
Anthrozoology and Anthropomorphic Poetic Expression

By Peggy Moran

Talking about animals is always an act of appropriation. Expressed through another's written ideas, thoughts, imaginings, biased observations, interpretations, and recordings, without awareness of their own status as a point of focus, the nonhuman animal is utterly subaltern, an object possessed and manipulated, where even natural behavior only occurs as permitted and portrayed by the author.

As one of these authors, I like to write poetry about animals as viewed through an anthropomorphic, child-centric lens. This approach provides me with as an ironic means for allowing the animal- as I do not know him- to peek back and gain an implied voice; paradoxically, the voice remains mine, posing as my interpretation of the hypothetical "Other".

Writing about the child, like the nonhuman animal, allows me to puppeteer my imagined human subjects into roles as inadvertent teachers or liaisons for animal-Other-centered connections at a more intuitive level. Children are, themselves, in-between, in a liminality or boundary space where they are suspended, for a while, between infancy- where they are entirely unaware of the greater sphere of lives around them- and entitled, adult, human dominion over nonhuman animals. Children are uniquely capable of identifying with animal-Others on a similar, shared plane of existence. Writing my human subjects as guileless children is an effort, on my part, to demonstrate a level of humility as I explore human-nonhuman attraction.

In both of these poems, I push my imagined subjects to roam and explore anthrozoological boundary areas, but not without leaving very human footprints.

Trickster

Tomboy runs willy-nilly through the wild dog woods,
sporting Father's new camouflage boots,
stomping saplings and kicking up leaves,
breaking bittersweet and cockscomb, crashing
trembling brush with no consideration

For coyotes, who crouch, eyes darting at ankles
slim and tender; long-faded tan tucked under
corduroy pants, wide-wale whispers of
thighs passing so near, unwieldy rubber
footwear can't mask her smell; each cell tells
stories of the taste of a November child;

They toy with thoughts of bursting forth: fangs
and foamy spittle gnashing to pierce the girl,
still pulsing, darker shades of autumn,
sanguine, pooling in the roots of tall dead grass,
grey and fading golden; instead, they hold steady,
muzzles pressed to the ground, ears cocked,

Almost coy; soundless breath signaling southbound geese,
tiny clouds from snouts long and toothy;

smiling, they fight the urge to wag, joyful
as she sings her winter song to conjure
the full, cold moon.

Cloud-Horse

On the morning after the Leonid showers, I skip school and bolt,
a coltish girl, to the wild-horse beach, racing the squall line
to follow him, spectral-bright; unfurling across shores of lifting terns,
trampling trembling sea-rocket and salt-meadow grass;

Tangled mane of wind-blown spume, all lightning-hooves and gusty-flare,
snorting blasts of salty-fume, all pale and pearly iridescence;

On his forehead, a tattoo, of the meteor-sort; rhythmic fragment
of light, in flight, infinite, until I speak; and then he stands, transfixed,

Silver haze of misty-brume, billowing with the stillness
of tidal pools in static air, holding breath before the hurricane;
I tie a kite to his bowstring tail and give chase, ignoring accusations,
sharp glances cast over colder-shoulder, not once recalling the rain

Of petals from the blossom tree, the sweetness of apple-breath;
all a welcome to where we used to stand, discussing gravity
until too late; in a sea-foam froth of acrid sweat and vapor-plume,
all arc-of-spark and sonic-boom, reluctant wings unfold, unbound,

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To sweep the sky in thunderous, pounding waves.

