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## *Man has created death* A Few Reflections on Animals, Humans, and Mortality

To claim that language makes man means, for Heidegger, defining him first and foremost with regard to man's contrast with the silence of animals.

Roberto Esposito: *Terms of the Political. Community, Immunity, Biopolitics.*

### 1.

Is the animal death any different from the human death? Or, rather, should we speak about death “of an animal” and death “of a man”, the phrases in which their genitive construction suggests that there is only *one* death which invades, with catastrophic results, various living organisms? We shall begin by a reading of a poem “Death”, which W.B. Yeats published in his 1933 collection *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*. The opening gambit tries to draw a clear distinction: man's death belongs to the regime of anxiety epitomized by dread and hope which the animal seems to be exempt from. The anxiety in question is directional: it looks towards the future but, at the same time, it is not homogeneous, and hence man is torn between two contradictory moods: dread and hope. The former related death to a more immediate future (we fear the very moment of dying); the latter refers us to a nebulous time of salvation and redemption of which we know nothing and which has to remain restricted to the domain of faith. This is how Yeats opens his poem:

Nor dread not hope attend  
 A dying animal;  
 A man awaits his end  
 Dreading and hoping all<sup>1</sup>;

We could surmise then that there are two different kinds of death: one, unattended and unawaited, the other – attended and awaited. The noun *end*, used with regard to man, prompts us to believe that only the latter kind of death, characteristic of a human being, is marked by the sense of an ending. Man, says Yeats, *awaits* his end while the animal does not, and the unawaited death, death which happens as if from the radical *outside* which does not belong to the regime of the animal's existence, such a death cannot qualify as the *end*. The animal *ends*, but it does not pay attention to or expects the end, and hence its ending is not a *real end*. It means that life stops to be, it ends only to the degree to which it ceases to breathe. A famous Monty Python routine "Dead Parrot" grasps this point well: any discussion concerning the status and criteria of the animal death is vacuous because animal death seems to be unproblematic in terms of its description. Hence, the odd argumentation of the parrot seller is from the start ridiculous because with a whole bunch of synonyms you can clearly demonstrate that the animal IS dead.

## 2.

In contradistinction, human death is controversial; with only a slight exaggeration we could argue that it happens *before* it *does* happen. Here we discover the source of anxiety. Human death announces itself a long time before its arrival, it has already arrived and haunts surreptitiously the human dwelling like Ulysses who, unrecognized, has landed upon the shores of Ithaca and is slowly getting ready to slaughter the suitors of his wife and their accomplices. Death is *attended* by dread and hope, and hence these two moods not only are companions of human death (which would mean that the animal death is companionless, is a lonely, abandoned and rejected death banished from all societal configurations of attendance, an isolated fact, one amongst many), but they also *wait upon* it, give it care and thought. With an eye upon the etymological connection of the verb *attend* (related to the French *tendre* and Latin *tendere*), we could claim that man is a being which stretches and lovingly extends and directs himself/herself towards death. The animal death, unlike its human

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<sup>1</sup> William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems* (Ware: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 2000), 198.

variety always already societal and connected, would thus be neutral, indifferent, emotionally cold, a fundamentally solitary event somehow unaccompanied, isolated, and misanthropic.

### 3.

As the poem unfolds, we learn yet another difference separating two kinds of death: the animal death comes as a cut, a sudden move of scissors, severing the thread of life; it is a momentary occurrence which comes always unattended and unexpected, always catches the animal unawares, thus, as we have said, it is an end without the sense of an ending. Human death has been provided with such a sense as it is thought with dread and hope, and thus the end is both catastrophic (dread) and redemptive (hope). Death in the human world makes sense because it has the sense of an ending, that is, it is a certain knowledge, something which you can learn and practice, something with a purpose. Either in its lay version of Montaigne (who tasks a philosopher with the obligation to learn how to die) or in the religious reflection of Christianity (we die to be eventually, like Christ, resurrected) the call is the same: human death is what interrupts life but, so to speak, from *within*. It is what has always been already present in human life. Here is Yeats again:

Many times he died,  
 Many times he rose again.  
 A great man in his pride  
 Confronting murderous men  
 Casts derision upon  
 Supersession of breath.

