Eleonora Sasso

"Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals". Conceptual Blending and Eco-animalism in Atwood's Speculative Fiction

Abstract: This paper takes as its starting point the notions of blending and conceptual metaphors in order to advance a new reading of Atwood's fiction, one which sees it as parabolic stories projecting the conceptual metaphors "man is a wild animal" and "nature is a victim of injury".

Atwood's *Wilderness Tips* (1991), *The Tent* (2006) and the *MaddAddam* trilogy not only develop their own detailed blueprints of the Canadian fauna, but they also reveal Atwood's eco-animalism blending together men and animals, and leading to genetic mixing of species. By spending her childhood in the bush among wild bears, silver foxes, otter, weasels and muskrats, Atwood experienced the horrors of animal abuse. I intend to track through these references and look at the issues – attitudes to human crimes against nature, question of animal representations in narrative writing, historical and personal past related to eco-animalism etc. – which they raise. But my central purpose will be to re-read Atwood's eco-animalism from a cognitive perspective, projecting Atwood's thoughts on the Canadian waste land, inhabited by genetically modified animals and by Gothicized animal figures. In line with T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in which thoughts are an entangled mass of animals, Atwood seems to employ new animal metaphors to convey their eco-bond with nature and to denounce all forms of animal exploitation. Through wild bears, aquatic birds, glow-in-the-dark rabbits, friendly, scentless rakunks (half-skunk, half-raccoon), wolvogs, rakunks, liobams, and so forth, I suggest, Atwood attempts to build into her works a kind of eco-warning which T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* extols with important socio-cultural consequences for the Canadian outcasts denouncing in Eliot's words "those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals".

Keywords: *conceptual blending, cognitive linguistics, eco-animalism, Margaret Atwood*

In her article published on *The Guardian* on Friday 14 October 2011, Margaret Atwood coined the term "ustopia" in order to define the Canadian wastelands depicted in her speculative fiction. According to Atwood, the lexical blend "ustopia" combines "utopia and dystopia – the imagined perfect society and its opposite – because ... each contains a latent version of the other.... Ustopia is also a state of mind, as is every place in literature of whatever kind".[1] Defined by Roswitha Fischer as "semantic coordinatives, base words that are equal",[2] lexical blends and in particular Atwood's neologisms provide useful insights into the phenomenon of mixing between categories that according to Lydia Burton "may well constitute the 'Canadian style'".[3]

[1] Margaret Atwood, "The Road to Ustopia", *The Guardian*, 14 October 2011.

[2] Roswitha Fischer, *Lexical Change in Present-Day English* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998), 39.

[3] Lydia Burton, ed., *Editing Canadian English* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1987), 7.

By applying the blending theory,[4] Atwood elaborates a conceptual blending in her ustopian lands inhabited by the most diverse fauna of Canada, anthropomorphized beasts, as well as genetically-modified animals projecting such conceptual metaphors as NATURE IS A VICTIM OF INJURY, and MAN IS A WILD ANIMAL. It is my aim to investigate Atwood's eco-animalism through the notion of cognitive stylistics – a rapidly expanding field at the interface between linguistics, literary studies and cognitive science – which provides an illuminating framework for discussing Atwood's eco-cognitive stylistic dimension in such intensely thought-provoking works as *Wilderness Tips* (1991), *The Tent* (2006), *The Door* (2007), and *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003, 2009, 2013).

These latter ones appear to be parabolic stories blending together men and animals, life and death, utopia and dystopia in line with T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in which thoughts are an entangled mass of animals. As an international patron of the "Friends of the Earth", and most recently, supporter of "The Ghosts of Gone Birds" project,[5] Atwood seems to employ new animal metaphors to convey their eco-bond with nature and to denounce all forms of animal exploitation. Through wild bears, aquatic birds, glow-in-the-dark rabbits, friendly, scentless rakunks (half-skunk, half-raccoon), wolvogs, rakunks, liobams, and so forth, Atwood attempts to build into her works the type of eco-warning that Eliot previously engaged with in *The Waste Land* with important socio-cultural consequences for the Canadian outcasts denouncing in Eliot's words "those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals".[6]

A paramount example of Atwood's eco-bond with nature is the short story "Death by Landscape" in which Lois, the character who wanted to be an Indian, seems to put into practice a process of indigenisation according to which "you must shamanise or die".[7] In Atwood's words Lois "want[s] to be adventurous and pure and aboriginal"[8] like the native people in order to belong to the land the white coloniser has conquered. Together with Lucy, Kip and Pat, Lois spends her time singing the song *Alouette* not only around the campfire at Camp Manitou, a sort of totemic clan system based on bird and wolf totems, but also while canoe floating on the lake. When they stop at Little Birch for overnight, they see out on the lake "two loons, calling to each other in their insane, mournful voices ... sound[ing] like grief" (133).

Only in the mystic power of music, the process in which voice magically encounters music and makes of it a sonorous collection of effects, captivating listeners with its intense musicality, there lies a possibility of ethno-centric dialogue when the spirit of the wild emerges in such songs as *Alouette*, *Clementine*, and *The Quartermaster's Store* whose repetition, an important rhetorical feature in oral narrative, facilitates the emergence of the repressed. Particularly relevant in this sense is the song *Alouette*, a popular French

[4] Blending theory, also known as Conceptual Integration theory or Conceptual Blending theory was developed to account for the online construction of meaning in terms of networks of "mental spaces". As Elena Semino maintains, "blending theory explains the production and comprehension of specific metaphorical expressions in terms of conceptual networks involving four mental spaces" (Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper, eds., *Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 114.

