

## Animal Humanities, or, On Reading and Writing the Nonhuman

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In *Marcovaldo, or the Seasons in the City*, an imaginative meditation on the relationship between urban and rural spaces in 1950s Italy, Italo Calvino writes that “The city of cats and the city of men exist one inside the other, but they are not the same city” (101). The imagined lines of demarcation between cats and men motivated (a naked) Jacques Derrida to return his cat’s gaze and to write about it in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, a text that has become a landmark reference in a growing field that is variously referred to as animal studies, human-animal studies, or animality studies.<sup>1</sup> Derrida’s cat helps trace a complex network of relations linking human and nonhuman animals—relations that include questions of companionship, consumption, labor, exploitation, ontology, language, and *poiesis*, to name but a few. Committed to both interspecies and interdisciplinary methods regardless of its name, the field of animal studies works to rethink the human-animal entanglement within a material world and within texts of all kinds. Cary Wolfe aptly opined that attempting to sum up this vibrant field is akin to “herding cats” (564).

This special section of *Ecozon@* on “Animal Humanities” proposes to consider the animal question from the specific perspective of the humanities, a discipline alternately considered to be in crisis, in transition, or at the forefront of rethinking a world in crisis. Such considerations have prompted an invigorating and far-reaching reassessment of the philosophical foundations, the meaning, and the potential of the humanities. Advocating for the displacement of the “profoundly anthropocentric core of the Humanities,” Rosi Braidotti, for example, argues that, “far from being a terminal crisis, these challenges open up new global, eco-sophical dimensions” (*Posthuman* 145). In “Humanities for the Environment—A Manifesto for Research and Action,” a group of scholars outlines a call for action to humanists, suggesting that, in an epoch of environmental crisis (and specifically in the context of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Paris), the humanities “may contribute to understanding of human imagination, perception and relationship with their surrounding environments—both social and natural” (Holm et al. 979). The article, which results from the work of scholars across the globe and from a diverse array of disciplines, takes as its guiding question: “What is the role of the humanities in the age of the Anthropocene?” (Holm et al. 978). Advocating for important work to be done in both pragmatic and philosophical terms, the

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the debate about these names can be traced in the *PMLA* issue dedicated to “animal studies.” Michael Lundblad proposes that we identify “animal studies” closely with advocacy work, whereas “animality studies” looks more at history and questions of human politics (496-7). Cary Wolfe seems to prefer this second interpretation, arguing that animal studies “studies both a material entity (nonhuman beings) and a discourse of species difference that need not be limited to its application to nonhumans alone and, second, that taking animal studies seriously thus has nothing to do, strictly speaking, with whether or not you like animals” (567).

manifesto argues that science alone cannot answer the multiplying crises of the “Great Acceleration” (Holm et al. 980). The authors posit that humanities should play a crucial role in understanding the “social uncertainties and contingencies” that will characterize a world marked by global climate change (Holm et al. 990). The humanities, they argue, understand both the nuances and the narratives of global environmental change, and thus are well-positioned to contribute both to seeing what is happening and to figuring out what can be done (Holm et al. 985-6). But the Manifesto is also an accusation. As they outline what they call the “New Human Condition,” the authors warn of the “unprecedented crisis of how we as a species will cope with the consequences, not to mention responsibilities, of being the major driver of planetary change. Our human intelligence has given us the power to create as well as to destroy the foundations of our own existence” (Holm et al. 983).

