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'Thou retir'est to endless Rest'. Abraham Cowley's 'Wise' and 'Epicuræan' *Grasshopper*

Abstract I: La lirica *The Grasshopper* di Abraham Cowley esemplifica magistralmente l'atteggiamento reverente e quasi animistico nei confronti della dimensione naturale che caratterizza la prima metà del diciassettesimo secolo: accanto al vasto processo di democratizzazione e all'interesse sempre più crescente per la scienza, un rinnovato entusiasmo per i classici apre la strada a una nuova sensibilità nei confronti del mondo animale. Accostandosi a Pitagora, Platone, Teofrasto, Ovidio, Plutarco, Porfirio e, tra i suoi illustri contemporanei, a Gassendi, Galileo e Montaigne, Cowley viene a negare indirettamente le teorie antropocentriche per sostenere che la natura esiste tanto per gli uomini quanto per le piante e gli animali. Cowley dedica numerosi saggi e poesie a piante e animali che non fanno parte del repertorio letterario classico e giunge a teorizzare e formulare un sistema educativo che include l'agricoltura, il giardinaggio e la zoologia. Nella lirica in questione egli associa obliquamente la cavalletta eponima, un insetto tradizionalmente assimilato alla cicala in ambito inglese, alle Muse, Apollo, Titono, Epicuro e alla figura del poeta: Cowley attribuisce all'"Insetto felice" tratti sia umani che divini e si identifica con esso per potersi ritirare, come fa il *grasshopper*, "in un riposo eterno", metafora della dimensione paradisiaca e immortale cui aspirano molti pensatori inglesi di questo periodo.

Abstract II: The lyric *The Grasshopper* by Abraham Cowley is a paradigmatic example of the reverent and almost animistic approach to the natural dimension that marks the first half of the seventeenth century: along with the vast process of democratization and the growing interest in science, a renewed enthusiasm for classic thinkers contributes to a mounting sensitivity towards the 'brute creation'. Close to Pythagoras, Plato, Theophrastus, Ovid, Plutarch, Porphyry and, among his illustrious contemporaries, Gassendi, Galileo and Montaigne, Cowley indirectly challenges anthropocentrism and believes that the earth equally exists for humanity, animals and plants. Cowley devotes numerous poems and essays to plants and animals that do not belong to literary tradition and even theorizes and formulates an educative system that includes agriculture, gardening and zoology. In the lyric under analysis, he obliquely associates the eponymous grasshopper, an insect traditionally identified with the cicada in English culture, with the Muses, Apollo, Tithonus, Epicurus and with the figure of the poet: Cowley endows the "happy Insect" with both human and divine features and connects himself with it in order to retire, as his *grasshopper* does, "to endless Rest", a metaphor for the paradisaic and immortal dimension to which many seventeenth-century English thinkers aspire.

'New heav'ns, new earth, ages of endless date'. Changing perspectives on the world

The scientific, religious, political, social and cultural 'revolutions' that marked Europe, and Great Britain in particular, in the first half of the seventeenth century gradually led to a vast process of democratization, to the reconsideration of ideas such as centralism, anthropocentrism, authority and slavery, to the popular chiliastic theories, to the agrarian revolution and, as a consequence, to a new relationship between man and the natural world¹.

The philosophical debates aroused by the new astronomic theories strongly contributed to a mounting democratic attitude and to changing approaches towards nature. If the breaking of the circular pattern of the universe and, as a consequence, its lack of a centre, fostered the re-consideration of the ideas and roles of centralism, authority and absolutism, Galileo even abolished the hierarchical contrast between the earthly and the heavenly dimensions, or between the sublunary and the superlunary world, by establishing the identification between earth and moon: in *Sidereus nuncius*, published in Venice in 1610, the "Tuscan artist"² explicitly declares that "atque similitudo inter Lunam atque Tellurem clarius apparet" (Galilei 1993: 112). Parallel to the Copernican revolution, the religious Reformation rejected any form of intermediation between the believer and God and, therefore, shortened the distance between the human and divine dimensions and questioned the very concept of a moral and spiritual hierarchy. Considering that in his celebrated treatise on blood circulation published in 1628, *De motu cordis*, William Harvey demonstrated that the heart does not function as the 'king' of the body any longer, it can be argued that the concepts of centralism, authority and monarchy were disrupted even in the medical field (see Hill 1982). It is worth observing that Harvey studied at the university of Padua from 1600 to 1602 and that therefore he was in direct touch with the revolutionary teachings and personality of Galileo, who was there professor of mathematics from 1592 to 1610. Along with the above-mentioned upheavals, it goes without saying that the most sensational and shocking instance of how authority and absolutism were questioned and refused in the first half of the seventeenth century is the trial, condemnation and beheading of Charles I in 1649.

