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Anna Feuerstein
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Introduction
The Political Lives of Victorian Animals

> And being furnished with like Faculties, sharing all in one Community of Nature, there cannot be supposed any such *Subordination* among us, that may Authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of Creatures are for ours.
>
> – John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*

> Human beings are not like sheep; and even sheep are not undistinguishably alike.
>
> – John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

> All animals, particularly those whose services are most required, as if conscious that they were ordained to be subject to man's dominion yield to it without reluctance, asking in return only to be treated with humanity.
>
> – William Drummond, *The Rights of Animals and Man's Obligation to Treat Them with Humanity*

This is a story about the political lives of animals in Victorian Britain. It seeks to show how mostly domestic animals were increasingly incorporated into a liberal political community, and how Victorian novels were fundamentally engaged with their politicization. *The Political Lives of Victorian Animals* reads animals outside of a symbolic and metaphoric framework to show how the rise of animal welfare discourses and anti-cruelty laws shifted how Victorians understood, related to, and imagined animals and animal subjectivity, especially within the novel. Not only did the rise of Victorian liberal thought and its regulatory strategies influence conceptions of and relationships with animals, but these new understandings of animals also affected the development of Victorian liberalism's most foundational categories: character, individualism, education, property, and self-government. Representations of animals throughout Victorian culture were increasingly liberalized and politicized, as animals were imagined as both having liberal qualities and challenging them.

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The Political Lives of Victorian Animals argues that while nineteenth-century British animal welfare discourse aimed to give animals political representation, and profoundly challenged how animals were conceptualized, it largely positioned animals within pastoral power, a power of care regulating their conduct through representing them as desiring subjection. The Victorian novel, I suggest, gave animals an alternate form of political representation that destabilized liberal categories governing animal subjectivity, and through more expansive representational strategies included animals into demands for democracy. Novels by Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, Thomas Hardy, and Olive Schreiner, among many other writers and thinkers, demonstrate the influence of Victorian liberalism on animals while working through the problems animals posed to liberal thought as Victorians sought to represent them literarily and politically.

Animals did not always fit easily into the confines of Victorian liberalism, and movements to incorporate them into a political community highlight the limitations of liberal thought and tensions within its claims of inclusivity. I adopt the capaciousness of the term "liberalism," and use it to signify a set of ideas, discourses, and practices inspired by and inspiring legislation, social reform movements, and political philosophy, constituting an often regulatory set of habits, or "way of being in the world" (Vernon 304). L. T. Hobhouse's definition of liberalism as "an all-penetrating element of the life-structure of the modern world" (22) emphasizes the pervasive nature of liberal thought as I understand it throughout this book. More specifically, Victorian liberalism promoted progress, freedom, and equality, while guiding economic thought and the movement of capital. It inspired democratic movements while also providing rationales for imperial expansion and the subjection of non-Western peoples.[1] Victorian liberalism cultivated the liberal individual, who had reason, character, the ability to consent to governmental rule, and the capacity to transform nature into property and move up economically. For Elaine Hadley, the liberal subject is "one who originates in a private sphere that predates the public sphere of civic duty but whose status as private property owner enables his disinterested participation in the privileged, deliberative exchanges of civil society" (*Living* 67). By the

[1] Lauren Goodlad notes the difficulty of this term, in part because of the many ways it can be defined: "as a democratic political philosophy; a theory of progress, freedom, equality, or tolerance; a universalizing perspective; a cosmopolitan ethics; a procedural ethics rooted in theories of democratic consent; an economic doctrine; or a basis for either promoting or rejecting imperial pursuits" (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 4). Throughout, I engage with Victorian liberalism in nearly all of these senses.

