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### Deposited in DRO:

30 September 2014

### Version of attached file:

Published Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Herman, David (2014) 'Animal worlds in modern fiction : an introduction.', *Modern fiction studies.*, 60 (3). pp. 421-443.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2014.0041>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

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## **Animal Worlds in Modern Fiction: An Introduction**

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MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 60, Number 3, Fall 2014, pp.  
421-443 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: [10.1353/mfs.2014.0041](https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2014.0041)



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## ANIMAL WORLDS IN MODERN FICTION: AN INTRODUCTION

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**David Herman**

Jonathan Lethem's 2014 short story, "Pending Vegan," opens with the following sentence: "Paul Espeseth, who was no longer taking the antidepressant Celexa, braced himself for a cataclysm at SeaWorld" (59).<sup>1</sup> In part because of the release of *Blackfish*, Gabriela Cowperthwaite's 2013 documentary linking the deaths of several animal trainers to the treatment of killer whales kept in captivity at the SeaWorld sites in San Diego, California; Orlando, Florida; and San Antonio, Texas, the corporation maintaining these marine mammal parks has become a flashpoint for debates about the appropriateness of keeping orcas (among other species) in captivity and about larger questions concerning human–animal relationships, including legal issues surrounding the concept of nonhuman personhood.<sup>2</sup> In a gesture that would seem to align Lethem's antihero with the parties opposed to SeaWorld in these ongoing disputes, Espeseth has at some point prior to his and his family's fraught visit to the San Diego SeaWorld site given himself the secret name of Pending Vegan, after checking out from the Santa Barbara public library "a popular account of the world's collapse into unsustainability under the weight of its human population . . . [and then] reading several famous polemics against the cruelty of farms and slaughterhouses," as well as "a book called 'Fear of the Animal Planet,' which detailed acts of beastly revenge upon human civilization" (60).<sup>3</sup>

The story, focalized through Espeseth, explores how two days after going off his medication the protagonist finds himself in a fragile, fearful psychological state, slowed in his progression from pending to

actual vegan by "inertia and embarrassment and conformity" (60), and concerned that some "otherworldly future inquisitor, most likely a pearly-gates sentinel with the head of a piglet or a calf, would hold him accountable for this delay" (60). Impressed by the orcas' "absolute and devastating presence" and ambivalent toward the other creatures he encounters during the family's outing, including flamingos, sharks, bat-rays, a sturgeon that snaps its jaws at him, dogs, cats, a pig, an ostrich, and a string of ducklings, Espeseth takes particular note of his twin daughters' complex relationship with animals, their "balancing of their desire both to cuddle and to devour mammals" (60). In an almost phantasmagoric final scene, the family attends a pet show billed as "Pets Rule!" The show's title is manifestly at odds with the hyper-domesticated animals it features—or is it? Performed on Astro-Turf with dogs that have been trained to flip miniature plastic burgers on a fake stove and cats that have been induced to climb a rope, the show stages (literally) the asymmetrical power relationships bound up with the concept of "pet." The title of the show notwithstanding, is it not the role of a pet precisely to *be* ruled, with the distinctive species characteristics of any particular pet being subsumed, more or less fully, under the performance of that role? Yet when the Jack Russell terrier whom the show's emcee describes as a "'Pets Rule!' rookie" bounds from the stage into the protagonist's arms, throwing off the other animals' performances in the process (63), the story's concluding scene calls into question the pet show's dominant script, which is also a script of human domination.

Both this final scene and key moments leading up to it concern institutions, practices, and attitudes that are centrally important for the study of animal worlds in modern fiction; the story thus provides a convenient point of entry into this special issue. Indeed, in an interview posted on a blog maintained by the *New Yorker*, Lethem reports that his work on "Pending Vegan" was shaped by some of the same literary and scholarly traditions that inform the essays contained in the present issue. Lethem traces the story back to a class on "Animals in Literature" that he recently taught. Recounting how he purchased "a bunch of animal-rights and vegan manifestos" in order to prepare for the course but did not manage to read all of these texts, Lethem adds: "I suppose some of this bad faith leaked into the characters: What would it be to think you've gone about halfway, or not even halfway, down some irreversible ethical path, then got stuck there?" In line with these comments, Lethem's protagonist reveals a remarkably divided sensibility, a profoundly double vision, as he moves with his children and his wife through the animal exhibits at the SeaWorld site. On the one hand, Espeseth/Pending Vegan proves to be cannily aware of SeaWorld as a manufactured experience of

animal otherness. Thus, although he plays along with his daughters' excitement when they see a flock of flamingos, acting as if the birds "were something wild spotted in the distance, a flock that could bolt and depart," he recognizes that in fact "they'd had some crucial feather clipped, rendering them flightless, the equivalent of crippling an opponent in a fight by slicing his Achilles tendon. The birds had no prospect of retreat from the barrage of screaming families pushing their youngest near enough for a cell-phone pic" (59). Empathizing with the beleaguered birds, Espeseth also models what it might be like to experience the world as a flamingo,<sup>4</sup> as the children crowd in one after another and present "their faces in what he imagined was for the birds a wave of florid psychosis. In the context of their species, these flamingos were like space voyagers, those who'd return with tales beyond telling. Except that they'd never return" (59). Further, although Lethem ironizes Espeseth's critique by juxtaposing it with an attention-seeking complaint about the sturgeon almost taking his finger off,<sup>5</sup> the protagonist equates the title of the "Pets Rule!" show with "Hitler's Big Lie technique," suggesting to his wife that in accepting the premise of the pet show "we're complicit with a well-recognized nightmare" (63). And in thinking about the site's overall design, the protagonist uses a telling metaphor that reinserts the human visitors into stark biophysical realities that SeaWorld itself seeks to mask or paper over: "You were being engulfed [as you moved through the site], digested, shit out" (60).

