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Wolf in Chic Clothing

Garry Marvin, *Wolf*. Animal Series. London: Reaktion, 2012. 199 pp. $19.99 pbk. Distr. by U. of Chicago P.

This is the last volume thus far, alphabetically at least, of Reaktion's handsome series of volumes on the evolutionary, sociological, cultural, and artistic histories of individual species (the first, alphabetically, is *Ant*, and we await *Zebra* — we can hope that *Aardvark*, too, is in the offing). The series was conceived by its editor John Burt as a sort of collection of Rough Guides to animals rather than places, covering "Natural history-slash-evolutionary history at the beginning of the volume, then the cultural history later on" (Burt qtd. in Banks). Like the Rough Guides, these books are meant to appeal to a wide variety of people, to both experts and casual tourists. And like every other volume in the series, *Wolf* is just 190 by 135 mm (or about 7 ½ by 5 ½ inches) in size, around 200 pages long, with approximately 100 illustrations in both black and white and color sprinkled throughout. Every volume's cover has a similar layout, including a slash of color for the top third of the cover and the remainder in sophisticated black (although the slash of color in this case is silver). It would be very tempting to subscribe to the whole series, in order to admire their mass presence on a bookshelf (although, even with the 25 per cent discount for doing so, that would come to close to $800, so perhaps not). I have only two: the volume under consideration and *Dog* by Susan McHugh (2004). I wouldn't mind owning Boria Sax's *Crow* (2004) or maybe writing Hippopotamus.

Wolf, after a brief introduction, consists of five developed chapters: "Canis lupus," a brief evolutionary and ethological introduction to the species; "Lupophobia," an historical and cultural overview of the wolf as hated predator; "Lupicide," about the destruction of wolves; "Lupophilia," about more positive views of wolves; and "Rewilding," about their reintroduction into their former habitats. These chapters are followed by a timeline, references, a bibliography, and a list of relevant associations and websites. The volume ends with a modest index. As the introduction notes, "the wolf of this book is largely the wolf of Western cultures and Western imaginings and representations" (10). The organization by attitudes works surprisingly well and sorts out, to some extent, to a chronological story of the wolf's position in human culture.

"Canis lupus" begins by discussing the emergence of the species from Cynodictis to Cynodesmus to Tomarctus to the divergent evolutionary paths of wolves and foxes and, by the late Pliocene, forms of Canis, and "emergent wolf species" (13). The chapter discusses relative sizes of these species as a way to differentiate them. While the chapter is profusely illustrated, it does not include an illustration of the relative sizes and appearance of these animals, as I remember seeing in the American Museum of Natural History. This is the first of several moments in the book where the illustrations did not advance or relate to the discussions.

This chapter also exhibits another block to its acceptance by a wide range of readers. The style is quite dry, employing the kind of technical language that, as Eileen Crist usefully points out, treats the animal as an object, so that its behavior is described "as something that happens to an animal, rather than an active accomplishment" (5). Crist differentiates this from "the ordinary language of action" which "is oriented toward the behavior's intrinsic meaning, including the subjective experience in (and of) the world that the behavior expresses and embodies" (4). "Objective" technical language mirrors the careful avoidance of anthropomorphism of scientific discourse, and Marvin is very careful in that regard. But technical language is also very stiff. We see the struggle in the following passage:

> Having only one breeding pair, with the more mature taking care of the less mature, might be interpreted as a form of individual and communal altruism for the benefit of all. However, young adults may possibly also gain from the experience of caring for young pups when they later mate and become parents. (22-23)

Passive voice, emotionally flat language, cautious qualifications, technical rather than anthropomorphic terms, make for a slow slog of a read that will not appeal to a wide audience. I understand that the author is trying to avoid any kind of anthropomorphism, but not all anthropomorphism is sloppy sentimentality; some of it is valuable comparison by analogy, as Frans de Waal and other ethologists have pointed out. A careful deployment of the livelier "language of action" such as de Waal, Boria Sax, and other popularizers of ethology have used to great effect, would lend this volume more appeal without sacrificing its integrity.

Nevertheless, the chapter makes a number of fine points. Its discussion of howling and its various functions and modalities, recognizing how "Wolves live in a multi-sensory social world in which members of the pack organize their lives through complex

signalling," was fascinating (27). The consideration of the structures of wolf packs dismantles Cesar Milan's facile "alpha male" training model by suggesting instead that "conflicts within the pack" can be seen "as the result of intra-family squabbles rather than as struggles for power" (33). Note that in these two quoted passages, the writing is also livelier, closer to naturalists' "language of action" than to scientists' technical language. Indeed, they demonstrate a constructive and responsible level of anthropomorphism.

