

Review of Joanna Bourke, *Loving Animals: On Bestiality, Zoophilia and Post-Human Love* (Reaktion Books, 2020) ISBN 978-1-78914-310-2 191pp

Erica Fudge, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

The conclusions of this book can be guessed by the end of its introduction by anyone with a knowledge of some basic ideas in 'post-humanist discourse' as it relates to human-animal relations. Indeed, Joanna Bourke's book is what might be called an extended syllogism: if, but, so. If post-humanist ideas present a challenge to 'human exceptionalism and the idea that culture is an entirely human preserve,' (30) and if we therefore refuse to see our (human) selves as special, separate, distinct, and if we recognise we are, like animals, embodied beings, what is to say sexual encounters between species are unacceptable? It seems by page 30 that Bourke is going to present post-humanists with a quandary. If, but, so: how could you say no?

What follows (the 'but' of the syllogism) are four chapters that explore, as she puts it, 'the changing historical landscape of bestiality and zoophilia, including their theological, psychiatric, philosophical and "sexual identity" phases.' (120) Chapter 1 offers an interesting overview of various political discussions that took place in state legislatures across the United States in the early twenty-first century, as it came to be recognised that the decriminalisation of homosexuality had also led to the accidental decriminalising of bestiality.

Chapter 2 turns to look at cruelty to animals, and uses the autobiography of Linda Lovelace as a way to begin. The material in the chapter, as Bourke notes, is difficult: the chapter's headnote, indeed, is a definition of 'trigger warning' (55) - in chapter 1 the headnote was a definition of 'criminal' (31). Following the work of Catherine A. MacKinnon (among others), Bourke traces links between 'the sexual abuse of non-human animals and that of human girls and women' in pornography - including pornography depicting animal and human (usually female) sexual partners.

Chapter 3 (headnote - a definition of 'paraphilia' (79)) traces the changing view of those humans - usually men - who engage in sexual activities with animals. It begins with Krafft-Ebbing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) in which 'zooeratie' was classed as 'a pathological form of desire' (79), and looks briefly at the work of R.E.L. Masters who, in 1962, declared human-animal sexual encounters to be 'quite natural' (88) and argued that, in fact, zoophiles were 'less "perverted" than homosexuals', as, he believed, same-sex love was 'abnormal' in a way that opposite-sex human-animal encounters were not. The chapter concludes with a discussion of a 'cure' for zoophilia.

Chapter 4's headnote is a definition of 'sexual orientation' (99), and this takes us into the idea of 'zoosexuality', and the emergence of zoo identity in the late twentieth century. Unlike bestialists who are using the animals as objects for the fulfilment of their (the bestialists') needs, zoosexuals regard their (sometimes monogamous) relationships with animals as reciprocal, and argue that their desire for animals is 'innate' (105). The chapter also addresses the issue of how and if consent can be understood to exist in such human-animal sexual relations.

This continues to be a focus in the final chapter on 'post-human love' (headnote: 'queering' - 'Denaturalizing heteronormative categories and practices' (118)). How can one know whether the animal other is consenting in a sexual encounter? The question takes Bourke to J.R. Ackerley's *My Dog Tulip*, a memoir of his obsessive relationship with the Alsatian Queenie; Thomas Nagel's philosophical inquiry into other minds - 'What is it Like to be a Bat'; analyses of human adult and infant communication; and debates about the sexual lives of intellectually disabled adults. The

question of power is central (inevitably) and, despite the fact that the neuroimaging of two dogs undertaken by Gregory Berns showed that they, like humans, have mirror neurons and so, in Bourke's words 'are capable of reading our minds,' (131) there remain difficulties regarding how informed consent can be understood to be given when 'what humans think is "sexual" might not be for the animals involved.' (139-140)

Such complexity does not stop Bourke from reaching the final (so) part of the syllogism. Yes, she admits, 'the vast proportion of human-animal sexual contact is coercive,' (144) but that does not mean that zoophilia per se should be condemned. The queer relationship that is zoosexuality 'absolutely *require[s]* a different conception of sexuality – specifically one that is neither phallogocentric or anthropocentric' (144), and as such 'may offer alternative models of libidinality' (145). And so she concludes: 'interspecies relationships can be complex, rich and fulfilling. Love – that most intimate and vulnerable emotion – is itself a *coup de foudre*; it is ungovernable. By being "open to otherness", we might finally find ourselves edging towards becoming true companion species.' (146)

I take it that Bourke means what she says here, but I am unable to remove the idea that this book is an exercise in extending the logic of post-humanist thought as far as it will go. If taken as such, it does ask us to think about where limits and boundaries exist in those ideas, and why. But its too brief encounters with many serious ideas – about consent and power to name just two – makes this also a troubling study.