In this period of profound change and transformation, the popular chiliastic theories had a special meaning in Great Britain. John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, published in the previous century but now more popular than ever, contributed to the millenarian belief in the nearness of Christ's second coming and to the widespread trust that he would soon establish the earthly paradise for one thousand years precisely in Great Britain: this legend prompted the identification between England and paradise and between the English and the Hebrews, both mistreated by the Roman official religion. According to a recently-created myth, moreover, the English Church was older than the Roman one since it had been founded by Joseph of Arimathea just after's Christ's crucifixion: this myth claims that Joseph, one of Christ's disciples, built the first Christian church at Glastonbury, Somerset, in 63 A.D. and that the hawthorn that sprouted in the very place in which he planted his rod budded every year at Christmas (see Schama 1995).

¹ Lévi Strauss 2001 and Steiner 2010 investigate how the rejection of anthropocentrism fostered a more respectful and compassionate attitude towards animals.

² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I: 288.

'They also know, and reason not contemptibly'. A new attitude towards the animal world

Both the chiliastic theories and the popular legends widely circulating in England in these years inspired the recovery of the original innocence of paradise and fostered ideals that today we would define as ecologist, animalist and vegetarian: as it is well known, in the paradises of all cultures humanity lives in perfect harmony with animals and is able to speak their language. If numerous seventeenth-century commentators were convinced that humanity became flesh-eater only after the Flood, after the degeneration of its constitution, Thomas Tryon even argued that the birth of wars and conflicts was the consequence of eating animal flesh, an unnatural habit that, in its turn, was one of the consequences of the loss of paradise: Tryon, a follower of Jakob Böhme's philosophical and mystic theories, had a deep humanitarian and ecologist spirit, was against slavery, strongly asserted vegetarianism and advocated a respectful attitude towards animals and plants. The link between the animal world and slavery is not surprising if considering that, from Pythagoras on, the status of animals was frequently associated with the status of slaves³, a socio-political theme of special importance in the English Renaissance, a period in which the number of British colonies in the New World was increasing and the ominous 'slave triangle' was reaching its peak. In his numerous treatises, as, for instance, *The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness* and *The Way to make all People Rich*, both published in 1685, Tryon deals with animal dignity in such a convincing way that Aphra Behn did not wear animal furs any longer and, thanks to his writings, Benjamin Franklin would be converted to a regardful behaviour with the 'brute creation'. In the essay *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies*, issued in 1684 under the name 'Philotheos Physiologus', Tryon addresses and accuses his contemporaries (that could be ours) of enjoying cruelty to animals, almost quoting Pythagoras and Plutarch:

The inferior creatures groan under your cruelties. You hunt them for your pleasure, and overwork them for your covetousness, and kill them for your gluttony, and set them to fight one with another till they die, and count it to a sport and a pleasure to behold them worry one another (Tryon 1684: 183; Thomas 1984: 170).

Embracing the spirit of the age, also Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, a convinced theorizer of abstinence from animal flesh for moral reasons, criticized the popular battles among cocks, horses, bulls, lions, wild boars and dogs and defined them as a "wicked and barbarous sport" (Evelyn 1901: vol. II: 30)⁴, as "a sport [...] of Barbarity" in which poor creatures "fight till they drop down" (Pepys 1995: vol. IV: 427-428)⁵. Consequent on the new democratic attitude and the changing perspectives on the natural world, in these years the animal theme was of crucial importance: the royal physician Walter Charleton, the botanist John Ray, the mathematician John Wallis, Thomas Tany, Roger Crab and Robert Norwood, among others, based their disquisitions on scientific and anatomic grounds (in particular on human dentition and intestine) in order to demonstrate that originally humanity was

³ See, among others, Sorabji 2001, Morus 1954, Arbuckle & McCarty 2015.

⁴ 17 August 1667.

⁵ 21 December 1663.

not carnivorous. As reported by Pepys in his diary, Charleton favourably commented on the theory of the original vegetarianism of man and declared that “Nature fashion[s] every creature’s teeth according to the food she intends them. [...] man’s, it is plain, was not for flesh, but for fruit. [...] all children love fruit, and none brought the flesh but against their wills at first” (Pepys: vol. VII: 223-224)⁶. Other thinkers reached the same conclusion by finding in the Bible an exhortation to abstain from animal flesh. According to interpretations most in vogue in this period, the Bible condemns eating flesh and unequivocally alludes to a vegetarian diet: “And God said [...] I have given you every herb bearing seed [...] and every tree [...]; to you it shall be for meat. [...] flesh with the life thereof, *which is* the blood thereof, shall ye not eat” (*Genesis*, 1: 29; 9: 4). Drawing on this reading of *Genesis*, in *Paradise Lost* Milton excludes animal meat and explains that both in heaven and in Eden the diet consists of “ambrosial fruitage”, “nectar”, “melliflous dews” and “pearly grain” (V: 426-430). The poet, besides, refuses the Cartesian idea of animals as machines devoid of reason and feelings and believes that all the living creatures have a soul and a mind: when Adam complains about his solitude, God comforts him by saying that animals “also know, / And reason not contemptibly” (VIII: 373-374).

