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Book Review

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Life Writing in the Posthuman Anthropocene illustrates the relevance of posthumanist accounts of the life course in the present-day context of ecological crisis. Past collaborators Ina Batzke and Linda M. Hess (Batzke et al. 2018) are here joined by Lea Espinoza Garrido in presenting an analytically-sophisticated and politically-poignant, yet often entertaining, collection of seven essays and one interview. In addition to their Introduction, these texts show how well the editors' shared interests in auto/biography, queerness, gender, popular culture, and migration studies synergize with the environmental humanities, a novel dimension in their respective bibliographies.

The eight contributions are equally distributed across two sections—"Responsible Relationality" and "Relational Responsibility"—that highlight two general approaches to the following posthumanist concern: how could life writing, the literary epitome of humanism, support more responsible/decentralized human-environmental relations, given that for centuries humanist philosophy helped justify the anthropocentric attitudes that caused the ecological crisis? Katja Sarkowsky frames this concern as a paradox in the opening essay, "Relationality, Autobiographical Voice, and the Posthuman Paradox: Decentering the Human in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Life Writing*." Her case study of Silko's memoirs, letters, essays, and photobooks uncovers a type of autobiographical storytelling that allows human and nonhuman elements to interface without breaching each other's ontological boundaries, for example without anthropomorphizing the "other-than-human" (25). To attempt such a breach would only result in an unproductive paradox. Instead, the author argues, this renowned Native-American writer scrutinizes both her material and discursive dependency upon human-nonhuman relations and her own privileged/human-centric position within said relations. Sarkowsky's comparative methodology shines particularly bright when she traces the effects of place upon the memoirist's narrative voice across and within her works: hence there is Silko, the host at the "storied spaces" (40) of her ancestral land in New Mexico, retelling tales from the past, but also Silko, the explorer of her new estate in Arizona, creating stories in the present.

The second contribution to this volume is Christina Caupert's "The Big Picture: Life as Sympoietic Becomings in Rachel Rosenthal's Performance Art." Like Sarkowsky's essay, this one takes the reader on an analytical *tour de force* through decades-worth of work by a profound female artist. The French-born daughter of Jewish Russians who fled the 1917 Revolution, Rosenthal was, for Caupert, a precocious posthumanist ecofeminist. Caupert reconstructs the philosophical progression of Rosenthal's one-woman shows from their earlier, feminist iterations (which critiqued individualist, stable, pre-given identities) to their latter-day, posthumanist ones (which often featured untrained

animals and dystopian sci-fi elements). Although illustrations would have been helpful here (supposing that they even exist), Caupert's vivid descriptions of these "collective sensory, affective, and intellectual journeys" (57) nonetheless convey how topics like interspecies companionship, war, gender norms, and technocratic capitalism collided on Rosenthal's stage as she openly processed autobiographical (mis)adventures.

In "Edges and Extremes in Ecobiography: Amy Liptrot's *The Outrun*" Jessica White extols works that, like Liptrot's, critically update the historically anthropocentric and imperialistic nature writing genre. Echoing a prime posthumanist concern, she asks whether nature is a mere "backdrop [...] to the human world" (115), or are they co-constitutive? For White, Liptrot's ultimately human struggles with alcoholism and homesickness are nonetheless environmentally contingent. They manifested when she moved to the big city in an attempt to flee the cold, rural isolation of the Scottish archipelago of her youth and the stress caused by her father's bipolar disorder. Furthermore, Liptrot overcomes her addiction only after reconnecting with her home by farming, ocean swimming, and protecting its endangered bird species. However, as compelling as texts like *The Outrun* and interpretations like White's are, "the relationships between a human and their ecosystem" (100) that are presented here often do not exceed the level of metaphor and analogy. For example, when Liptrot's and her father's emotional swings are characterized by herself and White as analogous to the archipelago's extreme weather, this is a nice allegory, but not an instance of more-than-human entanglement. Even the titular outrun, "the rough grazing land on the furthest reaches of a property [...] where domestic and wild animals co-exist" (103), eventually becomes a metaphor for Liptrot's anxious, though adventurous, personality. When the environment, then, is a mere mirror to one's soul, is this so different from old nature writing?

Finishing the first section, we encounter what is arguably the volume's most creative piece. "The Sentience of Sea Squirts" is a first-person account whereby poet Clare Brant combines her ocean diving anecdotes with kaleidoscopic philosophical musings. Inspired by "those questions of scale" that accompany "Anthropocene-minded criticism" (124), Brant introduces us to the tiny lives of sea hares, marine snails, and sea squirts. "Their lowliness on our scale of recognition makes them easy to overlook. We can't see the processes by which they filter, feed, repair, reproduce, so we think they do nothing" (129)—and treat them as pests, food, or pharmacopoeia. Her point is that posthumanist life writers should responsibly relate not only to those macroscopic and dry parts of the Earth wherein humans roam, but also to the small and underwater worlds that necessitate attention and care just as much. Scientific biographers, for example, could achieve this by exposing the "human constructedness" (135) of biological discourse, as illustrated in Brant's brief genealogy of sea squirt taxonomy.

