

Steve Baker, ed.. *Killing Animals*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006. 215 pp. \$25.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-252-07290-1.



Reviewed by Anca Vlasopolos

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The eight contributors to the collection entitled *Killing Animals* provide sufficiently diverse perspectives on the subject to make this book a worthwhile addition to the growing literature regarding animal rights and wrongs. The essays range from discussions of the hunting of animals by humans and the hunting of humans by animals to representations of hunted animals in nineteenth-century and contemporary art to the slaughter of animals for the meat industry to the killing of domestic animals in shelters.

Erica Fudge's lucid and insightful chapter, "Two Ethics: Killing Animals in the Past and the Present," alone makes the book invaluable for those interested in the historicizing of animal killing. She elegantly demonstrates that early-modern culture is not so distant from us in having introduced, primarily through Michel de Montaigne's essay on cruelty, the idea of sentience in animals as an ethical consideration in our treatment of them. I would like to imagine that a classical scholar might come up with similar instances of recognition in ancient texts since, as Fudge proves, modernity's claims to moral

progress and awareness in our relationship with animals need closer examination and analysis. Another chapter, Clare Palmer's on animals being killed in shelters, strikes hard at illusions we might have about the heuristic uses of contemporary discourses about animal companionship as opposed to pet ownership. She drives home the point that the cat and dog industry is closely related to the meat-for-consumption industry in terms of the uses we make of animals. While we abhor the idea of eating cats and dogs, the statistics of dog ownership tell a horrendous story of irresponsibility toward animals that, in Palmer's view, we have created to be dependent on us for their survival. I am merely highlighting the points that appeared to me most salient. Palmer's chapter is nuanced and profound, and it deserves to be read in full.

Jonathan Burt's essay, "Conflicts around Slaughter in Modernity," like Fudge's, is exemplary in clarifying the complex issues surrounding parliamentary and press debates about industrial killing of animals for human consumption. Burt concludes that whatever the discourse--ethi-

cal, religious, scientific--about the meat industry, the end result is the justification of large-scale slaughter. Other chapters present new takes on such endless controversies as hunting by pointing out how sports hunting differs from slaughterhouse killing. In fact, Garry Wilson argues, it differs from all other modes of animal killing, a large claim and to my mind not entirely convincing.

We get into fuzzier territory with Chris Wilbert's essay on man-eating animals and the current reporting obsession, with imperial antecedents, of animals out of control, animals needing to be controlled, as well as the dawning of a consciousness of what human-animal boundaries mean and how impossible they may be to police. In Wilbert's essay as in others in the collection, animal management appears as a term of opprobrium applied to pacifying animals before slaughter when the end result is death; to genetically modifying animals to be what we want them to be; to killing them when they become unruly; to organizing their spaces in wildlife parks and other preserves without regard to their needs or the needs of the indigenous people living in proximity to these spaces.

What seems to be missing in the essays is the awareness that very little of non-human life on our small planet can escape human impingement as we continue mindlessly to reproduce and that management is the only way for many species to survive. The pseudo-Darwinian concept--survival of the fittest--in terms of specific populations competing for the same resources in the same territory can no longer be seen as natural. Human interference in destroying and fragmenting habitat, introducing exotic species, and polluting remaining habitat has been so pervasive as to require the present-day management of even the vast ocean environments.

Two essays turn to specific issues of representation: Steve Baker's, which centers on the unusual, overlooked topic of animal killing in the plastic arts; and Robert McKay's, which consists of an

analysis of the single literary work to take on the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) "hysteria." Despite the interest inherent in the topics themselves, I found these essays to be less persuasive and cohesive. Both these critics throw up their hands in a postmodernist gesture toward indeterminacy. Baker's analyses of several works concludes with the observation that aesthetics trumps ethics in any judgment about art. While McKay commendably brings to the fore Deborah Levy's *Diary of a Steak* (1997), a piece that should be better known, his approach is so laden with jargon as to make his own contribution to the collection unnecessarily obscure and self-reflexive.

The conclusion to this series of essays is presented in the form of a round-table dialogue, and it is here that all the contributing scholars face with charm and humility their own limits about knowing animals.

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