

# Challenges for Historians Writing Animal–Human History: What Is Really Enough?

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**ABSTRACT** This essay considers issues facing historians working within the Animal Studies field. It draws on historiographical debates within feminist and social history to re-visit debates on animal agency, representation, and the nature of the materials for writing history. While arguing that the incorporation of animals within existing historical frameworks is positive in giving a status to animals' pasts, it suggests that more is possible. It asks what historians are really attempting to do in their work and both questions whether we are indeed attempting to imagine ourselves as animals and whether we are seeking to go back into a past. Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, it argues that historians should be attempting to bring the past into the present. It suggests a focus on the role of the historian—as opposed to the subject matter as such—in thinking through the type of history that is intended to be written. It also argues that readership and audience should not be neglected. While noting the difficulties in writing animal–human history, the essay nevertheless concludes both that this is a worthwhile task and that the posing of questions about methodology is a way of opening up further discussion.

**Keywords:** agency, historiography, incorporation, Trim the cat, War Horse exhibition



To attempt to reflect on work on animal–human history in the recent past is a daunting task. The inclusion of writing in Animal Studies with an historical perspective is not unusual.<sup>1</sup> In addition, there has been growth in academic conferences under the aegis of Animal Studies privileging both aspects of the past and a multi-disciplinary approach.<sup>2</sup> With the growth in the production of work on the subject content—animals—some publications have tried to open up historiographical analysis (including Donald 2007; Burt 2009; Mayer 2009). However, as has recently been written in discussion of the book series *A Cultural History of Animals*, published by Berg, “To say simply that things are so is not really enough” (Fudge 2011, p. 430). This essay attempts to take further what is enough and what more is needed and in what ways.

### **Incorporation: Analogies with Other Histories?**

The different cultural and historiographical circles in which they work influence those who write reflectively about the state of animal–human history. North American historian Harriet Ritvo, for example, has seen the growth in animal-focused work set against a broader political and cultural contemporary context that gives rise to new interests in the past: “Historical research on animals has been thriving within the discipline of history; historians’ sense of their fields has expanded to include such topics” (Ritvo 2002, pp. 403–406). She has welcomed the widening scope of historical subjects, paying particular attention in the North American context to environment history.<sup>3</sup> Ritvo has been positive about the incorporation of animals into general histories “of a given time.” This means that as subjects they start to become part of mainstream historical activity rather than being isolated in “peripheral, or even antiquarian, sub-fields” (Ritvo 2002, pp. 403–406).

This emphasis on incorporation—and broader political context—has analogies with work on women’s history. Both women’s history and animal–human history were seen as path-breaking new fields. Both have attempted to look at new subjects of history who had been marginalized and have given rise to new historiographical theories. Women’s history was influenced politically by so-called Second Wave Feminism in the 1970s. If nothing else, much work from the 1970s and early 1980s sought to make known the contributions women had made to society in earlier periods, particularly by highlighting actions that had been over-looked or written out of standard histories. In his earlier work, *The Making of the English Working-Class*, E. P. Thompson had sought to “rescue” his subjects “from the enormous condescension of posterity” (Thompson 1980, p. 12). This idea of “rescuing” marginalized groups and revealing their past role dominated much women’s and social history. It resulted in knowledge of ignored people and events albeit approached in a somewhat empirical vein. One of the key works of that time was Sheila Rowbotham’s *Hidden from History. Three Hundred Years of Women’s Oppression and the Fight Against It* (1973). This influential work, still in print, had its origins outside academia within the socialist–feminist movement of the early 1970s. This one book covered a lengthy period but was not criticized at the time for its “comprehensive” approach. The work was ground-breaking because the author made the subject matter seem valid within the discourse of history. The book did not attempt to develop new historiographical theories but rather to assert the right of marginalized women to be subjects within history, including labor history. It was left to later works to develop the impact of a history of women that would challenge the structures and concerns of existing notions of history. That is, work on historiographical processes developed later. Similarly, Jonathan Burt has discussed the history of animals as a history of disappearance, both in the sense of reduction in global biodiversity but also meaning that animals are just treated as icons and symbols that “paradoxically, places the animal outside history” (Burt 2001, pp. 203–204). Given the dearth of history writing on animals in the past, it is neither surprising nor, I believe, an issue in itself that books and articles continue to be written within a framework that is intended to “reveal” the past role of animals within established historical methodologies. As imaginative, feminist historian Carolyn Steedman has wryly commented, “Perhaps gap-filling is a puerile thing—no justification for a book—but historians do love doing it” (Steedman 2009, p. 32). We are still at very early stages of “retrieving” the hidden pasts of animal existences and their impact upon humans (Jenner 1997; McMullan 1998; Blaisdell 1999; Cummins 2003; Bartrip 2007). Work that is intended to bring to light previously unknown subject matter is being produced alongside research that attempts more historiographically imaginative approaches.<sup>4</sup>

## Opening Up Debate: What Questions Are Enough?

A recent collection by historian Dorothee Brantz attempts to do more than retrieve unknown pasts (Brantz 2010). She states that the history of animal–human relations can take many forms because different kinds of people have engaged with a wider variety of animals in many contexts. Brantz concludes her introduction with an exhortation to historians to reveal their methodologies and perspectives. This is advice well taken and is an approach that many scholars within more mainstream history have advocated as a way of developing an approach that is not empirical but rooted in the argument or methodology of the particular historian. In particular, she emphasizes the need to “always specify the sociocultural, economic, and political circumstances in which human–animal relations occur. We must also carefully chart the class, race, and gender relations that characterize human encounters with animals; and we must differentiate between diverse types of animals and their particular status within human societies” (Brantz 2010, pp. 10–11). Again this is a welcome approach. Historians are concerned with change (and continuity) over a period of time and different places. We analyze both broad trends and very specific moments and examples. Such approaches are given. As cultural historian Joanna Bourke has recently argued, in every period of history and every culture “commonsensical constructions of ‘the human’ and ‘the animal’ exist, but the distinction is constantly undermined and re-constructed” hence the need for clarity about specific time and place (Bourke 2011, p. 5).

However, despite Brantz’s discussion of historical methodology in her introduction, it is not primarily about the role of the historian but rather the subject matter of research, animals. For her the question of animal agency is “the problem with animals and history.” She has chosen to define agency as the ability to directly transform human structures, which would thus apparently exclude animals. (This, however, begs the question of the nature of the historical question being discussed and is rather narrow in focus. Analysis of domesticity, for example, could certainly easily embrace certain animals as historical agents [Brantz 2010, p. 3].) Other historians, however, working in the Animal Studies field have adopted different approaches towards animal agency. Jason Hribal, for example, has applied ideas of “history from below” drawn from E. P. Thompson in relation to the working class, to a history of animals. Some of his conclusions are both sweeping and contentious, not least because he chooses to focus on groups of animals rather than individual examples, and to transfer a Marxian concept of class as applied to humans to animals (Hribal 2007). More convincingly, Keri Cronin and Teresa Mangum focus on agency in other ways. By careful, detailed reference to animal welfare campaigners’ visual material of the nineteenth century, Cronin argues that representation of speaking animals “allowed readers and activists to recognize animal agency, but also existed as a site in which to imagine further articulation of nonhuman agency and voice” (Cronin 2011). Similarly, Mangum argues that in some circumstances during the nineteenth century, “the animals wrote back” (Mangum 2002; 2007, p. 173).

Having discussed agency, Brantz then turns her attention to materials: “writing the history of animals demands negotiating our desire to recover the *historical* [my emphasis] lives of animals vis-à-vis the fact that all of the available records of those lives have been produced by humans. Whether such a history can be anything *but* [original emphasis] representational is thus one of the key debates in the emerging field of animal studies” (Brantz 2010, p. 5). At this point there is an elision between the past—in the sense of events happening before the present—and the writing of history as (usually) writing or/and analysis that gives a status to chosen aspects of the past. This may be an unconsidered elision but it is an important one. An acknowledgment of the existence of a “past”—whether considering animals or humans—needs to precede the making of a history. Most working in the field of Animal Studies would not dispute that (at least certain)

animals have *past* lives. Whether past lives become “historical” lives depends not on the subjects themselves—be these animals or humans—but on those writing about them who then choose to construct a history. This is an important distinction. As Daniel Smail has suggested, “to admit that other animals have no sense of history is a quite different thing from claiming that animals cannot be held within the embrace of history” (Smail 2008, p. 69). The issue then is not about agency of the subjects of history as such (in this instance animals) but the choices, agency if you will, of those seeking to transform such actions into history. There is a distinction to be made between *events* happening in the past in which even the most conservative of historians would agree animals played a role, most obviously in the economy, transport, or warfare and the turning of this subject matter into particular histories that privilege animals. Whether one sees history as a construction or re-construction, a historian—of whatever sort—is key in its creation. An elision of “the past”—as events—with “history”—as an analysis or argument about such events—can lead to a lack of clarity. It both implies empirical approaches that inevitably promote materials or “sources” as the only components of value in the history-making process. It downplays the way in which various nations, communities, and individuals, as well as historians in different times and places, have created different histories for the present (Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998; Ashton and Kean 2009; Kean and Martin in press). When social historians such as E. P. Thompson or Sheila Rowbotham, whose work I referred to earlier, chose to write politically engaged histories about working class women and men, they were not deterred from doing so by what was often regarded as a comparative lack of material written by the protagonists themselves. They were clear about their own role in writing new histories. In order to make my point clear, I want to look in a similar way at the represented past of a particular cat, Trim.

### Trim the Cat: Questions of Agency, Materials and Historians

Trim was a totally black cat, apart from four white feet and a white star on his chest. His tail was long, large, and bushy. His head was small and round. He weighed between ten and twelve pounds (Flinders 1997, pp. 4–6). Trim lived alongside his brothers and sisters on various ships of Matthew Flinders, the Lincolnshire-born explorer of southern Australia (Flinders 1997, p. 2). Trim could swim. He could grab hold of a rope. He walked on the dining tables and took food from men’s forks and their mouths.

He was born in 1799 on the *Reliance* during a passage from the Cape of Good Hope to Botany Bay (Dudding 1973; Flinders 1997, p. 1). Trim was on the ship that explored the northern part of New South Wales before returning to England via Cape Horn and St Helena, having circumnavigated the globe (Flinders 1997, p. 29). He subsequently lived in a house in Deptford (then a dockland area of London). Trim went again with Flinders on a journey to the South Seas. Ship-wrecked in August 1803, the cat and crew were taken on board the schooner *Minikin* but stopped in the Isle de France due to the poor condition of the vessel. Thereupon they—men and Trim—were imprisoned on the allegation of spying. The men were removed to the *Maison Despeaux* as prisoners of war and Trim was later taken by a woman to be a companion for her daughter. Trim went away from this household and, despite a reward being offered, was never seen again by Flinders or the woman or her child.

Such are the bald “facts” of his existence. However, according to his biographer, Flinders, Trim was seen as fearless and affectionate. The evidence for this was falling overboard and thence learning to swim and having no fear of water. He was able to take food from officers and ordinary sailors alike because he was permitted to: he “was admitted upon the table of almost every officer and man in the ship.” In terms of the men he became, “the favourite of all

our ship” (Flinders 1997, pp. 16, 17). He could also “play dead.” Such behavior suggests agency of some sort, some choice of location and a particular, favorable, attitude towards humans. Cats were regular inhabitants of ships not least to act as mice and rat eradicators. But seemingly Trim did not only lurk in the lower decks, rather he was seen as unusual precisely because he engaged with people and was thus seen to go beyond a utilitarian role. Flinders’ attitude towards him was “the best and most illustrious of his race, the most affectionate of friends, faithful of servants, and best of creatures” (Flinders 1997, p. iv).

From this short summary we might conclude that Trim possessed agency. Amongst other things we are told, for example, that he returned to the ship when there were opportunities to go on land or he decided to play particular games at different times and made himself known to the captain of the ship and his officers by his presence near them. However, I want to unpack some of the layers around *how* we might know about Trim—and, in turn, know that he made various decisions. We know about Trim only because Flinders chose to write about him. This was distinctive on the part of a naval commander. The account of the cat is neither part of Flinders’ journals of his naval voyages, nor primarily his letters, but the protagonist in a separate account of just a few thousands words devoted exclusively to the cat.<sup>5</sup> Although it was not uncommon by this period for the wealthy to write elegies for dead pets or to erect an obelisk or sculptured tomb, Flinders did not have such an opportunity to speak of his affection towards the cat (Thomas 1983, p. 118). Trim was stolen, presumed killed, and therefore could not be buried by Flinders.<sup>6</sup>

Although we know about Trim because of the written account by Flinders, I would suggest that we also know about Trim because his *own* behavior was distinctive: he was not simply a construct of the naval commander. For example, when a rope was thrown over to him, “he took hold of it like a man, and ran up it like cat” (Murray-Smith 1977, p. 8), “he learned to swim and have no dread of water,” and “he was able to mount up the gangway steps quicker than his master, or even the first lieutenant” (Flinders 1997 pp. 2–3). It is also the case, of course, that the relationship between the cat and man provided the impulse for Flinders to write the account. Flinders makes explicit his emotional attachment to Trim. But, as ethologist Marc Bekoff has reminded us, “If animals didn’t show their feelings, it’s unlikely people would bond with them. We form close relationships with our pets not only because of our own emotional needs but also because of our recognition of theirs” (Bekoff 2007, p. 19).

Some might dismiss Flinders’ account as a mere “representation” by a human of a cat, that is, we are only presented with a construction outside the animal’s perspective (Rothfels 2002). However, we are not just presented with an account of the emotional impact of the cat on the human, although this is an impetus for the writing, but of aspects of the life of the cat. Human-authored texts, as illustrated here, can provide insights that are not merely reducible to the human perspective (Benson, 2011, p. 5). Arguably, Trim does have at least relative autonomy from the framework of the writing of Flinders, albeit because of the incidents that the human has chosen to record.

It remains the case, however, that the reason Trim is known about today has little to do with cats—or Animal Studies scholars. The work was not published at the time (Brown and Doolley 2005, p. 150). Because of the status of Flinders, rather than that of Trim, the work was included with Flinders’ papers in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.<sup>7</sup> Here the radical Australian Stephen Murray-Smith, who edited the journal *Overland*, found the account in 1971, some 170 years later while researching on Flinders. Although the account of Trim was previously unknown, it would prove to be a useful contribution to the journal since it was playing

an important role at that time in the development in Australia of radical nationalism (McLaren 2003, p. 193). The life of the cat would help re-create interest in Australia's past. While Flinders was described as “disgracefully neglected” by the British in the early 1970s (Dudding 1973, p. 15), he has been seen as a “popular hero” in Australia and has received enhanced attention through the focus on Trim from the 1970s onwards (Laughton 2004).

Flinders' unedited account of Trim was published in *Overland* in Winter 1973. As T. M. Perry, the Melbourne-based geographer, wrote in his accompanying introduction to this article, it was the first appearance of the essay in printed form. However, the work was published not because of intrinsic interest in Trim but for “the light it throws on early nineteenth century ship-board life and especially for its revelation of the author.” Moreover, it was printed because it was “uncharacteristic” of Flinders' other writings, which were defined as “official and scientific” (Perry 1973, pp. 2–3; Perry 1974).

Another layer to the narrative has been added by the 1995 statue of Trim by John Cornwell, erected outside the Mitchell library in Sydney's Macquarie Street—and behind the 1925 Colton statue of Flinders. Trim's paw prints crossing to and from the base of Flinders' statue provides the connection between the two in a space of commemoration. In some ways the statue of Trim reflects the intention of Flinders that a monument be erected to “perpetuate thy memory and record thy uncommon merits” (Flinders 1997, p. 30). But the unveiling conducted by Rear Admiral David Campbell accompanied by the Naval Reserve Band reflected the naval context for their relationship (Flinders 1997, p. 51).

The publication of Flinders' work and the subsequent commemoration of Trim might, it could be argued, have little to do with interest in Trim. However, that Flinders' work has been published does mean that others can, if they choose, use this material to create histories privileging Trim. Certainly there are many layers, including those of time, place, and intention, contributing to meaning here: if the narrative of the cat was simply looked at empirically it would overlook the literary, political, and historical context and the rationale for the account of his life to be brought into the twenty-first century. However, I would suggest that the fact that this is a human representation (on various levels) does not prevent use being made of the material, for example, by a writer seeking to write an account that privileges an animal. Certainly, it sheds some light on the life of a cat outside a purely domestic context and suggests an emotional relationship that is often imagined to be relatively recent (at least in the case of feline–human relationships). So while there is material from the early nineteenth century (albeit human-created) showing the role of a cat, it is primarily because of the role of other humans, historians, that Trim can emerge from the past—and the archive.

But, is human-generated material really such an issue? Routinely, social historians write, for example, about the role of workhouses and the poor law. They seek to understand the position of the inmates not least by using the registers and logbooks of the institutions or, where they exist, the rough examination books in which people seeking relief are obliged to tell a particular narrative—prompted by questions from an official—which can be written down as a personal narrative. It is known that these are mere traces, circumscribed stories. However, if a historian takes the decision that an emphasis on the lives of inmates of a workhouse is important, then the historian will decide that the available material, albeit limited and partial, will have to be used. The stance of a historian—and the materials—works in relation to each other. Those who seek to write histories on particular topics or from particular perspectives understand the limitations. Yet their commitment to histories that include, in this example, the destitute, the poor, and those excluded from former histories, lead them to believe it is “a price worth paying.”

## Benjamin and Brecht: What Are Historians Trying to Do?

Of course, by now discussing Flinders' writing I am providing another context. The reason I think it useful to discuss Trim here is not because I have a particular interest in Flinders, Murray-Smith, or Rear Admiral David Campbell, but because the cat illustrates my wish to write history that (at least) privileges the role of animals in the past. I can, however, almost hear Cary Wolfe's critique in my ear: "So even though—to return to our historian example—your concept of the discipline's *external* relations to its larger environment is post humanist in taking seriously the existence of nonhuman subjects and the consequent compulsion to make the discipline respond to the question of nonhuman animals foisted on it by changes in the discipline's environment, your *internal* disciplinarity may remain humanist through and through" (original emphases) (Wolfe 2010, pp. 123–124).

While noting the constraints apparently binding history,<sup>8</sup> I would, however, suggest that there is recent thinking in the field—as well as in the role of inter-disciplinarity integral to Animal Studies—that indicates that (at least some) historians are researching in ways that can help facilitate different sorts of history open to those working in animal–human history. Some of those who have been most critical of the possibility of history embracing animals tend, like Wolfe, to work outside this specific field.<sup>9</sup> In order to create *human*-centered histories, historians initiate a task of imagining, of thinking about what was it like to be alive in another time and place, in order to bring it into the present in some way. Those who think about such questions realize, however, that completion and success in such an endeavor is impossible since, amongst other things, there will only ever be traces existing in the present from the past. In her insightful work, *Dust*, Carolyn Steedman has explored what historians do when they go to "the archive," the commonplace location of paper-based materials that conventional historians use. It is, she says, to "do with longing and appropriation. It is to do with wanting things that are put together, collected, collated, named in lists and indices; a place where a whole world, a social order, may be *imagined* [my emphasis] by the recurrence of a name in a register, through a scrap of paper, or some other little piece of flotsam" (Steedman 2001, p. 81). This, after all, was the intention behind the research of Murray-Smith in the National Maritime Museum. Although many historians realize the rational impossibility of re-creating experiences from the past, there is always the hope that it is possible to do this particularly if one thinks it worthwhile to validate past lives. Indeed, if historians did not think it valuable to even attempt this task, then clearly we would not write "history." This is what historians do: we find material, often created in different times, with which to imagine a past and bring it alive in the present. Through the archival research of Murray-Smith and subsequent publication and heritage commemoration, Trim has been introduced to people of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

At this point I suppose I could introduce discussion around the (im)possibility of imagining oneself as an animal in the past, consider analogies with the approach outlined by Steedman, and the implications for animal–human history.<sup>10</sup> But are historians actually seeking to go back into the past? Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, I would suggest that the role of a historian is not to recreate the past "as it really was."<sup>11</sup> I accept that "The past contains nothing of intrinsic value, nothing we have to be loyal to, no facts we have to find ..." (Jenkins 2003, p. 29); however, as Benjamin suggests, "The true method of making things present is to represent them in our space, not to represent ourselves in their space ... we don't displace our being into theirs; they step into our life" (Benjamin 2002, p. 206). The emphasis here is upon ensuring that particular events of an earlier time are not forgotten but made relevant in a particular contemporary moment (Benjamin 1992, p. 247).

