

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

The Owl, the Goldfish and the Bull: The Question of the Animal and Romantic Poetry

ABSTRACT

This article argues that the representation of animals in Romantic poetry contributes to the contemporary philosophical and ethical discussion of the question of animals by providing a literary expression of the latter. Conversely, reading depictions of animals in Romantic poetry with their philosophical implications in mind throws light on the oppositions between different human groups, such as between Orientals and Occidentals, or between males and females, in Romantic poetry. These categories connect with each other in different ways in the works of three prominent Romantic poets: William Wordsworth, Lord Byron and Alexander Pushkin. Animals in their poetry reflect their views of various entities falling under the category of the self and that of the other; and indicate the relationships of these entities with such concepts as language, difference, passivity and subjectivity. These concepts find their formulations in the contemporary philosopher Jacques Derrida's writing on the question of the animals. My analysis will focus on three poems: Wordsworth's "There was a Boy", Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," and Pushkin's "The Fountain of Bakhchisaray." It will offer a reading of them side by side with Derrida's essay "And Say the Animal Responded".

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In Derrida's essay, which is a part of his lecture titled "The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)" (1997), he critiques Jacques Lacan's rendering of the Cartesian human/animal divide. He challenges Lacan's thesis that "the animal has neither unconscious nor language, nor the other, except as an effect of the human order, that is, by contagion, appropriation, domestication" (Wolfe 2003, 123). As Derrida sees it, this thesis follows the Cartesian tradition which attributes to the animal "a type of originary perfection" (Ibid., 124), a "fixity, within the presupposition of a code that only permits *reactions* to stimuli and not *responses* to questions" (Ibid.). It leads to the conclusion that the animal has code, but no language; can react, but not respond. In this essay I would like to discuss the forces and complexities of Derrida's contentions by looking at how the question of animal as the "other" figures in the poetic form. Specifically, I wish to concentrate on the way Derrida's deconstructivist project directs our attention to the intricacies of the dynamics between self and other in the poetry of British and Russian Romantic traditions, on how the philosophical lexicon developed by him might be used in the literary context for a renewed understanding of the Romantic poets' concern with the conditions of different life forms in their time. In the meantime I would like to contend that an analysis of the literary representations of animals in these texts serves to illustrate the different aspects of Derrida's investigation, and that Derrida's writing on animals provides critical insight into the exploration of both animal and human others by Romantic poets.

Derrida's reevaluation of the human/animal dichotomy based on the standard of language evokes not only the question of the other, but also that of the self. It continues the ontological investigation opened by Wittgenstein's well-known statement that "if a lion could speak, we could not understand

him” (Wittgenstein 1968, 225), which both acknowledges the possibility of otherness and negates its accessibility and comprehensibility: On the one hand, the presumption of a “lion’s language” postulates that language could not be defined in such a way as to serve as the line that divides human from animals; on the other hand, the implication that a lion’s life operates in a “linguistic domain” (to use Maturana and Varela’s terminology) that exists independently from the human domain prevents the human consciousness from grasping the lion’s life in the human language as the only available form in which knowledge is organized. “The Animal That Therefore I am” elaborates on Wittgenstein’s concern in the way that, on the one hand, it questions the accessibility of alterity from the ontological perspective in such statements as “for the other to be other it must already be less than other” (Wolfe 2003, 27) and “one cannot ‘welcome the other as other’” (Ibid.), on the other hand, it challenges the definition of humanity which becomes uncertain in human beings’ effort to approach the other in such observations as “discourses as original as those of Heidegger and Levinas, disrupt, of course, a certain tradition of humanism.”

The Romantic literary movement that swept over Europe targets at a disruption of tradition in the literary realm: the tradition of Neo-Classicism. The Romantics’ rebellion against tradition requires a new *weltanschauung* organized not by following the ideal representation of the world embedded in the Greco-Hellenic antiquity, but by amplifying the subjective experience of a lyricized self, who is at the same time indulged in and tortured by his/her *weltschmerz*, solitude and disenchantment, and whose behavior often speaks of an utter defiance of and contempt to artificial standards and conventions. In their aspiration to be liberated from external social, moral and ide-

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ological restraints, in their constant conflict with established institutions, authorities and etiquettes, the Romantic heroes often engage with a redefinition of the self and the other. Their rebellious character and self-imposed nobility tends to alienate them from their surroundings for a pursuit of sublimity and exceptionality, as a result of which they readily venture into the unfamiliar realm of others that might be utilized to reconstruct the self.

