

Cow, a novel by Beat Sterchi, was translated from the German by Michael Hofmann and published in translation by Random House Inc, Pantheon Books, New York (1990). Price: \$19.95. ISBN 0-394-58451-1. It was originally published in Switzerland as *Blösch* by Diogenes Verlag AG, Zurich in 1983.

Author Sterchi, son of a Swiss butcher, traces Blösch (straw-red unbrindled hide), the prize milk cow of the silent, taciturn, traditional Innerwalders to her dismal end as a carcass unfit for human consumption.

Accompanying this journey in milk-white Switzerland is a small, dark-skinned Spanish guest-worker named Ambrosio. He fits in well enough to milk Blösch and her herdmates until local discrimination, his lack of language skills and inadequate working papers were simply not good enough. However, he was still good enough to work in the undermanned slaughterhouse. Sterchi then reveals the dark side of how beasts and men prey upon one another and upon themselves.

Rather than a teachable moment, fear of the unknown appears in the form of Sterchi describing an experimenter asking for a calf's heart that is still beating . . . 'What are your lot experimenting on?' asked one of the workers called Überlander. 'Well, if only we knew', replied the man from the veterinary hospital (p 219). References to the historic Chicago Stock Yards and Swift & Company (p 224 & p 321) abound through worker Buri, who lost a leg there. ('The blacks in Chicago, they always used to eat testicles. Never raw though', p 280. 'It's getting to be as bad in Switzerland with all the foreigners as it is with the blacks in Chicago', p 281). Traditional European white veal from the viewpoint of the abattoir employees (p 225) and livestock dealer (p 267-269) is covered in graphic detail.

Thoughtful literary comments about cows can be found (. . . 'the cows that low the most give the least milk', p 277 and . . . 'the long history of her kind, as though she knew that she was one of those mothers cheated of their rich white milk, who had offered their teats for thousands of years, and for thousands of years been devoured in recompense. It was as though she knew that her kind had always had to beat their hooves sore on the stoniest of fields, that for her kind there was no escaping the leather harness of the plough that kept this world alive . . .' p 350). On the other hand, little appreciation is shown for squealing, noisy, randy pigs (p 322-341).

Ambrosio lasted seven years at the slaughterhouse. The final insult was losing his middle finger to a mincing machine. Before he and three others (Hugentobler, Gilgen and Rötliberger) became completely dehumanized and brutalized they perform a final symbolic act of defiance—a sacrificial rite involving a small brown-black Eringer cow. The men's anger is obvious by the last chapter as evidenced by the obscene language in the *filthy, squalid surroundings*. One cannot read this novel and not be moved by it. Having observed and taken part in farm slaughter growing up in rural California, visiting the Chicago Stock Yards Swift & Company as a university student (before the USA Humane Slaughter Act of 1957) and witnessing abattoirs in midwestern USA, I come somewhat prepared for slaughterhouses. However, I must admit that I was not prepared

for the worst possible scenario of Sterchi's thought-provoking remembrances, guilt and mind-set of a 'Dante's inferno abattoir' in Switzerland. Could this be happening in the country which had the world's first humane slaughter laws in 1874?

Ambrosio of Cow is in good company as he joins the downtrodden Lithuanian Jurgis in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and Isaac Bashevis Singer's Yoineh Meir in *The Slaughterer* who in despair threw the tools of his trade as a ritual slaughterer into the pit of the outhouse (toilet).

J L Albright

Department of Animal Sciences, Purdue University, Indiana, USA

Do hens suffer in battery cages? A review of the scientific evidence commissioned by the Athene Trust (1991). Michael C Appleby. Price £2.50 post free from Athene Trust, 20 Lavant Street, Petersfield, Hants GU32 3EW.

Appleby gives a useful introduction to this subject, providing scientific data to support people's instinctive dislike of cages. He draws evidence together under five headings which he calls the 'FAWC five freedoms', but are actually later modifications by other authors and differ substantially from FAWC (1st Press Notice 1979).

Appleby's facts are sometimes misleading. Only in 1995 will cages already in existence in 1986 have to provide a minimum space allowance of 450cm²/bird in EEC countries, and only in 1994 will abrasive strips on food troughs become compulsory in Sweden. He attributes incorrectly to a FAWC report a statement concerning pre-laying behaviour in hens. He also makes one or two sweeping statements - for example: 'the importance of feathers to the welfare of hens is not clear', 'there is no scientific evidence that general freedom of movement is actually important to hens', and 'there is almost no firm evidence that (wire floors) cause discomfort', and then proceeds to give evidence to the contrary.

By not using the second of FAWC's actual five freedoms - that the animal should be provided with 'appropriate comfort and shelter' - Appleby is spared answering the penetrating question of whether battery cages, even modified by his suggested legislation for the provision of 'more space and height . . . and alternative substrates such as perches, loose material or nest sites', are **appropriate** for laying hens. He suggests that his proposals for legislation could be complied with either by modified cages or by more radical alternatives but adds somewhat contentiously: 'in the current state of development of alternative systems there is no consistent welfare advantage known for either of these approaches.

Retailers have long since realised that hefty premiums can only be levied on eggs from alternative systems, preferably free-range. What is now needed is radical legislation (phased in over a suitable period of time) to give hens the sort of life which both producers and retailers like to suggest they already have.