On the other hand, Espeseth remains detached from debates concerning the treatment of captive orcas, and, despite observations like the ones quoted in my previous paragraph, he seems not to grasp some of the wider implications of his experiences at SeaWorld. Initially the killer whales (and the *Blackfish* documentary) function as mere counters in a self-serving argument, when Espeseth tries to block the family trip about which he feels anxious by "making his case to his wife with a paraphrase of a cable-television exposé of the ocean theme park, one that neither he nor his wife had seen" (59). She replies in what appears to be an equally disingenuous manner: "'The girls should see these things they love before they vanish from the earth entirely'" (59). Later, too, the narrative makes it clear that the protagonist is concerned about the visit to SeaWorld not because of how the animals kept there are treated but because of the threat it poses to his own fragile psychological equilibrium, human-on-human torture, not the plight of captive orcas, being his main point of reference.<sup>6</sup> Thus, although Espeseth has worked to desensitize himself to the imposing physical presence of orcas by watching YouTube videos and examining magazine pictures, he reflects how "the designers of the park had outsmarted him, softened him with flamingos, like a

casual round of cigarette burns to the ribcage, preceding a waterboarding" (59).

Perhaps most revealing, however, are the circumstances surrounding Bingo, the errant terrier who derails the pet show at the end of the story. Bingo turns out to be the dog the protagonist and his wife know as Maurice, whom they adopted from a shelter but eventually returned. As the narrator recounts, "when Pending Vegan had seen the dog's behavior around his pregnant wife, he'd banished Maurice from their lives. The dog had been too attentive, too obsessed with her pregnancy, curling itself along her stomach at night as if hatching the twins with his own heat" (61). Here again Lethem ironizes his protagonist's actions and attitudes. Espeseth expels Maurice from the family because of anxieties caused by the dog's proximity to his pregnant wife and unborn children, as if Maurice were an intruder into a primal scene of species propagation. But despite Espeseth's attempt to distance himself and his sort from this other kind of creatural life, the dog scouts him out in the end, breaking the performative plane, the staging of roles prescribed for nonhuman subordinates, to reveal different possibilities for transspecies affiliation.<sup>7</sup> Strikingly, the closing lines of the story recount how, the dog smelling on Espeseth's hands the turkey drumstick that the not-yet-vegan protagonist has shared with his daughters, "the terrier's frantic tongue drilled into the webbing between his [Espeseth's] fingers" (63). By this point, Espeseth himself has already rewritten family history in order to interpret the dog's behavior at the pet show as an act of apology for abandoning the family, and he has also found a portentous link between the double-named Bingo/Maurice and his own two-pronged identity. Yet the narrator's reference to the protagonist's webbed fingers evokes a longer evolutionary history that has created a much more fundamental connection between Espeseth and the nonhuman species he encounters during the visit to SeaWorld—species with which he both does and does not consciously affiliate himself.<sup>8</sup>

Much more could be said about the patchwork of contradictory assumptions and attitudes concerning animals and human-animal relationships that Lethem attributes to his protagonist, and not just to Espeseth's young daughters.<sup>9</sup> Yet the foregoing remarks about "Pending Vegan" have at least begun to indicate how the story opens up questions that are fundamental for any engagement with animal worlds in modern fiction. These questions are pursued, in different ways, by the contributors to this special issue. More generally, the questions help define the larger field of inquiry into which the issue taken as a whole seeks to intervene. Zoos (or marine mammal parks) as sites for investigating cultural representations of animals, the bestiaries that populate twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature, the

animal phenomenologies or *Umwelten* that authors model in fictional texts, the concern with modes of performance that cut across species lines, the narrative techniques used to bring animal worlds into relation with more or less dominant human priorities and practices—all of these questions for research, as well as others broached by Lethem's text, are addressed over the course of this issue. At the same time, in exploring how these questions bear on a variety of case studies, the contributors engage with a substantial body of previous scholarship in what is now a burgeoning area of inquiry.<sup>10</sup>

Important ideas have emerged from cross-disciplinary conversations being conducted under headings that include *critical animal studies*, *anthrozoology*, *animal geography*, *cognitive ethology*, *biosemiotics* (and *zoosemiotics*), *multispecies ethnography*, *human-animal studies*, *zoography*, *animal ethics*, *posthumanism*, and *biopolitics*, among others.<sup>11</sup> Although they have different institutional histories and intellectual genealogies, use more or less distinct methods of analysis, and appeal to various kinds of evidence to substantiate their claims, these partially overlapping rubrics encompass a number of interconnected strands of research. One strand involves the reassessment of ideas of the human—and of the nonhuman—in light of studies undercutting earlier assumptions about the distinctiveness of humans vis-à-vis other animals when it comes to language and tool use, cognition, and complexity of cultural organization. As already discussed in connection with Lethem's story, this work has led in turn to a rethinking of the scope of the concept "person," along with a wider re-examination of value hierarchies premised on the centrality of the human.<sup>12</sup> Another strand of work studies intersections among attitudes toward animals and norms relating to gender and sexuality. This research investigates the cross-mapping of species and gender constructs; it explores how women and animals become marginalized as other in interconnected ways by masculinist ideals of the self and, conversely, how a concern for animals gets coded as feminine.<sup>13</sup> Work in this area also examines links between ideas of animality and concepts of sexuality, whether the focus is on Freud's model of the unconscious as the site of humanity's archaic or phylogenetic heritage<sup>14</sup> or on "the queer history of people's life writing about intercorporeal relations as they arise in cross-species companionship" (McHugh 119). A third strand of scholarship, which seeks to integrate work in anthropology and biology, involves comparative study of how the members of different human cultures comport themselves in relation to animal others.<sup>15</sup> At issue is not just how human attitudes toward animals vary across cultures, but also how human groups recognize and participate in diverse "contact zones where lines separating nature from culture have broken down, where

encounters between *Homo sapiens* and other beings generate mutual ecologies and coproduced niches" (Kirksey and Helmreich 566), and where different understandings of the possibilities and limits of transspecies intersubjectivity can therefore take root.<sup>16</sup>

