

The Culture of Using Animals in Literature and the Case of José Emilio Pacheco

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Abstract: In his article, "The Culture of Using Animals in Literature and the Case of José Emilio Pacheco," Randy Malamud argues that the animal poetry of Mexican writer José Emilio Pacheco, compiled in his 1985 collection *Album de zoología* (trans. 1993 by Margaret Sayers Peden as *An Ark for the Next Millennium*) embodies a vast literary account of a range of animals. This book represents one of the most extensive treatments of animals by any modern poet, and one of the most sensitive and ambitious attempts to craft a discourse that facilitates an approach to animals on their own terms -- representing their authentic existence and consciousness, in a poetic that assumes and preserves the integrity and dignity of the subjects, and unlike most representations in culture and literature which clearly exploit or coopt animals in the service of our own aesthetic agendas. Malamud situates Pacheco's poetry against an unrelated but provocative strain of Mesoamerican spirituality, one that embodies a fervent conviction in the integrity and the importance of animals and "animal souls," suggesting a template for a potentially compelling trope that will allow people to regard animals in ways that transcend our cultural preconceptions.

Randy MALAMUD

The Culture of Using Animals in Literature and the Case of José Emilio Pacheco

A rich system of Mesoamerican beliefs about nonhuman animals inspires me to juxtapose them against something I study with more familiarity -- poetry, and specifically, the poetry of the contemporary Mexican writer José Emilio Pacheco, which, in a very different discourse, evokes a similar, extraordinary level of insight into the nature of the relationships between people and nonhuman animals. Despite Pacheco's geographical proximity to the Mesoamerican communities that embrace the animal beliefs I will discuss, I find no explicit or intentional connection between his ideas about animals and theirs; but simply a kind of coincidental complementarity. A great divide separates the culture I inhabit (demarcated by the academy, Western/industrial-world civilization, and the professional valorization of poetry) from that of the Mesoamericans, and Pacheco seems essentially an inhabitant of my world rather than theirs.

Pacheco's poetry embodies a praxis of the aesthetic incorporation of animals, and this praxis offers a standard against which to appraise the prolific canon of literary animals. Pacheco is one of the most thoughtful and complex artistic "users" of animals -- and, despite the profound respect for animals' integrity that pervades his poetry, Pacheco, like any artist whose work is filled with animals, certainly uses animals, with all the concomitant potential for exploitative appropriation that that formulation suggests. But Pacheco's use of animals, I believe, represents an ideal endpoint on the continuum of an animal-based -- and animal-centered -- aesthetic. In unfolding my examination of Pacheco, I will also attempt the theoretical proposition of criteria by which to evaluate animal poets, as I approach the general questions of why and how artists use animals: what it means when they do so, and what possible positive or negative implications -- judged from my avowedly leftist, ecological, and ecocritical perspective -- accompany the production and experience of such poetry.

There is a small but growing discourse relating to literary and cultural uses of animals: some of the books that I have found most useful in developing my own ideas include Rod Preece's *Animals and Nature: Cultural Myths, Cultural Realities* (U of British Columbia P, 1999); Steve Baker's *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester UP, 1993); Marian Scholtemeijer's *Animal Victims in Modern Fiction: From Sanctity to Sacrifice* (U of Toronto P, 1993); and Boria Sax's *The Parliament of Animals: Anecdotes and Legends from Books of Natural History, 1775-1900* (Pace UP, 1992).

I situate my reading of Pacheco against the Mesoamerican spiritual idea of "animal souls," which offers a template of the complexity and respect possible in human-animal relationships. Mesoamericans believe that a person's soul is explicitly connected with an external animal counterpart, or co-essence. "Mesoamerican souls are fragile essences that link individuals to the forces of the earth, the cosmos, and the divine," writes Gary H. Gossen: "they provide this link because they originate outside the body of their human counterpart, often in the bodies of animals" (1996, 81-82). Mesoamericans believe in "a private spiritual world of the self that is expressed through the concept of animal souls or other extrasomatic causal forces that influence their destiny" (1994, 555). Gossen studies the Chamula Tzotzil community of Southern Mexico (descendants of the ancient Maya), a culture which shares with most of the fifteen million Mexican and Central American Amerindians "a pan-Mesoamerican indigenous belief in what is generally known as *nagualismo* or *tonalismo* in the anthropological literature of the area" (Gossen, 1975, 448). The kindred terms signify, respectively, the transformation of a person into an animal, and a person's companion animal or destiny, which everyone is believed to possess (see Adams and Rubel 336). "The thread that unifies these various expressions" of the Mesoamerican human-animal spiritual affiliation "focuses on the predestination and life history of the self that lies outside the self and is thus not subject to individual control," Gossen writes (1996, 83). Mesoamerican animal beliefs embody metaphysical representations of human ties to the earth, nature, and fate, as mediated by animals (for a more extensive discussion of animal souls and the juxtaposition of Mesoamerican spirituality with literature, see Malamud).

