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“It Even Makes the Animals Laugh”: Contesting Henry Bergh and the Animal Protection Movement in Nineteenth-Century New York*

ABSTRACT

Henry Bergh founded and became president of the first animal protection organization in the United States, the American Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York City in April 1866, the same month in which his efforts to secure modern animal welfare legislation at the state level—also a first—were realized. From then until his death in 1888, Bergh steered his organization and the movement through the streets, the slaughterhouses, the courts, and the halls of that city and the nation. As this article shows, his critics were never far behind. Through a combination of media reportage, annual reports, and correspondence, this article weighs the impact of satire and ridicule directed toward Bergh and the animal protection movement alongside his efforts to reposition such coverage and in some cases to benefit from it. In doing so, it positions Bergh and the animal protection movement relative to issues of frame alignment, leadership, and performance in the context of a rapidly changing media landscape, the negotiation of which was central to the movement’s success or failure.

Keywords: Henry Bergh; history; social movements; animal welfare; animal rights; animal protection movement; American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (American SPCA, ASPCA); framing; satire; media

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Henry Bergh founded and became president of the first animal protection organization in the United States, the American Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), in New York City in April 1866. That same month he marked another first, in the realization of his efforts to secure passage of modern animal welfare legislation at the state level. From then until his death in 1888, Bergh steered his organization and the movement through the streets, the slaughterhouses, the courts, and the halls of that city and the nation. And yet, however admirable it may have been to some, Bergh's determination to protect New York and America's animals drew no end of opponents eager to take the ASPCA president down as many notches as his supporters sought to raise him. Viewing that contestation through the lens of social movement scholarship, one cannot help but ask how, in the words of the nineteenth-century New York actress and writer Clara Morris "the jibes, the jeers, the satire that made of him a laughing stock" affected Bergh.¹ Or, to shape our analysis more succinctly: in what ways did Bergh's critics frame him and the animal protection movement? And what, if any, were the responses of Bergh and others who might have attempted to reframe the criticism aimed in their direction? An exploration of these questions situates Henry Bergh and the animal protection movement within a rapidly changing media landscape, the contours of which were key to the movement's success or failure. In an era in which we are currently grappling with the impact of new media technology on social movements, an analysis of Bergh and his critics' approach to the framing of animal protection in the context of post-Civil War America's changing communications infrastructure offers a fresh historical perspective on the opportunities and challenges associated with frame alignment.² In particular, it brings forward the subtle, even par-

- 1 Clara Morris, "The Riddle of the Nineteenth Century: Mr. Henry Bergh," *McClure's Magazine* 18, no. 5 (1902): 418. For key biographical works on Henry Bergh see Ernest Freeberg, *A Traitor to his Species: Henry Bergh and the Birth of the Animal Rights Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2020); Zulma Steele, *Angel in Top Hat: A Biography of Henry Bergh, Founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942). Important discussions of Bergh and the ASPCA also appear in Bernard Oreste Unti, "The Quality of Mercy: Organized Animal Protection in the United States, 1866–1930" (PhD diss., American University, 2002); James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). For broader discussions of the history of the animal protection movement in the United States in which Bergh appears see Diane L. Beers, *For the Prevention of Cruelty: The History and Legacy of Animal Rights Activism in the United States* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 2006); Janet M. Davis, *The Gospel of Kindness: Animal Welfare and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Susan J. Pearson, *The Rights of the Defenseless: Protecting Animals and Children in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- 2 For a review of perspectives on frame alignment in the context of social movements see Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 611–639.

adoxical, ways in which humour can become a pivotal factor in the framing of social movements. Added to this in the case of Bergh is the relationship of framing to the dynamics of leadership and performance, both of which are central to understanding Bergh and his critics’ response to him. In terms of social movement strategy, the key issue to emerge from this contestation thus hinges on the degree to which Bergh was able to redirect and perhaps even to profit from more than two decades of bad press.

In the context of social movements, a number of studies have pointed to the use of humour as a tool for affecting change, in particular as a framing device to challenge opponents.³ Even in highly oppressive regimes where social movement activity is limited, humour has served as a means of criticism and resistance, or what James Scott has referred to as the “weapons of the weak.”⁴ Expressions of humour as strategy to ridicule, dismiss, undermine, or otherwise contest opponents thus appear widely among social movement repertoires, as confirmed in the wide range of humour-based tactics found in Gene Sharp’s *198 Methods of Nonviolent Action*.⁵ Less attention has been given in social movement analyses, however, to the role of humour that is directed against movements. Inasmuch as such material often takes shape not in the form of a formally organized counter-movement, but through the work of critics and professionals from within the media industry, the lack of sustained critical attention to this issue is not surprising. Perhaps the strongest analysis of these dimensions of media scrutiny is that of Todd Gitlin, whose work on the derogatory views of the mass media on the New Left in 1960s America exposes a media frame that undercut that movement but that also led to New Left activists’ increasingly sophisticated awareness of the power of the media and their need to influence the perspectives it offered the world.⁶ As such, we might begin by taking apart the feelgood mantra found in practically every contemporary social movement toolbox: first they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, then you win. In the case of Bergh, opponents skipped step one, and stuck to step two for more than two decades—Bergh’s entire tenure with the ASPCA—stopping only at his death in 1888. Their reasons for this were underpinned by the fantastic tangle of materials with which they had to work. In part, those materials spoke to the ways in which efforts to address the treatment and place of animals in

- 3 For an excellent overview and range of materials on the subject see Marjolein ’t Hart, “Humour and Social Protest: An Introduction,” *International Review of Social History* 52 (2007): 1–20, and the subsequent articles that accompany it.
- 4 Jim Scott, “Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 13, no. 2 (1986): 6.
- 5 Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action Vol. 2: Methods of Nonviolent Action*, (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973), accessed 22 February, 2021, www.aeinstein.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/198-Methods.pdf.
- 6 Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

society were easily juxtaposed to comic effect with the treatment and the place of humans. Nowhere, however, did critics find more opportunity to exploit the movement's incongruities than in the character of Bergh himself. A tall, angular figure made all the taller and more angular by his trademark top hat and long coat, Bergh presented to his many supporters a physical appearance that accentuated the gravitas with which he approached his work. For his detractors, however, tall and angular became gawky and ungainly, a physical identity that helped them to undercut the ASPCA president's seriousness and to highlight the many missteps, miscalculations, and misreading of the public that informed his career. From that tangle they teased one paradox after another, creating as an alter ego to New York's selfless champion of animals that of a muddling buffoon.

