

PETS IN THE MIDDLE AGES:  
EVIDENCE FROM ENCYCLOPEDIAS AND DICTIONARIES

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When trying to gather reliable information about animals as pets in the Middle Ages, modern scholars immediately come up against a major cultural barrier. As Klaus Weimann points out in his preface to the volume *Middle English Animal Literature*, medieval people “lived ... in close contact with several species of animals both wild and domestic,” but because they believed in a hierarchical scheme of existence with animals on a parallel plane below humans, they tended to think about animals as if they were a counterpart to human society (vii). Thus they wrote about them most often in ways meant to instruct, describing them in bestiaries, fables, or tales like the *Roman de Renart* with a moralizing intent, rather than conveying information as if they had interest in the animals themselves.<sup>1</sup> While we are able to find images in art and references in hagiography and narrative literature to many animals who lived in close proximity with their owners and whose relations with humans suggest that they had special status,<sup>2</sup> the examples tend towards the exceptional or even the symbolic, so that we are never sure that we are seeing a dependable representation of how people in general thought about animals that we, today, consider to be “pets.” Indeed, the lack of a word for pets, which extended well into the modern period, suggests that we may be taking for granted a lexical domain that did not exist, as such, in the Middle Ages. Thus, it is instructive to see what we can find out from looking directly at early dictionaries, word histories, and medieval encyclopedic works, where animals are discussed in ways that might more closely suggest their roles in relation to human society in the High to Late Middle Ages.

Modern etymological dictionaries document the word “pet” as being a rather late entry into English. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word is first recorded around 1539 as referring to a lamb reared by hand.<sup>3</sup> This word probably came from Scots or a northern English dialect with the pastoral sense as its primary meaning, though it is documented in the sense of “indulged child” (1568) near the same period. Johnson’s *Dictionary* clarifies that the lamb was “taken into the home,” and most etymologies speculate that the word was associated

with or influenced by “petty/petit,”<sup>4</sup> so one might imagine a connotation having to do with a diminutive member of the family. The sense of “pet” as a verb meaning “to stroke” is not found until 1818 (*OED*), ultimately associating the modern English word with a kind of physical attachment that is still not suggested by the French *animal domestique*, which includes domesticated animals such as cows, or *animal familier*, which can refer to an animal that is “common” or “familiar” as well as a pet. The modern German *Haustier* comes a bit closer, suggesting an animal that lives indoors, as does the French *animal de compagnie*, which emphasizes the role of companionship.<sup>5</sup> But none of these ideas of a “pet” as a separate class of animal is clearly distinguished by language in the Middle Ages.

Kathleen Walker-Meikle acknowledges this lexicographic difficulty in her recent book *Medieval Pets*, where she creates a working definition for the subject of her research by combining a modern meaning from the *Oxford English Dictionary*—“an animal (typically one which is domestic or tame) kept for pleasure or companionship”—with three additional stipulations suggested by Keith Thomas in *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800*. As Walker-Meikle points out, Thomas’s criteria, that the animal “was kept indoors, was not eaten, and was given a name,” may “also be applied to the medieval pet” (Walker-Meikle 2), a strategy that allows her to limit her topic primarily to the small dogs, cats, and other cosseted animals that were kept mainly by women, clerics, and certain aristocrats seeking to display wealth and power. But the ability of the modern scholar to draw these lines for purposes of research does not necessarily mean that animals meeting these criteria were perceived as constituting a single, functional category during the Middle Ages. Although, as Walker-Meikle argues, the existence of specific terms for the small indoor dog often kept by medieval ladies (OF *chienet*, MG *hündchen*) reinforces the idea that a distinction was maintained between dogs that worked and those that did not, the many depictions of greyhounds in medieval halls and bedrooms gives evidence of their acceptance as beloved members of the household,<sup>6</sup> with no sense that they were somehow conceptualized differently in their role as canine companions because of their utility and their association with men of noble status.

How, then, did people in the High and Late Middle Ages categorize the relationships between people and animals? Although the religious and literary sources already mentioned offer some insight into medieval perceptions of each animal’s inherent behavioral traits, we are more

likely to find an objective discussion of common beliefs and practices in the works of medieval encyclopedists, who, though they often simply repeated what had been said by their authoritative predecessors, began by the thirteenth century to include information gleaned from what we would now consider to be personal or scientific observation. In particular, the commentaries of Albertus Magnus (c. 1200-80) on Aristotle's treatises on natural history in *De Animalibus* reflect the views of a man who, according to James J. Scanlan, "began to observe the habits of animals during childhood and continued this pursuit during a busy adult career" (12), having, through his family's feudal connections, probably had "free access to the royal falconers . . . and imperial menagerie . . . of Emperor Frederick III" (6). Although the information offered by Vincent of Beauvais (c. 1190-1264), Thomas of Cantimpré (c. 1201-72), and Bartholomaeus Anglicus ("Bartholomew of England," c. 1203-72) "displayed little evidence of personal investigation" (Scanlan 20), their tendency to avoid the heavier moralizing of the bestiaries and the immensely influential *Physiologus* (first written down near the end of the fourth century) suggests that they, like Albertus, were moving in the direction of a more objective representation of what they and their contemporaries perceived as reality.<sup>7</sup>

