

Wærp, Henning Howlid. 2025. *Dyr og mennesker i norsk litteratur*. Orkana Akademisk. 263 pages. ISBN: 978-82-8104-616-0.

Over the past few decades, the interdisciplinary field of human-animal studies, also known as animal studies, has become increasingly popular, evidenced by the growing number of journals and anthologies dedicated to this topic. With *Dyr og mennesker i norsk litteratur* [Animals and People in Norwegian Literature], Henning Howlid Wærp provides a valuable contribution to the field, using a variety of literary lenses and frameworks to examine the relationships between humans and animals in selected Norwegian fictional and non-fictional prose narratives, from the end of the nineteenth century up until today. While most chapters focus on novels, Wærp also devotes individual chapters to short stories, essays, and an exploration narrative. Wild animals, including mammals, insects, and birds, receive considerable attention, as do pets, and farm animals also appear. In his prologue, Wærp points out how he had to set boundaries, both in terms of genre and the types of human-animal relationships highlighted.

In chapter one, which serves as an introduction, Wærp provides what he calls “generelle teoretiske refleksjoner” [general theoretical reflections] (9) on topics such as animals rights, the presence of animals in creative works, the nuanced and complicated relationships between human and non-human animals, and conservation. In doing so, he touches on creative works by Nordic authors ranging from Camilla Collett, Henrik Ibsen, and Sigrid Undset to Tove Jansson and Kerstin Ekman. He also references a variety of historians, literary critics, ecocritics, and philosophers, including Martha Nussbaum and her recently published *Justice for Animals: Our Collective Responsibility* (2023). Wærp continues to draw upon the work of these and other thinkers and critics in the thirteen chapters that follow, including Margaret Atwood, Erin James, Donna Haraway, and Arne Næss, framing his literary analyses in broad, yet nuanced, contexts.

As Wærp points out in the prologue, the book’s fourteen chapters can be read independently of each other and in any order. Reprints of animal-themed paintings, drawings, and other art works by mostly Nordic artists head each chapter, all containing an introduction where Wærp lays out his approach, a conclusion where we are left with questions to consider, and a bibliography. While Wærp does not use one theoretical framework or approach in this wide-ranging study (9), he does return to several themes throughout. These include the contemporary relevance of older literary works, the value of revisiting texts

through new lenses, and *økosorg*—eco-grief—which all function as refrains in the book.

Wærp draws on his long career as a literary critic and educator in this study, and the works of Knut Hamsun and polar literature, two of the research areas for which he is known, are given prominent positions. Several of the book's chapters build on previously published articles, such as chapter 10, which examines polar bears in Nordic children's and youth literature, and the book's final chapter, 14, on Sámi author's Sigbjørn Skåden's 2019 novel *Fugl* [Bird], a work of science fiction. These two examples also reveal that some chapters focus on one author and/or work, while others look at a particular theme through works by multiple authors. This distinction is also seen when comparing chapter 2—"Ikke bare en hund—Fire noveller" [Not Merely a Dog—Four Short Stories], which examines short stories by Per Sivle, Jacob Breda Bull, Ingvar Ambjørnsen, and Merethe Lindstrøm, written between 1887 and 1994—and chapters 3, 7, and 8, which focus on human-animal relationships in novels by Knut Hamsun, Mikkjel Fønhus, and Trygve Gulbrandsen respectively.

Two things Wærp does effectively are to highlight works previously overlooked by scholars and popular audiences alike, as he does in chapter 9 in his analysis of Tarjei Vesaas' first four novels (1923–1926), and to revisit previously studied, sometimes canonical works, through new thematic lenses. For example, chapter 5 provides a rereading of northern Norwegian Regine Normann's debut novel *Krabvaag: Skildringer fra et lite fiskevær* (1905) [*Krabvaag: Sketches from a Little Fishing Village* 2018], focusing on animal life. In chapter 6, Hamsun's poetic descriptions of insect life in works such as *Pan* (1894) are highlighted, and these are placed in the context of newer works, such as ecologist Anne Sverdrup-Thygeson's *Insektenes planet* (2018) [*Buzz, Sting, Bite: Why We Need Insects* 2019] and philosopher Arne Johan Vetlesen's *The Denial of Nature: Environmental Philosophy in the Era of Global Capitalism* (2015).

Chapter 11 examines well-known novelists Cora Sandel, Brit Bildøen, and Tove Nilsen's essays on their personal relationships to animals, while chapter 12 features Ole Robert Sunde's semiautobiographical "sorrow trilogy." Chapter 13 focuses on Knut Faldbakken's *Uår: Aftenlandet* (1974) [*Twilight Country* 1993], a work of science fiction which has received increasing attention since 2000. Wærp's reading of Faldbakken's dystopian society, a place in which there is little animal presence due to people's destructive actions, is unconventional, and surprisingly hopeful, looking at the nature and animal life that do remain.

Finally, chapter 4 is noteworthy in terms of its Canadian content. Wærp revisits Otto Sverdrup's *Nyt Land: Fire Aar i arktiske Egne* (1903) [*New Land: Four Years in the Arctic Regions* 1904] with new eyes, noting how Sverdrup's understanding of the behaviour and characteristics of the animals he and his men encounter in the Canadian High Arctic gradually changes and develops during the four-year expedition. Wærp argues that Sverdrup provides a deeper

description of human-animal meetings in the Arctic than other polar expedition accounts from this era, leading to “en forståelse av den særegne økologien i Arktis” [an understanding of the distinctive ecology of the Arctic] (83), and making Sverdrup’s account deserving of new attention.

While introducing his accessible and inviting study, Wærp notes that “å bli kjent med et dyr er en vedvarende prosess, kanskje ikke så forskjellig fra å bli kjent med et menneske eller en litterær tekst” [getting to know an animal is an ongoing process, perhaps not so different from getting to know a person or a literary text] (8). *Dyr og mennesker i norsk litteratur* provides readers with opportunities to become acquainted or reacquainted with a wide variety of primary and secondary works. In his book, Wærp models the value of returning to texts we have encountered before, with an open mind and new theoretical frameworks. Researchers and general readers alike will encounter questions we face as we share our habitat and lives with animals—questions which encourage further scholarship and reflection.

While *Dyr og mennesker i norsk litteratur* is only currently accessible to a Scandinavian-language audience, one can hope it will be translated in the near future to make it available to a broader readership.

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