Given these dynamics, Bergh and the animal protection movement made good copy in the rapidly changing media landscape of nineteenth-century America. By the time of the establishment of the ASPCA and state animal cruelty legislation in April 1866, a combination of technological, economic, and broader socio-cultural developments had transformed the newspaper from its position as a relatively limited political and economic narrative consumed via subscription at the start of the century into something far more diverse. Together the emergence of the penny press in the 1830s, growing literacy rates, and the shift to rapid reportage in the context of changing telecommunications infrastructure and the media contingencies of the Civil War made for a broader narrative spectrum comprised of a wide range of sensational reportage that travelled under the arms of paperboys alongside—or in lieu of—traditional political and economic coverage. Within those pages, an increasingly broad readership encountered a world of fact, fiction, and spaces in-between, a place of crime, murder, deviance, and society gossip, where the lurid details of the coroner's report vied for attention alongside those of the debutantes' ball, the latest protest turned violent, the extremes of poverty, and a steady supply of ethnic, racialized, and gendered tensions.⁷

7 A useful contemporary study of the development of American newspapers is that of *New York Herald* editor Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690 to 1872* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1873). On the development of the popular press in the United States see Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930). See also James L. Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989). In broader terms, these changes are a reflection of the historical evolution of the public sphere, as conceptualized in Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1989). On the relationship of the public sphere to social movements in the nineteenth century see Craig Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

In that context, Bergh’s movement proved irresistible. For many journalists, newspaper editors and owners, and a considerable segment of the public, Bergh and the ASPCA were exemplary in their efforts to inculcate a greater degree of kindness and sympathy relative to the plight of animals. In those contexts, coverage of animal protection framed Bergh in powerful terms as the defender of defenceless animals against their many foes, from horsecar drivers to dairy and slaughterhouse operators to sport and fight enthusiasts engaged in common pastimes including dog-fighting, cock-fighting, and pigeon shooting. In his efforts to curtail such activities, Bergh enjoyed widespread support despite misgivings over his sometimes extreme positions and pronouncements—a fact made readily apparent in the establishment of like-minded organizations throughout the United States within a few years of the ASPCA’s appearance.

Not everyone, however, was so supportive. Before the year was out, his fledgling organization was met with three soon-to-be-legendary ripostes via the New York media. The first of these appeared in the pages of James Gordon Bennett’s *New York Herald*—at the time the most widely circulating US paper in the world—on 13 May, less than three weeks after the *Herald* and its competitors had reported on the establishment of the ASPCA. In that issue, the *Herald* devoted nearly an entire page to a sustained satire entitled “Cruelty to Animals” in which the authors presented a meeting of animals in New York’s Union Square agitating for their rights while articulating their views on the ASPCA president and his supporters.⁸ Before month’s end, with that article still reverberating, Bergh became the central character in a narrative very much of his own making that unfolded across the New York media landscape well into the fall of that year. In this case, the issue was Bergh’s effort to arrest and prosecute under the state’s new animal cruelty laws schooner captain Nehemiah H. Calhoun, who arrived in New York from Florida carrying a cargo of turtles.⁹ Finally, in December Bergh set out on another mission, this time against a New York celebrity and media master who was perhaps the only individual in the city more immediately associated in the public mind with animals, the showman P. T. Barnum. At issue this time was the feeding of live animals to the boa constrictors on display at the *Barnum and Van Ambergh Museum and Menagerie Combination* on Broadway between Spring and Prince Streets.¹⁰

8 “Cruelty to Animals: Great Mass Meeting at Union Square,” *New York Herald*, 13 May 1866, 10. See also Darcy Ingram, “Imagining Animal Rights in Nineteenth-century New York: Satire and Strategy in the Animal Protection Movement,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 32, no. 2 (2019): 244–257.

9 American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), *First Annual Report* (New York, 1867) 5–10, 48.

10 For the beginnings of this interaction see Letter from Henry Bergh to Barnum’s American Museum, dated New York, 11 December 1866, New York Historical Society, N-YHS Dig-

Through these narratives, Bergh's detractors located quickly the grounds on which to frame a critical repertoire that would shape perceptions of the ASPCA president and his activities for the next twenty years. Located alongside equally compelling media coverage in support of Bergh, it offered at first glance little more than an alternative and often derogatory view of the movement and its leader. In the case of the *Herald's* satire, the authors amassed a collection of tropes that made a mockery of Bergh, his supporters, the notion of animal rights, and pretty much any other movement agitating for rights in the wake of the Civil War.¹¹ Inverting the commonplace rationale among supporters that the movement spoke for its voiceless subjects, they imagined what might happen were those subjects indeed able to speak for themselves. Alongside Bergh as the Great Boar who presided over the meeting, "Cruelty to Animals" introduced a cross-section of the city's animal denizens concerned as much with the attitudes and practices of their benefactors as they were with those of the broader public. By the time they were finished, those horses, dogs, cats, and rats had articulated many of the contradictions and controversies that had come to be associated with the movement.

In the case of the turtles, reports emerged in late May and early June that Bergh had attempted unsuccessfully to secure a conviction for cruelty to animals against the schooner captain, on the grounds that the reptiles were being transported on their backs, deprived of food and water, and secured by a cord passed through a hole bored through the fin of each animal.¹² In this instance Bergh lost not only the court case, but seemed also to be in danger of losing in the court of public opinion, as the media piled on to ridicule the ASPCA president's effort to extend anti-cruelty legislation to creatures seen by many to fall outside its scope. "Here we see," proclaimed the *Herald*, which led the media charge against Bergh, "the beginning of a gastronomic revolution that must in the end change the entire system of luxurious diet indulged in by our opulent epicures and connoisseurs of good living [...] What are the great gastronomers in all the shades of exuberant and voluptuous life without their green turtle? Where are the members of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals themselves?"¹³ In a combative response that ensured the issue remained in the papers well into the fall, Bergh challenged the reluctance of the public and the courts to recognize cruelty in the context of a reptile, including the expert testimony of a doctor who spoke against the view that turtles experience pain. To do so he called on the authority of science,

ital Collections, Henry Bergh Letters, 1866–1884 (<http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A103373#page/1/mode/2up>), accessed 22 February 2021.

11 See Darcy Ingram, "Imagining Animal Rights."

12 For summaries of Bergh's 1866 intervention on the behalf of turtles see also Freeberg, *A Traitor to his Species*, 7–19 and Steele, *Angel in Top Hat*, 43–48.

13 "More Cruelty to Animals: A Queer Gastronomic Revolution," *New York Herald*, 1 June 1866, 4.

specifically the well-known Harvard Zoology professor Louis Agassiz, who replied in strong and sympathetic terms to a letter from Bergh that turtles did indeed suffer from such treatment. While Agassiz turned down Bergh’s invitation to speak publicly on the issue in New York, the letter and the authority behind it fuelled Bergh’s determination that he had both ethics and science on his side, and he made sure that his exchange with Agassiz make its way to the press.¹⁴

In the case of Bergh’s decision to take on P. T. Barnum over the showman’s snakes, we find what was in many ways a continuation of the ASPCA president’s determination for a win that would expand the parameters of the law while expanding public perceptions of cruelty more generally.¹⁵ Upon receiving news that the snake exhibit at Barnum’s museum featured feedings of live animals to its boa constrictors, Bergh paid the museum a visit.¹⁶ Finding Barnum unavailable, he succeeded in frightening the museum’s manager enough to cause the snakes to be moved briefly outside of Bergh’s jurisdiction to New Jersey, during which time Bergh wrote directly to Barnum threatening legal action. In his characteristic earnestness, Bergh included in that letter a discussion of the barbarism of feeding the snakes live animals in which he exposed his limited understanding of the species. “It may be urged that these reptiles will not eat dead food,” he observed in disbelief, “in reply to this I have only to say—let them starve.”¹⁷

On the surface, it is difficult to see Bergh’s engagement with Barnum as anything but a disaster. Capitalizing on Bergh’s disbelief, Barnum wrote the following January to the very authority to which the ASPCA president had turned months before: Louis Agassiz. In his response to Barnum, Agassiz confirmed that he “did not know of any way to induce snakes to eat their food otherwise than in their natural manner—that is alive.”¹⁸ That done, Barnum further propelled the issue by insisting that Bergh publicly acknowledge Agassiz’s comments and withdraw his objection to the museum’s handling of the exhibit. When Bergh refused, Barnum went public with their correspondence, which appeared in full in the *New York World* in March 1867,

14 Letter from Henry Bergh to Barnum’s American Museum, dated New York, 11 December 1866; ASPCA, *First Annual Report*, 48; “Cruelty to Animals. Interesting Correspondence Between Mr. Henry Bergh and Professor Agassiz About the Sufferings of the Turtle,” *New York Herald*, 2 October 1866, 4.