Like “Humanities for the Environment,” this special section of *Ecozon@*, complemented and enhanced by the images, poems, and texts in the Creative Writing and Art section curated by Serenella Iovino, celebrates the potentials of the humanities to shift the lens on a complex world of social uncertainties and contingencies. Yet our contributors ponder something even broader than the “New Human Condition,” looking at the world with nonhuman, posthuman, and more-than-human conditions in mind. The authors of the Humanities for the Environment manifesto conducted work funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and organized themselves into “Observatories” that sought to “observe broadly and reach out to map and work with the many new environmental humanities initiatives developing regionally and around the world” (Holm et al. 978). Many of the essays in this special section recall that, in addition to being “observers,” we humans are also, as John Berger and Jacques Derrida so convincingly articulated, *observed* by nonhuman others. The Manifesto may well recognize that our world looks different when seen from different cultural perspectives: “The challenges look differently to people in the streets of Beijing, in the townships of Johannesburg, and in the cornfields of Kansas” (Holm et al. 979). Yet examining exclusively human perspectives on or even solutions to planetary problems encounters a limit of its own. As this section conceives the field, Animal Humanities wonders whether the “New Human Condition” might learn something from the “New Posthuman Condition,” or what Braidotti calls the “post-anthropocentric premises and technologically mediated emphasis on Life as a *zoe*-centred system of species egalitarianism” (*Posthuman* 146). In a series of three special issues of *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* dedicated to the work of prominent European ethologists Dominique Lestel, Viciane Despret, and Roberto Marchesini, editors Brett Buchanan, Jeffrey Bussolini, and Matthew Chrulew wonder: “Must the worlds of animals be forever cast outside of human knowledge, or are there overlapping ways of knowing—empirical, phenomenological, ethnographic, otherwise—that prove insightful regarding other forms of life, and indeed transformative of our own?” (2). In the multi-lingual, transnational context of the journal *Ecozon@*, Animal Humanities hears stories being told in a multitude of human languages, but is attentive to nonhuman languages as well. We seek to recognize that not only does “culture” influence the way that we see the nonhuman world, but it also shapes and shifts that very world, in a complex process of co-constitution that shows the porosity—and the creativity—of all partners to the collaboration. Donna Haraway argues that:

Once again we are in a knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down. Response and respect are possible only in those knots, with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories. Appreciation of the complexity is, of course, invited. (*When Species* 42)

Appreciating complexity. This is a necessary step on the path to mapping the interdisciplinary fields, interspecies voices, and creative artistic forms that both read and write the nonhuman.

The project of thinking animals within the humanities encompasses an array of currents and voices intent, to varying degrees and with different accents, on broaching philosophical, political, gender-based, and species-related hierarchies. Here we might easily locate the aforementioned Derrida and his cat, Braidotti's call for a "bioegalitarian" thinking" ("Animals" 526), Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal, and Roberto Marchesini's acknowledgment of the human cultural debt to the world of nonhuman animals. However, we must also acknowledge the multifaceted anxiety triggered by a project that threatens to supplant humanity, smugly complacent for millennia at the top of a species hierarchy hubristically devised by and for ourselves, as the measure of all things. Indeed, the unfathomable otherness of Derrida's staring cat signals "the abyssal limit of the human" and the redundancy of those categories and abilities—reason, language, amongst others—traditionally and jealously deemed *by man* as proper *to man*. This loss of anthropocentric privilege unleashes doubts that are not just ontological, gnoseological, and socio-political; humankind must also recognize the embodied vulnerability and finitude we share with the nonhuman animal. Thus while Heidegger struggles before our "scarcely fathomable, abyssal bodily kinship with the animal" (230), D. H. Lawrence acknowledges the cognitive and ethical limits of humanity in the face of fish being: "*I am not the measure of creation. / This is beyond me, this fish. / His God stands outside my God*" (339; italics in original). Here the philosophical and the literary agree that the human relation with the nonhuman animal is not an immediately comfortable one. The articles included in this section excavate this difficulty. Together they voice, from a broad variety of perspectives and fields, the bioegalitarian desire to reposition the human and the humanities within a wider web of relations. But they also contemplate the complex and even contradictory consequences of reconfiguring anthropocentrism, meditating on the shortcomings of the anthropomorphic impetus inherent in many of our humanistic attempts to give voice to the nonhuman animal.

We might embark on our attempt to map the multiple threads of our special section with a brief consideration of the paradoxes inherent in our chosen focus, namely, Animal Humanities. Of course the humanities, as a disciplinary designation, traditionally reflected a critical or speculative attention to human culture as opposed to, on the one hand, the long-standing academic tradition of theological studies and, on the other, the broadly empirical methodologies of the so-called natural sciences. Defined by the OED, in its simplest terms, as "learning concerned with human culture, especially literature, history, art, music, and philosophy," the humanities seem, at first glance, to allocate no space for the nonhuman. Yet, it is precisely here, in the space of literary language, cinematic image, artistic creation, ethical thinking, and the philosophical imagination, that the nonhuman animal, long defined as being without logos and without reason, might speak most clearly. As we have reflected and continue to reflect on what constitutes humanity both in theory and in practice, we have done so and still do so in the presence of nonhuman beings who, by turns, sustain us, threaten us, assist us, evolve with us, and shape us, serving as food, clothing, natural menaces, companions in labor and, especially in more modern eras, living in our domestic space. Across a broad swath of global cultures, our religious aspirations were grounded in a symbolic deployment of animal figures whose somatic features shaped our imaginings of the divine. John Berger acknowledges the paradox or "existential dualism" underlying our theriomorphic imagination writing that animals "were subjected *and* worshipped; bred *and* sacrificed" (7; italics in original). Equally, as Berger insists, the nonhuman animal lies at the foundation of humanity's artistic impulse constituting both the material and the inspiration for humanity's earliest artistic endeavors: "The

