Matter on the Move: the Poetics and Politics of Human and Nonhuman Migration in Ruth Padel's *The Mara Crossing*

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article s'attachera à explorer l'interface poreuse entre l'humain et le non humain dans le recueil de poèmes et d'essais The Mara Crossing *(2012) du poète britannique Ruth Padel, recueil qui raconte le phénomène migratoire du point de vue du sujet migrant qu'il soit humain, animal, végétal ou microbien. Il s'agira d'examiner l'utilisation stratégique chez Padel du trope jadis discrédité, l'anthropomorphisme, à l'instar de sa réhabilitation récente dans le « matérialisme vitaliste » de Jane Bennett, en tant que figure privilégiée qui permet de penser la redistribution des capacités d'action pratique et politique au-delà de l'humain en direction des êtres non humains, voire de l'ensemble du monde matériel, tout en faisant apparaître la matérialité inhérente de l'humain. En reliant les destins de sujets migrants d'ontologies diverses, Padel s'attache à raconter l'interdépendance et la vulnérabilité partagées de l'humain et du non humain dans un monde en mutation.*

Keywords: Anthropocene; anthropomorphism; migration; new materialism; nonhuman agency; vital materialism.

The Mara Crossing by British poet, scholar, conservationist and great-great-grand-daughter of Charles Darwin, Ruth Padel, published in 2012, takes its title from one of the world's largest animal migrations that each year sees millions of wildebeest, zebra, and gazelles hurl themselves into the crocodile-infested Mara River in Kenya on the last leg of their annual trek

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from the Tanzanian Serengeti to the fertile grazing grounds beyond.[1] Padel stages the crossing not only as a spectacularly violent encounter between the predators lurking in and around the river and their unsuspecting prey—"a walking canteen" (100) for the crocodiles and lions that have only to pick them off—but also as a theatrical encounter ("The stage was set," 101) between the human tourists who have gathered in their jeeps on the riverbank to witness and record the event with their whirring cameras and the nonhuman animals whose compulsion to fulfil their biological destiny the poet conveys by resorting to anthropomorphising tropes: "If they were human you'd have said they were plucking up courage" (101).

The eponymous crossing is an anchoring metaphor for the multiple human and nonhuman migrations that the poems and essays in this composite work probe and seek to make sense of, ranging from the seasonal kind Padel calls Go-and-Come-Back (that of humpback whales travelling between Arctic and tropics, for example) to the more permanent moves she calls Go-and-Stay that often take the form of invasion and colonisation, whether it be of natural habitats by new species or of new continents by human settlers. From the perspective of new materialism, which emphasises the vitality of materiality and the agency of the nonhuman,[2] this paper will examine the way in which Padel charts the migratory flows of all the "matter"—both human and nonhuman—that is on the move around the globe: from the seeds travelling in the guts of bears that over time have given us the apple tree ("Flight of the Apple") to the nightly rise and fall of billions of jellyfish in the ocean ("Nocturne"); from the individual mutating cells in our bodies ("First Cell", "Breaking the Bond", "Cell Begins Her Travels") to the origins of the Irish diaspora ("Directions for the Plantation of Ulster, 1610"); and from the long-distance migrations of birds ("Osprey") to the desperate attempts by today's Mediterranean migrants to reach the shores of Fortress Europe ("The Desert and the Sea"). As all seek "the

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[1] Padel, Ruth, *The Mara Crossing*, First Edition, Chatto & Windus, 2012 (98). Subsequent page references to *The Mara Crossing* will appear in the text between parentheses.

[2] Practitioners of new materialism (sometimes called vital materialism) all share a regard for nonhuman agents. Often associated with the so-called "nonhuman turn" in cultural theory, including Animal Studies and ecocriticism, they consider agency to be a capacity localized not only in the human but "distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field" (Bennett 23). Theorists working in and around new materialism include Jane Bennett, Richard Grusin, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Bruno Latour to name a few. For an overview of the new materialist turn in cultural theory, see Coole and Frost.

shortest crossing" (39) in search of "new life", their routes often overlap: "If you superimposed human and avian journeys on a world map," writes Padel, "many lines would become one. Over the Strait of Gibraltar, over the Bosphorus or coming up from South America to North, human migrants face the same hostile planet as the birds: desert and sea, mountain and storm—and predators" (209). The collection examines why almost every species, including our own, makes such perilous journeys.