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mid-nineteenth century, Hadley argues, liberalism cultivated liberal cognition, which she defines as

> a wide range of strikingly formalized mental attitudes . . . such as disinterestedness, objectivity, reticence, conviction, impersonality, and sincerity, all of which carried with them a moral valence. Included under this category of cognition are also what seemed to them [the Victorians] quite specific techniques of thought production and judgment, such as "free thought," reflection, abstraction, logical reasoning, and internal deliberation. Such attitudes and techniques produced liberalized ideas in the individual, whose ideas then entered the political domain as "opinion" – liberalism's version of political agency. (*Living* 9)

The animal, by contrast, was property, irrational, or too wild for inclusion in a political community. Indeed, as Locke stresses, "inferior" animals were made for humans, and thus lack political autonomy (*Second Treatise* 271). What were considered animal qualities such as instinct, wildness, appetite, and brutality were also attributed to racialized subjects and the lower class. Mel Chen's claim that "animality is coarticulated with humanity in ways that are soundly implicated in regimes of race, nation, and gender, disrupting clear divisions and categories that have profound implications ramifying from the linguistic to the biopolitical" (159) highlights the construction and regulation of animality in both animals and humans. Animals deserved political inclusion only if they obeyed the rules of a hierarchical and civilized liberal thought.

In order to include animals in a political community, Victorian animal welfare discourse constructed animals to adhere to liberal norms: they had reason, were civilized, consented to domestication, and obeyed an animal–human hierarchy. Most often in Victorian discourses of the law, animal welfare, social reform, and education, animals were imagined as internalizing an animal–human hierarchy. Treat us well, these animals said, and we will obey your authority, as Unitarian minister William Drummond suggested in 1839: "All animals, particularly those whose services are most required, as if conscious that they were ordained to be subject to man's dominion yield to it without reluctance, asking in return only to be treated with humanity" (82–83). Throughout animal welfare discourse especially, animals showed a striking similarity to liberal individuals, as they were constructed with liberal cognition. Yet shared qualities have the opportunity for disruption; the fact that liberal discourses strove to suppress nonliberal animal qualities suggests animals had the ability to challenge the very discourses that struggled to maintain them. For alongside the inclusion of animals into the regulatory strategies of Victorian liberalism there

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was a counter animal politics that challenged and disrupted liberalism's central tenets and philosophies.

This disruption happens most forcefully in Victorian novels, where representations of animals register tensions within liberal discourses and offer an alternative politics. Indeed, I argue that animals in the novel should be read more politically, as they frequently advance an animal politics that destabilizes the primacy of liberal thought and its regulatory strategies. That is, rather than just projecting liberal politics onto the animal sphere, some Victorians brought animals into the political sphere, privileging animal qualities and showing how non-hegemonic forms of animality challenge liberal discourses and offer alternate forms of community and political agency. As Derrida emphasizes, one cannot assume animals are pre-political; rather, "the animal is already political, and exhibit, as is easy to do, in many examples of what are called animal societies, the appearance of refined, complicated organizations, with hierarchical structures, attributes of authority and power . . . so many things that are so often attributed to and so naïvely reserved for so-called human *culture*, in opposition to *nature*" (*Beast* 14–15). More recently, Brian Massumi calls for "a different politics, one that is not a human politics of the animal, but an integrally animal politics, freed from the traditional paradigms of the nasty state of nature and the accompanying presuppositions about instinct permeating so many facets of modern thought" (2). For Massumi, animal politics asks us to rethink how we value instinct and animal epistemologies, "animality itself" (3), for "to think the animal is to think instinct. Would it even be possible to conceive of an animal without instinct? Why, then, the widespread embarrassment at the term? Why must it always be played down, like some beastly Victorian secret best left unsaid?" (54). Massumi's reference to the Victorian era is telling, for the period saw a fundamental shift in how animals were conceptualized. Yet the multiple ways Victorians imagined animality shows the reductive nature of Massumi's characterization of animality. For the Victorians, animality signified a wide array of qualities and epistemologies, both positive and negative. Cultivating an animal politics informs and challenges an anthropocentric human politics, especially the destructive yet unstable hierarchies that posit reason above instinct, civilization above nature, the human above the animal.

