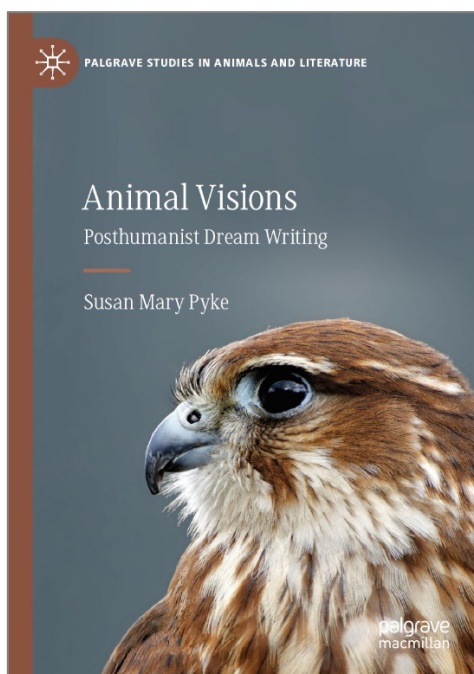


BOOKS

Susan Mary Pyke, *Animal Visions: Posthumanist Dream Writing*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 314 p.

Efforts to challenge our anthropocentric worldview so deeply imbued with ideas of human superiority are, rather fortunately, becoming increasingly prevalent as of late. Susan Mary Pyke's *Animal Visions* is one such challenger, attempting to explore and examine literary resistances to speciesism by critically engaging with texts that provide insight into "cross-species relations", and offer "less hierarchical understandings of animal cognition and sentience" (2). Needless to say, such an undertaking may inevitably come into conflict not only with the supremacist feelings of individual people, but with all the master narratives that have been implanting, justifying and continuously advocating for them to this day.

Our "fabricated conceit of privilege", as Pyke puts it (1), is nothing new; let us just think of Adam's God-given dominion over the earth and its creatures. It would not be farfetched to claim that such tales seem to be hardwired into the human



(sub)conscious, and their effects have become strikingly evident since global industrialisation and intensified animal agriculture. At a later point Pyke would compare all this—quite fittingly, insofar as the nature of the comparand is concerned—to a factory "reinforced with rivets so rusted-in, so deeply corroded, that they may infect [one's] wounded efforts to bring them undone" (281). Yet efforts are made, nonetheless, for how

else could change be brought about otherwise.

Before that, however, Pyke dedicates her comparatively lengthy introduction to presenting how such issues have been dealt with by her predecessors, with a particular focus on Descartes's arguments about animals being no more than instinctive, insentient machines, as well as the rather problematic exceptionality of humans as the only thinking beings—who also happen to be animals themselves. On the other end, much closer to Pyke's own views, are the ideas of

Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza, arguing that there is more to the world than what humans can or want to perceive of it, for their perspectives can never be as limitless as that of a god's—the best they can do is to strive towards such godly reason. This is linked by Pyke to Kant's claim about knowledge beginning with experience, as humans can only see and feel what is humanly possible. Yet the Cartesian conviction still persists and dominates, and no wonder, for how else could humanity get away with all the atrocities they commit without this sense of privileged entitlement backing it up. As Pyke reminds us, "the use of nonhuman animals for the physical and psychological sustenance of humans remains the global norm" (2).

In order to counter the violence resulting from such views, and to depict animals and animalities not as a "reduced category" but in a way that can make room for the "personhood" of the creatures in question to show through, Pyke suggests a sort of non-anthropocentric dream writing as the innovative literary resistance needed, which invites readers to reimagine themselves "as the vulnerable animals they are, co-dependent with other species in a shared and fragile world" (5). The practice itself builds on the works of French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous, arguing that dreams, where the inner self and the outside world are brought together, can "unsettle the given" by providing novel and unorthodox ways of seeing that world, opening new conceptual spaces. Cixous' demonstrations draw mainly on Derrida, with the "always-present ghost" of Freud lurking in the background (5). As the analysis of a person's dreams can help in reworking their self, Pyke claims, so

too can dream writing rework one's understanding of what it is to share the world with others that interact with that self. She goes even further, suggesting that open understandings of how people and other animals sharing a habitat dream alongside each other "may be part of the therapy this damaged world requires"—for if humans want to continue living with those animals in the face of the ongoing major extinction events, "new ways of being-together are required" (29).

The prime subject of Pyke's analysis is Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, as well as several derivative works responding to the novel, with a focus on their shared refusals to comply with the exclusionary, anthropo-theological and humanist thinking that has been outlined in the theoretical framework. Chapter Two, thus, goes on to expand on the discussion about dreams and visions featuring Derrida and Cixous, but with Brontë's novel in mind—which is, as Pyke argues, "both of dreams and like a dream" (90), where dreams do much more than provide "narratorial impetus" (124). Yet she also reminds us that, while dream writing certainly opens possibilities, it does not offer explications. While there is an almost inevitable return to the Freudian roots of the practice here—adding a psychological depth to the Romantic influences like Wordsworth's or Schelling's concerning prophetic dreams and divine messages, by exploring concepts such as displacement and condensation—Pyke ultimately dismisses Freud's ideas of hysteria, and his interpretations of "a regression into infantile egocentricity" (148) in favour of Cixous's, through which the ghostly dreams of the moor are read as "productive outpourings of resistance" instead (42).

