

# **The Speaking World**

by

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## **Abstract**

Using a hybrid of poetry, creative prose, and critical prose, this thesis demonstrates a way in which we can rethink the natural world. Through a series of analyses and original verse and prose, using a reading premise derived from Zen Buddhist philosophy, it presents a vision of animal life and the natural world as philosophically nuanced and psychologically complex. It attempts to reposition the philosophical dominance over the natural world that humans have often considered their monopoly. All the poetry of the thesis engages and illustrates the main critical points outlined here.

After an introduction setting out the basic aims and concepts of the thesis, the opening essay quotes David Attenborough. The philosophy espoused in his text, evolutionary theory, cannot be sustained if an animal's psychology is given greater importance. Secondly, from *The Life of Birds*, I present a critique that suggests that a bird's psychology is complicated to the point of mysticism. The third essay looks at Nietzsche. This piece suggests that what blinds us to the complexity of an animal's world is human ego. Next I look at Marc Bekoff, suggesting that the ego's dominant response is to anthropomorphise animals. The next essay gives a brief reading of Hamlet as a character liberated by a philosophy derived from the sparrow's world. Then follows a series of analyses of poems about non-human animals. A reading of an Emily Dickinson poem shows a narrator trapped in the world of a threatened and unstable ego. Next the poet Ted Hughes and his encounter with a hawk are shown as distanced by the human ego's inability to step outside binary oppositions. Then follows a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, where I argue that he draws on the notion of externality, an ego construct. The next poet, Takahashi, writes ego into his poem. His poem fails to speak without it. Finally, I look at D.H. Lawrence. Here the inability of ego to relinquish itself from dominating its encounter with the natural world is critiqued. The discursive parts of the thesis are interwoven with examples of my own creative practice that attempt to put into effect the ideas I am elaborating. In the conclusion, I offer proposals for further thought.

## **Keywords**

creative writing, poetry, creative-critical, hybrid, psychology, animals, nature, natural world, Zen Buddhism, philosophy

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## Introduction

### Beginnings

Whilst at university I became interested in Zen Buddhist philosophy, reading writers like D.T. Suzuki and Alan Watts. This was combined with an interest in the literary theory I was learning on my course. Two friends at the time also grew interested in Zen and started attending a Zen group in their local city. They seemed keen and interested until one day a few months later they announced they had stopped attending their group because Zen was apolitical. I puzzled over this as I couldn't understand how so severe a philosophy could have no social engagement. That puzzlement started a thought process towards seeing if and how Zen philosophy could be utilised as a critical standpoint. I bought and read books on Zen as a therapy, and its relationship to the arts. Then I had an intuition that the two worlds often referred to in Zen texts, the absolute and the relative, did interact critically, offering insights to Zen practitioners. As I started my thesis I pursued this further. I found a specific text by D.T. Suzuki that gave me a simple reading premise. When you isolate portions of a text and bounce them off each other, utilising the reading premise to govern this action, new insights about the text reveal themselves. This was the first step. The premise offers a critical awareness of the discriminations a text needs for its development.

### Theory derived from passages from *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind* by D.T. Suzuki

An identity is a single unit of meaning that can be undone, come apart in one critical operation. It is a summary, paraphrase, definition or other interpretive unit. It is referred to as an identity because there must be a suggestion of closure in order for the unit of meaning to open and come apart. The following Zen story from Suzuki's book is illustrative of this point.

When Kao the Sha-mi called one rainy day on Yao-shan, the master said: 'So you are come.'

Kao: 'Yes, master.'

Yao: 'You are very wet, are you not?'

Kao: 'No beating of such a drum.'

Yun-yen and T'ao-wu happened to be with Yao-shan, and Yun said: 'No hide is here, and what drum is to be beaten?'

Tao said: 'No drum is here, and what hide is to be beaten?'

Yao-shan finally said: 'What a fine tune we have today!' (p. 101)

A conceptual object, the 'hide', is isolated to critically insubstantiate another conceptual object or identity, the 'drum', suggesting the limitations of the discrimination, suggesting that the discrimination drum is just a conceptual unit within a wider field of meaning.

Ego identity is an identity of cultural concepts created by the distinctions isolating and separating it: discrimination. Suzuki writes, 'this world as conceived by the human mind, is a realm of opposites' (p. 52). Suzuki then goes on to describe discrimination in this way:

The Chinese term for 'Discrimination' is *fen-pieh*, which is a translation of the Sanskrit *vikalpa*, one of the important Buddhist terms used in various Sūtras and Śāstras. The original meaning of the Chinese characters is 'to cut and divide with a knife', which exactly corresponds to the etymology of the Sanskrit *viklp*. By 'discrimination', therefore, is meant analytical knowledge, the relative and discursive understanding which we use in our everyday worldly intercourse and also in our highly speculative thinking. For the essence of thinking is to analyse – that is, to discriminate; the sharper the knife of dissection, the more subtle the resulting speculation. (p. 51)

The isolation of the conceptual identities 'drum' and 'hide' in the quoted story are examples of discrimination as defined by Suzuki. Such a discrimination by its very definition is 'relative'; it is never the whole picture. When discrimination moves in the wider field of meaning it will always come up against its limitations and its inability to measure up to the whole picture or the 'non-discriminating Prajñā' (p. 51) in which it is just a part.

Isolating conceptual identities, making discriminations that have a suggestion of closure when we interpret a text, opens the way for a reading practice that will inform and structure the individual poems and essays of my research. One isolated identity is undone by the following isolated identity, demonstrating its limitations. By becoming aware of an identity's limitations we become conscious of a wider meaning, which equally is a conceptual identity to be challenged. The process repeats endlessly: meaning endlessly evolving. Identities are formed at different levels, for example chapter, paragraph, book, archetype. Main theme identities can be undone by parts. External identities such as historical texts or natural history texts can challenge the primary text and vice versa.

### Poetry Developments

After applying this premise to texts such as news broadcasts and fiction I started to apply it to the natural



world. It was applied to relationships I saw occurring naturally but also internally to my own discriminations within poems. Here I will briefly attempt to hint at the kind of process I go through to develop my poems. This process is very loose, and is not always at work in the writing of some of these poems, although it all started here.

### **Brush and Sky**

Eye-line falls and fails  
to penetrate the brush  
a tangle of shadow  
a silence of cover.

Shifting  
the sky blooms  
birds scattering  
air flapping  
shatters the ears

in one leap  
brush  
and sky  
touch.

In 'Brush and Sky' the first stanza pulls our attention downwards towards the ground and fails to draw conclusions. Then climbing birds draw us skyward, highlighting not only the limitations of focusing downwards, but also the limitations of the binary opposition high/low. The birds cut across this opposition, opening up the idea of a seamless space without any demarcating discriminations. The birds have shown the limitations of walking in a human world of oppositions, the natural world undoing them.

### **Into the Wind**

Hawk threw her head  
into the wind, her eyes spread wide.  
She would break the wind's fury  
against her consuming  
wings.  
Her beak would cut  
open the wind's heart  
and plunge  
into its howling  
belly.

As hawk floated  
the wind followed.  
As hawk changed direction  
the wind obeyed,  
her wings stretching,

feathers settling  
where she dreamed the wind  
into being.

Hawk's heart beating,  
her breath wind,  
lighting the day  
she soars above  
lakes, fields, trees  
one thought  
expanding.

The first stanza of 'Into the Wind' shows hawk as an isolated being in opposition to the entity wind. In the second stanza hawk is complementary with the wind but still an isolated being. This separation hawk/wind is the limitation highlighted when these two stanzas are compared and contrasted. The final stanza attempts to overcome these limitations by developing a wider perspective. This new position is, I believe, hawk's world, where wind and hawk are indivisible.

### **Camel**

In a distant desert  
a lone speck crosses  
the horizon  
mumbling,  
"the desert  
has dignity  
moving through it".  
Sand drifts  
across humps,  
clinging,  
rolling on.  
Heat, like breath,  
rises, waves  
reaching skies.  
Camel's eyes  
large distant  
suns.

In 'Camel' the first section shows a conscious being moving through the desert. The second section is the same camel at one with its environment. The limitations of the first section are that camel is a contained consciousness moving in a larger environment. To address this the final section tries to show us camel's all encompassing consciousness is as large as the desert world it moves through.

What I am attempting to show with these succinct readings is that the premise I derived from Zen philosophy seems, when applied to the natural world, to lift us away from human discriminations and present

a picture of the natural world as a much more unthinkable place. This is I believe the world these animals actually exist within. This premise opens up a world of animal psychology few would consider exists.

### Critical repercussions

The poems and the reading premise were then brought into relationship with a number of philosophies of the natural world with which my poetry is engaging. The world of these animals offered an alternative space within which to analyse these texts. These analyses try to present an angle on what I perceive as dominant philosophies held about the natural world. The opening passage I quote from David Attenborough is written in a style obsessed with mechanical details. The social life of the birds described is left unvoiced and again lost to structural detail. My poem 'Scraggy Nest', which accompanies the analysis of Attenborough's passage, attempts to redress what I perceive as a biased and imbalanced description of the life of birds. The poem shows a bird adrift in obsession, denial, delusion, and then awareness. Such psychology is erased from Attenborough's text because, I would argue, the philosophy espoused here, evolutionary theory, cannot be sustained if an animal's psychology is given a greater degree of importance. This idea is followed by a sequence of poems that can be read around the theme of mind and body in complicated union, offering a challenge to popular evolutionary theories' attempt to silence an animal's psychological world.

The second passage, also from *The Life of Birds*, I critique again by attempting to take the argument of the importance of animal psychology a step further. My poem 'Air Vision', which accompanies the Attenborough passage, suggests that the complexity of a bird's psychology is complicated to the point of mysticism. It suggests that the contradictions that evolutionary theory cannot resolve become coherent if animal psychology is given a more dominant role in an animal's development. The poems following this section engage with this complicating of an animal's mental world.

The third critical piece looks at two aphorisms by Nietzsche. I wish through these pieces to suggest that what blinds us to the complexity of an animal's mind is that we fail to perceive a world that is not enclosed by the human ego. Although troubled, the dominating ego writes itself on to the environment in Nietzsche; this I believe is a practice common to most encounters people have with the natural world. My poem 'Into the Wind' shows a bird mentally affirming its being beyond the bounds of ego. This affirmation is reminiscent of the ultimate affirmation of the *Übermensch*, but free of the taints of human ego. The poems

after this piece can be seen to revolve around this idea of affirmation.

The next critical piece looks at the writer Marc Bekoff. I take up the theme of ego blinding us to the natural world and suggest that the ego's dominant response is to apply anthropomorphic projections onto animals. I attempt to analyse the ways in which anthropomorphism, far from actually connecting us with animals, puts barriers up between us and them. The poem 'Sparrowhawk' tries to suggest that Bekoff's claim that anthropomorphism is all we have is false and that it is possible to connect with an animal's world without projecting human ego traits on to them. The poems that follow continue to weave around the notion of anthropomorphism and alternatives.

After suggesting that animal psychology is more complex and philosophical than has been generally allowed, the next critical piece gives a brief reading of *Hamlet*. What comes out of this reading is the idea that Hamlet is trapped in the world of an ego under erasure, and eventually is liberated by a philosophy derived from the sparrow's world. My argument is that the idea of the natural world offering us a philosophy to learn from is hinted at by other writers throughout the literary tradition. The poems surrounding this critical piece try to make clear some of the philosophies animals inhabit.

My thesis attempts to establish a world of animal psychology only vaguely hinted at by other writers. It offers a fresh perspective from which to assess the dominant human world and hopefully to readdress the imbalance of power and disconnection between the human world and the natural world.

### Dominant Egos

The final set of essays looks at a group of nature poems, again poets I have continually engaged with throughout the development of my style and theories. These small essays try to isolate more accurately what I mean by human ego and how I believe the world of my poems differs in its outlook.

