

2023

[Review] Krishanu Maiti, editor. Posthumanist Perspectives on Literary and Cultural Animals. Springer, 2021. Second Language Learning and Teaching: Issues in Literature and Culture. 188 pp. ISBN 978-3-030-76159-2 (eBook)

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Recommended Citation

Woodward, Wendy, [Review] Krishanu Maiti, editor. Posthumanist Perspectives on Literary and Cultural Animals. Springer, 2021. Second Language Learning and Teaching: Issues in Literature and Culture. 188 pp. ISBN 978-3-030-76159-2 (eBook), *Animal Studies Journal*, 12(1), 2023, 116-119.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/vol12/iss1/8>

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Abstract

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[Review] Krishanu Maiti, editor. *Posthumanist Perspectives on Literary and Cultural Animals*. Springer, 2021. Second Language Learning and Teaching: Issues in Literature and Culture. 188 pp. ISBN 978-3-030-76159-2 (eBook).

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Posthumanist Perspectives is vibrant collection of essays which broaden the readers' appreciation of nonhuman animals and their ubiquity in (mostly) English language culture. Maiti's introduction, 'Animals in Posthuman Thought', proffers a substantial overview of the provenance of Critical Animal Studies and how posthumanism emerged. Maiti, in his introduction, conceives of the collection as a classroom casebook. Certainly, it has broad transdisciplinary appeal. Essays are organised under the topics: Contestations over Species Hierarchy and Categorizations; Animal (Re) Constructions; Interspecies Relationalities; Intersectionality – Gender and the Nonhuman. Various genres feature: film, novels, creative nonfiction, TV series, visual art, but poetry doesn't.

Peter Ellis' 'Can Natural Theology Re-think its Relationship with Non-Human Animals' is an excellent beginning to this volume, making a case for the relevance of Genesis in the Western secular debate about animals and discussing the ethical ramifications of the received wisdom of both Genesis and Darwinian evolution as violent. Countering this, a recognition of a sort of poeisis, 'where the creativity of all creatures is brought into action at the same level and involves us all' (19), inspires. In 'Reassessing the Predator: Representations of Predatory Animals in John Vaillant's *The Tiger* and Nate Blakeslee's *The Wolf*', Monica Sousa gets to the root cause of precisely *why* we are so against predators, suggesting that this concept is 'an Anthropocene reflection of the fear of the collapse of human superiority' (26). Josh Hayes in

‘Birds of a Feather: Interspecies Ethics and the Fate of Liminal Companion Animal’ makes an argument for the protection of wild urban parrots, seen as ‘exotics’, and calls for a re-thinking of parrots as companion animals.

Adrian Tait writes about ‘Nonhuman Intelligence and Intentionality in Three Short Stories by H.G. Wells’, surprising (this reader at least) with the point that Wells was against human exceptionalism. Aaron McMullan’s essay, ‘The Snake Has a Face: Levinas, Mondo, and the Suffering Non-Human Animal’ enlists Levinasian philosophy of the ethics of the other having a face in a consideration of mondo films where violence is often perpetrated against the nonhuman who ‘addresses the human from a space beyond the frame’ (65). “‘Neigh Way, Jose”’: Posthuman Communication in *BoJack Horseman*’ by James M. Cochran deploys queer ecologies in an analysis of this popular TV series with its eponymous star a humanoid horse. In ‘Jacques Derrida and the Autobiographical (Non-human) Animal: An Analysis of (False) Animal Autobiographies’, Samantha Allen Wright is positive about the ethics of a couple of animal autobiographies she considers, but to label them ‘false’ seems oddly negative. In another literary essay, ‘The Animal Survives: Sarah Orne Jewett’s *A White Heron* Intervenes as Survivor of the Industrialized World’, Lauren Perry makes a case for reading this nineteenth century text through the lens of literary animal studies.

Several substantial essays in *Posthuman Perspectives* dispense with disciplinary boundaries. In an enchanting essay, ‘Bowers of Persuasion: Towards a Posthuman Visual Rhetoric’, Cynthia Rosenfeld blends natural sciences and the humanities, suggesting that what she calls ‘aesthetic sensibility’ and, hence, visual rhetoric, plays an important part in evolution. In ‘Human-Animal Relationality: Artistic Travels through a Subculture’s Imaginations’, Ninette Rothmüller analyses bestiaries, whether medieval manuscripts or an exhibition of tattoos on mixed martial arts’ fighters’ bodies. In an essay about boundary-crossing literature, ‘Understanding Across Differences in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Les Neuf Consciences du Malfini* and in Dany Laferrière’s *Autoportrait de Paris avec Chat*’, Iona Wynter Parks foregrounds intersections between human and non-human animals in a postcolonial environment.

The essays dealing with intersectionality and gender are particularly engaging. Daniel Lanza Rivers gives a chilling account of social Darwinism in relation to ideals of heteronormative masculinity and its connections with nature as ideal and a recreational space – but only for some. His essay, ‘Into the Woods: The Creaturely and the Queer in 20th Century US American Hunting Narratives’, theorises the ‘creaturely’ as an alternative space. ‘Madness, Femininity, Vegetarianism: Post-anthropocentric Representations in Olga Tokarczuk’s *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* and Agnieszka Holland’s *Spoor*’, by Katarzyna Nowak-McNeice, analyses a novel and its filmic adaptation from a ‘feminist-vegan’ standpoint, indicting the ways that discriminatory apparatuses overlay each other. ‘The Bird and Eye: Kinship with Birds as Proto-ecofeminist Discourse of Liberation in George Meredith’s *The Egoist*’ by Keri Stevenson is a delightful analysis of Meredith’s nineteenth century novel, and shows how kinship with birds is central to the liberation of the main character from an undesirable engagement, this connection contradicting the reductive trope of women and nature.

Posthumanist Perspectives on Literary and Cultural Animals is published in the series, Second Language Learning and Teaching and in the subseries Issues in Literature and Culture. While a native speaker of English will be well served by the variety of essays in this volume, a second or foreign language student could struggle with terminology. In a frontispiece, general editor Mirosław Pawlak asserts that not only will the series apprise readers of a ‘variety of issues’ but that it will ‘shed light on how such issues can best be learned and taught, as well as how instruction of this kind can enhance the mastery of second and foreign languages’ (n.p.). *Posthumanist Perspectives*, however, barely engages with Learning and Teaching strategies. Few allowances are made for potential readers of English as a second or foreign language.

Some contributors, at least, provide pedagogic or linguistic background to their discussion, delving into key terms in posthumanist animal debates in ways which enable vocabulary acquisition and/or usher readers into relevant theories. Monica Sousa defines ‘anthropomorphism’ (31). Cynthia Rosenfeld clearly delineates posthuman theory; James M. Cochran unpacks the terms ‘queer’ and ‘queer ecology’ (102-3). Ninette Rothmüller leads the reader into Derrida’s philosophy and its varied reception. Essays explaining their theories and terms would have been more supportive of second and foreign language speakers. Alternatively,

a general glossary could have situated the reader more confidently in relation to current debates. In addition, infelicities of style, syntax, vocabulary and nomenclature recur, which is particularly disadvantageous for second or foreign language readers. On the Contents page, for example, nonhuman appears as one word and hyphenated. One hopes that such errors and inconsistencies will be corrected in future editions.