

Review Section

Pete Porter¹ *Grizzly Man*. 2005. Lions Gate/Discovery Films. Directed by Werner Herzog; *March of the Penguins*. 2005. Warner Independent/National Geographic International. Directed by Luc Jacquet; *The Story of the Weeping Camel*. 2003. ThinkFilm/National Geographic World Films. Directed by Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni.

Grizzly Man, *March of the Penguins*, and *The Story of the Weeping Camel* are all documentaries that gesture toward the unknown and the unknowable: *Grizzly* makes the unfathomable depths of the human character and nature its central theme; *Camel* climaxes in an ancient ritual that defies rational explanation; and the narrator (Morgan Freeman) of *Penguins* often admits the limitations of what humans understand about the mating habits of Emperor penguins in Antarctica. All adopt a contemplative pace, often pausing to witness the wonders of nature, such as glacier formations in *Grizzly*, sand swirling in the wind in *Camel*, and the play of sun and sky in *Penguins*. Of these, only *Penguins* devotes itself exclusively to the lives of nonhuman animals in the wild, postponing the appearance of humans until the credits reveal the filmmakers interacting with the penguins. By contrast, *Camel* follows a family of shepherds in the inhospitable Gobi Desert of South Mongolia as they care for camels and sheep. *Grizzly* also is about human-animal relationships, ceaselessly questioning the motives and accomplishments of an animal advocate living among grizzly bears in the wilds of Alaska.

In terms of the treatment of animals during filming, all are model citizens. *Grizzly* uses only pre-existing footage—some of it quite impressive—of bears, foxes, and their Alaskan habitat. A chief challenge of filming *Penguins*, in addition to the harsh conditions, was that curious penguins kept approaching the filmmakers and spoiling shots. Both these films depict acts of violence and death, sometimes explicitly, but condemning filmmakers for failing to intervene in the events that they photograph would contradict decades of documentary practice. (It also would require a separate treatise in itself.) *Camel* contains no scenes of violence, but the alert viewer might wonder what lies outside the frame for its sheep; the film makes no reference to their slaughter or lack of it. Presumably, the camels are useful mainly as transportation and for their wool. Of course, as any fiction film raises the specter of animal training, any documentary raises issues of privacy, whether the subject is human or nonhuman. A fairly graphic scene of a troubled birth in *Camel* comes to mind in this regard. In terms

of what is taken by most as best practices in terms of documentaries with animals, however, all these films are exemplary. Questions of animal and animal advocate representation within the films are more complex.

Grizzly Man

This film is a portrait documentary of Timothy Treadwell, an amateur naturalist who spent 14 summers living among grizzly bears in Alaska's Katmai National Park. *Grizzly* is thus of interest for its representations, not only of bears but also of a bear advocate and what drove him into the wilderness. For director Werner Herzog, it is, as he explains in a voice-over, the story of someone who sought to "leave the confinements of his human-ness" but "crossed an invisible borderline" between human and bear in the process. The penalty for Treadwell and his companion Amie Huguenard was death; the executioner was Bear 141, a 20-year-plus male grizzly who was himself executed by park officials. Herzog, mostly in voice-over, leads the investigation into the circumstances surrounding what the film structures as an inevitable confrontation between human and bear. Calling Treadwell's story "not a look inside wild nature but a look inside ourselves—into our nature" as human beings, Herzog structures *Grizzly* as a murder mystery where deeper mysteries of the self lurk behind known superficial identities. His main evidence in reconstructing Treadwell as person and as animal advocate is the more than 100 hours of video footage that Treadwell shot over his last three summers in Alaska.

Grizzly Man opens with a panoramic shot of an Alaskan meadow, two grizzlies foraging in the distance, and Treadwell in the foreground describing them and their activities to the camera. Treadwell defines himself as a "kind warrior" who "will be master" as his name and dates (1957-2003) appear below him. After some words from Herzog, archival footage of Treadwell on *The Late Show* with David Letterman shows him reassuring Dave that we won't someday hear that he's been eaten by bears. Here the film cuts to the first of several interviews with Treadwell's friends, opponents, parents, and officials who responded to the attack by Bear 141 (Huguenard's parents declined to be interviewed for the film; Amie remains a mystery, despite Herzog's aborted attempts to understand her).

