

Editorial Ecozon@ 7.1

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Animal Humanities, the focus of the themed Section of this issue, is a field which has grown rapidly over the past twenty years, and is finding expression, not only in the United States and the UK, but also increasingly in Europe, in publications, conferences, specifications for academic posts, summer schools, and student dissertations. A semi-autonomous sphere of ecocriticism, alternatively defined as ‘Animality Studies’ and ‘Cultural Animal Studies’, it has emerged as an exciting interdisciplinary undertaking, drawing together lines of enquiry in literature, the visual arts, ethics, ontology, epistemology, religious studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology and law. Animals play a central role in our lives (almost universally as food, and often as pets) and in our cultures (for instance as avatars of the wildness within us), and the interaction with them in our everyday lives is characterised by paradoxes and tensions. We are, on the one hand, animals ourselves, yet on the other we have for centuries defined ourselves as human subjects through our differences from them. This endlessly fascinating relationship of similarity-but-difference has made animals a symbol for human beings since time immemorial, prompted countless fantasies of transformation from man to animal and vice versa, and given rise to thought experiments in hybridity and meaningful solidarities between the human and non-human. A key challenge today, at a time when the interdependence of human and non-human animals is becoming ever clearer, yet animal species are becoming extinct at a rate unknown for millennia, is how to reconceive animals and our relationship with them, and how to represent in texts and images the human/ animal entanglement in the material world in ways which do justice to animals’ agency and otherness.

Embracing both zoontology and zoopoetics, Animal Humanities draws on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, postmodern theories of becoming animal, posthumanist conceptions of coexistence and coevolution, and debates on the rights and wrongs of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representation of animals and humans. As Elena Past and Deborah Amberson note in their introduction, the essays by Felice Cimatti, Anne Duggan, Christina Vani, Damiano Benvegnù, Shengmei Ma, Matteo Gilebbi, Todd LeVasseur, and Michael Charles Vale/ Donna Leanna McRae presented in the Special Section engage with a “knot of socio-political concerns, language and ethnic traditions, and expressive modes” in their exploration of the heterogenous relationships between non-human and human

animals. The pros and cons of anthropomorphism, the politicisation of animals, instances of interspecies communication and friendship, and other themes are discussed in novels, films, poems and discourses ranging temporally from the seventeenth century to the present, and geographically from Britain, France and Italy to China.

The theme is taken up in the Creative Writing and Arts Section. This comprises sets of images by the Spanish artists Verónica Perales and Nuria Sánchez-León, poems in English and Spanish by Florian Auerochs, Jacob Price, Juan Carlos Galiano and Antonello Borra, and a humorous short story by the Californian writer Robert Davis. As Serenella Iovino writes in her introduction to the Section, this variety of creative contributions illustrates perfectly Amberson and Past's claim that the non-human animal, long defined as being without logos and without reason, "may speak most clearly in artistic image and literary language".

In the first of three essays in the General Section, Agnes Kneitz examines a classic of German environmentalist writing, Wilhelm Raabe's short novel, *Pfister's Mill* (1883). The plot centres on the pollution of a river by effluent from a sugar beet factory. Raabe based his work on a contemporary court case in his home town of Brunswick, in which the owner of a riverside inn (the eponymous Pfister's Mill) sued the owners of a sugar beet factory for compensation after his customers deserted him because of the stench from the polluted river. Kneitz locates the novella in the wider context of industrial pollution at the time, scientific advances, and emerging legislative control. She shows why Raabe, caught between nostalgia and insight into the inevitability of industrial development, and between the associated literary currents of Realism and Naturalism, failed to reach a wider audience with this tale, with which he had hoped to alert contemporaries to a major social problem.

The second essay, by Kerim Yazgünoğlu, is concerned with the posthuman "Meta(l)morphoses" in Jeanette Winterson's novel, *The Stone Gods* (2007). Extrapolating from trends in the present, Winterson imagines a future in which the destruction of the environmental basis for life continues apace, and the human body has become hyper-gendered and technologically, discursively, and materially constructed. Drawing on theories of posthumanism and "trans-corporeality" (Stacy Alaimo), Yazgünoğlu argues that *The Stone Gods* warns against the dehumanization of the human, while exploring the beneficial and deleterious effects of biotechnology and machines on human-nonhuman "naturecultures."

The third essay, Bryan Moore's "The Earth as Pinprick: Some Early Western Challenges to Anthropocentrism," shows how ancient Greek and Roman thinkers anticipated aspects of modern science, Darwinian evolution, and contemporary theories of posthumanism. Moore presents passages from the Presocratics to late antiquity, demonstrating the existence of a tradition challenging anthropocentrism which extended over 800 years. He suggests that this work of the ancients may help us move more responsibly into the future.

The issue closes with the customary Reviews Section. This includes review essays by Sara Crosby and Susanne Karr. Crosby presents two recent books on the Gaia hypothesis, by Toby Tyrell and Michael Ruse, which adopt diametrically opposed standpoints on its value. Karr discusses (in German) a major new German work located midway between philosophy and cultural history, published by Benjamin Bühler and Stefan Rieger in four volumes since 2006. Examining in turn the role played by Animals, Plants, Stones, and other structures of thought in scientific, political, literary and other discourses, Bühler and Rieger trace a history of the systems for ordering information which have come to dominate our perception of the world. Their studies of a series of key figurations of knowledge reveal the central role of metaphor, analogy, anthropomorphism, and narrative, and throw a fascinating light on the relations between nature and culture, including those between human and non-human animals. A further contribution to Animal Studies, Marie-Luise Egbert's *Life of Birds in Literature*, is reviewed by Roman Bartosch. The remaining reviews, by Luis Prádanos, Sebastian Thiltges, Stefan Schustereder and Margarita Carretero, pursue the aim of *Ecozon@* to communicate research in and between different languages and cultures, presenting the first major collection of essays on art and environment in Spanish (Tonia Raquejo and José María Parreño's *Arte y Ecología*), Pierre Schoentjes's outline of a Francophone *Écopoétique* (reviewed in English), the proceedings of a German conference on ecopedagogy edited by Roman Bartosch and Sieglinde Grimm, and a Spanish volume with several essays focused on ecology and gender (Alicia Puleo's *Ecología y género en diálogo interdisciplinario*).