Why the Rhinoceros Doesn't Talk

The Cultural Life of a Wild Animal in America

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On Disneyland's Jungle Cruise, three animatronic men are forever chased up a palm tree by a rhinoceros whose sharp horn moves endlessly just out of reach of the lowest man's bottom. Visitors to this ride float past harmless elephants who squirt water in the boat's direction, playful gorillas ransacking a camp, and an intimidating herd of hippos who, despite the guide's fearful warnings, do nothing but surface menacingly from the man-made lagoon.

Since 1955, the Jungle Cruise has been an anomaly in the theme park. While other rides humanize animals, here they do not talk or sing. They resemble their wild selves in both physical form and behavior. The ride claims to represent actual geographic locations—the tropical forests of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Though there is a verbal identification of the continental shift, visually, the "jungle" itself is quite amorphous. Actors portray riverboat guides, adding spontaneity and human contact to the mostly robotic rides elsewhere. The jungle is too dangerous, it seems, to go it alone. Disney will send its visitors flying passively over the skies of Neverland, but an animatronic jungle is too much for a lone tourist. The interaction and "adventure" built into the narrative of this ride reveal a key to the mythology of the jungle itself. Tourism is essentially written into the experience of the jungle. Humans interact with wildlife in a seemingly "authentic" experience of a real but mythologized landscape with real but animatronic animals.

The mechanized creatures in the Jungle Cruise represent animals in the

wild, not cartoons. Still, there is something not quite wild about these animals, specifically the rhinoceros. Those are no ordinary men up the tree but poachers; this is no ordinary ride through the jungle but one endowed with moral meaning. The wild, it implies, will turn on evil. Thus in Disney's sole attraction about wild animals for nearly fifty years (until the opening of Animal Kingdom, which offers a similar morality play), they are feared and violent, yet know right from wrong. They, like their anthropomorphized cousins, have a moral order.[1]

Having lived with the memory of this ride since childhood, I was struck when I came across a description of a similar scene in an 1838 news story on the Indian rhinoceros.[2] The report quotes a local informant's "authentic" account of the animal, which is represented as evidence of the rhino's wildness. How did this story survive for close to 150 years and become part of Disney's iconic representation of the experience of this animal, not to mention of the jungle itself?

In American popular culture, rhinos are few and far between, endowing such cameo appearances with added importance. When it comes to animals in the latter part of the twentieth century, Disney is a rich source of cultural meanings. The Disney theme parks and films mirror popular attitudes toward certain species. The Jungle Cruise reflects not only the myth of the rhinoceros's wild violence but its continuing association with the image of an exotic natural landscape.

From the earliest days of the rhino's existence in the American imagination, this animal has embodied two elements—the wild and the mythic. Western theology of the early nineteenth century was characterized by a literalism that led biblical scholars to identify the rhinoceros with the reem, or unicorn: possessed of a single horn, solitary rather than social, strong, and randomly violent. Christian thought blended with science, folklore, ancient Roman texts, and Renaissance imagery to form an idea of the rhinoceros that exaggerated its savageness. Cultural perceptions of rhinos as aggressive influenced how these animals were treated in captivity and even determined for many years what was accepted as reliable scientific data about the species. These perceptions simultaneously reflected and reinforced the existing cultural construction of wildness as foreign and foreignness as wild.

In the following analysis, I hope to show why Americans perceive the rhinoceros as quintessentially wild. I will argue that past cultural representations of the rhino have surrounded the biological animal with symbolism that expresses American attitudes toward its place of origin—the wilderness

of tropical forests. The longevity of these representations demonstrates a national preference for myth over science, as well as a predilection for locating wildness far from home.

Historians have examined the concept of wildness mainly as a problem of geography. Although *wildness* and *wilderness* imply two different meanings—the former about behavior, the latter about space—one cannot be understood without the other. Objects—in this case, animals—that are considered wild are located inside wilderness. Though they can be removed, exhibited, and displayed outside the space of wilderness, their perceived wildness rests in their association with this landscape. In his essay "The Trouble with Wilderness," the environmental historian William Cronon outlines a history of ideas about wilderness, which was a place of both terror and wonder in which lay the origins of American identity. Although Cronon focuses on the problem of separating humans from nature, which he sees as a central problem with modern environmentalism, he also separates wilderness from time. "[T]here is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness," he writes; "[i]t is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny. Indeed, one of the most striking proofs of cultural invention of wilderness is its thoroughgoing erasure of the history from which it sprang."[3] The erasure of history is easier when the place of wild(er)ness is thousands of miles away. The concept of a jungle wilderness is a cultural construction reliant on its distance from American history and American experiences of nature. The mythos remains distinct from the reality. And so it is with the rhinoceros:

