Continue

Perhaps only the animals can tell us what it is to be human. The souls of ten animals caught up in human conflicts over the last century tell their astonishing stories of life and death. In a trench on the Western Front a cat recalls her owner Colette's theatrical antics in Paris. In Nazi Germany a dog seeks enlightenment. A Russian tortoise once owned by the Tolstoys drifts in space during the Cold War. In the siege of Sarajevo a bear starving to death tells a fairytale. And a dolphin sent to Iraq by the US Navy writes a letter to Sylvia Plath . . . Exquisitely written, playful and poignant, Only the Animals is a remarkable literary achievement by one of our brightest young writers. An animal's-eye view of humans at our brutal, violent worst and our creative, imaginative best, it asks us to find our way back to empathy not only for animals, but for other people, and to believe again in the redemptive power of reading and writing fiction. 'Only the Animals?is mesmerizing and exhibit and our creative, imaginative best, it asks us to find our way back to empathy not only for animals, but for other people, and to believe again in the redemptive power of reading and writing fiction. like Kafka. Dovey's exquisitely drawn creatures grapple nobly with their animal natures, a genius point of view from which to illuminate how we humans - ostensibly conscious and verbal - are trapped in ours. This book feels like a major mind announcing itself. 'Anna Funder' Wholly extraordinary.' Michelle de Kretser?' The life stories related by these very civilized animals are in some cases touching (the elephant), in others amusing (the mussel), but all are absorbing. They are transmitted to us with a light touch and no trace of sentimentality. J.M. Coetzee 'An audacious work of the imagination . . .?An extraordinary series of fabulist tales . . . The yarns are funny, tragic,?smart, arch, poignant and playful all at?once.'?The?Saturday?Age 'The emotional heat here is pitched at?Bunsen burner blue - hard and clear, without a?flicker of showy sentiment - while the main?criticism that might be launched against such?stories, that they traffic in a naive anthropomorphism,?is checked at every move by a rigorous?deployment of contemporary developments in?animal psychology and neuroscience. The best of the stories are not only smart in a?modern, scientific sense, however; they keep?one foot in the older, folkloric tradition of animals?from the cultural margins. To be seen by animals?is a profound inversion of the situation? where it is we who do the watching. The results? are sometimes profound, and always powerfully? disconcerting. '? Weekend? Australian 'I was? unprepared for the anarchic brilliance of? this wonderful book. Dovey persuades us of? her characters as she teeters on the edge of? sentimentality, but in the next breath she? dances back and? Only the Animals? becomes? a kind of conversation that anticipates the? response? and parries it . . . ? it is an examination: there? is palpable restraint on the page and Dovey? draws no conclusions. ? Only the Animals? is a? glorious imaginative leap, not into the minds? of animals, but into our own. ? The idea that fiction can be both playful?and intelligent should not be so surprising . . . It's layered?and astonishing and far and away the?best thing I've read this year. Dovey has a?particular talent for mixing exuberance and?melancholy in the one story without tonal?jerks or jars, and this story sparkles on the page . . . It's beautiful?writing, but besides that, it's enthralling.? Most writers don't generate this much? genuine emotion... Perhaps only the animals caught up in human conflicts over the last century tell their astonishing stories of life and death. In a trench on the Western Front a cat recalls her owner Colette's theatrical antics in Paris. In Nazi Germany a dog seeks enlightenment. A Russian tortoise once owned by the Tolstoys drifts in space during the Cold War. In the siege of Sarajevo a bear starving to death tells a fairytale, and a dolphin sent to Iraq by the US Navy writes a letter to Sylvia Plath . . . Exquisitely written, playful and poignant, Only the Animals is a remarkable literary achievement by one of our brightest young writers. an animal's-eye view of humans at out brutal, violent worst and our creative, imaginative best, it asks us to find out way back to empathy not only for animals, but for other people, and to believe again in the redemptive power of reading and writing fiction. Only the Animals is mesmerizing and exhilarating, funny and moving. It has elements of strangeness and greatness, like Kafka. Dovey's exquisitely drawn creatures grapple nobly with their animal natures, a genius point of view from which to illuminate how we humans - ostensibly conscious and verbal - are trapped in ours. This book feels like a major mind announcing itself.' Anna Funder'The life stories related by these very civilized animals are in some cases touching (the mussel), but all are absorbing. They