Padel's choice to intersperse her poetry with prose aims to urge more closely on the reader the political dimension of rootlessness, displacement, and asylum that are the corollaries of human migration. Writing in *The Guardian* in 2012 just as the Mediterranean migrant crisis was beginning to intensify, she explains:

> I wanted the prose because I wanted to make the human issues clear, as well as memorable and resonant. Poetry can give what Robert Frost calls 'a fresh look and a fresh listen', but a poem's clarity does not always transmit equally to everyone, and *I wanted to make the political point clear*—that human migration is part of animal migration, and migration has been part of life on this earth from the start (emphasis mine).[3]

Politics being mostly construed as an exclusively human domain, as political ecologist Jane Bennett has observed in her discussion of *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, the material or nonhuman natural world often registers as a mere set of constraints on, or an enabling context for, human action, as a passive, even inert background for the endeavours of active human subjects (Bennett 2010: xvi). Amitav Ghosh has also remarked on this exclusion of the nonhuman from the political domain in his 2016 *The Great Derangement. Climate Change and the Unthinkable*: "As for the nonhuman, it is almost by definition excluded from a politics that sanctifies subjectivity and in which political claims are made in the first person" (129). Padel makes no bones about her foregrounding of the specifically human drama of "*homo viator*, man the pilgrim" (2), against a backdrop of nonhuman or animal migration. Microbiology and birds allowed her, she insists, to approach the human issues "obliquely, in a deep perspective and context," the biological and zoological dimensions giving "more depth and voice" to what she explicitly calls "the human poems," and allowing her to

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[3] Padel, Ruth, "Ruth Padel: 'Poetry Has a Responsibility to Look at the World.'" *The Guardian* 21 Mar. 2012. Web. Accessed 14 Sept. 2016.

highlight the issues neutrally, without thumping a political tub [so that] by the time I reached the human sections, the principles of waste, danger, scale, the compassion and empathy we desperately need in order to see and understand all migration journeys, had been laid down for me by bar-headed geese, ospreys, dunlins, blackpoll warblers, hummingbirds.

The implicit anthropocentrism[4] of the poems' teleological arrangement, from microbial migration through bird and animal migration, culminating with human migration—the former being used in order to pave the way for a compassionate understanding of the latter—should not detract from the collection's environmentalist politics, however. As a conservationist and Trustee of the Royal Zoological Society who has written extensively on environmental issue,[5] Ruth Padel's environmentalist credentials need no demonstrating. The political focus of the collection is dual: to elicit understanding and compassion for today's refugee and migrant populations while at the same time addressing the ecological pressures that comprise some of the "push" factors of the human exodus, the "fished-out seas [and] corporate over-use of resources which uproots people and destroys their land" (217) just as it impacts upon the millennial migratory patterns of nonhuman animals.

The poetics in which the dual political agenda is couched revolve mainly around the trope of anthropomorphism, "the interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics" (Bennett 2010: 98). Padel returns again and again to the resemblances between human and nonhuman migrants, owning up to a deep-seated human disposition to "compare ourselves with nature and see ourselves reflected in it" (34). Hence, the herds of wildebeest gathering on the banks of the Mara "jostl[e] from behind like a stadium audience" (101); birds preparing for migration are "like athletes before a race" (56); and the bats whose droppings fertilize and pollinate the African rainforest are "dizzy as customers at the bar of the Electric Ballroom" (89). In the poem "Nocturne," deep-sea zooplankton, protozoa, and krill are dubbed "tenants of the dark" (83), while the ghostly, insubstantial forms of jellyfish that rise and fall nightly in the ocean bear an uncanny resemblance to "a convoy of wraith-buskers / creeping from the Tube" (84-5).

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[4] Timothy Clark defines anthropocentrism as "the almost all-pervading assumption that it is only in relation to human beings that anything else has value" (Clark 2).
[5] On tiger conservation in particular. See Padel, Ruth, *Tigers In Red Weather*, London: Abacus, 2006.

