"HOW MUCH THEY CAN TEACH US": LORNA CROZIER'S PORTRAYAL OF NONHUMAN ANIMALS

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Abstract

Drawing on literary animal studies theory, ecopoetry and material ecocriticism, and following Shapiro and Copeland's (2005) analysis criteria, this article examines Lorna Crozier's depiction of non-human animals in her poems. The corpus consists of the poetry and photography collections *The Wild in You* (2015) and *The House the Spirit Builds* (2019), and the prose poetry collection *God of Shadows* (2018). I contend that Crozier criticises the human abuse of the nonhuman world; proposes ways for humans to discard anthropocentrism in favour of biocentrism; and grants saliency to insects, rodents, amphibians, and reptiles as animal species that have usually been despised in the West.

Keywords: Lorna Crozier, Ecopoetry, Critique of Animal Abuse, Superiority of Nonhuman Animals, Biocentrism, Critique of Speciesism.

«CUÁNTO NOS PUEDEN ENSEÑAR»: LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LOS ANIMALES NO HUMANOS EN LA POESÍA DE LORNA CROZIER

Resumen

Partiendo de la teoría de los estudios literarios sobre animales, la ecopoesía y la ecocrítica material, y según los criterios de análisis de Shapiro y Copeland (2005), este artículo examina la representación de los animales no humanos en la poesía de Lorna Crozier. El corpus abarca los volúmenes de poesía y fotografía *The Wild in You* (2015) y *The House the Spirit Builds* (2019), así como el volumen de prosa poética *God of Shadows* (2018). Sostengo que Crozier critica el maltrato al mundo no humano; propone nuevas formas de dejar atrás el antropocentrismo en favor del biocentrismo; y otorga visibilidad a insectos, roedores, anfibios y réptiles en tanto que especies a menudo menospreciadas en occidente.

Palabras clave: Lorna Crozier, ecopoesía, crítica del maltrato animal, superioridad de los animales no humanos, biocentrismo, crítica al especismo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Canadian writer Lorna Crozier, who was born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, in 1948, has written extensively about nonhuman nature and the interaction between human and nonhuman beings in her poetry, with both wild and domestic animals featuring prominently. Indeed, Crozier's admiration of the natural environment and love for it has strongly shaped her writing career, which spans almost fifty years. Often defined as one of Canada's pre-eminent poets[1] and a mentor for young generations of writers (Governor General 2011), both the quality of her work and some of her thematic concerns are comparable to that of fellow Canadian writer Margaret Atwood. Specifically, Crozier's critique of patriarchal systems and her rewriting of mythological stories to re-inscribe female experiences, as well as her ecological awareness are in line with Atwood's work. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of the work of these two authors is beyond the scope of this article.

The environmental concerns that Crozier voices in her poetry have been influenced by the profound impact that place has exerted on Crozier throughout her life. In this respect, her poetry is imbued with a strong sense of connection to both her birthplace, namely Saskatchewan, and the place that became her home in adulthood, Vancouver Island. As such, on the one hand, the vast fields, open skies, and treeless landscapes of the prairie environment populate her poetry. On the other hand, the West-Coast mild weather, evergreen forests, and the lush home gardens that Crozier grew with her late husband, the fellow poet Patrick Lane, also permeate her poetry. Crozier's cultivation of affective ties to place resonates with Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of topophilia, i.e. "human love of place" (Tuan 1974, 92) or, to put it in other words, "a space-conscious 'awe' combined with and resulting from a place-centred commitment to the world itself" (Bryson 2002, 108). Indeed, Crozier herself has often voiced in interviews that her strong connection to place is closely associated with her deep concern about the natural environment. For instance, in her interview with Elizabeth Philips (2002), when Philips asks her:

> You use a lot of imagery from the natural world, and more specifically, of wild and domestic animals. Is this, in some ways, the mark of a writer of place, who is interested in the animals of that place? (145)

Crozier replies:

[1] Crozier was awarded the prestigious Governor General's Literary Award for the poetry collection *Inventing the Hawk* (1992); was recognized as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2009; and was named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2011. Furthermore, she has received five honorary doctorates, among other awards and distinctions, such as British Columbia Lieutenant-Governor General's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013 and the 2018 George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award.

