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The Animals in Chester's *Noah's Flood*

Of the five extant middle English Noah plays, the Chester cycle's *Noah's Flood* is the only one that attempts to represent the actual loading of the beasts and birds onto the ark. All five manuscripts of the Chester play agree in their emphasis on this critical moment of the deluge story, naming up to forty-seven different creatures in a verbal catalogue parcelled out to seven of the main characters. The catalogue, which appears in lines 161–92 of the Lumiansky and Mills edition of the play, stands out; it consumes over thirty lines of dialogue and stops the play's action, vividly embellishing upon the story's biblical source. To aid the actors and producers in their presentation of this scene, the manuscripts all contain stage directions that call for the catalogue's delivery in visual as well as verbal form: 'the arke muste bee borded rownde aboute. And one the bordes all the beestes and fowles hereafter rehearsed muste be paynted, that ther wordes may agree with the pictures'.¹ With both verbal and visual reinforcement the catalogue forces audiences to recognize this animal-centred moment as integral to their dramatic experience of Noah's story.

The specific birds and beasts in the catalogue also seem to reflect careful choice. The catalogue is substantially the same in all five manuscripts, and in H (the latest manuscript), the stage directions, in Latin this time, place even clearer constraints on actors and producers presenting the catalogue, urging them to ensure that the pictures accord exactly with its words: 'Tunc Noe introibit archam, et familia sua dabit et recitabit nomina animalium depicta in cartis ... et animalia depicta cum verbis concordare debent'.² These stage directions, then, exhort both scribes and performers to keep the catalogue intact, altering neither its specifics nor its performative effect as both a visual and a verbal experience.

The birds and beasts in this carefully assembled catalogue, as well as the order in which they appear, serve to underscore some important issues that the play strives to convey elsewhere in its action and dialogue. The catalogue also

raises some new issues that the dialogue and action cannot adequately formulate. It is thus a crucially important component of Chester's *Noah's Flood*. Above and beyond what the catalogue can teach us about this particular play, however, it also offers an interesting perspective on medieval and early modern relationships between animals and humans in general, for the catalogue is, in effect, an organizational scheme that betrays a number of assumptions about the natural world that can provide us with insight into how that world was philosophically and socially conceptualized. The catalogue exhibits, for example, some useful information about how specific animals were categorized in terms of their utility to humans. It also adopts the 'wild/tame' distinctions prevalent in the works of medieval and early modern natural historians. In addition, it encodes social information, dividing up its creatures with attention to social practices that associate certain animals and birds with people from specific status groups. Finally, the catalogue pays close attention to the relationship of gender roles with respect to nature. For instance, it links human males with beasts traditionally associated with masculine activities and connects human females with creatures that relate to the household or to traditionally feminine activities. Although the catalogue bristles with a rich variety of details pertaining to the natural world, it is unabashedly anthropocentric, as we would expect in an analysis of that world from a medieval or early modern source. The catalogue features some surprises, however, making it an especially interesting text for its time period.

Before we proceed with an analysis of the catalogue's details, a brief generalization about the sources of its informing principles will be useful. First, biblical injunctions concerning 'clean' and 'unclean' animals do not strongly influence the catalogue, even though in its introductory lines, Noah (roughly following scripture) has just informed his family to use that binary as a sorting device to decide which animals to include on the ark: 'Of cleane bestes seaven shalbe, / of uncleane two: thus Gode bade mee' (157–8).³ Second, the medieval bestiaries' moral directives for the animal world do not have much influence either on the animals chosen for the catalogue or on how they are to be judged, though the ordering principles of the bestiaries sometimes come into play. Rather, the everyday lives of people are the principal sources of information shaping the catalogue, along with folk taxonomies and certain literary associations that the birds and beasts carried. Third, the play occasionally seems to reflect material from learned sources such as natural histories. Of those histories that contribute to the catalogue, some date to the early modern period, not a surprising fact given the late date of the

drama texts.⁴ Edward Topsell's popular English adaptation (1607) of Conrad Gesner's natural history is thus just as useful in an analysis of the catalogue as earlier medieval natural histories such as Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (which continued to be consulted in the early modern age). Clearly, even though the play's roots lie squarely within the medieval period, the extant play-texts demonstrate some interests that we can definitively identify as early modern.

The catalogue (reproduced in the Appendix) begins with Shem's announcement that he has ushered lions and leopards into the ark (161). Both of these animals had heraldic — specifically royal — associations, suggesting that the ark's human denizens wished to preserve, among the beasts and birds, the prerogatives that royal status brings with it. The lion, of course, was popularly the king of beasts, an ancient identity preserved both in fable traditions and in medieval and early modern natural histories. John Trevisa's late fourteenth-century English translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, which remained an authoritative source for natural information well into the sixteenth century, introduces the kingly lion by noting '*Leo* in grew [Greek] hatte *rex* in latyn, kyng in englishe, and hatte *leo* "kyng" for he is kyng and prince of alle bestes'.⁵ Most bestiaries, too, begin with the lion, following the order of *Physiologus*.⁶ The Chester ark, then, preserves the monarchical system, providing the beasts with a clear ruler to ensure political stability in what might be imagined as an otherwise unstable community after the flood. The leopard provides further political stability, standing in for an aristocracy to accompany the king; leopards had been common in heraldic devices for generations of the English ruling class.⁷

Once the lions and leopards are on board, Shem turns immediately to the class of animals that had the most practical importance to humans, namely the domestic rural animals that supported the medieval and early modern economy with their labour and the products their bodies provided. Together, these animals were known as *iumenta*, and bestiaries and natural histories frequently group them together (as does the play).⁸ The horse, along with the mare that accompanies it, begins the list, surely because of its associations with the activities of the nobility, namely war and hunting. Yet the privileged social status of the horse should not blind us to the animal's huge importance as a daily source of labour in non-noble environments, not only in the transport of human riders, but also in hauling carts full of goods, powering mill-wheels, and, increasingly, in plowing.⁹ Shem continues by noting the loading of oxen, beasts quintessentially identified as labourers. The ox is a castrated

animal, an interesting fact to contemplate given the dramatic context here, for the biblical injunction to preserve *pairs* of animals, male and female (Gen 6:19), seems to imply that God's plan was to replenish the earth after the flood through the beasts' future sexual reproduction. The presence of oxen here shows that, to the Chester dramatist, the idea of a beast's usefulness to Noah's human family was more important than its ability to participate fully in God's reproductive plan (but the mention of 'calves' in line 163 is presumably to remind us of the need for breeding stock).

Shem then catalogues the other domestic beasts: swine, goats, calves, sheep, and 'kyne' (both cows and bulls, presumably). These animals were crucially important to medieval and early modern rural economies, providing food for humans and supplying useful carcasses after the animals' food-value had been exhausted. (Sheep, of course, would have been valued primarily for their wool, rather than their food-value, but their meat and milk were consumed as well). The urban economy used animal by-products in the production of soap, candles, glue, leather goods, and artefacts made from horn.¹⁰ The foregrounding of swine in this catalogue (clearly there for food-value) again shows the unimportance of biblical literalism, since an old testament culinary context would have prohibited pork as unclean — yet it appears here because it was a staple of medieval and early modern diets. Clearly, the catalogue reflects actual human dietary habits. This function, combined with the catalogue's recognition of significant animal labour, stresses the usefulness of the animal world.

Ham is the next character to contribute to the catalogue. He continues the theme of usefulness by mentioning asses and camels, both animals that laboured but were not eaten. The ass was popularly known as the hardest working of the medieval ungulates, able to survive on poor food and to patiently endure severe beatings administered by impatient humans. Edward Topsell, in his early modern compendium of natural knowledge, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, addresses the ass's usefulness: 'some for the mill, some for husbandry and the plough, some for burthens and carriage, some for the wars, and some for draught ... not refusing any manner of burthen although it breake his backe'. He notes, too, that 'Mules, Horses, and Asses, keepe no holli-daies'.¹¹ The camel, too, was a reliable worker. Trevisa writes: 'cameles beþ bestes þat bereþ charges and burþenes; and ben mylde and softe and y-ordeyned to bere charge and cariage of men'.¹²

Ham next moves to the category of deer, semi-domestic animals. As Trevisa notes, they are not 'tame' but 'wilde', yet they 'beþ kyndeliche more

sterynge þan tame bestes and more mylde þan cruel bestes'.¹³ Interestingly, these animals, strongly associated with the nobility, surrender pride of place to the lowly domestic beasts discussed above. Their secondary placement, however, makes sense when we consider the limited usefulness of their meat. Though they are definitely food animals, restrictions on who was allowed to consume them in the medieval and early modern periods made them a niche-market commodity. Venison was food for the noble classes.¹⁴ In addition to the social restrictions that kept venison from being more widely eaten, archaeological evidence indicates that even on aristocratic tables, venison only made up five percent of the meat consumed.¹⁵ But Ham is careful, at least, to acknowledge the aristocratic focus on venison, and therefore the aristocratic prerogative to engage in the social display of hunting, by listing 'bucke and doe, harte and hynde' (166). The buck and the doe are the male and the female fallow deer. Presumably they come first because after the fourteenth century, fallow deer had overtaken the native red deer (hart and hind) in number and popularity, in part because they were more successfully kept in enclosed parkland.¹⁶

Japheth's catalogue comes next. He is in charge of representing small four-footed beasts with claws,¹⁷ and he chooses to mention, from that large category, only cats, dogs, otters, foxes, fulmarts, and hares. To modern readers, this selective inventory is by no means self-evidently structured, but to medieval and early modern audiences, its semiotics would have been clear. Cats and dogs come first because of their important functions in households; both were valued because of their natural tendencies to keep other, more threatening beasts away from humans' food and property. The presence of cats, of course, kept rodents at bay (an idea that Shem's wife will pick up later, in lines 177–80). Cats were working animals, with such a natural connection to their labour (mouse- and rat-catching) that natural historians sometimes knew them as 'murilegi', or 'enemy to mice and rats'.¹⁸ Dogs — in addition to their usefulness in the hunt — were guardians of the household, the sheepfold, and the barn-yard. Early modern natural historians were assiduous in representing the various kinds of dogs and their functions. Topsell creates a general category called 'The Village Dogge or House-keeper', after which he discusses more specialized breeds, such as harriers, terriers, and bloodhounds.¹⁹ In commenting on the variety of dog breeds, Topsell mentions several animals in Japheth's catalogue with specific reference to their relationships to dogs. Dogs have sundry uses, he writes, '[S]ome for the Hare, the Foxe, the Wolfe, the Hart, the Bucke, the Badger, the Otter, the

Polcat ... &c. Some for one thing and some for another'.²⁰ Humans valued dogs because they helped manage other animals, most having been bred specifically for herding, hunting, and guarding duties directed at the control or capture of beasts that had major impacts on the human economy. Japheth's privileging of the cat and the dog, then, demonstrates the importance of the use-value of the animals on the ark.

His specific mentioning of the otter, the fox, the fulmart, and the hare, however, has more surprising implications. People viewed all four of these beasts as harmful to the economy, preying on human food stores in fishponds, hen-houses, crop fields, and gardens. They were vigorously hunted. Three of these animals, moreover, were considered inedible, so they were hunted as pests rather than as potential sources of nutrients. Before generalizing too much about these animals, or speculating about why the play would stress their presence on the ark, we can get a better sense of how medieval and early modern people would have reacted to them by surveying their specific habits and habitats.

The otter, a 'beast of vermin' in hunting circles, was hunted, *par force*, with dogs.²¹ It was also surely hunted less formally as a pest preying on fish and therefore consuming human stores by raiding private fishponds. The otter was comparable to the fox in its display of craftiness and deceit during the chase.²² According to Topsell, its flesh stunk because of the animal's tendency to store rotten fish in its den, and was also inedible.²³ Its riparian habitat would have made the citizens of Chester and its environs particularly aware of it, for Chester is on the River Dee. The fox, Japheth's next animal, hardly needs discussion as a predator of human poultry stocks. Though it was a 'beast of chase', and therefore partially protected as the quarry of the nobility, literary and folkloric sources confirm its reputation as a clever, and ultimately worthless, beast.²⁴ Its diet of hens, ducks, geese, and rabbits meant that, in everyday life, it came across as a scourge of the barnyard. Trevisa calls the fox a 'stynkyngeste beste and corrupte' and notes that its flesh, 'of hevye smell', is inedible, not even providing any nutritional value if consumed.²⁵

Also denounced as a competitor against humans was the fulmart. This animal, in the weasel family, appears in modern taxonomies as the European polecat (*mustela putorius*), and it was common in Britain before 1800. It preyed on poultry, as readers of Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* might remember, for the youngest rioter in that tale is able to buy poison by telling the apothecary the plausible story of needing it to kill polecats in his barnyard.²⁶ In a natural history text of 1781, namely William Smellie's translation of

Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* (1749), we learn that the polecat 'approaches our habitations, mounts on the roofs, takes up his abode in hay-lofts, barns, and unfrequented places, from which he issues during the night ... He steals slyly [sic] into the court-yards, voleries, and pigeon-houses ... cutting off the heads of all the fowls, and then transporting them one by one to his magazine ... He never retires far from the abodes of men'.²⁷ Polecat flesh stunk, according to Topsell, and its fur was not much in demand.²⁸

Finally, people hunted the hare, a 'beast of venery', with dogs (both *par force* and by coursing with greyhounds) and saw it as a challenging beast to capture. Hares often lived on arable land or pasture, therefore coming into conflict with agriculturalists. In *Piers Plowman*, Piers contracts with the Knight to keep hares out of the cornfields.²⁹ Japheth himself telegraphs a hint as to their dietary preferences for human-grown food when he gives the hares cabbage to eat on the ark: 'hares hoppinge gayle can goe / here have colle for to eate' (171–2). John Cummins, in *The Hound and the Hawk*, quotes from a Middle English poem that catalogues some of the hare's nicknames: 'cabbage-stag', 'beast-that-dwells-in-the-corn', 'player in the hedgerow', 'Hart of the stubbles', 'Beast of the straw', and 'Squat in the hedge'. Such nicknames, by recalling the deer that were the usual quarries of the hunters, and by placing the hares in the cultivated fields and adjoining hedgerows, clearly underscore the facts that hares were hunted as sport and were also pests which made incursions onto human property in order to steal food.³⁰

Japheth's catalogue, then, includes the useful beasts, namely cats and dogs, but it also turns to four beasts that were, generally speaking, quite useless to humans. Otters, foxes, and polecats were all considered low status quarry,³¹ and at various points in medieval and early modern history, they, along with hares, were either permissible game for everybody, or in some cases actually had bounties on their heads.³² Humans considered their flesh inedible, and their fur was not very valuable, in part because of the widely-recognized stench of these animals. Their stench, in fact, may give us a clue as to why Japheth wants to emphasize their presence on the ark. Animals with strong odours, of course, are the ones most easily pursued and captured by dogs — and Japheth had pointedly included dogs at the beginning of his catalogue. Otters, foxes, polecats, and hares were all, in fact, beasts routinely hunted by dogs in medieval and early modern England.³³ In Japheth's list, then, this highly selective catalogue forcefully evinces an animal-centred interest. If dogs are on the ark, then those creatures that dogs 'naturally' pursue should also be on the ark. Just as the hares receive cabbage to eat, and the cats receive

mice (177–80), so must the dogs be given what was thought to be their natural prey — even though such prey would bring only misery to the human communities that flourished after the flood.

In general, the Chester *Noah's Flood* shows more concern for the food and prey of its animals than any of the other extant English flood plays. Many lines of this play, including those God speaks, refer to the large project of ensuring that the beasts have proper nutrition during the flood:

of meates that mon be eaten,
 into the shippe loke the be gotten,
 for that maye bee noe waye forgotten.
 And doe this all bydeene
 To sustayne man and beastes therin ... (129–33)

At moments interspersed throughout the catalogue, too, characters note that they are loading food along with the animals: ‘have here colle for to eate’ (172); ‘here the eaten there meate’ (171); ‘them before / meate for this wedder’ (184). The otters, foxes, polecats, and hares, then, we can best defend as essential to the ark because of their usefulness to its animal community (in this case as prey) rather than its human one.

The animal-centred thinking visible here finds further confirmation through deeper analysis of Shem’s wife’s contribution to the catalogue. She is the one who thoughtfully includes mice and rats for the felines:

Here are beastes in this howse;
 Here cattes maken yt crowse;
 Here a rotten, here a mowse
 That standen nere together. (177–80)

This quotation stresses how happy the cats are (they are ‘having a merry time’) to have rodents to pursue. Aside from a desire to make the cats happy, no reason stands out for rodents to be included on the ark at all. Theologians, beginning with Augustine, argued that mice were excluded from Noah’s ark because they reproduced by spontaneous generation; therefore they did not need to be saved from the deluge because they would arise again spontaneously after the flood waters receded.³⁴

As we conclude analysis of the men’s part of the catalogue, namely Shem’s, Ham’s, and Japheth’s, we can generalize a bit about the social information

it encodes. The animals that they mention are associated with traditionally masculine activities, namely political governance (with the lion and leopard), plowing, crop production, large animal husbandry, trade (of animal commodities, such as wool), and hunting. Medieval and early modern people would have viewed these activities as comprising the backbone of their economy and the basis of its major social divisions, with the contributions of royalty, aristocracy, the mercantile class, and the peasantry clearly accounted for in the animals on the ark. As we move into the women's catalogues, quite different aspects of the medieval and early modern economies emerge.

