

Other Perspectives: The Representation of Animals in the Poetry of Thomson, Smart, Cowper and Burns



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Abstract

This thesis will critically examine the animal poems of James Thomson, Christopher Smart, William Cowper, and Robert Burns. Even though there is an extended body of scholarly work on these poets, little consideration has been given to their attitude towards nonhumans. I will argue these poems are founded on a Lockean epistemology that guarantees their representations of animals are faithful to their real-life counterparts because they are derived from first-hand experience. This poetic authenticity is further enhanced by allowing nonhumans to represent themselves via their creaturely voices. The corporeal and vocal signs these sentient creatures make testify to their rational agency. Both these forms of representation are types of advocacy and, as such, can be understood as appeals for compassionate treatment. These poets feel justified in promoting this position as they adhere to a theological belief that God loves all His creations. Thus, benevolence for animals is a universal truth derived from a transcendental authority. In advancing this idea, Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns manifestly refute Descartes's claim that animals are machines; instead, they portray nonhumans as active agents. Consequently, these poets actively participated in a cross-disciplinary debate on the status of nonhumans in the eighteenth century. This period was pivotal in challenging assumptions about the interaction between animals and man.

A contextual overview of key critical concepts that shaped the conversation on animals will be undertaken to understand this correlation. This approach will help situate these poems within the discourse on nonhumans and chart those texts that influenced them.

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List of Short Titles and Abbreviations

Au.	Autumn', in James Thomson, <i>The Seasons</i> , ed. by James Sambrook (Clarendon Press, 1981)
Burns	Robert Burns, <i>The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns</i> , in 3 vols, ed. by James Kinsley (Clarendon Press, 1968)
LPW	William Cowper, <i>The Letters and Prose Writing of William Cowper</i> , in 5 vols, ed. by James King and Charles Ryskamp (Clarendon Press, 1979-86)
LRB	Robert Burns, <i>The Letters of Robert Burns</i> , 2 nd edition, in 2 vols, ed. by J. De Lancey Ferguson and G. Ross Roy (Clarendon Press, 1985)
PWC	William Cowper, <i>The Poems of William Cowper</i> , in 3 vols, ed. by John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp (Clarendon Press, 1995)
Smart	Christopher Smart, <i>Jubilat Agno</i> , W.H. Bond (ed.) (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954)
Smart, ii	Christopher Smart, <i>The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, Volume II: Religious Poetry 1763-1771</i> , in 6 vols, ed. by Marcus Walsh and Karina Williamson (Oxford University Press, 1983)
Smart, iii	Christopher Smart, <i>The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, Volume III: A Translation of the Psalms of David</i> , in 6 vols, ed. by Marcus Walsh (Clarendon Press, 1987)
Smart, iv	Christopher Smart, <i>The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, Volume IV: Miscellaneous Poems in English and Latin</i> , in 6 vols, ed. by Karina Williamson (Oxford University Press, 1987)
Sp.	'Spring', in James Thomson, <i>The Seasons</i> , ed. by James Sambrook (Clarendon Press, 1981)
<i>Spectator</i>	<i>The Spectator</i> , ed. by Donald F. Bond, in 5 vols (Clarendon Press, 1965)
Su.	'Summer', in James Thomson, <i>The Seasons</i> , ed. by James Sambrook (Clarendon Press, 1981)
Wi.	'Winter', in James Thomson, <i>The Seasons</i> , ed. by James Sambrook (Clarendon Press, 1981)

Introduction

Copying Nature with Care

In an article for the *Public Ledger*, Oliver Goldsmith writes

The better sort here pretend to the utmost compassion for animals of every kind; to hear them speak, a stranger would be apt to imagine they could hardly hurt the gnat that stung 'em; they seem so tender, and so full of pity, that one would take them for the harmless friends of the whole creation.¹

Goldsmith's use of 'pretend' suggests a discontinuity between seeing nonhumans as worthy of compassion and a failure to actualise this concern. The animal poems of James Thomson, Christopher Smart, William Cowper, and Robert Burns attempt to bridge this gap. These authors produced an extended body of work in which animals exhibit authentic independent agency, legitimating their status as active subjects. Drawing on their first-hand encounters with animals, these poets represent creatures faithful to their real-life counterparts. This fact has readily been acknowledged by critics both then and now. For instance, in 1777, John Moore wrote that, in his popular poem *The Seasons*, what Thomson

seems most solicitous to produce in the minds of his readers, is a full acquiescence in the economy, and filial confidence in the Author of Nature. And he paints every part of the year, and every genial form that wakes, to the plastic energy of poetic enthusiasm.²

For Hugh Blair, 'Thomson is a strong and a beautiful Describer; for he had a feeling heart, and a warm imagination. He had studied, and copied nature with care'.³ William Hazlitt

¹ Oliver Goldsmith, 'Against Cruelty to animals. A Story from the Zendvest of Zoroaster', Oliver Goldsmith, *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, vol. ii, 5 vols, ed. by Arthur Friedman (Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 66. Letter xv, Wednesday, 5 March 1760.

² John More, *Strictures, Critical and Sentimental, on Thomson's The Seasons* (Richardson and Urquhart, 1777), p. 167. On *The Seasons*'s status as a well-loved eighteenth-century poem, Dwight Durling notes, 'The collected *Seasons* appeared in 1730, and went into three editions that year. They were reprinted, separate from Thomson's other work, at least forty-seven times before 1800, and were included in twenty-two editions before that date – a total of at least seventy-two editions from 1730-1800'. See Dwight L. Durling, *Georgic Tradition in English Poetry* (Kennikat Press Inc., 1963), p. 49

³ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. by Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran (Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 458.

concludes that Thomson's poetry created a 'vivid impression which the whole makes upon his own imagination; and thus transfers the same unbroken, unimpaired impression to the imagination of his readers'.⁴ Critics writing about Cowper's poetry similarly acknowledged his preoccupation with the natural world. For instance, Roderick Huang notes that 'the position of William Cowper as a nature poet in the history of English literature is assured'.⁵ Maurice J. Quinlan has a similar sentiment when he states that 'Readers admire him as a nature poet, as a poet of domestic life'.⁶ While eighteenth-century critics, unaware of *Jubilate Agno*, failed to recognise Smart as a poet concerned about the status of animals, this changed with the discovery of the poem in 1939. To twenty-first-century readers, he is inextricably linked with his cat, Jeffery, an opinion expressed by Neil Curry, who states that Jeffery is 'the most famous cat in the whole history of English literature'.⁷ Curry's sentiment is akin to one expressed by Christopher Devlin who writes 'beautiful Jeffery [sic] —who must by now be one of the most famous cats in history'.⁸ For Clement Hawes, 'The "consideration" of Jeffery is widely known and justly celebrated'.⁹ Moreover, *Jubilate Agno* is a poem in which animals command coequal worth with their human counterparts. Like Thomson and Cowper, Robert Burns has a corpus of work in which nature is thematically important. In a scientific study that catalogues the wealth of natural phenomena that Burns's poems include, John Young states

Within the full range of the natural scene, Burns referred to various natural elements on many occasions — Landscape (835 times); Flowers (446); Trees (457); Mammals (91); Birds (336); Seasons (223); other miscellaneous wildlife (112) and

⁴ William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt – Volume 5, Lectures on the English Poets and A View of the English Stage*, 21 vols, ed. by P. P. Howe (J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1930), p. 87.

⁵ Roderick Huang, *William Cowper; Nature Poet* (Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 1.

⁶ Maurice J. Quinlan, *William Cowper: A Critical Life* (University of Minnesota Press, 1953), p. ix.

⁷ Neil Curry, *Christopher Smart* (North House Publishing Ltd, 2005), p. 18. As demonstrated in the chapter on Smart, even without Jeffery, *Jubilate Agno* is a poem that abounds with compassion for animals.

⁸ Christopher Devlin, *Poor Kit Smart* (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), p. 119.

⁹ Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 215.

the elements (350). A quite remarkable total of some 2,880 references, unsurpassed by any other poet, then or since.¹⁰

Unsurprisingly, given this plethora of references, critics of Burns's work have long acknowledged his debt to the natural world. This can be evinced in two critical studies on him that bookend his poetic output. The first was written early in the poet's career by Henry Mackenzie. Commenting on Burns's 'To a Mountain Daisy', he observed, 'I have seldom met with an image more truly pastoral than that of the lark, in the second stanza. Such strokes as these mark the pencil of the poet, which delineates Nature with the precision of intimacy'.¹¹ The second, equally important, was written after the poet's death by James Currie, who noted, 'The scenery he describes is evidently taken from real life; the characters he introduces, and the incidents he relates, have the impression of nature and truth'.¹² Other early nineteenth-century reviewers of Burns's work agree. William Greenfield, for instance, labelled him 'our poet of nature'.¹³ This critical pronouncement is echoed by Josiah Walker, who proposed that Burns

not only looked on nature with a lover's eye, but saw it so near and undisguised, that he was able to copy it with more fidelity of similitude, and greater freshness of colouring, than his more polished and instructed superiors.¹⁴

Modern criticism concurs with this analysis. Explaining the reasoning that underpins his influential *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, Thomas Crawford writes in his 'Introduction',

¹⁰ John Young, *Robert Burns, A Man for All Seasons* (Scottish Cultural Press, 1996), p. ix. In a letter to Professor Dugald Stewart, of 30 July 1790, Burns admits his interest in nature, stating, 'ever since I read [...], Aiken on the poetical use of Natural history, a favourite study of mine, the characters of the Vegetable & the manners of the Animal kingdom'. See *LRB*, ii, 42.

¹¹ Henry Mackenzie, 'Unsigned Essay', *Lounger* (William Creech, 1786), p. 388. No. 97, Saturday, 9 December 1786. Donald Low calls this review 'by far the most influential contemporary account of his [Burns] poetry. See Donald A. Low, *Robert Burns: Critical Heritage*, ed. by Donald A. Low (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 67.

¹² Currie, i, 269. Currie's 'nature' refers to an essential quality recognisable in a 'character' or 'incident'. As such, his statement aligns with those characters and incidents described in Burns's poetry.

¹³ William Greenfield, *Essays on the Sources of the Pleasures Received from Literary Composition* (J. Johnson, 1809), p. 158.

¹⁴ Robert Burns, *Poems by Robert Burns: with An Account of His Life, and Miscellaneous Remarks on His Writings, Containing also Many Poems and Letters Not Printed by Doctor Currie's Edition*, vol. ii, 2 vols (John Moir, 1811), p. 266.

I began from one blindingly simple premiss — that in investigating any phenomenon whatsoever you look first for the “principal contradiction” [...] That contradiction, I soon saw, was [...] the conflict and interpenetration of the poet’s innate gifts and temperament on the one hand with his total environment on the other.¹⁵

What separates these four authors from other eighteenth-century poets who write about nature? Their affiliation is more than a congruency over theme. Many other writers in this period similarly produced poems celebrating nature, including John Philips’s *Cyder* (1708), William Somerville’s *The Chace* (1735), and John Dyer’s *The Fleece* (1757). What distinguishes the work of Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns from their Georgic peers is a belief that compassion for animals is a moral imperative.

Poetry that Speaks of Universals

In this respect, they are conforming to Samuel Johnson’s conception of the ideal poet, as expressed in his *Rasselas*, where he declares

He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same: he must therefore content himself with the slow progress of his name; condemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity. He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind.¹⁶

For these four poets, the idea of sympathy for animals as creatures worthy of moral consideration transcends history. It is as valid for the followers of Pythagoras, when they delineate its importance as part of metempsychosis, as for society in the eighteenth century. This contention recuperates Smart as an advocate for animal compassion for modern readers. Even though it was unpublished in his lifetime, *Jubilate Agno* strongly states the case for animal equality when its opening lines declare

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.

¹⁵ Thomas Crawford, *Burns, A Study of the Poems and Songs* (The Mercat Press, 1978), p. i.

¹⁶ Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Rasselas and Other Tales*, vol. xvi, 23 vols, ed. by Gwin J. Kolb (Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 44-45.

Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.¹⁷

Smart's tenet that animals are an essential constituent of the world is just as relevant now as two hundred and sixty years ago. Even if we do not share Smart's theological belief, certain of his poems, like those of Thomson, Cowper, and Burns, have much to teach us about how to interact with animals. Similarly to the other three poets, Smart often substantiates his claim for the importance of all living beings with recourse to the ultimate transcendental authority – God. In his eternally immutable decrees, epitomised in the edict 'A righteous Man regardeth the Life of his Beast', they find justification for their own position. Burns's comment, 'We are all equally creatures of some Great Creator' embodies this recourse to a higher authority.¹⁸

Benevolent Dominion

Given the preeminent authority of God's word in the eighteenth century, the interpretation of scripture that refers to animals is directly relevant to their status in this period. This connection between the Bible and nonhumans underpins a concept known as the Great Chain of Being. Arthur Lovejoy explains the importance of this ideology when he writes

the phrase [...] was long one of the most famous in the vocabulary of Occidental philosophy, science and reflective poetry [...] It was, in fact, until not more than a century ago, probably the most widely familiar conception of the general *scheme* of things.¹⁹

Lovejoy goes on to note, 'It was in the eighteenth century that the conception of the universe as a Chain of Being, and the principles which underlay this conception [...] attained their widest diffusion and acceptance'.²⁰ The idea describes a hierarchical structure that uses

¹⁷ Smart, 30, A1, 1-3. Because Smart occasionally uses an antiphonal structure, ordering *Jubilate Agno* proves problematic for editors. On textual grounds, explained on pp. 89-90, this thesis will use W.H. Bond's text rather than Karina Williamson's edition for Clarendon Press.

¹⁸ Prov. 12.10 and *LRB*, i, 418, letter to Patrick Miller, 21 June 1789.

¹⁹ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Harvard University Press, 1942), p. vii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183. Lovejoy traces this idea's long and complex origins to Plato and Aristotle but sees the Bible as a significant influence on eighteenth-century writers.

Biblical precedent to justify man's elevated position over the rest of Creation. Passages such as

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

validated man's subjugation of his fellow creatures.²¹ Here, the interpretation of 'dominion' is critical. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives two significant definitions for this word. The first is 'The power or right of governing and controlling; sovereign authority; lordship', and the second is 'Ownership, property; right of possession'.²² The predominance of one definition over the other radically affects how humans interact with nonhumans. If the first term confirms man's privileged position as a 'governing and controlling' agent, the second robs animals of their subjectivity, positioning them as merely the 'property' of man. Addison attempts to explain the psychology of this second position when he states, 'You [the reader] must have observed, in your *Speculations on Human Nature*, that nothing is more gratifying to the Mind of Man than Power or Dominion'.²³ Understanding which definition has greater fidelity to its initial derivation becomes crucial since the Great Chain seems to put no moral limits on man's use of those beings lower down the order. The word 'dominion' in Hebrew is רָדָה (rādâh), which 'means to tread the wine press'.²⁴ Over time, this definition expanded to be understood as simply to 'tread down'. As Claus Westermann explains, 'the expression has its origin in the language of the royal court in Babylon and Egypt'.²⁵ The full implication of this derivation

only becomes clear when the verse [Gen. 1.26] is read in context of both 1:16 and 1:29. The conclusion from the latter is that dominion over animals cannot mean

²¹ Genesis, 1, 26. Towards the close of the eighteenth century, this hierarchy starts to flatten out as the boundaries between one species and the next are questioned. As such, it becomes harder to justify the preeminence of man over other species. See pp. 48-49 for Goldsmith's 1763 view on this subject.

²² 'dominion, n.', definition 1 and 3.a. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/56717 [accessed 6 November 2021].

²³ *Spectator*, 273. No. 500, Friday, 3 October 1712.

²⁴ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. by John J. Scullion (First Fortress Press, 1994), p. 158.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

killing them for food. What then is meant? It is here we look to 1:16. We saw that there ‘to rule’ can only have a non-literal meaning — the sun rules over the day, the moon rules over the night; the meaning is appropriate to 1:26; among living beings, humans rule over animals without condition. [...] Dominion over the animals certainly does not mean their exploitation by humans. People would forfeit their kingly role among the living [...] were animals made to be the object of their whim.²⁶

This understanding refutes a meaning that seeks to represent animals as things rather than subjects. With recourse to the first definition of ‘dominion’ because of its etymological primacy, Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns can justly promote nonhumans as beings worthy of compassion.

Cross-Species Cooperation

Smart’s belief that animals can converse with man via their own semiotic systems is also shared by the other three poets in this thesis. In composing a poem partly based on the *Georgics*, Thomson’s *The Seasons* exploits the traditional conceit that successful husbandry depends on reading the signs of the natural world, including those expressed by animals. Christopher Loar expounds on the implications of such a strategy when he notes, ‘Georgic verse sometimes seems uncannily to anticipate calls for the understanding of the nonhuman that reject human exceptionalism and emphasise complex forms of agency that emerge from assemblages of living [...] materials’.²⁷ Attentive readers of *The Seasons* understand that at the heart of the poem is an instance of what Johnson labels the ‘just representations of general nature’.²⁸ Thus, Thomson’s poem is more than a description of a single year but rather a

²⁶ Ibid., 159. Victor P. Hamilton concurs with this interpretation. See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapter 1-17* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990)

²⁷ Christopher F. Loar, ‘Georgic Assemblies: James Grainger, John Dryer, and Bruno Latour’, *Philological Quarterly*, 97.2 (2018), p. 242.

²⁸ Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Johnson on Shakespeare*, vol. vii, 23 vols, ed. by Arthur Sherbo (Yale University Press, 1968), p. 61.

From the ‘Preface to Shakespeare’. W.J. Bate explains that for Johnson, ‘general nature’ is ‘knowledge of the universal’. See W.J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England* (Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 61.

cyclical and universal documentation of nature, which elucidates the position that the successful cooperation between man and animals is beneficial to all.

Cowper's poetry also articulates how interspecies communication and cooperation are possible. Writing to Lady Hesketh on the 27 June 1788, he informed her that while walking with his companion dog Beau, he wished to gather a waterlily but found it out of his reach.

Cowper then writes

Beau had all the while observed me very attentively. Returning soon after toward the same place, I observed him plunge into the river while I was about 40 yards distant from him, and when I had nearly reached the spot, he swam to land with the Lily in his mouth, which he came and lay'd at my foot.²⁹

The poem resulting from this incident, 'The Dog and the Water-Lily', is an encomium to cross-species cooperation in which a universal truth emerges from a particular incident. After documenting, with poetic diction, the location where this event unfolds, Cowper proceeds to relate his failed attempt to acquire the flower:

With cane extended-far I sought
To steer it close to land,
But still the prize, tho' nearly caught,
Escaped my eager hand.³⁰

Unable to retrieve the waterlily himself, he joyfully recounts Beau's successful acquisition:

I saw him with that Lily cropp'd
Impatient swim to meet
My quick approach, and soon he dropp'd
The treasure at my feet.³¹

Such is Cowper's happiness towards his animal that he declares, 'the world [...] | Shall hear of this thy deed'.³² Documenting a real instance of cooperation between man and animals becomes the driving force behind Cowper's poem.

²⁹ *LPW*, iii, 189.

³⁰ *PWC*, iii, 28, 17-20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 29, 33-36.

³² *Ibid.*, 37-38. An extended analysis of this poem can be found on pp. 153-158.

Jean Hagstrum explains the importance of this point in Johnson's theory of poetic fidelity when he writes, 'the particular is important as that from which the general has been derived and as that upon which all description must ultimately depend'.³³ Cowper's affectionate bond gestures towards a network of rights and obligations between nonhumans and humans predicated on a harmonious relationship. Such a concern is also central to Burns's poem 'The Auld Farmer's New-Year-morning Salutation to his Auld Mare, Maggie'. Here, a farmer promises to care for a horse because she is a 'trusty *Servan*'. Burns's poem, though, goes beyond obligations founded on the principle of economy. Their relationship is predicated on a shared history that entwines man and animal. In his influential *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith declares, 'Those animals [...] that have been remarkably serviceable to their masters, become objects of a very lively gratitude'.³⁴ The concord between Maggie and the farmer is just such an example. Elevated beyond an interaction between master and servant, it is instead based on an empathic reverberance between horse and man.

Previous Books on Animal Compassion

Most critical studies that analyse the evolving relationship between man and animals in this period concentrate either on charting the history of this change or a close reading of those texts that influenced it. Focusing on the Romantic period, Christine Kenyon-Jones's *Kindred Brutes* (2001) is principally a study of literary texts that aims 'to consider work of the period which makes deliberate use of imaginative features and linguistic art forms (particularly verse) in its approaches to animals'.³⁵ Conversely, in detailing the cultural events that

³³ Jean H. Hagstrum, *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism* (The University of Minnesota Press, 1952), p. 88

³⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 111.

³⁵ Christine Kenyon-Jones, *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001), p. 203.

influenced the debate on animals, James Turner's *Reckoning with the Beast* (1980) is more concerned with documenting Victorian attitudes toward nonhumans. Similarly, Keith Thomas's authoritative *Man and the Natural World* is firmly a work on cultural history. Spanning the years between 1500 and the end of the eighteenth century, it is by far the most influential study of animals from this period. Despite their importance, these three books were published before recent approaches to the debate on animals emerged. The newest of them appeared over twenty years ago, and in the case of Thomas's book, forty years. Moira Ferguson's *Animal Advocacy and Englishwomen, 1780-1900* (1999) is focused on a close reading of such writers as Sarah Trimmer and Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Her incisive analysis of these poets concentrates, like Kenyon-Jones's and Turner's books, on a period beyond the focus of this thesis. More pertinent to this study, David Perkins's *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (2003) combines a close reading of poetry alongside an explanation of emerging cultural changes. His brief analysis of single poems by Smart, Burns and Cowper are insightful and demonstrate an awareness of the ambiguous status of nonhumans. He fails, though, to engage with poems outside the literary canon. Similarly, Scott Hess's *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship* (2012) comments on poems that have 'multiple points of view and centres of experience, including a wide range of animals pursuing their own purposes and agendas'.³⁶ Of methodological importance for this study, Hess notes the importance of a dualistic approach to literary texts, commenting that 'early ecocritics reacted [...] against what they understood as the excesses of both poststructuralist and New Historicist criticism, which tended to dissolve all environment either into text (in poststructuralism) or into ideology (in New Historicism)'.³⁷ A blended approach, as this thesis will undertake, should mitigate such 'excesses'.

³⁶ Scott Hess, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship* (University of Virginia Press, 2012), p. 33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

All of these books, though, demonstrated a dearth of criticism that solely focuses on the most pivotal period concerning the relationship between humans and animals – the eighteenth century. Other studies partially fill this gap. Nathaniel Wolloch's *The Enlightenment's Animals* (2019) attempts to chart the 'history of historiographical and economic conceptions of animals'.³⁸ While not refuting the influence that philosophy and nature history had on the discussion concerning animals, Wolloch focuses on less familiar themes such as the seventeenth-century practice of animal experimentation and Dutch paintings. His pan-European account concurs with the conclusion of this thesis by emphasising the importance that Scottish writers played in this debate. Ingrid Tague's *Animal Companions* (2015) is a historical account that maps the emerging trend for 'pets' that occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century. Her justification for this phenomenon has been helpful to this thesis when situating William Cowper's position on companion animals. Heather Keenleyside's *Animals and Other Voices* (2016) examines how rhetorical language defines the concept of the animal in the long eighteenth century. Her analysis of James Thomson's use of personification to claim kinship between species becomes even more intriguing when combined with periphrasis. As the chapter on Thomson in this thesis shows, the elision between humans and nonhumans in *The Seasons* questions the bifurcation between man and other species that is insisted on in humanist thinking.

John Morillo's posthumanist account in *The Rise of Animals and Descent of Man* (2018) sees writers who entreat for greater animal compassion as reacting against Descartes. His emphasis on the Cartesian position as a site on which a narrative of animal worth in the eighteenth century unfolds is highly persuasive. Descartes's discourse is founded on the assumption that other species' experiences are not worth considering. This is predicated upon

³⁸ Nathaniel Wolloch, *The Enlightenment's Animals* (Amsterdam University Press, 2019), p. 13.

the Humanist belief that man's is the only ontology of importance. In his *A Discourse on Method* (1637), Descartes famously declares

I resolved to pretend that everything that had ever entered my head was no more true than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately afterwards I noted that, while I was trying to think of all things being false in this way, it was necessarily the case that I, who was thinking them, had to be something; and observing this truth: *I am thinking therefore I exist*.³⁹

Here, Descartes posits the idea of humans as intelligent, self-evaluating creatures. Building upon this belief, he claims that man is the only rational animal. This he justifies by excluding all other species because they are devoid of language. Thus, he states that

They [animals] would never be able to use words or other signs by composing them as we do to declare our thoughts to others. For we can well conceive of a machine made in such a way that it emits words, and even utters them about bodily actions which bring about some corresponding change in its organs [...] but it is not conceivable that it should put these words in different orders to correspond to the meaning of things said in its presence, as even the most dull-witted man can do. [...] This shows not only that animals have less reason than man, but that they have none at all.⁴⁰

These two passages on intelligence, one that raises man and the other that lowers animals, attempt to portray nonhumans as dumb brutes not worthy of moral consideration.⁴¹

Fundamentally, as Bruce Boehrer notes, they 'emerge hand in hoof from Descartes's meditations, in symbiotic and mutually reinforcing relation: the former crafts a notion of humanity composed of inwardness and speculation, while the latter denies such qualities to nonhumans'.⁴² Jane Spencer cites the period under analysis in this thesis as a critical one when she observes that, 'Since ancient times, reason had been understood as the mark of man's separation from the beasts, but this sharp division was blurred in the eighteenth century by claims for nonhuman animals' reasoning powers'.⁴³ In refuting Descartes's

³⁹ René Descartes, *A Discourse on Method*, trans. by Ian Maclean (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 28.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁴¹ For a contextual explanation of animals as automata, see Lloyd Strickland, 'God's creatures? Divine nature and the status of animals in the early modern beast-machine controversy', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 74.4 (2013), pp. 291-309. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2013.858230>.

⁴² Bruce Thomas Boehrer, *Animal Characters* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 9.

⁴³ Jane Spencer, *Writing About Animals in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 6.

notion, Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns are in the vanguard of this new opposition. These poets also share another aspect that separates them from Descartes. Counter to Descartes's rationalist opinion that knowledge of the world is formed from reason, they rather adhere to an Empiricist explanation. Like Locke and Hume, they privilege the importance of sensory experience gained first-hand as the only viable way of understanding their environment.⁴⁴

Morillo's book goes on to argue that British writers sympathetic to animals deviated from Descartes's animal/machine model and instead focused 'on fine feeling as a register of moral life empowered by sensibility'.⁴⁵ For him, these 'complex negotiations with sensibility, as well with as [sic] multiple philosophical and theological traditions, enable [animal discourse] to move away from Descartes'.⁴⁶ As the chapter on Smart in this thesis demonstrates Morillo's argument is well-founded since Theologians such as John Hildrop, James Granger, and Humphry Primatt refute Descartes's philosophical conceptualisation of nonhumans. Similarly, it will be demonstrated in the chapter on Cowper that Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith all subscribed a level of rationality to animals. While David Hume's comment in his *A Treatise of Human Nature* typifies their belief when he contends

Next to the ridicule of denying an evident truth, is that of taking much pains to defend it; and no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ The importance of first-hand experience as the only valid method of faithfully representing animals will be explained later in this chapter. See also footnote 63 for the connection between universal truths and Empiricism.

⁴⁵ John Morillo, *The Rise of Animals and Descent of Man, 1660-1800* (University of Delaware Press, 2018), p. xi.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by Ernest C. Mossner (Penguin Books, 1985), p. 226. Book one, part 3, section 16, 'Of the reason of animals'. The *OED* gives one definition of 'reason' as 'To think in a connected or logical manner; to employ the faculty of reason in forming conclusions'. It is this sense that Hume alludes to and which this thesis will employ when referring to animal rationality. See 'Reason, V.'. Definition 6. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, December 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5679487283>. Hume is not alone in allotting reason to animals. For instance, two other writers are Alexander Pope (see Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes and Characters of Book and Men*, vol. i, 2 vols, ed. by James M. Osborn (Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 118), and John Wesley (see Sermon 60: The General Deliverance', *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons 34-70*, vol. ii, 32 vols, ed. by Albert C. Outler (Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 441). See Erica Fudge,

Like Morillo, Menely emphasises the importance of sensibility in the discourse on nonhumans.⁴⁸ For him, eighteenth-century poets conceived this phenomenon as a form of communication that involved both body and voice. As such, the creaturely voice is a semiotic system accessible to all subjects. An instance of which, discussed in greater detail in the chapter on Smart, occurs when *Jubilate Agno* pronounces that:

For a LION roars HIMSELF compleat from head to tail.⁴⁹

Here, the animal's praise for God manifests itself in a corporeal 'roar' that omits no part of its anatomy. This opens up new readings of animal poems in which non-linguistic forms reconfigure the interaction between perceived divergent species.⁵⁰ The value of this approach is exploited and expanded in the following chapters, demonstrating how semiotic interaction can operate outside sensibility.

For instance, in the case of the Cowper's dog Beau, its bodily actions lie outside Menely's account of a creaturely voice predicated on sympathy. Similarly, sympathy does not solely account for those animals that praise God in *Jubilate Agno*. Nevertheless, the creaturely voice is a critical element in Smart's theology, for when it is entwined with human utterances, the effect is an exponential communal paean to the creator of all living things.

A History of Ideas: Changes in Eighteenth-Century Thinking

To gain a fuller account of the changing status of animals as represented by these four poets, this thesis will undertake a contextual close reading of relevant texts from other discourses.

Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England (Cornell University Press, 2006) for the history of this idea leading up until the eighteenth century.

⁴⁸ Tobias Menely, *Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* (The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 20. Keith Thomas also briefly touches on sensibility. See Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London Allen Lane, 1983), p. 279.

⁴⁹ Smart, 79, B1, 229.

⁵⁰ The chapter on Thomson will chart the competing explanations of how language operated and how this affected animals. See pp. 31-42.

Combining the contextual advances in philosophical, theological and scientific thinking in the eighteenth century alongside a close reading of the poems, it will be possible to overcome the weaknesses in those accounts that only give either a macroscopic or microscopic view. It will then be possible to better understand how their rhetorical poetic strategies contributed to that debate on animal welfare. Thus, from out of the particular, their general and universal message of compassion to all species will be shown to emerge. This is the case with Cowper. He takes advantage of the wealth of new information that materialises with the rising trend of natural history books in the second half of the eighteenth century. Jane Spencer notes that these texts ‘influenced the way animals were imagined in literature, encouraging a shift from previously dominant symbolic readings of animals towards a new understanding of the written animal literally as referring to real animals outside the text’.⁵¹ Cowper co-opts the taxonomical systems and empirical descriptions of natural history books to guarantee the fidelity of the animals he represents in his poetry. Furthermore, by drawing directly from nature (the same source as the books he emulates), Cowper eschews anthropomorphical characteristics and instead shows animals as active agents, truthful to their own natures. Burns, similarly, commandeers critical new ways of thinking about animals. His references to Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in ‘To a Mouse’ and ‘To a Louse’ gesture towards a philosophical recognition in the eighteenth century that posits that animals are worthy of moral consideration. Even though moral sentiment is not Burns’s primary reason for writing poetry, using this form (rather than a prose treatise) aids its persuasiveness. The power of poetry to influence the reader is an idea prevalent among certain eighteenth-century critics, such as Johnson. William Youngren believes verse can sway a reader because, ‘while philosophy simply imparts moral *precepts*, poetry embodies them in vivid and lively

⁵¹ Jane Spencer, *Writing About Animals in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 6.

examples—or images or actions or patterns—that can move or penetrate the mind as precepts cannot and that therefore have a far greater power than precepts to influence our conduct’.⁵²

Poetic Interactions

No author writes in a vacuum. Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns all engaged in a critical dialogue that crossed disciplines. Recognising the broader cultural trends deepens an appreciation of the poetry under examination in this thesis. Historical context informs close reading. A contextual close reading also illuminates how each poet responded to their fellow authors. In his biography of William Cowper, James King writes that John Johnson recorded in his diary a conversation he had with Cowper in which, ‘during all the years that he lived after this, I never heard him talk so much at ease, again. It was chiefly about Thomson the poet, that we talked’.⁵³ This love for Thomson’s poetry is confirmed when commenting in a letter on his death, Cowper declares, ‘He was a poet, for whose memory, as you justly suppose, I have great respect; in common, indeed, with all who have ever read him with taste and attention’.⁵⁴ Similarly, Smart was known to the author of *The Seasons*, as Betty Rizzo confirms when she states, ‘By 1746 Smart’s London life included Sunday evening parties at Mrs Cibber’s house in Scotland Yard in the company of such new friends and associates as [...] James Thomson’.⁵⁵ Christopher Devlin notes that Cowper also knew Smart and was ‘glad to call him friend’.⁵⁶ Indeed, he subscribed to Smart’s *A Translation of the Psalms of David* (1765).⁵⁷ Cowper also admired Burns. In a letter to Lady Hesketh, he comments, ‘I think him an extraordinary Genius, and the facility with which he rhimes [sic] and versifies in

⁵² William H Youngren, ‘Generality, Science and Poetic Language in the Restoration’, *ELH*, 35.2 (1968), p. 166

⁵³ James King, *William Cowper a Biography* (Durham University Press, 1986), p. 268.

⁵⁴ *LPW*, iv, 26.

⁵⁵ Betty Rizzo, ‘Introduction’, Christopher Smart, *The Annotated Letters of Christopher Smart*, ed. by Betty Rizzo and Robert Mahony (Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), p. 15.

⁵⁶ Christopher Devlin, *Poor Kit Smart* (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), p. 10.

⁵⁷ Christopher Smart, *A Translation of the Psalms of David* (Dryden Leach, 1765), ‘A List of the Subscribers Names’, no page number.

a kind of measure not in itself very easy to execute, appears to me remarkable'.⁵⁸ Burns was equally generous in his praise for his predecessors. Thanking a friend for sending him a copy of Cowper's poems, he writes, Cowper is 'the best Poet out of sight since Thomson'.⁵⁹ The fact that he also acknowledges the greatness of Thomson is unsurprising. Many of Burns's poems and letters reverberate with allusions to *The Seasons*. In his 'Address, To the Shade of Thomson', Burns publicly declares his esteem for his fellow poet. For Burns, Thomson is 'that Immortal Bard' who 'has looked into Nature for himself: you meet with no copied description'.⁶⁰ Not only did these poets know each other's works, but they were also connected in their endeavour to show animal perspectives in their poems.

Faithfully Representing Animals

Here, Burns's comment is revealing. Nature is the original source; thus, a truthful representation must be faithful. Johnson's *Dictionary* defines 'represent' as 'To exhibit, as if the thing exhibited was present'.⁶¹ Inherent in this definition is that the object presented must be in accord with the 'thing' it copies. In other words, a truthful representation.⁶² For Johnson, 'The value of every story depends on it being true. A story is a picture either of an individual or of human nature in general: if it be false, it is a picture of nothing'.⁶³ Thomson,

⁵⁸ *LPW*, iii, 145. In another letter, Cowper writes, 'I have [...] read Burns's Poems, and have read them twice. And though they be written in a language that is new to me, and many of them on subjects much inferior to the author's ability, I think them on the whole a very extraordinary production'. See *LPW*, iii, 15-16.

⁵⁹ *LRB*, i, 322, letter to William Dunbar, 25 September 1788.

⁶⁰ *LRB*, i, 325-326.

⁶¹ 'represent, v., a.', definition 1 in Samuel Johnson's, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in 2 vols (W. Strahan, 1755).

⁶² If poetry as a mode of truth-telling is problematic for contemporary readers to accept, M.H. Abrams believes this is because the reconceptualization of prose as the medium of truth and poetry as the mode of emotion can be traced back to J.S. Mill. Attempting to answer the question 'What is Poetry?', 'Mill reinterprets and inverts the neo-classical ranking of the poetic kinds. As the purest expression of feeling, lyric poetry is 'more eminently and peculiarly poetry than any other...' Other forms are all alloyed by non-poetic elements, whether descriptive, didactic, or narrative, which serve merely as convenient occasions for the poetic utterances of feeling'. Incidentally, Abrams further notes that 'Mill largely relied in large on Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*' for his theory. See M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 23.

⁶³ James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson; Together with Boswell's Journey of a Tour to the Hebrides*, vol. ii, 6 vols, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill, rev. and enlarged by L.F. Powell (Clarendon Press, 1934-1950), p. 433. As

Smart, Cowper, and Burns ascribe to this meaning. Johnson tacitly acknowledges this when he exclaims that the author of *The Seasons*

looks round on nature and on life, with the eye which nature bestows only on a poet; the eye that distinguishes, in every thing presented to its view, whatever there is on which imagination can delight to be detained, and with a mind that at once comprehends the vast, and attends to the minute.⁶⁴

Their poetry eschews anthropomorphic animals as false representations of originals. A striking feature common to all the poets in this thesis is a first-hand experience of the animal they are writing about. Burns acknowledges the importance of this point when, as noted earlier, he claims that in Thomson's poetry, 'you meet with no copied description'.⁶⁵ This unmediated documentation substantiates their belief that their poetry can make real-world claims for nonhumans. This is of critical consideration if poets are to fulfil their potential as 'legislators'.⁶⁶ Animals are no longer empty vessels made to speak human concerns with human voices. The multitudinous species portrayed by these four poets are authentic creatures, being recognisable representations of their real-life counterparts.

Representing Animals and Speaking Bodies

Nonhuman vocal and bodily utterances in the poems of Thomson, Smart, and Cowper are also genuine representations of how animals communicate with their own species and those outside them. This act aligns with a definition of representation as 'The action, fact, or right of being represented or representing others'.⁶⁷ Representation should be understood to mean

noted, 'Johnsonian generality, then, rests upon an empiricist theory of perception that affirms a reliable congruence between outward phenomena and the process of the mind that organize and interpret them'. See Leo Damrosch, 'Generality and Particularity', *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Eighteenth Century*, vol. iv, ed. by H.B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 384.

⁶⁴ Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Lives of the Poets*, vol. xxii, 23 vols, ed. by Stephen Fix et al. (Yale University Press, 2010), p. 22.

⁶⁵ This is a literary point as well as a privileging of first-hand observation over knowledge gained from books.

⁶⁶ Even though verse that make real-world claims are not necessarily good poems, all of the major ones under consideration in this thesis are of strong aesthetic merit.

⁶⁷ 'representation, n.1'. Definitions 1.a. and 3.a. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/162997 [accessed 29 May 2023].

not just simply ‘portraying’ but also speaking for their benefit. These poets represent animals in two interconnected ways. They not only make animals their primary subjects but also advocate on their behalf, thus presenting nonhumans interacting joyously with their environment. In doing so, they acknowledge that animals are more than objects. They are individual subjects worthy of attention. If ontologically and epistemologically animals are unknowable, poetic imagination attempts to interpret their thoughts and desires. Samuel Johnson defines poetry as ‘the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason’.⁶⁸ The amalgamation of imagination with reason makes verse markedly different from the prose pamphlets. Furthermore, if representation informed by reason allows poetry to make truthful claims about corporeal agency, imagination permits the poet to go beyond the knowable. Samuel Johnson defines ‘representation’ as both an ‘Image, likeness’ and an ‘Act of supporting a vicarious character’. Examples of both of these definitions are used by the poets in this thesis.⁶⁹

Philosophically, imagination becomes a form of reinscription that describes ‘the formation or possession of images, concepts, or thoughts in the mind, esp. as representing, or as a means of acquiring knowledge of, objects or states of affairs in the world’.⁷⁰ These poets not only participate in the act of translation but also go beyond advocating on behalf of ‘dumb’ creatures. In recording the physical and vocal utterances that emanate from nonhumans, they allow animals to speak for themselves, for instance, in Thomson’s description of birdsong from ‘Spring’ or the bodily acts that animals perform to demonstrate their adoration of God

⁶⁸ Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Lives of the Poets*, vol. xxi, 23 vols, ed. by Stephen Fix et al. (Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 182-183. From the ‘Life of Milton’. If other writers differ in their definition of poetry, Johnson’s description harmonises with the approach used by the poets under analysis in this thesis.

⁶⁹ ‘representation, n.1’. Definitions 1 and 2 in Samuel Johnson’s, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in 2 vols (W. Strahan, 1755).

⁷⁰ ‘representation, n.1’. Definition 9.b. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/162997 [accessed 29 May 2023].

in *Jubilate Agno*. By relaying this creaturely voice, the poets in this study effectively document animals engaging in acts of self-expression. In all these multiple forms of representation, Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns provide a counter-discourse that challenges a view of animals as unworthy of compassion. Instead, they portray a world alive with sentient beings with an equal claim to consideration as man.

Popular Poets and Influential Legislators

Popular poetry is more likely to successfully disseminate its ideas to a wider readership.

Thomson, Cowper, and Burns were popular in their time and beyond. *The Penny Post* noted in 1842 about Thomson, for instance

If to be popular, in the best meaning of the word, that is, to be universally read and understood long after all temporary tastes or influence have ceased to act, be the best test of a poet's genius, then we must place the author of the 'Seasons' high indeed in the intellectual scale.⁷¹

Similarly, Cowper could legitimately claim an extensive audience for his work. Henry Crabb Robinson, writing in his diary on 25 April 1812, noted that

Cowper [...] made Johnson a present of *The Task*, if he would bear the risk. It became popular, and Johnson having tacked the first to it, gained largely by the sale of both volumes. [...] Johnson in the course of time, gained at least £10,000 by Cowper's works.⁷²

Norma Russell has commented that 'the demand for his poems steadily increased during the years following his death'.⁷³ She has recorded 'ninety-three editions published between 1800 and 1837'.⁷⁴ Burns's poetic reach goes beyond even Thomson and Cowper. J.W. Egerer has catalogued over one thousand-two hundred collected editions of Burns's poems published

⁷¹ *The Penny Post*, vol. xi (Charles Knight and Co., 1842), p. 113.

⁷² Henry Crabb Robinson, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers*, vol. i, 3 vols, ed. by Edith J. Morley (J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1938), p. 72.

⁷³ Norma Russell, *A Bibliography of William Cowper to 1837* (Clarendon Press, 1963), p. xvi.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

worldwide between 1786 and the end of the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ This trend continued into the twentieth century, as Alan Bold confirmed when he wrote

Burns has become probably the best-known poet in the world; statues have been raised to Burns not only in Scotland but in London, Albany, Barre, Chicago, Denver, Milwaukee, San Francisco, Fredericton, Toronto, Adelaide, Ballarat, Melbourne, Sydney and Dunedin. American Presidents sing 'Auld Lang Syne', Soviet schoolchildren chant 'A Man's a Man for a' That'.⁷⁶

More pertinently, their fame was not founded solely on their poetic abilities. They were also held in high regard for advocating compassion towards animals. John Oswald's pamphlet *Cry of Nature* (1791) co-opts lines from Thomson's *The Seasons* to demonstrate how nonhumans have the same emotional bonds as man.⁷⁷ Hence, Oswald writes, 'What simile [is] more apt to excite the sympathetic tear, than the turtle-dove forlorn, who mourns, with never-ceasing wail, her murdered mate? Who can refuse a sigh to the sadly-pleasing strains of Philomela?'⁷⁸ To make this point, he follows this passage by citing lines 716-718 from Thomson's 'Spring' concerning a nightingale's distress on finding her eggs have been robbed. For him, Thomson is the 'most beautiful of all our poets' because his poetical ability is used to propagate mercy towards animals.⁷⁹

The popularity of *The Task* becomes a powerful tool for social change. Its influence can clearly be seen in J. Feltham's article 'The Rights of Animals'. Writing for the *Penny Post*, Feltham declares

⁷⁵ See J.W. Egerer, *A Bibliography of Robert Burns* (Oliver and Boyd Ltd, 1964). With regards to Burns's reception outside of Britain, Murray Pittock observes there are 'well over 3,000 translations of his work into other language listed in the National Library of Scotland's Bibliography of Scottish Literature at the time of going to press (for comparison, there were 431 translations of Byron and 263 of Adam Smith). See Murray Pittock, 'Introduction: 'The mair they talk, I'm kend the better': Burns and Europe', *The Reception of Robert Burns in Europe*, ed. by Murray Pittock (Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 1.

⁷⁶ Alan Bold, *A Burns Companion* (Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., 1991), p. 151.

⁷⁷ As shown in the chapter on Thomson, he repurposes *The Seasons*' Georgic form. Rather than its traditional use as an agrarian manual, Thomson uses its didacticism to teach how to treat animals compassionately. Oswald's citation from *The Seasons* shows the success of this strategy.

⁷⁸ John Oswald, *Cry of Nature; or, An Appeal to Mercy and to Justice, on Behalf of the Persecuted Animals* (J Johnson, 1791), p. 11. The reference to the 'turtle-dove' is also by Thomson and can be located in lines 615-619 from 'Summer'.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

we are bound to animals by the general duties of humanity; justice we owe to men, benignity to other creatures: there is a certain natural commerce, a reciprocal obligation between us and them; as the humane Poet says,
 Superior as we are, yet they depend
 Not more on human help, *than we on theirs*;
 Their strength, or speed, or vigilance, were given
 In aid of our defects.⁸⁰

This passage from *The Task* transcends its poetic origins. Feltham intends it as a biblical parable that instructs his audience on how to interact with other species.

The poetry of Thomson and Cowper as exemplars of how to treat animals extends beyond the eighteenth century. In 1802 John Ritson published *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food, as a Moral Duty*. He quotes a long passage from Cowper detailing cruelty inflicted on animals before following this up with another from Thomson on blood sports.⁸¹ Gesturing towards the section on vegetarianism from *The Seasons*, Ritson claims, ‘One of our poets writes, that whoever abstains from the flesh of liveing [sic] creatures, all men and all sorts of liveing creatures regard such a man with the profoundest respect’.⁸² Ritson presents Thomson’s beliefs as a paradigm for others to emulate. Thomson’s status is raised beyond that associated with a poet. He is now viewed as a moral arbiter of public virtue.⁸³ William Cowper’s poetry was even cited in Parliament. In defending his ‘Bill for Preventing Wanton and Malicious Cruelty to Animals’, Thomas Erskine argued in the House of Lords that animals

are created indeed for our USE, but not for our ABUSE. Their freedom and enjoyments, when they cease to be consistent with our just dominion and enjoyments, can be no part of their natures; but whilst they are consistent, I say their rights, subservient as they are, ought to be as sacred as our own [...] This subject is

⁸⁰ J. Feltham, ‘The Rights of Animals’, from *The European Magazine, and London Review*, vol. 29, January 1796 (J. Sewell, 1796), p. 51. The lines 608- 611 are from ‘Book VI, The Winter Walk at Noon’. Feltham’s italicization of ‘*than we on theirs*’ is not in the original.

⁸¹ Joseph Ritson, *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food, as a Moral Duty* (Richard Philips, 1802). The relevant quotes can be found in this thesis on p. 240 for Cowper’s *The Task*, ‘Book VI’ lines 385-392, and p. 44 for Thomson’s *The Seasons*, ‘Autumn’ lines 379-400. Cowper is quoted a further time in the essay, while Thomson is cited twice more.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 215.

⁸³ Interestingly, Ritson suggests that Thomson’s communal esteem extends beyond his own species and encompasses all living creatures.

most justly treated by one of the best poets in our language. Mr Cowper, in the Task.⁸⁴

John Lamb, the brother of Charles and Mary, wrote in favour of Erskine's bill. Besides citing passages from Thomson's *The Seasons*, he also notes that

Although Lord Erskine's Bill did not specify objects of so little estimation, yet I presume to imagine it was his Lordship's wish and motive to call thereby the general attention to the suffering of all our humble-earth-born fellow-mortals, as the humane kind-hearted Burns denominates them.⁸⁵

Oswald, Erskine, and Lamb's comments all acknowledge the success these three poets had in their attempt to be the 'legislator of mankind', as Johnson terms them.

If Smart is absent from these examples, this is because *Jubilate Agno* was not available until 1939. As the comments previously cited by Neil Curry, Christopher Devlin and Clement Hawes suggest, the anthologised section of this poem concerning Jeoffry shows Smart is sympathetic to other species. A careful reading of the animal poems by Thomson, Cowper, Smart and Burns reveals a deep concern for animal welfare. Their ideas engaged with scientific, theological and philosophical texts. This resulted in popular verse that championed better treatment for nonhumans beyond their own century and even influenced parliamentary debates. What marks them out from other poets who advocated for compassion towards animals in the eighteenth century is their attempts to represent animal perspectives in their poetry. This is why first-hand experience is so vital for them. The nonhumans that they portray must be faithful to their real-life counterparts. Only then can animal agency be poetically conveyed to the reader. In doing so, the second definition of representation becomes evident. As a form of advocacy on behalf of the animals, they not only speak for animals, but they also allow animals to speak for themselves. Their creaturely voices speaks

⁸⁴ Thomas Erskine, *The Speech of Lord Erskine, in the House of Peers, on the Second Reading of the Bill for Preventing Malicious and Wanton Cruelty to Animals* (Richard Phillips, 1809), p. 4.

⁸⁵ Lamb, 7.

from within the poem directly to the reader through corporeal signs. Far from being dumb creatures with no reason, as Descartes claims, animals are reasoning beings who can communicate their passions and desires to other species and are thus worthy of moral consideration.

Chapter One

Reading the Signs: Capabilities and Kinship in James Thomson's *The Seasons*

Then most delighted, when she social sees
The whole mix'd Animal-Creation round
Alive, and happy.⁸⁶

They speak little, but always to the purpose,
and that knowingly. They always speak
Truth [...] And is not this an Advantage
they have over us?⁸⁷

The Seasons's Georgic Beginnings

In his 'An Essay on the Georgics', Joseph Addison writes about the form that

It raises in our Minds a pleasing variety of Scenes and Landskips, whilst it teaches us: and makes the dryest of its Precepts look like a Description. A Georgic *therefore* is some part of the science of Husbandry put into a pleasing Dress, and set off with all the Beauties and Embellishments of Poetry.⁸⁸

Addison further states that Virgil's *Georgics* give an account 'of the Signs in Nature'.⁸⁹ He suggests that parallel to Virgil's passages of bucolic description, the poet entwines a didactic message: to be successful at husbandry, one must read the signs of nature. Influenced by this principle, James Thomson envisions the georgic as a mode of writing that celebrates man's ability to shape the material world around him. Wrapped up in a paean to the economic power of Great Britain, *The Seasons* acknowledges that this is possible when man harmonises with his environment. Critically, this involves collaborating with his fellow creatures. On this subject, David Fairer writes that

Georgic never underplays the fact that nature imposes a responsibility, and in Virgil and his eighteenth-century imitators natural forces have a way of getting back at you. Co-operation is a safer bet than human mastery'.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Au., 381-384.

⁸⁷ Guillaume Hyacinthe Bougeant, *A Philosophical Amusement upon the Language of Beasts* (T. Cooper, 1739), p. 45.

⁸⁸ Joseph Addison, 'An Essay on the Georgics', John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden: Poems, The Works of Virgil in English, 1697*, vol. v, 20 vols, ed. by William Frost and Vinton A. Dearing (University of California, 1987), p. 146.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ David Fairer, "'Where Fuming Trees Refresh the Thirsty Air': The World of Eco-Georgic", *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 40 (2011), p. 205.

This mutually beneficial relationship is only achievable when man correctly interprets and appropriately responds to the signs that nonhumans emit. In other words, the Georgic poem cultivates the belief that cooperation and communication are the two fundamental skills of husbandry. A shepherd who neglects his flock or forgets to feed them creates a social disjunction that is disastrous for both man and beast. For Thomson, this dereliction of duty is both injurious to the country's economic power and a sin against God, whose edict in Genesis requires man to be a steward towards animals.

No other poet in the eighteenth century was so closely associated with Virgil as James Thomson. In George Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead*, Boileau enquires, 'Who is the Poet but lately arrived in Elysium, whom I saw Spenser lead in, and presents him to Virgil, as a Writer related to him in his *Georgics*?'⁹¹ To which he receives the reply, 'By your Description it must be *Thomson*. He painted Nature exactly, and with great Strength of Pencil. His Imagination was rich, extensive, sublime'.⁹² In his 'Preface' to *Winter*, Thomson acknowledges his debt to his Roman predecessor, declaring, 'It was this Devotion to the *Works of Nature* that, in his *Georgicks*, inspired the *rural Virgil* to write so inimitably; and who can forebear joining with him in this Declaration'.⁹³ Unsurprisingly, modern critics have continued this tradition of seeing Thomson as Virgil's eighteenth-century heir. In his *Georgic Tradition in English Poetry*, Dwight L. Durling states, 'when Shenstone placed a memorial to Thomson in "Virgil's Grove" at Leasowes, he gave appropriate expression to the common veneration of the adopted Scot as "the English Virgil"'.⁹⁴ This kinship between Thomson and Virgil is founded on the former's composition of the most famous georgic in the eighteenth century, *The Seasons*. However, Thomson was not the only writer in this period working with

⁹¹ George Lyttelton, *Dialogues of the Dead* (W. Sandby, 1760), p. 128.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹³ James Thomson, 'Preface', James Thomson, *Winter*, 2nd edition (N. Blandford, 1726), pp. 16-17.

⁹⁴ Dwight L. Durling, *Georgic Tradition in English Poetry* (Kennikat Press, 1964), p. 47.

this form. Other examples of the georgic are John Philips's *Cyder* (1708), Christopher Smart's *The Hop-Garden* (1752), Robert Dodsley's *Agriculture* (1753), John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757), and James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* (1764), to name but five well-renowned poems from this genre. Thomson, like these other 'eighteenth-century writers began to use the georgic to open up modern topics for poetic discussion, and in so doing to develop a more technical, even manufactured, language with which to tackle contemporary economic subjects'.⁹⁵ David Fairer believes the plasticity of the form is its defining feature in this period. For him, it is the eighteenth-century Georgics's ability to be faithful to Virgil's *Georgics* but still comment on contemporary concerns that make them so 'fascinating'.⁹⁶ Thomson's *The Seasons* is preeminent in amalgamating these two features, especially in its fresh vividness towards nature. For example, Samuel Johnson thought, 'The reader of *The Seasons* wonders that he never saw before what Thomson shews him, and that he never yet has felt what Thomson impresses'.⁹⁷ John Aikin concurs, declaring that the poet had produced an original description of the natural world in *The Seasons*. For instance, he states that if 'Thomson has so forcibly deepened the horrors of his *Winter* from the Pole, so he has not been less successful in heightening the brilliancy of his *Summer*'.⁹⁸

Commenting on *The Seasons*'s predecessor, L.P. Wilkinson writes

The four Books of Virgil's *Georgics* are unique: they do not conform to any recognizable class of poetry. Ostensibly indeed the poem is 'didactic': it teaches about farming. But this should deceive no one today, [...] [Virgil] wrote not to teach farmers but to delight readers.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ David Fairer, 'Georgic', *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry*, ed. by Jack Lynch (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 457.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Lives of the Poets*, vol. xxiii, 23 vols, ed. by Stephen Fix et al. (Yale University Press, 2010), p. 1292.

⁹⁸ John Aikin, *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (J. Johnson, 1777), p. 146.

⁹⁹ L.P. Wilkinson, 'Introduction', Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by L.P. Wilkinson (Penguin Books, 1982), p. 11.

If Virgil's primary aim is to 'delight readers', this should not wholly obscure the poem's other purpose of explaining how the natural world works. Hence, H. Rushton Fairclough's observation that Virgil's poem 'is filled with an ardent love of country and nature, a keen sympathy not only with rustics but for beasts and birds, and especially, bees'.¹⁰⁰ It is in this 'keen sympathy [...] for beasts', *The Seasons* most closely resembles the *Georgics*.¹⁰¹ If Thomson envisages his poem as a combination of literary production with an agrarian manual, this fusion improves *The Seasons*'s chances of reaching an audience influential enough to propagate a compassionate stance towards animals.¹⁰² As such, Thomson's poem is chiefly directed at a readership that would appreciate its aesthetic qualities while acknowledging its truthful representation of animals.¹⁰³

The Seasons, then, is as much about literary labour as agricultural endeavour. Kevis Goodman's comments in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* that

Virgil's central pun on *vertere* (to turn) and *versus* (the furrow in the field and a line of written verse) emphasizes, the *Georgics* are just as much about the poet's careful labor of representation within a larger field of cultivating activities.¹⁰⁴

This observation concerning Virgil is equally applicable to Thomson. Whether with their examples of the 'poet's careful labor' or the farmer's industry, both poets testify to the social bonds these two practices help strengthen. Here, the interpretation of signs becomes

¹⁰⁰ H. Rushton Fairclough, 'Introduction', Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid i-vi*, ed. by H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. by G.P. Goold (Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Interestingly, L.P. Wilkinson believed that 'in successive revisions [of *The Seasons*] which took place between 1726 and 1744 more and more of Virgil was incorporated, making it increasingly episodic in the process'. See L.P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil: A Critical Study* (Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 303.

¹⁰² See footnote 2 and p. 20 on the success of this endeavour.

¹⁰³ Here, Thomson conforms to Horace's belief that a poet should aim to 'utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life' (*poetae aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae*). See Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (William Heinemann, 1942), p. 479. See p. 19 for the same sentiment echoed by Samuel Johnson.

¹⁰⁴ Kevis Goodman, 'Georgic', *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th edition, ed. by Roland Green and Stephen Cushman (Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 556.

fundamental for both the reader and the husbandman. Thomson would have agreed with John Dennis's judgement that

There is nothing in Nature that is great and beautiful, without Rule and Order; and the more Rule and Order, and Harmony, we find in the Objects that strike our Senses, the more Worthy and Noble we esteem them. I humbly conceive, that it is the same in Art, and particularly in Poetry, which ought to be an exact Imitation of Nature.¹⁰⁵

Fidelity to the natural world is essential for 'Worthy and Noble' poetry. As for the husbandman, success also depends on understanding the 'Rule and Order' of the natural world. Virgil enlarges on this theme in the first of his *Georgics* when he pronounces:

In order for men to know what might be coming,
Drought, or torrential rain, winds bringing the cold,
Jove, the father himself, provided signs.¹⁰⁶

Virgil continues by describing how animals react to the oncoming storm, writing:

In the neighboring wood all of a sudden sounds different.
Then too the sea-swells rise against the keels,
And the gulls fly landward crying in their flight,
And the little sea coots run along the shore,
Looking as if they're frolicking as they go,
And the heron deserts its own familiar marsh.¹⁰⁷

Man, then, is not the only animal to experience the consequences of the storm; this also occurs to other creatures. These lines stress the social bond that such elemental forces create. David Ferry notes, 'They are all creatures together, all readers of signs, and signs themselves, and all of them are going to suffer the storm's coming on'.¹⁰⁸ Like Virgil, Thomson similarly represents animals as both signs and readers of signs. When in 'Winter' a storm approaches, he describes how:

[...] Drooping, the Labourer-Ox
Stands cover'd o'er with Snow, and then demands
The Fruit of all his Toil. The Fowls of Heaven,

¹⁰⁵ John Dennis, 'Advancement and Reformation of Poetry', *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, vol. i, 2 vols, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker (The John Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 202.

¹⁰⁶ Virgil, *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by David Ferry (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), p. 31.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ David Ferry, 'Introduction', Virgil, *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by David Ferry (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), p. xii.

Tam'd by the cruel Season, croud around
 The winnowing Store, and claim the little Boon
 Which PROVIDENCE assigns them. One alone,
 The Red-Breast, sacred to the household Gods,
 Wisely regardful of th' embroiling Sky,
 In joyless Fields, and thorny Thickets, leaves
 His shivering Mates, and pays to trusted Man
 His annual Visit.¹⁰⁹

Each animal is attuned to their surroundings - a careful reader of the oncoming tempest. For domesticated animals, their recourse is to seek a place of safety that man is obliged to provide for them in exchange for their labour. With its description of domesticated animals, Thomson follows Virgil's precedent. In book iii of his *Georgics*, the Roman poet mentions horses, cattle, sheep and goats. In both cases, this is ostensibly undertaken to show that the interdependence between species is central to the relationship between domesticated animals and man because of their constant interaction. Importantly, this partnership excludes wild animals as, unlike domestic ones, they were less easy to dominate; hence, most eighteenth-century writers would have concurred with Richard Brookes when he stated, 'The most obvious and simple division therefore [...] is into Domestic and Savages; by Domestic I mean such as man has taken into friendship, or reduced to obedience; by the Savage, those who still persevere their natural independence and ferocity'.¹¹⁰

Here the domesticated ox, covered in snow, understands the need for shelter. 'The Fowls of Heaven' also use their experience from similar climatic events.¹¹¹ They react to this change of weather by also seeking safety in a shelter made by man. Similarly, the wild robin correctly interprets the changing environment and withdraws to a place of safety also

¹⁰⁹ Wi., 240-250.

¹¹⁰ Richard Brookes 'Introduction', *A New and Accurate System of Natural History*, 2nd edition, vol. i, 6 vols (F. Newbery, 1773), i. xxv-xxvi. Like Buffon and Goldsmith, Brookes's understanding betrays a humanist conviction that all animals that benefit man are domestic, and all those that cannot are wild. Importantly, Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns often ignore this bifurcation. They write compassionately in defence of both wild and domestic animals, even if sometimes they are not always consistent.

¹¹¹ Wi., 242.

constructed by humans. In each case, Thomson delineates examples showing how the interaction between divergent species is part of God's decree for social harmony. Thomson's periphrastic epithet for birds as 'The Fowls of Heaven' positions man as a benefactor who providentially aids a fellow animals. Similarly, in labelling the robin as a bird sacred to 'the household Gods', he again recalls man's biblical obligation to be a steward to nature. Furthermore, in providing these places of safety, man practices good husbandry. In return for pulling a plough, the ox earns his shelter, or in *The Seasons*'s poetic diction, 'The Fruit of all his Toil'. Thomson's choice of the ox is not without significance, as the animal appears in Virgil's poem. Moreover, Llewelyn Morgan comments that there are

numerous references in ancient texts to a pre-eminence among domesticated animals attributed to the ox which is such as to accord oxen a status almost equivalent to humans. According to Varro (*Rust.* 2.5.3; cf. Columella 6 *praef.* 7), killing an ox had in the past been a capital offence. The ox was the *socius hominum in rustico opere*, 'the partner of mankind in agricultural work', and as such equivalent to, and as inviolable as, a human fellow-worker.¹¹²

Thomson's ox suggests that if this animal can raise its status by being a 'partner with mankind in agricultural work', other animals could equally benefit from such interactions. A further instance of a harmonious collaboration between man and animals can be seen in 'Summer' when shepherds shear their flocks. Here, the relationship is one 'Of happy Labour, Love, and social Glee'.¹¹³ The poem goes on to describe the mutual benefit that occurs between nonhumans and humans. For the sheep, it is the removal of 'a cumbrous Load', whilst, for the shepherd, the fleece he sells will provide for his family.¹¹⁴ Thomson also stresses the social benefits such interactions produce for the country, exclaiming that

¹¹² Llewelyn Morgan, *Patterns of Redemption in Virgil's Georgics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 109.

¹¹³ Su., 370.

¹¹⁴ Su., 421. The opening lines of John Dyer's *The Fleece* similarly make the same connection between harmonious interspecies relationships and commerce, stating, 'The care of Sheep, the labors of the Loom, | And arts of Trade, I sing'. See John Dyer, *The Fleece: A Poem in Four Books* (R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), p. 3, lines 1-2.

Britannia will see ‘Her solid Grandeur rise’.¹¹⁵ When man practices good husbandry, the outcome helps all, from the tiniest robin to Britannia herself. Thus, compassionately interacting with animals becomes a patriotic act of global significance.

