

Turner, James. *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. Pp. xii, 190. Index, bibliographic note, notes, illustrations. \$14.00.

Turner's book, which evolved from his 1975 doctoral dissertation at Harvard, is accurately titled. Specifically, the author attempts "to trace the origins of

one complex of attitudes and ideas” (p. xi) concerning man’s treatment of animals during the nineteenth century in the Anglo-American world (England and the United States). The dominant themes in his analysis are the realization that human beings are direct descendents from animals, the rising esteem held for science “as the key to the future of the race,” and, an “enhanced sensitiveness about pain” (p. xi). Each attitude is traced and analyzed within the context of what Turner identifies as “the shock of massive industrialization and urbanization” which was “wrenching people loose from old habits of mind and putting the relationship between man and nature on a radically new footing” (p. xii). The story moves along with a topical and chronological presentation emphasizing the general animal sympathy generated in the early 1800’s, the origins of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) movement, Charles Darwin and the contributions of ethnology, anthropology, physiology, and psychology to man-animal relationships, the horror of physical pain with special attention on vivisection, and finally, an explanation of the thought that “all creatures formed one seamless, mutually interdependent web of life” (p. 132).

The author is at ease with his material and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the various actions designed to eradicate animal suffering. A majority of the available sources of primary data were utilized, most notably the various SPCA manuscripts and minute books, yet there is still evidence of a thorough utilization of available secondary literature. More material is devoted to Britain than the United States, but this is to be expected since most of the early developments were initiated in and around London during the 1820’s and not until the 1860’s in the American cities of Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. This is explained by the fact that the United States was approximately forty years behind the industrialism of England. Although Turner argues convincingly in most cases, his belief that reformers attacked cruelty to animals instead of other more controversial human problems, like working-class slums, is difficult to accept. (However, formal concern for animals did precede similar developments for children.) In fact, Turner himself admits that “this sort of displacement of guilt from exploited workers to maltreated brutes would be impossible to document” (p. 54). At other times, the author’s prose is something less than appealing: “The new Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was only a few minutes old when its parents began to quarrel about the infant’s future” (p. 40).

For the sport historian, Turner’s book provides an excellent introduction to, and a synthesis of, the basic ideas of man-animal relationships which are necessary to understand in any study of animal sports. Because of the nature of the topic, several blood sports receive mention, but bull baiting is a central issue in the early cruelty to animals legislation in Britain. Rightfully depicted as a move to suppress a traditional lower class rural amusement, the attempted banning of bull baiting was never contrasted with its obvious counterpart, fox

hunting. Why should one inhumane activity be unlawful yet another legal? Turner also alludes to bear baiting, cock fighting, cock throwing, horse racing, and hunting, but suggests that space limitations imposed by a density of population relegated these sports to rural areas only. This was simply not the case for blood sports, since metropolitan areas became major hubs of activity. Hotel and tavern owners along with proprietors of gambling halls like “Kit” Bums’ Sportsman’s Hall in New York (which Turner notes on p. 52) were just a few of the urban sponsors of these activities. Here, I would suggest that animal sports, like parks, were viewed as bringing part of the country into the city. The rodeo, horse and dog shows, Captain Bogardus shooting pigeons, Wild West shows, and Buffalo Bill on horseback shooting at buffalo, are further cases in point.

Turner alludes to some interesting concepts relating to the “animal in man” and its accepted outlet in sports, the relationship between morality and physical health, and the differing philosophies of protectionists, conservationists, and hunters, but unfortunately fails to elaborate at any length. We also learn that Dio Lewis, better known as a temperance reformer and proponent of physical culture and health, was asked to organize a SPCA society in Boston in late 1866, but that it took the death of two horses involved in an exhausting long distance race to move local lawyer George Angell toward its finalization in March of 1868. Finally, one must wonder why Turner never discusses dog fighting, ratting, or the clamor to substitute glass balls (later clay pigeons) for live birds in the numerous indoor shooting contests of the 1880’s and 1890’s? An appraisal of each would have been beneficial for a more indepth analysis of the concept of cruelty since each case was unique (for example, rats are animals too, but were viewed as being noxious and therefore worthless), yet all three are emblematic of the problems encountered by blood sports—the idea of human beings gaining pleasure or amusement from observing or administering pain to maimed and helpless animals.

On a larger scale, although I relish this kind of history, one must question the author’s ambitiousness when he attempts to characterize the “Victorian mind.” How representative are the ideas of the small number of individuals discussed, especially those who were members of the various SPCA’s? Also, despite the fact that Turner does a commendable job of illustrating the interconnection of animal protection and literature, law, and religion, a closer comparison to other reform movements would have been beneficial. Lastly, how would the author account for the never ceasing popularity of cock fighting, dog fighting, and fox hunting and their networks of participants and spectators, periodicals, supply houses, and gambling syndicates?

Criticism is usually easier to generate than praise for books that are exceedingly provocative. So, I would be remiss if I did not express my total enjoyment in reading this original and generally well written book. Turner has put

together ideas and concepts never associated in a serious way before and in so doing, his book will be a stimulus for future studies. New questions will be formulated and some of his hypotheses will be further tested as new evidence and situations are provided. Yet, after all is said and done, Turner and those before him who have exhibited an interest in the welfare of animals must be congratulated for their continual reminder that the state of the animal kingdom reflects the quality of living.

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Corrigenda: Three errors have been discovered in the book review of Cary Goodman, *Choosing Sides: Playground and Street Life On the Lower East Side* by Stephen H. Hardy in Vol. 8, No. 3 (Winter 1981), 85-87. The bibliographical entry on page 85 should read Cary not Gary and on the same page, it should be Lee F. Hanmer not Hammer. The quotation from Williams on page 87 should read “. . . . our shaping perceptions” instead of “. . . . or shaping perceptions. . . .” We regret these errors and apologize to Mr. Goodman and Mr. Hardy.