Review Article

Centring the Animal: Re-evaluating the Human–Animal Relationship since the Middle Ages

Quick Cattle and Dying Wishes: People and their Animals in Early Modern England. By ERICA FUDGE (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 2018; pp. 264. $115; pb. $29.95);

Interspecies Interactions: Animals and Humans between the Middle Ages and Modernity. Edited by SARAH COCKRAM and ANDREW WELLS (London: Routledge, 2017; pp. 260. £120; pb. £34.99);

Animals Through Chinese History: Earliest Times to 1911. Edited by ROEL STERCKX, MARTINA SIEBERT and DAGMAR SCHÄFER (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2018; pp. 290. £75; pb. £22.99);

Animal Skins and the Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries. By SARAH KAY (Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago P., 2017; pp. 232. $49);

In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France. By PEGGY MCCracken (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 2017; pp. 240. $45).

The emerging scholarship within Animal Studies or human–animal relations represents a rapidly developing field. It is chiefly marked by a change in scholarly attitude: where once animals were a backdrop to human history, they are increasingly seen as authentic and autonomous historical agents who had a real impact on the world around them. The early form of the study of animals in history focused on human ideas about animals, where, like René Descartes’ automata, animals were indifferent and reflexive presences, open to the meaning we assigned them. Thankfully, this approach has long been cast aside. As the animal historian Erica Fudge has observed, today scholars strive to trace ‘the many ways in which humans construct and are constructed by animals in the past’.1 This shift encourages us to examine the part that both humans and animals have played in shaping each other’s lives and the broad spectrum of relationships they have had with each other.

As a discipline, Animal Studies has benefited greatly from work in a wide range of fields. Its beginnings can be traced to the animal rights movement of the 1970s and foundational texts such as Peter Singer’s Animal Liberation (1975) and Harriet Ritvo’s The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age (1987; rev. ante, cvi

1. E. Fudge, ‘The History of Animals’ (25 May 2006), available online at https://networks.h-net.org/node/16560/pages/32226/history-animals-erica-fudge, accessed 20 Oct. 2020.
Important discussions also happened in the field of theoretical literature with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work on ‘becoming-animal’. Thus, rather than a unified approach, Animal Studies encompasses a variety of methods adapted from participating disciplines. Consequently, the theories that guide much of the work in Animal Studies vary. Yet at their core, these theories resist a whole series of traditional binaries—human/animal; male/female; nature/culture—that reinforce systematic oppression and inform reductionist systems.

The five books reviewed here highlight some of the methods and challenges of the study of animals—or, better yet, what Sarah Cockram and Andrew Wells term ‘interspecies interactions’. Each book aims to develop a better understanding of such interactions by examining and valuing particular cases, and ultimately rejecting the broad conceptual distinction between humans and all other animals. The challenge for historians is how to consider the presence of animals as historical or literary actors in a way both to contest assumptions and to broaden our understanding of the past.

Erica Fudge’s response to this challenge in Quick Cattle and Dying Wishes: People and their Animals in Early Modern England is to examine closely the ways in which humans and animals lived alongside each other in the home and on the farm in seventeenth-century England. Sarah Cockram and Andrew Wells seek similar ‘moments of entwinement’ between humans and animals in their edited volume Interspecies Interactions: Animals and Humans between the Middle Ages and Modernity. Animals are regarded as historical actors to a lesser extent in Animals Through Chinese History: Earliest Times to 1911, edited by Roel Sterckx, Martina Siebert and Dagmar Schäfer. Rather, this extensive collection examines how animals played a central role in thought processes throughout Chinese history. Turning to imaginative literature, Sarah Kay’s Animal Skins and the Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries presents a thorough examination of the page as a site at which human and animal converge, while Peggy McCracken’s In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France explores ideas of power and authority in medieval texts against a backdrop of human–animal relationships.

These books each provide rich material for reflection about how animals both invite and disrupt ideas about ‘natural’ relations or divisions. I begin with Quick Cattle and Dying Wishes (2018), in which Erica Fudge examines such relations through seventeenth-century wills.