Language, the Guarantor of Sociable Creatures: A Humanist Perspective

To guarantee the status of animals as social beings, Thomson demonstrates they are not only creatures that read signs but also speakers of them. Whether or not nonhumans had a language, though, was a contested question in the eighteenth century, one that had its antecedence in the writings of the early Greeks. In his *Politics*, Aristotle famously states that

For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well [...], but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals.¹¹⁶

Speech, for Aristotle, is distinct from voice. It is the outward sign of rational intelligence and moral certainty and, thus, an essential indicator of the difference between man and all other species. Its use evinces that humans can assimilate and articulate their inner thoughts. In his opinion, man accomplishes this because of self-reflectivity. In other words, his ability to think about thinking rather than just reacting, which in Cartesian terminology can be designated as the *cogito*. The gap between man and animals was built not so much on signs, whether oral or physical, but on the intentions behind them.

Descartes goes beyond Aristotle by refuting that nonhumans learn from experience and make choices based on prior learning, supposing they only have recourse to hard-wired instinctual

¹¹⁵ Su., 424. For a contextual account of Thomson’s political thinking, see Christine Gerrard’s *The Patriot Opposite to Walpole: Politics, Poetry and National Myth, 1725-1742* (Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by H. Rackham (Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 11.

actions. In a letter to the Marquess of Newcastle written on 23 November 1646, Descartes proselytised that

none of our external actions can show anyone who examines them that our body is not just a self-moving machine but contains a soul with thoughts, with the exception of spoken words, or other signs that have reference to particular topics without expressing any passions [...] and I say that these signs must have reference, to exclude the speech of parrots.¹¹⁷

Descartes' signs of passion are equivalent to Aristotle's animal voices. Both lack intentionality since they insist that nonhumans have no rational mind to direct their utterances. When animals emit signs of pain or pleasure, they instinctively react to external stimuli. Descartes believes that this is analogous to types of human guttural vocalisations. As he explains when he writes, 'It often happens that we walk or eat without thinking at all about what we are doing; and similarly, without using our reason, we reject things which are harmful for us, and parry blows aimed at us'.¹¹⁸ Attached to Aristotle's and Descartes's conception that reason differentiates human speech from animal voices is a tacit acknowledgement of the importance of self-reflectivity and address. Humans employ language as the apparatus to articulate concepts, allowing them to interact successfully with the world. Without language, animals are unable to do this. Moreover, since they do not directly address a chosen subject their signs are indiscriminate. Conversely, when humans communicate, they intentionally address a pre-specified individual or group.¹¹⁹ Thus further testifying to the intelligence that underpins their utterances.

Defining language is directly relevant if the claim that animals are social beings is to be substantiated, for sociability is a sign of rationality. This is a point that Virgil's fourth

¹¹⁷ René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume III The Correspondence*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 303.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 302. Descartes, thus, concedes that animals share the capacity with man to communicate reactively to external stimuli, but only humans can speak reflectively.

¹¹⁹ As eighteenth-century critics such as Bentham had pointed out, not all humans have this ability, children and people with mental illness being but two possible exceptions.

Georgic makes abundantly clear when the poem describes the communal spirit of the bees.

Jasper Griffin notes, ‘Virgil treats his bees in the fourth *Georgic* as if they formed a sort of human society’.¹²⁰ For instance, the bees ‘hold the dwellings of their city jointly, and pass their life under the majesty of law’.¹²¹ Their egalitarian credentials are manifested by holding their ‘city’ as common stock (*solae communis natos, consortia tecta urbis habent*).

Furthermore, the bees agree to abide by ‘the majesty of the law’ (*magnisque agitant sub legibus aevum*). A few lines later, this group ethos is further established in the lines:

At dawn they pour from the gates—no loitering; again, when the star of eve has warned them to withdraw from the pastures in the fields, then they seek their homes.¹²²

Parallel to the previous examples, these lines fail to differentiate the social practices of bees from humans. Instead, the poem stresses the geographical and psychological commonalities between them and man. When ‘they pour from the gate’ (*runt portis*), it is implied that bees live in a structure similar to humans. This is confirmed later when ‘they seek their homes’. The bees’ communal spirit is also evident in their work ethic since they only return to their domiciles when danger approaches. Thus, Virgil demonstrates that bees react in a similarly rational manner as man.

Concerning animals as the progenitors of language, Lia Formigari wonders

How far is the social state necessary to man’s emergence from the animal world, and what role has language in the progressive differentiation of man from other creatures? Further: if man is a creature originally endowed with reason, how does this reason manifest itself in language?¹²³

¹²⁰ Jasper Griffin, ‘The Fourth *Georgic*, Virgil, and Rome’, *Greece and Rome*, 26.1 (1979), p. 62.

¹²¹ Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid i-vi*, ed. by H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. by G.P. Goold (Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 229, ‘*Georgic iv*’, lines 153-154

¹²² *Ibid.*, 231, lines 185-186.

¹²³ Lia Formigari, ‘Language and Society in the Late Eighteenth Century’, *The Journal of History and Ideas*, 35.2 (1974), p. 275.

Importantly, sociability, reason and language are the signifiers that justify man's claim to superiority over lesser animals. Writing at the end of the seventeenth century, John Locke declared

Besides articulate sounds [...], it was further necessary, that he [man] should be *able to use these sounds as signs of internal conceptions*; and to make them stand as marks for the ideas within his own mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men's minds be conveyed from one to another.¹²⁴

Locke's conception of language as a transaction that only occurs between humans betrays the exceptionalism that infects much of the debate on how signs were conveyed in this period. He confidently believes that human speech is the only language capable of fulfilling all the requirements in any semiotic system comparable to man's. Locke's notion is redolent of eighteenth-century theorists who also failed to consider that animals display the same capabilities.

James Beattie's understanding of language is indebted to Descartes and Locke. He believes, like Descartes, that

We speak, in order to communicate our thoughts to one another; which our social affections incline us powerfully to do: and the practice of speaking improves our natural faculty of separating, arranging and comparing our ideas. I call that faculty natural, and consider it as the foundation of the art of speech: for, without it, though some animals might be so taught, or a machine so constructed, as to articulate words, it would be impossible to speak rationally, or with intelligence.¹²⁵

After explaining how 'social affections' aids mental composition, Beattie clarifies how signs are 'expressive of human thought, [and] may be divided into Natural and Artificial'.¹²⁶ For him, 'Natural' signs, which include 'Anger, Joy, Sorrow, Hope, Fear, Scorn, Contentment, Pity, [and] Admiration', are expressed both bodily and verbally.¹²⁷ Blind to the consequences,

¹²⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Roger Woolhouse (Penguin Books Ltd, 1997), p. 362.

¹²⁵ James Beattie, 'The Theory of Language', *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1783), p. 239.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

Beattie ascribes to animals ‘the belief that the use of natural language constitutes a fair criterion of rationality’, a point he ambivalently gestures towards when he concedes that ‘It has, however been a common opinion, and is probable enough, that there may be, among irrational animals, something, which by a *figure* we call *Language*’.¹²⁸ These two statements show the bind that Beattie’s theory is incapable of resolving. He recognises that ‘irrational’ animals have language but is fearful of giving them equal status with man by according to their signs, the same ‘criterion of rationality’ he proffers to man.

Hugh Blair is another Scottish Enlightenment writer propagating this view of human exceptionalism. The first sentence of his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* states the importance of speech as a divinely given gift. Hence, he writes, ‘One of the most distinguished privileges which Providence has conferred upon mankind, is the power of communicating their thoughts to one another’.¹²⁹ This is because, as Blair explains

among nations in a civilized state, no art has been cultivated with more care, than that of language, style and composition. The attention paid to it may, indeed, be assumed as one mark of the progress of society towards its most improved period.¹³⁰

Unlike Locke, who views language as a source of confusion due to the arbitrary nature between sign and signifier, Blair perceives it as a stable form of communication. For him, when language is in its formative stage, ‘there may be traced some degree of correspondence with the object signified’.¹³¹ The stability between sign and signifier emerges because language is a unifying gift from God. Like Beattie, Hugh Blair deems speech a marker of rational consciousness. Thus, he writes

if Speech be the vehicle, or interpreter of the conceptions of our minds, an examination of its Structure and Progress cannot but unfold many things concerning

¹²⁸ Stephen K. Land, ‘James Beattie on Language’, *Philological Quarterly*, 51.4 (1972), p. 889 and Beattie, 234.

¹²⁹ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. by Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran (Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

the nature and progress of our conceptions themselves, and the operations of our faculties.¹³²

Blair contends that man is the only creature that communicates reflectively. Kames also envisages a connection between speech and community. He states, ‘Among the particulars that compose the social part of our nature, a propensity to communicate our opinions, our emotions, and everything that affects us, is remarkable’.¹³³ Where Kames slightly diverges from Beattie, and Blair, is on intelligence. Rather than specifying that reason precedes language, he argues for rational intelligence as a constituent part of speech. Thus, Kames asserts on the final page of the *Elements of Criticism* that ‘there is scarce any reasoning without some degree of abstraction; and we cannot abstract to purpose without making use of general terms. Hence it follows, that without language man would scarce be a rational being’.¹³⁴ In summation, the ideas of the Scottish writers Beattie, Blair and Kames espouse three key points concerning language. First, it is clear evidence of a rational mind. Next, language helped initiate human societies before facilitating ever-higher levels of civilisation. Finally, these two points combined testify to man’s superior status over other species.

A Wider Community: Language and Animals

The doctrines of these writers expressed the most commonly held opinions about language in the eighteenth century and their rejection of animals as rational speakers. However, they did not go unchallenged. For example, certain critics argued against human exceptionalism. Even if their counter-discourse was not as widely disseminated, it still underpinned an emerging change in attitudes towards nonhumans in this period. Such authors could call on Biblical precedence, citing Job 12:

But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall teach thee:

¹³² Ibid., 91.

¹³³ Kames, Henry Home, Lord, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. ii, 3 vols (A. Millar, 1762), p. 204.

¹³⁴ Ibid., iii, 406.

Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.

Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?
In Whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.¹³⁵

Advocates for rational animal voices could also co-opt the views expressed by the sceptical writer Hieronymus Rorarius in his 1544 book *Quòd Animalia Bruta Ratione Utantur Meliùs Homine Libri Duo*. A text that became more widely known due to Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, in which he gave a commentary on Rorarius's beliefs. Here, Bayle summarises Rorarius's views, writing, 'He undertakes to show, not only that brute beasts have reason, but that they make better use of it than man'.¹³⁶ Bayle goes on to comment that

This book is not ill wrote, and it contains a great many singular facts concerning the ingenuity of beasts, and the malice of man. Those which concern the capacity of beasts, put under great difficulties both the followers of Mr Des Cartes and those of Aristotle.¹³⁷

Montaigne is another early modern writer whose views on animal language influenced eighteenth-century thinkers. In his *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* (1576), he states

As for the power of speech, it is certain that, if it is not natural, then it cannot be necessary. And yet I believe [...] that if a child, before learning to talk, were brought up in total solitude, then he would have some sort of speech to express his concepts; it is simply not believable that Nature has refused to us men a faculty granted to most other animals.¹³⁸

Both Bayle's commentary and Montaigne's essay influenced writers on rational animal language that came after them. One infamous example is Guillaume Hyacinthe Bougeant's cogently argued *A Philosophical Amusement upon the Language of Beasts*. Born in 1690, Bougeant was a French Jesuit who taught classics in Caen. He wrote histories, comedies, and critical polemics, but the *Language of Beasts*, printed in an English translation of 1739, is his most influential work. This text mocks both Christian teaching and Descartes's beast-

¹³⁵ Job, 12, 7-10.

¹³⁶ Pierre Bayle, *The Dictionary Historical*, vol. iv, 5 vols (J.J. and P. Knapton et al., 1734), p. 900.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 901.

¹³⁸ Michele Montaigne, 'An Apology for Raymond Sebond', *The Complete Essays*, trans. by M.A. Screech (Penguin Group, 1991), p. 512.

machine hypothesis. In it, he satirically declares that even though he is sure his thoughts emanate from a rational consciousness, ‘it would be altogether impossible for me (unless God should expressly reveal it) to beat it into my Head, that the Men with whom I live are indeed nothing but Machines’.¹³⁹ Bougeant follows this up with the statement that animals certainly have souls. Shockingly for his readers, he clarifies that their souls, though, are those of devils, which accounts for their brutish behaviour. A heretical opinion for which he was exiled to La Flèche, only being readmitted into the order upon recanting his belief in April 1739. It is unfortunate that this section of *Language of Beast* made the most lasting impression because, as Aaron Garrett elucidates, ‘the remainder of the work contains one of the most penetrating accounts of animal language to be found in the eighteenth century’.¹⁴⁰ In it, Bougeant enquires, ‘Why has Nature given Beasts the Faculty of Speech?’¹⁴¹ His answer is, ‘Why, to no other End but that they might express their Desires and Sentiments one to another, and by that Means supply their Wants and whatever is necessary for their Preservation’.¹⁴² He explains that the disparity between man’s excessive signs compared to the ones made by animals is due to the former’s fallen nature. For Bougeant, ‘Before he [man] had sinned, his Eyes were shut to all worldly and sensible Goods. He had no Desire for them. Sin opened his Eyes, and to his Misfortune he coveted these Goods’.¹⁴³ Because animals are untainted by sin, their needs are simpler, and hence, they require fewer signs than man. Bougeant also justifies his claim that animal language has developed in tandem with their needs by representing nonhumans as superior beings. He admirably explicates how animal vocabulary

¹³⁹ Guillaume Hyacinthe Bougeant, *A Philosophical Amusement upon the Language of Beasts* (T. Cooper, 1739), p. 5

¹⁴⁰ Aaron Garrett, ‘Introduction’, *Animal Language, Animal Passions and Animal Souls* (Thoemmes Press, 2000), p. xi

¹⁴¹ Guillaume Hyacinthe Bougeant, *A Philosophical Amusement upon the Language of Beasts* (T. Cooper, 1739), p. 42.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 43.

is perfectly aligned with their needs whilst simultaneously mocking man's predilection to pontificate when he states that

Limited as it is, it is sufficient to Beasts, and more would be no service to them. Were it not to be wished, that ours, at least in some respects, were less abundant and prolix? Men are naturally great Talkers and, if I dare say so, blab much.¹⁴⁴

Bougeant also suggests that man's supernumerary signs explain why animals are morally superior. Compared with the strict functionality of animal language, 'Men abuse the Faculty of speaking Nature has given them! How many Errors and Falsehoods are the ordinary Topicks of our Conversation'.¹⁴⁵ A more extensive vocabulary, for Bougeant, only increases post-lapsarian man's ability to dissemble. Animals do not have this failing since 'They speak little, but always to the purpose, and that knowingly'.¹⁴⁶ Once he has testified to the ethically superior speech of animals, he devotes the rest of his text to addressing common misunderstandings about nonhuman language. For instance, he states

Birds Sing, they say: But this is a Mistake. Birds do not Sing but Speak. What we take for Singing is no more than their natural Language [...] They sing not for singing's sake as we fancy they do. Their Singing is always an intended Speech.¹⁴⁷

He further believes, 'Let a Ewe in a Flock of a hundred Lambs hear her own bleat, she immediately knows him again, and hastens to him'.¹⁴⁸ Animal speech, thus, perfectly replicates a definition of human language since it is initiated by a rational creature, intentionally addressed and unique to that speaker.

Bougeant's position received support from John Hildrop's *Free Thoughts Upon the Brute-Creation* (1742). Hildrop (1682-1756) was educated at St. John's College, Oxford, before coming rector of Maulden in Bedfordshire. In 1740, he started contributing to the *Weekly Miscellany*. Like Bougeant, if he is known at all, it is for his single essay on the treatment of

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 44.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 45.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 46-47.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 50.

animals. Written in reply to Bougeant's text, Hildrop disagrees with the idea that animals have the souls of devils. However, he does affirm that Bougeant is correct to ridicule the

unintelligible trumpery of Mechanism, Instinct, Substantial Forms, and what not of the *Aristotelian* and *Cartesian* Philosophy, which like occult qualities, are hard Words without a Meaning, intended only as a thin disguise for Ignorance and Affectation.¹⁴⁹

Hildrop wonders why any owner of a horse or a dog would 'train them up by Correction or Discipline to the several Offices for which they are intended' if they were machines.¹⁵⁰ To do so would 'be absurd and ridiculous, as it would be to caress and reward your Clock or your Watch for going well, or to correct and punish them with a Whip or Cudgel for going wrong'.¹⁵¹ For Hildrop, it is equally absurd that animals speak merely out of instinct, without reflection, imagination, or reason behind their utterances. Commenting on this subject, his prognosis is that detractors of rational animal speech 'do not pretend to define it, to shew us its real Nature, or wherein it consists, they seem only to speak of it as a blind Impetus, and unknown Impulse; a kind of a Mechanical Necessity'.¹⁵² Like Bougeant, Hildrop suggests that animal signs have many commonalities with human forms of communication. Inherent in each animal's voice is a rationally derived desire. As such, for him, signs are delivered to provoke preferred responses. Moreover, these signs are directed at a designated individual rather than emitted randomly. Hildrop departs from Bougeant's claim that animals are untainted by sin. However, he does so only to entwine their ultimate destiny with that of man. For as he writes

there seems to be a strong Presumption, that in the Intention of their Creator in their original Frame, and their Relation to the universal System, they [animals] were to be Partakers of that Blessing and Immortality which was the Privilege of the whole of

¹⁴⁹ John Hildrop, *Free Thoughts Upon the Brute-Creation: or An Examination of Father Bougeant's Philosophical Amusement, &c.* (R. Minors, 1742), p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

Creation, till Man by his Disobedience forfeited it for himself, and by consequence for them.¹⁵³

Hildrop has no answer to the question of whether animals have immortal souls. He is, though, convinced of their parity with man. If human souls are incorruptible, then so are those of animals. For Garrett, Hildrop's approach typifies British theorists's different concerns over their continental counterparts. It is Garrett's conviction that 'eighteenth-century English language philosophers and essayists had a far greater interest in the moral status of animals'.¹⁵⁴ For Hildrop, the similarities between man and animals question the hierarchy of the Great Chain since the 'Differences that distinguish these several Ranks and Degrees of Being, is not easy to conceive'.¹⁵⁵

The Semiotics of Pain: Animal Cruelty in *The Seasons*

It is not only in the provocative prose of Bougeant and Hildrop that arguments for animal language can be found. It is also discernible in *The Seasons*. Thomson wants to show that, like man, animal sociability results from their language. Moreover, their communication can be interpreted across species, making their signs integral to God's benevolence towards all creation. When these creatures express pain caused by humans, they are testifying to man's sinful nature. In *The Seasons*, animal signs and poetic techniques are intertwined to represent nonhumans as worthy of the reader's compassion. The different modes of animal communication are not only signs for their own species. Thomson intends that these animals should interact with other creatures in the poem while communicating with the reader outside it. To ignore such cries for help, whether inside or outside the literary frame, is to be

¹⁵³ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵⁴ Aaron Garrett, 'Introduction', *Animal Language, Animal Passions and Animal Souls* (Thoemmes Press, 2000), p. xii. Rather than confine this interest to 'English language philosophers', Garrett notes it is more accurate to say 'British' since many thinkers who made crucial contributions to this debate, as this chapter will testify, were Scottish. This point is equally valid for Thomson and Burns.

¹⁵⁵ John Hildrop, *Free Thoughts Upon the Brute-Creation: or An Examination of Father Bougeant's Philosophical Amusement, &c.* (R. Minors, 1742), p. 65.

complicit in the act of cruelty described. In doing so, the poet makes animal semiotics marks of moral significance. For Tobias Menely, animals in *The Seasons* ‘assume an interspecies audience, a semiotic community in which groans are intelligible signs of a body’s suffering, capable even of instigating sympathetic action’.¹⁵⁶ In his article ‘Against Barbarity to Animals’, Alexander Pope comments

Perhaps that voice or Cry so nearly resembling the Human, with which Providence has endued so many different Animals, might purposely be given them to move our Pity, and prevent those Cruelties we are too apt to inflict on our Fellow Creatures.¹⁵⁷

Pope asserts that the guttural cries emitted by humans in pain are the same as those made by animals. Furthermore, the fact that they ‘might purposely be given’ by ‘Providence’ suggests they are divinely authorised. This thought is underlined by his contention that they are our ‘Fellow Creatures’ since God makes all living things. Pope’s prose sentiment expresses the poetic position Thomson takes in his poem.¹⁵⁸ For instance, in ‘Autumn’, *The Seasons* documents a litany of persecuted animals. This section commences in a mock-heroic tone with:

HERE the rude Clamour of the Sportsman’s Joy,
The Gun fast-thundering, and the winded Horn,
Would tempt the Muse to sing the *rural Game*:¹⁵⁹

The employment of ‘fast-thundering’ and ‘winded Horn’ gestures toward the uncontrollable elemental forces that foreshorten the lives of all living creatures throughout the changing

¹⁵⁶ Tobias Menely, ‘Animal Signs and Ethical Significance: Expressive Creatures in the British Georgic’, in *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 39.4 (2006), p. 112.

¹⁵⁷ *The Guardian*, ed. by John Calhoun Stephens (The University of Kentucky, 1982), p. 236. No. 61, Thursday, 21 May 1713.

¹⁵⁸ No direct correspondence between Thomson and Pope survives, but both poets were on cordial terms, as references in their letters to others show. In one of the few extant letters of Thomson, he wrote to Aaron Hill on 11 May 1736, ‘Mr Pope was the other Day inquiring kindly after you: I should be glad we could, at the same time engage him’. See James Thomson, *James Thomson (1700-1748): Letters and Documents*, ed. by A. D. McKillop (University of Kansas Press, 1958), p. 106. Furthermore, a letter written by Richard Savage, a mutual friend of both poets, on 26 May 1737 states, ‘Mr. Thomson has received a letter from Mr. Pope, full of affectionate expressions both to him and me. He has ordered each a copy of his letters and poems’. Ibid., p. 110. The Rothschild Library holds a copy of volume two of Pope’s *Works* (1735) and Pope’s *Letters* (1737), in which Thomson wrote that they are the gift of the author. Ibid., p. 111, footnote 3.

¹⁵⁹ Au., 360-362.

seasons. These lines comically align man with Jupiter, the god of thunder. Here, the poem also obliquely hints that as wielders of thunder, humans are surrogate divinities with power over the fates of lesser species. This jovial mood, though, soon evaporates as the poem recounts the darker aspect of the 'Sportsman's Joy'. The use of '*Game*' here is entirely ironic since the soon-to-be-narrated scene is antithetical to a definition of 'game' that stresses it is a 'Jest, opposed to earnest or seriousness'.¹⁶⁰ Only from the rider's perspective is the forthcoming action frivolous. Rather than sing a valedictory song, this 'Muse' will commence a dirge that documents man's tyranny over a vulnerable flock of birds:

Caught in the meshy Snare, in vain they beat
 Their idle Wings, intangled more and more:
 Nor on the Surges of the boundless Air,
 Tho' borne triumphant, are they safe;¹⁶¹

The use of 'intangled' combined with the repetitious 'more' intensifies the fatalistic sense this passage conveys. If the opening line innocently declares, 'Here the rude Clamour of the Sportsman's Joy', its denouement in the bathetic question 'are they safe' utterly repudiates this position. These seven lines of verse exemplify how *The Seasons* emotionally overwhelms the reader. The first three lines employ words and images celebrating the hunt, like 'joy', 'thundering' and 'sing'. The tone in the following four lines is more empathetic to the unfortunate objects of this 'Sport' with its poignant use of 'meshy Snare', 'in vain', and 'intangled'. Thus, commencing with the still serenity of the 'Sportsman's Joy', this scene charts the trajectory to a diametrical state of despair epitomised in the futile question of 'are they safe'. However, this is not just a temporal journey from one narrative line to another. Instead, this passage is chronicled via the change of subject position between human to animal, hunter to hunted, and victor to victim. In changing focus from the 'sportsman' to his prey, the poem intensifies the dramatic journey undertaken by the readers. With the birds now

¹⁶⁰ 'game, n. s.', definition 2 in Samuel Johnson's, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in 2 vols (W. Strahan, 1755).

¹⁶¹ Au., 370-373.

‘Dead to the Ground’, the narrative returns to the earlier call that invoked the ‘Muse to sing the *rural Game*’.¹⁶² The poem’s response to such a request is resolute:

THESE are not Subjects for the peaceful Muse,
Nor will she stain with such her spotless Song;
Then most delighted, when she social sees
The whole mix’d Animal-Creation round
Alive, and happy.¹⁶³

From line 362, the Muse resists the temptation to sing about the ‘*rural Game*’, as such a song is not ‘spotless’ but rather stained with the blood of innocent animals. The rhetorical power to hold the reader’s attention in this passage emanates from the many instances of sibilance, for example, ‘she stain’ and ‘spotless Song’. This culminates in the critical tenet of ‘she social sees’. For those attentive enough to notice Thomson’s poetic technique, this ensures they see this sentiment as central to the poet’s vision of interspecies relationships.

With mirth now entirely banished, the poem proceeds to narrate ‘This falsely chearful barbarous Game of Death’.¹⁶⁴ Where animals hunt at night to hide the reprehensible crime of killing even for subsistence, man has no shame. Abroad during the day, man is:

Inflam’d, beyond the most infuriate Wrath
Of the worst Monster that e’er roam’d the Waste,
For Sport alone pursues the cruel Chace,
Amid the Beamings of the gentle Days.
Upbraid, ye ravening Tribes, our wanton Rage,
For Hunger kindles you, and lawless Want;
But lavish fed, in Nature’s Bounty roll’d,
To joy at Anguish, and delight in Blood,
Is what your horrid Bosoms never knew.¹⁶⁵

Thomson’s accusatory lines achieved their emotional resonance via the violent yoking of antithetical pairs of words or phrases, such as ‘Sport’ with ‘Cruel Chace’, ‘joy’ with ‘Anguish’, ‘delight in’ with ‘blood’ and ‘horrid’ with the maternal evoking ‘Bosoms’. The

¹⁶² Au., 377.

¹⁶³ Au., 379-383.

¹⁶⁴ Au., 384.

¹⁶⁵ Au., 392-400.

overall impression imprinted on the reader is that the hunter's actions utterly oppose nature, whose bounty will lavishly feed man without killing animals. This crime is compounded when its only justification is 'Sport alone'.

Clashing Philosophies: The Influence of Pagan and Christian Views in *The Seasons*

The poem not only articulates the belief that hunting animals for sport is against God's wishes. It also provides a solution. Earlier in the poem, Thomson proposes that Nature

[...] pours ten thousand Delicacies, Herbs,
And Fruits, as numerous as the Drops of Rain.¹⁶⁶

Nature, then, has supplied enough subsistence for man to live without killing other animals.

The reason for advocating vegetarianism can be found earlier in the poem, as explained in the lines:

Of Health, and Life, and Joy? The Food of Man,
While yet he liv'd in Innocence and told
A Length of golden Years, unflesh'd in Blood,¹⁶⁷

For Thomson, pre-lapsarian man's innocence is contiguous with his vegetarian diet. By indulging in meat, man further enmeshes himself in a sinful existence. However, Thomson does not only use Biblical precedence to justify a meat-free existence. As can be seen in the lines:

Whose wisest Will has fix'd us in a State
That must not yet to pure Perfection rise.
Besides, who knows, how *rais'd* to higher Life,
From Stage to Stage, the *Vital Scale ascends*?¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Sp., 352-353. This sentiment is similar to Portia's argument in *The Merchant of Venice* that 'The quality of mercy is not strain'd, | It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven'. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, IV. 1. 180-81. Thomson here draws a parallel between nature and heaven as spaces both divinely governed. More importantly, he analogises that to be a vegetarian is to participate in an act of mercy. Finally, he suggests that not eating meat means acting in accordance with God's will.

¹⁶⁷ Sp., 236-238.

¹⁶⁸ Sp., 375-378. Pythagoras's views on vegetarianism were well known in the eighteenth century through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Addison's *The Spectator* 211 and the writings of William Temple, amongst others.

Here, he puts forward a pagan belief proffered by the most renowned vegetarian, Pythagoras. The alliteration in the opening lines arrests the reader's ear, alerting them to the importance of this passage. This is confirmed in the use of sibilance in the last lines, 'Stage to Stage', 'Scale', and the 's' sound in 'ascends'. Thomson suggests that in eating animals, man could also be killing the migrated souls of previous humans. This theory of metempsychosis receives further attention in his poem *Liberty* (1735). Here, he states:

Whatever shares the Brotherhood of Life:
He [Pythagoras] taught that Life's indissoluble Flame,
From Brute to Man, and Man to Brute again,
For ever shifting, runs th' eternal round;¹⁶⁹

'From Brute to Man, and Man to Brute again' perfectly captures the poet's vision of animal and human souls in harmony as they cyclically elide into each other. How securely Thomson believed in metempsychosis is questioned by Ralph Cohen, who notes that the lines:

Besides, who knows, how *rais'd* to higher Life,
From Stage to Stage, the *Vital Scale ascends*?

from *The Seasons* were not added until 1746, six years after he had written *Liberty*.¹⁷⁰ For Cohen, 'This revision seems to call into question the assurance with which he had treated the Samian Sage [Pythagoras] in Part III of *Liberty*'.¹⁷¹ It may be a literary acknowledgement on Thomson's part to include this section on transmigration. Alan Dugald McKillop comments that the section in *The Seasons* on the transfer of souls 'is based on the speech of Pythagoras in *Metamorphoses* XV, and the verbal borrowings are considerable'.¹⁷² The intertextuality that such 'borrowings' entail may suggest that Thomson's poem has a deferential attitude to ancient writers. From this reading, it could be interpreted that *The Seasons* establishes a semiotic symbiosis with authors such as Virgil and Ovid. Analogous to the husbandman's

¹⁶⁹ James Thomson, *Liberty, The Castle of Indolence, and Other Poems*, ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 74-75, lines 62-65.

¹⁷⁰ Sp., 377-378.

¹⁷¹ Ralph Cohen, *The Unfolding of The Seasons* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 36.

¹⁷² Alan Dugald McKillop, *The Background of Thomson's Seasons* (University of Minnesota, 1942), p. 104.

reading of the signs in the natural world, Thomson interprets the signs of other writers.¹⁷³

Another possibility is suggested if the following five lines of *Liberty* are considered:

Thence try'd against the blood-polluted Meal,
And Limbs yet quivering with some kindred Soul,
To turn the human Heart. Delightful Truth!
Had he beheld the living Chain ascend,
And form a rising not a circling Whole.¹⁷⁴

At first, Thomson's rhetoric reinforces its transmigratory stance of 'Kindred Souls'. He next modifies his opinion upon recognising 'Delighted Truth!'. In a moment of epiphany, Thomson proclaims that life is not a process of souls endlessly migrating but rather an evolving progression on the Great Chain. McKillop believes, 'In Thomson's later thought the Pythagorean doctrine is thus adapted to religious progressivism'.¹⁷⁵ Ontologically, these lines from *Liberty* are problematic when read alongside similar passages in *The Seasons*. Are the indeterminate souls of nonhumans in *The Seasons* also part of the same 'rising' life in *Liberty*? Such a statement presents a view of the Great Chain that was becoming less fashionable. One reading that would harmonise with *The Seasons* is to understand the Great Chain as a scheme that still elevates man above other animals. The use of 'rising', though, should be interpreted as meaning not a system of rigid hierarchies but rather a collection of indeterminate strata. This reading would privilege a Christian perspective, with God as the architect of the Great Chain, rather than Pythagoras's pagan conception. More specifically, it gestures towards a model of the Great Chain that accommodates the scientific discoveries challenging the clear division between humans and nonhumans. Thomson's poem anticipates the changes to this model that relinquishes a conception founded on a well-defined static

¹⁷³ McKillop finds that Thomson's poem is full of 'verbal borrowings' from other writers. This creates a work that is rich in intertextuality. Thomson's Pythagoras gestures towards the views of this Greek philosopher portrayed in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Incidentally, Dryden's influence can also be felt in *The Seasons*, as he translated this section of Ovid's poem for Jacob Tonson's and Virgil's *Georgics*.

¹⁷⁴ James Thomson, *Liberty, The Castle of Indolence, and Other Poems*, ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 75, line 66-70.

¹⁷⁵ Alan Dugald McKillop, *The Background of Thomson's Seasons* (University of Minnesota, 1942), p. 115

order. By the end of the century, the Great Chain will better reflect advances in natural philosophy that reconceptualise each stratum as links in a continuous line. This alternative model is reflected in a review written by Oliver Goldsmith in 1763. Here, he comments

The graduation from one order of beings to another, is so imperceptible, that it is impossible to lay the line that shall distinctly mark the boundaries of each. All such divisions as are made among the inhabitants of this globe, like the circles drawn by Astronomers on its surface, are the work, not of nature, but of ourselves.¹⁷⁶

Goldsmith's insistence that most hierarchies are human constructs rather than natural questions man's privileged position in the Great Chain. For Arthur Lovejoy, Goldsmith's opinion strongly suggests 'the general habit of thinking in terms of species, as well as the sense of separation of man from the rest of the animal creation, was beginning to break down in the eighteenth century'.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, as James Carson notes

The hierarchical and systematic chain of being is partly governed by the principle of continuity – a principle that insists on the fluidity, complexity and richness of nature that cannot be comprehended by systematic thought. The distinctiveness of empirical individuals and the blending of neighbouring links on the chain exert pressure against the rational construct of species categories. The principle of continuity can also have animal-friendly implications. The chain of being is unbroken, so that the distinction between one link and the next is imperceptible. One species imperceptibly shades in to another.¹⁷⁸

This new perspective alleviates some of the ambiguities in *The Seasons* brought about by a disjunction between warring theologies. However, even this solution is not entirely satisfactory, as so much of the poem attempts to expunge the constructed binomial difference between humans and nonhumans by showing their equivalent social natures. James Sambrook contends that '*The Seasons* is not given over to the systematic promotion of any single truth, religious or political'.¹⁷⁹ This may tentatively explain the paradox between the

¹⁷⁶ Oliver Goldsmith, 'Review of R. Brookes's A New and Accurate System of Natural History', *Monthly Magazine, or, Literary Journal*, vol. 29 (R. Griffiths, 1763), p. 284. John Locke expresses the same sentiment in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Roger Woolhouse (Penguin Books Ltd, 1997), p. 666.

¹⁷⁷ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 231.

¹⁷⁸ James Carson, 'The great chain of being as an ecological ideas', *Animals and Humans: Sensibility and Representation*, ed. by Katharine M. Quinsey (Voltaire Foundation, 2017), p. 107

¹⁷⁹ James Sambrook, *James Thomson 1700-1748: A Life* (Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 102.

Christian and pagan dogma that occasionally clashes within the poem. Ultimately, though, *The Seasons* authorises a view of the natural world as a place created by God for the harmonious interaction of all his creatures, as the poem enthusiastically proclaims:

Soul of surrounding Worlds! in whom best seen
Shines out thy Maker! may I sing of thee?¹⁸⁰

Thomson makes this point of central importance in his ‘A Hymn on the Seasons’. For him, God is manifest in every aspect of nature. Writing about the different seasons, Thomson declares:

These, as they change, *Almighty Father!* these,
Are but the *varied God*. The rolling *Year*
Is full of Thee.¹⁸¹

Like its longer counterpart, ‘A Hymn on the Seasons’ implores the reader to understand the natural world as a gift from God to all beings. In return, Thomson believes that all creation should unite and sing a hymn of thanksgiving to their divine creator:

Nature, attend; join every living soul,
Beneath the spacious temple of the sky,
In adoration join; and, ardent raise
An universal *Hymn!* To *Him*,¹⁸²

When Thomson proposes that the sky is a ‘spacious temple’, he geographically suggests that the earth is the nave in a biospheric church, where the congregation, consisting of ‘every living soul’, can celebrate their celestial maker. Thomson’s deliberate use of church iconography harmonises with his Christian call for the ‘adoration’ of God. Words and images fuse together to celebrate this ‘universal *Hymn!*’ As the creator of all living things, it is only apt in Thomson’s view to envisage nature as a sacred place where all voices should communally emit loving signs towards their benefactor. Furthermore, if ‘A Hymn on the

¹⁸⁰ Su., 95-96.

¹⁸¹ James Thomson, ‘A Hymn on the Seasons’, *The Four Seasons, and Other Poems* (J. Millan, 1735), p. 43, lines 1-3.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 45, 40-43. This passage recalls a similar command in the ‘Boof of Revelation’ (Rev., 7, 9-10). Christopher Smart also makes the same passage central to *Jubilate Agno*. See pp. 90-91 for an extended analysis of this belief in Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*.

Seasons' celebrates the cyclical year and *The Seasons*, it is also true that God is at the centre of all three.

Animal Cruelty and the Breakdown of God's Social Community

To justify a divinely sanctioned interspecies community, the poem attests to how animal cruelty is a practice that destroys such social harmony. Moreover, in his brutality towards innocent animals, man betrays his position as a steward for the rest of creation. A crime compounded by wantonly abusing them for entertainment. In emotively describing each sporting act, he allows animals to speak with their own creaturely voice. By presenting the reader with the victim's perspective, Thomson avails a closer kinship between his audience and the persecuted animal. An example of this can be seen in passages such as:

Hot-steaming, up behind him come again
Th' inhuman Rout, and from the shady Depth
Expel him, circling thro' his every Shift.
He sweeps the Forest oft; and sobbing sees
The Glades,¹⁸³

David Perkins perceptively observes that in such scenes, Thomson 'narrates the chase from the point of view of the stag and foregrounds its suffering, which is mental as well as physical'.¹⁸⁴ As usual with Thomson, in passages he feels are important, the poem arrests the ear of the listener through the use of sibilance. Thomson also foregrounds the animal's suffering by representing the creature 'sobbing'. An utterance that allows the stag to emit a sound comparable to a human in a similar situation, thus creating an empathetic relationship. For Tobias Menely, Thomson's choice of the genre further strengthens this compassionate interaction. This is because, for Menely, 'British georgic, notable for its literal rather than allegorical treatment of animals, [was] written in an era, the early eighteenth century, when

¹⁸³ Au., 438-442.

¹⁸⁴ David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animals Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 76.

moral philosophers defined bodily sympathies as a primary vehicle of collective identification'.¹⁸⁵ The body of the stag, thus, becomes a site on which Thomson's audience can communally mourn its cruel treatment. The signs of cruelty expressed there also become a non-linguistic semiotic system, and thus a creaturely voice in which corporeal marks communicate across species boundaries, testifying to the animal's suffering. In its last moments, the poem gives an insight into the animal's psychological state, again through the bodily signs that it emits:

The big round Tears run down his dappled Face;
He groans in Anguish; while the growling Pack,
Blood-happy, hang at his fair jutting Chest,
And mark his beauteous chequer'd Sides with Gore.¹⁸⁶

The 'big round Tears' and 'groans in Anguish' are contrasted with the 'growling pack'. This scene in which the stag's 'beauteous chequer'd Sides' are marked with gore is reminiscent of Christ's crucifixion. As stigmata, these wounds are thus rendered as the visible signs of the Passion. If the stag is positioned as Christ, the second Adam, whose innocence shows man a better life, the hunters are his persecutors, damned by God for killing him.¹⁸⁷

Again, Thomson's choice of signs communicates across species as they are comparable to an emotional state in man. The pathetic scene culminates when the dogs leave their 'blood-happy' symbols on the stag by 'mark[ing] his beauteous chequer'd Sides'. Such an act perfectly demonstrates Menely's point that 'bodily sympathies' help facilitate 'collective

¹⁸⁵ Tobias Menely, 'Animals Signs and Ethical Significance: Expressive Creatures in British Georgic', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 39.4 (2006), p. 113.

¹⁸⁶ Au., 454-457. This scene echoes Jacques's empathetic reaction upon seeing a stag with 'big round tears | Coursed one another down his innocent nose'. See William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II. 1. 38-39. William Cowper identifies himself as a 'stricken deer'. See *PWC*, ii, p. 165, line 108. The crying stag is a familiar idea in seventeenth-century writing. For instance, Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (13.217), Gascoigne's *Hunting* (136-140), and Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (1.2.450-1) all use this image. This subject is also central to Montaigne's essay 'Of Cruelty'. Their inspiration for doing so derives from Ovid's account in *Metamorphoses* of the tears that Actaeon wept upon being turned into a stag by Diana. The empathetic connection between Jacques, Cowper and the reader of *The Seasons* towards this injured beast aligns with Adam Smith's 'impartial spectator'. See pp. 179-181.

¹⁸⁷ Christ depicted as a stag was a common image in the Middle Ages. For instance, in the writings of Hildegard of Bingen.

identification'. Thomson's deployment of the physical characters on the stag's body is explicitly intensified by the verbal sounds that all wounded animals make. Because the signs in this scene are a universal language, for they can equally be inflected/found on all animals, including man, they express a non-species-specific message. This episode thus engenders a collective identity between species in its attempt to show a commonality through shared signs.

Finitude and Sufferings as Sympathetic Bonds

Furthermore, by describing a scene that results in the death of an animal, Thomson gestures toward what posthumanist theorists such as Cary Wolfe, Jacques Derrida, and Cora Diamond envisage as a fundamental reason for cross-species cohabitation. As Wolfe explains, a 'fundamental ethical bond we have with nonhuman animals resides in our shared finitude, our vulnerability and mortality as "fellow creatures"'.¹⁸⁸ Thomson invokes this strategy repeatedly in *The Seasons* to create a sympathetic union between different animals by emphasising their shared destinies with man. In highlighting the fatality all beings are subject to, Thomson proposes an understanding of interspecies relationships based on kinship, including the capacity to feel hurt.¹⁸⁹ This sentiment was famously codified in 1780 in Jeremy Bentham's declaration that

The day *may* come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny [...] It may come one day to be recognized that the number of legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate? What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But

¹⁸⁸ Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism* (University of Minnesota, 2010), p. 80.

¹⁸⁹ As demonstrated on pp. 64-66, Thomson uses words such as 'race' to create an impression that all creatures belong to the same family. Similarly, L.P. Wilkinson has stated that in Virgil's *Georgics*, 'Man and beasts are not distinguished. Love and death are dominant themes in this Book, and between them comes disease and age'. See L.P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil: A Critical Study* (Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 94.

suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?¹⁹⁰

Musing on this pronouncement, Jacques Derrida agrees, as does Cora Diamond, with Bentham's ethical statement, 'Can they suffer?' For Derrida, at the heart of this sentiment, 'Mortality resides there. As the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion'.¹⁹¹ Bentham, Diamond, Derrida and Wolfe stress universal compassion for all species because of their interconnective fate. Their secular sentiment is comparable to Thomson's Christian message that all living beings have a coequal claim to life because of their shared lineage from God.

The Seasons not only describes the cruel treatment of animals in field sports, but it also illustrates how, in his domesticated practices, man can be a 'tyrannic Lord' to such creatures as bees.¹⁹² To collect their honey, the husbandman must empty the hive of its inhabitants. Eighteenth-century beekeepers knew how to achieve this humanely but still resorted to practices that devastated the entire colony. One such procedure is described in *A Dictionary of Husbandry*. This method involved starting a fire in a pre-dug pit. The hive is then placed over the aperture, and the bees are subjected to the poisonous smoke that enters the hive. The inevitable result is that 'you'll have the Bees dead in a quarter of an Hour'.¹⁹³ It is this system of collecting honey that is described in *The Seasons*. The details Thomson depicts are faithfully represented, even though they are presented in a poetic idiom. His tone is far from neutral. The poet's emotive description leaves his audience in no doubt concerning his

¹⁹⁰ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. by J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 283.

¹⁹¹ Jacques Derrida, 'The Animals That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. by David Wills (Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 28.

¹⁹² Au., 1189.

¹⁹³ *Dictionarium Rusticum Urbanicum & Botanicum: or A Dictionary of Husbandry, Gardening, Trade, Commerce, and All Sorts of Country-Affairs*, 2nd edition, (London: J. Nicolson, 1717), p. 28

thoughts on this procedure. For him, the bees are a ‘tender Race’ and ‘happy People’, in which they are ‘robb’d and murder’d, in that Pit’.¹⁹⁴ Co-opting Aristotle’s, Beattie’s and Blair’s view that society is a marker of rational beings, Thomson stresses the bees’ communal spirit. He describes them as:

Sat tending public Cares, and planning Schemes
Of Temperance,¹⁹⁵

Unfortunately, these rational acts of foresight are cruelly cut short as:

[...] Thousands, tumbles [sic] from their honey’d Domes,
Convolv’d, and agonizing in the Dust.¹⁹⁶

As noted earlier, Thomson’s choice of bees is especially relevant concerning Virgil’s *Georgics*. David Fairer observes the importance that bees play in the *Georgics* when he writes, for

Virgil the farmer-poet, the ideal of practical organisation is represented by the beehive, which forms the subject of his final book. This analysis of a state-in-miniature brings to a climax the *Georgics*’ concern with how civic order should reflect the natural interdependence of all life.¹⁹⁷

Thomson also represents bees as an ordered community. In describing the practices prejudicial to vulnerable creatures, Thomson aims to re-educate his audience. He endeavours to accomplish this by showing them the signs of cruelty inherent in the practices of man.

The Seasons as a Guide for Interspecies Relationships

Thomson is performing the part of a moral husbandman, guiding his flock of readers on how to interact with other species ethically. This is how John More interprets the poet’s role when he pronounces that

in delineating the sufferings of creatures in so many important respects on a level with ourselves, imagination is totally out of the question, and the heart alone affected. We then overlook our natural superiority, and commiserate those for

¹⁹⁴ Au., 1181, Au., 1176. and Au., 1172.

¹⁹⁵ Au., 1177-1178.

¹⁹⁶ Au., 1182-1183.

¹⁹⁷ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (Pearson Education Limited, 2003), p. 95.

kindred, whom at another time, we might trample to death, or devour as lawful prey.¹⁹⁸

Thomson's poem attempts to elicit a sympathetic reaction from its readers. However, the success of this strategy was both complex and, at times, contradictory. Responding to the lines:

[...] *Man*, whom Nature form'd of milder Clay,
With every kind Emotion in his Heart,

Percival Stockdale thought, 'This pathetic passage from a muse who was eminent for humanity, if it cannot make us Pythagoreans or Gentoos, should at least make us the merciful protectors of the animal creation while we suffer them to live'.¹⁹⁹ John Lamb was similarly moved. Writing in support of the *Bill for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (1809), he alludes to the following lines from 'Spring':

But let not on thy Hook the tortur'd Worm,
Convulsive, twist in agonizing Folds;
[...] as you tear it from the bleeding Breast²⁰⁰

Reflecting on this cruel act, Lamb writes

On Sunday goes forth the angler to his innocent recreation (as men humorously call it) and impales the poor earthworm, which in its torture writhes about with strength prodigious in so small and soft an animal, [...] while a copious slimy sweat, as of blood, exudes from every pore'.²⁰¹

Not all reactions to Thomson's poem were this unambiguous. John Lawrence can evince a more uncertain example. Writing in *The British Field Sports* (1818), he confesses that after reading the hunting episodes in *The Seasons*

¹⁹⁸ John More, *Strictures, Critical and Sentimental, on Thomson's The Seasons* (Richardson and Urquhart, 1777), pp. 219-20.

¹⁹⁹ Sp., 349-350. Percival Stockdale, 'Notes to *The Seasons*', *The Seasons* (John Stockdale, 1794), no page number. Note to 'P. 18. l.16'.

²⁰⁰ Sp., 388-389 and 391.

²⁰¹ John Lamb, *A Letter to the Right Hon. William Windham on his Opposition to Lord Erskine's Bill for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (Maxwell and Wilson, 1810), pp. 19-20. In a review of this pamphlet, an anonymous writer concurs with Lamb, stating, 'We have no doubt that the bull, which feeds in Mr. Windham's meadows at Felbrig, has as much repugnance to the *pleasant pastime* of being beaten with bludgeons by a mob of clowns, or lacerated by a couple of bull-dogs as he would himself'. See *The Critical Review, or Annals of Literature*, 20.1 (J. Mawman, 1810), p. 110.

I must freely own that, these sentiments of the Poet, at once so humane and rational, have ever had considerable weight in my mind, and I humbly conceive, that Hunting would lose nothing, either of its charms and allurements, or its real advantages, by a distinction in favour of the timid and harmless Animals.²⁰²

This compassionate sentiment is then followed with an antithetical declaration that ‘gradual reflection, may work this change in their favour [but] were I at this instant mounted, and in view of a Hare or Stag Hunt, the probability is that, I should leave reflection behind me—Tally ho! and join the jovial Chase’.²⁰³ Lawrence’s confession shows how split he is on the subject. Lamb explains such a contradictory stance thus ‘The imperfection of our moral obligations long acted on, you see, Sir, renders it of no consideration; the amusement of an idle and stupid animal of our own class in natural history, is of more importance’.²⁰⁴ Lamb’s comment testifies to how prevalent Lawrence’s view was. Lawrence freely acknowledges that his reason concedes the pointless cruelty involved in field sports, but his passions drive him to repeat a practice he knows to be wrong.²⁰⁵

Animal Signs of Social Harmony in *The Seasons*

The Seasons not only documents signs that evince social disharmony between different species but also gives counter-evidence of a world full of joyous communications that celebrate harmonious communities. These examples again challenge prevailing theories of speech that deny nonhumans parity. Eighteenth-century theoreticians who insisted language was the faculty that divided man from the rest of creation would probably dismiss the creaturely voice (bodily gestures and audible sounds of animals) as reactive. To constitute communication for them, signs need to express a rational mind that communicates an idea to

²⁰² John Lawrence, *British Field Sports* (Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1818), p. 296.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ John Lamb, *A Letter to the Right Hon. William Windham on his Opposition to Lord Erskine’s Bill for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (Maxwell and Wilson, 1810), p 20.

²⁰⁵ For a curtailed but concise history of hunting, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London Allen Lane, 1983), pp. 160-165.

a designated addressee. *The Seasons*, though, is populated with a cacophony of intelligible signs. For example, in ‘Spring’, the poem describes the mating calls of birds. With these specific signs unused for a year, each bird is slow to recall its required song. Eventually they:

[...] try again the long-forgotten Strain,
At first faint-warbled. But no sooner grows
The soft Infusion prevalent, and wide,
Than, all alive, at once their Joy o’erflows
In Musick unconfin’d.²⁰⁶

The fact that their song is ‘long-forgotten’ suggests that these animals are not emitting random sounds but rather pre-designated utterances that have temporal and contextual significance. This ‘prevalent and wide’ communication for Thomson is ‘The Symphony of Spring’.²⁰⁷ The birds described as ‘Quiristers’ comprise larks, thrushes, wood-larks, nightingales, blackbirds, bullfinches, linnets and more.²⁰⁸ The poem stresses that their songs are not without meaning. They are a method of communication that conforms to the rules of human language in which one subject responds to another, as in the lines:

The Black-bird whistles from the thorny Brake;
The mellow Bullfinch answers from the Grove.²⁰⁹

Thomson’s description of the birds as ‘Quiristers’ can only be fully realised when juxtaposed with the lines from ‘A Hymn on the Seasons’ quoted earlier:

Nature, attend; join every living soul,
Beneath the spacious temple of the sky,
In adoration join; and, ardent raise
An universal *Hymn!* To *Him*.²¹⁰

In their daily practice of communicating with each other through song, these animals also praise their creator. The signs the birds utter can be interpreted as having a double meaning.

²⁰⁶ Sp., 586-590.

²⁰⁷ Sp., 580.

²⁰⁸ Sp., 597. The tag of ‘Quiristers’ affirms their relationship and duty to God.

²⁰⁹ Sp., 604-605.

²¹⁰ James Thomson, ‘A Hymn on the Seasons’, *The Four Seasons, and Other Poems* (J. Millan, 1735), p. 45, lines 40-43.

They are both referential and self-referential - a cross-species dialogue and a choral acknowledgement that such vocalisations are only possible because of God.

Furthermore, the discourse between these birds evinces a central theme within *The Seasons*, that social harmony is intrinsic to nature. Ralph Cohen has stated, by showing birds mating, this 'entire passage (614-765) deals with the organization of family, the concern for children'.²¹¹ The vocalisations these birds make are not merely reactive signs. They are encoded with a message that entices female birds to mate with them. Thomson poetically describes the motivation behind these utterances, stating that it "'Tis Love creates their Melody'.²¹² The following line confutes the notion that such communication is without meaning when it declares, 'This Waste of Music is the Voice of Love'.²¹³ Thomson directly repudiates a human perspective that sees bird noises as meaningless melodic sounds. He firmly interprets their signs as an intentional act that commences social relationships. This is a point the poem stresses with the use of the word 'Voice'. John Aiken observes that such episodes recall human emotions, commenting that Thomson 'assigned to his feathered pairs feelings which only belong to human lovers'.²¹⁴ The poem continues by showing how the birds attempt to secure a partner. They accomplish this when:

[...] in airy Rings they rove,
 Endeavouring by a thousand Tricks to catch
 The cunning, conscious, half-averted Glance
 Of their regardless Charmer.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Ralph Cohen, *The Unfolding of The Seasons* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 54.

²¹² Sp., 614

²¹³ Sp., 615.

²¹⁴ John Aiken, 'A Comparison Between Thomson and Cowper as Descriptive Poets', Lucy Aiken, *A Memoir of John Aiken, M.D.*, vol. ii, 2 vols (Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1823), p. 186.

²¹⁵ Sp., 621-624.

In representing their strategies as ‘Tricks’, Thomson suggests that such signs are the premeditated actions of rational creatures. The intelligence of these birds is confirmed when their potential partners are described as both ‘cunning’ and ‘conscious’.²¹⁶

These episodes demonstrate how zoosemiotic systems initiate communal living in rational animals other than man. For Thomson, collective harmony is a concern for all species.

Writing to Aaron Hill on 18 April 1726, he elaborates on this point, stating

Social love is [...] the just and free Exercise of which, in a particular manner, renders one amiable, and divine. [...] Humanity is the very Smile and Consummation of Virtue; ‘tis the Image of fair Perfection, in the Supreme Being, which, while he was infinitely happy in himself mov’d him to create a World of Beings to make them so.²¹⁷

Conversely, when social ties are broken, it is again through language that animals communicate their pain to the world. In ‘Summer’, the poem records the response of a bereaved bird:

The Stock-Dove only thro’ the Forest cooes,
Mournfully hoarse; oft ceasing from his Plaint,
Short Interval of weary Woe! again
The sad Idea of his murder’d Mate,
Struck from his Side by savage Fowler’s Guile,²¹⁸

Its unique voice signals to the reader the bird’s lamentable condition. Like many animal responses in *The Seasons*, the adjectives that describe the dove’s actions, ‘Mournfully’ and ‘weary’, are congruent with human behaviour. In doing so, Thomson questions the exceptionalism that understands emotional states motivated by reflection as possible only by humans. *The Seasons* envisages the many congruences between animals and man, for they are ‘intelligent beings with a rich, varied social and emotional life’.²¹⁹ Further reactions to

²¹⁶ Johnson’s *Dictionary* defines ‘conscious’ as ‘Endowed with the power of knowing one’s own thoughts and actions’. See Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in 2 vols (W. Strahan, 1755).

²¹⁷ James Thomson, *James Thomson (1700-1748): Letters and Documents*, ed. by A. D. McKillop (University of Kansas Press, 1958), p. 26.

²¹⁸ Su., 615-619.

²¹⁹ Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer, ‘Preface’, *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*, ed. by Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer (St. Martin’s Press, 1993), p. 1.

domestic tragedies can be seen when a nightingale has ‘To brook the harsh Confinement of the Cage’ or when robbed of her eggs an ‘astonish’d Mother finds a vacant Nest’.²²⁰ In both cases, their replies signal the sadness when family ties are broken. In the case of the bereaved mother, she:

Takes up again her lamentable Strain
Of winding Woe; till wide around the Woods
Sigh to her Song, and with her Wail resound.²²¹

With its alliterative use of ‘w’, the cadence of this passage lingers in the reader’s ear, allowing them time to contemplate the sorrow this creature is experiencing. The poet’s use of ‘Mother’ acknowledges the bird’s reaction as one of universal maternal significance.

Regardless of their genus, animals are bound together by their emotional responses. When the parents of fledglings find they require food, the poem narrates how they forgo their hunger and give with:

Affectionate, and undesiring bear
The most delicious Morsel to their Young,²²²

This passage eschews any reference to species and instead designates them as ‘A helpless family’, making their plight universal. This scene, thus, takes on a compassionate equivalence prevalent in all domestic relationships. When these birds ‘Check their own Appetites and give them all’, they demonstrate their paternal reasonability to be a counterpart of a similar human response.²²³

Communicating Across the Divide: Interspecies Semiotics

When animals employ signs, they are not in dialogue with just their own communities. *The Seasons* demonstrates how animals dissolve the barriers between species by communicating

²²⁰ Sp., 716 and Sp., 718.

²²¹ Sp., 726-728.

²²² Sp., 677-678.

²²³ Sp., 686.

directly with their human counterparts. For example, when winter brings weather that threatens the lives of animals, domestic creatures appeal to their owners to provide shelter:

The Cattle from th' untasted Fields return,
And ask, with meaning Lowe, their wonted Stalls.²²⁴

By stressing that the signs these creatures make are pregnant with 'meaning', Thomson questions the assertion that human language is the only form of communication initiated by a rational mind. Moreover, their appeal for shelter strongly suggests that animals re-enact another criterion that distinguishes human language, that of being directed at an addressee. In line with Georgic precedent, it is the husbandman's duty to correctly interpret these signs and discharge his obligation to the cattle by leading them to their stalls. Rather than measure animals by standards that see humans as the apex, *The Seasons* erases boundary differences. This manoeuvre, on Thomson's part, is an essential strategy in harmonising the relationships between animals and humans. On this principle, Menely writes

No aptitude has played a larger role in this effort to distinguish human from animal than language. Yet, while it establishes the primary domain of difference, language alone is never sufficient, perhaps because it is evident even to the most anthropocentric philosopher that nonhumans express states of being through gesture and vocalization.²²⁵

The full importance of Menely's statement only becomes apparent with the realisation of the access these gestures and vocalisations grant. Intelligent signs are fundamental to forming societies for Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Beattie, and many other language theorists. It is not only man who reads the signs of animals. Nonhumans also interpret those marks left by different species. When during a hunt, a stag tries 'To lose the Scent', a pack of relentless dogs are 'slow, yet sure adhesive to the Track' until they 'Hot-steaming, up behind him come again'.²²⁶ Here, the dogs track the unfortunate creature by the scent it leaves behind. This

²²⁴ Wi., 84-85.

²²⁵ Tobias Menely, 'Animals Signs and Ethical Significance: Expressive Creatures in British Georgic', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 39.4 (2006), p. 113.

²²⁶ Au., 160-161. Sextus Empiricus also notes the ability of dogs to read signs, writing 'when, on arriving at a spot where three ways meet, after smelling at the two roads by which the quarry did not pass, he rushes off at

engagement is only possible because one creature can interpret the signs of another. Far from species-specific, the creaturely voice is open to interpretation by all sentient life.

Periphrastic Personification: The Erasure of Difference

The Seasons attempts to erase an epistemology that sees animals as inferior to man in another way. Even though Thomson's poem was universally praised, it drew criticism because of its prolixity. An early reviewer of the poet's work, Robert Shiels, thought that

Mr. Thomson's poetical diction in the Seasons is very peculiar to him: His manner of writing is entirely his own: He has introduced a number of compound words; converted substantives into verbs, and in short has created a kind of new language for himself. His stile has been blamed for its singularity and stiffness.²²⁷

Samuel Johnson is typically less couched on this topic. For him, 'Thomson's 'diction is in the highest degree florid and luxuriant [...] It is too exuberant, and sometimes may be charged with filling the ear more than the mind'.²²⁸ Likewise, for William Hazlitt, Thomson 'pieces out a beautiful half line with a bombastic allusion, or overloads an exquisitely natural sentiment or image with a cloud of painted, pompous, cumbrous phrases'.²²⁹ Unusually, Wordsworth concurs with Hazlitt's assessment. Even though he pronounces that *The Seasons* 'is a work of inspiration', he harshly condemns Thomson's diction because 'he writes a vicious style; and his false ornaments are exactly of that kind which would be most likely to strike the undiscerning'.²³⁰ Wordsworth's conclusion was a mantra repeated by subsequent

once by the third without stopping to smell. [...] the dog implicitly reasons thus: "The creature went either by this road, or that, or by the other: but it did not go by this road or that: therefore it went by the other". See Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, vol. i, 4 vols, trans. by R. G. Bury (Harvard University Press, 1933), p. 43. See Luciano Floridi, 'Scepticism and Animal Rationality: the Fortune of Chrysippus' Dog in the History of Western Thought', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 79.1 (1997), pp. 27-57 for an extended analysis of the importance of this incident for later writers on animal rationality.

²²⁷ Colley Cibber, *The Lives of the Poets of Great-Britain and Ireland*, vol. v, 5 vols (R. Griffiths, 1753), p. 202.

²²⁸ Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Lives of the Poets*, vol. xxiii, 23 vols, ed. by Stephen Fix et al. (Yale University Press, 2010), p. 1293.

²²⁹ William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt – Vol. 5, Lectures on the English Poets and A View of the English Stage*, 21 vols, ed. by P. P. Howe (J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1930), p. 86.

²³⁰ William Wordsworth, 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface', *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 2nd edition, vol. ii, 5 vols, ed. by E. D Selincourt (Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 419 and *ibid.*, 421.

critics until late in the twentieth century. The consensus was that the loco-descriptive passages were well chosen. However, the ‘artificiality’ of the language jarred against the poem’s theme concerning the ‘natural’ world. In other words, the form of Thomson’s poem did not harmonise with its content. A specific instance of Thomson’s ‘vicious style’ was its circumlocutionary rhetorical figures.

Cohen has noted a ‘prevalence of personification in *The Seasons*’.²³¹ In his analysis, this

figure distances the poet’s self from nature, yet provides neutral, generalized human features to express his involvement in it. Since the figure moves between human and natural characteristics, the poet can use scientific knowledge humanistically. At the same time the distancing of the poet is necessary to avoid any implication of judging nature by his values, to avoid, that is, the sin of pride.²³²

The pertinent comment here is contained in the last sentence. When Thomson employs personification, he does so in a way that ‘avoids any implication of judging nature by his [man’s] values’. The term personification is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘The attribution of human form, nature, or characteristics to something’.²³³ Thomson, though, subverts this meaning. Besides ascribing human characteristics to animals in *The Seasons*, he also attributes animal characteristics to man. Using personification in such a fluid way, the poet questions a species hierarchy that measures all creatures by an anthropocentric standard. Like his employment of equivalent animal signs and his description of interspecies social practices, Thomson’s use of personification erases the boundary between animals and humans. Moreover, it does this so that neither species is the dominant partner. Central to his figurative technique is periphrasis. Rather than directly assigning a single personified word to each individual or, more often, group, Thomson’s epithets are delivered discursively. It is this pleonastic language that critics of *The Seasons* cite as an example of its florid style. Its employment, though, is far from poetic affectation. For Kevis Goodman, Thomson uses the

²³¹ Ralph Cohen, *The Unfolding of The Seasons* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 24.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ ‘personification, n.’. Definition 1.a. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2022. Web. 4 July 2022.

technique to ‘attempt to craft an English poetic idiom corresponding to Virgil’s own periphrases’.²³⁴ This is partly true, but more critically, Thomson’s deployment of periphrasis is integral in questioning species’ differences. John Butt deems that ‘his periphrases were used not to escape vulgarity, but precisely and evocatively. [...] The periphrasis enabled him to draw attention to a single attribute’.²³⁵ Combined with a personified noun, this creates a memorable impression on the reader. For instance, he often uses periphrastic personification when writing about animals to emphasise their sociability.