The Political Lives of Victorian Animals traces the rise of liberalized animal subjects and their counterpart, the animal offering alternatives to the confines of Victorian liberalism. Representations of animals can disrupt animal–human hierarchies and put pressure on animacies often reserved

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for the human. Understanding "language as animated, as a means of embodied condensation of social, cultural, and political life," resulting in an "*animacy hierarchy*, which conceptually arranges human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority" (Chen 13), suggests that language and representation can also reorder such hierarchies. This happens through rethinking conceptions of animality, for as Chen rightly explains, "animality must be considered as a complex thing, material, plastic, and imaginary, at least in conformation with other concepts such as wildness, monstrosity, bestiality, barbarity, and tribality, as well as what it is to be human" (122). In order to avoid watered-down conceptions of animality, I examine different ways animal subjectivity – and by extension notions of animality – were represented by Victorians across numerous discourses: animal welfare, the law, popular culture, economics, natural history, political philosophy, and the novel. I demonstrate how liberalism influences representations of animals throughout the Victorian novel, complicating readings that reduce animals to metaphors or symbols. Although Mary Sanders Pollock has suggested that "the conventions of literary realism (like those of modernism) exclude the representation of nonhuman subjectivity, and hence, the exploration of a biotic and social community which includes nonhuman animal subjects" (137), I show how mostly realist novelists took pains to imagine animals as subjects within a multi-species social and political community. Indeed, representing animals in ways that veer from their dominant representations in animal welfare discourse registers a desire to examine all the possible realities of animal lives.

I begin with an analysis of nineteenth-century anti-cruelty and animal welfare movements, which constitute turning points in the inclusion of animals into the political sphere. The first anti-cruelty law was passed in 1822, which protected cattle from "wanton cruelty," and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was formed two years later to help enforce the new law and push for more legislation. The period continued to witness a massive influx of publications promoting kindness toward animals, pushes for more legislation, and a revision of appropriate animal–human relationships. Through this, animals were increasingly incorporated into juridical structures, and regulated under what Foucault calls governmentality, that is:

> the tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power – sovereignty, discipline, and so on – of the type of power that we can call "government" and which has led to the development of a series of specific

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> governmental apparatuses (*appareils*) on the one hand, [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges (*savoirs*). ("Security" 108)

Governmentality is the mentality of governing, the extended power networks that govern a population rather than a territory. The term emphasizes both the juridical *and* extra-juridical strategies humans use to govern, manage, and control animals, often under the guise of reform and protection. It results in what I call the government of animals: a movement away from individual human sovereignty over animals toward their incorporation into the regulatory strategies of liberal governmentality and its extended power networks. The government of animals works in part by regulating subjectivity. Beginning in the nineteenth century, alongside the rise of anti-cruelty legislation, certain animals – mostly domestic – were increasingly *liberalized*; not only were they viewed as subjects with thought and feeling, but they were frequently represented with liberal qualities such as reason, character, and disinterest. While Hadley identifies the importance of liberal cognition for the mid-Victorian human, I suggest there was a simultaneous liberal animal cognition, not confined to the second half of the period, but present from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

This is not to suggest that animals were never conceptualized politically before the nineteenth century. Tobias Menely has shown how in eighteenth-century England "publics, advocates, representatives, and positive law itself" suggest animals were not the "exception" to "modern political community" (12). While Menely shows how poets of sensibility spoke for animals within the public sphere, I argue that in the nineteenth century animals were brought under the government of humans through cultural representations more broadly, and that this resulted in the increasing liberalization of animal subjectivity. While animal populations were affected by a biopolitics that controlled and enhanced biological life, animal subjectivity was often constructed within pastoral power, strategies of cultivation and protection that resulted in subjection. Biopower and pastoral power were central to the political lives of Victorian animals, as they were increasingly taken under the stretching arms of liberal expansion.

After an analysis of anti-cruelty legislation and animal welfare discourse, I transition to Victorian novels and demonstrate how they often countered dominant liberal discourses of animal subjectivity, thus complicating the government of animals. Ian Watt, Nancy Armstrong, and Alex Woloch have demonstrated how the British novel was fundamental to the rise of liberal subjectivity and political inclusion, and I suggest animals are included in these politics even as they challenge them. While Watt describes

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how, beginning with *Robinson Crusoe*, realist novels represented white male individualism, or *homo economicus*, in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Armstrong focuses on the novel's role in crafting female middle-class subjectivity. She further locates two types of individuals in the realist novel: an individual who allowed him- or herself to be subjected to the social contract and was inscribed in a narrative of social movement, and an Althusserian "bad subject," who "take[s] the ideology of free subjectivity too much to heart and do[es] not freely consent to their subjection" (*Novels* 29). The realist novel's incorporation of minor characters, Alex Woloch argues, represents the field of democracy. He explains that the