In looking at encyclopedic works such as Albertus Magnus's thirteenth-century *De animalibus* or John of Trevisa's fourteenth-century *On the Properties of Things* (a translation of the thirteenth-century *De proprietatibus rerum* by Bartholomaeus Anglicus), one soon finds, however, that the broad lines of organization are not helpful in distinguishing clear functional categories. The mammals and birds that we consider today to have special status—dogs, cats, and perhaps horses or parrots—are listed alphabetically alongside all the other species (mammalian or avian) and receive the same methodical treatment, in the sense that the types of information provided and the order of presentation do not vary much. In Albertus, for example, each animal is characterized by the features that distinguish it from other animals, as in "*cervus* (deer) . . . a well known animal whose antlers continue to produce new points until it reaches the age of six years."<sup>8</sup> Frequently, the distinguishing feature is emphasized through a supposed etymological connection, as in *cathus* (cat), which is said (incorrectly) to derive its name from "*capiendo* (seizing)" since the main feature of the cat is its "animosity toward mice" (22:41). In expanding on the initial description, Albertus often repeats anecdotes, provides details on the particulars of mating, or speculates on certain natural features of the animal. Again, in the passage

about the cat, he says the “usual color of its fur is grey like deeply frozen ice” but he points out that certain varieties, “especially the domestic cat” may “display a wide profusion of colors due to variations in their diet.” The standard information also includes the value of the animal for fur, skins, meat, or medicinal uses. Surprisingly (at least for modern readers), the entry on the cat, which pet-lovers would expect to reflect some level of privilege, ends after a passage of only about 200 words, many of which are dedicated to discussing the medicinal value of cat bile.

Equally at odds with modern organizational expectations is the fact that the cat appears twice in the catalogue, with a second entry under the name *musio*, meaning “mouser” (22:121). This time it is defined as “the household animal some call the mouse-catcher,” and it is characterized by the fact that its eyes “glow like [coals] in the night,” that it likes to keep clean by washing its face, and that it attacks its natural enemies with great shrewdness. Under this name, the description includes more information about those cats that might be classified as fully domesticated: Albertus comments that this cat “enjoys gentle strokes of human hands,” plays with its image in a mirror, “suffers unduly from being soaked in water,” and likes being “snug.” By clipping the mouser’s ears, he says it “can be made to stay indoors more easily” since it does not like night dew in its ears. Likewise, if its whiskers are trimmed, it “loses its audacity.” The implication seems to be that the mouser, despite its place in the household, is inclined to want to wander, but it can be made to stay inside and do its job—not out of any sense of affection or obligation, but in response to the owner’s knowledge of certain controlling techniques.

In contrast to entries on cats, encyclopedic discussions of the dog, though still inserted alphabetically and following the standard pattern of organization, are many times longer and cover numerous topics in great detail, and it is here that we begin to see some sense that the dog is to be treated differently from most other species. A typical entry divides breeds of dogs into at least three categories: according to Vincent de Beauvais these include the noble sight hounds, of which the greyhound is the main example; scent hounds, which would include the ancestors of modern foxhounds, bloodhounds, setters, and spaniels; and guard dogs, including large mastiffs and nondescript medium-sized mongrels, but also the *caniculi*—“small dogs which noble matrons carry in their bosoms” (18.10). This categorizing of dogs according to the specialized purposes they serve in relation to human needs is similar to the encyclopedias’ typical division of horses into chargers, palfreys, race horses, and plow

horses, and the parallels between dogs and horses are likewise carried out in the encyclopedias' long treatments of information about breeding, feeding, training, illnesses, and veterinary cures. Unlike the comment on the color of cats, references in Albertus to the breeding of dogs are specific and scientific: "Dogs are bred from parents of differing characteristics and consequently display a wide variety of forms" (22:27). Noting that "the dog performs so many tasks beneficial to mankind," the author launches into an entry of several thousand words expanding "upon the art of raising and feeding thoroughbreds and treating them when they take sick."

