;  
*flet Petrus* underneath it.  
There is inescapable hope, the pivot;

yes, and there Peter's tears  
run down our chanticleer's  
sides and gem his spurs.

Tear-encrusted thick  
as a medieval relic  
he waits. Poor Peter, heart-sick,

still cannot guess  
those cock-a-doodles yet might bless,  
his dreadful rooster come to mean forgiveness

Peter's remorseful tears turn the potentially violent spurs into sparkling artefacts that might garner admiration. He is raised to the position of "the Prince/of the Apostles" under the emblem of the rooster. The militant assault of the roosters that was explored in the first section is forgotten as they are reduced to just one rooster that becomes the "inescapable hope, the pivot", an emblem of absolution, for the poem's male characters at least. At the same time, however, it is difficult to imagine Bishop missing the irony of the "little cock" so pointedly positioned between Peter and Christ within this scene, perhaps satirising these men, extravagantly forgiving one another under the insignia of the "bronze cock".

Throughout the poem there is a prevalent attempt to solidify the roosters and turn them from real, living birds into iconographic renderings in metal and stone. There is a proliferation of metal that persists from the "gun-metal blue dark" of the opening stanza. The roosters are dressed in "green-gold medals", coloured in "oil-golds and copper greens"; the "tin rooster perches"

over the church; the dead rooster's "metallic feathers oxidise". And later Peter's "dreadful rooster" is rendered in the "[o]ld holy sculpture ... carved on a dim column in the travertine". It then becomes "a new weathervane ... a bronze cock on a porphyry/pillar". Each example suggests an attempt to make the rooster into a palpable artistic object; to pin down their otherness into a human frame of reference that will outlast the mortality of the birds and their human counterparts.

However, as Siobhan Phillips suggests, with reference to Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium', Bishop's "metallic cocks do not seem to provide that timeless place 'out of nature'" (120). Instead, the constant shift of these emblematic statues implies the flux of a more earthly impression of nature, time and history. Bishop highlights the ways in which the human cultural significance of an animal can alter with time, while simultaneously reinforcing the idea that the animal other can never be entirely taken "out of nature" or comprehended in human terms. There is a reassurance that real, living roosters will always crow, but that "'Deny, deny, deny'/is not all [they] cry" – that they cannot be assigned any one meaning except inconclusiveness. She uses the otherness of the roosters to represent the ways in which human behaviour can be read, suggesting that everything is dependent on the context, refusing to confirm that the birds represent any one thing in particular. Their animal instinct to crow at the break of each new day gives them the characteristics of both reliability and transformation. They demarcate the passage of time and in doing so can become the embodiment of multiplicity.

The final section of the poem turns to what Costello calls “the noniconic force of nature” (67), and it is the “low light” that comes, “gilding//from underneath/ ... gilding the tiny/floating swallow’s belly”, that admits nature’s changeability. This gilding is transient, echoed in “the day’s preamble/like wandering lines in marble”, which suggests permanence, but also movement and unpredictability. By ending the poem back in the post-dawn morning where “[t]he cocks are now almost inaudible”, Bishop implies that the “noniconic force of nature” can always undermine anthropomorphic symbolism, despite the multiple layers of artistic meaning that might be derived from an animal. This turn towards the dawn sky renders both human and animal, and their concerns, insignificant, suggesting once more the question of a spiritual otherness, which ultimately goes unanswered.

In ‘Roosters’, as in several of Bishop’s animal poetics, traditional religious teachings are transformed to encompass a broader sense of ecological spirituality. As demonstrated, within her work animals often function to suggest a broader spiritual communion with nature. Their presences undermine traditional incarnations of religious practice in an attempt to equalise human/animal life. Though she maintains their absolute otherness, by suggesting animal life as emblematic of humanity, she creates a sense of recognition between human and animal.

## “It Is Not for Us to Understand Art”: Combinations of Animal Otherness and Visual Art in the Poetry of Marianne Moore

Marianne Moore is widely regarded as one of the foremost poets of the modernist movement, ranked alongside the likes of T.S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens for her highly innovative style, form and use of language. In a career that spanned six decades, her poetic subjects were wide-ranging, with very little left unconsidered. Topics as varied as marriage, geography, war and nectarines for example, captivate the pages of her collected works, where her unique blend of reticence, humour and modesty prevail, leaving behind a constant sense of mystery when attempting to unpick her rationale.

In his loosely comparative essays, ‘Two Bestiaries’, W.H. Auden considers the work of D.H Lawrence and Marianne Moore, and states that “[w]hen I first read Lawrence’s poetry, I didn’t like it much, but I had no difficulty in understanding it. But when in 1935, I first tried to read Marianne Moore’s poems, I simply could not make head or tail of them” (296). Elisabeth Joyce notes that her work is often “received with...trepidation”, and suggests that this may be “because it is so deeply invested in subversion, but a subversion that Moore felt compelled to mask” (9). As has been widely acknowledged, animals are a key feature of Moore’s oeuvre; she seems to find in their otherness the perfect conduit for her enigmatic exploration of life. Her animal poems exemplify some of her deepest moments of subversion, and cannot be

read without the overwhelming sense that there is something more going on beyond the surface. At the same time, however, they remain pointedly factual in describing genuine animal physiologies.

Discussing the crossovers between science and poetry with regard to animal life, Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence notes that

[i]t is increasingly clear that the unity of science with poetry may be the sole way that human relationships with nature may be completely understood. And it is only through knowledge about those relationships that we can hope to reverse the destructiveness toward other species that has become the hallmark of our time. (52)

Moore's lifelong passion for natural history is well-documented; having minored in biology at Bryn Mawr, her studies of animal life are observed and recorded to the smallest minutiae, at times even emulating scientific inquiry. By celebrating their otherness in these terms, she advocates for the respect and preservation of the natural world. Randy Malamud suggests that "Moore's poetry invites us as readers to interrogate our relationship with animals in a way that will lead us to recognize the importance of this interaction as an imaginative experience, as well as the difficulty of accurately and meaningfully knowing these animals" (94). Often as she ruminates on a given creature, she poses questions, constantly seeking an exact way in which to pinpoint its otherness, though concrete conclusions are rare in Moore's poetry. Malamud goes on to note that "[w]e may come close to the animals, sometimes very close, but we will not fully *grasp* them (with both connotations of 'grasp': 'hold' and 'understand')" (95).

