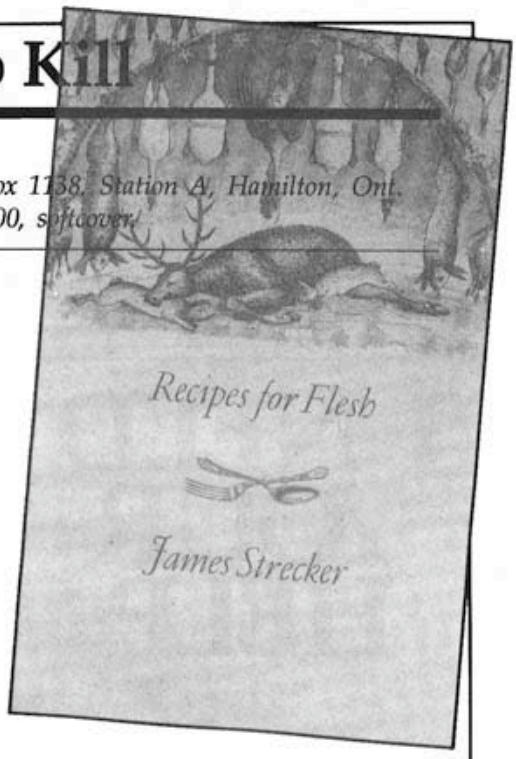
Poetic License to Kill

Recipes for Flesh

By James Strecker; Mini Mocho Press (Box 1138, Station A, Hamilton, Ont. L8N 4B3, Canada), 1989; 80 pages, $10.00, softcover.



Like a duck blind concealing hunters (the blind hiding the blind), the external appearances of *Recipes for Flesh* disguise its insidious intent. Despite its title, it is not a cookbook. And contrary to its cartoon cover of cutesy though dead animals, it is not a children's book. The book is poetry. For adults only.

Title and cover are the most palatable parts of this chapbook. Once opened, all animal hell breaks loose. Other eco- and animal-rights-poets write through their tear ducts. James Strecker mixes into his ink blood, sweat, spit, adrenaline, and venom. No bile, though. Deceptively pleasurable to read, these poems can be as hard to stomach as a picnic in a slaughterhouse.

Cancel the picnic. Foreboding clouds darken the horizon. *Recipes for Flesh* is *against* slaughterhouses and carnivorism, not *about* picnics and vegetarianism. Against milk-drinking and egg-eating. Against grazing and factory farming. Against vivisection and animal experimentation. Against hunting and trapping. Against bullfights and roadkills. Against fur and leather. Against urbanism and hedonism. Against harlotry and pornography. Against acid rain and food chemicals. The poems *against* far outnumber those *about*. About what? About hypocrisy and cruelty. About abortions and funerals. About decadence and death.

James Strecker, for whom "there is no end of darkness, no ember of eternal light," is not a cheery poet. In one poem on the factory farm "each morning [is] the

Continued on next page

birthday of nothing" while in another poem at the restaurant "the smoke of dead flesh flows rancid into tomorrow." He shares ranks with Leopardi and Baudelaire rather than with run-of-the-puppy-mill Wimpy the Pooh contemporary poets who tend to romanticize animals' lives as all fun and frolic. He instead discloses their deaths and denounces the humans who are responsible. "If you will not condemn," Strecker advises clamorously, "be silent with philosophy."

For the matador, he wishes "a darning needle driven hard through your own testicles." Vivisectors are "men who are given speech to say nothing." If hunters already are not cursed, "I curse you, killers of beauty." Meat-eater morality "smells of rotted flesh in the belly." While down on the factory farm, "hen and men are mad or going crazy." Man is, in short, "the user of woman and earth, the killer of lamb." And in the last stanza of the concluding poem, he implores, "father, forget them, for they know what they do."