This expansion and sub-classification of the standard types of information, with an emphasis on practical concerns, does not, in itself, prove that medieval people had a special category of what we might call "elite animals." However, one can, by extrapolation, make certain corroborating observations. While the entries on cats are uniformly short and sometimes, as in Albertus, oddly inaccurate as to features such as variations in color, those on the dog and the horse go on in meticulous detail for many pages, exceeding even the entries for animals like sheep and oxen, whose breeding and health were clearly of great importance to the economy. Furthermore, as both the encyclopedias and the iconography of the period confirm, the service performed by dogs and horses seems to put them into a separate category based upon their close association with the needs of the aristocracy, who hunted and traveled more frequently than the rest of society and, as is often mentioned in the case of the dog, could afford to share food from their tables.<sup>9</sup> Cotgrave's *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (1611), for example, describes a "soupe de levrier" made of coarse brown bread moistened with the "last and worst" fat of the beef pot, and Froissart, in his *Debat dou Cheval et dou Levrier*, even suggests that the greyhound can expect to be rewarded by his traveling master with any "bon morsel" of table scraps that might be available,<sup>10</sup> a privilege not often extended to other animals. Thus, while general usefulness is an important measure of an animal's value, a sense of common purpose and even empathy seems also to be at work in separating those that were of special interest from those that were not. Likewise, while many other animals besides dogs are mentioned in the encyclopedias as having been kept for non-utilitarian reasons, the reasons that they were kept did not necessarily reflect a similar sense of how their various natures and behaviors resonated with the interests of their keepers.

In Albertus, some of the shorter entries referring to such “non-utilitarian” animals kept in the home seem to parallel the modern desire to fulfill aesthetic impulses or satisfy curiosity. The paragraph on the *merula* or blackbird (23:128) suggests considerable effort and possibly expense being devoted to fulfilling the desire to hear birdsong. The entry says that when kept indoors in cages, blackbirds tend to maintain “their ariose song” throughout the entire year, due to the affluence of their daily living, for in human domiciles they feed on meats, in contrast to their natural diet, and the addition of meat seems to encourage their willingness to sing. In contrast, the *carduelis* or finch (23:41) seems to be kept both for its song and for visual pleasure. The author makes a point of saying that they are easily-captured, “dull-witted birds,” and he comments, apparently with some surprise, that when confined to a cage, a finch will grasp a beaker of horn suspended from the top and drink from it, but afterwards will let the beaker fall. This remark reveals some disdain for the bird, which lacks even the most basic foresight or reason. Indeed, we may get our best sense of the limitations on empathy for caged birds by the reference to the training of the ring-necked parakeet (*psytacus*, 23:138), which is said to have a talent for forming the sounds of articulate speech. Albertus says the parakeet is fond of speaking to children and more easily taught by having it listen to children. But its ability to imitate human sound does not cause those who train it to imagine that it has anything like a human experience of suffering. Rather, because it is said to have a hard head, it is “common practice” to reinforce learning by striking it on the head with a “tiny iron rod,” a practice that would certainly strike most modern readers as alien to the contemporary concept of the “pet.”

If the pleasure and entertainment derived from keeping songbirds does not generate a level of empathy and esteem that we would associate with the experience of the modern house pet, neither does another feature often mentioned in the encyclopedias, the quality of playfulness. As defined in one modern dictionary,<sup>11</sup> a pet is “a domesticated animal kept to fondle and play with,” so we may surmise that the element of play is an expectation for almost any potential modern pet except, perhaps, for reptiles and fish, though even these may exhibit entertaining responses to handling or food. From the medieval encyclopedias, we can see that people of earlier centuries were also fascinated by the idea of playfulness or entertaining performance, but these characteristics do not figure heavily into their level of respect for the animal, and often seem to be associated with danger. In Albertus, for example, the badger is mentioned

as being “a very playful creature” when “tamed,” but it also has a “great proclivity for biting” (*daxus* 22:49).<sup>12</sup> Medieval families apparently did not try to tame ferrets, which, far from being playful, are described as “wild and fearless” with “inborn wrath” and bloodthirstiness (*furo* 22:101). But they did attempt to train the otter. Unfortunately, according to Albertus, the fact that the domesticated otter was “a very playful animal” was offset by the fact that it was “given to nipping with its sharp teeth” (*luter* 22:118).<sup>13</sup>

It is perhaps worth noting that the motive for attempting to domesticate the otter was that it could be taught to drive fish into nets, and this impulse towards finding the usefulness of animals, rather than indulging in a direct pursuit of amusement, may have frequently been the source of information about whether they were playful or not. Indeed, comments on playfulness extend to animals that would never have been kept in the home. About the bear, Albertus says that it can be taught to turn horizontal wheels, draw water from a well, or lift rocks to the top of wall, but on the subject of play, the analysis is un-sentimental: “Suffice it to say, captive bears can sometimes be tamed and trained to become playful animals, but they are easily provoked to the point of venting uncontrollable rage and killing humans” (*ursus* 22:145). About the *symia* or ape, the warning is dire, for, he says, “however thoroughly it may be tamed, it remains a savage beast” (22:136). While one might be attracted to it by its apparent resemblance to humans, he says it imitates mischievous rather than good behavior. The ape will cavort in a playful manner with children, but when not closely watched it will “strangle them and hurl their bodies from high places.” Also, the passage points out that the ape “bears a grudge for a long time”—a behavior that points to what might be seen as a similarity to humans, but does nothing to raise it in the encyclopedist’s esteem.

