

Kay Are

Natural selection: A translation-in-progress of *Bestiario* (2014) by Beatriz Restrepo

A translation is a theory of the source text.

– Andrew Chesterman, *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory*, 1997

Figures are [...] material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another.

– Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 2008

The relation of organism to organism [is] the most important of all relations.

– Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 1859

We were never human.

– Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 2008

This work uses translation and diagramming as devices in offering an interpretation of Colombian poet Beatriz Restrepo's 2014 collection *Bestiario*. The collection indexes sixty animals in sixty poems (a translation of ten poems taken from the collection's first section are given here), in reference to the medieval *Bestiarium Vocabularium*, a formative element in the encyclopaedic tradition that permeates the natural sciences. My translation also uses the affordances of visual metaphor to convey my reading of Restrepo's 'Bestiary' as concerned with the mutual nesting of human and non-human animal worlds – with beasts as human inventions, and with human invention as critically shaping animal worlds. Each poem frames a species either in terms of its implication in a human social practice or in terms of its presence in a cultural imaginary – not bees, for instance, but the bees of the novel *Pedro Páramo*; not albatrosses, but Baudelaire's 'Albatross'. Not least among such social practices is the domesticating technology of alphabetisation in the cataloguing of the more-than-human. I have re-ordered Restrepo's poems to stress this.

As images, the translated poems point to the historical use of word and image, equally, as tools in the human organisation of species and inter-species relationships. The poems' material aspect also correlates the evolution of species with the selective nature of translation, which proceeds by engendering variations that cumulatively deliver the translated text. Creative decisions in the event are granular, manifesting as innumerable points of greater or lesser divergence from the appearance, sound and meaning of an original.

Following on from the diagrammatic interpretation are Beatriz's original poems in Spanish and my more 'transparent' translations of them into English. I include these here, imagining that comparison across versions can further elucidate the material poetics of translational and creative process.

Acknowledgements

Bestiario, by Beatriz Restrepo Restrepo, was originally published by Ediciones Uniandes, Bogotá, in 2014. Copyright on the poems in the original Spanish remains with the author. Copyright on this translation into English remains with Kay Are.

Biographical notes

Kay Are studied at the University of Melbourne and has taught there for over a decade, in creative writing and in Spanish and Latin American Studies. The PhD research at the Writing and Society Research Centre, University of Western Sydney, evaluated the affordances for creative practice and pedagogy of some key insights of quantum physics, as read through feminist new materialist philosophies. Are's research intersects the fields of the environmental humanities, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the creative arts.

Beatriz Restrepo Restrepo has a doctorate in Hispanic and Latin American Studies from the Université de la Sorbonne – Nouvelle Paris III. She has specialised in the study of poetic language since her undergraduate degree in Philosophy and Letters from the Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá. The collection *Bestiario* (Ediciones Uniandes, 2014) is her first book of poems, and was a finalist for the the Colombian Ministry of Culture's National Poetry Prize (2015). She appears in the anthology *Poesía colombiana del siglo XX escrita por mujeres (Twentieth-Century Colombian Poetry by Women)*; Apidama Ediciones, 2014). The manuscript for her poetry collection *La Sombra de Ellis (The Shadow of Ellis)* was in 2016 awarded second place in the competition established by Ediciones Embalaje del Museo Rayo, Roldanillo, Colombia. Beatriz can be contacted at beatrizrestre@gmail.com.

