

Mobilizing Literature in the Animal Defense Movement in Britain, 1870-1918

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Abstract

The eighteenth-century and Romantic literature have often been seen as intellectual precursors that contributed to the rise of modern sensibility and British love of animals. However, rather than regarding the literary sphere as a static tradition that effected instantaneous influence over human attitudes towards animals, I regard it as a repository of resources open to uses in the ongoing animal rights movement of the later nineteenth century in Britain. After a brief outline of the development of this movement in the Victorian age, this article examines the special affinity claimed by the movement with the literary sphere. It explores the movement's engagement with the available literary resources, including contemporary reviews, criticism, publications, constructions of lineage, solicitations of support and other writings. It then demonstrates the movement's active utilization of the intellectual, emotional and cultural resources in various literary traditions, including Romantic poetry, nature writing, and nineteenth-century novels, to meet its numerous needs. The period under focus in the article is the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: this is when the British animal defense movement entered into an active period of rapid expansion and radicalization.

Keywords

animal rights, animal protection movement, mobilization, nature writing,
Romantic poets, Victorian England

But words are things, and a small drop of ink
Falling like dew, upon a thought produces
That which makes thousands,
perhaps millions, Think.

—Lord Byron (qtd. in Suckling 103)

In 1910, around 3,000 people and an assorted lot of dogs of all sizes and colors gathered in London. They progressed from Marble Arch through Oxford Street, Regent Street and Pall Mall to Trafalgar Square, protesting the removal from the Latchmere Recreation Grounds in Battersea of the Brown Dog Memorial, an emblem of justice and mercy for many anti-vivisectionists.¹ Leading the procession were colorful banners of different sizes bearing a picture of the “brown dog,” the names of participating societies and of well-known champions of anti-vivisection.² Among the most conspicuous banners was one inscribed with poet laureate Alfred Tennyson’s name and his words “Hold Thou No Lesser Life in Scorn?” Several other banners in the spectacular procession paid tribute to other eminent and popular literary figures, such as Robert Browning, John Ruskin, James Russell Lowell, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Ouida.

The honorary status and high visibility of literary men and women on a symbolic occasion such as the Brown Dog Demonstration was not at all unusual. It had been a significant feature of the animal protection movement that came into being in the 1820s and intensified in the last third of the nineteenth century, when the vivisection controversy unleashed a period of active social agitation into the Great War. In one sense, the movement was no different from other nineteenth-century popular movements, such as anti-slavery, Chartism and socialism, in that it contained in its rank a class of inspiring poets and writers who could sing the praises of its cause (Taylor 357-79). Indeed the animal protection movement could claim a long-lasting and very special affinity with the literary sphere. In writings, speeches, and visual representations, long lists of distinguished literary men and women echoing humanitarian ideals were frequently summoned as forceful arguments for bettering the treatment of animals. The repository of ideational, moral and emotional resources in the various literary traditions was also widely drawn upon by the animal workers in their efforts to legitimize and mobilize for their cause.

¹ For details, please see Lansbury and Mason.

² “Vivisection” is the performing of surgery, as well as other forms of experiment, on living animals for the purpose of scientific research.

Historians had already detected in eighteenth-century and Romantic literature an emerging sensibility towards animals and regarded this, together with Evangelicalism, as a crucial intellectual background for the rise of the anti-cruelty movement in the early nineteenth century.³ With the rise of human-animal studies, increasing numbers of literary scholars began to turn to the theme of humanitarian sympathy for animals in literature with a literary-critical eye or sometimes a celebratory spirit.⁴ However, historical and literary studies, while revealing the frequent presence of animals in English literature and the possible shaping force of literature on Britons' attitudes towards them, helped only to confirm the common assumption that literature's influence on society was spontaneous and self-evident, leaving out other possible mediating social forces. In this paper, I seek to make clear the more dynamic relationship between literary traditions and social change by turning to the animal defense movement's reception, interpretation, and utilization of the various literary traditions in its period of mobilization. I will demonstrate how, through a series of literary "tasks," such as reviews, criticisms, essays, genealogies, solicitation of support and more properly literary writing, the movement was able to construct a humane literary tradition beneficial to its cause, and thereby to achieve social change.

The central concept at work in this paper will be similar to Roger Chartier's notion of "appropriation," as expounded in his studies on the popular reception and appropriation of texts or cultural forms.⁵ Yet I am extending this approach to a single reform movement that constituted an "interpretive community" with its own interests, needs and tasks to be fulfilled in its interaction with cultural assets. The more frequently used term, however, in sociological studies of movements, is "mobilization": it refers to the various functions of a movement often hidden in our account of its activities, such as the framing of issues, the formation of internal and external consensus, the reinforcement of commitment, and the interpretation and dissemination of useful ideas that are essential to all discursive tasks of the movement. The present article, however, follows no theoretical agenda and employs the term as a heuristic device that aids in our comprehension of the process through which literary resources were translated into action and social change by the creative agency of the movement. It should also be noted that this article is not a study of the various literary traditions *per se*, but a study of how these traditions

³ For details, please see Halttunen; Harwood; Thomas; and J. Turner.

⁴ For details, please see Gates, *Kindred Nature* and *In Nature's Name*; Kenyon-Jones; Perkins and Preece.

⁵ See Chartier, "Intellectual History," "Culture as Appropriation," and *Forms and Meanings*

were perceived, utilized and recreated by the British people in the nineteenth-century animal defense movement in pursuit of their objectives.

General Background

Beginning in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Evangelicalism swept the churches and influenced the morals and values of British society for over a century. Its stress on salvation through divine grace and good works led to the unprecedented flowering of charitable projects for the alleviation of the suffering of underprivileged groups. Its religious fervor also helped fuel the emergence of reform movements, concerned with moral and social causes, such as the abolition of slavery and the slave trade, sexual purity, temperance, and prison reform. Around the same time, a revolution of the heart occurred in literature, philosophy and the polite culture of the day. Instinctive sentiments and natural sympathy were idealized and “the man of feeling” came into vogue. Poets and writers professed humanitarian sentiments and strove to identify themselves with the feelings of their subjects; readers and audiences, too, were not ashamed to show their sympathy for the misfortune of others. With this heightened sensibility there came a greater sensitivity to pain and suffering, to an ever-wider range of social problems brought about by the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the period.