My reading of the Emily Dickinson poem attempts to show the narrator trapped in the world of ego. This particular ego is threatened and unstable, but because not relinquished, finds itself lost to a slightly mad tinge of which the narrator is aware and troubled. In the poems following this analysis, instability of ego is portrayed and questioned.

Next I look at the poet Ted Hughes, offering an analysis of his poem, 'Hawk in the Rain'. Again I argue his encounter with the hawk is distanced by the human ego's inability to step outside of the binary

oppositions it relies upon to negotiate its world. This reliance on binary oppositions separates the narrator from the hawk he seems desperate to connect with. My poem 'Circling' suggests a hawk's world is free of such cognitions and offers us a psychology not bound by such human ego considerations. The poems in this section play with the theme of relationships that Hughes' poem also has at its heart.

Next follows an analysis of a poem by Gerald Manley Hopkins. Again I find a relationship between a man and an animal, the kestrel of 'The Windhover'. My poem 'Launched' portrays a bird's world without any seeming reliance or even the possibility of some life external to its own. Hopkins' poem, I argue, draws in the notion of externality. He brings the idea of Christian grace, somehow granted from beyond, into his poem, and the transfiguring beauty of the kestrel is distanced and lost. The idea of an expansive world somehow contained but without a hint of any necessary externality is written throughout the poems that accompany my critique of Hopkins.

The next poet I look at is the Zen poet Takahashi. The expansive world I suggest dominates an animal's experience has a place here in Takahashi's poem. My poem 'Hawk's Flight', here alongside Takahashi's, shows an animal's world where ego is removed to the point of death, not even registering a trace. I here argue that Takahashi writes ego into this poem; the poem fails to speak without ego. This is not the restraining ego that the previous readings highlight, but a shifting fluid ego. The poems that follow offer a shifting world, but one without the traces of ego.

The final essay is on D.H. Lawrence's 'Snake', and it brings us full circle. Here the inability of ego to restrain itself from dominating its encounter with the natural world is shown through a series of manipulative moves the ego makes. The ego keeps stepping away from any acknowledgment that the otherworldly nature of the snake is also a part of the narrator's inner life. The accompanying poem, 'Flickers', attempts to show us the otherworldly as a world not tampered with by ego. It is a world existing on the fringes of consciousness, which remains unacknowledged in 'Snake'. The concluding poems move on the fringes of the otherworldly.

I hope through the following poems and essays to present a view of the natural world unvoiced in anything but the occasional natural world poem written by other poets. The world I present is one where animals are shown to exist within a philosophy and psychology that is as nuanced and complex as any human philosophy.

## **Openings**

### **Ripple**

Duck  
rippling  
waves

### **Agility**

Squirrel's agility  
becomes just tree

### **Blossom**

Among the trees, blossom  
raining through my head.  
Only with winter's violence  
can new futures burst  
the orchard with freshness.

### **Eagle**

One with the taste of blood,  
seeing his shadow cover the rocks  
or blind in light.

### **Endless Food**

Food tipped for sheep.  
Defying time and space  
they race  
to keep  
food plentiful.

### **Footsteps**

Footsteps on water,  
crow's trails through air,  
sunlight ripples.

### **Formless**

The formless  
image fish,  
rising bubbles  
through water,  
breaking cloudy skies.

### **Frozen**

Frog froze on a well trod  
path in woodland.  
World could consume  
with ease his squat body.  
He leapt with the thrill  
of overgrown grasses  
and unseen lives.

### **Gunshot**

dispersing  
into lives, a ball of birds  
rises and spreads  
into clear skies.

### **Hedge**

Clamouring  
trills in the hedge,  
habitat.

### **In the Open**

Stoat, in the open  
sun's flames  
burning his senses.  
Under cover  
dark cools his paws.  
Sun's flames dance  
day after day  
after day.

### **Ink**

The bat flittered  
the inky sky  
spelling its name  
like a Japanese  
calligrapher's brush  
capturing moonlight.

### **Licked**

Dog licked  
the world clean,  
grooming  
his place in it.  
Dog barked  
a clean dog  
is a clean world.

### **Light**

Crow  
on branch  
light  
as sky.

### **Movement**

He replied to the questions  
asked by the sea  
from the depths of his dark night.  
The sea moved.

### **Past Crow**

Walking  
past crow  
the line that marks danger  
is never drawn,  
he's gone.

### **Revealed**

Gull twisting  
in gale,  
the stronger the wind,  
the more revealed.

### **Steady Sun**

Sun sits steady above  
turning days.  
Kites circle high,  
display, gone,  
may never have existed.  
Sun turns the day.

### **Talk**

He told the fields, the trees, the streams,  
the mountains, anyone who would listen,  
this is who I am. No-one listened.  
His shadow mocked  
his midday words.

### **Turning**

gliding around trees, crow  
knows only straight flight  
out into light.

### **Defences**

Woodpecker  
surveys tree's defences  
sees through them  
hammers

### **Criss-crossing**

Lapwing  
criss-crossing paths  
in bare face of sky

### **Uncatchable**

Kestrel, air, uncatchable.

### **Trapped**

I have you trapped  
by tree's branches,  
says Blue tit.

### **Sky falls**

covers earth  
in forgetful snow.  
Earth waits.

## **Mind and Body: A passage from David Attenborough's *The Life of Birds*:**

Another species from these deposits, however, was most certainly even closer to a true bird than Archaeopteryx. It was about the size of a magpie. Its body was clothed in feathers and it had three clawed digits on each fore-limb. But the column of bones in the tail is much shorter and, most significantly of all, instead of jawbones and teeth it has a horny beak. This must have been a most significant advance towards efficient flight for the change not only reduced the animal's weight but brought its centre of gravity into its abdomen so that it would have no longer been nose-heavy in the air. It was called, in honour of the great Chinese sage, Confuciusornis. Several hundred specimens of this fascinating creature have now been found, some remarkably well preserved with a blackish haze around the bones showing the extent of the animal's feathered flesh. Some even have a pair of extremely long quills projecting from the tail, suggesting that these were males and that there were now major differences between sexes. The specimens occur in such numbers it is tempting to suppose that the birds lived in dense colonies.

More recent rocks in Australia and Spain, Argentina and North America have now yielded bird fossils of a still more advanced kind. These later species now had all the weight-saving adaptations that are characteristic of true birds. The long bony tail had been reduced to no more than a small triangle of fused bones at the back of the pelvis. The long bones of their wings and legs had become hollow, supported internally by criss-crossing struts. Many had a keel on their breastbone to which large wing muscles were attached. Their ribs had flanges that bound them together and gave their chest strength. (pp. 21-23)

### **Scraggy Nest**

Around his scraggy nest  
he wove an aura.  
Perfecting the last twigs  
admiration lifting his eye,  
she flew to him.  
He could not see  
her wholesome figure, puffed,  
her sharp eyes looking elsewhere,  
just her preened and oiled  
feathers, her flight touched with light.  
He lived his aura  
drawing her in.  
She turned aside  
twitching her tail  
leaving him alone  
in a scraggy nest,  
haphazard, disarrayed,  
and aware.

Evolution is one of the great achievements of human ingenuity. Its ability to meaningfully describe the profusion and diverse forms of life on our planet is remarkable. I look out of the office window: magpies hunt spiders on the roof of the building opposite. Across the road, blackberries will soon awaken on the field fringes, behind which a fox that has survived winter stalks the field edge on the hunt for voles. These strange and remarkable things of nature have a history; they have connection, they have survived.

Although evolutionary theory has changed our perception of the planet we inhabit, it has a downside.



It reduces complex creatures to a cause and effect system that sidelines any engagement with an animal's psychology. Osprey perform their yearly circuit migrating between English lakes and the warmth of Africa. There are relationships that make this a sustained and continuing pattern of behaviour. One osprey that started on this seemingly programmed journey only crossed the channel to Spain. He refused to continue with the remainder of his trip, feeling perfectly happy where he was. He *chose* to stay put, and we do not know why. Maybe his psychology overrode his behaviour patterns. He didn't react blindly, he assessed, calculated, predicted, settled on a thought. He saved himself hundreds of miles of danger navigating the seas and weather. He knew he couldn't be sure that the effort of migrating further was worth it. He decided he could survive better where he was than by following previous flights. He did something new.

In my poems I suggest a revision of evolution's mechanistic philosophy. I attempt to suggest that the natural world is as philosophically nuanced and as psychologically complex as our own. Evolution is successful as an historicist theory of nature, but it has failed to be so adept at dealing with projecting its insights into the future. It fails as a predictive theory. The population of even common garden birds can be threatened one year, and in another year flourish. We do not fully understand the circumstances that give rise to these fluctuations. I would argue that, like that of man, the complex psychology of animals has repercussions on evolution. They too can be psychologically unfit one year, and the next in perfect condition. A cold winter can make them more amenable to mates, or less. Their ideals can be high, rejecting many admirers, or low and indiscriminating, leading to matches seemingly unfit to an evolutionist. I would suggest that the impact of psychology on evolution will always prevent evolutionary theory from being a predictive science. We will never master another species' psychology, any more than we can fathom our own.

Under the circumstances of impending environmental catastrophe we need to be spending more of our intellectual and financial resources refining our ability to look at the future. Yesterday I walked into a main street bookshop which had a display table stacked high with books on evolution: books arguing why evolution is true, or attacks on religion using evolutionary theory as their basic rationale. These engagements with the theory of evolution alarm me. Not because we shouldn't study evolution, but because of the number of prominent minds locked in materialist analysis as if it offered a solution to the world's ills. We need to do something. We need to open our minds to the influence of the natural world and learn what to respect. There can be no miracle of science. We know what we are doing to the environment and we continue doing it. What is necessary for survival is a new psychology, a psychology that is open to being something new.

## **Tangled Nest**

Coot approached the hedge  
moving thousands of years into the past  
swimming into the voices of ancestors  
gathering twigs.  
Coot heard the voices again  
and repeated the trip.  
The centre of the pond rippled, changing.  
Each twig dragged across time  
created the pond.  
The tangled nest  
of new and old voices,  
births, unrepeatable.

### **Hawk's Shoreline**

Hawk stretched his wings over the sea. Wave after wave of thought washed away. He knew the emptiness filling the dark skies and darker seas. Then the horizon seemed to narrow, and then to narrow further, until he created shoreline with his mind.

He sat scanning the landscape. Everything was here. Perfection soothed his belly. He had found an indestructible dream. Indestructible because no-one was near, no-one knew.

The sun dropped and rose, and dropped and rose again. Hawk starved. In the emptiness of his mind a crystal formed. Now he saw the absence of others. Carrying his new sight he flew on and on.

Dear Rob

I'm a newcomer to birding, having been introduced to binoculars by a friend a few years ago. It's a contagious activity. When my RSPB membership was renewed this year it turned into a joint membership with my partner signing up. Then my mother, after hearing endless reports on birding trips, got the bug. My mother doesn't travel a great deal so when she discovered various web cams and web sites - including the RSPB's - it opened the world of birding to her. Here she discovered the sights and sounds of the Highlands and other remote places. Now thanks to the RSPB online she has embarked on a trip to Africa and hopefully back again alongside migrating osprey, their routes visible on Google earth. She has been thrilled by the birds making the trip and distressed at the number that don't survive. I wrote the following poem to try to describe how on the edge osprey live, a fish meal the difference between life or death.

### **Prey**

Osprey sees straight  
through himself.  
He doesn't see the waves tipping  
the water's edge of his eyeline.  
He doesn't see the wind rippling feathers.  
He doesn't see the sun rise  
high over him touching his back.

A silver shadow grows.  
It's something primeval.  
It's lunch.  
Falling from sky  
feathers tug the wind  
he sees the path under waves  
he sees sun beneath  
heading into death  
hitting the water, lost.

