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**Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in
Literature and Culture, ed. Sanna Karkulehto,
Aino-Kaisa Koistinen and Essi Varis, New York,
Routledge, 2020**

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Review of the collective volume *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture*, ed. Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen and Essi Varis, New York, Routledge, 2020.

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This transmedial volume probes literature, comics, gameplay, art and human-technology interactions that take us to the threshold of our humanity. It will be of particular interest to researchers who wish to gain an overview of the field of posthuman/nonhuman studies and to those who would like to see how one can implement theories that are notoriously challenging to apply, such as poststructuralism and material ecocriticism. The contributors rely on these theories to criticise the anthropocentric ideology that has dominated human-nonhuman relations and to increase ecocritical awareness of our embeddedness in, and dependence on, natural and technological nonhumans.

The value of this experimental volume lies in its ability to ask, rather than answer, key questions, as can be seen from the introduction and opening chapter, in which Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, Karoliina Lummaa, Essi Varis and Carole Guesse first attempt to define “posthumanist reading” in a theoretical way (12), before applying it to Michel Houellebecq’s clone narrators and Finnish visual and sound poetry. Then, analysing narrative techniques that writers use to explore the gap between humans and nonhumans, Kaisa Kortekallio contends that the first-person perspective has the ability to “authentica[t]e the physical effects and bodily feelings” that result from human-nonhuman relations (67) and Essi Varis convincingly shows the ability of Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* to speculate about nonhuman perspectives. In this graphic novel, the nonhuman characters (Dream, planets, beetles...) change form to reflect how they see each other. The shape of the spread also mirrors nonhuman viewpoints: for example, the action is shortly framed in a giant ruby reflecting multiple scenes on its faces, before being enclosed in the enamel surfaces of a row of teeth, as one of the characters perceives the world through its mouth. Yet, at the same time, Varis never loses sight of “the insurmountable wall of [human] subjectivity” that complicates both the representation of, and research on, nonhumans (102). She responds to this challenge by writing that, “when faced with something unknowable [...] imagining is the only option” (85) – which summarises the spirit of the volume.

The volume successfully interrogates binary oppositions. For instance, Brad Bolman questions the (dis)similarity between humans and pigs, which was first theorised for anatomical dissections and later revisited by the performance of Miru Kim in a pigsty. In addition, Marleena Mustola and Sanna Karkulehto study the savagery of humanity revealed by monsters in children’s literature, while Hana Porkertová reconceptualises the relation between guided and guide dog with the Deleuzoguattarian concept of “assemblage” (189). Turning to AI, Cléo Collomb and Samuel Goyet undermine the instrumental AI/evil AI dichotomy. In the field of design, Patricia Flanagan and Raune Frankjær create technological hats that blink with you or rustle like bamboo, to demonstrate that machines can be “warm [...] and organic” (250), and grant “access [to] the experiential faculties of nonhumans” (241).

Sometimes, the researchers' analyses show that the representations of nonhumans are lacking. For instance, Jonne Arjoranta, Marleena Huuhka and Mikko Keskinen show that some video games (*Aliens versus Predators* and *Minecraft*) and novels (Charles Siebert's *Angus*) have a very limited ability to provide insights into the experientiality of nonhumans.

Like all *avant-garde* work, the volume contains a few inconsistencies. For example, the authors could have made their arguments more compelling by justifying their methodological and theoretical choices more thoroughly. For example, readers may wonder why some scholars choose Haraway's "becoming-with", instead of Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming-other" in order to discuss gaming (224), to argue that humans "become-with" nonhumans in Tolonen's *Monster Nanny* (136) and to contend that the artist Miru Kim "becomes-with" pigs during the few hours she spends in their pigsty (178), and why neither theory is thoroughly explained. One may also point out that the autoethnographic methods employed, including personal reading (Varis), game-playing (Huuhka) and friendship with the subject of inquiry (Porkertová), could also gain further persuasive power if the scholars reflected more purposefully on the bearing that their situatedness has on their research.

The contributors' exploration of non-anthropocentric viewpoints is also occasionally undermined by anthropomorphising expressions, such as "cross-species understanding" (5) or electricity that "pursue[s] happiness" (224), which are problematic insofar as they presume reciprocity, choice and intentionality. However, the volume skilfully reflects on its own limits in the afterword, in which Juha Raipola criticises material ecocriticism for ignoring the "differences between human and nonhuman agency" (267). By inviting scholars to "analyze the numerous ways in which matter escapes our desire for narrative descriptions" (277), Raipola ends the volume with precious advice for further research.

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