

'A Moon Without Metaphors': Memory, Wilderness, and the Nocturnal in the Poetry of Don McKay

Joanna Dawson (University of Victoria)¹

Abstract:¹

This article seeks to interrogate Don McKay's body of poetry through the lens of his own critical writings, with a particular focus on poems linking representations of the nocturnal with his concept of "wilderness," which he defines as the ability of all things to "elude the mind's appropriations" ("Baler Twine" 21). In McKay's poetry, night is variously the time of shape-shifting, de-materialization, memory, and non-empirical knowledge, all of which require a re-investigation of the division between inner and outer, memory and experience, and between naming and knowing. At the same time, the article highlights poetic strategies used by an artist who loves the natural world as much as, if not more than, the language in which he renders it. As such, the nuances that assert and describe "otherness" are sharpened; by the same token, the non-human wilderness and the one inherent in human systems of language are shown to imply one another. The uncomfortable space beyond empirical knowledge—and beyond the epistemological convenience of a dichotomy between self and other that such a mode of knowledge introduces—is one that the night forces upon the mind as the latter is reminded of "another gravity" that, even if unseen, remains at work. It is this explanation of the other as "another gravity" that informs much of McKay's poetry, and that forms the basis for his critical writings about human relationships with the environment beyond mere relationships of utility.

*"[...] [...] There's
a sorrow that's so old and silver it's no longer
sorry. There's a place
between desire and memory, some back porch
we can neither wish for nor recall."*

(McKay, "Song for the Song of the Wood Thrush," *Camber* 125, ll. 6-10).

¹ Joanne Dawson, Department of English, University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 1N4 jldawson@ucalgary.ca

In his essay "The Bushtits' Nest," Don McKay explores and recreates the experience of the Biblical Adam's task of applying names to the natural world. Initially brimming with enthusiasm and to his great personal satisfaction, Adam assigns names to the flora and fauna, honoring God's "love of code" (91); however, waking in the middle of the night, Adam is no longer pleased with his choice of the name "Screech Owl," among others, and now sees the name as a constricting "cage for the bird which could be set down in one place or another in the sentence" (91). Night is the site of Adam's disillusionment with the imprecision of nomenclature, with him realizing that, under the auspices of the lunar, the nocturnal invades diurnal reality and wilderness invades language. The darkness reveals an unfamiliar, mutable side of the natural world not visible at the time of naming, and a bewildered Adam wonders "Would the whole ceremony have to be done again under the moon's changing eye? Would everything have to have a day name and a night name?" (91). In Don McKay's poetry, night is variously the time of shape-shifting, de-materialization, memory, and non-empirical knowledge, all of which require a re-investigation of the division between inner and outer, memory and experience, and between naming and knowing.

Night undermines the exactitude of definition and reminds us that there is a point at which categories become obscured, even eclipsed, and that while the mind may try to drape itself over the external world, there is a kind of wilderness in everything which resists transmission. Don McKay has described this inherent space beyond time and memory as "[...] a loneliness/which must be entered rather than resolved,[...]" ("On Leaving," *Camber* 201, ll. 20-21). In the same way that the moon illuminates the night, McKay's poetry operates like night vision (Michaels 180),² and while not attempting to de-code the nocturnal or the wild, his verse demonstrates that they can be commented on and interacted with meaningfully and ethically by entering this space beyond memory and desire. McKay's definition of "wilderness," which will be used throughout the discussion, is "not just a set of endangered spaces, but the capacity of all things to elude the mind's appropriations" ("Baler Twine" 21). This paper seeks to link the representations of the nocturnal in McKay's body of poetry with his formulation of "wilderness" as a space beyond utility, and it also highlights how his poetry articulates its subject matter without appropriating it. Relying on the phenomenological insight that the perceiver is inextricably part of the perceived,³ the following exploration of the nocturnal in McKay's poetry tries to articulate a distinctive understanding of wilderness, and by extension, of how ethical relationships are to be established with it.

