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On Dogs and Good: Iris Murdoch's Animal Imagination

Des chiens et du bien : l'imaginaire de l'animal dans la fiction d'Iris Murdoch

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Résumés

Français English

Il n'est guère surprenant que la gent canine, exemplaire par ses capacités d'empathie et de dévouement, soit devenue l'animal éthique par excellence des romans d'Iris Murdoch, incarnant ainsi un modèle moral à l'encontre des tendances obstinément égoïstes de l'humain par ailleurs analysées dans les écrits philosophiques de Murdoch. Mais voilà qui soulève un important problème esthétique : comment écrire l'être chien alors qu'il est étranger au langage humain ? Cette étude propose une analyse de passages-clés tirés de quelques œuvres majeures de la romancière, visant à explorer le travail de la zoopoétique murdochienne dans son devenir animal. Dans *L'Animal que donc je suis*, Jacques Derrida reconnaîtra ce « point de vue de l'autre absolu » au contact du regard de l'animal ; mais cette « altérité absolue » que Derrida théorise en 1998, Iris Murdoch l'avait bien avant imaginée et mise en texte en des pages où le monde est perçu, vécu par le chien — où la focalisation glisse de l'humain à l'animal pour devenir ce qu'il conviendrait d'appeler « zoofocalisation », comme si l'autre absolu s'emparait de la voix narrative.

Dogs being exemplary in terms of empathic and selfless capabilities, it is no wonder Murdoch chose this species, in her novel-writing, as her totem ethical animal, as the counter-example to the 'fat, relentless [human] ego' (*The Sovereignty of Good* 52) exposed in her philosophy: 'dogs are often figures of virtue', she once confirmed in an interview (Dooley 155). But dogs' foreignness to human language poses a crucial aesthetic problem: how can this unspeakable alterity be written? In analyses of key-passages of some major novels, this paper proposes a zoopoetic approach to the ways in which the text works at inscribing this animal otherness. In

1998, Derrida theorised about 'the point of view of the absolute other' (*The Animal that therefore I Am*) expressed by the gaze of the animal—a point of view which Murdoch had set to words much earlier through borderline narrative experiments where focalization shifts from human to animal, in pages where the novelist's imagination ventures into what could be termed 'zoofocalisation', when everything passes through the animal's perceptions as though



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Texte intégral

- 1 In her philosophical paper 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', Iris Murdoch discussed the 'self-forgetful pleasure [we take] in the sheer, alien, pointless, independent existence of animals' (*The Sovereignty of Good* 85):

I am looking out of my window, oblivious of my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage done to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but kestrel. (*TSG* 84)

- 2 This 'pleasure' can thus be considered as an antidote to what Murdoch calls, in 'On "God" and "Good"', the 'enemy' of 'moral life' that is 'the fat, relentless ego' (*TSG* 52) or 'greedy organism of the self' (*TSG* 65).
- 3 A decade or so later, in the closing debate of the 1978 Caen conference, Murdoch resumed the idea in this reference to Laska, Levin's female dog in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*: 'As Tolstoy describes the feelings of Levin's dog—suddenly he becomes a dog! This is very pleasing, and it provides a method of [. . .] taking the weight off somewhere else, as it were, towards the side, which is good' (*Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch* 81–82).
- 4 Thus, the art of fiction lends itself well to the moral task of shifting the centre of gravity 'outward, away from self' (*TSG* 66), provided that the artist's imagination is powerful enough to go through the most 'alien' experience of becoming animal.¹ Murdoch's comments on Levin's dog are strikingly topical given today's high level of interest in zoopoetics which, as an offshoot of ecopoetics, is a critical approach 'that explores the human capacity for becoming animal';² an approach further defined by Anne Simon as follows:

An analysis of how one writes the animal (by means of syntactic distortions, of stress displacement, rhythmic variations, subtle shifts of perspective, and so on). Human language is not necessarily an obstacle to reach for the creatures who communicate and express themselves differently, or more silently than us. Relocating, transforming our own language, makes it possible to access and convey the alterity of other animals. The same would apply to putting oneself in another human's shoes! (my translation)³

- 5 This paper aims at adopting such an approach to Murdoch's fiction, if only because five years after the Caen conference, she followed in Tolstoy's footsteps by publishing *The Philosopher's Pupil*, the first novel in which her narrator sees part of the story

out of a dog's eyes. Zed, a 'clever humorous' Papillon (*TPP* 201), is indeed Murdoch's first focalizing nonhuman being, or '*animot*' ('animal-word'), to freely adapt Jacques Derrida's famous portmanteau neologism⁴—albeit in a way which stays true to Derrida's philosophy—in the manner of Simon when she gave the title '*Animots*' to her project for the ANR (the French National Research Agency):

I pluralized the word in order to show an interest in words, syntax, turn of phrase and expression, instead of animality as a pure concept (unless with the aim of deconstructing it). Taking up Derrida's '*animot*' was also a way of paying tribute to philosophy and, more generally, to transdisciplinarity. (my translation)⁵

- 6 In that sense of the term, Murdoch's '*animot*' seems to correspond to what Haraway calls a 'figure', inasmuch as it is understood as a 'material-semiotic node' entangling human text and animal body:

Figures [. . .] are not representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another. For me, figures have always been where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all of the force of lived reality. (Haraway 4)

- 7 Only once—ten years later—did Murdoch repeat the experiment, in *The Green Knight*, with Anax, 'a distinguished and unusual collie with blue eyes' (*TGK* 1). Interestingly enough, Zed and Anax are males, which arguably allows Murdoch's narrative voice to move even further away from self⁶—in the same way as Leon Tolstoy chose a female dog for the zoopoetic moments of *Anna Karenina*. These rare and remarkable events in Murdoch's fiction, when the novelist's imagination ventures into what could be termed 'zoofocalization'—when everything passes through the animal's perceptions—make it possible to take to the letter what Peter Conradi calls Murdoch's 'animal intelligence': 'a quality of understanding, [an] ability to encounter the sensuousness of the activity of thinking, in all its immediacy' (Conradi 2001a, 8). 'Immediacy': no mediation between the animal and reality—or rather, no interpolation by the blind, self-centred fantasies so typical of human thinking; only the 'body's imagination' (Abram 2010, 290), 'an imagination steadily nourished by [the] senses' (Abram 2010, 298).

