

Susan Crane. *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain*. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. vii + 270 pp. \$59.95. ISBN: 978-0-8122-4458-8.

Any study of animals is constrained by human thought patterns. Animals exist as concepts as much as they do as beings, and researchers are left trying to disentangle the two even as they add new concepts to the field. Susan Crane confronts this problem explicitly as she studies ideas about animals in a number of medieval British literary sources. Crane uses modern intellectual constructs like postmodernism and deconstruction to shed light on what medieval people thought about the animals that shared their lives.

The author intends to demonstrate that new ways of approaching the sources might yield a post-humanist approach that no longer devalues nonhuman life. There is no question that the predominant medieval philosophy privileged humans, considering that animals were irrational, soulless creatures that existed only for human use. However, Crane's analysis allows her to reveal incidents in which humans and animals are joined in a web of creation, tied to each other outside a clear hierarchy. This is a useful reminder that there is always more than one way to look at something.

The first two chapters cover what Crane calls cohabitation, looking at examples of humans living in close proximity with an animal. The first considers Irish sources, beginning with a poem of a cat hunting for a mouse with the same single-minded approach as a scholar seeking inspiration. This chapter also describes Irish saints who happily take help from miraculously intelligent animals. The second chapter discusses Marie de France's famous sympathetic werewolf, in which human and animal coexist in some harmony in one man. Do these examples convincingly reveal a world of humans and animals interacting horizontally rather than vertically? It depends on how you look at it, and that's Crane's point.

The third chapter considers the medieval bestiaries that organize animals according to both their physical and moral characteristics. In a sophisticated analysis of that very human occupation of taxonomy — we do love to organize things — Crane shows that medieval authors of the bestiaries found common ground between humans and animals. The author continues the theme of ordering nature in the next chapter on hunting. Here, Crane shows that in the very real activity of hunting, people order their relationships with animals in a ritual way.

The final two chapters return to the theme of cohabiting with animals, at least with literary ones. Crane analyzes romances in which people and animals are joined in close metaphors. In Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*, a falcon and a woman are linked in ways that each is made more noble by their close association. This was so true that symbol and reality merged. In a similar way, knights and their horses were also joined in such a close tie that one knight in a romance gives up everything to save his horse. Crane argues that in these instances, "postmodern versions of the self embedded in materiality" (139) linked the medieval world to ours in ways that have been previously missed.

The audience for this work will probably be an academic one because the author presupposes a previous knowledge about such texts as Chaucer and medieval romances. It is easier to follow Crane's analysis if the reader knows the story. With this limitation, however, the book is well argued, clear, and original.

Professor Crane's work brings a new contribution to the scholarship of the relationship between humans and animals. With a methodology drawn from literary criticism and philosophic musings, she offers new insights into ways of thinking about how people thought about animals. With this approach, the reader may not learn very much about medieval animals themselves, but learns a great deal about the minds of humans who think about animals. Crane demonstrates that at least some medieval thinkers conceived of a world in which animals and humans were linked instead of separate, but as always the researcher is forced to return to the concepts within the human mind. The animals themselves remain elusive.

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