The first interviewee is Warren Queeney, a friend of Treadwell's, who recalls how he learned of "Timmy's" death. The close juxtaposition of these scenes begins the ongoing but respectful quarrel between Herzog and Treadwell that saturates the film. They clash openly in their views of nature when Herzog ventures that Treadwell's utopian

view was challenged by death and predation. The universe is not harmony, Herzog states flatly, but “chaos, hostility, and murder.” Animal advocates will find familiar the charge of holding a utopian vision of nature that omits death, as well as others made by interviewees, such as preferring the needs of animals to those of humans, treating animals as children, and covertly disliking humans. All these likely apply in some degree to Treadwell, as does a certain self-loathing, the outgrowths of which are alcoholism and its cure—self-reinvention as animal advocate and the consequent adventure into nature. Finally, Herzog cites an entry in Amie’s journal, made days before the fatal attack, that Treadwell was “hell-bent on destruction.” Combined with Treadwell’s repeated insistence that he will “die for these bears,” the attack becomes understandable as the culmination, as much as it is the termination, of his advocacy.

Herzog questions Treadwell’s achievements as animal advocate, filmmaker, and human being at the same time that he admires them. The ironist Herzog revels in the mysteries of Treadwell’s many facets while the romantic Treadwell would have, presumably, excised them in assembling his footage. At times, Treadwell speaks in juvenile terms about the bears and foxes and seems to imagine an audience of children. Other moments are not for the ears of children, as when he wonders aloud about his lack of success with women or when he launches a profanity-laced tirade against the forest service.

What fascinates Herzog is human complexities: Treadwell clutching his childhood teddy bear in one scene and fending off a bear approach in another. The limits of human transformation and human imagination are on clear display as Treadwell adopts bear behavior but continues to see them as either cuddly or deadly, as either out of *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams* (1976) or out of *The Edge* (1997), in which a grizzly stalks three men. Throughout *Grizzly*, Treadwell describes bears with personal names, distinctive characteristics, and sometimes-detailed histories; he clearly considers them individuals with personalities and agency.

Sam Egli, a pilot who assisted with cleanup after the attacks, also assigns theory of mind to the bears. Egli ventures that the bears put up with Treadwell as long as they did because they probably thought he was crazy. Because Treadwell acted as though he were dealing with people in bear costumes, he “got what he deserved” in Egli’s opinion. Other officials speak of Treadwell as doing more harm than good; by acclimating bears to humans and humans to bears, he contradicted centuries of the native tendency to give bears a wide berth and to keep bear and human societies separate. What emerges most powerfully from *Grizzly* is the variance of opinion about Treadwell, his advocacy, and an appropriate human-bear relationship.

A final irony to Treadwell's story lies in his demise, the specifics of which support his view and the views of his opponents. He and Amie, failing to return to human civilization as planned, returned instead to the Alaskan wilderness and stayed into the season later than usual. Bears familiar to the pair had migrated for the winter and "scariest, wilder bears had moved in," as Herzog puts it. Over footage of Amie sitting before the stranger Bear 141, Herzog comments that he sees "no recognition" in him, only the "blank stare" of hunger. In the end, Treadwell was generally successful in his efforts to befriend grizzly bears, but he needed to be wrong only once to prove his opponents right.

The final image of *Grizzly* encapsulates its central tensions, its ongoing conflict between Treadwell's romantic view of nature and its nonhuman inhabitants and Herzog's ironic view of it as chaos. Treadwell walks upstream, uphill, and into the distance as two grizzlies follow at a leisurely pace. Whether Treadwell is leading or slowly fleeing them remains in the eye of the beholder, which suggests the degree to which Herzog succeeds in respecting Treadwell's view while expressing his own. *Grizzly* is not for all ages and will not be to all tastes. Some parts feel overly staged, some descriptions verge on the sensationalistic (Herzog explicitly resists crossing this line), Treadwell is sometimes difficult to watch, and Herzog is as unswerving in his pursuit of a vision as Treadwell was in his. *Grizzly Man* succeeds, however, in allowing the mysteries of Treadwell and the bears to remain intact so that viewers must sort them out for themselves.