Against this religious, social and cultural background, the movement for the prevention of cruelty to animals came into being.⁶ In 1822, the first Cruelty to Animals Act was passed; in 1824, the first anti-cruelty society—the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA; the RSPCA from 1840)—was founded. They were joined in the next few decades by other parliamentary acts and reform societies. Led by the middle classes and patronized by the upper classes, the nascent movement concentrated its force chiefly on working-class cruelties such as the mistreatment of draught animals, the baiting and fighting of bulls and dogs, and cruelty in marketplaces and slaughterhouses. In the beginning, most of the energy was devoted to prosecution and legislative work. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the movement further extended its scope to such philanthropic work as the institutionalization of homes for stray and sick animals and the erection of drinking troughs on highways and streets. In the 1860s and 1870s, many societies began to embark on educational projects for the cultivation of kindness in the young, the most successful one being the Bands of Mercy movement, which had 800 “bands” (groups) for teaching kindness to children all over the country by 1900.

⁶ For details, please see Harrison; Kean; Ritvo; Ryder; and J. Turner.

Between the 1860s and 1900s, the number of magazines advocating humanity to animals grew from one to over a dozen. In the 1870s, the vivisection controversy brought forth new campaigns and created many anti-vivisection societies.⁷ There were altogether over two hundred branches of these societies in Britain by 1920, working exclusively to abolish or restrict animal experimentation.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the entry of socialists and feminists into the movement, the animal cause became more radicalized: the concepts of “rights” and “justice” gradually entered into movement discourses which used to be dominated by the religious languages of “mercy” and “kindness”; issues that were neglected in the past, such as hunting, flesh eating and the wearing of furs and feathers also received more attention. During this period of rapid expansion, the movement’s interaction with and utilization of the cultural and intellectual traditions of the age also intensified. The older traditions of Christianity, as well as the newer ones of natural history, evolutionism and radical social and political ideology, became repositories upon which the movement drew for its work. Within this context of appropriation and mobilization, the literary traditions, too, became inextricably bound to the animal defense movement.

Affinity with the Tradition of the Heart

From the early days, the animal-rights reformers were acutely aware of the rich sources contained within the various literary traditions; they shared a belief in one great encompassing literary tradition which was in complete resonance with the humane spirit of the animal cause. With the intensification of campaigns in the late nineteenth century, this belief was more enthusiastically reiterated by leaders and supporters of the animal-rights movement. Amidst the vivisection controversy of the early 1870s, the famous man of letters and secularist Sir Arthur Helps, in his *Some Talk about Animals and Their Masters*, after a parade of literary espousals of humaneness towards animals, summed up the case that “[a]gain, the greatest poets in all ages have been great admirers of animals, and their sayings would form a code of tenderness for these our fellow-creatures” (106). In the preface to a collection of essays on animal cruelty, Sidney Trist, secretary of the London Anti-Vivisection Society and editor of the *Animals’ Guardian*, pointed out that “practically every great and familiar name in our literature has been associated with advocacy of the claims of animals and pleas for their kindly and protective treatment” (vi-vii). He then provided a seemingly unending list of around fifty

⁷ For details, please see French and Rupke.

English and foreign authors, from Shakespeare down to the present day, to demonstrate his point. The sheer number of writers and poets who had expressed sympathetic views on animals in the recent past must have added to the movement's conviction of its special connection with the realm of literature. Between the years 1750 and 1830, the amount of writing that concerns or touches significantly on animals, as described by David Perkins, "approaches the numerical sublime" (x). In addition, the increasing self-awareness of the animal protection movement and widening cultural significance of literature in the nineteenth century also contributed to the movement's identification with the literary sphere and its belief in the consonance of literature with its overall objective.

Influenced by the reformation of morals and manners beginning in the eighteenth century, the anti-cruelty movement shared much of its moralistic character. In its efforts to stop cruelty to animals, it was concerned not only with the sufferings of animals but also with the demoralizing effect of such cruelty on the character of humans and with moral and social evils, such as rowdiness and drunkenness, which often accompanied animal baiting and working people's mistreatment of animals (Li 266-68). To the anti-vivisectionists as well, vivisection was reprehensible not only because it transgressed the moral boundaries of the pursuit of scientific knowledge by causing pain to defenseless creatures of God, but also because of its brutalizing influence on its practitioners. Literature since the eighteenth century, on the other hand, was increasingly recognized as a powerful source for the elevation of morality and for the expansion of social imagination and sympathy. The emphasis on the primacy of feelings and natural sympathy in eighteenth-century literature and the Romantic extolment of the imaginative faculty especially strengthened the perceived link between literature and morality. Seeing in the perceived functions of literature its own moral objectives, the animal-rights movement naturally welcomed literature as an ideal source of moral elevation and a means of expanding social sympathy with the non-human world.

Furthermore, the widespread nineteenth-century perception of literature, especially poetry, as belonging to the heart contributed also to the animal workers' identification with, and special interest in, literary sources.⁸ In the Victorian worldviews, science and intellect occupied a sphere distinct from feelings and moral virtues. Corresponding with the popularly assumed conflict between religion and science were dichotomies between art and science, spiritualism and materialism, emotion and rationality, sentiment and intellect, and (most common of all) heart and brain (head). If anything this polarity was intensifying in the Victorian period.

⁸ For more on the standard Victorian perception of poets and poetry, see Bristow.