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2. Deleuze and Guattari refer to ‘becoming-animal’ as a unique process which rejects the idea of the human–animal divide based on human superiority. ‘Becoming-animal’ is not a shift from one identity to another, nor is it the merging of identities. Rather, it implies the deconstructing of identity, a process that is neither linear nor hierarchical; it is one that ‘produces nothing other than itself’: G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, tr. B. Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: U. of Minnesota P, 1987), p. 237.

3. See E. Fudge, ‘Foreword’, in S. Cockram and A. Wells, eds., Interspecies Interactions: Animals and Humans between the Middle Ages and Modernity (London, 2017), p. xvii.
from the Essex Record Office. Focusing on the period 1620 to 1634, Fudge claims that wills are particularly useful in detailing human lives lived alongside animals by tracking people’s concerns and intentions after death. They reveal ‘a world of ongoing negotiation and tentative collaboration’ where the lives of human and animal were not only entwined but interdependent.\(^4\) Although only about 10 per cent of the wills in the Essex Record Office included specific bequests of animals, Fudge argues that the descriptions of animals that do exist imply that animals had more than just financial meaning to testators. Her emphasis is thus on qualitative rather than quantitative analysis as she examines passages that make visible what would otherwise be invisible.

Fudge is upfront regarding the limitations of her work, acknowledging that the wills she examines were made mainly by those in upper and middle ranks (very little is revealed about those of lower status), and women are chronically under-represented. Nonetheless, she confronts issues that are ubiquitous in Animal Studies: what to do with ambiguous terminology? How should scholars interpret animal absence? Perhaps most importantly, how can historians grant animals an active role in history when our access to them is through sources created by humans? To address these questions, Fudge takes a good look at the lives of real animals, and with a little imagination illustrates the relations between animals and humans which were not only vital but constant.

The first two chapters look at the varying terminology used to classify owned animals. How testators categorised entities that were constantly changing in concise legal terms was challenging. Furthermore, terms were often polysemous: ‘cattle’ could refer to cattle (that is, bovines) specifically, to livestock more generally, or even to other possessions that were movable but not, in the words of Fudge, ‘self-moving’.\(^5\) Animals might even be subsumed within a catch-all phrase such as ‘the rest of my goods’. The overarching question of these chapters, and indeed the book, is whether the use of a particular term indicated a particular attitude toward animals or whether the language used in wills was shaped and constrained by the legal limitations inherent in such documents. By acknowledging the purpose of a will (ensuring uninterrupted ownership and avoiding disputes) as well as the fact that animals, as living beings, move, change and age, Fudge argues that phrases that seem detached and unfeeling might ‘evidence not the objectification of animals but their particular natures and how important bequeathing them was’.\(^6\)

Personal names, as examined in Chapter Three, worked in a similar manner. Of the wills that Fudge examines, 0.3 per cent contained named animals. Yet for Fudge, this lack reflects the legal constraints

\(^4\) E. Fudge, *Quick Cattle and Dying Wishes: People and their Animals in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY, 2018), p. 223.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 28.
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 38.
and formalism of wills, since naming animals was certainly widely practised. For instance, in his diary from 1651, Ralph Josselin named every one of his cows. According to Fudge, such individualisation demonstrates that these animals were part of the human community and important as co-workers, even while their personal names played no role in the law. In fact, it was downright risky to name an animal in a will: if the specific animal bequeathed had perished or was otherwise unavailable after the testator’s death, the legacy was void. It was thus far safer to use general terms to ensure the legatee received something. This created, as Fudge puts it, a gap between ‘legal definition and lived relation’.

In Chapter Four, Fudge explores evidence suggesting that farm animals were valued for more than their productivity and financial worth. Beginning with bees and lambs, Fudge looks at the possibility of animal bequests as having a symbolic or spiritual value when read alongside practical and religious manuals. Finally, in her last chapter, Fudge looks at people who lived separately from animals in an urban environment and how this might affect the way that animals were perceived. To do this, she compares the wills from Essex to those written and probated in the diocese of London from 1620 to 1635. It seems that few people living in the capital included specific animal bequests in their wills (less than 1 per cent). Fudge is therefore forced to interpret this silence, concluding that Londoners experienced different encounters with animals, not that animals disappeared from their lives. For instance, people in the city often lived in spaces converted from animal use to human use and food might be brought in rather than produced on site. Animals would still have been present in daily life, but this ‘species isolation’ would have meant a very different lived experience from that of the country.

Quick Cattle and Dying Wishes presents a thorough investigation of mid-seventeenth-century wills, in which animals play multifaceted roles as ‘agents and things, symbols and goods, colleagues and meat’. Fudge demonstrates that recognising animals as both stock and individual creatures were not contradictory methods but different means of distribution available to testators. Furthermore, the co-operation of such animals—on whom the lives of humans vitally depended—was essential, allowing the animals a certain leeway to dictate the human–animal exchange.

Similar efforts to centre the lives of animals are explored in the edited volume Interspecies Interaction: Animals and Humans between the Middle Ages and Modernity. The collection aims broadly to take the animal experience as seriously as the human experience; like Fudge, the editors, Sarah Cockram and Andrew Wells, are keen to find

7. Ibid., p. 100.
8. Ibid., p. 175.
9. Ibid., p. 169.
ways of granting animals an active role in history. To de-centre the human, they focus not on how humans and animals lived together, but rather on how humans and animals ‘produced emotions and acts in each other’. As a result, the chapters in this collection cover a wide historical range spanning the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Although largely Eurocentric, a variety of sources are also used, including letters (Cockram, Peter Edwards), newspapers (Helen Cowie), legal records (Wells), and recipe books (Karen Raber).

Comprising ten chapters overall, the first section looks broadly at emotional responses and connections between humans and animals. The second section highlights the ‘use and abuse’ of animals, while the final section covers the theme of identification and classification. Like Fudge, Cockram and Wells acknowledge that much of the evidence derives from humans, which limits how fully the animal can be centred in their investigation. Yet there are several chapters that stand out in their efforts to highlight moments in which animal agency or resistance were recognised. In Chapter Four Peter Edwards explores the lives of horses in his study of the Levinz Colt bred in Nottinghamshire in the 1720s. Using his background as a socio-economic historian, he stresses that the relationship between man and horse is ‘a two-way process’, and strives to construct what he calls an ‘animal biography’. To do this, Edwards traces the Levinz Colt’s life and temperament through a series of letters, allowing him to study the horse not only as an individual, but one which shaped the workings of an eighteenth-century breeding stable.

Another strong contribution is Andrew Wells’s ‘Blurred Lines: Bestiality and the Human Ape in Enlightenment Scotland’. Here Wells considers discussions of interspecies sex as a way to determine species difference alongside cases of bestiality that came before the Scottish courts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He argues that in both situations the behaviour of the animal participant was important. In bestiality cases, eyewitnesses were often rare, so evidentiary rules were stretched to include animal behaviour as proof that the crime had occurred. Such behaviour, ranging from resistance to affection, was given considerable testamentary weight in court. An animal’s behaviour was also considered in a late eighteenth-century thought experiment which imagined intercourse between humans and apes. The desire (or lack thereof) to mate with a human partner was taken to indicate that the animal did or did not belong to the same species as humans. Animals were thus key not only to convicting those engaged in the act that was ‘not to be named’ but also in determining their own taxonomic fate.

Wells’s article compellingly reminds us that animal agency (albeit as interpreted by humans) includes the capacity to determine ideas and events. Such capacity is clearly demonstrated in Krista Maglen’s

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10. S. Cockram and A. Wells, ‘Introduction’, in Cockram and Wells, eds., Interspecies Interactions, p. 7.
11. P. Edwards, ‘The Tale of a Horse: The Levinz Colt, 1721–29’, ibid., p. 89.
essay, an intriguing piece detailing the role of dangerous native animals in the development of colonial Australia. Her chapter, entitled “‘The Monster’s Mouth…’: Dangerous Animals and the European Settlement of Australia’, considers the role of sharks, snakes and other creatures in framing the European understanding of Australia, where stories of the danger posed by such creatures were actively disseminated in order to deter convict escape and police early colonial settlements. Although used to regulate and control human movement, Maglen notes that these animals ‘did not passively and compliantly conform to the spatial framing imagined by the settlers’. Dangerous creatures could be found within the boundaries of the colony just as easily as they could be found beyond its boundaries. They could be found in domestic areas, perhaps around the home or hidden in the woodpile—areas that were meant to be safe and civilised. These animals ‘were not cleared nor controlled but were recalcitrant agents that persisted in their claim to space’. By acknowledging and accepting this claim to space, humans and animals were not only drawn into but shaped each other’s environments.

