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Locating the Animal in Emily Dickinson's Poem "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -"

Локализация животности
в стихотворении Эмили Дикинсон
«Я слышала, жужжала Муха,
когда я умирала»

Абстракт

В статье исследуется проблема поэтического представления анимальности без традиционной дихотомии человек/животное. Автор утверждает, что стихотворение затрагивает вопрос о животной природе *Homo sapiens* через изображение взаимодействия умирающего человека с насекомым. Присутствие насекомого препятствует восприятию лирическим субъектом идеи бессмертия. Локализация анимальности достигается путем разрушения героических нарративов, что способствует более полному раскрытию ограниченности человеческого существования. Животное в человеке оказывается локализованным в его смертной биологической сущности и интегрированным в семиотическую систему.

Ключевые слова: животное, анимальность, поэзия, ограниченность, постгуманизм

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Abstract

The article explores the problem of poetically presenting animality without reinforcing the conventional human/animal distinction. The article argues that the poem addresses the issue of locating animality within *Homo sapiens* by its poetic rendering of an interaction between a dying human and an insect. The insect's presence makes the vision of immortality inaccessible to the lyrical speaker. Locating animality is achieved by undermining heroic narratives, which leads to a fuller revelation of the human's finitude. The animal within the human being turns out to be located in their finitude determined by the mortal biological constitution and embeddedness in a semiotic system.

Keywords: animal, animality, poetry, finitude, posthumanism

The discipline of animal studies creates a promising area of posthumanist inquiry into the discourse surrounding species relations in texts of culture. However, finding the proper approach to conducting it might prove challenging. Cary Wolfe explains that to address issues of interest within animal studies adequately, one must focus not only on the thematic aspect of the studied material but also on the methodology of studying that object of knowledge called “the animal.”¹ In other words, it is not enough to study the non-human subject. It is also important to critically approach how that subject is studied. One of the challenges that Wolfe presents animal studies with is the question of “locating the animal” in a way that does not reinforce the human/animal dichotomy.² The mode of being inherent to animality, and therefore to the status of an animal that allows an object of study to be analyzed within the framework of animal studies, should be shared by all members of the animal kingdom. Since *Homo sapiens* belong to this kingdom, it seems that Wolfe’s assertion that “the animal of animal studies” can be located not only “among the birds and beasts” but also “at the very heart of this thing we call human” should prove true.³ The animal studies researcher must adopt a nondiscriminatory approach to identifying animality. They should not presuppose the exclusion of *Homo sapiens* from the area of interest. The same is true for a poet who wishes to explore the issue of animal identity in their literary work. However, in order to locate animality within a human being, the poet may find it necessary to dismantle certain narratives that lie at the foundation of the human/animal distinction. Interestingly, it seems that such a phenomenon can be found in Emily Dickinson’s poem “I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -,” and it is achieved through a poetic rendering of an interaction of a dying human and an insect.

In this article, it will be argued that in her poem “I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -,” Dickinson adequately addresses the problem of locating animality within *Homo sapiens* by poetically rendering its interaction with a species of insect at the moment of the human’s biological death. Heroic narratives on which the human/animal distinction is based are undermined, and the difference between the two species is reduced to a common denominator, namely their finitude. The poem will be analyzed using theoretical tools sourced from the works of Ernest Becker, a twentieth-century cultural anthropologist, and Cary Wolfe, a contemporary posthumanist philosopher. The article will begin by presenting the theoretical framework of the conducted analysis. Then, it will move on to analyzing Dickinson’s poem. Finally, the article will end by presenting the study’s findings and drawing conclusions.

¹ Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 99.

² Cary Wolfe, “Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities,” *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): 572. *JSTOR*, accessed March 7, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25614299>.

³ Wolfe, “Human, All Too Human,” 572.

