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# WHY LOOK AT ANIMALS? CREATURELY ENCOUNTERS IN PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

This essay considers encounters with animals in the work of Henry David Thoreau, Stanley Cavell and J. M. Coetzee. More specifically, it explores what it calls ‘poetic’ engagements with animals – engagements in which our relations with nonhuman others are not cast in appropriative or instrumental terms. Along the way, it draws on the work of the American philosopher Cora Diamond. It also takes inspiration from a famous passage from George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, and offers a creaturely, environmental reading of some of the ideas invoked in that novel. What, it asks, might it be like to respond to Eliot’s injunction to treat the lives of others with complete seriousness?

*Keywords:* poetry; animal studies; ecocriticism; philosophy; literature.

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If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. (George Eliot)

This well-known sentence from *Middlemarch* enacts what it celebrates: it turns outwards. Beginning with a ‘vision’ of ‘ordinary human life’, it moves towards a larger, ecological landscape, one which includes the grass’s growth and the squirrel’s beating heart. Moving outwards, the sentence also rides on the circles of a widening sensibility – modulating from a human ‘we’ to an intimate form of ‘hearing’ others, before ending with a recognition of the immense activity that ‘lies on the other side of silence’.

Yet the sentence, it should be noted, is predicated on a subjunctive clause: ‘If we had’. This mode of attention, it seems, is difficult to inhabit. Indeed, it seems impossible to sustain: ‘we should die of that roar’. This listening, this intense attunement, would destroy you. The sentence thus says two things: imagine, but also

acknowledge the impossibility of truly imagining. The sentence begins with 'vision' but ends with 'silence'.

The narrator does not try to resolve this tension. On the one hand, she praises the effort involved in imagining. On the other hand, the sentence is an injunction whose very terms are impossible to fulfil: the state it imagines would lead to a terminal breakdown, an overwhelming of one's self. Eliot has explored these dangers before. In *The Lifted Veil* (1859), for instance, she endows her narrator Lattimer with extrasensory abilities, so that, able to participate in 'other people's consciousness', he can hear a 'roar of sound where others find perfect stillness'.<sup>1</sup> For Lattimer, however, these abilities turn out to be debilitating: they overwhelm – constantly, and against his will – his sense of self. It seems that the narrator in *Middlemarch* is alert to the dark side of sympathy, to the possibility of total (and therefore incapacitating) absorption in the lives of others. Her exhortation to imagine is qualified by a *caveat emptor*. But the qualification is also qualified, I think, by the narrator's affirmative vision of the imagination. If unlimited sympathy is unsustainable and even impossible, one must also guard against being too guarded. The novel is partly an exploration of this proposition.

True, even the most sensitive of people can be insensible to others: Eliot is realistic about this. 'As it is,' her narrator observes in *Middlemarch*, the 'quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.'<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, her narrator enjoins us to imagine anyway – even if the effort is patchy and hard to sustain. One may not physically 'hear' the squirrel's heartbeat, but one might imagine what that sound might 'be like', and this might be sufficient. What is at stake, after all, is not the success or failure of sympathetic identification but the sensibility involved in the imaginative effort. There is a richness to the attempt which stands independent of its success.

What might it mean to stand before animals in the way described by Eliot? What would it 'be like'? This essay explores that question by looking at animal encounters in the work of Henry David Thoreau and Stanley Cavell. In different ways, both writers dramatize what it means to see animals with 'keen vision and feeling', not as ideas, symbols or allegories, but as living, breathing creatures. They therefore show what it might be like to see animals as fellow others or as companion species, and in such a way that attends to their 'significant otherness', as Donna Haraway has put it.<sup>3</sup> This essay then engages with Elizabeth Costello (the fictional

protagonist of J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*) and the work of Cora Diamond (an American philosopher); it concludes with some brief remarks on poetry and the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

### *Thoreau's moose*

In *The Maine Woods*, a record of three separate journeys to Maine between 1846 and 1857, Thoreau reflects on the experience of disturbance before an animal – namely, a dead moose discovered by his travelling companion during a hunting expedition. ‘He had found the cow-moose lying dead, but quite warm, in the middle of the stream, which was so shallow that it rested on the bottom, with hardly a third of its body above water.’<sup>4</sup> Thoreau's first response betrays the instincts of a naturalist. Lacking a measuring tape, he fashions a gauge using a rope from his canoe, tying knots to mark out the moose's length and height. All these pains he takes, Thoreau writes, because he ‘did not wish to be obliged to say merely the moose was very large’ (*MW*, 153). Once the measurements have been taken, however, and once his companion begins to ‘skin the moose’, the voice of Thoreau the naturalist is troubled by another, more complicated presence:

I looked on; and a tragical business it was, – to see that still warm and palpitating body pierced with a knife, to see the warm milk stream from the rent udder, and the ghastly naked red carcass appearing from within its seemly robe, which was made to hide it. [...] In the bed of this narrow, wild, and rocky stream, between two lofty walls of spruce and firs, a mere cleft in the forest which the stream had made, this work went on. (*MW*, 156-57)

The discovery of the moose is, to some extent, the culmination of Thoreau's expedition. Earlier in *The Maine Woods*, he explains that he has come to the woods as ‘reporter or chaplain to the hunters’ in order to satisfy his desire to see ‘a moose near at hand’ (*MW*, 133). But his reaction to the moose surprises him, prompting a range of unexpected feelings.

The above passage is fascinating but particularly difficult to interpret. For a moment, Thoreau's voice seems to lift free of the scene, as though he and his companion were being watched from above, from a detached, even cosmic perspective. In the bed of a stream, in the cleft of a forest, ‘this work went on’. The

detachment of that phrase, 'this work', is especially marked Thoreau's close observations of the moose being skinned, a process which prompts both horror (the moose's carcass is 'ghastly') as well as admiration for the creature's former dignity (its 'seemly robe'). Vacillating, his voice is at once engaged and detached, embedded and quite apart: in any case, it bears the signs of being deeply troubled. The event is described as a 'tragical business', and, in a repetition of that theme, Thoreau later speaks of the 'afternoon's tragedy' (*MW*, 160). He has come to the woods to see moose 'near at hand', but this encounter is much too close. The expedition has somehow gone awry.

Part of Thoreau's anxiety is explicable. The moose has been shot neither for its hide nor for its flesh but 'merely for the satisfaction of killing him' (*MW*, 161). In this regard, the moose's death is without utility – a shocking waste of life. But what does it mean to see the moose's death as a 'tragedy'? There is something powerfully charged about Thoreau's response that cannot be explained conventionally – that exceeds, I think, the 'normal' response which many of his contemporaries would have had to the moose's death.

During his expedition in the woods, Thoreau spends a great deal of time studying local plants. This fact is worth stressing, as it gives some indication of his state of mind at the time of the moose's discovery. When his companion stumbles upon the dead creature, indeed, Thoreau says that he was 'absorbed' in the activity of looking at a flower, an *Aster macrophyllus* (*MW*, 152). Part of his disturbance at the moose's death can thus be attributed to the shock of transition. The gentleness of botanizing, characterized by close looking and noticing, is interrupted by a different form of relating to the natural world, one characterized by harmful imposition. The 'tragedy' of the afternoon is partly this loss of 'innocence'.