Regarded until recently as an exclusively pejorative term implying the sentimental projection of human emotions onto animals and the expression of a presumptuous sense of human exceptionalism, anthropomorphism, while it might seem to engender kindness towards animals and acceptance of their agency, writes Greg Garrard, "is really a way of *not seeing* animals in their own right at all" (165). Conversely, following Eileen Crist's defence of anthropomorphism as a genuine source of understanding in *Images of Animals*, Timothy Clark posits the idea that "language that may seem problematically figurative or 'merely anthropomorphic' can also acquire provocative value as a way of doing justice to the agency of the non-human, as in Haraway's naming nature 'coyote'" (192). In this view, anthropomorphism, positioned as it is on the hazy borderline between the human and the nonhuman, can assist in disrupting the conceptual or rhetorical dualisms that "separate the human from the nonhuman—variously conceived as animals, plants, organisms, climatic systems, technologies, or ecosystems" (Grusin x). The Cartesian dualisms that parse the world into distinct categories of nature/culture, active/passive, subject/object, organic/nonorganic are increasingly being seen as the chief impediment to the emergence of what Bennett calls "greener forms of human culture and more attentive encounters between people-materialities and thing-materialities" (2010: x). If we wish to foster more sustainable and ecological ways of thinking about our world, Bennett argues, a new "partition of the sensible" to borrow Jacques Rancière's useful phrase, is needed and one tactic, she suggests, might be to "revisit and become temporarily infected by discredited philosophies of nature" (2010: 18) such as anthropomorphism: "A touch of anthropomorphism … can catalyse a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but *with variously composed materialities that form confederations.* In revealing similarities across categorical divides and lighting up structural parallels between material forms in 'nature' and those in 'culture,' anthropomorphism can reveal isomorphisms" (2010: 99; emphasis mine).

Bennett's vital materialist approach thus offers a more positively inflected understanding of anthropomorphism as a reciprocal process of redistributed agency in which "human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature" (2010: xvi) while "a vibrant materiality … runs alongside and inside humans" (2010: viii). The poetics of *The Mara Crossing* emphasise a similar redistribution of agency and a repartitioning of the "sensible" throughout the nonhuman world in order to transcend human-centred exceptionalism. The collection instantiates both formally and thematically the confederation of "variously composed materialities" adduced by Bennett. Formally, the collection straddles the diverse fields of natural science, history, literature,

myth, and art; thematically the "ontologically distinct categories" of the human and the nonhuman coalesce around the word "migrate" which, Padel reminds us, although we might associate it primarily with birds, "was first used in English … of people. That was in 1611; it was used in 1646 of animals and only in 1697 did it begin to be used of birds" (36). Today the word is used in microbiology to describe the movement of cells in an organism where it is the basis of the immune system: "Cells migrate to a site of infection or trauma, travelling towards wounds to attack invading bacteria … in other words, to heal, repair damage and create new life" (22). In a nod to how migration traverses the realms of the animate and the inanimate, the poem "Cell Begins Her Travels" weaves together vegetal, fungal, and insect displacements in diasporic images of "spores", "fronds" and "bees" whose reiterated liquids, fricatives and sibilants evoke an imagined "ruffling" movement that is compared to a purposive quest for the afterlife ("bent on heaven"):

> Cell waves longhaired
> flagella like the spray of spores on mould.
> In a blitz of lamellipodia, Cell
> sprouts her motile fronds. She, the queen bee,
> will fibrillate each organelle
> in turn. Her ruffling front slides on,
> retracts, moves on again.
> So Cell migrates
> like an old soul bent on heaven. (24)

On inquiry, Padel learns that cell biologists use the anthropomorphising term "migrating" precisely in order to "give an impression of purpose … The cells just seem to be going somewhere. Purposefully" (22). Such anthropomorphic projections of intentionality or *telos* are, however, belied by the fact that cells are actually "guided … by migration-promoting chemicals they detect in their environment. They find some attractive and like to go towards them, they find others repulsive and try to get away from them" (22). This prompts the poet to wonder: "is all motivation ultimately chemical?" (22), including, perhaps, human motivation.

