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Book review: The animals reader: the essential classic and contemporary writings. By L. Kalof and A. Fitzgerald. Oxford: Berg. 2007. xvi + 386 pp. £15.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781845204709

Emma Power

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Book reviews

The animals reader: the essential classic and contemporary writings. By L. Kalof and A. Fitzgerald. Oxford: Berg. 2007. xvi + 386 pp. £15.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781845204709.

This multidisciplinary text draws together key historical and contemporary readings to introduce readers to ongoing debates surrounding the roles and place of animals in society. Highlighting the shifting nature of human–animal divisions, it challenges readers to rethink contemporary animal practices and encourages them to be alert to the differences, continuities and interconnections between people and animals.

The book's six themed sections examine the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of human–animal relations, as well as animals' roles as pets, food, spectacle, symbols and scientific objects, in a predominately Western context. An examination of 'Animals as Philosophical and Ethical Subjects' provides a strong foundation for the collection and encourages readers to consider how the categorization of animals impacts on both the opportunities of people and their ethical obligations to animals. Contributions drawn from Aristotle, Singer, Regan and Nussbaum, among others, introduce contrasting perspectives on the question of animal rights and provide a challenging introduction to later sections.

Kalof and Fitzgerald discuss their choice of pieces that 'have had a major influence in how the Western world thinks about animals'. While they certainly achieve this goal, the inclusion of contemporary non-Western perspectives in the book's introductory section (and in addition to Levi-Strauss' contribution later in the book) would complement the text and further challenge readers' conceptions of human–nature and human–animal divisions in Western society by highlighting alternative ways of seeing and engaging with animals.

The editors' selection of often contrasting pieces sparks debate within the text. With its succinct introductions, which contextualize chapters historically and within the broader field of human–animal studies, this text provides a comprehensive introduction to key debates in a format that is accessible to undergraduate students.

Macquarie University

EMMA POWER

Stories from home: English domestic interiors, 1750–1850. By Margaret Ponsonby. Aldershot: Ashgate. 2007. x + 221 pp. £55.00 hardback. ISBN: 9780754652359.

This book is written by a design historian but its themes – house-and-home, consumption and material culture – and its approach are entirely relevant to current cultural geography. Margaret Ponsonby develops a design historical focus on objects to give serious attention to