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Broadcasting Beasts

Claire Molloy, *Popular Media and Animals*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 256 pp. \$85.50 (hb); \$72.00 (kindle).

Claire Molloy's *Popular Media and Animals* is published in Palgrave Macmillan's Animal Ethics series, designed to explore the centrality of animal issues to contemporary scholarship and in particular to consider the ethical implications of our new knowledge of animal sentience, cognition and awareness. Interdisciplinary in its approach, the series strives to investigate the philosophical, ethical, and political challenges, both conceptual and pragmatic, posed by shifting human/animal relations. The Series Preface also states that it aims to provide introductory overviews that map out ethical positions on animals that will be of service to university courses. Molloy's text fits this rubric well, providing a comprehensive overview of the way popular modes, particularly journalism, mediate our understanding of animals. The book is organized around ways animals are integrated into our imaginations and practices: as film performers, documentary images of "authentic" nature, objects of experimental practice, food, and sources of recreation for hunters.

Molloy's work is particularly strong in its careful and detailed research regarding the history of animal welfare and a shifting context of legislation. Her second chapter, "Media and Animal Debates," is an excellent resource for anyone interested in this history, filled with details from primary newspaper research from the early days of the RSPCA and ASPCA through the 1980s. Molloy shows how journalistic representation of animal rights and animal welfare concerns shifted during this period from early pejorative associations with sentiment and the feminine, through a period of sympathy and support (particularly regarding resistance to traders who sold pet animals to research labs), to the demonization of animal "terrorists" following ALF actions in the 1980s. Molloy reviews the links between anti-vivisectionist and feminist struggles, and provides a compelling and detailed account of the entwined histories of advocacy, legislative change, and media response that encompasses both US and UK contexts. The strongest chapter in the book, this overview is extremely useful for teaching.

Chapter 6, "Farmed," is similarly useful in its careful tracing of historical changes in agricultural practices from the end of the First World War to the present. It is filled with a wealth of primary research that adds important detail to the changing cultures of

animal consumption, from the effects of rationing during World War II, creating a culture of “home food production” (103) that included animal husbandry, to the roles of groups such as the Milk Marketing Board and the British Egg Marketing Board (BEMB) in constructing beliefs about the benefits of certain foods to increase market share. This chapter focuses on UK examples almost exclusively and thus is less inclusive than Chapter 2’s discussion of animal welfare legislation, but is nonetheless extremely useful in its accumulation of detail such as the changing rates of consumption for various animal products. This chapter reads a number of advertising strategies to reveal what they obscure about the realities of industrial agricultural production, drawing our attention to a gap between nostalgic images of family farms and green spaces dominant in advertising of animals for food compared to the realities of factory farming necessary to sustain the astonishing levels of consumption generated by efforts like those of the BEMB. Particularly innovative is Molloy’s inclusion of celebrity chef television series in her analysis, an under-theorized site manufacturing current ideologies regarding animals and practices of food consumption.

The main limitation of this book, however, is this uneasy mix of analysis of popular culture (as expressive of contemporary concerns and anxieties regarding human/animal relationships) and analysis of journalistic and similar non-fictional genres (advertising, the cooking shows) doing similar ideological work. While the book is to be commended for recognizing that all genres are engaged in the ongoing production of cultural “common sense” regarding animals and human/animal relations, it nonetheless tends to overlook the importance of distinctions among them. The overall result is a rather uneven book: *Popular Media and Animals* is excellent in its analysis of newspaper accounts and advertising strategies, but comparatively weak in its discussion of the work done by fictional texts. In particular, it fails to engage with any of the recent theoretical work done on the role of popular fictions in constructing and reflecting contemporary attitudes toward animals, such as Susan McHugh’s essential work in essays and her recent *Animal Stories* (2011).

There are two main problems with the discussion of examples drawn from popular culture. First, while there is evidence of extensive primary research supporting this book, its engagement with secondary scholarship on animals and popular culture is weak and fails to acknowledge or engage with existing interpretations very similar to those offered by Molloy. For example, the discussion of animal performers in chapter 3, “Stars,” does not cite Jason Hribal’s important work on evidence of animal resistance, work that includes Hollywood animal performers but extends to animals involved in other attractions such as circuses, zoos, and rodeos, a historical dimension lacking from

Molloy's discussion. Similarly, chapter 4, "Wild," considers the problems of the attitude toward animals created by nature "documentaries" and troubling production methods that stage animal interactions to capture them on film, yet fails to acknowledge Cynthia Chris's *Watching Wildlife* (2006) which makes these arguments and more. The discussion of *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick 1968) similarly overlooks extensive scholarship on both films, some of which engages with the question of animal representation.

This leads to my second reservation about this book, the inclusiveness or representativeness of examples drawn from popular culture. One short introductory book cannot cover everything, to be sure, but this book would be improved by providing some rationale for the examples chosen. The chapter on "Stars" uses as its main study the chimpanzee from *Bedtime for Bonzo* (de Cordova 1951), a film now famous given the later career of co-star Ronald Reagan. While this may serve to illustrate the way animal performers were given a media image of living like a human film star (the argument of this chapter), the book returns to this text/chimp again in chapter 5, "Experimental," where it seems less suitable. The point made about research and this film — how contemporary research on raising primates as human was filtered into Hollywood narrative — is fair enough and supported by discussions of similar experiments conducted on chimpanzees Peter, Gua and Viki. Yet this one case study does not support the wider claims made about the nature of mad scientists and animal experiments in horror and sf film overall. Surely a better example here would be one of the many film adaptations of H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), a novel itself in dialogue with contemporary antivivisectionist discourse that Molloy discusses in chapter 2.

The readings of popular texts at times seem to contort them to fit a preferred paradigm — such as a discussion of *Them!* (Douglas 1954) in the context of discourses of managing insect threat, which overlooks other equally significant elements of the film's themes (gender, the role of the military), or reading of *Jaws* (Spielberg 1975) as a film of nature's revenge, when other films explicitly (unlike *Jaws*) articulate this theme, such as *Frogs* (McCowan 1972) or *Deep Blue Sea* (Harlin 1999). While this book is first-rate at historically contextualizing newspaper accounts of animals and exploring reasons for changing conventions, it fails to be similarly attentive to the importance of context for the kinds of stories told in popular fictions. If we understand the fictional texts in *Popular Media and Animals*, however, merely to be hooks that draw the reader into the

discussion of various issues of animal ethics, these criticisms are mitigated. For example, chapter 7, "Hunted," uses an exchange in an episode of *Northern Exposure* (1990-1995) to introduce the ethical positions taken on the topic. The analysis in this chapter offers little to help us better understand the themes of the series, but it does provide a good overview of ethical issues related to hunting.

This book fits well into the paradigm described for the series, and provides a broad overview of the issues relevant to animal ethics and how popular attitudes toward them have changed over time. As well as being useful for classrooms, it provides considerable detail from primary research of attitude expressed in newspapers at various times, and of statistics related to food consumption, both of which will be useful for ongoing scholarship. Although the readings of popular fiction do not offer anything not already established in scholarship, they are situated within useful discussions of non-fictional contexts (animal tourism, pesticide use, and more) that ably create opportunities to orient these texts toward broader considerations of animal ethics. *Popular Media and Animals* is thus an excellent overview of issues of animal ethics, and could be a useful volume for teaching, were it not for Palgrave Macmillan's pricing structure. Even the kindle edition of the book is expensively priced for such a venue, and I hope they will consider this limitation as this important series moves forward.