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Maria Moss (eds)

# **Multispecies Futures**

New Approaches to Teaching Human-Animal Studies

Neofelis

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## Introduction

In the last decade, human-animal studies (HAS)<sup>1</sup> and other intersecting fields dealing with “the question of the animal”<sup>2</sup> – ecofeminism, the environmental humanities in general and ecocriticism in particular, extinction studies, and the posthumanities, to name but a few<sup>3</sup> – have grown dramatically. While the developments Margo DeMello described in 2010 only seem to have accelerated,<sup>4</sup> there has been, somewhat surprisingly, a rather limited number of

1 We use the designation proposed in Margo DeMello: *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies*. New York: Columbia UP 2012, p.2. <https://doi.org/10.7312/deme19484> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

2 Jacques Derrida: *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet, transl. from the French by David Wills. New York: Fordham UP 2008, p. 8. We are referencing the second of many times that Derrida uses this key phrase in his text.

3 It is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide even a cursory overview of the overlapping trajectories of the environmental humanities, ecocriticism, or the posthumanities, but we will address some pedagogical interventions of note in these fields below. Key academic texts in the recent discourse on extinction include Deborah Bird Rose / Thom van Dooren / Matthew Chrulow (eds): *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death, and Generations*. New York: Columbia UP 2017. <https://doi.org/10.7312/van-17880> (accessed: January 24, 2022); and Ursula K. Heise: *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species*. Chicago / London: U of Chicago P 2016. <https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226358338> (accessed: January 24, 2022); see also Bartosch’s contribution to this collection for a nuanced discussion of how global problems such as extinction and climate change require us to reconsider how and why we teach HAS or, for that matter, other issues. For a discussion of ecofeminist HAS and related pedagogies, see the epilogue by Greta Gaard in this volume.

4 Margo DeMello: Introduction to Human-Animal Studies. In: Idem (ed.): *Teaching the Animal: Human-Animal Studies Across the Disciplines*. New York: Lantern 2010, pp. XI–XIX, here pp. XII–XIV. Back then, DeMello described HAS as “one of the most rapidly growing fields of intellectual inquiry today” (ibid., p. XII).

studies focusing on pedagogical theory and practice across different disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities. Those looking for guidance on how to propose, develop, and teach a HAS course are likely to consult *Teaching the Animal: Human-Animal Studies Across the Disciplines*, a groundbreaking volume that showcases a wide range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches.<sup>5</sup> More recently, collections such as Björn Hayer and Clarissa Schröder's *Tierethik transdisziplinär: Literatur – Kultur – Didaktik* (2018) have provided additional theoretical and practical perspectives with a focus on philosophy and ethics, literary and cultural studies, and didactics, thereby also expanding the debate beyond the Anglophone academy.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these studies in the field of HAS proper, other closely related and often overlapping discourses have provided guidance on how to teach animal studies in various institutional contexts, at different levels, and with different groups of learners. For example, ecocriticism has, since its inception in the US in the early 1990s, interrogated traditional literary and cultural studies approaches toward nonhuman animals and how they are represented across media, often by integrating different analytical frameworks or by exploring inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives.<sup>7</sup> In many ways, the premises, course designs, curricula, methods, and educational goals in ecocritical approaches to teaching HAS have closely resembled those in other disciplines.<sup>8</sup> For example, these approaches share the assumption that the animals that students encounter in texts are, simply put, more than mere symbols signifying human

5 DeMello (ed.): *Teaching the Animal*.

6 Björn Hayer / Clarissa Schröder (eds): *Tierethik transdisziplinär: Literatur – Kultur – Didaktik*. Bielefeld: Transcript 2018. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839442593> (accessed: January 24, 2022).

7 See, for example, Greg Garrard: *Ferality Tales*. In: Idem (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2014, pp. 241–259. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199742929.001.0001> (accessed: January 24, 2022). In this chapter, Garrard aims to “locat[e] ferality by *triangulating* from animal studies to ecocriticism, ethology and evolutionary ecology and literary fiction, using the insights (and perhaps lacunae) of each to produce a multifaceted, interdisciplinary projection of this concept” (ibid., p. 242 emphasis in original).