I am going to reserve discussion of Noah's wife's animals for last, since her part of the catalogue presents special problems. I will begin with Shem's wife, noting first that her concern about the cats and the mice places her influence squarely in the domestic sphere; she is attentive to the 'house' (177), keeping tabs on rodent control with the help of her domestic (or at least semi-domestic) house-cat.³⁵ Her part of the catalogue, then, is gendered, given that most people saw women's sphere as the house and home. Ham's and Japheth's wives both concentrate on birds, an interesting fact that deserves further analysis. This play is not the only flood play to assign the care of birds to the women on the ark. The York Play of the flood carefully parcels out the animals and birds in the same strictly gendered way — beasts to the men, birds to the women. Noah says,

My sonnes, se ye mydday and morne
 To thes catelles takes goode heede;
 Keppes þam wele with haye and corne;
 And women, fanges þese foules and feede,
 So þat þey be noȝht lightly lorne.³⁶

This gendered division of labour is certainly not an arbitrary one, for women in the medieval and early modern periods would have been associated with birds in many daily settings. In village life, for example, women monitored the barn-yards, where domestic fowl were kept.³⁷ Visual forms of the story, too, reiterate this association; the *Holkham Bible Picture Book* shows the women carrying birds onto the ark.³⁸ Such oversight of the flocks was also part of the duties of town women and those who aspired to be urban householders in more elevated social positions. In aristocratic circles, the type of hunting that women participated in was falconry, a sport that used birds to capture other birds for the aristocratic table.³⁹ These plays, then, gesture

toward these gendered divisions of labour by reminding us of the relationships that women had, in their daily lives, with the natural creatures common in their immediate environments.

Ham's wife begins the bird catalogue with herons, cranes, bitterns, swans, and peacocks, all birds that were eaten at aristocratic banquets. Indeed, any of these roasted birds on the table would have signalled to visitors that their hosts were able to afford gourmet fowl. Herons, cranes, bitterns, swans, and peacocks were typically parts of the 'first roast course' of aristocratic feasts, and they graced the 'top table' only.⁴⁰ Aristocrats could purchase these birds from commoners who trapped or netted them, of course, but those in this list that served as the occasional quarry of aristocratic falconers, such as herons, cranes, and bitterns, usually commanded more social capital at table than those that were domestically raised.⁴¹ Swans and peacocks, however, even though they were raised as semi-domestic, were also accorded high status as roasts because of their heraldic associations and their symbolic connections with the ancient blood lines or traditional social practices of the aristocracy. The swan, for example, whose flesh was the most expensive among the fowls, was associated with the legend of the swan knight, the animal/human hybrid from whom even Henry VI claimed descent.⁴² The peacock, too, had knightly associations, as evident in literary texts such as *The Parliament of the Three Ages* and Jacques de Longuyon's *Voeux du Paon* (c. 1310). Knights were represented as taking public vows at the dinner-table on the roasted bird, promising to carry out individual military feats of one kind or another.⁴³ In short, the governing principle behind Ham's wife's bird catalogue is the social cachet of its birds, especially in their roasted forms. The list, then, is highly biased toward the food value of the birds, and also biased toward socially superior diners. This play's cataloguing of birds thus begins with those thought to have connections with the ruling classes, following the pattern in the catalogue of beasts, which begins with the 'noble' lion and leopard.

The rest of the avian kingdom remains for Japheth's wife to handle. She chooses a mix of both domestic and wild birds, all of them (except the crow, raven, and kite) having food value for medieval and early modern people. The rooks of line 186 were baked in pies and the doves of line 189 (raised in dovecotes) regularly appeared on the roast table. Curlews (line 187) and red-shanks (line 190), the latter being a common local water-bird, were hunted and roasted.⁴⁴ The remaining birds — cocks, ducks (mentioned twice), and drakes — were domestic animals, raised for eggs and meat — although wild

ducks were also hunted. The cock here is surprisingly without a named mate (a hen), implying that the animal has been gelded and therefore has been targeted for the stewpot. John Trevisa's first sentence on the cock is 'The cok hatte *gallus* and haþ the name of geldinge for among foules onliche þe cok is igilde'.⁴⁵ Like the gelded oxen in Shem's catalogue, the cocks thus appear in their most useful forms, namely as delicious capons. Japheth's wife does not mention the domestic goose, an odd omission perhaps — but then the goose was almost a sacred bird for Chester, associated with St Werburgh, the city's patron saint. Explicit mention of it as a lowly food bird may not have been decorous.⁴⁶ Japheth's wife concludes her catalogue by noting the presence of song-birds, 'eyche fowle that leadenn makes' (191), which were also eaten.

Surprisingly, this catalogue of useful birds does not include the raptors, birds we might expect to be given pride of place on the ark since their exclusively aristocratic owners employed them to capture birds for the table and also fetishized them. Part of the reason that the women ignore the raptors might be the association between these birds and male sport culture, even though women would sometimes participate in falconry in the medieval and early modern periods. Wild birds for consumption, moreover (including cranes, herons, bitterns, curlews, and others), were increasingly becoming available on the market, having been snared and netted as part of commercial operations. Because of this development, falconry declined throughout the later middle ages as a necessary form of food acquisition. Another reason for the absence of raptors here is that the women's catalogues seem to deliberately focus on birds notable for their food-value. Even though one can use the raptors (peregrine falcons, gersfalcons, goshawks, etc.) to catch the herons, cranes, ducks, bitterns, and curlews, one cannot actually eat the flesh of these raptors. They were considered inedible (actually taboo) because they were flesh-eaters themselves, a food restriction mentioned even in scripture (Deut. 14:12–18).⁴⁷

The only raptor the catalogue mentions is the kite, which, along with the crows and ravens, acted as a scavenger in both rural and urban environments, cleaning up animal carcasses and the refuse of butchery operations.⁴⁸ The kite, although it did occasionally prey on other birds, was ridiculed as a bad hunter, a coward in the face of the larger, more 'noble' hunting birds — so its presence in the catalogue is certainly not for its usefulness to the human community as a raptor.⁴⁹ Its classification with the corvines (rooks, ravens, and crows) suggests other reasons for its inclusion, namely its abilities, as a carrion-eater, to cleanse the human environment of animal refuse. Crows

were also urban scavengers, performing the same function.⁵⁰ We can address the presence here of rooks and ravens — the other corvines — by noting that rooks were eaten when they could be raised domestically on a diet of grain,⁵¹ and ravens (along with doves) *had* to be foregrounded because the biblical plot of the flood narrative (Gen 8:8–9) has Noah use a raven to determine when the deluge had receded enough to uncover land. The raven, of course, was a carrion-eater, too — a fact that provided theologians with occasions for moralization about its failure to return to Noah; medieval commentaries and visual representations denounce the bird as too focused on corpses to return to Noah's ark.⁵² Although the Chester play does not morally castigate the raven (further demonstrating its typically rather affectionate representation of animals), other Noah's flood plays, both English and continental, do.⁵³

The women's bird catalogues, generally speaking, focus on birds associated with two of women's traditional activities, cooking and cleaning. This conclusion may sound comical (even grossly and foolishly 'modern' in its implications) — but it is worth taking seriously given the Chester play's particular emphases. The play, as scholars and critics have noted, focuses on issues of labour: how to organize necessary tasks, how to complete tasks expeditiously, and how to parcel out duties so that all members of the household share the labour. As David Mills writes, 'the image of organized labour, each [character] with an appropriate task to perform, is in contrast to the more individual and comic construction of the ark in York or Towneley.'⁵⁴ Successful completion of the immense tasks of building, provisioning, and maintaining the ark prior to the deluge requires cooperation and organization of the highest order, and the play exemplifies precisely this theme of organized cooperation. With Noah as the organizer of the labour, the end result of which is the completion of the ark that God commissions, Noah's sons and their wives each offer a speech designed to show audiences exactly how such an immense task might be successfully divided and, ultimately, successfully carried out (53–80). I would argue that the characters create their animal catalogue in the spirit of this theme of cooperative labour, remembering specifically to include animals that are useful to the human economy.

We should also keep this theme in mind when analyzing and judging Noah's wife's animal catalogue. Here are the animals she chooses to mention:

And here are beares, wolves sett,
apes, owles, maresmussett,

wesills, squerrells, and fyrrett;
here the eaten there meate.