In ‘Spring’, he calls fish ‘the finny Race’.²³⁶ Birds are labelled the ‘soaring Race’, the ‘lonely Race’, the ‘Summer-race’, ‘the tuneful Race’, the ‘Swallow-People’, and the ‘feathery People’.²³⁷ Bees are ‘the tender Race’ and ‘The happy People’, deer the ‘fearful-flying Race’, bears are a ‘boisterous Race’, lambs are ‘the sprightly Race’, whilst snakes belong to ‘the Savage Race’, and insects are ‘unseen People’.²³⁸ Thomson’s use of the word ‘Race’ suggests that animals, like humans, are social creatures, and his choice of ‘people’ portrays them as beings equivalent to man. Furthermore, verbs such as ‘boisterous’, ‘sprightly’, ‘fearful’ and ‘tender’ attempt to stress animal actions and emotional states comparable to their anthropological counterparts. John Aiken is thus correct when he states, ‘Another artifice which he employs to give dignity to a humble topic, is to annex to it moral sentiment, and, as it were, *humanize* the animal natures concerned in the scene’.²³⁹ Ralph Cohen has also noticed this tendency in *The Seasons*, concluding that ‘Thomson’s precision, achieved by converting periphrasis to a combination of personification and scientific classification,

²³⁴ Kevis Goodman, ‘Magnifying Small Things: Georgic Modernity and the Noise of History’, *European Romantic Review*, 15.2 (2004), p. 220.

²³⁵ John Butt, *The Augustan Age* (London, Hutchinson’s University Library, 1950), p. 94.

²³⁶ Sp., 395.

²³⁷ Sp., 753, Sp., 757, Su., 237, Su., 611, Au., 838, and Wi., 87.

²³⁸ Au., 1181, Au., 1176, Wi., 822, Wi., 836, Sp., 838, Su., 913, and Su., 311.

²³⁹ John Aiken, ‘A Comparison Between Thomson and Cowper as Descriptive Poets’, Lucy Aiken’s *A Memoir of John Aiken, M.D.*, vol. ii, 2 vols (Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1823), p. 185.

interpreted nature accurately, scientifically and humanistically in order to illustrate the relation between the realms of man and animal'.²⁴⁰

Labels such as 'Race' and 'people' are not only applied to animals. Such is their interchangeability that Thomson also relates these nomenclatures to humans. For him, people are 'the gladden'd Race', a 'Race of Heroes', the 'Thrice happy Race', or alternatively 'the gross Race'.²⁴¹ This he does to emphasise the parity between different species. One of the definitions of 'race' given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is 'belonging to the same family'.²⁴² Johnson's *Dictionary* confirms the close communal relationship inherent in the word 'race' with his first three definitions, including the word 'family'.²⁴³ More than questioning the assumption that animals are not worthy of ethical consideration, Thomson stresses that companion species deserve kinship.

Heather Keenleyside cogently notices that Thomson uses 'personification to do something besides attribute "human" or mental actions to other creatures—very often, to do something like the inverse'.²⁴⁴ By transposing his personifications, Thomson can further demonstrate to his audience the equivalency between animals and man. For example, 'luxurious Men':

[...] flutter on
From Toy to Toy, from Vanity to Vice;²⁴⁵

The amorous Damon, perplexed at how to woo his love, is:

[...] In sweet Confusion lost,
And dubious Flutterings,²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ Ralph Cohen, *The Unfolding of The Seasons* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 4.

²⁴¹ Sp., 242, Wi., 499, Wi., 881, and Wi., 944.

²⁴² 'race, n.6'. Definition 1.a. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2022. Web. 14 October 2022.

²⁴³ 'race, n.', definitions 1, 2 and 3 in Samuel Johnson's, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in 2 vols (W. Strahan, 1755).

²⁴⁴ Heather Keenleyside, *Animals and Other People* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 35.

²⁴⁵ Su., 348-9.

²⁴⁶ Su., 1293-1294.

When a mother feels that her child is in danger, her reaction is to grasp the infant ‘to her fluttering Breast’.²⁴⁷ ‘The City swarms’ as does ‘the Village’.²⁴⁸ Most tellingly, Thomson’s inverse-personification changes a courtly fool into an invertebrate in the lines:

While, a gay Insect in *his* Summer-shine,
The Fop, light-fluttering, spreads his mealy Wings.²⁴⁹

In his use of ‘flutter’ and its variations, Thomson figuratively attributes the movement of an animal’s wings to human actions and emotional states. Moreover, in the case of the ‘fop’, the poem erases his physical body, metaphorically metamorphosing him into an insect.

The Seasons’s Excursive Eye

For Donna Haraway, companion species can be defined as a ‘co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exists the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all. Historical specificity and contingent mutability rule all the way down’.²⁵⁰ Like Thomson’s use of periphrastic personification, Haraway’s theory erases species hierarchies whilst celebrating the interdependency that is an essential element of survival in any ecosystem. *The Seasons*, too, enunciates this position by showing how language can deconstruct the boundaries between species.

Thomson not only models this levelling ethos in the text but also attempts to emulate it in the poem’s structure. The organisation of *The Seasons*, viewed through a posthumanist lens, can be said to eschew a hierarchical structure of species. Twentieth-century critic Reuben Brower complains that in his descriptive passages, ‘Thomson is trying to substitute a willed or

²⁴⁷ Su., 933.

²⁴⁸ Wi., 630, and Su., 352.

²⁴⁹ Wi., 644. This character is also an allusion to Sir Fopling Flutter in George Etherege’s *The Man of Mode* (1676).

²⁵⁰ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2020), p. 12.

imposed order for the lack of unifying vision active in the separate descriptions'.²⁵¹ In his 'Life of Thomson', Samuel Johnson writes, 'The great defect of the *Seasons* is want of method; but for this I know not that there was any remedy'.²⁵² William Bayne concurs with this view, noting Johnson showed 'greater accuracy [when he] declared that the glaring defect of *The Seasons* was "its want of method"'.²⁵³ Johnson further elucidates on this point, commenting that the poem's lack of structure is not Thomson's fault but is inherent in loco-descriptive verse. This he explains when he states

There is this want in most descriptive poems, because as the scenes, which they must exhibit successively, are all subsisting at the same time, the order in which they are shewn must by necessity be arbitrary, and more is not to be expected from the last part than from the first. The attention, therefore, which cannot be detained by suspense, must be excited by diversity.²⁵⁴

However, what Johnson viewed as a lack of structure in the poem is not necessarily the defect many eighteenth-century critics thought it was. Instead, it can be understood as a celebration of interconnected multiplicity. Describing species that 'are all subsisting at the same time' allows Thomson to populate the poem with a 'diversity' of animal voices. Here, then *The Seasons* can celebrate a multiplicity of species, each endowed with their own agency.

As the title of the poem makes evident, this change is cyclical. Thomson's choice of verse further emphasises this point. Unlike the couplet, which tightly organises lines into rhyming pairs, thus enclosing the epithet/meaning between paired words, Thomson's employment of blank verse gives his lines the freedom to wander in the natural landscape of the poem. This verse form thus harmonises the loco-descriptive passages from which *The Seasons* is composed. This accounts for why critics view the poem as lacking in structure. Conrad

²⁵¹ Reuben A. Brower, 'Form and Defect of Form in Eighteenth-Century Poetry: A Memorandum', *College English*, 29.7 (1968), p. 539.

²⁵² Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Lives of the Poets*, vol. xxiii, 23 vols, ed. by Stephen Fix et al. (Yale University Press, 2010), p. 1293.

²⁵³ William Bayne, 'Introduction', James Thomson, *Poems by James Thomson* (W. Scott, 1901), p. xxvi.

²⁵⁴ Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Lives of the Poets*, vol. xxiii, 23 vols, ed. by Stephen Fix et al. (Yale University Press, 2010), p. 1195.

Brunström has observed that Thomson's 'Blank verse is effective at generating a sense of being "lost" because sentence length is so hard to predict'.²⁵⁵ Rather than present his readers with a rigid sequence of events, Thomson's poem alternatively offers 'Ten thousand wandering Images of Things'.²⁵⁶ This encourages his audience to replicate a meandering attitude when reading *The Seasons*. Like the shepherd who 'Beneath the formless Wild; but wanders on', the reader is likewise able to peruse the 'formless' descriptive passages as they too amble through the poem.²⁵⁷ David Reid has stated that he thinks 'A typical form of the desire for the illimitable in Milton and Thomson is their delight in wandering, straying, erring movement, movement that seeks to lose itself in mazes and intricate tangles'.²⁵⁸ This roving perspective is only fully realisable for both poets because of blank verse. This is not the only example of the poem's meandering structure. *The Seasons* also roams along through its use of enjambment, which overflows from one line to the next in a figurative disregard for poetic borders. For instance, in the poem's opening lines of:

Come, gentle SPRING, Etherial Mildness, come,
And from the Bosom of yon dropping Cloud,
While Music wakes around, veil'd in a Shower
Of shadowing Roses, on our Plains descend.²⁵⁹

With each line merging with the next, the poem gives a sense of expansiveness that the closed couplet would negate. This example also shows how *The Seasons* uses alliteration to arrest the reader's ear by signalling where they may want to linger over a particular locodescriptive passage. This is especially true in Thomson's use of sibilance, such as 'shadowing Roses', which in this example is reinforced by the persistent 's' sounds in 'music', 'wakes', 'Roses', Plains, and 'descend'. Here, while the auralty encourages the audience to delay and

²⁵⁵ Conrad Brunström 'Blank Verse', *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry*, ed. by Jack Lynch (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 394

²⁵⁶ Sp., 463.

²⁵⁷ Wi., 283.

²⁵⁸ David Stuart Reid, 'Thomson's Poetry of Reverie and Milton', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 43.3 (2003), p. 674

²⁵⁹ Sp., 1-4.

enjoy the sounds, the physical ‘s’ shape on the page tempts them to elliptically meander further through the poem. Even down to the grapheme (with its use of the single letter ‘s’), poetic ambling is woven into the structure of *The Seasons*, as the poem animates the reader to see the wide variety of descriptive scenes on offer.

It is apt that Thomson constantly uses multiple eyes within *The Seasons* to delineate such scenes. In 1815, Wordsworth compared Thomson’s poetry with those of his predecessors, Dryden and Pope. For Wordsworth, these earlier poets failed to see the natural world. For him, ‘A blind man, in the habit of attending accurately to descriptions casually dropped from the lips of those around him, might easily depict [...] with more truth’ than Dryden and Pope. Conversely, Thomson’s poetry engages in ‘the art of seeing’.²⁶⁰ For Wordsworth, he is ‘the teacher [who] would further the proficiency’ of his readers by showing how to view the natural world.²⁶¹ Wordsworth recognises that seeing is critical in *The Seasons*. Kevis Goodman expounds on this observation when she notes that ‘*The Seasons* has a whole battery of ocular epithets attached to it: the “philosophical eye,” “reason’s eye,” the “purer eye,” the “sage instructed eye,” and others’.²⁶² Besides these ocular images, Thomson also employs physical eyes. He shows a robin who enters a domestic setting, ‘Eyes all the smiling Family’.²⁶³ Also, in ‘Winter’ there is a social eye, composed of the narrator and the reader, in the lines:

BUT what is This? Our infant Winter sinks,
Divested of his Grandeur, should our Eye
Astonish’d shoot into the *Frigid Zone*;²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ William Wordsworth, ‘Essay, Supplementary to the Preface’, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 2nd edition, vol. ii, 5 vols, ed. by E. D Selincourt (Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 420 and *ibid*.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*.

²⁶² Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 39.

²⁶³ *Wi.*, 253.

²⁶⁴ *Wi.*, 794-796.

The communal ‘our Eye’ has the ability to wander all over the Earth, taking the reader with it. By melding the reader’s vision with the poem’s narrative eye, it also subtly suggests that both agree with *The Seasons*’s promulgations. Moreover, the almost divine spatial ability of the narrative eye to access even remote regions of the Earth further reassures Thomson’s audience of the epic scope and inclusiveness of nature.²⁶⁵

The Seasons uses the word ‘eye’ one hundred and two times. Many of these instances are associated with the individual perspectives of humans and animals that populate the poem. For Goodman, *The Seasons* uses figurative eyes to create a panoramic view of social and economic coherence. However, as the material eyes evince, Thomson’s scope is even more far-reaching. By presenting a variety of different species with multiple points of view, Thomson creates a proliferation of different agents, each one reading the signs around them. Furthermore, the poem does not privilege any one perspective. It merely dispassionately describes what it sees. If Wordsworth is correct in believing that *The Seasons* teaches ‘the art of seeing’, it is also evident that Thomson uses the eye excursively.²⁶⁶ Commenting on the cyclical nature of manual work in the Georgic, David Fairer writes, ‘in a poetic structure, ‘meaning’ can be variously located. It is not just an end product, a final figure, but the production line itself in all its intricacy’.²⁶⁷ By stressing the cyclical importance of the process of creation rather than its ‘end product’, *The Seasons* is less concerned about teleological privileging than it is about continuous universal interdependency. Such a strategy

²⁶⁵ An example of a passage from *Paradise Lost* that similarly exhibits such grand imagery can be found in the lines ‘Beyond this flood a frozen continent | Lies dark and wild, beat with perpetual storms | Of whirlwinds and dire hail, which on firm land | Thaws not, but gathers heap, and ruin seems | of ancient pile; all else deep snow and ice’. *Paradise Lost*, book ii, lines 587-591.

²⁶⁶ For a counterview that sees Thomson’s use of the eye in *The Seasons* as a political/aristocratic device that directs the reader in a similar manner to the paintings of Claude Lorrain see John Barrell, *Poetry, Language & Politics* (Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 100-118.

²⁶⁷ David, Fairer, ‘The Year Runs Round’: The Poetry of Work in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Ritual, Routine, and Regime: Repetition in Early Modern British and European Cultures*, ed. by Lorna Clymer (University of Toronto, 2006), p. 153.

ensures that the poem, in both form and structure, countenances a more fluid hierarchy of species that emphasises the importance of a continuing network of mutuality.

Shaftesbury and the Social Subject

However, constructing a text that questions the dominant ideological position provides Thomson with other challenges. If humans act like animals and animals behave like humans in *The Seasons*, what is the fundamental difference between them? Many eighteenth-century critics would have retorted that the answer is language. However, even here, Thomson shows how animal signs are equivalent to human speech. Furthermore, his stance on cross-species communication gestures towards Shaftesbury's opinion that such interactions create sympathetic bonds. This he explains when he proposes

It will be considered how many the pleasures are of sharing contentment and delight with others, of receiving it in fellowship and company and gathering it, in a manner, from the pleased and happy states of those around us, from accounts and relations of such happinesses, from the very countenances, gestures, voices and sounds, even of creatures foreign to our kind, whose signs of joy and contentment we can anyway discern. So insinuating are these pleasures of sympathy, and so widely diffused through our whole lives, that there is hardly such a thing as satisfaction or contentment of which they make not an essential part.²⁶⁸

A. R. Humphreys, like many twentieth-century critics, has noted that 'Thomson is the most distinguished poetic disciple of Shaftesbury'.²⁶⁹ The passages on communal unity in *The Seasons* articulate Shaftesburian rhetoric. In 'Summer' Thomson writes:

Of Walking comes: for him who lonely loves
To seek the distant Hills, and there converse
With Nature; there to harmonize his Heart,
And in pathetic Song to breathe around
The Harmony to others. Social Friends,

²⁶⁸ Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. by Lawrence Klein (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 204. In 'Summer', the poem offers a paean to Shaftesbury in the line 'The generous ASHLEY thine, the Friend of Man; | Who scann'd his Nature with a Brother's Eye'. See Thomson, 130.

²⁶⁹ A. R. Humphreys 'The Friend of Mankind' (1700-60) – An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sensibility', *The Review of English Studies*, 24.95 (1948), p. 209. See also C.A. Moore's 'Shaftesbury and the Ethical Poets in England, 1700-60' and Robert Inglesfield's 'Shaftesbury's Influence on Thomson's *Seasons*'.

Attun'd to happy Unison of Soul;²⁷⁰

Thomson's phrase 'converse | With Nature' positions the walker as an interlocutor with the environment and its inhabitants. This visceral semiotic correlation opens new possibilities for interspecies connectivity. For Thomson, nature has a transforming power, an ability to release the hidden social subject inherent in all creatures. A similar sentiment can be found in Shaftesbury's contention that

the case must necessarily stand, [...] when as yet they were unassociated, unacquainted and consequently without any language or form of art. But that it was their natural state to live separately can never without absurdity be allowed. For sooner may you divest the creature of any other feeling or affection than that towards society.²⁷¹

Even if Thomson occasionally employs the trope of the retired poet escaping to a bucolic setting, he always returns to the Shaftesburian premise that the soul of man only attains true harmony in a social environment. This message is constantly echoed in *The Seasons*. For instance, the poem discusses 'the *social Offspring of the Heart*', 'the social Spirit', 'social Sweetness' and 'the gay social Sense'.²⁷² Such is Thomson's conviction in Shaftesbury's thesis that he confidently describes the process in poetic terms:

The conscious Heart of Charity would warm,
And her wide Wish Benevolence dilate;
The social Tear would rise, the social Sigh;
And into clear Perfection, gradual Bliss,
Refining still, the social Passions work.²⁷³

Thomson's Christian tone implied through 'Charity and 'Bliss' hints that the emotional states of the 'social Tear' and 'social Sigh' emanate like all benevolent passions from a divine benefactor. The broader consequence of this passage is that it allows him to align

²⁷⁰ Su., 1380-1385. Thomson here follows a tradition of the solitary walker communing with nature. Similarly to the passage concerning the tears of the wounded stag, Jacques from *As You Like It* conforms to this archetype. Whereas in the previous reference, characters like him and Cowper are positioned as the other, a subject that is outside of the social space, here the solitary walker is far more liminal, as both simultaneously inside and outside of different communities.

²⁷¹ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. by Lawrence Klein (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 285.

²⁷² Au., 1029, Wi., 552, Sp., 322, and Su., 24.

²⁷³ Wi., 354-358.

Shaftesbury's psychological insights into man with the central theme of *The Seasons*: God is the creator of a diverse but harmonious natural world.

Significantly, Thomson's poem goes beyond Shaftesbury's understanding of social harmony as a quality associated almost exclusively with man. By showing animals cooperating, *The Seasons* questions their exclusion from a community predicated on social harmony.²⁷⁴

Richard Nash makes this observation when he states that much of Derrida's posthumanist claims about species companionship can be found in *The Seasons*. For Nash

If, in retracing our intellectual genealogy, we follow that path [Derrida's] as well as the one Thomson charted, we may find ourselves caught up in a world that seems freshly re-imagined, in which we are not the centre, surrounded by an environment, but participants in a vast and complex ecological, as well as social, network that both includes and exceeds us.²⁷⁵

Capacities and Kinship: Competing Strategies in *The Seasons*

Thomson's *The Seasons* is undoubtedly a text that transmitted a compassionate stance towards animals that resonated and influenced future readers of the poem. His twin strategies of capacities and kinship, with their different ideological approaches, create ambiguities in the text. Working within a humanist methodology that sees language as a marker of sociability and rationality, *The Seasons* demonstrates how animals have a semiotic system comparable to man's. Language is the preeminent human skill that testifies to their supreme status. Thus, if animals have moral equivalency in the world, it is contingent on their resemblance to man. Cary Wolfe summarises the outcome of such a manoeuvre for twenty-first-century readers when he declares

²⁷⁴ It will be Francis Hutcheson who will philosophically extend Shaftesbury's conception of social morality to include animals in works such as *A System of Moral Philosophy*.

²⁷⁵ Richard Nash, 'Poetics of the Hunt: Re-reading Agency and Re-thinking Ecology in William Somerville's *The Chase*', *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay and John Miller (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 249.

the capacities that we possess, but in diminished form, so we end up ethically recognizing them [animals] not because of their wonder and uniqueness, not because of their difference, but because they are inferior versions of ourselves, in which case the ethical humanism that was the problem from the outset simply gets reinforced and reproduced on another level.²⁷⁶

For Wolfe, this is the aporetic outcome of all humanist strategies, no matter how compassionate they attempt to be. To apply this reading to *The Seasons* feels unduly harsh. No matter how true it is for a posthumanist audience, for eighteenth-century writers such as Thomson, this manoeuvre would have been outside the humanist framework that saturates their thinking. This is not to say that *The Seasons* fails to offer a counter-discourse to a dominant ideology. Instead, such a challenge emanates from inside a discussion of the status of nonhumans predicated around a normative enlightenment conception. Thomson's strategy of capacities is a practice that stresses the similarities between species by dissolving the distinction between subject and object, in which the animal is viewed as the latter. Though anthropometrical in principle, it attempts to decentre the human and rather celebrate animal voices.

Conversely, Thomson's examples of kinship can be understood by modern readers as an escape from this possible bind since they are not reliant on comparing human and animal capacities. The language of kinship celebrates interspecies connectivity. Thus, Thomson's periphrastic personification not only metamorphoses animals into people but also figuratively transposes humans into nonhumans. Furthermore, in the sections on animal cruelty, *The Seasons* also generates a sympathetic bond between the vulnerable subject and the reader. This is achieved by reminding the audience that all species are connected by their finality. This ontological similarity is expressed in Cora Diamond's contention that 'The awareness we each have of being a living body, being "alive to the world", carries with it exposure to

²⁷⁶ Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 192.

the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them [animals]'.²⁷⁷ A strategy predicated on kinship abjures a view that seeks to elevate man over his fellow creatures.

However, an apparent clash does occur in *The Seasons*'s theological epistemology. The poem's evocation of metempsychosis proliferates an understanding that envisages 'Kindred souls' eternally being transferred from one animal to another without any hierarchy. The Christian ethos central to the poem, though, privileges the Great Chain's notion that man is superior to all other animals. Christian capabilities thus uneasily rub up against pagan kinships without either being entirely refuted by the other. Ultimately, it is a reconceptualising of the Great Chain as a linear, not hierarchical, model that surfaces in *The Seasons*. The credentials of this egalitarian structure are strengthened by placing at its apex a God who loves all his creatures equally.

A Poem Alive with Voices

The positive influence *The Seasons* had on its audience concerning animal welfare is undeniable.²⁷⁸ The poem's appeal for the compassionate treatment of nonhumans influenced writers such as William Cowper, William Wordsworth, and John Clare. Robert Burns composed an 'Address, To the Shade of Thomson, on crowning his Bust, at Ednam, Roxburgh-shire, with Bays' acknowledging his pre-eminence as a poet of nature. In this composition, Burns recognises Thomson's compassionate attitude towards animals. Lines written about 'Autumn' suggest that Thomson also:

[...] sees, with self-approving mind,
Each creature on his bounty fed.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Cora Diamond, 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy, *Philosophy and Animal Life*, ed. by Stanley Cavell (Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 74.

²⁷⁸ See p. 254 on the poem's influence.

²⁷⁹ Burns, ii, 578, 11-12.

Thus, Burns expresses the belief that his fellow Scot's motivation was ethically justifiable.

The Seasons more than describes the actions of animals. It is a text alive with creaturely voices. Here, Thomson's employment of the georgic is most graphically illustrated, as the correct interpretation of signs is central to the poem. If it is vital for their flourishing that characters in the poem correctly interpret the signs around them, it is equally critical that the reader does the same. *The Seasons*, then, is not only nominally a work about rural interpretation. It is also a text to be consumed by an urban audience as a cultural and literary product and, moreover, as a didactic manual for moral improvement. In both instances, semiotics is the poem's central practice. Thomson wants his readers to understand the importance of communication in creating harmonious relationships. John Goodridge firmly believes that 'The poem is carefully orchestrated to illustrate and illuminate a single theme [...] The tone and message of that theme is one of triumphant harmony'.²⁸⁰ This statement may be slightly reductive, but it draws attention to Thomson's belief in the importance of social relationships across species. Since Aristotle's *Politics*, a common theme in the theory of language is how it enables social structures to flourish. In the eighteenth century, Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as James Beattie, Hugh Blair, and Lord Kames espoused similar theories on how language allows societies to form. For these writers, such evidence was proof of man's pre-eminence over the rest of the natural world. Thomson's poem provides examples of nonhumans using their creaturely voice, whether corporeal or vocally, to evince that they are also social creatures and thus equally worthy of ethical consideration. On this premise, *The Seasons* appeals to the sentiment of its readers to treat animals as companion species. This entreaty is underpinned by the natural theology of Shaftesbury, with its

²⁸⁰ John Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 12.

contention that man is inherently virtuous and social. From this stance, Thomson extends Shaftesbury's position and situates animals as companion species.

This claim to enfranchisement, though, is made on a more certain ground than an understanding of comparative capabilities authorised on anthropocentric terms. In its attempt to avoid the ambiguities introduced by a methodology based on capacities, *The Seasons*'s semiotic connections eviscerate the naturalised boundaries between species. Thus, when animals communicate in the poem, their signs are represented as being equal to human language. Moreover, the sign is the paradigmatic structure in *The Seasons* as it literally enables interspecies connectivity whilst also being the impetus behind individuals becoming organised societies. The poem, with its multiple loco-descriptive scenes, presents a cornucopia of semiotic exchanges between different species to the reader. In doing so *The Seasons* celebrates a world alive with rational animal voices.

Chapter Two

The Word Made Flesh and the Flesh Made Word: Poetic Creation in Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.²⁸¹

Eighteenth-Century Theological Pamphlets Against Animal Cruelty

As documented in the previous chapter, Bougeant's *A Philosophical Amusement upon the Language of Beasts* and John Hildrop's *Free Thoughts Upon the Brute-Creation* were just two examples of didactic writings that attempted to erase the difference between humans and animals in the first half of the eighteenth century. These authors were not isolated Christian voices. From the 1750s onwards there was a marked increase in texts that co-opted the Bible to argue for compassion towards animals. John Morillo cogently notes, 'at the centre of this cultural war was the theological and Cartesian question of whether animals had souls, and what that entailed for their lives and ours'.²⁸² For example, the anonymous pamphlet *Clemency to Brutes* (1761) opens with a quotation from the book of *Proverbs*, 'A righteous Man regardeth the Life of his Beast'.²⁸³ This reference instigates a practice throughout *Clemency*: deferring to scriptural authority to persuade its reader. The pamphlet's exegesis explains that man should only kill for food.

This point is particularly levelled at working-class families, whose cruel pastimes are seen as an attempt to imitate the practices of their social betters. Unintentionally, though, by

²⁸¹ Smart, 30, A, 1-3.

²⁸² John Morillo, *The Rise of Animals and Descent of Man, 1660-1800* (University of Delaware Press, 2018), p. 72.

²⁸³ Anon, *Clemency to Brutes; The Substance of Two Sermons Preached on a Shrove-Tuesday, With a Particular View to Dissuade from that Species of Cruelty Annually Practised in England, The Throwing at Cocks* (R. and J. Dodsley, 1761), p. 3. See Prov., 12, 10.

acknowledging that the upper classes also engage in blood sports, it imbricates all sections of society. The author's strategy here is to demonstrate how everyday occurrences of barbarity towards animals lead to a moral degradation of the nation.²⁸⁴ This is detrimental to the image of Britain as a place of humane Christian values, as the author makes clear when he states, 'Barbarity [...] is very highly reproachful to our Nation'.²⁸⁵ For a single individual

Cruelty to them throws on a Man's general Character such odious Insinuations, the opposite Behaviour by the rule of Contraries, must have a tendency to create in People a favourable Opinion of it; It must have a very strong tendency towards rendering him esteemed and caressed, as the Friend and Benefactor of Mankind.²⁸⁶

When individuals practice Christian compassion towards animals, this will exponentially create a godly nation. However, by excluding wild creatures as worthy of compassion, *Clemency to Brutes* defines itself in anthropocentric terms. If this pamphlet only extended benevolence towards creatures that benefited man, other texts later in the century would go much further. Nevertheless, it is sincere in its attempt to mitigate animal cruelty on theological grounds.

James Granger's biting polemic *An Apology for Brute Creation* (1772) exceeds even *Clemency to Brutes* in its combative rhetoric. Like *Clemency*, *Apology* also inscribes itself as a sermon, thus testifying to its Christian principles. In its opening salvo, though, Granger goes further in his attack on his parishioners than the author of *Clemency* had dared. Satirically and with bitter irony, Granger dedicates his pamphlet to his neighbour, Tom Drayman. This is no panegyric. Instead, Granger complains that Drayman

²⁸⁴ Interestingly, the first print in William Hogarth's *The Four Stages of Cruelty* shows boys cock throwing. Kant's argument that cruelty to animals is the first stage in being cruel to humans uses this print series to explain his idea. The anonymous author of *Clemency to Brutes* also references this series as an exemplar to describe the consequences of cruelty to animals.

²⁸⁵ Anon, *Clemency to Brutes; The Substance of Two Sermons Preached on a Shrove-Tuesday, With a Particular View to Dissuade from that Species of Cruelty Annually Practised in England, The Throwing at Cocks* (R. and J. Dodsley, 1761), p. 3.

²⁸⁶ Anon, *Clemency to Brutes; The Substance of Two Sermons Preached on a Shrove-Tuesday, With a Particular View to Dissuade from that Species of Cruelty Annually Practised in England, The Throwing at Cocks* (R. and J. Dodsley, 1761), p. 20.

Having seen thee exercise the lash with greater rage, and heard thee swear, at the same time, more roundly and forcibly than I ever saw, or heard, any of thy brethren of the whip in London, I cannot help thinking that thou hast the best right to this discourse. But I am afraid, Tom, that I shall, in some parts of it, appear to thee to be as great a *Barbarian* as thou seemest to me a Savage.²⁸⁷

Here, Granger's use of '*Barbarian*' gestures towards the word's original derivation as defined by the Greeks.²⁸⁸ For them, all those outside their culture were uncivilised.²⁸⁹ With the association of ancient Greece as an archetype of an enlightened culture, Granger positions himself as speaking from within a community that propagates the same edifying values. With one crucial difference, Granger's classic model is shorn of its pagan theology and replaced with a Christian ethos. Conversely, he concedes that Drayman will view him as a 'barbarian' because excessively lashing horses is viewed as a normalised occurrence in eighteenth-century Britain. In criticising Drayman's treatment of his horse, Granger condemns all those who replicate his actions. In the pamphlet's opening lines, Granger sets up two opposing groups. The first is a civilised community that adheres to the compassionate treatment of animals as preached in the scriptures. The second is a savage one that routinely mistreats domesticated animals.

Granger proceeds to implore Drayman, 'For God's sake and thy own, have some compassion upon these poor beasts; and especially the fore-horse of thy team. He is as sensible of blows as thou art'.²⁹⁰ Similarly to *Clemency, An Apology for the Brute Creation* proposes that the moral worth of a nation can be measured by its compassionate treatment of animals. Passages from the Bible ably support all of Granger's points. The success of his sermon can be gauged

²⁸⁷ James Granger, *An Apology for the Brute Creation, or Abuse of Animals Censured; In a Sermon on Proverbs xii. 10. Preached in the Parish Church of Shiplake, in Oxfordshire, October 18, 1772* (T. Davies and W. Goldsmith, 1772), p. 2. The passage from the Bible that Granger is preaching on is from Proverbs, 12, 10, 'A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast'.

²⁸⁸ From the Greek βάρβαρος.

²⁸⁹ 'barbarian, n. and adj.'. Definition 2.a. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/15380 [accessed 18 November 2022].

²⁹⁰ James Granger, *An Apology for the Brute Creation, or Abuse of Animals Censured; In a Sermon on Proverbs xii. 10. Preached in the Parish Church of Shiplake, in Oxfordshire, October 18, 1772* (T. Davies and W. Goldsmith, 1772), p. 3.

in two conflicting pieces of evidence. As a text, *An Apology for the Brute Creation* went through four editions by 1776. However, as a sermon preached before parishioners, it was a failure. In a postscript to the pamphlet, Granger concedes, ‘The foregoing discourse gave almost universal disgust to two considerable congregations. The mention of dogs and horses, was censured as a prostitution of the dignity of the pulpit, and considered proof of the Author’s growing insanity’.²⁹¹ Ultimately, Granger could not bridge the gap between himself and the ‘savages’.

If Granger’s pamphlet met with mixed fortunes, Humphry Primatt’s *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals* (1776) was far more influential. John Morillo believes Primatt ‘earns his place at the head of the published [...] clerics instrumental in advancing animal clemency and rights in the eighteenth century’.²⁹² Similarly, Aaron Garret states he is ‘one of the most important figures in the development of a notion of animal rights’.²⁹³ He also received praise in a book on the history of the RSPCA, which declared, ‘All lovers of animals should remember the name of that author with gratitude, because, as we shall presently show, Dr Primatt’s book may be regarded as the foundation-stone of this society’.²⁹⁴ Near contemporaries also viewed Primatt’s text as a significant advancement in the ethical treatment of nonhumans. John Toogood’s 1792 pamphlet *The Country Clergyman’s Shrovetide Gift to his Parishioners* acknowledges this debt in its subtitle, *Taken Chiefly from Dr Primatt’s Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy, and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*. For all this, there are sparse details concerning Primatt’s life.

²⁹¹ James Granger, *An Apology for the Brute Creation, or Abuse of Animals Censured; In a Sermon on Proverbs xii. 10. Preached in the Parish Church of Shiplake, in Oxfordshire, October 18, 1772* (T. Davies and W. Goldsmith, 1772), p. 22.

²⁹² John Morillo, *The Rise of Animals and Descent of Man, 1660-1800* (University of Delaware Press, 2018), p. 97.

²⁹³ Aaron Garrett, ‘Introduction’, *Animal Language, Animal Passions and Animal Souls* (Thoemmes Press, 2000), p. xix.

²⁹⁴ Edward G. Fairholme and Wellesley Pain, *A Century of Work for Animals: The History of the RSPCA, 1824-1924* (John Murray, 1924), p. 10.

Among the few known facts is that he was born in London in 1735. He entered Clare College, Cambridge in 1752 and gained a BA by 1757. He died at Kingston-Upon-Thames on February 23 1777.²⁹⁵ Critically, ‘Primatt left the Church of England in 1774 [...] due to his growing discontentment with it and his fellow clerics’ doctrinalism, and out of a conviction that he could do more good outside of the church’.²⁹⁶ In a letter he wrote John Calder, Primatt shows the direction of his theological and intellectual thinking before writing *A Dissertation on Duty and Mercy*. Here, he confessed he was ‘unfortunately debarred from all rational discourse, through the narrow and bigoted notions of his [church] brethren’.²⁹⁷ To pursue a course he believed would promote ‘rational discourse’, he turned to Unitarianism. It is from this position that Primatt composed his influential work on animal compassion.

Primatt’s *Dissertation on the Duty and Mercy* was his only published work, but its longevity has far outlasted all other eighteenth-century pamphlets on this subject, being in print between 1776-1834.²⁹⁸ Primatt presents his text to ‘men of all ranks’, including ‘those, who have not had the advantage of a liberal education’.²⁹⁹ He thus stakes his claim that alleviating animal suffering is the responsibility of every human. This sentiment is confirmed when Primatt proclaims in the opening sentences of his tract that

Love is the great Hinge upon which universal Nature turns. The Creation is a transcript of the divine Goodness; and every leaf in the Book of Nature reads us a lecture on the wisdom and benevolence of its great Author.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ *The London Chronicle*, February 25-27, 1777, (James Dodsley, 1777), p. 195. *The London Chronicle* writes, ‘On Sunday died, at Kingston upon Thames, the Rev. Dr. Humphry Primatt’.

²⁹⁶ Adam Brigden, ‘Humphry Primatt (1735-1777): Animal Protection and Its Revolutionary Contexts’, *Anglican Theologians*, ed. by Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey (Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 99. Adam Brigden has discovered important information about Primatt’s life, which corrects previous anachronistic accounts.

²⁹⁷ John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. iv, 8 vols (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 840. Letter to John Calder, 11 November, 1773.

²⁹⁸ Ryder, Richard D. ‘Primatt, Humphry (bap. 735, d. 1776/7), Church of England clergyman and writer on animal welfare’. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 03. (2023), <https://www.oxforddnb-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-47020>. [assessed 8 February 2023]. See also Richard D. Ryder, ‘Introduction’, Humphry Primatt, *The Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*, ed. by Richard D. Ryder (Centaur Press, 1992), pp. 11-17.

²⁹⁹ Humphry Primatt, *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals* (R. Hett, 1776), p. v.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

Humans and nonhumans reside together as part of a ‘universal Nature’, both owing their existence to a compassionate ‘Author’. Up to this point, Primatt’s strategy is an orthodoxy espoused by Hildrop and Granger; all species deserve moral consideration because they all came from a loving creator. Where he differs from the majority of divines is in formulating the central importance that pain plays in justifying animal welfare. Thus, he writes

in *one* particular we all agree alike, from the most perfect to the most dull and deformed of men, and from him down to the vilest brute, that we are all susceptible and sensible of the misery of *Pain* [...] Superiority of rank or station exempts no creature from the sensibility of pain nor does the inferiority render the feelings thereof less exquisite. Pain is pain, whether it be inflicted on man or beast.³⁰¹

If this dictum sounds familiar, it is because it is strikingly similar to what is widely acknowledged as the most famous pronouncement on animal suffering in the eighteenth century, Jeremy Bentham’s footnote in his *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.³⁰² However, Primatt’s statement precedes Bentham’s declaration by fourteen years.³⁰³ As such, he is the progenitor of a line of argument that extends through Bentham’s utilitarian position to Peter Singer, whose 1975 book *Animal Liberation* was influential to modern critics of animal suffering.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Ibid., 7.

³⁰² See p. 53 for this passage.

³⁰³ Martha Nussbaum declares, ‘Bentham famously argued that the species to which a creature belongs is as irrelevant, for ethical purposes, as its race: it does not supply a valid reason to deprive a sentient being of a decent life’. See Martha Nussbaum, ‘The Moral Status of Animals’, *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, ed. by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (Berg, 2007), p. 32. Though Primatt is usually given credit for stating that pain is the overruling factor for benevolence towards animals, a case could be made that the philosopher John Gay (1699-1745) was the first to pronounce this sentiment publicly in his *Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality* (1731). An anonymous contribute to *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1749 also stressed this point. In summing up the cruelty to cock-throwing, he declares, ‘Reader farewell, but learn some compassion towards an innocent creature, that has, at least, as quick a sense of *pain* as thyself, whatever it has of *Justice, Mercy and Truth*’. See *Gentleman’s Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, vol. 19 (Edward Cave, 1749), p. 148.

³⁰⁴ Keith Tester comments, ‘In Britain the concern with animals’ rights has been an especially widespread and lively social issue since the middle of the 1970s (although, as we will see, the roots of the idea are to be found in the eighteenth century). The surge of interest can be attributed to the debates stimulated by the book *Animal Liberation*, written by the Australian philosopher Peter Singer’. See Keith Tester, *Animals and Society: The Humanity of Animal Rights* (Routledge, 1991), p. 2.

Primatt continues his argument by giving various instances of maltreated animals. These exemplars are often taken directly from the Bible. For example, he relates the parable of Balaam abusing his ass, as related in chapter twenty-two of ‘Numbers’. Rather than see this as a figurative story, Primatt insists on a literal interpretation focusing on the cruelty inflicted upon the poor creature. For Primatt, if God speaking through an ass is a miracle, ‘a greater miracle’ occurs when ‘the Rider is not struck dumb with amazement at the voice of the beast. Infatuated even unto madness, he considers not the overruling power of GOD’.³⁰⁵ Thus, Primatt downplays the importance of a talking animal and focuses on Balaam’s ‘infatuated’ madness instead.³⁰⁶ What is critical in this passage for Primatt is not God’s miraculous intervention. Instead, it is the cruelty that the ass undergoes. Answering critics who deny the validity of cruelty to animals as a subject worthy of deliberation in the scriptures, he robustly responds, ‘I wish this part of the sacred history were more duly and gravely attended to, than I fear it is’.³⁰⁷ Even though Primatt acknowledges this episode’s ‘sacred’ source, his use of ‘history’ evinces his belief that this event manifestly occurred. By presenting this occurrence as a documented account of animal cruelty rather than a figurative parable, Primatt focuses his reader’s attention on the unfortunate ass instead of its broader biblical significance, albeit one with moral worth because of its scriptural heritage.

Primatt’s insistence in this literal reading goes against most exegesis on this passage.

Moreover, as Jane Spencer notes, ‘After Primatt, the literal interpretation of Balaam’s ass as a

³⁰⁵ Humphry Primatt, *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals* (R. Hett, 1776), p. 222.

³⁰⁶ In a footnote at the end of this passage, Primatt directs his reader to Thomas Newton’s *Dissertation on the Prophecies*. Here, Newton comments, ‘it is thought strange, that Balaam should express no surprise upon this extraordinary occasion: but perhaps he had been accustomed to prodigies with his enchantments [sic]; or perhaps believing in eastern doctrin [sic] of the transmigration of human should into the bodies of brutes’. See Thomas Newton, *Dissertation on the Prophecies, Which Have Been Fulfilled and at the Same Time are Fulfilling in the World*, vol. i, 3 vols (J and R. Tonson and S. Draper, 1754), pp. 119-20.

³⁰⁷ Humphry Primatt, *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals* (R. Hett, 1776), p. 229.

story against cruelty spread'.³⁰⁸ Primatt's strategy for his non-figurative reading of this incident becomes evident when he apologises for the length of time he has spent explaining its relevance. He confesses, 'I have dwelt longer upon it, because this *particular instance* of passion and cruelty is, I believe, more common than any other'.³⁰⁹ Brutality to equine creatures is not confined to the Bible, but one Primatt believes is currently prevalent. By updating the scene from a biblical setting to a contemporary one, he transfers the responsibility for rectifying animal cruelty from a remit solely in the province of God. Instead, he charges his fellow men to intercede on behalf of brute creation.

What complicates the narrative of writers such as Granger and Primatt is the indeterminacy concerning animals when the entirety of the Bible is taken into consideration. As Rod Preece and David Fraser explain

within Christian thought we see a history of conflict and contradiction that defies any simple classification. Some of the conflicts involve different denominations with different views about the human-animal relationship. However, within denominations, there also have been competing views, and sometimes the debate has occurred within individual souls.³¹⁰

This is not to say that writers who actively opposed the position held by Granger and Primatt advocated cruelty to animals. Instead, they preached in favour of a biblical understanding of 'dominion' that transformed animals from subjects to objects. This form of speciesism

³⁰⁸ Jane Spencer, *Writing About Animals in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 62. Examples of this literal interpretation include lines 467-479 from 'Book 6' of Cowper's *The Task* and an episode from Sarah Trimmer's *Sacred History* (2.69). Spencer further observes that Primatt's text partakes in a wider trend in this period, namely, stories, often in children's literature, about cruelty to animals. See *ibid.* What connects Primatt with this phenomenon is his didactic use of a single story extracted from the Bible rather than an abstract scriptural quote.

³⁰⁹ Humphry Primatt, *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals* (R. Hett, 1776), p. 235.

³¹⁰ Rod Preece and David Fraser, 'The Status of Animals in Biblical and Christian Thought: A Study of Colliding Values', *Society and Animals*, 8.3 (2000), p. 258.

sacrifices nonhuman agency to economic determinism and consequently materially enriches humans whilst simultaneously diminishing animal happiness.³¹¹

Background to Christopher Smart and *Jubilate Agno*

Christopher Smart's own poetic concern towards animals grapples with the identical biblical passages that engaged Granger and Primatt. There is no record of him having read these pamphlets, but it is highly suggestive that all of these authors were reading the same sections of the Bible to justify their cause. As such, the sympathy towards animals in his poems has much in common with the views these divines expressed.

Born in Shipbourne in 1722, Smart was educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge. He won the University's Seatonian Prize, given for the best poem in English on a subject 'conducive to the honour of the Supreme Being and recommendation of Virtue', on each of the five occasions he entered it. However, his fortunes in later life were not so happy. In 1757, he was committed to St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics. He spent a year there before being admitted in 1758 to Mr. Potter's private establishment in Bethnal Green. The severity of Smart's condition is not entirely clear. Upon his malady, Johnson comments, 'I did not think he ought to be shut up. His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him; and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as anyone else'.³¹² Hester Thrale mirrors this opinion.

For her

While *Kit Smart* thought it his Duty to pray in *Secret*, no living Creature knew how mad he was; but soon as the Idea struck him that every Time he thought of praying, Resistance against the divine Impulse (as he conceived it) was a Crime; he knelt down in the Streets, & Assembly rooms, and wherever he was when the Thought

³¹¹ R.D. Ryder defines 'speciesism' as the 'widespread discrimination that is practised by man against other species [...] Speciesism and racism both overlook or underestimate the similarities between the discriminator and those discriminated against and both forms of prejudice show a selfish disregard for the interests of others, and their sufferings'. See R.D. Ryder, *Victims of Science* (Davis-Poynter, 1975), p. 16. Ryder goes on to show that he is in a tradition that Primatt initiated by claiming that all beings suffer pain alike.

³¹² James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson; Together with Boswell's Journey of a Tour to the Hebrides*, vol. i, 6 vols, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill, rev. and enlarged by L.F. Powell (Clarendon Press, 1934-1950), p. 397.

cross^d his Mind—and this indecorous Conduct obliged his Friends to place him in a Confinement whence many mad as he remain excluded, only because their *Delusion* is not known.³¹³

In *Jubilate Agno*, Smart confirms the views of Johnson and Thrale for his enthusiasm to pray in public, confessing:

For I blessed God in S^t James's Park till I routed all the company.
For the officers of the peace are at variance with me, and the watchman smites me
with his staff.³¹⁴

As evinced in these lines, Smart attempts to justify his actions by imitating the rhythms and metre found in the Psalms, thus suggesting that his passion for prayer is divinely authorised. From these three accounts, what seems to have caused his committal was a zeal to pray in public. In his *Journal* for the 31 July 1739, John Wesley associates such enthusiasm with 'religious delusion'.³¹⁵ Quoting an anonymous source, he agrees with their sentiment that 'A Minister of our Church, who may look upon it as his duty to warn his parishioners, or an author who may think it necessary to caution his readers against such Preachers or their doctrine'.³¹⁶ This comment, combined with Johnson's and Thrale's opinions on Smart, suggests that excessive religious fervour in public was viewed as a transgression of polite society. Seemingly, on this basis alone, he was denied his liberty.

Smart composed *Jubilate Agno* between 1759 and 1763 while incarcerated. Criticism of this piece must be tempered by the thought that the poem remains incomplete. What Smart's final design was or how the poetic lines were to be organised is now impossible to tell with complete certainty. Discovered among the papers of Colonel Carwardine Probert, W.F. Stead oversaw the first publication of Smart's poem in 1939 under the title *Rejoice in the Lamb: A*

³¹³ Hester Lynch Thrale, *Thraliana, the Diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs Piozzi)*, vol. i, 2 vols, ed. by Katharine C. Balderston (Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 728. Entry for 17 January 1789.

³¹⁴ Smart, 55, B1, 89-90.

³¹⁵ John Wesley, *The Journals of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. i, 4 vols (London, J.M. Dent & Sons Limited, 1913), p. 216.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

Song from Bedlam. The ‘manuscript is written on both sides of loose folio leaves, ten single and three double, giving thirty-two pages in all’.³¹⁷ W.H. Bond challenged Stead’s chronological ordering of the lines. He argued for a closer relationship between the LET and FOR verses that were numbered or dated concomitantly. His 1954 edition of *Jubilate Agno* changed Stead’s layout; instead, he printed the ‘Let’ verses on the left-hand page and the extant ‘For’ verses on the right-hand. Karina Williamson concurs with Bond’s surmise that there is a close connection between the ‘Let’ and ‘For’ verses. She, though, opts for a different arrangement from him. For the version of *Jubilate Agno* Williamson edited for Clarendon Press’s *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart*, she alternates the ‘Let’ and ‘For’ verses down the same page. Harriet Guest believes this creates a problem for the reader because by doing so, Williamson fails to respect ‘the evidence of catchwords in the MS, which indicates that one ‘Let’ verse is followed by another, and not by a ‘For’ verse.’³¹⁸ Critically, then, Williamson’s version of *Jubilate Agno* obscures the vertical relationship between concurrent ‘Let’ or ‘For’ verses and instead promotes a horizontal reading that stresses a ‘Let’ verse *with* a ‘For’ verse. Critically, as will be shown later in this chapter, *Jubilate Agno* is a text that insists on being read in various directions simultaneously. Moreover, the act of movement, which Smart terms ‘translation’, is key to material and poetic creation.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Karina Williamson, ‘Introduction’, Christopher Smart, *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, Volume I: Jubilate Agno*, 6 vols, ed. by Karina Williamson (Clarendon Press, 1980), p. xxii. All pages are in Christopher Smart’s handwriting. Williamson further elucidates, ‘The manuscript consists of a series of disconnected fragments. A is a double folio, number 1, containing LET verses only. Folio 2 is missing. B consists of four pairs of cognate leaves (originally double-folios) containing 295 LET verses (folio 3) and 768 FOR verses (folios 3-5). C consists of two unnumbered sing leaves, one of LET, one of FOR verses, which appear from dates in the text to be parallel; these must be portions of one of the missing folios 6-9. D consists of two double-folios of LET verses, numbered 10-11. The text breaks off less than half-way down the fourth side of folio 11, so it seems unlikely it was continued’. See p. xxii.

³¹⁸ Harriet Guest, *A Form of Sound Words; The Religious Poetry of Christopher Smart* (Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 125, n. 3. Williamson’s choice of combining ‘Let’ and ‘For’ verses on the same page seems particularly perverse in light of Bond’s comment that ‘Obviously the author [Smart] intended the *Let* and *For* sections to be physically distinct’. See W.H. Bond, ‘Introduction’, Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*, re-edited, W.H. Bond (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 18.

³¹⁹ See pp. 114-115 for the importance of this word.

Smart's Magnifying Community

Jubilate Agno precisely lays out its project in its opening lines:

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.³²⁰

As its title makes clear, this is a poem about joy, or more accurately, the manifestation of bodily and spiritual joy that occurs when worshipping God. This theme is woven into the structure of *Jubilate Agno*. Its poetic metre is closely aligned with the lyrical psalms, whilst its concern with joy echoes Psalm 98's conviction that:

Shew your selves joyful unto the Lord, all ye lands: sing, rejoice and give thanks.
Praise the Lord upon the harp: sing to the harp with a psalm of thanksgiving.³²¹

Verse eight continues with:

Let the sea make a noise, and all that therein is: the round world, and they that dwell therein.³²²

Adam Potkay deems that religious

Joy is, at a fundamental level, about *getting inside*, if without (fully) knowing what it is one's getting into. In [the Book of] John, the body or self does not enter into or receive joy apart from others. It is incorporated in a Greek plural "you" (*en humin*), a body of disciples or believers who are inter-related or identified.³²³

To reject animals from a community of worshippers is to deny them access to joy. This decision also impinges directly on those who would debar others from partaking in the act of collective adoration because to impoverish any individual is to reduce the effectiveness of the

³²⁰ Smart, 30, A, 1-3. Ecclesiastes, 3, 19 states 'For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity'. This sentiment expressed in line 2 of *Jubilate Agno* is strikingly similar to the position taken by Thomson, Derrida, Wolfe and Diamond, see pp. 52-53 and p. 75.

³²¹ *The Book of Common Prayer, The Texts of 1549, 1599, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 560. Psalm 98, lines 5-6.

³²² Ibid., line 8. In Smart's translation of this verse for his *Psalms of David*, he foregrounds to a greater degree the animal life that occupies the natural than the Bible, writing, 'Let ocean make a noise | With ev'ry isle he buoys, | And after all the life his floods contain, | The rounded world above, | And all that live and love | Their Maker on the hills or plain'. See Smart, iii, 237, 43-48.

³²³ Adam Potkay, *The Story of Joy, From the Bible to Late Romanticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 31.

whole community. Moreover, both parties fail to accomplish their devotional duties by imperilling an animal's ability to praise the Lord. Following biblical precedent, Smart adheres to the conviction that a broader community will create more joy. Where he departs from Anglican orthodoxy is in the composition of this congregation. Smart's faith in joy is such that he imparts it at every opportunity. This accounts for the abundance of wordplay in *Jubilate Agno*; playful puns become expressions of joy. By creating this poem, he is involved in the act of manifesting religious exuberance on the physical page. Thus, joy not only envelops the structure and meaning of the poem but is also woven into the body of the paper he is writing on. Smart's holistic practice refuses to deny any part of his project from prohibiting a concept as critical as this one.³²⁴ Following Psalm 98's recommendation that the psalm is the perfect arrangement for expressing joy, *Jubilate Agno* models itself on this verse form. This also accords with Smart's project to update *The Book of Common Prayer* to accommodate all creatures currently excluded. By using this established assemblage of sacred words, he feels assured that the assimilation of his poetry into the heart of Anglican liturgy will be more readily accepted.

Smart's belief in the importance of joyful communal worship is not without precedent. He is following an assured literary tradition. For instance, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton writes:

Speak ye who best can tell, ye sons of light,
 Angels, for ye behold him, and with songs
 And choral symphonies, day without night,
 Circle this throne rejoicing, ye in heaven,
 On earth join all ye creatures to extol
 Him first, him last, him midst, and without end.³²⁵

³²⁴ Smart's religious enthusiasm for public prayer can be viewed as an extreme expression of spiritual joy. He is only rigorously following St. Paul's command to 'Rejoice evermore. | Pray without ceasing | In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ concerning you'. See 1 Thess., 5, 16-18.

³²⁵ See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 2nd edition, ed. by Alastair Fowler (Pearson Longman, 2007), book v, lines 160-165.

James Thomson follows this tradition in his 'A Hymn on The Seasons', writing:

Nature, attend; join every living soul,
Beneath the spacious temple of the sky,
In adoration join; and, ardent raise
An universal *Hymn! To Him*.³²⁶

In all three examples, they are poetically reinterpreting a passage from 'Revelation', which states:

lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;
And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.³²⁷

Smart's most obvious poetic model for worshipping God is the psalms. As one of the earliest forms of lyrical poetry, they inaugurate a tradition Smart intends to incorporate into his recodified liturgy. Unlike Milton and Thomson and appositely the poetry of King David, Smart proposes a far more radical hermeneutics of the book of Revelation.³²⁸ This biblical passage is indistinct concerning whether animal voices are amongst those who praise God. *Jubilate Agno* removes this doubt by indefatigably testifying to the legitimacy of their presence. For the poem, nonhuman utterances are critical in amplifying such doxology. David Fairer notes, 'In Smart, self-expression is by definition *praise*, and his poetry takes delight in the way every created thing plays its part'.³²⁹ When humans and nonhumans congregate 'to give glory to the Lord, and the Lamb,' their combined worship is not an aggregation but an exponentiation. Smart plays on the double sense of 'magnify' as a synonym for 'to glorify'

³²⁶ James Thomson, 'A Hymn on the Seasons', *The Four Seasons, and Other Poems* (J. Millan, 1735), p. 45, lines 40-43.

³²⁷ Rev., 7, 9-10.

³²⁸ An instance of how much further Smart was prepared to reinscribe the Bible to show compassion for animals can be seen in the line 'Let Arron, the high priest, sanctify a Bull, and let him go free to the Lord and Giver of Life'. The corresponding passage in 'Leviticus', declares 'And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself'. Smart replaces 'kill' with 'sanctify'. In his version, Aaron replicates the actions of God, for both now are the 'Giver of Life'. See Smart, 31, A, 15 and Lev., 16, 11.

³²⁹ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (Pearson Education Limited, 2003), p. 186.

and ‘To make greater in size’.³³⁰ When all species ‘magnify his name *together*’ [my italics], their assemblage enables praise to be amplified. In other words, by uniting, they literally multiply their voices. *Jubilate Agno* is, thus, a poem about communal worship in which the community *must* include ‘every Creature’ to optimise its ability to give due deference. As such, the poem expands the anthropocentric message in ‘The Book of Revelation’ by reinscribing an interspecies ethos that widens the Christian community. Such a radical interpretation of a scriptural passage hints at Smart’s wider programme of reorienting *The Book of Common Prayer* to include parishioners from diverse parts of creation. Smart’s justification for this endeavour originates from within his own religious community. As a member of St. George the Martyr in Queen Square, Smart came under the influence of Robert Nelson. Nelson, as Chris Mounsey explains, ‘though a staunch Anglican, emphasized the need for a constant revitalizing of the traditional Anglican services and the use of everyday language to explain them to ordinary people’.³³¹ Smart’s response to such a calling is his profound rereading of ‘Revelation: 7, 9-10’ and the logical consequence that unfolds from his interpretation of this passage.

Merging Identities in *Jubilate Agno*

Smart is alive in *Jubilate Agno* to language’s power to create new connections. His playful use of ‘magnify’ is just one instance. Another is his poetic deployment of metaphors. Smart exploits the biblical conflation that sees Christ as a lamb. This is apt as the focus of worship that inspires this interspecies community is, as the poem’s opening line makes clear, the ‘Lord, and the Lamb’. Menely enlarges on this point when he explains

Smart respond[s] to anthropocentric orthodoxy by identifying a logic of animal references woven into the very fabric of theological language. The “Lamb” in which *Jubilate Agno* rejoices is the sacrificed Christ—the “Lamb of God” referred to in

³³⁰ ‘magnify, v.’. Definitions 1.a. and 2.a. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/112338 [accessed 28 November 2022].

³³¹ Chris Mounsey, *Christopher Smart: Clown of God* (Associated University Presses, 2001), p. 280.

John 1:29, in Revelation, in the liturgical Agnus Dei—but it is also in an important sense a real lamb, the creaturely life whose incarnate vulnerability, recognized at the level of the imaginary, makes it available for symbolic substitution.³³²

Menely's observation that the lamb is a 'real lamb' is of critical consideration. If Smart encourages his readers to view the symbolic congruency between Christ and the lamb, he also needs them to observe the animal shorn of its figurative significance. For *Jubilate Agno* to successfully plead for nonhumans to be admitted into a congregation that praises God, they must be acknowledged as real animals. Presented as mere cyphers invested with symbolic meaning, they lose the ability to represent themselves. As the poem repeatedly demonstrates, praise is an active choice made freely by each creature. To consider animals only figuratively is to deny them their natural agency to adore their maker.³³³

Even within this solemn scriptural orthodoxy, Smart delights in the ability of words to create multiple subject positions. He fully exploits the transposition between man and animal to sanction *Jubilate Agno*'s endeavour to include all species in a religious community. As he does so, he draws the reader's attention to the liminal status this theological doctrine imposes. By dissolving the barrier between the divine-human and the lowly lamb, he asks his audience to question the anthropological assumptions that certain theological divines employ to exclude animals from Christian consideration. He implies that if a lamb can be elevated to the same position as Christ, the status of other animals is equally fluid. It is the creative ability of language to raise a corporeal body to an incorporeal one, an ascendancy that commences from such a diminutive level to one of supreme majesty. Furthermore, this relationship between God and his son is also an association between God and animals. This act eschews a

³³² Tobias Menely, *Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* (The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 136.

³³³ Real lambs play an important part in the Bible. Excluding their figurative status, they are mentioned one hundred and forty-one times. As corporeal creatures, they are predominantly featured in the Old Testament as 'burnt offerings'. Their ability to purify the sins of man and assuage the wrath of God mean they have an elevated status over other animals.

humanist conceit that privileges man over other creatures. Rather, Smart's poem inaugurates a venture to show parity between all species predicated on a belief that in God, they share a common ancestry. He evinces this on the theological premise established in two concurrent passages in *Genesis*, which state, 'God *made* the beasts' and 'God said, Let us *make* man' [my italics].³³⁴

Fittingly, *Jubilate Agno* follows this section on the equivalency between man and animal by citing the most widely known biblical text concerning the interaction betwixt species in the line:

Let Noah and his company approach the throne of Grace, and do homage to the Ark
of their Salvation.³³⁵

Chris Mounsey observes, 'The particular quality of the Ark of animals is their having been saved by coming together under one roof at the bidding of God'.³³⁶ The site of this harmonious interaction, the ark, becomes a symbol of their salvation. The poem's use of 'Ark' not only refers to the boat built by Noah but also to the Ark of the Covenant. Crucially, the Ark not only represents deliverance but also signifies the relationship between creator and creations.³³⁷ For it is by entering into a covenant with God that grace is bestowed on those who worship Him. By placing this example at the head of his poem, Smart pronounces this episode as the preeminent story in which God grants salvation to man and animals because they assemble at his word. Following this divinely authorised model, *Jubilate Agno* gathers its own collection of relationships between animals and humans to achieve the same end.

³³⁴ Gen., 1, 25-26.

³³⁵ Smart, 30, A, 4.

³³⁶ Chris Mounsey, 'Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*', *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Christine Gerrard (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 295.

³³⁷ A third connotation for the Ark can be seen in *The Book of Common Prayer*. The epistle for Easter Even compares the Ark with Christ, stating, 'once the long-suffering of God waited in the dayes of Noah, while the ark was a preparing; wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also now save us [...] by the resurrection of Jesus Christ'. See *The Book of Common Prayer, The Texts of 1549, 1599, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 321

Connecting Animals with Men

Such is the importance of this interconnectivity between species that Smart devotes the rest of ‘Fragment A’ to giving a multitude of examples. These take the form of associating a biblical figure with an animal to reveal their commonality, thus merging the perceived gap between them. Such referentiality takes full advantage of a wide range of literary techniques. For instance, in the line:

Let Romamti-ezer bless with the Ferret—The Lord is a rewarder of them, that diligently seek him.³³⁸

This connection between man and animal is not arbitrary. Romamti-ezer in the Bible was the son of ‘Heman the king’s seer’.³³⁹ Smart pairs him with this animal because, as Arthur Sherbo explains, ‘The association is with activities of the ferret as exemplified in the verb ‘to ferret out’’.³⁴⁰ Both Romamti-ezer and the ferret are connected with the act of diligently looking. Smart’s merging of a literal meaning with a figurative one parallels his collation between man and animal. He suggests that language, like subjects (for instance, in Christ and the lamb), can occupy more than one position. To state that they are fixed is to ignore their condition for multiplicity and deny God’s design for a world of interconnected heterogeneity. Isabel Karremann further stresses that creaturely bodies in *Jubilate Agno* are a means to signification. For her, ‘Animals and their attributes do not merely stand metaphorically for a quality of language; their specific embodiedness itself is transposed into a linguistic sign and becomes a source of meaning in language’.³⁴¹ If Karremann is correct, the animals that proliferate Smart’s text are materially encoded with a denotation implanted by God. As will be shown later in this chapter, bodily movements that are translated literally into signs/words

³³⁸ Smart, 33, A, 43.

³³⁹ 1 Chron., 25, 4-5.

³⁴⁰ Arthur Sherbo, ‘More on Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*’, *Notes and Queries*, 39.1 (1992), p. 46.

