

Jacob Abell
Baylor University, USA
jake.abell@baylor.edu

Liam Lewis, *Animal Soundscapes in Anglo-Norman Texts* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2022) pp. 197.

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Liam Lewis's monograph on animal sounds in Anglo-Norman literature offers more than a welcome contribution to medieval studies. The text's major arguments also supply productive avenues for enriching ecocriticism at large. The book's four chapters each develop a close reading of a French-language text composed in medieval England. Chapter one offers detailed analysis of passages from *Le Bestiaire* of Philippe de Thaon, a twelfth-century verse catalogue featuring allegorical interpretations of animals. Lewis maintains that the textual description of specific animal sounds matters as much as visual illuminations for the overall representation of animality in the *Bestiaire* (39). To substantiate this claim, Lewis looks to the cries of lions and the calls of sirens. The latter works to remind the medieval reader of sounds that might tempt, ensnare, or corrupt human listeners. Lewis interrogates this association to reveal the siren as a challenge to male authority, since the siren's call initiates sounds whose power threatens masculine sovereignty (50-51). This reading draws support from the bestiary's illuminations which depict the siren with an unopened mouth: even in the bestiary's visual mode, the document deprives the female siren of her agential voice which is simultaneously consigned to a signifier of nefarious seduction in the text. Lewis's reading of the mandrake offers a creative effort to identify the mandrake's *cri* as an interruption of the bestiary's allegorizing tendencies. Whereas nearly all other plants and animals described in the text yield up fodder for Christian exegetical interpretations, the mandrake's cry does not belong to this schema. Lewis therefore positions the mandrake as a non-human creature who resists anthropomorphism, refusing to be pressed into the service of biblical hermeneutics.

In chapter two, Lewis turns to Walter of Bibbesworth's thirteenth century *Tretiz*, a language learning manual featuring lists of animal sounds rendered in English and French. If imitating animal sounds is a useful tool for learning different human languages, Lewis maintains, it follows that the entire pedagogical approach of the *Tretiz* calls into question any clear distinction between humanity and animality (82-83). Working from recent theories of sound and language, Lewis sets out to explore these animal noises through "sound zones," which refers to the "linguistic and cultural environment" from which sound emerges (74). Lewis persuasively argues

that these lists elevate the status of animal sounds to something closer to human language. For instance, the list begins by asserting that “man speaks” (76) before elaborating the moos of cows and other animals; by generating a list of animal sounds from the primary example of human speech, animal noises seem to approach interspecies intelligibility (76-77). Plants, no less than animals, participate in the text’s high regard for the status of non-human voices. This is especially apparent in the example of the hazel tree whose audible shaking evidently belongs to the same class of sounds that animals make (78).

Chapter three investigates animal noises in an Old French hagiography of St. Francis. According to Lewis, this *Vye de Seynt Fraunceys* (dated to the 1270s) represents animal sounds as part of a broader effort to link animals to Francis’s journey of sanctification. Lewis shows that the verb *chaunter* (to sing) is shared by both humans and animals in the *Vye*. Crickets and humans (among other creatures) therefore share in a common vocal capacity for praise of the divine (105). Close reading, therefore, reveals the common doxological character of sound production shared by humans and their animal counterparts, manifesting their common capacity to vocalize “communal praise” (112).

Chapter four investigates animal utterances in the *Fables* of Marie de France. Following Howard Bloch’s research, Lewis identifies the fable with the animal capacity to deceive through speech. One such fable features the bleats and cries of hunting dogs in pursuit of a deceptive wolf. The verbs denoting those cries—*escrier* and *huër*—are shown to be terms derived from the contemporary English legal practice whereby citizens would raise up “the hue and the cry” (142) in pursuit of a criminal. Thus, Marie de France’s anthropomorphizing of her canine subjects casts a complex web of analogies between human legal procedures and the realm of wolves and dogs. From this arrangement, the poet produces literary animals who do, in fact, demonstrate some form of animal subjectivity by virtue of their ability to utter, speak, and bark. Turning to the Middle English lyric “Sumer is icumen in,” the book’s coda sustains Lewis’s analysis of the interdependent and reflexive nature of animal and human sounds in medieval English sources.

Among the book’s virtues, Lewis elaborates compelling insights about his theme across a diverse range of primary source genres. The book sidesteps the pitfalls of interdisciplinary overreach, instead elaborating complex arguments that reveal tight connections between hagiography, grammatical texts, encyclopedic literature, and fables. Lewis refuses to artificially segregate medieval animals into the silos of genre, and the reader reaps the rewards of this methodological commitment. Most importantly, Lewis’s book is instructive insofar as it refuses to reduce his medieval sources to exponents of an exaggerated anthropocentrism or as transgressive efforts to abolish the distinction between animals and humans. Lewis’s careful reading of the chosen sources draws out the fluid representations of animal sounds between these two extremes. We come to appreciate how these Anglo-Norman texts connected humans and animals along a spectrum of adversarial and cooperative relations, often

with ambiguous results that simultaneously preserve and trouble the boundary between humans and non-humans.

Lewis's book, therefore, successfully identifies a broadly shared Anglo-Norman understanding of animals and humans as creatures with ineluctably shared destinies. As the chapter on St. Francis makes especially clear, humans and animals become subjects by making meaning through the production of noise, song, and sound. This thesis—well defended throughout the book—may be especially generative as a contribution to contemporary ecocritical debates. If ecocriticism aims to formulate cultural frameworks with practical application in policy and activism, then Lewis's book helps to show the evident value of medieval sources to better understand the mysterious affinities and differences that related humans and animals in the centuries that preceded our own.