Bruce Thomas Boehrer. *Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature.*
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. 238 pp. index. illus. bibl. $49.95. ISBN: 978–0–8122–4249–2.

Animal Characters argues that the modern concept of literary subjectivity, and with it the rise of the novel, emerges alongside the increasing denial of literary subjectivity to nonhumans. Boehrer develops his argument by tracking the early modern, chiefly English discursive fortunes of several kinds of animals — horses, parrots, cats, turkeys, and sheep — in the works of, among other authors, Ariosto, Cervantes, and Tasso; Milton, Middleton, and Shakespeare; Rabelais and Cavendish; and in several lesser-known works such as *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*.

Boehrer identifies a general tendency in literary representations of animals between 1400 and 1700 in which the admiring characterization typical of the works of earlier centuries gave way to disparagement. One of the last of a tradition of admired chivalric horses — including Bayard of the *Quatre fils Aymon,* Arondel of *Bevis of Hampton,* and Bucephalous of the Alexander legend — is the loyal Baiardo of *Orlando furioso,* a heroic character in his own right with his own motivations and desires. Some sixty years later, Shakespeare's *Richard II* depicts a depersonalized horse indifferent to whatever king chooses to ride it, while with Cervantes, the equine chivalric tradition utterly collapses. The parrot suffers a similar decline due to its semiotic utility for religious sectarianism: long praised for its intelligence and splendor, the parrot is eventually demoted to being considered an absurd luxury capable only of uncomprehending repetition. In this, the parrot became, at least for the Protestants, an emblematic papist, nominally Christian but lacking any understanding of its own faith. In a chapter that moves his book from representations to actual living animals, Boehrer shows how religious sectarianism had a far more dire effect on cats. Even at the very moment when people began to accept cats as domestic companions, they subjected cats to public, ritualized torture, sometimes to show their contempt for Catholics or High-Church Anglicans, and sometimes in a way that virtually transubstantiated the cat's suffering body, "generat[ing] a pattern of redemptive figurative suggestive of the Atonement, with the tortured animals serving as the instrument of deliverance" (131). Turkeys were a victim of their own success. When the turkey first appeared in Europe, gourmands admired it as much for its glorious plumage and dignified bearing as for its tasty flesh: Europe finally had a palatable peacock. However, as the European production of turkeys

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increased and democratized consumption, attitudes towards turkeys shifted from admiration to contempt; this process may be compared to what happened to the medieval pig, as thoroughly illustrated by Michel Pastoureau ("La chasse au sanglier," in *La chasse au Moyen âge*, ed. Bagliani and van den Abeele [2000]). By the eighteenth century, turkeys were held to be as stupid and gluttonous as the rabble whose tables they graced. The penultimate chapter concerns sheep, animals so laden with symbolism as to experience what Boehrer calls "the opposite of reification," where "real sheep los[t] their materiality and [were] reconstituted within the realm of the symbolic" (181). The brief final chapter argues that the animal-men of Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* should be understood primarily as figures created for a satirical struggle against both the Royal Society and the lower classes.

A short book that covers so much ground can do only so much. Nonetheless, I wish that Boehrer had solidified his arguments about medieval to modern discursive shifts in animal characterization by engaging more deeply with traditions of animal satire, fables like Ramon Llull's *El Llibre de les bèsties* or beast epics like *Ysengrimus*; that he had engaged more with other discursive studies of animals and of eating, such as those by Douglas Gray, Erica Fudge, and Sara Lipton on cats and those by Allen Grieco and Bruno Laurioux on food and social class; that he had been far more suspicious about Frazer and Sebillot's antiquated characterization of animal rituals as vestigial paganism; that he had relied less on literature and more on medieval and early modern religious and philosophical teaching to discern continuities and developments in the mutually reliant categories of "animal" and "human"; and, finally, that he had been more inspired by the posthumanist insights of critical animal theory. For example, any critical treatment of elite horsemanship should take as its ground Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Deleuzoguattarian discussion of the "chivalric circuit" in *Medieval Identity Machines* (2003). Not to use, or only to glance at, such work is to remain within the very humanist tradition the book ought to have been critiquing.

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