

Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture, edited by Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen and Essi Varis



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Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Essi Varis, editors.

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A post-anthropocentric worldview rejects the primacy of human beings and seeks to encourage more ethical cohabitation between humans and nonhumans. In this vein, the anthology *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture* offers a collection of essays that aim to encourage serious reflection on the intra-action of various forms of matter.

The editors, Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Essi Varis, acknowledge that this line of inquiry has become increasingly popular across disciplines as the destructive impact of human life on the planet can no longer be ignored (1-2). However, what sets this collection apart is its literary and cultural studies methodology and its subsequent attention to both real and imagined figures. They argue that art's capacity to induce reflection on "subjective, embodied aspects of (nonhuman) experience...is likely to have notable epistemological and ethical repercussions" (5)—in ways that other disciplines are not able to achieve. In addition to effectively demonstrating the need for such an approach, the editors' introduction identifies the significance of narrative studies to the processes by which posthumanism, and by extension new materialism, interrogate forms of embodiment.

The anthology is divided into five sections. The first section contains essays that focus on theoretical and methodological concerns. In the opening chapter, Carole Guesse, questioning whether literature can ever really be posthumanist, ponders what a literary studies framework has to offer posthumanism. This chapter is followed by essays on the summoning of nonhuman entities through art and engaging in a mode of reading called "becoming-instrument" (57). This latter chapter in particular, by Kaisa Kortekallio, offers a useful way for thinking through the essays in the second section, which reflect on the depiction of nonhuman characters in a variety

of media: comic books, video games, and children's literature. Each of these chapters posits that fictional characters "can be used as a tool for approaching other, actual or imaginary, nonhuman creatures" (Varis 87). In their chapter "Wild Things Squeezed in the Closet: Monsters of Children's Literature as Nonhuman Others," Marleena Mustola and Sanna Karkulehto conclude that such a tool (like a monster in a children's book) reconfigures the boundaries between humans and nonhumans through the cultivation of empathy. The third section addresses the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals. Mikko Keskinen opens the section by positioning the deceased dog narrator in Charles Siebert's *Angus* (2001) as a hybrid, "quasi-human character" (159). Similarly, the other chapters in this section examine the transboundary relationship between humans and pigs, as well as disabled humans and guide dogs.

The fourth section analyzes the agency afforded to human-created machines. Among calls for "renewed narratives about digital machines" (Collomb and Goyet 203) and "resisting the capitalist agenda of colonialism and docile subjectivity available for the player in *Minecraft*" (Huuhka 220), Patricia Flanagan and Raune Frankjør offer the most distinctive chapter in the anthology: "Cyberorganic Wearables: Sociotechnical Misbehavior and the Evolution of Nonhuman Agency." They contend that the "techno-genesis of the body [via wearable technology]...has the potential to foster interconnected ways of understanding our place within the Neganthropocene" (Flanagan and Frankjør 236). The chapter is filled with images of cyberorganic technology like the *Bamboo Whisper*, and the authors make a compelling case for how such wearables force us to rethink what it means to be human, nonhuman, and everything in between. Thoughtfully placed, the final section, which consists solely of Juha Raipola's "Unnarratable Matter: Emergence, Narrative, and Material Ecocriticism," considers the limitations of seeking to understand that which is not human through a narrative lens.

As evidenced by the range of content contained in this collection, the diverse texts and modes that are addressed is commendable. As with any anthology, some of the essays are stronger than others, but this is a collection that conveys a sense of cohesion, of each chapter being essential and in conversation with each other, in a way that anthologies don't always achieve. If there's a weakness, it's that the contents vary in terms of their accessibility both stylistically and in their subject matter. Accordingly, this is a collection for the posthumanist scholar who is already well-versed in posthumanist thought. Despite the heavy subject matter, however, there is a refreshing sense of playfulness to *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture* that manages not to undermine the urgency of the topic but instead demonstrates the imaginative potential for more ethical cohabitation. Ultimately, this is a significant contribution that reminds us what art and literature have to offer an endangered planet.

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