first subject matter for painting was animal. Probably the first paint was animal blood” (7). Human language and poetry too might constitute a further human debt to the nonhuman animal because, as Berger suggests drawing on Rousseau and Lévi-Strauss, “it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal” (7). In a similar vein, Roberto Marchesini insists that that the artistic impulse would not be possible without the human tendency to hybridize with the nonhuman: “human identity, in all its complexity, is an unstable structure in marked nonequilibrium that can maintain itself only by acquiring information from the outside. [...]. Cultural identity is possible only through structures of mestizoization that capture external information in an active way” (“Mimesis” xiv). That “outside,” for Marchesini, always brims with the heterogeneous complexity of the nonhuman, including nonhuman animals and the technosphere.<sup>2</sup>

So, as the disciplinary humanities turn to consider human culture, the nonhuman is always already present within this space. Yet as the humanities acknowledge this debt from the past and turn to the coming times of planetary ecological crisis, we must move beyond a symbolic deployment of the nonhuman and embrace, as Braidotti puts it, a “neoliteral relation to animals, anomalies and inorganic others” in order to “relate to animals as animals ourselves” (“Animals”, 528 and 526). This ethical charge also seems to underpin Serenella Iovino’s advocacy of “posthuman ethics,” an ethics “based on the co-extensive materiality of human, nonhuman, and natural subjects, in a perspective which necessarily implies moral horizontality [...]. All this opens up a very ‘concrete’ dimension—‘concrete’ in the Hegelian sense of the mutual merging of idea and reality” (64).

An evolution from the symbolic to the literal animal—a nonhierarchical evolution that recognizes the value of all iterations of the creatures along the path—represents an ethical aspiration of the Animal Humanities, an ideal that truly affirms a meaningful solidarity between the human and the nonhuman. This special section structurally embodies this standard, opening with Frankenstein’s monster, a fictional being neither animal nor human, and closing with Cobby, a chimpanzee whose hybridity derives from humanity’s anthropomorphizing affection but who remains nonetheless, as the authors affirm in their final paragraph, a unique individual. These two articles frame and are entangled with a broad array of co-related and intertwined concepts, each central to the Animal Humanities which, as a disciplinary hybrid, encompasses ontologies, epistemologies, ethics, philosophies of language, political rights and identities, economic and agricultural exploitation, as well as questions of representation, anthropomorphization, and symbolization. Across the essays in this section, a knot of socio-political concerns, language and ethnic traditions, and expressive modes tangle with the question of the heterogeneous relationships between nonhuman and human animals. Moreover, in selecting the final essays, we endeavored to encompass a wide range of language traditions and a wide swath of geographic referents.

Language immediately imposes itself as a concern in the opening essays. Long considered the sole property of humankind, the particular status of language, as well as the reified category of human reason, are explored and ultimately contested by a series of hybridized figures which defy categorization, namely, Frankenstein’s posthuman monster (Cimatti), Scudéry’s thinking and feeling chameleons (Duggan), and Elsa Morante’s talking dog, Bella, bound by affection to her own human-animal hybrid child companion, Useppe (Vani). Morante’s portrayal of Bella’s thoughts and desires, represented as facial or bodily gestures easily interpreted by Useppe or as direct discourse rendered, in this generically peculiar

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<sup>2</sup> See in particular *Il tramonto dell'uomo*, where Marchesini offers a hermeneutic for “technoscience” and argues in favor of “technopoiesis” (155-178).