It seems that this loss allows Thoreau to appreciate, in a particularly striking way, the violence involved in hunting. The 'hunting of the moose', he goes on to write, 'merely for the satisfaction of killing him [...] is too much like going out by night to some wood-side pasture and shooting your neighbor's horses'. The moose, he continues, 'are God's own horses, poor, timid creatures' (*MW*, 161). Despite the severity of these remarks, however, Thoreau's view of hunting is not at all straightforward. Although he has 'had enough of moose-hunting' after the moose's death, he also recognizes, in the same paragraph, the appeal of the hunter's life: 'I think that I could spend a year in the woods, fishing and hunting just enough to

sustain myself, with satisfaction.’ He continues, ‘this would be next to living like a philosopher on the fruits of the earth which you had raised, which also attracts me’ (*MW*, 161). There are aspects to the hunter’s life, and the hunter’s embeddedness in the natural world, which he refuses to disparage. As his thoughts develop, however, he goes on to wonder why others cannot spend time in the ‘solitude of this vast wilderness’ without the urge to hunt animals or cut down trees: ‘For one that comes with a pencil to sketch or sing, a thousand come with an axe or rifle’ (*MW*, 162). Thoreau is pained by the fact that, for some, engagement with nature means damaging it in some way. On the other hand, he does not spare himself from these critical musings, even in his capacity as a ‘chaplain’. For the ‘chaplain’, he notes, ‘has been known to carry a gun himself’ (*MW*, 133). ‘The afternoon’s tragedy,’ he later admits, ‘and my share in it, as it affected the innocence, destroyed the pleasure of my adventure’ (*MW*, 160).

Thoreau’s account is noteworthy for the range of feeling it records. His response to the moose’s death is animated by subtle moods and complex tensions. There is his aversion to the moose’s exposed flesh, for instance, but also his curiosity for detail (as the animal is being dragged to the stream’s edge, Thoreau wonders if the colour of its skin is best described as being ‘brownish-black’ or ‘perhaps a dark iron-gray’ (*MW*, 152-53). Or, mixed in with his interest in the hunter’s life, there is his visceral sense of its unscrupulousness. Finally, there is his sense of guilt and ownership over what has happened. Though he had not come to Maine to hunt, and though he had ‘felt some compunctions about accompanying the hunters’ through the woods, he accepts that he is somehow complicit in the moose’s death (*MW*, 133). Of course, Thoreau must have seen dead animals before: hunting scenes would have been difficult to avoid for someone who liked roaming in the woods. For whatever reason, however, the death of this particular moose cannot be ignored so easily. Indeed, it marks Thoreau’s conscience as it does his consciousness, and, once his companions have left him to make his camp alone, his meditation reaches its apogee:

As I sat before the fire on my fir-twigg seat, without walls above or around me, I remembered how far on every hand that wilderness stretched, before you came to cleared or cultivated fields, and wondered if any bear or moose was watching the light of my fire; for Nature looked sternly upon me on account of the murder of the moose. (*MW*, 163)

The fire, the night and the expansiveness of the forest all prompt in Thoreau a sense of awe for the world around him. But the mood is compromised by the wrong which he feels has been committed against the moose, a wrong which involves him intimately. The ‘botanical specimens’ he studies by the light of the fire may remind him of gentler hours – but the ghost of the moose chastises and haunts him: ‘Nature looked sternly upon me’ (*MW*, 163).

Oddly, this experience of being looked on from above reprises Thoreau’s earlier description of the moose’s skinning: in the cleft in the forest, in the middle of a stream, ‘this work went on’. Is this initial description perhaps the first iteration of being watched by the ghost of the moose – and was that earlier ghost, as it were, shrugged off even as its presence was felt? Is it being addressed more directly now? In any case, the natural world that so absorbed Thoreau in the day rebukes him at night. And Thoreau’s response, to use a phrase from Donna Haraway, is to ‘stay with the trouble’, to avoid, that is, simplifying or trivializing the moose’s death.<sup>5</sup> Sitting by the fire, reflecting on his ‘share’ in the day’s ‘tragedy’, he stays awake to the disturbance the moose has caused in him, encountering it face to face, as it were – even if in ghostly form.

### *Cavell’s horse*

In a letter to his friend and fellow philosopher Vicki Hearne, Stanley Cavell recounts an equally memorable encounter with an animal – in this case a horse. Cavell’s record is more philosophical than Thoreau’s, at once denser and more self-reflexive, but it contains reflections of a similar nature, not least feelings of shame and awe before a nonhuman other:

The horse, as it stands, is a rebuke to our unreadiness to be understood, our will to remain obscure ... And the more beautiful the horse’s stance, the more painful the rebuke. Theirs is our best picture of a readiness to understand. Our stand, our stance, is of denial ... We feel our refusals are unrevealed because we keep, we think, our fences invisible. But the horse takes cognizance of them, who does not care about invisibility.<sup>6</sup>

A number of things seem to be happening here. First, Cavell suggests that our relation to the horse is defined by a desire for knowledge. ‘There is something specific,’ he writes, ‘about our unwillingness to let our knowledge come to an end with respect to horses.’ At the same time, Cavell writes that we fail to acknowledge what horses can ‘know of us’. There is an ‘unwillingness to make room for their capacity to feel our presence’ (AT, 115). Our relationship with the horse, in other words, is asymmetrical. We approach the horse as a subject of knowledge but refuse to stand before it unguardedly, exposed to what it might know of us.

But what if horses have the ‘capacity to feel our presence incomparably beyond our ability to feel theirs’ (AT, 115)? Why might we be unwilling to acknowledge this? In one of his essays, Cavell says that we sometimes forego acknowledging others because of our fear of being exposed before them. Our denial of others is thus partly a denial of ourselves, and this is partly how we keep ourselves hidden. In particular, Cavell speaks of Shakespeare’s famous tragedy, *King Lear*, and of Lear’s attempt to ‘avoid recognition’, which he sees as linked in complex ways to a ‘shame of exposure’ and the ‘threat of self-revelation’.<sup>7</sup> Understanding this, Cavell writes, can lead to a shock of recognition as we realize the ways we have also evaded the work of acknowledgment: Lear is not a tragic figure because he is ‘singled out’ to suffer, but because he keeps himself in ‘hiddenness, silence, position; the ways people do’.<sup>8</sup> But since, Cavell writes, we are ‘ineluctably actors in what is happening’ in our lives, ‘nothing can be present to us to which we are not present.’<sup>9</sup> Our hiddenness, which also hides others from us, is not an inevitable fact about the world but something to which we commit. We therefore bear responsibility for what we miss or make present.

