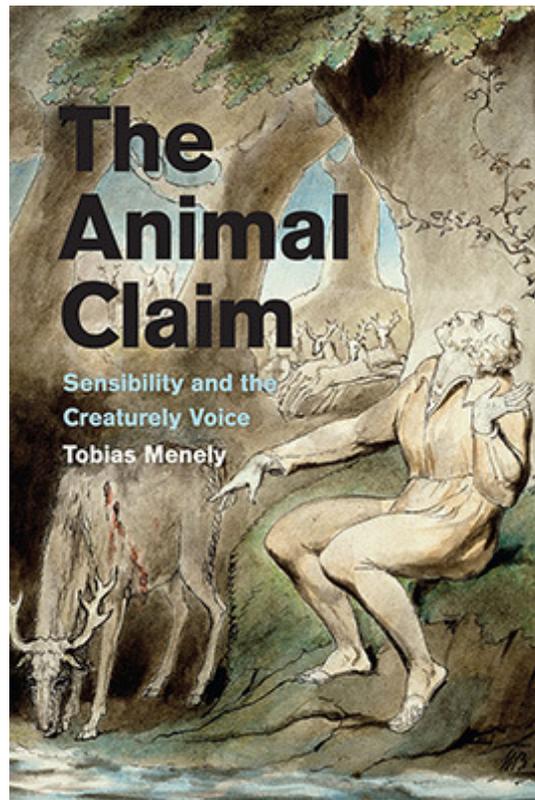


Reviews

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Affective Clamor

Tobias Menely, *The Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015. 280pp. \$90.00 hb; \$30.00 pb.



Animal studies, or human-animal studies (HAS), or anthrozoology, finds a refreshing and grounded new perspective in Tobias Menely's *The Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice*. Menely's focused literary critique of poetry from the long eighteenth century, coupled to his insightful accounting of the emergent politico-cultural discourse of animal voice and the rights — arguably natural, divine, or juridical — pursuant to it, is a stunning accomplishment. It responds elegantly to Kari Weil's recent *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012), and provides a kind of tempering and expansive literary companion to Brian Massumi's *What Animals Teach Us About Politics* (2014) and *The Nonhuman Turn* (2015), edited by Richard Grusin. Add to this Menely's framing innovative enquiry into the linguistics and rhetorical impact of "animal claims

regarding injury and interest" (1), and *The Animal Claim* indeed deserves recognition as a keystone work in incisive anthrozoological analyses.

This new book should be read — admittedly anachronistically — as a foundational text, a starting point for any examination of the creaturely voice, presenting as it does in written form the all-but-deafening nonverbal (yet nevertheless emotive and aural) testament to community- and identity-formation, to a hopeful advocacy that calls — even clamors — for constitutive and shared acknowledgement between the human and nonhuman animal. It's as if *The Animal Claim* forms a synthetic wellspring of animal studies out of which we are convinced again (and stirringly) of the indelible influence of such seminal thinkers as Benjamin, Derrida, Agamben, and Peter Singer; we are made to acknowledge implicitly and by exemplary demonstration the importance of considering thematic, periodized studies of the animal, such as Harriet Ritvo's *The Platypus and the Mermaid* (1997), David Perkins' *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (2003), and now Menely's *The Animal Claim*; and we find a collective sympathy through more idiosyncratic, yet no less prescient studies of animality like Bec and Flusser's *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis* (2012). Perhaps most significantly, Menely's book enacts a truly progressive investigation into animal-human relation, finally producing a convincing argument for its just representation without falling into the heretofore seemingly unavoidable trap of anthropocentrism. Admittedly, the introduction got off to a bit of a slow start, weighing this reader down with a jargon-heavy recapitulation of definitions and methodologies. A necessary burden later realized, however, when the first chapter lifts off with the attestation: "It is only if we ... presume the prior categorical identity of the human as a rational animal — that speech (*logos*), which in itself never fully transcends the passions and the voice, can be understood (tautologically) as the source of human exceptionality" (25). The human, as Menely reveals, is "an unfinished identity," rather than a moral center, itself still transitioning between passion and reason, passivity and willfulness. That it likewise undertakes to represent itself while simultaneously performing the "uniquely human labor of speaking for others" (205) sets the human brightly as storyteller, as advocate, as community builder through the protraction of "sensibility" — an affective practice and trope fitted never-so-neatly to what Menely tells us is the "communicative heterogeneity" of the creature.

From here, Menely gracefully constructs an extended argument to recuperate the creaturely voice, one that necessarily looks perspectively — and thus representationally — from both sides (human and nonhuman) and resides in the performance of marked paradox: we must "regard rights as neither simply an intrinsic

condition of nature nor a contingent condition of state recognition, but rather as a *communicative transaction*, a claim that begins before the law and yet is only realized in the law” (13, emphasis mine). In short, a “condition in which one is called upon in order to speak for” (17). The achronistic deployment of sensibility as a formative trope of the Georgian literary imagination allows for Menely to traverse effectively (if also at minor times diffusively) the subject material of Enlightenment philosophy, eighteenth-century poetry and periodical culture, and nascent parliamentary debates over animal welfare. The polysemous capacity with which Menely endows “sensibility” ultimately aids in the elision of any assumed hierarchical distinction between human and animal in favor of a creaturely arbitration, i.e. of responsible representation and responsivity: “A creature is always in relation, subject to another; a creature comes after” (14).

Menely’s exceptional new analyses of such canonical poems as Thomson’s *The Seasons* and Cowper’s *The Task*, as well as Pope’s *Windsor-Forest* and Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*, alongside his studies of popular Enlightenment thinkers Hobbes, Hume, and Rousseau, are presented like a series of woven vignettes of close reading, historically and politically contextualized not just in their contemporaneous moment but for their ineluctable value to present-day debates over industrial livestock farming, animal rights and claims to sentience, and zoontological investigations. In a sense, then, the literary critiques appear as advantageous by-products of a carefully wrought ethico-political call-to-action, even as these critiques are clearly central to the work as a whole. As Menely demonstrates, “we must continue to ask how animal claims have been recognized, amplified, and instituted, how the sovereign state or subject is made answerable, and how the essentially poetic quality of law and lawmaking informs the horizons of political community” precisely because “the claims of the animal continue to haunt the liberal state” (12, 201). *The Animal Claim* likewise demands for a continued accounting of “the communicative conditions in which we find ourselves answerable to the clamor of other beings who are like ourselves passionate and finite” (205). Menely’s menagerie of animals, from the worm to the starling to the ass, is a convincing parade of impassioned voices recorded to compel an ethical response. These creaturely voices have, in effect, been hopefully “called upon in order to speak for” (if you’ll excuse this inversion of Menely’s original meaning) the human still in process of becoming just.

Works Cited

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