From the start, then, by incorporating science into her poetic reflection Padel prises open the question of the humanistic notions of freedom and intentionality, which anthropomorphising tropes project onto the nonhuman. She returns time and again to the strange compulsion or "inner need" (43) that lies at the heart of all migrations and sits uneasily with the metaphors of freedom and purpose with which we habitually construe the natural world

and its creatures, and which we in turn use as "something to think with about ourselves" (183). The animals amassed at the Mara river are thus "a distillation of programmed compulsion" (101); the simultaneously mechanomorphic and anthropomorphic "clockwork gazelle doing a splashy butterfly", seemingly drawn by "a magnet on the other bank pulling" (103), is compelled, we are told, by the phosphate minerals contained in the grass on the other side: "All for a mineral, all for a phosphate" (104). Another mineral, magnetite, discovered by geologist Heinz Lowenstam in the skulls of some migrating species like Monarch butterflies and homing pigeons enables these species to navigate around the globe in response to the magnetic pull of the earth (54), forcing us to re-evaluate our habitual trope for freedom, "free as a bird" (183): "birds, who seem so free, are slaves to their genes. Their precise timings, and the direction they take, are the result of genetic programming: complex inner drives passed down in their DNA. Their bodies and brains order them where to go and when" (56). Thus is the trope demystified as mere anthropomorphic projection.

This debunking of anthropomorphism might seem to support the Cartesian idea of a mechanistic, law-governed natural (nonhuman) world behaving deterministically, deprived of any kind of agency. As Bennett has shown, too often "the philosophical rejection of anthropomorphism is bound up with a hubristic demand that only humans and God can bear any traces of creative agency" (Bennett 2010: 120). However, although it is animated by "push" and "pull," Padel's natural world is neither passively mechanistic, nor energized solely by anthropocentric projections of agency, but moved by an intrinsic vitality and creative energy which Bennett might call an "agency" of its own. Supposedly inert minerals exert uncanny power in, and on, Padel's poetic vision. The discovery by Italian scientist Stefano Lorenzini of gel-filled receptors in the upper lips of sharks, which enable them to detect bands of magnetism in the seabed, occasions in the poem "The Ampullae of Lorenzini" a poetic reverie that slides from real-world geography to the fantastic lands of the imaginary, "Cathay, Shangri-La or Eldorado":

> Who doesn't long
> for gel-filled pores
> somewhere —
> and under your top lip would do —
>
> magneto-receptors, telling you
> which geologic line
> to follow
> clean below Orion

over the East Nazareth Mountains
into some Gangetic Sea,
Cathay, Shangri-La or Eldorado
and along the seabed, home? (86)

Meanwhile, another mineral, salt, the vital "Chemical" in the poem of that name, is the matter that sets in motion the yearly migratory endeavours of

mountain goats in Montana
climbing sheer cliffs for a lick of salt

and brocket deer wading in Amazon quicksand
pumping their front legs to stop sinking

and suck the rich mineral upwellings.
We flow to what we need, they said.

Elephants in Kenya march their young
through tunnels under Mount Elgon.

… steering

with giant foot-glands right to the core,
the great dead-end heart of salt rock

then going at it, gouging it out
with their tusks. Listen to them crunch,

crunch, crunch for their life. (95)

The vibrant crunching and gouging of the salt conveys a sense of the vital interactions of the nonorganic ("dead-end") and the organic ("heart") in a story of migration which is akin to an initiatory journey or ritual revisiting of a primal scene, "this gash in their lives, // this every-year-a-bit-longer inward journey / under the mountain, into the dark." (96)

Padel's close linguistic and imaginative attentiveness to the "small agencies" (Bennett 2010: 95) exerted upon and by migrating nonhuman matter, from viruses, parasites, and bacteria to apple seeds and "particles of plastic" which end up in the ocean (192), stresses the interdependence and shared vulnerability of the human and the nonhuman in an ever-changing world. The defamiliarization strategy which forces us to adopt "a parasite's point of view" (20) in her description of how diseases like malaria spread

and thrive in human bodies, depends nonetheless on the anthropomorphic depiction of the parasite *plasmodium falciparum* as all-too-familiar "hoodies and hackers" intent on taking over the body cell by cell in an act of metaphorical computer piracy in "Spinning the Plasma":

> They [cells] have been penetrated
> by Plasmodium falciparum.
> The parasite has multiplied,
> breaking the red cells down
> which spells fever, shivering,
> fever again
> until – in the uncertain mill
>
> of evolution
> all hardworking parasites pursue,
> shape-shifting to hoodies and hackers
> as attempts to outwit them change –
> it's curtains. (25-26)

