



Stockholm
University

Department of English

Human and animal in 'the Open': an exploration of image and
worlding in the poetry of Marianne Moore and João Cabral de
Melo Neto

Enaiê Mairê Azambuja
Masters Thesis
Literature
Spring, 2015
Supervisor: Stefan Helgesson

Abstract

This thesis firstly aims at discussing the early works of American poet Marianne Moore (1887-1972) through the bio-philosophical perspectives developed since the investigations of Estonian Jacob von Uexküll (1864-1944). The study elucidates Uexküll's research on the web-like forms of life that is the *Umwelt* of animals and Moore's creation of poetic environments. Such investigations provide a basis for the analysis of Moore's animals and environments in dialogue with Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) concepts of "poverty in world", and "animal captivity". Uexküll's and Heidegger's concepts are revised by Italian Giorgio Agamben (1942-), who proposes that there is an openness in the state of being ontologically captivated, caused by interactional processes occurring within the environment. Subsequently, taking into account these same perspectives, this thesis offers a comparative study of Marianne Moore and Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto (1920-1999), engaging, respectively, her early poems with his book *O Cão Sem Plumás* [*The Dog without Feathers*], written in 1950. From the bio-philosophical perspectives previously discussed, this study focuses on moral and ethical stances addressed towards interpretations of the onto-ethological (Buchanan, 2008) nature of animals. The study analyses how both Moore and Melo Neto convey their ethical reflections and specific moral issues through expressions of nature and animal life, especially when they emphasise contexts of violence, misery and deprivation, either in material or conceptual respects, involved with the ontological and world-forming conditions of both animals and human beings. Therefore, the research will focus on their use of literary devices, such as allegories, and literary genres, such as fables, in order to develop both explicit and implicit dimensions of their poetry, thus providing a deeper understanding of the ontological status of animals and human beings.

Keywords: Marianne Moore; early poems; João Cabral de Melo Neto; *The Dog without Feathers*; Jacob von Uexküll; *Umwelt*; Brett Buchanan; *Onto-Ethologies*; Martin Heidegger; Giorgio Agamben, Fable; Allegory.

Introduction

Marianne Moore, poet of the genuine

In the search for oneself, in the search for sincere self-expression, one gropes, one finds some seeming verity. One says, 'I am this, or that or the other', and with the words scarcely uttered one ceases to be that thing.

- Ezra Pound, *the ABC of Reading*

Critical studies of the poetry of American Marianne Moore (1887-1972) have been prolific since the early decades of the twentieth century, especially those which situate the poet in the broad context of Anglo-American modernism (Jarrell, 1953; Rosenthal, 1965; Vendler, 1980; Birkerts, 1989; Gregory, 1995; Lakritz, 1996; Joyce, 1998; Bazin, 2010), and gender (Juhasz, 1976; Heuving, 1992; Diehl, 1993; Sielke, 1997; Zona, 2002; among others). Furthermore, many studies on the relationship between humans and animals in Moore's poetry have been narrowly divided into either repressed self-expression or repressed female experience, - as in assertions presented by T.S. Eliot, R. P. Blackmur, Charles Molesworth, Adrienne Rich, and Suzanne Juhasz – or as associated with Presbyterian symbolism, thus viewing nature as a record of God's purposes – which is the view presented by critics such as Jeredith Merrin and Andrew Kappel. In the essay entitled "Two Bestiaries", published in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* in 1962, W. H. Auden proposes a different view on Moore's apprehension of nature.

Auden (1962), who might have been one of the first critics to analyse Moore's animals, commences by distinguishing the various ways in which animals are presented in a literary work: 1. in a beast fable; 2. in a relation of similitude; 3. as an allegorical emblem; 4. as in the romantic encounter of man and beast; and, finally, 5. as objects of human interest

and affection. However, according to Auden, Moore's poems pertain to another class, that of naturalism, thus evidencing intimate, but tense, relationships between nature and culture. In fact, such tensions are emphasised with modernism, galvanised by the scientific and technological achievements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as cosmology, in the wake of the Copernican turn; biology, with Darwin's revolutionary *On the Origin of Species*; and psychology, with Freud. Those achievements challenged the basis of anthropocentrism, especially Darwin's discoveries, which implied that human beings were conditioned by the same process of natural selection as all other species. In addition, the European socio-cultural context of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century, in which avant-garde movements developed, was shaped by the rise and progress of secularisation, the first wave of the feminist movement, and the traumatic events and consequences of the Great Wars, which clearly contributed to a destabilisation of humanity's certainty in its supremacy.

In her doctoral dissertation "A Modernist Menagerie: Representations of Animals in the Work of Five North American Poets", the scholar Emily Essert (2012) investigates the representation of animals in the work of Marianne Moore, among other modernist poets, as a moral and ethical response to the context of – or symptom of – humanity's crisis. According to Essert, modern poets, such as Moore, are prompted to analyse human beings' relationship with other animals by considering its implications with respect to social issues which shape their representations of modern humanity. However, instead of presenting a definite or consistent position, they investigate human nature, "often using animal tropes or imagery to blur the human/animal boundary. These poets thereby evince an awareness of humanity's evolutionary proximity to other creatures, but their work often inscribes anxiety or ambivalence about such kinship" (p. 4). Thus, in short, Essert's main assumption, which I will support in my discussion of allegories and fables, is that the representation of animals, so widely applied by modern poets, provides "effective ways of registering their anxieties about gender, embodiment, war, morality, and the nature of the human" (p. 5).

Essert (pp. 214-250) studies the use of animals as allegories,¹ pastiches and allusions in Moore's wartime and Depression-era poetry as a means of coding or obscuring the poet's

¹ The animals in Moore's poetry, as Essert claims, are "modernist allegories" (2012, p. 228). She argues that "allegory" is a precise term to relate to Moore's poems, because it captures the double way of their significance: both literally and figuratively. Unlike other kinds of figurative language, allegories provide a coherent sense of the primary, or "literal", level of signification. Moore's animal poems are, Essert argues, "legible as literal accounts of the creatures they represent" (2012, p. 228). Thus, her poems enable both the reading of their implicit and explicit levels of significance. Such openness or indeterminacy represents a new modernist

social and moral critique. The scholar argues that “rather than offering her moral directly, Moore avoids dogmatism by presenting the animal, and leaving it to the reader to glean a moral message” (p. 37). Above all, Essert’s dissertation focuses on the application of animal tropes and imagery as a means to address human questions (p. 7). In contrast, the present study analyses the same scope, i.e., Moore’s early work, including wartime poetry, but with special focus on the extent to which Moore’s poetry, whether in its structural or imagetic constructions, enlightens the question of the ontological status of the animals she writes about.²

Along with scholars such as Susan McCabe (2009), author of the article “Survival of the Queerly Fit: Darwin, Marianne Moore, and Elizabeth Bishop”, Essert focuses on the possible dialogues between Moore’s poetry and Darwin’s theory of evolution.³ Alternatively, I propose the analysis of the investigative work of Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll, as a means of understanding a horizontal perspective – that is, the analysis of current (synchronic) interactions among organisms and environments - rather than Darwin’s vertical point of view, on biology’s diachronic evolutionary environments. For this purpose, I will present, in chapter one, section one, an analysis of Marianne Moore’s early poems in dialogue with Uexküll’s major work, *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (2010), together with Brett Buchanan’s seminal writing about Uexküll, the book *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze* (2008), which I base my own understanding of Uexküll’s ideas. Buchanan develops the concept of *onto-ethology* as a means of studying both the ontologies of animals and their behaviour in natural and current conditions, thus pointing toward pre-rational or pre-linguistic forms of interaction between animals and environments (biosemiotics). Buchanan’s reading of Uexküll’s biological investigations is fundamental to my research in that it explores the consequences of Uexküll’s studies to the forming of subsequent philosophical theories.

allegory, in Essert’s view. For the purposes of the present study, I will focus on both the explicit and implicit configurations of Moore’s animals and their relation to the poetic structure.

² Marianne Moore was an avid editor of her early poems, especially those from the books *Poems* (1921) and *Observations* (1924), which are likely to have been dramatically altered between their first publication and their last. Therefore, aware that the modifications made by Moore in some of her poems reflect ideological shifts throughout her life, as observed by Robin G. Schulze (1998, pp. 297-298), the present dissertation considers the poems included in the books *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (2003) and *Becoming Marianne Moore: Early Poems (1907-1924)* (2002), from those comprising the books *Selected Poems* (1935), *What are Years* (1941), and *Nevertheless* (1944).

³ In her article, McCabe argues that Darwin’s natural selection influenced Moore’s creative process and the constant process of editing of her own poems. Such claim can also be found in the article “Textual Darwinism: Marianne Moore, the Text of Evolution, and the Evolving Text” (Schulze, 1998).

Rather than lineages descending historically through time, as evidenced in Darwin's theory of evolution, Uexküll observes relations that extend horizontally across time and space. As Buchanan explains, "nature becomes akin to a 'web of life' that extends in all directions uniting both living and non-living things into a cohesive design. [...] Nature conforms to a plan, a 'super-mechanical principle' (TB, 350), that has no 'formative impetus,' but that extends across all things, both organic and inorganic" (pp. 20-21). Thus, the present study elucidates Uexküll's research on the web-like forms of life that is the *Umwelt* of animals in discussion with Moore's constructions of poetic environments on her early poems. Such investigations will provide solid basis for the analysis, also in chapter one, of Moore's animals and environments in dialogue with Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) concepts of *poverty in world*, and animal *captivation*, as presented in a piece from his seminar series "The Animal is Poor in World" (2012) and in Matthew Calarco's study "Heidegger's Zoontology" (2012). Chapter one will conclude with the perspectives presented in *The Open: Man and Animal* (2004) by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1942-). Uexküll's and Heidegger's concepts are reshaped by Agamben, who proposes an openness in the state of being ontologically captivated. I argue that Agamben's *the open* is closely related to Marianne Moore's ideas on the genuine in poetry, which is a reference to the poet's authentic, bodily instincts and a fusion between reality and imagination. As her metapoem and ultimate manifesto "Poetry" (2003, pp. 266-267) suggests, a poet is a "literalist of the imagination", who records, according to Robin G. Schulze, "the wondrous visions that issue from the depths of his or her natural responses to his or her social, cultural, and biotic environment" (1998, p. 287).

Moore's poetic environments are built upon the contrast between the actual and the imagined. According to Vivienne Koch (Rees, 1984), Moore's environments are a combination of "what is imaginable in the actual, to its actuality, that is at once the key and the meaning to her charmed movement between the human and the animal kingdom" (1984, p. 237). So much so that, as Ralph Rees notes, Elizabeth Bishop, enchanted by Moore's inseparable combinations of the natural with the artificial, and of the factual with the fabulous, envisaged the possibility of "a realm of reciprocity, a true *lingua unicornis*" (1984, p. 237). Marianne Moore, in a curious parallel with Uexküll, believes in the subjective nature of the experience, where reality is perceived through the senses. Such are Moore's ideas about what is genuine, expressed in the first verses of "Poetry":

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all
this fiddle.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one
discovers in
it after all, a place for the genuine.
Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise (2003, p. 266).

Expressions of capability, such as grasping hands, dilating eyes, and rising hair, are metonyms not only related to Moore's understanding of the genuine in poetry, but also to Darwin's study of instinctual response. According to Schulze, Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (Darwin, 2009) were first annotated in Moore's reading diaries in 1910 (1998, p. 283). Evidently, Moore's idea of the genuine owes something to the work of Charles Darwin. Furthermore, not only Darwin but also Uexküll believed in the subjective apprehension of reality through the subject's senses, though Uexküll's main theories particularly involved the intertwining of such subjects in simultaneous time and space, rather than in an evolutionary lineage.

A “literalist of the imagination”, as stated by Moore, will always produce “imaginary gardens” which contain the natural, instinctual, raw energies of “real toads” (1998, p. 287). The rawness, in Moore’s conception, reflects a tendency to create a natural environment in art, especially in the linguistic and thematic space of poetry. The word/image evokes the ontological status of the signified and its referent, and thus, the environments of poetry contain an infinitude of new subjective meanings. Moore’s poetic subjects undergo a process of objectification, of materialisation, presenting animals and men “as such”, thereby endowing them with the same value as poetic matter. In Moore’s poems, all organic and inorganic beings are placed at the same level of ontological significance in the imaginative and factual instances of the poetic world. Thus, there is the achievement of a new ethical stance towards animal life in Moore’s poetry, an ethical dimension of writing expressed by means of both imagetic constructions and innovative linguistic structures.

While Auden identifies the naturalistic way in which animals are presented by Moore, her poems are evidently imbued with both literal and figurative, factual and imagined, meanings. Animals are expressed as embodying both natural and human values, which represent the basis of Moore's ethical and moral stances. According to Essert, her poems can be considered "modernist allegories" precisely because they do not subjugate one dimension of poetic meaning under another. Both implicit and explicit levels of significance are

perfectly legible and, therefore, the poems are very different from traditional allegory, which commonly emphasised the implicit, often moral, message, as for example, in the famous instance of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. On the other hand, some of Moore's poems are still representative of the traditional configuration of the fable, inspired by the work of Aesop and La Fontaine, such as "The Frigate Pelican" (2003, p. 25), "To a Prize Bird" (2003, p. 31), "Peter" (2003, p. 43), "To a Snail" (2003, p. 85), "The Paper Nautilus" (2003, p. 121), and "The Wood-Weasel" (2003, p. 127).

In chapter two, I will analyse the writing of modernist allegories and fables as a way of reflecting not only on humanity's values and perspectives, but also on the contribution that the lives of animals offer to human beings' existence. The analysis will be based on a comparative study which will take into consideration two different contexts, that of the war and post-war world of Marianne Moore's poetry, in the context of Anglo-American modernism, in contrast with the influence of economic, social, and cultural issues to the modern poetry of Brazilian João Cabral de Melo Neto (1920 – 1999). Moore's selected early poems will engage in a dialogue with Melo Neto's book *O Cão sem Plumás* [*The Dog without Feathers*], written in 1950. From the bio-philosophical perspectives presented in chapter one, I will explore the resonances between Moore's and Melo Neto's poetry, analysing to which extent Melo Neto is an implicit 'critic' and follower of Moore's work by way of incorporating her use of thematic and formal features in his own poetry. Much like Marianne Moore, the Brazilian poet prioritises the image over the message, the tangible over the discursive; demonstrates an interest on the fusion between poetry and prose or poetry and oral/folk literature; and expresses a logic of poetic construction, developed through rationalism and objectivity. However, both still emphasise the value of imagination and the image in conjunction with the "raw material of poetry".

Furthermore, I will present a reflection on the similitudes and diversions of their modernist allegories – which consist of expressions of violence, misery and deprivation - and their writing of fables. I will analyse how Moore presents a modernist allegory in which there is an implicit social, political and moral meaning, by preserving the form of the fable in her poems. In parallel, I will investigate how Melo Neto disintegrates the allegorical imagery, emphasises the explicit meanings within his poems, and inverts the fable. In Melo Neto's *The Dog without Feathers* (1950) - a possible allusion to the Greek biographer Diogenes Laërtius' critique on Plato's definition of man - all beings, including humans, are contained in captivation, thus presenting the same status of ontological poverty. The agent responsible for this captivation is explicitly revealed as being the social and economic structure of society,

which conditions part of its people, animals, and environments to a situation of deprivation. In both Marianne Moore's and João Cabral de Melo Neto's poems, animals are capable of expanding their ontological status in the process of becoming. Moore achieves such process by anthropomorphising animals, while Melo Neto expresses both animals and human beings as formerly featherless creatures, deprived beings who cannot have knowledge of the world as such, but who can multiply their ontological significance within their own lives and through interactions within their environments. Moore's fables present animals in a mutant state of anthropomorphisation, while in Melo Neto's, human beings are animalised and defined by their environments and relations with other beings.

Chapter 1

A Dialogue between Marianne Moore's Poetry and Animal Philosophy

The present chapter will consider selected poems by Marianne Moore in the light of reflections on the ontological significance of animals and their representations. Firstly, Marianne Moore's animals and environments will be analysed within the scope of Jakob von Uexküll's investigations in biology, which influenced philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ernst Cassirer, Georges Canguilhem, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In the wake of previous discussions, Moore's poems will then contribute new perspectives on Martin Heidegger's concepts of *captivation* and *poverty in world*. Finally, the concept of *the open*, introduced by both philosophers Martin Heidegger and Giorgio Agamben will open up a new line of enquiry about Uexküll's ontological investigations, as well as it will be emphasised through the expression of animals and environments in Moore's work. The revision of such miscellaneous philosophical perspectives provides a deeper understanding of the onto-ethologies of animals in Moore's poetry.

The Onto-Ethologies of Jakob von Uexküll and Marianne Moore

Were the eye not sunlike, it could never gaze upon the sun.

- Goethe, Theory of Colour

Were the sun not eyelike, it could not shine in any sky.
Were the flower not beelike, and were the bee not
flowerlike, the consonance could never work.

- Uexküll, Theory of Meaning

In 1934, the Baltic German biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944) wrote a picture book entitled *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*⁴ (2010), in which he analyses the reality of the animal environment. However, the word "worlds" in the title does not suffice to signify the breadth of existence of both animals and human beings. The German original elucidates Uexküll's intentions of studying the environments of animals, called *Umwelten*,

⁴ Original German title: *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*.

while the external world [*Welt*] and the general surroundings [*Umgebung*]⁵ are meaningless to the animal.

