

A Dino Fix

*“Linus the Vegetarian T. Rex”
as a Picturebook for
the Anthropocene*

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Abstract: In this essay, I combine ecofeminism, critical animal studies, and vegan studies to analyse the depictions of dinosaurs in a vegan picturebook, Robert Neubecker’s *Linus the Vegetarian T. Rex*. Because picturebook dinosaurs, like the titular Linus, can mobilize the intense “conceptual interest” in dinosaurs found among young children, I argue that a co-reading of *Linus* can help initiate conversations and facilitate learning about difficult “adult” concepts, such as evolution, extinction, and the Anthropocene, in children primarily but not limited to ages four to six. As compared to largely anthropocentric mainstream children’s literature, a vegan picturebook like *Linus* can also intervene in early childhood education before children are socialized into dominant anthroparchal ideologies that normalize the consumption of animals and contribute to global warming; moreover, it can promote positive attitudes toward science and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education. Due to its ambiguous and open-ended messaging, as well as its imaginative approach of enlivening dinosaur fossils at a natural history museum, Neubecker’s *Linus* arguably encourages an ethical stance toward living nonhuman animals and thus offers a blueprint for “a picturebook for the Anthropocene”: challenging the more obviously reductive instrumentalist depiction of dinosaurs in mainstream children’s literature; raising awareness about the climate crisis by promoting veganism and vegetarianism while also interrogating gendered assumptions about plant-eating; and combating sexist and adultist attitudes toward science education.

Keywords: *Anthropocene; children; dinosaurs; interspecies empathy; picturebooks*

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[M]any adults displace the full impact of climate change to future generations. In contrast to this, children who were born into the 21st century [...] are growing up in the context of a different sense of urgency, of a world already out of control.

Margaret Somerville and Sarah Powell,
“Researching with Children of the Anthropocene”

But we are not all in the Anthropocene together – the poor and the dispossessed, the children and non-human animals are far more in it than others.

Karen Malone, *Children in the Anthropocene*

Who doesn't love dinosaurs? An entire culture industry fosters and caters to a phenomenon that can rightly be called “a dino obsession”. In the popular imagination, such as the *Jurassic Park* franchise, dinosaurs figure as monsters or legendary prehistoric creatures. In children's media, they are often pictured as anthropomorphic talking animals. Take, for example, the titular dinosaur in the late 1980s animated series *Denver, the Last Dinosaur*, with his signature sunglasses, or Baby Sinclair in Jim Henson's *Dinosaurs* and the amiable purple-coloured T. rex in *Barney & Friends* in the early 1990s, all three disneyfied, “culturally-netenized”,¹ and meant to evoke favourable reactions from children through their resemblance to toys (Baby is, appropriately, an animatronic puppet while Barney is a human in a furry suit). To young children, anthropomorphic dinosaurs in picturebooks can also be loads of fun, as their human-like traits make these animals more “relatable”.²

In this paper, I explore how our cultural obsession with dinosaurs can be used to teach young children about the Anthropocene, taking as a case study Robert Neubecker's *Linus the Vegetarian T. Rex*, a children's picturebook about an anthropomorphic vegetarian *Tyrannosaurus rex* who comes to life at a natural history museum and

1 Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, 181.

2 Young et al., “Empathy for Animals”, 335.

befriends a human girl. Picturebook dinosaurs, like the titular Linus, mobilize young children’s “dino obsession”, an intense “conceptual interest” typically found among four- to six-year-olds.³ I propose, then, that a co-reading of *Linus* can help initiate conversations and facilitate learning about difficult “adult” concepts, such as evolution, extinction, and the Anthropocene, and also seek out productive, age-appropriate ways to collaboratively address these urgent environmental concerns with children aged four to six. (*Linus* is recommended by the publisher for ages four to eight.)

Bringing dinosaurs into the discourse of the Anthropocene—the current geological epoch characterized by the “growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere”⁴—may seem counterintuitive at first. The word “dinosaur” is colloquially associated with being outdated and obsolete. Dinosaurs are extinct and can only be empirically studied through body or trace fossils. But they can also be accessed discursively through visual or textual media. More so than living nonhuman animals, dinosaurs confirm Steve Baker’s claim that, when it comes to animals, the “real” and the “symbolic” are interconnected: “Culture does not allow unmediated access to the animals themselves”, with cultural representations mixing “history, culture, public opinion, [and] received ideas.”⁵

From a scientific perspective, however, dinosaurs are anything but *always already* dead monsters, even as they defy expectations we might have about living animals. As the last apex predators to perish in the fifth mass extinction, dinosaurs are the logical paradigm to think through evolution, sustainability, and extinction, and also to rewrite the history of the Anthropocene less anthropocentrically by reminding humans that, while they may be the current apex predator, they are not the first and likely not the last. Katherine Hayles describes this as “posthuman terror”, the fear that humanity will join “the dinosaurs as a species that once ruled the earth but is now obsolete.”⁶

3 Alexander et al., “Conceptual Interests”, 325.

4 Crutzen and Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene’”, 17.

5 Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, 10, 25.

6 Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 283.

This is a cautionary tale in which humans are simultaneously the culprits in power and the victims powerless in the face of forces larger than they are: global warming, thinning atmosphere, asteroids. It is through this “terror”, too, that we come closest to sharing the dinosaurs’ animality, however culturally mediated or even debatable that animality may be: besides being our distant evolutionary relatives, dinosaurs force us to confront the possibility that we may not survive the sixth mass extinction. To read stories about dinosaurs allegorically, as signifying something else, risks what Baker calls “denying the animal”,⁷ that is, the real existence of the pictured animal. Simply put, a dead dinosaur is not unreal or symbolic, and in that death lies buried an animal as well as a bit of ecological wisdom.

Engaging children in a subject they are passionate about can foster empathy across the species divide and introduce them to other, less familiar concepts, while also promoting pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour.⁸ *Linus the Vegetarian T. Rex* is notable for the way that it challenges the more obviously reductive instrumentalist depiction of dinosaurs in mainstream children’s books, where they are often absurdly anthropomorphized and used to teach human lessons to human children, such as how to count or behave. Although *Linus* is instrumentalized insofar as his encounter with a human girl is meant to tell a (human) story, the picturebook’s objective transcends species-chauvinist concerns: by (mis)casting the legendarily ferocious Cretaceous-age predator as a child-friendly vegetarian, *Linus the Vegetarian T. Rex* foregrounds the importance of eco-sustainability present in many, though not all, countercultural vegan children’s books. With the latter, *Linus* also shares a focus on ethical dietary choices raised during mealtimes, though it differs in its more mainstream publication (by an imprint of Simon & Schuster).⁹

7 Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, 136-7.

