



Philip Howell. *At Home and Astray: The Domestic Dog in Victorian Britain*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015. 264 pp. \$39.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-3686-4.

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Commissioned by Zoei Sutton

About five minutes into reading Philip Howell's *At Home and Astray: The Domestic Dog in Victorian Britain*, I started underlining sections for my own research. I don't even study the nineteenth century but Howell's book skillfully uses interdisciplinary animal studies theory and primary sources to construct an argument about the place of the dog that has relevance even outside of his time period. Howell is a lecturer in geography and uses his background in cultural and historical geography to construct his argument. *At Home and Astray* explores a new meaning of domestication, focusing on the dog in the nineteenth century. Each of its six chapters assesses different attempts to domesticate "spaces" to provide a "home" for dogs. The central proposition of the book is that "the place of the dog in British society was a 'live' question throughout the Victorian age" (p. 2). Unsurprisingly for a geographer, Howell defies the "dog question" as the issue of the dog's "place" in British society (p. 3). He treats the question of space both metaphorically and literally.

Each chapter is essentially a stand-alone essay, collected under the common theme of domestication and the dog's "place." Chapter 1 discusses the place of dogs in Charles Dickens's vision of the city and his celebration of domesticity. Dickens's ideas about domesticated na-

ture are used to highlight and discuss Victorian attitudes to the dog as both a public and private animal. Chapter 2 explores the Victorian moral geography through the contradictions and complexities of the "bourgeoisification" (p. 21) of the dog—revealed through dog-stealing practices in Victorian London. Due to the ambiguity of the pet dog there was little recourse for owners when one was stolen other than paying the requested ransom. Elizabeth Barrett Browning had her spaniel Flush stolen three times before she moved to the Continent, where stealing much-loved dogs from the affluent was less of a problem. Howell argues that dog stealing was portrayed as a "direct attack on the home" (p. 59). The ambiguity of the dog's status was highlighted through the problem in English law of the value of a dog as property—unlike other property, the dog could wander off or be coaxed away. Identifying whether the dog had been stolen or merely found was a problem standing in the way of prosecution of dog thieves.

Chapter 3 analyzes the role of the Battersea Dogs' Home in associating ideas of home and domesticity with dogs, or at least certain classes of dog. Howell engages with Hilda Kean's argument that the status of the dog came to be interlinked with the idea of home in the nineteenth century, and that this can be seen in the way that

Battersea was promoted. However, Howell is keen to analyze the kind of “home” that Battersea truly was and who the “homeless” dogs were. He analyzes the different classes that dogs were put into in this “temporary home” and highlights the high death rates of Battersea—emphasizing how truly “lost” these dogs were. Battersea was instrumental in making the dog’s presence in public space a concern of the government and the police.

It’s not until chapter 4 that Howell discusses Charles Darwin and evolution. For me, this chapter would have been better placed earlier in the book, considering that the central argument of *At Home and Astray* is so focused around ideas of domestication. An earlier discussion of the meaning of domestication in the nineteenth century would have been beneficial. This being so, Howell still makes a compelling case in chapter 4 that dogs were “anomalous animals,” troubling the distinction between “natural” and “artificial selection” (p. 103). Dogs were important in the work of Darwin, particularly his work on the emotions. Darwin argued that the evolution of dogs was not the work of evolution alone. Howell questions why Darwin focused so much on dogs, considering the inherent difficulties of categorization.

The last two chapters are, for me, the best parts of the book. Howell is at his best during discussion of space and places and it is this historical-geographic analysis that adds something unique to the literature of the dog in the nineteenth century. In chapter 5 Howell discusses do-

mestication of the hereafter through exploring the spaces that Victorians used to keep their dead pets in pet cemeteries. Moreover, it also discusses the more metaphysical aspect of where people believed their animals went after death. Howell argues that heaven was considered to be a home and that pet dogs were seen to be potentially a part of this domesticated afterlife—just as they were in the earthly home. Howell argues that Victorian sentimentality can be seen physically through the pet cemeteries they left behind and that these have a significance beyond the mockery often attributed to them.

Chapter 6 argues for the domestication of the city through dog-walking practices. Howell suggests that there was an attempt to domesticate the city on behalf of animals through the endeavor to defend and develop public spaces where both dogs and humans could be. To explore these concepts Howell looks at two physical objects associated with dog walking in the nineteenth century—the dog muzzle (highlighting fears over rabies) and the dog leash (which he uses as an emblem of the opening of public spaces). Howell argues that dogs played “their part” in the “domestication of urban space” (p. 152) through the societal and legal debates they inspired.

Overall, this is an excellent read for all who are interested in the place, both literal and metaphorical, of the dog in the nineteenth century and I recommend it heartily.

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