> asymmetric structure of characterization – in which many are represented but attention flows toward a delimited center . . . registers the competing pull of inequality and democracy within the nineteenth-century bourgeois imagination . . . a dialectical literary form is generated out of the relationship between inequality and democracy . . . the *claims* of minor characters on the reader's attention – and the resultant tension between characters and their functions – are generated by the democratic impulse that forms a horizon of nineteenth-century politics. (30–31)

Woloch never suggests that animals are minor characters, yet they proliferate throughout the Victorian novel, often as individualized characters who jostle for space with protagonists in significant ways.

Following these claims, I argue that qualities of the Victorian novel – such as the valorization of individualism, delineation of subjectivity, the proliferation of minor characters – and its reflection of democratic concerns, make it an ideal space for exploring how Victorians constructed animal subjectivity and brought animals into a liberal political community. Within the novel, animals often function as the "bad subject" Armstrong identifies: they resist human subjection, challenge human representational strategies, and disrupt liberalism's hierarchical ideologies that contribute to the oppression of animals and other non-bourgeois subjects, such as working-class and colonized subjects. Animal characters and epistemologies in the Victorian novel demonstrate how alternative subjectivities existed alongside and often challenged the individualism of liberal subjectivity. Indeed, as Pam Morris argues, Victorian novels "are undoubtedly complicit with the shaping and legitimizing of a perception of subjectivity" and "provide alternative and, at times, even utopian perceptions of inclusiveness as genuine community and democracy. In turn, this multifaceted dialogic participation in processes of imagining mass society produced intrinsic innovations to the formal structures and verbal codes of

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the novel as a genre" (6). I suggest that animals are included in these novelistic efforts, even as they undo them; for the inclusion of animals in the Victorian novel is itself a formal innovation that expands political inclusion. Indeed, conceptualizing animals as minor characters nuances how we read them more generally.

Animals populate the pages of Victorian fiction widely and diversely: from the dogs of Charles Dickens and George Eliot, *Black Beauty*'s beaten and exhausted horses, to the hunted elephants and tigers of late-century adventure fiction, Victorian novels portray the many ways animals are entwined with humans, often through individualized animal characters. George Levine posits realism as an important genre for representing animal otherness, suggesting that "Animals are almost the perfect test of the possibility of achieving the kind of imaginative self-transference that the ideal of Victorian moral realism implies" (*Realism* 250). Yet for Levine, Victorian texts most often end up "assimilating the animal to human purposes" (*Realism* 250), foreclosing the productive engagement with otherness realism aims for. In this reading, animals in realist texts, as in Victorian society, are at best projections of human ideologies, as Harriet Ritvo outlines in *The Animal Estate*. For Ivan Kreilkamp, this does not prohibit the production of sympathy, as he claims that narratives of animal suffering permeate domestic fiction and cultivate the sympathetic middle-class reader, linking "real" animals to strategies of the Victorian novel ("Petted"). Theresa Magnum notes how even anthropomorphic animals have the potential for disruption:

> Penned in by the conventions of character and plot that organize genres, animals cannot escape the binary opposition that separates humans from non-human animals. Still, the increasingly scientific approach to observation over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the emphasis on imagined thoughts and feelings, quotidian life, and detailed, localized settings often led to productive tensions with anthropomorphic representations of animals in popular literature and art. The great power of the best of these texts is that in their sheer alien otherness, in the quiet yet shocking details of a being's not-human-ness, the animal characters sometimes baffle conventions of representation, if only via the startling details of their particularity caught by an observant artist's brush, chisel, camera, or pen. These moments of animal intractability sometimes launch an "animal" commentary on "the human" as a category. (156)

Animals in Victorian fiction are mostly anthropomorphized, but this does not mean they cannot be taken on their own terms. Anthropomorphic animals frequently register moments of alterity, and analyzing them more closely

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illuminates how Victorians attempted to imagine animal lives. Taking these representations seriously helps show that Victorian novels may be more posthuman than has been recognized, and that Victorian animal representations may be more radical than has been previously believed.

