Alexander Pope’s interest in animals is well documented. He strongly opposed the animal experimentation of his day, and owned a succession of much-loved dogs. Animals appear regularly in Pope’s poetry, often as part of an ecological outlook that challenges the traditionally human-centered model of the natural world and cosmos. The poems focus on animal subjectivity, rather than representing them as objects of human activity or as symbols of human notions. They thus create a plurality of perspectives that challenges human dominance.

Pope’s focus on animal experience reflects contemporary debates about animal materiality, sentience, and intelligence which were part of an emerging school of sensibility and citizenship, key elements in his own satiric stance. This paper examines the notion of animal subjectivity in Pope’s poetry and shows how that concept, far from being a mere ancillary indulgence, is in fact key to his poems’ ideological complexities and to his own deepest beliefs.

Katherine Quinsey has published extensively on the poetry of Pope and of Dryden, on religion, feminism, and drama in the seventeenth century, and on ecopoetics in the work of Restoration poet Anne Finch and of Canadian poet Margaret Avison. She is editor of Under the Veil: Spirituality and Feminism in Post-Reformation Britain and Europe (2012) and Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama (1996). In addition to her current work on Pope, religion, and print culture, Dr Quinsey has research interests in ecopoetics and animal welfare in the eighteenth century.