³⁴¹ Isabel Karremann, ‘Human/Animal Relations in Romantic Poetry: The Creaturely Poetics of Christopher Smart and John Clare’, *European Journal of English Studies*, 19.1 (2015), p. 104.

play a critical role in the relationship between God and his creations. Karremann's quotation also explains why puns are so important to Smart. In an extended section in 'Fragment B2', *Jubilate Agno* shows the interchangeability between word and body by substituting the phoneme *-ble* with the word 'bull'. With each paronomasia, the poem further reveals that hidden within words are embodied animals, or as *Jubilate Agno* declares:

For BULL in the first place is the word of Almighty God.³⁴²

Patently, Smart's conception of language differs from those of other eighteenth-century writers such as Beattie, Blair, and Kames. He rejects their understanding of language as a human construct, a move that would debar other creatures from partaking in worshipping God. Instead, as Harriet Guest explains

Smart's use of language is dominated by his belief in its divine origin, for this belief not only recognizes a divine revelation in language, which becomes not only a means of communicating our ideas through a pre-given, arbitrary, and contractually agreed set of signs, but a system which, in reflecting the divine creative language which was instantaneously manifested in the created world.³⁴³

This idea gains credence if *Jubilate Agno* is viewed as a poem about worshipping God as the creator of all things. As such, He is not only the originator of every species but also the means by which they praise him. This is enunciated in the poem's second line where 'Nations, and languages, and every Creature' are implored to 'Rejoice in God'. For Smart, God is not only the creator of all living things, but via language, he is also the instigator of meaning. These two acts of creation both derive from the same source and, like Romantizer and the ferret, elide into one holistic entity. Smart's insistence on signs written on the bodies of animals reinscribes language as a universal mode of communication in which all

³⁴² Smart, 115, B2, 676. Smart gives examples of this when the poem states, 'For two creatures the Bull & the Dog prevail in the English | For all the words ending in ble are in the creature. Invisi-ble, Incomprehensi-ble, ineffa-ble, A-ble'. See Smart, 113, B2, 645-646. He sees dog 'in the English' is because 'can is' and 'canis' are homophones.

³⁴³ Harriet Guest, *A Form of Sound Words; The Religious Poetry of Christopher Smart* (Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 169. The idea that language was a 'universal grammar' given by God was far from universally accepted. It did find adherents in writers such as James Beattie.

creatures can participate. In the words of Ainsworth and Noyes, ‘God created all things, and all things exist in adoration of Him. Animate life, inanimate objects, even the natural forces and powers of the earth praise God in their very properties, or in the carrying out of their functions’.³⁴⁴ This universal sign system reunites the ‘Nations’ (including for Smart nonhuman communities) that were splintered after the fall of Babel. It is not only ‘Voices’ that can speak, but also bodies, which the poem represents as a legitimate form of ‘language’.

Some similarities between nonhumans and humans are entirely created within the Bible. This, for example, is the case with the line:

Let Joshua praise God with an Unicorn—the swiftness of the Lord, and the strength of the Lord, and the spear of the Lord mighty in battle.³⁴⁵

The connection here is made by Balaam, who, prophesying about Joshua, observes:

God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce *them* through with his arrows.³⁴⁶

Interestingly, where Balaam’s use of the unicorn refers only to its strength, Smart’s line materially brings forth the animal rather than focusing on an imagined characteristic of an imaginary animal. Moreover, through the use of ‘with,’ Smart physically binds Joshua and the animal together.³⁴⁷ This act of animal creation gestures towards St. John’s declarative, ‘And the Word was made flesh’.³⁴⁸ Again, *Jubilate Agno* demonstrates how poetic creation is comparable to divine creation by manifesting the *logos* in physical form. By enclosing Joshua and the unicorn within the same line, *Jubilate Agno* also stresses their intimate relationship

³⁴⁴ Edward G. Ainsworth and Charles E. Noyes, *Cristopher Smart: A Biographical and Critical Study* (University of Missouri, 1943), p. 111.

³⁴⁵ Smart, 32, A, 26.

³⁴⁶ Num., 24, 8.

³⁴⁷ The physical resemblance of the unicorn is also important as Arthur Sherbo notes, ‘The horn of the unicorn suggests the spear’. What is of critical importance here is the physical manifestation of the unicorn in the reader’s mind rather than an abstract concept, i.e. its strength. The image of the unicorn’s horn also explains why Smart gives Joshua a spear, as there is no mention of one in Balaam’s prophesy. See Arthur Sherbo, ‘More on Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*’, *Notes and Queries*, 39.1 (1992), p. 46.

³⁴⁸ John, 1, 14.

visually on the page and syntactically by their closeness when the words are arranged within the line. Furthermore, as evinced in the poem's opening lines, the union between man and animals ensures a magnifying of their strengths, not only in Joshua's and the unicorn's ability to physically defeat the enemies of Christianity but also in their praise of their divine creator.

The Web of Signification in *Jubilate Agno*

Smart is not reliant on connections solely from the Bible. He also makes them outside of this text. This is evident in the line:

Let Heman bless with the Spider, his warp and his woof, his subtlety and industry,
which are good.³⁴⁹

Heman is used alongside Ethan, Chalcol, Darda and Mahol because of his wisdom.³⁵⁰ The 'Spider' is not a reference to a biblical source but is from Pliny's *Natural History*, where he states, 'It begins at the middle to weave its web, and then extends it by adding the threads in rings around, like a warp upon the woof'.³⁵¹ Smart views the spider's act of making a web comparable to Heman's 'subtlety and industry'.³⁵² Man and beast are not merely connected via their diligence but also because they perform actions prescribed by their creator. Thus, by enacting their natural inclinations, they are fulfilling God's purpose for them.³⁵³ John Block Friedman elaborates on this important consideration when he observes, 'All things praise their Creator, according to Smart, in fulfilling the potential which God gave them, and insofar as they do this they may be said to have a voice'.³⁵⁴ If Friedman's contention is true, this is not only another method by which Smart shows how the word can be made flesh. Now

³⁴⁹ Smart, 33, A, 37.

³⁵⁰ See 1 Kings, 4, 31.

³⁵¹ Pliny, *The Natural History of Pliny*, vol. iii, 6 vols, trans. by John Bostock and H.T. Riley (Henry G. Bohn, 1855), p. 29, book xi, chapter 28.

³⁵² The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'subtlety' as 'Skill, dexterity; precision, care; ingenuity in workmanship'. See 'subtlety, n.'. Definition 1. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/193191 [accessed 29 November 2022].

³⁵³ The idea of animals following their natural proclivities as a form of worship will be explored in the section on Jeffery, the cat.

³⁵⁴ John Block Friedman, 'The Cosmology of Praise: Smart's *Jubilate Agno*', *PMLA*, 82.2 (1967), p. 253.

Jubilate Agno reverses this edict, making flesh become the word. By according to the actions that God has inscribed on them, they manifest their devotion to their creator. In other words, the *logos* is written on their bodies. In the very act of movement, they transform corporeal motions into signs of praise. This form of communication allows supposedly mute creatures to conjoin with those who can speak. Smart's use of 'voice', thus, translates not to an act of orality but to any semiotic system.³⁵⁵ In 'Fragment B', *Jubilate Agno* declares:

For the praise of God can give to a mute fish the notes of a nightingale.³⁵⁶

This figurative line insists that all forms of praise are equivalently valid. Those without voice communicate semiotically through their actions. The poem presents this mute praise as an equally legitimised form of adoration as the sweet 'notes of the nightingale'. For Smart, acts of reverence are proportionately valid. Man may prize the lyrical voice of the nightingale, but God sees beyond this. For Him, all worship is worthy of being recognised as beautiful. This premise is also behind the line:

Let Ross, house of Ross rejoice with the Great Flabber Dabber Flat Clapping Fish with hands. Vide Anson's Voyage & Psalm 98th ix.³⁵⁷

Even though academics disagree on what type of animal Smart is describing, the vital point is the connection between sound and concept.³⁵⁸ If Smart typically exploits the usual arbitrariness between signified and signifier to make oblique connections, he recognises a more stable relationship here. The words 'Flabber Dabber' are onomatopoeic. Their sound firmly anchors them to their meaning. In giving this nomenclature to the creature, Smart also explains how it praises God. For 'Flabber Dabber' is the noise it makes when it claps. Thus,

³⁵⁵ This similarly applies to *Jubilate Agno*'s use of 'tongues' in its opening line. Smart's belief in non-vocal adoration probably originates from Psalm 148.

³⁵⁶ Smart, 45, B1, 24.

³⁵⁷ Smart, 145, D, 11.

³⁵⁸ Smart's description does not perfectly match any animal in Richard Walter's *Anson's Voyage Around the World*. W.H. Bond conjectures that it may be a 'flat-fish'. See Smart, 145, note 1. Clement Hawes proposes that it could be a 'sea lion'. See Clement Hawes, 'Poised Poesis: Ecstasy in *Jubilate Agno*', *Reading Christopher Smart in the Twenty-first Century: "By Succession of Delight"*, ed. by Min Wild and Noel Chevalier (Bucknell University Press, 2013), p. 86.

the name of the animal and its action become indivisible. Smart implies that the creature defines itself when it engages in devotion. From a theological stance, it is entirely appropriate that name and nature are in harmony, each an expression of the other – flesh and word uniting. This biblical connection is further strengthened when the line mentions Psalm 98. In *The Book of Common Prayer*, the relevant passage announces:

Let the flouds [sic] clap their hands, and let the hills be joyful together before the Lord: for he is come to judge the earth.³⁵⁹

In echoing its environment, the ‘Flabber Dabber Flat Clapping Fish’ is in a symbiotic relationship with its surroundings. Even though it cannot vocalise its praise, like the ‘mute fish’, God hears and recognises all the signs of adoration made by his creations.³⁶⁰

This widening definition is a democratising movement that grants all those ‘with the breath of life’ the ability to worship. As usual in ‘Fragment A’, Smart deploys his meaning horizontally by joining Heman and the spider in the same sentence with the word ‘with’. This passage, though, has a broader significance. The lines before and after this mention the other names associated with Heman in the Bible, such as those who also possess wisdom, namely Ethan, Chalcol, Darda, and Mahol. *Jubilate Agno*, thus, also inscribes a meaning that runs vertically. To fully understand Smart’s poetic project, the reader must replicate the actions of Heman and the spider and subtly and industriously read the poem across its various axes. Here, the poem reproduces the dimensions of a web with its semiotic movements that warp and woof signification. As these binomial strands of meaning radiate out from Smart’s poem, they encapsulate Geoffrey Hartman’s contention that ‘What the poem conveys is a spreading

³⁵⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer, The Texts of 1549, 1599, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 560. Day 19. *Evening Prayer*, Psalm 98, line 9.

³⁶⁰ Interestingly, one of the definitions of ‘mute’ in the *OED* is ‘Designating any or all signs of the zodiac which are symbolized by creatures having no voice (including Cancer, Pisces, and Scorpio)’. See ‘Mute, Adj., Definition 6’. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, December 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4983919851>. This meaning was in use in the eighteenth century.

consideration from which nothing will eventually be excluded’.³⁶¹ This animal-created structure is thus a fitting metaphor for *Jubilate Agno*. It symbolises the complex interactions that connect all living creatures in the natural world and the signification that manifests from such relationships.

The Punching of Meaning in *Jubilate Agno*

Smart’s belief that animals and language are closely tied together receives its most precise enunciation when he writes:

For the power of some animal is predominant in every language.³⁶²

To evince this principle, Smart commences over the ensuing few lines to give examples of how animals are universally connected to all languages. For instance, the following two lines state:

For the power and spirit of a CAT is in the Greek.
For the sound of a cat is in the most useful preposition κατ’ εὐχην.³⁶³

Smart playfully draws the reader’s attention to the close graphological and phonetical resemblance of the Greek word κατ with cat. He is not just making a philological observation. The importance of the relationship only becomes apparent when κατ’ εὐχην is translated into English since its meaning is ‘according to one’s prayer, or by reason of a vow’.³⁶⁴ Pronouncing the English word ‘cat’ is to show a sign (in both senses of the word) of a commencement towards worshipping God.³⁶⁵ Regardless of derivation, Smart declares, that

³⁶¹ Geoffrey Hartman, ‘Christopher Smart’s Magnificat: Toward a Theory of Representation’, *ELH*, 31.3 (1974), p. 440.

³⁶² Smart, 112, B2, 627.

³⁶³ Ibid., 112, B2, 628-629.

³⁶⁴ Smart, 112, note 1.

³⁶⁵ The physical act of pronouncing the word and the illocutionary meaning this act instigates are both signs of devotion towards the creator of body and language. In lines 638 and 639 of ‘Fragment B2’, Smart writes, ‘For the Mouse (Mus) prevails in Latin | For Edi-mus, bibi-mus, vivi-mus—ore-mus’. Playing on the phonetic similarity between ‘Mouse’ and ‘Mus’, the second line translates as ‘For we eat, we drink, we live—let us pray’. Inscribed on the body of the mouse is its salvation in ‘its ability to prevail’. Since it is through language (Latin in the case of the mouse), all creatures connect with God when they engage in the act of worship.

all languages and all living things have a divine originator. *Jubilate Agno* extends this trope three lines later:

For Clapperclaw is in the grappling of the words upon one another in all the modes of versification.³⁶⁶

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘Clapperclaw’ as ‘To claw or scratch’.³⁶⁷ The resemblance to the actions of a cat is unmistakable. Tobias Menely sees this word as connoting ‘the way words, placed in relation, shift and invert one another’s meanings along metaphoric and metonymic poles, the way, particularly in verse, words *turn* (on) one another, shifting meaning tropologically’.³⁶⁸ Smart, then, understands the referentiality inherent in language as he joyfully exploits this characteristic in the service of God. What strikes the reader is also the forceful image this conjures up.³⁶⁹ As Moira Dearnley explains, ‘Smart seems to be implying that words in a poem should be associated as violently and powerfully as cats in a fight claw and bite one another’.³⁷⁰ This opinion accords with Smart’s account of poetic composition when he writes:

For my talent is to give an impression upon words by punching, that when the reader casts his eye upon ‘em, he takes up the image from the mould wch I have made.³⁷¹

In the *Works of Horace, Translated in to Verse* (1767), Smart expounds further on his mode of verse creation when he explains

³⁶⁶ Smart, B2, 112, 632.

³⁶⁷ ‘clapperclaw, v.’. Definition 1. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/33789 [accessed 30 November 2022].

³⁶⁸ Tobias Menely, *Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* (The University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 141-142.

³⁶⁹ In his ‘Life of Cowley’, Samuel Johnson also stresses the aggressive movement when words are combined in his unapproving comment, ‘The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together’. See Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: The Lives of the Poets*, vol. xxi, 23 vols, ed. by Stephen Fix et al. (Yale University Press, 2010), p. 26.

³⁷⁰ Moira Dearnley, *The Poetry of Christopher Smart* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 163-64.

³⁷¹ Smart, 99, B2, 404. Bond reproduces Smart’s original elision while Williamson silently expands it to ‘which’.

Impression then, is a talent or gift of Almighty God, by which a Genius is empowered to throw an emphasis upon a word or sentence in such wise, that it cannot escape any reader of sheer good sense, and true critical sagacity.³⁷²

Smart's use of the word 'punching' in *Jubilate Agno* is, as Allan Gedalof explains, 'taken from type casting, where the matrix receives its impression from a punch and a letter is cast in the mould thus made'.³⁷³ In both pronouncements, 'impression' and 'mould' are the critical words that suggest their importance in the act of poetic creation for Smart. Like all inventive processes, the nascency behind them is God's. It is His gift that transforms the poet into a 'Genius' and, by implication, makes the verse he composes a work of poetic perfection. The sublimity of such a text ensures that 'any reader of sheer good sense' will recognise the divine inspiration behind it and judge its worth accordingly. The impressions that *Jubilate Agno* makes are of critical significance since they will originate from the supreme creator, both poetically and theologically. If the site for Smart's punching is the written page, it is the reader's mind where the impression is made. Gedalof's belief that, more precisely, this is 'an impression of an impression' lucidly explains the impetus behind all of Smart's serious poetic endeavours.³⁷⁴ In 'Fragment D' there is a line:

The Lord magnify the idea of Smart singing hymns³⁷⁵

Smart views his poetic self as an active intermediary between God and the reader. He is the conduit through which the divine impression is transmitted to the audience. This line also inverts the imploration for creation to 'magnify' the Lord. Now Smart foresees God magnifying his 'ideas'. This ouroborostic relationship further testifies to the interconnectivity between creator and creation.

³⁷² Christopher Smart, *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, Volume V: The Works of Horace Translated into Verse*, 6 vols, ed. by Karina Williamson (Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 6.

³⁷³ Allan J. Gedalof, 'Smart's Poetics in *Jubilate Agno*', *English Studies in Canada*, 5.3 (1979), p. 267.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 267.

³⁷⁵ Smart, 155, D, 148. This is probably a reference to his writing hymn 29, 'The Fifth of November'. Regardless, it is evidence that Smart views his poetry as an inception from God.

It is because of the effect this divine impression will leave upon the reader's mind that this process is so critical. Here, then, is why *Jubilate Agno* reinterprets scriptural texts by assigning actual animals to biblical characters. The impression that Smart intends to create in his audience is not abstract characteristics but manifest bodies. He eschews figurative connections that assigning associated nonhuman qualities to humans would entail. Instead, he binds the relationship between man and animal by actualising the creature that embodies the attribute mentioned in the Bible. The reader fixes in their mind not a patriarch with an associated animal simile but rather two interconnecting and coequal beings. Through this reinscription of biblical verse, Smart denies the transfer of power from one being to another. No longer has a human subsumed the subject-defining characteristic of an animal. Instead, *Jubilate Agno* celebrates the connections created through shared capabilities.³⁷⁶ This is not to propose that the traits of creatures are not crucial to Smart, but what is imperative are the agents that enact them. Like the employment of the ferret, unicorn, and spider, their divine parity is evinced through their association with scriptural characters.³⁷⁷ As Magdalena Ozarska explains

what matters here most is perhaps the intriguing concept of interrelationships and interpenetration of the human and animal spheres. They both appear not only to co-exist peacefully side by side, but also become fused together.³⁷⁸

This is only possible because Smart metaphorises animal characteristics from the Bible into their corresponding physical subjects in *Jubilate Agno*.

³⁷⁶ An example of this would be the simile 'Samson is as strong as an ox'. This line is composed of a human (Samson) and a trait associated with an ox (strength). By rejecting the connective simile and replacing it with an actual ox, Smart stresses the shared capability shared by both subjects. This represents a relationship between coequals rather than of subject and disposed and disembodied other.

³⁷⁷ This is not to say that animals gain their ethical status via their association with biblical characters. Rather, Smart highlights their common capabilities and kinship as creatures originating from the same source.

³⁷⁸ Magdalena Ozarska, 'The Presentation of the Animal Sphere in Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*', *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature*, 26.1 (2002), p. 69.

Holistic Self-Representation in *Jubilate Agno*

Besides showing the material kinship between men and animals, Smart also conjoins them through their ability to praise. In ‘Fragment B1’, he inscribes:

For EARTH which is an intelligence hath a voice and a propensity to speak in all her parts.³⁷⁹

Here, Smart reiterates the declaration in the opening lines of *Jubilate Agno* that every creature, human and nonhuman, has an associated voice. In his *Anima Magica Abscondita* (1650), Thomas Vaughan states, ‘For Nature is the Voice of God, not a mere sound or command but a substantial, active breath, proceeding from the Creator and penetrating all things’.³⁸⁰ Smart’s poem extends this argument by proposing that ‘the Voice of God’ proceeds from an ‘intelligence’. In doing so, he counters John Wesley’s pronouncement that ‘We have no ground to believe that they are in any degree, capable of knowing, loving, or obeying God. This is the specific difference between man and brute—the great gulf which they cannot pass over’.³⁸¹ Smart, though, insists that behind each voice, there is a rational subject capable of actively worshipping their creator. An action that bridges Wesley’s gap, giving nonhumans direct access to their maker. As such, *Jubilate Agno* represents animals both corporeally within the poem and also by acknowledging their agency to speak with their creaturely voice. In ‘Fragment B’ he expands on this theme, commencing with the line:

For a man speaks HIMSELF from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ Smart, 79, B1, 234.

³⁸⁰ Thomas Vaughan, ‘Anima Magica Abscondita’, *The Works of Thomas Vaughan: Eugenius Philalethes*, ed. by Arthur Edward Waite (Theosophical Publishing House, 1919), p. 84.

³⁸¹ John Wesley, ‘Sermon 60: The General Deliverance’, *The Works of John Wesley: Sermons 34-70*, vol. ii, 32 vols, ed. by Albert C. Outler (Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 441. ‘This sermon first appeared in the *Arminian Magazine* in 1782, V. 8-14, 61-69 (January and February), under the title *Free Thoughts on the Brute Creation*. The title had been borrowed from an essay by John Hildrop [...]. Wesley thought well enough of Hildrop’s essay to abridge and publish it with its original title in the *Arminian Magazine* for 1783 in twelve instalments. Thus, when he prepared to reprint his own sermon for the 1788 collection, he had to give it a new title and chose ‘The General Deliverance’. See ‘An Introductory Comment on Sermon 60’, *ibid.*, p. 436.

³⁸² Smart, 79, B1, 228.

He is not suggesting he speaks *for* himself. Rather, his body actually talks on his behalf, thus the uppercase use of HIMSELF. This is yet another instance of one of Smart's 'punching' words. The religious signification of the part of the body Smart selects also denotes its importance. The 'crown' of his head alludes not only to this imperious part of the body but also to the 'crown of thorns' worn by Christ as a sign of his passion. Furthermore, Smart's use of 'sole' puns on its homophonic relationship with 'soul'.

Not only does man speak with all his body, from top to bottom, but he also articulates internally with his very essence. As *Jubilate Agno* confirms:

For the VOICE is from the body and the spirit—and is a body and a spirit.³⁸³

Manifesting itself as a form of non-vocal holistic praise, this corporeal utterance directly challenges any anthropocentric notion that the worshipping of God is only accomplished through vocal utterances, such as the oral communication that emanates from rational humans. By locating signs on the body, Smart widens the community that can rejoice in giving 'glory to the Lord, and the Lamb' by including animals. For example, the poem revibrates the same syntactical structure when it asserts:

For a LION roars HIMSELF compleat from head to tail.³⁸⁴

This terse line with stringent economy profoundly reinscribes Anglican doctrine. Again, Smart emphasises the word 'HIMSELF', suggesting the deed the animal takes is one of an independent agency. By stating the physical extremities of the animal (head to tail) and the use of 'complete', 'HIMSELF' is defined in bodily terms. Taken together, these words modify the earlier use of 'roars'. It no longer connotes a spoken action but a corporeal one. Smart's creative translation of this verb is another example of his 'punching' words. Its effect draws the reader's attention to the lion's ability to represent itself (HIMSELF) in its bodily

³⁸³ Ibid., 81, B1, 239.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 79, B1, 229.

act of praise. This movement of enfranchisement permits a widening of the Anglican community by incorporating an animal customarily excluded from its flock.³⁸⁵ The poem, though, does not confine itself to a quadruped with the elevated status of the lion. Instead, *Jubilate Agno* is a plenitude of both domestic and wild animals regardless of their size, from whales to sea urchins and even worms that live in the body of humans.³⁸⁶ No creature, regardless of stature, Smart declares, is to be excluded from the Christian community.

Smart argues in his 'Hymn VI. The Presentation of Christ in the Temple' (1765) that:

I speak for all – for them that fly,
And for the race that swim;
For all that dwell in moist and dry,
Beasts, reptiles, flow'rs and gems to vie
When gratitude begins her hymn.³⁸⁷

His declaration that he will speak on behalf of all creation suggests that he empathises with their situation. Here, Smart positions himself as a prophet who will advocate on behalf of every living thing. He envisages himself as a contemporary King David whose own psalmic creations (including *Jubilate Agno*) will poetically testify to a spiritual recognition of the importance of all sentient life.³⁸⁸ Furthermore, Smart's confession that he will promote the rights of animals to actively worship tentatively implies he views their situation as analogous to his own. On this point, he is far more ardent in *Jubilate Agno*:

Let Andrew rejoice with the Whale, who is arrayd [sic] in beauteous blue and & is a combination of bulk & activity.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ Here, the lion literally lies down with the lamb.

³⁸⁶ Smart, 60, B1, 124. Ibid., 78, B1, 233, and ibid., 46, B1, 37. This last line mentions Ascarides, which Bond notes is 'a worm in the intestines'. See Smart, 46, footnote 4.

³⁸⁷ Smart, ii, 42, 41-45.

³⁸⁸ It has long been recognised that Smart self-identified with the biblical David. It is also commonly understood that Smart conflated David with Orpheus. See, for instance, Fraser Easton, "'Mary's Key" and the Poet's Conception: The Orphic versus Mimetic Artist in *Jubilate Agno*', *Christopher Smart and the Enlightenment*, ed. by Clement Hawes (St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 153-75. *Jubilate Agno* declares, 'For the story of Orpheus is the truth' [...] For he was a believer in the true God and assisted in the spirit'. See Smart, 129, C, 52 and 54. Moreover, in his ode 'On the Goodness of the Supreme Being', Smart amalgamates the biblical patriarch with a mythical Greek character in the line 'Orpheus, for so the Gentiles call'd thy name, | Israel's sweet psalmist'. See Smart, iv, 305, 1-2. I am unaware, though, that any critic has made a connection between Orpheus's ability to charm creatures through lyrical songs and Smart's poetic ability to communicate with and through animals.

³⁸⁹ Smart, 60, B1, 124.

For they work me with their harping-irons, which is a barbarous instrument, because I am more unguarded than others.³⁹⁰

Smart considers his position similar to that of a whale because they are both exposed to an instrument of subjection. His use of ‘unguarded’ sees himself and the animal as creatures without protection. It also implies an application that has personal significance since ‘unguarded’ can also mean to be too honest. Is he proposing that his present situation resulted from his sincere public displays of religious conviction? If so, his unguarded/sincere actions have placed him in a position where he has no ~~un~~guard to protect him. Like the animals he ‘speaks for’, Smart finds that others have dominion over him. In such a situation, he feels he has only one recourse. This he elucidates in the next pair of ‘Let’ and ‘For’ lines with:

Let James rejoice with the Skuttle-Fish, who foils his foe by the effusion of his ink.
For the blessing of God hath been on my epistles, which I have written for the benefit of others.³⁹¹

What connects these initially incongruent passages is the word ‘ink’ in the ‘Let’, since both the cuttlefish and Smart ‘foil’ their foes through the use of this substance. The fish confuses its foes by releasing ink into the water, whilst Smart employs it to write in his defence. For both, it is a form of protection, a method of guarding themselves against attack. Smart also gestures that this defensive activity has a broader theological implication. His choice of the name ‘James’ in the ‘Let’ and the word ‘epistles’ in the ‘For’ verse gestures toward the epistle of James in the *New Testament*. Smart, like James, also writes for the benefit of others. ‘Fragment C’ provides the evidence for this understanding when the poem states:

For it is the business of a man gifted in the word to prophecy good.³⁹²

Moreover, in doing so, he aims to accord with the saint’s pronouncement:

whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.³⁹³

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 61, B1, 124.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 60, B1, 125 and *ibid.*, 61, B1, 125.

³⁹² Smart, 129, C, 57.

³⁹³ James, 1, 25.

In following James's advice, Smart aims to gain his 'liberty' by creating a poem that will receive God's blessing. Writing is also a recuperative act for each creature within the poem. By naming nonhumans in *Jubilate Agno*, Smart radically reinscribes God's act of bringing all the animals to Adam 'to see what he would call them'.³⁹⁴ Smart's practice of naming animals in his verse attempts to question their subservient role as creatures dominated by man. One method he employs is to equate animals with biblical patriarchs in an attempt to raise the status of each creature by association. Such is the case with Joshua and the unicorn, Heman and the spider, and Romamti-ezer and the Ferret. Moreover, animals free from sin are seen by Smart as both sources of understanding lost after the Fall and models to emulate. He makes just this point in his 'On the Omniscience of the Supreme Being' (1752):

Woeful vicissitude! when Man, fall'n Man,
Who first from Heav'n from gracious God himself
Learn'd knowledge of the Brutes, must know by Brutes,
Instructed and reproach'd.³⁹⁵

This act of re-naming is the power of words to create subjects. By investing coequal capabilities with figures of authority in the Bible, Smart stakes a claim for reciprocal consideration for nonhumans. Ultimately, this reinscription inaugurates a process that inverts Adam's citational dominion over the rest of creation. For Smart, drawing on words is a powerful tool for liberating marginalised communities. As such, this is just another example of *Jubilate Agno* being 'written for the benefit of others'.

Poetic Language as an Act of Creation

Smart also demonstrates the power of language to erase the difference between humans and nonhumans. In line 14 of 'Fragment A', *Jubilate Agno* announces:

³⁹⁴ Gen., 2, 19.

³⁹⁵ Smart, iv, 209, 160-163.

For I bless God to M^r Lion M^r Cock M^r Cat M^r Talbot M^r Hart M^{rs} Fysh M^r Grub,
and Miss Lamb.³⁹⁶

This list of people Smart knew or had subscribed to his poetry continues to emphasise the kinship between all beings. Chosen because they are homophones of animals, Smart takes advantage of the aurality in language that permits the elision of one word into another. He presents this figurative possibility as a process analogous to his yoking of biblical patriarchs and animals in his use of parallelism. In both instances, humans and nonhumans are fused. A quality inherent in literature that written words, when spoken, become indistinguishable from other words is thus an exemplar of the affiliation that connects different species. As

Magdalena Ozarska notes

At some points, as the extraordinary is breathed into the ordinary, the borderline between the human and the animal kingdoms becomes obliterated so that some intermingling of these two is to be noted.³⁹⁷

In blessing these people, Smart is also concurrently blessing the homophonic creature. This process gestures towards the Anglican practice of holy communion in which one body consubstantiates into another.³⁹⁸ In the sacrament, it is the process of reciting a catechism that initiates the union, whilst in the poem, it is the act of reading. In both cases, the word of God is transformed into flesh. For Smart, then, poetic creation is analogous to the acts of conception undertaken by the Lord.

³⁹⁶ Smart, 59, B, 114.

³⁹⁷ Magdalena Ozarska, 'The Presentation of the Animal Sphere in Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*', *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature*, 26.1 (2002), pp. 63-64.

³⁹⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer* defines the Eucharist as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given unto us, ordained by Christ himself'. The phrase 'visible sign' stresses the corporeality of such an act, which is analogous to the elision of man with animals in these lines. The biblical phraseology of which suggests this is a 'sacramental union'. A further instance of this theological confederacy can be seen in the phrase mentioned earlier, 'the Lord, and the Lamb'. This connection is further secured by mentioning the *Agnus Dei* during the fraction (the breaking of bread). Finally, this sacramental performance, like the sharing of Christ's body in the form of bread, is a communal act that signifies the harmonious fellowship between all of God's obedient subjects. See the Catechism question 'What meanest thou by this word *Sacrament*?' in *The Book of Common Prayer, The Texts of 1549, 1599, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 429

Smart's poetry is also indebted to Robert Lowth's belief concerning Hebrew poetry/biblical verse. Born in Winchester in 1710, Lowth became a renowned scholar of Latin and Greek. He was elected as the professor of poetry at Oxford in 1741, a position he held for ten years. In 1766, Lowth became the bishop of St. David's, and by 1777, he was the bishop of London. Lowth finally died in 1787 at Fulham Palace. His most famous book, *Praelectiones De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (1753), 'established a new method and reading and understanding those passages of the Hebrew Bible, such as the Psalms and many of the writings of the prophets'.³⁹⁹ 'In place of metre', he argued

that the structure of Hebrew verse could be identified by its own parabolic or figurative mode of expression, and in particular by the parallelism, or repetitions of similar words or phrases, sometimes in a regular order, sometimes not, that gave rhythm to Hebrew poetry and song, and served almost as an alternative to metre.⁴⁰⁰

Smart was intimately aware of Lowth's views. Six years before he commenced *Jubilate Agno*, he wrote about them in the January 1756 edition of a periodical he edited, *The Universal Visiter* [sic].⁴⁰¹ It is not surprising, then, to find Lowth's influence throughout *Jubilate Agno*.

For instance, in the recurrence of one of the names from line 114 in 'Fragment B':

Let Pleasant, house of Pleasant rejoice with The Carrier Fish—God be gracious to Dame Fysh.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ All biographical information on Lowth is taken from the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. See Scott Mandelbrote, 'Lowth, Robert (1710-1787), biblical critic and bishop of London'. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 03. Oxford University Press. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-17104> [accessed 13 February 2023].

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Christopher Smart, 'Further Remarks on Dr. Lowth's Celebrated Prelections', *The Universal Visiter or Monthly Memorialist*, number 1, January 1756, ed. by Christopher Smart (T. Gardner, 1756), pp. 73-74. Later in his life, he became friendly with Lowth. In a letter written by John Hawkesworth in October 1764, he reports Smart 'had lately received a very genteel letter from Dr. Lowth, and is by no means considered in any light that makes his company as a gentleman, a scholar, and a genius less desirable'. See Arthur Sherbo, *Christopher Smart: Scholar of the University* (Michigan State University Press, 1967), p. 196.

⁴⁰² Smart, 149, D, 65.

Instead of employing her name as a homophone, Smart responds to Lowth's acknowledgement of parallelism as a consistent trait in Hebrew poetry.⁴⁰³ Their syntactical correlation gestures to the reader the congruity between 'Fish' in the first clause and 'Fysh' in the second. The first word rhythmically merges with the second, as one signifier collapses into another, thus giving an instance of the emblematic relationship between humans and nonhumans. As in his use of homophones, this is another example of a poet using language to create concord between species. These micro paradigms are analogous to how God achieves the same harmonious effect on a macro scale. Smart, a man made in God's image, envisages himself and the deity he worships as creative beings.⁴⁰⁴

Replicating the Bible: The Antiphonal Structure of *Jubilate Agno*

W.H. Bond also noticed another congruence between Smart's poetry and Lowth's discovery in *Praelectiones De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum*. As demonstrated, a chain of significance runs horizontally between the 'Let' and 'For' verses. The first edition of *Jubilate Agno*, edited by W.F. Stead, had merely observed that 'Smart was trying to introduce various characteristics of Hebrew poetry'.⁴⁰⁵ Bond went further, noting that several passages in Lowth's book help explain *Jubilate Agno*'s structure. For example, when clarifying the construction of these early biblical texts, Lowth observes that

The Hebrew poets frequently express a sentiment with the utmost brevity and simplicity, illustrated by no circumstances, adorned with no epithets (which in truth they seldom use); they afterwards call in the aid of ornament; they repeat, they vary, they amplify the same sentiment; and adding one or more sentences which run

⁴⁰³ Where this is an example of horizontal parallelism, line B1, 116, 'Let Noah rejoice with Hibris who is from a wild boar and a tame sow. | For I bless God for the immortal soul of M' Pigg of DOWNHAM in NORFOLK' is one of vertical parallelism. Here, the word 'Hibris (meaning a pig) in the 'Let' line is coupled with the use of 'Pigg' in the 'For' line. Both vertical and horizontal parallelism exhibit the creative power of language to rhetorically harmonise the relationship between different species. See Smart, 58, B1, 116 and 59, B1, 116.

⁴⁰⁴ This relationship is not equal, but one between master and servant.

⁴⁰⁵ W.F. Stead, 'Appendix IV', Christopher Smart, *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song from Bedlam*, ed. by W.F. Stead (Jonathan Cape, 1939), p. 296.

parallel to each other, they express the same or a similar, and often a contrary sentiment in nearly the same form of words.⁴⁰⁶

Directly relevant to the use of parallelism is Lowth's observation about '*the manner of chanting the hymns by alternate choirs: whence the origin of the poetical construction of the sentences, and that peculiar form, in which verses and distichs run parallel or correspondent to each other*'.⁴⁰⁷ Hypothesising on these two principles, Bond declares, 'Smart's plan is now obvious. Writing in what he conceived to be the Hebrew tradition, he sets out to compose a pair of poems, separate yet intimately related, agreeing page for page and line for line'.⁴⁰⁸ Though this structure disintegrates as *Jubilate Agno* progresses, in 'Fragment B,' there is a precise antiphonal arrangement. Namely, each 'For' verse answers the 'Let' verse. This call-and-response structure inaugurates a vertical dialogue in *Jubilate Agno*. Smart's use of this arrangement further enlightens the reader on his conception of how animals and humans are connected in a divinely ordered world. For example, when he writes:

Let Libni rejoice with the Redshank, who migrates not but is translated to the upper regions.
For I have translated in the charity, which makes things better & I shall be translated myself at last.⁴⁰⁹

Smart interconnects himself with the redshank in a web of spatial and semiotic movements. Both actions hinge on the use of 'translated'. Initially, the connection is merely the graphological repetition of this word in both the 'Let' and 'For' lines. Regarding movement, the connection is referential since Smart deploys 'translated' as a synonym for 'transported'. Like the bird, Smart will be 'translated' upwards, epitomised in the redshank's ascendancy in the sky and Smart's journey towards Heaven. Finally, the poem suggests language's power to create or *transform* one thing into another. The supreme example is the primacy invested in

⁴⁰⁶ Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, vol. i, 2 vols, trans. by G. Gregory (J. Johnson, 1787), p. 100.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., vol. ii, 24.

⁴⁰⁸ W.H. Bond, 'Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno*', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 4.1 (1950), p. 46.

⁴⁰⁹ Smart, 40, B1, 11 and *ibid.*, 41, B1, 11.

the words of God to be translated into natural phenomena.⁴¹⁰ On a superficial level, this could regard the divinely designed bird, whose natural action of flying brings it closer to its maker. A more complex example is the 'For' line, where a chain of creative events originates in words and is transformed into geometric materiality. The process commences as an act of poetic creation when Smart translates passages from the Bible by turning them into the lines of *Jubilate Agno*.⁴¹¹ This act of versification is interpreted propitiously by God or in the poem's phrase 'translated in the charity'. Finally, the third translation occurs when Smart's poetic endeavour is transformed into bodily reward as he ascends upward.⁴¹² From biblical inscriptions to heavenly transportation, God is the alpha and omega of this sequence.

Jubilate Agno's antiphonal structure further collapses animals into humans in the lines:

Let Shephatiah rejoice with the little Owl, which is the wingged [sic] Cat.
For I am possessed of a cat, surpassing in beauty, from whom I take occasion to
bless Almighty God.⁴¹³

Like the previous occasion, this is also a case of translation as creation. In Bond's notes to *Jubilate Agno*, he remarks, '*The little Owl* is still known to country people as the cat-owl'.⁴¹⁴ This initial transition from one creature to another in the 'Let' line is followed by further confluence in its antiphonal partner. Here, human and animal merge as Smart becomes 'possessed of' the now de-winged cat. This complex relationship displays one constant feature in Smart's use of animals. They are always the standard against which humans are

⁴¹⁰ An instance of this would be Gen. 1.3, 'And God said, Let there be light: and there was light'. In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine comments 'nec aliter quam dicendo facis: nec tamen simul et sempiterna fiunt onima, quae dicendo facis'. William Watt's 1631 translation interprets this as 'Nor does thou make it otherwise than by saying; and yet are not all things made together, or everlasting, which so thou makest by saying'. See St. Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, vol. ii, 2 vols, ed. by William Watts (Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 225. In a later poem, Smart pronounces, 'God himself, th' Almighty word'. See 'Hymn XVI' in Smart, ii, 63, 17.

⁴¹¹ This is a point Smart expounds further on in the line, 'For I pray the Lord Jesus to translate my MAGNIFICAT into verse and represent it'. See Smart, 47, B1, 43.

⁴¹² This is the meaning of the line 'I shall be translated myself at last'.

⁴¹³ Smart, 52, B1, 68 and *ibid.*, 53, B1, 68.

⁴¹⁴ Smart, 52, note 2.

measured. Whether the 'For' line means that the conjoining of the cat and Smart increases his beauty or that he alone surpasses its splendour, the animal is still held in high regard.

Jeoffry the Cat, the Perfect Christian

Smart's assimilation of his identity with a cat shows his close affinity with this particular creature. This idea resonates in a confessional statement made later in 'Fragment B1' when he concedes:

For the purse is for me because I have neither money nor human friends.⁴¹⁵

Concerning this sentiment, Arthur Sherbo observes, 'Having been deserted [...] he sought solace in the company of a cat'.⁴¹⁶ This seems only partially true. The numerous citations to cats throughout *Jubilate Agno* and Smart's belief that he is 'possessed' by the animal indicate that they have a far greater significance in the poem than just companionship.⁴¹⁷ Friedman notes, 'There are a number of indications in the *Jubilate Agno* that Smart knew and used Isidore's encyclopaedia and that he was influenced by its fanciful etymologies'.⁴¹⁸ One of which is

The mouser (*musio*) is so called because it is troublesome to mice (*mus*). Common people call it the cat (*cattus*) from 'catching' (*captura*). Others say it is so named because *cattat*, that is, 'it sees' – for it can see so keenly (*acute*) that with the gleam of its eyes it overcomes the darkness of night. Hence, 'cat' comes from Greek, that is, 'clever'.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ Smart, 87, B1, 283. Smart, maybe punning here on the close resemblance between 'purse' and 'puss'. Later in the poem, Smart describes Jeoffry's circumstance, declaring, 'For he is the Lord's poor and so indeed is he called by benevolence perpetually—Poor Jeoffry! poor Jeoffry! the rat has bit thy throat'. Conjoined by the word 'poor', Smart's association with his pet seems far more equal than the guest/host relationship Cowper shared with his hares. See Smart, 117, B2, 742.

⁴¹⁶ Arthur Sherbo, *Christopher Smart: Scholar of the University* (Michigan State University Press, 1967), p. 130.

⁴¹⁷ Smart's interest in cats predates *Jubilate Agno*. In a letter published in *The Midwife*, Smart jokingly recommends a cat-organ because 'it is universally known and acknowledg'd that these Animals, at the Time of their Amours, are the most musical Creatures in Nature'. See Christopher Smart, 'A Letter from Mrs. Midnight to the Royal Society, Containing Some New Curious Improvements Upon the CAT ORGAN', *The Midwife, or, The Old Woman's Magazine*, issue 1, October 1750 (T. Carnan, 1750), p. 99.

⁴¹⁸ John Block Friedman, 'The Cosmology of Praise: Smart's *Jubilate Agno*', *PMLA*, 82.2 (1967), p. 255, footnote 15.

⁴¹⁹ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. by Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 254.

Smart, thus, feels justified in associating the traits that Isidore ascribes to the cat itself, namely its ability to catch, see in the night and its cleverness. Furthermore, Smart will narrate how his companion cat, Jeffry, uses these capabilities to become a defender of the faith. Unlike Isidore's cat, Jeffry's actions are not directed towards a mouse but rather at an adversary more worthy of the perfect Christian practitioner Smart envisions him to be. This is intimated when *Jubilate Agno* writes about Jeffry that:

For he is the servant of the Living God duly and daily serving him.⁴²⁰

A few lines later, the poem gives further evidence for this supposition when it documents Jeffry's nocturnal activities in the lines:

For when his day's work is done his business more properly begins.
For he keeps the Lord's watch in the night against the adversary.
For he counteracts the powers of darkness by his electrical skin and glaring eyes.
For he counteracts the Devil, who is death, by brisking about the life.⁴²¹

Jeffry's electrical skin 'brisking about the life' is once more seen as a bodily sign of God's creative power.⁴²² Combined with his 'glaring eyes,' it also symbolises his ability to defend the deity who gave him life. These bodily acts of devotion are physical evidence that Jeffry is in accordance with Christ's decree that 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you'.⁴²³ Three times in the poem Jeffry is defined as patient. Smart considers this virtue another sign of the cat's ability to display his theological credentials. Clement Hawes believes that Smart's 'emphasis on composure—on harmonising the mind—suggests the program for a patient ecstasy that is methodically achieved in the face of adversity'.⁴²⁴ This thematic concern seems to complement the poem's

⁴²⁰ Smart, 115, B2, 698.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 116-117, B2, 719-722.

⁴²² The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites that the earliest use of the word 'electrical' was in 1616. 'electrical, adj. and n.'. Definition 1.a. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/60254 [accessed 13 February 2023]. Jeffry's electrical body will gain its full significance later in this chapter.

⁴²³ John, 15, 7.

⁴²⁴ Clement Hawes, 'Poised Poesis: Ecstasy in *Jubilate Agno*', *Reading Christopher Smart in the Twenty-first Century: "By Succession of Delight"*, ed. by Min Wild and Noel Chevalier (Bucknell University Press, 2013), p. 82.

structure. For if the repetitious use of ‘For’ verses gives *Jubilate Agno* a vigorous conviction in the eternal and harmonious power of God, the tension created between antonyms, such as ‘death and ‘life’, imprisoned within a single line serves as a warning to the reader to be ever vigilant. Jeffry can thus be seen as both object and subject in the poem.

The opening line on Smart’s companion animal commences, ‘For I will consider my Cat Jeffry’. This suggests that the poet’s meditation on Jeffry will follow a philosophical tradition that tries to comprehend the sentience of beings other than man.⁴²⁵ In his ‘Apology for Raymond Sebond’, Montaigne asks, ‘When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?’⁴²⁶ In the twenty-first century, Derrida similarly muses about the mental processes of other species. Finding himself unclothed in the presence of his pet, he ponders, ‘Why let oneself be overcome with shame? And why this shame that blushes for being ashamed? Especially, I should make clear, if the cat observes me *frontally* naked, face to face’.⁴²⁷ Jeffry, though, is not reduced to an object to consider human concerns. Smart’s first-hand encounters ensure that the knowledge he gains from this experience empirically justifies the agency of the cat.⁴²⁸ Like Montaigne and Derrida, Smart acknowledges the autonomy of the creature upon which he is gazing. As Max Sutton explains, ‘Jeffry exists in his own right, and he is significant, both to the human world, as represented by his master, and to the cosmic order, for being what he is: “complete cat”’.⁴²⁹ As a paradigm of creaturely perfection, Smart presents Jeffry as an example to be emulated. If Magdalena Ozarska is correct in her assumption that in charting Jeffry’s diurnal

⁴²⁵ Smart, 115, B2, 697.

⁴²⁶ Michele Montaigne, ‘An Apology for Raymond Sebond’, *The Complete Essays*, trans. by M.A. Screech (Penguin Group, 1991), p. 505.

⁴²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. by David Wills (Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 4

⁴²⁸ *Jubilate Agno* acknowledges a debate to Locke’s explanation of experience via sense data in the line ‘For an IDEA is the mental vision of an object’. The following line names ‘Locke’ as the originator of this belief. See Smart, 98, B2, 395-396.

⁴²⁹ Max Keith Sutton, ‘Smart’s “Complete Cat”’, *College English*, 24.4 (1963), p. 304.

occurrences, ‘the association brought to mind is that of Saints’ lives, depicting the holy people’s daily routines, permeated by piety even in their most down-to-earth manifestations’ this imports religious significance into his every gesture.⁴³⁰ Even though the tone in this section is less severe than those praising the devotions of the saints, the poem’s sentiment remains sincere. Smart’s consistent use of beginning every line with ‘For’ ensures that each action is quickly followed by the next. This rhythmical litany of pious deeds imbues this section with a joyful spirit. Moreover, each accruing new act combines with the previous ones until the reader is overwhelmed by the magnificence of Jeoffry. It is as if Smart attempts to transfer the passion of the cat’s actions into the mind of his audience. Reading these lines, thus, becomes a communal act. Hopefully, for Smart, this infectious enthusiasm will result in an epiphanic moment in which the reader realises that Jeoffry is worthy of serious consideration. Unsurprisingly, the poem acknowledges him as an:

[...] instrument for the children to learn benevolence upon.⁴³¹

In *Chronicles*, King David commands:

the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren *to be* the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy.⁴³²

Jeoffry is also an ‘instrument’ for ‘lifting up the voice with joy’. It is fitting, then, that this line combines biblical phraseology with a lyrical tone that emerges through the repeated ‘en’

⁴³⁰ Magdalena Ozarska, ‘The Presentation of the Animal Sphere in Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*’, *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature*, 26.1 (2002), p. 70.

⁴³¹ Smart, 117, B2, 729. As early as 1752, Smart used the cat as an animal to emulate. In his ‘To Miss Kitty Bennet and her Cat Crop’ he proposes Kitty should replicate the cat’s modesty and prudence in the lines ‘Tho’ this, ‘tis own’d, be somewhat rude, | And Puss by nature be a prude, | Yet hence you may improve, | By decent pride and dint of scoff | Keep caterwauling coxcombs off, | And ward th’ attacks of love’. And ‘Your Crop a mousing when you see | She teaches you oeconomy | That makes the pot to boil’. Smart foreshadows this close relationship with the cat by calling her ‘Kitty’. His use of alliteration (in the ‘K’ sounds) in the title is a typical technique that Smart employs to demonstrate the interrelationship that words can create. See Smart, iv, 203, 13-18 and 19-21.

⁴³² 1 Chron, 15, 16.

sound in 'instrument', 'children', and 'benevolence'. The poetic rhythm here underscores its scriptural message, which testifies to Jeoffry's worthiness before the Lord.

As an ideal Christian, he is not only an object for both Smart and children to consider, but he also has the capability for autonomous reflection himself.⁴³³ This is established in the line:

For having consider'd God and himself he will consider his neighbour.⁴³⁴

Similarly to the cats of Montaigne and Derrida, Jeoffry is represented as thinking about those thinking about him. In doing so, he returns Smart's gaze. The poem, though, records the broader scope of the cat's field of view. Jeoffry does not restrict his cognisance to merely meditate about one man; his thoughts also encompass his maker and his 'neighbour'. This cerebral performance ensures that the reader can glimpse an instance in which an animal thinks and cares for others, an empathetic act that affirms the communal nature of Jeoffry.

Furthermore, as the poet reflects on this animal, Smart charts the cat's ability to create an identity through performance:

For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.
For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.
For then he leaps up to catch the musk, w^{ch} is the blessing of God upon his prayer.⁴³⁵

It is through his actions that he exhibits his nature, transforming God's words into physical form as he does so. Actions that are divinely sanctioned when he receives his creator's benediction, or as the poem states:

For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.⁴³⁶

Earlier in the poem in 'Fragment A' Smart had written:

Let Anna bless God with the Cat, who is worthy to be presented before the throne of grace, when he has trampled upon the idol in his prank.⁴³⁷

⁴³³ Like Adam and Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, God has given Jeoffry the free will to choose whether to obey His edicts or not. Unlike them, Jeoffry will resist temptation. See Smart, 116-117, B2, 721-722.

⁴³⁴ Smart, 116, B2, 715.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 699-701.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 118, B2, 765.

⁴³⁷ Smart, 34, A, 57.

If this line seems obscure when initially encountered, it becomes more lucid when read concerning the significance of Jeffry's movement. The 'pranks' of the cat are another method of counteracting the Devil. Even in actions that might be viewed as non-serious, as the word 'pranks' implies, the righteous action of trampling on false 'idols' ensures their worth before God.⁴³⁸ Jeffry strengthens his credentials as the apotheosis of creaturely perfection for *Jubilate Agno* to document when Smart writes:

For, tho [sic] he cannot fly, he is an excellent clamberer.
[...]
For he can tread to all the measures upon the musick.
For he can swim for life.
For he can creep.⁴³⁹

His imitation of animals on land, sea, or air attests to his status as the preeminent creature in *Jubilate Agno*, as the poem confirms in the line:

For his motions upon the face of the earth are more than any other quadrupede.⁴⁴⁰

Moreover, Jeffry's mastery of his environment allows him to represent all creation. The movements he expresses in different spatial ecosystems all emanate from one body. His corporeal form, working harmoniously with all of nature, becomes a symbol for the convocation of creaturely praise.

Thus, Smart makes Jeffry's body the perfect site to chart God's sign. In an article in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in March 1754, a correspondent signing themselves 'G' states

Natural electricity is common almost to all animals, especially those destin'd to catch their prey by night; cats have this property in the greatest degree of any animal we are acquainted with; their furr [sic] or hair is surprizingly electrical. If it be gently raised up it avoids the touch till it be forc'd to it and by stroking their backs in the dark, the emanations of electrical fire are extremely quick.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites 1576 as the earliest date of 'Prank', being used to mean 'a practical joke'. See 'prank, n.2'. Definition 3.a. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, September 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1136359602>. Addison writing in *The Spectator*, under the eidolon of Mr. Spectator, describes how he once observed a cat play 'several Pranks above the Capacity of an ordinary Cat'. *Spectator*, i, 482. No. 117, Saturday, 14 July 1711. If line 57 from 'Fragment A' refers to Jeffry, it could be argued that he also has a capacity above an ordinary cat.

⁴³⁹ Smart, 118-119, B2, 765, 766, 768-770.

⁴⁴⁰ Smart, 119, B2, 767.

⁴⁴¹ *Gentleman's Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, vol. 24 (D. Henry and R. Cave, 1754), p. 113.

Smart invokes this idea in the line:

For by stroking him I have found out electricity.⁴⁴²

A Few lines later, he explains the theological signification of his quasi-scientific discovery:

For the Electrical fire is the spiritual substance, which God sends from heaven to sustain the bodies of both man and beast.⁴⁴³

As mentioned earlier, in Smart's theology, electricity is the material sign of God's power to create life. Combined with the comment in *The Gentleman's Magazine* that 'cats have this property in the greatest degree', it can be argued that Jeoffry is the apex of vital agency at the structural and ontological heart of *Jubilate Agno*.⁴⁴⁴ Jeoffry is literally a MAGNIFI-CAT, a witty pun Smart intentionally makes.⁴⁴⁵ In writing about his cat, Smart accomplished his desire for:

[...] the Lord Jesus to translate my MAGNIFICAT into verse and represent it.⁴⁴⁶

This achievement is charted in a double sense. Firstly, in a playful way, he documents the Christian devotion of his cat as his versification turns flesh into words. This is a reverse action of Jeoffry turning the word into flesh through corporeal acts of devotion. Secondly, in the accretion of these words, his MAGNIFI-CAT is slowly translated into a liturgical poem. Here, Smart again demonstrates the power of the word to create. As evinced earlier, 'translate' means both to change and to move. In petitioning for divine intervention, he is not only entreating for Christ's blessing. Smart draws a parallel between poetic creation and the creation of life. The project of *Jubilate Agno* is to not only 'represent' itself as a canticle of praise (his Magnificat) but also to 'represent' the animals the poem enumerates. Through this

⁴⁴² Smart, 118, B2, 762.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 764.

⁴⁴⁴ The description of Jeoffry the cat comes at the end of 'Fragment B', a point midway through the extant version of the poem. As already demonstrated, he is also the being who best represents the Christian qualities required to actively worship God.

⁴⁴⁵ This playful association aligns with Smart's description of Jeoffry in the line, 'For he is a mixture of gravity and waggery'. See Smart, 117, B2, 738. If there is *gravitas* in the word 'Magnificat', there is waggery in 'Magnifi-cat'.

⁴⁴⁶ Smart, 47, B1, 43.

endeavour, Smart hopes to raise the status of all nonhumans by imprecating them within his Christian verse. Jeoffry is the symbolic depiction of these creatures. By representing Jeoffry (his Magnifi-cat) in *Jubilate Agno*, he not only validates the animal's ability to rejoice in the worship of God, but Smart also puts forward his literary credentials to advocate/represent on behalf of all creation. Recalling the collapsing of Smart with a cat in line sixty-eight suggests one last change.

Translated into English, 'Magnificat' transforms into the Latin phrase 'my soul praises the lord'.⁴⁴⁷ Derived from *Luke 1: 46-55*, it is also known as the *Song of Mary*. The relevance to Smart resides in the fact that it is a crucial canticle in Evensong. In widening the meaning of the word 'Magnificat', *Jubilate Agno* attempts to recodify a hymn central to *The Book of Common Prayer*. Not only does Smart simultaneously advocate for his cat and himself, but he also inaugurates, via his redefining the Magnificat's latitude, a process that will insert compassion for all animals in a service at the heart of Anglican life. He literally magnifies/widens the canticle, so it is no longer appropriate to call it the *Song of Mary*, but rather a joyous *Song for all Creation*. Hence, when Smart merges with the cat, he actualises the poem's initial call for 'man and beast' to 'magnify his name together'.

Before and After: Smart's Concern for Animals Outside of *Jubilate Agno*

Even without *Jubilate Agno*, Smart's compassion for animals is amply displayed in his work before and after his incarceration, for example, in 'On an Eagle Confined in a College-Court' (1751). In a lofty classical tone, Smart bewails how the 'Imperial' bird, the 'servant of almighty JOVE', is denied its dignity and freedom by being caged.⁴⁴⁸ However, where the

⁴⁴⁷ 'Magnificat, n.'. Definition 1. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/112320 [accessed 13 December 2022].

⁴⁴⁸ Smart, iv, 90, 1 and *ibid.*, 5.

initial verse testifies to the eagle's pedigree as the preeminent bird in Greek and Roman culture, the second verse descends into pathos:

Oh cruel fate! what barbarous hand,
What more than Gothic ire,
At some fierce tyrant's dread command,
To check thy daring fire,
Has plac'd thee in this servile cell,⁴⁴⁹

Foreshadowing William Cowper's concern for putting birds in cages in his 'On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in a Cage', Smart describes how this creature is denied its freedom in hyperbolic terms. Suddenly, though, the poem's register changes again as it castigates the members of Cambridge University. With bitter invective, the verse satirically asks:

What time by thee scholastic Pride
Takes his precise, pedantic stride,
Nor on thy mis'ry casts a care,⁴⁵⁰

Smart's use of 'precise' here is pejorative. The students's narrow, pedantic walk is symptomatic of their lack of ability to see beyond their classical studies and notice the suffering bird. Smart's poem, thus, ends ironically with:

Cramp'd by the oppressors of the mind,
Who study downward on the ground;
Type of the fall of Greece and Rome;
While more than mathematic gloom,
Envelopes all around!⁴⁵¹

The scholars who study classical texts fail to see a creature that was so highly celebrated by those cultures. By epitomising the eagle as an emblem of antiquity, its contemporary fate is mirrored in the 'fall of Greece and Rome'. The fortune of past civilisations becomes the destiny of all caged animals. A vertical movement in the poem further stresses this creaturely injustice. The verses on the bird precede those on the students. This spatial privileging on the page is replicated in the narrative. The eagle is described as a bird:

[...] who wont to soar

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 11-15.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 25-27.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 91, 8-40.

High o'er the rolling cloud,⁴⁵²

Conversely, the members of the University are students 'Who study downward on the ground'. Unfettered, the eagle would naturally occupy a physically and morally higher space than the students. This is because the action of incarcerating the bird places their claims to superiority under stress.⁴⁵³ The poem's epithet for the college inhabitants as the 'oppressors of the mind' has a double meaning. They not only subjugate the unfortunate bird but are ironically also persecutors of themselves since they are unable to see beyond their 'pedantic' books. For Smart, this lack of ability to live in the present blinds them to the beauty of creation. As a scholar himself, Smart knows the worth of classical texts, but not to the detriment of God. The scholars may have pagan knowledge, but they are devoid of Christian understanding. Moreover, they lack the wisdom to apply the lessons they read about to real-life situations. By caging the bird, they deny its ability to praise God through its natural inclination to fly. For Smart, this is the most lamentable crime one creature can inflict on another.

By 1756 when he published 'A Story of a Cock and a Bull', his concern about suffering animals had become even more urgent. In rhyming couplets, the poem charts the grim fate of domestic animals that are no longer useful to man. On the day preceding the slaughter of an aged bull, the poem laments:

But hold, to-morrow is the fair:
Thou to thy doom, old boy, art fated
To-morrow—and thou shalt be baited—
The deed was done—Curse on the wrong!
Bloody description, hold thy tongue—⁴⁵⁴

Even though the poem acquiesces and denies the reader a 'Bloody description', graphologically, the use of long dashes evokes the movement of the slashing knife that will

⁴⁵² Ibid., 90, 1 -2.

⁴⁵³ This cruel action ironically foreshadows the future fate of the academically accomplished Smart.

⁴⁵⁴ Smart, iv, 24, 28-32.

inexorably come. This presage of doom, explicitly stated in ‘art fated’, is expressed with more nuance in the poem’s structure. The regular metrical verse creates a sense of inevitable certainty. The use of the closed couplet reinforces this. Just as the reader knows the predictability that the end of one line will rhyme with the next, the poem equally portents the inescapable fate of the bull. This destiny seems all the more inequitable to a creature the verse vernacularly calls ‘old boy’. A phrase that both recalls its past useful service and the reason for its demise. The fact that the ox is ironically going to the ‘fair’ thus seems far from fair/just.

A comparable narrative is also told concerning a cock. Once again, after documenting the invaluable service this animal has given to its owner, the poem indignantly decries:

Whose vigour brav’d the Shrovetide billet,
Had just return’d in wounds and pain,
Triumphant from the barbarous main.⁴⁵⁵

Referencing the same cruel practice of throwing stones at cocks that the anonymous author of *Clemency to Brutes* and John Toogood railed against, these lines openly voice a concern for this subjugated creature. The final section of ‘A Story of a Cock and a Bull’ changes its focus, for it no longer comments upon the victims of injustice. Instead, it centres on the perpetrators of these crimes. Its pronouncement is damning:

When bloody, base, degenerate man,
Who deviates from his maker’s plan,
Who nature and her works abuses,
And thus his fellow-servants uses,
Shall greatly, and yet justly, want
The mercy he refused to grant.
And, when his heart, his conscience purges,
Shall wish to be the brute he scourges.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 325, 40-42.

⁴⁵⁶ Smart, iv, 325, 59-62.

Written in a period when Smart's reputation in London was not associated with overtly religious poems, this final section justifies the compassionate consideration of animals in Christian terms. Its short syllabic words with a rhyming tetrameter detail a concern *Jubilate Agno* will reiterate. Starting from the premise that all life is divinely conceived, the use of 'fellow-servants' firmly articulates that every species is beholden to God (servants) and that each being is connected in a non-hierarchical structure (fellow). If Christian consideration fails to motivate the recalcitrant sinner, the poem appeals to their self-interest. Invoking the Golden Rule, the poem suggests the biblical prescription 'all things whatsoever ye would that men should do for you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets'.⁴⁵⁷ 'A Story of a Cock and a Bull' is a poem that deals with themes addressed in the sermons cited earlier. Like *Clemency to Brutes*, it stresses the Christian duty to treat all animals benevolently. It also agrees with *An Apology for Brute Creation* that animals are sensible of the blows directed towards them. The language of these sentiments is similar to *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and the Sin of Cruelty to Animals*. In both cases, the diction is forceful. Equally important, it is easy to comprehend. This is because Smart intends his poem, in the words of Primatt, to be read by 'men of all ranks'.⁴⁵⁸

Smart's poetry, after his release, elaborates on themes advanced in *Jubilate Agno*. This is the case in some of his verses in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Fasts and Festivals of the Church of England* (1765). Marcus Walsh notes the subscription list for this book is 'a formidable directory of public figures and men of arts and letters'.⁴⁵⁹ These include Robert

⁴⁵⁷ Matt., 7, 12. In a move that presages a concern in *Jubilate Agno*, Smart's poem reinscribes this verse to include all creatures, not just the 'men' St. Matthew considers.

⁴⁵⁸ See p. 83.