8 Lithoxidou et al., “Developing Empathy”; Ernst et al., “Young Children’s Empathy”.

9 While most vegan children’s books tend to be published by smaller, independent presses or self-published, like Julie Hausen’s *We All Love* or Kate Foster’s *Vegan Nursery Rhymes*, *Linus*’s publishing pedigree belies the book’s marginalized status: in Amazon’s (admittedly not unbiased) Best Sellers Rank, Neubecker’s book is at no. 340,249 (no. 993 in Children’s Dinosaur Books). In contrast, Marcus Pfister’s mainstream hit *The Rainbow Fish* sits at no. 331.

By promoting veganism and vegetarianism (henceforth: *veg*anism*) over environmentally damaging carnivorism, it can also help raise awareness about the evidenced connection between meat consumption and global warming. Finally, by pairing the nonhuman animal with a human girl, *Linus* brings into perspective a host of *veg*an* and ecofeminist concerns, linking “the oppression of women and the domination of nature”¹⁰ with gendered perceptions of “the other”: the “gender gap” and historic underrepresentation of women in science¹¹; anti-science prejudice¹²; the cultural associations around the image of the male scientist and the patriarchal ideologies informing the study of nature; and the denigration of *veg*anism* through mainstream anti-vegan discourses, which associate it with self-abnegation, restriction, and malnutrition (e.g., “the limpness of ‘lettuce eating’”¹³), which can further be said to carry gendered and anti-feminist overtones given the western cultural identification of meat-eating with masculinity.

Accordingly, this paper is organized in four parts: I begin with a summary and analysis of Neubecker’s *Linus*, considering in particular the text’s open-ended, ambiguous messaging and its use of whimsical logic and humour; then, I place *Linus* in the context of mainstream children’s literature and culture, homing in on the role of anthropomorphism in the depiction of dinosaurs; third, I consider *Linus* specifically as a vegan picturebook from a theoretical perspective informed by ecofeminism, critical animal studies, and vegan studies; and finally, I argue that the human–animal friendship at the centre of this picturebook challenges gendered and adultist assumptions, not only about *veg*anism* but also about science and scientists.

Due to its ambiguity and open-endedness, as well as the imaginative approach combining fossils, dinosaurs, human children, and science/natural history museums with *veg*anism*, *Linus* may be regarded as a sort of blueprint of a picturebook for the Anthropocene,

10 Glotfelty and Fromm, *Ecocriticism Reader*, xxiv.

11 See, e.g., Beede et al., “Women in STEM”; Skolnik, “Why Are Girls”.

12 Philipp-Muller et al., “Why Are People Antiscience”.

13 Cole and Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals*, 22.

a text to start an intergenerational child–adult dialogue about non-human animal and environmental concerns while, at the same time, promoting veg*anism and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education to and for young girls. The “fix” in the title of this paper is thus also a deliberate pun: on children’s dinosaur “fix”-ation (and the related dinosaur addict’s “fix” to a craving for more dinosaurs); a sorely needed “fix” (solution) to anthropogenic environmental damage; and also, informally, a “fix” (tough situation) that is the climate crisis.

Granted, children’s books are written, edited, published, and typically selected for purchase and circulation by adults. Because of the adults’ role in producing children’s books, they are “*inevitably* didactic in some way”; in the words of Peter Hunt, a pioneer in the academic study of children’s literature, “even the most child-friendly [book] is adopting some implicit attitudes”.¹⁴ Yet while being an “adult” issue, ecological sustainability is also child-centred, particularly for those born in the twenty-first century who are the most vulnerable and deeply impacted. To that end, I include my own experience of co-reading this book with Freya, my five-year-old daughter, as a way of encouraging other eco-minded adults to co-learn about the Anthropocene with children. Aspiring toward the critical lens of what childhood studies advocate John Wall terms “childism”, I assume that children like Freya are “empowered meaning-making agents”¹⁵ capable of co-producing knowledge and valuable insights.

I. *Linus the Vegetarian T. Rex*: Summary and Analysis

Weighing about half a kilogram (1 lb), Neubecker’s *Linus the Vegetarian T. Rex* is an ANSI letter-sized (8.5" × 11") hardcover book, with illustrations by the author rendered in ink on watercolour paper and then digitally coloured. Integral to the book’s material haptics, the vibrant images on its glossy, predominantly bleed pages are inviting and stimulating; colours range from tans and greens in the background to the bright blue, yellow, and copper of Linus’s plump body

¹⁴ Hunt, “Instruction and Delight”, 14.

¹⁵ Wall, “Childism”, 262, 257.

Robert Neubecker

LINUS THE VEGETARIAN T. REX



Beach Lane Books • New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

Figure 1:

Title page from *Linus the Vegetarian T. Rex* by Robert Neubecker.

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and the human protagonist Ruth Ann's blood-orange dress, which resonates with the warm orange hues of other friendly animals the two protagonists meet: the herd of iguanodons and Ellen, the triceratops, along with her children. The sheets are relatively thin and subject to tearing, making the somewhat unwieldy large book more appropriate for co-reading with an older reader than a typical board book, which is less vulnerable to inexperienced, sticky little fingers. *Linus* shares this paper quality with most vegan children's books I have consulted, likely because they are meant for kindergarten-age children (or older) who are more socially aware and independent than toddlers, and are therefore more likely to question their own and others' beliefs and behaviours.

The plot is straightforward and can be summarized in a single sentence: it is a story about a fictional vegetarian *Tyrannosaurus rex* who befriends and has lunch with a human girl. *Linus* opens with an image of this child, Ruth Ann MacKenzie, proudly holding up her membership card to the Museum of Natural History. During her visit to this museum, Ruth Ann enters the "Cretaceous Surprises" exhibit, where her favourite dinosaurs come to life. The first thing Ruth Ann says upon meeting Linus, "a gigantic *Tyrannosaurus rex*", is: "Please don't eat me!" In the illustration accompanying this encounter, Linus's sharp-teethed mouth is gaped open over the girl's terrified face, her body perched on one foot as though blown away by his forceful breath; the text, meanwhile, announces his friendship and invitation to a shared meal, a notable irony. Along with other vegan picturebooks set during mealtimes, *Linus* thus teaches children "how to eat correctly, that is, to put it simply, what to eat and what not to eat or who eats whom".¹⁶ As "powerful socializing events", shared mealtimes make individual dietary practices visible.¹⁷ In the case of veg*anism, the traditional food chain is re-imagined so that predators are no longer presented "as eating subjects" hierarchically superior to "certain animals" who serve "as objects to be eaten"¹⁸; hence, experiences meant to reaffirm community membership and a sense

16 Daniel, *Voracious Children*, 4; cf. Andrianova, "friends, not food".

17 Daniel, *Voracious Children*, 15.

18 Daniel, *Voracious Children*, 14–15, quoting psychologist Paul Rozin.

of belonging can actually expose differences and turn into invitations, or even demands, to justify those differences—something that could be especially stressful for children. In contrast to Dan Bodenstein and Ron Robrahn’s *Steven the Vegan*, a notable vegan picture-book where the young Steven is asked by his classmates to explain why he is a vegan, the burden falls not on the human child but on Linus the dinosaur to justify his diet.

