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And say the animal responded . . . in Klingon?

Vint, Sherryl. *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*.
Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010. 269 pp. \$95.

A question that once might have arisen only amid the nerdiest scenes of late-night dorm life now seems to be gaining traction in animal theory: what if you spoke to an animal, and say the animal responded, only in the *Star Trek*-inspired language Klingon? Pushing Jacques Derrida's famous proposition ("And say the animal responded?") to describe her dog's precise, intentional, and intense modes of communication as those of a Klingon warrior princess, Donna Haraway's more recent investigations of companion species extend a longstanding assumption that science fiction offers the best suggestions for transforming ideas about non/human relations. So what might systematic research into this popular genre reveal?

The first book-length study to take up this challenge, Sherryl Vint's *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*, shows how current debates in philosophy and literary studies regarding animals and animality have never been far from science fiction, a popular genre defined by its concern with technological and scientific transformations of social relations that include, but are not limited to, human lives. Cleverly written both to introduce seasoned researchers in animal studies to the study of science fiction, as well as to clarify the relevance of this small sub-field of literary studies to much broader and growing interdisciplinary discussions, *Animal Alterity* makes the case that some exceptional writers in this genre offer ideal models for "find[ing] a way to connect with and respect alterity without reducing it to an image of self" (225).

One of the greatest strengths of this book is its structure, which allows Vint to sidestep the pitfalls of engaging in a battle for legitimacy within the discipline of literary studies that all too often lend a shrill, defensive tone to science fiction research. Chapters are organized to identify common themes as equally important to both science fiction and animal studies, including:

the identification of a metaphysics of subjectivity that excludes animals at the root of many of humanity's problems; a concern with environmental

destruction and the loss of a livable world for humans and other creatures, a recurrence of war with fellow creatures, human and non-human; the threat of human annihilation and a vision – sometimes fearful, sometimes optimistic – about another species replacing us as the dominant form of life; [and] themes of isolation, loneliness and alienation that are encapsulated in humans' relationships with other species. (208)

Solidly grounded in contemporary literary and animal theory as well, *Animal Alterity* advances posthumanist investigations – especially those of Rosi Braidotti, N. Katherine Hayles, and Barbara Herrnstein-Smith – into different ways of conceptualizing human subjectivity in relation to other life forms through close readings of a breathtaking array of science fiction texts, some familiar but many arcane, and all explicitly including characters perceived as animals.

While the exclusive focus on literary forms like novels and short stories offers no direct answer to my opening Klingon question, this structural decision enhances the argument by enabling *Animal Alterities* to illustrate key developments in the history of science fiction writing. Unearthing often obscure predecessors and antecedents to popular and critically successful science fiction texts like H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1898), Vint aligns the different ways in which science fiction writers have addressed similar questions about species and otherness, and her analyses suggest that the stories mutate across time as a result of otherwise seemingly disparate developments in feminism, poststructuralist theory, and scientific ethology. Questions about how the migrations of these narratives to visual media forms like film, television, and graphic novels might influence or reflect these content changes remain open in the book, occasionally emerging in notes and citations as invitations to further research.

The sheer range of literary examples representing “different historical and national contexts” is another aspect that makes this book important, and allows it to do more than just “illustrate the richness of sf's engagement with the question of the animal” (21). As Vint notes in the Introduction, science fiction has long been understood as critical to utopian thinking at pivotal historical moments, particularly as a means of responding to (if not intervening in) the global unevenness of scientific and technological achievements. Because the large and small animal revolutions imagined through science fiction occupy a weird space/ time relation – at once relegated to the past, at least, of literary history virtually upon publication, yet categorically staking

claims in the future by projecting forward new visions of species life — the power of these stories may never quite be able to be articulated in the familiar terms of human sociality.

However, with the particular sequences of authors and stories of remodeling human subjectivity that Vint presents here, it seems that there is much more to say about the emerging force of feminist, antiracist, and postcolonial voices in not simply finding new audiences for the genre, but also renewing its relevance for thinking about human-animal relations at the turn of the twenty-first century. Again, this is not a weakness so much as a clear indication that *Animal Alterities* boldly goes where no one has gone before, in order to clear paths for ongoing investigations in a number of fruitful directions.