[5] "The Ghosts of Gone Birds" is an amazing U.K. exhibit of extinct-bird art to raise awareness on the increasing loss of bird species across the world. Atwood, who produced, together with others, new work for the exhibition, stated: "To find so many creative people engaged with the subject of birds and the threat of extinction that faces so many of them today, is truly inspiring. This magnificent show will reconnect us to the natural world, teach us about our past, and fuel our interest in saving what we are losing daily", http://www2.canada.com/topics/news/story.html?id=5601478, accessed 17 July 2015.

[6] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Harvest Books, 1958), 73.

[7] Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), 58.

[8] Atwood, "Death by Landscape", in *Wilderness Tips* (London: Virago Press, 2011), 129.

Canadian children's song about plucking the feathers, eyes, and beak from a lark, as a form of retribution for being woken up by the bird's song:

> Alouette, gentille alouette, / Alouette, je te plumerai. // Je te plumerai la tête. Je te plumerai la tête. / Et la tête! Et la tête! / Alouette! Alouette!/ A-a-a-ah // Je te plumerai le bec. Je te plumerai le bec. / Et le bec! / Et la tête! / Alouette! A-a-a-ah // Je te plumerai les yeux. Je te plumerai les yeux. / Et les yeux! / Et le bec! / Et la tête! / Alouette! / A-a-a-ah....[9]

[9] W.D. Lighthall, *A Pocket Song Book for the Use of the Students and Graduates of McGill College* (Montreal: Lovell Printing and Publishing Company, 1879).

Originally employed by French colonialists during the French Fur Trade in the second half of the 16th century, the song was believed to help to pass the time and make the work seem lighter for canoe trippers who used to transport trade goods in exchange for furs. From a cognitive perspective, Lois's singing projects the conceptual metaphor MAN IS A WILD ANIMAL based on the mental pattern of *planning* (e.g. *je te plumerai*) and the mental phenomenon of metonymy as exemplified by such expressions as *tête, bec,* and *yeux*. Endowed with the cognitive power of stories, the French song appears to be a parable of survival helping the reader to understand the sense of man's exploitation of animals. As opposed to human singing voices, the crying of the loons, connoted as insane and mournful, projects the conceptual metaphor ANIMALS ARE VICTIMS OF INJURY. According to Oatley and Johnson-Laird's nine basic emotion modes,[10] the birds' voices convey the everyday emotion of sorrow whose literary equivalent is called in Sanscrit *rasa*. This latter, as Oatley suggests, may allow the reader to see more clearly into the true nature and implications of emotions. It is not by chance that the narrator depicts the calling of lake birds as a grieving background, as an omen of death projecting the animal parable as a conceptual blending between man and animals sharing the same destiny. At the end of the story, Lois will desperately search for Lucy who has vanished near Lookout Point, by calling her name in the same emotional voice as that of the birds' crying.

[10] Keith Oatley and P. N. Johnson-Laird, "Towards a Cognitive Theory of Emotions", *Cognition and Emotion*, 1 (1987), 29-50.

It is likely that Atwood metaphorically constructs girls as birds realising a set of correspondences between the LOONS source domain and the domain of experiences relating to Lois – the LOIS target domain: Lois corresponds to an ululating loon.

The frequency and elaboration of metaphorical expressions drawing from the source domain of birds as exemplified by such short stories as "Eating Birds" and "Nigthingale" suggest that a systematic set of correspondences between the BIRD domain and the FEMALE domain is part of Atwood's conceptual structure. The fact that Atwood constructs women in relationship with birds, as bird eaters because "they want to be one with birds"[11] and as singing birds denouncing the violence and abuse of men is entirely consistent with the view

[11] Atwood, "Eating Birds", in *The Door* (London: Virago Press, 2007), 127. All further references are to this edition, quoted as *EB* in the text.

of metaphor proposed by cognitive metaphor theory. On the one hand, Atwood's BIRD domain (or in schema theory terms, her BIRD schema) is highly shamanised, and has positive emotional associations:

> We ate the birds. We ate them. We wanted their songs to flow up through our throats and burst out of our mouths, and so we ate them. We wanted their feathers to bud from our flesh. We wanted their wings, we wanted to fly as they did, soar freely among the treetops and the clouds, and so we ate them. We speared them, we clubbed them, we tangled their feet in glue, we netted them, we spitted them, we threw them onto hot coals, and all for love, because we loved them. We wanted to be one with them. We wanted to hatch out of clean, smooth, beautiful eggs, as they did, back when we were young and agile and innocent of cause and effect, we did not want the mess of being born, and so we crammed the birds into our gullets, feathers and all, but it was no use, we couldn't sing, not effortlessly as they do, we can't fly, not without smoke and metal, and as for the eggs we don't stand a chance. We're mired in gravity, we're earthbound. We're ankle-deep in blood, and all because we ate the birds, we ate them a long time ago, when we still had the power to say no. (*EB*, 127-129)

Similar to the song *Alouette*, albeit with a different intended action (shamanic cannibalism), "Eating Birds" projects the conceptual metaphor MAN/WOMAN IS A WILD ANIMAL based on the mental phenomenon of metonymy as clearly expressed by such sentences as "we wanted their feathers"; "we wanted their wings"; "we tangled their feet in glue" and so forth. But such a brutal practice turns out to be useless because of the human nature of women who are "mired in gravity, they are earthbound" and will never sing and fly as birds do.

