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# [Review] Stray: Human-Animal Ethics in the Anthropocene Barbara Creed, Stray: Human-Animal Ethics in the Anthropocene

Siobhan O'Sullivan

*University of New South Wales, siobhan.osullivan@unsw.edu.au*

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**Abstract**

Barbara Creed is well known for her contribution to the field of Film Studies, as well as feminist thought more generally. Books such as *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993, Routledge) and *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (2005, University of Melbourne Press) established Creed as a leading international thinker. They also attest to Creed's willingness to push boundaries and to take on challenging and controversial topics. In recent years Creed has turned her attention to the lives of nonhuman animals, and the multitude of ways in which humans engage with, oppress, and may learn from their nonhuman animal kin. *Stray*, Creed's latest monograph, brings together many aspects of her work in an engaging, informed, challenging and complex way.

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Barbara Creed, *Stray: Human-Animal Ethics in the Anthropocene*.

Sydney: Power Publications, 2017, 200pp.

**Siobhan O’Sullivan**

**University of New South Wales**

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*Stray* is dedicated to Nenette. Nenette was born in Borneo in 1969, but lived most of her life at Jardin des Plantes, Paris. As an orang-utan, Nenette is an example of one of the many ways in which the contemporary world renders individuals ‘stray’. The opening dedication hints at the expansive way in which Creed approaches the topic. It also points to where Creed’s heart and passion lies, as she launches into a seemingly intractable analysis of what it is to be a stray in the contemporary world.

It is clear from the introduction that *Stray* affords Creed wide scope to examine many of her passions. Moreover, it provides her with the perfect platform from which to demonstrate

how connected these issues are, even though they may appear not to be at first glance.

Creed writes:

The stray offers a rich and varied concept and a lens through which to consider the future of the planet and the lives of all living beings. I have considered the stray historically and in a variety of forms: human stray, *homo ferens*, woman as stray, stray dogs and other discarded animals, uncanny strays, abject creatures bred for consumption and experimentation, resilient and altruistic strays, the stray as refugee, and companion strays. (167).

This exploration uses many of the cultural artefacts with which Creed has worked for so many years, including film, plays, novels, visual art, letters and much more. All this is combined with academic scholarship, critical analysis, and original theoretical thought. The book is neatly presented and features forty colour images. *Stray* is divided into two sections: 'Part I: Animals and Human Stray' and 'Part II: Ethics in the Anthropocene'. Each part is again broken up into short chapters, allowing Creed to range across a wide variety of topics and interests.

Perhaps my favourite chapter is 'Chapter 10: Stray as Law-Breaker'. In that chapter, Creed takes as her starting point the European, Middle Ages practice of making nonhuman animals stand trial, and face the death penalty. One of the crimes for which animals could be found guilty was trespass; that is, the crime of straying. Creed recounts in detail the seriousness with which legal minds approached this type of wanton misdeed. She shows that in 1659 it was thought that nonhuman animals, including a caterpillar in the case of a crime that Creed examines in some detail, have a right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of justice', but not to the detriment of 'man, to whom all lower animals are subject' (86). Yet Creed quickly reminds us that while attitudes from the fifteenth century may seem comical to us now, if a shark should dare to stray into a popular human swimming space in 2018, the outcome may well be the same, although we no longer bother with the pretext of a trial.

At times Creed treats the notion of the stray in an almost whimsical fashion: part celebrated outsider, part avant-garde artist. In 'Chapter 1: Stray Thoughts' Creed writes 'Staying is an activity, to some an art', and 'Many writers and artists have placed great

inspirational value on straying' (17). But taking an irreverent approach to the notion of straying is only a small part of the book's focus. Overall, Creed's tone tends to be a mix of both serious and urgent. She tells readers that 'Climate change, global warming and a dramatic increase in the extinction of species threatens to change the face of the planet and the way in which all species, including the human, will live in the future' (167). But Creed is not despondent. Far from it. She notes the 'resilience' of both humans and animals. She also put forward what she calls a 'stray ethic' to help guide us as we learn to live in the Anthropocene.

More than anything, *Stray* offers much to the reader who is primarily interested in the often-oppressive human/nonhuman animal relationship. Creed writes:

In *Stray* I argue that human beings have abandoned many species of animals, particularly those they raise for slaughter. The conditions in which food animals (poultry, pigs, cattle, fish) are raised and kept until slaughter are horrific. To breed entire species for human consumption is to abandon them to a world of cruelty and indifference. (10-11)

*Stray* is a testament to Barbara Creed's intellectual prowess. But it is also emblematic of the rapidly maturing status of the field of Animal Studies, also known as Human Animal Studies. Completely unheard of twenty years ago, and very much on the outer margins of academia just ten years ago, Creed's thoughtful contribution to the animal debate demonstrates, once again, that the Animal Studies has arrived as a discipline. Scholars of the highest standing now include the lives of nonhuman animals within the scope of their theorisation.

I commend *Stray* to readers as a significant contribution to thought in the field of Animal Studies. The book will make a timely and engaging contribution to any Animal Studies collection and should be purchased for both private collections, as well as public and institutional libraries.