

KIBBLE SCRIBBLERS: ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

May 20th 2020, 12.30-2.30pm

12-14 participants via zoom (COVID workshop)

This workshop offers an invitation:

- to recall and write about a real encounter with an animal that was in some way important or special.
- to *imagine* an animal encounter.
- to create a hybrid human-nonhuman, anthropomorphic or utterly out-of-this-world creature, place it in a human environment and give it a voice.
- to reflect on the ways in which animals can teach us about ourselves and others.
- to write a praise poem to a specific animal.

Part I

Before meeting the group on zoom (due to covid-19), email everyone a brief prompt the week before, to allow them to begin considering what they might write: **‘Can you remember a time when you encountered an animal, and you felt that it was in some way special?’**

When you meet in the workshop, flesh out the prompt: It can be a real or an imagined encounter, and by special I mean it could be extraordinary, strange, surprising, unusual. This animal can be wild – one you came across when you were outside some time – or a domestic animal, it doesn’t matter which.

Invite participants to write for 3 minutes on this theme.

Participants could write in couplets – maybe one line of each couplet is about the animal and one line is about you and your response to it? – or just free-write whatever comes to mind. Invite participants to think about their **sensual experience of this encounter:**

What sounds do you hear?

What do you smell?

Do you touch the animal and if so, what does it feel like?

What does it look like?

And taste, well, maybe if you’re someone who eats meat, you might be eating the animal!

3 mins writing.

Then go into breakout rooms in pairs for 6 mins (2 mins each plus a minute either side to say hello and goodbye). Send a message when the first 2 mins is up, so that they can swap. Invite participants to choose who goes first based on the alphabetical order of your middle name?

Return to main group.

Go round and each person has 1 minute to say hello and share something from the opening prompt work if they like.

Part II

Introduce the main writing exercise, and give participants time in breakout groups to talk about it and to brainstorm ideas together before taking a break.

Almost all my poems about animals are based on imagination, not real encounters (some are, but they're few and far between), and I also like to make creatures up: I mentioned in the preliminary email about Horse-Man as hybrid of horse and human, and I've also created a creature called Bus-Dog, who is half dog half human. I share this poem later in the session.

Talk a bit about anthropomorphism, if you like!

The invitation is to think about creating a being that is not 'real'; to allow participants to create something otherworldly or just strange. I find personally, that these imaginary beings are great teachers and often I find I'm able to process my own emotions by using them as mouthpieces or explorers. Often I'll put the creature in a place that creates an odd juxtaposition and then just see what happens: Bus-Dog is a human in dog-form travelling on a bus to a cemetery.

Allow participants 2 minutes to jot down any old ideas that may come in relation to the creation of an imaginary creature. And then you can go into breakout rooms for 10 mins or so (3-4 in each gp), to discuss ideas and share writing, if you like.

What is your favourite creature?

What might it want to say to you?

If you sit really still and listen, what words or phrases or images come from this imaginary creature? Jot down the first things that come without censoring anything. Just allow yourself to free-write absolutely anything that comes to mind.

Where does it want to take you?

Can you picture a scenario it might want to navigate?

I sometimes use these creatures to process material I'm working with in my day to day life. For example, yesterday I was thinking a

lot about the notion of desirelessness and the way in which the ego tries to direct our lives; and I ended up writing a piece called My Name Is Delicate Flint, about a piece of flintstone that represents the ego and spoke to me through this persona. It's a very useful way of creating space for potential healing, I find.

So, if you were going to create an imaginary creature, what might it look like? Does it have a name? What is it going to show or tell you?

Come back to main group then break for 25 minutes. Stretch, come away from screen, open window, go outside if you can, make a drink, have a snack, keep writing on this theme.

Part III

Then return and go into breakout groups for 15 mins (3-4 people in each gp). Listening, taking turns. Send messages every 3 minutes, so participants can swap and make sure everyone gets a go.

Then back to whole group and open sharing.

Read whatever animal poems you like. I read from my own work, 'Two Cows', and talked about how this animal encounter was imaginary, but very real to my inner eye. Animals always teach me something and I think in this poem, and in fact I have to admit that in many of my poems, the lesson is patience!!! It's often only months or years later when I come back to my poems and re-read them that I see what it is they want to say to me.

Screen share and read 'Two Cows' and 'Bus-Dog'.

Q&A

Final takeaway suggestion: write a praise poem to an animal: it could be to yourself as human animal, or to a pet or to your favourite wild animal. If you've read Lucille Clifton's 'Homage to my hips' – a brilliant praise poem – you could draw on this for inspiration or thinking about form if you like. Or you could simply write a three line poem, beginning with the animal's name:

Name of animal – some physical aspect you love about it – why/what it teaches you.

For example:

Horse, your muscle is my muscle,
you teach me how to run
and how, when it rains, to stand still.

This workshop actually took longer than 2 hours. I cut a few bits and bobs out to make space as I went. I think it could easily stretch to a 3 hour workshop or more.