The dramatic event of death is always grave, has its ultimate seriousness, its *momentum*. It is most critical and fateful, it is *momentous*, but for the human being it is not exclusively *momentary*. Yeats argues, perhaps in agreement with Montaigne, that what marks a genuine human being, what constitutes humanity of the human, is precisely the fact that “we die many times”. Human death, unlike the death of the animal, carries with it – paradoxically – our ability to overcome death. If Yeats’ phrase that “a great man” knows “death to the bone” is to be meaningful, it probably communicates the following truth: man rises to the level of proper humanity (becomes “a great man”) only when he/she, through the experience of dread and hope, acquires a certain knowledge of death, knows it to *the bone*, and thus death is never something foreign and

external, but something we are acquainted with, which is precisely what distinguishes human and animal as far as death and dying go. *Death is the bone which supports the flesh of human life.* The true, mature manhood/womanhood is knowledgeable about death; the true animality is not.

#### 4.

But the concluding couplet brings with it an ambiguity which dims this picture.

He knows death to the bone –  
Man has created death.

How are we to solve the enigma of the last line? The conundrum which puts forth a radical and scandalous proposition that man is a maker of death? That man is a profoundly suicidal being: dies by his/her own hand, deals death to himself/herself? Several paths may guide our thinking now. First, Yeats' claim could simply firmly endorse the biblical story of creation, in which death is a consequence of man's disobedience to the dictates of God. Man dies because of his/her insubordination to God; resistance against God is how death infiltrates human existence. This is precisely how John Milton begins his famous poem stating that he wants to sing: "Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit / Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste / Brought death into the world, and all our woe".

#### 5.

The second path is opened by the adjective qualifying men as "murderous". This modifies the Biblical story considerably. Since "a great man" opposes the "murderous men", we can assume that the course of human history is determined by the intensification of the technology of death and dying. We have to remember that Yeats' poem appears in 1933, some 15 years after the apocalyptic world war which literally invented new ways of allotting death, at the same time surrounding them and their deadly effects by the rhetorically sophisticated ideological constructs of the type *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*. The Second World War will shortly add another layer of technological

advancement in the procedures of death dealing. Man has created death because man is a historical being, lives in and through his/her history which, as Swift brilliantly showed, is a story of the growing inventiveness of destruction. Nor is he the only author to do it. Bernard Mandeville phrases it with equal radicalism: "Tis only Man, mischievous Man, that can make death a sport"<sup>2</sup>. Since Gulliver is proudly reporting human history to his equine host who is overcome by disgust and derision, we may suspect that the phrase "Man has created death" offers yet another line of distinction between man and animal. Man is a historical being, which animal is not, therefore it is exempt from the dark, apocalyptic threat which has always accompanied human life and human death. From this perspective man's existence is a distortion of life and man's death only contributes to this disfigurement. Having listened to a long sequence of brutalities and atrocities enhanced by the technology of deadly machines, the wise horse traces some fatal stigma in humanity. This is what the Bible could render as Cain's mark, a vision of history as an unfolding of means to amplify evil always already present in the very human nature and reason. The horse is "confident, that instead of Reason, we were only possessed by some quality fitted to increase our natural vices; as the reflection from a troubled stream returns the image of an ill-shapen body, not only *larger*, but more *distorted*."<sup>3</sup>

## 6.

This demarcates a beginning of the third path. Man has created death not only through the inventiveness of the technology of killing but also through the elaborate procedures of commemorating death, singling it out in the refinement of mourning and funerary celebrations. John Anster Fitzgerald's 1865 painting *The Death of Cock Robin* provides a brilliant example of the *natural* animal death translated into the discourse of the *created* human death. Based on the folk ballad *Who Killed Cock Robin?*, it changes the original scenario of the text: it is not birds (as the ballad claims) that prepare, organize and participate in the funeral but an assortment of fairies. The striking and nearly offensive presence of a dead animal body, which we may see in so many paintings, Fitzgerald saves and somehow restitutes with the immateriality of beings which, like fairies, may have either a semblance of miniature bodies or wear monstrous, disfigured bodies. The body of the dead bird is redeemed from the brutal neutrality of *natural* death by becoming a centre of an elaborate ritual solemnizing its

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), 179.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 295.

passing away and thus alienating it from the world of the raw, brute, natural fact. A death, *uncreated* death, becomes now *the* death, death *created*. Man has created death because his/her human condition develops all kinds of means of celebrating and commemorating to avoid the frontal confrontation with death which, in the human perception, always intervenes as a force of non-meaning, if not sheer absurdity.