In the study *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze*, the scholar Brett Buchanan considers Uexküll's major works and his influence on subsequent philosophers such as Heidegger and Deleuze. I consider Buchanan's research on Uexküll's influence on modern and contemporary philosophy as fundamental to my essay, especially because of these philosophers' relevant contributions to the former concepts produced by Uexküll's investigations. Based on the behaviour of animals, Uexküll's studies combines an ethological (behaviourist) examination and a means of understanding the ontological status of animals. In addition, Buchanan investigates how Uexküll contributed to the establishment of biosemiotics as a field of research. This refers to the analysis of how sign systems are generated and interpreted within nature understood as "the embodiment of significance and the possibility of meaning in [natural] life" (2008, p. 5). The extensive meaning of the *Umwelt* and of biosemiotics to the early poetics of Marianne Moore will be the focus of this section.

According to Uexküll, the *Umwelt* can be likened to a soap bubble [*Seifenblase*] encircling every animal. This invisible cage which surrounds the living being is "filled with the perceptions accessible to that subject alone."⁶ As soon as we ourselves step into one of these bubbles, the surrounding meadow [*Umgebung*] is completely transformed. A new world emerges in each bubble" (2008, p. 1). Thus, the *Umwelt* is an animal's individual system, which is constituted and created by the animal's perceptions and responses towards its surroundings. The *Umwelt* is formed by the animal's perceptual world [*Merkwelt*] and active world [*Wirkwelt*], and may contain the *Innenwelt*, self-oriented features, and the *Umgebung*, which are world-oriented features.

The metaphorical soap bubble is a representation of the way in which the *Umwelt* limits an organism's life, in a similar way to the concept of *captivation* developed by Martin Heidegger, later discussed in this study. However, while this invisible cage constitutes the

⁵ The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben explains that *Umgebung* is the "objective space in which we see a living being moving" (2004, p. 40), thus emphasizing the human perspective, or the human *Umwelt*, to the conceptualization of "surroundings".

⁶ Uexküll mentions a similar metaphorical bubble-like form which also encircles human beings and stimulate the development of their subjective perceptions: "Then, we will see each of our fellow human beings as being enclosed in bubbles that effortlessly overlap one another because they are made up of subjective perception signs" (2010, p. 70). Uexküll implies that there is a sense of multiplicity, community, and aggregation in the bubble-like forms of human life. However, overlaps are also recognizable in the environments of other relational and relatable organisms, which "mesh with one another in the intricate web of life" (2008, p. 25). Yet, what is curious is Uexküll's attribution of subjective perception to "not just human forms of perception but to the *Umwelten* of all animal perceptions" (2008, p. 13).

boundary of the living being's environment, it also happens to shield the organism from external examination. Buchanan claims that Uexküll perceives the *Umwelt* as not only providing a spherical boundary preventing an organism of penetrating in the other's environment, but also contributes to interlacing and contrapuntal relationships by being a finite space limit.⁷ Thus, there is openness to the other in the organism's enclosed environment, which establishes the meaning and range of such an organism's life.

It is necessary to emphasise Uexküll's understanding of "world", which is essentially distinct from that of philosophers such as Heidegger, for whom the "world *as such*" can only be known through human cognition. Throughout his work, Uexküll clearly points out the existence of multiple worlds, arguing that there are as many worlds as there are subjects, "there no more exists a single world than there exists a single organism that inhabits it" (2008, p. 22). Thus, there are also as many environments as there are animals, the world is multiplied into infinite animal environments. It is important to draw attention to Uexküll's claim that the animal and the *Umwelt* form a single unit together, thus being interdependent. What Uexküll emphatically argues against is the interpretation of animals as being "soulless machines, vacuous objects, or dispassionate brutes" (2008, p. 2), according to Brett Buchanan. Therefore, animals should be considered according to the environments they inhabit and to their behaviour in such environments. Within the interaction of body and environment, the animal behaviour gives access to its ontological dimensions, while ethology, in turn, works as a frame to the being and its process of becoming. In the process of becoming, the behavioural body is essential for the occurrence of subjective reality; whereas the human life is filled with the products of the consciousness, rational thought, mind and spirit, the body is fundamentally "instinctual, sensual, mechanical and finite" (2008, p. 3).

In Uexküll's notion of the configuration of nature, organic and inorganic beings cohere in harmony, for he believed that nature conforms to a plan (*Planmäßigkeit*) (2008, p. 8), and that organisms are "musical tones" which harmonise with other living and non-living things. With a musical reference, Uexküll also distances himself from Darwin's theory of evolution, which Uexküll thought of as a "'vertical' model of descent and one that emphasises far too much a chaotic view of nature's formations" (2008, p. 8). He clearly focuses on a 'horizontal' configuration of evolution, in which organisms relate to things surrounding their environments.

⁷ The study of the animal as a "subject" involves the "relationships with its "others", its "intersubjective relations" (2008, p. 29). Thus, Uexküll's onto-ethology is essentially relational.

There are only subjective realities in the establishment of environments. Uexküll claims that “the objective realities of the surroundings never appear as such in the environments” (2010, p. 125), and that objective realities are projections of what humans see as the surroundings of animals. On the other hand, environments not only constitute instinctual reactions to external *stimuli*, but also creations by the animal’s body and its experiences. These are the so-called “magical environments” of Uexküll’s ontology, where the world is meaningful on account of purely individually subjective experiences.⁸

In Uexküll’s *A Theory of Meaning* (2010, p. 139), each and every organism, together with its environment, can be simultaneously a carrier and receiver of meaning. With this, the biologist refers not only to actions and reactions of the organism according to environmental *stimuli*, but also with the creation of perception marks and effect marks by the organism in the environment.⁹ He explains that the “search image, the tracing of the most familiar path, and the demarcation of territory already constitute exceptions to this rule, since they could be ascribed to no sort of external stimuli but represented free productions of the subject. These subjective productions had developed in connection to repeated personal experiences of the subject” (2010, p. 119). Thus, Buchanan argues that, for Uexküll, “organisms actively interpret their surroundings as replete with meaningful signs. They are not merely passive instruments or message bearers, but actively engaged in the creation of a significant environment” (2008, p. 31).

Uexküll’s formulations of organisms as carriers and receivers of meaning are part of the biologist’s theory of life, which studies how meaning is generated through relationships in nature. Although the term biosemiotics was only coined in 1961, Uexküll is considered one of its founders, for he studied the structure of nature as a system of signs. Buchanan’s words resonate this research’s view that,

In studying the behavioural patterns of different animals, Uexküll noted that animals of all levels, from microorganisms to human animals, are capable of discerning meaning from environmental cues beyond a purely instinctual reaction. Such meaning is attributable to how organisms enter into

⁸ Here, Uexküll resonates Immanuel Kant’s notion that “all reality is subjective appearance”, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Contradicting Locke’s line of thinking, Kant coined the expression “*Ding an sich*” (the “thing-in-itself”) to refer to essential objectivity. Kant was sceptical about Locke’s belief in the true objective essence of scientific knowledge, and asserted that it is impossible to know the true nature of the *Ding an sich*, other than that it exists. According to Kant, scientific knowledge is always subjected to a filter of subjectivity and human beings’ collective sense of objective reality is merely an intersubjective agreement.

⁹ Perception marks are responsible for the notions of form and movement, and also for the awareness, or feeling, of time and space by the organism. Effect marks are the organism’s reactions to its environment’s space and the appearance of directional signs in its movement.

relationships with other things and thus come to see the environment as laced not just with signs, but with significance itself (2008, p. 8).

The Estonian biologist gives a series of examples to illustrate the multiple relations and, as a consequence, significant signs and marks created among organisms. One of the most famous examples is that of the tick, whose living habits and environments are observed by philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben and Deleuze & Guattari. By analysing the tick's life, Uexküll and the aforementioned philosophers develop a better understanding of the animal's ontological significance within its *Umwelt*. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben mentions Uexküll's explanation on the expected pattern which is followed by the tick's instincts:

This eyeless animal finds the way to her watchpost with the help of only her skin's general sensitivity to light. The approach of her prey becomes apparent to this blind and deaf bandit only through her sense of smell. The odour of butyric acid, which emanates from the sebaceous follicles of all mammals, works on the tick as a signal that causes her to abandon her post and fall blindly downward toward her prey. If she is fortunate enough to fall on something warm (which she perceives by means of an organ sensible to a precise temperature) then she has attained her prey, the warm-blooded animal, and thereafter needs only the help of her sense of touch to find the least hairy spot possible and embed herself up to her head in the cutaneous tissue of her prey. She can now slowly suck up a stream of warm blood (2004, p. 46).¹⁰

The tick's movements express its *Umwelt* structure, which contains only three carriers of significance: 1. the odour of butyric acid, 2. the temperature of the mammal's blood, and 3. the hairiness of mammals.

Among other examples, such as the bee and the flower, Uexküll's most intriguing objects of analysis are the spider and the fly.¹¹ The biologist argues that there is a "fly-likeness" in the spider's nature, who constructs its web according to the fly. To be fly-like means that the spider has assumed certain fly characteristics in its constitution, though "not from a particular fly but from the primal image of the fly (2010, p. 190)". Uexküll claims that the spider "has taken up certain *motifs* of the fly melody in its bodily composition. Any

¹⁰ Originally in *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (Uexküll J. V., 2010, pp. 44-45).

¹¹ Uexküll's example of the spider and the fly is widely used in the subsequent studies by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In parallel with Uexküll, the French philosophers are concerned with the nature of the organisms' relations, though challenging the very understanding of the concepts of "body" and "organism". Life is considered a play of varying relations which establishes brief assemblages, thus animal life occurs in "lines of flight" instead of being encapsulated in a sphere. According to Buchanan, "from Uexküll, we are introduced to an entirely new way of considering such things as milieus and territories, rhythms and refrains, and how becoming-animal questions previous ontological positions" (2008, p. 38).

animal, as primitive as it can be, is capable of anticipating its surroundings by “reading” meaningful signs of its environment. Also, Uexküll not only asserts the importance of living beings’ products, such as a spider web, but also recognises the role of inorganic elements to the formation of the organism and its environment, such as affects and temperature, among others.

The resonances of Uexküll’s relatable organisms are also perceived in the poetics of Marianne Moore, especially during her early experimentations with the syllabic verse structure, in which animals relate to their environments and to other organic and inorganic beings at the core of her poetic structure. In “Marianne Moore’s Ecopoetics Architectonics”, Josh A. Weinstein argues that Moore’s poems are ecosystems, in which her formal achievements create “an interconnected and interrelated system of individual units and groups” (2010, p. 373). Thus, Moore’s poems are illustrative of an ecopoetics, for they “indicate an ethical and aesthetic stance toward the natural world” (p. 373). Moore’s ethics is expressed through the humility with which she recognises her limitations in the act of writing the other’s [other organic and inorganic beings] significance.¹² However, my understanding is that ethics and aesthetics are not presented as a harmonious pair in Moore’s poetics. Similarly, Bonnie Costello (qtd. in Weinstein, 2010) observes that the pair is the central tension of her work, a controversy between “‘the urge toward aesthetic value and significance, and toward mastery of nature by mind and culture’ and ‘a principle of humility toward the earth, [...] the search for a ‘cure of the ground,’ as a locus of significance and the proper source of moral and aesthetic order’” (2010, p. 375). Moore’s early poems contain a wide range of innovative poetic structures, such as extensive use of quotations, unexpected line breaks, enjambments, peculiar and dynamic rhyme schemes, highly intense visuality, consonances, alliterations, and assonances, are techniques which illustrate such tension and a general tendency to express and emphasise the natural world. As Weinstein well argues, Moore’s work cannot be regarded as a pure vanguardism, but “rather the orchestrated attempt of a sophisticated poet to transcend the perhaps limiting bounds of avant-garde poetry to create an ecological system of a high degree of complexity in her work” (2010, p. 378).

Through the creation of innovative poetic forms, which are related to Moore’s scientific and imaginative interest in nature, the poet demonstrates an attempt to understand

¹² Weinstein briefly discusses Moore’s biographical account of her relationship with animals as a second-hand experience. He quotes Malamud, who reads Moore’s detachment as an expression of her ethical stance: “whereby if ‘animals generally suffer whenever they come into contact with people [...] Moore, who wants to depict animals with as much integrity and dignity as possible, chooses a stance [...] at a discreet remove’. For Moore, Malamud continues, ‘precise naturalistic accuracy (which might demand observational proximity) was not a chief aspiration: more important was an imaginative connection’” (2010, p. 377).

the intersubjectivity of nature's environments. Weinstein argues that Moore's ecopoetics is an example of the assemblage between form and content, expressed by "the creation of complex interweaving structure through the use of repeating, yet inaudible or nearly inaudible, syllabic verse; regular, yet often unaccented rhyme schemes; and the flattening of hierarchy in her portrayal of the mundane and the fabulous in her animal, as well as human, subjects" (2010, p. 373).

Within the structure of her ecopoetics, one of the most intriguing formal features of Moore's poems is the metre called syllabic verse, widely used in the Romance languages, but uncommonly employed in English. Moore's syllabic verses, as will be later shown, present a regular and continuous, rather than chaotic, structure. The verse is considered to be the main metrical unit, if not the whole stanza, with its atypical line breaks and rhythms. In his study on English metre, Martin J. Duffell explains that Moore's way of counting syllables is anti-rhythmical (2008, p. 208), taking into account the final post-tonic syllables of each verse, thus making it impossible to hear the syllabic regularity.¹³ Such regularity is perceived only through the eyes, what Robert Beum calls 'visual syllabics' (1957, p. 273), i.e., syllabic verses which widely varies in length, but that are isosyllabic at the corresponding lines of each stanza. Despite its modernist reshaping, the repeatable symmetry of each stanza was characteristic of the English traditional verse for centuries, from rhymed couplets to romantic odes. However, as Margaret Holley (1984) observes, Moore's stanzas are reconfigurations of traditional forms, by the interplay and the blurring of tensions between organic and mechanical structures; between the abysses of poetry and anti-poetry; human and non-human; poetic subjects and objects. Thus, with its combination of "long and short, end-stopped and enjambed lines, with indentations determined sometimes by rhyme and sometimes by line length, weight and balance" (1984, p. 189), Moore's syllabic verses admit uncommon poetic rhythms of spoken and written language into its configuration:

What the syllabic measure does that free verse does not do is to cross the rhythms of the natural voice or nonpoetic passage over the traditional textual appearance of the repeated stanza form. Moore's syllabic poems are shaped like traditional verses, but they do not sound like them. The written and seen dimension of her work reinforces a premodern expectation that the spoken and heard dimension radically undermines. The nonmetrical measure of her poetry

¹³ Duffell recognises three main features in Moore's metrics: it is syllabic, asyntactic (by the enjambment of syntagms), and visual (2008, p. 208). Also, because of atypical line breaks, Moore's phrasal stresses usually do not coincide with the line end, emphasising syllables of little significance, which demonstrate the poet's regard of the poem itself as a unit, a whole of meaning.

releases an anti-"poetic" rhythm that constitutes a critique of our habitual association of the sound of poetry with metrical music (1984, p. 190).

Holley's concept of the organic nature of the model stanza reinforces my argument that form and content together are the embodiment of the *Umwelt*, i.e., the expression of animals and their environments. Poems such as "The Fish" and "Black Earth", both published in Robin G. Schulze's organisation of Moore's early poems (*Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907-1924*, 2002), illustrate the way in which the rhymed syllabic verse, among other linguistic and imagetic constructions, enacts the description of natural processes and their complex system of interrelations. Moore wrote both "The Fish" and "Black Earth" in 1918, later published in her collection *Poems* (1921), and the poems are illustrative of her connection with the Imagists in the pre-World War I period. The poems' syllabic structures are very similar: both present a regular rhyme scheme as well as a regular pattern of indentations and line breaks. "The Fish" contains eight stanzas of five verses each, presenting a somewhat conventional rhyme scheme as AABBC. While "Black Earth" contains seventeen stanzas of four lines each, and their rhyme scheme is AABC. However, Moore presents a varied syllabic meter in order to destabilise the conventionality of the rhyme schemes. The metrical pattern of "Black Earth" (2002, pp. 87-89) is 4-6-13-13, while Moore's final version of "The Fish" (2003, pp. 32-33), is 1-3-9-6-8 syllables, as it is evident in the first stanzas of the poem:

The Fish

wade
through black jade.
 Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
 adjusting the ash-heaps;
 opening and shutting itself like

an
injured fan.
 The barnacles which encrust the side
 of the wave, cannot hide
 there for the submerged shafts of the

sun,
split like spun
 glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness
 into the crevices—
 in and out, illuminating

The third stanza of the referred section of the poem illustrates the imagetic and sonorous effect perceived throughout the poem. The wave-like form recognisable in the poem is constituted, among other forms, by the indentations, presenting movement in the page, by internal rhymes, and by L-shaped patterns of alliterations, which link the penultimate and final line of each stanza and the final line of a stanza with the first lines of the subsequent, producing a highly dynamic effect, such as in the end of the second stanza and the beginning of the third: “there for the submerged shafts of the / sun. / **split like spun**” [emphasis added]. Similarly, in content, the subject of the fish is not only restricted to the body of the title but also is the major connection and central axis of the poem, being an evidence of the fact that all organisms interact in their maritime environments and with each other. Thus, fish, barnacles, mussels, and other animals mentioned in the poem all form a sea of submerged bodies confined in bubble-like environments which are alternately hidden and revealed, closed and open, by the “submerged shafts of the / sun, / split like spun / glass”, moving with “spotlight swiftness” and illuminating the watery medium through its cracks and shadows. However, the “turquoise sea of bodies”, i.e., the *Umwelt* presented by Moore, is not entirely natural or spontaneously produced, as it is observed in the way that the jelly fish, “crabs like green lilies” and “submarine toadstools” “slide each on the other”, a violent image of clashing between organisms, which culminates in the final stanzas:

All
external
 marks of abuse are present on this
 defiant edifice—
 all the physical features of

ac-
cident—lack
 of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and
 hatchet strokes, these things stand
 out on it; the chasm-side is

dead.
Repeated
 evidence has proved that it can live
 on what can not revive
 its youth. The sea grows old in it.