are transmitted to us with a light touch and no trace of sentimentality. J.M. Coetzee My twin sister and I, like all young elephants in our herd, were raised on a feast of stories about our ancestors, whose souls glowed at us from constellations in the sky. On certain summer evenings, the elders would point out identifying features among the stars: the tip of a trunk, or the triangular ends of an ear spread out in preparation for a charge, the same shape as the continent of Africa. They would tell us the story of one of these hallowed forebears looking down on us. My sister and I liked to reenact what we had heard, living out an ancestor's great moments on earth and imagining what it might feel like to die and be transmuted into a soul that sparkles forever, wheeling about on an invisible axis. Description The souls of ten animals, each killed in a human conflict of the past century or so, tell the story of their deaths in turn. There is the camel killed in colonial Australia and the blue mussel killed in Pearl Harbour; the cat who died in the Eastern Front in World War II and the parrot killed during the 2006 bombing of Beirut; the ape who died in Germany during World War I and the Russian tortoise lost in space during the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Each of the animals also pays homage to a human writer who has written imaginatively about animals during much the same time span, from Henry Lawson to Ted Hughes, from Kafka to J.M. Coetzee, from Colette to Virginia Woolf, from Tolstoy to Jose? Saramago, from Gu?nter Grass to Jack Kerouac, from Tom Stoppard to Julian Barnes. As the soul of the tortoise explains, borrowing the words of the poet Czeslaw Milosz, 'So little of the total suffering, human or animal, can ever make its way into literature in the end. When it does, we should pay attention, and pay our respects.' A tribute both to animals sometimes shock us into feeling things we can't seem to feel for other humans? Why do animals allow authors to say the unsayable? Can we become intimate with an author by understanding his or her symbolic use of animals? Is it still possible to feel something authentic for other living beings caught up in fatal conflict in a time of compassion fatigue? Is a different relationship with animals possible if we no longer make them marginal to our lives and deaths? Can fiction really help us to find meaning, or even morality? And as the soul of the dolphin wonders in her narrative, why do we sometimes treat animals, and sometimes treat animals as humans? Only The Animals asks us to find our way back to empathy not only for animals, but for other human beings, and to believe again – just for a moment – in the redemptive power of reading and writing fiction. A note on sources Given that the stories in Only the Animals pay homage to many authors who have written about animals, I am indebted both directly and indirectly to multiple works of literature. Many of the animal narrators intentionally use words, phrases and sentences taken verbatim from the work of other authors. Where appropriate, permission to reprint material has been requested and included in the print version of the book. Please click here for a complete list of sources. "These stories are strange and richly imagined...haunting and atmospheric...tragic but knowing...a window onto the human animal's struggle to balance entitlement and obligation." - The New York Times Book Review "Only the Animals doesn't simplify or sentimentalize, but it does suggest that there is something irreducibly powerful about our imaginative bonds with animals. As long as there are humans, there will be animals, and as long as there are animals, we will think and write and dream about them." - The Boston Globe "Wonderfully weird and profoundly witty...as unsettling as they are beautiful, these quietly wise stories wedge themselves caught in human conflicts, Dovey is at no risk of succumbing to the sentimentality or moralising to which her enterprise could have fallen prey...Dazzling." - The Guardian (UK) "I remember being told once that there are bioluminescent plankton; these stories remind me of that fantastic, startling and real illumination. The animal narrators are not mythic, or naive-they are psychologically full. And though the humans in these stories often act like beasts, having actual beasts tell the stories give the reader a broadened sense of what we affectionately term humanity." -- Rivka Galchen, author of Atmospheric Disturbances" I have been waiting, since Blood Kin, for another work of fiction by Ceridwen Dovey. Only the Animals is filled with knowledge and wisdom and beauty. It leaves a strange and striking trace on its reader." -- Rachel Kushner, author of The FlamethrowersWinner of the inaugural Readings New Australian Writing Award (Short Story Collection) at the 2014 Queensland Literary Awards (Fiction) Watch the book trailer (directed by Andre Sawenko and Ben Alpass at Penguin) here: www.youtube.com/embed/h2PzCgKXgKs