Other relevant strands of research include discussions of anthropomorphism that have produced distinctions between naive versus critical or heuristic styles of anthropomorphic thinking;<sup>17</sup> anti-Cartesian work in cognitive science developing broadly ecological models of mind—models that, in portraying consciousness as something that arises from how intelligent agents of all sorts interact with their larger environments, extend and refine Darwin's emphasis on the continuity between human and nonhuman minds;<sup>18</sup> research in animal geography, sociology, and other fields studying not only "the many ways in which animals are 'placed' by human societies in their local material spaces (settlements, fields, farms, factories, and so on), as well as in a host of imaginary, literary, psychological and even virtual spaces," but also how "animals destabilise, transgress or even resist our human orderings, including spatial ones" (Philo and Wilbert 5);<sup>19</sup> discussions of contemporary art practices vis-à-vis broader cultural assumptions about and discourses on animals;<sup>20</sup> and critiques of attempts to use rights-based discourse to promote better treatment of nonhuman animals, in favor of "a bioegalitarian turn encouraging us to relate to animals as animals ourselves" (Braidotti 526).<sup>21</sup>

Given the breadth and depth of this ongoing animal turn, as Kari Weil has termed it,<sup>22</sup> the foregoing list could be extended indefinitely. But though it is impossible to provide here an exhaustive account of established as well as emergent areas of research that are relevant for the study of animal worlds in modern fiction, I hope to have given some sense of the range of scholarship with which the present special issue is in dialogue. I turn now to a more detailed sketch of the contents of the issue itself.

In the following synopsis, I depart from the issue's chronological arrangement to highlight the diversity of approaches used by the contributors as well as links among the individual essays. I will, however, begin with the beginning, since in tracing out relationships between modern fiction and other cultural practices through which representations of animals have circulated, and in suggesting how portrayals of animal worlds span generic depictions of species as well as detailed accounts of individual animals' experiences, Aaron Santesso's essay outlines general areas of concern addressed by other contributors via different case studies and analytic perspectives.

In "The Literary Animal and the Narrativized Zoo," Santesso explores how fictional treatments of animal worlds influenced the



presentation of animal environments in German and American zoos from the late nineteenth century onward. Santesso notes that the earliest zoos grouped animals into taxonomic kinds, treating them as collections of scientific specimens rather than as the inhabitants of differentiated worlds. Over time, however, the design of zoos began to be shaped by different design principles. Carl Hagenbeck, who founded the Tierpark Hagenbeck near Hamburg in 1863, began to create panoramas that situated captive animals in displays organized by geographic and dramatic, rather than taxonomic, imperatives. Thus Hagenbeck's northern and Arctic panoramas transformed individual animals from representatives of species to characters in scenes, drove a wedge between those animals' moment-by-moment experiences and the dramatized scenarios that they were being used to stage, and helped usher in what Santesso characterizes as a new philosophy of narrativized display, whereby areas in zoos could be experienced by visitors as unfolding stories. This new design philosophy reflected, in part, a growing interest in replicating animal environments as they might be encountered in the wild; but it also reflected zoo designers' desires to capitalize on the growing popularity of fictional tales of adventure, with exhibits recruiting from the exoticized geographical settings and the escalating battles with ever-more ferocious animal antagonists that were the hallmarks of many of these fictional accounts. Yet there were local differences between such adventure-tale traditions, and the contrast between American African-adventure novels and German Arctic-exploration novels finds expression in the sequential continuity of the Bronx Zoo's 1940 "African Plains" exhibit versus Hagenbeck's more discretely arranged panoramas. Overall, using the history of zoo designs as a case study, Santesso's essay reveals not only how ways of understanding animals and human-animal encounters can spread across cultural domains and representational platforms, but also how the idea of an "animal world" itself involves a basic tension or polarity, as previously indicated. The concept encompasses, on the one hand, taxonomic, species-level engagements with nonhuman creatures and generalized models of the environments or *Umwelten* that their organismic structure makes it possible for them to inhabit; but on the other hand, the idea also includes narrativized accounts of animals as individual beings caught up in a life history, often though not necessarily defined in reference to particular human projects and experiences.

Santesso, then, uses the case of the zoo to explore the impact of fictional worlds on public, institutionalized scenes of animal encounter. By contrast, Benjamin Bateman, in "Species Performance, or, Henry James's Beastly Sense," shifts the focus to the way literary authors such as James reframe human relationships by situating them in a

larger biotic domain, a transspecies nexus. Santesso examines how fictional texts can mediate humans' encounters with animals and their environments; Bateman, using James's 1903 short story "The Beast in the Jungle" as his chief example, investigates how fictional treatments of domestic spaces and relations can ground themselves in—and shed light on—entanglements between human and nonhuman worlds. The story dramatizes, through John Marcher's and May Bartram's allusive (and elusive) interchanges, complex modes of identity work. But this work involves more than just human identities; instead, it arises out of what can be described as a process of cross-species triangulation, with John Marcher orienting to May Bartram's own orientation to the titular beast in the jungle, the imagined animal presence about which Marcher once told her in the past, and which comes to rehaunt their conversations in the present. This nonhuman other thus helps constitute who the human characters are, both individually and jointly.<sup>23</sup> Here Bateman leverages Judith Butler's ideas about gender performativity to develop an account of how the story stages a model of species-level performativity, a constantly enacted, moment-by-moment co-constitution of masculine and feminine identities vis-à-vis a wider range of possible identity positions, including those corresponding to nonhuman identities. Indeed, Bateman glosses the narrative as a whole as the story of Bartram's attempts to induce "Marcher to detach from human coordinates, to 'see' themselves and their environment in a novel way," with Bartram articulating grounds for resistance to "human norms at the same time as she makes the rethinking of animal matters central to a gendered critique of male exceptionalism." In developing his analysis, Bateman brings into a rich synthesis ideas articulated by commentators as diverse as Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, Timothy Morton, Stacy Alaimo, and Elizabeth Grosz, among others. The essay thus provides both a useful introduction to core issues in the broader field and also an example of cutting-edge work on animal worlds in modern fiction specifically.

