THE WILD THINGS

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the creation of several iconic personalities, who because of their presumed abilities to freely and successfully cross back and forth between the dichotomous worlds of wilderness and civilization, were able to demonstrate their heroics to the public largely through surrogates of the wilderness; captive wild animals, especially those deemed most dangerous. Using various media and venues these people were able to become popular personalities for an increasingly urban population with little or no direct contact with what was deemed “wilderness.” Each of the iconic personalities was very much in tune with the prevailing public perceptions surrounding wilderness and wild animals. Along with their publicists and collaborators they created and often internalized images that reflected the values, unique talents, and backgrounds of contemporary popular heroes, both real and fictional. This coincides with William Cronin’s theory that wilderness “is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in history.”

By examining in depth the creation, careers, and legacies of three of these iconic heroes; Isaac Van Amburgh, Frank Buck and Clyde Beatty, it becomes evident how they paved the way for their many successors, most notably Marlin Perkins, Gunther-Gebel Williams, Jack Hanna and Steve Irwin.

Shifts in public perception of the increasingly threatened wild and the growing controversy over the practice of keeping wild animals in captivity have recast many of these former heroes into villains. Yet for much of the public the allure of individuals able to defy the real or imagined dangers of the wild remains fascinating. Today, in a culture fixated with celebrities and stars, perhaps this willingness to create an image, becoming the hero of children
and the envy of adults, is the only way to successfully purvey a message of habitat preservation, respect for the environment, and the importance of “green” practices.
To my Parents
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CHAPTER 1.
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the creation of several iconic personalities, who because of their presumed abilities to freely and successfully cross back and forth over the imagined border between the dichotomous worlds of wilderness and civilization, were able to demonstrate their heroics to the public largely through surrogates of the wilderness; captive wild animals, especially those deemed most dangerous. Using the stage, traveling menageries, circuses, public zoos, natural history museums, books, newspapers, periodicals, radio, motion pictures, comic books, lectures and television, these people who captured, trained, exhibited, wrote about, studied, or attempted to preserve wild animals were able to become popular personalities for an increasingly urban population with little or no direct contact with what was deemed “wilderness.” Each of the iconic personalities was very much in tune with the prevailing media and public perceptions surrounding wilderness and wild animals. Along with their publicists and collaborators they created and often internalized images that reflected the values, unique talents, and backgrounds of contemporary popular heroes, both real and fictional. As William Cronon writes, Wilderness is,

Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history. . . . As we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires (Cronon UtneReader.com).

By examining in depth the creation, careers, and legacies of three of these iconic heroes; Isaac Van Amburgh, Frank Buck and Clyde Beatty, it becomes evident how they paved the way for their many successors, most notably Marlin Perkins, Gunther Gebel-Williams, Jack Hanna, and Steve Irwin. All of these personalities, the techniques they used to gain fame, and their exploitation of captive wild animals—the term itself an oxymoron to many critics—came under scrutiny both during their lifetimes and as concepts of wilderness changed. Shifts in the public’s perception of the increasingly threatened wild and the growing controversy over the practice of keeping wild animals in captivity have recast many
of these former heroes as villains. Yet for much of the public the allure of individuals able to defy the real or imagined dangers of the wild and its denizens remains fascinating, and they, just as much as the animals they associated with, are “The Wild Things.”

**Concepts and Influences**

The greatest influence on the creation of these icons was the attraction of exotic wild animals as representatives of the separation between wilderness and an urbanized public. Initially Van Amburgh’s ability to successfully enter a cage with lions, tigers, and leopards was attributed to the magic power of his strange, fixed eye, but when he appeared in London, he soon became depicted as the lone frontier hero, fully comfortable in the wilderness and in the company of wild animals. Since most western European countries had long ago devastated their wilderness regions, exotic wild animals were especially popular in traveling menageries and the newly created public zoos.

The empire-building activities of Britain in the 19th century led to the creation of a new type of hero; the explorer-sportsman-adventurer. As Europeans staked their claims in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia, they encountered amazing populations of mega fauna. The new hero, largely similar to the American frontiersman, was a fearless, deadeye shot who played by the rules of fair play in pursuing big game.

The opening of public zoos across Europe and in Ante-Bellum America, along with the booming growth, initially of menageries and then of large railroad circuses, made for a rich market for professional wild animal collectors. These men had little interest in the rules of the fair hunt, and instead killed without reservations countless adult animals to obtain young specimens that were easier to acclimate and transport. As the 19th century drew to a close, Theodore Roosevelt urged Americans to revitalize their mythic heroic past through sport hunting. At the same time in the United States, zoos and natural history museums gained acceptance as important and necessary educational institutions that indicated the sophistication of major cities. Expeditions were launched to the far corners of the globe in search of specimens for both venues. At the turn of the century the hunters and trappers were joined by a new hero,
the wildlife photographer, who was lauded as possessing the same bravery, patience, and expertise as these other adventurers, but without the need to kill.

The accounts, along with the fictional works they inspired, of these khaki-clad adventurers, whose image had become the hallmark for almost all the wildlife icons to follow, became popular reading in the United States. At the same time, naturalists like Seton, Long, and Roberts, with their popular wild animal stories in which they individualized animals and dramatized their lives, found a large, enthusiastic audience. They also drew critics, especially Roosevelt, Muir, and Burroughs, who deemed them, “nature fakers,” whose tales were the products of their active imaginations rather than scientific observation. But it was writers like Seton who would have the greatest and most obvious influence on Walt Disney and the documentaries and animated features he would begin to produce in the 1940s.

Beginning in the 1920s Frank Buck and Clyde Beatty began drawing on the cult of celebrity and the rise of popular periodicals that had helped propel Van Amburgh to stardom. Assuming the images of the white big game hunters of Africa and India, they merged their appeal with the popular Horatio Alger success stories, the rise of the self-made man, the mounting interest in professional sports journalism, and fascination with the “natural.”

Marlin Perkins followed the path pioneered by Buck, while utilizing the new medium of television, and establishing the image of the zoo-based adventurer, a concept later adapted and developed by Jack Hannah and Steve Irwin. Beatty, who combined the image of the fearless big game hunter with the glamour of the circus, was succeeded by Gunther Gebel-Williams, who merged rock star dazzle with a seeming ability to communicate and become one with a diversity of wild animals.

The rise of the philosophy of animal rights and the increasing political strength of animal protection activists caused the circus wild animal trainer to almost vanish as a heroic icon. Future heroes would have to convincingly embrace the concepts of conservation of wilderness and preservation of species in their appearances. Animals housed in their zoos or utilized in presentations were described as “ambassadors of the wild,” hopefully increasing the public’s dedication to green living and their determination to help save the wilderness habitats of endangered species. These proclamations were not
sufficient for the activists who condemned circuses, zoos, and many wildlife programs as money-making enterprises with little true interest in the welfare or conservation of animals beyond their exploitation.

**Wilderness and Wildness**

In 1913 Webster’s defined wilderness as a word deriving from *wildor*, or wild beast. It was a tract of land, or a region, uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings, whether a forest or a wide, barren plain; a wild; a waste; a desert; a pathless waste of any kind. But wilderness came to be not just a disorderly or neglected place, but a quality valued for cultural, spiritual, moral or aesthetic reasons, which might even be vital for human spirit and creativity to blossom.

In 1964, the United States became the first country to designate land officially as ‘wilderness’ through the Wilderness Act. The Act’s definition stated that, “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” The law went on to describe an area of wilderness as “undeveloped Federal land” that retained “its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable; (2) outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least 5,000 acres of land,” or is of sufficient size to make preservation practical, and finally may contain unique and important ecological and geological features of scientific, scenic or historical value (1964 Wilderness Act. Wilderness.net June 16, 2010).

This concept of wildness not only assumes that we know what and how to preserve something that is unique but reinforces the dichotomy of the natural and urban worlds. J. Baird Callicott argues that the Act has “enshrined the bifurcation” (Callicott 1993: 409).

In western civilization wilderness was antithetical to development. It was the realm of the unknown and engendered fear and foreboding. Judeo-Christian religions reinforced the wilderness threat to human safety by claiming that wilderness harbored spirits of pagan animism, along with devils and
demons. But wilderness was also a place for retreat and restoration of self and soul. For most people in western society today, David Klein writes, wilderness is a concept, the reality of which they have not personally experienced. These conceptions come largely from television, especially public television which attracts only five percent of viewers—a miniscule amount when compared to commercial primetime programming. He adds that even if programs about wilderness are presented, they lack the ability to convey the nuances, complexity, beauty and richness of ecosystems. The possibility to create an understanding, appreciation and respect is only possible if the viewer accepts television as an authoritative voice (Klein 2010: 3, 4).

The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan pointed out in 1974 that people rarely perceive the irony inherent in the idea of preserving the wilderness, since “wilderness” cannot be defined objectively. It is as much a state of mind as a description of nature. By the time we speak of preserving and protecting wilderness, it has already lost much of its meaning. For example, the biblical concept of awe and threat and a sense of sublimity cannot be fully encompassed by man. “Wilderness” has become a definition of the orderly process of nature, while true wilderness only exists in the great cities of the world (Tuan 1974: 112). This reflects Carl Jung’s observation in 1934 that ‘states’ of wilderness as experienced by human beings referred to emotional and psychological wilderness rather than being at the mercy of wild beasts (Roderick Nash Resources ).

More and more historians and philosophers are coming to this same conclusion—wilderness is not a real thing but a phenomenon created by perception. The concept of wilderness as a frightening, stimulating, and awe-inspiring place where man pits his physical and mental strength against the savage land in his attempts to conquer and subdue it includes indigenous people who were regarded as a form of wilderness savageness. One outdoors enthusiast insists that, “wilderness is a word used by people who are still too far removed from their natural habitat.” He believes that he lost his wilderness when he lost his fear. “Once you lose your ‘sense’ of wilderness you gain something much more precious—the sense of existing as part of the natural world” (“The Philosophy of Wilderness”: 3).
William Cronon also argues that wilderness is a “profoundly human creation.” Rather than being the “last remaining place where civilization, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth,” it is a product of that civilization, and “it could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made.” Cronon observes that “as we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longing and desires.” Cronon examines the created borders dividing us from wilderness, the human and non-human, natural and supernatural and the subsequent 18th century expression of the sublime. A word once of great power, now watered down by commercial hype and advertising. Accompanying the concept of the sublime was the romantic tradition of primitiveness. Dating back at least to Rousseau, it reflected a belief that the best cure for an over-civilized, industrializing, urban world was a return to simpler living. In 1756 Edmund Burke defined the sublime as “an idea of pain and danger without being actually in such circumstances. Whatever excites this delight, I call sublime.” Harsh, wild landscapes were temples demonstrating God’s power. By the mid-19th century the awe and terror of sublimity morphed into the outdoor recreational movement where wilderness became a place of comfort and moral regeneration (Cronon UtneReader.com).

The Australian Peter Ashley also writes about wilderness spirituality and its ability to heighten awareness and elevate consciousness beyond the everyday corporeal world. Ancient and timeless, it humbles humans by its awesomeness, increases the sense of the aesthetic, provides a personal mystical experience, and can challenge competence and physicality (Ashley 2007: 53).

For Americans accepting the myth of the frontier, this wild, untamed region was a place for natural renewal and “the quintessential location for experiencing what it meant to be an American.” As the frontier vanished, the only way to protect the “nation’s most sacred myth of origin” was to set aside national parks and wilderness areas. The twin concepts of sublimity and primitiveness converged into one image of wilderness filled with moral values and cultural symbols, according to Cronon. The problem with this approach, he insists, is that we relegate wilderness and with it, wonder and otherness to pristine, uninhabited landscapes in the far corners of the globe, and fail to see the otherness in the close at hand.
Gary Snyder concurs with Cronon, insisting that, “a person with a clearer heart and an open mind can experience the wilderness anywhere on earth. It is a quality of one’s own consciousness. The planet is a wild place and always will be” (Cronon UtneReader.com).

John Knott of the University of Michigan presents a counter argument. Michael Pollan and William Cronon have emphasized the constructedness of wilderness and of nature largely by Europeans as a way for white culture to signal “the strangeness of the natural world that indigenous people find familiar and sustaining. The romantic, pantheistic idea we invented, became a wilderness ethic derived from Thoreau and Muir. We continue to invent versions of nature that serve our purposes as evidenced by motion pictures, television, zoos, and theme parks. For them this clean line of demarcation between civilization and wilderness, human and nature, humanity and animality, allowed for the control of wilderness by the idealization of progress and science (Knott 2004: synopsis).

Knott believes there is value in the terms, wilderness and wildness. They are resonant for activists who want to experience or write about what they think of as “wild” nature, whether remote or close at hand. An awareness of difference is accompanied by heightened alertness, a sense of fundamental mysteriousness, and a “receptivity to the unexpected and the strange that makes discovery possible.” For Knott, wildness is a richer more inclusive, flexible term than wilderness. Wildness can be found anywhere and can be seen as “a property of body or mind.” Since wilderness is a place and wildness a quality, we can talk about degrees of wildness, and allow for the interactions of humans with a natural world. Thoreau, for example, equated wildness with timelessness, and a tonic that could stimulate unconventional thought, freeing, reenergizing and heightening awareness, health, and vitality (Knott 2004: synopsis).

This Romantic concept of wilderness began in earnest in Europe in the 18th century, when artists, writers and philosophers saw nature as the raw material for divine inspiration. As Roderick Nash wrote, a society must be technological, urban and crowded before a need for wild nature makes intellectual and economic sense. Nash, whose seminal work Wilderness and the American Mind, observed that paradoxically the sanctuary the Puritans fled to and the enemy they strove to conquer was one in the
same. Cotton Mather called wilderness the empire of the Antichrist and at the same time a refuge for the new church. Nash continues to explore the changing definition and meaning of wilderness, arguing that “wilderness is a moral resource. It is the best environment to learn that humans are members in, and not masters of, the community of life, and perhaps the starting point for saving this planet” (Nash Mar. 30, 2002).

Only with the advent of herding, agriculture, and settlement did distinctions between controlled and uncontrolled animals and plants become meaningful. Controlled space—corrals, fields, and towns emerged. The un-mastered lands of the hunter-gatherers became threatening to settled folk. The wilderness, will, self-willed, willful and uncontrolled became wild or wildeor meaning beast, in particular savage and fantastic beasts inhabiting a dismal world of forests, crags, and cliffs. Wilderness was a powerful weapon to threaten and punish the recalcitrant in the Old Testament (Nash Mar. 30, 2002).

Humans were no longer part of nature but distinctive and better—not only than the flora and fauna but the ‘savages’ who still lived as hunter-gatherers. Nature was an adversary to be targeted for exploitation and possession. The war, Nash sadly concludes, was “very successful,” with only fragments remaining. “The ark is sinking—and on our watch.” Humans became “cosmic outlaws,” no longer acting like parts of nature. They were “terrible neighbors” to 30 million plus other species sharing space on the planet, and “wreaking ecological havoc.” Nash insists “We have become a latter day ‘death star’ with the same potential for devastation as an asteroid had on dinosaurs. This is not an environmental problem but a human problem—we are a civilization out of control—the goal should be to not conquer the wilderness but ourselves.” We need restraint on the part of a species “intoxicated with its power.” Wilderness preservation expresses a belief in the rights of nature. “We did not make the wilderness—in it we stand naked of the built and modified environment—open to seeing ourselves once again as large mammals dependent not on our technological cleverness but on the health of the ecological community to which we belong” (Nash Mar. 30, 2002).

When we enter wildness, we enter someone else’s home, Nash reminds us. Wild places deserve respect not for what they can do for us but for what they mean to “our fellow evolutionary travelers.” The
concept of wilderness is important, Nash concludes. Wilderness is nature we do not own or use can open our minds to intrinsic value. By definition we do not dominate or control wild places. “Wilderness is not for people at all. It is where the wild things, the willed things are” (Nash Mar. 30, 2002).

According to Chris Powici, John Muir sought to end the frontier mentality of conquest and tried to rediscover an essential inner frontier experience. For him the mountain landscape kindled enthusiasm, made “every nerve quiver” and “filled every pore.” Wilderness was for Muir an aspect of consciousness. It was where text, nature and matter all intersected. Muir was very much a believer in the dualism of nature and the contaminating infection of civilization (Powici 2004: 77).

Powici quotes from Louis Owens’ 1995 novel, Wolfsong (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press) in which an aging Native American says: “When people here long ago, before the white folks came, there wasn’t any wild animals. There was only the mountains and river, two-leggeds and four-leggeds and underwater people and the rest. It took white people to make the country and the animals wild. Now they got a law saying it’s wild so’s they can protect it from themselves” (Powici 2004: 81).

Vanessa Sage writes that at the center of the modern pagan version of wilderness is a Romantic hero in search of a more authentic experience in a broadly conceived “natural world.” Nature is romantically conceived as having the remarkable ability to transform the individual. The person walking the earth on a quest for self-discovery is romanticized into a hero (Sage 2009: 28).

She cites the first truly “Romantic writer” Rousseau’s seminal essay, “A Discourse on the Arts and Sciences,” in which he argues that learning resulted in luxury, profligacy, and slavery. The only antidote to reason was imagination. We need imagination, emotion, experience, individualism, and idealism to overcome our ‘fall’ from natural grace following our development of an “overwhelming concern with what others think of us” (Sage 2009: 29).

Modernity provided little room for enchantment—a sense of delight and astonishment at the wonders, marvels and mysteries that were believed to be intrinsic to the pre-modern world view. Romantics would re-infuse the world with magic and mystery. The Romantic hero was the walker between worlds—from the everyday into spiritual reality and back again. The hero hopes that in directly
confronting the terror and beauty of nature he or she will be able to make social comments on the use and abuse of nature, and also on the very boundaries that are set up between nature and culture. Through the actions of heroes we glimpse briefly at human perfection and perhaps something divine (Sage 2009: 41).

The 18th century Romantic hero attempted to obtain personal fulfillment, which was considered inseparable from liberty and the absence of constraint. He had three qualities: a deep reverence for nature, a response to the world based on feeling rather than rational cognition, and an insistence that the world could only be understood from a subjective viewpoint. Those with a pure and wise heart and mind could perceive the glories of nature everywhere. An isolated rebellious wanderer, alienated from society, he valued solitude where he could expand his mind and imagination. Heroes, of course, by definition are special and can achieve things ordinary people cannot. However, the Romantic desire for communion with nature can be considered a call for a return to primitivism and emphasizes the distinction between nature and culture (Sage 2009: 41-42).

The Classicists saw the conquest of wilderness as a signal of human achievement, but for the Romantics the wilderness was a symbol of lost innocence and a source of nostalgia for a mythic golden age. In contrast, the Transcendentalists found wilderness a powerful place that could empower and provide adventure for the mind, heart, body and soul. Wild places were breathtakingly magical, beautiful, and spiritual (Sage 2009: 45).

Another Australian geographer, Sandie Suchet, writes how we often deny knowledge constructed by alternative ontologies, cultures and discourses. Instead we create static, distinct boundaries between culture and nature, human and animal that are fundamental to Judeo-Christian tradition, Enlightenment science, industrial technologies, Western philosophical traditions, and dominant academic approaches (Suchet 2002: 141, 151).

Humans construct these binaries through the process of naming and categorizing. In zoos, for example, animals are confined, subdued, interpreted and classified creating a nexus between the scientific and popular. Zoos are places where humans engage in cultural self-definition against a variably
constructed and opposed nature. With animals as the medium, “they inscribe a cultural sense of distance from that loosely defined realm that has come to be called ‘nature’” (Suchet 2002: 142-143).

Nature is something to be converted through art, science, and philosophy from something alien but inert and passive into something humans are more comfortable with. In the Judeo-Christian tradition animals are part of nature, external and inferior, lack conscious reason, and can be further categorized as either tame or wild. Civilization is defined as the taming, domestication, and controlling of external separate wild nature, wild animals and certain wild, indigenous people through agriculture, industry, gardens, and cities (Suchet 2002: 143, 146).

Hunting and gathering societies marked by the absence of ‘civilization’ are considered untamed, uncontrolled, savage and wild. Ideologies that romanticize ‘primitive ‘people,” “wild animals,’ or wilderness accept the dominant binaries, but reverse the valuation of the oppositional relationship. In fact fictions of undisturbed wilderness and an original and authentic wild actually encourage practices of resource exploitation or conservation management (Suchet 2002: 146).

There are no direct equivalents in aboriginal languages to some of these binaries. The environment is sentient and communicates with them and is in no way inferior. To some indigenous people, the wild is the degraded country after man has ‘tamed and domesticated it,’ meaning nothing grows, life is absent, and it has the quality of deep loneliness, while what is called ‘wild’ by Eurocentric terms is quiet, unspoiled and not dangerous. By calling animals; wildlife, landscapes; wilderness, and particular people; wild—as self-evident epistemological givens—Eurocentric practices of managing, taming, and controlling the wild, wildlife, and wilderness are legitimizied. Suchet concludes that these actions silence, ignore, and denigrate alternative knowledges, weaving a circle where Eurocentric beliefs, values and assumptions of the wild, wildlife, and wilderness are legitimated by their own reflections. Literal and metaphorical representations of the wild ‘other’ are fundamental sources of justification for the colonizing processes. Representing, naming, categorizing, mapping, writing, teaching, and photographing all construct images of uninhabited, pristine, harsh wildernesses, of wild animal resources, and of wild, primitive, savage humans (Suchet 2002: 147-149).
Leslie Van Gelder takes a more spiritual approach to wilderness. She believes “what’s wild is something we haven’t yet been able to define. . . we have to work very hard and try with all our energy to find a way to speak what wilderness is. . . it’s the place of creations.” The author’s father’s experiences in Africa enabled her to grow up with wilderness stories about outsiders’ refusals to adapt, tales of the code of the wilderness, and recounted moments of wonder and awe. Consequently, the wild became the source of a deep sense of respect. When a person falls in love with the wild, wilderness places cease to be wild, but places where one feels safe from emotional danger. In the wild, faith comes from the direct and often wordless connection to a greater than human force and the experience of the flow of cycles of creation, change, and re-creation. Humans and their ways of being do not dominate this worldview, but are parts of a greater whole and subject to the same set of natural laws. Wilderness and the wild, Van Gelder contends, are places of the heart and head, emotion and experience, story and silence. They find their expression in the “continuous dance between feelings of fear, love and safety, in an ever-changing zone between self and other.” Wilderness is a place of no names. “We want to name which by its very nature defies language. The wild’s great implicit power is its inability to be captured in our words” (Van Gelder 2004: 207, 212).

The concept of otherness came with the rise of agriculture, the cultivation of domestic species, a growth in human populations, and a separation between the manipulated and un-manipulated environment. Divinities moved from the earth to the sky. Fear, Van Gelder continues, is the root of agricultural society. Fear of starvation, death, and the ‘other.’ Along with a culture that supported the notion of a spiritual difference between humans and other beings, came the concept of wilderness, its otherness, our lack of control, and our fear of it. If we cannot tame or break its spirit, we try to turn wilderness into an abstraction that can be dismissed. Jack Turner and David Abram both conclude that wilderness has everything to do with language; “Wilderness’s greatest power and its most wicked threats lie buried deep in its own wordlessness.” Like a clear pool it reflects back to us the stories we tell ourselves. If our society is one based on fear, it fears the wild. If it embraces complexity, we see paradox,
humor, and multiplicity. If we fear others, we see others; if we see resonance, we find harmony (Van Gelder 2004: 213-215).

The myth of the pastoral is the basis of the fear of wildness; a dichotomy between safe, inhabited, peopled spaces and the fear of the otherness of the wild. It is a simplified tragic worldview that opposes complexity, the very source of life, and the defining feature of the wild. In a simple dichotomy “voiceless wilderness cannot speak for itself and thus is incapable of removing the pluralistic mantle of purity and desolation, heaven and hell. The virgin and whore. Tamed and wild” (Van Gelder 2004: 215). The concept of the virgin wild is especially problematic. Once we enter it, it has been ruined, and the only way to rid ourselves of the shame is to destroy it. In the pastoral myth a place is pure because humans live in harmony with a tamed version of nature. The wilderness in contrast either becomes the apex of purity because of the absence of humans, or the pit of terror because it is untamed by humans. The effect of humans on the environment is what becomes central to the story. Wilderness is no longer a self-contained complex area but instead a repository of extremes. “Abandon hope all ye who enter this dark wood. The dark wood will not tell you its tale” (Van Gelder 2004: 215, 217, 219).

Van Gelder concludes that each of us possesses a wilderness of our own. Our own survival is continually at risk and depends fully on our own wildness. One person’s wilderness is another’s wild land. When we understand a place we become part of it, and it part of us. Few people experience the full evolution of a wilderness becoming a wild land, and a wild land, a home. We all, however, feel pieces of it. “We are drawn toward wilderness as water is toward the level. And there we find the something we cannot name. We find ourselves, we say. But I suppose what we really find is the void within ourselves, the surviving heart of wildness that binds us to all the living earth” (Van Gelder 2004: 220-221).

We try to capture wildness in stories of adventure and survival, danger and exploitation, but Van Gelder reminds, “our deepest encounters we don’t turn into words.” “Wildness is a state of being. We don’t go to wildness, we feel it . . . . wildness comes to us unexpectedly, powerfully, with the force to create life and take it away in the same breath.” In the wild we openly engage the elements of chance “with the willingness to not know where it will go.” We are taking a risk and the potential to be ‘out of
control.’ “The potential to experience heart-stopping beauty or savage pain. Wildness is the state of being open to the unknown” (Van Gelder 2004: 223-224).

**The Sportsman-Adventurer**

By the mid-19th century, zoos became another educational tool, as well as a source of civic pride along with symphonies and museums. Wealthy civic leaders sought to outdo rival cities with the biggest and most diverse collections. Wild animals, art and megafauna fossils all became commodified in the process. For both cities and the rural stretches of America, circuses, now entering their golden age as they rapidly expanded their size and scope by moving to rail, offered cutting edge, social more bending performances, and pioneered the use of mass advertising and publicity. The market for wild animals skyrocketed. Dominated by the German dealers, wild animals became a highly profitable product as zoos and circuses demanded more and more exotic species. Together zoos and circuses would help satisfy and urbanizing public’s urge to confront the wild vicariously.

Tales of exploration of a new, wild frontier, Africa, stimulated the public. Beau Riffenburgh in the *Myth of the Explorer* argues that there was a symbiotic relationship between explorers, exploration, and the press. The papers sought to increase circulation by exploiting the daring expeditions. Stanley’s search for Livingstone, for example, was funded by the *New York Herald* as newspapers competitively claimed that they alone had exclusive rights to certain adventure’s narratives. Even as this new age of exploration diminished, the image of these heroic, noble characters showed journalists that these kind of exploits exaggerated through an exaggerated and sensationalistic style, could appeal to a mass market of readers (Riffenburgh 1993). The explorer faced danger everywhere, and the British, in particular used the opportunity to describe how they had climbed to new levels of bravery and ingenuity to conquer the most wild and threatening landscapes (Libby 2003: abstract).

Along with the explorer, initially in Britain and spreading to America—the sportsman adventurer—appeared. As Europe, and in particular England, sought to expand its empire in Africa, India, and southeast Asia, army officers and civil servants combined sport and duty in India and especially Africa with its uncharted territories and incomparable fauna. This new ‘wild’ required that a Victorian be
resourceful and brave, seeking to expand scientific and geographic knowledge through descriptions, drawings, and specimens, throwing the “light of reason on what was novel or unexplained.” Another attraction was the potential fortunes to be made in capturing wild animals for zoos, menageries, and circuses, and the lure of ‘white gold’ or ivory (Haresnape 1974).

Some of the accounts were pretentious or lurid, while others wrote brilliant observations. Journals about encounters with great chiefs, big game, and amazing landscapes were turned into popular, romantic travel books. One of the first and worst of the big game hunters was Roualeyn George Gordon Cumming, who Livingstone called a “mad sort of Scotchman” who had “acquired, seemingly in the cradle, a consuming passion for blood sport” with a “sensual joy in killing.” He began a five-year killing spree in 1843 and returned to London with 30 tons of spoils that were put on exhibition. “His perils, of course were constant and awful; many of his escapes were hair’s breadth and wonderful; and while all provided him to be one of the bravest mortals and as mighty a hunter as Nimrod, some excite sickening horror, and provoke sharp questionings as to the moral character of the ‘sport’” (Altick 1978: 290-292).

The French game hunter Paul du Chaillu, who later became an American citizen, propelled himself into the position of being the leading expert on the newly discovered gorilla. He brought back from Africa “many thousand of stuffed animals, birds and skeletons” for the “nobler aim of enlarging our knowledge of natural history.” The collection included four gorilla specimens that were being restored. Du Chaillu became probably the most popular lecturer on the circuit in the United States by 1869, although some other explorers questioned the authenticity of his descriptions of encounters with gorillas (“New Man-Monkeys” Nov. 12, 1859: 723 and “Du Chaillu’s Lectures for Young Folks” Mar. 6, 1869: 148).

During the latter half of the century, the live wild animal trade had become solidified by the German Hagenbecks. They used a diverse group of “catchers.” Initially the trade was almost totally dependent on indigenous catchers and middlemen, with Europeans purchasing the animals at coastal and, later, inland trading centers. The next stage, according to Nigel Rothfels, was dominated by people whose primary occupation was collecting animals for circuses and zoos. Some of them were professional
commercial elephant and marine mammal hunters, who captured young animals during their hunts; others were naturalists, explorers, and later, photographers, who occasionally collected live specimens. Colonial army soldiers and settlers often caught or purchased animals for Hagenbeck, as did a group of independent entrepreneurs who were especially good at working with indigenous people in acquiring wild animals for the trade. Finally, there were the professional catchers that Hagenbeck outfitted (Rothfels 2002: 44-80).

The articles and books describing the animal-catching business were typically extremely detailed in bloodiness and destructiveness. To capture a baby elephant for a zoo, for example, a professional hunter would round up an entire herd and then kill the adults. One hunter, Hans Domenik, wrote, “As if from a fountain, the red blood sprayed up from the thick arteries onto our clothes as we stood beside the animals examining our guns and discussed how we should precede with the hunt” (Domeniik, in Rothfels 2002: 61).

Gradually, partially in response to zoo directors who did not like this bloody side of collecting emphasized, the literature tamed down. One hunter wrote of establishing a wild animal reservation where animals could be acclimatized before shipping. The reconstruction of the image of the collector did not change the fact, according to Rothfels, that “however romantic or adventuresome the exploits of the animal catchers of this period may have been represented as being, in most cases this business had a ruthless side in dealings with animals, people, and environments which was almost a necessary component of the trade” (Rothfels 2002: 68).

Even in Lion Jack, P. T. Barnum’s fictional animal collecting adventure originally written for Frank Leslie’s Boys’ and Girls’ Magazine, Barnum writes young Jack’s “perilous career gives a pretty correct idea of the risks, sacrifices, and thrilling adventures which attend the capturing of savage beasts, birds, and reptiles, in order that their habits may be studied by civilized people.” At the outset of his story, Barnum describes the menagerie heading home after a long season. The animals were “used up and half dead. . . . that kind of property thrives better in its native jungles than it does in cages on wheels, and there was nothing but their skins to show, now, for some of the most rare and costly animals in the outfit.” He
added that there was “not a single panther factory, or a hyena farm . . . in all the manufacturing or agricultural districts. Someday, the natural genius of our people may bring about a better state of things, but then, as now, the only chance was to import a fresh lot from foreign parts” (Barnum 1875: ‘introductory’, 9-10).

Almost the same sentiment was expressed by William Hornaday fifty years later when he launched a “worldwide hunt to fill the Bronx Zoo.” Hunters were sent to India, South America, British Columbia and other parts of the world to capture big cats and bears for the zoo, since “old age had taken a heavy toll of star animals of the zoo in the past year” (“World-wide Hunt” Oct. 22, 1922: 36). Ironically, eight years later, Hornaday announced that the “game of North America is sinking for the third time. We are trying to rescue it, but the chances are 9 to 1 against us.” Those who would destroy it are well organized with plenty of money and are “perfectly relentless,” while the defenders “are poorly organized, poorly provided with money and they have practically no political influence” (“Dr. Hornaday at 80” Dec. 1, 1934: 15).

As firearms improved, big game was decimated, and the hunters were forced to travel further and further inland. Gradually the sport of shooting became an execution. The difficulty of the chase had given value to the trophies, but as the century wore on, all the hunter had to do was pull the trigger in a carefully arranged encounter. Hunting narratives gradually lost popularity and emphasis was turned to the establishment of the Sabi Game Reserve (now Kruger National Park) in South Africa in 1898 (Haresnape 1974).

In India, a hunting code was established in respect to tiger hunting. Tigers and tiger hunting had potent underlying meanings. The cats were considered royal beasts and “kings and masters of the jungle,” closely associated with the Mughal emperors who hunted tigers as a symbol of kingship, and as a representation for the British of all that was wild and untamed in the Indian natural world (Sramek 2006: 659).

Tigers were dangerous and powerful, so tiger hunting “represented a struggle with fearsome nature that needed to be resolutely faced.” Only by successfully vanquishing tigers would Britons prove
their manliness and their fitness to rule over Indians. In late Victorian and Edwardian times British dignitaries would be regularly photographed “astride or along a dead tiger;” a staged “conquest of Indian nature by virile imperialism” (Sramek 2006: 666).

John MacKenzie in *Empire of Nature* (1988) argues that big game hunting was central to British imperialism in Africa and India. It symbolized dominance of the environment and was an integral part of the construction of British imperial masculinity. “The hunting of tigers in India and lions in Africa symbolized for Britons the triumph of culture over nature and of the colonizer over the colonized.” As the century progressed, so did bombast, with Victoria declared Empress of India in 1876. Tiger hunting, initially a British-Indian joint venture, became “hedged with codes and rules” (MacKenzie 1988: 17-23).

Tiger hunting required coolness and good aim helping develop the important Victorian traits of character, keeping men fit and hardy, and away from gaming and debauchery. Since tigers did kill about 1,200 people annually in India alone—often acting “cowardly and deceitfully,” tiger hunting could be justified as a way to protect helpless panic-stricken Indians from such savage creatures and menaces to society. If tigers were encountered while the hunter was on foot, the hunter was admonished to “face him like a Briton, and kill him if you can; for if you fail to kill him, he will certainly kill you” (Sramek 2006: 666-667).

In 1908, the Shikar Club was established in Great Britain by a group of aristocrats and military men to extol the importance of big game hunting which many believed was under attack by humanitarians who wanted to emasculate Britain by ending war and the resultant threats of decadent urban industrial encroachment. The club insisted that personal and national regeneration could be achieved through hunting and restore Britain as a “virile and martial nation.” They argued that the concept of Fair Play in shooting was a British invention, as was respect and admiration for game (McKenzie, C. 2000: 1, 73).

Since hunting within Britain had long been controlled by gameskeepers, it was deemed artificial and unsatisfying. Only hunting in North America, the northern hills of India, or the wilderness of tropical America offered real sport. These “primeval ancestral grounds” honed masculine skills and instincts
through “true wild pagan sport that stirs the blood,” in wild places with no urban restrictions and at least 25 miles between each hunter (McKenzie, C. 2000: 74-75).

Although humanitarian Henry Salt retorted that the elite club “exhibited sheer, untempered barbarism,” members emphasized that they upheld the traditions of true masculine shooting, deriving merit from strenuous and cerebral effort, respect for habitat—forest, mountain, and desert—and knowledge of the habits of animals. Clean sport was based on British pluck and chivalry, and served as a release for the natural “blood-lust” part of “innate masculinity.” To kill unemotionally and scientifically was not barbaric, but demanded an understanding of wildlife, habitats, and environments. They could reflect in the glory of their trophies, which had been gained through “strenuous endeavor, tremendous hard work, and the risk of unknown regions.” They differed from the indigenous African hunters, who they deemed feeble, savage, ignorant, unrefined and unenlightened, and without manly control over the land and the animals within it (McKenzie, C. 2000: 76-79).

The Shikar Club expanded membership to explorers, naturalists, and authors, who together with military men and royalty, were all gentlemen who “reinforced social hegemony by confronting the wilderness and its animals while retaining social behavior suitable for leadership.” Prowess with the gun symbolized “natural, personal, political, economic, and moral superiority over ‘others’” (McKenzie, C. 2000: 78-79).

By the 1920s members began to link themselves to the conservation movement, condemning films that showed hunting from motor cars, and wounded and dying animals, which they insisted was counter to good sportsmanship, and “how real sportsmen behaved on expeditions”(McKenzie, C. 2000: 79).

In America a similar movement was taking place as American sport hunters in the late 19th and early 20th century hoped to “reclaim the frontier past, to sanctify individualism, and to demonstrate their superiority to women and immigrants” Hunting and the wilderness became interwoven as the “very wellspring of America’s unique national character” (Ward 1980: abstract). In the Gilded Age, hunting became a way to define oneself as an American, and as an equal of the British aristocrats. The movement
peaked just as American big game along with the frontier had all but vanished. The insistence, especially by the powerful spokesman of the movement, Theodore Roosevelt, that hunting was the quintessential American tradition was actually an effort to capture an imagined past by inverting logic (Herman 2003: 455).

In colonial and early America, hunting was a subsistence activity for pioneers. In fact most Americans considered full-time hunters as barbaric and backwards as the Native Americans, with no legitimate claim to the land. The idea of full-time hunters smacked of indolence, loss of caste and moral principles. American greatness was attributed to settlement and agriculture (Herman 2003: 456).

But Roosevelt insisted it was a way American men could reinvigorate themselves with frontier manliness, individualism, and self-reliance, demonstrating Anglo-Saxon superiority to new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe without a frontier or big game hunting tradition. The adventures of Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and Lewis and Clark could be relived. Hunting was not barbaric if done in a scientific, noble, and civilized manner demonstrating expertise in the habits, haunts, and taxonomy of wild game. Hunters were the chivalrous and self-reliant heroes of American history. Backwoodsmen were stern strong, virile, and filled with the common sense and resourcefulness that made America great. Lewis and Clark had taken hunting to the scientific level and Daniel Boone, now celebrated in paintings, sculpture and increasingly fanciful biographies was a romantic hero and the “autonomous model for manliness.” Boone lived in a “libertarian wilderness” where each man determined his own fate. He was depicted as a self-made man who never smoked or drank, always paid his bills, and engaged in a “glorious struggle for survival.” As the “First White Man of the West” he controlled his own destiny, battling both “noble beasts and ignoble Indians.” Roosevelt emphasized that Boone was the great American hero and that hunting was the key to a “strenuous life,” without which America could lapse into irrelevancy. Only two types of men and two types of nation existed: those with strong courageous hunters and the weak, who suffered from timidity, laziness, ignorance, and over-civilization. Roosevelt, like George Custer, often chose to dress in buckskins to indicate that nature had chosen him rule the army, the
Indians, and the Continent. For Roosevelt this concept expanded into a “cult of empire” (Herman 2003: 457-460).

In 1909 Roosevelt took part in the Roosevelt-Smithsonian Expedition to Africa hoping to serve science by collecting specimens just as the Lewis and Clark expedition had a century earlier. Bearing papers declaring him a “consultant in zoology” from the Smithsonian, the American Museum of Natural History (Roosevelt’s father had been a founder), and Harvard’s Museum of Comparative Zoology, Roosevelt and other wealthy American hunter-naturalists were given access to hunting grounds normally closed to foreigners. Although they did not rule these African lands politically, they could still be considered “masters of the globe” (Herman 2003: 460).

In 1887 Roosevelt and his friends founded the Boone and Crockett Club made up of outdoorsmen, scientists, military leaders, explorers, artists, writers, and industrialists to promote “manliness and self-help,” along with better game laws, and the need to establish wildlife preserves. He denounced private game preserves as “autocratic and dismal.” The nation needed public preserves overseen by the Federal government if it was to seriously save habitat, wildlife, and big game hunting, along with providing the happiness derived from the “pure and beautiful outdoor life” (“Boone and Crockett Club Annual Meeting” Feb. 1, 1902: 88 and Schullery 1978: 2).

The club, which still exists today, promotes the guardianship and management of big game and associated wildlife in North America” along with maintaining the highest aspects of Fair Chase and sportsmanship. “Fair Chase” meant “the ethical, sportsmanlike, and lawful pursuit and taking of free-ranging wild game animals in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper or unfair advantage over the animal” (History of the Boone and Crockett Club Jan. 23, 2007).

During this process of making the United States a nation of hunters, thirty-nine periodicals dedicated to hunting, fishing and the outdoors life sprang up. But by 1906, new stories of successful hunting trips began to appear in some of these periodicals. They were authored by women who sought the “carefree and health-giving experiences of camp life.” They insisted that on the frontier and in the backwoods women had always hunted, and that a desire to hunt was instinctive in both men and women.
Annie Oakley’s accomplishments spurred the establishment of 3,000 trapshooting clubs with over 200,000 members by 1914, with a large proportion being women (Herman 2003: 455, 464-465).

The drive to overcome the threatening crisis of ‘over-civilization’ included children, who needed to “revel in savagery” and be taught tracking, trapping, hunting and taxidermy. “Hunting, once considered barbaric and backwards became for the Gilded and Progressive Eras—a badge of American identity worn by the most ‘civilized’ of Americans.” State governments passed laws limiting the rights of immigrants to hunt since the Back to Nature Movement distinguished the morally and physically healthier American from degraded aliens pouring into the country (Herman 2003: 467-468).

William Hornaday of the Bronx Zoo, who had once written that if given the chance Italian immigrants would behave like human mongooses and destroy native songbirds for food, established the National Collection of Heads and Horns at the zoo. These examples of the world’s vanishing big game would also memorialize the chivalry, courage, and manliness of the great hunters, and was democratically open to anyone who cared to visit. The most lasting gift of the elite sports hunters was the conservation movement, which despite their social and political convictions, was of redeeming importance (Herman 2003: 469-470).

Hornaday, like Roosevelt, combined a love of the outdoors and wildlife with an almost brutal willingness to acquire specimens first for the National Zoo and then the Bronx Zoo. He took Roosevelt’s side in 1907 by asserting in a letter to the New York Times that attacks on sport hunters were based on ignorance, since at least nine-tenths of the game laws in the world existed because of the initiatives and money expenditures of sportsmen acting against the “pot hunter, the market hunter, and the game butcher (“Sportsmen as Game Savers” Oct. 14, 1907: 8).

Gradually, gentleman in a suburbanized America with a growing abhorrence of hunting entered into a new pastime that demanded concentration, mental discipline, and allowed for the enjoyment of the splendors of a created natural setting—golf—which came to be the “new theater for cultural politics” (Herman 2003: 471).
Natural history museums, in particular the American Museum of Natural History, assumed leadership in the preservation of the wilderness and in financing expeditions to the far corners of the world. They pioneered habitat dioramas, which were seen as a way to preserve the wilderness that was part of the national consciousness. Taxidermic advances in naturalistic representation were combined with illusionistic background paintings providing the viewer with an imaginative, safe glimpse of the wild animal in its actual habitat (Wonders 1993). Years later Joseph Wallace described his fascination with these dioramas.

There I would stand spellbound before a diorama illustrating an African rain forest, North American plain, or Andean mountaintop scene. And although I liked the mounted gorillas, bison, and condors, what intoxicated me were the painted backgrounds, the vast mysterious jungles, and endless plains stretching off into the unimaginable distance. With an intensity that I still remember clearly, I yearned to step through the glass into those backdrops, to visit those marvelous environments for myself.

I grew up on crowded big-city streets, navigating a maze of noise and clutter and smog and buildings so tall they blocked the sun. The AMNH was my oxygen, a doorway to green worlds that I otherwise could not have imagined (Wallace 2000: 1).

In 1904 Henry Fairfield Osborn, the director of the AMNH, urged that the same efforts put forth to preserve the giant sequoias should be directed toward animal preservation. He argued that

The total national investment in animal preservation will be less than the cost of a single battleship. The end result will be that a hundred years hence our descendants will be enjoying and blessing us for the trees and animals, while in the other case, there will be no vestige of the battleship, because it will be entirely out of date in the warfare of the future (Osborn 1904: 312).

One of the museum’s taxidermists, Carl Akeley became a popular hero by writing about his adventures in Africa and the development his remarkable museum exhibits. Akeley declared that to do taxidermy by the new method, “a man must be first a field man, able to collect his own specimens, must know animal anatomy and clay modeling and must have enough artistic sense to make his groups pleasing as well as accurate.” His great work was the African Hall in the AMNH. Dominated by a group of elephants at the center, it had forty windows providing an arrested look into the vanishing wildlife and vistas of the continent. He believed that in fifty years the story told by the Hall will be history, and in two hundred years, a myth. While hunting gorillas in the Virungas, he became an outspoken advocate for their protection, and established the first national park in Africa—a gorilla preserve in Rwanda. On his fifth
expedition to the region, he died of a fever and was buried close to where he had seen his first gorilla (Teichert 2002: 10).

Late in the 19th century a new method emerged that allowed the wild to be safely presented to the public that did not involve the killing of animals: photography. Eadward Muybridge’s sequenced images taken in 1884 of captive wild animals—a lion, jaguar, zebra, kangaroo, eagle and elephant—were probably among the first wild species to be captured in any kind of motion picture process. During that same year nature film historian, Derek Bouse found it especially relevant that Muybridge made a series of sequenced shots of a tiger attacking a tethered buffalo. “Here was indeed a momentous event: wildlife imaging had made its first use of three devices that would become firmly rooted conventions in later years: a fenced enclosure, a dramatic confrontation staged for the camera, and an unwitting participant who becomes a disposable subject” (Bouse 1998: 123-124).

Another film pioneer, Etienne-Jules Marey went beyond Muybridge’s careful set-up conditions, inventing a “photographic gun” that enabled him to capture birds in flight (Bouse 1998: 124). In 1895 the Kearton brothers pioneered many of the film techniques still in use for capturing natural behavior in the wild through the use of ‘hides’ or ‘blinds.’ By 1913 McClure’s declared that “To-day a new race of hunters scours the face of nature—men who hunt wild animals, not for their skins but for their photographs. . . . This is romance. And if that is not enough, it is also science—natural history made interesting (Steele Jan. 1913: 329). Theodore Roosevelt’s son Kermit called the adventurous photographers “Nimrods of the Lens,” and a fine lot of sportsmen in the best sense of the word” (Roosevelt 1926: 450).

Nature photography even produced its own heroes in Martin and Osa Johnson who were deemed the “later day Adam and Eve” living without fear among the animals of the wild. Like Akeley they had gone to Africa to refute the claims of David Livingstone about “Darkest Africa.” Between 1917 and 1937, the couple produced nine feature-length documentaries, and dozens of “short subjects,” over 10,000 still photographs, and eighteen books (Imperato Nov./Dec. 1999).
Structure of the Dissertation

With such varying definitions and philosophies of wilderness and the wild, it is easy to see how individuals have been able to ‘brand’ themselves using variations of the concepts that best fit their goals and motivations. Therefore it is important to look both at the contemporary accounts of those individuals who became favorites of the popular press because they provided journalists with the opportunity to create sensationalized versions of their lives and adventures battling against the wild. These were often in strong contrast to the books that Buck, Beatty, Hannah, Perkins, Gebel-Williams, or Irwin actually wrote. These were generally far less dramatic and attempted to provide behavioral or scientific underpinnings to the actions of wild animals and avoided anthropomorphizing them as the press frequently did.

When Isaac Van Amburgh became the first well-publicized wild animal trainer in America during the 1830s, the Romantic movement had not yet gripped the American imagination. Large parts of America were still undeveloped with their resource potential the dominant motivation for exploration. The public did have an interest in the exotic animals often found on display on street corners in bustling commercial centers or in tavern or inn yards in rural areas. Because they were a form of entertainment that could be presented as educational, menageries were able to venture successfully into highly conservative New England. As a result, prosperous Hudson River valley landowners invested in a steady supply of exotic animals that they took on the road in the summer and then displayed indoors in the entertainment district of New York City during the winter months.

Van Amburgh, from Fishkill Landing in upstate New York, came to the city seeking a career. After a few unsuccessful ventures, he landed a job as a groom for a major menagerie, found he had a knack with wild animals, and was soon entering their cages. His rising popularity led to his appearance in a theatre venue performing in special plays written for him and his big cats.

It was not until he was sent to London to perform, following a downturn in the American economy, did the link to wilderness occur—albeit facetiously. His imaginary biography was devised by a poet/playwright who was irate that Van Amburgh’s act had gained enthusiastic audiences and the support of young Queen Victoria, and was overshadowing the serious legitimate theater.
Horne’s narrative incorporated the theme of a man born and raised in the wilderness with innate skills to control and even befriend wild animals, who eventually becomes a sensation in a major center of civilization—London. Van Amburgh’s plays did not reflect this tie to the wilderness, but instead were based on more pseudo classical themes with his costumes suggestive of a Greek, Roman or gladiator. America had not yet emerged from the classical influence in art, architecture, and law, with its emphasis on courage, honor and moral uplift.

As early as the 18th century, London had begun to exhibit an obsessive interest in all types of fame and what is called the culture of celebrity. Dozens of newspapers, print shops, coffeehouses, theaters, exhibitions, spectacles, and pleasure gardens provided outlets for its expression. Celebrity followed a certain narrative with standard elements. The individual typically rises from obscurity or poverty, attains stardom, often falls, and then rises again. These trials both haunt and strengthen the celebrity and he or she emerges more brilliant and admirable. The word ‘celebrity’ first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1849 and was linked to the booming popular press and increased literacy.

Although a wave of the cult of celebrity swept Europe beginning in the 1780s, in London the “theater was the crucible of celebrity.” The Court shrunk in importance and entertainment proliferated. “It was from the performers and audiences—Parliament included—that the stars of celebrity culture emerged—earthy—yet touched with the aura of mystery and magic the kings used to have” (“Celebrity in 18th Century London” June 2005: 21).

When the licensing law lapsed, the printing business soared with broadsheets, newspapers, books, and prints flooding the city. By 1770, sixty newspapers were printed in London every week. The free press and weak libel laws meant almost anything could be written about almost anyone with just some caution taken when stories involved the Crown and Parliament. Even the barely literate could enjoy the Illustrated London News and the Illustrated Times.

This was also the great age of biographies and novels, speculation, gossip, and leaked information. “Celebrity was born at the moment private life became a tradable public commodity.” In this
climate “anyone with the skills to use the press and play to the audience might become, however briefly, celebrated” (Altick 1952).

The persona Van Amburgh’s unofficial biographer chose for his subject was that of a frontier hero from the backwoods of Kentucky. To add to his savageness or wildness and his uncanny control over seemingly untamable animals, he was described as a ‘half-breed.’” Like James Fenimore Cooper’s heroes, he was a rugged individualist, combining strength, resourcefulness, restlessness, combativeness, independence, and violence. After fleeing the backwoods because he believed he had killed the two men who had slain his bear—Van Amburgh had to learn to live in civilization, putting his amazing skills with animals to work in a menagerie where he quickly rises to stardom. In part his appeal is based on his being an American ‘primitive’—a hero born in the wild-- with the unique gifts wilderness has bestowed on him. He has the quintessential American qualities of fairness, honorableness, generosity, politeness, humbleness, and yet is quick with his fists.

The heavy press coverage Van Amburgh received in London and Paris, especially his appeal to young Queen Victoria, was repeated in American newspapers and periodicals. When he returned to the United States, his name became the gold standard for menageries and circuses, remaining in use well into the 20th century (Stevens Sept. 2001: 599 and Engel 1988: 22). Van Amburgh, today, is best known as the subject of two Edwin Landseer portraits. The first, commissioned by young Queen Victoria, depicts Van Amburgh lying among his big cats—barely keeping the magnificent big cats away from the lamb he is holding. The animals exhibit the fierce tension and wildness so admired by the Queen. The subsequent painting done for the British military hero, the Duke of Wellington, illustrates not only Van Amburgh’s act, but the complete dominance of the wild, so much a part of British colonial power.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, more sentimental attitudes towards animals arose both in England and the United States. These stories were reflected in more critical stories about Van Amburgh. But there also seemed to exist, a need to glorify his death which had been unexceptional. For example, the French theatre historian, Henri Thetard, wrote a dramatic account of Van Amburgh being
killed during a performance. His death reflected his hubris in thinking that he could always successfully control the wild.

The concept of the value of publicity was reiterated in an editorial in the *Sheboygan Press* in 1935. The writer discussed the enormous press coverage the arctic explorer Admiral Richard Byrd had received along with some derisive comments about the worthlessness of his discoveries.

Don’t forget for one minute that Admiral Byrd is a showman, and that it has been his showmanship that has made it possible for him to finance the flight across the Atlantic, make two trips to Little America and do many other things he has accomplished. Speaking of showmanship, there are probably a hundred capable wild animal trappers, the same number of wild animal trainers, thousands of fan dancers, but the ones you read and talk about are Frank Buck, Clyde Beatty, and Sally Rand. Similarly in the exploration field, it is Admiral Byrd who runs away with the bulk of the publicity and that is what helps him sell his books and lectures about his experiences. . . . (“Admiral Byrd” July 13, 1935: 9).

This article also mentions Buck and Beatty, who are the subjects of chapters 3 and 4 in this dissertation, as having benefited from publicity.

Born around the turn of the century, the two iconic heroes of the “wild,” Buck and Beatty, Americanized the 19th century British heroes who were confronting the megafauna of India, Southeast Asia, and the African savannas. Both learned their skills in the 1920s and then emerged during the Great Depression as brave heroes with ordinary roots who could vicariously thrill and provide means of escapism to a public, most of whom could scarcely afford vacations or getaways to the scenic “wildernesses” of America.

Although they dressed in the tradition of big game hunters, both claimed to deplore the killing of wild animals and instead presented themselves as being able to enter and confront the wild—Buck capturing, caring for, acclimating, and transporting wild animals for zoos and circuses where these representatives of the wild could be safely enjoyed by the public. Beatty joined the circus, quickly moved up the ranks from big cat groom, and by 1931 was commanding the center ring of the Greatest Show on Earth in Madison Square Garden. His act was not one of carefully trained behaviors or tricks, but one of almost out of control mayhem—a trip into the wild of the public’s imagination where he battled as many
of 40 lions and tigers followed by a hair-raising escape back into the safety of civilization. Throughout his life his mantra remained that wild animals could be trained but never tamed.

Each represented a prototypical version of the American hero born out of dime novels, pulp fiction, Horatio Alger stories, and the new world of sports heroes. In New York they both became the favorites of columnists writing for the great proliferation of newspapers and magazines. In the 1920s newspapers began promoting their columnists—first the World with Heyward Broun, and the McNaught syndicate with O. O. McIntyre. McIntyre’s column was described by the Washington Post as a “letter from New York read by millions because it never lost the human homefolk flavor of a letter from a friend.” The Ohio native’s “New York Day by Day” was published in over 500 newspapers with a combined circulation of 15 million, earning him a reported $200 thousand per year. McIntyre would befriend both Buck and Beatty and write about them frequently (“O. O. McIntyre” Feb. 15, 1938).

Gossip columnists were also an important part of the star system publicity machine. They offered chatty glimpses into the lives of the rich and famous, and were used during the 1930s and 40s as powerful publicity tools by the movie industry. Two of the most famous were Mark Hellinger and Walter Winchell. Winchell was syndicated in 2,000 newspapers worldwide and read by an estimated 50 million people. He also had a Sunday night radio broadcast and earned a reputation of being able to make or break a celebrity. Another columnist, Sidney Skolsky, invented the term “Oscar” in 1934 and was considered the premier entertainment reporter in New York. Ed Sullivan began his column in 1931 and his hot temper led to feuds with Winchell and other rival columnists (“The Press” July 8, 1935).

Thrown into the mix were the extremely popular magazines like the Saturday Evening Post, which had begun publishing in 1821. It was the most widely read magazine in the 1920s and 30s with a circulation of three million. Its leading competitor, Collier’s (1885), was a pioneer in half-tone picture reproduction and had been active in muckraking journalism. Contributors were as diverse as Jack London who reported on the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Winston Churchill, who wrote an account of the First World War. Collier’s peak circulation was about 2.5 million (“Collier’s” http://umspartacusscholar.net). The mingling ground for columnists, journalists, authors, and
entertainment figures was the newly emerging nightclub scene, born out of Prohibition and reflecting returning soldiers’ experiences in France.

The other dynamic was the new American obsession with professional sports and youth. Nineteenth century Americans sought an historic consciousness since the country was a virgin land without the European tradition, architecture, and culture, but also without its perceived decadence. America was the land of freedom, openhandedness, and unlimited aspirations, without an acknowledged elite. It needed heroes—heroes that were apolitical, asocial, virtuous, spontaneous, and timeless.

The first American fictional athlete hero was Frank Merriwell (1896). Between 1899 and 1974, 217 books celebrated the exploits of what would be the quintessential American hero. He had prowess, playfulness, and was a true sportsman. The athlete hero typically was from a small town or the country. He was not wealthy or desperately poor and little mention was made of his parents, except that they were helpful and understanding. The potential hero left his small safe environment for a new challenging one, where he first was depicted as an underdog. Through triumph and success, he made himself “gloriously known” to his new associates. Often he had to face personal adversity, setbacks, failures and injuries, but in time he became praised, admired, and immortalized. Unlike classical heroes as described by Joseph Campbell, the sports hero does not typically return to his roots, expand his consciousness, or atone with his father. Essentially he is a self-centered, child-hero. Ever since Natty Bumppo, American heroes were depicted as individualists, who avoided corruption, but were egocentric rather than sociocentric (Oriad 1982: 30-36).

Frank Buck was very much the self made man of Horatio Alger’s 118 novels. He rose from poverty to wealth by taking advantage of every opportunity offered him. He was vigorous, lucky, ambitious, competitive, shrewd in business, honest, and generous with his friends. He retained his old Texas skills, being able to lasso a tiger or leopard or knock out an orangutan with a well-placed punch to the jaw. He achieved his goal to be considered the foremost wild animal collector in the world. He could mingle freely with New York society—and much to their envy—return to the Romantic wilds of Malaya and the simple life of his jungle camp (Oriad: 44-46). Buck was a master of painting an extremely
romantic word picture of the wild both in his books and lectures that enraptured both children and the most hard-boiled sportswriters. His Southeast Asia was a wilderness filled with the sublimity, primitiveness, moral values, and cultural symbols that Cronin alludes to.

If Buck was the somewhat sophisticated self-made man, Beatty typified that other favorite American hero, the natural. His was the way of youth—graceful, dazzling, defiant—a fighter for glory, relying on stamina and endurance to compensate for mistakes. As the frontier receded, and half the population lived in cities, Americans found it hard to give up a perception of themselves as “Adamic children of nature,” so they had to cling to vicarious or fragmentary experiences of nature. The circus was part of this forever wilderness. It continued moving like the pioneers, it was independent and tough, and could transform its environment—bringing the exotic and wild to urban lots (Oriad 1982: 75-77).

The natural was blessed with the innate skills that had allowed pioneers to exist in a natural environment. He was adaptable, clever, and lived a charmed life. Athletic but untrained, he could easily lose control and go wild—leaving a game to chase a fire truck or play marbles. He would come to dress well, but continually expressed fears of big cities. He attracted women, but claimed to be shy. He moved like a cat—all natural talent—and played for the fun, sights, smells, sounds, and tactile sensations of the game—in Beatty’s case his encounters with the big cats. He was simple and complex, idealistic and cynical, lyrical, and violent, spontaneous yet disciplined. These qualities along with his exuberance, presumed naïveté, and his hero worship of other athletes, made Beatty the favorite of both the gossip columnists and sports writers. For the sports journalists he was the toughest of athletes, willing and able to face death every day, overcoming horrific injuries, and showing little concern for monetary gain. And yet his battles in the arena served as a conduit to an ancient past as it allowed his inner savagery to emerge (Oriad 1982: 75-77). He resembled in a way Billy the Kid, who has been described as the last vestige of primitive savagery. Beatty, like the Kid, was small, skinny, polite, ingratiating, with clear blue eyes and a frank and open countenance. Both were showmen in defiance of death. The Kid as the western hero that stirred the imagination and Beatty as he commodified the wilderness and could suddenly in the big cage match the ferocity of the big cats with his own transformation to violence (Page Feb. 1991: 137).
Beatty played on the human desire that David Quammen describes, “Humanity badly needs things that are big and fearful and homicidally wild, because they give us perspective, and testify that God might not be dead after all.” We have a special fascination—evident in our mythology, religion, art, and epic literature—with a short, formidable list of alpha predators. . . big enough, fierce enough, voracious and indiscriminate enough to—occasionally kill and eat a human” (Quammen 2003: 3).

Beatty and Buck very much fulfilled a nation’s imagination—echoing the vaunted heroism of the frontier wilderness experience, bringing excitement and the belief that a lone American can overcome anything. They were as Sage describes, special human beings, the romantic hero who could walk between two worlds. They re-infused the world with a sense of astonishment of how easily they could confront the terror and beauty of nature and cross back from that boundary separating civilization and wilderness.

Although Buck would live until 1950—continually lecturing, writing, and appearing on radio programs, and Beatty would perform until his death in 1965, their heroics would seem tame with the reality of a world war and the resultant nuclear age. The romantic sites of Buck’s escapades became theaters of war, and Beatty’s bravery in the big cage became diluted and nostalgic rather than terrifying. In a world that had witnessed the horrors of the holocaust the concept of wilderness as raw and wild and out of control reverted in the 1950s into a pleasurable destination for tourism and the enjoyment of scenic wonders.

The final chapter discusses some of the most popular successors to the first three icons. Zoo director Marlin Perkins foresaw television as the future for wildlife education and programming even when only 300 receivers existed in the Chicago area. More conservative and laid back than Buck, Perkins—soft spoken and gentlemanly—made Wild Kingdom into one of the most popular and memorable television programs of all time. Like his predecessors, he would come under criticism late in his career.

“The often invisible lines in film between documentary, entertainment, education, and even art have continued to be a source of vexation for critics and scholars over the years, as well as people who make films—perhaps especially wildlife and natural history films.” Both Marty Stouffer of Wild America
and Marlin Perkins of *Wild Kingdom* gained reputations as faking many of their films through the use of tame animals or tethering or penning. Stouffer, who lost his contract with PBS following these allegations, asserted that he wanted to educate and entertain people, and that he felt a certain urgency about education. Marlin Perkins shared the sentiment, insisting that *Wild Kingdom* was primarily educational, but that if you didn’t entertain with the animals “doing something special . . . then we wouldn’t have the opportunity to tell the story.” A colleague of Perkins, who became a zoo director himself, insisted that zoo animals were used in close-ups and nocturnal scenes, but that Perkins loved animals and would not harm them. He added that Perkins “brought nature to the world,” and cultivated generations of conservationists and environmentalists (Lonati Apr. 1, 1996). This is not to say that audiences had lost their bloodlust. The same vicarious excitement the public had received when watching Van Amburgh or Beatty enter the arena of big cats or viewing the animal combats of the Buck films, never really diminished.

In the field of wild animal training, the succession of trainers that followed Beatty failed to catch the public’s imagination. As early as the 1930s, reporters speculated that Beatty and Mabel Stark had taken the wild animal act to such a sensational level that there was little room for growth or competition. It was not until 1969, when Irving Feld, owner of Ringling Bros. purchased the entire German Circus Williams in order to acquire its star and his animals.

Gebel-Williams initiated a new style—he was the only one of the icons not garbed in safari clothing—but instead was costumed as a peroxided, dazzling rock star. Also unlike his predecessors, he did not battle with the wild, but became one with tigers, leopards, and elephants. He entered the arena standing along with a tiger on the back of an elephant. At the conclusion of his leopard act he draped one of the cats around his neck and exited the arena to thunderous applause. He danced and ran among the three rings of elephants, somersaulted off their backs, all the time providing verbal cues. He was the reincarnation of Pan—a creature of the wild himself—able to communicate and interact with the wild rather than forcibly overpower it. After twenty seasons, Gebel-Williams retired, leaving a void in the circus world that has not been filled. His style of act was exactly right for a time when the nascent animal
rights movement would strive to change the public’s perception concerning the exploitation of wild animals.

The public’s continuing interest in wilderness was largely fulfilled with nature or wildlife programming produced by the more scientific and serious-minded. Although National Geographic, PBS and Jacques Cousteau presented the wilderness as something unique, beautiful, largely separate from civilization, and well worth preservation, television executives concluded that what really drew audiences were iconic personalities who could make the wild romantic and exciting. Possibly the best known of these present day icons is Jack Hanna, a former zoo director with a naïve sense of humor, slightly discombobulated style, and pleasant mannerisms make him a favorite guest—along with his “ambassadors of the wild”-- on television talk shows, especially David Letterman. Never appearing without his safari clothes, Hanna gives the impression that he has just dropped in from the wild, where he was far more at home, rather than in front of a television camera. Hanna is an excellent promoter of the Columbus Zoo, which catapulted into the position of America’s most popular zoo, as well as for conservation, although his approach is very unscientific.

The Discovery Channel came up with their own iconic star; Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter. In many ways, Irwin was a summation of all the previous wilderness icons. He was raised by parents devoted to saving the reptiles of Australia, and spent his childhood in the bush actively engaging with snakes and crocodiles. Irwin exuded charisma—a youthful over-joyedness for nature and wild animals. He was never seen out of his trademark khakis and enthusiastically described his love for all things wild. He was manic and in-your-face about the importance of conservation, and tried to bring the viewers over the boundary line and into his world of the wild so they could better appreciate what he wanted to save and the beauty of what many deemed as the most hated animals on earth. More than any of his predecessors he utilized his fame and audacious behavior to actually preserve habitat in Australia. Irwin showed that with a public still obsessed with celebrity that perhaps the best hope to reinvigorate a love and respect for wilderness and wildlife was not the scientific approach, but a lunatic ‘wildlife warrior’ who fought for and not against the wild. His mantra was, “Come with me, share my wildlife with me,
because humans want to save things that they love. My job, my mission, the reason I’ve been put onto this planet, is to save wildlife and I thank you for coming with me. Yeah, let’s get ‘em’’’ (Shears 2006: 203).

“__And now. . . . Let the wild rumpus start”__ (Sendak 1963).
CHAPTER 2

ISAAC VAN AMBURGH

*till Max said “BE STILL!”
And tamed them with the magic trick
of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once
and they were frightened and called him the most wild thing of all (Sendak 1963).

An American Wild Animal Trainer in London

On Thursday, January 24th, 1839, nineteen-year-old Queen Victoria, after dining at 8, arrived late at Drury Lane Theatre with a very small entourage. The purpose of her visit obviously was not to see the production of Rossini’s *William Tell*, but the act that followed. Victoria, much to the chagrin of her critics, already had visited Drury Lane two times to see the American sensation Isaac Van Amburgh. The Queen later recorded one of her longer diary entries:

….we came in about 20 minutes before the lions came on. Van Amburgh surpassed even himself, and was miraculous, he stayed a much longer time than usual in the first cage, and all the animals were much more lively than usual; in the second cage, as usual, the lamb was brought in, while he was reclining on the lion’s body and head, and put before the lion’s nose, which he as usual bore with indifference; when one of the leopards, the smallest of all the animals and a snarling little thing, came, seized the lamb and ran off with it; all the others, except the lion, and all those in the other cage making a rush to help in the slaughter; it was an awful moment, and we thought all was over, when Van Amburgh rushed to the Leopard, which he beat severely,—took the lamb in his arms,—only looked at all the others, and not one moved, though in the act of devouring the lamb. It was beautiful and wonderful; and he was immensely applauded; he held the lamb for a few minutes in his arms, and then sent it out of the cage, but remained himself some little time in the cage, making these animals obey as usual. After the Pantomime was over, we waited in a little anteroom till everybody was gone, and the house quite cleared, and then we all went down on the stage, which was walled in by Scenery, and the cages with the animals again brought on; there they were, and most beautiful beasts they are, so sleek, so well-conditioned—and so wild—that really Van Amburgh’s power seems little short of a miracle. They had *not* been fed *since* early the *preceding day*, and consequently were wilder than usual; Van Amburgh who was in plain clothes, is a tall but not very powerful-looking man; young, very modest, quiet and unassuming; with a mild expression, a receding forehead and very peculiar eyes, which don’t exactly squint but have a cast in them. I asked him if that had happened before with the lamb; he replied, ‘Sometimes it does; it did the first time I took one in, but the lamb was unhurt; they then fed them, and they roared and fought with one another terrifically; but it was very fine.’ I didn’t allow Van Amburgh to go into the cages, but he went to them and stroked them and they obeyed him wonderfully; he told Lord Conyngham that they were all full grown but two, when he first had them; the large lion in the furthest cage is the fiercest, he says; and the weight of the leopard which he carries on his head and shoulders and makes it perform every sort of beautiful trick is 14 stone. He scarcely ever uses an iron bar to them, but only a stick made of rhinoceros hide, which he showed us. . . (Esher 1912: 105-107).
Alfred Bunn, manager of Drury Lane, attested to the scene. “The boldest in the Royal suite speedily retreated” after a lion sprang at a tiger, which had secured the largest piece of meat, and the animals crashed against the side of the cage with such force that it seemed they would break through. “But the youthful Queen”, Bunn continued, “never moved either face or foot. With look undiverted and still more deeply riveted she continued to gaze on the novel and moving spectacle” (Bunn 1840: 154).

Victoria had first honored Drury Lane with her presence on January 10, after she returned from Brighton. Van Amburgh was appearing in the Christmas pantomime, *Harlequin and Jack Frost*. The Queen had no great expectations since the holiday offerings were typically “noisy and nonsensical.” But in the eleventh scene, this noise and nonsense was forgotten as the Queen later reminisced, “The Lions repaid all.” Van Amburgh, she admitted, was no Adonis, and he had “an awful squint of the eyes,” but he was obviously a “very strong man.” The animals “all seemed activated by the most awful fear of him. . . he takes them by their paws, throws them down, makes them roar, and lies upon them after enraging them.” It was this mastery over the cats that truly fascinated the royal teenager, enough so that she made repeat visits on the 17th and 24th. On January 29, Drury Lane presented the *Maid of Artois* along with Van Amburgh in a command performance. The Queen also attended on February 4, as well as the 12th and the 26th, when the trainer appeared with *Farinelli*. Her diary notes indicated that Van Amburgh

threw himself down on the ground with the lioness over him; and then half lying down allowed the lioness to come behind him, and then pushed his head into her mouth; she also licked his hair (all the time behind him) like a dog would your face. It is quite beautiful to see, and makes me wish I could do the same (Rowell 1978: 25).

The Queen’s attendance, well-recorded and commented on both in the London and New York press, assured Van Amburgh’s future as an American superstar well worth his reported 300 pound per week salary. But the Queen’s comments drew both praise and sarcastic criticism to Van Amburgh, Victoria, and public taste, as well as reflecting an urban, industrializing population’s enthusiasm for captive wild animals.

Van Amburgh, “The Second Daniel,” along with his boss, Lewis Titus, proprietor of the menagerie known as the Zoological Institute, and a number of wild animals departed New York on July 7,
announced that Van Amburgh had arrived in Liverpool aboard the Pennsylvania and was heading toward London. His “extraordinary exhibition” would realize the scriptural passage concerning the lion and lamb lying down together and a little child leading them. Advance publicity claimed that Van Amburgh’s act consisted of him entering a cage with lions, tigers, and other predators, accompanied by a child nine-years-old and a pet lamb. After presenting various groupings, “He fearlessly places his bare arm, moist with blood, in the lion’s mouth, and thrusts his head into the distended jaws of the tiger” (The London Times Aug. 8, 1838).

On arrival in England, Van Amburgh’s animals debarked in London, while the trainer docked in Liverpool. When they were united in London, The Times reported one of strangest scenes ever beheld.

The lions, tigers, and all recognized him at once. When he entered among the group they crouched, they crawled, they lashed their tails with every demonstration of delight at beholding him again. He scratched the neck of the big lion, and his majesty growled forth his pleasure in tones like the sound of distant thunder” (“Van Amburgh” Sept. 19, 1838).

During the last week of August, Van Amburgh made his English debut at Astley’s Royal Amphitheater. Philip Astley (1742-1814) is recognized as the founder of the modern circus. A trick rider and later a theatrical manager, he built his first amphitheater in 1770. In 1794, it became the Royal Amphitheatre of Arts under the patronage of the Prince of Wales and Duke of York. Astley also expanded to the continent, constructing an amphitheater in Paris in 1782, followed by eighteen more permanent circus buildings scattered throughout Europe. By the time of Van Amburgh’s arrival in London, Astley’s was being managed by Andrew Ducrow, a spectacular equestrian performer, whose Belgian father had trained him from early childhood in tumbling, riding, and rope dancing. His most famous act was “The Courier of St. Petersburg” in which he straddled two cantering horses, while other horses wearing the flags of the nations the courier was passing through, trotted between his legs (“Astley, Phillip” EB Online 2008; “Ducrow, Andrew” EB Online 2008, and Saxon 1968: 19).

Ducrow was proprietor over the third version of Astley’s (two earlier buildings had been destroyed by fire). The stage, 130 feet in width, was the largest in Europe. The adjustable proscenium
allowed the stage opening to expand from 40 to 60 feet. Huge platforms, strong enough to support
galloping horsemen and carriages, could be raised and lowered, while being masked from the audience’s
eye by elaborate scenery representing castles, bridges, and mountains (“Astley Philip” EB Online 2008;

Astley’s presented no legitimate drama, officially defined as plays whose dialogue could be in
prose, unaccompanied by music, or recitative. The London patent theaters, Drury Lane and Covent
Gardens, had an exclusive monopoly on ‘legitimate theatre’ until 1843. Astley’s could present
equestrianized melodramas or hippodramas in which horses were the stars or heroes; rescuing heroines
and babies, apprehending villains, and even climbing mountains in chase sequences. The great popularity
of these shows eventually led Covent Gardens and Drury Lane to produce their own hippodramas, hiring
equestrians from Astley’s (“Astley, Philip” EB Online 2008; “Ducrow, Andrew” EB Online 2008, and
Saxon 1968: 21).

Now Astley’s advertisements announced that for

The first time in England the extraordinary lions, tigers, leopards and other trained animals, from
the Zoological Institute, New York, introducing the performance of Mr. Van Amburgh, the
Conqueror of Brute Creation . . . . in the course of the evening an extraordinary zoological
pageant, entitled The Brute Tamer of Pompeii: or, The Living Lions of the Jungle. The Roman
renegade, Mr. Van Amburgh. . . . “ (The London Times Aug. 8 and September 3, 1838).

On August 26, 1838, a day before his first public appearance, Van Amburgh gave a special
private showing for the press. The London Times reviewed his presentation as an “unprecedented
attraction.” The “extraordinary ‘zoological pageant’” allowed Van Amburgh to exhibit “a species of
animal magnetism which must throw Mesmerism completely and forever into the shade.” In the
melodrama, Van Amburgh played the role of Malerius, a Roman exile, who on his return to Rome is
seized by the emperor who throws him into a den of lions, tigers, and leopards (The London Times
September 3, 1838). The actual “arena” was two separate cages into which Malerius was successively
cast. The spectators joined “the beasts of Creation” in roaring their approval (Saxon 1978 ). Since
Malerius had spent his exile in the forest and learned to converse with “the most ferocious and majestic of
the lower creation,” as well as gaining a “perfect acquaintance with all instincts, and a complete mastery
over all their dispositions and passions; so that instead of being instantly devoured by them, he is treated like another Daniel, with kindness, and even fondled with affection.” After observing the amazing display, the emperor relents and returns Malerius to his family. The Times added that “Van Amburgh’s exploits are truly wonderful. And performed with a promptitude and easy familiarity which at once bewilders and delights the spectators.” They strongly recommended “all our wonder-loving friends to go this week (the last of his performances) and judge for themselves whether any description, however eulogistic,” must still come short of truly describing the act (The London Times Sept. 3, 1838).

Even the far more intellectual, Pencillings in the Pit gave Van Amburgh a rather back-handed endorsement. Boz, a penname of Charles Dickens, felt that despite having to buck huge audiences,

> For the benefit of our loving friends, we contrived, at a great sacrifice of personal comfort, to be present on Monday evening at the wild beast exhibition, at Ducrow’s, and the performance of Mynheer Van Amburgh, or rather the performance of Mynheer’s lions, tigers, leopards, & c. (Actors by Daylight or Pencillings in the Pit Sept 1, 1838: 213).

The philosophic, he continued, would call it

> indisputable evidence of the superiority of intellectual power over brute forces; while the lesser pedantic, but more enthusiastic spectators will say, with the showman, ‘It must be seen to be credited.’ For our parts we allayed our feverish anxiety, by witnessing them here, before they are transplanted (as they doubtless will be) to the boards of our only “national” theatre and earnestly advise our readers to do the same (Actors by Daylight or Pencillings in the Pit Sept 1, 1838: 213).

Two weeks later, Boz reported that Van Amburgh continued to pack the house to overflow, but that he had had an almost “fatal affair with the tiger, --but for his intrepidity and nerve, he must have fallen victim to the animal’s ferocity” (Pencillings in the Pit Sept. 15, 1838: 230). Dickens obviously had mixed feelings about the circus. In Sketches by Boz, he writes of his childhood recollections of Astley’s, and later would favorably present circus people as humane and compassionate in Hard Times.

The London Times followed up a few days later with a lengthy biography of Van Amburgh. They reported that the animal trainer was born in Fishkill, 30 miles north of New York City, and was the descendant of original Dutch settlers, or “knocatokkers,” as Washington Irving called them. At fifteen, Isaac went to New York and found employment as a clerk in a relative’s warehouse. After a few years he became bored, as any “adventurous Yankee” would, and joined a traveling menagerie. Now 20, “his fine
figure, iron frame, and Herculean strength, fitted him admirably for his new vocation” (“Van Amburgh” Sept. 19, 1838).

One day in New Jersey, the lion’s regular keeper, who entered the animal’s cage as part of the exhibition, was absent. As the crowd grew increasingly restless, Van Amburgh volunteered to enter the cage of the good-natured lion with only a cane for protection. He talked to the big cat, and the two seemed to get along well. “In approaching wild animals,” says Van Amburgh, “courage is everything.” After the lion died, the company broke up and Van Amburgh joined the much larger Zoological Institute in New York. The menagerie owned some of the finest animals on exhibition. Van Amburgh “prosecuted his favorite pursuit—studied the temper of the animals, and proceeded step by step till he brought them all into a singular state of civilization” (“Van Amburgh” Sept. 19, 1838).

His greatest challenge was placing a lion and tiger together in the same cage. They fought for months, and when they reached a point of exhaustion, Van Amburgh entered the cage to “begin his course of discipline to control both.” Gradually, he increased the number of animals to ten. Violent conflicts frequently erupted, Van Amburgh claimed, because

the tiger is like a reckless, good-for-nothing, drunken rascal, who spends his time carelessly at taverns, and fights in a moment. Tigers have all bad spiteful tempers. The lion is not so irascible, he is slower and cooler, but there is not the generous feeling about him which he has been cracked up for. The leopards are like cats—playful, but easily provoked (“Van Amburgh” Sept. 19, 1838).

The writer found Van Amburgh’s method of discipline extremely interesting, as were his training techniques. “From the first moment of his intercourse with them, he talked to them as he would to a human being. ‘They believe,’ says he, ‘that I have power to tear every one of them in pieces if they do not act as I say. I tell them so, and have frequently enforced it with a heavy crowbar’” (“Van Amburgh” Sept. 19, 1838).

Van Amburgh, the article continued, was one of “the most athletic men of his size in the world.” He had “a fine figure, iron frame and Herculean strength.” The author added that the trainer was

“singularly made. His body is perfectly round, but rather thicker than broad. His bones large and firmly set, and his flesh almost muscle. Yet, from the peculiar conformation of his body, he seems to have all the
grace and lightness of a Mercury.” This strength, tone of voice, rapid movements, and peculiar “cast of eye,” combined to give an impression of superior power to the big cats. Especially his strange eye, which “heightens the effect of his expressive face, as is said of the ‘terrible eye of Caliph Vatheck’” (“Van Amburgh” Sept. 19, 1838).

The power of the human eye to control wild animals had been written about previously. An 1827 article described, “The overmastering effect of the human eye upon the lion has been frequently mentioned by travelers. This is also true of the tiger.” The article claimed a British officer taking a stroll in the Indian jungle encountered a tiger, “unarmed, the officer decided to look at him squarely in the face, and in a few minutes, the tiger which had been ready to spring, grew disturbed, shrunk aside, and attempted to creep around behind him.” The man kept turning, and after an hour the tiger gave up (“Power of the Human Eye” Nov. 30, 1827: 107). All through the century, anecdotes about the power of the human eye appeared in periodicals. In 1857, George Pitt, later Lord Rivers, declared he could tame the most ferocious animal by looking at it steadily (“Power of the Human Eye” May 14, 1857: 78). This was reiterated in an 1871 article that claimed the “way to meet a wild beast is to fix your eye on him boldly.” There was, the author insisted, nothing equal to the power of the eye (Davis May 25, 1871: 163).

Van Amburgh was not unwilling to use force if necessary. Once, when a tiger became ferocious, Van Amburgh coolly took his crowbar and landed a tremendous blow on the cat’s head. He then said, in a menacing tone, “You big scoundrel, if you show me any more of your pranks, I’ll knock your brains out.” After this episode, the tiger behaved like a “country gentleman” for a couple of months (“Van Amburgh” Sept. 19, 1838).

It important to emphasize, that the state of journalism in the early 19th century frequently found the same individual serving as proprietor, editor, and dramatic reviewer. By the 1820s, it had become established practice, both in the United States and England, for managers to give season tickets, gifts, ‘seegars,’ and champagne to editors. The amount of print an actor or performance received was directly proportional to the amount its manager was willing to pay for advertisements and the insertions of paid puffs or press releases. Everyone understood and played according to the rules of the game. If a
newspaper failed to review a production or wrote too objectively, managers withheld payment. On August 16, 1840, *The Age* bluntly stated, “New Strand, Astley’s, Surrey, and Victoria we believe are open, but cannot afford to advertise, consequently we cannot afford to puff them” (Saxon 1968: 24). By 1825, papers began to sell space for puffs, which they printed as news stories, but charged for at the same rate as advertisements. For example, when New York’s Bowery Theater opened in 1826, it employed a man to “write up” the merits of the theater, and if this incipient press agent was not enough, the manager set up a “cold cut room” with writing materials, food, and drink, “exclusively for editors and magistrates.” The practice reportedly assured The Bowery’s success for years. Theatrical people admitted that, “success was as much a matter of preparing an audience as pleasing it.” By the 1840s, most theatrical triumphs were the result of the talents of a press agent, rather than the merits of the show. Almost all newspapers, and most periodicals, were “slaves of the paid puff” (Grimsted 1968: 42-43).

The press and theater world was also particularly fascinated with the supposed near fatal attack Van Amburgh had experienced with a tiger, as reported in September by Boz. In the United States, *Niles’ National Register* facetiously wrote that Van Amburgh,

> famous throughout the United States as a tiger tamer and lion queller, has recently carried his collection of wild, or rather tame, beasts to England, and is now exhibiting them at Astley’s Amphitheatre in London….One of his tigers having manifested a disposition to take high English ground after arriving upon the soil whose very touch is so instantaneous in imparting freedom to man, beast and bird, Van Amburgh had to fight for his sovereignty (“John Bull” Oct. 20, 1838: 117 and “Van Amburgh Escapes Instant Death” Oct. 27, 1838: 2).

Although the author contended Van Amburgh would probably be eaten one day, this time he effectively settled the matter. In a severe test of his courage and presence of mind, Van Amburgh, after a tiger during rehearsal refused or could not do a certain feat, beat the animal severely with a large horsewhip, incensing the tiger, which sprang on the trainer and threw him to the ground.

Mr. Van Amburgh, who is of Herculean cast, and possessing extraordinary muscular power, instantly perceived the intention of the animal, which was that of tearing him to pieces…. seized his foe by the lip of the lower jaw, and thus pinioned him as a bulldog would an ox at a bait. A long battle ensued, Van Amburgh and the tiger locked in combat on the floor. Eventually Van Amburgh threw the
tiger on his back, kneeled on his stomach, and with his free hand reigned down punches on the tiger’s head, face and nose until blood flowed. After sensing he had subdued the animal he released his hold, and the tiger submissively crouched down. Prior to this the onlooking performers thought they were rehearsing part of the show (“John Bull” Oct. 20, 1838: 117 and “Van Amburgh Narrowly Escaped Instant Death” Oct. 27, 1838: 2).

A few days later the New York Mirror claimed the incident was a fabrication.

Mr. Van Amburgh’s lions and tigers are too well-behaved and discreet to quarrel with him ‘before folk.’ And they would refuse to associate with the beast, who would so far forget his cue upon the stage as to indulge in savage propensities. We wish that certain of our actors would show a similar regard for the decencies of life (“Mr. Van Amburgh’s Set To with a Tiger” Oct. 27, 1838).

The Mirror also reprinted a piece from the London Musical World less than a week later. It began, “Apropos of the Evil One, there is a Mr. Van Amburgh at Astley’s, who certainly has dealings with him.” No one else would enter a cage of beasts with “all the ferocity of their natures keenly alive within them,” and “knock them about as if they were shuttlecocks” (“Van Amburgh and His Lions,” Nov. 3, 1838: 119).

The animals are the finest specimens of their kinds that we have seen, powerful, full of life. Their jaws furnished with teeth that would daunt a Kentuckian, ‘half-horse, half-alligator.’ Only iron gloves could keep their claws in order, yet he “will provoke them severally until their glaring eyes, roars, and whirling paw threaten instant destruction, when a look and almost imperceptible gesture from this lord of creation, are sufficient to still them to the most prostrate submission (“Van Amburgh and His Lions” Nov. 3, 1838: 150: 119).

They bound over his outstretched arm, leap on his shoulder, cower on the ground, or fondle and caress him, “as the word is given.” The author contended that fear, not love was the dominating factor, “but that fear and an untamed nature should be at one and the same time existent in these ferocious animals is the marvel.” He then poked fun at a story in the Observer, “which swallows anything,” that Van Amburgh began his career after getting drunk, knocking at the lion’s den, and after being admitted, beating up the inhospitable cat. . . .To which we add, that the East India Company has engaged him to clear their territories of the large vermin which infest them—reserving the elephants only for their own
use—and that he has contracted to do it for the skins alone! ("Van Amburgh and His Lions" Nov. 3, 1838: 119)

But the real maelstrom of invective began when Van Amburgh opened his run at the Royal patent theater, Drury Lane. Alfred Bunn, the manager, knew that the American’s appearance would assure a profitable season, while his rival at Covent Gardens, the Shakespearian actor William Macready, would sacrifice financial gain rather than lower his standards for high theater. Macready had a circle of friends that included the prominent artist and Court favorite, Edwin Landseer, along with Dickens, and R. C. Horne, a largely failed poet and playwright, who would direct their talents towards Van Amburgh.

Drury Lane was built in Westminster, London in 1663 by Thomas Killigrew as a theater royal with a charter from Charles II ("Drury Lane Theatre" EB 2008). When Van Amburgh arrived in London, the controversial Bunn had already taken over the management. Bunn wrote that theater managers were typically assailed with “envy, malice, and all uncharitableness.” He suffered these verbal tirades for “polluting” the arena immortalized by great Shakespearians, by resorting to “quadruped performances, owing to the total want of attraction in biped ones.” But these, he insisted, were the entertainments the public patronized and “applauded to the very echo” (Bunn 1840: 33).

Animals had always been popular additions to the English theater. For example, when the Hope Theatre was constructed in London in 1613, instructions called for an all-purpose building that was large enough for plays and had a removable stage enabling the presentation of bear and bull-baiting. Trained animals assured crowds, and the more surprising and dangerous the animals, the better. In 17th century operas and ballets, life-size models of camels, rhinos, and elephants were wheeled on stage, while appearances of live dogs and horses were often woven into plots. Almost any animal on stage would arouse interest. Animals might be displayed in pens on stage to give an aura of authenticity to some exotic setting. Managers often gave top billing to an exotic animal like a zebra, or produced plays specifically for the purpose of introducing an elephant. One tragedian even rented an elephant for his benefit, and he and the heroine rode the pachyderm across the stage (Gascoigne 1968: 254 and Grimsted 1968: 101-102). A 1752 satirical attack on Covent Garden announced a pantomime in which: “The principal parts will be
performed by a wonderful Armadillo from Brasil, a Serpent from the River Oronoque, the famous Lanthorn Fly from Peru, a Mermaid from the Landrons Islands, a surprising Camel, a Rhinoceros and many horrible animals, being their first appearance on the English stage” (Gascoigne 1968: 254-257).

The Royal theaters supposedly gave their patent holders a monopoly over the drama, but the regular drama had been unable to sustain the theaters financially. Bunn pointed out that earlier managers at Covent Gardens had supported Shakespeare with hippodramas of Bluebeard and Timour the Tartar utilizing Astley’s equestrians. Bunn had seen Van Amburgh’s act at Astley’s in September and decided to contract with him for Drury Lane. On October 20, the last day of his run at Astley’s, The Age reported Van Amburgh was drowned out by a roaring lion while trying to deliver his farewell address, causing Ducrow to quip, “It was the best speech of the season” (Saxon 1978).

For Van Amburgh’s Drury Lane engagement, Bunn produced the spectacle Charlemagne, “in which are displayed the genius of Ducrow and the wondrous power of Van Amburgh over the beasts of the forest.” Bunn continued, “Now look ye at all these animals—horses, lions, tigers, leopards, &tc., &tc. Observe their docility, and their ability, and then look for these qualifications in the actors. The comparison nauseates one. There is more intellect and pliability in these extraordinary creatures, than in the present combined companies of Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres” (Bunn 1840: 151).

Although Bunn’s success especially infuriated “the Shakespeare clique—Mr. Macready and his toadies,” he readily retorted that “the highest personage in the realm, . . . has expressed a strong desire to witness the wonders enacted by Mr. Van Amburgh,” while “there is no demand now-a-days for tragedy, for one very good reason, that there are no actors to act it; and for another, that people have plenty of it at home” (Bunn 1840: 159).

The sworn enemy of Bunn was William Charles Macready, the Shakespearian tragedian and lessee of Covent Garden, who sourly complained that during the “regime of Alfred Bunn, the National drama had been blasphemed by the introduction of ballet girls and trained animal acts.” In the 19th century, the dominant method of theatrical production was a permanent company formed by a leading actor who took the starring role in the plays as well as handling the business and financial arrangements
(“Actor-Manager System” EB 2008). In the early 1830s, Macready and Edmund Kean were the foremost British actors, and following Kean’s death, Macready reigned supreme (Toynbee 1919: vii).

As a boy, Macready attended Rugby, but his father fell on bad times and was forced to become the manager of a shaky provincial theater. After his debt-ridden father went to jail, 16-year-old Macready took charge of the company until his father’s release. He debuted as an actor in 1810 and won a five-year engagement at Covent Garden in 1816. He did not endear himself to other performers with his violent temper, humorlessness, and “unblemished character.” He loved theater as art, but hated the atmosphere. He especially detested the actor’s benefit, a system by which an actor would receive an evening’s full box office receipts. Actors did anything to raise ticket sales, since it was their one chance to acquire a small nest egg. Comedians and tragedians reversed roles. Specialty acts were added to the bill, and to Macready, all pride, dignity, and artistic integrity were driven out of the theater (Downer 1966: 35). In fact, following his own benefit, Macready, who was working under the management of Bunn, screamed and sprang at Bunn while he was counting and checking receipts, giving him a black eye and sprained ankle. It took three workers to separate them, and the injured Bunn quickly summoned a physician, surgeon, lawyer, and policeman, according to Macready’s diary (Toynbee 1919).

Accompanying the reopening of the refurbished versions of Covent Garden and Drury Lane in the early 19th century, observers noted increased rowdiness in the overcrowded, stifling pit. The noise often led to patrons not hearing a word of a play. The half-price gallery was equally noisy. Dickens spoke of the suffocating atmosphere, youths loudly expressing their approval or disapproval, and the odor of fried fish, porter, sausages, cakes, and oranges. Critics claimed the early Victorian theater had become the preserve of the uneducated rabble, who demanded melodrama, physical spectacle, and wild sensation. The melodrama offered thrills, escapism, ideal friendship and love, perfect people, heroes, heroines, a strong code of justice, supreme individualism, and ultimately happiness and rewards. Increasingly, even the nobility was attracted to any theater offering the exceptional, like Sadler’s Wells’ aquatic melodramas, Ducrow’s hippodramas, and Van Amburgh’s trained wild animals (Leech 1975: 22-27). There was a gradual change in behavior as the century progressed, largely because of continuous improvements in
seating arrangements. The highly notorious pit was transformed from one of the cheapest sections of the theater into one of the most expensive: the orchestra. In addition, more comfortable seats, a system of reserved seating that ended the nightly battle for space, and splitting the galleries into an open section and closed boxes near the stage, tended to civilize the atmosphere (Gascoigne 1968: 257-258).

Macready was initially overjoyed when he heard, what proved to be a false rumor, that the “horse and beast” pieces at Drury Lane had failed. “I do feel thankful for this defeat of a bad man’s attempt to debase still lower the art and artists he has so long and brutally oppressed.” Three days later he dramatically denounced

the base unmanly conduct of the papers, The Times, Post and Herald, who have been lauding the trash of Ducrow and Van Amburgh and deprecating the business of Covent Garden Theatre. I have suffered from internal throes of passion and indignation until life has felt painful to me. . . . I lift my heart to God—but in vain. I must hope for repose and comfort, or I shall sink under the torture of mind I undergo (Toynbee 1919: 473-474).

Even though he presented a command performance for Victoria, “The young Queen was, obviously, no more interested in the theatre, and her taste in dramatic entertainment was no better, than in the other arts. Trained lions and Italian opera appealed to her and Shakespeare and the classic plays were well beyond her intellectual reach.” On January 24, 1839, Macready disappointedly noted that he had heard “the Queen was going to pay a third visit to Drury Lane Theatre to see the lions, and after the performance to go on the stage.” The Court Journal, he observed, in a “wretched piece of trash,” justified the Queen’s patronage of Van Amburgh, as did the Times and Herald, both of which gave “high commendation of Mr. Van Amburgh’s beasts;” but “of course were silent on Covent Garden.” Toynbee, as editor of Macready’s diaries, added that the actor seemed to forget the Queen was still in her teens and would in all likelihood enjoy Van Amburgh more than the legitimate drama to which she still gave “liberal patronage” (Toynbee 1919: 492-493).

Horne’s ‘Biography’ of Van Amburgh

A great admirer of Macready was Richard Henry Horne (1803-1884). Like many other young writers of his generation, he experimented with genre, subject matter, and techniques. Horne produced a prodigious amount of writings and was during his life, a journalist, editor, poet, dramatist, novelist, and
critic, as well as serving in the Mexican Navy and as a magistrate in Australia (“Richard Henry Horne” April 30, 2000).

His most well-received piece was the epic poem, *Orion*, and his most quoted line, “Tis always morning somewhere in the world.” Horne has been described as tactless, vain, and a combination of affectation, fierceness, humor, absurdity, enthusiasm, and ignorance. Diminutive, he was a “miniature combination of the troubadour and prize fighter” (Gosse April 1899: 490).

Horne fought to raise the writer’s social rank. He fervently believed a life devoted to humanity’s welfare through the medium of literature, also deserved humanity’s recognition and protection. He thought that Macready’s appointment as manager of Covent Garden would result in a burst of vitality. He frequently attended Macready’s imaginative and beautiful stagings of Shakespeare, showering the stage with flowers. He and his literary friends haunted the green rooms and dressing rooms, hoping to present the manuscripts of their plays to Macready. They shared Macready’s anger at the popularity of Van Amburgh, attributing it to a downward slide in public taste (Blainey 1968: 92). “The engagement of this unrivaled corps *brutalique*. . . . is likely to produce a new era in English literature and manners.” He advised Covent Garden to compete by presenting “Coriolanus mounted on a lion with his mother riding side-saddle on a buffalo.” As a further response, Horne wrote a “sly and malicious,” tongue-in-cheek biography of Van Amburgh--supposedly by an admirer-- entitled, *The Life of Van Amburgh: The Brute Tamer, with anecdotes of his extraordinary pupils*, this text was supposedly written by Ephraim Watts, a Citizen of New York and Proprietor of a Gun-store on Upper Lexington (Pearl 1960: 75). Dripping in sarcasm directed at Bunn and the public that supported Van Amburgh, Horne produced a super-hero origin story in which the protagonist controls animals as a result of a combination of his Native American heritage and through sheer physical force. But his true super-power is his amazing eyes. Not very sophisticated, he is willing to attempt almost any feat with wild animals, at least once (“Watts” 1839).

“Watts” declares in the preface that he does not like to denigrate British literary people, but so many stories about Van Amburgh are
gross manufactures, calculated merely to produce laughter in a matter not at all laughable in itself, and to imitate American fancifuls that may almost be called lies; thus trying to make it appear that even Truth lies plain before them. Does he do wonders, or does he not?—that’s the point. Are the bellies of his lions and tigers stuffed with mops and mattresses, and their limbs worked by a crank under the cage—or are they right down living and leaping beef-eaters? I cannot see such hoaxing stuff written and vended about my countryman, just to raise a laugh, without endeavouring, before I return to New York, to give the people here some correct notions of him. This I shall do in a short sketch of his actual birth, parentage, self-education, habits, and adventures, furnished from the best sources, among his own family in America, and from my own positive knowledge (“Watts” 1839: x).

Watts claimed he was known and respected by “almost every third or fourth man you might meet in a walk any forenoon along the Broadway.” He argued that his versions,” for my own part certainly do believe them true, as I know they are so in spirit, and have therefore uncommon good reason to believe them to the very last letter of special moral fact” (“Watts” 1839: x-xi).

Horne then launched into an amazingly imaginative tale that would be cited, at least in part, as an accurate source until the present day. Watts’ portrayal of Van Amburgh is quite different than the young Hercules of the London Times. Instead, he is narrow-sided, long-backed, five-feet-ten and a half inches tall, and “shows no particular calves . . . and is altogether, much the same size up and down.” Although not muscular, “bone and sinew make him strong: resolution makes him great.” He had delicate, handsome features, but of course, his most outstanding feature was his eyes.

The balls project exceedingly, and it seems as if he could look all around without turning his head the least. Three-quarters round him I am sure he can, if not more. But they are not bright shining eyes; they have a cold whitish appearance, and would resemble a dead ghost’s, only that they continually move in a quick circle, and seem to visit all places at once (“Watts” 1839: 14).