A similar denial of an other occurs in Cavell’s encounter with the horse. We miss the horse’s presence by casting our relationship with the animal in primarily epistemological terms – terms not entirely apposite to the embodied experience of seeing and being seen by another. Our stance is therefore one of ‘denial’ because, by grasping for knowledge, we curtail the possibility of understanding. As Stephen Mulhall writes in a related context:

It is not, after all, too difficult to imagine ways in which the picture of a concept as subsuming a particular, or of concepts as ways of grasping reality, might encode a kind of imperialism of reason with respect to the real. Heidegger, for example, noted

the echo of 'greifen' [grasp] in the German for concept (*Begriff*), and the possibility it opens up of picturing thinking as grasping or clutching at things, even pawing or clawing at them, rather than (say) allowing them to make an impression on us, or taking them to heart.<sup>10</sup>

The horse's stance, in contrast to that of the grasping thinker, is open to what it cannot know. As such, it presents a kind of rebuke, chastising us for 'our will to remain obscure'. The knowing human subject, it turns out, is the least ready. But the horse remains unperturbed: it takes 'cognizance' of our 'fences' but does not care for them (*AT*, 115).

Cavell's account can be read productively alongside Thoreau's experience of the moose. There is an 'unwillingness' which Cavell admits to, and which can be discerned in Thoreau, to be entirely exposed to the animal other: 'Nature's stern gaze' and the horse's 'rebuke' suggest that some form of evasion has taken place (*AT*, 115). At the same time, there is a self-watchfulness in both writers that tries to take 'cognizance' of inner fences that have been built, of 'refusals' that are 'unrevealed' but powerfully active. Indeed, both accounts can be seen as painful exercises in fence-dismantling – painful because, in Thoreau's case, one must confront a ghostly accuser in a difficult tribunal, and because, in Cavell's case, the disavowal of intellectual mastery over the horse means the relinquishing of control. Both Thoreau and Cavell attempt 'to make room' for the animal's presence even though the cost of making room is a profound disturbance to the self. By the end of his meditation, Thoreau opens himself more fully to the moose's death, an occasion which involves difficult self-interrogation, while Cavell gently remonstrates himself for his own deflections, deflections which he recognises in the hope of overcoming.

Denials take place all the time in human encounters. We risk dealing out 'little deaths' to others every day, Cavell writes, through 'our slights of one another', a 'willful misconstrual', a 'shading of loyalty', and through 'any countless signs of skepticism with respect' to the 'separateness of another'.<sup>11</sup> But the risk of denying others is especially pronounced in the case of relations between humans and nonhumans. This is because the factors that we count on in human encounters – a shared cultural context, for instance, or the ability to speak English – are limited or even non-existent. The possibilities for 'willful misconstrual' are therefore endless.

There is of course a rich spectrum in which this is and is not the case. In thinking of the language I share with my dog, for instance, I feel satisfied that we understand each other in certain ways, even if many things remain incommunicable. We share a world with each other – and to the extent that we share a world, our forms of life share meaningful points of contact. When I watch my dog chase a bee, however, I realize that there are cases in which understanding and being understood are impossible. The bee's seems completely unavailable to me in a way my dog's life is not. I simply do not know how proceed with some animals – or what proceeding would even look like. Even in the case of my dog, however, what I may sometimes take to be mutual understanding might not be understanding at all, as when I think my dog has understood and assented to an instruction (not to pee on the shoes of our house-guests), only to find that that instruction has not been understood (we wake to find that the shoes are wet). Or there might be moments when I point to the distance, indicating a dog in another field, only to see that my dog is looking at my finger. These are comic instances of misunderstanding, and one can list many more. But there is also a more substantial sense in which our attempt at mutual intelligibility comes to an end, not so much because of 'miscommunication', but because the grounds for what it might mean to communicate simply do not exist. As Ludwig Wittgenstein writes, 'A dog cannot be a hypocrite, but neither can he be sincere.'<sup>12</sup> Here Wittgenstein is not making a value-judgement about dogs but illustrating the radical differences between us and them. 'Hypocrisy' and 'sincerity' only make sense, only have a proper home, in inter-human communication, because of the particular ways in which human beings can lie to each other or be desirous of honest conduct. There are deep connections, in other words, between a culture's way of being and the words that make sense for it. The dog's inability to be a 'hypocrite' is a powerful index of cultural difference, an indication of what Wittgenstein might call a different 'form of life'.<sup>13</sup>

What is significant about Cavell's encounter, however, is the sense in which openness to the other can continue even when our knowledge comes to an end. It is in this sense that the horse's stance provides a model for the human observer: its deportment is not defined by a need for knowledge but by a readiness to understand and be understood. But it is also in this sense that the horse rebukes us for our unwillingness to acknowledge what it might feel of us. As Cavell writes in a different context:

To withhold, or hedge, our concepts of psychological states from a given creature, on the ground that our criteria cannot reach to the inner life of the creature, is specifically to withhold the source of my idea that living beings are things that feel; it is to withhold myself, to reject my response to anything as a living being.<sup>14</sup>

However, as much as Cavell's horse rebukes us, its stance is also an invitation to relate to it differently, to stand before it without withholding ourselves. This includes resisting the movement in which our lack of knowledge turns into a curtailment of what the horse may know of us, a projection of our own lacunae, that is, onto the animal other. One can continue being open to the other without being certain what one is relating to. The horse is a good picture of this.

This quality of being radically open exemplifies what I want to call a 'poetic' relationship to the world. It is a relationship George Eliot, Thoreau and Cavell explore in the passages discussed above – and it is a relationship J. M. Coetzee explores with extraordinary intensity in *The Lives of Animals* (1999), through his fictional character Elizabeth Costello. If the horse is, for Cavell, our best picture of understanding, poetry is, for Costello, our best form of reciprocating that understanding in language.

#### *'The difficulty of reality'*

In her essay on Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, the philosopher Cora Diamond writes that Elizabeth Costello is trying to come to terms with a 'difficulty of reality'.<sup>15</sup> Here, Diamond is alluding to our treatment of animal others under industrial modernity and to Costello's engagement with this reality. A famous novelist, Costello has come to an Australian university to deliver a lecture and seminar, and, at liberty to select her own topic, has chosen to address what she calls the 'horrors' of human domination of animal life, of 'what is being done to animals at this moment in production facilities (I hesitate to call them farms any longer), in abattoirs, in trawlers, in laboratories, all over the world'.<sup>16</sup> According to Diamond, Costello is trying to grasp the immensity of this reality, to think and imagine it fully. By doing so, she is trying to avoid what might be called 'deflection'.