My approach here also invokes comparative literature and culture, both theoretically and in application: When I read animal poetry, I ask what it reveals about people's relationship to animals and about how human culture frames our relation to animals. I seek some formulation that answers Henry Beston's call, in *The Outermost House*: "We need another and a wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals" (25). Mesoamerican communities have confronted the issue of human-animal relationships, and arrived at a simple, compelling awareness: They believe that human existence is directly related to, and dependent upon, the fortunes of other creatures. The conception of animal souls that underlies their spirituality appeals to me as a vivid example of Beston's "more mystical concept of animals," which inspires me to integrate Mesoamerican sensibilities, in some adaptation that fits literary culture, into the consideration of animal poetry. For Mesoamericans, animal souls are real, immediate. They live out, at the core of their belief system, a valorization of animal life. The "set of beliefs and language for talking about [animal souls] reside at the very core of what might be called a native metaphysics of personhood in Mesoamerica," Gossen writes; "the language of souls has fundamentally to do with Mesoamerican construction of self and social identity, destiny and power" (1994, 556) and constitutes a salient element of the most central aspects of human nature -- "our strength, our frailty, our vulnerability, our inequality, and even our unwitting capacity to destroy ourselves" (1994, 566).

An Ark for the Next Millennium is the title given by Margaret Sayers Peden to her 1993 translation of José Emilio Pacheco's poems published as *Album de zoología* (1985). Her edition, the text I shall discuss here, presents nearly eighty animal poems -- certainly one of the richest poetic assemblies of animals ever created -- divided into sections representing the elements that each animal inhabits: water, air, earth, and fire. The lyric subjects include crabs, fish, octopus, and whales in the realm of water; sparrows, owls, buzzards, mosquitoes, flies, bats, and moths in the air; monkeys, lions, horses, scorpions, boars, ants, and mice on earth; and, finally, a lone poem about a salamander, which mythically inhabits the flame, in the last section. In this collection Pacheco, on his own, presents a system of beliefs about people, animals, and their shared existence that rivals the Mesoamerican system of animal souls in its philosophical and ethical intricacy.

A keenly-honed consciousness of animals pervades Pacheco's canon. His first collection, *Los elementos de la noche* (*The Elements of the Night*), from 1963, includes "animals, later to populate many of Pacheco's most memorable indictments of man, lurk[ing] in these opening lines," writes Michael J. Doudoroff (265). *No me preguntes como pasa el tiempo* (*Don't Ask Me How the Time Goes By*), from 1969, includes a section called "The Animals Know," thirteen animal poems that anticipate what would become the larger collection of animal poems in *Album de zoología*. *Desde entonces* (*Since Then*), from 1980, depicts "a parade of animals, to mankind's discredit. The theme of ecological balance, an implied ethical environmentalism, is intensified in this collection" (Doudoroff 270). *Miro la tierra* (*I Look at the Earth*), published in 1986, which situates the devastating 1985 Mexico City earthquake as its central metaphor, features the "attribution of prophecy to animals" (Doudoroff 273). In the mode of *An Ark for the Next Millennium*, the poems of *Miro la tierra* feature a panorama of animals that inhabit our world, arrayed in their ecosystemic intricacy and integrity, interspersed with our society and our consciousness: "The omnipresent rats of Mexico City pursue the speaker in a sardonic nightmare memento mori. Bluebottles replace the sparrows and pigeons. A mock dithyramb to the flies leads into a lesson on the food chain at the insect level, the great chain of being degraded and inverted" (273). *Miro la tierra* features what Doudoroff calls "moral lessons drawn from the observations of animals" (273).

Cynthia Steele reads *An Ark for the Next Millennium* as predominantly allegorical: the animals' main function, she suggests, seems to be serving as a platform for the examination of people. The creatures are most interesting when they generate a commentary on people. Her summary of the collection focuses on the human context that she sees implicit in these poems: For example, "Many of the sea and river creatures have been endangered by man. ... As for the creatures of the air, some are man's faithful companions and helpful harbingers of disaster. ... Like people, animals

react differently to the prison of this world and the void beyond. ... In short, this ark's passengers share the beastly human condition" (91-92). Her reading, while not incorrect, is reductionist: It is assumptively, conventionally anthropocentric, and underappreciates the degree to which Pacheco is using animals not just as a meditation on our own condition, but also to advance two other poetics: representations of animals as they interact with people -- as distinct from the converse, people's interaction with animals -- and animals on their own terms, absent humanity altogether. Beston, again, reminds us that animals "are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations" (25); Pacheco's poetry acknowledges such an ethic of independent identity for animals. This three-dimensional perspective of Pacheco's, akin to Mesoamerican sensibilities that acknowledge the polyvalence of animals and animal souls, transcends the implicit monodimensionality that underlies Steele's critique, and that is, indeed, the default condition of much animal poetry.

Most poetry about animals, harmless enough, induces a brief and pleasant -- if predominantly anthropocentric -- moment of contemplation of our fellow creatures; it may mildly scent, but does not very keenly interrogate, an authenticity, a complexity, and a nobility that nonhuman animals certainly possess, but that people often fail to acknowledge significantly, in our art (or in any of our other endeavors that involve them). A very small, special strain of animal poetry, on the other hand, surpasses these sensibilities. This uniquely sensitive stratum, where I believe Pacheco's poetry merits a solid place, is importantly enlightening on the triple-front of aesthetics, ecology, and ethics. Such poetry has the potential to educate and reform its readers, with respect to what I believe are the profoundly unacceptable practices that mark our behavior, as a culture, toward animals: Condescension and trivialization; heedlessness of the parity they deserve in the ecosystem we all share; imperialist exploitation. Poetry like Pacheco's honors animals, without implicating them (and thus positioning them as subaltern) in human cultural models. It attempts to confront animals as they are, instead of as they appear to us, or as they suit and flatter our habits.