Beasts know and fear his indescribable eyes. “If a lion could speak, he would tell us how it was.” All Van Amburgh’s power, Watts insisted, lay in his eyes, just as Samson’s lay in his hair (“Watts” 1839: 14).

Although Watts describes Van Amburgh’s birthplace as Kentucky, all the places named in the book are from New York State. For example, the future trainer was born in July of 1811, in Duchess County, Kentucky. His grandfather was a Tuscarora Indian, while his father was so afraid of wild animals, he died of fright after unexpectedly coming upon the picture of a wild boar on a newly painted tavern sign. Before young Isaac’s birth, his mother had a marvelous dream, in which she found herself by
Lake Onondaga near Oneida (strangely located in Kentucky, as was Syracuse). In her dream, she came upon sixteen large kettles. The first contained a salted lion’s head, the second, the paws, and so on. She ate the whole lion, but “it is very worthy of remark, that, when she devoured the head of the lion, her mouth seemed to expand in a fit proportion large, so that she put the whole of the lion’s head into her mouth, and it roared all the way down her throat while she swallowed it.” This, Watts asserted clearly, foretold her son’s later feat of thrusting his head into the lion’s jaws. By alluding to Van Amburgh as a half-breed, Horne not only creates an exotic image, but also raises the unspoken question of whether he was a bastard (“Watts” 1839: 16-18).

Watts’ text continues, by suggesting that from an early age Van Amburgh had demonstrated an ability to “subjugate the souls” of animals, initially insects, but as his faculties strengthened, to most of the small animals that came his way. His “severe rule” over these creatures was tempered with kindness, and he was often found sitting in a barn surrounded by rats, mice, efts, cockroaches, and small lizards with which he shared his pottage. By five, he could ride and subdue any “vicious nag.” At eleven, he had gained the reputation of being the best horse breaker in Kentucky, when he was not too busy taming the “wolves, foxes, polecats, hyenas, wild boars, buffaloes, and other horned brutes” that roamed the woods. He could also track any animal--lost, stolen or seized by predators--for his neighbors, not only returning the lost creature, but punishing, or turning over the perpetrator to be shot. Asked to teach a lesson to a particularly vicious and marauding wild boar, he utilized what would become his favorite training tool: the crow bar. He began the boar’s rehabilitation “by striking him a dreadful blow across the spine, and thus commenced his moral education.” When some farmers informed Van Amburgh that several hives of honey had been stolen, he found the culprit to be a favorite bear he had been training. He informed the men that they were allowed to punish the bear, but no more. However, when they broke their promise and killed his pet bear, cutting off its paws, he worked over the men to such an extent that he left them for dead and fled the territory (“Watts” 1839: 18-21).

Eventually, he worked his way to the coast, boarded a ship to Bombay, and when the ship docked, went ashore, captured a bear, took it aboard, and on the voyage demonstrated his skills by
training Job. He also succeeded in teaching some seals to fetch and carry, but even more noteworthy was his ability to control the “frolicksome” behavior of porpoises. Watts claimed to be aware of the many tales in which Negroes and Indians have jumped overboard armed only with a knife, and proved victorious against sharks. But Van Amburgh had decided to try to tame the predator. Spying a shark, he jumped into the sea with his “favorite rod of instruction, the crow-bar,” but found it was of little use. The shark clamped down on the bar, when Van Amburgh was unable to retrieve it, he swam to the surface, caught a rope tossed down to him, and barely escaped the jaws of the shark. A crewman then threw him a harpoon, and he speared the great fish. He called for Job, the bear, to dive in and lift the shark out of the water. Crewmen opened fire and threw a ‘running noose’ over its head, hoisting the shark up to the yardarm, where it “hung as a specimen of one too obstinate to be tamed, even by Van Amburgh” (“Watts” 1839: 25-26).

Upon learning from a fellow Kentuckian that he was not a murderer, he returned home and joined the huge 60-wagon menagerie of Titus, the “great American brute-store keeper and proprietor.” Van Amburgh proved his worth by breaking a lioness that had killed a keeper and injured two others with his “silent system.” Three days later, he exhibited the animal, even sticking his head in its mouth. He also disproved the belief that once tasting blood, a lion would be unmanageable, by dipping his arms in blood and then thrusting his arm down the lion’s mouth. The overjoyed Titus made him head keeper and private tutor to his son (“Watts” 1839: 27-28).

Van Amburgh even endeavored to tame and teach an opossum to read and write. He sat with the marsupial among the branches of a tree, making him fix his eyes on a page of Dobb’s Spelling Book. When Mathews, the English comic came along, all three became friends, and Mathews composed a song, “Van Amburgh Up a Gum Tree.” Titus decided to send the trainer to England when “so accomplished and proper a young lady as the elder Miss Titus could fall in love with anyone who valued her devotionate charms at a lower rate than the roaring society of the wilder animals of creation.” These episodes lead up to Van Amburgh’s appearance at Astley’s, where he received 300 pounds per week, and a great deal more from private lessons. Watts noted that his performance there was to be followed by a balloon ascension
from Vauxhall Gardens with a tiger as a passenger, which would subsequently parachute down. Although local magistrates stopped the stunt, the trainer still hoped to descend in a diving bell with his favorite lion (“Watts” 1839: 29-31).

When Alfred Bunn visited behind the scenes at Astley’s, he became so excited that he even offered to clean the cages. Van Amburgh tried to calm him.

In the wild fever of his human energies suddenly excited, and mad for right earnest action, but not clearly seeing the ways and means, he stood gasping for breath in front of the cage, and lifting up first one leg, then the other, in quick succession, as children do in a sudden passage of rage or joy. . . . Van Amburgh, seeing the state of mind Mr. Bunn was in, calmed him on the shoulder, and in the very kindest manner offered to show him all over the inside of the cage, and point out the merits of its magnificent inhabitants; assuring him that he should be happy to accept his offer, not, as he said smiling, as a cleaner, but as a feeder (“Watts” 1839: 32-33).

Thus, Bunn, the actor, poet, musician, scene arranger, became manager of a menagerie.

Watts, claims to have heard that Bunn was also taking lessons to become an animal trainer himself. “Whether in his sweetest or angriest mood, he may take my word, the creatures will make no more of him than a hot cross bun. What could excuse the wanton suicide of such a man! The public loss would be of a degree that is quite impossible to conceive” (“Watts 1839: 33).

According to Watts, Van Amburgh turned, “topsy-turvy,” all previous conceptions of wild animals. Lions, tigers and leopards are not to be feared, he claimed, instead he looked upon himself as an object for them to fear. He considered all wild animals cowards at heart, and that it is only “their immense strength and ferocity which have gained them the undeserved reputation of courage.” To make them submissive, they only had to be faced boldly, “and show them now and then what you can do, and it was all over with ‘their terribleness.’” None, he exclaimed had the courage of the English bulldog. Watts added that Van Amburgh was a very religious man, and he first got the idea of taming animals after reading a passage in Genesis as a boy. Since men had been given dominion, any time he heard of a man fleeing from, or being killed by a lion or tiger, he said to himself, “This ought not to be; it was the man’s own fault!” (“Watts” 1839: 36).

Still, wild animals always delighted him, and he confessed that his happiest moments were spent in their dens. Despite rumors to the contrary, Van Amburgh emphasized that he never fed his animals
until after the performance—giving those cats that misbehaved but a single rump steak, “though it made his heart bleed to do so.” He called drugging despicable, “and no fair proof of anything but the powers of physic.” Neither were his cats hand-raised pets that considered him their father, although he admitted “he shouldn’t be ashamed of such offspring.” He regularly bought any fine specimen that came his way, such as a tiger he especially liked at Surrey Zoological Gardens that later became part of his act (“Watts” 1839: 38).

Van Amburgh was sickened by the treatment of wolves by mankind, since “they were the most intelligent and affectionate creatures possible, when properly trained; and yet mankind was afraid of them!” Hyenas, however, were “a sneaking, snarling, cowardly set of animals.” He also would not face a baited bull, since it was an “insane animal,” nor a rhino since it had “no animal intellect.” Van Amburgh did admit a horror of serpents and snakes, and “would not go near one for any fame or money.” He believed he got the fear of snakes from his father, while his power over wild animals was inherited from his grandfather, Fang-borgun-d’oom (“Watts” 1839: 37).

Watts concluded that Van Amburgh’s English junket had netted a great deal of money both for the trainer and Titus. Although Van Amburgh had expressed considerable admiration and gratitude toward the British, Watts argued that the debt of gratitude was owed to Van Amburgh by England since the American had given such impetus to the stagnating theater. The silver crowbar, he was to receive from the committee, corps, and stud of Drury Lane was a great honor—especially since three German barons had promised to stare at it for a day to impregnate it with magnetic powers-- but not nearly what the cat man deserved; although Watts conceded that the modest, kind-hearted, pleasant, good-natured, and resolute Van Amburgh would undoubtedly be satisfied. After all, he had drawn the attention of the most notable Britishers, “all the first literaties and scientificals,” including the Queen who had supposedly visited him in cognito and offered him a private order of knighthood, which he respectfully declined. English writers and scientists all agreed that Van Amburgh’s methods with the big cats would help prevent their extinction, and render them “the most useful and ornamental members of civilized and commercial communities.” In fact, Watts bragged that the trainer was swamped with orders for educated
lions and tigers that would patrol the interior of banking houses all night long, and he—Watts—hoped to be the contractor for the crowbars (Watts 1938: 41-43).

**Landseer Portrays Van Amburgh**

If Horne’s facetious biography of Van Amburgh provided erroneous fodder for future historians, the best visual images of the trainer were produced by the contemporary artist, Edwin Landseer. Landseer (1802-1873), whose father wanted one of his sons to achieve success as an artist and be accepted by the Royal Academy, began studying and sketching domestic animals at the age of seven. At eleven, he was already winning awards for his animal drawings. Soon he expanded his repertoire to wild animals, sketching at the Tower menagerie and Polito’s in Exeter Exchange. His first etching was of the head of a lion, an animal that would remain one of his favorite subjects. Young Landseer had ingratiated himself with Polito’s owner, the animal dealer Edward Cross, who allowed the boy free access to the dilapidated building whose interior walls were covered with garish paintings of tropical flora. Landseer’s drawings depicted lively, spirited animals that were a far cry from those inhabiting the cramped cluttered cages. Another important influence was the great painter and anatomist, George Stubbs, who stressed the importance of dissection to any aspiring animal artist (Lennie 1976: 9-10).

By 1835, Landseer had gained the important patronage of the nobility, acquiring a clientele that made other artists highly envious. He received Royal privilege after painting Prince George’s dogs as well as Dash, the King Charles Spaniel that was the favorite companion of Princess Victoria. Her mother, the Duchess of Kent, presented the portrait to Victoria on her seventeenth birthday in 1836. A year later, Victoria became Queen, and reportedly after the Coronation returned to the palace, called for Dash, and laid aside her scepter, orb, crown, and robes in order to give him a bath (Lennie 1976: 97).

In Victorian society, dogs were an outlet for sentimentality that allowed for the avoidance of the more serious problems of poverty, colonial exploitation, and child labor. Children were to be disciplined and Victoria herself called babies very nasty, frog-like objects. Horses were not as commonly sentimentalized, since they were most often used as beasts of burden. Two-thirds of omnibus horses,
about 1,300, died in service each year in London. The sight of horses dropping dead in the street was an

Dogs, however, had become the counter to worry and work. Victoria adored dogs, and Landseer,
who has been deemed the finest dog portraitist of all time, could capture a pet’s likeness for perpetuity.
Dogs were selfless, playful, honest, and faithful. When Dash died on Christmas, 1840, gloom fell over the
Royal household, and when Eos, the greyhound, died a few years later, Prince Albert had a monument
erected to him at Windsor Castle. *Punch* satirized the “Queen’s menagerie,” which included two
marmosets (also painted by Landseer), along with parrots, macaws, and lovebirds (Lennie 1976: 100).

The inclusion of plants and animals in portraits was not unique to Landseer. They often served as
visual codes during the late colonial period in Boston and New York, as well as England. Animals could
indicate character, class, and social identity. Elite Americans imported spaniels, hounds, and greyhounds-
- the province of the aristocracy alone in England--as symbols of an emerging privileged and leisured
class. Cultivated flowers and fruits were indicative of a woman’s discipline, knowledge of science,
handiwork, and therefore her character. Flowers were reared and cultivated just like the *tabula rasa* of a
child. Cultivated flowers became “analogous to civilization and the superior character it nurtured.” The
foremost American portraitist, John Singleton Copley, used flowers and fruits in female portraits and
business ledgers, ships, and quill pens in male portraits, to distinguish virtue, accomplishments, and class
distinctions. Animals, however, could be used with both males and females. Exotic, often imported birds,
like parrots and hummingbirds, demonstrated class privilege. They indicated the sitter’s skill in being able
to train a bird to perch on a hand or ribbon. In fact, upper class American girls and young women were
encouraged to train birds as part of their proper education. In 1777, the Young Ladies’ School of the Arts
attempted to improve its students’ characters by teaching them the keeping and caring of tamed birds, as
well as breeding, caging, nesting, feeding, and weaning canaries. When Copley depicted the remarkable
feat of a girl balancing a hummingbird on her fingertip, it was meant to be a sign of the subject’s quality
and moral accomplishment (Staiti 1995: 61).
Boys were frequently given squirrels as pets, which they were expected to bring into a civilized state by training, “which following Lockean pedagogy, in turn improved the trainer.” In Copley’s paintings, “civilized” squirrels are held in check by collars and chains by their young masters; demonstrating the boy’s moral attainment. In 1784, Benjamin Franklin wrote an epitaph for the squirrel, Mungo, who despite a luxurious life, had escaped only to be killed by a dog. “Who blindly seek more liberty. . . . whether subjects, sons, squirrels or daughters, that apparent restraint is real liberty, yielding peace and plenty with security” (Staiti 1995: 61).

Victoria, an “unrepentant circus fanatic,” had always enjoyed Ducrow’s shows and regularly summoned performers to appear before her to be presented with a tiepin or necklace. The young Queen’s fascination with Van Amburgh was largely based on his cool self-assurance among animals noted for their fearsome savagery. Her five visits to view his act were justified since “one can never see it too often, for it is different each time.” At one point in his performance, “he took them by their paws, throwing them down and making them roar, and he lay upon them after enraging them.” It was this part of the act that Victoria engaged Landseer to paint. In February 1839, the Queen observed Landseer’s work in progress and asserted that

A most beautiful picture Landseer is doing of the lions; it is perfection; Van Amburgh on the ground holding the tiger by the head who is roaring—and one could fancy one heard it, the large lion lying behind him, the other lion growling at him, the panther reclining his head in his lap, and another beast looking at the lamb leaning against the man’s breast, it is quite beautiful, like nature, and you are supposed to be inside the cage (Duffy Autumn 2002: 25).

The Queen, who would subsequently hang the painting in the Horn Room at Osborne, called it “most beautiful. . . a wonderful piece of painting. . . just exactly as I saw him,” she also recorded in her diary that Lord Melbourne, her most trusted adviser, commented about the painting that “Why, he (Van Amburgh) quite brings Daniel down.” Victoria referred to the two spotted cats as ‘2 chetas, or kind of leopards.’ Art critics who viewed the work at the Royal Academy in May, 1839, claimed they were neither quite one or the other, while the snarling lioness illustrated the habit of artists to paint the reputation of an animal rather than the actual animal (Lennie 1976: 104).
The painting also raised the ire of Victoria’s political critics. After an unfortunate scandal, the Queen was accused of possessing a streak of cruelty that was made even more evident by her patronage of Van Amburgh. Victoria had assumed the throne in 1837 via a circuitous route. George II had only one legitimate grandchild among 57 offspring, and she had died in childbirth. This left twelve middle-aged children to hopefully produce an heir. Edward, the Duke of Kent, left his companion of 28 years to marry a German princess in 1818. A year later Princess Alexandrina-Victoria was born. In 1820, the Duke died, followed shortly by the demise of George III, which left Victoria third in line. After the deaths of the Duke of York (1827), and William IV (1837), Victoria, barely 18, ascended to the throne. She heavily relied on the advice of the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne. This drew criticism in Parliament since the Prime Minister was expected to be neutral. Two scandals did not improve Victoria’s image. The first occurred in 1839, when a Tory member of the Court was commanded to undergo a pregnancy examination, but soon died of what proved to be a tumor. The second scandal occurred when the Conservative Party won the election and Robert Peel would have assumed the Prime Ministership. He insisted the Whig ladies of the Court resign, but when Victoria refused, Peel felt unable to take office and Melbourne returned. Victoria came to be characterized by her political enemies as a strong willed, egotistic, inflexible, and imperious ruler, lacking propriety and respectability (Rompalske March 1998 and Spall, Jr. April 1987: 19).

However, Arthur Duffy argues that the Queen may have seen a moral value to Van Amburgh’s act, since there was repeated emphasis on it demonstrating man’s God-given authority over all other creatures, with no better proof of his power than his relaxed pose, guarding the lamb, which evoked another biblical reference (Duffy Autumn 2002: 26).

Arthur Wellesley, the First Duke of Wellington (1769-1852), known as the Pacificator of British India and the Defeater of Napoleon at Waterloo, also admired Van Amburgh. Wellington was described as cool and imperturbable under fire. A careful planner, he spoke bluntly and to the point, issued orders, and expected to be obeyed. Considered the greatest British general of his era, the national hero distrusted
democracy, and regularly spoke out against the “ignorance and licentiousness” of the press. The Iron Duke became Prime Minister in 1834, and head of the House of Lords in 1841 (‘Wellington’).

The painting of Van Amburgh, Landseer produced for the Duke proved quite strange. Theater historian, A. H. Saxon called it “Landseer’s Joke on Macready.” The view is from outside the cage, unlike that of the Queen’s, but the act contains the same number, species, and sex of big cats depicted in the first painting. The painting, which hung in Wellington’s Apsley House, was sold in 1975 to Paul Mellon. After being restored at Yale, an accumulation of objects in front of the cage were revealed, including a bouquet, laurel wreath, orange peel, and what Saxon deemed the joke, a playbill showing one of the actors on the bill to be Macready in *Taming of the Shrew* (Saxon Autumn 1978: 89-93).

The Duke had visited Van Amburgh’s performances twice. In 1841 the artist George Hayter wrote that the Duke had wanted a painting of what he deemed a great moral lesson. . . . we are informed that all the animals of creation were created for some use; but we don’t know how to reduce some of them to obedience. The Lyon, the Royal tiger, the Hyena and others, but Van Amburg has effected this, what I want is Landseer to paint for me is Van Amburg, surrounded by the animals he not only has taught obedience but how to live in peace with each other (Duffy Autumn 2002: 26).

Van Amburgh would be standing up, with the animals lying around him, and the lamb at his feet between the lion and the tiger. In an adjoining cage other ferocious beasts are getting along peacefully. This, he concluded, was education, the great moral lesson (Duffy Autumn 2002: 26).

Presumably, Wellington had ordered the painting soon after the Queen, but Landseer had dragged his feet, not beginning the work until late summer of 1846, before finally displaying it at the Royal Academy in 1847. *The Portrait of Mr. Van Amburgh, as he appeared with his animals at the London Theatres* did not garner an enthusiastic critical reception. The composition was acceptable, but there was little imagination evident. The Duke, however, was obviously pleased, sending a check to Landseer for 1000 pounds along with a request that the work be engraved. He hung the painting opposite a portrait of the Duke of Marlborough in Apsley House. The Duke reportedly called it his, “sacred object,” and had an ornamental cartouche added to the frame with the lines from Genesis speaking of man’s dominion over the animals. Obviously, he deemed Van Amburgh more than a stage actor, especially since his art taste
generally ran to the Old Masters, commissioned paintings of his family, or depictions of public life (Duffy Autumn 2002: 26).

The final version of Wellington’s painting was quite different in composition and tone than Victoria’s. It was much larger and the viewpoint was from outside the cage. Van Amburgh stood erectly with a commanding pose. Although the big cats were the same, they were more humanized, and the lamb was omitted. Nineteenth-century reviewers found the “expressions of obedience…marvelously truthful.” Both *The Atheneum* and the *Times* remarked about the “extraordinary pose and expression” of the lion in the corner which was “merely feigning submission.” The Duke himself considered the painting naturalistic (Duffy Autumn 2002: 26-27).

Critics did find fault in the depiction of Van Amburgh, who, according to *The Atheneum*, was far from a lord of creation and did not suggest “the moral power exercised by man over the brute race.” Also unique in Wellington’s version was the use of symbols, especially as Saxon noted, the complex playbill teasing Macready by advertising Van Amburgh in “positively his last appearance on this stage as the main attraction, followed Macready and Company in *The Taming of the Shrew.*” There seems to have been very little contemporary notice of this, with only the *Examiner* criticizing “the playbill with its stale jokes” (Duffy Autumn 2002: 28).

Analysis of the composition reveals two possible sources, Rubens’, *Daniel in the Lions’ Den* and Jacque-Louis David’s, *The Oath of the Horatii*, both of which could have been seen in the Louvre in 1840. Van Amburgh did typically wear a Roman gladiatorial costume and there was a feeling of neoclassical history, heroism, and masculine vigor in the *Oath*. But counteracting these positives was the British dislike of David and Napoleon.

Duffy offers a possible explanation, pointing out that the portrait was of an American, a citizen of the Republic. Hyatt Frost, a later biographer of Van Amburgh, recalled that the trainer was loyal to “the plain and republican simplicity to which he had in early life been inducted.” But was the Duke, a strong monarchist, aware of this when he ordered Landseer to paint Van Amburgh in this pose? Even more surprising, were the liberties Landseer took with a painting for such an important, influential patron, by
adding what appears to be satire. Although David’s paintings were derided in England as “pompous and unnatural,” Landseer’s friends knew him to be an excellent caricaturist, always making private jokes of his contemporaries. The coterie of “smart” artists and writers, which included Landseer, Macready and Dickens, thoroughly disliked the sensationalism of Van Amburgh. Dickens readily knocked him, once signing a letter “Chas Dickens otherwise, Wan Amburg.” After viewing a performance of the lion queen, Ellen Chapman, Dickens remarked how much better she was than the American, “and I think the D. of Wellington must have her painted by Landseer” (Duffy Autumn 2002: 31).

Paintings of circus and stage performances were very rare and this painting emphasizes the artificial situation by including the iron bars and stage. Duffy concludes that Landseer wanted to emphasize it was, “Van Amburgh the performer, not Van Amburgh the man,” who impressed the Queen and Duke of Wellington (Duffy Autumn 2002: 31).

When the Duke finally took possession of the work in 1848 following the Royal Academy exhibition, he wrote a letter thanking Landseer for the care he devoted to the painting. Landseer thanked the Duke for the 1000 pounds, “Your Grace is solely entitled to the merit of the painting, its grandeur and dignity as an illustration of the text from Scripture. The mind and thought belonging to the picture is yours, the matter only mine.” He added that the Duke had been overly generous in his payment and that he would paint, in addition, anything the Duke wanted. Obviously Landseer felt a degree of guilt, having been commissioned in 1839 and not beginning the painting for seven years (Duffy Autumn 2002: 32).

Landseer had never actually produced monumental or traditional history painting, so the portrait may have poked fun at the pretentious works of David and Haydn. The act could be interpreted as a travesty of nature, with Van Amburgh the bombastic star of a melodrama. But after Haydn, who had been a mentor of Landseer, committed suicide, a general sense of guilt pervaded London. Especially, since during that same span of time another American entertainer had seized the British imagination; General Tom Thumb, accompanied by P. T. Barnum. Landseer, Dickens, and Macready had seen him in 1846 at the Egyptian Hall. The Times called Haydn a martyr for the cause of high art and attacked “the display of a disgusting dwarf who poured into the pockets of a Yankee showman a stream of wealth which would
have redeemed an honourable English artist from wretchedness and death.” Van Amburgh, like Tom
Thumb, was an American who had won the enthusiastic approval of the two most admired and influential
in the land—the Queen and the Duke of Wellington--and what could demonstrate the triumph of the
Americans better than Van Amburgh’s control over a lion, the symbol of Britain (Duffy Autumn 2002:
33).

*Punch* was well aware the lion in the corner could also represent Britain and in 1847 published a
cartoon, “The Russian Van Amburgh taming the British Lion, showing the power of an Emperor’s Gold.”
It shows Czar Nicholas I as Van Amburgh brandishing a bag of gold in front of a cowed British Lion with
a crown on its head (*Punch* XII 1847 in Duffy Autumn 2002: 35).

In 1850, Landseer was knighted by Victoria. During his lifetime exhibitions often featured 30 to
40 of his paintings. His last major undertaking was four bronze lions that would surround Nelson’s
monument in Trafalgar Square. He received the commission in 1859 and finally finished the colossal
bronzes in 1867 (Duffy Autumn 2002: 35).

When Landseer died in 1873, *The New York Evangelist* wrote that although few Americans had
the opportunity to see his actual paintings, engravings of the majority of his works are

scattered throughout households and hanging upon the walls of public institutions. They will
recall to the people of many lands the memory of a great painter who excelled all his fellows in
art in the faithful and exact delineation of the humor, the sentiment, and various peculiarities of
the animal world (“Edwin Landseer” Oct. 30, 1873: 3).

An 1876 article, “Engravings from Landseer with a Sketch of the Life and Works of the Artist,”
argued that the Queen’s portrait of Van Amburgh was not reckoned among the masterpieces of
Landseer’s art, and the Duke’s version was even less acceptable. Both, they charitably admitted, have
“extraordinary merits,” but to critics these, “nor any of Landseer’s paintings of lions approach in merit
and value those works of his youth.” When he produced the Wellington painting, he had not painted lions
for a long time, and instead of the accuracy he strove for as a youth, when he actually dissected dead
lions, he “aimed at sad pathos and semi-humanity,” displaying “higher intellectual and imaginative
qualities,” along with a dash of melodrama. The author concludes that *Van Amburgh* was a “failure
throughout, extremely injurious to the reputation of the painter” (“Engravings from Landseer” 1876: 67). Estelle Hurll, in 1901, concurred that Landseer often overemphasized a point, exaggerating its meaning to make it plain (Hurll 1901: viii).

In 1879, The Art Journal claimed “ourselves and our readers” owe a debt of gratitude to the owner of *Van Amburgh and the Lions* for allowing it to be engraved. In it, Van Amburgh dressed as an ancient Roman holds in his right hand a small whip:

The only weapon he was accustomed to use on these occasions to defend himself against any attack the animals might be tempted to make upon him, though, so far as our recollection of Van Amburgh’s performances serves us, there was never any or much danger attending them, so thorough was the subjection to which he had reduced the naturally savage hearts, and that too, as was generally understood, without the exercise of anything deserving of the name of cruelty. The lion, a noble animal, has raised himself against the bars of the cage, with his mouth partly open; behind him is the lioness, crouching down, with her eyes fixed upon their master with an intensity almost indescribable, yet with a mildness that is absolutely beautiful; so too is the face of the leopard beyond. The lioness, the texture of whose skin is a masterly piece of artistic handling, is, combined with the face of the leopard, the triumph of the picture, from the expression thrown into them. On the right of the tamer, is a splendid tiger growling at its compatriots, and in the rear is a young leopardess. . . . . Landseer never painted animal portraiture more naturally and beautifully than in this composition, while even the human figure harmonizes with the subject (“Our Steel Engravings” 1879: 313).

Campbell Lennie, evaluating the Queen’s painting, wrote that the picture with its text from Genesis seemed to reduce God to the status of a menagerie keeper. While “the king of beasts. . . . lolling on a plinth behind the trainer with an expression of inveterate kindness and decency on his face was obviously gazing straight towards Trafalgar Square” (Lennie 1976: 100).

Other art critics tended to agree. What distinguished Landseer from the really great animal painters was his penchant to make animals more beautiful than they really were and as a medium for expressing human sentiment. The animals appear on his canvases like actors participating in tragic, melodramatic, or farcical scenes. To John C. Van Dyke, Landseer at his best was a good draftsman with facile brushwork, great superficial finish, and had extremely successful engravings of his paintings circulated in all the “countries of Christendom.” Despite Landseer’s dislike of the public’s adoration of Van Amburgh, Landseer, himself, represented the remarkable success of the popular over the artistic. He
was the most published artist in Britain, with a vast and devoted following (Ormond 1981 and *Masters in Art* 1904: 201).

Just a few years later in 1907, McDougal Scott insisted that Landseer had an “almost phenomenal love of all animals. A love strengthened by a profound belief in the almost human intelligence of the animal brain.” He had, Scott added, an almost “mesmeric influence over dogs. He subjected them to his will by kindness, and made them his ‘faithful friends and servants.’” Like no artist before, he treated animals as sentient intellectual beings, only separated from man by their inability to speak (Scott 1907: 56).

However, Scott admitted that Landseer lived in a time of “false mawkish sentimentality that often crept into his work.” He was undoubtedly a student of animals and a master draftsman, yet his works often lack truth and realism. He was poor at drawing the human figure, and only fair as a colorist and in composition. Landseer could be a bright, witty, welcome guest—the “Prince of Storytellers”—yet he also suffered from alcoholism and depression, and was hyper-sensitive to criticism. He expressed a similar contradiction in his paintings, seeming to often take pleasure in depicting the physical suffering of animals. In 1837, he wrote Lord Ellesmere, “Who does not glory in the death of a fine stag? On the spot—when in truth he ought to be ashamed of the assassination…” (Scott in Ormond 1981).

His last painting--to some of his later critics, his greatest work—was, *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, in which two polar bears climb over an Arctic shipwreck. It unsentimentally speaks of British imperialism, death in far away desolate places, the violent and destructive forces of nature, and hints at evidence of cannibalism (Ormond 1981: 207).

At the time of Landseer’s death, Victoria, who owned 39 oil paintings, 16 pastel drawings, two frescos, and many sketches by the artist, called it a “merciful release” (Hurll 1901). He was buried at St. Paul’s Cathedral in a public funeral at which the flags were flown at half-mast. The service, conducted by the Bishop of London, cited lines from Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*; “He prayeth well who loveth well both man and bird and beast.” *Punch* published a 27- stanza poem, which included the following:

Mourn all dumb things for whom his skill found voice,
Knitting ‘twixt then and its undreamt of ties,
Till men could in their voiceless joy rejoice.
And read the shadow in their silent eyes.

How many a weary pacer of the street,
In city pent, has passed these scenes to scan,
And drunk the heather’s fragrance round his feet.
In draughts where with wild nature strengthens man.

His art has been sound teacher to his age;
Whither of sympathy ‘twixt man and brute,
Or lessons drawn from nature’s wholesome page,
And pleasure that in truth has deepest root (Punch Oct. 1, 1873).

While another poem claimed:

He has not lived in vain whose magic art
Portrayed God’s creatures in the nobler par;
He has not lived in vain whose teaching tends
To human sympathy with our dumb friends (Lennie 1976).

The Satirical London Press

By the autumn of 1838, the New York Mirror reported that Van Amburgh had become quite a lion in London, and that Charlemagne was a very expensive piece just as a way to introduce Van Amburgh and his savage companions (“Alas for Old Drury and the ‘Legitimate Drama’” Dec. 29, 1838: 215). Ducrow produced the grand production, mangling the original script to cut out dialog and get to the action. The theme was about true and false knights, the abduction and rescue of a maiden, horseback charges starring Ducrow on his horse, Pegasus, elaborate tableaux with excellent scenery, and the grand finale where Van Amburgh’s character is condemned to the cages of the big cats. One critic called “his management of the ‘kings of the forest’” as “grand and appalling” (Actors by Daylight Oct. 27, 1838: 276). The London Times described the spectacle:

We did hear the sage and humane Charlemagne; after inveighing against treason and treachery, humanely order that a grand offender, whether Marsila or Ganalcon we cannot say, should be consigned to the tender mercies of certain forest radicals, lions, tigers, panthers, and leopards, who have been recently caught. Instanter, the scene changed and Mr. Van Amburgh took his station, with the utmost grace, in his wild beasts’ drawing-room. It was a pity that Lord Brougham was not present. Van Amburgh keeps these creatures, from the playful panther to the growling and not over-good tempered lion, under such ‘sovereign sway and mastery’ that the noble and learned Lord might from the scene before him, have caught some new ideas with reference to the perfect management of infant as well as public schools. The extraordinary talent which Mr. Van Amburgh possesses to make the fiercest beasts of the forest fear him and obey
him, and to induce them of smaller size and somewhat gentler natures to fawn on and be fond of him, is a point in natural history to which we have more than once adverted. . . . He certainly must be considered a very extraordinary man, who makes a lion his bed, a tiger his pillow, a leopard his foot covering, and who, when he walks has a respectable panther in the place of a boa (“Drury Lane Theatre” Oct. 23, 1838).

At the end of November, Van Amburgh and Ducrow had a violent falling out and when the actor, John Hatton, tried to intervene he received a black eye. Actors by Daylight described the incident: “Jack fell, the Monsieur galloped off, while Van Amburgh, master of the well fought feud, was received by one universal roar of approbation from the Menagerie.” Ducrow and his equestrians left on December 1, but Bunn managed to work them into his Christmas pantomime (Actors by Daylight Nov. 17, 1838).

Figaro in London drew a parallel between Van Amburgh and “that most powerful beast tamer McConnell.” The Irish statesman, Daniel O’Connell (1775-1847), nicknamed The Liberator, was considered the most successful champion of democracy in Europe. In 1828, he overwhelmingly won an election for a seat in the British Parliament. As a Catholic, he could not take a seat unless he acknowledged the King as the head of the Church. Popular agitation led to the Catholic Emancipation bill and in 1830 he was seated. Figaro claimed the Irish “magician,” an active political reformer, brought the political beasts into such perfect subjugation by using a system that in many ways corresponded with the method adopted by Van Amburgh.

It is not by kindness on the one hand or by affection on the other that O’Connell has brought into a state of subjection the brutes by whom he is surrounded, but it is the powerful use of a rod of iron that he has forced them into the state of abject terror in which they at present holds them. The ferocious beasts had long been in the habit of grinning through their teeth at O’Connell, until at length he advanced boldly into their den, and by laying about him right and left caused such a degree of agitation among the beasts that they shrunk back into the recesses (“The Political Brute Tamer” Dec. 10, 1838).

They showed their cowardice in the presence of the “Irish Van Amburgh.” He held them at bay not through de-fanging or de-clawing, but by moral conscience (“The Political Brute Tamer” Dec. 10, 1838).

During the Christmas holidays, Drury Lane produced the traditional pantomimes with over 2,000 children visiting the theater, largely to see Van Amburgh.
An attempt to set off the value of his skill in taming and governing the lions and tigers by introducing absurd figures of wild animals was hissed by the audience. The dissatisfaction ceased when the scene changed to the real dens with the tigers and lions. Van Amburgh, as usual, mastered the ferocious monsters with power and control, which astonished those who had not witnessed his exploits (Actors by Daylight, No. 44 Dec. 29, 1838: 19).

Meanwhile The Spirit of the Times, a sports and entertainment newspaper, published the words to a satirical song, The Drury Lane Menagerie, to be sung to the tune of The Campbells are Coming (“The Drury Lane Menagerie” Dec. 22, 1838: 355).


According to Brownrigg’s story, Diedrich Van Amburgh was born above the White Hart hostelry in The Hague. The young son of the innkeeper soon showed his amazing powers with the family cat, “said to have been looked into a palsy in her attempt to steal the pap of Diedrich.”

The cat was so completely fascinated, subdued, terrified, by the glance of the babe, that in four-and-twenty hours the animal became from a most beautiful jet-black, a dirty gray white. Now he who at six months could look a black cat white, may be reasonably expected at thirty to change lions into puppy-dogs and tigers into doves (Brownrigg Albion 1839: 97).

At ten months, little Diedrich was left inadvertently in the wine cellar, which was infested with rats as large as hares, some being as large as medium-sized dogs. When the fearful family descended into the cellar, they found their son seated on a gin-tub, shaking his rattle, nodding his head, and “conceitedly trying to snap his little, thick, turnip-radish fingers” to “no less than a hundred and fifty rats. . . dancing and caracoling and at the voice of the baby running up the gin-tub, and licking his face, and subjectedly, as if in token of homage, rubbing their noses against his toes.” Rats stood on their hind legs, begged, sat on his knees, and hung about his neck like a necklace (Brownrigg Albion 1839: 97).
At four, the youngster drove about town in a small shell-like vehicle drawn by twelve rats. There was no doubt that he was destined to become “the Hannibal of Hyenas—the Caesar of Leopards—the Napoleon of Bengal Tigers.” In a few years, the boy was able to call the dolphins from the ocean so they would obligingly gave him a daily four-hour ride out to sea. Diedrich left home with a Dutch skipper in a search to find leopards, tigers, and lions, but instead he was put to work luring whales—by whistling Yankee Doodle—to the ship, where they allowed themselves to be harpooned. “By the force of those great gifts awarded him from his birth,” he made what would have been a long, miserable three-year voyage into “a long excursion of pleasure. What Diedrich had been in his infancy to the rats, that was he in his boyhood to the spermaceti whales.” Finally, however, he managed to desert the ship by hitching a ride back to Amsterdam on the back of a white shark (Brownrigg New Monthly 1839: 45).

Van Amburgh eventually acquired the big cats he wanted, which he trained by intellect rather than brutality. When in Ceylon he concluded that

if there are lions who eat rajahs—tigers that have a propensity for child-stealing—and leopards, nurturing in their savage breasts, a preference for living flesh, no matter of man or beast—the evil arises solely from the misfortune of their ignorance; that they know no better, and are to be pitied for their darkness (Brownrigg New Monthly 1839: 48).

The author was sure it would delight readers that Mr. Van Amburgh, “quite in opposition to the general belief, rules them with the downiest feather.” His heaviest weapon is a stick of cinnamon. He uses this on the hides of his pupils

not as a means of physical punishment, but as a far more bitter chastisement. . . .It is really delicious to witness the interview of Van Amburgh with the beasts in their time of relaxation—when not stirred up to please a vulgar audience by an affectation of ferocity, it is most gratifying to witness the interchange of caresses between the master and his servants; the mild intelligence on the one side—the confidence and gratitude on the other (Brownrigg New Monthly 1839: 48).

His treatment of the brutes, Brownrigg continued, is largely intellectual. He reasons with them and eventually succeeds in conveying right and wrong behavior. He has various manuscripts at his disposal to read to the animals to tranquilize their “rising passions” and finds nothing better than the libretto of a new opera (Brownrigg New Monthly 1839: 48-49).
The article concluded that, although they did not have the brute-tamer’s address, or the cost per lesson, “if any of our readers, male or female will apply personally to him, having made up their minds to conform to the selfsame harmonizing system worked out with such success upon the lower animals, they need not for an instant doubt of the same gratifying results,” since he would do for men of “all conflicting opinions, passions, and interests” what he has already done for lions, tigers and leopards (Brownrigg New Monthly 1839: 49).

In February, The Gentleman’s Magazine, wrote a scathingly sarcastic review of “Ephraim Watts” biography of Van Amburgh. “This celebrated beast-tamer, who has lately charmed all England, has had his life taken; two individuals have been caught . . . and their misdeeds published to the world. The offenders are—Washington Warren, of New York, and a certain Mister Ephraim Watts, formerly of New England, but now of Old London” (“Mirabilia Exemplae” Feb. 1839: 135).

The preface was denounced as “one of the most finished chapters of egotism and foolery ever penned.” Ephy Watts describes a wild boar as ugly, vicious, and piratical, while a rhinoceros is a “clumsiudinacious brute!” In the midst of the narration, Watts assures us that Van Amburgh praises the rifles he sells in his store. He also informs readers that Victoria was so delighted with Van Amburgh that she visited him incognito at his lodgings, offering him a private order of knighthood. . . . What is a private order of knighthood. . . . how could her most gracious majesty visit the brute-tamer incog., if she offered to knight him—an honor proceeding only from royalty? Nevertheless Queen Vic had a right to do the genteel thing to the menagerie man, as a return for the attention paid Deaf Burke by the Congressmen at Washington (“Mirabilia Exemplae” Feb. 1839: 135).

The Queen’s visits to Drury Lane were also satirized in Actors by Daylight:

The Queen’s visit to Drury-lane theatre on Tuesday last (from an exclusive source).
The Queen paid a private visit to Drury-lane theatre, on Thursday eve last, the 24th inst. The newspaper reports state the visit was a strictly private one, and that at the end of the performance the Queen (the audience having quitted the theatre) went upon the stage, which was completely walled in by the scenery, and saw Van Amburgh’s fed. The reports state that no other persons were present, the Queen’s suite excepted, but Mr. Van Amburgh, Mr. Bunn, and Mr. Russell the stage manager. This, however, is not correct—we were there.

“So, these are the animals.” Said her Majesty, pointing to the dens which had been again drawn upon the stage.

“Yes, your Majesty,” said the Marquis of Conyingham.

“And that’s Von Humbug, the man who trained them” said the Queen, pointing to Bunn.
Bunn rectified the trifling error of her Majesty and intonated that the lion tamer was Van Amburgh. The Queen here says the beasts might want their suppers, which was responded to by a roar of gratitude and delight from the beasts themselves, who doubtless understood her Majesty. A cold collation, consisting of shins of beef, bullocks’ heads and other such delicate edibles, was then served up to them, we regret to add that the animals paid no more respect to her Majesty than they would to us but devoured their food with a voracity truly alarming. Surely Mr. Van Amburgh might have taught them that there were some little ploys of etiquette that should be observed before so distinguished a great visitor.

“Astonishing!” cried the Queen, “they eat raw beef.”

“They do indeed,” replied the Marquis.

“They are wonderful animals,” continued her Majesty, “and Van Amburgh is a wonderful man, I wonder they don’t tear him to pieces. I daresay they will someday. It is a very curious sight: lions are very fierce, and so are tigers, and so are leopards. Mr. Van Amburgh must have a great deal of courage—ask him if he is ever frightened of them, my lord?”

Van Amburgh’s reply was in the negative.

“La, you don’t say so!” cried the Queen.

“Well I never—they are fine animals,” she continued, “very astonishing too.”

The Queen made many more remarks, which at once displayed the extraordinary wisdom and brilliant intellect nature has bestowed upon her, and fearing that late hours might not agree with the lions, and the tigers might take cold, the Majesty quitted the classic boards of Drury-lane Theatre, and returned to Buckingham Palace, to dream o’er the wonders she had seen and to make up her mind to ask her mother’s advice, whether she should invite Van Amburgh’s beasts to a dinner party at the Palace or not (Actors by Daylight Feb. 2, 1839: 98-99).

One week later the magazine reported:

Several new pieces—of beef, &c. were produced here on Monday evening last, much to the gratification of the audience and the lions. The entertainments were received with roars of approbation, especially by the later. The meat looked fresh, the beasts hungry and the audience anxious, all were satisfied. At the end of the repast, one of the leopards was called for, which refusing to appear, the Bengal tigress announced the supper for repetition “every evening until further notice.” The Queen witnessed the performances on this occasion. She came privately to the theatre, and quitted it privately (Actors by Daylight Feb. 9, 1839: 118).

The London Times wrote that after Van Amburgh had despotized over his four-legged and parti-coloured subjects. . . . then came the great treat (at all events for the animals) of the night—the feeding of the lions, tigers, panthers, and other fierce vermin of smaller grade. These creatures we can affirm, are not confined to a Poor Law Commissioner’s dietary. The allowance of beef appeared to be ample; quite sufficient for all the ravenous animals, if anything like justice prevailed in this four-footed assembly. But it was not so. The O’Connell of the brutes, a fellow with staring eyes, shaggy mane, grinning visage, and portentous teeth, having swiftly gorged his own legitimate portion of food, turned on his weaker companions. . . we never before saw so truly exemplified the power of ‘the lion’s share’ (“Court Circular—Drury Lane Theatre” Feb. 5, 1839).

At the conclusion of the wild beast ‘festival,’ Her Majesty and suite left the theater as “silently and secretly as they entered it” (“Court Circular—Drury Lane Theatre” Feb. 5, 1839).
Figaro in London furthered the tirade against the Queen, who “should by at least an outward appearance of propriety and good taste, set an example to the community.” The author wrote he was referring, of course, to the “peculiar taste which the Queen has manifested for seeing wild beasts... and her most unaccountable, and insatiable desire to witness the nasty and revolting process of feeding them.” If this “strange and indelicate as it confessedly is” behavior had been confined to the Queen, it would not matter, but the “slavish British public sought to follow suit” and “beastly exhibitions having become popular from her patronage of them, are now presented to the public to the exclusion of the drama... and even some inferior entertainments, but low as ever they are, they are infinitely superior to the exhibitions of which the vitiated taste of our Virgin Queen has set the hateful example” (“The Queen and the Wild Beasts” Feb. 1839).

It is quite evident, that had it not been for the extraordinary notion of the Queen, no manager (out of the precincts of Bartholomew Fair) would have thought of announcing as part of the performances, the feeding of a number of wild beasts; and we are, therefore, indebted to Victoria, as a girl of less than twenty (which alone should have induced a more delicate taste) for the introduction to the stage of certainly the most beastly and degrading exhibition that ever polluted it (“The Queen and the Wild Beasts” Feb. 1839).

If the Queen kept setting such an example, “at what point of horror and filthiness” will the managers stop, “for their interest must overcome their judgment, and impel them to keep pace with the public desire to witness the disgusting sights, which the patronage of the Queen has established as the only fashionable theatrical exhibition” (“The Queen and the Wild Beasts” Feb. 1839).

That spring, even The New York Mirror and Saturday Evening Post lampooned the Queen’s visit.

We had the good fortune (having fallen asleep during the performance) to be in the theatre at Drury, when her majesty witnessed the feeding of the lions on the stage, after the audience had been let out. A plague side-scene, placed just before our sidebox, intercepted our view for sometime, but at length we got a sight of the royal party. The following is all can recollect of the conversation that took place:

“Don’t you feel very much afraid sometimes when you’ve got your head in the lion’s mouth, Mr. Van Amburgh!” said a thin clear voice; ‘and is it true that, if the lion wags its tail, he is sure to bite your head off?’—Van Amburgh ‘aggravated his voice’ to such a submissive whisper that I
couldn’t hear what he said in reply. He did not seem half so independent as his beasts, who were roaring away, and clawing at their bars, and lashing their tails like the surges of an ocean.

“Dear, dear, what a sweet pretty leopard!” said the same pretty voice; ‘and so playful too. Well, I should like to have one of your leopards, Mr. Van Amburgh. Cousin All should feed it. What a delightful romp I could have with it! Mais gardez vous, Madame la Baronne’—and then there was a loud scream and clear laugh. ‘Well, I couldn’t have thought that the creatures was so fierce! Oh! The dreadful brute. I dare say he would almost attack me if I went near the bars.’

‘Do you think, Mr. Van Amburgh,” said the young lady again, “you could take another lamb in as safely as you did that one tonight. Here is one who would like very much to try the experiment,’ and she laid hold of the lapel of the coat of an elderly gentleman standing by, and pushed him slightly to the bars, saying to him, ‘Do now, there’s a good, kind man. It would be such fun.’ The elderly gentleman did not appear to think so. He jumped back with such agility, that if the curtain had not been down, he must have fallen into the orchestra, and, as it was, he only saved himself by a very decided clutch of the bit of green baize. Such a laugh! Such a clear, singing laugh, I never heard’ (“The Queen and the Lions” April 13, 1839 and “The Queen and the Lions” May 4, 1839: 4).

Of course, Alfred Bunn’s diaries reveal his objections to the press’s criticism of the Queen. He argued that Victoria’s inquiries of Van Amburgh were not those of just a youthful mind, but revealed her close scrutiny of the animals and performance. Bunn admitted that a visit to the stage by a ruler, something so without precedent, would not “escape the observations of those malicious partisans the sole object of whose life is to carp and cavil at the actions of their equals, and who naturally lie in ambush for an opportunity of attacking their superiors, and the more exalted in rank, the better for the purposes of such people.” The young Queen, Bunn insisted, was indulging in a harmless recreation suitable to a time in life when

the mind is thirsting for every kind of information. Just because destiny made her Queen, should she be barred from the pursuit of pleasure. . . . a more beautiful or truly interesting sight could not be devised, than to behold this young and lively creature emerging from the trammels of state. . . . and seeking relief in those diversions which instruct and amuse at the same time; and none but a fool will withhold the award of both these qualifications from Mr. Van Amburgh’s surpassing exhibition (Bunn 1840: 163).

After the noteworthy incident of viewing the animals being fed, Victoria honored Drury Lane with a command performance on January 29th. In addition, Landseer, “this gigantic genius, this prince of painters, this wonder among art and artists,” was ordered to paint Van Amburgh. After the performance, the Queen had a lengthy conversation with Van Amburgh, and her questions, according to Bunn, revealed a rich knowledge of natural history and a “desire for increasing that store.” Bunn noted that her
enthusiasm for Van Amburgh was not unique, as the Duke of Wellington attended twice, and had half-hour talks with the trainer each time (Bunn 1840: 164).

The Marquis of Anglesea, Lord Brougham, and a long list of remarkable and fashionable characters, poured into the theatre, day after day, even as early as nine o’clock in the morning, to witness the process of feeding the animals and to see (more anxiously than anything else), the extraordinary individual who held such control over them, to the surprise as well as admiration of all beholders (Bunn 1840: 165).

On February 15, Van Amburgh gave a superb dinner for about 70 in the saloon of Drury Lane in appreciation of the patronage he had received. He consulted with Bunn since he did not want to appear ostentatious, but properly thankful. A dinner was decided upon, since Bunn contended nothing caused people to forget their differences as effectively. It was held during Lent, Bunn satirically commented, “because Lord John Russell could make our doors fast, he had not the power to make us fast.” The whole company of Drury Lane was invited along with nobility, literary men, and professionals (Bunn 1840: 195).

Bunn strove to keep the affair light-hearted, and toasts were drunk to the Queen. The entertainment largely consisted of toasts to, and responses by Van Amburgh, as well as singing. Bunn claimed all agreed on Van Amburgh’s “manliness of character and undaunted nerve,” accompanied by “modest reserve,” and a lack of vanity. Those in attendance resolved they should reciprocate by holding a dinner for the American (Bunn 1840: 196 and “Dinner at Drury Lane” Feb. 15, 1839).

Following the dinner, the articles about Van Amburgh took a more diverse turn. They kept the American’s name before the public, and typically dealt with animal births, deaths, fights, escapes, and attacks, often with the dates highly confusing. For example, a March 9, 1839 piece in the Spirit of the Times, “Green Room Gossip,” referred to an incident reported in Age in January about Van Amburgh’s old lion, Billy, suffering from the “wuffles.” He refused his shins of beef, a sheep’s head, and a goose. At last, a “tallow-faced Jew of the Alhambra” suggested pork. Van Amburgh threw a “grunter” into the den, and the lion bolted down the porker. “Billy is improving upon a pig per diem.” On February 28, The
Times reported that Van Amburgh had received two new lions from America and would appear with them at Drury Lane on the occasion of Mr. Bunn’s benefit. The Spirit of the Times claimed that Billy now had a room assigned to him alone. Unfortunately, when Van Amburgh greeted the sleepy lion with his usual, “Holles, Billy!,” the big cat rose up to greet him and wagged his tail in a nearby fire. The roar that issued from him even shook Van Amburgh’s nerves (Spirit of the Times Mar. 9: 2 and Mar. 16, 1839: 15; “Green-Room Gossip” Jan. 13, 1839: 14, and “Royal Surrey Theatre” Feb. 28, 1839). Although there were some reports that Billy had subsequently died, others claimed he had been sent to the country to restore his health (“English Green Room Intelligence” Mar. 30, 1839: 48).

Two weeks later, the newspapers noted how the toasts of London during the past season had been two Americans, Van Amburgh and Dan Rice. But as Rice’s portrayal of Jim Crow waned in popularity, Van Amburgh became the mainstay of Drury Lane’s success (“English Green Room Intelligence” Mar. 30, 1839: 48). Also in April, the New York paper, Spirit of the Times, claimed that a female member of the new ballet at Drury Lane, who was a friend of Van Amburgh’s, gained permission to go backstage to see the lions. Unfortunately, one seized her by the head, laying open her scalp completely (“Foreign Theatricals—Drury Lane Theatrical Fund” April 6, 1839: 60). At a rival exhibition at St. James Theatre, a tiger quickly killed a panther that had annoyed him. Less than a month later, two lions at this same exhibit died. Necropsies were conducted at King’s College with no foul play determined (“Death of the Lions ‘Bobby’ and “Prince.”” May 4, 1839: 106).

During this time, a story emerged that would become a mainstay in wild animal trainer lore, when it was reported that a gentleman went to Drury Lane every night in expectation of Van Amburgh being “made a meal of.” He would not miss the sight for the world and was confident it would occur one evening (“General Intelligenti” April 25, 1839: 159).

On March 23, Van Amburgh had his benefit. The Spirit of the Times claimed that when Rule Britannia was sung at the finale, Van Amburgh could not come out front and Titus was forced to appear and apologize for him. The reason, the paper revealed, was that “Van Amburgh unfortunately split his
inexpressibles.” The American’s run at Drury Lane had lasted 115 days, in addition to his dates at Astley’s. The result was the reduction of the animals to a state of obedience that is quite marvelous, for, while the huge monarch of the forest approaches Mr. Van Amburgh with every demonstration of attachment, tenderly and familiarly passing his lips over his cheek, the splendid tigers, indomitable as she had been supposed to be, advances and courts his attentions with almost equal fondness; and the three or four panthers play about him, leaping on one shoulder then on the other, like so many kittens. The whole of the exhibition is surprising, but this portion of is more; it may be said to be really pleasing (“Drury Lane Theatre—Van Amburgh’s Benefit” May 4, 1839: 108 and “Foreign Theatricals” May 11, 1839: 120).

Van Amburgh then prepared to depart for Manchester or Liverpool, but his success in London had to be beyond his hopes. He was well aware that audiences craved novelty, so that, even with the wonder he has brought across the Atlantic for our entertainment, he could never have contemplated the possibility of keeping alive the public interest as he has done now for so many months together, an undoubtedly assured him success in the North. . . .The evening passed off altogether pleasantly as possible, considering that the excited multitude had come to bid a favourite actor farewell ( “Drury Lane Theatre—Van Amburgh’s Benefit” May 4, 1839).

That spring, Ducrow and Van Amburgh reconciled and appeared together on the same bill in April ( “Drury Lane Theatre—Van Amburgh’s Benefit” May 4, 1839).

Van Amburgh Goes to Paris

The next stop on Van Amburgh’s tour was Paris, where another short volume on his life raved that “his success in Paris, it is almost impossible to describe; the enthusiasm of that vivacious people was kindled to an absolute fervor; the whole city was animated with one sentiment, that of witnessing so extraordinary a spectacle, and dresses, bonnets and ribbons, ‘a la Van Amburgh,’ became all the rage” (A Concise Account… 1841: 9).

Earlier in the century, Parisians had enjoyed the performances of Henri Martin, who had toured the continent with his animal collection beginning in 1821. A serious student of zoology, especially ornithology, Martin gained a good reputation and the friendship of the leading amateur zoologists of the day, including Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia, Baron Cuvier, and the Arch Duke of Saxe-Weimar. Martin’s patroness was the Duchese de Beni, who helped him establish his menagerie in Paris.
In 1830, Martin made his debut at Cirque Olympique in the first lion melodrama; *Les Lions de Mysore*. He enacted the role of a noble escaping through the forest from the wrath of a sultan. He is captured and thrown into a cage with a “ferocious” lion, and demonstrates his mastery over the animal. Frequently, Martin used a wire net masked by jungle scenery to create the impression that all the animals and actors were actually intermingling. In one scene, he rescued his two sons from a pair of boa constrictors, striking the pose of *The Laocoon*. As comedy relief, a pelican came on stage and stole the dinner of the Sultan’s jester. During his ‘adventure,’ Martin also encountered llamas, a buffalo, a monkey, and a kangaroo as he wandered through the wilderness. The Sultan entered the stage riding on an elephant and engaged in a tiger hunt. He then captured Martin, and gave him a chance at freedom if he could vanquish an untamed lion in single combat in the arena at Mysore. The victorious Martin was forgiven by the sultan and took part in a triumphant procession that wound across the stage, complete with the elephant, dancing girls, military troops, and a band (Saxon *Enter Foot and Horse* 1968).

Generally, the French displayed a scientific attitude toward the study of wild animals. In 1804, Frederic Cuvier, who had earlier denounced menageries as institutions of extravagance, changed his mind and wrote a guidebook to the newly established menageries of the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. Following the Revolution, the Jardin des Plantes and the Cabinet d’Histoire Naturelle had been democratized into the museum. The basis of the exhibit was exotic animals confiscated from Versailles. This collection was supplemented through formal government sponsored scientific voyages and from gifts presented by naval officers, colonial administrators, merchants, and travelers. Many naturalists doubted that anything could be learned from captive animals, but Cuvier argued that menageries were to zoologists as labs were to chemists, and could eventually render field studies unnecessary, or at least provide a basic understanding, in advance of field work, of the “faculties and dispositions” of various species (Burkhardt, Jr. Feb. 2001: 62).

Public interest in wild animals also was evidenced through the popularity of the sculptures of the so-called animaliers, a French school of sculpture whose members devoted their careers to depicting animals as they appeared in nature, rather than symbolically or decoratively. Prior to this development,
animals were shown as emotional, moral, and physical extensions of humans and not really subjects for serious art (Irye 1994: abstract).

When Antoine Louis Barye exhibited his first animal sculpture at the Paris Salon of 1831, a critic dubbed him an Animalier, ‘a maker of animals.’ The classic tradition concentrated on the study of the human body, but the Romantic Movement urged a return to nature and aroused interest in wild animals. For those accustomed to classical art, the new unfettered style seemed brutal. Barye had sketched live animals at the Jardin des Plants, gaining insight into their movements and individual behaviors. He dissected animals, sketching and honing his skills, as well as studying the mounted specimens of the Museum of Natural History to perfect his anatomic knowledge. Barye’s popularity, which peaked between 1837-48, caused the number of animaliers to burgeon during the latter half of the 19th century (“The Animaliers” June 17, 2008 and “Antoine Louis Barye” June 17, 2008).

Barye displayed his masterpiece, *Tiger Devouring a Gavial* (now in the Louvre) in 1831, followed up by *Lion and Serpent* (1832). His *Lion* (1833) was described “as terrifying as Nature, What vigor and what truth! . . . Is his atelier a desert of Africa or a forest of Hindustan?” Another admirer claimed, “yesterday I heard a lion roar.” His were not whimsical views of animals, like the “mawkish, over sentimental view seen at its worst with Landseer” The bridge between Barye and Landseer was the Romantic French painters Gercault (1791-1823) and Delacroix (1798-1863) (Mackey1973). After traveling in North Africa, Delacroix began to paint animal scenes of tremendous wild energy, featuring combats between lions and serpents, lions and tigers, lions attacking Arab traders, and scenes of Daniel in the lion’s den. His lion hunt pictures have been called a terrifying confusion of lions, men, and horses—a chaos of claws, fangs, and cutlasses (Huyge 1963).

But even Delacroix came to be an admirer of Barye, saying that no one ever rendered so well the expressions felines reveal through the sinuous movements of their tails. According to critics, he was able to see wild animals in captivity, and through his “vigorous imagination,” transform them “into their forest aspect concerned with killing and self-preservation, brought before us at moments of crisis and tense
effort, of violent attack and frenzied resistance... embodiments of concentrated strength.” The emphasis is on strength rather than aristocratic elegance (Jouve 1921: 47).

In this milieu, it does not seem surprising that Van Amburgh’s debut was eagerly anticipated by Parisians. They wanted to see the man “to whom the most ferocious tigers are but crouching slaves, and under whose piercing eye the monarch of brute creation feels his mighty spirit cowed and overmastered.” But when the crowds arrived at the Porte-St.-Martin Theater, they found inspectors had not ruled the setup adequately safe for the public, delaying the premier one night. On Saturday, the overflow audience loudly clamored through the introductory piece. This was followed by the melodrama in which the animals would appear, but to the audience’s dismay it went on scene after scene. Murmured curses could be heard with every scene change. When the sultan finally mentioned throwing someone into a den of wild beasts, there was a long and loud round of applause. As ‘Ahmed’ was being marched to his certain death, he asked to see his child, who he then declares is not his, but instead the offspring of Saud, his great enemy at the sultan’s court. He throws the child into the animal den and dares the father to retrieve it. Finally Van Amburgh appears as Saud, who is in the midst of his terrible companions, consisting of three enormous lions, a lioness, two or three immense tigers, and several leopards and panthers, the whole of whom fear and obey him with the docility of a lady’s spaniel; the largest and most ferocious of the monsters crouch before him as their master, while the smaller and more playful of the forest tribe caress him as a friend. He strikes and excites the most savage of them by blows until their rage becomes terrible to witness, when, at the first amicable motion or friendly pat from his hand, they exhibit the tameness and even cordiality of a favourite domestic animal. A spectacle more critically interesting, and at the same time terrible, it is nearly impossible to imagine. The terror, we should state, arises from the contemplation of the enormous strength and tremendous proportions of most of the animals, the length of whose teeth and claws made more than one of the audience not a little grateful for the cautious vigilance of the police, although the calm security of Van Amburgh, and his complete command over the animals prevent anything like serious alarm (“Van Amburgh in Paris” Sept. 28, 1839: 360).

The reporter added that there was no resemblance between Van Amburgh’s act and Henri Martin’s earlier exhibits.

Setting aside the vast superiority in the appearance of the present animals, which are among the very finest which have been seen in Europe, the wary intercourse of M. Martin with his menagerie, compared with the command by Mr. Van Amburgh, was the mere display of a showman placed in comparison with the mastery which the scientific naturalist may be supposed to obtain over the most untamable of the brute creation by a close and philosophical attention to
their natures and their habits. It is unnecessary to add that this really remarkable spectacle was successful, or that, it will attract crowds in Paris, as it did in London, for a period of several months (“Van Amburgh in Paris” Sept. 28, 1839: 360).

**Back to England**

Back in London, Ducrow engaged the tall, handsome, John Carter’s animal presentation for Astley’s in October. Carter, an Englishman by birth, had been living in America. The melodrama, *The Miracle or Afghur the Lion King*, was described as an “Egyptio-Hindu-Arabian Spectacle,” featuring horses, ponies, zebras, ostriches, and crocodiles, “besides other beasts natural and unnatural, paraded in endless variety up and down the stage.” Carter, asleep in the ‘wilderness,’ was rudely awakened by a leopard that sprang at him from a rock. After subduing this first challenge, he was thrown into a den of lions, tigers, leopards and panthers. Dialogue from the play asserted, “He would take the untamable lion by the throat! Do battle with the wily Hyena, and make the fierce and ravenous tiger crouch at his feet like a beaten hound.” After mastering them, he drove a lion harnessed to a chariot up a ‘mountainside.’ Many critics called his animals too tame, with their spirits broken, compared to the “savageness, uneasiness,” of Van Amburgh’s, which infused spectators with “the satisfactory feeling that the life of a fellow creature was in danger and thus gave a zest to the scene. . . .” (Disher 1971: 144-147).

In contrast, there was more freedom of movement in Carter’s performance since the front of the stage was covered by wire and animals and actors interacted. The harnessed lion proved particularly hazardous. When Carter struck the animal when it refused to move, the lion grabbed him by the thigh, severely biting him. In another incident, the lion was badly injured when Carter, the lion, and chariot fell off the ‘mountain’ (Saxon 1978).

Although Ducrow seems to have done well financially with this venture, many of his customers urged him, “Give us thy riders and thy stud, Ducrow! Nor let a scene, once famed for graceful men, be longer turned into a Lion’s Den!” (Disher1971 and Saxon 1978)

In 1840, Carter, who had also appeared in Paris at the Cirque Olympique, joined forces with Van Amburgh. Thus, during the 1840s, Van Amburgh toured Great Britain and France, sometimes in connection with Ducrow or in partnership with Carter. He played Edinburgh, Dublin, Manchester, and
Liverpool. In Edinburgh, he appeared at the Theatre Royal, where a “brilliant audience” crowded the house and listened intently to “catch a preliminary roar from ‘the lions of the night.’” The wild animals were contained in a den that extended completely across the stage, in one section were the lion, two tigers, and three leopards, while the other housed a lion, lioness, and three leopards. “There must have been few of the spectators who did not feel a shudder, when the intrepid man stepped into the first den, and stood calmly amid the monsters, that could have riven him in pieces, did they but know their own power.” The reporter noted that the lion and tiger crouched down, while the leopard prowled about. He found the “docility of the leopards remarkable.” On Van Amburgh’s signal, they sprang on his shoulders, “rest upon his head, or spread themselves on the ground to make a pillow for him.” He then “playfully boxes with them and the cats growl, snarl, and snap when he knocks their heads on the ground or cuffs their ears. But he just has to say a word to still their growls and have them crouch at his feet.” Van Amburgh then opened the jaws of a roaring lion, rapidly opening and shutting its mouth, which broke “the roar into a succession of sounds that mingled the ludicrous with the horrible and when we thought its patience was to be exhausted, he shut its mouth close, and pressed its muzzle lovingly against his cheek.” The lioness seemed most rebellious, and when he tried to grab her ear, she struck at Van Amburgh several times. “The rapidity of his hand kept him clear of the strike,” and when she advanced her head, growling, Van Amburgh “coolly put his face close to her, and looked steadily (and almost playfully) into her eyes, till she shrank back from his glare. It was striking proof of the power so often remarked of the human eye, and it drew down thunders of applause” (A Concise Account . . . 1841: 10-11).

Van Amburgh was held over at the theater, since the manager claimed he could have filled the boxes eight times over. During this second engagement, Van Amburgh announced he would display all of his animals, including a performing elephant and “those scarce and valuable animals, THE GIRAFFES OR CAMELOPARDS, which will form a phalanx of attraction exceeding anything ever witnessed.” Four giraffes had been captured in what is now the Sudan. The two youngest reportedly had been suckled by native women for 40 days prior to their arrival at the Nile. The trek to the Second Cataract began in January 1840 and ended in the middle of March. On May 20, they arrived in Alexandria and from there
the animals were shipped to New York where they arrived in mid-August. Two remained in the United States, while the other two were exported to England and initially kept in the former menagerie area of the Tower of London. These two females stood about nine and twelve feet respectively (*A Concise Account...* 1841: 12-15).

The author insisted that, “the present advanced state of natural history precludes the necessity of going into a lengthened or minute description of the elephant.” The ‘docile,’ ‘clever’ animal was previously seen at Astley’s. It was nine feet tall with finely formed tusks. The author concluded that, the uniqueness of this splendid collection, the unrivalled fame of Mr. Van Amburgh, the style in which it is conducted, so different from anything which was ever presented to the British public, will, it is hoped, procure for it that liberal support and patronage it will be the pride of the proprietor to describe (*A Concise Account...* 1841: 16).

The exhibit, he added, will visit all the principal cities and towns in the United Kingdom (*A Concise Account...* 1841: 16).

Van Amburgh appeared in a number of productions, such as the one presented at the Royal Surrey Theatre, *Mungo Parke, or The Arab of the Niger*, in which he played an Arab attacked by a leopard, then a lion, and “finally encounters the whole herd in their dens.” At the same time, Carter was at Astley’s in the French “melodrama and ballet of action” that he had performed for 128 nights in Paris, called, *The Lion of the Desert, or, The French in Algiers (“A New French Melodrama” The London Times June 29, 1840).*

Then, shockingly, in July 1841, *The Theatrical Journal* reprinted a letter from Voonsacket, U. S., dated June 16, that had first appeared in a French paper, claiming Van Amburgh had perished in a most frightful manner. While exhibiting his animals in a meadow near Scituate, a young lady had dared him to enter the tigers’ cage at feeding time. He replied that there was no real danger, and ordered an “enormous piece of beef to be thrown in.” A tigress gained possession of the slab and retreated to a corner with her prize. Van Amburgh tried three times to take it from the roaring tigers, who furiously lashed their tails. The audience correctly began to doubt Van Amburgh’s reassurances, and the tigress finally leapt at him, knocking him down, and burying her claws in his throat. The audience quickly fled, which left Van
Amburgh “at the mercies of the maddened animal, who continued to vent upon him her rage until he became a lifeless corpse. After much difficulty the tigers were shot, and the mutilated remains of the beast tamer recovered” (“Chit Chat: Reported Death of Van Amburgh” July 10, 1841: 262-263).

Stories about the demise of Van Amburgh continued to circulate, often with recent circus historians citing them as fact. An 1846 story quoted by Peter Verney in 1978, claimed that on a sultry, overcast, almost stifling day near Boston, an especially intense electric storm broke out. While admonishing the nervous cats, Van Amburgh turned his back on a lion, the animal immediately pounced on the trainer, mauling him, and although Van Amburgh battled the cat, even forcing his hand down the lion’s throat to throttle it, he died from his wounds just hours later (Verney 1978: 121-122).

Contrary to such reports, Van Amburgh was very much alive. However, unfortunate incidents did occasionally occur. In the spring of 1842, while the menagerie was traveling from Dover to Folkestone, the driver of a wagon containing some of the animals failed to lock the wheels as he descended a steep hill. The cage wagon sped up, the shaft horse fell under the wagon, and the driver was thrown to the road and run over, making him “quite extinct.” The horses, wagon, and wild animals were scarcely damaged (“Lions at Dover” April 20, 1842).

The following year, Van Amburgh played the English Opera House in his new capacity as theatrical manager and lessee of a national theater. Carter was a partner in this undertaking. Their joint display was said to demonstrate the ability of man to tame the wildest animals, to subdue those creatures whose natural instincts would lead them to devour him, and whose physical strength, and “carnivorous organization gave them the power, had they the will to do so. But it excites also a feeling of wonder as to the means by which the startling effect has been produced, and excitement, from the evident danger in which the chief actor is placed.” The men, the writer concluded, with little doubt, eventually will be injured and the justification for such an exhibition could also be questioned. Today, “the ability to provoke wonder (unlike ancient Rome) is now only rewarded by the applause of those not occupying the highest point in the scale of intelligence.” Thankfully, he continued, the days of “agony and blood” in the Coliseum are gone, as well as the “minor barbarities of bull-baiting, bear-baiting, and badger-drawing.”
Although it was difficult to talk about good taste at the same time as describing the “barbarizing warrrings of lions and tigers,” he conceded that Van Amburgh was not the only manager catering to lower tastes and noted that “at least the two tamers display courage and sagacity.” They presently were appearing in *Aslar and Ozines; or, The Lion Hunters of the Burning Zarara*. The plot, admittedly was tedious and confusing, and “we avoid in charity any allusion to the brute-tamers as actors, apart from their peculiar vocations…” (“Mr. Van Amburgh and his Lions” Jan. 21, 1843: 44).

In 1845, Van Amburgh built a “commodious brick amphitheater,” and his performances, which included equestrians and Sweeny, the banjo player, were well attended (*The Theatrical Journal* Jan. 11, 1845: 16). Three years later when he appeared at The Rotunda in Vauxhall Gardens, the critic contended that there was no appearance of “bullying” in his exhibition, as was seen in performances of itinerant keepers. Instead, he “rolls about, amongst and upon the huge creatures of the desert and the jungle, as a child will do with a large family dog on the hearth-rug, and they seem in turn to regard him with the same degree of affection.” In fact, the critic began to think the ferocity of lions and tigers might be the exception rather than the rule. The animals, it was noted, were in splendid condition (Scott 1955: 105-106).

**Souvenirs of Van Amburgh**

During his stay in England, Van Amburgh was immortalized in Staffordshire pottery. Staffordshire was the pottery district of England, and furnished the country with everything from earthenware flowerpots to the most superb porcelain tableware, from children’s playthings to replicas of the Portland Vase. The district was about 10 miles long, three to four miles in width, and contained 70,000 residents. Black smoke poured from the factories, while the by-products included arsenic, muriatic acid, and sulphur (“A Peep at the Staffordshire Potteries” February 22, 1840: 59).

“Staffordshires,” bright, strikingly painted representations of the celebrities of the day, were aimed at the growing working class consumer market. Both workers and the middle class, with their increasing disposable income, could purchase figurines, commemorative plates, and mugs. They were sold, often by Italian street vendors, at city stalls, fairs, and seaside resorts, as chimney ornaments, for
mantelpieces, or window sills. The figures represented a “whole kaleidoscope of Victorian popular
culture,” including characters from art, religion, literature, idealized figures like Jack Tar, or actual people
from public life. Some depicted scenes from Astley’s or melodramas, while sports figures and animals
also proved popular. Since Victorian culture was based around the “performance of good character,” and
placed a “high premium on the notion of transparency” that would reveal motivation, the Staffordshire
figures usually marked the “conjunction of narrative and portraiture” (McWilliam 2005: 107-113).

Needless to say, Vam Amburgh figures were popular. One eight-inch group showed a bearded
Vam Amburgh with a black tiger, while another six-inch piece depicted him standing with his hands
resting on the heads of flanking lions, while a tiger peers over his left shoulder with its paws resting on
Vam Amburgh’s back. A third piece shows the trainer wrestling with a lion. The cat is on its hind legs
while Vam Amburgh attempts with both hands to open its jaws (Stanley 1963: 115). Other memorabilia
included mugs and pitchers commemorating his run at Drury Lane.

In addition to sculptural figures Vam Amburgh also was the subject of hand-colored juvenile
drama sheets. These were printed sheets of scenery and characters, first appearing about 1810, from
which children could create their own miniature theaters (Burlingham 2009). The 1839 Vam Amburgh set
showed the trainer in a tropical setting and were entitled,

“Vam Amburgh the Brute Tamer,” “Vam Amburgh the Conqueror,” “Vam Amburgh Reposing,”
and “Vam Amburg’s Daring Feat.” In the first he subdues a lion, tiger and cheetah—his hand in
the tiger’s mouth. In the second he has made the wild cats docile (a sheep grazes behind them)—
the tiger rests its paws on Vam Amburgh’s shoulders and licking his ear, and a child (holding
another lamb) balances on the tamer’s knee and the lion’s head. In the third, Vam Amburgh, in
repose on the lion, is licked by the other wild cats. In the last, he places his head between the
lion’s jaws (Catalog 68, Dramatispersonae).

An 1838 hand-colored lithograph, “Mr. Vam Amburgh in the Character of the Brute Tamer of
Pompeii as Performed at Astley’s Amphitheatre, and the Theatre Royal Drury Lane,” depicts Vam
Amburgh standing on stage, facing the audience, with his hands on the docile heads of an adoring lion
and tiger, while another tiger stands looking over his shoulder, a sheep gazes at him, and two leopards,
and a lion are in the background. Thus, even in these prints for children, there is the continuing emphasis
on containing wild animals, controlling them, and eventually making them docile, well-behaved companions.

**Van Amburgh as an Inspiration to Popular Novelists**

During Van Amburgh’s appearance in Paris, he attracted the attention of Eugene Sue (1804-1857), a journalist known in France as the ‘king of the popular novel.’ A favorite author of melodramatic fiction, he even had gained royal patronage. His major achievement was the serial novel that first began appearing in the French periodical press in the 1840s. Born into wealth, Sue joined the navy as a youth and traveled to Asia, Africa, and America. By 1830, he became financially independent, embraced socialism and republicanism, and decided to model his lifestyle to that of Lord Byron. Although he quickly gained a reputation as a dandy, his serialized novels increased newspapers’ circulations, and he became one of the highest paid writers in France. His writing style is deemed exaggeratedly sentimental, often containing comments on the cruelties of capitalism. His *The Mysteries of Paris*, was quite influential on Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables* and a plethora of books and articles about the ‘secrets’ of cities. *The Constitutionnel* offered him 100,000 francs for *The Wandering Jew*, a good investment since it quadrupled circulation. It was published in 169 episodes during 1844 and 1845, and outsold Hugo, Dumas, and Balzac (Zboray Dec. 2000: 457).

*The Wandering Jew* was based on a familiar legend. On the road to Calvary, Jesus Christ condemned a man to wander the earth until the Second Coming. Sue’s anti-clerical novel features a Jesuit priest who hopes to become the next pope and is trying to find the Wandering Jew. In most late Middle Ages manuscripts, the wanderer is described as about 50, with a long white beard, wearing tattered clothing, barefooted or in sandals, and carrying a walking stick. In the 17th century, prints depicting the wanderer became very popular and by the 19th century, they often included a ship in the distance (“Eugene Sue”).

In America, Harper & Bros. and The New World Press raced to publish the first translation, Harper won, but omitted the final chapter, while the New World version was late but complete. In 1857,
Harper’s Weekly claimed Sue’s works revealed an utter lack of useful purpose “beyond the amusement of the moment, these novels are a ‘mess’” (“French Novels” Aug. 29, 1857).

Supposedly, Sue had attended Van Amburgh’s performances and had conducted a long and interesting interview with the American concerning his methods of subduing wild animals. Sue utilized this information in creating the character of Morok, probably the first fictionalized wild animal trainer. In the story, Morok is far from the typical hero, but instead is as foul a villain as ever trod through the pages of literature. Sue was clever at interpreting the interests and moods of the public in his popular works. Like his contemporary, Dickens, he had socialist leanings, not as a battler for public causes, but as a reporter who knows what the public will enjoy. Critics called him a literary soldier of fortune (Lipton May 2002).

The melodramatic plot of The Wandering Jew, all fifteen hundred pages of it, centered on the evil machinations of the Jesuits to win a fortune of millions of francs which otherwise would go to the seven heirs of the Huguenot family of Rennepont. These heirs must be in a certain house in Paris on a certain day and hour to receive their legacy. The ruthless Rodin will stop at nothing to prevent this. The novel contains all the prerequisites for a best seller: riots, ribaldry, insanity, lynchings, sadism, kidnappings, robberies, cholera epidemics, and murders. There never is a dull moment. The legendary Wandering Jew appears occasionally to warn the heirs and delay their misfortunes, although he has no power to change the outcome. Sue’s blood-and-thunder opus was timed perfectly with a swell of anti-Jesuit feeling in Europe. There was a tendency to make secret or mystical orders into the scapegoats for prevailing hard times. The book immediately spawned a plethora of plays, parodies, and melodramas, one of which was Morok. There can be little doubt that Van Amburgh’s popularity spurred the inclusion of a lion tamer in Sue’s novel, for Morok even possesses a strange left eye similar to the American’s (Sue 1845).

Morok is introduced in the novel as he stands in the stable of the Inn of the White Falcon amidst his iron chains, collars with sharpened points, muzzles studded with nails, and long steel rods. To one side is a small stove and to the other a flexible coat of mail and two long pikes stained with blood. Amongst all these ‘tools of torture’ were small glass cases of rosaries, necklaces, medals, images of saints, and
religious pamphlets. In the background are cages containing Le Mort, the black panther, Judas, the tiger, and Cain, the lion. From the beam hangs a large canvas painting inscribed, “The Veracious and Memorable Conversion of Ignatius Morok, Surnamed the Prophet, which happened at Fribourg, in the Year 1828.” The vivid painting was divided into three compartments, the first showing a man with a long, very light colored beard, attired in the skin of a reindeer, who flees terrorized in a sledge drawn by six wild dogs pursued by a pack of foxes, wolves, and monstrous bears with jaws agape. Under the picture was the legend: “In 1810 Morok was an idolator, and fled before wild beasts.” The second illustration showed Morok in a white robe kneeling before a man in a long black gown while a tall angel watches from the corner. This drawing was labeled: “Morok the Idolator fled from Wild Beasts; The Wild Beasts will now flee before Ignatius Morok, Converted and Baptised at Fribourg.” The third panel depicted the new convert, haughty, disdainful and triumphant, in his long blue robe with one hand on his hip and the other extended while a terrific crowd of tigers, hyenas, bears, and lions crouches at his feet. “Ignatius Morok is Converted; The Wild Beasts crouch at his feet,” screams the banner (Sue 1845: 4-6).

Sue describes Morok as forty years of age, of average height, with a very thin frame. Although naturally fair, he has been bronzed by his wandering life, and his hair, which hangs to his shoulders, is pale yellow. He has angular features and a long yellowish-white beard.

The physiognomy of this man was the more singular as his eyelids, which were very wide and high, displayed his fierce eyeball encircled by a white ring. His look, fixed and extraordinary, exercised a wonderful and actual fascination over his animals, which however, did not prevent the prophet from also using in their subjugation the terrible arsenal of weapons which lay around him (Sue 1845: 6).

Morok was extremely intelligent as he intrepidly gave displays, which by a “clever deceit” were attributed to a state of grace. Actually, Morok knew wild beasts long before his conversion. Born in the North of Siberia, he had at an early age been one of the boldest hunters of bear and reindeer. In 1810, he became an imperial courier for the Czar and drove his sledge through all kinds of obstacles, like a human projectile, to his destination. Sue notes that even in fifteen hundred pages he cannot explain how Morok became converted and acquired his menagerie (Sue 1845: 20).
Morok became the henchman of the evil Jesuits and now awaited the arrival of the noble old soldier, Dagobert, who was escorting orphan twins, daughters of his former commander, to Paris so they could collect their inheritance. Dagobert’s only possessions were his Siberian dog, Kill-Joy, and the gallant and intelligent old war horse, Jovial. After the soldier stables Jovial and retires to the inn, Morok dons his armor, conceals it with loose pantaloons and a long robe, and grasps the red-hot iron by its wooden handle. He then appears with the cats. When Morok nears Le Mort,

the white ring which encircled his glaring eyeball, seemed to expand, while his eye rivaled in brilliancy and fixedness, the glaring, steadfast gaze of the panther. . . . Then the round ears of LeMort fell back on her neck, flattened like those of a snake, the skin of her forehead wrinkled convulsively, while she drew up her nostrils, covered with long bristles, and twice silently opened her wide jaw, armed with formidable fangs. At that moment a kind of magnetic sympathy seemed to be carried between the look of the man and the beast (Sue 1845: 70).

Judas and Cain threw themselves against the bars until driven into submission by Morok.

The prophet then went to Jovial’s stall, covered the trembling old charger’s nose and eyes, and led him to the menagerie where he barred the door. He released the hunger maddened Le Mort, who had been intentionally starved for several days. The panther sprang with “concentrated fury” on the hapless Jovial, who neighed and desperately tried to escape. In a grisly scene, Le Mort kills the horse. But the screams have aroused everyone in the inn, and Dagobert arrives on the scene too late. The smug Morok blames him for letting his horse loose and complains that now he will have to endanger his life by recaging the enraged Le Mort. The old soldier is horrified by the sight and loss of his old friend. He demands payment from Morok, but the tamer has gained the support of the townspeople through his supposed piety. When the mayor is called to settle the dispute, Morok accuses Dagobert of having an illicit affair with his young charges. Meanwhile, Goliath, the tamer’s giant assistant, has stolen the travelers’ papers to further delay their passage to Paris (Sue 1845).

Later, the Jesuits praise Morok for being such a staunch ally. He encourages the dissipation of another heir and literally drinks him permanently under the table. He also evilly supplies liquor to strikers so they destroy the factory of yet another heir (Sue 1845).
Morok becomes the toast of Paris when he appears in a spectacle with his animals, in which he performs with them in a ‘forest,’ feigning the “most desperate combats.” He no longer distributed his religious items or displayed his conversion banner since this type of pious display was not in vogue in Paris. The tamer was troubled, however, because he had been followed in every performance, by an Englishman whose narrow face, large nose, and great round eyes, came to terrify Morok, since he knew that the man had wagered that Morok would be devoured by his beasts in his presence during an exhibition. An attack of nerves had already distracted the trainer to the extent that his arm had been severely injured by Cain. Morok was certain the man would cause his destruction, but he would not suspend his act, because, as he remarked in savage excitement:

‘Have you ever heard of the fierce pleasure of the gambler who stakes honor—life in a card? Well, I too in the daily exercises in which my life is risked, find equally a wild and fierce pleasure in daring death in the presence of a trembling crowd, aghast at my audacity. In truth, in the terror with which this Englishman inspires me, sometimes experience, in spite of myself, a kind of indescribable excitement which I abhor and yet which dominates me’ (Sue 1845: 288).

As Morok performed, the Englishman again stared fixedly at him, as the tamer descended a series of boulders and approached the cave where Le Mort was chained. When their eyes met, Morok visibly contracted in fear. He continued pantomiming tracking the panther, and shot an arrow into the cave, while Le Mort’s growls and roars rang out over the theater. As Morok crept toward the dark cavern, dagger in hand, the Englishman leaned out of the box breathlessly excited, with a sardonic smile on his face. He seemed, according to Sue, to be giving out an incredible amount of magnetic power to attract Morok. Just as Morok gave out a savage scream and flung himself on Le Mort, a terrified spectator in a box let her bouquet roll into the cave. An Indian Prince, who is also an heir to the fortune, was so intensely caught up in the action that he leapt on the stage where the wounded Morok lay, and stabbed the panther to death (Sue 1845).

This is the last we read of Morok, who the author contends is a hundred times more hideous than the brutes he tames, until we reach the end of the book and the scene switches to a hospital filled with the victims of a cholera epidemic sweeping Paris. Morok, presumably a victim of the dreaded disease, had been brought there. But when he breaks out in a “fearful distemper,” it is discovered that he is suffering
from hydrophobia contracted from a bite by one of his guard dogs. Morok leaps up and rushes into the corridor where he delivers an ultimately fatal bite to a young man trying to restrain him. Morok is manacled, but on the next day, a horrible uproar again echoes through the hospital. Patients stagger and crawl out of the way of the rabid tamer. Morok is naked except for a ragged quilt about “his emaciated loins and fragments of the ligatures which he has broken.” His matted yellow hair hangs over his face, his beard stands on end, and his glaring, bloodshot eyes roll unnaturally in his head. His mouth foams, and he gives off harsh guttural sounds, while his veins swell to the bursting point. He advances by leaps like a maddened wild beast and tries to break out a window to escape, but his hydrophobia has given him a fear of shiny objects and he retreats in horror. He furiously tries to tear down a door, behind which the twins, who happened to be visiting a patient, are cowering. The good priest, Gabriel, another heir, comes to the rescue, and shuts himself in with Morok. The tamer throws himself at Gabriel, who grasps him by the wrists. Suddenly, Morok seems to become limp, his head grows bright violet, and he falls against the priest’s shoulder. When Gabriel relaxes his hold, Morok springs up and seizes the priest’s arm in his teeth and delivers a sharp, deep “terrific bite.” While his jaws are still fixed on Gabriel’s arm, rescuers arrive, throw a blanket over the madman’s head, and despite his struggles, bind him and lead him away for the last time. Gabriel quickly cauterizes his arm in time to save his own life, but the stressful situation is too much for the sensitive twins who instantly fall victim to cholera and die in each other’s arms within a day (Sue 1845: 661-665).

In 1848, Van Amburgh, now back at Astley’s, performed in the new melodrama, Morok, the Beast Tamer, introducing a “rare black tiger,” which probably was a leopard. The review in the London Times charitably claimed:

A drama of this description does not come within the rules of criticism. The author is trammed with certain situations and effects that must be introduced; and in writing up to these he is compelled to make everything give place to them. Mr. Bernard, however, is a skilful dramatist, and he has managed his plot remarkably well; the peculiar performances of Mr. Van Amburgh falling appropriately into the course of the story-no less as regards his combat with the panther of the jungle, than his final well-known exhibition in the cage, with his entire menagerie, as a prisoner who has been offered the alternative of embracing an infidel faith or being thrown into a den of wild beasts (Speaight 1980: 81-83).
The Easter audience was “uproarious” and “very heartily applauded the spectacle.” The article was accompanied by an engraving in which Morok is attacked by the panther while trying to hide in a cave from pursuing troops. The Rajah’s men are first alarmed, but then form a torch-lit background to the struggle (“Astley’s” *The London Times* 1848).

Shortly after Van Amburgh’s run as Morok, he returned to the United States. He obviously had been renewing his menagerie as early as 1845, when it was reported that he sold some of his animals at Manchester for high prices, including a black-maned lion (350 pounds), a six-year-old lion (310 pounds), two eight-month old lion cubs (10 and 35 pounds), an elephant (750 pounds), and a giraffe (400 pounds) (*Punch* 1845).

**Van Amburgh Returns to New York, But Remains a Favorite in England**

Van Amburgh arrived in New York with an extensive collection of wild animals, including lions, tigers, leopards, hyenas, birds, and a large male elephant that Titus, Van Amburgh & Co. had purchased from the Surrey Zoological Gardens as a basis for the new Zoological Institute. Reportedly the elephant was extremely reluctant to leave its mate and had to be dragged to the ship with the assistance of Van Amburgh’s erstwhile partner, John Carter (“Things Theatrical” Nov. 1, 1845: 428). On April 20th, 1846, Van Amburgh made a grand entrance in New York, as part of a procession of 150 horses and 50 carriages, marching from the head of Broadway and back, following a route that took them to Lafayette Place and 19th Street, where the show exhibited. A “new and colossal Roman Chariot” led the parade, “drawn by eight of the largest horses in the world, and containing Shelton’s Brass Band” (Odell 1903: 231).

During his absence, the only American contemporary trainer to gain much fame, or be compared with Van Amburgh, was another New Yorker, Jacob Driesbach (1807-1878). He made his debut at Thomas Hamblin’s Bowery Theatre in May, 1842. A woodcut of Driesbach depicted him wearing a headdress of ostrich feathers, a sleeveless animal skin shirt, and holding a jaguar on his lap. His lions were called so civilized they could be invited to dinner (Thayer”Herr Driesbach”).
Van Amburgh had become a household name in England and frequently was referred to in plays and other literary pieces. James Robinson Planche (1796-1880) wrote over 180 theatre productions during a career that spanned half a century. He also translated French fairy tales, was a pioneer in stage costuming, and created the English musical review, or fairy extravaganza which became one of the most popular forms of entertainment in Britain. They were comic dramas replete with music, topical satire, and spectacular stage effects (Buczkowski 2001: 42). For example in *Fortunio and his Seven Gifted Servants* (1843), Planche writes:

Fortunio: Is she determined to make me a martyr? Does she suppose me to be Van Amburgh or Carter? The famous lion tamers.  
Chorus: Never was a hero more handsome or smarter,  
Braver he is than Van Amburgh or Carter,  
First fight a dragon, then go catch a Tartar!  
He certainly next will the Thames set on fire! (Planche 1843)

And in *The Queen of the Frogs* (1851):

Princess: But are there really wild beasts in this wood?  
Queen: So I have generally understood. Lions and tigers, panthers, bears and boars, and all sorts of fierce creatures on all fours—fiercer than any great Van Amburgh knew, or Gordon Cummings ever said he slew (Planche 1851).

In Planche’s *The Discreet Princess* (1855) there is a song sung to “The Campbells are Coming:”

“No tiger Van Amburgh had ever to dare,  
No bear ever petted by Labarriere,  
Was half so ferocious, rapacious, atrocious!  
“So, Madam, I’d have you beware, beware!”  
Pal: “But Hark! What brutish roars my ears profane?”  
Vsn: “Oh Mercy! All the beasts from DruryLane!”  
Har.: “They act ‘The Desert’ there, Van Amburgh, the lion tamer, exhibited his wild beasts in that drama, written for that express purpose.”  
Earm.: “Oh, shame! Oh, rage! They’ll make a desert of the British stage!” (Planche 1855).

George Croly (1780-1860), an Irish poet, historian, novelist, and theologian in his play, *The Modern Orlando* (1846), claimed, “I want Van Amburgh’s art, to play with wolves and pards!” (Croly 1846). However, William James Linton (1812-1898), a skilled wood engraver, who worked for *The Illustrated London News* in 1842, gradually became more and more interested in social problems and finally moved to the United States. *Bob-Thin* (1845), a biting satire on the state of morals, was directed
against the unfairness of England’s Poor Laws. Written in doggerel verse it appeared in The People’s Review:

And there, oftimes, our gracious Queen
Cheereth not with her lustrous face
The common dimness of the place;
Though she delighted, it is said,
To see Van Amburgh’s lions fed;
God bless her Majesty’s sweet features!
Lions are interesting creatures.
Yet, Lady! Would it not be grander
To feed the hungry poor who wander,
Through all weather, early and late,
To and fro—for they dare not wait—
Before your guarded palace gate (Linton 1845).

The British press also did not lose interest in Van Amburgh. When a seventeen year old lion queen, Helen Bright, was killed by a tiger, Punch, disgusted at the fatal mauling, wondered if the tiger would be immortalized at Madame Tussaud’s and condemned Landseer for the Van Amburgh painting. They reminded readers of the high and glorious days of Van Amburgh when Her Majesty and attendant Lords and Ladies patronized the tricks of sovereign sway and masterdom manifested by the Lion King and his brute lieges on the stage of Drury Lane. More; Her Majesty was so pleased with the governing power of King Van Amburgh, that she commanded Edwin Landseer to immortalize his majesty and four-footed subjects on about half-an-acre of canvas. (Punch Jan.-June 1850).

Punch sarcastically added that as a high example, the picture has been taken down, packed up, and is about to be shipped as a present to the Emperor of Morocco. In the dominion of his Majesty, lion tamers may certainly find a more congenial atmosphere than in highly civilized and Christianized Great Britain (Punch Jan.-June 1850).

Two years later, a London correspondent to Spirit of the Times claimed that Londoners were excited at the report that Van Amburgh had recently arrived and might again perform. But this was not his intention. Instead, he was in England to purchase privately a collection of animals for his menagerie (Raymond and Van Amburgh). While dealers bought numerous rare animals at the sale of the late Earl of Derby’s “extensive and unrivalled collections,” Van Amburgh, “suddenly and quite unexpectedly appeared, and demonstrated his enterprising spirit and sound judgment in obtaining rare specimens.” Raymond and Co. sent a London agent to the auction, because if Van Amburgh had attended in person,
the prices might have been driven up by rival bidders. He acquired a pair of African lions, Royal tigers, and a jet black leopard. He also purchased a pair of “Alpaccas,” a species of animal never seen in the United States, along with a guanaco, and pairs of llamas, emus, kangaroos, and gold and silver pheasants. The Earl Fitzwilliam invited Van Amburgh to Wentworth Castle, where he presented him with pairs of crowned cranes and black swans. The animals were shipped to New York aboard an American packet ship. The passage took twenty days and despite rough weather the cargo arrived safely. “Van Amburgh,” the article concluded, “although copied by many others, still was supreme as a performer,” and the animals in his collection were healthy, young and vigorous, “taken from their native lairs and forests, giving the spectator at a glance a knowledge of their characteristics and habits when in the jungles” (“Our Special London Correspondence” March 20, 1852: 49). They added that the performances of Mr. Van Amburgh, “the great undevoored” as he is called, “are firmly established, classing first in the world. His performances before Queen Victoria, and other renowned persons of Europe, has rendered his fame imperishable.” Besides his professional achievements, “he is everywhere endorsed and acknowledged a gentleman, whose social qualities and knowledge of the wild will command for him an unqualified welcome” (“Things Theatrical—Van Amburgh Has Arrived” April 3, 1852: 4).

Van Amburgh also was lauded in the press as an astute showman who engaged the best circus artists of Europe for his show, including a champion vaulter who could throw 86 consecutive somersaults, equestrians, tight rope artists, jugglers, a Risley act, and a clown. “With this galaxy of talent he expects to astonish’em, and he will do it, too” (“Our London Correspondence” Mar. 22, 1856: 61).

In November 1848, the combined menageries of Van Amburgh and June, Angevine, and Titus opened at the Zoological Hall at 35-37 Bowery. However, a Mr. Brooks was advertised as the trainer who would enter the den. The following year, Van Amburgh did star in the Bowery Theater’s week-long production of Morok, The Beast Tamer, in which he introduced his “unequalled collection of wild animals.” Among them a black tiger, “hitherto considered untrainable.” The menagerie returned annually to New York, since the “love of staring at animals being a fixed characteristic of the human eye.” Here
men, woman and children, could, at reasonable prices, gratify “the inferiority complex” by looking at “beings inferior in the scale of existence” (Brown 1903: 687-688).

Another recession hit the United States in 1853, with the year considered a disastrous one for showmen. The expenses connected with keeping exotic animals nearly ruined many proprietors (New York Times, Nov. 16, 1853). But just two years later, P. T. Barnum proposed to establish a “grand zoological institute” on Broadway (“Facts and Topics” Dec. 6, 1855: 182). In 1859, Van Amburgh’s Menagerie of Trained Animals appeared at Niblo’s Gardens, a popular site for melodramas located north of the Bowery Theatre that later gained fame as the birthplace of American vaudeville. Van Amburgh’s act was advertised as “those world-renowned and traveled natural curiosities” (“Niblo’s Gardens” [advertisement] Mar. 15, 1859). That same year he appeared at Palace Garden on 14th Street. The advertisements called it a “great moral exhibition visited in the past week by 43,781 persons, with a larger and greater variety of animals than all other shows in the United States combined. The only complete menagerie in the United States.” Obviously, Van Amburgh himself was no longer performing, as the ads noted “Professor Langworthy still continues to astonish the multitudes by his bold and daring performance in the dens” (“Van Amburgh and Company’s Menagerie at Palace Garden” Dec. 3, 1859).

Earlier that year, Van Amburgh gained some unwanted publicity while exhibiting in Philadelphia. A fifteen-year-old girl visiting the show during rehearsal, slipped behind the scenes when no one was watching. She patted the lion on its back and then moved on to the tigers, but the big cat was less tolerant and seized her arm while tearing at her head and face. The men heard her screams and plunged a pitchfork into the tiger while pulling the girl to safety. Her arm was amputated and her chance at survival was bleak (“Service of Dr. Peace” Feb. 19, 1859: 364).

Sometimes the stories took a stranger twist, as when a huge tawny Asiatic lion became devoted to a female black tiger; the only specimen in the country. The lion never touched his food until his “little charm has selected her share.” The author claimed all of Van Amburgh’s animals were as “fat as moles,” but the black tigress was “aldermanic in her proportions.” When she was removed, the lion would not eat or rest, but just frantically paced. They feared he would pine to death if she died. When a lioness was
introduced, the lion broke her spine and crushed her ribs. Although her life was saved, her hind parts remained paralyzed (“A Lion’s Love” May 1862: 462).

