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Erica Fudge. *Animal.* London: Reaktion Books, 2002. 182 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-86189-134-1.

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A Book I Wish I'd Written

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Part of Reaktion Books's Focus on Contemporary Issues series, *Animals* announces that human views of nonhuman animals are experiencing a radical change. That change, in turn, promises to radically change the prevailing "culture story." Fudge argues with passion for this change, one she believes is long overdue. Conspiring against it is what she sees as our unacknowledged fear "that there is a [recognizable] kinship between us and them." As Rita Mae Brown's three nonhuman sleuths, the cats Mrs. Murphy and Pewter and the Welsh Corgi Tucker observe in *The Tail of the Tip-Off*, humans like to believe "the world revolves around them" (p. 68). The clever trio see clearly that humans refuse to "know they [themselves are] ... animals" (p. 180).[1]

Fudge disagrees, arguing that humans know full well that they are animals and on one level desire to be since that kinship makes them part of the larger community of life. She sees that desire for belonging in conflict, however, with the equally deep human desire to be "top dog." The fear that we are not, in fact, the reason the universe was created has, so far at least, controlled the Euro-American culture story, rendering it hopelessly anthropocentric: "Mastery–control, domination–is the means by which we annihilate the fear" (p. 8). Fudge reinforces her point by examining in this book how we now live with and use animals.

Fudge denies making any direct attempt to proselytize, or present an "evangelical" reading of animals' rights. "Rather," she explains, she "will be asking you, through the organization of the book, to think about the ways in which Western society uses animals. The book is, though, polemical: that is, it presents an argument about the need to rethink our relationships with animals. This polemic arises from an analysis, not of philosophical positions about animals, but of the ways we currently live with them" (p. 9).

Fudge begins by tracing the evolution of our current relationship to animals, focusing on what she sees as the key metaphors that determine the way we live with them. Drawing on anthropologist Annabelle Sabloff's *Reordering the Natural World* (2001), Fudge isolates three domains of metaphor: the domestic, the factory, and the rhetoric of animal rights. Sabloff goes on to argue that a third essential domain "that would allow for a biocentric, as opposed to an anthropocentric relationship," is conspicuously missing. In the other three domains, she argues, "animals as such disappear and are replaced by a metaphoric [i.e., human-created] structure" (p. 12). Sabloff's fourth domain would create room in the human mind to accept "the radical wholeness of other life forms, ... their inherent value ... as opposed to a relation that sees only humans as centrally significant, and represents the world accordingly" (p. 12).

Fudge feels instead that what is needed is not another metaphoric domain but a clear understanding of "the ways in which we live with animals on a day to day basis" (p. 12). Her argument is simple: once humans "acknowledge some of the frequently cruel contradictions in the ways in which we live with and think about animals we might be on the road to creating a new language" in which animals are free to be subjects in their own right and humans can acknowledge their own animal identity. There is, however, the nagging fear that we may not be "able to think beyond ourselves, to include within the orbit of our imaginations as well as our material existences ... beings of other species" (p. 22).

Still, Fudge reasons, "dominion cannot persist comfortably ... with the recognition of sameness." To live in contradiction, simultaneously accepting kinship and yet maintaining our right to dominion, leads her to suggest that H. G. Wells's Dr. Moreau, usually seen as a villain, instead "might actually represent us" all too well (p. 21). How we have become, by omission if not commission, like Dr. Moreau is the subject of her three central chapters. The first explores the invisibility and visibility of animals historically and in the present. The second com-

pares real and symbolic animals, looking deeply into the concept of anthropomorphism. The third looks in equal depth at the question of human power over the other animals.

In each chapter the nature of fiction as both literature and part of the larger culture story we enact each day is seen as central to how we treat animals, making Fudge's book essential reading for anyone interested in literature and/or animal issues. She is particularly instructive on texts as varied as *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, and Eric Knight's *Lassie, Come Home*. *Lassie*, although it ventures only partway into the dog's mind, strikes Fudge as "more realist than magic realism," because it reminds the reader of "the powerful desire of all humans–children or adults–to get into the minds of animals" (p. 75).

Her comments on anthropomorphism and sentimentality seem to me particularly insightful:

"We may regard the humanization of animals that takes place in many narratives as sentimental, but without it the only relation we can have with animals is a very distant and perhaps mechanistic one. As well as this, anthropomorphism might actually serve an ethical function: if we didn't believe that in some way we can communicate with and understand animals, what is to make us stop and think as we experiment upon them, eat them, put them in cages? By gaining access to the world of animals, these books offer a way of thinking about human-animal relations more generally, and potentially more positively." (pp. 76-77)

The dangers inherent in assuming animals are just like us seem to Fudge magnified in a film such as *Babe* (1995). For her "the logical conclusions of the dangers of anthropomorphism" are illustrated by the animatronics and computer-generated images used to create the film. By conflating the real and the magic inherently understood to explain speaking animals in books and less "realistic" films, she believes the real animal (the one *not* us) is totally lost. What we mistake for an animal is a robotic animal existing in a world Fudge describes as a nightmare world in which there is no distinction between "natural history ..., children's fantasies, and industrial farming" (p. 88).[2] What is hidden is that in such a world the fate of pigs who remain pigs is "not just fantasy, ... not just farming, ... [but] genocide" (p. 89).

This conflation is traced in terms of actual animal use, not just in food production but also in areas like xenotransplantation: "From subject to object, fellow being to tool, animals play their parts in a very confused and confusing world of humans" (p. 111). Until humans are ready to shift the concept of intelligence from abstract thought and language to "ability to scent, and ability to get home without a map," Fudge claims we cannot begin to see ourselves as not superior. Then, again, she writes, "it is little wonder that we won't broaden our notion of intelligence, that we don't change the frame of reference. If we did, everything else would change" (p. 141).

Finally, convinced as she is of the importance of reinforcing the human sense of connection to the animal, Fudge insists on the necessity of also maintaining respect for the differences that mark each species of animal. We must learn, she concludes, to "think about animals as animals" (p. 159). Currently, because "our perception ... is based on our limitations," she feels we cannot attain that respect. As a way of approaching it, then, we must change what we can change–how we treat animals on a day-to-day basis "in a culture where meat eating, pet ownership, animal experimentation and anthropomorphic children's books all sit comfortably together" (p. 164).

Fudge, in acknowledging that her discussions of topics such as "animals in literature" and "meat-eating" are meant not to exhaust the topics, but to suggest directions for future discussions, leaves her readers with a clear challenge to put their own skills and interests to work in the effort to change both the ways we think about and the ways we live with other animals.

Notes

[1]. Rita Mae Brown, *The Tail of the Tip-Off*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 2003.

[2]. As Fudge sees, this filmic device literally takes us back to the issue raised by Descartes's mechanistic theory, a "key debate" in creating the Western human's present ethical relationship to other animals. "What is the difference between an animal and a machine that looks like an animal?" (p. 92). Fudge finds a further layer of this debate in our insistence on judging other animal's intelligence by their ability to understand and use human language, an insistence that trains them to be other-than-themselves when it seems clear to her that "to view the thing-in-itself ... seems ... the most obvious way of understanding chimpanzees, gorillas, and their nonhuman cousins" (p. 128).

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