From among all the animals that serve as subjects in countless poems, anthologized in copious collections. I cite two examples of failures to achieve what Pacheco does in his use of animals. First, consider W.B. Yeats's short poem, "To a Squirrel at Kyle-na-no": "Come play with me;/ Why should you run / Through the shaking tree / As though I'd a gun / To strike you dead / When all I would do / Is to scratch your head / And let you go" (155). The most pronounced trope that undercuts the value of most animal poetry is a sense of imperial mastery over animals: they exist for us to use as we please, in our life and in our poetry. Yeats epitomizes this attitude by playfully positioning himself alternately as tormentor and friend -- only hypothetically as tormentor, but of course the suggestion, even in its negative case (as the speaker's demurrals assert: what makes you think I would kill you?), implies the possible advance to actuality (I could kill you -- and, in fact, here's how I'd do it: I'd get my gun ...). The poem presumes that the encounter between poet and animal is inherently on the poet's own terms -- that the squirrel is his subject, to treat badly or kindly. The speaker's privilege, obviously, massively inflects the poem's political situation, the relationship between man and animal. The writer of a poem like this, apparently, believes himself to be recounting an enlightening and equitable interaction with an animal, but this conceit is self-evidently insupportable.

It may seem fairly obvious that Yeats as an animal poet is a wolf in sheep's clothing, but he is no straw man: His poetic pervades the great majority of animal poems, even if not as blatantly as here. Animal poetry, in the main, uncritically accepts the idea of human power over animals; it exhibits a sense of benevolence that always inherently includes its antithesis (here manifest, although usually sublimated), the option of harming the animal if the mood hits the human poet, reader, actor, voyeur. The animal subject exists for our pleasure, and at our pleasure. We use the animal in poetry, as we use it in industry, agriculture, science, zoos, to accomplish a specific purpose and satiate a specific desire: nutrition, entertainment, status, or fodder for contemplation.

An animal poet who looks nicer and more ecofriendly, but still falls short under close scrutiny, is Mary Oliver. Oliver has created a copious canon of animal poetry; her poem "Egrets" typifies her stance toward animals. Oliver arrives, by the end of that poem, at a very satisfying and

illuminating image of the birds, but begins -- and this beginning clearly establishes the poem's trajectory and focus: "Where the path closed / down and over, / through the scumbled leaves, / fallen branches, / through the knotted catbrier, / I kept going" (19). The poem depicts her voyage, her quest, her arduous confrontation with nature, her ... finally, just her. The regrets are a quest-object; they are exhilarating (for her!) when she finally arrives at their pond-nest. It is as if they exist to formulate the climax of her poem; they are dignified by her fascination in them -- but if she happened not to have found them, not to have persevered, bravely, through scumbled leaves and catbrier, what then would have been their significance? The poem fails to address this contingency. In the same vein, to return to Yeats: his best known animal poem is probably "The Wild Swans at Coole." That lyric uses the titular animals as little more than a device to occasion Yeats's own introspective self-assessment. At the end, the birds' migration to another place -- away from Coole and far out of the poet's line of vision -- relegates them to an imaginative void, and the poem concludes on the assumption that the audience will be content to remain with the poet and yet another of his maddeningly elusive terminal questions concerning himself or other men (but not, in any substantial sense, the swans).

Like many ecologically-conscious people who brake for squirrels and eat low on the food chain, I find Oliver's poetry refreshing, and I think I would probably enjoy a walk in a forest with her. That is to say, I do not mean to imply that she is a bad person or sadistic toward animals (which, I suppose, is what I do feel about Yeats after reading "To a Squirrel"), but still, her work does not break through a glass ceiling of anthropocentrism. She appropriates the animals as hers to use, for the duration of the poem, but then what? The reader is not made to feel that the animals of which she writes exist (or that their existence is important) when she has stopped looking at them, when she is done using them, when the poem is over. A conspicuous give-away is simply the too-prominent presence of the poet herself. This centrality of the human-perceiving consciousness is not the sole reason I disqualify Oliver's poetry from "breakthrough" status, but it certainly poses a significant obstacle to a poetic that aspires to extend beyond speciesist self-obsession. A poet who writes about animals and uses a first-person (human) voice must explicitly confront and resolve what that voice means with respect to the rest of the world, if the poetry is to transcend the tradition of regarding animals as unpoetic (except as subjects, backdrop), unvoiced, culturally disenfranchised. The danger of the human "I" with respect to animals -- real, or cultural representations thereof -- is what we might call, extracting a theoretical application from Yeats, the problem of "striking you dead." Unless the poet consciously orients herself otherwise, the poetic "I" is inherently exploitative of nonhuman animals; superior to them; uniquely expressive, sentient, privileged, in the world that her poetry delineates. It is a segregationist I, speaking for people to people and essentially about people, albeit with a cast of hundreds of minor characters from other species. The logical endpoint of human pervasiveness in animal poetry is narcissism, and speciesist isolationism. As sensitive and delicate as Oliver may be, she has not crossed the Rubicon, say, from sympathy to empathy. (Although that distinction oversimplifies the ideal potential of animal poetry, it will serve, to begin with, as a rough boundary.)

Oliver's "The Snakes" begins, "I once saw two snakes," and I continue reading with a diminished expectation that the two snakes she once saw will transcend the frame, the subjugation, of the poet's gaze, even though the entire remainder of the poem offers an intricate and compelling account of these snakes. Her poem "The Fish" begins, "The first fish / I ever caught..." and includes an expression I find especially irritating, gratuitously pantheistic: "Now the sea / is in me: I am the fish, the fish / glitters in me" (56). Again the human presence, the human sense of control, is paramount. If a tree fell in the forest and nobody heard it, would it make a noise? (Yes.) If an animal lives in the forest, or river, and an animal poet like Oliver does not see it, does it make a noise? (Again, yes, but we would not know it from her poetry.)