Early poems such as 'A Jelly-Fish' (first published in *The Lantern* in 1909), 'To a Chameleon' (first published as 'You Are Like the Realistic Product of an Idealistic Search for Gold at the Foot of the Rainbow' in 1916) and 'To a Snail' (first published in *Observations* in 1924) offer compact examinations of their eponymous animals, all three of which have a natural inclination towards concealment. The chameleon is "[h]id by the august foliage" (PMM 102), and for the snail "[c]ontractility is a virtue" (PMM 174). The jellyfish is "[v]isible, invisible,/[a] fluctuating charm" (PMM 14), suggesting an almost-magical otherness that cannot be fathomed by the human "you" who attempts, throughout the poem, to grasp, both physically and philosophically, the animal. She reiterates this motif later, in her 1941 poem, 'He "Digesteth Harde Yron"', stating that "[t]he power of the visible/is the invisible" (PMM 244), underlining the idea that sublimity lies in that which cannot be seen. These examinations of animal otherness all show that there is value in *not* knowing the natural world intimately, and that pleasure can come from the acts of watching and wondering.

Besides her focussed studies of individual animals, Moore is adept in her use of animal imagery to describe a wide range of subjects; as Auden notes "[l]ike Lawrence, she has an extraordinary gift for metaphorical comparisons which make the reader see what she has seen...[b]ut, unlike Lawrence she likes the human race" (303-04), and this becomes a prominent feature throughout her work. For example, Benjamin Disraeli becomes a "bright particular chameleon" in 'To a Strategist' (PMM 88); the swan of 'Critics and

Connoisseurs' has "flamingo-coloured" feet (PMM 106); and the subject of 'Those Various Scalpels' has hair like "the tails of two/fighting-cocks" (PMM 116). By transforming animals into images that describe a range of subjects, she advocates for animals as works of art within nature. Through simile and metaphor, she allows her animal others to cross the boundary between nature and culture, which in turn erases the boundary altogether. She places her animal subjects within both ecological and anthropological contexts, framing them with human points of reference while maintaining their essential animality. There is no sense of mastery about her animal imagery; as Bonnie Costello suggests in *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions*, Moore "display[s]...the enchantments of association rather than the power of usurpation" (199) in her work. Animals are regarded with a prolific reverence, next to which the poem itself, the act of writing about an animal becomes almost inadequate.

Costello states that "Moore's dominant sense, most would agree, was sight. Her metaphors are based on visual resemblance, her stanzas are arranged by the look of the page rather than by metrical rhythm or rhyme" (186). Her work is distinctly pictorial, proliferating with images that bring to life her subjects so succinctly as to reiterate the uniqueness of her poetry on a near line-by-line basis. Several Moore scholars have undertaken studies into her enthusiasm for visual art and the ways in which this informed her writing. Costello, Joyce and Linda Leavell (see *Hanging on Upside Down*, 2013) offer extensive biographical evidence of Moore's engagement with visual art

alongside their analyses of her work, and insist that it would be impossible to deny the crossovers between these interests and her poetry.

Costello highlights the fact that “[a]lmost every poem Moore wrote involved a picture or art object at some stage of composition”, noting “the scope of [her] imagination, [and] her ability to create poetic order out of widely divergent materials” (192). The rate at which her imagery fluctuates across genres, landscapes and historical periods creates an often-vertiginous effect. It is thanks to this her work can be read with multiple inferences; there is a constant expansion and contraction of focus that refuses to offer any concrete points of origin or destination, something that Costello terms her “pluralistic sense of reality” (197). Guy Rotella notes in *Reading and Writing Nature* that “[s]he employs without distress the subjective cultural ‘filters’ that protect us from the threat of wholly wild nature and are essential to representation. She does so in ways that never presume completely to control or possess nature and that expose repeatedly but without anxiety the illusions of art” (183).

Of interest to the current study are her interrogations of animal otherness through the alterity of visual art. The air of ambivalence she creates is mimetic of the enigma that shrouds the origins and existence of both. In ‘Animals in Visual Art from 1900 to the Present’, Jonathan Burt offers insights into the role animals play within artworks and suggests that “the alien nature or otherness of the animal parallels the open-ended otherness of the artwork: one form of alienating difficulty mutually reinforces the other” (165). The scope of his suggestion can be widened to encapsulate Moore’s use of animals

in her poetry; the poems themselves become emblems of otherness, explorations of what it is to operate simultaneously within the overlapping realms of nature, culture, poetry and art.

Poems throughout her collected works, including 'An Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish' (*PMM* 173), 'No Swan So Fine' (*PMM* 189), and 'The Jerboa' (*PMM* 190), see animals depicted as art objects, which are thus transformed into literary art through her versification. Leavell discusses her diverse exploration of nature and visual art in 'When Marianne Moore Buys Pictures', commenting on "the spiritual forces' underlying the visible world". She suggests that "rather than lamenting the loss of traditional values in an increasingly diverse world, Moore witnesses truth in the diversity itself. To her the 'spiritual forces' are most evident in the uniqueness of individuals—especially 'genuine' works of art and exotic animal species" (252).

This sense of "spiritual force" underwrites much of Moore's work. Though her language is often notably scientific, there is a spiritual undercurrent that runs throughout her oeuvre. In her private life, Moore was a devout Presbyterian, attending twice-weekly church services. However, as Robin Schulze discusses, while Moore and her fellow modernists were transforming the literary world, it is important to remember they were "all members of the first American generation to grow up in the shadow of another, more revolutionary idea of change—Darwin's theory of organic evolution by means of natural selection" ('Textual Darwinism', 271). Schulze acknowledges a trend amongst certain progressive Protestant clergymen at the beginning of the

twentieth century, who “accepted evolution as a proven scientific fact and deemed the process supremely compatible with Christian faith” (272). She goes on to suggest that Moore’s brother, himself a pastor, was influenced by their teachings and passed them on in turn to Moore. Within her work, particularly her animal poems, the crossovers between spiritual mystery and factual evolutionary biology are keenly explored.

Straddling this divide allows Moore, like Bishop, to remain ambivalent in her conclusions and to constantly question the world around her. Often the most profound moments of poetry within her work come from the idea of incomprehension, of not having the exact heart of the thing revealed. As she said in her 1942 review of José Garcia Villa’s *Have Come, Am Here*, “only the purblind would dissect a rose to determine its fragrance, or a poem to discover its secret; for a poem deprived of its mystery would no longer be a poem. And mystery is different from obscurity.” (CPMM 370). Similarly, an animal deprived of its otherness is no longer an animal, and so Moore does not assume she can reveal the meaning behind their existence. There is very rarely an attempt to get inside the mind or body of the animal; she is content to marvel through observation, presenting them as poetic portraits with added turns towards the sublimity of visual art.