15 See also Freeberg: *A Traitor to his Species*, 63–73 and Steele, *Angel in Top Hat*, 235–239 for discussions of this encounter.

16 Barnum’s summary of this exchange with Bergh can be found in P. T. Barnum, *Life of P. T. Barnum: Written by Himself* (Buffalo: Courier, 1888), 322–323.

17 Letter from Henry Bergh to Barnum’s American Museum, dated New York, 11 December 1866. While it is now well-established that captive snakes can indeed be induced to eat dead food, this was not the case in Barnum’s day.

18 Barnum, *Life of P. T. Barnum*, 323.

thus capping the first year of Bergh's presidency as one of considerable success, but also of relentless ridicule.¹⁹

“You Take a Kinder and More Gracious View [...] than do the Caricaturists of Our Papers”:
Bergh and the Comic Press²⁰

The critical narrative that developed in response to Bergh upon the establishment of the ASPCA received a tremendous boost in the 1870s with the proliferation of popular illustrated newspapers. In short order, Bergh became the subject of some of the most influential cartoonists of nineteenth-century America. Challenging the positive perspectives among many New Yorkers in favour of Bergh's very public remonstrations against animal cruelty, the proliferation of these satirical images contributed further to his farcical identity, both in New York and beyond.²¹

Among the first illustrators to address Bergh in satirical form was Thomas Nast. By far the most influential of America's nineteenth-century cartoonists, Nast was best known during his lifetime for his relentless attack on New York's corrupt Tammany Hall leader William “Boss” Tweed that contributed to the latter's downfall in the early 1870s.²² In August 1871, while in the midst of his campaign against Tweed, Nast turned his attention briefly to another news item ripe for satire. Publication that year of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* returned to the forefront of public attention the question of humanity's biological origins in ways that overlapped neatly with the questions posed by Bergh and others regarding the ethical dimensions of human-animal relations, and Nast lost no time in bringing the two together. In “Mr. Bergh to the Rescue” (see Figure 1), the viewer encounters three figures standing outside the entrance of the ASPCA headquarters. In tears on the left, and pointing to Darwin on the right, is a gorilla who complains to Bergh standing between the two: “That *Man* wants to claim my Pedigree. He says he is one of my Descendants.” To this, the ASPCA president replies: “Now, Mr. Darwin, how could you insult him so?” The par-

19 Barnum, *Life of P. T. Barnum*, 322–23.

20 Morris, *The Riddle of the Nineteenth Century*, 416.

21 It is worth noting that in relative terms, Bergh and the ASPCA got off lightly; in collective terms, the cartoonery associated with the satirical illustrated newspapers discussed in this article offers a parade of derogatory racialized, ethnic, and gendered stereotypes that both confirmed and reinforced the widespread presence of such perspectives.

22 Fiona Deans Halloran, *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 205–210, 214. In addition to his work against Tweed, Nast is also the source of both the popular depiction of Santa Claus in North America and the emblematic Republican elephant.



Figure 1: Thomas Nast, “Mr. Bergh to the Rescue,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 19 August 1871, p. 776.

adox at hand—that in the assertion of a biological link between humans and non-human animals it is the latter who bear the brunt of the insult—is clear enough, and fitted into a broader narrative of human-animal reversals that was standard fare among Bergh’s critics. Appearing in the same issue as one of Nast’s most famous exposés on Tweed, the panel attests to both the comic value ascribed to Bergh and the movement he led as well as to Bergh’s currency as a public figure.²³

23 Thomas Nast, “Mr. Bergh to the Rescue,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 19 August 1871, 776.

Despite being at the forefront of the cartoonery depicting Bergh, “Mr. Bergh to the Rescue” nevertheless remained committed to a relatively representative visual approach that was typical of Bergh’s proponents, and not at all typical of the visual criticism that would follow. During the 1870s there appeared a growing number of illustrated newspapers whose satirical reportage rivalled mainstream graphics-oriented publications such as *Harper’s Weekly* or *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* that generally supported Bergh’s efforts and fostered the movement’s spread across the nation. In publications including *Judge*, *The Daily Graphic*, and *Puck*, readers encountered a very different Bergh. His head enlarged, his body elongated, top hat tilted, and moustache stretched, Bergh went from character to caricature in cartoonists’ efforts to draw attention to the paradoxes and incongruities that informed his actions and to complement the text-based media reportage of them. Given Bergh’s enthusiasm and his hands-on approach to animal protection, supporters and critics alike found a wide range of opportunities on which to capitalize, the result being that Bergh seldom left the New York media spotlight. From the parade of images that appeared in these latter newspapers there emerged a number of overlapping themes that further entrenched the critical repertoire established during the ASPCA’s first year of operations.

The most obvious of these themes centred on animal agency and elevation to the status of humans. While many instances involved relatively straightforward use of this theme, some of the more critical commentaries saw cartoonists position the city’s animal inhabitants as opponents of Bergh and the ASPCA. This takes shape frequently in illustrations of Bergh threatened by some form of animal uprising or reproach. An excellent example is a February 1881 work by *Puck* cartoonist Frederick Burr Opper, the title of which—“Bergh’s Latest”—underscores his subject’s familiarity to readers (see Figure 2).²⁴

In this instance, Opper was responding to Bergh’s efforts to secure passage of legislation that would help to prevent the suffering and death of horses in stable fires. The widespread importance of the horse to urban life meant that cities such as New York were home to thousands of horses, and they like their human counterparts occupied an environment in which space was both limited and costly. Bergh’s particular concern was the stabling of horses in cellars and on upper floors, which in instances of fires could not be easily evacuated. Aided by the combination of feed, bedding, and the stables’ heavy wooden construction, fires spread rapidly in these environments, resulting in some cases in the death of hundreds of horses in a single fire. Such was the fate a year earlier of the stables of the Eighth Avenue Railroad Company, where in November 1879 more than two hundred horses were abandoned to a conflagration

