

Parliament “thought to limit or take away the *Remora* of his negative voice, which like to that little pest at Sea, took upon it to arrest and stopp the Common-wealth steering under full saile to a Reformation” (*CPW* 3: 501). The simile brings into play the crucial aspects of the symbolic remora, triviality and delusion. The tyrant Charles believes his objection sufficient to deflect a whole people from their course; the heroic Parliament exposes that belief as arrant superstition.

 Prolusion 6 (*CW* 12: 236; *CPW* 1: 281)
Defensio Secunda (*CW* 8: 60; *CPW* 4: 582)

RHINOCEROS

“We are now to discourse of the second wonder in nature,” announces Edward Topsell at the beginning of his entry on the rhinoceros.³¹ It is “a Beast every way admirable, both for the outward shape, quantity, and greatness, and also for the inward courage, disposition and mildeness” (460).³² Topsell speaks for most Europeans of his day. While the rhinoceros receives due attention in the works of ancient authorities, it evokes extravagant admiration in the Renaissance, a change in status for which Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut is undoubtedly responsible. The nature of Milton’s references to the rhinoceros, including the fact that there are only two, suggests that he may not share the general admiration.

Aristotle reports that the horned “Indian ass” is said to have a solid hoof (*PA* 218).³³ Strabo is particularly interested in the horn, which, he says, the rhinoceros uses as a weapon in the way a boar uses its tusks (7: 334).³⁴ Pliny observes that at the games of Pompey the Great (55 BCE), “as many times else, was shewed a Rhinoceros, with one horne and no more, and the same in his snout or muzzle” (Holland 1.205; *NH* 3: 52).³⁵ Strabo (7: 334), Pliny (*NH* 3: 52), and Aelian (3: 376–78) recount instances of enmity between the elephant and the rhinoceros, including the rhinoceros’s practice of sharpening its horn on rocks to prepare for combat.³⁶ The rhinoceros that Aristotle, Strabo, Pliny, and Aelian speak of is undoubtedly the Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), which has a single horn, as does the Javan rhinoceros (*R. sondaicus*). The two species of African rhinoceros, Black (*Diceros bicornis*) and White (*Ceratotherium simum*), have two horns (Macdonald 476).³⁷ There is some debate about whether Martial saw an African animal when, in his epigrams on the spectacles at the Colosseum under the Emperor Titus, he describes a rhinoceros “*cornu gemino*” tossing a bear (1: 28).³⁸ Thomas May faithfully translates the phrase in his 1629 edition of Martial’s epigrams:

Whilst long the fearefull Keepers did provoke
 Th’Rhinoceros, ere he his anger tooke,
 They did despaire th’expected fight t’obtaine;
 At last his usuall rage return’d againe;
 For with his double horne he tost a Beare
 As high as Buls stuff’d Bals have tossed there.
 (sig. B6^{r-v})

In addition to these relatively sober accounts of what is recognizably the rhinoceros, Pliny and Aelian include in their natural histories highly colored accounts of beasts called, respectively, “monoceros” and “cartazonus.” In these beasts, modern editors speculate, we can perceive the distorted outlines of the rhinoceros. For centuries, Pliny’s “monoceros” provided confused confirmation of the story of the unicorn. His account of the “monoceros” occurs in a passage that begins with a description of the Indian ox with one horn and solid hoofs (possibly, the Loeb editors suggest, a blurring of the antelope and the rhinoceros) and the *axis* (probably the Indian spotted deer) (NH 3: 56n^a and n^b). Then Pliny proceeds to describe the fearsome monoceros:

But the most fell and furious beast of all other, is the Licorne or Monoceros: his bodie resembleth an horse, his head a stagge, his feet an Elephant, his taile a bore; he loweth after an hideous manner; one black horn he hath in the mids of his forehead, bearing out two cubits in length: by report, this wild beast cannot possibly be caught alive. (Holland 1.206; NH 3: 56)