Eclipse, Nightmare, and Shape-shifting: The Dark Side of the Moon

The exploration of the nocturnal is a recurrent one in McKay's work, as exemplified by the titles of two of his poetry collections, namely *Sanding Down This Rocking Chair on a Windy Night* (1987) and *Night Field* (1991). Spanning his entire career, this focus on the nocturnal can also be found in other collections such as *Birding, or Desire* (1983) and *Another Gravity* (2000), with individual poem titles like "Fridge Nocturne" (*Camber* 10), "Dusk" (*Camber* 6), "Pausing by Moonlight Beside a Field of Dandelions Gone to Seed" (*Camber* 35), "Dark of the Moon" (*Camber* 165), "Before the Moon" (*Camber* 174) and "Nocturnal Migrants" (*Camber* 178). Often in McKay's work, day is the time for naming, viewing, classifying, creating order, and, as described in "Twinflower" (*Camber* 110-112), implementing the "[...] bright/reticulated snaps of system" (*Camber* 111, ll. 39-40). Night, however, corresponds to a force that obscures that which was clearly visible and

thus empirically classifiable by day, often complicating the unerring faith in human reason that is engendered by these organizing activities. This description of night reads in close keeping with what he describes elsewhere as the “wilderness” inherent in all things natural and man-made. A telling point of intersection in McKay’s poetry is one at which a human mind, clinging to its categories, fears, and concepts of duality, encounters the unfamiliar, the wild—and at times the chaotic—in the form of the night. And when the mind tries to establish order and domination over the darkness which eclipses it, tyranny ensues.

In “Nocturnal Animals” (*Camber* 9), the speaker introduces the issue of consumption by describing how “[...] Southern Ontario/ surrounds this kitchen like well-fed flesh” (ll. 1-2), the wilderness figured in terms of its suitability for slaughter. The poem also speaks well to this human-order/wilderness-disorder dichotomy by situating the human in the centre, recalling if not invoking the worldview of humanism.⁴ After musing about how if he or she had a cigarette, he or she would “[...] smoke it like an angry campfire/ burn it into the unblemished body of the night,” the speaker delves into a story in which a pack of wolves “took shape” in a town called Lobo, named after a species of small wolves that has been nearly decimated due in part to over-hunting. The description of the wolves not as simply appearing or emerging from the darkness, but as taking shape relates to the association of night with shape-shifting and with terror. Alanna F. Bondar writes: “stories of human-animal mutations, particularly those transformations that occur at night, imply a cultural fear of wilderness and the human wilderness link completed only in nightmarish vision” (79). Not only do people fear wilderness in and of itself, they also dread the possibility of being taken over by it; night, as described here, is a site of sublimation, disintegration, and terror.

Enticed by the smell of “[...] an automated pig barn/waiting for them like an all-night restaurant” (*Camber* 9, ll. 22-23), the wolves naturally leave Lobo, “[...] lifting the tombstone of its name” (*Camber* 9, l. 17). Connected with the later description of the wolves as “spectral,” implying a ghostly and immaterial presence, the image of the tombstone opening so that they can emerge also links up with the animals’ haunting of the speaker with a reminder of the atrocity of the species’ near-extinction. Unfortunately, the pig barn associated with the human convenience of an all-night restaurant leads the wolves to their death, and as a result of human contact, they are “Shot,/their bodies wisped away, [...]” (*Camber* 9, ll. 25-26), and dematerialized. The ethical impetus of this dissolution of form points to a tendency to minimize environmental concerns in the sense that if something is immaterial, it does not have to be protected or even considered.⁵