> I do think I've been put on Earth to defend skunks. And cats and shrews and spotted owls […] I see animals as pure beings, unsullied. We're smudged and they're clear about who they are. […] There are things they know that we don't. […] They make me aware of a world that's invisible to my lesser senses. (145-146)

Crozier's willingness to both protect and honour the more-than-human world often becomes a desperate call for human stewardship in the face of environmental degradation and endangered animal species in the era of the Anthropocene. That is to say that Crozier's poetry fits into the category of ecopoetry, as, to borrow from J. Scott Bryson's words when describing ecopoetry, she highlights "the interdependent nature of the relationship between people and the worlds they inhabit" (2005, 11). Particularly, Crozier's poems are imbued by an attitude of humility towards other-than-human animals. Such an attitude is foretold in the quotation from Crozier's poem "God of Birds" (*God of Shadows* 2018, 16) that conforms the first part of this article's title, namely "How much they can teach us." In this line, "they" refers to birds and, therefore, the line –actually the whole poem– is about the life lessons that humans can extract from birds' behaviour. Crozier's ecopoetry is thus aligned with that of other Canadian ecopoets of a similar generation to hers, notably Robert Bringhurst (Martínez-Serrano 2021), Jan Zwicky (Dickinson 2010), Don Mackay (Mason 2008), Tim Lilburn (Rigby 2020; Kerber 2004), and Dennis Lee (Dickinson 2018).

The ensuing article focuses on animal-centred poems in three of Crozier's latest poetry collections, in which the poet's advocacy for environmental responsibility has become more vocal, namely the poetry and wildlife photography collection *The Wild in You: Voices from the Forest and the Sea* (2015) –with photographs by Ian McAllister; the collection of poetic prose *God of Shadows* (2018); and the collection of poetry and photography *The House the Spirit Builds* (2019), with photographs by Peter Coffman and Diane Laundy. Following Kenneth Shapiro and Marion W. Copeland's analytical framework for human-animal scholarship (2005), I will argue that in Crozier's poems animals are presented true to themselves. That is, in Shapiro and Copeland's own words, "an animal could appear as him or herself –as an individual with some measure of autonomy, agency, voice, character, and as a member of a species with a nature that has certain typical capabilities and limitations" (344). Specifically, Crozier's depictions of animals often involve their interaction with humans; thus, my examination of her poems will also comply with Shapiro and Copeland's request that human-animal scholarship incorporate "an analysis of human-animal relationships" (345). In this line of thought, I will contend that Crozier criticises the human abuse of the nonhuman world; proposes ways for humans to discard anthropocentrism in favour of biocentrism; and grants saliency to insects, rodents, amphibians, and reptiles as animal species that have been usually despised or considered inferior in Western culture.

2. ECOPOETIC UNDERPINNINGS

As Leonor María Martínez Serrano and Cristina M. Gámez-Fernández argue in their introduction to their edited collection of essays, *Modern Ecopoetry: Reading the Palimpsest of the More-Than-Human World* (2021), "poetry represents a powerful inquisitive tool to explore and interrogate the nonhuman world, to understand how *Homo sapiens* relates to other species and the nonhuman world, and to figure out alternative ways to dwell responsibly on Earth" (2). In this line of thought and in order to shed some light on Crozier's poetic portrayal of nonhuman animals and the relationships humans establish with them, J. Scott Bryson's seminal definition of ecopoetry as a "subset of nature poetry [that] takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues" (2002, 5) will prove helpful. In a similar vein, Adeline Johns-Putra (2016) further states that "[e]copoetry […] can be distinguished from traditional nature poetry by its emphasis on the inter-connectedness of human and nonhuman life in a time of unprecedented anthropogenic environmental damage" (5). Bryson lists the following three characteristics of ecopoetry:

> [First,] an emphasis on maintaining an ecocentric perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of the world[…] [second] an imperative toward humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature[…] [and third] an intense skepticism concerning hyperrationality, a skepticism that usually leads to an indictment of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe. (5-6)

As regards the second characteristic, an attitude of humility towards the nonhuman world is essential to wish to protect it (Bryson 2005, 21). Likewise, Josh A. Weinstein (2015) further explains:

> In our time, a time of growing concern about global warming, air and water degradation, and an overall anxiety with regard to environmentally unsustainable development, humility, and particularly an ecological humility, helps provide a framework for approaching the world in a manner that respects not only our own narrow interests but those of the other elements of our ecosystems. (760)

Regarding Bryson's third characteristic of ecopoetry, Anne Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street (2013) clarify in the preface to their edited collection of ecopoems, entitled *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, that the reason why ecopoetry is skeptical of hyperrationality is that it "would separate mind from body –and earth and its creatures from human beings– and that would give pre-eminence to fantasies of control" (xxviii). In this sense, ecopoetry, in line with ecocriticism, discards the Cartesian split.