Locating the animal is sure to bring a more conclusive answer in biology than in literary studies. According to Eldra Solomon, Linda Berg and Diana Martin's book on biology, organisms classified as animals must be eucaryotic, multicellular and heterotrophic. Additionally, many animals can be characterized by varied, specialized tissues and a nervous system, as well as the ability to move with the use of muscle contraction, which is an adaptation that most of them possess.⁴ What is more, their cells do not have a cell wall.⁵ When a species meets the requirements mentioned above, there should be no problem with asserting its belonging to the animal kingdom. Such seems to be the case with *Homo sapiens*, as it is classified as a species of primates, which are an order of the animal class Mammalia.⁶ In other words, biology seems to have conclusively located *Homo sapiens* within the animal kingdom. It is essential to address why this identification of the animal is more challenging to make in the context of literary studies. In his book, *What Is Posthumanism?*, Wolfe references what he calls "the fundamental anthropological dogma," which asserts that "the human" is achieved by escaping or repressing not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment.⁷ In other words, the human/animal distinction is sustained by the fact that the human being represses the biological and physical dimension of its being, justifying its unique status among species by locating its "humanity" beyond the sphere of material embodiment. The phenomenon which has drawn much attention of scholars is the repression by *Homo sapiens* of the very species' biological existence. In fact, the theme of the human species' denial of its embeddedness in nature has been noted by various researchers and authors writing on posthumanism and animal studies. For example, in his article on Theodor Adorno and a posthumanist approach to analyzing international relations, Stephen Hobden observes that the "separation of the human from the rest of nature," which humanity attempts to achieve, "requires the denial of the nature that lies within the human."⁸ Of course, this nature that is internal to the human includes the species' own animal attributes. The denial of these characteristics, which include the finitude of physical embodiment, leads to the denial of animal identity as a whole. The status of the human being as an animal is therefore subjected to the process of repression, which is a psychoanalytical concept referring

⁴ Eldra P. Solomon et al., *Biologia*, trans. Barbara Bilińska et al. (Warszawa: Multico Oficyna Wydawcza, 2011): 486.

⁵ Solomon et al., *Biologia*, 85.

⁶ Solomon et al., *Biologia*, 466–467.

⁷ Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, xv.

⁸ Stephen Hobden, "Being 'a Good Animal': Adorno, Posthumanism, and International Relations," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 40, nos. 3/4 (2015): 254. JSTOR, accessed January 31, 2025, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24569461>.

to a phenomenon that Peter Barry describes as “‘forgetting’ or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events so that they are forced out of conscious awareness.”⁹ This is precisely the problem that a literary studies researcher may encounter when trying to locate the animal in a non-discriminatory manner. Since the animality of *Homo sapiens* is psychologically removed to the sphere of the unconscious, it can easily be forgotten and overlooked. Because literary studies is a discipline belonging to the humanities, it can find itself prone to unconsciously granting humans a special status and excluding *Homo sapiens* from all animal-oriented considerations. The literary scholar who wishes to move beyond the human/animal distinction must remain exceedingly vigilant, so that they do not let the fact of human animality leave their consciousness.

The same applies to the practice of poetry. Namely, the poet who wishes to address the issue of species relations in regards to *Homo sapiens* and other animals must try to bring human animality to the consciousness of the readers. To understand how this can be achieved, one must first identify the reason behind the repression of human animality. Ernest Becker has offered one perspective on this issue in his book, *The Denial of Death*, where he argues that the “idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity—activity designed [...] to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man.”¹⁰ To support his argument, he describes the mechanics of how the mortality of the human being is repressed in human psychology and culture. Throughout his book, the repression of death seems deeply interwoven with the repression of the animal self. Indeed, Becker proposes a model of human identity based on a dichotomy resembling that of the human/animal distinction. According to Becker, a human is “half animal and half symbolic.”¹¹ The animal part of human identity corresponds to its biological constitution, that is, the embodiment along with its finitude. The symbolic half corresponds to the human’s ability to form complex abstract thought, to imagine things beyond nature, to be aware of its name and of its history. The coexistence of these two parts creates what Becker calls “the condition of individuality within finitude” and engenders a paradoxical state of being “out of nature” as a symbolic subject with pretensions to uniqueness and exceptionality while remaining “hopelessly in it” as a mortal creature with a biological constitution.¹² *Homo sapiens* emerge as creatures conscious of their finitude. This consciousness causes the species to feel anxiety about its condition, which is “to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feeling [...] and with all this yet

⁹ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, 4th edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 97–98.

¹⁰ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (London: Souvenir Press, 2011), xvii.

¹¹ Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 26.

¹² Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 26.

to die.”¹³ Thus, the repression of animality awareness observable in the cultures of *Homo sapiens* emerges as an evolutionary adaptation to cope with the fear of death, a severe problem for an animal capable of exhaustive reflection on its individuality and mortality. By developing this model of human identity, Becker seems not only to have located the animal within *Homo sapiens*, but also to have projected the human/animal distinction onto the human being itself. In other words, from Becker’s analysis we can conclude that the source of this distinction is so deeply entrenched in the human way of looking at the world of living beings, because it is evolutionarily instilled within them and structures their identity. We can also understand that the function of the cultural reinforcement of this distinction is the alleviation of the anxiety caused by the awareness of mortality. Consequently, the theme of finitude emerges as a potential poetic tool for locating the animal within the human being.

However, the limitations of embodiment are not the only finitude humans share with non-humans. Invoking the theories of Jacques Derrida, Wolfe explains that “there are two kinds of finitude” which concern the human. One is the finitude of “physical vulnerability, embodiment, and eventually mortality,” and another is the subjection to a semiotic system.¹⁴ This second finitude can be understood as the embeddedness in a system of communication and discourse which, while giving humans the means to refer to themselves and create autobiographic narratives, is exterior to an individual. It shapes species relations independently of the interacting specimens, as the forms in which they can address each other have been developed through long processes that they individually had no part in creating. It determines how *Homo sapiens* conceptualize, recognize, and articulate relations with nonhumans.¹⁵ As Wolfe explains, “the estranging prostheticity and exteriority of communication” emerges as a condition “shared by humans and nonhumans the moment they begin to respond to each other using any semiotic system.”¹⁶ The state of permeation of the cultural discourse with the human/animal distinction is a condition which both *Homo sapiens* and other species are confined to. What is essential is that the second finitude causes the finitude of biological embodiment and mortality to become “*inappropriateable*” (emphasis in Wolfe) to the human being.¹⁷ The embeddedness in the semiotic system constructed to repress the animality of the human being is an obstacle in reaching awareness of the finitude of embodiment. Thus, if

¹³ Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 87.

¹⁴ Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, 118–119.

¹⁵ Cary Wolfe, “Second Finitude, or the Technics of Address: A Response,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 47, no. 4 (2014): 555. JSTOR, accessed October 5, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/phil rhet.47.4.0554>.

¹⁶ Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, 119.

¹⁷ Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, 118.

a poet wants to present the physical finitude as a link between human and non-human species, they should also address the finitude constituted by communication or discourse.

In Becker's theory, culture emerges as a vital facilitator of human animality repression. It develops a system of heroics, which assigns symbolic meaning to human existence and activity, so that individuals can "earn a feeling of primary value."¹⁸ Heroic narratives help *Homo sapiens* focus on their symbolic identity, simultaneously repressing their animality awareness. They give structure to human exceptionalism, which constitutes a basis of the human/animal distinction. Perhaps it is through the poetic dismantling of these heroic narratives that the poet can overcome the obstacle of the finitude of communication and make the awareness of biological finitude shared by human and non-human animals accessible to the reader. In this way, they might achieve a nondiscriminatory rendering of species relations.

This undermining of heroic narratives to bring forth the presence of physical finitude and locate the animal within *Homo sapiens* can be observed in Dickinson's poem "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -." Dickinson wrote about death extensively. As Ruth Flanders McNaughton notes, a large part of her poems "deal directly with Death," a word which the writer "almost always capitalized."¹⁹ We can thus assume that the question of mortality was of great importance to the writer. The poem is written from the perspective of a dead lyrical speaker who recounts the moment of their death. In their last moment, they gain awareness of a fly buzzing somewhere in the room. We can assume that the speaker is a *Homo sapiens* by the circumstances of their passing, namely that they are in a "Room" surrounded by "The Eyes around," which signifies people gathered around a deathbed. Thus, the poem offers us a deathbed scene with the dying human subject being observed by their close ones, who are also *Homo sapiens*. The speaker notes that the breaths of the humans are "gathering firm / For that last Onset - when the King / Be witnessed - in the Room." Then, the moment of death comes and the buzzing of the fly becomes audible. The speaker describes this experience thusly:

I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable - and then it was
There interposed a Fly

¹⁸ Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 5.