As it is lunch time, Linus asks Ruth Ann to join him, and his predatorial identity, already mollified through anthropomorphic infantilization (big round eyes, short arms, and stubby feet), is further dismantled by the veg*an reappropriation of the rhetoric of hunting: the vegetarian dinosaur “*attacked* [...] a patch of arugula”; “*stalked* [...] some yummy broccoli”; and “*pounced* [...] on a plump tomato” (my emphasis). When Linus greets rather than eats a herd of iguanodons, Ruth Ann exclaims: “Didn’t you want to eat those guys?” Linus replies: “I wouldn’t dream of it [...] They’re my friends!” The girl is understandably shocked when Linus denies his identity as a dinosaur who is “fierce” and “a predator”; he says, instead, that he is “A VERY POPULAR ONE!” Rather than eating other animals, Linus befriends them, thereby inviting Ruth Ann and, by extension, other children to treat nonhuman animals with equal respect. For those not just veg*an-curious but fully vegan, this would serve as a re-affirmation of their beliefs and practices, however un-“POPULAR” they might otherwise seem.

It is only when accosted by a band of velociraptors that Linus takes charge, picks up Ruth Ann, sets her at the top of a tree, and proceeds to “ROA[R] AND ROA[R] AND ROA[R]”; even then, Linus refuses to be characterized as “*ferocious*”: ““You’re my hero, Linus!” said Ruth Ann. ‘Nonsense!’ said Linus. ‘I’m just me—a very big, very brave, very VEGETARIAN *Tyrannosaurus rex!*’” After this brief encounter with danger, “Linus and Ruth Ann spend the afternoon munching on veggies and chatting about all things Cretaceous”, before she finally steps through the curtain, purchases a stuffed T. rex at the museum shop, and sets out on her next adventure. “She had enough time for one more exhibit. But now she wasn’t sure what to expect”, the penultimate page reads, as Ruth Ann is shown passing by the entomology

exhibit with a glass case full of butterflies, and on to the final illustration with planets and the sign reading “Space”, where a small green Martian cooly peeks out from behind an exhibition stall.

Picturebooks typically contain simple texts along with visuals, and pictures are such an integral component of meaning-making that in recent childhood studies the compound form “picturebook” has become preferable. Perry Nodelman notes that written texts meant for younger readers are commonly believed to “need the pictures to shadow them, to show and tell all that the written words cannot say”.¹⁹ Moreover, at this age, children are still learning hierarchical valuation and other reading strategies from adults: who is at the centre, who is named, and therefore who is important. Especially the younger ones, however, “tend to scan a picture with equal attention to all parts”; “the ability to pick out and focus on the human at the centre is therefore a learned activity”, Nodelman argues, “and one that reinforces important cultural assumptions, not just about the relative value of particular objects, but also about the general assumption that objects do indeed have different values and do therefore require different degrees of attention”.²⁰ This prepares the ground for less anthropocentric reading experiences.

Whereas the text of Neubecker’s *Linus* is only 407 words long, it spans a total of 38 pages, not counting the title page. The picturebook’s illustrations feature the titular dinosaur in the centre of the dustjacket and on 29 further pages, with his body spread over two pages nine times, and with three of these iterations in the form of a stuffed animal purchased at the museum giftshop. Ruth Ann dominates the opening page and appears on twenty other pages, most often alongside Linus, who towers over her, as well as on the front inside flap of the dustjacket next to her dinosaur friend. In terms of page numbers and not just size, Linus prevails. In the middle fold, for example, his gigantic bluish-green face — with neotenic green eyes and sharp teeth revealing bits of partially-eaten lettuce — occupies close to two-thirds of the visual space; the tiny heads of the two

19 Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult*, 13.

20 Nodelman, “Decoding the Images”, 73.

velociraptors, peeking out on the left, are barely noticeable in comparison, and Ruth Ann, while foregrounded and speaking (“You’re supposed to be a predator!”), is also off-set. Hermeneutic strategies like these can help foster pro-environmental behaviour by decentering the human and re-focusing the young reader’s attention on the nonhuman muddle comprised of similarly relatable anthropomorphic herbivores (a triceratops family and a herd of iguanodons) and two threatening velociraptors, who sneak up on the pair of friends in a subtle way that encourages the child’s eye to travel from the centre and toward the margins. A child is also likely to question who is more or less important and therefore deserves more or less attention, based on the colour, size, position, and proximity of the human and nonhuman representations.

When I co-read *Linus* with my daughter, Freya notices a variety of smaller dinosaurs peeking through the high grasses; she compares one of them to the more familiar frog. While she may be focalizing through a fellow human girl, Freya is evidently more drawn to the surrounding nonhuman animals. Unlike me, she does not pick up on the humorously undermined expert stance taken by Ruth Ann at the museum: according to the text, “[Ruth Ann] knew all about the Ice Age. She knew all about the oceans”; the illustration adds to this a dimension of the know-it-all, whose assumed pose and eagerness to teach others is not welcomed by the adult museumgoers based on their annoyed facial expressions. George Bodmer writes that, beyond a mere gloss, pictures are often in “tension” with words, with “the illustration offer[ing] a ‘text’ in itself, which always tells a slightly different story”.²¹ This is also a “remind[er] that an implied reader is made up of a multitude of selves” and of “different age groups to which the text may simultaneously appeal.”²²

Further, Freya asks about the velociraptors hiding in the bushes; it is only after she points this out that I trace a foreshadowing strategy through the visuals, showing the velociraptors spying on Linus and

21 Bodmer, “Approaching the Illustrated Text”, 78, 72.

22 Knoepfmacher, Introduction, 6–7. This makes it challenging for librarians, publishers, and teachers to determine the age level for any given children’s or young adult book.

