

EDITORIAL

The notion that animals exist primarily for human use is largely rooted in Genesis 1:26, in which God affirmed the right of humans to “rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves.” While this verse is often interpreted as promoting stewardship rather than dominance, it nevertheless established a distinction between humans and animals that reinforced the superiority of the former over the later—a distinction that was also accepted by early animal rights activists, who sought to pass legislation prohibiting acts of cruelty and neglect toward animals on the basis of Christian values.

Charles Darwin was one of the first to challenge this distinction by recognizing the essential similarities between humans and animals. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), for example, he argued that “there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties.” He also described the similarities between their facial expressions and social behaviours: “Besides love and sympathy, animals exhibit other qualities connected with the social instincts which in us would be called moral.” Some writers even claimed that animals were more moral than humans, as seen in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880): “People speak sometimes about the ‘bestial’ cruelty of man, but that is terribly unjust and offensive to beasts, no animal could ever be so cruel as a man.” J. Howard Moore’s *The Universal Kinship* (1906) similarly argued that the “gulf between human and non-human beings . . . has no foundation either in science or in common-sense” and that the idea of human superiority reflects man’s attempt “to lessen his guilt by the laudation of himself and the disparagement and degradation of his victims.” The notion of human-animal relations as a history of violence and oppression provided a new foundation for the animal rights movement, which gradually adopted the language of civil rights. By the end of the century, for example, books like Marjorie Spiegel’s *The Dreaded Comparison* (1996) emphasized the similarities between the enslavement of Africans and the treatment of animals, and Alice Walker’s

introduction also extended this comparison to the enslavement of women: “The animals of the world . . . were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men.” Anthropocentrism was thus seen as a form of social injustice and inequality.

Our autumn issue features a special section that addresses this theme in various ways. Some of these works focus on the problem of treating animals as resources to be managed and the potential cruelty that this treatment entails. For example, Charlotte Beck’s “Taking Care of Harvey” describes a cat’s efforts to compete with a new baby for its owner’s affection; while the owner is initially sympathetic, the conflict quickly escalates due to their unequal distribution of power and the implicit assumption that the life of an animal is not equal to that of a human. Sara Mang’s story “Her Wild” similarly describes an escalating conflict between humans as animals, as the protagonist employs a series of advanced technologies to control an unruly population of geese that appear to be interfering with her love life. John Barton’s poem “Squadron” employs human warfare as a metaphor to describe infestations of insects, and Danielle Thien’s story “Cimex Lectularius” focuses on an infestation of bed bugs and its effects on a couple’s relationship. Sabyasachi Nag’s poem “Walking Cooper” provides a more peaceful meditation on the everyday experience of walking a dog, and Nicole Bayes-Fleming’s story “Between Her Teeth” similarly examines how dogs not only provide companionship but also have the potential to serve as surrogates or substitutes for human relationships. Andrew Lafleche’s story “Abandon” explicitly addresses the theme of animal rights by dramatizing the efforts of activists to end the practice of whaling in the Faroe Islands, and John Van Rys’ story “In the Hills and Valleys of Perche” similarly criticizes the unethical treatment of horses, which is based on the assumption that they are nothing more than resources for human use. Sara Wilson’s poem “The Twittering Machine” and Louisa Howerow’s poem “A Flock of Terns at Dusk” provide a fitting conclusion to this section by presenting a stark contrast between the sense of horror evoked by the mechanization of birds and the sense of wonder evoked by the observation of birds in nature.

Our autumn issue also features Jonathan Ely Cass’ photo-essay “Yukon Gone,” which discusses the significance of the raven in indigenous communities, as well as two new chronicles: Roberta Barker’s review of Hannah Moscovitch’s play *Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story* (2017) and Chris Elson’s review of several recent jazz concerts and releases.