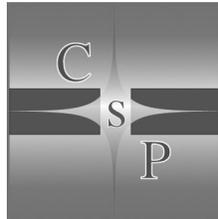# Entertainment, Leisure and Identities

Entertainment, Leisure and Identities

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

ENTERTAINING IDENTITIES?

ROGER SPALDING

There is sometimes a tendency to view Entertainment as an essentially frivolous activity. Graham Greene, the novelist, famously divided his works into serious fiction, which explored issues like sin and redemption, and 'entertainments'; the division is suggestive of the issues to be explored in this collection. The readers of *Heart of the Matter* are not simply reading a book, they are engaging with profound issues, and constructing an identity of fundamental seriousness. The readers of *Stamboul Train*, on the other hand, are constructing an identity of sensual self-indulgence. In a similar way when the Church authorities inveighed against the ale-houses of seventeenth rural England, their complaint was not against drunkenness *per se*, but against the ungodliness that was implied by it.[1] Entertainments, whatever their nature, are not mere diversions, but are markers, or signifiers of social identity. For the educated middle classes, the term "*Sun*-reader" acts in this way, producing an identity consisting of a complex of undesirable, and dare one say it, vulgar, attitudes and behaviours.

Identities linked to entertainment are, as shall be seen, often imposed by social groups who invest such activities with negative connotations. Implicit within the label "*Sun*-reader" is the idea that readers of the newspaper passively consume it; and that their identity is the sum total of the attitudes it contains. The negative labelling of social groupings via the medium of their entertainment activities thus often fails to recognise quite complex interactive relationships between consumers, and the product and activities they use and pursue. In large part this is the result of a clash between paternalistic agendas – usually middle class in origin - promoting improving activities, and more hedonistic agendas that lead to the appropriation and adaptation of whatever pursuits are on offer. This is a dialectic that recurs frequently in the history of leisure.

The historical investigation of Entertainment and Identity clearly overlaps with work exploring the themes of Leisure and Popular Culture. Leisure is as Hugh Cunningham suggests, "the time left after work", in other words the temporal location of entertainment.[2] Culture can best be seen as the embodiment

of social attitudes and outlooks, of which the pursuit of entertainments can be seen as one component. In recent times the Countryside Alliance have made use of this linkage, describing foxhunting not simply as a sport, but as part of a "way of life". In Britain many of the investigations of leisure and popular culture have tended to focus on the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Very frequently such accounts theorise social conflicts as the product of clashes between a customary popular culture and the values embodied in new notions of work discipline and political economy. The fullest and most detailed example of this approach being E. P. Thompson's *Customs in Common*.[3] One development of this approach has been to see leisure, and the entertainments that filled it as areas of conflict between plebeian culture and the improving middle classes, anxious to regularise the social habits of their workers, seeking to impose "a play discipline to complement the work discipline that was the principal means of control".[4] This meant replacing the rowdy, often drunken diversions of wakes and fairs, with 'improving' rational recreation.[5]

From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards "cultural pessimists" argued that popular culture was progressively debased by the development of a commercial mass culture. Writing in 1932, Q. D. Leavis declared:

> The effect of the increasing control by Big Business - in which it would hardly be unreasonable, on the strength of the evidence above, to include the film interests - is to destroy among the masses a desire to read anything which by the widest stretch could be included in the classification 'literature…[6]

Such negative attitudes towards, popular fiction, cinema and later, television have had a very long life. D. J. Taylor, in an article celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, described the book's account of the morally debilitating consequences of the television-led mass culture of the 1950s, as 'uncannily prophetic of developments in the late 20th century'.[7] Such pessimism has not, though, gone unchallenged. Hugh Cunningham has argued the popular culture of the 20th century was not simply imposed by the interests that controlled the new mass forms of communications; rather, it was shaped by a process of negotiation through which consumers made the products offered them, their own.[8] An example of this process is provided by the development of Association Football, which was introduced to the population at large, from the public schools, as a form of rational recreation, but which 'rapidly developed along independent working-class lines'.[9]

Other historians take an even stronger position on the development of commercial culture. J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue argue that what others might see as commercial mass culture was the product of market demand by the

people themselves, and that as such was neither an imposition, nor a development to be viewed negatively.[10] This debate, on the nature of commercial mass culture, continues to the present-day in a multiplicity of forms. To take one example the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) defines the process of marketing as: "the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably".[11] The market, therefore, simply satisfies existing wants. Against this one might pose the views of a figure like Naomi Klein who, in her best-selling book, *No Logo*, argues that marketing creates desires by manipulating the perceptions of the public.[12]

Cinema and television have, probably because of the apparent passivity of the viewers attracted a great deal of critical attention over the years. This was a concern before the second world war, and it remains a concern today, witness, for example the claims of Mediawatch, the successor to the National Viewers and Listeners Association, established by Mary Whitehouse, made in the wake of a series of shootings in South London, in 2007:

> In this age of "joined up" government and the trend for multi-agency approaches to problem solution the influence of film and television cannot be ignored nor can the industries remain aloof or beyond criticism for the culture of violence to which they have contributed.[13]

In the view of such social conservatives, moving images are passively received and, in some cases, imitated by the audience. Such attitudes could also be found amongst those who were, nominally, on the political left. W. H. Auden, for example, talked of the working classes:

> By cops directed to fug
> Of talkie-houses for a drug.[14]

In opposition to this view of passive reception a number of cinema historians have argued that film cannot simply implant ideas in the heads of audiences, but has to interact with them and confirm ideas and attitudes already held.[15] This approach is also based on the notion of negotiation between the consumer and the commercial provider mentioned earlier. However, it does leave scope for further controversy: what if the values confirmed by cinema are seen in a negative light by the historian or commentator? This issue arose in the 1990s in relation to what were called "Heritage Films". In Britain these were principally associated with the Merchant Ivory production company, frequently set in Edwardian England, and characterised by sumptuous interiors and beautiful period exteriors. For many critics these films were nostalgic and reactionary, embodying the values of Mrs. Thatcher's Britain.