Given modern experience and legal regulations regarding “exotic animals,”<sup>14</sup> it should not surprise us that most of the animals listed in this way are not recommended as good companions. But the case of the cat is particularly interesting, because, even though it is both useful and playful, it never achieves morally positive commentary. In Book IV of *The Natures of Things*, Thomas of Cantimpré says that the cat or *murilego*

gets its name from the Greek meaning *astute* because it sees as astutely in the darkest caverns or tunnels as it sees by day.... It is a dirty animal and odious.... It pursues mice and others of

their kind whom capturing, it first plays with and then chews up.... They delight in praise and attention, and enjoy warm places whence out of extreme laziness they often burn their fur... They delight in the stroking of man's hand which pleasure they express in a kind of singing... They yield to lust very quickly.

The sudden back and forth movement between positive and negative characteristics implies a kind of untrustworthiness of character that apparently makes the cat ineligible for inclusion in the most elevated category of animals. Indeed, when the cat is alluded to in literature, it is often to underline someone's predatory nature, or, as in Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale*, as an example of people who are "untrue":

Lat take a cat, and foster hym wel with milk  
 And tender flesh, and make his couche of silk,  
 And lat him seen a mous go by the wal,  
 Anon he weyveth milk and flesh and al,  
 And every deyntee that is in that hous,  
 Swich appetit hath he to ete a mous. (175-80)

The feline's independence and desire to satisfy its own appetites is, apparently, the disqualifying factor in any consideration of the cat for true companion status. Such disregard for the interests of house and master are in direct contrast to the dog, a creature that Albertus introduces first with the phrase "an animal known to most people" and then immediately characterizes as "a faithful animal whose love for humans sometimes prompts it to lay down its life for the sake of its master" (22.27). He notes that "upon the death of its owner a dog often hovers around the corpse, refusing to leave the deceased patron." And the issue of the close proximity with humans is broached almost immediately, as Albertus notes that "a mongrel, which is the type of dog usually given the duty of guarding the household, will lie on the floor near the table at mealtimes, keeping one alert eye on the door and the other on its master's hand, hoping for table-scraps from his owner's largess." Indeed, in *On the Properties of Things* ("De cane"), Trevisa explains that the dog has "more witte than othere bestes." Dogs

knoweþ here owene names. And loveþ here lords and defendeþ þe  
 houses of here lords; and putteþ hem willfulliche in peril of deþ



for here lords; and renneþ to take pray wiþ here lords; and forsakeþ nought þe dede body of here lordes. . . . And loveþ company of men and mowe nouzt be wiþouten men, as Isidorus seiþ. (1164.35)

As Gervase of Tilbury (1150-ca. 1228) had earlier explained in his discussion of the spirit in *Otia Imperialia* (*Recreation for an Emperor*):

And it is due to this spirit that some animals are intelligent and loyal, such as dogs, the only beasts which by a natural instinct respond willingly when they are urged to perform a task for which they have been trained; disciplined by the mere expectation of a punishment they fear, through a certain innate principle of obedience, they can be held in check until by a nod or a sign they are given leave to act. They have, too, *special capacities which bring them as close to rational creatures as they set them above the other beasts, namely their ability to distinguish, to love, and to serve*. For they distinguish between their masters and strangers, and while they do not hate those whom they attack, those whom they love they serve zealously; and loving their master and their home, they do not guard them merely out of a natural physical aptitude, but they watch over them out of the solicitous love they feel for them. [My emphasis; p. 61]

The sentence referring to “special capacities” is perhaps the most important here, since these capacities establish a continuum placing dogs “as close to rational creatures” (humans) as they “set them above other beasts”—that is to say, in a precise middle point that maintains the special status of rationality for people but allows dogs a capacity for love, a word that is repeated four times and seems to signal, in conjunction with rationality, a second basic mark of the human soul. Although love by itself might be dismissed as mere emotion, its placement between the ability to “distinguish” (that is, to recognize differences between people<sup>15</sup>) and to “serve” (to follow a course of action based on having distinguished and loved), suggests a very complex mind indeed.<sup>16</sup>

None of this analysis would be very surprising to a modern dog-lover, but what is perhaps more unexpected is that for medieval thinkers, much of the special status of the dog is shared—exclusively—with the horse. According to Albertus, war horses

are noted for the affection they display for their masters and squires, such that, having lost them, they will refuse food and grieve to the point of death. Sometimes they shed tears in their grief... (*Equus* 22:53)

Trevisa's text says the horse has strong emotions, being "ioiefil in feeldes" and "comforted wiþ noyse of a trompe"; he can be "excyted" to run by the sound of a familiar voice. Furthermore, he is "sory" when beaten in battle and "gladde" when victorious. Some know their "owne lord alone" and forget "myldenesse" if their lord is overcome. It is not unusual for a horse to allow no other man to ride on his back but his "owne lord alone" and "many hors wepeþ whan his lord is deed." And finally, "it is yseyde þat hors wepeþ for sorwe right as a man doþ," and so "þe kynde" of horses and men are combined as centaurs (II.1186-87). Further emphasizing the capacity for emotion, he claims that mares' love for their colts is greater than the love of other animals for their offspring (II.1189).