On the other hand, because of Atwood's feminist view, her schemata relating to women and relationship with birds carry negative emotional associations. The title of the short story "Nightingale" refers metaphorically to Procne whose correspondence with a nightingale is more than simply a matter of linguistic expression: "Then she starts turning into a bird, the way she always does, and when I look down the same thing is happening to me" (*EB*,137).

Of course, given its subject matter (a woman who is victim of her husband's violence turns into a bird), Atwood's story can be identified with Ovid's story of "The Rape of Philomela by Tereus". As a blend, however, the allegory is complex due to the former re-writings of the Philomela myth by Eliot in *The Waste Land* (1922) and "Sweeney and the Nightingales" (1919-1920). Therefore, we cognitively map the Philomela and Procne story onto Atwood's story, but there is no communal feminist revenge in Atwood's version. Procne reveals her crime (filicide) warning her sister against the perils of violence:

I wanted you to avoid the mistakes I made, that's all.
What mistakes?
In answer she lifted up her hands. They were wet, they glistened. Our son, she said. I couldn't stop myself.[12]

[12] Atwood, "Nightingale", in *The Tent* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 137.

Atwood significantly changes the destiny of the two Greek sisters, one of whom survives the other and is haunted at night by the restless ghost of Procne doomed to tell her tragic story in order not to be forgotten or dismissed.

Thus, the resulting blend reveals mismatches between analogues in the mental spaces. With Procne, Philomel and Tereus in the source domain and Atwood's Procne, her husband and her sister in the target domain, frames such as marriage, abuse, and violence provide generic structure for this mapping to occur. The relation between the Greek myth, Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Atwood's re-writing is forced by conceptual integration as the figure below suggests:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Generic Space:
Abused women

violence on women
female abuse, sorrow and pain</td></tr>
<tr><td>Specific source:

Ovid's and Eliot's Procne and Philomela

are killed by men
suffer patriarchal violence</td><td>General target:
Women who

are subject to domestic violence
suffer patriarchal abuse and neglect</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Blend:

Atwood's women are like Procne and Philomela
A class member is the prototype</td></tr>
</table>

Information from the generic space of abused women includes marriage, childbirth, unfaithfulness and violence. This generic background informs the construction of both Eliot's lines and Atwood's story and it is also vital for conceptualising the allegory here.

Like Eliot's Philomela changed into a nightingale "filling all the desert with inviolable voice" (l. 101),[13] Atwood's Philomela appears to be turned into a singing bird whose unchained melody reaches out the hearts of men: "I begin to sing. A long liquid song, a high requiem, the story of the story of the story.... A man standing underneath our tree says, *Grief*".[14] Atwood has altered the mythical story to create greater similarity to Eliot's wasteland in which Philomela's crying may sound meaningless to someone ("'Jug Jug' to dirty ears", l. 103) but the world is still horrified by their tragedy.

[13] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 31.

[14] Atwood, "Nightingale", 138.

Reminiscent of the crying of the loons featured in "Death By Landscape", and Philomela's grief sung in "Nightingale", the howling wilderness described in "The Tent" is a humanised form of life, hybrid creatures connoted in zoomorphic terms, nocturnal howlers who cry out their legacy of ontological confusion, of polymorphous subjectivity, borderland métissage in relation to the dominant social culture.

In search of revenge and blood, the howlers surrounding Atwood's paper tent enact the cognitive metaphor MAN IS A WILD ANIMAL who "can kill and then howl over in celebration and then eat, one way or another".[15] Though assaulted by these animal-like howlers with "red and shining eyes" (*T*, 146), Atwood continues describing their natures, features, habits, and histories in written form in order to denounce the damages perpetuated by human beings. For Atwood, the tent is a mental space, a "flimsy cave" (*T*, 146), where she is affected by a "graphomania" (*T*, 146), the sole domain where projection and blending are components in this continual mental activity that together form the cerebral dynamo that drives parabolic thought in the human mind.

[15] Atwood, "The Tent", in *The Tent*, 145. All further references are to this edition, quoted as *T* in the text.

In terms of cognitive linguistics and of the range of motion events, the howlers are *figures* whose path is contrasted with the *ground* (i.e. the tent), which functions as a reference point or landmark for orientation and is tied to what the narrator regards as the present state of the world. Analysing the howlers' motion events in relation to the tent, we can determine their mapping scope whose source concept (GOAL-ORIENTED MOVEMENT) is metonymically related to a wider target concept (PURPOSEFUL or INTENDED ACTION). To put it into more simplified terms, the motion event that involves the motion towards the tent is related to the sole purpose of survival:

> You don't want to attract the howlers, but they're attracted anyway, as if by a scent. The walls of the paper tent are so thin, but they can see the light of your candle. They can see your outline, and naturally they're curious because you might be prey. You might be something they can kill, and then howl over in celebration, and then eat one way or another. You're too conspicuous. You've made yourself conspicuous. You've given yourself away. They're coming closer, gathering together. They're taking time off from their howling