> It is a cinema focused on a class that could pretend to be insulated from the world outside. In this it is very much in tune with our contemporary consumerist view of the world as a place in which objects exist only in acquisition, not in the labour of their creation.[16]

The arguments around the merits of "Heritage Films" reflected a much wider debate about Heritage itself. From the 1980s capitalised Heritage had boomed as a leisure activity, encompassing museums, country houses, reconstructed communities and "experiences". For many critics, like Patrick Wright, these developments constructed a conflict-free vision of the past that validated the role of the ruling classes as the creators of 'Beauty'. They also, as a consequence provided a historical underpinning for present-day class divisions.[17] In opposition to this view Raphael Samuel argued that Heritage sites, and a whole range of other, associated activities should be welcomed, as widening the extent of popular engagements with the past. Indeed, in many ways he takes us full circle by arguing that visitors do not passively consume museum displays, but interact with them in a selective fashion. He also rejected the "perceived opposition between 'education' and 'entertainment' and the unspoken and unargued for assumption that pleasure is almost by definition mindless".[18]

The entertainment activities that occupy leisure time have been and remain disputed territories. A central focus of that argument centres on the polar oppositions of ownership and manipulation. Superimposed on that dialectic was a very large measure of paternalism as middle class commentators, of all political persuasions, reflected negatively on the disappointing attitudes of the population at large. To that extent it could be argued that much of the debate was about the identities that social groups failed to assume. For W. H. Auden, quoted above, in a passage echoing Marx's claim that "religion is the opium of the people", the working class drugged by popular cinema, failed to assume its historic revolutionary identity.

Such debates are based on a separation between the objective and the subjective, that, in other words the identities assumed by individuals and social groups have some relationship to an external world, within which different identities could be assumed. In the late twentieth century a school of post-structuralist historians emerged, who argued that societies did not have an externality, but existed entirely within the construct of language. Social relations are therefore imagined, and individuals make themselves through the activities, including entertainments, that they undertake.[19] From, this perspective individuals do not express their identity through their entertainment activity, rather their activities are, in total, their identity. This view does not mean identity is fixed. Language is a social medium and meanings exist in relation to other meanings, and meanings themselves, according to historians of this

school, are constantly in a state of fluid redefinition as they react one upon another. This approach, with its view of language, places a huge emphasis on culture, indeed in one sense it renders all history into Cultural History.[20] It also, because of its stress on the subjective nature of experience rejects any notion of hierarchy within human activities, thus no entertainment is improving, or debasing, it is simply an expression of what those who pursue them are. In a similar way the dialectic between ownership and manipulation also loses meaning, because it implies some external organising principles governing human affairs.

The debates around entertainment and identity are, as this short introduction has suggested, diverse, wide-ranging and ongoing. The chapters in this collection reflect that diversity. They represent detailed studies of specific entertainment activities mainly drawn from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and they contribute to the discussions outlined above by filling the gaps, so to speak, and providing further detail for the development of overarching accounts of how entertainment activities contribute to the shaping of identities.

The first contribution, by John Simons is an exception in this collection in that it looks at developments in the medieval period. It demonstrates the clear link between entertainment and leisure time as it discusses how the well-to-do of medieval England expressed their sense of personal identity through the keeping of pets. One might also see it as dealing with the early stages of process that picks up momentum in the nineteenth century. Many of the medieval pet-keepers that John Simons refers to are members of the church – monks and nuns – and their pets appear to enable them to assume an identity different from that laid down by clerical authority. Indeed, it is striking that Hugh Cunningham, speaking of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, states "people increasingly found their identity both individually and collectively in their leisure activities rather than in, say religion".[21]

Michael Hayes' chapter examines the way that an ancient tradition of Irish dancing, as taught by a traditional travelling teacher survived into the twentieth century. The teacher that he focuses on could be seen as in some ways a cousin to the *griots* of pre-literate African cultures. These traditional figures acted as oral historians and preserved the memory and also, thereby the traditions and identity of their communities. "Munnix", the subject of this piece, also acted to preserve the cultural heritage of his particular district of Ireland. He can be seen to be a late surviving remnant of what was once a much more fluid and mobile society.

In medieval societies Carnival provided the plebeian classes with a temporary release from the constraints of everyday life. Jill Fernie-Clarke explores Blackpool as a location where sanctioned misbehaviour has been

institutionalised and become an everyday activity. One might also see Blackpool as the product of a desire for the expression of vulgar self-indulgence, a liminal location where the constraints of daily life do not apply, and another identity is allowed to emerge.

Tim Harding's work looks at a very different activity, the spread of Chess playing amongst a wide social spectrum in nineteenth century Lancashire. This was an activity for those who wished to improve themselves; and also to advertise their intellectual ability. It also enabled working class players to mix with their social superiors. Chess playing can perhaps be seen as part of the process by which a section of the working demonstrated its civilisation and respectability.