I read a great deal of animal poetry, and the vast majority of what I read strikes me as manifestly and immediately offensive, like Yeats's poem, or more seductively and insidiously blindered, like Oliver's work. Rarely, I come across a poet such as Pacheco who provides an antidote. In his canon, animals enjoy a respectful prominence on their own terms, irrelevant of what they can do for us (or what we can do to them). His animals are unconstrained by the

politically oppressive subtext that tends to infuse animal poetry. A human presence in any poetry, as mediator, artist, is unavoidable, but Pacheco minimizes this, as much as possible. He declines to play the control freak, as is usually the inclination of our species when we regard animals. Pacheco's animal poetry is keenly attuned to the featured poetic animals themselves: predicated upon a deep appreciation of a dignity that is independent of and apart from humanity: "The animal shall not be measured by man," as Henry Beston writes (25). Pacheco's poetry addresses how non-human animals and people share the world: how our own species is inextricably connected with all the others. Both these criteria support my alignment of this poetry with animal souls. Pacheco tells us, as Mesoamerican spirituality holds, that our fates are connected with those of the animals -- sometimes manifestly and rationally, and sometimes, as it seems to us, accidentally or coincidentally (but this sense of accident probably reflects our imperfect understanding of the larger logic at work in the ecosystem; what we conceive as an accidental human-animal relationship may embody a larger rationality in nature that eludes our perspective).

Sometimes Pacheco's poetic animals are pointedly in their own world -- in their natural habitats apart from people, or simply in an unspecific setting (but importantly, lacking any human presence), where they are themselves. In poems where people are absent, Pacheco celebrates the consequent freedom animals enjoy; he explicitly notes in "Forest Clearing" how human intrusion would undermine the tableau: "Year after year the deer come / to this forest clearing / to mate. / No one has ever seen their sacred ceremony. / Should someone / somehow interrupt it, the next year / there would be no deer" (79). The animals' world outside the forest, beyond the clearing, "is called death, / a word that to them means hounds / and high-powered rifles" (79). People are dangerous, and even in our absence Pacheco cannot repress the image, the potential, of our predatory violence. (Remember again Yeats's poem to the squirrel, where the lack of a literal gun does not make the poem any less lethal.) The guns and dogs convey an implication that our predatory style is unnaturally obsessive: unfairly stacked against the deer; overpowerful, with the fancy weapons and the other animals we corrupt in our quest to destroy them. To the extent that these deer "understand" us, or that we "communicate" with them, Pacheco ironically asserts, what we express is the absolute absence of any real connection. In "Forest Clearing," when animals encounter people, we stand as the signifier for which the understood signified is their own death. In Mesoamerican terms, such a construct would be, literally, suicidal/ecocidal. In *An Ark for the Next Millennium*, I believe, such a suicidal tenor resonates beneath Pacheco's account of the human relation to animals. The most basic ecological analysis of the human cultural behavior and attitudes depicted in Pacheco's poetry would reveal that when we destroy enough of "them," we will have destroyed ourselves in tandem.

"No one has ever seen their sacred ceremony," the poem asserts -- embodying a trope which infuses "Forest Clearing" with a spiritual potentiality. Does Pacheco mean that if people happened to see this "ceremony" -- this mating ritual, this gathering of deer -- it would cease to be sacred, because our mere presence would profane it? Or because guns and dogs would presumably accompany our presence? The poem suggests that Pacheco envisions the animal ceremony as encompassing some experience or sensibility on the part of the deer that must remain separatist, within the realm of animals alone -- seemingly, then, antithetical to the shared sacredness that Mesoamericans believe connects people and animals. I believe it is, finally, impossible for the reader, within the terms of this poem, to perceive precisely what is sacred about the ceremony at the forest clearing -- impossible because, in the mode of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, we cannot know, if we observe an event, that it would happen identically absent our watching it: our observation somehow changes, perverts, the course of the event.

By Pacheco's definition, we cannot experience this sacredness in which the animals partake. Yet the invocation of sacredness here in "Forest Clearing," even given its inherent elusiveness to people, is a trope that locates Pacheco's poetry, whether intentionally or coincidentally, in the same realm as the spirituality of Mesoamerican animal souls. Although the sacredness cannot be mutually shared or experienced, as Pacheco tells us, perhaps the contact zone of the poem per se, the ground that Pacheco stakes out and "clears" for us, is indeed a safe vantage point from which his readers can "watch" what is going on -- what these animals are doing, what their sacred

ceremony comprises. Just as Pacheco is telling us that we cannot share in the animals' sacredness, he is actually, paradoxically, simultaneously offering at least a glimmer of something -- something that people always knew animals did (mating), but probably not something we had consciously perceived as cloaked in a spirituality. The ultimate measure of this sacred, albeit tenuous, sharing, is less satisfying, less graspable, than what Mesoamericans enjoy in their belief system. Certainly we must accept that any inkling we may find in animal poetry of the connection that Mesoamerican culture posits between people and animals will be more nebulous, and more paltry, here than there. It is perfectly fitting -- as a consequence of the ecological hauteur pervading Pacheco's industrial-world culture -- that we merit no more than the tiniest whiff of a natural, interspecies spirituality that Mesoamericans receive so much more bountifully. But if we did get, anywhere in our poetry, such an attenuated vision of the spiritual potential lurking at the margins, the clearings, of our culture, I suggest that it would look like what Pacheco presents in moments such as this sacredness-that-we-are-forbidden-to-see in "Forest Clearing."