The multiplication of alliterative pairs of phonemes and internal rhymes cascading throughout the poem— *p*enetrated / *P*lasmodium / *p*arasite; *cells* / *s*p*ells*; *p*arasites *p*ursue; *sh*ape-*sh*ifting; *h*oodies / *h*ackers—mimics the replication of the parasite in the body, while the image of "hoodies and hackers", human propagators of technological viruses, captures the menacing quality of the human itself as an alien otherness that is transported within, uncannily familiar, both us and not-us. These poems view the human body as a multiplicity of beings including the bacteriological. "Breaking the Bond", a poem about the replication of DNA by the snapping apart of the double helix, stages the process of cell migration in the production of life as a "soap opera of relationships" (9) in which the prime movers are a swarm of nonhuman vitalities—enzymes, proteins and molecules—at work within the body:

> Cell summons her treasurer,
> hoarder of energy. Adenosine
> triphosphate, to break the welded rungs
> and separate the partners
> in their hydrogen-bond pavane. (14)

The flailing legs of the replicating DNA molecule that grow apart in opposite directions confirm that "contrariness is built into us" (8) and insist on the composite materiality of all bodies including the human. That "we all

descend from primeval slime" (7) is the claim of "First Cell" which stresses the material basis of all life forms:

> Born in a deep-sea vent, synthesised
> by lightning in a reducing atmosphere
> or carried here by meteorite, we're all
> from somewhere else. (10)

If, as Padel holds, "We're conflict from the start" (12), the otherness within is inscribed in our cultural as well as our biological DNA. It is deeply rooted in the founding Judeo-Christian story of the Fall as "the story of how something harmful got into the system from the start. One name for Satan is *alienus*, the stranger, the outsider. Parasites tell the same story" (21). In a bid to foster a sense of commonality with the vibrant and alien materialities migrating and being displaced around and within us—molecules, animals, plants, earth, artefacts, bacteria, not to mention other human beings—the poems encourage us to own the human body's inner aliens which the conventional disparaging associations of disease with the immigrant "other" would deny: "Syphilis has always been seen as the unwelcome immigrant, coming from somebody and somewhere else. France called it the Italian Disease, the Dutch the Spanish Disease, Russians called it the Polish Disease, Turks the Christian or Frank Disease, Tahiti the British Disease … but no one knows where it began" (20). The endlessly deferred origin of such "shape-shifting" diseases and parasites conveys a sense of the vagabond, roaming, nomadic quality of all the matter that is on the move in Padel's narratives of migration, as well as of the intimate intermingling of the human and the nonhuman: "We, mosquitoes and *Plasmodium* evolved and spread together" (21).

The evolution of the apple, the first of several narratives of "forced migration"[6] captured in "Flight of the Apple", is that of the "interaction between plants, animals and people whose horses trod pips into the soil of forests and plains" (19): "Fruit trees migrate by forced migration: the seeds travel in the intestines of animals who drop them, fertilised by dung, in alien soil" (19), until, from the Tien Shan Mountains of Kazakhstan, the pips of the hawthorn tree come to seed the founding narratives of Western culture and human progress in which the apple figures as an emblematic fruit:

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[6] The others being "the enforced migration of enslaved Africans which created African American culture" (119) and the "forced migrations known as the Trail of Tears" (151).

… to William Tell
protesting an unjust edict,
Newton dozing in a Cambridge garden,
to Eden, to Eve. So apples sprang
wherever we tamed the horse. (27)

A more disturbing image of nonhuman migration is that evoked in the poem "The Mirror of Nature" of the drifting detritus of human civilisation which ends up in the ocean where it takes on a nefarious agency, plating the zooplankton and

… protozoa
on whom we all depend – …
… floe by floe,
with particles of plastic.
Tidewater glaciers unleaven
like loaves deliquescing back into dough. (192)

After the apple, another archetypal foodstuff and symbol of human civilisation, loaves of bread, is offered up here for our contemplation, but these loaves that are "deliquescing back into dough" offer only a prospect of regression and degeneracy. In the new geo-political era of the Anthropocene, which emphasises the entanglement of human and nonhuman destinies in what Bruno Latour calls a "*kakosmos*, that is, in polite Greek, a horrible and disgusting mess!" (481), humans, with their plastic and pollution, have become nonhuman actants and must now, as Richard Grusin has put it, "be understood as climatological or geological forces on the planet that operate just as nonhumans would, independent of human will, belief, or desires" (vii).[7] The hiatus that separates the human from the nonhuman seems to be

