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Introduction to Vol. 10, Issue 1: The Human-Animal Bind

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"Adunque, questa terra cerca di mancare di sua vita, desiderando la continua moltiplicazione. Per la tua assegnata e demonstrata ragione gli animali sono esemplo della vita mondiale."
-Leonardo da Vinci, "Pensieri sulla natura, XCIX"[1]

"And my heart accused itself
Thinking: I am not the measure of creation.
This is beyond me, this fish.
His God stands outside my God."
-D.H. Lawrence, "Fish"

Humanity may well fancy itself to be, as Protagoras suggested, the "measure of all things."[2] However, the unfathomable variety of lives that share this planet with us more often than not fails to mirror back to us our human visage or the proportions of our bodies. Commonly read as an homage to the harmonious correspondences between the human form and the dimensions of the world, *Vitruvian Man* together with its maker, Leonardo da Vinci, are often mischaracterized as standard-bearers for an unabashedly anthropocentric Humanism. Yet, in engaging with his world, Leonardo reserved attention for human and for nonhuman animal life, even going so far as to suggest, as our epigraph indicates, that it is the promiscuity of all animal life that reflects the laws of nature and the earth rather than the imagined perfection of humanity. While Leonardo places human and nonhuman together in an eternal cycling through birth and death, it is the absolute alterity of nonhuman life that stymies D. H. Lawrence in our second epigraph. Specifically, it is a fish, just caught and now dying in the poet's hand, that elicits an acknowledgment on the part of Lawrence of the ontological and epistemological limits of the human reach.

The human relation to the nonhuman animal is, like the fish itself, a slippery one, ranging from companionship and benevolence to exploitation and violence with many stops in between. Our title, the human-animal bind, reads almost as a slip of the tongue. One expects a reference to the more conventional human-animal bond grounded in affection and care, but it is, in truth, the word "bind" that more accurately captures the thorniness of the human-animal relation. This is certainly not to deny the bond of love that connects multiple humans with multiple companion

[1] In Leonardo da Vinci, *Frammenti letterari e filosofici*, ed. Edoardo Solmi (Florence: G. Barbèra, 1908), 170. English translation from *The Complete Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*, ed. Jean Paul Richter, trans. R. C. Bell (New York: Dover Publications, 1970 [1888]), 471 (§1219): "This earth therefore seeks to lose its life, desiring only continual reproduction; and as, by the argument you bring forward and demonstrate, like effects always follow like causes, animals are the image of the world."

[2] Our reference reflects an almost institutionalized misreading of Protagoras who is, more likely than not, suggesting a version of radical relativism rather than an elevation of humanity above other animal species. For a more nuanced reading of Protagoras' dictum, see Ugo Zilioli, *Protagoras and the Challenge of Relativism: Plato's Subtlest Enemy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Christopher S. Celenza, "Humanism and the Classical Tradition," *Annali d'Italianistica* 26, *Humanisms, Posthumanisms, & Neohumanisms* (2008): 25-49, especially 28-29.

animals, from the conventionally cuddly varieties of cat, dog, and rabbit to the more daring but no less loving interspecies relationships that connect humans with, for example, snakes, spiders, and even alligators. The nonhuman animal is often the best antidote for humanity's loneliness in a relation that, we like to believe, is as beneficial for the nonhuman as it is for the human. Unsurprisingly, the recent COVID-19 lockdowns across the globe triggered a boom in animal adoptions as humans enthusiastically embraced the company of nonhumans in this time of isolation and anxiety. Eager perhaps to do a little good while restricted to home, many humans anticipated that the adopted dog or cat or, more rarely, snake might help pass the time and even distract children indefinitely home from school.[3] Here's hoping that when we are fully released back to our lives, Spot, Mr. Whiskers, and Sid will not be returned to the shelter or simply abandoned.

Even when our engagement with nonhuman animals appears to be motivated by an altruistic motive, we must still question the ethical premises of our outreach. If for Shakespeare, "Love is not love/Which alters when it alteration finds," how can love withstand finding not just alteration but true alterity?[4] Can we really love that which is other or does all human love for animals involve a quotient of anthropomorphism? Does empathy for the nonhuman always entail a levelling of difference? Moreover, how do we learn to engage with and care for the nonhuman animal? Our cultural imaginary is heavily populated with anthropomorphized animals. Selecting a few examples more or less randomly from the so-called Western classics, we might mention Achilles' horses who purportedly weep when they understand that their master's beloved Patroclus has been killed in battle (*Iliad* 17.426-440) or Odysseus' faithful dog, Argos, who dies at the venerable (and slightly incredible) age of twenty once he recognizes that his still-disguised master has returned from his wandering (*Odyssey* 17.290-327).[5] Turning to children's literature, a venue that seems to have institutionalized a form of anthropomorphism on steroids, we might mention some representative figures—Paddington Bear, Winnie the Pooh, and the talking cricket from Collodi's *Pinocchio*, to name just a few foot soldiers in this anthropomorphized army of creatures. What is the relevance of these rather arbitrarily chosen literary references? What are the moral lessons to be learned here? Is it a mistake to expose ourselves and our impressionable children to this entrenched anthropomorphism? Have we wronged nonhumans by populating our literary classics with these anthropomorphized creatures? Can we not instead engage ethically with the animal other as other through the lens of wonder or awe?

Anthropomorphism poses a moral bind in and of itself. It is undeniable that, in humanizing the nonhuman, we risk, as Kari Weil suggests, turning away from those questions posed forcefully by animal studies, namely, "how to understand and give voice to others or to

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[3] Multiple sources reported on this phenomenon. The following constitutes a representative example: Kim Kavin, "Dog adoptions and sales soar during the pandemic," *Washington Post*, August 12, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/08/12/adoptions-dogs-coronavirus/. Even when not adopted and physically brought home, nonhuman animals distracted and comforted a bored and anxious humanity across the gamut of social media websites. For example, Labradors Olive and Mabel went viral when their human, Andrew Cotter, a temporarily unemployed Scottish sports commentator, began uploading their daily endeavors in the form of short videos with commentary: Andrew Cotter, "Olive and Mabel. Episode 1 – The Dog's Breakfast Grand Final," YouTube, March 27, 2020, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPhpJuraz14&list=PLdca3BMTMUqzJ21JyvfoTsoDkJFmrB7Ku&index=1. They have since, with the help of their human, published a book: Andrew Cotter, *Olive, Mabel & Me: Life and Adventures with Two Very Good Dogs* (Edinburgh: Black & White Publishing, 2020).

[4] William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116, accessed December 15, 2020, http://shakespeare.mit.edu/Poetry/sonnets.html.

[5] Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 365-66; Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 260-61.

experiences that seem impervious to our means of understanding; how to attend to difference without appropriating or distorting it."[6] To level all animal difference surely constitutes a moral failure. Yet, Paul Shephard defends anthropomorphism, employing a verb that works well for our purposes when he writes that it "*binds* our continuity with the rest of the natural world. It generates our desire to identify them and learn their natural history, even though it is motivated by a fantasy that they are no different from ourselves."[7] Similarly, Juliana Schiesari argues that an unqualified rejection of anthropomorphism risks constructing an "emotional 'firewall' between humans and other creatures, implicitly reducing them to the level of things or property to be bought, sold, or used at will."[8] So, perhaps in trying to love the nonhuman animal, we must learn to navigate the moral minefield and accept the risk, to return to our borrowing from Shakespeare, of altering alterity. A dose of anthropomorphism might be employed to mitigate the extremes, for example, of modern industrial livestock production, a practice that, for Schiesari, constitutes the culmination of a refusal to humanize the animal other.[9]

Schiesari's references to industrialized agriculture bring us toward the darkest contradictions of the human-animal relation. Here, bind acquires a literal meaning, rendering the actual tying and instrumentalization of the nonhuman animal, which is bound so that it can pull the plough or so that it may be killed, disassembled, and transformed into raw material.[10] Together with this literal meaning, bind here retains a moral metaphorical resonance, reflecting the quandary or moral dilemma triggered by a relation that oscillates between the extremes of personalized care that bolster the contemporary pet industry (clothing, personalized collars, and so on) and the industrialized killing that characterizes much of contemporary agriculture. The ethical contortions required to anthropomorphize and cherish some of the cuddlier species but objectify and consume those bound to the farm are troubling. Like Jeremy Bentham, most humans understand that the nonhuman animal shares with us a capacity for suffering and pain.[11] As such, it is no coincidence that the agricultural industries have long tended to construct their slaughterhouses far from the public eye, fearful that the populace might come to associate their dinner with the animal it once was.[12]

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[6] Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 7.

[7] Paul Shepard, *The Others. How Animals Made Us Human* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997), 88, emphasis is ours.

[8] Juliana Schiesari, *Polymorphous Domesticities: Pets, Bodies, and Desire in Four Modern Writers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 8.

[9] Ibid. The moral conundrum raised by anthropomorphism reflects a serious concern for scholars who adopt a rights-based approach to animal studies. Choices to protect certain species are often made with prejudice as nonhuman beings who more closely resemble the human are granted legal protections while those deemed too alien or too unappealing are excluded. Cary Wolfe decries the unthinking condescension of what he terms that "kind of humanism called liberalism," writing that it has a "penchant for the sort of 'pluralism' that extends the sphere of consideration (intellectual or ethical) to previously marginalized groups without in the least destabilizing or throwing into question the schema of the human who undertakes such pluralization." See "Human, All Too Human: 'Animal Studies' and the Humanities," *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): 564-75, 568. Cora Diamond explores the paradoxical question of animal welfare in "Injustice and Animals," in *Slow Cures and Bad Philosophers: Essays on Wittgenstein, Medicine, and Bioethics*, ed. Carl Elliot (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 118-48.

[10] Nicole Shukin explores the entanglement of capital and animal bodies in *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[11] We refer to Bentham's famous reconfiguration of philosophical hierarchies regarding animal being: "The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, can they *suffer*?" See *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), 311.

[12] Paula Young Lee's edited volume *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* traces the development of the industrialized slaughterhouse in Europe, the United States, and Mexico. While several of the essays underscore

To complicate this moral bind even further, the nonhuman animal has long served humanity as a type of screen on which to project and, perhaps, exorcise our fantasies and fears of the divine. Multiple civilizations and religions, from the Egyptians and the Hindus to the Greeks and the Aztecs, have shared their theriomorphic or zoomorphic deities with the world. With Anubis, Ganesha, Pan, and Huitzilopochtli amongst others, we find ourselves before animal-human hybrids or deities capable of shifting between animal and human form. Like the human, in that it suffers and dies, the nonhuman animal is also impenetrably other and even appears supernatural or magical. This is, in essence, John Berger's position as he describes the nonhuman animal as an "*intercession* between man and his origin."[13] Coming from "over the horizon," the animal belongs "both *there* and *here*" and it lives, in the human sphere, under a dualism according to which it is both "subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed."[14]