The second part of the book is opened by Renata Lucena Dalmaso, for whom "Relational Responsibility," this section's title, entails a move away from seeing human-nonhuman relations as merely spatial. Like Brant, Dalmaso invites us to go beyond anthropocentric scales—in this case, of time. Her essay "Humanity, Life Writing, and Deep Time: Postcolonial Contributions" illustrates postcolonial life writing's power to articulate posthumanist temporalities. The span of celestial and geological formations, deep time is a cornerstone concept in her reading of two books: one by the renowned Indian writer Amitav Ghosh, and another by Brazilian philosopher and Indigenous militant Ailton Krenak. For Dalmaso, these authors' depictions of their ancestral connection to rivers, forests, and mountains transcend personal, familial, and ethnic narratives. More specifically, they circumvent anthropocentrism by spotlighting nonhuman narrators, like tree rings, sedimentation layers, and the weather. Human agency, a tenet of humanist storytelling, is thereby reframed as but one of the many vectors in a story being told for much longer than anyone's lifetime.

The second essay in this section continues the literary criticism format followed by the majority of the contributions. “Helen Macdonald’s *H is for Hawk* and Critical Posthumanism” by Monir Gholamzadeh Bazarbash is a reminder of the physical, psychological, and social challenges to ethical interspecies relationships. Bazarbash extracts many practical insights from Macdonald’s experience of training Mabel, a goshawk. Evoking “this sense of close connection and radical difference at the same time” (190), her process of understanding (rather than suppressing) Mabel’s wants, needs, and habits involved hunting with and sleeping in the same quarters as Mabel but also coping with her random nightly attacks. Insofar as it is a radical stance against humanist hierarchies of bodies, groups, and species, posthumanism can be uncomfortable to implement sometimes, as suggested by Bazarbash’s reading of Macdonald’s self-reported display of relational responsibility towards Mabel.

In “Writing Life on Mars: Posthuman Imaginaries of Extraterrestrial Colonization and the NASA Mars Rover Missions,” Jens Temmen shows that space colonization politics is not only an extension of European colonialism but it also sidesteps the climate crisis public debate. Powerful states and their ultrawealthy contractors, enamored by the promise of an entire planet’s worth of unmined, unfarmed, and undeveloped land on Mars, have weaponized humanity’s fear of extinction, Temmen argues, by framing the idea of an off-world mass resettlement as a viable solution to environmental collapse. He proceeds to carefully demonstrate how this neoliberal project of privatizing Mars fuels the mediatic processes of animorphization of NASA robots and heroification of billionaire ‘astronauts,’ an analysis which makes this a compelling piece of cultural criticism.

The book closes with “(Life) Narrative in the Posthuman Anthropocene: Erin James in Conversation with Birgit Spengler,” a truly effervescent interview of ecocritical, narratological, and feminist proportions. One gets pleasantly lost in the interlocutors’ perspectives on, for example, forest fire science communication and econarratology as an anti-imperialism of the mind. Moreover, James invites scholars to investigate how the environment, broadly conceptualized, is made absent in humanist narratives. Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* is her example here: “the whole plot is made possible by Sir Thomas Bertram’s plantation in Antigua”, “the whole thing is financed by a system of enslavement [...] that largely goes unnarrated” (239-240).

Life Writing in the Posthuman Anthropocene is a down-to-earth (quite literally) posthumanist account that substitutes speculative futurism for a much-needed socioecological sensitivity. Students of the aging process would be inspired by the ways in which their object is put into perspective—temporally, philosophically, culturally, and bio-ecologically—by all of the authors discussed above, except perhaps for Brant and Temmen (although the latter does touch upon nonhuman death rituals). The book would also benefit anyone interested in the intersection between environmental and biographical studies; in the search for ‘actually-occurring’ posthumanism; or in the analytical import of theories by figures like Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Karen Barad. Indeed, although this is not a theoretical book (i.e., one will not find the clarification of basic terms like post-, anti-, trans-, and nonhumanism in it), all of the essays stand as rigorous examples of theory application.

References

Batzke, Ina, Eric C. Erbacher, Linda M. Hess, and Corinna Lenhardt, eds. 2018. *Exploring the Fantastic: Genre, Ideology, and Popular Culture*. Bielefeld: Transcript.