Along with the democratic attitude and the growing interest in scientific studies that marked this period, a renewed enthusiasm for classic thinkers, above all for Pythagoras, Plato, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Porphyry, Empedocles, Lucretius and Seneca, contributed to the mounting sensitivity towards the natural world. Many English authors, like Milton, rejected the Aristotelian, Stoic and Cartesian conception of animals as ‘mechanical’ beings lacking reason, challenged anthropocentrism and, close to most Classics, close to Montaigne, Galileo, Gassendi and Leibniz, believed that the earth equally exists for humanity, animals and plants. The debate on animal dignity and on the relationship between human and animal psychology was particularly animated in these years: among the most eminent disputers were René Descartes, on the one hand, and, on the other, Pierre Gassendi and Michel de Montaigne. Announcing his intention to complete a thorough essay on animals, in a letter to the marquis of Newcastle Descartes expresses his mechanist vision of the natural world and explicitly equates animals to clocks:

les bêtes [...] agissent naturellement et par ressorts, ainsi qu’une horloge [...]. Et sans doute que, lorsque les hirondelles viennent au printemps, elles agissent en cela comme des horloges. Tout ce que font les mouches à miel est de même nature, et l’ordre que tiennent les grues en volant et celui qu’observent les singes en se battant, s’il est vrai qu’ils en observent quelqu’un⁷ (Descartes 2009: 2353).

Whereas for Descartes no animal, even the most evolved and intelligent, has anything in common with man, for Montaigne animals are endowed with intellect and thought and for Gassendi they even have a soul⁸: thanks to his theory of monads, Gottfried Wilhelm

⁶ 28 July 1666.

⁷ Letter to the marquis of Newcastle, 23 November 1646.

⁸ For the relationship between man and animal in early modern England, see Fudge 2000, 2004, 2006. For

Leibniz would be the first thinker who broke down the barriers between the animal and the human world. The gradual rootedness of the new caring approach towards animals led to a regardful relationship between mankind and nature that anticipated David Hume's, Jeremy Bentham's and Charles Darwin's vision of the 'brutes' and foreshadowed recent moral philosophy on animals, such as Tom Regan's "respect principle" and the 'ecofeminist theories' formulated by Carolyn Merchant, Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan.

It is precisely in the central years of the seventeenth century that the democratic movements of the Levellers and Diggers tried to retrieve man's original 'state of innocence', now frequently identified with Amerindian societies and with American colonies, by promoting their innovative socio-agrarian and vegetarian theories: these two political movements advocated the abolishment of social classes and private property and endeavoured to create a society entirely based on agriculture and gardening. Gerrard Winstanley, the leader of the Levellers, suffered when seeing beasts of burden and working animals grieving for hard labour and suggested that every parish should deliver a weekly lecture on natural sciences instead of the Sunday sermon. Paradoxically enough, both Diggers and Levellers were defeated by General Thomas Fairfax, the champion of republican ideals and one of the strongest supporters of Oliver Cromwell: the final destruction of both movements took place in the last years of the sixties, with the restoration of the Stuart monarchy. As it had already happened during the reign of Charles I, during Charles II's government numerous groups of Puritans left Great Britain in order to found in the New World, in North America, a society entirely based on that primitive Christianity that in Europe seemed ineluctably lost. The English interpreted the westward voyage implied in the colonization of America, now perceived as the original Eden, as the continuation and perfection of a sacred process started with the Reformation: the westbound movement of the pioneers, strongly imbued with solar symbolism, completed, according to this reading, the triumphal march of wisdom and true religion from the East to the West. As the fact that America was unknown to the Europeans until the Reformation was read as a signal of divine providence, so the pioneers were aware of their being the first followers of the course of the sun in its journey towards the paradisaical gardens of the West and were convinced of their bringing salvation to the whole universe. The conflict between country and city, or the topos of natural and innocent life as opposed to urban and corrupted artificiality, became a central theme and a literary convention well established in England during the seventeenth century (see Eliade 1969): in this light, the American plantations were regarded as a sort of paradise, as an enlarged, and untainted, 'countryside' of the mother country (cf. Williams 1985).

'Happy Insect, happy Thou'. Poetry, natural philosophy and 'minor' animals

Abraham Cowley concentrates all the features just surveyed: he was actively involved with experimental science and with the new botanical and zoological studies, advocated the foundation of a society for scientific research and enterprise, was imbued with classical culture,

animals and philosophy in the Renaissance and early modern age, see Muratori & Burkhard eds. 2013. For the modern Western debate on animals, see Boas 1933. For animals and men from a historical and cultural perspective, see Morus 1954, Arbuckle & McCarty 2015, Brantz 2010, Raber 2013, Agamben 2002.

