

[Review] Susan Mary Pyke.

Animal Visions: Posthumanist Dream Writing.

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Animal Visions is a gift for any aficionado of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Susan Mary Pyke, with a background in literary animal studies and ecofeminist literary criticism, reads this iconic text diffractively through the concepts of dream writing and dream reading. Various 'afterings' – novels, poems, film, dance – in response to the novel are centrally included and intertwined with the original text, for example: Anne Carson's 'The Glass Essay'; Kathy Acker's 'Obsession'; film versions of *Wuthering Heights* including Bunuel's *Abismos de Pasión*; Kate Bush's 'Wuthering Heights'.

Dream writing is a 'practice' in which readers are 'embodied with the bodies of others' (9) as they are made aware of their own vulnerabilities and animalities, their co-dependence with other species. Possibilities are opened up but never brought to closure in explication as readers co-dream with the dreaming writer. Dream writing when it is posthumanist can foster ontological connections with other creatures, but these can be unsettling. Brontë's affective dream writing haunts the afterings that engage with the posthumanisms of the novel.

For Pyke, the narratives of posthuman dream writing 'unfold' (105) depending on the reader's reception. Reading Pyke's interwoven text can be dream-like, even mesmeric (at least for this reader), yet while the poetic expressiveness beguiles, theories of Freud, Derrida,

Cixous, Jung, Brennan, Ettinger to name a few, anchor discussions on dreams. The reader is gently led into a posthumanist openness that does not demand clarity or closure in her understanding of Brontë's dream writing.

Spectres haunt *Animal Visions*. The Emily ghost manifests repeatedly in the novel, in this text and in the afterings. The Cathy ghost is indeterminate and 'peri-hysterical'; a substantial examining of theories around hysteria, and the pitfalls of deploying hysteria contextualise Cathy's terrified scream at her own reflection in the mirror. The 'uneasy uncertainty' about ghosts recurs in *Wuthering Heights* and its afterings.

In my (dream) reading one of the most persuasive chapters is that on 'Moor Loving' with its ongoing negation of romantic love as 'desire limited to the self' (196). Posthumanist 'moor love' is expansive, incorporating 'the more than human' in its 'devotional' (196) love without possessiveness. Ettinger's matrixial borderspace opens out such love. This chapter is enchanting dream writing as the diffractive methodology refuses the dualisms of self and other, discourse and matter, words and things.

In the foregrounding of the presence of animals in the novel, Pyke suggests that '[t]o consider the question of animal relations in this novel is to consider its heart' (238). Pyke takes a detail, magnifies it, entwines it with other details: in this way birds feature – the death of lapwings, the bird's feathers in the hat gifted to the girl-child Cathy at Thrushcross Grange, the feathers the dying woman tears from her pillow. Heathcliff, who has been critically regarded as bestial is redeemed through a reading that has him merely as 'an animal amongst other animals' (243-244). Cathy's famous cry 'I *am* Heathcliff' becomes a statement beyond binaries of transcorporeality that encompasses not only Heathcliff but the moors as well.

The 'readerly devotions' (73) of various 'afterings' intra-act with *Wuthering Heights* as posthuman dream writing as posthuman dream reading. *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), the first 'aftering', is not included although Lyndall and Waldo in the Cape Colony echo Cathy and Heathcliff; the barren Karoo recalls the 'Thou' of the moors; posthumanist encounters with the land and other animals recur. For this devoted reader its non-inclusion is a disappointment and

perhaps unjustified – a case of different readings as Pyke settles on Schreiner’s anthropo-theological closure as a reason not to consider it here. The discussion of Anne Carson’s ‘The Glass Essay’ is joyous no matter that the poem is tragic; that of Kathy Acker’s ‘Obsession’ disturbing, edifying. Dream writing is ‘painful joy’ (142). Sylvia Plath’s speaker in ‘Wuthering Heights’ makes an unheroic anthropocentric choice but the closure of the poem is not as stark as Pyke suggests. That the ‘house lights/Gleam like small change’ does not signify an entirely grateful return to civilisation (Just as the ‘lit house’ where ‘the old difficulties take me to wife’ at the ending of ‘Parliament Hill Fields’ promises no sanctuary).

Literature can make readers more attentive, but Pyke is careful not to make large claims: ‘going on with life, as if cross-species communications do indeed occur, might be enough to create lasting change’ (242). It might seem grandiose to posit dream writing as an antidote to climate change science but an attentiveness to a world that communicates can nurture ways of being beyond the limits of the anthropo-theological, foster a sensitivity to ‘shared possibilities of grace’ (273) with other creatures. Dream writing certainly queers humanist thinking.

Animal Visions locates *Wuthering Heights* historically: mystical, uncanny, troubling a Wordsworthian view of Nature as a female muse subservient to human desire. *Animal Visions* is poetically mesmerising. So much so that we accrue a different sense of our (reading) body that is not limited by our skin.