The verses “external / marks of abuse” and “all the physical features of / ac- / cident – lack / of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and / hatchet strokes, these things stand / out on it;

the chasm-side is / dead” evidence the allegorical character of the poem, thus containing implicit agents of violence and abuse, though not being explicitly mentioned and not having their origins revealed. Furthermore, the structure reveals itself to be unnatural, corrupted by an undisclosed human presence which is also perceived in the images of destruction and objectification enacted by the war. In “Instruments of Dissection: Syllabic Verse in the Age of Mechanical Destruction”, Victoria Bazin (2010) argues that “The Fish” implicitly embodies the ethical crisis of war in its content and form.¹⁴ In its content, the sea presents marks of abuse and accident; while mussel shells opening and shutting like “an injured fan” resembles an injured seaman gasping and losing his breath, the bodies of diverse organisms, sliding “each on the other”, together form a mass of torn human flesh. The sea, then, is not read as a natural ecosystem but as a metaphorical mass watery grave by the war time reader. Bazin quotes Slatin who asserts that the poetic form “acts like a linguistic fortress that both protects and contains the subject matter (...) the rigid syllabic structure operating like a ‘defiant linguistic edifice’ to control the emotionally charged content of the poem” (2010, p. 67). If Moore’s somewhat mechanical precision in the use of syllabic verse may point to her concern about new technologies of modernity, she also considers the meaning of humanity and its relation to nature, especially in the wake of the use of technologies of mass destruction so much in evidence during the Great Wars. In my understanding, it is precisely because of the connections between the explicit configurations of the maritime animal and the implicit social dimension evidenced in previously mentioned verses that the poem’s ontoethology reaches its openness.

While “The Fish” portrays the animal in its movement across the maritime environment and its instinctual awareness about its surroundings as it “wade[s] through black jade”, the poem “Black Earth” (2002, pp. 87-89) demonstrates a deeper interaction between organisms and environments, so much so that they can hardly be distinguished. Through the occurrence of several assemblages, the elephant, which acquires the speaker’s subjectivity, develops a closer relation to its environment, thus assuming its nature. In the act of “being black earth”, it is possible to observe the elephant’s experience in a mutating, always changing, rather than bubble-like, environment. Therefore, the verses in stanzas three to six evidence the inevitable intrusion of the environment in the animal’s life:

¹⁴ Bazin informs that Moore “may have been reading about Einstein’s recent work in quantum physics suggesting that all matter exhibits both wave-like and particle-like properties; the seemingly paradoxical features of this underwater world reflect the indeterminacy of matter itself. This dissolution of boundaries extends to a more unsettling indeterminacy related to perception” (2010, p. 69).

(...) The sediment of the river which
 Encrusts my joints, makes me very gray but I am used

To it, it may
 Remain there; do away
 With it and I am myself done away with, for the
 Patina of circumstance can but enrich what was

There to begin
 With. This elephant skin
 Which I inhabit, fibered over like the shell of
 The coco-nut, this piece of black glass through which no light

Can filter—cut
 Into checkers by rut
 Upon rut of unpreventable experience—
 (...)

In the poem, language is the limit which separates the inner life of the animal and the outer interference from its environment. Language adopts the nature of the animal, thus preventing the latter's soul of being "cut into by a wooden spear". The elephant becomes the earth, its skin is black earth, also compared to human beings, who speak within their "shells". However, the language of the animal is capable of breaking the "shell" which encircles the inner self, thus, blurring the inner and outer dimensions of the organism, its skin and soul, the natural "I" and the spiritual "I", and also the animal's "I" in direct contact with other organisms' "I":

That tree trunk without
 Roots, accustomed to shout
 Its own thoughts to itself like a shell, maintained intact
 By who knows what strange pressure of the atmosphere; that

Spiritual
 Brother to the coral
 Plant, absorbed into which, the equable sapphire light
 Becomes a nebulous green. The I of each is to

The I of each,
 A kind of fretful speech
 Which sets a limit on itself; the elephant is?
 Black earth preceded by a tendril?(...)

Moore's elephant has its subjective inner self now completely exteriorised, thus creating a different *Umwelt* configured by new assemblages, new biological sign systems. The elephant becomes "black earth preceded by a tendril", expressing the denseness of natural processes not only through the language of science but also through imagination. The final stanza correlates with Uexküll's and Kant's idea, discussed previously, that the only knowledge we can have of reality is subjective, thus questioning the existence of a limit between science and imagination: "(...)Will / Depth be depth, thick skin be thick, to one who can see no / Beautiful element of unreason under it?".

Moore is interested in presenting and questioning the binary oppositions which form the explicit and implicit scope of her work: distinctions between the human and the non-human, the interior and exterior constitution of an organism, the visible and invisible, the real and imaginary, the signifier and possible signifieds. Such are the characteristics of Moore's modernist allegories, which equally reproduce both explicit and implicit dimensions of meaning and present the natural world involved in humankind's imagination. In fact, Moore emphasises, in her poetry, the "ecological nature of the human imagination itself" (Weinstein, 2010, p. 378). Imagination works as a filter for human beings' perception of reality. Likewise, all expressions of objective realities in nature are projections of what humans see as the surroundings of animals. For both humans and animals, it is only possible to perceive a subjective reality, in the Kantian sense. In the next section, I will propose that imagination, exteriorised in poetry to express human and animal instances, is what provides openness to the environments of animals.

The Openness in Captivation of Moore's Animal Allegories

Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos. [We are a sign that is not read].

- Hölderlin, *Mnemosyne*

One of Jakob von Uexküll's major legacies was the emphasis on the relational character of animal life and the animal's capacity of detecting relevant marks and signs in its environment. However, according to the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, Uexküll's vulnerability is precisely the lack, in his investigations, of a proper transition from animal life

to the existence of human *Dasein*.¹⁵ I resonate Buchanan's view, who argues that Heidegger reads Uexküll as offering "insightful glimpses into the world of animals, and even though he points out a difference between animal and human worlds, he has not adequately described the essential manner of this relation underpinning the relation to world" (2008, p. 53). Thus, Heidegger finds it necessary to ask again or rephrase some of Uexküll's enquiries, such as "what does it mean to have an environment?; what is an environment? Is it different from the world?; and to whom does 'having an environment' apply?" (2008, p. 39). The task of answering such questions is carried out by Heidegger, who attempts to differentiate the existence and worlds of *Dasein* from the lives and environments of animals.

In "The Animal is Poor in World" (in *Animal Philosophy*, 2012), Heidegger explains that man is not merely a part of the world but is "also master and servant of the world, in the sense of "having" world" (2012, p. 17). However, Heidegger enquires about the otherness of other beings, such as animals, plants and material things, and questions their relations to world. Thus, the German philosopher formulates three distinctive states of being: 1. the stone (material object) is worldless [*weltlos*]; 2. the animal is poor in world [*weltarm*]; 3. man is world-forming [*weltbildend*]. Heidegger's thought on animality clearly establishes a boundary between the human relation to world and the animal relation to world. While inanimate things do not have the possibility of accessing the world, the German philosopher proposes, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1995), published in 1929-1930, a similar bubble-like form of animal environment as seen in Uexküll's investigations:

the animal's way of being, which we call "life", is *not without access* to what is around it and about it, to that among which it appears as a living being". It is because of this that the claim arises that the animal has an environmental world [*Umwelt*] of its own within which it moves. Throughout the course of its life the animal is confined [*ist... eingesperrt*] to its environmental world, immured as it were within a fixed sphere that is incapable of further expansion or contraction (1995, p. 198).

In this sense, the concepts of "self" and "selfhood" - and also the process of identity-forming of the otherness - are properties of human beings, in contrast with the "proper being"

¹⁵ Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* does not express a substance or object, but a way of being. Heidegger affirms that the only being which *exists* is the human being. "Rocks are, but they do not exist. Trees are, but they do not exist. Horses are, but they do not exist. Angels are, but they do not exist. God is, but he does not exist. (...) The proposition "the human being exists" means: the human being is that being whose being is distinguished by an open standing that stands in the unconcealedness of being, proceeding from being, in being" (Buchanan, 2008, p. 64). Thus, the openness in the being of humans is related to their capacity of accessing the world of beings *as such*, i.e., the ontological state of beings.

of animals which does not imply consciousness, reflection or personality. Animals have a primal instinct which shape their relation to other beings. This limitation in its alterity makes the animal a captive being. Matthew Calarco (2012) interprets captivation as a condition in the animal's openness to other beings, such openness being only possible by "species-specific instincts". Heidegger's instinctual and confining ring¹⁶ reveals a double action in the animal's relational status: "it encircles the animal, and thereby strictly limits its access to specific types of other beings, and, at the same time, disinhibits and opens the animal up beyond itself to the surrounding environment" (2012, p. 24). Thus, the animal is not only made captive to its own instincts, but also is captive to other beings, by way of their relation between which there is no gap. The animal interacts with its other, though cannot recognise it as another being, *as such*.

In "Heidegger and the Question of Man's Poverty in World", Rafael Winkler (2007) analyses Heidegger's 1929-30 lecture course, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, and identifies a different tendency in the philosopher's notions of poverty. Winkler contradicts the common assertions that Heidegger privileges *Dasein* over the animal, existence over life, and "the irredeemable anthropocentric notion of the animal's 'poverty' in world, a predicate which is said to acquire its entire sense only from the point of view of man's world" (2007, p. 523). Such a commonplace reading of Heidegger's text points out that the animal is deprived of man's ability to project a world and of having the *logos* which is the main response to world.¹⁷ However, I would resonate Winkler's saying that man's condition of "having" world and producing projections of worlds is only made possible through their relations to the animal:

But if we focus upon what Heidegger does, not upon what he says but upon what he does in drawing the distinction between man and animal, then something entirely different becomes apparent. Everything turns around the question concerning the source of man's finitude, the cause of his finite transcendence, and this, as Heidegger will show us, is to be found not so much in man's *being-towards-death* as in his *being-towards-life*, in *man's relation-to-the-animal*. Apparently for the first and only time in Heidegger's grand oeuvre, we find that man's metaphysical nature activates itself, becomes

¹⁶ By the animal's self-encirclement through a ring of captivation, Heidegger expresses a manner of being, rather than just a confining space. Through its manner of being, an animal is capable of interacting other beings that "disinhibit [*enthemmt*]" its behaviour, that is, "'affects' or initiates the capability in some way" (1995, p. 254).

¹⁷ And, yet, Winkler points out that animals, too, have a language, though unable to recognise something *as such* and develop concepts. Animals have the ability to interpret something as something – "is in possession of not the apophantic, but the hermeneutic, 'as'" (2007, p. 527) – in order to orient themselves within the environment and, thus, survive.

historical and world-shaping, only through a relation-to-the-animal – a relation at once more opaque and more sublime than man’s relation-to-death and to being, to the finitude of being (2007, p. 523). [emphasis added]

In *The Open*, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2004) investigates the origins and relations in Heidegger’s language involving the terms captivation (*Benommenheit*), absorption (*Eingenommen*), and behaviour (*Benehmen*). All terms are related to the root verb *nehmen*, “to take”, which, in turn, is derived from the Indo-European root **nem*, “to distribute”, “to allot”, “to assign”. For Heidegger, the animal is not only captivated within itself, but also absorbed by its surroundings. Thus, captivation is a form of behaviour, a “form of self-like behaviour” (1995, p. 237) of the animal within an environment, though never within a world.

Heidegger, then, distinguishes between the behaviour [*Benehmen*] of animals and the specific manner, proper of human beings, called comportment [*Verhalten*]. It is precisely the structure of relationality, that is, the ethological dimensions of behaviour and comportment that exposes the ontological differences between animals and humans. The relational status of animals are conditioned by their ability to perceive what Uexküll calls “carriers of significance”, a pre-linguistic set of interaction. The “carriers of significance”, or what Heidegger calls *das Enthemmende*, or ‘the disinhibitor’, provides, in my understanding, an openness in the *Umwelt*, which is then characterised as a disinhibiting ring (*Enthemmungsring*). For this reason, the animal can only come into relation with another when this another disinhibits it, or ‘affects’ it, by providing signs, thus being carriers of significance.

Agamben mentions Uexküll’s example of the relation between spider and fly to demonstrate how each animal cannot see the *Umwelt* of the other, in a reciprocal blindness. And, yet, the spider determines the configuration of its web according to the dimensions of the fly’s body and defines the web’s resistance by interpreting the impact of the fly’s body in flight. Therefore,

the radial threads are more solid than the circular ones, because the circular threads—which, unlike the radial threads, are coated in a viscous liquid—must be elastic enough to imprison the fly and keep it from flying away. As for the radial threads, they are smooth and dry because the spider uses them as a shortcut from which to drop onto its prey and wind it finally in its invisible prison. Indeed, the most surprising fact is that the threads of the web are

exactly proportioned to the visual capacity of the eye of the fly, who cannot see them and therefore flies toward death unawares (2004, p. 42).

The spider's web, then, assumes the feature of being "fly-like", for being in tune with the archetype or image of the fly, which is a carrier of significance; though the perceptual worlds of both animals are unreachable to each other. This example illustrates the openness of animal behaviour and captivation, or, according to Agamben, "the specific openness of being taken in the drivenness of instinctual captivation" (2004, p. 54). Agamben states that "life is a domain which possesses a wealth of being-open, of which the human world may know nothing at all" (2004, p. 60). In a reference to the Eighth Duino Elegy, by Rainer Maria Rilke, Agamben concludes that "while man always has the world before him – always only stands 'facing opposite' and never enters the 'pure space' of the outside – the animal instead moves in the open, in a 'nowhere without the no'" (2004, p. 57).

Like the spider who is disinhibited by the fly and its environment, the poetry of Marianne Moore also manifests an awareness of the surroundings of animals and attempts to repeat and interpret the signs expressed by the animal's archetypes, producing images which erupt between the boundary of nature and imagination. Such boundary, often blurred, reflects her idea of the genuine in poetry, through the "imaginary gardens" of its images which contain in itself an organic reality, represented by the presence of "real toads". The double quality of such representations of animals is itself an openness in the captive ontology of the poetic object. My understanding of "object" here correlates with Douglas Mao's which emphasises the "articulation of meaning through linguistic relations, networks and patterns rather than through a representative, universal human subject" (Bazin, 2010, p. 75). Mao recognises that a poetic object is neither a commodity (Goods) nor a symbol (God), but an object which maintains all its polysemy. This freedom from human values is not only perceived through Moore's open expression of a genuine natural world filtered by imagination, but also through the "machine-like" precision of her verse. The uncanny effect of an automatised voice is especially perceived in Moore's syllabic verses, e.g., in "The Fish". In Victoria Bazin's words, "in the age of mechanical reproduction, Moore's machine aesthetic troubles the boundaries between the human and the non-human" (2010, p. 74). Moore's "mimicking of the manufactured object" and her attempt to dehumanise the lyric voice actually indicates her struggle to reach the expression of a genuine natural world; authenticity being achieved by the instrument of poetic imagery, usually allegorical, so as to

emphasise the dehumanising states (in the form of social, political, economic and cultural crisis) within humanity itself – inserted within the interpretation about the lives of animals.

These allegories are reflections of Moore's disappointment with the way animals are treated by men and her concern with ecology, in poems such as "Black Earth", "A Grave", "A Jelly-Fish", among others. In addition, I would also like to call attention to the way Moore's verses represent a form of accessibility to the animal world through experience. Moore's emphasis on a first-hand experience of nature through perception, over the second-hand apprehension through a theoretical and philosophical approach, is evident in poems such as "Black Earth" (2002, pp. 87-89), and "New York" (2003, p. 54). In "New York", for instance, the view of the urban space is conditioned by the immediate perception of animal violence and consumerism:

the savage's romance,
 accreted where we need the space for commerce-
 the center of the wholesale fur trade,
 starred with tepees of ermine and peopled with foxes,
 the long guard-hairs waving two inches beyond the body of the
 pelt;
 the ground dotted with deerskins-white with white spots,
 "as satin needlework in a single color may carry a varied
 pattern,"

The cultural apprehension of "the scholastic philosophy of the wilderness" correlates with the view of a city which values the dead skin and meat of animals - a neutralised wild – rather than the "accessibility to experience", the first-hand encounter with nature:

(...) that estimated in raw meat and berries, we could feed the
 universe;
 it is not the atmosphere of ingenuity,
 the otter, the beaver, the puma skins
 without shooting irons or dogs;
 it is not the plunder,
 but "accessibility to experience".

In Moore's view, "the otter, the beaver, the puma skins / without shooting irons or dogs", i.e., the living animal, is pure "accessibility to experience", thus expanding the meaning of the final verse of the poem, which refers to a saying by Henry James (Moore, 2003, p. 269). The Anglo-American writer envisioned a way of understanding history through pre-rationalized

and pre-linguistic experiences. In parallel, Moore proposes such a way in the understanding of nature.