Karalyn Kendall-Morwick's "Mongrel Fiction: Canine Bildung and the Feminist Critique of Anthropocentrism in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*" likewise brings concepts of animality into a productive and exemplary dialogue with questions about gender. As Kendall-Morwick notes, Woolf expressed reservations about publishing her experimental biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel, fearing that the text's likely popularity (it did go on to become an international bestseller) would lead to her stigmatization as a typically female writer who produced widely read but trivial works. Whatever its reception history, though, *Flush* (1933) can be placed alongside other modernist texts that engage in a sophisticated reworking of the *Bildungsroman* tradition—texts such as D. H. Lawrence's *Sons*

*and Lovers* (1913), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939). For Kendall-Morwick, *Flush* makes a distinctive contribution to this modernist project by linking female development with the life histories of nonhuman animals, thereby demonstrating how speciesism and phallogentrism work together in (and in fact help co-constitute) patriarchal social structures. In turn, those structures find expression in the classical *Bildungsroman* tradition, with its focus on the self-realization of a human hero who stands apart from the sorts of transspecies ties on which Woolf instead chooses to focus. Rather than reading *Flush*'s biography as an allegory for the situation of the female writer, Kendall-Morwick stresses how the dog's and Barrett Browning's lives are intertwined and mutually enabling. In her account, Woolf's text affirms "not a narrowly humanist project of self-cultivation but an ongoing process of intersubjective becoming that exceeds the boundaries and potential of the individual human."

Marco Caracciolo, in his essay on "Literary Fiction and Animal Phenomenology in Italo Svevo's 'Argo and His Master,'" also explores questions of intersubjectivity in human-canine relationships, but he employs different investigative tools and engages with his focal text for different analytic purposes. Whereas Kendall-Morwick argues that Woolf uses the resources of fiction to reconsider species hierarchies and their links to phallogentrism, in part by recasting animal *Umwelten* as different from rather than inferior to human ways of encountering the world,<sup>24</sup> Caracciolo identifies a paradox or double-bind in literary attempts to stage a critique of anthropocentric attitudes toward animals. Such texts by necessity present animal experiences via human language, and to that extent they participate in the dynamic of appropriation and control that they aim to unmask.<sup>25</sup> As Caracciolo also notes, however, literary authors can circumvent this paradox by highlighting the constructedness of their own projections of animal worlds, as when Kafka presents an obverse image of anthropocentrism by fleshing out a canine-centric worldview in "Forschungen eines Hundes" ("Investigations of a Dog"), written in 1922. For its part, Svevo's 1927 short story "Argo e il suo padrone" uses narrative embedding to call into question the reliability of the narrator's translation of Argo's account. The primary (human) narrator may be suffering from mental illness; he may also have ulterior motives for recounting events from the vantage point of a dog who does not always grasp humans' reasons for acting in the way they do. Extrapolating from Kafka's and Svevo's self-aware strategies for engaging with animal worlds (and to these strategies one might add Woolf's creation of a fiction-biography hybrid in *Flush*), Caracciolo leverages the ideas of phenomenologists, philosophers of mind, and psycholo-

gists to argue for a broad distinction between the functions of literary representations of animal experience, on the one hand, and those of attempts to develop a scientific phenomenology of animal minds, on the other hand. Other contributions to the issue map out different, more deeply entangled relationships between the literature and the science of animal worlds, as when Jan Baetens and Éric Trudel discuss Thalia Field's use of fiction to create a meta-ethology in *Bird Lovers, Backyard* (2010); Carrie Rohman highlights the relevance for literary analysis of post-Darwinian insights into the biology of aesthetic display, and vice versa; and Matthew Calarco evokes the broader history of the phenomenological tradition and its implications for engaging with animals and human-animal relationships.<sup>26</sup> Yet Caracciolo raises important questions for this area of inquiry, including ethical questions linked to what he describes as humans' and animals' "mutually partial and imperfect incomprehension" of one another. This aspect of Caracciolo's discussion complements Calarco's account, later in the issue, of what he characterizes as the radical alterity of animals and their worlds.