The theme of interspecies interactions continues in Animals Through Chinese History: Earliest Times to 1911, where animals play a critical part in human thought-processes. This edited volume presents a good starting-point from which to explore the relationship between animals and knowing. The aim of the collection is to demonstrate how animals were seen as ‘a window onto human society and natural change’, always a useful exercise, but one which keeps the human firmly centred. In fact, the chapters here largely explore animals in their symbolic or philosophical role: Timothy H. Barrett and Mark Strange explore the metaphorical use of cats in early Buddhist texts; David Pattinson describes the transition of bees from negative to positive role models during the Song period; and Vincent Goossaert examines respect for animal life as a basis for salvation in late imperial morality books. Such chapters could benefit from more attention to the tension existing between constructed animals and real animals, between the lived reality and literary imagination. However, by focusing on the construction of animals through language, materials or bureaucratic means, these authors provide an interesting overview of how animals were valued by various groups of people.

As the editors mention in the introduction, care needs to be taken when comparing the historical approaches to the human–animal divide of China and the West. Rather than classifying traits as uniquely human, both animals and humans might express the same moral or

12. K. Maglen, “‘The Monster’s Mouth…’: Dangerous Animals and the European Settlement of Australia’, ibid., p. 218.
13. Ibid., p. 219.
14. R. Sterckx, M. Siebert and D. Schäfer, eds., Animals Through Chinese History: Earliest Times to 1911 (Cambridge, 2019), p. 1.
15. See D. Schäfer, M. Siebert and R. Sterckx, ‘Knowing Animals in China’s History: An Introduction’, ibid., p. 6.
principle within Chinese thought. Keith Knapp, for example, explores animal manifestations of filial piety in Confucian narratives (Xiaozhi zhuan) in his essay, ‘Noble Creatures: Filial and Righteous Animals in Early Medieval Confucian Thought’. Crows, he demonstrates, were often depicted as displaying the filial act of fanbu or ‘feeding in return’ whereby offspring would provide food to elderly parents. The key difference between humans and animals, according to these texts, was not that humans could act virtuously and animals could not. Rather, humans expressed piety based on the recognition of the hierarchical father–son relationship, whereas animal behaviour focused on the principle of reciprocity. As a result, animals were morally similar to humans and differed, Knapp argues, ‘in degree rather than kind’.16 For Knapp, this implies that authors of Xiaozhi zhuan viewed animals and humans as part of the same moral community, their acts of virtue expressing the same principle that differed only by degree.

Animals displaying what Westerners might consider human traits can be seen again in Martina Siebert’s contribution, ‘Animals as Text: Producing and Consuming “Text-Animals”’. Using ideas of re-assemblage and consumption, she explores specialised monographs called pulu which provided scholars with animal morphology, habits and classifications on both a species and an individual level. Living animals were constructed in pulu as ‘textual animals’, to use Siebert’s term, many of whose characteristics were sourced from hearsay or other written works. Tigers, for example, were constructed using short anecdotes in order to highlight certain characteristics. From a safe, philological distance, tigers were depicted as multifaceted entities: they could provoke fear, display respect and even punish cruelty. In one story, a tiger repays kindness by bringing a deer to the person who removed a thorn from his paw. Horses, too, were recreated from previous works but as historical individuals from China’s past rather than as creatures the author could observe in his own time. Siebert argues that the reduction of living animals to text allowed the textual versions to be regenerated and rejuvenated in each new work. Particular aspects of animals could thus be selected by authors and consumed anew by pulu readers.