Rising into breath  
Osprey climbs  
heading for home  
clutching life  
one leaping soul  
drifting  
once more  
seeing nothing  
the flesh  
his catch  
a new sunrise.

Dear Mark

Logie has gone missing. The transmitter stopped sending signals before she left England. They fear she may have been hit by a car or similar accident. Her two chicks have set off in the wrong direction, clearly they have their mother's ability to navigate. One had set off over the North Sea but returned inland due to unstable weather. It would be frightening for anyone. The other is close to Ireland. Later they found one chick dead, it looks like it was starving and then hit by a truck. The other one that was last noted close to Ireland is also missing.

It is terribly sad news. I had the months of their journey to Africa filled. Now I'm lost. I've searched the internet for happier news and have found two osprey that made perfect trips in record time. I will look forward to following them home to England and see if they help stabilise the osprey situation here.

Mum

## **Sky and Sun**

Baby elephant opened its eyes,  
light shook its pupils.  
It moved its trunk,  
muscles tightened its senses,  
dust tickled its brain.  
It stood.  
From a height  
it measured the earth and stepped  
into a felt freefall,  
bumped into mother  
who corrected its sense  
of space.  
Turning,  
the sun surprised it,  
sky surprised it,  
lost in movement  
every breath, sky and sun.

## **Sitting**

Cormorant sat  
all afternoon  
drying her feathers.  
She contemplated the sun's  
dynamics, light waves hammering  
her chest, sounds  
thrilling her head.  
Density of air fluctuating  
dancing with each intake,  
expanding, contracting  
her heart beat.  
Every feather calculating  
wind turbulence,  
spreading  
patterns of skies across her body.  
All in a split second.  
Cormorant sat  
a universe surrounding.

## **Out of Clouds**

Day lost colour  
colour lost warmth  
warmth seemed somewhere else.  
Osprey knew fledglings  
followed summer  
across oceans  
and leapt to where  
they already existed.  
Storms threatened her flight,  
but sun grew stronger.  
Hunger threatened her stamina,  
but winds got warmer.  
Breaking out of clouds  
into clear skies that mirrored  
water, she saw her young  
alive here, and  
settled with the weather.  
By the time the heat looked  
like never-ending  
chicks jostled in the nest  
fed with a journey's beginning.

### **Sophistication: A second passage from David Attenborough's *The Life of Birds*:**

Now imagine such a creature using its abundant energy to pursue its prey, say a large insect. It might well rise on its hind legs, as the frilled lizard of Australia does when it wants to move at speed. That would leave its fore-legs free. If they were covered with long fibrous scales – proto-feathers – then stretching them out might lift the animal into the air and enable it to snatch at its prey with its mouth. Alternatively, if it was running to escape a bigger animal, then such a manoeuvre might take it out of range and into safety. So this warm-blooded reptile would have taken its first step towards flight. Disbelievers in this theory maintain that such an animal would not, when running on its hind legs and seeking to put on a turn of speed, suddenly stick out its forelegs since such an action would instantly slow it down. (p.18)

### **Air Vision**

Kestrel hovers.  
Air particles scatter  
through him.

Envious birds fall  
past. His eyes  
steady as daylight.

Sparrow puzzles.  
Kestrel's toying trickery  
nothing he couldn't bend  
his mind to. He asked Kestrel  
to reveal himself.

"Every fibre of body must balance  
on eyes in the wind, finding  
the charmed place  
in turmoil, flexing  
thoughts through earth."

Sparrow sees.  
Twig exists in mind. I sit in mind.  
Miracles like my nest are all mind.  
Why would I need to hover.

In pursuit of food maybe the predator saw a large insect rise out of reach, maybe saw a need to rise beyond itself to continue the chase. Mastery of this thought could lead to a consciousness of improved survival.

Alternatively this animal, running away from a predator itself, replayed that moment of seeing its own prey rise away from harm and reached into another's world for a route of escape. Maybe it saw beyond biology.

This scenario still relies on survival or biology as the dominant factor in a creature's evolution.

However, both domestic and wild animals engage in playful behaviour; they do things for pleasure. Why could these species not also experience life on the borders of the mystical? Thoughts could escape biological necessity leading to a speculative engagement with their world. If taking to the air is a break with biology, a vision lifting the creature out of its current reality, then it is a dream of something more.



The explanations of evolutionary leaps, such as an animal taking to the air, are locked in logical contradictions. Such problems as drag preventing an animal from reactively spreading its limbs into the wind only stand firm within purely mechanistic reasoning. If an animal's world is an interrelation of mind and body, unexplained and incomprehensible behaviours settle into a world view where the contradictions dissolve.

The mind's dexterity, not just physical reactions, could determine evolutionary change. An animal's vision could rest beyond the biological determinism our sciences impose on behaviour. Animals may inhabit a world devoid of biological laws or mental and physical limitations. They may live within a vision of what they are that contains what they could be.

## **Solitude**

Held in a fluid connection  
lambs turn their mothers'  
bellies and are forced  
into a cry  
breaking against sky.  
A gentle nudge sends  
memory running, fleeing  
boundaries, eyes know  
the solitude of the field.  
Attempting to correct  
the mistake, lamb calculates  
its limbs, standing on a grass edge  
spring sky will erase.

## **Rock Pool**

He jumped into the rock pool.  
In a splash  
he was walking on water,  
looking into the depths,  
seeing himself rippling  
the day's light.  
He seemed alive.  
The ripples subsided.

The wader's fragile body structure is deceptive, disguising its tremendous ability as a long distance traveller. Waders stand in the rich mudflats of the coast, feeding and converting food into fat to protect them against the rigours of flight. They consume food to such a degree that they can nearly double their summer body weight in necessary preparation for their winter journey. Even this is deceptive, as many of their internal organs, such as their guts and even their brains, shrink to allow more reserves of fat to sustain them through the gales and crosswinds.

They sat on the beach.  
She looked for high tide,  
it was lost.  
She looked for a flicker  
of wings trailing the foam,  
nothing.  
She stared and stared  
for the horizon's depth  
to tell how far out  
the sea lay waiting.  
All she could see  
were his eyes  
empty as the landscape  
they melted into.

Waders feed mainly on the seashores and mudflats around the coast. When their long travel begins they stay close to where food reserves can be found, in the safety of the shallow swells of water. Before any strenuous ocean crossing takes place the increase in fat reserves for the stamina to stay aloft is often accompanied by the development of a fresh set of feathers. Although their life is always localised around water, they have no capacity to drop and float on the waves and unlike other water birds cannot swim. They cross hundreds of miles of dangerous sea without a break, many not surviving the turbulent winds.

Blue sky ripped through the day  
the foaming waves breaking  
against the bow  
parting seas.  
Sails flapped like a rent curtain.  
The mast stood firm, a distorted  
wooden cross sailing through history.  
Nets were cast for humanity.  
When they returned empty of miracles  
the message was clear.

## **Poised**

Trunk poised  
he lifted his leg  
inching towards the  
knowledge he had  
to catch the herd.  
Sunlight loosened his mind.  
Flying with a flock  
of birds, winging through skies,  
body dissolving  
in clouds, drifting,  
until his foot called,  
he focused,  
inching his leg higher,  
hearing his mother  
had moved, then  
with the ants  
criss-crossing the dirt, frenzied,  
again focused,  
leg high as necessary,  
three legs, troubled balance,  
waterfowl dipping  
he rolled across water,  
coolness refreshing him, weightlessness  
charming him.  
He felt his mother's trunk nudge  
him falling into a step  
skipping round to catch the herd.

## **Spooked**

Jay spooked,  
image of man breaking  
into sight  
larger than world.  
It flew across fields,  
man's stride long enough  
to pursue.  
It flew over hillsides,  
man's reach still long enough.  
By the time  
Jay looked back  
the speck that was man  
had dissolved  
into countryside  
like a raindrop.  
Jay landed into forgetfulness,  
a world away from anyone.

## **Calf**

The stars burnt,  
nostrils flared damp breath  
putting them out.  
Cow felt nothing.  
The hillside sloped  
a vertical drop into space.  
She floated  
with no flicker of concern.  
The earth circled  
making her dizzy  
her body motionless  
alone in dark.  
The calf, her very centre  
lay without breath.  
Her mind a vacuum  
no-one hearing the distant  
moan that would  
lift him on his feet  
to be given the milk he needed,  
to be given the life  
she needed.

**Affirmation: A passage from Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*:**

310

*Will and Wave.* – How greedily this wave approaches, as if it were after something! How it crawls with terrifying haste into the inmost nooks of this labyrinthine cliff! It seems that it is trying to anticipate someone; it seems that something of value, high value, must be hidden there. – And now it comes back, a little more slowly but still quite white with excitement; is it disappointed? Has it found what it looked for? Does it pretend to be disappointed? – But already another wave is approaching, still more greedily and savagely than the first, and its soul, too, seems full of secrets and the lust to dig up treasures. Thus live waves – thus live we who will – more I shall not say.

So? You mistrust me? You are angry with me, you beautiful monsters? Are you afraid that I might give away your whole secret? Well, be angry with me, arch your dangerous green bodies as high as you can, raise a wall between me and the sun – as you are doing now! Truly, even now nothing remains of the world but green twilight and green lightning. Carry on as you like, roaring with overweening pleasure and malice – or dive again, pouring your emeralds down into the deepest depths, and throw your infinite white mane of foam and spray over them: Everything suits me, for everything suits you so well, and I am so well-disposed toward you for everything; how could I think of betraying you? For – mark my word! – I know you and your secret, I know your kind! You and I – are we not of one kind? – You and I – do we not have *one secret*?

**A passage from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*:**

196

Countless dark bodies are to be inferred near the sun – and we shall never see them. Among ourselves, this is a parable; and a psychologist of morals reads the whole writing of the stars only as a parable – and sign-language which can be used to bury much in silence.

In the passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche applies himself critically to the very form of writing he delights in so much, parable. Parables abound in all his works not to mention their dominance in *Zarathustra*. Is there a sense in which he has caught himself 'burying much in silence'?

What is buried in silence in the aphorism *Will and Wave* is the natural world. By removing some of the rhetorical devices that flood this passage, that time and again thrust parable on us, we start to hear the waves speak:

Wave approaches, crawls with haste into the inmost nooks of this cliff! To anticipate something of value, high value, hidden. – Back, slowly, white with excitement; already another wave is approaching, more greedily and savagely than the first, full of secrets.

Sadly, however, what the waves say to Nietzsche is lost to us forever, drowned by the need to speak for ego. So why this act of silencing the natural world?

For the death of God to be announced any world beyond the bounds of the willing ego must be a dream. What is required of ego is a land freely open to the products of symbol and metaphor, a land subject to the human psyche and nothing more. Only then can man create his world. Only in a world liberated of any

meaning but man's, can ego destroy and create values at will. Parable destroys the natural world to make space for another ego-born reality in its place. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche writes that 'it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*'; only as a blank page on which to write parables is the world justified. In its own right the natural world is denied any autonomy, and any meaning.

Nietzsche is aware, as the criticism of parable suggests, that he is silencing one thing in order to say another. Of all writers Nietzsche comes closest to speaking the natural world, he just has other priorities. With environmental crisis threatening the future, we now need to speak with a fresh set of priorities. It seems necessary to see the world as more than man's creation. If ego can be relinquished, even for a moment, the world of hawk speaks. This is a world where the separation ego sets up between it and the natural world breaks down. We then find ourselves inhabiting a philosophically complex world that is far from human, but still our world. A world not created, but also created. A world where within and without lose themselves in an affirmation worthy of the *Übermensch* – until ego again encloses us in separation from this speaking world, and we dream ourselves again.