"Lupophobia" is the first chapter to add cultural history to the mix and begins with an evocation of Angela Carter's superb "The Company of Wolves" (1984). Marvin goes on to compare the attitudes toward wolves of nomadic herders who regard wolves "as simply doing something natural" (37) and of pastoralists, for whom "Wolves became unwanted, often feared, intruders into human affairs" (36). The pictures accompanying this section, from Goya and Doré to religious manuscripts and illustrations for Aesop's fables, are wonderful. Next, Marvin explores lycanthropy, which he usually calls, awkwardly,"werewolfery." In both cases, however, the emphasis is on description rather than analysis, so that the significance of these portrayals of wolves, their social, religious, and symbolic implications, are diminished or missed. As the chapter segues to Little Red Riding Hood and ends with the Nazi identification with wolves, such implications could have offered a very rich discussion.

"Lupicide" traces the growing determination in both Europe and North America to systematically destroy the wolf population from Charlemagne in 812 until the recognition in 1973 in the US of the wolf as an endangered species. The descriptions of the trapping of wolves in the American West are especially powerful; Marvin draws parallels between the attitudes of the hunters toward the wolves and those toward famous human outlaws. Neither here, nor in the previous chapter, is the other parallel drawn between the eradication of wolves and similar projects to eradicate "undesirable" or "dangerous" human populations, but it is difficult not to make the connection. The illustrations for this chapter do not always seem relevant to the subjects being discussed. Why, for instance, is there a photo of scientists at the Bureau of Biological Science studying a variety of animal skulls, including, one assumes, those of wolves?

"Lupophilia" describes more sympathetic views of wolves, beginning with those of Native Americans for whom "there was no notion of wilderness as either a physical or cultural environment set apart from humans into which they ventured as into alien

space" (122). Next, Marvin considers stories of children raised by wolves, both mythical and historical, and includes some lovely pictures of Romulus and Remus and the *benigna lupa.* Again, there is less analysis and more description than one would like. The chapter also discusses the role of symbolic wolves in the Boy Scouts and the growing respect for wilderness in the US toward the end of the nineteenth century. Marvin relates Aldo Leopold's conversion to the cause of the wolf after he kills a pack of wolves in a moving section (143-144) and follows that with a fairly scathing description of Farley Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf* (1963) as "anthropomorphic soap opera" (145). He contrasts this with what he sees as a more realistic treatment in Jean Craighead George's 1972 children's book, *Julie of the Wolves*. The chapter continues with discussions of Clarissa Pinkola Estés's popular psychology text, Women Who Run With Wolves (1992), the movie *Dances With Wolves* (1990), and Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* (1936). The illustrations for this chapter are equally eclectic (or perhaps haphazard?), including two cheesy "new age" postcards.

The final chapter,"Rewilding," cannot, of course, acknowledge the very recent resumption of wolf hunting in the US. Instead, it offers the more cheerful subject of the "natural recolonization or repopulation by wolves and their deliberate reintroduction in areas from which they had previously been eradicated" (172). This very brief chapter offers more arguments against their rewilding than it does for, and neglects to connect the attitudes toward their reappearance with similar attitudes toward human migrations, but it does have an interesting paragraph on Japan's attitude "in terms of a symbolic process of atonement for the sins of the destruction of wild environments" (179). The subject of rewilding is a rich one that I would have liked to see more fully developed.

I am sure that many of my reservations about the volume are connected to the restrictions of the series, and, in spite of the rather stiff prose and lack of analysis, I found it a useful introduction to a creature who is, in western eyes, a combination of the folkloric, the historical, and the familiar. When we think of the wolf, we cannot help but associate her with the big bad wolf, the settling of the American West, and the dog in our living room. I am happy to have this chic volume on my shelf and will certainly consult its useful perceptions as well as the bibliography, timeline, and list of websites.

Works Cited

Banks, Eric. "Animals Reconsidered." *The Chronicle Review: The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 18 Oct. 2009. Web. 29 Dec. 2012.

Crist, Eileen. *Images of Animals: Anthropomorphism and Animal Mind*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999.