The poet curses humans and specifically Western men because he loves nature and specifically exploited animals. Expressing love is not enough. He expresses also opinions. Yet he is keenly aware of the danger and impotency of his enmity. He confesses two dreams. "In one I love my kind." But "in the other, I/despair that he tortures what/is holy to me, so I shoot him." Not that he schemes to shoot any shotguns or to plant any pipe bombs. His pipe dreams are enough. He offers even his own critique of his book. "Would it be that poetry carried a loaded gun." Strecker's poetry compares to a Stinger missile, hand-held but capable of downing fighter aircraft.

Strecker's poetic pen is beautiful—and lethal. And his outrage most of us would agree is justifiable—though vengeful. Do not think, however, that his vengeance poisons his poetry. Given the chance to render some flying factory farm into a scrap heap and its farmer pilots into masses of protoplasm, Strecker would launch no missile. His missives are enough. Strecker need kill no carnivores. With cholesterol and salmonella, with cancer and heart disease, they are killing themselves.

—Mark Mathew Braunstein

Mark Braunstein is author of *Radical Vegetarianism*.

The ANIMALS' AGENDA

January/February 1990
Vol. X, No. 1

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE

Greg Bechle, Mark Braunstein
Marion Copeland, Phil Maggitti
Wayne Pacelle, Jean Pearson
Kathy Squadrito, Ruth Yanne

Poetic Injustices

On Speaking Terms with Earth

By Jean Pearson
Great Elm Press, 1988
25 pages, $4.00, softcover
($4.75 postpaid from Earth, P.O. Box 417, Bethlehem, PA 18016)

This is a compact chapbook of short poems, but don't let its size fool you. Big passages come in small packages.

Half the poems in the collection were first published elsewhere, some in prominent poetry journals such as *Mickle Street Review, Milkweed Chronicle,* and *American Poetry Review.* Others appeared in notable animal rights and deep ecology periodicals such as *Between the Species, Ecospirit,* the Canadian *Trumpeter,* and right here at home in The ANIMALS' AGENDA. The nature of the poems? The poetry of nature.

Are we angels who have lost our wings, or apes who have lost our hair? Pearson might assert we are apes who have lost our angels.

Jean Pearson speaks through the "I" in most of the poems, while in others she hides disguised inside the "we" and loses herself inside the human horde. Yet the true protagonists of all the poems are Earth, animals, and wilderness. Nature, for short. And shortly disappearing. Hers is both a voice *in* the wilderness and a voice *for* the wilderness. Both a voice eulogizing nature's wonder and a voice lamenting nature's plunder. Half poetic, half polemic.

Zoological gems glisten within each poem. Heard from a moving car, "Crickets swim by in their surges of sound." In autumn, "Crickets now have little to say." And in spring, "The water wanders with ducks on its back." Along a bank of that same wandering river, "Woodchuck murmurs out of her sleeve of earth." Elsewhere, in cramped captivity, "A five-foot alligator curves like a busted tire."

This collection is, however, no modern bestiary, no Noah's integrated ark. The animals who most often capture Pearson's imagination are those who capture their prey: bears, hawks, badgers, gators, wolves. Predator poetry.

A century ago, human hunters were still recipients of the praise of poets. Walt Whitman, for one. Whitman built the bridge over which most modern nature poets must pass. Pearson pays homage to him with her generous bouquet of exclamation marks and her optimism, too. "I support all candidates for tomorrow," she campaigns. But Pearson differs from Whitman in scale. The bearded old man explored an entire continent as a source of inspiration. Pearson finds fascination equally in the infinitely small and infinitely large, like Thoreau who traveled much while remaining in Concord. Speaks Pearson, "Every day I gather myself more into this place." That place is her home in Pennsylvania in the foothills of the Poconos. Two poems take place in the Everglades and two in Sweden. All the others speak of her home, her river, her wilderness. Yet they teach us to love whatever home is our own.

Jean Pearson

"What comes to me in sunlight is sweeter than almost any lesson of men." Pagan? Pantheist? Or misanthrope? Are we angels who have lost our wings, or apes who have lost our hair? Pearson might assert we are apes who have lost our angels.