[From] the phenomenologist's perspective, that which we call *imagination* is from the first an attribute of the senses themselves; imagination is not a separate mental faculty (as we so often assume) but is rather the way the senses have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things [. . .]. One perceives a world at all [. . .], one makes contact with things and others only by [. . .] lending one's sensory imagination to things in order to discover [. . .] how they are different from us. (Abram 1997, 58, 275–276)

- 8 Dogs being exemplary in terms of empathic and selfless capabilities, it is no wonder Murdoch chose this species as her totem ethical animal, and was inspired by two of its members in the creation of her '*animots*'. This gave her access to an intelligence that is 'other than a privation' (Derrida 48)—and perhaps even the opposite of a privation: on a quest for the good, being deprived of the burdensome ego is a major asset. Furthermore, a dog's privileged place among us humans enhances, by contrast with our selfish propensities, his natural goodness.
- 9 Zed and Anax are obviously not Murdoch's only canine characters. Her novels are home to a vast community of dogs: dogs strictly speaking, but also cynomorphic

creatures—dog-like humans and other animals. And yet, as shown in the next section of this paper, the human cynomorphs seldom shine by their ethics, which raises a problem of interpretation. The following section will focus on *The Philosopher's Pupil*, home to the exemplary Zed, to show how Murdoch's very first 'animot' is brought to life as consciousness shifts and relocates itself, as verbal and animal bodies entangle into a 'material-semiotic knot' (Haraway 4) of goodness. This will be followed by an analysis of the narrative counterpoints, in *The Philosopher's Pupil* and *The Green Knight*, which set in striking contrast the clouded, ego-bound human perception, and the dog's 'sensory imagination' (Abram 1997, 276), 'clarity of vision' (TSG 68)—a vision 'burn[ing] with ecstasy and love' (TPP 248), a vision with the power to make one 'become part of an immense world being' (TGK 186) and even to reach and transform the human other.

Cynomorphic Creatures

10 One would expect Murdoch's dog-featured humans to be ethically minded, but the novelist often frustrates this expectation by ironically conceiving them as ethically challenged, fake figures of the genuine, virtuous dog.⁷ To name but a few examples, fantasy and anxiety-ridden Paula Biranne in *The Nice and the Good* has a 'keen smiling dog face' (18). In *The Message to the Planet*, Alfred Ludens's 'thousand-eyed jealousy [leaps] like a ferocious watch-dog from its lair' (299). A most interesting specimen, however, is to be found in *The Unicorn*: Marian Taylor, with her 'long dog-like nose and smallish lively brown eyes', and her 'compressed aggressive mouth' (83), has a very personal interpretation of a major reference in moral philosophy—Kant's Categorical Imperative. In its original version, Kant's concept promotes the respect of others above one's personal interest, but doggy-nosed Marian completely misunderstands the notion by using it as a 'power' tool at the service of her own desires and of what she believes to be other people's desires (more particularly, Hannah Crean-Smith's):

she did feel in her bones a kind of urgency, a sense of being now in a position of power or trust which she must exploit while she could. She felt above all, as a sort of categorical imperative, the desire to set Hannah free, to smash up all her eerie magical surroundings. (TU 124–125)

11 The 'imperative' felt by Marian actually corresponds to what Murdoch identifies, in her philosophy, as the constricting 'fantasy mechanism' (TSG 67) of the ego, as opposed to the liberating, unselfing virtues of goodness. This implies—with all due respect to René Descartes—that the machine (the 'mechanism') is in the *cogito*, in the self-serving cogitations of the human mind, not in the supposedly soulless nonhuman animal.⁸

12 In contrast with their spurious human counterparts, Murdoch's cynomorphic nonhumans seem exemplary. Their gaze—albeit conveyed from the outside—expresses an intensity of being that would make Descartes turn in his grave. Witness the moments, in *The Unicorn*, where Murdoch humorously confronts 'doggy' animals with doggy Marian herself, as if to hold up potential mirrors to the woman. Each time, however, the mirror-image proves thoroughly other, as in the case of Marian's encounter with a 'doggy faced' pipistrel; although the bat is trapped within a room of the aptly named Gaze Castle, its 'bright dark eyes' meet Marian's with overpowering force:

The bat, a little pipistrel, was pulling itself slowly along the rug with jerky movements of its crumpled leathery arms. It paused and looked up. Marian looked into its strange little doggy face and bright dark eyes. It had an almost uncanny degree of presence, of being. She met its look. Then it opened its little toothy mouth and uttered a high-pitched squawk. Marian laughed and then felt a sudden desire to cry. (TU 40)