We would not, of course, usually classify working horses—and particularly medieval horses—as pets, but the point here again is that we can be misled by trying to think according to modern categories. The horse, like the dog, is a worthy companion animal whose loyal nature—and particularly the ability to base loyalty upon human-like emotion—sets him apart from the rest of the animals. Voyagers often traveled great distances with dogs and horses, both in large parties or as individuals,<sup>17</sup> and both horses and dogs were often housed in very close proximity to humans, whose lives depended on the quality of the animal who would carry them into battle, help them locate or pursue game, warn them of danger, and—in moments of distress—show empathy for their suffering. This final and distinctive characteristic was crucial, in the context of a culture that speculated much more than we on the nature of the soul and insisted on the distinctive theological status of human beings. With a choice of words that might strike the modern ear as quite surprising, the translator John of Trevisa labels the category that emerges from this kind of analysis with a quote from Pliny, who says that "among bestes that woneth with us houndes and horses beth most *gracious*" (my emphasis, 1164.35). Besides confirming the concept of a category of those animals who "dwell with us," this statement—and the word *gracious* in particular—establishes a much narrower and more elite category of animals who, at the very least, are *gracious* in the sense of having especially "pleasing qualities" (*OED*)<sup>18</sup> but, given the examples of self-

sacrifice and emotional connection already cited, are also likely to fall within the definition that includes the exhibition of “kindness or courtesy” or the ability to be “kindly” and “benevolent.”<sup>19</sup> If we follow Cotgrave’s synonyms (since the word was borrowed from Old French), we may conclude that these animals could have the ability to be “courteous, affable, respective, debonair; gentle, benign, favourable”—or even “full of humanity” (Cotgrave, *gratieux*). Unlike the cat, who fails to understand the “courteous” obligations of loyalty and service that come with accepting food and affection, the dog and the horse exhibit the obligatory reciprocity that was still highly valued as a remnant of feudal values in late medieval society.

It is worth emphasizing at this point that, while these characteristics can be recognized as feudal or, more generally, noble, it is an error to separate out only those dogs and horses who serve the aristocracy from others of their kind since, as shown earlier, the encyclopedists distinguish between types of dogs and horses in their statements on use, but usually not in their appraisals of character and emotion. By the same token, it would be a mistake to assume that the special nature of the dog and horse arises simply from their association with noble activities. In his lengthy description of falcons, Albertus Magnus—an expert himself on falconry—refers often to the “nobility” of the aristocratic hunting hawk, but he also makes it clear that the falcon acts in its own interest: it can be recalled “with a ‘halloo’” like a dog, but requires a lure in the shape of a decoy; it will show “fidelity” to its owners, but only when “amply nourished and well trained”; and it “enters quite willingly into the spirit of the chase” but does so “as if it gloried in displaying its powers to the spectators” (23:50). Training methods “mimic the feeding patterns of the wild state” (23:70), and manuals include a recipe of “celeriac, black mint, and parsley” in cooked meat, which is given to the bird to discourage it from flying away (23:88). He cautions falconers to avoid being injured by “breath, bite, or claws” (23:102), a type of warning never affixed to discussions of the training of other “noble” animals.

One additional distinction between the falcon and the dogs and horses with which it might be compared is the fact that it is an animal that was captured, rather than bred, for use by humans. Albertus claims that falcons are “best if allowed to mature in their own nest” (23:74) so that natural instincts have a chance to develop fully. Likewise, he discusses the wild bird’s increased effectiveness when hunting with “one or more partners” and the necessity of hooding the falcon until the prey is visible to control its “wanton urge to attack any quarry” (23:49). In every

case, the training process seems calculated to allow the bird to follow its nature (especially its pleasure in the hunt) in a way that will benefit its handler, without any expectation that the bird will *choose* to act on behalf of the person simply because of a feeling of loyalty. Medieval thinkers lacked the modern scientific perspective that would allow them to think in terms of the thousands of years of selective breeding and artificial selection that could lead dogs and horses to a point where their desire to respond to human will has become a part of their nature.<sup>20</sup> But the term *gracious* is one indication that, like us, medieval people did recognize the uncanny sensitivity of dogs and horses to human needs, and they associated this characteristic more closely with the behavior of these two animals than with the cat or any other potential non-human companion.<sup>21</sup>

