ECOCENE

CAPPADOCIA JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

Volume 5/Issue 2/December 2024

Book Review

Book Review: *Lost Kingdom: Animal Death in the Anthropocene*

Sinan Akıllı
Capadoccia University, Türkiye
sinanakilli@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-5061-3188

Akıllı, Sinan. 2024. Review of *Lost Kingdom: Animal Death in the Anthropocene*, ed. by Wendy A. Wiseman and Burak Kesgin. *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities* 5, no. 2 (December): 68–73. https://doi.org/10.46863/ecocene.115.

Book Review/ Received: 16.09.2024 /Accepted: 23.12.2024

Book Review: *Lost Kingdom: Animal Death in the Anthropocene*

by Sinan Akıllı

●

About the Author

Sinan Akıllı is an associate professor of English at the Faculty of Humanities, Cappadocia University. His research interests include ecocriticism, critical animal studies, and posthumanism. Most recently, he has published his "The Rise of the Novel and the Narrative Labor of Horses in the English Novel of the Early Anthropocene" in *Planet Work: Rethinking Labor and Leisure in the Anthropocene* (Bucknell University Press, 2022) and contributed the article "The Agency and the Matter of the Dead Horse in the Victorian Novel" to *Equestrian Cultures: Horses, Human Society and the Discourse of Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 2019).

Book Review

Sinan Akıllı

Wiseman, Wendy A., and Burak Kesgin, eds. 2024. *Lost Kingdom: Animal Death in the Anthropocene*. Series on Climate Change and Society. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press.

We are humans. We do not appreciate the value of good things before we lose them. This is a typically human trait. And when, eventually, the rarity and value of good things dawn upon us, it is often too late. What is uncared for becomes irretrievably lost. Consequently, we become wounded, and we suffer. But then again, there is another truth about human nature and experience: Most of us, if not all of us, must have observed, at some point (or multiple times) in our lives, that our wounds have the capacity of making us stronger. Wisdom, exquisite beauty, and resourcefulness often bloom out of deep wounds. The deeper the wound, the more graceful the flower. At least the ones who are not blind to their own blindnesses, see that flower. Of course, for "grief wants silence, stillness, time to remember" as the authors of the "Epilogue" in *Lost Kingdom: Animal Death in the Anthropocene* express it (2024, 313).

In their article titled "The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship," the group of scholars who have been among the most influential ones in the emergence and establishment of the term Anthropocene—including, of course, Will Steffen, Paul Crutzen, and Jan Zalasiewicz—announced that "[w]e are the first generation with the knowledge of how our activities influence the Earth System, and thus the first generation with the power and the responsibility to change our relationship with the planet" (Steffen et al. 2011, 749). Ever since that time, their announcement resonated in various spheres with different focal points. The thirteen essays, including the powerful "Introduction" and the solid "Epilogue," in *Lost Kingdom*, edited by Wendy A. Wiseman and Burak Kesgin, together comprise one of the limited number of works that are designed to assume the responsibility of planetary stewardship by both reflecting and capitalizing on the concept of "loss." In a time when the risk of being the target of critical arrows on the grounds of "pessimism" and even "disaster

mongering" is very likely, *Lost Kingdom* bravely puts forth its central argument in a manner that is not only substantial and persuasive, but also constructive, progressive, and hopeful. Hopeful against all the odds that are also explicated in detail within its own pages. Very much like a brave human being fighting with cancer. Aware of all the bleak scenarios and limitations that are imposed on the slightest hope by the bitter realities of contemporary human society and systems, *Lost Kingdom* nurtures whatever hope is left by being a book about not only "loss," but about what I would call "life, loss, and love in the Anthropocene." The editors and the authors of the chapters of *Lost Kingdom* seem to have taken the silence, the stillness, and the time to grieve and eventually to see a three-petal flower of hope blooming out of the greatest wound in our planet's history. On the first petal, "Life," *Lost Kingdom* explores the inextricability and the ongoing cycles of extinction and evolution, death and life, love and grief. The second petal engages the concept of "Loss" through foregrounding the common suffering and mortality of the human and the more-than-human in a complex web of relationality. In *Lost Kingdom*, "hope," the last remnant in the Pandora's box-like Anthropocene that we have unleashed, rests on the last petal, "Love," itself dwelling in "care" and "mourning" as vectors of healing action. After all, life is all about loss and love; and the task of planetary stewardship entails a deep understanding of life in the first place.