- 13 Marian's encounter with the trapped pipistrel is an indoors variation on her earlier face-to-face with a seal—a sea-dog—on the beach. In the following passage, the text is split up into two paragraphs hinging on an anadiplosis: the final word of the first paragraph ('face') is repeated as the first word of the next, producing a mirror effect between Marian and the seal's 'dog-like head'. But again, what the reflection sends back is a gaze, an address that Marian cannot comprehend because the 'big prominent eyes' express what she is incapable of—the 'unsentimental, detached, unselfish, objective attention' intrinsic to moral life (TSG 66):

Marian studied the pebbly verge. It looked as if the beach shelved very steeply, creating an undertow, each retreating wave being sucked with positive vicious violence back beneath the tall uncurling crest of its following successor. Marian began to wonder what to do. Then she lifted her head and saw a face. The face was floating in the sea directly opposite to her, just beyond where the waves began to rush in. As soon as she had seen it it⁹ disappeared. Marian gave a little startled cry into the roaring of the sea. She realized the next moment that of course it was only a seal. She had never seen one so close. The seal rose again, lifting its sleek dripping antique dog-like head and regarded her with big prominent eyes. She could see its whiskers and its dark mouth opening a little. It floated lazily, keeping just out of the surge, and keeping its old indifferent gaze fixed upon her. Marian found the animal both touching and frightening. It seemed, with its head of a primitive sea-god, like a portent. But whether it was warning her out of the sea or inviting her into it she could not decide. After a minute it swam away, leaving her trembling. (TU 32)

- 14 This mirror-scene can be read in the light of a passage from *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, where Murdoch quotes Rainer Maria Rilke's interpretation of a paradoxically selfless self-portrait of Cézanne, which seems to have been painted with the vigilant humility of a dog:

About a self-portrait of Cézanne, Rilke speaks of 'an animal attentiveness which maintains a continuing, objective vigilance in the unwinking eyes. And how great and incorruptible this objectivity of his gaze was, is confirmed in an almost touching manner by the circumstance that, without analysing or in the remotest degree regarding his expression from a superior standpoint, he made a replica of himself with so much humble objectiveness, with the credulity and extrinsic interest and attention of a dog which sees itself in a mirror and thinks: there is another dog'. (MGM 246)

- 15 As the sea-dog fixes his gaze upon Marian, is this what he is thinking—'there is another dog'?

- 16 In the final lines of *The Sea, the Sea*, Charles Arrowby finds himself in the same situation as Marian, apart from a few variations: he encounters four sea-dogs instead of one; whereas in *The Unicorn* the seal's gaze is level with Marian, Charles's seals gaze at him from below (like Marian's pipistrel), and his reaction differs from Marian's in that after the initial fear, he recognizes 'beneficence' in the animals' gaze. Otherwise the setting is the same, the seals' 'doggy faces' are also surprisingly close, and their eyes express the same detached inquisitiveness as they go about their own business while fixing their gaze on the human observer:

I heard, odd and frightening in that total stillness, a sound coming from the water, a sudden and quite loud splashing, as if something just below the rock was about to emerge, and crawl out perhaps onto the land. I had a moment of sheer fear as I turned and leaned towards the sea edge. Then I saw below me, their wet doggy faces looking curiously upward, four seals swimming so close to the rock that I could almost have touched them. I looked down at their pointed noses, and only a few feet below, their dripping whiskers, their bright inquisitive round eyes, and the lithe and glossy grace of their wet backs. They curved and played a while gulping and gurgling a little, looking up at me all the time. And as I watched their play I could not doubt they were beneficent beings. (TSTS 476)

- 17 These scenes from *The Unicorn* and *The Sea*, *The Sea* combined, each with its (figuratively or/and literally) naked human meeting an animal's gaze, are Murdoch's amazing anticipation of Derrida's seminal meditation on the 'surrounding' animal gaze (in the French philosopher's case, a cat's); a gaze which is, to the 'naked' human, the inaccessible point of view of the 'absolute other', an 'absolute alterity':

The animal is there before me [. . .]. It surrounds me. And from the vantage of this being-there-before-me it can allow itself to be looked at, no doubt, but also—something that philosophy perhaps forgets—it can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me. The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity [. . .] than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat. (Derrida 11)

- 18 In Murdoch's texts, human nakedness is symbolic of the animal's natural ability to see through our pretences—an ability explicitly discussed by Jean-Christophe Bailly in *The Animal Side*. This essay, which resumes and continues Derrida's meditation, is thus also anticipated by Murdoch's bat and sea-dog scenes: '[The animal] gaze is [. . .] disarming when it settles on us [. . .]. We experience the feeling of being in the presence of an unknown force [. . .]that in effect traverses us [. . .]. It is as though we were in the presence of a different form of thought' (Bailly 14–15). Bailly sees a 'watery origin' in the purity of this 'unformulated' animal gaze, 'this purely strange and strangely limitless place which is the surface of the eye' (Bailly 14); a 'watery origin' of which the powerful sea, the element of Murdoch's sea-dogs, is a prophetic manifestation.

19 'Animot'

- 20 Yet, for all their efforts to take into account the animal's point of view, Derrida and Bailly are unable to transcend its alterity, to cross out its 'absolute[ness]', to gain access to the other side, to the world as seen by the other. Such is, perhaps, the limitation of the philosophers' purely intellectual, theorizing approach, surpassed by the power of the artist's imagination as it manifests itself in *The Philosopher's Pupil* where, for the very first time, Murdoch's narrator gives life to the genuine dog concept by imagining and exploring what it is to be Zed, Adam's diminutive and nonetheless—or rather, therefore—remarkable dog: asked once if Zed's size '[had] anything to do with the shrinking of virtue', Murdoch exclaimed, 'Nothing like that!' (Dooley 156); she did not elaborate, but it can be supposed that the Papillon is minute in proportion to his ego.