Playing with the stock trope of death as eternal night and endless sleep, the title “Nocturnal Animals” implies that the wolves are not just literally nocturnal, but are also figuratively so because they are dead. By extension, the night imposed by humans is one of violence and death, not of regeneration, transformation or union. The decimation of the Lobo population adds another dimension to the title because it is not just a few wolves in particular that have been killed—the species as a whole has entered the dark night of its existence. In contrast to the human impulse to “automate” (*Camber* 9, l. 17), modify and build, the wolves’ only action was that of being animal and following their nature in an attempt to survive. McKay is not necessarily even suggesting that it was wrong for the farmer to protect the source of his/her livelihood, or stating that it was indeed a farmer that shot the wolves at all; he does, however, point out a serious flaw in a biotic system that results when consideration of the wild is not included. The poem ends by describing the wolves’ eyes as “stubbed out,” connecting with the earlier image

of the cigarette the speaker imagines burning into the night. The action of stubbing out indicates the power to extinguish or destroy, which demonstrates that the distribution of power between the shooter and the wolves is not equal, and even if both human and wolf are attempting to meet the same survival-oriented needs, it follows from the logic of the poem that the ability to “stub” life out requires a careful exercise of this power.

The (In)visible: Night-vision, Appropriation, and X-Ray

Besides issues of preservation, another feature of the nocturnal in McKay’s poetry in terms of the human negotiation with otherness also implies the exploration of the boundary between inner and outer. Without the reliability of the sense of sight, the appropriate way of knowing the world shifts from one that is empirical to one that is intuitive (MacKendrick 46). In “Dusk” (*Camber* 6), appropriately titled in the sense that it indicates a time that is transitional and polymorphous, heaviness is evoked by a lack of sight. In the third stanza of the poem, the speaker remarks: “Shadows sadden./The details of your face escape like minnows./We become weight—” (*Camber* 6, ll. 10-12), thereby indicating the increased kinetic sensation that results when sight becomes less precise. Adding to the dark stillness, the alliteration in the line “Shadows sadden” hushes not only sound but also thought: it is the sound of the mind drifting away from itself. The overall unhinging of the reliability of the traditional five senses to negotiate the night requires what Louis Mackendrick calls “a more elemental form of understanding” (46) which privileges feeling over observing.

Another way in which the inner/outer dichotomy is undermined in McKay’s poetry is by illustrating the ability of x-ray to render visible that which was incapable of being seen. X-ray subverts the metaphysical tendency “that points to the referential movement from the visible to the invisible” (Ricoeur 288), instead making the invisible materialize.⁶ X-ray, therefore, like moonlight, reveals the night of the body as, for instance, in “Bone Poems” (*Camber* 77-83), where to be x-rayed is to “ [...] Moon-bathe” (82, l. 3). With characteristic jest, the speaker in the poem then goes on to liken x-ray to: “[...]peep shows that could/melt your skin and show the bones/inside your feet[...].” (82, ll. 6-8), describing the resultant image as “[...]an ocean where a loose/family of fish was/wriggling in blue spooky light” (82, ll. 10-12). The speaker thus highlights the fact that x-ray, indeed a function of human ingenuity, ironically shows us that there are things about ourselves that we do not know and cannot even see. As the penultimate line so purely and simply states: “There are other worlds” (82, l. 13). The poem then connects the images of x-ray, or “moon-bathing,” with pre-historic fish and the dead dog that “[...] swims in the earth” (82, l. 14) by means of a lexical set associated with water, at once likening the body to an ocean, and again to the earth itself containing the dead dog, an earth which, like the foot, houses bones. McKay effectively creates a poetic ecosystem in which interconnection is the primary characteristic, highlighting an interdependent and ecologically sound relationship between people and the rest of the natural world.

One way in which similarity is shown to be an ethically relevant characteristic of nature occurs when McKay describes a hawk’s talons as “[...] fine/ and slender as the x-ray of a baby’s hand” (*Camber* 4, ll. 3-4) in “Close-up On a Sharp-Shinned Hawk.” Cleverly avoiding the pitfall of anthropomorphic attribution by not comparing the talon to a baby’s hand, but to an image of it, the speaker illustrates that humans can understand animals and other members of the natural world in terms of human attributes without necessarily being appropriative or privileging the human as biologically superior or more evolved.

