Poetic License to Kill
Recipes for Flesh
By James Strecker; Mini Mocho Press (Box 1138, Station A, Hamilton, Ont. L8N 4B3, Canada), 1989; 80 pages, $10.00, softcover

Like a duck blind concealing hunters (the blind hiding the blind), the external appearances of Recipes for Flesh disguise its insidious intent. Despite its title, it is not a cookbook. And contrary to its cartoon cover of cutey though dead animals, it is not a children's book. The book is poetry. For adults only.

Title and cover are the most palatable parts of this chapbook. Once opened, all animal hell breaks loose. Other eco- and animal-rights-poets write through their tear ducts. James Strecker mixes into his ink, blood, sweat, spit, adrenaline, and venom. No bile, though. Deceptively pleasurable to read, these poems can be as hard to stomach as a picnic in a slaughterhouse.

Cancel the picnic. Foreboding clouds darken the horizon. Recipes for Flesh is against slaughterhouses and carnivorism, not about picnics and vegetarianism. Against milk-drinking and egg-eating. Against grazing and factory farming. Against vivisection and animal experimentation. Against hunting and trapping. Against bullfights and roadkills. Against fur and leather. Against urbanism and hedonism. Against harlotry and por-


James Strecker, for whom "there is no end of darkness, no ember of eternal light," is not a cheery poet. In one poem on the factory farm "each morning [is the] birthday of nothing" while in another poem at the restaurant "the smoke of dead flesh flows rancid into tomorrow." He shares ranks with Leopoldi and Baudelaire rather than with run-of-the-puppy-mill Wimpy the Pooh contemporary poets who tend to romanticize animals "lives as all fun and frolic. He instead discloses their deaths and denounces the humans who are responsible. "If you will not condemn," Strecker advises clamorously, "be silent with philosophy."

For the matador, he wishes "a darning needle driven hard through your own testicles." Vivisectors are "men who are given speech to say nothing." If hunters already are not cursed, "I curse you, killers of beauty." Meat-eater morality "smells of rotten flesh in the belly." While down on the factory farm, "hen and men are mad or going crazy." Man is, in short, "the user of woman and earth, the killer of lamb." And in the last stanza of the concluding poem, he implores, "father, forget them, for they know what they do."

The poet curses humans and specifically Western men because he loves nature and specifically exploited animals. Expressing love is not enough. He expresses also opinions. Yet he is keenly aware of the danger and impotency of his enmity. He confesses two dreams. "In one I love my kind." But "in the other. I despise that he tortures what is holy to me, so I shoot him." Not that he schemes to shoot any shotguns or to plant any pipe bombs. His pipe dreams are enough. He offers even his own critique of his book. "Would it be that poetry carried a loaded gun?" Strecker's poetry compares to a Stinger missile, hand-held but capable of downing fighter aircraft.

Strecker's poetic pen is beautiful—and lethal. And his outrage most of us would agree is justifiable—though vengeful. Do not think, however, that his vengeance poisons his poetry. Given the chance to render some flying factory farm into a scrap heap and its farmer pilots into masses of protoplasm, Strecker would launch no missile. His missives are enough. Strecker need kill no carnivores. With cholesterol and salmonella, with cancer and heart disease, they are killing themselves.

—Mark Mathew Braunstein

Mark Braunstein is author of Radical Vegetarianism.
Poetic Injustices

On Speaking Terms with Earth

By Jean Pearson
Great Elms Press, 1988
25 pages. $4.00, soft cover
($4.75 postpaid from Earth, P.O. Box 417, Bethlehem, PA 18016)

This is a compact chapbook of short poems, but don’t let its size fool you. Big passages come in small packages.

Half the poems in the collection were first published elsewhere, some in prominent poetry journals such as Middle Street Review, Milkweed Chronicle, and American Poetry Review. Others appeared in notable animal rights and deep ecology periodicals such as Between the Species, Ecospirit, the Canadian Trumpeter, and right here at home in The ANIMALS’ AGENDA. The nature of the poems? The poetry of nature.

Are we angels who have lost our wings, or apes who have lost our hair? Pearson might assert we are apes who have lost our angels.