On the other hand, instead of opposing against the mischaracterisation and misperception of nature within an urbanised environment, the poem “Black Earth” immerses the reader in the natural world, offering the experience of being in an elephant’s skin, of being the elephant. Furthermore, the reader is able to perceive the complex and deep assemblages of the animal among its environment and its openness to encounter the lives of other beings, “with the naturalness / Of the hippopotamus or the alligator”:

Openly, yes,
 With the naturalness
 Of the hippopotamus or the alligator
 When it climbs out on the bank to experience the

Sun, I do these
 Things which I do, which please
 No one but myself. Now I breathe and now I am sub-
 Merged; (...)

Such assemblages are the openness of the captivated animal, its captivation being life itself, with its finite possibilities of relational experiences. The open is due to a “patina of circumstance” which “can but enrich what was / there to begin / with”. However, the elephant’s skin has endured the history of power, which “cut / Into checkers by rut / Upon rut of unpreventable experience”. Thus, the elephant’s life refers not only to the dissatisfaction with human engagement with animals and nature, but also becomes an allegory of humanity’s history of power and violence. While the limit of the animal’s life is described by its body - the circumference of its trunk - which is “the unity of life and death”, the human being, a “wandlike body of which one hears so much, which was made / to see and not to see; to hear and not to hear / That tree trunk without / Roots, accustomed to shout / Its own thoughts to itself like a shell”, is limited by the other’s “fretful speech”. As a result, I believe Moore’s verse resonates Rafael Winkler’s interpretation (2007) of Heidegger’s human world. As mentioned before, Winkler claims that Heidegger’s philosophy left an apparently unintended openness to a different interpretation, that is, that the world of human beings is limited not only by their relations with each other, but also by their relations with other living beings. Thus, humans’ capacity of shaping the world is precisely conditioned by their relational experiences, which bind their ontological status and make them finite creatures.

Human beings' relations to nature are also expressed as a play between a state of interference by the former and a resistance by the latter, in the poem "A Grave" (2003, p. 49). The poem is a reflection on human ontology itself and presents a distinction between man's and the speaker's relation – a feminine interference to the maritime environment:

Man looking into the sea,
taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have to
yourself,
it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing,
but you cannot stand in the middle of this;
the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave.

Jeanne Heuving (1992) compares the thematic form of "A Grave" with the form presented in the Romantic lyric. The latter gives emphasis to the voice of the speaker, who attempts to understand his inner crisis through meditation on a natural environment. The initial state of the subject is that of unhappiness or disillusionment, which is then transformed by a natural phenomenon, such as a sudden wind or a change in the sky. The speaker achieves "an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem" (Heuving, 1992, p. 97). Thus, there is the projective shift, within the Romantic form, from outer environment, to inner self, and, finally, back to the exterior world. The speaker projects his inner troubles to the environment.

Moore's poem, on the other hand, reverses this process. Heuving points out that the poem starts and ends with a brief meditation by the speaker, but presents a lengthy scenic description in its middle. For Heuving, "it is precisely through the speaker's separation from the natural scene, which in dominant Romantic iconography is feminine, that she achieves a positive resolution of her crisis" (Heuving, 1992, p. 98). In Moore's poem, the environment denies, or resists, the disclosure of man's self-projection. The sea is not a mirror, but a grave, thus expressing an ethical stance towards human acts which have consequences to both human worlds and animal environments. The maritime environment invites humans to "read" its signs and, through this, understand themselves, for the sea is not a repressor of human acts, but "a collector, quick to return a rapacious look":

There are others besides you who have worn that look--
whose expression is no longer a protest; the fish no longer investigate
them
for their bones have not lasted:

men lower nets, unconscious of the fact that they are desecrating a grave,
and row quickly away--the blades of the oars
moving together like the feet of water-spiders as if there were no such
thing as death.

The speaker's inner crisis is clearly the human (masculine) act of desecrating nature, of disturbing the mechanical movement of the waves, in which "dropped / things are bound to sink - / in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor / consciousness". The speaker progressively distances herself from the natural environment, because she understands, with consciousness and not volition, that the sea is a grave and that she cannot force her will to power into the environment in order to solve her inner crisis. According to Heuving, "the overall effect of this poem is of a kind of containment, as if everything could be known only through its most pronounced boundedness" (Heuving, 1992, p. 99).

While the relations between human beings and animals are expressed as essential in Heidegger's philosophy and Moore's poetics, both employ such relations as a means to achieve a better definition of humans' existence or the expression of their inner conflicts. Thus, both still present an anthropocentric perspective, though they open up new lines of enquiry into the onto-ethological significance of animals. In chapter two, I will analyse the writing of modernist allegories and fables as a way of reflecting not only on humanity's values and perspectives, but also on the contribution that the openness of animal life offers to human beings' existence. The analysis will be based on a comparative study regarding the resonances between the works of Marianne Moore and Brazilian João Cabral de Melo Neto.

Chapter 2

Onto-Ethologies in the Wake of Conceptual and Material Miseries in the Poetry of Marianne Moore and João Cabral de Melo Neto

Marianne Moore is usually recognised as belonging to the Imagist movement not only because of her particular connection with its members and their poetic ideology but also because they contributed to the publication of her first book, *Poems*, in 1921. The book was published without her knowledge by her friend, the Imagist poet H.D., and happened to attract the attention of poets such as William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, Mina Loy, and Ezra Pound. Although her complexity prevents her unquestionable affiliation to any specific group of modern poetry, Moore's poems, especially her late poetic phases, are heavily influenced by Imagist principles. Such are those published on March 1913 in the magazine *Poetry*, which contained the essay entitled *Imagisme*, written by Pound. The essay presented the three main positions of the Imagist movement: 1. direct treatment of the “thing”, whether subjective or objective; 2. use of absolutely no words that do not contribute to the presentation; and 3. rhythmical composition following the sequence of the musical phrase, not the sequence of the metronome.

The Imagists' main purposes were to create precision of imagery; clear and sharp language; use of free verse in order to express the individuality of a poet; and freedom in the choice of a poetic subject; among others. For Pound, the visual image is the unique poetic statement and, therefore, more important than the writing of voluminous work itself. The image is considered a poetic unit, for it presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. Thus, the Imagists attempted to isolate the image in order to disclose its essence, a feature similar to the developments in avant-garde art, such as Cubism. While Cubism provided a synthesising of multiple perspectives into a single image, the Imagists, by applying Pound's Ideogrammic Method, juxtaposed concrete instances to reveal an abstraction. Such imagist elements, as well as the compression or, rather, precision of language into an image, is encountered in Moore's poetry, especially in her use of nature as poetic subject matter.

Although her poetry presents Imagism's extensive precision of language, rejection of traditional forms, attention to the image, and repression of personal emotions, Moore's poetry contains her own unique features, such as the use of syllabic form, particular sonority formed

by alliterations, assonances, and internal rhymes; purposeful patterns of indentations, prosaic language, extensive use of quotations, and use of unusual and scientific terms. The difficulty in labelling poets such as Marianne Moore, who began writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, is due to their complex interweaving of influences and rejection of past aestheticisms, as well as their constant pursuit of originality, spontaneity and beauty. Twentieth century Modernism, including the Imagist movement, rejected Romantic and Victorian aestheticism and made use of classical values, such as directness of presentation, economy of language, and the experimentation with non-traditional verse forms. The complex poetics that characterise the Imagist are however not the reserve of that movement, but could be compared with many other poets or groups of poets in the twentieth century, such as the Russian Acmeists, or the early poetry of Gunnar Ekelöf in Sweden, or the Brazilian João Cabral de Melo Neto, on whom I will focus my analysis. The search for the genuine in poetry, especially through the development of new poetic forms and the fusion of imagination and reality, is found in both Moore's and Melo Neto's complex crafting.

Born in Recife in 1920, the Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto, one of the greatest Brazilian poets of all time, is generally associated with the last generation of Brazilian Modernism, the so-called "Generation of '45".¹⁸ As subsequent to the generations of '22 and '30, the movement represented a reaction against the declared absence of form and lack of thematic engagement of the previous modernist generations. Brazilian Modernism began in 1922, in São Paulo, as an aesthetic movement of literature and other arts. Its two major creators and leaders were the writers Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954) and Mario de Andrade (1893-1945). In turn, 1930 is considered the starting point of the second generation of Brazilian Modernism. Its main foundations were the development of a "poetry of the quotidian" by Manuel Bandeira (1886-1968), the early poems of Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902-1987), and, in prose, the development of regional themes with the writers Graciliano Ramos (1892-1953), Jorge Amado (1912-2001) and Jose Lins do Rego (1901-1957). The generation of '45, on the other hand, was constituted by a group of poets who contested the aesthetic innovations of the '22 group.

¹⁸ Melo Neto was a diplomat and lived part of his life abroad, in cities such as Barcelona, Marseille, Seville, Bern, Dakar, and London, having published *O Cão Sem Plumas* [*The Dog Without Feathers*] while living in the latter, in 1950. The poet was part of the Brazilian Academy of Letters from 1968 to his death in 1999 and was awarded the 1990 Camões Prize, the greatest prize in Portuguese language, and the 1992 Neustadt International Prize for Literature. In 1999, the year of his death, Melo Neto was a strong contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Although Melo Neto launched his literary career on the brink of the '45 emergence, with the book *A Pedra do Sono* (*Stone of Sleep*) in 1942, he followed a singular path.¹⁹ Much like Marianne Moore, the Brazilian poet prioritises the image over the message, the tangible over the discursive; demonstrates an interest on the fusion between poetry and prose or poetry and oral/folk literature; and expresses a logic of poetic construction, developed through rationalism and objectivity. During a lecture at the International Congress of Writers in São Paulo, in 1954, Melo Neto (qtd. in Gonçalves, 1992) mentioned the aspects by which modern poetry is enriched and characterised:

a) in the structure of the verse (new rhythmic forms, syntactic rhythm, new forms of suppression and “enjambment”); b) in the structure of the image (collision of words, approximation of strange realities, process of association, and imagery from the subconscious); c) in the structure of the words (exploration of musical, visual, and, in general, sensory values of the words; fusion or disintegration of the words; restoration or invention of words, invention of onomatopoeia); d) in the notation of the phrase (material distinction of words, violent inversions, subversion of the punctuation system); and e) in the typographical disposition (calligraphic signs, use of blanks, variation of typographical characters, symmetrical disposition of the semantic and phonetic basis) (p. 639).

As I have mentioned before, such elements are also recognisable in Moore's poetics, especially her use of atypical syllabic verse and rhyme schemes, unusual construction of enjambments which disintegrate and/or transform words and sentences, visually significant format of indentations, among others. However, I would like to emphasise the importance of the imagetic structure as one of the most evident connections between Marianne Moore and João Cabral de Melo Neto. In both, imagery is the medium through which the conjunction between the imaginary and the actual is made evident, thus demonstrating the poets' perspectives about their own art. In an analysis of Moore's fables, Bruce Ross (1984) compares her imagetic creation and formal structures with two other relevant poets, respectively an Imagist and a Modernist, William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens. Ross regards Moore's conception of the employment of both imagination and reality in poetry, in a parallel with Williams and Stevens for they also “return again and again to the confrontation

¹⁹ According to Brazilian critic Haroldo de Campos (1992), Melo Neto rejected his affiliation to the '45 movement, claiming that the only unifying criterion between him and the generation was chronological. Campos points out the problematic of a strictly common use of “historical situation”, which presupposes a common historicity, a common vision of history. “Such a common characteristic”, Campos observes, “could not exist between a marked idealistic propensity for the imponderable and a pointedly realistic tendency toward the substantial and the concrete” (p. 617).

of the poetic consciousness with the structure of actuality” (1984, p. 339). According to Ross, all three writers wrote landscape poems, inspired by the tensions between culture (art) and nature. For William Carlos Williams, representative of the Imagist movement, poetry expresses the immediate engagement (contact) with reality, which is “unmediated by any philosophic ordering, aesthetic predilection, received structure, or academic tone” (1984, p. 340). The poet’s imagination and the form and meaning of the poem are produced by the poetic subject itself, which Williams claims to be found not in ideas but “in things”. Things which are, according to Wallace Stevens’ terminology, anti-poetic, because they are “taken from the palpable world and serve as unique individual complexes in their own right” (1984, p. 340). Differently from Williams, Wallace Stevens asserts that poetry is an exercise of fiction created by the interaction between the depth of imagination and the surface of reality. In Stevens, there is a philosophic consciousness about the difficulties of ordering reality and the emotions, and a concern about the aesthetic consequences of art. In contrast, Moore is considered to stand between “the extremes of Stevens’ aestheticism and Williams’ thoroughgoing revelatory realism” (1984, p. 340). If Williams emphasises the importance of reality over poetic imagination and Stevens highlights the imagination above reality, in Moore, aestheticism is intimately connected with the expression of actuality, therefore producing a balance between the two main perspectives.

Moore, as well as Melo Neto, explained their poetics through metapoems. Moore’s *Poetry*, first published in *Others* in 1919, claims that the poet should be a true “literalist of the imagination”, i.e., someone who produces “imaginary gardens” which contain the natural, instinctual, raw energies of “real toads”. The rawness, in Moore’s conception, reflects a tendency to create a natural environment in art, especially in the linguistic and thematic space of poetry: whatever discloses its natural rawness means authenticity, spontaneity, and the genuine in poetry. Similarly, in Melo Neto’s *Poema (Poetry)*, published in 1942, the poet, and its “vegetable absence”, is lost in imaginary gardens:

Ó jardins enfurecidos,
 pensamentos palavras sortilégio
 sob uma lua contemplada;
 jardins de minha ausência
 imensa e vegetal;
 ó jardins de um céu
 viciosamente freqüentado:
 onde o mistério maior
 do sol da luz da saúde?

O raging gardens,
 thoughts words sorcery
 under a contemplated moon,
 O gardens of my vast
 vegetable absence,
 gardens of an enchanting,
 addictive sky:
 where is the larger mystery
 of light the sun health?
 (2010, p. 15)

Both poets comment on the need of a poem to start building objects that are simultaneously imagined and legitimate.²⁰ In “Stepping Into Prose” (1992), Flora Süssekind studies Melo Neto’s use of fictionality and reality in poetry, as well as the convergences between his poetry and Moore’s. She claims that “fictionality and literalness appear constantly as a duo, according to the classification of Blake as “a too literal realist of imagination,” which was endorsed by Marianne Moore. It constitutes a precise description of invention (...) [and], on the other hand, it enhances “realism” (as in “the real frogs” in the “imaginary gardens” in “*Poetry*,” mentioned by Melo Neto), except that this realism is linked to a decisive poetic confirmation of the imaginary and to a “conjunction of fantasy and determination”: “*What is more precise than precision? Illusion,*” as in [Moore’s poem] “Armor’s Undermining Modesty” (pp. 651-652). The critic Aguinaldo Gonçalves compares Moore’s and Melo Neto’s engagement with natural environments in the space of their poetry. He mentions Melo Neto, who asserts that, in expressing nature, a poem happens to have as its subject the creation process itself. Melo Neto argues that “if art deals with objects and beings of nature, then why would it not deal with objects that one could consider as coming directly from nature? These “objects” are the works of art that act as *raw material* for the poetic work” (Gonçalves, 1992, p. 642).

Melo Neto not only reflected on his own poetic crafting, but also studied the art of others, among which are Francis Ponge, his friend Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, and, of course, Marianne Moore. In the next section, I will briefly analyse the role of Melo Neto as Moore’s

²⁰ The critic Flora Süssekind points out that, in Melo Neto’s “A Imaginação do Pouco” (“Imagination on a Small Scale”) there is also a reference to Moore’s metapoem, starting with its title, which is extracted from the most extensive version of Moore’s poem “Poetry”. “Imagination on a Small Scale” combines the tales of Sinhá Floripes, heard by Melo Neto in his childhood, “with an infusion of reality among the inhabitants created in her “animals’ heaven”: “Some animals were known, / and she described those that weren’t: / of those that she invented / (connecting a “paca” to a “jia”) / she gave a precise description, / not only of its strange anatomy / but also of its speech, religion, / and of its habits” (Süssekind, 1992, p. 651).

critic, expressed in his later poetry, and also the influence of the American poet on the Brazilian's poetic engagement in not only social but ecological perspectives – and, as a consequence, an onto-ethological poetic investigation - from the poems of 1950 onwards. Furthermore, in section three, I will discuss Moore's and Melo Neto's reflections on the onto-ethologies of human beings and animals through the creation of allegories and fables, which evidence conditions of conceptual as well as material miseries.

João Cabral de Melo Neto: the critic and the follower

Melo Neto's work is commonly divided into three phases. The first one, which starts in 1942 with the publication of *A Pedra do Sono* (*Stone of Sleep*), features an oneiric thematic typical of the Surrealist movement. The second occurs between 1945 and 1950 and contains two major works, *O engenheiro* (*The Engineer*) and *Psicologia da composição* (*Psychology of Composition*) – which expresses what Melo Neto calls as “empty rationalism”, appreciated by a hollow intellectual bourgeoisie. The year of 1950 represents a turning point in the poet's ideology and poetics, with the publication of the book *O Cão sem Plumas* (*The Dog without Feathers*). Melo Neto expresses his rejection of the empty materialism of his two previous books and engages in the discussion of social issues, which he brilliantly achieves on the subsequent works. The third phase, initiated by *O Cão sem Plumas*, marks Melo Neto's rupture with lyricism and reveals an explicit concern with the social reality of Pernambuco, the poet's home state. The poet is, then, concerned with the social participation of poetry, which is not done through moral messages, but through the structure of poetry itself. Through mimesis, he breaks with the actual in order to accomplish it in its fullness, capturing its dynamic structure, its becoming. Melo Neto's works which are subsequent to 1950 are the product of a constructive rationality; memories and feelings from the various levels of psychological experience are left behind to be reborn in language and the inner poetic status becomes pure expression materialised in verse. Such is the feeling perceived in the books *Morte e Vida Severina* (*The Death and Life of Severino*, 1955), *Quaderna* (*Four-Spot*, 1960), *A Educação pela Pedra* (*Education by Stone*, 1966), *A Escola das Facas* (*School of Knives*, 1980), and *Agrestes* (*Rough and Rude*, 1985), just to mention a few.

