

When the Grass Sings: Poetic Reason and Animal Writing

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Abstract: In this article I shall propose María Zambrano's poetic reason as a suitable method for developing a knowledge of animal being. To do so, I will follow the analyses (Derrida, Coetzee) that place animal thinking in the poetic sphere, thus showing the need for a poetic/literary knowledge to make a philosophical knowledge of the animal possible. Animal writing expresses our nature in relation to animal nature; it discloses our animal interbeingness. Finally, I will point to some of the principles of ecofeminist/animal ethics, like care and empathy, which arise both in what I propose to call animal writing and in Zambranian poetic reason.

Keywords: Animal writing; ethics of care; María Zambrano; passivity; poetic reason.

‘In *Claros del bosque*, when I was so liberated of the word without music, of the word without song, of the abstract word, though never from the liturgical word, I heard the grass sing.’

María Zambrano, ‘*Sobre la iniciación*’ (‘On Initiation’).

1. Introduction: Writing the Silence

The silence of the natural is a recurrent theme in our Western tradition. The scientific/technical discourse, in particular, builds a silent world, where nature is mute, which implies, by contrast, the defence of a rational and transcendent humanity, to whom the exclusive use of language is attributed. In this sense, Manes (1996: 17) points

out, the domination of nature by instrumental reason implies the consideration of nature as a passive and silent agent. Of course, this cognoscitive perspective entails a kind of ethics that, among other things, has led us to environmental disaster, where the exploitation of resources arising from anthropocentrism leads to ecological collapse. The demand for a paradigm shift and, with it, a new ethics with regard to nature is now necessary for establishing new links with the world we inhabit. The effort to create new connections with nature and the attempt to render an account of it through writing will, as we shall see, be the first step toward the possibility of creating a different ethics that articulates other non-anthropocentric principles that make the inhabiting of the Earth possible.

However, the anthropocentrism providing the grounds for the assumption that only humans are language beings is a perspective that has been strongly contested from a number of different paradigms. Gagliano, for example, understands this as an example of a narcissistic attitude and contempt for the nonhuman world. From an incarnate conception of language, and in the face of the idea of a silent nature, she proposes an ‘intercultural’ dialogue that recognises agency and subjectivity in plants. This would allow for a new type of alliance and ethical relationship, as it would promote human caring for nature (Gagliano, 2017: 93-96). Biosemiotics, for its part, upon affording meaning and significance to the whole sphere of nature, dislodges the idea of the exclusivity of language for humans. In this regard, Wheeler understands the development of biosemiotics as a development of ecocriticism (Wheeler, 2006: 106). In turn, Viera proposes the concept of ‘phytographia’ or ‘plant writing’. Starting from the assumption of a continuity between the plant world and human cultural production, the author analyses the modes of lettering or setting of the vegetable word in the human world, and the way in which humans and plants are interlinked: ‘*Phytographia* is the

appellation of an encounter between writings on plants and the writing *of* plants, which inscribe themselves in human texts' (Vieira, 2015: 216). These theoretical paradigms start out from the idea of a continuity between the natural and human worlds, beyond the fracture or discontinuity constructed by an anthropocentric way of thinking.

In this regard, one of the topics of nature writing, environmental literature or ecocriticism, is precisely to think how one can write about nature and animals without falling into anthropocentric positions (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010: 195), which means positioning yourself on a horizontal plane wherein the idea is to give a voice and word to the more-than-human others.

But writing about nature and animals also puts into question the role played by the method of knowledge and the capacity and limitations we have for expressing our connections with other species and nature. In this way, one of the concerns since the beginning of what has come to be called nature writing is the problem of estrangement that our link to nature generates. This translates into the difficulty of depicting this relationship in writing, a common theme in this literary genre. This difficulty in expressing presence and verifying that there is something that cannot be transferred to writing is what ecocriticism has referred to as an 'ecopoetics of negativity' (Rigby, 2006: 10). This is linked to the question of the unspeakable, a question found in mystical literature and which thus relates nature writing to this literary output. We see how this issue appears again and again in many of the authors who address this question and what kind of writing they consider most suitable for taking on this task¹. Focusing

¹ In attempting to recount his experiences in the woods of Massachusetts, Thoreau points out that 'we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard' (Thoreau, 1985: 93). As he expresses his experiences in the woods, Thoreau insists on the need to try to render an account of a living nature beyond an objectifying report, and thus, in some way, reify and paralyse the life he comes across. The author of *Walden* suggests that the most appropriate way of expressing his experiences in the woods is through poetry-literature, in contrast to the accounts more typical of disciplines like history or the natural sciences. In his lovely text, *The Tree*, Fowles also focuses his discourse on the problems involved in establishing a link with nature and the way that writing is inadequate in expressing the feelings and experiences that his relationship with nature provokes in him:

on the topic concerning us in this article, poetic writing will be revealed as the most suitable method for addressing the issue of what we shall call animal writing. Both Derrida and Coetzee assert that animal thinking, if possible at all, is only possible in poetry. In this regard, animal writing lies in the wake of the same methodological issues as nature writing; it faces the difficulty of expressing and capturing in writing the levels of experience that go beyond the merely rational.