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[7] The poem "The End of the Line" (188) is an elegiac expression of the Anthropocenic dimension of Padel's poetics which testify to the "rumour of greed in the human soul". (189) The "end of the line" in question is a reference to, on the one hand, the end of the District Line of the London Underground where a warehouse of the Natural History Museum can be found, and on the other to the collection of stuffed animals it contains, specimens of already or soon-to-be extinct species that have literally reached the end of their evolutionary line. An "underworld library of death", the archive could be mistaken, from the street, for a "factory, / not the stilly realm where Persephone sits enthroned // and Nature ticks the extinction boxes one by one; / Hades arrived at by airlock and a puddle" (188). The place is the "last bolt-hole" of the endangered nonhuman species whose existence now pertains solely in their taxonomic inscription in the archive: "each species / inscribed with the place and the date / of a hunt" (188).

dissolving in the wake of the world's material surfeit; the Mirror of Nature is cracking, and along with it all of the linguistic tropes that have sustained the anthropocentric belief in humans' innate right to control it:

> Our relation with nature is ambivalent, and it's changing. We feel we have a right to control it, but we also like to use it as a mirror, something to think with about ourselves. Strong as an oak, free as a bird. But as the planet changes, the mirror is cracking. We can't use water and snow as images of purity now the seas are full of particles of our plastic, and layers of the carbon we loose into the air are embedded like tree rings under the North Pole. (183)

In a nod towards Lynn White Jr's controversial charge against the Judeo-Christian Bible's "huge burden of guilt" (White 12) for granting humans dominion over the whole earth,[8] Padel excoriates the "jaw-cracking lies" Western humanity has smugly subscribed to:

> *Eden*, they say, as they always have.
> All this is Creation, made for us to enjoy.
> What can we do with a mind
> that told itself jaw-cracking lies
> then patted itself on the back? That knew
> it was a bit of a bastard, but richer for the devil
> in it; always so sure it was washable-clean
> and could be redeemed by worldwater – so pure,
> so green – and by *religio*, meaning 'a tie'?
>
> But no tie endures. … (191)

The dissolving of the religious tie entails the dissolution of all the boundaries that have sustained and organized what Bruno Latour, following Alfred North Whitehead, has called the Great Bifurcation, that is "the division … between appearances and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, history and immutability" (Latour 476), as well as between "human destiny (microcosm) and nonhuman destiny (macrocosm) [which] are now entangled for everyone to see (contrary to the strange dream of Bifurcation)" (484). This is Padel's premise too, in seeking to present human migration as "part of animal

[8] White claims that, "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" inasmuch as "no item in [God's] physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image" (9).

migration," a premise she drives home by making us feel and share in the experience of being "other," of being part of the nonhuman. Poems that espouse the point of view of the migrating cell or parasite, or that explain the world in terms of the contribution of something as apparently insignificant as the apple seed, all aim at dispelling anthropocentric hubris by bringing to our attention the multiple agencies of the nonhuman with which our existence is enmeshed and on which it is largely dependent.

Other poems seek to transgress the species boundary in an attempt "to move animal experience into human language" as Gillian Beer has put it (Beer 2005: 319). Padel's "Dunlin" shifts the focalisation to that of migrating birds flying in V-formation while maintaining anthropomorphic terms like "neighbour" and "lift":

> my wing pushes down
> making upwash off the tip
> which my neighbour taps
> and gets his lift for free. (42)

"Pregnant Gazelle" uses *prosopopaeia* to address the reader-as-migrating-animal:

> You're in your worst dream.
> An hour to giving birth
> and you've got to get over a river
> piled with split bodies. (113)

Such shifts in focalisation "strive to do justice to the nonhuman as an agent in its own right" (Clark 195) but inevitably run up against the challenge of how to convey an animal's sense of its own environment in human language. The poem entitled "How does a zebra decide?" (112) is likely to remain forever an unanswered question.

