

ORION  
AN ORION READER

# Animals & People

*A Selection of Essays from Orion Magazine*

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Teacher's Guide

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## *Introduction*

# BLURRING THE SPECIES BARRIER

**I**N HER BOOK *When Species Meet*, writer and scholar Donna Haraway argues that when members of different species cross paths, each participant can innovatively discover new ways of being, new gestures, new signs, new ways of exploring the species barrier—and, crucially, new ways to transgress the barrier in moments of cross-species understanding.

In multiple ways, species meet throughout *Animals & People*. As readers, we too participate. We meet pelicans, horses, storm petrels, and pandas. We grapple with the intellect of octopuses and the enormity of sturgeon. We feel humbled at the wisdom of the elders of other species. We feel awe for the uncanny ways coyotes survive. We participate in loss and elegy. Together, these essays become an immense gesture entreating readers to turn toward other animals with openness, and to learn new ways to interact and coexist on the planet.

# ANIMALS & PEOPLE

PATTIANN ROGERS

1. In “Some Notes on Organic Form,” poet Denise Levertov describes the stanza as carving out space to contemplate, to meditate, to muse, and “to stand with open mouth” in a state of bewilderment, perplexity, or awe. The duration of a stanza comes to fruition as it draws the poet and the reader into a contemplative space. How does Pattiann Rogers accomplish this with her stanzas? How do the varying lengths of indentation—the blank space of silence—help carve out a contemplative space to grapple with human-animal interactions?
2. The pronoun *we* includes both *you* and *I*. Read a couple of stanzas, switching the *we* to an *I*. Follow that reading with another, switching the *we* to a *you*. How does the tone and texture of the poem shift? What is gained by using *we*? What is lost?
3. In the final stanza, Rogers suggests the possibility of reconciling the contradictions surrounding how humans interact with animals through the iconic image of the lion and the lamb lying down together in peace. Is such a reconciliation of contradictions possible?
4. “Animals and People” introduces the collection of essays, functioning much like a prelude. However, it could also function as a postlude. After reading several or all of the other essays, return to “Animals and People.” How do some of the lines and stanzas shift in meaning, resonance, impact, and weight when the poem is read as a postlude?

## Selected Books by Pattiann Rogers

- *Holy Heathen Rhapsody* (2013)
- *The Grand Array: Writing on Nature, Science, and Spirit* (2010)
- *Wayfare* (2008)
- *Song of the World Becoming: New and Collected Poems, 1981–2001* (2001)
- *The Dream of the Marsh Wren: Writing as Reciprocal Creation* (1999)
- *Geocentric* (1993)
- *The Tattooed Lady in the Garden* (1986)

## Selected Resources

- “An Interview with Poet Pattiann Rogers,” conducted by Jeannine Hall Gailey:  
[http://www.pw.org/content/interview\\_poet\\_pattiann\\_rogers?cmnt\\_all=1](http://www.pw.org/content/interview_poet_pattiann_rogers?cmnt_all=1)
- Additional poems and interview published by *Missouri Review*:  
<http://www.missourireview.com/anthology/interview-with-pattiann-rogers>
- Pattiann Rogers’s website: [http://home.comcast.net/~pattiann\\_rogers/](http://home.comcast.net/~pattiann_rogers/)

# LEARNING TO SURF

DAVID GESSNER

1. Locate several specific places where Gessner blurs the line between what it means to be human and what it means to be an animal. What happens as these two spheres merge?
2. Early on, Gessner establishes the concept of *funktionslust*. Discuss moments when you have experienced *funktionslust* and when you have witnessed another animal seem to experience it.
3. Gessner foregrounds how the process of “habituation” dulls one’s appreciation of the presence of other species. How does the practice of writing (and reading) push against the tendency toward habituation?
4. Scholars of ecopoetry have suggested that language can be a means of “echolocation,” that is, of cultivating a profound sense of dwelling within one’s local bioregion. How does Gessner’s writing become a practice of dwelling?