8 See, for example, the approaches to teaching literary animals included in DeMello (ed.): *Teaching the Animal*; or in Hayer / Schröder (eds): *Tierethik*; to those presented in Karla Armbruster: *Thinking with Animals: Teaching Animal Studies-Based Literature Courses*. In: Laird Christensen / Mark C. Long / Fred Waage (eds): *Teaching North American Environmental Literature*. New York: MLA 2008, pp. 72–92; or Bart H. Welling / Scottie Kapel: *The Return of the Animal: Presenting and Representing Non-Human Beings Responsably in the (Post-)Humanities Classroom*. In: Greg Garrard (ed.): *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2012, pp. 104–116.

characteristics, desires, and preoccupations. Recent work in didactics that has embraced a posthumanist perspective has likewise considered the question of how learners, particularly students in second and tertiary education, could and should (re)engage with the-more-than-human world and, more specifically, nonhuman animals.<sup>9</sup> These interventions and the approaches put forward by ecocritics discussed above have, for the most part, proposed teaching practices that have been or could be implemented in current curricula. As critics like Helena Pedersen have pointed out, these approaches to teaching HAS matter, and yet they might fall short of their goals because they require further grounding in educational theory.<sup>10</sup> In addition, what is ultimately required, Pederson argues, is the “liberation” of the current educational system “from the grips of the animal-industrial complex” and new critical animal pedagogies that turn “[e]ducation [into] a space for unthinking the human, ourselves and our relations to the world.”<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Pederson’s approach to teaching is much more in line with other activist and intersectional takes on animal pedagogies, and issues such as veganism or social justice,<sup>12</sup> which are likewise calling for dramatic changes in the way we learn about and interact with nonhuman animals. This is not to say, however, that these critical animal pedagogies are by default more political or effective than those discussed above. Rather, it is probably best to conceive of all of these approaches

9 See, for example, several contributions in Roman Bartosch / Julia Hoydis (eds): *Teaching the Posthuman*. Heidelberg: Winter 2019; or Roman Bartosch: *Animals Outside in the Teaching Machine*. In: *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies* 27:2 (2016), pp. 147–164. The term “more-than-human world” has been used by environmental philosopher David Abram, for example in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perceptions and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Random House 1996.

10 For a discussion of Pedersen’s point regarding the (lack of) theoretical underpinning in current approaches, see Helena Pedersen: *Teaching the Animal*. Review of *Teaching the Animal*, ed. by Margo DeMello. In: *Humanimalia* 2:1 (2010), pp. 86–89, here p. 87. For a contribution that does engage with these theoretical questions, see Roman Bartosch: *Dying to Learn: Teaching Human-Animal Studies in an Age of Extinction*, in this volume.

11 Karin Gunnarsson Dinker / Helena Pedersen: *Critical Animal Pedagogies: Re-Learning Our Relations with Animal Others*. In: Helen E. Lees / Nel Noddings (eds): *The Palgrave International Handbook of Alternative Education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016, pp. 415–430, here pp. 422, 427. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-41291-1\\_27](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-41291-1_27) (accessed: January 24, 2022).

12 See, for example, the contributions to Agnes Trzak (ed): *Teaching Liberation: Essays on Social Justice, Animals, Veganism, and Education*. New York: Lantern 2019; or Anthony J. Nocella II / Carolyn Drew / Amber E. George / Sinem Ketenci et al. (eds): *Education for Total Liberation: Critical Animal Pedagogy and Teaching Against Speciesism*. New York: Lang 2019.

to teaching HAS as part of a continuum, with most if not all of them pursuing similar objectives and premised on various conceptions of relationality, ethical regard, empathy, respect, bodily integrity, and agency.

In her article, “Current Objectives of Human-Animal Studies: Why the Story of Harriet the Tortoise Should Be Retold,” Mieke Roscher engages with these issues and, more specifically, responds to Haraway’s call to action in *When Species Meet* in order to propose a political history of animals. To develop this new historiographical approach, she turns to concepts of agency and human-animal interaction as the most widely discussed paths to making visible the involvement of animals in “our” shared history. Built on the story of Harriet, a Galápagos tortoise and a decisive historical figure living in the Galápagos Islands during Darwin’s visit in 1835, who died as recently as 2006, Roscher shows how praxiography, material culture, and spatial approaches could be connected to tell different stories to the ones currently being told by traditional historiography. Tortoises and turtles in particular have already influenced historical thinking, not least because they have come to symbolize the extinction discourse as well as debates on climatic change and the Anthropocene. Hence, Roscher introduces a political history of animals that pays attention to agency and relations (and agency as a relation), practices and materialities, spaces and places, and offers a way to retell Harriet’s life story – and the life stories of many other animals – in the future.