In Romantic poetry we see the other in its various representations: the animal, the Oriental, the other gender, the other religion, and so on, many of which are distinguished by their linguistic or communicative traits. In the case of the other as the animal, the presence of animal in natural settings in Romantic poetry complicates the problem of the accessibility of nature – the other “other” as opposed to human – especially when the animal engages with the Romantic hero when he/she takes the flight to nature in his/her search for identification and solution, as we see in William Wordsworth’s poem “There was a Boy” (later incorporated into “The Prelude”):

...he, as through an instrument, Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls That they might answer him.— And they would shout Across the watery vale, and shout again, Responsive to his call,—with quivering peals, And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild Of jocund din! And, when there came a pause Of silence such as baffled his best skill: Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise Has carried far into his heart the voice Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene Would enter unawares into his mind With all its solemn imag-

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ery, its rocks, Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake. (Wordsworth 1910, vol. 3, 122-123)

Here the boy mimics the voice of the owl, and seeks the “answer” from it, which is “responsive to his call.” However, the responsiveness of the owl between the boy and the animal, as Christine Kenyon-Jones indicates, does not necessarily suggest the realization of communication between human and nature (Kenyon-Jones 2001, *British Romanticism and Animals*, 139). In fact, if one contrasts the owl’s response with its occasional reticence, one will find the former equal to the “jocund din,” while it is in the latter occasion that the “voice of mountain-torrents” enters his heart, and the “visible scene” enters his mind. Therefore, the boy’s internalization of nature’s message – his receiving of its “imagery,” his grasp of nature all at once – takes place only when the animal becomes silent.

The animal as the other disappears in the larger other, nature, in “There was a Boy.” This ratifies Kenyon-Jones’s argument that in Wordsworth’s view it is the inanimate, unifying nature that summons the sublimity, while the animate “beasts and birds” in their specificity “denied an equal power over his spiritual life and vocation” (Kenyon-Jones 2009, 139). She quotes Wordsworth’s writing in book 2 of “The Prelude”: “... for in all things / I saw one life, and felt it was joy. / One song they sang, and it was audible...” (Kenyon-Jones 2009, 138). Kenyon-Jones continues to point out that in Book 8 Wordsworth “makes it clear that he did not in fact regard animals as part of Nature at all” (Ibid.). Following her proposition, one may argue that the unification and sublimation of nature in Wordsworth’s poem requires the “sacrifice,” if one is allowed to use Derrida’s term here, of the specificity and ordinariness of the animal.

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In Derrida's analysis, while the fixation of animal as a pre-coded machine without the ability of responding reduces the animal and makes "the other less than the other," it is rather the human solicitation of a response from the animal that "sacrifices" it. In other words, the animal ceases to be the other once we call it. It cannot respond to our call not because it is not equipped with the necessary repertoire or mechanism to respond, but because our call is never directed to it. The crux of the question here, then, is not whether the animal possesses a language, but whether human beings are able to find the other in the human language. Here one recognizes a dialogue of Derrida with Heidegger: If the other, as analyzed in *Being and Time*, is essentially defined not by its distinction from us, but by the way of life that it shares with us, by the potential to be identified by us as the "they" (*das Man*) in our common present-to-hand experience, then the animal cannot be the other in relation to the Being-with (Heidegger 1962, 26: 154-155). What this reflection implies is that as soon as the lyric hero starts to mimic the call of the owl in order to seek an answer from it, the owl as the other vanishes, for it is not from the owl that the hero is expecting the answer, but from his own experience that comprises the everyday form of his being.

From Derrida's perspective, the sacrifice of the animal, and of the other in general, originates from the problematic nature of our quest of the other "as such," as Cary Wolfe observes in his reading of "The Animal That Therefore I am":

It is the rejection of "animality in general", and of singularity and identity in general, that is amplified considerably in Derrida's recent lecture...The "Animal, what a word!" He exclaims. "[W]ithin the strict enclosure of this definite article ('the Animal' and not 'ani-

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mal')...are all the living things that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors or his brothers..." For Derrida, this "immense multiplicity of other living things...cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance"...It enacts what Derrida calls the "sacrificial structure" that opens a space for the "non-criminal putting to death" of the animal – a sacrifice that...allows the transcendence of the human, of that Heidegger calls "spirit", by the killing off and disavowal of the animal, the bodily, the materially heterogeneous, the contingent – in short, of *Différance*. (Wolfe 2003, 22-23)