Roger Ryan's chapter on the development of yachting links to John Simon's work, in that it addresses a leisure activity that amongst other things, because of the equipment required, demonstrated the status of the participants. The work also shows how yachting, like other Victorian sports reflected the class polarisations of British society, just as cricket drew a social distinction between players (paid) and gentlemen (amateurs) so too yachting distinguished between the amateur owners and their paid crew members. Yachting was also presented as a patriotic activity, preparing men for service, it was argued, in the Royal Navy.

Vanessa Toulmin's chapter considers a hitherto relatively neglected area, the "fixed halls" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These venues, like her example, Reynolds' Waxworks in Liverpool, provided their patrons with live freak shows, waxworks displays – frequently involving graphic portrayals of gory crimes - and variety performances. In some ways one might see their relationship with popular taste as prefiguring the offerings of the contemporary tabloid press; whose reports of grossly over-weight children are less the product of their concern for the public good, than their own version of the Reynolds' "infant jumbo".

As has been shown, much of the debate around the issue of entertainment and identity focuses on the issue of control and manipulation, principally in relation to commercially provided entertainments. Jessica Wardhaugh provides an example where this dichotomy did nor operate, at least not in a commercial sense, because the Anarchists of late 19th century Paris established their own theatre. In doing so they created a tradition that would be continued by the French Communist Party after its formation in the early 1920s. Here then we see theatre used in an attempt to create a consciously oppositional identity; and also a political practice that was broadly defined to encompass the cultural and the artistic.

Roger Spalding's piece explores the interaction between the agenda of the British Board of Film Censors, the ambitions of filmmakers and the cultural

attitudes of the cinema-going audience in the construction of identity in Britain in the 1930s. The example used to illustrate this process is the unusual film, for the time, *The Last Adventurers*. Unlike other products of the time this film, which focuses on the Grimsby fishing industry, does attempt a serious, that is, non-comic, portrayal of working people

Kevern Verney's contribution marks the eightieth birthday of the performer and political campaigner, Harry Belafonte. Over the course of his long career Belafonte has had to balance the requirements of his roles as a popular performer and as an activist. The longevity of Belafonte's career when combined with this duality of roles has made his life emblematic of the changing fortunes of African Americans in the post Second World War period. In many ways the difficulties Belafonte faced in shaping his public identities reflected, however indirectly, the difficulties of the Black population as a whole.

The work of the various contributors covers a wide range of experiences, but they all share the view that, far from being trivial, entertainment pursuits play a central role in the shaping of identity, and that furthermore, to a lesser or greater degree participants can play an active role in shaping their public personas through the entertainments activities they chose to engage in.

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16. Craig Cairns, 'Rooms Without a View' 1991, in Ginette Vincendeau, *Film, Literature, Heritage* (BFI, 2001) 5

17. Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (Verso, 1985) 69 – 70

18. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (Verso, 1996) 271

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21. Cunningham op. cit. 339

CHAPTER ONE

ANIMALS, LEISURE AND STATUS: SOME ASPECTS OF PET-KEEPING IN THE MIDDLE AGES

JOHN SIMONS

In Vittorio Carpaccio's painting of St Jerome bringing his lion back into the monastery the lion looks politely on as St Jerome introduces him to a gate keeper who is caught in the act of escaping. Another monk, his back to us, is poised delicately on one toe, his other leg thrust out almost parallel to the ground in his haste to get away and, in the background, two more monks rush up a flight of stairs. Among this scene of disruption other activities appear to go on in quiet tranquillity but the viewer is struck not only by the action of the human comedy but also by the extraordinary number of animals that appear to throng the monastic gardens. Some of these – a stag and what is either a pheasant or a peacock – are making off to get away from the lion but others browse peacefully on and one can identify various tame birds, another deer, some bees and what appears to be a beaver. Now, we should be aware that in a painting of this type the various animals depicted are likely to have iconological and symbolic values derived from the well known text, *Physiologus*, the bestiaries that derived from it across Christendom throughout the Middle Ages and, of course, the wonderful *Etymologiae* of St Isidore of Seville.[1] However, as Dante explained in his famous letter to Cangrande della Scala, even the most complex allegorical texts have a layer of literal meaning and this literal layer was an important element of the quadripartite allegorical structure. And so although we might follow the lead of the bestiaries and read the beaver, which sits stolidly and oblivious to the danger posed by the lion, as a reminder of monastic poverty and chastity, we might also assume that Carpaccio's depiction of the monastery is also, in some ways, a realistic account of a real situation and that an ecclesiastical establishment such as St Jerome's monastery might well have had a fair-sized menagerie, which went beyond the simple requirements of agricultural and security, attached to it.

We can see more evidence of this ecclesiastical pet-keeping in the *General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* where Chaucer spends some time describing the little dogs which follow the Prioress:

> Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde
> With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed.
> But soore wepte if one of them were deede,
> Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;
> And al was conscience and tender herte.[2]

(She had some small hounds that she fed with roast meat or milk and fine white bread but wept bitterly if one of them died or of someone hit it with a stick. With her it was all conscience and a tender heart.)

