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## Animal Studies

Dominic O'Key

In this chapter I survey, highlight and critically reflect on recent work in Animal Studies, a field that continues to yield deeply researched scholarship and incisive works of critical and cultural theory, all in spite of its relative lack of institutional footholds. This is my first outing as a *Year's Work* reviewer, and so my ambition for this initial venture is modest. I wish, quite straightforwardly, to explore a handful of publications that caught my attention in 2022. I do not pretend to have a robust rationale for my criteria for inclusion. Instead, let me say that these are all publications that excited me in some way, that excited something in me, and that I believe will excite others too. I have divided the chapter into four sections: 1) 'Living Machines of Imperialism' examines two postcolonial animal histories, Saheed Aderinto's *Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa* and Jonathan Saha's *Colonizing Animals*; 2) 'I Dream of Dogs' briefly considers Linda Pyne's *Endlings* before focusing on Margret Grebowicz's short book of cultural critique on dog ownership, *Rescue Me*; 3) 'The Gay Frog is the Opposite of the Gay Penguin' turns to recent issues of *Humanimalia* and *Green Letters*, and a special section of *Environmental Humanities*, co-edited by Sarah Bezan and Ina Linge; and 4) 'Inside the Slaughterhouse' looks at recent publications in the Palgrave Studies in Animals and Literature series, concentrating mostly on Sune Borkfelt's *Reading Slaughter*. I end the chapter by reflecting on the links between these publications; I introduce my own monograph, *Creaturely Forms in Contemporary Literature*, in order to tie together the review's key ideas. In all of this I have tried not to impose a grand narrative on the books reviewed, nor isolate them as symptoms of broader ideological tendencies. Yet if there is an argument here it is this: Animal Studies continues to remind us that human-animal relations are not natural, timeless or inevitable. They are historical. They can be transformed.

When I was asked to write this review chapter my first impulse was to look back through previous volumes of *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*. Animal Studies was first featured in 2015 – later than I anticipated. Matthew Calarco's review essay from that year tells us a great deal about where the field was, and where it is now. Back then, 'ontology' was arguably the keyword of theoretical inquiry into human-animal relations, a pivotal and knotty category that undergirded competing visions of posthumanism and post-anthropocentric subjectivity. Meanwhile the concept of entanglement still stood as a shimmering, affirmative corrective to the field's occasional pessimism of the intellect. Sure, there were grumblings against it, but it would take a few years for the concept to meet robust, substantively delineated critique – on which Eva Haifa Giraud's *What Comes after Entanglement?* (2019) is the go-to text.

There was also a notable split between what Calarco called the 'theoretical camps' of Critical Animal Studies on the one side and the so-called mainstream Animal Studies on the other. Seven years have passed since this assessment, in which this method war (which is really just a war for resources, as wars tend to be) has gone somewhat cold. As Giraud reflected in last year's review chapter, it could be taken as a sign of the field's disciplinary maturation that, in more recent works of scholarship, 'the relationship between critique and

complexity is not a zero-sum choice' (p. 19). In other words, new work in Animal Studies defies the supposed oppositions between mythic notions of uncompromising commitment, intellectual flexibility and theory for theory's sake.

But is this because scholars have found novel ways of reconciling these allegedly antithetical positions? Is it because they are productively disregarding this antithesis altogether? Or is it more of an unconscious development, as fresh-faced newcomers to the field are plainly indifferent to, perhaps unaware of, what seem to be becoming legacy debates? Maybe it also has something to do with the ascendancy of other research areas like the Environmental Humanities, which continues to attract and assimilate ideas from Animal Studies. The Environmental Humanities need not be an existential threat to Animal Studies; the two can and should be thought of as being immensely complementary, as I suggest in this essay's third section. Yet an edited collection from this year, *The Promise of Multispecies Justice*, offers us a case in point, as it elaborates a vision of multispecies justice without once historicizing its operative concept's relation to – its emergence from and break with – the intellectual genealogy of pro-animal thought. Emerging from a different tradition, the Environmental Humanities shouts about multispecies justice but stays tight-lipped on animal liberation.

## 1. Living Machines of Imperialism

'Animals, like humans, were colonial subjects in Africa' (p. xiii). This is the central thesis that propels Saheed Aderinto's *Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa: The Human and Nonhuman Creatures of Nigeria*, here quoted from the work's acknowledgements, but proclaimed throughout the book in moments of reiteration, explication and complication. Published in Ohio University Press's impressive New African Histories series, *Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa* begins with a set piece scene: Queen Elizabeth II's official visit to Nigeria in 1956. A show of pomp in the final years of imperial rule, the royal visit saw Nigeria's public infrastructure – its roads, hospitals, factories – carefully curated for the recently-crowned monarch. Yet until now, Aderinto tells us, 'scholars of Africa did not see the involvement of animals in that visit, as in other display of imperial might, as part of the politics of curating the empire' (p. 2). Over two thousand durbar horses were paraded in an official welcome. The monarch was introduced to Burtu, the hornbill mascot of the First Battalion of the colonial military unit. She was photographed admiring a dairy cow. On the eve of her visit a nationwide extermination drive sought to rid the streets of dogs. Under British rule, Aderinto says, colonial 'laws and institutions of power governed animals' everyday life. Animals were sorted, indexed, and prioritized to meet colonialists' construction of normality, orderliness, and modernity' (pp. 2–3).

*Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa* thus sets out to widen African historical scholarship, calling for an 'animal turn' (p. 5) in postcolonial history. At stake, Aderinto argues, is both a deeper understanding of colonial rule and a sharpened sense of social history's irrevocable relation with natural history. Through close attention to the ways that animals in nineteenth and twentieth-century Nigeria thwarted colonial encroachment, ignored its imposition of borders, laws and norms, and stirred debate both in the colonies and in the

imperial core, Aderinto offers a remarkably detailed study of how ‘animals have been an integral part of Africa’s past—making history and shaping narratives’ (p. 4). Animals are ‘subjects, objects, and agents of historical change’ (p. 21).

Aderinto’s corpus is vast. Years of research in Nigeria’s National Archives, across sites in Ibadan, Kaduna and Enugu, have led him to examine colonial records and expert reports, veterinary and agricultural records, court proceedings, local petitions, journalism, poems, cartoons and photographs – many of which are reproduced in the book. The eight chapters are correspondingly broad, covering different if often interlinked human-animal relations: meat production, public health, animal sports, zookeeping, conservation and the representation of animals in literary and visual art forms. Key to this ‘integrative’ (p. 18) approach is the deliberate juxtaposition of multiplying relations, from Muslim, Christian and animist cosmologies to African elites and European officers. Aderinto’s account shows us that colonialism was totalizing but not total. Colonialism ‘did not represent a complete disengagement from precolonial or “traditional” identities. Rather, modern conceptions of animals coexisted with the traditional, creating a host of contradictions’ (p. 16).

*Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa* considers a number of species: cows, pigs, goats, sheep, manatees, elephants, leopards and birds. But it is dogs, horses and donkeys that emerge as the three key animals that unlock the transforming complexities and contradictions of colonial animal subjecthood. During British rule Nigeria’s horses shifted from hardy combatants to venerated athletes. Horse racing quickly became the state sport in colonial Nigeria. While individual donkeys were physically exploited as beasts of burden, carrying untold kilograms of goods across untold kilometres, the figure of the donkey as such became a culturally celebrated working animal. In the final years of the empire mistreated horses and donkeys would become the subjects of British anti-cruelty campaigns and paternalistic welfarism. As Aderinto puts it in his eighth chapter, ‘metropolitan critics saw the horse and donkey as vital living machines of imperialism ... For them colonialism could not be a success until the colonial subjects came to treat animals with compassion’ (pp. 246–247).

Dogs were considerably more vexing. Unlike horses, dogs did not so much shift as multiply: in number, function and meaning. Praised in Yoruba poetry, meditated on in literary pamphlets, used for personal and property protection, individually biographized in colonial memoirs and collectively eliminated for fear of rabies, the indigenous and imported dogs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries testify to the co-existence of numerous contradictory ideas about domesticated animals. Aderinto explains how colonial modernizations put pressure on the ‘practical’ indigenous companions of Nigerians. Dogs still functioned as the ‘hunter, collateral, currency or means of exchange, ritual being, watchdog, travel companion, scavenger’ (p. 95), but they also increasingly became stray street dogs that co-existed – and sometimes even bred with – the cherished pets of colonial officers. Dog fancying and racing grew in popularity, as did policing and property protection, which turned some dogs into ‘important bodies in policing the racial boundaries of colonialism’ (p. 106). In all this Aderinto convincingly argues that colonialism scrambled human-dog relations. Less persuasive, however, is the concluding thought that city-wide dog taxes, introduced in the 1930s, were ‘neoliberal’ (p. 251) – the Mont Pelerin Society would not form for at least another decade.

*Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa* concludes by fast-forwarding to the postcolonial present, a time of expansion in cattle production, zoos, wildlife parks and veterinary schools. Aderinto suggests that animals, once ‘reconstituted to fit imperial ideals of law and order and of capitalist expropriation’ (p. 249), have not been adequately freed or reconstituted anew under independence. Future animal histories might therefore trace the unfinished task of decolonizing nature – a task especially important for wildlife conservation, the prevailing iterations of which Aderinto rightly identifies as stemming from colonial rule. In this conclusion, though, Aderinto seems to condemn conservation altogether; he criticizes the idea that ‘wildlife must be protected in the interest of the animals and their habitats’ (p. 256), and scare-quotes the word ‘extinction’ as if it weren’t real. Aderinto’s point here is that colonizers often leveraged the threat of extinction in order to justify land grabs and the banning of local hunting practices; it is that, in postcolonial Nigeria as elsewhere, wildlife protections have often vindicated the securitization and militarization of reserves against poachers, a fact that Rosaleen Duffy compellingly demonstrates in *Security and Conservation: The Politics of the Illegal Wildlife Trade*, another new book from 2022.

But biodiversity loss is a very real threat – for the Cross River gorilla, the red colobus, the Nigerian damselfly and the toads of the Idanre Hill. Globally, too, there is an increasing consensus that we are living through a sixth mass extinction event. Wildlife conservation must therefore be reimagined, *decolonized*, not junked. By dismissing extinction, Aderinto risks justifying or even perpetuating the anthropocentric logics that he criticizes in his otherwise topical and methodologically rich animal history. Nevertheless, *Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa* is a meticulous account, and one well worth reading.

