

[Review] Daniel Horowitz, *Bear With Me: A Cultural History of Famous Bears in America*. Duke University Press, 2025. 288 pp. ISBN: 9781478028826.

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Daniel Horowitz's *Bear With Me* offers a richly textured and intellectually engaging cultural history of bears in American culture. Spanning over two centuries, the book traces how bears – both real and imagined – have come to occupy a central place in the American imagination, serving as icons of wilderness, comfort, danger, and identity. Drawing on a broad interdisciplinary foundation, Horowitz blends insights from media studies, environmental humanities, and cultural history to explore the symbolic and emotional roles that bears have played across diverse cultural domains.

The book's central thesis is that bears have served as potent cultural signifiers, embodying a range of contradictory meanings: wildness and domesticity; menace and comfort; ecological crisis and nostalgic innocence. Horowitz's analysis is particularly effective in demonstrating how these meanings have been mediated through anthropomorphism, a process that renders bears legible as moral agents, political symbols, and emotional surrogates. As he writes, bears 'represent and evoke both terror and comfort', a duality that makes them uniquely suited to their cultural omnipresence.

Organized thematically, the volume includes chapters on emblematic figures such as Smokey Bear, the Teddy Bear, and Coca-Cola's polar mascots, as well as more recent phenomena including the 'Cocaine Bear' and the gay bear subculture. These case studies are

unified by a consistent methodological approach that blends cultural history with media analysis, yielding insights into the ways in which bears have been mobilized to articulate shifting American values around nature, identity, and consumption.

Horowitz's treatment of anthropomorphism is especially nuanced. Rather than simply critiquing it as a form of sentimental projection, he explores its affective and political utility, particularly in the context of environmental advocacy and children's literature. The chapter on Smokey Bear, for instance, reveals how a government-sponsored mascot became a symbol of environmental stewardship while simultaneously reinforcing anthropomorphic tropes that blur the line between animal and human.

The book also engages with darker themes, such as the tragic story of Timothy Treadwell, whose fatal encounter with grizzly bears in Alaska serves as a cautionary tale about the limits of emotional projection onto wild animals. Horowitz uses this case to underscore the psychological and ethical complexities of human-bear relationships, particularly in the context of environmental activism and ecotourism; he does, however, mainly consider this impact from a human-centred perspective. Climate change emerges as a recurring motif, especially in discussions of polar bears. These animals are framed as 'emblems of ecological crisis', their plight used to evoke empathy and mobilize public concern. Horowitz critiques the commodification of this empathy, pointing to corporate branding strategies that exploit environmental imagery for commercial gain.

Horowitz's prose is lucid and engaging, balancing scholarly depth with narrative accessibility. In comparison to other recent works emphasizing ecological, behavioural, and conservationist perspectives, Horowitz's volume is more focused on symbolic and representational dimensions offering complementary insights into the cultural and biological significance of bears. It is particularly well-suited for scholars in American studies, cultural history, environmental humanities, and media studies.

In conclusion, *Bear With Me* makes a valuable contribution to the cultural history of animals. It reveals how bears have served as mirrors of American values, anxieties, and aspirations, and how their representations continue to shape our understanding of nature, identity, and emotion. This exploration of deeply seated cultural models built around the understanding, or at times miss-understanding, of an iconic animal provides much of value for the field of animal studies.