### **Into the Wind**

Hawk threw her head  
into the wind, her eyes spread wide.  
She would break the wind's fury  
against her consuming  
wings.  
Her beak would cut  
open the wind's heart  
and plunge  
into its howling belly.

As hawk floated  
the wind followed.  
As hawk changed direction  
the wind obeyed,  
her wings stretching,  
feathers settling  
where she dreamed the wind  
into being.

Hawk's heart beating,  
her breath wind,  
lighting the day  
she soars above  
lakes, fields, trees  
one thought  
expanding.



## **Paint**

He looked skyward painting sun breaking apart the night sky. He painted trees into blossom. He sketched landscapes green and blue seas of birth. He drew everything into being with a flourish of life curving colours around the world.

Then he sat and stared. The colours seemed faded. In his head brightness burned like a hundred stars colliding. He had failed. He slept.

In his dreams all the colours of the universe assembled, arranging themselves on a palette. Everything in his hand, he woke and painted, worlds resurrecting with his eyes.

## **Creature of Sands**

Once a statue stood  
defying the planet.

Arms lifted skies,  
eyes pierced earth's crust,  
feet firm astride  
landscape that now  
battered and tore  
its symmetry. One eye  
sand eroded. An arm  
amputated by wind  
thrown elbow first  
thirty feet from its conception.  
Desert rose  
to overwhelm  
licking, devouring, corroding.

A figure stands in the desert.  
Sand and man sculptors, fused.  
Landscape writing  
an unforeseen form,  
a creature of sands,  
a traveller through seasons  
whose story is a map  
of cracks and movements,  
sun rolling, measuring  
sand and blood.

## **Lightning**

The rain taps the window. Absentmindedly I tap the windowsill, watching the storm gather. In a build up of cloud cover, the sun hides. Faces, featureless, pass by. A strip of lightning opens the sky. Life, a shadow. Thunder follows. The storm stretches closer. I look at the clock, hands frozen. Again a lightning strike, thunder throwing itself after. So much energy lighting skies. In the act of closing the curtains to turn in, it breaks over me and throws me into air.

Hours unfold, sky separates  
clouds prickle, lightning cutting through time,  
unfurling slowly, landscape growing  
stretching into a fiery arc, tree tips burning.  
A life long as the waters it rolls along,  
alive in trailing feedback, rumbling away years.  
Fingers run wide, light, touching, reaching  
into the age of hillsides.  
Delicate warmth, suspended,  
an eternity against a dark sky  
standing stark as a river of starlight  
light years long.  
Every particle burns itself into fullness  
holds for a lifetime and then undoes  
scattering in all directions  
leaping into dark, becoming  
the answer to the dark.

He looks like he's been struck by lightning. He steps as if streaking through sky. The cloudy weather, the dark skies, a fiery balance. He smells the tense air, heading up the main street. I haven't thought about him for years. He stops, and speaks me into the air, saying, "I have never seen through a smile before". As I walk away Spring turns, sun breaks across the street.

### **Between Earth and Heaven**

Buzzard crosses grassland,  
crosses hedges, streams,  
comes to rest  
branch barely flexing.

Eye sharp with the hunt,  
my strides alert him,  
without breath  
he takes to air.

He glides  
between earth and heaven  
between the gun and the rabbit,  
between the fox and the vole.  
His eye never settles  
adjusts his flight  
circles.

## **Mind and Flesh**

Ground shifts  
beneath his skull.  
In his eyes a horse forms.  
No god has mind  
for this flesh,  
muscularity born  
before him. Majesty  
reigns, its strength  
an idea of world.  
Its breath rolling,  
recurring forever, penetrating  
even madness.

The horse raises  
its front legs, reaching  
into skies, nothing beyond  
its horizon. The cabman  
beats the beast  
for its desire. The horse  
breaking at its bonds,  
is beaten again.

Nietzsche crosses the street,  
throws his arms around life.  
His body will deflect the blows  
and transfigure them. Broken  
he falls to the ground  
still embracing,  
at the mercy  
of the breath of man and beast.  
Beneath his idea  
they see fear leave  
his mind  
and call for the doctor.

**Anthropomorphism:** The following passages enclosed in quotation marks are taken from a book by Marc Bekoff called *The Emotional Lives of Animals*. Marc Bekoff is here described as ‘one of the foremost experts on animal emotions.’ He is professor emeritus of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

‘Why are we so special?... It’s my hope that the study of human-animal interaction will put an end to the useless dualisms such as “we” versus “them”... “higher” animals versus “lower”.’ (p. 21)

The project is to dissolve dualisms that separate human from non-human animals. Whatever those dualisms are they are unproductive. They lead to a categorisation of the non-human animals as lower, which flatters our egos and separates us from them.

‘As humans who study other animals, we can only describe and explain their behaviour using words with which we are familiar from a human-centred point of view.’ (p. 123)

Due to the restriction of only knowing and working within a human world, our words never inhabit an animal’s world. We can only work with what is familiar, our own culture-based language.

‘So when I try to figure out what’s happening in a dog’s head, I have to be anthropomorphic, but I try to do it from a dog-centred point of view.’ (p. 123)

A dog-centred point of view, from a perspective limited to the world we call human, can only be what we think our own world is like, removing arbitrarily certain characteristics we assume a dog not to possess. We separate what makes humans special from what is dog, and fail to dissolve the dualisms.

‘If we decide against using anthropomorphic language, we might as well pack up and go home because we have no alternatives... Anthropomorphism is inevitable and involuntary.’ (p. 124)

If we are locked in a human world separate to animals, then it is only by imposing our own characteristics

onto them that we are able to see them.

‘zookeepers’ anthropomorphic accounts proved to be “an intuitive and practical guide to behaviour” enabling them to best interact with the captive chimpanzees for whom they cared.’ (p. 124)

Here, in caring for captive chimpanzees, anthropomorphism seems to offer a way of understanding them and of helping us act in their best interests. The problem entailed in treating chimpanzees this way is that we turn them into distorted humans, setting up distinctions between what we consider human and non-human. The very need to step closer to their world in this fashion betrays the separation inherent in anthropomorphic reasoning.

‘When we anthropomorphise, we’re doing what comes naturally... It’s part of who we are.’ (p. 125)

Projecting human traits is easy and normal. Does that make it right, truthful, helpful? Who benefits?

‘Anthropomorphising endures because it is a necessity... We must make every attempt to maintain the animal’s point of view.’ (p. 125)

Attempting to infer an animal’s point of view means stepping outside the boundaries of what is human. The act of anthropomorphising, of projecting our consciousness into another animal’s world, makes stepping outside of that consciousness an impossibility. To affirm the animal’s distinctness a divide must be created between us and them, which undermines Bekoff’s use of anthropomorphism to connect with the animal world.

‘I can feel what animals are feeling and that I’m not projecting my own, unrelated emotions. My feelings actually know what’s going on inside the animal, and this emotional empathy seems to be innate.’ (p. 128)

This move from thought to emotions looks like an attempt to side step the issue of language, an attempt to remove the barrier between humans and animals that language creates. Just because empathy is innate

doesn't make it accurate. It seems humans have a difficult time assessing their own emotions, let alone accurately reading those of another species. Emotional empathy is still anthropomorphism; it still relies on separating the language that is dominant in the human world from the world we suppose an animal inhabits. Clearly these anthropomorphic tactics continually draw on arbitrary separations between what we consider human and what we consider non-human.

If we concentrate on an animal's behaviour in comparison to a human's it is easy to view their world as a much simpler world, as an uncultured version of our own. If we imagine ourselves living their life we fail to take account of the vast differences in how we perceive our worlds. To assume that removing those elements of our own world that are not present in an animal's brings us closer to them is a mistaken and damaging hypothesis. In the very removal of the things absent in an animal's world we are dividing us from them, we are making judgments on what it means to be a non-human animal from a human's perspective. This level of discrimination always present when anthropomorphising is at the human ego level and this is the key problem with such projections.

People who criticise anthropomorphic practice do not believe animals have ego constructions as part of their psyches, a perspective I share. I disagree, however, with the undervaluing of animal life that often accompanies such criticism.

I believe animals inhabit the same world as humans, or more precisely a more complex world that the human ego protects us from. The undervaluing of animal life is the cost of an overvaluation of human ego. Zen Buddhists have long critiqued this view of ego as the cause of suffering and it is the planet and its creatures that suffer. If we can step into a world outside of ego we start to glimpse the natural world, a world more philosophically complex, psychologically nuanced than our ego-driven reality.

### **Sparrowhawk**

Wind rides the hillside  
wrestles tree tops  
dips between houses  
shakes dust along the road.  
Sparrowhawk, wind in his heart  
etches the hill line  
touches the light between trees  
skates the shadows  
of the footpath  
rises and drops over houses



outplaying sun, gone.  
Air settles.  
Wind nowhere.

The only thing that is personified in this poem is the wind. Sparrowhawk cuts through this personification, living in a world where nothing is fixed, where within this world's fluidity he is creator. Not even the sun is a fixed point in his mind and he flies through this world with complete ease. No human could exist in this environment, which is why anthropomorphism is so comforting. We have an ego to protect us from this reality, an ego that hides this world we share with Sparrowhawk. Encountering the world of Sparrowhawk, can we do anything but respect creatures that inhabit similar worlds?

## **Lost**

Sheep graze, lost, warm  
under clear skies  
a full field.  
Spooked, a stray sheep  
trips, runs, turns,  
losing itself  
again in the flock  
and the warmth  
clear heads grazing.

## **Blind**

Waving the prettiest pheasant tail,  
spread like an exotic reed bed,  
it attracts all, creating patterns of awareness.  
A human snaps into view,  
the tail a beacon signalling armies.  
Bury it in the undergrowth  
out of sight, no-one harms a hedge,  
I'm gone.

\*

Wriggling my pink body over earth,  
hugging ground like darkness.  
The closer I squeeze the earth  
the more invisible I am  
I become just earth,  
a place of blindness,  
such empty taste,  
why look my way?

Bird, eyes sharp as metallic suns  
daggered its beak into flesh,  
freshness filled its belly.

\*

Circling the bowl I swim endless worlds,  
past the sunken castle, unreal, a showpiece.  
Space beyond, shadows, elongating,  
I'm safe as my castle.  
Then two small eyes grow, bodiless,  
ever larger, peering from beyond my universe,  
an octopus,  
entering my world  
swimming everywhere on every ripple,  
there's no hiding place.  
I look straight, accustoming myself  
until seeing my own eyes  
stare back at me  
I again roam an endless space.

## **Rumbles**

Sky rumbles.  
Pig hears his belly.  
Shadow floats over trough.  
Pig squeals, runs for food.  
Pig behind hears  
himself squeal,  
runs toward his voice  
other squeals join,  
one voice growing louder  
light breaks, shadows disappearing  
voice quietens  
sky rumbles.

## **Wall of Books**

I ordered books along that wire to the world, the internet. I placed them, in the colours of the spectrum, along the oak bookcases lining the walls of my home. I did not read them. These little pockets of future coloured the walls like multicoloured bricks. Inside, I knew books were disappearing in the world, slowly sapping the streets of their lights. So I stacked. When I had filled the walls with rainbows of ideas, I owned more than a lifetime of thoughts. Even if the whole world disappeared, I was safe, the world was safe. I sat and looked at future life spread into every corner of sight, stable as brickwork. Everything was here locked in a house that no longer needed the world. Outside

Jay sensed summer  
losing light.  
Morsels of warmth-encased acorns  
started to drop.  
Jay collected and buried.  
He had no taste of the bounty,  
storing summer, keeping summer warm.  
The weather turned.

Oaks threw their long days away  
dropping, bouncing, rolling.  
Jay buried them, safe.  
Weather turned again.

Acorns gone  
Jay now knows only a memory of summer exists,  
he remembers everything,  
he digs up morsel by morsel  
and every bite fills his belly  
with lost light.  
Beneath the trees  
summer lives.

