

**Animal Presence and Human Identity in Modern Literature**

(Dis)figurations of Humanimality from Shakespeare to Desai

By *Kimberly W. Benston*

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**Explores literary representations of the human-animal encounter in modernity that press human “being” to its limits.**

*Animal Presence and Human Identity in Modern Literature* explores literary representations of the human-animal encounter in modernity that press human “being” to its limits. This project arises within the question, “can an animal die?” formulated in response to Martin Heidegger’s famous assertion that, properly speaking, animals cannot “die” but can only “perish,” an assertion that sharply summarizes western “humanist” philosophical discourse – particularly as etched in the “modern turn” initiated by Descartes – in which the “human” emerges precisely as that (non)animal which enjoys a distinctive relation to both the inner essence and outer edge of existence. Alongside the philosophical continuum that stretches from the Cartesian reduction of animality to mechanistic re-action to the Heideggerian marginalization of animal life as active but unreflective materiality, literature develops a counter-examination of the human-animal nexus that variously implicates the animal in human ontology and explores that intersection as constitutive of social narratives and cultural institutions. Texts from Shakespeare to Desai have been selected for both their variety of formal and linguistic inflections of the human-animal encounter, and for their shared participation in an evolving discourse that is here termed “humanimality”: the ever-shifting interaction of human and nonhuman creatures that animates our still-evolving modernity.

**Readership**

Students and scholars of critical animal studies; students and scholars of literature and culture in post-Enlightenment modernity; students and scholars of post-colonial and critical race studies; students and scholars of continental philosophy.

**About the Author(s) / Editor(s)**

Kimberly W. Benston is Francis B. Gummere Professor of English and Africana Studies at Haverford College, where he has also served as Provost and President.

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rakeshsainik@newgen.co

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