(173–6)

With these animals, Noah's wife violates a number of principles that inform the catalogues of the other characters. First and foremost, not a single one of her animals contributes to the household economy. None is edible and none performs worthwhile labour. They are either entertaining animals or useless predators with bad reputations, let loose on the ark without any clear way to control them. Given Noah's wife's reluctance to work in the earlier scene — her excuse being that women are too weak to perform great labour (65–8) — her animals continue this theme of idleness. Second, her animal catalogue lacks order, jumbling together birds with beasts; the wild with the tame; the clawed animals with those having nails; and the small with the large. All of the other characters, as I have outlined above, carefully placed their animals in recognizable, hierarchized groupings with unambiguous import with respect to medieval and early modern social or economic categorizations. In the York *Building of the Ark*, God commands such orderliness even more forcefully, instructing Noah to stow the animals 'in þere degree' and not to mingle beasts and birds into a single group: 'þay sall not sam blende'.⁵⁵ In the Chester play, however, the principle of orderliness is visible mainly in its catalogue, which Noah's wife disrupts. She ignores careful distinctions and groupings, giving us a disorderly list, one that mirrors her own disorderliness in refusing to work or, later, to enter the ark. Third, and finally, her catalogue lacks clear gender identity markers. The other women chose to name birds, creatures associated with females in the medieval and early modern period — but Noah's wife only mentions one bird (the owl) and instead begins her catalogue with some 'extreme' (very masculine) animals, the bears and the wolves. These animals would have underscored the element of masculinity visible in her character when she defies Noah's orders and threatens to disrupt the family gender hierarchy. When she finally does mention animals associated with women, she picks ones with negative (often strongly lustful) connotations. In short her catalogue is filled with thematic import, all of it strengthening the playwright's portrayal of her in other sections of the play.

The bears and the wolves that begin her catalogue are totally inappropriate animals for a female speaker to be managing. Both bears and wolves were hunted by men with dogs, but as quarry they lacked the nobility (and the food-value) of the deer that Shem so lovingly mentioned earlier in the play. Bears were actually a rather remote and exotic quarry, hardly relevant

to English hunting *teehne*, for bear-hunting in this late period was largely confined to the Pyrenees.⁵⁶ Female bears, by tradition, were especially lustful, vigorously pursuing their male mates in breeding season,⁵⁷ and bears in general were reported to be gluttonous and omnivorous, competing with humans for honey, among other foods.⁵⁸ Noah's wife, however, may be including the bear primarily for its entertainment value. Bear-baiting was a hugely popular spectacle throughout the medieval and early modern periods, with Cheshire leaving us especially full records of municipal sponsorship of this form of entertainment.⁵⁹ By the mid-sixteenth century, protestant disapproval of this sport was evident, and Chester's puritan mayor actually banned bear-baiting in Chester in 1599–1600 — so Noah's wife would have been going against the contemporary moralists by wanting the bear on the ark for its entertainment value.⁶⁰

The wolf, on the other hand, was not a beast for sport; rather it was considered vermin, preying on human livestock and competing with humans for wild game. Like the bear, it was thought to be innately gluttonous; quoting Aristotle, Trevisa writes: 'wolves mouþ openeþ most wyde and . . . þe beste is a greet glotoun'.⁶¹ Highlighting the gluttonous bear and wolf, then, Noah's wife aligns herself with animals that threaten to take more than their share of the ark's provisions. English folk tradition also associated wolves with criminals and outlaws, and wolves' skins, hair, and meat held no commercial value.⁶²

Many medieval and early modern sources suggest the foolishness of Noah's wife's animals. Alexander Neckam discusses bears, wolves, and apes together in his *De Naturis Rerum* as perverse and violent animals with little practical use for humans (though he does underscore the entertainment value of bears and apes).⁶³ Apes, of course, were moralized as types of the fool and were widely distrusted as thieving and deceitful animals.⁶⁴ Humans imported and kept both apes and marmosets (monkeys) solely for entertainment. As Topsell says about the ape, 'generally they are held for a subtyll, ironical, ridiculous and unprofitable Beast, whose flesh is not good for meate as a sheepe, neither his backe for burthen as an Asses, nor yet commodious to keepe a house like a Dog, but of the Graecians termed *Gelotopoion*, made for laughter'.⁶⁵ Trevisa agrees and includes the marmoset in his catalogue of beasts intended for entertainment: 'Som bestes beþ y-ordeynede . . . for mannes merþe, as apes and marmusettes and popyngayes'.⁶⁶ The *Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* (1436) reflects the view of apes and marmosets as luxury imports, listing (and deriding) them as such.⁶⁷ By naming apes and

marmosets, then, Noah's wife aligns herself with the morally suspect sphere of the idle rich, who waste their time and money on specious, unprofitable entertainment.

Frequently linked with the ape was the owl, a bird with both comic and sinister associations. Owls and apes appear together in many late medieval visual and verbal contexts. In Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, to dream of 'owles and apes' is to dream unprofitably.⁶⁸ In a drollery from the *Luttrell Psalter*, a comic ape dressed as a falconer holds an owl on his gloved arm.⁶⁹ In early modern satiric literature by William Dunbar, John Skelton, and others, owls and apes appear together.⁷⁰ The owl as a nocturnal bird, moreover, had primal associations with death and, when alive, with antisocial tendencies, since other birds were seen as hating it as a predator of its own kind.⁷¹ Unlike the 'aristocratic' raptors, people viewed the owl as a dirty bird, an innate defouler of its own nest in the fable tradition, and therefore one that was sure to make a mess on the ark.⁷² The owl, then, is definitely a questionable creature for Noah's wife to champion, especially when its associates (the ape and the bear) are only going to provide laughs for the human denizens of the ark.

The weasels, squirrels, and ferrets that comprise the last line of Noah's wife's catalogue definitely carry 'girly' feminine associations, but none of their feminine attributes appear as positive features. Weasels and squirrels had strong sexual connotations, being associated with lust and with feminine wiles.⁷³ Squirrels were notable as women's pets as well, so again Noah's wife is thinking of pleasure rather than utility in including them.⁷⁴ Although the squirrel was trapped for its meat and fur, the trapping population consisted largely of the peasantry, making the squirrel an ignoble beast.⁷⁵ Peasants and commoners, including women, also employed ferrets and weasels in ignoble hunting practices, particularly to poach rabbits, whose fur could be sold. Late medieval legal documents show fines levied against peasants for using ferrets and weasels to secure, illegally, rabbits from the warrens of the aristocracy.⁷⁶ For Chester audiences, ferrets and weasels would likely have immediately evoked this underworld environment given their strong association with rabbit-hunting, and together these animals suggest that Noah's wife is planning a questionable future for herself as a procurer (possibly a wearer) of rabbit fur. With the hint that poaching might be on her mind, the Chester playwright surely signals her insubordination, since, as Roger Manning has persuasively argued, poaching was frequently a social code signifying wilful rebellion against authority.⁷⁷ Again, then, her animals align

her with disobedience, this time against the legal codes of medieval and early modern society.

The weasel, too, had associations in devotional literature with those who turn away from their own salvation by ignoring the word of God. Texts as early as *Physiologus* moralized the weasel in this way, and Richard de Fournival even wittily adopted the idea in his *Bestiare d'Amour* when he portrayed the weasel as a figure for women who ignore the verbal inducements of male lovers.⁷⁸ This tradition of viewing the weasel as a female who pointedly ignores her own salvation seems particularly appropriate to the situation of Noah's wife, for she too initially rejects the chance to preserve her life on the salvific ark.

Using the animal catalogue of Noah's wife, then, the Chester playwright has not only strengthened her character as a fun-seeking, disobedient figure of misrule, but also provided audience members with a comedy that would have resonated with their deep familiarity with the roles of animals in daily life. The catalogue as a whole, moreover, including the animals that Shem, Ham, Japheth, and their wives mention, presents us with a concise but orderly representation of the most important late medieval and early modern animal/human relationships, and we can assume that the catalogue held deep significance for its audience because it reflected their experience and knowledge of the natural world.

The appearance, both visual and verbal, of the long animal catalogue also helps to confirm that the Chester flood play is unusual in its emphasis on the role of animals throughout its representation of biblical history. Both here and elsewhere the cycle shows much affection toward animals, with a concern for their well-being (visible in the provision of political stability for the animal kingdom, plenty of food for the beasts confined on the ark, and prey animals for the dogs and cats in keeping with their natural propensities to hunt). When possible, the Chester playwright(s) used live animals in the play productions. As Peter Meredith has pointed out, a number of characters in the Chester plays, other than Noah with his crow and dove, interact with animals, either real or artificial: the kings, Balaam, Balak, Melchisadek, Abraham, and Christ all require animals in their scenes, most of which would have been live.⁷⁹ Further attention to the positive affective relationships between humans and animals occurs in the Chester *Shepherds' Play*, which contains many speeches by the shepherds that stress their love for their animals and their desire to keep them healthy.⁸⁰ The Chester cycle,

then, provokes its audience to consider animals and humans as co-enactors of biblical history, in it together for the long run.