Jonathan Saha’s *Colonizing Animals* begins in much the same way as *Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa*. Opening with a short declarative sentence – ‘Imperialism was an interspecies affair’ (p. 1) – then steering its readers towards captivating examples, Saha builds a picture of how ‘British colonialism transformed ecologies and fostered new relationships with animals in Myanmar, even while it was itself embedded in ecologies and forged through relationships with animals’ (p. 2). Some animals, like elephants, buffalo and oxen, were recruited for empire’s expansion; others, like Burmese military horses and the two-horned rhinoceros, were its casualties. Over half a century later, the breakdown of empire also saw a recomposition of its interspecies relations. Animals became potent symbols of anti-colonial struggle: the galon bird rising, the peacock fanning its tail. And ‘as the British retreated and the city [of Rangoon] burned, the streets were taken over by rats, dogs, and vultures that fed on the remains of the unfortunate humans who had not survived the chaos’ (p. 6).

Saha’s work is deeply engaged with Animal Studies. Early on he confesses that there once was a time when he would ignore animals in archival documents; his former research methods had an ‘anthropocentric orientation’ (p. 13). To read *Colonizing Animals*, then, is to read the work of a self-scrutinizing historian, one who has set about to search the archives for animals and, through this, fundamentally restructure their academic practice. The outcome is an energizing work full of searching reflections on the practice of animal history as such. *Colonizing Animals* builds on the work of other animal historians like Harriet Ritvo, Erica Fudge, Rohan Deb Roy and Joshua Specht. It grapples with the writings of Donna Haraway, Vinciane Despret and Jacques Derrida, contrasting their posthumanist analyses of ontological

difference between species with the Subaltern Studies project's postcolonial critique of social racialization as phenomenological imposition – an analysis that should be read by all who wish to synthesize animal and postcolonial studies. And the book ends with a fascinating contemplation of the function and politics of animal history in the wake of its purported methodological triumph and, at the same time, in the shadow of the Anthropocene. In a virtuoso conclusion which flows from thinker to thinker, combining Erica Fudge's radical animal history with David Graeber's anthropology of value, Samantha Frost's theory of the human as biocultural subject with Zakkiyah Imam Jackson's afropessimist posthumanism, Saha outlines how animal history might move beyond its foundational critique of anthropocentrism, its 'politics of negation' (p. 186).

First, Saha says, the field must now throw off its Eurocentrism and provincialize itself. This means not simply looking at different sources, but actually reconstituting a historical method through the very forms of human-animal relations that preceded, and were variously marginalized and eradicated by, colonialism and the capitalist mode of production. Second, Saha argues that the field should reclaim individual animals as discreet subjects of analysis. If the individual's agency and unity have been troubled by the scalar implications of the Anthropocene on the one side and microbiology and new materialism on the other, then the task is not to forget subjectivity entirely but rather critically recast it so that it remains a coherent object of analysis. Animals might thus be thought of as 'biologically plausible fictions' (p. 191), and the historian's task would be to reconstitute the animal's subjectivity itself as an interspecies becoming, that is, to narrate the life of a subject who also 'represents more than the organism itself' (p. 196). At stake in this critical gesture, borne out by Saha's clarifying readings of ecological, postcolonial and Marxist thought, is an important defence and refinement of Animal Studies itself.

## 2. I Dream of Dogs

The University of Minnesota Press's Posthumanities series, edited by Cary Wolfe, has been publishing innovative works in Animal Studies for fifteen years. Yet in 2022 it was Minnesota's Forerunners: Ideas First series that gave us two intriguing forays into Animal Studies thinking: Lydia Pyne's *Endlings* and Margret Grebowicz's *Rescue Me*. The Forerunners series offers short volumes, priced accordingly in slim paperbacks, with open-access ebook versions available for free reading online, anytime. The series editors describe these books as 'thought-in-process scholarship, where intense analysis, questioning and speculation take the lead'. Arguably the series' most well-known title thus far has been Kathryn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018).

Of the two books under discussion here it is Pyne's that is the more 'in-process': summarizing the conceptual history of the endling, the last known individual of a given species; framing the sixth mass extinction in too simplistic terms as being 'driven by people' (p. 2); and then retelling the stories of endlings like Martha the passenger pigeon, Orange Band the dusky seaside sparrow, 淇淇 (Qí Qí) the baiji river dolphin, Lonesome George the Pinta Island tortoise and Benjamin the thylacine (whose name was not actually Benjamin), all with the occasional non sequitur. Still, I like the way that Pyne's book probes the rise, uses

and problematics of endling stories. Fundamentally Pyne's worry is that endlings have come to stand as tragic heroes of the Anthropocene:

Today, we might like to tell ourselves that we tell endling stories as an act of memorializing. Perhaps even penance. ... Perhaps telling and retelling endling stories is about contrition; perhaps it's catharsis. We've learned our lesson, we would like to tell ourselves, and we'll be more careful in the future. Other species—other endlings—might beg differ. (pp. 29–30)

Pyne's argument, then, is that the stories we tell about endling stories, rather than shocking us into ecological consciousness – whoever this 'us' might be – may instead grant us a reprieve. Thus Pyne calls for new forms of 'endling storytelling' that 'could offer something other than despair' (p. 79). But what these stories might look like, and what other affects they might generate, remains unsaid. I appreciate Pyne's provocation, but *Endlings* ultimately raises more questions than it answers.

