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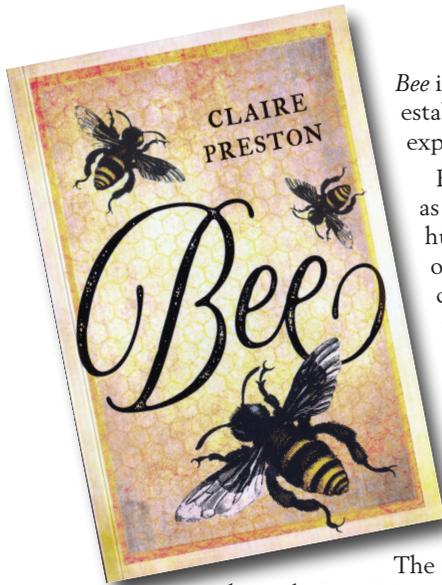
Bee

Clair Preston

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Bee is another of Reaktion's distillations on the cultural relationship that human civilisation has established with the animal kingdom. In *Bee*, Clair Preston describes the domestication, exploitation, gradual understanding and interpretation of the honeybee and its society.

Early chapters introduce this relationship and outline the biology of the honeybee, as well as the history of bee keeping. The following chapters examine bee society as a model for human political systems, and discuss historical perspectives on the colony's cleanliness, civil order and social stability, a view that presents bees as pious, chaste and hard-working creatures. These chapters also outline some of the misunderstandings and incorrect assumptions that early apiarists made. *Bee* then examines the many uses that humans have made of bees and their products, ranging from honey itself to beeswax, propolis and mead, but also looks at the value of bee pollination to agriculture and the use of bee products by the pharmaceutical industry. The book goes on to examine the influence of bees on the arts, from the perfect design of the hexagonal cell to their influence in architecture, from ancient Greece to the Alhambra and Gaudi's more recent buildings. It also looks at the creation of the beehive hairstyle and the influences of bees in both madrigals and classical music.

The chapter 'Bees in Folklore' examines references from Shakespeare and bees as nurturers of the gods; Pan, Dionysus and Zeus were all fed by bees as babies. It offers a history of 'tanging' (the practice of banging pots and pans to attract bees), how the Mormons adopted bees as their emblem, and bees as messengers between worlds, to highlight but a few of the fascinating references. In the chapter 'Bee Movie', Preston describes the transformation of our view of bees in the 19th century from diligent worker to mere mechanical parts in the hive machine, a view driven by the industrial revolution and the rise of factories. Then, in America, anti-communist sentiment added to this view, presenting bees as a Marxist enemy, a view that was aided by the famous B horror movies which often featured bees as monsters.

The final chapter looks at real and fictional celebrities who have taken up beekeeping as a retirement occupation and also offers an outline of colony collapse, along with a look at possibilities for the future, where bees could be trained to detect drugs, explosives and landmines.

Bee offers an in-depth account of our relationship with bees via a kaleidoscope of illustrations and historical accounts. Unlike other books in this series it is a history rather than an overview of our cultural links with bees but, viewed as such, it offers an excellent but densely packed chronology of this relationship.

Bee is an excellent addition to the libraries of beekeepers and naturalists who are looking for a greater appreciation of this ancient craft.

Peter Smithers