> to peer, to sniff around. Why do you think this writing of yours, this graphomania in a flimsy cave, this scribbling back and forth and up and down over the walls of what is beginning to seem like a prison, is capable of protecting anyone at all, yourself included? It's an illusion – the belief that your doodling is a kind of armor, a kind of charm – because no one knows better than you do how fragile your tent really is. Already there's a clomping of leather-covered feet, there's a scratching, there's a scrabbling, there's a sound of rasping breath. Wind comes in. (*T*, 145)

Such verbs of motion as *coming closer, gathering together, sniff around* the TENT as exemplified by such sentences as "They're coming closer, gathering together", "They're taking time off from their howling to peer, to sniff around", are always related to goal-oriented movements which project the conceptual metaphor of SURVIVAL IN THE WILDERNESS. Furthermore, the path of the howlers' trajectory can be accessed conceptually through different windows of attention[16] in casual-chain events: *initial windowing* (see the light in the tent), *medial windowing* (come closer to the tent), and *final windowing* (sniff around and scratch the tent).

By blending men and animals in such a neologism as "the howlers", Atwood fuses together two mappings in this image. At the beginning of the story, she envisions people howling grief, to summon help, for revenge and for blood, later on she depicts things howling over in celebration, as if to employ all the sensorial modalities from the highest (SIGHT, followed by SOUND, SMELL, TASTE) down to the lowest sense, namely TOUCH. The blend arising from the fusion of material from the two input spaces (the HUMAN domain and the ANIMAL domain) into the wasteland scenario is based on the cross-space correspondences and on their shared structures.

Atwood's disillusionment and despair is embodied by the totem animal par excellence, the bear, alias *nanuk*, featuring in such poems as "Animals Reject their Names and Things Return to their Origins" and "Bear Lament". In those examples, Atwood's ustopian schemata dealing with bears and their ruined environments are applied as metaphorical source domains to construct a range of experiences. The BEAR domain has high multivalency or a wide scope due to its salience, its high level of elaboration and its emotional associations.

In "Animals Reject their Names and Things Return to their Origins" Atwood is overwhelmed by the bear's speech starting a revolt against linguistic logo-centrism. The wild bear renounces his metaphorical definitions "child-stealer", "shape-changes", "old garbage-eater" and rejects all blended spaces such as fairy-tale and totemism. By mapping a non-human being onto a human being, Atwood gives voice to voiceless animals rejecting the human act of naming entities and thereby professing their nameless condition. Behind the bear's words "My true name is growl"(*T,* 78), there lies a return to the wild, an eco-

[16] According to *Talmy* (1996), the *windowing* of *attention* is only one part of the larger cognitive structural category in language called the "distribution of *attention*", which is a system constituting the fundamental delineation of *conceptual* structuring in language. Leonard Talmy, "Windowing of Attention in Language" in Masayoshi Shibatani and Sandra A. Thompson, eds., *Grammatical Constructions: Their Form and Meaning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 235-287.

parable whose mental scope is magnified by the notion of linguistic projection: "don't offend the bear/Have compassion on his heart/Think twice before you speak". (*T,* 83)

Likewise, "Bear Lament" uses a metaphorical scenario related to the BEAR source domain in order to construct man's behaviour as absurd and unacceptable. In the beginning, the speaker is fused with the bear, dating back to the time when she believed she could "crawl inside a bear .../and take on its ancient shape" (ll. 2; 4)[17] in order to save herself in a time of crisis. In the blend, the poet enters the bear's secret house experiencing a dreamtime as if to "insulate" (*BL*, l. 12) herself from all the evils of the world. But the fairy-tale scenario is turned into a wasteland, when the lyrical "I" reports seeing a thin white bear, "thin as ribs/and growing thinner" (*BL*, ll. 20-21) searching for some food, "sniffing the brand-new/absences of rightful food" (*BL*, ll. 21-22). To put it into metaphorical terms, the "bear came over the mountain" to see what he could find but all that he could see was the other side of the mountain. As suggested by Alice Munro's short story significantly entitled "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" recalling the well-known American song "The Bear Went Over the Mountain", Atwood projects the conceptual metaphor THE BEAR IS ALL OF US and that we are already on the other side looking desperately for a paradise lost.

[17] Atwood, "Bear Lament", in *The Door*, 57. All further references are to this edition, quoted as *BL* in the text.

The projection of this concept, this new space in which men and animals are blended together leads to such rhetorical questions as "Oh bear, what now?/And will the ground/still hold?" (*BL*, 58 ll. 26-28), "What's the use anyway / of ... making animals cry?",[18] "Did we cause this wreckage by breathing?"(*BL*, 54), "Is it our fault?". In all those verses, Atwood strengthens the nature of the parabolic projection according to which man is a 'wastelander' whose only hope for salvation may be found in singing a message of harmony with nature.

[18] Atwood, "Owl and Pussycat, Some Years Later", in *The Door*, 34.

This eco-parable is projected by such poems as "Owl and Pussycat, Some Years Later" and "Singer of Owls" in which Atwood activates SINGING IS BELIEVING. In the first poem, the artistic collaboration between Charles Pacther[19] and Atwood is metaphorically equated to the relation between an owl and a pussycat singing under a full moon. For both owl (Pachter) and pussycat (Atwood), "singing's a belief/[they] can't give up"[20] because despite their worldwide success ("We're in anthologies. We're taught in schools,/with cleaned-up biographies and skewed photos", ll.143-144), they still want to spread their eco-messages ("there is still/a job to be done by us", ll.113-114) in order to change the world.