Margret Grebowicz's *Rescue Me* takes the human–dog relation in late capitalism as its main object of analysis, questioning and speculation. Her motivations for doing so are both personal and historical. As Grebowicz tells us at the very start, she lives with two dogs (Abba, a basenji, and Waffles, a chihuahua) and longs to live with even more:

I dream of more dogs. When I fantasize about a life of success, my future, much-improved self is surrounded by dogs ... Financial stability = more dogs. Structure and routine = dogs. Mental health = dogs. A happy family = dogs. Buoyed by these fantasies, I am no different than a dog hoarder, except that my armies of dogs are in my dreams (p. 1).

Writing primarily from this personal perspective, 'of the closeted hoarder, the one who wants too much, loves too hard, and probably does it wrong despite her best intentions' (p. 17), Grebowicz wants to historicize her desire, that is, to situate her fantasy within the now: the 'attrition of life in late capitalism' (p. 11) that engages both interpersonal and interspecies relations.

*Rescue Me* is therefore as much a note to self as it is a work of cultural critique, as Grebowicz situates her desire for more dogs within a 'rapidly growing and increasingly self-aware dog-owner culture' (p. 19) whose prominence has only sharpened since the COVID-19 pandemic. Although describing this apparent boom in dog ownership as 'the Great Adoption', Grebowicz sees it as 'just one stage in a much longer process' (p. 11) that includes declining euthanasia rates, expanding pet and veterinary care industries, and increasing dog food costs since the 1990s. Situated within this moment, each chapter takes on a specific problem of contemporary human-dog relations. The first chapter sees Grebowicz deconstruct the logics of rescue. Reflecting on the seemingly anti-consumerist call to 'adopt, don't shop', Grebowicz details how the current valorization of the rescue dog rests on a false dichotomy between good shelters and bad breeders, between conscientious adopters of long-sheltered scraggly hounds and status-obsessed consumers desperate for an Instagrammable puppy. Yet there are legitimate reasons why people might want a puppy, just as there are an increasing number of barriers that prevent people from adopting. Are you a home owner? Can you guarantee a fenced-in yard? Do you have the income to afford veterinary care? Increasingly, Grebowicz argues, adoption tends to 'reduce dog ownership to economic status' (p. 23), pricing out those demographics who stand to benefit most from canine companions.

The problem with this is not simply the high cost of entry but the logic itself, its discriminations exacerbating the commodification of the human-dog relation – a relation which people enter into, Grebowicz says, precisely in order to find something unquantifiable, decommodified and uncorrupted by capital: interspecies love.

The second chapter turns to food, exploring the rise of ‘work-to-eat’, the idea that dogs should ‘earn’ their dinner, exemplified by contraptions like the Kong Wobbler that releases food over time. Although grounded on a vision of pre-modern companionship in which sled-pulling, livestock herding and hunting was the norm, ‘the work-to-eat concept has little connection with the real history of the working dog, or the dog as worker, who had a specific, important job to do’ (p. 39). Work-to-eat offers little more than stimulation and challenge for their own sake. ‘A tired dog, we are constantly told, is a good dog’ (p. 39). Finally, *Rescue Me* casts a critical eye on the ‘alpha paradigm’ (p. 49), still in cultural circulation due in part to celebrity dog trainers like Cesar Millan and his ‘training ground of dominance’ (p. 50). Yet this is not another polemic against the Dog Whisperer. Pointing to Millan’s main corrective to pet cultures – that scary dogs are actually just scared dogs – Grebowicz acknowledges that ‘Millan’s contributions to dog life and to training culture have been considerable, and much greater than his many critics like to admit’ (p. 51). Nevertheless Millan insists on there being a ‘pack leader’, an idea discredited at least as early as the 1970s. And this bleeds into his attitude towards dogs, characterized for him as one of necessary domination but for his critics as unnecessary violence that does little to resolve or even soothe dogs’ anxieties. In the end, Grebowicz argues that Millan’s penchant for the pack is symptomatic of a wider desire for living in a ‘rational, well-ordered, predictable, and thus manageable social organization’ (p. 59). This isn’t to say that we all secretly crave authoritarian rule, but that we seek social units that are understandable and manageable. Yet social life is full of uncertainty, especially if lived with dogs. Grebowicz’s conclusion, then, is that we must foreclose this foreclosure of possibility, eliminate this elimination of the unknown, that structures petkeeping in the twenty-first century. Doing so begins, Grebowicz suggests, when humans can confess that they are not really the ones who are saving dogs; their dogs are saving them.

*Rescue Me* is a snappy intervention, benefiting from a brevity that implies a broader cultural analysis to come. In such an analysis it will be interesting to see whether Grebowicz follows Saha’s *Colonizing Animals* by provincializing as well as historicizing her desire. For in the end *Rescue Me* is a book about contemporary human-dog relations in the USA, pitched implicitly to a US readership. This is not to accuse the book of the bad assumption that America is the world. Rather, it is to say that Grebowicz does not directly reflect on the specifically American cultural milieu to which her book responds, nor rigorously thematize its relationship with wider global ecological issues: the greenhouse gas emissions associated with pet food production, for instance, or its reliance on the lives and deaths of cows, pigs and chickens, or the downstream consequences of pet waste. For we might say that, as things stand, the promise that dogs will rescue us psychologically rests on them also polluting the planet; dog-ownership is thus both a reparative connection with nature and another kind of climate change disavowal.