Kathy Acker's "Obsession"—one of the two poetic responses discussed in detail here—is explicitly rejecting the “omniscient righteousness of Freudian psychoanalysis” (129). Beyond the efforts to overcome poorly-aged diagnoses, as well as to move steadily closer to the animal visions promised in the title of the volume, Pyke also discusses the entrapment of women reminiscent of the oppression of other races and species, as well as the problematics of the godly male voice offering directions to the dreamer “in a masterful and prophetic voice” (25). These issues are tackled in the second poem analysed by Pyke, Anne Carson's “The Glass Essay”, where the oppressed speaker ultimately walks away from her psychotherapist, leaving behind the masculinist space and fatherly Law that was immobilising her—to embrace her dreams (139-41).

Chapter Three links these visionary dreamscapes to the Romantic-Victorian-Gothic fascination with the supernatural, with a particular interest in the three Cathy-hauntings present in *Wuthering Heights*—in the window during Lockwood's stay in her room, coming *from* the moor; the bedridden Cathy's encounter with her lost self in the mirror, prompting an escape *to* the moor; and, lastly, the wanderings with Heathcliff, finally *on* the moor (187). Pyke examines how these hauntings are revisited, to varying degrees, by the films directed by William Wyler and Peter Kosminsky, and also looks at how they are accompanied by Brontë's own apparitions—echoes “lingering around the moors like a myth” (164)—in literary adaptations including Carson's poem from before, and two novels—Jane Urquhart's *Changing Heaven* and Stevie Davies' *Four Dreamers and Emily*. All such hauntings involve the mingling of two worlds

by the crossing of their boundaries—occurring both on the meta-level of adaptations and in-story, by letting ghosts in through the window. Insofar as the latter type is concerned, Pyke draws attention to the fact that while traditionally these represent the clashing of the domestic female interior and the undomesticated male exterior, here the exact opposite happens, causing a “strategic confusion”, as Cathy's ghost is seeking entry into the house where Heathcliff is being trapped—both ultimately wanting only to roam the moors together (171-2). Enclosures here, Pyke argues, are there for the breaking (172).

The interconnected relations between people and their surroundings—in this case that of Cathy, Heathcliff, and the Yorkshire moor—are the main topic of Chapter Four, brought together in the form of a co-affective state dubbed by Pyke as “moor love” (195). Mapping the different, selfish ways in which characters like Lockwood, young Catherine or Joseph relate to the moor, and contrasting them with Cathy's “more equitable” responses to it, Pyke argues that she represents a true co-participant in a non-hierarchical relationship (200-1). With Heathcliff—his being not only Cathy's lover and foster brother but as much a part of her as she is part of him—they merge and split and merge again (170), “partially entangled and partially separate [...] in the always intra-active dynamic world that is part him, part Cathy and part the weather” (210). Keeping these in mind, with the help of the previously mentioned adaptations and the introduction of yet another one—Luis Buñuel's surrealist film *Abismos de Pasión*—Pyke goes on to argue how the moor with its wuthering winds activates an awareness of co-affectivity that turns Wordsworth's “human-

centric breezes into sweet nothings" (214), while the works of Arnold and Buñuel, cinematic as they are, raise this to a wholly different level where the audience "may become part sensing animal" accompanying the characters through wind and rain (232).

Nature here—unlike the overtly female muse of the Romantics—is neither obsequious nor benevolent; it is not there to heal, awe or please the human, Pyke claims (22), for people are simply no more deserving of such special treatment—servitude, really—than other animals (268). This quasi-cosmic indifference of nature is the subject of the fifth chapter, "Respecting and Trusting the Beast", exploring the apparent contradictions of the canine-equine Heathcliff—both friend and subject to affection yet, at the same time, a brute and bitter enemy—whose conduct towards people and other animals, often equally cruel, is a surprisingly complex issue. Pyke's explanation is comparatively simple, however: "Heathcliff is an animal amongst other animals", one that obeys his individual predilections, not speciesist assumptions, and who consequently refuses to privilege people above other creatures (243-4). Sharing a habitat with animals, standing vigil, howling, choosing to be as dirty as he deems fit, can

all be traced back to this very idea. Cathy's declaration saying, "I am Heathcliff" is read, thus, as an acknowledgement that she too can never be severed from the world she inhabits, and that both are "as much animals as any creature of the moor" (244).

While texts like these can undoubtedly serve as eye-openers to many—and do; we need look no further than the dozens of responses, textual or otherwise, examined in this volume—Pyke is still well-aware that no systemic change can or will happen immediately, or that the damages caused by our "disrespecting" and "untrusting" actions can be healed just through the act of writing or reading (278). The movements these can generate "cannot be dictated or predicted", she admits, for a shift in the desired direction takes time, and sustained attention. Yet she remains optimistic when making statements like "even the most minor gesture will have an impact" (279). She talks of a certain kind of *grace*, animal grace, in the sixth and last part of the book, on which the maintenance and growth of our slowly budding awareness of the sentience and cognition of non-humans depends. Engaging with such texts is itself an act of dreaming to Pyke, from which the human can wake with their understanding of the world reshaped—if they are willing.

ZSOLT OPRA

MA student, Babeş-Bolyai University,

Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Email: zsold.opra@stud.ubbcluj.ro