The focus then for animal–human historiography, I am arguing, is not upon materials as such (or the connotations of those materials constructed by humans) but the function of the history writing and the role of the historian. To take this idea further, I refer to a well-known poem cited at the start of a recent essay by Clay McShane and Joel Tarr on horses in nineteenth century American cities (McShane and Tarr 2010). The authors quote some famous lines from Brecht’s poem “Questions from a worker who reads.” The lines chosen include, “Was it the kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?” Implicit in the rest of the essay is that horses were involved in creating such landscapes and, by implication, histories. They say, “urban historians have paid too little attention to these ‘four-legged workers’” (McShane and Tarr 2010, p. 227). Their essay—as in their subsequent book on the topic—is an admirable act of incorporation (McShane and Tarr 2011). The poem, however, can be employed in different ways. There is an explicit emphasis on the materials for creating the past outside books, particularly traces from the physical landscape. Such traces could include the gradients modified or not by the labor of horses, the rat runs under floor boards, the tracks in the wood taken by foxes, the marks on trees scratched by cats. As Wilbert has suggested, “moving to see how nonhumans are active in the making of our worlds is a widespread change, though a nonlinear one from more human-centred practice ...” (Wilbert 2006, p. 46).

“Questions from a worker who reads” also works on another level. Socially constructed public events provide a framework for questioning the nature of conventional history. Answers are provided but they are revealed through a silence, by what is not said, at least in words. However, the experiences of those without a voice—animals and certain humans—*have* been marked in the landscape, in the material culture of the past. Hence, other histories are possible. The key component, however, is the question being asked. Without active and conscious attention, the material itself would not convey such meaning (Kean 2004, pp. 188–190). In the Brecht poem the emphasis is both on what actually happened—the workers *did* do these things, the wars *were* fought—but also on what the “worker who reads” wants to know: understanding other ways of viewing the world.

Are there possible analogies to be made here with those attempting to write animal–human histories that privilege animals? Erica Fudge has written in illuminating ways about the problem of historiography for Animal Studies. She has challenged the role of representation, the way that the past is documented. In such discussion the materials for writing history are problematized as they emanate from humans. Fudge argues that as access to animals in the past is through humans “then we never look at the animals, only ever at the representation of the animals by humans.” The difficulty then can be, she continues, that animals themselves disappear, abandoned in favor of the “purely textual” (Fudge 2002, p. 6). The material becomes an issue not because of the material *itself* but because Fudge is keen on writing history that has, at the very least, a focus on animals.<sup>12</sup> If a historian is simply “writing in” animals to existing frameworks of history, this is, of course, a valid approach. However, if a historian is attempting more than this, for example, by seeking to disrupt accepted ways of looking at aspects of the past by highlighting animal–human relations, this becomes more difficult. It is perhaps unsurprising that recently Siobhan O’Sullivan and Rod Bennison have described “Human–Animal Studies [as] an international phenomenon, with animal-related *puzzles* engaging the minds of inquiring scholars the world over” [my emphasis] (O’Sullivan and Bennison 2011, p. 334). For many working on the past in the broad Animal Studies field, the focus of their work is not around agency or representation as such, but an attempt to show in the present the importance of animals in the past (and present) or that change has occurred or that the lives of animals and people are (in various ways) intertwined.

## Different Starting Points?

A different starting point might not be the subject matter, animals, per se but the historian's intentions. Thus, Jonathan Burt with his interest in post-humanist scholarship can state, "We have not to date been particularly well served by the history of animals in the twentieth century" (Burt 2009, p. 159). Thinking more explicitly about one's own role could be a useful starting point. This has been explored creatively in a new book by Jorma Kalela who argues, "It is the choices historians make that define the parameters of their studies and this gives them a great responsibility. They are, in relation to their own society, guardians of sound knowledge of the past, and in relation to past societies, instrumental in making sure that justice is done ..." (Kalela 2011, p. 24).