Traditionally the people preaching kindness to animals had always been regarded as a sentimental race that had no “brain” but only a “heart.” From the 1870s, the outright rejection of all animal experimentation by many animal lovers worked to further entrench this public perception. Though people in the movement had always been eager to cast off this “too-sentimental” or “mindless” image, the dominance of the above polarity in the thinking of the Victorian age only challenged many dedicated workers for animals to more seriously examine and more vociferously proclaim the spiritual and emotional basis of their beliefs and actions. It was therefore common to hear of animal workers like the secretary of the National Canine Defense League, C. R. Johns, who replied to a critic of animal rights that he was “neither a sentimental lady nor an emotional clergyman,” but if he were, “it would be nothing to be ashamed of—sentiment and emotion being the motive powers of all the best movements in the world” (27). Stephen Coleridge, honorary secretary of the National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS, since 1897), in responding to the charges of sentimentalism and faddism also proudly declared the “sentiment faculties far stronger and nobler” than the cogitative, and regarded feeling as lying “at the ultimate foundation of all the greatest poetry” (*The Idolatry* 12). This connection of poetry with the highly esteemed realm of the heart and of feeling can, then, best explain the movement’s strong identification with literature.

Finally, the public perception of the social role of writers and poets in the nineteenth century also added to the attractiveness of the literary sources for the animal campaigners. In accordance with the perceived role of literature in society, poets were seen as teachers of feelings, in effect higher moral “guides.” They were sometimes even seen as prophets and philosophers, as well as teachers, and their “teachings” carried moral weight and authority that even surpassed those of the traditional moral guardians of society, the clergymen and church dignitaries. The literary artists themselves did not recoil from the lofty role assigned them, and many of the Romantic and Victorian poets and writers were among the main expositors of the belief in poets as moralists and seers of truth. Wordsworth, a very highly respected and widely read poet-prophet for the greater part of the nineteenth century, once remarked that:

But a great Poet . . . he ought, to a certain degree, to rectify men’s feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane, pure, and permanent, in short, more consonant to

nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things.
He ought to travel before men occasionally as well as at their sides.⁹

Ruskin, a convicted anti-vivisectionist, believed that to imagine deeply was to prophesy and that artists of great imaginative power could envision greater truths than other people (Landow 372-78). Writers such as Thomas Carlyle, Alfred Tennyson, Christina Rossetti, John Keble, and Isaac Williams have all variously articulated the belief in poet as prophet. Needing constantly to claim greater moral truths and project humanitarian ideals, the animal defense movement did not fail to recognize and utilize the forceful social role of the literary class. Whether in writings, in speeches, or printed independently as mottos, the words of respected authors, like those of other authorities, were very widely employed to produce the largest effect upon the readers and audiences.

Activists as Literary Critics

When encountering the vast pool of literary works of the past, people in the movement still needed to engage in an active process of selection and interpretation. The fact that the influence of a literary text depended greatly on the ways it was perceived required workers to evaluate literary works in a relevant and helpful way. In their search for ideational, moral and cultural resources, not all works with animals as their subject were useful or satisfactory to them, and not all authors or literary genres carried equal force or commended the same public respect. A primary task was thus to reread carefully-selected authors and texts in accordance with the humanitarian interests of the movement and to disseminate the new perspectives. Through a process involving the selection, interpretation and reintroduction of works, both canonical and non-canonical, from a particular humanitarian perspective, the animal defense movement gradually established for itself a special canon of writers and texts which it proudly proclaimed its "own," and which it used for various practical purposes. Led by the educated middle classes, the animal defense movement also possessed a large number of learned people well-versed in the literary traditions who could aid the movement in this respect. As the cause of kindness to animals gradually gained acceptance and even respectability in the later nineteenth century, sympathetic writers and occasional critics also did not hesitate to write on the subject, taking points of view clearly helpful for the cause. Yet perhaps no leading figures in the movement were so

⁹ Wordsworth to John Wilson, 1800; qtd. in Blamires 222.

acutely aware of the importance of the critical task, or carried it out with such dedication, as Henry Salt, honorary secretary of the Humanitarian League for almost three decades (HL, 1891-1919).

Salt was an Eton master in classics before he resigned and devoted himself full-time to his literary, vegetarian and socialist causes in 1884. He was the author and editor of many pioneer works on literary figures such as Henry David Thoreau, Percy Bysshe Shelley, James Thomson, and Thomas De Quincey (Hendrick 87-139). As honorary secretary of the HL, editor of *The Humanitarian* (later *Humanity*, 1895-1919) and *The Humane Review* (1899-1910), and frequent writer for other journals advocating the animal cause, Salt ceaselessly reviewed and commented upon a wide range of current and past literature—propagandist, poetic, fictional, dramatic or scientific, from the movement's particular humanitarian perspective. For example, his series of 24 articles in 1895-1897 in the *Vegetarian Review* of the Vegetarian Society, of which he had been Vice-President since 1885, discussed the works of a series of mostly contemporary writers such as Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Bernard Shaw, James Thomson (B. V.), Edith Carrington, Henrik Ibsen, John Burrough, W. H. Hudson, and Edward Carpenter, which he regarded as positively contributing to the humanitarian cause; he also compared these authors to others which he did not see as helpful. Salt was uncomfortably aware of his inevitable role as a critic for the movement, a vocation increasingly professionalized since the late nineteenth century, and joked about his image as “a sort of literary ‘bruiser’ and humanitarian ‘chucker-out’” (“Among the Authors” 569). However, he saw the urgent need for humanitarians to step in where professional criticism had failed, that is, to appreciate the higher humanitarian sentiments and aspirations in authors, and also to redirect attention and stimulate readers' interest in them. In his work for the movement, Salt not only engaged in this kind of humanitarian critique himself, but also constantly solicited critical articles from among his wide circle of literary friends sympathetic to the humanitarian movement. His letter to W. E. A. Axon, writer and leading figure of the vegetarian movement, reveals the challenge of this behind-the-screens endeavor:

The kind of article I find it most difficult to get is that of the literary order. In fact I have had to write or rewrite most of them myself for the HR. I mean articles on men like De Quincey, Shelley, Thoreau, etc., who have a strong humanitarian side. If any such name occurs to you as a possible subject, please bear it in mind. Or indeed any subject, akin to the humanitarian movement, would suit us.

The success of Salt's endeavors in this direction can be seen in the large number of literary articles written with a critical humanitarian perspective in *The Humane Review*—though quite a few were penned by himself.