[19] Charles Pacther is one of Canada's pre-eminent visual artist. His images of the queen, moose, and maple leaf flag are icons of Canadian contemporary art. McClelland & Stewart has published an illustrated book on his life and work (1992), and Cormorant Books has published *The Illustrated Journals of Susanna Moodie*, his celebrated collaboration with poet Margaret Atwood (2014).

[20] Atwood, "Owl and Pussycat, Some Years Later", in *The Door*, 35.

As suggested by Nathalie Cooke, Atwood usually presents herself both as a metamorphosized pussycat and a tiger firmly convinced that cats are part of us:

> Tiger or pussycat? In Atwood's case, you can't be one without being the other. The appeal of the pussycat is precisely the power of the tiger. There's something very engaging about the very down-to-earth Atwoodian figure with the streak of humour and a curl in the middle of her forehead – the one who doesn't take herself too seriously and who, in the process, is wickedly funny and deadly serious.[21]

[21] Nathalie Cook, "Lions, Tigers and Pussycats", in Reingard M. Nischik, ed., *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 23.

In the animal poems featuring owls and pussycats, Atwood activates a metaphorical blending between human and non-human entities extending the concept of a cross-domain mapping. Poems appear to be blended spaces helping to explain the strange fusion between different conceptual domains. The composed input spaces are drawn on to create a single fantastic imaginary space in which a "moulting owl" (l.151) and an "arthritic pussycat" (l.152) believe in the power of singing stories: "But sing on, sing/on, someone may still be listening/besides me. The fish for instance./Anyway, my dearest one,/we still have the moon" (ll.157-161). As moon-oriented animals, the Pactherian owl and the Atwoodian pussycat seem to operate mainly through the cognitive tool known as *narrative projection* of stories. Inspired and attracted by the moon, the owl and the pussycat constantly sing the wilderness surrounding them like "The Singer of Owls" of the eponymous poem.

Through the lens of cognitive grammar it is possible to read Atwood's animal poem by applying the notion of *profiling* which refers to a perceived relationship between two entities: the singer and the owl. The singer of owls is easily recognised as a *figure* profiled against a larger *ground* (darkness, and shadows of trees). In the first two stanzas of the poem, the poet is profiled as a singer of owls moving against a background, "wandering off into the darkness" (l.1), preferring dim corners, and shamanising himself into an owl as exemplified by such verbs as *opening to silences*, *swallowing mice*, *allowing ruthlessness and feathers to possess him*. In verbs like "open" and "allow" there are participant roles in the semantics of the verb: the primary focal participant (the poet), and the secondary focal participant (the owl). In "open", we profile the poet opening to wilderness, whereas "allow" profiles two participants, the allower ("the singer of owls") and the seizer ("the owl") blending together into one metamorphosed entity.

Questioning himself about the sense of life, and the meaning of singing wilderness, the poet confronts himself with the owl who reveals the bond between them: singing out of necessity a night song, or what Roland Barthes would call, a *geno-song*[22] projecting all drive energies while praising the beauties of nocturnal entities. The owl's thicket, moon, and lake are the landmarks against which the trajector ("the figure within a relational profile")[23] is profiled. The framework of profiling demonstrates how effects are achieved in the poet's mind, by his mind, and for the pleasure of his mind.

[22] Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice", in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 182.

[23] Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen, eds., *Cognitive Poetics in Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 56.

Other poems such as "Blackie in Antarctica", "Mourning for Cats" and "Our Cat Enters Heaven" reveal Atwood's animal subjectivity. They show that Atwood takes different views of essentially the same animal. Like Eliot who, in his early and later poems, anthropomorphised animals turning them into social creatures and more specifically into city dwellers, Atwood privileges the cat metaphor accepting the animal within the human. Reminiscent of Eliot's clever and witty verse of cats (*Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, 1939), Atwood's cats appear to be humanised animals, whose names are invented "bluntly and without artifice" ("Blackie in Antarctica", ll.9-10). The art of naming cats, in Eliot's view, is a difficult practice due to the nature of cats defined as "ineffable effable" ("The Naming of Cats", l.29)[24] which is better rendered by the lexical blend "effanineffable" (l.30).

[24] Eliot, "The Naming of Cats", in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), 209.

In all Atwood's aforementioned poems, cats are associated with death which is seen as a scenario. From a cognitive perspective, a scenario is a complex structure consisting of sequences of action concepts, which actions are to be performed in recurrent situations with particular goal. In "Blackie in Antarctica" Atwood provides a tragicomic scenario according to which Blackie the cat, the yowling mooner and faithful companion dies because of an incurable illness and is buried in the freezer beside frozen hamburgers and chicken wings. In this death scenario, Atwood projects the conceptual metaphor DEATH IS SCORN as exemplified by such lines as "Catlike, you hated/being ridiculous" (ll.39-40),[25] "Death/is, though. Ridiculous" (ll.46-47). From a black cat leaping from roof to roof, Blackie is ironically turned into "a thin-boned Antarctic/explorer" (ll.31-32) associated with a Pharaon for the red silk in which he is wrapped. But such a blend between human and non-human is much more evident in "Mourning for Cats" in which Atwood associates them with dead children endowed with big eyes. The mourning for dead cats is so deep and sentimental that the poet asks himself a series of rhetorical questions about such a mutual relationship: "Why do dead cats call up such ludicrous tears?/Why such deep mourning?/Because we can no longer/see in the dark without them?/Because we're cold/without their fur?" (ll.27-33).