¹⁹ Ruth Flanders McNaughton, "Emily Dickinson on Death," *Prairie Schooner* 23, no. 2 (1949): 203. JSTOR, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40624107>.

With Blue - uncertain - Buzz -
Between the light - and me -
And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see - ²⁰

Multiple interpretations of the poem have been proposed, and the buzz of the insect has been assigned various roles. In his essay, Thomas Ford provides a short list of those interpretations. Some researchers see the fly's buzz as a tool for achieving irony. Another theory proposes that it represents the intrusion of the physical world upon the perspective of spiritual life, and yet another establishes the fly as a signifier of the final signs of waning vitality.²¹ Ford argues that the poem constitutes a response to transcendental pronouncements by Henry David Thoreau, who seems to propose that observing the natural world can lead to cosmic revelations. Dickinson's poem indicates otherwise, namely that "man's transcendental aspirations will remain unfulfilled," and the fly represents "life unfiltered by the metaphysics of Transcendentalism." This is because its observation does not yield to the human observer any transcendental truth. It provides the dying speaker with a "terrestrial" experience instead of a "cosmic" one.²² The presence of the fly emerges as a poetic tool to dismantle the heroic narrative of the ability of *Homo sapiens* to gain contact with an immaterial dimension of existence.

The chief way in which the poem undermines heroic narratives is the substitution of the "King's" onset with the fly's interposition. The breaths of the humans are "gathering firm" in anticipation of "that last Onset - when the King / Be witnessed - in the Room."²³ The onset of the King signifies a revelation of a higher being who comes to take the human soul into the afterlife. The humans in the poem are awaiting such revelation because their focus is placed on the symbolic self of the dying speaker, repressing the awareness of the lyrical subject's biological finitude. The revelation of a higher being would affirm the heroic narrative of the human's exceptional status. The observers and the dying speaker all await the coming of "the King" because the expectation of immortal metaphysical life is integral to their code of heroics. However, no such revelation comes. Instead of a higher being, a fly appears, who "interposes" on the scene. Using the verb "interpose" is crucial, as it implies that the insect inserts itself between two objects, preventing them from

²⁰ Emily Dickinson, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died - (591)," *Poetry Foundation*, accessed October 12, 2024, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45703/i-heard-a-fly-buzz-when-i-died-591>.

²¹ Thomas Ford, "Thoreau's Cosmic Mosquito and Dickinson's Terrestrial Fly," *The New England Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1975): 495. JSTOR, accessed February 26, 2024, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/364634>.

²² Ford, "Thoreau's Cosmic Mosquito," 500.

²³ Dickinson, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died - (591)."

achieving an end. The fly lodges itself in-between the dying speaker and the “light,” which signifies a continued existence in a spiritual realm. Its presence becomes an obstacle that renders the revelation of the afterlife impossible. This impossibility comes from the function which Dickinson assigned to the non-human animal in the scene. As noted by Sam S. Baskett, “the fly is an active, immediate agent as it looms [...] in the speaker’s final consciousness, at the very heart of the feeling/ meaning of the poem as well as at the obliterating presence at the death.”²⁴ By looming in the human’s consciousness at the moment of death, the insect acts as a signifier of animality, which brings the animal half of human identity into the consciousness of the speaker. As the fly’s buzz becomes central to the scene, so does animality. At the moment of death, the human becomes aware of their biological finitude. It is not a higher being that the speaker is faced with, but an animal which manifests itself both in the buzzing of the fly and the human’s own expiring body. The anticipated triumph of the symbolic self, signified by “the King,” is substituted by the undeniable presence of the animal self, “a Fly.” The heroic narrative of continued disembodied existence is made inaccessible by the insect’s interposition. Thus, the animality of the human is revealed in the form of its most terrifying implication – mortality.