### 3. The Gay Frog is the Opposite of the Gay Penguin

2022 saw the relaunch of *Humanimalia*, the open-access journal of human–animal relations. An online, biannual, interdisciplinary journal, *Humanimalia* has since its first issue in 2009 published some of the major contributions to, reflections on and interventions into the field. When the journal’s long-serving founder and editor Istvan Csicsery-Ronay announced his retirement, *Humanimalia* looked for a time like it might be retired too. But thanks to the work of Kári Driscoll, as well as a new team of associate editors (full disclosure: including myself) and peer reviewers the journal has migrated from its first home at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana to Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

*Humanimalia*’s stimulating 2022 issue redoubles the journal’s commitment to explore how ‘the relationship between humans and nonhumans is always historically, culturally, and technologically mediated’, a theme pinpointed by Driscoll in his editorial introduction (p. iv) and developed by each of the issue’s articles. Verity Burke’s analysis of animal death masks in natural history museums examines the relationship between animal celebrity, the artistry of preservation and the tensions between preservation and conservation. Through studies of tigers in Rajasthan and bears in Alaska, Kath Weston argues powerfully for a recognition of what she calls the historically inflected backstories of individual animals, and against a generalizing projection of species habits. Nora Schuurman examines how Finnish animal rescue charities craft the ‘adoptability’ of homeless dogs. For her, a more ethical pet culture is modelled by their vision of rescue dogs as subjects with particular life histories and individual interests. Borbála László’s phenomenological interrogation of mid-century Hollywood’s classic dog figures peels away the layers of meaning immanent to the canine film-image. John Drew then offers an incisive re-reading of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* that reflects on the specifically pedagogical affordances of literary animal studies – a topic under-explored but critically important to the field’s future. Eva Meijer’s contribution frames her experience living with and caring for ex-laboratory mice as a small-scale experiment in modeling interspecies society-making and multispecies futures. Finally, Erica Fudge returns to the concerns of her 2006 ‘rumination’ on animal history, first published on *h-animal*. By turns summative and agenda-setting, Fudge’s Janus-faced essay ends by asking how animal history might transform in method and subject matter through its engagement with the Anthropocene.

Such questions are at the heart of a recent special issue of *Green Letters*, ‘Animal Futurity’. Co-edited by Nora Castle and Giulia Champion, the issue begins by gravely acknowledging the expected planetary horizon: a century of species extinctions, deep-sea mining and zoonotic disease. Yet the objective of the collection, Castle and Champion write, is ‘to envision how current and emergent ideologies, technologies, and practices could be extrapolated to alternative futures’ (p. 2). The eight essays that follow, all interesting in their own right, cross literary studies, cultural and media studies, science and technology studies, anthropology and geography. Some of these essays – like those on gene-editing (Clare), de-extinction science (Mitchell and Waterhouse; Niitynen) and rewilding (Altrudi) – have a stronger, more self-consciously delineated emphasis on human-animal futures than others.

And what the special issue ultimately suggests about interspecies futures is ultimately left unexplained. Still, the essays collectively underline Animal Studies' interdisciplinarity, as well as its sometimes complementary, other times uneasy, overlap with environmental and ecocritical debates.

I want to think about this methodological overlap more closely by pivoting to another special issue published this year: 'Sex and Nature in the Anthropocene', a special section of *Environmental Humanities*. This is not a straightforward contribution to Animal Studies. For as co-editors Sarah Bezan and Ina Linge note in their scene-setting introduction the collection wedds 'historians of sexuality with scholars in the environmental humanities', intentionally integrating their 'mutually beneficial practices and approaches' (p. 592). The upshot of this synthesis, they argue, is to historicize the relationship between sex and nature – a task established in books like Catriona Sandilands and Bruce Erickson's *Queer Ecologies* and Nicole Seymour's *Strange Natures*, developed across the decade since their publication, but one now in need of new attention in the wake of the discourse surrounding the Anthropocene. Building on these works, this special section on sex and nature aims to shed light on the myriad, complicated and contradictory ways in which the Anthropocene – as both geological epoch *and* conceptual phenomenon – has shaped, and is also shaped by, contingencies of gender, sex and sexuality.

Bezan and Linge's main argument is this: that the scale of the Anthropocene 'obscures and essentializes the detailed, entangled, and complex histories that give meaning to the human, the nonhuman, and the environment' (p. 594). The promise of queer ecological thought, then, is that it can fracture the Anthropocene's singularity. This emphasis on queerness's stubborn particularity repeats a by-now familiar critical-rhetorical move: difference disrupts universality. Yet as Catriona Sandilands' foreword and Juno Salazar Parreñas and Nicole Seymour's afterword make clear, the special section's key contribution is its fusing together of gender and environment in order to enrich both fields as distinct modes of inquiry. Ecological difference revises gender and sexuality studies' historical tendency to naturalize 'nature' as that thing out there to which human subjectivities should never be essentialized; queer difference compels the authors to seek out new archives, marginalized histories and minor artistic forms that expand and complicate the assumed canon of environmental scholarship.