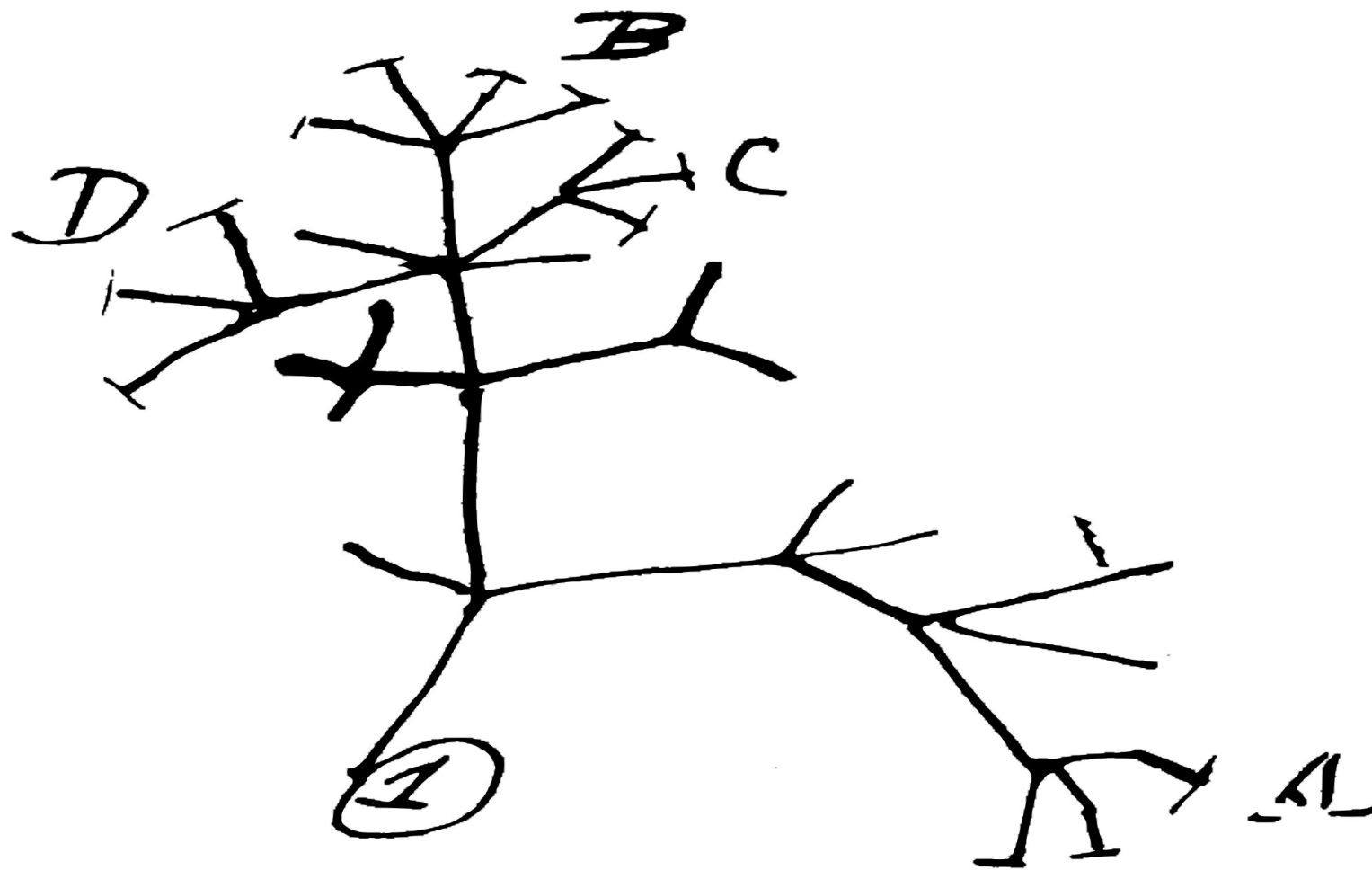
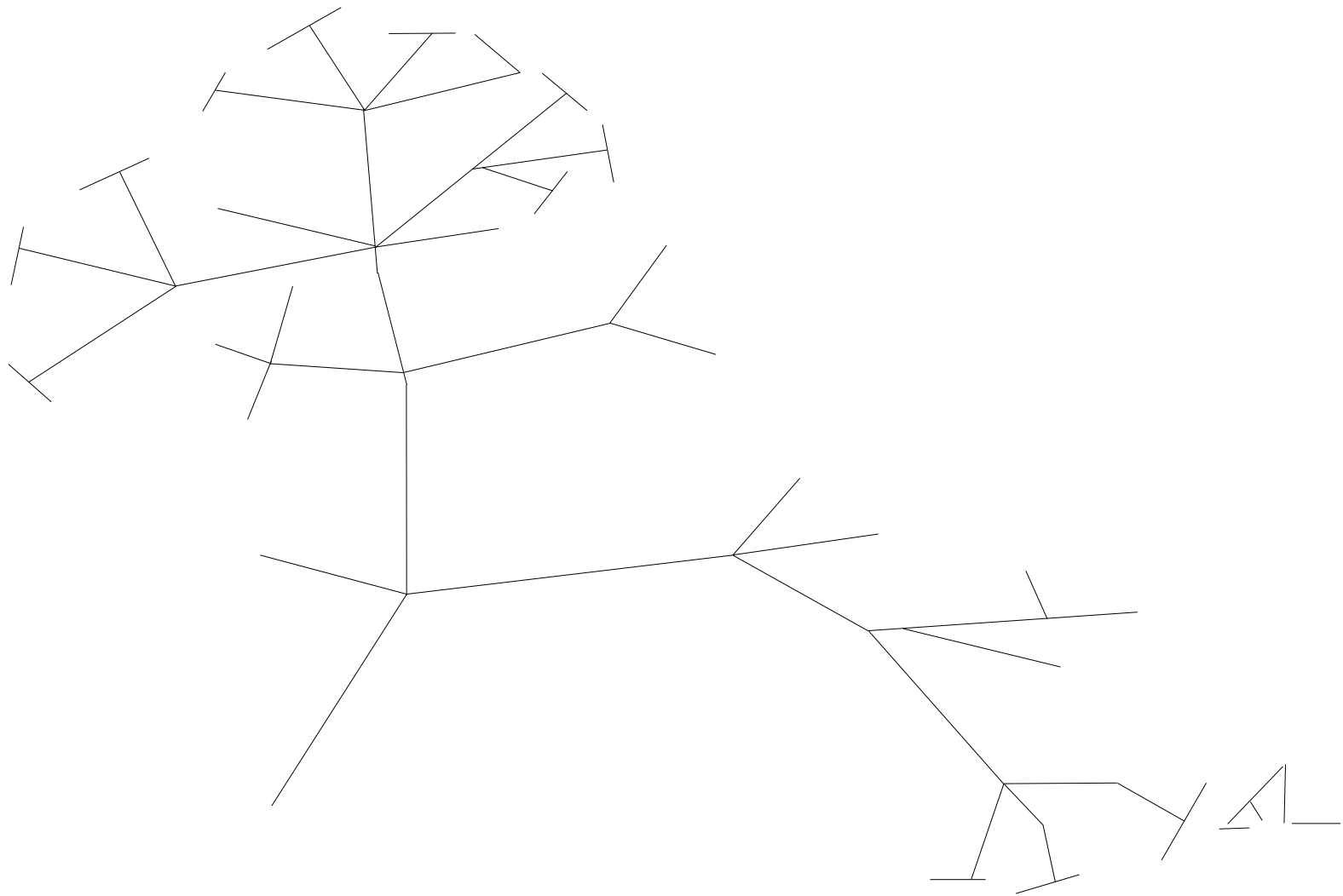