It is important to note that using this device does not necessarily imply an atheistic pronouncement. According to McNaughton, while Dickinson was not a professed Christian, she was also not an atheist, and her inclinations would probably be most accurately described as agnostic.²⁵ It seems that the access to transcendental revelations is rendered inaccessible to the speaker precisely in order for the human to face the actuality of finitude. There is no definite pronouncement that the afterlife does not exist, but it is nevertheless withdrawn from the scene and does not manifest itself to the dying *Homo sapiens*. This is a recurring theme in Dickinson’s oeuvre. As rightly observed by Douglas Anderson, the poet often hints at “continuations in which we do not participate.”²⁶ Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the poem asserts the inexistence of the afterlife. The heroic narratives are undermined not in order to reject spirituality or religion, but in order to focus the reader’s attention entirely on the material aspect of mortality. The author refuses to offer any affirmation of narratives that sustain the symbolic self, so that the animal self’s presence can manifest itself uninterrupted. In this way, the poet circumvents the discourse surrounding *Homo sapiens* as an exceptional species, preventing the speaker, and consequently the reader, from gaining access to heroic narratives of immor-

²⁴ Sam S. Baskett, “The Making of an Image: Emily Dickinson’s Blue Fly,” *The New England Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2008): 343. JSTOR, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20474633>.

²⁵ McNaughton, “Emily Dickinson on Death,” 207.

²⁶ Douglas Anderson, “Presence and Place in Emily Dickinson’s Poetry,” *The New England Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (1984): 218. JSTOR, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/364993>.

tality. Thus, the biological finitude shared by the two interacting species can enter the reader's awareness unhindered.

There are two chief reasons why the fly is so effective in poetically bringing forth human animality. Firstly, these insects are known to detect decomposing matter, including dead bodies, and lay their eggs therein. Carrion provides the eggs with moisture and safety, and once they hatch, it becomes a food source for the maggots.²⁷ Therefore, their presence is associated with mortality, the most dire consequence of being an animal. Secondly, insects possess certain properties that seem instinctively discomforting to humans. Jeffrey A. Lockwood enumerates six chief fear-evoking phenomena associated with insects. He argues that insects are able to "invade our homes and bodies," "evade us through quick, unpredictable movements," "undergo rapid population growth," "harm us," "instill a disturbing sense of otherness," as well as "defy our will and control." Thus, they can "invade, evade, overwhelm, attack, perturb, and defy" human beings.²⁸ These characteristics generally cause insects to be unsettling animals for *Homo sapiens* to interact with. Since contact with insects is seen as discomforting, then it seems fitting that it is by their presence that the poet would try to bring forth the uncomfortable revelation of the human's animal finitude.

The interaction of the human and the fly in the poem also addresses the second type of finitude. The animal condition of mortality becomes present in the scene as a consequence of undermining the heroic narrative of spiritual immortality. As the reality of physical finitude dawns on the speaker, they are allowed to assess their relationship with the other species honestly. However, as this opportunity presents itself, they can no longer "see to see."²⁹ The phrase "see to see" uses two meanings of the word. The verb "see" means not only *to perceive*, but also *to understand*. According to Jeffrey Simmons, "Dickinson's epistemology prizes keen perception as a way to embody knowledge of the world and of ourselves."³⁰ In other words, in the poet's works, perceptual experience serves as a locus and means of reflection. At the moment of death, the speaker loses their eyesight. Therefore, any perception on which they can gain knowledge becomes inaccessible. Even though they are now ready to face the fly as a fellow animal, they are frustratingly unable to. The fly does not manifest itself visually as an object to reflect on or as a subject with which to

²⁷ Denise Gemmellaro, "The Flies and Beetles That Turn Death Into Dinner," *Entomology Today*, 2017, accessed October 12, 2024, <https://entomologytoday.org/2017/10/03/the-flies-and-beetles-that-turn-death-into-dinner/>.

²⁸ Jeffrey A. Lockwood, *The Infested Mind: Why Humans Fear, Loathe, and Love Insects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 37.

²⁹ Dickinson, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died - (591)."