There is, in fact, an ethical imperative to recognize the scaffolding of language and human involvement because, as McKay states, "it is as dangerous to act as though we were not a part of nature as it is to act as though we were not a part of culture" ("Baler Twine" 30-31). There is nothing wrong with desiring to see the world from a bird's eye view, but as McKay further intimates in his poem "Icarus" (*Camber* 170-173), this has to be done under gravity's influence by climbing a rock face, opposable thumbs and all. As asserted in the last two lines of the poem, lines in which Icarus anachronistically imagines the Hardy Boys and Tom Sawyer in action, "Somehow they will find a way to put their brute/heads in the clouds" (*Camber* 173), but they will do this by human means, experiencing the other in a real and thoughtful way: by fully acknowledging the gifts and restrictions of our observations and capabilities.

The Night and Otherness: Phenomenological Navigations and Visitations

Aside from ascending rock faces, McKay's poetry gestures in loftier directions. A notorious and sincere admirer of all things avian, McKay writes in "Nocturnal Migrants" (*Camber* 178-179) that birds travel "navigating by the stars and the earth's own/brainwaves [...]" (178, ll. 15-16), their flight simultaneously directing attention upward and earthward, bridging the planetary and the earthly. This ease of flight, then, is facilitated by an ability to incorporate knowledge from both realms, illustrating that the acknowledgment of both the logical (or grounded) and the expressive (or lunar) is in fact desirable. The mind's ability to reach escape velocity and enter direct experience without the clutter of its categorical thinking leads to expansion, and suggests that union with its stipulated opposite is not threatening, but amenable. McKay goes on to explore the reluctance that accompanies this abandonment of the self. Darkness for McKay does not just represent absence, but also signifies an exit. In "Dusk," the speaker describes

the slow
rollover of evening, the spruce
growing dense, gathering dark,
standing in pools of departure.

(*Camber* 6, ll. 1-4)

But departure from what? It is potentially a departure from conceptions of the self that are anchored in the visible and the empirical. In "Meditation on Snow Clouds Approaching the University from the Northwest," McKay describes such a moment as:

the cadence where we meet a bird or animal
to lead us, somehow,
out of language and intelligence.

(*Camber* 106, ll. 17-19)

The speaker oscillates between fear of loneliness—or at least fear of entering the darkness without a guide—and the irresistible attraction to the other in the form of the moon, which “[...]gathered longing into moths/and kept reality from overdosing on its own sane/self[...].” (“Dark of the Moon,” *Camber* 165, ll. 3-5). Despite this ambivalence, the speaker feels tugged on,, much like moths are intoxicatingly drawn to light. But centripetal force prevents him or her from escaping the pull of the earth and of the mind by flying, from existing in the free space beyond them.

However, one way to buffer the sharp boundary between self and other consists in recognizing the space beyond the self as a space that is also human. The nocturnal offers an occasion for the exploration of this space as it literally provides light, but it is a light that subverts the categories of the mind. In “Before the Moon” (*Camber* 174), the speaker states that before nighttime, “[...] Whatever a thing was,/that was it, no ifs or/airspace [...].” (ll. 9-11), airspace in this case referring not only to flight, but also to the desire to explore the zone between two things: between earth and sky, self and other, and between the literal and the figurative. Without the dimension of the night, this in-between space does not constitute a relevant space of reflection. There was nowhere to go to temporarily elude the self; before the moon, “[...] Place was obese,” “[...] so full of itself/there was no leaving home, and so/no dwelling in it either [...].” (*Camber* 174, ll. 11-14). The self was simply occupied choicelessly due to a lack of alternatives. For this reason, before the moon, “[...] Longing was short/and sedentary [...].” (*Camber* 174, 14-15). In accordance with the big bang theory of planetary evolution, the moon here refers to the chunk of the earth that got away from itself. According to this logic, the moon does not amount to a separate entity but to a part of the earth’s self, the part that is missing.