Her 1917 poem, ‘The Monkeys’ (PMM 121, also known as ‘My Apish Cousins’), is a notable exception. Moore employs anthropomorphism to give voice to a tiger, who takes over the narration of the poem halfway through to explore themes of discrimination, art and criticism through the lens of animal

otherness. Using her nature-as-art principle, Moore initially fuses animals and culture in transparent terms: the human-cultural practice of viewing animals as exhibits in a zoo. She uses this to ground her poem in reality, introducing the idea of animals *as art*, before an about-turn into the surreal (rare in Moore's work), where an animal *discusses art*.

She begins the poem with a dreamlike sequence in which the lyric 'I' revisits a memory of going to the zoo twenty years earlier. It opens with an examination of a series of animals in their unnatural habitat. The inclusion of the title as part of the first line serves to initiate the overriding subject of animals as art:

### **The Monkeys**

winked too much and were afraid of snakes. The zebras, supreme in their abnormality; the elephants with their fog-colored skin and strictly practical appendages were there, the small cats; and the parakeet—trivial and humdrum on examination, destroying bark and portions of the food it could not eat.

Each animal is obscured or obscuring something; the winking monkeys seem to have a secret, while the zebras and the elephant betray nothing through their camouflage. The parakeet, who might be expected to be colourfully exotic is actually rather dull. Moore offers uncharacteristically brief observations, suggesting these animals as a peripheral distraction hiding the promise of something much more intriguing. Although they were "magnificent", the memory of them is "dim". They are obstinately pedestrian, refusing to become objects of the creative imagination.

Far more thrilling of course is the tiger, “that Gilgamesh among/the hairy carnivora”. He is part-human, part-animal, part-god, bridging the gap between humans and animals, while at the same time standing removed from both, hinting towards the idea of a divine otherness. He is made both more familiar and more foreign the moment his speech begins. He comes with his “resolute tail”,

astringently remarking, “They have imposed on us with their pale  
half-fledged protestations, trembling about  
in inarticulate frenzy, saying  
it is not for us to understand art; finding it  
all so difficult, examining the thing

as if it were inconceivably arcanic, as symmet-  
rically frigid as if it had been carved out of chrysoprase  
or marble—strict with tension, malignant  
in its power over us and deeper  
than the sea when it proffers flattery in exchange for hemp,  
rye, flax, horses, platinum, timber, and fur.”

The tiger’s speech is open to several different, though equally significant interpretations that largely rest on the definitions of “they” and “us” within the poem. Taken literally, the division may connote animals and humans; as Malamud suggests, the tiger is perhaps a “large cat protesting its exploitation in the zoo” (120). Alternatively, Moore may be employing anthropomorphism as a means of exploring human issues; Pamela White Hadas believes the poem is “adamant about the wickedness of critics” (120), while Costello suggests that it “deals chiefly with a taste for art that sacrifices the ‘magnificence’ of nature for the narcissistic satisfactions of baroque complexities, high-sounding interpretations, and intellectual emphasis” (30).

Moore plays with the idea that art is open to interpretation, both directly when the tiger says that “it is not for us to understand art”, and indirectly in her open-ended presentation of “us”, “them”, and “art” itself. The reader is invited to contemplate, with the speaker, *what* exactly this animal encounter might connote, and in the process, to realise that intellectual growth is possible through human-animal interaction. The human speaker is still, twenty years later, contemplating the tiger’s enigmatic speech, suggesting that she, like the reader, was left uncertain of its specific meaning. But, whoever “they” are, their “protestations” have been “imposed”, which suggests “they” believe their critical approach is the only version of artistic truth. This places “us” in a position of vulnerability, perfectly embodied by the captive animals. The clear naming of animals and art within the poem, and the noted challenge of understanding them, gesture towards a key inference of its message: that both animal otherness and the creative imagination transcend concrete reason and critique.

Camilla Flodin states that “[h]umanity has defined itself as the opposite of nature in order to control it. Through the mastery of both internal human nature (desires, needs) and external non-human nature, humanity has been able to escape nature’s immediate hold” (139). She goes on to explore Adorno’s idea that “art remembers humanity’s dependence on nature” (140). In ‘The Monkeys’, art is “malignant in its power over us”; infectious, invasive, incurable, though also, perhaps, cruel in its refusal to be neatly decoded. It goes “deeper than the sea”, unfathomable to every living creature, with the suggestion that it

will only reveal its secrets after death. Flodin suggests that “[a]rt can only hint at reconciliation between man and nature by expressing nature’s suffering” (141). By equating the power of art with the power of the sea, Moore ties nature’s otherness to the alterity of art and appeals for respect towards both. That the animals within the poem are confined to zoo enclosures turns them to live artworks, demanding that they be respected too.

William Desmond notes that “[g]reat art has always drawn its admirers by its power to renew our astonishment before the mysterious happening of being, not of course in such a seemingly generalized way, but by an aesthetic fidelity to the inexhaustible singularities of the world, human and nonhuman” (2). Through the tiger’s otherness, Moore can contemplate this “mysterious happening of being”, exploring the concept of “art”; what it means and who it is for, while at the same time questioning what it means to be animal and what it means to be human, without offering any firm summations. Art becomes dangerous, luring us in by “proffering flattery”; we hand over our natural world to art and the creation of it, as is reflected in Moore’s potentially ironic use of an animal narrator within this poem. Costello suggests that “[i]n a sense the poem...barter[s] nature for flattery, using industry to convert things to human use, making nature represent humanity” (31).

This circles back to the animals listed in the first stanza, all of whom have been removed from their natural environments and purchased for display in a zoo, tapping into the idea of nature as a human commodity. It is pertinent

here to quote Moore's entry in *The Book of Knowledge 1955 Annual*, entitled 'What There Is to See at the Zoo'. She notes that

[w]e are the guests of science when we enter the zoo; and, in accepting privileges, we incur obligations. Animals are masters of earth, air and water, brought from their natural surroundings to benefit us ... the zoo [is] a museum of living marvels for our pleasure and instruction (CPMM 475).

As Costello notes, "Moore's poetry predates the environmental movement by several decades, but it shares some of its prominent themes: a disdain for human rapacity, plunder, and anthropocentrism; a celebration of nature's variety, economy, and ingenuity" ('On Poetry & the Idea of Nature' 133).