[25] Atwood, "Blackie in Antarctica", in *The Door*, 13.

By enumerating all the cat peculiarities – see in the dark, soft fur, playful nature and so forth –, the poet describes an alternate possible world as a different version of the world in which cats represent man's hidden second skin, the only way to find some relief from the world's woes. According to possible worlds theory, Atwood's possible worlds of logic are abstract, complete and consistent sets of states of affairs conceived for the purpose of logical operations. This is eminently exemplified by the poem "Our Cat Enters Heaven" whose textual universe is a dynamic combination of a text actual world on the one hand, and a different type of an alternate possible world formulated by the animal characters. As Gina Wisker has aptly summarised

"The laws of the human world have all been translated into something more palatable for a devious, mischievous, slyly vicious cat.... the cat is clearly in his heaven, free to catch, play, crunch, and be his cat self. It is whimsical, amusing and wry".[26]

Atwood describes this alternate possible world as an upside down Wish world in which God is a form of cat and the souls of human beings are mice persecuted by cats. By projecting the dreams of the cat entering afterlife, Atwood creates a conflict between the Wish world on the one hand, and, on the other, the human inferno. The following dialogue excerpt between the soul of the cat and the cat-like God provides a paramount example of Atwood's alternate possible world:

> They're the souls of human beings who have been bad on Earth, said God, half-closing its yellowy-green eyes. Now if you don't mind, it's time for my nap.
> What are they doing in heaven, then? said our cat.
> Our heaven is their hell, said God. I like a balanced universe.[27]

In order to introduce the mechanics of mental space analysis, I will briefly outline Gilles Fauconnier's account[28] of the comprehension of the following sentence:

When he got to heaven the cat started persecuting human mice

Fauconnier's diagrammatic representation of the mental space configuration relevant to this sentence is reproduced as the following Figure:

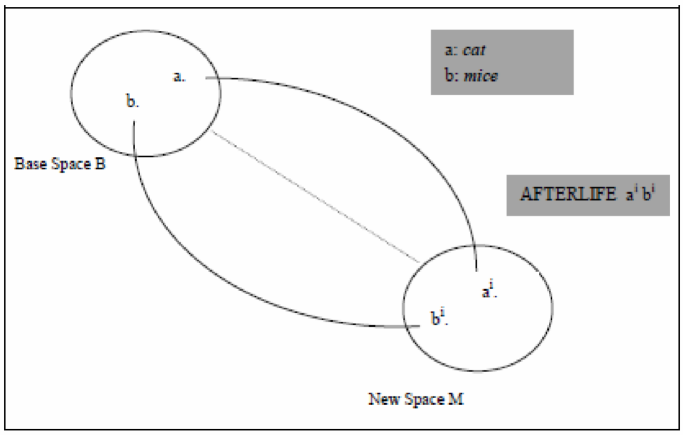

Fig. 1.

[26] Gina Wisker, *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 174.

[27] Atwood, "Our Cat Enters Heaven", in *The Tent*, 65.

[28] See Gilles Fauconnier, *Mappings in Thoughts and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1997), 42-43.

The comprehension of this sentence, according to Fauconnier, involves the construction of two mental spaces. The first mental space, the 'Base' (B), includes two elements 'a' and 'b', which are accessed by the names 'cat' and 'mice'. This space is linked with information about the two entities which is part of background knowledge or has been derived from the preceding co-text. The Base is the space that functions as the starting point of each network of spaces, and is always accessible for the addition of further material of for the construction of new spaces.

The second mental space is derived from the Base via the sentence "when he got to heaven", which functions as a 'space builder'. Space builders are linguistic expressions which trigger the construction of new spaces and indicate the nature of the connection between each new space and the one from which it is constructed. The sentence "when he got to heaven" sets up the new space as a "possibility" space, i.e. as corresponding to a state of affairs that may or may not be true in relation to the Base. The possibility space contains two entities 'a^i' and 'b^i', which are counterparts of 'a' and 'b' in the Base, and are accessed by means of the same names. This is in virtue of what Fauconnier calls the "Access Principle". In the possibility space, a^i is persecuting b^i. This space is also structured by background knowledge triggered by the expression "Our heaven is their hell". This is indicated in the Figure by the small-capital mnemonic[29] AFTERLIFE in the square box. The dashed line indicates that M is set up relative to B, while the curved lines indicate a relationship of identity between elements in the two spaces. While B is the Base space of the structure, M is the "Focus" space, i.e. the space to which material is being added by the sentence. The space builder is marked for temporal distance from the Base, making what Fauconnier calls "reality within fiction".[30]

[29] Mnemonics are commonly used in cognitive linguistics to indicate frames or schemata.

[30] Fauconnier, *Mappings in Thoughts*, 50.