Whereas Woolf's and Svevo's (and also James's) texts focus on a single transspecies relationship, James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), published six years after *Flush*, features an entire late-modernist bestiary, previously documented, as Margot Norris remarks in her essay, in a 1999 study authored by Hildegard Möller.<sup>27</sup> Growing out of a decades-long engagement with Joyce's text, and based on the premise that Joyce's nonhuman animals serve to situate his human characters within a larger mythological as well as ecological context, Norris's discussion seeks to provide less an encyclopedic taxonomy than a selective presentation of this creatural plenitude. Norris acknowledges that it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between symbolic and literal uses of animals in *Finnegans Wake*, but she argues that even the more symbolic treatments of nonhuman beings have the effect of anchoring Joyce's text in a larger biosphere. Literal animal references, meanwhile, suggest a biological, evolutionary basis for human practices, with animals' needs for food, habitation, and dominance, for example, translating into family feuds and wars between nations in the domain of human history. This emphasis on the fundamental continuity between humans and nonhuman species, coupled with Joyce's use of stone-aged human characters to ground language and culture in evolutionary timescales, reflects a biocentric versus anthropocentric vision—a way of seeing that Norris had previously, in her 1985 study of *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*, traced back to Darwin. Norris's present contribution focuses special attention on one of Joyce's most detailed engagements with nonhuman life in *Finnegans Wake*: namely, the "Ondt and the Gracehoper"

episode, which rewrites Aesop's fable about the hardworking ant and the irresponsible grasshopper. Gathering together insects, vertebrate nonhumans, and humans in the same storyline, this episode demonstrates how Joyce populates his text with a transspecies cast of characters figured "as bodies, as organisms, as living beings, and thereby situates them as belonging to a larger nature, a more inclusive scene of a vital earth."

If Norris situates Joyce's animal figures in a vital domain spanning diverse cultures, geographical regions, and ecological niches, Sundhya Walther, in "Fables of the Tiger Economy: Species and Subalternity in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*," explores the politics and ethics of this global domain of animal life. Specifically, Walther draws on ideas from postcolonial theory, as well as previous work connecting postcolonial and animal studies, to discuss how power asymmetries relating to geopolitical forces, class positions, and cultural identities bear on Adiga's portrayal of animal worlds and human-animal relationships in his 2008 Booker Prize-winning novel. Walther frames her analysis by making a distinction between two processes that feature in the novel and that are in tension with one another. On the one hand, there is the process of becoming-animalized, which Walther associates with an anthropocentric humanism and that involves a human identifying with a nonhuman other; this other becomes, for the human subject, an image of the animalization that results from his or her being in a subaltern position. On the other hand, there is a process of becoming-animal, which Walther links to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's work on radically transformative human-animal relationships that involve a dissolution of fixed species identities. This second process comes into play during the pivotal moment of Balam Halwai's encounter with the white tiger in the Delhi zoo. Walther argues that, overall, an anthropocentric humanism with its attendant anxieties about becoming-animalized predominates in the novel. This postcolonial humanism accounts for Adiga's reliance on the genre of the fable, in which animals function as a means for reflection on humans' moral failings rather than being autonomous loci of experience in their own right. Yet in its portrayal of Balam's encounter with the tiger the text opens a space of transspecies contagion, a space where "the animal is defined not necessarily by species, but by the condition of subalternity itself," creating possibilities for "transgressive and powerful multispecies alliances" under shared conditions of oppression. Building on work by Ron Broglio, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert, Nicole Shukin, and others, Walther argues that the text uncovers an anti-anthropocentric political economy in which the otherness of the animal can be interpreted not as a metaphor for but as structurally linked to the otherness of the subaltern.<sup>28</sup>

Like the contributions discussed thus far, the other essays included in the issue develop a variety of approaches to the study of animal worlds in twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction, with Raymond Malewitz drawing on ideas from thing theory to explore Cormac McCarthy's representations of animal agency in *The Crossing* (1994), Carrie Rohman leveraging the work of Elizabeth Grosz and others to present a post-Darwinian account of transhuman aesthetics in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), Jan Baetens and Éric Trudel showing how Thalia Field uses experimental writing practices to reflect on the conceptual, cultural, and political stakes of ethological inquiry in *Bird Lovers*, *Backyard*, and Matthew Calarco suggesting how multiple philosophical traditions bear on the ethics of human-animal relationships as they are portrayed in Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013). Finally, in his review of Juliana Schiesari's *Polymorphous Domesticities: Pets, Bodies, and Desire in Four Modern Writers* and the *Beckett and Animals* volume edited by Mary Bryden, Robert McKay provides not only an assessment of these two studies but also a capstone discussion for the issue as a whole. McKay's long experience in the field enables him to look back at the history of literary animal studies even as he uses these two books to reflect on its current state and possible lines of development in the future.

In "Narrative Disruption as Animal Agency in Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing*," Malewitz revisits from a different perspective the paradox also discussed by Caracciolo: namely, the paradox that literary authors' attempts to create non- or anti-anthropocentric representations of animal worlds must be couched in human language and thus participate in the logic of appropriation that they critique. However, working in dialogue with the thing theory outlined by commentators such as Ken Alder, Bill Brown, and Bruno Latour, Malewitz suggests a different strategy for negotiating this paradox. Rather than creating a dichotomy between the animal phenomenologies of literature and science, Malewitz situates literary representations of animals in a wider ecology of discourses concerned with modes of nonhuman agency, whether such agency is instantiated in material objects or in members of nonhuman species, and proposes to read these representations against the grain of literary language to "build a taxonomy of moments in which literary animals disrupt, undermine, or overload the anthropocentric system dictated to them by the terms of that literature." Malewitz develops a structural analysis of what he terms the animality taxon and uses it to illuminate the emplotment, resistance to plotting, and re-emplotment of the wolf that features prominently in the opening chapter of McCarthy's 1994 novel *The Crossing*. More precisely, the taxon of animality involves three states:

(1) an initial state in which an animal subserves an anthropocentric plot, (2) a subsequent state in which the animal disrupts that plot by acquiring a conflicting value or meaning, and (3) a moment in which, with the animal's relationship to the human characters having become altered, the animal's value or meaning gets "suspended in a language of undecidability" such that the material trace of its agency can be registered in the moment before or perhaps during the process of "anthropocentric recoding."<sup>29</sup> In a reading of McCarthy's text rich with implications for the environmental humanities in general as well as animal studies in particular, Malewitz locates the wolf's animal agency in the interstices of several anthropocentric plots. At issue is what he calls the wolf's "trans-signification," which manifests itself in the moments of transition between the different human uses to which the wolf is put—the incommensurable plots into which she is inserted—over the course of the unfolding narrative.