Aelian’s similar description of the cartazonus adds the detail that the horn is not smooth but has spirals (3: 288–90).³⁹

The Bible seems at least partially to confirm classical accounts of the monoceros or unicorn. Job 39 implies that the beast is untameable, as God demands of Job: “Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him?” (10–11).⁴⁰ A Geneva gloss explains: “Is it possible to make the vnicorn tame? signifying that if man can not rule a creature, that it is much more impossible t[hat] he shulde appoint the wisdome of God, whereby he gouerneth all the worlde.” The single horn is the subject of Psalm 92.10, a verse that has particular significance for Christian interpretations of the unicorn: “But my horn shalt thou exalt like *the horn of* an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil.”⁴¹ At Luke 1.68–69, Zacharias (after having been rendered speechless by a vision in the temple) suddenly begins to prophesy, associating the horn with the Messiah: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.” Isidore of Seville declares that the rhinoceros, monoceros, and unicorn are the same beast (97). It cannot be captured alive by a hunter, he states, but it will lay its head in a young virgin’s lap and allow itself to be taken (97). Despite Isidore’s assertion that all three names signify the same creature, medieval bestiaries seem to attempt some distinctions. Elaborated versions of the monoceros are as close as they get to representing the actual rhinoceros (George and Yapp 88).⁴² The (legendary) unicorn—which, however, borrows a few features of the monoceros—they call “unicornis” or “rhinoceros” (George and Yapp 88), identifying it with Christ. They observe, for instance, that its single horn signifies “Christ’s saying, reported in John’s gospel . . . ‘I and the father are one’” (Baxter 46). The young virgin who alone can tame the unicorn is, of course, Mary.

In the history of early modern attempts to disentangle the rhinoceros and the legendary unicorn, Dürer’s role is crucial. Wide dissemination of his woodcut ended attempts to link the two beasts. Dürer had not seen a living rhinoceros, nor even a stuffed one, when he made the drawing upon which the woodcut was

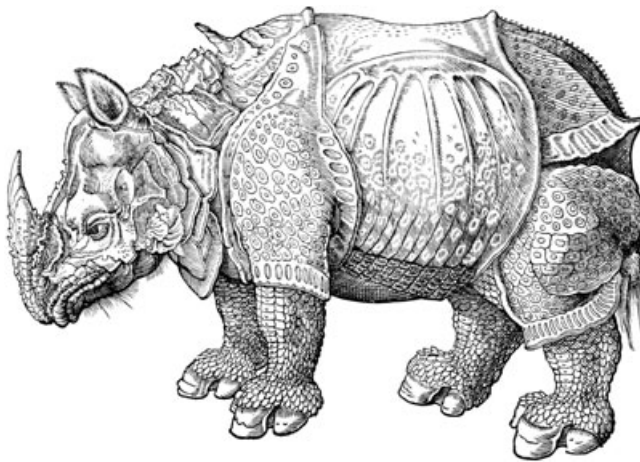


Fig. 7: “De Rhinocerote,” from Gesner, *De Quadrupedibus Viviparis*, p. 953. Reproduced by permission of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter.

