Richard D. ALTICK
The Shows of London Harvard 1978

only the Head[!]; yet she hath all her senses to Admiration, and Discourses, Reads very well, Sings, Whistles, and all very pleasant to hear."[10]

Thus, too, Sir Hans Sloane studied the animals at Bartholomew Fair and sent a draftsman to record their physical characteristics. But the most extensive illustration of the overlapping of the world of the Royal Society and that of Bartholomew Fair, and of the fact that all things then were grist for scientific pondering, is found in the many volumes of the society's *Philosophical Transactions*. Few of the freaks, human and subhuman, exhibited in London between 1665 and 1800 go unmentioned in those grave and lively pages.* Sometimes it was there, or at the society's meetings, that a new marvel was first heralded, before it went on show. Shortly after a letter describing them was read before the Royal Society (12 May 1708), Helena and Judith, the phenomenal seven-year-old Hungarian sisters, went on display at the Angel, Cornhill. These were Siamese twins, although the term would not be invented until another such pair, actually coming from Siam, were the sensation of London in 1829. "One of the greatest Wonders in Nature that ever was seen," ran the publicity, "being Born with their Backs fastn'd to each other, and the Passages of their Bodies are both one way. These children are very Handsome and Lusty, and Talk three different Languages. . . . Those who see them, may very well say, they have seen a Miracle, which may pass for the 8th Wonder of the World."[11] The sight, as Swift remarked a month after the twins went on display, "causes a great many speculations; and raises abundance of questions in divinity, law, and physic."[12] Few of those questions occurred to the ordinary sensation seekers who crowded into the Angel, but the philosophical and scientific implications of many such exhibitions were reason enough why savants joined servants in visiting the shows and, no doubt, gazed slack-jawed with the best of them.

The demand for human and animal freaks kept well abreast of the increasing supply.† The ships that brought botanical specimens to Petiver and Sloane also had as cargo a colorful variety of birds, animals, reptiles, and sea creatures—some ferocious, some mighty in size, some distinguished by singular physical attributes or habits, but all possessed of the glamor of distance, tangible living evidence of the still largely mysterious regions to which English explorers and traders now were penetrating. One of the huge volumes of handbills, prints, and newspaper clippings relating to London exhibitions that were assembled by the antiquarian Daniel Lysons is encyclopedic on the subject of living creatures alone: elephants, tigers, lions, rhinoceroses, orangutans, dromedaries, American elk, buffalo, beavers, bears, hippopotamuses, zebras, chimpanzees, cassowaries, ostriches, pelicans, black swans, vultures, electric eels, grampuses, dogfish, crocodiles, porpoises, sea hogs, whales—the list is almost as long as the whole roster of the then known animal kingdom.

Of all these importations, the one that most excited Restoration London was "the strange Beast called the Rynnoceros." Evelyn, like most of the learned, identified the breed with the fabled unicorn, although the reality somewhat belied the myth, for "it more ressembled a huge enormous Swine, than any other Beast amongst us."[13] Arriving aboard an East Indiaman in August 1684, the "Rhinincerous" (the spelling presented insuperable difficulties to contemporary pens) was valued at £2,000—an impressive indication of its worth as a commercial showpiece. The Rhinenceras was immediately put up for sale and was "bought for £2320 by Mr. Langley one of those that bought Mr. Sadlers well at Islington & in a day or two will be seen in Bartholomew faire." But Mr. Langley was unable to raise the money and lost his £500 deposit; whereupon the owners took back their Rhinonceros and put it up for resale, "but noe person bid a farthing soe lyes upon their hands." By the end of September the Rhynonceros was at the Belle Sauvage inn at the foot of Ludgate Hill, where the proprietor was said to take in £15 a day at a price of 12d. for a look and 2s. for a ride. The Rhynoceros continued to attract crowds until its premature death two years later (September 1686); "the severall proprietors haveing Ensured £1200 on her life the Ensurers are catched for much money."[14]

Apart from its putative identification with a legendary animal, the rhino's value derived from its sheer size, ugliness, and, of course, rarity. In the days before scientific nomenclature and taxonomy were established or had descended to the common understanding, much of the charm of these show beasts resided in the aura of mystery or romance in which the showmen diligently wrapped them. Whatever scientific rigor the advertisements lacked was often atoned for by a pleasing touch of poetry. In the records are found such creatures as "a Murino dear, one of the seven sleepers," "the Noble Histix from the West Indies," and "the little Whifler, admired for his