Jean Pearson speaks through the “I” in most of the poems, while in others she hides disguised inside the “we” and loses herself inside the human horde. Yet the true protagonists of all the poems are Earth, animals, and wilderness. Nature, for short. And shortly disappearing. Hers is both a voice in the wilderness and a voice for the wilderness. Both a voice eulogizing nature’s wonder and a voice lamenting nature’s plunder. Half poetic, half polemic.

Zoological gems glisten within each poem. Heard from a moving car, “Crickets swim by in their surges of sound.” In autumn, “Crickets now have little to say.” And in spring, “The water wanders with ducks on its back.” Along a bank of that same wandering river, “Woodchuck murmurs out of her sleeve of earth.” Elsewhere, in cramped captivity, “A five-foot alligator curves like a busted tire.”

This collection is, however, no modern bestiary, no Noah’s integrated ark. The animals who most often capture Pearson’s imagination are those who capture their prey: bears, hawks, badgers, gators, wolves. Predator poetry.

A century ago, human hunters were still recipients of the praise of poets. Walt Whitman, for one. Whitman built the bridge over which most modern nature poets must pass. Pearson pays homage to him with her generous bouquet of exclamation marks and her optimism, too.

“I support all candidates for tomorrow,” she campaigns. But Pearson differs from Whitman in scale. The bearded old man explored an entire continent as a source of inspiration. Pearson finds fascination equally in the infinitely small and infinitely large. And it matters not that Thoreau’s writings were written while remaining in Concord. Speaks Pearson, “Every day I gather myself more into this place.” That place is her home in Pennsylvania in the foothills of the Poconos. Two poems take place in the Everglades and two in Sweden. All the others speak of her home, her river, her wilderness. Yet they teach us to love whatever home is our own.

“What comes to me in sunlight is sweeter than almost any lesson of men.” Pagan? Pantheist? Or misanthrope? Are we angels who have lost our wings, or apes who have lost our hair? Pearson might assert we are apes who have lost our angels.

—Mark Mathew Braunstein

The reviewer is author of Radical Vegetarianism.
Kangaroo Court

The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals

By E.P. Evans
Faber and Faber (50 Cross St., Winchester, MA, 01890), 1987
(first published in 1906)
336 pages, softcover, $7.95

After 70 years of slumber, E. P. Evans’s *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* is experiencing a reawakening. Here is chronicled a neglected chapter of Western Europe’s Middle Ages: animals accused of human crimes and tried in human courts. Actually no more abominable than medieval feudalism, inquisitions, and holy wars, all these animal annals are well documented.

Two types of trials were conducted. Individual farm animals, usually pigs and cows, were tried in civil courts for specific crimes, usually homicide. And entire wild species, usually insects and rodents, were called to account by ecclesiastical tribunals for pestilence and plague. Guilty verdicts nearly always were delivered, in which case the courts sentenced execution and the Church pronounced excommunication, physical condemnation and metaphysical damnation. The frying pan or the fire, the animals always got burned—often literally.

The Church prosecutors regarded the accused bugs, birds, and beasts as instruments of the devil disguised in feathers and furs. Among the many cases described in depth, the more illustrious occurred in France and Germany. In 1488, slugs were warned against consuming crops, else they suffer excommunication. In 1519, criminal proceedings were instituted against field mice. In 1541, the Church condemned a plague of locusts. In 1587, weevils were tried, but the final decision of the case remains unknown. The last page of the records was destroyed—seemingly devoured. Evans speculates, “Perhaps the prosecuted weevils, not satisfied with the trial, sent a sharp-toothed delegation into the archives to obliterate and annul the judgment.”

Despite Church anathemas, unwelcome insects usually departed only “after having eaten up every green thing and reduced the inhabitants to the verge of starvation.” When dinner was done and they did disappear, the Church claimed full credit. Until then, the failure was blamed on the sins of human congregants. No one at the time questioned the Church’s ability to compel insects and rodents to seek their supper elsewhere. Without such firm faith, any such trial “would have been a dismal farce in the eyes of all who took part in it.”

Our furry friends fared little better in the secular courts. Records survive for at least 144 prosecutions from the years 824 to 1845 in which the accused were found guilty. This tally does not indicate how many, if any, were acquitted as innocent,
The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals
The Lost History of Europe’s Animal Trials
E. P. Evans
Foreword by Nicholas Humphrey

The reviewer is the author of Radical Vegetarianism: A Dialectic of Diet & Ethic.