historical novel, in exactly the same manner as human speech, draws us towards another concern, namely, the uses and abuses of anthropomorphization. If the Animal Humanities are to take seriously and ethically what Kari Weil sees as their potential to “understand and give voice to others [...]; to attend to difference without appropriating or distorting it; [...] to hear and acknowledge what it may not be possible to say” (7), animal humanists must reflect on the risks inherent in the anthropomorphic gesture. John Simons warns of the dangers of “trivial anthropomorphism,” an expression he coins to expose the philosophical levity of many literary occasions on which the nonhuman animal is humanized. Highlighting children’s literature in particular, Simons argues that every representation of nonhuman animality “appropriates the non-human experience as an index of humanness” (87) and remains “trivial” if it fails to “press against and force us to question” that boundary between human and nonhuman (119). Yet, an absolute refusal to anthropomorphize establishes, as Juliana Schiesari suggests, an “emotional ‘firewall’ between humans and other creatures,” implicitly reducing them to the level of things or property to be bought, sold, or used at will” (8). Simons in fact allows for the potential of a “strong anthropomorphism” that does represent the nonhuman in human terms but does so “either to show how the non-human experience differs from the human or to create profound questions in the reader’s mind as to the extent to which humans and non-humans are really different” (120).<sup>3</sup>

Anthropomorphization is indeed a double-edged sword, most certainly from the perspective of the nonhuman creature. In the case of Morante’s *Bella* we are permitted an imaginative glimpse into the potential complexity, both in terms of thought, communicative ability, and self-consciousness, of dogs and, we are arguably called upon to reflect on those supposed faculties and borders that separate human from nonhuman. However, Vale and McRae reveal the dark side of the anthropomorphic impulse in their biography of Cobby whose television career came to an abrupt end when he ceased to be the large-eyed and furry creature privileged in what the authors term the realm of “cutopia.” Anthropomorphization has historically favored only certain nonhuman creatures and ultimately, in denying these cuddly nonhumans their own distinct culture, makes it easier to relegate the bulky, herd animals, themselves possessors of their own social and cultural orders, to objects of consumption, whether for entertainment or meat. In effect, anthropomorphization paradoxically opens the way to the industrial and agricultural instrumentalization of the nonhuman animal. The full brutality of this regime is revealed in the abattoir poetry of Ivano Ferrari in which massacred bodies are sadistically sexualized and nonhuman animal suffering is paralleled with that of the human animal (Gilebbi). However, the agricultural relationship has perhaps the potential to be one of care and concern as is suggested by the religious and spiritual philosophies and dilemmas that inform bovine agriculture in the context of a planetary ecological crisis (LeVasseur).

Though certainly the most brutal, the agricultural exploitation of the nonhuman is not the only instrumentalization of animals. Indeed, stripping the nonhuman creature of its cultural identity primes it for deployment as mere symbol not only for human traits in the style of a literary fable or parable, but also for political ends. This politicization of the nonhuman animal informs several of the essays here. While Jiang Rong’s wolves serve as ambivalent national symbol for a China torn between its cultural past and contemporary global capitalism (Ma), Clement Richer’s companion shark invites reflection on the racial undertones buttressing a post-

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Shepard also defends the ethical potential of anthropomorphism on the grounds that it “binds our continuity with the rest of the natural world. It generates our desire to identify them and learn their natural history, even though it is motivated by a fantasy that they are no different from ourselves” (88).

colonialist politics (Benvegnù). Yet, while the political dimensions of these questions of nationalism and race are crucially important, they remain essentially human questions. The authors of these essays approach their texts and subjects with a nuanced analysis that acknowledges the duality of the nonhuman animals in their chosen texts and films, as well as the slippery question of what it means to represent an oppressed human through the figure of an oppressed nonhuman. Indeed, central in these two essays is the question of adaptation, and in fact a politics encompassing both the human and nonhuman animal returns in the translations from literary text to film and from one geographical area to another—from China to France and from Martinique to Italy via the Sulu archipelago. Real and imaginary landscapes consider historically existing and fictionalized animals through central dichotomies of civilization/wilderness, West/East, White European/ethnic other. But these dichotomies yield an ethics of hybridization that encompasses both the mediatic adaptation and the represented animals: the translations themselves reveal the orientalist and exoticizing gaze directed at the other, both human and nonhuman. The mediatic migration of these animals returns us to questions directly related to what we might see as a politics of or for animal being, namely, respect for the culture of those animals who live outside “clopedia” and the moral obligation to guarantee an ecologically sound habitat for all creatures on the planet. Ultimately, in chorus, these essays urge us to leave aside our all too human nostalgia for an always already imagined or constructed natural and uncontaminated space, whether mountainous or marine. We must instead nourish deference for and a healthy terror of the shark or the wolf; acknowledge the processes of domestication that included humans in a still unfolding dance of collaboration and coevolution; and learn to relate to creatures as creatures ourselves. Reading and writing the nonhuman, the vocation of the Animal Humanities, opens creative and critical horizons on urgent ethical and environmental questions.