I would like to introduce in this article some ideas by the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano (1904-1991) on philosophical writing² and I shall propose her poetic reason as a suitable method for developing a knowledge of animal being. The life and work of Zambrano were marked by fundamental events such as the Spanish Civil War and the War in Europe. Zambrano's 45 year exile pervaded her philosophy to such an extent that she established the concept in one of her thought categories. Zambrano studies philosophy in Madrid with Ortega y Gasset, García Morente and Zubiri. Her interpretations of rationalism and Kantian philosophy and Husserlian phenomenology or the philosophy of Heidegger clearly influence the work of Zambrano. Furthermore, Zambrano is heir to mystic Spanish thought, of authors such as San Juan de la Cruz and Miguel de Molinos, but also Santa Teresa and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. One of her philosophical concerns is to determine whether there has been a real philosophical tradition in Spain or, alternatively, as the thesis defended by Zambrano suggests, non-systematic thought that appears in literary works and essays. From 1939 Zambrano begins to develop her reflections on the link between philosophy and poetry, analysing what is particular to each discourse. This gives rise to *Filosofía y poesía (Philosophy and Poetry)* (1939). These investigations into the characteristic aspect of systematic

'But what I gain most from nature is beyond words' (Fowles, 2010: 36). And it is precisely this difficulty in grasping and articulating thoughts and feelings on nature that motivates and enables writing: 'I know I came to writing through nature, or exile from it, far more than by innate gift' (Fowles, 2010: 104).

² I expand on this question in Balza, 2000; 2012.

thought and literary or non-systematic thought would be expressed in her well-known formula of ‘poetic reason’, which Zambrano uses to discover a new form of reason that accounts for that which is forgotten or rejected by systematic reason. A maximum expression of this form of reason is her text *Claros del bosque* (1977) (*Clearings in the Forest*), written years later during her stay in Jura, France. I will analyse Zambranian poetic reason as a kind of writing that helps to develop a knowledge of human animality and animal writing.

2. The Grace of Nature: Return to the Senses

I shall focus here on one of the women considered to be one of the best writers of nature writing: Annie Dillard. My analysis will focus on Dillard’s text because I believe it poses this issue paradigmatically. My aim now is to take Dillard’s ideas on the problem of expressing experiences of nature so as to later compare them to Zambrano’s poetic reason. It is here, I believe, where we find one of the most promising methodological approaches to philosophical writing that respond to the questions posed by nature writing.

I wish to look now at some of the topics appearing in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, published in 1974, in order to later compare them to some of the issues analysed in Zambrano’s 1977 book *Claros del bosque*. In this book, Dillard depicts her experiences during her stay in Tinker Creek by telling stories, describing herself as ‘an explorer’ and ‘a stalker’ of nature itself, with her book being ‘the straying trail of blood’ (Dillard, 2007: 14-15). Her time in the woods allows her to experience another form of knowledge that goes beyond what we might call techno-scientific reason. The characteristics of this new kind of knowledge experienced by Dillard are the following; it is an unprejudiced type of vision: ‘When I see this second way I am above all an

unscrupulous observer' (Dillard, 2007: 33); it is a knowledge characterised by its passivity, in contrast to the active nature of scientific knowledge: 'It was less like seeing than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance' (Dillard, 2007: 36); it is a wisdom that cannot be actively sought, but rather the product of revelation. It is understood as a present, a gift, or to use a term typical of the mystical/religious sphere, *grace*: 'But although the pearl may be found, it may not be sought. The literature of illumination reveals this above all: although it comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise' (Dillard, 2007: 35); moreover, those who see in this way experience absolute concentration, receptiveness and a lack of self-consciousness, and therein lies *innocence* for Dillard. Finally, this form of knowledge is true vision, connecting us to our senses: 'When I see this way I see truly. As Thoreau says, I return to my senses' (Dillard, 2007: 34).