This unusual interest in animal life may, in fact, be partly attributable to the plays' late date of composition. The arrival of reformist religious views in England brought with it a new consideration of the responsibilities that humans had as stewards of the animal world. Keith Thomas's survey of the growth of ideas after 1500 concerning the problematic morality of human-inflicted suffering among animals might be profitably read alongside the Chester cycle's interest in foregrounding its animal life. This point does not deny the traditional medieval roots of the plays; rather it corroborates the growing sense among scholars that the Chester cycle was flexible enough to flourish in new reformist contexts.⁸¹ One of those contexts may well have been an interest in covenant theology, as Lawrence Clopper and Phillip Zarrilli have argued with specific reference to the Chester flood play.⁸² As covenant theology does, the play certainly addresses God's pact with humanity and with the created world, but as this essay strives to show, the play suggests that humans have a pact with the created world as well, one that recognizes the fact that animals and humans are part of a single community sharing small quarters — both in the ark and in the world. The play gives renewed scrutiny to the human stewardship of animals, analyzing the human uses to which animals were routinely put. Most movingly, perhaps, it also recognizes that humans owe animals a debt of kindness and care, clearly an important component of Chester's representation of the natural world.

Appendix⁸³

Then Noe shall goe into the arke with all his familye, his wyffe excepte, and the arke muste bee borded rownde aboute. And one the bordes all the beastes and fowles hereafter reahersed muste bee paynted, that ther wordes may agree with the pictures.

SEM Syr, here are lions, leopardes in;
 horses, mares, oxen, and swynne,
 geates, calves, sheepe, and kyne
 here sytten thou may see.

CAM	Camelles, asses, man may fynde, bucke and doe, harte and hynde. All beastes of all manere of kynde Here bynne, as thinketh mee.	165
JAFETT	Take here cattles, dogges too, otters and foxes, fullimartes alsoe; hares hoppinge gayle can goe here have colle for to eate.	170
NOES WIFE	And here are beares, wolves sett, apes, owles, maremussett, wesills, squerrells, and fyrrett; here the eaten there meate.	175
SEMES WIFFE	Heare are beastes in this howse; here cattes makyn yt crowse; here a rotten, here a mowse that standen nere together.	180
CAMS WYFFE	And here are fowles lesse and more — hernes, cranes, and byttoer, swanes, peacocks — and them before meate for this wedder.	
JAFETTES WYFFE	Here are cockes, kytes, crowses, rookes, ravens, many rowes, duckes, curlews, whoever knows, eychone in his kynde. And here are doves, digges, drakes, redshanks ronninge through lakes; and eyche fowle that leaden makes in this shippe man may fynde.	185 190

Notes

- 1 All quotations from the Chester *Noah's Flood* are from R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills (eds), *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 2 vols, EETS ss 3 (Oxford, 1974). The passage quoted here, which occurs between lines 160 and 161, is substantially the same in

- the four manuscripts that make up the 'Group Series'; in the late manuscript known as H, the passage is in Latin and differs in its emphases. See note 2 below.
- 2 Ibid, *Noah's Flood*, 1.48, textual note to sd.
 - 3 The coming of Christ to earth abrogated the 'clean/unclean' distinction, according to theologians, who cite Acts 10:9–16 to support this view. In that narrative, heaven informs Peter that unclean meat does not exist. For discussion of the dissolution of this distinction, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500–1600* (Oxford, 1983), 53–4. A 'Judaising' strain in late Lollardy, however, was visible in the adoption of Jewish food laws by some early modern reformers. See John Fines, 'Judaising in the Period of the English Reformation — The Case of Richard Bruern', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 21 (1962–67), esp. 323.
 - 4 On the dating of the Chester cycle, see Lawrence M. Clopper, 'The History and Development of the Chester Cycle', *Modern Philology* 75 (1978), 219–46. For discussion of the cycle's 'bridging of the medieval/early modern divide', see Theresa Coletti, 'The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-Century Religious Culture', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37 (2007), 531–47.
 - 5 *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus. De Proprietatibus Rerum*, ed. M.C. Seymour, 3 vols (Oxford, 1973), 2.1214. All future references in this essay to Trevisa's work are to this edition. Bartholomew and Trevisa cite Isidore as their source here. Francis Klingender, in *Animals in Art and Thought to the End of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge MA, 1971), 257 notes that the thirteenth-century mosaics in St Mark's (Venice) depict Noah loading the animals into the ark with the lion coming first.
 - 6 Florence McCulloch, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*, University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages 33 (Chapel Hill, 1960), 137 and Wilma George and Brunsdon Yapp, *The Naming of the Beasts: Natural History in the Medieval Bestiary* (London, 1991), 46. On the collection and keeping of lions by royal and civic authorities as symbols of their worldly power, see Lisa J. Kiser, 'Animals in Medieval Sports, Entertainment, and Menageries', Brigitte Resl (ed.), *A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age* (Oxford, 2007), 105–6. On early modern conceptions of the hierarchized ways in which animals reflected the human social order, with lions at the top, see Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 60–1.
 - 7 For the extensive use of the leopard device in the arms of the English Plantagenets, see Caroline Shenton, 'Edward III and the Symbol of the Leopard', Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (eds), *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2002), 69–81. For lions and leopards in English royal and aristocratic heraldic traditions in general, see A.C. Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*

- (rpt New York, 2007), 172–86 and Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford, 2000), 80–2.
- 8 Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus's text treats this category thus: 'Hereof Basilus spekeþ in *Exameron* and clepeþ tame bestes *iumenta* and seiþ þat þay be bestes ygraunted and y-ordeyned to use and to helpe of mankynde. And som beþ y-ordeyned to travaile, as hors, oxen, an cameles, and oþre suche; and somme bereþ wolle for clopyng of men, as scheepe and oþere suche; and some to be y-ete, as swyn and pigges' (2.1092). For the bestiary evidence, see George and Yapp, *The Naming of the Beasts*, 46. In the medieval Cornish drama, the *Ordinalia*, 'horses, cattle, pigs and sheep' (l 1065) are the only animals specifically mentioned as being on the ark. See Edwin Norris (ed. and trans.), *The Ancient Cornish Drama* (Oxford, 1859), 1.81.
 - 9 See John Langdon, *Horses, Oxen, and Technological Innovation: The Use of Draught Animals in English Farming from 1066–1500* (Cambridge, 1986), 250–3 for commentary on horses' plowing functions.
 - 10 For the astonishing number of products made with domestic animal parts, see Lisa Yeomans, 'The Shifting Use of Animal Carcasses in Medieval and Post-Medieval London', Aleksander Pluskowski (ed.), *Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals as Material Culture in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007), 98–112, esp. the chart on 112.
 - 11 Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts* (London, 1607); facsimile published by Da Capo Press (New York, 1973), 24; all future page references to Topsell in this essay are to this facsimile. In bestiary illustrations of the ass, the animal is often bearing a load. See George and Yapp, *Naming of the Beasts*, 104.
 - 12 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 2.1156. See also Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 95. Camels, though not native to Britain, would have occasionally been seen in captivity; however, they were extremely common animals in medieval and early modern visual art.
 - 13 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 2.1093.
 - 14 On the legal restrictions preventing deer-hunting among any except the members of the ruling classes, see Richard Almond, *Medieval Hunting* (Phoenix Hill, 2003), esp. 31–3 and 115–42; Emma Griffin, *Blood Sport: Hunting in Britain Since 1066* (New Haven, 2007), 36–48 and 71–9; and William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 2006), 46–81. For the early modern period, see Roger B. Manning, *Hunters and Poachers: A Cultural and Social History of Unlawful Hunting in England, 1485–1640* (Oxford, 1993), 57–82.
 - 15 Gilly Lehmann, 'The Late-Medieval Menu in England: A Reappraisal', *Food and History* 1 (2003), 55. Lehmann is using evidence from the years 1431–32 cited by