Figure 1. Darwin's early notebook sketch of the 'tree of life', illustrating his theory of natural selection.



Bees?

To taste only the taste of orange
blossom in warming weather.

Pedro Páramo, Juan Rulfo

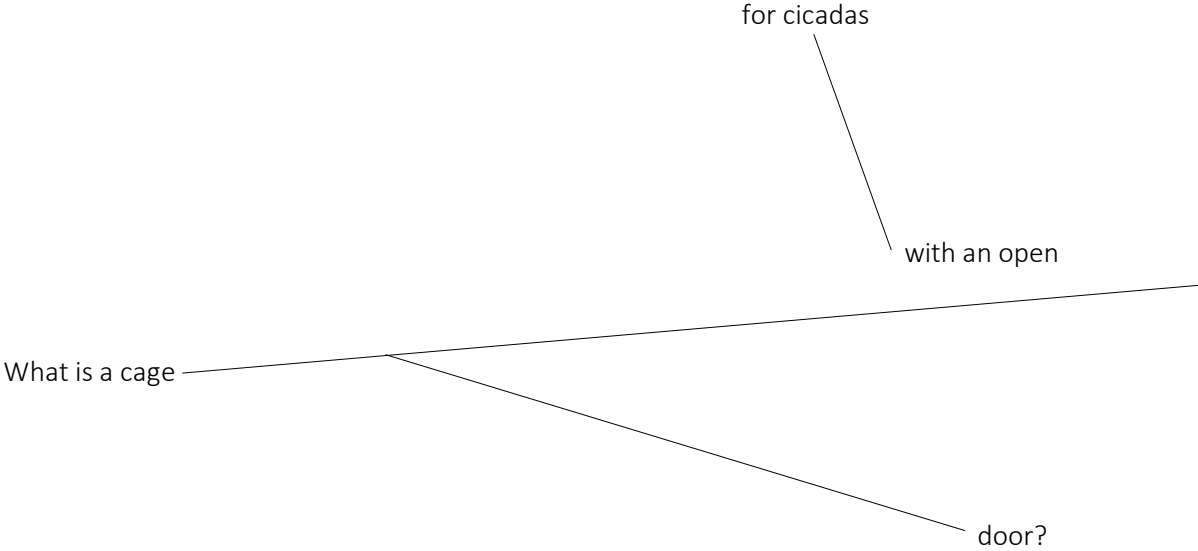
Now, through the toxic soapwort,
buzz

They once said of the town:

'It smells of spilt honey'.

souls in silence,
murmured voices,
hollow footsteps.