24 Frederick Burr Opper, “Bergh’s Latest,” *Puck*, 2 February 1881.

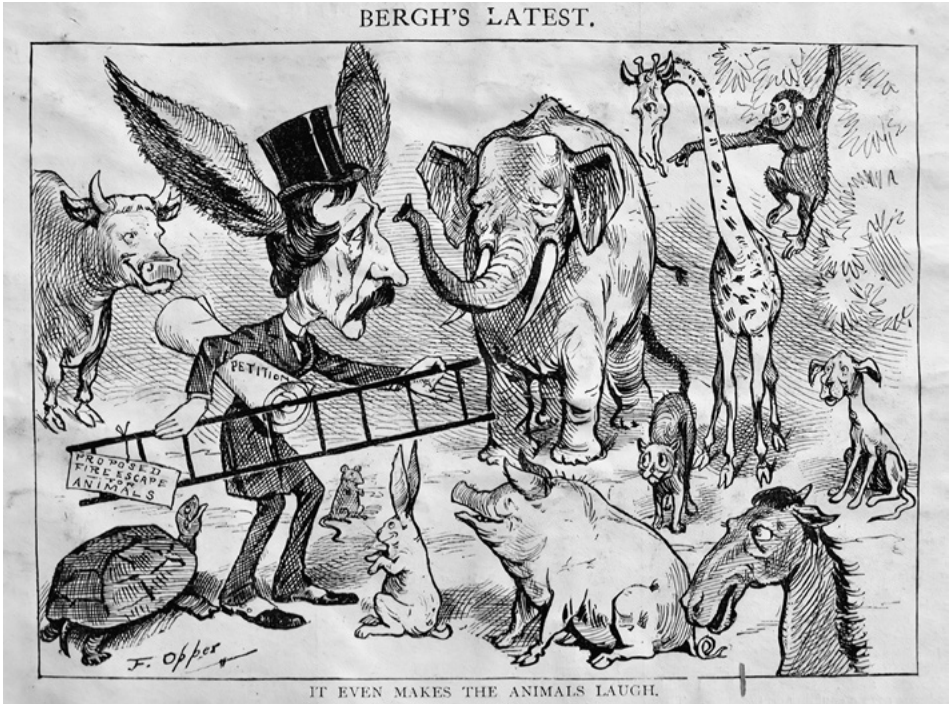


Figure 2: Frederick Burr Opper, “Bergh’s Latest,” *Puck*, 2 February 1881.

that burned the company’s stables on the corner of 49th Street to the ground.²⁵ In this concern Bergh was not alone, but was part of a broader discussion aimed at tapping both legislation and technology for solutions, including some ingenious systems that would enable stable workers to release animals easily and quickly in the instance of a fire.²⁶ Opper’s response narrowed that discussion to a nine-rung ladder in Bergh’s hands, a petition under his arm, and, in a gesture to the foolhardy and naïve King Midas of Greek mythology, whose unpopular opinions proved to be his downfall, the ears of a donkey. Opper’s caption—“It even makes the animals laugh”—underscores the absurdity that his surrounding cast of animal characters, and by extension his readers, identify in Bergh’s actions.²⁷

25 On Bergh’s efforts to establish legislation regarding fires in stables during this time see ASPCA, *Fifteenth Annual Report* (New York, 1881), 7–8. On the November 1879 stable fire see “The Eighth Avenue Fire,” *New York Herald*, 27 November 1879, 5; “A Whole Block Ablaze” *New York Herald*, 26 November 1879, 5; Frank J. Kernan, *Reminiscences of the Old Fire Laddies and Volunteer Fire Departments of New York and Brooklyn. Together with a Complete History of the Paid Departments of Both Cities* (New York: M. Vrane, 1885), 249–51.

26 See for example “Fire-Escape Horse-Stall” *Our Dumb Animals* 13, no. 8 (1881), 63.

27 Opper, “Bergh’s Latest.”



Figure 3: C. Gray-Parker, “Henry Bergh’s Dreadful Dream (The True Cause of His Antipathy to Fox Hunting),” *The Daily Graphic*, 25 October 1882, p. 811.



Figure 4: Grant E. Hamilton, “By All Means, Let the Animals Loose,” *The Daily Graphic*, 25 May 1882 (cover illustration).

In the seeming simplicity of such work, the cartoonists who engaged Bergh, the ASPCA, and the animal protection movement pored to the core complex ethical debates spanning the breadth of society, from the political and economic to the social and cultural to issues of health, medicine, and the environment. In doing so, they correspondingly shaped viewers’ perceptions of the more detailed text narratives that appeared in the media and that worked in similar terms with inversion, paradox, irony, and juxtaposition to ridicule Bergh and the movement. Bergh’s effort to challenge a fledgling organization of fox hunters taking to the field in Long Island for example, was met by *The Daily Graphic* in October 1882 with C. Gray-Parker’s illustration “Henry Bergh’s Dreadful Dream (The True Cause of His Antipathy to Fox Hunting),” in which a transmogrified Bergh—the ASPCA president’s head affixed to the body of a fox—runs in desperate flight from a pack of hounds and, behind them, a field of mounted foxes in full pursuit (see Figure 3).²⁸ His call to close the Central Park

28 C. Gray-Parker, “Henry Bergh’s Dreadful Dream (The True Cause of His Antipathy to Fox Hunting),” *The Daily Graphic*, 25 October 1882, 811.

Figure 5: Frank P. W. Bellew (“Chip”), “Mr. Bergh wants to send his pets back...,” *Judge*, news clipping, ASPCA Pictorial Scrapbook, May 1880–March 1888, ASPCA Archives, New York, NY.



Menagerie in 1882 met similarly with multiple illustrations of angry animals. On the cover of *The Daily Graphic*, Grant E. Hamilton’s “By All Means, Let the Animals Loose,” depicts Bergh in flight from the menagerie’s newly released inhabitants (see Figure 4), while in the illustration presented in *Judge* by cartoonist Frank P. W. Bellew (aka “Chip”) a mostly four-legged mob has Bergh cornered against the menagerie wall in protest. “Mr. Bergh wants to send his pets back to their native jungles and things,” Bellew’s caption reads. “The pets object. They like their menagerie life much the best” (see Figure 5).²⁹

Overlapping this work, a second prominent theme among cartoonists centred on paradoxes associated with violence in the context of Bergh’s views of animals and society. In these illustrations, critics honed in on the tension that emerged when Bergh’s insistence on kindness toward animals clashed with statements or actions from the ASPCA president that seemed to move in other directions. An excellent example is the cartoon that appeared in the *New York Graphic* on 21 July 1880 (see Figure 6).³⁰ “A Sad Catastrophe” plays on Bergh’s submission to the city of an ordinance that called for the slaughter of the city’s stray cats. “A cat is an animal, and the President of the S.P.C.A. is bound to stand between them and all harm,” reads the brief accompanying article. “But Mr. Bergh is a man with nerves, capable of irritation by the mewling and the yowling of the cats. He has a right to his night’s rest. Indeed, he cannot prevent

29 Grant E. Hamilton, “By All Means, Let the Animals Loose,” *The Daily Graphic*, 25 May 1882 (cover illustration); Frank P. W. Bellew, “Mr. Bergh wants to send his pets back...,” *Judge*, news clipping in: *ASPCA Pictorial Scrapbook, May 1880-March 1888* (ASPCA Archives, New York). On Bergh’s protest over the confinement of animals in the Central Park menagerie see “Items,” *Friends’ Intelligencer*, 27 May 1882, 240.

30 “A Sad Catastrophe,” *New York Graphic*, 21 July 1880.