Three years later, the menagerie was set up at 17th Street and 6th Avenue. Three times a day, “a pupil of Van Amburgh toys and plays with the beasts as though they were harmless as kittens” (“Van Amburgh’s Menagerie” Apr. 5, 1862: 8). In 1863, Van Amburgh & Co.’s Mammoth Menagerie, Great Moral Exhibition and Egyptian Caravan opened in a renovated Broadway menagerie with “none of the old odors, and inadequate facilities,” but rather as “the finest zoological building in the world.” The menagerie was great family entertainment, “strictly moral and a school for the study of animated nature.” It featured elephants, Langworthy with the big cats, the only living giraffe, three living white bears, and the only ‘Poonah Bear.’ “All Living Alive! Alive! Alive!” The ad noted that the show had sold out on Thanksgiving, and that there would be no passes or free tickets (New York Times Nov. 23 and Dec. 1863 [advertisements]).

Van Amburgh had achieved such notoriety that his name was often used in metaphors. When the New York Draft Riots broke out in 1863, the New York Evangelist pronounced that outbreaks like this should be met head on and put down.

It is not by soft speeches, but by hard blows. A mob is a wild beast—to be treated just as Van Amburgh treated one of his tigers which he saw preparing to spring on him. He retreated not an inch, but turning straight on the brute, he fixed his sharp eye upon him, and brained him with his club till the savage beast shrunk into a corner of his den. This may seem harsh treatment, but it is the only merciful one. It saves a hundred lives, where it destroys one (“A Day of Terror. . .” July 16, 1863: 1).

Escapes and accidents in the menagerie always made for good reading. A Columbus, Ohio paper described the escape of a thirty-foot boa constrictor who had fastened his jaws on the keeper’s hand and wrapped three coils around him when he opened the side of the glass case to feed the snake—“a single convulsion of the creature and the keeper’s soul would be in eternity.” Luckily, two men carefully uncoiled the snake and pried open his jaws (“Adventure with a Boa Constrictor” Nov. 11, 1863: 180).
Remembering Van Amburgh

On June 10, 1865 Van Amburgh was featured on the front page of the popular sports and entertainment paper, *The New York Clipper*. The article asserted his name had become a household word on both sides of the Atlantic. The German-American had been recognized at a young age for his “courage, perseverance, and extraordinary influence over brute creation.” The article went on to describe his early career and the performances in New York that first made him famous. His initial appearance was at the Richmond Hill Theatre in the fall of 1833 (“Van Amburgh, The Lion King” June 10, 1865: 1). The following January, Van Amburgh and two lions appeared in *The Lion Doomed or The Bandit of Benares*. In this production, Van Amburgh was cast into a den of lions, and engages in “mortal conflict” with the “male beast.” He manages to escape, “and this scene which probably exceeds anything of the kind ever witnessed here, closes amid the cheers, and the free respirations of the excited spectators. . . .the drama closes with the conflagration of the City of Benares” (Odell 1903: 680). Later that season, he appeared at the Bowery Theatre in a melodrama written specifically for him by Miss Medina, entitled, *The Lion Lord, or, the Forest Monarch*, in which he played Constantius, a Greek. The climax of this play saw Van Amburgh ride a horse up a set of Mazeppa runs, and as he reached the flies, a Royal Bengal tiger sprang at him. Then the actor and tiger, locked in combat, struggled down to the footlights. Reportedly, this was received with “tumultuous enthusiasm.” Unfortunately, when the Bowery Theatre burned, the manuscript was destroyed (“Van Amburgh, The Lion King” June 10, 1865: 1).

In November 1834, the Zoological Institute opened at 37 Bowery, with an outstanding animal collection, and featured Van Amburgh as the principal attraction. Until the spring of 1838, Van Amburgh appeared as the star performer of the Institute’s winterquarters. Each year he tried to add a new popular aspect to his performance, such as the introduction of a child and lamb to the dens (“Van Amburgh, The Lion King” June 10, 1865: 1). In the spring of 1837, Van Amburgh starred at the National Theater in *Bluebeard* with “his rare and magnificent animals.” The stage was arranged so the audience received a perfect “view of the encounters, with the most entire safety. He gave a “fearless and extraordinary performance as the Roman Gladiator” (Brown 1903: 363). In a handbill of that same year, he was
described as the “unrivalled Conqueror and Manager of the Whole Brute Creation” (Museum of Akin Memorial Library, Quaker Hill, Pawling, N.Y. in “The Wild West Show” Aug. 18, 2008). His farewell engagement, prior to sailing to England on July 7, 1838, was at the Old National Theatre at the corner of Leonard and Church, where they proffered a benefit for him (“Zoological Institute” Mar. 31, 1838). The Mirror bid him a fond goodbye.

The gladiatorial feats of Mr. Van Amburgh, at the National Theatre, though somewhat at variance with the legitimate drama, have been of a character truly remarkable and extraordinary. The complete control which he exercises over animals the most ferocious shows the effect of culture and education in a new and surprising form. His fearless acts of placing his bare arm moist with blood, in the lion’s mouth and thrusting his head into the distended jaws of the tiger—the playful tenderness of the lion and tiger toward the infant and the pet lamb, who are put in the same cage with them—are all attended with the most thrilling and dramatic interest. The enterprising proprietors of these beasts deserve much credit from the students of natural history for the perseverance and skill they have displayed in forming their admirable collections. Mr. Van Amburgh, who is quite a young man, sails with his lions and tigers today for England, where we cannot doubt, that his truly wonderful exhibition will fully remunerate him for his exertions and for the intrepidity with which he manages the docile animals under his care. We bespeak for him the kind consideration of our trans-Atlantic brethren of the press (“Report on Van Amburgh” July 7, 1838).

The Clipper article then reiterated Bunn’s account of the Queen’s attendance at Van Amburgh’s performances. In Europe, Van Amburgh performed several melodramas written specifically for him. He made a number of tours of England, Ireland, and Scotland and “the prestige of his name drew an overwhelming throng of people wherever he went.” Van Amburgh was also one of the first to introduce American style tenting in Europe, and the way his menagerie traveled proved fascinating to the British. In 1845, he returned to the United States, and subsequently made a few brief trips to Europe (Bailey 1874: 399).

Although, The Clipper noted Van Amburgh himself had not performed for several years, he continued to accompany the menagerie that bore his name on tour. He “doubtless would feel very like a fish out of water if away from the exhibition any length of time.” The article then pointed out that the very recent photograph on the cover gives a good idea of his present appearance. He looks much younger than he really is. A whole-souled, genial old gentleman, he has hosts of friends in every part of the Union, and both himself and his menagerie receive a hearty welcome wherever they go. It is needless to add that the
numerous reports of his death are without foundation; there has never been but one lion tamer by the name of Van Amburgh, and that one is the subject of the present sketch (“Van Amburgh, The Lion King” June 10, 1865: 1).

Ironically, six months later on November 29, 1865, Van Amburgh suddenly died in a Philadelphia hotel room at the age of 57, of what was described as either “congestion of the spleen,” or “congestion of the brain.” One article claimed he had survived some serious attacks during his career, in the worst of which, a portion of his bowels protruded through the wound inflicted by a lion. “The probability is that Mr. Van Amburgh received more scars than any other individual, while pursuing the duties of the profession, to show the world the triumph of man over the most ferocious beasts of the forest or the jungle.” They added that Van Amburgh had been seen on Chestnut Street a day or two before his death and seemed extremely well. He was buried next to his mother at St. George’s Cemetery in Newburgh, New York (“The World in Miniature” Dec. 30, 1865: 831 and Newburgh Daily Union Dec. 4, 1865).

Isaac Van Amburgh was born in Fishkill Landing, Duchess County, New York on May 26, 1808. The village, approximately 60 miles from New York City, was located on the crest of a ridge that separated Fishkill from the Hudson River, and served as an early landing place. During the Revolutionary War, warehouses were located there to serve as commissaries for the army, since river access allowed for easy transport of bulky provisions. In 1913, Fishkill Landing and Mattewan merged to form present-day Beacon, a name commemorating the beacon fires that blazed from the summit of Fishkill Mountain to warn the Revolutionary armies of the movement of British troops (“Beacon, New York”).

In the memoirs of Henry D. B. Bailey, a contemporary of Van Amburgh, Bailey remembered attending a roughly built schoolhouse with young Isaac. He described his classmate as a self-made man, with all his education gained at this rustic school. Van Amburgh was tall, athletic, of a mild disposition, and easily won the affection of both teachers and fellow students. Bailey said Isaac developed an interest in natural history and asked to borrow books by Buffon and Goldsmith. After finishing school, he decided to become a tailor, but his eyes were not able to take the strain. He moved to New York City and entered the mercantile business at the corner of Broadway and Bleecker with a partner, William Hutchings [Van
Amburgh’s step-father was Benjamin Hutchings. He then set up another business on South Street. At this point Bailey loses track of Van Amburgh, who presumably traveled through the Southern states. Bailey calls it a “vacuum in his life, of which we cannot gather any information,” until he joined the Raymond & Co. Menagerie, “the largest to date in either Europe or America.” Supposedly, Van Amburgh impressed the owners with his bold attempts to tame “those wild and ferocious animals, the lions and tigers.” After performing feats no one had previously accomplished, the proprietors decided to advertise Van Amburgh as a modern day Daniel who would enter a den of lions. The announcement drew both anticipation and criticism of something so foolhardy and dangerous (Bailey 1874: 403).

In the fall of 1833, at the Richmond Hill Theatre, Van Amburgh “performed a feat with the lions and tigers that, with the exception of the prophet Daniel, had baffled the skill and sagacity of man in all former ages.” Van Amburgh even volunteered to drive up Broadway in a chariot drawn by lions and tigers, similar to Goldsmith’s description of Marc Antony riding through the streets of Rome in a chariot drawn by lions. The proposed stunt was cut short by local authorities. Later Van Amburgh appeared at the Bowery Theatre in *The Lion Lord* (Bailey 1874: 403-404).

Many of Van Amburgh’s old school mates journeyed to the city to watch him perform, among them Bailey, who claimed he will never forget the impression that it produced on his mind,

in witnessing so sublime and fearful a spectacle. Van Amburgh was attired in a dress which his own good taste and judgment had designed for the occasion. As he approached the door of the den of lions a thrill of horror involuntarily escaped the audience, but with a firm step and unaverted eye he opened the door and went through with the programme without manifesting any fear, to the astonishment of the large audience (Bailey 1874: 404).

In 1845, he returned to the United States, joining with James Raymond in touring the largest menagerie in the country. At 19, when he left home, Van Amburgh was penniless, but by his return, he had accumulated a fortune. Bailey claimed he had a last chance to talk to Isaac when he and his menagerie played the Fishkills in 1848. Everyone in the area turned out to see him, since he said it would be his last visit as a performer. Bailey claimed he could see at a glance that Van Amburgh had “shunned the intoxicating bowls. His appearance was noble, his height rather more than six foot. Age had made no
impression on that powerful frame. I felt myself in the presence of more than an ordinary man” (Bailey 1874: 405-406).

The Development of Menageries in America

As early as the 16th century, American colonists began to collect natural curiosities, with the first cabinets of curiosities appearing in the 18th century. The necessity for permanent zoological gardens did not exist in early America, which was primarily rural. By 1790, only two towns had populations between 25 and 50 thousand people. Before permanent zoos could appear, urbanization, reduction of the wilderness, knowledge of, and interest in nature and animals, along with a class wealthy enough to enjoy leisure time and willing to accept viewing animals as suitable entertainment, had to exist.

In 1743, Benjamin Franklin established the first American scientific society, while earlier in Philadelphia, John Bartram’s garden became the first botanical gardens. Thirty years later, the Charles-Town library society began the first cabinet of natural curiosities, preceding the Peale museum in Philadelphia by 11 years (Kisling 1989: 109). Charles Willson Peale’s museum contained living fish, reptiles, and amphibians, along with stuffed birds and mammals. The center of attraction was an entire mastodon skeleton excavated in upstate New York in 1801. Peale was an early master of combining patriotism, profit, art, and popular culture. In all, he had more than 100,000 natural specimens in his collection. His son Rubens Peale managed the Philadelphia museum from 1810 to 1822, the Baltimore museum, 1822-25, and the New York museum, 1822-45, which he sold to P.T. Barnum following the Panic of 1837. The early cabinets of curiosities evolved into the dime museum with its premier expounder being Barnum (Cozzolino June 2008: 26 and “Charles Willson Peale” 1998).

The American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review published a “Survey of the Progress and Actual State of the Natural Sciences in the United States of America, from the beginning of this century to the present time” in December 1817. They called for the formation of learned scientific societies untouched by jealousy—“snarlers and sneerers”—that instead would follow God’s wish for us to improve both ourselves and mankind. The authors advocated more natural history museums that would equal those of Europe, citing as good examples; Peale in Philadelphia and Scudder in New York. Menageries were
deemed positive institutions, “collected by individual exertions,” and enjoying the liberal patronage of the public (“Survey of the Progress . . . of the Natural Sciences” Dec. 1817: 81).

Natural knowledge was gradually diffusing, but unfortunately many universities and colleges have professors “who have yet to learn what they are to teach.” Fortunately more and more public lectures and articles in newspapers and journals were helping to expand knowledge of natural history. Willson’s *Ornithology of the United States*, Mitchell’s *Fishes of New York*, and the accounts of Lewis and Clark’s travels, were considered brilliant examples of what can be achieved, yet, they added, “Merely one half of our animals have been described as yet,” and no general volume describing the known animals has been proposed (“Survey of the Progress . . . of the Natural Sciences” Dec. 1817: 81).

Nine years later, another Boston paper discussed the lack of great museums as compared to Europe. The Parisian Jardin had a museum with the “rarest curiosities in nature,” along with a menagerie featuring lions, tigers, panthers, hyenas, and wolves that amuse or terrify the spectators. There even was a serious attempt to match the plantings to the animals’ natural habitats. Two camels were trained to turn the wheel of a machine that supplied the gardens with water. In addition to the carnivores, the park had antelopes, deer and sheep, and a large aviary with the birds arranged according to their species and habits. At the end of the garden, a visitor would find a 600-foot long museum of natural history exhibiting the fossil remains of plants and animals. In addition, there were preserved birds and quadrupeds, as well as two paintings showing respectively, a lion and an eagle pouncing on their prey. Another area was dedicated to comparative anatomy, as well as 24 preparations showing the embryonic development of the chicken, from ‘speck of life’ to bursting from the shell. The annual expenses of the compound, which employed 160 people, were 12,000 pounds (“Museums” Jan.-July 1826: 135).

However, museums were not the only way to learn about natural history. The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge published over 1600 printed treatises on mathematics, natural philosophy, ancient history, and biography. They were loaded with engravings and cost six pence. They reached “prodigious” circulation in Great Britain, and the publications were also sent to agents in New York and Philadelphia, who distributed them for 12.5 to 15 cents per issue. Another publication was a 216-page
volume, with numerous wood engravings, describing living specimens in the menageries of Europe. “The sprightliness and fidelity of the execution are not surpassed in any similar work.” The book begins with a defense of the study of natural history, which has been called the “science of observation; easily pursued, and a highly agreeable form of study. A person can every day keep their interest alive by discovering and observing some plant, animal, or mineral.” As an observer of nature, everyone had in his or her power, the ability to become a naturalist “in greater or less degree.” The difference between the savage and civilized man, they pointed out, is regard for the wonders and beauties of the creation that surrounds them. In advanced civilizations, there is leisure time available to acquire knowledge, and “it is the positive duty of all to acquire knowledge, by observation, by reflection, by reading, by listening to the informed. Knowledge is not limited, but inexhaustible and available for all.” An individual does not have to be formally trained to contribute to zoological knowledge, they added, he or she just needs the ability to describe what they see.

Menageries played an important role by providing a collection of various living animals. Safely confined and treated with care and kindness, their noxious or ferocious propensities may be restrained or subdued, and by constant discipline their habits may there be rendered useful, or at least, inoffensive. Some distinguished naturalists believe the ferocity of many carnivores may be entirely conquered in the course of time, that they only flee from man through fear, and attack and devour other animals through the pressing calls of hunger; and that association with human beings, and an abundant supply of food, would render even the lion, the tiger, and the wolf as manageable as domestic animals. An example is the domestic cat, who shares so many properties with the tiger (“The Menageries” Oct. 24, 1829: 9 and Oct. 31, 1829: 17).

Attendants injured by wild animals cannot blame the treachery of their charges, but only their own ignorance of the animals’ habits. For example, a lion with relatively poor hearing is awakened after feeding, loses all presence of mind, and flies off in the direction he is lying. This fact is well known to the Bushmen in Africa, but led to the death of a keeper at Exeter Exchange in London. Lions can be obedient and even affectionate, but the species has not been fully understood. The keeper would not have been killed if he did not place himself in a position “where the discipline by which the lion had been rendered grateful would be useless, from the stronger force of natural propensity” (“The Menageries” Oct. 24, 1829: 9 and Oct. 31, 1829: 17).
The importation and exhibition of wild animals in the American colonies and young nation was a hit and miss affair. Black bears, deer, and mountain lions might be captured and displayed at rural taverns by hunters and farmers. The most sophisticated of these exhibits was an occasional dancing bear. Exotic animals were occasionally purchased by enterprising seamen in foreign ports as personal pets, or in the hope of selling them to an exhibitor. Large animals typically arrived while still cubs or calves, for example, the first young elephant in 1796, and the first two tiger cubs in 1806. Lions and camels had entered the colonies as early as 1720 according to surviving advertisements. What could be called the first menagerie, loosely defined by circus historian, Stuart Thayer, as consisting of three animals of different species, first appeared in 1813. Between that date and 1834, there seems to have occurred a rapid expansion as more than 40 menageries appeared on the road (Thayer “A History of the Travelling Menagerie”).

The first ads indicating that a “keeper” would enter the cages of the lions and tigers appeared in 1829. The ‘keeper’ in question may have been Charles Wright (1792-1862), the manager of the show. This also marked an advance in cages since originally animals were transported in shifting dens; simple boxes with bars on one side that were barely larger than the animals they contained. The cages were carried on wagons, unloaded by hand, and placed on sawhorses for viewing by customers. For a man to actually enter a cage, it would have had to be much larger and perhaps wheeled, or the animals could possibly have been led to a larger cage by a collar and chain. The early animal acts were relatively tame, if an 1832 article is representative. “It is truly astonishing to witness with what patience and good humor this [lion] suffers himself to be played with; the keeper opening his mouth, putting his hand in his tremendous jaws, pulling out his tongue and even wantonly whipping him, fearless and safe” (Thayer “The Keeper Will Enter the Cage”).

The menagerie of June, Titus, Angevine, and Company engaged in voluminous advertising, much of which still survives. They owned the largest printing press in the United States, and were able to produce posters as large as 6’ x 9.’ Their initial venture may have centered on the importation of the first Indian rhino. The menagerie’s entire collection was valued at $200,000, with a daily nut of $70. A 25-
cent admission price helped defer these expenses. In 1833, a Mr. Roberts, supposedly a former assistant in the Tower of London menagerie for ten years, was attacked and may have been killed. His replacement was Isaac Van Amburgh. During the final season of this menagerie, it advertised a 14-piece band and one of the first bandwagons. Three tents accommodated 10,000 people, who could view 60 exotic animals, pulled by 29 wagons and 64 horses, with a crew of fifty men (Thayer “The Keeper Will Enter the Cage”).

The true heyday of menageries in America was from the late 1820s until the Panic of 1837. When the Zoological Institute was formed in 1835, it, like Peale's natural history museums, was a profit-seeking venture, but also insisted its goal was the general diffusion and presentation of knowledge concerning natural history, as well as gratifying “rational curiosity.” P.T. Barnum recalled in 1854 that the failure of the venture in 1837 was because it was conceived by speculators who hoped to sell the stock at a profit and let the stockholders look out for themselves (Flint 1996: 97).

Prior to the good press the Zoological Institute typically received, the concept of keeping captive animals was occasionally criticized, as exemplified in a lengthy 1833 New York Mirror piece. After describing the condition of the elephant, as a “poor wretch” shut up “days, nights, and years in this dark low prison, where the blessed sunshine and the breath of flowers never come!,” the author turned his attention to the lion, Napoleon:

This terrible beast has been eighteen years in his cage. You cannot but observe the weary feeling with which his fierce and burning nature yields to this his uncontrollable destiny. He paces up and down his narrow cage, he rubs his worn body against the bars, and presses his head to the iron. Sometimes, exhausted with fruitless longings for escape, he yawns—closes his heavy eyes—lies down and stretches himself out till some prying visitor pokes him with a cane, or the keeper rouses him. Then again his restless soul rages—he renews his anger—lashes his sides with his tail—like the living coals of fire his eyes glow and flash, and the ground trembles with his mad roar. . . .He once lay in calm majesty, (for in human beings themselves could majesty scarcely be more strikingly illustrated) his beard flowing around his solemn, awful countenance; one paw hanging without his cage, a picture like Jove revolving in his thoughts the destinies of man. A rugged, state-prison-looking fellow, thrust at him with his stick, and when his eyes, inflamed with sullen horror at the past and deep despair for the future, were lifted towards him, he spit in his face. The king of beasts raised his head. He was silent, but fixed those fiery orbs full and steadily on the man, with a grisly gaze of such concentrated, savage, withering contempt and desperate hate, as could have done no dishonor to the “prince of hell” himself (“Menagerie” January 26, 1833: 239).
The writer found the menagerie a place for thought and musings, especially for those who had never seen wild animals other than as illustrations in books. The noises alone, are “strange, striking, and impressive.” He describes the “guttural growl” of the “execrable hyena,” the piercing cries of the monkey, the loud exclamations of the elephant, the screeches of the ounce, and the screams of the tiger and panther.

Shrieks, moans, wailings, and yells. . . rise and mingle and clash in hideous discordant confusion, that strike the shuddering soul with new and blacker conceptions of horror and despair; and over all, ever and anon, the very heart quails at the tremendous roar of the raging lion, his bosom bursting with impotent anguish and revenge (“Menagerie” January 26, 1833: 239).

He concludes the piece, by claiming that this hell would not exist, except for “the rash act” of “our first mother,” Eve. Not only have the once gentle beasts become savage, but the “innnocence, the peace, the joy, the love” once dwelling in the human bosom, “have been darkened and put away for the clash and fury of deep vices and desolating passions. It is an awful, although sublime thought, that we live upon the wreck and ruin of a fallen moral world. It makes the heart tremble” (“Menagerie” January 26, 1833: 239).

This article was in stark contrast to a *Mirror* article three years later urging the public to visit the Zoological Institute. “The absence of every objection in the slightest degree offensive encourages all classes to visit this show, and we again commend it even to the most fastidious.” People of all ages “cannot fail to be delighted with the noble beasts, in such fine order, and many, superior specimens of their species.” The “volume of nature” can never be “too profusely perused by sage, poet, or Christian” since it reveals the “mighty hand” of God. “Read natural history to children and then treat them to this sight. . . . set their thoughts in motion. They will come up a thousand wild scenes of history, poetry and romance.” Every step provides something to “fasten the gaze and fascinate the imagination,” as “some new and more wondrous curiosity breaks upon the sight.” The “guilty hyena,” “formidable tiger,” “terrible leopards,” “monarch lions,” “brute buffaloes,” “fearful serpent,” the zebra “painted in some fantastick caprice of playful nature,” and screaming monkeys “claiming familiarity with his brother man.” While the wonderful relationships between the keepers and their charges reminded the author of the verse,
The lambs with wolves shall graze the verdant mead, 
And boys in flow’ry bands the tiger lead; 
The steer and lion at one crib shall meet, 
And harmless serpents lick the pilgrims’ feet
(“Zoological Institute” Feb. 6, 1836: 255).

When the Zoological Institute set up in the Bowery during the winter, the New York Mirror claimed it lacked all the “quackeries,” vendors, healers, and false advertising typically attached to New York entertainment. The writer remembered visiting menageries in Paris and London in 1826, and although he found more animals in the Jardin des Plantes, they were not as fine specimens, or as in good condition. The Zoological Gardens of London provided more air and space, but if these were the animals previously kept in the Tower, they lacked the size, beauty, and vigor of their American counterparts.

The entry to the exhibit space at 37 Bowery was a spacious salon, 30 to 40- feet wide and 175-feet deep. There was a gallery on each side brilliantly illuminated by three cut-glass chandeliers. The portion under the side galleries was divided into a number of dens, well secured in front by iron bars. These contained “without exception, the finest specimens we have ever seen” of full-grown, active, healthy, and “apparently on the best possible terms with themselves and all the world,” tigers, hyenas, leopards, lions, and some very small deer. The “whole establishment was the picture of cleanliness, fastidious, scrupulous purity.” Amazingly, there was none of the odor “thought inseparable from carnivores” (“Arts and Sciences: The Zoological Institute” Dec. 13, 1834: 190).

At the end of the room is the “unwieldy rhinoceros,” described as the clumsiest, ugliest, most ferocious looking, and the “most restless monster of them all.” The only time he is quiet is when the keeper scratched his “distorted snout.” His “little red, fiery eye rolls perpetually with a most ominous glare of pure unadulterated malice.” The rhino obviously had reason for its restlessness, since it was flanked by two elephants; the larger was described as sulky and ill-natured, while the smaller was more “courteous.” Adding even more stress to the rhino, was a large den suspended over him that contained a lion, lioness, and tiger living together harmoniously, with a pair of leopards housed on either side. Adjacent to the female elephant was a polar bear, who, the writer noted, continually pounds the floor of his den with his forepaws. Next to the bear is a gnu, with “legs and body of a mule, head of a goat,”
followed by a group of very active apes and monkeys. Adjacent to this den was a pair of zebras, along side a pair of dromedaries. There also was a fine specimen of an ostrich, “a monstrous bird,” as well as “a proud lioness and her three gamboling cubs.” A band was always present, but it was drowned out by the shrieks, chattering, snarling and general uproar at feeding time ("Arts and Sciences: The Zoological Institute" Dec. 13, 1834: 190).

A few weeks later the *Christian Advocate and Journal* similarly praised the condition of the animals, but also went on to describe the sensation of the keeper entering their cages.

The animals. . . of gigantic strength, have been taught to submit to the commands of their keepers, is a striking illustration of the actual lordship exercised by man over the brute creation and the almost absolute control over some of them. . . Such a collection of animals, thus disciplined, is well worth the attention of those who take pleasure in beholding the works of an almighty hand ("Zoological Institute" Jan. 16, 1835: 84).

This, they added, was not a “rude establishment,” but well lit, ventilated, clean and supplying elegant seating areas ("Zoological Institute" Jan. 16, 1835: 84). *The Family Magazine* further noted the skylights, as well as the numbered dens with the animals’ names painted above, which seemed permanent but were removable. They discovered that the exhibit was so odor free because each den had a slightly inclined floor, behind which ran an inclined gutter. At the upper end was a pump supplying water, which kept the cages clean and “inoffensive.” Above the exhibit was a promenade or gallery with stuffed seats covered in crimson fabric, and behind the band, two elegant ladies’ and gentlemen’s saloons ("Exhibitions" April 1835: A28).

That summer the *Christian Watchman* referred to articles from the *Salem Landmark* praising the Zoological Institute. This show, they assured readers, was entirely different than others that have “infested our country,” in that visitors will actually gain “improvement” from “witnessing the wonderful works of creation.” The study of natural history by the young is a wholesome amusement, and “regarded by the enlightened as a useful branch of knowledge,” as well as a source of the curious and amusement to the unlearned. The Bible, the article argued, has “noticed animal creation as an important part of the works of an all-wise creation.” Although books by distinguished naturalists like Buffon are illustrated with elegant engravings, no matter how beautiful the pictures, they never are, “so correct and perfect and
understanding of the size and peculiar appearance as the animals themselves. Who had a correct idea of
the lion or elephant till he saw one?” (“Zoological Institute” July 3, 1835: 108).

The writer contended that the proprietors were intelligent, respectable men, who had gone to great
expense to exhibit the best and most interesting animals. They provided an unmatched opportunity to the
students of the Bible and natural history to improve themselves. The menagerie served to “divert the
youthful mind from attractions more objectionable.” Teachers, scholars of Sabbath schools, members of
Bible classes, and others engaged in “moral and intellectual improvement may here enlarge the stores of
knowledge and find new cause for celebrating their thoughts to the Great Architect of all things. They can
admire the creature and learn to adore the Creator, in the beauty and variety of His works” (“Zoological
Institute” July 3, 1835: 108).

Although the acceptance of menageries as places of edification suitable for the most religious
seems to pervade popular literature, there are exceptions. Theaters were seen as rivals to the pre-Civil
War evangelical movement. They were deemed as “moral assassins,” rather than spiritually up-lifting.
Actors, as well as patrons, were “men of shady morality.” Henry Ward Beecher called the theater, “the
gate of debauchery, the porch of pollution. . . the door to all the sinks of iniquity.” He added,

If you would pervert the taste—go to the theatre. If you would imbibe false views—go to the
theatre. If you would efface as speedily as possible all qualms of conscience—go to the theatre. . .
If you would be infected with each particular vice in the Catalogue of Depravity—go to the
theatre (Cole, Jr. 1954: 114).

In typical contrast, a Zanesville, Ohio paper wrote that

there is a very decided difference in a moral point of view, between exhibitions of this
description, and performances of a theatrical character. If it is praiseworthy and proper to learn
the description of God’s works, it cannot be objectionable to see them; while in this way a far
better idea is obtained than can be acquired from pictures and verbal descriptions (“The
Menagerie” April 1849).

An Ohio-based Christian newspaper described these exhibits as very popular and profitable,
albeit expensive to operate. Recently one visited our city, continued the writer, and it was our duty to
give “our strongest testimony” and “loudest warning” to all professors of religion against going to see the
exhibits themselves, permitting their children to go, or encouraging anyone to attend (“Menageries or
Although it was not evil to see any creature God made, the menageries insisted they were contributing to the knowledge of natural history. This can be true only in menageries that are nationally or scientifically run, so that the behaviors of living animals as they react in their natural habitats can be observed. This is the way, for example, Audubon gained his knowledge. But what contribution, critics asked, could a wandering caravan of animals, far from their “native haunts,” surrounded by a gazing crowd, “with stupid, ignorant keepers,” who knew nothing more about the natural history of the animals than the gaping spectators, “who are more intent on listening to barbarous music, or looking at monkey tricks. . .than on the study of natural history.” Rather than “well qualified professionals in science,” there is a “sottish set of teachers who drive wagons, attend doors, blow bugles, beat drums and ride ponies.” (“Menageries or Zoological Exhibitions” Aug. 5, 1836: 58). The author then enumerated his objections:

1. The men employed are “strollers” with no “family circle” or societal restrictions. They are profane, Sabbath-breaking, intemperate, lewd gamblers. In fact, this same company was observed traveling on the Sabbath in Pittsburgh and Clarksburg, Virginia.
2. The “fit occasion which they offer for the practice of every kind of vice.”
3. They produce unnatural excitement by raising expectations, and holding the attention of the young, thus “endangering them to evil.” The menageries are not directed toward serious natural history, but to the pranks of a monkey, dissipating serious thought.
4. They have a brutalizing tendency. Men enter the cage with lions and tigers, or attend the animals like menial servants.
5. These menageries are enormously and unnecessarily expensive. The ‘nut’ is $300 to $400 daily; with an income of $600 to $900.
6. The word of God condemns these exhibitions, not expressly, but in spirit.
7. An enlightened conscience condemns them.
8. The primitive Christians condemned such exhibitions and only superficial Christians would favor them.
9. The Methodist-Episcopal Church condemns them since they not directed toward the glory of God (“Menageries or Zoological Exhibitions” Aug. 5, 1836: 58).
It is wrong, therefore, for church members to attend shows, menageries, circuses, and theatrical amusements since they opposed scripture, good sense, good taste, science, and religion. They were foolish gladiatorial, barbarous, un-christianized exhibits, and those who attended should have been visited by a preacher or lay leader, who would redirect them to repentance and reformation. If they refused, they should have been expelled from the church. The author then cited how the Zoological Institute had stolen scripture in their advertising, claiming that “the lion and lamb lie down together, and a little child should lead them.” A Mr. Van Amburgh and a Master Haymen, a boy, are to enter the cage at half-past-three daily. “What a pious place this must be,” the article concluded (“Menageries or Zoological Exhibitions” Aug. 5, 1836: 58).

*The New York Evangelist* also criticized the Zoological Institute the following winter on its policy of not admitting people of color, except when attending to a white family or children. When a black family arrived by carriage, the man at the door punched the father in the chest with a cane, and exclaimed, “We don’t admit niggers.” The father wrote, “I got into my carriage and came home, thankful for having escaped from the jaws of such social beasts” (Van Rensalaer Mar. 3, 1837: 1).

The Bowery, where the Zoological Institute wintered, had been since the early 1820s, New York’s entertainment district, with taverns, dance halls, brothels, print shops, and clothing stores. Gradually, the Bowery became home to American Nativist and Populist causes, as contrasted to the traditional high culture found at the rival Park (Brown 1903: 365). Theater manager, Thomas Hamblin sought to attract working-class patrons by introducing spectacular productions and melodramas, gaining the Bowery the nickname, “the Slaughterhouse.” When the theater burned again in 1836, it had achieved the reputation as the most popular of the four theaters and two amphitheaters in New York. Another fire in 1838, was described as “awful grandeur,” heightened by the tremendous roarings of the Zoological Institute’s lions, tigers, and other animals frightened by the roar of the flames and the clatter of the firemen and spectators (*Niles National Register* Feb. 24, 1838). Hamblin rebuilt the theater even larger, and it became the favorite haunt of the Bowery “b’hoys and g’hals,” in their colorful garb, as well as soldiers and sailors. Nearby was the notorious Five Points, home to the most vicious gangs of New York.
The aristocrats of the district were the butchers, since they produced the favorite diversion of bull-baiting (Allen 1990: 133).

The great fire of 1835 had begun in the same area and resulted in an estimated $20,000,000 loss in property. This catastrophe was believed to be one of the major causes of the financial panic of 1837. The losses were so great, many businesses suspended operations, and insurance companies could not pay off their policies in full. Scarcities of bread led to another uprising in February 1837 when a mob attacked a wheat and flour store, destroying 500 bushels of flour and 1000 bushels of wheat (Asbury 1928: 40-43 and “Great Fire of 1835”). It was in the wake of this unstable situation in New York that the proprietors of the Zoological Institute decided to send Van Amburgh, along with the big cats with which he performed to London. London, at this time, had a population six times that of New York.

Although menageries remained separate institutions in Europe following the American Civil War, they largely became integrated into circuses in the United States. Only Van Amburgh’s menagerie survived the depression of the 1840s and lasted an extraordinary forty years. While zoos were only in the fledgling state, traveling circuses offered the best collections and reached larger audiences (Flint 1996: 97).

Even though most Americans remained quite utilitarian in their opinions about the value of wilderness, they still exhibited a continuing curiosity about unusual animals, but not until after the Civil War were the requirements finally in place for the support of public zoological parks. The Federal government was actively involved in funding scientific expeditions, as it became increasingly acceptable for countries to fund scientific activities and cultural facilities. Animal collections were deemed culturally, scientifically, and socially beneficial institutions.

Gradually the term, menagerie, came to have a negative connotation, especially when compared to the established zoological institutions wealthy Americans had visited in Europe. The first proposal for a permanent zoo was in Philadelphia. The Zoological Society was incorporated in 1859, but the park did not open until 1874. New York’s Central Park had proved a dumping ground for menagerie animals that
were often held in the basement of the Arsenal Building on Fifth Avenue. The exhibition largely remained a menagerie until the 20th century (Kisling 1989: 109).

In 1863, journalists in New York began to clamor more insistently for a zoological garden “for the instruction and delight of citizens and strangers,” similar to those found in virtually all the capi tors of the cultured world. A collection of native animals could even attract European tourists, but still no public-spirited citizens had stepped forward to help in assembling a collection that would educate children, help students, and provide innocent pleasure to the working class. The zoo, they argued, should be placed in Central Park (“Menageries and Zoological Gardens” Dec. 10, 1863: 395).

Admittedly, although not many men can run a successful hotel, fewer yet could keep a menagerie, since it takes peculiar knowledge possessed by only a handful. But on the other hand, this country already had the oldest and most complete menagerie. Van Amburgh’s contained some 200 animals, employed when it traveled, 94 men and 134 horses, who moved the show an average of 18 miles a day. Their summer tour covered 3,000 miles, with a daily nut of $600. However, even in this fine exhibition, they added, animals were subject to diseases, with only six animals surviving over six years. In fact, the menagerie is entirely renewed every five years, with $30,000 worth of the healthiest and best-conditioned animals purchased each year. Yet there is always the risk an animal might die suddenly. Most of the animals captured for menageries arrived first in England, since London had two or three animal brokers who sold on commission. The big cats all seemed to suffer from a kind of consumption marked by wheezing and weight loss. Eventually they wasted away and died. Typically, Van Amburgh donated the bodies to university zoological departments, natural history museums, or academies of science (“Menageries and Zoological Gardens” Dec. 10, 1863: 395).

The animals had to be cared for and usually one man was placed in charge of the cleaning and feeding of four cages. The carnivores are fed once a day, six days a week. Small animals were fed twice daily, while elephants browsed all day long. Water might be changed four or five times a day. Lions were fed 15 to 18 pounds of beef a day, while an elephant consumed 300 pounds of hay and two bushels of oats when traveling, and 400 pounds of hay and no oats, when idle. The keepers, through experience,
were able to nurse ill animals back to health, and knew how to provide for young animals. Why then, with this expertise available, implored the writer, cannot New York make this menagerie the nucleus of a zoological garden on 25 acres in Central Park, since it would prove a credit and advantage to the city? (“Menageries and Zoological Gardens” Dec. 10, 1863: 395).

In 1876, William Cameron Coup, the innovative circus manager and partner of Barnum, unsuccessfully urged in *Appleton’s Journal* that he be allowed to construct an aquarium and zoo on 20 acres in Central Park. After 15 years of private operation, he promised to turn the enterprise over to the city. He cited as his reasons, the paucity of the present collection, and the poor location, which was far too close to 5th Avenue. He claimed the buildings were so badly ventilated that no one could remain long enough to study the animals. Coup reminded officials that the rarest animals in captivity were owned by showmen and that the city could not afford to import them (Loeffler March/April 2005).

Surprisingly, it was after the Civil War, during the time of the most recklessly corrupt government in the history of New York, that $500,000 was allotted, and work begun on two great museums: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History. The AMNH quickly acquired the choicest works of Edouard Verreaux, a French taxidermist considered the finest in the world. This included 2,200 birds, 220 mammals, 400 skeletons of mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish, along with the entire collection of South American specimens belonging to the late Prince Maximillian of Germany (“Museum of Natural History” Sept. 16, 1871: 332). The movement culminated with the establishment of the New York Zoological Society and the construction of what zoo historians deem the first modern zoo, the Bronx Zoo, at the turn of the century.

**The Development of Menageries and Zoos in Europe**

The pastime of collecting exotic animals and planting ornamental gardens began more than 4000 years ago in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Zoos and gardens provided pleasure and prestige, as well as satisfying curiosity. Between the 6th and 4th centuries BC, formal gardens took on a rectilinear form enclosed by high walls and were divided by canals into four equal sections intersecting at a small pool. They were called pairi-daeza (“wall-surrounded”), changed by the Greeks into *paradeisus*, which
eventually evolved into ‘paradise’ in Christian and Islamic writings influencing the concept of Eden (Foster July 1999: 64)

Man and beast supposedly lived in harmony in the Garden of Eden until Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God manifested itself in a hostile landscape accompanied by a loss of easy dominion over other species. Some animals became extremely fierce, and even the less dangerous species had to be coerced into submission. The Elizabethan bishop, James Pilkington, claimed savage beasts were instruments of God’s wrath, confronting them fostered human courage, a useful asset in war. Animals were designed and distributed with human needs in mind, and human civilization was virtually synonymous with the conquest of nature. Thus, the initial motivation for studying natural history was utilitarian (Foster July 1999: 64).

Gustave Loisel, an early historian of menageries and zoos, described in 1912, five stages in their development: the prehistoric; the period of paradises; the period of a caged collection reflecting the importance of a ruler and the extent of empire; and the emergence of the classical zoo in Paris following the Revolution, financed through public and private funds, aimed at public education and recreation, combining science and amusement, and serving as a source of public pride. Finally, the modern barless zoo attempts to recreate the natural environment. The development paralleled changes in communication in the west from totemic to allegorical. Menageries became like stained glass windows, iconic reminders of stories to be contemplated. Finally, zoos became vast storehouses of life, living panoramas meant to be both informative and scientific, while still entertaining. Yet, even the most modern of zoos have come full circle, harking back to the religious and iconic, as exemplified by signs at the Bronx Zoo calling exhibits a “palace in praise of elephants and rhinos,” or a “cathedral of the diversity of the tropical rainforest.” Like the stained glass window, they are meant to invoke awe and respect (Veltre 1996: 19).

By the early 17th century, a plethora of concepts about animals emerged. For example, Rene Descartes likened animals to machines or automata. They had complex behaviors but were unable to communicate, reason, or sense pain. Animal analogies were also common, with social subordination often equated with domestication. Other races, or groups of people such as the poor, were typically described as
beastlike and their behavior deemed ignorant and inferior. Animals were categorized as edible and inedible, wild and tame, useful and useless. Even early naturalists described species as despicable, cowardly, or generous, elegant, and sprightly. Ever since the Medieval bestiaries, zoology freely mixed fact and fiction, science, religion, and moral lessons. Each species had some socially relevant human quality, usually based on stereotyping rather than observation. For example, Benjamin Franklin, who advocated the wild turkey as the national bird, called the bald eagle a rank coward, sharping and robbing, and not representative of the brave and honest republic of America. Although some naturalists tried to eliminate the anthropomorphic descriptions, this old view remained very much part of the Romantic Movement emerging in the late 18th century (Thomas 1983 and Tangle Aug. 16, 1999: 78).

Richard Conniff describes late 18th century London as a “great beast of a town.” A population of 700,000 was packed into seven square miles. The Thames was lined with ships representing Britain’s power in the politics of global empire, commerce, industry, and urban life. But London was also “the nursing ground for the science of natural history.” Along with collecting, came the hallmarks of the Enlightenment: classification, hierarchy, systemization, cataloging, and illustration. In no other European center was the passion higher to follow Linnaeus’s lead by discovering and classifying the “incredible variety of life on earth.” Meanwhile, in Paris, Buffon, the administrator of the Jardin des Plantes, wrote the 36-volume, *Histoire Naturelle*. Buffon carefully ignored religious or supernatural explanations, while Linneaus based his work on the religious concept of Eden. Thus, Linneaus escaped religious condemnation, but did devise a classification system that was essential to being able to intelligently talk and write about the natural world. Buffon was more far-seeing, anticipating ecology and ethology, but was forced to add a declaration of faith in scripture to his work (Conniff Dec./Jan. 2006/07: 42-47 and Mar. 2008: 44-49).

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Dutch East India Company was the major supplier of exotic animals to Europe. They constructed special pens and stables at the Amsterdam docks, and maintained a depot at the Cape of Good Hope until 1832. Conniff points out that at the start of the 18th century, the known world did not include Antarctica, and western adventurers had just glimpsed the coast of Australia.
Every ship that returned from Africa, Asia, and the Americas seemed to carry some bizarre new attraction. For some they were just curiosities, but for the more scientific minded they offered questions of how and where they lived, as well as how they fit into the scheme of nature, and what they told us about our own species. By the late 18th century, a community of gifted naturalists felt each new species held the potential to reveal the secrets of life (Conniff Mar. 2008: 44-49).

Richard Altick, in The Shows of London, describes the deluge of exhibitions catering to “the indulgence of curiosity and the sheer sense of wonder,” that could be found in London. “Scientific” and “historical” rarities replaced the religious relics of the Middle Ages. The exhibitions presented a “momentary escape from the dullness, the mental vacuity, the constriction of horizons, the suppression of the imagination which were too often the price of life in the enveloping city” (Altick 1978: 1, 3).

The politics of entertainment was mixed with the politics of life and reflected the history of popular taste. An “insatiable appetite for novelty” competed with a loyalty to old attractions. But with innovations in mass communication, public taste became increasingly biased toward newness. “Curiosity was the great leveler” among all social classes. The likes of the Duke of Wellington “mixed unaffectedly, though perhaps not always comfortably, with the common people wherever rarities and spectacles were to be seen.” The relish for exhibitions was the most effective way of lowering class barriers. Aware of their power, showmen carefully injected scientific and educational claims when presenting their exhibitions. This became of paramount importance in light of the early Victorian commitment to the education of the populace at large. Altick notes that, “of all the classes of documents that historians may be called to deal with, few are more engagingly disingenuous or downright mendacious than show-business publicity, where honesty possesses neither virtue nor advantage” (Altick 1978: 3-4).

Among the most popular exhibitions were wild animals, although an edict in 1697 prohibited the showmen from displaying, lions, leopards, and other “ferae natura,” since this was the monopoly of the Keeper at the Tower of London. However, just three years later, Ned Ward observed that tigers were ‘grown now so common they are scarce worth mentioning,’ and in 1773 a catalog of London sights
asserted, no doubt with some exaggeration, that there were “Lions, Tygers, Elephants, &c. in every Street in Town (Altick 1978: 35).

Altick believes the charm of what was almost an encyclopedic list of imported animals was “the glamour of distance, tangible living evidence of the still mysterious regions to which English explorers and traders now were penetrating,” and showmen, well aware of this, “diligently wrapped” the beasts in an “aura of mystery and romance” (Altick 1978: 37).

An especially popular kind of exhibit at the time was “the happy family display.” The showmen knew that combining animals of “opposite natures” is not only exceedingly difficult, but showed “the power of discipline over the strength of instinct.” A typical grouping might consist of a cat, mouse, hawk, rabbit, guinea pig, owl, pigeon, starling, and sparrow—each enjoying its own “modes of life in the company of others, the weak without fear, the strong without desire to injure.” There is no prettier exhibit, claimed the writer,

This is an example, and a powerful one, of what may be accomplished by a proper education, which rightly estimates the force of habit, and confirms by judiciary management, that habit which is most desirable to be made a rule of conduct. The principle is the same, whether it be applied to children, or to brutes (“Singular Association of Animals” Sept. 5, 1829: 132).

In 1829, King George IV granted a charter to the Zoological Society of London. The London Zoo was the brainchild of Sir Stanford Raffles, the founder of the colony of Singapore, and an enthusiastic naturalist. When he returned to London, he urged the formation of a zoo as a scientific endeavor. According to the prospectus, a great collection from every part of the globe could be directed to scientific research and not just “vulgar admiration.” Raffles sought some of England’s leading scientists as collaborators in the venture. The government provided five acres in Regent’s Park, and entrance to the zoo was restricted to members and their guests. The 200 animals were either donations or former residents of the menagerie based in the Tower of London. The word “zoo” was not used until 1868 when it was popularized in the lyrics of a song, “Walking in the Zoo is an OK Thing to Do” (Croke 1997: 142).

A guidebook, published in 1799, called the nine species kept in the Tower, the best collection in Great Britain. By 1828, the menagerie, which had been allowed to decline under George III, was rebuilt.
It housed over 200 animals (including 100 rattlesnakes from four to six feet long). Lion cubs played among the visitors, a boy rode a zebra around a paddock, and a female leopard would seize and destroy any umbrellas, parasols, or hats within her reach. In the early 1830s, William IV presented the collection to the Zoological Society of London, and in 1834 it became the nucleus of the London Zoo in Regent’s Park (Dremron August 1896: 29).

An early description of the London Zoo, which attracted over 30,000 visitors in its first seven months, indicated it was not much better than the private exhibits. “The vulgar are too fond of irritating the fiercer animals... and both vulgar and others are often exceedingly rash, in introducing their hands into the dens and enclosures, or careless in placing themselves so near the bars, as to defeat the effect of every precaution for their safety” (Blunt 1976: 47).

The grounds were largely neglected and the animal collection scant. “No one but a third-rate traveling showman could have put together the large animal houses, which it was said, ‘were nothing better than caravans dismounted from their wheels.’” The exhibits were constantly damp, and the big cats lived, on average, no more than two years after their arrival. Between 1832 and 1836, the zoo lost nine lions. These dens were replaced with outdoor terraced dens in 1840, which left the animals exposed to rain, cold, and snow. The ventilation in the monkey house was so bad, keepers removed the animals killed by carbon monoxide by the wheel-barrowful each morning. In 1836, critics in the Quarterly Journal called for a truly humane zoo with larger, drier, well-ventilated dens that “would enable the animals to take some exercise, and amuse themselves instead of dosing away the monotonous lethargic life to which they are now doomed.” Leigh Hunt, the poet and contemporary of Byron, questioned why animals should be kept in captivity at all if conditions could not be improved. Why, he asked would a great people, “think themselves warranted in keeping any set of fellow-creatures in a state of endless captivity—their faculties contradicted, their very lives, for the most part, turned into lingering deaths?” (Altick 1978: 318).

One of the most popular exhibits became the bear pit (not demolished until 1900). Depicted in six views by George Scharf (1835), who later would produce scientific lithographs for Darwin and Owen, they show a bear at the top of a vertical pole extending from the center of the pit attempting to get a bun
on the end of a stick being offered to it by a keeper. Also visible in the picture are the upper class visitors. When the zoo first opened, it was a popular venue for high society and not until the reform acts of the 1830s was it considered “rational recreation” for working people. The zoo was officially opened to the general public in 1847-48, under the leadership of the experienced museologist, David W. Mitchell, who vastly improved the conditions. Previously, at least in principle, it was only for members and their guests, but London guidebooks included tips on how visitors could obtain tickets in bars or from coach drivers (Altick 1978: 317).

Responses to the zoo were quite diverse. Some claimed the idyllic scenery made the animals happier than the grim, old Tower menagerie, but a letter to the editor complained how little was being done to improve the flimsy buildings and undrained ground that forced animals to stand in mud and film-covered water. In 1855, four years after Mitchell left for a new position, the zoo was again under attack by the *Quarterly Review* for the miserable conditions, “nutshells of cages” and “box-like dens.”

‘We stall our lions and tigers as we would oxen, till they grow lethargic, fat and puffy, like city aldermen. With half an acre of enclosed ground, strewn with sand, we might see the king of beasts pace freely, as in his Libyan fastness, and with twenty feet of artificial rock might witness the tiger’s bound’ (Altick 1978: 319).

However, the majority of the public, visiting primarily for fun, was enthusiastic (Ito 2006: 159). Thomas Veltre, in *New Worlds, New Animals*, argues that a menagerie is part of a “culture expressing its ideas about humanity through its relations with other animals and its environment. A menagerie reflects a culture’s ideas about political power, and ultimately the place of animals and human beings in the universe.” It is by definition, a place for the management of animals, requiring an urbanized economy, and an investment in space, labor, and food, while implying “containment, dominion and control.” The novelty of animals as exotic representatives of faraway places, as often freakish metaphors chosen to be unique representatives of their species, and as evokers of emotional responses, is also basic to a menagerie’s popularity. A menagerie is primarily concerned, Veltre concludes, with the symbolic role of animals (Veltre 1996: 19).
In early Christianity, nature was a symbolic system through which God spoke to man. The lion, for example, was king of beasts because it was the beast of kings, an emblem of wealth and power, and often an agent for divine punishment. A second-century Christian manuscript described three religiously symbolic characteristics of the lion. It erased its footprints with its tail, it slept with its eyes open, and cubs were born dead, coming to life after 30 days when their father breathed in their faces (Kaplan 1981: abstract). The tiger did not come off as regally as the lion. In the first edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1768-71), the tiger was described as more ferocious, cruel, and savage than the lion.

Although gorged with carnage, his thirst for blood is not appeased; he seizes and tears in pieces a new prey with equal fury and rapacity, the very moment after devouring a former one; he lays waste the country he inhabits; he neither dreads the aspect nor the weapons of men; puts to death whole troops of domestic animals, attacks young elephants, rhinoceroses, and sometimes even braves the lion himself. The tiger seems to have no other instinct but a constant thirst after blood, a blind fury which knows no bounds or distinction, and which often stimulates him to devour his own young, and to tear the mother in pieces for endeavoring to defend them. He lies in wait near watering places, seizing his prey or engaging in massacres. If he kills a large animal he demonstrates his great strength by often dragging them to deeper woods to finish them off. Neither force, restraint, or violence can tame the tiger. He is equally irritated with good as with bad treatment: he tears the hand that nourishes him with equal fury as that which administers blows: he roars, and is enraged at the sight of every living creature. Almost every natural historian agrees in this horrible character. It is happy for other animals, that the species of the tiger is not numerous, and that they are confined to the warm climates. They are found in Malabar, Siam, Bengal, the interior parts of Africa, and in general, in all the regions that are inhabited by the elephant and rhinoceros (tygerstuff.html).

Diana Donald, in *Picturing Animals in Britain: 1750-1850*, argues that in 18th century Britain, wild carnivores were typically deemed, “outcasts and bandits.” Goldsmith characterized them as “the untamable and rebellious offspring of nature,” while Buffon’s descriptions talked of the inaccessible, solitary retreats of ferocious animals where they ruled like Satan and the fallen angels. The *History of Quadrupeds*, spoke of the tremendous rage and madness--fatal to any animal they met--of lions living in deserts burned by the scorching sun, while Blake described them as creatures of the impenetrable, dark, ‘forests of the night.’ The tiger was especially treacherous, unsocial, and pathologically malevolent even killing its own kind (Donald 2007: 67-68).

These views were countered by the repeatedly quoted passages in the Book of Job that presented a view of the magnificent, untamed, untamable animals that represented the power of God and could be
used as instruments of that power. On the other hand, Rousseau, Buffon and Stubbs saw animals always losing to man’s tyranny. In captivity, their natural society was destroyed and they no longer could choose their own mates, live in their natural social organization, or express their intelligence and courage. The effects of civilization were either death or an atrophying of natural powers (Donald 2007: 166).

Certain animals become especially popular. By mid-19th century, London’s booming middle class obsessed on exotic animals. To study God’s creatures was respectable and morally uplifting. Victorian ladies collected shells, butterflies, pressed flowers, raised hothouse plants, took seashore walks, and engaged in bird watching. Victorian parlors were filled with aquariums, fern collections, butterflies, and books on natural history. In the London Zoo, the hippo Obaysch, a diplomatic gift, was the benefactor of Mitchell’s ‘star system,’ whereby a “single new and noteworthy acquisition received special publicity” (Altick 1978: 318). Obaysch became the subject of a Lewis Carroll poem describing his appetite. Thousands lined up each Saturday to see him, including Queen Victoria and her children. Silver models were sold on the Strand, and the “Hippopotamus Polka” became a hit. *Punch* regularly chronicled the life of “HRH-His Rolling Hulk,” and called him “the lion of the day” (Altick 1978: 318 and Root Feb. 1993: 34).

Early in the 1850s, a craze broke out in England over sea life. Scores of books on marine biology appeared. Darwin had opened the door to anxieties over the fragility of biological anatomical boundaries, and exotic sea creatures seemed to stoke the public’s imagination. Public and private aquariums flourished, and naturalists observed and recorded the sexual behavior, anatomy, and metamorphosis of sea creatures. Poorer citizens set up fresh water aquariums with animals captured in ditches and ponds, while the wealthier opted for marine species. Lloyds maintained 15,000 specimens in stock and sold seawater by the pint. More than 70 guidebooks were published between 1850-58. Their tone ranged from satirical or comical, to religious or scientific, with a sprinkling of parody, semi-eroticism, and the latest popular songs. One guidebook called the aquaria, theaters of the early world; the realms of the unknown, unclassified and uncomprehended, just like wild, uncharted Africa. John Harvey’s 1858 guidebook described how “dark ugly forms dart past us, with bright cold eyes and glancing teeth.” The biology of
animals such as the barnacle, as described by Darwin—attached by its head, waving its feet, with a mouth between its legs—seemed like a grotesque distortion of human anatomy. Males often were minute and parasitic, reduced to only a testes and penis. If species were not fixed, could human males similarly degenerate? There seemed to be two possible paths; progress or devolution from idleness. By the 1880s marine creatures—parasitic and immobile—were evidence of the nightmare of degeneracy. The concept was incorporated in popular fiction such as H. Ryder Haggard’s, Lost Tribes, H. G. Wells, Morlocs, and the human-animal hybrids of Dr. Moreau. Two of the most avid readers of marine biology were Bram Stoker, as his working notes for Dracula indicate, as well as H. G. Wells, whose Martians, in The War of The Worlds, were grotesque creatures combining parasitism and vampirism (Stott December 2000: 305-327).

In 1874, Frances Power Cobbe tried to counter some of the common anthropomorphemic references in an article dealing with “Animals in Fable and Art.” She wrote about the irony in the use of terms like “brutal” and “beastly,” “manly” and “humane.” No brute ever kicks its mate to death, or any beast makes itself drunk. Yet the language in police reports designate outrages as “beastly,” or wallowing in the gutter, yet when a hen defends its chicks, we call it “manly,” and label compassion, as “humanity” as if we were incapable of cruelty (Cobbe May 23, 1874: 451).

If we studied animals carefully and dispassionately, Cobbe continued, we would eventually come down to common ground. The old fabulists, since the Egyptians, would pick out some animal trait and make that animal possessing it, a representative of that attribute. They saw animals strictly as allegorical figures, exhibiting cunning, folly, or courage. Each species was described as if it consisted of one individual and made all other members of that species deserving of reward or punishment for all time (Cobbe May 23, 1874: 451).

Cobbe insisted we should not study animals as a pool to see ourselves, but to penetrate the depths to find “lovely and mysterious things lying below.” Each animal should be studied “not as a tale of an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, but a verse in the great Bible of the universe—to be read thoughtfully and treated tenderly. For when a species dies out, its loss is final and irredeemable.” We
must first “read these books—so full of wisdom and poetry” before they are torn up (Cobbe May 23, 1874: 451).

One of the chief offenders of allegorizing animals was Landseer, who used dogs to caricaturize humanity, according to Cobbe. The lion, she continued, along with Richard the Lionhearted, should be dethroned. The king was faithless, covetous, and ferocious and the big cat, a “great carnivorous imposter.” The lion is credited with all kinds of sublime and generous qualities, simply because of his magnificent head, impressive mane, and tremendous roar. Fabulists crowned him the king of beasts, lordly, and magnanimous. Landseer “did truckle to the pride of humanity as to show the lion as repressed and tamed by Van Amburgh,” and in a later work, “crying like a whipped child made to stand in the corner.” The real lion is not as brave as a tiger. She cites a witness, traveling in Cochin, China, who recalls seeing a tiger tied to a stake and forced to combat 46 elephants after being declawed and having its mouth sewed shut. He flung himself at them over and over, until the elephants slunk away before returning and killing the cat by tossing him from their tusks (Cobbe May 23, 1874: 451).

David Quammen, writing 130 years later, claims the public’s interest in predators can be traced to prehistory. “Great and terrible flesh-eating beasts have always shared the landscape with humans. . . . every once in a while, a monstrous carnivore emerged like doom from a forest or river to kill someone and feed on the body.” There are psychological, mythic, and spiritual dimensions to these alpha predators: the tiger, the great white shark, lion, leopard, polar bear, brown bear, crocodile, and Komodo dragon, all of which are “big enough, fierce enough, voracious and indiscriminate enough to occasionally kill and eat a human.” Lions are mentioned some 130 times in the Bible. Those encountered by Daniel, decline to eat him, but as arbiters of righteousness devour the bad guys. Quammen believes that probably by 2150, when human population reaches 11 billion, these animals will cease to exist in the wild. Increasingly genetically similar zoo animals will cause people to question if there once really were widespread unpredictable creatures sharing habitats with humans (Quammen 2003: 12-13).

One theory postulates that the extermination of alpha predators is basic to colonialism. An invading alien people, with different weapons and organizational style, find themselves far from home.
They experience detachment, ignorance, fear, and anxiety, which they compensate for with an assumed sense of superiority. The invaders “seize hold of an already occupied landscape and presume to make it their own by killing the alpha predators.” They do this not in the name of sport or adventure but as interlopers, “the stealers of the landscape, who want to make themselves comfortable, safe and supreme in unfamiliar surroundings.” In America, this was evident in the loathing and slaughter of wolves and grizzly bears, animals pivotal in the belief systems of indigenous people. “You haven’t conquered a people and their place, until you’ve exterminated their residents” (Quammen 2003).

Desmond Morris claims there are six ways we approach other species. Three—as predators, prey, and pests—have persisted since prehistoric times. More recently, we have added the scientific, aesthetic, and symbolic. Once we have become organized, animals become ways to satisfy our nutritional, economic, and emotional needs. Not until the late 19th and early 20th century, did we rejoin the animal kingdom. In the 18th century, when we began exploring seriously, we did not find dragons, but exotic species that were shipped back to Europe as commodities. One goal was to acclimate them to European climates so they could provide food, leather, and entertainment. Politically, they represented wealth and power. “My zoo is bigger than yours because my empire is bigger, my navy faster, my explorers more adventurous, and so on” (Morris [foreword] in Lippincott and Bluhm 2005).

This prevelant concept was supported by the idea that animals were nothing more than representatives of far-flung lands. It was not by accident that Sir Stanford Raffles would want to recreate the conquest of empire building by founding the London Zoo, which by 1847, was described as a “forlorn stamp collection of animals—one of everything—barely surviving.” If the animals died from improper care, stress, fights, or transmitted human illnesses, they could easily be replaced. There was little thought given to the devastation of natural habitat occurring in the empire. Nietzsche wrote near the end of the 19th century, “If God’s second blunder was woman, his first was creating animals; men wanted only to dominate them.” When the Philadelphia Zoo opened in 1874, conditions were hardly better, and the sloth was quickly poked to death by walking sticks and umbrellas (“From Zoo Cage. . . ” July 11, 1998: 81-83). In fact a joke appearing in Puck in 1893 was entitled “Cheated”: 
AUNTY (to Tommy, who has been to the menagerie).—Well, Tommy did you see the tiger?
TOMMY (whimpering)—Yes; b-b-but
AUNTY—But what—what are you crying about?
TOMMY—They wouldn’t let me poke him (“Mutual Improvement” Dec. 6, 1893).

John Berger argues that in the 19th century, in both Western Europe and North America, a process began by which every tradition that had previously mediated between man and animal was broken. The treatment of animals in academic painting was indicative of their impending disappearance. “The images are of animals receding into a wilderness that existed only in the imagination” (Berger 1980: 15). Grandville, more than a century earlier, in “The Public and Private Life of Animals” (1840-42), depicted them dressed up and acting like men and women. The lion, for example, represented absolute courage and the hare; lechery. What began would reach its apogee with Disney (Berger 1980: 15-17).

Zoos are a monument indicative of both the disappearance of animals and impossibility of observing them in daily life. They are “an epitaph to a relationship which was as old as man.” At the same time, reproductions of animals became a regular part of middle class childhoods, as well as more increasingly realistic animal toys. Animals in the zoo were described to children as originals of their reproductions (Berger 1980).

The Victorian era was one of strange dichotomies in a changing world and emerging mass market. Domestic animals were sentimentalized and cherished, while the killing of wild animals for trophies was a prime source of entertainment and status for the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. At the same time, people became enthralled with nature, exploration, and the discovery of new species. They sought to tame nature with elaborate gardens. Truth to nature was valued in art, while concepts of both the dignity and ferocity of nature prevailed (McKenzie 2001: 4). There also emerged in the 18th century, as the post-modernist Foucault points out, an admiration of discipline, submission and allegiance, both of one’s self, as well as nature--the more obedient and disciplined, the more useful (Foucault 1975: 110).

Early travelers found the British especially cruel since the general populace engaged in bull and bear baiting and cockfighting, while the aristocracy demonstrated an obsessive pre-occupation with hunting and hawking, complete with stylized pursuits, captures and kills. The Romanticists’ emphasis on
sensation and feeling influenced campaigns against flagrant cruelty to animals by assuming the minority Christian view that humans were charged with the care of God’s creation. Charles Darwin stressed that humanity toward animals was one of the noblest of human qualities and one of the last to be acquired. While in the Christian millenarian view, wild animals would lose their ferocity and again live in harmony with man. Thus, the mid 19th century was one of mixed feelings about exploitation, subjugation, dominion, and new sensibilities. But also very prominent, were thoughts of prestige, anxiety over social control, and the practice of empire building. The dog, for example, “knew its place,” and by accepting human dominion was a “nobler creature than the cat, which refused to subordinate its will to masters” (Ritvo 1987 and Thomas 1983).

In both Britain and America, the growing middle class, in the period between 1820-1870, was convinced animals could help socialize children by teaching them to be aware of, and hate the thought of, causing pain to other creatures and ultimately to other people. Learning kindness was critical, advisors counseled, since children were prone to cruelty. Success in life, family, society, and politics depended on moral strength. Cruelty to animals led to lack of control and a propensity to violence in adulthood. Children should be taught animals were worthy of kindness because of their own moral and emotional capacities. Evangelical Protestantism, first emerging in the northeastern United States, taught the responsibility of the individual, and the concept of social progress toward perfection, both of which demanded self-control. The passions could be stimulated by alcohol, gambling, romance novel reading, and certain amusements; making a man dangerous to himself and other innocents, including animals (Grier June 1999: 95).

Women were increasingly expected to cultivate properly socialized children. One way was to teach kindly stewardship of animals, since such behavior was likened to a loving God’s attitude toward humankind. Kindness to animals became a marker of middle class identity, which eventually led to the humane movement. Signorey’s Letters to Women (1835) cautioned mothers to “check the first buddings of those Domitian tastes. Instruct it that the gift of life, to the poor beetle, or the crawling worm, is from the great father above, and not lightly to be trodden out.” Parents should provide an example. A cruel
child would lead to an even worse adult. For example, Benedict Arnold in childhood had destroyed insects, mutilated toads, stole the eggs of the mourning bird, and tortured domestic animals. Hunting remained questionable. It was a preparation for manhood, but since the middle class did not hunt for subsistence, it became, as Alcott warned, a pernicious blood sport based on the love of killing. Making “a game of the suffering of God’s creatures” hardened the heart for “rapine, murder, and war” (Grier June 1999: 95).

Companion animals, on the other hand, could prevent thoughtless cruelty and tyranny toward dependent beings, as well as promoting a love for natural history and intellectual improvement. Animals also had excellent emulalable virtues, for example, the faithfulness of dogs and the neatness of cats. They demonstrated devoted love, happiness, grief, mental and physical suffering, and gratitude. Pet keeping, the author concluded, was aimed at creating a good man in “a culture that worried a great deal about the nature of mankind, itself” (Grier June 1999: 95).

Phillip Howell argues that Victorians did not try to repress the beast within, in fact animals and humans were complexly configured and incorporated into British cultural life. Rural nostalgia and a desire to repress animality were not entirely symptomatic of a bourgeois cultural order filled with cruelties and contradictions. Victorians determinedly transgressed the boundary and rejected both the theological and scientific ideology embracing animals as part of a shared moral community (Howell 2002: 5-22).

Maggie Berg used the example of Anne Bronte’s, Agnes Grey, to show that in Victorian society, the “bodies that matter” were those of white middle-class men, whose coherent identities depended upon cruelties exerted on those beneath them.” Not only were animal types equivocated with Victorian social hierarchy, justifying exploitation of those at the bottom, but that “speciesism,” the assumption animals were inferior to humans and did not warrant equal consideration and respect, was inextricably linked to classism and sexism (Berg Summer 2002: 95)

As a governess, Agnes Grey discovers the connections between the treatment of animals and women, bullying of people and animals, aristocratic tastes, and pursuits of oppressive social hierarchy.
Her young charge makes her watch “how manfully he uses his whip and spurs” on his rocking horse. He promises he will cut his real horse and make him sweat (Berg Summer 2002: 95).

The role of the whip, according to Anne McClintock, helps mark the metamorphosis from child to man, and is the symbol of social violence, an emblem of social potency, and the violent mastery of servants and animals. “In the precocious accession to masculinity, the whip marks the boundary between women and men and between men and animals, which have to be continually re-inscribed.” The riding master with his whip was the dominant motif of Victorian pornography, as was the language of horsemanship, e.g. “show their paces,” and “present themselves.” Black Beauty, she believes uses the image of the horse to protest the power of men. Domestic violence was a key factor in the founding of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in 1824. The long practice of savage cruelty towards animals presumably produced brutal wife beaters (McClintock 1995).

**Legacy of Van Amburgh**

In both England and America, circuses also were sources of fascination and outrage. Perhaps they were too popular with children, resulting in critics from the press and pulpit to denounce them as “traveling death” and “moral ruin.” Clerics insisted they misdirected money from worthy endeavors like missionary work.

However, no one, according to John Culhane, had been more responsible for both popularizing the circus and arguing for its righteousness than Isaac Van Amburgh. His publicists, like those of fellow menagerie men, turned criticism of mass entertainment on its head by using scripture to justify their endeavors. Since Genesis 26 gave man dominion over all the animals, “Why, then it was a religious act for trained animals to lie down with a lamb” and when Van Amburgh brought a child into the den, he was “completing the picture of the triumph of faith over the savage heart.” Showmen invited the audience into the world of spiritual experience and almost supernatural wonder. Rachel Adams called the circus a place where “education and entertainment mixed in tense, if profitable, collaboration, punctuated by a contentious dialogue between the lofty discourses of the museum and the university and the promotional hype of the commercial entrepreneur” (McElaney 2006: 139-160).
The articles that followed Van Amburgh’s death in 1865 were influenced by this amazing turmoil of ideas marking the Victorian era. Empire, brutality, colonialism, and destruction of the natural environment were being challenged by new scientific discoveries, exploration of the inner self, and rising sensibilities about cruelty and injustice. The trend in articles about the American performer shifted from arguments about taste and popular entertainments to far more moral tirades, especially since by this time the dramatic, formal theater no longer tried to appeal to all tastes once separate popular entertainment venues had emerged.

In 1868, for example, James Franklin Fitts wrote,

…my particular subject of complaint just now is the growing thirst after novelty and sensation which leads men and women of our day to crowd eagerly together and witness the sufferings and dangers of man and beast for their own diversion, and which impels other men to ransack the globe and their own fertile brains in pursuit of some new variety of torment wherewith to appease the gnawing vultures of novelty, curiosity and sensation. Will not human nature plead guilty upon arraignment to the indictment of continual, deliberate inhumanity to man and beast, for the satisfaction of its own selfish amusement? (Fitts Oct. 1868: 556).

Years ago, Fitts continued, a familiar joke dealt with a man who followed Van Amburgh’s menagerie from town to town, attending every show. When asked why, he replied that “the big lion would bite off Van Amburgh’s head when he put it in his mouth, sure, some day, and he was bound to be there when it happened.” Fitts added, that this was an exhibition hundreds of thousands had seen,

but does anyone for a moment suppose that if it were entirely divested of the possibility of the lion’s chewing up the showman’s head, it would draw four dozen? I trow not. . . . or let the dear public be assured that the lion’s teeth and claws have been carefully drawn, and Van Amburgh might thrust his head, shoulder deep down the throat of the royal brute, to empty chairs (Fitts Oct. 1868: 556).

Other articles were more informative and attempted to explain how wild animals were trained, for example, “Lions and Lion Taming,” that appeared in the 1872, Ohio Farmer. Forest lions were presumably far more intelligent and teachable than those bred in captivity. The training process began with feeding the animal with one’s own hands from outside the cage, finally the trainer could enter and repeat the process with each animal singly, at all times, “avoiding violence” and not “arousing the dormant devil.” The lion, like a cat, “likes friction,” and by stroking down the back and scratching around the head, and will respond like a cat by rubbing its head against the trainer’s hand. The cat can then be
taught to jump over a band which is gradually heightened, and finally through hoops. The whip is for direction not punishment. To get a big cat to lie down, one flicked him on the back with a “tickling whip,” while pressing him down with his other hand. The ‘head in the mouth’ is accomplished by raising the lion’s head and taking hold of the nostril with the right hand, and the underlip and lower jaw with the left. The lion, because of this great pressure on the nostril and lip, loses much of the power of his jaws, so that a man can pull them open and put his head inside the beast’s mouth—the feat which was so closely associated with Van Amburgh. The only danger was if the animal should raise one of his forepaws and stick his claws into the trainer. If he does this, the trainer must “stand fast for his life” until the cat withdraws his claws (“Lions and Lion Taming” May 18, 1872: 311).

Writers also discussed the concept of the power of the human eye as an effective tool for animal training. The rather strange protruding eye of Van Amburgh, and its possible power over his wild charges, had always caused speculation. An 1853 article in The National claimed, “The eye has much to do with the subjection of certain of the larger kinds. The eye speaks the wish of the master. The eye enforces the command of the master. The animal sees, feels, and instantly obeys.” He gave Ducrow as an example, since horses were seen to quake with fear at his sight. Although he claimed Ducrow was an “awful brute. . . We have noted his eye; we noticed their eyes. There was ‘a mystery’ to us, no longer. This is Mesmerism, properly so-called. We may introduce the word now, harmlessly, for all the world are opening their eyes to its power” (“The Art of Taming Animals” July-Dec. 1853: 47-49).

The concept of animal magnetism or Mesmerism, as it was called after its founder, burst upon Victorian Britain in 1837, after a long controversial existence in France, when professor of medicine, John Elliotson of the University of London, began a series of experiments with his patients. For the next 15 years there was intense speculation and argument about the nature of influence and power between people, and people and the environment. First put forth by Anton Mesner (1734-1815), the director of medicine at the University of Vienna, the theory described magnetism as a universal fluid that especially affects the nervous systems of humans, with an uneven distribution resulting in illness. Gradually the ideas of Mesmerism, animal magnetism, phrenology, and hypnosis became complicatedly intertwined.
Dickens and Browning, for example, were strong advocates, since Mesmerism promised to satisfy what Porter calls, “that passionate, ultimate quest of earnest Victorians to prove the reality of the soul and the power of the mind over matter.” The leading evangelists of the era, like the Beechers and Charles Finney, were described as dynamic, with magnetic personalities, hypnotic eyes, and a psychic force over people. But as the ideas spread in the popular press, as well as through commercialization and itinerant performers and entertainers who posed as scientists, professors, and healers in the 1840s and 50s, the concept became increasingly scrutinized. More and more the concept was dismissed as rubbish and a ridiculous idea (Porter Sept. 1985: 22-29; Gezundhajt 2007: 178-194; Parssinen Autumn 1977: 87-104, and Cole, Jr. 1954).

In 1876, *The Albion* laughingly observed that the power of the human eye as exercised by a woman over a man was doubtless irresistible, “but when a man imagines that his own eye can exert some influence over lower creation, and that he has only to gaze fixedly on a wild beast to subdue its ferocity,” he frequently miscalculates. A good example was a professor in Vermont who when attempting the feat was tossed 27 feet by a bull (“Power of the Human Eye” Feb. 5, 1876: 12).

*Forest and Stream*, in a more serious piece, explained:

That wild animals have, as a rule, an instinctive fear of man, is a very common opinion, and rests upon the same basis as that concerning the occult power of the human eye. It is questionable whether any proof whatever can be adduced to show that man, as man, is dreaded, before he has made himself terrible to the animals who fly from his scent on sight. . . . it is the unusual that excites terror. . . . This is so universal a trait among all highly developed animals, including men, that it seems unnecessary to do more than specify its existence (“The Lion of Fact and Fancy” Oct. 30, 1890: 287).

Sixteen years later the same periodical wrote sarcastically:

One needed but to look sharply, calmly and steadily into the very center of the eye of lion, tiger, bull, elephant, or mad dog and victory began at once for the man. The formula required that the animal thus transfixed, should relax, his eyes would slink and roll, his legs would involuntarily carry him backward a few steps, after which he would suddenly turn and scurry away over hill and dale, in glorious panic, with head erect and tail athwart the sky (“The Basilisk Eye” Jan. 6, 1906: 14).

In a later issue of *Forest and Stream*, the author further explained his denial of the contention that “there is something so terrible and majestic in the human eye that man has only to fix his gaze on the
most terrific denizens of the forest to inspire them with awe.” The basis of this concept is that the Family *felidae* seize their prey from behind using their weight, jaws, and claws to overwhelm it. The tiger is not a coward, nor can the human eye dominate him, the author continues, but the destructive instinct, “the enjoyment of which would be marred if they attacked in front, and provoked their prey to battle, and it is a merciful provision of nature that they show no such tendency.” The eye-to-eye contact would be completely meaningless with bulls or grizzlies, however, since they typically meet their foes face to face (“The Human Eye” Feb. 24, 1906: 295).

A writer in the *Independent* pointed out that noted wild animal trainer, Frank Bostock, who presented an act of 27 lions, would have to have 27 pairs of eyes if the concept of the magnetic power of the human eye was true. Instead, the trainer needed self-control, unshakeable nerves, constant patience, unwearying physical agility like a Spanish bull fighter, highly developed knowledge of the nature of the animals he is training, and the ability to retain self-possession even when badly hurt and in extreme danger. The author insisted that the trained wild animal “is simply a product of science and may so exist until it discovers its own power. After that its training is at an end and it becomes merely a zoological specimen” (“The Training of Wild Animals” Dec. 24, 1903: 3067).

In 1908, the phrenologist, Allen S. Williams, claimed in a lecture that it is the ferocity of the big cats and consequent danger to man when he confronts them, that makes the taming and training of wild animals a fascinating exhibition to a public that cheerfully pays to see it. But to the majority of the audience, the feats are secondary to the morbidity of most spectators, with the exception of performing elephants, monkeys, sea lions, and bears, where the public marvels at the accomplishments of both the animals and their trainers (Williams Apr. 1908: 116).

Williams admitted that although the motive of these presentations was monetary, the majority of trainers that he had studied for the past 25 years, loved, admired, and were interested in wild animals, or they would not have made such a huge commitment in time and effort to such an uncertain business. He claims he has observed only minor instances of cruelty, but an almost consistent strong attachment to the
animals. Showmen insisted zoo animals rebel against monotony and die of ennui, while performing animals thrive with the variety of experiences and exercise they enjoy (Williams Apr. 1908: 116).

He added, that to him the high degree of animal differences—phrenological and physiognomical—are plainly evident, and that not only do different species demand different training methods, but individual specimens vary also. To the untrained eye, 100 lions look the same, but inspection of their heads, faces, and bodily contours, reveal great variations to expert ‘animal men,’ who must “deal differently with each animal like a physical instructor” (Williams Apr. 1908: 116).

Training is usually adapted to the nature of the animal, and although sometimes force is used, more typically animals are led by holding food before them and then rewarded for obedience and punished for being refractory. With the big cats, the trainer must carefully adhere to the same rotation of events. Williams concludes that hazards still exist, since familiarity breeds contempt-- especially if the trainer lacks intellect-- which can easily lead to the loss of his or her limbs or life (Williams Apr. 1908: 116).

Other writers reminisced nostalgically about seeing Van Amburgh when they were children. Alcott recalled the four-mile hike to see “Van Amburgh & Co.’s New Great Golden Menagerie, Circus and Coliseum in early June 1877. A story in St. Nicholas the same year, recalled the minister coming in “with a great flaming, yellow handbill.” The father said to his excited children that it was not a circus bill (circuses being proscribed amusement in that home),

“but a fine menagerie, the best that ever came to the state.”
“Oh father, menageries are good!”
“It is Van Amburgh’s, a rare collection, and he will go into the lion’s cage and perform some marvelous tricks” (Allison May 1877: 492).

When the magical day arrived, the children dressed in their Sunday’s finest,

went through the narrow door into the great white tent, among the crowds of people standing everywhere, or sitting tier above tier, all along one side of the tent. Gravely and wonderingly they looked into the great iron cages where tigers and lions paced back and forth in uneasy confinement, or bears lay and slept, or gazed back at them with sharp, fierce looking eyes (Allison May 1877: 492).

They were amazed at the performing elephants and the dancing pony with a monkey on its back. Then,
Van Amburgh himself came in presently in splendid costume, bespangled with gold and silver, and went into the lion’s cage, as the handbills had promised, and played with the terrible creatures as if they had been dogs; and he opened their mouths, and showed people their dreadful teeth, till the children’s faces grew white with excitement (Allison May 1877: 492).

Edwin Guillet, in *Pioneer Days in Upper Canada*, described how, in the 1850s and 60s, Van Amburgh’s “collection of the animal kingdom” was one of the most popular entertainments in Canada. Since circuses often “offended the refined,” Van Amburgh’s advertisements assured there was no such entertainment accompanying the show, instead, “It will afford an opportunity to the most religious of gratifying their curiosity in seeing with their eyes some of the wonders of animal creation.” Admission was 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children, and the show promised to provide “a feast to the naturalist, and an opportunity to the Christian philosopher to contemplate the wisdom and power of the Supreme Being in the Creation of animated nature” (Guillet 1933: 200).

Shortly before Van Amburgh’s death, he united with Barnum, and these two internationally known celebrities jointly exhibited on Broadway the animals Van Amburgh had collected. The menagerie, the *New York Times* claimed, was “the most complete school of natural history in this country” containing especially splendid specimens of big cats. These animals, the article continued, half the children in the country have seen, “and remembrance of their feats forms the great event in the memory of them all” (“Van Amburgh’s Animals” Dec. 29, 1866: 4).

“Next to marbles, footballs and ‘belly-guttered’ sleds, there is nothing so attractive to a genuine boy as a wild beast—particularly if at any period of his existence he had the good fortune to slay, mash or eat a human being, missionary or whatever,” while “his tail lashed in fury.” We have known boys, the author continued, who would run away from high school to follow a menagerie and others, whose curiosity impelled them to run risks and suffer the pangs of parental displeasure for a single look at a Royal Bengal Tiger. Such boys do not live now probably, but there are thousands who have witnessed with pleasure not unmixed with awe, the large array of wildom caged at Barnum’s for their express benefit (“Van Amburgh’s Animals” Dec. 29, 1866: 4).

Sadly, a defective flue resulted in a “magnificent midnight spectacle” as Barnum’s museum burned. The animals howled and roared in fear. Those that did not succumb in the fire and managed to escape were shot by police. A few animals were rescued, but the giraffe and elephant, exposed to the cold,
were not expected to live. The loss of contents amounted to $400,000 and the building an additional
$60,000 (“Van Amburgh’s Animals” Dec. 29, 1866: 4). The city was left with “nothing of natural history
or scientific study,” although resources were available in Europe for “a superb museum of nature and

The menagerie in Central Park, in 1869, “poor as it is compared with European Zoological
Gardens is still very instructive to children and ignorant people.” An earlier1866 article reported that the
zoo’s alligator and baboon had died, along with the rabbits and guinea pig. The eagles were sick and
covered with all kinds of “unclean things.” The three birds in the menageries should be given “sympathy
and a passport” (“Central Park” April 22, 1866: 4). Still, the Times concluded that “the importance of
imbuing the vast mass of ignorant people growing up in our city with a taste for pure amusements cannot
be exaggerated. . . .” and could “affect profoundly the future interests of our whole community” (“The

In 1867, Van Amburgh was the subject of a painting by George Cochran Lambdin (1830-1886), a
Pennsylvania based artist who was noted for his genre paintings, children’s portraits, and later amazing
flower paintings that won him the reputation as the best floral painter of all time. However, critics were
not so generous when his Van Amburgh was exhibited at the National Academy. Critics claimed that as
“passable as it may be in color, this picture is feeble in drawing as in character, and it is difficult to
discern a parallel between the late famous lion-tamer, from whom it derives its title, and a small boy
holding a harmless calf by the ear” (“Pictures at the National Academy” May 18, 1867: 310; “Lambdin,

Since the post-Civil War period was one of increasing sentimentality and growing humane
movements both in Britain and the United States, it is not surprising that Van Amburgh came under
criticism. The RSPCA, founded in England in 1824, was the first and most successful ‘cause group’ in the
19th century. Victoria, in fact, would draw censure when she gave the organization her royal imprimatur
since she had been such an ardent fan of Van Amburgh. One of the association’s chief strategies was to
stress the necessity to civilize the lower classes by curbing animal cruelty and promoting moral character (Harrison 1973: 786-820).

In a widely distributed 1873 article, “Van Amburgh, The Lion King,” or “Three Months With a Lion King,” an anonymous author revealed what he believed is the secret of Van Amburgh’s professional success. He cast the American as a vile coward; quite a contrast from the flamboyant stories that had greeted his arrival in England 35 years earlier (“Van Amburgh, The ‘Lion King’” May 29, 1873: 204 and “Three Months with a ‘Lion King’” Mar. 1873).

The author, an artist, wrote that he met the American trainer in Paris in 1838. Van Amburgh had proved a sensation in Paris just as he had in England, but he did not make a favorable impression on the writer. While drinking with Van Amburgh, he found him a “very stupid, ignorant fellow, and for an American totally devoid of that drollery and smartness in conversation which, if not always enlightening is comical and amusing.” He described Van Amburgh as having an extremely slow, studiously upright, theatrical strut, a physique marked by immensely broad shoulders, narrow hips, and very thin straight legs, a pleasing expression, and an “‘unintelligible’ squint of the left eye that ever revolved in the head of a human being: when he chose, it was perfectly appalling. . . I would defy anyone to be sure at whom or what he was glaring.” But the author was equally sure this ‘piercer,’ despite its variety of expressions, was just part of the act and had no effect whatever upon the animus of the beasts. Like the fictional Morok, Van Amburgh was followed around at his performances by a gentleman who wagered that he would be torn apart. He sat in a front seat or private box peering at Van Amburgh through an opera glass. The bettor almost got his wish when the Yankee was badly mauled. The author admitted that although the trainer “was in the most exquisite pain,” he “bore it manfully, and smoked his cigar with the utmost coolness, save occasionally giving utterance to those peculiar Yankee oaths which characterize the nation.” When Van Amburgh’s leg did not respond to treatment, doctors agreed that he would have to be operated on. “This courageous, dauntless gladiator, who daily and mightily risked his life, who boasted he would face the most savage wild beast, and on several occasions had done so. . . .” But when he faced the doctors, “he howled and yelled worse than any hyena. He cried for mercy, begged, prayed, and implored
like a child that they would not hurt him.” His behavior, the author claimed, consisted of, “yelling, cursing, and fighting,” which was “inconceivably disgusting and ridiculous.” When the operation on his infected leg proved a success, his “gratitude was boundless, and his thanks, unceasing and sincere. He wept like the veriest child” (“Van Amburgh, The ‘Lion King’” May 29, 1873: 204 and “Three Months with a ‘Lion King’” Mar. 1873).

When the writer was given permission to sketch the animals, he tried to get the tiger to extend his claws by irritating him with the handle of a hoe, but found he could not achieve the desired result. He sat opposite the tiger, which had gone to sleep with a paw extending through the bars. The author carefully and tenderly examined the cat’s toes, “until, I had thoroughly ascertained the truth of my suspicions—he had no claws.” They had been extracted and then the toes cauterized. He soon discovered it was true for all the animals.

The conclusions I immediately came to at this astounding mutilation were these: Here is beyond comparison the very handsomest and noblest collection of wild beasts ever seen together, tame, submissive, and tractable as domestic-bred animals, in most superb coat, fat as moles, and apparently as affectionate and grateful for kindness as would be the most intelligent and faithful of man’s companions; the one great and accountable reason for this is that in themselves—their courage, their ferocity, and their savage natures—they are vanquished, annihilated, utterly undone and demoralized. Plundered of their weapons, offensive and defensive, their very heartstrings torn asunder, their quick, sensitive natures crushed out—cast off the rack, cowed bleeding, benumbed and incapable to obey the will of their torturer. ‘Ah, I exclaimed, ‘poor beautiful pampered creatures, you are not what you seem; you are no longer lions and tigers, rulers of deserts and jungles, unhappy, miserable brutes, I pity you from my heart; nevertheless in your low estate you are yet more admirable than man!” (“Van Amburgh, The ‘Lion King’” May 29, 1873: 204 and “Three Months with a ‘Lion King’” Mar. 1873).

The author asserted that he confronted Van Amburgh with his discovery. The trainer was embarrassed and confused, which “in my disgust, I found really enjoyable.” Van Amburgh then cursed and said if the artist repeated his discovery, it “would just ruin the concern.”

“You artists are too inquisitive. I wonder nature stands to it, always prying into her bosom secrets. She’ll revolutionise some day I guess, and throw you.” After uttering a volley of slang, and cooling down, he extracted a promise that as a gentleman and a man of honor that I would never repeat what I had seen as long as he was performing (“Van Amburgh, The ‘Lion King’” May 29, 1873: 204 and “Three Months with a ‘Lion King’” Mar. 1873).

When Van Amburgh gained sufficient strength to visit his cats after a three month convalescence, the animals greeted him in an overwhelming manner: springing against the bars, purring, quietly roaring,
and “exhibiting every conceivable demonstration of affection and delight at his return that their natures dictated and were capable of. Nothing but Van’s caresses would pacify or calm them.” He seated himself in the cage and lectured the lioness for the “impropriety of biting him.” He then put them through a short rehearsal although he was still forced to walk with a crutch and finally, as a reward, fed them the sweet biscuits and lumps of sugar he had taught them to enjoy. He went through the same routine with each set of animals, all of which literally mobbed and hustled him, “almost beyond his control.” The author kept his promise to Van Amburgh, but the display of affection had only reaffirmed his suspicions that the animals’ spirits had been completely broken. Once the trainer was dead, he felt free to write:

I have kept my word. This is the first time I have ever disclosed the excruciating process, the refined agony, and despicable cowardice by which Van Amburgh made himself a “Lion King.” Van Amburgh is now no more, but he died a natural death—not torn to pieces in revenge for unjustifiable brutality and vulgar daring. He was *Par excellence* at the head of his then novel and hazardous calling—a “Lion King.” (“Van Amburgh, The ‘Lion King’” May 29, 1873: 204 and “Three Months with a ‘Lion King’” Mar. 1873).

Many of the early, more favorable publicity stories also continued to be quoted. A *Chambers’ Journal* piece on “Lion Kings, Queens, and Trainers” described Van Amburgh as the most renowned of all lion kings and a native of Holland (“Lion Kings, Queens” Mar. 17, 1877: 174-176).

Thomas Frost, who publicized Van Amburgh’s show, recalled in 1881, how the trainer had been killed in newspapers half a dozen times, his back broken twice, and his head bitten off by a tiger. He explained that lion trainers typically acquired their future pupils as young as possible, fed them by hand and avoided any violence. There was very little training involved in Van Amburgh’s signature trick of sticking his head in the lion’s mouth. In fact, Frost described it as a foolhardy feat, in which “a considerable amount of risk is incurred, without exhibiting any intelligence, grace, or docility on the part of the lion” (Frost 1875: 92-94).

In 1883, *Chambers’ Journal* reported that Faimali, The Lion Queen, who was Van Amburgh’s daughter, was torn to pieces by an animal during a performance. There is no other reference indicating whether Van Amburgh had a daughter or was married (“Faimali” Aug. 25, 1883: 529).
Seven years later, Charles H. Day (1842-1907), a circus agent and free lance writer, published a serialized story, “Van Amburgh, Elephant Performer and Lion Trainer.” In a later, 1907 article, Day remembers that all the lion kings were full-bearded men, looking similar to artists’ depictions of Daniel. Van Amburgh was so lauded and praised that he became intractable, “cussed,” and was as “difficult to control as the imperious Dan Rice, the greatest clown that America ever knew” (Day 1907).

Often Van Amburgh, “filled with his own importance,” would leisurely stay at a tavern, not bothering to drive to the next town on the route. His failure to appear was injurious to business since the Lion King was “the whole show.” Hyatt Frost, the menagerie’s manager, tried to bring his partner around by finding someone to do his act. Oscar Hyatt, an assistant manager, volunteered. Van Amburgh, Day recalled, was a man of “splendid proportions,” while Hyatt was “slab-sided, long, lean, and lank”—looking like a scarecrow. But he entered the “iron bound den” and “defied the monsters of the jungle” successfully. After that, Day reported, Van Amburgh missed no more performances (Day 1907).

In 1928, Henry Thetard, the noted French circus historian, published Les Dompteurs, a part of a multi-volume work. In the chapter devoted to Van Amburgh, he described him as an enigmatic figure, “almost wild,” who had “seduced the English love of originality.” Van Amburgh, he continued, “as we know, was devoured by a tigress, at the age of 35.” His rival, Carter died similarly. “These two passionate men were granted the favor of dying young, in full glory and beauty” (Thetard 1928: 57-73).

Thetard recounted Van Amburgh’s early days, utilizing as a source Horne’s colorful ‘origin story’ that depicted him as a mixed blood (Native American and Dutch) born in Kentucky. After fleeing the country, Van Amburgh returned to the United States where he encountered Titus’s menagerie and proved his fearlessness and ability to control wild animals by entering the cage of Norah, a lioness that had injured several keepers. Van Amburgh then joined the show at Titus’s request. He understood the big cats, having encountered cougars in Kentucky, and knew that an aggressive animal could be controlled by hitting it on the nose or behind the ears. He was capable of reading their individual characters despite the big cats’ frequently enigmatic expressions. He discovered that Norah was not a vicious animal, but one that was fearful because of ill treatment and the continuous loud yelling of Titus’s menagerie men. Van
Amburgh entered the cage with an assistant at the door. When the lioness sprang, he leapt out of the way, while his assistant used an iron bar to block the lioness. Clamping down on the bar, the lioness lost several teeth. At the same time, Van Amburgh hit the animal across the muzzle. The lioness retreated to a far corner and Van Amburgh left the cage, leaving Norah to her own thoughts. The first rule was not to push an animal too far—to the last limit of fear—which would be extremely dangerous. The following day, Van Amburgh returned alone. He talked to the lioness, watered her, and cleaned the cage. Friendly rubs were followed by hugs, convincing the lioness that the same hand that punished, could caress and provide food. By the time the show left Boston, Van Amburgh could sleep, lying on the lioness, and Titus held to his commitment of hiring him at a $100 per week salary. Van Amburgh pushed his control over the cats, not only putting his head in the lion’s mouth, but even dipping his arms in blood and placing them between the jaws of a cat. He also took a lamb and a little five-year-old girl into the cage--creating a living tableau--according to Thetard (Thetard 1928: 57-73).

Van Amburgh enjoyed the hectic life of a traveling menagerie. In 1838, after engaging in a heated rivalry with Barnum for two years, Titus decided to send Van Amburgh and his animals to London. According to contemporaries, Van Amburgh’s performances were sensational and unforgettable. Thetard described him as a large man, with almost a feminine delicacy about his face. He had chestnut hair and the prominent cheekbones of his Indian heritage. He worked bare-armed, dressed in a tunic, and appeared strong, but not overly muscular. His eyes were strange and almost frightening—prominent, glaring, and an indecisive greenish, gray color. This, Thetard claimed, so impressed Eugene Sue he gave Morok the same trait in *The Wandering Jew* (Thetard 1928: 57-73).

The trainer understood that the trick to control was to simply apply his stronger personality, or “soul,” over the “weak souls” that inhabit the powerful bodies of the big cats. His grasp of the situation enabled him to combine lions, tigers, and leopards; an amazing achievement since none of these species normally get along with each other. It is a shame, noted Thetard as an aside, that Van Amburgh did not bequeath his recipe to the League of Nations. His feats at Drury Lane attracted not only young Queen

Van Amburgh then brought his show to the Theatre de la Porte Saint-Martin in Paris for five months. The police required him to substitute a dummy for the real child he normally brought into the den. To sensationally advertise the show, the theater manager insisted it was certain that one day Van Amburgh would be devoured. The trainer proved an overwhelming success, and in 1840 he began a tour of France starting in Rouen, followed by venues in Belgium, Holland, and Germany (Thetard 1928: 57-73).

He returned to America in 1842, and despite the death of Titus, continued his route throughout the United States. Four years later, in Boston, an impending late-summer electrical storm filled the cats with fear and stood their nerves on end. Edith, Van Amburgh’s favorite tigress, was exceptionally nervous. She paced, vocalized, bared her teeth, and struck the cage sides. Her sense of agitation spread to the other lions and tigers, and their roars filled the menagerie. The act started out well, but when Edith hesitated, Van Amburgh was forced to confront her for the first time. He knew her inaction might precede an attack, but if he did not address her disobedience, he could lose control. As he lifted his whip, she attacked with no warning, unlike lions who always signal their intentions. When the crowd screamed, Van Amburgh’s assistants, rather than acting quickly, stood and prayed. The tiger grabbed Van Amburgh’s throat, forcing him to the ground, while he tried to keep the animal’s mouth at a distance. During the struggle, the tiger’s claws plowed through Van Amburgh’s shoulder and blood flowed freely. His assistants remained frozen, except for one who ran and opened the exit, signaling the other cats to leave the cage. Edith and Van Amburgh remained locked in combat. The assistant passed the trainer a cutlass and he plunged it into the body of the tiger. The audience had either rushed out the door at the onset of the fight or stood on chairs to get a better view. With Edith dead, the menagerie men were able to remove Van Amburgh from the cage and place him on a cot. His head, neck, and shoulders were covered with bloody gashes. Surgeons offered little hope, and with his wife at his bedside, Van Amburgh died a few days later of tetanus (Thetard 1928: 57-73).
Years earlier, Van Amburgh had told the Duke of Wellington that, “The day I believe that my animals are no longer afraid of me, I retire.” This terrible accident, Thetard concluded, demonstrated that it is “impossible to completely destroy the instincts of a wild beast. . . . Despite ten years of patience, good treatment and affection. . . .” After his death, his widow operated the menagerie until 1866, when it was sold to Barnum (Thetard 1928: 57-73).

Van Amburgh’s name continued to be actively used in menagerie and circus titles until 1921, while a very popular mid-19th century song entitled “Van Amburgh is the Man,” or “The Menagerie” is often sung as a camp song.

**The Menagerie**

Van Amburgh is the man, who goes to all the shows
He goes into the lion’s cage, and tells you all he knows;
He sticks his head in the lion’s mouth, and keeps it there a-while,
And when he pulls it out again, he greets you with a smile.
Chorus:
The elephant goes around, the band begins to play.
The boys around the monkey’s cage had better get out of the way.

First comes the African polar bear, oft called the Iceberg’s Daughter,
She eats three cakes of ice per day then calls for soda water;
She wades in the water up to her knees, not fearing any harm,
You may growl and grumble as much as you please, and she don’t give a “darn.”
(Chorus)
That Hyena in the next cage, most terrible to relate,
Got awful hungry the other day, and ate up his female mate;
He’s a very ferocious beast, don’t go near him little boys,
For when he’s angry he shakes his tail, and makes this awful noise [imitate growling].
(Chorus)
Next comes the Anaconda Boa Constrictor, oft called Anaconda for brevity,
He’s known throughout the whole wide world for his age and great longevity;
He can swallow himself, crawl into himself, and crawl out again with facility,
He can tie himself into a double-bow-knot with his tail, and smile with the greatest facility.
(Chorus)
Next comes the Great Vulture, awful bird, from highest mountain’s top,
He’s been known to eat up little girls, and then to lick his chops;
The performance can’t go on, there’s too much noise and confusion,
Ladies don’t feed those monkeys cakes, you’ll ruin their constitutions.
(Chorus) (*The Wild West* [Song Notes] Aug. 18, 2008).