Though perhaps less well-known than 'The Monkeys', 'Dock Rats' (PMM 137), likewise addresses some of the issues surrounding the commodification of nature from the point of view of the animal other. It is a poem that celebrates the hardy rodents who have made their home in a bustling New York dockyard. The setting acts as an urban meeting point for nature and humanity, all apparently working in harmony as life moves unstoppably through the scene. The rats are not disregarded as vermin, but are here celebrated in their otherness as perpetual spectators and purveyors of the creative imagination. Their collective position as poetic narrator turns them from animals to artists. Under their gaze, "shipping [becomes] the/most interesting thing in the world".

There is a persistent sense within 'Dock Rats', as there is in 'The Monkeys', that nature is the controlling force behind everything, from industry

to art, and that it shouldn't be taken for granted. This is reflected in Moore's choice of narrator. The rats are the only unchanging quantity within the poem. They are literally *docked* rats – as they explain, “[o]ne does/not live in such a place from motives of expediency”; they have chosen to hull themselves in a habitat that fascinates and facilitates them. They embody the idea that nature cannot be stifled or suppressed even in the areas that humans have attempted to control. Moore had a particular soft spot for rats; her family nickname was ‘Rat’, after the character from *The Wind in the Willows*. This biographical detail leads Leavell to read this poem, in her 2013 biography of Moore, as an example of “ironic self-portraiture” (*Hanging on Upside Down* 170). Unlike Bishop and Lawrence, Moore rarely exposes any distinct suggestion of self in her examinations of animal otherness, however, it is not difficult to see her just behind the wry observations of these rats.

They “regard the place...craftily” in the opening line, recalling the rat of ‘Holes Bored in a Workbag by the Scissors’, who stands for “craft, industry, resourcefulness” (*PMM* 114). In ‘Dock Rats’, “craft” acts as an early nod towards poetic technique, which is carefully manipulated throughout to create an immersive blend of nature and culture that turns the shipping trade from industrial practice to art. The 30-line poem contains just six sentence breaks, though there are thirteen semicolons, and 10 dashes and hyphens, which place a subtle stylistic emphasis on the theme of interdependence between human and nonhuman life. Moore's wending, list-like sentences carefully maintain the rats' otherness, evoking their scurrying movements and all-encompassing

observations, while at the same time capturing the ceaseless activity of the environment.

And yet, there is a notable lack of individual human movement; the only people referred to are those aboard the ferry-boat who are reduced to singular heads, “assigned, one to each compartment, making/a row of chessmen set for play”. Humans become rigid toys in the eyes of the rats. Further to this, the various ships described act as metaphors for the different aspects of human society the rats are witness to: militarists (“the battleship”), hobbyists (“the steam yacht”) and holidaymakers (“the ferryboat”) are all indistinguishable from the vessels they sail in. There is a clever reversal of otherness at work within the poem that reduces humanity to a fixed imitation of life that is under nature’s control.

The middle section of the poem turns specifically to commerce and, as in ‘The Monkeys’, animals feature as tradeable stock, implying anthropocentrism, despite humanity’s apparent inertia. The parakeet and the monkey could quite easily be the same as those who featured in the earlier poem, arriving here before being taken to the zoo. This is immediately followed by a turn back to the water, however, which has been quietly controlling the scene throughout. There is an overriding insistence that nature’s role in the vitality of the scene ought to be acknowledged; though the dock has been constructed by humans, the rats make clear that this human industry wouldn’t be possible without nature:

There is the sea, moving the bulk-  
head with its horse strength; and the multiplicity of rudders

and propellers; the signals, shrill, questioning, peremptory, diverse;  
the wharf cats and the barge dogs; it

is easy to overestimate the value of such things.

There is a suggestion of underlying threat here from the sea that challenges the human “overestimation” of control. The unfathomable “horse strength” of the sea suggests wild nature, intimating the power of the water to cause destruction, speaking subtly to Leavell’s idea of the “‘spiritual forces’ underlying the visible world” (‘Moore Buys Pictures’ 252). The water becomes reminiscent of that depicted in an earlier poem, ‘The Fish’ (PMM 127), and later, in ‘A Grave’, where “the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave” (PMM 145).

The changeability of the sea is mirrored in the invocation of subject through form in the second half of the poem; the unpredictable rhyme scheme and stanza arrangements, and the varied line-lengths shift to emulate the ebb and flow of the water. The underlying impression of dangerous nature is still offset, however, by the light-hearted narration of the rats, who revel in the constant variation of their surroundings. This idea of perennial movement encompasses the sense of shifting poetic ambivalence Moore displays throughout her work.

Within both ‘The Monkeys’ and ‘Dock Rats’, though there is a clear distinction between humans and animals, their shared ability to speak closes the evolutionary gap and appeals to the sympathetic imagination of the reader, to encourage a positive, progressive connection with the natural world. Christina Gerhardt states that “[t]he discourse about the other is never merely

about the other but also about the fears and aspirations of the self. Allowing a recognition rather than a suppression of the animality within allows a recognition of the humanity, too” (178). In seeing ourselves through the eyes of a talking animal, it becomes easier to empathise with their position as living creatures. Drawing humans and animals together in this way makes it more difficult to suppress the notion that life on earth is part of a spectrum.

Robin Schulze notes that “Moore was obsessed with the study of natural history”, suggesting that “[t]he...animal and vegetable subjects [she] selects—the pigeon, the pangolin, the buffalo, the nectarine, the echidna, the ostrich, the rose, and the ape that [she] deems her ‘cousin’—are in fact animals and plants of particular interest to naturalists engaged in the study of organic evolution” (“Textual Darwinism’ 275-276). Published in 1936, ‘The Pangolin’ (PMM 224-26) is an extended study of an animal that facilitates a new perspective on humanity’s position within nature. While she does not employ animal speech here, in it Moore indulges her passion for natural history and offers a modulation of form that acts as a mimetic, artistic study of evolution. Like the pangolin itself the poem is presented as “scale/lapping scale”, becoming a multi-layered, progressive movement from animal to human as well as an observation of nature’s place within human art.

