

[Review] DeVries, Scott M.
 Creature Discomfort: Fauna-criticism, Ethics and the
 Representation of Animals in Spanish American Fiction and
 Poetry. Leiden: Brill, 2016. *Critical Animal Studies*, 4. 328pp.

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Scott M. DeVries' exhaustive overview of Spanish American Literature serves as a substantial introduction to Spanish American literature in relation to Critical Animal Studies and what DeVries terms Traditional Animal Studies. Motivated by the lack of Spanish American literature featuring in animal studies, his survey convinces of the richness of this literature. The neologism 'fauna-criticism' is underpinned by TAS and CAS for their 'ethical advocacy in defense of nonhumans' and for their theorising about animals which generates a 'proper understanding' of animals (25). The term is intended to avoid the 'slippages of meaning' (32) and the 'baggage' that has accrued to other terms like liberationism, animal rights or animal studies, terms which may have become contradictory and problematic.

DeVries delineates seven tasks that structure his analysis within TAS and CAS debates. Geared to an extension of the canon and a revision of Spanish American literary history, *Creature Discomfort* also aims to rediscover earlier texts which can be regarded as animal-centric and reinterprets canonical texts which incorporate animal ethics. He plans to 'expound animal ethical positions' (27) suggesting that literature can have an activist role in raising consciousness and empathy.

In Part I, Sentience, Consciousness, Identity, on nineteenth, twentieth century and contemporary texts, we are introduced to Uruguayan Horacio Quiroga's short stories of animal

sentience, to Colombian José Manuel Marroquín's *El Moro* which recalls Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, to Chilean Luis Sepúlveda's environmental novels. These narratives range from a coati with agency and empathy for humans, to a colt's perspective on human cruelty, to an orphaned seagull taught to fly by a cat. Texts are located historically and geographically and in terms of literary history.

Literary Animal Studies has tended to neglect the genre of poetry, although the publication of Aaron M. Moe's *Zoopoetics: Animals and the Making of Poetry* (Lexington Books, 2014) and Michael Malay's *The Figure of the Animal in Modern and Contemporary Poetry* (Palgrave, 2018) may signal a shift. DeVries' consideration of Spanish American poetry in Part 2, *Gone to the Swans: Modernismo and Poetry*, is a welcome contribution to poetic debates. Yet he evinces dis-ease about its unreliability, referring to 'the inexplicit, ambiguous, and sometimes opaque or even doubtful language of poetry' (139), and too much of the analysis of the poems comes close to paraphrase with a lack of attention to poetic diction undermining this chapter. In spite of having to engage with poems through translation, such aspects as imagery, tone and language could be productively included in connection with the figuring of animals. Even so, the poems of Pablo Neruda, Homero Aridjis and José Enrico Pacheco shine through and demand further attention by animal studies scholars.

In Part 3, *Regional Literature, Indigenismo, Recent Fiction*, DeVries's analysis often takes off when he includes posthuman concepts that are not directly bound by the parameters he has set himself. Judith Butler's 'grievability' in relation to the endless killing by colonial settlers of viscachas opens up Argentinian Carlos Quiroga's novel, *Animalitos de Dios*. Similarly, Anat Pick's concept of vulnerability (which both human and nonhuman animals share) expands an appreciation of *indigenista* literature. The representation of the hell realms in 'El Matadero' (The Slaughter Yard) by Esteban Echeverría could have benefitted though from more engagement with animal studies debates about killing such as those raised, for example, in Jay Johnston and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey's edited collection *Animal Death* (Sydney University Press, 2013). The stark recurrence of detailed depictions in regional literature of cruelty to horses, whales and circus animals makes for painful reading.

Indigenous traditional beliefs in recent literature and non-fiction foreground kinship between human and nonhuman, totem animals and metamorphosis. Rigoberta Menchú of the K'iche people who believed in the nahual or totem animal describes the killing of animals in her village by militia sent by the plantation owner: 'to kill an animal is like killing a person' (261) she says. At first DeVries seems to dismiss Menchú's testimony as it does not 'promulgate an animal liberationist discourse' (261), but he grants that 'viewed from a fauna-critical perspective' (262), her testimony can be read alongside Spanish American indigenista texts which deal with 'animal ethics' and animality.

Much as I admire *Creature Discomfort* and much as I learned from it, I found it limited, to some extent, by a certain rigidity in relation to TAS and CAS: categorising texts too often takes precedence over a more open-ended discussion, one which could celebrate rather than shy away from multiplicity or lack of closure. At the same time, *Creature Discomfort* is impressively far-ranging and will be invaluable for the researcher in Spanish American literature, and for undergraduate and postgraduate students in animal studies.