[Review] *Animal Horror Cinema: Genre, History and Criticism*, Katarina Gregersdotter, Johan Höglund and Nicklas Hållén (eds). Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

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Animal Horror Cinema: Genre, History and Criticism is the first anthology of academic writing on the animal horror genre. It provides both an historical overview of animal horror cinema as well as a selection of in-depth essays on particularly potent and provocative examples of the genre. The collection as a whole offers a large and varied range of critical analyses and interpretations on the significance of the animal in modern horror film and is a valuable text for critical animal studies and cinema scholars as well as fans of horror film.

In a comprehensive introduction, the editors clearly define animal horror cinema as a portrayal of fictional narratives rather than documentary offerings – an important distinction to make given the long history of animal, 'wildlife', and 'nature' documentaries and the plethora of such material widely available to audiences. The realm of animal horror cinema is thus defined as a place where fictional representations of 'dangerous and transgressive' animals elicit fear and suspense, and where such animals seek to 'challenge the predominance of the human through physical, sometimes consumptive, violence' (5). It is then suggested that the volume may be read as 'an exploration of animal horror cinema as a space made possible by the spatial and conceptual separation of the human and the non-human animal' and that this separation 'prepares the ground for narratives about moments when humans and animals come face to face, or even cross the conceptual borders that separate them' (3). Indeed, in the essays that follow, the authors not only describe the contributing factors of to this space between the human and non-human animal, but also the significance of the 'horrific' invasion or erasure of that space with respect to their chosen films. The authors also elucidate and analyse various filmic representations of the entanglement of the human and non-human animal experience, and the implications of that entanglement in wider contexts.

The collection begins with a history of animal horror cinema. The genre's trajectory is traced from *King Kong* (1933) the 'first widely successful animal horror film' (22) and the influence of early wildlife and natural history films on the burgeoning genre, through to the animal invasion films of the 1950s and 60s and narratives informed by the 'tenuous nature of American life during the early atomic era' (26). The 'eco-horror' films of the 1970s and 80s, which depict animals acting 'on behalf of a brutalised nature' are also discussed, as is the significance of the infamous animal horror *Jaws* (1975) and its continuing influence on the genre. The chapter ends with a discussion on the influence of technology on contemporary animal horror films, not just in terms of narrative influence (the advent of genetic manipulation and increased animal testing for example), but also in terms of film production and the dichotomy created by the employment of computer generated imagery (CGI) whereby animals on the screen might now look more realistic, but are perhaps 'less real in the sense that they can be made to behave as an animal actor could not be made to do' (35). This historical overview provides essential contextual material for the reader and makes for a strong foundation for the remainder of the collection.

Australian animal horror is the subject of two critical analyses, and both offer diverse takes on the films chosen for discussion. In Michael Fuch's essay on the ecocritical subtexts of *Rogue* (2007) *Black Water* (2007) and *The Reef* (2010), he persuasively argues that the anthropocentric representation of animals in the films (namely, the Australian crocodile and the great white shark) actually frustrates the notion of human dominance over the ecosystem. Fuch draws attention to 'fissures in the perceptual realism' of the films (14) where differences in lighting 'produce a plasticity' (48), lack of depth in certain images highlights their composite character, or attempts at representing the 'realness' of animals via the use of computer generated imagery are problematic. Fuch asserts that these disruptions to the visual narrative 'counteract the movie's reality effect' (48) and suggest that humans will 'never be able to truly comprehend "the animal" [...] as any (illusion of) understanding these species requires human discourses which can never capture their essence' (49). Fuch's point is definitely food for thought, and is a helpful one to bear in mind during the reading of the other analyses in the collection. In 'Consuming Wildlife: Representations of Tourism and Retribution in Australian Horror Film', Maja Milatovic also discusses the Australian film *Rogue* and its representation of the Australian crocodile as a 'counter-paradisal' source of horror (76), as well as Colin

Eggleston's classic, *The Long Weekend* (1978), which depicts a couple harassed by various animal species including eagles, possums, and dugongs. Milatovic contends that these films represent the links between consumerism, tourism, and the commodification of Australian wildlife and, despite the films' reaffirmation of stereotypes and the 'Western imperial gaze' (14), the confrontations between indigenous animals and humans counter the commodification of land based on 'white entitlement, privilege and stereotypes' whilst also posing questions about 'white complicity' (78). Miltovic's work therefore provides an excellent example of a discussion of the entanglement of human and non-human animal issues.