The idea of readers consuming animals through the medium of a book is further complicated when that book is made from animals, a fact highlighted in Sarah Kay’s insightful work, Animal Skins and the Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries. In her examination of medieval bestiaries, Kay sketches a phenomenology of the parchment book, looking at the page itself, as well as what is written, drawn, or painted on it. She brings together post-humanism, the history of the book and skin studies, grounding her work in the notion that skin

16. K. Knapp, ‘Noble Creatures: Filial and Righteous Animals in Early Medieval Confucian Thought’, ibid., p. 65.
is both a surface of inscription and an envelope of identity. For Kay, the parchment page becomes the site at which human creativity and intellect finds expression, ‘a convergence … between livestock and literacy’.17

Kay’s overarching argument is that the skin of a bestiary provokes moments of recognition that suture the reader to the book, and by so doing temporarily suspend the constantly shifting distinctions between human and non-human. What she means by ‘suture’ is based on Slavoj Žižek’s idea in which the distinction between content and medium is momentarily suspended. Bestiaries are a particularly intriguing subject in this regard, with their focus on non-human animals, because it is the material form of bestiaries that creates a suture between content, reader and page; it is on the skin of an animal that ‘other animals are read as interpretable texts’.18

The six chapters are organised thematically and in pairs, complete with illustrations in both colour and black and white. The first two begin with skin as connecting nature with scripture, where the characteristics of animals are offered as a shortcut to sacred history. In Chapter Two, for example, Kay looks specifically at the snake and its skin which can be shed and renewed, thus modelling the idea of Christian rebirth. In one thirteenth-century manuscript, snakes are depicted as unpainted, similar to a nude man who occupies the same page. Standing out against framed rectangular backdrops of colour, the unpainted surface of the parchment creates a convergence between human skin, the skin of the snake and the skin of the page.

The connection between nakedness and animality is not only suggested by an unpainted surface, but also by the tears and holes in the parchment. The penetrability of skin is explored in the second pair of chapters, and specifically the idea of orifices, whether sexual (ch. 3) or inflicted wounds (ch. 4), and the discomfort this produces. The damage to the skin makes it all the more visible as skin, reminding the reader of his or her own vulnerability. Of particular interest in Chapter Four are instances in which animals have the capacity to injure humans. In the Second-Family Bestiary (the genre’s most frequently produced Latin version), men hunting animals are coupled with examples of animals that hunt other animals, including humans. The images continue to depict and reflect the vulnerability of skin, but now the skin that is injured is human. In one manuscript, the crocodile, like the snake in Chapter Two, remains unpainted, as is the naked man he is in the process of eating. Caught in a battle for survival, they are each other’s victim: as the crocodile opens his jaws to swallow the man, we notice the large knife the man has implanted in the crocodile’s back. Again, they share the same surface, the same skin. This sharing, as Kay says,
creates a ‘space of exception between the human prerogative to claim the lives and skins of other creatures, and the counterattack mounted by those creatures against the violence of this claim’.19 By turning the tables on humans and making them the prey, these animals call into question man’s privileged and safe position, thus destabilising formerly relied upon categories.

The final two chapters focus on recognising likeness and continuity between humans and other animals, and the implications this has for the reader. By repeatedly imagining how parchment as animal skin adds to, or interferes with, the reading process, Kay presents a work which explores how bestiaries problematise the images of similarity and difference that they are intended to depict. By returning the reader’s attention to the physical book, we are confronted with the presence of animals whose bodies not only made the book possible but also reflect our own fleshly natures. The page thus re-establishes and reinvigorates the connection between all creatures.

Species interaction playing out on the parchment page is also explored by Peggy McCracken. She centres the animal in her work, *In the Skin of the Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France*, by inviting us to think of the exercise of power and authority in the light of human–animal relationships. She discusses a range of literary texts and images composed between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries with a focus on vernacular bibles, biblical commentaries and fictional narratives. She argues that the persistent use of sovereignty in stories involving animals and figures of animality highlights issues of mastery and submission. Drawing on this idea and the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics, McCracken demonstrates that power dynamics are at work in relations around the physical, as well as the symbolic, subordination of the animal world.

What McCracken means by sovereignty involves the notion of lordship (*seigneurie* in Old French, *dominium* in Latin) and distributed power relations. Such relations are explored in each of her five chapters, defined in terms of exploitation, acquiescence, affection and protection. In Chapter One, she explores animal skins, their use as a technology, and their representation of human superiority, while also showing that animals may resist such use. The fourteenth-century *Conte du papegau* (Tale of the Parrot) and the twelfth-century poem *Le Roman des romans* (The Story of Stories) detail the killing and flaying of animals, which McCracken interprets as a display of human sovereignty that ‘reinstates human dominion over animals as well as over land and other human subjects’.20 In the Tale of the Parrot, the flayed skin of the Fish Knight,

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19. Ibid., p. 101. Kay is using Georgio Agamben’s idea of ‘space of exception’, meaning an area of ambiguity, in which animality is simultaneously included within the human and excluded. For more, see G. Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, tr. K. Attell (Stanford, CA, 2004).