More recently, Van Amburgh has come to represent the worst in animal training. In the *Online Journal of Creative Writing*, he was called “the particularly brutal American trainer,” who won the accolade of being the first to stick his head in a lion’s mouth. The more, the author contended, she read of...
him, “the more it seems a pity that one of these lions didn’t bite it off. Van Amburgh was a sadist who
customarily beat his animals to demonstrate his physical superiority.” He was emulated by other trainers,
“most prominently the 20th century master of circus cruelty, the American Clyde Beatty.” The author
found it strange that the “greatest animal painter of the day (or perhaps ever), Edwin Landseer, would
paint the “aggressive American,” since “the rest of his oeuvre shows a profound empathy with a regard
for his animal subjects” (Brien Nov. 2000).

In John Stokes’ “Lion Griefs”: The Wild Animal Act as Theatre,” the professor of modern British
Literature introduces Van Amburgh as the first of a succession of modern lion trainers. Stokes claims “his
basic act simply required him to demonstrate his power over his animals with the use of whips and pistol
shots, and then to reveal a unique personal rapport by mingling among them unharmed.” He then cites
Watts as “a contemporary American admirer.” Stokes addresses the two Landseer portraits, the first in
which the viewer is in the cage and the second, which is more complicated and symbolic. Stokes theorizes
it may have been a satiric way of cutting Van Amburgh down to size. He argues that in the first painting
for Victoria, the depiction is very theatrical.

The real falsity of that representation lies not in the fact that the expressions of the wild animals
are humanized but that, by acknowledging both the spectators and Van Amburgh himself, they
are apparently benefiting from the situation. Consequently, it is perfectly safe to be in the cage
with them, at least while Van Amburgh is in there too (Stokes May 2004: 138).

Conversely, Wellington’s commission shows the animals literally put in their place theatrically,
“by a mere, if authoritative gesture.” Both of Landseer’s portraits of the trainer, “depend upon reciprocal
relationships that have never been, and can never be, anything like so simple, so secure” (Stokes May
2004: 152).

Stokes argues that all trainers, as their biographies infer, suffer through the mixed emotions of
performing for greed, moral pride, or a quasi-spiritual conviction that “beyond the threat or promise of
violence, the public might discover in the controlled animal act a vision of peaceful co-existence.” Thus,
it is not surprising that the motif of the lion and lamb show up so often. “It’s a picture of undeniable
beauty,” concludes Stokes, “and the deepest arrogance. The peaceable kingdom of the beasts is, as usual, a theatrical scene created by a man” (Stokes May 2004: 153).

Much of the recent discussion of Van Amburgh centers on a renewed interest in Landseer and the place of wild animals in the art and literature of Victorian England. For example Fierce Friends was a 2005 art exhibit organized by art historians, Louise Lippincott and Andreas Bluhm. The innovative exhibition featured paintings, sculpture, and scientific illustration, along with examples of taxidermy, mounted skeletons, and fossils. The “family friendly exhibit” opened at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and later traveled to the Carnegie in Pittsburgh. It attempted to interpret how artists responded to the rise of zoos and natural history museums, an increased knowledge and interest in animals, and the changing image of the natural world. Both of Landseer’s paintings of Van Amburgh were included in the show. In the exhibition catalog, the organizers wrote that Landseer’s first painting of Van Amburgh showed the culmination of the act, a biblical tableau with all creation living peaceably together, but the authors argue that Landseer “delights in the theatricality and artifice of the moment, not its spirituality.” The audience, safely outside the cage, anticipates all hell breaking loose, as the lamb cringes, the leopard stares at its neck, the lioness snarls at the tiger, while the tiger is restrained only by Van Amburgh’s “dominant hand; who will prevail—will the peaceable kingdom explode.” In his second painting of Van Amburgh, the mood is decidedly different although the cast is the same. The trainer gestures imperiously with his hand and holds a metal crowbar. “The lion grimaces like a humiliated schoolboy in the corner.” The lioness cowers, the tiger threatens, and leopards wait in ambush. The painting “exposes the cruelty behind the illusion, animals’ misery, hideously unnatural conditions of life—or so it appears today.” To contemporaries, the first painting exemplified man’s moral power and the second represented physical dominance over all of nature. “Van Amburgh’s wooden countenance expresses the divinely mandated superiority of the human race” (Lippincott and Bluhm 2005: 67, 100-101).

Gail E. Husch, in Something Coming, discusses Apocalyptic expectations as expressed in mid-19th century American painting. Husch believes a revived interest in millennialism arose in the period between 1848 and 1852 as a result of anxiety over European revolutions, the war with Mexico, the
increasingly contentious debate over slavery, waves of new immigrants, and a devastating cholera epidemic. Variations on the subject of peace and harmony became increasingly common. Edward Hicks, in the early 19th century, created over 40 works with the title, “Peaceable Kingdom.” A Quaker minister, he depicted predators and prey coming together in harmony. Barnum imported from England a “happy family” exhibit featuring cats, dogs, rats, monkeys, and squirrels living contentedly together. The artist Junius Brutus Stearns painted, *The Millenium*, in 1848. Husch believes the painting, exhibited at the National Academy in 1851, is highly evocative of Landseer’s 1839 portrait of Van Amburgh which Stearns would have been able to see when he visited London. In it, a naked boy leans against the side of a large, reclining lion, while a lioness, lamb, and a leopard appear placid and subdued in an idyllic background. Husch postulates that the painting demonstrates the intersection of high art pretensions with the strategies of popular entertainment (Husch 2000: 144-145, 252).

In the recently published, *The Novel and The Menageries: Totality, Englishness, and Empire*, author Kurt Koenigsberger writes that the Victorian desire to classify, contain, and control had a “homologous” expression in art, animal entertainments, and empire. The common denominator of Victorian fiction, exotic animal exhibitions, and spectacles of empire “was the impulse to create the illusion of a unified, coherent, inevitable geopolitics,” based on the “idea of empire as a comprehensive whole.” Animal exhibitors, by their ability to manage alien beasts, as well as their advertising and publicity, “evoked and delineated a burgeoning empire” (Koenigsberger 2007: ix-xiii).

One reviewer observes that “Both the menageries and realist narratives [this includes circuses, zoos, taxidermy exhibits, and paintings], in these abstracted senses, encouraged faith in the rightness of empire, offering spectators and readers fantasies of British control over sprawling distant dominions including lions and elephants. The civilized, across the globe, possessed the strength to attack and destroy, but “the shaping force of realist conventions of plot and display kept animals and people alike in check.” Landseer’s painting of Van Amburgh “lolling about in the midst of his awed lions, tigers, leopards, and lamb,” demonstrates most visually, the “smug mastery” over exotic animals and the great swathes of land and people they embody (Mangum Summer 2008).
Koenigsberger argues that Landseer’s painting of *Van Amburgh and the Animals* offers a perspective from within the animals’ enclosure, but carefully sets the English spectators safely behind bars and introduces “Van Amburgh himself—an exceptional case, and a brash American”—as a “kind of alibi for the painting’s viewer, prompting meditation on the relation of exotica to English subjects with a carefully cultivated separation and distance.” Landseer’s later painting of the trainer, “displays a totalizing command balanced by a distance between the English viewer and the management of the beasts themselves” (Koenigsberger 2007: 41). To exemplify this further, Koenigsberger cites the music hall standard, *Britannia’s Menagerie*:

Britannia has a menagerie that reaches all over the world
She has some animals rich and rare, some treacherous creatures are caged up there.
The name of the keeper is old John Bull, a man with a smiling face,
He certainly does know how to keep each animal in its place.
Chorus:
Let’em growl, let’em howl, and grind their teeth with rage.
They may bite, snarl and fight, but they mustn’t get out of their cage—
For they know Johnny Bull is their master, and he holds the key,
They’ll be treated all right if they only keep cool in Britannia’s menagerie
(Koenigsberger 2007: 39-40).

Another extremely intensive study of the era is Diana Donald’s *Picturing Animals in Britain 1750-1850*, which features on its dust jacket a close-up of Van Amburgh from Landseer’s 1839 painting. Donald discusses the paradoxical views of animals prevalent during that century. Although people were aware of the beauty and spirit of wild animals, they still desired to capture and tame them. Even if other species were considered inferior to humans, animals were frequently given human attributes in stories and fables. Laws against animal cruelty began appearing, but abuse and sport hunting persisted largely unabated (Donald 2007: preface).

After hunting and capturing wild animals, civilized men were expected to make them gentle and amiable. This, Donald explains, was especially evident in Van Amburgh’s performances in which he thrilled audiences by displaying absolute dominion and control over the big cats. The act both excited audiences vicariously and provided a sense of triumph of the human race. She points out that the performance was staged and advertised with biblical and historical allusions in mind, for example, the
child and the lamb gave it a millennial context. Yet Van Amburgh typically performed garbed as a Roman gladiator, evoking the bloody ancient games. Donald freely references Watts, contending that in spite of mixed messages, “it was Van Amburgh’s naked and ruthless intimidation of the big cats that actually impressed the public: even on stage, he quelled them with a ‘deluge of blows.’” Van Amburgh’s move from Astley’s to Drury Lane signaled the upper class interest in the performance. She feels Taylor Weld’s illustration of the Queen’s backstage visit is a comic contrast between the “primitive--but artificially incited--ferocity of the caged beasts and the effete elegance of the courtiers, one of whom strikes an attitude of nonchalance, as though in nervous assertion of human superiority” (Donald 2007: 191-195).

Van Amburgh’s act was meant to prove that man’s courage, knowledge of natural history, and divestment of superstition could give him power over inferior species. Donald writes that Landseer’s treatment of both paintings is deliberately literal, highlighting the bars and Van Amburgh’s histrionics. In the Duke of Wellington’s version, a “shabby lion with worn teeth,” rears up, perhaps as a preliminary to some tableau where the trainer puts his head or arm in the lion’s mouth. To one side, an overweight, cowering, lioness looks up at Van Amburgh with dread. The melodramatic pose recalls advertising posters, popular illustrations, and well-known masterpieces. Landseer’s banal treatment is a way to subvert the meaning, since the artist wants to discern between biblical legends and the “inglorious actualities of Van Amburgh’s brutal training methods.” Critics lambasted Landseer’s characterization as vulgar, tawdry, ludicrous, and stagy, with his depiction of Van Amburgh looking like “any itinerant professor” of dog training. Despite the standing of his patron, who called it a portrait of “our modern Lysimachus [a lieutenant of Alexander who killed a lion], the painting seems to be overtly satirical and flippant, revealing his scepticism about millennialism and religious sanction.” Donald argues that Landseer’s “disjunctions’ of style and approach disconcerted Victorians. She adds that “his anthropomorphism was self-conscious, provocative and tendentious: it drew attention to itself, especially through the differences from his more straightforward depictions of animals.” He used his sardonic dog paintings to draw attention to many of the “corrupt institutions and practices of Victorian society.” In fact, in 1856 his friend Charles Dickens made Landseer the narrator of a critique of the London Zoo’s
treatment of lions with their cramped narrow enclosures and endless pacing. Dickens estimated they passed each other 250 times an hour (Donald 2007: 191-195).

Donald believes; however, in studying animals in art and literature that it is too easy “to interpret them simply as symbols or metaphors for aspects of the human: to such an extent that animals themselves appear to have no existence or meaning, other than those conferred on them by writers.” We look at the social, political, wealth or status of patrons, and the sheer *tour de force* of artists, yet the animals, per se, have not been considered proper objects of scholarly attention. Even in the area of animal protection, more is written about class and political agendas, than the actual conditions of animals. What is important, Donald emphasizes, is to analyze material “for what they truly contain: evidence of human convictions and emotions about other species. Fragmented, obscure, deeply conflicting as this evidence may be, it offers the only possibility of recovering a key aspect of history which has, as yet, hardly begun to be understood.” Of course, she admits, animals are set in a bewildering complex of forces, and it is difficult to extricate them from religion, science, imperial goals, and commercial greed (Donald 2007: vi).

Donald observes that some authors believe that between 1750 and 1850, man’s relations to other species in Great Britain changed more radically than any other century in its advances in humanitarianism. But, according to Donald, this avoids the ruthless use of horses and the “mass carnage” by big game hunters and commercial trappers “in the far flung British Empire” (Donald 2007: vii).

The perception of animals in American culture was influenced by myths, folklore, the frontier experience, manifest destiny, and the fear of immigrants and the working class possibly disrupting the established order through mobocracy. Other factors included classism, orientalism, religion, economics, social structure, politics, philosophy, technology, research, and later, zoos, the press, television, as well as conservation and animal protection movements. Animals have been likened to gods, demons, machines, tools, children, and prophets. The most repeated trope is anthropomorphism, through which we project our feelings, thoughts, and motives onto other species (Chalinor in Hoage 1989: 1-3).

Probably the dominant attitude in the early 19th century was the “dominionistic”—the mastery and control of animals; a means to display skill, strength, and often a masculine superiority and
dominance over the wilderness with the capability of rendering it submissive and orderly. No greater
demand was more dramatic than taking on and confronting the fiercest animals, turning them from
brutes to model citizens (Kellert 1989: 5-24). However, as the century wore on this desire drew
occasional criticism, for example, in 1882, William O. Stoddard wrote in *St. Nicholas*,

> There still lurks among us, in spite of our civilization, a relic of the coarse and morbid attitude
> which made the heathenish, savage populace of Rome, clamor for the bloody shows of the arena. We
> are still uncivilized enough, many of us, to be drawn to gaze upon a performance which
> seems to be full of danger. It is a disgraceful appetite, but every manager caters to it more or less.
> The passion for it begins with the wild animals in their dens. Unfortunately, some people love to
> see a man or woman in among the ferocious brutes, and in constant deadly peril of strong teeth,
> and rending claws (Stoddard 1882: 366).

Actually, very little is known of Van Amburgh or his techniques, since there are no interviews,
and the newspaper and periodical pieces were either puffs, or produced with some political or personal
motivation related to the propriety or impropriety of wild animal acts in legitimate theaters, the hero-
worshipping nature of the populace, the popularity, or dislike of those notables who enjoyed his
performances. He became a legend in his own time with an imaginative origin story and repeated gory
death reports that are still cited by historians.

Although Van Amburgh represents in many ways the Victorian Age’s emphasis on discipline and
control of the wild and unruly, his performances also displayed wild animals in action. This was
something less and less part of the American and English experience. Great Britain had been deforested,
except for the Royal holdings, and the fiercer wild animals--wolves, bears, and lynxes--extirpated. This
was equally true of eastern America. But there seemed to remain a psychological need to know that
somewhere, something big, bad, wild, and fearful still roamed. As the 19th century wore on, a greater and
greater sense of loss of a more Eden-like age, of the sublimity of the American landscape prior to rapid
industrialization, of the primitive man—as exemplified by the native Americans in the writings of James
Fenimore Cooper and the paintings of Thomas Cole—with his innate connection to the natural world
(Van Amburgh was often cited as having a mixed blood heritage), appeared in literature, art, and
philosophy.
For a large part of the 19th century, Van Amburgh was the man associated with bringing the public what might be their first live view of exotic, dangerous wild animals. The young Queen Victoria was obviously thrilled by Van Amburgh’s bravery and control over the big cats, but she was equally excited by the animals, “and there they were, and most beautiful beasts they are, so sleek, so well-conditioned—and so wild.”

This wildness, ready to erupt, is what Victoria found so attractive in Landseer’s first work. We are in the cage with Van Amburgh—something even the Queen wished to be able to do—as the trainer lies on the ground surrounded by big cats, holding the lamb. He has become one with nature, which in a second could overwhelm him, but because of his strength of character and his understanding of wild animals, he is able to hold it, at least temporarily, in check. The cats are not depicted as cowering creatures, but in their full powers, accepting Van Amburgh as the alpha animal. Van Amburgh’s act, in which he mixed lions, tigers, and leopards in a small confined space, seems foolhardy at best, especially to modern wild animal trainers who know they cannot hope to control the animal, only the situation in which they place themselves.

Van Amburgh’s animals probably were born in captivity or imported when still very young and then raised together, undoubtedly with a succession of lambs as companions. The descriptions of training methods appearing later in the century include food baiting and repetition rather than force. A rigid weapon like a crowbar would not really be protection to the trainer in a small, enclosed area, unless the animals had been disciplined at a young age, possibly by rapping them on their very sensitive noses, which would have left them wary of the crowbar. In neither of Landseer’s portraits does Van Amburgh carry the legendary crowbar. In the Wellington version, he holds what seems to be the flexible, rhino-hide crop he showed the Queen, a far better means of signaling and control, but certainly not an instrument that would cause the big cats to cower in fear. However, since this was an era when discipline and corporal punishment of the unruly were very much part of the socialization and educational system, as the popular euphemism, “spare the rod, spoil the child,” reflects, Van Amburgh would have been expected to willingly discipline his wild animals, if need be.
Obviously, from descriptions, his big cats and other menagerie animals were in far better condition than those in zoos and most other menageries in Europe and the United States. For more than 60 years, his name was used generically when referring to wild animal acts or menageries. Today, however, Van Amburgh has come to represent for many, unbridled cruelty and exploitation of animals—a modern mindset reflecting the adverse publicity surrounding circus wild animal trainers and captive animals in general. These attacks began concurrent to his performances in England and America, despite his enormous popularity, largely because of political, cultural, and religious agendas.

Many present day animal activists strongly believe that wild animals should not be removed from their natural habitats and placed in captivity. They argue that there is nothing educational about watching confined animals since they cannot express their full range of behaviors. Watching trained wild animals is worse; not only are their traveling enclosures even smaller and more inadequate than those found in zoos, but stress may cut short their normal life expectancy. Training techniques are also questioned. Even if not obviously cruel, critics suspect that they use other, less easily observed tricks, such as drugging, declawing, de-fanging, or over-feeding before a performance. Wild animal acts, critics have long contended, only pander to the bloodthirstiness of the public and tend to brutalize the spectators. They give little credence to opponents who argue that the physical activity, mental challenges, and diverse experiences enhance and stimulate an animal’s mental and physical well-being.

Van Amburgh also established the basic model for later wild animal trainers and popular zoo celebrities. Since at least seven other American keepers entered a cage with one or more big cats prior to Van Amburgh and we barely know their names, he must have been a better showman and animal man, possessing the skill to create a feeling of anticipation and excitement in an audience. Although he was advertised using religious connotations--especially in America, where in many areas, still-observed Puritanical standards condemned most forms of entertainment--none of the ‘lion shows’ or plays he appeared in had a religious aspect. He typically enacted the role of a Roman, Greek, or Arab who is held prisoner, then cast into a den of wild animals, and finally wins his freedom and acclaim when he successfully confronts them. The lamb and child certainly had biblical or millennial overtones that
occasionally attracted criticism. In the modern world, the late Steve Irwin recently drew the wrath of critics when he took his young son into a crocodile exhibit while he fed the huge reptiles.

Horne (“Watts”) also provided Van Amburgh with a superhero origin story. The American even had an overwhelming fear of snakes like present day fictional hero, Indiana Jones. Many modern historians, including Thetard, have chosen to give Van Amburgh an equally dramatic ending, not as a semi-retired showman passing away naturally in a Philadelphia hotel, but as a vigorous hero in his prime. It was a necessary conclusion: Van Amburgh either had to be critically injured and then gallantly return, or be killed. Injury or death, not only assured legendary status, but proved that the act was as audacious and dangerous as it seemed, justifying the audience’s underlying belief that truly wild animals could only be controlled tenuously and certainly not forever. Thetard’s ending, drawn from numerous false accounts of Van Amburgh’s demise, perfectly filled the bill. On an oppressive summer day, a thunderstorm is brewing. The impending violent weather agitates the big cats, placing their nerves on edge. Thus, an uncontrollable natural event causes the previously controllable big cats to act instinctively. When Van Amburgh attempts to force these ‘monsters of god’ to perform, he loses control, is attacked, overwhelmed, and dies heroically. His death is the result of his hubris in thinking that he could always successfully contain and control the wild.

This drama can be seen played out in just the last few years. The devastating, career-ending injury to the magician-animal trainer, Roy Horn, of the Las Vegas duo of Siegfried and Roy, became a favorite topic of tabloids, periodicals, and television interview programs. They endlessly questioned how he could have lost control of a tiger he had personally raised and presumably loved. After several years of rehabilitation, Roy appeared with the tiger on stage in a farewell show—the resurrection of the action hero—in a final demonstration of control. Not as lucky was Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter, whose unswerving boldness and risk-taking combined with a much-publicized dedication to wildlife, resulted in his death from the barb of a stingray while filming an episode of his popular program. The media questioned, speculated, and delved into how such an intrepid outdoorsman could lose control of the
situation, while children and adults worldwide mourned his passing. These instances stand in strong contrast to Van Amburgh’s death as his actual banal passing was scarcely noted in the press.

Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935) wrote elegiacally in “Plummer Street, Gardiner, Maine”

Was it a dream of mine, or was it here
Van Amburgh used to come so long ago?—
So long ago? If it was not last year,
When was it, then, the place was all arrayed
With tents and elephants and lemonade,
Lifting machines, freaks, peanuts, and pop-beer?

From Thetard Les Dompteurs. Paris: Librarie Gallinad, 1928
Sir Edwin Landseer, *Isaac Van Amburg and His Animals* (1839). The Royal Collection Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Sir Edwin Landseer, *Portrait of Mr. Van Amburg as He Appeared with His Animals at the London Theatre*, 1847.
CHAPTER 3.
FRANK BUCK

“... and he sailed off through night and day and in and out of weeks . . . to where the wild things are
(Sendak 1963).

Early Years

Frank Buck was born on March 17, 1884 in a wagon yard filled with horses and mules located on the outskirts of Gainesville, Texas. Not until Buck’s last book, *All in a Lifetime* (1941), did he reveal his early life in any depth admitting that his mother had warned him to tell no one where he was born, even though his father was the proprietor. He concluded that his status seemed to only matter in America and not in the snowy mountains of Nepal, steamy jungles of Malaya, or hot, dusty plains of India. He ironically observed that “in any of these primitive places to which the streams run and the winds blow, the measure of a man is judged by his abilities and not by his birth” (Buck and Fraser 1941: 13).

His father, who Buck described as a “belligerent fighting man,” moved the family, which included Frank and his three siblings to a suburb of Dallas, then a city of just 35,000, where he had been promised a job at a Studebaker wagon and carriage dealership. The senior Buck was a distant relative of the Studebaker family. Frank found their new house along Turtle Creek to be a veritable “museum of natural history” inhabited by redbirds, blue jays, flying squirrels, opossums, raccoons, copperheads, cottonmouths, and rattlesnakes. He especially gravitated towards birds, trapping them and placing them in homemade cages (Buck and Fraser 1941).

Buck admitted he disliked school, although he found geography fascinating. His brothers had found work at a local ranch where Buck joined them as a “cowpuncher,” a job he described as cruel. The cattle being shipped north to the Chicago stockyards were packed so tightly on railroad stockcars that if they lay down they would be trampled to death. The cowpunchers rode in the caboose with one man assigned to every four or five cars. At every stop, they would “punch’ the cattle to their feet using a long pole with a sharpened nail at the end (Buck and Fraser 1941: 25).
The distasteful job got Buck to Chicago where he stopped in a pool hall, and learned from the locals that he could obtain a job at a nearby hotel. Urged to ditch his cowboy hat and spurs, Buck was hired as checkroom attendant at $2.50 per week along with room and board. Buck soon was promoted to bellboy, but kept his eye open for chances to make easy money. This opportunity came in the person of a fast-talking con man who taught Buck how to beat boarding house bills and hop on freights. The risks the two took continually escalated until they reached Sedalia, Kansas, where Buck accompanied his tutor on a safecracking job. In the middle of the dangerous escapade, Buck decided he was risking too much, quit, and hopped a freight headed back home to Texas. Just short of Dallas, Buck changed his mind and went north again, this time to Pine Bluff, Arkansas where he ran a carnival game for $.75 per day at the state fair. Following this short gig, Buck headed to St. Louis where he encountered two boys he knew and together they scraped by doing odd jobs. Like his pugnacious father, Buck frequently got into fights on the road. Eventually he returned to Chicago getting hired as a bellboy at the fashionable Virginia Hotel, a family and theatrical establishment, where he received tips for pushing the baby carriage of Cornelia Otis Skinner, the daughter of a noted actor who, herself, would become a Broadway actress, motion picture star, and best-selling author (Buck and Fraser 1941 and “Cornelia Otis Skinner”).

Although Buck had just a seventh grade education, he added to his knowledge by carefully observing people—their language, social races, manners and etiquette—as well as by listening to discussions about plays, books, and poetry. As luck would have it, he met an ex-professor from Dublin in a Clark Street saloon. The elderly reprobate became his private tutor forcing Buck to read books by the great authors and philosophers aloud while criticizing his pronunciation, all for a bottle of whiskey (Buck and Fraser 1941).

At the hotel, Buck met Amy Leslie, a pioneering female journalist who was the theater critic for the Chicago News. He described this small, “plump,” laughing woman as the most brilliant and cultured woman he had ever met. Whenever she had an extra ticket, she invited Buck to accompany her to plays. She found him interesting and ambitious, and got him a job paying $25 per week working for Sol Bloom. Bloom, then in his early thirties was a remarkable self-made man. Born in Chicago to Polish-Jewish
immigrants who moved to San Francisco when he was three, Bloom’s formal education had lasted a single day since his parents could not afford the books. At seven, he went to work in a brush factory while also helping his father sell household products door-to-door. After befriending David Belasco, Bloom landed a theater job at night, and by fifteen became box office manager of the Alcazar Theater, which was owned by the family that published the San Francisco Chronicle. Mike de Young of the Chronicle had discovered that at the age of thirteen Bloom had a prodigious memory and could mentally compute faster than any experienced bookkeeper. In just four years, and after building his own theater at seventeen, he was able to travel to the Paris International Exposition where he was hired as the representative of the fifty Algerian and Tunisian performers of the Algerian Village. When Bloom returned to the United States, he learned that Chicago had gained the rights to the 1893 World’s Fair and Exposition marking the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the New World. Unhappy with the direction the Exposition was taking with the Midway under the direction of the head of the Department of Ethnology at Harvard who had conservatively rejected Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, Bloom returned to San Francisco. His friend de Young had become a member of the Exposition commission. He quickly hired Bloom to manage the fair’s concessions despite his audacious demand for a $1,000 per week salary. Only 21, Bloom headed to Chicago to oversee construction. He also brought over the Algerians and Tunisians he had represented in Paris, providing a preview to the Press Club of Chicago. He played a tune he remembered from the Paris show that became known familiarly as “The Streets of Cairo” (“Sol Bloom”).

Despite the financial panic of 1893, the Exposition was an enormous success. Estimates reveal that one of every four Americans visited the Fair that introduced the hamburger, Cracker Jacks, carbonated soft drinks, the Ferris Wheel, the term, “Midway,” the White City, which became the inspiration for L. Frank Baum’s, Oz, and of course, Little Egypt and the belly dance, a sobriquet Bloom denied ever using (“David Belasco;” “The Panama Pacific Exposition” and “Sol Bloom”).

After investing his earnings in foodstuffs, Bloom lost his entire bankroll when all his perishables spoiled on sidelined refrigerator cars during the railroad strike of 1894. But the indomitable Bloom quickly convinced the largest sheet music publisher in the United States to allow him to open a Chicago
branch. Eventually Bloom became a very successful independent music publisher, and moved to New York, where he dabbled successfully in real estate development, building among other things, the Apollo Theater. In 1923 at the age of 50, Bloom ran for the Congressional seat to which he would be elected for fourteen straight terms. He became commissioner of the New York’s World Fair in 1939, the same year he became chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Congress. Prior to his death in 1949, Bloom was active in the creation of the State of Israel, and helped write the United Nations Charter (“Sol Bloom”).

Working for such an amazingly talented and ambitious man, it was not surprising that Buck, increasingly ambitious himself, would marry the much older Amy Leslie. Chicago papers blared that Leslie had married a twenty-year-old bellboy from Texas, and she quickly became the butt of jokes. Buck claimed that he provided her with strength, protection, and vitality, while she provided intelligence and knowledge. He was introduced to George M. Cohan, Lillian Russell, Billie Burke, and David Belasco, a pioneer in theatrical lighting and set design who had written *Madame Butterfly* and *The Girl of the Golden West*, both of which were turned into operas by Puccini. Belasco unsuccessfully tried to convince Buck into becoming an actor (“David Belasco;” Buck and Fraser 1941).

Buck remained restless and he soon left Bloom to join John Murdock and Martin Beck. Beck demonstrated remarkable insight in choosing new theater locations, as well as possessing an instinct for new talent with his most notable discovery being Harry Houdini. In 1913 Beck built the Palace Theater in New York and with Edwin Albee bought out the Willie and Oscar Hammerstein theater franchise. The Palace operation seemed shaky until he created a sensation by engaging Sarah Bernhardt. In 1924 he built a legitimate theater, the Martin Beck on 45th and 8th Avenue (Downer “Martin Beck”).

Buck was only an office boy to the head of publicity, but also moonlighted as the representative and correspondent for the *New York Telegraph* as well as booking acts for banquets, parties, and clubs. He also helped promote outdoor music festivals under Walter Damrosch, the famous conductor noted for his interpretation of Wagner, and a pioneer of classical music on the radio where he became NBC’s director of music between 1928 and 1942. These jobs provided Buck with enough income to buy his own
home in Norwood Park. The suburban location reengaged Buck with nature and he quickly built his own aviary to which he added a duck pond complete with teal, mallards and swans (Buck and Fraser 1941 and “Walter Damrosch”).

His newspaper connections led him to befriend George Ade, the humorist, and John McCutcheon, the cartoonist, whose daily column “Stones and Streets of the Town” was enormously popular. The two Purdue fraternity brothers collaborated on Ade’s popular books, and McCutcheon, deemed the Dean of American cartoonists, eventually won the Pulitzer Prize for his insightful work that often appeared on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune*. Years later McCutcheon along with Edith Rockefeller McCormick and James Simpson, the head of Marshall Field’s, planned the construction of the Brookfield Zoo (“John T. McCutcheon”).

**Discovering the “Wild”**

Perhaps spurred by his own growing backyard wildlife exhibit, Buck began voraciously reading books about every kind of animal as well as regularly studying wild animals at the Lincoln Park Zoo. Then one night, Buck became involved in a pickup game of poker with some other young Chicago hotshots. After winning $3,500, Buck impetuously decided to leave for South America in the morning. He had already been increasingly ignoring his wife who still had her *Chicago News* job, and convinced himself it was best to leave her in the company of her two grown nephews and a niece in the new house (Buck and Fraser 1941 and Gordon Sept. 1957: 29).

Frank Buck now embarked on what he believed had always been his boyhood dream. “I could not have been over eight years old when I determined to find the source of the wind, the mouth of the river, the oceans to which the fish swim, and the far lands and forests to which the birds flew” (Buck and Fraser 1941: 11).

When Buck arrived in Brazil, he saw the jungle for the first time.

The jungle was to turn into a love as deep as any man ever had for a woman. . . . In that moment, as completely alone and as far away from the world in my mind as I have ever been before or since, I was for the first time in my life utterly happy. I was seeing and drinking in the jungle, the mysterious place to which the wind blew and whence the birds came. I decided then, there and permanently, while the tropical sun beat down, and heavy foliage steamed, that the jungles of the
world were my future life, and that from them in some way I should earn my living (Buck and Fraser 1941: 73).

Buck had about $5,000 to invest and he decided to become a supplier of his first love, birds. He struck a deal with two Portuguese bird buyers promising to pay cash for any good, healthy collections of jungle birds they could have waiting on the dock in a month or six weeks, while he went on to Rio and Buenos Aires. That agreement made by Buck while still in his early twenties would, he claimed, serve as a successful model for the next thirty years working equally well in India, Burma, Siam, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies (Buck and Fraser 1941).

While in Buenos Aires, Buck met the famed fight promoter Tex Rickard and they traveled together. Rickard (1870-1929), an equally adventurous individual, had followed the gold rush to the Klondike and while still in his twenties had opened a gambling hall. In 1906 he promoted his first fight in Nevada. When boxing entered a controversial era, Rickard went to South America, but returned to the United States in 1915. By 1925 he gained the prize plum of boxing -- the rights to promote fights at Madison Square Garden. Teaming with Jack Dempsey and his manager Jack Kearns together they grossed $8.4 million in five fights. They also were behind the first radio broadcast of a title fight. In 1926 Rickard founded the New York Rangers and built the third version of Madison Square Garden ("Tex Rickard").

On returning to Bahia, Buck found the bird collection waiting. He sailed with it to New York where William T. Hornaday, director of the Bronx Zoo, quickly bought 20 black-necked swans. The rest of the collection was purchased by the Philadelphia Zoo and New York bird dealers. Buck found he had made a $3,000 profit and immediately returned to South America. He took his next cargo to London where many large estates had private aviaries. He had been spending money foolishly until he again met Rickard who gave him two tips; always carry cash, and always carry pride, no matter where in the world you were (Buck and Fraser 1941).

While in London, Buck visited the collection at the Prince Albert Zoo, where he could see Texas music in the way a striped Bengal tiger paced his cage. . . I could feel the elusive wind I had never quite caught in the sleek way a coal-black leopard, darker and glossier than the
trough of any ocean wave I had ever seen, and more graceful and poised, swept silently from one
end of his iron barred cage to the other. And the gray-sided elephants were completely ponderous
and just as romantic to me. I could hear Kipling’s singing words crying out every time I looked at
their swaying bodies:

“Elephants a chunkin’ teak
In the sludgy, squidgy creek. . .” (Buck and Fraser 1941: 86).

Buck insisted that animals had become his new love. He wanted to know everything about them; how
they fed, how they existed, how they lived in their native state.

Above all I wanted to bring back some alive. . . didn’t matter being a hundred as much as the I
have since told myself that it did; that I was and always have been a businessman. But actually I
do not believe that was ever the reason. I simply, suddenly, desperately, wanted to deal in animals
as well as birds and as simply as my thoughts flowed I went out to get them (Buck and Fraser
1941: 86).

**Becoming a Successful Wild Animal Supplier**

Buck believed his career truly began during 1912-13 when the German Hagenbecks, the leading
and most respected animal collectors and dealers in the world, were forced to cease operations because of
the British blockade. Prior to the war, “Every German Consul in the smallest port of Asia or Africa had
been a Hagenbeck agent on the side.” Now Buck seized the newfound opportunity and left England on the
next ship to Singapore via San Francisco. He knew it was a gamble, but Buck had always loved gambling,
especially roulette; however, he had learned from “Bet-A-Million” Gates to always quit when ahead
(Buck and Fraser 1941).

Singapore was an amazing city, the veritable crossroads of the world, and became Buck’s home
and four-acre headquarters for many years to come. At first he distrusted the shrewd, bargaining Chinese,
but then concluded that “wherever a Chinese goes he improves the race.” He also met the man who
became his assistant or “boy,” Dahlami Ali. Buck later assured his readers that Ali was far more than a
servant, having become a trusted friend and teacher. As they traveled together in Sumatra, Borneo, and
Java, Ali taught him the languages, how to effectively talk and trade, and how to distinguish between sick
and well animals. “Color,” Buck claimed, “is after all, but a shading between black and white” (Buck and
Fraser 1941: 99).
Buck’s first trip to Asia netted him $6,000, so he quickly returned to Singapore making his first actual trip into the jungle, and experiencing his initial attempts in participating in the actual capture of wild animals. The first animal Buck attempted to trap was a 28-foot long python. He utilized his Texas lassos to secure the powerful snake. Buck also captured his first black leopard, a “village marauder, black as coal and angry as sin.” As he looked at the leopard, Buck concluded that,

this was a wonderful life—fine and thrilling. I felt that the world was mine. I loved the jungle, I loved the people, I loved the wild creatures. Had I died then and there, beside that first leopard trap in Johore, I would have been content. I felt I had seen life in its fullest (Buck and Fraser 1941: 107).

Buck added to this collection, birds captured by Bhutan mountaineers. They were in horrible shape -- stuffed into baskets and crates -- and over half died. He also brought back his first elephants, two young Indian females about six feet tall, along with hundreds of monkeys. When Buck arrived in San Francisco with this “first genuinely big wild cargo,” he felt he “was an animal dealer at last.” His early business experience in Chicago was paying off and he made a larger profit than he had ever dreamed of. He established invaluable contacts and friendships with Hornaday at the Bronx Zoo, Dr. William Penrose of the Philadelphia Zoo, and George Vierheler of the St. Louis Zoo. Vierheller, a former telegrapher—a job that gave him constant arm cramps—gave up that position to become superintendent of the St. Louis Zoo at the age of 40. He remained in that position until 1962. He was a charter member of the AZA when that organization was founded in 1924, later serving as president and on the Board of Directors. Buck also made himself known to circus and carnival owners, as well as private collectors (Buck and Fraser 1941).

While in San Francisco, Buck ran into Frank Burt who he had met while in the theatrical business. Burt was head of concessions and admissions for the San Francisco Panama Pacific Exhibition of 1915. Burt asked Buck to take charge of publicity and special events for the 65-acre amusement zone reminding him “once in show business, always in show business.”

The Exposition was a great success, lifting the morale of the Bay Area after the devastating earthquake and fire of 1906. The event celebrated both the completion of the Panama Canal and the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the Pacific Ocean by Balboa. The centerpiece was the 435-foot Tower of
Jewels covered with 100,000 cut glass “gems” that sparkled in the sunlight and illuminated by 50 electric searchlights at night (“The Panama Pacific Exposition” and Buck and Fraser 1941).

After the successful run ended in December 1915, Buck was approached with a new offer, this time from movie pioneer Mack Sennett, to become director of publicity and promotions for his studio. With stars like “Fatty” Arbuckle, Gloria Swanson, and Wallace Beery, the future seemed bright. But after seven months, Buck quit the job and headed back to Singapore. He “wanted the East” as Kipling had written (Buck and Fraser 1941: 118).

In 1913 Buck met the Sultan of Johore and a great friendship ensued. Educated in England and frequently commuting to Paris, the Sultan had gained the label of a playboy who spent money at an incredible rate on wine, women, and song. But following the death of his father, the Sultan returned to Johore, which was located on the Malayan peninsula north of Singapore, and turned a very poor region into a prosperous one with the introduction of rubber plantations (Buck and Fraser 1941).

Buck fulfilled a remarkable deal in 1920 when he received a request for two armor-plated Indian rhinos for the Bronx and Philadelphia zoos. The rhinos, the largest of the species, were already almost extinct from over-hunting, and only survived in any numbers in Nepal. But to acquire them took a virtual diplomatic mission since the Nepalese population was considered both sacred and exclusive royal property. The zoos were willing to pay $7,000 each for the animals (Buck and Fraser 1941: 144).

While procuring over 500 specimens for the new Dallas Zoo, Buck met the nephew of the Maharajah of Nepal, who helped him negotiate for the rhinos, the final price being $12,000 for the two specimens. Buck, himself, was not allowed to enter Nepal, but a royal hunt was arranged to capture the rhino calves. Unfortunately, the general conducting the hunt got carried away in the excitement killing between a dozen and twenty rhinos along with the target calves’ mothers. He justified his actions by calling them marauders of native plantations. The captured rhino calves, escorted by Ghurka guards so they would not be killed for their valuable horns, were transported by bullock car to a railroad station. From there they traveled to Calcutta, Hong Kong, and finally sailed to San Francisco. Buck only broke even on the deal to acquire “the rarest and most valuable animals ever seen in this country.” The zoo
directors gave him an additional $2,000, although Hornaday was “horrified” that anyone would shoot so
many incredibly rare animals (Buck and Fraser 1941).

Another first for Buck was the importation of the great black cockatoo, which he managed to sell
for $3,000. Buck always found New Guinea an Eden for birds with over 500 indigenous species. The
cockatoo had been captured as a baby by a native boy who fed it insects, goat’s milk, and later, nuts,
seeds, and rice. The boy bartered the bird to a Chinese trader for some knives. The bird was traded several
more times before Buck discovered and purchased him and got the cockatoo into excellent shape before
taking him to America (Buck and Fraser 1941).

By the 1920s, Buck was wellknown in his profession, but he wanted more. His experience in the
entertainment industry, along with the famous acquaintances of Amy Leslie he had met, gave him an
unremitting desire for celebrity status. He sought out magazines to tell his stories. One of the first
appeared in ASIA—The American Magazine on the Orient. An ad for the magazine claimed the

keynote of ASIA is truthfulness to life in its vivid realities. It is this rather than cheap fiction and
fantastic fancy that has enabled ASIA to do the spectacular in reaching of the most distinctive
people in the country form a circulation of a few thousand, five years ago, to one of over 65,000
today. . . . (Outlook August 23, 1922).

The ad went on to discuss an article on Roy Chapman Andrews’ expedition sponsored by the American
Museum of Natural History and ASIA to find the origins of primitive man in the Gobi, along with an article
by Buck, “In a Pit with a Wild Leopard” in which

Frank Buck, one of the ablest collectors of wild animals, snakes, and birds for zoos and circuses,
starts this installment of his adventures mildly enough with a tea-party. He winds up in a pit with
a black leopard, the fiercest of its kind. More thrilling than fiction. As valuable as a book on
natural history (“In a Pit with a Wild Leopard” August 23, 1922).

The August issue contained the article “A Jungle Business” by Buck. In it he described how he
got started in the business. He explained that whenever he crossed the Pacific with a cargo of wild
animals, “nine out of 10 of the people I meet on the Pacific liners ask, ‘How in the world did you ever
happen to go into this kind of work? What an odd business, but what an interesting life you must have.’”
Buck found the question difficult to answer since he had done other more potentially lucrative
commercial enterprises, but perhaps, as a “great zoologist” had told him, “The love of animals was bred in you from your earliest childhood, and you were bound to go back to it” (Buck August 1922: 633).

In the piece, Buck admitted to his wagon yard days, and began relating his childhood experiences in what was to become an “exclusive residential section of Dallas.” There he caught local animals and had his dog, Zip, pull a little red wagon upon which he had built a miniature circus cage containing everything from June bugs to rattlesnakes. In the family barn he exhibited snakes, opossums, raccoons, and cardinals to the other boys in the neighborhood (Buck August 1922: 633).

After going to Chicago when he was eighteen, Buck read up on zoology, ornithology, and natural history, constructing an aviary in his garden that became one of the best in the Midwest. After working at the Panama Pacific Expo, he gained a job with a Japanese steamship company to publish an official shippers’ guidebook. To accomplish this task he had to visit every important port on the coast of Asia from Yokohama to the Persian Gulf. Accompanied by his wife, he was struck by the beauty of the tropical seas and busy ports. In Malaya, he first saw animals outside of a zoo as planters often let pet rhinos and orangutans have the run of their estates. Every port was also filled with mynahs, parrots, lories, and gibbons. Seeing the possibility of collecting these animals, he wrote William Hornaday at the Bronx Zoo asking if he had any interest in acquiring specimens he might find. Hornaday quickly cabled him back that he indeed, would be interested (Buck August 1922: 633).

While enjoying gin slings in Singapore, Buck met Jim Turner an animal dealer who had run a show at the Exposition amusement zone. Turner showed him his compound and recounted some of his hairbreadth escapes. Later Buck learned that Turner never actually went into the jungle himself. Buck next moved on to Calcutta where he visited the zoo and spoke to the director, who told him about his suppliers. In India he bought some tigers, cranes, and assorted small birds before heading to Colombo where he added some langurs. He then voyaged to Singapore to meet Turner’s Chinese animal trader. Since this was a magazine devoted to Asian studies, Buck took some time in describing the personality and business practices of the trader (Buck August 1922: 633).
Having been successful in selling his first animal shipment, Buck returned often to the East. Although he admitted that the wild animal trade was profitable, it could not be considered completely commercial. “No one can be successful as a collector without an inherent love of animals. I have seen many go down, because they looked upon the game purely as a money-making scheme” (Buck August 1922: 633).

He then related the story of Bob Hackett, a California breeder of pheasants and ornamental fowl. A good customer, he never tired of bickering over price, and finally decided to go into business himself, sailing to Singapore where he hastily printed up a business card pronouncing himself a wild animal dealer. He told Buck to go to Calcutta because he planned on cleaning out the local dealers, paying three to five times the going rate. For example, he bought twenty orangutans, but only eight survived to even make the voyage. Buck, meanwhile, had paid only a fraction for six orangutans, all of which successfully survived the journey. When Hackett finally sailed, he had a cargo for which he had paid $48,000, assured he would make a $50,000 profit; however, he could not find buyers for the animals, which were worth only between $4,000 to $5,000, finally selling them at auction for $3,000. Hackett never again ventured to Singapore (Buck August 1922: 633).

In October, Buck had another article appear in ASIA, “From Singapore to the Zoo.” In it he described his compound in detail and told of the growing demand for tropical birds in America, both from zoos and amateur hobbyists. The richest sources of birds in the East were New Guinea and the Himalayas. Buck claimed that when word reached these regions that he was coming, native trappers arrived from the wilds with large collections of birds. The most magnificent came from New Guinea where the soft-billed birds living largely on fruit and berries have unusually beautiful coloration. Buck worked out different diets for his birds, and although they might seem expensive for the buyer, “there is little realization of the risk undertaken to procure rare specimens and of the number of hands one small bird passes before it reaches the European dealer in Singapore” (Buck Oct. 1922: 816).

Careful study of every animal’s diet in the wild is necessary to the successful animal collector or trader. For example, tapirs have a fondness for water plants. So in the early stages of captivity, Buck sent
natives into the jungle to gather the particular vegetation an animal normally feeds on. In the case of the
tapir, leaves are mixed with 10 percent alfalfa and then gradually the percentage of alfalfa is increased
until its diet became just alfalfa with some ground raw sweet potatoes. After three months of captivity, the
animal was eating easily procurable alfalfa and grain mixtures. This proved equally true for rhinos, deer,
water buffalo, and gours. Buck asserted that, “if my entire shipment were made up of newly caught
animals that had not been broken to cage life and cage diet, I should lose 75 per cent of my animals on the
trip” (Buck Oct. 1922: 816).

Before sailing, he had to calculate how much food would be required for each individual species
in the shipment. This usually consisted of cases of canned milk, bags of rice and other grain, a few tons of
sweet potatoes, bales of hay, a great quantity of straw for bedding, a large supply of fresh meat, hundreds
of dozens of eggs, and several crates of live chickens. The eggs and meat were purchased in Calcutta
where the “best beef—the cat animals must have the best beef—is 14 cents a pound.” Often, he also took
along several hundred pounds of jungle leaves, which had to be kept cool and sprinkled with water every
day. He arranged with the ship’s butcher to cut up so many hundred pounds of beef per day, some into
chunks and some into hamburger. The cook was hired to boil rice, sweet potatoes, and eggs. The big cats
were fed beef five days a week, on the sixth day they received a fresh killed chicken, and on the seventh,
they fasted. Orangutans were provided rice and milk for breakfast, and later in the morning they received
all the plain boiled rice they wanted. At noon they were fed milk and fresh fruit while later in the day they
got boiled sweet potatoes, bread, and rice. In between, they were treated with sugar cane, bits of toast
soaked in tea, and sometimes a bottle of tea (Buck Oct. 1922: 816).

Buck always mixed the bird food himself. He would set out four or five large dishpans filled with
a type of bean flour, boiled rice, ground meat, mashed bananas, mashed sweet potatoes, raw eggs,
chopped hard-boiled eggs, and an Indian cooking oil made from butter-fat. He mixed the ingredients in
different combinations for various birds trying to make them correspond to their natural diets. Buck
believed this careful attention to details and diets enabled him to minimize deaths on the long passage.
All mishaps could not be avoided, and escapes occasionally occurred. He cited the incident where a large orangutan escaped and he was forced to knock the animal out with a wallop to its chin. In 1921, a stormy sea enabled a leopard to escape when its cage rolled over. The captain calmed the 125 passengers, and in an exciting chase, Buck finally cornered and lassoed the big cat, which was safely delivered to the Lincoln Park Zoo (Buck Oct. 1922: 816).

**Rival Collectors**

These articles in *ASIA*, although interesting, and reiterated in Buck’s subsequent books and articles, did not really garner him the fame he sought. News of the arrival of cargoes of wild animals appeared regularly in newspapers. For example in December, 1922, the *New York Times* announced the arrival in Hoboken of the U.S. liner *President Polk* with enough rare animals from Africa, Madagascar, and South America for a complete zoo. The animals were collected by Ferdinand Bontels for his brother Henry a New York dealer (“Zoo from Africa” Dec. 14, 1922: 12). Earlier that year, Hagenbeck’s American representative, John T. Benson, reported he would be importing the deposed Kaiser’s lions, tigers, elephants, and hippos to be exhibited in Coney Island, and that the collection of the King of Bulgaria might soon follow. The article concluded that spring “will see some of the largest importations of wild animals ever brought to this country, as every zoo and circus is in need of animals to replace those that died during the war. Shiploads are coming from Africa, India, and Europe.” Benson estimated their total value at $500,000 (“Ex-Kaiser’s Menagerie” Jan. 21, 1922: 9).

On June 1, the *Times* announced that Jurgen Johannsen had docked with one of the largest cargoes of wild animals ever brought to the Port of New York. The United American liner *Mount Carroll* shipment consigned by Hagenbeck’s American representative contained thirteen baby elephants, 200 monkeys with 60 babies in arms, two Bengal tigers, two sloth bears, three black panthers, two hippos, along with about 900 birds and 56 snakes. The cargo had been kept company by eight “educated dogs.” Johannsen showed records that proved he was the “world’s champion elephant catcher” having captured 318 of the animals in the hills of India in just ten weeks for the British government (“Brings Big Cargo of Wild Animals” June 1, 1922: 4).
A few days later, a $100,000 cargo for animal dealer Louis Ruhl arrived at the West 47th Street Pier on the *Hansa*, flagship of the Hamburg-American Line. The animals were collected by Albert Meens, a trapper and hunter in the Burmese jungles and in a part of India that had never before been seen by a white man. The cargo included eight elephants, seven baboons, 25 snakes, and 150 birds, with one species of lovebird never before seen in this country. A train waited along a siding to take the shipment to the Sells-Floto Circus in Boston. Meens himself was on another ship with an additional nine elephants for the circus (“Huge Animal Cargo” June 5, 1922: 8).

Thus Buck was certainly not unique in his profession. In fact, beginning in June, 1926 *ASIA* would run a series of articles by J. L. Buck, another collector and no relation to Frank. J. L. described why he found the leopard the most interesting of big cats: “Biting, snarling, spitting, it is a fast and ugly fighter, magnificent to the end. I have only understood, as I have tried to look into the evasive eye, now wheedling, now fierce, of the beast, why the African attributes to it human passions.” *ASIA* had apparently expanded its venue to include Africa, where J. L.’s story was set, and described the importance of the leopard in African beliefs and the formation of the secret clan, the Leopard Society. Like Frank’s tales, it contained an exciting escape-capture sequence of a tiger in a freight car bound for the Philadelphia Zoo (Buck, J. L. June 1926: 500).

In January 1927, J. L. described the capture of Horace the African pygmy hippo who after great difficulties died just ten days from New York (Buck, J. L. Jan. 1927: 16). This story was followed up with “Riddles in Animal Behavior,” which took place in Sierra Leone and South America. After discussing driver ants, anteaters, pumas, jaguars, and lions, J. L. asserted:

A collector does not work with animals long before he realizes that they act as individuals and that one animal in special circumstances may perhaps do something that none of the species has ever done before. Certainly no man can spend his life with animals and not marvel constantly at proved facts that the layman would dub ‘nature-faking’ (Buck, J. L. Feb. 1927: 120).

Two months later, J. L. recounted how he caught “the most intelligent of Great Tree-Dwelling Apes” by shaking a chimpanzee out of its nest. In this adventure, J. L. was accompanied by his son, Warren. When the attempted netting of an adult male chimp went terribly wrong resulting in the death of a native boy
and Warren was forced to shoot the old chimp, J. L. reminisced how he felt sorry for the animal. “Chimpanzees have always seemed to me so nearly human that killing is close to murder” (Buck, J. L. April 1927: 308).

Yet despite Julius Buck’s exciting adventures, he would never achieve the fame Frank would eventually enjoy. In the 1920s, J. L. and his son opened a small zoo in East Camden, New Jersey, but continued their expeditions and achieved their greatest success in 1930 when J. L. and Warren brought back from the French Congo only the fifth gorilla to reach the United States alive, a three and a half year old named Bushman. The Bucks had been on a seven-month, 5,500-mile long journey through Central Africa. They believed they were the first to take along no kitchen equipment, instead eating with native tribesmen and traders. The simplified system worked well. The Bucks arrived back in the United States with 200 chimps, baboons, and assorted monkey species along with four tons of African reptiles (“Naturalist Returns” June 12, 1930: 15).

The gorilla J. L. had brought back was destined for the Lincoln Park Zoo and became what was deemed by zoo directors, “the most outstanding animal in any zoo in the world and the most valuable.” Bushman attracted an estimated 3 million visitors a year. Orphaned, Bushman had been nursed for a year by native women in Cameroon. He became the first gorilla in a zoo “west of the Potomac,” and called by a writer in 1947,

like a nightmare that escaped from darkness into daylight and has exchanged its insubstantial form for 550 pounds of solid flesh. His face is one that might be expected to gloat through the troubled dreams that follow overindulgence. His hand is the kind of thing a sleeper sees reaching for him just before he wakes up screaming (Schrouder Aug. 15, 1930).

At the zoo, his keeper taught Bushman to wrestle, tackle, and pass a football on the Lincoln Park lawn, until he became too big and recalcitrant to handle. Bushman was “a publicity godsend” to the zoo, which had opened in 1868 with a pair of swans from Central Park. The gorilla, despite his fearsome look, had a great, hammy personality that endeared him to the public, lounging while eating grapes and gulping quart bottles of milk, or gently playing with mice he found in his exhibit. In 1950, when Bushman, who had collapsed in his cage due to a heart problem, arthritis, and old age, seemed near death, 120,000
Chicagoans came to the zoo to pay what they thought were last respects to their longtime favorite. However, Bushman recovered and lived another six months, eating 22 pounds of fruit, bread, and milk each day. After his death, Bushman was mounted and put on exhibit in the Field Museum where Chicagoans can still admire him (Schrouder Aug. 15, 1930 and “Manners and Morals” June 6, 1950).

J. L. and Warren would never have the luck of Frank. Articles mentioning them became tales of humorous escapes, such as “Two Escaped Penguins March Along Together Down That Old Freedom Road in New Jersey,” or the possibility of “mysterious beast” sightings being escapees from their zoo. When a lion escaped in a baggage car, Warren lifted the 140-pound animal back into its cage and drove off with it in his station wagon. Articles cited how he was frequently confused with Frank Buck (“Two Daring Escapes” April 18, 1949, Sept. 26, 1950 and “Buck Granted Use of Tract” Camden People).

Craving Fame

But perhaps no one could match the continuous drive for fame of Frank Buck. After 18 years of successful and profitable animal trading, Buck found himself broke when a typhoon destroyed his cargo, with the exception of a few animals that had been in the holds. Buck stayed in San Francisco with a friend of the mayor who owned a trucking firm. Eventually Buck scraped together enough money to travel to Manila where at an arranged lunch with American businessmen operating in the Philippines, he was given $6,000 for another expedition. In just six months he returned to San Francisco with a large cargo of animals. In the next two years, he amassed over $100,000, repaid his benefactors, and moved to New York with his new wife, Muriel Riley (Buck and Fraser 1941).

Buck lamented that by the mid-1920s he had achieved a worldwide reputation as an animal collector and dealer and was well known to zoo directors all over the world. When the public viewed animals in zoos and circuses, they saw the animals he had brought back, but knew nothing of “the man who brought them back.” He had met the famed war correspondent Floyd Gibbons in Singapore. The energetic, enthusiastic Gibbons wanted to see Buck’s compound, and in fact, liked it so well he stayed on for a time. He urged Buck to get together with him in New York so they could collaborate on a book. Gibbons was a war correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, and earned an excellent reputation as a radio
newsman. In 1916 he was part of the expedition seeking to capture Pancho Villa, and in World War I he
lost an eye during a rescue attempt in Belleau Wood. For this he received the French Croix de Guerre
with Palm and in 1941 posthumously became the first civilian to be made an honorary member of the
Marine Corps. Gibbons also narrated newsreels and received a star in the Hollywood Walk of Fame.
When he and Buck met again four years later, Gibbons had become a popular radio attraction, and had no
time to write a book; however, he steered Buck to a top literary agent and they made a deal with The Saturday Evening Post for two articles (Buck and Fraser 1941 and “Floyd Gibbons”).

For some reason, Buck avoided writing of the events that would culminate in his becoming a household name. His ascension began with an introduction to Edward Anthony. The son of Hungarian-
Jewish immigrants, Anthony grew up in New York devoted to baseball, reading action stories, and
Horatio Alger. He took business courses, worked as a “supe” at the Metropolitan Opera, meeting Caruso,
and as a cub reporter interviewed John L. Sullivan. During World War I, his near-sightedness and flat feet relegated him to the Quartermaster Corps, where he specialized in putting on shows for the troops,
meeting George M. Cohan, Irving Berlin, and Victor Herbert, who agreed to write some songs for the productions (Anthony 1960).

After the War, Anthony went to work for Bamberger’s Department store in Newark, and joined a
group for literary and philosophical discussions. He soon moved on, becoming a publicity man for a book
publisher, and at one time worked simultaneously for three different publications—The New York Herald,
Farm and Field, and Judge, a humor magazine, whose editor, Harold Ross, would later launch The New Yorker—writing sports and book reviews. He became acquainted with the poet Amy Lowell and the noted dog story writer and breeder Albert Payson Terhune. He then joined the New York World where he continued to meet the celebrities of the day; Robert Frost, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Charlie Chaplin, and Grantland Rice. In 1922 Anthony published his first book, a children’s story The Pussycat Princess published by Century. Three years later he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and sent to a sanitorium.

Following his release, he went to work for Herbert Hoover’s presidential campaign as a publicity man. One idea was to have a cartoonist tell Hoover’s life pictorially, but the idea was killed off as
undignified. Eventually the concept was agreed on and became a great success when it appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Anthony also sought endorsements for Hoover from famous people including Madame Galli-Gurci, the opera singer, John Philip Sousa, Will James, Hamlin Garland, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and Charles Lindbergh. The campaign proved to be a winning strategy (Anthony 1960).

After the election, Anthony sought out humorists like Alexander Woolcott and Christopher Morley to write for the *American Magazine*, as well as recruiting possible radio guests, actually engaging Calvin Coolidge, Clarence Darrow, and Jack Dempsey. Attempts to get H. G. Wells fell through because the author was embarrassed by his high squeaky voice. Anthony also turned his children’s book into a popular comic strip illustrated by Grace Drayton creator of the Campbell Soup Kids, as well as publishing, *Razzberry*, a collection of his sports columns. In 1924 he joined the staff of the Crowell group of magazines, eventually becoming publicity director and publisher of the *Woman’s Home Companion* and *Collier’s* (Anthony 1960).

Four years later, Eugene Katz, a fellow newspaper and advertising writer, who had retired but still wrote for a financial trade paper, told Anthony, who had lost his meager savings in the stock market crash, about an interesting man he had met, who possibly could be the subject of a book that could help recoup Anthony’s barren coffers. The man’s name was Frank Buck, Katz continued, and he specialized in importing Asiatic animals demonstrating skill not only in trapping them but in the business of trade and barter (“Eugene Katz” June 30, 1935: 28 and Anthony 1960).

Anthony decided to double-check on Buck with Raymond Ditmars at the Bronx Zoo. Ditmars had an interesting career. The son of a Confederate officer, he had attended military school, and after graduating in 1891 was hired as an assistant curator of insects at the American Museum of Natural History. He found the job boring and the salary pitiful. His true love was reptiles, but he could find no job connected with them so he worked a few years as a criminal court reporter for the *New York Times*. One day an editor told him to write a humorous scientific story and Ditmars complied, writing about himself and snakes. His witty articles about animals led to a meeting with William Hornaday. In July of 1899, Ditmars was hired as curator of reptiles, donating his own private collection to the zoo. By 1910 he had
risen to the rank of curator-in-chief, but while trying to eradicate tuberculosis among the zoo’s large primate collection, he contracted the disease himself. After he recovered, Ditmars traveled to Europe to study zoo conditions, collect specimens, and exchange animals. He also led zoo expeditions to Central and South America as well as the West Indies (“Raymond Ditmars” May 13, 1942: 18 and Pope 1973).

He continued to write enthusiastically about his first love, snakes, and devised means of venom collection and antidotes for snakebites. The *New York Times* noted that “As champion of the lowliest, most detested, least understood forms of life he did more, single-handedly, than any writer of his generation to convince a shuddering world that reptiles have their place in the scheme of nature” (“Raymond Ditmars” May 13, 1942: 18 and Pope 1973).

Ditmars spent more than 40 years at the Bronx Zoo, not only seeking to continually improve the zoo, but to bring his knowledge of animals to the public, publishing *The Reptile Book* (1907) and *Reptiles of the World* (1910), almost the sole popular works on the subject available at the time. Ditmars also enjoyed lecturing and as a pioneer nature photographer enlivened his talks with motion pictures depicting animal behavior that he filmed at his makeshift studio in Scarsdale (Pope 1973). When his first book was reviewed in the *Times*, the critic wrote,

> And as soon as we get over our first disgust, that repulsion innate for almost everybody, we find this work full of interest. These poor creatures are not one tenth as bad as they look. And after a study of them their appearance ceases to be disagreeable; they are nature’s grotesques and have a rightful place of their own in her catholic cathedral. . . . in secret and subterranean ways they all have something to do toward maintaining the balance of life (Mann May 4, 1907: BR281).

Ditmars also disproved various popular beliefs such as milk snakes robbing cows and whiskey being a cure for snakebite (Mann May 4, 1907: BR281).

In 1914, Ditmars presented his motion picture about wild animals *The Book of Nature* at Wallack’s Theatre on Broadway. A critic raved that Ditmars “has trodden roughshod over all the traditions of the ‘movie’ business and has produced an evening’s entertainment that is remarkable. He will personally deliver the lecture that accompanies the film” (“Notes Written on the Screen” Dec. 20, 1914: X9).
When Ditmars died in 1944, the *Times* noted that his writings had been especially appealing to boys and girls who “readily responded to his single hearted determination when on the trail of a specimen or a scientific proof, to his buoyant spirit of adventure, to his disregard of nature and never-failing ability to turn the light of humor on a situation.” They concluded that he was a great naturalist with “contagious enthusiasm” (“Raymond Ditmars” Oct. 15, 1942: 18),

With Ditmars’ credentials, Anthony thought no one was better to ascertain Buck’s credibility. Ditmars quickly recalled the story of the assignment Hornaday had given Buck to obtain an Indian rhino, and Buck’s adroitness in dealing with the Nepalese. He urged Anthony to write the book since animals were so unpredictable and full of surprises that the so-called unexpected should be regarded as the expected. Buck, he added, was probably the most experienced man in the trade of Asiatic animals. The authors of most commonly available scientific books typically lacked firsthand experience, so if Anthony combined Buck’s adventures with solid scientific research and the knowledge zoo experts could provide--since Buck was primarily a trader--the resultant book could prove amazing (Anthony 1960).

Anthony told Katz to arrange a meeting over dinner. He found Buck interesting and enthusiastic, but also over-hearty. “Our first handshake almost cost me a couple of digits,” so he warned Buck that any more of those and he wouldn’t be able to type. Buck was a born storyteller. Although his tales were fascinating, he had the habit of commenting on them before the listener could adding, “Man, that was exciting,” or laughing at his own punchline. He also had the annoying propensity to bang people on the back so hard that you could feel the effects for a week. Anthony urged him to tone it down, after he pounded someone so forcibly that their highball glass flew across the room (Anthony 1960: 260).

Collaborating on a book was a new experience for both Anthony and Buck. Anthony finally decided his strategy would be to just let Buck talk since stopping him would ruin his spontaneity. He fired all sorts of questions and then let Buck ramble on until he had accumulated a mass of amorphous information (Anthony 1960).

For example, Anthony learned that Buck considered the gaur or great wild ox of Malaya the most dangerous animal. It was powerful, ill-tempered, and the only beast that stalked the hunter by circling,
coming up from behind, and then goring and trampling its victim. Buck also revealed the special soft spot he had for the tiny chevrotain or mouse deer. This shy, beautiful animal standing only ten to twelve inches high was the hero of many Malayan legends (Anthony 1960).

Anthony was sure he was gathering enough information for a follow-up book, but he learned from a friend that Buck had been complaining in a speakeasy that all his collaborator did was ask questions, never doing any actual writing. Their relationship often was quite stormy with each of them hurling the Malayan oath, “Soure Cabatcha”—son-of-a-bitch—at the other. Anthony concluded that Buck was used to issuing commands to Ali, his Number One Malayan “boy” and Lal, his Number One Hindu “boy” and he wanted to do the same to him, his Number One American “boy.” Buck would bark orders and tell Anthony to leave his regular job since he wanted to talk, to which the author would sarcastically reply, “I’m sorry, Shahalam di Rimba (King of the Jungle World).” Buck thought a collaborator should open his mail, see people for him, and take telephone messages (Anthony 1960: 263).

Anthony regularly dropped off outlines of the proposed book to Clifton Fadiman then the editor of Simon & Schuster. The Columbia University graduate had risen through the ranks at the publishing house. For fifty years Fadiman served as senior judge for The-Book-of-the-Month-Club, was The New Yorker’s book editor, and was the moderator of the top-ten ranked radio program, Information Please (“Clifton Fadiman” and Anthony 1960).

In order to make the book as factual and accurate as possible, Anthony gathered so many reference books and maps that he was forced to get a room at the Shelton Hotel to handle the over-flow. He then began a marathon writing session from 7 p.m. Friday to 2 a.m. Monday during which he batted out 25,000 words -- one-quarter of the book. Fadiman found the first draft bouncy and spontaneous. But then the project bogged down. Buck, unknown to Anthony, and despite knowing his collaborator’s connection to Collier’s, made a deal with the rival Saturday Evening Post (Anthony 1960). Collier’s (1888-1957) was in a circulation battle with the Saturday Evening Post. Both magazines hired the top writers and artists available. In 1905, for example, Collier’s 11-part series, “The Great American Fraud,” led to the establishment of the first Pure Food and Drug Act. The magazine reached its peak circulation—
2.85 million-- in 1946 ("Collier’s"). Buck already had a wide circle of friends, largely animal dealers and zoo people, but now he widened it to include acquaintances from newspapers and periodicals. This was not difficult since Buck was highly gregarious and easily made friends in restaurants, clubs, and speakeasies. His evenings became so solidly booked, he only had time for Anthony on Saturdays and Sundays (Anthony 1960).

Fadiman began to press for the rest of the book. He warned Buck about the hazards of nightlife, which although not taken very well, did get Buck back to business. Anthony recalls that Buck was a first class actor and pantomimist acting out the escaped panther adventure on his hands and knees. However, another impasse was reached over the title of the book. Buck insisted on Claws and Fangs, while Anthony argued it was too conventional and that the only good title would be Bring ‘Em Back Alive. To convince Buck, Anthony and two good friends, Terhune and Bradley Kelly decided to hammer out the title at a local speakeasy. Kelly, a lawyer and civic leader worked for King Features Syndicate where he would become vice president five years later. King Features was the brainchild of William Randolph Hearst and Moses Koenigsberg to consolidate all of Hearst’s newspapers’ columns, editorial cartoons, puzzles, games, and comic strips (Anthony 1960; “King Features” and “Bradley Kelly” Jan. 31, 1969).

Before Terhune began writing his famous dog stories, he had toured Syria and Egypt on horseback, visited leper colonies, lived with the Bedouin, and been a reporter for the New York World. He had written a comic opera and more than 30 motion picture scripts, as well as being a member of prestigious clubs like The Players’ and The Adventurers’ Club. He first introduced his Collie hero Lad in Redbook. The noble, intelligent, loyal dog could be deadly in combat protecting his master, mistress, and their children. Terhune told Buck that the key to writing success was aiming at a mass audience, and to have something exciting happen every thousand words. After a long night of drinking and haranguing the three men wore Buck out and he finally, although reluctantly, agreed to the proposed title (Anthony 1960; “Albert P. Terhune” Feb. 19, 1942: 19; Krebs May 8, 1977: 377 and Puckette May 25, 1930: 65).

The book, Anthony admitted was certainly not a major work, but it sold well, hit best seller lists, and managed to launch Buck into the world of celebrity he craved. He could never forgive Buck’s
oversight and lack of acknowledgement of Eugene Katz even though Anthony continually urged him to do so. Raymond Ditmars had agreed to write the introduction, but Simon & Schuster’s rush to publish gave him no time. Ditmars participated in promotional efforts and reviewed the book for the New York Herald Tribune, hoping to bring it to the attention of more serious students of animal behavior (Anthony 1960).

Prior to the release of the book in the fall, Buck’s two articles with The Saturday Evening Post appeared. His co-author was Wesley Stout, a Kansan who had been in the navy and worked on newspapers all over the country before joining the magazine in 1922. In 1937 he became editor-in-chief. The first, “Jungle to Zoo” recounted the capture of the two Indian rhinos for the Bronx and Philadelphia zoos, as well as the trapping of a large male orangutan. In the article Buck noted that he had brought back at least 100,000 birds, many of them rare, but the bulk of them were ornamental and singing cage birds used as house pets. He added that Australia and New Guinea had recently placed an embargo on their export, while the United States had placed a high tariff on the import of live birds as a result of lobbying efforts by the United Canary Breeders. Buck called the new laws absurd since for example, a strawberry finch caught by the thousands by “nesters” in northern India cost only two to eight cents each. Wholesalers paid from $30 to $50 per hundred, and retailed them at $3.50 per bird. The duty drove the price to $5 to $6 per bird. The same problem occurred with the Shana thrush: a far more expensive bird, and some rare finches from Australia; the red-face and black-face Lady Gould, which were subject to an absolute embargo. However, Buck agreed that Australia and New Guinea had to protect the increasingly endangered birds. The American Audubon Society and William Hornaday secured a law prohibiting the importation of any wild bird feathers after fashion seekers caused the near extinction of the crowned pigeon and birds of paradise (Buck and Stout April 12, 1930: 18).

Buck still found a rich market for rare pheasants and claimed the great black cockatoo of New Guinea was the rarest bird he ever imported and subsequently sold to department store magnate John Wanamaker for a price of $600. Buck asserted that a growing number of wealthy private collectors were among animal dealers’ best customers, these included Frank Phillips, the Oklahoma oilman, and the
greatest private collector of them all, William Randolph Hearst. Public zoos were also multiplying. “No city can longer pretend to the title without some attempt at a menagerie, and towns that would not have dreamed of more than a few head of deer before the war, now maintain respectable zoos.” In 1930, the three premier zoos were The Bronx, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. But, he added, Detroit had just opened a major zoo, and Mrs. Harold McCormick recently donated 160 acres surrounded by the Cook County forest reserve, a tax had passed, and the famed cartoonist, John McCutcheon, headed a newly created zoological society to plan the construction of Brookfield Zoo in Chicago. But, “The tangled state of Chicago and Cook County finances has held up the work. . . .” (Buck and Stout April 12, 1930: 18).

Two weeks later, the second installment, “Nice Fresh Tigers, Etc.” appeared. In it, Buck discussed how the Sultan of Johore had been invaluable in providing tigers, since he paid his subjects a bounty of $100 for trapping live tigers. Although Buck trapped and brought back many tigers, only one was a known man-killer. In the United States, a Bengal tiger sells for between $800 and $1,000 with a little less for the Malayan sub-species. Black leopards bring $700 while young elephants—ten to twelve years old—bring $2,200, compared to adults which cost as much as $3,000. Elephants are so hardy and long-lived they seldom have to be replaced so very few dealers bought elephants on speculation. Elephants, Buck pointed out are most easily obtained when keddas or roundups are held in order to census the wild population, but the feeding and shipping costs are so high, they are not very profitable. Buck then described some of the complications in shipping an elephant meant to give rides at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, and also how he brought back the smallest and youngest elephant ever seen in the United States after solving its difficult nutritional needs. He elaborated on an escaped leopard aboard ship, and the tricks involved in transporting pythons and cobras. Finally, he described the horror of being temporarily blinded by he venom of a black spitting cobra (Buck and Stout April 26, 1930: 18).

“Bring ‘Em Back Alive”

These episodes, many of which had earlier appeared in ASIA, became the basis of all Buck’s future books, yet none had the backing of Simon & Schuster’s promotional prowess. Bring ‘Em Back Alive begins with Buck’s statement that he doesn’t intend to add to the many volumes of natural histories
on the “habits of wild animals,” unless the information is directly related to his specialty of collecting. During the last 18 years, he admittedly had plenty of thrills and narrow escapes but, he emphasized, he did not have

a love of looking Death in the eye. I am not that kind of adventurer. I take no unnecessary risks. When a man operates on as big a scale as I do he doesn’t have to look for trouble. No matter how careful one is, something is bound to go wrong when live animals and reptiles are handled wholesale. It is then that experience counts (Buck and Anthony 1930: 3).

Then Buck listed the names and quantities of all the species he had captured. He concluded that many scientists have never left a museum or university, and that he too was a student, but of the

Hard-boiled details of the collecting business or the best way to get a snarling tiger out of a pit into a cage without getting messed up in the process, how to transfer a murderous king cobra from a crude native container to a modern snake box, how to---but perhaps, I’d better launch my story (Buck and Anthony 1930: 5).

Buck’s first chapter dealt with a capture of a tapir, “the meekest of animals,” and how he was almost killed by “a damned tapir, an animal that has always seemed to me a sort of giant cockroach, with as much spirit and personality, under normal circumstances, as that loathsome bug.” The lesson he learned was how foolish it is to generalize about animals that “have as much variety as human character.” The closest to a generalization one could make is that “most animals are dangerous when they think they are in danger.” Tapirs, the prey of tigers, leopards, and crocodiles, had “an aggressiveness born of perpetual fear” (Buck and Anthony 1930: 7-17).

The second episode told of the capture of the adult orangutan that had “as terrifying an appearance as I’ve seen in any animal,” with a “tremendous chest,” “prodigious arms,” “bulging muscles,” and “murderous teeth” (Buck and Anthony 1930).

The third chapter was the most violent of the book, as Buck took the opportunity to express his own opinions most vehemently. He growled that not even the jungle itself or “Anglo-Saxon villains” who were mere comic book characters could be compared to the cruelty of the Hindu ruling class. Buck described a brutal fight put on by such a ruler between a tiger and a bull water buffalo. The tiger had been deprived of food for two or three days and the buffalo of water, while small spikes had been driven into the bull’s shoulder. The tiger quickly killed the buffalo by getting on the bull’s withers and yanking its
head back, breaking its neck. In the process, the tiger’s back was broken. The maharajah ordered his men to shoot the tiger that was now just an eyesore and nuisance. Buck was disgusted and let it be known to an Australian who trained horses for the ruler. The man called Buck a hypocrite who deemed himself a saint, because he didn’t kill animals. Buck replied with a statement of his philosophy:

I hate princes who have animals killed to gratify their sadistic impulses and I despise the tea party jungleers who make their kills for the rotogravure sections of Sunday papers. The next time I see a picture of a hunter standing with one foot on the head of a lion or tiger that he has just killed, I’m going to commit murder. I have nothing but respect for real hunters. The greatest of all is the Sultan of Johore. He is not one of your platform huntsman. He meets his wild game on an even footing, out in the open, without a regiment of natives stacking the cards against the animal he is after. He has taken his life in his hands hundreds of times. An account of his exploits would make the greatest of all chronicles of big game hunting. Beside his feats, those of most so-called big game hunters pale into silly insignificance. . . . You just said I think I’m a saint because I don’t kill animals. You’re talking through your hat. After all, my business is to collect wild animals and bring ‘em back alive for the zoos and circuses. How the hell could I bring ‘em back alive if I killed them (Buck and Anthony 1930: 38).

Buck’s acquaintance then told him to return since the prince planned to stage another animal battle. He had a magnificent tiger placed in a squeeze cage where its claws could be yanked out one by one safely. Buck’s hatred of the prince grew, and he was disgusted with himself for watching and listening to the big cat’s horrible cries that reflected its agony, suffering, melancholy, and “murderous longings.” This indignity was followed by another; his mouth was sewn shut. Then he was thrown to six dogs, crosses of mastiffs and Irish wolfhounds known as “boarhounds.” Buck admitted that, “Asia could get to you.” The tiger, a “grisly sight” managed to get one fang free and ripped out the guts of a dog. The cat gathered its strength and made an amazing leap to a wall, falling over the barrier, while it tried to run on “gory stumps.” On the same path stood the maharajah’s young son. At the tiger’s approach his servants fled and he “died like a dog—at the bloody paws of another member of royalty: the Royal Bengal Tiger.” His father’s guards pumped bullets into the tiger, but Buck philosophized, “Who says no justice . . . now and then?” (Buck and Anthony 1930: 47).

Buck then reiterated the already published story of his acquisition of the two rare Indian rhinos. He felt if he could carry on successful negotiations with the Nepalese government his reputation would be
made as a zoo collector even though the ruler’s men had killed 21 rhinos to obtain the calves (Buck and Anthony 1930).

In each of Buck’s books, he wrote glowingly of his assistant or “boy,” Ali. Years earlier Ali had been brought to America by a circus agent who discovered the young man in Singapore where he sold parrots and monkeys to foreign ships. Ali stayed two years in America with the circus as an animal keeper as well as appearing in parades. Growing homesick, he returned to Asia where he traveled throughout Borneo, Sumatra, and the Malay peninsula acquiring an amazing knowledge of indigenous wildlife (Buck and Anthony 1930).

Another chapter related how Buck captured and delivered the first man-eating tiger ever displayed in America. The subject of man-eaters was a favorite topic of discussion with his friend the Sultan of Johore. The phenomenon is an unusual “perversion” since the big cats do not normally eat human flesh. Tigers can acquire the taste following an unsuccessful attack by a hunter, or because the animal has been severely injured, or is so old it has lost most of its teeth along with its strength and agility so that only humans prove an easy enough target. In one year, 1,500 people in British India were reportedly killed by tigers. After devouring any prey, the tiger “curls up and enjoys one of those wonderful long sleeps that always follow a good bellyful. And which I have always believed to be as much a part of the joy of making a good kill as the actual devouring of it” (Buck and Anthony 1930: 146).

As early as 1867, explorers in Africa had drawn the same conclusion about man-eating lions. Man-killing could be avoided “if men could be induced to forebear injuring the race of lions.” Man-eaters are never the “young and vigorous,” but instead are “old and effete” and past their best days of strength and fleetness. Not until a lion is too infirm or ill to run down its normal prey might it turn to humans. They would try first for a small child, or boys and girls, and in extreme cases, a woman. Only if on the brink of starvation, would a lion attempt to kill an adult man. The writer believed human flesh was distasteful to lions, since their first act after attacking a human is to head to water for a drink (“Man-Killers” 1867: 114-128).
To capture a man-eater Buck planned to dig a hole four-feet by four-feet at the surface and 14 to 15 feet deep. The opening widened halfway down to a floor ten feet across. The opening was then covered with palm branches. Three days after constructing the trap, Buck got word a tiger was in the pit. Using his Texas lassos to get eight different holds on the cat, Buck and his assistant slid down the muddy sides of the pit in a downpour. Buck grabbed the cat’s tail to guide him into a crate. The tiger wound up at Minneapolis’s Longfellow Zoo (Buck and Anthony 1930).

Buck related the story of bringing back a female baby elephant under three feet in height for movie work. Alerted that there was a baby elephant in a village, Buck found the tiny animal, thin and emaciated, and probably no more than 10 to 12 days old. He claimed the weak, wobbly, trembling, starving little animal was in worse condition than any baby animal he had ever come across. He knew the villagers were lying when they claimed to have been feeding the little elephant bananas since such a young animal cannot yet use its trunk. Buck concocted a gruel of goat’s milk and rice, feeding the animal through a bamboo stalk. Baby Boo arrived in the United States in great shape, and Buck received his $2,000 (Buck and Anthony 1930).

Crocodiles, an animal Buck admittedly did not like, were the subjects of the next chapter. The reptiles were especially abundant in the Sunderbands, a 1,000 square mile area of islands and marshes located where the Ganges enters the Bay of Bengal. Natives typically caught crocodiles by tying a monkey to vertical and horizontal sharpened sticks. When the croc took the bait, it would be unable to close its mouth and comes onshore where it is easily caught. When natives make a capture, they truss the animal up, take it back to the village, and cut open its belly to see if there are any remnants of humans, like jewelry and bangles (Buck and Anthony 1930).

Buck revealed that he still thrilled at bringing back “firsts.”

Nothing delights me more than to place under the nose of an eminent zoologist a bird or beast or a snake he has never seen before—something that up to then had only been a name—perhaps a ponderous Latin one—in the natural history books or the zoological dictionary. When a phlegmatic scientist suddenly comes alive is always a treat to me. A scientist jumping up and down with a burst of scientific joy is real compensation (Buck and Anthony 1930: 178-179).
Not all attempts to bring back animals are successful. Buck acquired some proboscis monkeys for just $21 each, but this is just a fraction of what it actually costs to get the animal to the United States. These primates normally eat thick, waxy leaves indigenous to Borneo, and to change an animal’s diet is always dangerous. But soon the monkeys grew to like a water plant, raw carrots, bread and rice. However, the monkeys got wet when a careless crewman hosed down their cages on the ship’s deck. After the baby proboscis died, the mother pined and had to be force-fed, the only example of a broken heart that Buck had ever witnessed (Buck and Anthony 1930).

Buck then launched into a long description of how Asian elephants are captured. Elephant capture was a government concession in Burma and an organized industry in Siam. Most of the captured elephants are bound for tea estates where they are used for hauling and roadwork while in India they build roads, haul teak, and take part in royal ceremonies. Buck’s order was from Herbert Fleischacker, a banker and president of the San Francisco Park Board, for an elephant that could give rides at Golden Gate Park. Buck picked out a good-natured, easily broken female which only balked when she was going to be pulled aboard ship. But news in Asia spread that he had been killed by “the biggest most ferocious elephant ever seen,” while in actuality she was the best-behaved elephant he had ever been around, and proved a great attraction at the park (Buck and Anthony 1930).

There was always a big demand for monkeys. By 1930, Buck estimated he had imported 5,000 for use as pets, exhibitions, and scientific research. One shipment alone consisted of 750 Rhesus monkeys bound for a medical research institute (Buck and Anthony 1930).

Birds remained his first love. “I have never ceased to be daffy about them.” He claimed to have brought back over 100,000 birds, some never before seen in America. Birds, he contended, were so special he often felt he should have been paid for “the privilege of handling these creatures instead of being paid” (Buck and Anthony 1930).

In any animal adventure book attacks and escapes are highlights and Buck’s opus is no exception. His favorite, oft-repeated tale, is of a leopard that escaped on the U.S.S. Granite State. The frightened animal was finally cornered in the mess room. Buck claimed, “I was making it clear to this foolish beast
who was running the show. It is purely a mental proposition, the same psychology entering into it that makes it possible for experienced trainers to tame the jungle’s wildest beasts.” Buck was determined to recapture the leopard alive since “to me an animal dying is as painful a sight as human death and I meant to save that pesky leopard’s life if I got clawed up in the process.” Buck was successful, and five weeks later the big cat was on display at Lincoln Park (Buck and Anthony 1930: 247).

To Buck, there was no more beautiful mammal than the Malayan mouse deer. This little ten to twelve inch high browser is the key figure in many local legends. The swift “pelandock” can outwit other jungle denizens, and bring peace to warring animals. Buck admitted he was a sentimentalist when it came to these dainty, beautiful animals. Whenever he found one in a native trap, he released it. “Few sensations,” he added “were comparable to the thrill of raising a trap door and seeing a mouse deer go bounding off like a streak in a series of ecstatic leaps.” Buck was importing nine of these little animals, but upon docking he learned that they would not be allowed ashore, since they were hoofstock and a fear of communicable cattle disease existed. He was forced to chloroform each of the little deer (Buck and Anthony 1930: 251).

Circuses, especially the Al G. Barnes Trained Wild Animal Circus, were major clients of Buck. He found Barnes to be a real student of animals’ “habits and peculiarities,” which enabled him to achieve remarkable results with his animals. Buck loved the show, an all animal circus; “it differed from other circuses in that there were no acrobats and none of the other tedious bores that usually put me to sleep.” He especially admired the head trainer Louis Roth who had great patience and a “staggering knowledge of the habits and characteristics of animals.” Buck enjoyed watching the climax of his act when a tiger he had brought back six years earlier rode on a horse’s back and leapt through a fiery hoop, re-landing on the horse’s back (Buck and Anthony 1930: 264).

If Buck had to pick one animal he considered the most vicious in the jungles of Asia—one that attacked without provocation and with unfailing determination—it was the king cobra, whose venom was significantly worse than that of the Russell’s viper or green mamba, and in addition was able to hold the victim in its jaws until its venom sacs were emptied. Most animals make a hasty retreat from man, Buck
observed, but not the cobra. Buck had brought back one of the largest to fill a request by Raymond Ditmars. The snake became the pride of the Bronx Zoo reptile house for many years and after its death was mounted and displayed at the American Museum of Natural History (Buck and Anthony 1930).

*Bring ‘Em Back Alive* was well-received. In *Travel*, Christopher West’s five-page illustrated review claimed the book made “most stories about wild animals seem tame and monotonous.” He called the list of animals Buck has delivered to America “staggering.” Unlike the big game hunter whose job is done when he kills his quarry, those who capture wild animals run into continuous risks involved in trapping and shipping. Utilizing excerpts from two chapters, West contended that some of “Buck’s encounters with wild animals at his own compound were as hair raising as any adventure a hunter could have in the wild jungles.” He continued that,

> if you would know the real romance of the big zoological garden you will find it in this book. There is little enough romance in a broken and defeated tiger glaring sullenly through its bars, and captive elephants, lions, camels, and crocodiles are a familiar sight. These creatures have lived through their great days and many of them have had amazing stories (West Oct. 30, 1930: 39).

“Some of them,” he adds, “have fought desperately before they yielded to the enemy” (West Oct. 30, 1930: 39).

*Time* magazine wrote briefly about Buck’s delivery of two Indian rhinos to New York and Philadelphia describing the great difficulty in transporting wild animals by rail, boat, and truck to their ultimate destinations (“White Seals” Oct. 6, 1930). While Thomas Masson said in *Life* that “at last here is an intelligent animal book that has human interest.” It is the story of how Buck “gets ‘em, holds ‘em and delivers ‘em.” He added that Edward Anthony “couldn’t have done as good a job as he did if he hadn’t been ‘sold’ to Buck’s stuff. You feel that” (Masson Oct. 10, 1930: 27). In the *North American Review*, Herschel Brickell found “endless good stories in the volume,” and concurred with Buck’s “general conclusion after his careful study of animal life” that man is “much more cruel than the worst animals he has ever trapped.” Buck is that sort of person, wise as well as quick with the lasso and whatever else he uses in battles” (Brickell Dec. 1930).
The Bookman agreed. “The Roosevelts shot big game, the Martin Johnsons photograph it, but Frank Buck brings it home in a cage for your Zoological Garden. And his task is by far the most difficult.” His admission that he does not actually seek danger causes the reviewer to observe that, “such honesty in a book of this type is almost unique. And in spite of it his stories are packed with excitement and common sense and a real feeling for animals” (“Notes on New Books” October 1930).

The New York Times also gave the book a lengthy review, illustrating it with a Delacroix lithograph of Tigre Royal. The reviewer Florence Finch Kelly especially enjoyed the story about the cobra, and “its unfailing determination to wipe out anything that crosses its path. . . . this lust to kill invests the king cobra with a quality of fiendishness, that puts it in a class by itself, almost making it a jungle synonym for death.” Kelly liked the modest, matter of fact way in which the tales were told. It has a “conversational narrative,” as if “Mr. Buck was talking to you off-hand and so inevitably it is a bit overstated with words, but it is vivid and lively and Buck can be recommended to anybody who likes being made to sit on the edge of his chair and gasp for breath as his eyes eat up the print to see what happens next” (Kelly Dec. 14, 1930: BR7).

Raymond Ditmars, who would have written the introduction, also praised the book in a review appearing in the New York Herald Tribune. He asserted that anyone interested in animals or actual stories of adventure largely taking place in India and Malaya will find the work of this author good reading, “where the completion of one chapter lures one into another. It is an exciting trail” (Ditmars Oct. 5, 1930: 6). In his own book, published in 1937, Ditmars wrote that,

most zoo animals nowadays are caught by and bought from professional collectors who make a business of knowing just what each zoo needs and how much it can pay. Stocking a zoo is largely a matter of purchasing good show specimens. Occasionally, however, the Bronx Zoo will commission a man to go on a trip to get an especially rare animal. Frank Buck was sent for an Indian rhino, Robert L. Garner was sent for a gorilla (“Book from the Bronx” Sept. 30, 1937: 6).

The one chapter that stirred controversy involved the tale of the cruel treatment of the tiger by the maharajah and the cat’s subsequent revenge. In a full-page syndicated story by Dan Smith, “The Fearful Price the Rajah Paid for Cruelty to a Tiger and the Torrid Controversy Over Author Buck’s Remarkable Recital of the Revenge of a Wild Animal Which Slew Its Brutal Tormentor’s Only Son,” Smith
concluded that Buck was not only one of the best collectors of wild animals in the world today, but largely the silent type. This kind of man, when he finally writes or talks of his experiences, is very likely to correctly and accurately describe them according to psychologists. Only when stories are retold repeatedly do they become more exaggerated or untrue. Thus to most readers and his personal acquaintances, Buck’s book seems truthful. But book reviewers who often do not take into account an author’s “prestige and eminence in other fields” may find it entertaining, but question its truth, some declaring “it stretches credulity to the breaking point.” Buck retaliated that everything was true, some reviewers’ experiences are limited, and “they never have had, and probably never will have, an opportunity to see life in the raw—as it is lived in Asia, and especially among the petty royalty of India” (Smith Oct. 19, 1930).

Other critics believed Buck stuck to the “unembroidered facts” and these are certainly thrilling enough. They pointed out that he does not really believe in a “law of the jungle.” Animals are motivated by fear. “No animal has to be told whose way to keep out of, if he knows nothing else he instinctively knows who his enemies are. Fear, fear, fear! No instinct is more ingrained in creatures of the jungle more than this.” Buck they added, describes animals as they are “which means the highest point of interest which has yet been reached by any volume of adventure among animals. The book comes to the front at an appropriate time, when public attention is focused on the problems of conservation and preservation of wild animal life in this country” (“Adventurer Buck” Oct. 15, 1930: 2).

With the publication of *Bring 'Em Back Alive*, Buck engaged in a speaking tour addressing 300 women in Cleveland. Typically, he claimed he “would rather face a wild tiger in the heart of the African jungle than to face a woman in the most civilized point of civilization. . . . Buck, the hero of hundreds of thrilling dashes in jungleland for the big game that he brings back to this country alive and healthy, readily admits this dread of women.” Buck finally agreed to speak after arguing he was a “lion hunter” and not a “lounge lizard.” Finding the speech an ordeal he answered the question of whether the tiger was the most vicious animal, “No I can face a wild tiger with more ease than a woman, no matter how calm” (“Hunter Prefers Wild Tigers” Nov. 7, 1930: 6).
Bring ‘Em Back Alive continued to get favorable reviews. The Saturday Review believed “if every cage could bear the history of its inmate’s capture and transportation we should gain greatly in our knowledge of the animal’s character, both as a species and an individual, and its collector’s prowess. This is what Mr. Buck tells us in as rich a setting of true adventure-story as anyone could wish for.” Buck himself, the critic adds, handles “every species with a patience, sympathy and understanding equaled by personal bravery and resourcefulness in sudden crises” (The Saturday Review Feb. 28, 1931: 317). The [London] Times found the narration a “stimulating account of human ingenuity, resource, nerve and courage” (The Times [London] Literary Supplement Apr. 12, 1931: 262). The Spectator observed “that the book is written by a man who...loves and is thoroughly humane towards animals making its record of perpetual and inevitable cruelty the more painfully impressive” (The Spectator Feb. 7, 1931: 196). [All of these reviews appeared in Book Review Digest].

Edward Anthony; meanwhile, energetically contributed to the growing Buck legend by running a series of monthly installments of Buck’s adventures in Collier’s. Excitingly illustrated, the first, “The Meanest Beast,” appeared on January 17, 1931. The sub-head read:

One of the thrills staged by the Roman Emperors for their spectacle-loving people was a battle to the death between oddly assorted animals. But they never thought of pitting a black leopard against sharks. It remained for an accident two thousand years later to contrive that. Here’s the story—told by a famous catcher of wild animals (Buck and Anthony Jan. 17, 1931: 19).

In the article Buck claimed to have found more black leopards in the Malay peninsula than anywhere else in the world, and that “mystery and cussedness” combine to make it “the most fascinating of the great cats inhabiting the jungles” (Buck and Anthony Jan. 17, 1931: 19).

The following month in “Standback,” Buck revealed what happened when a cobra spit venom in his eyes (Buck and Anthony Feb. 21, 1931: 18). In March, he introduced the honeybear, an animal he considered “the greatest comedian in the animal world.” Buck believed its humor was linked to “an insatiable curiosity...a perpetual inquisitiveness” over every little event and happening in the world around him (Buck and Anthony March 14, 1931: 25).
Meanwhile, Buck continued on the lecture circuit giving talks to groups like the Olean, New York Men’s Club of the Presbyterian Church. In it he claimed to have found the orangutan the most interesting animal. The reporter noted that at the conclusion of his talk Buck painted a beautiful word picture of the desert with its great sandy wastes declaring that the most beautiful sight he had ever seen, and one that he would never forget was the desert at night with the tropical moon shining upon a caravan of camels as they moved silently along. “It is something like that—the beautiful things with which one comes in contact, that one remembers about the jungle and the desert and that compensates for all the hard living and the privations one encounters in Asia,” Buck concluded. Another extremely memorable sight was the base of Mount Everest. “The grandeur of the Himalayas is beyond words to express and I shall never forget those remarkable scenes—the mountains reaching high into the heavens and the valleys thousands of feet deep” (“Buck Tells Experiences” March 20, 1931: 3).

Perhaps it was this romantic side of Buck and his provocation of wanderlust in the deskbound that appealed to America’s greatest sportswriter, Grantland Rice. Rice “became famous by helping turn Ruth, Ty Cobb, Bobby Jones, Knute Rockne, Joe Louis, and Jim Thorpe into American gods. He considered them all close friends and made reading about their exploits in prose and poetry even better that watching them.” In 1924 he wrote the most famous ‘lead’ in sports writing, when he described Notre Dame’s 13-7 victory over Army: “Outlined against a blue-gray sky, the Four Horsemen rode again” (Bayless Dec. 27, 2000).

Born in Murfreesboro, Tennessee in 1880 and a Vanderbilt graduate, Rice’s most quoted line was an ode to football and life. “For when the One Great Scorer comes/ To write against your name,/ He marks not that you won or lost--/ But how you played the Game.” The peak of Rice’s fame was reached in the 1920s and 30s, when his column was syndicated in over a hundred newspapers with a combined readership of ten million. He also wrote a weekly column for Collier’s, had a weekly radio program on NBC, edited The American Golfer Magazine, and produced and narrated an Academy Award winning series of sports films. American sports fans largely saw their heroes and major events through Grant’s
eyes. Today Rice’s “celebratory style” is known as the “gee whiz” school of sportswriting. (Fountain 1993).

In March, 1931 Rice wrote a poem “The East A-Callin’” in honor of Buck who he said was leaving soon for Singapore to shoot footage for a motion picture. The poem caught the romance of Buck’s career and his rising appeal to a growing audience.

“I’d like to roll to Rio once, just before I die,”
So roving Rudyard Kipling wrote beneath an English sky;
And when in dreams I hear the waves that lap some jungle shore,
I’d like to snap my Western leash and start for Singapore.

When you are in the jungle, Frank upon the leopard’s track,
When you have struck the tiger’s spoor where jungle depths are black,
I’ll be in some pot bunker, Frank, still plugging for my four,
But dreaming of the Eastern trek that leads to Singapore.

I’d like to see how rhinos live in some unguarded place.
Or watch the python’s lidless eyes that outstare time and space;
But when the hooded cobra swings across your jungle path,
Well, I’ll be hacking in the rough with all the cobra’s wrath.

I want to swing from Singapore just once before I’m old,
To fade into the jungle depths and know the jungle fold;
Where telephones no longer ring nor taxicabs careen,
To watch lost birds of Paradise against the jungle green.

We who are slaves of desk and den and know the pay check’s dole,
May see no elephants at dusk seek out the water-hole;
But, as we look beyond tall spires that climb against the sky,
Will dream of reaching Singapore just once before we die.
(Rice March 21, 1931: 16).

Buck seemed able to move smoothly between the two worlds. Longtime playwright, author and editor of the New York Daily Mirror, Jack Lait wrote in his syndicated column “Highlights of Broadway” that Buck’s book was doing well, and “its handsome author was a lion socially.” He “schmoosed” with Buck about the old Chicago days, the poker games, the waitresses, and the ‘round table gang,’ that included the two of them. “Oh, Boys-if Frank could bring THAT back alive!” (Lait May 24, 1931).

Buck’s articles continued appearing in Collier’s. In April, “The Patsy,” re-told the story of a hard-luck elephant that wound up in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park, becoming “one of the happiest and best loved elephants in America” (Buck and Anthony April 25, 1931: 9).
The following month’s installment, “Discord on Paradise,” described various episodes involving birds, which Buck reiterated were his first love and still held “the chief place in my affection and interest.” The story related how Buck was challenged by Louis Roth, the noted animal trainer with the Al G. Barnes Circus to teach a bird of paradise to talk. Buck first taught a mynah to say: “Hello, kid, how’s business.” He then introduced the mynah to “Earl,” his bird of paradise. He would reward Earl with morsels of rambutan, “a jungle fruit the paradise bird craves beyond any other delicacy.” After two months, Earl could manage, “Hello.” The weary mynah began stealing the rambutan rewards, while Earl concentrated on repeating the words. Right after Earl finally got it, the mynah’s thievery did not go unheeded. Buck pointed out that the bird of paradise is one of the most ruthless battlers in the bird world and frequently attacks smaller birds, gripping them and pecking their brains out. Buck heard Gabby, the mynah’s shrieks, and rescued him in the nick of time. From then on Earl would just have to hear the word “Hello” to be driven into a fury (Buck and Anthony May 30, 1931: 10).