Within the frame of parabolic projection, Atwood creates a blend between men and animals in order to expose the unhealable wound between man and nature as envisioned in *MaddAddam* trilogy dealing with the imminent extinction of humanity. For example, in *Oryx and Crake* the only one man who has survived a mysterious worldwide plague is Jimmy the Snowman whose eco-mythical voice of warning suggests that nature is the recipient of nurturance and as such it involves respect, interdependence, adoration and commitment. Persecuted by gene-spliced animals like wolvogs, pigoons, rakunks, snats and bobkittens, the last man on earth finds safety and comfort into the top branches of trees where he sleeps for fear of those genetically modified wild animals. Reminiscent of Eliot's three leopards in *Ash Wednesday* sitting under a juniper tree and waiting to devour the speaker's body (his legs, heart, liver and brain), Atwood's animals prowling at night under Jimmy's tree are voracious carnivores (malevolently intelligent pigoons and savage wolvogs) in search of fresh meat: "Wolvogs can't climb trees, which is one good thing. If they get

numerous enough and too persistent, [Jimmy will] have to start swinging from vine to vine, like Tarzan. That's a funny idea, so he laughs. 'All you want is my body!' he yells at them. Then he drains the bottle and throws it down".[31]

Likewise, *The Year of the Flood* focuses on a group called God's Gardeners, a small pacifist community of survivors of the same biological catastrophe depicted in *Oryx and Crake*. The female protagonist is Toby, one of the God's Gardeners encountering two liobams in the meadow, i.e. sacred animals announcing the advent of the Peaceable Kingdom. This lion-ship splice commissioned by the Lion Isaiahists (a Biblical extremist group) represents the only way to create a possible world of peace: "to fulfil the lion/lamb friendship prophecy without the first eating the second".[32]

In Atwood's wastelands, the common species of animals have disappeared and in their place genetically modified beasts do populate the land. Reminiscent of Eliot's "The Fire Sermon" in which "the nymphs are departed" (l.3)[33] from the brown land, liobams represent epic spirituality and history of humanity. If Eliot's nymphs do belong to the world existing before the industrial revolution, then Atwood's liobams are to be interpreted as Darwinian evolutions of animal species resulting from the age of waste.

In such eco-mythical parables, Eliot and Atwood share the same vision on linguistic experimentalism projecting their ethics of responsibility. As forms of eco-linguistics, Eliot's and Atwood's play on words and lexical blends are endowed with the power of warning. See for example Eliot's cock in "What the Thunder Said" standing "on the rooftree / Co co rico co corico" (ll.392-393)[34] announcing the rain, or the previously mentioned "effanineffable" cat musing on animal names and their existential meanings, or even the rats' alley ("I think we are in rats' alley/Where the dead men lost their bones", ll. 115-116)[35] where wastelanders live in constant consciousness of death.

By applying the blending theory, Atwood elaborates a blended linguistic structure as exemplified by bisyllabic blends of zoomorphic forms which follow the principles of lexical economy and asyntactic relation of CanE. Such simple 2-word sequential blends as *wolvog* (wolf+dog), *pigoon* (pig+-oon), *rakunk* (racoons+skunks), and *snat* (snakes+rats) not only recall the wildlife of the Great White North inhabited by such animals as *nanuk* (bear), *tuktu* (caribou), *amarok* (wolf), *siksik* (squirrel), and *pangnerk* (buck), but do establish a linguistic resemblance with Inuit polysynthetic language characterized by a very rich morphologic system according to which words begin with a root morpheme to which other morphemes are suffixed.

Atwood's use of prefix-suffix pairs (*wolvog, liobam*, *rakunk*, and *snat*), i.e. source words which are semantically similar (the source words of *wolvog* are related in that wolf and dog are canine species) or semantically related (the source words of *liobam* are related since lions feed on lambs), may reflect Inuit

[31] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Virago, 2003), 126.

[32] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (London: Virago, 2009), 112.

[33] Eliot, "The Fire Sermon", in *The Waste Land*, op. cit., 32.

[34] Ibid., 44.

[35] Ibid., 33.

derivational suffixes or what Lawrence Smith calls "derivational postbases".[36] As Arthur Thibert explains in the appendix to his Inuit Dictionary, "[i]n Eskimo, the suffixes are of the utmost importance. The meaning of each and every word is liable to be modified by one or several suffixes".[37]

Of particular interest is the lion-lamb blend mapping whose network representation involves the vital relation of identity between the animal properties of the lion and the animal properties of the lamb. This lion-sheep splice, commissioned to force the advent of the Peaceable Kingdom, does look gentle with curly golden hair and twirling tails but as soon as it opens its mouth, it displays sharp canines.

In line with Eliot's lion image blending together multiple meanings suggesting the animal nature being part of man's evolution (as in Sweeney,[38] Burnank and Bleinstein),[39] Atwood's liobam is strictly connected with man's destiny. This sacred animal appears to represent the "brutality couched in fluffiness which dominates the worlds before the Waterless Flood".[40] The cross-space mapping of cause and effect is activated and compressed into the blended property *dangerous/gentle* – a blended property because it can be understood as the result of a proceeding blending process based on the mental space "dangerous lion"/"gentle lamb" and another input space devoted to the outstanding qualities of sacred animals. The mental spaces involved show to what extent the blend between them is a forced result of compression of predator and prey properties. The liobam's gentle disposition is therefore due to the compression of a cause-effect relation between ferocity and gentility into a blended property. The following passage well clarifies Atwood's blending process with respect to animals and their social behaviours: "They're nibbling flower heads, they don't look up: yet she has the sense that they're perfectly aware of her. Then the male opens its mouths, displaying its long, sharp canines, and call. It's an odd combination of baa and roar: a bloar, thinks Toby".[41]

The frame below well exemplifies the conceptual blending network (an array of mental spaces) in such a neologism as liobam:

INPUT SPACE 1	INPUT SPACE 2
ANIMAL: lion APPEARCE PROPERTY: golden hair, sharp canines CALL PROPERTY: roar BEHAVIOUR: strolling and sniffing around as if it owns the place	ANIMAL: lamb APPEARCE PROPERTY: twirling tail CALL PROPERTY: baa BEHAVIOUR: nibbling flower heads

[36] Lawrence Smith, *A Survey of the Derivational Postbases of Labrador Inuttut (Eskimo)* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1978), 55.