Like liberalism, the "Victorian novel" is a capacious term, and I do not mean to suggest that *all* Victorian novels and genres offer a radical animal politics. For example, John Miller's *Empire and the Animal Body* demonstrates how late-century adventure novels glorify animal death. Animal autobiographies such as *Black Beauty* are often the product of an animal welfare discourse in which claims for animal protection rest on their acceptance of human authority. Even children's literature, which prominently features talking animals, often reinforces an animal–human hierarchy through its anti-cruelty message, religious discourse, and engagement with natural history, as Tess Cosslett shows. With the exception of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, I focus on realist novels for their detailed portrayal of subjectivity and multi-species communities. I am interested in novels that purport to represent quotidian life, as they highlight how animals were imagined in the everyday lives of Victorians. Particularly in the realist novel, representations of animal subjects focus less on the subjected nature of animals and more on their status as subjects with interiority and their imbrication within daily life. Animals in the Victorian realist novel are both part of the tradition of interiority linked to Victorian individualism and a radical departure from it. As I have shown elsewhere, the incorporation of animals into the realist novel extends its examination of alterity and highlights its limitations.[2] Here, I expand this to show the political nature of animals and their connections to liberal strategies of governmentality.

Within Victorian culture, animals are often represented as liberalized creatures yet also exude forms of character and subjectivity that challenge the more typical liberal emphasis on moral character and a well-articulated subjectivity. By using the term "creature," I gesture toward the differences humans project onto animals, as Locke does when he calls them "inferior creatures" "made for another's uses" (*Second Treatise* 271), and the similarities and sympathetic connections that arise from understanding both animals and humans as "fellow creatures," as Thomas Hardy does throughout his fiction.[3] In *On Liberty*, J. S. Mill frequently writes of a political

[2] See "The Realism of Animal Life: The Seashore, *Adam Bede*, and George Eliot's Animal Alterity."

[3] Anna West and Elisha Cohn give extensive readings of the term "creature" in Thomas Hardy's work. For West, "the word 'creature' encourages readers to consider the liminal ground between the human and the animal, the juxtaposition of kinship and alterity, and the compounding of (at times

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community composed of fellow creatures, thus the term gestures toward a political sphere constituted by otherness and inclusion. Anat Pick has more recently employed the term "creaturely" to signify a bodily vulnerability shared by animals and humans. More significantly for my purposes, she claims that "Reading through a creaturely prism consigns culture to contexts that are not exclusively human, contexts beyond an anthropocentric perspective" (5). In this sense, a discourse of the creature encourages us to examine multi-species cultural contexts that de-privilege the human. Although reading the creature in relationship to humanity rather than animality, Eric Santner's definition of "creaturely life" as "the peculiar proximity of the human to the animal at the very point of their radical difference" (12) is useful to emphasize the animal–human similarities *and* differences that the term "creature" implies. A liberal creature is thus an animal holding qualities of the liberal subject, who at the same time has the ability to highlight the radical differences between animals and humans, and put pressure on the very culture from which liberal discourse emerges. Thus *The Political Lives of Victorian Animals* highlights how the inclusion of animals into a political community both reifies the distance between animals and humans and includes them under similar strategies of care and control.

Victorian Liberalism and Victorian Animal Studies

Considering the large body of work on Victorian liberalism, and the influence of animal studies on Victorian studies, it is striking there are only rare mentions of how animals too were regulated by liberal strategies. Bringing animals into studies of Victorian liberalism can show a less anthropocentric liberalism and highlight liberalism's limitations in dealing with otherness. Critics from Lauren Goodlad and Elaine Hadley to Uday Singh Mehta and Lisa Lowe have recently detailed Victorian liberalism's exclusions and contradictions, providing more nuanced accounts of its regulatory practices. Such studies have come from calls to understand how liberalism was challenged "from below" (McWilliam 110) and to examine popular culture, social movements, and key terms such as "character" and "the liberal subject," associated with Victorian liberalism. Goodlad's

contradictory) connotations that together gesture toward the unknowability of the individual" (*Hardy* 11). Cohn emphasizes the term's connection with power as she argues, "in *Tess*, the word 'creature' links humans to the natural world through vulnerability to suffering caused by intentional manipulation, rather than by mindless natural processes . . . To be a creature is to be shaped by external forces and to be unable to change them" (169).

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