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Review of *Hog Ties: Pigs, Manure, and Mortality in American Culture* by Richard P. Horwitz

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Hog Ties: Pigs, Manure, and Mortality in American Culture. Richard P. Horwitz. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. xxv+312 pp. Notes, index. \$27.95 cloth (ISBN 031221443X)

This book is “an attempt to track moral and practical connections among disparate things” concerning pigs, as Richard Horwitz finally points out in the last chapter. The first part dabbles with the role of pigs in American culture, but the author moves quickly to his personal experiences as a college professor with a part-time job on a hog farm, leading up to a key event in the book—an eyewitness account of a transmissible gastroenteritis (TGE) outbreak on a hog farm.

The “hog wars,” as Horwitz dubs conflicts arising from corporate take-over of the American hog and pork business, dominate the second and third sections of the book. Making much of his claim to unbiased neutrality on this matter, he is quick to label others as zealous advocates for one side or the other. His understanding of the day-to-day work on a hog farm may well be superior to that of most academics, but his comprehension of the full range of issues

underlying the “hog wars” seems shallow, reflecting the views of many large hog farmers. They don’t particularly like their industry being taken over by giant corporations, but they don’t see much they can do about it. His position is supported by articles in mainstream trade magazines, such as *National Hog Farmer* and *Pork*, which shape as well as reflect attitudes of the pork industry.

Horwitz articulates his position fairly well, but his claims of not “taking a side” are empty. He is clearly not an opponent of corporate hogs, and perhaps he is not an intentional promoter. But his arguments are corporate arguments. He labels opponents as unrealistic “populists” while referring to supporters as “realists”—without granting that reality has more than one dimension. In arguing that opposing corporate takeover is “unrealistic,” he clearly takes the “corporate side.”

A chat with another hog farmer, in part four, reinforces Horwitz’s perceptions of reality on a hog farm, bringing the subject back to diseases and TGE. Part five seems a summary of “everything you never thought to ask” about hog diseases and how they represent the uncertainties of life on a hog farm. The final part begins with an attempt to return to pig culture, while the book’s last chapter, perhaps its best and least biased, deals with humane treatment of animals.

This reader is left wondering why Horwitz wrote the book. Perhaps the answer is found in a chapter where he bemoans that some “populists,” his university colleagues, had messed up a planned interview with the head of Premium Standard Farms—an interview he had hoped would showcase the best of the big hog corporations. After recovering from the disappointment, he concluded that belittling his colleagues would make as good a chapter as the PSF interview promised to be and make just as interesting reading. Perhaps he simply needed to write a book. **John E. Ikerd**, *Emeritus Professor of Agricultural Economics, University of Missouri-Columbia*.