March of the Penguins

Few could have predicted the runaway success of Warner Independent/National Geographic's (WI/NG) French wildlife film import, *March of the Penguins*. An intriguing chapter of this story is how WI/NG modified *Penguins* from its original French version, *La Marche de l'empereur*, to conform it to the wildlife film style familiar from TV sources, such as *National Geographic Explorer*, the BBC Natural History Unit, and the PBS series *Nature*. Unlike its French source, the WI/NG version emphasizes the penguin group instead of a single mating pair, adds no human voices to characters, and includes a voice-over narrator (Leydon, 2005). Such changes enable *Penguins* to avoid classical storytelling's emphasis on individual characters, which Derek Bousé (2000) claims diminishes the documentary value of wildlife films. But if classical techniques essentially grovel to a mass audience tutored in nature by Disney's *Bambi* (1942); Disney's True-Life Adventures, *Born Free* (1966), and *The Bear*, as Bousé claims, what explains the enormous popularity of *Penguins*, a film that literally excised them?

One likely reason is that its scenario plays out themes that Bousé (2000) says wildlife films often reflect: “responsible parenting, communal spirit, the work ethic, deferred gratification, moral behavior, and the sexual division of labor in marriage” (p. 157). Another answer, it would seem, is the restraint of *Penguins* in its approach to the penguins and its characterization of the penguin community. Finally, and perhaps most important, *Penguins* resonates with audiences because it respects both the audience and the penguins, a stance that aligns it with prestige-level TV wildlife film. Shots of violence are few and from a distance; in such cases, the narrator expresses regret but never surrenders to bathos. *Penguins* often acknowledges misfortune but rarely lingers on it (a notable exception is when ice claims a mishandled egg). The narrator’s attitude implies that the death of individuals by cold or predation matters less than the continuation of the species; as mentioned earlier, the American version emphasizes the group over the individual. In sum, much of the appeal of *Penguins* stems from its offering spectators something familiar in terms of theme, which largely confirms mainstream values, and narration, which resembles prestige-level television wildlife film. Of course, some might object to these same qualities in *Penguins*; it lacks originality, it champions traditional but outdated values, and it fails to withhold scenes of violence. This last criticism should be dismissed as it amounts to faulting a documentary for not re-writing nature.

Another factor in its success is the predictability of its story, which enables *Penguins* to reach exceptional emotional peaks and valleys. In addition, the narrator consistently invites the audience to invest in the penguin goals of propagating the species and survival, both of which are continually under threat. The adventure begins with the migration of penguins to inland Antarctica and the thickest ice in order to guard against chicks falling through into the sea. Once they arrive, the subsequent tasks are finding a mate, hatching the egg, and transferring the egg to the males. The tasks continue with the return trip to the ocean by the females to feed, the males guarding the eggs against the cold, the hatching of the chicks, the return of the females, the transfer of the chicks, the departure of the males, and the maturation of the chicks until they themselves plunge into the sea. Each stage admits of clear narrative resolutions, elegantly described by the narrator, and punctuated by stunning photography.

The finding-a-mate sequence climaxes with two penguins in a ballet of movement and a symphony of vocalizations that express deep contentment. Images throughout emphasize the deep bond that permeates the penguin community, as when the females return and a sea of male penguin heads turns to greet their arrival. Finally, a moody and evocative score by Alex Wurman consistently cues the preferred emotional direction without being overly didactic. Ultimately, the charm of *Penguins* lies not in the

originality of its subject but in its exquisite presentation of a predictable and, hence, potentially deeply moving and satisfying, story.

The Story of the Weeping Camel

Camel offers a similarly simple story, but its method of storytelling is understated to the point of absence. No voice-over narrator interprets what we see or directs our attention. Instead, the plot unfolds as if indifferent to the camera. The most notable exception to this occurs at the film's open when the grandfather Janchiv addresses the camera to tell the story of why the camel weeps. Other exceptions are when characters peer momentarily at the camera as if unaware of the prohibition against doing so. That such moments remain in the film might be attributed to practical circumstances: The filmmakers took only 10 hours of raw film stock into the field and returned with a 90-minute feature film (by comparison, *Penguins* was assembled from 120 hours of footage) (Elley, 2003, Shatkin, 2005). But such moments serve a poetic function in that they invest events with uncertainty and chance. Overall, *Camel* exudes a disarming amateurishness, lending it an awkward intimacy that hovers somewhere between mainstream fiction film and the documentary movement known as direct cinema.

The unifying plot line and only explicit conflict of *Camel* involves the difficult birth of a calf, Botok, and his rejection by the mother, Ingen Temee. After a failed series of efforts to persuade Ingen to milk Botok, the decision is made to perform an ancient ritual as a last resort. The ritual, however, requires a violinist; so the family sends its two young males, Dude and Ugna, on a journey to a nearby village. On the first stopover of their journey, they pause at the yurt of a neighbor and Ugna becomes entranced by television. The visit to the village, where bicycles replace camels as the preferred mode of transportation, finds the violinist, some batteries for the portable radio, and more interest in a television. The climactic moments of *Camel* come in the form of two rituals, their power and mystery accentuated by some unusual, but astute, choices in photography and editing. As with *Penguins*, the majesty of the scenes derives from an anthropological sensitivity infused with awe for the mysteries of nonhuman animal existence. In *Penguins*, and to a certain extent, *Grizzly*, humans are irrelevant to the nonhuman community. In *Camel*, they prove essential to restoring it to harmony by repairing the damaged bond between Ingen Temee and Botok. A strident position might insist that *Camel* is an apologia for exploiting animals as livestock, but most of those sympathetic to animals likely will be moved by these scenes. The filmmakers thank their subjects by giving each generation of the family a moving photo credit,

as in a curtain call, a series that begins with the grandparents and concludes with Ingen Temee and Botok looking into the camera exactly as the human characters have. The message of inclusion is clear; this family includes both humans and nonhumans.

The final scene of *Camel*, is, if you will, pregnant with significance. After opening with the grandfather telling the myth of why the camel weeps, an example of native oral tradition, *Camel* closes with the young inviting the modern world into the yurt. Ugna adjusts a television set and yells instructions to Dude. The film cuts to an exterior high angle of Dude adjusting a satellite dish that stands as tall as he does.

Significantly, the elders of the family are absent, but they must have traded 30 sheep for the TV as Dude earlier predicted in the village. On the roof of the yurt are small solar panels that presumably power the new electronics and avert the need for an electrical hookup, which Dude claimed would cost the entire flock. Happily, someone has found a middle way between abandoning the past and rejecting the future. The scene invites parallels between the difficult birth of the young camel and the arrival of television; whether this implies the loss of rituals and oral traditions or the invention of new ones remains open. In some ways, the scene recalls Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* in that it depicts the temptations of modern life and forebodes the vanishing of native traditions. Dude and Ugna, however, have witnessed the magic of the ritual and are likely to preserve it. In addition, the ritual and all of its mystery came to *Camel* viewers through television, thus redeeming its potential to reveal the world rather than replace it.

Before they landed in cinemas, *Grizzly Man*, *March of the Penguins*, and *The Story of the Weeping Camel* all originated, in one way or another, as documentaries for TV. *Camel* was planned as an hour-long TV film; *Penguins* was slated for French TV; and *Grizzly* was born from a project at Discovery Films, a division of Discovery Channel. Happily, all benefited from what Derek Elley, estimating *Camel's* box office prospects for *Variety* in 2003, called the "theatrical renaissance in docus." While *Grizzly* and *Camel* surpassed limited expectations for financial success, *Penguins* has gone on to become the second-highest grossing documentary ever after *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004).

It was the box office success of *Fahrenheit* that spurred Warner Independent to devote more attention to distributing documentaries, a strategy that *Penguins* rewarded by resuscitating the sagging division. The success of *Penguins*, in turn, was undoubtedly a factor in the relatively wide theatrical distribution of *Grizzly Man*. Hopefully, their successes will prompt future productions that are as worthy of interest. A more critical perspective on these films and their representation of nonhuman animals could likely

be adopted, but it is the responsibility of criticism not only to point out flaws but also to recognize works that are exceptional.

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Erica Fudge¹ *Figuring Animals: Essays on Animal Images in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Popular Culture*. Mary Sanders Pollock and Catherine Rainwater (Eds.). New York: Palgrave, 2005.

On page 275 of *Figuring Animals*, one page before the end of the final essay, Catherine Rainwater quotes from the literary critic Wayne Booth's study *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Fiction, Booth writes, is "the most powerful of all the architects of our souls and societies." For him, stories can build worlds—not just within the cover of a book, but outside of it too. The tales we are told help us, if you like, to tell our own tales. Such a statement on the role of fiction offers an important context for thinking about the ways in which nonhuman animals are figured in western society. It helps to address the question as to why it is that cultural representations of animals are worth thinking about at all. It is not simply that such tales can tell us about the

reality of the ways in which we live with the nonhuman; some do this, others offer something else. Animal tales can reinforce the status quo or can they change it. Imaginative fictions—the products of culture—have, therefore, an important role to play in the ways in which we live with, and think with, the nonhuman. It says a great deal about this collection of essays, I think, that Booth's statement about what it is that fiction can do comes right at its end and not at its beginning. It would have offered an interesting and useful framework for all of the contributors, but sadly the focus of the collection is often hard to detect.

As well as a lack of clear thematic link between essays, what this collection reveals are significant differences in the ways in which scholars from backgrounds in literature, visual and media culture, and philosophy address the question of the animal. Some of the essays the editors Mary Sanders Pollock and Catherine Rainwater include are theoretically sophisticated (I return to these), while others simply discuss the specific ways animals are represented in culture without any such clear theorization. Sadly, the latter group of essays is in the majority in *Figuring Animals*. In addition, in the light of developments in the field of animal studies in the humanities over the last 10 years, this means that most of this collection is not moving the debate forward. In fact, in 8 of the 15 essays, I would say that the movement is a retrograde one. In her essay on cat shows, Susan E. Jones never fully analyzes the cat fancy in which she is involved. She emphasizes the role of women in showing cats but then argues that her "essay is indebted" to a book by Louis L. Vine (p. 62). An interesting point might have been made about gender here; about the fact that it is mostly women involved in the shows, while one of the key texts on cat care is written by a man. Instead, Jones's essay is, in the main, an anecdotal account lacking analytic detail.

Nancy Vosburg's essay on Remedios Varo's animal paintings is a close analysis of the works but does not address head-on the issue of animals until its final paragraph. The essay, in fact, would have been more at home in a collection on Varo than one dealing with the representation of animals, something that the editors might have spotted.

Despite the focus on the literature of anti-vivisection, Mary Sanders Pollock's discussion of Ouida's writings likewise doesn't really open itself up to current debates in animal studies and remains firmly a piece of literary historicism.

The same could be said of David Banash's discussion of Michael Fields' *Whym Chow: Flame of Love*. Lindsay McLean Addison's study of the differences between the novel and filmic versions of the "Black stallion" story lacks any theoretical framework and falls back on unsupported historical generalizations that are not really helpful. Likewise,

Tim Gadd's discussion of "human-animal affiliation in modern popular film" uses one film—*K-911*—to oversimplify some complex shifts in the ways in which animals are present in contemporary cultural fictions.

There are other problems as well. William J. Scheick's reappraisal of Counter-Reformation visual representations of animals is fascinating, but is out of place here. It details depictions and meanings of inspired animals in sixteenth-century European art while every other essay in *Figuring Animals* looks at cultural products from the mid-nineteenth century and after. Why this one study of Renaissance material? Why not include more? What about the eighteenth century? The collection would lose one of its most interesting essays, but would gain in coherence without Scheick's discussion. Another kind of problem exists in Jutta Ittner's essay on the writings of Brigitte Kronauer and Clarice Lispector. Unlike some of the other essays in the collection, Ittner does attempt to read her chosen authors within a critical animal studies framework, but her footnotes are so full of errors that it is perhaps only someone well-versed in the field who could find the materials to which she refers: Steve Baker's *The Postmodern Animal* is referenced as *The Postmodern World* (sometimes without capitals and italics) (p. 116); Garry Marvin and Bob Mullan, the authors of *Zoo Culture* are listed as the editors Bob Marvin and Garry Mullan (p. 117); and the important "Eating well," or "The calculation of the subject: An interview with Jacques Derrida" is listed as being included in *What Comes After the Subject*, translated by Peter Connor et al, when it is in fact in *Who Comes After the Subject*, edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (p. 117); a significant typo to be sure. This may seem picky, but such errors do not give one confidence in the discussion that includes them.

In their introduction, Pollock and Rainwater argue that "the essays [in the collection] are unified in their mutual tendency to expose weaknesses in western epistemological frames of reference that for centuries have limited our views and, thus, our experiences of animal being, including our own." (p. 2). Such a statement is only problematically applied to some of the essays discussed above, but it can serve as a unifying principle in relation to the other essays in the collection—although Melanie Fox's account of her experience with bears while working in Sequoia National Park doesn't really address epistemological issues as such. She focuses rather on the dangerous outcomes of those epistemological frames—on the invasion of human territory and homes by bears and on the desire by humans to encounter the bears on their own (human) terms. "I am now more afraid *for* the bears than *of* them," Fox writes of the outcome of the categorical confusion she has encountered in the national park (p. 48). As such, it seems a shame that her interesting piece did not serve as a conclusion to this collection, as a record of one of the possible outcomes of the ways in which western cul-

ture has thought about itself and its relation to animals. It would sit in interesting relation to the more optimistic essay that currently closes the collection: Catherine Rainwater's discussion of deep ecology and Native American writings, in which a different worldview that overturns the dualistic model that underlies current core western attitudes is proposed.

As well as these two interesting pieces, there are five other valuable essays in *Figuring Animals*. Beginning with Emmanuel Levinas' essay on his encounter with Bobby the dog in a Nazi concentration camp—now familiar to many of us in animal studies—H. Peter Steeves looks in part at the issue of "home" and at the question of whether the animal has a home, offering significant correctives to constructions of the animal as the natural and thus homeless because at home everywhere.

Carrie Rohman offers an absorbing analysis of H.G. Wells's novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and uses it to reach out to wider questions about the nature of the human in post-Enlightenment thought. Christopher Powici reads the Mowgli stories from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* alongside Ursula Le Guin's story, "Buffalo gals, won't you come out tonight," and uncovers significant shifts (and stabilities) in the role of animals in the construction of the human.

Robert McKay uses Judith Butler's gender theory to rethink species relations and offers a reading of Margaret Atwood's novel *Surfacing* in illustration. Julie A. Smith traces the different ways in which writers of modern fiction depict the animal mind, using philosophical writings by, among others, Norman Malcolm and Thomas Nagel, and work by neurologist Antonio Damasio alongside discussions of novels by writers including Carl Hiassen, Jane Smiley, and Virginia Woolf.

It is through the sense of self depicted by Brad Watson in his short story, "Seeing eye," that a way forward might be found, Smith argues. Watson's story fits with ideas discussed by Damasio in which the self is "realized through the rich experiences of the body that we share with nonhuman animals" (p. 245); for Smith, it is by focusing on the bodiliness of thought, and not on the Cartesian construction of the mind without a body, that a new relationship with animals might be found. This relationship would maintain human difference from animals (and animals' difference from each other) where it exists, but would recognize that difference as not being absolute.

Ultimately, the lack of consistency in *Figuring Animals* means that its success as a collection is limited. It contains some really significant pieces of work, but, sadly, it also contains some essays that do not achieve anything like the standards set by the best pieces. This is to be expected from any collection of essays (it's a rare edited volume that is consistently good) but what is disappointing here is that the good

essays are in the minority and that the collection as a whole lacks a coherent thematic, historical, and theoretical focus.