In his now-famous 1978 essay, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, wherein he coined the term “ecocriticism”, William Rueckert contemplates some theories of ecology (which he admits are “somewhat poetically commented upon”). He proposes the idea of a poem as “stored

energy, a formal turbulence, a living thing, a swirl in the flow". He states that "[i]n literature, all energy comes from the creative imagination" and goes on to suggest that

"[i]t is perhaps true that the life of the human community depends upon the continuous flow of creative energy ... from the creative imagination and intelligence, and that this flow could be considered the sun upon which life in the human community depends; but it is not true that energy stored in a poem ... is used once, converted, and then lost from the ecosystem. It is used over and over again as a renewable resource by the same individual. (108-09)

Moore's approach in 'The Pangolin' embodies Rueckert's ideas in several ways. The poem, like the pangolin itself, spirals outwards from a very close examination of the animal to the broader connotations of human-animal similarities and differences, mimicking, literally "a living thing". Form corresponds to her exploration of subject and embodies the notion of the poem as "a renewable resource". The use of repetition; of themes, words and individual sounds; offers a gentle progression from one end of the spectrum to the other. Her long, complex sentences are heavily descriptive with multiple overlapping clauses that force a circularity of their own, often commanding multiple readings to fully grasp the thread of expression.

Costello suggests that "[w]hat Moore shows us in the struggle of the pangolin is repeated in her own poetic behaviour. The problem the poem poses, in part, is how to stabilize the struggle, how to make it graceful, and the pangolin becomes a model for her solution" (122). She uses the pangolin's

otherness as a starting point from which to pose questions on the various alterities of art, history, religious grace and existence. She places humans and animals on the same coil, at different points, so that the poem becomes a rumination on evolution, reflected in the narrative structure's slow transition from pangolin to man.

At the same time, it is concerned with the power of creation, encompassing natural species' development, artistic imagination and divine otherness. However, unlike Lawrence's fish and bat, who have gods beyond the Christian-Judeo God, the pangolin becomes independent of any prescribed religious rhetoric in the characterisation of him as a "miniature artist engineer". As Rachel Trousdale notes, Moore "seem[s] to give the pangolin design credit for his own body" (130), imbuing him with a sense of agency, suggesting that nature can produce works of art, and is aware that it is doing so. This highlights Rueckert's idea of the creative imagination, which runs throughout the poem. The pangolin is juxtaposed with "man, the self, the being we call human, writing/master to this world". They are both subject to natural solar and lunar cycles that dictate their hours of activity, a motif that not only reinforces the overriding impression of the spiral contained within the poem's structure, but suggests man and pangolin as complementary opposites: despite operating in different timeframes, they share the same earth, and have some of the same traits.

Rueckert states that "The first Law of Ecology – that everything is connected to everything else – applies to poems as well as to nature" (110).

Laurence Stapleton notes that within 'The Pangolin' "there is expert presentation of major themes varied by subordinate ones" (109), suggesting it as a sort of poetic collage. Moore's use of shifting imagery creates an almost-cinematic movement; a documentary-style exploration of overlapping situations that mimics the interconnectedness of life. Moore combines animal metaphor and images of the natural world with images from art history and architecture, merging human and animal histories to highlight the parallels of life on earth.

Srikanth Reddy discusses Moore's use of digression as a means of "arranging her various fields of knowledge" (452). For Reddy, 'The Pangolin' becomes a prime example of the ways in which interdisciplinarity functions, and he suggests that it can be read as a "poetic lecture" (459). The fusion of disciplines within the poem's thematic reach becomes key to Moore's use of animal otherness to interrogate human edifice, highlighting that, for Moore, there is no real difference between what is considered "nature" and what is thought of as "culture".

The poem opens with a series of descriptors that immediately establish the crossovers between art and nature that will continue throughout the poem:

Another armored animal—scale  
lapping scale with spruce-cone regularity until they  
form the uninterrupted central  
tail-row! This near artichoke with head and legs and grit-equipped gizzard,  
the night miniature artist engineer is,  
yes, Leonardo da Vinci's replica—  
impressive animal and toiler of whom we seldom hear.

Moore begins with a self-referential wink towards what was, by that point in her career, a well-established fondness for self-protective, “armored animals”. The chameleon, the snail, the elephant of ‘Melanchthon’ (PMM 122) and the titular animal of ‘The Jerboa’ (PMM 190), for example, all have means through which they can conceal themselves, and the pangolin joins their ranks, armour-clad and ready to avoid the fray. The “spruce-cone regularity” of the pangolin’s scales conjures a woodland setting and suggests an animal so close to the flora of its surroundings it may be mistaken as part of it. This implies a natural inclination for camouflage as well as an intimate relationship with the earth.

Moore notes that this is an animal “of whom we seldom hear”, reinforcing the idea of concealment through sound, or lack thereof; there is a quietness about the pangolin that gestures towards rarity. Aurally, however, these opening lines are filled with hard sounds; [t], [k] and [p] proliferate, mimicking perhaps a human moving conspicuously through the forest towards the pangolin. The exclamation at the end of the opening sentence highlights both wonder and bewilderment in approaching the animal’s otherness. The plural “we” demarcates an “us and them” dichotomy between the human speaker and the “impressive animal”, though this is one of only two instances where the speaker uses a first-person pronoun (the second appearing in the penultimate stanza), suggesting she would like to maintain a naturalist’s distance from the animal. This distance allows for a more expansive, immersive experience, permitting the speaker to slip between subjects and themes factually without becoming embroiled in emotive opinion. Moore’s

descriptions are scientifically informative; emulating, almost, an information card in a zoo or an art gallery.

They are not without humour, however; the quickly shifting images create an element of farce. The pangolin is characterised as a “spruce-cone”, then a “near-artichoke”, becoming simultaneously more familiar in terms of appearance and more alien in terms of biology. There is a cartoonish aspect to the image of a bipedal artichoke wandering around the forest at night (see Parkin, 1966), though this description is not made with derision; he just as quickly becomes human in the form of Leonardo da Vinci, and then turns back immediately to an “impressive animal”, a shape-shifter of sorts that the speaker is struggling to pin down.

Not only do the spruce-cone and the artichoke visually call to mind the scales of the pangolin, they are both natural exemplars of the Fibonacci spiral, which relates to “the golden ratio” that da Vinci employed in multiple works of art (see Bulloet et al.; Iosa et al.). Moore carefully fuses nature and culture from the poem’s outset, using art to exemplify animal otherness and vice versa. The pangolin becomes “the night miniature artist engineer” and “da Vinci’s replica” – the duality of “replica” here casting him as not just da Vinci in miniature, but also as a reproduction of one of his artworks.