* Thus providing the showmen with valuable publicity in the form of borrowed scientific prestige. Another handbill in the BL collection cited previously (551.d.18) announced "a fresh, lively Country Lad, just come from Suffolk, who is cover'd all over his Body with Bristles like a Hedge Hog, as hard as Horn, which shoot off Yearly." It went on to refer to "the PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS, (Numb. 424, Pag. 299), publish'd by the ROYAL SOCIETY, under the Direction of Sir HANS SLOANE, and other eminent Men of all Nations, where they will find a full and particular Account of this surprising Lad, from the Time of his Birth. But though most People are acquainted with the Credit of the PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS, yet, as many are not furnish'd with them, we think it proper to transcribe the following Lines for their Satisfaction; by which it will appear to every one, that the various Things expos'd for many Years past (under the title of Curiosities) have all been far inferior to the Lad we are speaking of." Actually, the short excerpt given does not make any explicit comparisons; it merely remarks that "it is not easy to think of any Sort of Skin or natural Integument that exactly resembled it."

† Indeed, on at least one occasion there was a serious oversupply. Sir Edmund Verney, a Royalist soldier and M.P., wrote to his son in 1636: "A merchant of lundon wrote to a factor of his beyoand sea, desired him by the next shipp to send him 2 or 3 Apes; he forgot the r, and then it was 203 Apes. His factor has sent him fower scoare, and sayes hee shall have the rest by the next shipp, conceiving the merchant had sent for two hundred and three apes; if yo[u]rself or frends will buy any to breede on, you could never have had such a chance as now." (*Memoirs of the Verney Family during the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Frances P. Verney and Margaret M. Verney, 2nd ed., London, 1907, I, 82.)

EXETER CHANGE

extraordinary Scent."[15] In 1703, the Coach and Horses tavern, Charing Cross, displayed

> Two Kaamas's, Male and Female, lately arrived from the Bear-Bishes; being the strangest Creatures that ever was seen alive in Europe; being as tame as a Lamb, having a Trunk like an Elephant, Teeth like a Christian, and Eyes like a Rhinoceros; Ears with a white Furr round them like Sable, Neck and Main like a Horse, and Skin as thick as a Bouffler [buffalo?], a Voice like a Bird, stranger Feet than any Creature that ever has been seen; live as well in Water as on Land.[16]

A decade later, at the Duke of Marlborough's Head, Fleet Street, an especially busy showplace, one could view a "noble and majestick Lion" from Barbary and a younger specimen from Algiers, "so wonderful tame that any Person may handle him as well as his Keeper"; a "noble Panther, lately brought from Egypt, one of the beautifullest Creatures in the World for variety of Spots of divers Colours," and a "noble Pelican or Vulture, lately arriv'd from America . . . the Head like a Griffin, Neck like a Swan."[17]

The familiar hypothesis of the "missing link"—the as yet unidentified occupant of the twilight zone between human beings and the rest of the animal world—was recurrently invoked when creatures suitable for the role turned up. There was, for example, the "Man Teger, lately brought from the East Indies, a most strange and wonderful Creature, the like never seen before in England, it being of Seven several Colours, from the Head downwards resembling a Man, its fore parts clear, and his hinder parts all Hairy; having a long Head of Hair, and Teeth two or three Inches long; taking a Glass of Ale in his hand like a Christian, Drinks it, also plays at Quarter Staff."[18] This probably was a West African baboon. Another candidate for the role of neither-man-nor-beast was the "little Black Hairy Pigmey, bred in the Desarts of Arabia," who was shown at the White Horse inn, Fleet Street, early in the century. Two feet high, with "a Natural Ruff of Hair about his Face," he was said to walk upright, drink a glass of ale or wine, and do "several other things to admiration."[19] The "pigmey" was also, in all likelihood, a member of the monkey family. Toward the end of the century was displayed still another "monster"—this one from "Mount Tibet"—which was said to "approach the Human Species nearer than any hitherto exhibited, and is supposed to be the long lost link between the Human and Brute Creation." A quadruped five feet high, it was unknown to Buffon, but its great beauty and sagacity, "affability, friendship, and good-nature" had led the natives to call it "The Child of the Sky" or "Wonder of the East."[20] Perhaps it was the Abominable Snowman?