- 21 The birth of the '*animot*' takes place during a fleeting but remarkable shift of perspective from Adam McCaffrey (Zed's young master and playmate) to the Papillon himself—to being gazed at by the animal, to *being* the gazing animal. The process begins by merging the boy's and the dog's visions in the shared verb 'gazed', before revealing a short preview, in brackets, of the world according to Zed alone, with its

typical olfactive dog signature:

[Adam] lay down under the tree and let Zed jump on his chest and sit with neat front paws resting on his collar-bone. However quickly [Adam] raised his head, he could not surprise Zed looking anywhere else than straight into his eyes with his provocative intent mocking stare [. . .]. The great earth [. . .] had wide dark entrances into which Adam and Zed gazed with awe, only Adam kept a firm hold on Zed in case he should be tempted to go down. (In fact Zed had no intention of going down, not that he was not a brave dog, but he suffered from claustrophobia and the whole place smelt extremely dangerous.) (TPP 49–50)

22 In this fleeting moment of zoofocalization, it looks as if the text is ready to glide into something new: to turn into a narrative operated by a thoroughly other point of view assumed by a thoroughly other voice. That other narrative voice, however, is held in abeyance in the brackets, like something near and yet out of hearing. This sense of a thought held in a margin of the text is Murdoch's way of registering her own '*animot*'.

23 This will be repeated in the scene at church during the religious service which Zed is also attending. Comfortably curled up in Adam's pocket, the Papillon fixes his disturbing, traversing gaze on Robin Osmore, a man of law who feels his questionable morals has just been discovered by 'the little beast':

Zed's little delicate head with its black-and-white domed brow peered from the top of the pocket. After looking about for some time with an alert critical air, he had fixed upon Robin Osmore, staring intently at the legal man with an expression of amazed quizzical curiosity. Osmore, aware of the scrutiny, became uneasy, disconcerted, fidgeted, looked elsewhere, then looked back to find the little beast still staring, its clever humorous gaze giving an extraordinary impression of a judging intelligence, a strange little spirit, not really a dog at all. (TPP 201)

24 As it turns out, the whole human assembly are lost in self-centred cogitations. A series of interior monologues begins, rhythmized by the anaphora '[he] thought', '[she] thought. . .' whereby the omniscient narrator reveals—on a humorous tone which would be Zed's if he could talk—that all have something upon their conscience, except Tom McCaffrey who ridiculously flatters himself with being 'good', an ethical impossibility:

Brian thought, what a skunk I am [. . .]. Anthea Eastcote thought [. . .], I must give up Joey Tanner. Nicky Roach thought, I must work harder and not go to bed with girls all the time (but he felt rather sad about this). Mrs Roach thought, I must stop spending these crazy amounts on clothes. I must be mad! [. . .] Miss Landon thought, I must prepare my lessons better and, quite simply, stop *loathing* the children! Mrs Bradstreet had a very serious sin, not unconnected with her late husband, upon her conscience. Sometimes she felt she was damned, sometimes she thought she should tell everything to the police (how much did they know?) [. . .]. Tom thought, I'm innocent, I'm good, I love everybody [. . .], oh I feel so happy! (TPP 205–206)

25 After this tour of the human souls and their 'roofbrain chatter' (Abram 2010, 179), the narrator stops at the threshold of Zed's consciousness; the expected interior monologue gives way to the narrator's humble surmise of what the dog *may* be thinking: 'What Zed thought is not known, but as his nature was composed almost entirely of love, he may be imagined to have felt an increase of being' (TPP 206). The Cartesian paradigm, 'I think, therefore I am' (Descartes 31) is reversed: 'being', unknowable, unfathomable being, does not belong to the self-conscious *cogito*, but to

him who practises another form of thought:

Our tongues enact a massive split between our minds and our bodies, effectively severing our verbal, speaking selves from our corporeal, animal experience [. . .].

Hence thinking, for us, seems to have little bearing on our carnal life; it often seems entirely independent of our body and our bodily relation to the biosphere. [Our] reflections [. . .] seem to issue as directives from a centralized thinker—or self—oddly independent of our materiality, a floating locus of awareness situated somewhere within our heads.

Other animals, in a constant [. . .] relation with their sensory surroundings, *think with the whole of their bodies* [. . .], never having separated their sentience from their sensate bodies, having little reason to sequester their intelligence in a separate region of their skull where it might dialogue steadily with itself—many [. . .] animals [are] in a fairly constant dialogue not with themselves but with their surroundings. Here it is not an isolated mind but rather *the sensate, muscled body itself that is doing the thinking*. (Abram 2010, 278, 194–196)

Dogs of Love

26 It is some forty pages later that a tell-tale narrative counterpoint begins, intertwining the visions of the two ethical poles of the novel: Zed and Adam's uncle, George McCaffrey, the tormented 'philosopher's pupil'. Portrayed from the beginning as 'enraged [. . .] like a howling dog' (TPP 14), George is among Murdoch's spurious cynomorphs. The same key event—an encounter between Zed and George—is conveyed through their eyes in turn, resulting in a *chiaroscuro* of egoism versus attention, antagonism versus sympathy. George, typically blind with rage, thinks he owns other people (in this particular instance, his mistress Diane Sedleigh) and contemptuously—mistakenly—projects his fury onto Zed:

[George] saw that he was accompanied by Zed. The little dog, as George's head turned, barked at him, then retreated and posed, front feet down, back up, the rump and plummy tail aloft. Then he sprang up, stamped his tiny paw, whined eloquently, then barked again. George lifted a threatening fist and Zed snarled, showing white pointed teeth. George thought with satisfaction, even the dogs bark at me now. He went out into the road, banging the front gate after him. He thought [. . .], I'll go and see Diane. She'd better be in. (TPP 247)

27 Zed's experience of the same event could not be more different. Unlike George, his consciousness is not conveyed via indirect speech—verbal 'thinking' from the 'head'—but via body language. It is Zed's 'sensate, muscled body itself that is doing the thinking' (Abram 1997, 196): 'barked', 'retreated and posed', 'front feet', 'rump', 'tail', 'sprang up', 'paw', 'whined eloquently', 'showing [. . .]teeth'. Here is not only an 'intelligence in the limbs' (Abram 2010, 196) but also an intelligence operating through *smell*. 'Smell, the most instinctive, least educable of the senses, is [. . .] used [in Murdoch's novels] to suggest both the animal nature of our apprehensions [and] the unselfconscious connections between such responses and the moral faculty' (Conradi 2001a, 194). Smelt by Zed, the encounter is 'fascinating', of 'endless interest' and stimulates his imagination, the 'empathic propensity of [his] body' (Abram 2010, 254); only a soul 'burning with ecstasy and love' can feel this way towards such a 'nasty' and 'offensive' human:

Zed had not meant anything in particular by barking at George. He had

followed George from the garage, sniffing at his heels. George always smelt different from other humans; but today there was a new smell, stronger and more exciting, but also rather nasty. It was an animally smell, yet also it offended Zed in some fastidiousness of his soul, which was clothed in white plumage and burning with ecstasy and love. Zed was endlessly interested in George. He smelt him, when he could get near enough (which was not often) with a special nose-wrinkling fascination. If he had seen George buried he would have dug him up. (TPP 248)

28 Zed's olfactive understanding of George is a remarkable manifestation of 'realism' in the way meant by Murdoch—the ability to 'realise' the 'separateness and differentness of other people', which makes it 'hard to treat another person as a thing' (TSG 65–66), however alien this person may be. Zed's 'wrinkling nose' can sense the truth beyond appearances, leading him to 'dig up' what is hidden beneath the surface on which most humans are content to project their fantasies.

29 Interestingly enough, Zed's bodily, olfactive 'fastidiousness' and realism, anticipate by two years a medical story published in 1985 by neurologist Oliver Sacks, 'The Dog Beneath the Skin'. The story is about the 'world of pure perception' revealed to a young medical student whose sense of smell was unlocked by amphetamines for three weeks during which he 'dreamt' he was a dog—as if the dream of being a dog made him see reality for the first time:

Vivid dream one night, dreamt he was a dog, in a world unimaginably rich and significant in smells [. . .]. Waking, he found himself in just such a world. 'As if I had been totally colour-blind before, and suddenly found myself in a world full of colour [. . .]. I "saw" everything [. . .]'. But it was the exaltation of *smell* which really transformed his world [. . .].

He experienced a certain impulse to sniff and touch everything ('It wasn't really real until I felt it and smelt it') [. . .]. 'It was a world overwhelmingly concrete, of particulars [. . .], a world overwhelming in immediacy, in immediate significance'. Somewhat intellectual before, and inclined to reflection and abstraction, he now found [them] somewhat difficult and unreal, in view of the compelling immediacy of each experience. 'That smell-word [. . .]', he exclaims. 'So vivid, so real! It was like a visit to [. . .] a world of pure perception, rich, alive'. (Sacks 156–157)

30 The dog is in the detail. This ecstatic sense of wonder, through touch and smell, at every atom of the world, this falling in love with reality as it manifests itself in the infinitesimal, is a striking echo to Murdoch's vision of real, unselfish love, which could be the ultimate manifestation of the ethical imagination: 'the direction of attention is [. . .] towards *the great surprising variety of the world*, and the ability so to direct attention is love' (TSG 66, italics added).

31 Pure, selfless love, is the sharp, 'magnetic ray' (TGK 185) that links Anax, the distinguished collie of *The Green Knight* and Murdoch's only other focalizing animal, to his beloved and missing master Bellamy James. It is the 'ray' that guides Anax in his escape through the streets of London in search of Bellamy. The runaway collie is himself desperately sought by Clement Graffe, one of his guardians. As in *The Philosopher's Pupil*, a narrative counterpoint intertwines zoofocalization and human vision to convey the same event from the two perspectives. The chase is a page-turner (182–191) alternating between the fugitive and his pursuer's antipodal points of view: on the one hand, Anax's swift decision-making in 'the dense moving forest of people's legs' (183), the city at the tip of his nose and paws, in paragraphs which read like a tribute to Virginia Woolf's *Flush*;¹⁰ on the other hand, Clement muddled in the meanders of his own and other people's fears, the 'misty haze' (183) of an obsession with his brother Lucas—'love' tainted with 'terror', 'hate' and 'guilt' (184)—, all

diverting him from his urgent mission, slowing down his progression. By contrast, Anax's senses and clarity of vision—and his correlated ability to love—never fail him. Even in moments of 'exhaustion' (186), the collie's 'strange, light blue eyes' (109) do not miss a single detail of London's 'great surprising variety' (*TSG* 66), like this much smaller inhabitant of the city that most humans would not see, or if they did would scorn, fear, or kill . . .