## 7.

Exactly a hundred years earlier Jean-Baptiste Greuze painted *A Girl with a Dead Canary* which introduces yet another problematic aspect of the animal death. Not only is it implicated in the intricate cultural machinery of humanity somehow disarming death and dying, but it also raises a question of degree and limits of the possible cultural translation of animal death into the discourse of human culture of commemoration. Denis Diderot in his commentaries to the Paris Salon considers the mournful figure of the girl excessive and extravagant and shifts the weight of the scene upon the exclusively human platform. The despair of the young woman has purely human reasons, and the corpse of the bird, a case of animal death, serves only as a cryptic sign of a human, all-too-human, drama. First, it is a case of a certain cultural formation which, at that time, viewed readiness for sentimental grieving as a mandatory human disposition. The culture of sentimentalism naturally enough places at its centre losses which man cannot refrain from mourning over. The man of feeling is a man always ready to face loss, and the readiness for such a confrontation determines a certain platform upon which animal death very quickly transits to the realm of human death. Sentimental culture minimizes the distance between the two. The threshold between them is permeable.

But there is yet another level upon which the philosopher reads the young girl's lamentation. Now the animal, although still present in its dead form, recedes to a distant background. In Diderot's interpretation the girl mourns her lost virginity, which transgression doubles upon itself: sexual passion not only opened the cage of moral restrictions but also made her forget to feed the canary causing the bird's death. One can argue that animal death is "natural" to the extent to which it does not have causes, it is "natural" because it comes as a matter of fact, and this facticity makes us exempt from efforts which would determine its causes. Animal "simply" dies, and its death is *groundless*. Human being never dies *simply*; his/her death always must be accounted for, if not medically then philosophically. Freud talks about it in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*: "Even today in some strata of our population no one can die

without having been killed by someone else – preferably by the doctor. And the regular reaction of a neurotic to the death of someone closely connected with him is to put the blame on himself for having caused the death.”<sup>4</sup> If medicine or criminology give us physiological reasons of death, philosophy and religion secure a mysterious *rest* which is immune from death despite its physical occurrence. Hence, *non omnis moriar*; there is a *rest* in us which the animal lacks and which accounts for the difference between the two kinds of dying.

## 8.

On this path we also have to problematize language. It is through language that man creates death and its funerary and commemorative ceremonies. This means that not only do we *create* our human death, but in the very discussion of the animal, its life, emotions, and death, we inevitably *construct* and maybe even *invent* them. All our talk about animals is precisely a *talk*, that is a form of linguistic deliberation. What brings us closer to animals also, at the same time, separates them from us. “We are human and cannot avoid the language and knowledge of our own emotional experience when we describe a strikingly similar reaction observed in another species. But anthropomorphism remains a genuine barrier to understanding these different worlds”<sup>5</sup>. We have to be aware of this warning as it opposes the radically Cartesian position which viewed animals, as opposed to humans, as machines deprived of the thinking soul, and thus allowing for unlimited rule of the anthropomorphic metaphorization. And indeed, what could be more man-made than a *machine* with all its implications concerning the unquestionable domination of man as the machine’s inventor, constructor and master. Our essay, while recognizing that it uses man’s language to refer to experiences of the non-human, tries to remain closer to the venerable line of philosophers who, like Montaigne, Charron, Spinoza, Mandeville or Hume, try “to criticize (in different degrees) the ranking of different capacities [of humans and animals – T.S.] as drawing on illicit anthropomorphic prejudice”<sup>6</sup>. Informed by such criticism, we want to argue that a common assumption which holds animal death to belong to the

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<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*, trans. James Strachey (London: Norton & Company, 1964), 152.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Bekoff, ed., *The Smile of a Dolphin: Remarkable Accounts of Animal Emotions* (New York: Discovery Books, 2000), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Aaron Garrett, “Animals and Ethics in the History of Modern Philosophy,” in Tom Beauchamp and R.G. Frey, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66.

domain of speechlessness cannot remain unchallenged. We interpret the fact of animal death being silent, voiceless, and signless not as the eradication of speaking but, rather, as a demonstration of the withdrawal of speech from the domain of human articulated discourse towards the fundamental domain where articulation changes its status. From semantics to sounds, from words to noise: the animal is a force which brings us to the vicinity of the source of language, *zoon* reveals the origins of *logos*. Emily Dickinson, in one of her poems, discloses such presences in her native language:

Many a phrase has the English language –  
I have heard but once –  
Low as the laughter of the Cricket,  
Loud, as the Thunder's Tongue –<sup>7</sup>

Animal sounds are what constitutes the underside of the human speech; they are Dickinson's "laughter of the Cricket" reverberating in the palaces of man's poetry. If Nick Cave is right in his claim that "The ghosts howl through the words making them chime"<sup>8</sup>, then the ghosts in question are those of *zoon* which haunts human speech.