> In virtually all of its manifestations wilderness represents a flight from history. Seen as the original garden, it is a place outside of time, from which human beings had to be ejected before the fallen world of history could properly begin. Seen as the frontier, it is a savage world at the dawn of civilization, whose transformation represents the very beginning of the national historical epic. . . . Seen as the sacred sublime, it is the home of a God who transcends history by standing as the One who remains untouched and unchanged by time's arrow.[4]

All of Cronon's assertions about the construction of wilderness—that it is outside of time, savage, changeless—could be applied to the rhinoceros.[5]

The story of the rhinoceros reveals much about the construction of wildness in American culture. This story begins with the experience of the first living rhinoceros to be brought to the United States. The ways in which this rhinoceros captured the imaginations of the general public left a legacy for all his cousins to follow. When the animal arrived in Boston Harbor aboard the

Georgian in 1830, its owner, Marmaduke Burrough, immediately sold it for a profit to a showman. An American consular official in Calcutta and enterprising trader in exotic natural specimens from rocks to human skulls, Burrough had purchased the rhinoceros with the intention of selling it to a menagerie. The archives indicate little more than a profit motive in Burrough's transaction, but he did go to quite a bit of trouble to complete it, negotiating the price, locating a ship willing to transport the cargo, and paying for the cage, provisions, and freight. Burrough's brother wrote that year: "I hope you have made a good thing with your Rhinocerous."[6]

The most common way for early-nineteenth-century Americans to experience exotic animals was in a menagerie. In the preceding century, showmen had toured the country with unusual creatures, displaying their appearance and behavior to a wide audience. Some of these creatures performed tricks, while others merely gazed back from behind bars; but all were meant to amuse.[7] These displays presenting wild animals to the public became a form of popular education, as well. People went to menageries to see animals from foreign countries and, by extension, to learn and form opinions about those countries.[8]

In 1824, the *Saturday Evening Post* ran an advertisement for "A Grand Exhibition of Twenty-One Living Animals, much the largest and most valuable collection, ever exhibited in America." Among the creatures on display were a lion "taken by the Arabs," a "learned polar bear," an "ouran outang, or wild Man of Africa," Arabian camels, and several llama (or "South American camels"). The advertisement also describes the interactions between humans and animals that may occur at this exhibition. The lion "will suffer his keeper to kiss and handle him, and often manifests great fondness for him." At the same time, the lion is "the best model of strength joined to agility. Its anger is noble, its courage is magnanimous."[9]

Because the lion seems to display a liking for his human handler, his anger is described not as ferocious or savage but "noble." Similarly, an elephant touted as "the largest and most sagacious animal in the world" as well as "one of the greatest natural curiosities ever offered to the public" was admired for his "sagacity and docility." He enacted a balancing act and gave money to his handler with his trunk. These animals were not put in cages merely to be observed; they performed "amusing exercises" that demonstrated humans' ability to interact with and control these wild creatures as well as the animals' ability to interact with culture. The animals in the menagerie were anthropomorphized—given human characteristics, emotions, and tasks to accomplish.[10]

The rhinoceros, on the other hand, represented a different kind of animal amusement. It did not accept projections of emotion or intelligence; it would not perform tricks (or, at least, not exciting ones); and it seemingly had no desire to participate in human culture. One writer, in fact, thought the rhinoceros should steal the moniker "king of the beasts" from the lion, as it "is certainly more dangerous, and . . . could kill him in a few moments."[11] Despite, or perhaps because of, its resistance to anthropomorphism, the rhino saw its fifteen minutes of fame as the greatest of all natural curiosities, at least in the billing of the menagerie business. A September 1830 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post* advertised Marmaduke Burrough's rhinoceros as "The greatest natural living curiosity ever exhibited in America . . . the Unicorn; or, one horned rhinoceros." "His nose is armed with a formidable weapon," read the ad, "even the Lion, Tiger, and Elephant avoid a contest with him."[12] Despite the colorful description of its behavior in the wild, the illustration accompanying the text shows him without animation, as a still, unexpressive specimen.

Americans' sense of the rhinoceros's wildness derived not from reports of the animal's behavior in its natural habitat but from a link in the Western imagination between the rhino and the biblical unicorn, or reem. Theologians had recently identified this creature, which is mentioned in Numbers, Deuteronomy, and elsewhere in Scripture, with the rhinoceros. Thus the reference in Burrough's advertisement evoked not just secular mythology but also religious associations. I have, however, found no written accounts of the 1830 exhibition that explicitly link the rhino on display with a unicorn.

Nineteenth-century travelers' reports of encounters with rhinoceroses in the wild emphasize the animals' savagery. Sir Andrew Smith, in an excerpt from his *Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa,* gave this account in 1838 of the wild rhino's behavior:

> Its disposition is extremely fierce, and it universally attacks man if it sees him. The usual method of escape adopted by the natives is to climb up a dense high tree, so as to avoid, if possible, being seen. If the animal misses his sight of the fugitive, he immediately gallops off to his haunt; from when it may be inferred that [h]e is not endowed with the power of a keen scent. Should he, however, espy his object in the tree, wo[e] to the unfortunate native: he begins to butt with his horn, strikes and penetrates the tree, and continues piercing it till it falls when [h]is victim seldom escapes being gored to death. . . . Having killed his victim, he leaves him without devouring the carcass.[13]

In this description, the rhino is not only violent but pointlessly so, apparently killing for mere pleasure. The rhinoceros is not a carnivore but, according to Smith, will attack humans without provocation. Moreover, this is not

Broadside for the rhinoceros, or unicorn, 1835. (Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin)

survival of the fittest, where one animal dies so that another may live; it is a matter of chance, in which human death serves only to prove the animal's ferocity. This narrative affirms the popularity of such stories in natural-history texts. The rhinoceros's behavior as represented in Smith's text was a product of local mythology, not of scientific observation. These accounts of the rhino frequently refer to Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) of ancient Rome, who was considered the first natural philosopher by nineteenth-century Westerners and who describes the rhinoceros this way in his *Naturalis Historia:*

> In the same solemnities of Pompey, as many times else, was shewed a Rhinoceros, with one horne and no more, and the same in his snout or muzzle. This is a second enemie by nature to an Elephant. He fileth that horne of his against hard stones, and maketh it sharpe against he should fight; and in his conflict with the Elephant, he layeth principally at his bellie, which he knoweth to be more tender than the rest. He is full as long as he, his legges are much shorter, and of the boxe colour.[14]

Pliny's description relies explicitly on observation of a captive rhinoceros, not a wild one. What's more, the rhino is shown as a calculating enemy of the elephant, the animal that Pliny praised as "the greatest, and [the one that] commeth neerest in wit and capacitie, to men."[15] Thus by syllogistic logic the rhino is identified as humans' adversary and located at the periphery of civilization.[16]

Although distant in time and space from nineteenth-century American observers of the captive rhinoceros, Pliny molded the opinions of the educated public in regard to exotic animals such as the rhinoceros. Writers in the popular press of the 1830s invoked this classical authority to reinforce notions of typical rhino behavior. For example, a report in *Mechanics' & Farmers' Magazine of Useful Knowledge* on the first rhino brought to America described the species as a "great rarity . . . that was better known to the ancients, since we have accounts of him from Pliny, Dio Cassius, and others, from whom we learn that he was frequently exhibited in their circus and triumphal shows."[17] The anonymous author goes on to use Pliny to portray the alleged violence of rhinos, despite never having observed such behavior himself. The article does, however, claim that even though the rhinoceros on exhibit in Boston was "not of a ferocious nature," it "is sometimes liable to paroxysms of rage."[18] This phrase regarding fits of ferocity is repeated again and again in descriptions of the rhinoceros, both general ones and those in natural-history publications. These fits are thought to be a natural trait even though they are seen only in the captive rhinoceros. As the author of the *Mechanics' & Farmers'* article puts it:

> The animal now with us, appears to be of a stupid nature, and exhibits no traits of intelligence or instinct beyond those of the Hog, to which he seems to be allied in manners as well as form. He appears to distinguish no one around him, and to be insensible to every thing but the calls of appetite; eats constantly, whenever food is offered to him, and almost of any kinds. . . . It is singular, however, that his natural placidity of temper should be interrupted by a fit of passion, which he is subject to every day, with the greatest regularity, and sometimes twice a day. The fury attacks him, with more or less of violence, during which he is entirely ungovernable, runs about butting with his horn against any thing within his reach, and is only appeased by offering him some of his favorite sweet food.[19]

Like Pliny, this writer interprets the captive animal's behavior as evidence of its habits in the wild. S/he blames neither the handler nor the condition of captivity itself for the fits but the rhino's own nature. The behavior of caged animals, however, is culturally constructed not only by the preconceived notions of the audience but by its artificial environment and treatment by humans. Reports of the captive rhinoceros reveal more than its natural disposition; they convey culturally embedded ideas about its wildness as well as the rhino's own ideas about being on display.