was deeply influenced by the myth of paradise and had a respectful attitude towards plants and animals. Moving from the new astronomic theories and from the consequent redefinition of the role and symbolism of the earth within the whole universe, he also reconsidered the relationship between humanity and animals. Cowley regarded with both enthusiasm and dismay the idea of a world without limits and expressed a relativistic standpoint that strongly evokes Giordano Bruno's principles: if the Italian thinker believed that man, in his *exilium in illo infinito*, can be compared to an ant that has lost its way in the boundless space and, at the same time, believed that a star is not greater than a man⁹, in the essay *Of Greatness* Cowley declares that "this whole Globe of Earth, which we account so immense a Body, is but one Point or Atome in relation to those numberless Worlds that are scattered up and down in the Infinite Space of the Skie which we behold" (Cowley 1906: 434). Pervaded by the relativistic and 'ecologist' spirit of the age and close to the Levellers' interest in natural philosophy, albeit utterly far from their political theories, Cowley idealized and formulated an educative system that included agriculture, gardening and zoology: juxtaposing the "genuine taste" of the countryside to the sophistications of the city and arguing that "the three first Men in the World, were a Gardner, a Ploughman and a Grazier", in the essay *Of Agriculture* he maintains that any father should "provide a Tutor for his Son to instruct him" in natural issues (Cowley 1967: vol. II: 321) and in his Baconian essay *A Proposition for the Advancement of Learning* stresses the importance of zoology as a university course.

As already said, the changing attitude towards the natural world that marked this period was not prompted only by compassion and by a democratic and sensitive spirit but also, and possibly above all, by the new scientific interest and empirical approach: Thomas Sprat, a founding member of the Royal Society and Cowley's literary executor and biographer, remarked the interrelation between the poet's works and his life, personality and scientific concerns. Deeply interested in the new experimental science and a distinguished natural philosopher, Cowley involved himself with the Royal Society: as reported by Samuel Johnson, "in 1657 Cowley was made a doctor of physic" and "in the commencement of the Royal Society [...] he appeared busy among the experimental philosophers with the title of Dr. Cowley" (Johnson 1961: vol. I: 7). Cowley followed Thomas Sprat's and John Evelyn's advice¹⁰ and celebrated in verse the Royal Society. With the poem *To the Royal Society* he praised in particular the glories and merits of Francis Bacon, the "mighty Man" that inspired and was the moral founder of the Society: "Bacon at last, a mighty Man, arose / [...] and boldly undertook the injur'd Pupil's cause"¹¹, i.e. the cause of natural philosophy. Permeated with the spirit of the age and with the scientific interests of the Royal Society, Cowley knew much about animals, both real and mythical: he was familiar not only with

⁹ "Alla proporzione, similitudine, unione e identità de l'infinito non più ti accosti con essere uomo che formica, una stella che un uomo; perché a quello essere non più ti avvicini con essere sole, luna, che un uomo o una formica" (Bruno 1973: 60-61).

¹⁰ Evelyn records in his Diary a letter written to him by Cowley on May 13, 1667: "my laziness in finishing y^e copy of verse vpon y^e Royal Society, for w^{ch} I was engag'd before by M^r Sprat's desire, & encourag'd since by yow, was the cause of this delay" (Cowley 1967: vol. I: lxxvii).

¹¹ Cowley, *To the Royal Society* (*The History of the Royal Society, 2^d Edition*), ll. 37-38. The lyric is included in *Occasional Verses*, a collection of poems written between 1663 and 1668.

Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, Ulisse Aldrovandi's zoological studies, Edward Topsell's *History of Four-Footed Beasts* and Thomas Moffet's *Theatre of Insects*, but also with the more scientifically treated information in Francis Willughby's *Ornithology* and Johannes Goedaert's *Natural Metamorphoses, or, History of Insects* (cf. Hinman 1960: 298). Among the most influential early modern theorists on animals, it is worth mentioning (besides the already quoted Montaigne, Descartes, Gassendi, Leibniz and Ray), Bernard Palissy, Hyeronimus Rorarius, Baruch Spinoza and, later, Thomas Hobbes and David Hume.

Cowley's numerous interests and attitudes led to his peculiar way of mingling poetry and natural philosophy, his writing essays in a poetical language and, vice versa, his composing poetry with the condensation, clearness and economy of good prose: highlighting the poet's 'double' essence, Samuel Johnson wittily defined him as a "philosophic rhymers" and, convinced that one of the great sources of poetical delight is "presenting pictures to the mind", concluded that Cowley "gives inferences instead of images" (Johnson 1961: 28, 34). In his passionate celebration of natural peace and rural pleasures, Cowley demonstrated deep knowledge and respect for animals: in the lyric *The Garden* he compares the melodies of birds to the poet's song and wishes, as Montaigne did, that the "Birds that dance from Bough to Bough" (st. iv) were not the target of cruel sports. By declaring that "'Tis well if they [Birds] become not Prey" (*The Garden*, st. iv), Cowley can be aligned with Tryon and Margaret Cavendish, the strenuous defenders of animals that explicitly questioned men's right to kill birds for their fun: Cavendish's *Dialogue betwixt Birds*, published in 1653, and Tryon's *Country-Man's Companion* and *The Complaints of the Birds and Fowls of Heaven*, both published in 1683¹², are a majestic and moving defence of "the Freeborn Nations of the Air", as Cowley would say¹³, that can be regarded as the basis of important cultural, social and legislative changes. Although the indifferent and utilitarian approach was still rooted, the increasing sensitivity towards birds led to a series of Acts that forbid hunting wild fowl in 1689 and, more than one century later, to the foundation of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824¹⁴: the more and more responsible and respectful attitude towards the 'brutes' is precisely what would prompt Arthur Schopenhauer to write about Great Britain in his philosophical essay *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (1839) and to consider the English as a 'happy exception' in Western culture (Schopenhauer 2012).

'Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing'. The insect of Apollo and the Muses

Embracing the new scientific approach and the new regardful attitude towards the brute creation, Cowley, as much as the Cavalier poet Richard Lovelace, composed lyrics that demonstrate a deep interest in animals that do not belong to poetic tradition. If, around

¹² The complete title of Tryon's essay in defence of birds is *The Complaints of the Birds and Fowls of Heaven to their Creator for the Oppressions and Violences Most Nations on the Earth Do Offer Them*.

¹³ Cowley, *Ode. Upon Liberty*, st. iii. Reformulating the same image, in the following century James Thomson would define birds as "plumy race, / The tenants of the sky" (*Winter*, ll. 137-138).

¹⁴ For the compassionate attitude towards beasts, see Thomas 1984, De Levie 1947, Franklin 2005, Singer 1990, Regan 1983.

1649, Cowley wrote the lyrics *The Country Mouse*, *The Swallow* and *The Grassehopper*¹⁵, Lovelace included in *Lucasta*, published in 1649, the poems *The Grasse-Hopper*, *The Ant*, *The Snail*, *A Fly Caught in a Cobweb* and *The Falcon*: the title of Lovelace's lyrical collection, *Lucasta*, is the contraction of the Latin terms *lux* and *casta*, but it also evokes the noun *locusta*, i.e. grasshopper. Cowley's and Lovelace's interest in 'minor' animals was undoubtedly influenced also by the vogue of the so called *style rustique*, the artistic pottery created in the previous century by Bernard Palissy, the French zoologist, naturalist, alchemist, hydraulics engineer and architect of gardens profoundly admired by Francis Bacon: Palissy used to model in a most naturalistic way insects, serpents, fish, snails, lizards, other reptiles and various plants in order to decorate the dishes, grottoes and *Wunderkammern* of majestic country estates. If Bacon was fascinated by Palissy's innovative lessons of natural science (see Farrington 1952), Evelyn greatly admired his naturalistic pottery in the royal estate of Fontainebleau (cf. Evelyn 1901). Enraptured both by Palissy's ceramics and by doctor Wilkins's transparent apiaries¹⁶, Evelyn devoted a whole section of his monumental *Elysium Britannicum* to the breeding and study of insects, bees, fish and birds ("Of Aviaries, Apiaries, Vivaries, Insects, etc"). If the *Philosophicall Apiarie* is useful, according to Evelyn, both for recreation and contemplation¹⁷, the buzz and murmur of bees is pleasant and fascinating because the "industrious chymists" produce honey, a "delicious *Elixir*" and "*Panacea*":

Their very murmurs are agreeable and exceedingly charming, and if they rob our Flowers, it is but to gratifie us with their *Hony* & that delicious *Elixir* which these industrious chymists extract, no imaginary *Panacea*, but the richest most elaborate and admirable that nature produces, or arte can shew (Evelyn 2001: 273-274).

Although convinced, as all his contemporaries, that the *Commonwealth* of bees is governed by males ("They have a Citty, King, Empire, Society". Evelyn 2001: 274), Evelyn even declares, radically far from Descartes's theories, that bees are intellectually close to men: "The Bee is the wisest, the most artificial & approaching nearest to the understanding of men" (Evelyn 2001: 274). The celebrated *gardiner* embraced the biblical vision of grasshoppers as a devastating scourge, but regarded the insects as worth consideration and appreciation for their being, close to the bees, endowed with humanity and kindness: "a sort of [Grass-hopper] more humane, & so intelligent, as being asked of an erring Traviler the way to the next Towne, will by stretching out one of his legs direct the passenger & seldome deceive him" (Evelyn 2001: 308).

As Evelyn associates bees and grasshoppers with men in the light of their intelligence,

¹⁵ Cowley's poems were collected in *Miscellanies*, published in 1656.

¹⁶ As recorded in his diary, Evelyn was profoundly impressed by the complex architecture of the transparent hives constructed by Wilkins: "we all dined at that most obliging and universally-curious Dr. Wilkins, at Wadham College. He was the first who showed me transparent apiaries, which he had built like castles and palaces, and so ordered one upon another, as to take the honey without destroying the bees" (Evelyn 1901: vol. I: 295. 13 July 1654).

