

EDITOR'S FOREWORD:
SPECIAL ISSUE ON MEDIEVAL PETS

For three successive years, the Medieval Association of the Midwest organized sessions on Medieval Pets for the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The first of these, in 2009, attracted an audience of nearly eighty enthusiastic attendees, so as organizers we immediately discovered that we had hit upon an attractive topic. In fact, the zeitgeist was in favor of it, as a spate of book publications demonstrated. For example, *A Cultural History of Animals* (2007), a six-volume collection ranging from antiquity to the modern day, had recently appeared, and a number of other more specifically medieval projects—including session participant Karl Steel's *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (2011), a special issue ("The Animal Turn") of *postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* (2.1, 2011), Joyce Salisbury's *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (2011), Kathleen Walker-Meikle's three books beginning with *Medieval Pets* (2012), and Susan Crane's *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain* (2013)—were all in preparation during the period.

Among the papers read at those MAM sessions, at least one, Karl Steel's "Ridiculous Mourning: Dead Pets and Lost Humans," has found publication elsewhere. In this volume we are pleased to be able to present other memorable contributions by Kristen Figg, Peter Goodrich, Harriet Hudson, Ryan Judkins, and Alison Langdon, all of which have been substantially revised and expanded for inclusion here. To them are added a new study by Irvén Resnick, as well as John Block Friedman's review of Walker-Meikle's books. So this special issue of *Enarratio* will prove, we hope, a substantive and timely addition to a distinguished list of recent publications on the subject of animals in the Middle Ages.

Several definitions of "pets" have been put forward, led by historian Keith Thomas's provisions that the animal be allowed indoors, named, and not eaten (112-15). All three are significant markers, but nonetheless interrogated by our essays. For example, given names can be significantly withheld, as when an animal becomes a metaphorical extension of its owner's persona, like John of Tilton's *cervus domesticus*, the *bisclavret* of Marie de France's *lai*, the loyal greyhound of Sir

Aubrey, or the dog who brings bread to Sir Gowther. Named animals may also be metaphorical, like Sir Tryamour's True Love, or tropologically suggestive like Tristrem's Hodain and Ysonde's Peticrewe. While pets are not eaten, they participate in the "eating" performed by their masters, even of Tristrem's and Ysonde's fatal potion, or signify what is consumed or in danger of being consumed/consummated, as in Sir Gawain's plight in the domain of Sir Bertilak and his wife. And if they are strictly indoor animals, what then do we make of the symbolic intimacy of the garden and deer park, or the accompaniment of knights and ladies by their animals in the forests of (mis)adventure?

Clearly, the borderline between Thomas' "pet" and less domestic animals is thin. To be human is also to be animal, and sometimes bestial, even monstrous. Walker-Meikle observes, therefore, that pets acquired "an ambiguous animal-human status" (*Medieval Pets* 108): in fact, they "formed a part of their owners' identity and were almost always connected to status" (109). These insights influence medieval judgment of human character and behavior, and serve as key *topoi* of the essays here, all of which adopt a theorizing as well as documentary approach to their subjects. Walker-Meikle also emphasizes that medieval pets, like modern ones, were "repositories of affection and companionship" that released them from "any traditional utilitarian function" (108). Once again, this proves an appropriate yet simultaneously misleading binary. Among other findings, the preponderance of opinion in our essays problematizes the separation of functions by noting how often intimacy characterizes both utilitarian and non-utilitarian relationships of man and beast. The sharing of human food is an important sign of this intimacy that distinguishes the human-pet relationship from other human-animal interactions, as well as an element of "conspicuous consumption" and display (*Medieval Pets* 109).

Such definitions conceive pets as a borderland between the binaries of human and animal, domestic and wild, work and leisure, good and evil, exaltation and abasement, core and periphery. As in the courtly romance, where the multidimensional concept of chivalry is most interesting for those occasions where its values are set in conflict with one another, so animals in medieval literature, with their long history in myth, fable, scripture and bestiary, are most interesting for their signification of conflicting valences in the supposed human dominion over God's creation, as subverted by the Fall. In short, medieval pets become a fascinating palimpsest for the whole range of human

interactions with the animal world and animal nature, and that is what justifies the recent vogue of animal scholarship.

The foregoing remarks are a preamble to the real introduction of this special issue, Kristen Figg's survey of pets (or potential pets) as discussed by medieval encyclopedias and dictionaries. In her study, Figg documents the evolution of the concept "pet" and explores the shifting medieval relationships between humans and animals—not just the usual domestic companions, dogs and cats, but increasingly unusual ones like song and raptor birds, horses and asses, deer, otters, bears, and apes. She discovers in these reference works a considerable range of views about animals' respective capacities for rationality, their suitability as pets, and their utility in both domestic and occupational spheres. The conclusions that are drawn in these works, she reveals, often depend upon the authors' sense of the innate nature of the animals as measured in relation to human capacities.

Ryan Judkins' contribution focuses on one atypical "pet"—deer—an apparently disruptive denizen of some interior domestic spaces as well as a staple of parkland and forest. The deer proves to be an icon of both control and consumption, animals neither fully domesticated for consumption like pigs, sheep, or cattle, nor wild like boars, but requiring special attention like hunting animals and thus expressing the owner's desire to assert elect status and governorship over others. In *William of Palerne* and other texts, as well as in legal records and the historical hunting park, one finds a medieval empathy for deer as well as imaginatively harmonious communities of people and animals, ones that contrast a broader culture of violence and predation.