With the world gone, I gazed along the bookcases, leaping from one pattern to the next. Rows of multicoloured spines caught every area of eye. I started to read furiously, feeding my isolation with other worlds. Slowly the books got harder to decipher, pages turning more and more slowly. Just the odd word at first, then sentences, chapters, then whole collections of books. Had I bought the wrong ones, had I not checked before I stored? They seemed to contain mad marks without meaning. Then books melted, becoming a wall of flaming colour. I was trapped. The wall faded, sight failed, darkness took over. Outside flowers broke to singing birds.

## **Belly**

Hog's belly hurt,  
sun high  
day full  
belly empty  
lost.  
Gate flings wide  
his meal scatters.  
Every pig adores food,  
the fighting  
the bites  
the love  
across the world,  
no recrimination  
no revenge  
one minute food and frenzy  
the next  
feeling sun  
echo mind.

## **Beneath Skies**

Moving, spreading, clouds gain skies  
fill air, dark in threat,  
ground below insecure.  
Sheep stop grazing, huddle, still,  
only their coats ripple,  
as grass around earth, wind  
curving the hillside.  
Minds blank, dark,  
hoping windy skies  
find no anchorage and pass  
without the crash of weather  
that would rattle  
their heads  
and unbalance  
the earth.  
Time lost in skies  
possibilities ending  
here, now, in the rainfall  
catching all  
out in the open.

**Philosophies:** The following notes offer a possible reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Indented passages are from Hamlet's speeches in the *Complete Oxford Shakespeare*.

So excellent a king, that was to this  
Hyperion to a satyr. (Act 1 Scene 2 lines 139-140)

My father's brother, but no more like my father  
Than I to Hercules. (Act 1 Scene 2 lines 152-153)

Ideals like these are such a contrast to the everyday ego that ego is deflated and almost erased by their glare. By this deflation his father's image overwrites Hamlet's own. The world of myth elevates and the ordinary world is lost. The world of his father's ideal is a mythical battle of archetypal proportions; how can a son live up to this? Indeed a son's ego can never stand up to the onslaught of such a battle and struggles to exist in a world of such height.

Remember thee?  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,  
That youth and observation copied there,  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain  
Unmixed with baser matter. (Act 1 Scene 5 lines 97-104)

Is it any wonder his father's ideal haunts him? And the ideal is threatened by foul play so can neither be maintained nor laid to rest. Hamlet's erased ego cannot keep the ideal father alive and so has to avenge the disturbance to his father's memory. He reads the erasure of his ego as his own choice, as his own act.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy. (Act 1 Scene 5 lines 168-169)

As I perchance hereafter shall think meet  
To put an antic disposition on. (Act 1 Scene 5 lines 172-173)

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite  
That ever I was born to set it right! (Act 1 Scene 5 lines 189-190)

He is claiming control over the shocks to his personality and the instability of his circumstances. The world of his father's memory and death is a larger world than Hamlet's deflated ego can cope with; he is at the



mercy of circumstances, and his great flights of soliloquy enact the erasure of ego and loss of control.

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world! (Act 1 Scene 2 lines 133-134)

I have of late – but  
Wherefore I know not – lost all my mirth, forgone all  
Custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily with  
My disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems  
To me a sterile promontory. (Act 2 Scene 2 lines 293-299)

Ego erased by the idealised father, the disturbed and broken ideal where the Satyr has destroyed Hyperion, has broken and disturbed Hamlet's world and any connection with a world exterior to his prison house of ego. It is an ego he can never relinquish because in the very perceived act of erasure he is shackled to the thing being erased.

Why, what an ass am I? Ay, sure, this is most brave,  
That I, the son of the dear murdered,  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words  
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,  
A scullion! (Act 2 Scene 2 lines 584-589)

Hamlet's self-castigation at his delay in revenging his father's murder seems centred around there being no cultured world worthy enough to act for. The enclosed world Hamlet struggles through, the bad dreams, make action meaningless. Ego is drained of the incentive to raise itself to act. The natural world is non-existent, his connection to any external environment fragile, phantom.

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew. (Act 1 Scene 2 lines 129-130)

To be, or not to be; that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And, by opposing, end them... to say we end  
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to... Who would these fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life. (Act 3 Scene 1 lines 58-79)

Hamlet's question: to be one with the world or to be divided in mind? To an erased mind the last thread of

reality is physicality; everything is embedded in the body. To exist or not to exist is a state of a body tortured. Even the mortality of the body offers no certainty of escape from ghostly thoughts. There is no remedy for a haunted mind, a mind lost to ghosts, leaving the reality of his empty body, which he is divided against.

A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm...  
Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar. (Act 4 Scene 3  
lines 27-31)

Hamlet strips away politics, culture, and everything that would be derived from ego. To him there is nothing left but a meaningless food chain where fish and king are equal in the cycle of bodily function. Mind and body ruptured.

At this point Hamlet is ushered off to England. On his return his state of mind seems transformed.

Shakespeare's play offers no background for the how or why of Hamlet's transformation. The following speech implies a dramatically different attitude to his circumstances.

There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. (Act 5 Scene 2 lines 165-168)

What if, when ego stability is relinquished, released, a philosophical world opens itself? A philosophy where human ego is still undone but we are left in a world which remains worthy of a Hamlet soliloquy, glimpsing a world, a fulfilled world beyond ego? His disconnection from the environment is here repaired by a knowledge explicit in the sparrow's world. Hamlet gains the knowledge that being anchored in the present, and in mortality and flesh, releases a fluidity of mind, an adaptability free from an overly restraining consciousness, a world not out of joint but where mind and action are one, self melted into world like dew settling, divisions evaporating.

### **Shifting Suns**

The lake, the tangled nest,  
the wind, and sun within  
grew inhospitable and out of joint.  
Osprey needed to fix the sun,  
so flew. Each day she left  
memory behind.  
The sun became bigger

clearer, purer. It slowly  
adjusted until it stopped  
rolling and hung  
in her head, immovable.  
She landed.  
The lake teemed.  
Warm wind surrounded.  
A perfect nest site  
for her young, they too,  
born shifting suns.

## **Ghost**

I walk the misty reservoir keeping to its edges. Sky mirrors the dark fabric of rippling waves. I look to the path at scattering leaves. I barely notice the sun breaking, before trees drop again into the distance. A cold wind shakes the leaves, shakes the water's surface. I stare at my feet, warm in my thick coat and woollen hat. I am lost in a chill of a dream. For an instant the sun falters. I stop dead. A vision rises from my steps.

Wind tears the trees  
back, a laughing head,  
hair electrified.  
Sun breaks sky  
a fiery iris  
falling through space.  
Star's cold touches the water  
lighting waves, lifting like  
chattering teeth  
punctuating the air.  
Hillsides roll  
a body curve  
that throws the world  
on its side.  
I touch a tree  
fall through its roots  
into ground  
turning,  
turning.

"You look white, are you alright?"

"I've just seen a ghost."

"You mean someone you've not seen for ages?"

"No, no-one I know, but a vision of a figure rising out of the reservoir."

"A vision?"

"The whole landscape lifted into a distorted, mad figure, like this world was broken open and the laughter of other worlds took over."

"What?"

"I was walking the reservoir as I've done a hundred times before, not really paying attention, and another world, a spirit world, erupted and unwove the fabric of reality. A laughing head roared above the waters and out into space, taking me with it."

"Here give me your coat. You need to sit down."

"I can never walk my reservoir again."

## **Feeder**

Squirrel feeds.  
Blue tit's head full of nuts  
dodges the grey tail  
and body gripped firm.  
Blue tit, head full of nuts  
knows nothing else,  
dodges a world  
empty and nutless.

## **Song**

Robin sang.  
It ran through him  
that if he sang loud,  
if all joined in a great chorus,  
he could hold summer to him.  
He sang.  
A feeling spread  
that his world,  
all his surroundings,  
had the changing colour  
of his mind.

## **Caterpillar**

knew nothing  
of the whole afternoon  
it took to cross the road.  
Every step a fresh idea  
replacing every other idea,  
building as the body curled,  
expanding as light moved,  
rising as the temperature eased,  
all an adventure in mind.  
A landscape beyond  
the possibility of a road  
or an afternoon.

## **Camel**

In a distant desert  
a lone speck crosses  
the horizon  
mumbling,  
“the desert  
has dignity  
moving through it”.  
Sand drifts  
across humps,  
clinging,  
rolling on.  
Heat, like breath,  
rises, waves  
reaching skies.  
Camel’s eyes  
large distant  
suns.



### **Ego Instability: Emily Dickinson's Poem 328**

A Bird came down the Walk –  
He did not know I saw –  
He bit an Angleworm in halves  
And ate the fellow, raw,

There are two anthropomorphic words in this encounter with a bird. It is initially described as coming down the 'walk'. At first glance it may seem hard to see how the walk and the bird are entwined by anthropomorphism. I would argue they are, the bird sauntering down a human walk. I believe the second anthropomorphic word justifies this reading. 'Fellow', the OED tells us, can mean 'a companion, associate, comrade' - words with deeply human connotations. Instantly we see how the humanised semantic meanings are at odds with the bird's behaviour, a very non-human behaviour, of biting the fellow in halves and eating him raw.

And then he drank a Dew  
From a convenient Grass –  
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall  
To let a Beetle pass –

The anthropomorphism continues, as the bird takes a 'convenient' drink and steps politely aside to let a beetle pass. Again the description and the behaviour wrestle disjunctively, as no human could snatch a drink of dew from a grass blade, and a human would not step politely out of the way of a beetle. The human behaviour described as belonging to the bird is not secure. The anthropomorphism is thwarted by the actual bird's behaviour. The two worlds, human and bird, do not map onto each other.

He glanced with rapid eyes  
That hurried all around-  
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought-  
He stirred his Velvet head

The anthropomorphism continues to be troubled, the 'hurried' eyes turning into 'beads', and his head 'velvet'. The bird is becoming a doll, the human personality dissolving, and with this transformation the connection with the bird's world becomes stranger.

Like one in danger, Cautious,  
I offered him a Crumb  
And he unrolled his feathers

And rowed him softer home-

Who is in 'danger', the speaker or the bird? The anthropomorphism builds with the bird rowing 'home'. I would argue that at this point in the poem the speaker's danger is that they are self-conscious of the lack of connection with this creature, of how the human world is thwarted and made unreal by this encounter. No attempt at writing the human world onto this bird has stayed in place; readjustment has been continually needed. It is this process of readjustment of how the bird is perceived that has led to the consciousness that the traits of human ego, in their projections, are not absolute; they float free of any definite anchorage in an external world.

Than Oars divide the Ocean  
Too silver for a seam-  
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon  
Leap, plashless as they swim.

Here the anthropomorphism continues as if we have no other way of writing the world. With the rowing 'oars' we drift into complete fantasy, where the distinctions of the human ego are lost, the air becoming 'ocean', where butterflies 'swim'. The inability to connect with the bird's world seems to have left a doubt of there being any real world to connect with. Once ego distinctions have been shown to be fantasy but you have been unable to glimpse a world outside of ego, all connection is lost to fantasy; the world dissolves.

### **Golden Leaves**

I was travelling  
down a road  
of many trees, and  
every leaf  
that passed  
from sight  
was a thought  
stripped away,  
until I was just  
a man travelling  
down a road  
lined with golden  
leaves.

If you recognise the unreality of ego but continue to cling to it you are lost to fantasy. But if you allow ego discriminations to flow past unattached you connect to a world on the other side of ego.

## **Orchard**

I was born in the spring. My parents say they used to sit me in the orchard where they could see the blossom in my eyes. My whole body wriggled with the bursting fruits within. Every way I looked seemed filled with joy. For them the orchard was life.