Once in a while a specimen of a creature much valued for its exhibition potential came up the river under its own power. In 1702 the skeleton of a whale caught in the Thames was exhibited in a field near King Street, Bloomsbury; the head alone was alleged to weigh forty hundredweight.[21] A decade later one could visit, on a barge near Blackfriars, a "Royal Parmacitty Whale taken in the Thames . . . the noblest Fish ever seen in England." When it got inconveniently ripe, it was auctioned off and demolished, and Thoresby, visiting its skeleton on the Isle of Dogs, measured it at forty-eight yards long and thirty-five round.[22] Still another specimen, displayed sometime in the 1730s, was billed as "the largest Thames-Monster, or miraculous man-eater, that was ever in the World."[23]

Except for the Tower of London, there was no fixed site for the public display of whole menageries until the 1770s, when Exeter Change began to be associated in Londoners' minds with the idea of wild animals on show.* The building has been erected in the last quarter of the seventeenth century with materials salvaged from old Exeter House, which had stood on the same site in the Strand.[24] (The area is now covered by Burleigh Street and the Strand Palace Hotel.) On the ground floor, flanking an arcade which incorporated the Strand footway, was a double line of forty-eight stalls occupied at first by hosiers, milliners, seamsters, and the like. Slowly the nature of the goods and services offered changed. So-called toy shops eventually predominated—mini-boutiques for the sale of fans, china, lacquer ware, tea, silks, brocades, watches, snuff boxes, cutlery, purses, heads of canes, trinkets and baubles of a thousand kinds. These shops, by the nature of their trade, became informal meeting places for the fashionable and idle of both sexes; it was there, for example, that members of Miss Arabella Fermor's set, in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, doubtless went for their hair-styling equipment. While the extravagantly coiffeured habitués of Exeter Change gossiped, flirted, and haggled over the costly trifles on display, the large well-lighted room above housed a long succession of exhibitions,† among them Mrs. Mills's waxwork show, a sixteen-foot-high bed adorned with "the most beautiful feathers of divers Colours woven into a Stuff," architectural models, and exhibitions of art and miscellaneous objects prior to sale by auction. One such exhibition included an electrifying machine, a

* Joshua Brookes had a "vivarium" with a menagerie adjacent to his anatomical museum near Oxford Street, but this of course was not public except insofar as passersby could peer through the iron gate at the animals chained to pieces of Gibraltar rock. The night the nearby Pantheon burned down (16 January 1792), "the heat was so violent . . . that his doors and sash-frames were blistered, and the eagle, hawks, raccoons, foxes, and other animals, terrified by the scene and incommoded by the heat, were panting and endeavouring to break their chains. The mob assembled, and fancying that the poor animals were roasting alive, kept up an alarming yell, and threatened to pull the house about his ears." (*Reminiscences of Henry Angelo*, London, 1904, I, 72–73.) Brookes's brother at one time kept a menagerie at 242 Piccadilly, and it was from him that the anatomist got some of his specimens.

† Thus inaugurating an association between exhibitions and "bazaars" which would persist into the mid-Victorian period. More will be said about this later (Chapter 30).

Cremona violin, "a fine groupe of heads drawn with a red-hot poker," and Indian bows and arrows—a sufficient microcosm of eighteenth-century taste.

Some time in the 1770s Exeter Change was taken over by a longtime tenant, a businessman named Thomas Clark who had expanded his stick shop to include cutlery and other hardware and a complete line of equipment for military and naval officers en route to their foreign stations. Eventually he accumulated a fortune of £300,000 and paid the then enormous sum of £7,000 a year in income tax; but never was he known to spend more than a shilling for dinner.[25] Clark put the multipurpose hall to a new use, as a theatre for the popular one-man "entertainments" (songs and recitations) of the elder Charles Dibdin, the composer and dramatist. Subsequently, under Dibdin's management (1776–1781), the hall was occupied by a puppet acting company, the Patagonian Theatre, which had originated in Dublin and during its long London run performed some forty plays, half of which, chiefly ballad operas, were adapted by Dibdin from the human theatre.

From time to time in these years, probably between Dibdin's and the Patagonian puppets' seasonal engagements, the large room at Exeter Change was the London headquarters of the small traveling menagerie belonging to Gilbert Pidcock, who took it to the London fairs and into the provinces during the summer. It was during one of the earliest years of this arrangement that George Stubbs painted a picture, made from sketches at Pidcock's, of an Indian rhinoceros and another of a baboon and an albino macaque monkey, both for John Hunter, who obtained pictures of animals of which he was unable to acquire actual specimens.[26] On another occasion, according to a contemporary anecdote, Stubbs got word at 10 P.M. that there was a dead tiger at Pidcock's which he could buy for a song. "His coat was hurried on, and he flew towards the well-known place and presently entered the den where the dead animal lay extended; this was a precious moment; three guineas were given the attendant, and the body was instantly conveyed to the painter's habitation, where in the place set apart for his muscular pursuits, Mr. S[tubbs] spent the rest of the night carbonading the once tremendous tyrant of the jungle."[27]

At some point, Clark had himself become a dealer in wild animals and birds. In 1793 Pidcock bought Clark's stock to add to his own. The exhibits at this moment, housed in rooms whose walls were painted with appropriate scenery, included a "unicorn" (rhinoceros), a zebra, a kangaroo from Botany Bay, an African ram, a "Sagittaire [secretary] bird that kills the snakes," a "Fiery Lynx," and a "ravenous wolf from Algiers," along with such timely but unrelated items as a "French Beheading Machine." Four years later they were joined by elephants and tigers.[28]

The Exeter Change menagerie never had any overtones of the sideshow or the circus: the wild animals were there simply for their own sake, as examples of what might be seen in the jungle and on the veldt. But although exoticism was never to be underrated as a drawing card, showmen found domestic animals to be quite satisfactory exhibition material so long as they were either monstrous or talented. Presumably because pork, roasted on the spot, was the traditional *plat de la fête* at Bartholomew Fair, a gigantic hog was a standard attraction there, indeed the show's virtual emblem—"the Genius of Smithfield," as Henry Morley, the historian of the fair, called it.[29] Each successive specimen had more grandiose dimensions claimed for it. Early in the century a Buckinghamshire hog on show was ten feet long, thirteen hands (four feet four inches) high, and seven and a half feet in girth; in 1748 the current monarch was twelve feet long and weighed 120 stone; by 1779 either the progress of husbandry or an elastic measuring tape had elongated the newest specimen to fourteen feet. "When he rises from the ground for the spectators to see him, he roars in such a manner that his voice seems to mix, as it were, with the earth."[30] Nor were hogs the only gigantic farm animals to be shown. At the White Horse inn, late the "place where the great Elephant was seen," could be viewed a Lincolnshire ox nineteen hands (six feet four inches) high and four yards long; it had previously been shown at Cambridge University "with great Satisfaction to all that saw him." Later the same hostelry featured a Worcestershire mare that stood as tall as the ox.[31]

The anomalous, deformed, or superabundantly equipped animal was as commonplace in the London shows as it has been until recently at country fairs. Nature's mistakes and aberrations had a morbid attraction for a popular mind that was steeped in superstition and avid for crude shocks, even outright revulsion. Not that the educated mind was any less fascinated. In 1654 Evelyn recorded seeing a six-legged sheep, which "made use of five of them to walke," and, at the same show, a generously endowed goose "that had four legs, two Cropps, & as many Vents."[32] Early in the next century an advertisement called attention to a similarly equipped "strange Cock from Hamborough,

105–107, and William J. Smith, "A Museum for a Guinea," *Country Life*, 127 (1960), 494–95.

33. *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.n. "James Parkinson."

34. For the collection as it then was, see William Hone, *Hone's Every Day Book* (London, 1826–1827), II, cols. 987–91.

35. William Jerdan, *Men I Have Known* (London, 1866), p. 70.

36. *The Life of Thomas Holcroft, Written by Himself . . .* (London, 1925), II, 216–17.

37. Joseph Farington, *The Farington Diary*, ed. James Greig (New York, 1922–1928), III, 273.

38. There is a marked copy of the catalogue at BL.

39. Handbill, GL, Fairs collection.

40. *Boswell: The Ominous Years, 1774–1776*, ed. Charles Ryskamp and Frederick A. Pottle (New York, 1963), p. 111.

41. *Sophie in London*, p. 115.

42. *The Prelude* (1805 version), III, 651–68. (*The Prelude: A Parallel Text*, ed. J. C. Maxwell, Harmondsworth, 1971. All quotations from the poem are from this edition.)

3. MONSTER-MONGERS AND OTHER RETAILERS OF STRANGE SIGHTS

1. *The London Spy Compleat*, ed. Ralph Straus (London, 1924), p. 304.

2. J. P. Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London . . . to the Year 1700* (London, 1811), p. 210.

3. *The London Spy Compleat*, p. 176.

4. *Macaroni and Theatrical Magazine*, January 1773, clipping in EC, Gardens box.

5. *The Prelude* (1805 version), VII, 662–94. Compare Ned Ward's lengthy description of the fair as it was a century earlier (*The London Spy Compleat*, pp. 240–49, 251–69). Hundreds of handbills and newspaper clippings are collected in two scrapbooks which Henry Morley used for his history of Bartholomew Fair (n. 10 below): BL (C70.h.6 (2)) and GL (A.5.2.no.12).

6. Evelyn, III, 197–98.

7. Pepys, VIII, 326.

8. Ibid., VIII, 569.

9. *The Diary of Robert Hooke, 1672–1680*, ed. Henry W. Robinson and Walter Adams (London, 1935), pp. 5, 184, 309, 423, 208, 310.