Ruth Ann, the bright green sclera of their disembodied eyeballs popping out against the dark grasses, several pages before their heads and the rest of their bodies become visible and the two are “ROARED” into submission. As an adult with prior knowledge of carnivorous dinosaurs, I assume that the T. rex’s predatorial identity must play some part in the text, so I wait for the parade of veggies and tolerance to transition to something more confrontational; in contrast, in our first few co-readings, Freya had almost no prior knowledge of the T. rex, but built anticipation through visual cues while scanning the entire visual canvas without her attention skewing toward the centre, as might that of a fully socialized reader.

The same applies to dinosaur extinction. When turning to the page with the reconstructed dinosaur bones in Neubecker’s picturebook, Freya has asked repeatedly: “Why are the dinosaurs (like) skeletons?” At that point we had not yet had an occasion for a serious conversation about death; her first encounter with death was, therefore, at the species level, through a visual encounter with dinosaur bones. Shaped by her socioeconomic status as a white child growing up as a vegetarian in the Upper Midwestern United States, with access to progressive, pro-environmental, science-based education both in and outside the home, Freya’s experience is by no means illustrative of all children. But it does resemble the experience of writer Kristin Poling’s son, whose first encounter with death was similarly mediated by dinosaur skeletons when learning about the fifth mass extinction. Poling wonders whether this experience may not become a common one, that of “encounter[ing] the idea of death as a species event, and only later as an individual experience and tragedy”, at least among “precariously privileged” upper- and middle-class American children, who are introduced by their parents to the realities of mass extinction and climate change. As questions of extinction and survival push the boundaries of secular parenting, Poling recommends turning to science-based picturebooks, such as *Grandmother Fish: A Child’s First Book of Evolution*, *Our Family Tree: An Evolution Story*, and *Where Do Mountains Come From, Momma?*, which are meant to teach children about the Anthropocene: specifically, to understand “ourselves as individuals in the context of vast planetary

systems and species identities”; to foster cross-species empathy in children, “not just for cuddly pandas, but for mucky lakes and poisonous frogs”; and then to transform this into action, “help[ing] children become responsible stewards of a threatened planet”.²³

The need for an Anthropocene education is borne out by our further co-reading. Recently, when Freya and I turned to the last of the four pages with an erupting volcano in the background, the final image before Ruth Ann exits the exhibit, Freya paused: “But why is the volcano exploding?” Rather than supplying an answer, I encouraged her to respond: “Why do *you* think it’s exploding?” “When volcanoes exploded, ash covered the earth and the dinosaurs died. The volcano and also the asteroid. I learned it at school”, she added, “when we learned about dinosaurs. But maybe the volcano erupted and created the land, and the dinosaurs were safe...?”

Children’s literature can help children work through serious issues, such as suffering and death.²⁴ Animal suffering and death are anthropocentric standard fictional devices that are used for didactic and/or aesthetic purposes, such as the wolf’s literal scalding in *The Three Little Pigs*.²⁵ This is put in perspective by dinosaurs, who are dead and extinct, and whose fossil remains can be transformed into an opportunity to reflect on the precarity of life not just for dinosaurs or humans, but for all living, and especially critically endangered, species. It is important that we never see any bones identified as belonging to Linus or the other Cretaceans in the exhibit; the closest is Linus’s footprint in the mud. Dinosaur deaths are not represented; both their enlivenment and oblivion are framed/contained by the exhibit’s curtains. Although both the T. rex and triceratops skeletons are featured in the opening pages, along with those of the diplodocus, pterodactyl, and stegosaurus, the iguanodons and velociraptors integral to the plot are missing. The museum reconstructions are disconnected from the enlivened creatures; yet their deaths are still a fossilized fact. It is precisely this tension that Freya articulates

23 Poling, “How to Talk to Children”.

24 Haynes and Murriss, *Picturebooks*, 4.

25 Andrianova, “Anthropomorphism”, 11.

in her wish to rewrite the extinction by turning lava into constructive igneous rock, rather than sun-blocking ash ushering in an ice age.

Present in four illustrations in *Linus*, the image of the erupting volcano may serve as an opening to a discussion of the volcanoes erupting around us today—or of rising sea levels, melting icecaps, and weather extremes, which might otherwise remain in the proverbial background even as we figuratively and literally embrace our nonhuman companions, as does Ruth Ann in the final image of the Cretaceous exhibit. In the vignette taking up two-thirds of the page, Linus is shown hugging Ruth Ann’s small body, both their eyes closed in a moment of intimacy; in the top left corner is the erupting volcano, in the top right—the sun setting above a cave with a curtained door and a sign promising “Future Surprises”. The caption below reads: “Then it was time to say good-bye. Ruth Ann stepped through the curtain...” Freya’s wishful thinking that the volcano not be the cause of dinosaur extinction is far from naïve; it’s a step toward a more holistic ethics of planetary care.

Indeed, with their special kind of whimsical logic, picturebooks can help demonstrate the critical value of error, humour, and ambiguity, especially when presenting young children with difficult concepts. Joanna Haynes and Karin Murriss note that picturebooks “bend, stretch, or break the rules, and in this play with conventions, a space between the ‘real’ world and other possible worlds is opened up”; it is humour and play, they write, that “make picturebooks suitable for philosophical enquiry as they make it possible to become self-critical.”²⁶ Neubecker misrepresents the carnivorous *Tyrannosaurus rex* as a vegetarian who eats a vegan lunch and is pictured happily chomping on a carrot, thus positing the speculative possibility of animals evolving from meat eating to vegetarianism, as did the *Falcarius utahensis*, “a dinosaur whose ancestors evolved from being meat eaters to vegetarians”, who is mentioned on the dustjacket to Neubecker’s picturebook and apparently served as its inspiration.²⁷

26 Haynes and Murriss, *Picturebooks*, 39.

27 In 2015 Chilean scientists also discovered the *Chilesaurus diegosuarezi*, an unusual herbivorous theropod (Lemonick, “T. Rex’s Oddball Vegetarian Cousin”).

By (mis)casting an archetypal carnivore as a plant-eater, Neubecker takes on a vast mainstream cultural industry centred on the T. rex—made (in)famous by the genetically recreated meat-eater terrorizing humans in Michael Crichton’s *Jurassic Park* and Steven Spielberg’s high-grossing blockbuster film (plus sequels!), and although a different mutated species of theropod, also evoked in the giant Godzilla of the 1950s. But what if, instead of being bioengineered or reawakened through nuclear radiation, a dinosaur could come to life as animal, rather than monster, through the sheer power of a child’s imagination?