The gently affectionate portrait of the worldly nun gives us a way into thinking about the concept of pet ownership in the Middle Ages and, in particular the way in which the ownership of animals can begin to help us explore both the ways in which animals can confer status on their human companions and also the opening up of the idea of leisure as a category of time which is distinctive from work and rest. But, as is so often the case, Chaucer also brings echoes of a contemporary controversy into his fiction and the Prioress's pet dogs remind us of a specific campaign that was being waged by the church authorities in England in the late fourteenth century to try to bear down on what they saw as the increasing problem of pet keeping among monks and nuns.[3] In 1345 Hugh de Seton, Archdeacon of Ely, had written to an abbess in his jurisdiction forbidding 'dogs or birds, both great and small, being kept by an abbess or any nun within the walls of the nunnery or beneath the chair, especially during divine service.'[4] In 1387 – very much at the time when Chaucer was writing the *General Prologue* – the formidable William of Wykeham felt it necessary to write to the nuns of Romsey Abbey in the strongest terms:

> Whereas we have convinced ourselves by clear proofs that some of the nuns of your house bring with them to church birds, rabbits, hounds and such like frivolous creatures, to which they give more heed than to the offices of the church, with frequent hindrance to their own psalmody and to that of their fellow nuns, and to the grievous peril of their souls, therefore we strictly forbid you, jointly and singly, in virtue of the obedience due to us, that from henceforth you do not presume to bring to church any birds, hounds, rabbits or other frivolous creatures that are harmful to good discipline…What is more, because through hunting hounds and other dogs living within the confines of your nunnery, the alms which should be given to the poor are devoured.[5]

   This was the most significant outburst in England of an attempt to prevent the members of monastic and other religious orders from keeping pets that had been going on for a long time. Surprisingly, one of the earliest manifestations of this is to be found in the Franciscan Order (which one might have thought would have been particular sympathetic to animals). In 1260 (Pope Innocent III had given permission for the foundation of the order only as recently as 1210) the head of the Order officially ruled that 'no animal be kept, for any brother or any convent, whether by the Order, or any person in the Order's name, except cats and certain birds for the removal of unclean things.'[6] Later in the century the Benedictines followed suit although a hundred years earlier a great prince of the Church like Thomas à Beckett would progress with an entourage that included not only his servants and clergy but also his horses, his hounds and his troop of pet monkeys.[7]

   It is perfectly understandable that men like William of Wykeham might fear that church discipline and proper devotion was compromised when a nun spent her time playing with a pet rabbit when she should have been following the service or that money spent on dog food was money taken away from the poor. But this anxiety to rid the monasteries and nunneries of companion animals might also tell us some other things about the nature of pet-keeping in the Middle Ages and how it signifies the beginnings of a new consciousness about the way that time might be divided. It also impels us to consider some of the ways in which the status of an individual human might be defined or reinforced by the kinds of non-humans she or he chooses as companions.

   To understand the ways in which pet-keeping was changing the human sense of identity and the human sense of how time might be divided we need to start by considering the fundamental categories of the non-human as these presented themselves in the Middle Ages and also to set out, very briefly, the ways in the which the Middle Ages conventionally figured the relationship between humans and non-humans. This last task is, perhaps, best done first as it offers a context for everything that follows. Fundamentally, the position of non-humans in the Middle Ages – at least as far as the western Church was concerned (the eastern Church had a somewhat more inclusive position on the relationship between humans and the environment) – was that of subordination.[8] Non-humans were entirely under the control of humans who occupied a privileged space in creation. Non-humans were there simply for the use and pleasure of humans: they had no soul and no existence beyond that of their physical trace. There was, therefore, no duty or obligation towards non-humans, no requirement to treat them kindly and no expectation that we might relate to them in any way that was richer than the way that we might relate to, say, a tree. There was theological justification from this deriving from the dominion over the animal kingdom given to Adam and the further privileges over animals acquired by humanity

after Noah's rescue of creation from the Flood. It was suspicious and probably sinful to attribute personality or character to animals (as the nuns of Romsey were plainly doing) although it was accepted that some animals might show noble traits of loyalty and courage and that all animals might offer us insight in the works of God through the symbolic lessons that their behaviour, actions and appearance might teach us. The fidelity of dogs, for example, was recognised and came in for particular praise.[9] But these noble, dare we say, human traits were not recognised as belonging, in some way, to the animals in question or considered as deriving from some element of an inner being of that animal: as St Bonaventure argued, the specific affection and docility shown by animals towards humans such as St Francis is a signifier of the holiness and innocence of the saints and those like them not an index of the emotional or intellectual state of the animals.[10]

The theological position taken by the fathers of the western church left open a relatively limited set of opportunities for the classification of the animals and this classification is only meaningful in so far as it describes the relationship of a specific set of animals with the human world. Leaving aside the monstrous and mythological beasts which exist only as portents or as signifiers of the marvellous, the animal kingdom in the Middle Ages can be divided fairly handily between the wild and the tame and between the useful and the non-useful.[11] Wild animals can be further subdivided between those that are suitable for hunting and those that are not and those that are a nuisance (e.g. mice) and those that are not. Domestic animals may be useful in that they can be farmed for food or other produce, useful in that they can work for us as draught, pack or transport animals or useful in that they might work for us in other ways such as hunting, domestic security, entertainment, warfare, or other local tasks (such as rat and mouse control). This basic typology carries no expectations or assumptions that the animals themselves might inspire any particular affection or take on specific and individualised characteristics. But that is exactly what happens when animals make the leap from associates to companions and that leap is only possible when humans begin to consider that time spent watching, caring for or playing with animals is something different from work and that free time or leisure time is almost, but not quite entirely, exclusively associated with a growth in status by which the whole day does not have to be spent on the fulfilment of basic needs or on simple relaxation.[12]

Hunting offers a complex example of an activity using animals which falls between work and leisure and which is also largely bound up with the status of its participants. Most aristocratic hunting was not a utilitarian pursuit in that the game thus procured was by no means the only source of suitable meat for the table and one can see that it exhibits all the signs of an exclusive leisure pursuit. It required expensive and complicated equipment and personnel, it developed an

arcane and extensive technical language that would not have been available to anyone not directly involved as a participant or servant in the hunt, and it was hedged about by ritual and by protectionist custom and legislation. In the Middle Ages hunting was, thus, a pursuit which marked out its participants as having high social status and one of the markers of this high status was precisely that they had the leisure to hunt.

