[Review]

Ann-Sofie Lönngren. Following the Animal: Power, Agency, and Human-Animal Transformations in Modern, Northern-European Literature. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2015. 213 pp. Index.

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Abstract: *This timely book deals with the theme of human-animal transformations in modern literature from Europe's northernmost part, all of which are structured by power and agency in relation to the Western tradition's human/animal divide. The figure of transformation simultaneously contains subversive and conservative potential because the transformation can be voluntary and liberating or forced, oppressive and degrading. This means that human-animal transformation in literature is about agency, change and politics. The purpose of the book is to bring out the tension between the anthropocentric and more-than-anthropocentric worlds imbedded in the figure of human-animal transformation.*

The author of this timely book notes in the Introduction that the book's four chapters can be read either together or separately. They all deal with the theme of human-animal transformations in modern literature of Europe's northernmost region, and are structured by power and agency in relation to the Western tradition's human/animal divide. The figure of transformation simultaneously contains subversive and conservative potential since the transformation can be voluntary and liberating or forced, oppressive and degrading. Hence, human-animal transformation in literature is about agency, change and politics. The book aims to bring out the tension between the anthropocentric and more-than-anthropocentric worlds imbedded in the figure of human-animal transformation.

Scandinavian literature includes many examples of this transformation. August Strindberg's *Tschandala* (1888), a novel that was not translated into English until 2007, presents a fascinating narrative of literal human-animal transformation. One of the main reasons for the late translation of the novel is its racist and sexist character. Lönngren's interest in the novel is due to the fact that these provocative aspects are structured around a human-animal transformation. She explains the difference between the notion of actual 'animals' and the concept of 'animality', stressing that these two terms do not mean the same thing. 'Animality' has been defined as the translation of animal instincts into human characteristics, in the wake of the animalisation of humans by Darwin and Freud. *Tschandala* depicts both the concept of 'animality' and actual animals. Moreover, it engages both of these categories in relation to gender, race, sexuality and social class. The dynamics build up to the human-animal transformation at the end of the novel, in the Gypsy-man's transformation into a dog – an act which Lönngren sees as akin to Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming animal'. This transformation becomes 'a line of escape' (80) from a human world of racism. It can also be conceptualised as an act of resistance and a logical choice rather than defeat. Regarding the discussion of ethnic alterity and animality, Lönngren reminds us that the dehumanization of certain groups 'has opened the door for the large scale executions of humans (particularly during World War II)' (12). She notes that in modern Western societies, being defined as 'human' or 'animal' is 'a question situated in the tension between biopolitics and necropolitics'. She further builds on Cary Wolfe's (2003) observation that 'the humanist discourse of species will always be available

for us by some humans against other species – or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference' (Wolfe, qtd in Lönngren 12). This reminder of the intersection between race and species makes the image of the Gypsy-man from the novel written in 1888 relevant in the post-Holocaust context.

In her reading of *The Wolf Bride* (1928) by the Finnish-Estonian woman writer Aino Kallas, Lönngren focuses on the gender and sexuality aspects of the protagonist's identity as both human and wolf. While the novel builds on the mediaeval belief in werewolves and witches, the narrative can also be situated within the context of natural history. In Estonia the significance of wolves is greater than in other places in northern Europe because forests occupy more than 40% of the country's area. Wolves have been abundant here, and humans have had to defend themselves and their livestock. To transgress a boundary between wolves and humans is seen in *The Wolf's Bride* as a constant threat. Lönngren asserts that these transgressions made up 'an "other world", finally resulting in a unique depiction of the qualities of literary wolf-hood' (126). The novel's subtext contains elements of more-than-anthropocentric resistance executed by animals and other non-human agents. The power of the wolf pelt – an object that the wolf-bride wears – can be conceptualized as a literary depiction of Jane Bennet's (2010) notion of the 'vitality of matter' with the non-human as an *actant* because it has sufficient coherence to make a difference and even alter the course of events. The heroine Aalo's body transformation may be seen a depiction of the process of literary materialization.

While transformations into wolves are partially related to the geographical landscape of Northern literatures, a transformation into a monkey takes place in *The Monkey* (1934), by Karin Blixen, the famous author of *Out of Africa,* who published under the penname Isak Dinesen. The monkey in this novel was brought from Zanzibar to an unspecified Northern Protestant country in the early nineteenth century. Written as a 'Gothic tale', the story culminates in the monkey's transformation into a Prioress. Lönngren suggests that the heroine goes through a bodily transformation that leads to joint wisdom. This in turn 'makes up a pledge for a more ethical, less violent relationship between different kinds of bodies' (164). The novel subverts notions of the relationship between matter and discourse, African and European, human and animal.

Lönngren creatively formulates her interpretative method as 'following the animal'. She defines this method as a combination of explanatory strategies, such as identifying points mapped out at the text's surface, examining the metaphorical layers and studying the materiality of animals, as well as being constantly in an engaging relationship with previous scholarship. Her book attests that she excels in all these components. The discussion is always sophisticated and informative, and the lucid writing makes the book easy to follow for those who are not familiar with the texts under investigation. Intertextual links with other fictional writings make the book helpful and useful for readers with limited knowledge of Northern European literatures.

In the Conclusion Lönngren returns to the relevance of Foucault's concept of 'subjugated knowledges' (171) and Donna J. Haraway's notion of 'situated knowledges' (171) for understanding the harmful effects of anthropocentrism. She concludes her book with an engaging observation that, while writing this study, she gained the insight into the anthropocentric world with its 'building blocks' made of 'the bones of non-human animals' (173). Lönngren's theoretically well-informed analysis succeeds in showing that knowledge is always power and that writing is always inherently political.