- Christopher Dyer in *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989), 59–60.
- 16 See Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 65, and Jean Birrell, 'Deer and Deer Farming in Medieval England', *Agricultural History Review* 40 (1992), 123.
- 17 For this category as it appears in bestiaries, see George and Yapp, *The Naming of the Beasts*, 43.
- 18 See Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 2.1228. Other names for the cat that etymologize its 'natural' relationship to the mouse include *muriceps* and *musio*, the latter coming from Isidore's *Etymologies* (xii.2.38). Bestiaries sometimes grouped cats and mice together — in violation of the usual natural ordering of these beasts. See McCulloch, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*, 102. Bestiary illustrations often portrayed the two together as well; see George and Yapp, *The Naming of the Beasts*, 115–16.
- 19 Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 160, 165–74. For hunting breeds, see also Edward of Norwich's *Master of Game*, ed. William A. Baillie-Grohman and F.N. Baillie-Grohman (1909; rpt Philadelphia, 2005), 105–22.
- 20 Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 165.
- 21 John Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting* (London, 2001), 148. Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 574 notes that the special breed of the 'otterhound' is used for hunting this creature. The categories that applied to hunting quarries, such as 'beast of venery', 'beast of chase', and 'beast of vermin', came from medieval hunting manuals, and they were complex and shifting; see Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 61–2. Given the late date of the Chester plays, it might be just as reasonable to distinguish the hunted animals using Elizabethan legal categories, which in 1598 were 'beasts of forest', 'beasts of chase', and 'beasts and fowls of warren'. See Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 59n.
- 22 Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 147.
- 23 Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 573–4.
- 24 In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the fox is castigated as having 'wyles' (ll 1700, 1711, 1728, 1905) and its pelt is viewed as being 'foule' (l 1944). References are to the edition of Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (Berkeley, 1978). The Reynard beast epics and the fable tradition also underscore (and exaggerate) the fox's antics as a predator on human food. For English examples of these traditions, see Kenneth Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinaert and Other Foxes in Medieval England: The Iconographic Evidence* (Amsterdam, 1999). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the fox's image as quarry brightened considerably when it became a more common *par force* hunted beast; this change in status occurred when deer became scarcer and hare-hunting diminished owing to

- enclosure of land. See Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 164. On the hunting of foxes as ‘unwanted vermin’, see Emma Griffin, *Blood Sport*, 83; on their flesh as inedible, see Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 222.
- 25 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 2.1263, 1104.
- 26 Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn (Boston, 1987), p 201, ll 854–6. All references to the works of Geoffrey Chaucer are to this edition.
- 27 Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, *Histoire Naturelle*, trans. William Smellie, *Natural History, General and Particular*, 8 vols (London, 1781), 4.248, <<http://faculty.njcu.edu/fmoran/vol4polecat.htm>> (accessed 15 October 2010).
- 28 Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 219.
- 29 A.V.C. Schmidt (ed.), *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Complete Edition of the B Text* (London, 1978), passus 6, l 29.
- 30 Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 117–19. See also Edward of Norwich, *The Master of Game*, 14 and 21 for the hare’s predation on human crops, and the middle English poem, ‘The Hunted Hare’, which locates the animals in furrows (l 18) and among the cabbages, leeks (l 34), and kale (l 37). The poem is edited by Roswell Hope Robbins, *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (Oxford, 1952), 107–10. Although hares were sometimes eaten, they were looked down upon as inferior food. In Andrew Boorde’s *Dyetary of Helth* (1542), he writes: ‘Better is for the houndes or dogges to eate the hare after they have killed it ... than man shuld eate it; for it is not prayسد, nother in the olde Testament, nother in physycke’, F.J. Furnivall (ed.), *EETS es 10* (London, 1870), 275. Thomas, in *Man and the Natural World*, 54 notes the widespread folk-belief that the eating of hare’s flesh by a pregnant woman will result in hare-lipped offspring — another reason for the avoidance of hares as food. For an excellent survey of dog/hare pairings in medieval art and literature, see Ruth Mellinkoff, *Averting Demons: The Protective Power of Medieval Visual Motifs and Themes*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles, nd), 77–83; Mellinkoff, however, fails to distinguish between hares and rabbits.
- 31 Griffin, *Blood Sport*, 83.
- 32 For example, in 1189 the charter of the City of Colchester stated that King Richard had given the city’s people rights to hunt foxes, hares, and polecats; see ORB: *On-line Reference Book for Medieval Studies*, ed. Kathryn Talarico, s.v. ‘History of Medieval Colchester’, <http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/culture/towns/colchstr.html> (accessed 15 October 2010); and much later, the 1566 Act for Preservation of Grain placed bounties on the heads of foxes, polecats, otters, and other pests; see Erica Fudge, *Animal* (London, 2002), 147 (she is citing *Statutes of the Realm* 8 Eliz. c.15).
- 33 On the love of hounds for fox-hunting, and on the animals’ scent, see Edward of Norwich, *The Master of Game*, 64–6. For otter hunting with hounds, see 72–4.

- 34 See the *City of God*, 15.27. Augustine's comments on mice and other spontaneously-generated beasts, such as insects, being excluded from the ark became part of the tradition of ark commentary. For later influential citations of this view, see Hugh of St Victor, *De Arca Noe Morali*, chap. 13; Rabanus Maurus's *In Genesim*, 2.6 (PL 107, col. 517), and Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, chap. 33 (PL 198, col. 1084). Pliny's *Natural History*, 9.84 notes the belief that mice originated in the earth and many medieval authorities, including Isidore of Seville and Bartholomaeus Anglicus, repeat this belief; it also appears in the bestiary tradition. See also Warren Dawson, 'The Mouse in Fable and Folklore', *Folk-lore* 36 (1925), 239–40.
- 35 Cats were becoming more house-bound in this period, and although most of them were still somewhat feral (as some cats are even today), their presence in the human household was increasing. See Esther Pascua, 'From Forest to Farm and Town: Domestic Animals from c 1000 to c 1450', Resl, *A Cultural History*, 101–2.
- 36 Richard Beadle (ed.), *The York Plays*, 2 vols, EETS ss 23 (Oxford, 2009), 1.50 ll 171–5. In this quotation I have modernized the yoghs by making them 'y' or 'gh'.
- 37 For women as keepers of domestic poultry, see Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1986), 147; C. Anne Wilson, *Food & Drink in Britain from the Stone Age to Recent Times* (London, 1973), 110; and the anonymous 'Ballad of the Tyrannical Husband', Eve Salisbury (ed.), *The Trials and Joys of Marriage* (Kalamazoo, 2002), ll 54–6.
- 38 'E lurs femmes oyseus portaunz', reads the Anglo-Norman text; see F.P. Pickering (ed.), *The Anglo-Norman Text of the Holkham Bible Picture Book*, ANTS, vol. 23 (Oxford, 1971), 11 and 78n. The illustration confirms that the women are the conveyors of birds onto the ark; see *The Holkham Bible Picture Book* introduction by W.O. Hassall (London, 1954), f 7v.
- 39 On urban women's oversight of domestic and wild birds destined for the table, see *The Goodman of Paris (Le Menagier de Paris)*, trans. Eileen Power (Woodbridge, 2006), 138 and 199. On women's falconry and the specific birds associated with it, see Robin S. Oggins, *The Kings and Their Hawks: Falconry in Medieval England* (New Haven, 2004), 33, 111, 118–19; Cummins, *Hounds and Hawks*, 215; and Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 159–61.
- 40 Lehmann, 'The Late-Medieval Menu', 65–7. Bitterns, as smaller birds than the others in this list, were sometimes served later in the meal. For some sample late medieval menu plans, see Constance B. Hieatt and Sharon Butler (eds), *Curye on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century*, EETS ss 8 (London, 1985), and T. Austin (ed.), *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books*, EETS os 91 (Oxford, 1888), 60–1.