Activists as Compilers and Genealogists

Besides the critical task, the animal defense movement had a great interest in compiling and constructing a literary lineage which it could claim as its own. The latter half of the nineteenth century was a time when English society showed a desire to review its own literary past. By 1887, there had already appeared on the publishers' lists no less than forty-four manuals, surveys, and primers on literary history (Gross 193). Projects for writing popular histories of English literature aimed not only to establish a continuity for the nation's literary achievements, but also to provide rich sources for the moral and spiritual cultivation of the people (Collini 342-74). Sharing a belief in the ameliorating functions of literature, the animal defense movement engaged in similar attempts at constructing a literary tradition that could serve its needs. With their emphasis on universal humanity rather than the English nation, their search were not limited to English works but sometimes included Asian, European and ancient traditions. The classical tradition particularly, having experienced a long revival since the eighteenth century and been much appropriated by nineteenth-century intellectual elites for a multitude of moral or political purposes,¹⁰ received especial attention. Greek and Latin writers and poets, including Pythagoras, Porphyry, Plutarch, Virgil, Lucretius, and Seneca, who had expressed humanitarian or vegetarian views were all equally deemed their own literary predecessors. In the same year John Morley's thirty-nine-volume landmark project, the "English Men of Letters" series, was launched, the *Dietetic Reformer* also started a five-year series (1877-1882) on the literature of humane dietetics by Howard Williams, scholar at St. John's College Cambridge, supporter of the RSPCA and later founder and active member of the HL. The articles, like those of the "English Men of Letters" series, contained mostly biographical information on nearly sixty authors from ancient times down to the present who had expressed vegetarian ideals. They were later published in a single volume as *The Ethics of Diet: Biographical History of the Literature of Humane Dietetics* (1883)

¹⁰ For details, please see Jenkyns; F. M. Turner; and Ogilvie.

and became a classic in the vegetarian movement.¹¹

Williams's grand project henceforth served as a model for all later attempts in the humane movement to draw upon past literary resources and to establish its own literary ancestry. In 1937, the Jubilee year of the Vegetarian Society, when Charles C. Forward wrote the first substantial history of the vegetarian movement, he did not begin with the founding of vegetarian societies but with the earliest literary records of vegetarian ideals expressed by writers from the classical period onward. Pythagoras, Ovid, Seneca, Plutarch, and a long list of eighteenth-century poets and writers were all honored as the pioneering predecessors of the movement.¹² *The Animals' Friend* carried between 1897 and 1903 a series on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century "humane poets" that included Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Cowper, Robert Burns, Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Christina Rossetti, Thomas Hood, John Ingelow, William Wordsworth, John Keats, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. In 1899, Williams embarked on another series of articles called "Pioneers of Humanitarianism," to be published in the HL's journal *Humanity*. This time the literary survey was expanded to include literature that had bearings on the broader humanitarian agenda of the HL, including concerns about the treatment of criminals and inequality in society. This was followed in 1902 by a series of lectures held by the HL on "pioneers of humanitarianism," which discussed the lives and works of Shelley, Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Wagner from the humanitarian standpoint. Apart from these planned projects, the journals of animal societies frequently printed poems or carried articles on past writers whom they considered as their predecessors in the literary field. A number of anthologies of specially-selected humane poems also emerged from within the movement: *The Humane Educator and Reciter* (1891), compiled by F. H. Suckling; *Kith and Kin* (1901), edited by Salt; *The Great Kinship* (1921), edited by Lloyd Bertram; *Speak up for the Animals: Poems for Reading and Recitations* (1923) by Ernest Bell; and *An Anthology for Animal Lovers* (1927) by E. Dooley. All these attempts served to place the animal defense movement within a laudable humane literary tradition and strengthen its affinity with the literary sphere. The rich materials accumulated in all these various projects also had a useful function in the movement's propagandistic and educational work: not just in writings but in singing performances and recitations at public gatherings or Bands of Mercy classes.

¹¹ The work was re-published by the U of Illinois P in 2003 with a new introduction by Carol J. Adams.

¹² C. W. Forward's series of articles were first published in the *Vegetarian Review* in January, 1897. They were later published as *Fifty Years of Food Reform: A History of the Vegetarian Movement in England*.

Mobilizing Didacticism and Promoting Kinship with Nature

Yet, one may wonder, what general criteria were used by the movement in its review, critique, and promotion of texts and authors? What were the more favored genres and writers? And how were they made use of in the animal campaigns?

Salt once mentioned the impossibility of enumerating all the writings that were “more or less tinged with humanitarian sentiment” (*Humanitarianism* 14). Indeed, in view of the vast pool of literature, humane workers needed to constantly engage in a critical selection process. Howard Williams described his search for “literary relics of Hellenic ethical thought” as “a judicious extraction and selection of the precious metal from the ore”—“a method of eclecticism which would be of the greatest utility in numerous similar cases” (“Two ‘Pagan’ Humanitarians” 90). In an anthology of humanitarian poetry edited by Bertram Lloyd, published in 1921 but gestated within the HL several years before that, he spelled out his criteria for the inclusion of poems: (1) those which actually inculcated justice for animals as an ethical duty or voiced the feeling of humaneness as a matter of conscience; (2) those which expressed a general sentiment of the universal kinship of living beings or bond of union between them; (3) those which tended to evoke in the reader emotions or ideas favorable to the growth of humane feeling (xiii-xiv). These criteria fitfully reflected the considerations behind most similar efforts in the movement. To put it simply, animal workers sought not only works that directly expressed humane sentiments and feelings of kinship with animals but also those that indirectly facilitated the expansion of human sympathy and imagination.

In terms of the mobilization tasks of the movement such as the framing of issues, the formation of consensus and cohesion, the dissemination of useful ideas, etc., it was the works in the former category that could be of the most immediate use to the movement. The vivid and realistic descriptions of animal suffering and of the intense human emotions involved, the morality and high ideals evoked and the explicit message of humaneness of writers and poets were all useful literary resources for the animal defense workers. In this respect, many of the Romantic poets who had expressed sympathy for animals and indignation at expressions of cruelty to them became the movement’s most steadfast allies and most heavily-used authorities. Amongst all Romantic poets, Wordsworth was especially highly regarded by the people in the movement and occupied an honored place. In his poems, Wordsworth spoke with no ambiguity of his felt sympathy “to the inferior

kinds,”¹³ and condemned such acts of cruelty toward animals as putting birds in cages, wanton slaughter of insects, and the mistreatment of donkeys and horses. With his increased cultural authority after his death, Wordsworth’s poems gained a very prominent place in the movement. His poem “Hart-leap Well,” which, despite its conventionally nostalgic description of a hunting experience in Part One, contains an explicit moral in Part Two and was especially well-received by animal lovers and reformers. Commenting on this poem, Maurice G. Hering asserted in his article in the *Westminster Review* that “[e]very lover of Wordsworth, every friend of dumb animals, will believe that the wider the circulation and the greater the appreciation of this poem, the quicker will be the coming of that ‘milder day’ for which we pray” (424-25). The explicitness of Wordsworth’s view of man’s treatment of animals was once even called “too openly dogmatic” by an animal worker, who was nonetheless “thankful for utterances so clear and emphatic on the rights of animals” (E. C., “The Humane Poets. William Wordsworth” 131).

Other canonical Romantic poets, including William Cowper, Robert Burns, William Blake, Samuel Coleridge, Lord Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, were no less unequivocal in their passionate sympathy for humans’ fellow creatures and so were also highly valued by the movement for both their didactic and “prophetic” qualities. The gentle, evangelical Cowper, who kept many domestic pets and who openly proclaimed that “I would not enter on my list of friends / (Though graced with polish’d manners and fine sense, / Yet wanting sensibility) the man / Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm” was regarded as “more dear, perhaps, to humane readers than any singer except Shelley” (“Notes” 174). The ploughman-poet Burns, who spoke apologetically of human tyranny over other creatures in his well-known poems such as “To a mouse” and “On seeing a wounded hare,” was hailed as being “*in excelsis* the leader of the modern feeling for animals” and as “a prophet as well as a poet, preparing the way for later movements” (Japp 222, 229). The revolutionary poet and painter Blake, with his noted condemnation of various inhumanities towards animals in his “Auguries of innocence,” was also regarded as having “the soul of a prophet” (Heath 82).

The many impassioned verses sympathizing with animals, and showing them suffering various forms of human oppression, were often quoted in writing and in speeches in support of campaigns against cruelty to animals; some even acquired a much wider currency in the movement. For example, the last two lines of Wordsworth’s “Hart-leap well”—“Never to blend our pleasure or our pride / With

¹³ See the “Dedication” section of “White Doe of Rylstone,” a poem not so widely read today but greatly loved by many Victorians.

sorrow of the meanest thing that feels”—were transformed into a pithy credo, one frequently iterated by animal workers as an expression of their innermost belief. The manifesto of the HL directly alluded to the “well-known lines” of Wordsworth, calling them congruent with the basic principle of the group—“that it is iniquitous to inflict suffering, directly or indirectly, on any sentient being” (Salt, *Humanitarianism* back cover). Samuel Coleridge’s concluding lines of “The rime of the ancient mariner,” which first appeared in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), also became very frequently recited and utilized by all animal lovers in the movement:

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small:
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (158-61)

The Scottish SPCA even printed these lines on the title page of its annual reports for over a decade, from at least 1882 to 1892. The RSPCA and the Bands of Mercy not only printed each year these lines, now virtually transformed into a motto, in their annual reports, magazines and publications,¹⁴ but also weaved them into hymns and songs for great and small occasions at both the national and the local levels. Inscribed on a large banner, hung high behind the speaker’s platform on the great organ in St. James’ Hall, at the NAVS’s 1899 annual meeting were precisely these omnipresent lines of Coleridge (“Annual Meeting” 51).

Apart from poetic passages with explicit messages that could be easily adapted to the various propagandistic, educational and symbolic uses of the movement, poetry with themes of natural beauty and the natural lives of animals, recognizing the kinship of all life within Nature, was also welcomed and promoted by the animal workers. In this respect, the nature poetry of the eighteenth century and Romantic poetry that infused musings on nature with the subjective experience and intense imagination of the poets (Fulford 109-32; Goodridge; Schneider), offered the most abundant resources. It was thought that the poets’ identification with, and idealization of, nature and its creatures could ultimately lead to an understanding of the spiritual unity of life and engender a common feeling among humans and other animals. The exaltation of the innocence, spontaneity, joy and natural goodness of animals in Romantic literature were also considered helpful in raising people’s general appreciation of animal life. Keats, for example, from whose poems the animal lovers could not derive direct moral precepts regarding the

¹⁴ Printed on the title page of the annual reports of the RSPCA from at least 1877 to 1907.

treatment of animals, was valued nonetheless for his conception and personification of sublime natural beauty. In *The Animals' Friend* we read this comment on Keats: "His was the more delicate and dainty touch which made lovely things more loveable, turned the prose of lowly life into poetry, and for ever crowned with honor that which, in the eyes of the majority, appeared ignoble" (E. C., "The Humane Poets. John Keats" 51). The many celebrated eighteenth-century and Romantic poems on birds, beasts and even insects, such as Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and "The Grasshopper and the Cricket," Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark," and James Thomson's *The Four Seasons* were all valued for the same reason.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a new genre of nature writing in prose emerged in Britain and was also much drawn upon and promoted by the movement. The "poet-naturalists,"¹⁵ as they were sometimes called by participants in the movement, included English and American writers like Henry David Thoreau, Richard Jefferies, W. H. Hudson, Edmund Selous, Seton Thompson, William J. Long, Francis Herrick, and John Burroughs. These writers differed from the previous generation of natural history writers in their infusion of human aspirations and poetic imagination into observations of nature. Their works were characterized by both their emotional engagement with nature and their watchfulness of/over all of nature's inhabitants. Salt, a most active promoter of this kind of literature, also regarded "humaneness" as one the distinctive features of the writings of these poet-naturalists, who had "derived from their intimacy with nature an increased sense of sympathy and solidarity with all sentient beings" ("Return to Nature" 34). In the late nineteenth century, when the animal defense movement gradually expanded its field of concern to include conservation, works in this genre were especially valued by the large number of nature lovers and societies with the dual aims of animal protection and the conservation of nature. These included the Society for the Protection of Birds (1889--, from 1904 RSPB) and the Selbourne League (1885--). At a time when the movement increasingly drew upon evolutionary theories and developed a mobilizing discourse on the "kinship of life," the nature poets and poet-naturalists, with their human pathos and lively imagination, also supplemented the scientific notion of "kinship of all lives" with their emotional depictions of man-nature sympathy.

