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## A Literary Bestiary: Crafting Animal Presence Through Literary Devices

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### **Abstract:**

"Animal studies" in English poetry is a burgeoning field of literary world that examines the multifaceted ways animals are represented, understood, and interrogated within poetic works. It moves beyond simply seeing animals as allegories or symbols for human traits and instead seeks to understand the complex human-animal relationship and the agency of animals themselves as depicted in verse.

This paper delves into the various ways in which poets utilize word choice, imagery, and an array of literary devices to depict animals in poetry. It analyses how careful diction, which includes specific nouns, dynamic verbs, and rich sensory language, produces vivid and immediate portrayals of animal appearance, movement, and sound. Additionally, the examination explores the deliberate use of imagery—visual, auditory, and tactile—to engage readers in the realm of the animal and express its essence. Beyond mere descriptive methods, the abstract emphasizes the important function of literary devices such as personification, metaphor, simile, and symbolism in endowing animals with greater significance, mirroring human characteristics, or acting as vehicles for philosophical exploration. The use of alliteration and onomatopoeia to replicate animal sounds and movements, along with apostrophe and varied tone, is also addressed. Ultimately, this paper uncovers how these poetic instruments collectively establish deep connections between human readers and the non-human realm, nurturing empathy, wonder, and a sophisticated comprehension of animals within the literary domain.

**Key words:** Animal studies, poetry, literary elements, symbolism, imagery, animal narration



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Animal studies is an interdisciplinary field that explores the complex relationships between humans and animals, examining the cultural, social, historical, and philosophical contexts in which animals are represented, used, and treated. This field encompasses a wide range of disciplines, including literature, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, biology, and psychology.

Animal studies challenge traditional notions of human exceptionalism, questioning the boundaries between humans and animals and highlighting the ways in which animals shape human culture, society, and identity. By examining the representation of animals in literature, art, media, and everyday life, animal studies scholars aim to promote a deeper understanding of animal experiences, emotions, and consciousness.

However, this article examines the compelling presence of animals in Christina Rossetti's "Caterpillar," Sharmistha Mohanty's "A Snake eats a Mynah," Emma Hine's "Jaws," and Mary Ruefle's "Grasshopper," demonstrating how these poets masterfully employ literary devices to imbue their creatures with profound meaning and resonance.

Focusing on the use diction, diction is a crucial element in poetry, referring to the choice of words and language used to convey meaning, tone, and atmosphere. Poets carefully select words to create a specific effect, evoke emotions, and convey complex ideas.

The diction in "Caterpillar" is intentionally simple, childlike, and gentle. Words like "fuzzy," "hurry," "soft bed," and "a-flicker" are straightforward and non-academic. This diction creates a feeling of innocence and wonder, appropriate for a poem about a natural transformation.

The poem starts with the direct, declarative statement, "A Snake eats a Mynah," using simple, common nouns and verbs. The poem's power comes from its refusal to use flowery or emotional language. Words like "eats" are direct and lack embellishment. The phrase "it is not a metaphor" is a deliberate act of diction, a meta poetic statement that forces the reader to focus on the raw, literal reality of the scene. The diction is spare, creating a sense of cold, detached observation that highlights the harshness of the event.

The diction in the poem "Jaws," The poet uses words that feel both specific and menacing. The word "Jaws" itself is a powerful piece of diction, instantly recognizable and loaded with cultural terror. She also includes words such as - animatronic shark, slick apertures, anvil and infrared in this poem.

Next light falls on imagery. Imagery, in a literary or poetic sense, is the author's use of description and vivid language, deepening the reader's understanding of the work, by



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appealing to the senses. There are different types of imagery. These include – visual imagery, auditory, kinaesthetic imagery, olfactory or gustatory and tactile imagery.

The poem *Caterpillar* opens with the description "Brown and furry," which creates a tactile image of the caterpillar, allowing readers to visualize its texture and colour. This imagery establishes a connection to the natural world, emphasizing the caterpillar's earthly presence.

*A Snake eats a Mynah* opens with vivid imagery as it describes the Snake consuming the Mynah. Phrases like "head first" and "yellow legs extend" create a stark visual representation of the predatory act, immersing readers in the scene and evoking both fascination and horror. The imagery captures the brutality of nature and the instinctual behaviours of animals.

*Jaws* by Emma Hine's poem starts with striking imagery that captures the visceral experience of craving colour and blood. Phrases like "the blood washes up on the beach" create a stark visual that evokes both beauty and horror, establishing a sense of urgency and desire. The imagery of the shark's "quick whip and slither / of its tail" conveys its stealth and power, suggesting a lurking danger beneath the surface.

Mary Ruefle's poem "Grasshopper" begins with a vivid image of attempting to catch a grasshopper, which serves as a metaphor for the elusive nature of certain experiences in life. The description of the grasshopper as "practically impossible" to catch suggests the challenges of grasping fleeting moments or understanding the complexities of existence.

Coming to the symbolism, used to represent ideas, persons or entities in literature.

In the poem *Caterpillar* by Christina Rossetti, the caterpillar symbolizes transformation and potential, as it is destined to become a butterfly.

*Spin and die,*

*To live again a butterfly* (Rossetti, 1893, lines 9–10)

The lines encapsulate the theme of metamorphosis, suggesting that the caterpillar's current state is merely a phase in a more profound journey.

In *The Snake and a Mynah* poem, the natural predator-prey dynamic is represented by the snake and a mynah. Consumption symbolizes the cycle of life, death, and rebirth in addition to physical survival. The owl's "terror" and eventual wing loss serve as additional symbols for the fragility of life and the unpredictable nature of untamed life.

The shark in Hine's *Jaws* poem symbolizes not only a physical threat but also deeper psychological fears and desires within the speaker.



The line

*some wild need inside me*

*ticking into place* (Hine, 2021, lines 12–13)

hints at an instinctual drive that connects the speaker to the primal nature of the shark, suggesting a shared existence that transcends fear.

Beyond being just an insect, the grasshopper in the poem *Grasshopper* symbolizes deeper philosophical themes, such as mindfulness and the importance of appreciating life's small wonders. Its presence in the poem invites readers to reflect on their own experiences and the moments that often go unnoticed.

Talking about the alliteration. Alliteration can be defined as a series of words, occurring close together in the phrases or lines of poetry, that have the same first consonant sound.

In the poem *Caterpillar*, the repetition of the /h/ sound in "hurry" and "hovering" creates a rhythmic quality that mirrors the movement of the caterpillar as it scuttles along its path. This sound device enhances the poem's musicality while drawing attention to the caterpillar's actions.

Also, the repetition of the /s/ sound is used in the following lines in the poem *Jaws-never showing its hidden side*.

*Surely space is just another underwater* (Hine, 2021, lines 1–2)

Next the focus shifts to Metaphor and Simile. A metaphor is a figure of speech used for comparison. While, simile is common poetic device. The subject of the poem is described by comparing it to another object or subject, using 'as' or 'like'

In Sharmistha Mohanty's poem "A Snake eats a Mynah", The phrase "The seasons are muscular and original" serves as a metaphor for the strength and inevitability of nature's cycles. It suggests that nature is powerful and primal, shaping the lives of all creatures within it.

In the *Jaws* poem, the comparison of the shark to the moon—  
*The shark, like the moon, is*

*pockmarked, unstoppable* (Hine, 2021, lines 1–2).

the above lines serve as a simile for the duality of beauty and terror. Just as the moon has phases and hidden sides, so too does the shark embody mystery and danger, reinforcing the idea that there are aspects of nature that remain unseen and unfathomable.



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The grasshopper serves as a metaphor for fleeting moments in life. By attempting to catch it, Ruefle suggests the difficulty of grasping ephemeral experiences and the transient nature of existence. The grasshopper symbolizes those moments that are beautiful yet difficult to hold onto.

Talking about Juxtaposition, is an act or instance of placing two opposing elements close together or side by side.

Sharmistha Mohanty's "A Snake eats a Mynah" presents the contrast between life (the snake eating) and death (the mynah being consumed) is starkly, highlighting the harsh realities of survival in nature.

*There is no I in the breath* (Mohanty, 2019, lines 1–2)

The lines suggest the loss of individuality amidst the chaos, emphasizing a collective experience within the natural world.

Emma Hine's *Jaws* shows contrast between the beauty of color and the brutality of blood creates a tension that permeates the poem. The speaker's longing for "the color" juxtaposed with the violent imagery of blood suggests a complex relationship with nature—one that encompasses both attraction and repulsion.

In Mary Ruefle's poem "Grasshopper", the juxtaposition of the grasshopper's lightness against the concept of "motionless time" creates a tension that highlights the complexity of existence. This contrast emphasizes how something so small can represent significant ideas about time and awareness.

Another poetic device is personification, is a poetic device where animals, plants or even inanimate objects, are given human qualities – resulting in a poem full of imagery and description.

