***At Home and Astray: The Domestic Dog in Victorian Britain*, by Philip Howell (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia University Press, 2015), pp.252, $39.50**

Dogs were ubiquitous in Victorian London. Lapdogs nestled on ladies’ knees; fighting dogs like the famous Billy exhibited their skills in the rat or the bear pit; strays and working dogs roamed the streets, while family pets graced many a middle-class home. *At Home and Astray* charts the development of mankind’s relationship with the dog in the Victorian city, painting a rich picture of canine life in the metropolis. Drawing on approaches from Animal Studies, cultural history and historical geography, Howell explores the spatial dimensions of dog-keeping in nineteenth-century Britain, assessing ‘the dog’s *place* in British society’ (p.3).

*At Home and Astray* focuses on a series of contemporary debates in which canine identity took centre stage. Chapter 2, ‘Flush and the Banditti’, examines the harrowing phenomenon of dog theft, which occurred on an almost daily basis in mid-nineteenth-century London. Chapter 3, ‘Finding a Forever Home’, traces the history of Battersea Dog’s Home (founded in 1860 as the ‘Temporary Home for Lost and Starving Dogs), highlighting the institution’s close relations with the Victorian state. Chapters 1 and 4 study the role of the dog in literature and science, focusing on the figures of Charles Dickens and Charles Darwin respectively. Chapter 5 assesses the social and spiritual significance of dog cemeteries, which challenged existing religious assumptions about animal immortality. Chapter 6 explores the controversial issue of dog muzzling in public – a measure prompted by fears over the spread of rabies. Through a thought-provoking analysis of these debates, Howell elucidates the shifting status of the dog within Victoria society, interrogating its role as, by turns, beloved pet, valued property, scientific subject, vector of disease and even proto-citizen.

One theme that runs throughout Howell’s analysis is that of class. Whether it was lower class dog stealers intruding into the comfortable world of bourgeois pet owners or the forced removal of ‘homeless’ working-class dogs from the streets, class pervaded human-canine interactions in the Victorian era. Pampered bourgeois pets might be ransomed for large sums of money if stolen, or sold for a profit by the dogs’ home, but working-class mongrels were much more likely to be removed from the streets and euthanized; as an article in *The Times* remarked ‘The King CHARLES owns and enchanted life – the turnspit or mongrel may be turned into sausage meat without a tear over its untimely grave’ (p.90). Howell perceives this differential treatment as part of a broader cultural shift which associated dog ownership explicitly with the bourgeois household and maligned stray or working dogs as dirty, unruly and potentially dangerous. *At Home and Astray* also emphasises the degree to which gender mediated discussions of the dog, showing how patriarchal rule confined both women and dogs to the domestic sphere.

Another recurring theme in the book is the question of the legal status of dogs and the state’s right to control them. The dog stealing controversy raised the thorny question of whether dogs should be regarded as property, and their theft punished in the same manner as other property crimes. The dog muzzling legislation of the late 1880s, on the other hand, was conceived by opponents as a direct threat to the personal liberties of both dogs and their owners, generating a flurry of anguished letters to the press. One owner of a Japanese lap-dog complained that the wire muzzle she had been forced to buy was too tight for her poor pooch, who ‘will not move a step’ when wearing it, ‘but stands with head and tail drooping’ (‘Dogs and Muzzles’, *The Animal World*, February 1890, p.31). Howell suggests that the tensions that surfaced in both debates reflected, in part, the ambiguous nature of the dog, which was valued on sentimental as well as monetary grounds and blurred the boundaries between object and subject.

Throughout, *At Home and Astray* highlights the geographical dimensions of dog life in Victorian London, showing how different places and spaces conferred different meanings on its canine inhabitants. Dogs in the home formed part of the domestic idyll of the bourgeois world, owned, cared for as part of the family. Dogs on the streets, by contrast, represented disorder and disease and were increasingly perceived as a danger to be extirpated. Howell contends that these two processes operated in tandem, creating what he calls a ‘moral geography of dogs’ (p.176). The more some dogs were welcomed into the Victorian home as animal companions, the more stray dogs were cleansed from the public sphere.

*At Home and Astray* is a carefully researched and lucidly written book which makes an important to contribution to our knowledge of Victorian culture and the role of animals within it. Theoretically astute and methodologically innovative, it will appeal to historians of animals, but also to students of urban life, crime and society in the Victorian era.

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