³⁰ Jeffrey Simmons, "Dickinson's Senses of Experience," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 65, no. 1 (2020): 23. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45390353>.

establish a relationship. The lyrical subject hears the buzz but cannot see the fly. This indicates that the awareness of animality lingers in the speaker's consciousness but cannot manifest itself fully. The human finds it impossible to address the fly from the newly gained perspective.

This failure of vision renders the speaker's reflection on animality impossible. They remain firmly embedded in the two finitudes, that of embodiment and that of discourse. Even at their deathbed the human being finds it impossible to overcome the preestablished modes of thinking and fully realize their animal condition, which they share with the insect. However, as the reader gains access to the speaker's experience, they are free to reflect and reach conclusions, which the lyrical subject was unable to arrive at. The undermining of heroic narratives followed by showcasing human limitations allows the reader to locate the animal in the scene, and its location manifests itself in the finitude of the dying *Homo sapiens*, as well as in the insect accompanying them.

In conclusion, Dickinson's poem "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -" achieves the goal of locating animality through undermining heroic narratives, consequently creating a possibility for bringing forth the awareness of finitude – the condition that emerges as the location of the animal identity. Dickinson begins by undermining the notion of continued existence beyond the material world by making the vision of the afterlife inaccessible for the speaker. This is achieved by placing a non-human species between the lyrical subject and the spiritual realm, substituting the presence of a higher being with that of an animal. It is essential that the species is an insect, as these animals are conventionally perceived as unsettling by *Homo sapiens*, and this quality mirrors the unsettling nature of mortality awareness entering the human consciousness. The moment of death signifies biological finitude, whereas the human inability to observe and understand the non-human species signifies the finitude of embeddedness in a semiotic system. Dickinson not only locates animality in the finitude of *Homo sapiens*, but also crafts a poetic commentary on humanity's difficulty in relating to non-human species. The most important conclusion from the analysis is that to poetically locate the animal without reinforcing the human/animal distinction, the poet can explore the finitude of the creature in question. To do so for *Homo sapiens*, the writer can choose to undermine the heroic narratives which enable the awareness of human animality to remain out of the reader's consciousness. By doing so they can enable finitude, the locus of animality, to genuinely reveal itself.

In view of the presented analysis, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -" emerges as a literary work containing markedly posthumanist themes. Dickinson's poem does not present the human as a being able to easily transcend its biological existence, but rather as a creature that is deeply dependent on its embodiment and firmly embedded in the material world. The author achieves this effect by using the undermining

of heroic narratives as a poetic device. It allows the poet to focus the attention of the reader on the physical aspect of human death. The emphasis on the material world which the poem offers in its representation of dying renders the theme of finitude more effective. It allows the reader to gain awareness of the human's limited biological constitution and the human species' embeddedness in the physical world. It is as a consequence of this focus on materiality that the animal identity of *Homo sapiens* reveals itself in the poem. Moreover, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -" showcases how conducive the presence of a non-human animal is to poetically locating animality within the human. Once the notion of *Homo sapiens*' exceptionalism becomes undermined in the poem, the proximity of the non-human to the human allows the reader to make an immediate connection between the two creatures. Their shared animal identity becomes readily apparent. This revelation of a common identity shared by the human and the non-human further emphasizes the posthumanist character of the poem.

Although Dickinson's poetry has been studied extensively, its complexity demands novel analyses. The posthumanist dimension of the poem has not been exhausted as a research area. For example, visuality seems to play a key role in the poem's undermining of anthropocentric heroic narratives. It is the failure of the speaker's vision which brings the work to its conclusion and ultimately reveals the human speaker's finitude. It would benefit our understanding of the poem to more comprehensively address the theme of sight from the perspective of posthumanist philosophy. The "essentially prosthetic nature of the visual" is an important topic in Wolfe's *What Is Posthumanism?*³¹ Therefore, it should be possible for the researcher to find adequate theoretical tools for such an undertaking. The withdrawal of visuality might likely be even more significant to the posthumanist reading of the poem than this article asserts. Perhaps analyzing Dickinson's verse from this perspective would continue to deepen our understanding of this complex piece of poetry.

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³¹ Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, 131.

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