Cicadas



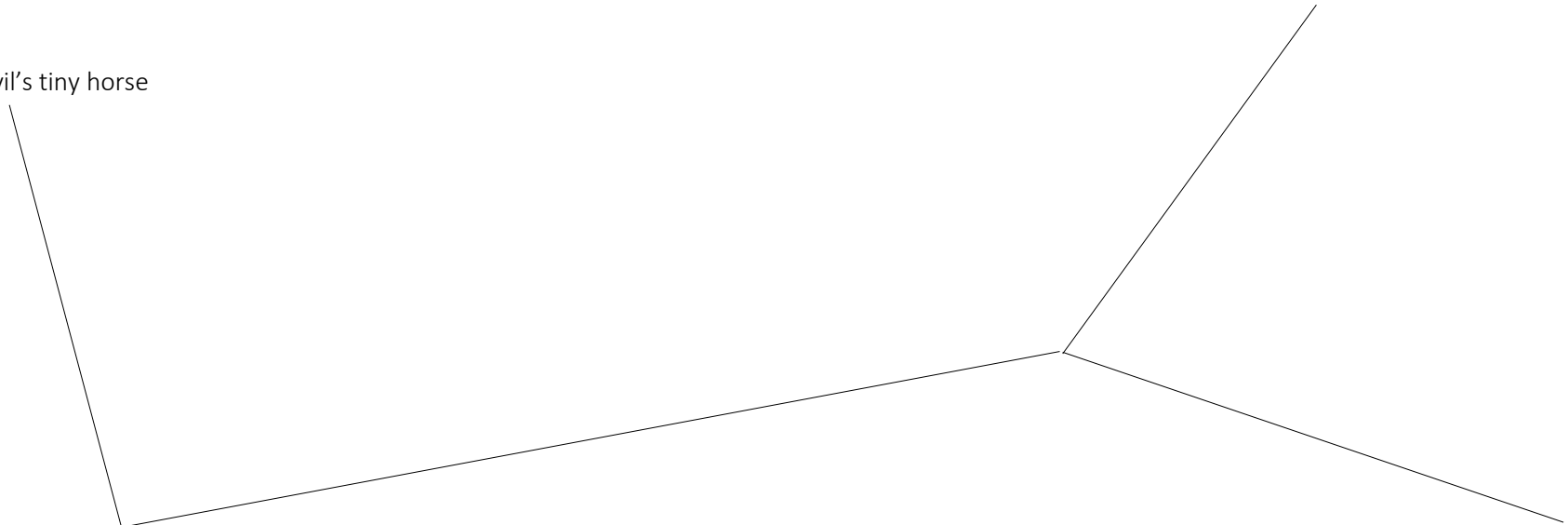
Dragonfly

Devil's tiny horse

suspended in air.

They hound you for your
sound. You die at the hands

of your
crystalline
wings.



Hérons

The river behind, rolling on and on.
Beyond the window screen: the river.
Afternoon descends,

Wind. Jubilation.

the river too;

sky, stars.

The long sand bank
in fiesta.

Parrots, macaws, and parakeets.

And then the herons,

suddenly, slowly
crossed their wings, being slow
and being white.

Hogs

Born by the dozen.

They fit in one hand: squealing, piglets.