As “Before the Moon” suggests, inner becomes outer—and thus self becomes other—when the moon “[...]fisted itself into otherness inside the/body of the earth, bulbed,/broke out on its own” (*Camber* 174, ll. 2-4). This moment of emergence proves relevant to both the creation of poetry and to the creation of intimacy caused by this gravitational pull. Before the moon, the speaker acknowledges, “there was no second gravity and no/dark art of reflection,[...].” (*Camber* 174, ll. 5-6), and as such, each night was identical, “[...] and fell formlessly,/with no imagination,/and without you in it” (*Camber* 174, ll. 25-27), demonstrating how the same relation applies to interpersonal connections. By figuring night this way, McKay reinscribes the category of wilderness, frequently figured as the nocturnal, as a legitimate site of self-knowledge, in fact implying that the boundary between inner and outer is fluid if not, at times, non-existent. The objective is not just to reach escape velocity and gain enough momentum to exit the self, but also to subvert the mind’s operations enough to get at the sides of ourselves that seem separate and remote, to see ourselves as sites where wilderness resides.

Sinking versus Soaring: Memory and the Present

In McKay’s poetry, in addition to language, time and memory are other forces that oppose the upward movement of unrestricted imagination. In this regard, time becomes collapsed and dispersed by night much in the same way that it is by remembering. Just as empirical distinctions prove necessarily unreliable in the night, in haunting the mind, the past obscures the concept of linear time. Because the content of memory involves that which has already taken place—be it thought, experience, observation, or utterance—the act of remembering blurs categories of time because though relating to

the past, it can, paradoxically, only take place in the present. This could be described as another example of what McKay defines as wilderness, that which has the power to elude the mind's appropriations, in the sense that, in the act of remembering, the past and the present "bleed together," and things already said and done can profoundly affect the present. Memory thus negates the mind's prefabricated notions of chronology and is itself a form of wilderness indigenous to the mind.

Memory can disturb the surface of the mind's stillness much in the same way that naming functions like the knife that separates the namer from the named. For instance, in "Pausing by Moonlight Beside a Field of Dandelions Gone to Seed" (*Camber* 35), silence and stillness are emphasized by the "absence of owls" (l. 6) and the car that is cooling down (l. 4). Even though "Gossip is dead" (l. 12), the calmness cannot last much longer. In a field full of light and downy, precariously hanging seeds, the speaker remarks: "Your next breath/triggers ten million peccadilloes" (*Camber* 35, ll. 13-14).⁷ Whether breath is being drawn to yawn, speak, or even gasp with wonder, the observer cannot experience the scene without affecting it in turn. In this sense, breath is much like thought, as both can be kept at bay and temporarily withheld, but will inevitably and involuntarily kick back in.

On the other hand, birds are creatures of present time in McKay's poetry, often opposing the forces of regret and loss occasioned by reflection. McKay describes this phenomenon directly in "Hover" when he writes that the bird,

[...] pissing off both
gravity and time,
refusing to be born into the next
inexorable instant [...]
(*Camber* 187, ll. 9-13)

exists only in the present, in the space between past and future, between flight and freefall. The song of birds also lifts the speaker to a place beyond time and memory, in this case by means of sensory stimulation. In "A Toast to the Baltimore Oriole" (*Camber* 22), the bird's song situates the speaker in present time by soothing him or her out of language, never dealing with "[...] what is past,/ or passing, or to come" (ll. 5-6). The experience of the bird's song evades loss because it can never pass, it can only be, as it does not comment on or contribute anything in terms of content that is not equally part of the form of the song. This is a site at which the human search for "meaning" enters the wilderness of the present and begins to collapse, both as a result of the assumed separation of form from content, and from the assumption that all "content" that is intelligible must be capable of formal encapsulation to be made "systematically meaningful" (Dickinson 37).⁸ The song, as such, does not "mean" anything, and that is exactly why it is capable of leading the speaker out of himself, to the point where the listener and the listening become united (Kabat-Zinn).

