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Memorializing Animals during the Romantic Period
(Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015)
by Chase Pielak

WILLIAM BLAKE'S "AUGURIES OF INNOCENCE" SETS OUT IN DARK DETAIL the connections between all living (and spirit) beings and the ripple effects of one creature harming another: "A dog starvd at his Masters Gate / Predicts the ruin of the State /A Horse misusd upon the Road /Calls to Heaven for Human blood / Each outcry of the hunted Hare/ A fibre from the Brain does tear /A Skylark wounded in the wing / A Cherubim does cease to sing." Though Chase Pielak's *Memorializing Animals* does not treat Blake explicitly, save for a footnote, the book's argument is aligned closely with Blake's writings. Pielak is interested in moments of community between human and non-human animals, and he is attuned in particular to the ways in which "dead and deadly animals" provide moments of what he calls "rupture," where questions of what it means to be human and what differentiates humans from non-human animals come to the fore. Pielak is clear that his is not a treatise on animal rights; rather, it explores the ways that non-human animals "help us read human and human/animal social relations." And yet, crucially, he argues strongly and persuasively that animals *matter*, and that during the Romantic period they "begin to matter in ways they hadn't before" (6).

The disparate ways that animals matter during the period are taken up in *Memorializing Animals*' six chapters, which trace six relationships that Pielak identifies as being disrupted by animals: friendship in Charles and Mary Lamb, hierarchy and self in John Clare, death in Coleridge, the expectations of life in Byron, and memory in Wordsworth. In each of these cases, Pielak examines the ways in which animals function as "animemorials": anti-memorials, "creatures that cannot be known or assimilated and thus destabilize memory and the possibility of memorial" (5). And so while Pielak's title seems to refer most directly to the memorializing of animals who have died, it also refers to animals who themselves act as memorials. While *Memorializing Animals* is ostensibly a book about animal death, it is much more about animal afterlives: "the trajectory from life into memory as it is graphed onto the bodies of animals in Romantic literature" (1). For this reason, readers of *The Coleridge Bulletin* will be pleased to learn, Pielak's Coleridge chapter is especially key. Pielak argues that "reading animal bodies—allowing them to speak—is a vital practice for Coleridge's poetry," and it is in this chapter that animals who themselves memorialize are given room to speak (91).

Pielak's opening chapters uncover the many challenges of living and speaking with the other. Chapter 1, "Beasts at the Table: Charles and Mary

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Lamb and Roast Animals," explores animals who "expose the difficulties inherent in all relationships, human and animal alike" (13). Through readings of "That You Must Love Me and Love My Dog," "The Beasts in the Tower," "The Boy and the Skylark," "The Rook and the Sparrows," "A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig," "That We Should Lie Down With the Lamb," and "That We Should Rise With the Lark," Pielak traces Lamb's attempt to "create a relational scheme" between humans and non-human animals to "order these relationships into a community" (36). It is an attempt, Pielak argues, that is undermined by Lamb's erasure of the human animal distinction, but the very "life together" for which Lamb strives (and fails) is the template for Pielak's discussion of Clare's animal poetry.

The subtle shift from "life together" to "living together" in the second chapter's title, "Living Together: John Clare's Creature Community," is indicative of what Pielak sees as Clare's primary project: the active establishment of community with animals. Reading "On Seeing a Lost Greyhound in Winter," "Thrice Welcome," and "The Ants," Pielak notes that Clare "perceives animals neither as pets nor as game" (8). These are poems that establish a "creature community, detailing an understanding of living together with animals" (38). It is a project, argues Pielak, that is truly Pantisocratic, "built around chosen kinship," establishing in print what "his contemporaries could not establish in life." In chapter 3, "Mourning Eden's Churchyard: Clare's Animal Bodies," Pielak takes up other Clare poems in which "melancholia is the chief form of experience available." Through a series of close readings, Pielak identifies animals who fully participate in community, "not just as knowable listeners, but also as knowing advisors." Much has been written about Clare's animal poetry by the growing number of Romanticists working in animal studies and ecocriticism, and Pielak cites these critics extensively throughout his two chapters. Clare's poems serve Pielak's idea of the animemorial particularly well, and his own contribution to Clare studies might have been richer had he been more explicit in discussing the ways in which Clare's animals resist memorialization as much as they enable it.

The process of memorialization is quite literally grounded in Chapter 4, "Dead(ly) Beasts: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Wandering Cemetery," which reads "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "The Raven," "To a Young Ass," and "Christabel" in the context of Romantic-era concerns about urban burial. Pielak's premise is that Coleridge's poetry arises from a place in which "deadly animals hang around and death is imminent," and that the animals in Coleridge's work—as keepers of secrets and dangerous knowledge— are often representations of the proximity of death to life. "Coleridge is attentive to the lives of animals," writes Pielak, "even as or particularly because they indicate the end of the human" (75). This chapter, like Coleridge himself, is particularly attentive to the lives of animals. During Pielak's lengthy reading of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," for example, he notes that "we need to ask not only why the mariner killed the bird, but why the animal responded in the first place" (78). (This question goes unanswered; the implication being that the

bird had no reason to hail the mariners' call or, perhaps, that Pielak knows better than to speak *for* the animal.) This shifting of perspective from human as primary actor to non-human animal as primary actor enriches Pielak's reading of these oft-interpreted poems and is a highlight of the monograph.

Pielak shifts attention from deadly to dead animals in chapter 5, "Eccentric Beasts: Byron's Animal Taboo and Transgression," focusing on Canto 2 of *Don Juan* (Juan's spaniel) and "Epitaph to a Dog." He argues that the transgressions around the dead dogs of these two poems are sufficiently destabilizing to "attack the possibility of the humane" (120). The two dog tales fall at opposite ends of a spectrum, the first a case of "exemplary friendship" and the second a form of cannibalism. Pielak's attempt to bring these together is less successful than his other chapters. Piealek argues that "Epitaph" is evidence that Byron's bond with Boatswain blinded him to human (and other animal) suffering, which seems in conflict with the poem's criticism of human-to-human abuses. Again, this chapter would be well-served by a discussion of animemorial, and the ways in which Byron's dogs destabilize memory and refuse assimilation.

The final chapter, "Landed Beasts: William Wordsworth, the White Doe, and the Cuckoo," serves as a fitting conclusion to *Memorializing Animals*. In many ways, the entire monograph—and particularly the chapter on Coleridge—has been leading up to a discussion of Wordsworth, where the idea of the animemorial comes most sharply into focus. Pielak describes the book's trajectory as moving "from rupture through reconciliation," and it is in Wordsworth's poetry that Pielak finds the most successful attempt at such reconciliation. Unsurprisingly, Pielak acknowledges that Wordsworth's poetic animals "often lead back to the narrator," but he suggests that there is value in this, as Wordsworth treats animals as "fellow citizens" in his own "quest to be at home with himself and the other within himself." This, really, is the take-away: Pielak's work seeks not only a new way of reading Romantic-era literature, but a new way of being with others in the world. Pielak concludes by saying that "Wordsworth, haunted by animal voices, made a home for himself against the surfaces of animal bodies, so must we" (154). Here, as elsewhere, Pielak is explicitly in dialogue with Ron Broglio's *Surface Animals: Thinking with Animals and Art* and implicitly with a decade of work in animal studies that seeks to take the non-human animal on its own terms. The particular value of the idea of the animemorial is that it respects the animal as a being who cannot be fully known. The readings Pielak sets out here are a "necessary guide not only for rereading Romantic period literature, but for understanding ourselves in light of our complex relationship with animals now" (154).