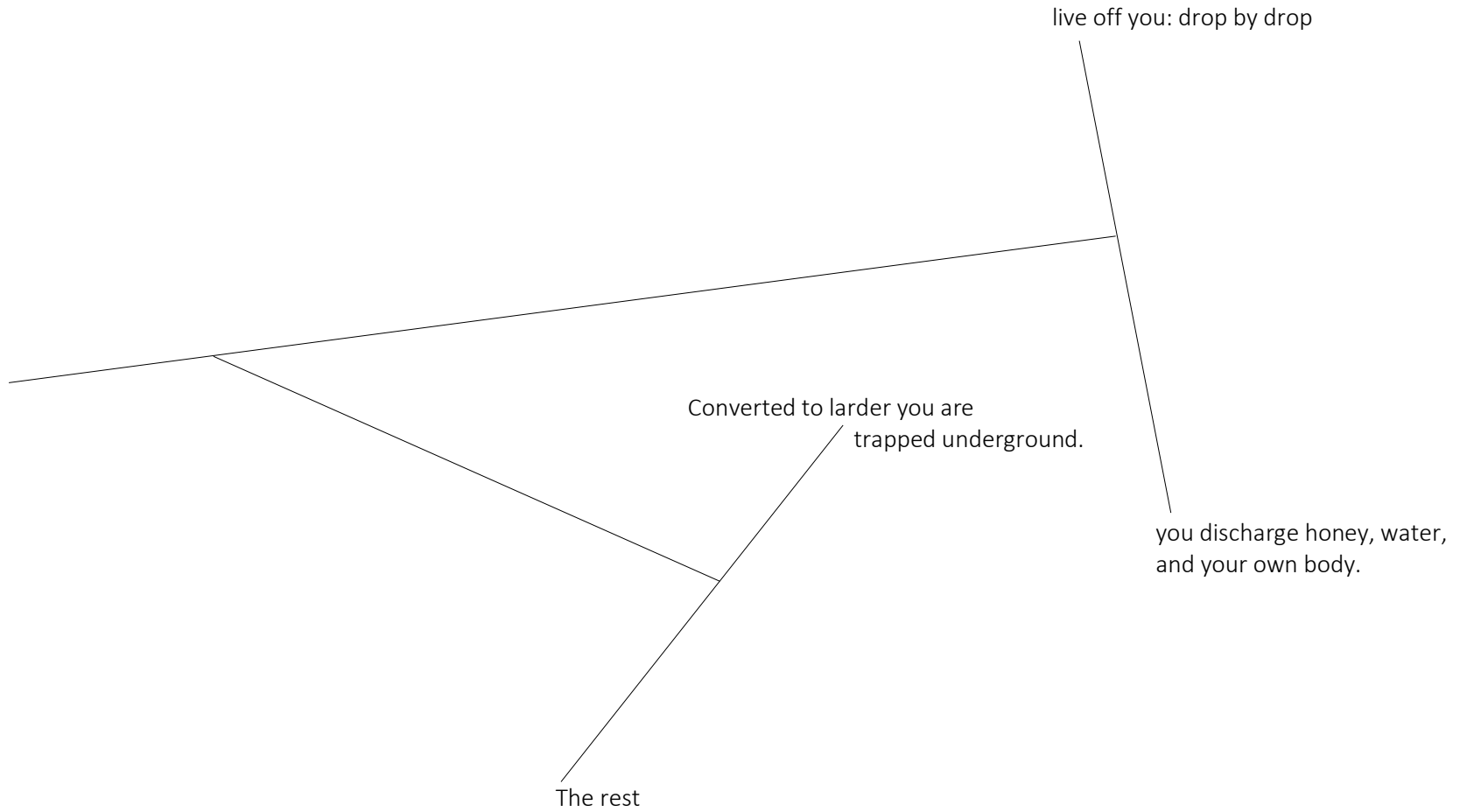
They will feel the knife,
feel the warmth of their skin
unto silence.

Then only the merriment
of their executioners.