In Diamond's account, deflection names a movement in which we turn away from or elide the complexity of an experience of life. We sometimes 'deflect' an issue, Diamond says, by dishonouring an experience through the form that our

responses take. As she explains with reference to Cavell (from whom she borrows the term):

Cavell writes about the philosopher who begins (we imagine) from an appreciation of something appalling: that I may be suffering, and my suffering be utterly unknown or uncared about; ‘and that others may be suffering and I not know’. But the philosopher’s understanding is *deflected*; the issue becomes deflected, as the philosopher thinks or rethinks it in the language of philosophical skepticism. And philosophical responses to that skepticism, e.g., demonstrations that it is confused, further deflect from the truth here. (Diamond, 57)

In this example, what originally strikes the philosopher as appalling –the pain of another – loses its force. This is because that pain is diluted as the philosopher tries to think about that pain in the ‘language of philosophical skepticism’ (i.e. in a language which requires justification for any truth-claim about the world). Crucially, both Diamond and Cavell point out that that pain is *further* deflected by engaging with the sceptic on his or her terms, even if one is *refuting* what the sceptic says. This is because the issue of pain is being addressed within the wrong framework, one which fails to appreciate the true appallingness of what is going on (ibid.).

In addition to ‘deflection’, Diamond uses another important phrase in her essay, the ‘difficulty of reality’:

That is a phrase of John Updike’s, which I want to pick up for the phenomena with which I am concerned, experiences in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in its inexplicability. (Diamond, 45-46)

In Diamond’s reading, Costello is someone who particularly tries to resist, as far as possible, certain deflections she sees at work in philosophical thinking with regard to animal others. Deflection is what happens, Diamond explains, ‘when we are moved from the appreciation, or attempt at appreciation, of a difficulty of reality to a philosophical or moral problem apparently in the vicinity’ (Diamond, 57). In trying to avoid such a deflection, not least by refusing the language in which animals are seen as a *question*, and in which *issues* are taken up and advanced,

Costello wants to engage more fully with the material reality of our relations with animals, including, in this case, the ‘horrors’ of our treatment of them in abattoirs, trawlers and laboratories. Something of this reality, she feels, is threatened by adopting a particular language – the language of philosophy.

This is not to belittle the importance of philosophy when it comes to clarifying and explaining our ideas. As Diamond remarks, there are ‘hard problems’ in philosophy, and ‘university philosophy departments’ are integral in helping us see ‘what constitutes a good argument, what is distorted by emotion, when we are making assertions without backing them up’ (Diamond, 58).<sup>17</sup> Nor is it to repudiate completely what Diamond calls ‘deflection’ – which is, after all, part of the experience of being human. As Ian Hacking writes in response to Diamond’s essay, ‘Don’t knock deflection [...]. Man is the deflecting animal.’<sup>18</sup> Here, Hacking is not advocating ignorance as a virtue, nor celebrating the fact that we are sometimes closed off to others. Rather, he is pointing out that, in the course of a normal day, we often act in ways that fall short of the ideal image of the non-deflecting, open-minded person. To open ourselves fully to every uncertainty, exploring the hidden depths of every encounter, including encounters that might pose a threat to our identity, is impractical, undesirable, and perhaps even impossible. There are, after all, bills to pay and buses to catch. One might say that we deflect as a matter of course, as a way of just getting by in the world. But when Diamond remarks that certain philosophical arguments *block* us from appreciating a difficulty of reality, in this case an aspect of our relationship with other animals, she is saying something much more particular than Hacking’s general claim that ‘Man is the deflecting animal.’ She is pointing out the ways in which certain modes of thought involve deflection, or, more strongly, the ways in which deflection is *built into* certain ways of relating to the world. The refusal to engage with reality, that is, may not only happen in moments of ignorance or absent-mindedness, but in the very *midst* of our thinking life. And Costello, for Diamond, is a figure who tries to overcome this kind of deflection:

What I have meant to suggest by picking up Cavell’s use of the term ‘deflection’ is that the hardness there, in philosophical argumentation, is not the hardness of appreciating or trying to appreciate a difficulty of reality. In the latter case, the difficulty of reality lies in the apparent resistance by reality to one’s ordinary mode of life, including one’s ordinary modes of thinking: to appreciate a difficulty of

reality is to feel oneself being shouldered out of how one thinks, how one is apparently supposed to think, or to have a sense of the inability of thought to encompass what it is attempting to reach. Such appreciation may involve the profound isolation felt by someone like Elizabeth Costello (Diamond, 58–59).<sup>19</sup>

In remarking upon Costello's 'isolation' in Coetzee's novella, Diamond seems to have in mind various instances where Costello alienates herself from other characters. John, Costello's son, thinks that his mother has become too 'intense about the animal business' (*LA*, 66). And Norma, Costello's daughter-in-law, thinks Costello has withdrawn from the arena of rational thought (*LA*, 48-49). Then there are instances where Costello makes controversial comparisons between factory farming and the Holocaust, an analogy which offends various characters in the text, none more so than Abraham Stern (a character of clearly Jewish origins), who refuses to attend a dinner held in Costello's honour (*LA*, 49-50).<sup>20</sup>

But Costello's isolation from others is also much more subtle and pervasive, in that, apart from seeing the 'animal business' differently, she often finds herself unable to use the *language* of her peers. Her isolation is, among other things, deeply linguistic. Coetzee draws our attention to Costello's differences in a number of ways. Recall, for instance, that Costello is a famous novelist, speaking to a university audience as an invited guest. Her audience, we can assume, is well-versed in the protocols of critical debate, and, in the context of a university lecture, it probably expects her to understand and adopt these protocols too. But Costello is a novelist — a point she emphasizes repeatedly — and this turns out to be a crucial source of tension in the novella. She wants to approach animal others primarily in literary and imaginative terms and not in the philosophical or critical terms of her interlocutors. This makes her impatient with academic debate, and she is often unwilling or unable to clarify herself in the ways desired by others. 'I was hoping not to have to enunciate principles,' Costello says in response to a question from an audience member. 'If principles are what you want to take away from this talk, I would have to respond, open your heart and listen to what your heart says' (*LA*, 37). One can only imagine how, in the context of university lecture, this would have baffled (or perhaps even irritated) Costello's questioner.

From time to time, Costello shows an awareness of how she might be baffling others. She also recognizes that her remarks might be taken as sentimental or even

irrational. 'I want to find a way of speaking,' she says at one point, that is 'cool rather than heated, philosophical rather than polemical.' This is the kind of language, Costello continues, in which 'we can discuss and debate what kind of souls animals have' or 'whether they reason or on the contrary act as biological automatons' (*LA*, 22). But this philosophical language – the language of 'Aristotle and Porphyry, of Augustine and Aquinas, of Descartes and Bentham' – is also precisely what Costello wants to avoid. This is because philosophical discussion of 'the animal', in her view, deflects the singularity of animal others by approaching them in the form of philosophical questions. Her refusal to use the language of Descartes and Bentham, then, or even the language of 'Mary Midgley and Tom Regan', emerges from her desire to avoid the reduction of animal otherness into an issue or a question. That language partly tempts her, not least because it seems to offer a way of getting a grip on a difficulty of reality, but it is one that she also declines to take up. '[S]omething in me resists' that language, Costello says, 'foreseeing in that step the concession of the entire battle' (*LA*, 25).