That this category of the gracious animal is both exclusive and natural may be reinforced by a fable that has Aesop as its source but is repeated in several medieval versions.<sup>22</sup> In the Fable of the Dog and the Ass, as retold in the Caxton edition (Lenaghan 85f.), the narrator describes a little hound whose lord loved him greatly, and “the lytyll dogge lyked and chered and lepte upon his gowne.” When the ass sees the dog being stroked and eating meat from the table, he decides to imitate the dog’s “disporte” and “Ioye”, so the next time the master comes home, “the asse beganne thenne to daunse and to make feest and songe with his swete voys” and “lepte upon his sholders and beganne to kysse and to lykke hym.” The ass, as one might anticipate, ends up getting beaten for his efforts and learns not to try to “doo a thyng whiche as for hym impossible is to be done.” The lesson seems to be that every being has been created with its own set of behaviors and characteristics, appropriate to its place in the world. While the fable may be intended to remind people that they must live within the constraints of their own birth, its moral presupposes a larger sense of natural order and a belief that the world is organized into categories that are both unchangeable and necessary to those who would live a reasonable life. Like humans, animals have very particular natures, and the animals’ innate characteristics define their proper relationship with humankind.

In the medieval mind, then, humans do not choose animals to be “pets,” but instead respond, and give due respect, to the innate nature of the superior beast. Dogs and horses share in some qualities of human moral and emotional behavior, and because of that, they are not merely pets, but valued companions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a recent discussion of the treatment of animals in bestiaries and hagiography, see Susan Crane, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain*. In Crane's discussion of the life of Cuthbert, she argues convincingly that, unlike the hierarchy implied in most medieval literature, "Irish hagiography's hierarchy of species looks less than vertical," in that it presents "a natural world so continuous with human society" (39). It is unlikely that one set of attitudes towards animals was universal throughout medieval Europe, just as attitudes and definitions today are not necessarily consistent across cultures and ethnicities. For a discussion of the range of attitudes towards dogs in the modern world, see James Serpell, ed., *The Domestic Dog: Its Evolution, Behaviour, and Interactions with People*, 246-53.

<sup>2</sup> For a useful collection of manuscript images of dogs, see Kathleen Walker-Meikle's *Medieval Dogs*. For a similar treatment of cats, see her *Medieval Cats*.

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*. "Pet."

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, which suggests the likelihood that the word is "probably associated with or influenced by petty" (*pet*, accessed April 2015). Although the *OED* cites the more likely connection to the Scottish Gaelic *peata*, tame animal, the similarity to *petit* may well have reinforced the sense of "smallness" in the word and its meanings.

<sup>5</sup> This point is brought home by the fact that the European Parliament voted on May 23, 2013, to create a «passeport européen» for "animaux de compagnie" (see "Animaux de compagnie"). In this context the term refers specifically to dogs, cats, and ferrets, which would now be free to travel to England without being required to stay in quarantine for fear of rabies. According to *Wiktionnaire*, this phrase refers to "un animal domestique qui tient compagnie à l'homme pour sa présence, sa beauté, sa jovialité, ou pour ses talents par opposition à un animal de production." ([http://fr.wiktionary.org/wiki/animal\\_de\\_compagnie](http://fr.wiktionary.org/wiki/animal_de_compagnie))

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Walker-Meikle, *Dogs*, p. 26 (Margaret of York prays to the Risen Christ, BL add. 7970, f. 1v), p. 49 (Charles the Bold receives Vasco de Lucena's translation of Quintus Curtius, BL Royal 20 C III f. 12r), and p. 73 (Lothbrok's hound returns home without his master, BL Harley 2278 f.44v).

<sup>7</sup> The relationship between medieval encyclopedic texts is complex. As Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr., and Irven Michael Resnick explain in the Introduction to their complete translation of *De animalibus*, Books Twenty-two through Twenty-six of Albert's work (the part cited throughout this study) "present a bestiary or dictionary of animals based on the *De natura rerum* of Thomas of Cantimpré, Albert's former student," while it is Books Twenty and Twenty-one that "represent Albert's original contribution to the field" (40). However, there is no doubt that Albert's approach to his subject through observation and experimentation had a profound influence on the development of medieval science, and he was everywhere concerned with the problem of how to "reconcile conflicting traditions in medieval natural philosophy" (41). For a discussion of Albert's use of Thomas de Cantimpré's *De natura rerum* and the likelihood that Albertus developed his emphasis on personal observation by adapting material from two of Thomas's sources, see John B. Friedman, "Albert the Great's Topoi of Direct Observation." The works of the other three authors mentioned here were all clearly intended for use by preachers, and thus they retain, to a greater or lesser degree, some moralization. Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum* was particularly well known in the Middle Ages, having been translated into French, English, Dutch, and Spanish; for convenience, the English translation by John Trevisa will be referenced in this paper.