Honey ant

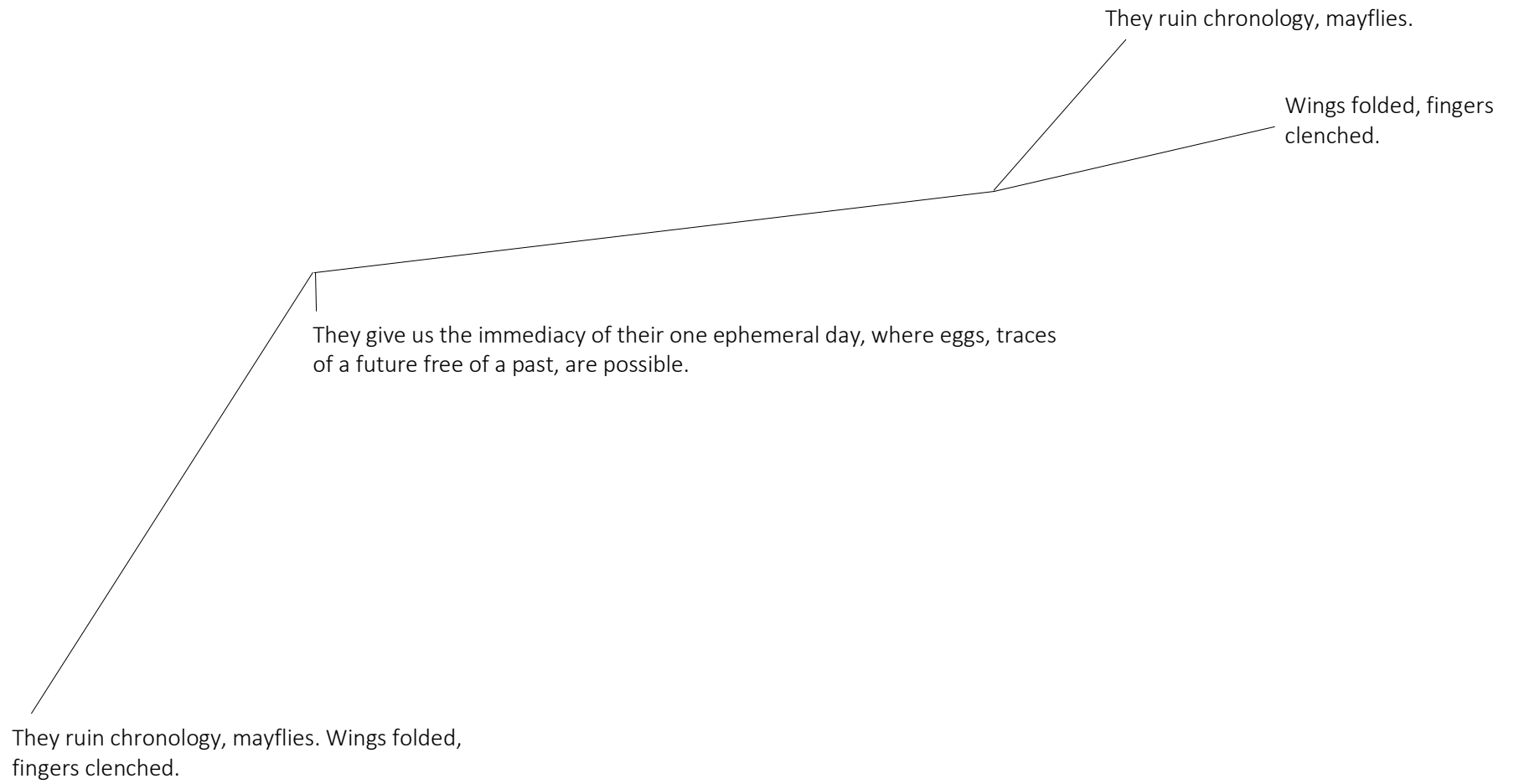
(Myrmecocystus)

'Depilate; to subtract bit by bit without leaving an impression. To diminish invisibly. What depilates? Dreams, time, a life.'



Mayflies

(Ephemeroptera)



Moose

Scaled hide
and cold-blooded?
Reptile.