In "No Higher Life: Bio-aesthetics in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," Rohman develops a different approach to studying fictional representations of animal agency; this approach is grounded in the shared evolutionary history of humans and nonhuman species. Focusing on the artwork embedded in Coetzee's own artwork—namely, protagonist David Lurie's chamber opera-in-progress—Rohman argues that the novel figures the aesthetic not as an exclusively human domain, but as "a tendency of the living in general, a bio-impulse toward superfluity, display, and participation in broad organic and cosmic forces," with that cross-species tendency or impulse being grounded in a "creaturely orientation of life to other life, and to the pulsations to which all life is exposed." In developing her analysis, which focuses in part on Coetzee's portrayal of an injured dog as an active participant in Lurie's composition of his chamber opera toward the end of the novel, Rohman draws on Elizabeth Grosz's Darwin- and Deleuze-inspired work on art and creativity. For Grosz, art has its basis in the dynamics of sexual selection, in the use of gestures, movements, and performances (songs, postures, display behaviors, language productions) to generate attraction and allure in performative worlds that cut across the species boundary. It is not just that Lurie employs animal references (a cat in heat, a bird in flight) in his reflections on the process of composing the opera; what is more, when the injured dog proves responsive to Lurie's banjo plucking, Lurie decides to write the dog's voice into the opera itself. He interweaves the dog's "lament to the heavens" with the passionate yearnings of the protagonist of the opera-within-the-novel, crossing the species divide to engage in a mode of artistic production that not only registers but directly involves the broader biotic community. In turn, by using an embedded story about the production of an artwork to

model how aesthetic practices are anchored in transspecies forms of agency, Coetzee self-reflexively situates his own novel in a biocentric frame of reference.

Baetens and Trudel's "Backward/Forward: Thalia Field's Meta-narratives" focuses on an even more pervasively self-reflexive text, demonstrating how traditions of experimental writing provide distinctive resources for engaging with animal worlds. Linking Field's innovative, self-aware narrative practices in *Bird Lovers*, *Backyard* to a broader concern with the inescapable mediation of animals and their environments by linguistic, narrative, and other representational modes, the authors read Field's text as an interrogation of the possibilities and limits of stories as means for exploring nonhuman species as well as transspecies relationships. At the same time, they suggest how the text moves beyond metanarrative reflexivity to consider how narrative as a representational practice relates to knowledge production—in this case, production of knowledge about animals. More specifically, Baetens and Trudel uncover genealogical connections between the bicultural (French American) Field's methods and what commentators such as Christophe Hanna and Franck Leibovici have described as a French "poetic document" school, which defines poetic documents as artifacts designed to reveal the formal as well as ideological structures that undergird discourses or ways of seeing. In the case of *Bird Lovers*, *Backyard*, Field suggests analogies between the generic heterogeneity of her own textual assemblage and the difficulty of pinning down the concept of species. This is, after all, a text that features (among many other voices, registers, and topics) a bird-narrator who reads Wittgenstein and writes as a scientist, a section paralleling the Watergate scandal and Konrad Lorenz's suspect use of ethological theory to advance ideas of racial purity, and a doctor's report about his experiences treating children affected by US nuclear-weapons tests on the Bikini atoll in the Marshall Islands in the mid-twentieth century. Hence Field braids together problems related to the taxonomy of literary genres and problems related to the taxonomy of species. She also uses an assortment of textual designs and thematic emphases to reformulate the question broached in Santesso's essay: how individuals relate to the species of which they are taken to be members. Overall, interpreting *Bird Lovers*, *Backyard* as a "poetic document" in the sense previously mentioned, the authors argue that Field "encourages the reader to become aware of the dense and opaque web of linguistic, narrative, and ideological forms and formats that structure and impose, often in very implicit and apparently natural ways, our shaping of the notions of human and nonhuman."



If Baetens and Trudel focus on a text that foregrounds questions arising from the relationship between literature and (the production and circulation of) ethological and other knowledge about nonhuman beings, Calarco's case study underscores the far-reaching significance of ethical questions raised by animal worlds in modern fiction. In "Boundary Issues: Human–Animal Relationships in Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*," Calarco begins with a comparison between Fowler's 2013 novel and Franz Kafka's 1917 short story, "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie" ("Report to an Academy"). Both texts center on nonhuman primates, with Kafka's story of Rotpeter's transformation from ape to human posing what Calarco describes as a challenge that Fowler's text takes up—namely, a challenge "to rethink the limitations of human language as well as the structures and processes through which becoming human takes place in view of their effects on both animals and human beings." In Fowler's novel, the narrator-protagonist is a human rather than a nonhuman primate; but Rosemary was raised with Fern, a cross-fostered chimpanzee, and as she attempts to come to terms with the meaning and legacies of her relationship with Fern by recounting its viscissitudes, Rosemary also articulates a number of key issues bearing on human–animal relationships more generally.