The poet's surgical precision and imagetic sharpness in treating the materiality of poetic objects are already encountered in the formative and groundbreaking book *The Dog*

without Feathers. Furthermore, they become evident in his subsequent works, from *Uma Faca só Lâmina* (*A Knife All Blade*), published shortly after, in 1955, to his later poetry, which reveals Melo Neto's poetics already in their title, such as *Educação Pela Pedra* (*Education By Stone*) (1966), *A Escola das Facas* (*The School of Knives*) (1980), and *Agrestes* (*Rough & Rude*) (1985). However, it is only with the book *Serial* (*Serial*), published in 1961, that Melo Neto begins to reveal his greatest influences in literature and art, and the book contributes to the revelation and achievement of his very first professional desire: that of becoming a critic. In one of its poems, "O Sim contra o Sim" ("Yes Against Yes), poets and painters are brought together in the space of poetry. The poet dedicates four stanzas to each of his artistic subjects: Marianne Moore, Francis Ponge, Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, the Portuguese poet Cesario Verde, early-twentieth century Brazilian poet Augusto dos Anjos, Juan Gris, and Jean Dubuffet. Melo Neto accords verses that converge with his or her technique, showing the procedures of several artists while revealing the essence of his own poetic practice. The poem's first four stanzas are poetic commentaries on Marianne Moore's surgical form of writing,²¹ and, according to Flora Süssekind, they extract "from the last two verses of "Those Various Scalpels" its meditating tone: '*But why dissect destiny with instruments / more highly specialized than components of destiny itself?*'" (Süssekind, p. 651). Those verses are converted, in Melo Neto's poem, into a series of convergences between a pencil and a scalpel, thus, approaching both verse and wound, writing and dissection:

Marianne Moore, em vez de lápis,
emprega quando escreve
instrumento cortante:
bisturi, simples canivete.

Ela aprendeu que o lado claro
das coisas é o anverso
e por isso as disseca:

²¹ The following four stanzas of the poem recognise the same aspect in the work of French Francis Ponge: "Francis Ponge, also a surgeon, / uses a different technique, turning / the things he operates on / in his fingers, and himself around them". Both he and Moore are considered by Melo Neto as anti-lyricist, "objectivists" and materialistic poets. In Richard Zenith's "The State of Things in the Poetry of João Cabral de Melo Neto (1992), the critic points out that both twentieth-century poets have their own *parti pris* on behalf of things, being important references for Melo Neto. The poets reveal a process of creation, development, and deconstruction of images, and, for them, poetry is, above all, a question of words, which, each of them, have weight, consistency, temperature, like an orange or a knife. However, while Moore penetrates the poem through a "clear scar", Ponge surrounds the poetic object, "and just when it would seem / he can no longer penetrate, / he enters without cutting, / through a crack that went unseen".

para ler textos mais corretos.

Com mão direta ela as penetra,
com lápis bisturi,
e com eles compõe,
de volta, o verso cicatriz.

E porque é limpa a cicatriz,
econômica, reta,
mais que o cirurgião
se admira a lâmina que opera.

[Marianne Moore, refusing a pen,
writes her stanzas
with a cutting edge,
a common jackknife or scalpel.

She discovered that the clear side
of things is the obverse,
and therefore dissects them
to read texts more accurately.

She enters with unswerving hand
and a scalpel pen
to produce, on leaving,
a neatly stitched poem.

And since the scar is clean,
sparse and straight,
more than the surgeon
one admires the surgical blade].
(Education by Stone, 2010, pp. 145-146)

The sharp quality of Moore's poetic form and imagery can be recognised in a poem such as "The Fish" (2003, pp. 22-23), for instance, in the choice of alternately sharp and soft words in the verses "shafts of the / sun, / split like spun / glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness / into the crevices – in and out, illuminating / the turquoise sea / of bodies. The water drives a wedge / of iron through the iron wedge / of the cliff (...)". Moore's sharpness also characterises Melo Neto's poems, as is perceivable in his long and tense poem *Uma Faca só Lâmina* (*A Knife All Blade*) from 1955. According to Richard Zenith (1992), apart from the literal meaning of the imagery and its sharp edges, both poets employ a trenchant attitude toward their subjects. The poets do not pile images on top of each other,

like the surrealists and others, but prefer to “plumb but a few well-chosen images to exhaustion”. They dissect rather than accumulate images, thus subjecting the poetic material to

a scientific method of investigation - hence the predominance of strict verse patterns. In the case of Moore, if preservation of the line length (which is determined syllabically in her early work) requires hyphenating a word, then she is happy to comply, so that dissection occurs even at the level of the individual word. Cabral, for his part, will discard the troublesome word and search for another: from the mid-fifties on, his poems' metric and assonantal rhyme schemes (perfect rhymes being more rarely employed) are almost never violated. Dissection, in these poets, does not preclude intuition, but it demands formal procedure, so that once the poem is set in motion it carries itself forward like an independent organism, according to its own logic, with what would seem to be minimal intervention on the part of the poet (Zenith, 1992, p. 635).

In Melo Neto, the apparent absence of the poet reaches its extreme, for the Brazilian poet “reduces his role to that of a behind-the-scenes technician” (p. 635). Moore, on the other hand, steps indirectly into the poem, through direct quotes of influential writers and books. Melo Neto understands that complete detachment is impossible, the poet is not at all dispensable, though he not only admires the surgeon that is Marianne Moore, but also her surgical blade which makes a “clean, sparse, and straight” scar on the poem. This wound is nothing less than the poet's self, the action of “speaking of me, / speaking myself” as in the verses of “Dúvidas Apócrifas de Marianne Moore” (“Apocryphal Doubts of Marianne Moore”), published in *Agrestes (Rough & Rude)*, 1985). In the poem, Moore is transformed into the subject and speaker of the poem, which is about the insistent effort of the depersonalisation of the discourse:²²

Sempre evitei falar de mim,
falar-me. Quis falar de coisas.
Mas na seleção dessas coisas
não haverá um falar de mim?

Não haverá nesse pudor
de falar-me uma confissão,
uma indireta confissão,

²² This effort also echoes, according to Sússekind, passages of Moore's “Tell Me, Tell Me” (2003, p. 231): “where might there be a refuge for me / from egocentricity / and its propensity to bisect, / misstate, misunderstand / and obliterate continuity?” (Sússekind, 1992, p. 652).

pelo avesso, e sempre impudor?

A coisa de que se falar
Até onde está pura ou impura?
Ou sempre se impõe, mesmo
Impuramente, a quem dela quer falar?

Como saber, se há tanta coisa
de que falar ou não falar?
E se o evitá-la, o não falar,
é forma de falar da coisa?

I have always avoided speaking of me,
speaking myself. I wanted to speak of things.
But, in the selection of those things,
might there not be a speaking of me?

Might that modesty of speaking myself
not contain a confession,
an oblique confession,
in reverse, and ever immodest?

How pure or impure
is the thing spoken of?
Or does it always impose itself, impurely
even, on anyone wishing to speak of it?

How is one to know, with so many things
to speak or not to speak of?
And if the avoidance of speech
itself be a way of speaking of things?
(Selected Poetry (1937-1990), 2011, p. 170)

This poem and “Homenagem Renovada a Marianne Moore” (“Renewed Homage to Marianne Moore”), also published in *Agrestes*, are direct dialogues with the work of the American poet. They go from “the perception of surgical precision and the discussion about the literalness of imagination to an attempt to define diction, the ‘voice tonality’ of the poems” (Süssekind, 1992, p. 652). Melo Neto claims that not only his, but also Moore’s, poetics are based in the idea “that poetry is not on the inside / but is, like a house, something outside, / and before one lives inside it / it must be built”. Such statement is sufficient explanation for why Melo Neto is called the “poet-engineer”. In “Renewed Homage to Marianne Moore”, objectivity is pointed out as a characteristic of Moore’s text:

Cruzando desertos de frio
 que a pouca poesia não ousa,
 chegou ao extremo da poesia
 quem caminhou, no verso, em prosa.
 E então mostrou, sem pregação,
 com a razão de sua obra pouca,
 que a poesia não é de dentro,
 que é como casa, que é de fora;
 que embora se viva de dentro
 se há de construir, que é uma coisa
 que quem faz faz para fazer-se
 — muleta para a perna coxa.

Crossing deserts of coldness
 which slight poetry will not risk,
 she who walked through verse
 in prose arrived at poetry's limit.
 She was able to show, without preaching,
 by the reason of her spare work,
 that poetry is not on the inside
 but is, like a house, something outside,
 and before one lives inside it
 it must be built — this something
 one makes to make oneself able,
 this crutch for the one who is lame.
 (Selected Poetry (1937-1990), 2011, p. 172)

The poem also emphasises Moore's inclination to "verse, in prose", such as in her poems "When I Buy Pictures", "Charity Overcoming Envy", and "The Past is the Present", which mixes a call to Habakkuk with an observation about Hebrew poetry, defined as "prose / with a sort of heightened consciousness" (1992, p. 652). Moore replaces her own voice with observations, which is her characteristic attitude of description and reasoning, as perceived in poems such as "The Fish", "A Jelly-Fish", and "The Steeple-Jack", and also in argumentative poems, which are attentive to details, such as "Critics and Connoisseurs" and "No Swan So Fine".

Allegories of Violence and Reconfigurations of the Classic Fable

(...)
Inorganic are
the flowers and the plants,
the fruits, the creatures
when they are in a state of words.²³

- João Cabral de Melo Neto, *Psychology of Composition*
(VII), 1947, trans. by Djelal Kadir

Marianne Moore and João Cabral de Melo Neto convey ethical reflections and specific moral issues in their expressions of nature and animal life. Therefore, they make use of literary devices, such as allegories, and literary genres, such as fables, in order to develop both explicit and implicit dimensions of their poetry. In Moore's allegories, animals are perceived as embodying virtues, as being characterised by their "likeness-with-difference" (Essert, 2012, p. 212), thus making animal tropes and imagery essential aspects of her poetics. Furthermore, the American poet preserves the thematic and rhetorical structure of the traditional fable, such as those written by La Fontaine, which is defined as a "didactic instrument that has been traditionally used to instruct the unlettered in the prudential realities of human behaviour through a homespun narrative" (Ross, 1984, p. 328). The structure of the fable permits that the readers distance themselves from its moral truths, due to the depiction of animals and animated nature, rather than human beings, in its narratives.

Moore presents modernist allegories of violence and cruelty, which imply social, political, ethical and moral criticism, and also preserves the structure and development of the classic fable in her poems. Melo Neto, on the other hand, disintegrates the allegorical imagery, dissolves the dialectic dimensions of poetic meaning, and inverts the fable. While in Moore's poems the animal is capable of expanding its ontological status in the process of becoming and being, João Cabral de Melo Neto expresses both animals and human beings as featherless creatures, captivated beings who can only acknowledge the world through a state of ontological deprivation. In Moore's fables, the animal is sometimes anthropomorphised while in Melo Neto's, human beings are usually animalised and strictly defined by their environments and relations with other beings.

²³ "(...) São minerais / as flores e as plantas, / as frutas, os bichos / quando em estado de palavra".

In *O Cão Sem Plumas* (*The Dog without Feathers*)²⁴ – a possible allusion to the Greek biographer Diogenes Laërtius' critique of Plato's definition of man²⁵ – all beings, including humans, are contained in captivity, an ontological poverty which is the consequence of a context of social and economic poverty enacted by capitalism. The conjunction between man and nature is given by a lack and destitution. The poet was motivated by the publication of a study, in the end of the 1940s, about worldwide mortality rate (Godoy, 2010, p. 72). While, in India, life expectancy was no more than 29 years, in Recife, Brazil, it was even lower, 28 years. Melo Neto develops a social critique against a ruling elite that shows itself oblivious to the naked poverty of an excluded population. The social critique and, above all, the critique on the capitalist system as a reification that alienates the Brazilian Northeastern man, indicates the development of a modernist allegory consisted of poverty, hunger and mud. Melo Neto did not aim to bring up a messianic message, but tried to draw society's attention to the situation which conditions much of the population born daily in the wetlands of Recife and condemned to an existence within a rigid social stratification which does not offer them any possibilities of ascension. The oppositional stance is further sharpened by the speaker's scathing criticism of the "city's 'cultured families'" which continue to "brood over the fat eggs / of their prose" (2010, p. 63).²⁶ The poet, above all, demonstrates an aversion to an idealistic, reactionary and metaphysical poetry. The raw character of his poetics can be perceived in the form of the poem and in its intense crafting: quatrains, internal rhymes, anaphora, similes, metonymy and synonymy relations, reiteration, anti-discursive apparatus, and anti-lyricism are joined by popular sources – and their rhetorical devices - memorialising records, and a strong narrative component.

The poem is commonly included in a triptych regarding the Capibaribe River, which is also formed, respectively, by the books *O Rio* (*The River*, 1954) and *Morte e Vida Severina* (*Death and Life of a Severino*, 1956), the latter being one of his most acclaimed works. *The Dog without Feathers* is divided into four sections which are called I — Landscape of the

²⁴ A direct allusion to Brazilian writer Graciliano Ramos' first novel, *O Mundo Coberto de Penas* (*The World Covered in Feathers*), in which the writer addresses the countryman's misery in an organic relation with nature, and, therefore, feathers have the meaning of conviction and deep suffering.

²⁵ In his sixth book, called *The Cynics*, the Greek biographer Diogenes Laërtius narrates an empirical critique of Plato's definition of man: "Plato having defined man to be a two-legged animal without feathers, Diogenes plucked a cock and brought it into the Academy, and said, 'This is Plato's man.'" On which account this addition was made to the definition,— "with broad flat nails". Plato's conception of man takes into consideration the immediate recognition of a physical fact, that man is featherless, thus his comprehension is grounded in the material world. In the poem *The Dog without Feathers*, Melo Neto attributes a disjointed aspect to the material world, so much so that fragments of being penetrate the landscape (where everything melts into mud) and ends up contaminating every living being within the environment.

²⁶ All citations refer to the English translation by Richard Zenith in *Education by Stone* (2010).

Capibaribe River, II — Landscape of the Capibaribe, III — Fable of the Capibaribe and IV — Discourse of the Capibaribe. The first two parts are descriptive and focus on the landscape. The third evokes the fables by La Fontaine – parables about animals whose moral applies to human beings. The third part draws up an axiom from which morals is extracted and which will relate to the fourth and last part of the poem, the “Discourse of the Capibaribe”. Like many of Melo Neto’s poems, the fourth part has a didactic purpose. Each of these sections, or movements, correspond to a distinct level of the same theme, which is neither the river nor the city separately, but the opaque, dense and viscous reality they all form.

Fragmented, disruptive relations between the environment and the animal are the leitmotif in Melo Neto’s poem. However, those relations go far beyond the interaction of living beings within a landscape. Material elements of the landscape, such as the river, are implicated in the “being-open” in captivation (Agamben) and, therefore, opened in the world through their instances of motion and transformation. While the dog without feathers - like the man without feathers - is characterised by its privation and negation, the river represents that which goes through the environment and transforms it, the constant becoming which occurs in the openness of animals to environments. Such a claim can be confirmed by the analysis of the very first stanza of the poem, in “Landscape of the Capibaribe River”, as seen below. The stanza is structured in similes which produce oppositions between that which goes through (crosses) either being or environment, and that which is crossed. The presence of similes creates a duality based in motion, between dynamism and immobility. Thus, the river crosses the city; the dog crosses a street; the sword, its sharpness, crosses a fruit:

The city is crossed by the river
as a street
is crossed by a dog,
a fruit
by a sword.
(v. 1-5) (2010, p. 62).²⁷

Because of its descriptive form - which is the hypothetic form of the whole poem to be developed, - the soft and sharp formations of the words “street” and “dog”, “fruit” and “sword” keep with each other, taken two by two, the same relation of traversing that there is

²⁷ The original poem, as well as its translation, can be read in the Appendix section.

between “city” and “river”, denoted by the verb. The motion of a river, for instance, is opened to - and in - its own horizontal movement. However, in subsequent verses, Melo Neto presents a new kind of simile, which happens to be between river and dog:

The river
 was like a dog without feathers.
 It knew nothing of the blue rain,
 of the pink fountain,
 of the water in a water glass,
 of the water in pitchers,
 of the fish in the water,
 of the breeze on the water.
 (“Landscape of the Capibaribe River”, v. 12-19)

The verses, which present the constant repetition of instances of alien natures as rhetorical device, expose the poet’s questioning of the ontological importance of unnecessary attributes to several beings. The title of the poem itself – as well as its subject: the dog without feathers - for instance, refers to an unattributable, unnecessary, lack, if ontological definition is considered to be based in a physical attribute (Plato). Therefore, if the elements which base a comparison are illogical, the dynamism attributed to the river reverses itself and create the tension perceived, in the following verses, between the river and the fish, characterised by their “knifelike nervousness”. The river, then, because it is a symbol of the inconstancy and fluidity of the world, knows not what it has but what it has not: the crabs, the mud, the octopus and the oysters, in the lines 20-26 of the following extract, are only culminations of a river, an end which is no longer a river but the act of becoming mangrove or the sea:

It knew the crabs
 of mud and rust.
 It knew sludge
 like a mucous membrane.
 It must have known the octopus,
 and surely knew
 the feverish woman living in oysters.

