Beastly Journeys
Tim Youngs

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Beastly Journeys:
Travel and Transformation at the fin de siècle

Bats, beetles, wolves, butterflies, bulls, panthers, apes, leopards, and spiders are among the countless creatures that crowd the pages of literature of the late nineteenth century. Whether in Gothic novels, science fiction, fantasy, fairy tales, journalism, political discourse, realism, or naturalism, the line between the human and the animal becomes blurred. Beastly Journeys examines these bestial transformations across a range of well-known and less familiar texts and shows how they are provoked not only by the mutations of Darwinism but by social and economic shifts that have been lost in retellings and readings of them. The physical alterations described by George Gissing, George MacDonald, Arthur Machen, Arthur Morrison, W. T. Stead, Bram Stoker, H. G. Wells, Oscar Wilde, and many of their contemporaries, are responses to changes in the social body as Britain underwent a series of social and economic crises. Metaphors of travel – social, spatial, temporal, mythical, and psychological – keep these stories on the move, confusing literary genres along with the indeterminacy of physical shape that they relate. Beastly Journeys should appeal to anyone interested in the relationship between nineteenth-century literature and its contexts and especially to those interested in the fin de siècle and metaphors of travel, animals, and shape-changing.

'A lively and energetic romp through a wide range of fin de siècle texts [...] Youngs' readings are smart, and they take implicit aim at a kind of animal-recuperation tendency in the historiography that is most welcome as “post-human” analyses take root in literary studies.'

Professor Antoinette Burton, University of Illinois

'Youngs offers a late Victorian menagerie of beasts and men that is compelling and surprising. It suggests that the wavering border between human and animal is one of the decisive borderlines in an era that remains so pivotal to our understanding of the modern world. Consistently inventive.'

Professor Roger Luckhurst, Birkbeck, University of London

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