Resisting a particular philosophical language is of crucial importance to Costello. Indeed, on certain occasions it is a matter of life and death – or rather a matter of how we appreciate or fail to appreciate life and death. This is especially clear in Costello's debate with Professor Thomas O'Hearne, an academic philosopher who has been invited to respond to her lecture on animals. For the most part, the debate proceeds in a calm and civilized manner. O'Hearne raises a number of substantial objections to Costello's lecture, to which she responds forcefully but politely. The tone of the debate changes, however, when O'Hearne raises the topic of death. Animals, according to O'Hearne, do not '*understand* death as we do': death is 'just something that happens' to animals, 'something against which there may be a revolt of the organism but not a revolt of the soul'. 'And the lower down the scale of evolution one goes, the truer this is. To an insect, death is the breakdown of systems that keep the physical organism functioning, and nothing more' (*LA*, 63). Costello's response is direct and curt, but also, in the context of an academic debate, unusually impassioned:

Anyone who says that life matters less to animals than it does to us has not held in his hands an animal fighting for its life. The whole of the being of the animal is thrown into that fight, without reserve. (*LA*, 65)

Costello admits that the ‘fight’ of other animals against death may lack the intellectual dimension of the human fight, but she also argues that it is ‘not the mode of being of animals to have an intellectual horror’. Their ‘whole being,’ she continues, ‘is the living flesh’ (ibid.). Then Costello does something remarkable. She points out the weakness of everything she is saying:

If I do not convince you that is because my words, here, lack the power to bring home to you the wholeness, the unabstracted, unintellectual nature, of that animal being. That is why I urge you to read the poets who return the living, electric being to language. (ibid.)

Costello feels she has reached the limits of what can be said between herself and O’Hearne, at least in the terms of their current discussion. There is something amiss, she realizes, about the *form* their dialogue has taken, in which positions are staked out through arguments. O’Hearne has been defending a certain notion, namely that animals do not have an ‘intellectual horror’ of death, a position which Costello thinks mischaracterizes the animal response to death. However, precisely at the point where Costello’s argument stands in need of explanation, and where she might be expected to adduce certain examples, she stops short: ‘my words [...] lack the power to bring home to you the wholeness [...] of that animal being’(ibid.). At a crucial moment in the debate, Costello breaks off from a particular way of speaking, from a particular manner of continuing. And she turns to poetry: ‘I urge you to read the poets.’

### *Rilke’s panther, Hughes’s jaguar*

But what is this thing called poetry? What can it ‘do’ that academic debate cannot? Costello explores these questions in a seminar entitled ‘The Poets and the Animals’, which takes place the day after her lecture and examines the connections between our forms of thought and the ways in which we acknowledge or refuse to acknowledge nonhuman others.. As in her engagement with the philosophers, Costello’s treatment of poetry is patchy: she skates over intricate historical questions connected to particular writers and ideas, and offers unsystematic readings of animals in poetry, confining her analysis to a handful of poems. Unlike her engagement with

philosophy, however, which is mostly antagonistic, Costello's tone in this seminar is more affirmative. She finds in poetry an entirely different mode of relating to the world, one which allows for the kind of sympathetic attachment she thinks philosophy has denied itself in relation to animal life.

Costello never explicitly spells out a theory regarding the relations between poetry and animal life. But it soon becomes clear that a definition would be antithetical to her purposes, for what seems to attract her in poetry is precisely its indefinability, its wild resistance to paraphrase. Nevertheless, a kind of thesis emerges in her reading of poetry about animal life. Some poems, it seems, are capable of their own deflections in relation to animal others — while other poems seem to resist this especially well. Costello explores both kinds of poems.

Costello's seminar begins with a reading of 'The Panther' (1903) by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. When Rilke wrote this poem, he was under the counsel of Auguste Rodin, who apparently urged the poet to observe animals at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. Studying the world with a naturalist's precision, Rodin said, was integral to his artistic training. The result of this advice was 'The Panther', one of Rilke's most translated poems.

The lithe swinging of that rhythmical easy stride  
which circles down to the tiniest hub  
is like a dance of energy around a point  
in which a great will stands stunned and numb.

The poem is ranked among Rilke's finest works. According to Charlie Louth, the poem 'provided a standard concentrated utterance' against which Rilke would measure his future writing; and according to T. J. Reed, the poem 'describes with an exactitude a zoologist can admire'.<sup>21</sup> Rilke seems to '*become* the panther' in this poem, William Pratt writes, 'pacing in his cage in the menagerie' of the zoo.<sup>22</sup> For Costello, however, there is something amiss about poem. The panther is powerfully evoked, but its energy seems to be projected onto it. In fact, the panther is really a 'stand-in for something else', she argues. Its 'dance of energy around a center' is an 'image that comes from physics, elementary particle physics'. And 'Rilke does not get beyond this point — beyond the panther as the vital embodiment of the kind

of force that is released in an atomic explosion' (*LA*, 50). His animal is a trope for trapped energy — and it is energy, not the animal, that is the subject of Rilke's poem.

Costello finds a different spirit at work in the poems of Ted Hughes, whom she says is 'writing against Rilke' (*LA*, 50). As she remarks of two of Hughes's poems, 'The Jaguar' (1957) and 'Second Glance at a Jaguar' (1967):

He uses the same staging in the zoo, but it is the crowd for a change that stands mesmerized, and among them the man, the poet, entranced and horrified and overwhelmed, his powers of understanding pushed beyond their limit. (*LA*, 50-51)

Against Rilke, whose animal is a 'stand-in for something else', Hughes feels 'his way toward a different kind of being-in-the-world' (*LA*, 51). For him 'it is a matter [...] not of inhabiting another mind but of inhabiting another body' (*ibid*). This places Hughes in contact with what might be called a 'difficulty of reality', in that he confronts something which resists his ordinary forms of thought. What Cora Diamond says of Elizabeth Costello is true of Hughes's experience here: 'shouldered out' from how he is 'apparently supposed to think' about the world, he encounters a limit to his understanding with respect to the jaguar, an animal which brings home to him the 'inability of thought to encompass what it is trying to reach' (Diamond, 58).

Personal observation was central to the later poem Hughes published about a jaguar, 'Second Glance at a Jaguar'. 'I'm having a pleasant time at the [London] Zoo,' he wrote in a letter, five years before the poem's publication. 'I have a season ticket & go nearly every day & draw animals & look at them a bit more closely than I have done heretofore.'<sup>23</sup> One result of looking 'more closely' was the accumulation of concrete details. Images and associations are not projected upon the creature, as in Rilke's 'The Panther', but seem to emerge from the speaker's close observation of how the jaguar actually acts and moves:

Skinful of bowls he bowls them,  
The hip going in and out of joint, dropping the spine  
With the urgency of his hurry  
Like a cat going along under thrown stones, under cover,  
Glancing sideways, running

Under his spine.

