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Shannon, Laurie. The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales

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the syntheses and transcendences that are at the heart of the humanistic disciplines. These essays are a reminder of the value of those endeavours and the richness of their possibilities. As Leonardo said, “the noblest pleasure is the joy of understanding.”

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Shannon, Laurie.

The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales.

Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Pp. xv, 290 + 29 ill. ISBN 978-0-226-92417-5 (paperback) \$26.

Reading Laurie Shannon’s *The Accommodated Animal*, I was reminded of Margaret Atwood’s “The Animals in That Country,” which is routinely read as a reflection of the disparities between “old” and “new” worlds, civilization and wilderness, or culture and nature. But Atwood’s poem also provokes the questions that Shannon’s study poses in its exploration of the disjunction between pre- and post-Cartesian creaturely dispensations: Do animals possess the subjective powers of feeling, thought, and communication? Do they have faces and gazes? Are they entitled to justice, sovereignty, and dignified lives and deaths? Or are they merely objects, mindless mechanical automatons whose lack precludes any notion of their cosmic citizenship or political participation? Citing Bruno Latour’s contention that the modern constitution entrusts scientific power with the representation of objects, and political power with the representation of subjects, Shannon frames these philosophical questions by asserting that the beast-machine doctrine sanctioned by the Cartesian imperative, *cogito ergo sum*, renegotiated a transformation in the status of animals from political subjects to scientific objects, an ontological shift that effectively disanimated animals by rendering them faceless.

Beautifully written and carefully researched, *The Accommodated Animal* adds to a growing body of scholarship that brings historical questions to bear on animal studies, challenging the modern (but puzzlingly anti-Darwinian) binary that would position animals and humans as creaturely opposites. Erica Fudge and Bruce Boehrer have separately demonstrated how actively the line

distinguishing these categories must be policed in order for it to hold, and Fudge in particular has noted how animals have consistently vexed the subject-object divide. Shannon's focus here is comparatively more philosophical and political; less interested in blurring any species boundaries than in drawing attention to an early modern "zootopian" constitution of inclusion, she assembles a broad spectrum of early modern legal, scientific, philosophical, theological, natural-historical, literary, and dramatic discourses that mutually acknowledge a cross-species arrangement of cosmo-political relations. Admitting her tactically anachronistic deployment of the word "animal" in the title—as opposed to the more frequently invoked "beast" and "creature," "animal" only rarely appears in the English vernacular or archive prior to the 1590s—Shannon explains that the term's departicularizing force ("*the* animal") shepherds all non-human life into a single category on the basis that those creatures lack whatever attribute singularizes humanity, thereby buttressing a reductive binary that formerly failed to register. The book's Shakespearean subtitle is somewhat misleading since Shannon's touchstones are so clearly philosophical—Montaigne and Descartes loom particularly large—rather than dramatic; still, she offers brilliant readings of Lear's "poor, bare, forked" and "unaccommodated man" and the superiority of animals occasioned by the night-rule of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The book's rather brief index and lack of a bibliography regrettably make it less accessible as a resource than it deserves to be. Although Shannon admits that, while animals were never ranked as equals to humans, they were also not reduced to nothing, at times her Cartesian focus tends to downplay the tensions within earlier discourses on the relative status of animals. Shannon's point, however—that the Cartesian dispensation effectively eradicated a formerly vital discourse of cosmopolity—makes a crucial and incisive contribution.

Shannon begins by detailing how creatures before Descartes were held to be related within a shared regime of orders or laws that governed them commonly, emphasizing how this earlier dispensation incorporated cross-species relationships in the political, legal, and contractual terms of sovereignty and subjection, thereby establishing a constitution of parties, memberships, rights, and obligations that was extended to all animated creatures. This constitutional frame harkened back to and synthesized classically-derived natural history and the hexameral tradition established in the first chapters of Genesis, which conceived of cross-species relations as a multi-kindred domain whose diverse parties are governed by a shared set of laws that imply creaturely (rather than

exclusively human) capacities for lawful and lawless signification. In her penultimate chapter, Shannon paints a searing portrait of the consequences that early Enlightenment assertions of exclusively human subjectivity would have in terms of creaturely dispensations when she juxtaposes sixteenth-century legal trials of animal subjects to seventeenth-century scientific trials that employed live animals as the objects of vivisection and vacuum tube experimentation. In “The Animals Reject Their Names and Things Return to Their Origins,” Atwood returns to a dystopian or utopian (depending on perspective) theme that Shannon shows has a long and storied history: animals revolting against mankind’s tyrannical oppression. That topic, Shannon argues, continues to expose the political terms of human exercises of power and dominion over animals. Will we ever own and exercise the ethical extent of our contractual obligation? Woefully, and to our enduring disgrace, it may already be too late.

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