—*Mark Mathew Braunstein*

The reviewer is author of Radical Vegetarianism.

The ANIMALS' AGENDA
THE ANIMAL RIGHTS MAGAZINE

February 1989
Vol. IX, No. 2

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE
Ronnie Bamberger, Neal Barnard, Laura Bevan, Billy Ray Boyd, Mark Braunstein, Marly Cornell, Karen Davis, Jennifer Kupinse, Phil Maggitti, Bill Meade, Wayne Pacelle, Ken Ross, Lainé Roundy, Mark Sommer, Walt Taylor

The ANIMALS' AGENDA
THE ANIMAL RIGHTS MAGAZINE

December 1988
Vol. VIII, No. 9

PUBLISHER
Animal Rights Network, Inc.

EDITOR
Kim Bartlett

EDITOR-AT-LARGE
Patrice Greanville

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Wayne Pacelle

NEWS EDITOR
Merritt Clifton

ART DIRECTOR
Jean Griffin

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
Laura R. Yanne

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Peter L. Hoyt

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE
Ronnie Bamberger, Neal Barnard, Mark Braunstein, Kevin Conklin, Bill DeRosa, David Kay, Jennifer Kupinse, Michael Pereira, Maureen Slater

The ANIMALS' AGENDA is published by Animal Rights Network, Inc. a non-profit charitable organization incorporated in Connecticut. We offer a broad range of materials and information about animal and environmental issues, and provide a forum for discussion of problems and ideas. We try to reach people at all levels of consciousness and commitment to inspire a deep regard for, and greater activism on behalf of, animals and nature.

Animal Rights Network, Inc.

Directors: Donald Barnes, Kim Bartlett, Syndee Brinkman, Patrice Greanville, Evelyn Kimber, Jim Mason

Typography by Alphabet Soup
Bridgeport, CT

Kangaroo Court

The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals

By E.P. Evans
Faber and Faber (50 Cross St., Winchester, MA, 01890), 1987
(first published in 1906)
336 pages, softcover, $7.95

After 70 years of slumber, E. P. Evans's *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* is experiencing a reawakening. Here is chronicled a neglected chapter of Western Europe's Middle Ages: animals accused of human crimes and tried in human courts. Actually no more abominable than medieval feudalism, inquisitions, and holy wars, all these animal annals are well documented.

Two types of trials were conducted. Individual farm animals, usually pigs and cows, were tried in civil courts for specific crimes, usually homicide. And entire wild species, usually insects and rodents, were called to account by ecclesiastical tribunals for pestilence and plague. Guilty verdicts nearly always were delivered, in which case the courts sentenced execution and the Church pronounced exorcism or excommunication, physical condemnation and metaphysical damnation. The frying pan or the fire, the animals always got burned – often literally.

The Church prosecutors regarded the accused bugs, birds, and beasts as instruments of the devil disguised in feathers and furs. Among the many cases described in depth, the more illustrious occurred in France and Germany. In 1488, slugs were warned against consuming crops, else they suffer excommunication. In 1519, criminal proceedings were instituted against field mice. In 1541, the Church condemned a plague of locusts. In 1587, weevils were tried, but the final decision of the case remains unknown. The last page of the records was destroyed – seemingly devoured. Evans speculates, "Perhaps the prosecuted weevils, not satisfied with the trial, sent a sharp-toothed delegation into the archives to obliterate and annul the judgment."

Despite Church anathemas, unwelcome insects usually departed only "after having eaten up every green thing and reduced the inhabitants to the verge of starvation." When dinner was done and they did disappear, the Church claimed full credit. Until then, the failure was blamed on the sins of human congregants. No one at the time questioned the Church's ability to compel insects and rodents to seek their suppers elsewhere. Without such firm faith, any such trial "would have been a dismal farce in the eyes of all who took part in it."