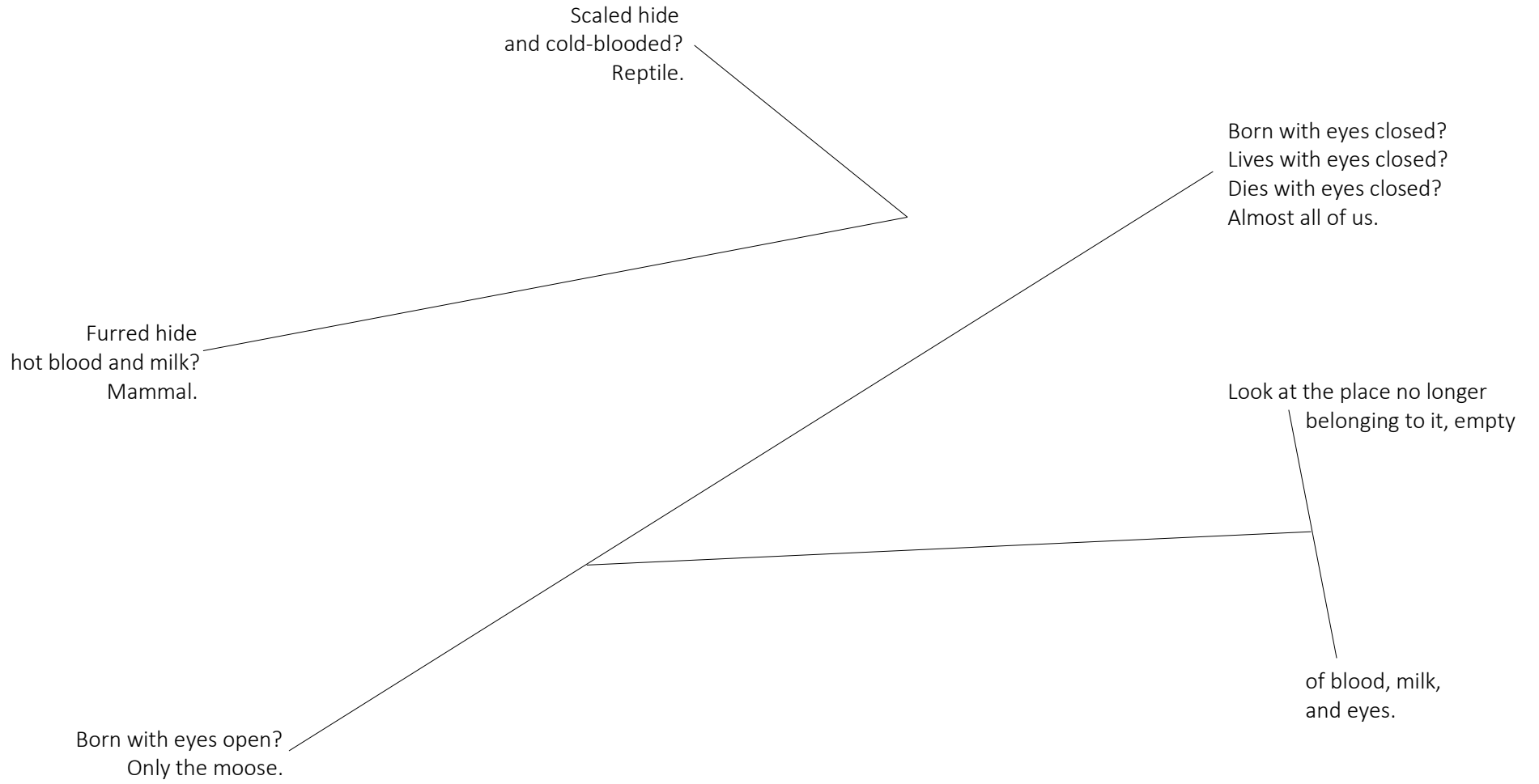
Born with eyes closed?
Lives with eyes closed?
Dies with eyes closed?
Almost all of us.

Furred hide
hot blood and milk?
Mammal.

Look at the place no longer
belonging to it, empty

Born with eyes open?
Only the moose.

of blood, milk,
and eyes.



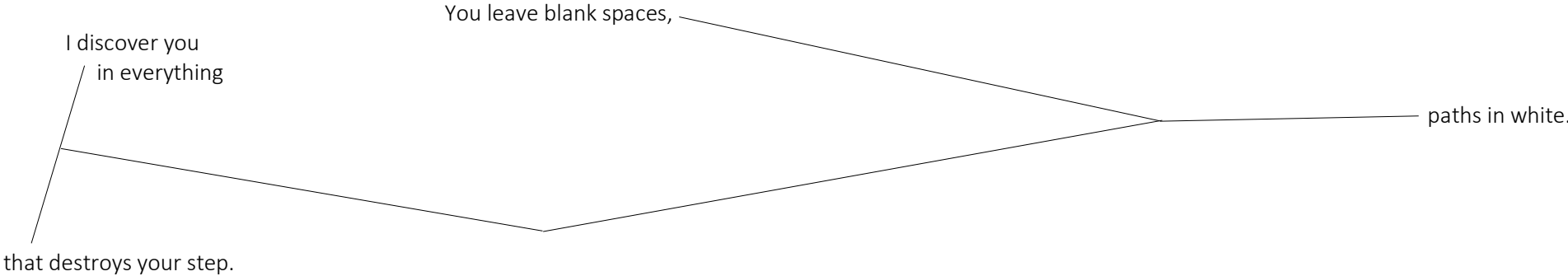
Phoenix

Its small death



Its resurrection ————— has no name, nor limit.

Slug



¿Abejas?

