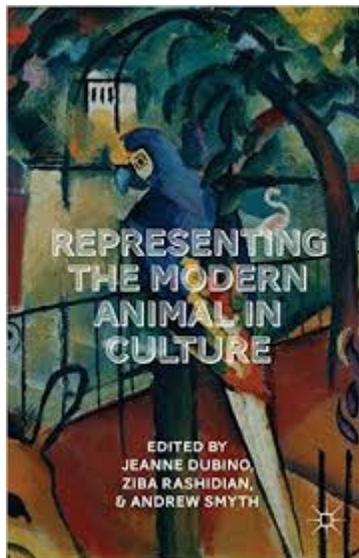


Reviews

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The Presence of the Withdrawn

Jeanne Dubino, Ziba Rashidian, and Andrew Smyth, Eds., *Representing the Modern Animal in Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 266 pp. \$95.00 hb.



“Modernity,” writes Jeanne Dubino, “is marked by the increasing disappearance of animals.” Dubino, one of three editors of Palgrave Macmillan’s *Representing the Modern Animal in Culture*, points out in her introduction that before modernity, “animals were everywhere” (1). We no longer live alongside animals saturating the spaces in which life resides with mingled modes of being. With the transition to modernity, the editors of this volume endorse John Berger’s that animals appear to have withdrawn. Looking down my Chicago street, paved and populated with cars and building after building, the animals indeed seems to have gone, retreated to representation. The animal’s new natural habitat is within pages, paintings, theaters, and galleries. *Representing the Modern Animal in Culture* tracks in its twelve essays the history of this textual animal migration from the eighteenth through the twenty-first centuries.

The editors have divided the book into three parts intended to serve as a rough chronology — “Lives with Domestic Animals in the Modern Era,” “Animals as Metaphor in the Age of Darwin,” and “Reconceiving Nonhuman Animals in the

Contemporary World.” The book does not try to be a comprehensive or even broadly representative overview of modern culture’s animal; in fact, the diverse selection of essays underscores one of the volume’s unspoken highlights — that the human cultural milieu, such as it has been for the last couple of centuries, is so packed with animal representation that structural categorization becomes impossible. What does seem to be certain is that “the modern animal” is a representative animal. But rather than treating representation as simplification, *Representing the Modern Animal in Culture* sees it as a leaping-off point that allows representations of animals to escape the devastating gravity of simply being used as an allegorization of humans or human ideals.

The first section, “Lives with Domestic Animals in the Modern Era,” suggests a stronger claim than its title would indicate. While the essays in this section do each discuss humans living with domestic animals, the varied arguments share an unspoken commonality — each is about human relationships with animals; real, bidirectional interrelations across species boundaries. “Lives” with animals, this section suggests, means “relationships” with animals. Donna Landry’s essay, “The Noble Brute: Contradictions in Equine Ideology, East and West,” on “equine ideology” in the eighteenth century is an effort to come to terms with what Landry terms “deep equine feeling” (30). Landry shows representation dealing with the problem of recognizing passion in an animal that is so easily transformed into an aesthetic object, while productively entangling that idea with the issue of empire and native peoples, in which postcolonial understandings of race and species come into conflict and conversation. What Landry does with horses, Dubino does with dogs in her essay on nineteenth century British travel writing about stray dogs in Turkey, “Paying Tribute to the Dogs: Turkish Strays in Nineteenth-Century British Travel Writing,” which traces the relation of Turkish strays and British xenophobia. A lesser essay would rely on the allegorization to do the heavy argumentative lifting, Dubino’s work troubles allegory and finds foreign peoples and dogs to be in a deeper relation, in which the eyes of empire cannot make sense of these other tribes of beings who make claims on the colonial monopoly on subjectivity. Kevin Ferguson’s beautiful contribution to the section, “Pets in Memoir,” bears special mention: in its personal mode, it foregrounds the relationship that inheres in representation of the domestic animal in memoir. Anthropomorphic as the pet memoir might necessarily be, it contains a self-othering in the animal subject’s resistance to reductive humanization, instead exploding allegory outward into the simple fact that there is an animal whose story — a story of relation — must be told.

