



How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages (Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture)

Karl Steel

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How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages tracks human attempts to cordon humans off from other life through a wide range of medieval texts and practices, including encyclopedias, dietary guides, resurrection doctrine, cannibal narrative, butchery law, boar-hunting, and teratology. Karl Steel argues that the human subjugation of animals played an essential role in the medieval concept of the human. In their works and habits, humans tried to distinguish themselves from other animals by claiming that humans alone among worldly creatures possess language, reason, culture, and, above all, an immortal soul and resurrectable body. Humans convinced themselves of this difference by observing that animals routinely suffer degradation at the hands of humans. Since the categories of human and animal were both a retroactive and relative effect of domination, no human could forgo his human privileges without abandoning himself.

Medieval arguments for both human particularity and the unique sanctity of human life have persisted into the modern age despite the insights of Darwin. *How to Make a Human* joins with other works in critical animal theory to unsettle human pretensions in the hopes of training humans to cease to project, and to defend, their human selves against other animals.

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