Figure 6: “A Sad Catastrophe,” *New York Graphic*, 21 July 1880.

cruelty to animals at all unless they give him a chance.”³¹ The illustration appropriately captures a bedraggled Bergh in nightgown and cap, poised to level a boot at the cats who have gathered at his bedroom window—an act with which many nineteenth-century urban inhabitants sleepless under similar circumstances would have readily identified. The “sad catastrophe,” of course, is not Bergh’s loss of sleep and its impact on the good work he does, but rather his loss of credibility: “He has a right,” the accompanying article concludes, “but the public is also at liberty to draw the moral—viz., that sweeping humanitarian principles are mighty nice on paper but will not always work in practice.”³²

Perhaps the most compelling works to approach Bergh from this perspective are those of Joseph Keppler. Another German New Yorker who exerted a significant influence on the cartoon industry in America, Keppler expressed his considerable skills as an artist and political commentator through the illustrated newspaper *Puck*, which he co-founded in 1876, first as a German-language weekly, followed soon by an English edition.³³ During his career Keppler and *Puck* repeatedly met Bergh head-on in terms

31 “Pictures of the Day,” *New York Graphic* 21 July 1880. See also “Mr. Bergh and the Cats: How the Philanthropist Proposes to Get Rid of the City’s Feline Tramps,” *The Sun*, 22 July 1880, 2.

32 “Pictures of the Day.”

33 Thorough coverage of Keppler can be found in Richard Samuel West, *Satire on Stone: The Political Cartoons of Joseph Keppler* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988). On the origins of *Puck* see pp. 71–76.

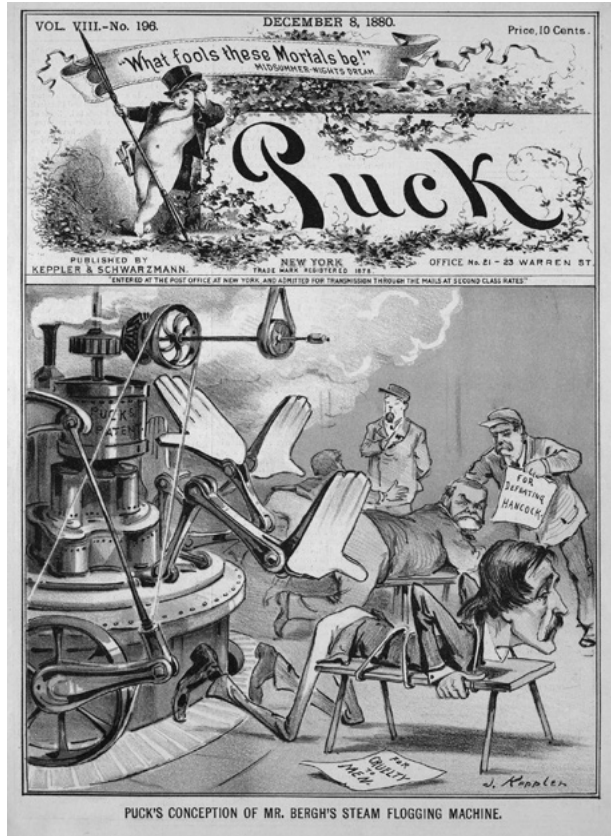


Figure 7: Joseph Keppler, “Puck’s Conception of Mr. Bergh’s Steam Flogging Machine,” *Puck*, 8 December 1880 (cover illustration).

akin to those of the magazine’s cover illustration for 8 December 1880, “Puck’s Conception of Mr. Bergh’s Steam Flogging Machine” (see Figure 7).³⁴

Here, Keppler was spurred by comments Bergh made while attending a prison reform meeting the previous week. Albeit not on the meeting’s list of speakers, Bergh was spotted in the audience, and was invited to take the stage in light of the many scheduled speakers who failed to attend. His impromptu response floored the meeting’s organizers:

A great deal has been said about improving criminals. Let me tell you how I would improve them. I would abolish all the penitentiaries in the land, and save the expense of running them. In their place I would have whipping-posts everywhere. And to make sure that the lash was laid on feelingly, I would offer a reward for the

34 Joseph Keppler, “Puck’s Conception of Mr. Bergh’s Steam Flogging Machine,” *Puck*, 8 December 1880 (cover illustration).



Figure 8: Joseph Keppler, “Bergh’s Bastinado: A Hint from the Apostle of Humanity,” *Puck*, 8 August 1877, pp. 8–9.

invention of a steam machine that couldn’t be bribed with offers of political place or money.³⁵

That the nation’s leading advocate for the prevention of cruelty to animals supported the application of corporal punishment for humans shocked Bergh’s immediate audience, and in turn the many readers who encountered his comments in the widespread media coverage of the meeting that unfolded. For Keppler, Bergh’s suggestion of a steam machine offered the potential to package in a single, tidy image the paradox that reverberated among journalists throughout the city. In Keppler’s depiction, and with the help of new colour lithography technology that *Puck* helped to popularize, the gangly gears and mechanical hands of the steam machine created a fittingly satirical industrial backdrop for the scene that appeared. Strapped to a bench, a prostrate Bergh features as the machine’s subject as Keppler pushes the paradox at hand to

35 “Reformers Much Amazed,” *The New York Times*, 1 December 1880, news clipping in: *ASPCA Scrapbook, Vol. 8, August 1878–September 1882* (ASPCA Archives, New York), 197. See also “Henry Bergh’s Pessimism: He Entirely Upsets a Prison Reform Conference by Suggesting Whipping Scamps By Steam,” *The World*, 1 December 1880, news clipping in: *ASPCA Scrapbook, Vol. 8, August 1878–September 1882* (ASPCA Archives, New York), 196; “Hard-Hearted Henry Bergh,” *The Sun*, 1 December 1880, news clipping in: *ASPCA Scrapbook, Vol. 8, August 1878–September 1882* (ASPCA Archives, New York), 197.

another level, the champion of kindness to animals now being punished, via machinations of his own design, for the crime of “Cruelty to Men.”

Keppler’s steam flogging device was clearly a response to Bergh’s words of the moment, and it landed amidst a flurry of reportage on them. But it also made explicit the larger irony at hand: the far-from-progressive or democratic vision that underpinned Bergh’s work. In advocating vociferously for corporal punishment, Bergh underscored his broader belief in a hierarchical conservative social order based heavily on rank, in which his desire to curtail cruelty to animals reflected not the extension of liberal or democratic ethos, but the inclusion of animals in obligations of responsibility and respect among the social ranks. And this, Keppler and others who had watched Bergh with a critical eye for some time understood, was nothing new. Indeed, Keppler emphasized this point in the very first volume of *Puck*, with a two page spread entitled “Bergh’s Bastinado. A Hint from the Apostle of Humanity” (see Figure 8).³⁶ Here, Keppler picked up on Bergh’s recently vocalized support for the bastinado (foot whipping), which first-hand observation during a visit to Cairo in the 1840s led him to view as a highly effective deterrent.³⁷ This time, however, Bergh appears not as the subject of punishment but as its agent, attired in stereotypical eastern garb as he delivers blows to the feet of a group that includes the owners of the *New York Sun* and the *New York Herald*, whose papers routinely castigated him. Throughout Bergh’s tenure neither Keppler nor *Puck* would let go of this theme, to the point that it came to encapsulate for critics the very essence of the ASPCA’s contradictory character, as presented in “Mr. Bergh’s Dual Nature” (see Figure 9).³⁸ Appearing in February 1881,

Figure 9: “Mr. Bergh’s Dual Nature,” in: *Puck*, 2 February 1881.