based.⁴³ He copied the drawing that a Portuguese artist had made in 1515 of a live rhinoceros. The rhinoceros itself, intended as a gift to Pope Leo X, perished on the voyage to Rome from Lisbon; its body was preserved (Cole 1: 339). Dürer’s woodcut achieved “rapid success,” for as F. J. Cole remarks, “it envisages the distinctive congruity of the animal better than later ones executed from the life” (1: 339). Indeed, even when images based on actual observation of a living rhinoceros became available in the later part of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, they were often rejected in favor of Dürer’s beautiful and familiar image; it was copied, and those copies themselves copied, innumerable times.⁴⁴ The existence of genetic markers, so to speak, makes descendants of Dürer’s rhinoceros easy to trace. Dürer apparently knew that some classical authorities (e.g., Martial) had spoken of the rhinoceros’s *two* horns, although no evidence for two *nasal* horns existed. Cole speculates that Dürer, “anxious that his figure should not be found wanting in so striking a feature, ventured to invent an inconspicuous second horn on the withers” (1: 340). This horn, and the beast’s appearance of wearing armor, are the marks of the beasts descended from Dürer’s original. It dominates the early modern conception of the rhinoceros for over two hundred years, from its first splendid reproduction in Gesner’s *De Quadrupedibus Viviparis*, published in 1551 (see Fig. 7), to its final bedraggled appearance in a cheap compilation of animal descriptions in the mid-eighteenth century (Cole 1: 343).⁴⁵ “The armed rhinoceros” that Macbeth would rather face than Banquo’s ghost is no doubt one of Dürer’s beasts (*Macbeth* 3.4.100). Another one is engraved in Henry Peacham’s emblem, “Non invicta recedo,” borrowed from Jovius and addressed to Peacham’s “Scholler, Mr. Hannibal Baskerville.” The verses declare that the rhinoceros either conquers the elephant (q.v.) or is slain by him: “For never vanquisht, he returns againe.” So should a student “take courage, and treade vnder foote dispaire / . . . And sooner leaue, your bodie in the place, / Then back returne, vnletter’d with disgrace” (Peacham 106).

Milton pairs the rhinoceros and the elephant in Prolusion 6, but it is not to hark back to the combat between them, as Du Bartas does in *La Sepmaine* (251).⁴⁶

Rather, it is to draw attention to the phallic shape of horn and tusks. I commend a large, oily snipe to you, Milton says to his “banquet” guests (themselves figured as the dishes to be served):

rostro eousque praelongo & eduro, ut impune possit cum Elephante
aut Rhinocerote certamen ingredi; eam autem in hunc diem
commode obtruncavimus, propterea quod prægrandium Simiorum
more incepit puellis insidiari, & vim inferre mulieribus. (CW 12: 236)

with such a long and horny beak that it could attack an elephant or
a rhinoceros with impunity; but we have had it killed for to-day, just
at the right moment since it was beginning to be a danger to young
girls and to attack women, like the large apes. (CPW 1: 281)

The Tradescants exhibited both what they call a “Monoceros horne” and a “horn, jaw-bone. back-bone” of “The Rhinoceros” (Tradescant 7). Several rhinoceros horns from their original collection are still extant, including one now believed to be the smaller horn of the African rhinoceros (Davies, “Zoological” 348).

There was no live rhinoceros in England during Milton’s lifetime. In October, 1684, John Evelyn and William Godolphin went to Ludgate Hill to see the young female “Rhinoceros (or Unicorn)” exhibited there—“the first that I suppose was ever brought into England,” remarks Evelyn (4: 389). “She belonged to Certaine *E. Indian Merchants*,” he records (4: 390); for twelve pence one could view her, for two shillings, ride her (4: 390n1). Evelyn finds her more like “a huge enormous Swine, than any other Beast amongst us,” and notes particularly the position of her small eyes,⁴⁷ her thick legs, the “extraordinary bulke and Circumference of her body,” and her “set of most dreadfull teeth” (4: 389).⁴⁸ The horn on her nose, he states, “was but newly Sprowting, & hardly shaped to any considerable point” (4: 390). He marvels most, however, at her skin, his description confirming the influence of Dürer’s engraving.⁴⁹ Her skin “hung downe on her hanches, both behind and before to her knees, loose like so much Coach leather . . . so as one might take up this, as one would do a Cloake or horse-Cloth to a greate depth, it adhering onely at the upper parts: & these lappets of stiff skin, began to be studded with impenetrable Scales, like a Target of coate or maile, loricated like Armor, much after the manner this Animal is usualy depicted” (4: 390).