“Art” in fact becomes a physical presence in the first stanza and a half, with playful repetitions and reconfigurations of ‘a’, ‘r’ and ‘t’ that ensure the subject does not elude the form. The sounds appear, ordered correctly, not only in “artist”, but in “regularity”; “artichoke” and “apertures”. They are found

in reverse order in “central”; “extra”; “contracting” and “impenetrably”, and they appear in varied formations in “solitary” and “miniature”. When reviewing the work of José Garcia Villa’s *Have Come, Am Here*, Moore noted that “[i]n some of the poems a new rhyming — ‘a principle of reversed consonance never used in English poetry before, nor in any poetry’—substitutes for the crudeness of rhyme a more gently weighted, more richly textured effect” (CPMM 369). Though her stanzas in ‘The Pangolin’ are roughly rhymed with an *abaccdedefg* pattern throughout, her use of hidden rhyme becomes much more indicative of intent, and in fact suggests that she herself was attempting (though by slightly different means) to achieve “a more gently weighted, more richly textured effect” almost ten years prior to her review of Garcia Villa’s collection. As Moore notes within her review, “[t]he delicacy of force of such writing reminds one of the colors [*sic*] of black ink from a hogs’-hair brush in the hand of a Chinese master” (370).

This attention to detail continues in the second stanza, where the sense of the miniature is maintained. The detailing is drawn downwards to the physical level of the pangolin:

Armor seems extra. But for him,  
the closing ear-ridge—  
or bare ear lacking even this small  
eminence and similarly safe

contracting nose and eye apertures,  
impenetrably closable, are not;—a true ant-eater,  
not cockroach-eater, who endures  
exhausting solitary trips through unfamiliar ground at night,  
returning before sunrise; stepping in the moonlight,  
on the moonlight peculiarly, that the outside  
edges of his hands may bear the weight and save the claws

for digging.

The heightened sense of compactness found in words like “small”, “safe” and “contracting” implies a want of careful study of the subject; a quick glance at the pangolin won’t be enough to allow a full appreciation of him. He appears mechanised in his own reduction, shrinking into himself as the viewer draws near, until he becomes “impenetrably closable”, further fuelling the speaker’s curiosity about his enigmatic otherness.

The use of “apertures” connotes a camera lens, indicative of both the pangolin curling in on himself, and at the same time suggestive of a photographer struggling to capture a clear image of the animal; the images blur the closer the focus. This forces the speaker’s attention outwards to a broader imagining of the pangolin moving through the forest. Moore creates a heightened sense of alterity through the description of his “solitary/trips through unfamiliar ground at night”, suggesting a lonely figure exploring the unknown, which can apply to both the animal and the human speaker.

The profusion of present participle verbs draws the imagination along with the pangolin’s movements, turning this into a moving image of a seemingly-live animal, rather than a static portrait. This plays again with the idea of a camera tracking the pangolin through the forest; he represents nature becoming art in real time. Particularly in the “exhausting solitary trips” from which he comes “returning before sunrise” can the pangolin’s routine be experienced. The long, meandering sentence that crosses the stanza break

itself becomes somewhat exhausting, mimicking the animal's progression on his nocturnal hunt for food.

Towards the end of this stanza, the speaker briefly turns her subject from pangolin to snake, depicting him as “[s]erpentined about/the tree”. The lengthy sentences therefore also emulate the snake-like shape the pangolin adopts, and their structure illustrates Moore's own art imitating nature. As in many of her poems, here she uses one animal otherness to identify another, employing animal metaphor to familiarise the pangolin. In the guise of a snake he maintains a scaled appearance, but becomes an animal that is perhaps less unusual and therefore more readily comprehensible. Unlike a snake, however, the pangolin is entirely benign; his “harmless hiss” upholds the serpent metaphor, but removes any threat of attack – instead it is he that retreats from potential danger.

Moore maintains the idea of the “[s]erpentined” shape to draw further nature/culture comparisons when she likens the pangolin to the “fragile grace of the Thomas-/of-Leighton Buzzard Westminster Abbey wrought-iron vine”. While Moore could have simplified her description of the “wrought-iron vine”, she chose to name the blacksmith who forged them, giving credit to the artist and, at the same time, upholding her perennial bid for precision. The shaping of the vines and the curled pangolin are further reminiscent of the Fibonacci spiral, tying this imagery to that of the artichoke and spruce cone found in the first stanza.

This spiral, the “ball” of the pangolin, is so tightly rolled that the speaker admits a defeat in trying to unfurl it, forced, as she was in the second stanza, to zoom out once again to continue her assessment:

rolls himself into a ball that has  
power to defy all effort to unroll it; strongly intailed, neat  
head for core, on neck not breaking off, with curled-in feet.  
Nevertheless he has sting-proof scales; and nest  
of rocks closed with earth from inside, which he can thus darken.  
Sun and moon and day and night and man and beast  
each with a splendor  
which man in all his vileness cannot  
set aside; each with an excellence!

She notes his “sting-proof scales;/and nest of rocks”, remembering his impenetrability and enhancing his self-protective characteristics. Taffy Martin suggests that “[t]he pangolin ... rejects and deflects any public recognition” (16), and Costello states that “[t]he pangolin escapes both our physical and our interpretive grasp” (124). His nest can be “closed with earth from inside”, augmenting his want of privacy and his connection to the physical planet – a fact that is substantiated by the mention of “iron”, “core” and “earth” in the same stanza. The pangolin is elemental in his embodiment of nature. “Man” on the other hand is imbued with a “vileness” that means he cannot “set aside” the “splendor [sic]” of “[s]un and moon and day and night and man and beast”, suggesting a want of mastery over their “excellence”. Here the pangolin’s otherness is used to suggest that yes, nature is art, but it does not seek recognition for its work.

His suggested modesty continues into stanza four, where he, though well-equipped as a warrior, prefers to avoid confrontation, even in his search for food:

“Fearful yet to be feared,” the armored  
ant-eater met by the driver-ant does not turn back, but  
engulfs what he can, the flattened sword-  
edged leafpoints on the tail and artichoke set leg- and body-plates  
quivering violently when it retaliates  
and swarms on him. Compact like the furled fringed frill  
on the hat-brim of Gargallo’s hollow iron head of a  
matador, he will drop and will  
then walk away  
unhurt [...]

Though he is armour-clad and equipped with a sword-like tail, the pangolin turns from war to art. This can be seen not only in the repetition of “*artichoke*” (emphasis added), but also in the mention of Gargallo, and the way the pangolin curls into himself again. Note that he does not become the matador, but rather the flourish on his hat, staying out of the way of danger. The repetition of “iron” within a reference to an artwork calls back to the “wrought-iron vine” of the previous stanza, emphasising the idea of art drawn from the earth.

