

The last two poems of the book are the dialogue poems. Both of these poems are self-referential. The first deals with the theme of the misfortune and the decline into poverty of the Marquess Lancia. The second is a dialogue between Blacatz and Peire and is about the futile wait for love's reward, for 'It is not love but obvious deception if today you request love and tomorrow you abandon it' (248).

Peire Vidal's songs and poems reveal the hopes, dreams and disappointments in both private and public life in the late twelfth century. Fraser's translation and commentary encapsulate the work and the times. This is a useful and highly accessible text for any students or specialists of medieval literature.

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Hartmann, Sieglinde (ed), *Fauna and Flora in the Middle Ages: Studies of the Medieval Environment and its impact on the Human Mind*

(Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2007) paperback; 323 pages; RRP €46.50; ISBN 9783631563021

Fauna and Flora in the Middle Ages promises, on its jacket, to 'present a multifaceted picture of environmental history and reveal a broad range of attitudes towards the natural world current in Western Europe during the Middle Ages'. In my opinion, it does not deliver. That is not to say that it is without interest for the medievalist, although the pickings are rather slimmer for the early medievalist. The editor, Sieglinde Hartmann, has drawn together papers delivered at the Leeds International Medieval Congress between 2000 and 2002, all of which have something to do with animals, plants or the landscape. This is about the limit of the book's cohesiveness.

Hence, we find an extremely technical and detailed seismological analysis of a thirteenth-century Swedish earthquake (Gabriele Schwarz-Anetti, D Fah, Ph Kastle, V Masciadri and R Schibler, 'The Churwalden (CH) Earthquake of September 1295') rubbing shoulders with a discussion of the theme of exile in a fable (Nigel Harris, 'Animals and Exile in the *Ecbasis cuiusdam captivi*'). While this latter has some slight connection to animals in that the main character of the fable is a calf, Harris is not interested in the 'calf-ness' of the character, merely in the human characteristics and behaviour it conveys. This is not a fault in the paper – it is a very good paper – but it might be grounds for suggesting that the paper does not belong in this collection. Harris's second paper ('The Camel in Medieval Literature: Perspectives and Meanings'), by contrast, does make some very interesting comments about human perceptions of and interactions with animals. He argues that the characteristics attributed to

camels underwent a shift after the first crusade, as the number of western Europeans who had actually seen a camel increased dramatically. For instance, camels had earlier been associated with humility, whereas they later came to be associated with anger, avarice and pride.

Albrecht Classon's 'The Dog in German Courtly Literature: The Mystical, the Magical, and the Loyal Animal' is, despite its title, about leashes, bells, inscriptions and courtly love, and only tangentially about pet dogs. Also to do with dogs, David Salter's "'A Dog's Life": The Experience of Exile in Middle English Romance' stretches the definition of medieval as well as conceding that 'in medieval romance, very little interest and attention is actually directed at the creatures' and 'their importance ... resides in what they tell us about the character and condition of the hero'; it devotes substantial space to Shakespeare in its discussion of the theme of exile.

The remaining 'fauna' papers are more rewarding. Malcolm H Jones contributes a marvellous account of his detective work in trying to account for a cat skin in a Hieronymus Bosch painting. In the process he passes on a great deal of useful information about the cat and its fur in medieval society, gleaned from obviously painstaking and inspired research. His second article, 'Saints and Other Horse-mutilators, or why all Englishmen have Tails' is of considerable interest to the early medievalist. His survey of references to mutilation of horses (cutting of tails and ears and so on), mostly early but continuing into late medieval, is again thorough, and related to what is known and surmised of early Indo-European horse beliefs. Umberto Albarella's paper on animals in exile presents an extensive and interesting array of evidence for imported animals in the medieval period, including some interesting archaeological evidence. I suspect that Marc-Andre Wagner's 'Le sacrifice du cheval chez les Germains: elements de comparaison avec les pratiques des Celtes' and Adelheid Krahn's 'Tiere in den langobardischen und suddeutschen *Leges*' may be amongst the more interesting of the papers, but being printed in French and German respectively they may be lost to many Anglophone readers.

Maria E Dorninger's assessment of the Alps as an environment in Middle High German epic is an interesting study of the literary use of landscape, while Aleks Pluskowski's interdisciplinary exploration of medieval hunting landscapes presents some very interesting material, although his argument, which was clearly more fully expounded in his PhD thesis, is difficult to follow. The remaining papers consist of a nice survey of 'Archaeological Evidence for the Use of Plants in the Medieval German Empire in Special Consideration of Gardens and the Possibilities of their Exploitation' by Marlu Kuhn, an account by Gerhard K Helmstaedter of

Artemisia as found in medieval botanical treatises, and two papers on gardens in literature and art.

This book features a minimalist editorial approach. Some of the English expression is poor, proofreading is sloppy, and there is not a consistent referencing system (some papers use in-text references, others footnotes). It is a disparate assortment of papers, and it is unfortunate that it holds itself out to be something which it is not. This may well be due to the increasing insistence by publishers that collections be ‘tightly themed’, overlooking the appeal of wide-ranging scholarship to a discerning audience.

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Olson, Lynette, *The Early Middle Ages: The Birth of Europe*

(Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) paperback; 304 pages; RRP \$57.00; ISBN 1403942099

As the subtitle suggests, this book sets out to challenge historical conventions surrounding the ‘early Middle Ages’. Instead of accepting that the period c450-c1050 is an ‘insignificant interval between the glories of Graeco-Roman civilisation and the Renaissance’, Lynette Olson convincingly argues that these centuries significantly contributed to the formation of European civilisation as we know it today. One of the most impressive aspects of this book is that this sophisticated subject matter has been carefully crafted in order to make the work approachable for students and scholars of all levels.

We see evidence of this crafting in each section of this book. For example, the introduction clearly delineates the study’s agendas, and the threads of these underlying arguments are repeatedly taken up and interlaced throughout the book’s seven chapters. Readers are immediately made aware that Christianity and the church were important in this period; but Dr Olson makes it quite clear that the waxing and waning of the church’s power within the fledgling European nation states does not preclude a preoccupation with more secular concerns; nor does it overshadow the impact that other faiths, such as Islam, had on shaping ‘the birth of Europe’. The author admits that the book is also concerned with drawing attention to the female half of the population. Accordingly, case studies, primary sources, and a plethora of useful illustrations are all skilfully employed in order to remind readers that women were frequently great motivators of change, and that ‘they actually had *relatively* better access to wealth and power than women in the better organised periods before and after’ the centuries covered in this study.