

Book Reviews

Adducing historical, philosophical and biomedical evidence, Morris invites us to conclude that this time-honoured physical/psychological division of pain possesses little intrinsic validity. It is the legacy of an exploded metaphysics, which shores up a difficult-to-defend division within medicine (between somatists and psychiatrists). It conveniently shelves, for the medical profession, the more intractable problems of chronic pain that cannot be attached to identifiable lesions, rather as has been suggested by A. D. Hodgkiss in his 'Chronic pain in nineteenth-century British medical writings', *History of Psychiatry*, 1991, ii: 27–40.

Morris has constructed his book as a sequence of thematic essays, designed to challenge these dubious dichotomies and bring evidence to bear from a range of sources—patient experience, the world's religions, great fiction (e.g. Tolstoy's *Ivan Ilych*), aesthetics, sexology, and so forth—to enrich our understanding of the phenomenon. Arguing thematically that pain is to be taken not as sensation but as experience (that is, sensation filtered through culture), Morris demonstrates convincingly the extraordinary relativity of pain encounters, concluding that coping with pain depends heavily upon appropriate kinds of cultural training. Our society is one, he argues, which has abandoned all serious education in the endurance of pain, not least because it is no longer perceived as having any positive value or meaning. Analysing the cultures of Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Christianity, Morris explains the meanings attributed to pain in earlier value-systems (punishment, trial, scourge, blessing, warning), which once understood were expected to make it more bearable.

A certain amount of the ground traversed in this book is familiar; I would have preferred a more sustained analysis of transformations in medical thinking (e.g., before and after anaesthesia) rather than the somewhat marginally relevant discussions of pain and the aesthetics of the sublime, or the mandatory account of de Sade, or speculations on Lyotardian post-modernist readings of pain. Nevertheless, *The culture of pain* constitutes a lucid and illuminating historical and literary introduction to a vexed topic.

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THOMAS R. COLE, *The journey of life: a cultural history of aging in America*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. xxxv, 206, illus., £30.00, \$27.95 (hardback 0–521–41020–7).

This cultural history of the "historical meanings of aging" traces the process and experience of growing old in western culture from its ancient roots, through medieval and early modern Europe, its transmission with English Puritans to the New World and its subsequent fate, to the present, in the United States. Its sources are the work of historians and other commentators on old age, medical, philosophical and religious writings, literary and visual representations, all selected according to principles which are not always clear.

The line of narrative is very clear. In the ancient world old age was a stage of life with a meaning, which was transmitted to the medieval west where it acquired a Christian vocabulary. Whether or not expressed in spiritual terms, this past old age was a distinct phase of life which was accepted as "natural", through meditation upon, or experience of which, people could prepare their path from life to death. Cole oscillates as to whether old people were especially respected but seems generally to imply that they were.

Then came the growth of commerce and capitalism, of the bourgeoisie and possessive individualism. Traditions of kin responsibility for their elders (which Cole generally assumes to have prevailed in medieval and early modern Europe) were sundered, "old age lost its ideological prestige". Individuals were expected to maintain personal control over their physical as well as their circulating capital, to be as prudent in their personal as in their financial lives in order to remain fit and prosperous and attain contented decline and death. Those who failed suffered and were stigmatized. As totalitarian collective institutions replaced Victorian individualism, the expectation of individual control over aging has declined, to be replaced by scientifically—generally medically—defined prescriptions of the social roles of age groups. Over time a meaning and purpose which once existed has been removed from later life; above all the book is a plea for its recapture.

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Along the way there is much interesting, and certainly deeply felt, material and comment, but, as history, the book is marred by its uncritical application of modernization theory, by its over-simple ascription to each time period of consensus about aging, in place of the messily competing discourses which were closer to reality, indeed by a general tendency to smooth out the complexities of the past to a greater degree than can be justified even by the attempt to cover a lot of time in a short space.

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WILMA GEORGE and BRUNSDON YAPP, *The naming of the beasts: natural history in the medieval bestiary*, London, Duckworth, 1991, pp. xiv, 231, illus., £42.00 (0-7156-2238-2).

This book, whose publication sadly the authors did not live to see, comprehensively studies the depiction of aerial, terrestrial and marine creatures in illuminated English bestiaries or medieval books of beast lore. The authors felt that such works served as textbooks of natural history for monastic students. Deriving ultimately from the second-century Greek *Physiologus*, or Naturalist, these bestiaries show a great and often fanciful variety in the artists' depictions of the animals and the ways in which they are treated by the manuscripts' compilers.

Though the authors claim that nothing systematic has been written on the bestiary before, perhaps an overstatement, the book does offer the first detailed examination of how these creatures were described in about forty English manuscripts. Why continental bestiaries are not considered is unclear. The discussion of the manuscripts follows, in the main, M. R. James's classification into families and sub-families, and the codices consulted range in date from c. 1120 to 1450.

While the book contains a great deal of information, and has, for its price, a large number of illustrations, some in colour, the exact audience for which it is intended is a bit uncertain. The Introduction has an extremely detailed treatment of the development of the various bestiary families and their relation to the ancient *Physiologus*, which would chiefly interest specialists. The bibliography, however, is very brief, and should certainly be supplemented by the extensive one in Willene B. Clarke and Meradith T. McMunn, *Beasts and birds of the Middle Ages: the bestiary and its legacy* (University of Pennsylvania, 1989) with which the authors were apparently unacquainted.

Both, moreover, but especially Yapp, seem concerned to show that the illustrators of the bestiaries were much more accurate observers of animals, particularly birds, than has been hitherto noticed—"many . . . of their pictures are not only correct but highly original" (p. 28)—and to give the exact species for every drawing of a creature in the manuscripts studied. This often involves a considerable amount of natural history and, taken as a collection of characteristics of the animal world that was known in the Middle Ages, the book will be very useful for many sorts of readers. Various interesting problems of taxonomy are treated, and the point is quite rightly made that the bestiary compilers were clear on differences between mammals and birds but had difficulties classifying creatures such as the bee and the bat, placed with birds because they fly. This sort of material will be of considerable value to the historian of science.

It has long been known that many scenes in religious art such as painted glass, misericord carving, roof boss sculpture, and manuscript illumination, drew on the lore of bestiaries, but the authors caution that such indebtedness can sometimes be overstressed and M. D. Anderson, F. Bond and G. L. Remnant, who have pioneered the study of such a relationship are criticized in this regard.

The structure of the book proper—as the title suggests—begins with scenes of God or Adam naming the animals, and then follows a breakdown into the various families showing the animals described and depicted in the texts of the English bestiaries. Various headings and sub-headings—"Beasts with Claws (large)"—somewhat clog the flow and the entry on the unicorn is typical of the rather flat-footed prose: