



among
Animals

The Lives of Animals and Humans
in Contemporary Short Fiction

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Introduction

As a society, we have a curious relationship with animals. Some animals we welcome into our homes and our lives. We tell them we love them. We call them our children. We become inconsolable when we lose them.

Other animals do not receive such adoration or protection. Some are viewed as nuisances, others as expendable. We keep our distance from these species. We use words like *anthropomorphize* so as not to get emotionally attached. We create mental hierarchies of animal intelligence so we may prioritize one species over another. We create barriers in our minds and on our lawns and in our legal systems to keep animals in their place and us in ours.

The stories in this anthology call attention to the many walls we have constructed.

At Ashland Creek Press, we believe that literature has an important role to play in not only reflecting the world around us but in changing it for the better. This anthology grew out of a desire to publish writing that re-examines and re-imagines our relationship with nature—specifically, with animals.

It's a relationship in need of serious therapy.

The stories you will read here are as diverse as the species they depict, yet they also have much in common. Many of the stories underscore the equalities among humans and animals. "Aren't

You Pretty?” and “Beyond the Strandline” reveal that the grief and loss experienced as a result of injury and death are equal, regardless of species. And in “Litter,” we experience firsthand the world through a stray dog’s eyes.

In “Pelicans,” we witness how an understanding of one species is vital to the survival of another. In “Greyhound,” a rescued animal plays the role of rescuer. And in “The Weight of Things Unsaid,” a baby turtle reminds a mother of two losses, human and animal, and the unbearable weight of each.

Some stories reveal that people who live on the edge of wilderness are often those most in conflict with it. In “Bad Berry Season,” a park ranger does her best to keep bears and people apart, an increasingly futile effort with tragic and surprising consequences. In “Blue Murder,” a farmer who is at odds with the local birds finds himself inexplicably drawn to an individual one.

The apparent contradictions between the animals we love and the animals we kill are not always so apparent to the characters of some stories. In “Emu,” we watch the narrator tenderizing pork for dinner while praying for the sparing of a stray who showed up behind her home. In “Meat,” a child’s eyes shed light on the inconsistency of our society’s yearning for “guilt-free” meat and the compassion we have for our pets.

And in “The Ecstatic Cry,” a penguin researcher in Antarctica resists people, only to find that connections are similar in the animal and human worlds.

Sometimes, these connections emerge via the spiritual and mythological. In “The Boto’s Child” a woman has an encounter with a mythical dolphin, and in “With Sheep,” the lines between human and animal are blurred beyond distinction. In “Alas, Falada!” a zookeeper in mourning for an eland finds solace in a fairy tale.

“Miriam’s Lantern,” the last story in the anthology, deals

with those who are last. In this haunting tale, a man must witness the extinction of a bird species, knowing that he played a role in its demise.

*Day and night I brooded on letting the bird go.
Together the two of us, of unrelated but closely connected
species, from separate but closely related cages, would
rise up into the sky—*

I hope you enjoy these stories as much as we have, and that you'll share them with others.

Ultimately, it is our hope that this collection, while bringing us into so many different and varied worlds, sends a larger message as well — that we are all animals sharing this planet, and it is up to human animals to be better neighbors.

—John Yunker