¹⁵ A title first given to Thoreau by his friend and earliest biographer, William Ellery Channing.

Poets as Teachers and Activists

In drawing sustenance from a literary tradition congruent with its ideals, the animal protection movement also had to solicit support from contemporary writers who could assist the cause by exercising their pens and their authority. The most basic task of animal rights groups in this regard was constantly to appeal to noted literary figures for their sympathy and help. Under the direction of Salt, the HL regularly sent out special circulars to renowned literary men and women, either for general support or for special campaigns. In an article explicating the intimate relationship between humanity and art in an early issue of *Humanity*, Salt appealed openly to his artist friends “for their *thought*, for their outspoken *word*, in the cause of humanity” (“Humanity and Art” 146). Over the years, the HL had been especially successful in this respect and often boasted of the large number of distinguished writers “whose names could not fail to carry weight (“The Humanitarian League” 129-30). Other societies spared no effort in this direction, either. In 1906, when the second royal commission on vivisection met, Stephen Coleridge, as honorary secretary of the NAVS, appealed in a letter to George Meredith—the last of the literary giants before the Great War—by alluding to the literary humanists honored by the movement:

I have no knowledge of your opinions on these matters beyond the conviction that, in common with all men of letters, from Dr. Johnson to Tennyson, you will abominate the torture of animals. When I was first drawn into this long combat we had the support of such great names as Ruskin, Manning, Carlyle, Browning, Tennyson, but they are gone . . . I recognize that your name now stands alone. To you, therefore, I appeal to throw the weight of your splendid reputation on the side of mercy to animals, and to come before the Commission and tell them whatever your heart and mind direct in this great moral controversy.¹⁶

¹⁶ Coleridge’s letter to G. Meredith, dated 3 Oct. 1906; printed as “Correspondence. Mr. Meredith and Vivisection.” For an evaluation of Meredith’s reputation in Britain in the nineteenth century, see I. Williams.

Lind-af-Hageby of the Animal Defense and Anti-Vivisection Society, during her much publicized libel trial in 1911, told the court of her efforts at soliciting literary support:

When I organized in 1909 an International Congress of the supporters of animal protection and Anti-Vivisection I wrote personally to Leo Tolstoy, Maeterlinck, Pierre Loti, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and a great many other people prominent in the world of literature, and asked them for their support, and they gave their support most wholeheartedly in letters strongly condemnatory of cruelty to animals. . . . I contend that the Anti-Vivisection movement has had in all times the support of the pioneers of human thought and feeling—the poets, the artists, the writers, those who know humanity better than others. Shakespeare warned us . . . (284)

The reasons behind the movement's enthusiastic contacts with living writers were not much different from those behind their appropriation of the literary past. The generally assumed affinity between literature and humanity, the great moral and cultural authority carried by literary figures, the didactic or inspirational power of texts, as well as the need to sustain a constructed literary lineage or canon all brought the animal protection workers' attention to the contemporary literary scene. A signature on a memorial, a commissioned pamphlet or poem, a speech or mere presence at a meeting, or just a letter of support from a famed writer—all could be effectively utilized by the movement. And of all literary persons, most sought after were those who, like Tennyson, Carlyle, Browning, and Ruskin, had reached the status of wise sages and great thinkers in the public's mind and carried great moral authority.¹⁷ Together with church dignitaries and aristocratic patrons, these Victorian sages headed the lists of petitions and occupied the seats of honorary members or vice-presidents of many societies. Their photographs were hung high on the walls of the committee room of the Victorian Street Society (VSS, 1876-1897; later National Anti-Vivisection Society), among those of other figures of high social prestige. At anti-vivisection stalls in exhibitions, the photograph of Tennyson

¹⁷ For more on the role of the men of letters and the "Victorian sage," see Holloway 1-20; Heyck Chapter 2.

was also featured more prominently than those of any other church dignitaries who were also the established moral guardians of society.¹⁸

The cases of Tennyson and Browning, two of the most venerated poets in society since the 1860s and 1880s, can demonstrate the friendly relationship maintained between the movement and its sympathetic literary friends.¹⁹ Like the Romantic poets, Tennyson and Browning were both keen lovers and observers of nature and they wrote lovingly about both domestic and wild animals in their poetry. Yet besides the role of their poetry in cultivating a gentle feeling towards animals, of more immediate utility to the movement was their direct backing in name and in writing. Tennyson supported the anti-vivisection agitation from its start in the mid-1870s through the invitation of the leading anti-vivisectionist, F. P. Cobbe, and early accepted the vice-presidency of the VSS (Cobbe 553). His poem “In the Children’s Hospital,” written at the high tide of anti-vivisectionism in 1879 and 1880 and directly connecting vivisection with atheism, was in close rapport with the prevalent religious sentiment of the mainstream movement and was frequently quoted by it. Like Tennyson, Browning also approached the vivisection question from a Christian standpoint and expressed his unreserved support for anti-vivisection campaigns with even more vehemence. He was also enlisted as a vice-president of the VSS and upon the inquiry of Dr. Berdoe, a medical doctor and Browning scholar, gave his support to the idea of an anti-vivisection hospital (Berdoe, “The Humane Poets”). Browning’s often-quoted words to Cobbe, “I would rather submit to the worst of deaths, so far as pain goes, than have a single dog or cat tortured on the pretence of sparing me a twinge or two,” echoed the widespread sentiment of willing self-sacrifice in the anti-vivisection movement. As if echoing Cowper, who would not enter among the list of his friends any who needlessly treaded upon a worm, Browning, when replying to Cobbe’s request for a signature to a petition, stated that “whoever would refuse to sign would certainly not be of the number” of his friends.²⁰ His poem “Tray,” which contrasted a selfless dog that saved a drowning girl’s life with a selfish scientist who offered to purchase the dog—exclaiming “How brain secretes dog’s soul, we’ll see!” (Berdoe, “The Humane Poets”)—was also much quoted in the literature of the movement.