... No sentir otro sabor sino el del azahar
de los naranjos en la tibieza del tiempo

Pedro Páramo, Juan Rulfo

Decían del pueblo: “Huele a miel derramada”.
Ahora, entre el veneno de las saponarias,
zumban silencios de ánimas, hilos de voz, pisadas huecas.

Bees?

To taste only the taste of orange
blossom in warming weather.

Pedro Páramo, Juan Rulfo

They once said of the town: ‘It smells of spilt honey’.
Now, through the toxic soapwort, buzz
souls in silence, murmured voices, hollow footsteps.

Cigarras

¿Qué es una jaula para cigarras
con la puerta abierta?

Cicadas

What is a cage for cicadas
with an open door?

Libélula

Caballito del diablo suspendido en el aire.

Te buscan por tus sonidos.

Por tus alas transparentes mueres.

Dragonfly

Devil's tiny horse suspended in air.

They hound you for your sound.

You die at the hands of your crystalline wings.

Garzas

Atrás el río, siempre bajando.

Detrás del anjeo, el río.

En el atardecer, también el río; cielo y estrellas.

Viento, algarabía.

Loros, guacamayas y pericos.

Era la fiesta en el playón.

Y de pronto las alas, lentas, de las garzas
se cruzaban, por lentas y por blancas.

Hérons

The river behind, rolling on and on.

Beyond the window screen: the river.

Afternoon descends, the river too; sky, stars.

Wind. Jubilation.

Parrots, macaws, and parakeets.

The long sand bank in fiesta.

And then the herons, suddenly, slowly
crossed their wings, being slow and being white.

Cerdos

Nacen por docenas.
Cabén en una mano:
chillan, cochinitos.

Sentirán el cuchillo,
la tibieza en su piel
hasta el silencio.

Lo demás será fiesta
Para sus verdugos.

Hogs

Born by the dozen.
They fit in one hand:
squealing, piglets.

They will feel the knife,
feel the warmth of their skin
unto silence.

Then only the merriment
of their executioners.

Hormiga melífera

(Myrmecocystus)

“Pelusiar, quitar a poquitos sin dejar huella. Menoscabar sin que se vea. Pelusiar, ¿qué? Los sueños, el tiempo, la vida”.

Convertida en despensa, quedas atrapada bajo tierra. De ti viven los demás: gota a gota les das miel, agua y tu propio cuerpo.

Honey ant

(Myrmecocystus)

‘Depilate; to subtract bit by bit without leaving an impression. To diminish invisibly. What depilates? Dreams, time, a life.’

Converted to larder you are trapped underground. The rest live off you: drop by drop you discharge honey, water, and your own body.

Efímeras

(Ephemeroptera)

Quiebran el orden del tiempo las efímeras, las alas plegadas, los dedos encogidos.

Nos regalan la inmediatez de su único día. Allí son posibles los huevos, rastros de futuro, sin pasado.

Quiebran el orden del tiempo las efímeras, las alas plegadas, los dedos encogidos.

Mayflies

(Ephemeroptera)

They ruin chronology, mayflies. Wings folded, fingers clenched.

They give us the immediacy of their one ephemeral day, where eggs, traces of a future free of a past, are possible.

They ruin chronology, mayflies. Wings folded, fingers clenched.

Alce

¿Piel escamosa
y sangre fría?

Reptil.

¿Piel con pelaje,
sangre caliente
y leche?

Mamífero.

¿Nacen con los ojos cerrados?
¿Viven con los ojos cerrados?
¿Mueren con los ojos cerrados?

Casi todos.

¿Con los ojos abiertos?
Solo el alce.

Mira el lugar que ya no le pertenece, vacío
de sangre, de leche, de ojos.

Moose

Scaled hide
and cold-blooded?

Reptile.

Furred hide,
hot blood
and milk?

Mammal.

Born with eyes closed?
Lives with eyes closed?
Dies with eyes closed?

Almost all of us.

Born with eyes open?
Only the moose.

Look at the place no longer belonging to it, empty
of blood, milk, and eyes.

Ave Fénix

Su muertecita
es igual a una muerte.

Su resurrección
no tiene nombre, ni límite.

Phoenix

Its small death
is equal to a death.

Its resurrection
has no name, nor limit.

Babosa

Sé de ti
por todo aquello que destruye tu paso.

Dejas
espacios vacíos, caminos en blanco.

Slug

I discover you
in everything that destroys your step.

You leave
empty spaces, paths in white.