## 9.

In the same way, animal death is a certain foreign force which from within deconstructs and compromises elaborate humanness of human death. As human culture alphabetizes animal behaviour bringing the non-human within the realm of the human, human death alphabetizes, politicizes, ideologizes, historicizes the purely "natural" cessation of action which animal death is. We, humans, *die* to the extent to which we manage to defend and protect our dying from animality which effort has been supported by a long tradition of using different names for human and animal deaths. Humans *die*, animals die a rotten death; in Polish there is a radical difference between *umierać* and *zdychać*. If our human life wants to guard its meaningfulness, our death cannot be merely animal death, it cannot be *a* death; we cannot just *die*, our death cannot belong to the realm of *zdechnąć*. To put it differently, the animal is what we have always wanted to transcend also because it is implacable in reminding

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<sup>7</sup> Emily Dickinson, *Final Harvest. Emily Dickinson's Poems*, ed. Thomas Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1961), 41.

<sup>8</sup> Nick Cave, *The Sick Bag Song* (London: Canongate: 2015), 15.

us all the time of the inevitability of death as a “bare” experience, a “natural” cessation of action. This is what Ted Hughes teaches in his *Bear* poem:

The bear is a well  
Too deep to glitter  
Where your shout  
Is being digested.  
The bear is a river  
Where people bending to drink  
See their dead selves.

[...]  
He is the ferryman  
To dead land<sup>9</sup>.

## 10.

Human death overcomes the bareness of animal death, the rawness of earth, which describes the animal world. The problem human beings have with dying is that, literally and figuratively, death compromises our efforts to go beyond earth and its limitations. Venerable and intricate protocols of *sacrum* take us above the mundane quotidian existence of *profanum*. Human technology with swaggering vanity speaks about the “conquest of cosmos”, and the necessity to, sooner or later, “leave the earth”. Human being wants to see his/her potential as illimitable. As our corpse is lowered into the earth, at the same time, we try to figuratively excavate it from there, raise it, almost bring back to life. We may die as a material combination of cells, but, unlike animals, we do not die complete; there is a *rest* which refuses to pass away, *non omnis moriar*. Hughes’s poem resonates thus with the unresolved question of how to define and determine the *very moment* of death which, as various debates amongst medics and philosophers demonstrate, cannot be unanimously reduced to the matter of biology. In 1968 the Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School to Examine the Definition of Brain Death opined that it is the “irreversible coma” that marks the death’s territory, therefore positing that the criterion of death is purely medical, that is, biological. But already in 1972 a report of the Task Force on Death and Dying of the Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences suggested that the problem is of an entirely philosophical character and cannot be resolved but rather only open a field of interpretations. Thus, the *rest*

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<sup>9</sup> Ted Hughes, “The Bear,” in Ted Hughes, *Wodwo* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), 41.

of which we have just spoken seems to indicate that we feel uneasy about the unproblematic identification with our own bodies which would reduce us to the level of merely and exclusively biological organisms. As we learn from an in-depth study of the problem: “[...] biological structure is only one aspect of human beings or persons. Unless we think our ontology is completely independent of having a perspective on the world, values, and interests, there is no reason why these biological aspects should take precedence over the psychological and moral aspects of persons.”<sup>10</sup>

## 11.

We want to believe that although we appreciate the earth, we do not live *for* the earth; and the message of Christianity turned this belief into its central point. We want to define ourselves as human beings precisely on the strength of the argument that our understanding, our knowledge, our civilization derives from the effort to outgrow the limitations of earth. These limitations are, Hughes never tires of repeating, accountable for animality.

The wolf is living for the earth.  
But the wolf is small, it comprehends little.

In other words, if we refer to Xavier Bichat’s famous and impactful distinction of two types of life, one – internal, repetitive, and automatic (like breathing or digesting), and the other – relational which connects me to the external world through a network of responses, we may say that humanity has always wanted to place death firmly in the domain of the latter<sup>11</sup>. In this way, the ominousness of the merely organic death was countered by its inscription in the workings of mourning, historical memory, private or state historical politics. What the animal effectuates is that it forces us to realize that both human and animal elements combine to make a human being which implies a recognition of the finitude of human life, which figuratively may be represented by the image of excavating a corpse within the texture of our life. This is what J.M. Coetzee’s Ms. Costello claims in *The Lives of Animals*: if we acknowledge the presence of the non-human animal in us, we admit that a corpse has always been lying in the caves of our life. There are two principal consequences of this recognition:

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<sup>10</sup> John P. Lizza, *Persons, Humanity, and the Definition of Death* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 98.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of Bichat’s impactful theories see Roberto Esposito, *Third Person*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (London: Polity Press, 2012), 20-25, 71-72.

first, a sudden awareness of the physical vulnerability to finitude; and, second, a dramatic blow to the carefully protected organization of life. As Ms. Costello confesses: “my whole structure of knowledge collapses in panic”<sup>12</sup>. This ruination of the painstakingly constructed structure also means that we have to go back to asking radical questions about possible differences between the animal and human life. All of a sudden, we begin to suspect that the separation between the two is arguable, and its questioning becomes now an ethical obligation of man. In Nicholas Evans’s novel *The Loop* which tackles the brutality of wolf hunting, the dying wife talks to her husband, a ruthless poacher and wolf hunter: “Do you think, Joseph, their life is the same as ours? I mean, what it’s made of, that little flicker or spirit or whatever it is, inside them. Do you think it’s the same as what we have inside us?”<sup>13</sup> The dilemma marks a constant element in the history of man’s effort to position himself/herself in the general project of the Creation. As Giorgio Agamben says: “In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of the body and soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element. We must learn instead to think of man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements, and investigate not the metaphysical mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and political mystery of separation.”<sup>14</sup>

## 12.

*In fine*, perhaps what the animal does is to straightforwardly remind us of the *body* as the vehicle of life, and if so, then the natural development of events makes this body cease to act and die. This lesson is not (as Pascal well knew) to our liking because its message is transmitted in ways we find far from refinement, in a tongue which defies human dictionaries. If we listen to Frederick Douglass, we will know the discourse of death, like that of slavery, cannot be made fully articulated, that is fully justified, despite culture providing us with a large arsenal of means to do it. We can no more understand the swan song of death, the song of animal death, than we can understand the brutality and cruelty of slavery. “I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. [...] They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension”. And then he takes recourse

<sup>12</sup> John Maxwell Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 32.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolas Evans, *The Loop* (New York: Dell, 1998), 371.

<sup>14</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 15.

not to semantics but to acoustics, not to words but tonalities: “tones loud, long and deep” in which souls were “boiling over”, “wild notes” which filled him with “ineffable sadness.”<sup>15</sup>

### 13.

The animal provides a discourse, a truly alternative one because unarticulated, for those who want to critically discard the present state of the human affairs. If we are to find or disclose a *logos* of a new, more human and humane, politics (also concerning death and dying), we need to elaborate on the lesson of the animal spirit. It is precisely in the animal and its awkward, perhaps even nightmarish, sounds that this old/new *logos* reveals itself compromising the human propaganda of the greatness of man’s history. We find a powerful study of such a revelation in another poem from Ted Hughes’s *Wodwo* volume. Called accurately “Logos”, in two of its four stanzas it marks the appearance of the new *logos* which critically deconstructs man’s history from a position of the “ancient law” which puts on a par the human and the non-human:

Creation convulses in nightmare. And awaking  
Suddenly tastes the nightmare moving  
Still in its mouth  
And spits it kicking out, with a swinish cry –  
Which is God’s first cry.

Like the cry within the sea,  
A mumbling over and over  
Of ancient law, the phrasing falling to pieces  
Garbled among shell-shards and gravels,  
the truths falling to pieces...<sup>16</sup>

If the animal is a force which from within deconstructs the humanness of death which always wanted to blunt the cutting edge of our finitude, if it bares and compromises our “making” of death, if the animal un-makes our death and dying, this situation in Freudian terms makes us re-live the duality of the conscious vs. unconscious. This is a point Freud makes in his striking and penetrating essay written at the beginning of the First World War. Having stated that our unconscious positively refuses to deal with our own death,

<sup>15</sup> Frederick Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Yale University Press: New Haven 2001), p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Hughes, *Wodwo*, 34.