¹⁷ "an ornament that cannot be dispensed withall, and the Bee itselife of such use for contemplation and diversion" (Evelyn 2001: 273).

so Cowley, in his Anacreontic lyric *The Grassehopper*, indirectly equates grasshoppers to humanity by presenting them as the link between heaven and earth. Thomas Browne's theory of man as an *amphibium* in between the divine and the material worlds was a concept well rooted in the seventeenth century: according to the doctor, "thus is man that great and true *Amphibium*, whose nature is disposed to live [...] in divided and distinguished worlds [...] betweene a corporall and spirituall essence" (Browne 1963: 44). If grasshoppers are for Cowley 'amphibians' between heaven and earth, like men, for Johann Jakob Bachofen they represent the union of light and darkness since, as the first autochthonous men, they were originally generated by the earth, by darkness, and aspire to light, to the sun (Bachofen 1988: 779): in the lyric *To the Cicada*, the source of inspiration for Cowley's poem, Anacreon refers to the insect's autochthonous quality when defining it as "Loving song, *earth-born* and prudent" (l. 16. Italics mine. Anacreon 1993: 26). It is worth noticing that both Anacreon and Bachofen actually deal with cicadas and that the English term 'grasshopper' most frequently stands for 'cicada', the celebrated *téttix* of ancient Greece, the ornament worn by the participants in the Eleusinian mysteries – rites devoted to Demeter, mother earth¹⁸. Besides Cowley and Lovelace, also Edmund Spenser, Andrew Marvell, Robert Burton, James Thomson and Leigh Hunt, for instance, use the term 'grasshopper' to praise the cicada and the pleasure provoked by its musical chirping.

The grasshopper-cicada Cowley celebrates in the eponymous lyric feeds on dew, the nourishment of angels, and functions, as if it were a human being, as the *amphibium* that connects the heavenly and earthly dimensions¹⁹:

Happy *Insect*, what can be
 In happiness compar'ed to Thee?
 Fed with nourishment divine,
 The dewy *Mornings* gentle *Wine!*
 (*The Grassehopper*, ll. 1-4).

Considering that for the ancients dew was a trace of Iris, the swift messenger of the gods that symbolises the rainbow, i.e. the bridge that links heaven and earth, Cowley's reference to the "dewy Wine" sheds further light on the 'amphibious' substance of the insect. Dew was also read as a sign of Eos, the goddess of dawn that loved Tithonus, a mythological figure connected with the grasshopper-cicada. According to the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, Eos asked Zeus to make Tithonus immortal but forgot to request eternal youth for her beloved: Tithonus became older and older and extremely garrulous, to the point of shrinking and becoming an ever chirping grasshopper (see Càssola 1999: 270). In the English version of the myth, Tithonus is transformed into a grasshopper, and not into the original cicada. Noticing that in Greek there are at least three insects that mean 'grasshopper', Allen argues that the

¹⁸ For the Eleusinian mysteries, see, among others, Càssola 1999, Jung & Kerényi 1985, Kerényi 1967, Eliade 1978, Frazer 1922.

¹⁹ Lovelace' *amphibium* grasshopper is, in its turn, the link between air and earth: "The Joyes of Earth and Ayre are thine intire, / That with thy feet and wings dost hop and flye". *The Grasse-Hopper. To my Noble Friend, Mr Charles Cotton. Ode*, ll. 5-6.

very Greeks confused different singing insects: “The Greeks do not distinguish clearly between the various singing insects, and it is not always clear what they mean when they use *téttix*, *kalamaía*, *mántiV*, *ǎkríV*” (Allen 1960: 83n).

Close to the classical readings of the Greek *téttix*, Cowley emphasizes the divine substance of the insect. Nature is anthropomorphized and presented as Ganymede, Zeus’s cup-bearer, busy at serving dew and wine to the “happy Insect”:

Nature waits upon thee still,
And thy verdant Cup does fill,
'Tis fill'd where ever thou dost tread,
Nature selfe's thy *Ganimed*
(*The Grassehopper*, ll. 5-8).

Although Cowley begins his lyric faithfully drawing on Anacreon’s poem, opened with the invocation “We may well pronounce thee happy, / Oh, Cicada that on tree-tops, / [drinkst] thy little *dew-draught*” (*To the Cicada*, ll. 1-2. Italics mine), soon he transforms the original source in a hyperbolic treatment of the insect. In his elegy for the death of Cowley, John Denham precisely dwells on the poet’s ability to emulate the ancients and on his being “no pick-purse of anothers wit”, as Philip Sidney would say²⁰, thus alluding to Cowley’s classical culture, to his originality and, thus, to the lively debate on creation/imitation:

To him no Author was unknown,
Yet what he wrote was all his own.
[...] He did not Steal, but Emulate,
And when he would like them appear
Their Garb, but not their Cloaths, did wear
("On Mr. ABRAHAM COWLEY. *His Death and Burial amongst the Ancient Poets*", ll. 28-29, 35-37)²¹.