This true, innocent, passive, unprejudiced knowledge is a gift, a present from nature that connects us to our senses. And through her writing Annie Dillard attempts to give an account of what she experienced in the woods. Life in contact with nature has allowed Dillard access to a form of knowledge that transcends technoscientific knowledge. Her book is the testimony of this knowledge, separate from instrumental reason³. Dillard's experience in Tinker Creek has gifted her the ability to access another form of knowledge. It is a knowledge that recovers a privileged status for the senses, beyond the forgotten place that techno-instrumental reason had placed them in. The *grace* of nature is therefore a return to the senses.

Since the publication of one of her first books, *Filosofía y Poesía* in 1939, Zambrano as well has claimed *grace* as a constituent element of poetic knowledge: 'Or is it that the

³ For the religious character of Dillard's text and its links to Theology and Christian beliefs, see: Warren, 2010.

ultimate truths of existence, those of dying and of love, although persecuted are pursued to the end, voluntary, by adventurous deed, by what later will be called “grace” and that in Greek was bestowed the lovely name, *jaries* [sic], *carites*?’ (Zambrano, 1987: 19)⁴. As we shall see, this knowledge within the poetic sphere appeals to the senses⁵ for Zambrano as well, attempting to articulate a knowledge that transcends the merely rational sphere of scientific/instrumental philosophy.

3. Clearings in the Forest

Indeed, the search for a true, innocent, passive and unprejudiced knowledge, which connects us to our senses, is also the quest undertaken by Spanish philosopher María Zambrano when she suggests her *poetic reason*. Without getting into the significance of Zambrano’s proposal⁶, I will examine some of the points that relate poetic reason to the concepts posed in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. As we will see, this is all aimed at proposing the method of knowledge that assumes poetic reason as a suitable method for animal thinking.

Although Zambrano’s analysis of poetic reason begins early in her publications, I wish now to highlight some of the issues brought up in her 1977 book, *Claros del bosque*. I do so because I consider it one of the most successful examples of what should be –and is– Zambranian poetic reason. Zambrano’s aim is to find a new form of reason that accounts for what is forgotten or rejected by systematic reason. What she proposes with this reason, referred to as ‘poetic’, is a broadening of the limits of reason; that it may ‘awaken and take charge of all areas of life’ (Zambrano, 1977: 15). Zambrano aims to recover for the word those areas of reality that have been excluded from reason as

⁴ *Philosophy and Poetry*. Translated by D. Ohmans, 2008.

⁵ The notion of soul in Zambrano refers to the sphere of the pre-theoretical, the non-rational *a priori* of knowledge, the centre of the appetites and desires of the subject; in the words of the author: ‘the original feeling’.

⁶ See: Balza, 2000; Balza, 2012; Balza, 2014.

insignificant, wicked or impossible to know. To this end, she proposes a diverse method of knowledge, a method that is distinguished more than anything by its passivity. The passivity of the proposed method consists of allowing oneself to be invaded by a sign. What is proposed by all of this is to recover the origin of thought, in the sense that it is wonder before the ever contingent event. Herein lies the metaphor of the clearings in the forest, which lends its name to the title of the book: the clearing in the forest is the metaphor that refers to the time of revelation in knowledge, it is the place of revelation, of a creative time or a broad present that enables knowledge⁷. In contrast to the active subject of science, poetic reason advocates the constituent passivity of her method: ‘You need not look for it. You need not search. This is the immediate lesson of the clearings in the forest: you must not look for them, nor look for anything from them. Nothing particular, prefigured, familiar’ (Zambrano, 1977: 11).

Similarly to Dillard, Zambrano insists on the passivity that distinguishes this form of knowledge, a knowledge that is unprejudiced for her as well. A knowledge that is innocent and that connects us with the forgotten or rejected areas of our being. But this passivity will be, as we shall see, an *active passivity* or a ‘higher passivity’: the activeness in passive knowledge lies in its ability to provoke the act of writing, with the aim of relating what has occurred in the clearings in the forest. Thus, writing for Zambrano is constituted in the testimony of these fortunate times when revelation occurs. Poetic reason thus allows her, insofar as she allows herself to be taken by this passive method, to reconnect with the Earth and, somehow, transcend the barrier

⁷ One of Zambrano’s philosophical references is Heidegger, to whom she dedicated a number of works (Zambrano, 1938). For similarities and differences between the metaphor of the Zambranian clearings in the forest with the Heideggerian *Lichtung*, and for the relation of the concept of the poetic reason of Zambrano with the analyses of Heidegger on philosophy and poetry, see: Acevedo, 2008; Adán, 1999; Cacciari, 2003.

separating us from our link to nature. This is why in *Claros del bosque* she hears the grass sing.