Trees shake in spring,  
music and laughter,  
right to the tips of branches.

When winter descended I became troubled. I feared sleep. I took no enjoyment in feeding. It was like I knew the pain of the orchard, as if all colours were stripped away. The snows dropped over the huddled trees and I rested uneasy. Would I awake? I had no strength to thaw the landscape. I waited.

Trees standing,  
holding the whole weight  
of a winter day.

Because I can see the summer's movements, because I share its inner patterns, I tend the orchard. When the winter looks hard into me, I feel the orchard's hopefulness. I am the first to sense spring, seeing the colours in my eyes cover the trees. Today I know the fruit. I sense it passing. I see a new orchard here in my hand.

Trees touch sun  
in summer.  
Find earth  
in winter.  
They grow  
in all directions.

## **Shifting Sands**

She dreams moonlight  
bordering hills  
throwing light around darkness.  
She dreams rivers  
wasting stone away  
unseen.  
She dreams owls  
eyes wider than voles  
clutching beating muscles  
breathless.  
A vixen's cry  
cuts through open land.  
She moves, eyes flickering.

\*

Daylight enters her  
sleeping head.  
Dreams lift and drop  
her breathing chest.  
The sun rises over her,  
starlings display,  
trees shake in wind.  
The beach she slides over,  
molten glass in sunlight,  
seas twisting, turning.  
She dreams wakefulness.  
She dreams.

\*

Awakened dreams.  
She traces sun  
rolling east to west,  
moon gliding across  
rotating skies.  
Night, day, slips,  
reflected, in sea's depth, wave  
over wave,  
gazing.  
One look a world exists,  
next evaporates in shifting sands.  
Jumping through folds  
in space and time,  
a grain of sand  
whirling.

## **Brush and Sky**

Eye-line falls and fails  
to penetrate the brush  
a tangle of shadow  
a silence of cover.

Shifting  
the sky blooms  
birds scattering  
air flapping  
shatters the ears

in one leap  
brush  
and sky  
touch.

## **Calm**

Calm sits over the reservoir  
leaves barely tremble  
water rolls into stillness.  
Duck moves easy, slow  
a quiet paddle  
through mind  
leaving day undisturbed.

### **Feathers Stood Tall**

Six eggs  
six worlds  
warmed under tail feathers.  
Her head full of the light of day,  
the stars of night.  
She looked around.  
It was all hers.  
If anyone came near  
her feathers stood tall,  
not mortal fear  
but a cloud passing,  
over sun, over stars.  
Eggs opening  
that too a shadow.  
She sat on worlds  
and that occupied the full stretch  
of time and space.

## **Seed**

suspended  
in the damp dark.  
Where?  
What?  
Fibres stretch  
waiting to unfurl and fill space.  
They want to be fields,  
they want to be woodland,  
they want to break out in colours.  
Suspended in the glory  
of all landscapes, unknowing,  
instinctively edging  
out into light,  
hillside changes.



### Relationships: 'The Hawk in the Rain' by Ted Hughes

drown in the drumming ploughland  
                    swallowing of the earth's mouth

The entrance to the earth is dragging Hughes downwards into the earth's body. The earth reminds him he is earth bound; he is being dragged into the recognition of his own body and its limitations. Swallowed like a 'morsel' of food, his own body seems disconnected to him and undervalued. He has to drag himself through the clay, which highlights his physical limitations. The effort, the slowness, remind him of his human body in contrast to the hawk 'effortlessly at height'.

wings hold all creation

His awareness is pricked by the presence of the hawk. Everything that has captured his attention is sharpened and stark. All of this creation is drawn out by the hawk's magnificence and held by the hawk's wings.

## Steady as a hallucination

A hallucination is a product of the human mind. The hawk, or more importantly, what Hughes makes of the hawk is Hughes' creation. The division of high and low, hawk above, Hughes trapped on earth, is built out of Hughes' psychology.

point of will that polestars

‘Point of will’ because the hawk has mastery of the sky; it merely wills itself free of the earth’s clutching. It ‘polestars’ because it is the point in the sky from which Hughes’ position, as a creature of earth, is circumscribed. It dominates Hughes’ moment, as alien and out of reach, even beyond Hughes’ mental grasp.

## Fulcrum of violence

‘Fulcrum’ because Hughes’ mind pivots between hawk’s high and Hughes’ low, between sky and earth, human and bird. Its violence seizes Hughes’ mind which is torn between these opposites, unable to reconcile them, unable to master them. Finally, with Hughes below struggling through earth and bird master of skies, hawk remains out of the reach of Hughes’ mind.

meets the weather

Hughes’ only connection, his only similarity with the hawk, is when the hawk dies. At that point it too will succumb to the earth. The use of the word ‘weather’ here is metaphoric as well as literal. The use of metaphor highlights once more how the description of the hawk crashing into ‘the mire of the land’ is a product of Hughes’ mind. Hughes here attempts to free his mind, which is torn between bird and man, high and low, by their shared fate in death, a physical limitation that in Hughes’ world binds them both.

Smashed [...] with the mire of the land.

Hughes’ poem is structured around high and low and the various permutations of that opposition. I would argue that this kind of distinction building is a product of ego. It holds the full cognition of the natural world at a distance to protect us from its full glare. As much as Hughes may manipulate this opposition he seems unable to break away from it. This is the distance between him and hawk. The only place he can connect with hawk is in the clay grave at the annihilation of hawk’s world, only then do they share space.

### **Circling**

High, wings stretched  
Buzzard still  
as the polestar,  
forest circles.

Under falling leaves,  
foxes scent voles,  
squirrels the seasons.  
Step by step  
the forest itself  
strides.

High, eyes too alert  
Buzzard silent, still.

If we can see a world unattached to such ego distinctions as high and low, earth and sky, we enter buzzard's world. No matter how high he circles, his sharp sight and sharper mind never lose connection to the world moving below him. Through his eyes, the distinctions fold into a perception that misses nothing, that contains everything. Buzzard contains an idea somehow unfettered by oppositions. It masters both high and low at the same moment.

### **Ted's Fishing Trip**

Ted approached  
the pond.  
Rainfall disfigured  
the water's depth  
drawing eyes  
into surface splashes.  
He knew Pike grinned  
the water's dark.  
Later sun trembled  
across waves.  
Trees swayed, ghosts  
in air. Weeds  
suspended, a drifting landscape.  
He sat in mossy rocks  
waiting an age, still.

The float ripped out of light  
down, down, into cavernous worlds  
dragging day with it.  
His life a fight to restore air.

Pike gasps.  
In a watery eye, density delves.  
Oily sun runs across scales  
sharp shafts of light  
glinting from a gaping grin.  
Weeds rise, smell circulates  
air. A shower of rain falls  
from its mass of mossy rock.  
Fins bend in witching wind.  
In a moment  
the day kicks in his hands  
a smile, caught.

## Sky

large, looming.  
Grubs disappeared  
so bird left the nest  
to emptiness.  
The world grew,  
the bird grew.  
Lifting on strong winds  
made it stronger.  
Rising high above trees  
made them smaller.  
Travelling further  
took thoughts further.  
Unnoticed, the horror of a small nest  
fell away, and larger than earth  
bird fed, soared, courted,  
eyes full of sky.

## **Buzzard Meets Swift**

Goliath circled,  
air created to fan his wings.  
He circled, shadow mocking sun.  
David feeling shadow cool his nest,  
flew forgetting everything,  
forgetting his size to keep warm his blood.  
David pecked, he darted, he stormed.  
Goliath soaring, finding David  
at every move,  
not wanting trouble in the air,  
left to where the air flowed  
through his feathers,  
where he created clouds  
with every breath.

\*

David knew his beak flashed  
he knew his eyes consumed with flames  
his stretched wings metallic  
his movement jet propelled.  
Mirroring sunlight he looked hard,  
he saw everyone knew he was a steel bird  
carrying whole worlds on his wing tips.

\*

Everyone knew David  
he pranced like his mind was in space  
like he could leave earth behind  
like he could leave them behind.  
They knew David  
a bird so alone his eyes saw no-one.  
They knew David  
a bird who did live in space  
but knew nothing of emptiness.  
They knew David  
and left him singing  
songs that tormented the air between them  
songs they simply couldn't understand.

## **Past a Lifetime**

A small dog crossed my path in a wood. He stood still and checked me out. I did the same until his owner, an old man, appeared behind him. The old man said the dog was a kind and unvicious animal whom he had just been playing with. The old man and the dog had a bond that made me think hard. I believe the dog was ageless for the old man. He was younger in actual years, but had the whole history of nature in his instincts; the dog makes a mockery of Time.

Dog dips his head, halts.  
Eyes deep, unblinking.  
Light reveals itself.  
Motionless  
he monitors my movement,  
every element, scene  
spreading across his eyeline.

The old man caught up,  
hands raised,  
no need for caution.  
His dog friend to all, young  
playful, soft, safe.  
He brings fun, filling  
every hour.  
The pup has grown with me.  
I know the world he sees.

His eyes look  
past his lifetime  
into darker movements  
where earth stirred.  
First scratchings of life  
embedded  
in his muscle fibre.  
Under fine fur  
something old  
as daylight,  
old as sound,  
here  
breathing the breath  
of this world,  
being the breath  
of this world.

Dog was nowhere and the old man was nowhere with him. They walked an unmarked path through woodland. Grasses brushed their legs and when they breathed a damp mist exhaled then vanished. Signs highlighted their way unnoticed. The changing faces of the seasons, leaves blocking sun, then dropping colours all over the path. The direction of a gentle wind, a rustle playing the branches. The illumination of stars pivoting, night sky revolving around their lives. They played a timeless game. Only the throw of a stick. Only the wet coat. Only the burn of sun, a moment. They did not know the beginning. They would not know the end. Dog was nowhere and the old man was nowhere with him.

## **Thermals**

Gull, head full  
of the thermal lift,  
broke the earth's orbit  
world shrinking away  
weightless  
everything effortless  
as light spreading.



## **Black Space**

Crow black as space  
sees earth spinning  
in chaos beyond unfolding feathers.  
His eye sharp as a star  
is no pivot holding worlds,  
dark eyes rolling.  
He shakes off  
the light he seemed  
born to emit, and  
happy not to get involved  
flaps off into everyone's night.

## **Externality: Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'The Windhover'**

*The Windhover*  
To Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-  
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding  
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding  
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,  
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding  
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh air, pride, plume, here  
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion  
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

The kestrel is 'morning's minion', 'daylight's dauphin', 'dawn-drawn', it has a place so attuned to its environment of 'rolling level' and 'steady air' that it rides the air majestically. The dexterity of language and rhythm - 'sweeps smooth', 'rung upon a rein', 'the hurl and gliding' - suggests 'the mastery of the thing'. The absolute mastery of its world, born out in the mastery of the description suggests how Hopkins is exalted by the bird, lifted, transported out of his everyday human existence.

The middle stanza shifts the scene. With 'brute beauty', 'valour', 'act', 'pride', this stanza retreats into a more abstract world, into a more human and mental description. Here, Christ seems to have been brought into the scene, and with him the concept of Christian grace. The kestrel had the power to transport Hopkins into the heights, but Christ's grace 'a billion times told lovelier' is triggered through this encounter, and magnified, to put distance between the direct experience of the bird and Hopkins' response. This is the abstract grace of Christian faith.

In the final stanza we are earthbound in contrast to the kestrel's heights. We 'plod' and 'plough down sillion', suggesting that the only thing that can lift man out of his earthly condition into the heights of 'ecstasy' is the grace of God. A section from Hopkins' *Notes on Suarez* seems to confirm this reading: 'elevating, which lifts the receiver from one cleave of being to another and to a vital act in Christ: this is truly God's finger touching the very vein of personality, which nothing else can reach.'