But what of Animal Studies? What does this queer ecology, in all of its 'promiscuous disregard of disciplinary boundaries' (p. 722), as Parreñas and Seymour put it, bring to the party? Two essays, interrelated in topic, guide us toward an answer. The first is Marianna Szczygielska's 'Animal Sex in Public', which finds new things to say about one of Animal Studies' most analyzed sites of critique: the zoo. For an essay principally concerned with same-sex encounters between captive animals, Szczygielska harnesses a range of approaches, theories and histories; the essay stands, concomitantly, as a theoretical application and transformation of reproductive futurism in light of turtle celibacy, a history of how European sexology developed in conjunction with studies of captive animal sex acts, and a critique of the mainstream celebration of 'gay' penguins, which ends up ossifying nature for a born-this-way articulation of identity, upholding a conservative homonormativity that seeks legitimacy

in the respectability of child-rearing. Szczygielska points out that, in a time of mass extinction, the zoo develops a regime of chronobiopolitics that consolidates its historical transformation in self-professed purpose from Garden of Eden to Noah's Ark, from exotic menagerie to the last guarantor of species survival. In this regime the reproduction of species takes center stage. But as Szczygielska concludes, this is increasingly becoming a reproduction *without* sexuality, forced on zoo animals through technologies like artificial insemination and gene-freezing (p. 655).

'The gay frog is the opposite of the gay penguin' (p. 675), writes Hannah Boast in her essay, 'Theorizing the Gay Frog'. Boast's focus is the disgraced conspiracist Alex Jones, whose widely-watched rant-performances about 'gay frogs' have functioned as expressions of an alt-right media ecology emboldened by the Trump presidency. (Jones, who filed for bankruptcy in the back-end of 2022 after being ordered to pay over a billion dollars in damages to the families of Sandy Hook victims, would presumably think it a satanic conspiracy against him that Boast's article falls around page 666.) Jones's sex panic routines may be situated at the absurd 'confluence of conspiracy, profiteering, and performance' (p. 665), but as Boast shows they are not completely unfounded: endocrine-disrupting chemicals *have* been shown to alter frogs' sexual morphologies. Yet the point here is Jones's bad faith performance of credulity, his catalytic propagandizing, which appropriates the supposedly 'gay' frog into a bigger swamp of discursive practices. Focusing on Jones's rant allows Boast to draw out the ways in which the gay frog, as meme, plays 'a dual role in alt-right discourse as both a danger and endangered' (p. 671). In this emergent permanently-online ecofascism, the chemically-altered intersex frog emblemizes sexual monstrosity, overpopulation, immigration as invasion, deep state contamination projects and feminization – all at the same time. The mutating frog, 'neither charismatic megafauna nor "unloved other"' (p. 669), is thus leveraged as an indicator species of a rapidly eroding 'natural' white masculinity.

At same time, though, the 'gay frog' became an ironic source of humour – not only for a sympathetic alt-right (for which Pepe the frog is the key figure), but also for an antipathetic liberalism which, from John Oliver on HBO to YouTube remix parodies, all poked fun with their own performance of credulity. What Boast is after here is a redemptive critique of ecopolitical humour – not unlike the one that Nicole Seymour proposes in *Bad Environmentalism* (2018). Boast challenges the smugness of liberal debunking in order to forecast new queer irreverence and ironies around the figure of the frog, for her an aspirational toxic figure that represents 'our immersion in chemical atmospheres while still allowing the potential to advocate for all forms of queer life' (p. 675). This is an essay, then, that takes humor seriously, and in doing so spotlights an often neglected or even rebuked category of Animal Studies critique: the comic – something that looks set to be further develop in *Animal Satire*, a volume forthcoming with the book series to which I now turn.

#### 4. Narrating Production

Palgrave Studies in Animals and Literature continues to be one of the most vibrant book series for new work in Animal Studies. Its three new titles for 2022 all deserve mention. First is *Animals and Detective Fiction*, edited by Ruth Hawthorn and John Miller, which

convincingly makes the case that crime writing is a multispecies genre, one that ‘emerges out of the imagining of human-animal relations and which, throughout its subsequent development, consistently stages and investigates conceptions of species’ (p. 2). Hawthorn and Miller’s jumping-off point is Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, the 1841 story that not just invented the detective genre as such, but did so through the figure of an animal criminal, a ‘large fulvous Ourang-Outang of the East Indian Islands’ (Poe qtd. in Hawthorn and Miller, p. 1). *Animals and Detective Fiction* focuses for the most part on canonical Anglophone texts. By self-consciously limiting their scope to foundational texts – Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins, Agatha Christie, Patricia Highsmith, James Ellroy – Hawthorn, Miller and their contributors set out to redress the ‘critically marginal’ yet ‘historically integral’ (p. 4) role that animals play in detective fiction’s ethics, ontologies, politics and forms. A corrective volume that successfully sets the record straight, *Animals and Detective Fiction* is the starting point for further literary scholarship on genre fiction and Animal Studies.