Bryson (2005) further asserts, borrowing from a Tuanian notion of place, that ecopoetry ultimately aims "to create place [and] […] to value space" (8), as "the more we view the rest of our world as place and home, the more care we will take not to damage it" (15-16). Bryson summarises ecopoetry's objectives in the following manner: "to know the world and to recognize its ultimate unknowability" (8). This

is precisely what Crozier does in her poetry, as she openly acknowledges that she will never be able to fully translate into words what she observes in the non-human natural world or her understanding of it, because it "means more than you / can ever say" ("The Beauty of Opposites," *The Wild in You*, 18, ll. 9-10).

3. CROZIER'S PORTRAYAL OF NONHUMAN ANIMALS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH HUMANS

3.1. Crozier's Criticism of Human Abuse of Nonhuman Nature

In order to illustrate Crozier's critique of animal mistreatment and water pollution, respectively, the poems "A Murder of Crows" and "The Return," both from the collection *The Wild in You* will prove useful. In "A Murder of Crows," Crozier does not elaborate on crows, as the title suggests, but describes bears' hibernation in such a way that the readers might find bears charming:

> Sure, at the end of fall,
> bears dig shallow bowls to plop
> their fat bellies in
> when they lie down to nap
> and they love to nap. (ll. 5-9)

Without faltering to a true portrayal of bears, Crozier uses humour to encourage a view of bears which might slightly remind us of teddy bears, but is not reductive in any sense. Together with this literary technique, Crozier also wonders about the group noun for bears, and plays with imaginative possibilities:

> How about a burliness of bears,
> a bulk of bears?
> A balladry, a bedazzle,
> a bamboozlement of bears,
> a brouhaha! How about
> a magnificence, a blessing of bears. (ll. 11-16)

Beyond mere wordplay, the alliterative pattern of the voiced bilabial plosive sound, /b/, present in each collective noun reveals a twofold purpose. Firstly, Crozier selected words that begin with the letter *b*, like the word *bear* itself, in order to create an aural amplification of the animal's name. By so doing, Crozier both grants space to this nonhuman being in her poem and acknowledges the bear as subject, as opposed to the hunter's vision of the bear as object, as trophy. Secondly, the word choice emphasises characteristics related to bears; namely, the fact that they are amazing and imposing creatures, as suggested by the nouns "bedazzle" and "bamboozle," and the fact that they have been mistreated throughout history, as implied by the

nouns "balladry" and "brouhaha." On the one hand, "balladry" critiques the dancing shows that bears were trained to perform through pain-inflicting techniques in zoos and street entertainment from the Middle Ages into the late twentieth century ("Bear Conservation" par. 2), a practice which, unfortunately, is still present in some countries ("Bear Conservation" par. 6). In turn, "brouhaha" refers to the public outcry that such a mistreatment of bears should spur. The following quotation clearly illustrates this point, as Crozier's criticism of bear hunting becomes vocal:

> If we say a *blessing of bears*
> over and over again
> will we come to believe it?
> Will we swear to do no harm?
> Will we call the trophy hunters
> what they really are? Try as we might,
>
> we find nothing made of letters
> to spell the evil that they do.
>
> Bears haunt our sleep, bang without heads
> into the walls of our nightmares, batting
> the air with the stumps of their legs,
> their paws gone. (ll. 17-28)

The possible group nouns for bears that Crozier suggests connect with the title of the poem, "A Murder of Crows." That is, Crozier creates a pun involving the collective noun for a group of crows and the fact that a new collective noun for a group of bears should be coined in order to avoid their being murdered at the hands of humans. However, the ending to the poem no longer contains any traces of humorous word play, as it depicts the atrocities carried out by humans on bears. The poem ultimately advocates for the need to see them as wild animals, as beings to be grateful for and who deserve living in peace, undisturbed by humans. The image that accompanies the poem, taken by renowned American wildlife photographer Ian McAllister, contributes to regarding the bear in the poem in its vulnerability. That is to say, whereas throughout the poetry and photography collection there are other images of bears that both show their might and present them as awe-inspiring ("Genesis: Rainforest" (11), "Spirit Bear, Ghost, Moon" (41-42), and "Being Seen" (54)), in "A Murder of Crows" the picture presents a grizzly bear laying down on the moss, with what from a human perspective would be a sad regard, and with its paws in the forefront of the image. Thus, Crozier's last line in the poem, "their paws gone," which structures the poem into both a lament and critique of bear trophy hunting and a celebration of bears, seems to have been inspired by the bear's attitude and bodily position in McAllister's photograph.