## **Launched**

Buzzard launched from the branch  
he gripped with mind.  
He rose beyond the tree  
which seemed no more than branch.  
Drifting higher  
the wood below shrank  
until his claw surrounded it  
one twist snapping it into line.  
Rising further  
the stretch of fields, streams, hillsides,  
the cows, sheep, houses  
all fitted in a sight that  
saw it all,  
one twist  
sending  
worlds  
tumbling.

In 'Launched' the buzzard inhabits a world untouched by any conception outside itself. This world of buzzard's is not dissimilar to the world of the first stanza of the Windhover. It is a world of stark contrast to the Christian faith and grace, and the buzzard's world critically isolates Christian grace as an ego created human construct.

It seems Hopkins has been transported by his encounter with the kestrel into a place of grace. I would argue his 'heart in hiding' that 'stirred for a bird' is hidden because it actually betrays God when a bird with no external support can impact as grace. Because he believes only God can give the ecstasy he experiences as grace, Hopkins has to rewrite the encounter with the bird as an encounter with Christ. He can make these two differing worlds compatible only in abstracting the encounter by overlaying Christian grace over it. At this point the natural world has been lost to an abstracting human ego. The very experience of direct engagement with the delight a bird stirs, the very inspiration for the poem, has been distanced. Hopkins ends earthbound with only God's singular and unbidden grace capable of giving him wings.

### **Hawk's Leap**

Hawk leaps into wind  
rustles leaves  
shakes branches.  
He rolls fields  
spreading, flattening grass  
in waves, dispersing freshness.  
He lifts, drives clouds  
outwards, upwards.  
Rain breaks  
he disturbs  
its fall, crashes  
it across landscapes.  
Hawk lands  
talons clutching deep  
into earth.

### **Crow takes the Skies**

Crow squats on the stone wall  
gazing a black eye over  
the ploughed, gorged field.  
A multitude of canyons stretch.  
Tracks of nomadic beetles  
traipse new paths in his eyes.  
Other tribes criss-cross  
the high clefts of earth,  
sink below a mud valley.  
Crow takes the skies  
wings carry his sight  
endless flight  
across mountainous rifts of earth  
turned stones, continents.  
Landing on the other side  
looking back  
universes shift and expand  
before him.

## **Flying**

Dreams of flying had haunted Tom all his life. He had attempted to become a pilot, but his eyes failed him. He studied zoology and spent hours looking through binoculars at birds. They never seemed close enough, the heavy weight in his hands reminding him gravity stood between him and flight. Still he dreamed of surfing the air, of seeing the earth move beneath him, the wind in his eyes, his body flexing in the currents. He never saw through his dream.

One day, looking up from his car window at what appeared to be an osprey above him, he collided with an oncoming lorry, and all was blank.

Chaffinch flickers in the thicket  
attempting to break free  
only as far as his voice  
will carry. He breaks  
through his voice.  
Rising over the cusp  
of a hill, a solitary Crow  
overthrows hedgerows.  
Eyes steady, Kestrel floats,  
high, blind  
to gravity. Drawing circles  
around mountains, melting  
into the dark clefts of rock,  
Raven. Stretching wings  
over the mountain range,  
Eagle breathes worlds  
dressed in the heat  
of suns.

Eagle sat on his mountain. Flickers of sunlight scorched his frozen feathers and he lifted high. His empty stomach troubled his eyes. He scanned the mountainsides. The cold wind caused contractions. He circled the moment. A movement, caught, but he knew the impossible and climbed.

The day flickered to a close. Eagle returned to his perch. His troubled belly did not allow sleep. The cold licked his feathers. There was no sunrise or sunset, just the pain of emptiness, on a cold perch, in the dark, wind howling.

## **Endless**

Moorhen tiptoes  
ripples in its mind  
stretching out  
in gentle swells.  
Wind rocks  
the surrounding trees  
thoughts trembling.  
Weeds sway  
bending Moorhen's head  
the pond reflects, full.  
A figure sends ripples,  
alarm, through  
Moorhen's feathers.  
Running into dark  
undergrowth  
ripples cannot follow.  
The endlessly  
open pond is lost.  
Moorhen disappears.

## **Drifting**

A slight tightening of her belly  
sends sparrowhawk into skies.  
High, mind loosening  
her body relaxes, caressed by light.  
Circling, earth rotating  
the expanse of trees, streams, hillsides  
flow through her head  
evaporating,  
world drifting  
on the breeze she rides.



### **Shifting Identity: Shinkichi Takahashi's 'Sparrow in Winter'**

Sparrow is 'full of air holes'; he has no fixed stable self, no body as identity. To talk of the wind holding sparrow aloft, as opposed to it flowing through him, would be to posit a body as identity. A body named sparrow and an air current named wind would have been two identities held, by discrimination, separate. However, because sparrow has no such body identity in opposition to wind he may sustain an injury without cognition; he takes no mental ownership of these traumas.

Again in stanza two the 'air streams through him, free, easy' - sparrow has no stable identity and is liberated, experimenting on air. He jumps across branches that are empty because identity is absent. Injury, trials, a buttressing wind of life has no impact on his mind or sense of equilibrium. Emptiness is his protection. Living in a limitless world without demarcation leaves nothing that could define or even be called sparrow's mind in the restrictive sense of an identity.

The third stanza moves from directly describing sparrow to an addressee, 'you'. This addressee is again sparrow but at the same time the reader of this poem. The world described – 'my every shot misses: you're impossible' - is a world simultaneously sparrow's world and ours. 'Houses [...] crumple', atomic machinery appears - these images are a human world, and a world ruled by fear. Takahashi chooses to restrict humanity's images to atomic warfare. Here humanity, with all its achievements, is reduced to the poverty of fear, a fear of holocaust. The final word 'belly' takes us back to the first – 'breastdown' - linking sparrow

with this final stanza.

The human world described in the final stanza is the world of ego. Sparrow's world is the broader, indefinable world within which ego is housed. I believe this poem entreats us to accept sparrow's world as our own. The human ego remains within this world, unattached to the fears of civilisation's great destructive forces. By realising this we free ourselves from action based on fear; this is liberation.

### **Hawk's Flight**

Hawk spreads wings  
circles, soars, dives  
crossing grassland  
outstripping hedgerows.  
Hawk's flight perfection:  
soaring he soars  
diving he dives.

Wind blows  
trees bend  
grasses shake.  
Breeze ruffles Hawk's feathers  
curves his wings  
lifts, drives  
wind blows his breath.

The day Hawk died  
he fell through  
sky, wind  
spread across fields,  
neither noticed.

The first stanza of 'Hawk's Flight' presents a picture of the hawk as we ordinarily perceive him. It is a being, self contained and self controlling. The second stanza widens the idea of being. It shows hawk's world as only existing in relationship. This widening relieves hawk of an ego identity. It is a fluid display of existence, adapting and built within the environment's characteristics, not a separate and isolated being. The absence of ego leaves hawk's death free of traces, attachments or residue. This is the same world Takahashi presents but without ego mixed and contained within it. It is an ideal of non-attachment without ego distancing or remaking the natural world.

## **Fields Home**

Walking the path home, through fields. Imagining the light burning in its rooms. The table we share, eye to eye, breath counted, a succession of rises and falls. The speech dancing, the love in the pulse, and the spread of the landscape in our eyes.

Cow sees itself in clouds,  
feels itself flying.  
It chews the grass fresh,  
knowing a dream  
floats free,  
warmth  
spreading across fields.

## **Hillside Home**

Buzzards circle above  
where we walk  
mapping the territory  
of our new home.

Our first walk around the countryside of our new home was to scan quickly for bird life, to get a taste of the thrills of new surroundings. On seeing the buzzards there was no knowing whether we were mapping their territory or they defining ours.

Lost to skies  
our gaze  
lost to skies  
our strides.

We were full, gazing along the reservoir banks, freshness washing our eyes. Every step walking a new planet. New people, new skies, we were new born.

Walking  
the planet moving  
we still in sun flaming.

Rooted in a new world we tried to acclimatise ourselves to hill lines, curving paths, the spread of trees, dry mudflats above the waterline. We were in a home expanding before us. There were years in this landscape. Years of imaginings. Years of rolling seasons.

Sun burnt  
away years here  
soaked in warmth.

The flooded valley would fuel our lives through the touch of tough times and the warmth of good. It would show its concern for us by its constant surprise, shifting clouds, flocking birds, reflected skies.

The smile on the breeze  
is the smile on our faces  
circling the reservoir.

When we returned from our journey the landscape in us was different. We knew something of the hillsides, something of the water's depth, something of the summer's breadth. Our home was in the surroundings.

Trees stretch, burning over hillsides,  
mapping sky like pathways,  
arching light.  
Roots sink deep into time.  
Our eyes climb,  
limbs move through space,  
spreading,  
reaching,  
drawing warmth to feel our place  
beside the reservoir,  
where we always existed.

### **Nothing but Sing**

Days lengthened  
trees edged into light  
buds uncurled and yawned  
away winter.  
Robin felt his pulse  
quicken and sang.  
The taste of pollen  
lifted the earth  
everywhere clamouring  
tongues loosened the hills.  
Robin sang and didn't stop singing.  
Spring laid open  
the land, it reached  
into every flower, seed, animal,  
into skies, through waters.  
Robin could do nothing but sing.  
Spring, shaking the landscape  
had more on his mind  
than Robin and left  
before he opened his eyes.

## **Crowd**

Rooks crowd  
black eye inside black eye inside black eye  
lining the stone wall.  
Rook's head full of voles weaving the grass blades  
of hillsides stretching beyond  
sheep and cows' calls  
lost to the treeline, shaped  
by squirrels scratching, running  
clattering leaves, wood pigeons' flight  
reflections that are the pond below,  
where geese rest from windy alive sky.

High, glistening in rook's eye,  
sun holds rook's mind in its gaze.

## **Sea of Feathers**

Rook sits on branch  
quite alone.

The flock lifts  
he rises wide as sky  
wings cover wood  
noise, rumbling black cloud  
rippling sea, refracted light  
he swirls, his shape  
a sea of feathers  
erasing sun.

The flock breaks  
tatters of black  
dissolve into streams  
of light.

Rook lands  
claws steady roots  
as alone as he's ever been.

### **Other Worlds: D.H. Lawrence's 'Snake'**

A snake came to my water-trough  
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,  
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob-tree

These lines give us a hint that this encounter with the snake is an encounter with the 'strange' otherworldly.

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom  
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of the stone trough  
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,  
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,  
He sipped with his straight mouth,  
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,  
Silently.

The rich detail of this description implies in its profusion a fascination, an obsessed gaze. I would argue that this encounter has constellated the otherworldly in Lawrence. However, instead of recognising his own otherworldliness Lawrence projects it all onto the snake. The projection is Lawrence's defence to keep his ego intact.

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,  
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,

The attempt to make a comparison with cattle shows how in the poem the snake is domesticated. This is an attempt to allay the otherworldly attraction, to avoid recognition of this aspect in Lawrence's own personality.

And stooped and drank a little more,  
Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the earth

Here is a hidden place, the bowels of the earth, where people cannot step, cannot know. Here Lawrence cannot step into this quarter of his own psyche, having no knowledge it is his own world as well as the snake's.

On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.

The July day and the volcano show Lawrence unconsciously identifying with the snake as they both share



the day and the same environment.

The voice of my education said to me  
He must be killed,

The voice here divides Lawrence's mind. His ego positions itself against the otherworldly, against the snake's world. His projection holds his fascination and prevents Lawrence from recognising he is divided against his own otherworldliness. The poem continues to play out this divide and Lawrence's attempts to heal this split mind.

