

## BOOK REVIEW

CONOR S.: *FLY*. Reaktion Books, London, 2006, 222 pp. ISBN 13-978-186189-294-2, 10-1-186189-294-2. Price GBP 12.95.

There are many books on fly or flies. But they are written from a narrowly scientific and scholarly point of view. They deal with their morphology, anatomy, taxonomy and life cycles etc. The reviewed book is quite different.

How fly or flies are dealt within the current book is indicated by the introductory verse by William Blake, taken from his poem "Fly" (1789–1794). "Am not I a fly like thee? Or art not thou a man like me?" The content of the book is "cultural", and deals with flies in general, but the house fly is the principle hero.

We learn many things about flies in ancient times, both negative and positive. That they were linked with the Devil and demons, and Jews were permitted to kill them on the Sabbath. On the other hand, Egyptians seeing flies leaving bodies prepared for mummification believed that they might contain souls of dead. Others realizing how flies love the sun thought of them as representatives of the world of light or admired them because of their fine construction and beauty. There is much information on how flies were hated or loved.

Naturally there came a time when it was realized that flies are carriers of disease. When the "Christmas-fly" of different parts of England, which was held as a blessing on the house, became a "slayer of men" (Fitsimons, 1915) and it became necessary to mercilessly kill them. In this connection we can learn for instance of how the church at Foigny (1121), where St Bernard of Clairvaux was preaching, was attacked by a swarm of flies.

He delivered an anthem that cause the flies to die, which would be useful for contemporary fly eradication, if only it was known what St Bernard said.

It is not possible to give a detailed summary of the book. Previous paragraphs only illustrate the contents. It includes much interesting information, chapters on biology (Redi's experiments are included), genomic studies on them and also the therapeutic use on flies, flies in poetry, in fiction (for instance Holding's "The Lord of Flies" 1954), in films, in painting, etc. All is perfectly cited. The text closes with a "Timeline of the Fly", an historical review of the development of opinions on flies and studies on them. At the end is a concise bibliography.

Of course this book includes some small and but unimportant errors. One thing is not mentioned. The directive of China's Mao-Tze-Dung about the four scourges that needed to be eradicated: sparrows, snails, rats and – flies. If information is right, each person in China had to kill at least one fly every day. Bearing in mind the number of people in China, this would have been really devastating for flies. There is no response to the request of Ogden Nash, who in 1926 wrote: "God in His wisdom made the fly, and then forgot to tell us why". It would appear nobody knows.

This book is a very interesting read. The book is perfectly prepared from a typographical and bookish point of view and contains many colour reproductions. For all dipterologists or entomologists, who are not oriented only strictly scientifically to their field, it is a highly recommendable book.

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