Crozier's poems relate to McAllister's and Coffman and Laundy's photographs in an ekphrastic way. The concept of *ekphrasis* in relation to poetry is concerned with "giving voice to a mute art object," providing "a rhetorical description of a work of art," or, in a more general sense, a 'set description intended to bring

person, place, picture, etc. before the mind's eye" (Mitchell 1995, 153). While it is true that there has been a "problematic history of ekphrasis" (Spicer and McDermott 2017, 62) due to conceptions based on the pre-eminence of poetry versus painting in gendered readings of each art form, such as in Heffernan's theorisations of ekphrasis (2004) (Spicer and McDermott 2017, 62), this is not the case of Crozier's work. Instead, the relationship established between Crozier's poems and the photographs that accompany them aims to foreground an ecological ethics.

In a similar vein to "A Murder of Crows," "The Return" also voices Crozier's critique of human abuse of nonhuman nature and the nonhuman animals that live in marine environments. Specifically, "The Return" is concerned with ocean pollution, while celebrating the end of whale hunting and the return of the whales to the coasts of British Columbia, Canada. Within this area, the Great Bear Rainforest is the particular ecosystem that is the focus of attention not only in this poem but throughout *The Wild in You*. Crozier describes whales' agency in her description of their decision to return to the BC coasts, and imagines their voice in spreading the word about the cessation of whale hunting:

> How did they know the slaughter had stopped?
> The news travelled far across the ocean floor–*the whalers*
> *are gone*–and the humpbacks began their journey home.
>
> After twenty years away, only the oldest knew the smells,
> the depths, the places of birth and feasting. Deeper
> and wider than where they'd lived in exile, the silence
> they remembered remains. It's quiet enough
> for the teaching, for the calves and mothers to thrive. (ll. 1-8)

After this story about the success of conservation strategies, Crozier reminds her readers that while whales are not hunted anymore, they cannot live in peace either, as their lives –along those of many other marine creatures– are disturbed by noise pollution produced by cargo ships:

> This is a good story, the return of the humpbacks,
> a story we like to tell, but the silence is dying,
> the seas poisoned with noise. Tankers fracture
> the whales' calls, hammer the herrings with clamor,
> rip the fabric of dolphin dreams. (ll. 9-13)

As a result, Crozier imagines whale speech and thought, as she voices whale criticism of human disrespectful interaction with the nonhuman world:

> In all whale dialects, when they speak of us,
> they don't call us "humans," they don't call us
> "woman" or "man." We are the-beings-
> who-wound-the-waters, who-shatter-
> the-ocean's-eardrums, who-blacken-its-lungs. (ll. 14-18)

That is to say that Crozier campaigns for the stewardship of wild species by not only condemning human cruelty towards them but also by using human language to convey what animals might think of humanity. To use Margarita Carretero-González's terminology, Crozier's translation of nonhuman animals' experiences into poetry is an instance of "interspecies transcreation," which encourages "empathy and ecosocial change" (850). As such, Crozier changes the focus from an anthropocentric to a biocentric one. The image that accompanies the poem shows a humpback whale near the coast, with the rainforest blurred in the background of the photograph. The picture features the beauty of the whale's tail and lower body while submerging into the water, which is magnified by the bright sunshine that makes its skin glow. Moreover, the photograph is also spectacular in its capturing of the curtain of water that the thrust of the whale's tale fashions. In this case, the details in the photograph do not seem to have inspired Crozier's poem; in its stead, the picture underscores Crozier's denunciation of continued human disturbance of marine habitats by presenting the whale as a magnificent creature that we should both admire and respect. In Crozier's own words in her introduction to *The Wild in You*:

> It wasn't only the days I spent in the rainforest and Ian's photographs, brilliant as they are, that turned me to poetry. It was also learning about the vulnerability of this place and its inhabitants. I share Ian's passion for the natural world, and though it may sound crazy, I believe that if we honor living things other than ourselves – orcas, ravens, wolves, cedars– our attention will remind us that they are holy. To see them clearly is the deepest kind of praise, the deepest kind of love. To wound them and their habitats is to wound ourselves. (6)

Crozier's description of nonhuman nature and animals as holy in this quotation bespeaks her advocacy for the superiority of the nonhuman world and thus, for a de-centring of humanity. Therefore, her ecocentric stance aligns with indigenous' worldviews, as the interdependent nature of the world lies at the core of their belief systems. That is, Crozier's poems not only aim at promoting conservation strategies and exploring more sustainable interspecies relationships, but in this particular collection, they also aim at paying respect to the First Nations that inhabit The Great Bear Rainforest, as well as their ontologies, and epistemologies.

Further criticism of water pollution can be observed in the prose poem "God of Water" (*God of Shadows*, 36), in which Crozier compiles a number of water-related myths, such as the fountain of youth and the River Styx. Through an invented, female god of Water that Crozier imagines being present during the Flood in Genesis, Crozier voices the following criticism: "all around her / the rivers running. That was the best of times, the undamned / rivers running" (ll. 13-15). With this statement, Crozier alludes to the ongoing environmental harm inflicted on the nonhuman natural environment that gained momentum during the Industrial Revolution and that capitalism is intent on maintaining. That is, the planetary scale of environmental change that the terms *Anthropocene* and Haraway's *Capitalocene* (2015) capture, each with its specific nuances. More specifically, Crozier focuses on

the vulnerability of rivers to human-centred action. On the one hand, she criticises the contamination of river water by claiming that at the beginning of times, rivers were "undamned;" that is, not condemned, but healthy, thus clearly implying that now they are not. As a result, this initial time period was "the best of times" because drinking water was safe for all living beings. Indeed, as Nadia Morin-Crini, Eric Lichtfouse, Guorui Liu, Vysetti Balaram, Ana Rita Lado Ribeiro, et al.'s review of the available literature on water pollution concludes, "the multiform pollution resulting from our lifestyles and growing consumption patterns are major threats to this vital element that is water, with consequences also for the environment and human health" (2002, n.p.). On the other hand, the adjective "undamned" also creates a pun with *undammed*, namely a river that has not been altered by human action with the construction of dams. According to Jeff Duda, Ryan Bellmore, and George Pess (2019), the ecological effects of placing human-made dams on rivers are the following ones:

> Dams alter riparian and downstream habitats, replace sections of river with impounded lakes, and disrupt the flows of sediment, organic materials, and the migration of aquatic organisms like fish. Altering natural flow regimes also disrupts complex interactions among geomorphic, fluvial, and biological processes that are critical to ecosystem function. (par. 2)

While the human creation of dams in a river may not "damn" its waters forever, given that river restoration is possible when dams are removed, its native species are likely to perish (Duda, Bellmont and Pess 2019, par. 7). Hence, Crozier's prose poem becomes a call for humans to stop exerting violence on fresh water, as all living beings need it to survive and thrive.

3.2. Crozier's Proposal of Ways for Humans to Discard Anthropocentrism in Favour of Biocentrism

The power of the nonhuman world to challenge human perception and progressively transform human beings' behaviour from human-centred to nature-centred can be observed in the poem "Things Are Not What They Seem" (2019), from the collection *The House the Spirit Builds*. In this collection, the poems by Crozier are set in conversation with the photographs taken by Peter Coffman and Diane Laundy at Wintergreen, an educational retreat centre at the heart of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, in Ontario, on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee lands. On many occasions throughout the collection, Crozier was inspired to write her poems by Coffman and Laundy's photographs; however, in this case, Crozier wrote the poem from direct observation of a millipede on the walls of the sustainable buildings at Wintergreen and the photograph was taken later to illustrate the ideas conveyed in the poem. Crozier realises that what she is observing is not a "rusted spike" (l. 3), but a millipede. She then envisions the millipede "as one of many nails / a boy was told to pull from a board" (ll. 7-8), and imagines the

boy discarding the fake nail, that is, the millipede, by throwing it to the ground: "He yanked it out, it fell in the dirt and crawled away" (l. 9). Such an encounter with the nonhuman world, Crozier ponders, would then contribute to the boy's upbringing by making him aware that "*Things are not / what they seem?*" (ll. 10-11), as the title of the poem announces. Such wisdom about life might lead the boy to pursue a number of different careers, among which that of "a soft-hearted carpenter / who delights in dovetail, tongue and groove; / who builds walls out of bottles, mortar, cordwood, / broken watches, crockery –and never has to kill a nail?" (ll. 13-16). Crozier could very well be describing by means of this fictional story the process behind the building of Wintergreen walls, such as the one in the picture; a process certainly inspired by the love and respect towards the natural environment of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve.