This slippery duality of the nonhuman animal, different from us but somehow uncannily the same, has weighed on humanity.[15] A good portion of Western thought has expended its energies in loosening the binds that tie humanity to the nonhuman. From Descartes' denial of animal reason to Martin Heidegger's horror, expressed in his 1946 "Letter on Humanism," at our "scarcely conceivable, abysmal *bodily* kinship with the beast," much philosophical thought has sought to fence the human off from the nonhuman, guarding against any encroachment on the part of the animal.[16] Yet, thankfully, there is also a thread within philosophical thought intent on confronting and coming to terms with the unease prompted by the proximity of our animal kin. In one of the landmark texts of animal studies, Jacques Derrida, on being observed naked by his cat, is compelled to acknowledge that, behind the animal gaze, "there remains a bottomlessness, at the same time innocent and cruel perhaps, perhaps sensitive and impassive, good and bad, uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret."[17] The power of this unfathomable gaze is that of disclosing to the observed French philosopher "the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself."[18]

Derrida's denunciation of human hubris resonates with a body of thought broadly termed "posthuman." Under this gigantic umbrella, we might locate a corpus of thinkers determined to view the human-animal bind in terms of our moral responsibility toward our nonhuman kin. This is an obligation or bind grounded both in an awareness of ourselves as one species among many

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the construction of the abattoirs on the outskirts of the various cities, her contribution provides the following description of the slaughterhouse: "By design, it deliberately evades the gaze, because for others to witness its activities implies responsibility for the killing, tethering the consumption of mass-produced meat to a collective cultural guilt." See Paula Young Lee, "Siting the Slaughterhouse: From Shed to Factory," in *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse*, ed. Young Lee (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008), 47.

[13] John Berger, "Why Look at Animals," in *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 6, italics in original.

[14] Ibid., 6-7, italics in original. Berger's article suggests that only the vestiges of this dualism remain in contemporary society. Processes initiated by industrialization and completed by what Berger terms "corporate capitalism" have severed humanity from its connection with nonhuman animals and nature more broadly (ibid., 3).

[15] Georges Bataille highlights this uncanniness of the nonhuman animal, writing that the animal "opens before me a depth that attracts me and is familiar to me. In a sense, I know this depth: it is my own. It is also that which is farthest removed from me, that which deserves the name depth, which means precisely *that which is unfathomable to me*." See *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1992), 22, italics in original.

[16] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 230, italics in original.

[17] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 12.

[18] Ibid., 12.

sharing an ecosystem and in the role the nonhuman animal has played and continues to play in shaping humanity. This rejection of anthropocentric hierarchies might permit us, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would put it, to engage with a becoming-animal. It might also encourage us, as Rosi Braidotti writes, to "relate to animals as animals ourselves" in a move she terms a "bioegalitarian turn" that seeks to "deterritorialize, or nomadize, the human/animal interaction."[19] Posthumanism rejects the vestiges of human exceptionalism, promising to acknowledge the mutual entanglement of the constitutions and destinies of all species. Donna Haraway describes a process by which a "knot of species co-shap[es] one another in layers of reciprocating complexity."[20] Only here are mutual "response and respect" possible "with actual animals and people looking back at each other, sticky with all their muddled histories."[21] This relational model of engagement carves out a space for what Roberto Marchesini terms the animal epiphany, an attraction or "animal appeal" that exerts a "gravitazione decentrativa" ("decentralizing gravitation") on humans, carrying them into "territori esistenziali ibridi" ("hybrid existential territories") and ultimately replacing the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* with a *dialogo ergo sum* that acknowledges the role of nonhuman beings in the making of the human.[22] In effect, posthumanism seeks to reassess the bind that ties humanity to the animal world, reconfiguring it as an entanglement of species through which we can acknowledge the debt humanity owes to those nonhuman beings who have shaped and continue to shape our destiny.

Approaching the Italian Human-Animal Bind

One of our goals in proposing this thematic section of volume 10 of *California Italian Studies* was to open modern and contemporary reflection on the thorny human-animal relation to the thinking of earlier historical periods. It makes sense that much of the work to date on animal studies is grounded in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as this is a period marked by global mass migration to urban centers and away from a daily interaction with the nonhuman animal. This is the point Berger made as he described the "rupture" engendered by capitalist modernity within the many traditions that bound man to nature.[23] In addition, we find ourselves living in an epoch so scarred by the human impact on the earth's geology, climate, and ecosystems that the term Anthropocene is becoming increasingly familiar even to non-specialists. The human and nonhuman inhabitants of the earth now face the prospect of an imminent climate and ecological emergency that already manifests itself in extreme weather events, wildfires across the globe, and the mass extinction of animal species. Writing now during the COVID-19 pandemic, we, like the rest of our species, are living under what appear to be the direct consequences of humanity's increasing encroachment on nonhuman terrain and its apparently insatiable appetite for flesh.[24] Again, it makes sense that scholars of contemporary culture have turned toward the nonhuman animal and that most of the contributions we were

[19] Rosi Braidotti, "Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others," *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): 526–32, 526.
[20] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 42.
[21] Ibid, 42.
[22] Roberto Marchesini, *Epifania animale* (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), 89-90. Translations are our own.
[23] Berger, 3.
[24] Serenella Iovino explores some of the unfortunate consequences of our continued infringement of nonhuman territories in "Cross-species Conversations and the Coronavirus," trans. Elena Past, *Seeing the Woods, A Blog by the Rachel Carson Center*, 2020, https://seeingthewoods.org/2020/05/22/cross-species-conversations-and-the-coronavirus/.

delighted to welcome reflect precisely that circumstance. We are delighted too to place these pieces in conversation with several contributions grounded in earlier periods and movements. As scholars of the Renaissance and Modernism respectively, our decision to work together on the human-animal relation might not initially seem an obvious one. Yet, to us, it was a no-brainer. We hoped to capture the multiple resonances between our own fields, both of which are marked by a reconfiguration of the human that was programmatic in scope, impacting the fields of culture, philosophy, science, sociology, politics, and religion. Moreover, our specializations are also frequently subjected to a type of reductionism that suggests an almost exclusive interest in questions related to the human. Through this lens, Modernism becomes the direct reflection of man's alienation in the modern metropolis, and the Renaissance, as our opening paragraph suggested, offers a uniform embrace of a celebratory anthropocentrism. In both cases, the reality is more complex.