Another exemplary analysis regarding human and non-human animal entanglement is found in Craig Ian Mann's essay which focuses on the American horror, *Allligator* (1980). In this narrative, the alligator is encountered outside its natural habitat, and the implications of its infiltration of the urban cityscape and its choice of human fodder are explored. Mann's discussion of this 'post-*Jaws* eco-horror' set in Chicago and based on the 'Alligators in the Sewers' urban legend, is interesting and insightful. He argues that the film's potency is derived from its relationship with the urban legend from which it draws the foundations of the narrative and its over-arching theme of repetition. Mann illustrates the ways in which *Alligator* 'transforms the cyclical nature of urban legends into a metaphor for the plight of the social underclass, doomed under the capitalist system to repeat periodic cycles of oppression and revolt' (111) via its depiction of a revenge-seeking super-gator who 'emerges from the sewers and eat[s] his way to the top of the social food chain, only to be forced underground' (111). His is another potent example of the entanglement of human and non-human animal lives.

Another invasion by an animal into a human space, albeit an invasion of a very different kind, is the subject of critique in Susan Schwertfeger's 'Re-Education as Exorcism: How a White Dog is Challenging the Strategies for Dealing with Racism'. Schwertfeger's analysis centres on the film *White Dog* (1982), the story of a stray dog taken in by an actress living in the Hollywood Hills who later finds that her canine companion has been trained to attack and kill black people. In an interesting move, Schwertfeger employs the features of the Gothic genre as the foundation for her analysis. She discusses the ways in which the literal and figurative 'white dog' may be viewed as both an uncanny and haunting figure in the Gothic tradition, and the many references to the term 'monster', a notion 'canonically linked to the Gothic' (130). Once she has established these and other Gothic-like characteristics of the film, Schwertfege then

highlights the ways in director, Samuel Fuller, inverts Gothic tropes in order to address the issue of racism and its consequences. She convincingly argues, for example, that while traditional monster or Other is usually shown as 'dark', 'the dog's white coat […] counteracts the white normative self' whilst also permuting the 'colonial schemes of domination and authority' (135-136) and that the humanizing of the 'monster' in various ways is a reversal of the usual practice of de-humanizing the Gothic Other. Schwertfege's work here is cogent and forceful and an asset to the volume as a whole.

Though it is explained in the introduction that the focus on Anglo-Western animal horror cinema is due to the Western origins of the genre (as spurred by the prevalence of a 'certain fascination with the primitive, as it is constructed in the West' (13)), it would have perhaps made for a richer volume if more analyses of non-Western films had been included. The sole deviation from Western examples of the genre is Myha T. Do's discussion of the 'insidious invasion of animal demons into the societies and hearts of humans' (16) in the Chinese film *Painted Skin* (2008). Do's analysis of the human-animal 'transmutations' in Gordan Chan's film and the ways in which these representations bring power issues around sexuality, gender, and consumption to the fore, is a compelling read and it seems a shame that there are no other analyses of films outside the Western realm here to compare and contrast with Do's work. However, the collection is nevertheless a diverse and robust one, and this is a small criticism of an otherwise absorbing and informative read. As the editors state in the introduction:

> The reason why this is the first anthology of its kind might be that, with the exception of some notable classics, […] animal horror cinema has long been seen as a low-budget, low-quality form of entertainment that is largely disconnected from serious cultural debates. (5)

This inaugural anthology intelligently and effectively challenges those assumptions and makes a strong case for the value of animal horror films as rich sources of material for critical analysis.