⁴⁵⁹ Marcus Walsh, 'Hymns and Spiritual Songs: Introduction', in Smart, ii, 2. *Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Fasts and Festivals of the Church of England* was printed in 1765 along with *A Translation of the Psalms of David, Attempted in the Spirit of Christianity, and Adapted to the Divine Service*. Both these texts, like *Jubilate Agno*, are part of Smart's project to recodify *The Book of Common Prayer* with verse that brings animals into the Anglican community. Unlike Primatt's *Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Animals*, no second edition of the book was printed. A total of 736 subscribed for the 859 copies available. Walsh further notes, 'The diversity of Smart's subscribers is an index both of the range of his acquaintance, and of the

Lowth, whose influence on *Jubilate Agno* has already been noted and the poet William Cowper. Echoing *Jubilate Agno*'s call for 'every creature' to give 'glory to the Lord', Smart rephrases this sentiment with child-like simplicity in his 'Hymn III: Epiphany':

Come, ye creatures of thanksgiving,
Which are harmoniz'd to bless,
Birds that warble for your living,
Beasts with way of love express.⁴⁶⁰

Forgoing *Jubilate Agno*'s biblical phrasing 'Hymn iii' still echoes the ethos of its more complicated precursor. It also eschews the isocolonic and the antiphonal structure that *Jubilate Agno* uses to such a significant effect. Instead, it relies upon monosyllabic words within a simple ABAB rhyme scheme. This is an entirely appropriate arrangement for a hymn, ensuring its cogent sing-song message is easily discernible by any congregation. The register of the poem is one of delight and instruction. Even though Smart's audience would have been unaware of *Jubilate Agno*, poems like this give adequate evidence to his contemporaries of the importance of interspecies worship. 'Hymn iii' also propounds another theme that connects it to his previous piece. In the line 'Beast with ways to love express', Smart repeats his idea that animals worship God by conforming to their natures. The last line's use of 'living' gestures towards a definition that can be understood as 'reason to live'. Here, the very totalising act of singing, a literal chorus of praise, ensures that birds conform to their maker's design. This obedience is a bodily act of worship in which their creaturely voice acknowledges God as their creator. As such, as John Block Friedman explains, 'He invokes them as models for men. For, in fulfilling their proper natures, [they] contribute naturally to the universal harmony what man must contribute voluntarily, namely praise to

audience for which his *Psalms* and *Hymns* were intended'. See Smart, ii, 2 Literary authors who subscribed include Akenside, Churchill, Cowper, Grainger, Gray, Murphy, Smollett, and the brothers Warton.

Unfortunately, it received scant notice in the press.

⁴⁶⁰ Smart, ii, 38, 33-36.

the Creator of all'.⁴⁶¹ The poem gives other examples of animals adoring their maker to further emphasise this point:

Browsing kids, and lambkins grazing,
Colts and younglings of the drove,
Come with all your modes of praising,
Bounding through the leafless grove.⁴⁶²

Set within a joyous pastoral setting, Smart harmonises the child-like language with his didactic message. All animals worship God according to their natures, or in Smart's vocabulary, 'all your modes of praising'. Kids, lambkins, colts and younglings all acknowledge their creator in different ways. The poem's choice of young animals suggests that the actions of these creatures are the perfect model for children to emulate. The vertical alliteration by pairing the opening words of each line, 'Browsing' with Bounding' and 'Colts' with 'Come', further stresses the harmonious relationship between God and creatures the rhyme scheme confirms.

Smart's belief that adoration is manifested by bodily actions is reiterated in his 'Hymn XXXIII: St. Stephen'. Here, the poem announces:

God! great and manifest around,
In earth, and air, and depth profound,
In every movement, animals that breathe,
And all the beauties visible beneath.⁴⁶³

As Marcus Walsh observes, 'In Smart 'breath' and 'breathing' are normally used in reference to prayer'.⁴⁶⁴ This double sense of 'breathe' touches the opening concern of *Jubilate Agno*, the ability for living (breathing) creatures to sing (breathe) in praise of their maker. It also unrelentingly reiterates the earlier poem's conviction that every living creature (animals that breathe) demonstrates their love for God via their agency. His conviction in this obsessive

⁴⁶¹ John Block Friedman, 'The Cosmology of Praise: Smart's *Jubilate Agno*', *PMLA*, 82.2 (1967), p. 250.

⁴⁶² Smart, ii, 38, 45-48.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 89, 5-8.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 427.

belief is a constant theme in these later poems. As usual, Smart democratises praise by reinterpreting it as a bodily utterance, thus giving even silent animals a creaturely voice. Furthermore, by highlighting that there are as many ways to adore their maker as there are animals, he proposes that each creature is equally as special and unique. It is this congregation of distinctive individuals that make the worship of God so vital. Smart believes, counterintuitively, that all things are the same in their differences. Even in their multiplicity, each creature shares a common ancestry derived from the same maker. No matter how dissimilar each animal is, their boundaries dissolve when they unite ‘and magnify his name together’.

Smart also published *A Translation of Psalms of David* in 1765. It continues with a preoccupation that animals are integral to God’s world. Almost certainly, its composition began whilst Smart was still incarcerated. In *Jubilate Agno*, he possibly refers to writing it when he declares:

[...] I sing a psalm of my own composing.⁴⁶⁵

‘Psalm CL’ echoes *Jubilate Agno*’s opening concern that it is the duty of all creation to worship God:

Let all things that have breath to breathe
 From heav’n above, from earth beneath,
 To Christ’s renown repair;
 O give him back your breath again,
 Put all the life into the strain,
 And soar by praise and pray’r!⁴⁶⁶

Smart’s use of breath/breathe imbues these lines with a sense of vitality - a bodily enactment of the joyous practice of praise itself. The use of ‘breath’ is another example of a punching word, a significance underlined by its repetition in these lines. Smart requires the reader to

⁴⁶⁵ Smart, B1, 45, 32.

⁴⁶⁶ Smart, iii, 386, 31-36.

understand that this word signifies animal vigour and vigorous animal praise. The whole verse radiates the same enthusiasm for public devotion that Smart exemplified in St. James's Park. This passion is poetically reaffirmed in the eye rhyme of 'breathe' with 'beneath', the vocal concord between 'again' and 'strain', and the alliteration in the final line's pairing of 'praise' with 'pray'r'. Smart employs his considerable skills in versification to evince the divine harmony between words. This seductive, highly poetic stanza expands on the *King James* version of this psalm. Here, it is just a single-line:

Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.⁴⁶⁷

Smart swells this over six lines. His psalm highlights the interconnectivity between the creator and his creations, which is absent from the authorised edition. Breath becomes the conduit between God and his creatures. It is both received and returned. It gives life and acknowledges the gift of life.

Part of 'Psalm XLIX' rhetorically asks whether man vitiates himself when mistreating animals. In a single verse, it summarises a concern that Smart had touched on in 'A Story of a Cock and a Bull', declaring:

Yet is man from his beginning
Weak, nor honour long retains,
And degrades himself by sinning
To the brutes o'er which he reigns.⁴⁶⁸

This consideration is absent from the *King James* version. However, Smart's insertion here demonstrates his concern for animals nominally under man's care. In alternating rhyming lines, he shows a preoccupation with animal welfare, a consistent feature in his poetry throughout his entire canon.

⁴⁶⁷ Ps. 150, 6.

⁴⁶⁸ Smart, iii, 117, 45-48.

Unsurprisingly, his *Hymns for the Amusement of Children*, published in 1771, continues to advocate on behalf of brute creation. This occurs overtly, for instance, in his verse on ‘Good-nature to Animals’. Its message councils compassion for all creatures. As the following lines exemplify:

The man of Mercy (says the Seer)
Shews mercy to his beasts;
Learn not of churls to be severe,
But house and feed at least.⁴⁶⁹

The opening verse paraphrases the passage that inspires *An Apology for Brute Creation*, *Proverbs* 12, 10.⁴⁷⁰ The poem then commences by stating the same sentiment that Primatt will later express in prose. Shorn of the biblical phraseology that is a striking feature in *Jubilate Agno*, Smart’s sing-song verse resolutely retains its Christian ethos. Along with ‘Hymn III’, this poem suggests that Noel Chevalier is correct in writing that Smart shows a tendency for ‘embracing of a playful, childlike relationship with God in his later, religious poetry’.⁴⁷¹ Smart’s model here is Isaac Watts’s *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715). Marcus Walsh notes that other than Watts, ‘by 1770 no real tradition of hymns for children had become established’.⁴⁷² If each shares a simple vocabulary suitable for young readers, their differences could not be starker. Watts’s hymns warn sinful children of the dangers of a wrathful God. Smart’s verse directly opposes this view and instead celebrates the joys given by a benevolent creator. In terse, easy-to-remember lines, ‘Hymn III’ is typical of the others in this collection. It expounds a scriptural

⁴⁶⁹ Smart, ii, 356, 1-4. In *A Song to David*, Smart rephrases this biblical passage as ‘Be good to him that pulls thy plough; | Due food and care, due rest, allow | For her that yields thee milk’. See Smart, ii, 137, 250-252.

⁴⁷⁰ This is the same passage that the anonymous author of *Clemency to Brutes* employed in his sermons.

⁴⁷¹ Noel Chevalier, ‘Breaking the Circle of Science: Newton, Newbery, and Christopher Smart’s New Learning’, *Reading Christopher Smart in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Min Wild and Noel Chevalier (Bucknell University Press, 2013), p. 124. Mary Jackson credits Smart with writing or co-editing an early periodical for children, the *Lilliputian Magazine* (1751). See Mary V. Jackson, *Engines of Instruction, Mischief, and Magic: Children’s Literature in England from Its Beginnings to 1839* (Scolar Press, 1989), p. 83.

⁴⁷² Smart, ii, 309. Walsh goes on to discount Wesley’s *Hymns for Children* because ‘Wesley’s only concession to the child’s level of understanding was to supply a section of thirty-four (out of a total of 105) ‘Hymns for the Youngest’, which are indeed simple in both diction and doctrine’. See *ibid.*, 310.

tenet that connects Smart to a wider community of Anglican divines that pronounced on this issue. ‘Good-nature to Animals’ then proceeds to give explicit examples of injustice towards nonhumans. On caged birds, the poem mournfully asks:

Shall I melodious pris’ner take
From out the linnet’s nest,⁴⁷³

This is followed by a verse that touches on the same concern central to James Granger’s *An Apology for Brute Creation* (1773) – the mistreatment of domesticated horses and dogs. The poem’s narratorial voice enquires:

What, shall I whip in cruel wrath
The steed that bears me safe,
Or ‘gainst the dog, who plights his troth,
For faithful service chafe?⁴⁷⁴

Similarly to the ‘Let’ and ‘For’ lines in *Jubilate Agno*, pairs of lines form a close relationship, one almost answering the other. Each couplet alternates human cruelty with animal fidelity. The poem’s sense of injustice is thus evoked by the clash of opposing actions – ‘to whip in cruel wrath’ against ‘bears me safe’. Smart seems to imply that compassion manifests itself through bodily actions. As such, ‘Good-nature to Animals’ modifies a theme in *Jubilate Agno*, that corporeal activities are redolent of adherence to one’s Christian duty. This poem, though, modifies *Jubilate Agno*’s message in the service of compassion towards animals. Whereas in the previous poem, the physical movement of nonhumans was a sign of adoration to God, in this poem, humans direct their signs towards animals. Even non-signs such as forbearing ‘to whip in cruel wrath’ can be interpreted as a benevolent act towards an innocent creature. Smart, though, is not content with extending mercy only to animals that are of service to man. Unlike Granger’s sermon, this hymn does not confine itself to the welfare of domesticated beasts. Instead, in mentioning silk worms, dormice, wrens, and robins, it

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 356, 5-6.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 9-12.

follows the pattern exemplified in *Jubilate Agno* by arguing for the primacy of all creatures. Not only are animals capable of worshipping their creator, but as creations of God, they are also worthy of compassion. Without exception, then, Smart's Anglican community comprises all those with 'the breath of Life'.

Praise is of central concern in Smart's *A Song to David*. In a section beginning at stanza LI, the poet embarks on describing the seasons in a way reminiscent of James Thomson's well-loved attempt. Typically, Smart's vignettes of the changing year are closely tied to the act of worship. This he achieves by repeating the word 'ADORATION'. Commencing in the first line, the word moves down one line for each stanza. This concludes in verse LVII, only to repeat the sequence in the next section. Once this is completed for the second time, Smart breaks the cycle and fixes 'ADORATION' in the subsequent first lines until all of the seasons have been described. The moving repetition of this punching word overtly symbolises the cyclical nature of the seasons. Smart's breaking of this pattern from stanza LXIV, though, is a mystery. Whatever the reason, the whole sequence effortlessly replicates the sublime beauty of nature. J.B. Broadbent comments 'Schematic rhetoric so overt as the anaphora of the "Amplification in five degrees" and the cadencing of ADORATION down the stanzas, was extraordinary for his time, when rhetoric was small scale and syntactical and often satirical in function'.⁴⁷⁵ The liquid use of 'ADORATION' as it flows down each verse is matched by the poem's use of enjambment. For instance:

LIII.
 Rich almonds colour to the prime
 For ADORATION; tendrils climb,
 And fruit-trees pledge their gems;
 And Ivis with her gorgeous vest
 Builds for her eggs her cunning nest,
 And bell-flowers bow their stems.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁵ J.B. Broadbent, 'Introduction', Christopher Smart, *Song to David* (Rampant Lion Press, 1960), p. xviii.

⁴⁷⁶ Smart, ii, 139, 313-318.

These run-on lines evoke the meandering ‘tendrils’ in line two. The hyphens in ‘fruit-trees’ and ‘bell-flowers’ also carry the reader connectively through this stanza. The organic freedom of the poem is further suggested by its sparse punctuation. Smart’s careful crafting of this verse ensures that it achieves the required effect when employed. The semi-colon after ‘ADORATION’ encourages the reader to pause momentarily on the most critical word in this cycle. The use of commas signals that the succession of images of the natural world will change the stanza’s focus – from one plant to another, to a bird (the semi-colon is here used to differentiate between a plant and animal), and finally, back to a plant. If the commas separate, the anaphoric use of ‘And’ unites. Its repeated deployment as an opening word for half of the lines in this stanza emphatically conjoins plants and animals together. Where the commas invoke the difference between these two living entities, the use of ‘And’ stresses their shared heritage and duty to adore God.

Smart’s conviction for creaturely praise is also evident in the lines:

LV.

The spotted ounce the playsome cubs
Run rustling ‘mongst the flow’ring shrubs,
And lizards feed the moss;
For ADORATION beasts embark,
While waves upholding halcyon’s ark
No longer roar and toss.⁴⁷⁷

The use of enjambment here does not connote twisting tendrils; rather, it enacts the unrestrained movement (run) experienced by the joyous cubs. Smart’s use of ‘ark’ is also closely tied to animals.⁴⁷⁸ It is not only symbolic of a harmonious interaction between different species (including man), as confirmed in the last line of ‘No longer roar and toss’. It is also figuratively united with a bird. Used as a noun, halcyon is a name associated with the kingfisher. If this seems tenuous, it is strengthened by the fact that it was a bird ‘which

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 140, 325-330.

⁴⁷⁸ See p. 95 on the significance of the Ark in Smart’s animal theology.

brooded around the time of the winter solstice in a nest floating on the sea, charming the wind and the waves into calm'.⁴⁷⁹ The possessive apostrophe on 'halcyon' transforms the ark from a boat, suggesting it is the bird's body. Not only does this intimate a harmonious connection between different creatures mirrored in a calm ocean, but these lines also describe the bird's body serenely affecting its environment by 'charming the wind and the waves into clam'.⁴⁸⁰ The kingfisher's physical presence creates a congruent ecosystem. Both boat and beast, then, interact joyously in the natural world they inhabit.

Smart's Liturgical Project

Smart's *Jubilate Agno* is a work that shares the concerns of other religious texts. Unlike *Clemency to Brutes, On the Future Life of Brute Creatures, or An Apology for Brute Creation*, it is not presented to its reader as a prose sermon. It does converge with these pamphlets, along with *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals*, in its appeal for the compassionate treatment of nonhumans on theological grounds. Where *Jubilate Agno* departs from this undertaking is in the scope of its enfranchisement. It does not confine itself to merely domesticated animals but envisages a fellowship between all species without distinction, similar to Thomson's *The Season*. Unlike Thomson, Smart is unafraid to rewrite or expand on the Bible. As such, his verse has more in common with a methodology found in the pulpit, where sermons were extemporised upon a particular theme. Smart's poem is remarkable in its unwavering faith in the ability of animals to praise their

⁴⁷⁹ 'halcyon, n. and adj.'. Definition 1.a. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/83373 [accessed 20 January 2023].

⁴⁸⁰ The belief that the kingfisher (halcyon) nests on calm waves is an ancient Greek myth. The story concerns Ceyx and Alcyone. When Ceyx is drowned, Alcyone, distraught with grief, attempts to throw herself into the sea. Upon seeing this act, the gods take pity and turn her into a kingfisher. Ovid relates this tale in his *Metamorphoses*. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by A.D. Melville and Edward J. Kenney (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 271.

maker. His desire to rewrite *The Book of Common Prayer* is an ambitious project that attempts to widen the Anglican community to include all those with ‘the breath of Life’.

Technically, it is a poem that encompasses a wide range of tones, moving from its witty indulgence in puns to a register that resounds with the sombre authority of the *Old Testament*. The totalising effect of *Jubilate Agno* can be summed up in the word ‘joy’. Not only is it a joyful paean to God, but the poem’s language also fizzles with rhetorical flourishes. Smart’s infectious enthusiasm for prayer is suffused into the very grammar and syntax of the poem. To dismiss it as the work of an unbalanced mind is to fail to appreciate its complex structure and comprehensive subject matter. The chronological stretch of the poem commences with an epoch inhabited by biblical patriarchs and ends with episodes contemporary with the poem’s composition. Such is its desire to be relevant that certain lines in the poem were written the very day they appeared in the newspapers. For instance, ‘Let Nereus rejoice with the Calamary—God give success to our fleets’ refers to Boscawen destroying the Toulon fleet at Lagos Bay. Smart wrote this line just before the success of this attack.⁴⁸¹ This yearning for pertinency permits Smart to justify his scheme for updating the 1662 liturgy for one more fitting for 1763. Encouraged by Robert Lowth’s exposition of the writing practices of the Hebrews permits Smart to present *Jubilate Agno* as an updated text inspired by the Scriptures. By following these ancient writings’s parallelism and antiphonal structure, Smart was more than attempting to present his poem as a work with a biblical pedigree. He intended to embed a complex web of meaning within his efficacious text. Bert Weber argues that combined with verse-rhythm and parallelism

Hebrew verse is shot through with repetition (recurrence), be it in terms of identity, similarity, or polarity. Built up out of inner-textual relations, these recurrences, be

⁴⁸¹ See Smart, 82, B1, 260. Karina Williamson notes that ‘Dr. Bond [...] discovered that some of the Let and For folios were numbered and dated concurrently. See Karina Williamson, ‘Introduction’, Christopher Smart, *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, Volume I: Jubilate Agno*, 6 vols, ed. by Karina Williamson (Clarendon Press, 1980), p. xxiii. On this evidence, contemporary events and lines in *Jubilate Agno* can be matched up.

they of a semantic, syntactic, morphological, phonological, prosodic, or structural-configurational nature, are characteristic of Biblical Hebrew poetry.⁴⁸²

Jubilate Agno partakes in all of these techniques as the poem exuberantly exploits the slippages inherent in poetic language to create connections between man and animals unattainable in prose. Through the horizontal signification created by parallelism and vertical meaning in its employment of antiphony, Smart's verse depicts the interrelationship between man and animals in both the past and present. By modelling his poem on the psalms, Smart places *Jubilate Agno* in a lineage whose antecedents originate with the earliest Hebrew poets. In doing so, he does not eschew *Jubilate Agno*'s ability to use the poetic conventions upon which its figurative associations rely. For his contemporaries, this was an uncontroversial exercise. As Rivkah Zim explains, 'In the late sixteenth century, the word 'psalm' could be applied as a generic term in relation to poetry'.⁴⁸³ The advantages of doing so were palpable, for 'The Book of Psalms was regarded as a divinely inspired verse which combined essential doctrine with necessary comfort to Christian readers'.⁴⁸⁴ Furthermore, by situating the poem in a psalmic tradition, he exploits *Jubilate Agno*'s scriptural legitimacy without closing off the poetic conventions that give it metonymic advantages denied to prose.

Smart's theological model is not constrained to just the psalms. He also incorporates an antiphonal structure. This is a salient feature in *The Book of Common Prayer*. He does so to actualise further the poem's central concern that man and animals should conjoin when praising God. To certify that all creatures, even mute ones, can adore their creator, Smart proposes that by according to their designer's purpose, the physical actions of animals are signs of their adoration. As a non-vocal form of praise, each creature can now actively

⁴⁸² Bert Weber, 'Towards a Theory of Poetry of the Hebrew Bible: The Poetry of the Psalms as a Test Case', *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 22.2 (2012), p. 160.

⁴⁸³ Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535-1601* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 40.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

participate in a fundamental Christian activity. Moreover, by engaging in this Magnificat, their presence multiplies with those of man. In a play on words, Smart enthusiastically suggests they magnify the Magnificat.⁴⁸⁵ The most common strategy Smart employs in connecting animals with men is tethering them with the word ‘with’. Bonded in a single sentence, this horizontal connection emphasises a single capability shared by each subject. Whilst many features of Smart’s verse are inspired by *The Book of Common Prayer*, his connecting men with animals is of his devising. Drawn from Smart’s extensive reading, these gnomic connections could suggest that *Jubilate Agno* is the product of a madhouse.⁴⁸⁶ However, extensive scholarship by W.F. Stead, W.H. Bond, Arthur Sherbo, and Karina Williamson has shown the logical, if eclectic, reasoning that underpins the poem. Smart draws on his intimate knowledge of the Bible, alongside Pliny’s *Natural History*, Isidore’s *Encyclopaedia*, William Salmon’s *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*, Eleazar Albin’s *Natural History of Birds*, Walton’s *Compleat Angler*, George Anson’s *Voyage round the World*, Daniel Coxe’s *Description of Carolana*, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and James Thomson’s *The Seasons*, besides numerous eighteenth-century articles from periodicals on science and philosophy. All these are put to service to provide a liturgy that encapsulates his belief in an inclusive Christian community. This collision between theological and secular texts exemplifies Smart’s conviction that God’s divine purpose is manifest in any semiotic system. This fusion between diverse genres is also manifest in Thomson’s *The Seasons* with its use of

⁴⁸⁵ Here, Magnify should also be understood as a verb that means ‘to sing in praise of’.

⁴⁸⁶ In connection with writing *Jubilate Agno*, Moira Dearnley calls Smart a ‘mad poet’. See Moira Dearnley, *The Poetry of Christopher Smart* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 140. Conversely, Chris Mounsey observes, ‘that *Jubilate Agno* is the work of a madman is hard to sustain when it is read alongside his other works from the madhouse years: *A Song to David*, a poem on a similar theme written in an exact rhythm and rhyme scheme; and a metrical translation of all 150 psalms’. See Chris Mounsey, ‘Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*’, *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Christine Gerrard (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 290. Smart understands the stigma of being labelled mad but is ‘willing to be called a fool for the sake of Christ’. See Smart, 49, B1, 51.

the georgic informed by a theory of moral sentiment and Cowper's verse when he amalgamates writings on fables, theology and natural history.

Moreover, words inaugurate acts of creation. God is both word and word maker. His utterances transform supernatural articulations into natural breathing bodies. For Smart, the poet is a temporal exemplifier of a practitioner who uses words to create. The ability to play with language demonstrates its referential capacity to connect disparate subjects.⁴⁸⁷ He changes emblems into real creatures and, like Christ's comment in Mathew 16:18, uses witty puns to make serious points. *Jubilate Agno* demonstrate Smart's child-like joy in creating connections by playing with words. His use of antanaclasis, paronomasia, rhymes, antiphonal verse, and parallelism all testify to the divine creative power inherent in language. This explains why Smart believes punching words leave an impression that 'cannot escape any reader of sheer good sense, and true critical sagacity'. Smart's view of animals is coherent in his poetry before and after *Jubilate Agno*. If the earlier animal poems are more accusatory towards man's unjustified dominion, in *Jubilate Agno* there is a greater emphasis on cooperation. He also incorporates more biblical phraseology after 1759.⁴⁸⁸ This is mixed with the exuberant use of figurative language. Their tone, informed by scriptural writings, are presented as hymns to a compassionate creator. Ultimately, though, his entire verse on

⁴⁸⁷ The use of the word 'play' should evoke a definition that conforms to Derrida's belief that 'There is a possible play, with regulated gaps and interpretative transformations. But this play would not be possible without the iterability which both repeats the same and—by repetition itself—introduces into it what we call in French the *jeu* ["play," "give,"], not simply in the sense of the lucid, but also in the sense of that which, by the spacing between the pieces of an apparatus, allows for the movement and articulation [...] This play is sometimes what allows the machine to function normally, but sometimes the same word designates an articulation that is too loose'. See Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature, *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Routledge, 1992), p. 64.

⁴⁸⁸ It is almost certain that *A Song to David* was written in this middle period of Smart's career. A comparison between this poem and *Jubilate Agno* shows multiple instances of congruity. It seems highly likely that upon abandoning *Jubilate Agno*, Smart commenced work on *A Song to David* (if he was not already working on it). As such, *Jubilate Agno* can be viewed as a notebook in which Smart worked out many of his concerns that would ultimately be published in *A Song to David*.

animals reverberates with the same dictum – compassion for nonhumans is consistent with God’s divine purpose.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the passage from *Jubilate Agno* that describes Jeoffry, the cat. He is the joyous heart of the poem. As an actual cat, he engages with Smart when each of them considers the other. Much of Jeoffry’s power to affect the reader is derived from Smart’s ability to faithfully represent a real animal whose actions testify to his truthfulness as a cat. This probably explains why the section on Jeoffry is so frequently found in anthologies. Isolated from the rest of *Jubilate Agno*, though, he loses his symbolic identity in the poem. Shorn of his religious meaning, his playful actions become the endearing qualities of a family pet. Only when he is returned to his rightful place at the centre of the poem does his full significance become apparent. For in his capacity to turn flesh into the word, Jeoffry (flesh) becomes an emblem (word) representing all devotional animals in the poem. At the same time, he is also the word becoming flesh, for the desire to express signs of devotion to God (word), is evidence that his corporeal utterances accord with his nature (flesh). The combination of flesh with word/word with flesh makes him the perfect Christian practitioner.

By emphasising Jeoffry’s credentials as a genuine creature, Smart’s portrayal has a truthfulness denied to the cat that inspired Thomas Gray to write ‘Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes’ (1748). Gray’s animal is more redolent of a creature from a beast fable. As such, Gray does not celebrate the cat’s vital agency. Instead, he employs her in this mock-heroic poem to teach a moral lesson:

Not all that tempts your wand’ring eyes
And heedless hearts, is lawful prize;
Nor all, that glisters, gold.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁹ Thomas Gray, *Thomas Gray and William Collins: Poetical Works*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 28, lines 40-43.

The inability of Selima to profit from such advice ensures that any agency the animal displays is undercut by its role as a humanistic emblem of avarice. Poor Selima, then, is sacrificed to prove a humanist truism. Jeffery's vitality makes him the very opposite of Selima. His independent agency, for example, can be witnessed in his daily orisons. Actions that the poem recounts as pious movements that accord with its divinely sanctioned nature. As such, Jeffery is an exemplar for not only all animals but all those with sentient life. The poem presents him as the perfect Christian practitioner. This secures his place within *Jubilate Agno* as object and subject, symbol and animal, word and flesh.

Chapter Three

Observed Companion Animals and Other Animals in the Poetry of William Cowper

My descriptions are all from Nature. Not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience. Not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree, conjectural.⁴⁹⁰

Cowper's Animal Poems

Critics have long acknowledged that Cowper's poetry is often associated with the natural world.⁴⁹¹ When scholars have discussed this aspect of his poetry, though, they generally, in the words of John Morillo, 'focused too much on *The Task*'.⁴⁹² Vincent Newey's *Cowper's Poetry: A Critical Study and Reassessment*, and Martin Priestman's *Cowper's Task: Structure and Influence* typify this bias. Even biographical works such as David Cecil's *The Stricken Deer*, Thomas Gilbert's *William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century* or Hugh L'Anson Fausset's *William Cowper* ignore the majority of his other poems on nature. John Morillo has noted that

claims about Cowper and animals [...] have rested on a surprisingly small sample of evidence: a set of animal epitaphs, especially the one on his pet hare Tiney, and his letter to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, about keeping hares as pets; poems on his dog Beau; and scattered but emphatic lines ...from his peculiar, personal epic autobiography, *The Task* (1785).⁴⁹³

This chapter will analyse a broader range of Cowper's poems on animals to draw out findings that a partial view of his work misses. Cowper's fables and poems concerning domesticated animals will be given significant notice. These texts on nonhumans fall into two distinct categories. In his fables, Cowper critiques the validity of portraying animals anthropomorphically. The antipode to the fable's humanising discourse can be found in his

⁴⁹⁰ *LPW*, ii, 285.

⁴⁹¹ See p. 2.

⁴⁹² John Morillo, *The Rise of Animals and Descent of Man, 1660-1800* (University of Delaware Press, 2018), p. 70.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 114.

poems on companion animals in which, as Perkins writes, ‘he describes animals affectionately and realistically, taking a sympathetic interest in the creatures they naturally are’.⁴⁹⁴ Influenced by current scientific, religious and philosophical texts, Cowper’s non-fabular poems reflect compassionate ideas about animals that became popular in the second half of the eighteenth century. As an owner of a companion animal, he draws on his everyday experience with animals to claim that he faithfully represents them. Cowper achieves this by following a scientific model that guarantees truth through empirical observation and documentation of the natural world around him. His poems can thus claim that they represent animals more realistically than the artificial world of the fable. In this sense, Cowper’s poetry on companion animals can be termed anti-fables.

This is not to claim that this form did not fascinate him. Throughout his life, Cowper read the fables of John Gay. Charles Ryskamp notes, ‘The very first books Cowper owned, and mastered, were the *Pilgrim’s Progress* and Gay’s *Fables*’.⁴⁹⁵ This interest lasted until the last year of his life. James King explains that when Cowper was severely ill, he still ‘soldiered on with further translations, including renderings of some of Gay’s *Fables* into Latin’.⁴⁹⁶

Similarly, Thomas Wright notes that Cowper ‘used to recite “The Hare and Many Friends” for the amusement of company’.⁴⁹⁷ Furthermore, Bill Hutchings states, ‘it was from this fable [...] that Cowper took the name Puss for one of his own pet hares’.⁴⁹⁸ Despite his admiration for this genre, he was still suspicious of the talking creatures that inhabit them. Hence, Cowper’s poems on companion animals eschew the anthropomorphic characteristics that are

⁴⁹⁴ David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animals Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 48.

⁴⁹⁵ Charles Ryskamp, *William Cowper of the Inner Temple, Esq* (Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 56.

⁴⁹⁶ James King, *William Cowper: A Biography* (Duke University Press, 1986), p. 282.

⁴⁹⁷ Thomas Wright, *The Life of William Cowper* (T.F. Unwin, 1892), p. 37.

⁴⁹⁸ Bill Hutchings, *The Poetry of William Cowper* (Croom Helm, 1983), p. 120.

a defining feature of the genre. Instead, he prefers to represent nonhumans truthfully through their authentic actions.

Companion Animals in the Eighteenth Century

Contemporary readers of Cowper knew of his companion animals from the poetry and prose pieces he wrote about them. Lady Hesketh, a friend of the poet, noted that ‘He was very fond of animals, and had at one time, five rabbits, three hares, two guinea pigs, a magpie, a jay, and a starling; beside two gold-finches, two canary birds and two dogs’.⁴⁹⁹ Cowper’s compassion for animals influenced some readers to follow his example.⁵⁰⁰ The model of Cowper as a sympathetic ‘pet’ owner is echoed in the burgeoning number of middle-class readers who were also starting to keep companion animals in this period.⁵⁰¹ Ingrid Tague postulates that this phenomenon flourished in the latter half of the eighteenth century because, historically, this was the earliest point that the necessary material conditions for ‘pet’ keeping coalesced, as she explains when she states that

Thanks to the financial and commercial revolutions, eighteenth-century English people could indulge in an ever-growing number and range of consumer goods. In this context, when consumption was no longer simply a matter of necessities, it became possible to consider keeping an animal for the purposes of pleasure alone.⁵⁰²

However, the expansion of British trade and the wealth that came with it fails to fully explain why companion animals became so popular. When other influences are considered, a more

⁴⁹⁹ Lady Hesketh, ‘Anecdotes of the Poet’, *Poems: The Early Productions of William Cowper* (Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1825), pp. 73-74. She also writes ‘I forgot to enumerate a squirrel, which he had at the same time, and which used to play with one of the hares continually’. *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁰⁰ After reading Cowper’s *Task*, ‘James Plumptre, vicar of Great Gransden in Huntingdonshire, preached before the University of Cambridge, with Prince William of Gloucestershire among the hearers, on “The Duties of Man to Brute Creation”’. Cowper’s piece on hares for the *Gentleman’s Magazine* was also ‘a favourite piece with children for several generations and with many older persons, Jeremy Bentham among them’. See David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animals Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 2 and p. 46.

⁵⁰¹ For the definition of a pet, or the preferred twenty-first century term ‘companion animal’, I will follow Keith Thomas’s three criteria. ‘First, it is ‘allowed in the house’. [...] ‘The second feature of the pet was that it was given an individual personal name’. [...] ‘Thirdly, the pet was never eaten’. See Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London Allen Lane, 1983), pp. 112-115.

⁵⁰² Ingrid H. Tague, ‘Dead Pets: Satire and Sentiment in British Elegies and Epitaphs for Animals’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 41.3, (2008), p. 291.

nuanced picture emerges regarding the popularity and validity of companion animal ownership. Among these other disparate elements are the rise in sentimental literature (underpinned by sympathy), the increase in books on natural history, and a changing attitude towards animals expressed in books, pamphlets, newspapers and magazines. To give just one example, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, on Tuesday, 26 August 1760, reported that

At a common council held this day at the *Guild Hall* of the city of *London*, an order was issued for the constables, beadle of the several wards, and the watchmen, and other ward-officers to kill *all* dogs that shall be found in the streets or highways of the city of *London*, after the 27th instant and a reward of 2s is ordered to be paid for each dog that shall be so killed and buried in the skin, being first several times slashed in the body.⁵⁰³

Issued to eradicate 'mad dogs', the *Gentleman's Magazine* deplored such a measure, writing, 'It is hoped and wished a greater evil may not result from these orders than they are intended to remedy. [...] Of the dogs that will be massacred on this occasion, not one in 1000 will be mad'.⁵⁰⁴ The *Gentleman's Magazine's* emotive use of 'massacre' suggests that not everyone agreed with this policy. One such person was Horace Walpole, who wrote to a friend that

In London there is a more cruel campaign than that waged by the Russians: the streets are a very picture of the murder of the innocents—one drives over nothing but poor dead dogs! The dear, good-natured, honest, sensible creatures! Christ! how can anybody hurt them?⁵⁰⁵

Walpole, a noted dog lover, is not alone in decrying the treatment of these animals. Samuel Johnson also felt strongly, believing

Among the inferior professors of medical knowledge, is a race of wretches, whose lives are only varied by varieties of cruelty; whose favourite amusement is to nail dogs to tables and open them alive; to try how long life may be continued in various degrees of mutilation, or with the excision or laceration of the vital parts.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰³ *Gentleman's Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, vol. 30 (D. Henry and R. Cave, 1760), p. 392.

⁵⁰⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, vol. 30 (D. Henry and R. Cave, 1760), p. 392.

⁵⁰⁵ Horace Walpole, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. xxxv, 48 vols, ed. by W.S. Lewis (Yale University Press, 1973), p. 306, letter to the Earl of Strafford, 4 September 1760.

⁵⁰⁶ i Samuel Johnson, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Idler and Adventurer*, vol. xvi, 23 vols, ed. by W. J. Bate (Yale University Press, 1963), p. 55. *Idler* 17, Saturday, 5 August 1758.

Johnson concludes this essay in *The Idler* by stating that ‘it is time that universal resentment should arise against these horrid operations’.⁵⁰⁷ If normative working practices with animals in the latter half of the century treated nonhumans as things, companion animal owners respected animals as sentient creatures. Keith Thomas thinks that keeping ‘pets’

had intellectual implications. It encouraged the middle classes to form optimistic conclusions about animal intelligence; it gave rise to innumerable anecdotes about animal sagacity; it stimulated the notion that animals could have character and individual personality; and it created the psychological foundation for the view that some animals at least were entitled to moral considerations.⁵⁰⁸

Cowper believes that his companion animals have many of these qualities. By describing their unique and individual personalities, he hopes to present animals to his readers more authentically. Additionally, Cowper guarantees the truthful representation of nonhumans by basing his poetry on actual events. He creates verse informed by everyday observations. Moreover, the animals in his poems can claim to be more morally edifying than fables since they do not routinely misrepresent nonhumans. As such, he emulates a poet he greatly respected, James Thomson. This appreciation can be seen in a letter to the Reverend William Unwin. Writing about which poetry Unwin’s son should read, Cowper states, ‘Thomson’s Seasons might afford him some useful lessons. At least they would have a tendency to give his mind an observing, and a philosophical turn’.⁵⁰⁹ Cowper himself demonstrates both these qualities in his poems on animals.

Cowper and Natural History

In studying and documenting the lives of animals that surround him, Cowper’s poetry follows a model laid out in the natural history books of the period. Jane Spencer believes children’s

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁰⁸ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London Allen Lane, 1983), p. 119. For a counterview, see Nathaniel Wolloch, *Subjugated Animals: Animals and Anthropocentrism in Early Modern European Culture* (Humanity Books, 2006), p. 65.

⁵⁰⁹ LPW, ii, 11.

literature in the eighteenth century ‘drew on works of natural history that disseminated new observations of animals’ forms and habits and sometimes upheld, sometimes questioned, the line dividing ‘man’ and beasts’.⁵¹⁰ This point applies to Cowper’s animal poems. Cowper reinscribes scientific texts into poetry. In doing so, he re-locates them from an unfamiliar outside world to a place of greater experience – the domestic space. He partly achieves this by inverting the organising structure that is a salient feature of books on natural history. He eschews scientific taxonomies and lists regarding different species and instead focuses on individual animals that gain distinction through personal ‘pet’ names. What Cowper finds most useful in these books is their truthful approach to representing nonhumans via detailed observation. However, he is deeply suspicious of any discourse that refutes his Christian position. In ‘Book III’ of *The Task*, he writes:

Some more acute and more industrious still
 Contrive creation. Travel nature up
 To the sharp peak of her sublimest height,
 And tell us whence the stars. Why some are fixt,
 And planetary some. What gave them first
 Rotation, from what fountain flow’d their light.⁵¹¹

A few lines later, the poem concludes with:

If this be learning, most of all deceived.
 Great crimes alarm the conscience,⁵¹²

Cowper rejects any science that questions God’s dominant place in the natural world but willingly co-opts its observational methodology for validating the relationship between man and animals. Here, primary experience is paramount. For him, knowledge gained through observation is more valuable than from ‘borrowed from books’.⁵¹³ As such, Cowper would have indeed agreed with Locke’s empiricist contention that ‘So much as we ourselves

⁵¹⁰ Jane Spencer, ‘Creating Animal Experience in Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33.4 (2010), p. 470.

⁵¹¹ PWC, ii, 167, 155-160.

⁵¹² Ibid., 184-185. The section concerning ‘false’ science can be found in lines 150-190.

⁵¹³ See footnote 490.

consider and comprehend of truth and reason, so much we possess of real and true knowledge. The floating of other men's opinions in our brains, makes us not one jot the more knowing, though they happen to be true'.⁵¹⁴

As a companion animal owner, he naturally focuses on the creatures surrounding him. In other words, then, Cowper's domestic animal poetry inverts the methodology of natural history books by ignoring the general in favour of focusing on the specific. George Eliot wrote of Cowper's poetry

No object is too small to prompt his song—not the sooty film on the bars, or the spoutless teapot holding a bit of mignonette that serves to cheer the dingy town-lodging with a “hint that Nature lives;” and yet his song is never trivial, for he is alive to small objects, not because his mind is narrow, but because his glance is clear and his heart is large.⁵¹⁵

By focusing on specifics, Cowper's ‘clear glance’ observes the individual animals that his poetry then mimetically represents with microscopic detail. This stimulates in his audience a feeling that Cowper's poetry portrays animals in a method faithful to their real-life counterparts. He is a poet, companion animal owner and scientific observer of the world around him. Cowper eschews a conception of the natural, espoused in the neoclassical pastoral tradition, as a static Arcadian idyll. He instead employs an empirical model similar to the one expressed by Thomas Tickell in *The Guardian*. For Tickell, the genre should not be fixed in a classical location, as he explains

There are some things of an established Nature in Pastoral, which is essential to it, such as a Country Scene, Innocence, Simplicity. Others there are of a changeable kind, such as Habits, Customs, and the like. The difference of the Climate is also to be considered, for what is proper in *Arcadia*, or even in *Italy*, might be very absurd in a colder Country. By the same Rule the difference of the Soil, of Fruits and Flowers is to be observed. And in so fine a Country as Britain, what occasion is

⁵¹⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Roger Woolhouse (Penguin Books Ltd, 1997), p. 105.

⁵¹⁵ George Eliot, ‘Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: the Poet Young’, *The Westminster Review*, January-April, vol. 47 (Leonard Scott & Co, 1857), p. 22.

there for that Profusion of *Hyacinths* and *Pæstan* Roses, and that *Cornucopia* of foreign Fruits, which the *British* Shepherds never heard of!⁵¹⁶

For Tickell, by setting the pastoral in Britain, the genre gains a greater similitude of realism.

Cowper goes beyond this, creating not realistic poems set in a generic England but hyper-realistic ones in a particular location that can be uniquely located through names. Thus, Cowper creates verses imbued with empirical observations that convey a sense of specificity in time and space. In doing so, his poems reflect an increasing interest in a practical methodology derived from works on natural history. This genre gained prevalence as the eighteenth century progressed, as Harriet Ritvo explains

The expansion in the number of natural history titles published annually gives some index of the growth in popular demand: from 1730 to 1749 all English publishers combined issued an average of two natural history books per year, a figure that quadruples for the last two decades of the eighteenth century and multiplied many more times afterwards.⁵¹⁷

Such was their popularity that *The Critical Review* declared in 1763 that ‘natural history has now, by a kind of national establishment, become the favourite study of the times’.⁵¹⁸

As somebody fundamentally interested in a wide variety of scientific literature, reading these texts opened up new ways of writing about animal experiences. Notably, this method refuted an anthropomorphical medium. Ingrid Tague believes that

The growing willingness to celebrate rather than condemn human-animal affection was undoubtedly rooted in new values expressed in the culture of sensibility and the humane movement. But an alternative model of masculine pet keeping which drew on the popularity of natural history, also emerged during the later decades of the

⁵¹⁶ *The Guardian*, ed. by John Calhoun Stephens (The University of Kentucky, 1982), p. 129. No. 30, Wednesday, 15 April 1713. Tickell’s essays on the pastoral ran over five issues of *The Guardian*. Richard Steele announces in issue 15 that the subject of the pastoral would be introduced in a future edition. Thomas Tickell analysed the genre in issues 22, 23, 28, 30 and 32.

⁵¹⁷ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: the English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 8. Ritvo sees 1749 as an important year in natural history publishing, as this was when Comte de Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle* came out. Six English multivolume translations of this work appeared in the eighteenth century alone, along with ‘an interminable number of tacit derivations, of which Oliver Goldsmith’s *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, 1774, was probably the most successful’. For a fuller account of eighteenth-century natural history publications, see *ibid.*, 3–8.

⁵¹⁸ *The Critical Review: or, Annals of Literature*, vol. 16 (A. Hamilton, 1763), p. 312.

century. In the works of William Cowper [...] we see [him] presenting [his] pets to a public audience through the medium of scientific discovery.⁵¹⁹

An example of this can be seen in his well-known article for *Gentleman's Magazine* in June 1784, in which Cowper writes about his hares. He commences by stating, 'Convinced that you despise no communications that may gratify curiosity, amuse rationally, or add, though but a little, to the stock of public knowledge'.⁵²⁰ Cowper justifies his argument scientifically since it adds 'to the stock of public knowledge'. He further explains that the hare 'though its general properties are pretty well known, is, for the most part, such a stranger to man that we are but little aware of its peculiarities'.⁵²¹ Here, Cowper elevates the particular over the general by claiming his method will reveal facts about the hare missed by other observers. In doing so, he claims a privileged place for the companion animal owner. He feels qualified to document their 'peculiarities' from this unique position. Thus, Cowper projects to his audience the image of a scientific investigator of animal behaviour and a loving owner of companion hares. This dual position accounts for the tone in which the article is written. For instance, he includes observational details that give him the confidence to refute certain information about hares. One such example occurs when he writes, 'I take it to be a general opinion that they graze, but it is an erroneous one, at least grass is not their staple'.⁵²² Cowper's article mixes scientific observations with the voice of a sympathetic and joyful owner who intimately interacts with his animals. In another instance, he describes Puss's actions, writing that the animal would 'bite the hair from my temples. He would suffer me to take him up and to carry him about in my arms, and has more than once fallen asleep upon my knee'.⁵²³ Cowper employs an inverse method to that used by books on natural history. They define the general habits of all hares. However, while still using the language and

⁵¹⁹ Ingrid Tague, *Animal Companions* (Pennsylvania University Press, 2015), p. 209.

⁵²⁰ *LPW*, v, 40.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 43. This is another instance of him questioning the validity of the general over the particular.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 41.

techniques of these books, Cowper focuses on one particular hare. In doing so, he expects his readers to extrapolate the information and apply it to all hares. If he is ambiguous about knowledge garnered even from natural history books because of their general observations, Cowper greatly values their language and methodology. This is because these techniques avail him the vocabulary to document the particular domestic lives of his animals whilst also guaranteeing the empirical truthfulness of his claims. He combines this practice with the voice of a sympathetic companion animal owner, thus presenting an account of his hares that is both compassionate and scientifically rigorous.

Empirical Compassion: Harmonising Practices in Cowper's Poetry

The ability to combine these two subject positions would have been denied to writers in the first half of the eighteenth century. These two identities become available only with the rise in natural history publications and the gradual acceptance of animal ownership. Cowper's portrayal as both a scientific documenter and loving companion animal owner inspired at least one member of the general public to emulate him. The *Gentleman's Magazine* for September 1788 published a letter entitled '*Curious Particulars in the Natural History of Squirrels*'. In it, the anonymous writer declares that 'I have for several years diverted myself by keeping squirrels, and have found in them not less variety of humours and dispositions than Mr. Cowper observed in his hares'.⁵²⁴ The correspondent proceeds to give a detailed account of living with squirrels, including a diagram of their dancing habits and three instances of the accompanying music. The article, defining itself as a natural history text, declines to describe the squirrel based on its general habits. Instead, it focuses on their 'particular' (the word is stressed in the title) practices seen at first-hand. Through this related methodological focus, the author claims kinship with Cowper. The insights this

⁵²⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine: And Historical Chronicle*, vol. 58, part ii (John Nichols, 1788), p. 774.

correspondent has gained have come, like Cowper's, through sharing his domestic space with the animals he has chosen to observe sympathetically. Moreover, like Cowper, he portrays himself as a companion animal owner and a natural scientist.⁵²⁵ It is a position made more accessible by periodicals, like the *Gentleman's Magazine*, allotting space in their publications to accommodate the growing interest in natural history. W.P. Jones makes this point when he writes

The popular magazines about 1760 vied with one another in catering to the interest in natural history. As early as July 1752 the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* proposed a series of coloured engravings and articles to constitute "a compendious System of Natural History". In 1759-60 the *General Magazine of Arts and Science*, the *Grand Magazine of Universal Intelligence*, the *Royal Magazine*, the *Imperial Magazine*, the *Weekly Magazine*, the *Lady's Magazine* and the *Royal Female Magazine*, all contained regular series of engravings of flowers and animals.⁵²⁶

Cowper incorporates this newfound interest in documenting the natural world in his poetry.

Bill Hutching has noted that

One of the qualities of Cowper's poems on animals is that they manage to have universal implications, therefore implications for man in general and the poet in particular, while at the same time rendering full individuality to the animal being addressed or discussed.⁵²⁷

Cowper can render their 'full individuality' because he is a companion animal owner.

Furthermore, it is by focusing on the particular that his animal poems avoid being anthropomorphical. They are not figurative objects that stand as cyphers for human concerns, but they become recognisably authentic creatures through the accretion of their 'particulars'.

'The Dog and the Water-Lily'

⁵²⁵ I am using the word scientist for the convenience of modern readers. Cowper and the anonymous author in the *Gentleman's Magazine* would have considered themselves natural philosophers. See W.P. Jones, 'The Vogue of Natural History in England, 1750-1770', cited below for a history of the term 'natural history'.

⁵²⁶ W.P. Jones, 'The Vogue of Natural History in England, 1750-1770', *Annals of Science*, 2:3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00033793700200631>, p. 346.

⁵²⁷ Bill Hutchings, *The Poetry of William Cowper* (Croom Helm, 1983), p. 124.

This can be seen in a poem like ‘The Dog and the Water-Lily’, which is suggestively subtitled ‘No Fable’. From the outset, Cowper signals to his audience that the central character in this poem will be a dog. However, the addition of ‘No Fable’ warns the reader not to mistake this animal as a mere anthropomorphical character. He is a real dog whose agency drives the poem’s narrative. Heather Keenleyside notes that

Poems like “The Dog and the Water-Lily” often earn Cowper a place in a literary-historical story about the modernization of the animal fable, which charts a shift from conventional, generic, and abstract figures [...] to increasingly naturalistic, particularized, and sympathetic depictions of living or life-like animals.⁵²⁸

Rather than a ‘modernization’ of this genre, it would be more accurate to describe it as a corrective to this form, in other words, an anti-fable. Informed by reading texts on natural history, Cowper creates a character that minutely represents the particular dog that inspires the poem. In doing so, he opens up an alternative way of representing animals from one that the fable propagates, hence the addition of ‘No Fable’ to the title. This does not mean that Cowper disposes of the moral message that is a requisite component of the genre. Rather, he encodes the poem’s didactic aim in the act of truthfully portraying the dog. A representation the poet hopes will engender a strong sympathetic feeling in his readers towards nonhumans. This titular protagonist behaves like a dog because Cowper contends that is what he is. In the language of Donna Haraway, he is constantly alert to the ‘otherness-in-relation’.⁵²⁹ The poet understands that a sympathetic interaction between man and animals ‘depends on getting on together’.⁵³⁰ This Cowper accomplishes by paying careful attention to how Beau reacts. In doing so, he fulfils his ‘obligation [...] to ask who are present and who are emergent’.⁵³¹ The poet believes that Beau’s ‘emergent’ subjectivity can only be genuinely represented in his verse by underpinning it with an actual incident that will guarantee its truthfulness. ‘The Dog

⁵²⁸ Heather Keenleyside, *Animals and Other People* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 10.

⁵²⁹ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2020), p. 50.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

and the Water-Lily' is no fictive story but a poetic description of an event that factually occurred.

In a letter to William Unwin, Cowper states 'My descriptions are all from Nature. Not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience. Not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree, conjectural'. 'The Dog and the Water-Lily' is a prime example of this.⁵³² The narrative hinges on observation - Beau observes Cowper 'attentively', and Cowper watches Beau. Here, the poet's observations about his companion animal concur with the factual details laid out by natural history books in this period. Thomas Pennant, for instance, observes of dogs in his *History of Quadrupeds* (1781) that 'The prominent passion of the whole race towards an attachment to mankind, prevents these animals from separating themselves from us [...] it seems beyond the power of ill usage to subdue the faithful and constant qualities inherent in them'.⁵³³ Cowper's depiction of Beau perfectly aligns with contemporary scientific literature, each agreeing on how real dogs behave.

The poem closely follows the chronology of the letter, mixing factual details with poetic diction. The first verse commences:

The Noon was shady and soft airs
Swept Ouses's silent tide,
When 'scaped from literary cares
I wander'd on his side.⁵³⁴

Here, Cowper employs words and images customarily associated with the pastoral, one in which, as Fairer points out, it was usual to employ 'simple vocabulary and phrasing with a dignified manner'.⁵³⁵ Cowper's use of 'Ouse' situates the poem's action not in some generic

⁵³² A portion of a letter to Lady Hesketh on the 27th of June 1788 describing this incident is cited on p. 8.

⁵³³ Thomas Pennant, *History of Quadrupeds*, vol. i, 2 vols (B. White, 1781), p. 219.

⁵³⁴ PWC, iii, 28, 1-4.

⁵³⁵ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (Pearson Education Limited, 2003), p. 81.

rural idyll but in a specific physical and temporal location. Following Tickle's petition to set pastorals in more realistic settings, the poem self-consciously combines fiction and fact. This is further emphasised by framing the factual story within a fictive border and can be characterised as a division between the literary and the literal.⁵³⁶ In the third line, Cowper explains that he has undertaken this walk to 'scaped from literary cares'. This line signals that the poem's narrative is about to depart from the imaginative world of fiction and enter a realm predicated on factual description. From line four until line thirty-six, Cowper's verse tells of the actual life events that the letter to Lady Hesketh corroborates. Even though his diction is poetic, ultimately, the genesis for this part of the poem originates in the real world. Once Beau has retrieved the waterlily, Cowper returns to the realm of fiction, declaring that he will 'write the poem' that is before his readers's eyes with the lines:

Charm'd with the sight, the world, I cried,
Shall hear of this thy deed,⁵³⁷

This announcement signals to Cowper's audience that they are about to re-enter the fictive realm, the site where the proposed poem will be composed. Neither privileging poetic fiction nor factual observation, 'The Dog and the Water-Lily', then, can be seen as an example of Cowper enfolding documented events concerning his dog Beau within a poetic frame. He also blends the poetic genre of the pastoral with an observational methodology grounded in books on natural history. In doing so, he poetically represents the dog in a manner consistent with its real counterpart.

Conrad Brunström and Katherine Turner have stated that 'Cowper's poems permit animals to talk on many occasions and for many reasons, but are always self-conscious and often deliberately ridiculous about so doing'.⁵³⁸ This would suggest that Cowper is gently mocking

⁵³⁶ This separation begins in line four and does not return to the fictive until line thirty-seven.

⁵³⁷ *PWC*, iii, 29, 37-38.

⁵³⁸ Conrad Brunström and Katherine Turner, "'I shall not ask Jean-Jacques Rousseau': Anthropomorphism in the Cowperian Bestiary", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33.4 (2010), p. 453.

the use of an anthropomorphical discourse, which by default claims to represent nonhumans' actual thoughts and intentions. If Cowper wants his readers to be suspicious of talking animals, the anti-fabular 'The Dog and the Water-Lily' offers an alternative way of representing nonhumans in poetry, in which their actions 'speak' for them. Hence, in this poem, Beau is silent. His agency is at the poem's centre, both textually and thematically. Beau is also the central motivation that compels Cowper to compose this text. The poem valorises the particular harmonious 'inter-action' between Cowper and his dog. He models one specific relationship that encourages his readers to have a sympathetic response towards all animals. As is his usual approach, Cowper focuses on a particular animal to make a general comment on how humans should associate with other species. This micro-interaction, though, is not the end of the poem, as Cowper further expands the horizons of this relationship to include God; in the lines:

But, chief, myself I will enjoin
 Awake at Duty's call,
 To show a Love as prompt as thine
 To Him who gives me all.⁵³⁹

Here, the poem playfully inverts the role of dog and man by having Beau teach Cowper how to behave. The dog's attentive and loving interaction with his master is a model that the poem suggests should be replicated throughout all of nature. The advantage of such a paradigmatic kinship is the promotion of a compassionate relationship between all animals, man included, by emphasising the importance of trans-species affinity. The poem, thus, evinces the significance that a harmonious interspecies relationship plays in a world where all creatures originate from a single source: that of a divine creator. In the secularist terms of Richard Nash, 'we [man] do *not* share a world with other creatures. Rather, other creatures who inhabit a shared ecology also participate in that system, perceiving and responding to it, via

⁵³⁹ PWC, iii, 29, 41-44.

the mediation of sensory apparatuses'.⁵⁴⁰ The central theme, then, of 'The Dog and the Water-Lily' is the cooperation between Beau and Cowper. The poet hopes the example of this affiliation will spread beyond the particular to the general. In fact, it should emulate the rippling water the dog sets in motion when it retrieves the water lily and swell all the way to God.

Resisting Anthropomorphism: Cowper's Anti-Fables

If Cowper wants his audience to be alert to talking animals, he also wants to defend the right to combine fact with fiction, as he does when he represents animals in his poetry. In his translation of Comte De Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* (1749), William Smellie writes of De Buffon's future volumes in this series, that 'I failed not to announce to your friends in this country the advantages which Science and Literature have yet to expect from you'.⁵⁴¹ Smellie saw the importance of Buffon's book not only in scientific terms. G.S. Rousseau has stated that in the eighteenth century, Buffon gained 'remarkable popularity in Britain and among English-speaking readers [...] No previous books on natural history were sought after so eagerly'.⁵⁴² Its contribution to literature was also an essential factor. Reviewing the fifth volume of Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*, the *Monthly Review* wondered 'whether his fame being owing to the solidity of his investigations and discoveries, or to those sublime flights,

⁵⁴⁰ Richard Nash, 'Poetics of the Hunt: Re-reading Agency and Re-thinking Ecology in William Somerville's *The Chase*', *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay and John Miller (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 243.

⁵⁴¹ Georges-Louise Leclerc, Comte De Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular*, 3rd edition, vol. i, 9 vols, trans. by William Smellie (A Strahan & T Cadell, 1791), p. iv.

⁵⁴² G.S. Rousseau, 'Science books and their readers in the eighteenth century', *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Isabel Rivers (St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 220. Such was his pre-eminence in the field of natural history that numerous writers, including Goldsmith, used his books as the basis for their own works.

and that magic power, energy, and grace of style, that have astonished and bewitched a considerable part of Europe'.⁵⁴³ Buffon's prose style, even when translated, was an essential component of his popularity. Modern readers would judge the success of a book on natural history via its contribution to the field of biology. For Smellie, such books can exist as both literature and science. Mixing these genres was common in an age when such disciplines were less rigidly partitioned. Cowper follows Buffon's examples and is happy to merge different registers for his didactic purpose. Furthermore, like Buffon, he is dismissive of fables and instead relies on first-hand experience when representing animals.⁵⁴⁴

Cowper's poem 'Pairing Time Anticipated A Fable' questions how fables portray animals. Its opening lines comically explain that:

I shall not ask Jean Jacques Rousseau*
If Birds confabulate or no,
'Tis clear that they were always able
To hold discourse at least in fable,⁵⁴⁵

The asterisk after Rousseau then directs the reader to a footnote stating

It was one of the whimsical speculations of this Philosopher that all fables which ascribe reason and speech to animals should be withheld from children. But what child was ever deceived by them, or can be, against the evidence of his senses?⁵⁴⁶

Cowper believes it is evident, even to children, that real animals do not use the same language as humans to communicate. This tacitly implies that anthropomorphical discourse is a fictive lie used only to impart a human-centred didactic message. After its advisory

⁵⁴³ *The Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal*, July-December, vol. 61 (R. Griffiths, 1780), p. 531.

⁵⁴⁴ In the first volume of his *Natural History*, Buffon states (in French), 'One ought to begin by seeing much and re-seeing often'. Quoted in Anita Guerrini, 'Animals and natural history in eighteenth-century France', in *Animals and Humans: Sensibility and Representation*, ed. by Katharine M. Quinsey (Voltaire Foundation, 2017), pp. 68-69. The corresponding paragraph in Smellie's translation declares that ideas about animals in previous books are 'hypotheses [...] all constructed on tottering foundations. The ideas they contain are indistinct, and the facts are confounded, and the whole is a motley jumble of physics and fable'. See Georges-Louise Leclerc, Comte De Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular*, 3rd edition, vol. i, 9 vols, trans. by William Smellie (A Strahan & T Cadell, 1791), p. 3.

⁵⁴⁵ *PWC*, iii, 51, 1-4.

⁵⁴⁶ *PWC*, iii, 51, footnote. John D. Baird notes that these additional words may have been written by William Enfield, the editor of the *Speaker* in which the poem first appeared, and not by Cowper. See *PWC*, iii, 303.

introduction, 'Pairing Time Anticipated' follows the recognisable beast fable pattern in which animals articulate human concerns, finally yielding a moral conclusion. The poem's self-conscious and comedic tone, though, suggests that this poem is far from a traditional example of the genre. An example of this is seen in the lines:

And with much twitter and much chatter
Began to agitate the matter.⁵⁴⁷

The humorous pairing of 'twitter' with 'chatter' suggests that the poem believes the birds' utterances should not be taken seriously. As such, they can be seen as an example of Brunström and Turner's 'deliberately ridiculous' language. Two of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* definitions for 'chatter' are 'to make a noise as a pie, or other unharmonious [sic] bird' and 'To talk idly or carelessly [sic]'.⁵⁴⁸ If both of these meanings can be read pejoratively, this is a conclusion the following line confirms. Far from being harmonious, when these birds speak, their words merely 'agitate'. Thus, the poem signals that readers should be wary of their discordant voices. It, for instance, judges that a finch's 'tongue knew no controul'.⁵⁴⁹ Once the debate between these anthropomorphical birds has ended, the poem concludes:

Soon ev'ry father-bird and mother
Grew quarrelsome and peck'd each other,
Parted without the least regret
Except that they had ever met,⁵⁵⁰

Cowper suggests that animals fail to interact beneficially when they use human voices. The fable's outward moral concerning the importance of effective cooperation is a message that is not only full of human significance. It is also a sly inward comment on the breakdown in relationships between animals when they use inauthentic speech. The birds's artificial voices

⁵⁴⁷ PWC, iii, 52, 15-16.

⁵⁴⁸ 'To Chatter, v., n.', definition 1 and 3 in Samuel Johnson's, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in 2 vols (W. Strahan, 1755).

⁵⁴⁹ PWC, iii, 52, 26.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 53, 56-59.

destabilise and critique the poetic construction of the beast fable. The reader is forewarned of this eventuality in the footnote to line one.⁵⁵¹ Cowper suggests that even children have the evaluative skills to be distrustful of talking animals. The birds' false utterances warn the reader not to mistake these creatures for their real-life counterparts; instead, they see them as a humanistic device. For Cowper, anthropomorphical animals should not be viewed as accurate representations of their real-life counterparts. The fable creates subaltern subjects, silenced and disempowered of their agency. As such, they are denied the ability to stake a claim for a closer kinship with man. For Brunström and Turner, 'The speech of animals cannot be rendered 'authentically', but their discourse can be rendered deliberately unrealistic and comically human'.⁵⁵² Cowper is intensely aware of this conceit and vigorously exploits it in this poetry. A further example of this tension between real and natural voices can be evinced in 'The Nightingale and Glow-Worm'. This poem also presents an animal that speaks inauthentically. Here, it is a glow-worm when it says:

Did you admire my lamp, quoth he,
As much as I your minstrelsy,
You would abhor to do me wrong,
As much as I to spoil your song,⁵⁵³

The archaic and stylised use of 'quoth' highlights the ridiculousness of a speaking glow-worm. This is a point the creature itself concedes when it confesses that its voice spoils the nightingale's natural song. Conversely, the nightingale, who never talks in the poem, is praised because he 'Had cheer'd the village with his song'.⁵⁵⁴ The poem evaluates each voice and pronounces via tone and self-accusatory commentary that authentic speech has more worth than artificial utterances.

⁵⁵¹ See p. 159 for Cowper's footnote.

⁵⁵² Conrad Brunström and Katherine Turner, 'I shall not ask Jean-Jacques Rousseau': Anthropomorphism in the Cowperian Bestiary', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33.4 (2010), p. 456.

⁵⁵³ *PWC*, i, 416, 15-18.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

‘The Jack Daw’ can be seen as a corrective to ‘The Nightingale and Glow-Worm’ and ‘The Dove’.⁵⁵⁵ The poem directly addresses the reader about the bird by declaring:

You think no doubt he sits and muses
On future broken bones and bruises,
If he should chance to fall;
No not a single thought like that
Employs his philosophic pate,
Or troubles it at all.⁵⁵⁶

Here, Cowper accuses his readers of seeing their fears about flying as ones that would also trouble the poem’s titular character. For the jackdaw, flying is part of its nature, so the bird is indifferent to such an occurrence. These lines mockingly question the anthropocentric practice of assigning human concerns to nonhuman creatures. Using canines as a metaphor for all animals, Donna Haraway believes that ‘Dogs are not an alibi for other themes; dogs are fleshy material-semiotic presences in the body of technoscience. Dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with. They are here to live with’.⁵⁵⁷ By representing the jackdaw realistically, the poem becomes a satirical commentary on the inability of humans to use their reason and recognise the difference between themselves and other species. By conforming to its own logical and rational behaviour, the jackdaw can be seen as a theriophilic trope. George Boas defines theriophily as the belief that animals ‘are more “natural” than [civilized] man, and *hence* man’s superior’.⁵⁵⁸ The poem values the bird’s natural behaviour over the faulty homocentric logic that measures all species by the same human defined standard.