As we can see, Zambrano takes on some of the major issues of nature writing. The passivity of the proposed method, the need to connect with nature, the aim of recovering areas of our being hidden or discarded by techno-scientific reason; the search for innocence; all of it, I believe, with an interesting methodological proposal: the essayist hence develops a reflection on what kind of philosophical writing is suitable for accessing this knowledge. Her poetic reason aims to recover those objects excluded from consciousness, but always with the goal that this knowledge be transmissible. Thus, this philosophical writing that is poetic reason is linked to nature writing, insofar as they pursue common objectives. And although Zambrano does not make explicit reference in her texts to what we call animal thinking, I believe that her proposal of philosophical writing shares common traits with what I propose to call animal writing.

4. Animal writing: listen to the whispering

‘The clearing in the forest is a centre where it is not always possible to go; it is observed from the edge and the appearance of animal tracks does not facilitate taking that step. It is another realm lived in and guarded by a soul. A bird chirps and calls to be followed wherever its voice carries. And it is obeyed.’

(Zambrano, 1977: 11)

What I call animal writing refers to the issues encompassed in what some authors have coined ‘animal thinking’. Animal thinking reflects on the difficulties of accessing what relates us to other non-human animals: what we might call our animal being. Derrida

describes the abyssal limit that the history of thought and culture has erected between humans and other animals; but even if we knocked down that ontological wall and devised links with other animals on a horizontal and materialistic plane –as opposed to the vertical and dominating representation of idealism–, access to the knowledge that relates us to other animals would be very difficult (or almost impossible). Connected to the difficulty of accessing this form of knowledge is the matter of expressing this animal knowledge, as occurs in nature writing.

With the term animal writing⁸, I wish to analyse the difficulties and characteristics of a philosophical writing that gives an account of our link to non-human animals. By this I do not refer to a reflection on our ethical relationships with animals, but rather a consideration of what we share with non-human animals. This involves examining what kind of knowledge can be articulated about our animal being. Additionally, as an ontological matter, it will show us a great deal about necessary justice and appropriate ethical relationships with animals. My thesis is that Zambranian poetic reason can help us to think about what kind of philosophical method is suitable for animal writing and thinking.

What I understand by animal writing is a type of writing that wishes to express that pre-verbal knowledge that links us to other animal species, thus showing our animal being. Therefore, animal writing begins from the premise of a continuity with other animal species, but it also recognises and takes into consideration the difficulty of connecting

⁸ An example of animal writing would be the poem 'Come into Animal Presence' by Denise Levertov: Come into animal presence. / No man is so guileless as / the serpent. The lonely white / rabbit on the roof is a star / twitching its ears at the rain. / The llama intricately / folding its hind legs to be seated / not disdains but mildly / disregards human approval. / What joy when the insouciant / armadillo glances at us and doesn't / quicken his trotting / across the track into the palm brush. / What is this joy? That no animal / falters, but knows what it must do? / That the snake has no blemish, / that the rabbit inspects his strange surroundings / in white star-silence? The llama / rests in dignity, the armadillo / has some intention to pursue in the palm-forest. / Those who were sacred have remained so, / holiness does not dissolve, it is a presence / of bronze, only the sight that saw it / faltered and turned from it. / An old joy returns in holy presence (Levertov, 1961).

with them. In this sense, it is different from Moe's concept of zoopoetics, because animal writing deals with, above all, human poiesis about human animality. For Moe, zoopoetics is an ebb and flow between the human and nonhuman, consisting in the interaction between the human, animal and textual spheres, recognising that nonhuman animals are also makers, and they have agency in this making. It is, in the words of Moe, not a monospecies event, but a multispecies and a co-making one (Moe, 2014: 24). Perhaps the most important difference is that, with his zoopoetics, Moe also wants to analyse nonhuman animal rhetoric, and when I refer to animal writing I focus, above all, on human rhetoric, be it related to the human animal being or its interaction with other animal species. What can be recognised from the thesis of Zambrano is the idea defended by Moe of a 'universal bodily poiesis' (Moe, 2013: 4) that we would share with the other animals.