36 Joseph Keppler, “Bergh’s Bastinado. A Hint from the Apostle of Humanity,” *Puck*, 8 August 1877, 8–9.
 37 Keppler, “Bergh’s Bastinado,” 2.
 38 “Mr. Bergh’s Dual Nature,” *Puck*, 2 February 1881.



Figure 10: James Albert Wales, “The King of New York: a Good Man Gone Wrong,” *Judge*, news clipping, ASPCA Pictorial Scrapbook, May 1880–March 1888, ASPCA Archives, New York, NY.

this illustration sets out Bergh’s career in kindness to animals on one side, against which his repeated advocacy of cruelty toward humans appears on the other. Dividing the two sides in the middle of the panel is an appropriately two-faced Bergh who gestures in both directions.

That focus on a divided identity, of kindness to animals on the one hand and cruelty to humans on the other, or on what the German edition of *Puck* referred to as Bergh’s “Doppel-Natur,” complemented an equally prominent focus on the ASPCA president’s reputation for overzealousness.³⁹ Noted from the very start of the ASPCA’s operations, this view was often well-warranted, inasmuch as Bergh’s considered attention to the conditions of animals went well beyond the norms of his era. Be one a carter, an industrialist, a medical scientist, or a public transit rider in New York, one ran the risk of encountering at some point Bergh’s fury. As a result Bergh seemed to many a tyrant of some form, relative to the power dimensions that enabled this wealthy New Yorker of independent means and aristocratic bent to bring his values to bear on the lives of so many. To present Bergh in terms of monarchical power was thus an easy trope to employ, as in *Judge* co-founder and cartoonist James Albert Wales’ illustration “The King of New York: a Good Man Gone Wrong,” which finds a crowned ASPCA president issuing commands to city authorities from his throne, against a backdrop of scenes depicting truncheon-waving ASPCA inspectors—“Bergh’s Police”—accosting women and children on the street (see Figure 10).⁴⁰

39 “Mr. Bergh’s Doppel-Natur,” *Puck*, 2 February 1881, 320; ASPCA, *First Annual Report*, 28–29.

40 James Albert Wales, “The King of New York: a Good Man Gone Wrong,” *Judge*, news clipping in: *ASPCA Pictorial Scrapbook, May 1880–March 1888* (ASPCA Archives, New York).

Figure 11: James Albert Wales, “First of May—Make Room for the New Cast,” *Judge*, news clipping, ASPCA Pictorial Scrapbook, May 1880–March 1888, ASPCA Archives, New York, NY.



In terms of overzealousness, the most powerful critique of them all came in the brilliant connection made early in Bergh’s career that pulled into a single package the ASPCA president’s physical features, his excess of devotion, his aristocratic bearing, his Europhilia, his comical naivety, his love of high art in the form of theatre and literature, and the quest-like fervour that seemed to inform his efforts. In a characterization that would endure throughout his presidency, Bergh was set alongside Cervantes’ Don Quixote, the naïve and idealistic knight-errant emblematic during the nineteenth century of a social order eclipsed by modernity. Over the years, observers described him as the “brave old Don Quixote of New York”; the “Knight of the Rueful Countenance”; “Don Quixote II”; the knight-errant’s “prototype”; and in Bergh’s own words “the absurd old *Don*.”⁴¹ That connection also gained ground through the work of the city’s caricaturists, for whom it took only the exchange of Bergh’s top hat for a helmet and his cane for a broken lance to position him as such (see Figure 11).⁴² In this instance, Wales casts Bergh not only in terms of his connection to Don Quixote, but also as an instantly recognizable character in one of the myriad panoplies of New York society to appear in the illustrated press that would feature Bergh among caricatures of the city and the nation’s leaders, celebrities, and otherwise familiar public figures.

41 “The Only Mourner,” *Puck*, 16 July 1879, 23; “Henry Bergh” *Harper’s Weekly*, 24 March 1888, 204; Morris, “The Riddle of the Nineteenth Century,” 422; “Mr. Bergh’s Castle,” *New York Herald*, 30 April 1877, 4; Morris, “The Riddle of the Nineteenth Century,” 416.
 42 James Albert Wales, “First of May—Make Room for the New Cast,” *Judge*, news clipping in: *ASPCA Pictorial Scrapbook, May 1880-March 1888* (ASPCA archives, New York).

“In Concert with Thoughtless Observers and Flippant Writers of the Press”: Bergh and the ASPCA Strike Back⁴³

That a portion of the New York press, in both written and illustrated form, had a field day with Bergh is clear. The broader question that informs this study, however, remains: to what extent, if any, did Bergh and the animal protection movement profit from the steady diet of ridicule that the press fed to the public? Did Bergh in fact feed from it, and did he go so far as to cultivate it, in anticipation of the benefits it might provide? Looking closely at the comments of Bergh and others, it seems unlikely Bergh recognized any opportunities at all when he first read the *Herald's* satirical take on him and the animal protection movement in May 1866, coming so quickly as it did after his successes in the New York legislature and in the establishment of the ASPCA that April, over which he must justifiably have been jubilant. Social movement scholars, however, have observed that the presence of movements in the media hinges often on their capacity to generate attention through spectacle, novelty, drama, and controversy—all strategies that are readily apparent, for example, in the contemporary animal rights movement.⁴⁴ In like terms, movement coverage is subject to the demands of the media in terms of its preference to cover events, its interest in the power of visual images, and its reliance on movement leaders, spokespersons, and experts for information.⁴⁵ Given the overlap between these considerations and the general character of the animal protection movement, it is not difficult to see how that movement was an ideal target for media attention, one that Bergh had the potential to magnify considerably.

43 ASPCA, *First Annual Report*, 5.

44 On the strategic use of controversy in the contemporary animal rights movement see James M. Jasper and Jane D. Poulsen, “Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal Rights and Anti-Nuclear Protests,” *Social Problems* 42, no. 4 (1995): 493–512; see also Elizabeth Cherry, *Culture and Activism: Animal Rights in France and the United States* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016); Marie Mika, “Framing the Issue: Religion, Secular Ethics and the Case of Animal Rights Mobilization” *Social Forces* 85, no. 2 (2006): 915–941.

45 For an overview of movement-media dynamics as presented here see Kathleen Rodgers, *Protest, Activism, and Social Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 167–72; see also P. J. Shoemaker and S. D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influence on Mass Media Content*, 2nd ed (New York: Longman, 1996); Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*. Studies that deal with the capacity of the animal protection movement to draw public attention via its controversial dimensions include James M. Jasper and Dorothy Nelkin, *The Animal Rights Crusade: The Growth of a Moral Protest* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Keri J. Cronin, *Art for Animals: Visual Culture and Animal Advocacy, 1870–1914* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2019).

By the end of the ASPCA’s first year of operations, a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics had taken shape within the society, to such an extent that the bouts of ridicule associated with that first year proved to be a training ground of sorts for Bergh as he discovered the importance of the media to the movement and the strategies he might employ in order to shape the messages it delivered. Indeed, that satirical coverage contributed significantly to Bergh’s ability to emerge from his position in the wings as a wealthy but relatively obscure New Yorker who had spent much of his life in Europe to take the stage as a celebrity in his own right. From there, the next twenty years were witness to a contest of sorts between Bergh and his detractors. To suggest that Bergh was always on top of his game—that what seemed to be missteps or errors of judgement were in fact carefully calculated manoeuvres aimed at generating attention—would go too far. Sometimes, Bergh’s missteps and errors of judgement were just that. Nevertheless, there came quickly to Bergh’s repertoire an understanding of what in Erving Goffman’s terms stands out as the dramaturgical dimensions or the *performance* of his position that included an awareness of his capacity to generate attention through controversy, and within that the potential to redirect and perhaps even capitalize on his own missteps and the critical voices that responded.⁴⁶

On this issue, “Cruelty to Animals” is a good place to start. In choosing to publish “Cruelty to Animals” in May 1866, the *New York Herald* effectively announced to the city and the world the establishment of the ASPCA, giving that event far more coverage than it had received in any newspaper to date. Albeit in satirical form, the *Herald* thus made available a considerable amount of information on the animal protection movement and the various issues it sought to address in the city. What is more, in framing the movement in terms of animal rights, and thus as both radical and ripe for ridicule, the article inadvertently invited heartfelt consideration among its readership of the movement’s more modest objective to curtail the extremes of unnecessary or, in the language of the day, ‘wanton’ cruelty.⁴⁷ Within a year of the ASPCA’s establishment, Bergh and others in the organization were already taking note of these dimensions, and were making an effort to frame their critics’ comments in such terms. In the ASPCA’s first annual report in April 1867, secretary William Coventry Henry Waddell devotes considerable attention to the society’s relationship to the New York media. Among his observations, Waddell contrasts the “greatest aid and assistance” of the press with “the studied attempts at ridicule on our efforts in the earlier portion of our organization; by elaborate descriptions of meetings of animals in ‘Union Square’

46 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

47 Adam D. Shprintzen observes a similar dynamic in the context of the vegetarian movement in the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century. See Adam D. Shprintzen, *The Vegetarian Crusade: The Rise of An American Reform Movement, 1817–1921* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 95.

and elsewhere, to discuss their views of our proffered aid; and articles of kindred character.”⁴⁸ At another point, Waddell turns directly to the benefits of such commentary:

Whilst admitting that these latter cases gave rise to much ridicule among unreflecting persons; nevertheless it is now very generally conceded, that these lively comments, far from being a detriment to our cause, were, on the contrary, a positive advantage; by reason of the greater prominency which was thereby given to the Society in the public mind, by drawing attention thereto; as well as the increased moral consequences resulting from the contemplation of the quality of mercy; as applicable to a class of beings hitherto regarded as being beyond the sphere of the humanities of life.⁴⁹

Marking an effort both to situate the society’s critics on the fringe of public opinion and to discourage further criticism by highlighting its positive impacts, those observations speak to Bergh and the ASPCA’s growing awareness that their critics just might, in their own way, be doing their movement a favour.

That interpretation squares nicely with Bergh’s ongoing willingness to court controversy, and speaks in turn to the degree to which his actions were shaped by a distinct awareness of the benefits to be gained by treating the city as his stage, its inhabitants and the media as his audience. While not all of his actions led to the level of ridicule discussed above, they nevertheless generated constant discussion both positive and negative in the media and among the general public. Similarly Bergh relished more formal dramaturgical or performance-based contexts, among them his routine appearances as prosecutor in the city’s courts despite having no formal legal qualifications; his promotional tours and speeches; and his willingness to engage with newspaper journalists, including those who had long criticized his work. It also meshes well with his experiences during the years before he established the ASPCA, as evidenced in the performance-based skills demanded of a diplomat and a member of elite society, and perhaps more importantly in the many times his less-than-mediocre efforts as a poet and playwright—pursuits that stand in themselves as testaments to Bergh’s engagement with framing and performance—met with caustic reviews. From that context, a journalist writing for *Scribner’s Monthly* in 1879 explained, came a nuanced understanding of the media. “I will give you a little advice that may serve you well through life,” Bergh reportedly gleaned from a London publisher years previously upon the rejection of a recent work. “If you are bound to appear in print, well and good if the newspapers speak in praise of you; but, next to praise, being cut to pieces is the best

48 ASPCA, *First Annual Report*, 30–31, 28.

49 ASPCA, *First Annual Report*, 8.

thing to be hoped for. What we have to fear most is that we won't be noticed at all. Silence is fatal.”⁵⁰

Such a fate clearly was not in Bergh's purview when it came to the ASPCA. During his long tenure as the society's president, the criticism levelled at him fitted into an ongoing, multi-layered narrative of considerable complexity. For critics, a breaking story on Bergh was often only the first round in a series of attacks and counter-attacks. A typical pattern would run as follows: Bergh initiates an action or recommendation relative to animals; media correspondents respond in positive and/or negative terms; Bergh responds to the media; media correspondents respond to Bergh's responses and to each other; and so on.

In that context, one of the most powerful tools in Bergh's repertoire was the media interview. As with the sudden proliferation of illustrated newspapers, the interview was a new feature in journalism, emerging at around the same time Bergh established the ASPCA, with the *New York Herald* being among the first to employ it.⁵¹ During the 1870s and 1880s interviews became an increasingly common tool both for journalists and for political and intellectual figures keen on publicity, and Bergh made frequent use of them as a communications tool alongside his many speeches that he knew would make their way to the press. Indeed, one cannot underestimate Bergh's efforts to see his voice in print. In addition to arranged interviews and speeches, it was not unusual for the ASPCA president to show up uninvited and unannounced to a public or society meeting, where he would be noticed by one of the organizers and asked to speak. To this, Bergh would respond with a phrase along the lines of “when I came here tonight I had no more idea of being called upon than,” followed by a supposedly impromptu narrative that would appear in the next morning's papers, its off-the-cuff guise creating the sense of an informal conversation more akin to an interview than a formal speech.⁵²

Bergh's willingness to engage in such exchanges with newspaper journalists, including those who had long criticized his work, alludes to both his awareness of their potential to frame perceptions of the animal protection movement as well as to the dramaturgical dimensions of the interview itself. Consider for example the interview Bergh granted in 1877 to a journalist from his media nemesis, the *New York Herald*. Calling on Bergh at his office, the *Herald* representative asked at one point Bergh's opinion of the paper. Bergh replied:

50 “Henry Bergh and His Work,” *Scribner's Monthly* 17, no. 6 (1879), 878.

51 See Christopher Silvester, “Introduction,” in *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, ed. Christopher Silvester (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 1–48.

52 The example provided appears in “Preserve the Forests: The Citizens Enthusiastically in Favor of the Movement,” *The World*, 12 April 1884, news clipping in: *ASPCA Scrapbook*, Vol. 9, September 1882–February 1887 (ASPCA Archives, New York), 130.