Memory, then, is directed downward, impeding the abandonment of the mind's categories. In the cleverly titled poem "Drag," the speaker's comment illustrates the heavy pull of the gravity of recollection, stating:

[...] It occurred to me that,
unlike Horned Larks, who are imagination,
I was mostly memory, which,
though photogenic and nutritious, rich
with old-time goodness, is notoriously
heavier than air.

(*Camber* 164, 17-22)

And while memory can be seen as a way to subvert loneliness, ultimately it fortifies the barrier between what was and what is, further alienating the person remembering from the possibility of uniting with something outside of the self. Anne Michaels astutely remarks that “[m]emory, like love, gains strength through restatement, reaffirmation; in a culture, [it does so] through ritual, tradition, stories, art” (181), pointing out memory’s self-sustaining quality. Memory acts like a nurse log in a forest, providing the groundwork for more of itself to thrive. McKay figures this quality of memory as an edifice, indicating in “On Leaving” (*Camber* 201-202) the need

to stop
building and remembering and building artful
monuments upon the memories.

(*Camber* 202, ll. 26-28).

Indeed, it is these accreted layers of memory that prevent the mind from truly engaging with the wilderness of the present.

Eternity, Infinity, and “Another Gravity”

Just as Icarus was unsuccessful because he was unable to affirm his humanness by finding a way of flying suitable to his position in the world, the desire to merge with that which is outside of ourselves is incompatible with our traditional tools for accomplishing this. Don McKay’s poetics posits that a mode of attention beyond utility is required in order to alleviate the disparity between the desire for meaning and the ways in which it is sought, a mode of attention that does not favor the construct. According to McKay, the problem “stems from our easy [but flawed] assumption that a definition of things under the heading of utility is adequate, that their being is fully explained by what they’re used for” (“Remembering Apparatus” 57). This unsatisfactory premise can be ameliorated by recognizing “that tools exceed the fact of their construction and exemplify an otherness beyond human design” (“Remembering Apparatus” 57). For McKay, this space beyond human categories, names, time, and memory is meaningful, ethically relevant, as well as rich and replete with experiences worthy of commentary, provided our understanding of what is considered to be “human” becomes enlarged or refined. For this to take place, it is necessary to see everything—thought, plant, animal, memory—as:

[...] lit

by its own small moon—a snowberry,

a mothball, a dime—which regulates its tides

and longings. [...]

(“Finger Pointing at the Moon,” *Camber* 196, ll. 32-35).

Implying that every small thing has its own rhythms and is worthy of spotlight, or more precisely, moonlight, McKay emphasizes the ethical importance of recognizing the innumerable other gravities that are at work.

In “Between Rock and Stone: A Geopoetic Alphabet” (2005), Don McKay describes the difference between absence and the infinite, stating: “Nothing is absence under the auspices of eternity; zero, on the other hand, is absence which slides into mind because it has intimations of infinity” (126). Infinity is endless time with subject position subtracted out of it, and in this sense “[t]he idea of eternity domesticates infinity, nudges it firmly in the direction of place and makes it habitable” (“Between Rock and Stone” 105). In short, the concept of “eternity” adds a dimension of ethical accountability to human experience, which is not a presupposition of the mere idea of “infinity.” It is at the point where the mind does not see its own hand in perception that Adam awakens with a fright in the pre-lapsarian Garden, and that the human is no longer willingly exiled from the world underlying the one that is tagged with names. The nocturnal in Don McKay’s poetry, with its constant shape-shifting, dematerializing abilities, undermines the presumed authority of the mind, and shows that indeed, “there are other worlds” (“Bone Poems” *Camber* 82, l. 13). The uncomfortable space beyond empirical knowledge—and beyond the epistemological convenience of a dichotomy between self and other that such a mode of knowledge introduces—is one that the night forces upon the mind as the latter is reminded of “another gravity” that, even if unseen, remains at work. In this regard, wilderness, the mind, and the nocturnal often meet at such a juncture, and wilderness, like the force of gravity, cannot be denied. And once the mind begins to realize that the world is still the world, even when, as Dennis Lee puts it, the mind is “eclipsed” (43), the space between memory and experience, between earth and sky, self and other, and between the literal and the figurative ceases to be seen as absence. After all, the assumption that the natural world is dependent upon reason is, like the concept of zero, “a moon without metaphors” (McKay, “Between Rock and Stone” 126).