In Cowley’s Anacreontic composition, Nature serves the *grassehopper* as Ganymede, humanity sows and ploughs for it and the very Phoebus is the insect’s father:

Man for thee does sow and plow;
Farmer He, and Land-Lord Thou!
[...] Thee *Phæbus* loves, and does inspire;
Phæbus is himself thy *Sire*
(*The Grassehopper*, ll. 15-16; 23-24).

Cowley embraces Anacreon’s idea that the insect is loved both by Phoebus and the Muses (“And the Muses truly love thee: / And thou art loved of Phoebus”)²² but, by claim-

²⁰ Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 74, l. 8.

²¹ The elegy is quoted by Grosart (Cowley 1967: vol. I: cxxi).

²² Anacreon, *To the Cicada*, ll. 12-13.

ing that the god is the insect's father, hyperbolically stresses the connection between the grasshopper and Apollo, the god of the sun whose frequent epithet is Phoebus, 'the brilliant'. Among his many aspects, Apollo is the head of the Muses' games, is the god of music and poetry and generally composes in verses his oracles: in the *Homeric Hymns*, the cicada is associated with the sun and with music and, for these reasons, is one of the animals consecrated both to Apollo and to Demeter. By insisting on its activities, "drinking, and dancing, and singing" (l. 9), Cowley links the *grasshopper* also with the Muses, who gather at Hippocrene's fountain in order to dance and sing:

Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing;
 Happier then the happiest *King!*
 All the *Fields* which thou dost see,
 All the *Plants* belong to *Thee*,
 All that *Summer Hours* produce,
 Fertile made with early juice
 (*The Grasshopper*, ll. 9-14).

In his dialogue *Phaedrus*, Plato confirms the links among the insect, the Muses and poetry. Socrates explains to Phaedrus that the grasshoppers were originally poets, human beings so enraptured by the music and songs of the Muses that died of hunger and thirst: now these poets live in the grasshoppers. In his celebrated English version of the dialogue, Benjamin Jowett respects the British tradition and translates the term τέττιξ as 'grasshopper' and not as 'cicada':

the grasshoppers chirruping in the heat of the sun over our heads [...] are said to have been human beings in an age before the Muses. And when the Muses came and song appeared they were ravished with delight; and singing always, never thought of eating and drinking, until at last in their forgetfulness they died. And now they live again in the grasshoppers (Plato 1928: 262 d).

Besides explicitly quoting Plato's *Phaedrus* and connecting the grasshopper with the Muses, in his most influential treatise on melancholy Robert Burton dwells on the myth of Tithonus, juxtaposes the singing insect to black bile and identifies it with poets, scientists and men of culture:

poets, rhetoricians, historians, philosophers, mathematicians, sophisters, etc., they are like grasshoppers, sing they must in summer, and pine in the winter, for there is no preferment for them. [...] About noon, when it was hot, and the grasshoppers made a noise, [Socrates] took that sweet occasion to tell [Phædrus] a tale, how grasshoppers were once musicians, poets, etc., before the Muses were born, and lived without meat and drink, and for that cause were turned by Jupiter into grasshoppers. And may be turned again, in *Titoni cicadas, aut Lyciorum ranas* (Burton 1948: vol. I: 307).

'Prophet of the ripened year!'. The grasshopper and the poet

Albeit the cicada is popularly related to rashness and foolishness, Cowley's grasshopper is wise and prudent, is the link between heaven and earth, is associated with Apollo, the Muses and Demeter and, close to Plato's, Callimachus's and Anacreon's *téttix*, is identifiable with the very poet. If, as argued by Socrates, "the grasshoppers chirruping in the heat of the sun over our heads" are "the prophetesses of the Muses" that inspire men with the gift of oratory (Plato 1928: 262 d), it is clear why Cowley draws a subtle link between the poet and the "happy Insect", in its turn sacred to Apollo and, thus, connected with poets and poetry. Apollo's relationship with music sheds light on the choice of depicting the *grassehopper* as a singing insect and, indirectly, as a poet: it is worth observing that Apollo is generally represented as the god of music and poetry in mount Parnassus, where he heads the Muses' games, and that his oracles are often expressed in verses. I am convinced that, when presenting a shepherd as enraptured by the melodies of the happy insect ("The *Shepherd* gladly heareth thee, / More *Harmonious* than *Hee*", ll. 19-20), Cowley is emphasising the *grassehopper's* characteristic musical feature²³ and is wittily linking it with Apollo, sometimes represented as a solitary shepherd: Apollo as a shepherd was so fascinated by Hermes's music that even bartered his own herd of cattle to get Hermes's lyre in exchange. Subsequently, Hermes invented the flute, an instrument that Apollo, defined in the *Homeric Hymn* as "master of the Muses" and "singer with the flute", obtained by exchanging it with his golden rod (afterwards Hermes's caduceus).

