

■ Caring for Difference: A Review of Human-Animal Studies in Taiwan from the Last Decade

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In the stimulating ecotheory anthology *Veer Ecology*, various brilliant thinkers were invited by editors Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert to propose one vital verb to propel ecological reflections. Cheryll Glotfelty identifies in her foreword to the volume that “entangle” or “entanglement” is a term that “threads its way through the collection . . . reimagin[ing] people as materially embodied, ecologically embedded beings with the capacity to enter into reciprocal relationships with nonhuman persons” (viii-ix). In the study of animals, affirming and deciphering entangling participants has launched various attempts at more historicized, politicized, and gendered readings on the interconnected relationship between various materialities and constructions of humans and animals. For example, critical animal studies distinguishes itself from animal studies in considering not only “the question of the animal” but more importantly “the condition of the animal” by focusing more urgently on “circumstances and treatment of animals” (Taylor and Twine 1). The emphasis of critical animal studies on engagement and intersectionality speaks to human-animal studies’ centralization of “together-in-one,” which entails “study[ing] animals with humans, and humans with animals, never forgetting that we are both animals in general and humans in particular” and remembering that “we cannot talk, write, or even think about animals in any sense except in the context of humans” (Marvin and McHugh 2). Michael Lundblad’s proposition of animality studies similarly draws attention to human-animal en-

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tanglement, opting for the focus on the close reading of “the discursive constructions of animalities in relation to human cultural politics” (“The End” 11). Rather than shying away from the human factor by working under pretenses of scientific objectivity and universalizing generalizations, increased dialogues between the sciences and humanities have heightened ethical attentiveness to deciphering human participation in animal matters.

Critical and creative reconsiderations of humans’ material and discursive engagement with nonhuman animals have taken on disparate routes for different animal welfare activists and scholars. As one of the representative inaugurators of the modern animal advocacy movement, Peter Singer campaigns for a utilitarian principle for the ethical treatment of animals with his animal liberation philosophy. According to his foundational work *Animal Liberation*, criteria for the treatment of animals rest on sentience and especially the capacity to suffer. Despite their common devotion to animal welfare, Singer’s contemporary Tom Regan objects to Singer’s utilitarian calculations and instead argues for the justice of extending animal rights due to animals being “subjects-of-a-life” with “inherent value” (247). Unsatisfied with the rationalist approach of both Singer and Regan, feminist animal-care theorists advocate for the implementation of emotional responses in animal ethics theory. Josephine Donovan accentuates the dialogical nature of care theory, opting for a dialogical animal-standpoint theory in which humans enter into conversations with nonhuman animals as two subjects to learn to “care about what animals are telling us, learning to read and attend to their language” (324). Donovan’s suggestion speaks to Patrick Murphy’s “ecofeminist dialogics,” in which nonhuman others are “constituted as speaking subjects” (Donovan 14). Donna J. Haraway similarly calls for the need to “make oddkin,” acknowledging that “we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations. . . . That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and not noplacement, entangled and wordly” (4). To form oddkin, Lori Gruen proposes “entangled empathy” as a type of caring perception which entails an “experiential process involving a blend of emotion and cognition in which we recognize we are in relationships with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships by attending to another’s needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, and sensitivities” (3). These models all seek to restore “absent referents,” a term politicized in Carol J. Adams’s foundational *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (13). Also aiming for political impact, Deane Curtin’s “politicized ethic of caring for” advocates developing the capacity to not only care about others but also care for others (“Toward an Ecological Ethic” 92). He argues for the need to skillfully employ empathy so as to cultivate “compassion as a *moral* commitment” (“Compassion” 44).

Over the past decade, Taiwan’s academia has continued to actively participate

in producing insightful scholarship on animal welfare and human-animal research. In the field of literary and cultural studies, *Tamkang Review* devoted a special issue to the theme of “Cetacean Nations” in June 2012. Michael Lundblad in his introduction to the special issue points to a common thread among the different perspectives of the issue’s contributors being their “interest in the history of human-cetacean interactions with a desire to make those encounters meaningful” (5). Neel Ahuja’s “Species in a Planetary Frame: Eco-cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and *The Cove*” from the same issue questions the divide between nation and species by tracking the “the radical interpenetration of species and the transnational character of ecological movements” (13) to call for a “planetary ethic” which “recognizes the muddled assemblages of bodies, affect, and environment that constantly reproduces the field of ethics and politics as multispecies domain” (28). Emily Shu-hui Tsai’s article on cetaceans collected in *An Introduction to Ecoliterature*, edited by Robin Cheng-hsing Tsai, also addresses *The Cove* along with various other cetacean texts. From the same collection, Hsin-ya Huang’s and Rose Hsiu-li Juan’s articles feature a variety of whale texts in their explorations of the ecological ethics of indigenous literature. These three articles provide a comprehensive examination and envisioning of the various interconnections between humans and aquatic mammals in theory, practice, and literary endeavors. To actively promote whale welfare, Paola Cavalieri cites multiple cetological studies in her article “Declaring Whale Rights” from the before-mentioned *Tamkang Review*’s special issue to demonstrate whales’ complex communication skills and social structures in support of the moral and legal need to extend rights to whales who “possess self-awareness and sophisticated intelligence” (131). Cavalieri’s advocacy for whale rights is grounded on the commonality between humans and whales, which for some, however, may also run the risk of perpetrating an anthropocentric hierarchy in its prioritization of animals with human-like qualities.

