

Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu, PLANT AND ANIMAL METAPHORS AS SIGNS OF PROTO-ECOFEMINISM, Hartung-Gorre Verlag, Konstanz/ Germania, 2024, ISBN 978-3-86628-8324/ 3-86628-832-8, 180 pages.

Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu's book proposes a survey on the plant and animal metaphors in the books written by four different female writers who published and lived in various European countries, in different literary epochs. From the start, we realize that the author intended to underline the perpetuation of the plant and animal imagery along the history of the European literature from Charlotte Brontë – Victorian writer to Beatrix Potter – a modern writer of children's, an illustrator of her own books and later a conservationist (taken into consideration her huge donation to the National Trust) to Karen Blixen – another modern writer (this time coming from Denmark, yet, writing about Kenya) to Ana Blandiana – a Romanian poet (known for her dissent activity during the communist regime).

The structure of the book is meant to show the readers how the plant and animal imagery evolved throughout the world literature from 1840's until 1990's and these are the literary works that Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu discussed in her survey: *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck* (1908) and *The Tale of Johnny the Town-Mouse* (1918), *Out of Africa* (1937) and Ana Blandiana's poems having as protagonist a tomcat called Arpagic (1980-88). At first, it might seem that this book is just another survey dealing with the oppressive images meant to denigrate one gender or the other. Yet, the author chose to focus her work on the re-interpretation of literature through the prism of biodiversity and ecofeminism. From the introduction, the author announces the readers that her work had nothing to do with animal studies (which advocate for the rights of the animals), though it should fall under the umbrella of animality studies (dealing mainly with animal imagery meant to help writers construct the characters' identity). Animality studies are used by the author to analyse how the female writers interpreted plants and animals to define the Other or the marginalized characters. As women happen to be more frequently defined through animal metaphors, the present book shows how animality studies can be linked to feminist, and ecofeminist studies, in particular, because women (be they children, women of colour or victims of colonization) are suppressed, oppressed, enslaved, marginalized, reduced to their reproduction function so that a whole species should be perpetuated. The four female writers analysed in this survey tried to show their readers how their characters deemed as 'the Other' are too often associated with plants and animals, thus highlighting their animality or a close connection to nature and their intentional disconnection from culture, from education.

Viewed as a whole, the book tries to find in each of the four female writers a possible interest in biodiversity and environmentalism or conservationism. This would be the reason, for instance, for which Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* is categorized in various genres and styles ranging from arabesque to phytographia – both terms being analysed with examples from the novel. A long series of

concepts related to environmentalism are employed by Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu to show how the Danish writer chooses to detach from colonialism (because of its destructive effects on nature) and embrace ecofeminism, thus terms like Anthropocene, Plantationocene, Capitalocene or Planthropocene, Afrocentricity are included (and explained) to validate her analysis of Blixen's concerns for the environment.

The other chapters of this book also foreground the female writers' interest in revealing the exploitation of nature which liaises with a subversion of the traditional gender roles. The final chapters underline how children's literature might be used as a tool to transmit an ecofeminist perspective on nature and how children can be taught how offensive language might be concealed underneath the images of little, adorable animals. The author aimed to show how Beatrix Potter's tales and Ana Blandiana's poems were hugely influenced by the restrictions and censorship imposed on their life and work (Beatrix Potter's life was totally controlled by her strict parents who did not allow her to get out of the house or marry outside her social class, whereas Ana Blandiana was repeatedly censored under Nicolae Ceaușescu's totalitarian regime and suffered under the occasional house arrests) and how these traumatic experiences and frustrations transform in their books into beautiful flowers or cute animals.

The present survey should not be included in the series of works dealing with natural sciences as it only refers to the differences between nature and its cultural interpretations and raises our awareness on ecopoetics. All in all, this book will prove to be a useful tool for undergraduates and doctoral students as well as young professionals who aim at constructing their career in literary studies and are interested in discussing the women's oppression and marginalization through plant and animal imagery.

Mariana Tîrnăuceanu
"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău