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Jacqueline A. Stuhmiller (ed.): *Animal Husbandry*

The book consists of four parts, the first beginning with broader overviews, followed by a section in which specific literary and legal cases are discussed. The third section reflects on literary examples of a woman allegedly having married an animal. Whether that is true or a valid approach, I'll discuss below. Finally, in section four, we learn about bestiality in medieval art and in the case of the anonymous alliterative romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Joyce E. Salisbury sums up what the various authors have presented and confirms that the fear or even horror of bestiality is still with us today. The book concludes with a bibliography and an index.

Marian E. Polhill begins with a review of what ancient and medieval authors from Aristotle to Augustine, Isidore of Seville, and Albertus Magnus had to say about bestiality, relying heavily on the seminal study by Salisbury from 1991 (*Sex in the Middle Ages*). She examines the philosophical and theological discourse regarding bestiality, monstrous births, and hybrid births, all of which actually continued strongly in the early modern age, but that is beyond the limits of her study. Polhill also includes to her credit the testimony of major Arabic writers.

Bailey Flannery examines the evidence of folklore and folk tales as collected by Angela Carter, although there are many other valuable anthologies available to serve the purpose of examining bestiality. The original story reflecting the sexual relationship between a human and an animal can accordingly be found in *Genesis*, where the snake seduces Eve, though there are no clear indications of any sexual intimations.

In the second section, Katherine Leach offers a fascinating reading of the Middle Welsh *Mabinogion*, its Fourth Branch, where there are, indeed, several cases of bestiality (or is it rather shapeshifting) which threatens to undermine social cohesion and the stability of the human community, such as in "Math, Son of Mathonwy" because of sexual violence and the subsequent transformation of the culprits into animals. Whether this would really fall into the category of bestiality, might be somewhat questionable, especially when it concerns the appearance of a werewolf, which raises many interesting questions.

The most solid contribution to this volume would be the study by Tess Wingard, who outlines what we know about legal approaches to the charge of bestiality during the Middle Ages, a study that certainly should have been placed at the beginning of this volume. We learn, for instance, that the issue of bestiality was often raised during times of social and religious unrest. However, the sin of bestiality was regarded as such a horrible case that any sinner guilty of it had to be taken to the bishop who was the only one entitled to hear the confession and impose the respective penance.

Crystal N. Beamer introduces the little studied Middle English romance *Cheuelere Assigne* where the charge of bestiality is falsely raised against the female protagonist, who had initially claimed that a woman who delivers twins must have had carnal knowledge with two men. This finds an interesting parallel in Marie de France's *lai* "Le Fresne" and in other European verse narratives, and the entire theme, an archetype, of *Cheuelere Assigne* later became the source of modern fairy tales. It would have been valuable also to consider the Middle High German *Mai und Beafloer* or the pan-European *Manekine* in this context, all of them predicated on the topoi of the calumniated wife and the delivery of twins. The tradition of *Melusine*, however, as Beamer claims, does not fit well in this context, especially because the motif of the evil stepmother is missing here. The situation is much more complex at any rate because Melusine demonstrates being a good Christian, so her hidden monstrosity does not mean that Reymund's marriage with her amounts to bestiality. Beamer then goes one step further and introduces two early seventeenth-century legal cases involving the charge of

bestiality against a woman, trying quite successfully to correlate the literary framework with legal and historical reality, and in that process, the charge of bestiality involving women's orifices and speech. There is a bit of repetition and too much paraphrase, but the issue itself addressed by the poet proves to be of universal concern, which could have been examined more in comparative terms.

In the following section, Larissa Tracy takes on Marie de France's "Bisclavret" and examines the wife's decision to destroy her husband once she knows his secret of being a werewolf. Although she draws on a wide range of relevant studies, the essential components are not fully picked up: miscommunication in marriage, fear of the other, and weakness of the woman's character (but also of the husband). I find it very difficult to recognize here examples of bestiality because the wife does not consider her husband a beast as such and only feels horrified about his transformation into a werewolf once a week for three days. Both persons prove to be failures as marriage partners, yet only Bisclavret is redeemed at the end as if he did not carry any guilt. Bestiality, however, could not really be referred to here, and Tracy's argument that Bisclavret enjoys his status as a werewolf is rather doubtful (147). Similarly, it seems wrong to blame the wife for having committed adultery because she marries the other knight only after her husband has disappeared for good. Moreover, whether Bisclavret is comfortable with his wolfish body, as Tracy claims, cannot be confirmed at all (156), if the opposite might not rather be the case because he is very angry about being stuck in the beastly shape and very happy to regain his human appearance. We can agree with her, however, that Bisclavret only changes his physical appearance, but not his human mind, which makes it possible for him to return to humanity later on once his clothes have been provided for him again. The effort to identify here a form of bestiality seems to be, as I believe, basically speculative and imaginary.