20. P. McCracken, *In the Skin of the Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France* (Chicago, IL, 2017), p. 9.
a monstrous and threatening animal-like being, is justified because it serves human needs; a threat is eliminated and its physical remains (the skin) acts as a trophy for the knight. The poem, *Le Roman des romans*, on the other hand, imagines protests of animals for their treatment by humans. If the animals could speak, the poem tantalisingly suggests, they would resist the exploitation of their bodies for symbolic displays of human power and pride.

Chapter Two focuses on the contractual nature of sovereign relations as represented in Saints’ Lives and Marie de France’s fables. These texts describe dominion as an affective relationship in which animals as subjects consider, or even desire, human mastery. In the thirteenth-century *Life of Saint Modwenna* and a fourteenth-century miracle story about Saint Francis, wolves give up their wild natures for life under human care. To compensate them for their loss, the wolves are offered affection or a regular food source, which they accept. Such fantasies of social order, McCracken argues, use depictions of animals to conceptualise forms of governance that, similar to the arrangement arrived at by the wolves, are agreed upon based on mutual benefits.

A similar agreement between animals and humans can be seen in Chapter Three, which tackles the theme of sovereignty as protection. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘becoming animal’, McCracken is interested in ‘the space of indifferentiation between the animal and the human’ and specifically the use of animal skins and images in displays of identity. In Chrétien de Troye’s late twelfth-century *Chevalier au Lion* (Knight of the Lion), a lion vows to stay and protect the knight, Yvain, who has saved him from a fire-breathing serpent. Yvain then takes on the identity of his new companion animal, appropriating not only his name but (based on manuscript illuminations) his image, which was displayed on Yvain’s arms and armour. When the knight is called upon to protect a nobleman’s children, he does so by vanquishing a brutish giant who wears a bear skin. Unlike Yvain’s symbolic use of an animal as a sign of his lordly status, here the wearing of animal skin emphasises the giant’s animality and distance from courtly culture. Later Yvain defends the fountain of the Lady of Landuc, who makes him the master and guardian of her lands. The ability to protect is thus inexorably tied to the knight ‘becoming lion’, which not only produces but reinforces his superior position.

In Chapter Four, McCracken extends her investigation to the role of self-sovereignty and its underlying themes of choice and recognition. The goal of this chapter is to highlight the ways in which gender is used in medieval narratives to think about the relationship between autonomy, knowledge and power over others. Here McCracken focuses on tales of snake-women, demonstrating that sovereignty is gendered in encounters with these women because the recognition of their

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21. Ibid., p. 69.
hybridity presents the men who gaze upon them with knowledge of their condition and thus a claim to authority. Finally, in the last chapter, McCracken takes up representations of the wild man, arguing that the distinction between human culture and animal wildness is not as clear as might be supposed. In the thirteenth-century *Naissance du chevalier cygnet* (Birth of the Swan Knight) and the fourteenth-century *Tristan of Nanteuil*, a wild child reintegrates into human culture to restore his human identity while maintaining a connection to the animals who raised him. McCracken explores such human–animal kinship relations as questioning the very formation of human identity, leaving us to ponder whether humanity is an acquired act, rather than a natural one.

Writing animals into history is not without its challenges, yet the need for historians to include animals as meaningful and significant actors remains as critical as ever. As a field, Animal Studies has made enormous strides, while acknowledging that a more global perspective and a more diverse approach to social class is necessary. At the same time, a fundamental question remains: how to capture the nature and quality of relationships with animals—entities that move and change—based on the evidence before us? By emphasising that human cultures are interspecies systems, the five books reviewed here each seek new evidence or new ways of reading evidence to reveal how life was experienced and manifestly entwined with animals. The efforts of these works to centre the animal and decentre the human (and therein lies their strength) are key to re-evaluating the human–animal relationship and the way in which this is captured throughout history. As Animal Studies continues to grow and challenge the absence of the non-human from history, we can look forward to more works that look to interrogate moments in which animals contributed to, acted within or even resisted human narratives.

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