Pacheco repeatedly suggests that when animals interact with people, animals end up the worse for the encounter. The poem "Octopus" reiterates the theme of animals' sublimity in the world away from people, contrasted with the dangerous degradation they suffer in proximity to us: at the opening the octopus, distant from human environs, is "Dark god of the deep, / fern, mushroom, hyacinth / among rocks unseen by man, hidden in the abyss"; it is a "Radiant, nocturnal beauty." Contact with people triggers the poem's *peripeteia*: "But on the beach contaminated by plastic garbage / that fleshy jewel of viscous vertigo / is a monster ... and people are killing it, / clubbing the beached, defenseless creature. / Someone hurls a harpoon and the octopus breathes death / through the wound, a second suffocation (23). The construction of the animal as "a monster" is not in the poet's authentic voice, but his ironic one: Among people, the animal becomes that. We distort the octopus, calumnify it as a monster, and treat it accordingly.

A few of Pacheco's poems posit a possible, if unremarkable, coexistence between people and animals -- a symbiosis, along the lines of *tonalismo*, although in a pronouncedly more pedestrian variant. The poem "3:05" describes a bird who "comes to our patio" every afternoon at the same time, "looking for ... what? No one knows. / Not food: it rejects / the slightest crumb. / Not a mate: / it always is alone. / Maybe from simple inertia, from watching us / at the table, always at the exact same time, / it gradually has become, like us, / a creature of habit" (33). Although the poem connects, in the spirit of animal souls, the lives of people and animals, it does so in a resigned, uninspiring way -- lacking the brand of spirituality that Mesoamericans would bring to such a topos. Rarely does Pacheco portray people having the necessary intelligence, or appreciation of nature, to embrace the sort of symbiotic relationship betokened by bona fide tonalismo; and when, as in "3:05," he situates the animal as the initiator, then the challenge that the poem puts forth is the question of whether we are deserving of such a bond, such a tribute. If the bird in this poem, or any animal, has sought out a link to a person, then Pacheco drily suggests that is an indication of the animal's having somehow sunk to our level (where it deserves no more than it gets).

Another manifestation of human-animal coexistence depicted in Pacheco's collection is explicitly parodic: The poem "Lions," for example, begins, "Like the courtiers of Louis XV / they smell bad / but revere appearance./ They live on their past glory, the roar / given a forum on MGM's / movie screens" (75). Lions do not smell bad, at least not for lions -- they smell as they are supposed to smell. They are not like Louis XV's courtiers, although they do revere appearance. They may live on their past glory but the cinematic reference point, while embodying a potent and famous icon of the animal to millions of human beings, is meaningless to the real lions themselves, so it is, to say the least, a curious image to use in describing their real lives. Pacheco is playing here with relationships between people and lions. There are lions, and then there are our lions -- caricatures of lions, human cultural constructs. While "Lions" does testify to a kind of coexistence between people and animals, it does not suggest that that coexistence is genuinely informed. The ways we choose to represent lions may move us farther away from actually knowing them. But at the same time, the reality of our cultural situation is that we do in fact know lions primarily as Pacheco depicts. Taking the MGM icon and the extremely strained courtier simile as emblems of human

epistemologies of animals, Pacheco's poetry forces his readers to acknowledge that, for better or worse, these are the sorts of cultural processes and translations that mediate our relationships to animals. Our conceits and prejudices, our applications of our own sensibilities that overlay the animals' real selves, make it likely that we will not see them well -- will not recognize them, appreciate them, or understand them on their own terms.

Our figures of language, far-fetched and imprecise, betray our deficits of natural appreciation, and our abilities to interact with animals in some way beyond the human cultural contrivances in which we have entrapped them (movie logos, zoos, circuses, and so forth). We must attempt to remain keenly aware of this built-in degree of error in our representations of animals. Even the poet himself, despite his devout appreciation of the natures of animals, seems aware that he cannot escape his implication in this human tendency to regard animals by our own standards. A self-deprecating tone -- wry, or cavalier, or deflationary, laden with the assumption of irony bespeaking the impossibility of Pacheco's ever really commanding this "ark" -- resonates throughout the collection. But at the same time, Pacheco pragmatically acknowledges that however ludicrous or anthropocentric our sensibilities with respect to animals, this is where we must start from: if our predominant association with a lion is from a movie opening, or if our imaginative tendency is to mull an animal by comparing it to an irrelevant human social milieu, then this is where Pacheco, too, will begin, presenting his animals in the ways we know them. Perhaps his triumph will be to commence with us at our present, uninspiring, level of coexistence with animals, and then, over the course of the collection, take us at least a bit beyond this, making us aware of the limitations of our current imaginative and literal interactions. When Pacheco says the things he does about lions in this poem -- "Show business is in their blood. / They are gluttons, / gigolos, entrepreneurs / that eat / proletarian horsemeat" -- he describes them ridiculously but at the same time, he does the best that he can, trapped in our culture, of attempting to understand them.

Pacheco attempts to situate "Lions" (and all his poetry) in a space common to both animals and people -- the same space that gives rise to the greater enterprise of Mesoamerican spirituality. The meeting ground Pacheco discovers is mutually unsatisfactory, strange, silly; the two camps are worlds apart -- a direct consequence of which is the tenor of ecological failure, sloth, retrograde consciousness, that pervades *An Ark for the Next Millennium*. In *tonalismo*, the relationship between people and animals is closer and more natural, although still not perfect: in that system, too, there is a cultural gap between people's perception of animals and the animals themselves. Indeterminacies, mistakes, frustrations, and prejudices plague people's interaction with animals. But finally, Pacheco's poetry -- as strongly as Mesoamerican spirituality -- asserts that however difficult, or potentially skewed, or tainted, or inauspicious the terms of the relationship between people and animals may seem, the bottom line is that we must accept its existence, one way or another. People and lions coexist in this world, in ways that MGM movie logos barely begin to tap, but if that is our entree, our common ground, so be it: some of Pacheco's animal poetry, like "Lions," must be content to exist there.

Generally, Pacheco's animals resist the world of people. Some creatures actively try to shake off the human world -- the first line of "Investigation on the Subject of the Bat," for example, depicts animals as glibly oblivious to their situation amid our culture: "Bats know not a word of their literary reputation" (49). (Lions, of course, similarly, know nothing of their star presence at MGM -- but Pacheco does not need to make every point in every poem.) "Fragment of a Poem Eaten by Mice," a seven-line work that trails off in an ellipsis at the ending, presents itself as an artifact that figuratively embodies animals' resistance or antipathy to human culture, their ability to devour and destroy, in the conduct of their natural behavior (eating paper), what we value as our crowning glory, a text. The poem reads: "A community of primitive rituals, / mice worship darkness. / At night they seem / fierce, always furtive. / Incisive, hungry, confronting / persecution, they need to hide. / Forever spying on those who spy on them" (135). The poem evokes what Stanley Fish dubs the "self-consuming artifact" (something that "becomes the vehicle of its own abandonment. ... A self-consuming artifact signifies most successfully when it fails, when it points away from itself to something its forms cannot capture" [3-4]). Its subject matter

(it is about mice, as well as having been eaten by mice) consumes the human artifact, or all but seven lines. It points away from itself (as Fish's trope describes), and toward that which is no longer present, eaten by mice.

This absence is frustrating -- presuming that we enjoy Pacheco's poetry, we would like to have more of it, the supposedly larger poem that has been partly devoured. But the absence also contributes to Pacheco's poetic, literally and physically making a key point that underlies the entire collection: the force of animals is somehow greater, more important, than we conventionally acknowledge, especially in contrast to the value we accord the human force. Put more simply: we had better watch out for these mice, which can hold their own against the poet. Do the mice realize what they have eaten? (Quite likely, I think.) Why have they eaten the poem about themselves? How did they decide what to eat -- where to stop, what to leave uneaten? Such questions just begin to skim the surface of the issues Pacheco's poetry raises, regarding how animals and people meet on the field of aesthetics. Pacheco and his poetry represent the human element here, and he willingly gives this over, allowing his presence to be usurped -- nibbled -- by the animal presence. He asks us to consider what animals in animal poetry may take from us, not just what they may give to us. He thus evokes an equilibrium, a symbiosis, to which we must attune ourselves. If we want to engage with animals (poetic or real), veritably, we must realize that they will not lie there inert.

I regard the experience that the poem enacts as "self-consuming" -- rather than, what might seem more literally the case, as "mouse-consuming" -- in a testament to what I believe Pacheco thinks of as the "self" (the center, the ego, the consciousness, the voice) of this poem, and of all his poetry: and it is a self jointly occupied, jointly comprised, of the human and nonhuman forces. "Fragment of a Poem Eaten by Mice" is a meeting ground of the human soul (art) and the animal soul. One may, in this formulation, regard the animal soul as anti-art, since it has devoured the man-made artifact. Instead of what might be, say, a fourteen-line poem if it had been protected from hungry mice, we have only a seven-line remnant representing the engagement, the interaction, between people and mice. But I consider the mice eating as a vital contribution to the art, the artifact. The title of the poem, of course, would be meaningless without the animals' contribution to (not, I think, "subtraction from") it. The poem begins, and is predicated upon, the inevitability that it will be eaten by mice. Pacheco seems to enjoy this circumstance, and means for us to as well. He is perhaps flattered that mice might think his work worth the trouble to ingest; he believes that this experience represents as much of an intercourse between our souls and theirs as we are likely to get. There is nothing tragic in his poem's consumption: there are lots more poems where this one came from. Pacheco is a poet, and the "food" he has to give animals, his offering to them, his product, is a poem. It signifies his respect for animals, his desire to connect with them and delineate a common ground, that he offers (or concedes) his poem to them.

If Coleridge's frustration of incompleteness in "Kubla Khan" betokens the power of elusiveness and ephemerality that characterizes the Romantic imagination, then Pacheco's incompleteness here is a comparable testimony to the power of his subject matter, animals that will not let themselves be restrained by people -- will not march to our marching songs -- and to the supremacy of that insight (animals' unconsciousness of our hubristic self-adulation) over the plodding mechanics of human capturing, fixing, in art. The mice have eaten one poem, we are explicitly told. They would have no reason to stop with one, we might reason: the entire catalogue we have here in our hands -- this poetry, any poetry -- is written in what we should recognize as a kind of invisible ink: the animals could eat it all. The world of rodents, bugs, birds, worms, et al., is capable of eventually ingesting (devouring, destroying, heedless of the value with which we invest it) any text that we celebrate as a cultural treasure.

Pacheco posits his textuality as not superior to, nor immune to, the powers of animals. This ecologically balanced (and humble) perspective infuses Pacheco's poetry, and, I argue, typifies the best model of how people can write animal poetry without exploiting (subjugating, coopting, domesticating, aestheticizing, stylizing) the subjects. Instead, Pacheco looks at the animals -- while they, in the poems, look back at us in tandem -- on equal footing, with parity, eye to eye, as

cohabitants of this planet. Pacheco's short poem "Sparrow" explains animals' resistance to our world as a manifestation of a simple, classic dichotomy, the nature/culture clash: "In our quiet garden, it alights / but suddenly startled by your gaze / takes wing, rising in unbounded flight / preferring its liberty to our maze" (35). Like countless animal poems, "The Sparrow" contrasts the freedom of animals to experience their own, natural processes, with the constraints and unnatural repressions that human society has created, which fetter and torment us. This rift is one figuration of the causes of the ecological dissonance -- the incompatibility between us and our feathered or furry cousins -- in *An Ark for the Next Millennium*, but not an exhaustive etiology. Animals react in a range of complex behaviors, consciously or instinctually, to resist people, to escape our influence, and to preserve their own often-fragile integrity as they negotiate the biotas we prominently define with our desecration. Animals may warn starkly, as in a jeremiad, of the dangers and encroachments of our human processes; the prose poem "Augury," for example, recounts: "Until just recently I was awakened by the sound of birds. Today I realized they're no longer there. Those signs of life are gone. Without them, things seem much drearier. I wonder what may have killed them -- pollution? noise? starving city dwellers? Or maybe the birds realized that Mexico City is dying, and have flown away before the final ruin" (37).

Another poem, "The Buzzard," expresses the threat inherent in the loss of animals in the world around us: The unappreciated role they play in our ecosystem, and the cost of losing them. "Augury" depicts a world where animals have simply abandoned a human biota, shaming us implicitly by their refusal to coexist with us amid the conditions we have wreaked. But "The Buzzard" is more ecologically explicit, and adjudicatory, about how people may fare when we have insulted these birds to extinction. After the opening stanzas describe people's scorn for the bird's aesthetics (reflecting the speciesist prejudices that accompany our malfeasant ecological ethos), the poem offers a moralistic *peripateia*: rebutting the bird's bad reputation, Pacheco celebrates its ecological importance and exposes the short-sightedness of our failure to appreciate the importance of living codependently (that sensibility that is so crucial to the Mesoamerican mindset) with buzzards: "But without this regional variant / of the vulture so defamed by rhetoric, / without this 'turkey buzzard' or 'carrion eater' / -- with such names it is insulted -- / what would have become / of the accursed regions / visited / by yellow fever / and other plagues / of the *tristes tropiques* // Buzzards / were our recycling brigades / And now that buzzards are extinct / garbage is about to engulf the world" (47). The last two lines convey Pacheco's bitter appraisal of human behavior, conjoined with a sense of revenge, justice, consequence, *contrapasso*: We will get what is coming to us, and it will not be pretty.

Most of Pacheco's animals are not absent our world but very much in it -- insistently intermixed with people, generally to their detriment, as in "Bitch on Earth," which begins: "A pack of dogs is following a bitch / through the uninhabitable streets of Mexico City. / Extremely dirty dogs, / half-lame and blind, / knocked about, / and covered with oozing sores. / Condemned to death / and, more immediately, to hunger and homelessness" (141). The streets are equally uninhabitable for man and beast; the tableau happens to highlight the resident animals, but could just as easily describe the human population of the city's underclass. Often, as here, Pacheco's account of the sad fate of animals in our society accompanies a report of people's corollary misfortunes. We are fellow sufferers with the animals, which is the condition that is fundamental to the Mesoamerican system of animal souls. The fate of people and animals that occupy the same space is linked, coincident, interdependent. And in Pacheco's poetry, this interdependence manifests itself most prominently in the depictions of a world commonly painful for people and animals. "Bitch on Earth" portrays people fouling their environs, creating a slum, and animals suffering concurrently. Another poem, "Equation to the First Degree, with Unknown Quantity," raises a similar vision of animals suffering in environs people have despoiled: "In the city's last river, through error / or spectral incongruity, suddenly / I saw a dying fish. It was gasping, / poisoned by filthy water as lethal as / the air we breathe" (19).

The poem is not only about the dying fish, but also about the danger and illness that the people who share this fouled ecosystem may expect: The people who breathe the poisoned air as the fish breathe the poisoned water (not that the lethal water alone is not dangerous enough to us).

Everything is connected to everything else, as Barry Commoner's ecological mantra asserts. The poem's first-person observer tries to hear the language, the message, the moral, of the dying fish, but cannot penetrate through the sullied environment, the void of its impending expiration. "I will never know what it tried to tell me," the poem concludes, "that voiceless fish that spoke only the / omnipotent language of our mother, death" (19). As happens often in Pacheco's poems, interspecies communication fails, a casualty of the fouling of the medium of our commonality -- the environment. But the remaining ur-language is extinction. If we fail at all other means of communication and interaction with animals, Pacheco promises, the default "language" that will fill the vacuum will be simply death.

A baboon in "Baboon Babble" offers another example of an animal ensconced, to its misfortune, in human culture. "Born here in this cage," in a zoo, completely circumscribed by the circumstances of human captivity, the first lesson it learned was that "in every direction I look this world is / bars and more bars. / Everything I see is striped / like the bars of a tiger's pelt. / They say somewhere there are free monkeys. // I have seen nothing / but an infinity of kindred prisoners, / always behind bars" (69). "The Well" depicts an instance of unfortunate interaction between people and animals. An epigraph offers an ironic human misperception of the power of turtles: We have looked to them to assist our own health and safety, but we are disappointed in our ecological mistake: "The traditional method for purifying well water -- keeping a turtle in the bottom -- was instead an extremely efficient form of contamination. Ambrosio Ortega Paredes: *El agua, drama de México* (1955)" (9).

