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[Review] Michael Lundblad, editor, *Animalities: Literary and Cultural Studies Beyond the Human*. Edinburgh University Press, 2017. 249pp

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Abstract

Lundblad's introduction defines and separates human-animal studies, animality studies and posthumanism. While there are perhaps more cross-overs than Lundblad suggests, the introduction provides a lucid discussion of these fields, sub-fields and their provenance. In addition, each essay in *Animalities* locates its analysis in relation to these categorizations. Cary Wolfe's essay on 'The Poetics of Extinction' considers the case of Martha, an individual, named passenger pigeon who was the last of her species, partly via Michael Pestel's installation which memorialises her and seems to offer some hope that she might live again. Neel Ahuja continues with the spectre of extinction and ecological destruction – here in relation to a posthuman New York, through recent 'speculative images of climate disaster' (44) and ponders why, with certain exceptions, animal studies does not foreground extinction and climate change. (Amitav Ghosh asks a similar question of literature, history and politics in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (University of Chicago Press, 2016) suggesting that the climate crisis we face is also 'a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination' (9).

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Frida Beckman's 'J.G. Ballard's Dark Ecologies: Unsettling Nature, Animals, and Literary Tropes' tracks what seems 'exhausted' in Ballard's work: 'the human and the modes of representation' that shore up its 'ontological and epistemic priority' (60). In a substantial essay Beckman shows how Ballard opens up boundaries between the human and the nonhuman; for example, the representation of birds in a number of the novels derives from metaphors and

allegories which are both ‘evoke[d] and distort[ed]’ (62). Dark ecology, Beckman confirms via Timothy Morton, is an “ethics that refuses to digest the object into an ideal form” (75). For Beckman, Ballard shows ‘how literature can contribute to an imagining of a more nuanced ecology’ (77).

Sara E.S. Orning writes of Patricia Piccinini’s unsettling sculptures, analysing them as ‘Staging Humananimality’ and located within a cultural genealogy as they challenge familiar notions of a cohesive, human self. Orning contrasts the viewing of Piccinini’s humanimal hybrids with that of Victorian ‘freaks’; in the former the spectator cannot, ethically, deny similarities and consequently cannot maintain distance and objectification. Anat Pick’s far-ranging essay on ‘Electricity and the Spectacle of Animality’ fruitfully juxtaposes the electroconvulsive therapy experienced by Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (1963) with the putative experience of Topsy the elephant whose electrocution was filmed by Thomas Edison in 1903. If both were subjected to ‘electrotorture’ (115) one to be disciplined, the other to be killed, Pick refuses simplistic tropes of their subjections.

Michael Lundblad on ‘The Nature of Birds, Women, and Cancer’, in connection with Terry Tempest Williams’ texts on the same subjects, proffers a deft critique of the linking of human life, death and illness through the figuring of animals who are romanticised for their ‘blissfully ignorant way of being in the world’ (133). Lundblad skilfully shows how an animal studies reading re-interprets Williams’ memoirs which have constructed birds anthropomorphically and how such a reading raises questions about the agency of the birds themselves.

‘Animality, Biopolitics, and *Umwelt* in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*’ by Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai is a substantial contribution to the literature on this novel. He steers his reading through the insoluble demands (as Ghosh shows) of human- versus animal animality, but it’s a pity that two key scenes – that of the tiger-killing and that of Fokir’s self-sacrifice in the storm – are not included. An animal studies reading of this novel, Tsai argues, would be a travesty, as would a deep ecology reading favouring wildness and animals over humans. He regards Ghosh’s

novel as a ‘critical bioregional ecology’ (162) which incorporates history into nature and transcends such categorising.

Karen Lykke Syse’s ‘Looking the Beast in the Eye: Re-animating Meat in Nordic and British Food Culture’ is highly topical and a little disturbing in its close analysis of celebrity chefs, carno-centrism, and meat nostalgia. Syse asks, counter-intuitively, whether a strong criticism of the meat industry and a visible foregrounding of the animal to be eaten underpins the gender performativity of the often hypermasculine chefs. Could this trend be commendable for looking the animal in the eye, as John Berger would have it? Are gender roles even relevant in meat nostalgia? Syse, with some reservation, regards the chefs as ‘public voices’ which insist on more reflective meat-eating.

Colleen Glenney Boggs’s essay on ‘Love Triangle with Dog: *Whym Chow*, the “Michael Fields,” and the Poetic Potential of Human-Animal Bonds’ delights with its feast of dog-love, a pseudonymous Michael Field, off-beat spirituality and poetry which repays close study. Boggs deploys animality studies in her essay for its ‘approach enables us to move beyond dichotomizing and singularising “the” human and “the” animal, and to see animality as a discourse formation’ (191). The poetry reveals not only the subject formation of the two Michael Fields but also how, together with their beloved, deceased Chow, it opens up a sanctified, eternal space.

Greg Garrard’s ‘Bestial Humans and Sexual Animals: Zoophilia in Law and Literature’ discusses different aspects of bestiality, or, as Garrard suggests we call it, zoophilia, which is a less loaded term. Garrard details the concept of zoophilia in law, animal rights discourse (for Peter Singer it is ‘hypocritical to ban zoophilia whilst permitting factory farming’ (213)), the stallion/gelding complex and literary texts. Garrard maintains, convincingly, through a close reading of a couple of novels, that interspecies desire and agency are not to be denied by interpreting these texts allegorically.

Michael Lundblad’s ‘hope’ that *Animalities* ‘might help us to continue to develop and refine [the] important questions’ (19) raised by the categories and debates in human-animal studies, animality studies and posthumanism is well-realised in this collection of lively and thoughtful essays.