¹⁸ For a description and photo of the interior of the VSS committee room, see “The Rise” (24-27). For photos of the exhibition stalls of the NAVS at the Church Congress in 1901 and 1902, see *Zoophilist and Animals’ Defender* Nov. (1901), Nov. (1902).

¹⁹ For an estimation of the prestige enjoyed by Tennyson since the 1860s, see Jump 3-11. For that of Browning, see Litzinger; Litzinger and Smalley.

²⁰ See R. Browning, letter to F. P. Cobbe, 28 December 1874; qtd. in Coleridge, “Robert Browning” 97.

Besides literary greats like Tennyson and Browning, other acclaimed and lesser Victorian poets also came into the orbit of the movement through their poetry or practical work. Diverse and variegated though Victorian poetry was, animals and the natural world remained dominant themes. Noted poets such as Matthew Arnold (1822-88), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61), Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919), Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and many others all left behind poems that showed their affectionate love for their faithful companions and were subsequently merged into the humane tradition framed by the movement. Some poets and poetesses also directly engaged in the movement's work and campaigns themselves. Christina Rossetti, for example, not only ardently circulated leaflets and acquired names for anti-vivisection and anti-hunting petitions, but also especially composed poems for animal bazaars to raise money for charities (Marsh 443-46). Edward Carpenter, the prophetic poet of *Towards Democracy* (1883) and member of the HL, used his fame to draw large crowds and fans from progressive and spiritualist circles to the HL's lecture halls, or to its weekly teas at London's vegetarian restaurants (Salt, *Company* 137).

Novelists as Propagandists and Campaigners

Despite the elevated status of poets, "poetry," as noted critic and poet Edmund Gosse said, "is not a democratic art" (Gosse 514). Novels were what really belonged to the Victorian republic of readers. The fictional story, especially when combined with a sensational quality, although earlier in the century castigated by some religious people for its supposed corrupting effect on morality and also slighted by the critics for its vulnerability to vulgar public tastes, enjoyed a full sway over the Victorian reading public. Being shaped by and capable of shaping the dominant values of the day, the fictional form had a long history of being employed by nineteenth-century reformers as a medium of social criticism and advocacy (Brantlinger). In the late nineteenth-century, when the vivisection controversy grabbed the attention of the nation, there emerged also a noticeable group of novels that dealt with the theme of the ethics of animal experimentation; the best-known among them was Wilkie Collins's *Heart and Science*, published in 1883.²¹ Often written by anti-vivisectionists themselves, these novels made good use of the

²¹ For details on Collins's work, see Farmer and MacEachen. For novels in which the theme of vivisection received primary or secondary attention, see Berdoe; Cassidy; Colmore; Corelli; Daal; Graham; Hadwen; Huntly; Maartens; Macdonald; Marston; Maxwell; Melena; Pain; Phelps; Reed; Stevenson; and Wells.

fictional form, with its engaging plots and realistic representations, to expose, shock, present issues, offer extended arguments and supply details and facts about the vivisection controversy. The plots were usually about the protagonist's conversion to the anti-vivisection cause or the heroine's (often the wife or daughter of the vivisectioning scientist) courageous defiance of male authority to protect the suffering animals with whom she strongly sympathized. Through the design of the plot, readers were brought into scenes in hospital wards and laboratories usually closed to public scrutiny, and exposed to horrors which they could never otherwise so vividly experience. Arguments for and against vivisection, and even the real-life opinions of scientists or anti-vivisection leaders, were also sometimes meticulously supplied in these novels. Generally very realistic and informative, these anti-vivisection novels were able to pass on to the reader essential knowledge and understanding related to the controversial subject, and could also reach an audience that extended beyond the reach of the movement's normal propagandistic channels. With females now constituting a substantial portion of the readership, especially for magazines and novels, the fiction genre especially aided the movement in reaching those potential female supporters who otherwise had limited access to the channels of public discourse.

Apart from those writing overtly anti-vivisection novels, many novelists reflected in their works the Victorian fondness for domestic animals and some also openly aligned themselves with the cause against cruelty to animals. Numerous major and minor nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novelists and dramatists were active supporters of the animal rights cause; these include Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, John Galsworthy, Ouida (Louise de la Ramee), Jerome K. Jerome, Lewis Carroll, Mona Caird, Sarah Grand, and Florence Dixie. What is mainly known about these authors is their fondness or sympathy for animals as expressed in their works. Less well known, however, is their actual association with the animal protection movement and conscious use of literary means to advance the animal cause. For example Dickens, the first Victorian novelist to achieve universal popularity, was a member of the RSPCA and, as a journalist, a pioneer in raising the issue of humans' unjust treatment of animals. The popular weekly *Household Words* (1850-59), published by Dickens for "the discussion of the most important social questions of the time" (qtd. in Lohrli 4), often carried articles criticizing such cruelties as the eating of veal, the transporting, slaughtering and hunting of animals. Hardy, who lived through a more active period of animal defense in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more openly aligned himself with slaughter, anti-vivisection and anti-hunting reforms (Asker 71-89; Campbell). He

served on the central executive committee of the Council of Justice to Animals and closely supported the HL, the Animals' Friend Society, and the RSPCA.²² Clearly willing to use his work for the animal cause, he made available for reprint by *The Animals' Friend* for slaughter reform and anti-blood-sports campaign two well-known extracts from his novels—the long and realistic pig-killing scene from *Jude the Obscure* (1895), and the scene of Tess hiding from rape in a forest together with the dying victims of a shooting party in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (Editor, "A Merciful Man"; "Thomas Hardy"). As he said of his works in a letter to a friend: "What are my books but one plea against man's inhumanity to man, to woman, and to the lower animals?"²³