Endnotes

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- ¹ This work was made possible by funding from the University of Calgary’s Teaching and Learning Funding Committee and from a fellowship furnished by the Calgary Institute for the Humanities.
 - ² In an essay entitled “Cleopatra’s Love,” which lyrically relates memory, love, and knowledge, Anne Michaels describes poetry’s ability to bestow night vision, a description included in full here: “Parts of our selves are exposed, and like the latent image on film, develop; silver bromide of knowledge darkening. A poem can give us night vision; getting used to the dark, we begin to make things out. The invisible rendered visible: breath on glass” (180).

- ³ By “phenomenology,” I mean a knowledge and understanding that is “embodied,” stemming from David Abrams’s reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Spell of the Sensuous*. While it is not my immediate purpose to discuss these ideas in their full depth, my reading investigates how these principles are articulated in Don McKay’s poetry in relation to his concept of wilderness with its emphasis on eluding the mind’s appropriations. As such, I focus on various aspects of this “embodied” intelligence, which according to Abrams, strives “not to explain the world as if from outside, but to give voice to the world from our experienced situation *within* it, recalling us to our participation in the here-and-now, rejuvenating our sense of wonder at the fathomless things, events and power that surround us on every hand” (47). The act of reading is one of the ways whereby the self experiences itself and the world, which guides the ethical and experiential dimensions of McKay’s work. For more on Abrams’s reading of Merleau-Ponty, see *Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage, 1996), especially pages 44-72.
- ⁴ Humanism, in this case, is defined by M.H. Abrams as a worldview that “assumed the dignity and central position of human beings in the universe; emphasized the importance in education of studying classical imaginative and philosophical literature, although with emphasis on its moral and practical rather than its aesthetic values; and insisted on the primacy, in ordering human life, of reason (considered the universal and defining human faculty) as opposed to the instinctual appetites and the ‘animal’ passions” (123).
- ⁵ This is elaborated on in Paul Ricoeur’s *The Rule of Metaphor*. One instance in particular stands out when he writes: “John Searle postulates without hesitation the thesis that something must be in order that something may be identified” (219), pointing out a liability of Cartesian thought.
- ⁶ Adam Dickinson thoughtfully demonstrates that the methods of science and the reliance on the figurative to express matter are not contradictory; in fact, paraphrasing Daniel Tiffany, he writes: “Indeed, Tiffany goes on to argue that scientific materialism has always depended on images and tropes to depict the unobservable ‘reality’ of matter. He suggests that lyric poetry provides an alternate engagement with materiality precisely because of its concern with images and allegories” (37). For more on the relation between science and poetry, see Dickinson’s essay “Lyric Ethics: Ecocriticism, Material Metaphoricity, and the Poetics of Don McKay and Jan Zwicky” in *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 55 (Fall-Winter 2004), 34-52.
- ⁷ This also demonstrates that the prospect of authorial transparency remains an unattainable ideal, because there can be no pure, unobstructed interaction with the world without it somehow being altered or blown away like the dandelion seeds.
- ⁸ Adam Dickinson emphasizes this liability of the post-structuralist approach to semiosis, stating “linguistic thinking, or language-dependent thought, presupposes divisions between things as a consequence of syntax and symbolism—as a consequence, we might say, of being systematically meaningful” (37).

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