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Serving the Moral Agenda

Tom Regan and Andrew Linzey, eds. *Other Nations: Animals in Modern Literature*. Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2010. xx + 214 pp. \$29.95 pbk.

I am teaching first year college composition this semester using a non-fiction animal studies anthology called *Social Creatures: A Human and Animal Studies Reader*, edited by Clifton P. Flynn (Lantern Books, 2008). We use its contents as springboards to analytic, documented essays, and the students find plenty to say: it has worked pretty well. It may not be an ideal introduction to animal studies — *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, edited by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (Berg, 2007) comes closer but it demands more reading and analytic skill than my students yet have. At my school, the second semester of the sequence uses literature for its inspiration so I have been looking for a suitable anthology with an animal studies slant. I had high hopes for this relatively small and affordable paperback by two eminent scholars in animal studies, but was disappointed.

The collection has a twenty-page preface by Linzey, followed by an eighteen-page introduction by Regan. The preface explains the rationale for the book: to serve high school and college courses on animals in literature, to offer “writing of the highest quality” (xviii), focusing “almost exclusively on modern literature, especially fiction” that will be “accessible, even to newcomers to the field” (xix). The introduction offers an overview of the individual sections and selections. An overview of what human-animal studies is and of the major questions with which it grapples would also have been welcome in a text meant to appeal to newcomers. The readings themselves are organized into seven sections: “Humans Encounter Other Animals” (two selections), “Other Animals Encounter Humans” (three selections), “Other Animals as Companions” (three), “Other Animals as Prey” (four), “Other Animals as Tools” (three), “Other Animals as Food” (five), and an “Epilogue” with one selection. Among the authors represented are Stephen Crane, William Saroyan, George Orwell, Bobbie Ann Mason, Ernest Hemingway, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Alice Walker. Brief biographies of the authors of the selections follow, and then the acknowledgements.

Of the twenty-one selections, eight are non-fiction, all are prose, none is longer than fourteen pages, and their cited copyrights lie between 1896 and 1996: this is a very restrictive range of works, and the selections are not quite representative of “modern

literature, especially fiction" promised in the preface. A number of selections are excerpts or edited, although this is not always easy to detect, nor is it easy to tell original publication dates: for instance the excerpt from Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* is copyrighted 1967, the date of its translation, while the work was first published in Russian in 1852. Not only would this have been useful for readers to know, it also puts into question any rationale about restricting the selections to modern works. One must rely on the acknowledgements at the end of the book to find out dates of publication and to determine if the selections are complete, edited, or excerpted, and even then, one may not find out. The reader is also left with a number of more substantial questions: why is there no poetry at all? why is there so much non-fiction? why is there an intended focus on modern literature, and, if that is justified, why is it not held to with consistency? These problems suggest a lack of concern for literary matters.

In the preface Linzey may provide an explanation for this lack of concern. The anthology is meant, he says, to be "text that employs the pedagogical power of literature, including fiction, to help illumine our moral relations with animals" (xviii). In other words, as I see the project, the literature has been chosen to serve the moral agenda rather than to interrogate and expand it: its existence is very much secondary to the primary focus on morality. This diminishes the value of literature and restricts the role of the reader and analyst: the selections become mere tools. I can imagine that this volume might serve as a part of a general course on animal studies, one that also included a collection of essays on the moral, philosophical, religious, sociological, or anthropological aspects of the field. I cannot imagine being able to use it in a literature course. There is too little here to carry a whole literature course, even at the high school level, and the range is too narrow to offer any indication of how literature deals with the issues of animal studies. There are certainly some fine works included: the highlights are Bobbie Ann Mason's "Lying Doggo" (1982), Isaac Bashevis Singer's "The Slaughterer" (credited as 1983, but originally published 1967), and Alice Walker's (non-fiction) "Am I Blue" (no date). Other choices seemed less useful. I was surprised to see Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" (1936), one of the most widely anthologized essays in English. Cleveland Amory's "Pilling the Cat" (1987) seemed too trivial to include; Hemingway's "Pleasures of Hunting" was a questionable choice when "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936) would have provided much more thought; and Oriana Fallaci's "The Dead Body and the Living Brain" (1967) was both heavy-handed and incomplete. A more ambitious collection would have provided a very rich, complex, wide-ranging, and probing experience for students and for more general readers as well. It is a shame that the opportunity has been lost. I hope someone with

more interest in the potential of literature to expand our thinking rather than merely mirror it will produce a successful anthology: the need is there.