A shift in perspective from an anthropocentric to a biocentric one is further developed in the poems "Wolves," from *The Wild in You,* and "Frog," from *The House the Spirit Builds*. The splendour of these wild animals is evident in the way Crozier describes how observing a pack of wolves on the hunt may trigger the human's wildness to surface: "The wild in you has gone out / to meet the wolves who are hunting // on the other shore" (ll. 1-3). In this vein, Crozier acknowledges human kinship with the nonhuman world, and encourages the reader to step into the shoes of the wolves' prey. Thus, in an exercise of humility, Crozier reverses human self-centred expectations by distancing the narrative from a position of power. That is, humans, who have tended to think of themselves at the top of the food chain, might find it easy to connect with the wolves' might. However, Crozier reveals that what humans need to do in order to explore more equitable and sustainable interspecies interactions is to empathise with the prey, particularly the deer:

> You can't see
> this wayward part of you
>
> like you see your breath in winter,
> but you feel the bite of canine teeth
>
> as if you now live
> in the throat of a panicked deer. (ll. 3-8)

Therefore, Crozier suggests in her poem a different way for humans to relate to the nonhuman world, namely acknowledging animal superiority instead of human superiority. This idea is further highlighted by Crozier's admiration for the wolf's splendour in its wildness. Nonetheless, Crozier underscores in the subsequent lines that as much as humans would like to also attain such magnificence, they should know that it is ultimately impossible:

> You've never understood before
> what beauty means, how it

blasts the blood and leaves you
shaken, demanding more
than you can ever,
in this human body, be. (ll. 9-14)

The photograph presented alongside the poem showcases a single wolf propelling itself forward in order to cross the river from stone to stone. Unlike the plural form in the title of the poem, the photograph displays a single wolf. On the one hand, the picture draws attention to the wolf's skill and athletic body. On the other hand, it highlights the interaction between the animal and the water, in the wolf's minor splashing while generating momentum to jump forward. In a similar vein to the photograph accompanying the poem "The Return," McAllister uses water to create an aesthetic effect in his presentation of wild animals that works towards underscoring their powerful nature and the beauty implicit in it. In turn, the human admiration for the wolf that permeates Crozier's poem is reminiscent of the Romantics' understanding of the sublime; that is, just like William Blake describes a tiger in his famous poem "The Tyger" with both admiration and fear, Crozier marvels at the wolf and becomes frightened like the deer. Nonetheless, unlike the Romantics, Crozier's depiction of the wolf does not stand for a metaphorical portrayal of human feelings as culturally ascribed to nature, or as a pretext to discuss the nature of God and creation as in Blake's poem. Actually, lineation in the poem contributes to the portrayal of the animal itself, as the lines are relatively long, like the slender figure of the wolf in the photograph who is jumping from rock to rock. The line break is often in mid-sentence, after the verb, symbolising the moment of breath for the animal between one leap and the next. In addition, if we think of this breathing as referring to that of the human, its pattern suggests that the speaker is breathing with effort due to a sense of awe and reverence for the wolf.

A reversal of anthropocentrism in favour of biocentrism is also present in the poem "Frog" (51), in which Crozier again marvels at a wild animal through close observation. Crozier pays careful attention to the frog's body when singing its mating song and grants it saliency by referring to the male frog as "he" rather than "it":

He props his chin
on an orb of music,
thin-membraned, translucent,
more mysterious than
any planet. (ll. 1-5)

Such an attention to detail of an amphibian's body, which Crozier presents as intriguing, allows for a description of this animal from a realistic and positive stance. Crozier is further attracted to the frog by its song:

You're drawn to the pond
by his song, so much bigger
than his body
the size of your thumb. (ll. 6-9)