⁵⁵⁵ Interestingly, Cowper chose this poem to translate. The jackdaw is a member of the crow family, a bird that features in four of Æsop’s fables, ‘The Fox and the Crow’, ‘The Crow and the Pitcher’, ‘The Crow and the Sheep’, and ‘The Crow and the Snake’. It could be suggested that Cowper has selected this text, with its naturalistic bird, as a response to Æsop’s anthropomorphical reliant verse.

⁵⁵⁶ *PWC*, i, 422, 19-25.

⁵⁵⁷ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2020), p. 5.

⁵⁵⁸ George Boas, *The Happy Beast in French Thought of the Seventeenth Century* (John Hopkins University Press, 1933), p. 1. Montaigne, Bayle and Bougeant, among others in this thesis, also express this idea.

Cowper challenges his audience in 'The Jack Daw' to shake off their humanistic practice of believing animals have the same perspectives as man. When considering different species, humans should recognise that nonhumans have different concerns from man. Rather than use animals to 'think with', man should 'think about' them and acknowledge their vital agency. The next verse further emphasises the different perspectives between each species:

He [the jack daw] sees that this great roundabout
The world, with all its motley rout,
Church, army, physic, law,
Its customs and its businesses
Are no concern at all of his,
And says, what says he? Caw.⁵⁵⁹

Cowper's lines are emphatically anti-anthropomorphic. He locates the jackdaw in an elevated setting that realistically represents its viewpoint. This stanza also models how animals should be authentically represented in poetry. In direct opposition to the 'artificial' speech of anthropomorphical creatures, this bird's only utterance is the authentic one of 'Caw'. Unlike the glow-worm and the dove, this creature's sounds guarantee his faithfulness to his real-life counterpart. In voice, body and perspective, the jackdaw is imbued with a sense of dignity denied to most fabular creations.

This privileging of other perspectives can also be seen in 'The Cricket'.⁵⁶⁰ Here, Cowper encouragingly labels the creature as a 'harbinger of good'.⁵⁶¹ The narrator proffers a relationship based on economy in which, in return for a place of 'warm retreat', the insect will supply a 'song more soft and sweet'.⁵⁶² In doing so, the poem models a mutually beneficial relationship between man and animal that is highly reminiscent of similar

⁵⁵⁹ *PWC*, i, 422-423, 25-30.

⁵⁶⁰ Both 'The Cricket' and 'The Jack Daw' were translated by Cowper from the original Latin verse by his friend Vincent Bourne. Cowper was particularly drawn to them because, as he writes, Bourne's 'humour is entirely original, he can speak of a Magpie or a Cat in terms so exquisitely appropriate to the Character he draws, that one would suppose him animated by the Spirit of the Creature he describes'. See *LPW*, i, 481.

⁵⁶¹ *PWC*, i, 423, 4.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 5 and *ibid.*, 6.

compacts in Thomson's *The Seasons*.⁵⁶³ Even though the cricket's life is short, the verse proclaims that the happiness its song brings ensures its existence is more fulfilling than:

Wretched man, whose years are spent
In reprising discontent;⁵⁶⁴

Exemplified by the joy the insect's song engenders, the poem believes harmonious interaction is the cornerstone of life. If anthropomorphical discourse reduces animals to empty vessels filled with human voices, it can be said that the fable converts animals into 'things'. Conversely, the creature at the centre of this poem is full of vital agency. Still working within a humanistic framework, Cowper models ways that resist this transformation. Fables like 'The Jack Daw' and 'The Cricket' retain their moral ethos. Still, rather than impart a humanistic message, they wittily turn in on themselves by critiquing the false voices underpinning the genre.

Poetic Dialogue and Real Animals

Cowper also wrote non-fabular poems that highlighted the distorting speech that anthropomorphical animals produce. For instance, in his poem 'On a Spaniel Called Beau, Killing a Young Bird, July 15th, 1793' and its counterpart, 'Beau's Reply'. The first poem, like 'The Dog and the Water-Lily', is based on a factual incident concerning Cowper's dog, Beau. The title temporally fixes the poem's action in a specific moment and thus testifies to its truthfulness. In it, Cowper chastises Beau for killing a bird by pleading to the dog's 'human nature'. This deliberately absurd practice foregrounds the folly of judging animals by human values. Cowper also appeals to the dog's intelligence, saying to Beau that you:

Should wiser be than to pursue
Each trifle that he sees.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶³ See p. 61 and pp. 234-235.

⁵⁶⁴ *PWC*, i, 424, 29-30.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, iii, 201, 3-4.

Cowper argues that all life is essential, but moreover, Beau has ignored his master's instructions. Thus, the poet addresses the dog with the lines:

But you have kill'd a tiney bird
Which flew not 'till to day.
Against my orders, whom you heard
Forbidding you the prey.⁵⁶⁶

Cowper then explains to Beau that he has compounded this senseless act when he leaves the bird uneaten. In doing so, he charges the dog with the same sin that man is guilty of when he kills only for pleasure. The folly of such an accusation is another ironic instance in which Cowper ignores Beau's status as an animal. In the final verse, the poet sees the imprudence of his position. In his capitulation, though, Cowper still fails to comprehend Beau's motivations correctly. Thus, he writes:

I see you [Beau], after all my pains,
So much resemble Man.⁵⁶⁷

In failing to recognise the animal's perspective, Cowper denies Beau the faculty that defines him as a dog. In doing so, the poet knowingly commits the same folly he accuses man of in the 'Jack Daw': that of imposing human values on nonhuman subjects.

As is common in Cowper's poetry, his serious message that acknowledges animals have different perspectives from humans is presented in a self-ironising way. This is a point Brunström and Turner have also seen in Cowper's poetry, with them commenting that 'If such poems are deliberately funny, as most readers would agree, then it's equally true that a broadly comic tone, a mock-heroic inflation of domestic trivia, provides one of the ways in which Cowper can accommodate potentially very troubling material'.⁵⁶⁸ If Cowper gently mocks his inability to train Beau, he also comments on the impossibility of teaching a human-

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 5-8.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 202, 19-20.

⁵⁶⁸ Conrad Brunström and Katherine Turner, 'I shall not ask Jean-Jacques Rousseau': Anthropomorphism in the Cowperian Bestiary', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33.4 (2010), p. 460.

constructed moral code to any creature other than man. Ultimately, Cowper's attempt to improve Beau's ethical relationship with the world is doomed to failure.

Where 'On a Spaniel Called Beau, Killing a Young Bird, July 15th, 1793' highlights man's inability to decouple human thought processes from animal consciousness, 'Beau's Reply' interrogates the consequences of such actions. The poem is a monologue in which Beau defends himself. After six verses in which the dog justifies his actions, the final stanza undercuts all that has gone before. It critiques the validity of animals that articulate a moral code they neither understand nor conform to:

If killing birds be such a crime
(Which I can hardly see)
What think you, Sir, of killing Time
With verse address'd to me?⁵⁶⁹

Ironically, the central 'I' within the poem is not Beau but Cowper. Seen in conjunction with the first poem, they become not a dialogue between man and dog, but the poet 'killing Time' speaking to himself. Beau's anthropomorphical voice is exposed as fundamentally artificial. Bill Hutchings believes in this poem, 'The moralizer is simply moralizing to waste time. Thus the central motivation of Cowper's poetic career is called into agonizing question'.⁵⁷⁰ Hutchings's comment fails to consider the ironic, self-mocking tone that is often a feature in Cowper's animal poems. The reader needs to look beyond the comic surfaces of his verse to see that he is far from a moraliser wasting time. The last stanza of 'Beau's Reply' neatly encapsulates Cowper's position on animals in fables. As false impressions, they do not speak the truth, and hence, listening to them becomes an act of 'killing Time'.

The Dangers of Domestication: Companion Animals and their Owners

⁵⁶⁹ PWC, iii, 203, 25-28.

⁵⁷⁰ Bill Hutchings, *The Poetry of William Cowper* (Croom Helm, 1983), p. 135.

As has been noted, Cowper not only had a dog but also kept a large number of birds. Ingrid Tague has indicated that the ‘most common pets in the eighteenth century were caged birds, and the most common varieties of birds were native species captured in the wild’.⁵⁷¹ Like all forms of keeping companion animals, there was an active debate on the morality of placing animals in confinement. In 1798, Thomas Young passionately argued

What right have we to tame such animals as birds, squirrels and hares; and to cage and confine some of them; thus debarring them from the unrestrained exertions of the several energies of their natures, and depriving them of many enjoyments which a benevolent Creator has provided for them, and all this merely for the sake of amusement?⁵⁷²

Placing birds in cages made them an obvious focal point of criticism towards removing animals from their natural habitats. Several authors questioned the validity of caging birds.

Christian Raff’s *A System of Natural History* (1796), written as a dialogue between a master (M) and his pupil (P), has this to say on the subject

P. Well! they ought not to be allowed to keep nightingales in a cage, or in their apartments, since they will not go to hear them warble in the woods.

M. At least, it is certain, they do not deserve it. Thus, only go for a little to hear those unfortunate nightingales; you will perceive what a difference between the sad warble of these captives, and the sublime strains of the natives of the woods!⁵⁷³

Thomas Pennant’s *British Zoology* (1768) explains how once bird-catchers have ensnared their intended prey

they immediately kill the hens of every species of birds they take, being incapable of singing, and also being inferior in plumage; the *pippets* are likewise indiscriminately destroyed, as the cock does not sing well: they sell the dead birds for three-pence or four-pence a dozen.⁵⁷⁴

Raff and Pennant question the morality of removing birds from their natural habitats, especially as keeping companion animals was seen by certain sections of society as ‘an example of “wasting” precious resources (money and food) on needless conspicuous

⁵⁷¹ Ingrid Tague, *Animal Companions* (Pennsylvania University Press, 2015), p. 3.

⁵⁷² Thomas Young, *An Essay on the Humanity to Animals* (T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1798), p. 178.

⁵⁷³ Georg Christian Raff, *A System of Natural History, Adapted for the Youth in the Form of a Dialogue*, vol. ii, 2 vols, trans. by anon. (J. Johnson, G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796), p. 112.

⁵⁷⁴ Thomas Pennant, *British Zoology*, vol. ii, 2 vols (Benjamin White, 1768), p. 335.

consumption. They were inexcusable luxuries'.⁵⁷⁵ Other writers saw no such ethical dilemmas in caging birds and offered potential companion animal owners advice on taming them. Eleazar Albin's *A Natural History of Singing Birds* (1754) was one such book. *The Monthly Review* praised a later edition, writing that it 'is a work well known, and esteemed for the accuracy of the drawings. The present edition [...] cannot fail of meeting with due acceptance from the public, —and especially from young readers, who are bird-fanciers'.⁵⁷⁶ Albin claims to be 'a LOVER of BIRDS' on the title page. Besides identifying and describing the habits of many singing birds, he includes tips on caring for them at the end of each chapter. His advice for the skylark is typical, 'These birds, when taken old, are generally a little wild at first; therefore, to prevent them from fluttering and beating against the cage, tie the tips of their wings'.⁵⁷⁷ For Albin, songbirds are 'agreeable companions to man' since 'the animal world does not afford us objects more grateful to the eye, nor any that so sweetly charm the ear'.⁵⁷⁸ Albin sees it as irrelevant whether birds are in their natural environment or a domestic cage since, in both spheres, they can still perform their primary function as 'objects' that 'charm' man. Thomas Percival's *A Father's Instructions* (1784) has many tales promoting kindness to animals. One such story sees caging birds as a compassionate act. In 'The Canary Bird and the Red Linnet', a wild linnet asks a caged canary why he sings, to which he receives the reply that

It is over the comforts, and not the evils of my situation, that I rejoice [...] Heaven has conferred advantages on me, which are denied to you. For in that season you are exposed to hardship, famine, and danger, I am fed with a liberal hand; sheltered from the winter's cold; and protected from the fowler and every animal of prey.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁵ Ingrid Tague, *Animal Companions* (Pennsylvania University Press, 2015), p. 140.

⁵⁷⁶ *The Monthly Review; or Literary Journal*, July-December, vol. 61 (R. Griffiths, 1779), p. 73.

⁵⁷⁷ Eleazar Albin, *A Natural History of Singing Birds* (J. Wood, 1776), p. 20.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁷⁹ Thomas Percival, *A Father's Instructions Consisting of Moral Tales, Fables, and Reflections, Designed to Promote the Love of Virtue, a Taste for Knowledge, and an Early Acquaintance with the Works of Nature* (W. Eyres, 1784), pp. 282-83.

The book's justification that companion animal owners can legitimately remove animals from their natural environment on compassionate grounds is echoed in the opening lines of

Cowper's poem 'Epitaph on a Hare':

Here lies, whom hound did ne'er pursue
Nor swifter Grey-hound follow,
Whose foot ne'er tainted morning dew
Nor ear heard huntsman's hallo',⁵⁸⁰

This poem's sentiment mirrors the same reasoning in 'The Canary Bird and the Red Linnet'.

Moreover, by bringing a hare into his domestic space, Cowper sets up a dynamic between host and guest, one in which he, as the host, guarantees his pet's safety. For Erin Parker, this relationship is a practice regulated by the rules of hospitality. As she explains, it is not without risk since 'participating in hospitality and 'pet' keeping meant facing the mutual dangers and benefits, limitations and the opportunities, of accommodating the other'.⁵⁸¹ In his poems on caged birds, Cowper illustrates these dangers in a way that problematises his justification for keeping his own companion animals. For instance, violating the domestic sanctuary is a central concern in 'On the Death of Mrs Throckmorton's Bullfinch'. Again, fact informs poetic fiction as Cowper explains the genesis behind the poem to Samuel Rose in a letter on 11 November 1788. Here, Cowper writes, 'Weston has not been without its tragedies since you left us. Mrs. Frog's piping Bull-finch [called Bully] has been eaten by a rat, and the villain left nothing but poor Bully's beak behind him'.⁵⁸² Using Catullus's 'Death of Lesbia's Sparrow' as his model, Cowper further employs the mock-heroic tone and classical allusions that are his natural mode in his poems concerning companion animals.⁵⁸³

In this case, the first verse opens in mock-heroic terms with:

⁵⁸⁰ *PWC*, ii, 19, 1-4.

⁵⁸¹ Erin Parker, "'Doubt Not an Affectionate Host": Cowper's Hares and the Hospitality of Eighteenth-Century Pet Keeping', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 38.2, (2014), p. 76.

⁵⁸² *LPW*, iii, 228.

⁵⁸³ See Arthur Sherbo's 'William Cowper's Bullfinch Poem: A Minor Sub-Genre?', *Notes and Queries*, 32.2 (1985), pp. 243-45 for further information on the use of classical models in eighteenth-century poems on lamented companion animals.

Ye Nymphs, if e'er your eyes were red
With tears o'er hapless fav'rites shed,⁵⁸⁴

These florid opening lines belie the pathos with which the poem will close. This is a text in which the pet's voice and its lack will be a recurring feature. Cowper emphasises how Bully's domestic environment shapes him and his fateful outcome. Even his voice is given to him by his owner because:

[...] though by nature mute
Or only with a whistle blest,
Well-taught, he all the sounds express'd
Of flagellet or flute.⁵⁸⁵

Trained by his owner to sing, Bully is denied his own 'whistle'. To repay his owner/host for her protection, the guest, Bully, must use his artificial 'whistle' as payment. After all, as Eleazar Albin explains, people kept a bullfinch as a companion animal because 'It is a bird much esteemed for beauty and singing'.⁵⁸⁶ When this domestic space is violated by an unbidden guest in the form of a rat, Cowper ensures his description of its:

Long-back'd, long-tail'd, with whisker'd snout
And badger-colour'd hide.⁵⁸⁷

Combined with the epithet of 'beast', these lines leave the reader in no doubt as to the malignancy of this animal.⁵⁸⁸ With Bully's 'screaming' being a contributing factor to his demise, the following verse explains that:

For, aided both by ear and scent
Right to his mark the Monster went—
Ah, Muse! forbear to speak,
Minute, the horrors that ensued,
His teeth were strong, the cage was wood—
He left poor Bully's beak.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁴ PWC, iii, 30, 1-2.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 9-12.

⁵⁸⁶ Eleazar Albin, *A Natural History of Singing Birds* (J. Wood, 1776), p. 81.

⁵⁸⁷ PWC, iii, 31, 35-36

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 47 and ibid., 49-54.

Here, then, is a double silence. First, the ‘Muse’ refrains from speaking, but most tragically, Bully’s voice is expunged. Ironically, the only sign of him that is left is his beak. Brunström and Turner also see this as a poem about the erasure of an animal voice. As they explain

This is a poem about absent speech. Bully’s only defence presumably would have been a cry for help. The cry comes too late or is unheeded, and the only inedible portion of Bully turns out to be the beak, the indigestible symbol of communication’.⁵⁹⁰

It would also be accurate to say that this poem is about silencing natural and artificial animal voices. Bully’s voice is erased by his owner when he is taught to ‘whistle’, and his artificial voice dies with him at the end of the poem. Furthermore, the poem seems to slyly imply that Bully’s owner has implicitly, if unintentionally, contributed to his death. Vincent Newey notes that the kindly ‘precaution of banning cats from Bully’s room ...succeeds in leaving the way open to rats’.⁵⁹¹ Additionally, ‘A wooden cage facilitates the issue’, allowing the rat easier entry into poor Bully’s sanctuary.⁵⁹² These actions amount to a severe dereliction of a host’s duties towards their guest. Cowper’s poem interrogates his position on pet-keeping. He is fully aware that such actions highly problematise his justification for placing wild animals in domesticated spaces to mitigate the dangers they face in their natural habitats

The contention that domestic spaces are safe for animals also comes under pressure in ‘On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in a Cage’. The poem’s tone abandons Cowper’s usually humorous, ironic or mock-heroic style and instead appeals directly to the reader’s compassionate sensibility. For those who have read Cowper’s letters, this poem becomes more poignant because, as Cowper testifies, ‘The Tragical Occasion of it really happen’d at

⁵⁹⁰ Conrad Brunström and Katherine Turner, ‘I shall not ask Jean-Jacques Rousseau’: Anthropomorphism in the Cowperian Bestiary’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33.4 (2010), p. 460.

⁵⁹¹ Vincent Newey, *Cowper’s Poetry: A Critical Study and Reassessment* (Liverpool University Press, 1982), p. 224.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 225. Bill Hutchings makes a similar point. See Bill Hutchings, *The Poetry of William Cowper* (Croom Helm, 1983), pp. 129-130

the next House to ours'.⁵⁹³ Vincent Newey believes, in the poem, that the 'truth' is 'for real', not faked, in that it results from and projects lived experience'.⁵⁹⁴ Written in the first person, it documents the circumstances that have led to the bird's death, as narrated by the now-dead goldfinch. Throughout the poem, the bird puts forward a narrative account that privileges its own perspective. The dead goldfinch, then, does not speak with a voice that privileges a human perspective but rather one that genuinely represents the concerns relevant to the bird when it was alive. Hence, the lines:

Time was when I was free as air,
The thistles downy seed my fare,
My drink the morning dew;
I perch'd at will on ev'ry spray,
My form genteel, my plumage gay,
My strains for ever new.⁵⁹⁵

Here, the bird both justifies why living in the wild was so advantageous and, in the line 'My form genteel, my plumage gay', the reason for its captivity. With its liberty denied, the poem's final accusatory lines of:

Thanks, gentle swain, for all my woes,
And thanks for this effectual close
And cure of ev'ry ill!
More cruelty could none express,
And I, if you had shewn me less
Had been your pris'ner still.

reveal the pitiable circumstance that leads the goldfinch to conclude that its wanton death was preferred to its captivity as a 'pris'ner still'.⁵⁹⁶ Initially, the relationship between the bird and its owner is similar to the one in; 'On the Death of Mrs Throckmorton's Bullfinch', namely that of host and guest. However, the final verse reveals a darker interplay, as the bird views their relationship as between jailor and prisoner. In the last stanza, Cowper questions man's

⁵⁹³ *LPW*, i, 402. Letter to William Unwin, Thursday, 9 November 1780.

⁵⁹⁴ Vincent Newey, *Cowper's Poetry: A Critical Study and Reassessment* (Liverpool University Press, 1982), p. 227.

⁵⁹⁵ *PWC*, i, 417, 1-6.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 418, 13-18.

ability to understand the consciousness of animals other than himself. By decentring human perceptions and privileging the bird's point of view, Cowper encourages his readers to view animals as sentient beings and not objects for man's pleasure. This is why the host-guest relationship is so meaningful. It is because it acknowledges that each bifurcated partner is a separate being. Read in this way, 'On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in a Cage' is a salutary lesson, warning of the dangers that animals encounter when they are removed from their natural habitats. Moreover, this poem details how relationships can radically change when a host fails to fulfil their obligation to keep their guests safe. Erin Parker believes that

For Cowper, hospitality—viewed positively as a willingness to share one's domestic space and resources—was a concept that offered a suitable vocabulary for describing the benevolent stance Cowper wanted his readers to adopt towards many nonhuman beings, especially domesticated creatures.⁵⁹⁷

In sharing their 'domestic space', a host must remember their duties towards their guest.

Cowper's benevolent stance is partly a sympathetic understanding that animals have needs humans do not always comprehend. Anthropomorphism is a double danger to nonhumans.

Not only does it deny them the right to self-representation, but when humanlike animals speak, they often articulate actions directly contrary to their interests. Zygmunt Bauman has expressed the opinion that as enfeebled others, such subjects are

weak, vulnerable, without power, they are indeed without power since they cannot repay what has been done for them [...], and vulnerable since they cannot prevent us from doing whatever we think worth doing; once for all, with no hope of reversing the roles, they are stuck on the receiving side of the action in which we [humans] are the only acting subjects.⁵⁹⁸

The host-guest relationship produces an imbalance of power between subjects. Regarding animals as guests, it complicates their claim for self-determination by positioning them as disempowered subjects vulnerable to the vagaries of their host. Cowper's poetry, thus, highlights a problem in keeping companion animals. Owners often justified the removal of

⁵⁹⁷ Erin Parker, "'Doubt Not an Affectionate Host': Cowper's Hares and the Hospitality of Eighteenth-Century Pet Keeping", *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 38.2, (2014), p. 76.

⁵⁹⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Blackwell Publishers, 1994), pp. 219-20.

animals from their natural habitats because they believed a domestic space was a safer environment for them. The caprices of inattentive owners and predatory creatures entering this space problematise such a claim. If Cowper's poetry reflects his real-life practices, his verse sometimes fails to validate his justification for being a companion animal owner. The allegations in 'On a Goldfinch Starved to Death in a Cage' seem incompatible with those in the 'Epitaph on a Hare'. Such contradictions create a tension in Cowper's poetry that seems impossible to resolve.

Cowper's poetry is more successful in advocating for a compassionate relationship with animals. In many ways, his attitude regarding nonhumans is similar to Pope's. Like him, he envisages man as a steward of nature. For Richard Terry, Cowper's relationship with animals can be ascribed to

traditional providentialist assumptions about man's responsibility towards the natural world. These stressed that man's position regarding his fellow creatures was that of an appointed steward; animals were placed at his disposal, but he had no right to exercise claims on their lives beyond those of necessary subsistence.⁵⁹⁹

The sentiments that Cowper expresses in *The Task* (1785), such as:

On Noah, and in him on all mankind
The charter was conferr'd by which we hold
The flesh of animals in fee, and claim
O'er all we feed on, pow'r of life and death.
But read the instrument, and mark it well.
Th' oppression of a tyrannous controul
Can find no warrant there. Feed then, and yield
Thanks for thy food. Carnivorous through sin
Feed on the slain, but spare the living brute.

are comparable to those put forward in Pope's *Essay on Man*.⁶⁰⁰ Nathan Drake also sees

Cowper as an inheritor of Pope's ethical stance. Writing on Pope's compassionate plea for animals in his essay for *The Guardian*, Drake notes that 'The subject has been frequently

⁵⁹⁹ Richard Terry, "'Meaner Themes': Mock-Heroic and Providentialism in Cowper's Poetry', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 34.3 (1994), p. 625.

⁶⁰⁰ *PWC*, ii, 248, 450-458.

resumed, both in prose and verse, by succeeding writers; but by none with more energy and pathos than by our lamented Cowper'.⁶⁰¹ Additionally, the lines 'Carnivorous through sin | Feed on the slain, but spare the living brute', explain Cowper's post-lapsarian view in 'To the Immortal Memory of the Halibut, on which I Dined this Day, Monday, April 26, 1784'.⁶⁰² Cowper justifies killing the fish because of original sin, intimating that before this, Adam and Eve had lived in perfect harmony with animals. His verse on the halibut is a poetic thanks to God for providing the 'slain' fish. The ironic epithet 'Immortal' assigned to the dead fish testifies to poetry's ability to immortalise it in verse. In *Areopagitica* (1644), Milton declares that books are a 'pretious [sic] life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life'.⁶⁰³ Cowper also believes this. The lives of sentient beings are finite, but their representations in poetry have a 'life beyond life'. They are fixed in a text that will eternally testify to their affinity with their mortal counterparts. In his animal poems, Cowper can claim universal kinship with domesticated creatures and enshrine these real-life encounters for future generations.

Compassionate Creatures: The Philosophy of Hume and Smith

Philosophically, Cowper's compassionate sympathy has its antecedents in the Scottish Enlightenment. If this is first seen in Francis Hutcheson's *A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755), it becomes more widely associated with two later Scottish writers. It is to the ideas of Adam Smith and David Hume that Cowper is indebted. Markman Ellis has commented that 'Hutcheson, although committed to the pursuit of empirical enquiry, refused to relinquish the pedagogical function of moral philosophy, that it should not only describe the operation of

⁶⁰¹ Nathan Drake, *Essays, Biographical, Critical and Historical*, vol. iii, 3 vols, 2nd edition (Suttaby, Evance and Fox, 1814), pp. 114-115.

⁶⁰² The title of this poem can be seen as another instance of Cowper recording and documenting in scientific detail the exact time and place in which this event originally occurred.

⁶⁰³ John Milton, 'Areopagitica', *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. ii, 8 vols of 10 books, ed. by Ernest Sirluck (Yale University Press, 1966), p. 493.

virtue and duty, but should recommend it too'.⁶⁰⁴ For Smith and Hume, ethical ideas derived from an innate moral sense failed to critically explain how sympathy operated. Moreover, the equitable treatment of animals via disinterested benevolence becomes more challenging to justify when the cause is supernatural. As Aaron Garrett explains when he states, one can see

a tension in Hutcheson's idea of animal rights. In the end isn't it the natural right to happiness and the sense of pity that does most of the work, as it had for Mandeville? The whole argument seems to rely on the "right to happiness", which is supported by a benevolent deity and ordered by providence. But if there is no surefire way to know that providence is benevolent, or is at all, then how can we be sure of this general right to happiness?⁶⁰⁵

Both Hume and Smith move away from a theological underpinning for their concept of sympathy. Instead, they defined their ideas in materialistic terms, both corporeal and psychological. Though both philosophers tried to understand where sympathy originated, each had differing accounts to explain virtuous actions.

David Hume's essay 'Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature' states, 'In forming our notions of human nature, we are apt to make a comparison between men and animals, the only creatures endowed with thought that fall under our senses'.⁶⁰⁶ Even though animal intelligence is limited, Hume certainly accredits them with it. As Tom Beauchamp explains

Reason for him is the faculty of reasoning, and it has two and only two functions: (1) demonstrative reasoning, including the discovery of relations of ideas (in mathematical reasoning and the like), and (2) nondemonstrative or causal reasoning, including the discovery of matters of fact in experience. Hume considers nonhuman animals to engage in only the second form of reasoning.⁶⁰⁷

Through understanding, animals gain knowledge to predict future events. In Hume's words, 'the animal infers some facts beyond what immediately strikes his senses; and this inference

⁶⁰⁴ Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 12.

⁶⁰⁵ Aaron Garrett, 'Animals and Ethics in the History of Modern Philosophy', *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, ed. by Tom L. Beauchamp and R. G. Frey (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 78.

⁶⁰⁶ David Hume, 'Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature', *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, revised edition, ed. by Eugene F. Miller (Liberty Fund, 1994), p. 82.

⁶⁰⁷ Tom L. Beauchamp, 'Hume on the Nonhuman Animal', *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 24.4 (1999), p. 324.

is altogether founded on past experience'.⁶⁰⁸ A response by such an animal, whether verbal or bodily, could be interpreted as a sign of emotion and thus evoke a sympathetic reaction. Hume sees further similarities between animals and humans, both physically and theologically. Acknowledging the impossibility that abstract thought can determine whether the soul exists, he hypothesises that 'if a spiritual substance to be dispersed throughout the universe [...] we have reason to conclude from analogy, that nature uses it after the same manner she does the other substance, matter'.⁶⁰⁹ From this, Hume extrapolates that 'the same material substance may successively compose the body of all animals, the same spiritual substance may compose their minds'.⁶¹⁰ For him, the composition of the soul is practically the same for all sentient creatures. Acknowledging the difference between man and animals is one of degree rather than of kind allows Hume to state that, like humans, 'Animals undoubtedly feel, think, love, hate, will, and even reason, tho' in a more imperfect manner than man'.⁶¹¹ He confirms this opinion in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, declaring, 'Love in animals, has not only for its only object animals of the same species, but extends itself farther, and comprehends almost every sensible and thinking being'.⁶¹² Hume defines sympathy as 'the chief source of moral distinctions'.⁶¹³ Further stating that

No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than the propensity we have to sympathise with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own.⁶¹⁴

Sympathy is an emotional response that regulates society. Citing examples that would produce such an effect, he pronounces, 'The virtue of a brother must make me love him; as

⁶⁰⁸ David Hume, *An Enquiry into Human Nature*, ed. by Tom L. Beauchamp (Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 81.

⁶⁰⁹ David Hume, 'Of the Immortality of the Soul', *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, revised edition., ed. by Eugene F. Miller (Liberty Fund, 1994), p. 591.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 592.

⁶¹² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by Ernest C. Mossner (Penguin Books, 1985), p. 444.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 668.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 367.

his vice or infamy must excite the contrary passion'.⁶¹⁵ Such emotional reactions foster an empathetic connection between subject and object. It is this bond that governs the behaviour of ethical individuals in society. As Hume confirms when he asserts, once an emotional response has been engendered, 'the cause is compleat, and a good disposition is attended with good fortune, which renders it really beneficial to society, it gives a stronger pleasure to the spectator, and is attended with a more lively sympathy'.⁶¹⁶ How, though, does sympathy occur? Hume explains its mechanics when he writes

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea about it. This is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection.⁶¹⁷

Here, imagination, which conveys and converts the passion in the object into an 'equal emotion' in the onlooking subject, plays a critical part in facilitating sympathy. Such is the importance that imagination plays in this process that Hume restates his position later in the book, declaring

The bare opinion of another, especially when inforc'd with passion, will cause an idea of good or evil to have an influence upon us, which wou'd otherwise have been entirely neglected. This proceeds from the principle of sympathy or communication; and sympathy, as I have already observ'd, is nothing but the conversion of an idea into an impression by the force of imagination.⁶¹⁸

Moreover, he believes that it is a quality that nonhumans have, asserting, 'Tis evident, that *sympathy*, or the communication of passions, takes place among animals, no less than among men. Fear, anger, courage and other affections are frequently communicated from one animal

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 387.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 636.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 445.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 474.

to another'.⁶¹⁹ Ultimately, because animals are capable of emotional communication, they are subjects worthy of sympathy.⁶²⁰

Adam Smith, similarly, considers animals to be moral subjects. For him, 'When we see one man assisted, protected, relieved by another, our sympathy with the joy of the person who receives the benefit serves only to animate our fellow-feeling with his gratitude towards him who bestows it'.⁶²¹ Smith believes it is via our 'imagination we become the very person whose actions are represented to us'.⁶²² Here, the agent, via a process of empathy he calls 'fancy', experiences the same emotional state (analogous to Hume's 'passion') as the object of his attention. Smith explains it thus

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.⁶²³

Man can compassionately bond with any subject with similar emotional states, regardless of species. This Smith confirms when he asserts, 'The causes of pain and pleasure, whatever they are, or however they operate, seem to be the objects, which, in all animals, immediately ex-cite those two passions of gratitude and resentment'.⁶²⁴ He goes on to say 'that before any thing can be the proper object of gratitude or resentment, it must not only be the cause of pleasure or pain, it must likewise be capable of feeling them'.⁶²⁵ For Smith, sentience, not intelligence, is the entry qualification for nonhumans to be considered moral objects. He is not saying that animals have moral agency. Instead, ethical actions are, in the words of

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 445.

⁶²⁰ For a more hesitant view of animal sympathy in Smith's theory, see Markman Ellis, 'Suffering Things: Lapdogs, Slaves, and Counter-Sensibility', *Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Mark Blackwell (Bucknell University Press, 2007).

⁶²¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 82.

⁶²² Ibid., 87.

⁶²³ Ibid., 12.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 110.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 111.

Alejandra Mancilla, restricted ‘to human beings (as the only subjects capable of doing good or harm by design), it allows however the possibility for all nonhuman animals to be considered as moral patients, insofar as we can imagine ourselves in their situation’.⁶²⁶

However, for any sentiment to be legitimate, Smith wants to guarantee sympathy’s detachment from self-interest. If ‘disinterestedness’ was critical to Hutcheson’s philosophy, ‘impartiality’ is just as essential to Smith’s. To ensure that moral judgements have critical distance, Smith insists they must be unprejudiced, as he explains when he avers

But though man has, in this manner, been rendered the immediate judge of mankind, he has been rendered so only in the first instance; and an appeal lies from his sentence to a much higher tribunal, to the tribunal of their own consciences, to that of the supposed impartial and well-informed spectator, to that of the man within the breast, the great judge and arbiter of their conduct.⁶²⁷

This ‘man within the breast’, or impartial spectator, introduces a critical difference between Hume and Smith on sympathy. In Hume’s account, there is a ‘direct link from sympathy to motivation because sympathy is reflected self-love’.⁶²⁸ Smith’s account differs because the ‘impartial spectator’ mediates any emotional response for him. Thus ensuring that ‘sympathy is an act of imagination which only habit makes motivational. [...] we can obtain approbation as we step outside ourselves and regard our own actions dispassionately’.⁶²⁹ This hypothetical person acts as an intermediary between the subject and the object, ensuring that all responses accord with the community’s moral codes. It is this impartial spectator that regulates the individual’s relationship with society. Smith defines it thus, ‘The man who, not from frivolous fancy, but from proper motives has performed a generous action, when he looks forward to those whom he has served, feels himself to be the natural object of their love and

⁶²⁶ Alejandra Mancilla, ‘Nonhuman Animals in Adam Smith’s Moral Theory’, *Between the Species*, issue 9, (2009), p. 3.

⁶²⁷ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 32.

⁶²⁸ David M. Levy and Sandra J. Peart, ‘Sympathy and Approbation in Hume and Smith: A Solution to the Other Rational Species Problem’, *Economics and Philosophy*, 2004-10, vol. 20 (2004), p. 331-332.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, 332.

gratitude'.⁶³⁰ Conversely, 'The violator of the most sacred laws of justice can never reflect on the sentiments which mankind must entertain with regard to him, without feeling all the agonies of shame'.⁶³¹ Virtue, shame, and sympathy all originate communally through interaction with others. Smith confirms this when he states, 'Those vicegerents of God within us, never fail to punish the violation of them, by the torments of inward shame, and self-condemnation; and on the contrary, always reward obedience with tranquillity of mind, with contentment, and self-satisfaction'.⁶³²

As stated earlier, even if they cannot be moral agents, animals are worthy of man's sympathy as creatures 'capable of feeling'. It is of no regard that animals lack the intelligence to understand their situation because Smith believes, 'we feel upon this, as upon many other occasions, an emotion which the person principally concerned is incapable of feeling and which we feel by an illusive sympathy with him'.⁶³³ An instance of this is seen in *The Task*:

Witness, the patient ox with stripes and yells
 Driv'n to the slaughter, goaded as he runs⁶³⁴

Even though the ox is unaware of its impending death, the sympathetic reader comprehends the situation and responds accordingly. It is not just the ox but all the animals mistreated by man that evoke a sympathetic response. The concept of sympathy is crucial in advocating for more compassionate treatment of animals. Tobias Menely notes, 'By linking suffering with moral standing and sympathy with moral agency, sentimental discourse had mediated an extensive transformation in the status of animals'.⁶³⁵

⁶³⁰ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 99.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶³⁴ *PWC*, ii. 247, 420-421.

⁶³⁵ Tobias Menely, 'Zoöphilpsychosis: Why Animals Are What's Wrong with Sentimentality', *Symploke*, 15.1/2 (2007), p. 252.

It is this sympathetic relationship that Cowper wants to both evoke and model in his poetry.

The centrality of this emotion as a driving mechanism in happiness is confirmed in his

‘Addressed to Miss — on Reading the Prayer for Indifference’:

’Tis woven in the world’s great plan,
And fix’d by Heav’n’s decree,
That all the true delights of man
Should spring from *Sympathy*.⁶³⁶

To his contemporaries, Cowper was also a noted exponent of sympathetic expression. In a short-lived magazine called *The Flapper*, they devoted three entire issues to Cowper.⁶³⁷ The periodical believed that ‘on every occasion he writes not merely from his fancy but from his heart; and a heart, it is evident, as widely expansive and as tenderly sympathetic as ever animated a human bosom’.⁶³⁸ The article then floridly continues to announce

that his muse is but the minister of his benevolence—that under his culture, Parnassus itself teems with a new growth, since on every item he has engrafted the scions of charity. Nor does the affectionate sensibility of *Cowper* enter into his compositions merely as an ingredient. It appears rather as the invigorating principle of his poetry.⁶³⁹

Hume and Smith’s ideas give Cowper the philosophical language of sympathy central to the ‘invigorating principle of his poetry’. Their conception of sympathy permits him to claim that domestic relationships with animals are not the frivolous actions of a companion animal owner but a scientifically based practice that helps refine man’s virtue.

A Fellowship with Wild and Domesticated Animals

Cowper’s poems are littered with examples of him sympathetically interacting with nature. In ‘To The Nightingale Which The Author Heard Sing on New Year’s Day’, Cowper combines

⁶³⁶ PWC, i, 75, 45-48.

⁶³⁷ It ran from 1 February 1796 to 4 February 1797,

⁶³⁸ *The Flapper. A Periodical Work*, number XXXVIII, Saturday, 11 June 1796 (R.E. Mercier and Co.), p. 149.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

poetic imagery (he figuratively calls the bird Philomel) with his imperfect, ornithological knowledge.⁶⁴⁰ As the title expressly states, on the 1 January, the poet hears:

The foremost Morn of all they year
The melody of May?⁶⁴¹

Cowper feels ‘amazed’ that he has heard the bird sing so early in the year.⁶⁴² If it is true that Cowper heard a nightingale, this would be remarkable as Buffon’s *The Natural History of Birds* believed that ‘The nightingale, when he first arrives in the spring, is silent’.⁶⁴³ The critical point here is not the specific species but the connection between man and animal. Hence, the rest of the poem describes Cowper’s sympathetic relationship with the bird. The poet finds commonalities between himself and the nightingale in the lines:

Sing’st thou, sweet Philomel, to me
For that I also long
Have practis’d in the groves like thee,
Though not like thee in song?⁶⁴⁴

Like ‘The Cricket’, the poet, thus, communes with the bird. He hopes to hear ‘some divine command’ through this sympathetic relationship with the nightingale. Similar to ‘The Dog and the Water-Lily’, the interaction with an animal initiates a tripartite relationship between God and two of his creations. Here, the rationally derived sympathy of Hume and Smith is suffused with theological significance. This is typical of Cowper - his Evangelical belief is

⁶⁴⁰ Writing in *Notes and Queries*, J.E. Harting comments, ‘Many years ago, being in a district where nightingales abounded, I drew attention to a curious mistake made by the poet Cowper. After listening to the early spring-song of a thrush uttered from “a wither’d spray” in January, he wrote a poem “On hearing a Nightingale singing on New Year’s Day.” [...] It is strange that a poet did not recognise at once the song of a thrush, and that at the same time realize the fact that the nightingale is a summer migrant, and does not come till April’. See J. E. Harting, ‘Cowper’s Nightingale’, *Notes and Queries*, 148.4 (1925), p. 245, <https://doi.org/10.1093/nq/CXLVIII.apr04.245c>.

⁶⁴¹ PWC, iii, 180, 3-4.

⁶⁴² In his *The Guardian* essay on the pastoral, Alexander Pope slyly mocks Ambrose Philips’s anachronous use of the same bird as Cowper. See *The Guardian*, ed. by John Calhoun Stephens (The University of Kentucky, 1982), p. 161. No. 40, Monday, 27 April 1713. Cowper’s actual encounter with a Nightingale, similarly out of season, could be read as a riposte to Pope’s belief in applying neoclassical rules to the pastoral.

⁶⁴³ Georges-Louise Leclerc, Comte De Buffon, *The Natural History of Birds*, vol. i, 9 vols (Strahan, T. Cadell, & J. Murray 1793), p. 16.

⁶⁴⁴ PWC, ii, 180, 9-12.

always his master discourse, in which all other considerations are subsumed. John Morillo believes that

Cowper's most consistent interest, animals, philosophically intermingled the Classical and Christian in ways that enabled him to look forward. He anticipated a great, coming revolution, not just in poetry, but also in thinking about animals from both more scientific and more posthumanist points of view.⁶⁴⁵

Morillo's conclusions seem theoretically overly optimistic. Cowper certainly hopes for a better future for animals but could hardly 'anticipate a great, coming revolution' that privileges 'posthumanist points of view'. However, Morillo correctly identifies a blending of philosophical, religious, scientific and classical influences in Cowper's poetry on animals. It is this fluidity that gives his verse a vital poetic realism.

'Sparrows Self-Domesticated in Trinity College, Cambridge' is just such a poem that blends various styles to significant effect. For instance, its use of religious language places it in the tradition of Christian parables. At its centre, it models a sympathetic relationship between man and animals in which 'The Sparrows beg their daily fare'.⁶⁴⁶ In granting alms to these birds, the students at Trinity College engage in a compassionate act with another species. Each student is guided by their Smithian impartial spectator to dispassionately consider the ethical practice of giving alms to the birds. Once 'the great judge and arbiter of their conduct' approves the moral worth of their actions, the students are socially compelled to feed the birds.⁶⁴⁷ Moreover, critically, the social benefit of sympathy does not end here. It is extended to the audience. This is because each reader becomes concomitant with the students in the very act of engaging with the poem. Thus, sympathetic imagination facilitates the reader to 'enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him [the

⁶⁴⁵ John Morillo, *The Rise of Animals and Descent of Man, 1660-1800* (University of Delaware Press, 2018), p. 116.

⁶⁴⁶ PWC, iii, 224, 8.

⁶⁴⁷ See p. 180.

students in the poem], and thence form some idea of his sensations'.⁶⁴⁸ Simultaneously, each reader's impartial spectator bestows his gratitude on the students in acknowledgement of their social beneficence.

In giving food to the sparrows, the scholars act as hosts to the birds. A point that the word 'self-domesticated' makes clear in the title and also in the opening lines:

None ever shared the social feast,
Or as an Inmate or a guest,⁶⁴⁹

By eating simultaneously with the birds, the students assist in a communal activity where Cowper stresses the 'social' significance. The use of 'self-domesticated' further hints that these animals have freely entered this relationship. This interaction between host and willing guests seems less perilous to animals than between 'pet' owner and 'pet'. This poem, thus, encourages its reader to follow the example of the students at Trinity College, one in which the sparrows:

Solicit, what they soon receive,
The sprinkled, plenteous donative.⁶⁵⁰

In demonstrating how to interact sympathetically, these scholars act as stewards of nature and attentive hosts. The poem's optimistic stance believes that:

[...] who can grudge so small a grace
To suppliant, native of the place?⁶⁵¹

Using the word 'grace' opens up another possible reading of the responsibilities of a host. By welcoming the sparrows into their own domestic space, they offer a form of hospitality given according to the Bible by a man who is 'a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate'.⁶⁵² Furthermore, Cowper also gestures towards a different interpretation

⁶⁴⁸ See p. 179.

⁶⁴⁹ *PWC.*, 223, 1-2.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 224, 23-24.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

⁶⁵² Titus, 1, 8.

of ‘host’, one that is a nomenclature for God. In feeding the birds, the students partake in an act reminiscent of Holy Communion. This further secures the relationship in nature between a benevolent deity and the creatures he created, including man. Cowper implies that when man treats animals with compassionate equanimity, he follows an example sanctified by a sympathetic God.

Cowper’s Fluid Identity

Critics have argued from what position Cowper writes his poetry. Tobias Menely, in his *Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely*, believes ‘Cowper assimilated the language of sensibility’.⁶⁵³ Similarly, David Perkins states, ‘Whatever seemed androgynous about Cowper fitted in with the sentimental culture of his moment in history and was not incompatible with some tendencies in its religious life’.⁶⁵⁴ For Patricia Spacks, Cowper ‘represents himself as a man of tender feelings, concerned for the welfare of birds and domestic animals’.⁶⁵⁵ Conrad Brunström and Katherine Turner take the opposite view, believing that ‘For all his sensitivity to non-human beings, Cowper seems sceptical of the sentimental assimilation of man and beast’.⁶⁵⁶ Ingrid Tague prefers to see Cowper as part of ‘an alternative model of masculine ‘pet’ keeping, which drew on the popularity of natural history’.⁶⁵⁷ Rather than see Cowper writing from within a tradition of feminised sensibility or a masculinised natural history discourse, a more nuanced reading would be to see him inhabit various subject positions. Cowper’s fluid identities, anchored only in his Christian ethos, allow him to appropriate various alternative discourses. Even though Cowper can be seen, like Pope, to have a

⁶⁵³ Tobias Menely, *Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* (The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 147.

⁶⁵⁴ David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animals Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 57.

⁶⁵⁵ Patricia Meyer Spacks, ‘The Poetry of Sensibility’, *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 253.

⁶⁵⁶ Conrad Brunström and Katherine Turner, ‘I shall not ask Jean-Jacques Rousseau’: Anthropomorphism in the Cowperian Bestiary’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33.4 (2010), p. 456.

⁶⁵⁷ Ingrid Tague, *Animal Companions* (Pennsylvania University Press, 2015), p. 209.

conservative perspective of man's relationship with nonhumans, his poems acknowledge that animals are worthy of sympathy. Working within a Humanistic framework, he carefully melded scientific and poetic discourses that testify to his meaningful relationship with his companion animals. His poems, thus, avail themselves of readings that encourage his audience to participate in a more compassionate view of animals than was customary in Georgian England.

Cowper is not enamoured with learning 'borrowed from books' on natural history. What influenced him in this genre was their new empirical methodologies. Rather than cataloguing general species, as is usual in books on natural history, Cowper, as a companion animal owner, instead focuses on particular individuals. Thus, he can claim to delineate the behaviour of animals that co-inhabit his domestic space with greater scientific clarity. These daily interactions are reinscribed in his poetry and claimed as true representations of nonhumans. As he notes in his article on hares, this he does to 'add, though but a little, to the stock of public knowledge'.

These poems concerning domesticated companion animals, thus, counteract the inauthentic portrayal of animals in fables. When Cowper does compose poems for this genre, he ensures the words of his animals are deliberately ridiculous and thus draw attention to the falsity of anthropomorphic creatures and, in the words of Frank Palmeri, 'critique such a tendency from within the form itself'.⁶⁵⁸ Combined, Cowper's anti-fables and poems on real creatures provide a body of work that strives to show that genuine animals have an agency full of dignity and an individual perspective that needs to be acknowledged. Finally, Cowper also models himself as a sympathetic host. In doing so, he hopes to provide a protected domestic

⁶⁵⁸ Frank Palmeri, 'The Autocritique of Fables', *Humans and Other Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*, ed. by Frank Palmeri (Ashgate, 2006), p. 83.

sphere for his animal guests. Even though this space cannot always afford the security that justifies removing animals from their natural environments, Cowper promulgates the advantages such interactions with other creatures can bring. The poems that report actual relationships between Cowper and animals can, thus, be seen to have a didactic purpose. They offer a model of behaviour that encourages the reader, like the anonymous writer on squirrels to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, to engender their own mutually beneficial inter-species relationships with their companion animals. If Cowper sees himself as a compassionate host to his companion animals, he envisions this as a micro version of God as a benevolent host to the whole of creation.

Chapter Four

Robert Burns and Nature's Social Union

‘We are all equally creatures of some Great Creator’.⁶⁵⁹

The Poet of Nature: Burns's Public Persona

As a farmer from Ayrshire, Burns's subsistence depended on a successful interaction with domesticated animals. This close affinity conditions his animal poems and gives them a perspective quite different from his more socially elevated counterparts in this thesis. Even the wild creatures he documents are mediated by his experience as a farmer. Burns's blended position as both farmer and poet distinctively informs his verse on animals, as Nigel Leask explains when he comments

Burns's relationship to the animal world was both instrumental and sentimental: stockbreeding and the rationalization of the animal economy were essential elements of agricultural improvement, yet poet Burns knew that animals were living creatures and not just commodities, and as such demanded care and compassion.⁶⁶⁰

These twin perspectives create tension in Burns's work, which the self-reflective writer readily acknowledges. However, this bifurcating influence is not the only one in his poetry. Due to his labouring background, Burns is also acutely aware of economic and social hierarchies and how these imbalances condition the relationships between all subjects. One other crucial factor that should be considered when reading Burns's verse is its lyrical quality. Writing on the importance of this, he informs George Thomson

let me remark to you, in the sentiment & style of our Scottish [sic] airs, there is a pastoral simplicity, a something that one may call, the Doric style & dialect of vocal music, to which a dash of our native tongue & manners is particularly, nay peculiarly apposite'.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁹ *LRB*, i, 418. Letter 350 to Patrick Miller, 21 June 1789.

⁶⁶⁰ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 145.

⁶⁶¹ *LRB*, ii, 153. Letter to George Thomson, 26 October 1792.

Burns's poems are far from simple. Their complex lyrical rhythms and idiomatic poetic diction subtly combine to enhance the emotional register in his verses on animals.⁶⁶² He, then, would surely agree with fellow Scot Hugh Blair's comment that

Man is both a Poet, and a Musician, by nature. The same impulse which prompted the enthusiastic Poetic Style, prompted a certain melody or modulation of style, suited to the emotions of Joy or Grief, of Admiration, Love, or Anger. There is a power in sound, which, partly from nature, partly from habit and association, makes such pathetic impressions on the fancy, as delight even the most wild barbarians. Music and Poetry, therefore had the same rise; they were prompted by the same occasion; they were united in song; and, as long as they continued united, they tend, without doubt, mutually to heighten and exalt each other's powers.⁶⁶³

Poems such as 'The Twa Dogs', 'To a Mouse', and 'To a Louse' exploit the aural quality of the spoken and sung word. The multiplicity of voices in Burns's poetry allows him to present a range of perspectives in which changes in tone form a commentary on the views being expressed. Furthermore, his use of local dialect politicises language by ensuring it is seen as an act of personal and national independence.

The poems Burns composes are deeply rooted in the land of his birth.⁶⁶⁴ Burns writes, as the title to his first collection of verse proudly proclaims, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*

⁶⁶² Fiona Stafford notices the importance of environment and language in his use of this genre, commenting, that Burns 'adopted plainer language and local settings for [his] influential Romantic versions of pastoral'. See Fiona Stafford, 'Pastoral Elegy in the 1820s: *The Shepherd's Calendar*', *Victoriographies*, 2.2 (2012), pp. 103-04. Language grounded in location is also central to a florid review by Josiah Walker in which he states Burns's lyricism is 'allied with our national music, all powerful and pathetic as that is, has in a manner embalmed the strains native to our Doric reed, and given perpetuity to a language long since grown obsolete in our sister kingdom: It has done more: It has localized and consecrated every spot of our romantic country'. See Robert Burns, *Poems by Robert Burns: with An Account of His Life, and Miscellaneous Remarks on His Writings, Containing also Many Poems and Letters Not Printed by Doctor Currie's Edition*, vol. ii, 2 vols (Edinburgh, John Moir, 1811), p. 282. Rooted in a tradition of folk songs, Burns's lyricism becomes a seductive poetic device that firmly connects his poetry to the environment that inspires it. His treatment of pastoral symbolism, though, is often knowingly mocking.

⁶⁶³ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. by Linda Ferreira-Buckley and S. Michael Halloran (Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 427.

⁶⁶⁴ Even though James Thomson was born in Scotland, besides 'Winter', *The Seasons* is not a text that celebrates the country of the writer's birth. This seems more evident in the latter half of the poem, where descriptions are given of diverse parts of the world. Another difference between Burns and Thomson is evident when comparing the narrative personas in their poems. If Burns's verse often expresses the sentiments of the working classes, the narrator of *The Seasons* often seems remote from the rural people. For instance, when the poem recounts their battles against the environment, the narrative does so in a detached manner. Here it is important to understand the difference between pastoral and georgic poems. David Fairer 'The two genres [...]

(1786). Much of the poetic language he consciously employs roots him in the environment he knew from childhood. Writing about himself in the third person in the 'Preface' to his first collection of poetry, Burns states, 'Unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing Poet by rule, he sings the sentiments and manners, he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, in his and their native language'.⁶⁶⁵ This self-projection as a poet closer to nature than his cultured peers is strengthened in the epitaph on the book's title page:

The Simple Bard, unbroke by rules of Art;
He pours the wild effusions of the heart:
And if inspir'd, tis Nature's pow'rs inspire;
Her's all the melting thrill, and her's the kindling fire.⁶⁶⁶

However, this bluff poetic performance belies the carefully crafted verse that comprises Burns's first collection of poems. The conscious choice of Scottish dialect attempts to present unconscious, natural pieces devoid of poetic devices that would impede their supposed authentic voices. Fiona Stafford confirms this by stating, 'It was perhaps the widespread tendency to regard dialect as a hallmark of authenticity'.⁶⁶⁷ Unsurprisingly, when Henry Mackenzie calls Burns 'this Heaven-taught ploughman', he secures a lasting belief that Burns is devoid of scholarly aptitude or education and relies more on his natural ability.⁶⁶⁸ This conception of Burns's native genius finds ample support in Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), which declares

in many ways can be seen as opposing each other, with pastoral exploiting leisured ease (*otium*) while georgic emphasizes work (*labor*) and matters of immediate practical concern (*negotium*). See David Fairer, 'The pastoral-georgic tradition', *William Wordsworth in Context*, ed. by Andrew Bennett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 111. What is relevant to this thesis is how the Georgic tends to be didactic, for instance, when it teaches man how to interact with (and often master) the natural world.

⁶⁶⁵ Robert Burns, 'Preface', *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (John Wilson, 1786), p. iii.

⁶⁶⁶ Attributed to an anonymous poet, Carol McGuiirk has ascertained that it was actually written by Burns. See Carol McGuiirk, 'Preface', in Robert Burns, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Carol McGuiirk (Penguin Books, 1993), p. xii.

⁶⁶⁷ Fiona Stafford, 'Lice, Mice, Bumcllocks, Grubs: The Challenge of Regional Language and the Legacy of Robert Burns', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, issue 6, (2010), p. 15.
<https://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue6/stafford.htm>.

⁶⁶⁸ Henry Mackenzie, 'Unsigned Essay', *Lounger* (William Creech, 1786), p. 388. No. 97, Saturday, 9 December 1786. Burns's self-identification as 'Nature's Bard' outwardly reinforces this view.

Learning we thank, genius we revere; That gives us pleasure, This gives us rapture; That informs, This inspires; and is itself inspired; for genius is from heaven, learning from man: *This* sets us above the low and illiterate; *That*, above the learned, and polite. Learning is borrowed knowledge; genius is knowledge innate and quite our own.⁶⁶⁹

If Burns publicly encouraged this view, his private sentiments would be far closer to the truth. Writing to James Currie, Robert Anderson reports a conversation with Burns in which he confesses

It was [...] a part of the machinery, as he called it, of his poetical character to pass for an illiterate ploughman who wrote from pure inspiration. When I pointed out some evident traces of poetical imitation in his verse, privately, he readily acknowledged his obligations, and even admitted the advantages he enjoyed in poetical composition from the *copia verborum*, the command of phraseology, which the knowledge and use of English and Scottish dialects afforded him.⁶⁷⁰

As Burns readily concedes, his poems are a conscious mixture of Scottish and English poetic traditions, crafted with comparable care to those poets who garnered such praise for their poetic skill in England. Talking about emotional fidelity in poetry, Seamus Heaney keenly observes, ‘If you compare what he does with what Byron or Auden do in a similar vein, you find that the pair of them tend to be show-offs’.⁶⁷¹ Burns’s skill is always at the service of the poem and never the ego of the poet. This tendency directly aids the diversity of speakers in his poetry.

Kenneth Simpson elaborates on the importance of this point when he writes that in Burns’s poems, there is ‘if not an extinction of the self, the dispersal of the self amongst the many

⁶⁶⁹ Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, ed. by Edith J. Morley (Longman, Green & Co., 1918), p. 17. Addison similarly wrote, ‘Among great Genius’s [sic], those few draw the Admiration of all the World upon them, and stand up as the Prodigies of Mankind, who by the meer [sic] Strength of natural Parts, and without any Assistance of Art or Learning, have produced Works that were the Delight of their own Times and the Wonder of Posterity. There appears something nobly wild and extravagant in these great natural Genius’s’. See *Spectator*, ii, 126-127. No. 160, Monday, 3 September 1711.

⁶⁷⁰ For Robert Anderson’s ‘Letters to Currie, 1799’ see Burns, iii, 1537-1538. For an interesting essay on Burns’s phraseology, see Jeremy J. Smith, ‘Copia Verborum: the Linguistic Choices of Robert Burns’, *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 58 (233) (2007), pp. 73-88.

⁶⁷¹ Seamus Heaney, ‘Burns’s Art Speech’, in *Robert Burns & Cultural Authority*, ed. by Robert Crawford, (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 226-227.

roles which it could play'.⁶⁷² This resulting multiplicity of voices ensures that Burns's poems are endowed with a wide range of experiences. In Burns's poetry, the medium is there to serve the message. This suppression of the self aids the foregrounding of multiple animal experiences rather than one static perspective. Moreover, in performing the part of 'the Heaven-taught ploughman,' he deemphasises his highly literate credentials to foreground his 'ploughman' heritage and his associated bucolic relationships with different species. If his contemporary readers most readily accepted this projected persona, his vernacular verse further secures it on the page. Burns's rustic Scottish dialect promotes an understanding that equates demotic language with an intimacy of the natural world. The lack of a single narrative voice combined with first-hand experience of nature guarantees Burns's animal poems can claim to be both encompassing and authentic. They acknowledged that there are other perspectives than man's and that these different nonhuman voices have been faithfully represented in his poems due to his direct immediacy with their real-life counterparts.

'To a Mouse': Compassion on a Changing Scale

This methodology manifests in one of Burns's best-known poems, 'To a Mouse, On turning her up in her Nest, with the Plough, November, 1785'. Nigel Leask believes it 'is, justifiably, the most famous 'theriophilic' poem of the eighteenth century'.⁶⁷³ David Perkins notes, 'No poet writes of animals with more sympathy than Robert Burns. His "To a Mouse" is as widely loved as any poem on this theme'.⁶⁷⁴ Burns's title initiates the theme of the closeness between man and mouse, which is enlarged in the poem's opening stanza. This relationship is inaugurated in the poem's title by presenting it as an epistle directed from one fellow creature

⁶⁷² Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p. 186.

⁶⁷³ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 146.

⁶⁷⁴ David Perkins, 'Human Mouseness: Burns and Compassion for Animals', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 42.1 (2000), p. 3.

to another. The title also suggests other ways in which man and mouse are imbricated. If the use of 'Plough' intimates the poem's narrative is located in a rural setting, this immediacy is further strengthened by Burns's specific temporal marker of 'November', 1785.⁶⁷⁵ Furthermore, by referencing the plough in the title, the reader is conditioned to view the poem's narrative voice as authentically plebian. Even before the poem commences, the assumed lowly status between man and mouse is inherent. Unsurprisingly, this epistle model is sustained with the opening line's direct address to the recently afflicted creature. Burns's use of the features associated with the letter ensures he utilises an effect more commonly associated with Samuel Richardson. Writing to Lady Bradshaigh concerning his novelistic technique, Richardson claims a 'new Manner of Writing – to the Moment'.⁶⁷⁶ Mark Kinkead-Weekes explains Richardson's epistolary practice 'was essentially the creation of a fiction which could seem to be happening 'now''.⁶⁷⁷ Burns's 'To a Mouse' reproduces the same dramatic effect. The poem's temporal narrative intensifies the psychological depth of the speaker by implying that the act of thinking is imminent with the words on the page. Thus, 'To a Mouse' lays bare the speaker's thought process as he changes focus from the mouse to himself. Burns's 'Writing – to the Moment' also secures the conceit suggested in the title that man and animal are located in a specific time and space.⁶⁷⁸ In such close proximity, the poem's speaker intimately inspects the creature before him. Thus 'To a Mouse' begins:

Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous *beastie*,⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁵ The use of name, place, and date in the title suggests this verse is modelled on the epistle. The poem's truthfulness to an identifiable location is further attested by Burns's brother, Gilbert. Writing to James Currie, he attests that 'The verses to the *Mouse* and *Mountain-Daisy* were composed [...] while the author was holding the plough; I could point out the particular spot where each was composed'. See Currie, iii, appendix, p. 7.

⁶⁷⁶ Samuel Richardson, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, Volume II: Correspondence with Lady Bradshaigh and Lady Echlin*, ed. by Peter Sabor (Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 643.

⁶⁷⁷ Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *Samuel Richardson, Dramatic Novelist* (Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1973), p. 395.

⁶⁷⁸ Carol McGuirk comments that Burns's 'dramatic monologues' 'invite readers' full immersion in the here-and-now of the character(s) speaking up'. See Carol McGuirk, *Reading Robert Burns: Texts, Contexts and Transformations* (Pickering & Chatto, 2014), p. 3

⁶⁷⁹ Burns, i, 127, 1.

With its one or two-syllable words, the poem replicates the smallness of the mouse relative to the ploughman. The elision in ‘tim’rous’ with its shortening effect perfectly recreates the minute size of the creature in sound and the printed word. Seamus Heaney comments, ‘The mouse [...] was not cowering, but ‘cowran’, a participle as careless about its final *g* as we ourselves were in our schoolyard speech’.⁶⁸⁰ Heaney correctly notes how the poem proffers vernacular utterances rather than the polished sounds found in polite English verse. However, behind this unlearned word is a careful poetic choice. By removing the ‘*g*’, Burns also diminishes a syllable that would otherwise render the word too long for his purpose. Like the elided ‘tim’rous’, ‘cowran’ is simple in derivation, sound and image. Fiona Stafford perceives, ‘Crucial to his treatment of the subject is Burns’s use of language that suggests intimate understanding of the mouse and her world, while revealing the wider implications of her misfortune’.⁶⁸¹ Suitably, then, the tone in this opening line is both compassionate and doleful. It records the slightness of the animal’s frame while recognising the fickle fate that constantly threatens such a body. As Thomas Crawford explains, in ‘the opening stanza we hear a strong, mournful, mediative voice expressing all that is involved in knowing a commonplace animal; in coming face to face with it, suddenly and brutally, the poet grasps its essential “mousiness”’.⁶⁸²

The rest of the stanza continues to display sentimental concern for the unfortunate creature:

O, what a panic’s in thy breastie!
 Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
 Wi’ bickering brattle!
 I wad be laith to rin an’ chase thee,
 Wi’ murd’ring *pattle*!⁶⁸³

⁶⁸⁰ Seamus Heaney, ‘Burns’s Art Speech’, in *Robert Burns & Cultural Authority*, ed. by Robert Crawford, (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 218-219.

