

EJAS Call for Abstracts

Title: Interspecies Harmony in North American Literature and Culture

Articles in this special issue will be united in their pursuit of answers to the following question: what factors have historically influenced North American literary and cultural representations of harmonious human–animal coexistence?

Relations between humans and animals have always been in the background of the various concepts that have shaped the popular understanding of America. Some scholars, including historian Virginia DeJohn Anderson (2008), argue that the colonization of the continent was inevitably tied to a complete reshaping of human-animal relations: a shift from Native Americans' symbiotic entanglement with the non-human world to the Puritans' anthropocentric "stewardship of God's creation." Even if animals do not figure prominently in John Winthrop's vision of a "city upon a hill," America's assumed role as a model of moral conduct invites still largely unanswered questions of the role of human-animal relations in such modeling of conduct. Thomas Jefferson's agrarian ideal included a particular understanding of human-animal coexistence, rooted in Jefferson's belief in American exceptionalism and in the drive towards the nation's economic independence. Contemporary scholars from the interdisciplinary field of animal studies have begun to link the current exploitation of non-human animals, particularly of so-called livestock in the practices of factory farming, to the discourses inherent to America's founding and their subsequent transformation into capitalism and, more recently, neoliberalism (Shukin 2009; Glenney-Boggs 2013; Blanchette 2020). They have also noted how racist discourses of colonization are often intertwined with discourses of speciesism and animalization (Lundblad 2013; Boisseron 2018; Jackson 2020; Weaver 2021).

It is understandable that animal studies, as an ethically motivated mode of analysis, has largely focused its efforts on examining the exploitation of animals and on dramatizing how the anthropocentrism embedded in American – and, more broadly, Western – culture has had negative effects on the environment and the animal world. This is not surprising and is fully justifiable. However, in order to better understand the processes that shape the conditions under which animals live, die and interact with humans in North America, a broader study of human–animal relations is needed—one that includes an investigation of those historical and cultural contexts shaping notions of "ideal" interspecies relations and what such relations entail.

We wish to address this lacuna within animal studies and the environmental humanities by focusing on representations of "desirable" human–animal relations and on the constructedness of what counts as an illustration of "interspecies harmony" (both within the academic field and outside of it). We are therefore interested in "interspecies harmony" as a concept that is culturally and historically contingent and political. This framework for thinking about harmonious human–animal coexistence will direct our questioning in this issue. For instance, what is at stake for those who construct "interspecies harmony" in the way that they do—as both individuals and communities situated in a particular time and place? How do constructions of "interspecies harmony" function in North American society? How do they navigate the politics of gender, class, race, imperialism, the nation state, sexuality, and ability in the US? How are they employed in conservationist and environmentalist discourses?

Animal subjectivities and human–nonhuman entanglements are also central to this issue. Theoretical engagements with, for example, Donna Haraway's work on 'companion species' (2003; 2008) and Vinciane Despret's concept of 'anthropo-zoo-genesis' (2004) are welcome. These engagements may lead to questions regarding nonhumans as active agents in the production of human identities and cultures. For example, when humans interact with real animal individuals in portrayals of interspecies harmony,

what power do such individuals wield? What does a particular concept of “interspecies harmony” mean to these individuals? Moreover, how might the usual absence of living nonhuman bodies in the creation and reception of literature, film, music, etc. shape “harmony” as an aesthetic ideal in the arts?

Representations of interspecies harmony span “high” and popular culture. We are interested in portrayals of harmonious human–animal relations from across this continuum as well as across a variety of media and performance contexts, including literature, theater, film, music, video games, sport, and social media. We will consider articles that use a wide variety of methodologies: from archival to ethnographic research. Articles for the special issue will likely explore, but are by no means limited to, representations of

- human-animal relations in colonial and early American texts
- the role of animals (livestock, pets, and wild animals) in key concepts shaping American identity (“city upon a hill,” “errand into the wilderness,” American pastoralism, “manifest destiny”) and in various renditions of “the American Dream”
- the role of animals in Native American societies
- relations between humans and animals in mainstream representations of Native American cultures (e.g. *Pocahontas*, *Dances with Wolves*)
- “ideal” human–pet encounters (including changes in these over time)
- harmonious interactions between humans and “wild” animals
- interspecies harmony in American utopian literature and other fictional utopias
- “ideal” spiritual relations between humans and animals
- “cute” animals—for example, in images and videos posted on social media; the rise of cuteness as historically, geographically, and linguistically contingent category and the role of animals and “animal content” in “the power of cute” (May 2019)
- animals and children: representations of animals in children’s literature and film
- the shaping of animals’ willingness to serve or to form teams with humans

- harmonious visions of human-animal coexistence in ecological and environmentalist discourses

Abstracts should be no more than 300 words and can be sent to the issue co-editor, Jack Harrison, at j.harrison@uw.edu.pl. The deadline for abstracts is April 30, 2022, and authors of successful article proposals will receive an acceptance email in May 2022. Full articles will be due December 1, 2022, with the publication of the special issue planned for January 2024. All articles will undergo double blind peer review. Final manuscripts must follow MLA formatting guidelines.

We look forward to reading your abstracts.

Kind regards,

Dr. Justyna Włodarczyk and Dr. Jack Harrison

Department of North American Cultures and Literatures, University of Warsaw