This collection of essays opens with a contribution by Felice Cimatti on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus*, “*Frankenstein* on Language and Becoming (Post)Human.” In this essay, the so-called “monster” is central as Cimatti, drawing on a conceptual frame that encompasses psychoanalytical theories of human development, Wittgenstein’s reflections on “private language,” and Condillac’s sensationalism, considers the inevitable failure of the monster’s attempts to “become human” in the absence of a human community. Theoretical considerations of language take center stage here as the author sketches a portrait of a hybrid creature, neither human nor animal, that is offered as an example of a being who attempts, albeit unsuccessfully, to live a post-human condition.

Ontological classifications remain at center stage in the next essay, “Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Animal Sublime, or Of Chameleons*” by Anne Duggan. Here, the work of seventeenth century writer and thinker Scudéry reveals that René Descartes’s mechanistic vision of the nonhuman animal was challenged as soon as it was formulated. Moreover, Duggan reveals the ethical heart of Scudéry’s engagement with Cartesian theories of animality, showing that she proposes an interspecies friendship between humanity and the nonhuman animal by elevating it from its status as unreasoning object of scientific experimentation or metaphorical figure for humanity’s negative qualities. Scudéry does so, furthermore, in a manner that parallels her lifelong struggle for the recognition of women as beings endowed with rationality, and anticipates ecofeminist concerns.

Interspecies friendships also inform Christina Vani’s “Talking Animals ‘Talking’ with Animals in Elsa Morante’s *La Storia*.” Language continues as a central theoretical concern as Vani explores Morante’s fictional portrait of a particularly moving canine/human alliance set against the tragic backdrop of Italian fascism, the nation’s wartime experience, and the post-war

recovery. Drawing on theories of zoosemiotics, Vani focuses on Morante's representation of animal language, both spoken and gesticulative, and considers the interspecies hybridity which permits Useppe, one of the novel's child protagonists, to enter into a mutually decipherable dialogue with his beloved dog, Bella.

Damiano Benvegnù's "*Ti-Koyo and His Shark. Human-Animal Brotherhood from Clement Richer to Italo Calvino and Folco Quilici*" revolves around a central human-nonhuman friendship, too, in this case between a human boy and a shark. Here though, the interspecies relation is complicated by the fact that it appears in numerous narrative incarnations. Indeed, Benvegnù considers three versions of the same story—the original 1941 novel by Martinican writer Richer, Italian writer Calvino's short story adaptation, and Italian director Folco Quilici's 1962 film. This process of adaptation and re-adaptation reveals a political dimension to this friendship, remarkable in stories of human-animal friendships for the fact that it involves not a fur-covered, domesticated nonhuman but a sea-dwelling and potential lethal creature. Thus, while Calvino and Quilici reconfigure Richer's postcolonial and post-pastoral agenda, they also anthropomorphize or domesticate to some degree the shark himself as they themselves appear to fall prey to nostalgic ideals of an exotic, natural idyll.

The political dimension of constructions and reconstructions of a natural or wild space are equally central to Sheng-mei Ma's "Sino-Anglo-Euro Wolf Fan(g)s from Jiang Rong to Annaud," for here too we read of a non-western novel, already ideologically dense in its representation of a relation with wild and potentially lethal animals, in this case Mongolian wolves, later adapted for cinema by a Western director. Drawing on both historically extant and symbolically potent wolves, Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (2004) evokes a lost natural space that permeates Chinese nationalism as this elegy for the ferocity of the Mongolian wolf doubles as a justification for fanged aggression in the metaphorical wilderness of China's socialist-capitalist market. Unsurprisingly, Annaud's 2015 orientalist adaptation dilutes the multi-layered complexity of the text's nationalistic discourse, romanticizing elements of the narrative and rendering more "humane" the relation between humans and nonhuman animals.