When Milton mentions the rhinoceros in *Defensio Secunda*, it is to deny that he resembles one. In terms of his appearance, he says, he is able to confound liars: “nè quis, (quod Hispanorum vulgus de hæreticis, quos vocant, plus nimio Sacerdotibus suis credulum opinatur) me fortè Cynocephalum quempiam, aut Rhinocerotam esse putet, dicam” (CW 8: 60; “yet speak I shall . . . lest anyone think me to be perhaps a dog-headed ape or a rhinoceros, as the rabble in Spain, too credulous of their priests, believe to be true of heretics, as they call them” [CPW 4: 582]).⁵⁰ Edmund Gayton’s *Pleasant Notes upon Don Quixot* (1654) supports Milton’s allegation, as Kester Svendsen observes (272n2).⁵¹ The Spanish theater, says Gayton, “is much of it Legend, or some fictions upon Hereticks, and as they did render their persons and visages to be most horrid, odious, and inhumane, to the People of their Countrey, so they never bring any of these sects upon the stage, but they have a Hell, furies, and strange torments provided for them” (272). This does not, however, explain why a rhinoceros comes to Milton’s mind as an

example of monstrous deformity. Its pairing with the “Cynocephalum,” a combination of ape (q.v.), dog (q.v.), and human, may suggest an answer, however.⁵² Was Milton thinking not of the much-loved beast portrayed by Dürer but of the composite monster of Pliny, with its horse’s body, stag’s head, elephant’s feet, and boar’s tail? Pliny’s beast embodies precisely the problem Milton is addressing; that is, the monoceros is to the rhinoceros as “More’s” portrait of Milton is to the actual John Milton, the distorted product of rumors and lies, evidence of the writer’s ignorance.

Of Reformation (CPW 1: 543, 591)
The Likeliest Means (CPW 7: 297)

ROOK

Unlike the more solitary raven and crow, the rook is a sociable corvid, though it keeps bad company in Milton’s works.⁵³ *Corvus frugilegus* nests in tree-top colonies, indulging in “ [n]oisy, communal flight displays” (Burton, *Field Guide* 225). John Caius speculates that the rook got its name “from the Latin *rauce* and its harsh cry” (Raven 144; see Caius 22).⁵⁴ Aristotle lists it among grub eaters (*HA* 11: 102), which is accurate, although it also eats grain. Its pace is usually described as “sedate,” as it follows behind a plough looking for leatherjackets and worms (Burton, *Field Guide* 225; Cady and Hume 252). Whether, as Caius puts it, the rook “is more useful to man while devouring worms that damage the crops or useless while feeding upon grain” has still not been resolved (see Caius 22; Raven 144).⁵⁵ Early modern opinion leaned toward the latter view; as Keith Thomas notes, parish officials were periodically required by Parliament to exterminate rooks and other fowl that were seen as a menace to crops (274).⁵⁶ By the late sixteenth century, the rook’s name had become synonymous with cheating or swindling.⁵⁷ In Dekker, Ford, and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton*, a list of creatures typically acting as familiars is followed by Dog’s explanation to Young Banks: whenever you gamble, the devil “bets upon thy part; / Although thou lose, yet he will gain by thee.” Young Banks replies: “Ay? Then he comes in the shape of a rook” (5.1.139–41).

Milton’s three references to the rook are aimed at the prelates, evoking the term’s association with deception and cheating not unaccompanied by force. In *Of Reformation*, he deftly sketches the prelates as a parliament of unholy fowls.⁵⁸ Did bishops of old do as current bishops do, he asks sarcastically, that is, “goe about circl’d with a band of rooking Officials, with cloke bagges full of Citations, and Processes to be serv’d by a corporalty of griffonlike Promooters, and Apparitors?” (CPW 1: 543). Later in *Of Reformation*, turning to the ecclesiastical courts, he condemns the prostitution of “Divine Ministeries,” in which there can be no intercourse between redeeming grace and submissive penitence “without the truce of perishing Coine, and the Butcherly execution of Tormentors, Rooks, and Rakeshames sold to lucre” (CPW 1: 591). The rook is once again associated with greedy materiality when Milton denounces those who claim a “divine right” to tithe the population (CPW 7: 296). In *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means To*