One of the authors who has most reflected on the difficulties of accessing animal thinking is Derrida. When he posits this question in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, he first distinguishes poetic knowledge from philosophical knowledge, placing the notion of animal thinking in the former: 'For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a thesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of. It is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking' (Derrida, 2006: 7). Derrida distinguishes two kinds of discourse, two forms of theoretical treatise on animals; one is the properly philosophical discourse, encompassing theorists and philosophers as such: it is they who characterise themselves because they 'have never been *seen seen* by the animal' (Derrida 2006: 13). All of these philosophers⁹ –the author cites Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan and

⁹ Here there is an important and implicit issue of gender. For Derrida, the link to this animal knowledge held by women has been different to that maintained by men (Derrida, 2006: 13-14). For the relationships between animal ethics and feminism, see: Adams and Donovan, 1995; Adams and Gruen, 2014; Donovan, 1990; Kemmerer, 2011.

Lévinas— understand the animal as a theorem; in this long —and predominant— philosophical (idealist) tradition the question is posed in terms of the theoretical animal: as something seen and not seeing, as an object of knowledge and not subject to knowing. This implies for Derrida a huge denial of the animal being in the human and thus that of man is constituted as a symptom of this denial (Derrida, 2006: 14). The other type of discourse on animals that Derrida presents is that of poets or prophets: they, as opposed to philosophers, are defined by taking on the interpellation directed to them by animals and attempting to express that animal knowledge. This is where animal writing will be situated.

It must be stressed that the French philosopher's thesis is based on the idea that there is an animal knowledge. Derrida rejects the silent obfuscation, brutalisation, bewilderment, absence of language, mutism, distress and silence which certain philosophical traditions (especially idealism) attribute to animals (Derrida, 2006: 19). Animals are not only theoretical objects, they are also subjects of knowledge. The problem is not their lack of expression, but rather our difficulty in connecting with the animal being. And this difficulty in accessing this animal knowledge causes estrangement, a stupor before the animal as is also caused by nature.

Recalling some of Walter Benjamin's intuitions, Derrida states that the silence of nature and the animal is the product of the passivity humans have put them in. The sadness and melancholy that both nature and animals show are caused not by their muteness, but rather by their consideration as mere objects (Derrida, 2006: 19). Hardship, impoverishment and the lack of nature —and of the animal— consist of an absence of language, of finding oneself in a state without the power to name and respond. This aphasia of nature and the animal, a product of that passivity that consists of being named shows, despite everything, some form of the word: 'If this putative sadness also

gives rise to a lament, if nature laments, expressing a mute but audible lament through sensuous sighing and even the rustling of plants, it is perhaps because the terms have to be inverted' (Derrida, 2006: 19). Following then the trail of this animal babbling will allow us to access their/our knowledge and thus invert the terms in which the philosophical tradition has situated us.

In any case, Derrida tells us what animal writing should not be: it should not be fable; fable implies 'an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication. Always a discourse of man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man' (Derrida, 2006: 37). A discourse must be sought that is neither anthropomorphic nor moralising. The desired writing must involve listening to the babbling, the lament and the whispering that link us, from the margins of writing, to our animal being. Indeed, it is poetry that has allowed it, especially¹⁰, to offer its (non)voice to animals. It is the poets who have felt interpellated by animals, by their animal being, and thus have tried to access the knowledge that links us to animality. Poetry would thus show that other non-human subjectivities are possible, beyond the beliefs of philosophical idealism that, with its repeated zoophobia¹¹, rejects the different subjectivities of the animal being¹².

J. M. Coetzee also makes this distinction between philosophical knowledge and poetic knowledge in similar terms. In his text *The Lives of Animals*, first published in 1999 – and included later as a chapter in his novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2003)–, the author also discusses the different forms of animal knowledge that arise in philosophy and poetry.

¹⁰ For Derrida it is also possible to create a kind of 'Philosophical bestiary' that compiles the traces of the animal through the texts of the history of Philosophy (Derrida, 2006: 39).

¹¹ If idealism constitutes a project of man's dominion over nature and animals, zoophobia is the trait that idealism and transcendentalism share (Derrida, 2006: 102).

¹² Derrida puts forward the concept of 'animot' to surpass the anthropocentrism he finds in idealism. In this regard, Calarco indicates the need that the Derridean critique has for a concept that thinks of animality overcoming human-animal dualism. But Calarco's thesis is that 'animot' is a failed concept, to the extent that it maintains an anthropocentric bias, as it does not abandon the human-animal distinction (Calarco, 2008: 364).

Coetzee points to two main differences between philosophical discourse and poetic discourse. First, if the purpose of philosophical knowledge lies in finding an idea in the animal, the purpose of poetic knowledge is to record an engagement with the animal or, in other words, poetry consists of embodying animals through poetic invention. And second, as opposed to the search for one's own consciousness posited by philosophy, poetry aims to develop a knowledge of our animal being. The purpose guiding the poetic endeavour would then be the embodiment of the animal being by articulating a knowledge of it. In Coetzee's words: 'That is the kind of poetry... that does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him' (Coetzee, 1999: 51).