His paws were hurting, his high heart was daunted [. . .]. He kept pausing and looking about him. When he raised his leg at a sack of rubbish he was confronted by a mouse. It regarded Anax. Anax felt pity for the mouse, or something more like affinity, respect. He did not wantonly kill other creatures as cats do, and some dogs are taught to do. He felt such a strange feeling, as if he had lost his identity and become part of an immense world being. (*TGK* 186)

- 32 Through this synecdoche in which the 'part' becomes the whole, the infinitesimal becomes 'immense'; mutually 'attentive' dog and mouse join into an infinite animal being. Could the 'strange feeling' overwhelming Anax and, by extension, the mouse, be caused by their 'metamorphosis' as they 'participate' in 'the world's imagination' (Abram 2010)?

Each thing, attentively pondered, gathers our senses [. . .] *over there*, in the other, leads us to experience that other as a center of experience in its own right, and hence as another subject, another source of powers. Incomplete on its own, the body is precisely our capacity for metamorphosis. Each being that we perceive enacts a subtle integration within us, even as it alters our prior organization. The sensing body is like an open circuit that completes itself only in things, in others, in the surrounding earth [. . .].
[It] is not so much *our* imagination, but rather *the world's* imagination, in which our own actions are participant [. . .] Our lives are embedded within a psyche that is not primarily ours. (Abram 2010, 254, 270)

- 33 Thus, Zed and Anax are Murdoch's love totems, gods of love. Is it any wonder, then, that they are named after prestigious personages and deities: *Anax*, of Greek origin, is usually translated as 'lord' or 'king'. It is the epithet of Agamemnon and Priam in *The Iliad*, and of Zeus as the lord of the gods. Zed, short for the Hebrew name Zedekiah, means 'God is just'.¹¹ Murdoch's Zed and Anax have an infinite ability to love—including the 'absolute enemy' (*TPP* 248), as shown by the former in *The Philosopher's Pupil*. Zed's 'absolute enemy' is not George, but the fox who crosses paths with him just after the George incident, and challenges him with the highest degree of alterity he has ever met. It should be noted that Zed's bigger spaniel congeners are among the oldest breeds used by humans in fox-hunting; the atavism, therefore, is inevitable even in the friendliest and smallest member of the spaniel family:

Zed ran on down the garden; and it was then that he came face to face with the fox. It was the big dog fox.
Zed had never seen a fox but he had smelt the strong frightening odour and he knew what the apparition was. He recognized, as he had never done before, an absolute enemy [. . .].
[He] knew that he must stand. If he turned the fox would pursue him and in a few steps those jaws would crack his back. Zed could see the fox's teeth, wrinkling a little the soft black lip of the muzzle [. . .]. They were so close that Zed could feel the warm current of his enemy's breath [. . .]. Zed measured the terrible strength and the more terrible will that confronted him [. . .].
Then, quite suddenly, there was a noise nearby, human voices. The fox turned and in a second vanished. Zed sat down where he was. He felt so strange, as if he pitied the fox, or almost envied him, and did not want to return to the world

of happiness. (TPP 248–249)

34 Zed's 'pity' for the fox is of the same nature as Anax's pity for the mouse. It is 'something more like affinity, respect' (TGG 186), 'pity' in the ethical sense: selfless sympathy, without contempt, even tinged with 'envy', perhaps a longing to become the alien . . .

35 An alien who initiates a hypnotic dance around Zed, surrounding him with his gaze, just as the cat surrounds Derrida with his gaze; in this amusing intertextual coincidence between Murdoch and Derrida, Zed, at the centre of the dance, in the 'solitude' of his 'doghood', usurps the naked philosopher's place!

Zed, as he came to an abrupt stop, felt suddenly his solitude and with it the completeness of his doghood [. . .]. He felt incapable of barking. The big fox looked down at Zed with its cold pale eyes [. . .] which knew not of the human world. The fox's face, with its heavy black marking, looked macabre and wild, a face that devoured other faces [. . .]. Then a strange thing happened. The fox turned his head a little and lowered it right down until his muzzle almost touched the grass, still keeping his blue pale wild eyes fixed upon Zed. Then he dropped his black paw and sidled a little, as in a slow dance, moving round the dog. Zed moved slightly keeping his face resolutely toward the fox and staring with his blue-black eyes in which there was reflected so much of the expression of man. The fox continued to move round Zed with his head lowered and his eyes gazing, moving as in a very slow rhythmic dance, and Zed continued, upon the same spot, to turn. Then, quite suddenly, there was a noise nearby, human voices. (TPP 248–249)

36 Like Derrida, Zed 'sees [himself] seen' (Derrida 11) by another animal. 'Devoured' by the fox's gaze, Zed is a *mise en abyme* of the animal gaze. He is the alien seen by the superlative alien whose vision is accessed in its turn, in a fleeting shift of the zoofocalization from Zed to the fox's point of view: when what is seen is no longer the fox's 'cold pale wild eyes', but Zed's 'blue-black eyes'; widening circles of vision, further and further away from the human ego, towards the domesticated dog (whose eyes 'reflect so much of the expression of man'), even further towards the dog's wild counterpart, the fox whose eyes 'know not of the human world'; ever widening circles of love and imagination in which the enemy is 'given a place', an 'expressive power' (Abram 2010, 177), and turns from 'it' ('its cold pale eyes'), to 'he' ('his blue pale wild eyes').

