

Kathleen Kate, “La Rage and the Bourgeoise: The cultural context of Rabies in the 19th century

By: Angela Ray

A brief history of Kathleen Kete

- Kathleen was born in:
- Kathleen is currently the associate professor of history at Trinity College in Connecticut.
- She is the author of the following novels: *The Beast In the Boudoir: Petkeeping in Nineteenth century Paris* (1994), the editor of: *A Cultural History of Animals in the Age of Empire* (2007).
- She just recently completed an account of the history of ambition in France titled: “Making Way for Genius: The Aspiring Self in France from the Old Regime to the new.
- The essay: “La Rage and the Bourgeoisie is based off of a larger work titled: *The Beast in the Boudoir (Petkeeping in the Nineteenth century)* written in 1994.
- This work focused mainly on: how members of 19th century Bourgeois society imagined themselves through domesticated dogs and cats. As well as to how the bourgeois responded to a transitioning modernist world that had become.....

Overview of Petkeeping in the Nineteenth Century

- “Relentlessly unsentimental.”
- Kete explains the purpose of the pet as “the counteraction of the scientific and dehumanized age.”
- As a result of increasing disgust of humans due to their unfaithfulness, dogs replaced the human connection, and became the essential mode of connection among people in 19th century bourgeoisie society.

A definition of Bourgeoisie in the 19th century: the ruling upper class of a society.

Kete's central argument presented in: La Rage and the Bourgeoisie

Kete argues that rabies was caused as a result of: pet keeping practices

- Pets being kept in close quarters such as apartments, that were closed off from the outside
- The limited amount of interaction with other pets contributed to the closed in enslaved effect
- As a result of this modern, lifestyle many pets were leashed or muzzled whenever they went outside
- These modern practices caused dogs to lose contact with their once natural habitat of nature
- In 19th century France, these practices were found in accordance with rabie cases among Parisian dogs that were kept inside.

What Rabies was connected to in Nineteenth century France

- Many associated what is now considered an “acute viral disease” to violence and sexuality.
- This seemingly overimagnative conception of rabies could be tied to the universal feeling of agitation and unsettlement of the coming modern civilization. As well as the confusion of the relationship between nature and culture.
- With the world becoming increasingly different from what many knew it to be, there was a universal desire for power and control among humans and pets alike.

How Rabies transformed man into beast and the devastating effects of the transformation

- Rabies is a disease that attacks the central nervous system, after someone has been bitten, the disease travels from the nervous system to the brain.
- The feelings of excitation and agitation cause several symptoms that can be classified as the: **encephalitic phase- inflammation of the brain caused by an infection.**
- These symptoms caused even the calmest individual to transform in a unrecognizable, terrifying beast that would explode into rabid fits, not only being a danger to themselves but also anyone around them.
- Descriptions of these rabid fits would almost always include accounts of the patient trying to bite themselves others, or even their bedclothes.
- This is now believed today to be over exaggerated, nevertheless this symptom was continually considered as “diagnostically important during the time.
- These symptoms were perhaps more disturbing in children.

The mass hysteria of rabies among bourgeoisie society

The overall fear shifted from actually having rabies to possibly contracting rabies. This fear was based on the terrifying reports of the symptoms of rabies that its victims were forced to endure. One veterinarian describes the symptoms of becoming rabid as a the case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

- Because the patient still knows themselves as themselves, they are fully aware of their own deteriorating state of mind.
- The patient is left with their full faculties of mind, so they are able to see themselves die essentially.
- It is for this reason that death by rabies has been described as: “certain, slow, and horrible.”
- Efforts that patient’s made to control their biting urges were often in vain, but many patients did try to protect innocent bystanders by demanding to be restrained if they sensed a fit coming on.

The mass hysteria of rabies among bourgeoisie society

- The mass hysteria of contracting the horrible virus got so bad that it became the obsession of bourgeoisie society. Homes that were once thought of as safe havens became breeding places for horrifying shrieks, howls, and uncharacteristic violent fits from loved ones.
- Despite the reassurances from various veterinarians at the time that the disease was mostly rare in actual cases, these did nothing to quell society's growing fear of contracting the disease.
- The disease was described as being one of the most frightening diseases due to its devastating , beastly effects on its victims.

Visualization of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality crisis / The transformation from beast to man



What was the fear of Rabies initially birthed out of?

The fear of rabies was birthed out of just that, fear. According to Kete the fear of rabies was of human's own making.

- Kete suggests that the focus of the pathology of the disease in humans made what began as a fear of actually having rabies lead to a fear of the construction of how the disease is contracted.
- Kete quotes “Here bourgeois individualism became demonic and self destructive, as if turned back on itself. Fear of rabies was focused on the pathology of the disease in humans and what matters most to us as it did to nineteenth century bourgeois is that the most frightening aspects of that pathology were constructions.”
- The beastly appetites of humankind is what caused fearful, destructive “symptomatology of rabies.
- This insatiable appetite welcomed attention as well as destructive constructions of the effects of a mostly rare disease at the time, despite its initial fear.

The effect that sexuality had on rabies