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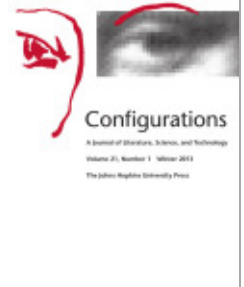
*The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature* ed. by Jean  
E. Feerick and Vin Nardizzi (review)

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human spaces and “complicates our own sense of place and sense of identity, of what it means to be a human animal” (p. 71).

Along similar lines, the fourth chapter considers the work of British artists Olly and Suzi in which animals participate in the creation and reception of art by directly interacting with the surface of paper and canvas. For example, *Anaconda on Painting* is a series of photographs in which the undulating snake leaves a muddy track as it travels over white paper. In Derridean language, Broglio frames this track as a “trace” that bears witness to, but cannot fully capture the “event” of the animal’s passing (pp. 96–97). This failure, in turn, creates a human/animal “pidgin” art that simultaneously highlights the workings of animal agencies and human/animal alliances and sets limits on our ability to make animals present to us as objects.

As my chapter descriptions suggest, Broglio’s characterization of his argument in the opening chapter does not always agree with how his argument actually proceeds. If, as he maintains, the visual arts reveal aspects of animal phenomenology that surpass conventional modes of human inquiry, such aspects are often made legible in the later chapters only when they are framed within the kinds of knowledge systems that they are purported to surpass. This aspect of the work is not necessarily a weakness; in fact, it reminds us of the suppleness of Deleuzian, Nietzschean, and Derridean frameworks, which Broglio uses to great effect in his innovative readings.

In sum, *Surface Encounters* will be an important resource for any scholar positioned at the intersection of the posthumanities and animal studies. By illustrating the creative exchange between the visual arts and contemporary theories—and, of equal value, by calling attention to the fascinating work of important new artists—Broglio illuminates new pathways for the ongoing interdisciplinary project of animal studies.

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Jean E. Feerick and Vin Nardizzi, eds., *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature*. Early Modern Cultural Studies series. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, 304 pp. \$95.00 cloth.

Coedited by Jean Feerick and Vin Nardizzi, *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature* is an important collection not only for early modern ecocritics, but also for ecocritics and Renaissance literary scholars more broadly. With rich, careful—sometimes even startling—excavations of the porous boundaries between human and nonhuman living things, the volume identifies the intricate crossings between humans and nonhuman actants, ranging from worms, dolphins, and vegetables to earth, apricots, stones, swine, and more.

*The Indistinct Human* challenges the dominant narrative of the Renaissance as an era in which Man was preeminent. Productively unraveling the (still entrenched) Burkhardtian notion of the Renaissance as the seminal moment of human individuation and selfhood, the volume is also relevant to current discussions of human subjectivity and periodicity. It seeks to establish the fullness with which conceptions of the early modern human are enmeshed with nonhuman

life-forms, elucidating the many ways that human exceptionalism—"the premise that humanity alone is not a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies"<sup>1</sup>—does *not* apply to pre-Cartesian constructions of humanity. As such, the collection recovers a perspective that more than resembles the posthuman disposition advocated by contemporary eco-theorists and highlights how early modern texts engage crucial and relevant ecological concerns. Feerick and Nardizzi's introduction, "Swervings: On Human Indistinction," opens the volume with strong statements regarding the book's intent. As they write, "the potential for human indistinction is the dark underside of Renaissance celebrations of man's preeminent place within the cosmos, and it is the subject of the essays brought together in this collection" (p. 2). The chapters in the volume "are united in their interest to explain a widespread cultural tendency to perceive only the most provisional and 'illusory' of 'boundaries' separating human 'selfhood' from nonhuman life forms" (p. 4). Moving deftly from Hooker's "tangled" chain of being to Aristotle's tripartite soul (vegetable, sensitive, intellective), the coeditors elucidate how humans and nonhumans intersect in overlapping, nesting ways.

Feerick and Nardizzi duly credit those individuals in animal studies who have "proposed the animal as a crucial border-figure to the human being in Renaissance materials" (p. 3). However, they also note how *The Indistinct Human* departs from previous scholarly investigations of the dispersal of the human, noting that such work tended "to identify an anxious awareness of suspect boundaries on the part of early modern writers" (p. 4). *The Indistinct Human* presents a more expansive range of responses to early modern cross-species identification: "Anxiety does have a role in the stories that our contributors tell of these exchanges and transactions, but they also detail postures of desire, admiration, disappointment, even release in the intricate relations perceived to conjoin human and nonhuman agents" (ibid.). The second key departure begins with the argument that recent scholarly work focused on questioning the human/animal divide is, even if by way of critique, a descendant of Cartesian thought. This collection seeks to recapture a pre-Cartesian sense of human indistinction, working across multiple frontiers and evincing the full range of relations invited by Aristotle's three souls, "imagining vegetables and animals as similarly ensouled forms of matter," and including "mineral life forms" as well (ibid.).