The human-nonhuman relationships that emerge in Matteo Gilebbi's "Testimoni dei macelli. Esseri umani e animali nella poesia di Ivano Ferrari" are disturbingly real. Exploring two poetry collections inspired by the time Ferrari spent working in an abattoir, Gilebbi identifies a critique of a pornographic sexualization of the animal body where cows and other meat animals are served up as if for sadistic pleasure. Yet, despite the fact that it is the human who does the slaughtering here, Gilebbi excavates deep and disquieting links between human and animal suffering, between cruelty inflicted on the nonhuman animal and cruelty endured by the human. The mortality we share with the nonhuman animal becomes imperative here. As Ferrari parallels his sick and dying wife with the animal victims of the slaughterhouse, it is a solidarity or empathy stemming from pain that indicates ultimately a potential site from which to challenge speciesism and other anthropocentric hierarchies.

Todd LeVasseur's essay, "Methane Dispensers and Bio-Dynamic Beings: Cattle as Polysemous Symbols in Environmental Religious Discourse," also confronts the familiar form of the cow, but here in its material form as generator of methane gas in an epoch when climate change is of central concern, as well as in its discursive form as alternately sacred or reviled. Arguing that life on our planet depends on understanding the nuances of interspecies existence, LeVasseur approaches the cow in the languages of religious environmentalism, biodynamic agriculture, and sustainable agriculture. Conflicting and complementary visions of domesticated kin, from animal and religious studies perspectives, underscore the difficulties of "managing" our shared space, but also reflect the high stakes of learning to do so.

The section closes with an essay by Michael Charles Vale and Donna Leanna McRae, titled “The Cutopia Paradox: Anthropomorphism as Entertainment.” Vale and McRae’s paper is a touching case study of the career of Cobby, a chimpanzee raised in a human household, who then starred in a television program, performed in the circus, and now lives in a zoo. The authors, who are also documentarians, expose the “cutopia paradox,” or the disconnect between human affection for “cute” animals and our willingness to bend and distort their lives to fulfill our desires for entertainment. Animals like Cobby are trapped between worlds, as they fit neither in wild nor in domestic spaces, but they are incontrovertibly individual creatures worthy of the kind of distinction Vale and McRae’s essay confers.

Finally, we would like to focus your attention on the artists featured in the Creative Writing and Art section, for whom the work of “Reading and Writing the Nonhuman” is elaborated in a fascinating variety of media and languages. The vibrant contributions here carry out the imaginative work of framing and reconfiguring relations between human and nonhuman animals. From Verónica Perales’ portrayals of great apes, to Nuria Sánchez-León’s depictions of slaughtered bodies of pigs; from Florian Aueroch’s verses, “Notes on Endangered Species” to Jacob G. Price’s bilingual “Water Droplets”; from Juan Carlos Galeano’s “Amazonian Cosmologies” to Antonello Borra’s “Alfabestiaro,” these visual artists and poets animate entangled worlds of beings, illuminating in words and images the “radical co-implication” of nonhumans in human creative arts, as Iovino eloquently explains in her introduction to the section.

The “Humanities for the Environment” Manifesto ends with a critique of a kind of “mega-thinking,” specifically calling out a human tendency, when thinking the environment, to identify “mega-problems” that demand impossibly ambitious “mega-solutions” and draw us to perplexity if not outright despair (Holm et al. 989). The humanities, in the authors’ view, should seek “evidence-based, reasoned, scaled and culturally diverse responses to the complex problems” (989). *Animal Humanities* takes on big questions, all the while attending to the irreducibility of individual stories and particular creatures, but also to their complexity, their hybridity, their codependence. As another manifesto, Haraway’s *Companion Species Manifesto*, eloquently advocates: “The relation is the smallest unit of analysis, and the relation is about significant otherness at every scale. That is the ethic, or perhaps better, mode of attention, with which we must approach the long cohabitations of people and dogs” (24). Vale and McRae’s closing comments on the dignity of the individual named (by humans of course) Cobby might serve as reminder of the high stakes of the enterprise at hand. The *Animal Humanities*, already well used to dealing in the currency of adaptation, generic hybridization, and self-conscious representation, are equipped to negotiate the stakes and potential pitfalls of a truly ethical engagement with nonhuman animality. Only by acknowledging the not inconsiderable dangers of anthropomorphism and maximizing the potential of an empathic imagination can the Humanities work to embrace that which we share with the animal and simultaneously respect the infinite and wondrous differences that constitute the plurality of life on the planet, and the hope for a shared future.

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