⁶⁸¹ Fiona Stafford, *Reading Romantic Poetry* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), p. 156.

⁶⁸² Thomas Crawford, *Burns, A Study of the Poems and Songs* (The Mercat Press, 1978), p. 165.

⁶⁸³ Burns, i, 127, 2-6.

The euphonic feminine rhymes of ‘beastie’ with ‘breastie’ and ‘brattle’ with ‘pattle’ suggest a lyrically harmonious connection between two ostensibly disparate species. The stanza’s phonetic harmony reinforces the accord between man and mouse when the poet confesses, ‘I wad be laith to rin’ an chase thee’. A gesture of compassion, though, that is imperilled by the very person who proffers it. This is suggested by a disjunction between the farmer and his narrative voice. The persona of the ploughman in the title is fractured by the poetical sentiments he utters. As Franklyn Bliss Snyder observes, ‘One ploughman, driving his share through the cunningly built nest, stamps with a heavy boot and moves on to the end of the furrow’.⁶⁸⁴ Freya Johnston goes beyond Bliss’s comment, stating

What is ‘Mismanagement’ from one point of view (the mouse’s) is good husbandry from another (the farmer’s), which is perhaps why Burns prefers to treat the relationship between man and beast as a matter of sheer mobility, of showing ‘unbounded good-will to every creature rational and irrational’.⁶⁸⁵

Johnston’s ‘matter of sheer mobility’ extends a possibility of harmonious relationships that seems denied to the split persona of the poet/ploughman. If the farmer considers the mouse before him as vermin, the poet is willing to extend his sympathy towards a creature he has just made homeless. This fissure will presage further ruptures as the poem progresses. One of which occurs in the very next stanza:

I’m truly sorry Man’s dominion
Has broken Nature’s social union,
An’ justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An’ fellow-mortal!⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸⁴ Franklyn Bliss Snyder, *Robert Burns: His Personality, His Reputation and His Art* (Kennikat Press, 1936), p. 117.

⁶⁸⁵ Freya Johnson, ‘To a Mouse’: Burns, Power and Equality’, *Burns and Other Poets*, ed. by David Sergeant and Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh Press, 2012), p. 53.

⁶⁸⁶ Burns, i, 127, 7-12. A comparable sentiment is conveyed in ‘To the Same’ (sometimes known as ‘The Second Epistle to J. Lapraik’), which announces, ‘For thus the royal *Mandate* ran, | When first the human race began, | ‘The social, friendly, honest man, | ‘Whate’er he be, | ‘’Tis *he* fulfils *great Nature’s plan*, | ‘And none but *he*’. See Burns, i, 92, 85-90.

Here, the sentiment changes from emotion to one emanating from the philosophical mind. This cerebral change in register is suitably garbed in a style more reminiscent of that spoken in Edinburgh than Ayrshire.⁶⁸⁷ Now written in English, it is a modulation in diction that attempts to replicate a vocabulary that will authenticate the idea it expresses. David Daiches commenting on this passage writes

We may wince a little at ‘Nature’s social union’, a piece of neoclassical English which stands out from the Scots dialect of the poem as a whole, but in fact the sudden and brief introduction of a graver phrase is not inappropriate in its context.⁶⁸⁸

Daiches’s observation concerning the tension between the poem’s use of ‘neoclassical English’ and ‘Scots dialect’ is pertinent, even if he fails to acknowledge its full significance. The tension in competing dialects is redolent of further anxieties in the poem between nature and culture, man and animals, and ultimately, those with and without power. On the rupture between different species, Kenneth Simpson succinctly states, ‘The breach in the natural harmony between human and natural worlds becomes a metaphor for the divisions among all created life’.⁶⁸⁹ Where Burns proposes a shared companionship founded on finality, seen in his use of ‘*fellow-mortal*,’ he also concedes that language can segregate as well as unite. Freya Johnston attentively detects that the opening stanza’s act of naming is reminiscent of God’s decree that Adam will have dominion over all animals.⁶⁹⁰ Burns’s humorous and accurate opening description of the mouse attempts to redress this edict without entirely refuting its foundational premise. Reflecting on the opening stanza’s yearning for an empathetic meeting with the animal, the poet seems to admit defeat in the second stanza by identifying ‘Man’s dominion’ as the cause of the mouse’s ‘ill opinion’. Here, an utterance

⁶⁸⁷ The periphrastic ‘earth-born companion’ evokes the phrasing of James Thomson’s periphrastic ‘English’ diction in *The Seasons*.

⁶⁸⁸ David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (Andre Deutsch, 1966), p. 152.

⁶⁸⁹ Kenneth Simpson, ‘Wraiths, Rhetoric, and “The Sin of Rhyme”’. *The Shaping of the Burns of the Kilmarnock Edition*, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 39.1 (2013), p. 114, <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol39/iss1/11>.

⁶⁹⁰ Freya Johnson, ‘To a Mouse’: Burns, Power and Equality’, *Burns and Other Poets*, ed. by David Sergeant and Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh Press, 2012), p. 53.

given as a direct address to the creature (Which makes thee startle, / At me) attempts to establish an accord with the mouse that only further highlights the gulf between them.

Ironically, while Burns speaks with two voices, Scottish and English, the animal is unable to speak with any.⁶⁹¹ Ultimately, the inability of the mouse to respond ensures that the poem is not a dialogue with the ability to foster an equal relationship but rather a monologue.⁶⁹²

‘Dominion’, it seems, is securely vested in those who can talk.

How should the poem’s desire for a harmonious relationship with animals be understood? Is it a self-reflective, and thus inward, analysis of interspecies relationships, or merely a man talking in a field to a mouse? If the premise is humorous, the poem’s compassionate sentiment is certainly not. Again, these competing registers work against each other, breaking down any harmonising tendency the poem attempts to establish. This corruption infects the very structure of the poem. Where the opening stanza’s feminine rhymes had promised harmony, the second verse descends into near dissonance. The semi-discord in the second stanza can be evinced when ‘dominion’ is rhymed with ‘opinion’, whilst the interceding line’s last word ‘union’ only half rhymes with those before and after it, thus jeopardising the stanza’s euphony.⁶⁹³ Similarly, where ‘brattle!’ and ‘pattle!’ have congruency in the first stanza, their counterparts in the second ‘startle’ and ‘mortal!’ fail to replicate the same sweetness of sound. Even though ‘tle’ and ‘tal’ have close affinities, the change of a single

⁶⁹¹ This is not to say that the mouse is unable communicate rationally (via the creaturely voice), but rather, it cannot speak in a human tongue.

⁶⁹² David Perkins notes a similarity between ‘To a Mouse’ and Anna Letitia Barbauld’s ‘The Mouse’s Petition’ (1773). See David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animals Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 8-10. There is no direct evidence that Burns knew this poem, but he was aware of her work. In ‘Sketch’ (K82), he writes ‘In thy sweet sang, Barbauld, survives | E’en Sappho’s flame’. See Burns, i, 191, 17-18. See Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p.160 for further evidence of the popularity of Barbauld’s poem in Scotland. The apparent difference between the two poems is their narrative voice. In one, a man speaks to a mouse. In the other, a mouse speaks to a man (Dr. Priestley). If Burns knew of Barbauld’s poem, it could be said that their respective poetic monologues become effectually an interspecies dialogue. The subject of which is animal compassion.

⁶⁹³ Spoken with a Scottish accent, it may have a greater aural concordance, but this change disrupts the poetical English vocabulary critics note as a salient feature in this stanza.

letter debars their correspondence and signals that greater incongruencies are to be expected.⁶⁹⁴ Stanzas three to six enlarge on the distressing condition of the destitute creature whilst also structurally foreclosing any amicable outcome. The apparent clash that results between farmer and mouse over wheat in verse three is first quantified in:

*A daimen-icker in a thrave*⁶⁹⁵

then granted by the poet because:

’S a sma’ request:
I’ll get a blessin wi’ the lave,
An’ never miss’t!⁶⁹⁶

The narrator here exhibits the stance of a compassionate poet rather than a typical rural labourer. Like the poem, this stanza’s use of direct address establishes a temporal and spatial bond, intensifying the narrative drama. The fiction of ‘Writing – to the Moment’, with its appeal to presence, attempts to secure a stable, benevolent relationship between man and mouse that the rhyme scheme threatens to imperil. This is not the only hazard to a harmonised union between different species. As the title declares, this touching scene occurs in November, and consequently, the field is stripped of its crop. What is the ‘sma’ request’ that Burns grants? Without any bounty to give, it seems, as Leask defines it, ‘an empty gesture’.⁶⁹⁷ Devoid of the ability to alleviate the mouse’s impoverished condition, its significance must reside only as a symbolic wish. Here, the reader must concede that however much the farmer wishes to show kindness to the mouse, the harsh reality is that it is unlikely to survive the inhospitable month of November.⁶⁹⁸ It is this ‘empty gesture’ that initiates a

⁶⁹⁴ A similar para-rhyme occurs in the third stanza with ‘thieve’ and ‘thrive’ and ‘live’ and ‘lave’. The fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth stanzas re-establish a more stable relationship between end rhymes.

⁶⁹⁵ Burns, i, 127, 15. ‘One ear of corn in 24 sheaves’.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 16-18.

⁶⁹⁷ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 166.

⁶⁹⁸ It should be noted that by setting his poem in winter, Burns intensifies this disaster. As such, this incident finds a dramatic correlation with Thomson’s description of animals in ‘Winter’ from his *The Seasons*. For Kurt Wittig, the wealth of natural detail given by each poet in describing this part of the year shows a ‘prominence of this season in Scotland, the realism with which the Scots take account of the hardness of life, or even the insistence with which they dwell on it’. See Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Oliver and Boyd Ltd, 1958), p. 154.

slow transformation of the mouse from a real into a figurative creature whilst still retaining its 'mouseness'. The fact that the creature never entirely loses its claim to authenticity is due to Burns's technical skill as a poet. The poem's opening stanza's careful observations establish the legitimacy of the animal as a real creature. Thus endowed, the mouse can resist being entirely transformed into an emblem for other powerless beings. It remains a self-actualising subject, not just a figurative object.

Many critics have recognised in the fourth stanza Burns's concern not only for the mouse but also for those left homeless by changes in farming practices. For instance, David Hill states that the fate of the mouse 'mirrors all too closely the way that Scottish tenants were evicted from their farms, and the poem can thus be read as a response to the Scottish Agrarian Revolution'.⁶⁹⁹ This does not diminish the text's concern for how the animal will survive, the 'bleak *December's winds* ensuin'.⁷⁰⁰ Burns, though, uses the specific instance of the mouse's condition to be redolent of all creatures, including man, who are defenceless in the face of overwhelming forces. Commencing with a lowly and diminutive creature, Burns amplifies his scale of compassion to encompass all of creation. This expansion justifies Johnston's claim that the poem preaches 'unbounded good-will to every creature rational and irrational'. Unfortunately, this is not the only tangible connection between species. If the epithet '*fellow-mortal*' gestures towards a shared finality, the poem's most quoted line:

The best laid schemes o' *Mice* an' *Men*,
Gang aft agley,

ensures that the reader understands that all living things are subjected to the vagaries of life.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁹ David Hill, 'Of Mice and Sparrows: Nature and Power in the Late Eighteenth Century', *Forum For Modern Language Studies*, 38.1 (2002), p. 7.

⁷⁰⁰ Burns, i, 127, 23.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 128, 39-40.

The enlargement of benevolence in the second half of the text outwardly relegates the importance of the poem's subject. It seems the mouse cannot even remain the focus of the epistle addressed to it. Instead, the final verse is a meditation on the human condition. Ironically, but entirely in keeping with the fluid movement of power that is a striking feature of this poem, this deprivileging in attention is countered by a movement that philosophically elevates the mouse. Burns envisages the creature as more fortunate than himself because:

The *present* only toucheth thee:⁷⁰²

This mournful conclusion suggests that the man and mouse, in psychological terms, are reversed in size. Burns proffers the belief that man's ability to project outside his temporal immediacy makes him more wretched than the mouse who only ever lives in the present. Where once the poet's mediative process fostered kinship between man and mouse, this same method of reflection now denies the poet companionship. Thinking is both a blessing and a curse, a way to kindle sentimental concern and a trait (because of foresight) that separates him from other animals. Initially, the poem tentatively attempts to form a bond between man and mouse, but by its conclusion, this seems out of reach. If 'Writing – to the Moment' tantalisingly promises a relationship predicated on the imminency of the present, the ability to see 'prospects drear!' relinquishes this claim. What then of the poet's conviction concerning 'Nature's social union'? Burns suggests that 'Dominion' can tyrannise those bereft of control. If language enables dominion, thought repudiates it. The various affirmations and negations of conflicting thematic and structural elements in 'To a Mouse' reaffirm this contention. The poem's competing power structures first harmonise and then throw into discord the relationship between species. All cognitive beings may originate as 'earth-born companions', but the only possibility of a congruent relationship is one, as the following line in the poem intimates, in their finality. A point McGuirk notes when she comments, 'Mice and men have

⁷⁰² Ibid., 44.

mortality in common'.⁷⁰³ Being a 'fellow-mortal' is also to be a mortal fellow'. Burns recognises the difficulty of man and mouse interacting on an equal footing since power structures, exemplified by dominion, create disjunctions in any such union. It is amid these limitations that diverse species bond as '*fellow-mortals*'. Conversely, as other texts in Burns's *corpus* demonstrate, when man eschews dominion and is more egalitarian, his relationship with animals is enhanced.

'The Twa Dogs. A Tale': Real Animals Speaking the Truth

Writing to James Currie, Gilbert Burns explains his brother's motivation for writing this poem, stating

The Tale of Twa Dogs was composed after the resolution of publishing was nearly taken. Robert had had a dog, which he called *Luath*, that was a great favorite. The dog had been killed by wanton cruelty of some person the night before my father's death. Robert said to me that he should like to confer such immortality as he could bestow upon his old friend *Luath* and that he had a great mind to introduce something into the book under the title of *Stanza to the Memory of a quadruped Friend*; but this plan was given up for the *Tale* as it now stands. *Caesar* was merely the creature of the poet's imagination, created for the purpose of holding chat with his favorite *Luath*.⁷⁰⁴

Gilbert's account that Burns's first thought was to write a poem entitled 'Stanza to the Memory of a quadruped Friend' testifies to the closeness between the dog and Burns. This fidelity to immortalise *Luath* is faithfully transcribed into his literary counterpart in 'The Twa Dogs'. In his lectures at the Surrey Institute, William Hazlitt pronounced, 'His 'Twa Dogs' is a very spirited piece of description, both as it respects the animal and human creation'.⁷⁰⁵

Currie similarly comments that 'Never where *twa dogs* so exquisitely delineated. [...] The dogs of Burns, excepting in their talent for moralizing, are downright dogs; and not like the

⁷⁰³ Carol McQuirk, *Robert Burns and the Sentimental Era* (University of Georgia Press, 1985), p. 8.

⁷⁰⁴ [James Currie], Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns; An Account of his Life, and A Criticism on his Writings, to which are Prefixed Some Observations on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry*, in 4 vols (J. M'creery et al., 1800), vol iii, Appendix, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁰⁵ William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt: Lectures on the English Poets and A View of the English Stage*, vol. v, 21 vols, ed. by P. P. Howe (J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1930), p. 132.

Horses of Swift, or the *Hind and Panther* of Dryden, men in the shape of brutes'.⁷⁰⁶ Burns's comic addition of 'A Tale' to the title wryly notes their dual status in the poem as real dogs in a fabular setting. They are to be seen as part of a literary heritage of the beast fable that ventriloquises human concerns without surrendering their claim to be real dogs. Currie acknowledges that through deft description, Burns never lets these animals become fully assimilated anthropomorphical projections. Alan Bold believes the poet 'was obviously proud of the poem: he placed 'The Twa Dogs. A Tale' first in the Kilmarnock Edition, a book he arranged with care'.⁷⁰⁷ The success of the poem's ability to portray the dogs as authentic 'living beings' is critical to the message it intends to convey.

The poem's opening lines comically merge fiction with reality:

'Twas in that place o' *Scotland's* isle,
That bears the name o' auld king COIL,⁷⁰⁸

The first four words evoke the traditional opening phrase for a children's tale, 'once upon a time'.⁷⁰⁹ However, this reading is quickly forestalled by the specific geographical marker that completes the sentence. The following line repeats this unsettling blurring between fact and fiction. The precise place in 'Scotland's isle' that the poem references is 'auld king Coil'. James Meikle explains that the name derived from a Welsh king who 'was the ancestor of a line of rulers in the central province of Dammonian Ayrshire, a province that became known after him as Coila or Kyle'.⁷¹⁰ He is also the inspiration for the nursery rhyme 'Old King Cole'. Like the opening line, fact is merged with fiction, or, more pertinently, the truth will inform and shape the fable. This is hinted at in the two halves of the poem's title, for the

⁷⁰⁶ [James Currie], Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns; An Account of his Life, and A Criticism on his Writings, to which are Prefixed Some Observations on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry*, in 4 vols (J. M'creery et al., 1800), vol i, pp. 296-297.

⁷⁰⁷ Alan Bold, *A Burns Companion* (Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., 1991), p. 205.

⁷⁰⁸ Burns, i, 137, 1-2.

⁷⁰⁹ The last line of the first verse confirms this reading when it states, 'Forgather'd ance upon a time'. See Burns, i, 137, 6.

⁷¹⁰ James Meikle, "'Auld King Coil" and Scottish Place-Names', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 53.3 (1942), p. 110.

natural behaviours of the ‘Twa Dogs’ will serve as a corrective in the proceeding ‘Tale’. For this reason, the poem ardently represents the dogs’s actions as faithfully as possible. In the anonymous poem on the title page, Burns is acclaimed as a ‘Simple Bard’. It is in ‘The Twa Dogs’ that his bardic voice is given full reign. A persona that is enhanced by having an animal called Luath.⁷¹¹

The description of the dogs begins:

The first I’ll name, they ca’d him *Caesar*,
Was keepet for his Honor’s pleasure;
His hair, his size, his mouth, his lugs,
Show’d he was nane o’ Scotland’s dogs;
But whalpet some place far abroad,
Whare sailors gang to fish for Cod.⁷¹²

In contrast, Luath:

[...] was a *ploughman’s collie*,
A rhyming, ranting, raving billie,
Wha for his friends an’ comrade had him,
And in his freaks had *Luath* ca’d him;
After some dog in *Highlan Sang*,
Was made lang syne, lord knows how lang.⁷¹³

Where Luath is proudly described as of Scottish extraction, his name being, as Burns states in a footnote, ‘Cuchullin’s dog in Ossian’s Fingal’, Caesar is ‘But whalpet some place far abroad’. Even their social status, derived from their owners, marks them apart. Luath is ‘a *ploughman’s collie*’, several classes below Caesar whose:

[...] locked, letter’d, braw brass-collar,
Shew’d him the *gentleman* an’ *scholar*;⁷¹⁴

⁷¹¹ In a letter to John Murdoch, Burns confesses, ‘In the matter of books, indeed, I am very profuse. — My favorite authors are of the sentim [sic] kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his *Elegies*, Thomson, *Man of feeling*, a book I prize next to the Bible, *Man of the World*, Sterne, especially his *Sentimental journey*, M’pherson’s *Ossian*, &c. these are the glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct’. See *LRB*, i, 17. Letter to John Murdoch, 15 January 1783. For a more detailed analysis of Burns’s connection with Ossian, see Peter T. Murphy, ‘Burns, Ossian and Real Scottish Genius’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 30.1 (1998), pp. 67-75, <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol30/iss1/9>.

⁷¹² Burns, i, 138, 7-12.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 23-28.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

This collar, a sign of the dog's elevated status, also marks him as an animal 'locked' under his master's dominion, as Liam McIlvanney confirms when he states, 'This image of the shiny metal collar - a mark of distinction which is also a badge of servitude'.⁷¹⁵ Here, the engraving of Caesar is a material enactment of Adam subjecting animals through naming. This subservience is confirmed in the second stanza's description of him as an animal 'keepet for his Honor's pleasure'. In his relationship with Luath, Burns rejects this pejorative understanding of dominion. To him, his animal is an active subject, as opposed to Caesar, whose owner views him as an object of status.⁷¹⁶ Such is the closeness between Luath and his owner that the line 'A rhyming, ranting, raving, billie' could equally apply to Burns rather than the dog the poem is immortalising.⁷¹⁷ The dogs, though, are oblivious to distinctions that would have debarred their owners from meeting on equal terms. Stanza three is an exercise in bathos that shows the absurdity of overlaying human constructions on animals. In a lofty tone, the opening two lines attempt to justify how the collar bestowed on Caesar makes him a '*gentleman an' scholar*'.

The animal, though, negates this material sign through corporeal action. Caesar is ignorant of his master's attempt to elevate his status with other dogs. Instead, the animal blithely associates with 'a Tinkler-gipsey's [sic] *messan*'.⁷¹⁸ The clash of dogs from different statuses creates a stanza that joyfully celebrates the interaction between these two animals. This comic scene also satirically questions the earlier act by Caesar's master to assert his dominion over his animal through naming. Unaware of what Caesar has written on his collar, his natural

⁷¹⁵ Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Tuckwell Press, 2003), p. 79.

⁷¹⁶ For a fuller explanation of the difference between 'dominion' that sees animals as property rather than acknowledging them as fellow creatures, see pp. 5-7.

⁷¹⁷ Evidence for this can be found in Burns's song 'There was a lad', on which Kinsley notes 'Burns from first intended the song as a portrait of himself'. See Burns, iii, 1227. The poem's opening line mentions the exact location in 'The Twa Dogs', Kyle. Moreover, Burns describes himself as 'rantin rovin'. See Burns, i, 320, 1 and 6. Kinsley glosses 'billie' as 'friend/comrade'. See Burns, iii, 1553. Both of these epithets, 'friend' and 'comrade', are equally applicable to Burns and his dog (and their friendship).

⁷¹⁸ Burns, i, 138, 18.

proclivity to associate with other dogs, regardless of their origins, mocks human relationships with their culturally constructed rules. This act, unfettered by class association, is mirrored in both the activities Caesar engages in with a tinker's mongrel and also in the locations they are merrily unaware of:

At *Kirk*, or *Market*, *Mill* or *Smiddie*,
 Nae tawtied *tyke*, tho' e'er sae duddie,
 But, he wad stan't, as glad to see him,
 An' stroan't on stanes an' hillocks wi' him.⁷¹⁹

The social relevancy that man invests in the Kirk, market, mill or smithy is unimportant to either dog. This bathetic stanza that begins with the lofty Kirk is brought to its comic nadir when Caesar's bodily action confirms the impossibility of maintaining his status as a '*gentleman an' scholar*'. The dog's pissing on stones is a sly comment on his master's failure to control him and reaffirms Caesar's claim to be defined by his agency rather than one conferred upon him by man.

Stanza six continues to describe the dogs as dogs. This time, Caesar's canine friend is Luath. The opening three lines confirm their camaraderie:

Nae doubt but they were fain o' ither,
 An' unco pack an' thick the gither;
 Wi' social *nose* whyles snuff'd an' snowcket;⁷²⁰

The synecdochic '*social nose*' gestures towards a bond between all dogs based on a shared capability. Sniffing together becomes an opportunity to display their credentials as social creatures. Burns's desire to carefully document how real dogs behave establishes that this union is entirely natural, expressing their innocent actions unencumbered by man's synthetic conventions. Fiona Stafford sees a broader connection, observing that through the use of

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., 19-22.

⁷²⁰ Ibid., 37-39.

onomatopoeia in this passage, ‘the narrator reveals his own kinship with the dogs’.⁷²¹ This literary effect also evokes a relationship entirely shorn of constructed connections. They are harmonious signs since their signifier is a natural expression of their signified. Contrary to the arbitrary alliance these two parts of the sign usually have with each other, onomatopoeia cuts across language barriers, allowing a Newfoundland dog to connect with a Scottish collie.

The tension between the natural, unencumbered behaviour of the dogs and the restrictive regulating practices of man generates much of the poem’s humour. Viewed through the constructed social prism that dictates human values, the activities of these dogs could be considered, as the poem terms them, a ‘farce’.⁷²² However, the word it is rhymed with ‘arse’ mediates this response acting as a burlesquing commentary upon class prejudice.⁷²³ In these instances of low comic humour, Burns establishes the dogs’ independence from the stifling rules of polite decorum. Even the narrator’s mixture of vernacular Scottish and normalised English diction in passages such as:

Whyles mice an’ modewurks they howcket;
Whyles scour’d awa’ in lang excursion,
An’ worry’d ither in *diversion*;

are a pointed, humorous commentary on unadorned language versus suffocating mannerly phraseology.⁷²⁴ These complex allusions and poetic techniques undercut a dominant ideological view that impels the subject to abide by unnatural cultural practices. It is not only animals that are dominated. All those without power are equally impeded. Burns pithily and not without a touch of irony (suggested by the use of italics), labels those that rule ‘*lords o’*

⁷²¹ Fiona Stafford, ‘Lice, Mice, Bumclocks, Grubs: The Challenge of Regional Language and the Legacy of Robert Burns’, *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, issue 6, (2010), p. 8.
<https://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue6/stafford.htm>.

⁷²² Robert Burns, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Carol McQuirk (Penguin Books, 1993), p. 94, line 43.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*, 44. This and the preceding line are quoted from the *Selected Poems* edited by McQuirk which uses the Kilmarnock version of the poem. Kinsley opts for Burns’s autographed notations found in a copy of an Edinburgh edition. Here, the two lines are changed to ‘Untill wi’ daffin weary grown, | Upon a knowe they sat them down’. See Burns, i, 139, 43-44.

⁷²⁴ Burns, i, 138-139, 40-42.

the creation'. The epithet has a biblical resonance to it. It reaffirms the earlier suggestion that those with power have dominion over all others (creation). The inclusion of the definite article 'the' claims equivalency with the supreme maker. Moreover, it insinuates that the ability of these lords to create is the source of their power. The act of creation, whether language or social conventions, allows elite groups to dominate others. Caesar's refusal to conform to social conventions intimated by his collar makes him the perfect advocate of a social union divested of prejudicial traditions.

The opening six stanzas, before the dogs begin to speak, are critical in sustaining an image in the reader's mind of these characters as real animals. Such is the strength of Burns's descriptive ability that even when they exhibit the anthropomorphical voices they employ for the rest of the poem, they never renounce their claims to be, in Currie's phrase, 'downright dogs'. When Caesar does begin to speak, it is with the credentials of a practitioner of unregulated social interactions. Stanza seven signals a change in tone as the real transitions into the allegorical. The dialogue between the two dogs is conducted with studious intent, even though their act of talking obliquely gives the poem a comic effect. Stafford has noticed

This deadpan conversation between the dogs is far more effective as social comment than a strident denunciation of social injustice, because its comedy is disarming rather than aggressive. A wealthy reader could hardly be offended by a dog's view of the world, but might well be engaged by its witty couplets.⁷²⁵

By employing nonhumans to critique 'social injustices', Burns's use of the beast fable is entirely appropriate. Moreover, the Scottish pedigree that the poem is insistent upon in the opening stanza is further strengthened by imitating a genre with a firm Caledonian connection in the poet Robert Henryson (d. c. 1490). John MacQueen believes that 'Henryson's greatness is most plainly to be seen in the range of general principles and ideas

⁷²⁵ Fiona Stafford, 'Lice, Mice, Bumcllocks, Grubs: The Challenge of Regional Language and the Legacy of Robert Burns', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, issue 6, (2010), p. 8.
<https://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue6/stafford.htm>.

which informs his poetry and allows it to encompass tragedy and comedy alike'.⁷²⁶ Harriet

Harvey Wood expands on this conviction when she states

The greatest, and the most original, of Henryson's work is [...] his translations of the *Moral Fables* of Aesop. In this rehandling of popular and traditional material, the reader has the best opportunity of assessing the classical nature of Henryson's originality—the originality that makes all things his own [...] Not only in tales for which no original is known, but in well-worn pieces like *The Town-mouse and the Country-mouse*, the story is told as though it had never been told before, with a wealth of personal observation, simple pathos and lively humour.⁷²⁷

Robert L. Kindrick believes the poem 'is an excellent touchstone' for 'The Twa Dogs'.⁷²⁸

Like Henryson, Burns follows the fable's convention of allowing animals to satirise human foibles anthropomorphically. More significantly, Henryson, like Burns, situates his poem firmly in Scotland. The focal characters in each poem also have counterparts. Again, each animal pair speaks from a position habituated by their social environment. Critically, though, there are two significant differences. First, unlike Caesar, the town mouse fails to appreciate the lifestyle of his fellow creature. When she is sharing her sister's country fare, she complains:

'My fair sister' (quod scho), 'have me excusit.
This rude dyat and I can not accord.
To tender meit my stomok is ay usit',⁷²⁹

Henryson's mice are conditioned by their environment and thus unable to empathise with their fellow mortal's way of living. In comparison, Burns's dogs are far more egalitarian.

Secondly, whilst each poem is eager to warn of the hazards inherent in socially elevated life,

⁷²⁶ John MacQueen, 'Henryson, Robert (d. c. 1409), poet'. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 23. Oxford University Press., <<https://oxforddnb-com.ezproxy> [accessed 3 April 2023].

⁷²⁷ H. Harvey Wood, 'Introduction', Robert Henryson, *The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson*, ed. by H. Harvey Wood (Oliver and Boyd, 1933), p. xv.

⁷²⁸ Robert L. Kindrick, 'Robert Burns and the Tradition of the Makars', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 30.1 (1998), p. 95, <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol30/iss1/11>. The poem, in which the first five words closely parallel Burns's verse, is also known as 'The Two Mice; The Taill of the Uponlandis Mous, and the Burges Mous'.

⁷²⁹ Robert Henryson, *The Poems and Fables of Robert Henryson*, ed. by H. Harvey Wood (Oliver and Boyd, 1933), p. 10, 218-220.

the nature of these hazards is entirely different. In 'The Two Mice', they are physical dangers, as the country mouse explains when she declares:

‘Thy mangerie is mingit all with cair,
Thy guse is gude, thy gansel sour as gall.
The subcharge off thy service is both sair⁷³⁰

The dangers posed by man to animals living in the town ensure that the country mouse returns to a place that she views as less threatening. The peril in 'The Twa Dogs' is one of moral turpitude. Where Henryson's poem conforms to a traditional bifurcation between town and country, Burns resists such an easy division. It is not the town that infects the morals of its inhabitants. Caesar is a testimony to this. Instead, it is an ethical unwillingness to empathetically connect brought about by the corrupting influence of power, or as Burns states in 'To a Mouse':

Man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union.

It is thus critical to the poem's didactic purpose that the communal actions of the dogs are represented authentically. Sited outside of the fabular convention, the first six stanzas provide a living alternative to the unsocial behaviour of those '*lords o' the creation*'. From verse seven, when the dogs begin to speak, and the fable begins in earnest, they no longer act but instead document their master's actions.

This is not a deed to be accomplished by an individual. The poem's appeal for communal harmony has a greater claim to truthfulness if participated in by more than one character. Thus, John C. Weston is correct to believe 'The attack on the cruelty, moral indifference, triviality, and psychosis of the aristocracy is not accomplished by a single ironic voice [...] but by both voices'.⁷³¹ Combining utterances from different classes, 'The Twa Dogs' presents

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 15, 344-46.

⁷³¹ John C. Weston, 'Robert Burns's Satire', *The Art of Robert Burns*, ed. by R.D.S. Jack and Andrew Noble (Vision and Barnes & Noble, 1982), p. 54.

a fraternal example that justifies the poem's democratic credentials. The juxtaposition between the dogs and their different masters questions the rigidity of any class system, as Robert Crawford acknowledges when he notes that Burns 'constantly im[plies] that the manifestly little may stand confidently beside the mighty'.⁷³² The transition between real and fabular dogs begins when Caesar asks:

I've aften wonder'd, honest *Luath*,
What sort o' life poor dogs like you have;
An' when the *gentry's* life I saw,
What way *poor bodies* liv'd ava.⁷³³

Appropriately, once the documentation of the different social classes commences, the poem's register reflects the seriousness of Caesar's enquiry. Josiah Walker comments on this tone, writing

Whether he [Burns] addresses, or supplies language to inanimate or irrational objects, it is so suitable and unforced, and appears so gravely in earnest, as to render the fable more delusive, and the personification more credible, than is commonly the case in similar attempts. His 'Twa Dogs' exercise their reason with the most sober propriety.⁷³⁴

Additional evidence for this 'sober propriety' can be discerned in the poem's structure.

Composed of four lines, stanza six is the shortest in the poem. The curtailed length of each line replicates the restrained directness of the dog's request. Finally, this sombre appeal is also reflected in the breakdown in the rhyme scheme in which none of the end words produces the same dulcet tones as the previous stanza. These structural features, at odds with much of the poem, combine to make Caesar's petition all the more memorable.

⁷³² Robert Crawford, *Devolving English*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 89.

⁷³³ Burns, i, 139, 47-50. This commencement is pretextually signalled by having Caesar's name at the start of the stanza, replicating the text of a play. This format continues with each dog's name being placed before the verse in which they talk.

⁷³⁴ From Josiah Walker's *Account of the Life and Character of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1811). Quoted from Donald A. Low, *Robert Burns: Critical Heritage*, ed. by Donald A. Low (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 230.

Before Luath has time to reply, Caesar delineates the life of his own master. Over the following two stanzas, the dog narrates how his '*Laird* gets in his racked rents'.⁷³⁵ The life of ease that Caesar recounts is in sharp contrast to Luath's tale of:

A *Cotter* howckan in a sheugh,
Wi dirty stanes a biggan a dyke,
Bairan a quarry, an' sic like,⁷³⁶

If Luath's opinion that:

Then chance an' fortune are sae guided,
They're ay in less or mair provided;
An' tho' fatigu'd wi' close employment,
A blink o' rest's a sweet enjoyment.

is over-optimistic, this does not negate the economic gulf between their masters.⁷³⁷ This division can be inferred from Burns's choice of couplets. As noted earlier, lines 47-50 on the gentry are notable for their discordant sound. In contrast, lines 106-110 on the honest farmers have an aural sweetness produced by the stanza's lyrical double rhymes. If, ostensibly, the dogs portray their respective masters as satisfied with their lives, the poem's rhyme scheme indicates a moral preference for the cottagers's harmonious sociability rather than the gentry's dissonant actions. This view is perpetuated in the opinions of the dogs themselves. Rather than make each canine ventriloquise the views of their masters, '*The Twa Dogs*' subverts this outcome. Caesar's independent actions, which are a testament to his sociability, are also evident when he speaks with a voice untainted by his owner's stultifying attitude. This independence of mind aligns with the communal actions of the two animals. The dogs' combined knowledge of both social classes makes this alignment possible, for Luath's lowly

⁷³⁵ Burns, i, 139, 51. These actions of the '*Laird*' are ones experienced by Burns. In a letter to John Moore, he elaborates on the model for Caesar's owner, stating, 'My father's generous Master died; the farm proves a ruinous bargain; and, to clench the curse, we fell into the hands of a Factor who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my Tale of two dogs [...] my indignation yet boils at recollection of the scoundrel tyrant's insolent, threatening epistles, which used to set us all in tears'. See *LRB*, i, 136-137. Letter to John Moore, 2 August 1787.

⁷³⁶ Burns, i, 140, 72-74.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 141, 107-110.

status excludes him from partaking in the pastimes of those above him. This is not to denigrate the contribution of the '*ploughman's collie*'. On the contrary, his descriptions of the simple pleasures of a rural community give a fuller account of their honest activities. This report contextualises the lives of the dissolute gentry. As such, when each dog's partial experience is united with the other, the result is a completeness that would be denied if they had failed to associate outside their own class. In doing so, they confirm the narrator's conviction that 'they were fain o' ither, | An' unco pack an' thick the gither'.

Stafford believes that 'there is no sense in 'The Twa Dogs' of lofty distance – Burns's carefully chosen words create a kinship between speaker and subject, and in doing so, include the reader'.⁷³⁸ Moreover, the words that Burns selects effectively align with the poem's structure to satirise all forms of segregation. He demonstrates how social hierarchies operate on the same principles that divide man from animals. In all cases, those with power tyrannise over those without it. By disregarding social divisions, the 'Twa Dogs' demonstrate the potential to rise above this undesirable situation. Comradeship is predicated on ignoring differences, whether geographical, social or corporeal. Here, the two dogs, by conforming to their nature, provide the perfect example. Ironically, this fabular message is most forcibly demonstrated in the first six stanzas, when the poem is least like a fable. In the poem's final stanza, the dogs shed their anthropomorphical bodies and return to their authentic selves. Here, other creatures also exhibit their natural identities exemplified via the noises they utter:

The *bum-clock* humm'd wi' lazy drone,
The kye stood rowtan i' the loan;⁷³⁹

Their emanations signal a return to the real. If this verse encapsulates a pastoral setting, it eschews its classical origins. Shorn of its nymphs and love-sick shepherds, Burns's gesture to

⁷³⁸ Fiona Stafford, 'Lice, Mice, Bumclocks, Grubs: The Challenge of Regional Language and the Legacy of Robert Burns', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, issue 6, (2010), pp. 9-10.
<https://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue6/stafford.htm>.

⁷³⁹ Burns, i, 145, 233-234.

the genre takes the environment around him as its inspiration. The inhabitants of his poem are authentic creatures, which ensures its message of sociability is genuinely relevant. In fact, it would be more precise to read the poem as a georgic. ‘The Twa Dogs’ countenances good husbandry since an effective interaction between man and other species benefits all.⁷⁴⁰ Moreover, like Virgil’s *Georgics*, the poem takes, via the dogs, its inspiration from authentic models. Ultimately, then, similarly to its Latin predecessor, the poem is a manual that provides advice on how different beings can harmoniously and naturally integrate. In this regard, inhabitants of the natural world have much to impart to those sections of humanity that wilfully subordinate all other creatures.

‘To a Louse’: A Creature Worthy of Consideration

Kinsley dates ‘To a Louse, On Seeing one on a Lady’s Bonnet at Church’ to be ‘written probably at the end of 1785’.⁷⁴¹ This corresponds to the same period of composition of ‘To a Mouse’. Alan Bold sees another connection between the two poems. For him, ‘like its companion [it] is an extraordinary poetic act of empathy’.⁷⁴² Burns employs the Habbie style, which Crawford observes is ‘eminently suited to poetic gossip and conversational topics’.⁷⁴³ Furthermore, it is also tonally congruent with ‘The Twa Dogs’ since its didactic core is veiled in a comic garb. The opening of ‘To a Louse’ signals that the reception of this diminutive creature will not be as accepting as the previously mentioned poems by Burns. As such, it can

⁷⁴⁰ See the chapter on Thomson for an extended analysis of the georgic as a manual that teaches how to interact with animals harmoniously.

⁷⁴¹ Burns, iii, 1147.

⁷⁴² Alan Bold, *A Burns Companion* (Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., 1991), p. 227.

⁷⁴³ Thomas Crawford, *Burns, A Study of the Poems and Songs* (The Mercat Press, 1978), p. 88. Kinsley notes that this ‘six-line stanza is the commonest in Burns’s poetry. [...] It was one of the most important individual contributions to the late eighteenth-century revolt against the decasyllabic couplet. [...] This stanza was apparently abandoned in English after the late Middle Ages; but survived in Scottish poetry, with a good deal of variation. [...] Burns began to use the ‘Standart Habbie’ conventionally, in elegy and in epistles; but his epistles are much more varied in style than those of his predecessors. He uses it too for serious as well as comic or satiric addresses’. See Burns, iii, 1018-1020.

be viewed as an inverse address to the first lines of 'To a Mouse'. Instead of acknowledging comradeship, the narrator of the poem sees an act of transgression committed by the louse when it climbs on a fine lady, later identified as Jenny. The narrator's reaction to the insect is far from the compassionate one given by the poet/farmer in 'To a Mouse'. If insects were viewed with horror, particular revulsion was reserved for the louse, as Stafford confirms when she notes

Insects were at once unlovely and uncontainable. The old Chain of Being, which ordered creatures from highest kinds to lowest had largely relegated the most unappealing insects to the bottom rung of existence and while Linnean classification contributed to the general shift in man's dominion of the earth during the eighteenth century, the dislike of insects especially the louse seemed entrenched.⁷⁴⁴

Leask concurs, graphically explaining the ecophobic difference between the mouse and the louse, when he writes, 'If the mouse is a bold hoarder and timid feeder, the louse simply gluts itself on the blood of its host'.⁷⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, the poem's opening line sets the tone for this revulsion as the narrator suddenly announces:

HA! whare ye gaun, ye crowlan ferlie!
Your impudence protects you sairly.⁷⁴⁶

This arresting opening gambit grabs the reader's attention. The initial word 'HA', with the excessive use of two exclamations, announces the surprised but triumphant mood of the narrator. John Spiers notes, 'In the development of this poem the shifts of attention and sudden excitements of the observer are reproduced in his speaking voice and correspond dramatically to the movements and struggling upward progression of the indefatigable,

⁷⁴⁴ Fiona Stafford, 'Lice, Mice, Bumclocks, Grubs: The Challenge of Regional Language and the Legacy of Robert Burns', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, issue 6, (2010), p. 4.

⁷⁴⁵ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 168.

⁷⁴⁶ Burns, i, 193, 1-2.

intrepid creature'.⁷⁴⁷ Words not only describe in 'To a Louse', they also take on physicality as they replicate the actions of the insect, thus imbuing the poem with a frenetic tension. Monosyllabic words fall one after the other, speeding the reader through the opening lines.

The narrator's playful invective continues in the next stanza with:

Ye ugly, creepan, blastet wonner,
Detested, shunn'd, by saunt an' sinner,
How daur ye set your fit upon her,
 Sae fine a *Lady*!
Gae somewhere else and seek your dinner,
 On some poor body.⁷⁴⁸

Kinsley glosses 'blastet' as 'accursed' whilst 'wonner' means 'wonder'.⁷⁴⁹ By conjoining these two words, the louse can be understood as either a marvellous creature that is cursed or an accursed creature that is a wonder because of its transgressive nature. Critically, the indeterminacy of the narrator to privilege one meaning over the other suggests that each individual reader's perspective is the determining factor.

This ambiguous phrase also hints that the denigrating remarks directed at the louse may not always be in earnest. Leask observes that the abusive language used in 'To a Louse' is an example of flyting, a Scottish tradition in which writers trade insults. It was

a literary subgenre with roots in ancient Norse, Celtic, and Anglo-Saxon traditions, 'flyting' was a popular court entertainment in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Scotland, and is particularly well represented in Scottish literature, from the Middle Ages.⁷⁵⁰

Burns's employment of this technique indicates that the invective spoken by the narrator creates ambiguity. Why use a genre associated with courtly entertainment and requiring a degree of literary skill upon a meagre insect? Especially since the louse is dumb and unable

⁷⁴⁷ John Spiers, 'Burns and English Literature', *The New Penguin Guide to English Literature: 5, From Blake to Byron*, ed. by Boris Ford (Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 101-02.

⁷⁴⁸ Burns., 7-12.

⁷⁴⁹ Burns, iii, 1553 and 1612.

⁷⁵⁰ Robert Burns, *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns, Volume I: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Nigel Leask (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 297, note 87.

to reply to the words addressed to it. Like previous poems in this chapter, the juxtaposition between high and low generates the wry rhetorical effect in these lines. This disjunction is further evidenced when the rhyme scheme in verse two is considered. Here, the only two lines that have an unpaired end rhyme are also the two indented. This visual protrusion and lack of acoustic cohesion mark them apart from the rest of the stanza. Their connection is not founded on the lyrical euphony in their feminine rhymes, as are other lines in this verse.⁷⁵¹ Instead, they are coupled because they create discord when paired. Their dissonance is not only generated by their lack of aurality but also by their antithetical sentiments. Where line ten concerns what the poem ironically defines as a fine lady, line twelve mentions a poor body. This absence of poetic harmony is a consequence of their opposing social status. The hierarchy imposed on man and animals in the first poem in the Kilmarnock edition is apparent here. As a poem that succeeds 'The Twa Dogs,' Burns's audience is primed to read the thematic resemblances between the two texts. Like Luath, the lowly louse is expected to associate with its equivalent class among humans. This act of animal transgression also has an analogous equivalency to Caesar's. Unimpeded by human values, the louse roams where it likes. Blithely unaware of social status, the unfettered movement of the louse on a 'fine a Lady' only intensifies the narrator's horror.

If ostensibly to puncture Jenny's social posturing, a consequence of placing a louse on her body reveals the disparity between the cultural rules of man and the natural sentiments of the rest of creation. The louse, as Stafford notes, is 'a creature untroubled by human constructs of rank'.⁷⁵² Where Jenny's performed status is a social construction, she is, after all, a member of the local bourgeoisie who puts on the airs and graces of a fine lady, the louse, by following

⁷⁵¹ The stanzas on either side of this one rhyme lines four with six. The first stanza has 'lace' and 'place', and the third has 'nations' and 'plantation'. This lack of aural concordance in lines four and six of the second verse is thus not a feature of the Habbie style but a poetic and socially relevant choice made by Burns.

⁷⁵² Fiona Stafford, 'Lice, Mice, Bumclocks, Grubs: The Challenge of Regional Language and the Legacy of Robert Burns', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, issue 6, (2010), p. 5.

its nature, is more authentic. In this sense, as Stafford goes on to state, ‘It may be ugly and appalling, but it is also wonderful’.⁷⁵³ Here, then, the narrator’s epithet of ‘blastet wonner’ may be laudatory after all.

To give a corrective to the louse’s unwarranted intrusion on a person ill-suited for its attention, the narrator wryly suggests in the third stanza a more suitable host:

Swish, in some beggar’s haffet squattle;
There ye may creep, and sprawl, and sprattle,
Wi’ ither kindred, jumping cattle,
 In shoal and nations;
Whare *horn* nor *bane* ne’er daur unsettle,
Your thick plantations.⁷⁵⁴

If Jenny is socially located in a prestigious pew where all can observe her, the louse has a parallel class-bound site assigned to it. The poem’s narrator wishes the insect was in a ‘beggar’s haffet squattle’. Haffet, meaning ‘temple’, ostensibly refers to that part of the man’s head just below his hairline. This is the perfect location for the louse to feed. It is also a sardonic reference to a place of adoration. Just as Jenny appropriately worships in a church, the louse has its own site rich with Christian relevance. As testified in a later stanza, the louse’s motivation to be on Jenny is to partake of her blood. The body on which the louse feeds is literally and symbolically the host to the insect. This now completes the two relevant stages in the sacrament: the drinking of blood and the eating of the host. The narrator suggests that the beggar is a more socially apt setting for the louse to engage in its Eucharistic undertaking. This blasphemous animalised Sacrament is thus a conflagration between an emblematic performance of the highest significance and an act committed by the lowest of creatures. Pittock writes that ‘To a Louse’ ‘simultaneously stands in the tradition of a number of eighteenth-century insect poems, and Donne’s ‘Flea’’. It is unlikely that Burns knew of

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ Burns, i, 193, 13-18.

this poem; a far more probable model for 'To a Louse' is Peter Pindar's 'The Lousiad'. Nigel Leask believes that 'Given that 'To a Louse' was probably composed at the end of 1785, it's quite possible that Burns was familiar with at least 'The Lousiad's first canto'.⁷⁵⁵ Regardless of which poem primarily influenced 'To a Louse', Burns had a rich heritage of insect poems from which to draw, including two notable examples in Stephen Duck's 'On Mites. To a Lady' (1738), and Robert Fergusson's 'The Bugs' (1773).

Throughout the third stanza, Burns plays on man's revulsion to lice. The sibilance in line fourteen invokes this disgust towards the louse as if the insect's erratic movement, described so emotively, is visually reproduced in the serpentine shape of the 's'. This horror is literally multiplied as one louse suddenly becomes a whole hoard with the words 'jumping cattle'.⁷⁵⁶ A more sombre image succeeds this dislike as the stanza ends with the insects associated with slaves in the line 'Your thick plantations'. In urging the louse to, as Carol McGuirk phrases it, 'emigrate' from Jenny and find a host more suitable to its status, the poem equates the lowest of creatures with the most unfortunate of people.⁷⁵⁷ Envisaged by sections of eighteenth-century society as sub-human, this analogy between enslaved people and lice seems appallingly pertinent. The word 'plantations' also has a personal relevance for the poet himself. Writing to James Smith in June 1787, Burns confesses

I cannot settle to my mind—Farming the only thing of which I know any thing, and Heaven above knows, but little do I understand even of that, I cannot, dare not risk on farms as they are. If I do not fix, I will go for Jamaica.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁵ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 170.

⁷⁵⁶ *The Concise Scots Dictionary* defines 'cattle' as 'lice, birds and beasts'. See *The Concise Scots Dictionary*, ed. by Mairi Robinson (Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p. 88.

⁷⁵⁷ Carol McGuirk, *Reading Robert Burns: Texts, Contexts and Transformations* (Pickering & Chatto, 2014), p. 70.

⁷⁵⁸ *LRB*, i, 121. Letter to James Smith, 11 June 1787.

Like Burns, those who cannot fit in or subsist are compelled to travel to a place more suitable. The forced emigration from Jenny to the beggar is an instance of the implementation of hierarchies, whether species or social, that have the propensity to ostracise.

Where, though, does the narrator actually counsel the louse to locate itself? If stanzas two and three unequivocally desire the creature to move to a more socially appropriate host, the fourth stanza is more ambiguous. Initially, the opening line:

Now haud you there, ye're out o' sight,

suggest that it is a thematic extension of the previous two verses.⁷⁵⁹ Read as an instruction to hide on 'some beggar', the line is consistent with the narrator's prior concern for social equivalence between the louse and his host. The following line, though, makes this supposition unsupportable. For here, the speaker pinpoints the exact location as:

Below the fatt'rels, snug and tight,⁷⁶⁰

Since beggars do not wear 'fatt'rels', which are the ribbon ends of a bonnet, it must be conceded that the narrator no longer demands that the louse remove itself from Jenny but rather stay and hide safely in her clothing 'snug and tight'.⁷⁶¹ Here, the narrator's assertions about the louse go against its perceived status in the eighteenth century as a creature on the 'bottom rung of existence'. Even if 'blastet wonner' is not kindly meant, the speaker's advice to the louse to avoid detection seems to express concern for the animal. These instances rub up against the narrator's outward threats to the louse, as exemplified in the fifth stanza. The narrator's ambiguous voice in 'To a Louse' makes it a more nuanced poem than James Kinsey's view suggests when he depreciatingly states it is a 'minor triumph of whimsy'.⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁹ Burns, i, 193, 19.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁶¹ *The Concise Scots Dictionary* defines 'fatterals' as 'ribbon ends, loose pieces of trimming; anything loose and trailing'. See *The Concise Scots Dictionary*, ed. by Mairi Robinson (Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p. 189.

⁷⁶² Burns, iii, 1147.

This newly revealed compassion for the insect continues when the narrator admits:

Na, faith ye yet! ye'll no be right,
 Till ye've got on it,
 The vera tapmost, towrin height
 O' Miss's bonnet.⁷⁶³

Here, the speaker admits his kindly meant warning will go unheeded. He views the creature as ambitious to ascend Jenny as she is determined to raise her social status. Much critical commentary has focused on the fashionable 'Lunardi' that Jenny proudly displays.⁷⁶⁴

Pittock's observation is typical when he states

Lunardi's hot air balloon was a contemporary sensation, its flight in Scotland being described by Robert Arnot in the *Scots Magazine* in October 1785. The 'Lunardi bonnet' in the shape of a balloon appeared shortly afterwards, and since Burns probably wrote the poem before the beginning of 1786, the 'Miss Jenny' of the poem is indeed setting the fashion.⁷⁶⁵

Pittock correctly connects Jenny's inclination to raise her status and the propensity for balloons to rise. Burns's choice of this mode of transport also resonates with another aspect of aspirational social climbing since both are prone to deflation. Like Shakespeare's 'bubble reputation', their precarious susceptibility to suffer reduction at any time demonstrates their transient and modish worth.⁷⁶⁶ Here, Jenny and the lowly louse seem closer than ever because, as Leask notes, Goldsmith's *An History of the Earth* states that the insect 'most frequently suffers from its gluttony, since it gorges to such a degree, that it is crushed to pieces by the slightest impression'. Crudely put, like balloons and Jenny's social ambitions, it will burst.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 21-24.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., 194, 35.

⁷⁶⁵ Murray Pittock, 'The Real Language of Men': Fa's Speerin? Burns and Scottish Romantic Vernacular', in *Burns and Other Poets*, ed. by David Sergeant and Fiona Stafford (Edinburgh Press, 2012), p. 97.

⁷⁶⁶ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II. 7. 153.

⁷⁶⁷ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 168-169. See Oliver Goldsmith, *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, 8 vols (J. Nourse, 1774), vol. vii, p. 73.

This view of a disgorged insect is confirmed in the fifth stanza when it is described post-sacramentally, its now blasphemous body bloated with the blood of its host:

My sooth! right bauld ye set your nose out,
As plump an' gray as onie grozet.⁷⁶⁸

The opening exclamation of surprise replicates the interpolation that commences 'To a Louse'. Like the inaugural line, it creates a dramatic tension predicated on immediacy. Fictionally, it presents the action as occurring in the same instance as the poem's composition. Action and reaction (the writing of the poem) are situated in a simultaneous presence. A state that, as Terry Eagleton explains, creates 'the fiction that 'experience' can be conveyed in all its living immediacy by language, the faith that writing and reality may be at one'.⁷⁶⁹ By presenting a narrative of such intense propinquity, the reader effectively becomes a co-conspirator, joining in with the narrator's voyeuristic gaze. As in the rest of the poem, vernacular language perfectly embodies a creature with such a low status. The comic description of the louse's body as plump 'as onie grozet' (gooseberry) is quickly followed by a more sombre image as the narrator explains what he would do if he caught the louse:

O for some rank, mercurial rozet,
Or fell, red smeddum,
I'd gie you sic a hearty dose o't,
Wad dress your droddum!⁷⁷⁰

The final line, though, lessens the narrator's threat. The low reference to the louse's 'droddum' (backside) undercuts the seriousness of his threat. The use of 'dress' also resonates with the poem's concern with elevated standing. If Jenny is clad in all her finery, the narrator prominently notes a similar material sign of the insect's social status in his address to the louse. This appropriately is also shown to be an emblem of its lowness - its bottom.

⁷⁶⁸ Burns, i, 194, 25-26.

⁷⁶⁹ Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa* (Basil Blackwell, 182), p. 40.

⁷⁷⁰ Burns, i, 194, 27-30.

Following the example in the third stanza, the louse's inferior standing is further implied when the narrator describes a location more socially appropriate for the insect. Thus, he directly addresses the creature:

I wad na been surpriz'd to spy
You on an auld wife's *flainen* toy;
Or aiblins some bit duddie boy,
On 's wylecoat;⁷⁷¹

The use of sibilance in 'surpriz'd and 'spy', and the monosyllabic end words of 'spy', 'toy' and later in the verse with the word 'fye' give this stanza a playful lyrical quality that again hints of the absurdity of addressing the lowest of creatures. The narrator's pronouncement further suggests, in Gerard Carruthers's words, 'the stupidity of the human conceit of imposing its own standards upon nature'.⁷⁷²

The final stanza delivers the poem's moral message. In a sentiment that is part secular sermon, part sentimental philosophy, the narrator directly addresses the reader with:

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see *oursels* as *others* see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us
An' foolish notion:
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
And ev'n Devotion!⁷⁷³

Concerning this verse, Crawford states, 'The first four lines of the eighth and last stanza, which extract a general truth from this concrete situation, have become proverbial throughout the English-speaking world'.⁷⁷⁴ Daiches concurs, observing, 'in 'To a Louse', perhaps better than anywhere else, he shows his ability to direct an apparently causal 'occasional' poem to a didactic conclusion, this conclusion expressed with all the simple gnomonic quality of a country

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 31-34.

⁷⁷² Gerard Carruthers, 'Burns and Publishing', *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 7.

⁷⁷³ Burns, i, 194, 43-48.

⁷⁷⁴ Thomas Crawford, *Burns, A Study of the Poems and Songs* (The Mercat Press, 1978), p. 155.

proverb'.⁷⁷⁵ The mixture of Scots-English in this stanza certainly gives the similitude of Crawford's 'proverbial thought' and Daiches 'gnomic quality'. At the centre, though, as has long been recognised, is a profoundly philosophical pronouncement taken directly from Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁷⁷⁶ The exact quote is

This self-deceit, this fatal weakness of mankind, is the source of half the disorders of human life. If we saw ourselves in the light in which others see us, or in which they would see us if they knew all, a reformation would generally be unavoidable. We could not otherwise endure the sight.⁷⁷⁷

The numerous references to vision ('saw ourselves', 'see us' twice, and 'endure the sight') in Smith's passage are relevant to Burns's poem. The empirical act of observation is the defining quality of the poem's narrator and, ultimately, the reader's only source of knowledge concerning the events that occur. The poem self-deprecatingly, though, demonstrates the partiality inherent in this act. The 'fatal weakness of mankind' is not only Jenny's but also that of the congregation, in which the narrator is a central participant and, by association, the reader too. How does this affect the titular insect in the poem? It seems that the phrase 'weakness of mankind' exonerates it from the flaw of self-deception.

This is confirmed later in Smith's treatise. While the analysis of Smith's influence on 'To a Louse' concentrates on the previously quoted passage, it is critical to read the next section with regards to animals. Here, Smith continues with,

Nature, however, has not left this weakness, which is of so much importance, altogether without a remedy; nor has she abandoned us entirely to the delusions of self-love. Our continual observations upon the conduct of others, insensibly lead us to form to ourselves certain general rules concerning what is fit and proper either to be done or to be avoided. Some of their actions shock our natural sentiments.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁵ David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (Andre Deutsch, 1966), p. 176.

⁷⁷⁶ For an extended analysis of Smith's book concerning animals, see pp. 178-181.

⁷⁷⁷ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 184

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

This critical section explains why humans fail to see ‘ourselves in the light in which others see us’. When man observes and then replicates the acts that govern societal relationships (conduct of others), he enmeshes himself in a web of constructed practices (specific general rules) that blind him to his natural proclivities. Fortunately, ‘Nature’ has not ‘abandoned us entirely to the delusion of self-love’. The corrective to this corrupting cultural regime is a return to the ways of nature (our *natural* sentiments [my italics]).

Poor Mailie and the Failure of Duty

Like ‘To a Mouse’, ‘The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie’ comes, in Crawford’s words, out of Burns’s ‘daily experience [on] the farm’.⁷⁷⁹ Gilbert Burns testifies to this when he informs Currie that

He and I [Burns] were going out, with our teams, and our two younger brothers to drive for us, at mid-day; when Hugh Wilson, a curious-looking, aukward [sic] boy, clad in plaiding, came to see us with much anxiety in his face, with the information that the ewe had entangled herself in the tether, and was lying in the ditch. [...] Poor Mailie was set to rights, and when we returned from the plough in the evening, he repeated to me her *Death and Dying Words* pretty much in the way they now stand.⁷⁸⁰

Hans Hecht describes the poem as a ‘humorous masterpiece of animal characterisation’.⁷⁸¹

Daiches is impressed with its ‘smooth octosyllables’.⁷⁸² He feels that it is written by ‘a poet with a farmer’s feeling for animals and a satirist’s awareness of the weakness of human

⁷⁷⁹ Thomas Crawford, *Burns, A Study of the Poems and Songs* (The Mercat Press, 1978), p. 77. Crawford goes on to show Burns’s literary pedigree when he notes, ‘The poem belongs to a favourite Scottish *genre*, which has obvious affinities with a type of stall-ballad recounting the last words of some criminal or popular hero. [...] Burns’s poem harks back to “Bonny Heck” [...], which was written about a dog, with the features common to the old beast fables so beloved of La Fontaine and John Gay’. See *ibid.*

⁷⁸⁰ [James Currie], Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns; An Account of his Life, and A Criticism on his Writings, to which are Prefixed Some Observations on the Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry*, in 4 vols (J. M’creery et al., 1800), vol iii, Appendix, p. 4.

⁷⁸¹ Hans Hecht, *Robert Burns: The Man and His Works*, trans. by Jane Lymburn (William Hodge & Company, Limited, 1971), p. 34. Hecht goes on to note that this poem is part of ‘a series of delightful poems, in which the peasant-poet describes his faithful companions of the lower kingdom with the understanding which comes from constant association with them’. See *ibid.*, 35.

⁷⁸² David Daiches, *Robert Burns* (Andre Deutsch, 1966), p. 127.

resolutions and institutions; here is a rich comic sympathy for both man and beast'.⁷⁸³ In some ways, 'The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie' can be read as the inverse poem of 'To a Mouse'. If Daiches is correct that Burns's composition about Mailie was composed with a 'farmer's feeling for animals', his 'To a Mouse', as has already been noted, is viewed through the lens of a poet. More importantly, though, the speech of 'Poor Mailie' is a transposed epistle. Instead of a man addressing an animal, as in 'To a Mouse' and 'To a Louse', the unfortunate sheep gives her dying words to a human. What connects these poems, regardless of who initiates the correspondence, is that they are, as Allan Cummings believes, 'the most simple and touching examples, [of] kindness and mercy to dumb creatures'.⁷⁸⁴ This is manifest in the poem's complete title, which informs the reader that the sheep in question is 'The Author's only Pet Yowie, An Unco Mounful' Tale'.⁷⁸⁵ Nigel Leask observes, 'The term 'pet' has a rather specialized Scots sense here as 'a hand-reared lamb or sheep''.⁷⁸⁶ This definition denotes not only the economic importance of the creature which hand-rearing warrants. It also reveals the compassionate bond that such an intermate interaction establishes. Mailie, thus, occupies two positions in the poem, one general and the other particular. She is a valuable piece of livestock and an animal Burns has defined as 'his only Pet'. If her act of dying stresses the financial loss he will incur, a point Mailie articulates in the fourth stanza, her impassioned speech is a testimony to the individual and emotional connection between Burns and the sheep. A bond that is strengthened when the poet gives her

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 128.

⁷⁸⁴ Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns; with His Life by Allan Cummings*, vol. i, 8 vols, ed. by Allan Cummings (James Cochran and Co., 1834), p. 371.

⁷⁸⁵ This poem exists in a slightly different version in Burns's *Commonplace Book*. Nigel Leask notes one difference, namely, 'The printed text further Scotticizes the diction, for example substituting 'ewe' with 'yowie''. See Robert Burns, *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns, Volume I: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Nigel Leask (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 320, note 87. By employing a vernacular pronoun, the poem suggests a closeness based on shared geographical location and a name of familiar endearment. This is strengthened through the use of 'only', which marks this relationship as special, thus heightening the poem's sentimental and loving relationship between farmer and farm animal.