Our furry friends fared little better in the secular courts. Records survive for at least 144 prosecutions from the years 824 to 1845 in which the accused were found guilty. This tally does not indicate how many, if any, were acquitted as innocent,

The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals

The Lost History of Europe's Animal Trials

E. P. Evans

Foreword by Nicholas Humphrey

nor how many records were lost, destroyed, or devoured. Animals often were buried alive or burned. Some were hanged, then chopped into pieces and fed to the dogs. The most numerous cases involved pigs executed for killing children. In 1266, a pig was publicly burned by monks. In 1386, a sow was dressed in clothes and then hanged by the neck (this lively scene, with the townspeople gathered around the gallows in the market square, is depicted on the cover of the book). In 1457, a sow was hanged by the hind feet. Her six sucklings were indicted too, though acquitted.

Larger farm animals were also arraigned. In 1314, a bull who killed a man was hanged; in 1389, a horse; in 1405, an ox. The most titillating cases that author Evans examines involve the heinous sexual crime of quadrupedal rape by men. ("Buggery" was the term of Evans' times.) In 1546, a man and a cow both were hanged and then burned. In 1565, a man and a mule together were burned alive. In 1662, an old man was spared from the very gallows where he was compelled to witness the demise of his illicit and unwilling sexual partners of the previous 50 years: one cow, two heifers, two sows, and three sheep. By 1750, judges showed clemency: a man was sentenced to death but they saved his ass.

Animals were convicted of crimes relating to more that just sex and death. In 1394, a pig was hanged for eating a consecrated wafer. In 1474, a cock was burned at the stake for laying an egg. Was the purpose of such prosecutions and punishments revenge or prevention? To our modern minds, the answers to this mystery bear more relevance than the accounts of historical events. If the prosecutions served as precautions, then the prosecutors must have recognized the rationality of the animals. But if mere vengence, then we must chastise the extreme irrationality of the prosecutors.

While relating with equal objectivity the arguments both of the plaintiffs and the defense attorneys for the animals, Evans does not hesitate to pass judgement on this period. "The penal prosecution of animals", he writes, "was the outcome of an extremely crude, obtuse, and barbaric sense of justice. It was the product of a social state, in which dense ignorance was governed by brute force." Nor does Evans cringe at condemning the Church. "It was also in the interests of ecclesiastical dignities to keep up this parody and perversion, since it strengthened their influence and extended their authority by subjecting even the caterpillar and the canker-worm to their dominion and control."

"The penal prosecution of animals was the outcome of an extremely crude, obtuse, and barbaric sense of justice. It was the product of a social state in which dense ignorance was governed by brute force."

Why the pretense of prosecution at all? Once we penetrate past the facade of justice, what we see is persecution, not prosecution. Beginning with the cursing of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Western man has been at war with animals, enslaving domestic animals in our homes and slaughtering wild animals in their homes. The author's own quest to address underlying issues contributes to the importance of the book. Throughout the text, Evans presents excellent, though sometimes digressive, summaries of Western views on animals, from Platonic to Cartesian philosophies, from Greek mythology to Christianity. He also presents information on Satanism and exorcism and their "dialectic hair-splitting

Continued on page 54

The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals

continued from page 51

and syllogistic rubbish, which passed for reasoning. . .and upon which was reared a vast superstructure of ecclesiastical excommunication and criminal prosecution against bugs and beasts." In the final 60 pages, the author includes a lucid aside about suicide and a short history of posthumous executions of human corpses accused as were-wolves, vampires, and witches. Evans shares his musings on modern criminal law and guides us on a tour of the torture chambers and execution sites of Western Europe. He concludes with his own theory of criminology and penology, and cautions that future generations will ridicule "our judicial treatment of human beings, who can no more help perpetrating deeds of violence, under given conditions, than locusts and caterpillars can help consuming crops."

This is an admirably written historical document and philosophical treatise that should prove to be of great interest to animal rights advocates, lawyers, historians, philosophers, and fans of the fine-tuned pen.

—*Mark Mathew Braunstein*

The reviewer is the author of Radical Vegetarianism: A Dialectic of Diet & Ethic.

DECEMBER 1988