Linus’s counterfactual identity as a herbivorous dinosaur can serve as a starting point for conversations about environmental sustainability and also an opportunity for children to ignite their critical thinking skills. Discussing the differences between images and words in picturebooks, Nodelman explains that these differences “both make the information richer and cast doubt on the truthfulness of both of the means which convey it.” An awareness of signs, Nodelman argues, is crucial for children’s education: “the more both adults and children realise the degree to which all representations misrepresent the world, the less likely they will be to confuse any particular representation with reality”; the promotion of such questioning is Nodelman’s alternative to “repressing [children] into conformity to our own [adult] views.”²⁸ Hence, juxtaposing the word “T. rex” with the image of Linus chomping on a carrot or affectionately hugging a young girl, the book offers children an opportunity to become more aware of semiotics, ask questions, and learn.

Linus presents us with a “mixed up world”, to use Affrica Taylor’s term, or a kind of “matted and entangled” assemblage that simultaneously houses living and dead dinosaurs, organic and manufactured entities, and humans and nonhumans, making space even for vegetarian T. rexes.²⁹ This is further consistent with *Linus*’s overall ambiguous and open-ended messaging. As one reviewer puts it, “Children may have a hard time determining what lesson they are to take from

28 Nodelman, “Decoding the Images”, 79–80.

29 Taylor, *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood*, 80, 88.

this. Are they meant to learn that vegetarianism doesn't make you a wimp? Or that it will win them hordes of adoring friends and fans? Or just not to make assumptions?"³⁰ Freya finds the book "cool" because it teaches her "that velociraptors are predators"; "what T. rexes look like", and "what the land looked like". The picturebook's merit lies in these multiple meanings, which range from instrumentalist (using animals to teach human children "not to make assumptions") to biophilic, eco-conscious takeaways — both the explicit endorsement of veg*anism and the visual rhetoric suggestive of impending extinction.

II. Anthropomorphic Dinosaurs in Mainstream Children's Literature

Anthropomorphism, the projection of humanlike traits unto nonhuman entities, is a feature of many children's books about animals, including vegan children's books. Humans are inclined to think about others in human terms for a number of reasons, including to learn more about unfamiliar others, both real and imaginary; to empathize across species lines, and to feel less lonely and more socially connected.³¹ Literature on animal empathy suggests that, "[w]hether our projections are correct or not, when we see animals as human-like, we have a greater likelihood of considering them worthy of moral consideration and in turn, worthy of protection."³² But research also suggests that anthropomorphic depictions of animals lead to children acquiring scientifically inaccurate ideas and adopting an anthropocentric worldview.³³

Although not as anthropocentric as mainstream dinosaur books, *Linus* does draw on the pervasive tradition of anthropomorphizing animals that risks reducing them to metaphors for human concerns. Along with two rows of sharp teeth, the bluish-green creature has kind saucer-shaped green eyes, childlike short arms, and stubby feet,

30 "Linus the Vegetarian T. Rex", *Kirkus Reviews*, 8 May 2013, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/robert-neubecker/linus-vegetarian-t-rex/>.

31 Epley et al., "Creating Social Connection"; Epley et al., "When We Need a Human."

32 Young et al., "Empathy for Animals", 335.

33 Ganea et al., "Do Cavies Talk?", 2.

all exemplifying neotenic traits that make him more relatable to human children. This could, however, be deemed an example of “weak” anthropomorphism as compared to mainstream children’s literature about animals, like Marcus Pfister’s *The Rainbow Fish*, which dramatizes a fish’s self-inflicted descaling presumably to promote sharing.³⁴ In contrast to what Victoria Simpson and Jared Piazza call “absurd” anthropomorphism, which invites children to think about “animals as humans”, “weaker” forms of anthropomorphism can help promote animal advocacy by encouraging humans to think about the animal and “not just stay within our own anthropocentric world.”³⁵

In contrast to *Linus*, Penny Dale’s *Dinosaur Dig!* offers an example of “absurd” anthropomorphism where dinosaurs are reimagined as construction workers building a swimming pool in a vibrantly coloured, alliterative, onomatopoeic counting book for children ages two to six.³⁶ *How Do Dinosaurs Play with Their Friends?*, one in a series with titles like *How Do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight?* and *How Do Dinosaurs Eat Their Food?*, teaches children how to play nicely and share.³⁷ *Dinosaur Kisses* traces the life of a young dinosaur as she learns to be more gentle by stomping, chomping, and eating in her attempts at kissing others.³⁸ Indeed, an analysis of representative dinosaur picturebooks yields some egregious examples of dinosaurs infantilized (*Kisses*) and depicted “as humans” in dinosaur costumes (*Dig!* and the *How Do...* series).

Whenever nonhuman animals figure in texts allegorically, as conduits for human messaging, they risk being transformed into what Carol Adams calls “absent referents”: “they literally disappear as living animals to become meat; they disappear conceptually when as dead animals they are renamed ‘pork’ or ‘bacon’ or ‘hamburger’; and finally, they disappear symbolically when their experiences become metaphors for someone else’s experience.”³⁹ Although it may

34 Andrianova, “Anthropomorphism”, 15.

35 Simpson and Piazza, “Humanising Animals”.

36 Dale, *Dinosaur Dig!*

37 Yolen, *How Do Dinosaurs Play*.

38 Stein, *Dinosaur Kisses*. This whimsical board book remains a colossal hit with my daughter.

39 Adams, “Foreword”, xiii.

be too late for the dinosaurs, it is not too late for other living herbivores who find themselves on the plates of children (often unwilling to eat animal flesh and requiring adult coaxing to do so), as well as in various cultural media, giving children cognitively dissonant ideas about eating the very same animals they love.⁴⁰ These books may and, in the case of my own child, *do* provide for exciting reading experiences; however, such use of fictional animals as instructional tools for human education also contributes to the normalizing of the same “anthroparchal” mechanisms through which humans dominate, use, and abuse their real-life counterparts,⁴¹ further fuelling a cultural amnesia that privileges symbolic animals over the actual nonhumans’ “flesh and blood realities”, which critical animal studies aims to recover.⁴² “Anthroparchy”, a term coined by Erika Cudworth, refers to the “*multiplicities of domination*” by which societies dominate and exploit nature to the benefit of humans.⁴³ From a very young age, children become socialized into mainstream meat-eating ideologies that normalize the consumption of animal flesh, secretions, and skins, and add to anthropogenic environmental devastation by upholding adult carnophallogocentrism, the cultural association between masculinity and meat-eating.⁴⁴

While the instrumentalist approach to animals may seem more obviously objectionable in the case of animals bred for consumption, such as chickens (meat-eating theropods’ distant relatives), the encounter with extinct animals is still an encounter with a nonhuman other, and the same mechanisms arguably apply. According to its dustjacket, *Linus*, too, conveys a human moral: that “no matter what era, being yourself will always be in style.” This is rehearsed by both Linus and Ruth Ann, and so presumably straddles the human/animal divide, but is still, as any such moral, reductive and in tension

40 Cole and Stewart provide the telling example of Burger King’s promotional tie-ins with the film *Chicken Run* (2000): children would take home a toy representation of the very same animal whose real counterparts failed to escape the fate that the film’s heroes fought against (*Our Children and Other Animals*, 4).