## **Selected Books by David Gessner**

- *The Tarball Chronicles* (2011)
- *My Green Manifesto* (2011)
- *Soaring with Fidel* (2007)
- *Sick of Nature* (2005)
- *Under the Devil’s Thumb* (1999)

## **Selected Resources**

- David Gessner’s website: <http://www.davidgessner.com/>
- The journal *Ecotone: Reimagining Place*, which Gessner founded: <http://www.ecotonejournal.com>
- Several online stories by Gessner published by *OnEarth*: <http://www.onearth.org/author/david-gessner>
- The Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s online resource on pelicans: [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brown\\_Pelican/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brown_Pelican/id)

# DEEP INTELLECT

SY MONTGOMERY

1. In her book *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway explores the inventive space that emerges as one species interacts with another—especially in play. Both parties must discover new ways of being, what Haraway calls an “ontological invention.” In Sy Montgomery’s essay, how is the octopus inventive when meeting a human? In what ways is a human inventive when meeting an octopus? How does Montgomery explore what happens “when species meet”?
2. “Deep Intellect” catapults readers into a state of wonder. Discuss specific places in the essay that provoke wonder through the content of the essay and/or through Montgomery’s craft.
3. Haraway emphasizes how cross-species interactions “enrich one’s ignorance.” Does new knowledge about the octopus make you feel more or less ignorant? Ignorance usually carries a negative connotation, but why, in this context, might ignorance be enriching?

## **Selected Books by Sy Montgomery**

- *Birdology* (2011)
- *The Search for the Golden Moon Bear: Science and Adventure in Pursuit of a New Species* (2002)
- *Walking with the Great Apes: Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas* (1991)

## **Selected Resources**

- Sy Montgomery’s website: <http://symontgomery.com/>
- The Seattle Aquarium’s webpage devoted to giant Pacific octopuses: <http://www.seattleaquarium.org/octopus>

# WISDOM IN THE WILD

J. B. MACKINNON

1. Discuss MacKinnon's use of humor throughout his essay. How does humor interact with the more serious moments of the argument? How does the humor invite us to take his insights seriously?
2. Part of writing and publishing involves opening up space for one's work; often, this can be accomplished by establishing a gap that needs filling in. How does MacKinnon establish that a gap exists? What does MacKinnon do in order to persuade his readers that the gap needs filling and that the need is urgent?
3. Some readers may see the attribution of wisdom to nonhuman animals as problematic—as merely anthropomorphizing. How does MacKinnon anticipate and address this counterargument? What is the difference between intelligence and wisdom in the human sphere? Does MacKinnon convince you that some nonhuman animals possess not just intelligence, but wisdom? Thinking back to “Deep Intellect,” do you think octopuses possess wisdom?

## **Selected Books by J. B. MacKinnon**

- *The Once and Future World* (2013)
- *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating* (with Alisa Smith, 2007)
- *Dead Man in Paradise* (2005)

## **Selected Resources**

- J. B. MacKinnon's website: <http://jbmackinnon.com>
- PBS exploration on the wisdom of animals:  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/wisdom-of-the-wild/wild-wisdom/861/>

# STORM PETREL

KATHLEEN JAMIE

1. Several ecocritics and ecopoets have emphasized the link between environmental collapse and the failure of human imagination. However, Jamie's essay awakens the imagination by drawing on data, poetry, history, maps, individual words, the few feathers and bones of a petrel, and more. How do the individual vantage points interact to spur your imagination? What is at stake in the process of cultivating "a flight of imagination on the back of a bird"?
2. Jamie points toward how humans intrude upon storm petrels (and other animals) by having them tagged with a human address when their address is "The Ocean." And yet Jamie's essay also points toward what is gained: an enriched and more sympathetic imagination. Is the tradeoff worth it? What ethical considerations must be grappled with as humans learn about other animals?
3. The final two words of the essay, "wambling waif," place pressure on the roll of language and the imagination. How does Jamie set the reader up for these final two words? How do these words further spur the imagination?
4. Often, animal migrations are reduced to a shallow understanding of instinct that leaves no room for animal agency (conscious intention). How does our view of the storm petrel shift when we assume agency—rather than a mindless instinct—contributes to their colossal migrations?

## **Selected Books by Kathleen Jamie**

- *Sightlines: A Conversation with the Natural World* (2013)
- *Waterlight* (2007)
- *Findings* (2005)
- *Mr. and Mrs. Scotland Are Dead* (2002)

## **Selected Resources**

- Poetry Foundation webpage on Kathleen Jamie that includes her biography, further poems, podcasts, and more: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/kathleen-jamie>
- British Trust for Ornithology's webpage on storm petrels with links to images, videos, sound, and more: <http://blx1.bto.org/birdfacts/results/bob520.htm>
- Map from the British Trust for Ornithology highlighting the locations of recovered storm petrel rings: <http://blx1.bto.org/birdfacts/results/map520.htm>

# DARK HORSE

LISA COUTURIER

1. The term “dark horse” often refers to an unknown racing horse who, on the track, surprises everyone with a win out of nowhere. The term can also refer to how something little-known suddenly gains prominence. In the context of Couturier’s essay, the term takes on new significance. How? In a race, winning is at stake. What is at stake in Couturier’s essay? Who are the “dark horses,” and what will it take for a “win”?
2. Couturier’s title ensures that, when readers of her essay hear the term “dark horse” during a race, they will likely think about the darkness of horse slaughter. In this way, Couturier plants a seed that has the potential to grow in the reader’s imagination long into the future. Using Couturier’s title as a starting point, discuss the work that titles can do. Consider the other titles of this collection as well as the titles you are crafting for your own work.
3. Couturier wants to make sure the reader engages with the injustice of horse slaughter. How does she draw the reader into the brutality of the underground horse market? How does she time the various moves of her essay so that the reader confronts what is happening?
4. In the early months of 2013, a scandal broke out: throughout the UK and other countries in Europe, horse meat appeared in products labeled “beef.” One of the resources below will direct you to a question-and-answer page on the BBC’s website that explores how this happened. In what ways does the coverage confront what happened? On the other hand, how does it cover up what Couturier exposes?

## **Selected Books and Essays by Lisa Couturier**

- *The Hopes of Snakes: And Other Tales from the Urban Landscape* (2005)
- “Heirloom” in *American Nature Writing* (2002)
- “A Banishment of Crows” in *American Nature Writing: A Celebration of Women Writers* (2000)
- “Reversing the Tides” in *The River Reader* (1998)

## **Selected Resources**

- Lisa Couturier’s website: <http://www.lisacouturier.com>
- BBC’s question-and-answer page focusing on the scandal of horse meat appearing in products labeled “beef”: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21335872>
- NPR interview with Couturier, focusing on her book *The Hopes of Snakes*: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4608701>
- The Humane Society’s ongoing coverage of horse slaughter: [http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/horse\\_slaughter/](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/horse_slaughter/)



# THE CREATURE BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS

BRIAN DOYLE

1. Fish stories, told by people who fish, have a long history of exaggeration. How does Doyle play with this expectation surrounding stories about, as his subtitle states it, “really big fish”? Does he exaggerate? Does he not exaggerate enough?
2. How does what we learn about sturgeon enlarge the vast domain of what we don’t know? How does Herman become an “agent of wonder” who ushers humans into a state of humility?
3. One of the resources below directs readers to Edmund Burke’s theory of the sublime. Read through a couple of the sections that pertain to the wonder a sturgeon inspires, such as “Of the Passion Caused by the Sublime”; “Power”; “Privation”; “Obscurity”; “Suddenness”; or others. Identify passages in Doyle’s essay that inspire a sense of the sublime. Discuss such moments in terms of Burke’s theory.
4. Think back to your answers to the second question about “Storm Petrel.” What are the ethics involved with the ways humans learn about or are inspired by other animals? How does Doyle confront the issue of captivity? Why is there “nothing to say” to the indignant woman who “was right,” after all?

## **Selected Books by Brian Doyle**

- *The Plover: A Novel* (2014)
- *Grace Notes* (2011)
- *Mink River* (2010)
- *Epiphanies & Elegies: Very Short Stories* (2006)

## **Selected Resources**

- Doyle’s “Epiphanies” column in *The American Scholar*: <http://theamericanscholar.org/how-did-you-become-a-writer/>
- Edmund Burke’s theory of the sublime: <http://www.bartleby.com/24/2/>
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife visitors’ guide with information on Herman: [http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/visitors/bonneville\\_hatchery\\_more.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/visitors/bonneville_hatchery_more.asp)
- Consider browsing the many YouTube videos of Herman.

# NEW DOG IN TOWN

CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM

1. Coyotes upset boundaries, something Ketcham draws attention to early in his essay. Rather than dwelling in “nature,” they thrive near the “most urbanized ingathering of *Homo sapiens* in America.” He also draws attention to the “unheralded . . . lesson in evolution” that the coyote offers. In the context of the essay as a whole, what is the lesson?
2. What are some of the traits of actual, biological coyotes that have contributed to the coyote’s iconic status as a trickster in story and myth? Ketcham juxtaposes the trickster of Native American storytelling with Wile E. Coyote. What is gained through the juxtaposition?
3. What is commonly meant by the phrase “survival of the fittest”? What are other possible meanings of “fittest”? According to different definitions, who might be considered more “fit,” the wolf or the coyote?
4. Ketcham’s essay progresses toward an unnerving discussion of “weed species.” How does he set the reader up for this moment? It is ironic that the species often seen as possessing the most advanced intellect, *Homo sapiens*, may function like a pervasive, relentless, and resilient weed. What is Ketcham’s response to such a diagnosis? What is your response?