Despite our best intentions of trying to discover a human-animal relationship that recognizes animals' power and tries to tap into this, "The Well" portrays our failure. Perhaps Pacheco believes we deserve to fail, given our opportunistic exploitation of animals and our refusal to work towards nurturing interspecies relationships when there is no immediate payoff for us. Once again, the short-sightedness of Western industrial culture -- the insincere and naive unsophistication of our relationship to the natural world as compared with Mesoamerican tribal cultures -- arises as the definitive difference between their successful integration of animal souls into their lives and our much more halting, sloppy attempts. In the well is "the gloomy turtle / we drop in / as instrument or talisman or spell / to purify / water, or consciousness, / Never realizing / that our subterfuges are the traps / into which, invariably, we fall / It's clear: / the turtle / does not purify / it fouls" (9, 11). Pacheco's text symbolizes the unknown in the equation, the relation, between people and animals: "We will never know the extent of the well / how deep it is / or the substance / of its poisoned filterings" (11). He warns us not to take nature for granted -- not to believe we have to have mastered all its tricks, at the risk of punishment for our overweening pride; we are hoist with our own petard.

An Ark for the Next Millennium stipulates much the same relationship between people and animals as in Mesoamerican spirituality: Necessary and extensive interdependence, coexistence, which is ignored or transgressed only at the cost of death. In "Whales," Pacheco describes the pathos surrounding the plight of that species amid human harvesting: "Through the sad night of the deep / resounds / their elegy and farewell / because the sea / has been dispossessed of its whales" (25). Pacheco complements this abstract paean with a more concrete, literal indictment of human behavior toward the animals. "They must surface to breathe," the poem explains, "and then the cruel, explosive harpoon / gluts itself on them / And all the sea becomes / a sea of blood / as they are towed to the factory ship / to make lipstick / soap oil / and dog food" (25-27). So the poem's narrative ends: The whales are dead, and we have our lipstick and dog food. But of course, the story does not really end there. An italic coda to the poem celebrates the leviathan's power by reference to a passage from the end of the Book of Job. And the ecological story does not end with lipstick. It continues, more ominously, in the cycle of consumerism and consequent industrial/economic exploitation of the world and its creatures, its resources, its ecosystems. "A sea of blood," the simple image Pacheco tosses in before soap and dog food, portends the imminent repercussions of our desecrating the repositories of life. It is as obvious to Pacheco as it is to the Mesoamericans what happens if we kill off the animals who are our coessences to satiate our vanity with baubles.

The poem's conclusion, based on Job 41:18-22, states, "*His eyes [are] like the eyelids of the morning. / Out of his nostrils goeth smoke, / like that of a pot heated and boiling. / In his neck strength shall dwell, / and want goeth before his face*" (27; author's parentheses). In the Book of Job, this homage to the whale's strength is emblematic of God's omnipotence, his grandness of design; the Bible cites the glory of the most majestic of animals, the largest mammal, to remind Job of his own mortality and insignificance. But as Pacheco recycles this passage, it conveys a sad irony: humanity has humbled and vanquished this noble animal, which once seemed as omnipotent as the Creator. Modern people have subdued God's majesty. Job goes on to describe the impervious and sublime power of the whale: "The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee ... he laugheth at the shaking of a spear" (41:26-29). But the modern whale, as Pacheco's poem describes, falls easy prey to just these weapons that the Biblical leviathan resists. In Job, the leviathan "maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment. He maketh a path to shine after him" (41: 31-32); this spectacular apotheosis contrasts ironically, pathetically, with the shining path, the "sea of blood," that is all Pacheco's modern whale can muster to mark his presence. "Whales" ends with the animal's impotent death, as opposed to the transcendent vitality of its existence that the Book of Job had celebrated in a earlier time. Pacheco suggests that we need to learn to respect the animals for their own inherent worth, and subdue our pretensions to omnipotence.

Pacheco's poems are, finally, more unlike than like the sympatico construction of the human and nonhuman world that characterizes Mesoamerican spirituality: as insistently as the poet strains to yoke people and animals, the final results of this attempted synthesis tend to be failures, or ironized beyond the range of any ecologically redemptive moral (other than a general "Repent O Man," which seems relatively feeble in terms of its ethical force). But in his depiction of the separateness of the human and animal realms, the hostility of "our" world toward "theirs," the distance we so often put between ourselves and other species, the danger we pose to them, Pacheco suggests -- however evanescently -- an ideal condition, an ideal relationship, such as the sort embodied in *nagualismo* and *tonalismo*. While his poetry depicts how far we often are from achieving this ideal, nevertheless it is not wholly pessimistic. It does succeed in introducing us to a world of shared connection, coessence, between people and animals, if only, largely, by negation: by the connection that is not there; that begins, but fails; that we repeatedly abrogate or betray. Pacheco repeats these overtures toward connection in dozens of striking, insightful animal poems that describe animals perfectly, imagine them spectacularly, appreciate them diligently, respect them uncompromisingly, and empathize with them movingly. Finally, Pacheco's poetry cannot help but leave the ecologically conscious reader with -- despite the fact of our tawdry record toward nonhuman nature -- a powerfully sustained moment of insight: a shared existence between reader and subject, between person and animal.

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