- 41 Umberto Albarella and Richard Thomas, 'They Dined on Crane: Bird Consumption, Wild Fowling and Status in Medieval England', *Acta Zoologica Cracoviensis* 45 (2002), 23–38 and Krish Seetah, 'The Middle Ages on the Block: Animals, Guilds and Meat in the Medieval Period', Pluskowski, *Breaking and Shaping*, 24. In Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* heron is served at Cambyuskan's birthday feast (l. 68). Herons and cranes, because they were large birds, could only be hunted with gyrfalcons and peregrines, the larger (and thus more 'aristocratic') raptors. For typical late medieval gentry and aristocratic consumption of birds, see C.M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven, 1999), 114–15 and 133–4. On heron hunting generally, see Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 214 and Oggins, *The Kings and Their Hawks*, 16–17.
- 42 See Anthony R. Wagner, 'The Swan Badge and the Swan Knight', *Archaeologia* 97 (1959), 127–38 and Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia, 2002), 111–25. See also Klingender, *Animals in Art and Thought*, 460–1 for a discussion of the Dunstable swan brooch and the swan as the emblem for the Bohun and Stafford families. Interestingly, even in non-aristocratic settings, the swan might be served in ceremonial dinners in the late medieval and early modern periods. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a Netherlandish lay fraternity held a yearly 'meal of the swan'; see Johanna Maria van Winter, 'Festive Meals in the Late Middle Ages: An Essay on Dining as a Means of Communication', *Food and History* 1 (2003), 101. On the high price for swan meat, see Wilson, *Food & Drink*, 118.
- 43 For knightly oaths upon birds, see Wagner, 'Swan Badge', 128, 136–7; Peter Hammond, *Food and Feast in Medieval England* (Phoenix Hill, 1993), 144–5; and J.H. Gurney, *Early Annals of Ornithology* (1921; rpt Chicheley, 1972), 57.
- 44 Redshanks were listed in Henry Percy's, earl of Northumberland's, household book (1512) as birds to be purchased and eaten at feasts; see Thomas Percy, *The Regulations and Establishment of the Household of Henry Algernon Percy the Fifth Earl of Northumberland* (London, 1905), 103–8. See also Gurney, *Early Annals*, 87, for redshanks on the menu for a banquet given in 1465 in honour of Archbishop Neville, and 94, for James V's purchase of redshanks for the royal larder.
- 45 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 1.627.
- 46 For the legend of St Werburgh and the geese, see Dominic Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2008), 85–112. In the early modern period, domestic geese 'were bred less for eating than for the sake of their valuable feathers' (Gurney, *Early Annals*, 108).

- 47 For a discussion of the old testament food laws, see Gillian Feely-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Washington, 1981), esp. 6–11 and 13–19.
- 48 In Tudor times, kites had even colonized London, being a common sight in city streets. See George and Yapp, *The Naming of the Beasts*, 25 and 146; Hugh of Fouilloy's *Aviaryum*, Willene B. Clark (ed. and trans.), *The Medieval Book of Birds: Hugh of Fouilly's Aviaryum* (Binghamton, 1992), 207: 'The kite flies constantly around kitchens and markets, so that it might more quickly seize any raw meat which might be thrown out of them'; and Terry O'Connor, 'Thinking About Beastly Bodies', Pluskowski, *Breaking and Shaping*, 8. See also S. Mulkeen and T.P. O'Connor, 'Raptors in Towns: Towards an Ecological Model', *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 7 (1997), 440–9 and Gurney, *Early Annals*, 80, 82, and 154. O'Connor and Gurney both suggest that kites, crows, and rooks were actually protected in urban environments owing to their usefulness as cleansing agents.
- 49 See Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, l 349, where the kite is called a 'coward'. In the *Squire's Tale*, too, it is derided by the female falcon for being of lower social station than the other raptors, ll 620–7. See also the *Knight's Tale*, l 1179. Trevisa notes that it can be taken by a sparrow-hawk (another 'lower class' bird), which is *smaller* than it is; see *On the Properties of Things*, 1.634–5.
- 50 O'Connor, 'Thinking About Beastly Bodies', 8. O'Connor discusses the kites and crows as being 'close-to-home' species.
- 51 Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 54 and 55. For rook pies, see Wilson, *Food & Drink*, 124.
- 52 The raven-and-dove scene of the Chester cycle play appears only in manuscript H, the latest of the manuscripts. See Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, Appendix Ia, 464–5. Interestingly, although Noah says he is releasing a raven, the stage directions state that a crow was used as a property. The use of the common crow here might suggest that a live bird was used in the action, for urbanized crows were easier to procure than the more remote, and more rural, ravens. For further commentary on this scene as one featuring a live dove, see Kathryn Wells, 'The Dove on a Cord in the Chester Cycle's *Noah's Flood*', *Theatre Notebook: A Journal of the History and Technique of the British Theatre* 47 (1993), 42–7. For moralization of the raven as a symbol of sin, see Richard of St Victor, *De Superexcellenti Baptismo Christi*, PL 196: 1018B, which Hugh of Fouilly picks up for his *Aviaryum*, 116 and 174–81. For a survey of early Christian moralizations of the raven, see Jack P. Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Leiden, 1986), 173–6.

- 53 In the York *Flood*, ed. Beadle, the raven is derided as a ‘fayland frende’ (228) guilty of ‘werkis wrange’ (231); in the Towneley *Noah*, ed. Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley (Oxford, 1994), 1.45, the raven is accused of being always hungry and ‘without any reson’ (725) when confronted with carrion; in the N-Town *Noah*, ed. Stephen Spector, *The N-Town Play: Cotton Vespasianus D.8* (Oxford, 1991), 1.49, the bird is a crow, deprecated for its carrion-eating (line 246); in the French *Passion de Semur*, ed. P.T. Durbin, *Leeds Medieval Studies* 3 (Leeds, 1981), 28, l 1037, it is again a ‘mal courbeaul’ and is cursed; in the *Mistère du Viel Testament*, ed. Le Baron James de Rothschild (Paris, 1878), the bird is a crow, and its feral refusal to return is contrasted to the dove being ‘domestique’ (6043); and in *Cursor Mundi*’s embellishment of the Noah story, the bird, a raven, is said to be guilty of deceit in line 1894 of the EETS edition, part 1, ed. Richard Morris (Oxford, 1961), 117. In *Cleanness*, the raven is seen as a rebel and as untrue, ll 455–6, ed. Andrew and Waldron. See also Brian Murdoch, *The Medieval Popular Bible: Expansion of Genesis in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2003), 116–18.
- 54 ‘The Chester Mystery Plays and the Limits of Realism’, Tom Scott and Pat Starkey (eds), *The Middle Ages in the North-West* (Oxford, 1995), 227. See also Peter W. Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle* (Chicago, 1982), 100; and Christina M. Fitzgerald, *The Drama of Masculinity and Medieval English Guild Culture* (New York, 2007), 35–6 and 58–60. That this play is so interested in delineating the kinds and extent of women’s labour might be related to the restrictive legislation of the 1530s to the 1570s in Chester, when statutes were passed to control women’s access to labour markets and guilds. See Mary Wack, ‘Women, Work, and Plays in an English Medieval Town’, Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (eds), *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women’s Alliances in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999), 33–51. See also Robert W. Barrett Jr, *Against All England: Regional Identity and Cheshire Writing, 1195–1656* (Notre Dame, 2009), for an argument suggesting that the Chester plays show the city’s transition from a monastic center to a mercantile civic corporation.
- 55 Beadle, *The York Plays*, ll 125–6.
- 56 Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 120–1; and Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 62 and 68–9.
- 57 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 2.1263 reports the female bear’s lustfulness, but this assessment goes back to classical tradition. See Oppian, *Cynegetica*, trans. A.W. Mair (Cambridge MA, 1963), chap. 3, sections 147–50, pp 124–73 and Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, trans. A.L. Peck (Cambridge MA, 1991), book 7, 608a, 32.
- 58 On the bear’s gluttony and omnivorousness, see Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 2.1102, where he quotes Solinus, and 1261–2. In devotional contexts, the bear’s

- gluttony was also commonly moralized; see Nancy Fischer, *A Handlist of Animal References in Middle English Prose, Leeds Studies in English* 4 (1970), 58. On the bear and human stores of honey, see the typical illustration included in Robert Delort, *Les Animaux Ont une Histoire* (Paris, 1984), 282.
- 59 Elizabeth Baldwin, "'Selling the Bible to Pay for the Bear": The Value Placed on Entertainment in Congleton, 1584–1637', Scott and Starkey, *The Middle Ages in the North-West*, 257–67. Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 42 too, says the bear is often 'nourished for sport' and that it will fight with many animals presented to it. On bear-baiting in general, see Kiser, 'Animals', 117–18.
- 60 For the puritan mayor's ban, see David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto, 1998), 71. Given the late date of the Chester manuscripts, thinking about protestant values reflected within them is by no means inappropriate, even with respect to the ark's animals. Against bear-baiting generally in the early modern period, see Robert Crowley's 1550 attack on it as a 'full ugly sight' in J.M. Cooper (ed.), *The Select Works of Robert Crowley* (Oxford, 1872), 16 (cited in Thomas, *Man in the Natural World*, 157).
- 61 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 2.1223–4.
- 62 For the wolf's outlaw status, see Aleksander Pluskowski, *Wolves and Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006), 187. Pluskowski cites both the *Tale of Gamelyn* and the *Towneley Plays* as his evidence. For the lack of a market for lupine products, see Pluskowski, *Wolves and Wilderness*, 117 and Cummins, *Hound and Hawk*, 134.
- 63 *De Naturis Rerum*, ed. Thomas Wright (London, 1863), chaps 128–32, pp 207–14. He also relates an anecdote about two apes and a bear owned by a wealthy man who had them for the purposes of entertainment; see chap. 129, p 208.
- 64 The fullest treatment of the medieval and early modern ape can be found in H.W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance* (London, 1952), passim. On its thievery and a possible folk connection between the ape and Noah's drunkenness, see John Block Friedman, 'The Peddler-Robbed-by-Apes Topos: Parchment to Print and Back Again', *Journal of the Early Book Society* 11 (2008), 87–120. Joyce E. Salisbury, in *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1994), 142–4, speculates that one of the reasons for the negative reception of the ape was its uncertain status as a borderline creature between animals and humans. The animal's connection to the demonic is even visible in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale*, where the demon casually remarks that he is a shape-changer who sometimes takes the form of an ape (l 1464).
- 65 Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 2.
- 66 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 2.1110.

