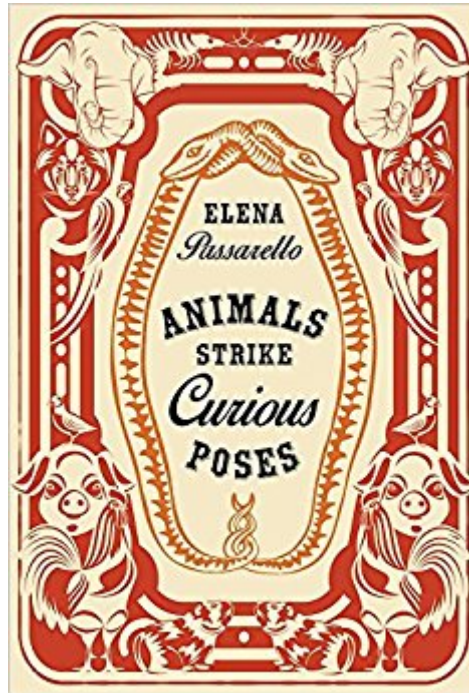




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# Animals Strike Curious Poses



## Synopsis

Beginning with Yuka, a 39,000 year old mummified woolly mammoth recently found in the Siberian permafrost, each of the 16 essays in *Animals Strike Curious Poses* investigates a different famous animal named and immortalized by humans. Modeled loosely after a medieval bestiary, these witty, playful, whipsmart essays traverse history, myth, science, and more, bringing each beast vibrantly to life. Elena Passarello is an actor, a writer, and recipient of a 2015 Whiting Fellowship in nonfiction. Her first collection with Sarabande Books, *Let Me Clear My Throat*, won the gold medal for nonfiction at the 2013 Independent Publisher Awards. She lives in Corvallis, Oregon.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Stunning.... Passarello's keen wit is on display throughout as she raises questions about the uniqueness of humans.... A feast of surprising juxtapositions and gorgeous prose." *Publishers Weekly*, starred review "This phenomenal collection documents the lives of particular animals from a wide range of species. Passarello treats her subjects with dextrous care, weaving narratives together in a way that investigates, honors, and complicates her subjects. Passarello has created a consistently original, thoroughly researched, altogether fascinating compendium." *Booklist*, starred review "The essays in Elena Passarello's *Animals Strike Curious Poses* are technically about animals you'll find in history books, but really they're about the worlds the creatures inhabit and the ways people intersect with them. That, and they're fiercely fun." *Marie Claire*, featured interview "Passarello is brilliant, and

these essays...will not disappoint in quirkiness, intelligence, and delight." *Martha Stewart Living*, "Page-Turners for 2017" "Packed with an assortment of facts, myths, and unexpected connections, each of the book's essays is a deeply researched ride that presents an almost staggering amount of information. But the essays are also highly playful.

Throughout, Passarello works as a sort of critical ringmaster, announcing both the sideshow act and our short-sighted desire for it. She entertains as she exhibits our missteps, and points to the ways we project onto and define ourselves in relation to animals." *Portland Mercury*

"In *Animals Strike Curious Poses* Elena Passarello spins fantastic, wondrous, and true tall tales about species big and small. Her essays are dream-spaces of imagery and ideas. This book will leave little doubt that Passarello is one of our country's most gifted young prose writers." *Hector Tobar*, New York Times bestselling author of *Deep Down Dark* and *The Barbarian Nurseries*

*Animals Strike Curious Poses* turns the bestiary inside out, holds the mummified mammoth heart up against our own, and, from the braided ventricles, springboards into intoxicating and animated meditations on our penchant for ownership via naming, our drive to saddle the world and its creatures with our weary, ponderous patronymics, and the attendant and cockeyed faux-fame. This book is a gift to us from one of the best, most important, and most exciting essayists of the 21st century." *Matthew Gavin Frank*, author of *The Mad Feast* and *Preparing the Ghost: An Essay Concerning the Giant Squid and Its First Photographer*

"Let's face it: animals are interesting, words are interesting. Put them together in arresting match-ups Mozart and starling, Darwin and refugee tortoise, spider and astronaut, gorilla and lexicon, ending and genetic futurist as Passarello does in this delicious collection, and you get a gorgeous picture of a curious mind engaged beyond self-interest. As she digs around in the animal images buried inside us, she finds that it is as if every animal a human brain has ever seen, it has swallowed. And we get to share here this fine and nourishing meal, artfully prepared, with her playful intelligence for company at the table. I am now forever in love with starlings and spiders and . . ."

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"Passarello is resplendent in her encyclopedic knowledge of natural history with a fierce and feral intelligence. Mammoth hunting, spiders in space, the last living tortoise from the Darwin expedition the magnificent animal essays in this utterly absorbing collection shimmer with complexities about human nature with extraordinary depth and music. The end result is simply superb a must for anyone who values wisdom served up with verve and a genuine adoration for the creatures with which we share this flawed and dazzling world." *Aimee Nezhukumatathil*

"Elena

Passarello's wildly inventive, meticulously-rendered meditations are their own kind of perfect animal. This is a hair-raisingly beautiful book.

Amy Fusselman: "What Rachel Carson called 'the problem of sharing our earth with other creatures' is still one of the most pressing problems of our time, but only a few individual creatures are known to all of us by name. Elena Passarello's witty, insightful, exquisite essays reintroduce us to these famous animals, and find new meaning in their fascinating stories."