At least one ambitious showman of this era attempted to train a rhinoceros for show. In 1855, Dan Rice purchased a rhino known as "Old Put" (after the Revolutionary War hero Israel Putnam) and taught it to sit, lie down, grunt, walk at varying speeds, and mount steps. The best he could do with the animal, other than the claim to have "exercised his will over 'the most obdurate disposition of animal nature,'" was teach it to ring a fire bell in a circus skit. The public was unimpressed, and the rhinoceros was "unanimously voted a humbug and a bore."[20] Old Put had killed a previous keeper, and his attitude toward his new handler showed no improvement. He gored Rice, sending him to the hospital for several days.[21]

Similar to Old Put, other rhinos on display were not passive actors in the construction of their wildness. As living beings, rhinoceroses exhibit individualistic behaviors and react to stimuli in their environments. Although some animals were acknowledged in the nineteenth century as possessing a degree of individuality, the rhinoceros was not among them. It is difficult for humans to observe rhinoceroses in the wild, as they wander dense jungles and swampy wetlands. This choice of habitat in and of itself has contributed to its mythic cultural construction. Each rhino reacts differently when confronted with humans, and its reactions are conditioned by multiple factors, such as gender, age, season of the year, and the presence of offspring. The rhino may charge, approach, or flee. The most prevalent account of the rhino is of the

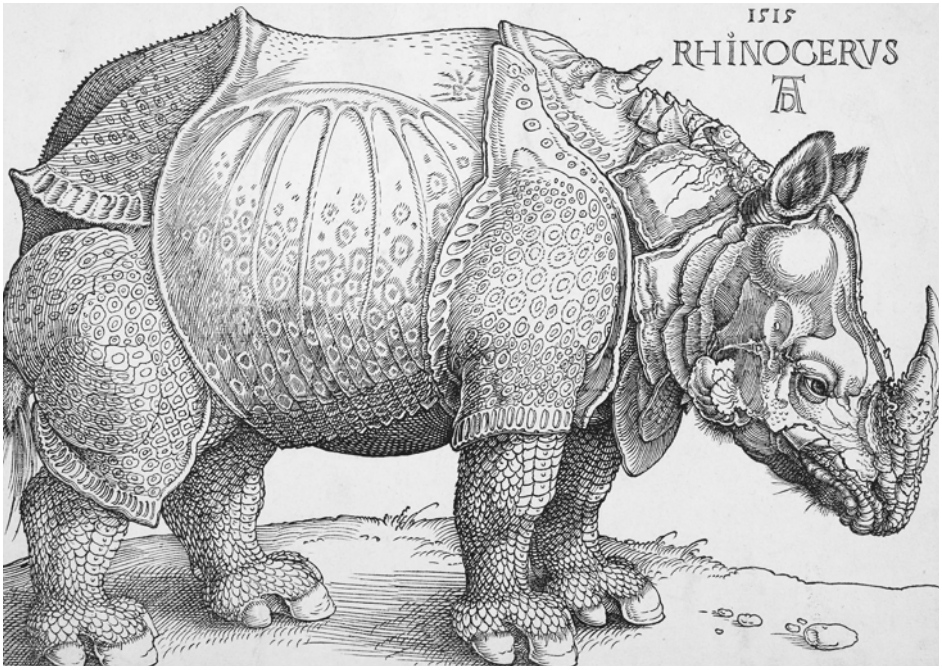
one who charges. But the sheer number of these reports does not necessarily reflect a reality. The rhino who walks away undetected may be as common as the one who chases a hunter up a tree. It is the latter tale, however, that is more exciting to tell, causing its popularity in the published literature.

In captivity, a rhino will not behave as it did in the wild. Placed in completely artificial surroundings, an animal is but a relic of its wild self. The Boston rhinoceros's "paroxysms of rage" suggest frustration with an alien and frightening environment. Though it may seem obvious that a caged animal acts differently from a free one in a recognizable landscape, this does not appear to be the understanding of those viewing this rhinoceros. The animal, removed from its natural environment, represented an "essence" of itself; its behavior was assumed to be a "natural" state of being. The caged rhinoceros provided a laboratory for the study not of nature but of the interaction between nature and culture. This critical point is one at which environmental history and cultural studies intersect. Studies of animals in history require examination of their perceived place in human culture at any given moment as well as a breakdown of these cultural lenses, attempting to understand the animal's behavior as more than symbolic. Without anthropomorphizing, scholars need to give an element of agency to animals both in the wild and in captivity in the construction of their cultural images. Understanding animal behavior is integral to understanding what people saw and what they did not see when looking at animals.[22]

The Iconography of the "Ugly" Rhinoceros

"[T]he Rhinoceros maintained its characteristic ugliness," wrote one female visitor to a menagerie in 1834.[23] Although she does not say where she got the idea that rhinos are ugly, the fact that she reiterated this view after her visit reveals one of the functions of the menagerie—to confirm commonly held beliefs about the natural world. While Pliny's writing guided nineteenth-century notions of rhinoceros behavior, popular ideas about what rhinos actually looked like derived from the work of the sixteenth-century German artist Albrecht Dürer. Although Dürer had never actually seen a rhino, in 1515 he created the image that remained for several centuries the best-known representation of it in Europe.

Dürer's woodcut was based on descriptions and a sketch, sent to Nuremburg from Lisbon, of an Indian rhino presented as a gift to the king of Portugal, Manuel I.[24] However unnatural Dürer's illustration may appear to the modern eye, this picture provided the visual vocabulary used by subsequent



Albrecht Dürer, *Rhinoceros*, 1515. (Photo courtesy of the British Museum, London)

natural-history illustrators. Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, exaggerated the animal's features in his *Histoire Naturelle* (1764), where the rhinoceros retains the armored skin and cumbersomeness of Dürer's depiction but assumes a new pose. Its horn is much more delicate than Dürer's, however, and Buffon has added significant details to the landscape in which the animal is portrayed. Whereas Dürer simply sketched the rhinoceros on top of a patch of grass, Buffon drew it on the edge of a cliff, with a mountain in the far left and another cliff on the right.

Buffon's drawing appeared after what the historian Louise E. Robbins calls a "veritable 'rhinomania' of poems, coiffures à la rhinoceros, engravings, and fancy clocks with rhinoceros bases," which had been spurred by the exhibition of a rhino in France in 1749.[25] The advertising for this French rhinoceros described it as exotic and naturally fierce but, unlike the later American one, "gentle as a dove."[26] It allegedly ran around its handler's house like a pet dog. Although Buffon did not go to see this rhinoceros, he was undoubtedly aware of the cultural artifacts that depicted it; and it is likely that he based his engraving on a life-size painting of the French rhinoceros by another artist.[27]

Another French naturalist, Georges Cuvier (1769–1832), painted the rhinoceros in a watery landscape with a marsh surrounding a lake. The rhinoceros is plated but not heavily, and its horn is realistically depicted. Most significant is the rhinoceros's pose. Cuvier's rhino is active, not standing like a frozen relic or stuffed corpse but moving freely. Its eyes are alert but not directed at the viewer.

Carl Joseph Brodtmann's illustrations in his *Natural History of Mammals* (1827) return the rhino to a simple patch of grass, giving it something natural to stand on that nevertheless conveys no real sense of its native home. Buffon's cliff was more dramatic than the natural landscape, associating the rhino with the traditional imagery of the sublime. Although Cuvier's illustration resembles the rhino's native habitat, he used another landscape of sub-

Georges-Louis Marie Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *L'Rhinoceros*, from *Histoire Naturelle* (ca. 1764). (Special Collections, University of Virginia Library)

limity—the amorphous space between land and water. One gets the sense when looking at Cuvier's rhino that it is a living being with a life of its own; whereas Buffon's is compelled to interact with culture through its gaze.[28]

In Brodtmann's representation, however, the rhino is a scientific specimen, neither gazing back like a captive amusement nor wandering freely. He reverts back to the static pose of Dürer's rhinoceros. Although the animal looks less cumbersome than Dürer's, in both drawings the rhinoceros is looking down and inactive. It seems that Brodtmann, despite his having seen a specimen of the actual animal, could not forget the cultural images of the rhino. He was drawing from nature but thinking about Dürer. Thus images of the rhino in the 1820s did away with the idealized landscapes of Buffon and Cuvier, placing animals outside of the landscape as physical specimens removed from natural settings. This convention reveals the shifting representation of animals in an increasingly scientific world as well as the ways in which the public was viewing these animals.

Early-nineteenth-century menageries contributed to this changing perception, since all of their animals lived on mere piles of hay in cages with steel bars.[29] Hence, visitors were unable to visualize the natural habitats of animals. They became scientific specimens that were significant for their physical form alone. If imagined in a landscape of the sublime, whether perched on a cliff or mired in a swamp, the rhinoceros was a representative of the exotic in the world and the wild in nature.

By 1860, however, P. T. Barnum was advertising his menagerie with an illustration of a rhino that placed the viewer inside the animal's cage. This perspective suggests a tame and perhaps even domesticated animal, as do the cartoonlike illustrations encircling the larger inset. In these vignettes, the rhino is shown being hosed down, looking at well-dressed ladies, lazing about, and being pulled in its cage by an elephant. The overall impression created by these images is that of a manageable creature, passive and unthreatening.

This advertisement works on two levels. First, Barnum wishes to attract a paying audience to his menagerie. Second, he plays on cultural perceptions of the rhinoceros to suggest that people will not only see what they expect but something more amusing. In Barnum's menagerie, one should feel more than awe at the rhino's rage or ugliness; one should see the rhino as a lumbering, lazy, odd creature of habit. Barnum's attempt here at anthropomorphizing the rhinoceros transforms the wild animal into an object of amusement. He animates its behavior, forcing thoughts and feelings on the animal.

Barnum's illustration takes the rhinoceros completely out of the jungle. Even more fascinating, however, is how, by doing so, Barnum has also taken

the jungle out of the rhinoceros. His rhino is an almost entirely cultural being, with no resemblance to its natural self other than physical form. It is not imagined as exotic or primitive; it is not meant to stand for the wild landscapes of Africa and Asia. It is simply an amusing sight—completely American, completely cultural.

The preference for the exotic did not, however, sever the rhino from its natural habitat. Although Barnum's amusement made the attempt, writers and artists extolled the exotic and the wild as sublime, restoring the rhino to its jungle home. While Barnum's rhino interacted with urban Americans rather than jungle dwellers, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century museums, zoos, and films visually restored the rhinoceros to its native landscape. As the public became more familiar with the form of the rhinoceros, they began to turn away from sources such as the Bible, Pliny, and Dürer, looking instead to these new sources of information. By the twentieth century, both science and entertainment sought to understand animals in relation to their natural habitat. American zoos increasingly replaced cages with "enclosures"—spaces that re-created an animal's natural habitat and constructed for the viewer an imagined glimpse into the creature's life in the wild.[30] Displaying the rhinoceros in such a setting reflected a changing aesthetic of wildness.

The rhinoceros appeared on the American scene in 1830 at a time when science and myth still coexisted peacefully. By 1860, tensions between entertainment and science pushed the rhinoceros out of the milieu of popular culture. Along with a growing body of scientific data that denied the rhino's mythic origins, trainers' inability to make the animal do anything that audiences found entertaining limited the place of the rhinoceros in American culture to zoological parks, not circuses. As the modern zoo emerged as a place of education, science, and recreation and the rhino's novelty and mystery wore off, its failure as a performer led to a fall from its former billing as the greatest of natural curiosities.

Similarly, the shift in zoos from cages to natural enclosures indicates an increasing public interest in the animal as more than itself, as part of a specific geography. Although for many this meant a more rational view of the world and the emergence of ecological thought, to others reacting to increasingly scientific constructions of nature, it had a different meaning. Nature writers, who clung to the idea of wildness as an integral part of American character and modern individuality, sought refuge in the concept of wildness. Interested in nature for its spiritual rather than empirical ends, these writers would regard the rhinoceros's habitat (if not the rhinoceros itself) as a true source of wildness.

"Wild Fancies"

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) looked to nature as the savior of the world, and, though not an unscientific man, he did not intend to let scientific knowledge ruin his spiritual communion with it. In his 1862 essay "Walking," Thoreau wrote: "The wildest dreams of wild men, even, are not the less true, though they may not recommend themselves to the sense which is most common among Englishmen and Americans today."[31] Here Thoreau complicates the meaning of truth in nature by asserting that foreign perspectives are as valid as those of his fellow countrymen and intellectual peers.

"The geologist has discovered," Thoreau continues, "that the figures of serpents, griffins, flying dragons, and other fanciful embellishments of heraldry, have their prototypes in the forms of fossil species which were extinct before man was created, and hence 'indicate a faint and shadowy knowledge of a previous state of organic existence.'" Invoking mythological creatures, Thoreau turns science on its head, calling their discoveries not a new understanding of the prehistoric world but evidence of the mythological one. His idea of a "shadowy knowledge" is key here, for what Thoreau is suggesting is that this prehistoric world can never be known except through shadow.[32]

Thoreau backed up his claim that truth in nature is subjective when he argued: "The Hindus dreamed that the earth rested on an elephant, and the elephant on a tortoise, and the tortoise on a serpent; and though it may be an unimportant coincidence, it will not be out of place here to state, that a fossil tortoise has lately been discovered in Asia large enough to support an elephant."[33] He knows that his colleagues may dismiss this justification of Eastern mythology as "an unimportant coincidence," yet Thoreau insists that it is still important to consider this point of view. In fact, he concludes: "I confess that I am partial to these wild fancies, which transcend the order of time and development. They are the most sublime recreation of the intellect."[34]

Thoreau, the famous advocate of wildness as the savior of the world, prefers abstract, mythological wildness to none at all. He mourns the world that science created in the first half of the nineteenth century, preferring foreign mythology to scientific explanation. For Thoreau, fossils re-create the mythic world of dragons and serpents, and support not biblical or paleontological texts but those of an exotic mythos. Thoreau wants wildness to remain "shadowy." It is not scientific inquiry that raises the intellect but "wild fancies"; it is not fact that inspires but sublimity. His fear is that, by knowing nature scientifically, its wildness would be lost. This suggests that, to Thoreau, *wildness* has less to do with nature itself than with the narratives to which it is attached.

Thoreau's location of validity in Hindu mythology is significant to the rhinoceros not only because both are Indian imports, but because both "transcend the order of time and development." And it is these foreign roots that allow them to do so. Looking at a living rhinoceros in America is a "sublime recreation of the intellect" because it at once inspires thoughts of the ancient, the mythic, the exotic, and the wild. It is the epitome of the sublime. It is this same cultural preference for "wild fancies" that enables Disneyland's Jungle Cruise, first opened in 1955, to employ a nineteenth-century myth about the rhinoceros that continues to have meaning in the twenty-first century. The rhinoceros is an example of a growing cultural preference for myth over science. This preference is reflected in specific ideas about the rhinoceros but is seen in more general arguments over wilderness throughout the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Even among preservationists, arguments about animal representation abounded. There were those who told tales of animals by anthropomorphizing them, and those who adamantly opposed such "nature-fakery."[35] Thus even "wild fancies" conflicted and were often contested. Why the rhinoceros remains unanthropomorphized in American culture is a question that reveals a consensus on how the species is defined if not on the definition of wildness itself. The rhino's wildness is complex and unstable; perceptions of the animal have relied on methods of exhibition and shifting notions of the place of wilderness. Thoreau is lamenting the loss of his idea of nature through science, just as turn-of-the-century Americans mourned the loss of wilderness in the perceived closing of the frontier. Throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the rhinoceros stood for the uncontested wildness of exotic places. Wildness is something "out there," something removed from civilization; the jungles of Asia and Africa where rhinoceros roam are as removed from American life as one can imagine.[36] Because of its origins abroad, the rhinoceros retains an air of the mythic, mystic, and wild. The voiceless rhinoceros supports the American construction of *wildness* as a cultural rather than a scientific term. Like the rhino in the menagerie, whose behavior is a product of both its natural disposition and cultural conditioning, wildness itself has been defined in a negotiation of natural and cultural realities.

The wild is unpredictable and sublime. It inspires respect and retains dignity. Neither measurable nor rational, wildness cannot be scientifically studied. It is a wholly cultural construction; and while nature plays a role in this construction, there is no such thing as innate or inborn wildness (though that is how it has often been historically understood). Scientists study animals' behavior, not their wildness; if their behavior is seen as wild, that is

cultural, not biological. It is therefore vital for those who study culture to analyze the relationship between humans and animals.

Frieda Knobloch argues that historians must reevaluate scientific documents from their own perspective because scientists themselves "refuse to acknowledge their epistemological limitations and formally exclude points of view that draw attention to the made-up-ness of science."[37] She further argues that the archives (both historical and scientific) are products of a "fiction of colonial knowledge gathering and control."[38] Thus to retell the story of rhinos from their own perspective is difficult not only because they do not speak for themselves but also because the archive itself refuses them a voice. Knobloch's assertion that historical science is a fiction draws further attention to the fact that certain places and animals are labeled "wild" for reasons beyond the natural. Ideas about animals reflect ideas about the places in which they live. Constructions of foreign landscapes are entangled in perceptions of other cultures as well as other natures.

Wildness, then, is constructed out of the unseen or, as Thoreau would have it, "shadowy" truths about nature. Through the rhinoceros, Americans could construct wildness as a truly sublime, exotic Other. Equating the rhinoceros with the ultimate wild, savage beast, Americans temporally and spatially displaced real wildness. They made wildness an abstract ideology rather than a material reality.

If Cronon's idea of wilderness as a place can be transposed onto wildness in animals, it says something more about wildness as a product of the past and of the mythic. Thus the wildness of animals lies not only in their association with the geography of wilderness but with an imagined inheritance of wildness from mythical and prehistoric beasts. Just as culture ascribed ancient time to wildness, the jungle—as a realm outside Western notions of civilization—was made sublimely wild. The wilderness is populated by beings who will forever remain beyond the margins of civilization. Thus it becomes obvious why nineteenth-century scientists and writers put such faith in firsthand accounts of the wilderness and its creatures. They were seen as one and the same, existing in a timeless mythic arena.

The Indian rhino is one of the few animals popularly known by its taxonomic nomenclature—*Rhinoceros unicornis*—while outside of a scientific context no one would ever refer to a polar bear as *Ursus arctos* or to a wolf as *Canis lupus.* The rhinoceros's Linnaean classification reflects its mythic associations, but in the cultural imagination it is the scientific name that prevails. So what is it about this animal that wards off anthropomorphism and sentimentality? It is its fulfillment of an American construction of wildness.

Because the rhinoceros does not live in the wilds of America, it has been easier for creators of culture to construct its image without regard to its actual behavior. It is always necessarily removed from its habitat and put in cages, dioramas, or on film. Removed spatially from the animal's native range, producers of Western cultural images have used the rhinoceros as a symbol of the sublime in nature. Most Americans have never interacted with a rhinoceros; there are no folk narratives of the rhino.[39] Representations of the rhinoceros, whether scientific or popular or even animatronic, are highly constructed images. If in today's Animal Kingdom theme park uncaged rhinos can peacefully coexist with tourists, is it culture or nature that has changed? Perhaps a little of both.

Notes

1. Stephen M. Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America* (Boulder, Colo., 1992); Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

2. *New-York Mirror,* 15 September 1838.

3. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York, 1996), 79.

4. Ibid.

5. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, 1967); Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven, 1991).

6. John Burrough to Marmaduke Burrough, 14 May 1831, shelfmark C0400, Box 1, Folder 10, Marmaduke Burrough Papers, Princeton University Library Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton, N.J.

7. Elizabeth Hanson, *Animal Attractions: Nature on Display in American Zoos* (Princeton, 2002); Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore, 2002).

8. Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987).

9. *Saturday Evening Post,* 31 January 1824.

10. Ibid.

11. *Appleton's Journal: A Magazine of General Literature,* 26 July 1873, 118.

12. *Saturday Evening Post,* September 1830.

13. Andrew Smith, *Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa* (London, 1838), quoted here from an excerpt printed in the *New York Mirror,* 15 September 1838.

14. Pliny the Elder, *The Historie of the World: Commonly called, The Natural Historie of C. Plinius Secundus,* trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1601), bk. 8, chap.

20, quoted here from the digital edition at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/holland/pliny8.html.

15. Ibid., bk. 8, chap. 1.

16. By contrast, elephants "understand the language of that country wherein they are bred, they do whatsoever they are commaunded, they remember what duties they be taught, and withall take a pleasure and delight both in love and also in glorie" (ibid.).

17. "Natural History: The One-Horned Rhinoceros of India," *Mechanics' & Farmers' Magazine of Useful Knowledge* 1.2 (15 July 1830): 50.

18. *Saturday Evening Post,* 29 May 1830.

19. "Natural History: The One-Horned Rhinoceros of India."

20. David Carlyon, *Dan Rice: The Most Famous Man You've Never Heard Of* (New York, 2001), 227–28.

21. Ibid.

22. Examples of such scholarship include Richard White's discussion of salmon in *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York, 1995); and Jon T. Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven, 2004).

23. Phoebe George Bradford, entry dated 12 May 1834, in *Phoebe George Bradford Diaries,* ed. W. Emerson Wilson (Wilmington, Del., 1975), 137, quoted here from the *North American Women's Letters and Diaries,* www.alexanderstreet4.com/cgi-bin/asp/nawld/getdoc.pl?/projects/artfla/databases/asp/nawld/fulltext/IMAGE/.6074.

24. T. H. Clarke, *The Rhinoceros from Dürer to Stubbs, 1515–1799* (London, 1986).

25. Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore, 2002), 93–97. See also Glynnis Ridley, *Clara's Grand Tour: Travels with a Rhinoceros in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York, 2004).

26. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves,* 94.

27. Ibid., 95.

28. John Berger argues that through the gaze, human-animal interaction is dynamically changed. Speaking of animals in captivity, Berger remarks that when an animal looks directly at the human, it interrupts the foundation of the zoo experience. The zoo is, he writes, "a monument to the impossibility of such encounters" ("Why Look at Animals?" in *About Looking* [London: Writers and Readers, 1980], 22). The gaze of Cuvier's rhinoceros may reflect a longing or an appreciation for a unique human-animal relationship, while Buffon's rhinoceros implies an aesthetic of the wild as separate from intimate interaction with the human world.

29. Hanson, *Animal Attractions.*

30. Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts.*

31. *Major Essays of Henry David Thoreau,* ed. Richard Dillman (New York, 2001), 180.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Matt Cartmill, *A View to Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).

36. Jennifer Price uses the term "Place Apart" to indicate the American perception of Nature as something outside the realm of culture (see Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* [New York, 1999]).

37. Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 154.

38. Ibid., 151.

39. While I take a leap here from nineteenth-century representations to mid-twentieth-century ones, there is a literature on the rhinoceros throughout these decades. The travels of Theodore Roosevelt and others, films by Martin and Osa Johnson, and new methods of exhibition in museums and zoos have contributed to the image we retain today. Though not discussed here, these sources are rooted in nineteenth-century imagery and contribute to the idea of the rhinoceros as sublimely and inexplicably wild. For more on this topic, see Kelly Enright, *Rhinoceros* (London, 2008).