One of these issues concerns language, or more precisely the limitations (indeed, incoherence) of efforts to make the capacity for language a shibboleth separating humans from other animals. Making (verbal) language the criterion of the human entails prioritizing language over all the other nonlinguistic abilities that animals possess that humans do not.<sup>30</sup> Giving language this criterial role also requires privileging what Calarco calls its disclosive over its dissimulative functions; yet because of the way it can be used to dissimulate and not just disclose, language should be viewed as another layer of mediation between humans and the world, not a uniquely human route of access to the real. More broadly, by focusing on "boundary issues" arising from Rosemary and Fern's shared family situation—a situation because of which Rosemary has to *learn* how to behave, or perform her identity, differently from a nonhuman primate—the novel suggests that efforts to draw hard-and-fast distinctions between humans and other animals are rooted in ideological imperatives. Such imperatives can be contrasted with double emphasis on indistinction and radical alterity that Calarco discovers in Fowler's text. On the one hand, Rosemary's account indicates both the extent to which she and Fern have co-constituted one another's identity, the human and the nonhuman becoming indistinct by entering into "complex registers of relation." On the other hand, Rosemary's and Fern's ways of experiencing the world refuse to be homogenized or flattened out

into sameness; indistinction does not translate into mere equivalence or substitutability.<sup>31</sup> Calarco's essay ends with a discussion of the ethical, political, and practical implications of embracing a view of human-animal relationships that acknowledges both deep continuity and radical alterity.

McKay's review essay concludes the issue by asking "What Kind of Literary Animal Studies Do We Want, or Need?" An essential ingredient identified by McKay is what he calls conscientiousness, which he found to be missing in studies of animals in literature before the time when he and other pioneering scholars in the field (including some of the present contributors) began to lay the institutional and intellectual groundwork that has made this special issue possible. As McKay uses the term, "conscientiousness" refers to "the peculiar correlation that to my mind gave birth to 'animal studies,'" in which "the commitment to developing both scholarly knowledge of an as yet unthought subject of inquiry [links up with] the responsibility needed to show the proper respect for, to take seriously as 'subjects' of experience, the animals whose lives are represented in cultural texts." Perhaps what the many approaches developed by contributors to this issue suggest overall is that, going forward, the concepts, nomenclatures, and methods of analysis required for conscientious engagement with animals and their environments will themselves need to continue to speciate, to grow ever more diverse, if they are to maintain the proper respect for the richness and diversity of more-than-human worlds, in fiction and elsewhere.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to my colleague Dan Grausam for pointing out to me that Lethem currently holds the teaching position at Pomona College formerly held by David Foster Wallace. The unfortunate circumstances surrounding Wallace's death give special salience to the decision by Lethem's protagonist to stop taking his antidepressant medication.
2. In response to the documentary, a petition with 1.2 million signatures was filed in support of a California bill (AB2140) that would ban killer whale shows and phase out orca captivity; as of April 2014, the bill was tabled for twelve months for additional study (Nirappil; Steinmetz). In 2011, two years before the documentary was released, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) filed a lawsuit against SeaWorld in a federal court in San Diego, arguing that in being forced to perform by SeaWorld five wild orcas were being held as slaves. The lawsuit was the first to use the 13th Amendment of the US Constitution, which prohibits slavery, in an effort to free nonhuman animals held in captivity. See PETA and also

Zelman. In reporting how "U.S. District Judge Jeffrey Miller dismissed the case, writing in his ruling that 'the only reasonable interpretation of the Thirteenth Amendment's plain language is that it applies to persons, and not to non-persons such as orcas,'" Zelman notes that by contrast legal scholar Rebecca J. Huss has argued in favor of extending person status to nonhuman animals, citing decisions to grant personhood to corporations as a precedent. In addition to Huss, see Favre, Francione, Sunstein, and Wise; see also Herman, *Storytelling* 207–15 for a discussion of strategies for characterization in fictional narratives that foreground questions of nonhuman personhood. A conference on "Personhood beyond the Human" held in December 2013 at Yale University also explored issues raised by PETA's lawsuit against SeaWorld. See <http://nonhumanrights.net>.

3. Lethem seems to be alluding here to Jason Hribal's study of the same name.
4. In other words, Espeseth tries to construct a model of what Jakob von Uexküll would characterize as the flamingos' *Umwelt*. In the philosopher Evan Thompson's gloss, this term refers to "an animal's environment in the sense of its lived, phenomenal world, the world as it presents itself to that animal thanks to its sensorimotor repertoire" (59). In addition to Uexküll, see also Buchanan 7–38, 187–90 and Clark 24–28.
5. This incident can be read as a small-scale version of the potential orca attack that the protagonist fears; it perhaps reflects his anxiety that a similar sort of threat to bodily integrity (or the unity of the human self) is presented, at different scales, by various nonhuman species.
6. In *Blackfish*, Howard Garrett and Lori Marino, an orca researcher and neuroscientist specializing in cetacean intelligence respectively, describe the harmful effects of breaking up families of orcas held in captivity, while former trainers interviewed in the documentary report problems with whale-on-whale violence among captive orcas, including one fatal attack. In "Free Willy," *Scientific American's* Board of Editors writes, "Captive orcas are unusually aggressive, biting and ramming one another as well as trainers. Many researchers think the animals behave this way because they are so stressed; some have suggested that longtime confinement makes cetaceans psychotic" (10).
7. The dog's deviation from the script results not only in a general breakdown of the performance of prescribed roles and regimented inter-species relationships, leaving a pig to wander off the stage, but also in an unleashing of animal puns that creates a curious mixture of species traits at the level of narration: "The ostrich had *ducked* behind a curtain and *goosestepped* to the lip of the stage, obviously off cue" (63; emphases added). The reference to goosestepping picks up with Espeseth's fascination with Nazi practices (at one point he reflects that orcas are "like panda bears redesigned by Albert Speer" [62]), but it also restructures an animal metaphor used to describe

a style of military marching as well as a mode of blind obedience. Here, with the verbal texture of the story itself becoming unruly or disobedient, Lethem's use of this metaphor maps the characteristic behavior of one nonhuman species onto another (performing ostrich as goose), instead of producing the more typical human-nonhuman blend (marching human as goose).