41 Andrianova, “Anthropomorphism”, 2.

42 Best et al., “Critical Animal Studies”, 4.

43 Cudworth, *Ecofeminist Theory*, 2, 4.

44 Derrida, “Eating Well”.

with the picturebook's overall open-endedness.

At the same time, one could rightfully ask to what extent the anthropomorphized Linus is, at least ambivalently, anthropocentric, since he can only be narrated in relation to a human girl and is depicted as coming to life by means of a (human) child's imagination. Being reduced to and reified as a cute stuffed toy is not ideal, either. The "central paradox" of anthropocentrism, according to Rob Boddice, is that the rejection of human exceptionalism ought to entail the rejection of ethical prescription, which would require that humans, should they espouse being "an animal, just like any other", also give up any ethical authority. "To embrace the anthropocentric means to acknowledge its *a priori* presence", Boddice contends, adding that humans, including ecologically-minded ones, "all begin their work *because* they are human, with unique skill sets and marks of distinction, in language, [and] in culture". Yet, anthropocentrism "as chauvinism, or prejudice" is different from anthropocentrism "as a non-optional starting point, a necessary cause."⁴⁵ Echoing this sentiment, Kari Weil writes: "It is hubris, if not *bêtise*, to believe that our thinking can fully escape humanism or that our thinking does not in the end come back to us as humans."⁴⁶ *Linus's* "non-optional starting point" is in his encounter with Ruth Ann because it is a picturebook for human children, but this anthropocentrism is integral to the book's non-anthropocentric objective: unlike the hapless wolf of *The Three Little Pigs*, this dinosaur does not have to die to teach young readers a lesson; his extinction lies outside the narrated shared experience, but informs the larger story of animal extinction so as to teach biophilic entanglement and mutual precarity.

III. Linus against the Anthroparchy: Dinosaurs and Vegan Picturebooks

Early childhood cognitive research has shown that dinosaurs can assist in the conceptual work of initiating conversations about the

45 Boddice, "Introduction", 12–13.

46 Weil, *Thinking Animals*, 150.

Anthropocene with young children. The first longitudinal analysis of the prevalence, duration, and intensity of conceptual interests in children confirmed that many children between the ages of four and six develop an intense interest in dinosaurs, which allows them to learn about this conceptual domain while also serving as a confidence booster. “Conceptual interests” or interests in “conceptual domains” motivate children to learn “through books (typically read to them by others), digital media, videotapes, and toy models that support them”, which then promotes “fact collecting”.⁴⁷ While, by age four, boys were more likely than girls to develop and express an interest in a conceptual domain, the rate of the decline of that interest upon entering school was similar in both. Such differences may be attributed to the cultural gendering of certain science-related subjects, such as dinosaur models, telescopes, and bug collecting, along with the gendering mechanisms at work in parents’ reporting on their children’s preferred activities. Confirming children’s interest in dinosaurs, another study focused on children’s knowledge about dinosaurs as a way to gauge how knowledge is structured and put to use when drawing inferences.⁴⁸

Building on young children’s “dino obsession” could in turn foster empathy towards other species. A study of children aged four to nine suggests that “young children are far less speciesist than adults, at least in the context of dogs and pigs”, and that they “prioritize humans to a far lesser extent than adults.”⁴⁹ If children do not intuitively “pick out and focus on the human at the centre”,⁵⁰ and are initially more biophilic, then ages four to nine also seem appropriate for them to learn about science, evolution, and eco-sustainability, as well as the precarity of life for all species, not just familiar domesticated ones. And the best time to do this is in early childhood before the use, slaughter, and consumption of animals is normalized through mainstream children’s literature and culture.

47 Alexander et al., “Conceptual Interests”, 325–26.

48 Chi et al., “Inferences”, 60–61, 27.

49 Wilks et al., “Children Prioritize Humans”, 10.

50 Nodelman, “Decoding the Images”, 73.

As well as promoting prosocial (other-caring) behaviour, empathy has been positively linked with pro-environmental behaviour and a predisposition toward conservation, and it has become a focus of wildlife conservation organizations, like zoos and aquaria.⁵¹ Recent studies challenge Jean Piaget’s claim that “children younger than six or seven years cannot ‘decenter’ and therefore behave in an ‘egocentric’ way”; in fact, “the young child can get in the position of another person” and develop empathy for others, both human and nonhuman.⁵² There is evidence of “empathic action in the form of sharing [...] in children as young as a year old”, which means that, cognitively, even very young children can “predict or imagine the experiences or perspectives of animals very different from themselves”; as they develop, moreover, children’s understanding of other animals evolves from “anthropomorphic peers” to more “diverse perspectives”,⁵³ and this can also be rehearsed through role-playing and games.⁵⁴

More so than mainstream children’s picturebooks, a growing body of vegan children’s literature is currently working to spread the message of eco-sustainability. For example, *That’s Why We Don’t Eat Animals*, a poignant critique of factory farming by prominent children’s writer and illustrator Ruby Roth, opens with the reminder that “[w]e are all *earthlings*” and concludes with practical suggestions for more sustainable behaviour, such as “Recycle and re-use”.⁵⁵ The book further links environmentalism to individual consumers’ choices, from what to buy and wear to which groups to join. Roth’s vegan cookbook, *The Help Yourself Cookbook for Kids*, similarly links individual choices to larger environmental impacts, teaching readers that “eating plants can help save the world”.⁵⁶ Predominantly targeting audiences of existing or aspiring veg*an children and guardians and often set during mealtimes, when dietary questions and differences are brought to the fore,⁵⁷ even ve-

51 Ernst et al., “Young Children’s Empathy”, 2–3; Young et al., “Empathy for Animals”, 338.

52 Lithoxidou et al., “Developing Empathy”, 76.

53 Young et al., “Empathy for Animals”, 332.

54 Lithoxidou et al., “Developing Empathy”, 81.

55 Roth, *That’s Why We Don’t Eat Animals*.

56 Roth, *Help Yourself Cookbook*.

57 Andrianova, “friends, not food”.

gan children's books have limitations, however, including “draw[ing] on already-existing problematic human–other animal relations (such as ‘pet’-keeping or cute style) or anti-vegan discourse (such as the reduction of veganism to an issue of dietary practice)”.⁵⁸