There is a complex interplay between rhythm and experience here. The repetitions of certain sounds ('bowls', 'thrown' and 'stones', as well as 'urgency' and 'hurry',) establishes a dominant pattern of long 'o' and short 'ur' and 'ee' sounds, which, in combination with the repetition of 'under' ('*under* thrown stones', '*under* cover', '*Under* his spine'), has the effect of propelling the poem forward as we read in anticipation of similar cadences. Just as the poem surges forward, however, there is a sense that it also looks back at itself. 'Skinful of bowls he bowls them', for instance, is notable not only for its description of the black marks on the jaguar's skin, but for its daring repetition of 'bowls', a word which, in its first iteration, is used as a noun ('Skinful of bowls') but then quite suddenly as a verb ('he *bowls* them). Through this weird description, the line forces a jarring retrospective glance. Similarly, 'hurry' contains the auditory memory of 'urgency', just as the third iteration of 'under' ('*Under* his spine') makes us conscious of its earlier iterations ('*under* thrown stones', '*under* cover'). The poem's repetitions sweep us backwards in the movement of going forwards, a dense layering of sounds and energies which seem, at the verbal level, to mirror something of the jaguar's hunched 'running', the ducking movement of its head, and the sway of its hip as it goes 'in and out of joint'. Unlike 'The Panther', in which the creature is a 'stand-in for something else', the creature in Hughes's poem seems to be muscling its way into language, 'Like a cat [...] under cover'.

Of course, as with any poem about any animal, Hughes cannot escape the prism of language. The jaguar is necessarily described within an all-too-human framework and so tangled up with human concerns and projections. Later in the poem, Hughes seems to acknowledge this through a number of extreme (and self-consciously outlandish) descriptions of the jaguar. Nevertheless, even as Hughes's poem owns up to these inescapable contingencies, to the fact that we inevitably anthropomorphize other creatures by describing them, his poem also manages to gesture towards the jaguar's otherness, not by transcending figures of speech (an impossible task in a poem), but by underscoring the provisional nature of each of his descriptions. By amassing a dizzying array of images to describe the creature, only to then summarily dispense with those images, the poem foregrounds both the inadequacy of its previous images and a sense that future images, however precise, will also fail to capture something of how the jaguar moves. The portrait Hughes

completes is also a monument to the impossibility of a complete portrait. The jaguar moves with a

A terrible, stump-legged waddle,  
Like a thick Aztec disemboweller,  
Club-swinging, trying to grind some square  
Socket between his hind legs round,  
Carrying his head like a brazier of spilling embers,  
And the black bit of his mouth, he takes it  
Between his back teeth, he has to wear his skin out,  
He swipes a lap at the water-trough as he turns  
Swivelling the ball of his heel on the polished spot,  
Showing his belly like a butterfly.

Again, the poem unfolds new images and phrasings in quick succession, as though to keep pace with the creature's movements. 'Aztec disemboweller' gives way to 'square socket' which gives way to 'hind legs round' which gives way to 'spilling embers' which gives way to 'black bit' which culminates in the surprising image of 'a butterfly'. Hughes's associations flow with an urgent momentum, never quite at rest. At first glance, there seems to be very little that holds these images together; on closer inspection, however, one can see how particular images seem to anticipate the next. 'Grind' and 'socket', for instance, clearly borrow from a mechanistic vocabulary, and so prepare the ground for 'Carrying his head like a *brazier of spilling embers*', an image which suggests a steam-engine overloaded with fuel. This description anticipates, in turn, the 'the *black bit*' of the jaguar's mouth, an image which suggest coal or ash, but which in any case contains a memory of the now burnt-out embers. In turn, the 'a' and 't' sounds in 'black bit' prepares us for '*back teeth*', just as the description of the jaguar wearing its 'skin out' anticipates 'polished'. Rushing from images of fire to water, from square sockets to round legs, from Aztec disembowellers to butterflies, the poem brings together dynamic opposites, finding in the jaguar a site of multiple forces and energies.

It is in this sense that Hughes's poem may be said to encode an 'ecological ethic' that is absent from Rilke's poem. If Rilke's 'The Panther' uses the animal as a symbol, Hughes's 'Second Glance at a Jaguar' engages with the creature as an

embodied other, one with a particular way of moving and being. Like the jaguar, moreover, which at ‘every stride’ seems to ‘turn a corner | in himself and correct it’, Hughes’s poem is full of revisions and recalibrations. It conscientiously breaks apart its own images, underscoring the creature’s otherness by refusing to allow a particular metaphor or conceit for the jaguar to reify into an emblem. In this way, the poem redeems the etymology of poetry as *poesis* – poetry, that is, as a process of making, creating, producing. The poem also suggests how the restless and transformative activity of poetic making and remaking might offer (non-instrumental) forms of relating to animal others, specifically forms of description which do not simply re-embed the animal other into what we know, but which find a way of acknowledging – even in the act of describing – the other’s otherness to what we know. This is not to say that the jaguar, by the end of Hughes’s poem, is somehow captured in its full totality. On the contrary, the poem cannot be more than its own conceits; even its most precise images reduce the jaguar to a series of verbal figures. By means of continually unsettling language, however, there is a sense in which the poem ‘releases’ the creature by foregrounding the ways in which the jaguar is always other to the poem’s images. The poem affirms that we can only ever ‘glance’ at the jaguar, and that its otherness is finally beyond the figures we make for it. Rather than positing this as a loss, however, the poem celebrates the alterity that ‘glancing’ implies – by itself becoming glancing. Unable to free the animal in reality, in the actual setting of the zoo, this homage is perhaps the only real gesture (if still a feeble one) available to the poem. Recognizing the intolerability of the creature’s caged condition, the poem refuses to burden the creature further by pinning it down in words.

The difference between Rilke and Hughes is nicely captured by the phrase ‘becoming-animal’, a term used by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*.<sup>24</sup> As Randy Malamud explains in relation to ‘The Panther’, Rilke’s poem fails the task of ‘becoming-animal’, a task which would require seeing ‘the whole animal and its life’ over and above ‘its iconically reductive cultural representation’.<sup>25</sup> In other words, Rilke sees the panther in all-too-human terms: his poem is not so much an encounter with an animal as an encounter with an idea of energy that the animal embodies. Indeed, this was partly the point: as Ralph Freedman observes of this period in Rilke’s career, the poet was striving to achieve a sculptural stillness in his poems. ‘The panther has become wholly *thing*,’ Freedman writes, and ‘this was the most advanced development so far in Rilke’s

professional life: the absorption, interpretation, and reinterpretation of Rodin's new sculpture.<sup>26</sup> But if this text marked an artistic breakthrough for Rilke, a thoroughgoing assimilation of Rodin's influence, the poem is troublingly uncritical in its relation to the actual panther. As Malamud writes, the 'poet and audience recognise this animal's intensity and his soul,' but they 'remain powerless within the text to celebrate this, or to ameliorate the animal's constraint [...]. There is no emotion possible other than pathos.'<sup>27</sup>

Malamud might be asking too much of Rilke here. Short of physically liberating the animal, it is not clear how Rilke might 'ameliorate' the panther's life in captivity. Nor is it clear if 'pathos' is entirely undesirable: the emotion, after all, might be the catalyst for a more fully-realised sympathy. As a comment on the imaginative trajectory of 'The Panther', however, Malamud's general point is convincing: because Rilke approaches the panther as an aesthetic 'thing', and because he is a sentimental and uncritical visitor to the zoo, the animal is further imprisoned by the concepts we make for it. The panther, to adapt a related comment Malamud makes elsewhere, lacks those 'lines of flight' which 'highlight the animal's mobility and agency', and which provide animals with 'paths of escape from the captivity and inertia' that 'plague animals in so many of their modern cultural incarnations'.<sup>28</sup> Rilke's panther, in other words, is never more than Rilke's panther (or the dominant cultural idea of panther's in his time).

