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**Peggy McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017) ix + 354 pp.**

Peggy McCracken's *In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France* addresses the treatment of animals in a diverse array of Latin and French vernacular fictional texts from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries. The goal of this study is to explore the ways in which literary texts use human-animal encounters to explore the legitimacy of human authority and dominion over animals. McCracken invokes theories on human-animal relations from thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, Agamben in order to draw out her readings of a wide variety of source texts, including romance, Biblical gloss, miracle stories, and fables. Over the course of the study, she demonstrates that the encounter between humans and animals causes notions of sovereignty to come to the fore.

In Chapter 1, «Wearing Animals: Skin, Survival, and Sovereignty,» McCracken examines the representation of flaying animals, demonstrating the ways in which medieval literary texts continually engage with Foucault's theory biopolitics. McCracken invokes notions of biopolitics to establish that human sovereignty is always grounded in the capacity to regulate life. Ultimately, this chapter reveals that narrative representations of animal skins used by humans for both material and symbolic purposes constitute a site of interrogation for medieval thinkers, who confirm human sovereignty over the terrestrial world through the defeat of the "strange creatures" that emerge from the wild and contest it.

Chapter 2, «The Social Wolf: Domestication, Affect, Social Contract,» examines the domestication of animals. Though domestication may often be violent, McCracken places emphasis on the affective and mutually-beneficial aspects of this relationship between humans and animals. By reading the figure of the wolf in several miracle stories, she demonstrates the ways in which narratives adopt animal perspectives in order to explain how humans lost sovereignty over the animal world. Even as literary texts fictionalize animal perspectives to endorse human social hierarchies, they acknowledge the affective relationships that organize human-animal interactions.

The third chapter, «Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Sovereign: Skin, Heraldry, and the Beast,» explores the dialogue between medieval texts and the theory of becoming animal articulated by Deleuze and Guattari. Medieval stories about men who become like animals are not about what

they become, but rather they are about the process of becoming. The most interesting topic in this chapter is the displacement of the bear by the lion in medieval symbolism. McCracken explores the Church's waging of a millennium-long campaign to eradicate pagan ursine cults and to replace them, through bestiaries, with the lion, a representation of Christ. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that romance narratives imagine interactions between animals and noble knights as sovereign relations defined by reciprocity, recognition, and response.

The fourth chapter, «Snakes and Women: Recognition, Knowledge, and Sovereignty,» examines medieval narratives about women and serpents. McCracken demonstrates that these narratives describe recognition in terms of mirroring, and the desire for knowledge as a desire for sovereignty. She argues that the circulation of recurring images of the woman-headed snake can be understood as a desire to demonize Eve by associating her more closely with the snake. Turning to medieval reiterations of the stories of Genesis, McCracken suggests that Eve responded to devil's promise of knowledge because she recognized it as a promise of sovereignty. Ultimately, this chapter offers a gendered analysis of the relationship between humans and animals. Women are doubly distanced from authority and dominion in these narratives, and animality is what makes this distance visible.

The final chapter, «Becoming-Human, Becoming-Sovereign: Gender, Genealogy, and the Wild Man,» highlights the ways in which human identity is indexed through nobility and rule. Reading the interactions between humans and animals in two medieval texts, *Le Chevalier au cygne* and *Tristan de Nanteuil*, McCracken demonstrates that the difference between human and animals is not primarily social, since both humans and animals live and interact within similar structures, nor is it physical, since kinship bonds are defined through shared nurture rather than blood. She argues that the cross-species bond of intimacy and loyalty shared by animals and humans in the forest offers alternate models of social organization and disrupts the security of dynasties grounded in the violent subjugation of animals to the needs, both material and symbolic, of human.

Ultimately, this study succeeds at linking the post-structuralist theoretical tradition with the diverse array of medieval fictional narratives that tell the interactions between the human and animal worlds. McCracken deploys Agamben's theory of sovereignty and Foucault's theory of biopolitics to successfully navigate the relations of power that are staged throughout the medieval source texts. Her readings of Derrida, Deleuze, and Guattari are successful at destabilizing traditional notions of animality,

and they provide insights into the way that medieval thinkers and writers construed the human condition. This study is required reading for those seeking to facilitate dialogue between the tradition of twentieth-century French theory and the fertile field of medieval animal studies.

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