Humanism has become a type of bogeyman, but Renaissance and broadly early modern thinking of animal being is far more nuanced. Frequently we think only as far as Descartes' vision of a mechanistic animal that feels no pain and we imagine all of early modernity in terms of a vaguely defined "humanist" (anthropocentric) triumphalism. The image that, at least in the eyes of many posthumanist theorists, personifies this diverse cultural movement is Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man*, with which we opened our introduction. The problem with such a tightly-defined conception is that, as scholars like Kenneth Gouwens have shown, what these theorists often describe as Humanism, even if we focus solely on the "Humanism" of late medieval and early modern Italy, is fundamentally at odds with the historical reality of a cultural landscape whose intellectual, theological, and political confines are far from uniform or even clearly marked.[25] Can Leonardo himself be considered a humanist? As Eugenio Garin implied in a classic study in which he identified Leonardo as a "figlio degli umanisti" ("son of the humanists"), the answer is far from obvious.[26] From the standpoint of Renaissance Studies, the *Vitruvian Man* has, in other words, become a straw man that can be used to articulate a critique of a Eurocentric, patriarchal, ableist, heteronormative set of theories and practices that are understood as European (or, more broadly, Western) anthropocentrism or, to adopt a more Derridean terminology, "carno-phallogocentrism."[27] The problem with this critique – a perfectly legitimate critique of certain

[25] See Kenneth Gouwens, "What Posthumanism Isn't? Humanism and Human Exceptionalism in the Renaissance," in *Renaissance Posthumanism*, eds. Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 37-63. For a nuanced account of anthropocentrism in the medieval and early modern periods, see Hans Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), 169-99. See also Kenneth Gouwens, "Human Exceptionalism," in *The Renaissance World*, ed. John Jeffries Martin (London: Routledge, 2007), 415-34. Among the studies on premodern posthumanism, see Karl Steel, "Medieval," in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, eds. Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3-15; Bruce Boehrer, *Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), especially 1-41; and, most recently, Steven Swarbrick and Karen Raber, "Introduction: Renaissance Posthumanism and Its Afterlives," *Criticism* 62, no. 3 (Summer 2020): 313-28. For a concise history of the scholarship on Italian Humanism, see Alexander Lee, *Humanism and Empire: The Imperial Ideal in Fourteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), xiii-xxii.

[26] Eugenio Garin, *L'Umanesimo italiano. Filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento* (Bari: Laterza, 1958), 215, translation is ours.

[27] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority," in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3-67, especially 19.

power dynamics, one should emphasize – is that it paints with too broad a brush centuries of various cultural phenomena, including the so-called Italian Humanism(s).[28]

Modernism too has been subjected to broad strokes. Sweeping definitions highlight a modernist fixation on the fate of humanity in the dehumanized landscape of technological and urban modernity. And while these considerations remain pertinent, they do not even begin to render the staggering range of artistic expression placed under the modernist umbrella. Specifically, they do not account for the many modernists who broached the nonhuman animal. It is no coincidence that our opening epigraphs placed Leonardo beside English modernist D. H. Lawrence, a poet and novelist with a marked interest in the fleshiness of humans and nonhumans alike. Carrie Rohman rightly highlights the attention paid to animals and animality in a post-Darwinian world still sporting the bruises left by the "catastrophic blow to human privilege vis-à-vis the species question."[29] While Rohman characterizes the response of Modernism in terms of a multipronged effort to reinforce anthropocentrism, she also tempers this position, writing of modernist texts that "variously reentrench, unsettle, and even invert a humanist relation to this nonhuman other."[30] What Modernism voices is a spiritual, cultural, and ontological anxiety before the nonhuman animal who, in the wake of Darwin's disclosures, is bound to us very closely, as our evolutionary origin and our disquietingly uncanny kin.

Turning to the Italian context, we find a sustained philosophical and cultural interest in the human-animal relation. As a philosopher who engages insistently with nonhuman animal being, Roberto Marchesini, cited above, is far from alone on the Italian peninsula. Indeed, it would not be incorrect to suggest that Italy appears uncommonly committed to thinking the nonhuman. Multiple contemporary philosophers have broached animality, and from multiple positions. A brief sampling would include the names of Paola Cavalieri, Giorgio Agamben, Paolo de Benedetti, Aldo Capitini, and Roberto Esposito.[31] Especially intriguing in the Italian case is the fact that, despite the professed "post-ness" of the positions associated with posthumanism, an egalitarian engagement with animality is not in fact new to Italy's philosophical tradition. Esposito suggests as much when he describes Italian thought, from Dante to Machiavelli, Bruno, and Vico, through Leopardi, Mazzini, and Gioberti, to Gentile, as a "living force."[32] This does not mean that Italian thinkers have programmatically engaged with the dignity of nonhuman animals but, rather, that Italian philosophy has embraced the "nonphilosophical."[33] Specifically, Esposito identifies in Italian thought a "genealogical vocation" that prevents it from suppressing those unsettling elements related to magic, myth, or a humanity deemed "too close for comfort to

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[28] As Brian Copenhaver has spelled out in a compelling study aimed at contextualizing Pico della Mirandola's thought, we might be better served using the word "classicism" rather than Humanism when we speak about the cultural practices of Italian Renaissance intellectuals. Brian P. Copenhaver, *Magic and the Dignity of Man: Pico della Mirandola and His* Oration *in Modern Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Pres, 2019), 157-58.

