

"Taking Hands"

by Paulette Callen

Sometimes I get to thinking...
I'm an ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVIST!
and I get all full of myself,
and I begin to loathe the hunters
and despise the trappers...
and then I get to thinking
about what Paul Watson said —
that he'd rather take the bloodied hand
of an honest seal hunter
than the hand of a hypocrite,
and I get to thinking...
Yes! Give me the hand of the hunter
over the manicured hands of those who buy
the cleaned up, bled, re-christened remains
of poor dead creatures wrapped in
cellophane;
give me the weathered hand of the trapper
over the soft, ringed hands of those who
pluck
their furs off racks in carpeted
muzak-infected department stores
out of sight and sound of the killing and
dying...
and then I get to thinking
about the time —
it wasn't so long ago —
when I petted my spaniel's head
with one hand
and ate my hamburger with the other,
and about the time —
not so very long ago —
when I snuggled with cozy rectitude into
the raccoon collar of my car coat,
and I get to thinking...

whose hand can I not take?
Ah! The vivisector's! Lowest of the low...
and I get to thinking of that biology class,
not so long ago,
wherein I held a great luminous green frog
and stroked him till he tranced a froggy
trance right in my hand!
and I gave him up to the killers to prepare
him dead
for Tuesday when I sliced him to pieces for
a B+.
Whose hand can I not take?
And still I take the medicines ground out
of the labs that grind away upon the
mangled bodies of my brothers
and sisters,
and I think,
Whose hand can I not take?
Then I think, surely the poachers,
those who, for a few cents, kill the gorilla
and cut off his hands
for ashtrays,
and what should I do —
stand before them
armed with my loathing?
or hold out my hands
and say
Here, take mine.