The last thirty-plus years bore witness to a remarkable flourishing of humanistic and social scientific studies of dogs, a “turn” neatly paralleled by increasing dog ownership across the globe and the pet industry’s own explosive growth. Following early works like Harriet Ritvo’s *The Animal Estate* (1989), which concerned the cultural importance of dog ownership and much else besides, a second generation of popularly focused, synthetic histories appeared in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These dogged histories, such as Marion Schwartz’s *A History of Dogs in the Early Americas* (1997), Mark Derr’s *A Dog’s History of America* (2004), or Laura Hobgood-Oster’s *A Dog’s History of the World* (2014), offered alternate versions of our received historical narratives by forefronting the role of man’s supposed best friend. Much of this work, as historian Chris Pearson summarized in 2013, emphasizes the “agency” of dogs in hopes of “allow[ing dogs] to enter history as active beings rather than as static objects.”[1]

There is much to be gained from these explorations into history’s wagging tail, research highlighting what Donna J. Haraway called the “significant otherness” of a beloved companion. Yet reading back through the accumulating pile of dog books also proffers a vague sense of déjà vu. “Neither humans, as they currently exist, nor dogs
would be here without each other,” writes Hobgood-Oster.[2] “The one thing of which I am sure,” explains Derr, “is that dogs will be around if we are.”[3] “Dogs are not surrogates for theory,” Haraway herself wrote. “They are here to live with. Partners in the crime of human evolution, they are in the garden from the get-go, wily as Coyote.”[4] Dogs and humans, so conceived, are each other’s sine qua non, a point which now appears, in its repetitions, less provocative or groundbreaking than it may once have. Although scientists still vigorously debate the exact origin of the human-dog bond (is it thirty thousand years or far less?), dogs unquestionably witnessed much of history’s great drama. Yet the continuous procession of candidates raises anew a basic question: What are the stakes of studying dogs? Are such books the academic reflection of our personal and social investments in canine companionship, or do they offer something more?

Keridiana W. Chez tackles the issue in her new book, *Victorian Dogs, Victorian Men*, a literary analysis that leads affect studies into the dogpile. Chez’s book distinguishes itself from some earlier dog histories by being explicitly globally minded, if Anglophonically focused. Across five chapters, the book explores how a contradictory, transoceanic “imagined community of humane people,” opposed to inhumanity both at home and abroad, was constructed and buoyed through literary dog culture (p. 12). For Chez, dogs played a crucial role in Victorian culture as “emotional prostheses” (p. 17), a term which is conceptual kin to Ivan Kreilkamp’s “anthroprosthesis” and gels with a broader approach in recent decades to study the dog-as-technology.[5] Where Kreilkamp saw anthroprosthesis as a way of conceptualizing the use of “animals in order to define the non-animality of the human,”[6] Chez is particularly interested in the way dogs served to mediate relationships and define “humaneness” in the Victorian period. In chapter 1, for instance, she shows how Dickensian “happy families” rely on the prosthetic dog to construct the normative “home.” Drawing on George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871-72) and *Adam Bede* (1859), chapter 2 on the other hand reveals how the dog’s otherness allowed it to serve as a key agent in a character’s emotional growth: “*Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch* show how the animal could act as an appropriated, incorporated part of the human, shaping the proverbial course of human events and narratives. Human events were human because they were also dog events, and stories were more human because they included the stories of dogs” (p. 75). One step removed, Chez’s insight might be revealing about the genre of dog histories itself.

The second portion of the book turns more explicitly to the creation of something like a “humane public sphere” in literature, emphasizing the connections between dog-prosthesis and Victorian masculinity. Chapter 3’s engagement with Margaret Marshall Saunders focuses on the way that mastery over dogs became central to definitions of masculinity for a period in which the sense of control over God’s creation was shaken (due to the writing of Darwin, in particular), while chapter 4 reads Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) against fears of rabies in order to reveal the elaboration of a masculinity grounded in “paranoid love” (p. 104) for one’s domestics and dependents. The book ends, close to the start of the twentieth century, with literary death knells for early Victorian optimism about the man-dog relation, reading Jack London’s evocation of the (satirically Agamben-inspired) “bare-dog” in *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906). For Chez, London’s texts reveal a backlash to earlier discourses of humaneness: here, the man-and-dog story transforms into one of the individual man mastering an independent, individual dog, symptomatic of the “disconnection” and “isolationism” of a coming era (p. 149).

Although the book feels abbreviated at times (its conclusion is a brisk four pages), and its argument about a globe-spanning humane imagined community would benefit from both geographical
and temporal expansion, *Victorian Dogs, Victorian Men* makes a compelling argument for continued study of the literary canine, particularly given our “profligately” Victorian approach to pet ownership (p. 152). As Chez notes, the period under study reveals a crucial transformation of a dog’s purpose from explicitly physical labor to an emotional work. The dog as emotional prothesis worked to construct the “humanity” and “humaneness” of its people, rather than run their treadmills.[7] Further studies in this light, Chez hopes, might reveal the dog as a bridge not to our own human(e)ness, but to itself. Whether this is simply the “bare-dog” otherwise or something else entirely remains uncertain.