[29] Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 1.

[30] Ibid., 12.

[31] As if to prove our point, this year Palgrave Macmillan published the following volume: *Animality in Contemporary Italian Philosophy*, Felice Cimatti and Carlo Salzani, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). It is also worth pointing out that the related field of ecocriticism has emerged in a particularly convincing manner within Italian cultural scholarship where it is shaped by scholars such as Serenella Iovino, Elena Past, Enrico Cesaretti, Pasquale Verdicchio, Damiano Benvegnù, and Matteo Gilebbi.

[32] Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 18.

[33] Ibid., 11.

the animal realm."[34] In other words, Italian thought seems to have consistently confronted its origins and found there an embodied human animal living among other animals. To clarify his claims, Esposito explores a variety of philosophical critiques of anthropocentrism in his text, pausing over Machiavelli, whom he describes as a thinker who "never cuts off the vital substratum—both bodily and animal—that underlies human action."[35]

We too would like to pause over the figure of Machiavelli who, infamously by now, wrote that the ideal prince must be able to move between two modes of being, or two natures, the human and the bestial. The implications of this proposal are political, of course, as the prince would lose power (and, more importantly, would be unable to advance the interest of his/her state) if s/he were unable to perform this movement, but they are also ethical and ontological.[36] In the language Machiavelli adopts in the context of *Il Principe* (*The Prince*), we are talking primarily about imitation – a key concept in his philosophy and in the way Renaissance thinkers conceived of the legacy of antiquity and of the relationship between art and nature. Machiavelli's emphasis on imitation also suggests that human nature is not radically (or essentially or metaphysically) distinct from the nature of non-human animals, otherwise it would be impossible for that individual to use the beast, when necessary.[37] Machiavelli's reference to the potentially bestial quality of the ideal prince is magnified by his use of the ancient myth of the centaur Chiron as educator of princes. Machiavelli notes how this story – told by unspecified "antichi scrittori" ("ancient writers"),[38] who probably include Ovid, Statius, and Quintilian, among others – captures allegorically what he considers to be the grim reality of statecraft. The premise of Machiavelli's assumption is that the idea he foregrounds in this chapter of *Il Principe* had already been developed millennia before the cultural movement (or, less correctly, period) we have come to term "Renaissance," though such a reading of the centaur stands partly in contrast to other, primarily Neoplatonic, interpretations of the same myth in the period between the 14th and 16th centuries, from Dante and Giovanni Boccaccio to Coluccio Salutati and Cristoforo Landino.[39] Mindful of the nuances of Italy's sustained attention to the human relation to the

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[34] Ibid., 23.

[35] Ibid., 24. Esposito discerns a criticism of anthropocentrism in a variety of Italian thinkers. Two examples will serve to illustrate his line of argument. In Leonardo's lion heads, Esposito identifies a "heterodox anthropozoological culture" different from the "spiritualistic current" that, from the Platonic school of humanism to Heidegger, "sought the divine aspect of human beings in the ontological distance separating them in some essential way from the animal" (ibid., 100-01). Reflecting on Giordano Bruno, Esposito explains that, while Aristotelian and Neoplatonic finalism suggests that humans have hands because of what they are, Bruno argues that humans are what they are because hands allow them to make an "anthropic leap" that stems from a difference not of essence but of potency, "thus rendering the human a different animal from others in terms of aptitudes and skills, but without signaling the ontological primacy of the human" (ibid., 69). On Giordano Bruno, see also Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), 549-96; Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Bruno's Radical Critique of Humanism," *Annali d'Italianistica* 26, *Humanisms, Posthumanisms, & Neohumanisms* (2008): 171-86.

[36] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ed. Ugo Dotti (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2009), 175-77.

[37] See also chapter 19 of *Il Principe*, in which Machiavelli praises the ability of the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus to imitate the fox and the lion (ibid., 189-91).

[38] Ibid., 176, translation is ours.

[39] This is not, however, the only time in which Machiavelli signals his reluctance to adopt an anthropocentric hierarchy. If Machiavelli had been an "anthropocentrist," he would have been a poor one. Suffice it to consider his poem *L'asino* (The Donkey) – written in *terza rima* and a parody of Dante's *Comedy* – where one of the animals, transformed into a pig by the sorceress Circe, refuses to return to his original human status, so satisfied is he of his current swinish condition. Here, too, Machiavelli most probably refers to a classical source, Plutarch's apologue *Gryllus*.

nonhuman animal, we turn now, as a type of Renaissance/Modernist centaur endowed, we hope, with some of Chiron's wisdom, to the wealth of contributions we received.

