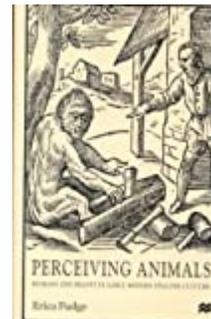




Erica Fudge. *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture.* London: Macmillan Press, 2000. x + 232 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-22572-8.



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Animals could be said to be truly hidden from history: they do not speak or write; they are destined to be forever represented by their “other,” humans. But they do have a presence in the historical sources. In a gripping introduction Fudge discusses their absent physical presence in the leather-bound volume adhered with “animal glue.” And they have a textual presence: in legal and religious writings, theories of education and science, political discourse, poetry, descriptions of travel and recreation. This intriguing book deals with such representations of animals in the early modern period as a way of reading conceptions of humanness (what Fudge calls human-ness). As she puts it, “Reading about animals is always reading through humans ...reading about humans is reading through animals” (p. 3). Her book could equally have been entitled: “Thinking humans.”

Although the logic of the book’s structure is somewhat forced, it essentially deals with representations of animals in various spheres of intellectual activity in early modern England, from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century (the book finishes with the Levellers in 1649). Robert Darnton’s work is not referred to in *Perceiving Animals*, but the first chapter of Fudge’s book, “Screaming Monkeys,” is what Darnton’s “The Great Cat Massacre” chapter is to his famous book on French cultural history: the core and interpretive heart of the work.

Using Alessandro Magno’s description of monkey- and bear-baiting in London’s Bear Garden as a way of unravelling the slippages between human and animal, Fudge highlights the instabilities of description which recur in deceptively simple descriptions of savagery to animals. What is happening when dogs attack a monkey on horseback, when carters whip a blind bear, or when dogs are set on bulls or bears? Does the torture of a monkey – similar to but different from men and women – reinforce or detract from the humanity of the spectators? Where are the humans in the performance? Is such cruelty an acting out of some kind of class war: is the master being symbolically torn apart by his workers? Or was, as the dramatist Thomas Dekker mused, the bear or bull fighting with the dogs “a liuely represe[n]tation ...of poore men going to lawe with the rich and mightie” (p. 18)?

The remaining chapters in the book develop the issues raised in the first chapter. Chapter two discusses religious views on humanity and animality. At first consideration there is a basic division between the animal and human dependant on the latter’s possession of a conscience. Yet Fudge shows that the figures of the infant, atheist, werewolf, and wildman, in various ways, undermine any certainty of this binary. “The original site of difference – the assertion of the animal’s lack of conscience – is shown to be too frail to work: there are too many hu-

mans who seem to lack a conscience, who are, implicitly, animal”(p. 35).

Throughout the book, then, the figure of the animal witnesses the human’s failure to be human. Chapter three (a difficult chapter) deals with the role of the animal in humanism and with what Fudge claims is the “failure of humanist logic to assert a difference between human and animal” (p. 90). Chapter four examines the way in which the new science, through vivisection and naming, threatened boundaries between human and animal bodies. Chapter five turns to the law to argue yet again for the instability in notions of the human. While Chapter six discusses the new humanity which Fudge has rather cleverly detected in the political/religious thought of the Leveller, Richard Overton. The book concludes, in its Epilogue, in the way that it began, with a baiting: “There is a terrible logic in this return to the Bear Garden. Baiting is the most spectacular representation of human dominion in early modern England, but it is also the most spectacular representation of humanity’s failure to establish its human-ness” (p. 170).

It is possible to argue with interpretations here and there. What of the role of the horse in the Bear Garden; its fate and role is somewhat lost in interpretations of the ambivalent humanity of its rider, the monkey? Sticking

with that first chapter, were spectators really locked in the bear garden? My reading of the text would limit the containment to those inside the ring itself, the performers rather than the spectators. How socially atomised was early modern London; a wider reading of the secondary literature may have modified Fudge’s impression somewhat? Does the ape in Figure 1 – and on the book’s cover – really return our gaze when we cannot even see its eyes, and is it gesturing towards the workman or merely indicating distress? In Chapter 2 Fudge seems to think that signature literacy is a direct measurement of reading ability when in fact it gauges the ability of a person to write their own name. Those who could not write may well have been able to read and should not therefore be dismissed by that clumsy description, “illiterate” (p. 44).

But these are minor quibbles that in no way affect the overall force of the book. *Perceiving Animals* is a stimulating addition to the cultural history of early modern England. Above all, it demonstrates, as the absent Darn-ton might express it, that animals are good to think with.

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