The river
 never opens up to fish,
 to the shimmer,
 to the knifelike nervousness
 existing in fish.
 It never opens up in fish.

(“Landscape of the Capibaribe River”, v. 19-32)

River and animal have similar encounters with the Open by meeting their own impossibilities i.e., that which they are not – it is not within them but it goes through them. In encountering their limitations, beings transmute in a constant wave of becomings: the dog which cannot conceptualise itself beyond its useless lack of feathers (or understand itself as being *as such*) is a tree with language (though without voice) or a bird with roots. In the following stanzas, another simile appears, now between river and man, both characterised by their relation to the dog without feathers:

Like the river
those men
are like dogs without feathers.
(A dog without feathers
is more
than a dog that’s been stripped,
is more
than a dog that’s been killed.

A dog without feathers
is when a tree without voice.
It is when like a bird
its roots in the air.
It is when something is so deeply
gnawed it is gnawed
to what it doesn’t have.)
(“Landscape of the Capibaribe”, v. 119-133)

The above stanzas support my claim about the ineffectiveness and meaninglessness of the dog’s lack, for a dog without feathers “it is when something is so deeply / gnawed it is gnawed / to what it doesn’t have”, thus, being “more / than a dog that’s been stripped, / is more / than a dog that’s been killed”.

The correlation between “river” and “man”, which is already present in the second part of the poem, culminates with the section “Fable of the Capibaribe”, in the contrast between the two and an opposite image, that of the clean, washed, white and pure presence of the sea. The river and the man are opposed to the sea because of their dirtiness, blackness, muddiness, which is evidenced by the use of repetitions and alternate soft and sharp verbs conducting the rhythm. The sea, on the other hand, represents a utopian ideal of renovation,

functioning within new variants introduced by the descriptive form. The sea destroys the river, it renovates by being destructive; it has teeth, like no river or man:

The sea and its incense,
 the sea and its acids,
 the sea and the mouth of its acids,
 the sea and its stomach
 that eats, and eats itself,
 the sea and its flesh
 glazed like a statue's,
 its silence, achieved
 at the price of always
 saying the same thing,
 the sea and its pure
 teacher of geometry.
 ("Fable of the Capibaribe", v. 260-271)

Another simile is then presented, comparing river and dog in relation to the sea, which represents a possibility of ontological openness.

The river fears the sea
 as a dog fears
 a door that's cracked open,
 as a beggar fears
 an apparently open church.
 ("Fable of the Capibaribe", v. 271-276)

There are three main qualities, which characterise living beings and the material elements of the environment, in the poem: viscosity, which is defined as that which does not have "teeth" and it presents a negative status of ontological poverty; sharpness, which has "teeth" and represents that which is positive; and thickness²⁸, which is itself the definition of interactional resistance within the environment. Those elements are developed within the four parts of the poem, starting with the description of the viscous quality of dog, man and river and their contrast with the sea, which is sharp. However, in the fourth part, "Discourse of the Capibaribe", the quality of thickness is exposed as being a property pertaining to dog, man

²⁸ English translator Richard Zenith changes the adjective "thick", in the lines 106-110 (Through the landscape / the river flowed / like a sword of thick liquid. / Like a humble / thickset dog.) to the use of the adjective "heavy". The reasons are unknown, but they are both translations of the Portuguese "espresso" which carries the meaning of denseness and thickness.

and river, thus reiterating the traversing aspect observed in the very first part of the poem: “The city is crossed by the river / as a street / is crossed by a dog, / a fruit / by a sword”. Therefore, from the clashes between river and sea, respectively viscous and sharp, the moral of resistance emerges, configured in a third aspect which is thickness. That which is thick sets the limits of the human self²⁹ and of the language. The last part of the poem, which is explicitly didactic, insists in the thickness of that which lives: whatever lives is “sharp,” “doesn’t numb”, “wounds”, “clashes”; whatever lives has teeth, it is thick. It resists, it cuts. Thickness corresponds to the idea of hardness, which is opposed to the softness of the viscous and which was not previously well defined in the quality of sharpness:³⁰

A dog, because it lives,
is sharp.
Whatever lives
doesn’t numb.
Whatever lives wounds.
Man,
because he lives,
clashes with the living.
To live
is to wend among the living.

Whatever lives
inflicts life
on silence, on sleep, on the body
that dreamed of cutting itself
clothes out of clouds.
Whatever lives clashes,
has teeth, edges, is heavy.
Whatever lives is heavy³¹
like a dog, a man,
like the river.
 (“Discourse of the Capibaribe”, v. 341-360)

²⁹ In this sense, I could say that the quality of “thickness” defines the limits of *Dasein*.

³⁰ In Melo Neto’s poem, there are also different articulations of time which can be perceived by the properties of sharpness and thickness. The former alludes to the discontinuity of time which means the instantaneity of “being-in-the-world”, the properties of lightness and volatility in being. The latter, on the other hand, refers to the perceptibility of continuous movement. The subsequent stanzas reflect relationships between living beings, whether these are called instinctual interactions or alterity. However, these relationships suffer a transformation in the moment of the stanza’s poetic image: “clashes with the living” is softened into “wend among the living”, thus, sharpness is metamorphosed into thickness; the instant of teeth and edges changes into the massiveness of time measurement: Whatever lives clashes, / has teeth, edges, is heavy / Whatever lives is heavy / like a dog, a man, / like the river”.

³¹ Richard Zenith changes the adjective “thick”, in the lines 106-110 (Through the landscape / the river flowed / like a sword of thick liquid. / Like a humble / thickset dog.) to the use of the adjective “heavy”. The reasons are unknown, but they are both translations of the Portuguese “espresso” which carries the meaning of denseness, heaviness, and thickness.

Not only is the morals of the poem presented but also the ethical standpoint endorsed towards the ontological definitions of animals evidenced in the above stanzas. The act of living is, in itself, a confrontation against ontological poverty, for living is essentially interactional, a movement of *being-towards-life* (Winkler), thus “to live / is to wend among the living”. Because of the heaviness [thickness] of living, dog, man, and river possess similar ontological definitions.

In the next two stanzas, Melo Neto attributes the quality of thickness to reality, especially to the real in time and movement and both in concrete and abstract instances. There is a hierarchical wave of becomings, presented in anaphora, defined by thickness, and the poet alludes to the heaviness of the endurance of hunger, a characteristic of social and economic poverty which causes captivation and ontological poverty:

Heavy
like everything real.
The river
is heavy and real.
As an apple
is heavy.
As a dog
is heavier than an apple.
As the blood of a dog
is heavier
than the dog itself.
As a man
is heavier
than the blood of a dog.
As the blood of a man
is much heavier
than the dream of a man.
(v. 361-377)

Heavy
as an apple is heavy.
As an apple
is much heavier
if a man eats it
than if a man sees it.
As it is even heavier
if hunger eats it.
As it is yet heavier still
if hunger sees
but cannot eat it.

The river
is heavy
like the heaviest reality.
Heavy
because of its heavy landscape,
where hunger
deploys its secret battalions
of visceral ants.
(v. 378-396)

In *A Máquina do Poema (The Machine of the Poem)*, the philosopher and critic Benedito Nunes (2007) points out that Melo Neto portrays the reality of human beings, concentrated in the image of a dog without feathers, and which is thick and scathing, cutting and aggressive,

being capable of reaffirming itself by rejecting the negation which reduces it to “non-being” (p. 49). Nunes asserts that being a dog without feathers is “non-being” and both landscape and living beings happen because of their own negation:

Every violated being whose attributes are obscured and mixed up (...) is a dog without feathers. By being exposed to a general corrosion, the dog without feathers is of a depleted nature. Its way of being is non-being, for it only exists as reality denied in itself. That which denies it and refuses its reality, to the point of making it merge with the river, is an anonymous intensity containing the opaque, sticky, poorly fertile and stagnant strength of the Capibaribe waters. The river knows men without feathers, their homonyms, those who will lose themselves in the river in a collusion of their similar natures, both eroded and depleted, both blending in the common dissolution which will humanize the river and liquefy men. Both can hardly be distinguished in the state of deprivation of featherless nature of which they share - the physical landscape from the human landscape (2007, p. 48) [translation mine].

According to Nunes, Melo Neto’s ethical stance is followed by his logic of composition, which the critic divides into two axes: vertical and horizontal. The first and foremost consists of the development of a singular imagery system, coined by Nunes as *arborescence of the image* which consists of the dissolution of metaphors (2007, p. 104) and occurs from the reiterations of verbal nuclei which form correlated significant. Nunes’ formulation of the concept of “non-being” is arguably supported by the *arborescence of the image*. However, I would argue that, although the poem starts with the premise that all beings are ontologically poor, the ethics outlined in “Discourse of the Capibaribe” regards beings as possessing the possibility of openness within their own lives and through interactional processes:

Because life that multiplies
itself in more life
is much heavier,
as a fruit
is heavier
than its flower,
as the tree
is heavier
than its seed,
as the flower
is heavier
than its tree,
etc. etc.
(v. 403-415)

The status of deprivation and of featherlessness encountered in river, dog, and man, also represents Melo Neto's writing itself, because there is no ornament in the described landscape. There is a mutual identification between the river, the featherless dog and the poetic crafting, though such is established by lack. And, yet, against all odds, there is an element of resistance in the remaining being: be it in the life in the mangrove or in the possibility of the poetic word.

In his study on Zoopoetics, Brazilian scholar Sérgio Gomide (2011) points out that, in *The Dog without Feathers*, the animalisation of man is more emphatic than the anthropomorphising of the animal. In the relation between human and non-human, knowledge remains inclined towards the animal, though it is presented as depending on human terms, according to the inhumanity to which this "inversion" or "displacement" of knowledge alludes. What is at stake is not exactly the knowledge possessed by animals, but the deteriorating human condition when confronted with the metaphor of this given knowledge (p. 7), thus composing a structure of moral nature, similar to that of the fable. In consonance with Nunes' allusion to the *arborescence of the image* (see footnote 28), the structure of the fable, which is part of Melo Neto's composition, undergoes a process of inversion. Through natural and human poverties, humans not only become-animals, but there is a constant becoming-other, in living or material beings. Although animals and environments are characterised by the same "onto-ethological" poverty which conditions human beings, there is a constant and multiple variety of becomings among beings expressed in the poem. Thus, the river is a dog, "a dog's sad belly" or the "dirty wet cloth of a dog's two eyes" (6-11), and it can be stagnant as "hospitals, prisons, asylums" or become a ripened fruit, above which flies were always "as if about to land" (93-98). Subsequently, the dog without feathers becomes a "tree without voice", a "bird, its roots in the air", and even the act of gnawing itself, gnawing the inexistent (127-133). Finally, the man in the river landscape loses its definite conception: the question is "where man begins in that man" (208-209); it is hard to perceive if, instead, the man is engulfed by the environment and keeps a living dog within himself, "under one's shirt, / one's skin" (339-340), wounding, clashing, wending among the living.

The anthropomorphism of nature is a predominant element of the fable tradition. However, similarly to Melo Neto's image construction, the anthropomorphisation of animals and material beings is rarely applied by Marianne Moore, though her creatures nevertheless convey truths applicable to human nature. Instead, Moore writes through what I will call an

“imagery chain”, which also refers to the imaginative development of her animal subjects. Objects and animals, Richard Zenith (1992) observed, “are more apt to be described in terms of other objects or animals, so that the mussel shells in “The Fish” are “crow-blue,” the sun is “split like spun glass,” and the crabs are “like green lilies” (p. 637). On the other hand, differently from Melo Neto, who presents the agent responsible for the poverty and lack and clearly positions his ethical and moral stances, Moore's poems present allegories of desolation and violence which are created by external, often absent, agents, mostly human beings. Thus, in Moore, men affect, sometimes indirectly – in the case of her war poems – animals and environments through violence and destruction.

One of the most significant critical assessments regarding Moore's work in terms of the fable is, according to Bruce Ross (1984), Vivienne Koch's essay published in 1948, in which Koch explores Moore's development of the matter of human behaviour and her extensive adoption of animal imagery, two essential elements of the traditional fable. Koch points out that Moore's fables resembles those of La Fontaine,³² for both describe animals with sympathy, democracy and moral order. Concurrently, Ross claims that the fable is the literary form that can be considered the definition of most of Moore's works. Her poems not only are filled with animals actively participating in the narratives, but also they contain a moral tone and a proverbial comment. In Ross' understanding, “the classic fable, from Aesop to Arnold Lobel, exhibits a two-part structure similar to that of many of Moore's poems. Theoretically designated as the body and the soul, or the tale and the moral of the tale, in classic discussions of the form, the fable's structure is evident in the initial narrative and the following proverbial gloss of a characteristic Moore poem”. (1984, p. 328). According to Koch (qtd. in.ESSERT, 2012), Moore's peculiar animals are meant to illuminate qualities which are not necessarily human ones: “in the oriental fable or in those of La Fontaine, one does not find the animals acting themselves out, as do Miss Moore's, to give us knowledge of humanity; instead, the fabulist endows the animal with human traits and attributes. With Miss Moore the animals as animals count for as much as the humans they may eventually inform” (2012, p. 229).

The Aesopian narratives, as well as the eastern fable traditions, are essentially revelations of principles of conduct. The poetic narrative, on the other hand, is a means for conveying “an imaginative work of literature's moral purpose without becoming either rhetorically sermonic or gnostic” (p. 334). Moore's fables – in fact, as any traditional fable –

³² The association of Moore with La Fontaine and with the fable is also emphasised by the 1954 publication of her translations of *The Fables of La Fontaine*.

are imaginative entertainments as well as allegories, and also evidence the relationship between the aesthetic quality of the animal subject and the moral lesson inferred through the subject. The traditional fable, from Aesop to the “tale-within-a-tale” structure of the *Pancatantra*, occurs as an illustration of a single proverbial wisdom and it is bound to the tale’s given moral. Moore’s fables, on the other hand, are “geometric, rather than linear narratives” and

Her penchant for diverse quotations and the absence of lexical connectives further stresses her insistence on the cumulative, self-referential, and spatial nature of her meditation. Her poems may be fables, but they are structurally closer to dreams than to storyteller's anecdotes. Even when the fable form is stylistically embroidered, as in the case of La Fontaine's reworkings of Aesop, the inevitable logic of a transparently simple narrative and a naive allegory is present (1984, p. 342).

Allegories are narrative strategies that allude to Moore’s anecdotal style in expressing animals, thus, they are rarely static beings in her poetry. In contrast with traditional allegory, Moore is concerned with the actual, living animal, therefore, she does not insert an idea onto a creature but observes the animal and associates it with virtues. In Essert’s view, this difference rests upon the fact that the “‘second, correlated order of signification’ of these poetic animals is not entirely determined by their role within the poem. This openness or indeterminacy suggests a new variety of modernist allegory, which enables a reading Moore’s animal poems as implicit, anti-authoritarian commentaries” (2012, p. 228).³³

The exactitude in Moore’s description of the shape, colour, movement and behavioural pattern of animals provides metaphors that illustrate moral statements. Such lessons are observed in poems structured on the Aesopian form, such as in “The Frigate Pelican” (2003, p. 25) [“(…)But he, and others, soon / rise from the bough and though flying, are able to foil the tired / moment of danger that lays on heart and lungs the / Weight of the python that crushes to powder.”], “To a Prize Bird” (2003, p. 31) [“You know to think, and what you think you speak / with much of Samson's pride and bleak / finality; and none dare bid you stop. / Pride sits you well, so strut, colossal bird. / No barnyard makes you look absurd; / your brazen claws are staunch against defeat.”], “Peter” (2003, p. 43) [“To leap, to lengthen out, divide the air, to purloin, to pursue. / To tell the hen: fly over the fence, go in

³³ Moore’s animals illustrate models of what she called “values in use”, which is clearly associated with the morality and virtues of the Protestantism (p. 236). However, such moral examples taken from other creatures are to be assembled by the reader themselves.

the wrong way / in your perturbation - this is life; / to do less would be nothing but dishonesty.”], “The Paper Nautilus” (2003, p. 121) [“as if they knew love / is the only fortress / strong enough to trust to”], and “The Wood-Weasel” (2003, p. 127) [“(…) In his ermined well-cuttlefish-inked wool, he is / determination’s totem. Out- / lawed? His sweet face and powerful feet go about / in chieftain’s coat of Chilcat cloth. / (...) Well, / this same weasel’s playful and his weasel / associates are too. Only / wood-weasels shall associate with me.”].

Many other poems present a similar fable and allegorical form, though the subject can vary from a concept or object to a state of mind. The poem “Sojourn in the Whale” (2003, p. 90), for instance, is an allegory of the critical economic and political situation of Ireland, compared to the hardships of Jonah inside the whale: “Trying to open locked doors with a sword, threading / the points of needles, planting shade trees / upside down; swallowed by the opaqueness of one whom the seas / love better than they love you, Ireland - / you have lived and lived on every kind of shortage”. “Critics and Connoisseurs” (2003, p. 38), on the other hand, is an allegory about the crafting of poetry itself:

There is a great amount of poetry in unconscious
fastidiousness. (...)