Hughes approaches his jaguar differently. If Rilke describes his panther with the eye of an artist, sculpting the animal into an expression of trapped and deflated energy, Hughes is partly sculpted *by* the animal: his engagement with the jaguar mesmerizes him. This is because Hughes tries to inhabit another body — and in so doing relinquishes some degree of intellectual control over the other. He does not approach the animal as a subject of knowledge (Cavell's horse), or as an artistic challenge (Rilke's panther), but as an embodied other that must be met halfway. As Costello remarks,

Hughes is feeling his way toward a different kind of being-in-the-world, one which is not entirely foreign to us [...]. In these poems we know the jaguar not from the way he seems but from the way he moves [...]. The poems ask us to imagine our way into that way of moving, to inhabit that body. (*LA*, 51)

To imagine the jaguar in this way is to recognize the animal's embodied vitality. The jaguar is not only something to look at, but something that looks. It is full of 'currents of life', before which the 'crowd stands mesmerised'. In this way, Hughes's poem can lead to what Mark Payne calls, in another context, a 'perceptual change' in our relations with animals. 'To see oneself seen,' he writes, 'is to become aware of oneself as an object of another animal's perception, then as one object among others in this perception, and then, finally, as a participant in an intersubjective encounter as it is experienced by another subject.'<sup>29</sup> And that, as Costello tells her audience, 'is the kind of poetry I bring to your attention today: poetry that does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him' (LA, 51).

Costello's analysis is not without its problems. In her reading of Hughes's jaguar poems, for instance, she acknowledges but does not engage with the 'ethics of caging large animals' (LA, 51). If anything, this issue should be central to our reading of the text. Since the poem cannot be separated from zoos as institutions, it cannot be read as a straightforward encounter between a human being and a nonhuman other. It is also a massive oversimplification for Costello to speak of 'philosophy' and 'poetry' as though they were clearly separable, each characterized by a set of common themes and properties. In many cases the distinction is not only simplistic but untenable. Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, for instance, or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, are works of both poetry and philosophy, and these elements cannot be separated without severely distorting the texts. We might also think of modern examples where poetry is in intimate conversation with philosophical themes, as in the work of Wallace Stevens, or philosophy which moves towards 'lyrical' or 'poetical' forms, as in the writing of Gaston Bachelard or Maurice Blanchot. In these cases, 'philosophy' and 'poetry' are deeply connected: they form crisscrossing strands of a particular writer's voice.

Finally, we might also resist Costello's uncritical celebration of the 'heart' as the 'seat' of sympathy, that 'faculty' which 'allows us to share at times the being of another' (LA, 34). In 'Reopening the Question of the Human and the Animal', Dominick LaCapra argues that we should be wary of such over-reaching formulations, criticizing Costello for 'seemingly accepting the questionable ideas that sympathy is identification with the other and that such identification is itself a preservative against cruelty and genocidal behaviour'.<sup>30</sup> In particular, LaCapra argues that thinking of

sympathy in these terms – namely, as a ‘fully identificatory form’ of engagement – is ‘very problematic as a moral or ethical sentiment in that it induces projective or incorporative identification’.<sup>31</sup> Sympathetic projection, in other words, may end up *eliding* the other by turning its otherness into a version of the same, even, paradoxically, as one tries to resist that very move. The ‘type of empathy or compassion Costello seems to be seeking,’ LaCapra adds, ‘would be better construed as an affective response that may involve elements of identification but nonetheless is also informed both by acknowledgement of the other as other and by the realisation that sympathy or empathy alone, however desirable on an ethical level, is not sufficient as a response to social and political problems.’<sup>32</sup> To be fair to her, Costello is partly aware of the problems posed by an unqualified conception of sympathy, an awareness that comes out most forcefully when she criticizes Hughes for the ‘primitivism’ of his thought. ‘It is deeply masculine’ and ‘masculinist’, she remarks, and its ‘ramifications into politics are to be mistrusted’ (*LA*, 52). In any case, however, LaCapra is right to suggest that Costello’s remarks on sympathy and compassion – remarks that are usually couched in aesthetic and ecological terms – require ‘supplementation by norms and processes linked to forms of socio-political practice’. Although such considerations may not ‘contradict’ Costello’s view, they nonetheless ‘take one beyond the world envisaged’ by her.<sup>33</sup>

Without recapitulating Costello’s simplistic view of philosophy, however, and even as one recognizes the limits of her discussion of sympathy, one may nevertheless take her seriously when she claims that poets return the ‘electric, living being’ to language (*LA*, 61). One might take seriously, that is, the notion that there are deep relations between our forms of language and the forms of recognition that language makes possible (or unwittingly withholds).

#### *Wittgenstein’s ladder*

Ludwig Wittgenstein was convinced that many of the intractable issues in philosophy were misconstruals of language, arising from what Gordon Hunnings has called ‘mistaken grammatical assimilations’.<sup>34</sup> Problems in philosophy came about when words and concepts from different homes were erroneously mixed up. The task of the philosopher, in this context, was to look at the ways this happened and to stop it from happening again:

Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily accessible wrong turnings. And so we watch one man after another walking down the same paths and we know in advance where he will branch off, where walk straight on without noticing the side turning, etc. etc. What I have to do then is erect signposts at all the junctions where there are wrong turnings so as to help people past the danger points.<sup>35</sup>