## Selected Books and Other Writings by Christopher Ketcham

- “STOP PAYMENT! A Homeowners’ Revolt Against the Banks” (Jan. 2012, *Harper’s*)
- “Wolves to the Slaughter” (March 13, 2012, *The American Prospect*)
- “The New Populists” (Dec. 12, 2011, *The American Prospect*)
- *Notes from September 11: Poems and Stories* (2004)

## Selected Resources

- Christopher Ketcham’s website: <http://www.christopherketcham.com/>
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s discussion of urban coyotes: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9359.html>

# WASTE LAND

MARY OLIVER

1. Discuss the implications of an elegy written for the loss of a “waste land.”
2. W. S. Merwin’s one-line poem “Elegy” reads, “Who would I show it to.” The final moments of Oliver’s lyrical essay grapple with a similar angst. Why is Oliver “frightened”?

## **Selected Books by Mary Oliver**

- *A Thousand Mornings: Poems* (2012)
- *Red Bird: Poems* (2008)
- *Owls and Other Fantasies: Poems and Essays* (2006)
- *Why I Wake Early: New Poems* (2005)
- *Blue Pastures* (1995)

## **Selected Resources**

- Poetry Foundation’s webpage on Mary Oliver:  
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/mary-oliver>
- NPR interview with Mary Oliver:  
<http://www.npr.org/2012/10/14/162785079/a-thousand-mornings-with-poet-mary-oliver>
- YouTube video of Oliver reading her poems: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnaP7ig69go>

# SEEING DEER

CRAIG CHILDS

1. What thoughts do you think Childs's son had when he saw the deer fighting? How does Childs use this moment to blur the line between humans and other animals?
2. Does Childs anthropomorphize the female deer at the end of the essay? Does she mourn? Is anthropomorphism a fallacy?
3. Childs's subtitle is "An autumnal elegy." Whose elegy is it? What has been lost? What is being mourned? Who is mourning?

## **Selected Books by Craig Childs**

- *Apocalyptic Planet: Field Guide to the Everending Earth* (2012)
- *Finders Keepers: A Tale of Archaeological Plunder and Obsession* (2010)
- *The Animal Dialogues: Uncommon Encounters in the Wild* (2007)
- *Soul of Nowhere* (2003)

## **Selected Resources**

- Craig Childs's website: <http://www.houseofrain.com/index.cfm>
- Interview with Craig Childs about "The End(s) of the Earth":  
<http://www.elevationoutdoors.com/camping/the-ends-of-the-earth/>
- Interview with Craig Childs about *The Animal Dialogues*:  
<http://www.prx.org/pieces/24804-craig-childs-interview-about-animal-dialogues>

# RADICAL BEARS IN THE FOREST DELICIOUS

AMY LEACH

1. When one thinks of endangered species, pandas are often among the first to come to mind. They are iconic megafauna, often used as logos for conservation organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund. They permeate culture, from stuffed animals to Panda Express to Animal Planet. How does Leach break through some of our preconceived notions about pandas? How does she use common knowledge—pandas eat bamboo—in order to get readers closer to seeing what an actual panda may be like?
2. Examine Leach’s language. As she provides a fresh perspective on pandas, she reimagines what language can do. In what phrases, sentences, or passages does Leach’s whimsical use of language open up new perspectives?
3. Leach’s essay may remind readers of the possible extinction of panda bears. But how are we reminded, and toward what end? How does her approach compare to more urgent pieces about endangered species?

## **Selected Books and Essays by Amy Leach**

- *Things That Are: Essays* (2012)
- “Sail On, My Little Honey Bee” (*A Public Space*, Jan. 9, 2009)
- “When Trees Dream of Being Trees” (*The Daily Palette*, Jan. 17, 2006)

## **Selected Resources**

- A nonfiction reading by Amy Leach, sponsored by Webster University:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHd35JIUXz8>
- A review of *Things That Are*:  
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/09/things-that-are-amy-leach-review>