In these first two stanzas, Crozier offers a poetic rendering of the photograph by Peter Coffman and Diane Laundy that is displayed next to the poem. In the picture, we can observe the profile of the body of a light green frog, sitting in the shallow waters of an unspecified place surrounded by dark-green, submerged plants. Nevertheless, the third stanza in the poem introduces a human being who is standing in awe at the frog's singing power and who wishes "to kiss him" (l. 10) in order to be transformed into an animal. By so doing, Crozier reverses the typical plot in fairy tales in which the frog becomes a prince when the princess kisses him:

> Not sick of being frog as you're
> often sick of being human,
> he'll stay the same
> but what will you become? (ll. 11-14)

Crozier suggests that the main reason to metamorphose into an animal is a disenchantment with human existence; her doubts regarding the nonhuman being that she would be transformed into contain Crozier's implicit criticism towards humanity's often unhealthy ways of being on the planet.

3.3. Crozier's Granting of Saliency to Rodents, Reptiles, and Insects

The subsequent section will examine a few illustrative prose poems by Crozier which discuss nonhuman "animals that do not lend themselves to straightforward anthropomorphism" (Aloi 2015, 23), particularly rodents, reptiles and insects; that is to say, those animals that often undergo speciesist discrimination due to their lack of similarities with humans. In this case, both the three main prose poems under discussion and the two supporting prose poems, belong to the collection *God of Shadows* (2018).

In order to grant saliency to slugs, gophers, and rats, Crozier envisions a god whose work consists in inventing new names for animals that humans despise in "God of Renaming" (*God of Shadows*, 31). Such a creative effort is aimed to make humans like slugs, gophers, and rats better so that they do not "wipe [such animals] out" (par. 1). Crozier imagines an anthropomorphised scenario in which the rats work to protect humans from doom. Indeed, material ecocritics believe in anthropomorphism as a strategy to grant "matter access to articulation, by way of stories that co-emerge with the human in *their differential intelligibility*" (Iovino 2015, 82). Crozier wonders, though, whether this story in which the rats are depicted as being useful to humans might have any real effect on socio-cultural perceptions of such animals and the resulting human reaction when the encounter with these animals occur: "Will it stop you from setting out the poison, the traps? The rats don't think so. And though they'd like the taste of glue, the nepotism, they hang on to *rat* with fierce rodent teeth" (par. 1). Crozier thus humbly questions the ability of art to exert any real change in the world, even if she keeps on trying to do so in her work, because as she confesses: "I do think I've been put on Earth to defend

skunks. And cats and shrews and spotted owls" (Philips 2002, 145). In the poem, Crozier also acknowledges the wildness of the rats and empowers them by presenting them as proud of themselves, even if this is a human quality. In turn, humans are shown to be stuck in their anthropocentric ways. That is to say that Crozier employs critical anthropomorphism "without denying nonhuman specificity, to provoke an empathetic response from a reader" (Carretero-González 2021, 854).

In a similar vein, human fear and disgust towards rats in the Western world (McTier 2013) is examined by Crozier in "God of Rats" (*God of Shadows*, 44), which suggests that human abhorrence of rats is partly caused by their resemblance to snakes:

> He should've made a different tail. Even kept it the same but endowed with curly hair or uncurly hair, enough to hide the nakedness. Many claim the tail looks like a snake, to which, unfair to the snake, we seem to have a natural aversion. (par. 1)

As this quotation suggests, Crozier intends to strip both the rats and the snakes off the socio-cultural prejudices attached to them. In their stead, she presents the (garter) snake's body as pleasing to the eye –"more subtle, beautifully green" (par. 2)– and its attitude as being much more convenient to humans than that of rats: "Unlike rats, they're shy. They don't want to hang around us, they don't want to nest in our attics or piss in the insulation" (par. 2). That is to say that Crozier challenges "the binary that sees insects and rodents viewed by the characters as extreme outsider others to the human," to borrow from Jade E. French's statement in relation to the work of Jean Rhys's late short stories (French 2023, 57).

Similar to rodents and reptiles, insects are often despised due to human fear of the diseases that some of them spread as well as the fact that they "rupture the sanctity of human spaces" (Cooke 2022, 467). Nevertheless, Crozier's poetry endows aesthetic value to all kinds of nonhuman animals, including insects. By so doing, Crozier both underscores the uniqueness of all living beings and challenges fallacies of human superiority, as the prose poem "God of Insects" (*God of Shadows*, 35) suggests.