Zambrano also distinguishes between philosophical and poetic discourse as forms of knowledge that arise in the history of thought. One of her first philosophical projects consisted precisely of analysing the various methods of knowledge employed by philosophy and poetry. In *Filosofía y poesía* (1939), she makes clear that poetry attempts to recover for the word those areas of reality that have been discarded by philosophy. Distinguishing philosophy from wisdom, Zambrano states that the method constitutes philosophy as a type of discourse different to that of wisdom, but reminds us that the origin of philosophy is that knowledge that is expressed in enigmas, in such a way that the origin of philosophy would be found in a wisdom that cannot be reduced by philosophical discourse. As we will see, Zambrano begins by distinguishing the philosophical discourse from the poetic discourse to then propose poetic reason as a philosophical discourse suitable for the passive knowledge of the poet.

What she criticises is that philosophy –idealism in particular– is identified with an active method of thought, which leaves ineffable or impossible scraps of reality, which are unsuitable for her method. Although she does not openly pose the animal question,

we can thus deduce from her theses on poetic knowledge –in line with those of Derrida and Coetzee– arguments to articulate an animal knowledge from poetic reason. To do so, we must first explore what characterises poetic knowledge as opposed to philosophical knowledge.

5. Passivity and Vulnerability: Can We Suffer?

The animal question for both Derrida and Coetzee is framed in the order of the unspeakable, where only poetry is able to bring out whisperings in the form of words. But what is that unspeakable, that which relates us humans to animals and is only possible to say through poetry? Derrida reminds us that we share vulnerability and finitude with animals. He analyses this mode of human-animal passivity based on Bentham's '*can they suffer?*'. This question leads to a passivity that is a passion or a *not-being-able*. The finitude that ties us to animals is the absence of ability, passivity and vulnerability experienced through this powerlessness (Derrida, 2006: 28).

As opposed to 'I think therefore I am', which denies all animality in humans, the certainty constituted by '*can they suffer?*' is a radical instance, which is the undeniable: 'No one can deny the suffering, fear, or panic, the terror or fright that can seize certain animals and that we humans can witness' (Derrida, 2006: 28).

So it is the very finitude of life with the experience of compassion that accompanies it that relates us to our animal being. And here lies the unspeakable for two reasons. There is the pain, fear, panic, suffering, that is, everything that refers to the field of ethics, to the abuse of others, including other animals. Violence and abuse (whether directed toward humans or other animals) can become unspeakable due to their magnitude, leading us to silence and leaving only compassion. This is what happens to Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello, mute before the pain of the animals and the abuse they are subjected

to. But also, and as Cary Wolfe points out, there is a second form of unspeakability, that which confronts us with our own cognitive limits: ‘But both moments insist on something else, too –a second kind of “unspeakability”’: not only the unspeakability of how we mistreat animals, but also the unspeakability of the limits of our own thinking in confronting such a reality’ (Wolfe, 2008: 14).

We see then that Derrida distinguishes two types of finitude in humans and with them two kinds of passivity and vulnerability. The first refers to physical vulnerability, understood as corporeality and mortality. The second, meanwhile, refers to passivity understood as the lack of ability. Derrida puts this second finitude in the order of the unspeakable, a sphere of which philosophy would not be able to render an account (Derrida, 2006: 28). And here is where the animal (and poetry) appear.

There is then a physical vulnerability that refers to our animal mortality, our carnal being, and in this sphere the ethical question of animal justice appears. But there is another sphere of finitude that refers to a kind of inability and powerlessness for which philosophy cannot account. It is in this second order that poetry attempts to give word to the limits of the human/animal being; it is this liminal knowledge that animal writing aims to relate. And ethics and philosophy would be responsible for the first order of passivity.

Indeed, as we were saying, for Zambrano poetic reason attempts to listen and recover for the word all that is relegated by philosophical reason. That which philosophical reason cannot say and express through concepts is possible through signs. And there appears the unspeakable, under the babbling, the groaning and the whispering. And so here we can place the possibility of animal writing.

But what in her eyes distinguishes the genuinely philosophical method from the method proposed for poetic reason? Mostly its passivity, as opposed to the active nature of the

philosophical method. Poetic reason is fundamentally passive. Let's see what this means.