This all sounds pretty obvious - and it is - but the activity of hunting is a useful one for getting us into some of the finer textures which show how pet-keeping can act as a signifier for wider social changes and, specifically, changes in attitudes to status and leisure that can be tracked in the Middle Ages. Take the following passage from *Octavian*, a fourteenth-century chivalric romance which is much concerned with, among other things, questions of social status.[13] In *Octavian*, Florent, the long-lost son of the Emperor of Rome is brought up by Clement a butcher of Paris and displays his noble nature by his comic failure to fulfil the workaday tasks that Clement sets him. For example, Clement sends Florent to sell two oxen but on his way he meets a squire who has a falcon. Florent exchanges the oxen for the falcon and is soundly beaten for his pains but, as he says:

> Wolde ye stonde now and beholde
> How feyre he can hys fedurs folde
> And how lovely they lye,
> Ye wolde pray God with all your mode
> That ye had solde halfe your gode,
> Soche anodur to bye. [14]

> (If you would stand now and look at how well he knows how to fold his feathers and how beautifully they lie, you would pray to God with all your heart that you had sold half your goods to buy another one such as this.)

Here Florent is demonstrating the superiority of his noble nature over the bourgeois nurture offered to him by Clement through his particular relationship with a particularised and individualised animal. The animal is a noble animal in that it stands high up the ranks of birds because of its mode of feeding and its use in the aristocratic sport of falconry. But Florent's appreciation of the falcon is far more than utilitarian and goes far beyond the simple appreciation of the bird as an adjunct to hunting. The appreciation shown here is primarily aesthetic. What Clement cannot do is simply stand and quietly look at the bird to appreciate the sheer beauty of its appearance and the rightness of the way the feathers are folded. Clement cannot do this because he is not noble and therefore has no aesthetic capability but the poem makes it clear that this aesthetic capacity arises out of the ability to stand and look. In other words, it arises out

of the ability to spend time on an entirely self-directed and inwardly directed activity which has no practical or commercial value and no relevance to the physical survival, comfort or health of the participant. Thus we see in the encounter between Florent, Clement and the falcon a moment in which the complex of status, identity and leisure come together.

That animals were kept in the Middle Ages as an adjunct to the pursuit of leisure by high status groups is beyond doubt and we can see them thronging the margins and illuminations of prestigious books such as the Lutrell Psalter or the Sherborne Missal. We see them in the Books of Hours – the little dogs trotting behind their owners in gardens or wandering about beneath or even on their dining tables as in the 'January' scene of *Les Très Riches Heures de Jean de Berri*. We see them in paintings – the cat that goes skittering across the floor at the sudden appearance of the angel in Lorenzo Loto's *Annunciation* for example. Although the poor widow in Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* may have a small holding so meagre that she is reduced to giving her one sheep a name (Malle) there is no indication that this familiarity is a signifier of the suggestion that Malle is in some way a pet or that the widow relates to her animals in any way beyond the strictly utilitarian. But she is lower class and we would not expect her to show any other kind of response. However, there is evidence that in some cases the lower classes did keep animals for leisure purposes and the implications of this for the good order of society through the maintenance of proper status divisions and status markers meant that such activities required restrictive legislation along the lines of the sumptuary laws that defined what individuals of different status groups could legally wear and the game laws that brought together the legal definition of land tenure with a definition of the right to enjoy the use of the animals that inhabited the land.

Swan keeping offers a useful case study for the development of a new consciousness concerning companion animals and in the second part of this essay I will be examining in some detail the history of swan keeping in medieval Lincolnshire. Before doing this we will need to consider swan keeping more generally. One of the most persistent juridical myths of modern times is that all swans are owned by the monarchy. This is not true. The Crown has a prerogative over any free flying swan and any swan on waters in the public domain. Giraldus Cambrensis thought that this prerogative dated back at least to 1186. But there is not and never has been any legal barrier to private ownership of swans and, as we will see, in the Middle Ages the ownership of swans constitutes a fascinating and complex example of the ways in which a relationship between humans and non-humans can spawn not only a battery of documents and reported customs but also a clue to the inner life and mentality of medieval people specifically as this relates to identity and leisure.

Why would anyone want to keep swans? Swans do, of course, make good eating (or so I am told) but their use as a foodstuff has always been only an incidental part of the motivation for swan ownership. Swan meat was a delicacy, a luxury dish which might be brought out as the centre piece for a grand feast, and it was never consumed on an everyday basis nor considered as a staple meat. So far as I can tell, swans were never farmed in the way that geese or chicken and, later, turkeys were farmed. So the motivation for swan keeping takes us beyond the superficially utilitarian.