he proceeds to describe culture precisely as an elaborate machinery dedicated to marginalization of death through its celebration. Not only are we shattered by the death of people we have been close to, but we also “assume a special attitude towards the dead, something almost like admiration for one who has accomplished a very difficult feat. We suspend criticism of him, overlooking whatever wrongs he may have done, and issue the command, *de mortuis nil nisi bene...*”<sup>17</sup> The war situation (which Freud sees as permanent) enhances all the processes through which we MAKE death through its heroicization. War, says Freud in the same text “forces us again to be heroes who cannot believe in their own death, it stamps all strangers as enemies whose death we ought to cause or wish; it counsels us to rise above the death of those whom we love”. Hence the agenda of Freud’s whole project: to un-humanize death, to un-make it through reminding us of its “naturalness”, that is, of its animal character. “Were it not better”, asks Freud, “to give death the place to which it is entitled both in reality and in our thoughts and to reveal a little more of our unconscious attitude towards death which up to now we have so carefully suppressed?”

#### 14.

At this moment bones need to come back to our ruminations. To “know death to the bone” means to come to terms with our own animality, to recognize the animal in us, to un-MAKE death, and only then, only on this condition of the human-animal democracy, can we rethink death as the foundation, the *supporting bone* of life. This is the message we can find in the animal bones visually analyzed by Georgia O’Keefe who, in her rambles through the Arizona and New Mexico deserts, gathered bones and skulls of animals bleached by the scorching sunshine. As she herself explains, they “were as beautiful as anything I know. To me they were strangely more living than the animals walking around – hair, eyes and all, with their tail switching. The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert even tho’ it is vast and empty and untouchable – and know no kindness with all its beauty.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, trans. A.A. Bill and Alfred Kuttner (New York: Moffat and Yard, 1918), accessed July 30, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> *Eloquent Objects. Georgia O’Keefe and Still-Life Art in New Mexico*. Essay by Charles C. Elderedge. Foreword by Joseph S. Czestochowski (Washington D.C.: International Arts 2014), 40.

## 15.

This is exactly a declaration of disobedience to the “distortion” of life Swift’s horse is thinking about. Man *has created death* as a cultural ceremony, a cultivation of memory inevitably inscribed in the circles of ideological and political tasks. All of them serve to maintain war as a dominating state of mind. What we call a “historical politics” is but a neutral name for what, in fact, tries to shape (Swift would say *misshape* and *deform*) life through the interests of death. This is exactly what the animal world, being a-historical, is exempt from. Ted Hughes grasps this in his hawk poem in which the death-dealing bird of prey speaks plainly about the allotment of death totally alien to the logic of cultural and historical rationality.

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.  
Inaction, no falsifying dream  
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:  
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!  
The air’s buoyancy and the sun’s ray  
Are of advantage to me;  
And the earth’s face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.  
It took the whole of Creation  
To produce my foot, my each feather:  
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly  
I kill where I please because it is all mine.  
There is no sophistry in my body:  
My manners are tearing off heads –

The allotment of death.  
For the one path of my flight is direct  
Through the bones of the living.  
No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.  
Nothing has changed since I began.  
My eye has permitted no change.  
I am going to keep things like this<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Ted Hughes, “Hawk Roosting”, in Ted Hughes, *Wiersze wybrane / Selected Poems* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1975), 30.

## 16.

Death is here a bare fact, stripped of the ornaments of meaningfulness. Death as a bare fact is not meaningful not because it is unimportant but because, like all other events in the animal world, it goes beyond or below the limits of meaning. Ted Hughes's poem elaborates this point in three steps.