As a response to "animal, what a word," Derrida foregrounds the neologism "*animot*" (Wolfe 2003, 121), which is a homophone of "*animaux*," the plural of "animal." It is of both ontological and ethical significance, as Derrida suggests, to acknowledge the plurality in both human beings and animals, in both the selves and the others. We hear the message repeated in his polemics with Lacan when he opposes to reducing the "differentiated and multiple difference...to one between the human subject, on the one hand, and the nonsubject that is the animal in general, on the other" (Ibid., 128). The foregrounding of multiplicity by Derrida is echoed by Ron Broglio in his argument that the question of animal phenomenology fragments as soon as it is raised, for "there is no single animal phenomenology" and "each sort of animal carries itself differently on earth and fashions a different sort of world" (Broglio 2011, XXII). What an "animal phenomenology" contributes to our contact with animals is that it opens one's way to the possibility of multiple phenomenologies, to a multifold discovery of varieties of *Dasein* – from the variety of species to that of breeds to

that of individuals – that repeatedly erodes the human/animal dichotomy (Ibid.).

In her article “Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-period Writing,” Kenyon-Jones contends that in contrast with the first generation of British Romantic poets, in the poetry of the second generation “the dividing line between human beings and animals becomes no more important than that between different kinds of humans or different kinds of animals, and binds all animated creatures together through the notion of sympathy or compassion” (Kenyon-Jones 2009, 147). She argues that “the opposition between ‘Man’ and ‘Nature’ in the earlier, Wordsworthian, ideology correlates with an emphasis on the need for a ‘kindness’ (what Wordsworth calls ‘gentleness’ and ‘tenderness’), which actually emphasized the distinctions and differences between ‘man’ and ‘brute’. The poets of the second Romantic generation, however, in their different ways tended to emphasize the consubstantiality, confraternity or kinship of humankind with animals, sometimes viewing this as a way of expressing political radicalism and defying social convention” (Ibid., 148). If one follows Kenyon-Jones’s proposition, then the transition from “animal” to “animals” in British Romanticism reflects the poets’ growing ethical awareness of the internal heterogeneity of the other. What’s more, it draws their attention from “the animal” as an element of the nature panorama to the life of individual animals, which allows the poets to establish a “one to one” relationship with their animals, a relationship that allows more space for identification and sympathy and contains the potential of being extended to the realm of human beings.

In order to examine the “different others” in the Romantic tradition, it is useful to focus on those occasions when Romantic poets transport animals from the natural setting to the

domestic and social setting, from the alien to the familiar. On the one hand, the frequent presence of domestic animals in everyday life demands a redrawing of boundaries between human beings and animals that often results in, as Alastair Hunt observes, a legislative structure that parallels the division of social classes or races, an order that entails the naturalization of artificially set hierarchies and privileges that takes advantage of the silenced “others” and legitimizes the rightlessness of those who were not capable of representing themselves (Hunt 2011, 135). On the other hand, since domestic animals have acquired their positions and roles in the social and family system, it becomes possible to take animals into account in the discussion of social justice and civil rights (instead of projecting the social hierarchy on animals, as one does in referring to “the animal kingdom”). Moreover, the appeal to liberate animals from the artificial hierarchies used to justify their appropriation also serves to draw attention to other minority groups who have suffered negligence, exploitation and violence. As a result, literary texts dealing with domestic animals often demonstrate an ethical intensity that rises from the specific political and social concerns of the authors. Two examples of domestic animals in Romantic poetry are the fish in Alexander Pushkin’s “Fountain of Bakhchisarai” and the bull in Canto 1 of Lord Byron’s “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.”