Another reason for swan keeping was that swans made good presents to give to high status visitors. If the Bishop came calling you could give him a pair of swans. Now, what this process of gift giving tells us is that swans had, like birds of prey, acquired significant status in the avian pecking order as this was perceived by the mediaeval mind, and that this status reflected back on you when you were in a position to give someone else a swan. Blackstone noted that swans are the only animals to have acquired a royal status. This is an interesting reversal of some of the principles of non-human subordination set out above as, in this case, it is the high status of the swan that confers secondary status on its owner and it is the high status of the swan that reinforces the high status of the visitor and recipient of the gift. Keeping swans as presents still has an underlying utilitarian motive but it is a more complex form of utility than farming for food. Here the value is to found in the symbolism of the interchange and in the ways the identity both of the giver and of the recipient is reinforced by the gift. Here also is where we find a new emergent attitude to leisure. As an individual or group of individuals begin to spend less time on the business of staying alive they begin to fill up the time with ritualised activities of one sort or another. They may be religious, for example, or they may involve the production of ever more elaborate varieties of material culture and although in time they may come to acquire a utilitarian value in themselves they spring from a motivation which is not utilitarian. I would argue that the notion of giving swans as gifts as part of a ritual of status recognition and status conferment is precisely such a ritual of leisure.

But there is a third reason for swan keeping and this takes us a little further beyond the boundaries of utility and practice. It would appear that an important motivation for swan keeping in the Middle Ages was simply aesthetic. Swans were good to keep because a flock of swans improved the look of your estate. And not only your estate of course: the royal associations of swans improved your looks as well. [15]

However, the power of swans to confer status on their owners gradually became a cause of anxiety and it was feared that too many people of the wrong status to start with were beginning to acquire and keep swan flocks. This, it was feared might cause a decay in the respect due to the upper classes in other

contexts and thus attempts were made to limit swan ownership to particular groups. The first major assault on mass swan ownership and the first national project to develop a statutory framework that clarified the rights and wrongs of swan keeping came with the *Act for Swannes* of 1482. This put in place a wide range of penalties for the abuse of swans and their environment and specified how swans should be kept. More significantly, it also proposed a property qualification. From now on the law said that only those who had property of the value of five marks or more were entitled to own swans. One can see from this provision of the Act that swans occupied not only a very special, if not unique, juridical position but also that they were clearly and explicitly seen as relating to the status of their owners. Status identity was conferred by swan ownership and this status was now confirmed and defined by a specific level of wealth.

The value of swans, not only as commodities (and I shall return to this later) but also as status markers is further demonstrated by the variety of quasi-legal documents that followed the *Act for Swannes* and attempted to define the local rules, known as Orders for Swans, for swan ownership and swan keeping. The best known and the most extensive of these is *The Order for Swannes both by the Statutes and by the Auncient Orders and Customes used within the Realm of England*. This was printed as late as 1570 and, by and large, it duplicates much of the material in the 1482 *Act*. However, it is interesting as it makes a clear distinction between the statutory position of swans and the customs which surround them. It is safe to assume that many of these customs predate the 1482 *Act* and also that the *Act* enshrined many of them.

Local areas developed their own *Orders for Swans*. The city of Lincoln had one of the fullest. This was *The Ordinance respecting Swans on the River Witham*.[17] Although this appears to be the record of a swan moot (a court to review the state of affairs regarding swans in the vicinity and to confirm their ownership) held in 1570 – coincidentally, the same year as the publication of the *Order for Swannes* - there is good evidence to assume that the rules and customs set out in the *Ordinance* were familiar for long before the *Ordinance* was compiled. For example, we know that a swan moot was held in Lincoln in 1512.[18] Unless there was a commonly agreed set of customs and practices the court would have had no grounds on which to make consistent decisions. In fact, there must have been swan moots before this date as the city council decided, in 1484, to appoint a swan collector who would exercise the right of waif and stray in favour of the city's own swan flock (which probably lived in a area of the city still known as Swan Pool and then much wetter than it is now). The collector would pursue any city swans that had swum into public waters and pick up the odd wild swan to supplement the city's holdings but unless there was already an established tradition of swan moots it would not have been possible to regulate his activities (in the event the city did not get round to employing anyone until

1520) or to settle any disputes which might arise over the ownership of any birds deemed waifs or strays by the collector. The fact that a matter such as swan ownership could have occupied the council of a busy city and led them to invest in an infrastructure to manage the swan flock shows just how important it was to these late medieval burgers to protect their interests in the birds and, thus, their perceived status.

Another *Ordinance*, now in extremely fragmentary form, is to be found in the papers of the powerful Armyne family. It appears to represent a document that was subtly different from the Witham *Ordinance* and, I suspect, was the Armyne family's own local code. The Armynes had an extensive swan flock and we know the names of three of the full-time swan keepers they employed between 1593 and 1613 but this Ordinance appears to date from about 1575 and, again, I suspect must be based on an older tradition if not an older document. The point is, of course, that a powerful landowning family were prepared to go to extraordinarily formal lengths to protect their rights over their swans.