<sup>8</sup> *De Animalibus*, 22: 42. All quotations from Albertus Magnus are from the widely available translation by James J. Scanlan and follow the system in his index where the first number refers to the book and the second to the marginal number; in cases where Kitchell and Resnick's translation differs substantively, the corrected translation is inserted in brackets. For a discussion of Albert's interest in observation and experiment, see the Introduction to Kitchell and Resnick, pp. 27-32.

<sup>9</sup> The association of dogs and horses with aristocrats contributes to their special status, in that these two animals stand in contrast to animals that might be associated exclusively with peasants, such as pigs. This does not, however, mean that the widespread view of their desirability is limited to the upper class. As an earlier encyclopedist, Alexander Neckam, points out, the requirements of even the average well-equipped peasant will include "brachet hounds, *levriers*, and mastiffs" (Holmes 201). For English translations of many additional passages from Neckam, see *Daily Living in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of this poem and the “expectations” of the dog and the horse with regard to their care, see Kristen Figg, “Froissart’s ‘Debate of the Horse and the Greyhound’.” In this poem the horse, who will be rewarded with oats, proclaims, “I wish to God I were a dog /... For then I would have bread and butter / For breakfast, and rich soup” (34-37). One of the most complete discussions of the care and feeding of dogs is to be found not in an encyclopedia but in the *Livre de la chasse* of the fourteenth-century nobleman Gaston Phébus, Count of Foix, who wrote his treatise between 1387 and 1389. This work was of such importance that it was translated into English as *Master of Game* by Edward, Duke of York, between 1406 and 1413. There still exist forty-four known manuscripts of the French text, including the famous luxury copy, Paris BnF MS fr.616, produced around 1407 and containing 87 superb illuminations, reproduced in the Harvey Miller facsimile edition of *The Hunting Book of Gaston Phébus: Manuscrit français 616, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale*. For a thorough overview of the rich tradition of hunting books in medieval Europe, including treatises on falconry, see Baudouin van den Abeele, *Texte et image dans les manuscrits de chasse médiévaux*.

<sup>11</sup> *Webster’s New International Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1934). Interestingly, the reference to playfulness does not continue into the third edition, nor does it appear in such sources as the *Random House Dictionary* (1983) or *Encarta World English Dictionary* (1999). However, playfulness can probably be presupposed as one of the qualities that give an animal its potential for “pleasure” or “amusement” (words that do appear in definitions) since one can easily find websites that rank “Dog Breeds’ Potential for Playfulness” (<http://dogtime.com/dog-breeds/characteristics/potential-for-playfulness>), “How to Pick a Pet by Its Playfulness” (<http://www.wikihow.com/Pick-a-Pet-By-Playfulness>), or even the “Top 14 Most Playful Cats” (<http://cattime.com/cats-with-highest-potential-for-playfulness.html>).

<sup>12</sup> Although the idea of taming a badger seems strange to most people today, the fact that it is possible is corroborated in Diane Ackerman’s biography *The Zookeeper’s Wife: A War Story*, in which the title character’s son raises a “clean, sociable baby badger,” who liked to take long walks on lead. For a full description of this charming family pet, who rode in a knapsack and played soccer, see pp. 27, 41, 43, 62-63, and 308. In order to survive the bombardment of Warsaw, Badger had “tunneled out of his cage ... and swum across the Vistula.” His identity

as a pet must have been clearly recognizable since he was reunited with his family when “Polish soldiers returned him in a large pickle barrel” (308).

<sup>13</sup> Both the charm and the tragedy of trying to keep wild otters as pets are beautifully documented in Gavin Maxwell’s best-selling 1960 memoir *Ring of Bright Water*. For readers in the twenty-first century, this book is revelatory of the major changes in attitude that have, in only the past fifty years, made domestication of animals taken from the wild an ethically unacceptable practice.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example the “Summary of State Laws Relating to Private Possession of Exotic Animals” published by Born Free USA, where the definition for “wild animal” in the recent law enacted in Ohio “includes, but is not limited to: hyenas; gray wolves, excluding hybrids; lions; tigers; jaguars; leopards; cheetahs; cougars; bears; elephants; rhinoceroses; hippopotamuses; African wild dogs; Komodo dragons; alligators; crocodiles; caimans, excluding dwarf caimans; black-handed, white-bellied, brown-headed and black spider monkeys; common woolly monkeys; red, black and mantled howler monkeys.”