Human-Animal Binds

The essays included in this thematic section reflect the impressive variety of Italian culture's engagement with the slippery human-animal bind. Ranging from an exploration of medieval legends concerning the zoological origins of Attila the Hun to a 1992 text by Michele Mari that strands us in the doldrums with the sailors of a Spanish galleon, the essays cover a broad temporal spectrum, reinforcing our conviction that Italian culture has long pondered nonhuman animal being. The geographical variety is equally impressive, taking us from agricultural Sicily to the high seas, from an urban Egypt to a fantastical island off the Portuguese coast, and from the waterways of Europe to a dystopian post-atomic landscape. The literary movements and genres represented here are equally varied and include Renaissance apologues, verist novellas, futurist novels, papal encyclicals, fairy tales, ecopoetry, and literary translation. The contributions feature a huge cast of nonhuman characters, including parrots, greyhounds, monkeys, dodos, horses, iguanas, pigs, and a vast array of marine life. Despite this variety, resonances emerge and, precisely as we hoped, they emerge across centuries as different thinkers and authors from different times and cultural movements turn to nonhuman animal being with similar strategies and intentions. We have organized these essays into four parts, which, standing outside of any periodization or chronologies, amplify those transtemporal resonances in the hopes of prompting dialogue about the human-animal bind between modernists and Renaissance scholars, as well as between posthumanists and scholars of humanism. There is much overlap across these four sections, a circumstance that reveals a certain arbitrariness in our organization. This, however, is an absolute good as it suggests the existence of multiple itineraries or roads not taken through the assembled essays and, accordingly, multiple conversations waiting to be had. For now, however, we will take our walk through four sections titled as follows: Nonhuman Voices, Nonhuman Hybridities, Nonhuman Ecologies, and Nonhuman Moralities.

Nonhuman Voices

Our first section, Nonhuman Voices, brings together essays that explore efforts to speak to and for the nonhuman dimension, a dimension that is not even exclusively animal. Taking us from Francis of Assisi's *Cantico delle creature* (*Canticle of the Creatures*) and its notable echoes in our current ecological crisis, through a sampling of Renaissance authors intent on giving voice to the nonhuman, and on to the posthuman impetus of Italo Calvino's *Fiabe italiane*, these essays rest firmly on an implicit reconfiguration of any species hierarchies as the human becomes one being among many animate and inanimate entities. Several of the texts explored actively flirt with anthropomorphism and, at times, animism, as the project of voicing others gets underway. Unsurprisingly, ecological concerns come to the fore as questions of shared space emerge and the responses are not simply ethical but also ontological and epistemological.

Arielle Saiber's essay, "The Textual Nonhumans of Italian Humanism," offers an exploration of Italian Humanism through the lens of posthumanist theory. This rich reconsideration of the often-misunderstood legacy of Humanism starts us off on exactly the right foot. Saiber begins by problematizing some of the preconceptions about pre-modern anthropocentrism and the cultural production of the Italian Renaissance, including the *Vitruvian*

Man. She then turns to three case studies – those of Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci, and Andrea Alciato – that illustrate the point she articulates in the first part of the essay. Her central argument is that each of these cases represents an effort to imagine what it is like to be a non-human. Insofar as these three examples reflect on this question, they dramatize an experiment within the humanist imagination in which animated beings and objects occupy a dynamic continuum that forfeits any illusion of human exceptionalism.

Demetrio Yocum's study of St. Francis' *Cantico delle creature* provides further evidence of the vitality and diversity of human-animal representations in the medieval and early modern periods. In "In Their Own Voices: A 'Kenotic' Approach to Animal Studies and Ecotheology," Yocum engages with posthumanist theories, underscoring the radically egalitarian quality of St. Francis' view of creation and the thought-provoking position adopted by the current pope, Francis, who in his encyclical "Laudato si'" channels some of the spirit that animated his saintly namesake in the 13th century. Within this single article, more than one conversation occurs across the centuries as St. Francis reaches forward through time both to Pope Francis and to Luigi Santucci who, in 1981, published a rewriting of the Canticle from the perspective of the animals. Placing us squarely in the space of ecological crisis, the ultimate purpose of this ecotheological conversation is to issue an invitation to humanity to listen to the earth and to its nonhuman inhabitants. Arguably, the ethical urgency of St. Francis' rejection of speciesism is even greater in the era of the Anthropocene as the earth cries out for us to cast aside doctrines of human exceptionalism and strive instead to establish a compassionate model of interspecies relation.

Pablo a Marca's contribution, "Fairytale Metamorphosis and Becoming–Animal: The Posthumanism of Italo Calvino's *Fiabe Italiane*," prolongs the engagement with posthumanism, arguing that Calvino's study of folklore served as a crucial source for his engagement with posthuman theory. Specifically, a Marca suggests that a type of transversal subjectivity emerges in the space of the fairy tale. Becoming takes the place of being, or at least it does as Calvino selects and reworks these tales from the various popular traditions of the Italian peninsula. Human voices yield to nonhuman storytellers, animal languages, and interspecies hybridizations. Indeed, voice and action are even detached from a stable speaker or agent as a type of transversality destabilizes fixed categories of being. Porosity is the keyword here as the fairy tale emerges as a type of post-anthropocentric narrative form equipped to offer a perspective that moves resolutely beyond the human.

Nonhuman Hybridities

Posthuman concerns also animate our second section, Nonhuman Hybridities, where they compete with a form of hierarchical thinking intent on employing the animal label to exclude, denigrate, and condemn. Here, the human-animal bind becomes uncomfortably literal as humans engage carnally with animals that are, by turns, strange and fantastical or domestic and real. Zoophilia and zooerasty challenge the species borders as nonhumans penetrate humans in a manner that is as psychological as it is physical. The consequences are not just ontological or epistemological but are also moral and political. The marine world takes center stage in two of the essays in this section. In one case, it is a space of obsession and fantasy where interspecies mediation points to the ultimate decline of human powers. In the other, technology and biology constitute the weapons in an ontological struggle for dominance or survival. In both, however, questions of food come to the fore as the marine world becomes one in which alimentary

hierarchies are inverted and humans become fish food. Political questions also emerge in this grouping of essays as the consequences of hybridization are denounced as unnatural and the crossing of interspecies borders becomes cause for moral outrage. This is a space in which species hierarchies are weaponized and the nonhuman label becomes not only a means to denounce humanity's baser instincts but also a tool for othering religious and ethnic minorities.