Given the state of language's roads, where 'wrong turnings' were all too 'easily accessible', the philosopher's role, as Wittgenstein conceived it, was to stop people from getting lost – by bringing an end to philosophy as it was understood by the great figures of the Western tradition, who were concerned with solving metaphysical or epistemological problems. As Wittgenstein puts it in *Philosophical Investigations*: 'Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language' (§109). Or, as he remarks in a later passage, 'What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand' (§118). But the work of 'destroying' a 'house of cards' is not a simple task. On the contrary, it can involve the terrifying unmaking of ideas and concepts in which we felt at home, the abandoning of roads with which we were deeply familiar. In Elizabeth Costello's case, it can also involve a feeling of *out-of-jointedness* with cultural practices around her, as in her inability to understand the 'stupefying' practices of eating meat, something she once took for granted. It can also involve, finally, a wrenching apart of a sense of self. 'It's that I no longer know where I am,' Costello confesses to her son, John, after she has completed her presentation at the university. 'I must be mad!' (*LA*, 69). Here, Costello seems to be describing a crisis of language, as well as the loss of a former understanding of the world, one that is deeply frightening.<sup>36</sup> Her house of cards comes down with a disorienting swiftness, disrupting all the signposts that had once seemed intelligible. She is now travelling, to put this another way, without a clear sense of direction, perilously close to the edge of sanity. As Diamond writes of such moments, 'To attempt to think [a difficulty of reality] is to feel one's thinking come unhinged. Our concepts, our ordinary life with our concepts, pass by this difficulty as if it were not there; the difficulty, if we try to see it, shoulders us out of life, is deadly chilling' (Diamond, 58). Paradoxically, however, this experience of being 'shouldered' out of life can also return one to life, not least by reminding one of the body one inhabits. Or, as Diamond writes in her

essay's conclusion, the 'coming apart of thought and reality belongs to flesh and blood' (ibid., 78). Costello's turn to poetry also belongs to 'flesh and blood'. By reading poems such as Hughes's 'Second Glance at a Jaguar', and by trying to relate to animal life beyond the terms provided by philosophy, she brings herself to the limits of what she can think. Not that poetry is without concepts, or that poetry always avoids 'deflection', or that avoiding deflection is always even desirable. Nor even that Costello wants to put a limit on thinking. On the contrary, her turn to poetry seems to signal something else – call it an embrace of 'negative capability' (John Keats), or an acceptance of *poesis*, that activity of restless making and remaking by which, relinquishing what we know, we reclaim the ordinary. Whatever it is, it returns her to life. Poets, Costello remarks, 'return the living, electric being to language'.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 26.
- <sup>2</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 159.
- <sup>3</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), p. 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods* (New York: Penguin, 1998), p. 152. Further references will be given in the text as *MW*, followed by the page number.
- <sup>5</sup> This phrase is taken from the title of a lecture delivered by Donna Haraway in 2010, ‘Staying with the Trouble: Becoming Worldly with Animal Species’, presented at Duke University Women’s Studies Program, Fifth Annual Feminist Theory Workshop.
- <sup>6</sup> Stanley Cavell quoted in Vicki Hearne, *Adam’s Task: Calling Animals by Name* (London: Heinemann, 1987), p. 115. Further references will be given in the text as *AT*, followed by the page number.
- <sup>7</sup> Stanley Cavell, ‘The Avoidance of Love’, in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Scribner, 1969), pp. 267 – 353 (p. 286).
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351. As Cavell writes of *King Lear*: ‘The cause of tragedy is that we would rather murder the world than permit it to expose us to change’ (*ibid.*).
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.
- <sup>10</sup> Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J. M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 116.
- <sup>11</sup> Stanley Cavell, ‘The Good of Film’, in *Cavell on Film*, ed. by William Rothman (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 340.
- <sup>12</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by Elizabeth Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 229.
- <sup>13</sup> The idea of a ‘form of life’ appears in various sections of *Philosophical Investigations* and is expressed most succinctly in the following formulations: to ‘imagine a language means to imagine a form of life’ (§19); and ‘the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life’ (§23).
- <sup>14</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 83.
- <sup>15</sup> Cora Diamond, ‘The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy’, in Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, John McDowell, Ian Hacking and Cary Wolfe, *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 43–90 (p. 57). Further references will be given Diamond, followed by the page number.

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<sup>16</sup> J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. by Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 19. Further references will be given in the text as *LA*, followed by the page number.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Diamond's own writing on animals, particularly her essay 'Eating Meat and Eating People', exemplifies the importance of sustained philosophical thought in reaching clarity about issues which have been 'distorted by emotion'. This essay is in Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 319–34.

<sup>18</sup> Ian Hacking, 'Deflections', in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, p. 164.

<sup>19</sup> In speaking of being 'shouldered out of how one thinks', Diamond is alluding to a word Ted Hughes uses in his poem 'Six Young Men', and which Diamond quotes at the beginning of her essay (Diamond, 44). In the poem, Hughes describes a photograph of 'six young men' who were killed in World War I. The poem speaks of the difficulty of coming to grips with the fact that all these men — in the bloom of their youth in the photograph — died fighting during the war. There is something painfully astonishing about this, and the speaker struggles to reconcile these deaths with the joviality of the young men in the photo, 'all trimmed for a Sunday jaunt'. The poem concludes: 'To regard this photograph might well dement, | Such contradictory permanent horrors here | Smile from the single exposure and shoulder out | One's own body from its instant and heat.'

<sup>20</sup> Readers of *The Lives of Animals* have also taken issue with the comparison, objecting to Costello's conflation of the deaths of animals under factory farming and the deaths of humans under religious persecution. See Peter Singer's response in *LA*, pp. 85–89.

<sup>21</sup> Charlie Louth, 'Early Poems', in *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, ed. by Karen Leeder and Robert Vilain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 56; T. J. Reed, 'Nietzsche's Animals: Idea, Image and Influence', in *Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 190.

<sup>22</sup> William Pratt, *Singing the Chaos: Madness and Wisdom in Modern Poetry* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996), p. 45. [should I put MO here so as to be consistent with reference 31, which places 'IL' after Evanston? Happy to leave out the state names, though, if that looks cleaner.]

<sup>23</sup> Ted Hughes, *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Christopher Reid (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 179.

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- <sup>24</sup> See chapter 10 of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 256 -341.
- <sup>25</sup> Randy Malamud, *An Introduction to Animals and Visual Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 46.
- <sup>26</sup> Ralph Freedman, *The Life of a Poet* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 172.
- <sup>27</sup> Malamud, *An Introduction to Animals and Visual Culture*, p. 48.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46. ‘Lines of flight’ is another term Malamud borrows from Deleuze and Guattari. As they explain in *A Thousand Plateaus*, ‘The line of flight marks: the reality of a finite number of dimensions that the multiplicity effectively fills; the impossibility of a supplementary dimension, unless the multiplicity is transformed by the line of flight; the possibility and necessity of flattening all of the multiplicities on a single plane of consistency or exteriority, regardless of their number of dimensions’ (p. 10).
- <sup>29</sup> Mark Payne, *The Animal Part: Human and Other Animals in the Poetic Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 8.
- <sup>30</sup> Dominick LaCapra, ‘Reopening the Question of the Human and the Animal’, in *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) pp. 149–89 (pp. 180–81).
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- <sup>33</sup> LaCapra, ‘Reopening the Question of the Human and the Animal’, p. 181.
- <sup>34</sup> Gordon Hunnings, *The World and Language in Wittgenstein’s Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 200.
- <sup>35</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 18.
- <sup>36</sup> It is no exaggeration to describe Costello’s sense of being lost here as a crisis of identity. As Charles Taylor points out in a separate but related context, there are deep connections between our spatial metaphors and our sense of self. ‘To know who I am,’ he writes, ‘is a species of knowing where I stand.’ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 27.