As Mikhail Epstein observes, domestic animals frequent Pushkin’s poetry (Epstein 1990, 213-214). The image of fish appears in such poems of Pushkin as “Eugene Onegin,” “Rusalka,” “Ianysh the Prince” and “The Tale of the Fisherman and the Goldfish” (Coyaud 1991, 38). The fish in “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai” are captive objects for the amusement of women in the harem:

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*Беспечно ожидая хана,
 Вокруг игривого фонтана
 На шелковых коврах оне
 Толпою резвою сидели
 И с детской радостью глядели,
 Как рыба в ясной глубине
 На мраморном ходила дне.
 Нарочно к ней на дно иные
 Роняли серьги золотые.
 (Pushkin 1978, vol. 2, 119-120)*

The Khan await, in fair array,
 Around on silken carpets crowded,
 Viewing, beneath a heaven unclouded,
 With childish joy the fishes play
 And o'er the marble cleave their way,
 Whose golden scales are brightly glancing,
 And on the mimic billows dancing.
 (Pushkin 1849, 11)

Both Monika Greenleaf and Stephanie Sandler point out the similarity of the fish to the women in the harem: the fish serve as pets and toys for the women; while the women themselves live in captivity and under the surveillance of eunuchs (Greenleaf 1994, 127-128; Sandler 1989, 173). Indeed, one may draw further parallels between the image of fish and that of women in the poem. In an early stanza Pushkin introduces the women as Arabic flowers: “*Так аравийские цветы / Живут за стеклами теплицы*” (Pushkin 1978, vol. 2, 118) [As in a hot-house bloom the flowers / Which erst perfumed Arabia’s field] (Pushkin 1849, 7). Here one sees the women as inactive beings

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through the glass, just as the women, in their turn, observe the fish swimming under the surface of the water. The metaphor of flower recurs in the poem, as in “цветут в унылой тишине” (Pushkin, vol. 2, 118) [bloom in the depressed quiet] (Pushkin 1849, 7), and in “Я в безмятежной тишине / В тени гарема расцвела” (Pushkin 1978, vol. 2, 126) [I in the harem’s quiet bloomed] (Pushkin 1849, 23) from Zarema’s soliloquy. Moreover, the fishes’ “walk on the marble bottom” (*на мраморном ходила дне*) and the women’s gesture of “dropping golden earrings to them on the bottom” (*к ней на дно...роняли серьги золотые*) imply the hierarchy of the imperial garden and the status of the women in their relation with Girei: he possesses both the women and the fish in the harem.

Through the women-fish metaphor, the human-animal hierarchy parallels the male-female hierarchy in the harem. This hierarchy proves crucial in the poem since it brings Zarema and Marina, that is, the eastern and western women, together (there are, by the way, two different Eastern figures, the Tatar Girei and the Georgian Zarema in the poem). In their meeting Marina doesn’t understand Zarema’s language, but she vaguely perceives her suffering: “Невинной деве непонятен / Язык мучительных страстей / Но голос их ей смутно внятен” (Pushkin 1978, vol. 2, 127) [The innocent maiden understands not / The language of tormenting passions / But their voice she vaguely receives] (translation mine). Her compassion for Zarema arises when she considers her vulnerability in front of Girei: “Или кончиной ускоренной / Унылы дни ее пресек, -” (Pushkin 1978, vol. 2, 127) [Or that it were her blessed doom / To ‘scape dishonour, life, and pain!] (Pushkin 1849, 27). Zarema, on the other side, in her momentary retrieval of Christian passion empathizes with Marina religiously: “Уж ей пора, Марию ждут / И в небеса, на лоно мира, / Родной улыбкою

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зovem.” (Pushkin 1978, vol. 2, 127) [Her soul is called again to heaven, / And angel joys await it there!] (Pushkin 1849, 27).

Their communication without understanding each other’s language recalls Derrida’s response to the human/animal divide with language as the boundary: “It would not be a matter of ‘giving speech back’ to animals, but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and the word otherwise, as something other than a privation” (Wolfe 2003, 23). He stresses that raising the question of the animal conventionally in terms of language or thought “determines so many others concerning *power* or *capability* [*pouvoir*], and *attributes* [*avoir*]: being able, having the power to give, to die, to bury one’s dead, to dress, to work, to invent a technique” (Ibid., 24). He offers an alternative way of posing the question: “The question is disturbed by a certain *passivity*. It bears witness, manifesting already, as question, the response that testifies to suffering, a passion, a not-being-able.” He continues: “What of the vulnerability felt on the basis of this inability? What is this non-power at the heart of power? ... Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion...” (Ibid.) In the interaction between Zarema and Marina, it is the double passivity, the double non-power – one towards Girei, and the other towards Christ – that connects them and dissolves the opposition between East and West, which retreats onto the background, yielding its place to the opposition between two genders, and that between human and God.