In “Tiere im imperialen Diskurs: Die Human-Animal Studies als Unterrichtsparadigma für das antike Rom” (Animals and Imperial Discourse: Human-Animal Studies as a Paradigm for Teaching Ancient Rome), Nils Steffensen, a historian specializing in ancient history, also focuses on political history, but he takes a different path from Roscher. Steffensen combines human-animal studies with the concept of new political history to explore innovative perspectives for teaching Roman history. He thus provides a framework that allows students to further their understanding of the political dimensions of historical consciousness and to enhance their orientation competency. Students learn to recognize and analyze power structures and relationships in historical and contemporary societies. According to Steffensen, HAS is of utmost significance for the initiation of this process. Animals played important roles in political decision-making processes in ancient Rome, and animals were meaning-making figures in governance discourses. Focusing on the practical and semantic functions of animals in the context of divination and the discourse of decadence, this essay shows that HAS can serve as a starting point for teaching in a way that addresses the formation and

utilization of empire. However, Steffensen does not only seek to promote students' understanding of political processes in the past but also hopes to motivate students to assess modern-day politics.

In "Preventing Malicious and Wanton Cruelty to Animals': Historical Animal Welfare and Animal Rights Education," Andreas Hübner outlines future historical animal welfare and animal rights education, sketching concepts and themes such as animal agency and historicity as well as the relational, spatial, and material practices employed between humans and animals. Hübner then historicizes present-day attitudes toward anthropocentrism and discusses educational and learning processes that (can) help to overcome human-animal dichotomies in the history classroom. Hübner presents subject-specific recommendations for critically integrating topics into future curricula and shows that it is possible to teach in a way that acknowledges the role of nonhuman actors. He thereby challenges conventional human-centered narratives of historical learning.

While Hübner, Steffensen, and Roscher provide new insights into how historical texts can lead students to reconsider relations and develop empathy, in "Dying to Learn: Teaching Human-Animal Studies in an Age of Extinction," Roman Bartosch assesses the pedagogical potential of literature and the role of literary studies in an age of climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental destruction and degradation, and animal death and suffering. As he points out, these developments and students' responses to these various crises have received little or no attention in most educational contexts. Furthermore, many of today's curricular goals are essentially useless and meaningless for students facing an uncertain future. Bartosch, like Pedersen, asks us to reconsider what education could and should be in the Anthropocene, to acknowledge students' needs, and to reflect on why and how we teach literature and literary HAS in particular. As he also shows with his reading of Max Porter's novel *Grief Is the Thing with Feathers* (2015), engaging with literary and cultural animals can be a means to "[cultivate] an interest in acts of relating animality and textuality in ways that open up ambiguity and, thus, imaginative spaces for potential conviviality and flourishing."<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the current emphasis on competencies, solutions, and teleological thinking, this kind of learning, Bartosch suggests, "is geared toward bearing witness, ruminating on its meanings, and thus repositioning oneself within a larger web of

13 Bartosch: Dying to Learn, in this volume, p.87.

ecological and semiotic diversities under threat.”<sup>14</sup> Teaching literary HAS and emphasizing “[c]apabilities, resilience, and multispecies flourishing,”<sup>15</sup> then, could be important means of preparing students for the uncertain and perilous times ahead.

Considering texts that are ideally suited to engaging students in the way Bartosch proposes, Liza B. Bauer looks at science fiction or speculative fiction writing – the literary genre *par excellence* for exploring alternative models of human-nonhuman coexistence. In her article “Reading to Stretch the Imagination: Exploring Representations of ‘Livestock’ in Literary Thought Experiments,” she dissects processes of reciprocal negotiation between human and nonhuman beings in texts such as Sue Burke’s *Semiosis* and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. Following Brian McHale’s and Donna Haraway’s credo that highly unlikely worlds encourage readers to critically reflect on current realities, Bauer addresses the following questions: What if chickens, cows, or pigs had the chance to exist for their own ends? What would happen if they could communicate in human language? Or if they were of superior intelligence? Would they subdue humankind, domesticate their co-inhabitants, or coexist harmoniously? By enacting these scenarios in literary storyworlds, SF proves to be particularly fertile ground, yielding insights into the current and future challenges of coexistence. As Bauer convincingly outlines, immersing ourselves in (science) fictional worlds to practice multispecies living does not seem too far removed from reality. The redistribution of animal agency shows that the passivity to which most livestock animals are condemned is not irrevocable. The well-being of both human and nonhuman animals will depend on whether it is possible to theoretically and practically broaden students’ understanding of these entanglements. Since alternatives to animal commodification are thinkable in experimental SF storyworlds, they could constitute, Bauer argues, a significant step toward abolishing animal exploitation.