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Karen Assunto¹ *The Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter*, a Series by Susan Wittig Albert. *The Tale of Hill Top Farm*, 2004; *The Tale of Holly How*, 2005. New York: Berkeley Publishing Group.

I think *Society & Animals* readers will find Albert's new *Cottage tales of Beatrix Potter* series intriguing. In both *The Tale of Hill Top Farm* and *The Tale of Holly How*,² Albert combines biographical information about Potter, anecdotes about her real-life non-human animals, and Potter-like "creature" tales. This mix results in satisfying novels that shed light on the life of a remarkable woman whose "little tales" helped to redefine how twentieth-century humans felt about the human-animal bond.

In both novels, Potter and the animals who surround her cast light on puzzles ("mysteries" is perhaps too strong a word) that have resulted in confusion and discord in the normally placid, rural town of Sawrey in the English Lake District. Albert develops her stories without dramatic dénouement, Holmesian genius, or Poirot-ish eccentricity. Albert's Potter does not so much solve mysteries as make off-hand comments that stimulate those in authority to think differently about what is happening.

Undoubtedly, Albert uses Potter's own writing style as a model, allowing her Potter character to influence those around her in the same subtle way Potter herself led her readers to understand the natural balance of her characters' lives and environment. In the novel, Potter's simple, two word comment, "Mrs. Maybrick," helps to convince the solicitor, Will Heelis, to look further into a neighborhood woman's mysterious ailment (*HH*, p. 222). In both books, Albert portrays Potter as a woman having supreme common sense as well as the ability to cut to the heart of apparently complicated problems. The situations in which she places Potter are as simple as keeping her tenants from leaving Hill Top Farm or dealing with a recalcitrant contractor and as complex as becoming involved with gathering facts about attempted murders.

Because animals played such crucial roles in Potter's life, Albert enlists them to help move the plots forward. For the most part, they do so in ways that anyone who has companion animals can recognize. For example, in *Hill Top Farm*, the cat, Max the Manx, reveals the location of the missing Parish Register to the vicar, who has been searching for it.

[T]he vicar was one of the few men who made their way into the women's domain of Castle Cottage, and Max had always rather enjoyed him. He put out his paw with a playful gesture and caught the vicar's cuff . . . [The vicar's] attention [was] attracted by the book on which Max was sitting . . . It was the Parish Register. (pp. 215-216)

What can be more natural for a cat than the "playful gesture" of "catching the vicar's cuff"? Has anyone who lives around cats not had them reveal a missing book, letter, or paper by sitting on the very object for which we are searching? By using this subtle approach, Albert allows nonhumans to help solve a riddle within the plot that could not be solved without their input. Along the way, she also emulates Potter in presenting precise descriptions of both Max the Manx and the environment in *Castle Cottage*.

Similarly, in *Holly Hpw*, Rascal the terrier (an historical resident of Sawrey, by the way), uncovers a pair of badger tongs that shed light on the death of a local man. Again, Albert sets up a natural situation: "And then Rascal—who had been scouting the area . . . seemed to find something of interest, lying hidden amongst the thicket of briars about twenty feet distant. . . . He raised his head and began to bark. . . ." (*HH*, p. 156).

The humans are not sure what Rascal has found, and their debate about the importance of the badger tongs drives him into a frenzy of barking and leaping; however, Beatrix Potter recognizes that the find must be significant: "I'm always surprised by what animals seem to know—and they always seem to want to tell us, too. It's such a pity we can't understand what they're saying." (*HH*, p. 157) In the *Cottage Tales* universe, the fact that animals can understand what "Big Folks" are saying, but not the reverse, is a constant frustration to the nonhuman characters.

For all the accurate, natural depiction of animals in these two books, it is the creature tales Albert establishes that are the most interesting. In these "tales of tails," Albert provides adult versions of Beatrix Potter stories, sometimes referring to characters Potter established in her books, but more often developing new animal personae.