Andrea Schutz attempts to read bestiality into a rather mysterious poem in the *Exeter Book* called "Wulf, min Wulf," positioned between "Dēor" and the Riddles and consisting of just nineteen lines. She makes an extensive effort to analyze and explain it, going down to the minutest syntactical elements, also probing the role of the wolf in early medieval society. Whether we face here a case of hidden bestiality, however, remains rather difficult to fathom, especially because Schutz raises more questions than providing answers about the relationship between the female speaking voice and the wolf. Is there a werewolf involved, as she suggests? In heroic poetry, the name of 'Wolf' appears quite often, without any indications that the person addressed might be a wolf-man.

In the fourth section, Anna Russakoff offers a sweeping overview of medieval art where we find examples of human and animal hybridity or close associations between people and an animal. Whether the image of the unicorn holding its head pressed against the Virgin's womb might be an indication of bestiality seems a bit of an overinterpretation (see also the book cover, which reveals a remarkable misunderstanding of the motif in religious terms), and as Russakoff herself admits, the evidence in the marginal glosses as to bestiality might be debatable, whether in Christian or Muslim manuscripts, many of which are nicely reproduced here. Interspecies sex was not presented, I believe, so the entire question might have to be viewed quite differently especially because the Church condemned bestiality so vehemently. Here we are reminded once again of the *Melusine* tradition, but the author does not offer any adequate analysis of those texts. Russakoff also refers to the *Roman de Fauvel* where a horse rises to the level of a king, which is not really a case of bestiality. The playful transformation of a mouse into a girl, as originally presented in *Kalila wa Dimna* and popularized in late medieval Western literature, falls into the same category. I am rather hesitant to follow the arguments developed here because I think they are the result of overinterpretation and the author's 'wishful fantasies.' Nevertheless, the material assembled in this article is impressive, and so the attempt to draw meaningful connections with bestiality.

Finally, the editor herself tries to offer a new interpretation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a camouflaged narrative revealing tendencies toward bestiality, especially when the

hunted prey that Bertilak hands over to his guest is identified as symbols of his bestial desires. Decapitation is correlated with castration (233), and the seduction scene in the bedroom, of which the husband knows only too well, is described as a drag show (234). Stuhmiller perceives here a case of medieval pornography (235) and goes on from there delving into ever more astounding imaginations that have very little to do with the original text. Two quotes will be enough to reveal the absurdity of this essay: "Fitt III also invokes and encourages the more exotic pleasures of voyeurism or scopophilia; sexual fantasies and erotic role-play; age play or perhaps pederasty; incest; masturbation; sexual violence and raptophilia; and BDSM. Other varieties of kink that are prominent elsewhere in the text are gender-bending, cross-dressing (transvestitism), transsexualism, body and phallus worship, and macrophilia and teratophilia (attraction to giants and to the monstrous, respectively)" (236). Another entertaining example of fantasy gone wild would be: "This ritual parceling-out of meat looks a lot like a sylvan gang rape" (241). Reading the kisses that Gawain gives Bertilak as expression of "zooeroticism" (242) sadly indicates that this author, as a medievalist, knows very little of the Middle Ages and is stuck in postmodern illusions about the medieval past.

In light of this sad collapse of serious scholarship, it might make sense why the frontispiece of this book shows a woman naked from the hips down tickling her genitalia from behind with a feather, a photograph by Ralph Gibson (1974), titled "Leda." While Stuhmiller's introduction impressed me in many ways, solidly building the rationale to explore bestiality in the past, her own article is, basically, not acceptable as serious scholarship. Alas, when Salisbury at the end emphasizes that bestiality "appeared regularly in sources from literature to law" (256), we find ourselves once again on very thin ice. I believe that the overarching problem in the entire volume consists of the erroneous assumption that shapeshifting signals a hidden form of bestiality. One would have to be much more meticulous and attentive to details when one makes such claims. As is nowadays often the case, the editor put together a very narrow selection of studies, which leave out entirely the Iberian Peninsula, the Holy Roman Empire, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe. But even the probably most telling evidence about bestiality by Geraldus of Wales is not engaged with. [1]

Nevertheless, the length of my review also indicates that the volume proves to be intriguing and inspiring, provocative and challenging. The authors have all made serious though not always successful efforts to enter into deeply probing discussions of a wide range of materials and to bring to the table both literary and historical, both theological and philosophical texts, not to forget legal documents. But there is just too much superficial reading, speculation, and imagination. It is shocking to realize that this respectable publisher, Brill, accepted the volume in its current form and did not realize the numerous problems that begin to compile increasingly in the second half.

Note :

[1] See, however, my article which had originally been scheduled to be part of this volume but fortunately was not accepted, A. Classen: Bestiality in the West: Geraldus of Wales's Sexual Fantasies about the Irish Borderlands: A Medieval Colonialist's Worldview, in: *Global Journal of Cultural Studies* 3 (2024), 42-52.