The problem of transgressiveness in medieval "pets" is further explored by Alison Langdon's essay on Marie de France's *Bisclavret*. Lycanthropy in this story is paratactic: neither explained nor rationalized but presented as a given (albeit an extraordinary one) of human existence. Building upon the critical tradition surrounding this *lai*, Langdon draws on the threads of recent research about human and animal categories to argue that both wolf body and dog behavior revolve around human vestment: not only the crucial clothes, but the wife's betrayal and her husband's bizarre disfigurement of her while himself in wolf form, express a range of strategies, simultaneously human and canine, for coping with bestial transformation. The alternating characteristics of dog and wolf, taken under the king's protection, privilege the organ signifying both scent and sexuality in their revenge and lead to the recognition of the protagonist's human character. But in Langdon's

interpretation, they leave open the question of how human either wolf or dog actually is, apart from their symbolic qualities.

After Langdon, our issue goes utterly to the dogs until its closing book review. Irven Resnick goes back to first principles in his wide-ranging discussion of religious polemics against Judaism, an important source not only of Western anti-Semitism but also of negative canine imagery in all Western literature. Resnick persuasively demonstrates that likening Jews to the “uncleanness” of this animal constituted a dehumanized Other that could be attacked for a wide variety of inimical behaviors such as gluttony, greed, and libidinousness, which served as grounds for insult. As Keith Thomas has observed, this proscription cast its shadow even into the seventeenth century, when “the taste for dogs had progressed so far as to be an issue on which contemporaries were prepared to overrule even scripture” (107). Resnick points out, however, that positive canine qualities such as intelligence, trainability, and affection were not totally ignored, but rather deemphasized. Consequently, Jews were forced to develop several strategies for deflecting anti-Semitic “dogism,” even to the point of re-emphasizing these positive qualities.

Harriet Hudson’s article offers insight into the way that the Middle English romance genre rehabilitated the negative imagery associated with dogs by emphasizing their *kyndenness* with chivalric values. Beginning with an overview of medieval attitudes towards canines, which increasingly identified them as guardians, hunters, servants, companions, and status symbols, she goes on to show how these attributes aligned with related qualities in the construction of knightly masculinity. In three late verse romances, *Sir Tryamour*, *Sir Tristrem*, and *Sir Gowther*, dogs could figure as character doubles, highlighting both disreputable and admirable male qualities, and sharing in human food and drink to the point of carrying Eucharistic overtones. Moreover, the exchange of dogs could come to parallel the male exchange of women and the intimate bonds of love service, and canines could even redress traditional scriptural scorn by serving as agents of redemption and divine grace.

Peter Goodrich’s concluding essay selectively spans an entire corpus of Old and Middle English references to dogs in order to emphasize the way in which the canine image grew to encompass a symbolic encyclopedia of potential meanings. Beginning with a fresh reading of a late medieval tale of the Dog of Montargis and culminating in discussion of an unexpected image cluster relating Bertilak’s hunting dogs to the bedroom behavior of Gawain and Bertilak’s lady, Goodrich’s

survey of Middle English usages and idioms regarding dogs confirms the growing complexity and subtlety of canine imagery throughout the feudal culture of England. Through this post-Conquest development in English society, dogs are prepared to function in succeeding centuries as alternative human identities for good or ill, which can be put on or off as the writer chooses, and can be symbolically invoked even through significant lack of mention. This state of affairs at the end of the Middle Ages is confirmed by John Davies' *In Cineam* of 1598:

Thou sayest thou art as weary as a dog,
 As angry, sick and hungry as a dog,
 As dull and melancholy as a dog,
 As lazy, sleepy, idle as a dog.
 But why dost thou compare thee to a dog
 In that for which all men despise a dog?
 I will compare thee better to a dog.
 Thou art as fair and comely as a dog,
 Thou art as true and honest as a dog,
 Thou art as kind and liberal as a dog,
 Thou art as wise and valiant as a dog.
 (qtd. in Thomas 107)

Our special issue is rounded off by John Friedman's insightful review of Kathleen Walker-Meikle's influential trilogy of books, bringing us back to the overall category of medieval "pets." Appropriately enough, the first and chief of these volumes was eventually published by the Boydell Press, which had contacted us as well, to ask about our intentions for the Pets sessions at Kalamazoo. Not knowing in advance what range and quality of work these sessions would attract, we have held out for this special issue, and hope that its essays will serve useful purposes for the many scholars interested in medieval pets.

Peter Goodrich
 Co-Editor, Special Issue

NOTE ON SUBMISSIONS

Although Volume 18 of *Enarratio* is a special issue focusing on a single topic, it continues the publication's tradition of offering articles from a variety of disciplines, cultures, and perspectives. The essays in this issue represent not only studies focusing on the literature and culture of the early and late Middle Ages, but also questions of intellectual influence, reception, and critical response. My gratitude goes to the readers who evaluated manuscripts for this volume, all of whom generously offered their time, energy, and expertise.

Contributors to *Enarratio* should follow the conventions of the most recent *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* and must join MAM (\$25) upon acceptance of an article. Submissions for future volumes may be addressed to either of the co-editors:

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