In the "Introduction" to this interdisciplinary volume, Wendy A. Wiseman first presents an account of the history of our disenchantment from our own animality and the rest of natural phenomena, to be followed by a comprehensive survey of the suffering and death of the more-than-human life, inflicted by anthropogenic activities, and of how this "crime" has been "made" invisible through discursive tools. To frame her argument, she invokes Justin McBrien's term "Necrocene—the Age of Death" (McBrien 2016 quoted in Wiseman 2024, xii) to replace the "Anthropocene," as she claims that our age is characterized "primarily [by] the ruination of the lifeworlds of animals, forests, prairies, and even glaciers" (xii). As a remedy, Wiseman invokes Donna Haraway's 2016 call for "making kin," which Wiseman argues as "the categorical imperative of our age" (xix). "We need stories," Wiseman insists, "stories that foreground animal lives, their imbrications with human worlds, and their powers of presence and of absence" (xix). And so, she invites prose narratives, poetry, and arts to "bear witness" (xxiii) to the "theft, wanton destruction, and genocide/theriocide [of Anthropos] in his (suicidal) war against the more-than-human world" (xv). Her main question throughout is "How do we avoid the conceptual and moral morass of painting anthropogenic extinctions as somehow 'natural,' 'inevitable,' or even 'progressive . . . ?'" (xi). Both Wiseman herself and the authors of the main chapters answer this question in *Lost Kingdom*. In Wiseman's words, this task can be effectively undertaken by making sure that "the unprecedented

nature and scope of the violence and, indeed, *criminality*, of current and impending mass animal (and of course vegetal) death must be brought to the fore" (xi).

Accordingly, in Part I, titled "Animal Interventions: Beyond Anthropos," the authors of the first five chapters explore the nexus of postanthropocentricism and mortality. In Chapter 1, Ishaan Shelby offers new conceptual frames of reference to animal suffering by employing a new mode of reading called "resurfacing," which mimics some marine mammals (7). Shelby urges us to look at and partake in the suffering of the ordinary as "a site of political intervention" (19) and see suffering as an option, in addition to adaptation and mitigation, in responding to the climate crisis (14) and some other "forms of exclusion and marginalization" that are situated in the same context. Kai Horsthemke's contribution in Chapter 2 dwells on "theriocide" that is "the mass slaughter of other-than-human animals" (31) and conflates this concept with genocide and the associated concepts of racism and speciesism; eventually arguing for the need to think on the basis not of species but of individuals. In Chapter 3, Rimona Afana sustains the discussion in the previous chapter but in the contexts of wildlife trade and industrial animal farming. Providing striking figures, Afana shows how "nonhuman suffering is invisibilized" (63). Steven Best's powerful essay explores the history of the rise and fall of *Homo sapiens*, as well as the history of "economy overwhelming ecology" (104) and focuses on the "different choices [that] can be made," just like the "significant choices [that] were made at key junctures in our social evolution" (91), in our time of planetary crisis. In the last chapter of Part I, Jodey Castricano revisits the famous philosopher-animal encounters such as that of Nietzsche and the Turin Horse, and Derrida and his cat, and foregrounds philosophical reflection and storytelling as modes of witnessing, and thus, of being-with precarious animals, as well as a means "to develop a transformational ethics towards [an] understanding of animal loss in the Anthropocene" (145).

Part II is titled "Animal Illuminations: Storying Relations in the Age of Extinction" and covers chapters 6–11. Janelle Baker, Lorelei L. Hanson, and Zoe Todd focus on bull trout wellbeing in Alberta, Canada and offer what they call "critical fish restor(y)ing" (155) as a new methodology to fulfill "our responsibilities to fish" (169), particularly to this species which had a place in indigenous cultures and is still important as an "indicator species for mountainous stream ecosystems' responses to climate change" (164). In Chapter 7, Lisa H. Sideris turns to the famous migratory monarch butterfly and explores the symbolic and ecological human-butterfly entanglements. Putting forth what she terms "renewal-as-becoming" (188), Sideris effectively argues that "recognizing death as an integral part of life processes may be essential to learning to live in ways that do not contribute to the mass death of extinction" (188). With Adrianne Krone's compelling analysis of chickens, "put differently," the species *Gallus gallus domesticus*, as

examples of Timothy Morton's "hyperobjects" (2013), Chapter 8 of *Lost Kingdom* strikingly defamiliarizes the already defamiliarized familiar—the flesh and blood chicken—while also highlighting the Jewish identity in the US that has been intertwined with poultry industry in certain historical moments. Andrea Ringer's and Éric Baratay's successive chapters revisit the cases of white tigers and chimpanzees, respectively, and explore fates of these two animals that have been objects of display and spectacle at museums and zoos in the Anthropocene. *Lost Kingdom* starts galloping in Chapter 11 with Eduardo Mendieta's impeccable analysis of the bestiary traditions and their chronological evolution on the one hand, and of what he calls "anthrohippology or *Homo equestrians*" (288) on the other. Mendieta's strong and well-supported final observation that "our accelerating Anthropocene age has come about in part through the 'dehorsification' of our world" (298) will find many a supporter among the readership of *Lost Kingdom*.