(...) I have seen this swan and
I have seen you; I have seen ambition without
understanding it in a variety of forms. Happening to stand
by an ant-hill, I have
seen a fastidious ant carrying a stick north, south,
east, west, till it turned on
itself, struck out from the flower bed into the lawn,
and returned to the point

from which it had started. Then abandoning the stick as
useless and overtaxing its
jaws with a particle of whitewash - pill-like but
heavy - it again went through the same course of procedure.

Similarly, the poem “To a Snail” (2003, p. 85) compares the writing of poetry to the anatomic and behavioural characteristics of the animal:

If “compression is the first grace of style,”
you have it. Contractility is a virtue
as modesty is a virtue.
It is not the acquisition of any one thing

that is able to adorn,
 or the incidental quality that occurs
 as a concomitant of something well said,
 that we value in style,
 but the principle that is hid:
 in the absence of feet, “a method of conclusions”;
 “a knowledge of principles,”
 in the curious phenomenon of your occipital horn.

Moore's wartime poems not only are expressions of allegories of violence and ethical misery, but also can be included in a special category of fable narrative. Her fables not only are metaphors which transmit clear moral and ethical stances, but they do present personal observations and perspectives towards the ontological status of animals. The external agent, evidently human, present in both poems “The Fish” and “A Grave”, for instance, is not the main concern in the moral conclusion of Moore's fable. Instead, the poet considers the inevitable destruction of the landscape and the death of fellow creatures, caused by the war, as the greatest of all harms. The moral lesson supposed to epitomise the whole meaning of the poem becomes an ethical position against human brutality. While, in “A Grave”, human beings' illusion of immortality and superiority is contradicted by the death of all beings - thus the “sea standing has nothing to give but a “well excavated grave” – “The Fish”, in turn, shows that “the turquoise sea of bodies” is nothing more than a revision of history, with its “external marks of abuse” and the evidence of its never-ending impermanence: “evidence has proved that it can live / on what can not revive / its youth. The sea grows old in it”.

According to Susan Schweik, Moore's fables are evasive, for they “evade the complexities of the human, of consciousness, and they evade hard facts of social and political relationship; what's more, they evade the presence of inexplicable violence in the world” (1987, p. 546). Although Schweik seems to point out a negative aspect of Moore's fables and allegories, she mentions Randall Jarrell, who states that those traditional literary techniques “fail to satisfy strict standards of verisimilitude in their depiction of human pain and violence”, and that they may carry with them “a proclivity for, if not a necessary relationship to, warmongering, since they do not show sufficiently the pressure of the literal”. Moore writes fables that are implicit anti-war poems, for she believes that “parables have special power, not only to comfort sufferers but to change behaviour” (p. 548).

The subtle expression of animal cruelty is another demonstration of an ethical stance in Moore's development of fables. Although, in the poem “Peter”, the daily rituals of a

housecat represents a fable on naturalness [“When one is frank, one's very presence is a compliment. / It is clear that he can see the virtue of naturalness, / that he does not regard the published fact as a surrender. / As for the disposition invariably to affront, / an animal with claws should have an opportunity to use them. / The eel-like extension of trunk into tail is not an accident.”], there are images of the clashing between human beings and animals:

(...) Demonstrate on him how the lady placed a forked stick
on the innocuous neck-sides of the dangerous southern snake.
(...) Lifted and handled, he may be dangled like an eel
or set up on the forearm like a mouse;
his eyes bisected by pupils of a pin's width,
are flickeringly exhibited, then covered up.
May be? I should have said might have been;
when he has been got the better of in a dream-
as in a fight with nature or with cats, we all know it
Springing about with froglike accuracy, with jerky cries
when taken in hand, he is himself again;
to sit caged by the rungs of a domestic chair
would be unprofitable-human. What is the good of hypocrisy?

Similarly, in the “Rigorists” (2003, p. 96), if the fable illustrates the capability of adaptation by the relocated Siberian reindeer, it also shows the objectification of the animal, conceptually and materially speaking, in favour of the human being's survival:

(...)
"finding their own food; they are adapted

to scant *reino*
or pasture, yet they can run eleven
miles in fifty minutes; the feet spread when

the snow is soft,
and act as snowshoes. They are rigorists,
however handsomely cutwork artists

(...)
And
this candelabrum-headed ornament
for a place where ornaments are scarce, sent

to Alaska,
was a gift preventing the extinction
of the Eskimo. The battle was won

*by a quiet man,
Sheldon Jackson³⁴, evangel to that race
whose reprieve he read in the reindeer's face.
[emphasis added]*

And, again, in “He ‘Digesteth Harde Yron’” (2003, p. 99), the evolutionary adept ostrich, who means perseverance, becomes subjected to human power:

How
could he, prized for plumes and eggs and young
used even as a riding-beast, respect men
hiding actor-like in ostrich skins, with the right hand
making the neck move as if alive
and from a bag the left hand strewing grain, that ostriches

might be decoyed and killed! Yes, this is he
whose plume was anciently
the plume of justice; he
whose comic duckling head on its
great neck revolves with compass-needle nervousness
when he stands guard,
(...)
Six hundred ostrich-brains served
at one banquet, the ostrich-plume-tipped tent
and desert spear, jewel-
gorgeous ugly egg-shell
goblets, eight pairs of ostriches
in harness, dramatize a meaning
always missed by the externalist.
(...)
The power of the visible
is the invisible; as even where
no tree of freedom grows,
so-called brute courage knows.

However, cruelty and violence are not the only aspects addressed by Moore in the characterisation of the relationship between humans and animals. Serenity and the patience required for humans understand – and bond with – their fellow creature is portrayed in “Elephants” (2003, p. 128):

(...)

³⁴ Presbyterian missionary.

The sloping hollow of the sleeper's body
cradles the gently breathing eminence's prone

mahout, asleep like a lifeless six-foot
frog, so feather light the elephant's stiff
ear's unconscious of the crossed feet's weight. And the
defenseless human thing sleeps as if

incised with hard wrinkles, embossed with wide ears,
invincibly tusked, made safe by magic hairs!

(...)

as a stair, to be climbed or descended with
the aid of his ear, expounds the brotherhood
of creatures to man the encroacher, by the
small word with the dot, meaning know—the verb bud.

These knowers "arouse the feeling that they are
allied to man" and can change roles with their trustees.
Hardship makes the soldier; then teachableness
makes him the philosopher—as Socrates,

prudently testing the suspicious thing, knew
the wisest is he who's not sure that he knows.
Who rides on a tiger can never dismount;
asleep on an elephant, that is repose.

If, as aforementioned, Heidegger attributes human beings' sense of finitude to their being-towards-life, which is, precisely, man's relation-to-the-animal, the bondage between humans and animals expose both to an ontological revision. Such an ontological reconfiguration, as well as the idea of time, which is essential to the concept of *Dasein*, is perceived in Moore's "What Are Years" (2003, p. 95), published in the 1941 selection:

What is our innocence,
what is our guilt? All are
naked, none is safe. And whence
is courage: the unanswered question,
the resolute doubt, -
dumbly calling, deafly listening-that
in misfortune, even death,
encourage others
and in it's defeat, stirs

the soul to be strong? He

sees deep and is glad, who
 accedes to mortality
 and in his imprisonment rises
 upon himself as
 the sea in a chasm, struggling to be
 free and unable to be,
 in its surrendering
 finds its continuing.

So he who strongly feels,
 behaves. *The very bird,*
 grown taller as he sings, steels
his form straight up. Though he is captive,
his mighty singing
says, satisfaction is a lowly
thing, how pure a thing is joy.
 This is mortality,
 this is eternity.
 [emphasis added]

Moore, as well as Melo Neto, praises the plenitude of nature in every poem, and the “virtue of naturalness” which involves a view of nature as an integrated whole, where environments are intertwined and *Umwelten* wend among each other, thus producing the communication between different ontologies in the fable narrative.

Conclusion

I have discussed, in chapter one, the bubble-like form of animal life developed by the biologist Jakob von Uexküll, which is the form of apprehension of the environment by the animal. The environment itself corresponds to the surroundings within which animals interact, thus called *Umwelt*. The *Umwelt* encircles an animal's life, setting its boundaries and its captivity, but, at the same time, providing a medium for the interaction and association with other organisms. Through the bubble of captivation – or the ring encircling the animal, in Heidegger's conception – Uexküll claims that animals discern meaning from environmental signs beyond a purely instinctual reaction and are able to enter into relationship with other organisms through these identifiable significances in their environment. Uexküll's *Umwelt* is, thus, an embryo of what would turn out to be the foundations for the contributions of biosemiotics.

Uexküll's biological studies contributed to the philosophical investigations about what defines and distinguishes human beings from other organisms. While the German philosopher Martin Heidegger claimed that our understanding of the world is unique, for only we have access to the world of beings *as such*, i.e., the ontological state of Being (*Dasein*), animals lack such an understanding and, rather, act and react in an environment according to external stimuli and through instincts. In parallel with Uexküll, Heidegger's animal is poor in world and existence, and, rather, is conditioned to its environmental and biological life. On the other hand, it is precisely the relational character of Uexküll's environment that creates an openness out of captivation. The environmental signs emitted by other organisms, i.e., carriers of significance, in an animal's environment produce affections in the animal, thus providing its ability of being-open. This is evidenced in Uexküll's and, afterwards, Giorgio Agamben's analysis on animal behaviours, e.g., in the fly-likeness of the spider or the mammal-likeness of the tick. The examples illustrate the openness of animal behaviour, or, rather, the special openness in the drivenness of instinctual captivation.

The biological and philosophical investigations of the lives of animals, previously discussed in my research, can be perceived as part of Marianne Moore's poetic constructions. Not only her subject matter, but also her aesthetic perspectives convey her moral, ethical, and ontological stances towards fellow creatures. Her poems present a discretion in conveying

moral messages, though they are emphasised by the allegorical and fabular nature of her images. There are also ethical perspectives about both humanity's atrocities, such as in wars, and animal cruelty. Finally, Moore presents an expansion of the animal's ontological status, by means of the employment of imagination. In chapter two, imagination is employed in the structure of modernist allegories and fables as a way of expressing not only humanity's values and perspectives, but also the contribution that the animal life offers to human beings' existence. The analysis was based on a comparative study between the American poet's selected early works and Brazilian João Cabral de Melo Neto's *O Cão sem Plumas* [*The Dog without Feathers*], published in 1950. It focused on allegories and fables which conveyed material and conceptual misery [poverty] as well as violence, taking into consideration the bio-philosophical perspectives previously discussed in chapter one. If Moore presents a modernist allegory in which there is an implicit social, political and moral meaning, and also preserves the form of fable in her poems, Melo Neto, on the other hand, disintegrates the allegorical imagery, emphasises the explicit meanings within his poems, and inverts the fable. In Melo Neto's *The Dog without Feathers* (1950), all beings, including humans, are contained in a sort of captivation, thus presenting the same status of ontological poverty. The agent responsible for this poverty is explicitly revealed as being the context of the social and economic structure of society, which conditions part of its people, animals, and environments to a situation of deprivation.

In both Marianne Moore's and João Cabral de Melo Neto's poems, animals are capable of expanding their ontological status in the process of becoming. Moore achieves such process by anthropomorphising animals, while Melo Neto expresses both animals and human beings as formerly featherless creatures, deprived beings who cannot have knowledge of the world *as such*, but who can multiply their ontological significance within their own lives and through their interactions within their environments. Moore's fables present animals in a mutant state of anthropomorphisation, while in Melo Neto's, human beings are animalised and defined by their environments and relations with other beings.

Bibliography

- Agamben, G. (2004). *The Open: Man and Animal*. (K. Attell, Trans.) Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Auden, W. H. (1962). *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays*. New York: Random House.
- Bazin, V. (2010). *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Group.
- Beum, R. (1957). Syllabic Verse in English. *Prairie Schooner*, 31(3), 259-275.
- Buchanan, B. (2008). *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Calarco, M. (2012). Heidegger's Zoontology. In P. Atterton, & M. Calarco (Eds.), *Animal Philosophy: essential readings in continental thought*. continuum.
- Campos, H. d. (1992). The Geometry of Commitment. *World Literature Today*, 66(4), 617-621. Retrieved December 04, 2014, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40148605>
- Darwin, C. (2009). *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Duffell, M. J. (2008). *A New History of English Metre*. London: Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA).
- ESSERT, E. (2012). *A Modernist Menagerie: Representations of Animals in the Work of Five North American Poets*. Doctoral Thesis, McGill University, Dept. of English, Montreal. Retrieved from https://www.google.se/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffibrarian.net%2Fnavon%2Fpaper%2FA_Modernist_Menagerie__Representations_of_Animals.pdf%3Fpaperid%3D19586839&ei=jEy6VKH7Ecu8ggSrkoCYBw&usq=AFQjCNFqE_
- Godoy, J. R. (2010). *Dois cães como objeto: elementos surrealistas em João Cabral de Melo Neto. Aproximações com o cinema*. Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Retrieved from <http://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8151/tde-09032010-102922>
- Gomide Filho, S. (2011). Zoopoética cabralina: considerações sobre a questão do animal e da animalidade na poesia de João Cabral de Melo Neto. *Em Tese*, 17(3). Retrieved December 04, 2014, from <http://www.periodicos.letras.ufmg.br/index.php/emtese/article/view/3768>
- Gonçalves, A. J. (1992). João Cabral de Melo Neto and Modernity. *World Literature Today*, 66(4), 639-643.
- Heidegger, M. (1995). *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. (W. McNeil, Trans.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Heidegger, M. (2012). The Animal is Poor in World. In P. Atterton, & M. Calarco (Eds.), *Animal Philosophy: essential readings in continental thought*. continuum.
- Heuving, J. (1992). *Omissions are Not Accidents: Gender in the Art of Marianne Moore*. Detroit: Wayne State University.
- Holley, M. (1984). The Model Stanza: The Organic Origin of Moore's Syllabic Verse. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 30(2/3), 181-191.
- McCabe, S. (2009). Survival of the Queerly Fit: Darwin, Marianne Moore, and Elizabeth Bishop. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 55(4), 547-571.
- Melo Neto, J. (2007). *O cão sem plumas*. Rio de Janeiro: Alfaguara.
- Melo Neto, J. (2010). *Education by Stone*. (R. Zenith, Trans.) New York: Archipelago.
- Melo Neto, J. (2011). *Selected Poetry (1937-1990)*. (D. Kadir, Ed.) Hanover: Wesleyan University Press; University Press of New England.
- Moore, M. (2002). *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907-1924*. (R. G. Schulze, Ed.) Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Moore, M. (2003). *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Nunes, B. (2007). *João Cabral - A Máquina do Poema*. (A. Müller, Ed.) Brasília: UNB.
- Rees, R. (1984). The Reality of Imagination in the Poetry of Marianne Moore. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 30(2/3), 231-241.
- Ross, B. (1984). Fables of the Golden Age: The Poetry of Marianne Moore. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 30(2/3), 327-350.
- Schulze, R. G. (1998). Marianne Moore's "Imperious Ox, Imperial Dish" and the Poetry of the Natural World. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 44(1), 1-33.
- Schulze, R. G. (1998). Textual Darwinism: Marianne Moore, the Text of Evolution, and the Evolving Text. *Text*, 11, 270-305.
- Schweik, S. (1987). Writing War Poetry like a Woman. *Critical Inquiry - Politics and Poetic Value*, 13(3), 532-556.
- Süssekind, F. (1992). Stepping into Prose. *World Literature Today*, 66(4), 648-656.
- Uexküll, J. V. (2010). *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*. (J. D. O'Neil, Trans.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Uexküll, J. v. (2010). A Theory of Meaning. In J. v. Uexküll, *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (pp. 136-200). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weinstein, J. A. (2010). Marianne Moore's Eco-poetic Architectonics. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 17(2), 373-388.
- Winkler, R. (2007). Heidegger and the Question of Man's Poverty in World. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 15(4), 521-539.

Zenith, R. (1992). The State of Things in the Poetry of João Cabral de Melo Neto. *World Literature Today*, 66(4), 634-638. Retrieved December 04, 2014, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40148607>

Appendix

O cão sem plumas

(Paisagem do Capibaribe)

A cidade é passada pelo rio
como uma rua
é passada por um cachorro;
uma fruta
por uma espada.

O rio ora lembrava
a língua mansa de um cão,
ora o ventre triste de um cão,
ora o outro rio
de aquoso pano sujo
dos olhos de um cão.

Aquele rio
era como um cão sem plumas.
Nada sabia da chuva azul,
da fonte cor-de-rosa,
da água do copo de água,
da água de cântaro,
dos peixes de água,
da brisa na água.

Sabia dos caranguejos
de lodo e ferrugem.
Sabia da lama
como de uma mucosa.
Devia saber dos polvos.
Sabia seguramente
da mulher febril que habita as ostras.

Aquele rio
jamais se abre aos peixes,
ao brilho,
à inquietação de faca
que há nos peixes.
Jamais se abre em peixes.

Abre-se em flores
pobres e negras
como negros.
Abre-se numa flora
suja e mais mendiga

como são os mendigos negros.
Abre-se em mangues
de folhas duras e crespos
como um negro.

Liso como o ventre
de uma cadela fecunda,
o rio cresce
sem nunca explodir.
Tem, o rio,
um parto fluente e invertebrado
como o de uma cadela.

E jamais o vi ferver
(como ferve
o pão que fermenta).
Em silêncio,
o rio carrega sua fecundidade pobre,
grávido de terra negra.