It is tempting to see poetic endeavours to think from other-than-human perspectives in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's intriguing notion of "becoming-animal." As Calarco points out, "becoming-animal" does not entail actually being an animal, nor even imitating or identifying with animals, but implies being transformed by an encounter with nonhuman perspectives (Calarco 42). As such, it is, as Clark shows, a concept "primarily designed to undo humanist conceptions of superiority and sovereignty" (Clark 198) through "a letting go of the illusory fixity of the conventionally human standpoint and a becoming open to otherwise unimagined modes of perception and sense" (ibid.). Padel undertakes to

present the reader with "unimagined modes of perception and sense" with her lyrical use of technical and botanical terminology in "Pregnant Gazelle" (*cauline, axil, bract, petiole, glumes*) to describe the intimate tri-partite structure of a blade of grass that offers nutrients to three different animals:

> By the time she heaves
>
> out of the river and drops her fawn,
> zebra molars are stripping the serrate
> leaf margins of new grass
> and rough cauline outer layers
>
> and ten thousand wildebeest
> grazing lower axils, where each petiole
> joins the stem, have exposed
> the glabrous shoots, bracts, umbrels,
>
> the branching lobes, paired glumes
> and tender root-scales
> of spikelets she can eat. … (113-114)

As well as offering a scale of observation imperceptible to the human eye, the effect of any use of scientific or technical language in literary works will, as Beer has observed, "stretch the reader's experience beyond the ordinary registers of sense-experience" (Beer 1996: 186). It is an experience also advocated by Jane Bennett as a salutary way to abandon the anthropocentric perspective: "*to stretch and strain* those modes to make room for the outlooks, rhythms, and trajectories of a greater number of actants, to, that is, get a better sense of the 'operating system' upon which we humans rely" (Bennett 2015: 231; emphasis mine). Padel's extensive incorporation into her poetry of terminology borrowed from the field of science partakes of her defamiliarizing use of language to prise the reader away from a comfortable reading experience.

Similarly, her questioning of the habitual use of prepositions of place and movement, such as "out" and "back" in the language of natural history commentators, when combined with the theme of migration, unsettles and reorients our ways of seeing and thinking about issues such as home, belonging, identity, centre, and periphery. Ornithologists "talk of going 'out' from a nesting ground to a winter feeding area and 'back' in spring, but what does this language mean?" she asks (64). To say, as Padel's bird book does, that a bird is "at heart an African bird" suggests to the poet that, "there's something upside down in this picture. These birds winter in Africa, but does

that mean this is where they're 'from'?" (65) In the same vein, the Royal Oak, regarded as an "emblem of England", is one of thirty-three so-called "native" trees, although its DNA reveals it was in fact a post-glacial migrant from the Iberian peninsula (18): "Did oak trees spread to England after the ice age or colonise it? Shift the language and you shift the perspective" (121).

By insistently urging us to "shift the perspective," to leave behind our conventional ways of perceiving and talking about the material world and our place in it, to see it as a much wider field of agency in which human perception, thought, and identity are enmeshed, Padel invites us to become migrants too because as she puts it: "Migration means leaving things behind you. It moves you into a disoriented world which doesn't add up in the way you are used to. You have to start putting things together in a new way" (152). The artist is, of course, often said to be an "inner émigré" (240), a stranger in her own land, one adept at shifting her perspective, at putting words and things together in surprising and revealing new ways to create new cultural life. "Words migrate too", writes Padel (98), and the word "Mara" exemplifies the creation of new cultural life in the multiple translations it has undergone, combining the Latin for "bitter" with the Sanskrit for "obstacle" and figures from North European folklore and Buddhism where it designates respectively a demon of horror and death, and of illusion and deception. By phonetic accident it resembles the Masai name for the river at the end of the wildebeest's journey and so comes to represent for Padel a compound of all these meanings, "bitter losses, struggle, barriers and obstacles but also the triumph of survival" (217). In stretching the sense of the word *Mara* and the word "migration"; in directing our gaze to the small agencies of the all the "matter on the move" around the world through strategic anthropomorphism that allows us, in Bennett's words, to "relax into resemblances discerned across ontological divides" (Bennett 2010: 119-20); in performing its multiple crossings between poetry and prose, biology and history, zoology and literature, daily life and the long perspective of evolutionary time, Padel's composite work strives to make us feel the "liveliness of things" both human and nonhuman in ways that might perhaps help to chasten our fantasies of human mastery and to promote "greener forms of human culture" (Bennett 2010: 108, x).

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