The abundance of fricatives here intensifies the pangolin’s softness, and this, along with the present tense narrative, reemphasises the idea of the speaker quietly following him as he goes about his work, while at the same time insisting on the pangolin’s peaceable temperament. His tail transforms from “flattened sword-/edged leafpoints” to a “graceful tool”, and is then compared with “prop or hand or broom or ax”. Moore attempts to familiarise his otherness in human terms, though this seems unsatisfactory, perhaps because

these tools are inanimate and she is trying to accurately recreate a living creature. She employs instead an animal simile characterising the pangolin's tail as "tipped like/an elephant's trunk with special skin", which suggests that it is his natural attributes that demarcate him as "special".

This distinctiveness

is not lost on this ant- and stone-swallowing uninjurable  
artichoke which simpletons thought a living fable  
whom the stones had nourished, whereas ants had done  
so.

Humans are labelled as "simpletons" for their misunderstanding of the pangolin's existence. Reddy highlights this moment as one that demonstrates Moore's poetic intentions. Having argued against critical appraisals that try to define 'The Pangolin' as a rumination on human nature or religious grace, he states that

"Moore, a fastidious translator of Jean de La Fontaine's oeuvre, examined the uses of fable more closely than any other American poet in this century, yet critical interpretations of 'The Pangolin' have disregarded the poet's own refusal to consider this animal a living fable. To say that 'The Pangolin' is about either grace or humans is to elide the first half of the text, which is emphatically about pangolins; considered in its entirety, this lyric is actually about pangolins *and* grace *and* humans."  
(458)

Moore insists on the pangolin's reality by denouncing the idea of it as a "living fable". The pangolin is an example of organic art, not a fabricated story intended to teach humans a lesson in morality. The comparisons drawn between man and animal are evolutionary rather than didactic. Moore's aim is

not to teach humans to be more like the fastidious pangolin, but to highlight the interconnectedness of nature and culture. By insisting that the pangolin is not a “living fable”, she repositions the animal within human history by undermining previous, anthropocentric assumptions about their existence. She highlights the validity of the pangolin’s survival, using his *reality* to encourage ecological preservation and appreciation.

However, Moore forgives these “simpletons”, admitting that pangolins have a “not unchain-like machine-like/form”, suggesting that their otherness is, at first glance, so extensive it would be easy to mistake them for something inorganic. This image draws again on previously explored iron imagery, but at the same time Moore also hints towards the pangolin’s biological development. The image of the chain reinforces the idea of natural links between humans and animals, and the way he moves, with the “frictionless creep of a thing/made graceful by adversities, con-//versities” becomes, perhaps, indicative of natural selection and the slow process of evolution.

This leads into the poem’s most complex, convoluted sentence, in which “grace” becomes the central focus:

To explain grace requires  
a curious hand. If that which is at all were not forever,  
why would those who graced the spires  
with animals and gathered there to rest, on cold luxurious  
low stone seats—a monk and monk and monk—between the thus  
ingenious roof-supports, have slaved to confuse  
grace with a kindly manner, time in which to pay a debt,  
the cure for sins, a graceful use  
of what are yet  
approved stone mullions branching out across  
the perpendiculars?

Costello suggests that this “transition from the grace of the pangolin to the grace of the church seems an unwanted digression”, but also notes that while “[t]he image of the pangolin is gone...its figurative and formal traces remain” (126). The multiclausal question form here imitates the tightly curled pangolin “that has/the power to defy all effort to unroll it”. Moore utilises the pangolin’s otherness in an attempt to fathom divine otherness. The “curious hand” calls back to the pangolin walking “peculiarly” on the “outside edges/of his hands”, suggesting that “[t]o explain grace” we must turn to nature. This mirrors the earlier image of the pangolin as the “Westminster Abbey wrought iron vine”, that attempted to explain nature through the “fragile grace” of their artistry. Unlike the pangolin, the cathedral is not physically closed; we may enter, study and marvel at the intricate architecture, but that’s not to say that seeing it will bring enlightenment. As the speaker discovered in her attempt to understand the pangolin through observation in the first half of the poem, otherness cannot be comprehended by sight alone.

Of course, it is difficult to ignore the religious aspect of this stanza, which feeds into the appearance of the soul at the end of the poem. The interrogative form here, however, points towards a lack of knowledge; seeking an answer to the question of divine otherness, but never claiming to have found one. Instead, this divergence to the cathedral brings the poem more pointedly to the notion of imaginative creation, reissuing the idea of the “artist engineer” in the form of the monks who built, adorned and were ultimately laid to rest within the structure.

While grace is a repeated focus of Moore's wordy phrasing here, the real question is one of existence, of "that which is at all". The idea of "forever" plays with the spiralling arrangement of the poem, of the "scale/lapping scale" of the pangolin, the cycle of night and day, and the artist's compulsion to leave something of themselves behind. Costello suggests that Moore's "emphasis is not on nostalgia or elegy but on exuberant survival and regeneration, through adaptation and restless transformation - of the natural world and the human world" ('Ideas of Nature' 133). As we enter the human world of the cathedral (literally coming indoors from the natural world), Moore takes a moment to exalt the work of the craftsmen who built it. Beyond its original purpose as a place of worship, it has over the centuries become a testament to the longevity of art and creation.

The leap from the cathedral to "[a] sailboat", then, is perhaps less far-reaching than it first appears, testifying to the endurance of "the first machine". This idea of endurance persists through the final three stanzas, which see the pangolin "on hind feet plantigrade,/with certain postures of a man". The naturalist speaker is now tracking man, observing him as she did the pangolin, seeing man in animal and vice versa:

Beneath sun and moon, man slaving  
to make his life more sweet, leaves half the flowers worth having,  
needing to choose wisely how to use his strength;  
a paper-maker like the wasp; a tractor of foodstuffs,  
like the ant; spidering a length  
of web from bluffs  
above a stream; in fighting, mechanized  
like the pangolin; capsizing in

disheartenment. Bedizened or stark

naked, man, the self, the being we call human, writing-  
master of this world, griffons a dark  
“Like does not like like that is obnoxious”; and writes error with four  
r’s. Among animals, *one* has a sense of humor.  
Humor saves a few steps, it saves years. Unignorant,  
modest and unemotional, and all emotion,  
he has everlasting vigor,  
power to grow,  
though there are few creatures who can make one  
breathe faster and make one erecter.