The status conferring value of swans was related to an increase in their commodity value and we can see, throughout the late Middle Ages and into the beginnings of the early modern period, records and activities that were designed to reinforce and codify ownership. However, it was not the swans themselves that were valuable (although individually they did have price and could be bought and sold) it was the marks of ownership which were nicked onto their beaks or the backs of their legs or both that carried the real value and the market that developed was not in the swans themselves but in the marks. Marks could, for example, be left in wills – one Lincolnshire will dates from 1479 and thus offers further evidence that formal swan management was going on in that county well before the publication of the *Ordinance*.[19] In 1567 Thomas Wymbyshe sold William Armyne a swan mark for the huge price of £1 6s 8d (£1.33). The penalty for altering swan marks was £3 6s 8d (£3.33) plus one year in prison which shows how valuable the marks were and how assiduously owners sought to use the law to protect their property rights.[20] Interestingly the city of Lincoln did not devise its own swan mark but purchased the one previously owned by William Yates in 1570. This may have been because it was easier to establish and protect ownership using a mark that was already extant and officially recognised than it would have been by using a new and unrecognised cipher.

The swan marks were recorded on occasion by sketches in deeds of sale and transfer and also in the proceedings of court cases where the ownership of swan marks was in dispute or where there was an accusation that swan mark had been altered.[21] More spectacularly they were recorded in magnificent manuscripts known as Swan Rolls. There are examples from Norfolk and for Cambridgeshire and parts of Lincolnshire. There is also a very full and

aesthetically extremely pleasing Swan Roll for the city of Lincoln and its immediate surroundings.[22] Swan Rolls offered an official record and place of reference for the forms of the various swan marks and they identified who owned which marks (some individuals held more that one mark) so they were vital documents in the negotiation of the legal minefield that was laying itself around the swan flocks.

The significance of all of this is that what we can see in the commoditisation of the swan marks is a particular kind of market which, it is arguable, signifies a particular kind of relationship between leisure and identity. The market in swan marks does not appear to have developed in the way, say, that the market in tulip bulbs developed in the seventeenth-century or, indeed, in the way that the market in snowdrop bulbs is developing as I write with individual bulbs changing hands for £150 or more. But there are similarities between these 'manias' and the buying and selling of swan marks in that what becomes valuable is not the commodity itself but the right to own it and, most significantly, the right to display that ownership to other owners and to people outside the charmed circle who meet the property qualification (and it might well be that the ability to pay £150 for a single snowdrop bulb is the same as having the 5 marks that enabled you to own a swan). We should remember that during the great outbreak of tulipomania the money was to be made by speculating in bulbs not by growing and selling the tulips themselves. The relationship between this and the buying and selling of swan marks and the implications of this for status are obvious. But there are also implications for leisure.

   In a market which derives from the utilitarian impulses associated with work (at least in the Middle Ages) it is goods that change hands. If swans had not become implicated in the complex relationship between status identity and leisure (and the ways in which leisure is, in itself, a status marker) then the people of, say, medieval Lincolnshire would have been buying and selling swans not swan marks. However, the swan mark is a non-utilitarian signifier of value and its very ephemerality shows it as the kind of toy that emerges when time permits. The burgers of Lincoln and those who lived elsewhere throughout the swan-keeping counties were devoting their leisure to the regulation and sale of the right to be recognised as being of sufficient property to own a swan, an animal which, in itself, had only marginal value and marginal utility.

   Swans were not, of course, companion animals in the way a lap-dog a monkey or a parrot might be. Perhaps we should best understand their relationship to humans as analogous to that enjoyed by hunting dogs or war horses. But this is only an analogy as in both of these cases the status conferred by the possession of the animal and the ability to engage in high status pursuits like hunting or chivalric combat is mediated by a utilitarian purpose, however

attenuated. While people might not have got the same kind of pleasure from their swans as the nuns of Romsey got from their rabbits or Chaucer's Prioress from her little dogs the swans were, nonetheless, not like hunting dogs either. Swans were luxury goods and swan keeping was a time consuming and, judging by the litigation it could involve, stressful activity bordering on what has later been called conspicuous consumption. Swan keeping also has all the hallmarks of a hobby or enthusiasm run to extremes. It was a leisure pursuit in that there was no need for it or, at least, no need for it to be pursued in such a complex fashion. But to have your sense of status and identity confirmed by your legal right to keep swans and your participation in swan ownership was clearly worth its weight in gold.

   Identity can be a worryingly unstable thing. We can become dizzily insecure if we feel that our identity (considered as a social mask) is being incorrectly read. It is clear that one of the ways in which we can strengthen it and grasp it more tenaciously is to bring together external signifiers which enable us to display it more and more effectively and with more and more conviction. In the Middle Ages it appears that certain kinds of animals could function as such signifiers both in the association of the owner with a status derived from the animals or with a specific activity only possible through the participation of the animal and in the display of leisure that such ownership and such participation conferred. The medieval attitude to animals does not speak out with one voice nor can it be reduced easily to a set of simple explanatory factors once we speculate beyond the bounds of the theology of Thomas Aquinas. But we can see, in fragments, how a changing pattern of leisure can be identified through the interactions of humans with their non-human companions. We can also see, again partially, how this pattern of leisure may be intimately related to the sense of self and, especially, to the public display of that sense which constitutes, in one dimension at least, our individual identity and our membership card to the groups of our choice.

Notes

1. See R. Barber, *Bestiary* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), R. M. Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* (London: Routledge, 1999) for samples of translations and images from these texts.
2. Quoted from F. N. Robinson (ed.), *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1957).
3. See J. Simons 'The Canterbury Tales and fourteenth-century Peasant Unrest', *Literature and History*, second series, 1:2 (1990), pp.4-12 for an account of Chaucer's literary use of the poll taxes, sumptuary laws and the various statutes designed to limit the wages and aspirations of farm labourers after the great peasant

revolt of 1391. On pet-keeping in monasteries etc. see J. Serpell, *In the Company of Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43 – 59.