In *Hill Top Farm*, she creates the owl, Professor Galileo Newton Owl, D.Phil., a cousin of Old Brown, a Potter character in *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*.³ Albert describes Dr. Owl as having “a wide reputation in applied studies in natural history, particularly in the nocturnal habits, preferences and tastes of small furry creatures” (*HTF*, p. 221). In *Hill Top Farm*, the “tail tale” revolves around rats, two of whom are wharf rats from London and one, a local rat, “a country-gentleman sort of rat, in a blue jacket, red waistcoat, fawn breeches, and smart boots” who has about him an air of “genteel poverty” (*HTF*, p. 225). The sleazy wharf rats (“hand rolled cigarettes dangled from the corners of their mouths”) have conned the country rat into gambling and are systematically bamboozling him out of School Roof Fund money that has been misplaced. The smaller animals, who want to find the School Roof Fund money, come to Dr. Owl for advice with some trepidation, because of his reputation. The appeal of small, furry creatures to Dr. Owl soon becomes apparent to the wharf rats, who become part of a stew for Dr. Owl (the recipe for which was given to him by his cousin, Mr. Brown).

In *Holly How*, the creature tale is more elaborate. It involves Bosworth Badger, who lives in a large badger sett, The Brockery (“brock” being an old term for badger), which Albert describes as a kind of cross between Toad Hall, hobbit holes, and Bugs Bunny’s burrow. Working with Dr. Owl (for whom Albert provides a wonderful parody of Henry V’s speech before the battle of Agincourt), Bosworth convinces the other animals to converge on a badger-baiting in an attempt to free two captured female badgers. Albert presents the tenuous relationship between animal species well:

As might be expected, the members of this peculiar coalition were not entirely comfortable with one another. The smaller animals tended to huddle together, out of the way of the larger, and the largest tended [to] put out the elbows and take up more than their fair share of the space. Feelings were frayed and nerves were taut, and there was a great deal of pushing and shoving and snapping and muttered warnings (*HH*, p. 256).

The “coalition” includes both undomesticated animals from the countryside and Potter’s guinea pig, Tuppenny,⁴ who has the misfortune to be lost, but who wishes for an adventure that includes the rescue of a damsel in distress. The sortie is successful, the two female badgers (the damsels in distress) are rescued, and rural balance is restored.

It is important that Albert sets up Bosworth Badger as an heroic figure. Potter herself, in *The Tale of Mr. Tod*, described the badger Tommy Brock as disagreeable: “His clothes were very dirty; and as he slept in the day-time, he always went to bed in his

boots. And the bed which he went to bed in, was generally Mr. Tod's" (*Complete Tales*, p. 254). Tommy also has an overpoweringly rank odor. In contrast, Bosworth Badger makes certain that The Brockery is kept tidy; he actually takes in guests who are grateful for a snug, clean place to stay. Perhaps the transformation—even apotheosis—of nasty badger to scholarly genealogist can be explained simply by Albert's plot requirements; however, it is more likely that she is aware of the controversy over the cruel practice of badger-baiting that arose in England after Potter's time and, along with more contemporary novelists like Brian Jacques, chooses to champion, rather than demonize, the animal.

Potter illustrated her children's books with charming and accurate drawings of various animals; Albert enables her adult reader to see these animals with their minds' eyes. Her characters' personalities, whether human or animal, are well thought-out and consistently presented. Potter's biographical information is, for the most part, well integrated into the plots. Best of all, the books are well written. Albert's prose is stylish and smooth. Her plots are cohesive. While she is no Kenneth Grahame or J.R.R. Tolkien, Albert's *Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter* make a great read for a sunny—or rainy—afternoon. I look forward to the next book in the series.

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Notes

- ¹ Correspondence should be addressed to Karen Assunto, 130 Twin Springs Drive, Kerrville, TX 78028. E-mail: mattpup@kctc.com.
- ² Hereafter referred to as *Hill Top Farm* and *Holly How* in the text, and *HTF* and *HH* in page references.
- ³ *The Complete Tales of Beatrix Potter*, Frederick Warne, London, England, 1989, p. 23. Hereafter referred to as *Complete Tales*.
- ⁴ Tuppenny is, by the way, the narrator of Potter's final novel *The Fairy Caravan* (1929).