By highlighting the finitude and incapability as the common essence of animals and human beings, Derrida anticipates Bro-

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glio's proposition that the impossibility of knowing what makes an animal from an animal's perspective reminds human beings of their own fragility and impotence (Broglia 2011, XXII). In particular, fragility as a "mode of relating to animals" (Ibid.), in Wolfe's words, challenges our habitual gesture of grasping and grinding in the acts of knowing and understanding, and opens the horizon for a different kind of contact with the others that is based on the acknowledgement of the impossibility of knowing. By emphasizing the suffering of animals, Derrida also returns to Jeremy Bentham's comment in 1789 that "the question (with animals) is not, Can they *reason?* nor, Can they *talk?* but, Can they *suffer?*" (Kenyon-Jones 2009, 147) Both Bentham and Derrida's reframing of the question of the animal aims at resolving the ethical crisis resulting from the reaction/response divide suggested by Derrida in his critique of Lacan, whose characterization of animals leads one to think that since the animal cannot respond, man cannot hold responsibility towards it. In Derrida's view, however, the mortality that "we share with animals" (Wolfe 2003, 24) requires that the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" concerns not only man.

The animal as the sufferer and as the victim recalls the bull-fight scene depicted in stanzas 68-80 in Canto I of Lord Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.". Kenyon-Jones mentions several interesting political episodes that background the writing of this scene. In 1800 and 1802 the anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce and his associates organized several unsuccessful attempts to ban bull-baiting, while in May 1809 Lord Erskine, another defender of slavery abolition, introduced a bill in the House of Lords "to prevent 'wanton and malicious cruelty' to domestic animals in general – the first of its kind ever to be debated in any Western legislature" (Kenyon-Jones 2001, 79). According to Kenyon-Jones, Byron heard Erskine's speech

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in the House of Lords, in which he had obtained a position two months earlier. In July 1809, two months after Erskine's speech, Byron attended the bull-fight near Cadiz, which would become the subject of his writing in December that year (Ibid., 80).

Byron's treatment of the bull-fight scene seems to echo these initial voices for animal rights. Right after the description of bull-fighting we read the narrator's comment on it: "Such the ungentle sport that oft invites / The Spanish maid, and cheers the Spanish swain. / Nurtur'd in blood betimes, his heart delights / In vengeance, gloating on another's pain" (Byron 2008, 48). The assertion that one gets accustomed to gloating on another's pain through watching bull-fight presupposes that one perceives the suffering of the fighting bull, which is able to express it during the fight: "distracted with his throes," it speaks his "woes" through "loud bellowings" (Ibid., 47). What's more, the juxtapositions of nouns and adjectives, as in "dart follows dart; lance, lance" (Ibid.) intensify the sense of pain in the scene. As one sees the fight unfold, one tends to identify with the bull, to follow his movement and to feel his exhaustion, when one reads "Foil'd, bleeding, breathless, furious to the last" (Ibid.). The identification and compassion culminate when the narrator takes the reader into the bull's body through the line "Where his vast neck just mingles with the spine" (Ibid.).

It is worth noticing that Byron reveals compassion not only towards the bull, but also towards the horses that suffer from the bull in place of man in the following line: "...nor more / Can man achieve without the friendly steed, / Alas! too oft condemn'd for him to bear and bleed" (Byron 2008, 46). The abhorrence towards the voyeuristic frenzy reaches the utmost intensity in the following lines: "Another, hideous

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sight! unseam'd appears, / His gory chest unveils life's panting source, / Tho' death-struck still his feeble frame he rears, / Staggering, but stemming all, his lord unharm'd he bears" (Ibid., 47). Through these lines Byron made us see both the bull and the horses as the sacrifices of human sports.

In Derrida's ethical discussion concerning the animal as the other, it is significant that the animal "has its point of view regarding me" (Wolfe 2003, 27). He illustrates this proposition: "The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat" (Ibid.). To feel the gaze of the animals serves as a key move in his attempt to reassign to us our responsibility for them. Romantic poets' sensitivity to the animals' point of view and its significance in regard to their ideological stance has been remarked and analyzed by Peter Heymans, who proposes that animals provided Romantic poets with an alternative "subjectivity and agency," as well as an alienating perspective that urges the distribution of our moral responsibility into the realm of all other forms of life (Heymans 2012, 14). The gaze, which embodies the animal perspective, recurs in British Romantic poetry, and the moral message contained in it is laid bare in Canto 8 from Shelley's "Queen Mab", which, as Kenyon-Jones indicates, demonstrates man's recognition of his essential kinship with animals: "No longer now / He slays the lamb that looks him the face" (Kenyon-Jones 2001, 144).

In Byron's bull-fight scene the narrator focuses repeatedly on the bull's eyes, in such phrases as "wildly staring," "red rolls his eye's dilated glow," "his eye is fix'd" (Byron 2008, 46). If we agree on that the animal's gaze conveys the impera-

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tive “Thou shalt not kill,”), then that “the mantle...wraps his fierce eye” (Ibid., 47) becomes a symbolic gesture which removes man’s responsibility towards it and approves the kill.

The suffering bull ominously anticipates the suffering human in the Colosseum scene in stanzas 139-142 of Canto IV. Not only does Byron foreground both of them in the respective scenes, but the way he presents their death manifests several commonalities. Both of them deace with dignity and pride: the bull “falls...without a groan, without a struggle” (Byron 2008, 47); while the gladiator’s “manly brow consents to death, but conquers agony” (Ibid., 188). The spectators celebrate the death of both: the bull dies “amidst triumphant cries” (Ibid., 47); while the gladiator falls in “the inhuman shout which hail’d the wretch who won” (Ibid., 188).

In an arena where a human being serves as the sacrifice for entertainment, the cruelty of “gloating on another’s pain” crosses the boundary between human and animal. The bull as the “forest-monarch” (Ibid., 44) and the gladiator from the land of “young barbarians” (Ibid., 188) share the same vulnerability and mortality in front of the “civilized” audience, and they die to satiate the same thirst of blood: the “crimson torrent” that “streams” (Ibid., 47) from the bull’s flank in the bull ring becomes the “bloody stream” that “murder breathed” (Ibid., 189) in the Colosseum, “where buzzing nations...roar’d or murmur’d like a mountain stream dashing or winding as its torrent strays” (Ibid.).

In Byron’s view, the sacrifice of both the other as the animal and the others as “barbarians” or “slaves” for pleasure originated from and exacerbated the same moral degeneration. In his note to line 1267 of the Colosseum scene he expresses his

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compassion with the “barbarian” gladiators and implies the sin of the spectators who may determine their deaths: “Of these (gladiators of different origins) the most to be pitied undoubtedly were the barbarian captives; and to this species a Christian writer justly applies the epithet ‘innocent,’ to distinguish them from the professional gladiators.” (Ibid., 205). He derogatorily mentions Justus Lipsius’s supposition that “the loss of courage, and the evident degeneracy of mankind” at the end of Roman Empire can be related to “the abolition of... bloody spectacles” (Ibid.) in the Colosseum.

Kenyon-Jones points out that John Hobhouse, who accompanied Byron in his visits in Rome, wrote a note to Byron’s note to line 1267 in which he refers to Lipsius’s commentary as “the prototype of Mr. Windham’s panegyric on bull-baiting” (Kenyon-Jones 2001, 84). There he compares William Windham’s idea that participation in bull-baiting had given British men their fighting spirit with the theory that the ‘torrents of blood’ shed in the circus had contributed to ancient Roman martial greatness” (Ibid.). If Byron knew Windham’s statement on bull-baiting, one would suppose that the parallel between the bull-fight scene and the Colosseum scene might imply a contemporary ethical and political polemic. Indeed, both the bull and the gladiator seem to stand for “the every single other” with whom Byron sympathizes for their sacrifice on the stage of history for the “imperial pleasure”:

...man was slaughtered by his fellow man.
 And wherefore slaughtered? wherefore, but because
 Such were the bloody Circus’ genial laws,
 And the imperial pleasure. – Wherefore not?
 What matters where we fall to fill the maws
 Of worms – on battle-plains or listed spot?

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Both are but theatres where the chief actors rot.
(Byron 2008, 188)

These lines extend the continuity between the bull ring and the Colosseum to the battle plains. The bull, the gladiator and the casualties in wars are ultimately bound by “the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion”, an experience that permeates Byron’s reflection on historical and contemporary events in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.”

The represented animals we have examined - Wordsworth’s owl, Pushkin’s fish and Byron’s bull - exemplify how the question of animals in Romantic poetry induces ontological, political and ethical questions about human beings, and how the exploration of the other leads to further and more profound thinking about ourselves. In the cases of Pushkin and Byron, by tracing the other from the level of species to that of ethnicity, community and individual, it seems that these poets had already taken an ethical move, a move of returning the Derridean difference to the “others.”

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