

Sinful Wolves and Faithful Dogs: Reflecting Medieval Man

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Which is The True Reflection of Man?

The Loyal Companion and Moral Teacher vs. the Greedy Beast Which One Can Be Transformed Into



Literary Examples

Wolf of Gubbio and Saint Francis

The 14th century tale of the Wolf of Gubbio tells of an unrelenting wolf harassing the town, devouring the livestock in an attempt to satisfy an insatiable appetite. When it had gone through all of the animals it began to attack the people of the town, consuming human flesh.

St Francis confronts the wolf, making the sign of the cross and ordering it to hurt no one else, requesting that it change its ways and live in peace. The wolf quickly succumbs and meekly lays by his feet, as gently as a lamb would.

This tale shows that the soul of the animal can be saved and its ability for salvation.

Is the wolf a symbol for the carnal wrong of society from which God is the only protection?



King Garamantes

The popular tale of King Garamantes tells of the king being kidnapped by his enemies.

His army of dogs crosses enemy lines and saves their master, returning him to safety demonstrating obedience and loyalty.

This tale exemplifies the qualities of the dog which are favoured by Medieval scholars.

Does this show that the dog is just a part of the system of the bestiary?



Identifying the Dog



The dog is groomed, elegant, and depicted with multiple colours including white, blue and ginger.

These chained dogs, perfectly aligned, demonstrate the order and compliance favoured in domesticated dogs.

Their heads are pointed heavenward, likely waiting for direction from their master.

Medieval scholars write about the dogs undying loyalty to its master as well as using it as a means to teach moral lessons.

The Faithful Dog



It is a common theme to see the depiction of a dogs undying loyalty.

The dog will lay by its dead owners' side, sometimes bringing food to their grave. Also, the dog will attack its owner's murderer, being an avenger of truth.

These attributes inform hierarchal beliefs and correct behaviour.

Dogs, being the domesticated companion to man, work to instruct on loyalty and faithfulness to one's master.

Is this all a dog is- a loyal companion to man?

Identifying the Wolf

The wolf is often shown stalking or attacking herds of sheep, which also hold religious symbolism within Christianity.

The animal is large, often black, with wild unkept hair and snarling fangs.

In most images, especially when shown going after sheep, the beast is hunched with its head low to the ground.

Descriptions of the wolf by Christian scholars describe it as embodying the attributes of the devil.



The Werewolf

Throughout history, the wolf played an important part in pagan folklore and myth. There was a belief in the ability of man to turn into a fierce beast, embracing the form and power of the wolf, which spawned a tradition of werewolf myths.

In pagan society anyone who could transform was viewed as having a divine nature, but Christian priests condemned anything stemming from magic, labeling it as devilish.

In the 15th century Augustine wrote *The City of God*, in which he states that demons cannot transform the soul of a person but can change their body parts into that of a beast. The devil cannot taint the soul, and any transformation is an imprisonment placed on sinful men through wicked acts.

Are these snarling wolves a depiction of the sinner within the beast- a representation of a cursed man in a devilish form?



Bestiaries

In the Medieval Christian context, bestiaries are an anthological collection of real and fantastic beasts. Since they are all one of Gods creations, medieval scholars examined the attributes of these beasts.

They believed they held moral lessons which one can learn from, displaying it within these manuscripts in an understandable way.



The Aberdeen Bestiary

What can be discovered by the placement and context?

In the Aberdeen bestiary, the wolf and the dog are placed in chronological sequence.

Is this a strategy to juxtapose the physically similar animals?

The wolf is described as having devilish qualities whereas the dog rescues kings and exemplifies lessons which Medieval Christians can learn from.

Is this to show the beasts dissimilarity?

Conclusion

It can be argued that while the dog is the domesticated companion of man, the wolf is the more accurate reflection, encompassing the wild beast that must be tamed through religious salvation.

Despite the condemnation of pagan beliefs by the church, there were still tales of men transforming into wolves as well as being saved through religious acts, which meant that the wolf has human qualities.

Also, despite the attempts of Medieval Christian scholars to separate the wolf from pagan magic, regional mythology and folk tales persisted, and very likely continued to affect the medieval reader's perception of these animals.

This understanding of werewolves can only further support the interpretation of wolves and man, though devilish and sinful, being mirrors of each other.

In comparison the dog is simply an obedient companion to man, working as a moral exemplar within the system of the bestiary. The dog worked alongside man confirming hierarchal norms and purely displaying admiral qualities.

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