Em silêncio se dá:
em capas de terra negra,
em botinas ou luvas de terra negra
para o pé ou a mão
que mergulha.

Como às vezes
passa com os cães,
parecia o rio estagnar-se.
Suas águas fluíam então
mais densas e mornas;
fluíam com as ondas
densas e mornas
de uma cobra.

Ele tinha algo, então,
da estagnação de um louco.
Algo da estagnação
do hospital, da penitenciária, dos asilos,
da vida suja e abafada
(de roupa suja e abafada)
por onde se veio arrastando.

Algo da estagnação
dos palácios cariados,

comidos
de mofo e erva-de-passarinho.
Algo da estagnação
das árvores obesas
pingando os mil açúcares
das salas de jantar pernambucanas,
por onde se veio arrastando.

(É nelas,
mas de costas para o rio,
que “as grandes famílias espirituais” da
cidade
chocam os ovos gordos
de sua prosa.
Na paz redonda das cozinhas,
ei-las a revolver viciosamente
seus caldeirões
de preguiça viscosa.)

Seria a água daquele rio
fruta de alguma árvore?
Por que parecia aquela
uma água madura?
Por que sobre ela, sempre,
como que iam pousar moscas?

Aquele rio
saltou alegre em alguma parte?
Foi canção ou fonte
em alguma parte?
Por que então seus olhos
vinham pintados de azul
nos mapas?

II (Paisagem do Capibaribe)

Entre a paisagem
o rio fluía
como uma espada de líquido espesso.
Como um cão
humilde e espesso.

Entre a paisagem
(fluía)
de homens plantados na lama;
de casas de lama plantadas em ilhas
coaguladas na lama;
paisagem de anfíbios

de lama e lama.

Como o rio
aqueles homens
são como cães sem plumas
(um cão sem plumas
é mais
que um cão saqueado;
é mais
que um cão assassinado.

Um cão sem plumas
é quando uma árvore sem voz.
É quando de um pássaro
suas raízes no ar.
É quando a alguma coisa
roem tão fundo
até o que não tem).

O rio sabia
daqueles homens sem plumas.
Sabia de suas barbas expostas,
de seu doloroso cabelo
de camarão e estopa.

Ele sabia também
dos grandes galpões da beira dos cais
(onde tudo
é uma imensa porta
sem portas)
escancarados
aos horizontes que cheiram a gasolina.

E sabia
da magra cidade de rolha,
onde homens ossudos,
onde pontes, sobrados ossudos
(vão todos
vestidos de brim)
secam
até sua mais funda calíça.

Mas ele conhecia melhor
os homens sem pluma.
Estes
secam
ainda mais além
de sua calíça extrema;
ainda mais além

de sua palha;
 mais além
 da palha de seu chapéu;
 mais além
 até
 da camisa que não tem;
 muito mais além do nome
 mesmo escrito na folha
 do papel mais seco.

Porque é na água do rio
 que eles se perdem
 (lentamente
 e sem dente).
 Ali se perdem
 (como uma agulha não se perde).
 Ali se perdem
 (como um relógio não se quebra).

Ali se perdem
 como um espelho não se quebra.
 Ali se perdem
 como se perde a água derramada:
 sem o dente seco
 com que de repente
 num homem se rompe
 o fio de homem.

Na água do rio,
 lentamente,
 se vão perdendo
 em lama; numa lama
 que pouco a pouco
 também não pode falar:
 que pouco a pouco
 ganha os gestos defuntos
 de lama;
 o sangue de goma,
 o olho paralítico
 da lama.

Na paisagem do rio
 difícil é saber
 onde começa o rio;
 onde a lama
 começa do rio;
 onde a terra
 começa da lama;
 onde o homem,
 onde a pele

começa da lama;
 onde começa o homem
 naquele homem.

Difícil é saber
 se aquele homem
 já não está
 mais aquém do homem;
 mais aquém do homem
 ao menos capaz de roer
 os ossos do ofício;
 capaz de sangrar
 na praça;
 capaz de gritar
 se a moenda lhe mastiga o braço;
 capaz
 de ter a vida mastigada
 e não apenas
 dissolvida
 (naquela água macia
 que amolece seus ossos
 como amoleceu as pedras).

III (Fábula do Capibaribe)

A cidade é fecundada
 por aquela espada
 que se derrama,
 por aquela
 úmida gengiva de espada.

No extremo do rio
 o mar se estendia,
 como camisa ou lençol,
 sobre seus esqueletos
 de areia lavada.

(Como o rio era uma cachorro,
 o mar podia ser uma bandeira
 azul e branca
 desdobrada
 no extremo do curso
 — ou do mastro — do rio.

Uma bandeira
 que tivesse dentes:
 que o mar está sempre
 com seus dentes e seu sabão

roendo suas praias.

Uma bandeira
que tivesse dentes:
como um poeta puro
polindo esqueletos,
como um roedor puro,
um polícia puro
elaborando esqueletos,
o mar,
com afã,
está sempre outra vez lavando
seu puro esqueleto de areia.

O mar e seu incenso,
o mar e seus ácidos,
o mar e a boca de seus ácidos,
o mar e seu estômago
que come e se come,
o mar e sua carne
vidrada, de estátua,
seu silêncio, alcançado
à custa de sempre dizer
a mesma coisa,
o mar e seu tão puro
professor de geometria.)

O rio teme aquele mar
como um cachorro
teme uma porta entretanto aberta,
como um mendigo,
a igreja aparentemente aberta.

Primeiro,
o mar devolve o rio.
Fecha o mar ao rio
seus brancos lençóis.
O mar se fecha
a tudo o que no rio
são flores de terra,
imagem de cão ou mendigo.

Depois,
o mar invade o rio.
Quer
o mar
destruir no rio
suas flores de terra inchada,
tudo o que nessa terra
pode crescer e explodir,

como uma ilha,
uma fruta.

Mas antes de ir ao mar
o rio se detém
em mangues de água parada.
Junta-se o rio
a outros rios
numa laguna, em pântanos
onde, fria, a vida ferve.

Junta-se o rio
a outros rios.
Juntos,
todos os rios
preparam sua luta
de água parada,
sua luta
de fruta parada.

(Como o rio era um cachorro,
como o mar era uma bandeira,
aqueles mangues
são uma enorme fruta:

A mesma máquina
paciente e útil
de uma fruta;
a mesma força
invencível e anônima
de uma fruta
— trabalhando ainda seu açúcar
depois de cortada —.

Como gota a gota
até o açúcar,
gota a gota
até as coroas de terra;
como gota a gota
até uma nova planta,
gota a gota
até as ilhas súbitas
aflorando alegres.)

IV
(Discurso do Capibaribe)

Aquele rio

está na memória
como um cão vivo
dentro de uma sala.
Como um cão vivo
dentro de um bolso.
Como um cão vivo
debaixo dos lençóis,
debaixo da camisa,
da pele.

Um cão, porque vive,
é agudo.
O que vive
não entorpece.
O que vive fere.
O homem,
porque vive,
choca com o que vive.
Viver
é ir entre o que vive.

O que vive
incomoda de vida
o silêncio, o sono, o corpo
que sonhou cortar-se
roupas de nuvens.
O que vive choca,
tem dentes, arestas, é espesso.
O que vive é espesso
como um cão, um homem,
como aquele rio.

Como todo o real
é espesso.
Aquele rio
é espesso e real.
Como uma maçã
é espessa.
Como um cachorro
é mais espesso do que uma maçã.
Como é mais espesso
o sangue do cachorro
do que o próprio cachorro.
Como é mais espesso
um homem
do que o sangue de um cachorro.
Como é muito mais espesso
o sangue de um homem
do que o sonho de um homem.

Espesso
como uma maçã é espessa.
Como uma maçã
é muito mais espessa
se um homem a come
do que se um homem a vê.
Como é ainda mais espessa
se a fome a come.
Como é ainda muito mais espessa
se não a pode comer
a fome que a vê.

Aquele rio
é espesso
como o real mais espesso.
Espesso
por sua paisagem espessa,
onde a fome
estende seus batalhões de secretas
e íntimas formigas.

E espesso
por sua fábula espessa;
pelo fluir
de suas geléias de terra;
ao parir
suas ilhas negras de terra.

Porque é muito mais espessa
a vida que se desdobra
em mais vida,
como uma fruta
é mais espessa
que sua flor;
como a árvore
é mais espessa
que sua semente;
como a flor
é mais espessa
que sua árvore,
etc. etc.

Espesso,
porque é mais espessa
a vida que se luta
cada dia,
o dia que se adquire
cada dia
(como uma ave

que vai cada segundo
conquistando seu vôo).

The Dog without Feathers, trans. Richard
Zenith

1
(Landscape of the Capibaribe River)

The city is crossed by the river
as a street
is crossed by a dog,
a fruit
by a sword.(1-5)

The river called to mind
a dog's gentle tongue,
or a dog's sad belly,
or that other river
which is the dirty wet cloth
of a dog's two eyes.(6-11)

The river
was like a dog without feathers.
It knew nothing of the blue rain,
of the pink fountain,
of the water in a water glass,
of the water in pitchers,
of the fish in the water,
of the breeze on the water.(12-19)

It knew the crabs
of mud and rust.
It knew sludge
like a mucous membrane.
It must have known the octopus,
and surely knew
the feverish woman living in oysters.(20-
26)

The river
never opens up to fish,
to the shimmer,
to the knifelike nervousness
existing in fish.
It never opens up in fish. (27-32)

It opens up in flowers,

poor and black
like black men and women.
It opens up into a flora
as squalid and beggarly
as the blacks who must beg.
It opens up in hard-leaved
mangroves, kinky
as a black man's hair.(33-41)

Smooth like the belly
of a pregnant dog,
the river swells
without ever bursting.
The river's childbirth
is like a dog's,
fluid and invertebrate.(42- 48)

And I never saw it seethe
(as bread when rising
seethes).
In silence
the river carries its fertile poverty,
pregnant with black earth.(49-54)

In silence it gives itself:
in capes of black earth,
in boots or gloves of black earth
for the foot or hand
that plunges in.(55-59)

As happens with dogs,
sometimes the river
seemed to stagnate.
Then its waters flowed
thicker and warmer;
they flowed with the thick
warm waves
of a snake.(60-67)

Then it had something
of a madman's stagnation.
Something of the stagnation
of hospitals, prisons, asylums,
of the dirty and smothered life
(dirty, smothering laundry)
past which it slowly flowed. (68-74)

Something of the stagnation
of decayed palaces,
eaten

by mold and mistletoe.
 Something of the stagnation
 of obese trees
 dripping a thousand sugars
 from the Pernambuco dining rooms
 past which it slowly flowed.(75-83)

(It is there,
 with their backs to the river,
 that the city's "cultured families"
 brood over the fat eggs
 of their prose.
 In the round peace of their kitchens
 they viciously stir
 their pots
 of viscid indolence.)(84-92)

Could the river's water
 be the fruit of some tree?
 Why did it seem
 like ripened water?
 Why the flies always
 above it, as if about to land? (93-98)

Did any part of the river
 ever jump for joy?
 Was it ever, anywhere,
 a song or fountain?
 Why then
 were its eyes painted blue
 on maps? (99-105)

II (Landscape of the Capibaribe)

Through the landscape
 the river flowed
 like a sword of thick liquid.
 Like a humble
 thickset dog.(106-110)

Through the landscape
 (it flowed)
 of men planted in mud;
 of houses of mud
 planted on islands
 congealed in mud;
 a landscape of mud
 and mud amphibians.(111-118)

Like the river
 those men
 are like dogs without feathers.
 (A dog without feathers
 is more
 than a dog that's been stripped,
 is more
 than a dog that's been killed. (119-126)

A dog without feathers
 is when a tree without voice.
 It is when like a bird
 its roots in the air.
 It is when something is so deeply
 gnawed it is gnawed
 to what it doesn't have.) (127-133)

The river knew
 about those men without feathers.
 It knew
 about their stark beards
 and their painful hair
 of shrimp and cotton shreds.(134-139)

It also knew
 about the warehouses on the wharf
 (where everything is
 a huge door
 without doors)
 opened wide
 to horizons reeking of gas.(140-146)

And it knew
 about the lean, corklike city,
 where bony men,
 bridges and bony buildings
 (everyone
 dressed in duck cloth)
 wither
 to their intimate rubble. (147-154)

But it knew much better
 the men without feathers
 who wither
 even beyond
 their deepest rubble,
 even beyond
 their straw,
 beyond

the straw in their hats,
beyond
even
the shirts they don't have,
and far beyond their names,
even when written
on the driest sheet of paper.(155-169)

For it's in the water of the river
that those men are lost
(slowly
and with no teeth).
There they are lost
(as a needle is not lost).
There they are lost
(as a clock does not break).(170-177)

There they are lost
as a mirror does not break.
There they are lost
as spilled water is lost:
without the sharp tooth
which in an instant snaps
the thread of man
in a man.(178-185)

In the water of the river
slowly
they are lost
in mud, a mud
which little by little
also cannot speak,
which little by little
acquires the cadaverous features
of mud;
the gummy blood,
the paralytic eye
of mud.(186-197)

In the river landscape
it is hard to know
where the river begins,
where the mud
begins from the river,
where the land
begins from the mud,
where man,
where his skin
begins from the mud,
where man begins

in that man. (198-209)

It is hard to know
whether that man
isn't already
less than man
— less than the man
who can at least gnaw
at the bones of his work,
who can bleed
in the public square,
who can scream
if the millstone chews his arm,
who can have a life
that is chewed
and not just
dissolved
(in that smooth water
that softens his bones
as it softened the stones).(210-227)

III (Fable of the Capibaribe)

The city is fertilized
by that flowing
sword,
by the moist gums
of that sword.(228-232)

At the end of the river
the sea extended
like a shirt or sheet
over its skeletons
of washed sand.(233-237)

(As the river was a dog,
the sea could be a flag,
blue and white
and unfurled
at the end of the journey
— or mast — of the river.(238-243)

A flag
that would have teeth
— for with its teeth and its soap
the sea is always
gnawing its beaches.(244-248)

A flag
that would have teeth
— for like a pure poet
polishing skeletons,
like a pure rodent,
a pure policeman
arranging skeletons,
the diligent sea
never stops
washing and rewashing
its pure skeleton of sand.(249-259)

The sea and its incense,
the sea and its acids,
the sea and the mouth of its acids,
the sea and its stomach
that eats, and eats itself,
the sea and its flesh
glazed like a statue's,
its silence, achieved
at the price of always
saying the same thing,
the sea and its pure
teacher of geometry.(260-271)

The river fears the sea
as a dog fears
a door that's cracked open,
as a beggar fears
an apparently open church.(272-276)

First
the sea pushes back the river.
The sea shuts the river out
of its white sheets.
The sea shuts its doors to all
the river's flowers
of earth, to all its images
of dogs or beggars.(277-284)

Then
the sea invades the river.
The sea
wants
to destroy in that river
its flowers of swollen earth,
whatever in that earth
can grow and burst,
like an island,

a fruit.(285-294)

But before going to the sea
the river lingers
in stagnant mangrove swamps.
The river unites
with other rivers
in a lagoon, in swamps
where life coldly seethes.(295-301)

The river unites
with other rivers.
United,
all the rivers
prepare their fight
of stagnant water,
their fight
of stagnant fruit.(302-309)

(As the river was a dog,
as the sea was a flag,
those mangrove swamps
are an enormous fruit: (310-313)

The same patient
and useful machine
of a fruit,
the same anonymous,
invincible force
of a fruit
— still forging its sugar
when already cut.(314-321)

As drop by drop
until sugar,
so drop by drop
until the crowns of earth;
as drop by drop
until a new plant,
so drop by drop
until the sudden islands
joyously emerging.) (322-330)

IV
(Discourse of the Capibaribe)

The river
exists in memory
like a living dog
inside a room.

Like a living dog
inside one's pocket.
Like a living dog
under the sheets,
under one's shirt,
one's skin. (331-340)

A dog, because it lives,
is sharp.
Whatever lives
doesn't numb.
Whatever lives wounds.
Man,
because he lives,
clashes with the living.
To live
is to wend among the living.(341-350)

Whatever lives
inflicts life
on silence, on sleep, on the body
that dreamed of cutting itself
clothes out of clouds.
Whatever lives clashes,
has teeth, edges, is heavy.
Whatever lives is heavy
like a dog, a man,
like the river. (351-360)

Heavy
like everything real.
The river
is heavy and real.
As an apple
is heavy.
As a dog
is heavier than an apple.
As the blood of a dog
is heavier
than the dog itself.
As a man
is heavier
than the blood of a dog.
As the blood of a man
is much heavier
than the dream of a man.(361-377)

Heavy
as an apple is heavy.

As an apple
is much heavier
if a man eats it
than if a man sees it.
As it is even heavier
if hunger eats it.
As it is yet heavier still
if hunger sees
but cannot eat it.(378-388)

The river
is heavy
like the heaviest reality.
Heavy
because of its heavy landscape,
where hunger
deploys its secret battalions
of visceral ants.(389-396)

And heavy
because of its fable's heavy plot,
because of the flowing
of its earthen jellies,
heavy when it gives birth
to its islands of black earth.(397-402)
Because life that multiplies
itself in more life
is much heavier,
as a fruit
is heavier
than its flower,
as the tree
is heavier
than its seed,
as the flower
is heavier
than its tree,
etc. etc.(403-415)

Heavy,
because life is heavier
when it is fought for
each day,
because the day is heavier
when it is won
each day
(like a bird
conquering each second
its flight). (416-425).