According to Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart, veganism is “a process that synthesizes a value-rational, rather than instrumental-rational, orientation towards other animals with socio-emotional healing and reintegration consequent to the renunciation of violence and exploitation; the renunciation of anthroparchal socialization”; because veganism is perceived as “a threat” to mainstream anthroparchal ideology in the West, it is misrepresented in popular media “as ridiculous, impossible to sustain, pleasure-denying, faddish”.⁵⁹ The term “vegan”, as the founder of vegan studies Laura Wright explains, combines vegan identity with vegan practice, and is also created and simultaneously “reconstituted by and within contemporary (non-vegan) media”.⁶⁰

Turning to *Linus*, what initially appears as an error—namely, Linus's identity as a herbivorous theropod—becomes, upon reflection, a serious “threat” to the meat-eating establishment and an imaginative reclamation of the T. rex for the countercultural veg*an child.⁶¹ When greeting a herd of iguanodons, Ruth Ann asks Linus why he did not eat them, to which he responds, “I wouldn't dream of it [...] They're my friends!” The book's promotion of healthy foods other than meat or dairy through a playful rhetoric of predator/prey can be interpreted as an attempt to make the consumption of veggies attractive to children. When co-reading this part of the book with my paradoxically veggie-averse vegetarian child, Freya exclaims, “Reading this book makes me want to eat all those veggies!” By staging the human–animal interaction during lunchtime and incorporating the adage found in many other vegan picturebooks that animals

58 Cole and Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals*, 160.

59 Cole and Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals*, 151.

60 Wright, *Vegan Studies*, 1–2.

61 Not surprisingly, *Linus* is mentioned in several lists of vegan children's books that promote prosocial, biophilic, and vegan messaging, including *ChooseVeg*, *World of Vegan*, and *Live Kindly*.

are “friends, not food”, *Linus* similarly evokes the reductive view of veg*anism in mainstream anti-vegan discourses as “an issue of dietary practice”, rather than a holistic ethics of animal empowerment.⁶² At the same time, however, it disturbs this view by extending veg*anism to include animal relationships/friendships and an awareness of the interconnectedness of diverse species.

Also pertinent is *Linus*’s well-intentioned but ultimately ambivalent engagement with gendered assumptions around veg*anism, along with its silence regarding the thorny relationship between American environmentalism and capitalism. By putting the face of a “fierce” T. rex on a vegetarian, the picturebook ostensibly challenges gendered perceptions of veg*anism as “weak”, “limp”, and “unhealthy”, particularly for children, in mainstream anti-vegan discourses that locate power in masculinist carnivorism. Hence, *Linus* can be said to inspire an ecofeminist combination of gender *cum* species recalibration to empower both women and animals, delivering on ecofeminism’s “necessarily anti-hierarchical” commitment⁶³ and “the fundamental interconnectedness of all life”.⁶⁴ Yet, while attempting to dispel the cultural association between plant-based diets, gender, and physical weakness, the picturebook simultaneously risks reinforcing those very stereotypes: the apex predator *Linus* is male whereas Ellen, the herbivorous triceratops, is female and a mother, pictured surrounded by her eight babies. Young readers may compound this by adding their own cultural assumptions, as does my daughter, who immediately genders the ungendered dinosaur skeletons on *Linus*’s fourth and fifth pages:

“I like her!” Freya says pointing at the triceratops skeleton.

“Why do you like her?”

“Because she is not a predator.”

“But how do you know it’s a *she*?”

“All the predators are *he*, and all the dinosaurs who are herbivores are *she*. The T. rex is a *he*.”

62 Cole and Stewart, *Our Children and Other Animals*, 160.

63 Gruen, “Dismantling Oppression”, 80.

64 Gaard, “Living Interconnections”, 1, 2–3.

So, while positing the very real possibility of conversion to veg*anism, *Linus* ends up precariously straddling the line between the culturally dominant image of the male predatorial *T. rex* and his imaginary, culturally marginalized, plant-eating doppelgänger.

Further, although the book is framed by the transactional nature of museum stewardship, it is selectively silent about issues of labour, production, and class, communicating the message of liberal environmentalism through a consumer-oriented lens that stops short of challenging the market economy based on the commodification of nature. It opens with Ruth Ann's proudly displayed museum membership card and concludes with her purchasing a miniature stuffed version of Linus, just seconds after sharing a meal and a hug with his "real" counterpart. She is seen contentedly carrying this reified Linus in the final two pages—an iteration of the consumerist dream of purchasing and owning material goods as a path to happiness. Just as why no actual currency is exchanged in acquiring the membership or the stuffed toy, other questions remain unanswered: about the (inter)national corporations supplying electricity and other services to the museum, or these corporations' possible trade entanglements with global petro-dictatorships; about the major museum donors' potential ties to those same unsustainable organizations and other anti-environmental entities; about the ethical practices involved in the production of the stuffed toys, rocks, bones, and books on sale at the giftshop or of the materials used in manufacturing the dioramas and display cases; about the current labour practices of the museum staff (to whom "Special thanks" is given on the copyright page), or more starkly, about the racist colonial history of acquisition and curation at natural history museums; and at the end of the day, about where all the museum waste is being disposed of, for there is no such thing as throwing "away". Unlike Roth's books, which are printed using soy inks onto recycled paper, *Linus* does not appear to be sustainably made; its eBook version would be considered more eco-friendly, if not for the resource-intensive and rapidly obsolescent e-readers required to read them.

Then there's the element of class. As much as all humans should have access to natural history as part of their sorely needed evidence-based

science education, museum memberships are typically not free, and such museums tend to be located in big cities, with the museum on *Linus's* opening page resembling the classical façade of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City (AMNH). Along with urbanism, the vegan lifestyle that Linus tries to inculcate in Ruth Ann is associated, in the popular imagination, with white upper-middle class culture and so-called “white veganism”.⁶⁵ The ease of “hunting” for and accessing fresh food in the book belies the gravity of global food insecurity exacerbated by the effects of climate change on agricultural production.

IV. Ruth Ann, the Dinosaur Expert and Science Enthusiast

Linus's limitations, I argue, should be weighed against its strengths. It is, undeniably, a feminist picturebook a co-reading of which can help introduce young (pre-)readers to difficult concepts, such as death, evolution, and the Anthropocene, and make STEM education especially appealing to girls and young women. Although smaller in stature than the titular dinosaur, the human featured on the title page of Neubecker's book is important in her own regard. As previously noted, Ruth Ann is introduced on the first page with her museum card in hand at the bottom of the steps to the Museum of Natural History. Although another child is depicted holding their parent's hand up the museum steps, she is independent and ostensibly without adult supervision. On the following page, she is shown confidently professing to an audience of museumgoers in front of a woolly mammoth, while another child, uninterested in the exhibited animal, is shown running away with their adult desperately clutching their arm. At the bottom of the same page, Ruth Ann is now teaching a pair of adults about whales: “She knew all about the Ice Age”, the caption reads; “She knew all about the oceans.” On the facing page, she is running to the dinosaur exhibit because, the text implies, that is what she “know[s] the *most* about”. The speech bubbles on the ensuing page confirm her knowledge of dinosaur varieties, ages, and diets.