It is the greatest paper in the world. It did me, without intending it, the greatest service I have ever had. Twelve years ago it represented me as presiding over an assembly of beasts, and that ridicule awakened the public from its apathy. The next day one million people understood my purpose and in a week twenty millions knew of it. I have travelled many parts of the world, and everywhere I have found the HERALD. The influence of such a paper should be in favor of this society and not against it.⁵³

That answer can be read alternately as Bergh's honest interpretation of the positive impact the *Herald's* criticism had on the animal protection movement or as an effort to discourage such criticism in the future. Most likely Bergh had both objectives in mind. Yet those comments point also to something even more revealing: the degree to which a decade-old article in the *Herald*, the 1866 satire "Cruelty to Animals," was impressed on him. As the two continued their interview, Bergh further confirmed his deep fascination with his opponents in the media: "Listen to these articles,' and here Mr. Bergh produced an enormous book, apparently filled with critical articles upon his course, which he read aloud with expression and strong emphasis, evidently enjoying those portions which were most severe upon himself. 'This is complimentary,' he occasionally said, 'and therefore I will pass it by.'"⁵⁴

As a final consideration relative to Bergh's awareness of the media, it is worthwhile to turn in more detail to that 'enormous book' mentioned above. Record-keeping by institutions in the form of books of newspaper clippings was common practice during the nineteenth century, and stretched well into the twentieth. The ASPCA archives contain volumes of such scrapbooks covering decades of newspaper reportage, the product during the ASPCA's first twenty years of Bergh's careful perusing, collecting, pasting, and documenting. That Bergh himself handled this task, one more suited to a society secretary than to its president, speaks to a deep engagement with the media and a thorough understanding of the identities it ascribed to him. In reading Bergh's commentary in those newspaper clippings, one also senses the degree to which the narratives he proffered in his many interviews, speeches, and letters were akin to the lines of an actor, repeated over the years as he moved from one audience and venue to the next. What is perhaps most striking about these volumes, however, is their thoroughness and accuracy—together they contain thousands of clippings of all angles and dimensions, their sources and dates carefully recorded in the margins of each volume. In short, there was nothing printed about Bergh or the ASPCA that the ASPCA president did not know about, no one who studied that material more closely, and

53 "Mr. Bergh's Castle," 4.

54 "Mr. Bergh's Castle," 4.

nobody better prepared to respond strategically to it, than Bergh himself.⁵⁵

A fitting point of closure for this discussion is an illustration that speaks in strong terms to the nuances of Bergh’s relationship to the media. “A New Don’t” appeared in *Puck* on 23 April 1884 (see Figure 12).⁵⁶ In it, a dishevelled Bergh appears in the guise of a sandwich man, an occupation and advertising strategy that came of age in urban environments such as New York during the nineteenth century. His message, not surprisingly, is one of protest—in this case protest against the gory ‘Crypt’ exhibit at the Eden Musée, a Dime museum catering to popular tastes in entertainment and education that had opened on West 23rd Street less than a month previously. From the perspective of cartoonist Eugene “Zim” Zimmerman, the point being made here turns on the paradoxical character of Bergh’s comments that week—that in criticizing the Eden Musée, Bergh inadvertently brings more attention to the institution that it might otherwise garner. In other words, Bergh, who is described in Zimmerman’s caption as “the benevolent boomer of the ‘Chamber of Horrors,’” is in effect publicizing the very institution he wishes to see shut down.

In those terms, “A New Don’t” fits nicely among the many illustrations of Bergh that appeared during his presidency. But reading the broader media coverage of Bergh and the Eden Musée brings an even greater sense of paradox to Zimmerman’s work. Initiated via publication of a letter Bergh wrote to the city’s mayor describing the gory exhibit as “an insult to civilization and to the moral sense of the community” akin to that of the bullfight and the gladiatorial arena, the media discussion that ensued saw Bergh turn directly to the press, where he reiterated his message to the mayor while complaining of the unwarranted publication of that letter.⁵⁷ It is of course impossible



Figure 12: Eugene Zimmerman (“Zim”), “A New Don’t,” *Puck*, 23 April 1884, p. 114.

55 Observations of Bergh’s role in producing the ASPCA’s scrapbooks are based on the handwriting in them as well as Bergh’s deep reading and knowledge of the press’s reportage on him and the ASPCA that is reflected constantly in his work.

56 Eugene Zimmerman, “A New Don’t,” *Puck*, 23 April 1884, 114.

57 Henry Bergh Incensed, “He Visits the Eden Musée and Writes to His Honor the Mayor,” *New York Morning Journal*, 9 April 1884, news clipping in: *ASPCA Scrapbook*, Vol. 9,

to believe Bergh had not anticipated that letter's publication—he was in fact well aware just how often such letters made their way to the public via the press. For its part, the management of the Eden Musée did not see Bergh's comments in the terms ascribed to them by Zimmerman. Instead, the museum superintendent charged that "Mr. Bergh is simply anxious to gain a little notoriety for himself in the newspapers."⁵⁸ Read from this angle, it is Zimmerman who wears the metaphorical sandwich board, carrying as did so many of Bergh's critics yet another piece of publicity for the ASPCA president and his movement—in this case, Bergh's message that venues such as the Eden Musée's Chamber of Horrors desensitized the public to violence and normalized cruelty both toward animals and among humans.

Reading Bergh's relationship to the media in this manner, be it with regard to this specific cartoon or to the many other materials presented above, uncovers a far more sophisticated approach to a rapidly evolving media landscape than one might otherwise anticipate. It has often been observed that social movement actors are quick to grasp and make use of new media technology.⁵⁹ As Bergh's case confirms, this has been true for some time. Indeed, while the sweeping changes in communications technology that the world has seen at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first are different from those of Bergh's era, they are perhaps no more transformative than those through which Bergh negotiated the place of the animal protection movement in New York and America. In the space of a few decades, the nineteenth-century media landscape changed dramatically in technological terms, in tone, in reach, in audience, in content, in strategy, in marketing, and in accessibility relative to both production and consumption. At first glance, that changing landscape brought new opportunities for critics to ridicule and correspondingly frame Bergh and the animal protection movement. Key among them, the proliferation of illustrated newspapers gave critics the ability to speak via carefully crafted images to Bergh's activities. In that context, the nation's leading cartoonists soon developed a common graphic repertoire through which they alternately introduced, undermined, derided, problematized, and dismissed in easy-to-access visual terms the oftentimes more complex stories involving Bergh that appeared in print form alongside their caricatures. As

September 1882–February 1887 (ASPCA Archives, New York), 128; "The Crypt of Horrors" *The World*, 10 April 1884, news clipping in: *ASPCA Scrapbook, Vol. 9, September 1882–February 1887* (ASPCA Archives, New York), 130; "Henry Bergh on the Horrible" *New-York Commercial Advertiser*, 9 April 1884, news clipping in: *ASPCA Scrapbook, Vol. 9, September 1882–February 1887* (ASPCA Archives, New York), 129.

58 "The Crypt of Horrors."

59 See for example Manuel Castells, "Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society," *International Journal of Communication* 1 (2007): 238–266. For a contemporary overview see Victoria Carty, *Social Movements and New Technology* (London: Routledge, 2018).

such, the newspapers’ critical caricatures alternately summarized those more complex stories in simple but striking terms for readers who chose to look no further while alerting readers interested in learning more of Bergh’s most recent escapades to the press’s more detailed written narratives.

Upon closer examination, however, that changing landscape appears also to have established conditions through which Bergh was able to put his own skills and experience to work in order to draw media attention, to counter such perspectives, and in some cases to reframe them in terms more favourable to the movement, or at the very least to profit from the publicity they generated. In this regard, the constant presence of a radical, overzealous, or hypocritical Bergh in the media spotlight drew even greater attention in New York and across the nation to the movement’s widespread and generally moderate efforts to curb the cruel treatment of animals than it might otherwise have enjoyed. In doing so, Bergh’s critics paradoxically helped position the animal protection movement within the mainstream of American society.

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