8. See Friedman et al. for a discussion of lobed fins and radials as phylogenetic precursors to limbs and digits. For a discussion of the divergent evolutionary paths followed by primates (including humans) and cetaceans (including whales and dolphins) and the way those paths have nonetheless resulted in convergent modes and degrees of intelligence, see Marino.
9. Insofar as "Pending Vegan admired [his daughters'] negotiation between their native animal-love and the pleasures of meat-eating," he and they embrace a contradiction that Erica Fudge has described in the following terms: "We live with animals, we recognize them, we even name some of them, but at the same time we use them as if they were inanimate, as if they were objects. The illogic of this relationship is one that, on a day-to-day basis, we choose to evade, even refuse to acknowledge as present" (8).
10. As Wolfe puts it in a study published in 2010, "what began in the early to mid-1990s as a smattering of work in various fields on human-animal relations and their representation in various endeavors—literary, artistic, scientific—has, as we reach the end of the new millennium's first decade, galvanized into a vibrant emergent field of interdisciplinary inquiry" (*Posthumanism* 99).
11. For overviews of (sectors within) the field, see, for example, Adams and Donovan; "Animal Studies"; DeKoven and Lundblad; Gross and Vallely; Smith and Mitchell; Waldau; Weil; and Wolfe, *Posthumanism* and *Zoontologies*. Contributions linked to some of the approaches appearing in my incomplete list include Gruen (animal ethics); Serpell (human-animal studies); Philo and Wilbert (animal geography); Allen and Bekoff (cognitive ethology); Maran, Martinelli, and Turovski (zoosemiotics); and van den Hengel (zoography).
12. For evidence militating against the thesis of human distinctiveness, see Herzing and White, as well as Marino. On nonhuman personhood, see my previous discussion and also Cavalieri.
13. See Adams; Dunayer; Haraway; Le Guin; and Scholtmeijer.
14. For instance, see Rohman 5–9, 23–24.
15. For an example of this strand of scholarship, see Ingold.
16. See Kohn.
17. See Crist; Daston and Mitman; DeMello; Karlsson; Mitchell, Thompson, and Miles; and Tyler.
18. See Noë; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch; and Thompson.

19. See also Arluke and Sanders; and Peggs.
20. See Baker, *Picturing and Artist*; Broglio; Brown, "Speaking" and "Illustrated"; and Pick and Narraway.
21. For rights-based approaches see Opotow, Regan, and Singer, as well as note 2 above. In addition to Braidotti's essay, see Calarco's contribution to this issue for a critique of such rights-based approaches.
22. See "A Report on the Animal Turn" in Weil, 3–24.
23. Compare, in this respect, the effect that Maurice has on Espeseth and his wife when the dog rejoins the family at the end of "Pending Vegan." The dog's re-entry onto the marital scene requires triangulation with a nonhuman other, which results, in turn, in new relational possibilities for the human couple: "His wife touched the dog, too, and Pending Vegan felt her arm graze his stomach, the first time in months" (63).
24. See also Herman, "Modernist" 554–60.
25. In his essay in this issue Raymond Malewitz argues that animal agency can be registered in those interstitial moments in fictional texts when an animal, having escaped from or disrupted some more or less dominant anthropocentric plot, has not yet been recoded as a participant in another competing plot.
26. See also, in this same connection, Calarco's *Zoographies*.
27. Here one can compare Beckett's later bestiary, as presented in the Bryden volume on *Beckett and Animals* discussed by Robert McKay in his review essay in this issue. Compare also the post-postmodern animal compendium featuring in Lethem's story.
28. Walther's analysis highlights the pertinence of a road sign that Espeseth and his family pass while driving to SeaWorld in "Pending Vegan": "Near San Diego, a road sign showed a silhouette of a fleeing Mexican family, like moose or deer, not to be hit in their illegal flight across the freeway's five lanes" (61). This transspecies connection links up, in turn, with other aspects of the story that raise questions about the relationship between humans' treatment of animals and the oppression of ethnic minorities in human populations. Thus, Espeseth's perceptions of SeaWorld are interspersed with a thread of references to the Holocaust—with the sheer pervasiveness of the references ironizing the protagonist's failure to consider the possibility of shared conditions of oppression. By contrast, in *Eternal Treblinka*, whose title echoes a phrase first used by Isaac Bashevis Singer, Charles Patterson draws explicit parallels between the forms of oppression experienced by animals involved in industrialized farming practices, on the one hand, and by Jews subjected to the Nazis' genocidal practices during the Second World War, on the other hand.
29. In "Pending Vegan," the final sequence involving Maurice can be read as an instance of this taxon. Initially embedded in the "Pets Rule!" plot, in the context of which he has been assigned a different

name, that plot is then disrupted when the dog leaps off the stage into Espeseth's arms. Further, before Espeseth can rescript (or re-conscript) him into a new plot in which "the dog had come to honor the alpha in his former pack" (63), the language of undecidability comes directly into play: "Whether this [the dog's departure from the stage] was part of the show or not Pending Vegan was undecided" (63).

30. In this same connection, see Kendall-Morwick's discussion of how Flush's inability to grasp the significance of Barrett Browning's acts of writing is offset by his greater perceptual acuity in other domains, such as the domain of smell.
31. In "Pending Vegan," Lethem's protagonist can be read as a character who is unable to appreciate either the indistinction or the radical alterity that Calarco discusses in his essay. Espeseth's anxieties about transspecies encounters suggest that he fails to grasp "registers of relation" that connect him to other animals. On this reading, the closing reference to the webbing between his fingers, rather than emanating from the protagonist's focalization of events, is part of the narrator's ironizing assessment of Espeseth—more specifically, of the character's failure to recognize the extent of his affiliation with animals, including Maurice. By the same token, apart from his fleeting attempt to model the flamingos' *Umwelt*, Espeseth makes no effort to imagine potential qualitative differences between human and nonhuman worlds.

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