But I must confess how I liked him,  
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my water-trough

The word 'guest' to describe the snake shows Lawrence is attempting to make the snake part of his own ego world, a human world. This fails as the encounter with the 'burning bowels' returns us to the otherworldly and the divide becomes harsher, 'if you were not afraid'. The snake seeks 'hospitality' – a word which returns us to the human world - but the snake comes from 'out of the dark door of the secret earth'. The secret here is that Lawrence hides from himself his own otherworldly connection to the world. As the snake leaves 'A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that horrid black hole', Lawrence protests at the snake taking him out of the human ego world into the otherworldly. Lawrence's simultaneous fascination and repulsion again leaves his mind divided. Blaming the divide on the snake is a clear projection. This is confirmed when

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,  
I picked up a clumsy log  
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.

I think it did not hit him,  
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in undignified haste,  
Writhed like lightning, and was gone  
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front,  
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

His fascination, the part of Lawrence drawn to the otherworldly, seems to lay open the way for Lawrence to superficially heal his split mind.

And immediately I regretted it.  
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!  
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education. [...]

For he seemed to me again like a king,  
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,  
Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords  
Of life.

And I have something to expiate;  
A pettiness.

Lawrence's paltry ego world is accursed and the snake a king uncrowned. Lawrence has elevated the snake and humbled himself before it - before a lord of life. This act is an attempt to heal his divided mind. By giving all the worth to the snake he keeps his projection of the otherworldly away from any recognition that it belongs to Lawrence's own mind. Lawrence protects his ego by this act of humility. He can be the bigger man by giving all the worth to the snake. So the divide between his own ego and the otherworldly has been glossed over, protecting his ego. Nothing remains of the divide or the encounter; the projections remain, unrecognised, only superficially resolved.

### **Flickers**

Sunlight leaves snake  
motionless as the  
rock he sits on.  
Sun falls into growing  
shadows and snake's mind  
flickers. His eyes dark  
slowly matching his surroundings  
mind coming back to him.  
Melting into darkness  
snake lives earth's vibrations.

Lawrence's fascination and unconscious identification with the otherworldly snake divides his mind. This is because the otherworldly is a part of Lawrence's own mental makeup. The divide happens because he projects that part of his mind outside himself onto the snake. It is projected because Lawrence's ego cannot be relinquished and so creates a double life in Lawrence's mind. If Lawrence could accept the snake's world as part of his own and release his grasp on ego - his need to give the snake a human place - he could encounter the otherworldly within and without himself. The snake would unearth Lawrence's ego by showing him the otherworldly in himself.

## Opening the Labyrinth

Outside the Cnossus maze,  
breaking  
beyond waste hills into Athenian skies,  
in cast shadows,  
its tortuous caves, weave  
like Autumn oaks mapping the air.  
I step aside its gaze, avoid its lost sun,  
its northern air.  
If I could wipe clean  
the disgrace,  
that gave birth to labyrinths,  
I will be raised and be crystal skies.

I walk the oracle's thought patterns,  
through the Daedulus mind.  
A magic thread knowing every twist.  
The minotaur hides from my binding,  
his silence confesses fear.  
I will make his night, morning eyes, opening  
his walled body beyond the Mediterranean edge,  
filling the world like gypsy moths lifting.

I hear his breath flood the hallways, smelling sacrifice  
as walls twist, corridors shuffle, in a confusion of exits.  
We meet eye to eye, the reflection,  
reaches through faces,  
falling beyond these narcissistic lakes,  
discovering limbs,  
beyond what suffered, what divided.  
My body knows the way now, head in hyacinth blooms  
flanks in the sun, above blindness.  
A whole body desiring breath,  
not a mind shackled to a labyrinth  
grasping at false suns.

## **Baby Universe**

The child opens its eyes.  
Sun flares in them.  
Closes them, sun never existed.  
Wet orange smothers taste-buds  
each tickled  
like swallowing electricity.  
“Cooma” breaks through the air.  
Child knows the noise,  
never tires of knowing.  
Then it knows the echo “ma”  
first worlds light lavishly.

\*

Snow fell, flutters  
of memory combing  
the garden grass.  
Snow falling  
into fair hair,  
a three year old  
blue eyes wide  
to the soft patter  
that sought him.  
Silk skin warmth  
he could own,  
a stable miracle  
built on melting patterns and  
the melting faraway face  
of childhood.

\*

Gravity pulls the darkness  
magnetism twists space  
electricity breaks for freedom  
unity fragments.  
Making itself the universe lives.  
Galaxies cascade,  
untameable nuclear reactions  
read space and time  
in themselves and fill  
the inner void with stars.  
Scattered like knowledge  
Time flows.  
On a bright night  
the child is born.  
It breathes a whole universe  
born of the first state  
in an unknowable dance  
across space and time  
it moves.

## **Orbits**

They danced orbits  
across outer sides of the great hall  
miles from each other  
miles of knowledge missing  
until swung face to face  
centre of the floor  
seas and mountains  
born from the same sun  
away  
around the chandelier  
they flew  
across the solar system  
they met again  
through cloud cover  
they danced free in a space of arches  
stepping the light of a shared trajectory

## **Sunlit Stoat**

Stoat smelt the air, bristling  
with movement he scurried  
across open grassland,  
a gloss of slick fur.  
The sun burned his senses,  
he weaved in and out  
to shake panic, eyes flashing  
towards the endless edges  
terror lying in wait.  
The sun spoke  
You I see.

Stoat runs across my eyeline, crossing a road from hedge to hedge. It's a sunny day. I have no intentions towards Stoat. As the heat drives sweat down my forehead I glance at the sun. I feel the heat on my arms. There is no shade, no relief from the downpour of light. At this moment Stoat's life or death is without meaning to me. Out in the open, waiting for a breeze, I feel no anxiety. Stoat runs off as if it's all about him. This clash of worlds draws me into Stoat's life. I try to enter the shadow with him.

Stoat leapt undercover  
panic behind taunting  
he didn't know the way.  
He knew the silence,  
sitting, still, breathless  
eyes wide as his journey  
he learnt the dark.  
Only then seeing  
the sun hadn't followed  
did a ripple of breath leave  
like the sound of fur settling.

Once Stoat disappeared into the thicket I'm sure I played no further role in his day to day life. To him I was left in the sun, out of sight, out of range. He will have left his anxiety outside the defensive structure of hedge. Other beings would now encounter Stoat, the little ones he towers over, creatures that elicit no threat, and the big birds with a sharp eye on Stoat. Although I was out of his life he was not out of mine. That moment of Stoat burns.

I'm out in the sun and I've lost Stoat to the shade. My memory of Stoat is trapped in words. His influence, an imagined Stoat's life, is linked with my own life, a shared world.

Sun watched.  
It saw world revolving  
piercing the shade.  
It had grown to love world  
death and life equally.  
Its eye sharp as  
hydrogen aflame  
saw everything.  
Day by day,  
revolution after revolution  
it never tired, it just burned  
with internal fury  
giving birth to love  
as one day it would  
give birth to flames  
devouring.  
Sun watched.

## **Fledgling**

In a dark universe  
no turning stars map his position  
needing to breathe blossom  
to stretch and fill the void  
body yearning for easterly sun  
for the trees' arms  
for the skies' lift,  
motion, towards others,  
a brain formed with purpose  
that will explode  
into the light of...

World in his beak,  
egg fractures,  
Crow eats.

## **The Crucifixion**

As Christ's light dies like a lightning shock and sky breaks,  
transfiguration overcomes me like the birth of wind.  
It melts body to body, flame to flame,  
with a touch like breath, I am the deciding moment,  
suddenly alive, finding the life that is me, a first sun.

The cross is my name.  
I feel like a child discovering its voice belongs,  
the first breath of cloudless thought.  
Voices born with me sing

He is the one true light of the future's call  
He has the deliverance of heights  
The child of God, the maker of man  
The body no longer limit, but lifted like sky

What to do with the name burned like colliding suns.  
How stamp it firmly on the world's landscape,  
so the universe rings with its metal.  
As the name rises thoughts surface free of the surf.  
Death's snarl becomes my smile on life,  
for age upon age I will mark the gateway,  
from grave to grave, prayer to prayer  
held close to conquer earth.  
I am the hero stepping between two storming worlds, like lightning.

Echoing through my grain, voices lift

What will you do when the dark nights of age draw in around you?  
I will carry the cross in my heart  
Crying its light through my veins  
To live clearly my path  
I will be kissed by eternity  
It will light my way into its secret places

As the years pressed in hard I was exalted above death,  
spitting stars to love me.  
Every cemetery honoured me with eternal monuments,  
churches were built to house the multitude of promises I represented.  
I was carried everywhere,  
precious metals around precious necks  
reflecting burning eyes.  
Could I fulfil such promise.  
I believed.  
I knew no other.  
With that acknowledgement awareness caught like a wound  
a shadow crawling across my sky.  
The more I believed,  
the more conscious I became of being smothered.  
The more I raised myself  
trying to separate, to shake off, to leave behind,  
the more I knew this second self sucking at my night skies.

In the shadow people sully my flesh,  
voices crowding through mine



We need more timber, cut through the valleys like echoes  
These handcrafted tables and chairs use the finest oak,  
grain like ancient rivers  
I hold this pencil, drawing lines delicate as a fingerprint  
I craft puppets, an ancient magic older than the sea's charm  
Throw on more wood that cold bites my thoughts

I am a carpenter's toy,  
I shouted my name at the shadow  
but people failed to see,  
I was the cross perfected by the breath of God,  
crafted like lightning.  
It hurts the body like fire such blindness.  
Is it evil in their empty eye sockets  
an inherent defect in the brain's waves  
some dreadful joking doll at the heart.  
I fragment into a multitude's forgetfulness  
losing myself in a shadow of dreams.  
I become the flames of my own horror.

I spent histories as flame,  
eyes locked shut.  
A day came when I saw through blinded eyes  
breaking through into a delight of leaping reds,  
a suppleness of thoughts,  
the way my life created histories,  
how I am reborn endlessly like the cycle of rain,  
my roots the fires of earth  
my head the eyes of heaven.  
I unite the beginning to the end of time,  
people see only themselves,  
I cannot make myself heard.  
Voiceless as the unborn  
I live endless deaths  
like a wind of breaths.

## **Conclusion**

I have two concluding thoughts, both further speculations. Firstly, after spending many years of my study out in the countryside, observing and writing commentaries on the behaviour of the animals I have encountered, I am slowly finding as the material increases that alongside the specific behaviours of these animals, they have, possibly unsurprisingly, species specific psychologies. So, although sharing a similar world, crows and rooks exhibit significantly different psychologies. I believe this possibility to have far reaching consequences for conservationists. The loss of even one species such as the endangered hammerhead shark, or even a more common species, is the loss not only of one animal we may want to protect but the loss of possibly a whole unique philosophical world that cannot be replaced. Can we begin to imagine new consequences to over fishing and environmental neglect? The loss of worlds is well underway.

My last thought is to acknowledge the sheer speculative nature of this thesis. I sympathise with those who may find this work an overly ingenious reading of animal behaviour and mental life, and accept that currently we have no way of confirming my readings. What I would say is that we cannot know this world doesn't exist. At present I can see complaints from those who choose to assume, based on the materialist condition of scientific method, that a reductionist reading of an animal's mind is preferable to speculation. But, even this materialist reading is speculative as we have no access to information to confirm a materialist view. With this conflict of readings we find ourselves wrapped up in a moral choice. The neglect of our planet, the destruction we daily engage in, is due largely to undervaluing the natural world, to seeing it purely as a resource to dominate. I would speculate further that the sciences of neurology and psychology will lead to firmer conclusions as to the reality of what I propose. However, until speculation can be backed up by knowledge, we are left with belief, scepticism, or simply open-mindedness. I hope my beliefs, as portrayed in this thesis, keep the natural world at the forefront of debate and open the way towards further imaginative sympathy with a shared world.

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