Galsworthy was an even more prominent public supporter of the animal defense cause in the early twentieth century, when his reputation as a serious author and social reformer was already firmly established. He was virtually omnipresent in the contemporary campaigns on behalf of caged birds and zoo animals, slaughtered animals, vivisected animals, hunted hares and stags and performing animals, as well as the campaign against the trade in decrepit horses and wild bird plumage.²⁴ Through his numerous articles in the general press and public actions such as lecturing, debating, presiding over meetings, and even personal investigation of cruelties in the slaughter-houses, Galsworthy had become the most influential literary celebrity spokesman for animals by the early decades of the twentieth century. His extraordinary popular appeal, however, from time to time prompted the HL to warn the British people against the "tendency to lionize one individual" and remind them of the efforts of unknown workers who had previously carried the cause through its "long term of public indifference and neglect" (Salt, "The Plumage Bill" 37; "Correspondence" 121). This is perhaps a case where the prestige and influence of literary figures eagerly sought by the movement paradoxically overshadowed and undermined the efforts of other supporters.

Conclusion

Entering into the wartime and post-war period in the early twentieth century, the animal defense movement, the society as a whole and the functions and place of literature in society underwent changes that gradually transformed the movement's

²² Hardy also accepted the Hon. Membership of the Wessex Saddleback Pig Society, whose objects included slaughter reform. See also his ode written for the RSPCA on its Centenary in Fairholme and Pain xv-xvi.

²³ Qtd. in "Thomas Hardy" 14.

²⁴ For works which shows Galsworthy's love of animals, see his *A Bit o' Love* and *A Sheaf*.

relationships with the literary sphere. As evangelicalism lost its sway and science gained greater prestige, both the society and the movement became more secularized. The literary scene also became more diversified and gradually cast off the Romantic influence that had endowed literature with its metaphysical and cultural authority in the nineteenth century. At the same time, the growing influence of the aesthetic movement that called for “art for art’s sake” and of Modernism with its new attention to the unconscious, the irrational and the aesthetic sides of human experience, also freed artists from their moral and social functions and contributed to the decline of the traditional prestige of the author. With the weakening of the moral authority and social influence of the literary class, within the movement a new class of professionals also replaced the many men and women of letters, broadly cultivated in the humanist tradition, who had previously occupied leading positions in reform societies for animals. However, despite these changed circumstances, literature continued to inspire many animal lovers and offered invaluable resources to the ongoing movement on behalf of animals. Yet in a new age, with new historical agents and their different degrees of awareness of what the various literary traditions could offer, the stories of mobilization would and will still need to be reinvented.

One may wonder how successful this movement was in its first hundred years of work. A brief review of major legislative advancements regarding the welfare of animals from the 1820s to the 1920s reveals a steady expansion of protection, offered to an ever-widening range of animals in ever-greater areas of human activity. In 1822, state protection was first offered to mistreated cattle. In 1835, protection was extended to domestic animals and the popular recreations of animal baiting and animal fighting were abolished. In 1854 the definition of domestic animals was further extended and the use of dogs as draught animals was made illegal throughout the UK by the Cruelty to Animals Act. In 1868 was passed the first Sea Birds Preservation Act, and this was followed by other eight acts between 1872 and 1904, which offered wider protection for a broader range of bird species. In 1876, Britain passed the earliest legislation in the world for the regulation of animal experimentation. The anti-vivisection movement never succeeded in its attempts to bring about the total abolition of animal experimentation or to exempt dogs from vivisection, but had a minor success in 1906 when the giving or selling of stray dogs to laboratories was made illegal by the Dogs Act. In 1900, the 800-year-old Royal Buckhound was abolished amidst the first wave of protest against hunting sports. In a compromise with stronger bills against cruel sports, the Wild Animals in Captivity Protection Act was passed in 1900: this extended legal

protection to wild animals in captivity. In 1911, a comprehensive Protection of Animals Act introduced stricter regulations and greater penalties for the mistreatment of animals, the use of steel traps, and the slaughtering of animals in slaughterhouses and knackers. In 1921, the belated Importation of Plumage (Prohibition) Act received royal assent after three decades of campaigning over the plumage question. Of course, behind all the legislative advancement was the more imperceptible transformation in cultural values regarding human relations with animals. When the bill which later became the first Act for the prevention of cruelty to cattle was under discussion in the parliament in 1821, there was loud laughter and members shouted “dogs! and cats!”; those days were now long gone. By the early twentieth century, then, it had become much more widely accepted that it is our duty as humans to be kind to animals, and this was deemed by many as a distinctive mark of civilization. In short, Britain by this time was no longer a land of unchecked acts of barbarism against any and all non-human creatures, as depicted by William Hogarth in his 1751 engravings *The Four Stages of Cruelty*. Rather, it prided itself as an animal-loving country and indeed had emerged as the world leader in animal welfare.

In his excellent *Romanticism and Animal Rights*, David Perkins claims: “To what extent all this writing registered or helped bring about a general change of mind, and to what extent it contributed to developments in the actual treatment of animals, are questions that cannot be answered with much certainty” (ix). These are indeed questions which the conventional examination of literary texts stops short of answering. Without explorations into the interpretation and dissemination process of literary texts engaged by different communities, we would not know how the words and thoughts of Romantic poets and writers came to exercise influence outside the realm of ideas and have bearing on the world of action. Our examination of the mobilization of literature engaged in by the animal defense movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain does strongly suggest that through the creative agency of the movement, the older as well as the contemporary literatures, and the men and women who wrote it, did help bring about changes in our attitudes toward and treatment of animals during those periods. And this also strongly suggests the potential role of literature as a socio-political force in the future.

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