Michelle Nijhuis, writer for National Geographic and blogger for The New Yorker: "Without bringing herself into the telling directly, Elena Passarello hovers above the little moment in history with wise wonder. She is writing in ways that are unique and fearless. There's nobody else that sounds like her, or is doing what she's doing. When she looks at something she finds interesting, she says, 'Let me see what's down that road!' And she runs down that road as fast as she can. The Whiting Foundation: "The beauty of Elena Passarello's voice is that it's so confidently its own. She's not selling her subjects. She writes with the kind of calm assumption of interest you make in a good friend (if a good listener) over dinner. But what she's saying is always unexpected, and full of information."

John Jeremiah Sullivan (on Let Me Clear My Throat): "In each essay, Passarello takes us on rambling, but carefully controlled walks that duck into alleys, wind through backstreets, beckon us into little mazes of looping associations, and often end up far from where they began."

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Booklist, starred review: "I've spent decades reading books on the roles animals play in human cultures, but none have ever made me think, and feel, as much as this one. It's a devastating meditation on our relationship to the natural world. It might be the best book on animals I've ever read. It's also the only one that's made me laugh out loud."

The formal exuberance of this modern bestiary is exhilarating.

Animals Strike Curious Poses: "speaks of and for the voiceless hordes with whom we share the earth, shows us

how we make sense of them and, crucially, how they make sense for us. This is a book with burning current relevance. It gives one hope that we humans might not be so lonely after all.

•The New York Times Book Review, "Editor's Choice" The essays in Elena Passarello's *Animals Strike Curious Poses* are technically about animals you'll find in history books, but really they're about the worlds the creatures inhabit and the ways people intersect with them. That, and they're fiercely fun.

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—Aimee Nezhukumatathil

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Essay. Passarello lives in Corvallis, Oregon and teaches at Oregon State University.

Erudite and delving deep into the lives of "famous" animals and the people they influence(d), this collection stimulates thought and has you crave more by this talented writer. The research behind her lines is utterly impressive but never for showing off -- it always feels essential to the threads of Passarello's cultural / historical tapestries. Some of the essays are more impressionistic than others. My favorite one is about Dürer and Ganda, the Renaissance "boilerplate" rhino. The chapters in this eccentric collection are proof that facts can be (at least) as much fun as fiction. But Passarello does not stint on lyricism either. Like the "murmurations" of starlings she describes, her writing is drenched with life, sound, and magic. A must-have for fans of the arcane and readers interested in the lives of these "Others." Though ultimately, our portraits of them are also a portrait of us. In an age of assembly-line dreck, this lovingly designed and produced book is a true standout, worth every dime.

Whoa. The writing for this is sometimes far too stylized, sometimes precious. And there are some truly disturbing animal stories here. I was especially disappointed since it was clear that the writer could have written a more enjoyable book: the chapter about Mozart and the bird was fascinating. I glanced at the upcoming chapters and read a few, but I did not finish this book. (I had bought an extra for an animal lover friend and then decided it was too grotesque for her. I gave it to the library.)

I adored this book, a collection of essays that move fluidly between history, science, memoir (a bit), and poetry. Many of the essays are virtuoso performances that combine research, intelligent speculation, beautiful imagery and a kind of longing for the creature world, a realm that may be disappearing from everyday life. "Vogel Staar," partly about Mozart's starling, is a standout among standouts. Highly recommended.

An unusual book.

Elena Passarello's essays tell secrets. They pass notes riddled with urgent information. They re-invent urgent. These are essays so impossibly good that we unfold them slowly and quietly beneath our desks. They may tell us that they'll beat us up at dusk on the playground. They may tell us that they love us. We will emerge from them changed and bemused, as the world stretches out now, differently burnished and so much bigger before us. We

suspect we will get in trouble for reading them. We suspect correctly. Or, wait: Elena Passarello's essays are street carnivals for us, they strap on roller skates and cartwheel along what were once the No Passing Zones. They put on make-up and wigs, take our make-up and wigs off. They busk, even though they don't need the money. They know weird and delicious things about the recesses of our hearts (the corporeal and metaphorical ones), and toothy fauna, monstrous sows, the courtships forged between our favorite naturalists and our favorite land-dwelling reptiles, and sea changes hiccupping on that big, bright thing we once mistook for our moon. They know what goes on in the ganglia of the spider's silk-spigot, and in the shadows cast by the giant carapace. Or, wait: they are fairy tales, or instructionals for living, for knowing the parts of ourselves we are compelled to mis-label as true; or an occasion for a party wherein we get to eat all of the cheese and all of the good olives; or an all-inclusive psychotherapeutic resort wherein we get to be both doctor and patient, where we get to play with methods humanistic and expressive, insightful and swaggery, postmodern and transpersonal. Yes, these essays dare to twine and untwine the animal-animal with the human-animal, addressing each in the context of a spiritual refinement of consciousness. Or, wait: Passarello's new book, *Animals Strike Curious Poses* turns the bestiary inside out, holds the mummified mammoth heart up against our own, and, from the braided ventricles, springboards into intoxicating and animated meditations on our penchant for ownership via naming, our drive to saddle the world and its creatures with our weary, ponderous patronymics, and the attendant and cockeyed faux-fame. Or, wait, wait: this book is a gift to us from one of the best, most important, and most exciting essayists of the 21st century. It's all we can do to unwrap it, and let the cat play with the bow, as we read it

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