Buck added that in the profession of collecting birds and animals, luck played a major role. He had purchased a common green barbet and hung its cage from a limb. A few days later when he called to the bird he got no response. Taking down the cage, he was “astounded and plenty scared” when a snake poked its head through the wires. It was a very rare, very deadly yellow-banded mangrove snake, a reptile in high demand in American zoos. He lost a $15 barbet and gained an extremely rare animal that was bought by Ditmars for the Bronx Zoo (Buck and Anthony May 30, 1931: 10).

The June 6 installment told about an animal Buck had not been able to obtain despite standing orders offering any price he cared to name. Zoos and circuses had long wanted to exhibit a white elephant, but “the barriers of superstition” stopped the importation, since a “curse is supposed to descend on anyone who lets a white elephant out of Asia.” In 1926 the London Zoo did acquire a white elephant, Pa Wa. When John Ringling heard of it he made a deal to acquire the rare animal on loan for a season. The Burmese keepers were in London when Pa Wa died in Calcutta on the return trip to Burma. In August, 1928 one trainer was found beaten to death with a sledge hammer and pick ax while the other was beaten severely and jumped out of his window to escape (Buck and Anthony June 6, 1931: 28).
Buck’s next article “Four-Legged Midgets” retold his experiences with two of his favorite diminutive animals; the anoa or pygmy water buffalo and the chevrotain or mouse deer. The anoa, the smallest of all bovines—only three-feet high—is probably the strongest animal for its size in the world. Hornaday wanted to be the first to exhibit them in America. The male, known as “Little Tough Guy” broke loose in the compound, attacking a much larger nilgai, impaling him, lifting him straight up, and then shaking him off. After the two anoas were delivered safely to the Bronx Zoo, the Philadelphia Zoo quickly requested a pair. The four anoas and their descendants remained the only specimens in America. The rest of the story dealt with Buck’s continuing affection for mouse deer (Buck and Anthony June 27, 1931: 27).

In the September issue, Buck recounted the story of three of his favorite animals; Mitzy, the elephant, Mike, the tiger, and Oscar, the hornbill (Buck and Anthony Sept. 5, 1931). Alternating between the light-hearted and the serious, the October chapter, related “Tiger Tales.” “Nobody knows what a tiger is going to do next,” argued Buck,” that’s his game; that’s what makes legends spring up about him in the Orient.” He added that “The animal kingdom’s closet approach to an inexhaustible theme” is the tiger. Buck considered the tiger the most “formidable of the great cats,” and believed “no more hopeless sign of amateurism can be found in the whole realm of zoology than that shown by the chap who announces the tiger will do this or that or the other thing under such and such circumstances.” The tiger is the “animal world’s richest subject. . . .the history of the tiger will not be written until the last tiger died, for no one knows what a lone survivor would do to upset all the entrenched theories about his species” (Buck and Anthony Oct. 31, 1931: 24).

In the final installment of the year, Buck explained reliance on traditional medicine in Asia threatens some wild animals with extinction. Especially troubling is the value of tiger parts as remedies in the Asiatic market.

There is, to begin with, the belief among the Chinese that the gall bladder of the tiger contains a panacea for all ills. There is no ailment, no matter how severe, that cannot be cured by bitter gall—dried and taken internally—of the jungle’s great striped cat. . . realizing the futility of trying to vanquish someone so richly endowed, the demons of ill health move out of the body of
the blessed one and take up their abode in a frame that will offer less resistance (Buck and Anthony Dec. 26, 1931: 19).

The gall of the leopard ranks somewhat below that of the tiger, while the raw liver of the wild dog, supposedly cures aching backs and revitalizes weak limbs. The power of the tiger’s “floating” shoulder bone has become popular even in the West. Buck claimed to know a wild animal trainer who would not enter the arena without the bone, and an English pilot who attributed his luck to a similar talisman (Buck and Anthony Dec. 26, 1931: 19).

Buck also began appearing in the syndicated New York gossip columns. James Aswell reported in “My New York” that Buck was seen promoting his book at the Wednesday Culture Club, which met on Friday at a “push bell restaurant on Park Avenue.” Present, along with the intellectuals of the New Republic, Atlantic, and Yale Review, were writers for The Saturday Evening Post, and Collier’s. George Bye, the literary agent, manages the gathering that include Albert Payson Terhune, Clarence Darrow, and Frank Buck, “the animal trapper, whose Bring ’Em Back Alive, rocketed him to fame and royalties” (Aswell June 27, 1931: 11).

Finally Famous

Fame was certainly coming Buck’s way, but there was one more medium he had to conquer to attain the notoriety he craved; the movies. In All in a Lifetime, Buck recalled how the two documentarians Shoedsack and Cooper had made a motion picture Grass about desert herdsmen in search of forage in Grass. Their next effort Chang dealt with jungle elephants in Cambodia. Buck recalled that Cooper had sought him out for some ideas. When Buck was invited to a private showing in San Francisco, he expressed that in his opinion Chang was the best wild animal picture to date. But, he concluded if two relatively inexperienced filmmakers could produce a good movie, he, with no lack of ego, could make a better one. “I know the jungle, and while not in anyway a scientist, I knew I was probably the world’s best authority on wild animals in their natural habitat.” Since he had a best-selling book as a starting point, it seemed to be the logical time to acquire backing for a film venture (Buck and Fraser 1941).
To Buck’s chagrin, his agent, publishers, and collaborator held out little hope. It is difficult to believe with all of Buck’s earlier show business contacts, along with his new acquaintances in New York literary circles, and despite calling steadily at all the New York offices of the major motion picture studios, he was unable to get past the receptionist or secretary. Buck claimed he began to feel like the carrier of bubonic plague. It was harder to see the moguls than maharajahs (Buck and Fraser 1941).

After a long series of rejections, the Van Beuren Corporation a subsidiary of RKO that typically produced short subjects, showed some interest. Amedee Van Beuren the producer was the son of a New York advertising executive whose agency later became part of the General Outdoor Advertising Company. His greatest success to date had been a series of cartoons based on Aesop’s Fables. RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) was founded in 1928 when Joseph P. Kennedy merged FBO Pictures, a production and distribution company, with the Keith-Orpheum theater chain, and formed a partnership with David Sarnoff, whose Radio Corporation of America had developed a new motion picture sound system, RCA Photophone. Their goal was to produce, distribute, and exhibit talking pictures under the brand name Radio Pictures with their logo showing a giant radio tower atop a spinning globe (“Amedee Van Beuren” and “A. J. Van Bueren” Nov. 13, 1938: 45).

The initial contract called for 13 short features with Van Beuren paying for the entire cost of the expedition. Instead of a salary, Buck would receive a share of the profits. But Buck knew in his heart the final result would be a feature picture when he set out on the nine-month trip to Sumatra, India, and Ceylon where they would shoot 125,000 feet of film. Buck insisted the footage was never faked, but shot in actual locations in real jungles. As soon as each reel was finished, it was sealed in tight tins and shipped back to the United States. Buck pleaded with Van Beuren not to make any pre-mature announcements of forthcoming short features prior to viewing the footage. Buck proved correct, the footage was cut back to 7,000 feet creating what he deemed something “utterly different and a sensation” (“Amedee Van Beuren”).


Although animal pictures seemed easy to make since they had no plot, no storyline, no actors, and no manufactured sets, allowing the cameramen to just keep grinding away, Buck wanted to clear up the misconception.

Only you don’t! The animals themselves are your actors—bad actors, most of them, dangerous and as temperamental as any Hollywood star. They made their own plot and story as they go along. And they are likely to change any scenario you have hoped for, surely without warning (Buck and Fraser 1941: 207-208).

The setting and stage is the jungle, he continued, “and the jungle was not designed by nature for the making of movies.” One problem is that the jungle is always dark even on the brightest day since tall trees with interlocking branches form a canopy. Buck recalled the only place to get effective pictures were natural clearings where the sun could penetrate. All a crew could do was set up a camera, and hope an animal would come along, or use native beaters to force an animal across the clearing. The first step according to Buck was typically to send out his ‘boys’ to contact tribal village people offering a reward for information about where particular animals frequented (Buck and Fraser 1941: 208).

Accompanying Buck to Asia were director Clyde E. Elliott and cameramen Nick Cavaliere and Carl Berger. Elliott (1885-1959), a graduate of the University of Nebraska, founded Post Pictures in 1919 to make nature films distributed by Paramount (“Clyde Elliott”). Buck sent postcards announcing his progress to Hollywood columnists indicating how far along they were in the shooting phase. In December, 1931, upon his return Buck tackled another entertainment medium when he appeared on a radio program hosted by Grantland Rice. Peter Dixon in his syndicated column “Inside the Radio Studios” raved that,

Buck’s voice had some quality in it that made the listener see vividly what he was describing. He packed more drama into his short staccato phrases than any actor or speaker we have heard. This column, if it were a sponsor of some programs, would rather have Buck as master of ceremonies than any other voice it has heard. Buck met the most rigid test of all radio speakers—he stopped a very interesting bridge game before he had uttered a dozen words. And Buck is neither an actor nor a trained speaker (Dixon Dec. 13, 1931: D13)

Obviously Dixon’s praise would be heeded as Buck would not only frequently appear as a guest on popular shows, but would have his own program as well.
Prior to the release of the motion picture in June, Buck’s ascendancy continued smoothly. In March, a syndicated feature “The Man Who Brings ‘Em Back Alive” appeared in many of the nation’s newspapers. It described some of Buck’s various adventures, stressed the importance of experience and diplomacy for success in animal collecting, and made mention of the forthcoming movie (Watson March 24, 1932: 4). In April, the last of the co-authored Buck-Anthony articles appeared in Collier’s explaining that bringing ‘em back alive is sometimes easier than what happens when he urged a tiger to sit for his portrait. The unhappy end result was that Buck was forced to shoot a tiger that exploded out of the bush and fell dead just four inches from where he stood (Buck and Anthony April 9, 1932: 28).

“Wild Cargo”

That same spring, a second book Wild Cargo the final joint venture between Buck and Anthony was released. Anthony had noted that his long interviews with Buck had provided enough material for a second volume. The exciting episode with the spitting cobra had led Anthony to the Bronx Zoo where Raymond Ditmars had a captive cobra demonstrate the remarkable speed of its strike, and provided him with an excellent description of the venom as “amber” rather than the “off-yellow” used to describe it in texts (Anthony 1960: 268-269).

Wild Cargo, boasted as its frontispiece a portrait of Buck painted by Pierre Nuyttens (1885-1960). The Belgian artist, costume, and stage designer had studied at the Chicago Art Institute and some of his portraits hung in the White House and the Library of Congress. He was considered an exceptional dry-point etcher. (“Artist is Killed” Jan.10, 1960: 78, and “Josef Pierre Nuyttens”). The book itself consisted of many stories that had already appeared in Collier’s; the hard luck young female elephant tale, the capture of a black leopard, the story of the anoa, mouse deer and clownish honey bear, the capture of a man-eating tiger, and how Buck survived the attack of a spitting cobra (Buck and Anthony 1932).

A new tale related a plan to take the first two American bison to Asia; one destined for the Sultan of Johore, and the other for the Rangoon Zoo. The ship carrying the animals first docked in Yokohama where their arrival made the front page and resulted in a committee from the Tokyo Zoo hoping to buy one of the bisons. The bison that landed up in Rangoon thrived, proving Buck right that the animal was
adaptive. The Sultan’s died as a result of a goring by its pen-mate, a sambar deer. The bison received the fatal wound while lying down trying to regain its strength after the lengthy ocean voyage. Other chapters involved a discussion of traditional Asian medicine, the bird of paradise-mynah incident, facts about pythons, and how pig-tailed rhesus monkeys were trained to pick coconuts from trees 50 to 60 feet tall (Buck and Anthony 1932).

In another chapter, Buck declared that the most terrific battle that can occur between two living creatures is a fight matching two bull elephants since “the tusks of a full grown elephant constitute the most terrible weapon the jungle knows.” He emphasized that the “dethroning” of an elephant herd leader was also the “jungle’s greatest tragedy” since “almost without exception such an animal turns rogue—goes mad.” Deprived of his role “an awful loneliness seizes him. A demented outcast, he views everything and everybody as his enemy and tears through the jungle, uprooting trees and destroying whatever happens to be in his path. More than one luckless native has been pounded to a pulp by a rogue elephant,” who is capable of destroying an entire village (Buck and Anthony 1932).

Buck then told about the role of the cassowary in the Papuan Islands where each egg has the food value of four-dozen chicken eggs. The meat of the bird is also eaten, the plumes become part of costumes, the skin is turned into leather, and the dangerous middle toe is made into a spear. He also wrote how natives killed mother orangutans if they raided fruit trees, capturing the babies, caring and nursing them, and then selling the apes at a good price (Buck and Anthony 1932).

The hill men of Northern Assam and Sikkim provided the world with the finest songbirds. They take fledglings from nests and raise the birds by hand. These include the shama thrush, which Buck considered the best songster. To him there was no greater thrill than coming down the mountains through “gorgeous teagardens of the Himalayan foothills with a caravan of a thousand birds—singing and whistling” It was the loveliest of cargos, “a sort of feathered pipe organ that fills the air with music—unforgettable” (Buck and Anthony 1932).

Buck concluded that he had really commercialized a hobby since “invariably the man who enters the field starts with a natural love for animals, and often some animals are so much fun, are so roguish,
and possess so much sparkle they are difficult to part with.” He then reiterated his belief that tigers, the most formidable of the big cats, were “the animal kingdom’s closest thing to an inexhaustible theme.” Buck admired the tiger and claimed they were far more difficult to breed in captivity than lions or leopards. Making one of his most accurate prognostications, Buck claimed the problem interested him, because

if our mighty hunters who continue to bump off the tiger keep up their work—and there is no indication that they intend to stop—there may come a time when the great striped cat will be as scarce as the unicorn of fable. Then it will be necessary to know how to breed them in captivity if we are to keep the species alive (Buck and Anthony 1932: 200-201).

He claimed he had brought back alive sixty royal Bengal, Malayan, and Manchurian tigers and only killed one when trying to film the trapping of the cat.

Buck noted that he received countless letters from boys, young men, and “a sprinkling of adventurous damsels,” whose love for animals is so great, they wanted to accompany him “without pay to the remotest jungles of the earth and work, work, work, as long as they can be assured of a real close-up of animal life” (Buck and Anthony 1932: 217).

The publisher, Simon & Schuster, advertised the book as a “kicking, biting, thrilling consignment of animal yarns,” and it is all that, added Raymond Ditmars. Ditmars enjoyed the natural history and descriptions of remote places, especially the hunt for the anoa. But he found the narrative about the black leopard-- “the most diabolical” of all carnivores-- the most thrilling (Ditmars May 29, 1932). Other critics said the combination of Anthony, an eminent journalist, dramatist, and author with Buck resulted in a book “which of its kind cannot be excelled” (“Wild Cargo” June 15, 1932: 2).

R. L. Duffus reviewed the book for the New York Times, comparing it to Paul Eipper’s In My Zoo. To Buck, animals are a source of adventure as well as of profit, while Eipper attempts to find differences in animals rather than generalizing and deducing. Wild Cargo is a continuation of Buck’s first book. “One sees Mr. Buck as a rather masterful person, striding through the jungles with native beaters at his heels or native beaters preceding him, and rounding up elephants, water buffalo, tigers, honey bears, birds of paradise, and the like.” He feels that Anthony has rounded the stories out to fit magazine format.
“Certainly here and there they do smell more of midnight electricity and typewriter ribbon than of the jungle.” Yet, he does not doubt Buck had some great adventures, and is a “keen observer and a student of animal psychology and is not afraid of occasional bits of rather appalling realism.” He said some of the chapters, like those on Asiatic superstitions and tigers, contain enough action and suspense to make a dozen average jungle motion pictures. The book; however, uses all the tricks of the writer’s trade to keep the reader’s interest, which Duffus concludes were not really necessary. “Mr. Buck’s exploits and observations are a dish that needs no sauce” (Duffus May 29, 1932: BR4).

*Time* also reviewed *Wild Cargo* favorably, especially enjoying the battle between the black leopard and the shark, Little Tough Guy, the anoa, and the capture of the man-eating tiger, in which Buck proclaimed, “To hell with that law,” and baited the trap with a dead Malay (“Beastcatcher” June 6, 1932). *Wild Cargo* was released simultaneously with the debut of the motion picture version of *Bring ‘Em Back Alive*. The studio lavished tremendous Hollywood-style ballyhoo on the premier at the Mayfair Theater on Times Square. People lined up for a block, four-wide, trying to see the opening. The marquee was decorated with full-size, mechanized papier-mache elephants and tigers that waved their trunks and snapped their jaws (“*Bring ‘Em Back Alive*” June 21, 1932). The exploitation director for RKO pictures was Terry Turner, who devised the “jungle” atmosphere for the theater. In 1952 he initiated the highly successful system of motion picture promotion that included radio saturation selling and multiple city openings (“Terry Turner” Dec. 1, 1971: 501). Buck made personal appearances, and characteristically he unabashedly said, “For the first time people saw the face of the man who had brought to zoos and menageries of America the animals they had marveled at for so many years” (Buck and Fraser 1941).

*Variety* noted that the “Mayfair Theater got behind this with wonderful exploitation, including one of the most arresting visual displays Broadway has seen.” It halted pedestrians on both sides of Times Square and diverted enough passers-by to the box office to make a line running around the corner by 2 p.m. Friday. The critic doubted that without this exploitation there probably would have been “no clamor for admission,” although word-of-mouth would have been good. It needs good advertising since “it has only wild animals to sell, and there’s no novelty in that mere fact.” The fights are excellent, “but it most
emphatically needs pushing and plenty of it to get the grosses of which, with that advertising support, it is unquestionably capable. . . . The tiger fight drew applause and no doubt kids will scream and whistle.”

The uniqueness of the python fight scenes are “certainly conversational material,” but “pythons are nasty to look at, no two ways about that. And will the ladies with their traditional horror of snakes tolerate that? A large doubt is the reply.” In the battles between the big cats and crocodiles, “audiences will be in the position of rooting for the treacherous cats, at other moments the villains of the story” ("Bring ‘Em Back Alive" June 21, 1932).

The dialog makes tigers a menace, but it’s hard to cheer for a python. “Snakes are still snakes.” Buck’s running commentary “is stilted,” “leans toward some comedy,” and “is constantly reminding the audience that he was taking chances.” Professional adventurers should have learned from earlier films, the critic adds, “how absurd the constant-danger-all-around-us line of talk is.” He concluded that the film had potential since the camera work was good, the sound was fair, but the dubbed roars, annoying. It will get money but needs extensive exploitation; “questionable for women, but great for men and kids” ("Bring ‘Em Back Alive" June 21, 1932).

Mordaunt Hall in the New York Times found the movie expertly photographed and an adroitly assembled series of scenes that afford no end of excitement and snatches of intermittent fun. He enjoyed Buck’s breezy commentary. The film differed from other big game hunting movies in that the “hardy adventurer” wants to capture the animals alive rather than kill them. Clyde Elliott and the cameramen deserve credit since they keep the camera in the background and provide remarkably clear views of the confrontations (Hall June 17, 1932).

The Wall Street Journal asserted that Bring ‘Em Back Alive had “almost universal appeal. . . . establishing new box office records at the Mayfair for the current season.” The story is dramatic and fast moving. “There is nothing faked in this production. Every foot of the film was shot in the jungle. Every scene is real. There is humor and there is beauty. . . . but above all else, it is outstanding for its thrills. It is so packed with startling occurrences that it moves ahead with an almost bewildering speed” ("Universally Appealing" June 23, 1932).
In discussing the state of the film industry, *Time* reported that Merlin Aylesworthy, president of RKO, at a meeting of the Academy of Arts and Sciences, claimed that since 1928 attendance had fallen from 10 million per day to 6 million per day during the first four months of 1932, and that the film companies faced bankruptcy because of the “ridiculously large salaries” for stars and executives. *Bring ‘Em Back Alive* was cited as a bright spot. It had been inexpensive to make and would probably become one of the most profitable films of the year. In fact, a total of 82,660 people saw the film in its first seven days in New York, 6,300 more than the previous record holder, *Frankenstein* (Lehrer 2000). Clyde Elliott knew that people liked wild animal cinemas for the same reason they liked the tigers in the circus, so he saw to it there were plenty of fights; the most spectacular between a python and a tiger (“State of the Industry” June 27, 1932).

As the film opened around the country, more syndicated articles about Buck appeared such as, “Jungle Animals Dangerous Only When Aroused.” Written by a woman, perhaps to help widen Buck’s appeal, the article cited Buck as a leading authority on wild animals, birds, and reptiles. Buck explained that the wild beasts were not nearly so bad as they are painted. Most of them are just as capable of friendship and affection as any human being. It is only when they think they are in peril that they become dangerous (Genn Aug. 28, 1932).

Buck admitted that “many of the animals make delightful companions and are so full of affection and love you hate to part with them.” He especially remembered an orangutan and a baby elephant “that were just as loveable as any child.” Buck advised that he never, however, has seen animal gallantry. He was frequently asked to give examples of that virtue, “but it isn’t in their nature.” Females will provide food to their young until they can fend for themselves, then they are driven off (Genn Aug. 28, 1932).

*Bring ‘em Back Alive* also kept attracting box office breaking crowds wherever it opened. As one local paper claimed, “The screen has never offered more amazing adventure.” Its authenticity was stressed, and the hero “was one of the few real adventurers who continue to bare their chests in remote corners of a world that rapidly is becoming commercialized. Mr. Buck makes courage pay for itself by capturing wild animals and selling them to zoos and circuses.” The critic insisted that there were no
Hollywood sequences to pep up the film, nor were there any “half clad beaus and belles of Burma. . . $1 a
day extras with a Max Factor suntan.” The actual advertisement called Buck, “Lord of the Jungle. . . Hero
to Millions. . .Outstanding Man in the World’s Most Romantic Trade. He saw the Kings of the Jungle in
Mortal Combat! Things no civilized man had ever beheld. . . Frank Buck saw them in the perilous wild of

In October, Clyde Elliott, the director, decided to return to Malaya to shoot Man Eater. He would
make “that old devil jungle. . .with its green malarial swamps, leeches, giant spiders and snakes, a first
class villain” that constantly fights man. In just a year, he added, the jungle can take an untended
plantation and “swallow, gobble and devour it completely.” Three actors--two men and a girl--will invade
the “land of tigers, black panthers, pythons, giant orang-utans, crocodiles, elephants, wild boar, water
buffalo, and cobras.” Elliott planned to utilize several cameras of the Carl Akeley-type for panoramic
shots as well as smaller cameras for the tight locations (“Inspiring Wilds” Oct. 12, 1932: X5).

Modern Mechanix revealed how the spectacular battle between the tiger and the 30-foot python in
Buck’s movie was filmed. In the film, the battle ended in a draw, and the question of who won, “is the
question which is bothering thousands of folks. . . who have been vividly impressed by the incomparable,
spectacular scenes.” The 10-minute long sequence caused cries of “fraud and hoax.” Admittedly the
sound effects were recorded at the Bronx Zoo later and then dubbed in, but the movie itself was all filmed
in Malaya, often using an automatic DeVry camera in battle shots, and not at a Hollywood movie set, or
faked like Ingagi, where humans wore ape suits (“How Frank Buck Filmed” Nov. 1932).

Initially, a water hole, the only one for miles around, was selected. The natives had been stalking
a tiger all day, knowing it would show up at the waterhole eventually. But prior to that scene, the python
and crocodile fight took place at the same waterhole. In actuality, the croc was no match for the python,
who breaks its neck. The tiger, extremely thirsty, after being tracked all day, approached the waterhole.
The cameras were concealed in “nests made of the local foliage,” but how the tree cameras were erected,
remained “trade-secret lore, the sole property of Frank Buck” (“How Frank Buck Filmed” Nov. 1932).
The snake, somewhat exhausted from its earlier battle with the crocodile, retreated, but the tiger lunges at the python, grabs it by the jaw and attempts to bite the snake’s head off. The tiger seemed experienced, but the snake managed to get its coils around the tiger. The big cat successfully extracted itself, gathered its strength, and resumed the fight. But the python gets a stranglehold on him and “his grip was firmer and firmer, deadlier and deadlier.” The tiger kept biting at the python, seeking its head. Finally the python’s grip is broken and the tiger escapes (“How Frank Buck Filmed” Nov. 1932).

One reason, the article explained, for the tiger’s success was that the snake had already exerted a lot of strength in its duel with the crocodile, a battle the cat would surely have lost. The tiger was also able to sink its teeth in four parts of the python’s back. Subsequently, the python was easily lassoed and pulled into a crate, while the tiger, now desperately hungry and thirsty, ran into a trap after three more hours of pursuit (“How Frank Buck Filmed” Nov. 1932).

Nick Cavaliere, who did much of the camera work, said the whole venture took eight months of patient work, using six cameras, 36 miles of film, and over 400 flares for night photography. The crew also brought along four complete sets of developing equipment, extra lenses, and 500 flash bulbs. Cavaliere believed the entire process, much of it trial and error, would help future filmmakers working on location (“How Frank Buck Filmed” Nov. 1932).

**Becoming an Icon**

As 1933 began, Buck’s continued rise to stardom seemed assured. A “neat stunt” was devised in which the popular radio personalities, George Burns and Gracie Allen, searched for Gracie’s mythical brother, ‘Lodge.’ CBS allowed the comedy team to wander in and out of other programs, asking a flood of stupid questions about the missing brother. In mid-January, Buck joined them in their search for the missing, ‘Lodge’ (McEvoy Jan. 30, 1933: 7).

That same month, a spoof appeared in *Life* in which Buck’s popularity, the author was sure, “has already started a movement for more ‘fight to the death’ pictures.” He claimed to have the first preview, with Buck providing the running commentary, “as these colossally exciting episodes unroll before your hungry gaze.” The ‘expedition’ set out from City Hall with the destination The Bronx. In a backyard in
that borough, Buck trained his telescopic lens on “the fight of the century.” “Standing there cool and collected was a Frigidaire. Stealthily stalking it was the last of the Icemen—a brawny, hairy tribe, now practically extinct. I knew this was a fight to the finish.” The horrible ending was cut by the Board of Censors and ended in a draw (McEvoy Jan. 1933: 7).

But soon a new fight ensued between the Frigidaire, and “its mortal enemy an Installment Collector,” aided by the bank and a “pack of Receivers.” The final 200 feet of film has the Frigidaire run to pieces, dying in a cloud of ammonia gas. Then Buck, himself, faced the Installment Collector. He called in his gun-boy Slo-Fever who was behind three installments himself. Parodying his infamous line from Bring ‘em Back Alive, Buck claimed, “His skin was as black as the ace of spades, but his soul was even blacker.” The battle lasted for hours. As “this great saga of fang and claw, and tooth and hangnail draws to a close,” a cage swaying on the backs of eight intrepid Redcaps came into view, accompanied by the sound of growling and snapping. “Sure enough, there it is. A Frank Buck! The Installment Collector is Bringing Him Back Alive!” (McEvoy Jan. 1933: 7).

Buck came under more spoofing in a radio column. In critiquing the winter broadcast offerings, Al Jolson was likened to a bleating old Billy goat, while The Goldbergs were full of “unbearable simperings,” “wooden sentimentality,” and “mutton chop philosophy.” Buck’s program, “Bring ‘em Back Alive,” was broadcast every Sunday from 5:45 to 6:00 p.m. It was sponsored by A. C. Gilbert of toy-making fame who at the opening of each episode, “says something to the effect”:

‘Well Frank, how about that thrilling and dangerous tiger you were telling me about last week?’” This cleverly introduces Mr. Frank Buck, who is no better than the sponsor as a speaker, followed by a shaky dramatization of one of Buck’s adventures, with much roaring of wild animals. Bring ‘Em Back Alive’s contract is scheduled to end. It would be just like them to renew it” (Fisher Feb. 1933: 126).

Gilbert was a Yale graduate, and accomplished Olympic athlete, tying for the gold in the pole vault in 1908. He worked his way through college as a magician, and founded a toy company to manufacture magic sets. In 1913 he invented the Erector Set, selling 30 million of the toy by 1935. Gilbert was also a radio pioneer, who began transmitting in 1920 on WCJ from Erector Square in Connecticut, what would be the first sports interview show (“A. C. Gilbert”).
Buck also appeared in ads for Camel Cigarettes. He explained how Camels gave him the steady nerves he needed to follow “his strange occupation of capturing wild animals alive.” He endorsed them because

I never would have been able to populate half the zoos in this country, and save my own life a half dozen times by quick action if I didn’t have healthy nerves. I am a heavy smoker, as you noticed if you saw my picture, Bring ‘em Back Alive, but I can smoke all I want because I smoke Camels. They don’t upset my nerves (“It Takes Healthy Nerves” The Gettysburg Times Sept. 11, 1933).

Buck left in late 1933 to film his second movie, Wild Cargo. He returned in January, on the Italian liner Rex walking with a limp because of an infected knee wound he received trying to transfer a honey bear from a net to a cage. After spending a day with Grantland Rice, the sportswriter penned another poem Jungle Flashes inspired by his friend.

I saw a python gliding by,
    And through the matted, jungle grass,
With soundless step and blazing eye,
    I saw a Bengal Tiger pass.

And then a coal black leopard stood
    With baleful glim and bristling scroff.
As pounding through a nearby wood
    A savage rhino galloped off.

My blood ran cold—with half choked breath
    I saw the cobra’s lunging strike—
Fate’s hooded bearer of swift death,
    The mortal enemy of life.

A bird of paradise in flight—
    A jungle orchid by a stream.
Whose eerie beauty stabbed the light
    With ghostly darts of name and dream.

I saw the purple shadows fall
    At dusk along my home-bound path—
I heard the jungle’s twilight call,
    The savage saga of its wrath.

Weird, wailing notes of life and doom,
    From tree and bush—by limb and soil—
A medley born of gleam and gloom—
    Of orchid spray and cobra coil.

“Come wanderer”—it seemed to say:
In the article, Rice compared Jack Dempsey’s assertion that you couldn’t drag him into a football game, while the sportswriter concluded, you certainly could not get any football player to enter the ring with the heavyweight, with Roscoe Turner’s invitation to Buck to fly cross country with him. The aviator had won almost every air race and broken countless speed records, while Buck who had just described his battles with a cobra and python, exclaimed with eyes popping that “I wouldn’t take a chance like that for any money.” Turner countered that he wouldn’t get within 20 feet of a cobra or python for all the money there is. Rice concluded, “It all depends whose game it is” (Rice Jan. 9, 1934).

“King Kong”

During the 1932-33 movie season two of the top grossing pictures were Bring ’Em Back Alive, making $1,044,000--especially surprising for an independently produced film that was released by RKO--and at the top, King Kong, which made $1,856,000. Prior to these two blockbusters, RKO’s fortunes had been declining with 19 of 34 pictures finishing in the red in 1930-31, including the biggest loser, Academy Award winning western, Cimarron (Jewell 1994: 37).

King Kong opened on March 1, 1933 at both Radio City Music Hall and the Roxy. It was to be screened five times daily before a combined 10,000 seats, the most ambitious film opening to date. The Daily Mirror screamed, “Crashing into Radio City tomorrow at 10:30 a.m.!!! Bringing you the wildest thrills since pictures came to the world!” (“King Kong” Advertisement. Mar. 1, 1933).

The film had been shot entirely inside a studio by co-producers and directors, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, utilizing the jungle locale footage from Shoedsack’s, The Most Dangerous Game (1932). The story behind the film reflects much on the real-life atmosphere of discovery and adventure that permeated the 1920s. The leader of the expedition to Kong Island is the brash, fearless, arrogant, adventurous filmmaker, and movie producer, Carl Denham. Lehrer contends that Denham was based on Buck, but most analysts believe Denham was based on Cooper, while Shoedsack is Jack Driscoll. Cooper left the U. S. Naval Academy to join the hunt for Pancho Villa in 1916. In World War I,
he became a flying ace, but he was captured and placed in a prison camp. Following the war, Cooper, “an adrenaline junkie of phenomenal appetite”, according to his biographer, worked as a crime reporter for the *New York Times*, joined the American Geographical Society, and became part of the Edward A. Salisbury Expedition to the South Seas. Cooper then teamed with newsreel cameraman, Shoedsack, who had been the expedition photographer. Their motto became, “Difficult, distant, and dangerous.” Together they made two great classic documentaries, *Grass: A Nation’s Battle for Life* (1925), chronicling the annual migration of the Bakhtiani tribe across the rugged Persian landscape, and *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness* (1927) shot in the jungles of Thailand. The last film was part ethnography, and part fiction, showing the challenges one family faced. Gradually the duo’s films became more and more fictionalized (and profitable), culminating in their great masterpiece, the entirely fictional, *King Kong*. The success of *King Kong* gained Cooper the presidency of RKO. But with the outbreak of World War II, he resigned, joined the Flying Tigers, later returned to the United States, and in 1952 launched the wide-screen sensation, Cinerama (Vaz 2005).

A great deal of popular culture was based on the discoveries being made by explorers and paleontologists. It was “pretty easy to imagine that if you don’t know what you’re going to find, you could find anything” (Movshovitz Dec. 11, 2005). One such influence that helped spawn *King Kong*: the adventurer and explorer William Douglas Burden who would go on to establish the Department of Animal Behavior at the American Museum of Natural History. Burden, the son of a New York iron and steel magnate, had been taken as a child to the northern wilds of Quebec, and after graduating from Harvard, searched for treasure and adventure in Alaska, Indochina, and South and Central America. (Campbell Nov. 16, 1978: D19).

During a hunting expedition in the Gobi desert, Burden met a kindred spirit in Roy Chapman Andrews, the intrepid explorer and paleontologist of the American Museum of Natural History. Both spurned offers by oil and mining companies, claiming expeditions should be objective, scientific, and without the taint of commercialism. Andrews considered Burden, a fellow “primitive at heart.”
Burden then began the serious study of geology, paleontology, and physiography at Columbia, eventually launching his own expedition to the Dutch East Indies to film and capture the legendary *Varanus komodoensis* for the American Museum of Natural History’s new Hall of Reptiles, donating $15,000 of his own money (Burden 1927).

In his book, *Dragon Lizards of Komodo*, Burden describes his arrival on the island and his first encounter with the dragons.

Although it is only a small island, twenty-two miles long by twelve miles in width, it fulfilled my wildest dreams. With its sharp serrated skyline, its gnarled mountains, its mellow sunwashed valleys, and its giant pinnacles that bind themselves like fangs to the sky, it looked more fantastic than the mountains of the moon. . . . We seemed to see a prehistoric landscape, --a lost world—unfold before us. Everywhere, great gubbong palms stood outlined against the blue. It is a melancholy land, a fitting abode for the weird creatures that lived in the dawn of things, and, as such, it seemed to be a suitable haunt for the predatory dragon lizards. . . .

Late at night I heard tomotoms beating across the water; incessant, monotonous, rhythmic beats, thrilling and barbarous. . . . And later still, at 9:30 a.m. at the foot of the pinnacle country on a gentle sloping talus cone, covered with short grass and a few palm trees, I saw my first dragon lizard in the open. He was a monster, --huge and hoary. I scrambled up to a point of vantage, taking great care, however, not to expose myself, as the eyesight of these beasts is much keener than that of deer. The lizard was working his way slowly down the hill, so that a black shadow preceded the black beast as he came. It was a perfectly marvelous sight,-- a primeval monster in a primeval setting. . . . (Burden 1927: 101, 103, 112).

The enterprise was a great success when Burden returned with twelve dead specimens for the museum and two living dragons for the Bronx Zoo. Attendance zoomed to an average of 30,000 a day at the zoo, with 88,000 men, women, and children lining up to see the giant reptiles on the first Sunday they were exhibited in September, 1926.

The migration of the huge saurians to this country is the climax of one of the most romantic quests of science. A world of savants had been stirred to an excited search for them. Numerous expeditions had been sent out to bring them back, dead or alive, as true specimens of a dragon, and proof that a universal myth was based on reality. Two American groups of scientists had joined the hunt and one of them succeeded in finding the fabled species, capturing two animals alive, and making New York the possessor of the two largest specimens of the giant monitor in captivity.

It all began with what appeared to be wild rumors among the wild tribes inhabiting the islands of the Malay Archipelago. Back in the native villages. . . .gruesome tales were told to travelers about a strange species of land crocodile, . . . sharp-eyed and agile, powerful and fleet, a man-eater emitting smoke from its mouth. The mere mention of the beast struck terror into the hearts of the Malays. These rumors reached naturalists who promptly dismissed them with a gesture of contempt, since they knew of no authentic record of the animals’ existence (Rich Sept. 19, 1926).
But the Komodo Dragons fared poorly. Lethargic, they bore no resemblance to the aggressive monitors of their native habitat where Burden had filmed them, free and wild, in a veritable primeval scenario. Writing about capturing the largest dragon he had discovered, Burden called it “so large and villainous of aspect that I trembled with instinctive revulsion” (Burden 1927).

All of Burden’s film was unstaged, except shots of him and his wife in the blind. However, he chose to photograph the dragons when they were in the most dinosaur-like poses. Burden hoped that he could match the success of the 1925 blockbuster, *The Lost World*. Although his footage was considered too scientific and educational to be a popular attraction, it did provide inspiration for Merian Cooper. In 1928, Burden went north to Quebec to film the Ojibway in *The Silent Enemy*, hoping to preserve a record of primitive America. In the film, Burden staged animal scenes he insisted were “absolutely truthful from a natural history point of view.” He used methods like starving a mountain lion and bear, placing them in the same enclosure, and providing them with a deer carcass. Meanwhile, Ilia Tolstoy, the grandson of the Russian novelist, led a special six-month, 1,000-mile expedition to film the climax, the great caribou migration which he felt would parallel Cooper and Shoedsack’s elephant stampede in *Chang*. Unfortunately, they missed the migration and were forced to substitute reindeer for the scenes. Although, the final version of *The Silent Enemy* was well-received artistically, it was not a commercial success causing Burden Films to fall into bankruptcy (Mitman 1994: 54).

Burden then established Beacon Films in 1930 with C. V. Whitney, Marshall Field, and Kermit Roosevelt on the board. Cooper and Burden, the vice presidents, decided in 1931 to obtain a photographic record of the mountain gorilla. They hoped to capture a gorilla family, keep them in an enclosure and feed them their natural diet. But when Cooper began to feel increasingly uncomfortable about being in debt to his and Burden’s friends, he joined RKO as an assistant producer and was given the green light to produce a gorilla picture. Cooper decided to set it on an island, just like Burden had described Komodo. He originally wanted to obtain actual gorilla footage to combine with enlarged footage of the Komodo dragons to create combat scenes (Mitman 1994: 55).
Cooper insisted that Carl Denham, the explorer-naturalist-photographer, was “a deliberate combination of you [Burden], Shoedsack, and me.” Even the conclusion was based on Burden’s explanation that the two Komodo dragons, which had drawn great crowds at the Bronx Zoo, were killed by civilization, depicted in *King Kong* by two icons of modernity; airplanes and the Empire State Building (Mitman 1994).

Gregg Mitman, in *Reel Nature*, concludes that *King Kong*

> Hyperbolized many of the popular elements that had made travelogue-expedition films of the 1920s successful: the mystery, intrigue, and danger of unknown lands; the violence and raw sexuality of nature waiting to explode; the thrill and adventure of capturing and taming wild beasts. *King Kong* was a stunning climax to the brief reign of the travelogue adventure film. Frank Buck and Clyde Beatty might continue to attract Great Depression audiences with their thrilling, death-defying capture of animals in films like *Bring 'Em Back Alive, Wild Cargo*, and *The Lost Jungle*, but only by creating on a Hollywood set, the same sensationalism and melodrama manufactured in *King Kong*. In Hollywood, artifice had surpassed nature, taking the spectacle of death and the exotic beyond anything the drama of ‘real’ nature could offer (Mitman 1994: 57-58).

Originally Edgar Wallace, a best-selling British mystery and adventure author was hired to write the script of *King Kong*. He quickly produced a first draft in which Danby Denham, a big game hunter somewhat like Buck, is sailing from Africa with a cargo of wild animals, which he deems inadequate. The captain tells him about a sea serpent off Vapour Island. They sail there and instead capture an 18-foot tall gorilla. The gorilla is put on display in Madison Square Garden, where a jealous female animal trainer locks the female lead in a tiger cage. Kong helps her escape and battles the tigers. He eventually dies atop the Empire State Building. Unfortunately before he could polish the script, Wallace died of pneumonia. The next writer, James Creelman, called Kong the “Eighth Wonder,” and changed the lead into Carl Denham, a movie producer. Kong was now displayed in Yankee Stadium, and the aspect of beauty and the beast was further developed, with the contention that the more brutal Kong is, the more women will cry at his demise at the end. The final writer was Ruth Rose, who revised the characters to be even more like Cooper and Shoedsack (Morton 2005). In one interview, Cooper imagined himself as King Kong, deep, human, formidable, while also loveable. The Empire State Building reminds Kong of the highest mountain on Skull Island that provides him a way of coming from complete disenfranchisement to a state
of power. New technology is used to kill the giant ape, the great embodiment of the wild. In fact, Cooper and Shoedsack are themselves seen in one of the planes attacking Kong (Movshovitz Dec. 11, 2005).

Burden went on to construct the largest oceanarium in the world in 1937. With the backing of Whitney, the oil and railroad magnate, co-founder of PanAm, and owner of a storied thoroughbred stable, and Tolstoy, the park, costing an estimated $500,000 would be the first to house various species together (Durso Nov. 23, 1937: B8). One of the community tanks was 100 feet long and 18 feet deep, while the circular tank was 75 feet in diameter and 15 feet deep. By 1941 the tanks housed some 50,000 fish representing 3,500 species. Thinking like a motion picture man, Burden hoped that Marine Studios would be of “intrinsic dramatic value to arouse admiration, wonder, or curiosity.” People would sit in the dark to view the tank through one of 200 portholes (Dean Mar. 9, 1941: SM 10). In 1938, MGM agreed to shoot a Pete Smith short subject, Marine Circus, with pretty girls swimming with porpoises, a male diver feeding the manta ray and shark, and concluding with dolphins performing acrobatic leaps to obtain fish rewards.

Marine Studios came to attract both tourists and scientists. Following the war, advanced naval research, Jacques Cousteau’s invention of SCUBA, the publication of Rachel Carson’s, The Sea Around Us, all combined to spur interest, further invigorated by Walt Disney’s adaptation of Jules Verne’s, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. By 1953, Marine Studios enjoyed attendance figures of 700,000 visitors annually, willing to pay the $2 admission fee. The following year they expanded to the west coast, opening Marineland of the Pacific, which averaged 5,000 people per day during its first year.

The star attraction of Marine City, was Flippy, a two year old dolphin captured in an estuary who was trained by Adolph Frohn, a fourth generation wild animal trainer. The dolphin became the iconic animal of marine based parks. Without them a park was doomed, and as Burden had discovered, without dolphins trained to conform to popular tastes and values, the same was true (Mitman 1994).
Buck Exploits the “Jungle” Craze

Even if Carl Denham, as Lehrer postulated, was not actually based on Buck, Buck’s success and popular recognition continued to grow. By February, ads in *Variety* began to promote Van Beuren-RKO’s, *Wild Cargo*.

After months of perilous adventure in the jungle, Frank Buck had his Wild Cargo ready to bring back alive to America, when bedlam broke loose in the thatched shelter room of the stockade where the animals were crated and caged. Monkeys screamed! Roars and cries pierced the air! King Cobra was loose! The hissing, spitting demon of the crawling world in whose fangs lurked certain death! Unarmed, his back to the wire and picket wall, his exit blocked by the hooded giant, coiled and ready to strike, Frank Buck ripped off his coat and like a matador baiting an enraged bull waited for the perilous moment when he or the cobra would strike first. Why is it that Nature saves her biggest thrills for Frank Buck? (“Buck Faces Death” Advertisement. Feb. 20, 1934: 32).

The blurb was accompanied by a full-page drawing of Buck and the cobra that the reader was assured, was sketched from an actual “frame of the film by famous artist, J. Clinton Shepherd. There’s no time for ‘stills’ in a world filled with thrills!” (“Buck Faces Death” Advertisement. Feb. 20, 1934: 32).

A second ad from the same issue showed Buck having lassoed a “man-eater” and pulling it out of a pit. The copy read that,

In his great picture, *Bring ‘Em Back Alive*, Frank Buck gave spellbound audiences their first sight of the jungle at war with itself, with its thrilling fights and survival of the strongest. In *Wild Cargo*, he shows the jungle at war with men. Not the war of guns and cruelty but the battle of wits between Man and his cunning antagonists” (*Variety* Feb. 20, 1934: 32).


Buck’s recent biographer Steven Lehrer writes that by 1934, his “popularity and fame were awesome.” Buck replaced *Amos and Andy*, when the popular radio actors took their first vacation in five years. “With his pleasant tenor voice, inflected by a hint of Texas, he was the most in-demand guest on every radio show in the United States” (“Radio” stevenlehrer.com).

In March, a new series of articles by Buck and an un-named co-author began to appear in *Collier’s*. The first described the capture of a clouded leopard, “by far the most rare and difficult to catch
of the leopards. It is extremely scarce even in its natural habitat,” and is seldom spotted even by those indigenous to its habitat (Buck Mar. 24, 1934: 9).

On March 26, 1934, Buck reached the pinnacle of his career according to Edward Anthony. Buck, he said, was not really truly irascible and testy, but he never fully understood the role of a collaborator, and the two split at the conclusion of the *Wild Cargo* project. The film was surprisingly chosen to premier at the new Radio City Music Hall, which had opened only a year earlier and generally assured the future profitability of a film when it opened nationwide. *Wild Cargo*, proved a spectacular success, and Buck became the toast of the town, shaking hands and signing autographs for the most famous people in New York. In his memoirs, Anthony recalled that when he first met Buck, he was broke, discouraged, and thirsting for recognition. He had said to Eugene Katz, “Someday I want to know how it feels to be a celebrity.” Now, at the age of fifty, he knew (Anthony 1960: 270).

In Buck’s, *All in a Lifetime*, he bragged that between his first two movies, “the whole American public apparently wanted to see and hear personally the man who ‘brought ’em back alive.’” He added that he was “deluged with offers to speak at luncheon clubs all over the United States.” “Not being a scientist, I made my talks as informal as possible and tried to answer any questions about animals at the end.” A favorite query was, where do you find cannibals? Buck always replied that to the best of his knowledge headhunters still existed, but not cannibals (Buck and Fraser 1941: 217).

*Wild Cargo* was well-received. The *New York Daily Mirror* movie critic claimed Buck, “has come back to civilization to report that the jungles have their ready-made scenarios, as lurid as any turned out by the busy-plot concocters of Hollywood. The animals by nature assume character roles.” A baby rhino is the heavyweight comedian, a Bengal tiger; the aristocrat, the villain is a black leopard, the gangster; the king cobra, the heavies; the elephants, the cavemen; the orangutans, and the langurs and honey bears; the comedy relief. Buck insisted that, “The jungle characters are timid and wild, good and bad, bully and sissy, coy and ferocious, but whatever they are they are true to their own selves before the camera. They naturally evolve their own plots” The anthropomorphization of animals in Buck’s films anticipated Disney’s *True-Life Adventures* (Johanesen March 25, 1934).
In another publicity story, Buck asserted he found life in Manhattan too peaceful. “I have all the luxuries and lots of leisure. But when a fellow who’s been going to jungle country so long as I have, he finds it in his blood. I wish right now I was back in my little palm-thatched hut. I can’t possibly get away until next Fall, but as soon as I can I’ll start out again.” If and when he retired, he would like a farm where he could keep all the “nice, harmless pets” to which he had become attracted to in his journeys; the rare beautiful birds and monkeys. “But even then, I suppose I’d get the old urge and about once a year I’d have to leave for India or some other far-off place” (“Rarin’ to Bring ‘Em Back Alive” Mar. 26, 1934: 6).

The ads in *Variety* were stepped up to coincide with the opening of Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus in Madison Square Garden. The ads screamed that Frank Buck’s *Wild Cargo* would be “under the big top at Radio City.” “Frank Buck is Back Alive. Back from the land of a thousand deaths to share his thrills with you! His jungle circus is the biggest show on Earth. . . . No wonder this dauntless prince of danger holds a world of men and women spellbound!” The ad continued,

Get the money, Showmen! . . . Frank Buck saves the biggest box-office thrills for showmen who know how to sell a circus. Get your copy of the sensational campaign book now ready! Jammed and crammed with practical show stuff! Ads, publicity, features! See the posters! Two styles of everything! See the fronts! See the displays! See the ballyhoo stunts! Get the money, Showmen! Sell a circus, like a circus (“Wild Cargo” March 27, 1934: 24-25).

A critic asserted that “there have, of course, been other animal pictures, so-called, since the Martin Johnsons and similar pioneers first invaded jungle demesnes with gun and camera. But, while the stampeding herds, the brute battles, the clowning simians and shudder-inducing reptiles are all in evidence, this one meets the disclaimer of being different.” Buck and director, Armand Denis, decided not to follow the beaten path and instead follow the story of the “mode and method” of capturing the “ferocious beasts that roam through the eternal darkness of the reeking, tropical, green hell of the jungle.” The picture was beautifully photographed, Buck narrates, and there are the “eerie noises” of the jungle at night. “And with all, there is a certain wild beauty to the wilderness that makes Mr. Buck’s nostalgia for the jungle understood and appreciated. The film is thrilling entertainment and a liberal education in natural history and the capturing of *Wild Cargo.*” Buck also appeared in person on the Music Hall stage along with the symphony, singers, and Rockettes (Crewe March 28, 1934: 14).
The New York World Telegram reported that in his personal appearance, Buck explained that he tried to make *Wild Cargo* a record of his Malayan trip, free of any dubious material and not give skeptics the world over a “chance to write and ask him how, when, and where this or that scene was made.” The picture, the critic concluded, was not only a fascinating record of an exciting journey into the Asiatic jungles but also a “valuable educational document” (Boehnel March 30, 1934).

The review in the *New York Daily Mirror* again emphasized how much men would enjoy the movie. The photography was “dazzlingly beautiful, particularly a dark blue sequence representing the jungle at night.” The narrative, written by the popular author of circus books Courtney Ryley Cooper “was terse, substantial and lit with humor” (Johaneson March 30, 1934: 25).

Kate Cameron of the *News* gave the picture 3 ½ stars, since she deemed it an excellent follow-up to “his first great movie, *Bring ‘Em Back Alive*, the exhibition of which was one of the most important picture events of the Summer of 1932.” The only reason it missed four stars was the plethora of wild animal pictures exhibited on the Broadway theater screens within the last two years, “wearing off the novelty.” Cameron also revealed that Buck confessed that his live appearances after the movie made him more frightened than he ever had been in his life (Cameron March 30, 1934: 52).

Variety was more caustic in its review. “The intrepid Buck has become more picture-wise in the two years that have passed since *Alive,*” the critic noted that technically and production-wise the film is smoother, but “seems too often to follow a script instead of nature. Buck has changed psychologically into more of an actor doing more mugging.” Although the photography looked like the ‘McCoy,’ “the frequently dubbed synthetic sound is obviously phony.” Buck, himself, “looks rather heavy around the middle in his Boy Scout get up” (“Wild Cargo” April 3, 1934).

The methods used in filming Buck’s pictures raised many questions. Buck was asked point blank by a *New York Times* reporter, “When you capture animals and put them in an enclosure, aren’t you staging fights for the screen that would never have taken place if the animals were left to themselves?” Buck, reportedly snorted and chuckled, replying that “only a gang from Hollywood would do a thing like that.” The question was a good one, since Buck’s books and articles always preceded his movies,
obviating reenactments of prior adventures. It is a question still asked today in conjunction with the scripting of wildlife television and motion picture productions (“Emperor of the Jungle” April 1, 1934: X4).

Buck, of course, defended the process. “Get this straight, I’m not a picture man. I’m a professional hunter. Any films I make are incidental to the main purpose of my expedition, which is to catch wild animals for the zoos. I have an arrangement with the Van Beuren people whereby they send cameramen and technicians with me to see what pictures they can get. That’s all there is to it.” Wild Cargo, he added, “simply shows the various methods I use to catch wild animals. “Naturally, the boys get some good pictures, because they follow me wherever I go. That time the python grabbed me by the shoulder and started to squeeze, they were right behind me and got a good shot of me freeing one arm and shooting the python’s head” (“Emperor of the Jungle” April 1, 1934: X4).

After recounting a few scenes, Buck reiterated that he was not a picture man, but a hunter. “They sent a director along with me, but he might just as well have been an errand boy for all the help he was to me. I’m not trying to fake anything. That stuff’s for Hollywood, not me.” At the end of the interview, Buck told the reporter “the ten jungle beasts he considered the fiercest, in order of ferocity.” They were the tiger, black leopard, water buffalo, the king cobra, the sloth bear, the rogue elephant, Russell’s viper, the black spitting cobra, the rhinoceros, and the crocodile (“Emperor of the Jungle” April 1, 1934: X4).

Variety had found the python scene obviously staged, “since the python is photographed slinking into its hiding place before it grabs the hunter’s arm in its jaws and starts to coil. It conveniently grabs Buck’s left wing, giving the Hunter the opportunity to kill it with a right-handed revolver” (“Wild Cargo” April 3, 1934).

Actually, the director of the film Armand Denis went on to become a pioneer in commercial wildlife television. After fighting in World War I, he studied chemistry at Oxford, but in 1926 following his invention of the automatic system of volume control, he decided to make filmmaking—especially involving his first love, nature and travel—his career. His first feature film was shot in Bali, and landed him the job as director of Wild Cargo. After directing a number of commercial films in the 1940s, Denis
and his wife filmed the feature, *King Solomon's Mines* in 1950 in order to gain the finances to produce their own picture, *Below the Sahara*. When the BBC saw this production, they underwrote, *Flying Wild Animals*, which in turn led to a long run series, *On Safari*. In 1966, Denis was hired as cinematographer for National Geographic’s, *The Hidden World of Insect* (“Armand Denis”).

Later in April, Buck and his “svelte, mink-coated red-headed wife,” took the Twentieth Century Limited to Chicago for the film’s debut there. Buck made the “dramatic revelation” that he had worked ten years in Chicago, doing almost anything for nickel tips and saving enough money to “embark for dangerous lands in his unique profession of wild-animal captor.” Buck’s wife admitted she accompanied him on all his trips but stayed in luxury hotels in Calcutta or Singapore. She also was the only living person who could call him “Frankie,” and get away with it (Diamond April 9, 1934: 1).

The *Chicago News*’ film critic called *Wild Cargo* jammed with “incidents.” But unlike *Bring ‘Em Back Alive*, this picture had only one fight. Perhaps, he speculated, they were avoided since imitators have “stuffed their thrillers with animal fights.” But the critic also noted that the “strapping, broad-shouldered Buck, looks as if he could step, with a change of makeup, into the role of a movie ‘heavy’” (Rodenbach April 9, 1934: 32).

The *Collier’s* series continued with a description of how elephants are captured in Ceylon in “Bull Strength.” Buck insisted that there was still a great deal of romance surrounding elephants (Buck April 7, 1934: 16). Meanwhile, a full-page syndicated story appeared nationwide. The lead-in to “The Thrill of Facing a Raging Rhino” claimed animals provide “eternal satisfaction” for the “intrepid hunter-showman,” whose enthusiasm has remained undimmed. Buck contended he took no unnecessary risks, “My life in the darkest interior in the Malay jungle, is really safer than crossing Times Square in New York.” However, when Buck was seized by the python while filming *Wild Cargo*, he quickly shouted out, “Picture,” to the two cameramen, Nick Cavaliere and Leroy Phelps. “It made a gorgeous scene” and left Buck with only a few strained muscles and a slight fracture of his ribs (Buck and Ingersoll April 8, 1934: F1).

*Time* magazine also questioned the veracity of the movie.
Purporting to be a photographic record of the latest Buck expedition to gather a shipload of creatures for the St. Louis Zoo, *Wild Cargo* is hardly more than an adroitly staged, carefully written continuation of *Bring 'Em Back Alive*. As a wild animal act, its realistic background gives it its chief advantage over a circus. But it makes Buck’s profession seem at once too exciting and too simple.

The 45 year-old [he was 50] has crossed the Pacific forty times and made five trips around the world. He maintains a complete stocked base in Singapore, and uses a network of native scouts to report the appearance of any rare or curious creatures. In Manhattan he has a handsome apartment in the Park Central Hotel (“The New Pictures” April 9, 1934).

Meanwhile, small town newspapers deviated little from the formulaic press releases as *Wild Cargo* opened across the country.

The *Collier’s* series continued through September. In May, Buck related the story of Lal, who was “more than a hard-working conscientious Hindu boy—Lal was a friend. . . who remained loyal both to his family and Sahib Buck until the bitter end.” Another episode took the reader on a Sunday stroll through the jungle. “Twenty years of jungle experience have only sharpened his interest in the life that teems there and the death that lurks in the green shadows and flashes in the open sky. . . . The struggle for existence knows nothing about holidays.” Buck insisted that more went on around you than ever had in the sawdust rings of a circus. He also told stories of romance in the islands of the Sulu Sea in the next installment. The “Bearer of the Tooth” told of the amazing closeness and understanding that developed between a giant bull elephant and his wizened little mahout. The final episode dealt with Buck’s experience in Borneo with what was believed to be the biggest crocodile in the world, a true “naga” or dragon. Buck managed to capture the 25-foot reptile after a terrific battle, but unbeknownst to him the Dyaks tightened the ropes trussing the crocodile for transport to such an extent they cut off circulation to the animal’s legs. They then proceeded to torture the crocodile that had terrorized their villages. Buck finally mercifully killed that great “naga.” “And this is probably the only time on record where a man nearly shed tears over a crocodile” (Buck May 5: 21, May 19: 22, June 9: 26, July 21: 17, and Sept. 8, 1934: 15).

Buck further capitalized on his popularity by opening one of the principal exhibitions at the 1934 Century of Progress in Chicago. The feature attraction of his “impenetrable jungle” was a monkey mountain in the form of a 65-foot volcano with a smoldering crater at the top, and more than a thousand
monkeys “chattering up and down its sides.” The exhibit would cover 33,000 square feet in the Midway. “Prowling in winding caverns in the base of the mountain, and hiding behind natural brush set in the mountain side, will be others of the jungle world.” Although some of the cheetahs, anteaters, gila monsters, ocelots, iguanas, and jackals would be caged, the goal was to have as many as possible “actually on the prowl.” Buck hoped to capture the atmosphere of his jungle camp with natural surroundings similar to plans for the new Brookfield Zoo (“Fair to Show” March 6, 1934 and “Frank Buck to have Jungle” May 2, 1934: 13).

In the spring of the following year, Buck’s third book hit the stores, co-authored by Columbia University graduate Ferrin Fraser who before his death at 65 in 1969, wrote more than 500 magazine articles, along with the radio scripts for Little Orphan Annie, Lights Out, Nick Carter, Terror and Suspense (“Ferrin Fraser” Apr. 2, 1969: 47). It was entitled, Fang and Claw, the name Buck had fought for with Anthony, and included many of the stories that had already appeared in Collier’s. Buck wrote in his introduction that his previous books had never told about the fascinating, exotic, and sometimes hostile people he had met in the East. Some of them could be likened to bull elephants while others were similar to mouse deer. They might display the weakness of the Raffili squirrels, yet if necessary demonstrate the strength of the tiger.

My theory is that humans as well as the animals of the jungle have fangs and claws. These experiences of mine, many of which I saw with my own eyes will I think, bear out my idea that the best or worst of us will someday bare our fangs and claws if we are transplanted—like that imaginary black leopard—to the strange and mysterious Far East (Buck and Fraser 1935: intro).

In a later chapter, he observed that, “animals, however, strike with fang and claw to live and protect themselves, men very often strike for no reason at all.” But after twenty years he still loved the jungle.

It’s savage, wild, ruthless; it’s dangerous as only poisonous malarial swamps and animal-infested forests can be dangerous, but it’s rugged, virile and strong as the earth it grows from. Anyone with red blood in his veins can’t help but thrill to untracked territory, and feel awe and respect for a jungle that stretches hundreds of miles around him, parts of it unknown and unexplored, knowing that perhaps he is the first man to set his foot on this particular patch of turf (Buck and Fraser 1935: Ch. 1).

He romantically described his Sunday walks, and repeated the story of the giant crocodile, claiming that he detested “these aquatic reptiles more than any creature that swims, crawls, runs, or flies
in the jungle country.” He called them sly as serpents and fierce as tigers, and kill more natives than all
the jungle cats combined. Their tails, hard as iron, can strike stunning blows, knocking a victim
unconscious, while their jaws make a shark’s seem small (Buck and Fraser 1935).

Intermingled with the animal stories were what he deemed as odd occurrences typical of the East,
such as the belief in “were-tigers.” He described what he deemed the most beautiful area in the world; the
Borneo coast, where the Sulu Sea’s crystal waters reveal thousands of fish, as well as containing some of
the most magnificent islands he had ever seen (Buck and Fraser 1935).

In recounting the story of the fifteen foot tall, seven ton bull elephant used in parades in Ceylon,
where the animal had the honor of bearing the tooth of the Buddha, and its mahout, Buck philosophized
that “so while stories of lions and lambs are a little difficult to believe, I find it easy to believe stories of
men and animals; because the love of a man for an animal is only surpassed by the love of an animal for a
man” (Buck and Fraser 1935: 126).

He further romanticized his job by describing the beauty of his jungle camp and “the medley of
miraculous sound and shadow and golden light that hails each new day. This chapter had appeared in
January in Collier’s and was entitled, “Never a Dull Moment.” After a hard day, Buck would retire to his
cot, where he could “see a few stars, clear and blue through the jungle leaves in a sky of velvet. An hour
later the forests will be bathed in white Malayan moonlight—gorgeous, eerie, silver. But I shan’t see it. I
shall be sleeping the sleep of a tired animal collector in my jungle camp” (Buck and Fraser 1935).

Alternating between the melodramatic and romantic to the farcical, Buck described his friendship
and the tragic end of Lal, his loyal assistant, and then launched into a description of the filming of jungle
movies and animal fights. He claimed that the first animal fight was filmed by the Pathe Freres. Rulers
and sultans often captured young water buffalo and trained them to fight. One such fight was staged
pitting the buffalo against a black leopard. When the two supposed adversaries ignored each other, some
men tried to anger the leopard by striking it with boards. The cat attacked and killed its torturer and fled
into the jungle. Buck then took credit for the “greatest animal fight ever filmed” referring to the battle
between a black leopard and python. He insisted that his rule was to make pictures that were authentic.
animal movies, it is the animals themselves that are the actors—“bad actors, some of them, dangerous, and as temperamental as any Hollywood beauty. They make their own plot and story as they go along, and they are likely to change any scenario you’ve hoped for, suddenly and without warning” (Buck and Fraser 1935).

Buck then described the difficulty for many species to make the transition from the wild to captivity. Many do not adapt well to cage-life, he admitted, and providing the proper food can be a challenge. A collector had to be able to nurse animals, keep them warm and dry, and even then the mortality rate is fairly high (Buck and Fraser 1935).

Buck believed that his exhibit at the Century of Progress had been very successful. The Frank Buck Jungle Camp was built with authentic material imported from the East. A complete camp was reproduced with one or two boys actually living on the site. Buck said this was the first time he showed a complete animal exhibit by himself. The public threw thousands of bags of peanuts and popcorn at the 400 rhesus monkeys residing on the 75-foot high rock ‘mountain.’ The exhibit included leopards, tigers, bears, bintorungs, a baby elephant, rare birds, and a 14-foot cobra—the biggest specimen on display in the world. In addition, two of the largest pythons ever exhibited could be seen, each of which was 30 feet long and weighing over 300 pounds. Buck found that the giant orangutan with its eight-and-a-half foot arm span attracted as many as 85,000 people a day. The ape was kept in a temperature-regulated cage that was guarded continually to prevent the public from feeding the animal, since he needed a special diet to survive (Buck and Fraser 1935).

Buck concluded by asserting that the true king of the jungle was the “magnificent bull elephant, his herd behind him, his head and trunk high, ready to charge with his five tons of power any foe that may be threatening.” The greatest of Ceylon’s bull elephants was Sahib; “strong as an Indian mountain, and brave as a regiment of ghurkas.” Nothing disgusted Buck more than when a “puny little nobleman, who had bought his title, could go into the jungle with a high-powered rifle in his weak hands and kill a bull elephant. These great herd leaders of the elephants are very rare. They are, to my way of thinking, the most magnificent of all animals” (Buck and Fraser 1935 and Buck Jan. 26, 1935: 28).
The *New York Times* reviewer called Buck “a careful hero who is determined not to become a bore.” Buck, he added, “knows listener psychology. No freewheeling Munchausen, he makes a story good but not too good. He is one of the rare articulate adventurers who has the good sense not to be forever asserting that he is the fellow who shot the bear.” Most of the tales in *Fang and Claw* related other people’s good and bad deeds. Some copied Mark Hellinger’s style, while other stories, were influenced by Somerset Maugham. The critic noted that the stock market crash had caused the wild-animal business to be “smashed pretty flat.” Zoos lost their appropriations, interest in private zoos almost vanished, and circuses hesitated in investing in animals. The only market left was for monkeys needed for medical experimentation (Van Gelder April, 28, 1935: BR5).

**Maintaining his Fame**

But Buck had diversified enough that his fame was assured, as he appeared in motion pictures, on the radio, at expositions, and in comic strips. In the spring, syndicated Broadway columnist O. O. McIntyre reported that Buck planned to make one more journey to the East prior to settling down in Hollywood. But a few months later the same reporter claimed Buck had bought controlling interest in the Raffles Hotel in Singapore where he would retire as “mine host.” He might make occasional forays into the jungles to fill special orders, but largely planned to spend his time greeting American tourists and sharing gin-slings with them while filling the back order of magazine articles he meant to write. (McIntyre April 22, 1945 and June 18, 1943: 4).

Another *Times* article dealing with the burgeoning hobby of maintaining tropical fish aquariums noted that it was Buck who first brought back the beautiful, colorful, and what was to become extremely popular, Siamese fighting fish (*Betta splendens*) to America. Descendants of his specimens were still found in tropical fish stores (Israel June 16, 1935).

In July, Buck’s associate T. A. Loveland returned from the Malay Peninsula, docking on Staten Island. Aboard the *Steel Traveler* was a “motley collection of 800 animals,” some bound for the Central Park and Prospect Park Zoos while the others were destined for Frank Buck Enterprises, Inc., Buck’s 35-acre zoo at Amityville, Long Island. The article claimed the seamen had let the 156 monkeys have the run
of the ship during the voyage and as the ship docked they could be seen scampering over the decks and rigging. Buck himself had remained in Singapore shooting his next motion picture ("Menagerie of 800" July 14, 1935: N1).

Just a day later, two animals, a giant python and an African lion escaped from their enclosures at Buck’s zoo. Attendants had been trying to lift the newly arrived rock python from its shipping crate into an exhibit when the 26-foot reptile sank its fangs into the handler’s hand and coiled around his chest, while another employee was ripped from shoulder to wrist by a lion. Both were expected to recover. In August the zoo again gained attention when 150 monkeys escaped after a worker, intending to clean the monkey mountain, had left a plank he had used to bridge the moat in place. The escapees ran along and onto the Sunrise Highway and the Long Island Railroad tracks. As evening fell, about 30 headed home. Anyone finding and returning a monkey was promised passes to the zoo ("Python Crushes Attendent" July 16, 1935: 21 and "150 Monkeys Flee" and "Simian Uprising" Aug. 22, 1935: 1).

In September, when Buck and his wife returned to New York from Malaya, he announced that 600 animals and about 5,000 birds would arrive in Brooklyn that same week. The rarest catch were wattled pheasants, never before seen in the United States ("Frank Buck Returns" Sept. 4, 1935: 7).

Buck also kept endorsing products, the latest for the New York Bureau of Milk Publicity, pre-dated the "Got Milk" ads by almost 70 years. In the Wall Street Journal ad, "Frank Buck... Tells how much milk increases a man’s coolness." Milk, he insisted was "a fine nerve food," "keeps muscles at their highest vigor." "Believe me," Buck concluded, "every man is a better man when he drinks milk." Later that same year, he endorsed Dodge cars, which he assured potential buyers were "built to take it" ("Frank Buck... Tells" July 18, 1935: 3 and the "Built to Take It" Dec. 12, 1935: 2). Buck also never tired of hobnobbing with the wealthy, selling birds to Doris Duke, reportedly the world’s richest woman for her private Palm Beach zoo (Knight Sept. 13, 1935: 19).

In September another shipload of animals docked in Staten Island with a cargo of 500 mammals, 5,000 birds, and eleven snakes. Buck and his associates worked from 9 a. m. to 5 p. m. off-loading the cargo. Most were delivered to Buck’s zoo, prior to shipping to other zoos across the country ("Wild
Animal Cargo” Sept. 14, 1935: 8). A New York columnist observed that despite more harrowing adventures, Buck seemed “fit as an ox and as hearty. The jungle is in his blood so deeply that he will never be content to remain away long” (Tucker Sept. 30, 1935: 6). Perhaps this was part of the reason he removed himself from consideration as the director of the Milwaukee Zoo (“Untermann Chosen” Dec. 11, 1935: 7).

Just prior to the Christmas release of the motion picture version of Fang and Claw, “Hold That Tiger,” appeared in Collier’s, now with Ferrin Fraser’s by-line. The story reiterated how the tiger was “undoubtedly Public Enemy Number One of the East. . . . since they killed over 600 people annually in British India alone.” Buck captured a tiger, and then “this huge living bundle of striped lightning” was lowered over a 700-foot precipice. “And the roars my huge striped piece of animal dynamite sent ringing across the wild jungles of Malaya, I now hear each day in my American jungle camp at civilized Amityville, Long Island, U. S. A.” (Buck and Fraser Dec. 14, 1935: 14).

Fang and Claw was both the inaugural and Christmas feature at the new Rialto on Times Square. The movie house had two innovations, an electric seat indicator board, on which lighted bulbs designated empty seats, and an additional box office located in the subway arcade. The new theater was designed to “suit masculine tastes,” specializing in films “dealing with adventure, action, mystery, and kindred forms of melodrama” (“Rialto to Open” Dec. 20, 1935: 29).

The proprietor Arthur Mayer planned to “minister to the masculine escapist urge: adventure, horror, blood.” The critic, however, found Fang and Claw “somewhat disappointing.” It seemed too familiar, suffered from “a paucity of excitement,” and “seemed over-staged.” “Things happen too patly, the invisible cameraman grinding calmly away, Mr. Buck handsomely in command of the situation, and the animals in the main rather dull-witted. The monkeys are the comedy relief, and the natives, once shy and child-like in earlier films, tend to ham it up.” The best incident occurs when Buck shoots a tiger that is mangling a young rhino, and then saves the rhino’s life by performing emergency surgery with his knife. The photography is good, and “Mr. Buck is reasonably modest in his off-screen commentary,” but the film still lacks a real feeling of nature in the raw never being boring (Sennwald Dec. 28, 1935: 10).
Smaller town reviewers stuck to the publicity releases claiming “the thrills and suspense that go with Buck’s dangerous profession and the quiet lure and majesty of the jungle are bound up into the story” or “filmed in the face of nameless perils and sudden death by the man who knows no fear” (“Buck’s Capture of Python” Dec. 20, 1935: 8).

Variety concurred with the Times that there was no real excitement or drama, perhaps because the Hayes Office had begun to frown on mortal combat scenes. The camera work was excellent and the print fine, especially considering the handicaps the cameramen had to overcome (“Fang and Claw” Jan. 1, 1936). As early as 1933, the New York Herald Tribune reported that although wild animals were still very popular in motion pictures, pure combat scenes had lost their appeal. There had been a reversal in the Buster Crabbe and Johnny Weismuller films, “a flat denial of the older principle that the cinematic wild beast must prove his anti-social positions at every possible opportunity.” Gorillas, once symbolic of “primeval horror,” became Tarzan’s staunch friends, while the 50-foot King Kong registered “devotion, bewilderment, and hurt feelings.” However, even these pictures inconsistently tended to end in a “spectacular climax of mayhem” (Furnas May 7, 1933: VII 3).

In January, Collier’s ran “Snake in the Grass” in which Buck claimed that snakes seem to be destined to be “kicked around, maligned, and wantonly killed more than any other creature.” He admitted that he was not particularly fond of them himself, but that he had seen some “that were as beautifully designed and colored as any creatures God ever made, and others that were more venomously poisonous. But I would like them to be understood and have a fair chance along with the other animals that populate the earth” (Buck and Fraser Jan. 11, 1937: 18).

Buck’s name was kept before the public by columnists. One noted how he always answered letters written to him by hundreds of boys and one girl, who wanted to accompany him on his adventures. Buck discouraged them, advising the youngsters to seek a job in a local museum, citing the case of Roy Chapman Andrews, “who became America’s No. 1 explorer” (“Adventurers Ask to Accompany” May 15, 1936: 2). Other articles described how he and the Martin Johnsons haunted restaurants offering
foreign delicacies like Egyptian squab, which came 33 to an order, as a breakfast dish (McIntyre Jan. 13, 1936: 4).

Buck’s Long Island zoo could also brag about exhibiting the first cheetahs born in the United States. The mother had been presented to Buck by an Indian prince after he had captured the father. Her cage was kept covered with canvas to ensure her privacy while she was fed a special supplement of warm milk, with raw eggs and cod liver oil (“Cheetah Twins” Feb. 23, 1936: 24).

Another article explained how Buck’s films had popularized into catch phrases, ‘No. 1 or No. 2 boy;’ the way he typically referred to his native assistants. Buck always gave his assistants credit. For example, when he captured a blue buck, the largest antelope in India, he divulged utilizing his assistants’ teaching and expertise, along with his own knowledge and experience with lassos (“Frank Buck Tale of Ali” Feb. 23, 1936 and Buck and Fraser Mar. 21, 1936: 26).

The May issue of Reader’s Digest featured the chapter, “Tiger Bait,” from Fang and Claw (Buck and Fraser May, 1936: 71). On the society scene, Buck was listed as a patron of the Texas Blue Bonnet Ball at the Biltmore (“Blue Bonnet Ball” May, 17, 1936: N3). While Buck’s zoo had suffered heavy losses from the exceptionally cold winter, it would soon be augmented by three very large pythons, one measuring 27 feet, along with king cobras, black and clouded leopards, 50 rare monkeys, and 3,000 birds (“Buck Gets New Animals” May 25, 1936: 20).

Buck also remained active on the lecture circuit. Lecture bureaus explained that the public “exhibits an apathy towards anyone who hasn’t a touch of the continental or a flair for the bizarre.” Most popular were English novelists, explorers, and big game hunters. As a rule, audiences liked to hear Arctic adventurers in the summer, and tales of sweltering places in the winter. The columnist pointed out that there was a lot of Barnumesque showmanship exhibited by most of these speakers. Buck, a vivid personality himself, made a specialty of enthralling his audiences with actual motion pictures of animals in action while dramatically describing his jungle exploits. His success on the circuit, together with his feature-length pictures and zoo, had made him independently wealthy (Tucker May 26, 1936: 4).
Buck gained attention when a male elephant was acquired by the Fleishhaker Zoo in San Francisco, with the hope of mating him to the zoo’s four females, three of which Buck had brought back from Southeast Asia. The male, who had already gained a rather shaky reputation as a circus elephant, was placed in a paddock with one of the cows. When a keeper unwisely tried to separate them, the bull knocked him down, stomped, kicked and repeatedly gored the man. After other keepers, working from a safe point, issued commands, the bull left his victim and allowed his hind leg to be chained. Fleishhaker and the director ordered the elephant to be killed. An animal lover managed to get a one-day reprieve, but the following day, three policemen with high-powered rifles, killed the bull. When told about the incident, Buck concluded that Wally had been in musth and “cried: ‘It was a useless waste of life. He would soon have been normal again’” (“Must and Murder” June 29, 1936).

In New York, Buck was described as a man-about-town, “as intrepid within nightclub walls as he is in more familiar Far Eastern jungles.” He was sighted at the Savoy-Plaza, and the new Grill Room of the Astor (“The Theatre: Before and After” July 9, 1936: 13 and “Mrs. C. Bell Walsh” Sept. 24, 1936: 22).

That fall Buck reportedly bought a horse at the annual World Championship Rodeo at Madison Square Garden, but when attempting to mount it at his zoo, the horse spooked, throwing Buck, and giving him severe contusions of the right leg and arm (“Horse Kicks” Oct. 19, 1936: 4).

But soon he launched another venture, “one of the largest and newest attractions in the show world: Frank Buck’s Bring ‘Em Back Alive Jungle Show.” Geared for fairs and expositions, it played Boston and New York before moving in for a fifteen-week run at the Texas Centennial Exposition in November. The 90 minute show included ten acts, including Roman Proske’s tigers, Bob Mathew’s lion King Tuffy, a mixed cat act, a talk by Buck describing his adventures, and closing with a supposedly “critically acclaimed” elephant act (“Frank Buck Will Bring Jungle” Nov. 6, 1936: 1).

In 1937, Buck and Fraser cooperated on another book project. On Jungle Trails was aimed at young audiences and was destined to become a favorite in the Texas school system. Buck explained in it that he made his first money through the capture of animals as a boy after he read an article about a man
in Rochester, New York who wanted all the rattlers he could get in order to produce rattlesnake oil, a supposed cure-all for rheumatism, gout, and stiff joints (Buck and Fraser 1937).

**Buck’s Philosophy**

After his initial trip to South America in 1911, Buck made up his mind that he wanted to be an animal dealer, and to date has crossed the Pacific 45 times in a quarter-century of collecting. He insisted he “never willingly or unnecessarily harmed or injured a single animal. . . . for I have only feelings of kindness for every creature that breathes on this earth” (Buck and Fraser 1937).

He explained that in the jungle, only the strong of each species survives and that although it seems cruel, it is a natural law since the beginning of time. Animals kill, he explained, “not for fun or to show off, but so they may live” (Buck and Fraser 1937).

Buck described the elephant, an amazingly intelligent animal, as the most powerful creature in the jungle. In the East, elephants were used as valued workers, as well as participants in religious festivals. Elephants, lived, according to Buck, five times longer than a horse or mule, and were far stronger. At the time the book was written, Britain controlled most of the territory where elephants were found, and they strictly enforced laws prohibiting the capture or shooting of the great beasts. When elephants were captured as potential workers, any elephant over eight feet in height was set free, since 40 per cent of larger elephants died in captivity. Male herd leaders were also protected (Buck and Fraser 1937).

Through the study of wild animals, Buck determined that “All animals behave more or less according to the habits that make up their family characteristics. But occasionally, they behave differently, not because they are crazy--they are ‘never crazy.’ They do the unusual for a very good reason” (Buck and Fraser 1937: 47).

Buck explained that his jungle camp in Johore was a convenient central location for all of the Far East. When he set out on an actual expedition, which might take eight or nine months, he typically had as many as 2,000 orders from zoos, circuses, and private individuals. To acquire these animals might necessitate traveling 20,000 miles—to Burma or Ceylon for elephants, Nepal for rhinos, Borneo or Sumatra for orangutans, the foothills of the Himalayas for birds, India for antelope and rhesus monkeys,
upper Malaya for pythons, and New Guinea for birds of paradise. Expeditions had to be carefully planned, since captured animals must have proper diets, fresh water, and shade to remain healthy (Buck and Fraser 1937).

Buck freely talked about evolution, “this long process by which animals and plants are changed,” describing how little tapirs have changed, while at the same time, horses have evolved quickly from small three-toed animals (Buck and Fraser 1937: 83).

He then explained that his “boys” were not truly boys, but men who were valued and trusted assistants.

Sometimes we are apt to think that because the people living in other parts of the world are of other races and may have brown or yellow skin, they are different from us. They are different—in their habits and customs. But in their ideals they are much the same as we are. A brown Malay or Hindu boy can be just as honest, loving and loyal as any American boy. And I want to tell you the story of Lal so you will know something about how a brown boy of the Far East behaves and feels and realize that he is not so different from you in his mind and heart, even though he worships a different god, and lives an entirely different life (Buck and Fraser 1937: 109).

“Our relationship always had to be, of course, that of master and servant,” Buck added. “Nothing else would have been right in the East. But I have always felt, and I am sure Lal knew it, that our real relationship was that of friends. And I am certain that no white man ever had a better or truer friend than Lal Bahuda, a twenty-two-year old brown boy, was to Buck Sahib” (Buck and Fraser 1937).

When a caged black leopard reached out of his cage and clawed Buck’s arm, Lal jumped in and rescued him. When Buck thanked him, Lal replied, “Please be more careful in the future. Lal not want to lose Sahib.” Buck felt, “These words, coming from a brown native boy on the deck of a ship at sea, while blood slowly trickled down my arm, are, I think, the finest words ever spoken to me” (Buck and Fraser 1937: 123-124).

Lal later grew ill and Buck paid for his care. Finally a doctor in Manila diagnosed a liver abscess. Soon Lal grew strong enough to visit his family in the foothills of the Himalayas, but shortly after he arrived, his house caught fire. Lal escaped, but when he realized his wife and children were hopelessly trapped, he turned back, walking into the blazing structure to die with his family (Buck and Fraser 1937).
Buck returned to an animal related topic, calling the tiger, the most ferocious and dangerous animal in the world. He explained to his young audience that they may have seen captive tigers, “but until you have seen a tiger free and savage in the jungle, on the loose, roaring and snarling defiance, ready to attack with fang and claw anything that stands in its path, you have never really seen a tiger.” The tiger silently stalks its prey, creeping along carefully, “then with a sudden lunge they rush forward, rear up on their hind legs, and strike their prey a powerful blow with their forepaws. . . a sharp bite of long canine teeth and the kill is made.” Man-eaters exist because man, without spears, arrows, revolvers, or rifles, is the most defenseless and most easily killed of all jungle creatures, but becomes prey only after a tiger is injured or incapacitated by age (Buck and Fraser 1937: 137-138).

Another animal Buck admired was the orangutan. In 1931 he brought back the largest specimen in captivity, with an eight-and-a-half foot arm span. Those great arms almost have the same crushing power as a python’s coils. Sadly these great apes are almost totally decimated, Buck continued. They are shot and stuffed for museums of natural history, or captured alive for zoos and menageries. After the Dutch stepped in, they halted the wholesale killing and capturing of the red ape without special governmental permission (Buck and Fraser 1937).

Buck then reiterated his special fondness for the mouse deer, revealing how he always frees them from native traps, allowing the fine, harmless little animal to speed away in a series of lightning like bounces (Buck and Fraser 1937).

Reptiles were Buck’s next topic. He observed that, “Every race and every tribe in the world seem to have more or less fear of reptiles. There seems to be something born in humans that makes them instinctively loathe any creature that crawls.” Buck added that although he was not a lover of reptiles either, and had experienced some very bad encounters, “but while not loving them, I do object to the wanton killing of harmless varieties.” Most species are harmless and “do a great deal of good, ridding farms and fields of insects, grasshoppers, mice, etc.” He asserted that he did not kill the poisonous snakes and man-killing reptiles of the Far East, if he could at all avoid it. Buck described the crocodile as “sly as
a snake, fierce as a tiger, and brave as a bull.” After relating how he survived a cobra spitting in his eyes, he ended the book on a didactic note (Buck and Fraser 1937: 234-235):

I hope that you will always remember this story, and no matter what an animal does to you, be kind to it. For the animal, be it mammal, bird, or reptile, always acts as nature intended it to act. I am mighty proud of the fact that in all my 25 years of experience with animals I have devoted myself entirely to live animals rather than big game hunting, museum collecting, or anything that necessitated killing them, to me a live animal is beautiful, whether it is an elephant, a tiger, a leopard, a bird, or even a lowly reptile. A dead animal is not beautiful and so I have dedicated my life to bringing animals back alive. I have always done so, and I always will (Buck and Fraser 1937: 260).

In the back of the book, Buck provided a list of animals he had brought back to America, along with the scientific names and descriptions of Asiatic animals (Buck and Fraser 1937).

Buck’s name remained in the news, whether arriving with another cargo of animals in March or providing animals from his zoo for a charity fair held at Greentree, the Whitney estate on Long Island; and when he and the director of the Central and Prospect Park zoos were involved in a traffic accident in Brooklyn, that resulted in Buck’s new sedan being wrecked (“Cargo of Animals Docked” Mar. 26, 1937: 11; “Hundreds at Fair” June 12, 1937: 18 and “Frank Buck in Auto Crash” Sept. 10, 1937: 17).

When Schenley Distilleries decided to run a series of ads featuring various celebrities, they commissioned Norman Rockwell, who was their major artist, to paint a portrait of Buck. The lead in the ad that appeared in popular magazines for Schenley’s Cream of Kentucky Straight Bourbon that fall was, “Have you eyes like Frank Buck’s? Seeking Happy Adventure?” (Lehrer 2000).

In November, Collier’s featured another Buck-Fraser article “Thank the Jungle” which insisted that when you eat your dinner, drive your car, or just relax in a comfortable chair, you are unconsciously patronizing the largest department store in the world—the jungle. He urged the reader to forget its wild animals and savage tribes for a moment to discover what an important role it plays in everyday life, supplying ratton, jute for burlap, hemp for ropes, beeswax, tapioca, both as a desert and as the glue on postage stamps, chewing gum, pineapple, coconut, cinnamon, pepper, nutmeg, castor oil, cocaine [“one of our most valuable local anesthetics”], quinine, all types of wood, and of course, rubber (Buck and Fraser Nov. 6, 1937: 88).
In the autumn, Buck appeared in his first serial, a fifteen-chapter adventure produced by Columbia Pictures, entitled, *Jungle Menace*. *Variety* believed that, “Kids will like *Jungle Menace* for its harum-scarum adventure and the presence of Frank Buck, with his Wild Animal Associates.” Set in a mythical Asian province—*Variety* thought it actually was South America—the story revolves around a gang that hijacks rubber shipments from a huge plantation. After the planter is shot by an unknown assailant, Buck as Frank Hardy, intervenes in an attempt to solve the crime. The serial was publicized as “One man defying a thousand deaths in a green hell of creeping horror! The fearless Frank Buck in his most hair-raising role! Merciless killers. . . a beautiful hostage. . . a cargo of wild animals run loose when the typhoon strikes! Terrifying adventures torn out of the heart of cruelest Asia.” The movie also introduced Sasha Siemel as the mysterious, “Tiger Man” (“*Jungle Menace*” and “*Jungle Menace*” Oct. 27, 1937).

**Sasha Siemel**

Siemel was in many ways the antithesis of Buck. Alexander Siemel was born in Latvia in 1890. In 1907 he migrated to the United States, but quickly headed to Argentina where he found work in a Buenos Aires printshop. Seeking adventure in the Brazilian jungles, he worked as a mechanic and gunsmith in the diamond mining camps of the Matto Grasso. There, a native taught him how to hunt jaguars with a seven-foot spear called a ‘zagya.’ He moved to the vast Patanal in 1925, hoping to gain employment as a *Tigero* from local cattle ranchers, who wanted to eliminate jaguars that preyed on their stock (“Big Game Hunter” Jan. 3, 1936: 17; Barkham Oct. 25, 1953: BR7 and “Sasha Siemel” Feb. 16, 1970: 37).

In 1929, Julian Duguid, along with two companions from England, hired Siemel to take them across the Patanal. Two years later Duguid introduced the character of the “Tiger Man” in his novel, *Green Hell*, which went through three editions quickly. The popularity of the book led the author to urge Siemel to embark on a world-wide lecture tour, and like Buck he became in high demand on the circuit. In 1932, Duguid followed up his success with a biography, *Tiger Man*. Siemel also became the subject of more than 35 articles appearing in *Collier’s, Life, Time, National Geographic* and a host of hunting and
Siemel had hunted with Teddy Roosevelt and in 1936 met with his son, who served as a representative of the American Museum of Natural History, at the Biltmore in New York. Siemel had six jaguar skins with him, with 35 more on their way by freighter. Some of the hides would be mounted and displayed along with animals killed by Roosevelt. That was the same year, Siemel appeared in *Jungle Menace* as “Tiger Von Dorn” (“Big Game Hunter” Jan. 3, 1936: 17; Barkham Oct. 25, 1953: BR 7, and “Sasha Siemel” Feb. 16, 1970: 37).

An article in *Ye Sylvan Archer* in 1937, claimed Siemel had killed 101 jaguars by rifle, 27 by spear, three by bow and arrow, and four by spear after the big cats had been wounded by arrows. Siemel was described as competent, with a keen sense of justice to others, as well as courage and judgment that he inherited from his Teutonic knight ancestors (Brommers May 1937).

The “Tiger Man” called jaguar hunting as hard work that necessitated crawling through a hot, mosquito infested jungles. The big cats shouldn’t complain, he added, since if they don’t like being tracked and hunted, they can “beat it.” “There is one redeeming feature about it though, at the end of the spear it is the cat that labors, not I. He is impulsive, does not like me. Few cats do, as a mater of fact. So he makes his lunge and is rewarded with a foot or so of cold steel. His intentions are laudable, but his judgment poor.” Basically, Siemel continued, that by “holding the spear just so, knowing where the cat is,” you provide him “the fullest faculty for self-destruction and suicide.” It was all a matter of experience. If he misjudged, he would no longer be here. But, Siemel insisted, he was not reckless although a certain amount of risk was always present (“Big Game Hunter” Jan. 3, 1936: 17; Barkham Oct. 25, 1953: BR 7, and “Sasha Siemel” Feb. 16, 1970: 37).

In 1947, Siemel and his wife, who he met in Philadelphia while lecturing, along with their three children, purchased a farm in southeastern Pennsylvania. He continued to write, lecture, and lead tours to South America with such notables as the mystery writer, Erle Stanley Gardner (Barkham Oct. 25, 1953: BR 7 and “Sasha Siemel” Feb. 16, 1970: 37).
In reviewing his book *Tigero* (1953) a *New York Times* critic claimed that no other white man alive could have written this book, since no other white man has lived so unique a life. He is the “wild Russian” so prominent in Duguid’s, *Green Hell*. Siemel, he emphasized, “is not to be confused with the lavishly equipped amateurs who came back from Amazon country with shrunken heads and inflated egos. Nor will you find in his book pith-helmeted hunters traveling in comfortable safaris with battalions of porters. Siemel is an authentic white hunter who spent 30 years in the swamps and forests of the Matto Grasso” (Barkham Oct. 25, 1953: BR 7).

For many years he and his brother sought excitement in river country doing odd jobs. Both became hunted for “causes of honor,” with Sasha’s brother being fatally ambushed. Sasha sought out the killer and threw him into the river, where the piranhas made quick work of him. Siemel engaged the jungle at its most elemental, “man against beast on the most primitive terms” (“Big Game Hunter” Jan. 3, 1936: 17; Barkham Oct. 25, 1953: BR 7, and “Sasha Siemel” Feb. 16, 1970: 37).

In 1953, Charles Collinwood interviewed Seimel on the CBS show *Adventure* produced by the American Museum of Natural History. Ten years later he opened a museum and store in Pennsylvania, filled with artifacts he had collected in South America. He made one last trip to the Patanal, guiding a group of geologists in 1961. Siemel died in 1970 at the age of 80 (“Big Game Hunter” Jan. 3, 1936: 17; Barkham Oct. 25, 1953, and “Sasha Siemel” Feb. 16, 1970).

**Buck tries Serials, the Circus, and the World’s Fair**

Harry L. Fraser, who had gained fame directing low budget movies, died in 1974. Originally an actor himself, he appeared as a masked hero in a Pearl White serial in 1916. He was chosen to direct *Jungle Menace*. Serials were ground out with an eye to maximize profits by shooting 60 or 70 scenes a day from dawn to dusk. Fraser remembered shooting the serial which called for trained animals from Goebel’s Wild Animal Farm to play the parts of wild animals Buck had captured and later break loose on board ship when high waves washed over the decks (Fraser, H. 1990: 112-118).

When Fraser began filming on a hot Southern California day, he noticed that Buck was “continually mopping his brow and restlessly calling for one of the prop boys to bring him cracked ice,
which he kept dropping into a big thermos he was carrying.” Buck then came over to Fraser asking him to pick him up in the morning, since the “cockeyed director didn’t care if he killed you or not.” Fraser agreed and told Buck to have his thermos full of coffee and be ready to go. Buck looked at the director quizzically and roared that his thermos was full of gin. “I’d die in the jungle just drinking coffee. I drink martinis, Harry. Keep me going. Now, my problem is where can I get a thermos filled with martinis at six o’clock in the morning?” Fraser said his breakfasts usually were coffee, ham, and eggs, but Buck solved the problem by having the hotel bartender fill up the thermos at 2 a.m. closing, and then have the clean-up man deliver the thermos to Buck. “So Jungle Menace and Frank Buck rolled merrily along” (Fraser 1990: 112-118). Fraser, who had witnessed many serious accidents with wild animals in movies, discovered that Buck was rightly afraid of the big cats and never trusted them (Fraser, H. 1990: 112-118).

Right near the set was a large billboard depicting Buck with a monkey on his shoulder, holding a pack of cigarettes. When the crew found Buck fast asleep on the set, they decided to get a still with a different cigarette brand in one hand and his thermos in the other, with the billboard in the background. The next day, the crew slipped the picture into the stills. Buck called the man a “so-and-so blackmailer” and agreed to buy him off, while the other crewmembers burst out laughing (Fraser, H. 1990: 112-118).

Fraser had to admit that despite his constant imbibing, Buck “never once slurred his lines. He could always walk straight. No one except those of us who knew his secret, would have ever guessed he wasn’t cold sober” (Fraser, H. 1990: 112-118).

Buck remained in the news. Entertainer Eddie Cantor had devised a radio promotion called the “March of Dimes” as a way of honoring President Franklin Roosevelt’s birthday while acquiring funds to combat infantile paralysis. When Dr. Paul de Kruif requested a reservation where rhesus monkeys—the only monkey deemed suitable for research—could be housed, Buck quickly offered his Amityville site, explaining that he had facilities for “several thousand monkeys,” and that every cooperation would be made with the foundation (“Dimes are Sought” Jan. 24, 1938: 23). During that same month Buck recounted the story of his acquisition of the extremely rare black cockatoo in Collier's (Buck and Fraser Jan. 29, 1938: 38).
In the spring of 1938 Buck launched himself into a new venture in a new venue when he became the feature presentation of Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus. The Ringling family had regained control of the circus and was in the process of streamlining the organization and renovating equipment. The *New York Times* reported that the facelift would be evident in the opening ‘spec,’ “Nepal.” A maharajah will ride at the head of a processional caravan to pay homage to the Great White Hunter, Frank Buck. The royal elephants, instead of shambling along in trappings embroidered with gaudy rhinestones, will “blaze forth in solid sheets of gold, silver, and white mesh. Gleaming aluminum, in designs almost severe in their modernity, also will be seen in the equestriennes’ carts” (“Streamlining Era” April 7, 1938: 35). A few years later, Ringling hired Norman Bel Geddes, who would design General Motors’ Futurama at the New York World’s Fair, to redesign and modernize much of their equipment. Buck was asked to help design the new monkey cages utilizing aspects of his “monkey mountain.” Together they transformed the boring cages by installing steel tubing criss-cross see-saws that provided exercise for the restless monkeys (“Streamlining Motif” Jan. 25, 1941: 17).

The predominant theme of the circus was the wild animal influence. In the opening spec, “Capt. Buck will ride along on Topsy, his Indian elephant, with a couple of cheetahs sharing the hunter’s wicker howdah. Bengal tigers, a lioness, and other predatory animals will be led along using leashes and collars, while Gargantua, the giant gorilla, will ride in his special air-conditioned, glass-enclosed indirectly lighted cage.” The seven-year-old, 460 pound gorilla had been acquired from a sea captain and raised by the wife of a stomach specialist in Brooklyn. However, Buck characterized him as the most terrifying of all living creatures (“Theatre: Jungle to Garden” April 18, 1938).

After 12 hours of “jumbled, noisy,” opening day rehearsals in Madison Square Garden, “Frank Buck, the animal hunter, paced anxiously around the arena while handlers, armed with rubber-tipped prods, coaxed his black leopards out of their cages into the ring, where Capt. Terrell Jacobs, the animal trainer put them through a few paces.” “They’re really the most dangerous animals in existence,” Mr. Buck said. “Mean, treacherous, worse than lions or tigers. They’re hardly trained yet and unless watched
carefully they might tear each other to pieces. Only one of them, Midnight, does a few tricks” (“Circus All Ready” April 8, 1938: 16).

The program described the opening spec, Nepal--“conceived, created, and produced”-- by Charles Le Maire, “designer of stage, screen, and open air spectacles:”

It portrays in fantasy, splendor and exotic opulence, the royal welcome to Bring ‘Em Back Alive Frank Buck by the Maharajah of Nepal and his native court . . . . In “Nepal” the master surrounds the adventurous figure of Frank Buck with a majestically moving multitude of artistically, richly and fantastically garbed Oriental nabobs, Indian princesses, rajahs, maharanees, court officials, dancing girls, palace guards, provincial potentates, attendants, soldiers of the native Nepal army and Bengal lancers—afoot, a horse, on camels and on elephants . . . and introduces the modern Knight of derring-do—Frank Buck—as no world renowned celebrity was ever before introduced. You can imagine the fun and excitement in doing a spectacle that combined Frank Buck’s return from the jungle with the pomp and pageantry of the Maharajah of Nepal’s court—the dancing girls—the flaming banners—the dazzling horsemen—the colorful British soldiery—the exquisite maharanees atop elephants, with their sweeping trains cascading to the ground, their folds upheld by Negro slaves—and then in sharp contrast the cortege following Frank Buck—natives in a wild array of exotic costumes—leading or carrying strange animals—interspersed with native women carrying bowls of tropical fruit and garlands of jasmine, hibiscus and orchids (Roberts Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus Official Program 1938: 8).

Buck was introduced as the

Internationally renowned Adventurer, who has led scores of Hazardous Expeditions in Remote Fastnesses, where only the Most Intrepid Dare set Foot, To Secure Rare Live Animals for the Greatest Show on Earth, as well as the Foremost Zoos throughout the civilized World (Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus Official Program 1938: 39).