- (a) "There is no sophistry in my body" – which is hawk's equivalent to Swift's horse's critique of the "distortion", of the "ill-shapen" human life;
- (b) "No arguments assert my right" – death rejects the protocols of rationality with which humanity has been trying to come to terms with it neutralizing its force. This surrender of rigorous rationality is a platform upon which the animal may meet the human. Ernst Thompson Seton in his *Wild Animals I Have Known* published in 1911 tells a story of Lobo, a gray wolf, "a giant among wolves", able to evade all the traps and ruses of wolfers, who has a mate, a white wolf named Blanca. Blanca is caught in a trap and killed. Lobo follows the dead body of his mate dragged by the hunter, falls into a trap himself, caught and held captive, dies "it is said, of a broken heart."<sup>20</sup> "It is said", is a crucial remark in the passage. It points out that what we are trying to capture is *human* both in terms of the experience (we know the human sense of grief) and articulation (language). For B.A. Dixon this however, despite the presence of language, establishes the ontological speechless democracy in the face of death, now common to both the human and the animal. As he writes in his commentary: "Lobo's sorrow is appropriate to the loss of an object of love. It is what any of us might feel in reaction to the tragic demise of someone we adore. And it is also within our range of experience to see that sorrow and grief can temporarily, or, for some, pathologically, blind us to reason and deliberation and impede us in the pursuit of what we ordinarily believe is appropriate action"<sup>21</sup>.
- (c) "I am going to keep things like this" – the metamorphic flow of human history with its intensity of destructiveness and complicated means of putting masses of people to death is countered by the austerity and monumentally severe stability of the animal world. Thus, we could argue that if man's world works by constant efforts to inscribe life within the circle of death, the animal world operates on a different principle: it always captures death as an element of life. Swift relates it in a characteristic passage how the equine mistress came late to her appointment making an excuse that "her husband [...] happened that very morning to *lbnuwnh*" which word can only with considerable difficulty be rendered into English as "to retire to

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Thompson Seton, *Wild Animals I Have Known* (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1911), 54.

<sup>21</sup> B.A. Dixon, *Animals. Emotion and Morality* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2008), 45.

*his first mother.* Her excuse for not coming sooner, was, that her husband dying late in the morning, she was a good while consulting her servants about a convenient place where his body should be laid; and I observed she behaved herself at our house as cheerfully as the rest: she died about three months after.”<sup>22</sup> Human history: life at the service of death, life in the name of death, in the shadow of death. Animal world: death at the service of life which, in its most fundamental democracy, does not mark particular events with a stigma of being more important than others.

### Abstrakt

#### *Człowiek śmierć uczynił*

Kilka uwag o zwierzętach, ludziach i śmierci

Korzystając z tekstów tak różnych poetów jak William B. Yeats, Emily Dickinson czy Ted Hughes, esej próbuje ukazać różnice w sposobie rozumienia i przedstawiania śmierci zwierzęcia i człowieka. Tradycyjnie w naszych wyobrażeniach ta pierwsza wydaje się nie nastęczać problemów, wszak w przeciwieństwie do śmierci człowieka, która poprzez lęk i niepokój zjawia się w ludzkim czasie jakby „przed czasem”, zwierzę umiera nagle, nieoczekiwanym cięciem przecinającym nić jego życia. Koncypujemy, że zwierzę umiera, nie przeżywając niepokoju, jaki śmierć wprowadza w horyzont życia ludzkiego od samego jego początku. Dlatego kultura zawsze suponowała, dając temu wyraz w popularnych aforyzmach w rodzaju *non omnis moriar*, istnienie jakiejś „reszty”, której śmierć nie jest w stanie dotknąć. Zwierzę z kolei umierałoby niejako „całkowicie”, „bez reszty”. Esei stara się zdekonstruować te tradycyjne przekonania, przywracając życiu ludzkiemu „zwierzęcy” wymiar śmierci.

#### **Słowa kluczowe:**

zwierzę, człowiek, śmierć, czas, koniec

### Абстракт

#### *Человек сам создатель смерти*

Несколько размышлений о животных, людях и смерти

Рассматривая тексты таких разных поэтов, как Уильям Б. Йейтс, Эмили Дикинсон или Тед Хьюз, автор статьи пытается показать различные способы восприятия смерти в жизни животного и человека. Традиционно обсуждение статуса смерти животных считалось бессмысленным, поскольку кажется, что с точки зрения ее описания, смерть животных легка. Она приходит как обрыв жизненной нити; она длится одно мгновение, всегда застает животное врасплох. Смерть человека, напротив, вызывает дискуссию; с небольшим преувеличением мы можем утверждать, что человек умирает прежде смерти. Смерть человека объявляет о себе задолго до своего наступления, она уже пришла и тайно присутствует в человеческой жизни, сопровождаемая страхом и беспокойством. Однако в смерти человек обретает некий таинственный покой, который не подвластен смерти, несмотря на то, что она происходит с физической точки зрения. Отсюда горациево *non omnis moriar*; в нас есть покой, которого нет у животного, и который объясняет разницу между двумя видами смерти. В статье делается попытка выдвинуть тезис о том, что нам

<sup>22</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 323.

необходимо выйти за пределы этих двух позиций и заново открыть для себя «животность» смерти в человеческой жизни.

**Ключевые слова:**

животное, человек, смерть, время, конец