Where *Animals in Detective Fiction* deliberately focuses on canonical works, Sune Borkfelt and Matthias Stephan’s co-edited volume *Literary Animal Studies and the Climate Crisis* takes a decidedly more contemporary and global approach. Owing perhaps to the planetary scale of climate change itself, as well as the geographical range and particular regional expertise of the volume’s contributors, *Literary Animal Studies and the Climate Crisis* charts across its three sections – on climate crisis, extinction, and the posthuman – the ways in which writers across different genres and traditions tell animal stories as climate stories. In Alex Lockwood’s chapter a preoccupation with literary craft and genre-bending ficto-critical writing gives a new perspective on literature as a privileged site for articulating a vulnerability that, shared across species lines, becomes charged with ethical import. Abby Schroering writes well about how Lynn Nottage’s stage production *Mlima’s Tale* (2018) repurposes the conventions of theatrical mimesis. Anastassiya Andrianova’s chapter offers a fresh reading of Yoko Tawada’s *Memoirs of a Polar Bear* (2011) – even if the analysis assumes a somewhat literalist reading, one that concentrates so strongly on whether the novel endorses zoos that it overlooks Tawada’s playful poetics of migration and translation. More broadly, the book’s emphasis on representations of animals and climate change leaves little room for a theorization of translation. As I read the volume I kept wanting to know: how might literatures in other languages differently articulate the climate crisis? And how, then, might literary animal studies be theorized as a mode of comparative and world literature?<sup>1</sup>

More than this, the volume made me wonder about what it means to conduct Animal Studies scholarship in a changing climate, and whether the emergence of the ‘climate crisis’ as a popular concept might impact on the ways we research, write and teach. These, though, are sadly not the concerns of the volume’s editors or contributors. *Literary Animal Studies and the Climate Crisis* is, instead, a strong example of how literary animal studies methods apply to climate change texts. Its analysis underscores how literature decentres the human, situates knowledge, uncovers slow violence and depicts species entanglements and shared vulnerability. The book’s key contribution is its argument, expressed eloquently and

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<sup>1</sup> I reflect on this final question in an essay titled ‘World-Ecological Literature and the Animal Question’.

passionately throughout, that literary narratives ‘work toward both understanding and mitigating’ (p. 14) the ravages of climate change.

2022 has been a bumper year for Borkfelt. As well as co-editing another Animal Studies volume with Matthias Stephan, *Interrogating Boundaries of the Nonhuman: Literature, Climate Change, and Environmental Crises* (Lexington Books), and contributing a chapter on animal narrative to the *Edinburgh Companion to Vegan Literary Studies* (Edinburgh UP), he is also the sole-author of a monograph: *Reading Slaughter: Abattoir Fictions, Space, and Empathy in Late Modernity*. Here, Borkfelt examines a wide range of texts drawn from across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, doing so in order to ‘make sense of western, and especially Anglo-American, slaughterhouse fictions as they appear in late modernity’ (p. 2). Borkfelt’s textual analysis starts with the idea that slaughterhouses are predominantly, if not totally, invisible. Theoretically indebted to two well-known theories within the field – Carol J. Adams’ notion of the ‘absent referent’ and Timothy Pachirat’s ‘politics of sight’ – he argues that the factory, as the site of mass animal life and death, is daily being invisibilized, whether that’s through the meat commodity’s mystifying transcendence from lively subject to mere flesh and cheap food, through historically-specific shifts in production locations, or through to straitjacketing ‘ag-gag’ laws that suppress whistleblowing in slaughterhouses. If the slaughterhouse is concealed, then slaughterhouse fictions function as unconcealment devices. Borkfelt’s central hypothesis is thus:

The individual animal, and the exact processes by which even the collective animals die and become food products, remains distant and concealed in the anonymity of the abattoir. By engaging with the slaughterhouse, literary narratives can help lift that concealment, challenge invisibility, and add ‘knowledge’ in the form of descriptions and narratives that prompt us to imagine the hidden space of slaughter. (p. 8)

Today, as a besieged humanities grasps at ways to justify its existence, the notion of ‘bearing witness’ is frequently instrumentalized and banalized. But the kind of literary witnessing that Borkfelt has in mind here is of great importance. For as Borkfelt writes in the book’s coda, ‘were ag-gag laws to become more widespread and comprehensive’, fiction might become even more singularly important for encountering, understanding and sensing animal production (p. 265).

*Reading Slaughter*’s chapters on literary anthropomorphism and the horror genre are especially noteworthy. In the former, Borkfelt works through the antinomies of anthropomorphism, its various uses and abuses and contested position within Animal Studies itself. He settles on the idea – arrived at through close analysis of James Agee’s ‘A Mother’s Tale’ (1952) and Neil Astley’s *The End of My Tether* (2002) – that anthropomorphism can ‘contradict clear-cut notions of a human/animal binary’ (p. 105). An ontologically destabilizing aesthetics, it thus undermines the assumed epistemes of animal observation while also defamiliarizing the social practices of animal slaughter. On horror, *Reading Slaughter* builds on Julia Kristeva’s foundational writings on the abject, arguing that the slaughterhouse is ‘a highly cultural construction that attempts internally to make killing and violence systematic—to establish order—while externally also attempting to separate such killing from entering our culture’ (p. 225). Where Borkfelt’s attentive readings of Matthew Stokoe’s gothic *Cows* (1997) and Conrad Williams’ post-apocalyptic gangster novella *The*

*Scalding Rooms* (2007) track a tension between the structuring order of the slaughterhouse and the corporeal messiness, the chaos, of slaughter itself, his analysis of Clive Barker's 'The Midnight Meat Train' (1984), Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000) and Joseph D'Lacey's *Meat* (2008) foregrounds the generic tendency of abattoir horror to plot out murderous and cannibalistic stories in which humans themselves become farmed meat. The slaughterhouse, depicted as a deviation 'from the norms of the rest of society', therefore 'taints' plotted social relations 'with its deviance' (p. 191).