4.   Quoted in Serpell, op. cit., 48.
5.   ibid. loc. cit.
6.   ibid. loc. cit.
7.   ibid., 47.
8.   The most thoroughgoing accounts of medieval attitudes to animals are to be found in A. Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1994), Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (Harmondsworh: Penguin Books, 1984) and J. E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within* (London: Routledge, 1994). J. Simons, *Animal Rights and Politics of Literary Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2002) also reviews medieval attitudes and offers a general overview of changing attitudes to animals. E. Fudge (ed.), *Renaissance Beasts* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004) and E. Fudge, *Perceiving Animals* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002) offer valuable material on changing views of animals in the early modern period. See also L. A. J. R. Houwen's review article of N. C. Flores (ed.), *Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996) in *Envoi*, 6.1 (1997), 50 – 65
9.   On this see two articles by S. Menache, 'Dogs: God's Worst Enemies', *Society and Animals*, 5.1 (1997), and 'Dogs and Human Beings: A Story of Friendship', *Society and Animals*, 6.1 (1998).
10. Quoted in D. Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2001), 30.
11. See Salisbury op. cit. on animals in general. On medieval monsters see D. Williams, *Deformed Discourse* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1996).
12. The best known examples of the origin of this apparent leap in consciousness are of course the famous passages in Montaigne's *Essais* where he speculates that although he thinks that he is playing with his cat, it is equally likely that his cat thinks it is playing with him ('An Apologie of Raymond Sebond') and where he explores the duty of kindness that humans have to animals and the way in which this duty expresses itself, *inter alia*, in the requirement to play with one's pets ('On Crueltie').
13. On this see J. Simons, 'Northern *Octavian* and the Question of Class' in M. Mills, J. Fellowes and C. Meale (eds), *Romance in Medieval England*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), 105 – 112. *Octavian* is also used as an example by Salter, op. cit., 82 – 95.
14. Quoted from M. Mills (ed.), *Six Middle English Romances* (London: Dent, 1973).
15. This is true as far as the statutes were concerned but many other animals have over the years become associated specifically with royal keepers. See D. Hahn, *The Tower Menagerie* (London: Pocket Books, 2004).
16. There is not a great deal of evidence for this assertion but it derives from a winnowing out of possible motives for swan keeping. N. F. Ticehurst first suggested it in his 'Swan Marks', *Lincolnshire Magazine* 3.4 (1937), 115 – 122. However, we have seen the aesthetic response to a high status bird in the romance of *Octavian*.
17. An MS of this text is in the Lincolnshire County Archive. It was later printed and formed the topic of an address to the Society of Antiquaries by Sir Joseph Banks (*Society of Antiquaries of London*, 16 (1810), 153 – 160.

18. See N. F. Ticehurst, 'The Swan marks of Lincolnshire', *Reports and papers of the Archaeological Socieites of the County of Lincolnshire and the County of Northamptonshire* (1936), 59 – 141.
19. In this year William Randson left a swan mark to his son Thomas.
20. Generally speaking the penalties prescribed in the order were draconian. On the other hand the people of Crowland were so dismayed by the property qualification of the *Act for Swannes* that they successfully petitioned King Edward IV to exempt them from it as few of them had five marks and most of them kept swans. So it is clear that there were lower class swan keepers. Indeed, if there were not why bother with a property qualification to exclude them?
21. There are at least two examples, both dating from the early seventeenth century of such disputes to be found in the Lincolnshire County Archives.
22. This was copied in the eighteenth century and also relates to the so-called Bromhead Manuscript which is another detailed account of swan marks dating from the mid sixteenth century.

CHAPTER TWO

MOLYNEAUX - "MUNNIX" THE DANCING MAN

MICHAEL HAYES

In this essay I provide a brief "life history" of a Travelling entertainer who was also a renowned teacher and whose step-dance repertoire and style was extremely influential in the north Kerry region of south-west Ireland, reaching to the era prior to the Second World War. I also discuss some of the social contexts in which this travelling performer/teacher operated and aspects of the oral history that circumvented this "character" and which are now the preserve of (primarily) elderly members of the rural villages and townlands where this travelling dance-master operated.

  Irish historians are quick to admit that we know very little about the early history of Ireland's Travellers or of the myriad of different types of "individual" travellers and travelling groups that populated the Irish roads before the advance of a more urbanised and industrialised Ireland in the mid-twentieth century. Scholars, endeavouring to research the origins of those people, who were previously referred to as "tinkers" in Ireland frequently, come across this problem. The little that we know is usually premised on sources (often "prejudiced" one assumes) provided by members of the "majority" or settled population and therefore it is difficult if not impossible to construct any comprehensive form of socio-cultural history for Ireland's nomads. It is also the case that since Ireland was essentially a colonial outpost of Britain for many centuries the "official" version of Ireland's history[1] is in many respects untrue or only a half-truth.[2] People who travelled for a living in Ireland were largely invisible among the Irish poor and those many Irish (often referred to as *bacachs*, beggars and seasonal cottiers) for whom nomadism or a partly-nomadic lifestyle was the norm prior to the early twentieth century. British colonial administrations did not distinguish between travelling people and other mobile Irish and Travellers[3], whether travelling alone or in company were most frequently referred to as an occupational or social subgroup if they were referred to at all. There are references for instance to travelling groups and cultures which no longer exist in Ireland but had at one time their own language, culture