Less than a week after the circus opened, non-performing employees of the Greatest Show on Earth went on strike. The three-hour show was shortened, and performers took on duties as riggers and stagehands. The “beef” concerned pay when the show played indoor dates in New York and Boston ($30 per month plus board as compared to $60 per month when under canvas). A settlement was finally reached at $45 per month. During the strike, four acts were omitted, as well as the elephants and other animals in the introductory spec. Picketers discouraged potential patrons by claiming, “It’s robbery,” “No animals,” and “Who wants to see Frank Buck without an elephant” (“Circus Strike Off” April 14, 1938: 3). Buck; indeed, *Time* reported had “walked democratically in the procession instead of kinging it in a howdah” (“Theatre: Jungle to Garden” April 25, 1938).
While Buck was in New York with the show, the *Times* discussed the importance of on-site shooting in films, insisting that “those who make jungle pictures more than any other director or producers, have actually visited scenes of their films in order to lend the proper amount of authenticity to them. Buck, they noted, was

Bringing ‘Em Back Alive long before he ever conceived of cashing in on the films. It is a matter of record that for two decades Buck, who made his living hunting and delivering wild animals to circuses and zoos, ‘burned up’ at the phony picturizations of wild animal hunts in Africa. Inspired by the Shoedsack and Cooper filmization of *Grass*, he decided to enter pictures and traveled far and wide in search of authenticity for *Bring ‘Em Back Alive, Wild Cargo* and his other efforts. Buck once expressed the opinion that the jungle—knowing but two laws—sex and food—created its own plot and scenarios. Finding animals was something else again (*New York Times* April 1, 1938).

Buck was facing some new problems as a circus performer. The American Federation of Actors, flexing its union muscle, insisted that their contract called for all performers in the show to join the union, and that unless Buck joined, they would strike when the show moved under canvas in Brooklyn. Ironically, Buck, who had made it very clear in his books that he was not a scientist, now as his class-consciousness rose to the surface, argued that he was. If the circus was faced with a strike, “he might compromise on his principles and join the union, even if against his wishes.” “Buck said he had every sympathy for the common worker, yet he described many of them as sweepers, shovelers, and performers of other mundane functions for the comfort of elephants” (*New York Post* May 5, 1938 from “The Circus” http://stevenlehrer.com).

He contended that he had worked many years to attain his position of scientist “and that’s all the work I perform in the circus.” He was asked what riding an elephant around the ring had to do with science, to which he retorted, “Well, that’s how I got to be a scientist—riding an elephant.” He claimed he sided with the workingman, since he had worked like a dog himself, but he didn’t want a union delegate telling him what to do. He argued that John Ringling North had told him that the contract did not compel him to join the union. Eventually the union relented and gave him a special dispensation (*New York Post* May 5, 1938 from “The Circus” http://stevenlehrer.com).
The problem was relatively short-lived. In July the circus train pulled into the Potomac freight yards outside of Washington, D. C. after six disastrous days in Scranton. The show prepared to move back to its Sarasota winterquarters after roustabouts refused to take a 25-cent pay cut. Buck urged them to do so, “but doughty Mr. Buck could not bring around the roustabouts.” The union head just called it a ploy to evade a union contract and shift acts to a smaller, non-union Ringling-owned show in the west (“Off the Road” July 11, 1938).

Buck remained undaunted. He authored an article about gorillas for the Baltimore Sunday Sun that would later appear in the November Reader’s Digest as “Caliban of the Jungle.” He called the gorilla, echoing the description of Gargantua, “which of all animals most nearly resembles man, the most terrifying and unpredictable of jungle creatures.” The subject of many untrue legends, the gorilla is still the most frightening of all wild creatures as Martin Johnson had earlier asserted. Buck concluded that. “It is when he stands erect that he is most impressive; or then, with unconscious but dreadful pathos, he appears to be a savage caricature of his human enemy” (Buck Nov. 1938: 61).

At the end of the year, Buck began to plan what would be one of his last major ventures when he and other New York World’s Fair dignitaries were photographed breaking ground for his two-acre Jungleland exhibit using an elephant hitched to a plow. Buck wanted to reproduce his Malayan camp, “with the highest degree of authenticity,” claiming he had an expedition “gathering native woods for building material, 5,000 poles for shed construction, many lengths of stout bamboo and a large quantity of altap, a fabric woven of palm leaves and used for roofing.” Plans called for a collection of shed-like buildings in which about 30 native Malays will live and work as they do in a jungle camp. Buck hoped to display between 3,000 and 4,000 specimens, including birds, and a thousand monkeys of varied species living on a monkey mountain. Elephants, including the African pygmy species, rhinos, okapis, tigers, leopards, and black leopards would be exhibited along with a large number of birds of paradise, ostriches and even the smallest humming birds. Near the village would be and arena with seating for a thousand people. “I am going to put on a series of animal acts, showing to what a remarkable extent animals can be trained. Not far from this will be a seal pool with 25 seals” (“Elephant in Snow” Dec. 22, 1938: 44).
The fair was largely the brainchild of Grover Whalen, who had been the general manager of Wanamaker’s, the city’s commissioner of plants and structures, police commissioner, and most famously New York’s Official Greeter for 35 years, deriving notoriety for having organized the first official tickertape parade as a welcome to the Prince of Wales, and planning the massive welcome to Charles Lindbergh after his solo flight across the Atlantic. Historian Frederick Lewis Allen noted that Whalen was able “to reduce welcoming to a science and raise it to an art” (Mayhew “Grover Aloysius Whalen”).

That winter, Buck became involved in yet another medium when Gummakers of America offered a series of non-sports bubblegum trading cards depicting his adventures.

The following spring, Buck’s assistant revealed that half of a large and valuable shipment of animals bound for the Fair was lost when huge seas relentlessly broke over the 425-foot ship. The animals could never be kept dry, and the resultant loses included four Komodo dragons. Luckily, three black panthers, nine birds of paradise, six honey bears, eight pythons, a 14-foot king cobra, two orangutans, ten gibbons, and 15 pigtail macaques did survive. The 26-day passage was considered by many crew members as the roughest they had ever experienced. On arrival Buck’s assistant reported that the early announcements that half the cargo was lost were exaggerations (“Half of Buck Cargo” April 15, 1939). In May another close call occurred when a Ringling tiger destined for Buck’s ‘village’ broke out of its crate but was encircled by circus employees, netted, and safely delivered (“Wild Animal Cargo Arrives for Fair” April 17, 1939: 9).

By August, the Fair itself was losing money—a projected $5 million during its entire run— and the Cuban Village and blackface show in the amusement zone had been forced to shut down. The only profitable shows according to Time were Buck’s Jungleland, the Parachute Jump, and Billy Rose’s Aquacade (“Eleanor’s Show” Aug. 21, 1939).

Buck sold numerous souvenirs at his Word’s Fair exhibit and these were augmented by his endorsement of Proctor and Gamble products that offered kids the opportunity to send for his “Handy Knife!” and “My Genuine Ivory Ring!” (Smithsonian Institution Research Information System).
All reminiscences about Buck’s exhibit were not without pangs of doubt, as the acclaimed E. L. Doctorow remembers in his 1985 novel, *World’s Fair*. Young Edgar receives tickets to the New York World’s Fair by winning an essay contest. One of the first things he wants to see is Frank Buck’s Jungleland. His description, torn between the dichotomy of a life of adventure and the seeming humanity of capturing animals alive is played against the harsh reality of the wild animal trade and keeping the wild under control.

At last! It was a zoo technically, he had lots of different animals, but the railings were wood and the cages portable, so it was more makeshift than a zoo, more in the nature of a camp. There were three different kinds of elephant, including a pygmy, and there was a black rhinoceros standing very still, as still as a structure, and who obviously understood nothing about where he was or why; there were a few sleeping tigers, none of them advertised as a man-eater, and tapirs, an okapi, and two sleek black panthers. You could ride on a camel’s back, which we didn’t do. On a miniature mountain, there lived, and screamed, and swung and leaped and hung hundreds of rhesus monkeys. We watched them a long time. I explained Frank Buck to Meg. He went into the wilds of Malaya, usually, but also Africa, and trapped wild animals and brought them back here to zoos and circuses and sold them. I told her that was more humane to do than merely hunt them. In truth, I had worshipped Frank Buck, he lived the life I dreamed for myself, adventurous yet with ethical controls, he did not kill. But I had to confess to myself, though not to Meg, that I had read his book twice and realized things about him I hadn’t understood the first time. He complained a lot about the personalities of his animals. He got into scraps with them. Once an elephant picked him up and tossed him away. An orangutan bit him, and he nearly fell into a pit with a certified man-eating tiger. He called his animals devils, wretches, pitiful creatures, poor beasts, and specimens. When one of them died on the ship to America, he felt sorry for it, but he seemed sorrier to lose the money the specimen would have brought. He called the Malays who worked for him in his camp, “boys.” Yet I could see now in the Malay village in Jungleland that these were men, in their loincloths and turbans and they handled the animals in their care quite well. Frank Buck himself couldn’t have been more impressive. They laughed among themselves and moved in and out of their bamboo shacks with no self-consciousness, barely attending to the patrons of Jungleland. I looked around for Frank Buck, knowing full well he wouldn’t be here. I understood his legendary existence depended on his not being here, but I looked anyway. The truth was, I thought now, Frank Buck was a generally grumpy fellow, always cursing out his “boys” or jealously guarding his “specimens” or boasting how many he had sold where and for how much. He acted superior to the people who worked for him. He didn’t get along with the authorities in the game preserves, nor with the ships’ captains who took him on their freighters with his crated live cargo, nor with the animals themselves. I saw all that now, but I still wanted to be like him, and walk around with a pith helmet and a khaki shirt and a whip for keeping the poor devils in line. The Jungleland souvenir was a gold badge with red and yellow printing. I pinned Meg’s to her dress and mine to my shirt (Doctorow 1985: 436-438).

At the end of the year, Buck, who maintained an office on Fifth Avenue, wrote a friend that his new book *Animals Are Like That* would soon hit bookstores. “If you are interested in some real ‘lowdown’ on the beasties, you may enjoy the book. It has been recommended by the Book-of-the Month-
Buck’s newest co-author was a former foreign correspondent and New York newspaper woman Carol Weld, the step-daughter of influential horror writer, H. P. Lovecraft. Buck argued in it that “Dead animals, like dead men, tell no tales. . . as I brought my game back alive and kept it alive. I know damned well what animals are likely to do.” Initially, he had to learn the hard way when trying to capture a man-eating tiger or bag “the biggest king cobra ever take into captivity.” The title refers to the fact that animals in many ways are like humans, while in other ways quite different. Monkeys or apes can often be treated like a child, but the “magnificently courageous” tiger can never, never, be trusted, for when “raised to wrath,” the big cat became “a formidable warrior whom few of even the most ferocious carnivores care to attack.” Buck explained that the true jungle law had nothing to do with nobility, chivalry, or sacrifice, but only fear. The Number One Public Enemy was the crocodile, while Number Two is the tiger (“But Never, Never Trust a Tiger” Feb. 4, 1940: 85).

In the spring of 1940, Buck assisted in John Ringling North’s “slapstick” induction into the Circus Saints and Sinners Club at the Hotel Astor. North was dressed as Gargantua, the gorilla, and led into the packed luncheon by Buck. The members, seated in a circus tent erected in one of the hotel’s large ballroom, roasted North, especially poking fun at his recent union woes (“North’s Inducted” Apr. 11, 1940: 32 and Green 1951).

The organization was founded in 1932 by Freddie Benham, a former sportswriter, war correspondent, and press agent. After reporting on the circus since the early 1920s, Benham decided to start an organization that could help finance a circus retirement home. It rapidly became a popular venue for wealthy notables, politicians, and famous show business personalities (“North Inducted” Apr. 11, 1940: 32 and Green 1951).

About this time Buck was elected vice president of the Ornamental Pheasant Society of America, an organization headed by the millionaire playboy and sportsman, Philip Plant, who had brought back
specimens from Africa for the exhibition he helped establish in the Akeley Hall at the American Museum of Natural History (“Philip Plant” June 23, 1941: 21).

In March of the following year, Buck’s last major book, again co-authored by Ferrin Fraser, *All in a Lifetime*, was released, in which he admitted that “he knew the special habitat of the American hobo. In short, he was once on the bum.” *Newsweek* called it a “sprawling uninhibited memoir of a master showman; it abounds in exotic stories and harrowing incidents. Frank Buck gets 100 for yarn spinning.” The *New York Times* was also sure the book would maintain reader interest throughout with its chronicling of reminiscences and adventure (“Private Life of Frank Buck” Mar. 31, 1941: 54 and Allen Mar. 30, 1941:BR 18).

In it Buck wrote of the “great American octopus called ‘publicity.’” He knew that until his first book and movie were released, he was “as unknown to the general public as an isolated and uninhabited rock in an uncharted port of the Pacific Ocean.” But once the ballyhoo began, his name soared, even though he was no better equipped than before.

I could tell no more, do no more, say no more. I was the same Frank Buck, fighting my way through a tough, hard life. But publicity made a sort of superman of me, a man who could do and loved all dangerous things. Naturally, being human I fell in love with the American trend of advertising and ballyhoo and aided it in running its course (Buck and Fraser 1941: 228-229).

Buck recalled how his radio appearances began with guest spots with Grantland Rice and his Coca Cola program, for which he received $300 for a three-minute interview. Eventually, he had his own program which aired three times a week. When Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden of the popular *Amos and Andy Show* took their first vacation in five years, Buck took their place for eight weeks, first receiving $1,500 per week, for the second eight weeks; $2,000, and the third; $2,500. When he asked his listeners to write if they enjoyed the program, he received 125,000 replies in just two days. Buck claimed he read every one and was always grateful for their comments. During his radio days, he met Niles Trammel who would later become president of NBC and who introduced him to a scriptwriter Ferrin Fraser who became Buck’s collaborator after his break with Anthony (Buck and Fraser 1941).
Opening a Zoo and “Jungle Larry” Tetzlaff

When Buck later opened his zoo on Long Island, he purchased his first real home in America since his Chicago days, a three-floor, 16-room house. He loved the zoo, but gradually new highways that lessened traffic near his site caused attendance to fall. He turned it over to T. A. Loveland, his partner in the venture. Lillian Bryson reminisced about when the zoo came to Massapequa in 1934. Built on 20 wooded acres, the park offered an elephant act, elephant rides, and a monkey mountain. She remembers that the entrance was marked by tall flagpoles flying brightly colored pennants. “On the days we saw Frank Buck, he was usually surrounded by grownups. He wore a pith helmet and jungle pants with high leather boots, and I think he had a mustache. We were in awe of him. He was handsome I thought, but didn’t appear more ready, in my mind, to bring them back alive than my father or Aunt Trudy” (Bryson Fall 1999).

Buck offered a job at his zoo to an interesting young man in 1939. Larry Tetzlaff had grown up in Kalamazoo, Michigan and by the age of eleven had collected about 250 snakes. He began giving lectures attempting to dispel myths and teach the truth about reptiles. At 19 he was given enough property by neighbors to build a “reptilium.” After saving the life of a 25-foot python with an infected mouth from the Ripley traveling exhibition, he was sought out by circuses and carnivals to provide reptiles or advice. At the University of Michigan, he wrote a scholarly paper on “Keeping Snakes Alive in Captivity” describing ways to decrease the usual high mortality rate of captive reptiles. Buck somehow got a hold of the paper and offered Tetzlaff a job at his zoo. In 1939, the newcomer quickly cut the death rate at Buck’s facility from 50 percent to almost zero. At the age of 20, Tetzlaff was put in charge of Buck’s reptile collection. In the three years he spent with Buck, he learned an enormous amount about the care and handling of all kinds of species, as well as acquiring his nickname, “Jungle Larry” (Rendell 1995: 110-113).

Subsequently Tetzlaff managed an alligator and ostrich farm and worked with famed herpetologist Ross Allen milking snakes. During the 1940s, he was supervisor of animals for three Tarzan movie productions, as well as providing antivenen for the military. Following the war he appeared until
1969 as a regular on a Cleveland-based children’s television show. Tetzlaff also conducted safaris to South America, Africa, and the Caribbean. In 1958, he brought back an enormous collection from Australia. The following year, *The (Toledo) Blade* and the Toledo Zoo co-sponsored a well-publicized 30,000-mile expedition to South America which resulted in the acquisition of 1,000 animals representing 100 different species (Rendell 1995: 115-126).

“Jungle Larry” set up a jungle camp, similar to Buck’s, at Cedar Point Amusement Park in Ohio, where as many a s 20,000 people a day passed through the camp and watched the animal training exhibits in the permanent arena. An excellent teacher, Larry provided an incubator for a generation of wild animal trainers, most notably perhaps, his own son David who demonstrated great skill in his handling of tigers and leopards. During the winter, the “camp” would be moved to Caribbean Gardens in Naples, Florida, which eventually became its year-round base. Today, the Naples Zoo is an AZA accredited facility with David Tetzlaff, its director (Rendell 1995).

Meanwhile, Buck, who maintained an office at ‘30 Rock,’ admitted he had fallen in love with Southern California, especially the San Fernando Valley after making a movie there in 1937. He had bought three-and-a-half acres of land that was filled with fruit trees and built some aviaries. It was then that he received a call from John Ringling North to join the Greatest Show on Earth. North promised him $1,000 per week for 33 weeks, 25 percent of souvenir sales, and a private railcar with a servant, guest quarters, and glassed-in observation deck. During the Depression when zoos could barely afford to feed the animals they had, the offer was too good to turn down. Buck regretted that he never had the opportunity to actually live in Southern California, since after his circus stint, Grover Whalen recruited him for the World’s Fair (Buck and Fraser 1941).

**The Last Decade**

Buck bragged that he had made it socially, financially, and professionally. He was now, The man who ‘brought ‘em back alive.’ The man people wanted to see and obtain his autograph on a menu, a cuff, or a shirt-tail. But in his heart, he still was the small town Texas boy who loved birds better than anything on earth. He still would rather be caring for an Argus pheasant, fussing with a snake, than be in the finest hotel in New York. Still just Frank Buck (Buck and Fraser 1941: 276).
In his autobiography, Buck also revealed some of his fears. He admitted that he had never flown, asserting that he would rather face a dozen live and hungry tigers in the open than spend a minute in a plane. He and Martin Johnson had been speakers at the Adventurers’ Club in New York. Johnson asked Buck if he would like to fly to Los Angeles with him. Buck declined, deciding to drive instead. Two days later he stopped to get a newspaper in Toledo, Ohio, only to be startled by the headlines describing Johnson’s death in a plane crash (Buck and Fraser 1941: 155).

In part, Buck’s fear grew out of an experience early in his career. On a 1917 journey back to the United States with a cargo of wild animals, Buck inadvertently got locked into the freezer that held the supplies for his animals, when he went in at 11 a.m. to get some liver for the pheasants. The result of the incident was a horrible case of claustrophobia that caused him to avoid subways, planes and to always leave doors slightly ajar (Buck and Fraser 1941: 159).

Buck also did not find it necessary to make “macho” choices when he divulged his favorite animal list. He had the deepest feelings for birds and admitted to loving them all ever since he was a boy. But the fairy bluebird--with its electric blue and coal black plumage--of the Malaysian Islands was irresistible to him. Very rare, the bird is shy and lives in the deepest jungles, but has the loveliest song. Reptiles were not exactly loveable, but they have gained a very bad reputation as man anthropomorphically deplores them, depicting them as sinners and tempters. Although they can be the gardener’s best friend, most men on sighting a snake pick up a rock or club to kill it. Buck claimed he had deep respect for the king cobra, which he deemed the bravest of reptiles, never retreating or hiding from danger. His favorite snake was the Asiatic mangrove snake. About five feet long, they are blue-black with brilliant yellow bands. Early in his career he captured 20 of them for Raymond Ditmars of the Bronx Zoo. Buck found it hard to generalize about mammals, since each species is so different and each single specimen is an individualist. The elephant; however, has to be his favorite, since it is “equable, sensible, and within 60 to 90 days after capture . . . . becomes tractable and learns what is expected of him with all the readiness of a valiant soldier” (Buck and Fraser 1941).
During the spring of 1941, *Science Digest* included a condensation of “Elephants are Like That.” In July, *Frank Buck’s Jungle Cavalcade* was released, opening at the Palace in New York. The picture was a compilation of scenes from his first three pictures with a newly recorded narration by Buck dubbed in. The script was written by Philip H. Reisman, Jr., who regularly wrote the narrations of documentaries and newsreels. With the advent of television he produced scripts for *Project 20*, *You Are There*, and adapted two Mark Twain stories for PBS (Ravo June 6, 1999: 50). *The New York Times* observed that

> The Palace seemed itself again yesterday. The ushers and usherettes were attired in sun-helmets and tropical togs, big-eyed children filed through a lobby filled with trunk-swinging papier-mache elephants and palpitating gorillas, and from the screen inside a familiar voice was saying: “Breaking camp at dawn, our safari moved ever deeper into the mysterious heart of Malaya. . . . And through it all there marched the keen-eyed, the pencil-moustached, the intrepid explorer. . . Mr. Buck, as everyone should know, is probably the most glorified Boy Scout of our time. With nets and assorted goodies he cajoles the more gullible jungle population into his crates for transportation to zoos hither and yon. . . . And along the line of march he stops long enough to film one hectic jungle combat after another. . . and for the main event we give you the suspensive battle between the tiger and a python. Everybody wears a chip on their shoulder in these parts (Crowther July 4, 1941: 17).

But the critic added a sober reminder that “Perhaps the present ferocity of homo sapiens has made the jungle seem almost hospitable by comparison. . . Besides there is the comforting difference that here at least one may watch from a ringside seat. Step up folks and don’t forget the peanuts” (Crowther July 4, 1941: 17).

*Variety* also found the re-reading made an excellent film since “Frank Buck’s jungle pictures are rated ‘daddy of ‘em all,’” and the collaborative effort produced a movie as “up-to-date today as the latest newsreel” (“*Jungle Cavalcade*” July 9, 1941: 17).

Buck remained active in New York society by participating in an auction for Bundles for Britain along with Katherine Cornell, Oscar Levant, and Bernard Gimble which was followed by a “V for Victory” sail up the Hudson during which “victory balloons would be released opposite President Roosevelt’s home at Hyde Park.” Buck, Una Merkel and Eddie Cantor joined the Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords on the cruise (“V for Victory” Aug. 20, 1941: 21 and *New York Times* June 19, 1941). Late that summer, Hollywood columnist Jimmy Fidler reported that he had enjoyed an unimaginable hilarious evening listening to Frank Buck and Errol Flynn compare notes on their jungle adventure. In the
fall, the Times noted that Buck and his wife had set sail for Havana (“Jimmie Fidler” Aug. 30, 1941: 9 and “Ocean Travelers” Oct. 4, 1941: 16).

Ironically, the last scene of Jungle Cavalcade shows the loading of Buck’s “live trophies” onto a United States-bound steamer sailing from Singapore. On December 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the seemingly impregnable island of Singapore fell to the Japanese. Buck’s trips to Southeast Asia would have to be curtailed (“Adventures of Frank Buck” July 7, 1941: 8).

Buck turned his efforts to South America and in December 1942, Jacare was released. The New York Times found the Amazon expedition, “a singularly uneventful adventure.” The film was more of an exhibit of curious South American wildlife that did present some interesting zoological facts. The title came from the native name for

the ugliest-tempered brute in the world, according to Frank Buck’s breathlessly delivered commentary, is a remarkably mild matter of lassoing a few alligators who seem harmless enough until goaded into throwing about the water for a few seconds. As one of the men catches a pair of raccoons by their tails, Mr. Buck remarks: “This isn’t as easy as it looks!” From the point of view of motion picture entertainment, that is unfortunate. It should look harder than it sounds (“The Screen: Glimpses of Jungle Life” Dec. 28, 1942: 23).

Released by United Artists, the film narrated by Buck actually depicted James Donaldson’s expedition. Although his movie making wasn’t up to “his master’s,” Donaldson’s “courage and resourcefulness fully justified Buck’s confidence,” according to another critic (“The Screen: Glimpses of Jungle Life” Dec. 28, 1942: 23).

Variety also liked the film, calling it “markedly better than the recent Buck pictures. It is a smooth, intelligent story.” Unfortunately, the director Charles E. Ford a former Universal editor, died in Los Angeles of peritonitis at the age of 43 (“Jacare” stevelehner.com and “Charles E. Ford” Aug. 8, 1942: 42).

With the war limiting his options, Buck returned to the lecture circuit presenting a talk on his “Jungle Adventures” for servicemen in New York. He also appeared as a frequent radio guest on programs like Bill Stearn’s Sport Views and the popular comedy, Duffy’s Tavern. Often he was seen
strolling through Central Park (“For Servicemen” Jan. 6, 1943: 19 and “Frank Buck to Speak at Edinburgh” Jan. 13, 1943: 10).

A Flying Fortress crew based in the South Pacific named their bomber the “Frank Buck” since “she’d always bring us back alive.” The plane lived up to its name when it had to make a forced landing on a beach in New Guinea and the crew constructed a make-shift strip to get back to their home base (“Frank Buck Plane” Sept. 1, 1943: 28).

Buck regularly spoke at army camps and claimed that soldiers were his best audience. He told them he had a special grudge against the Japanese since so much action was taking place in the Asian jungles he knew so well. He had a fine home in Singapore that had been confiscated by a Japanese general “and when the war is over and we get the Japs cleared out of Singapore I am going back to my headquarters” (Dendurent Nov. 15, 1943: 7).

Later that year, Buck appeared in *Tiger Fangs*, in which the Nazis plot to destroy the rubber supply from Malaya by drugging tigers with a substance that induces them to kill the natives harvesting the sap. Buck, who is called in to uncover the plan, according to the *New York Post*, gave a “stand-out performance. The jungle fellow is a right natural actor” (*New York Post* Nov. 24, 1943 in http://stevenlehrer.com/tiger_fangs).

Ironically, Buck’s visits to Army camps led to his first airplane ride. Buck got lost in his native Texas looking for the Eagle Pass Army Airfield, winding up instead in Laredo when he took the wrong bus from the train station. After calling the base to apologize, a plane was sent to pick him up. He told reporters that, “you can quote me that I was scared.” Buck did arrive on time for his presentation. A few days later, Buck’s father died at the age of 95 in San Angelo, his mother had died a few years earlier (“Frank Buck Gets Lost” Mar. 23, 1944: 6).

In October, the *Atlantic* published an article by Buck on “Talking Birds,” in which he described families of birds that could be taught to speak. All were not necessarily *Psittaci* or parrot-like birds since the hill mynah is probably the “world’s finest ornithological linguist.” The smaller parrot species should also not be overlooked, as well as the other members of the crow family (Buck Oct. 1944: 107).
When the war ended, Buck hoped to return to Singapore, this time planning to fly. The *New Yorker* explained that Buck was heading to the Far East to replenish the Ringling menageries that had been devastated by two fires, and to make

the first full-length in-situ jungle picture in Technicolor....We caught him in his Rockefeller Center Office last week, pacing up and down and growling occasionally as he reflected on the war conditions that have confined him to this country for the last several years. Equipped with seven guns, twenty-five lasso ropes, and a change of underwear, the redoutable adventurer will fly via Rome, Cairo, Basra, Karachi, Calcutta, and Bangkok to Singapore, which he first visited in 1912. There he plans to establish a command, from which he will dash off into the jungles of Indo-China, Malaya, India, Ceylon and the Dutch East Indies. Except for the new film, he intends no innovations. ‘Same old stuff—no radar, no nothing,’ he told us. ‘You dig the same old-fashioned pits and use the same old-fashioned knives and come back with the same old fashioned tigers’ (“Talk of the Town” Sept. 14, 1946: 19).

Since no new animals had been imported since 1941, Buck expected to clean up, especially with black leopards and pythons. Buck was sure his native helpers, some of whom had been captured by the Japanese, were still alive. In the old days he could deliver animals to zoos right off the docks, and go back on the same ship. He pondered whether the attitudes of the natives had changed. “They used to think white men were god, but now they’ve seen the yellow man kicking him around, they may not respect the white man any more”....although he “earnestly hopes the Malays still think white men are gods” (“Talk of the Town” Sept. 14, 1946: 19).

Obviously Buck’s trip was delayed since he was sighted at the Stork Club and back on the lecture circuit. A note was made that he had been involved in a taxicab smashup in Chicago, suffering a deep cut over one eye (“Sporting Life” Nov. 11, 1946).

That March, he was still lecturing in Texas and in the spring his serial *Jungle Menace* was released as a feature picture *Jungle Terror*. But on April 30, 1947, Walter Winchell revealed in his column that “Frank Buck is so ill at St. Vincent’s that insiders are using the famous line about him now!”

In August, the columnist Earl Wilson noted that Buck, hurt in an auto crash months ago, brought himself back alive into the Colony on his first night out. He was on a cane” (Winchell Apr. 30, 1947: 4 and Wilson Aug. 19, 1947).
By October, Hollywood gossip columnist Louella Parsons announced that the comedy team of Abbott and Costello would be making their 23rd picture in which they would play jungle explorers teamed up with “game hunter, Frank Buck, himself” (Parsons Oct. 14, 1947: 10).

That November, Buck was back on the lecture trail in Texas, but he became seriously ill on his way to Amarillo and was flown back to New York. A month later, while still a patient at Lenox Hill Hospital, Buck filed a lawsuit for $250,000 in Federal Court against Columbia Pictures and Astor Pictures. He argued that when he made the serial *Jungle Menace* in 1936, he signed a contract refusing to agree that parts or the entire film could be made into a feature length picture. Columbia agreed to stop exhibition, but entered into a deal with the Astor Company to distribute the film. Later that month, Winchell reported that Buck was again gravely ill (“Frank Buck Cancels Talk” Nov. 7, 1947: 5; “Frank Buck Files Suit” Dec. 9, 1947: 39, and Winchell Dec. 24, 1947: 6).

On a lighter note, a Hollywood reporter noted that thirty coeds at the University of Southern California—all would-be writers—had decided that if they were marooned on a desert island, at the top of their list of the five people that would like to be marooned with, was Frank Buck since “he’s a double-threat man. They figure he’ll protect them from wild beasts—and roast one now and then for chow” (McPherson Dec. 26, 1947).

In February, Louella Parsons announced that Sol Lesser had bought the Selig Zoo in Los Angeles and had offered Frank Buck a job to head an expedition to Africa to restock it. In the spring another columnist wrote that Buck, who was so desperately ill following an operation the previous year that he was flown by private plane to Texas to recuperate, had undergone treatment that would make medical news and now weighed 200 pounds (Parsons Feb. 19, 1948: 10). To which another reporter added that since Buck had been involved in the taxicab accident fifteen months ago he had been in and out of hospitals. He had never been ill before. “He considers it the height of irony that his most difficult safari was his progress from hospital to hospital in the heart of civilization.” He declared that he was well now, had regained the fifty pounds he had lost, and planned to fly to the headwaters of the Nile in August to set up plans for a safari into Africa in November. The African trip will allow for color pictures since the
jungles of Asia are too dark. Buck, now 64, had a saddle-leather complexion and a vigorous handshake. He was “impatient to get going on the only thing which really interests him deeply—exploring jungle life and bringing them back alive.” He felt his early pictures are really dateless because animals never change. But the possibility of bringing back color pictures for the first time would add a new dimension (Turner June 22, 1948: 22).

In the spring of 1948, Disney released the cartoon spoof *Frank Duck Brings ‘Em Back Alive* starring Donald Duck. Buck’s, *Bring ‘Em Back Alive* was re-released causing a critic to comment, “this is a film which was a ‘must’ on every youngster’s list years ago. It is just as entertaining and educational today” (*Syracuse Herald Journal*, June 26, 1948).

That July it was announced that a British company would produce “Frank Buck’s Adventures in Africa,” his first film in ten years. But in November, he was back in Hollywood to “bring Lou Costello back alive.” “Everybody remember Frank Buck? For 35 years Mr. Buck has been a jungle talent scout combing veldts and thickets for furry cuties to sign up on life-time contracts with zoo.” After listing some of his animal battles, Buck, the article continued, has a new assignment as technical adviser to Abbott and Costello’s comedy *Africa Screams* in which he also plays a role capturing, “Stanley Livingston,” Costello’s character. Buck wanted to be assured he would not be made fun of, “Because I ‘m an idol to lots of youngsters, and I wouldn’t want them to be disappointed.” Buck added that previously he had shot all his movies in the real jungle. “Mr. Buck will charge through the Hollywood jungle in the same khaki shirt, puttees, high laced boots, pith helmet, long-barreled pistol, and longer barreled rifle that he wears in Africa.” As soon as he is done shooting this film, he hoped to head on to Africa and insisted he would try to bring back a baby cheetah for Max Baer, Jr. (Manners July 2, 1948: 26 and Mosby Nov. 19, 1948: 8).

After filming *Africa Screams*, Buck claimed he had signed a contract with Richard Pollmer to star in *They Kill to Live*. He would play himself in a semi-documentary to be filmed in Malaya (Parsons May. 6, 1949: 7). Buck also did an unusual endorsement for the St. Louis Zoo. The zoo ad quoted Buck as calling it “The best zoo in the world” (“Visit St. Louis” May 19, 1949: 11).
*Africa Screams* opened in June. It co-starred Clyde Beatty and Max and Buddy Baer along with Buck. One Hollywood columnist had expected fireworks during the filming when Beatty was added to the cast, since he and Buck had presumably been feuding for years. The movie was deemed highly derivative, but popular with kids.

**A Hero to the End**

Then in July, syndicated columnist Robert Ruark of the Scripps-Howard Newspaper Alliance, wrote that he had gained the permission of “Mr. Frank Buck, the big tiger cat and monkey man, to print his most triumphant exploit to date. Mr. Buck has just performed the unusual feat of bringing himself back alive.” Ruark described Buck as looking like a pro blocking back, with a “rough-cut kisser” filled with vitality. “Quite a feat for a man, who, according to doctors, should have been dead two-and-a-half-years ago.” Buck had lung cancer. His friends referred to him as “poor old Frank.” But Frank is “a kind of stubborn ass,” like “the rich old boy who found he couldn’t take it with him, Buck decided not to go.” In fact, he was able to return to Singapore for two weeks to look over the situation and in the process gained twelve pounds. He found that his old base camp area was now teeming with guerrillas and bandits, so he could not start filming until they were cleared out, or else endanger his crew. “Having ducked the big bullet, he does not want to expose his frame to the little ones” (Ruark July 25, 1949: 11).

The taxi accident Buck had been involved in Chicago in October, 1946 had crushed his chest and banged his spine out of alignment. It took three hospitals to discover his lungs “bore a malignant fungus.” He had a major operation in December 1947, after which his cancer began to respond to radiation treatments. For a long time, friends became silent when they saw him so thin and wan, but now Ruark wrote, he looked terrific with only some shortness of breath from a missing rib and collapsed lung. Ruark called Buck lucky, and a man of “remarkable spiritual substance,” full of future plans for more expeditions and a possible television show. He should be an inspiration to others with cancer (Ruark July 25, 1949: 11).
Remembering Buck

But just eight months after Ruark’s upbeat revelation on March 25, 1950, Frank Buck died at the Texas Medical Center in Houston, where he had been a patient for a month. He was survived by his second wife, Muriel, a daughter, sister, and two brothers.

The New York Times obituary pointed out that Buck’s childhood fascination with all kinds of animals continued throughout his life.

It was this obsession that so completely captured the imagination of youngsters throughout the land. There were few boys who did not experience the vicarious thrill when they read of his adventures in his books, saw his exploits in motion pictures or heard him relate his thrilling stories in lectures and on the radio (“Frank Buck Dies” Mar. 26, 1950: 92).

Buck estimated that during his 33-year career he captured more than 100,000 birds of every species, more than fifty elephants, and 65 tigers, along with scores of other mammals and reptiles. In school, he loved maps and could pour for hours on the far off names: Ceylon, Borneo, Nepal, Sumatra, Java. . . “And it was in these distant lands that Frank Buck ultimately achieved his reputation as an animal entrepreneur extraordinary” (“Frank Buck Dies” Mar. 26, 1950: 92).

An editorial in the Abilene paper said that almost every major zoo in the country, each “with its devoted clientele of animal lovers,” was indebted to Frank Buck for the steady flow of jungle creatures into its cages.

He was mauled and pawed in various parts of the earth, but survived to die prosaically in a hospital bed. There is a bit of Frank Buck in most of us, but nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine-hundred and ninety-nine out of a million take it out in dreaming. He was a solidly built, stocky man with a ready grin, in whom the sense of fear seemed not to reside. Actually, no man is completely fearless, not even Frank Buck, but the fact that prodigies of valor are performed with a flourish in spite of butterflies in the stomach makes a man a genuine hero.

Is there a replacement for Frank Buck? Can the nation’s zoos keep their cages and dens supplied with suitable specimens to entrance the doting public? Probably so, but whoever he is, he won’t have the color and sense of drama Frank Buck possessed. He was in a class by himself ( Passing of Frank Buck” News Mar. 27, 1950: 6).

The Middletown (Ohio) Journal editorialized that “It was one of the paradoxes that the death of one of this country’s best known big game hunters should have been caused indirectly by a taxicab. . . sorrowfully it can be said that a machine did what no wild beast could do.” His life
was one that everyone dreams of emulating. . . . to millions he became known as the man who would “Bring ‘Em Back Alive.” What a slogan that was! It immediately conjured up in the minds of young and old alike, a man in whipcord breeches, boots and sun helmet, tanned face and neat mustache. He became the mold, in effect, for jungle hunters.

Two generations have known of Frank Buck. Like the late Edgar Rice Burroughs who died a few days earlier, he brought home the breath and substance of faraway lands and made them familiar to everyone (“End of the Trail” Mar. 31, 1950: 6).

Buck was cremated in a very quiet, simple service in Houston and his ashes strewn over the Texas prairies. He left an estate of about $100,000 to his wife, daughter, and sister (“Frank Buck is Cremated” Mar. 27, 1950: 2).

Robert Ruark wrote poignantly of Buck’s passing.

The death in a week’s time of Frank Buck and Edgar Rice Burroughs has been of considerable shock to an age group which was raised to manhood before the advent of television and the sundered atom. We were of a group that had to seek simpler heroes than Raygun Terwilliger, the Inter-Planetary Man.

We settled for a magnificently romantic specimen called Tarzan of the Apes, created in a moment of inspiration by Mr. Burroughs, who had never been to Africa. Tarzan’s vogue was such that anybody who ever ventured into the jungle in the flesh, also automatically became a demigod. The likes of Frank Buck and the late Martin Johnson were romantic, to my set, far beyond the appeal of the Rover Boys and that arrant prig, Tom Swift, with his lousy little electric rifle.

There is no doubt in my mind that Tarzan of the Apes was the greatest single fictional achievement of our time. I forget how many score volumes are devoted to his exploits, but there must have been some 20-odd movies made about him. I read the original book again, the other day, and still find it fascinating.

Tarzan was a simple soul, and therein rests his charm. He carried a knife and a rope and a spear, and he could break a lion’s neck with no weapons at all. He did not become cluttered up with conversation and sophistication until very late in the piece—and he always felt more at home in G-string than in the silly habiliments of civilized men.

Tarzan never really understood civilization. He only killed when he was hungry or angry, never for fun. When he made a kill, he flexed his muscles, threw back his head and roared. He swung effortlessly from tree to tree—this cost me a broken arm at a very early age—and when he fell in love he just picked up the dame and shoved off with her through the tall timber.

So long as Tarzan was competing with Numa, the lion, or Histah, the snake, or Tantor, the elephant, or Bolgani, the gorilla, he made out fine. It was only after he learned to read and write and talk, and decided he wasn’t an ape that he got into trouble. In that respect Tarzan is rather typical of the human race in its current dilemma.

In the knowledge that it was highly unlikely that a Tarzan could exist, we settled for Frank Buck. He was a burly, powerful man, with a bull-neck and a rough-cut face, made dapper by a small mustache. He was always just leaving for or just back from a safari.

There was a lot of showman in Frank, and you always felt that he had personally wrestled anything he brought back alive, even though most of the time he bought his wild beasts from native hunters, Frank gave off an aura of invincibility, just like Tarzan.

That’s why none of us were surprised when Buck acquired cancer, and seemingly beat it on a 1000-to-one shot. This time last year the disease seemed licked, and Frank thought so, too. He gained back a lot of weight, and took off for Malaysia again. He returned with a flock of beasts, a deep tan, and all of his old bounce. It was a shock to read he had died of cancer, after all.
At 66 life didn’t owe Buck very much, because he lived it all the way up. It is just that his death inspires quiet grief over the passage of a whole way of living. Buck would not have cut a tremendous dash today, where people commute from continent to continent and the jungle is as close as the delicatessen. So much bigger game than tigers is stalked daily in the papers. I imagine modern youth finds Tarzan a very dull fellow, too, when ranged alongside the comic book heroes and our own everyday dramas of spies and H-bombs and guided missiles, snorkel submarines and radar. But Tarzan was a mighty myth, from where I sat, and Frank Buck was a much bigger guy than Buck Rogers. I regret the youngster of today and tomorrow is doomed to be cheated of such simplicity of hero worship (Ruark Mar. 31, 1950: 18).

Ruark was a University of North Carolina graduate who served as a naval gunnery officer in World War II, and had risen through the ranks of the newspaper business. Following the war, he began to write fiction as well as numerous pieces for leading magazines. Ruark loved hunting and fishing as a boy, but as a writer he lived a wild life, drinking heavily. Perhaps influenced by his hero, Buck’s passing, Ruark fulfilled his boyhood dreams by booking a six-week safari in Tanganyika [Tanzania] for himself, his wife, and legendary professional hunter, Harry Shelby. Ruark fell in love with Africa, writing articles on his adventures for Field and Stream and producing one great book, Horn of the Hunter. From 1951 until his death from the effects of alcoholism in 1965, Ruark traveled back and forth to Africa. His novel, Something of Value, about the Mau Mau uprising was purchased by MGM for $300,000 (“Robert Ruark” 1981).

Just prior to his death, Buck narrated Tiger a children’s record that was released by Columbia on April 17, 1950. The next month, the first of three bi-monthly issues of Frank Buck Comics appeared. They were drawn by Wallace Wood, who got his first cartooning job drawing backgrounds for Will Eisner’s The Spirit before becoming an award winning artist specializing in science fiction and fantasy comics, and Joe Orlando, who drew a number of Classics Illustrated, did illustrations for Mad Magazine, and wrote the Little Orphan Annie strip, before becoming associate publisher of DC overseeing Mad Magazine. The initial Buck story was “The Spoor of the Elephant Rustlers” and began with the splash: “An elephant drive is more systematized by experience and by the government! Yet, in the jungle nothing is certain. Nothing is tame, as Frank Buck knew even before he found himself on the spoor of the elephant hunters!” Other stories included “Gentleman of the Jungle” about Soko, the orang-utan, and “Making of a Killer,” the story of a man-eating tiger (“Frank Buck” No. 70 May 1950).
Later that year, a 100-card set of Frank Buck’s Bring ‘Em Back Alive Jungle Picture Cards was issued by Topps. The package noted that “many of the animals you see today in North American zoos are the prizes of Frank Buck’s death-defying daring.” Nor did Buck disappear from popular publications. In March, 1952, Coronet ran a chapter from Fang and Claw, “Laws of the Jungle” (Buck Mar. 1952: 30). In 1957, Cavalier magazine, which began as a fiction periodical featuring mystery and detective writers like Mickey Spillane, but evolved into a men’s magazine, carried an illustrated article on Buck. The lead-in read: “The dapper Texan was called a combination of Jungle Jim and Tarzan. Actually, he was more at home in a woman’s arms.” The story began with Buck and his teenage buddies getting drunk in a Plano, Texas bar and raising hell. His father could never understand his wanderlust which soon brought him to Chicago, with his sole possessions—a ten-gallon hat and silver-plated spurs that were a gift from his uncle, a “distinguished hanging judge” in Oklahoma Indian Territory, who had presumably taken them from an outlaw he had hanged. The article continued with Buck’s brush with a life of crime, his subsequent job as a bellboy and marriage at 20 to Amy Leslie. Buck broke away since he felt increasingly like a “kept man,” finally finding his niche in the animal trade. “Business was business,” wrote Gordon, “but he never let it interfere with his pleasure.” The only thing that could take him away from the jungle for long was show business. “As a business man, Buck preferred the easiest and safest supply source, so he bought from the natives, but occasionally, when it was absolutely necessary, he made a capture himself.” The work was dangerous and occasionally he had narrow escapes from death (Gordon Sept. 1957: 29).

Buck, according to Gordon, “spent money as easily as he made it, and was popular with both men and women.” He settled down after he married Muriel Riley and embarked on his literary and movie career. “All the world loves a winner and he was hailed a man of vision, as well as a combination of Jungle Jim, Tarzan, and brilliant zoologist.” Actually, Gordon insists, Buck was an astute businessman—a jobber who dealt in animals instead of hats, shoes or handbags. But he was a jobber with publicity sense, and he did nothing to discourage the legend that grew up around him. In movies, on radio and lecture platforms, in comic strip advertisements for which he was paid fat fees, Frank Buck became the symbol of the clean-cut adventurer. He
was an inspired publicist, and he knew how to treat newspapermen. Wherever he went he was interviewed and invariably gave them a good story (Gordon Sept. 1957: 29).

For years he avoided telling about the poker game that staked him to his first venture in South America, instead claiming he had skimped and saved as an assistant taxidermist in a museum (Gordon Sept. 1957: 29).

Buck drank with the reporters and then regaled the “ink-stained wretches” with tales of far-off jungle adventure. His anecdotes were always good, although comparisons revealed “drastically different versions of the same adventure.” These anecdotes became part of Sunday supplement stories that created the myth out of the man. “No one ever compared them, and if anyone had, nobody would have given a damn. The public decided it liked Frank Buck” (Gordon Sept. 1957: 29).

His stints in live “showbiz” at the Chicago and New York World’s Fairs, and $1,000 per week appearance with Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey demonstrated that he was a “born showman. He loved the crowds and the crowds loved him. . . . He was what old Big Top hands call ‘a draw’ until the day he died. It would have been according to his tradition had he been clawed to death by a rampaging cat or trampled by a rogue elephant,” but instead he died of cancer. “His friends all over the world mourned him, but the big cats continued to roar lustily in their cages and circuses played to packed houses despite his absence. Frank Buck had had 66 fabulous years, and he’d have understood” (Gordon Sept. 1957: 29).

In 1971, Blue Water, White Death, based on Peter Matthiessen’s book Blue Meridian opened in New York. Vincent Canby, the Times critic, claimed that it included some of “the most smashing, man-against-beast-footage ever filmed by anyone anywhere at anytime.” It records the search of Peter Gimble for the great white shark off the coasts of South Africa, Ceylon, Mozambique, and South Australia. “Not since I was about six, and suffered the exquisite pains and pleasures of Frank Buck’s, Bring ’Em Back Alive, have I been so pleasantly exhausted by an armchair adventure. The world has become small, and comparatively tame, but in the great white shark, Blue Water, White Death, has found a beast so physically awesome, and still so little known, that it restores some sense of respect (and terror) to our conception of the natural order of things (Canby June 6, 1971: 7).
Two years later, Buck became the subject of an off-Broadway one-act play by David Freeman entitled, *Frank Buck Can’t Make It*. The set was meant to be the room of a big game hunter, filled with ornate hand-carved figurines, chairs with lion heads for decoration and tiger claws for legs, with animal skins on the walls and floors, a globe on a stand, and in the center a four-poster bed complete with canopy. But because of its off-Broadway status, the set was seriously cut down in opulence. The play was a farce about a hunter’s problems with his super-masculine image. Obie winner, James Hilbrandt played Buck. “I’ve fought off headhunters and aborigines,” he shouts, pacing he stage and twirling his bullwhip. “I’ve dined on elephant hind and kangaroo pouch stew, broiled and boiled. . . .” The critic added that his voice was powerful, but had a slight quaver, “betraying the hunter’s unlikely inner weakness” (Newman Dec. 24, 1973: 1).

In 1979, a *Times* article reminisced about the various collectibles available to children in the 1930s and 40s. Besides bubblegum cards and souvenir pins, Buck’s name, for example, was used in box top premium offers like the Frank Buck Club ring and sundial watch. “Youngsters overdosed on a daily fix of 15-minute adventure serials. For 90 minutes before dinnertime there was an endless array of gimcracks and games to be sent away for, personalized by the radio characters.” One expert on this era believed the radio shows were more successful than the later TV shows at not insulting their audience. They involved a youngster, as an individual, in going side by side and figuring the plot out with his or her decoder. “They treated kids like they were really people” (Clines June 2, 1979: 25). A collector of World’s Fair memorabilia, said as a child he especially was impressed by Frank Buck, “because he didn’t shoot ‘em, he brought ‘em back alive” (Barry Aug. 14, 1988: H32).

In 1982, 32 years after Buck’s death, CBS debuted a new adventure series, *Bring ’Em Back Alive*, which appropriates the dashing slogan, cut-to-measure myths and even the name of the 1930s animal hunter Frank Buck. Mounted like an old Republic serial, the slap-happy adventure show boasts a congenial leading man in Bruce Boxleitner. He is required to trap all manner of jungle animals without doing them physical harm and, not incidentally, battle Nazis, Asian warlords, and associated jetsam that floats past Malaya (Cocks Nov. 15, 1982).

The critics claimed this and a few other similar knockoffs were in response to the popularity of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The series stretched “the boundaries between high risk and high camp and incorporates
exciting cliffhanging thrills.” Buck balances capturing exotic animals with leading a colorful life at the Raffles Hotel. There he meets a beautiful State Department attaché who needs him to help her on dangerous assignments. Buck is also friends with the Sultan of Johore who likes to claim, “I was born with a silver service for 24 in my mouth” (O’Connor Sept. 24: C27).

**Exploiter or Inspiration?**

Randy Malamud, who immediately sets the tone of his 1998 book *Reading Zoos: Representing Animals and Captivity* by declaring in the first sentence that he does not like zoos, utilizes Doctorow’s description in *World’s Fair*, as a basis to discuss Buck. Buck, Malamud argues, was “a popular 1930s figure who provided a prominent bridge between children and animals. An exotic animal collector, trader, showman and publicity hound, Buck was featured in many flattering (and only loosely factual) characterizations of his exploits in the wild.” Along with books and films, he was further exposed through comics, magazine articles, lectures, and radio talks. His stories described adventures stalking wild animals in far flung settings, capturing them, fending off natives, and deftly transporting his ‘wild cargo’ back to America. All his media undertakings celebrate his heroic character. The film, *Fang and Claw*, opens with titles describing it as the ‘official and authentic motion picture record of Frank Buck’s wild animal collecting expedition in the Asiatic jungles.’ Buck’s publicity photographs depict the stereotypically intrepid tamer/master of wild animals and natives, down to the pith helmet (Malamud 1998: 279).

Malamud contends that the accounts of Buck’s adventures overstate his actual involvement in the capture of wild animals, and he served principally as a middleman between traders and American circuses and zoos. In *World’s Fair*, Edgar, as an adult, looks back at his initial response to Buck, and how he naively approved of Buck since he did not presumably harm or kill animals. He is aware that normally “big game hunters, white men in the dark worlds”—often are involved in cruelty towards animals, “as testimony to the hero’s bravery and he appreciates the trapper’s restraint.” Edgar, Malamud argues, does not think out the ethics of zoos or what happens to the wild animals once they are safely delivered. But Jungleland is not exactly a zoo, but more of a camp. “His careful deliberation is appropriate,” to Malamud, “for two reasons: first Buck is a polymorphic phenomenon—trapper? animal aficionado?
explorer? film star? And second, the World’s Fair is itself an amalgam of cultural genes integrating
entertainment, education, science, politics, advertising, and sociological indoctrination.” In fact, in light
of the Depression and the threat of war, the “confident, cocky outlook” of the Fair often seems “eerie”
and incongruous ” (Malamud 1998: 279-284).

Malamud also feels that Edgar is beginning to deconstruct the zoo when he describes the black
rhino. He tries to “avoid being sucked into the World’s Fair/Frank Buck fantasy world.” Obviously Edgar
had begun this process earlier by re-reading Buck’s books. Now he sees “the victims of heroic enterprises
first hand—the poor rhino, the exploited camel, the hordes of displaced monkeys. . . . Personal, immediate
exposure to the Frank Buck myth subverts, rather than affirms, the cultural conjunction of children and
captive animals.” Since Edgar is a budding writer, Doctorow presents his young hero as able to express
things most youngsters might be thinking. . . “the man who captures wild animals, although he appears
suave, doesn’t hold up under closer consideration. Buck’s motives seem self-serving, and the animals
bear the burden of his selfishness.” What Buck stands for extends to the institution of the zoo. Doctorow,
through Edgar, “makes the reader confront the ethics of captivity and imperialism head on.” When Edgar
looks at the animals, he sees not the animals themselves but the dynamics that have resulted in their
oppression—both on the part of producers (zoos and Buck specifically) and consumers (the audience
Buck cultivates with his cultural showmanship). He sees Buck in spirit, if not in the flesh, and comes to
realize that Buck, Jungleland, and the whole artificial world of the Fair is a scam. Yet Edgar is still a child
of the culture and thinks, “I still wanted to be like him.” The mythos of Buck and Jungleland, despite
being charades, have an undeniable attractiveness ” (Malamud 1998: 281-283).

Malamud points out that Solly Zuckerman writes in Great Zoos of the World (1980), that the
proliferation of zoos in the mid-twentieth century created a heyday for animal dealers. Along with zoos,
safari parks boomed as circus proprietors and dealers joined with large landowners to exploit wild
animals with never the animals’ wellbeing or the advancement of science in mind. “Wild beasts had
become a kind of currency. They would help keep roofs on country homes, and to buy mansions for
dealers” (Malamud 1998: 357).
Vickie Croke in *The Modern Ark: The Story of Zoos: Past, Present, and Future* discusses the glamorous, adventurous colorful tales of animal suppliers and zoo directors, burning, shooting, digging, and noosing their way through South American jungles, African savannahs, and Asian forests. Many; however, just set up shop in foreign ports, paying the natives for specimens they brought in.

One of the most famous was Frank Buck, who allegedly battled man-eating tigers, venomous cobras, and powerful rhinos—all without creasing his khakis or smudging his blindingly white shirts. Buck starred in a series of films about his work and wrote a swashbuckling book of adventure called, *Bring 'Em Back Alive*, published in 1930, that might have been more aptly titled, “Kill Most of Them Along the Way.” Countless adult animals were slaughtered so that offspring could be collected, and more died from harsh conditions and stress during travel. For every animal reaching a U. S. zoo, scores of others perished in the process. Throughout his career, Buck delivered (according to his own estimates) . . . all-in-all 10,000 animals and 100,000 birds. The number of animals that didn’t make it is incalculable (Croke 1997: 156).

Even the “enlightened Carl Hagenbeck was single-handedly responsible for the deaths of thousands of animals during his animal dealing days.” For example, young rhinos and elephants cannot be secured without first killing the older herd members, claims Croke. Hunters and their assistants would slash adult African elephants’ Achilles tendons and arteries, to both immobilize them and cause them to bleed to death. Less than half of young giraffes arrived safely in Europe. Hippos were captured by first harpooning them in a non-vital area, while zebras were rounded up by as many as 2,000 soldiers who would encircle a herd, pen them in and then attack them with long whips, thrashing them for hours until they were exhausted, dispirited, or died from the exertion (Croke 1997: 159).

Elizabeth Hanson in *Animal Attractions: Nature on Display in American Zoos* writes in the same vein. During the heyday of the animal trade beginning with Carl Hagenbeck in the 1860s and extending through Frank Buck’s career which lasted into the 1940s, “collectors and dealers in live wild animals rose in social status from obscure, marginal figures to heroes of popular culture. Animal collecting developed an identity as an occupation. The behind-the-scenes work of providing animals to zoos was made visible to the zoo-going public through newspapers and magazine articles, as well as books that celebrated the trials and triumphs of animal collecting. In these accounts collectors gave an insider’s perspective on their business, which required straddling the worlds of colonial commerce, circus entertainment, and zoos. They sometimes contrasted their work with hunting, which had different goals and ethics. Their adventure
stories added meaning to the specimens they delivered to zoos by making the animals into living links to places, people, and experiences described in their books (Hanson 2002: 95, 167).

A good example was the Indian rhino at the Bronx Zoo. It was not just rare, but the one captured by the Nepalese general Shum Shere and delivered by Frank Buck, as described by Buck in *Bring ‘Em Back Alive*. In addition, Hanson points out, animal collectors acquired “well-honed” skills in animal keeping and dietary demands that proved valuable to the zoo community (Hanson 2002).

Since animal collecting stories were really just a part of the larger genre of exploration and adventure tales, Buck’s readers frequently confused him with a big game hunter, probably because of similar clothing. But Buck’s stories are significantly different. In hunting stories, the climax is marked by the often bloodily detailed confrontation between hunter and quarry. Hunting is constructed as a metaphysical experience, a confrontation between man and nature that confirms white Western masculinity. Hunters, according to Hanson, supposedly abide by a code of ethics and fair play by only shooting mature male animals that are considered worthy opponents. Animal collectors in contrast, often steal big cat cubs while the mother is hunting or shoot nursing orangutan or rhino mothers to obtain their offspring, since their goal is to capture young animals that are easier to handle and acclimatize to captivity (Hanson 2002: 93).

Buck, Hanson, contends, sought to raise his status to “masculine-adventurer-hero of popular culture.” To solve this problem, Buck created his character not as a hunter, but rather as a heroic businessman, Buck rarely accompanied guides and trappers into the field to participate in collecting animals. He described this work—creating drives and pitfalls that snared the weak or young animals. The physical work was done by Malay assistants; stock characters referred to as “boys.” Since catching animals was not a test of manhood like hunting, it was work suited to servants who were not acknowledged as men. Furthermore, whereas in hunting stories the human encounter with animals in the jungle formed the high point of the narrative, in Buck’s stories capturing animals was just the first step in the process that allowed him to become a hero—keeping animals alive and transporting them to the United States (Hanson 2002: 93).
The collector’s work, Buck insisted, was much more difficult than a hunter’s, since the animals had to be kept alive. This was not easy, since special diets had to be designed and the animals protected from accidents and disease. The journey between capture and zoo or circus was the most delicate balancing act and required the most knowledge, since the success of the venture depended on this very specialized knowledge. Hanson concludes that “rather than a naturalist, hunter, or showman, Buck portrayed himself in his stories as a heroic businessman” (Hanson 2002: 94).

This did not make his profession less dangerous, as he had many narrow escapes when he was very frequently faced with hazardous, complicated scenarios, in which he tried not to kill the animal. Success depended on “cunning, skill, and knowledge,” to both avoid personal injury and save his specimen (Hanson 2002).

Buck, Hanson continues, lived the life of a businessman, not an adventurer in Singapore, where he bought animals, handled shipping schedules, oversaw his depot, and drank gin slings at the Raffles; “the social hub for Westerners in Singapore.” Once the order was filled he traveled with the animals, assuring their care and safety (Hanson 2002: 94).

Hanson claims Buck could have promoted his profession as part of a desire to bring the works of nature before the American public, or to arouse a concern for conservation as Carl Hagenbeck had, insisting the root of his work was a love of animals and nature. But Buck, Hanson, concludes was more concerned with new restrictions on export as a nuisance, and seemed unperturbed and amused when he finally obtained Indian rhinos for the Bronx and Philadelphia zoos after 21 additional rhinos were killed. Buck created his persona at a time of increasing American presence and power in the world. “In the way he dressed, and in his treatment of local people during collecting expeditions, Buck modeled himself on the least sympathetic sort of European colonial official.” Hanson also cites Doctorow’s description as evidence to her conclusions (Hanson 2002: 95-96).

Zoo directors had mixed feelings about Buck, claiming they enjoyed the publicity he brought them but feeling he was a “faker” because he was a businessman rather than an “animal man,” giving as
an example how he was fired from the San Diego Zoo after he made eleven elephants ill by treating their skin with an oil (Hanson 2002: 96).

Obviously, the anger over Buck at San Diego was reflected in the president of the Zoological Society, Harry Wegeforth’s letter to William Mann, director of the National Zoo in 1926, warning him that commercial dealers were creating problems for scientific expeditions. Buck was a definite factor in making it hard to get animals out since “there is an impression among the people of the East that he has made millions of dollars on the animals he has brought back to the United States” (Livingston 1974 and Hanson 2002: 112).

In 2000, Steven Lehrer, an associate professor of radiation oncology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City, and a lifelong fan of Buck, finally succeeded in reviving in print a compilation of the edited adventures of his hero. The only publishers with any interest were in Texas, Buck’s home state, and finally, Texas Tech University Press agreed to publish the excerpts from his books. Although Buck was extremely well known in the 1930s and 40s, few young editors knew him. “Fame is fickle. Maybe it’s the animal rights thing,” mused Lehrer ” (Whitaker July 30, 2000: 2F and stevenlehrer.com/ Buckreviews2).

Buck was, according to Lehrer, who examined some of his correspondence, a “sharp,” “shrewd individual” who shared agents with Raymond Chandler, the famed hard-boiled detective writer and creator of Philip Marlowe. When the London Times, for example, reviewed Fang and Claw, it compared it in substance and dramatic unfolding with the early work of Kipling. Buck; however, Lehrer concludes has been one of the great casualties of changing times, particularly because of American society’s increasingly divided views on wildlife, zoos, and racial relations. Although Buck was tolerant, he often seemed condescending, so Lehrer eliminated “the more objectionable racial references” (Whitaker July 30, 2000: 2F and stevenlehrer.com/ Buckreviews2).

In her review of Lehrer’s book, Anne Dingus of the Texas Monthly, remembered how popular Buck once was, but that “his methods seem beastly to us today” (Dingus Oct. 2000: 244). Tom Dodge of the Dallas Morning News adds that Buck’s trademark motto, “Bring’Em Back Alive,” indicates that even
in his day human consciousness was high enough to appreciate his respect for animals. Today that consciousness is so widespread that no one could become a hero of his stature by trapping jungle animals for profit (Dodge July 30, 2000). The _San Antonio Express-News_ humorously wrote, “picture a cross between Clark Gable and that excitable Australian fellow who frolics with alligators on cable TV, and you get something of a picture of Frank Buck” (Fowler Nov. 12, 2000: C3). To this the _London Free-Press_ added that “while most of today’s kids never heard of adventurer Frank Buck, there’s little question he was the Indiana Jones of his time. . . he was a hero who ranked up there with such stalwarts as Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey and Charles Lindbergh” (“Entertainment” Oct. 7, 2000: 5). _Gun Week_ also gave a glowing review, claiming Lehrer’s book “brought to life the deeds of a trapper whose life was legend in a day when men were men, and readers were darned glad of it” (Williamson Oct. 20, 2000).

James G. Doherty, the general curator of the Bronx Zoo, joined in, describing how as a boy he read every animal book he could get his hands on, and now as a zoo person he is dealing with captive populations some of which may be descendants of animals collected by Buck. Doherty said he was always impressed that even with limited equipment, Buck provided care and attention to his animals and was able to work out complicated methods of feeding and housing them. Charlie Hoessle, director of the St. Louis Zoo, wrote how Buck had been a personal friend of the major zoo directors of the world who respected him for his honesty and his concern for the welfare of his charges and conservation-mindedness. Lehrer agrees with these assessments and believes Buck was an early conservationist making the reader aware through the “respect, fascination, and awe he had for all animal life.” Although capturing some of these animals could have affected wild populations, they were placed in “environments in which they could breed and procreate without the threat of extinction. Thus, Frank Buck was one of the first wildlife conservationists, at a time when conservation was a sadly neglected entity. . . . Most important of all, Buck abhorred the senseless slaughter of animals” ( “Hoessle” stevenlehrer.com/Buckreviews2). Lehrer secured the rights to publish the anthology from Buck’s daughter, Barbara. She thought her father’s stories really put you in far off lands and gave the country a boost during the Depression. They served as an escape mechanism. Although her father treated animals humanely, she refused to be
identified by her maiden name so as not to risk being harassed by militant members of the animal rights
movement. Lehrer argues his research shows that Buck was ahead of his time in his respect and treatment
of animals. As a medical doctor, he feels no apologies are necessary for Buck’s providing the rhesus
monkeys that were used in polio research (Bruning Sept. 28, 2000: B3).

Today there is a zoo in Gainesville named for Frank Buck. The animals that had been located at
Fair Park, which opened in 1930, were moved to their present location in 1952, and two years later the
zoo was named in Buck’s honor. It is home to 130 animals and recently opened its new African
Savannah. In 2008, the Zoological Society opened the new Frank Buck exhibit, made up of items donated
by his daughter, who was so impressed by the zoo, she decided there was no better place to exhibit her
father’s legacy (“Frank Buck Exhibit Opening” frankbuckzoo.com).

For critics, Buck was far from an admirable role model. Derek Bouse, in *Wildlife Films*, found the
safari film’s “decadence,” epitomized by the “trio of phony ‘capture’ films by the Barnumesque
American Frank Buck.” He calls Buck a “devoted adherent of the vulgar-Darwinist notion that animals
live in constant interspecies war.” To prove it, Buck placed disparate species in small enclosures and then
provoked them to fight for the filmmakers. In *Bring ’Em Back Alive* fights occurred between a spotted
leopard and python, a black leopard and a crocodile, a black leopard and a tiger, a tiger and a buffalo, a
tiger and a crocodile, a bear cub and a python, a python and a crocodile, and a tiger and a python. They
were accompanied by Buck’s “inane” voice-over commentaries, “exceeded in their stupidity by the sound
effects” (Bouse 2000: 54-56).

Armand Denis, who would later gain much acclaim as a serious wildlife documentary maker,
filmed *Wild Cargo*. He was initially surprised to find Buck’s camp, not in the heart of the jungle, but just
a hundred yards off the main road near the Raffles Hotel, where Buck liked to spend his days, downing
Singapore slings. The camp had a few cages with “despondent looking animals,” and a number of
camouflaged enclosures in which the animals were placed, in order to be photographed. Bouse calls the
staged fights in a pit containing captive animals, “solely for cheap matinee entertainment,” the “worst
kind of voyeuristic animal pornography.” Denis recalled that Buck only had a penchant for
sensationalism, and was totally insensitive to animals. When he asked Denis what he thought about a possible fight to the death between a tiger and an orangutan, Denis argued it would be unrealistic. Buck, however, insisted that when he was around the two species would fight (Bouse 2000: 54-56).

In one film featuring a battle between a trapped tiger and Buck, the tiger had drowned in the pit when it filled with water in a rainstorm the night before, according to Bouse, but the scene was faked with Buck bragging he had captured a real man-eating tiger. But even Bouse admits that Buck’s films were among the first to “stake out the wildlife genre.” Safari films had, from the silent era on, involved staging, acting, fabricating, and dramatic story telling. Film pioneer, Muybridge had sacrificed a tied up buffalo to a tiger, and even Raymond Ditmars had staged fights, as did the British educational series, “Secrets of Nature,” in which the insistent theme was that the rule of the animal world was to kill or be killed. Disney’s post-World War II, *True Life Adventure* series, could, like Buck’s films, be sensational, condescending, and cruel (Bouse 2000: 54-56).

Today, it is politically correct to cast Buck as a villain, a self-aggrandizing braggart who decimated the wilds to acquire animals for zoos and circuses, who opposed conservation measures, and racially demeaned the indigenous people of India and Southeast Asia, considering them as no more than his servants. Critics cite Doctorow’s short description of Buck’s exhibit at the New York World’s Fair, and Edgar’s awakening to the real and simulacra, to point out the innate problems with animals in captivity, as well as Buck’s shortcomings as a hero.

However, a close reading of Buck and his first co-author Edward Anthony reveals an effort to avoid the sentimentalization and anthropomorphism of the nature fakers so common in literature. Anthony wrote how he filled a room with references and consulted with experts at the Bronx Zoo in order to make sure the geography and natural history presented in the articles and books represented the most up-to-date concepts. The discussions of animal behavior, for example, stress the importance of not over generalizing or villainizing, and the recognition that the actions of wild animals in different situations are not easily predictable.
Of course, the books, articles, and especially, the films, are filled with examples of animal combat. Since most of Buck’s actual adventures occurred in the late teens and 1920s, and none of the supposed combats were either filmed or photographed, we have no way to know if they really occurred or were part of the lore surrounding the capture of wild animals in the region. Animal combats have enthralled people for ages, and since Buck and Anthony were writing for a general audience, they are included. Although most seem unlikely, they are not out of the realm of possibility.

Buck was not afraid to show a more sensitive side, claiming over and over that his true love in the animal world was birds, with his favorite, the fairy bluebird, rather than choosing a more aggressive, dangerous species. Wherever he lived, one of the first things he did was to construct his own aviary. Other criticisms also do not seem fair. With the exception of one captain, Buck praised and cited his friendships with the captains of the ships that carried his wild cargo. He also saw laws being put in place by colonial powers to protect disappearing wildlife as a good thing, since he deplored trophy hunting and castigated those who enjoyed the cowardly “sport.” He criticized traditional Asian medicine and was aware of how it could potentially decimate the tiger in Southeast Asia. His only real run-in with regulations occurred when he docked with a cargo that included some of his favorite animals, the mouse deer. He was told that as hoofstock, the diminutive animals would not be let off the ship since they could be a possible disease threat to the livestock industry and he was forced to chloroform them.

As for racist claims, Buck, if anything, seems condescending, but not racist. He was working in a colonial region, where white men were expected to maintain the upper hand. But Buck gave credit to the indigenous people for teaching him everything he knew about trapping and collecting wild animals, as well as repeatedly heaping praise on his assistants, and noting how beneath the skin all men are basically the same. In Fang and Claw he is extremely critical of many of the whites he encountered in the region. His use of the word “boy,” today seems very insensitive, but he himself was a bellboy and cowboy, and had probably experienced many of the indignities that went along with those positions.

He certainly never spoke with the contempt of Douglas Burden when he wrote of breaking the color line in the East Indies.
And where is this getting the world, this intermarriage between race and race, this breaking down of the barriers of race consciousness? In the long run, as intermingling becomes more and more frequent, does it not lead inevitably to one grand hodgepodge, one loathsome mixture of all races into a pigsty breed? (Burden 1927: 53).

To his credit, Buck also wrote freely of evolution without reservations, including his book aimed at younger readers that became especially popular in Texas schools. Today, in most zoos and in Hollywood wildlife films, the “E-word” has become akin to the “N-word.” A 2006 Forbes article tells, “How Hollywood dumbs down movies about cute animals—and misses a chance to teach evolution.”

At least since the Scopes Monkey Trial religious forces have tried to corrupt American science education by sowing confusion about evolution, the cornerstone of biology. But their most pernicious effect may not be in overt insanities like anti-Darwin warning stickers in textbooks, which in any event the courts have stymied. Rather, they may have succeeded in making evolution seem so controversial and morally fraught that educators and entertainers sidestep the fuss and just don’t go there.

A couple of popular recent movies offer a case in point. March of the Penguins delighted millions with its stunning footage of emperor penguins trekking through forbidding ice fields to bring food back to their offspring. But a striking aspect of the spectacle—that parents listen for the unique calls of their chicks, rather than feeding the nearest or neediest one—is left unexplored. What a missed opportunity to explain the core idea of modern evolutionary science, that organisms are adapted to promote the replication of their genes, rather than the greater good of the species. We are meant to experience moral uplift at penguin’s parental dedication but are given no insight into the laws of nature.

Another recent dazzler, Winged Migration, is also evolution free. We fly with the birds for thousands of miles as they brave predators, hunger and horrific weather. Yet we are never told why these birds undertake this semiannual madness. There is no mention that organisms are opportunistic in the competition for food and that many birds evolved to take advantage of the Arctic summer, with its concentrated profusion of insects and seeds, while escaping its winter, which is too cold for them to rear chicks. The film is a visual spectacle for us to gaze at uncomprehendingly.

One more example: I recently bought a frog from a Web vendor that claims that its wares are “perfect for class projects, science fairs and anyone who appreciates the wonder of nature.” Yet this fails to reveal the name of the creature (Xenopus, or “strange foot”) or explain why it has such odd features, like being flat as a pancake, lacking a tongue and having feet that face backwards. This frog madly flaps food into its mouth while its forelegs, which the Web site describes as “clapping its hands.”

Once again, a golden opportunity to explain the living world has been wasted. The African clawed frog lives in water, but it evolved from standard frogs, who spend much of their lives above the surface. Over time Xenopus lost its sticky tongue (useless in the water), modified the use of its hands to catch prey and reshaped its feet and body for streamlined swimming. Its silly appearance is a product of this retooling, a fascinating but untold story. The only message conveyed by these supposedly educational media: cute animals do weird things. This may encourage children to become eco-tourists but not to become scientists. From the time they are young, scientists are energized by explanations, by the “Aha!” that comes from understanding why something is the way it is. And with living things, the answer to “why” questions always involves evolution. When you take the evolution out of biology, you dumb it down, turning it into a circus of animal antics rather than a source of deep and satisfying insight.
The unspoken taboo on evolution is not just a tragedy of missed educational opportunities. Our health and economy increasingly depend on biomedical research, from the epidemiology of bird flu to the treatment of AIDS, which depends on understanding evolution. Asian countries, which lack America’s squeamishness about evolution, are hell-bent on expanding their biomedical research sector. If we don’t overcome our reluctance to excite our children with modern biological thought, it doesn’t take a Darwin to predict who will be selected in this struggle for survival (Pinker Aug. 14, 2006: 40).

Today in the United States there are many more creationists than Darwinians.

About half of American polled by Newsweek in 2007 claimed that evolution did not occur at all—that God created humans in their present form. Most of the rest conceded that evolution might occur, but guided by the hand of God. More than twice as many Americans believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ as in natural selection (Bloom May 2009: 16-20).

In fact in a survey of 34 developed countries, the United States ranks 33rd, only ahead of Turkey, in the proportion of its population that believes the theory of evolution to be true (Bloom May 2009: 16-20).

In conclusion, we must remember that Buck was providing animals legally for zoos and circuses. The majority of his collecting occurred in the 1920s, a heyday for circuses and a period of the rapid expansion and growth of zoos that saw themselves as rivals for the most rare and charismatic species. The Depression severely decimated both markets as circuses folded and zoos had to drastically cut back their spending to survive. The subsequent World War, further limited the wild animal trade. Today circus menageries are largely things of the past, and accredited zoos assiduously practice Species Survival Programs, which largely involve the exchange and breeding of genetically diverse specimens to the zoos best equipped and possessing the greatest experience and expertise to house and maintain a particular species. Acquisitions are typically between zoos and seldom involve wild caught animals that are now stringently controlled under the Endangered Species Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Unfortunately, for some people, safely viewing the wild in a controlled environment is not enough. This urge to possess the wild has helped create a massive illegal international trade. In 2007, the State Department estimated its worth at between $10 and 20 billion dollars annually. Today, in the United States, 7,000 to 15,000 tigers (the most popular of the exotics)—4,000 of them in Texas—live in private roadside zoos, circuses, sanctuaries, farms, and backyards (only about 4 to 5,000 tigers exist in the wild), frequently kept in cages too small for them to
turn around, and badly malnourished from incorrect and insufficient diets. The big cats, including lions, leopards, and cougars, breed easily in captivity, but many of them suffer from the effects of severe in-breeding, such as immune deficiencies, heart problems, epilepsy and mental retardation, and can be purchased for less than a pedigreed dog. In many states, tigers can be bought, sold or given away easily since the Endangered Species Act regulates importation, and the USDA licenses exhibitors, not pet owners, nor does the Wildlife Safety Act forbid interstate delivery of animals for non-commercial uses (Glausiusz Feb. 2008: 40-44).

The American market is also extremely large for other exotic pets as well as trophies—tiger skins, rhino heads, and other rarities—and traditional Chinese medicine. The United States is believed to rank second to China and ahead of the EU in this illegal trade (Herro Jan./Feb. 2008: 7).

Ironically, the Malayan peninsula became the base of the world’s most notorious wildlife dealer, Wong Keng Liang (Anson Wong), who was finally arrested following a joint undercover operation by Australian, Canadian, Mexican, New Zealand, and American authorities. “It is almost impossible to name an animal or plant species anywhere on the planet that has not been imported legally or illegally—for its meat, fur, skin, song, or ornamental value, as a pet, or as an ingredient.” Europe, China and the United States purchase billions of dollars’ worth of wildlife, “emptying out parks and plundering wildlands.” Just as in Buck’s heyday, the process begins with local hunters and farmers catching animals for local traders who pass them along the supply chain. Like art, the rarer the item, the higher the price. “Around the globe, nature is dying, and the prices of her rarest works is going up.” It is a highly lucrative market with profit margins that make drug profits pale in comparison. “Wildlife trafficking may very well be the world’s most profitable form of illicit trade, bar none,” with easy to transport reptiles, “the diamonds,” of the trade. Often aggressive, relatively common, legally traded reptiles provide cover for the rare specimens hidden in the crate. The dealers frequently set up captive breeding facilities, use zoos to serve as fronts for illegal dealing and poaching, and have government wildlife officials on their payroll. In comparison with the vast network the illegal traders maintain, the enforcement agencies are pitifully undermanned. TRAFFIC, the arm of the World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for the
Conservation of Nature has just three investigators in Southeast Asia, while CITES employs only one enforcement officer, as does Interpol (Christy “The Kingpin” Jan. 2010).

Anson, who despite the long hard work of agents is free again, has access to amazingly rare animals, some of which were considered extinct in the wild, along with trophies like panda and snow leopard pelts. He is planning to open another zoo, this time specializing in the big cats, especially tigers. There is an enormous black market for the animals Anson claims to “love” (Christy “The Kingpin” Jan. 2010).

Tibetans wear tiger-skin robes; wealthy collectors display their heads, exotic restaurants sell their meat; their penis is said to be an aphrodisiac; and Chinese covet their bones for health cures, including tiger-bone wine, the ‘chicken soup’ of Chinese medicines. Experts have put the black market value of a dead, adult male tiger at $10,000 or more. In some Asian countries, tourist attractions called tiger parks secretly operate as front operations for tiger farming— butcherling captive tigers for their parts and offering a potential market for wild-tiger poachers too. (Keeping an adult tiger costs $5,000 a year in food alone, but a bullet only costs a dollar) (Christy “The Kingpin” Jan. 2010).

Perhaps, if we are to make target, of Frank Buck and Clyde Beatty, it is because they romanticized and helped create a continuing craze for wildlife through the mass media that could easily be perverted into a public desire to possess wild animals, with the often misguided belief that anyone, even without knowledge, training, or proper facilities, could possess and control the wild. Buck and Beatty’s success encouraged others to follow what seemed such a widely popular, glamorous, exciting, and potentially profitable genre to the point that more people visit zoos than attend the games of all major sports combined in the United States, and Animal Planet offers “all animals, all the time.”

From the New York Herald Tribune
Poster for *Wild Cargo* (1934) and Buck with Mouse Deer (Souvenir Postcard New York World’s Fair, 1939)

Norman Rockwell, *Have You Eyes Like Frank Buck’s? Seeking Happy Adventure?* Schenley Advertisement (*Life* Nov. 1, 1937)
CHAPTER 4.

CLYDE BEATTY

And when he came to the place where the wild things are they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws (Sendak 1963).

After the success of Bring ’em Back Alive, Edward Anthony was deluged with calls from other individuals who had exciting experiences with animals and wanted him to co-author a book with them. But just one really stood out and convinced Anthony to take on another animal man. The caller was Clyde Beatty, considered the top wild animal trainer in the country. When Anthony inquired about his personality he was told the young Ohioan was a great showman, well liked by practically everyone, including the press, largely because of his daring, modesty, dry sense of humor, and above all his genuineness. One newspaperman told him that

Clyde had more sheer guts than anyone I’ve ever known but you’re going to have a tough time getting him to admit he ever did anything that called for courage. He’s not self-deprecating. He knows he puts on a good show, one that takes nerve. But his attitude is: that’s my job. His approach is matter-of-fact and if you expect to get the whole exciting story—or a good chunk of it—acquaint yourself with some of his exploits. He’s figured in a lot of news stories, some of them thrillers. Look up the clippings and talk about these (Anthony 1960: 271-272).

He told Anthony just to get Beatty started and since he was a perfectionist, he will tell the whole story. The appeal of the book is that it will give him a chance to tell why things happened since he is a student at heart. For example, he will make it clear that the tiger escape in the Shrine Temple in Detroit was not due to carelessness since he has a strong sense of responsibility. He will also underplay his courage and ingenuity, but, he advised Anthony, to keep after him. He might give credit to everyone but himself, but that can be edited out later (Anthony 1960: 272).

Anthony found this advice helpful. When he questioned Beatty about an incident in Cleveland where three tigers had escaped, he gave credit to his aides, but when Anthony interviewed eyewitnesses, they described Beatty’s “coolness, determination, and ability to establish himself as boss in any situation involving wild animals.” He averted the possibility of a horrible tragedy through his mastery of “every trick of his unusual little known profession” (Anthony 1960: 272-273).
Running Away and Joining a Circus

Clyde Beatty’s life was one that could only dreamed by most youths—attaining stardom as the world’s greatest wild animal trainer, considered by many the bravest man in the world, hobnobbing with celebrities and reporters, flying a plane, boxing, watching his baseball heroes, making movies, co-authoring books and articles, and being unanimously acclaimed by Broadway’s toughest columnists and sportswriters.

Perhaps, even more amazing is what motivated Beatty. Like many driven people, he was hounded by a black dog. For him it was his childhood. Reporters typically skimmed over his early years, depicting them as blissfully bucolic—the country boy, enamored with animals, keeping a diversity of pets, finally runs off to join a circus, only to be brought back by distraught parents, who urge him to stay in school, but he runs away again, and in ten years is dazzling Broadway. There is no way to know how much he revealed in confidence to Anthony.

Beatty’s family lived in Highland and Ross Counties in southwestern Ohio. They probably were descendants of Irish immigrants who had settled in the area and were employed building canals and roadways. By 1900 his maternal grandparents had had 16 children, with nine surviving. After the death of his grandfather, Beatty’s grandmother, mother, uncles and aunts had largely moved to Bainbridge. Bainbridge is located in Paxton Township in the southwest corner of Ross County on the south bank of Paint Creek. It is in the heart of the very fertile Paint Valley. Back from the valley, the land rises into a lofty range of hills, ideal for fruit growing. Originally part of the Virginia Military Lands, the region had been settled by Revolutionary War veterans who received government land grants (Joys 1990: 34).

In 1910, Clyde’s mother, Margaret, and her mother, Lavinia, survived by taking in washing, while Clyde’s uncle John, who suffered from tuberculosis worked as a farm laborer. His uncle Charles also lived with his grandmother and his uncle Frank was boarded out with a farm family. His aunts were all married, and Clyde’s 27-year old mother shared a rental apartment with her brother George, who worked at a coal dock in town. Margaret already had three illegitimate children: six-year old Clyde, Georgia, five; Ruth, two, and she was expecting a fourth (Joys 1990: 34).
Life in a small rural town like Bainbridge was probably not easy for Margaret or her small children, since typically no remedial or social agencies existed in those regions. Among rural Irish families at the turn of the century, illegitimacy was common, and not severely condemned if the mother was self-supporting. After George married, Margaret had to rely totally on herself to support her family.

Famed Ohio author, Sherwood Anderson, recalled his own feelings when as a child he and his siblings were sent to pick up and deliver baskets of clothes. “We began asking ourselves the unanswerable question, “Why this one is born into life in a big house, with a carriage at the door, with no thought of where food came from. . . . Why does our mother have to washing the dirty clothes other people soiled.” For Anderson rather than feeling hatred or envy, he began to experience a kind of shame (Anderson 1965: 29 in Joys 1990: 34).

People in Bainbridge; however, remembered the children as being very clean and neat. Clyde was an especially “lively well-liked youngster.” Always small for his age, Buster, as he was nicknamed, kept rabbits and guinea pigs, and reportedly trained a chicken and a raccoon. He sold the raccoon to a passing circus after it bit him. Always trying to gain attention, he would stand on his head for pennies in the Shraders’ general store, after they spread paper to keep him from getting dirty. Beatty’s best friend, Howard Smith, later the town mortician, remembered that the two of them sold peanuts at the Pastime Theater (Matthews 1963: 32A and Joys 1990: 34).

The next few years saw more additions to the Beatty clan. Clyde’s sister Mabel was born in 1911, a sister, Lillie in 1913, and a brother Clifford in 1916. His aunts and uncles were producing a plentitude of cousins. His uncle Frank, for example, at the time of his death in 1958 had 41 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren. The region was also changing with the advent of World War I. Nearby Chillicothe became the site of Camp Sherman, an enormous training center for inductees. Virtually overnight, it became an army town, with an influx of men from all over the country. A sense of excitement and foreboding filled the air (Joys 1990: 34).

However, the camp became plagued with epidemics; first bronchitis and then the Spanish flu. By October 1918, despite the quarantine of all public meeting places, theaters and bars, almost 6,000 cases
had been reported, with a resultant death toll of 1,177. Chillicothe’s Majestic Theater became a temporary morgue with bodies stacked like cordwood. The army then hauled the bodies to the railroad depot, playing funeral dirges on the way, and the more upbeat “Dixie” or the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” on the return trip (Peck, G. R. 1972 and Joys 1990: 34).

Death would not only haunt Chillicothe, but would hit the teen-age Beatty’s family. It started in 1917 when uncle Frank’s son died shortly after birth. Then his uncle John died from tuberculosis in January 1918. Six months later, his grandmother died of rectal cancer. Charles enlisted in the army and was sent to nearby Camp Sherman. Still a poor fruit picker at heart, he went AWOL when the crops were ripe. He was always easily apprehended in Fruitdale, where he might be up a tree picking apples with his army cap on, or walking along a road carrying a bushel basket. The war had proven very unpopular to many Americans, which led to a high number of genuine desertions along with the ignorant misdeeds of country boys like Charles. The latter were usually easily apprehended or turned themselves in. They were often used as examples, as in the case of Charles, who was sentenced to hard labor at Leavenworth where brutal treatment of inmates was well-documented. Charles somehow managed to escape, but was caught again and returned to the prison until 1923 (Joys 1990: 34).

But the deaths had not stopped yet. In the spring of 1919, uncle George’s infant twins died, and in the fall—an especially beautiful time in Bainbridge when the leaves explode in a riot of color on the surrounding hills—tragedy struck again, a lot closer. Clyde’s four-year old brother and 15-year old sister were both stricken with diphtheria. At nine in the morning of October 25, 1920, Clifford died, and at one the following afternoon, Georgia died. Like their grandmother, they would be buried in unmarked graves. Again we can refer to Sherwood Anderson and wonder if: “Like all boys he thought much and often about death. In the night he sometimes awakened cold with fear, thinking that death must be just without the door of his room waiting for him. When in the winter he had a cold and coughed, he trembled at the thought of tuberculosis” (Anderson 1965: 99 in Joys 1990: 34).

His mother was pregnant again, and in March 1921 had another girl, Geneva. This child was attributed to James Tong, who Margaret married in the spring of 1922 (Joys 1990: 34).
A train track ran through the heart of Bainbridge. In *Ohio Town*, Helen Hooven Santmyer described a train whistle as the “voice of longing in childhood.” Even trips on the interurban allowed the “imagination to march faster than any train. . . . Those twenty minutes could cover several lifetimes—up to age twenty-five—each different, although fame was gloriously achieved in each.” The train, she continued, also exerted a pull you knew you would follow. “Unconcernedly confident that when you do, those who stay at home, and home itself, will never change, will always be awaiting your return. Today no child’s imagination can be as stirred as it once was by the last faint sound of a steam engine whistle dying away around the curve of the world” (Santmeyer 1997: 244 in Joys 1990: 34).

That pull to escape became stronger when young Clyde was accused of fathering Mary Butler’s child. Although she subsequently married a man named Nichols, she would haul Beatty into court for non-support whenever the circus played Ross County. In 1926, the Bainbridge mayor ordered him to pay two dollars a week child support for the four-year old boy (“Big Show Ready to Go” May 3, 1926).

Sherwood Anderson in his memoirs vividly recalls that same problem. At 14 he had already heard many stories of boys and young men caught by girls and women. “Suddenly there was a child expected and that was it. It all began out of a kind of blind eagerness you could not control. You were with a girl and it happened. And then before you realized what you were in for, you were caught, forced into marriage. . . . It was a risk, it was something terrible.” Anderson reminisced further:

one night when he had been late on the road wandering by fences, hearing the lonely barking of dogs at distant farm houses, getting the smell of the new ploughed ground into his nostrils, he came into town and sat down on a low iron fence that ran along the platform of the railroad station, to wait for the midnight train north. Trains had taken on a new meaning to him since any day might see him on such a train, bound into his new life (Anderson 1965: 99).

Thus, when the siren song of the circus came in August of 1921, it was not surprising that young Beatty would answer it. Working as a clerk in a general store, he had been beating rugs for extra pocket money the morning he left. (Later he would be described as a baker’s boy, a newsboy, and a farm boy who hitched the family mule in front of the courthouse and left with the circus.) A career in sports seemed far off—and the circus was here and now and meant an escape from an uncertain future and the tragedies of the past three years (Joys 1990: 34).
For many country boys the provocative lure of the circus had quickly become grim reality and they hastily beat a rapid retreat home, but for Clyde Beatty it was just what he wanted. He wrote in his usual fine penmanship to his favorite cousin, “Cibby” Penwell, about the beautiful countryside of North Carolina and what a good time he was having. In another letter to Cibby from Lancaster, Missouri, he wrote about a lion that had been poisoned and died, how he got two of the claws as souvenirs, and sent along a lock of the mane to his cousin. The lion, he excitedly wrote, had killed three men and conquered many more. He signed all of these, “Buster” (Matthews July 1965: 32A). The adventure of a lifetime had begun (Joys 1990: 34).

**The Status of Wild Animal Acts**

Beatty entered the world of the circus at an interesting time of both high popularity and transition. In the late nineteenth century, wild animal acts in America were relatively crude affairs, known as “hurrah” acts. The performance consisted largely of lions being made to jump and run around, hop over one another, and generally simulate much excitement (Conklin 1921: 52 and Joys 1984: 16). These methods, in which the animals were kept in a constant state of tension, were both cruel and dangerous. Carl Hagenbeck, of the famed family of animal collectors and zoo pioneers, introduced a system of training that would demonstrate wild animals’ natural beauty and intelligence, and revolutionize the wild animal act. “Brutes,” he asserted, “after all are beings akin to ourselves. They will repay cruelty with hatred and kindness with trust.” In 1887 he established a circus in Hamburg and hired an unemployed trainer who was willing to try the new system that Hagenbeck demonstrated using dogs and cats. They then began the two-year experiment using twenty-one lions carefully selected because of their disposition, power of concentration, and docility. Only four passed muster, but they were able to perform a number of behaviors capped by pulling a chariot around the cage. Their European tour commenced in 1889 and was very profitable (Hagenbeck 1909: 118 and Joys 1984: 19-20).

Hagenbeck believed he had demonstrated that wild animals could be affectionate creatures, but trainers had to be intelligent, have a love for animals, along with patience and sympathy. The roles of taskmaster and slave were replaced by those of teacher and pupil. The key was painstaking preparation,
the exclusion of animals that were clumsy, unintelligent, or did not have the temperament needed. The
trainer had to be vigilant and courageous, quick to exclude the big cats when they were in season, and
alert for any change in behavior, because even Hagenbeck admitted that deep down a “remnant of their
primitive ferocity” could burst out (Hagenbeck 1909: 118-121 and Joys 1984: 20-21).

Carl’s brother Wilhelm achieved remarkable results with the system. He taught a lion to do
equestrian tricks, assembled a group of seventy polar bears, and exhibited an act that included two tigers,
two lions, two black panthers, two leopards, three Angora goats, two Somali sheep, an Indian dwarf zebu,
a Shetland pony, and two poodles (Hagenbeck 1909: 136, 143 and Joys 1984: 21).

Hagenbeck debuted his acts, and his newly devised big cage arena at the Chicago World’s Fair in
1893. He followed this up with an appearance at Madison Square Garden. They then played Manhattan
Beach, and returned in the fall to the Garden with sixty new animals added to the troupe. When ten years
later his acts appeared at the St. Louis World’s Fair, Scientific American claimed that no great exposition
could be complete without a Hagenbeck display (Shepstone 1904: 97). Over a course of thirty years,
Hagenbeck trained over 700 animals using his system, as well as teaching the majority of European and

Even if not directly trained by Hagenbeck, most successful trainers were aware of and followed
his methods. Most notable of these were the Ferari brothers and Frank Bostock, English fun-fair showmen
who came to America in 1894 and set up their animal acts at Coney Island. Like Hagenbeck, Bostock
argued that only a genuine fondness for animals made a man a great trainer. It gave him sympathy for
them, and with that, understanding, and finally mastery. But he continued, just liking the big cats, did not
guarantee they would like the trainer. Often the beauty and fascination of an animal led a trainer to take
unbelievable risks. In an all out attack that could break out at any time, even revolvers and armor, were
of little avail, he warned. Animals had to be convinced psychologically of the power of the trainer, for
once a wild animal saw fear in the trainer, discipline was destroyed. Quickness of temper or a desire for
revenge also would immediately eliminate a potential trainer. Trainers needed to be courageous, cool in
emergencies, possess a dominating personality that displayed both his authority and self-mastery, have

Despite the positive influence of these new techniques and the good publicity they generated, some journalists still questioned the “rightness” of wild animal acts. Even Bostock admitted he felt guilty for jailing these forest, desert, and jungle creatures, but that after wrestling with his conscience he decided he had caused them no discommodities equal to the tragedies, hunger, and thirst they endured in the wilds. Most animals were willing, eager pupils, and any discipline was no more than that given “in the correction of an evilly disposed child” (Bostock 1920: xiv-xvi and Joys 1984: 36-37). For example, F. G. Aflalo in *Fortnightly*, addressed the ethics of training wild animals contending these “degrading spectacles . . . of horrible suffering to both man and brute” pandered to the worst in people and their desire for morbid sensationalism, without any danger to themselves. It was “danger at a distance—a fake, a surrogate for real life” (Aflalo 1900: 382). In 1902, Harvey Sutherland added that people liked the idea of the trainer going “directly from the circus to the morgue.” While the humorist George Peck wrote in 1906, “that the average audience never gets its money’s worth unless someone is hurt doing some daring act.” So Peck’s Bad Boy’s father, who had inherited a circus, decided to have someone pretend to be injured in every act, and have them carried out on stretchers by people dressed as doctors. “The show tried it in Bucyrus, Ohio, and had seven men and two women injured so they had to be carried out, and the audience went wild, and almost mobbed the dressing room, to see the doctor operate on the injured.” He added that they might even add a dissecting table if the audience demanded it (Sutherland 1902: 709; Peck 1906: 76-77 and Joys 1984: 37).

Many others, even some critics like Sutherland, agreed that the hallmark of the successful trainer was patience rather than cruelty. However in 1912 an article appeared in *Everybody’s Magazine* by Maurice Brown Kirby that would have long-term ramifications. In “The Gentle Art of Training Wild Beasts,” he sarcastically noted that the only use trainers had for the word “kindness,” was when they were interviewed. The only bond between man and animal was a stick, the bigger the animal, the bigger the
stick. Animals he claimed were not “taught, they are pushed and shoved and mauled and whipped and
dragged and choked and tortured into tricks.” If they couldn’t give in to pain, they couldn’t be broke. He
detailed the methodical, brutal breaking of a tiger by a “handsome, extravagantly reckless” trainer, “a
passed master in the art of thrilling an audience” and appealing to women’s “morbid love of
daredeviltry.” Ethics and sympathy had no place in the arena (Kirby 1908: 435 and Joys 1984: 42).

Kirby’s article became the basis for Jack London’s devastating attack on trained animal acts, as
told through a dog’s eyes, Michael Brother of Jerry (1917). Although London never credits Kirby, most
of the animal training school descriptions are virtually lifted word for word from the article. In his
preface, London explains that his insatiable curiosity had led him behind the scenes to learn how animal
performances were developed. What he found was a “body of cruelty so horrible that I am confident no
normal person exists, who once aware of it, could ever enjoy looking on at any trained animal turn.” As a
world traveler, London said he was never a “namby pamby” and had personally witnessed starvations,
whippings, mutilations, executions, battlefields, and the most horrible deaths, but nothing had appalled
and shocked him more than the sight of happy, laughing, applauding audiences watching trained animals
perform their turns. He could tolerate unconscious cruelty and undeliberate torture, but “what turns my
head and makes my gorge rise, is the cold-blooded, conscious, deliberate cruelty and torment that is
manifest behind 99 of every 100 trained animal turns. Cruelty as a fine art had attained its perfect flower
in the trained animal world.” He demanded that all men, women, and children acquaint themselves with
animal training methods, join or form humane societies, and walk out whenever any animal act was
staged. Those who read his book, he hoped, would “weep red tears and sweat bloody sweats’ as they
came to know what real cruelty and brutality were” (London 1917: v-vii and Joys 1984: 40, 54).

London wrote this book as he was dying. He suffered from uremia and depression, which had led
him to a dependency on opium and other drugs. London always opted for vividness and dramatic effect in
his writings and in this novel believed his stand against wild animal acts demonstrated a clear choice
between good and evil (Sinclair 1977; Rensberger 1978; London 1939, and O’Connor 1964).
London finished the book, but it was published posthumously. Soon Jack London Clubs popped up all over the United States. Members dutifully arose from their seats whenever animal acts were exhibited and silently walked out of the venue. By 1924, the clubs had a reported membership of 400,000 (London 1939). The Club especially attracted school children who would take the following membership pledge: “I am in favor of the Jack London club, and promise never to sit through any animal performance at a theatre, but will get up and leave during one of these animal turns, returning to my seat when it is over.” By June, 1919 there were over 21,000 members. Suggestions to strengthen the organization came from international members in China and England. One argued that since soon all war prisoners would be released, why not “show equal mercy to all ‘animal prisoners and captives. . . .I am sure all lovers of animals would gladly give to defray the expense involved.” Two years later, the Jack London club of Boston, urged the public to also leave when “pictures of these acts are thrown on the movie screen.” They added that “keeping animal life caged, and making it perform for profits is an inheritance from man’s jungle state. Like all evils, it exists only by reason of the people who patronize it. They, not the trainers, are the responsible ones” (“Jack London Club Grows” April 3, 1919: 8; “Opposing Animal Acts” Dec. 20, 1921 and “Brutality” Dec. 14, 1921: 4).

By the end of 1921, some editors noted that “the trained seals, the educated dogs, together with their senior performers, the elephants, lions, leopards, etc., are not seen so often as formerly.” The reason given was the work of the Jack London clubs, and the realization that behind every wild animal act there is a record of cruelty. Membership was growing at the rate of 4,000 per month to a total of 206,000. The movement in Canada and England had also grown, with one English journal wondering if “another citadel of cruelty” was about to fall (“Opposing Animal Acts” Dec. 20, 1921 and “Brutality” Dec. 14, 1921: 4).

This did not mean there were not prominent opponents to the movement. William T. Hornaday brought his lifetime of experience to bear in his book, The Minds and Manners of Wild Animals. He asserted that “the most interesting thing about a wild animal is its mind and its reasoning, and that a dead animal is only a poor decaying thing. If the feet of the young men would run more to seeing and studying the wild creatures and less to the killing of them, some of the world’s valuable species might escape being
swept away tomorrow or the day after.” He added that, “as the alleged lord of creation, it is man’s duty to know the wild animals truly as they are, in order to enjoy them to the utmost, to utilize them sensibly and fairly, and to give them a fair deal.” He emphasized the great importance of observing animals to understand how their minds work. This was best done in their natural habitats, but could be done effectively in the modern zoo (Hornaday 1922).

Hornaday devoted a chapter to the training of wild animals, which he strongly advocated if done correctly. He noted that,

Just now there is a tiny wave of agitation against all performances of trained wild animals in captivity, on the ground that all this is “cruel” and inhumane. The Jacklondon Society of Boston is working hard to get up steam for the crusade, but thus far with only partial success... . . Now what is the truth of this matter? Is it true that trained wild animals are cruelly abused in the training, or in compelling them to perform? Is it true that in making animals perform on the stage, or in the circus ring, their rights are wickedly infringed? Is it the duty of the American people to stop all performances by animals? Is it wicked to make wild animals, or cats and dogs, work for a living, as men and women do? Is it true that captive animals in zoological parks and gardens are miserable and unhappy, and that all such institutions should be “abolished?” What is the truth? In the first place, there is no sound reasoning or logic in assuming that the persons of animals, tame or wild, are any more sacred than those of men, women, and children. We hold that it is no more “cruelty” for an ape or dog to work on the stage than it is for men, women, and young people to work as acrobats, or actors, or to engage in honest toil eight hours per day. Who gave to any warm-blooded animal that consumes food and requires shelter the right to live without work? No one! I am sure that no trained bear of my acquaintance ever had to work as hard for his food and shelter as does the average bear out in the wilds. In order to find enough to eat the latter is compelled to hustle from dawn till dusk. . . . I regard the sentimental Jacklondon idea, that no wild animal should be made to work on stage or in the show-ring, as illogical and absurd. Human beings who sanely work are much happier per capita than those who do nothing but loaf and grouch. I have worked horse-hard, throughout all the adult years of my life; and it has been good for me. I know that it is no more wicked for a horse to work for his living, --of course on a humane basis, either on the stage or on the street. . . (Hornaday 1922: 204-205).

Hornaday insisted that “the vast majority of performing animals are trained by humane men and women, practicing kindness to the utmost, and they are the last persons in the world who would be willing to have their valuable stock roughly handled, neglected or in any manner cruelly treated.” He argued that zoological parks and gardens, “are no more in need of defense than the Rocky Mountains.”

Every large zoological park is a school of wild animal education and training; and it is literally a continuous performance. Let no one suppose that there is no training of wild beasts save for the circus ring and the vaudeville stage. Of the total number of large and important mammals that come into our zoological parks, the majority of them actually are trained to play becomingly their
respective parts. An intractable and obstinate animal soon becomes a nuisance (Hornaday 1922: 206).

Not only mammals, but many species of birds and reptiles are educated to:

(1) to be peaceful, and not attack their keepers; (2) to not fear their keepers; (3) to do as they are bid about going here and there; (4) to accept and eat the food that is provided for them, and (5) finally, in some cases to “show off” a little when commanded, for the benefit of visitors (Hornaday 1922: 206-207).

However, Hornaday believed that trainers should carefully select only animals that are amiable, mentally alert, responsive, and have good memories. The worst results and accidents occur when a trainer tries to force” ill-natured and irritable animals” to perform. An example was the noted wild animal trainer, Jack Bonavita, who lost an arm because of his stubbornness in retaining in his act a lion that hated him and was known to be extremely dangerous. Instead he advocated following the advice of Carl Hagenbeck who achieved remarkable success in training wild animals through kindness and common sense. Hagenbeck detested whips and punishments, dropping an animal from a group if it would not work without physical force (Hornaday 1922: 208).

Hornaday went on to propose a wild animals’ bill of rights--with many points that seem extremely contemporary--which he emphasized should be “copied and displayed conspicuously” in all zoos, menageries, theaters and shows where wild animal performances are given, and “in all places where wild animals and birds are trained, sold or kept for the pleasure of their owners.”

**Article 1.** In view of the nearness of the approach of the higher animals to the human level, no just and humane man can deny that those wild animals have certain rights which man is in honor bound to respect.

**Art. 2.** The fact that God gave man “dominion over the beasts of the field” does not imply a denial of animal rights, any more than the supremacy of a human government conveys the right to oppress and maltreat its citizens.

**Art. 3.** Under certain conditions it is justifiable for man to kill a limited number of these-called game animals, on the same basis of justification that domestic animals and fowls may be killed for food.

**Art. 4.** While the trapping of fur-bearing animals is a necessary evil, that evil must be minimized by reducing the sufferings of trapped animals to the lowest possible point, and by preventing wasteful trapping.

**Art. 5.** The killing of harmless mammals or birds solely for “sport;” and without utilizing them when killed, is murder; and no good and humane man will permit himself to engage in any such offenses against good order and the rights of wild creatures.
Art. 6. Shooting at sea-going creatures from moving vessels, without any possibility of securing them if killed or wounded is cruel, reprehensible, and criminal, and everywhere should be forbidden by ship captains, and also by law, under penalties.

Art. 7. The extermination of harmless wild animal species is a crime; but the regulated destruction of wild pests that have been proven guilty, is sometimes necessary and justifiable.

Art. 8. No group or species of birds and mammals that is accused of offenses sufficiently grave to merit destruction shall be condemned undefended and unheard, nor without adequate evidence of a character which would be acceptable in a court of law.

Art. 9. The common assumption that every bird or mammal that offends, or injures the property of any man, is necessarily deserving of death, is absurd and intolerable. The death penalty should be the last resort, not the first one!

Art. 10. Any nation that fails adequately to protect its crop-and-tree-protecting birds deserves to have its fields and forests devastated by predatory insects.

Art. 11. No person has any moral right to keep a wild animal, bird, reptile or fish in a state of uncomfortable, unhappy or miserable captivity, and all such practices should be prevented by law, under penalty. It is entirely feasible for a judge to designate a competent person as a referee to examine and decide upon each case.

Art. 12. A wild creature that cannot be kept in comfortable captivity should not be kept at all; and the evils to be guarded against are cruelly small quarters, too much darkness, too much light, uncleanness, bad odors, and bad food. A fish in a glass globe, or a live bird in a cage the size of a collar-box is a case of cruelty.

Art. 13. Every captive animal that is suffering hopelessly from disease or the infirmities of old age has the right to be painfully relieved of the burdens of life.

Art. 14. Every keeper or owner of a captive wild animal who through indolence, forgetfulness or cruelty permits a wild creature in his charge to perish of cold, heat, hunger or thirst because of his negligence, is guilty of a grave misdemeanor, and he should be punished as the evidence and the rights of captive animals demand.

Art. 15. An animal in captivity has a right to do all the damage to its surroundings that it can do, and it is not to be punished therefore.

Art. 16. The idea that all captive wild animals are necessarily “miserable” is erroneous, because some captive animals are better fed, better protected and are more happy in captivity than similar animals are in a wild state, beset by dangers and harassed by hunger and thirst. It is the opinion of the vast majority of civilized people that there is no higher use to which a wild bird or mammal can be devoted than to place it in perfectly comfortable captivity to be seen by millions of persons who desire to make its acquaintance.

Art. 17. About ninety-five per cent of all the wild mammals in captivity were either born in captivity were either born in captivity or captured when in their infancy, and therefore have no ideas of freedom, or visions of their wild homes; consequently their supposed “pining for freedom” often is more imaginary than real.

Art. 18. A wild animal has no more inherent right to live a life of lazy and luxurious ease, and freedom from all care, than a man or woman has to live without work or family cares. In the large cities of the world there are many millions of toiling humans who are worse off per capita as to burdens and sorrows and joys than are the beasts and birds in a well kept zoological park. “Freedom” is comparative only, not absolute.

Art. 19. While the use of trained animals in stage performances is not necessarily cruel, and while training operations are based chiefly upon kindness and reward, it is necessary that vigilance should be exercised to insure that the cages and stage quarters of such animals shall be adequate in size, properly lighted and acceptably ventilated, and that cruel punishments shall not be inflicted upon the animals themselves.

Art. 20. The training of wild animals may, or may not, involve cruelties, according to the intelligence and the moral status of the trainer. This is equally true of the training of children, and
the treatment of wives and husbands. A reasonable blow with a whip to a mean and refractory animal in captivity is not necessarily an act of cruelty. Every such act must be judged according to the evidence.

Art. 21. It is unjust to proclaim that “all wild animal performances are cruel” and therefore should be prohibited by law. The claim is untrue, and no lawmaker should pay heed to it. Wild animal performances are no more cruel or unjust than men-and-women performances of acrobatics. Practically all trained animals are fed and tended, they welcome their performances, an go through them with lively interest. Such performances, when good, have a high educational value,-but not to closed minds.

Art. 22. Every bull-fight, being brutally unfair to the horses and the bull engaged and disgustingly cruel, is an unfit spectacle for humane and high-minded people, and no Christian man or woman can attend one without self-stultification.

Art. 23. The western practice of “bulldogging,” now permitted in some Wild West shows is disgusting, degrading, and never should be permitted.

Art. 24. The use of monkeys by organ-grinders is cruel, it is degrading to the monkeys, and should in all states be prohibited by law.

Art. 25. The keeping of live fishes in glass globes nearly always ends in cruelty and suffering, and should everywhere be prohibited by law. A round glass straight-jacket is just as painful as any other kind.

Art. 26. The sale and use of chained live chameleons as ornaments and playthings for idiotic or vicious men and children always means death by slow torture for the reptile, and should in all states be prohibited by law (Hornaday 1922: 53).

The out-spoken Hornaday also went into lengthy discussions of the relative intelligence and personalities of species, as well as analyzing the possible victors in animal combats. Among the carnivores, Hornaday had a very high opinion of the lion as an animal “endowed with keen perceptive faculties, reasoning ability and judgment of a high order, and its mind is surprisingly receptive.” He admitted that courage was an abstract concept that was difficult to measure, but the animal that would go the farthest in “daring and defying man, even the man, with a gun, in foraging for food,” was “unquestionably ad indisputably, the lion. He cited as an example the Man-Eaters of Tsavo, where two lions demonstrated their “unquenchable defiance of white men armed with rifles. . . .I am sure that there is nowhere in existence another record of wild animal courage equal to this, and the truthfulness of it is quite beyond question” (Hornaday 1922: 242-244).

He insisted that lions are “the best of all carnivorous performing animals, because of their courage, serenity, self-confidence and absence of jumpy nerves.” He deemed leopards the worst, and polar bears stand next, “with big chimpanzees as a sure third. Beware of all three.” Lions, he contended, were “sanquine, courageous, confident, reposeful and very reliable,” as compared to the “nervous,
suspicious, treacherous and uncertain tiger.” Those who have hunted lions claim that “naturally the lion has more courage and less fear of bodily harm than any other wild animal of equal intelligence. By reason of his courage and self-confidence, as well as his majesty of physique, the lion is well worthy to be called the King of Beasts” (Hornaday 1922: 242-245).

Despite Hornaday’s advocacy of trained wild animals, Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey released a bombshell when they announced in March, 1925 that they were dropping wild animal acts from their circus. Although the big cats would be still displayed in the menagerie, John Ringling, who had not permitted wild animal acts in his circus until 1919, explained that,

There has been enough criticism by the public of wild animal acts, to warrant us in withdrawing them. The quite common impression is prevalent that tigers, lions, and such animals are taught by very tough methods and that it is cruel to force them through their stunts. Another reason that guided us was that many parents object to bringing young children to a show in which men or women enter cages with ferocious beasts. Then there was the delay to be considered. The delay in hauling the animals into and out of the circus tents and of transferring them from their shifting dens into the arena and back, is very objectionable and not without danger. The public seems to prefer acts in which animals seem to take an interested and playful part. Acts in which dogs, seals, horses, and elephants take part are especially popular. We shall have plenty of this type of act (“Wild Animal Acts Dropped at Circus” March 31, 1925: 20).

He added that since the decision was made, they had received many letters from individuals and humane societies lauding their move (“Wild Animal Acts Dropped at Circus” March 31, 1925: 20).

The following day, the Times editorialized, with a bit of irony how

Mourners over the evils of this time might get at least a little suacease of their sorrow from the fact that the managers of the big circus now in town have received so many appeals from people who are shocked at seeing human beings enter the cages of savage beasts that it has been determined never again to give exhibitions of this kind. Such sensitiveness was not felt in the past, or at least it has not had expression frequent enough to move circus men to drop what for centuries had been held by them to be an attractive feature of their shows. Always these demonstrations of mastery over lions and tigers have endangered the lives of the trainers taking part in them. The result occasionally has been death and often it has been serious injuries. Probably the interest they excited was morbid, based at least in part on a desire, not exactly to see somebody killed, but on a desire to be present when the ever-threatened revolt of the huge beasts took place.

To the interest, however, there has been more than this. To it was joined appreciation of the courage shown by the trainers and the lurking exultation at the proof they gave of man’s mastery over animals far stronger and better armed than himself. Several books apparently written from knowledge have expatiate in recent years on the terribly severe discipline that was necessary to cow the big cats, preparatory to public displays of their docility. The circus men do not admit the truth of this, but they mention the existence of the belief as one reason for using hereafter only animals that take pleasure in doing tricks (“It Shows A Change for the Better” April 1, 1925: 22).
Prior to John Ringling’s announcement, his brother Charles had had control of the circus production, during the early twenties. Charles contended that “to me my circus is my menagerie. . . I always think in terms of animals instead of sawdust and . . . other things. . . that make a circus.” Whenever he had doubts about himself, he went into the menagerie and looked his animals in the face, “for unless my animals like me, I am a failure. He believed if an animal did not like a man, there was something wrong with him, because an animal knew a man better than a man knew his own kind. During Charles’s reign, the Ringling circus featured seven animal acts in 1922, eight in 1923, and in 1924 four steel arenas were erected and four wild animal acts worked simultaneously (New York Times Dec. 4, 1926: 17; Pfening, Jr. 1972: 11 and Joys 1984: 61).

Although many newspapers urged other circuses to follow John Ringling’s example, they did not comply. The American Circus Corporation winter quarters teemed with animals and in Culver City, California, the winter home of the Al G. Barnes Wild Animal Circus—the favorite of Frank Buck—trainers worked breaking animals for the show. As carnivals, fairs, and amusement parks, once popular venues for wild animal acts, became more dependent on mechanical rides, most of the fifty or so active wild animal trainers in the United States found employment on these specialized circuses which enjoyed their heyday in the 1920s. Fierce competition among the circuses and trainers caused many of these men and women to push the envelope in recklessness and daring, and led to the wild animal act’s extreme popularity and dominance over other traditional circus acts.

The circus Beatty joined that summer of 1921 was Howe’s Great London and Van Amburgh Trained Wild Animal Circus, a twenty-five railcar show that was part of the American Circus Corporation that had been founded in 1919 by a triumvirate of Indiana circus men; Edward Ballard, Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers. In addition to the Howe’s show, the ACC had acquired the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus—a thirty-car show, the 90-year old John Robinson Circus—long a favorite in the south, and in 1920, their largest show, Sells-Floto—bought from Denver Post publishers Tammen and Bonfils. In the deal, they
obtained the Buffalo Bill title to add to the much-respected Hagenbeck name. The thriving corporation then bought 600 acres outside of Peru, Indiana to establish its winterquarters (Braden 1961: 15-18).

Over the next ten years, the ACC came to own what was probably the largest collection of animals in the world. The “Circus City Zoological Garden” contained six giraffes, three hippos, 30 camels, 40 elephants, 125 lions and tigers, 500 blooded horses, 200 dogs and ponies, along with ostriches, llamas, zebras, monkeys, pumas, black panthers, and polar, Russian, and Himalayan bears. Eleven hundred tons of timothy and alfalfa were harvested annually and a slaughterhouse was maintained to provide feed for the menagerie (Wirth 1964: 13-15 and Joys 1984: 88).

When the Howe’s show played nearby Hillsboro, Ohio it made a handsome appearance with its new all-steel flatcars and bright orange paint with dark brown lettering and white trim. The menagerie included seven elephants, along with camels, a sacred cow, zebras, a young male hippo, leopards, pumas, lions, tigers, polar bears, monkeys, and a glass-enclosed snake den. The show put on an outstanding mile-long parade capped by very handsome bandwagon. Louis Roth, formerly of the Al G. Barnes Circus had been hired to direct the wild animal acts which included dancing lions, a puma and leopard act, tigers riding an elephant, and Roth’s two featured acts—six Bengal tigers and four horseback riding lions. Earlier in the season, the ACC had sent the Howe’s show to the west to challenge the Barnes Circus on it home turf, but the competition proved fierce, and the rival followed Howe’s as far east as Illinois. The ACC vowed to acquire the Barnes show when the opportunity arose. When Beatty joined the circus, they were preparing for their southern swing that would end in Montgomery, Alabama where they planned to winter. The trip had been marred by a trouble-making employee who had been “red lighted”—tossed off the moving train—only to return and poison the lions (Bradbury Sept.-Oct. 1964: 4-13 and Joys 1984: 88-89).

The ACC’s 1922 strategy was to harass Ringling in the east with Hagenbeck-Wallace and Sells-Floto, while Howe’s would change its name to Gollmar, a title leased from the Ringlings’ cousins. The show itself remained largely the same except that Roth had returned to Barnes, and the two feature animal
acts were a lioness routine and an aerial balloon lion act, in which the big cat was raised high in the tent on a platform while fireworks were shot off around it (Reynolds 1965: 4-6 and McKennon 1972: 326).

The frequent changes of names and routes reflected the grift allowed on the Indiana shows. The ACC denounced as hypocritical the stand Charles Ringling and the New York Civic League took against the practices. They argued that Ringling ticket sellers were notorious short-changers and that the extremely high concession prices were highway robbery. Grift only helped pay for the unrealistic licensing fees in some communities, and even if the grift had been dropped, the ACC’s shows’ reputations would have led to trumped up charges, fines and payoffs. Ringling, which supposedly operated a “Sunday School” operation regularly had to make payoffs in cash and free passes to avoid police harassment (Reynolds 1965: 4-6; McKennon 1972: 326 and Joys 1984: 92).

During that season of 1922, Beatty who had been hired as a cage boy, led the young hippo around the hippodrome track during the “spec.” The following year, the ACC decided to concentrate its efforts on three shows, all based in Peru. The Gollmar equipment was moved north and combined with the best of the Robinson Circus. For its 100th annual tour, the newly enlarged John Robinson Circus would become strictly a wild animal show starring Peter Taylor and his mixed group of lions and tigers. Taylor was advertised as a native of Birmingham, England, who had for the past ten years been a big game hunter in Africa and South America, with the exception of a year spent training animals in England. A great showman, who young Beatty would carefully study, Taylor, clad like a British colonial officer in jodhpurs, high-buttoned military coat, high boots, and Sam Brown belt, presented a refined version of the fighting act (Joys 1984: 92-93). A 1909 article in *Collier’s* described the precursor to this as,

> the big untamable act . . . [In] such an act the tamer seems to be in no wise content with the natural ferocity of his animals. . . . [He] concludes his exhibition by deliberately and as it were, suicidally goading his beasts to the limit of animal endurance. They turn (or ought to turn upon him) every shuddery moment. And in the very eye blink, when he whips through the spring bar door, SMASH, it is (or ought to be) covered four feet deep with big cats raring to get at him (McFarlane 1909: 19).

The style had first been popularized in the mid-1880s, when early trainers tried to spice up their acts by enticing the animals to roar, leap, and strike out. Spectacular accidents could occur when either
the trainer or cats overplayed their roles. The fighting act, a somewhat more controlled and theatrical version, also accented the wildness of the big cats. The animals were trained to snarl and hit out on cue, with one animal taught to simulate an actual attack. Emphasis was placed on the cats’ lightning quick movements, rather than the controlled pace and ingenious behaviors of the animals presented by students of Carl Hagenbeck. No animal act is more difficult to execute effectively than a true fighting act, since both the trainer and the big cats have to be excellent actors and bluffers to make it convincing yet controlled (Coxe 1951: 129-133).

**Apprenticeship**

In 1965, following Beatty’s death, retired trainer John Charles (Chubby) Guilfoyle discussed with a Brownsville, Texas reporter how he had hired Beatty. Guilfoyle had begun his career in 1909, and in 1928 survived a lion attack in Syracuse, but lost his right arm. For the next 26 years he worked with only one arm, retiring in 1954. He believed Howe’s Great London was in Chillicothe the day Clyde approached him for a job as a cage boy.

Cage boys cleaned out the cages, fed the animals and generally helped me in caring for the animals. I didn’t pay much attention to him at the time because we hired cage boys in about every town and he was just another cage boy. Somewhere along the line I made him my assistant—I don’t remember now just why, except that he seemed to get along with the animals pretty well. When I first knew or felt that Clyde would make a trainer was one day—one morning—it happened so suddenly I hardly knew what happened. We were shifting some lions and the chutes were built so that after the lions passed a point a gate could be closed behind them. The gate was not opened ahead of them until the gate behind them was closed. Somehow Clyde got ahead of himself and closed the gate behind himself and there he was in a section of the chute with the animals. I wanted to holler at him but I was afraid that would upset him or his animals. But Clyde never lost his nerve. He opened the gate behind him, stepping back into the section and closed off the lions ahead, allowing them to go back and forth in the next section in perfect safety to himself. That’s when I knew, with that nerve and lack of fear that he could be a trainer, I asked him if he wanted to be a trainer and he didn’t hesitate. He answered that he would like to be a trainer if I would teach him (Murphy 1965: 14).

After training Beatty, Guilfoyle recalled that the first act he placed him in was a polar bear act.

The trainer had left the act and I started looking around for a man—and I suddenly thought to myself, ‘why look for a man when I’ve got a boy here who can handle the act.’ Beatty who was still in his teens or early twenties, worked the act for about a year and I had a seven-lion act and I figured he knew enough to be on his own.
No one can successfully dispute that Clyde handled the biggest animal act ever put on in this country. He handled 39 animals—lions, lionesses, tigers, and tigresses, all in the same cage at the same time. Nobody had ever done that before or since (Murphy 1965: 14).

In his biography *The Big Cage* Beatty insisted he had been circus-crazy as a boy. The posting of billboards prior to a show’s arrival in nearby Chillicothe, quickened the local kids’ pulses. But for young Beatty the real attraction was the posters

showing the animal trainer in his big cage with his wild beasts. . . . He seemed so calm and collected in this den of savage creatures. How brave he must be, I thought, not to be worried by these great animals that, according to the posters—one of which I still possess—could ‘snap his frail body in two with a single bite!’ (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 270).

Beatty believed that fondness of animals—“in fact I once had five dogs that were the despair of my mother,” made him “fertile soil” for the posters, especially one—so large it could only be mounted on the side of a building or a large barn.

I am not exaggerating when I say that there was one circus poster in particular, a masterpiece of lurid advertising that I’ll never forget, which in my boyhood days gave me as big a thrill as anything that has happened to me in all the years since—and plenty has happened. . . . In this masterly composition the trainer was literally besieged by animals. There were so many of them—tigers, bears, elephants, lions, leopards, etc.—it was hard to understand how the trainer could turn around without having the risk of having his ‘frail body’ bitten in two by one of these ‘bloodthirsty man-eaters’ some of which I recall, were publicized as beasts that frequently devoured their trainers (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 271).

Beatty went to see the advertised trainer, who certainly was not frail but weighed over 200 pounds, nor did all the animals depicted ever appear in the act, but his feat still “seemed the most wonderful thing in the world. I began to cherish a secret ambition to become an animal trainer.” He added that he was overwhelmed by the details of the act, the way the trainer cracked his whip, and the way the sound reverberated throughout the tent, and how he could be brave enough to actually stick his head in the lion’s mouth (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 272).

Soon Beatty had organized the neighborhood kids into putting on circus performances, in which he demonstrated his knack at teaching dogs to do tricks. But he soon took a backseat to a boy who could walk a rope, and later another who had a pony. Three years later, he seized the opportunity to join a circus. In *The Big Cage*, he describes himself as 15 and just ready to start his sophomore year at Chillicothe High School. In actuality he was 18, but the biggest part of Beatty’s appeal was his youthful
boyishness, which was the basis of so much of the publicity surrounding him, creating a strong contrast between the tough, grizzled circus veteran trainers, and this eager wide-eyed country boy.

I landed a job as a cage boy. What an event in my life this was! A regular employee of a circus! My compensation was five dollars a month and my keep, and it seemed a great deal at the time. . . How can I describe my delight on finding myself an assistant, even in a humble role, to honest-to-goodness animal trainers? It was an honor to clean the cages, to fetch water for the animals, to do anything that was asked of me. When I wasn’t busy around the animals, I watched the show’s chief trainer and his two assistants drill their charges. On the road I watched every move they made and in winter quarters I did the same (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 278).

Beatty became sure he could handle the animals. “This was my great secret. When I went to bed, I thought about it with satisfaction until I fell asleep, but in the morning when I faced the men whom I served as a sort of chambermaid, I was afraid that they might read my thoughts, and I would slink out of sight when their gaze rested on me to long” (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 278).

Actually, the trainers were pleased that Beatty wanted to learn since most cage boys wanted no more and feared facing the animals in the big cage. In just a year he became an assistant trainer under the tutelage of Guilfoyle, who Beatty claimed “couldn’t do enough for me. . . . Chubby, indeed, had so much faith in me that I became over-confident. But I conquered this folly. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Chubby knocked it out of me” (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 279).

Although he loved everything about the circus, the wild animal trainers were “ninety per cent of the show to me.” He added that he would have appreciated someone willing to teach him to be a clown or acrobat, but that is not what he wanted. “I wanted to be an animal trainer. In other words, I was not so much circus-crazy as arena struck. It was the big cage that fascinated me more than anything else in the world” (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 279).

When kids wrote him or approached him about becoming a wild animal trainer he first discouraged them, adding that there were only about a half-dozen jobs worth holding available in this country. If they persisted, he often helped them out offering them some meager job.

I wouldn’t leave my picturesque profession for anything in the world. Life would seem dull in any other job. But I wouldn’t be telling the truth if I didn’t point out that no one would ever think of becoming an animal trainer if he knew what it entails in the way of hardships. Once you’ve survived the hard knocks, you keep on going, for you know what it’s all about and you might as
well use your knowledge. But that’s no reason why you should encourage recruits (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 281).

Beatty admitted that he had done well in his field, “but if I had a son who wanted to enter it, I’d put him across my knee and wallop him” (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 281).

Beatty had been given the polar bear act, which was the biggest of its kind in the United States. Later, when people asked him what the most intelligent animal he ever trained was, he quickly answered that it was the bear. They could be taught more tricks than any other animal, but he gave up working with them because

the public does not have a proper appreciation of the dangers involved, and one cannot succeed in my field except in an act that hammers home the hazardous nature of the performance. People are so used to tame bears (the ones in Yellowstone Park are a good example) that they do not give a trainer much credit for a bear act.

This is so even when a man works with polar bears. All bears strike the show-going public as tame. People do not realize there are few animals more dangerous than the polar bear. His claws aren’t so bad as those of the lion or the tiger, but he bites ten times while these cats bite once. His specialty is to start biting at the ankle and work his way up the leg in a few seconds (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 266-267).

Beatty began to carefully study Pete Taylor’s act. The John Robinson program described his presentation as the “greatest animal act in all circus history.” The “mammoth audience” would become hushed as “only the snarling of disgruntled lions and tigers broke the silence. Chills crept up and down the collective spines of the onlookers as they gazed in awe on the twenty giant jungle beasts sniffing at the steel bars of the arena. Those on the front seats took a firmer grasp of their hats, ready to flee in case the bars proved inadequate to holding the tons of fighting flesh” (John Robinson Program. Season of 1923).

Taylor was described as ‘diminutive’. . . “A man so small in stature that a light blow from anyone of the twenty beasts would have killed him outright.” Yet the beasts knew he was their master. “They bowed to him, but in bowing fought every inch of the way.” His training methods were unique, the piece continued, since he did not believe in cruel methods. “He lets the beasts see he is master, and then for him the rest is easy. He never uses a loaded revolver. He never uses a goad. Rather he commands. That is the success of his remarkable act.” They added that Taylor was an Englishman who had traveled everywhere
in the world and that there was no wild animal “so wild that Peter Taylor has not trapped it, and made it do his bidding.” But despite all his adventures, he remained a true gentleman (John Robinson Program Season of 1923).

Beatty described him as a skillful teacher, who was always ready to give pointers to a newcomer. “The soul of patience, he would stand by hour after hour until I was doing the thing he was teaching me, in the manner he felt it should be done. Even when I got my animal to respond to the cue I gave, if Taylor thought I showed the slightest flaw in form he would make me give the cue over and over again until his artistic eye was satisfied” (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 61).

Taylor, whose act consisted of ten lions and four tigers, was one of the first to mix lions and tigers in America. But he advised Beatty that, the ‘one-species, one-sex’ animal act was doing a fade-out. ‘If you want to get anywhere in this game, Clyde,’ he told me more than once, ‘you’ll have to learn how to make lions and tigers perform in the same arena. And you’ll have to go beyond what I’ve done, and do it on a very big scale’ (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 59-61).

By 1925, Beatty, now on Hagenbeck-Wallace, was working two entertaining, but rather unexciting preliminary acts; the all bear routine, and a mixed group of four leopards, two pumas, three hyenas, two Russian bears, two Tibet bears, one polar bear, and two lionesses. Taylor, meanwhile, was going to add more tigers to his featured act to give it balance, when he suffered a nervous breakdown, or “arena shock.” Beatty called these rapid collapses “one of the great mysteries of animal training,” since there is no forewarning that it is about to occur. When it occurs, the trainer’s nerves are “so badly shattered that it is pathetic to watch his efforts to rally his confidence and restore himself as a trainer. He may retain his courage, but all kinds of “mental hazards develop.” In Middletown, Connecticut, Pete collapsed in the safety cage, and Beatty remembered helping him out. Taylor never performed his act again (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 62).

Circus historian Dave Price’s research uncovered a story that claimed Taylor had been hit in the head by the arena door, was treated at a local hospital and then returned to the show, but did not work the act. The same article claimed that he also had had a bad case of nerves that began after an attack that
winter. *Billboard*, in fact, reported that he had been hospitalized for three weeks in January for a nervous breakdown. There also were rumors that he had left the show with another man’s wife and gone to Cuba. He returned eventually, and had an act on Sells-Floto before retiring and opening a riding school in Jacksonville, Florida. He reportedly was shot and killed by an irate husband (Correspondence with Dave Price).

**Gaining Center Ring**

Soon after, Beatty took over Taylor’s act. He claimed that he had worked the animals in rehearsal several times under Taylor’s scrutiny, but never before an audience. He got through his first performance despite the aggressive attack of one experienced lion putting him to the test. The center ring featured act was his, a spot Beatty would not relinquish for the next forty years.

One of his first front page stories appeared in the *Texarkana Four States Press*, where a “huge,” “spellbound” audience had watched Beatty virtually fight his way into the steel arena during the afternoon show, and the night show proved even more harrowing, as he forced his way into the cage. One cat knocked the chair from Beatty’s hand, and the trainer slipped and went to his knees. Many in the audience turned away, and at that moment “another paw shot out and the trainer’s arm was ripped deep into the flesh from the elbow down almost to the fingers, in terrible gashes”. Although blood spurted from the wound, Beatty never lost his nerve, and finished the act, sending the cats back down the runway to their cages, before exiting the arena where medical help awaited. If he had given up the battle, circus men told the reporter, he would have never been able to re-enter the arena or control the cats. If he had quavered, the cats would have sensed his fear and indecision and finished him off. The 19-year-old Beatty, who had run off at age ten to study with Carl Hagenbeck in Germany, was described as the most daring trainer handling wild animals in the world (“Trainer’s Arm Torn by a Lion” Sept. 24, 1925: 1).

The following year, Beatty added six lions and tigers to the act, which now totaled 22 animals. In *The Big Cage*, Beatty describes the long, arduous, battle-filled process of adding these cats to the act. He said it would have been impossible without the lessons he had learned from Taylor, Guilfoyle, and Bobby McPherson.
I always think of them as the truest arena friends I’ve ever had. All accomplished trainers, they combined their skill as showmen with that rare ability to teach green youngsters like myself the various complicated tricks of the game. While I had a natural knack for handling wild animals, I doubt I should have gone very far if I had not been properly schooled in the methods of these three gentlemen (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 64).

Even at this early stage of his career, Beatty began establishing a very appreciative fan base in Detroit. The city was home to the largest, and most impressive winter Shrine circus date in the country. Beatty began appearing there with his polar bears and returned in February, 1926 with his newly acquired feature act. Walter Fuller of the Detroit News, who became Beatty’s staunchest cheerleader gave him full page coverage in a story entitled, “He Enjoys Being in a Cage with 15 lions and 3 Tigers. ‘Chewed up’ Eight Times, But Trainer Who Thrilled Detroit Loves His Job.” In it Beatty claimed that after seeing wild animals at the Cincinnati Zoo as a boy, he couldn’t get them off his mind. The only solution seemed to be to run away with a circus. He believed that “the first chewing up” a young trainer experiences can be his making or breaking. “If he can go back without fear he will be an animal trainer until he gets too old or the lions get him—which Beatty nonchalantly admits might happen any day. . . . It may be today or tomorrow. They always get you sooner or later, but I am ready and willing to take the chance” (Fuller Feb. 14, 1926: metro).

That spring Beatty returned to Chillicothe with Hagenbeck-Wallace. The Scioto Gazette reported that people flocked around the 20-year-old native son. He was the youngest wild animal subjugator in the world, educated in the thrilling and dangerous business by Carl Hagenbeck himself. His first lesson was a cub lion, “Nero,” that Hagenbeck gave him to study and play with. “Nero” is in his jungle act of 16 lions and lionesses, and 3 tigers, a great big black-maned fellow who does all sorts of stunts. When young Beatty puts his wild beasts through their paces, he stands every second of the time, on the very brink of the grave (“Big Show Ready to Go” May 3, 1926: 1).

In 1927, Beatty acquired an additional eight lions and tigers from an act Bobby McPherson had been working on another show. He hoped to add the cats one by one to his act, a feat the other trainers sharing the winter quarters believed impossible. Cramming thirty cats into a 32-foot arena seemed suicidal. McPherson, an excellent, experienced trainer himself believed it was possible with lots of time and patience, and the added insight he would provide Beatty on the personality of each cat. One tiger,
Fang, had proven very aggressive, once attacking McPherson, who was forced to wrestle with the huge cat barehanded before he could recover his chair and blank gun, in what had become a legendary act of bravery and survival. Following McPherson’s advice, Beatty successfully merged the cats into his act (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 69).

However, in publicity stories that appeared that year, Beatty is described as presenting a mixed act. *The Scioto Gazette* stated that “The wild animal acts which are conceded to be the most daring and sensational in circusdom will be presented by Clyde Beatty; 22 year old trainer, Jules Jacot; French war veteran, and Miss Dolly Castle.” Beatty’s 20 animal group consisted of leopards, “the only black panther in captivity,” hyenas, lionesses, pumas, jaguars, cougars, and three species of bears, Polar, Russian, and Tibet.” Jacot’s act was made up of 13 tigers and culminated with a tiger riding an elephant, under the direction of Dolly Castle (“The Wild Animal Acts” April 26, 1927).

Hagenbeck-Wallace’s three-day stand in Washington, D. C. drew a great deal of press coverage. Two hundred members of the “diplomatic corps and the official set as well as others whose names appear in the social register” were to be guests of the circus. They entered through a carpeted, canopied walkway and were seated in special boxes decorated with flowers (“200 of Social Set” May 1, 1927: 7). 20,000 showed up to watch the tents go up, while 18,000 attended the first two shows, including Mrs. Calvin Coolidge, a life-long circus fan. Beatty’s act with six lions, six lionesses, and three tigers, was one of a trio of acts that really stood out (“18,000 Flock to Circus” May 3, 1927: 4).

The *Billboard* review of the show in June called it “splendid.” It indicated that Jacot was working the mixed act and a tiger act, while Beatty was presenting “a wonderful number” consisting of 20 lions (“Hagenbeck-Wallace Show” June 4, 1927: 84).

Smaller town newspapers typically featured one or the other of two supplied publicity stories about Beatty prior to the circus’s arrival in town. The first claimed that,

The life story of Clyde Beatty is very much like one of the heroes in Horatio Alger’s books, as he ran away from high school intent upon becoming a big game hunter, but instead he became a trainer of wild animals. Today, despite his youthful age, he is known as one of the most successful animal educators in America.
Young Beatty’s home is in Chillicothe, Ohio. Several years ago, right after the World War, young Beatty disappeared from school and later wrote from Los Angeles that he was enroute to Africa to hunt big game. But before sailing time of a boat, Beatty encountered a circus man from his hometown. This man upon learning of Beatty’s desire to mingle with wild animals, told him of a position as a wild animal trainer with the circus. He also advised Beatty that it combined all the dangers of big game hunting, but paid a weekly salary, and, as the Ohio youth was beginning to feel the effects of a lean pocketbook, he took the circus offer. Today, Beatty, slightly over 21 years old, is chief animal trainer of Hagenbeck Wallace Circus that comes here for afternoon and evening performances (“Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus” June 3, 1927: 23).

For papers with even more space to fill, there was this story:

Sixteen years ago a small circus came to a small Ohio town and a small boy, 6 years old, looked on in wonderment as the daring lion trainer worked four roaring lions in the same arena. Fascinated by the daring of the trainer and idolizing the youth who was brave enough to beard four lions in one arena, the little boy decided that some day, he too, would be a trainer of wild animals.

When the afternoon show was over the boy hied himself to the menagerie and stood in awe before the several dens of jungle beasts. The trainer happened along—the same one the boy had seen during the show—and then and there began a friendship that has lasted throughout the years passed since.

“Some day I’m going to be a lion tamer, too,” the boy said. “Go ahead, bub, and when you fix to start the business look me up and I’ll help you along.”

That’s what trainers always tell little boys and girls that want to be lion tamers. But little did either of them think that the day would come when one would seek out the other and hold him to his promises.

Ten years passed by. The youthful trainer grew into manhood and scars from claws and teeth had taught him that jungle beasts were not to be treated as playthings.

The trainer was with the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus when it played the same Ohio town in which the boy ten years before had vowed that he would become a trainer. The boy was still there and in his last year in high school. He attended the circus and the lure of the sawdust, the peril of the steel arena and hissing jungle beasts all about him were too much. That night when the circus left the Ohio town, the youth was snuggled in a bunk, ready to begin his career.

Five show stands were made before the boy’s father located him, and one day when the show was ready to start and the boy—his duties consisting of opening and closing the arena doors for the trainer—entered the menagerie, he stopped short as he encountered his father.

The father pleaded with him to return and finish high school and receive his diploma. The boy held out to remain with the circus, pleading that for the first time in his life he was really happy and satisfied.

His father made inquiries around the arena and found that the boy had a natural ability to subjugate and make friends with jungle animals. An agreement was reached. The boy was to return home, attend school for two months, receive his diploma, and then, if he still wished, could join the circus.

Those two months passed slowly and the night when the youth received his diploma at the graduation exercises, a few hours later found him on a train, bound for Alabama to re-join the circus.

And from the day he joined, until now, the boy and the trainer, who sixteen years ago offered to help him, have been like father and son. That is the story of Jules Jacot, the veteran trainer.
And that is the story of Clyde Beatty, 22 years old, the foolhardy and sensational trainer with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus which comes to Sheboygan for afternoon and evening performances. Jacot took Beatty under his wing, so to speak, and taught him the art of training jungle beasts, the most treacherous of all animals. Morning, afternoon and night the two are together and when Jacot, during the performances, is in the ring working 15 Bengal tigers, and a group of Russian, polar and Tibet bears, Beatty is outside of the arena, pistol in hand, ready to shoot down the first animal that attempts to ‘leap’ his friend.
And when Beatty enters the steel arena amid 20 jungle beasts, including lions, tigers, leopards, hyenas, jaguars, cougars, pumas, the only trained black panther in captivity and other animals, Jacot is at hand, ready to protect his protégé, shouting warnings as one of the bests prepares to leap upon the back of Beatty, who takes more chances with his treacherous companions than any other trainer in circusdom.
That is the romantic and Toby Tyler story of Jules Jacot and Clyde Beatty.
And that is why everyone on the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus looks upon them as the modern symbol of Damon and Pythias (“Some Interesting Tales” July 14, 1927: 2).

That winter Beatty headed to Hollywood with some other circus members to take part in the shooting of a circus-themed motion picture. What occurred there might have been an even narrower scrape with death than any of his adventures with the big cats. In December, a young bank clerk, described as 19 years old, soft-spoken, fair complexioned, with gray eyes, dark wavy hair, and very neatly dressed, kidnapped and held for ransom, a prominent banker’s 12-year-old daughter. He wound up murdering and dismembering his victim, delivering part of her body in a suitcase for a $1,500 ransom. 
What ensued was one of the largest manhunts in West Coast history along with the lure of a $100,000 reward offered by the father. Beatty, who very closely matched the description was arrested twice, but released when he provided identification. Unluckily, another suspect-- temporarily jailed--was hanged by his fellow prisoners. William Hickman was subsequently captured in Oregon, brought to trial and hanged (“Killer Suspect Identified as Drug Store Bandit” Dec. 21, 1927: 2; “Hickman is Captured; Admits Kidnapping but Denies Murder” Dec. 23, 1927: 1 and Carroll Dec. 8, 1932).

When Beatty returned to the Peru winter quarters, he decided to add two more tigers to his act. Again it wasn’t easy, and he admitted being clawed and bitten three times before he merged the two tigers into the act, which now consisted of 32 cats. All he could hope for was a “fair amount of smoothness. . .
A fair amount is all I expect. Always bear in mind that lions and tigers are foes and that fights break out inevitably in a mixed group of this kind. The practical trainer does not hope to prevent such fights; he is satisfied if he can break them up before they go too far” (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 71).
During 1928, Beatty was billed in the Hagenbeck-Wallace program as “America’s youngest and most fearless wild animal trainer. . . . Conceded by the press and public the greatest and most daring act before the public.” The program also contained a page entitled, “A Living Refutation of Misleading Propaganda,” which was directed against the widely broadcast propaganda “regarding the cruelty exercised against wild beasts in training them for public exhibition.” Although the agitators were “well meaning and kind people,” they really have not conducted a thorough investigation. The circus invited them to examine the large collection of trained animals in the menagerie.

A comparison of the condition, the appearance and actions of the beasts used in the wild animal acts with those used merely for exhibition purposes will prove at once that the trained beasts are far superior to the others in condition, in contentment and health. Americans who have traveled amid jungles and seen wild beasts in their native state all agree that those in captivity are much stronger, and in much better condition than those of the jungles. This stands to reason—it would be a miracle if it were otherwise (“A Living Refutation” Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus Program. 1928 Season).

The refutation went on to explain that the acts were developed in the winter quarters in Peru, Indiana, by “fearless but patient trainers,” who follow:

- the process of elimination—upon finding a beast is difficult to teach from sheer stubbornness or lack of sense, the animal is not abused or mistreated but is sold for exhibition purposes and another more likely animal substituted in its place. All training is done at Peru in public, at no time is the public barred—for the trainers do not do anything of which they would be ashamed for outsiders to see.
- Those who are condemning the training of wild animals are actually defeating the very purpose for which they are contending—namely the bettering and protecting of wild beasts (“A Living Refutation” Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus Program. 1928 Season).

That season one of the longest articles describing Beatty and his act appeared in the *Kansas City Star*. It combined an eyewitness account of the act, which was being presented at the Kansas State Fair in Topeka, the usual circus publicity of how he got started, and a description of training methods and accidents that would be repeated in his 1933 biography. The article began dramatically.

An approaching storm had enveloped the night with a pall of clouds. Nervous flashes of lightning, ripping the lowering curtain with increasing frequency, emphasized an almost physical sense of oppression.
Suddenly a band somewhere broke into quick, pulsing music. The crowd of 10,000 persons in the state fair grandstand became electrified. Eyes were riveted on one spot, a high arena of iron bars, the dark mouth of a tunnel showing on one side. Brilliant lights etched each bar of the huge cage and made the surrounding darkness even heavier.
“Let’em in,” a voice commanded. A gate clanged. Out of the tunnel crept a great black-maned lion; behind him another, then another, until half a dozen stalked the barred enclosure, blinking uncertainly at the lights.

As the huge beasts broke into view the crowd became aware of a sturdy young figure in white striding forward, a revolver belted about his waist, pith helmet upon his head and boots upon his feet. Behind him marched a dozen riflemen in khaki.

The men in uniform deployed around the cage, the figure in white took off the helmet, bowed, picked up a chair, revolver and whip, and passed through the double door into the arena. Clyde Beatty of Chillicothe, O., and his “big cats” had begun their nightly chore (“The Young Man Who Sought Thrills” Sept. 30, 1928: C2).

After telling the usual story about Beatty’s enchantment with the circus in his childhood, his myriad pets, his running away with the circus, and return to finish high school, the article explained how he had acquired the polar bear act. He initially suffered from stage fright when he entered the ring with the bears, and one bear charged, sticking his head down between his forelegs and coming at him like a “locomotive under full steam.” He managed to successfully outmaneuver him, pleasing management with his performance. He subsequently took over the cat act, following the trainer’s breakdown, and was attacked from behind by a lion, that dug his teeth into his back, and threw him to the ground. Beatty was rescued by head trainer Louis Roth “from this baptism of fire.” He realized the attack was due to his own carelessness, and did not lose his nerve. The author then continued with his description of the act.

Electrical storms affect the felines of the jungles as they do those of the hearth—they make them fidgety and unstable. As Clyde stepped into the arena he held the chair, an ordinary lightweight affair, in his left hand, along with the revolver, loaded with blank cartridges. In his right hand, the heavy whip with its long lash cracked incessantly. Prodding with the chair, flashing the whip, the trainer beat the lions upon their pedestals.

Two of the great brutes refused to take their seats. They swung back and forth in the rear of the arena, attempting to re-enter the tunnel, crashing into each other in their frenzy. The long whip cracked between them, the chair beat upon their heads. One beast turned upon his tormentor, a heavy paw smashed at the chair. The gun exploded full into the infuriated animal’s face and it slunk to its seat.

As the boy in white turned to face the tunnel, the hoarse voice back cage shouted again, “Let’em in” and a veritable river of hate boiled into the arena—tigers, Royal Bengals and Sumatras, nearly a dozen of them rolling over, snarling, clawing, in their midst was the young trainer, the whip cracking continually, the revolver speaking almost as rapidly. An empty weapon was tossed aside, a loaded one snatched through the bars, a whip seized in cruel teeth was abandoned, another grasped from willing hands outside.

The trainer moved about with almost the speed of his “cats” as he shoved and threatened until all were seated in regular tiers. He had dominated them but this particular night he hadn’t quieted them. A tiger suddenly launched himself upon the lion seated next to him, claws digging into the bellowing beast’s shoulders. A flash of white across the arena and again the revolver barked into yellow pools of hate. The tiger sank back.
When Clyde Beatty came out of the arena that night he was panting for breath and wet with perspiration. Great seams of fatigue creasing his face made him look ten years older. He had put on a great show, the rest of the circus family said (“The Young Man Who Sought Thrills” Sept. 30, 1928: C2).

The reporter then detailed to the reader why the act was particularly dangerous. It mixed two breeds of lion and two breeds of tigers, as well as mixing together males and females of each species. There are also two full brother lions, that Beatty tries to seat as far apart as possible, since Beatty explained, “The lion is a gang fighter. When a lion gets into a fight the other lions join in. The tiger will sit silent and watch a fellow tiger torn to pieces” (“The Young Man Who Sought Thrills” Sept. 30, 1928: C2).

The circus management, which had invested over $30,000 in the act, did not want to lose any of the animals. Unfortunately two cats had been killed during the summer, and Beatty was nursing back to health a third badly injured tiger ” (“The Young Man Who Sought Thrills” Sept. 30, 1928: C2).

He then related his close call in Texarkana, when he interrupted an amorous pair of lions. The male attacked, knocked him to the ground, picked him up by the right hip and carried him around the arena for what seemed like forty laps. Eying the lioness, he dropped Beatty, who got up and finished the act. Beatty explained how trainers typically preferred jungle-bred cats, over domestically raised animals because a “jungle cat hardly ever forgets its inherent fear of man.” The cats’ educations do not begin until they are grown, he continued. The training is just a matter of routine and patience ” (“The Young Man Who Sought Thrills” Sept. 30, 1928: C2).

One of the highpoints of the act was when Beatty approaches a tigress on a low pedestal, then backs across the arena in a crouching position, pointing to the floor with his whip. Slowly the cat descends from her stool, creeping up until her face is close to Beatty’s, and then rolls upon her back. At his signal she rolls over and over. He explained how the trick was achieved in incremental steps, gradually increasing the distance. The whip was not the cue for her to advance, but rather a headshake. At one point, he left the tigress to goad a lion into an uproar. When asked why, since the lion seemed peaceful, an old circus hand replied, “That’s just the reason. He might get to day-dreaming there and
forget about being afraid of this boy out here. Every cat’s got to keep his eye on Clyde. That’s why he cracks the whip so much, to attract their attention and keep them awake” (“The Young Man Who Sought Thrills” Sept. 30, 1928: C2).

Beatty added that tigers were far more nervous than lions, but lions were “quicker to detect hesitation and nervousness upon the part of the trainer.” Other common misconceptions were that their teeth and claws were pulled, or that they had grown to like Beatty so that everything was just bluff and acting. The reporter learned the truth behind these fictions when he observed the cats being fed. The cats were calm and pacing while the chunks of meat were thrown in to them. They tore apart the meat with their fangs and bolted it down.

Then Clyde appeared in street clothes. Instantly the line of cages became a bedlam. The meat was forgotten as the great cats launched themselves at the bars, roaring and snarling. One lion pawed the floor of his cage like a maddened bull, a tiger reached beneath the bars of his cage, hissing like a Gargantuan tabby. Yellow eyes gleamed malevolently and the visitor felt mighty uncomfortable. That was raw jungle hate on exhibition or those big cats were mighty good actors. ‘They don’t seem to love you very much, Clyde.’
‘They know me. You could put me in a crowd of 1,000 people and turn those cats loose and every one would come for me,’ he replied, adding: ‘You know, I believe Nero, that lion, really likes me. I can do almost anything with him, sit on him, or ride on his back’ Fraternizing twice a day with thirty lions and tigers and not sure in his own mind whether even one has any love for him! (“The Young Man Who Sought Thrills” Sept. 30, 1928: C2).

The reporter then speculated if Beatty had any real protection while in the arena. At the introduction of the act some “soldiers” march in, who the announcer assures the crowd are for their protection, since Beatty was his own protection. Actually the “soldiers” were part of the atmosphere, and in reality a tumbling act with rifles were loaded with blanks. The sharp report of revolver, loaded with blanks, can startle a cat that was about to attack enough to change its mind. It is seldom used close up since it could blind an animal. Beatty emphasized there were no loaded guns to protect him, and no one would enter the arena to save him. His only “ace in the hole” was a fire extinguisher filled with ammonia in the hands of an assistant (“The Young Man Who Sought Thrills” Sept. 30, 1928: C2).

Beatty claimed he did not smoke or drink, and got some relaxation from riding carnival rides when the circus played a fair. But in Topeka he struck up a friendship with an aviator and became “air crazy.” He went up three times daily, and planned on buying his own plane, until the circus management
learned of his new obsession, calling it too reckless. Outside the arena he is small, shy, and unassuming. “The case of the Kansas City woman ‘wild to meet that lion tamer,’ provided him with a good laugh. This girl met him at a little party and sat beside him an hour in casual conversation without realizing he was her hero. When informed later she said: ‘Darn I thought he was a stunt flier’” (“The Young Man Who Sought Thrills” Sept. 30, 1928: C2).

The following January, Beatty, after an absence of three years, was scheduled to appear at the Detroit Shrine Circus, an event that the chairman, Tunis Stinson, expected to attract over 200,000 spectators. To get Beatty’s big 30-cat act, the Shrine organization had to assume complete responsibility for the care and safety of the “big felines,” as well as acquiring insurance policies covering the lives of the animals and their trainer (“30 Savage Cats” Jan. 20, 1929).

Early that summer Billboard reported that Beatty was accorded one of the greatest receptions ever given a circus man when the show played his home town, Chillicothe, O. The city was bedecked in flags and banners welcoming him home. Several pages of the local newspapers contained the greetings of Chillicothe merchants to their famous son. Clyde was presented everything from the keys of the city to wearing apparel. In an impressive ceremony, Beatty was made Chillicothe’s ambassador by the Chamber of Commerce. Besides being entertained at informal receptions. His day was filled with talks at clubs and organizations (“Clyde Beatty Accorded Reception” July 1929).

The Scioto Gazette noted that Beatty’s achievements were remarkable for “a boy born on a farm and not having seen a wild animal until about ten years ago, and now to be considered the “ace” of all wild animal trainers is a thing to marvel at” (“Bigger, Better and Grander” June 7, 1929).

When the circus arrived, the feature story in the Gazette declared that “Bainbridge Boy, Clyde Beatty, Cynosure of All Eyes Here Thursday.” The article added that the “outstanding trait of big animal trainer is mother love,” and that “Paxton Township’s Fearless son Cows The King of the Forest and The tigers of India.” Despite his position, Beatty has “one outstanding trait to his credit which all must applaud and that is his love for his mother.” The reporter claimed that if Beatty was within driving range of his hometown, he would visit his mother. He was not a spendthrift and sent a “goodly portion” of his mother to invest or help her out if needed. The article added that every man, woman, and child in Bainbridge knew him by sight, along with one-third of the population of Chillicothe. His success was
based on concentration, fearlessness and the psychological playing of the antipathy between lions and tigers (“Bainbridge Boy, Clyde Beatty, Cynosure” June 25, 1929: 10).

Later that year, Beatty experienced what he called the greatest thrill of his life, during an evening performance of the show in Pennsylvania. The Battle of Collinsville was an all-out fight that nearly wrecked the act. Typically Beatty started his routine by leaving in the three tigers who took the three highest pedestals in the pyramid of cats. Next, the twenty lions-- males and females--entered. They usually milled around on the floor of the arena, with males seeking out females, and minor spats ensuing, while others crowded around the safety cage door from which Beatty would enter the arena. The initial part of the battle began when a lion unexpectedly leapt up and dragged one of the top mounted tigers—Rosie, the rollover cat—down to the floor. She broke free, and returned to her seat. Beatty then left in the rest of the tigers, and successfully pyramided the group. One tigress, however, suddenly dismounted and tried to get back out the closed chute entrance. Racing around the pedestal bases, she quickly attracted the lions who began the fight. “All the other tigers except three jumped to the floor of the arena—not so much to join the fight as to be in readiness to leave the arena. There are no greater scrappers than tigers, but they avoid fights, whereas the lion instinctively starts a fight or joins the nearest one.” Every single lion in the act went after a tiger—twenty lions fighting nine tigers. “The tiger is one of the deadliest of four-legged fighters, but he is not a super-creature, and when surrounded and badly outnumbered, he finds it difficult to fight in his most effective manner. A tiger is normally at his best when fighting one another animal; and usually that one other animal is doomed. The striped cat is not a group fighter. As I have pointed out before, lions are gangsters, tigers fight alone” (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 67).

The fight had reached the uncontrollable stage, and according to Beatty “the trainer who tried to break up a fight of this kind while it was at its height, instead of waiting for it to subside, would definitely establish himself as too ignorant to be permitted to enter an arena again.” Three of the tigers remained on their pedestals, in fact Rajah who Beatty called “one of the greatest fighters the arena has ever known….diabolical in combat—one of the fastest, bravest, and most powerful tigers I’ve ever handled,” dozed off on his seat, since gang fights bored him. The only course Beatty could take was to be sure the
tunnel door was open providing the animals with an escape, and to get out of the arena before the whole boiling mass turned on him. Once he made a break for it and was out, he and his assistants could pump ammonia into the arena. Most of the cats dashed for the exit. Beatty re-entered and broke up the remaining nine cats. But one tiger lay dead, and another could not be saved. Beatty claimed no other episode gave him more nightmares or came as close to unnerving him.

And as always, after deciding that perhaps I’d better quit, I was horrified by the dullness of some of the other possible occupations that I considered. They were not for me. I knew I couldn’t stand them. They would do worse than kill me; they would kill my interest in life. There is a fascination about the big cage that only an animal-trainer fully understands, and I don’t believe I’ll quit while I can still crack a whip and brandish a kitchen chair (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 79-80).

During these years the American Circus Corporation was also expanding, becoming the dominant force in the circus world with the addition of the Al G. Barnes and Sparks shows. They owned every major railroad circus, save Ringling, in the United States. Fast and sleek, these lean thirty-car shows could out-maneuver the Ringling organization that had allowed itself to become cumbersome, stodgy, and complacent. The only thing the ACC needed was a gigantic draw and they found that in the person of the enormously popular western star, Tom Mix. Mix agreed to join the Sells-Floto Circus for the highest salary ever paid a circus performer, along with a private rail car with accommodations for two horses, a Rolls-Royce and an entourage of seven people. The gamble proved a success when Sells-Floto outdrew Ringling for the first time and brought home greater profits. The final blow came when Ringling reached an impasse over Madison Square Garden lease terms, and the ACC quickly agreed to a deal that involved a combined Sells-Floto and Hagenbeck-Wallace show playing the Garden (“Ringling Circus Breaks With Garden” Sept. 4, 1929 and Joys 1984: 110).

The bombshell came on Monday, September 9, 1929 when it was announced that the Corporation shows had been sold to John Ringling for $1,714,000 in cash that he had borrowed from the Providence Company in New York. Now Ringling had an empire of six railroad circuses moving on 235 railcars. None of the principals enjoyed their bonanza for long. Jerry Mugivan died in January, Bert Bowers died not long after, and in 1936, Ed Ballard was shot by Bob Alexander, a gambler and former business associate. John Ringling, himself, lost control of his show in 1932 after forfeiting payments on his loan
because of the Depression. He died heartbroken in 1936 after having sacrificed everything to keep the Ringling name supreme (Bradbury Nov.-Dec. 1973: 7).

In 1930, Beatty planned a course of action to add ten more cats to his act, attempting to reach his goal of forty. Thoughts of a bigger arena were impractical for logistic reasons, so Beatty carefully worked out a plan using diagrams and mathematics. He asserted that audiences kept demanding more from wild animal acts each year. “When no new sensational tricks occur to me, I increase the number of my performers, which in a way is a trick in itself—a much more difficult one than the mere teaching of a new stunt or two to your old group, when the planned increase is, as in the case under discussion, so great” (Beatty and Anthony 1933).

Early that year, Beatty was involved in, what for him had become a typical arena fight and injury, but it would draw national attention and lead to some major magazine articles. The Kokomo Tribune announced the arrival of Hagenbeck-Wallace for their season opener on April 26. Beatty, described as the youngest as well as the leading American trainer, was interviewed following a rehearsal, describing in detail the use of the whip, gun and chair, as well as the dangers involved in a large mixed act which he emphasized by baring some of his recent scars (“Jungle Cat Trainer in Kokomo” April 25, 1930: 19).

The next day the Tribune’s front-page headline blared that, “Pet Lion Saves Life of Peru Trainer, Attacked by Tigress. Clyde Beatty Severely Bitten Before ‘Prince’ Takes Hand in Combat.” Beatty had been charged and knocked down by a tigress, who had, according to hospital reports, severely lacerated his arms, and actually bitten through his left arm. Prince, actually Nero, “leaped from his pedestal, attacked the vicious offender and drove it across the arena, giving his master time to escape.” Prince tore the tigress’s side and knocked her aside. Beatty, would recover—always with the caveat—if an infection did not occur. “Displaying the fortitude which has marked his rise in the dangerous profession of wild animal training, Beatty said tonight from his cot, “I’ll be in there tomorrow when the show starts and I’ll put on my act” (“Animal Acts Featured” April 26, 1930). Beatty made good on his promise and appeared the next day. “Although seriously handicapped by his wounds, which had stiffened his fingers, Beatty entered the arena, and with whip, chair and gun in hand reasserted his mastery over the thirty-four brutes
which sat snarling around him. No more example of sheer nerve has ever been witnessed in a circus performance and the crowd indicated its enthusiasm in its wild applause as the wounded man completed his entire performance.” The day before circus officials had admitted that Beatty was the “most popular individual” connected with the show. “Little more than a boy, his courage and personality have made him popular wherever he goes” (“Animal Acts Featured” April 26, 1930 and “Jungle Cat Traner” April 25, 1930: 19).

The story made the national news, even The New York Times ran a story “Lion Saves Man From Tiger,” which claimed Clyde Beatty “owes his life to Prince, giant lion and veteran circus trouper” (“Lion Saves Man From Tiger” Apr. 27, 1930). Other newspapers ran the story with a picture of Beatty and ‘Prince’ entitled “King Among Beasts Saves Man” (“King Among Beasts Saves Man” May 2, 1930). As the circus toured the U.S. and Canada, the story of the rescue was repeated, as well as noting that “Horatio Alger heroes have nothing on Clyde Beatty,” who had dashed out of his classroom at the sound of a calliope, joined the circus, and became a renowned animal trainer (“Here’s Clyde Beatty and Prince the Lion that Saved his Life” May 15, 1930: 9).

Beatty later explained that Trudy, the tigress, was one of the ten new cats he was introducing into the act. She was somewhat of a freak, actually attacking lions, and also often was sluggish and not alert to cues. He had no other animal to substitute, and leaving her out would mean the act had thirty-nine—“but in circus business ‘thirty-nine’ sounds like ten less than ‘forty.’ And, besides, when you announce forty you’d better produce forty or some crank will brand you a faker” (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 80-82).

After a “fighting entrance,” Beatty had almost pyramided the cats, when he noticed that Trudy was excited and rattled by the music, since this was her first performance with the band. Just as she seemed to calm down a little, she suddenly sprang, determinedly coming after Beatty three times, and sending him sprawling, flat on his back between two tall tiger pedestals. When he sat up, the tigers on either side began clawing at him—one ripped off his shirt, and the other gave him a minor scratch on the scalp. The tigers had leaped down on the arena floor waiting to be let out of the arena, while the lions readied themselves for a fight. Nero, had grabbed Trudy off of Beatty. He was twice as big and heavy as a
300-pound tigress and he gripped on to her hindquarters, dragged her around, and clawed her whenever she resisted. The performance director had slipped Beatty a pole, and he now set to work trying to get Nero to drop Trudy and avert a free-for-all. He succeeded in seating Nero, the arena boss, broke up the other fights, and sent the cats out of the arena. Trudy recovered in about a month, and proved to be a nervous, but not unintelligent cat (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 84-88).

Beatty confessed that, “Nero was not even remotely concerned with saving me when he attacked Trudy from behind. He merely saw a good opportunity to rip up a striped tabby, one of his enemies, while he had her at a disadvantage.” In the subsequent stories, Nero was described as ‘gentle,’ and a ‘buddy,’ who had graciously taken orders through the years. Beatty was asked to help write a children’s book and a magazine article on how their friendship had developed over the years. He refused both projects (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 88).

Appearing in some newsreels, prior to the 1930 season, along with the national articles that appeared after the Kokomo incident; one in Field and Stream and the other in Literary Digest, provided Beatty with more recognition. They described him as a “personable young fellow,” and called the high point of the act, his stare down of Nero. Beatty would stop his charge by suddenly taking a step toward the lion, leaning forward until his face was within a foot of his and staring him into submission. Nero would gradually stop roaring and snarling, and with a baleful look, shake his head, back away, and return to his pedestal. “It was a masterful performance that lent credence to the oldest of wild animal training superstitions, the hypnotic eye” (“Personal Glimpses—How the Cat Man Fights Off Claws and Fangs” Jan. 24, 1931: 32-33 and Joys 1984: 112).

John Ringling now had to face a dilemma, his subsidiary Hagenbeck-Wallace was out-performing his own show, and with a daily nut of only $3,200 as compared to $11,000. He also needed a very strong act for his Garden stand that provided so much of the revenue and publicity for the coming season. There was one obvious choice, but it meant breaking his ban of wild animal acts on the Ringling show. The decision of the Ringling hierarchy to reinstate the wild animal act and to star a young trainer who had toiled in the boondocks for eight-and-a-half years with the ACC, may have been something of a
concession to the Depression, but it proved to be one of the wisest decisions Ringling made. Beatty had been making a name for himself, and in discussing the future of the Corporation shows and their personnel, Pat Valdo, a Ringling executive, it is believed, suggested to John Ringling that a tremendous act existed on Hagenbeck-Wallace, but that it could never achieve true star status unless it appeared in the Garden where it would attract the attention of the New York press. That publicity would then create even a bigger demand to see Beatty on the road, and contribute to Hagenbeck-Wallace’s success. Now it would be up to the critics to determine if the strategy was sound (Joys 1984: 115).

Making it in New York

During the 1930s, nine New York newspapers, plus the *Brooklyn Eagle*, vied for an audience. By 1935, 15,000 news dealers plied their trade in New York. The most respected paper was the *Times*, established in 1851 by J. H. Raymond. The *Herald-Tribune* was the result of the 1920 deal that brought together James Gordon Bennett’s, *Herald*, a sensational, sports-minded paper founded in 1835, with Horace Greely’s, *Tribune*, that had started in 1841, and was called the oracle of Republicanism. The oldest paper was the *Post*, originated by Alexander Hamilton. Like the *Post*, the pro-worker, *Sun*, started in 1833 by B. H. Day, was a tabloid, whose chief reporter, Richard Harding Davis, gave the public the first vivid pictures of Broadway at the turn of the century. It continued to attract reporters with literary ambitions. The *World-Telegram* was an offspring of the *World*, which had been founded by Jay Gould and became one of Joseph Pulitzer’s papers in 1883. By the 1930s it was part of the Scripps-Howard chain. E. W. Scripps, who had founded United Press International, once said,

> Our business is to get an audience. Whatever else it is, our newspaper must be excessively interesting, not to the good, wise men and pure in spirit, but to the great mass of sordid, squalid humanity. Humanity is vulgar, so we must be vulgar. It is coarse, so we must not be refined, it is passionate, therefore the blood that runs in our veins and in our newspapers must be warm. (Lee 1957: 10).

The most popular paper in New York was the *Daily News*, a morning tabloid built from scratch by J. M. Paterson and his Chicago crowd in 1919 to attain a circulation of 1,319,654 in 1929. Loaded with photos and illustrations, it was originated on the premise that “the 14-year old mind, even the 8-year old mind is a part of the mental equipment of the average human being” (Lee 1957: 10).
As an answer to the *News*, the Hearst papers, some historians insist, were not newspapers at all, “they were printed entertainment and excitement—the equivalent of bombs exploding, bands blaring, firecrackers popping, victims screaming, flags waving, houris dancing, and smoke rising from the singed flesh of executed criminals.” By 1935, the *News* and *Mirror* distributed 2,147,703 copies each morning (Lee 1957: 10).

The Broadway columnist was a phenomenon of the New York papers. These colorful writers created a magic kingdom surrounding a sixteen-block stretch from Times Square to Columbus Circle. None was more famous than the *Mirror’s* Walter Winchell, who could single-handedly create a bestseller, a hit play or movie. He epitomized the legendary New York characteristics of ruthlessness, hard-boiled cynicism, and great sentimentality.

The Stork Club, The Silver Slipper, The Parody, Le Pavillion, the Copa, along with Reuben’s and Lindy’s or Mindy’s—the neon names of night clubs, restaurants, and delicatessans flashed through their columns. The images burned in the national consciousness until they were as familiar as the neighborhood store, along with the Broadway credo, the wisecrack, the adolescent cynicism and whoozy sentimentality, Broadway’s smoky torch songs, its put downs and enthusiasms (Mosedale 1981: 23-24).

“The mores and behavior of a few hundred people” were emulated and talked about all over the country. The image was part of the lure that attracted thousands of young people to New York, “All of whom one way or another saw their name in lights or saw themselves hanging around with those whose names were in lights” (Mosedale 1981: 24).

The tribe of columnists—Ed Sullivan, Louis Sobol, Earl Wilson, Heywood Broun, Damon Runyon, Westbrook Pegler, Paul Gallico—observed New York’s entertainment and sports scene. “They made Broadway stand for values and attitudes which remain part of the American perspective.” It was a world of wars, great ball games, horse races, championship fights, sex, speakeasies, sleazy nightclubs, the Depression, and movie stars. Since the turn of the century, the press found the masses increasingly eager to hear every detail and thought about stars. “It was an era of great wealth and dire poverty. “It was a society that bred rapacious capitalists, prizefighters, entertainers, and whores.” Life here, Allen Churchill wrote, was “freer, wickeder, bolder, than anywhere else” (Mosedale 1981: 33).
During the Thirties, which could be considered a terrible decade, beginning with the Crash and ending with the onset of a World War, New York’s mood remained jaunty and cocky, and entertainment, sports, and nightlife bloomed. Every March, the city’s newsmen worn down by winter, became “sour” and “snarling,” “dull” and “uninspired.”

In March Father Knickerbocker is irascible—an old man with the grippe who has to work hard all day when he should be sitting in bed with a steaming toddy in his hand. . . . Then, one day, a glowing editor looks up from his desk at a man who stands before him. The editor’s scowl fades. He smiles for the first time since Christmas. He hops up and eagerly extends a hand to this gray-haired gentleman with a gray mustache, who wears a black and white plaid overcoat and carries a snakewood cane with a big silver knob at the top, and who laughs infectiously and says, “Hello, Jack. You’re looking great!” “By golly!” the editor cries, “It’s Dexter!” Spring has come to New York City. Dexter Fellows, press agent for the circus, is in town (Beatty, J. March 1930: 66).

Fellows was “the forerunner of spring in New York City—three hops ahead of the first robin.” The circus was also the sign of prosperity, for it played no “dead towns.” “In introducing himself, he never mentions what circus. To him there only is one. ‘If you were in London,’ he says, ‘singing God Save the King, would you think it was necessary to stop and explain what king?’” (Beatty, J. March 1930: 66). He supplied newsmen with plenty of ideas, often very fanciful and delivered with a twinkle in his eye, and bundles of always welcome photographs, and then just let them write! (Beatty, J. March 1930: 66).

The Ringling ads of 1931 announcing the annual spring run of the circus at the Garden proclaimed that “among its 10,000 marvels” would be “Fearless Clyde Beatty Alone with his Ferocious Performing 40 Lions and Tigers. The Greatest Thriller of the Century!” Frank Braden enthusiastically told of “the breath-taking, blood-curdling events that go on when Clyde Beatty and forty lions and tigers mingle together in one cage” (New York American Mar. 26, 1931: 7).

Dexter Fellows insisted that the earlier decision to drop wild animal acts was because circus officials believed parents objected to bringing their children to circuses where trainers risked a horrible death each performance. But as soon as they acts were pulled, the public demanded their return. “So this year we have one bigger and better than ever. Clyde Beatty and forty fierce beasts” (New York Times Apr. 5, 1931: 25).

Reporters were given a preview of the circus. “The feature of the show,” reported the American,
is Captain Beatty and his forty performing lions and tigers. Lined up in forty cages along the side of the Garden, the feline company gave roaring evidence that they aren’t half as pleasant as Beatty says they are. The ‘Captain’ explained: ‘All perfectly nice dispositions. No. No! That’s not a roar you hear. He’s just coughing! Look—I’ll stick my hand in the cage!’ He did and the resultant outcry would have frozen the blood of a Comanche Indian. But the ‘Captain’ still insists that they are nice lions socially (New York American Apr. 2, 1931: 6).

“Captain Beatty took his big cats out and slapped them about the center ring in friendly fashion—it least it seemed friendly enough on the Captain’s part. . . . Beatty, who is a slight and unassuming young man, admits he likes lions and tigers, but is very much afraid of matrimony” (New York American Apr. 3, 1931: 7).

On April 3, 1931, the Garden audience was ominously warned by the ringmaster’s dramatic statement: “Everyone is forbidden to move around or talk during the next act.” Gradually the house lights dimmed and then went of as brilliant spots illuminated the steel arena in the center ring. Now:


The effectiveness of the gamble would soon be known as the first reviews appeared. Marjorie Belisch wrote in the Journal:

Suddenly staccato drums rise in crescendo roll. And young Clyde Beatty faces death. Death from the mangling claws of 20 treacherous tigers. Death from the bared teeth of 20 threatening lions. It is the first time lions and tigers, these age-old enemies of the jungle, have performed together in the same arena. And it’s no easier than it looks. Only the barricade of a thin chair saves Beatty from the spring of a goaded tigress. Again he barely escapes the charge of a maddened lion by an attendant’s speed in opening exit bars. The whip cracks. The cowed beasts lurch, bound back to their perches on hefty pedestals. For a moment they are quiet. But the nervous twitch of a great tail, a smothered snarl, the lurking suspicion of cats’ eyes tell of hatred and lust for their trainer’s blood that may flare any moment into murder (Belisch Apr. 3, 1931: 4).

If the American review was a press agent’s dream, The New York Times was disgusted that Ringling had broken the ban, especially one that publicized and dramatized the vicious, dangerous aspect of the big cats. The day after Beatty’s debut at the Garden it reported in “studied understatement” and sarcasm that the animals were “carefree,” definitely less than 40 in number, and so bored, they yawned. In their review, “Circus Opens Here, Glorifying Lions,” the new feature was:
The cage act of one Clyde Beatty and several lions and tigers. The bills said there were forty-six beasts, the program forty, an expert on the subject, thirty-six, and actual count did put the total number considerably above a score. Mr. Beatty, a young man, goes into the cage and cracks a whip while his carefree charges growl. The audience liked it and that was that. Mr. Beatty, who knows the legend of the power of the human eye, makes one of his more considerable effects by starring a lion named Kazan into submission. Yesterday he apparently put too much English on the hypnotism, for Kazan distinctly yawned in the trainer’s face. But this may have been due to a matter of atmosphere, for it was rather hot in the Garden, especially for calisthenics and a thick mane. People who have been about circuses for some time said that such a wild animal act had not been seen hereabouts for some time. It seems they are hard things to transport, and at one time were in such quantities that audiences merely yawned like Kazan. But the style is changing again. New York is said to be yearning for lions, tigers, pistols, and whips (“Circus Opens Here, Glorifying Lions” Apr. 3, 1931: 27).

As the Garden run progressed, the Times urged humane societies to protect performing lions and tigers, even running a letter that called Beatty’s act one “of the most cruel exhibitions I have ever encountered.” The writer insisted that the trainer clubbed the animals so loudly the blows could be head a half-block away. For over half an hour the animals were punished; one at a time, causing children to cry (Travis, A. C. Apr. 23, 1931: 24). The following day Ringling spokesmen and Beatty assured the SPCA that the act had been changed, removing all objectionable parts. The wife of the Times’ managing editor was not convinced, and avoided the circus as long as Beatty was with it (“A Circus Act Denounced” April 23, 1931: 24; April 25, 1931: 13, and Joys 1984: 115-116). His popularity with kids became evident when a ten-year-old boy came to Beatty’s defense after the letter to the editor of the Times had called the act “one of the cruelest exhibitions ever witnessed,” and a case for the ASPCA (Travis, A. C. Apr. 23, 1931: 24). On the same day that an ASPCA spokesman announced he was assured nothing objectionable would appear in the act, the boy’s letter insisted that he had read all about modern trainers and how they no longer used cruel methods. He urged the irate writer to “go to the circus again and sit where he can see the arena better, he will be convinced that I am right. I have several pets myself and don’t like cruelty either” (Dike Apr. 25, 1931: 13 and Joys 1989: 4).

However, the United Press ran a syndicated article headlined, “Greatest Circus Fails to Excite Modern Youth.”

It becomes a painful duty to report today that the younger generation embracing individuals between the ages of four and ten, have grown so jaded and tired of it all that not even a circus can stir them out of their lethargy. . . . But even the death-defying Clyde Beatty who entered a cage
and outstared 40 jungle bred lions and tigers, failed to evoke more young sophisticates who sat docilely besides their parents waiting presumably for caviar and the cocktail our.

‘When,’ inquired a seven-year-old male, as Mr. Beatty thrust his nose into a lion’s mouth, ‘when will the lion bite the man’s head off, mother’ (“Greatest Circus Fails to Excite Modern Youth” April 6, 1931: 7).

The *Mirror* took a more standard tack, raving that,

A new collection of wild animals, remarkably trained by Clyde Beatty is the circus’s outstanding attraction. Beatty alone in a cage with 23 wild beasts, lions, tigers, and leopards, made the jungle beasts perform with the aid of a whip, a revolver, and a chair. And sometimes when one of them threatened to turn primitive, Beatty threw them one of those glances you’ve heard about, and Leo would turn and walk away. . . (Franklin Apr. 4, 1931: 17).

*The Daily News* pictured Beatty in the first action photograph ever taken of the circus in the Garden, captioning it, “King of Beasts. . . it’s not the lion but the guy who makes the lions (and tigers) jump” (New York Daily News Apr. 4, 1931: 23).

Joseph Cookman of the *Post* wrote:

Then comes an act that is featured in electric lights on the sign outside, Clyde Beatty and his lot of tigers and lions. In an iron cage illuminated with red lamps Mr. Beatty’s charges roar, snarl, and shadow box in an entirely satisfactory manner, and he cracks the whip, fires his pistol and brandishes a chair in a fashion that merits his billing. Every now and then Mr. Beatty displays the power of the human eye and altogether demonstrates to his audience the superiority of brains over brawn. It might not be as dangerous as it all looks, as the skeptics assert, but it is a good show (Cookman Apr. 4, 1931: 2).

But even more glowing tributes were to come. The *Herald-Tribune* headlined,

“Lions and Tigers Start Circus Off with a Shudder—Lone Human in Garden Cage Conquers 21 Beasts in Sensation of 1931.” Not since Hugo Zachini was first shot from his cannon has there been more excitement in the Ringling entourage than the moment yesterday when the Garden was darkened and the beasts came prowling up the runway to cages lit with the crimson glow of jungle fires. Children stopped munching their peanuts to squeal as the lions mounted their perches, shook their manes and roared. But the tigers were faster and quieter. They bounded at the bars and bared their teeth when the Garden lights went on. Crack! Went Mr. Beatty’s whip. Bang! Went his revolver. The lions roared; the tigers snarled . . . as a last gesture the tamer brought a tiger to the floor, then spreading his arms in mesmeric passes, drew the beast towards him as if he were on string. When he had the tiger crouching at his feet, he bounded out of the cage, a flash of white, and the Garden rang with applause (Rose Apr. 15, 1931: 12).

In a wonderful article, Robert Garland, the theatre critic of the *World-Telegram*, described his own and his young son’s emotions in a review titled, “Greatest of All Circuses Opens.” Saddened by the pall cast by the death of Lillian Leitzel, the phenomenal star aerialist who had died that winter in Copenhagen when an equipment failure caused her to fall, Garland still found, “Mr. Beatty, a newcomer
and a wonder.” The program called him the “sensation of the century, the greatest and most daring wild animal act ever presented. . . . for once in his lifetime the man who writes the program is guilty of understatement. Mr. Beatty is all the program says—and more! Lots more,” adds Roland, Garland’s young son (Garland Apr. 4, 1931: 29). *Time* Magazine described Beatty as the chief new attraction of the circus.

Mr. Beatty is left alone in a great cage in which there are some 40 hissing, snarling, rumbling lions and tigers. These he persuades to form various artistic groupings by means of a whip, chair, and frequently used revolver. Mr. Beatty’s most showmanlike beast is Kazan, a large old lion who quails and cowers very perceptibly when the trainer stares him into submission. Kazan is unable to stifle a yawn [Obviously the reviewer saw the same show as the *Times* reporter] (“Greatest Show” April 13, 1931: 38).

The last important review appeared in the April 18th edition of the often very caustic, *Variety*.

The principal time handicap and yet the Ringling show’s thrill right now is Clyde Beatty and his wild animal act. . . . He was spotted 16th at the opening matinee when too much time was consumed in setting up and taking down the arena. Beatty was No. 3 at night. Much too early for such a sensational exhibition. Even the horde of hostlers spotting the platforms within the cage and attaching the runway from the cages, 25 minutes required. Ringling figured the Garden date needed something exceptional, although he ruled out wild animal displays several seasons ago. Young Beatty is all they say about him, steely nerved, spectacular, well appearing and above all, a showman. Even the foreigners admire Beatty as a trainer . . . Beatty uses about two dozen cats . . . Entrance of the cats is a flash in itself, lights out and bunch lights turned on in the arena. . . . His top trick is coaxing a tiger to the ground and making him roll over. That’s the feat he sells best, with his face within 18 inches of the snarling cats. . . . The effectiveness of the tiger’s performance is the background. Most of the lions are at Beatty’s back on perches—what a picture of big mugs (*Variety* Apr. 8, 1931).

Ringling had its homegrown sensation . . . . and the New York media had discovered a new hero. On April 10 and 11, two radio programs originated from the Garden. The matinee was described along with a backstage tour, an hour broadcast of the Circus Saints and Sinners Convention, sounds of the circus, and interviews with circus author, Courtney Ryley Cooper, Frank Buck, John Ringling, and Beatty (*New York American* Apr. 10, 1931: 19). It was the first time a real circus performance had been broadcast successfully. The announcer was especially adept at describing “a battle of wits between a man and a cageful of tigers” (Reid Apr. 13, 1931: 8). Nick Kenny of the *Mirror*, however, later commented that Clyde Beatty, “the daredevil trainer told a radio audience from WOR the other night that if he
showed fear in the cage the lions would eat him. Yet he was so afraid of the little microphone that we could hear his teeth chatter” (Kenny Apr. 14, 1931: 30 and Joys: 1989: 4).

James R. Patterson, a publicist with Hagenbeck-Wallace described years later how the underpaid (he was making $75 per week), shy Beatty, readily agreed to interviews with the press, but refused radio talks. “I can’t talk to an audience,” he was quoted as saying. “With one man it’s okay, but with a crowd my hands shake, I sweat and my voice won’t work.” Patterson, well-acquainted with the trainer’s answers to interviews, fooled the listening public at times by playing Beatty on the radio (Patterson August 1972).

Circus performers were also aware of the New York jinx. “Tradition in the show is that each year New York claims a performer—who is either killed or hurt so badly he must be left in the city when it moves on.” There was little doubt that most observers believed Beatty was the logical candidate to continue the jinx (New York American Apr. 13, 1931: 1).

The colorful Walter Winchell noted:

This is straight stuff, and it isn’t a publicity trick either. Use if you like. . . The animal experts are unanimous in declaring Clyde Beatty a fool to work 40 lions and tigers in so small an arena as he uses at the Circus. . . they say he can’t get away fast enough if anything happens. . . . Beatty, it appears, readily admits this and recognizes his danger, but he says if he gets through the season without being clawed up badly, or killed, his reputation will be made. . . . Imagine! . . . What’ll you Beatty he does or doesn’t? (Winchell Apr. 17, 1931: 26).

On April 12, the jinx was fulfilled, not by Beatty, but by flier, Charlie Siegrist, who at an attempt at a triple somersault fell awkwardly in the safety net, fracturing his neck and ankle. His injuries were not life-threatening but would leave him in a cast for months (Joys 1989: 4.

Beatty also became the subject of two feature articles, one a full column piece in the previously negative Times, called “Lion Tamer Finds Some Fun in His Job,” that described his training methods. The cats are trained one by one, and it takes about a month to work a new cat into the troupe. During the act he carries a gun loaded with blanks, since there would be no time to get off an accurate shot during a sudden attack, and a real bullet could easily hit an audience member. The chair is his best weapon, and the whip “is just to keep his friends’ attention on him.” Lions and tigers were equally hard, or easy to train, but tigers seemed to have greater retention. He explained that he enjoyed the excitement and adventure of
performing in the circus ("Lion Trainer Finds Some Fun" Apr. 10, 1931: 26). On the same day, the *Sun* ran the first true feature article on Beatty that ran in the New York papers. In it Edwin Hill described a brutal battle that had occurred during a morning rehearsal between the trainer and his lion, Beelzebub.

The young man in white riding clothes turned his back for three heartbeats to lash a charging tiger into a cowed housecat. From above and behind a great Nubian lion, blackmaned, wicked and cunning as Beelzebub, took a chance, leaped and struck downward and outward with a savage swishing stroke of his right forepaw. If that terrific, murderous lunge had reached its mark it would have been goodbye to young Mr. Beatty. . . . If it had grazed him even, it would have torn off an arm or half of his face. But it missed him by an inch. Young Beatty, on his toes, moving like a dancer—turning, twisting, steel springs for feet—caught out of the corner of his eye as he whipped the snarling tiger into whimpering submission the shadow of the lion as it leaped and struck, and in the barest fraction of a second had sidestepped to safety.

Then began a duel between the two —lion and a man-- which lasted for ten minutes, and would have been worth twice the price of admission to the whole circus if the public could see it. But the audience was made up only of circus folk who had been going through the routines of their acts until Beatty poured his thirty-six cats into one cage. Used as all of them were to the thrills of the circus, they dropped whatever they were doing and concentrated their gaze on that cage of ferocity.

The lion circled Beatty, menacing, threatening, preparing to spring, his shattering roars quaking the air in the vast auditorium of Madison Square Garden. . . . The cats leaned forward, mouths open, red tongues showing behind daggers of ivory—every savage beast of them eager to make trouble.

As the great Nubian swirled around him, striking now and then with a force that would have felled a bull, young Beatty constantly advanced. Time after time, he sprang straight at the huge bulk of the lion, lashing it full in the face, hitting with a double stroke—right left—right left. You could hear the full impact of the leather thongs. You could hear more than that. You could hear people breathing hard all around. Better than anybody, the circus folk knew that young Beatty was playing with death; that one of those great cats might go completely crazy just long enough to rip a man to shreds. . . .

The question of mastery had to be settled right there and the lion was perfectly aware of it as the man. Beaten off in charge after charge, he retreated finally to the far side of the cage and backed under a platform and its rigging like a rat in a corner. There he crouched, belly flat to the earth—while his roars shook the Garden.

It was up to young Beatty to drive him out of that retreat and make him go to work—make him do his familiar and usual tricks. Time after time, the lash struck under the platform, taking Beelzebub in the face—thud, whack, thud! Finally the lion’s resistance broke all at once. His tail dropped between his legs, he slunk from under the platform, gave Beatty a wide berth, sprang six feet to his own proper platform, and from then on obeyed orders like a French poodle.

It was a thriller while it lasted, this relentless fight between Beatty and the great lion, while all around a cageful of wickedness looked on speculating in their feline way as to whether they dared take a hand. But when Beatty outmastered Beelzebub he took the mutiny out of a whole cageful of jungle cats. . . .

And then it was all over. One by one the jungle cats slipped into the narrow mouth of the runway leading to their individual cages down to the basement of the Garden and presently arose a chorus of full-throated roaring. It was feeding time and the lions and tigers, having worked extra time, wanted their red meat and no nonsense about it. . . .
Smiling like the boy he is—not a whit shaken by his duel with Beelzebub and the incessant menace ringed around him. He wore a white shirt open at the neck, white full-cut riding breeches and a black sash, and black riding boots beautifully polished. He’s a good looking young chap, of medium height, rather slim, but very muscular and hard as nails. He’s as quick as one of his own cats or he wouldn’t be drawing money from John Ringling today. He has light brown hair, grey eyes set wide apart and a rather pale face decorated with freckles (Hill Apr. 10, 1931).

Beatty described his training methods, and when Hill asked him about the future, he replied,

Oh, they’ll get me someday. They most always do. Something will happen that I won’t have been able to figure out in advance. Maybe I’ll get careless or something. Or maybe one of the cats will go plumb crazy, as does happen. If that ever occurs, good night! Still, who wants to live forever? (Hill Apr. 10, 1931).

Beatty also became acquainted with O. O. McIntyre, a fellow Ohioan and writer, who *Variety* claimed put the Broadway column on the newspaper map. McIntyre’s syndicated column in the New York *American* was read by an estimated 104 million people daily. Reportedly if he mentioned old-fashioned preserves, jellies, or apple butter in one of his columns, thousands of people from all over the country would send him jars, boxes, and barrels of the delicacies. “New York Day by Day,” offered a “picture of the big city, the outlanders wished to see: unbelievably glamorous, unbelievably dangerous, a haven for small-town-boy-makes-good, a reservoir of the defeated and lonely.” McIntyre never wrote about anyone critically (Mosedale 1981). On April 27, he announced that on “this day I gave my wife a wedding anniversary present, a tidy sum saved unbeknown to her. Then to look at a new auto I articled to buy, a light tan with red stripes, and to the Garden to see again young Clyde Beatty’s bravery among ferocious animals” (McIntyre Apr. 27, 1931: 15 and Joys 1989: 4).

In another column, McIntyre described having dinner with Beatty, who “mixes 30 lions and tigers. . . in a small circular cage and with a chair bottom and a cap pistol stands off their lightning charges with a gusto of courage that literally lifts the hair. . . . Beatty. . . is still the type of country boy to be seen in front of the drug store.” When he played his hometown, he left out his two most ferocious beasts, to placate his mother.

Even so she was utterly prostrated for two weeks. He is an engaging friendly lad, the sort with a nervous smile of agreement before knowing what is said. He weighs 145 pounds and has twice been literally torn to ribbons in the arena. He likes the movies, but spends most of his time reading in his dressing room and wandering about the circus watching other acts. He drinks a single glass of beer now and then but does not smoke (McIntyre May 20, 1931: 4).
McIntyre wondered “what a fellow like that has for delirium tremens” (McIntyre May 20, 1931: 4).

Beatty, not surprisingly, had a special appeal for children. On the last Monday of every Garden run, the show would host 15,000 orphans and crippled youngsters. The big thrill was Beatty’s act—“when he opened the gate to step into the cage with all those lions and tigers a great gasp of awe went up from the wide-eyed audience” (Greene Apr. 21, 1931: 11). That same day, the Journal photographed Beatty in action with his roll-over tiger, Tiba, and ran a close-up of the trainer’s so-called, “hypnotic eyes” (“His Eyes Keep Them Cowed” Apr. 20, 1931: 8 and Joys 1989: 4).

Beatty had made a great impression on New York. In reviewing a new book about lions, Rau-Tau—Father of Lions, Lawrence Stillings of the Sun, decided that, “since Mr. Beatty and his cage of cats had appeared in the Garden, the whole town was lair-minded.” When the critic had visited the big cats in the basement of the Garden and saw the lions lying lazily around, “maybe a devil said to me softly, it isn’t so dangerous, eh? Well it is not as dangerous as it seems and yet more dangerous than anyone ever dreamed” (Stallings Apr. 28, 1931: 27 and Joys 1989: 4).

That same opinion was voiced when Beatty, now back with Hagenbeck-Wallace played Brooklyn under canvas, a month-and-a-half after the Garden stand. “Lions roared, tigers snarled, the jungle growled its angry challenge last night in a borough of homes. . . . and when man-eaters go native, who will bring them back to the program? . . . the answer came in the flesh – Clyde Beatty. Like another Daniel, he walked into the den to cope with the situation” (Brooklyn Eagle June 11, 1931: 26).

Ringling’s plan had been to feature Beatty with the Big Show during its two indoor dates, New York and Boston, before sending him back out with Hagenbeck-Wallace for the rest of the season. He was now billed as “iron-nerved,” “electrifying,” and as “the young man who gave New York it’s greatest thrill since Lindbergh.” The June issue of Saturday Evening Post featured an article about him by Courtney Ryley Cooper, called “Trained but Untamed!” In July, the Times noted in a theater column that over in Broadway producer James W. Elliott’s office, “where they apparently will take a chance on anything, they now harbor the idea of presenting Clyde Beatty, star trainer of the Ringling show, in a melodrama. Mr. Beatty, who uses twenty-eight lions and tigers in his act, is said to be eager to exhibit his
art and his jungle cats in a New York play” (“News of Time Square” July 26, 1931). Echoes of Van Amburgh!

On May 6, John Ringling, still burdened with debt and the country deep in Depression, announced that Hagenbeck-Wallace was under an ultimatum, make good in four weeks or be taken off the road and put in storage (Variety May 6, 1931: xi and Joys 1989: 4).

The Almost Fatal Attack

Hagenbeck-Wallace proved to have a successful year, and Ringling planned to follow the same format with his shows in 1932. In October, Beatty’s wife, the former Ernestine Pegg, was granted a divorce and custody of their five-year-old daughter, along with child support amounting to $14.50 per week (“Wife Gets Decree from Lion Tamer” Oct. 31, 1931). The incident tickled the funny bones of the gossip columnists. Four weeks later, Beatty’s girl friend, Harriet Evans, a chorus girl with Hagenbeck-Wallace, gave birth to a baby girl on Christmas Eve in Chicago. The following month, on January 23, Beatty was rehearsing his act in Peru on a Saturday afternoon and thinking about driving to Chicago to see Harriet, when he was attacked by Nero. Beatty called the huge lion, the “most sporting and philosophic” animal he knew. He was the dominant arena boss, and sent any challengers spinning without a second glance. When Beatty took Nero into the arena alone, he followed the trainer around like a dog and even let him ride on his back, but if other cats were in the arena, Nero looked at him as one creature that stood between him and total rule. Beatty’s foolhardy admiration for the big cat caused him to relax his guard that unseasonably warm afternoon. He was standing in the arena near two of the lions’ favorite lionesses when Nero abruptly wheeled away from an intended hurdle jump, charged the trainer, and knocked him to the ground.

The first thing I knew I was flat on my back on the floor of the arena, with the lion standing over me. Just when I lost my chair I don’t recall.
It was the worst moment I have ever known. Nero is as powerful a lion as I have ever seen, and here was his chance to get me if that was his pleasure. As the big lion bent over me and bared the teeth with which he planned to mess up my features, I reached up with my right hand and planted it against his upper lip and nose. Then, with superhuman strength born of desperation, I shoved him away from me, actually succeeding in working him back as far as my arm could reach. He gave his head a snap to release himself from my palm-hold and as he did I found my hand in his mouth up to the wrist! I yanked it out in a hurry, scraping off patches of skin against his teeth.
I don’t understand to this day why he failed to bite the whole hand off. . . . He did not make for my face again, contenting himself with seizing what was nearest him. That happened to be the upper part of my leg. He grabbed it midway between the hip and the knee and tightened his jaws as if determined to snap the member in two. Having dug his teeth in deeply enough to satisfy himself (it developed later that they had sunk right into the bone), he began to drag me. After he dragged me about two yards he suddenly let go and made for a nearby lioness. The attack was over as fast as it began (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 119-120).

The initial report in local papers was that Beatty had been taken to a local doctor, E. H. Andrews for first aid and then sent by ambulance to Dukes Hospital in Peru. The wounds were cauterized, and the attending physician, Dr. Malouf, claimed there was not much danger, since one wound was superficial, and the other would cause no trouble unless infection set in. Beatty was expected to be released in less than a week (“Clyde Beatty is Better Following an Attack by Lion Once his Rescuer” Jan. 25, 1932). The following day the paper announced that an infection had set in and that Beatty was in critical condition with a raging fever, and that fellow trainer, Allen King, had taken the act to Detroit for the annual Shrine date. The news stories insisted that Nero was trying to guard Beatty after he fell, rather than kill him, or the wounds would have been more slashing. Blood samples had been taken to Indianapolis to determine the kind of infection the trainer was suffering from. As the week wore on, his condition degraded to extremely critical, and his mother arrived from Bainbridge. Malouf claimed it was Beatty’s otherwise excellent health that was enabling him to survive, although a crisis was nearing. A week after the attack he was in grave condition. After Malouf removed an abscess, it seemed that he was improving, but on February 6, it was reported that he was still in critical condition. On the 8th, a bacteriologist from the Indiana University medical school said Beatty seemed to be suffering from a disease more frequently occurring in the tropics where people are often bitten by wild animals. The *pasturella* germ was related to the same bacteria that caused rabbit fever and the bubonic plague. By the 13th, his temperature was normal, he could sit up, and his recovery seemed likely (Logansport Pharos-Tribune and Logansport Press Jan. 27; Jan. 28: 1; Jan. 29; Jan. 31; Feb. 1; Feb. 6, and Feb. 13, 1932, and “Fear Trainer Has Tropical Disease” Feb. 8, 1932: 1). Beatty himself claimed that five days after the accident, doctors planned on amputating his leg. He begged them not to, and attributed his recovery to a specialist who had
been called in. The doctor recommended an operation to locate a pus sac, which he found, and soon

Beatty’s wound was draining from as many as six tubes (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 121).

While it still seemed Beatty’s survival was in question, Walter Fuller of the *Detroit News*, one of Beatty’s first supporters and fans, wrote:

So, Nero, that great big, kind-hearted, human-souled, perfectly trained and oh, so innocent (you believe it, I never did) lion finally got Clyde Beatty, a friend of mine for years? Never was I one of those “I told you so” boys, but it sure looks to me like the betrayal of a trusted friend. This cat (Clyde called him that) Nero sure turned out to be a fine feline Judas—a royal double crosser! A sort of king of beasts turned deuce.