In the poem *Caterpillar*, the caterpillar is depicted as being "in a hurry," which imbues it with human-like qualities. This personification suggests urgency in its journey, reflecting the instinctual drive of creatures in nature and hinting at the caterpillar's role in the larger cycle of life.

Mohanty's poem "A Snake eats a Mynah" the cattle are described as "bellow," giving them a voice that reflects their distress or confusion in the face of the violent act occurring nearby. This personification allows readers to sense their presence and emotional response to the events unfolding in their environment.

Emma's poem *Jaws*, the shark is imbued with mythic qualities through descriptions such as "the mythic teeth" and "the slick apertures of its eyes." This personification elevates the creature from mere animal to a symbol of primal instinct and fear, emphasizing its enigmatic nature and the fascination it holds for the speaker.



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By personifying the grasshopper, the author in the poem *Grasshopper* makes it seem alive and dynamic; this enhances its role as a symbol of life's unpredictability.

Yet another device is Repetition. Repetition is nothing but the repetition of certain words or phrases.

In the poem, "A Snake eats a Mynah", the repeated questioning— "What should I / speak" and "What should I / imagine"—invites readers to ponder their place within this cycle. It reflects a search for meaning amid the brutality of existence and suggests a deep connection to the natural world.

In Mary Ruefle's poem "Grasshopper, this repetition reinforces the grasshopper's significance and highlights its qualities. It also helps to establish a rhythm that allows the reader to connect with the grasshopper's presence throughout the poem.

Focusing on Enjambment, by contrast, refers to a line break that interrupts the flow of a sentence: either the line usually doesn't end with punctuation, and the thought continues on the next line.

Rossetti employs enjambment to depict the caterpillar's persistent, uninterrupted progress. The lines are "Brown and hairy / Caterpillar in a hurry" and "Spins and makes a." a soft mattress that allows the butterfly to flow into the body and replicate the continuous process of transformation.

In *A Snake eats a Mynah* poem uses enjambment to create a fragmented, observational feel. The lines often break abruptly, such as "head first, yellow legs extend / from the Snake's filled mouth," which forces the reader to pause and absorb each grim detail individually.

Hine uses enjambment to create a feeling of relentless motion and the speaker's breathless fear. The long, continuous thought that

*I don't realize I'm starved  
for the color until the blood  
washes up on the beach* (Hine, 2021, lines 1–3)

pulls the reader along, mirroring the sense of being pulled into a dangerous situation.

The enjambment in this poem emphasizes the unpredictable, jumping quality of the grasshopper and the speaker's thoughts. The phrases

*but those who make  
a close study of life* (Ruefle, 2019, lines 1–2)

and "to abandon endless / exposure" create pauses that give weight to the key ideas and make the reader consider the word on the next line.



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Last but not least assonance and consonance are the poetic devices used by the poets to represent animals. Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds, while consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds. These devices create internal rhythm and texture.

The poem "Caterpillar" uses assonance with the repeated /u/ sound in "fuzzy" and "hurry" and the /i/ sound in "live" and "little." Consonance is present in the repetition of /r/ and /l/ sounds, contributing to its gentle, rolling rhythm.

Mohanty's "A Snake eats a Mynah" poem uses consonance, particularly with the "s" sound in "**Snake** eats a Mynah" and "smashes," creates a hissing or slithering effect that embodies the Snake's presence.

Hine's "Jaws" uses consonance to produce a harsh, percussive sound. The repetition of the "t" sound in "efficient teeth" and the hard "k" sound in "cracking" mimics the violent, mechanical action of the shark's jaws.

Assonance is used in the poem "Grasshopper" with the "i" sound in "It is practically impossible" and consonance with the "s" sounds in "study of life." These sounds create a quiet, almost meditative rhythm that stands in contrast to the jumping grasshopper.

In conclusion, even though these four poems cover a variety of topics and use different strategies, they all illustrate the amazing capacity of poets to conjure a strong "animal presence" by using the strategic literary instrument deployment. The stunning transformation in Rossetti's "Caterpillar" is shown by the use of soft imagery and symbolism. The harsh reality of Mohanty's "A Snake eats a Mynah" Hine's visceral metaphors in "Jaws" represent primal fear, while Ruefle's subtle symbolism in "Grasshopper" encourages the reader to face the raw force of nature.

Animal poetry offers a unique perspective on the natural world, reflecting on the beauty, power, and fragility of the environment. Through literary elements like imagery, symbolism, and metaphor, poets convey the intricate relationships between animals and their ecosystems, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings.

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