With clear reminiscences of the Spanish mystic tradition, Zambrano understands that in this form of knowledge there is no active search for an objective. Rather, it is a patient wait that listens and grabs onto whatever occurs in thought. The subject of knowledge must be a passive one that can be overwhelmed by event, because it does not involve asking, nor voluntarily searching for or pursuing a sense. Rather –and herein lies the passivity of the proposed method– it involves allowing oneself to be invaded by a sign¹³. Zambrano thus aims to recover the role of the senses in knowledge, awarding them a main role in the poetic reason method.

In this way, the passivity of this type of knowledge translates into the impossibility of provoking it, linking the activeness of thought to the passivity of intuition. Zambrano insists on denying the possibility of provoking such experience because it is unpredictable insofar as it assails the subject and cannot be controlled by the will.

But the interesting part of Zambrano's proposal is, as mentioned above, that it involves an *active passivity*, or according to formulation from a 1966 text, a 'superior passivity'¹⁴, that is, no longer merely passive, but rather associated with activity or a call to action.

Thus, if this second form of finitude that Derrida discusses confronts us with our animal being and the limits of knowledge, my thesis is that Zambrano's poetic reason reveals itself as a suitable method of knowledge to render an account of this form of passivity that shows our powerlessness: because rather than advocate remaining in this mere

¹³ In this sense, the sign is an unexpected event that activates the writing process.

¹⁴ Zambrano, M. 'El camino de la pasividad' ('The Path of Passivity'). La Pièce, 17 August 1966 (unpublished). Zambrano admits that her poetic reason is a type of mystical reason, but in the strict sense in which she analyses mystical thought. It is not so much proposing passive thinking, rather not forgetting the passive aspect of thought. The passive aspect of thinking is the silence that marks writing, and to write is 'silence and sound, to say and to be silent' (Zambrano, 1986a: 73).

helpless passivity, it attempts to write the whispering and babblings that express a knowledge of our animal being.

6. Embody the Animal

Both Coetzee and Derrida search for a knowledge of the animal beyond technoscientific reason. Derrida refers to the certainty of passivity and carnal vulnerability as the first link that we humans share with other animals. Both, as we have seen, insist on the unspeakability of this animal thinking, and place the possibility of this knowledge in the poetic/literary sphere. But not just any literary approach is valid. Thus, Derrida is clear that the animal thinking he is looking for cannot be found in anthropomorphic fabulation. Through Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee also criticises the tropological use of animals in literature, discarding any figurative use and any type of personification or allegory. In this regard, Scholtmeijer criticises the humanisation of animals in literature, insisting on the need for a literary approach to animals as subjects whose otherness is recognised (Scholtmeijer, 1995: 253). This demand for respect for the otherness of animals is also advocated by Donovan when she says that the treatment of animals in the literary sphere should be that of ‘animal *qua* animal’ (Donovan, 2016: 101), and not symbols or metaphors that serve to describe human emotions or qualities. For Donovan, treating the animal as an animal means respecting its uniqueness in contrast to the abstract generalisation proposed by science or philosophy, thus rescuing the specific individual creature. The methodological proposals for an ethical narrative of both Vance (1995: 184) and Donovan imply adopting the ‘attentive love’ proposed by Sara Ruddick (1989). This translates to attending to the individual subjects as well as their particular contexts. Donovan also adds a ‘mimetic comportment’ to her proposal (Donovan, 2016: 104), meaning that the animal being is worth paying attention to, an attention that

indicates respect and recognises the ontological status of animals.

Donovan defends Gilligan's theory of care in the treatment of animals in the literary sphere. In contrast to abstract generalisations, the ethics of care allow for situating and specifying the circumstances of the subjects, in this case, animals. The ethics of care is distinguished precisely by listening to the voices of silenced others, always beginning from the premise that these others are subjects with their own lives and not just mere consumable objects¹⁵. And for Donovan only literature is able to single out and respect the otherness of animals and thus give them that different voice (Donovan: 2016: 99).

The defence of the literary/poetic sphere being the only one capable of articulating the animal voice appears once again, thus offering us the animal thinking sought by Derrida. And here the concept of 'empathy' will bring together the proposed sense of ethical treatment. Malamud argues that it is the empathetic imagination that can place both the writer/reader and animals on one equal horizontal plane, making them cohabitants (Malamud, 2003: 33). The literary sphere clearly allows the necessary empathy to emerge for an animal ethics; because empathy, unlike sympathy, refers to the specific sphere of the lives of the animal subjects, the sphere of feelings, emotions and affections (Gruen, 2015)¹⁶.