In these arguments Borkfelt adheres to a vision of the modern slaughterhouse as a quintessential heterotopia: geographically peripheral if not hidden, psychologically distanced, as an aberration and exception. This is a specular logic that fuses individual knowledge with political change. It sees narrative as a form of 'illumination' that 'breaks through' the slaughterhouse's concealment (p. 120). The reader, previously 'shielded' from the grim reality of animal production, reads literary narratives of slaughter and is thus 'confronted' (pp. 48, 57, 58, 65, 81, and so on) with the truth. Borkfelt thus rightly appraises literary works for their unique force of unconcealment. Yet is the invisibility of animal death truly the only thing that ensures its continuation? Would glass abattoirs really hasten their abolition? As Alex Blanchette worries in *Porkopolis*, it is a hallmark of a particular liberal brand of pro-animal politics that thinks of factory farms as being 'so exceptional, and exceptionally bad, that their practices could be corrected if only they were "exposed" to the public' (p. 21). Does *Reading Slaughter's* premise of the slaughterhouse's concealment therefore inadvertently conceal the ways in which animal production was and remains an ambivalent, contradictory and contingent phenomenon, obscured and disavowed in some cases, romanticized, reclaimed and embraced in others? And does it judge literary works less by their literariness and more by their potentiality as energetic conductors of recognition and conversion? But what if these stories, by assuming that the slaughterhouse is structurally hidden, also participate in its camouflaging?

Regardless, *Reading Slaughter* makes an important contribution to Animal Studies. Well-researched and wide-ranging, it is a commendable work of survey and close reading that takes one of the key sites of human-animal relations, the slaughterhouse, and subjects it to a long overdue book-length interrogation. There is even something refreshingly old-fashioned about the book: Slaughterhouse fictions? The cultivation of empathy? Are we sure this isn't a book from the first wave of literary animal studies some two decades ago, a lost manuscript now unearthed and published? Borkfelt's unswerving focus on empathy, at once a theorization of 'empathics' and a method of reading, helps draw attention to the undeniable power, the force, of literary writing about animal slaughter – it is a welcome reminder of why we have literary animal studies in the first place.

## 5. By Way of a Conclusion

My own book, *Creaturely Forms in Contemporary Literature: Narrating the War Against Animals*, also published this year, shares Borkfelt's ambition to underscore the imaginative force of literature. Yet where Borkfelt focuses on representation of the slaughterhouse, my main object and site of analysis is the literary text itself. Focusing what I call the 'form-

problem' (p. 2) of writing human-animal relations, I begin *Creaturely Forms in Contemporary Literature* with two interrelated arguments. First, that literature, and indeed much literary criticism too, has functioned as an 'anthropological machine', a device that constructs and reproduces genres of human subjectivity. Second, that if, as many critics have argued, we are living through a war against animals, a period marked by globally increasing animal death – the mass production of some animals, made possible by the mass extinction of others – then it will be important to examine the cultural role that literature plays in the continuation of this war. These two arguments are not too far away from some others that have been made by literary animal studies critics over the years. But where these arguments ask how literature represents animals, *Creaturely Forms in Contemporary Literature* concentrates more on the relationship between representation and form. Put simply, I set out in my book to formalize literary animal studies, making the case that literary forms – plot, narrative, syntax, dialogue, characterization, images and intertexts – all inform how a text 'thinks' the problem of human-animal relations.

Intended, then, as an intervention into both the tacit humanism of contemporary literary criticism and the predominantly representational focus of literary animal studies, *Creaturely Forms in Contemporary Literature* theorizes a new literary formalism in light of interspecies relations. Through author-study chapters of W. G. Sebald, J. M. Coetzee and Mahasweta Devi, as well as readings of Richard Powers and Arundhati Roy, I argue that identifying scenes and representations of human-animal interaction must be part of a wider interrogation of how literary forms themselves compel new ways of relating to other creatures. When Sebald develops a poetics of connection and idiosyncratic use of images, when Coetzee experiments with realism and metafiction to differently plot human-animal relations, when Mahasweta's mobilizes the short story form and free indirect discourse – all of these are times in which literary forms momentarily break away from the anthroponormativity of modernity, by which I mean the historically-specific production of a normative humanity.

This break with anthroponormativity is in fact the promise of Animal Studies itself – as the publications discussed throughout this review clearly show. For in spite of their many divergences in method and tone, subject matter and hypotheses, these works ultimately cohere in that they denaturalize what might be otherwise framed as mere instinct, behaviour or habitat. Whether we're talking about Lagos' street dogs, Myanmar's elephant sanctuaries, pet-keeping in the USA or penguin sex in zoos, what appear as natural species interactions are theorized instead in these texts as social relations. In 2022, then, amidst reparative readings of nature's resilience and enraptured talk of entanglements, Animal Studies has not given up on the project of critique.

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