Angelo Castagnino's essay, "'Se è, può essere.' Animali fantastici ne *La stiva e l'abisso* di Michele Mari," engages with the fantastic as a narrative mode, leading the reader to visionary landscapes. Like other studies in this volume, Castagnino's contribution is centered on the sea, which emerges as a privileged space for the interaction between humans and non-human animals, including a variety of legendary sea-creatures. Castagnino also translates this post-anthropocentric vista into physical terms by highlighting Mari's depiction of the sailors' zooerastic obsession and his blurring of the alimentary hierarchy that traditionally sees humans as consumers of other animals. Moreover, while evoking the ancient bind between sailing and story-telling, Mari's novel depicts the ocean as an unknown space – a mystery and an abyss that opens up possible scenarios for a post-anthropocentric world. Within this oneiric framework Castagnino also considers issues of hybridity and human-animal telepathy, putting his analysis of *La stiva e l'abisso* (The Hold and the Abyss) in dialogue with various critical discourses: from the posthumanism of Rosi Braidotti and Jacques Derrida to the psychoanalytic approach of Boria Sax and Francesco Orlando.

Corie Marshall locates her contribution, "Futurism's Fish Tanks: Rethinking the Human in Marinetti and Bontempelli," beside recent scholarly efforts, and reads Marinetti's Mafarka as a futurist (super)human ideal within broader ecological discourses in which technology mediates between the human and a (conquered) nonhuman other. According to Marshall, Bontempelli, on the other hand, adopts a similar interest in the mediating value of technology, but he does so to undercut the interspecies hierarchy proposed by Marinetti. Thus, a conversation emerges across the two decades that separate the publication of Marinetti's *Mafarka le futuriste* (*Mafarka the futurist*) from Bontempelli's *Minnie la candida* (Candid Minnie) as Mafarka's simultaneous suppression and exploitation of the animal stratum is answered in Minnie's ontological anxiety before the loss of a biological anchor. For Mafarka, the natural, both in the form of the nonhuman animal and that of a racial other, represents a threat of contamination and, at the same time, a source of raw power, something to be simultaneously exploited and kept at bay through technological means. For the gullible Minnie, however, the precarious hierarchies of the futurist relation with the natural collapse before the prospect of a complete technological takeover of the biological sphere.

In his "'Figlio d'un cane!' La figura di Attila nel folklore medievale tra tradizione epico-cavalleresca e zooerastia," Roberto Pesce examines medieval Franco-Venetian chronicles detailing the genealogy of Attila, the infamous Hun leader, blamed for the sacking of various Italian cities, from Florence to Aquileia. At the intersection of folklore, bestiaries, and metamorphic allegorizations, these chronicles narrate how Attila was born of the interspecies union between his mother – a young noblewoman locked up in a tower by her father – and a beautiful greyhound. As Pesce notes, according to these chronicles, Attila's canine paternity explains his insatiable ferocity. The chronicles examined in this essay offer a clear insight into the way in which, during the Middle Ages, the Hun leader was regarded as a demonic foe and came to epitomize a destructive form of political appetites. Indeed, as Pesce mentions in his discussion of the broader intellectual context in which these chronicles were written, Dante included Attila among the tyrants punished in the river of blood (*Inferno* 12.134).

Nonhuman Ecologies

Environmental concerns occupy center stage in our third section, Nonhuman Ecologies. Here, in these varied landscapes of archipelago, borderlands, and post-atomic dystopia, we are invited to explore the relation between the world and all its inhabitants. These are all posthuman worlds not because the human is absent, but because the human is no longer the measure of all things. Humanity and its economic gaze threaten the balance of these worlds, transforming them into objects for commercial exchange or destroying them entirely by viewing only their value in terms of function. As such, other beings and other social configurations, hybrid and nonhuman, emerge, introducing a fluidity to and a mobility through the spaces depicted. There is a sense of liminality to the worlds explored here. Not only are these spaces inhabited by nonhuman animals, but they are also insistently borderlands, islands, and marginal spaces that are neither one thing nor the other, or they point to itineraries traced through space, waterways and post-apocalyptic journeys. These are also spaces of ecological activism as the local or regional reaches out to engage with the transnational, the natural embraces the postcolonial, and the human reaches for the animal within.

Adele Sanna's "L'isola 'arcipelagica' di Ocaña ne *L'Iguana* di Anna Maria Ortese" addresses three key issues: the notion of the island as a feminized space; the exploitation and mercification of nature; the relationship between hospitality and alterity. Sanna weaves together these critical threads, providing a compelling and impassioned examination of the ecological concerns that emerge from Ortese's novel. In so doing, Sanna also finds in Édouard Glissant's writings on the Caribbean islands the theoretical link between her ecofeminist discussion of *L'Iguana* and postcolonial studies; postcolonialism is one of the aspects within the broader posthumanist discourse that arguably deserves further investigation. Sanna's essay thus develops its theoretical core in a political direction, envisioning anthropocentrism as one of the many forms of Western imperialism.

In "Gli animali nel primo Pusterla: una lettura di *Il Dronte* e *L'anguilla del Reno*," Alice Loda analyzes the poems of the Swiss-Italian author Fabio Pusterla within an ecocritical framework. Much like Sanna, Loda engages with a multifaceted set of theoretical texts, including writings by Aaron Moe, Serenella Iovino, and Edward Said. A poet of the frontier, Pusterla – according to Loda – pushes his readers to wander through marginal territories and nationalities, hybrid identities and embodiments. This emphasis on liminality and animal subjectivity decenters the human position within the ecosystem of Pusterla's poetry – Loda effectively uses the term ecopoetry to characterize Pusterla's poetic praxis. The result is a thought-provoking and deeply anti-speciesist reading of *Il Dronte* and *L'anguilla del Reno*.