10. Henry Morley, *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair* (London, 1880; rptd. Detroit, 1968), p. 189. For a ballad on this topic, see pp. 223–24.

11. Quoted in *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*, ed. Charles Kerby-Miller (New Haven, 1950), pp. 294–96. See the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*, 50, part 1 (1757), 311–22, for contemporary descriptions of the twins, who died at Presburg in 1723.

12. *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford, 1963), I, 82.

13. Evelyn, IV, 389.

14. Newdigate Newsletters, Folger Library. I am indebted to Professor John Harold Wilson for these notes.

15. Walter George Bell, *Fleet Street in Seven Centuries* (London, 1912), p. 541.

16. Advertisement in *Flying Post*, 6–9 February 1703, quoted in William Bragg Ewald, Jr., *The Newsmen of Queen Anne* (Oxford, 1956), p. 167.

17. Ibid.

18. John Ashton, *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne* (London, 1883; rptd. Detroit, 1968), p. 204.

19. Ibid., p. 203.

20. *Morning Herald and Advertiser*, 1793; clipping in EC, Exhibitions (Various) folder.

21. J. P. Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London during the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1808), p. 311.

22. Ashton, p. 202; *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby, F.R.S.*, ed. Joseph Hunter (London, 1830), II, 235.

23. J. Holden Macmichael, *The Story of Charing Cross and Its Immediate Neighbourhood* (London, 1906), p. 63.

24. Material on Exeter Change is scattered through books on eighteenth-century London. The present paragraph is based upon the extensive EC Exeter Change file.

25. Obituary, 9 May 1816, EC, Exeter Change file.

26. Basil Taylor, *Stubbs* (New York, 1971), p. 210 and note to plate 73.

27. Constance-Anne Parker, *Mr. Stubbs the Horse Painter* (London, 1971), p. 86.

28. Newspaper clippings, EC, Exeter Change file.

29. Morley, p. 358.

30. Ibid., pp. 279, 336, 358.

31. Ashton, p. 202.

32. Evelyn, III, 93.

33. Ashton, p. 191.

34. Clipping from *Daily Advertiser*, 1753; Lysons, II.

35. Quoted in Ruth Manning-Sanders, *The English Circus* (London, 1952), p. 23.

36. R. Toole Stott, *Circus and Allied Arts: A World Bibliography, 1500–1957* (Derby, 1958–1971), I, 30–31.

37. Clippings, EC, Exeter Change file.

38. Ashton, p. 191.

39. Macmichael, p. 66.

40. *Mirror*, 32 (1838), 441.

41. Lysons, II, 105; *Mirror*, 32 (1838), 441.

42. Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, enlarged ed. by J. Charles Cox (London, 1903), pp. 200–201.

43. Robert Southey, *Letters from England*, ed. Jack Simmons (London, 1951), p. 340.

44. Lysons, II, 86–90.

45. *Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill and L. F. Powell (Oxford, 1934–1950), IV, 373–74.

46. *Diary of Robert Hooke*, p. 309.

47. Bell, p. 541.

48. John Kobler, *The Reluctant Surgeon* (Garden City, N.Y., 1960), pp. 238–44; *Dictionary of National Biography*.

49. *Dictionary of National Biography*; Colin Clair, *Human Curiosities* (London, 1968), p. 35.

50. Ashton, pp. 205–206.

51. Taylor (cited n. 62 below), p. 64.

52. T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure* (Urbana, Ill., 1947), p. 777. I am indebted here to Professor Edwin W. Robbins.

53. Collection of advertisements, BL (551.d.18).

54. Ashton, p. 191.

55. Ibid., p. 190.

56. Morley, p. 248.

57. Collection of advertisements, BL (551.d.18).

58. Morley, pp. 248–49.

59. Ibid., p. 251.

60. Ibid., p. 253. One of the fullest contemporary sources of information on freaks on view in the last years of the seventeenth century and the first years of the eighteenth is a curious manuscript book (BL Sloane MS. 5246) entitled *A Short History of Human Prodigies and Monstrous Births, of Dwarfs, Sleepers, Giants, Strong Men, Hermaphrodites, Numerous Births, and Extream Old Age &c.* Compiled by one James Paris du Plessis, who claimed to have been a servant of Samuel Pepys, it is composed of Du Plessis's descriptions, illustrated by crude colored sketches, of freaks he saw in London, and clippings from the newspapers of 1731–1733. In his poverty-stricken old age, Du Plessis tendered the book to Sir Hans Sloane, who gave him a guinea for it.