In “Anthropomorphism: Animals as Metaphors in the Age of Darwin,” the second section in the book, the problem of animal representation is dealt with more overtly. The metaphorical animal, different from the “real” animal that is transformed into

allegory, collides with the expansion of Darwinism and Darwin-influenced thought in the nineteenth century. Darwin's style in his seminal works animated animals through literary devices, and these tropes proliferated into culture. Alexis Harley's contribution, "Darwin's Ants: Evolutionary Theory and the Anthropomorphic Fallacy," deals with this most directly in her reading of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism in various works by George Henry Lewes and Darwin himself. The analogic method, in which a mode of writing seems to bring a kind of personified life to the animal under study, may in fact reflect a problem in the boundaries between kinds that Darwin sought to trouble. Emily Essert's "Cats, Apes, and Crabs: T. S. Eliot among the Animals," and Joshua Schuster's "The Fable, the Moral, and the Animal: Reconsidering the Fable in Animal Studies with Marianne Moore's Elephants," take up the metaphorical animal in T.S. Eliot and Marianne Moore respectively, and in both the animal is subsumed into literary forms, while both insist on the real bodies of animals at the heart of the metaphor. Both essays seek to reconstruct those real animals as looking out from inside the verses they populate, both aiming to untangle what Schuster calls "the affective and imaginative lives of animals" (151).

We are brought to the twenty-first century and the present moment in the final section of the book, "The Posthuman: Reconceiving Nonhuman Animals in the Contemporary World." This section follows expertly on the discussions of Darwin in the previous section. Andrew Smyth's delightful essay "Splicing Genes with Postmodern Teens" on Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* series shows hybridization via genetic and social engineering as both a result of and relief from tyranny. Smyth reads the social divisions among hierarchically-arranged districts in the world of *Hunger Games* against contemporary practices of factory farming, and the subjugated life of the animal under capital alongside the worker who tends to both creatures and divisions among them. The scientific animal leaves the realm of science fiction and moves to bioart in Ziba Rashidian's "On the Wings of a Butterfly: Bare Life and Bioart in Eduardo Kac, Marta de Menezes, and Margaret Atwood," a reading of the ethics of using biological organisms in art projects. One of Rashidian's case studies, Eduardo Kac's development of a "fluorescent transgenic bunny with a chromosome from a jellyfish," is a story of the ethics of aesthetics, but takes a turn when the lab Kac partners with declines to let the artist take the rabbit home with him (193). Thus the muddle of bioart and the blurring of science and aesthetics emerges — issues of ownership collide with art, and the rabbit (which lived and died in the lab) is caught in the middle. Transnational mythmaking and animal representation meet in Susan McHugh's reading of Linda Hogan's novel *Power* and Hayao Miyazaki's film *Princess Mononoke*, "Animal Gods in Extinction Stories." Mythic animal god figures stand in and speak for the systems — ecological

and biological — that are under biocidal threat. McHugh finds the dying animal gods in her texts as figures who remain and resist, gods who will still retain a vital spark, but one which is undeniably dimming. The book closes with the standout essay in the collection, Neel Ahuja's "Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World." Representation is exceeded in this final chapter by the animal's insistence on having always lived with and had relationships with humans, which have not only caused representations to proliferate in modernity, but continue to demand an accounting. Ahuja tracks this accounting through the discourse of postcolonial cultural criticism. The strength of Ahuja's essay is in his methodology: the fusion of race and species, a shortcut in figuring relations between humans and animals especially in the wake of empire, must be undone. In this way, overlooked sites, species, and peoples will begin to emerge as having been central figures in shaping and being shaped by imperial forces and the cultures that emerged.

The editors have done an admirable job in assembling this collection, which coheres conceptually without suggesting that it encloses. In fact, the twelve essays reflect a series of provocations necessary for animal studies to remain relevant and dynamic. Literary and cultural scholars will also find much of interest as well. Not every reader will find something to latch onto in every essay, but such is the reality of a collection like this, which asks a fundamental question: if the animal has withdrawn from the natural world into culture, why do I still feel it breathing down my neck?