Adopting a similar theoretical standpoint, in his essay, "L'uomo è animale irritato. Una rilettura distopico-odeporica de *Il pianeta irritabile* di Paolo Volponi," Stefano Pifferi proposes an ecocritical reading of Volponi's novel. As Pifferi shows, in *Il pianeta irritabile* (The Irritable Planet), Volponi envisions a post-atomic apocalypse in which the world survives the destruction brought about by its human inhabitants. Among the themes that this contribution brings to the reader's attention, it is worth highlighting the novelist's vision of a non-anthropocentric humanism. In fact, according to Pifferi, Volponi's critique signals a radical alienation between humans and the rest of nature. The possibility of transcending this alienation, which manifests itself in a dystopian twenty-third century, rests on the rediscovery of humans' repressed inner animality.

Nonhuman Moralities

Our final section, Nonhuman Moralities, brings us back to the unyielding thorniness of the human-animal bind. Agricultural animals abound, raising questions about our duty of care and our instrumentalization of the nonhuman. Interspecies relations play out in the space of animal killing and consumption, a violence rendered graphically and perceived by human and by nonhuman eyes. Questions are posed in explicitly moral terms as we are invited to ponder the morality and legality of killing nonhuman beings with whom meaningful communication is entirely possible and for whom affection is a daily reality. Indeed, the dividing line between murder and killing is programmatically slippery here as the question of killing and eating is productively explored across two scholarly contributions and a literary translation. In addition, the moral dimension of this central concern resonates with the political, as questions of place and of the colonial other further complicate the species hierarchies.

In "'Non dovevo ucciderlo nemmeno?': Interspecific Killing and Kinship in Giovanni Verga's *Jeli il Pastore*," Bristin Scalzo Jones marries contemporary biological reflection on interspecific communication with a detailed textual analysis of Verga's drafting and redrafting of a single short story. At the heart of this essay lies an important invitation to scholars of the humanities to reconsider our dependence on those philosophical texts deemed essential to animal studies and to look instead toward current work in the biological sphere. In this spirit, Jones proposes that we rethink domestication, seeing it, as many biologists and evolutionary anthropologists do, not as a hierarchical act of domination but a process of interspecific communication. In her engagement with contemporary biology, Jones identifies an unexpected ally in Verga's Jeli, a literary character far more at home and in tune with the horses under his care than he is with his biological human kin. Jones takes us through Verga's evolving portrait of Jeli's relation with those who surround him and, in considering the violent finale of the tale, poses crucial moral questions regarding the distinction between the murder of a human animal and the lawful killing of a nonhuman animal.

In her essay, "Through a Glass Brightly: A Posthuman Re-reading of Fausta Cialente's *Cortile a Cleopatra,*" Maria Grazia Lolla examines Cialente's novel through the lens of posthumanist theorists such as Lawrence Buell and Rosi Braidotti. By considering what she terms the "human-animal continuum," Lolla argues that – like other texts discussed in this volume – *Cortile a Cleopatra* (Courtyard in Cleopatra) lends itself to an interpretation that jettisons the centrality of the human experience. In Lolla's reading, the decentering of the human perspective overlaps with a particular interest in the Levant, seen from the viewpoint of postcolonialism. Thus, Cialente's sensitivity towards animal welfare, which manifests itself in the rejection of interspecies hierarchy and animal consumption, helps reframe her critique of fascist imperialism. Thanks to its double focus, Lolla's analysis subtly and thought-provokingly straddles the line between posthumanist ethics and anthropomorphism.

Our final section of the thematic volume ends with Jon Snyder's elegant introduction and translation of Matilde Serao's short story "Canituccia." Both a critique of social violence and a tale of interspecies friendship, Serao's story literalizes the human-animal bind from which this collection of articles originates. Canituccia, the story's protagonist, is an abandoned seven-year-old child exploited, abused, and starved by Pasqualina and Crescenzo, the peasant siblings who raised her. Among Canituccia's responsibilities is the care of a pig named Ciccotto. A bond, which is at the same time affective and literal, develops between the two: Canituccia is tied to Ciccotto with a rope when she takes him to feed in the pastures around the farmhouse. Their

relationship develops around a series of paradoxes – she is famished, while he gets fat; she talks, while he (apparently) listens. These paradoxes culminate in the narrative's final scenes, when the pig is butchered for the Christmas holidays, prepared for dinner, and offered – exceptionally – to the starving child. Despite the hunger that is slowly consuming her, Canituccia refuses to partake in this last supper.

Conclusion

There is a certain urgency to the essays collected here. There is a sense, in the essays focusing on the contemporary and on earlier periods alike, that what is said matters, both for humanity and for the other animals. Certainly, if we think in terms of the looming climate emergency, the stakes are high for all of us. Moreover, what were once moral quandaries for the human—though they were always existential for the nonhuman—have become burning questions about survival. For instance, issues regarding the consumption of nonhuman animal flesh are inextricably bound up with humanity's future as the current pandemic, which is not the first example of zoonotic contagion, will almost certainly not be the last. Even those essays focused on interspecific communication and fantastical hybridizations point to a reality in which we humans live beside the nonhuman in an ecosystem teetering on the brink. The apocalyptic tenor of this debate, both in academic circles and in the media that – at least in Western Europe and North America – serve up images of a worsening pandemic and of natural catastrophes occurring across the globe, will hopefully impress upon us the urgency of what we face. If apocalypse offers, as its etymology suggests, the prospect of revelation, then perhaps this crisis might reveal the degree to which the human animal is bound to the nonhuman animal in a relation that will remain forever slippery.