[37] Arthur Thibert, *Eskimo (Inuktitut) Dictionary: Eskimo-English, English-Eskimo* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1997), 143.

[38] See Eliot's "Sweeney among the Nightingales": "The zebra stripes along his jaw/Swelling to maculate giraffe".

[39] "Who clipped the lion's wings/And flea's his rump and pared his claws?" ("Burbank with a Beadeker: Bleistein with a Cigar", ll.29-30).

[40] Wisker, *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction*, 75.

[41] Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, 113.

BLENDED SPACE	
ANIMAL: liobam APPEARCE PROPERTY: golden hair and twirling tail CALL PROPERTY: bloar BEHAVIOUR: nibbling flower heads, strolling and sniffing around as if it owns the place	

The lexical analysis of the word *liobam* may shed light on Atwood's borrowings from the Inuit language according to which one of the most commonly used infixes is -lior-, meaning "makes", while -b- is the transitive case for the subject of possession. At the same time, it is worth noting that the suffix -am produces homophony with Inuit sounds via assonance with the Inuit lexical item *ami* meaning "let me see".[42] It is significant, therefore, that liobam is a genetics work, possessed by a religious group whose intention is to let the world see the Peaceful Kingdom. Thus, though projecting the conceptual metaphor SCIENCE PROVIDES CONTROL OVER NATURE, Atwood aims at blending together science and nature by recalling the language of those peoples who fashioned their culture on nature's model.

[42] Thibert, *Eskimo (Inuktitut) Dictionary*, 139.

Another neologism which is worth mentioning is *Pigoon* (human/pig splices), a breed of genetically-modified pigs endowed with balloon-like bodies featuring both in *Oryx and Crake*, and *Maddaddam*. These transgenic animals designed to carry human-tissue organs for harvesting, live confined in the laboratories of the OrganInc corporation, whose scientists have exploited the genetic proximity between pigs and humans. If in *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy is frightened by the similarity between *Pigoons* and humans, in *Maddaddam* we are invited to view the *Pigoons*, the Mo'Hairs (human/goat splices), and other GMO creatures as part of a new natural order of things.

Quite significantly, the lexical blend of those 'humanimals' employs the Inuit "u" sound, which is pronounced "oo" as in shoot, or better as in the Latin "una". As suggested by Thibert, the main idea expressed by Inuit words beginning or ending with the letter U is the opening of the eyes[43] and the feelings of the soul as conveyed by *uimaktok* (i.e. is excited), or *ulutit* (i.e. saw). The word *Pigoon* produces homophony with Inuit sounds via matching the third person singular verbal suffix *-pigu*, and at the same time establishes an assonance with the Inuit lexical item *Angun* meaning "man". Atwood's *Pigoons* in *Oryx and Crake* are always described for their masculine strength and brutal voracity: "The two biggest ones ... move side by side to the door, bumping it with their shoulders.... There is a lot of muscle out there";[44] "Don't fall in," said his father. "They'll eat you up in a minute" (30). From this perspective, it could

[43] Ibid., 139.

[44] Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 314.

be argued that Atwood's neologisms such as *Pigoons*, *AnooYoo,*[45] *NooSkins* ("New skins"), *Miniluv* ("Ministry of love"), are characterised by a high homophone density. This tendency suggests that when a lexical blend word is to be processed, phonological information of its Inuit constituents is automatically activated and reverberates back to generate a series of orthographic representations of Inuit morphemic homophones.

All the lexical blends analysed so far seem to confirm an eco-bond with nature and in more specific terms with aboriginal peoples. In order to exorcise Eliot's desert waste of stony rubbish, Atwood linguistically evokes a world in harmony with nature, and the peoples who respected the earth and its beauties. As Katherine Barber maintains, "Canada's aboriginal peoples have had an undeniable impact on the language"[46] as attested to by "an influx of words designating Aboriginal cultural realities into more mainstream Canadian English".[47]

In Atwood's possible worlds, a range of apocalyptic alternative worlds, spiritual environmentalism includes even the most hybrid forms of animals, challenging the boundary separating humans and animals. The ustopian scenarios depicted by Atwood are complex conceptual structures consisting of sequences of eco-action concepts which are to be performed by 'humanimals' in recurrent situations with a particular environmental goal. This scenario captures the fact that animals have to do with stages of relationship with man: they either do or do not want to coexist, then they either do or do not get happiness from each other, and finally they either do or do not keep each other company. Humans and animals want, get or keep each other because of particular causes, because of sentimental or environmental issues but what still remains in the reader's mind is the echo of their calling for help, that howling wilderness whose noise is deafening.

[45] *AnooYoo* is a multi-word unit standing for "A New You", a company that markets and creates *beauty* and age-defying *products*.

[46] Katherine Barber, *Only in Canada You Say: A Treasury of Canadian Language* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2008), 64.

[47] Ibid., 65.