

David Hawkes and Richard G. Newhauser, eds., *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013). Print, xxvi + 322 pp., 19 b/w ill., ISBN: 9782503549217.



*Review*

The collections of essays gathered within *The Book of Nature and Humanity* are the result of the 2010 Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance studies conference at Arizona State University. The core question of the volume is one of categories, interrogating the divisions between human and inhuman, natural and unnatural. The editors propose in their introduction that ‘the processes by which the putatively obsolescent binary division of the human and the natural was initiated...surely deserve our full attention’ (xi). The diverse essays are arranged into a series of broad thematic categories in order to place them within context. Through a multifaceted exploration, the volume explores the precursors to the modern notion of the human, and ‘what is at stake in that concept’s passing’ (xxv).

In the first gathering of essays, entitled *Landscapes*, three essays approach the topic of the volume through the representation of the natural world. Albrecht Classen interrogates the notion of the mountain, its epistemic qualities, and the allegorical interaction of human and natural entities for the purposes of spiritual discourse and progression (3-18). Kathleen Crowther demonstrates a uniquely Lutheran attitude to the natural world, charting the transformation of natural history into doctrinal lessons and even pro-Lutheran propaganda (19-39). Laura Killian explores the *Florentine Codex*, a syncretic merging of medieval bestiary and Aztec animal lore in an attempt to allegorise the indigenous flora and fauna of New Spain (41-68).

In section two, entitled *The Human Body*, the focus turns to bodily nature. Fabian Alfie explores women’s flatulence in the poetry of Rustico Filippi and the

medieval distain for the human—and particularly the female—body contained within its bawdy word play (71-85). Brenda S. Gardenour Walter studies the 1978 Saturday Night Live skit ‘Theodoric of York, Medieval Barber’, and the pedagogical implications of unpicking the received belief that medieval medicine was crude and primitive (87-104). Michael Alan Anderson explores the versified offices of Saint Anne, mother of Mary. Within the Divine Office, Anderson argues, Anne is placed within a schema of holy ancestors using the natural imagery of root, branch, and flower (105-129).

In a two essay section entitled *The Body Politic*, the volume explores notion of the human and the natural as political categories. William Bradford Smith discusses the civic influence of the animal, interrogating the process by which the behavioural ambiguity of beasts was moralised as a part of medieval society or a malefactor (pp. 133-156). Guita Lamsechi studies Frieberg’s tulip pulpit, a sixteenth century floral form expressing the civic identity of a city famous for the production of luxury artefacts in gold and silver. By imitating the form of metalwork in porphyry, the pulpit alluded to the source of wealth as well as being a project created to showcase opulence (157-170).

In the subsequent section, entitled *The Animal Body*, the discussion turns to moralised relationships between animal and human. Jacqueline Stuhmiller explores the festive misrule and social inversion in a series of three ‘poaching romances’, *The Tale of Ralph the Collier*, *The Tale of Gamelyn*, and *Sir Degrevant*. In these tales, the figure of the poacher upsets the order of society, questioning the boundaries of categorisation by existing outside of societal frameworks (183-207). Laurence Erussard discusses the animal imagery of *The Legend of Robert the Devil*, in which a child borne of a pact with the devil is baptised, entering the world of animal and human in equal measure. Through animal imagery, Robert is converted through narrative from wild beast into hound of god, turning his bestial nature to righteous ends in the Albigensian crusade (209-221).

In the final section, *Ethnoscapes*, the volume turns to cultural categorisation. Charles W. Connell investigates crusade preaching for struggles over the issue of humanity. Mixed loathing and admiration for heretics, pagans and Saracens, argues Connell, demonstrate a transition from a discourse of extermination in the early crusades into a mission of conversion by the thirteenth century (241-263). Andrew Fleck discusses the astronomy of the seventeenth century through the writings of John Donne, arguing that his thought demonstrates a satirical distrust of the Copernican 'new cosmology' coupled to a polemical criticism of Catholicism by conflating them (265-285). In the final essay of the volume, Kendra Willson explores the use of proper names in the Old Norse structures of *Gísla Saga* and *Hrafnkels Saga*, arguing that their structural features create a sense of narrative claustrophobia contrasted with narrative loneliness that reflect changing relationships between characters and their environment (287-303).

Taken collectively, the volume is a successful attempt to organise diverse content in a form that promotes the opportunity for cross dialogue and broad appeal. The essays resonate with each other, and are a success as a collection of proceedings—the task of curating such a collection is not simple, and Hawkes and Newhauser demonstrate great proficiency. The essays reveal the intellectual diversity and excitement of their conference progenitor while promising to teach something new to all. Each essay reveals something new about pre-modern notions of structure, and the role of humanity within a complex and shifting environment of cultural and material actors.

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