The coeditors note how they also almost fell into the familiar taxonomy of animal, vegetable, and mineral. Late in the process, however, they recognized the hierarchy embedded in these categories and revamped the structure fully: part 1, "The Head-Piece"; part 2, "Modes of Indistinction (Crossings, Bodily Ingestion, Technologies of Conjunction)"; and part 3, "Indistinct Bodies ([Un]Sexed Bodies, Stony States, Soiled Bodies)." While part 2 is structured with paired chapters focused on modes of indistinction, part 3 presents paired chapters on indistinct bodies. Laurie Shannon's "Head-Piece" (the only reprint in the volume) articulates and develops the governing perspective of the collection, arguing for the necessity of abandoning the "spurious compass of 'the human/animal divide' to navigate a wider sea of new ecosystemic, genetic, and posthumanist knowledges—[to] aim for a more creaturely and less human-exceptionalist vision of cosmopolity" (p. 19). The chapters in the volume are admirably consistent, and one senses a deft editorial presence throughout, as every chapter contributes to the overarching goals of the text. Moreover, by my quick count, there are at least ten occurrences of authors citing other chapters in the volume, usually across paired

1. Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 11.

chapters. Chapter 10, "A Heart of Stone: The Ungodly in Early Modern England," and Chapter 11, "Of Stones and Stony Hearts: Desdemona, Hermione, and Post-Reformation Theater," authored by Tiffany Jo Werth and Jennifer Waldron, respectively, are sure to draw the readers' curiosity, as they take up human indistinction and stone—"the mineralization of the body and the matter of faith" (p. 8). Exemplifying the benefits of paired chapters, Werth and Waldron also carefully articulate symmetries and clarify differences between their arguments (compare pp. 191 and 209). Such connections and clarifications not only aid the reader in immeasurable ways, but also indicate the care and attentiveness of the coeditors.

It is no surprise that the chapters written by Feerick and Nardizzi are among the strongest in the book. Feerick's chapter on earth, Shakespeare's history plays, and "The Spanish Tragedy" not only locates the connection between the aristocratic body and the earth, but also demonstrates how these tragedies figure "the bodies of its most traditional aristocrats as themselves mini-landscapes or gardens undergoing erosion and destruction" (p. 239). These texts expose the artifice of social hierarchy, as all "decaying bodies insist on the fundamental indistinction between their flesh and dirt" (p. 247). Like Feerick, Dan Brayton, in "Royal Fish: Shakespeare's Princely Whales," raises issues of social hierarchy in his discussion of "interspecies kinship" between human and whales, concluding that in comparing princes and nobles "to the specific behaviors of whales that foreground the animal appetites of princes, Shakespeare implies the obverse of the conventional scenario of humans slipping down the chain of being to the level of beasts" (p. 61). Brayton's chapter is paired with Steve Mentz's engaging chapter ("Half-Fish, Half-Flesh': Dolphins, the Ocean, and Early Modern Humans") on dolphin stories ranging from Lucian to Pynchon; both are significant, as they focus on oft neglected marine animals.

Given that one of the volume's goals is to introduce a variety of pre-Cartesian modes and/or bodies of indistinction, it is appropriate that roughly five of the twelve chapters focus on botanicals and/or forms of grafting. Two of these stand out in particular. While Nardizzi has written of grafting elsewhere, his chapter, "The Wooden Matter of Human Bodies: Prosthesis and Stump in *A Larum for London*," engages disability studies, ligneous materials, and prosthesis. He argues that "indeterminacy at the site of prosthesis, where 'stump' names both wooden leg and amputated flesh, occasions a crisis of kinds in the discourse of surgery, which classes the prosthesis as a *supplément* whose signs are inhumanity and monstrosity" (p. 121). This crisis, Nardizzi notes, is intensified on the stage, as "performance visually frays stable distinctions between subjects and objects, between humans and nonhumans, and between organic and artefactual things" (p. 128). Hillary Nunn's splendid "Vegetable Love: Botany and Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century England" powerfully conveys how "greensickness," to which "overripe" early modern virgins were susceptible (and about which fathers fretted), leads to a pronounced state of indistinction. Along with changes in complexion, "a certain bad colour from white, more or less to green" (p. 163), and the cessation of menstrual cycles, which led to blood "giving way to more sap-like bodily fluid" (p. 169), Nunn explains that "one of the most vivid symptoms of the illness . . . was pica—the eating of substances not normally considered to be food—and dirt was commonly high on the list" (p. 167). "The habitual consumption of dirt," she notes, "suggests that the illness modifies the greensick female body's very nature, gradually transforming it into a plantlike substance. These unusual dietary habits could signal a young woman's perceived need to satisfy her inner vegetable, rather than animal, needs, and to bolster her increasingly plantlike internal functions"

(p. 168). Together, Nardizzi and Nunn provide the volume's finest examples of a materialist approach to human indistinction.

*The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature* raises a number of questions: How should the sort of assemblages of human and living nonhuman things in this volume be distinguished from or related to assemblages of human and non-living objects? What continuities might be found between human indistinction in the Renaissance and the Middle Ages? Are there ways that such border crossings persist into the late seventeenth century and beyond? How do non-English literary texts of the Renaissance transverse human and nonhuman living things in similar or different ways? How might indistinction (discursively and materially) construct and serve categories of distinction? There is little to criticize in this splendid and important collection. Feerick and Nardizzi have presented a remarkably strong and persuasive volume that works in meaningful ways to dislodge anthropocentric views of Renaissance humans who, if I may paraphrase Haraway, were never really human from the start.

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