⁶⁵ Museums are not only urban phenomena; initiatives like the Smithsonian Institution's “Museum on Main Street” bring museum exhibitions and educational resources to small towns in rural America. Among efforts to challenge “white veganism” and gatekeeping, notable is A. Breeze Harper's *Sistah Vegan Project*.

Other picturebooks about dinosaurs, also set in natural history museums, often feature and foreground the human protagonist. *Harry and the Dinosaurs at the Museum* by Ian Whybrow, for instance, tells of a boy with a “bucketful of dinosaurs”, who come to life while he completes a surprisingly not-boring school assignment about Roman history. Hannah Ko’s *The Dinosaur Museum* describes a class field trip to a dinosaur museum that allows two boys to bond over their shared fear of dinosaurs. Davide Cali’s *A Funny Thing Happened at the Museum...* is unreliably (and delightfully) narrated by Henry, another male child. On the other hand, *Linus* defies gendered associations between dinosaurs and boys by showcasing a friendship between a vegetarian dinosaur and a girl, thereby summoning interrelated ecofeminist and veg*an concerns, including the “gender gap” in the so-called hard sciences which, despite recent social advances, remain male-dominated, and the conservative distrust of evidence-based science and the climate crisis.

In her influential essay on the AMNH, Donna Haraway describes the natural history museum as a “visual technology”, underscoring the masculine-gendered dimension of visually experiencing (and dissecting) nature (as an object), which is typically imagined as a “she” and “without technology”; due to how the visual experience in the museum is structured, Haraway adds, “one has, willy nilly, the moral status of a young boy undergoing initiation”.⁶⁶ This certainly applies to the aforementioned boys in *Harry and the Dinosaurs at the Museum* and *A Funny Thing Happened at the Museum...* But, of course, nature is also “constructed as a technology through social praxis”⁶⁷; take, for example, the animatronic T. Rex at the popular Dinosaurs Exhibit in London’s Museum of Natural History, who stands 4.5m (14.8ft) tall and terrorizes children with his roars.

In *Linus*, Neubecker creates a visual experience of entering into the kind of “time machine” that Haraway describes (the exhibit transporting the visitor from urban “chaos” to a calming “individual

66 Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy”, 52.

67 Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy”, 52.

communion with nature”⁶⁸), where fossils, rather than taxidermied mammals, reveal the constructedness of nature as technology through human-nonhuman social interaction. But the “eye (I)” is now part of “the spectacle”,⁶⁹ and ritually communes with nature through a shared meal. This “eye (I)”, moreover, is not a young boy being initiated into a manhood of hunting with a gun/camera, but a young girl who seeks knowledge and is also open to re-evaluating all “[s]he knew”, including that dinosaurs ate “Meat! More Meat! Lots and Lots of Meat!” To the typically male/masculinist meaning-making agent of phallogocentric western epistemology this poses a transgressive gender-bending revision — in other words, challenging Haraway’s “necessarily a boy [...] progress[ing] through Youth”,⁷⁰ the normative function of naming, classifying, and controlling animals having been traditionally assigned to (western, white, cis-gender, nondisabled) males, like H.F. Osborn, AMNH’s President, who named the T. Rex “the tyrant lizard king” in 1905 after the first T. rex had been discovered by another man, the fossil hunter Barnum Brown.

Linus can be considered alongside a number of recent feminist books which encourage young girls’ curiosity about science. One notable example is Linda Skeers’s *Dinosaur Lady: The Daring Discoveries of Mary Anning, the First Paleontologist*. Recommended for five-to-seven-year-olds, *Dinosaur Lady* retells the story of Mary Anning, whose fossil discoveries shaped the burgeoning science of paleontology, shattering, as the book claims, “the commonly held belief that the Earth was only six thousand years old” and introducing the notion “that a species could become extinct”, all at a time when “[w]omen were not allowed” to join the Geological Society of London, attend lectures, teach, or take university classes. The “lady” referenced in the title is ironic since Anning effectively challenged cultural conceptions about what is or is not “proper” for a “lady”, specifically by discovering dinosaur droppings, “something a lady shouldn’t talk about”, yet a valuable key to ancient creatures’ diets. In its concluding sentence, the picturebook suggestively encourages the young

68 Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy,” 23.

69 Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy,” 52.

70 Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy,” 22.

reader to be as daring with whatever limited means they have: “And she did all that with a homemade hammer, a chisel, and a never-ending quest to fearlessly keep exploring—and learning.”⁷¹ Although it does not self-inscribe into a feminist revisionist tradition, *Linus* does incorporate some of the same tropes, such as the intelligent, science-savvy young girl who is fearless, daring, and set on sharing her expertise with others, including those perceived to be hierarchically superior (namely, adult males). It also promotes epistemic humility and collaborative learning as the child is forced to grapple with Ruth Ann’s know-it-all stance about dinosaurs being contested by Linus (e.g., that he is not a carnivore, would not eat his “friends”).

V. Concluding Thoughts

There is tremendous creative energy in contemporary children’s literature. Bridging the momentum of *Grandmother Fish* with that of *Dinosaur Lady* and *Linus*, children’s books about natural history, extinction, and the Anthropocene present an opportunity to re-evaluate anthropocentrism, patronizing attitudes about the “children of the Anthropocene”, and sexism in the so-called hard sciences. While still learning interpretive strategies and linguistic codes, children are remarkably intuitive and capable of producing surprising insights, such as my daughter’s counterfactual desire for the erupting volcano not to annihilate the dinosaurs as an opening to a discussion of what humans can do today in the face of environmental crisis.

But to empower children in our precarious age of climate crisis, adult mentors need to provide pathways for them to (co-)produce art, knowledge, and meaning beyond writing eco-conscious picture-books and reading them to and with young (pre-)readers. Children can compose their own books or create dinosaurs and their ecosystems out of paper, cardboard, plastic, or play dough. My hope is that engaging them in a subject many are already passionate about (dinos!) can help foster interspecies empathy and lead to children making better decisions with regard to nonhuman others and our shared planetary future.

71 Skeers, *Dinosaur Lady*.

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