In her contribution, “Of Birds and Men: Lessons from Mark Cocker’s *Crow Country*,” Michaela Keck discusses strategies for teaching Mark Cocker’s encounters with the often-ignored members of the corvid family in *Crow Country* (2007). Part natural history, part pastoral, and part personal memoir, *Crow Country* raises and explores questions central to HAS regarding both dichotomies such as self/ other, human/ animal, and subject/ object,

14 Bartosch: Dying to Learn, p. 83.

15 Ibid., p. 94.

as well as the potential and limitations of anthropocentrism and the narratives humans construct about other animals. As Cocker's twenty-first-century account of the rooks in East Anglia demonstrates, these corvids are neither domesticated nor companion animals. Since students will be familiar with crows and might even consider them a nuisance at times, Cocker's text offers new perspectives for thinking about so-called "trash animals."<sup>16</sup> However, crows are also famous for their cognitive skills and cooperative capacities, and are therefore particularly suitable agents for challenging human-animal distinctions and simple notions of species boundaries. Keck's paper engages with *Crow Country* as an entry point to teaching core questions of HAS, exploring the ways in which Cocker's narrative draws students' attention to the de/constructions of the birds' natural and cultural history and, conversely, of human animality and/or difference. Focusing on rooks as social constructs and agents, as well as rooks anthropomorphized and reconfigured, Michaela Keck illuminates the role of human-bird relationships in current Anthropocene contexts.

In "Teaching Empathy and Emotions: J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* and Human-Animal Studies," Alexandra Böhm focuses on one of the most influential novels in the field of HAS. In her article, she delineates the two main difficulties in teaching Coetzee's text: firstly, the text's protagonist, fierce and fearless Australian author Elizabeth Costello, is often less-than-lovable and offers few grounds for identification; secondly, the text's multilayered structure further problematizes the authorial voice. However, by focusing on Costello's reassessment of emotion and empathy, Böhm convincingly demonstrates that Coetzee's text offers possibilities for understanding the key concepts of HAS, such as animal agency, alterity, and the necessity of assuming a non-anthropocentric perspective. In the narrative, Costello employs empathy in her approach to animals, but is this also true of the metadiegetic level of Coetzee's text? Does the text itself suggest how to teach empathy? Alexandra Böhm demonstrates that it is possible to elicit affective responses to these questions through emotion journals and role-playing.

Taking her cue from Margo de Mello's *Teaching the Animal*, Maria Moss employs a hands-on, didactic approach to teaching human-animal studies (THAS), introducing texts that she has used in her seminars in the past – from philosophical background materials and sociological surveys to novels,

16 See Kelsi Nagy / Phillip David Johnson (eds): *Trash Animals: How We Live with Nature's Filthy, Feral, Invasive, and Unwanted Species*. Minneapolis / London: U of Minnesota P 2013.

short stories, and poems. In her article, “‘The skin and fur on your shoulders’: Teaching the Animal Turn in Literature,” Moss uses texts that “look at the animals from inside out,”<sup>17</sup> ending with a discussion of SF (see Liza B. Bauer’s article) and chimp fiction. From James Lever’s *Me Cheetah* to George Saunders’s story *Fox 8*, she focuses on animal agency within the narrative form, presenting texts that feature animals as narrators. Once we acknowledge that notions of language, cognition, and thinking about the future are no longer limited to human narrators and that “storying” is no longer specific to humans, Moss writes, interspecies storied imaginings mark one possible alternative to the long history of human dominance and exceptionalism – not just in life, but in literature, too.

In “Jagd oder die Kultivierung der Gewalt: Tierethische Sensibilisierung anhand der Filme *Die Spur* und *Auf der Jagd*” (Hunting or the Cultivation of Violence: Sensitizing Students to Animal Ethics using the Films *Spoor* and *On the Hunt*), Björn Hayer proposes an intervention that allows students to understand hunting as a cultural practice and its representation in contemporary film, and to develop greater compassion for nonhuman animals. Arguing that it is possible to relate the cognitive and affective educational goals listed in several secondary school curricula with the objectives of HAS as defined by Gabriele Kompatscher, Hayer sketches a teaching sequence that focuses on two texts featuring hunts: Agnieszka Holland’s *Pokot* (*Spoor*, the 2017 screen adaptation of Olga Tokarczuk’s novel *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*) and Alice Agneskirchner’s 2018 documentary *Auf der Jagd*. Framing his nuanced readings of these two films with recent debates on hunting and animal ethics, Hayer shows that this approach allows secondary school students to develop a better understanding of cinematography. In addition, students also discover how cinematic animals can be used to elicit different cognitive and affective responses that may lead to the development of an ethical regard for nonhuman animals. Contributing to both the literature on animals in film and on related pedagogies, Hayer proposes an approach that could easily be implemented both in secondary schools and in various other educational contexts and settings.