As in cases of anthropomorphism, concerns over the one-sided distortive humanization of animals remains a subject of dispute, yet a great deal of recent scholarship similarly warns against rashly attacking or altogether avoiding anthropomorphic attempts because such rashness may prematurely abort possibilities of interspecies intimacy. Tsung-huei Huang’s “Toward a New Age of Anthropomorphism?: Reconsidering the Human-Animal Assemblage through the Looking-Glass of Alice Books” provides an acutely thorough discussion on various strands of anthropomorphic debates. Huang’s essay underscores the importance of recognizing and deciphering differences in anthropomorphic endeavors, for the acknowledgment of differences as well as the interest in understanding differences constitute the reflective starting point for empathetic attentiveness. Furthermore, Huang also deems it necessary to distinguish between our disparate relationships with varying types

of species to determine what would be a suitably ethical treatment of said species. Problematic cases of anthropomorphism which inferiorize and starve animals to extinction are critiqued by Sun-chieh Liang in his essay on anthropocentricized carnivorism in the *Ice Age* animation franchise. Shu-fen Tsai's article from the same collection argues that the realist literary device employed in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* refrains from distorting animals through personification by showing respect to the subjectivity of the tiger and of nature. Li-ping Chang's essay also highlights the importance of respect and care in her analysis of Native American treatment of animals in Forrest Carter's *The Education of Little Tree*. Yu-ching Wang's journal article "'This Dog is the Road': Affectivity and Vulnerability in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*" rectifies anthropomorphic devices by drawing out Woolf's novel's criticism of inequality via the female writer's empathetic entanglement with dogs. Also discussing literary representations of dogs, Yalan Chang's "'Like a Dog': J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Feminist Ecocriticism" conducts an ecofeminist ethics of care perspective to examine instances of "becoming animal" as depicted in Coetzee's novel. Chang argues that aligning the suffering of humans with that of animals is not to conflate or discredit their differences but to reveal the inseparability of human and animal problems in an attempt to further encourage care for others. Chia-ju Chang's "Putting Back the Animals: Woman-Animal Meme in Contemporary Taiwanese Ecofeminist Imagination," which is anthologized in Bookman Books's *Key Readings in Ecocriticism*, also brings together theories and texts which discuss productive alignments between women and animals. Drawing on Wang Shau-di's animated film *Mofaama (Grandma and her Ghosts)* and Li Ang's *Shafu (The Butcher's Wife)* along with its cinematic adaptation *Shafu (Woman of Wrath)* by Zeng Zhuangxiang, Chang regards these Taiwanese texts as "suggest[ing] a shift away from both patriarchal and anthropocentric tradition towards a gender and species equal perspective" (282). In the previously mentioned *Tamkang Review* special issue, Sun-chieh Liang accredits Taiwanese nature writer Liu Kashiang's anthropomorphic representations in *He-lien-mo-mo the Humpback Whale* as demonstrative of critical anthropomorphism. Citing Haraway's comment that "therio-anthropomorphisms can lead to much sounder scientific investigation than belief that some idioms are free of figuration and others are polluted with culture," Liang argues that being with the animal is "a question of whether the vocabulary brings the human and the animal together in a contact zone where life begins" ("Animal Contact" 53).

For Gregg Lambert in his essay "Animal Poverty: Agamben, Heidegger, and Whitehead" from *Tamkang Review's* December 2018 special issue, death or rather robbery is what connects humans with nonhumans in its revelation of the perception of "a supreme apathy; life is in-human, not for us, but for itself. . . . It is this

indifference, moreover, wrongly depicted as cruelty or as malign evil, that reveals our reaction of terror in the face of life (fundamentally a stranger) and which makes us fear it absolutely” (31). Whereas Lambert examines different rationalizations that justify robbery, Ian Buchanan’s article from the same issue voices dissatisfaction towards Jane Bennett’s “vital materialism,” contending that raising ethical awareness is insufficient without entailing the obligation to act. Referencing Fredric Jameson, Buchanan states that “failure of imagination may well be the death of us all as a species. . . . We seem to be incapable of imagining something better than what we have, except in the highly localised sense of a new commodity. The irony of this is that our imagination is impeded by an unwillingness to give up on the world we have” (8). Also on the importance of imagination, Duncan McColl Chesney in his article from the September 2014 issue of *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* highlights training the imagination via fiction to evoke the ethical obligation towards other species. In Chesney’s reading of Jiang Rong’s *Wolf Totem* and Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, the former demonstrates Spivak’s “planetarity” in its recognition of the mutual need and obligation among Others whereas the latter illustrates how the internal alterity of the human prompts “learn[ing] of the animal and the other in the self” (197).

Being respectful of differences is fundamental to human-animal encounters, whether literally or materially or more significantly both. However, merely learning more about animals is not enough, for bridging connections does not necessarily lead to the ethical obligation to act. Hence, as many of these recent essays exemplify, cultivating the emotional sensitivity to care about animals in order to activate humans to further care for nonhuman others remains an urgent political matter for all.

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