

Bookreview: Stories from home: English domestic interiors, 1750-1850. By Margaret Ponsonby. Aldershot: Ashgate 2007. ISBN 9780754652359

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Book reviews

The animals reader: the essential classic and contemporary writings. By L. Kalof and A. Fitzgerald. Oxford: Berg. 2007. xvi + 386 pp. £15.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781845204709.

This multidisciplinary text draws together key historical and contemporary readings to introduce readers to ongoing debates surrounding the roles and place of animals in society. Highlighting the shifting nature of human–animal divisions, it challenges readers to rethink contemporary animal practices and encourages them to be alert to the differences, continuities and interconnections between people and animals.

The book's six themed sections examine the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of human–animal relations, as well as animals' roles as pets, food, spectacle, symbols and scientific objects, in a predominately Western context. An examination of 'Animals as Philosophical and Ethical Subjects' provides a strong foundation for the collection and encourages readers to consider how the categorization of animals impacts on both the opportunities of people and their ethical obligations to animals. Contributions drawn from Aristotle, Singer, Regan and Nussbaum, among others, introduce contrasting perspectives on the question of animal rights and provide a challenging introduction to later sections.

Kalof and Fitzgerald discuss their choice of pieces that 'have had a major influence in how the Western world thinks about animals'. While they certainly achieve this goal, the inclusion of contemporary non-Western perspectives in the book's introductory section (and in addition to Levi-Strauss' contribution later in the book) would complement the text and further challenge readers' conceptions of human–nature and human–animal divisions in Western society by highlighting alternative ways of seeing and engaging with animals.

The editors' selection of often contrasting pieces sparks debate within the text. With its succinct introductions, which contextualize chapters historically and within the broader field of human–animal studies, this text provides a comprehensive introduction to key debates in a format that is accessible to undergraduate students.

Macquarie University

EMMA POWER

Stories from home: English domestic interiors, 1750–1850. By Margaret Ponsonby. Aldershot: Ashgate. 2007. x + 221 pp. £55.00 hardback. ISBN: 9780754652359.

This book is written by a design historian but its themes – house-and-home, consumption and material culture – and its approach are entirely relevant to current cultural geography. Margaret Ponsonby develops a design historical focus on objects to give serious attention to

both the 'fleshly' and the immaterial implications of possessions for those who acquire, live with and dispose of them. She understands the domestic as a setting for the production and manifestation of social and cultural identities and sees household goods as a crux in the complex negotiations between people, their circumstances (including their gender, age, social status, wealth and location) and discourses of home.

This particular study is set among the middling sort in England between 1750 and 1850 because, Ponsonby argues, this is when, where, and for whom a particularly potent normative discourse of domesticity developed. She is impressed by the ethnographic approach of recent material culture studies but cannot observe or talk with her historical subjects. Instead, in a method more akin to the archaeological tradition of material culture studies in the United States, she minutely considers their household possessions, as evidenced in inventories, household accounts and personal papers. Ponsonby analyses combinations and arrangements of goods in a small number of specific houses, reading them in their social and cultural contexts to produce numerous new insights. For example, she follows a complicated trail of crockery and room names to delineate the gendered practices of genteel formal hospitality. And against the frequent assumption of the nationwide influence of London, she is able to retrieve a distinct elite provincial identity. It is, for the most part, the owners who are thus illuminated; the less privileged household members remain rather more in the shadows.

In the second part of the book, Ponsonby turns to a discussion of the differing interpretive strategies used in historic house displays. She argues that it is more revealing to focus on individual cases than to take a generic approach. This is her own methodology, which does yield enormously rich results, although it makes her generalizations less convincing.

This book's attention to the ordinary practices of everyday life brilliantly fractures the still-pervasive monolithic myth of Victorian domesticity. Ponsonby suggests that these 'different' homes were individual deviations from the ideals of the period; a larger study might allow us to consider whether such deviations might rather be seen as expressive, or even constitutive, of commonly held norms.

Queen Mary, University of London

LESLEY HOSKINS

A movable feast: ten millennia of food globalization. By Kenneth F. Kiple. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007. xvi + 364 pp. £15.99 hardback. ISBN 9780521793537.

Based largely upon the author's *The Cambridge world history of food* (2000), this book offers an overview of the interaction between the world and the foods we currently consume. Reviewing the history of domestication, sedentism, power over resources, and trade, 'the globalization of foodstuffs' suggests that our world has been integrated since the beginnings of the Neolithic. The story of our foods is one where all aspects of history can be examined. Perhaps the best example is the expansion of the Portuguese along the African coast and Columbus' voyages across the Atlantic: 'The New Worlds they reached to link with the Old brought food globalization on a cataclysmic scale' (p. 104). This led to what Thomas McKeown called the 'modern rise of population', because of the infusion of higher-caloric