While Hayer convincingly shows how engaging with different film genres can lead not only to a better understanding of the medium but also to a greater awareness of and empathy for nonhuman animals, Jobst Paul proposes an

17 Michael Ondaatje: Introduction. In: Idem: *The Broken Ark*. Ottawa: Oberon 1971, pp. 5–9, here p. 6.

approach to teaching HAS that develops learners' ability to understand and evaluate how representations of animals may function as vehicles for racism, antisemitism, and other dehumanizing ideologies that are based on modes of thinking that provide justifications for animal death, suffering, and exploitation. As Paul notes in "The Philosophical Animal Deconstructed: From Linguistic to Curricular Methodology," the animals that appear in Western philosophical and theological traditions have been disconnected from their referents and have primarily served various human purposes, for example, as figures of thought. Analyzing representations of wolves in the 2019 election campaign by Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), a right-wing German political party, Paul demonstrates how animals have been used to stigmatize and marginalize vulnerable populations such as refugees, and how these stereotypes have, in turn, been instrumental in justifying centuries of violence against nonhuman animals. To help learners understand this vicious circle, Paul introduces a method that can be used in various educational contexts, at different levels, and with learners of all ages. The approach to teaching HAS that he proposes allows learners to reconsider how language and power work through the figure of the animal and to develop the ability to think intersectionally. Particularly in an age of numerous political and environmental crises, there is an urgent need for pedagogical interventions such as the one proposed by Paul.

In her article, "Spinnenbrille, Dog-Cam und Gassi mit Ziege: Reflexionen über ein tierlinguistisches Projektseminar" (Spider-Glasses, Dog-Cams, and Walkies with a Goat – Reflections on a Project Seminar on Animal Linguistics), Pamela Steen describes a linguistics seminar that she taught in the summer semester of 2020 at the University of Koblenz-Landau. The author offers a general classification of pragmatic linguistics in HAS in order to justify its categorization as a sub-discipline of cultural animal studies. Steen pays special attention both to the creative methods participants use to incorporate animal perspectives into their research and to the aspect of empathy for animals. This aspect is not only a central linguistic feature but also relevant to the researcher's perspective. A particularly sophisticated method of empathizing with animals are the "spider glasses" developed by a student of Steen's seminar, Katharina Anna-Lena von Werne. In excerpts from her research report, von Werne describes how she sees the world "through the eyes of a spider" and what personal changes this has brought about for her in relation to non-human animals.

Reframing and contextualizing the contributions to this collection in her epilogue, Greta Gaard shows how many of the key concerns and objectives of human-animal studies and of related fields such as critical animal studies can be traced back – sometimes directly, at times obliquely – to earlier forms of intersectional activism as well as scholarship by women on behalf of (non)human others. In her account of the emergence of human-animal studies as a distinct institutionalized discourse, Gaard stresses the important contributions made by feminist scholars working at the intersection of fields such as ecofeminism and critical race studies, as well as environmental justice and animal liberation movements. These perspectives have, Gaard argues, greatly contributed to the evolution of human-animal studies into a dynamic and increasingly transdisciplinary field. These developments have opened up numerous lines of inquiry regarding modes of oppression and exploitation across species lines for researchers and students alike while also pointing to, in very practical terms, numerous opportunities for sustainability initiatives, for example, on campuses. Perhaps most importantly, human-animal studies has, Gaard emphasizes, effectively dismantled dominant and destructive conceptions of Western identity, inviting us to reclaim and practice “ecological multispecies kinship, powering and re-storying our collective humanimal resistance and recovery in the Anthropocene.”<sup>18</sup>

Taken together, the contributions in this volume and their different approaches to teaching HAS consider how concepts of agency, interaction, relationality, and empathy could be used to overcome human exceptionalism and the categorical divide between humans and animals in and outside the classroom. In this sense, they also expand the institutional boundaries of teaching HAS without necessarily abolishing the institutions of education and knowledge themselves. The articles thus provide guidance for readers teaching in these institutional structures while pushing these structures at the same time. In light of the rapid advances being made in the field of HAS and new perspectives that are developing on the concepts listed above, it is safe to assume that theoretical and practical approaches to teaching HAS will continue to evolve. We hope that the present volume can contribute to this development and inspire those seeking to firmly establish HAS in school and university curricula in an effort to overcome anthropocentrism and its effects in education and beyond.

18 Greta Gaard: Epilogue, in this volume, p. 231.

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