If *Victorian Dogs* was forced to justify and at times atone for its narrow period focus, *Dog’s Best Friend? Rethinking Canid-Human Relations*, a new collection edited by John Sorenson and Atsuko Matsuoka, offers a wildly heterogeneous counterpoint. An explicitly activist text framed by the “critical animal studies” approach that its editors have played a key role in theorizing, much of *Dog’s Best Friend?* is an attempt to answer its titular question. If domestic dogs are characterized as man’s best friend, the introduction asks, how could wolves and other canids be vilified for so long as savage monsters and demons? What does the coexistence of these opposing perspectives mean? As in *Victorian Dogs*, the editors wonder “how representations of various canids function in the social construction and performance of human self-definition and boundaries in terms of class, family, gender, nation, and race and how they are used to assert power, prestige, and status” (p. 9). Here Sorenson and Matsuoka fluidly encapsulate what we might call a central vein of the “new” dog studies approach. Yet in seeking to give the reader a bit of everything, *Dog’s Best Friend?* ends up, like many edited collections, an imbalanced product. The blending of methodologies and styles, a kind of accidental reflection of the mixed stray dogs championed in many chapters, leaves some portions of the text far smoother than others.

The book’s first section offers three interesting case histories of human-canid relations that take us from the gendered implications of ancient Greek and Roman views on dogs to the class-structure of England’s early modern dog laws before ending with the contradictory role of dog and fox lure in Tokugawa-era Japan. It is an appealing and insightful jaunt through dog history that nonetheless leaves many questions, periods, and places out of sight. England is well-trod dog history territory, at this point—Martin Wallen’s chapter, “Well-Bred is Well Behaved,” makes for a nice companion to his own *Whose Dog Are You?* (2017) as well as the excellent *The Invention of the Modern Dog* (2018) —and many readers will leave curious about dog culture elsewhere in Europe, in less-studied parts of Asia, or on the African continent as a whole.[8]

Section 2, “Dogs in Space,” which is by far the longest portion of the book, soothes some of these curiosities by exploring contemporary sociological and anthropological questions about dog ownership. Karla Armbruster analyzes the lingering dilemmas over a dog’s “proper” place in public space, while Chia-ju Chang unpacks the fascinating kin relations of dog-protecting “Gou Mama” in Taiwan. Across these chapters, the focus is squarely on the plight and significance of “stray” or “mongrel” dogs. As Chang writes, “the story of dog mothers and their fur-kids demands that we think about what it means to be a stray and to go stray in a capitalist society” (p. 227). Because most of these chapters take place outside the “West,” however, the section somewhat unintentionally situates “strays” as a non-Western problem and “purebred” dogs as a uniquely Western concern. Further efforts to complicate this dichotomy would be of great utility in future studies.

Section 3 is a truncated look at “Exploitation,” with one chapter on the consumption of dogs, by John Sorenson, and a second chapter about the American nongovernmental organization Beagle
Freedom Project (BFP). Sorenson does a skillful job of disentangling “cultural” discourses over the consumption of dogs, walking a necessary tightrope between condemnation and acceptance while articulating the genuine ethical complexities over consuming other animate creatures. Tim Fowler’s exploration of the rhetorical strategies of the BFP is valuable as one of the first scholarly engagements with a project that has seen surprising legislative success in recent years, but the chapter relies heavily on the self-presentation of the BFP and its allies. This leaves space for other scholars to more critically examine how groups like the BFP, controversially supported by Lara Trump, fit within a broader activist milieu focused on the plight of experimental animals, including the (thus far) unexplored “White Coat Waste Project.”

Finally, section 4 brings us to the plight of wolves and coyotes. Here Rob Laidlaw’s extensive study of the umwelt of wolves and his analysis of new scientific research into wolf movements is the standout contribution. Laidlaw makes a powerful case for the failure of zoos to give adequate space for wolves to be themselves (bare-wolves, perhaps) and ends with a call to rethink received ideas about wolf dangers and captivity: “Perhaps it is time for zoos to phase out, with few exceptions, the keeping of grey wolves and other wide-ranging carnivores altogether,” he writes (p. 333). Stephanie Rutherford’s chapter gives us a history of wolves in the Canadian imagination with many excellent nuggets of insight, particularly concerning the historical role of wolf bounties in relation to settler colonialism. “Some wolves became dogs, and others remained resolutely part of the wilderness that needed taming,” she writes, rearticulating the collection’s central paradox (p. 349).

Where do our studies of dogs and other canids go from here? As Sorenson and Matsuoka note in Dog’s Best Friend?’s conclusion, much research remains to be done in offering a genuinely comprehensive account of human-canid relations. Here and elsewhere, many peoples, places, and times are absent. So, too, are many kinds of canid: Dholes or African wolves, for instance, or a variety of less-studied dog breeds. But Dog’s Best Friend? is particularly valuable for centering capitalism in our stories of the human-canine bond, offering in-depth analysis of what Haraway called the “encounter-value” of dogs.[9] Future scholars now have a variety of openings through which to problematize and further scrutinize how the pet industry has supported and constrained various forms of canine interaction and study. Such analysis offers a valuable path which might circumvent some moldier platitudes about human-canine connections in favor of the sort of questions that Chez and others have raised concerning how emotional connections themselves have been utilized and, occasionally, weaponized. There is, additionally, room for further studies on the role of dogs in a variety of scientific disciplines, a curious oversight in the current collections considering the importance of canine research not just in the past but also the present. If numerous theorizations of the human-canine bond have relied on new genomic or neuroscientific approaches, extended examinations of those sciences might reveal even more about the cooperative and combative relationships between humans and their barking comrades. Dogs are now unquestionably agents of history; the exciting question is what comes next.

Notes

Otherness,” in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 98.


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