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David P. Rando, *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens, and Ghosts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 200pp.

Since its inception, the field of Animal Studies has challenged the concept of human exceptionalism. As part of an effort to counter this concept, scholars in the field have argued the many ways in which nonhuman animals are equal to humans. This has led to a widening of our collective understanding of nonhuman life, evidenced in the increase in popular literature on the subject. Still, there has been a persistent societal impression that nonhuman animals, while more often considered worthwhile and valuable in their own right, are not as unique and important as humans. With the rise of technological advancements, most recently the advent of widely available generative AI, the existence of what humans consider to be intelligent life that matches, and often far surpasses that of humans, has led to a situation in which human exceptionalism wavers.

Understanding the importance of this moment to the future of human/nonhuman animal relationships, David P. Rando explores the dynamic between humans, nonhuman animals, and nonhuman entities such as robots, clones, androids, aliens, and ghosts. This triangulated connection has previously been considered from other perspectives, with Erika Quinn and Holly Yanacek, in their 2022 study of nonhumans in modern German cultural history, posing nonhuman animals, machines and robots as the lens through which we can see humanity. In trauma literature, *Ghost, Android, Animal: Trauma Literature Beyond the Human* (2020) by Tony M. Vinci explores depictions of trauma in animals, machines and spirits, and how they can help represent inclusive ways towards trauma healing. Rando participates in the wider discussion of these three groups by exploring an alternate approach, focused on investigating literary nonhuman entities but leading towards a new understanding of nonhuman animals.

Rather than champion the talents and abilities of nonhuman animals, the author pivots to the artificial, the unknowable, and the weird. As there are, he offers, no set ways in which we can expect to behave towards clones, aliens and ghosts, our relationship with them is relatively free from the longstanding traditions, dynamic and emotional connections we have with nonhuman animals. Utilising this relative newness, potential and unfamiliarity of the artificial, alien and spiritual nonhuman, as well as their ability in literature to communicate with and mirror humans, Rando

argues that examining these entities' relationships with humans bypasses any remaining hidden beliefs we may have about nonhuman animals, and helps to "unsettle received ideas" (75). *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens and Ghosts*, offers examples of such relationships from the works of Kazuo Ishiguro, Jeannette Winterson, Philip K. Dick, Octavia E. Butler, Jeff Vandermeer, Louise Erdich, George Saunders, Richard Powers, Jonathan Luna and Sara Vaughn, and Peter Brown. Through them, we begin to see the underlying connections between different literary interactions with nonhuman entities and come to understand what they can tell us about our relationships with nonhuman animals.

Delivering on its title's promise, *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens and Ghosts* covers a wide range of non-animal entities, each of which highlight different aspects of the way in which non-human animals are oppressed, marginalised and abused. In an act of inclusion, Rando positions a different take on Viktor Shlovsky's *ostranenie* as an ideal way to disrupt old mental avenues and create a better, anthropocosmic future. The varying intensities of relationships between humans and nonhumans in Rando's literary examples each show different aspects of human/nonhuman power dynamics. Using reading strategies from critical animal studies as a guide, the book is structured according to four major themes: nonhuman hope, the artificial gaze, familiar aliens, and posthumous humanity. Despite his use of familiar reading strategies, Rando pointedly refuses to look at his nonhuman non-animal subjects through a "literal, figural, symbolic or allegorical" lens (2), in order to arrive at truly new conclusions about the way we see nonhuman animals, as well as the way we define ourselves as human. Rather, Rando approaches his nonhuman literary examples from a fresh angle, proposing to see the nonhuman representations from a middle distance, allowing these stories about clones, spectres, metatextual literary characters, etc. to exist somewhere between the human and the nonhuman animal. In doing so, he argues, we can step away from any direct comparison or attempting to make each nonhuman fit a mould, and come closer to the truth: that there are aspects of both present in these entities, and that their value as a tool to look at nonhuman animal representations lies in their existence in a space between.

The author's sharp sense of focus is upheld throughout the book, and each topic is presented as both well-referenced and understandable, making it an ideal read for more experienced and more junior scholars alike. Along with addressing underlying speciesism, suppressed bodily autonomy, and the concept of the soul, Rando also shines a light on nonhuman experiences of humanness in literature. Additionally, the author wields his longstanding knowledge on the different ways in which we write hope, and opens it up for nonhuman use, "democratising" it. In his wide range of examples, which include characters who are clones, robots, spirits and (extra)terrestrials, Rando finds behaviours, sensations, qualities and emotions which, whether within the novel or in its societal context, are deemed to be exclusive to humans. Rando's detailed analysis demonstrates that, in contrast to these nonhuman characters, their human counterparts often cannot live up to their world's internal standards for human goodness and morality. It should be noted that nonhumans are

not idealised as part of this analysis, nor are humans vilified. Instead, both parties' merits and shortcomings only highlight the futility of a divide between the species. A poignant idea that the author develops in this context is the concept of constructing value, framing it as nonhumans having an "uniqueness to" someone, rather than an inherent value (151-152, 177). Approaching value this way combats the notion that nonhuman animals are worthless until their worth is proven by anthropocentric standards. Instead, any nonhuman can be "unique to" anyone, without a need to seek proof. As such, "uniqueness to" is a vital part of future discussions of human-nonhuman relationships.

In his introduction, the author makes it clear that *Doing Animal Studies with Androids, Aliens and Ghosts* does not focus on non-human animal representations beyond posing them as examples with which to compare representations of clones, androids, aliens, spirits, etc. This clear-cut focus makes the book particularly accessible to students new to the topic. Even so, given the attention devoted to characters that exist on the fringes of the "nonhuman", and the insightful inclusion of nonhuman animals in the chapter on posthumous humanity in particular, the book may have benefited from a section on zoomorphic aliens, ghosts or androids, as they reside in an even more nebulous space between nonhuman animals and nonhuman others. That said, the insightful inclusion of the sections on plantlike nonhuman networks and language pull their weight as representations of other Earthly organisms made strange, discussing the fungal network-like "learners" in Richard Powers' 2018 *The Overstory* (61-62) and the fruiting bodies that "spell out an endless sentence in English" in Jeff VanderMeer's (2014) *Annihilation* (98-99).

As a whole, Rando contributes greatly to the fields of Animal Studies by offering an alternative way to observe the obscured ways in which humans still view nonhuman animals, as well as the arguably weakly supported constructs we have built to separate ourselves from all other species. With its intriguing case in favour of democratised hope, free will, and mutual respect between species, it is a key text for any scholar looking to venture beyond the fringes of Animal Studies to explore its many possibilities.

Works Cited

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