- 67 George Warner (ed.), *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye: A Poem on the Use of Sea-Power*, (Oxford, 1926): 'The grete galees of Venees and Florence / Be wel ladene with thyn-
ges of complacence /.../ Apes and japes and marmusettes taylede, / Nifles, trifles,
that little have availed' (ll 344–9). Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 4 con-
firms the luxury status of apes when he writes, 'they are only kept in riche mens
houses to sport withal'.
- 68 13092.
- 69 See Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World* (Kent OH, 1971), 39.
- 70 For the owl and ape confederacy in general, see Rowland, *Blind Beasts*, 36–40;
Mellinkoff, *Averting Demons*, 87–8; and Oggins, *The Kings and Their Hawks*, 130
and 193n128.
- 71 Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 1.614.
- 72 See, for example, Marie de France's fable 80 of 'The Hawk and the Owl' to get a
good sense of the nest-defiling and unaristocratic folk profile of the owl. For the owl
as hated by other birds for its pride and ugliness, see also the Phaedrian fable 614,
in *Babrius and Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. Ben Edwin Perry (Cambridge MA, 1965),
Appendix, 545. In the medieval period, this fable was adapted by, among others,
Odo of Cheriton, *The Fables of Odo of Cheriton*, trans. John C. Jacob (Syracuse,
1985), 130–1. See also *The Owl and the Nightingale*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Exeter,
2001), ll 90–100, for a vivid description of the owl's perceived dirtiness and nest-
defiling habits. English misericords also frequently depict the owl, sometimes as
a symbol of the Jew; see Mariko Miyazaki, 'Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-
Semitism', Debra Hassig (ed.), *The Mark of the Beast* (New York, 1999), 23–43; and
other visual depictions of the owl often show it in darkly immoral environments.
See Klingender, *Animals in Art and Thought*, 403–4, for the bird's appearance in
illustrations of the Book of Revelation. Richard Holland's *The Buke of the Howlat*
(1445–52) deploys many of the owl's negative cultural meanings in its satire; see Re-
gina Scheibe, 'The Major Professional Skills of the Dove in *The Buke of the Howlat*',
L.A.J.R. Houwen (ed.), *Animals and the Symbolic in Mediaeval Art and Literature*,
Mediavalia Groningana, vol. 20 (Groningen, 1997), esp. 32–7.
- 73 Malcolm Jones, in *The Secret Middle Ages* (Phoenix Hill, 1997), 7–58, surveys the
erotic content of squirrel imagery and verbal references to squirrels on late medi-
eval rings and personal seals. In folklore, weasels were connected to immoral and
deceitful young women; see Beryl Rowland's discussion of Chaucer's Alison being
compared to a weasel in the *Miller's Tale*, *Blind Beasts*, 25–9. The weasel was always
gendered female in the Aesopic/Romulus/Phaedrus tradition, and its vernacular
name in medieval French and Italian, 'bellette' and 'donnola' respectively, identified
it as a young woman. For the deep connection between women and the weasel in

- both classical and medieval folklore, see Maurizio Bettini, *Nascere: Storie di Donne, Donnole, Madri ed Eroi* (Turin, 1998); Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 729 rehearses some of the classical sources that reflect these ideas.
- 74 On noblewomen's pet squirrels, see Teresa McLean, *The English at Play in the Middle Ages* (Windsor Forest, 1983), 98; Compton Reeves, *Pleasures and Pastimes in Medieval England* (Phoenix Mill, 1997), 125; Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, 57; Woolgar, *The Great Household*, 190; and Lucia Impelluso, *Nature and Its Symbols*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (Los Angeles, 2004), 234, 236–7. Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 658 notes that squirrels are 'sweete-sported beastes, and are very pleasant playfellowes in a house'.
- 75 On squirrel trapping, see Aleksander Pluskowski, 'Communicating Through Skin and Bone: Appropriating Animal Bodies in Medieval Western European Seigneurial Culture', Pluskowski, *Breaking and Shaping*, 33–4. Vair (the fur of the red squirrel) was categorized as a 'heraldic' fur, however — and it could be valuable; see Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 24; see also the manuscript illustration of peasants trapping squirrels, fig. 29. For the fines imposed on peasants caught with squirrels and rabbits, see Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound*, 117.
- 76 Delort, *Les Animaux*, 310 (his evidence is Mediterranean); for English evidence, see Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 33, 93–4, 108–9, and 134–5; Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 236; Edward of Norwich, *The Master of Game*, 74; Manning, *Hunters and Poachers*, 72, 128, 131, 155, and 165; and Griffin, *Blood Sport*, 59 and 61. Griffin and Almond both refer to the manuscript illustration in the *Queen Mary's Psalter* that specifically shows women catching rabbits with ferrets (BL MS Royal 2B VII, f 155v). See also the male and female peasants hunting rabbits with ferrets depicted on the Burgundian Tapestry (Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, fig. 36; Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, fig. 48). Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 183 tersely remarks that ferrets 'are tamed to hunt Conies out of the earth'. For women in poaching bands, see Manning, *Hunters and Poachers*, 183.
- 77 *Hunters and Poachers*, 135–48 and 209–31. On women's involvement in the trafficking of fancy and fur-trimmed clothing being sold to those of inappropriate social station, see Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford, 2007), 153 and 195.
- 78 See Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge, 1995), 34 and Richard de Fournival's *Bestiare d'Amour*, in *Master Richard's Bestiary of Love and Response*, trans. Jeanette Beer (West Lafayette, 1985), 9. The idea of the weasel's ears being important to its identity stems from a late classical legend, preserved in bestiaries, that the weasel conceived its young through its ears and gave birth through its mouth (though the functions of the ears and mouth sometimes appear

- reversed). See Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 30–9, and, for an early modern reaction to this folk-belief, Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*, 728.
- 79 “‘Make the Asse to Speake” or Staging the Chester Plays’, David Mills (ed.), *Staging the Chester Cycle* (Leeds, 1985), 65–6. Lawrence M. Clopper points out that the Chester guild accounts also corroborate the presence of live animals in the plays; see Lawrence M. Clopper (ed.), *REED: Chester* (Toronto, 1979), lvi; lxvii, n21. The Balaam play does not star a live ass, however, possibly because the playwright was unwilling to have it beaten onstage.
- 80 For an analysis of these speeches and an argument suggesting that the Chester play is unusual in its appreciation for sheep when compared to the Towneley shepherds’ plays, see Lisa J. Kiser, “‘Mak’s Heirs”: Sheep and Humans in the Pastoral Ecology of the Towneley *First and Second Shepherds’ Plays*”, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108 (2009), 336–59.
- 81 For some Anglican influences on the Chester cycle, see Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago, 2001), esp. 184–5; for the overall religious climate in which the Chester dramatists were operating, see 275–93. See also Coletti, ‘The Chester Cycle’, 531–47; and Paul Whitfield White, ‘Reforming Mysteries’ End: A New Look at Protestant Intervention in English Provincial Drama’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999), 121–47. The 1572 performance of the Chester plays, however, resulted in them being condemned as ‘papist,’ so we must be careful before labelling them as reformist. See Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, *Cheshire Including Chester*, 2 vols, *REED* (Toronto, 2007), 1.143–8. It is also important to remember that most of the Chester cycle manuscripts date from a period much later than the cycle’s last performance and they may not reflect any actual performance of the play. For manuscript dating, see Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1.ix–xxvii. For explicitly protestant biblical commentaries that focus on the ark and its animals, see Don Cameron Allen, *The Legend of Noah: Renaissance Rationalism in Art, Science, and Letters* (Urbana, 1949) esp. 78–81.
- 82 Lawrence M. Clopper, ‘The Principle of Selection of the Chester Old Testament Plays’, *Chaucer Review* 13 (1979), 272–83; and Phillip Zarrilli, ‘From Destruction to Consecration: Covenant in the Chester *Noah* Play’, *Theatre Journal* 31 (1979), 198–209.
- 83 From Lumiansky and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 1.49–50, ll 169–92.