Thinking in this way might lead animal-human historians not just to "write in" animals but to re-work given frameworks. Certainly, particular historical periodization—terms such as the long nineteenth century, for instance—do not necessarily make sense in relation to animals (Fudge 2002, p. 5). However, simply by looking at themes specific to animals in the past, such as hunting or domestication can "flatten out some of the distinctions" between different times, leading both to an ahistorical approach and an avoidance of discussion of the role animals have specifically played in relation to key moments of change such as the Enlightenment or Industrial Revolution (Fudge 2011, p. 426). Acknowledging the animal presence can disrupt and challenge conventional ways of seeing. In standard British social history, the 1911 Insurance Act, for example, has usually been seen as the first step on the way to constructing a modern welfare state, as realized by the 1945 Labour Government, with limited pensions and welfare benefits. But, as Tansey has noted, this was also the Act that instituted for the first time a state-endorsed medical research committee with implicit support for experimenting on animals (Tansey 1994). The institution of the National Health Service in 1948 took this a step further, as some animal campaigners argued at the time, with the government now officially "sanctifying" the "cruel and immoral practice" of vivisection (BUAV 1947). Asking different questions about this key piece of social legislation may well result in demonstrating the role of animals in welfare policy, but more significantly it can also challenge the ways in which the NHS as such is seen and the nature of the animal-human relationship that helped create it. Similarly, notwithstanding the key work of Angus Calder (Calder 1969; 1991), the start of the Second World War in Britain on the Home Front is often seen as a moment of consensus at a time when Britain stood alone and "could take it." The construction of the historical moment of World War 2 has been solely within a human framework. However, once we realize that in the first few days of the war in September 1939, when no bombing had occurred and without any government diktat, an estimated 400,000 pet animals were killed in London alone at their individual keeper's behest, we might start to review established frameworks (Moss and Kirby 1947, pp.18–19; Clabby 1963, p. 41; Kean in press).

While the killing at the start of the war *separated* animal-human interests, circumstances throughout the war tended to blur the animal and human both in terms of their survival and through the circumstances of their deaths. Humans adapted to circumstances: so did animals. Cats, for example, as analyzed both by the Cats Protection League and Julian Huxley, secretary to the Zoological Society, soon learnt on hearing an alert that there was danger from above. Accordingly, they would run to cellars and under chairs. As Huxley noted, animals' acute hearing meant that in saving themselves they were also alerting humans (Cats Protection League 1941). We cannot simply incorporate within such an existing grand narrative additional knowledge of events happening to animals during the war. Rather, this moment challenges the notion of what it was to be human or animal at that time. Both humans and

animals alongside each other endured experience of bombardment, and changes in diet and domestic circumstances. But simultaneously, in some instances, there was a clear distinction between human and animal in which the human was not the one protecting vulnerable family members but killing or abandoning them.<sup>13</sup>

### Who Is History For? Material, Audience, Empathy—The Example of “War Horse” at The National Army Museum

I have suggested the role of the historian in writing animal–human history is key. But thinking about audience/readership is also important in determining the focus of research. The article an academic historian may write for *Anthrozoös* on vivisection is likely to be rather different from one written on a similar topic for the popular glossy *BBC History* magazine.

There may well be lessons to be drawn from the construction of animal–human histories outside academia aimed at a general audience, for example in plays and exhibitions. The process by which “popular understanding” informs the choice of history or heritage can be illuminating. In 2007 Britain’s National Theatre staged an innovative production of *War Horse*, originally aimed at its Xmas “family” market.<sup>14</sup> “Joey” a first world war horse and his human companion, Albert, journeys through the battlefields of France and eventually returns home. It was based on the novel of the same name by Michael Morpurgo, well known for his animal-focused stories in war including the bombing of Dresden and the current war in Afghanistan (Morpurgo 2010a; 2010b). The political and social context was well researched. The accompanying program included material on the loss of life of horses in the war previously known mainly to military historians or to the specialist readers of works such as those by Clabby, Thompson, or Singleton (Clabby 1963; Thompson 1983; Singleton 1993).

The impact of a horse—a puppet moved internally and externally by human puppeteers—was designed to mimic the movements of an actual horse. Although the “puppet” did not speak—it was, after all, a horse—it was presented as possessing emotion and was also a focus for human emotion. Such innovation emphasized an animal doing things—and suffering. It proved to be hugely popular.<sup>15</sup> Lynda Birke has analyzed this being caused in part by the depiction of the animal–human bond (Birke 2010). Quoting Morpurgo, she also suggests another reason. British (television) audiences were now used to seeing coffins coming home draped in Union Jacks: “suddenly the whole business of what happens when you go to war has come home. Maybe that is also part of what has struck a chord in *War Horse*, maybe the suffering that we know goes on and we know perfectly well went on in the First World War is relevant now and not passé” (Morpurgo in Birke 2010, p. 130).

This year, the film *War Horse*, directed by Steven Spielberg, opened in Britain to mixed reviews. Significantly, the historical context in some ways is not the key framework. Spielberg has said he saw the narrative “as a timeless story about the sacrifices of love” (Groskop 2012) and has downplayed the war context. It was not, he has said, his intention to make a war movie (Spielberg 2012). This is a different emphasis to that of the National Army Museum, which this year opened a special exhibition entitled “War horse: fact or fiction?” curated by Pip Dodd, which must surely challenge its self-stated crudely drafted rationale to “present historical fact.”<sup>16</sup> That is, the museum has used as a legitimate basis for its display of a fictional work, and has also drawn on some of the ideas of the genre of the novel, play, and film. There is much here of the familiar structure of museum exhibitions: panels, displays of material from the existing collection, things to do aimed at children. The introductory panel explains the relationship between the book/play/film and the more usual material offered by a military museum: “*War*

*Horse* is the story of Joey, a young red bay colt taken from a farm in Devon and the care of his loving owner Albert to the bloody battlefields of France ... Throughout history thousands of horses like Joey have played a vital role supporting soldiers on the battlefields." Thus the *individual* (and fictional) story is not downplayed but placed within a broader context. There are displays describing the role of horses in general in warfare at different moments in the past, but this is balanced by a focus on individual horses. These include: Marengo, Napoleon's horse whose skeleton was displayed in London in 1832; Jimson the mule serving with the Middlesex Regiment in India and the South African Wars who received medals for his work, and Sefton of the Household Cavalry injured by an IRA bomb in London in 1982 who received the honor of "horse of the year" in 1984. In some ways the emphasis on a fictional individual horse, Joey, has encouraged a more expansive approach to "real" horses. The focus on the individual and not merely the group creates a sense of empathy and identification missing from straightforward military history.

The majority of the material is, inevitably, from human-constructed sources, such as paintings (though there are also artifacts taken from horse corpses such as a horsetail). An artwork of a large horse made of wire stumbling upon barbed wire evokes far more than the textual explanation of the suffering caused to horses through such entrapment. A pair of binoculars encourages the human visitor to look through them and see how a horse sees differently, with a panoramic vision but a blind spot. But such artifacts and approaches are significant. Sandra Swart has argued that the fact that human instruments of control such as whips or reins were needed indicates horses' own resistance. Indeed although humans may not be able to see like a horse, Swart has noted that "many [people] have tried to think like a horse, which was essential in the process of domesticating and training them" (Swart 2010, pp. 202, 217). The exhibition attempts throughout to privilege horses rather than to speak of the work of soldiers with them. Thus, a letter from Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig to the Duke of Portland, chairman of the RPSCA in January 1919, outlines his gratitude: "As you are aware, animals have been exposed to very severe trials and hardships, and have suffered heavily, not only in battle casualties but through the exhaustion and loss of health consequence on the severe stress of their work ..."<sup>17</sup>

Near the end of the exhibition is a large horizontal display cabinet consisting of rows and rows of small white outline horses with two named from the play. The accompanying text states: "You have learnt about a lot of named horses in the exhibition, horses like Joey. Many of them were not as lucky as him. Help us to remember these forgotten heroes by naming them and decorating a paper horse and putting it on the Remembrance wall." The wall already contains such homage. One of the final panels defines remembrance as a feature of collective memory, thus being explicit about the rationale of this part of the exhibition (Halbwachs 1992; Samuel 1994; Nora 1996).

While this apparently simple and small exhibition seems unambitious in its approach, it is in fact quite sophisticated, raising questions about the presentation of animal-human history. The methodology of the exhibition is explained, a feature by no means commonplace in British museums. Significantly, individuals, including particular non-human animals, are privileged. Artwork designed to evoke an empathetic response is employed and, most importantly, an individual (fictional) animal is seen as worthy of analysis within a national story. In addition, the visitor is encouraged to respond empathetically to related subject matter, the plight of animals in war. It challenges the visitor to look at warfare generally and the First World War in particular in different ways to the norm.

## Conclusion

Today imaginative historians routinely incorporate approaches from different academic disciplines into their work. These may be broadly drawn from literature, anthropology, psychology, or philosophy. Those working in Animal Studies may also draw on the work of zoologists or veterinarians. The work of the new Bristol Cats Study run at the university's veterinary school by Dr Jane Murray (whose post is funded by Cats Protection) will surely be of interest. Her work is apparently "the first cat study of its kind" (Murray 2010) and draws on the study "children of the 90s" as a model. It uses cat keepers as conveyers of information through questionnaires with standard questions on cat behavior, characteristics, and lifestyle to facilitate improvement in the health and welfare of cats in the future.<sup>18</sup> Apart from improving cat health and well-being, the project may also be of use to those seeking to analyze in more meaningful ways cat behavior and feline–human relationships. While it is obviously a project of the twenty-first century it might, for example, help open up discussion of the way in which this relationship has changed or remained similar from earlier accounts we possess (such as that existing between Flinders and Trim). The ongoing work of John Bradshaw on dogs at the Anthrozoology Institute, also at the University of Bristol, has already suggested that dogs as social animals have more fine-grained emotions than humans, which can help us to look more critically at the canine–human relationship: "If the Inuit can have fifteen words for snow, maybe dogs can experience fifteen kinds of love" (Bradshaw 2011, p. 223).

It may be difficult thinking through the implications of writing animal–human history but this is a task that increasing numbers of historians are attempting. An anonymous reviewer of this paper suggested that the propositions explored here were not a "way forward" but rather a "way out." However, this begs the question of what is it that historians want to create. It may seem to this reviewer avoidance, but I do not think that there is only one type of history to be written. There are not ready-made answers but the very asking of questions can help us to think through historiographical processes and what we as creators of history are trying to do. They may also help us think through "what *is* enough"? As the last lines of the Brecht poem discussed above encourage us, "So many reports. So many questions."