The Epilogue, "'The End of Nature': Pedagogies of Grief and More-than-Human Relations" by Tess Beschel et al. is an account of a seminar/experience of "collective mourning" (303) involving faculty and students at the University of Washington. Exploring the questions "How can opening up the space of a university classroom to more radical, vulnerable, and emotion-filled engagements open up the very way we move through the world?" and "How can it change our engagements with each other, with the natural world, with those beings with whom we are already always in relation?" (305), the "Epilogue" presents a pathway for "new forms of learning and knowledge production" (306) and "pedagogies of radical relationality" (308), as "we [all] think about animal loss in the Anthropocene" (305).

In conclusion, *Lost Kingdom* fulfills its promise of bearing witness to Anthropocene extinction and is a welcome contribution to previous scholarship in a similar vein, represented by other full-length books such as *Fallen Animals: Art, Religion, Literature* (2017), edited by Zohar Hadromi-Allouche; David Sepkoski's *Catastrophic Thinking: Extinction and the Value of Diversity from Darwin to the Anthropocene* (2020); and *Animals, Plants and Afterimages: The Art and Science of Representing Extinction*, edited by Valérie Bienvenue and Nicholas Chare. Engaging the threats faced by nonhuman animals from all three of the terrestrial, aquatic, and avian lifeworlds, *Lost Kingdom* facilitates a holistic vision not only of animal mortality but also of how these threats are also entangled with the mortality and regression of human cultures, in Sideris's words, "as with the biosphere's unravelling in the Anthropocene, the ethnosphere is also subject to endangerment and extinction" (205).

I know that the Anthropocene cannot be studied within the isolation of national borders. The Earth system does not work with virtual, man-made constructs. However, in the face of realities, our immediate responses to the Anthropocene can be best voiced in the best possible location: Here. And now. As I write this review, Turkish society is debating matters of animal mortality. On July 30th, 2024, Turkish Parliament passed a law to round up around 4 million stray dogs. The law was approved with 275 votes in favor and 224 against, clearly showing the ethical dilemma between human interests versus nonhuman interests. Such dilemmas are natural and logical consequences of the prevalent anthropocentric perception of life on Earth. As Ece Toksabay, reporting for Reuters, explains, "under the new rules, any dogs showing aggressive behavior or that have untreatable diseases will be put down." Surely, the 275 yea-sayers have their justifiable reasons. But then again, within the first week of law's enactment, news of two cases of mass euthanasia that were uncovered by animal rights activists made its way to Turkish internet media. This news was immediately followed by protests and pleas on social media platforms for the annulment of the recent law. It is also important to note that the news also reported how those responsible for these mass killings were taken into custody by the police for interrogation. Of course, the reckless massacring of nonhuman lives cannot be—and is not—the main motivation behind the law. How could we ever talk about planetary stewardship if it were the case? This, however, does not change the very real risk of the abuse of the law. The risk resides not only in my country. It is a global matter. But hope remains in Pandora's box, as *Lost Kingdom* makes the reader feel. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of the volume, then, is to enable a powerful resonation of Haraway's reflection on "learning to be 'polite' in responsible relation to always asymmetrical living and dying, and nurturing and killing" (2007, 42). Therefore, this collection of essays is also a strong candidate as a reference source for prospective works which will engage the question of animal loss.

References

Bienvenue, Valérie, and Nicholas Chare. 2022. *Animals, Plants and Afterimages: The Art and Science of Representing Extinction*. New York, NY: Berghahn.

Hadromi-Allouche, Zohar. 2017. *Fallen Animals: Art, Religion, Literature*. Ecocritical Theory and Practice. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Haraway, Donna J. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. *When Species Meet*. 2007. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

McBrien, Justin. 2016. "Accumulating Extinction: Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene," In *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, edited by Jason W Moore, 116–37. Oakland: PM Press.

Morton, Timothy. 2013. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Posthumanities. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Sepkoski, David. 2020. *Catastrophic Thinking: Extinction and the Value of Diversity from Darwin to the Anthropocene*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Steffen, Will et al. 2011. "The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship." *Ambio* 40,7 (November): 739–61. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-011-0185-x.

Toksabay, Ece. "Turkey Passes Law to Round Up Stray Dogs, Opposition Vows Appeal." https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-passes-law-get-stray-dogs-off-streets-into-shelters-2024-07-30/.

Wiseman, Wendy A., and Burak Kesgin, eds. 2024. *Lost Kingdom: Animal Death in the Anthropocene*. Series on Climate Change and Society. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press.