⁷⁸⁶ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 148.

a pet name. This is an act, as mentioned previously, that Keith Thomas believes ‘stimulated the notion that animals could have character and individual personality’.⁷⁸⁷

Given this sentimental relationship, the poem’s tone is not confined to an unvarying pathetic register that such a tragic relationship would suggest. Rather, as Kenneth Simpson observes, Burns ironises the conventions of the genre with his ‘comic treatment of sentimentalism’.⁷⁸⁸ An instance of this modulation between sombre and comic modes, in which the latter self-referentially mocks the former, is in evidence in the poem’s opening lines:

As Mailie, an’ her lambs thegither,
Was ae day nibbling on the tether,
Upon her cloot she coost a hitch,
An’ owre she warsl’d in the ditch:
There, groaning, dying, she did ly,
When *Hughoc* he cam doytan by.⁷⁸⁹

The lyrical quality of these lines, created through short syllabic words and alliteration (‘dying’, ‘did’, ‘doytan’), are at odds with the less than idyllic sentiments they express. The comic effect created by this disparity is held in equilibrium by the solemn image of Mailie ‘groaning, dying, [where] she did ly’. Fiona Stafford has noted that ‘Burns caught the comedy of everyday misfortune, but his amusement never destroyed the underlying sympathy, which co-existed with a sense of the tragedy inherent in the commonplace’.⁷⁹⁰ This comment is particularly apt in this opening passage. The poem’s tone, rhythm, imagery and diction are carefully crafted to produce a touching scene that teeters on the edge of comedy.

⁷⁸⁷ See footnote 501 for Thomas’s definition.

⁷⁸⁸ Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot: The Crisis of Identity in Eighteenth Century Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen University Press, 1988), p. 189.

⁷⁸⁹ Burns, i, 32, 1-6.

⁷⁹⁰ Fiona Stafford, ‘Burns and Romantic Writing’, *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 105-06.

This refusal to yield to a single emotional register and instead create a complex web of competing tones elevates Burns's animal poems above his Scottish predecessors. This can be seen when the relationship between man and animal in 'The Death of Mailie' is juxtaposed with Gilbert Hamilton's 'The Last Words of Bonny Heck, A Famous Grey-Hound in the Shire of Fife' (c. 1700). Where the connection between Bonny Heck and his owner is less nuanced – a brutal master condemns to death an animal who has given loyal service, the relationship between Burns and his animal is far more ambiguous. Mailie's death by strangulation is also ascribed to a human, as the poem's titular animal explains when she decries:

Tell him [Burns], if e'er again he keep
As muckle gear as buy a *sheep*,
O, bid him never tye them mair,
Wi' wicked strings o' hemp or hair!⁷⁹¹

Unlike Bonny Heck, Burns's treatment of his ewe is all the more tragic since it is unintentional. The appellation of 'pet' acknowledges the sense of guilt in her owner that is entirely lacking in Hamilton's poem. In failing to protect Mailie, the tragedy of her death takes on a double significance that resonates on different levels. In contrast to Bonny Heck, the sheep's value to her master goes beyond a fiscal concern. Mailie is no object of property but a subject that has an emotional tie with her owner. With Adamite dominion over his livestock, a compassionate master has an ethical obligation to ensure those animals under his protection are kept safe, as failing to do so also imperils his ability to subsist. This precedent becomes all the more pertinent since, as a good husbandman, Burns's reciprocal duty to Mailie requires him to protect her in return for her wool.⁷⁹² Reading the word 'pet' in a more traditional sense draws a comparison with Cowper and his hares. Like him, Burns sanctions Mailie's entry into his domestic sphere by treating her as a pet. In doing so, the poet acts as a

⁷⁹¹ Burns, i, 32, 17-20.

⁷⁹² See p. 61 and pp. 234-235 for an analysis of a farmer's obligation to care for his animals in return for their labour or produce. This is evident, for instance, in lines 84-85 from 'Winter' in *The Seasons*.

host to his newly admitted guest. This conferred status creates a dynamic that demands that in exchange for the emotional comfort that Mailie gives her host, Burns has an ethical duty to protect her as his guest. His failure to ensure this happens results in a tragedy comparable to the demise of Bully in Cowper's 'On the Death of Mrs Throckmorton's Bullfinch'. Contrary to Cowper's poem, where the goldfinch is denied the ability to speak, Mailie's last words affirm the strength of feeling between pet and pet owner when she informs Hughoc to:

Tell him, he was a Master kin',⁷⁹³

Moreover, even after this tragic event, the relationship between sheep and farmer is unbroken, as she still addresses Burns as 'my *Master dear*'.⁷⁹⁴ In allowing Mailie to speak, her personification becomes another sign of her status as a pet. David Perkins notes, 'To imagine Mailie as quasi-human is typical of pet owners. [...] Mailie is an individual creature, an animal person, and is imagined as a friend'.⁷⁹⁵ Are the words emanating from this quasi-human the sentimental projections of an owner attempting to assuage his guilt? For Mailie to still consider her owner in favourable terms would undoubtedly bring comfort to a careless master. If this is the case, the request for the safety of her offspring gives Mailie's owner a chance for redemption.

Mailie's petition is both sentimental and comic. Initially, she entreats her owner to:

[...] save their harmless lives,
Frae dogs an' tods, an' butchers' knives!⁷⁹⁶

This maternal entreaty intensifies the solemn tone that outwardly characterises much of the previous stanzas. Mailie's following supplication undercuts this mood, for her concern is not

⁷⁹³ Burns, i, 33, 25. Mailie's act of fidelity is heartfelt, even though it is tinged with irony since it is her master who has caused her death.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 32, 16.

⁷⁹⁵ David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animals Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 51.

⁷⁹⁶ Burns, i, 33, 29-30.

typically associated with a ewe for her lambs.⁷⁹⁷ Instead, they appertain to her offspring's moral and social well-being. Thus she adjures:

An' may they never learn the gaets,
Of ither vile, wanrestfu' *Pets*!
To slink thro' slaps, an' reave an' steal,
As stacks o' pease, or stocks o' kail.⁷⁹⁸

The movement from the natural concerns of a ewe for the safety of her lambs to considerations beyond her ken marks a moment of bathetic comedy. Here, Mailie vocalises a desire for social status that is corporeally cautioned against by Caesar and the louse. Kenneth Simpson observes the irony in Mailie's newly expressed social pretensions. In his view

Unwittingly [...] she has contradicted herself spectacularly: her advice to her master, Burns, is never again to tether a sheep (thus avoiding her fate being repeated), but when she turns to concern herself with her offspring such Rousseauistic endorsement of liberal and natural rearing is undermined by her insistence that they remain in the parish and avoid bad company.⁷⁹⁹

The disparity between Maillie's natural concern for the welfare of her young and her artificial preoccupation with social etiquette collides with comic effect in these two stanzas. Moreover, if Burns playfully exploits the disjunction of Mailie's anthropomorphic ability to speak, her vain and self-aggrandising utterances further reveal the comedic potentiality that such vocalised sentiments entail when assigned to nonhumans.

In an earlier draft of the sequel to 'The Death and Dying Words of Mailie' entitled 'Poor Mailie's Elegy' Burns explains the sheep's superior lineage in the lines:

She was the flow'r o' Fairlie lambs
A famous breed!⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁷ Mailie's act of forethought in imagining the fate of her lambs is another sign of her anthropomorphism. Compared with the mouse in 'To a Mouse', who lacks this ability, she becomes a comic character when she strays from her own animal nature.

⁷⁹⁸ Burns, i, 33, 35-38.

⁷⁹⁹ Kenneth Simpson, 'Burns and the Rhetoric of Narrative', *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns*, ed. by Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 37-38.

⁸⁰⁰ Burns, i, 35, 15-16.

Mailie's advice to her offspring, 'To stay content wi' yowes at hame' and avoid other 'menseless, graceless brutes', is predicated on an aversion to breed with sheep socially inferior to them.⁸⁰¹ Mailie then is the very antithesis to Caesar in 'The Twa Dogs'. As a Newfoundland dog, he, too, is from a highly valued breed. Through his actions, though, Caesar demonstrates his democratic principles. His friendship with Luath and socialising with a tinker's mongrel secure his position as a creature to emulate. As such, his bodily actions speak with a louder and more authentic voice than Maillie's anthropomorphic words. Thus, Maillie's pronouncements on social status are full of bathetic humour, coming as they do after her evincement of maternal care in the previous stanza. Gerard Carruthers notes that the 'Poor Mailie' poems set

out a terrain that becomes pronounced in Burns's oeuvre, that of questioning the boundary between the spheres of nature and of humanity. We have a mild satire on the presumption that nature can be made to accord with human predilections'.⁸⁰²

The gap between these two stanzas marks the boundary of this concern. On one side is an animal's natural desire for the safety of her young. On the other, a human preoccupation with status that blithely enforces divisions that rents one living being from another.

This commentary on social presumption does not spare its writer. Nigel Leask notices, 'Mailie's descent from improved Fairlie stock quite literally embodies the poet's own aspirations to social and economic improvement'.⁸⁰³ Maybe this is why the reference to 'Fairlie stock' fails to be retained in the printed edition.⁸⁰⁴ Whilst fiscal betterment through hard work is in accord with other poems in the Kilmarnock edition, social climbing jars

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 33, 48 and *ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁰² See Gerard Carruthers, *Robert Burns* (Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2006), p. 10.

⁸⁰³ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 149. Kinsley notes Fairlie is an 'estate on the Irvine, water near Kilmarnock, where the poet's father was employed'. This shared geographical location between Burns and Mailie further suggests that sheep and man are closely aligned in the poem. See Burns, iii, 1020.

⁸⁰⁴ The lines in the Kilmarnock edition still suggest a more elevated pedigree, just one that is not so closely aligned with Burns: Thus they are, 'She was nae get o' moorlan tips, | Wi' tauted ket, an' hairy hips; | For her forbears were brought in ships, | Frae 'yont the TWEED'. See Burns, i, 36, 31-34.

against the ethos expressed in ‘The Twa Dogs’ and ‘To a Louse’.⁸⁰⁵ If the poem criticises Mailie’s unnatural social pretensions, it is equally exacting on her owner, whose lack of care is a betrayal of his obligation to protect his ‘only Pet Yowie’.

Honouring Obligations: An Exemplar of Nature’s Social Union

Where the division between man and animals in the previous poems suggests how hierarchical systems divorce species, ‘The Auld Farmer’s New-Year-morning Salutation to his Auld Mare, Maggie’ can be seen as a corrective to this view. As Leask readily admits, this is a poem in which ‘The boundary between man and beast [...] narrows’.⁸⁰⁶ This is because, as Leask goes on to explain, Maggie is an ‘animal whose relationship with her human employer transcends species boundaries’.⁸⁰⁷ The adjective ‘Auld’ in the title is the first of many couplings that conjoin the farmer with his mare. The farmer’s opening address to the horse of:

A Guid New-year I wish thee, Maggie!

sets the scene for the acts of compassion recorded in the poem.⁸⁰⁸ Both man and animal have aged together. Looking back to days, ‘When thou an’ I were young an’ skiegh’, the farmer proudly acknowledges the vigorousness of his animal companion.⁸⁰⁹ This reflected comment seems to dissolve the material differences between them. Many of the attributes, both past and present, of the horse are equally applicable to her owner. Maggie, like her master, was formerly ‘steeve an’ swank’ and ‘hamely, tawie, quiet an’ cannie, | An’ unco sonsie’.⁸¹⁰ Both, though, are ‘howe-backet, now, an’ knaggie’.⁸¹¹ Burns’s choice of words take on a

⁸⁰⁵ It should be observed that having Mailie come from elevated stock makes her demise (socially) more poignant.

⁸⁰⁶ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 153.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁸⁰⁸ Burns, i, 165, 1.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 166, 43.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 165, 14, and *ibid.*, 166, 29-30.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, 165, 3.

physicality that embodies the agrarian location in which the poem is set. His heavy use of vernacular dialect vividly evokes the rural environment in which both man and animal labour. This spatial connection is further sustained by a plethora of pronouns in connective phrases, such as ‘‘thou an’ I’, ‘thou was corn’t, an’ I was mellow’, ‘We took the road’, ‘thee an’ I’, ‘we twa hae wrought’, ‘We wad be beat’, ‘we’re brought’, ‘We’ve worn to crazy years thegither’, and ‘We’ll toytle abouth wi’ ane anither’.⁸¹² They convince the reader that Maggie’s and her owner’s fates are firmly entwined.

These instances of shared experience are more than casual spatial and temporal markers; they testify to the mutual interdependence that each has for one another. Snyder articulates this belief, writing that the farmer and the horse typify ‘the sympathy that exists the world over between man and the beasts that labor for him’.⁸¹³ Stanza sixteen supplies further evidence of Maggie’s indispensability when the farmer acknowledges they have:

Monie a sair daurk we twa hae wrought,
 An’ wi’ the weary warl’ fought!
 An’ monie an *anxious day*, I thought
 We wad be beat!
 Yet here to *crazy Age* we’re brought,
 Wi’ something yet.⁸¹⁴

Unusually for Burns’s verse, but entirely suitable here, the poem’s tone is unvarying. Its sombre register mirrors its realistic details. As such, its earlier elegiac recollections of happier days find their resolution in the line ‘Yet here to crazy Age we’re brought’. This stark admission of shared experience contributes to the poem’s truthfulness. Writing about this text, Thomas Carlyle acknowledges its ‘clearness and minute fidelity’.⁸¹⁵ Even Crawford, who is disparaging about it, concedes its realism, stating ‘‘The Auld Farmer’s Salutation’’ is

⁸¹² Ibid., 165-168, lines 43, 49, 63, 91, 94, and 95. Other intertwined actions can be found in paired lines in which the first documents the actions of the horse and the second records the farmer’s response. These connections in lines 3-4, and 8-9 record the shared history that binds farmer and mare together.

⁸¹³ Franklyn Bliss Snyder, *The Life of Robert Burns* (Macmillan and Co., 1932), p. 174.

⁸¹⁴ Burns, i, 167, 91-96.

⁸¹⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *Essays* (Chapman Hall, 1883), p. 5.

photography, not painting; it is documentary'.⁸¹⁶ Like 'The Twa Dogs', 'To a Mouse' and the Mailie poems, Burns's experience as a farmer provides the basis for a poem rich in lived bucolic detail. This claim to authenticity generates much of the poem's empathetic feelings towards Maggie.⁸¹⁷

Alan Bold notices another way in which Burns connects the farmer with his mare when he writes, 'Maggie, of course, is female and Burns dwells on the attractions she once possessed'.⁸¹⁸ For instance, in the lines:

Thou ance was i' the foremost rank,
A *filly* buirdly, steeve an' swank,
An' set weel down a shapely shank,
As e'er tread yird;⁸¹⁹

The importance of this point becomes relevant upon reading the lines,

When first I gaed to woo my *Jenny*,
Ye then was trottan wi' your *Minnie*.⁸²⁰

A dowry gift from his father-in-law, Maggie's equine beauty is the counterpart to the farmer's bride-to-be. If Jenny is his domestic partner, Maggie is her domesticated equivalent since each in their sphere is equally beloved by the farmer. This connection via femininity engenders a relationship between man and horse that transcends one purely predicated upon Maggie's utility. It suggests the farmer appreciates the horse's individual nature rather than just her economic worth.

⁸¹⁶ Thomas Crawford, *Burns, A Study of the Poems and Songs* (The Mercat Press, 1978), p. 117.

⁸¹⁷ Maurice Lindsay notes the horse in the poem was named after Maggie, 'An old mare belonging to Burns'. See Maurice Lindsay, *The Burns Encyclopaedia*, 4th edition, rev. and eds by David Purdie, Kirsteen McCue and Gerard Carruthers, (Robert Hale. 2013), p. 199. Even though the horse is a labouring animal, not a pet, Maggie's name individualises her. This strengthens the intimate relationship between man and animal.

⁸¹⁸ Alan Bold, *A Burns Companion* (Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., 1991), p. 230.

⁸¹⁹ Burns, i, 165, 13-16.

⁸²⁰ Ibid., 166, 25-26. The symmetry of pairs should be noted in these lines. The farmer and Jenny in line 25 are mirrored by Maggie and her mother in line 26. This vertical harmony will soon develop into a horizontal one as the poem entwines Maggie's life with her owner.

For reasons of love and faithfulness, the farmer's ownership of Maggie is founded upon an understanding of dominion that acknowledges an ethical obligation to ensure that those governed are treated kindly. Unlike Bonny Heck's owner, the farmer in this poem is willing to care for his rural partner beyond her years of useful toil. As such, 'Auld Mare Maggie' enacts two philosophical principles previously mentioned in this thesis. Both are from writers, like Burns, who are Scottish. The first is located in Francis Hutcheson's *A System of Moral Philosophy*. It occurs when he expounds his conviction of the reciprocal obligations inherent in the master and servant relationship between man and other species. As Hutcheson states

brutes may very justly be said to have a right that no useless pain or misery should be inflicted on them. Men have intimations of this right, and of their own corresponding obligation, by their sense of pity.⁸²¹

One of these 'rights' is that man is required to feed and care for those animals that provide labour. Leask also discerned that the second philosophical conviction comes from Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Here, Smith pronounces, 'Those animals [...] that have been remarkably serviceable to their masters, become the objects of a very lively gratitude'.⁸²² It is the farmer's failure to ensure that his animal is protected that inaugurates 'The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie'. Conversely, as stanzas thirteen and fourteen attest, Maggie's owner is presented as a paragon of attentive compassion towards his animal. The second half of the poem's title, 'on giving her accustomed rip of corn to hansel in the New-year', is the first indication of the farmer fulfilling his obligation to the horse.⁸²³ The poem, though, is full of similar acts of kindness. For instance, the second line declares, 'Hae,

⁸²¹ Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, vol. i, 2 vols (R. and A. Foulis, 1755), p. 314.

⁸²² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 111.

⁸²³ The word 'accustomed' indicates this is not an isolated instance.

there's a ripp to thy auld baggie'.⁸²⁴ It is the final two stanzas that perfectly encapsulate the ethos of these two Scottish philosophers:

An' think na, my auld, trusty *Servan'*,
That now perhaps thou's less deservin,
An' thy *auld days* may end in starvin',
For my last fow,
A heaped *Stimpert*, I'll reserve ane
Laid by for you.⁸²⁵

The tentative 'perhaps' in line ninety-eight creates a sense of dramatic uncertainty soon dispelled by the stanza's final two lines. The faithful service of the horse will be acknowledged long after her usefulness is exceeded. The thoughtful planning expressed by the farmer when he confesses, 'I'll reserve ane | Laid by for you' is a positive example of forethought that so troubles Burns in 'To a Mouse'. This is not the only way the relationship between man and horse can be read as a corrective to that poem.⁸²⁶ Talking about 'Auld Mare Maggie', Perkins states

there is with Burns not the least feeling in the poem that animals are happier or more wretched than human beings, that they are morally or metaphysically higher as nature or lower as brutes, or even that their emotions and life experiences are essentially different.⁸²⁷

The power struggles rife in 'To a Mouse' are absent in 'Auld Mare Maggie'. As such, the claim that man and animals are part of 'Nature's social union' finds a more harmonious expression in the relationship between farmer and horse. These two poems converge around the conviction that all creatures are fellow mortals. A constant theme in 'Auld Mare Maggie' is that both man and horse are approaching their moment of finality. A point that the farmer makes in the last stanza when he admits:

We've worn to crazy years thegither;
We'll toyte about wi' ane anither,⁸²⁸

⁸²⁴ Burns, i, 165, 2.

⁸²⁵ Ibid., 168, 97-102.

⁸²⁶ In the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, 'Auld Mare Maggie' is the twelfth poem, and 'To a Mouse' is the fourteenth.

⁸²⁷ David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animals Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 52.

⁸²⁸ Burns, i, 168, 103-104.

Unlike its use in 'To a Mouse', to see the farmer and horse here as '*fellow-mortal[s]*' is to envisage a more joyful union. Here, the stress lies on '*fellow*' rather than '*mortal*'. As such, 'Auld Mare Maggie' celebrates the comradeship that flourishes when man compassionately discharges his duty to companion species.⁸²⁹ Moreover, in portraying a natural affection for his horse, the farmer serves as a model human. This example counteracts the bleaker depiction of man that is evident at the end of 'To a Mouse'.

Surrounded by Social Nature: Animals Beyond the Farm

It is not just on his farm that Burns found inspiration for his animal poems. The surrounding countryside also supplied ample inspiration. As noted, Burns loved to 'roved out as Chance directed, on the favorite haunts of my Muse, the banks of Ayr; to view Nature in all the gayety of the vernal year'.⁸³⁰ It is not only the environment for which the poet had a natural sympathy. Burns also felt compassion for the wild animals that inhabited it.⁸³¹ His poem 'On scaring some Water-Fowl in Loch-Turrit, a wild scene among the Hills of Oughtertyre' in lyrical couplets celebrates the natural world and the social union that abounds in it. This sombre paean to a world just beyond his farm commences with three rhetorical questions:

Why, ye tenants of the lake,
For me your watry haunt forsake?
Tell me, fellow-creatures, why
At my presence thus you fly?
Why disturb your social joys,
Parent, filial, kindred ties? —⁸³²

⁸²⁹ It should be noted that Maggie's dynamic with the farmer transcends a traditional understanding between domestic animals and companion animals. Where the former were valued for their labour, companion animals repaid their hosts with emotional support. The farmer's relationship with his horse, though, recognises both qualities.

⁸³⁰ *LRB*, i, 63. Letter to Wilhelmina Alexander, November, 1786.

⁸³¹ In this regard, this poem is even more radical than 'Auld Mare Maggie' since emotional empathy is extended beyond the domestic sphere to include wild creatures. In doing so, Burns challenges the commonly held view that assigns worth to an animal depending on whether it is domestic or savage (wild). See p. 30 on Richard Brookes's *A New and Accurate System of Natural History* for a precise definition.

⁸³² Burns, i, 364, 1-6

The poem's narrator defers from answering these questions until the second stanza. A careful reading of what he has already said, though, intimates what his position will be. For instance, in seeing the birds as 'tenants of the lake', he draws an equivalency with the homesteads of local farmers.⁸³³ This is reassuringly followed up by addressing them as 'fellow-creatures'. Line six attempts to justify this nomenclature, moving from local relationships between parents and offspring to a wider connectivity suggested by 'kindred ties'. An idea that the liberal use of pronouns connecting man with animals in this stanza freely supports.

The second verse now communes with the first by answering the poem's opening questions. With thematic congruity to Burns's other animal texts, the reason is man's tyrannical dominion, or as the poem states:

Conscious, blushing for our race
 Soon, too soon, your fears I trace:
 Man, your proud usurping foe,
 Would be lord of all below:
 Plumes himself in Freedom's pride,
 Tyrant stern to all beside.⁸³⁴

The accusatory tone and clear English diction leave no room for misunderstanding. Where birds are 'Common friends to you and me', man would be a 'Tyrant stern to all'. Interestingly, these two stanzas invert words generally associated with one but not the other species. As mentioned earlier, the birds emulate the actions of humans when they become 'tenants' of the lake. At the same time, man ironically performs a reverse action by mimicking birds when he 'Plumes himself'. Further evidence of this metamorphosis can be seen in the preceding line, 'Would be lord of all below'. The phrase ostensibly references man's elevated position in the Great Chain. It also suggests that this raised status gives him a

⁸³³ 'Tenants' further suggest that the birds do not actually own the lake but rather occupy it with the consent of a landlord. This idea gains credence when, in the fourth stanza, the poem states that the waterfowl 'All on Nature you depend'. See Burns, i, 365, 31. All creatures, including man, do not own their environment but rather occupy it as common stock since 'Nature's gifts to all are free' even if in practice they are appropriated by humans. See Burns, i, 364, 8.

⁸³⁴ Burns, i, 364, 13-18.

bird's eye view of the rest of creation, including those animals currently settled on the lake.

As the third stanza makes clear, man has failed to honour his obligation to protect animals (as part of his right to dominion). Other species kill because 'Strong Necessity compels' them to find food.⁸³⁵ Conversely:

[...] Man, to whom alone is given
A ray direct from pitying Heaven,
Glories in his heart humane—
And creatures for his pleasure slain.⁸³⁶

Burns's strength of feeling is comparable to Cowper's in *The Task*. For instance, in the lines:

That Man inflicts on all inferior kinds
Regardless of their plaints. To make him sport,
To gratify the frenzy of his wrath,
Or his base gluttony, are causes good
And just in his account, why bird and beast
Should suffer torture, and the streams be dyed
With blood of their inhabitants impaled.
Earth groans beneath the burthen of a war
[...]
Whom once as delegate of God on earth
They fear'd, and as his perfect image loved.⁸³⁷

The sentiments in both these poems recall Pope's aversion to hunting in his *Guardian* essay.⁸³⁸

If, upon reading this text, the reader asks who the more social being is, humans or nonhumans, the poem leaves the answer in little doubt. Where animals conform to their natures, man ignores his 'heart humane'. Unable to rely on human compassion, the narrator intimates that the birds should:

Swiftly seek, on clanging wings,
Other lakes and other springs,⁸³⁹

⁸³⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., 23-26.

⁸³⁷ PWC, ii, 246-247, lines 385-392, and 399-400.

⁸³⁸ See pp. 214-17 for more on Pope's essay.

⁸³⁹ Burns, i, 365, 37-38.

As in 'To a Mouse', this conclusion questions whether man and animals can be 'fellow-mortals'. In other poems, Burns gives a more optimistic answer. Here, he is far more hesitant. This may be because, as the following poem will show, he had direct experience of man's cruelty to those under his dominion.

Not only is Burns's compassion towards wild creatures evident in his poetry, but it can also be seen in his letters. Writing to Patrick Miller in June of 1789, Burns states

As I was in my fields early one morning in this last spring, I heard the report of a gun from a neighbouring wood, and presently a poor little hare, dragging its wounded limbs, limped piteously by me.—I have always had an abhorrence at this way of assassinating God's creatures without first allowing them those means of defence with which he has variously endowed them; but at this season when the object of our treacherous murder is most probably a Parent, perhaps the mother, and of consequence to leave two little helpless nurslings to perish with hunger amid the pitiless wilds, such an action is not only a sin against the letter of the law, but likewise a deep crime against the *morality of the heart*.⁸⁴⁰

The poet's choice of emotive words (piteously, abhorrence, assassinating, treacherous, murder, helpless) leaves his correspondent in little doubt about his force of feeling. Burns, though, is not content. He follows this charged account with the declaration

We are all equally creatures of some Great Creator; and among the many enormous instances of capricious partiality in the Administration of this world which cry to Heaven for retribution & vengeance in some after state of existence. I think it is none of the least flagrant, that power which one creature of us has to amuse himself by and at the expence [sic] of another's misery, torture & death.⁸⁴¹

Given this letter's ardency, it is unsurprising that the poem based on this incident is equally fervent. Entitled 'On Seeing a Wounded Hare limp by me, which a Fellow had just shot at', it

⁸⁴⁰ *LRB*, i, 417-418. Letter to Patrick Miller, 21 June 1789. According to Maurice Lindsay, 'the marksman was supposed to have been John Thomson, son of a farmer near Ellisland, and Burns is supposed to have threatened to throw him into the Nith'. See Maurice Lindsay *The Burns Encyclopaedia*, 3rd edition (Robert Hale, 1995), p. 89.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 418. After relating the same story to Alexander Cunningham, Burns writes, 'You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow, who could shoot a hare at this season when they all of them have young ones; & it gave me no little gloomy satisfaction to see the poor injured creature escape him.—Indeed there is something in all that multiform business of destroying for our sport individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, that I could never reconcile to my ideas of native Virtue & eternal Right'. See *LRB*, i, 404-405. Letter to Alexander Cunningham, 4 May 1789. For another letter on this incident, see *LRB*, i, 397-398. Letter to Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, 21 April 1789.

thematically echoes the sentiment expressed in Thomson's 'Spring' concerning the heath hen and her young.⁸⁴² Its opening lines set an accusatory tone that is consistent throughout the poem:

Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'rous art,
And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye;
May never pity soothe thee with a sigh,
Nor ever pleasure glad thy cruel heart!⁸⁴³

Burns's use of synecdoche body parts in 'murder-aiming eye' and 'cruel heart' become striking metaphors for the cruelty man inflicts on helpless creatures. This sense of injustice intensifies when the innocent environment, so recently the animal's home, now becomes its grave:

Seek, mangled wretch, some place of wonted rest,
No more of rest, but now thy dying bed!⁸⁴⁴

The narrator's reaction to this sorrowful scene is one of sentimentality. In the following lines, he profoundly feels the diminution of his enjoyment of nature. More importantly, he laments how the hunter's cruelty has impacted the hare's natural right to roam free. Thus, the lines state:

Oft as by winding Nith I, musing, wait
The sober eve, or hail the chearful dawn,
I'll miss thee sporting o'er the dewy lawn,
And curse the ruffian's aim, and mourn thy hapless fate.⁸⁴⁵

The poetic diction and English vocabulary exemplified in 'winding Nith', 'cheerful dawn' and 'dewy lawn' and its theme of animal cruelty are reminiscent of parts of Pope's *Windsor*

⁸⁴² See Sp., 699-701. The hare is also represented in the poetry of Cowper as similarly persecuted. See p. 168.

⁸⁴³ Burns, i, 465, 1-4.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid., 9-10. A verse found in Burns's commonplace book reflects his concern in the letters that this act will make the hare's offspring orphans, thus lessening their chances of survival. It goes, 'Perhaps a mother's anguish adds it throes woe, | The ~~hapless~~ hapless Pair espy thee o'er the plain: | Ah ~~hapless~~ helpless nurslings! Who will sustain | Your little lives, or shield you from the foe!'. See Robert Burns, *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns, Volume I: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Nigel Leask (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 102. On this elision, Burns writes to Alexander Cunningham, 'I am doubtful whether it would be an improvement to keep out the last Stanza but one, altogether'. See *LRB*, i, 405. Letter to Alexander Cunningham, 4 May, 1789.

⁸⁴⁵ Burns, i, 466, 13-16.

Forest or Gay's *Rural Sports*.⁸⁴⁶ Finally, Burns's use of 'Fellow' in the title is ironic. In the commentary on this poem, Kinsley notes that 'Burns sent a copy to Professor James Gregory who objected to the words 'fellow' and 'shot' in the title as 'colloquial and vulgar'.⁸⁴⁷ Whilst the choice of 'shot' is surely for its visceral effect, the use of 'fellow' is more ironically subtle. Reminiscent of the phrase '*fellow-mortal*' from 'To a Mouse', its use in the title of this poem lays more stress on the word omitted, 'mortal'. Since this is the effect of his action rather than of 'fellow', and by implication fellow feeling, a sentiment he has proven himself not to have.⁸⁴⁸

Burns's opinions on the cruelty of hunting are not only confined to his poems. He also composed songs on this theme, one such being 'Song, composed in August'. Its opening two lines set up a clash between nature and man that is found in previous poems in this chapter:

Now westlin winds, and slaught'ring guns
Bring Autumn's pleasant weather;⁸⁴⁹

Here, the opening bifurcation of 'westlin winds' and 'slaught'ring guns' signal the arrival of 'Autumn's pleasant weather' as they enjambable into the next line. If the initial two clauses create an ironic opposition between man and his environment, the second line suggests that nature is the most congruous because, as 'Autumn', it brings pleasantness. This suggestion is

⁸⁴⁶ For instance, see *Windsor Forest*, lines 111—114. Burns's verse on the hare also links this poem to Cowper's verse on his hares.

⁸⁴⁷ Burns, iii, 1303. In 2011, Burns's initial letter to Gregory, dated 13 May 1789, was found at Floors Castle in Kelso. It contains an early draft of 'On Seeing a Wounded Hare' entitled 'On seeing a ~~feeling~~ fellow wound a hare with a shot — April 1789'. The word use of the word 'feeling' was probably a mistake by Burns and thus struck through by a later hand and replaced with 'fellow'. The importance of the altered title is noted by David Purdie, who comments, 'For the publication it is changed from its incidental neutrality [the Floors title] to focus attention on the wounded creature itself'. See David W. R. Purdie, Iain Gordon Brown and Gerard C. Carruthers, 'Burns Manuscripts at Floors Castle: An Unpublished Letter and an Unpublished Draft of the Poem 'On Seeing a Wounded Hare'', *Scottish Literary Review*, 4.1 (2012), p. 63

⁸⁴⁸ Leask notes, 'Although a tenant farmer Burns was disqualified from field sports by the draconian eighteenth-century Game Laws (he seemed only to have possessed a gun when he joined the Excise Office), he abstained from poaching, and was consistently opposed to shooting animals, especially out of season'. See Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 162.

⁸⁴⁹ Burns, i, 4, 1-2.

confirmed in the second verse. Here, the poem supplies the lyrical sweetness reminiscent of the sounds made by the birds the line enumerates:

The Pairtrick lo'es the fruitfu' fells;
 The Plover lo'es the mountains;
 The Woodcock haunts the lanely dells;
 The soaring Hern the fountains:
 Thro' lofty groves, the Cushat roves,
 The path o' man to shun it;
 The hazel bush o'erings the Thrush,
 The spreading thorn the Linnet.⁸⁵⁰

The prior reference to 'Autumn' makes an obvious connection between this poem and Thomson's *The Seasons*. This second stanza confirms this conjecture, with its list of birds echoing those mentioned in 'Spring'. The plentiful rhymes in this stanza encode it with a sweetness that complements the subjects it describes. Besides the usual end rhymes, this verse exhibits others, such as the parallel one in 'groves' with 'roves' and 'bush' with 'Thrush'. The repetitious opening word 'The' that commences five out of the six lines (the only one that does not still begins with the same consonant) secures a repetitive fluidity in this stanza.⁸⁵¹

The following verse reiterates a constant plea throughout Burns's animal poems that humans and nonhumans should interact harmoniously. The instances of man's cruel actions, though, imperil the success of this petition. As the poem contends:

[...] ev'ry kind their pleasure find,
 The savage and the tender;
 Some social join, and leagues combine;
 Some solitary wander.⁸⁵²

The ironical use of 'pleasure' here inverts the poem's opening sentiment when the second lines reaffirm the bifurcation between man (savage) and nature (tender). The following line,

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 5, 9-16.

⁸⁵¹ The next stanza, ostensibly about man, also conforms to a rhyme scheme, but the amount of other harmonising pairs is far less.

⁸⁵² Burns, i, 5, 17-20.

‘Some social join, and leagues combine’, reverberates the same sentiment in ‘To a Mouse’.

The use of ‘solitary wander’ in the following line counteracts this optimism. Unlike Thomson’s and Milton’s deployment of man alone in nature, Burns’s solitary wanderer is cut off from his environment. This isolation is symptomatic of his lack of compassion for other species.

The description of birds communing in harmony in the second stanza of ‘Song, composed in August’ is also a defining feature of another of Burns’s texts. The deceptively titled ‘Hunting Song’ is more concerned with a ‘bonie hen’ than the men tracking her.⁸⁵³ The beauty of the bird is extolled in the lines:

Her plumage outlusted the pride o’ the spring,
And O! as she wantoned gay on the wing.⁸⁵⁴

The moorhen’s splendour is so that even the sun cannot surpass her. This hyperbolic encomium to a creature with such beauty is not Burns’s most accomplished poem, but it does display empathy towards other species. The hunters’ inability to shoot the bird ensures that nature’s social union is not broken. This sentiment is at the heart of Burns’s comment to John Moore when he writes, ‘Whatsoever is not detrimental to Society, & is of positive Enjoyment, is of God the Giver of all good things, & ought be received & enjoyed by His creatures with thankful delight’.⁸⁵⁵ This belief is poetically expressed in the song ‘Address to the woodlark’. More sentimental than the ‘Hunting Song’, it describes an encounter between a forlorn lover and a bird he hears in a forest. The opening lines are redolent of the whole poem:

O STAY, sweet warbling woodlark stay,
Nor quit for me the trembling spray,

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 377, 4. Kinsley comments, ‘The hunting metaphor is obviously sexual’. See Burns, iii, 1256. This aspect of Burns’s poetry conditions any reading of his work that argues for a lack of social regulation. See footnote 869 for a difference between liberty and licence as a reply to such concerns.

⁸⁵⁴ Burns, i, 377, 11-12.

⁸⁵⁵ *LRB*, ii, 73. Letter to John Moore, 28 February 1791. Burns’s observation here is similar to the views expressed by Smart in *Jubilate Agno*.

A hapless lover courts thy lay,
Thy soothing fond complaining.—⁸⁵⁶

His ardour is not only for his absent lover but also for the bird itself, whose song is a conduit to love, for as the text declares:

That I may catch thy melting art;
For surely that wad touch her heart⁸⁵⁷

Initially, his love for the bird's song connects man to animal. The woodlark's mellifluous sound, though, goes beyond the forest as the lover imagines the effect it will have on his partner. Burns's use of the poetic trope of a wanderer encountering the dulcet tones of a bird becomes an example of a harmonious interaction between different species. The woodlark's warbling connects man to bird and then bird (tender part) to woman (her heart). This action demonstrates that nature's social union can be achieved if man's heart is full of love. As the poem progresses, man and bird become ever closer, as the wander understands the bird's song is a lament for his lost mate. This concern for an absent partner further ties the man with the bird. The lover projects his condition onto the woodlark, thus demonstrating that nonhumans share the same emotional registers as humans. The uncertainty that binds mice with men in 'To a Mouse' also resounds in this poem, for united in grief, the status of man and bird as fellow mortals becomes all too relevant.

Finally, a more joyous celebration of nature's social union is evident in Burns's 'Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson'. For Allan Cunningham, this poem 'is one of the sweetest and most beautiful of his latter compositions. He calls on nature, animate and inanimate, to lament the loss of one who held his honours immediately from God'.⁸⁵⁸ If the congregation of

⁸⁵⁶ Burns, ii, 786, 1-4.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., 6-7. The sweet song of the woodlark is also mentioned in 'A song', in the line 'Hear the woodlark charm the forest', and 'Banks of Cree', with, 'So calls the woodlark in the grove | His little, faithful Mate to chear, | At once 'tis music—and 'tis love'. See Burns, ii, 548, 9, and *ibid.*, 731, 10-12.

⁸⁵⁸ Allan Cunningham, 'The Life of Robert Burns', Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns; with His Life by Allan Cummings*, vol. i, 8 vols (James Cochrane and Co., 1834), p. 265.

nature to mourn the death of Matthew Henderson is the poem's ostensible aim, the defining image that lingers in the reader's mind is the vibrancy of the pastoral scene that sustains the poem.⁸⁵⁹ These descriptions commence in the third stanza, as the narrator asks all of nature to mark the passing of their fellow mortal. An example of this can be seen in the stanza that pleads:

Mourn, ye wee songsters o' the woods;
Ye grouss that crap the heather bud;
Ye curlews calling thro' a clud;
Ye whistling plover;
And mourn, ye whirring paitrick brood;
He's gane for ever!⁸⁶⁰

In answering the narrator's invocation, the birds comply by singing. This natural ability becomes a legitimate semiotic system in which they can signal their concurrence with the poem's narrator.⁸⁶¹ Bird song is one instance in which man and animals can knowingly communicate commonly held positions. The insistence on this idea is reiterated over the following three stanzas, as birds are seen as ubiquitous in the natural world. Moreover, as the poem narrates further aspects of nature concurring in their elegiac response, the actions of the birds seamlessly amalgamate into a harmonising congregation.⁸⁶² Here, no one voice dominates another. This eschewing of hierarchical preferences shows that Nature is a genuinely fluid sphere. Taken in isolation, the birds can be seen as an exemplar of one species convening to mourn another. Their example actualises Burns's conviction that when man and animals correlate, they naturally form a compassionate fellowship. This act

⁸⁵⁹ Crawford finds the poem 'worthy of being considered as one of the greatest elegies to have been produced in the British Isles'. See Thomas Crawford, *Burns, A Study of the Poems and Songs* (The Mercat Press, 1978), p. 212.

⁸⁶⁰ Burns, i, 439, 37-42. A similar chorus of birds can be found in 'The Humble Petition of Bruar Water'. See Burns, i, 356, 39-48.

⁸⁶¹ As in Thomson, Smart and Cowper, bodily actions signal how the creaturely voice can cohesively communicate across species.

⁸⁶² In a book that was familiar to Burns (see *LRB*, ii, 42. Letter to Dugald Stewart, July 1790), Aiken states, 'the descriptive poet, who does not habituate himself to view the several objects of nature minutely, and in comparison with each other, must ever fail in giving his picture the congruity and animation of real life'. See John Aiken, *Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (W. Eyres, 1777), p. 11.

exponentiates with the addition of each new voice until finally, in chorus, they can proclaim, 'Nature's social union'.

The Power of Voice

William Greenfield's contention that Burns was 'our poet of nature' is entirely justifiable.

Moreover, his compassionate attitude towards domestic or wild animals is repeated throughout his poetry and prose. Burns's ability to compose highly engaging but challenging poetry ensures that his work loses none of its relevance for twenty-first-century readers.

Much of his appeal as a poet is founded on his technical prowess. Far from being an unlearned ploughman, he carefully controls the voices in his poems to achieve his didactic aims. Instances of this subtle modulation between comic and serious, ironic and sombre, or accusatory and self-reflective can be found throughout his work. Fiona Stafford observes that Burns's poems 'insistently recalled the spoken word, addressed to mice, daisies or dead sheep, he focussed on everyday objects to overturn entrenched opinions and force his readers to reassess their assumptions about the world'.⁸⁶³ She is correct in seeing the importance of voice in Burns's poetry. These performative acts disarm the reader with their effortless style and local vernacular, an effect ably helped by Burns's choice of the Habbie style. In the case of the epistles, they also fashion an informal familiarity between the addresser and addressee.

Moreover, their direct communication creates a sense of immediacy, as if the unfolding actions are being recorded in the same instance. Where the intimacy of narrative voice draws the reader, narrator, and subject together, writing to the moment intensifies the dramatic scene before them. Voice, though, can do more than this. In 'To a Louse', the narrator speaks with two voices. One narrates the events to the reader and occasionally gives his views. The

⁸⁶³ Fiona Stafford, 'Lice, Mice, Bumclocks, Grubs: The Challenge of Regional Language and the Legacy of Robert Burns', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, issue 6, (2010), p. 3.
<https://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue6/stafford.htm>.

other ventriloquises received opinions on static hierarchies. The juxtaposition between these opposing voices allows for modulations in tone and forces the reader to, in Stafford's words, 'reassess their assumptions'. Burns also carefully uses dialect to create different tones. The philosophical sentiment expounded in polished English diction in 'To a Mouse' is all the more noticeable because a supposedly inarticulate rural idiom frames it. This verse's erudite appeal for compassion towards other species, though, is equally expressed throughout the poem regardless of language differences. In the case of 'The Twa Dogs', the voice becomes a sign of social significance.⁸⁶⁴ On this topic, Heaney remarks

I am predisposed to like Burns's 'The Twa Dogs' because of its unfoolable, realistic sense on the world, its uncorny, wily humour and its unmitigated sense of justice [...] what distinguishes it as a poem is the way it combines tonal variety and technical virtuosity – the pitch of the voice and the musical trueness of it. It is because of a special mixture of intimacy and documentary accuracy in the art speech of the poem that none of the humour is at the expense of the dogs.⁸⁶⁵

The dogs's willingness to enter into a corporeal dialogue with each other questions the legitimacy of rigid relationships. Regardless of genre, whether it is elegy, pastoral, epistle, fable or even a combination of these, Burns's deliberate use of voice is one way he regulates the tone in his poems. Ultimately, then, Burns realises the potential for poetry to be a seductive and immersive process for the reader. He fully exploits these traits to persuade his audience to show compassion towards animals.

Thematic Concerns in Burns's Poetry on Animals

Talking about the central character in 'The Vision', Allan Cunningham's observation could equally apply to Burns when he writes, 'he was there to fulfil the social plan of Nature, and

⁸⁶⁴ The use of voice here applies to the poem rather than the words the dogs speak. Their democratic principles are firmly established via their bodily action rather than talking.

⁸⁶⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'Burns's Art Speech', in *Robert Burns & Cultural Authority*, ed. by Robert Crawford, (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 226.

form a not unimportant link in the great chain of being'.⁸⁶⁶ Burns's insistence on a harmonious bond between species is a central theme throughout his animal poems. This most noticeably occurs with the phrase 'Nature's social union' in 'To a Mouse', but other instances can be seen in the use of 'social nose' in 'The Twa Dogs' and 'social joys' in 'On scaring some Water-Fowl in Loch-Turrit'. These examples complement another word in the poet's animal canon, 'fellow', as in 'fellow-creature' and 'fellow-mortal'.⁸⁶⁷ The concept behind these expressions is dramatically foregrounded in their opposition to culturally constructed relationships, such as those expressed in 'To a Louse' and 'The Twa Dogs'. It is the power struggle between nature and man, the social and unsocial, natural equilibrium and cultural hegemony that clashes so violently in Burns's animal poems. With the harmonious interaction between humans and nonhumans jeopardised by 'Tyrannic man's dominion', these poems present a heartfelt and, at times, bleak portrayal of interspecies relationships. The smallness of the mouse and the louse only further emphasises their vulnerability to man who is a 'Tyrant stern to all'. However, Burns's 'antithetical mind' refuses to portray these creatures as mere victims.⁸⁶⁸ The same quality that resists reducing them to mere andromorphic characters, their animalness gives these creatures a dignity that enlarges their social worth. True to their natures, they emerge as exemplars for man to emulate whenever artificial social practices diminish him. If humans eschew these limiting rules and return to their authentic nature, only then will they understand 'We Are All Equally Creatures of Some Great Creator'.⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁶ Allan Cunningham, 'The Life of Robert Burns', Robert Burns, *The Works of Robert Burns; with His Life by Allan Cunningham*, vol. i, 8 vols (James Cochran and Co., 1834), p. 84.

⁸⁶⁷ See 'On scaring some Water-Fowl in Loch-Turrit' and 'To a Mouse' respectively.

⁸⁶⁸ In his journal, Byron perceptively states that Burns had 'an antithetical mind!—tenderness, roughness—delicacy, coarseness—sentiment, sensuality—soaring and grovelling, dirt and deity—all mixed up in one compound of inspired clay!'. See George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals: Volume 3 1813-1814, Alas! The Love of Women*, 12 vols, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand (John Murry, 1974), p. 238. Journal entry for Monday, 13 December 1813.

⁸⁶⁹ It is important to clarify that a return to an authentic nature is a call predicated on liberty, not licences. John Locke explains the difference between these two concepts when he declares, 'a state of liberty [...] is not a state

of licence: though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, but where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it. The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another life, health, liberty, or possessions: for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master'. See John Locke, *The Second Treatise: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government*, ed. by Ian Shapiro (Yale University Press, 2017), p. 102. Nature, for man and animals (since both share the same maker), is a democratic sphere. This difference becomes vital when reading Burns since the suggestive sexual undercurrent often found in his poems should not be sanctioned by unfettered licence but restrained by nature's liberty. For an extended reading of this influence in Burns's poems, see A.L. Kennedy, *Love Composition: The Solitary Vice, Robert Burns & Cultural Authority*, ed. by Robert Crawford (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 23-39.

Conclusion

Privileging First-hand Experience

In 1711, a writer observing a brood of hens on a friend's estate commented, 'As I was walking this Morning in the great Yard that belongs to my Friend's Country House, I was wonderfully pleased to see the different workings of Instinct in a Hen followed by a Brood of Ducks'.⁸⁷⁰ This encounter, apparently occurring in a rural setting, is far from the first-hand account it presents itself. The writer (Mr. Spectator) and his friend (Roger de Coverley) are fictitious eidolons of Joseph Addison.⁸⁷¹ Even the observations Mr. Spectator makes are not garnered from real life. Instead, they originate from Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*.⁸⁷² If the representation of animals derived from books was typical in the early eighteenth century, it was not so by its end. A new epistemological model drives this transformation. In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), John Locke stresses that all knowledge is gained by the senses when they engage with their immediate environment. As Locke explains

Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? [...] Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word it comes from *experience* [...] Our observations employed either about *external sensible objects; or about the internal operations of our mind, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that, which supplies our understanding* [...] These are the two fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.⁸⁷³

This new understanding of how experience is gained is not entirely absent from the account in *The Spectator*. Addison's realistic setting of a 'friend's estate' is just one way he shows the influence of Locke. A more pertinent one for this thesis is how he attempts to guarantee the

⁸⁷⁰ *Spectator*, i, 493. No. 121, Thursday, 19 July 1711.

⁸⁷¹ Burns read Addison from an early age. In the *Glenriddell Manuscripts*, he notes, the 'earliest thing of Composition that I recollect taking pleasure in was the vision of Mirza and a hymn of Addison's'. See Robert Burns, *The Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns, Volume I: Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Nigel Leask (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 190. 'The Vision of Mirza' appeared in *The Spectator* 159, Saturday, 1 September 1711.

⁸⁷² Donald F. Bond cites the exact passage as '2.48.124'. See *Spectator*, i, 493, note 3.

⁸⁷³ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Roger Woolhouse (Penguin Books Ltd, 1997), p. 109.

event's authenticity by presenting it as a first-hand account. Rather than rely on a second-hand report from a classical author, Addison instead justifies the truthfulness of his description by stressing its primacy, thus giving it the similitude of conforming to Locke's notion of how all knowledge is gained. Addison's tacit approval of this empirical method enhances the event's right to be taken as authentic. In various degrees, the poetry of Thomson, Smart and Cowper Burns all co-opt Locke's methodological approach to make statements about animals that can claim to be truthful because they are validated from first-hand experience.

Poetry that employs a rigorous empirical practice can claim to represent subjects with fidelity. An important point, for as Samuel Johnson explains, 'A story is a picture either of an individual or of human nature in general: if it be false, it is a picture of nothing'.⁸⁷⁴ This position is directly relevant for arguing that nonhumans deserve compassion. To extend this sympathetic consideration to the rest of creation, the poetry of Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns must represent animals as they are – creatures alive with agency. To transfer the compassion for animals generated by their poems, these four poets must demonstrate a congruency between the animals they write about and the real creatures they represent. The benevolent sentiment garnered when reading about nonhumans must be extended to authentic creatures to materially improve their real-world status. In other words, the reason Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns insist that their literary animals mirror their authentic counterparts is to provoke a similar compassionate response for real creatures as that generated by fictive ones in their verse.⁸⁷⁵ Here, then, poetry, in the words of Katharine M. Quinsey, aids in 'revising the animal-human boundary through imaginative empathy'.⁸⁷⁶ In authentically

⁸⁷⁴ See p. 18.

⁸⁷⁵ Here, the reader effectively is an Smithian impartial spectator critically mediating a sympathetic response. See pp. 179-181 for an extend analysis of this process.

⁸⁷⁶ Katharine M. Quinsey, 'Introduction', *Animals and Humans: Sensibility and Representation*, ed. by Katharine M. Quinsey (Voltaire Foundation, 2017), p. 4

representing real animals in this way, these writers can also effectively advocate on their behalf for better treatment. However, many of the poems in this thesis go beyond this form of secondary representation. By reporting each animal's creaturely voice, they allow nonhumans to represent themselves. This primary self-advocacy reminds readers that nonhumans are self-determining creatures with their own narratives to tell. Conversely, anthropomorphic animals are legally and poetically unrepresentative. Thus, the fable problematises man's obligation to these creatures because, as pure fictive creations, they cannot, in any legitimate sense, claim rights on behalf of real-life subjects. John Simons believes animals should be read 'in and for themselves and not as displaced metaphors for the human, and of course, we must do so without overlooking the ways in which animals comprise a language of alterity within human communities'.⁸⁷⁷ For this reason, Cowper's fables foreground their artificiality, and Burns refuses to relinquish the 'animalness' of Luath and Caesar in 'The Twa Dogs'.

Locke's Influence

The authority of Locke can be seen in the work of the four poets under analysis in this thesis.⁸⁷⁸ *The Seasons* explicitly praises the philosopher, believing he had 'made the whole internal World his own'.⁸⁷⁹ As S.H. Clark notes, in doing so, 'Thomson places him in a pantheon including Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, and Chaucer'.⁸⁸⁰ This is one reason *The Seasons* relies upon a narrative eye rather than a narrative voice.⁸⁸¹ Similarly, Christopher Smart recognises Locke's contribution to knowledge. In Smart's poem 'The Furniture of a

⁸⁷⁷ John Simons, *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (Palgrave, 2002), p. 6.

⁸⁷⁸ For a wider analysis of Locke's influence on poetry in this period, see Kenneth Maclean, *John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (Yale University Press, 1936).

⁸⁷⁹ Su., 1560.

⁸⁸⁰ S.H. Clark, "'The Whole Internal World His Own': Locke and Metaphor Reconsidered", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, April, 1998, 59.2 (1998), p. 242.

⁸⁸¹ See pp. 70-71 for an extended explanation of Thomson's narrative eye.

Beau's Mind', he playfully comments on the frivolous thoughts of a fop by comparing him to a child. Thus Smart writes:

When Infants are born, by experience we find,
With ideas so few they're supply'd,
That Locke has most justly resembled their mind,
To a cabinet empty and void.⁸⁸²

Smart's acknowledgement of sense data as the primary mode for gaining experience clarifies why Jeffry, the cat, is the most well-delineated animal in *Jubilate Agno*. Smart can empirically record his actions through his daily observations of the animal. Thus, the representation of Jeffry in the poem becomes indistinguishable from a real cat. This desire to represent animals authentically is critical to *Jubilate Agno*'s communal project of connecting diverse species to praise God. Robert Burns also acknowledges the importance of Locke. In a letter to Agnes M'Lehose, Burns praises 'the Great and likewise Good M^r Locke, Author of the famous essay on human understanding'.⁸⁸³ Similarly, Cowper also writes appreciatively of him, noting in his 'Progress of Error':

Grant me discernment, and I grant it you.
Patient of contradiction as a child
Affable, humble, diffident and mild,
Such was Sir Isaac, and such Boyle and Locke,⁸⁸⁴

All four writers draw on first-hand experience to represent animals compassionately in their poems. In the case of Cowper, he co-opts scientific practices to justify the authenticity of the creatures he encounters daily. His observations, when in close proximity to his companion animals, allow him to represent particular animals in his poetry. Burns's experience of animals is also derived first-hand. As a farmer, he interacted with both domestic and wild creatures daily. This aspect distinguishes his poetry from the other three authors discussed in

⁸⁸² Smart, iv, 328, 1-4.

⁸⁸³ *LRB*, i, 212. Letter to Mrs. Agnes M'Lehose, Sunday, 20 January 1788.

⁸⁸⁴ *PWC*, i, 277, 535-538.

this thesis. If the imbalance of power between species concerns Thomson, Smart, and Cowper, it is felt with greater vigour in the poetry of Burns due to his rural background.

Domestic and Wild Creatures

Direct contact with nonhumans does not necessitate a compassionate attitude towards them, as pro-hunting poems from the eighteenth century attest. Thematically, though, the animal verse in this thesis all attempt to present nonhuman perspectives in order to evoke an emotional response. In doing so, the poetry of Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns makes a vital contribution to raising the status of animals by representing them as creatures worthy of benevolence. In this endeavour, they ignore Richard Brookes' humanist definition of wild and domestic animals. Instead, they write compassionately about all creatures, from the smallest louse to the largest whale. The dominion over other species they countenance is predicated on compassion that sees animals as subjects rather than objects for exploitation. For them, mankind is a steward of nature and, in the case of Smart, Cowper, and Burns, also a benevolent host towards companion species. In this undertaking, their poetry acknowledges the inherent obligations in such a position. *The Seasons*, for instance, stresses man's duty to care for cattle that labour on his behalf.⁸⁸⁵ Similarly, in Burns's 'The Auld Farmer's New-Year-morning Salutation to his Auld Mare, Maggie', the farmer acknowledges the debt to a horse with whom he has shared his working life.⁸⁸⁶

The Wider Debate and the Influence of the Creaturely Voice

The poems under analysis in this thesis directly engaged with other eighteenth-century texts that debated the status of nonhumans. The animal poems of Smart engage and enlarge the

⁸⁸⁵ See p. 61 and pp. 234-235.

⁸⁸⁶ See pp. 237-238.

same biblical pronouncements that also influenced the anonymous author of *Clemency to Brutes* and James Granger in his *An Apology for Brute Creation*.⁸⁸⁷ Burns's 'To a Mouse' and 'To a Louse' poetically paraphrase passages from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiment* to persuade the reader that animals are worthy of ethical consideration.⁸⁸⁸ Cowper co-opts the scientific practices of natural history books, a genre in vogue in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Thomson engages with theories of language to demonstrate that animals are capable of rational speech.⁸⁸⁹ Interspecies communication is also another point of confluence between these writers. Their poetry provides numerous examples of nonhumans speaking on their own behalf. This creaturely voice, whether articulated via vocal cries or bodily signs, permits animals to represent themselves in these poems. As an act of self-determination, it reaffirms that nonhumans have an agency that is as valid as man's. By reporting the non-linguistic semiotic cries of other creatures, the poetry of Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns presents a wide range of animal perspectives. This emphasis on nonhuman points of view confirms the broad diversity of coequal, intelligent lives that cohabit in the same environment as man. This consideration is also at the heart of the many instances of shared capabilities with humans that the animals in these poems demonstrate, of which the conjoined fate of all living creatures is the most poignant one.

The Universal Theme of Compassion

Thomson, Smart, Cowper, and Burns feel justified in writing benevolently about animals because they believe compassion towards nonhumans is a moral imperative. This

⁸⁸⁷ See p. 79 and p. 81. The passage in question is from Proverbs 12.10, 'A righteous *man* regardeth the life of his beast'.

⁸⁸⁸ See p. 195 and pp. 223-224.

⁸⁸⁹ The most considered account of animal language in the early modern period is by Hieronymus Fabricius ab Aquapendente (c. 1553-1619) in his *On the Language of Brutes* (1603). See R.W. Serjeantson, 'The Passions and Animal Language, 1540-1700', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62.3 (2001), pp. 425-44.

transhistorical concept ensures that their claim for benevolence towards all species is as relevant now as it was in the eighteenth century. The gradual legislation introduced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries acknowledges this fact and testifies to the critical role these four poets played in this movement. When Lord Erskine declared in Parliament that animal compassion is a subject ‘most justly treated by one of the best poets in our language. Mr Cowper, in the Task’, he could have easily cited, as other commentators did, the poetry of Thomson and Burns.⁸⁹⁰ For instance, the title page of Percival Stockdale’s *A Remonstrance Against Inhumanity to Animals* (1802) quotes on its title page the lines in *The Seasons*:

Upbraid, ye ravening Tribes, our wanton Rage,
For Hunger kindles you, and lawless Want;
But lavish fed, in Nature’s Bounty roll’d,
To joy at Anguish, and delight in Blood,
Is what your horrid Bosoms never knew.⁸⁹¹

Thomson, Cowper, and Burns were constantly invoked by MPs in Parliament who were eager to enhance the cause of better treatment for animals. For instance, On 14 March 1930, while debating the second reading of a proposed *Protection of Animals Bill* in Parliament, Mr Foot declared

here are some names on the back of this Bill, but sometimes I wish it might be possible to put on the back of a Bill the names of the great British people of past years who would have been associated with the Measure. If that had been possible, I should have put on the back of this Bill such names as these: Robert Burns, [and] William Cowper.⁸⁹²

The MP for North Nottingham, William Whitlock, speaking in 1979 in favour of an act that would protect animals used for scientific purposes, invoked Burns to justify the assent of this bill. He thus stated

⁸⁹⁰ See p. 21 and p. 22.

⁸⁹¹ Percival Stockdale, *A Remonstrance Against Inhumanity to Animals, and Particularly Against the Savage Practice of Bull-Baiting* (M & J Graham, 1802), p. 1. The lines are from Au., 396-400.

⁸⁹² See *Protection of Animal Bill*, debated on Friday, 14 March 1930, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1930-03-14/debates/6df6eeb0-a8e8-46c2-9533-7468767cbd65/ProtectionOfAnimalsBill>. Interestingly, while romantic writers, especially Wordsworth, are cited in parliament on environmental issues, it is Thomson, Cowper and Burns who are called on to defend animals.

About 200 years ago [...] Robert Burns, in one of his best known poems, spoke of the breaking of “Nature’s social union” by “man’s dominion”. He referred to himself as “por [sic] earth-born companion”, “An’ fellow mortal” of the small, frightened mouse which his ploughshare had disturbed. [...] Today, although ever larger numbers of people think of animals as their earth-born companions and fellow mortals, “man’s dominion” is increasingly having such a disastrous impact on the animal world that species are being wiped out throughout the world and ever larger numbers of animals are being cruelly treated in ways which are said to be for the benefit of man.⁸⁹³

Burns proved by far the most popular poet to mention in favour of animal protection.

Conservative MP Bill Grant cited Burns to support a bill to ban the importing hunting trophies of endangered species, saying

Let me close with a verse from Robert Burns, which was penned as far back as 1789. He was a farmer, and he saw the fate of a hare that was shot and not killed, but simply wounded. Strangely enough, the title of the poem is “On Seeing a Wounded Hare”. I will read the first verse.⁸⁹⁴

Grant then closed his speech by quoting the first stanza of Burns’s poem. Burns is also invoked in a debate on a bill to protect the exportation of horses. Here, Mr Macquisten announces to his fellow MPs

I have a far higher standard for man’s faithful old servant, the horse, than slaying him. It is a habit of the Scot to find his religious consolations in the Bible, and his humanity in Robert Burns. I will give you a few lines of his New Year morning salutation to his old mare Maggie, when he gives her her morning’s corn.

After reading a substantial portion of the poem, Macquisten concludes with, ‘That is the treatment that Burns says ought to be meted out to old animals [...] I commend the words of Burns to all, as being the way to treat your old animals, your faithful old servants’.⁸⁹⁵ Even

⁸⁹³ See *Protection of Animals (Scientific Purposes) Bill*, debated Friday 16 November 1979, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1979-11-16/debates/631742b2-5ac6-4b6a-923b-8d95eeca089/ProtectionOfAnimals\(ScientificPurposes\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1979-11-16/debates/631742b2-5ac6-4b6a-923b-8d95eeca089/ProtectionOfAnimals(ScientificPurposes)Bill).

⁸⁹⁴ See *Trophy Hunting Imports*, debated Wednesday, 2 October 2019, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-10-02/debates/19268936-24CE-456B-8693-E2DB75A41FE3/TrophyHuntingImports>.

⁸⁹⁵ See *Exportation of Horses Bill*, debated Friday 5 March 1937, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1937-03-05/debates/532aaba5-dcb4-4460-afbf-8a713d578bed/ExportationOfHorsesBill>. Other instance of Burns name being invoked can be seen in *Clause 50—(Prohibition of Night Shooting and Use of Spring Traps)*, debated Thursday, 1 July 1948, the *Slaughter of Animals (Amendment) Bill*, debated Friday 29 January 1954 and a debate on issuing a Burns commemorative postage stamps, in which one of the reasons given was ‘The great sympathetic heart of the poet extended to the lower animals, and the animal welfare societies for which this country is renowned have greatly encouraged in their efforts by his war-hearted writings’. See *Burns*

though Smart's poetry failed to be recognised by his contemporaries as advocating compassion towards nonhumans, the universality of his theme ensures his animal poems retain their relevance for modern readers. Ultimately, benevolence towards other species, driven by the rising status of companion animals, the popularity of natural history texts and the propagation of creaturely sagacity in emerging philosophical debates all contributed to narrowing the gap between nonhumans and humans, even if in practice, much still needed to change. The animal poems of the four writers under consideration in this thesis positively contributed to this debate, influencing a proportion of the population other disciplines failed to attain.

Commemorative Postage Stamp, debated Thursday 17 April 1958, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1958-04-17/debates/b50dffe9-188f-42d6-922d-de27146261c5/Prayers>.

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