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## Notes

1. I realize that the term "anthrozoology" is another term that might be used to describe work within the Animal Studies field. However, since my approach is rooted in the humanities the term Animal Studies is more commonly found. Examples of writing within such parameters embracing works with an historical perspective include: *Animalibus: Of Animals and Cultures*, the series recently set up at Pennsylvania State University Press, co-edited by Garry Marvin and Nigel Rothfels; or the *Animals, History, Culture* series at The Johns Hopkins University Press, under the general editorship of Harriet Ritvo; or the animal series at Reaktion books, under the general editorship of Jonathan Burt. One of the first such series was initiated by Brill through the Animals and Society Institute, with a slant "that allows exploration of the relation between human and nonhuman animals in any setting, contemporary or historical, from the perspective of various disciplines within the social sciences and humanities." Works include Munro (2005) and essays within, Van Sittert and Swart (2008), McFarland and Hediger (2009), Tyler and Rossini (2009), Freeman (2010), and Alves (2011). A range of University Presses, including Virginia, Chicago, Cornell, and Oxford regularly issue books with an emphasis on animal–human history. Even when books are not defined as historical as such, for example, the new Palgrave Macmillan series on *Animal Ethics* edited by Andrew Linzey and Priscilla Cohn, ostensibly within the remit of philosophy, politics, sociology, and media, it too draws on a historical context.

2. Some conferences in 2011 with an emphasis on animal–human pasts include “Animal Ecologies in Visual Culture” (organized by Giovanni Aloï in London); “Representing Animals” (in Rennes, Brittany organized by Emilie Dardenne and Sophie Mesplède); and “Animal Gaze Revisited” (organized by Rosemarie McGoldrick at London Metropolitan University).
3. In Britain, historical works on hunting have been unsurprising given the controversy and publicity given to the parliamentary debates to regulate hunting. See, for example, Taylor (2004) or Tichelar (2006).
4. Within the framework of feminist scholarship, to refer back to my earlier example, there are feminist historians who would prefer to see histories of gender that acknowledge both the constructed nature of a history around women and men and their mutual influence. Nevertheless, such scholars may still choose to write articles for the *Women's History Review*, which champions a more empirical approach mindful of past neglect and the slippery status of histories privileging women's experience within (still) patriarchal societies, as opposed to the perhaps more historiographically imaginative *Gender and History*.
5. Flinders did, however, write to his wife from Sydney in June 1803: “Trim, like his master, is becoming grey: he is at present fat and frisky, and takes meat from our forks with his usual dexterity: he is commonly my bedfellow” (as quoted in Perry 1997, p. xvi).
6. Flinders believed Trim had been eaten, thus making Flinders' loss even greater: “it is but too probable that this excellent unsuspecting animal was stewed and eaten by some hungry black slave, in whose eyes all his merits could not balance against the avidity excited by his sleek body and fine furred skin” (Flinders 1997, p. 48).
7. The account is catalogued amongst Flinders' papers at FLI/11, National Maritime Museum archive catalogue.
8. See, for example, the innovative work of Daniel Smal in which he argues both for the importance of history and an approach that argues, “humanity's natural history persisted after the rise of civilization” (Smal 2008, p. 11). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer who drew my attention to this work.
9. See also the comment of anthropologist Garry Marvin, “I do not believe that scholars in the humanities can have much, or anything, of significance to say about animals outside any human context” (Marvin 2010, p. 62).
10. I am aware of the debates emanating from Nagel's statement that it was impossible for humans to imagine ourselves as a bat, “there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine” and that even if we could, we could not know “what it is like for a bat to be a bat” (Nagel 1974). Radical theologian Andrew Linzey, amongst others, has critically revisited Nagel, arguing that we do not need to know precisely how a bat thinks or feels or “mentally encounters the world” to “know basic things about how it can be harmed.” Linzey argues that humans can know things about a bat's consciousness and concludes, “We can know these things at least as *reasonably* as we know them in the case of most humans” (original emphasis). Linzey is attempting to alter people's response to animals and, if nothing else, to prevent harm. Thus, quite logically, he suggests that we only need to know certain things to effect particular ways of seeing—and then relating—to animals (or for that matter humans). Linzey intimates that knowing *human* experience is impossible, but this is a task that routinely historians undertake in relation to human history (Linzey 2009, p. 50). (Also see Coetzee 1999, pp. 31–33, 102; Simons 2002, p. 117; Rowlands 2002, pp. 14–15.)
11. “The History that showed things ‘as they really were’ was the strongest narcotic of history” [and thus to be avoided] (Benjamin 2002, p. 463).
12. I realize that Fudge is attempting to do more than this but I am suggesting this as a dividing “bottom line” between those seeking to privilege animals in one way and another and those seeking to merely incorporate them into existing histories.
13. Hilda Kean. The forgotten cat and dog massacre of World War Two: The “Nation of Animal-Lovers” and the “People's War.” Paper presented at the Representing Animals Conference, Rennes, October, 20–21, 2011. For a discussion of the complicated relationship between “pets” and humans, see Fudge (2008).
14. Directed by Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris from a script by Nick Stafford based on Morpurgo's novel (Morpurgo 1982).
15. It won five American Tony awards in June 2011 and British Olivier awards in 2008. It transferred both to the West End and Broadway.
16. <http://www.nam.ac.uk/about-us> Accessed on November 12, 2011.
17. There is also reference to the work of the Blue Cross and the Brooke. It is made clear that the work of the three organizations continues to this day.
18. <http://www.vetschool.bris.ac.uk/cats> Accessed on November 11, 2011.

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