Poetry, then, is the sphere in which it is possible to change customs and culture, always constituting a prior and necessary requisite for articulating an ethics and an animal justice in the philosophical realm. Empathy is necessary for justice; poetry-literature is necessary for philosophy.

The recognition of animal otherness is also a prior and necessary step to articulating the

¹⁵ On the tradition of ethics of care in animal ethics: Donovan and Adams, 2007.

¹⁶ In this area, various authors argue that women are closer to this animal knowledge. Having been excluded from culture, they find themselves in an excellent cognoscitive position to understand otherness and thus subvert the self-designated realities of authorised culture (McFarland, 2008; Scholtmeijer, 1995: 257). This does not just mean that women can give voice to animals, but rather that animal resistance can be an example for the feminist struggle. I will leave this question for a later study.

animal thinking sought by Derrida. It serves to find an animal ethics, but also to find an understanding of what links us to animals. Coetzee goes further, arguing that animal thinking translates to *embodying* the animal (Coetzee, 1999: 33). The embodiment Coetzee refers to points to a form of knowledge that contrast feelings and sensations with philosophical thinking through concepts. The attentive love and mimetic behaviour beyond fable defended by Donovan therefore seem to me to be valid ways of bringing us closer to animal knowledge. In this way it is possible to hear and tell the passivity and carnal vulnerability that we humans share with other animals. In contrast to the generalisations of philosophy, literature-poetry makes it possible to relate direct experience, unmediated through ideas or concepts. And this is where we can hear the language of the animal being and embody it.

In this regard, Zambrano, in one of her first analyses on the difference between the poetic and philosophical spheres, understands the poem as ‘incarnated unity’ (Zambrano, 1987: 22), where ‘we directly encounter the concrete, individual human’ (Zambrano, 1987: 13). Poetry is *grace* and ‘charity that cannot resolve to break the relationships that unite the person with everything living, partner in origin and creation’ (Zambrano, 1987: 63). And here, among all living things, human beings will also encounter animals.

7. Conclusion: Poetic Reason for Animal Knowledge

‘An animal without fable looks from afar’

(Zambrano, 1977: 13)

Our carnal and mortal condition is what links us to other animals; vulnerability and finitude remind us that we too are animals. For Derrida, our animal vulnerability is

accompanied by that passivity and leads to muteness and lack of speech. Zambrano also advocates the intrinsic vulnerability of the human subject, proposing *destitution* as the first ontological principle. And it is precisely this destitution that forces us and allows us to encounter others.

If Wolfe suggests that the biopolitical question lies in the fact that there is no longer an opposition of the human to the animal but rather that both –humans and animals– would occupy the same biopolitical space, in the sense that we find ourselves in continuity in the ‘expanded community of the living’, all of us (humans and non-humans) being ‘potentially animals before the law’ (Wolfe, 2013: 105), Zambrano will defend for literature-poetry the possibility of the opening in order to extend among things and to be able to find ourselves with all the others (Zambrano, 1987: 115). In this regard, Wolfe’s proposal of opting for an animal ethics that transcends the question of rights continues along the lines of Plumwood’s argument for an animal ethics that goes beyond the demand for rights for non-human animals. This is an interspecies ethics that recognises continuity between the human and non-human, allowing for the articulation of a human identity that accepts its animality (Plumwood, 2002: 194). Animal thinking and animal writing are only possible through assuming one’s own animality.

Thus, I believe that the ‘charitable justice’ practiced in poetry (Zambrano, 1987: 89), giving word and voice to those without it, allowing those left out of existence to become, is a form of knowledge that pushes ethics beyond the question of rights, though without renouncing them. As pointed out, poetry is necessary for philosophy, and its charitable justice complements an ethics of animal rights.

If Zambrano distinguishes the philosophical discourse of poetry in 1938, her research will later be aimed at finding a method of knowledge that combines poetry with the systematic pursuit of philosophy. This method is poetic reason, which by maintaining

the attempt of poetry to rescue those beings that lack an existence in language and give a name to everything left out of purely philosophical-scientific knowledge, will also aim to be transmissible through concepts like philosophical discourse. Poetic reason thus breaks the opposition between philosophy and poetry. In addition, poetic reason is a reason incarnate, because under this way of understanding knowledge we do not just find discursive or abstract reason involved, but also the senses, which connect the body both to the external surrounding it and its interior.

It practices empathy toward all living things and thus brings us closer to our animal knowledge. I therefore believe that Zambranian poetic reason is a proposal of philosophical writing suitable for animal thinking and for what I have analysed in this work as animal writing.

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