Like the pangolin “toiler” at the beginning of the poem, we see “man slaving/to make his life more sweet”, embodying industrious animals, highlighting multiple crossovers between species and directing attention back to the idea of a shared earth and evolutionary biology. Man, “capsizing in disheartenment” at the number of ways in which he might choose to use his strength, has almost *too much* freewill. Moore undermines anthropocentrism by suggesting that man is not infallible; even though he is a “writing-master”, he still manages to spell “error with four r’s”. Man’s saving grace, however, is his sense of humour. Through this he has “everlasting vigor,/power to grow”, to evolve and keep progressing. If the writer can look at their work without taking their mistakes too seriously, they stand to improve their art at the same time.

The coda sees man, the writing-master, go “cowering forth” both “not afraid of anything” and “[t]he prey of fear”, mirroring the pangolin who was “[f]earful yet to be feared”. There is a return to the naturalist’s scientific language as man is defined as “a mammal”, with “warm blood, no gills, two pairs of hands and a few hairs”. This image becomes a light-hearted reflection of the pangolin with his “certain postures of a man”. As Trousdale suggests, “Moore’s poetry and humor [sic] both depend on a precise, unsentimental, generous

extension of sympathy across the enormous difference not just between individuals but between species” (130).

Man and pangolin are both treated with the same sense of reverence, because for Moore they are both part of a larger, interconnected system and share undeniable biological traits. The writer’s work is “thwarted by the dusk”, which means his pangolin-counterpart will be readying himself to begin again his “solitary trips through unfamiliar ground at night”, thus continuing the cyclical turn of the poem’s form. Costello notes that the poem concludes with “the celebration of process” (129), though it might be argued that the poem in its entirety celebrates process, be that hunting for food, creating art or the slow progression of evolution.

And yet, the final three lines of the poem leave a lasting impression of the unknowable sublimity and circularity of existence:

“Again the sun!  
anew each day; and new and new and new,  
that comes into and steadies my soul.”

This implies that the soul, before sunrise, is *unsteady* and that only through the reliability of the rising sun can it be soothed. The idea that light brings comfort and darkness offers uncertainty suggests that the pangolin, who operates in the evening hours, is emblematic of an ultimately inscrutable animal otherness. By ending a convoluted poetic examination of animal otherness on the enigma of “the soul”, Moore refuses the possibility of any concrete conclusions about her intentions. However, in a 1965 ‘Voice of America Poetry Series’, she suggests that “[d]ifficult as it is to define the soul, ‘creativity’ is perhaps as

near a definition as we can get" (CPMM 590). When paired with a reading of 'The Pangolin', this suggests, perhaps, some link between the inexplicable alterity of art, animal otherness and the human spirit.

Throughout Moore's poetry, the mystery of animal otherness feeds into the mystery of poetry itself, though, as the study of both shows, moments of clarity and recognition are fleeting. The sense of ambiguous subversion that manifests throughout her animal poetry is only heightened when overlapped with the uncanny qualities of visual art and the creative imagination. Tonal crossovers of scientific factuality and poetic beauty encapsulate the ultimate unfathomability of both art and animal otherness. She encourages a need to keep looking, then to go back and look again, without offering any succinct or transparent answers to the questions her poetry poses. This perhaps is not through a want of obscurity, but because the questions themselves are beyond the reach of human comprehension. Animal otherness and the creative imagination in Moore's work are, as Leavell suggests, exemplifiers of "the spiritual forces' underlying the visible world" (252).

## Closing Comments

This study was intended to examine how poets D.H. Lawrence, Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore engage with animal otherness in their work. Through careful study of their animal poetics, it is apparent that, though they intersect thematically, their form, tone and narrative styles are often disparate. For example, Lawrence's evocations of animal otherness through direct address and unregulated free verse allow the animal poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* a distinct vitality. Form, for Lawrence, at times becomes complimentary to the unpredictability of animal movement, illustrating his own concept of "poetry of the instant present" (SCW 78). Conversely, Bishop's engagements with animal otherness are often evoked through carefully crafted verse forms, using sound chimes and rhyme to represent various characteristics of the animals she examines. Moore employs a combination of both these techniques, where form becomes mimetic of animal subject and sounds subtly suggest themes and ideas.

Both Bishop and Lawrence also explore ideas of the self in relation to the animal other. Bishop evokes everyday realities of life; sharing a cigarette with someone, riding a bus, watching a wind-up toy; and combines them with animal encounters to delicately reposition these moments as instances of existential affirmation. In some examples, animals are aligned with human women or impressions of femininity to subtly undermine anthropocentric and androcentric power structures in society. In conjunction with this, she uses traditional theological teachings to suggest the idea of "something bigger",

beyond humans and animals. By communing with the animal other, she suggests the intangibility of life, while at the same time celebrating the joyfulness that can be found in the lived moment.

Lawrence, on the other hand, attempts to engage certain animals in conversation through direct address, creating a sense of space between the self and the other. This space is often characterised through images of darkness, which are used to suggest an enviable bond between animals and the earth, one that cannot be shared by man. In these instances, the poet-speaker is driven towards frustration or acts of violence, betraying his jealousy of the perception that the animal knows something he does not. Elsewhere darkness indicates a realm beyond both human *and* animal, tipping his contemplations towards the unknowability of death. This feeds into his engagement with the traditional Judeo-Christian image of an omnipotent godhead. At times animals become emblematic of ghosts and ghouls, suggesting an impression of the afterlife and reiterating the untouchable essence of the animal other.

In contrast, Moore on occasion allows her animals to speak for themselves, largely avoiding expressions of the self, instead centralising the animal other as the point of focus. She blends the reality of the animal's life with vivid imagery and references to visual art, highlighting natural beauty while also contemplating the otherness of the creative imagination. She advocates for a respectful positioning of animals within art, which speaks to a concern for animal welfare in the wider world. Her use of near-scientific or factual language helps to bind her animal poetics to reality. However, it also

aids her tendency towards poetic ambiguity; there is inevitably something deeper going on beneath Moore's objective examinations of animal life, which is often brought to the fore in the powerful presence of nature that underlies much of her writing. Her own idea that "[t]he power of the visible/is the invisible" speaks to the sense of "spiritual force", which proliferates throughout her work, becoming most pointed in her considerations of the animal other.

On the subject of spiritual otherness, I think these three poets tend to agree. By contemplating "what it feels like to be an animal", Lawrence, Bishop and Moore think themselves into a realm of complete unknowability. When faced with animals, we are compelled to consider an unfathomable sense of alterity, belonging not only to the animal, but also to the human experience. Their work encourages a deep appreciation of animal life, all the while maintaining allusions to the otherness of death, and the notion of spiritual transcendence that lies beyond it.

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