

**BOOK REVIEW: *DEER JHONN:
LETTERS DESCRIBING WHAT CAN BE
SEEN* BY CARMEN M. CUSACK**

Alycia Mott, J.D. (formerly Alycia Wilson)

When I was first presented with the opportunity to review *Deer Jhonn: Letters Describing What Can Be Seen* by Carmen M. Cusack, I was thrilled. Not only would I have the opportunity to personally benefit from this work, but the entirety of the animal law community would benefit as well from the addition of this book.

The ongoing trend of the law, and postmodern society generally, is toward further specialization. Such an unchallenged trend does not come from a lack of value. Specialization, particularly in academia, allows for new breakthroughs and gems of innovation that simply would not be available to the nonexpert.

Nonetheless, there is a cost to intellectual specialization that too often results in

compartmentalization leading to the fractionalization of thought rendering collective wisdom inaccessible.

Ambitiously, *Deer Jhonn* attempts to bridge the benefits and hurdles of these realities. Only by mining the expertise of many fields is an elevated interdisciplinary approach provided by the text. Cleverly, fields from science to law are utilized to provide both a body of knowledge with a participatory approach to increase human to other animal empathy practice.

The word play of the title alone is illustrative of the exercise. The slang, “Dear John,” refers to romantic break up letters soldiers would receive on the brink of battle. Referencing this unfortunate phenomenon, *Deer Jhonn* dares to ask humanity, in particular would be welfarists and animal rights proponents, if we have sent our equivalent of a break up to the larger biological world on the brink of increasing ecological crisis.

In the tradition and same mechanism of *Pride and Prejudice*, these letters serve to both slow down the reader to allow for thought and reflection from

the oft decried contemporary world. But in actuality, these letters move the narrative forward as the reader is propelled toward greater understanding. The intellectual life of the animal advocate is enriched by empathetic practice. Indeed, anyone with the task of teaching another class or leading some type of seminar will find an invaluable friend in this union between abstraction and step by step instructions to a variety of exercises.

Does the Reviewer share every political or philosophical position asserted by the Author? No. Of course not. But that seems to be part of the point. Indeed, anyone in the larger community of animal law issues should seek out this innovative achievement so that in improving as an individual, the collective of people working to protect animals and our environments can thrive. All in all, *Deer Jhonn* belongs on every bookshelf regardless of any individual's area of practice.