Conclusion: Of Dog and Man¹²

37 Zed will encounter George again, once, in the turbulent sea—a typically transformative, animal element in Murdoch's fiction. On a family outing at the beach, George, tormented and self-obsessed as ever, looped up in an incessant chatter of interior monologue, has drifted from the group to swim on his own, unaware of the others' desperate search for the Papillon who has been engulfed and carried away by a powerful wave:

George was a good swimmer and made his way otter-like out to sea. He thought, as the water laved his head and shoulders, that's *good*, that's *good*. At the same time the cold sea was menacing; one could soon drown in such a sea, one could die of exposure. He thought, I would like to die like that. If I just swim on and on and on [. . .]. Suddenly, in the green swinging hollow of a wave, he saw below him and nearby something which he took at first for a plastic bag floating [. . .]. He turned, halting his course, to look at it. It seemed to be some

horrid kind of thing. Then he saw that it was a little four-legged mammal, a *dog*.
It was *Zed*. (TPP 351)

- 38 Zed's powerful eye-contact with George bursts the latter's poisonous bubble of self-pity, and fills him instead with pity of the ethical, selfless kind—pity for the other, cogitation-free. Gone are the introductory verbs (such as 'he thought') typical of human speech. George has switched to animal language ('cried out') and 'throws himself' (Abram 1997, 58) body and soul into rescuing Zed; the man has literally come to his *senses*:

George *cried out* with surprise and distress. He *saw clearly* now the little white muzzle held high, the eyes staring, the paws weakly moving. The next moment the dog was gone, lifted with swift force over the crest of the wave. George followed quickly, *his eyes desperately fearfully straining to see* the little helpless thing. He *perceived* Zed again and caught him up, then treading water lifted him. (TPP 351, italics added)

- 39 Gone is the scorn and rage that blinded George in their previous encounter. The man becomes animal, genuinely 'otter [other]-like'. The formerly spurious cynomorph now thinks and acts like a rescue dog whose attention is directed 'outward, away from self' (TSG 66). By sheer force of his gaze and body language, Zed makes the transformed man 'understand' how they can save each other:

The bedraggled creature hung limply in his hands, but Zed's blue-black eyes gazed with conscious intelligence, at close quarters, into George's eyes [. . .]. It was not easy, cold and now tired, in a strong-running sea, to swim with one hand while holding Zed clear of the sea with the other. But as George paused to rest and tread water, Zed slid as if on purpose on his shoulder and clung on against his neck [. . .]. George understood, and now holding one strand of the dog's coat and keeping one arm against his chest he could more vigorously make way. (TPP 351–352)

- 40 In this mutual, lifesaving embrace, dog and man 'lend [their] sensory imagination to [each other]', (Abram 1997, 276), entangled and transformed in an admirable animal-text figure, a marine-blue '*animot*' which could have been graphed out of Zed's 'blue-black', ink-like gaze. Murdoch's zoopoetics reintegrate man alongside animal, in the surrounding sea and earth.

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Notes

1 The phrase 'becoming animal' is often associated with a section from Gilles DELEUZE and Felix GUATTARI'S *A Thousand Plateaus* ('Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible'), but I will not use it in the Deleuzian sense for reasons best explained by Donna J. Haraway with a pinch of humour, and yet most seriously: 'Despite much that I love in other works of Deleuze, here I find little but the two writers' scorn for all that is mundane and ordinary [. . .]. Little house dogs and the people who love them are the ultimate figure of abjection for D&G, especially if those people are elderly women, the very type of the sentimental. "Ahab's Moby Dick is not like the little cat or dog owned by an elderly woman who honors and cherishes it. Lawrence's becoming-tortoise has nothing to do with a sentimental or domestic relation" (DELEUZE and GUATTARI 244) [. . .]. It took some nerve for D&G to write about becoming-woman just a few pages later!' (HARAWAY 27, 30).

2 'What is ecopoetics? For some readers, [it] is the making and study of pastoral poetry, or poetry of wilderness and deep ecology. Or poetry that explores the human capacity for becoming animal, as well as humanity's ethically challenged relation to other animals. For others, it is poetry that confronts disasters and environmental injustices, including the difficulties and opportunities of urban environments' (Jonathan SKINNER, online Magazine *Jacket 2*).

3 '[Le] propos est d'examiner comment on écrit les animaux (par exemple, par des distorsions syntaxiques, par des accents et des rythmes, par des choix subtils de perspectives, etc.) [. . .]. La langue n'est pas un obstacle pour accéder à [. . .] d'autres animaux plus mutiques que nous, dépourvus de langage articulé, dotés de modes d'expression extrêmement différents des nôtres. C'est à travers des délocalisations et des déplacements internes à notre langue même que nous pouvons rejoindre l'altérité, ou lui donner lieu [. . .]. Ce serait aussi valable, du reste, pour se mettre dans la tête d'un autre humain que soi!' ('Entretien sur la zoopoétique avec Anne Simon', online journal *Fabula / Les colloques*).

4 'Each time that, henceforth, I say "the animal" [*l'animal*] or "the animals" [*les animaux*] I'll be asking you to silently substitute *animot* for what you hear' (DERRIDA 47).

5 'Ce mot-valise "animot" [. . .], c'était une manière de dire qu'on s'intéressait aux mots, à la

syntaxe, à la phrase, à l'expression, et non à l'animalité comme concept (sinon pour le déconstruire). Reprendre "animot" à Derrida, c'était aussi rendre hommage à la philosophie et plus généralement à l'interdisciplinarité' ('Entretien sur la zoopoétique avec Anne Simon').

6 It is all the more tempting to assume this is a conscious choice of the artist as both dogs were drawn from real-life females—whose sex was thus presumably transformed for this purpose of double unselfing (from human to animal and female to male): 'Zed [. . .] was based on Diana Avebury's three-legged, shrill-barking Zelda; Anax on my and my partner Jim O'Neill's blue merle [female] collie Cloudy' (CONRADI 2001b, 438).