<sup>15</sup> A demonstration of how seriously medieval people took this ability to “distinguish” appears in the account in *The Chronicle of Benedict of Peterborough* of the murder of Thomas Becket, where the murderous knights are scorned by dogs who seem to respond to them with horror:

Truly the knights who had perpetrated that profane deed made their way back through the stable of the martyr and removed his horses, which they divided among themselves just as it pleased them. Those wicked ones, suddenly aware of their deed and despairing of pardon, did not dare to return to the court of the king whence they had come; but they withdrew to the western parts of England all the way to Knaresborough, an estate of Hugh de Moreville's, and there remained for awhile until they were considered vile by compatriots of that province. Truly everyone avoided their company, nor did anyone wish to eat or drink with them. They ate and drank alone, and they were banished to the scraps of food with their dogs. And when they had tasted from that dish, even the dogs no longer wished to eat anything from there. Behold the manifest and worthy vengeance of God, that those who defied the anointed of the Lord were despised even by their dogs. (Trans. Scott McLetchie)



<sup>16</sup> Although Gervase explains his reason for elevating the dog more precisely than do the encyclopedists (perhaps because it would be more suitable to his princely reader than to a general or ecclesiastical audience), his argument is not out of line with the thinking of others of his period and the years that follow. As Scanlan points out in his Introduction to *De Animalibus*, Albertus “conceded that animals have sentient souls and display behavior conditioned by sensory emotions, but he drew a distinct line that separated man from the rest of the animals, predicated on man’s possession of an immortal soul graced with the power of rational thought and free will (22.9-12)” (21). Gervase maintains this distinction while at the same time seeming to establish a middle category.

<sup>17</sup> For an example of the importance of both dogs and horses in providing a rich visual display during travel, see the description of Thomas Becket’s embassy procession, where two hundred fifty male servants are followed by “huntsmen with fine dogs of double leashes,” which, in turn, are followed by “eight carts, each drawn by five horses, with a driver (probably walking) leading a dog” (translated from Giraldus in Holmes 60-61). For more on spectacle in medieval travel, see Margaret Wade Labarge, *Medieval Travellers: The Rich and the Restless*.

<sup>18</sup> *OED* 2a, 1398 J. Trevisa tr. Bartholomew [of England] *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (Tollem. MS) xvii. xxiii, “Cipresse..haþ bitter leues, and violent smel, and graciouse schadowe.”

<sup>19</sup> *OED* 3. The word *gracious* is not documented in English before the fourteenth century. The use of the word to mean “pleasing” goes to 1303 (R. Mannyng *Handlyng Synne*), but another of its early meanings is “characterized by or exhibiting kindness or courtesy; kindly, benevolent, courteous.” A meaning of this kind appears around 1325 in the Harley Lyrics, where someone is said to be “dereworþe in day, graciouse, stout, ant gay” [where *dereworþe* means “worthy, honourable, noble, glorious”; G. L. Brook *Harley Lyrics* (1968) 49] and again in 1477, with a clear sense of “courtly behavior”: “They had neuer seen none so courtoys ne so gracious” [Caxton tr. R. Le Fèvre *Hist. Jason* (1913) 38].

<sup>20</sup> The domestication of cats took a “different trajectory” from that of dogs and horses. According to a 2009 study by Carlos A. Driscoll,

David W. Macdonald, and Stephen J. O'Brien (cited from the on-line version), wildcats were

improbable candidates for domestication. Like all felids, wildcats are obligate carnivores, meaning they have a limited metabolic ability to digest anything except proteins.... Cats live a solitary existence and defend exclusive territories (making them more attached to places than to people). Furthermore, cats do not perform directed tasks and their actual utility is debatable, even as mousers. [In this latter role, terrier dogs and the ferret (a domesticated polecat) are more suitable.] Accordingly, there is little reason to believe an early agricultural community would have actively sought out and selected the wildcat as a house pet. Rather, the best inference is that wildcats exploiting human environments were simply tolerated by people and, over time and space, they gradually diverged from their "wild" relatives. Thus, whereas adaptation in barnyard animals and dogs to human dominion was largely driven by artificial selection, the original domestic cat was a product of natural selection.

<sup>21</sup> Encyclopedia entries on dogs do, of course, follow other, more moralistic medieval texts in admitting that dogs also have many bad characteristics. John of Trevisa (1342-1402), for example, says that "houndes" have properties that are "nought ful goode," such as excessive appetite, sicknesses, and madness (rabies). Dogs also may have character flaws, in particular envy and lechery. But these weaknesses do not seem to have succeeded in offsetting what was otherwise seen as their superior character in the popular imagination. For more on this tradition, see the article by Irvn Resnick in this volume.

<sup>22</sup> The moral of this fable varies greatly from one retelling to another and illustrates the general tendency of animal fables to replace real animals with symbolic ones. In the version from *Ayenbite* (Morris 155), for example, the moral is that no one should seek after the "graces hver hi ne moghe nught come to," or, quoting Solomon, that one should not lift up one's eyes to riches.

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