In the light of the connections between the insect and music, Callimachus, as it is well known, regarded the cicada as an attribute of the Muses and as a symbol of the refined poet: for this reason, Anacreon ends his lyric by defining the *téttix* as "nearly equal to the immortals" (*To the Cicada*, l. 18). After drinking, singing and dancing, in the last couplet of Cowley's lyric the "*Voluptuous, Wise*" and "*Epicuræan Animal*" (ll. 31-32) feels satiated with its summer banquet and decides to retire: "Sated with thy *Summer Feast*, / Thou retir'est to endless *Rest*" (ll. 33-34). The reference to Epicurus is most interesting since in this period the Greek philosopher was frequently evoked for his 'naturalist' spirit and for his democratic and relativistic vision of the world: Cowley composed an Anacreontic lyric entitled *The Epicure* and, between 1647 and 1649, Gassendi published two successful guides in Latin on Epicurus and his ideas – *De vita, moribus, et doctrina Epicuri libri octo* and *Syntagma philosophiae Epicuri*.

Close to the Epicure that banishes toils and suffering and leaves the worry of the future to the gods²⁴, the *grassehopper*, after its summer feast, longs for retirement:

But when thou'st drunk, and danc'd, and sung,
Thy fill, the flowry Leaves among
(*Voluptuous*, and *Wise* with all,
Epicuræan Animal!)

²³ Close to the classical myth, Evelyn claims that the *grassehopper* prefers music to food and loves singing when the farmers are at work in the field: "They sing most when they are in the field, & love it better than their meate, 'tis pretty to consider how when a man is neere, they will sing as if very farr off, & when he is at a distance, in so loude a note as if he were just by one" (Evelyn 2001: 308).

²⁴ In the final couplet of the poem *The Epicure*, Cowley exclaims "Let's banish *Business*, banish *Sorrow*; / To the Gods belongs *To morrow*" (ll. 11-12).

Sated with thy *Summer Feast*,
Thou retir'est to endless *Rest*
(*The Grasshopper*, ll. 29-34).

As the happy insect “retires to endless Rest”, that is to say to the eternal dimension of heaven, so Cowley explicitly refers to the myth of paradise when declaring his wish to “retire to some American plantation” in order to abandon forever labour and grief: in the *Preface of the Author* to his *Poems*, Cowley announces that

my desire [is] to retire my self to some of our *American Plantations*, not to seek for *Gold*, or enrich my self with the traffic of those parts [...] but to forsake this world for ever, with all its *vanities* and *Vexations* of it, and to bury my self there in some obscure retreat (Cowley 1905: 8).

Considering that for seventeenth-century English thinkers the westward voyage to America, perceived as the original Eden, was strongly imbued with the symbolism of the sun, Cowley and his grasshopper have in common solar features, a musical-poetical skill and a fervent wish to withdraw to paradise.

A poem by Giovanni Pascoli corroborates the interpretation of the grasshopper's desire to retire to endless rest as the insect's longing for immortality. By linking the music of the grasshoppers with the melodies of the sistrum and with “invisible doors / that perhaps cannot be opened any longer”, Pascoli indirectly alludes to the mystery cult of Isis, the Egyptian mother goddess, giver of life and patroness of nature, and, thus, to the idea of immortality and resurrection after death:

squassavano le cavallette
finissimi sistri d'argento
(tintinni a invisibili porte
che forse non s'aprono più? [...])
(*L'assiuolo*, ll. 19-22).

Isis was often depicted with a pail symbolizing the Nile in one hand and with the sistrum, or ‘rattle’, evoking the sound of the breeze blowing through papyrus reeds in the other hand. In the essay *On Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch dwells on Isis's creating force and on the powerful role of her musical attribute: “The sistrum (rattle) also makes it clear that all things in existence need to be shaken, or rattled about, and never to cease from motion but, as it were, to be waked up and agitated when they grow drowsy and torpid” (Plutarch 1936b: 149). The sistrum is explicitly connected with Isis and with the perpetual cycle of life, death and rebirth: if the basic shape of the musical instrument resembles the *ankh*, the Egyptian symbol of life in the hieroglyphs, Plutarch explains that at its bottom “they construct [...] the face of Isis on one side, and on the other the face of Nephthys. By these faces they symbolize birth and death” (Plutarch 1936b: 149).

The grasshopper's wish to triumph over death, i.e. its wish to return to the earth it comes from, to the womb of the universal mother, reinforces both its links with Isis and

Demeter and its autochthonous essence (cf. Bachofen 1988: 779), a quality Anacreon highlights by defining the tétitx as “earth-born” (*To the Cicada*, l. 16). As his chirping alter ego aspires to resurrection by returning to mother earth, so Cowley hopefully longs for the eternal bliss granted by the primitive Christianity of the New World and by the earthly paradise that will be soon established in England for one thousand years: after all, as argued by Anacreon, the insect-poet is associated with the brilliant sun and is “nearly equal to the immortals” (*To the Cicada*, l. 18).

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