7 Among the exceptions to the rule, Hugo Bellfounder, in *Under the Net*, 'resembles [. . .] the dog Mars [. . .]. Hugo's exit from the hospital and almost from the book is conducted in all fours, with his bottom in the air, dribbling into the boots he holds in his teeth. This noble unself-consciousness gives him, as the would-be good man who sees objectively, [. . .] an odd, dogged, animal intelligence' (CONRADI 2001a, 45).

8 'Were there such machines exactly resembling organs and outward form an ape or any other irrational animal, we could have no means of knowing that they were in any respect of a different nature from these animals: but if there were machines bearing the image of our [human] bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible, there would still remain [. . .] most certain tests whereby to know that they were not [. . .] really men [. . .]. Though there are many animals which manifest more industry than we in certain of their actions [. . .], the circumstance that they do better than we does not prove that they are endowed with mind [. . .]. Thus it is seen, that a clock composed only of wheels and weights can number the hours and measure time more exactly than we with all our skin' (DESCARTES 46–47).

9 The lack of punctuation between 'it' as the object (of 'seen') and 'it' as the subject (of 'disappeared') poses a reading problem, both on the actual and interpretative levels. Is this stuttering of the text an aftershock of the 'face anadiplosis'—an internal anadiplosis, so to speak, whose lack of articulation would break the surface of the mirror, almost merging Marian and the seal's faces? And does it signal, at the same time, Marian's frightened refusal to identify with an image that *must*, therefore, disappear as soon as 'it' is 'seen'? A repression of the *id*? We may think of Lacan's definition of the unconscious as 'elusive': 'something whose adventure in our field seems so short, is for a moment brought into the light of day, [which] gives this apprehension a vanishing aspect' (LACAN 31).

More relevantly to the present approach, could this be Marian's running into the seal's alterity without being able to 'throw herself beyond' it, due to a lack of 'imagination' (ABRAM 1997, 58)? And does the grammatical shift of 'it' signal Marian's dawning yet reluctant realization that the other is not an object to be possessed, but an independent subject—just like herself?

Unless this glitch in the text has nothing to do with Marian and is part of a longer stuttering—the whole sentence, with its series of dental and sibilant alliterations and consonances ('As soon as she had seen it it disappeared')—which would be the artist's (Murdoch's) herself, tapping into the animal origins of human language. 'Words are human artifacts, are they not? Surely to speak, or to think in words, is necessarily [. . .] purely human [. . .]? Such, precisely, has been our civilized assumption. But what if meaningful speech is *not* an exclusively human possession? What if the very language we now speak arose first in response to an animate, expressive world—as a *stuttering* [italics added] reply not just to others of our species but to an enigmatic cosmos that already *spoke to us* in a myriad of tongues?' (ABRAM 2010, 4).

What is more, could the missing comma be Murdoch's incentive to read her text aloud in order to silence the 'internal, incessant chatter' that loops us humans back upon ourselves and impairs our attentive capacities? 'For many centuries [. . .], texts were written *with minimal or no punctuation* [italics added] [. . .]. As a result [. . .], reading aloud was necessary [. . .] to disambiguate the visual text [. . .]. Beginning in the seventh century, various scribal innovations were gradually adopted [. . .], aerating the text, [which] made it possible [. . .] to decipher the written text *without* sounding it out audibly [. . .]. A tight neurological coupling between the visual focus and inner speech arose in the brain, [which] inevitably began to influence—and interfere with—other forms of seeing. Soon our visual focus, even as it roamed across the visible landscape, began to release a steady flood of verbal commentary that often had little, or nothing, to do with that terrain. Such is the unending interior monologue that confounds so many contemporary persons—the "internal tape loop," or the incessant "roofbrain chatter," that Buddhist meditation seeks to dissolve' (ABRAM 2010, 178–179).

10 *Flush* (first published in 1933) is Woolf's playful biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel who spent part of his adult life in London. On one of his excursions through the streets of London, 'he heard his nails click upon the hard paving stones [. . .]. He smelt the swooning

smells that lie in the gutters; the bitter smells that corrode the iron railings; the fuming, heady smells that rise from basements [. . .]. Petticoats swished at his head; trousers brushed his flanks; sometimes a wheel whizzed an inch from his nose [. . .]. With every nerve throbbing and every sense singing, he reached Regent's Park' (WOOLF 28).

11 The first letters of Anax and Zed's names are worthy of interest as well. Together, they compress the whole written alphabet to its minimum, reducing its alienating effect between signifier and signified, an alienation which has contributed to humanity's loss of attentive and sympathetic capacities: '[A] phonetic script focuses our attention upon the specific sounds made by the human mouth. The written letters of an alphabet are no longer associated, by their stylized forms, with various entities and events in the surrounding earth [. . .]. Instead [. . .], each letter [. . .] is directly associated with a particular set of gestures, and sounds, to be made by the human tongue, lips, and palate. Hence, instead of windows through which one might glimpse the wider landscape, the letters of an alphabet function more like mirrors reflecting the human back upon itself. Other animals—to say nothing of trees, mountains, and rivers—have no place in this new sign system, no expressive power in this new semiotic' (ABRAM 2010, 176–177).

12 'Characteristically it is through the relationship between dog and man, and not man and man, that a reciprocated love is figured' (CONRADI 2001a, 162): indeed, in matters of ethical imagination man needs dog to look up to.

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