In "God of Insects," Crozier first acknowledges the large number of existing insects –"a billion billion" (para. 1)– to subsequently admit in a slightly hyperbolic manner that many of them are detrimental to both human and other-than-human beings: "a tiny beetle can eat a pine forest, grasshoppers devour continents of wheat, termites chew until a town turns ghost" (para. 2). However, she continues by stating that despite the destructive might of some insects, there are also others whose bodies and actions are worthy of admiration, such as "the delicacy of monarchs and mayflies, the ballet solo of the praying mantis, the song of field crickets, the dancing cartography of bees" (para. 2). Finally, Crozier closes the prose poem "God of Insects" by stating –via the metonymy of a god of insects that stands for insects themselves– that they have "been around the longest and will outlast" (para. 4). Therefore, Crozier clearly positions those beings that are often considered abject as species that will survive beyond the human species on our planet. Based on Julia Kristeva's theories on the abject, Natasha Seegert (2014) argues that "[a]rt provides

a potential way of exploring the othered abject […] [as] aestheticizing the abject makes the invisible visible and forces people to *see"* (2, emphasis original). In other words, the abject becomes an art object. In this sense, Julia Kristeva claims that "[t]he abject has only one quality of the object –that of being opposed to the '*I*'" (1). For Seegert, the space for observation and reflection that the artistic expression of the abject allows for encourages a shift in perspective on the viewer's part (3). This is precisely what Crozier's poetry urges readers to do; namely, to challenge established binary perceptions of the nonhuman world, such as domestic animals vs. pests, and to render all animals valuable.

It is worth noting that Crozier's poetic eye pays the same careful attention and respect to insects than to other nonhuman beings, as stated, for example, in the prose poem "God of the Moon" (*God of Shadows*, 17). In this text, she offers two metaphors for the moon, namely "a bowl of cherry blossoms as they open" and "a bowl of maggots: when they transmogrify into flies," and later on in the poem attests to the moon's "equal love of flies and blossoms." In fact, Crozier's attentiveness to the more-than-human world is the result of her own learning from it, as the following statement in the prose poem "God of Owls" implies:

> You want the slow unrolling of the owl's vowels to slip into your speaking. So much, so little they have to say. You want the owl's silence to be this god's silence, one that doesn't mean there's no one there, but *a refined and honed attention, a keen listening high above you, and a steady looking down*. (*God of Shadows*, 72, my emphasis)

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Crozier's poems in *The Wild in You*, *The House the Spirit Builds*, and the prose poems in *God of Shadows* are outstanding examples of ecopoetry. In line with Timothy Clark's definition of ecopoetry, they create "a space of subjective redefinition and rediscovery through encounters with the non-human" (2011, 139). Notably, and along the lines of Shapiro and Copeland's conceptualisation, nonhuman animals in Crozier's poetry are depicted as close to reality as human language and poetry allow for; they are given both agency and voice, and the uniqueness of each of the different animal species described is acknowledged. As Carmen Leñero (2010) argues, "[for Crozier,] poetic writing is […] an ability to listen to the voice of things, to search out what creatures, phenomena, and objects are capable of 'saying'" (117). Indeed, as my examination of Crozier's poems has revealed, her minute attention to the nonhuman world bespeaks a love and admiration for wild animals which leads her to criticise human abuse of nonhuman nature, specifically whale and bear hunting and water pollution. Moreover, by illustrating both animal superiority and imagining what animals might think of humans, Crozier underscores biocentrism as a healthy way of relating to the nonhuman world, while also offering creative advice on ways to overcome speciesism concerning insects, reptiles, and rodents. The photographs that accompany some of the poems under examination serve

a two-fold purpose, namely to emphasize the importance of ecocentrism and to denounce human exploitation of the more-than-human world. Ultimately, Crozier's poetry foregrounds the need to press the pause button on our rushed, daily lives and observe our surroundings, noticing the nonhuman beings that share the space with us. Hopefully, in an exercise of humility, we will accept Crozier's invitation to deconstruct notions of human supremacy, realizing that we are but one more species on Earth, dependent on healthy interspecies interactions for survival. Hence, in our contemporary capitalist-driven societies, the lessons learnt from nonhuman animals that Crozier's poetry illustrates offer much-needed, alternative ways of being on our planet.

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