But here it is Sunday. Last week I had a fine letter from Clyde, reminding me that he would put his cats into the arena at the State Fair Coliseum this afternoon in preparation for the Shrine Circus. “Meet me at the hotel,” Clyde wrote, “Then I’ll show you some real cats. I got three new ones and boy, are they tough.” I had the day marked on the calendar: “Meet Clyde Beatty.” Now I’ll have to go up to the Coliseum and watch three substitute trainers endeavor to whip those lions and tigers into shape so they can go on with them Monday. I hope they are successful. Whenever a theater or circus yarn is sent out it immediately sounds like a lot of publicity to a lot of people. But Clyde is now secluded in a Peru hospital and may be dead even as this appears. He is in a badly mangled condition and no one can see him just because that double-crosser of a Nero chewed Clyde’s leg and clawed his back and left an infection which specialists have been battling for a week. There’s a trusted friend for you.

“Haven’t you an idea that these lions and tigers are going to get you some time for the final count?” we had often asked Clyde. “Well if they do, I’ll be passing out in the game I love, anyway,” he replied with a grin. He is a full-fledged fatalist, as are most circus performers.” Besides while a tiger is getting me and I’m going down with my boots on,” he chided, “an automobile might get you and wouldn’t you be ashamed of yourself?” Well, maybe he’s right. Thousands upon thousands have seen young Beatty rush into the arena, with a chair, a blank cartridge pistol and a whip, to cow 38 lions and tigers, will miss him this year at the Shrine circus. Clyde is small of stature, is quiet and modest, has a powerful arm and a fearless heart and made millions throughout the land gasp, then hold their breath until his final spectacular exit from the barred arena. His act was unparalleled in the circus world. Beatty is personally known to hundreds of Detroiters who are pulling for his recovery. And that goes for me ten thousand times! (Fuller Jan. 31, 1932).

*Time* magazine breezily reported how after Beatty had been knocked down by a tiger three years ago,

an African lion named Nero leaped upon the tiger, knocked it across the cage. After that Nero was Trainer Beatty’s favorite beast, was the tamest in the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Last fortnight Animal Man Beatty was rehearsing his act at Peru Ind. He cracked his whip over Nero’s head. Nero snarled, crouched, sprang. As Trainer Beatty went down harp teeth tore through the flesh of his leg. Assistants rushed into the cage, whipped the lion away, carried Trainer Beatty off to a hospital.

Last week, his leg swollen and gangrenous, Lionman Beatty tossed on a hospital cot fighting for his life. Alone in his cage sulked his friend Nero (“Beatty and the Beast” Feb. 8, 1932: 18).

Beatty recovered sufficiently to make the opening at Madison Square Garden. He candidly remarked to reporters that since his last appearance, “So many things have happened, I am beginning to
wonder if my animals don’t know more about me than I do myself” (New York Herald Tribune Apr. 8, 1932: 8).

Now he was the true, resurrected action hero.

When Clyde Beatty first entered into the New York entertainment scene, a world obsessed with glitz, the star, and the celebrity, he was unique, for this was not the realm of the circus performer. Except for the columnists’ understandable interest in John Ringling, the newspapers gave fairly standardized coverage to the circus. Normally stories covered the show’s pending arrival, its setup in the Garden, the opening night, orphans’ day, and the annual appearance at Bellevue. Feature stories were usually comical bits about the giraffe’s sore throat, 200-year-old elephants, or the home life of midgets (Joys 1989: 4).

But Beatty had style, and a quality that intrigued the writers. Young, reckless, athletic, with a boyish zeal, he was the small town American boy who made good rather than a foreign performer or a member of a troupe or large circus family. In the circus hierarchy, the big cat trainer was usually the only one of his ilk. Clowns palled with clowns, acrobats with acrobats, while the wild animal trainer’s friends were frequently zoo men or other animal professionals. He stood alone both in the arena and in the circus world (Joys 1989: 4).

Beatty’s vigorous battles with forty cats were both dramatic enough to attract the theater and Broadway columnists and athletic enough to excite sports writers. In fact Beatty admitted that his two passions were boxing and baseball. He, like many young Americans, idolized Jack Dempsey, and when he won the heavyweight championship boxing mania had swept his hometown. Boys organized fights, and later took on similar fighters from neighboring towns. Beatty had won most of his fights, but he had been forced to lower his expectations to the lightweight division. He also dreamed of playing second base for his favorite team, the Chicago Cubs, but he did not have the patience for a professional baseball career. The circus beckoned. It was romantic, meant travel, and best of all was immediate. He often worked out in gyms, and once a fight manager offered to take him on, but he had just started making a name for himself in the circus, and he felt anything less than a championship in boxing would be meaningless (Joys 1989: 4).
Benjamin Rader claimed that there seemed to be a deep-seated need in the American public to produce and sustain dazzling sports heroes. These heroes,

assisted the public in compensating for the traditional dream of success. . . and feelings of individual powerlessness. As the society becomes more complicated and systematized and as success had to be won increasingly in bureaucracies, the need for heroes who leaped to fame and fortune outside the rules of the system seemed to grow (Rader Spring 1983: 189).

Now Clyde Beatty was on the verge of becoming such a hero. Unlike Buck, who appealed, most reporters believed, to men and boys, Beatty would have a wider audience. For men, he was a daring, athletic, sports loving action hero. The hard-boiled New York sports writers took him to heart, and articles and cartoons appeared as much on the sports pages as in the entertainment section. They saw him as the shy, small town kid, baffled by women, who loved baseball, boxing, and riding with cops on their runs. He was awed when he met his sports heroes, while he himself was the epitome of athleticism and speed in the big arena—a wiry welterweight—facing the deadly cats—something he did ‘for the love of the game’ rather than ‘big bucks.’ One misstep, these writers noted, would not mean a penalty, or a lost scoring opportunity, but serious injury or death, as his scarred body testified. Beatty became the symbol of the solitary ‘everyman’ battling the fearful darkness and overwhelming threats of the Great Depression. One political cartoonist depicted President Franklin Roosevelt, clad in safari gear, whip and chair in hand, battling the evil, snarling lion, ‘Depression’.

For children, he epitomized the dream of running away from home, joining the circus, and becoming a star. In his first three pictures he was teamed with child stars, and his image was not only as a hero to these boys, but as an adult who had not lost the exuberance of childhood himself. Newspapers ran interviews with his lions and tigers, often in cartoon form. One columnist wrote how Beatty’s picture—the pictorial section of the Daily News ran a full color pullout photo of the trainer—had replaced his young daughter’s former hero, Jimmy Cagney. That women liked his boyish good looks, buff physique, and sex appeal was evident when he appeared at a store for a book signing and almost all the 250 people waiting in line were women. The circus’s arrival every spring in New York was a major social event, with society matrons inviting performers—especially Beatty—to their elaborate parties.
Clyde Beatty lived what could only be dreamed by most youths—attaining stardom as the world’s greatest wild animal trainer, considered the bravest man in the world, hobnobbing with celebrities and reporters, flying a plane, boxing, watching his baseball heroes, making movies, co-authoring books, and by being unanimously acclaimed by Broadway’s toughest columnists and sportswriters. Beatty possessed a unique combination of show business glitz and the physicality and daring of a sports hero.

But, O. O. McIntyre, would muse,

because of the pronounced attachment for their calling, circus folk will work for less pay than entertainers of any other sort. Of course, during season, they receive free board—and excellent food, too. But their wages are astonishingly low . . . . Clyde Beatty enters a cage of ferocious beasts for $10 a visit and his board for a season of five months (McIntyre Mar. 2, 1932: 12).

Beatty now stood on the next level of success, since he had undergone the severe physical test expected of all action heroes, “the castration scene,” and the subsequent “resurrection.”

Back to New York

The 1932 circus season began full of trepidation and doubts. As late as February, Ringling had not set his subsidiary shows’ rosters, and finally announced that John Robinson and Sparks would not go out. The other worry was even though Beatty had survived his mauling and would make the Garden opening, would he be able to perform an act that demanded so much speed and agility. On March 1, the papers carried a photo of Beatty and the doctors attempting to secure scrapings from Nero’s teeth so a serum could be developed should a similar attack occur. Meanwhile, Dexter Fellows assured the press that Beatty was entirely recovered from the “claws of the awesome Nero” (“The Lion’s Fault” Mar. 22, 1932: 16; New York Evening Post Mar. 29, 1932: 4 and Variety Feb. 23, 1932).

On Wednesday, prior to the April 8th opening, Mary Pickford, from atop the Empire State Building, released a flock of balloons, each of which could be redeemed by a child for circus tickets at the Henry Street Visiting Nurse Service, a favorite charity of New York’s Four Hundred. On Thursday, Beatty rehearsed the big cats, and circus people gathered around to watch. Wilbur Wood of the Sun wrote that among those watching was a motley assemblage of writers, managers, fighters, and promoters, who
were habitués of the Garden. The fighters commented on the lions’ punching ability and their often right-pawed leads (Joys 1989: 4).

‘Amateurs or not, you couldn’t get me in there with that bunch for a thousand bucks a minute,’ pronounced Dumb Dan Morgan. ‘How much do you think that man Beatty gets for fussing around that cageful of lions and tigers twice a day?’ demanded [Tommie] Furrie. ‘Maybe seventy-five hundred a week,’ guessed Morgan. Furrie gave vent to raucous laughter. ‘They tell me that,’ he said, ‘that Beatty drags down a hundred bucks a week. He only got $75 last year, but they raised him up to a hundred because he got scratched up a few times and can’t get any insurance.’ ‘The fight game ain’t so bad at that,’ was Morgan’s comment (Wood Apr. 8, 1932: 38).

“Down on the ground, as alone in the iron cage as if he were in the jungle itself, was Clyde Beatty snapping his whip in pistol shot cracks over the heavy and resentful heads of his lions and tigers,” wrote Edwin Hill of the Sun.

Springing in and out among these gorgeously beautiful jungle cats, young Beatty worked like a demon among demons to smooth out his electrifying act—give it the last possible theatric touch. Only a little while ago he was flat on his back in a hospital, ripped up by a lion’s claws, but here he was this afternoon, nerve not even flicked by this terrific experience (Hill Apr. 18, 1932: 19).

Friday, the Post showed Beatty sitting on the temperamental Nero. Asked if he was frightened, “Afraid?” answered Beatty, scoffing. “Of course, they may get me some day, but you can’t think of that in this business. It may be, too, that I’ll get run over” (“Circus to Open in Garden Tonight” Apr. 8, 1932).

Henry McLemore, a UP sports correspondent, also was determined to interview Beatty prior to opening day. He was told he was helping unload his cats. “It’s a good thing somebody pointed out the man to me for I’d never have picked him out as a daredevil. He looks about as much like a lion tamer as does Ghandi. Young, slight, dressed in the height of fashion, he was twirling a cane and occasionally flicking a fleck of dust off his pearl gray coat when I arrived” (McLemore Apr. 7, 1932: 17).

The cane was the last remnant of the attack by Nero. Beatty described the attack, but when asked if there was any cat in the act he considered tame enough to lead around, it was Nero. “He tags around my heels like a puppy and does just about what I tell him to.” During the attack “He just forgot himself for the moment. I’ve forgiven him.” Besides, Beatty reminded the reporter, it was Nero who saved him from a tiger attack, and you can’t help but being grateful. McLemore’s next question dealt with how Beatty, surrounded by big cats in the act, protected himself from those facing his back.
By looking at the expression on the faces of the ones in front of me. If I see their eyes light up 
and a sorta wicked smile come across their faces. I know the cats in back of me are getting ready 
to pounce on me. Before this can happen I turn around and bully'em. You see, they hate me, but 
they’re scared of me. If ever they made up their minds I was afraid of them, they’d chase me from 
here to Seattle (McLemore Apr. 7, 1932: 17).

That night the circus opened before an audience described as inch-deep in ermine, since it was a 
benefit for the Henry Street charity. Although dressed to kill, the Four Hundred were not above eating 
peanuts or ashamed of drinking lemonade, commented the News’ society reporter. “Princess Aleene von 
Lichtenstein, fortified by peanuts both for herself and the elephant herd, sat in a box with Mr. and Mrs. 
John Ringling” (New York Daily News Apr. 10, 1932: 24). The Post observed:

It is the audience that makes the circus. It is an overdone commonplace that grownups take the 
children to share once more the thrill that they themselves had felt as children. But last night, at 
the opening there were few children to share once more the thrill that they once themselves had 
felt as children. Yet the audience was enthusiastic and the applause boisterous. For the most part 
people enjoyed the performance as they will today and tomorrow and so long as the circus shall 
exist—for itself. It recalls that vivid nostalgia for the days when.
The circus is the final resort of the true conservative. It never changes. It cannot change. Its 
audience would not like it if it did (New York Evening Post Apr. 10, 1932: 4).
The benefit performance was called a “perfection of wonder, mystery and excitement,” by the Sun. “It 
became obvious that everything written, said, or sung of this terrific spectacle (popularly called the 
circus) has been in the nature of understatement.” The receptiveness of the audience gave the show a 
magical quality, why else “did the lions and tigers seem to snarl more viciously and Clyde Beatty risk 
more recklessly than ever before. . . .” (New York Sun Apr. 9, 1932: 1 and Joys 1989: 4).

The Herald-Tribune reviewed the show as if it were a play with a cast of characters, featuring 
Fred Bradna as “The Master of Ceremonies,” Clyde Beatty as “The Lion Tamer,” and Hugo Zachini as 
“The Human Cannonball.” Beatty and his troupe of trained lions and tigers had “last night’s audience 
teetering on the edges of their fateuils in breathless suspense” (New York Herald Tribune Apr. 9, 1932: 
8).

This edition of The Greatest Show on Earth was indeed special, agreed Robert Garland of the 
World-Telegram.

The magic Mr. Kipling’s Mogli made is nothing when compared with the magic of the circus. 
The magic of Mogli is book magic, the magic of the circus is ageless. . . . The circus is constantly
the same you tell me. You see it once you see it always. . . . But when you think about it, you wouldn’t have it different, would you? What would you substitute for the small of the tanbark and the horses? What would you use in place of the seals with balls on their noses and the man in the tight white trousers who out-Daniels Daniel in a den of lions? 
....And then in the center ring there is ‘The fearless, youthful trainer Clyde Beatty demonstrating man’s power over ferocious beasts of the jungle’ . . . .In spite of these few kind words Mr. Beatty projects an act which is to say the least, magnificent. This part of it may be fake, that part of it may be phony, it’s a grand act just the same…. (Garland Apr. 9, 1932: 18).

*Time* insisted that, “Circus in the U.S. is still a glorification of the Animal Kingdom.” Inside the Garden:

A dozen languages merged into a humming background for the sharp cries of men selling balloons, noisemakers, dolls, mickeymice, pink lemonade gone modern in bottles, popcorn peanuts, frankfurters and colored parasols. Over all sounded the neighing of horses, bellowing of elephants, laughing of hyenas, screeching of monkeys. The Garden roof was a maze of ropes and wires, its floor a carpet of earth, sawdust and manure. In the air blue with tobacco smoke hung an odor as unmistakable as it is complex—acrid wild animal mixed with sawdust, hemp, tar, leather, and gunpowder—the immemorial smell of the Circus (“Circus” Apr. 18, 1932: 18).

First among the chief attractions was Beatty who puts 40 lions and tigers through their paces while “lurid red lights” played on the dimly lit cage, which occasionally was marked by lightning from his blank revolver. “The beasts snarl, hiss, roar, paw each other and Mr. Beatty, but nobody is hurt. The lions & tigers are frequently stubborn, which gives Mr. Beatty an opportunity to demonstrate his undeniable courage” (“Circus” April 18, 1932: 18).

The circus became one of the principal topics of conversation at cocktail and dinner parties during the spring of 1932. Karl Kitchen of the *Sun* believed it might have been because of the “dearth of new plays and other entertainments” and the “excellence of the performance at Madison Square Garden has inspired those who witnesses it to rave about some of its outstanding features—especially Beatty’s great animal act” (Kitchen Apr. 26, 1932: 19).

The articles that began to appear on Beatty followed a very definite pattern. Writers portrayed him as a small town boy whose obsession with animals would lead him to run away with the circus much to the chagrin of his parents. Beatty became such a dedicated and ambitious cageboy, he was given a chance with a polar bear act, with initially humorous results, and later, because of more good fortune, moved up to lions and tigers. Not content with just mixing species, he also mixed sexes, and continually increased the size of the act until it reached its present proportions. Patience, rather than cruelty typified
the big cats’ training. The animals were preferably jungle-bred since they still retained some respect for man. His equipment—the chair acted as a shield, with its four legs proving a brief distraction to an attacking animal; the gun, loaded with blanks, also could divert a cat’s attention, and the whip was purely a signaling device—all were scant protection against even one animal’s all-out attack. The hypnotic eye was just good showmanship, and would never save the trainer in a real predicament. The cats, even the best behaved of them, could never be completely trusted since they remained wild animals, as evidenced by Nero’s attack which almost ended Beatty’s life (Joys 1989: 4).

From this basic premise, each columnist added his or her touch. Alissa Keir in the News, for example added, a gossip column touch. “Although he takes great pains with the cut of his clothes and tries to slick down his curly brown hair, that won’t stay put, you’d guess him to be a farmer’s son. A frank boyish smile.” She continued that he was,

Possessed of infinite patience; he never loses his temper. If things go wrong, he’s inclined to sulk. He’s quite the favorite among the big circus family, they say his growing success hasn’t changed him in the least. Divorced, he has a little girl. Very rarely away from work. When he is, he dashes home to his parents for a visit. Doesn’t smoke and has never touched hard liquor. The only game he plays is golf. Needs ten hours sleep a night. Very often he has the same bad dream—that a herd of lions and tigers is chasing him and he can’t get at them (Keir Apr. 12, 1932: 36).

A few days later the Post ran a very similar story, and a week later, Joe Williams, the featured sports writer of the World-Telegram devoted an entire column to Beatty. Entitled, “Beatty the Lion Tamer. He Doesn’t Always Win and the Purse is Small.” Williams began the article:

A couple of young gentlemen dropped by to see me yesterday—(a) a prize fighter and (b) a lion tamer. It was easy enough to classify the prize fighter; he had a dent in his nose and a couple of pin cushions for ears. I wouldn’t have tagged the lion tamer right off, anyhow, because I had never seen one close-up before. This one would have been tough to identify under any circumstances. He wasn’t any bigger than a junior lightweight, looked like an Amherst sophomore, and there wasn’t a mark on him. I mean that you could see. A few minutes later young Clyde Beatty, of Chillicothe, Ohio, the greatest lion tamer the world has ever known, was showing me where a tiger had bitten through his right forearm and where a lion had torn his right leg into shreds (Williams Apr. 21, 1932: 27).

What made Beatty distinctive was not only his size and composition of his act, but that he was little more than a kid. The fighter, Alex Hart, a lightweight who had once battled Benny Leonard had just boxed three rounds at an uptown gym with Beatty. Williams guessed Beatty’s salary at $300 per week,
although he had heard it was less. He could not believe that anyone would face forty lions and tigers for such a pittance when compared to what Dempsey, Tunney, Londos, or Ruth made. “Yet here is a soft-spoken, blue-eyed youngster, not much bigger than a bottle of catsup, who twice a day walks into a cage bristling with tigers and lions and the payoff isn’t enough to keep One-Eye Connolly in monocles. Come get me officer, I give up.” Hart observed that at least, “You never have to worry about any mug trying to get your job” (Williams Apr. 21, 1932: 27 and Joys 1989: 4).

Even the sophisticated New Yorker devoted a column to Beatty. The writer broke in on the trainer just after his act, when he was getting his lame leg rubbed down with liniment. After a pleasant discussion, the author concluded that, “The arena is, in fact, a hot bed of violent and suppressed passions. No trainer before Beatty ever blithely mixed the species the way he does. The animals hate each other much more deeply than they hate Beatty, whom they regard merely as an annoyance. The hates change from day to day, but all tigers hate and fear all lions all the time. That never changes.” The writer added that, “It is a big time in Chillicothe when Clyde comes to town with the circus. Everybody goes except his mother” (“Beatty and the Beasts” Apr. 23, 1932: 11).

The Sunday, April 24, Mirror ran a full-page article on Beatty called, “Fights Jungle Cats Everyday,” written in the Hearst newspapers’ typically sensational style. “All around the cage were perches, some high, some low. And on those perches were 38 full-grown lions and tigers! Maneaters, every one of them! And this 25-year-old boy—this Clyde Beatty—was standing in the center of that cage. . . . a red spotlight flooded the scene with blood.” After the act the author accompanied Beatty to his dressing room. “The first thing you noticed was that he looked even younger than 25.” In street clothes, “You noticed that he was not only small in stature, but thin as well. You noticed also that his eyes twinkled. Somehow you expected to find a cold stare in them.” He then related Beatty’s close call with Nero. In telling the gory episode and its aftermath, the Mirror’s powers of exaggeration came into full play. “He was delirious for almost ten weeks,” continued James Bishop, “In his wild dreams he was chased perpetually by a pack of lions and tigers. They never caught him, but as he ran, he grew weaker, and weaker, and weaker . . . .” (Bishop April 24, 1932: D9).
When Beatty came out of the delirium, he fought the doctors’ plan to amputate his leg. He had get the number)—human beings had ever been known to have it.” When specimens of his blood were injected in guinea pigs, the hapless animals died in a few hours. “Finally,” enthused Bishop, “a surgeon took one last chance. He ripped open the infected leg from thigh to calf. Ripped it right down to the bone. There he found the cause. Two pus sacs. They were punctured. The poison dripped out slowly, the young patient recovered” (Bishop April 24, 1932: D9).

Ethyl Gasoline featured a series of full-page ads in magazines like Vanity Fair. The April ad called “Ethyl Makes Gasoline Behave,” was illustrated by a drawing very obviously Beatty. In fact, in later years he would use it on the covers of his circus programs (Vanity Fair [Inside front cover ad] Mar. 1932).

Meanwhile, the Garden, Variety wrote, had taken on its special aura, present only when the circus played there. “Clyde Beatty,” Ruth Morris noted, “the tamer of 40 (count’em) lions and tigers, chuckling over the column squib that said he was too timid to manage a wife. Jaunty contemplation of the prospect that one of these days he’ll enter the cage and won’t walk out.” Variety claimed that the usual rash of mishaps had occurred during the New York run. Alfredo Codona had ruptured his arm muscle during practice on the trapeze and was out of the lineup, while his former wife, Clara, had fallen and fractured her pelvis and was hospitalized, and Beatty had accidentally discharged his holstered blank gun while waiting to enter the arena. His breeches were burned and the wadding from the blank cartridge entered his thigh close to where he had been clawed. “Though in pain, Beatty went into the cage, the wound not being cauterized until later” (Variety Apr. 19: 1 and Apr. 26, 1932 and Joys 1989: 4).

The sensational 1932 edition of the Greatest Show on Earth had paid off. Ringling, the World-Telegram headlined, had built the best circus yet and won. In an article titled, “Stop Hoarding and Improve Your Product. His Advice to Business Men,” Ringling insisted, “that if I give them the biggest and best show they had ever seen, the people would talk about it and turn out” (Davis Apr. 26, 1932: 5).

Ringling was right. Variety’s headlines screamed that the “CIRCUS WILL DO $500,000—Drawing Top N.Y. Gross in 7 Years.” The advance sale for the last two weeks was $70,000 as compared
to a usual $15,000. One Saturday saw the biggest money the Ringling show ever drew in New York in one day. All this, in spite of a top price of $3.50 and a late opening that missed the Easter holidays. The performance ran three-and-a-half hours and there was no attempt to cut since Beatty’s act alone took twenty minutes, so running time would be automatically shortened when he left for Hagenbeck-Wallace (“Circus Will Do $500,000” Variety Apr. 19, 1932: 1 and Joys 1989: 4).

After the Boston indoor stand, Beatty rejoined the Hagenbeck show, and in a little over a month was back in New York—this time Brooklyn—under canvas. The Brooklyn Eagle was not to be outdone by its Manhattan rivals and devoted a whole page on June 12 to a “Sportrait of Clyde Beatty, Master of the Cats,” by Ed Hughes. It included a large cartoon of Beatty and a tiger. Hughes found that “You’d never guess the astonishing celebrity of the Beatty person by his appearance or his demeanor.” Despite having the “most hazardous job in the world . . . there was nothing of the prima donna about Beatty.” His dressing room was plain and barren, he was always in good humor, and enjoyed talking even a few minutes before his encounter with the cats. Five reporters clambered into his trailer along with some Brooklyn cops and he regaled them with the story of his climb to fame (Hughes June 12, 1932: C2-3 and Joys 1989: 4).

His everyday life was fairly normal. He drank little, didn’t eat before the afternoon show so not to be slowed down, went to the ballgame any chance he had, and usually spent the morning golfing or at the movies. He never prayed before entering the arena. “I just got to take care of myself, there,” he says (Hughes June 12, 1932: C2-3 and Joys 1989: 4).

He refused to divulge his salary and claimed it was in proportion to the gate the circus draws. Beatty did quote Carl Lorenz Hagenbeck, who while visiting America had made a special point in seeing Beatty’s act. He said, “Clyde, you ought to get out of this game. You can never be paid enough to make the risk worthwhile.” He added that: “Those cats will get Beatty. The act is too dangerous.” Beatty fatalistically commented that although injuries might slow a trainer down, it was nerves that eventually ended a career. Beatty’s fear was that his nerves would finally get the best of him and he felt that he might have another five years left. Hughes commented, “But you should see him figuratively drowning in
mental and physical perspiration after each session with his cats!” (Hughes June 12, 1932: C2-3 and Joys 1989: 4).

“That’s the way it will be with me, I guess. I’d like to get into flying but I suppose when I’m through with this I won’t have any nerves left for something like that. So I’m trying to save a little money, though I’ve been a heavy spender. I’d like to get out before something happens, of course (Hughes June 12, 1932: C2-3).

Beatty broke all the German family’s training rules: he mixed animals with great hatred toward one another; he kept lionesses in the act who provoked the males into fights that disrupted the performance; he retained rebellious cats (Beatty believed there was no cat he couldn’t handle), and he even kept proven killers if their strength and beauty excited him. For example, examine the way he described “Detroit,” a known killer lion.

Detroit . . . intoxicated me with his obvious superiority to other animals . . . . to me tigers have always seemed more attractive than lions. There is a dancer’s grace in their stealthy step and slinking stride, and the long curving arc of their striped bodies is a pretty picture. However, Detroit’s beauty, if it can be called that, was the beauty of anger and defiance—the way he wrinkled up his nose in hate, twisted open his mouth and lips in a grotesque snarl and narrowed his blazing eyes, the way he swung his right front paw with knock-out force. Maybe I’m cockeyed, but I thought he was something to see (Beatty and Wilson 1941: 47-48).

But the Variety columnists knew him better. They saw the drive behind his affable, unaggressive exterior. Why would he daily face more danger than “few heroes encounter in a lifetime?” Why wouldn’t he settle on being a bond salesman, bookkeeper, newspaper man, even a Marine, or with his eight hours of solo flying, a pilot? The same reason he did not become a boxer or baseball player.

Clyde Beatty may not know it, but fear drives him into the midst of a flock of snarling beasts—the fear of mediocrity. He is a showman, with a showman’s urge to be a topnotcher. He could assemble the regulation all-lion trope and audiences would be impressed. It takes just a little nerve to be a lion tamer, according to Mr. Beatty, if you have a flair for that sort of thing. But combine lions and tigers—their ancient jungle enemies—throw in a lioness or two, and you have a dangerous pack.

Present the act with a specially written score, each phrase synchronized with every movement of the animals, build up a dramatic lighting plot, time the stunts to a hair-breadth of suspense, stare down a menacing tiger until your showmanship tells you now is the moment to cue him to drop his head and prowl away; and you have Clyde Beatty’s formula for the ace of animal acts. Mr. Beatty has thrown into this showmanship to outweigh his knowledge of the fact that 90 percent of his audiences do not realize the tremendous risks he takes. They don’t know that he has
gone out of his way to make his act more hazardous than any of its kind. But Mr. Beatty knows and circus owners know—that’s the important angle. The unique peril with which Mr. Beatty surrounds himself is not the result of bravado—it is the deliberate choice of a businessman who is determined to excel all competitors. Beatty will never have to beg for a job. He’ll stay headman of the ring, though, one day, he may die for it (“Beatty, Sawdust Daniel” Apr. 10, 1932: 55).

The season of 1932 had attracted more than circus audiences, it had also convinced the powers that be that Clyde Beatty was a very salable commodity. Three national magazine articles appeared: “Beatty and the Beasts,” in the July American Magazine, “Close Calls,” in the August 6, Collier’s, and “Animal Trainers Never Quit,” in a September issue of Collier’s. The last two were with Edward Anthony, who was working with Beatty on his biography. The dauntless persistence was paying off (Joys 1989: 4).

Clyde Beatty’s extraordinary popularity coincided with a national interest in romantic locations and exotic animals spurred by the likes of adventurous and glamorous documentary filmmakers and lecturers, Martin and Osa Johnson. MGM’s Trader Horn offered, “Four Lions in Death Combat—and 1000 more thrills.” The daredevil explorer, Roy Chapman Andrews, of the American Museum of Natural History went on thrilling expeditions, which then became the subjects of books and lectures, as well as possibly serving as the prototype for Indiana Jones.

Variety called the thirties the “halcyon days” for animal owners in Hollywood. Anyone who owned anything from a canary to a pet puma had a feeling his or her day had come to cash in with the movies. Producers, encouraged by the success of Congorilla and Bring’em Back Alive, have “become animal conscious and have not only entered into the wild animal field back home, but sent expeditions into the field to exploit the jungles of the lesser known world” (Variety Apr. 22, 1933: 9).

In 1932, the most successful of all screen Tarzans, Johnny Weismuller, debuted in spectacular fashion. Furnas called the picture the outcome of a “satanic bargain” in which the best of The Shiek, Trader Horn, and the Greatest Show on Earth were combined (Furnas Apr. 3, 1932: Sect. VII 3).

The Big Cage

In August, Hollywood gossip columnist, Louella Parsons, announced:
I think everyone that is interested in the study of wild animals will enjoy seeing Clyde Beatty train his jungle pets. Universal, influenced, I have no doubt, by the great popularity of *Bring 'Em Back Alive* and *Congorilla* have engaged Mr. Beatty to make a picture showing his own methods of training the beasts of the jungle. The Beatty picture will be tentatively titled *Man and Beast* and it is based on an unpublished book by Edward Anthony. Mr. Anthony collaborated with Frank Buck in producing *Bring 'Em Back Alive* and he is a specialist on jungle lore. This is a picture that will get the men into the theater, for most of them are loud in their praise of the above-mentioned jungle epics (Parsons Aug. 23, 1932: 8A).

By September the deal was made and Anthony was scheduled to leave New York for Universal City to meet with Carl Laemmle, Jr. and scriptwriters to finalize the plot. Actual production would begin in November when the circus season ended and the animals could be transported to Universal City. When Hagenbeck had visited New York to see Beatty in action, he had vowed to secure the act for a European tour of London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome and Madrid, but the movie production would delay the trip for a year (“Clyde Beatty to Play in Pictures” Sept. 18, 1932: 10).

Enroute to Hollywood, Beatty was asked who would win in a fight between a lion and a tiger. He claimed that tigers generally feared lions since both animals had different codes of ethics, the lion “has some sense of brotherhood. He will pitch in and help a fellow lion out in a fight. But not the tiger, he will slink away or watch his kinsman get chewed up. His idea, is apparently, every tiger for himself.” Beatty added that in a fight where there were no reinforcements, “the tiger can give his majesty plenty of concern” (“Tigers Poor Sports” Nov. 17, 1932: 16).

Beatty’s statement apparently irked the famed tiger trainer, Mabel Stark, who was working on a motion picture at Paramount. She agreed with most of Beatty’s statements about fighting style, but insisted a tiger is not afraid of a lion. “I’ll put any of my full-grown tigers in any arena with a full grown lion and post $1,000 that the tiger will kill the lion . . . the tiger will defeat the so-called king of the beasts every time” (“Asserts Tiger can stop Lion” Nov. 20, 1932: 7).

During the off-season, circuses were also a good source of animals. In fact, when they went back on the road in the spring, Hollywood was often forced into postponing filming. “The producers seem to roll from one wild animal cycle to another,” wrote Kate Cameron of the News. The present one seemed to deal with wild animals in captivity, as evidence by Buster Crabbe’s, *King of the Jungle*, as compared
In early 1933, Fox was in Malaya filming *Man Eater*, and Universal had two animal pictures in the works, one of them being Beatty’s, *Big Cage*. Paramount also had two, while Warner Bros. and MGM each had one (Cameron Apr. 9, 1933: 67 and Joys 1989: 4).

In the midst of this glut of fictionalized wild animal and jungle films, Clyde Beatty, clad as a great white hunter, strode daily into a cageful of jungle-bred lions and tigers to do single-handed battle. This was not trick photography or a group of freakishly tame movie animals, but a true confrontation presented live. Beatty was able to cash in on the wild animal craze with the collaboration of Edward Anthony. The result was *The Big Cage*, published by Century and released in March. The reviews appeared quickly.

The *Sun* did a column entitled, “Females Smarter than Males in Animal World,” that quoted Beatty at length (“Females Smarter” Mar. 21, 1933: 24). A day later, the *Post’s* Ruth Seinfel devoted her column to a similar topic: “The Lady Cats Brightest—but They are also Stupidest, and have as well a Number of Other Unlovely Qualities, Says Clyde Beatty.” Seinfel admitted she had never seen Beatty’s act, “for some reason or other I always arrived at the circus too late for his act, or had to leave too early. Perhaps my psychoanalyst could tell me why it happened so—perhaps my subconscious was terrified at the idea of it and so arranged as to prevent me from witnessing it. Tyrannical little wretch, my subconscious. Anyway, I never did see Mr. Beatty in his over-populated cage.” This, however, did not stop her from enjoying the book (Seinfel Mar. 22, 1933: 16). The *Mirror*, whose strong suit was certainly not book reviews, did call *The Big Cage*, “a swell combination of stunts, odd references to animal intelligence, psychology, and lively photos” (*New York Daily Mirror* Mar. 26, 1933: 19 and Joys 1989: 4).

A few days later, *World-Telegram* columnist, Joe Williams, ran into Beatty and Anthony at a mid-town pub. Beatty quipped, “What do you think of me running around with my own ghosts already?” Williams found this morbid humor for a lion trainer, but also found Beatty, “younger, more buoyant, happier. This seems to be a characteristic of men who feed on exciting syrups of danger—they never
grow old, and as a paradox, they usually die young.” Beatty admitted that he had finally gotten life insurance from Lloyd’s of London, but only for the three months while he was filming the movie version. “The long mortuary list and the shyness of the underwriter would seem definitely to confirm the authenticity of the glamorous perils” (Williams Apr. 1, 1933: 11 and Joys 1989: 4).

Williams wondered aloud if it was worth it. Beatty concurred that a wild animal act might not have much social value, but it answered the spirit of adventure in him. “I have been an animal trainer at heart since I was a child. It is now my chief interest in life—my main outlet for adventure. And it has brought me complete contentment.” Williams agreed, “Young Beatty knew what he wanted and got it. What boots it if some feel the profession unworthy, aimless and trivial?” (Williams Apr. 1, 1933: 1).

At the end of their conversation, Ed Anthony entered in with a jingle he had written to solve a controversy—how to pronounce Mr. Beatty’s name.

Exhibit A:--
He’s from the well-known U.S.A. and not the distant Haiti—
This feller with the chair and whip who’s known to us as Beatty.

Exhibit B:--
His book I’ve read and found to be exhilarating, meaty,
Soul stirring, full of epic scenes. (Don’t mention it Clyde Beatty).

Williams “turned to the great circus star himself and asked which was correct—Beatty or Beatty?” “Beatty,” he answered (Williams Apr. 1, 1933: 11 and Joys 1989: 4).

The book came out prior to the movie, as Anthony and the publisher had wanted. William Sosken of the Post asked Anthony if he had gotten into the cage with Beatty, Anthony replied that he was fond of cats, but,

I’m much too cagey to do that,
    I love the bars that separate
The animals from me
    There’s nothing like a tete-a-tete
With full securities (Soskin Apr. 7, 1933: 11).

John Chapman of the News commented in his column, “Likewise enchanting is Clyde Beatty’s lion-taming saga, The Big Cage. Beatty, the circus and the book came to town at the same time, which is showmanship” (Chapman Apr. 7, 1933: 60).
The New York Times devoted nearly an entire page to its illustrated review. The critic concluded that in the book Beatty takes the public into the arena with him, and tells everything people who have seen his act would like to know, making no mystery of his profession. Originally luke-warm about Beatty’s act, the reviewer wrote glowingly, “Many thousands of Americans have seen Clyde Beatty in action. That remarkable performance of his, in which he steps into a thirty-two foot arena with as many as forty lions and tigers and puts them through their paces, is one which commands and deserves all the superlatives which circus ballyhoo can muster.” He found the book “fascinating reading,” and one of its most “engaging qualities” is that Beatty does not attempt to “surround the business of animal training with an air of mumbo-jumbo. . . . and makes no mystery about his profession.” The publishers wisely followed the photo format of Ernest Hemingway’s, Death in the Afternoon. The full-page photos were deemed “remarkably fine” and an “admirable and fascinating supplement to the book” (“Putting the Big Cats in Their Places” Apr. 9, 1933: BR20).

Hemingway became interested in Beatty’s act, and made a shrewd, observant study of animal training, surprising the trainer by his awareness of certain aspects of training which, while professional circus men took for granted, only professional animal trainers knew the significance of—for example, the importance of footwork, necessary when dealing with animals as fast as lions and tigers. Although speed was essential, knowledge of the animals’ behavior counted for more, because it gave the trainer the ability to move instinctively in the right direction. Hemingway found the act at its best when Beatty fought the cats at close range. Controlled resistance was encouraged in the animals. Hemingway also pointed out similarities between bullfighting and the cat act. An animal wandering off in either presentation would lose the audience (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 15-19).

Hemingway wrote of the inner satisfaction of being in a ring in which an animal was attacking with the conscious intent to kill. Such an experience provides enough of a sensation that there will always be men wanting to have it. It requires bravery, but he found that, like animal trainers, matadors may be frightened before the fight begins. Bravery, as the ability to temporarily ignore possible consequences, was the most common kind, but there was also the bravery that comes from exhilaration: it was the ability
not to give a damn for possible consequences. It is easier to be stupid and naturally brave, according to Hemingway, than to be exceedingly intelligent and still completely brave. He felt that if an animal man became afraid, his actions will become cowardly, dull, and defensive and it is better he retire than rob the public with poor performances. The public, in Hemingway’s mind, is vitally important, because the bullfight, like the animal act, engages spectators in a shared sense of immortality. “In playing with death bringing it closer, closer, closer, to himself. . . .he gives the feeling of immortality, and as you watch, it becomes yours” (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 15-19).

Many years later, Beatty said that the visit and presentation of an autographed copy of Death in the Afternoon by Hemingway made a lasting impression on him, but he did not feel he fit in the category of those flirting with death because of the thrill of it. He believed the risks he took were out of foolish recklessness or the desire to please an audience, not an attempt to see how close he could come to death without being killed (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 15-19).

Artist, John Steuart Curry, also began to make sketches of the circus performances and actually travelled with the show during its New England dates. He later said, “The relation of man to nature and of man to man has provided me with the subject and dramatic motivation for my work. To me this outweighs any decorative motive as such.” He enjoyed the compositional challenges, the brilliant synthesis of form and idea, and the sketches he made became a source of inspiration throughout his career. He could tell a story in a dynamic, linear way, devoid of narrative, genre, or historic significance. He saw circus people as enduring extraordinary trials of daily existence; salary cuts, the fear of injury and loss of income, and nagging chronic pain. He found they had the strength of discipline that allowed them to achieve a kind of spiritual transcendence. Curry did a series of drawings of Beatty, with the most finished work following a circular motif (John Steuart Curry Monograph No. 14, 1945; Schmeckebier 1943, and Junker 1998).

John Lardner in the Herald-Tribune called Beatty, “probably the greatest animal trainer of all time, and his youth, recklessness, and poise certainly make him one of the most valuable of modern box office assets.” His present billing status calls him, “the lithe young jungle god in supreme command of the
Ringling lions and tigers.” The book has done in a “less inspired and artistic manner for the American circus arena what Mr. Hemingway did for the Iberian bullring.” The story is told engagingly, he observed, but it is most fascinating as a source of information. “His book is a good circus book, immeasurably assisted by the sixty photographic plates which appear in a cluster” (Lardner Apr. 9, 1933 and Joys 1989: 4).

Raymond Ditmars reviewed the book for *The Saturday Review of Literature*. He liked the continuity, since it was not just a “sampler collection of experiences,” as well as the avoidance describing “maudlin” animal “friendships,” that only arouse skepticism. Ditmars had made a study of animal acts, and the narrative revealed “extreme ingenuity and patience, knowledge of animals—and bravery. And the latter quality is of all importance, it most be of a nature to stand battering shocks” (Ditmars April 1933: 551). Earlier that year Ditmars had given a talk in Toledo, Ohio where he argued that circuses were not cruel to animals. In fact, “some of the finest animal specimens are in circus menageries.” Cruelty, he added, was not an efficient circus method, since the big cats can be pushed only so far under a cruel master, and would soon refuse to perform. The movement of circus life is actually a boon to captive animals, providing a respite from the boredom zoo animals often experience (“Says Circuses Not Cruel” Feb. 25, 1933: 51).

The book began with a chapter describing “How It’s Done: The Freshman Class.” Beatty wrote that, “I now use jungle-bred animals almost exclusively. Having trained beasts born in captivity, I am cured of any further desire to make performers of such specimens.” Nothing is cuter than a cub, but like a spoiled child, they become sulky, sullen, obstinate brats. Cuteness is their undoing. Once man puts his mark on them, they are ruined. “Our civilization puts too high a valuation on the cute and the cunning. ‘Cuteness’ and ‘cunningness’ are superficial traits which should not be applauded in man or beast, it is my opinion as an amateur philosopher, unless they are accompanied by character.” Cuteness is of no use in the wild. Animals that know nothing about man can be bluffed. They find him something to be studied, and if the trainer is forceful and takes command with authority and assertiveness, they can overawe an animal and give it an inferiority complex. The trainer must never seem afraid. “Animals are impressed by
a seeming disregard for their almightiness and the trainer who shows often enough—and who also knows
how to make them perform—has a chance to reach the top.” But animal training is laborious work, he
cautioned, and often the trainer must rely on his own instinct and hunches (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 3-
24).

The second chapter was devoted to how different tricks were accomplished: globe rolling,
jumping through a hoop, riding on a horse or elephant, walking a tightrope, jumping to the trainer’s back,
and taking a hurdle. He explained disliked the head in the mouth trick because it took a freakishly tame
animal, has so many legends surrounding it, and worst of all, the cats have severe halitosis. The next
chapter dealt with mixing lions and tigers. Beatty clarified that he wasn’t the first to do it, only the first to
be successful on such a large scale. He then described how bears because of their acute intelligence,
curiosity, and ingenuity make an almost endless subject. He flowed this with a description of his closest
calls, and then described his dressing room on the road as well as the duties of his assistant. The whips
that lined one wall of his wagon were frequently described as irrefutable symbols of cruelty. But in
actuality only patience and kindness can succeed in the long run. No term made his blood boil more than,
‘lion tamer,’ since a wild animal can be trained but never tamed (Beatty and Anthony 1933: 25-58).

Beatty called some of the humane reformers “blind, unreasoning fanatics who, in their zeal to tell
their own story, are unwilling to listen to anybody else’s. They are ignorant, and—worse still—ignorant of
their own ignorance. They lack the saving grace of tolerance.” He sympathized completely with those
trying to prevent cruelty to animals. “I might even be so bold as to claim to be one of them” (Beatty and
Anthony 1933: 128-130).

Beatty then described some arena feuds and grudges that never seemed to heal, and went on, in
the next section, to describe the great variability among his animals. Just as no two people were alike,
neither were his cats. In a later chapter, he related how some of the cats reacted to severe weather, while
another dealt with an anecdotal story about a lion mother (Beatty and Anthony 1933).
He divided his mail into categories: mothers urging him to give up his job, people denouncing him for cruelty, kid’s asking for ideas for school compositions, those trying to sell him something, and worst of all, the sickening effusive ones (Beatty and Anthony 1933).

Escapes were the next topic. Two of them, the escape of Gracie the tiger in the unfinished Detroit Shrine Temple complex, where he was going to present a private performance for a group in 1929 and the escape of three tigers from their faultily constructed chute during a performance before a packed crowd in the Cleveland Auditorium, became his most repeated adventures through the years (Beatty and Anthony 1933).

The next chapter addressed “The Animal Question.” His most frequently asked question was who’d win a fight—a lion or tiger. At the time he had already lost six tigers to lions. The next most popular question was who were easier to train males or females. Females, he found, were more responsive, while males were more diehards, but once they decided the trainer was the boss, they start ‘clicking,’ and work with real zest. He added that one of the secrets of training was not to overdo; never working an animal for more than fifteen minutes at a stretch (Beatty and Anthony 1933).

The hardest animal to train was a black leopard that took three months to learn what took two weeks for a lion or tiger to comprehend. By far the smartest animal he has worked with was the bear, but the public doesn’t appreciate them. They are so used to the Yellowstone bears, that they do not give a trainer much credit for a bear act, even when it consists of polar bears. They fail to realize how dangerous a bear can be, biting ten times to a cat’s once. He likes to start training an animal when it is two to two-and-a-half years old, since by five or six they are set in their ways (Beatty and Anthony 1933).

In the last chapter, he described how he first became enthused with circuses, putting on backyard performances with his pets, finally quitting school after his freshman year in high school (Beatty and Anthony 1933).

Edward Anthony had worked on the book with Beatty after every show on the book. Century had snapped it up on the strength of one chapter and an outline. Just one more chapter was enough for Universal to buy the rights, so Anthony wound up in Hollywood working on the film version during the
summer of 1932. Universal was in such a rush, they asked Anthony to leave for Hollywood with only one-third of the book complete. It became a nerve-racking drive to finish the book, which had to be first, and help with the script. Anthony believed the some of the scenes depicting Beatty putting his lions and tigers through their paces were among the most spectacular ever filmed in Hollywood, but the movie lost sight of Beatty’s own life story. Orders had come from the top that they wanted a starring role for starlet, Anita Page, which led to a very conventional plot. “Insufficient time was left to give the great showman a chance to show how he went about the task of breaking in an animal fresh from the veldt or jungle.”

There was a big emphasis on the picture being “wholesome,” however one Universal executive added the character of a cage boy, played by Andy Devine, with a lot of jokes about cleaning up animal excrement. This led to an organization that rated pictures for parents, rating the picture as “offensive” (Anthony 1960: 278-279).

Riding High

For a boy who had aspired to be a baseball player or boxer, Beatty, the animal trainer, was on a remarkable skein of great reviews both for his performance and his book. He was batting a thousand and had nothing but knockouts. But change was in the air and some of this ill wind would blow Beatty’s way.

In November 1932, officials of The Greatest Show on Earth announced that Samuel Gumpertz, a Coney Island showman and Brooklyn real estate operator, would become vice president and general manager of the circus. The native of St. Louis had been in show business for over fifty years. At nine, he joined a circus and became an acrobat, at twelve he acted with a stock company in San Francisco. Then he became, in succession, a cowboy, a candy butcher, a bill poster, ticket taker, advance man, press agent, set designer, performer on the Buffalo Bill Show, promoter of early motion pictures, worked fights, publicized Houdini, produced Shakespeare, built the amazing Dreamland Park in Coney Island, imported 3,800 freaks, and became a successful real estate developer in Kings and Nassau Counties. He met John Ringling in 1893 at the Chicago World’s Fair and over the next twenty years they made trips to Europe together—Ringling seeking out new acts, and Gumpertz, new oddities (Johnston May 6, 1933 and Joys 1989: 4).
During the winter, while Beatty was in Hollywood, rumors circulated that he had deserted the circus. Other columnists reported that Beatty had found the camera work, and constant retakes, necessitating the big cats being dragged back and forth for some scenes, had left both him and the animals very nervous. He even complained that, “One more year of this and I’m through.” His friend O. O. McIntyre claimed Beatty had succeeded Johnny Weismuller as “something brand new in Hollywood lady killers.” Three years ago he was a shy farm boy—a circus runaway—“today, he has the pencil-mustached poise of a Menjou, attends teas, a wears a high hat to openings at Sid Graumann’s” (“What the Country Needs is a Good Five-Cent Nickel” Jan. 15, 1933; Carroll Feb. 2, 1933: 4, and McIntyre Feb. 21, 1933: 4). Walter Winchell asked whether it would be “the lady or the tiger?” “Clyde Beatty, the world’s greatest tiger trainer, is now swapping fibs with Merna Kennedy, when not busy at the Universal lot” (Winchell Mar. 5, 1933: 10A). Kennedy burst on the scene in 1928 as Charlie Chaplin’s co-star in The Circus. Her rumored affair with Chaplin broke up his marriage. Between 1928 and 1934 she appeared in 28 movies. After marrying choreographer, Busby Berkeley in 1934, she retired at age, 26, collecting a large alimony settlement when they divorced.

Ruth Seinfel of the New York Post wrote on why Beatty deemed the female cats the brightest and most responsive, as compared to the males that were more stubborn, but could be more “sporting and philosophic.” His most intelligent animal was a female tiger, but also his most stupid. Males tended to be more quarrelsome, but a lioness outstripped them, while his most bloodthirsty cats, were two lion sisters who killed and devoured their own mother (Seinfel Mar. 22, 1933: 16). Other syndicated articles debated which were the most intelligent animals, with Mabel Stark declaring it a toss up between the elephant and chimp; Olga Celeste, opted for the leopard, and Chubby Guilfoyle, for the elephant (“Film Trainers Differ as to ‘Most Intelligent’ Animals.” Mar. 12, 1933: 8).

On the surface all was normal that spring. Dexter Fellows, “wearing a yellow overcoat, a suit of clothes distinguished by checks about three inches square, a blue shirt and a silver-headed cane,” heralded the arrival of the circus, which would mark its Golden Jubilee (New York Sun Mar. 28, 1933: 23).
The Four Hundred planned another circus gala for April 25. Cobina Wright, the chairwoman, hoped to stage an old-fashioned circus parade as part of the festivities at the Waldorf-Astoria. The ceiling of the Grand Ballroom would be covered with a tent and the floor with sawdust. Box number one was held by President Roosevelt’s mother, and other guests would include the Vanderbilts, Chrystlers, and Marshall Fields. The beneficiary of the event was the Boy Scout Foundation. The show would consist of real circus acts interspersed with celebrities like Noel Coward, Fanny Brice, Ed Wynn, Bea Lily, and Jimmy Durante. Debutantes would sell programs and refreshments, while Paul Whiteman and George Gershwin would direct the orchestra. Noted artists Tony Sarg and James Montgomery Flagg would judge the costumes (“Dexter Fellows Here With Circus” *New York Evening Post* Mar. 27, 1933: 4; *New York Daily Mirror* Mar. 30, 1933: 12 and Joys 1989: 4).

The *Herald Tribune* editorialized that,

> Ranking with baseball as a national institution and far outstripping in glamour and suggestions of romance any mere competitive sport, the circus again fulfills its current cycle and is in town... So once more on Eighth Avenue there will be the smell of sawdust and horses and lions; there will be fifty elephants in honor of the very special occasion, the incredible Clyde Beatty in a cage with half a hundred assorted jungle cats, the traditional ‘Buffalo Bill’ Wild West show, human projectiles, clowns, explosive motor cars and the Marvelleus Parisian Flying Ballet Plastique. As many of the component parts of the show as may be will appear in units of fifty, and those that are not in the fifties will be in even hundreds, and the chances are that despite the times, New Yorkers will crowd the Garden in fifties and hundreds too. For the circus is as much a Manhattan hallmark of spring and happy times as it is in Gallipolis, Ohio, or Birmingham, Alabama and Gothamites cleave to old friends and old customs despite hell and high taxes (*New York Herald-Tribune* Apr. 4, 1933).

But there was also a certain sadness surrounding the Jubilee because for the first time in history no member of the Ringling family was in command. Only John Ringling, ill and disabled, remained alive and he stayed in Sarasota (Joys 1989: 4).

Still, the opening night proved as grand as was expected. Broadway luminaries Lynne Fontane, Alfred Lunt and Noel Coward all entered on the backs of elephants. The *Herald-Tribune* called the show as “lusty, exciting, and colorful as one ever saw it... excellence of casting and a comprehensive eye for the spectacular makes the fiftieth anniversary performance of the circus all that the most exacting might demand in the tradition of sawdust, animal smells, and the big top” (“Jubilee Circus” Apr. 9, 1933).
Sun deemed it “superlative. If anything it is more than the human eye can take.” The critic raved, “It is a most glamorous, heart-warming and soul-inspiring spectacle. It is along with beer and several other events of recent months, an indication of the turn of the times. The corner has been turned,” The Sun continued optimistically; “and the circus is just around it” (New York Sun Apr. 10, 1933). Variety took a more realistic approach and explained that the basic format of the show had changed little over the last six years, but actually little alteration was necessary to the “world’s out-stander in its field.” With “such class artists as Beatty, Colleano, Wallenda, the Codonas, Rooneys, Rieffenachs, Bradnas and the Yacopis, no show could miss” (“Ringlings, B & B Circus” Apr. 11, 1933 and Joys 1989: 55).

Despite the gaiety and opulence, the Great Depression wore on. One of its effects was the constant pleas from all types of people who hoped to join the circus. Another reminder was the Circus Saints and Sinners annual “Big Top Revel,” to raise money for infirm and destitute members of the profession. Joining the circus stars at the benefit were stage, screen, and radio celebrities like Fred Astaire, Tallulah Bankhead, Fannie Brice, and Lowell Thomas (“Famous Circus Stars” Apr. 26, 1933: 14). The Ringling gross at the Garden had also dropped. Easter week produced turn away attendance, but the first two weeks had been sluggish, and the new federal tax drained ten per cent from all ticket sales. The Garden jinx hit again when Alfredo Codona dislocated his shoulder while performing the triple somersault and would be out of action for six weeks (Joys 1989: 4).

“The summer of 1933,” Variety warned, “is expected to be a crucial season for circuses. There is no sure indication that all or any of the big tops will remain out for the full season.” If the shows did no better than break even, they would be shipped right back to winter quarters. The Ringling show would book ten weeks ahead, with further bookings dependent on business (“Big Tops Fight for Lives” Variety May 9, 1933: 63).

Depression or not, Clyde Beatty had become a genuine celebrity in New York. Paul Yawitz, who wrote the Mirror’s, “New York Uncensored,” column, reported that, “The news hounds who are invited to Jack Kennedy’s taproom dinner Wednesday [the circus would open Friday] will learn that the tops of the cages housing a dozen of Clyde Beatty’s lions and tigers, will serve as tables” (Yawitz Mar. 26, 1933:
Sportswriter Alan Gould added that Beatty’s off-the-job dissipations are playing bagatelle, drinking beer, and watching ice hockey (Gould May 30, 1933). Syndicated columnist Sam Love, observed that “Park Avenue’s new pet is Clyde Beatty.” He receives numerous invitations to tea and seems to have a “sudden grip on popular imagination.” He exhibits no “stagy pretense of fraternizing with the animals. He doesn’t stick his head in a friendly lion’s mouth. Instead, he smacks ‘em in the face with enormous impartiality and makes ‘em hop about lively” (Love Apr. 28, 1933: 4).

The News insisted his act was “still the feature of the circus as far as audiences are concerned, “Wide-eyed children and pop-eyed parents gasp as the 28-year-old master puts lions and tigers through their paces” (New York Sunday News Apr. 9, 1933). They backed this up with a heavily advertised two-page spread in the Sunday edition, that claimed, “Clyde Beatty, Circus Lion Tamer, who’s seen nature in the ROAR, and no fooling!—tells how it feels to have 65 tigers, lions, black panthers and leopards just waiting for a slip up!” (“Caged With Beatty and His Big Cats” [ad] Apr. 8, 1933: 17).

The sensationalized article, “Caged with Beatty and His Big Cats,” by Ruth Reynolds followed the now familiar outline. It insisted Beatty, “has been severely injured at least twenty-five times in seven years, and he gets ‘scratched’ at least twice a week. But his face—with the help of surgery—is as unscarred as a Broadway matinee idol’s.” He loves his job, but would like to spend all his leisure time flying, which has been forbidden by both movie and circus executives (Reynolds Apr. 9, 1933: 8).

The story added that, “there’s scarcely one black spec of love lost between Clyde and his cats. He admires them. They respect him.” Love for animals goes to his dog. He believed that a trainer’s drinking would not affect the cats’ behavior, but could cause him to lose an edge in reflexes that could prove fatal. “And now girls”-- inquired Reynolds. “Oh sure I MUST get married again sometime,” this charming young man chuckles, “No, I haven’t picked out the girl—yet.” He had a small daughter, whom he emphasized would not follow him in the business. He concluded that, “They’ll get me someday. But who wants to live forever?” (Reynolds Apr. 9, 1933: 8 and Joys 1989: 4).

Just three days later the News’ Sidney Skolsky devoted his entire column to Beatty. He described him as having had his face remodeled, looking like an overweight jockey, light and fast and sure on his
feet, and “as graceful as your favorite ballroom dancer.” He hoped to make enough money to retire at 35. To keep from being sluggish, he does not eat his big meal of the day until 10 p.m. He loves to raid the icebox and his favorite is chicken. He’s ticklish, likes beer, and enjoys riding with the police department on their calls. Skolsky, like the true Broadway gossip columnist, added that Beatty slept in the bottoms only of his pajamas and “generally sleeps alone.” He frequently found it hard to fall asleep. Divorced, he still likes all types of girls, blondes, redheads, and brunettes, but added that he did not think he would “be brave enough to marry again. Gals are too hard to handle” (Skolsky Apr. 21, 1933: 38).

The *News* also ran two large photos of Beatty in the arena four days later (“Photo Study in Watchful Waiting” Apr. 16, 1933: Mag. Sect.). The same day, the *Mirror* ran a photo and described a dangerous skirmish between Beatty and his big cats (*New York Sunday Mirror* Apr. 16, 1933: Mag. Sect.). The next day the *News* featured a political cartoon in which FDR was depicted as Beatty battling the lion, ‘Depression’ (“Face to Face” Apr. 17, 1933: 32). About a month later, Walter Winchell made a similar observation, “That Congress which enjoys having its own way is nibbling at its nails because it knows that Roosevelt has the people in back of him—a difficult to beat combination . . . . Makes me think of Clyde Beatty in that huge cage of beasts—the way the President handles them. . . . Hope they never bite him. . . . They all have the rabies” (Winchell May 17, 1933: 19 and Joys 1989: 4).

The *Journal’s* excellent sports cartoonist, Burris Jenkins, Jr. drew an exciting cartoon of Beatty called, “The Man Who Plays Games With Death.” Jenkins called Beatty, “one game sportsman,” who at the end of a performance looked haggard, and streamed perspiration. . . . his lips blue dry with strain.” Stripped, “his body is a mass of scars, mostly on his right side.” Jenkins described Beatty as the “youngest and best of cat trainers. He plays with death twice a day at the Garden—probably the most daring ‘fighter’ that ever went in there” (Jenkins, Jr. Apr. 19, 1933: 19 and Joys 1989: 4).

Louis Sobol, jockey-sized, bald-headed, mustached columnist and important Broadway historian had long held a reputation as a decent and honest gentleman. He devoted his entire *Journal* column, “The Voice of Broadway,” to Beatty. It recounted Beatty’s enchantment with the circus and animals as a boy, and about him attaining his present status (Sobel Apr. 29, 1933: 9). On the same day, John Chapman’s
column, “Mainly About Manhattan,” dwelt on the trainer. “The nervous Beatty with the dancer’s feet,
always moving faster than his cats, was a superb showman, perfect in timing and display.” Any thought
Chapman might have had that the act was phony was erased when he saw Beatty backstage. “A wiry little
fellow—the kind that ordinarily wouldn’t work up a sweat short of a mile run—Clyde was shiny wet and
dripping. All the time we talked he was nervous and jumpy, the way I was once for an hour after a boy
ran into my car. He didn’t have to tell me he had been under mental and physical strain.” Beatty loved
baseball, and was sorry he had gotten to the Stadium late for the Yankee-Senator rhubarb, but he had first
gone to a department store to autograph his book and almost all the 250 customers were women. One of
them would not let him get away, and without a chair or a safety cage, “it took him a long time to
escape.” Beatty and the circus had refused another proposed publicity stunt that would have had him get
into the cage with the Bronx Zoo lions and tigers (Chapman Apr. 29, 1933: 4 and Joys 1989: 4).

Paul Gallico, the News sports columnist, was like many of the sports writers of the Twenties and
Thirties, very versatile. These men were avid readers of ancient and modern literature, magazines, and
newspapers, and were often extremely critical and caustic about their subjects. Gallico later became a
prize-winning author of books and motion pictures. Two of his most famous works were the Snow Goose
no mean athlete himself. . .when I am writing about the courage and heroism of golfers and tennis players,
and prize fighters and football players and the like, for when Beatty makes a mistake, the penalty is not
one or two strokes, or five yards, but six months in bed trying to get some shredded flesh to look like an
arm and a leg again. The cats don’t quit when the whistle blows. In case you don’t know, Beatty is the
animal trainer who works in the cage with lions and tigers and who turns his back on half of them”

A couple of weeks later, Gallico wrote a column titled, “Clyde Beatty Gallico,” in which he
covered the wrestling matches at the Garden and “only my superb courage, fortitude, skill and condition
carried me through. . .Quickly, plucking a leaf from the book of my hero, Clyde Beatty, the animal
trainer, I leaped backward, lifting the cane chair from between my legs and holding the prongs in front of me, facing the maddened, infuriated wrestlers” (Gallico May 17, 1933: 42 and Joys 1989: 4).

Beatty had attained true celebrity. When six orphan boys in New Jersey saved a train carrying five hundred from a washout in the tracks, part of their reward was a trip to the circus. Beatty had invited them there and they received special box seats along with handshakes and autographs from the trainer (“6 Train Saving Orphans” May 7, 1933). Beatty was invited to parties, including a buffet supper given by the circus-struck Elizabeth Cobb, daughter of the noted humorist, Irving Cobb, for some circus stars and literary celebrities. Gene Tunney, the former heavyweight champion, and

one of the show folks spent a bedazzled half hour harkening while Gene told of his ring victories and then this enthralled listener burst into a group in the next room crying out: ‘Gee, it must be great to have as much nerve as that Tunney fellow’s got!’ The author of this tribute was youthful Clyde Beatty, whose job, twice daily, was to go into a steel-barred cage and master a snarling, rebellious collection of forty full-grown lions and half-tamed tigers (Cobb 1945: 341).

He even broke a Chippendale chair demonstrating the art of lion training to Clair Boothe Brokaw (later Luce) (Chapman May 15, 1933: 30). Socialite, Bill Fahenstock, Jr. invited Beatty, Con Colleano, and the Bradnas to a special beefsteak dinner with his friends at which they all dined wearing white aprons and chef hats. The deposed Russian prince, Alex Oblensky, sang to enliven the party (New York Evening Journal Apr. 22, 1933: 10 and Joys 1989: 4).

Beatty did have at least one detractor, Don Herold of Life.

The big talk of the circus this year is Clyde Beatty, and I don’t especially like him. He torments a lot lions into growling at him and pawing at him, and my sympathies are largely with the lions and tigers. I really don’t think Beatty is so much courageous as he is cruel and perhaps idiotic; at least I feel we need less of his kind of courage in the world; as a race, we are far too fond of starting trouble in order to show our valor (Herold June 1933: 34).

The only real problem Beatty did run into concerned the motion picture version of The Big Cage. The film was supposed to open at the Roxy and run simultaneously with the Ringling Garden stand, but a conflict arose when Gumpertz reportedly refused to let Beatty make live appearances at the theater to introduce the picture. He felt that although rental of the animals during the winter to movie studios was profitable to the circus-- [The forty-eight big cats were leased to Universal for $3,000 per week. The circus received $36,000 for the twelve-week period, instead of the usual feed bill of $17,000)]--Beatty
was being overexposed and personal appearances would be even more damaging to the circus box office. The following year when Frank Buck’s *Wild Cargo* opened at the Music Hall, he was expected to make up to five appearances a day. Whether Gumpertz’s belief was justified will never be known, but it was the first rift in his relationship with Beatty (Beatty and Wilson 1941: 206).

Even before the movie opened, Beatty’s experiences in Hollywood made good press. Just the arrival of Beatty’s cats in Hollywood awed the filmmakers, since they were so used to the unusually tame animals typically used in movies. Beatty’s animals really were tough and the cameramen who worked in special cages attached to the arena were admittedly terrified throughout the filming. On April 4, the *Journal* described problems with attempting to duplicate Nero’s attack, the cats’ general dislike for the intensely hot Kleig lights, which caused them to refuse to perform after five or ten minutes, and the fight sequence that led to a death of a tiger (Smits Apr. 4, 1934). The *Sun* utilized half a page in explaining these movie adventures. Beatty had made it clear to the director that the cats only took orders from him and when they were through with a scene that was it (Creelman *New York Sun* Apr. 5, 1933).

The motion picture process, like the act, was a terrific strain, especially since the cats were trained just enough to take, “the green off.” “And I change the routine every day,” explained Beatty. “They never know just what they’re going to do. Otherwise they’d go through the routine so fast that I couldn’t keep up with them” (Creelman *New York Sun* Apr. 5, 1933). On April 9, the *Times* ran a similar story called, “Thrills Galore” (“Thrills Galore” Apr. 9, 1933: X3). *Variety* followed up with a major story, “Even Lions Go Native in Hollywood, Beatty Finds in Own Nature Study.” The trainer charged the Hollywood lions with “being traitors to their breed. Beneath their hypocritically savage manes lurks the dry rot of Hollywood civilization. They’re soft, they’ve grown fond of men instead of fearing him and a lion who likes man, in Mr. Beatty’s estimation, is just a bum” (“Even Lions Go Native” Apr. 11, 1933: 2 and Joys 1989: 4).

When the trainer went to Hollywood, he didn’t ask to meet any stars, not human ones, just Jackie and Jimmie, the movie lions. After meeting them, he emphatically stated that, “he wouldn’t take a hair from the mane of his for any of these polite lions.” His cats have no inhibitions or repressions. “Mr.
Beatty’s lions and tigers were not impressed by Hollywood. They can take it or leave it. Just another jump in the route, they found it, and so did Mr. Beatty” (“Even Lions Go Native” Apr. 11, 1933: 2). These exploits also led to an article, “Tigers Never Bluff,” in the September issue of Travel, and “Working the Cats in the Kleig Lights,” in the April Literary Digest (Boone Sept. 1933: 32 and “Personal Glimpses—Working the Big Cats” Apr. 22, 1933 and Joys 1989: 4).

The film version of The Big Cage finally opened at the Mayfair on May 8. Originally it was to have day-and-dated the run of the circus in New York. Billboard called it an “exciting, constantly entertaining picture,” but most of the excitement and entertainment are provided by Beatty single-handed. The critic also singled out “little Mickey Rooney—who turns in a splendid performance as Beatty’s protégé.” The romance angle was “lousy,” and the conclusion “over hoked up.” “But after all, the pic’s all Beatty and he proves himself entirely capable of carrying it. He carries himself excellently by being “perfectly natural,” doing a much better job than most celebrities. They added that their were “grand studies of the animals and the photography is excellent throughout” (“The Big Cage—Mayfair” Mar. 1933).

The reviews followed a definite pattern. The Sun critic, John S. Cohen, Jr. called the plot very weak but some scenes were the “most legitimate circus episodes ever filmed.” The movie demonstrated how subjugation was psychological, and is a “worthy tribute to the bravery of this young man—the youngest and most prominent lion trainer alive.” Cohen added, “Incidentally he betrays an ingratiating and likeable screen personality. He might even tame the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lion and be a star in his own right” (Cohen, Jr. May 11, 1933 and Joys 1989: 4).

Thornton Delehanty of the New York Post called the film more exciting than the actual show. After reading the book, the viewer would expect a “swirl of blood and sand.” Actually, he found no reason why the bloodthirsty shouldn’t enjoy, as I did, the mishaps and near catastrophes of the animal training business. . . . It contains lurid details, and behind the scenes views the viewer could never enjoy at the circus.” There were some spectacular moments, but the film has as “footless and dangling a plot as
ever concocted in Hollywood.” The “feeble attempts at human interest” work against the realism, and the comedy scenes are “hard to forgive and forget” (Delehanty May 10, 1933: 17 and Joys 1989: 4).

Kate Cameron of the News gave the movie three stars. She deemed it “thrilling” and “thoroughly absorbing” whenever Beatty is seen working the lions and tigers. She reiterated that the plot and dialogue were poor, but Beatty was so good you should not miss the film (Cameron May 9, 1933: 32).

The Mirror’s reviewer found Beatty’s work with the big cats exciting and stirring as usual. “He has a pleasant voice and surprising ease before the cameras.” He claimed the story was not equal to his assets, “or the magnificent animals that were the real stars” (Johaneson May 9, 1933: 21).

The New York Times’ Mordaunt Hall found the film “weak and wobbly” in plot, but strong on animal training scenes, which were very exciting. The close-ups gave the viewers an opportunity to see the act like they never could from their circus seats. “The excitement is real and its therefore worth ten times the wild shooting and popping of machine guns in gangster stories,” Beatty might not bother much about dialogue, but his actions speak louder than mere words” Hall believed the 25-year-old director, Kurt Neumann, did a great job in bringing out Beatty’s enthusiasm and thoroughness. [Neumann went on to co-produce and direct with Sol Lesser a series of Tarzan films between 1945 and 1954. He would later gain fame as a sci fi director, directing Kronos, Rocketship XM and dying shortly before release of The Fly (1955)] (Hall Apr. 14, 1933: X3).

Richard Watts of the Herald-Tribune was more negative, feeling the film would face two problems; the plethora of animal pictures already released and the humanitarians’ outcry over the lion-tiger fight. A “few earnest animal lovers may be annoyed, anyway.” However, the movie did provide an “excellent chance to show us the skill, the courage, and the showmanship required by his act and since it has excellent photography, it can be said The Big Cage accomplishes what it sets out to do.” Although a great showman, Beatty is not an actor, but is “pleasant and likeable” Beatty “proceeds to boss the growling public enemies around, thereby achieving something vicariously beneficial to the shattered pride of the harried human race” (Watts, Jr. May 9, 1933 and Joys 1989: 4).
The *World-Telegram* reiterated that the picture has many faults, but “as a thriller it is pretty hard to beat.” The lion and tiger fight “is alone worth the price of admission” (Boehnel May 9, 1933: 16).

*Billboard* said the “picture’s all Beatty and he proves himself entirely capable of carrying it. . . Beatty carries himself excellently by the simple expedient of being perfectly natural, turning in a far better performance than most celebrities who are made actors overnight.” The studies of animals and photography were excellent throughout (*Billboard* May 1933). *Variety* found it exciting “now and then,” and the lion and tiger fight is a “corking experience.” The Hays Office report on family acceptability of pictures deemed *The Big Cage* opening scenes were marred “by bits of coarse language,” further, the film had no “femme appeal” other than to mothers “seeking film fare for the kiddies” (“*The Big Cage*” May 16, 1933: 17 and Joys 1989: 4).

None of the reviews were as humorous as those in the Indianapolis papers, one of which said, “Clyde Beatty’s portrayal of Clyde Beatty is flawless and his collection of cats is superb” (*Indianapolis Star* Apr. 2, 1933). A little later they claimed that he played himself better than any actor could have. They hinted that the “daring young man was greatly disturbed at the efforts of tattlers to establish a romance between him and his leading lady, Anita Page. The way he handles a pack of lions and tigers, you wouldn’t suppose he was shy of girls would you?” (Corbin May, 15, 1933).

Other out-of-town papers called it “a clean, red-blooded picture. There isn’t anything sexy, sugary or woozy about it. Those who enjoy a clean film will be delighted with it” (“*The Big Cage* is Red-Blooded Drama” April 23, 1933: 3).

*Universal Weekly* in its Showmanship section described how the fight scene had been played to lions and tigers at the St. Louis Zoo, with newsmen present to take photos of the reactions of the animals listening to the uproar (“Reaction Test at Zoo” Apr. 22, 1933: 28).

On May 5, the New York *Daily News* editorialized that the eight-minute lion and tiger battle in *The Big Cage* was the most exciting they had seen in current movies. “Nowadays we can see these magnificent fights, which cost the Roman emperors so much for 50 cents. That certainly looks like progress. Lets have more and better animal fights in the movies.” Despite ‘animalarians’ antipathy, it is
animal nature to fight, and “there isn’t a more terrific and satisfying spectacle than a fight.” He hoped the movie men would stand up against the critics and fight. *The Big Cage* brawl was even more exciting than the staged fight between a python and tiger in *Bring ’Em Back Alive*, which was fought in a three- or four-acre enclosure with a corrugated iron fence, in which some of the scenes had to be cut when the combatants pulled down the camouflage covering the fence ([editorial] “Great Movie Animal Fights” May 5, 1933: 18 and Joys 1989: 4).

“If all this sounds a trifle pagan, better charge it up to the fact that, like almost everybody else, we’re so sick and tired of being told what is good for us and what isn’t. The holier-than-thous brought on the pagan reaction that seems to be setting in today, and they only have themselves to blame” ([editorial] “Great Movie Animal Fights” May 5, 1933: 18). Colonel Patterson, the colorful publisher of the *News* was a personal acquaintance of Beatty, and one of the few people he took into the arena (Joys 1989: 4).

J. C. Furnas more or less concurred, arguing that Hollywood had been turning the animal kingdom into one of Barnum’s Happy Families. This was especially true of the gorilla—once seen as the “symbol of jungle horror—it has been depicted as Tarzan’s staunch friend, as well as the “brobdingnaguan gorilla, that its makers could cause a fifty-foot ape to register devotion, bewilderment, and hurt feelings.” That it could be so “successfully pathetic’ was the “finest piece of hippodroming ever seen on the screen.” The only new thing that can be done “is to do another picture about dinosaurs and pterodactyls and make the audience feel sorry for them.” He concluded that these pictures generally ended in mayhem that was inconsistent with the “industry’s new tendency to look at animals through the eyes of the SPCA and St. Francis of Assisi” (Furnas May 7, 1933: VII 3).

He also theorized that one of the harbingers of the Depression was a great panic in the international market in Hamburg.

When lions were going for a few dollars apiece and snakes at 50 cents a linear foot. . . . It might be suspected that Hollywood laid in some bargains then and has been cashing in on them ever since. A recent trend was not to cast all animals as anti-social gangsters and primeval horrors but have some demonstrate their palship with deserving humans, for example in *King of the Jungle*, *Tarzan*, and *Zoo in Budapest*, for which Jesse L. Lasky bought more than 500 beasts to Fox Movietown City (Furnas May 7, 1933: VII 3).
The motion picture followed very little of the plot of the book, but unlike Buck’s pictures it was an attempt to make Beatty into a true action star, and bring to the screen the persona that audiences who had read the many articles about Beatty would expect. The plot revolves around Beatty trying to put together an act consisting of 20 lions and 20 tigers that even the circus management thinks is too dangerous. The action takes place largely at the winterquarters in Peru where Beatty has achieved the status of head trainer. His friend, Russ, who is engaged to a beautiful aerialist, has a bad case of nerves or “arena shock” and can no longer train wild animals, which actually pleases his worried fiancée. Another, older trainer, O’Hara, has become a hopeless alcoholic and has to be kept away from the cats. When the drunk’s son, played by Mickey Rooney in his first full-length picture, runs away from private school to be with his father, Beatty tells the crew to act as if the boy’s father is still in charge. Late at night, O’Hara releases Beatty’s cats into the arena and attempts to train them, but they readily kill him. The good-natured Beatty consoles the boy, telling him his father was a great trainer, and then makes young Timmy his “assistant.” After Beatty is injured by Nero, Timmy helps him sneak out of the hospital so he can perform his act, save the circus, and recapture the animals that escape after a terrific thunderstorm.

Beatty, as the typical action hero of the era, avoids women. Obviously involvement with a girlfriend or family would ruin him as a trainer by depriving his performance of all its daring, bravado fun, just as it had for Russ, who suffered a nervous breakdown, or Timothy O’Hara who reverted to the bottle. Beatty, on the other hand, remained focused on his goal in his usual boyish, exuberant manner and succeeds while they have failed. In *The Big Cage*, Beatty mirrors many of the more recent action stars, lithe, agile, muscular, but not overly so, breezy, and having a great time risking his neck.

But the picture also raised a controversy that persists until this day over the staged lion-tiger fight [The fight is available on YouTube]. In one report the lion killed the tiger so quickly, the cameramen could not get a good shot of the action. Beatty contended there “wasn’t supposed to be any killing—just a fight.” But he had to use three tigers before the scene could be properly photographed. He said the lights had also made the animals sleepy and cranky. Another problem concerning the retakes, was that normally Beatty changed the act’s routine every day, so that the cats never knew what they were expected to do,
otherwise they would go through their routine so fast that he wouldn’t be able to keep up with them. In another article he admitted that most attacks were the result of his own carelessness, while fights typically occurred two or three times a week. Before filming *The Big Cage*, he thought a full-grown tiger could kill a full-grown lion if they met alone on a fair playing field, but the fight sequence proved him wrong.

Beatty also wanted it known that it was his cats that attracted the film stars to the set, including an excited group of starlets, not him. He said that Carl Laemmle, Sr., along with the director, the young German, Kurt Neumann, who had originally been hired to make some of the studio’s pictures for German audiences, and horror star, Boris Karloff, all became so shaken during some of the arena scenes they couldn’t stay on the set (Smits Apr. 4, 1933 and Creelman Apr. 5, 1933).

A month later, Invincible Films released, *Taming the Jungle*, trying to cash in on the success of Beatty’s movie. It showed a number of trainers like Mel Koontz and Olga Celeste teaching their big cat pupils. The *Mirror’s* movie critic observed, “Not one of the trainers is the equal of Beatty in showmanship. That young man is able to make his magnificent performers appear unafraid of whips, chairs, and pistols which are the paraphernalia of the cat men. The lions, tigers, leopards and pumas of *Taming the Jungle* seem to be broken” (Johaneson June 4, 1933: 19 and Joys 1989: 4).

Beatty had again proven himself to the Broadway columnists and sportswriters, but there was a long season ahead and his showmanship would be needed to keep Hagenbeck-Wallace afloat. *Variety’s* review of the circus’s opening in Chicago sans Beatty, called it a “Depression circus designed for 80 cents and diminished intakes. . . .Poodles Hanneford and his family is about the beginning and the end of anything like circus fame in the show.” The rest of the acts were written off as apparent non-entities. The spec was horrible, with the singing, “shrill, off-key, and unintelligible” and the dancing as “uneven as the sawdust surface” (“Easter Spurts Up” Apr. 25, 1933: 63).

Obviously some improvements were made, since at the end of June, when Hagenbeck-Wallace played the Bronx, *Variety* called it an excellent show living up to its reputation as the second best show in the nation. “The stand-out turns stood out. . . .There is an air of youth. . . .that counts. The show is speedy throughout.” Gumpertz had warned the show that it would have to operate on its own or be pulled off the
road in a month-and-a half. “The show’s top feature of course, is Clyde Beatty, who rejoined the outfit after opening with the Ringling show in New York and Boston, Beatty looks better under canvas and his performance is better. The big cats were much more lively than in the Garden, and the solo tiger tricks were worked more smoothly. Beatty, first a showman, and secondly a trainer, came out of the cage dripping with perspiration. He is the most publicized and sensational act under canvas” (Variety June 27, 1933 and Joys 1989: 4).

Beatty’s career sped along in high gear. But he had suffered a blow when Nero was poisoned on the train after the Ringling indoor dates. The lion had performed brilliantly both in the circus and in Hollywood since the attack. Beatty recalled that “On the Saturday night we closed he had never been better, and if not strictly his friend, I was his No. 1 fan, next to himself.” When he found the “fallen monarch” dead, “the sadness gnawed at me and I could not overcome it. I . . . was too big to cry. . . . It is a painful thing to see a lion as great as Nero come to his end. . . .struck down in his prime.” Although he hired a lawyer to investigate the death, the killer was never found (Beatty and Wilson 1941: 104-105).

While on the road, Beatty participated in some publicity stunts such as a staged wrestling match with a costumed “Depression” tiger on the steps of the Camden, New Jersey city hall (“Just in Fun” June 15, 1933). In August, the Akron Beacon-Journal ran a full-page story entitled, “Facing Almost Certain Death in His Daily Task.” The author believed that Beatty, who she described as looking like a polo player, handsome, immaculately clean cut, with a charming personality, and in perfect condition, knew more about the workings of the feline mind than any learned scientist ever will and that’s why he can make “the heart of a spectator seem to stop in suspense.” He has studied the nature, moods, reactions, and mental capacities of those “hot blooded cats.” Their “minds and intelligences” vary as much as those of humans. Cruelty and brutality, she assured readers were things of the distant past (Brown Aug. 20, 1933: full spread). The Syracuse Herald observed after visiting the backyard of Hagenbeck-Wallace that, “circus folk, behind the glitter of tinsel, are just like all of us.” They found Beatty as quiet, unassuming, and bashful. He largely stayed in his dressing room wagon, listening to baseball games and dance music over his radio (“Circus Folk” Aug. 28, 1933: XX).
The 1933 Hagenbeck-Wallace season was a success and in September in Bristol, Virginia, he married his long-time girl friend, Harriet Evans. As the season wound to a close, the marriage spurred a syndicated columnist to write that:

It would have been natural for Beatty to have fallen for a movie actress on the lot while filming *The Big Cage*, a turn that might have done him no good, but he came back beneath the Big Top, to his own environment, to select a mate—a young woman who regularly takes her turn in the air—like his own in the cage. If the circus management had not looked out ahead, however, when their star was growing brighter and brighter. A lot of trouble would have been to handle. They fixed Beatty’s contract to hold him tight. He had ideas when he tasted big success. He was talking his own terms to the circus about the time the movie bid came to him but was halted when reminded: ‘Well, suppose the show doesn’t lease the animals to the movies for you to work, what then?’ It made him rewrite that, after all, the circus had made him and he owed his first allegiance to it (Cook Sept. 25, 1933: 5).

In October, Beatty bought a male and three female lions to rebuild his act. They were valued at $50 each. In return the zoo got a male Sumatran tiger worth $650 as a mate for its female, and a camel. Beatty had been looking at zoos all over the country for smart two-year old cats, and these were among the few that filled the bill (“Beatty Takes Four Tigers” Oct. 30, 1933).

At the winter date in Cleveland, Beatty gained more publicity when he called forth in rehearsal, a “committee” of four brother lions to punish, Sammy, a renegade lion who had killed a lioness. All-time attendance records were broken at the Public Hall. Ten thousand people jammed into one performance and the manager ordered the outside doors opened so that the four thousand outside could see for themselves that there was no room left (Cleveland Plain Dealer Feb. 3, 1934).

In 1956, circus historian Marian Murray wrote that Beatty drew such “immense audiences” because of “his carefully exaggerated atmosphere of sound and fury.” Like Van Amburgh, Beatty provided the crowd with “ample opportunity to indulge its sadistic instincts” (Murray 1956). This criticism had already been ably answered by Cleveland theater critic William F. McDermott during the winter of 1934. He described the circus as the primitive essence of the drama. It is make-believe in its purest form and quite unashamedly acknowledges that people like to be fooled. What Eugene O’Neill offered in a sophisticated way, the circus offers in simplicity; people rejoice in believing life is stranger and more wonderful than it really is. Clyde Beatty’s act was genuinely exciting, and all too dangerous as...
the scars on his arms and chest silently proved. But, McDermott added, it was not as dangerous as he made it seem. Often he had to coax the lions to roar and plead with the tigers to make passes at him. Some of the animals roared and leapt only out of a desire to please the trainer when they obviously prefer to lie down and take a nap. But the circus audience wanted to believe these roaring beasts were thirsting for blood and ready to spring, and Beatty succeeded in giving them what they wanted. “Beatty,” McDermott wrote, “is the best of the showmen among the animal trainers. With the greatest grace and skill he tantalizes the spectators with the risks of his life amid beasts of the jungle and causes the circus leopard and the lion to seem more ferocious than the wild beasts of the Roman Coliseum.” This make-believe, subconsciously understood as such by audiences, distinguished the circus and “explains the secret of its charm for children and the children that all men are” (McDermott Jan. 26, 1934).

_Time_ magazine featured an article about Beatty’s battles with Sammy the lion. It reiterated the mantra that Beatty’s success rests on the rule that lions hate tigers, tigers hate lions, and to make the public pulsate the big cage had to be a “welter of hatred and jealousy’ from mixing species and sexes. In the Cleveland Auditorium, during a winter date, Sammy had attacked a young lioness. Beatty jumped in to separate them even wrapping his fingers in Sammy’s mane and whacking him again and again over his head. After ten minutes, Sammy released his hold, but the lioness was dead. Beatty asserted that he could not let any animal have the idea that it was so tough it could bully other performers. The next night, Sammy escalated his aggressiveness, knocking Beatty down. After this escapade Beatty decided to take his four lion brothers, the oldest and toughest in his act, and drive them in the ring, work them up, and then send in Sammy. The brothers closed in on the bully, and by that night he was the meekest cat in the act. However, Beatty’s actions outraged Cleveland’s Animal Protective League (“A Bully and His Betters” Feb. 12, 1934). The incident led to a full-page article in the _Detroit Free Press_ (“Murder” Mar. 18, 1934: 11).

After this incident, he was off to Hollywood and the Max Sennett Studio to make a twelve-chapter serial for Mascot, entitled _The Lost Jungle_ (Billboard Mar. 3, 1933). In this picture, the first for B-picture legend, Nat Levine, who enjoyed giving newcomers like John Wayne their start, as well as
featuring non-Hollywood stars like Beatty, Red Grange, and singing cowboy, Gene Autry, Beatty again plays himself, and Mickey Rooney more or less reprises his role (“Nat Levine and Mascot Pictures” surfinetinc.).

Beatty, hard at work breaking cats has no time for his girlfriend Ruth (Cecilia Parker), who decides to go on a search for an unchartered island with her father, a professor. Even this possible loss of Ruth does not stir Beatty until he gets word that the entire party has been lost in the jungle. Beatty, along with the circus press agent (the comedy relief), and his assistant, who actually hates him and has been trying to sabotage Clyde’s cat act, hire a dirigible to seek out Ruth and her father. The island is not only rife with animals Beatty has to tame, but with pirates seeking a lost treasure, and his assistant who becomes a mysterious villain. After twelve episodes, Beatty saves Ruth and her father, and sails off with them into the sunset (Weiss and Goodgold 1972). The movie was also released as a feature film in order to appeal to a broader range of outlets. Beatty’s serial life was smooth sailing, but his career with Ringling was about to become stormy.

Early in March, Ringling officials announced that Beatty would play both the Ringling date and the Hagenbeck-Wallace Chicago Coliseum engagement (Billboard Mar. 17, 1934). During this same month, two national articles appeared: “Clyde Beatty Says Women Are Like Tigers,” in the Pictorial Review and another in the Sunday supplement, Every Week Magazine. In Shawell’s article, she claims all previous trainers “were struggling through a comparatively mediocre novitiate, waiting for Clyde Beatty to step into the cage and put on a show that, according to his less daring predecessors, was not only impossible, but would be absolutely suicidal on the first attempt.” To succeed, Beatty has to know an enormous amount about animals. Like women, no two tigers are the same, and he must look for hidden, telltale characteristics. In fact when, he meets someone he finds himself studying them the same way he does his cats. He cannot subjugate a tiger by force, because a frightened cat would have no interest in learning, but would be like a woman if all her spirit and will were taken from her. Tigers often hide their emotions, and instead wait for the opportunity to attack, “like a woman whose primitive instincts have been aroused to a desire for revenge.” Lions like men, seem to suffer less in unaccustomed and foreign
environments, the article continued, while a tiger undergoes “terrific changes in her whole being.” Shawell concluded that there was “a little tiger in the best of women and a little lion in the worst of men” (Shawell March 1934: 4).

The sick and aging John Ringling was not faring as well. The News quipped that the employer of animal trainers “who bend the tempers of jungle beasts to their will, today asked the law for the second time in six months to divorce him from the blonde young wife whose temper he has found ‘violent and ungovernable’” (New York Daily News Mar. 4, 1934). Ringling, who suffered from thrombosis, insisted his pulse soared from 68 to 82 when she flew into a rage on being asked to go to dinner. His pulse jumped from 76 to 104 when she denounced him in the presence of servants (New York Daily News Apr. 6, 1934: 22). The News also ran a two-page article, “Ringlings Own Circus, But Find Life Isn’t One,” that outlined the brothers’ family rows and divorce suits (Reynolds Apr. 1, 1934: 55 and Joys 1990: 34).

What this meant for Beatty was that Gumpertz was still in charge of the circus empire and the two did not see eye to eye. The manager had dropped Beatty’s billing to third or fourth and had radically cut his pre-season publicity. Beatty was probably further irritated by the publicity Frank Buck was garnering at the Music Hall, a treatment denied his picture the previous year. In fact the ads for Wild Cargo were very circus-like, urging showmen to advertise the movie as they would a circus (Variety Mar. 27, 1934).

The final straw came when the circus was scheduled to open without a full rehearsal. Dexter Fellows explained it would make the performance “super-charged with excitement.” No one, however, would be more nervous than Beatty, who had just arrived in town “with his forty-seven animals and his bride.” Twenty of the big cats were new acquisitions and Beatty had not performed with them since January. Two months were an unusually long period of idleness for both Beatty and the cats. “I think they’ll remember me, all right,” he said, “but what I’m afraid of is that they’ve forgotten each other. . . I’ll probably have trouble keeping them apart” (New York Herald Tribune Mar. 29, 1934). Beatty then reportedly got into a strong disagreement with Gumpertz over the lack of rehearsal time and walked out. He knew it meant it would be his last season and an end to the wonderful times in New York, but refused to relent until he was granted rehearsal time. When the circus opened—filled, by all reports, with more
action than ever—Beatty’s act went over well (although Variety reported that the cats were a little lethargic) (Variety Apr. 3, 1934: 63). Beatty was especially effective when he passed his pistol and whip outside the steel-barred enclosure to “hypnotize” the roll-over tiger. “The sigh that goes up from the audience when the tiger is through rolling and Beatty is out of the cage is like the exhaust of a million bath tubs” (Green Mar. 31, 1934: 4). If it was true Beatty’s publicity had been ordered cut, then it becomes evident that the Broadway columnists had not publicized him as a favor to the circus or because of a payoff by Ringling. They sincerely liked him and his performances and they demonstrated their admiration in the next few weeks (Joys 1990: 34).

Walter Winchell wrote, “Recommended to diversion seekers: Clyde Beatty’s spellbinding indifference in a cage of tigers and lions at Ringling-Barnum-Bailey Circus. . . .” (Winchell Apr. 12, 1934: 19). On the same day, Robert Garland, theater critic of the World-Telegram, who had enjoyed Beatty’s act from the beginning, produced a delightful article describing the experiences of himself and his children at the circus.

I played ‘possum—young ‘possum—with Bubbles, Kenneth, and Junior. They don’t like old people. They just put up with them. So I made out that I was never in loveb with Lillian Leitzel. I had thought. Year after year, in Baltimore and elsewhere, I adored that lovely lady. It wasn’t because she managed to throw herself over her own shoulder more often than you think possible. Not that alone, at any rate. Through an alchemy of her personal devising, she became the great lady of the Greatest Show on Earth. She had talent, she had distinction. She had charm. I, along with the circus miss her. Without her, the big top is never quite the same.

But to Bubbles, Kenneth, and Junior. Lillian Leitzel isn’t so much as a name, Clyde Beatty is, however, Clyde Beatty who, in the center ring, is ‘the fearless, youthful trainer of wild animals,’ demonstrating, two times a day, from New York, New York to Baraboo, Wisconsin, ‘Man’s power over ferocious beasts of the jungle.’ Demonstrating at the same time that a showman is a showman. Ot that I am belittling Clyde Beatty. How could I? It’s not to his discredit that he sets out to be brave to the best possible advantage. Or that Bubbles prefers him to Jimmy Cagney. Bubbles with seven circuses behind her, is a Clark Gable fan. He, apart from her mother and the Junior that is her brother, is Bubbles’ everything. But until the night Dexter Fellows invited us to the circus, Mr. Cagney ran second to Mr. Gable. Now, that isn’t so. Mr. Cagney has dropped down a peg making room for Mr. Beatty. Not for Mr. Beatty, the big beat-the-cats man, but Mr. Beatty the good-looker.

Mr. Beatty realizing that two and two makes one, even in the animal kingdom, brings sex appeal into the circus. In puttees, white pants and the winsomest of windbreakers, he is what widows and misses cry for.

Sex appeal or no sex appeal, get up and no get up, Mr. Beatty’s act occupies the center ring. And deserves to. You can push the Wallenda Family over toward Ninth Avenue and shoot the Great Hugo and his not-so-great co-bullet from a cannon along the arena’s southern side, but Clyde
Beatty occupies the center ring, the spotlight and the attention of the customers. He earns them too. All three of them (Garland Apr. 2, 1934: 14).

This circus, Garland concluded, was as dramatic as he ever saw it, far better than the boring ’33 version. “It has never exceeded its present degree of quality” (Garland Apr. 2, 1934: 14). There was no doubt the show was sensational since the police arrested a stream of persistent scalpers outside the Garden, where distraught women and children faced SRO signs (Joys 1990: 34).

On April 3, Burris Jenkins again featured Beatty in his cartoon called, “Bringing Himself Back Alive!” Jenkins had accompanied Beatty in a backstage tour of the cats following a performance.

‘Keep in the middle and you’ll be all right,’ says Beatty. I keep in the middle, Beatty starts down the plank. In one stride the roaring breaks out. They’d spotted him. Paws spread wide—they looked 18 inches across—dripping claws, great legs tawny or striped, reach for him from both sides. A few feet behind him I follow, not one of them makes a pass at me. They don’t seem to notice me. They’ve just been fed and each is nursing a huge chunk of raw meat. Beatty goes between them, snapping his fingers at their faces, whistling at them, laughing at their ferocity. A few minutes before he’d been in there alone, with 29 of them, alone and unarmed. Unarmed because at one stage of his act, the boy trainer tosses away his whip, his chair, his pistol with a tiger crawling at his feet, ‘I only do this,’ he explains, ‘when they’re behaving right’ (Jenkins, Jr. Apr. 3, 1934: 25).

Beatty also continued to figure in political cartoons. The Herald-Tribune ran one in which General Johnson of the National Recovery Act (NRA) was trying to subdue the auto manufactures (lions) and labor (tigers). The title was “When the Big Cats Start to Roughhouse.” The sign on the arena called it, “The Great Clyde Beatty Johnson Wild Animal Performing Act” (“When the Big Cats Start to Roughhouse” Mar. 25, 1934: 5). A couple of weeks later, a Herald-Tribune editorial entitled, “Why Not Let the Circus Do It?” wondered if the aides of General Johnson possessed the hypnotic eye of Clyde Beatty they could handle the protestors against the NRA (“Why Not Let the Circus Do It?” Apr. 10, 1934: 22 and Joys 1990: 34).

Beatty’s precarious position with Ringling was reinforced by a rumor reported in Variety on April 10 that “Dorothy Herbert will emulate Clyde Beatty and debut shortly as a wild animal trainer. The equestrienne is not known to have heretofore handled big cats, but has expressed herself as being unafraid. Showed her stuff by entering a cage of lions at Sarasota last winter” (“The Circus is in Town” Apr. 10, 1934: 4). The Sun had described Herbert at the show opening as riding a beautiful black horse
and “not wearing much more clothes than a burlesque strip artist after the last strip.” She “figures all through the show, winding up with breathtaking hurdle jumping with her black steed” (Green Mar. 31, 1934: 4 and Joys 1990: 34).

The columnists ignored the rumor and kept writing about Beatty. Edwin Hill of the Journal claimed drama was never higher in the circus than when the young man from Ohio entered the arena. “There’s a thrill in that spectacle that tingles right up the backbone. The old suspense and dread that one of the big cats might jump.” Beatty, he added, “has the gift, just like Daniel in the Bible, . . . the knack of it in his bones.” Hill grew even more maudlin when he described Beatty’s performances near his hometown. His mother couldn’t attend because it was too much for her heart. “She stays at home and listens with her heart in her mouth for the telephone to ring. And the first thing young Beatty does when he springs from the cage is to dash to the nearest phone and tell his mother that the jungle cats have been fooled again” (Hill Apr. 10, 1934 and Joys 1990: 34).

Probably no article was more complimentary than the one written by Mark Hellinger who came from a wealthy family who opposed his becoming a reporter. Hellinger was described by his peers as kind, honest, gentle, hardworking, never a double-crosser, and rich in talent. Hellinger died at 44, and during the last 14 years of his life reportedly consumed a bottle of brandy a day. If Walter Winchell was deemed the premier Broadway columnist, Hellinger was considered the first true Broadway reporter (Mosedale, 1981). Praise from Hellinger was quite meaningful for as a rule he disliked circuses. He had heard so much about Beatty that he finally relented and saw him perform.

He’s still under thirty—but with his circus work, his books, and his motion pictures, he is known to millions of citizens in America and to animal trainers throughout the world. . . . But right here and now, I want to thank Mr. Beatty for one thing: watching him work for the first time from a box seat, I received one of the greatest thrills of my life. His performance is the greatest act I have ever witnessed, and that takes in the Volstead Act and Winchell’s bravery when he played the Paramount. . . . He has taught lions to hurdle, and he is the only living trainer who has succeeded in teaching a tiger to roll over at his command. How long he will remain the only living trainer is extremely problematical. Thus far, Clyde Beatty has been pretty lucky. He has been mighty close to death on numerous occasions and he is only a step or two in advance of the Grim Reaper every time he walks out for a performance. His is without a shadow of a doubt, the most hazardous occupation in the world. Compared to Beatty, the average steeplejack is a first class pansy. . . .
Not only was Beatty a great performer, but he was personable and interesting to talk to. We spent two hours together, and I can’t remember when I’ve enjoyed an interview so much (Hellinger Apr. 13, 1934: 14).

The only part he did not particularly like was the close-up visit with the big cats.

“Here are lions and tigers what are lions and tigers! Thoroughly healthy, dangerous, unfriendly, and treacherous, Beatty in contrast was a sweet, unaffected, simple guy. Nervous, quick, smiling, polite and a good listener. . . .He is a fatalist, knows his cats well, and is no fool” (Hellinger Apr. 13, 1934: 14).

The *Sun* insisted the success of the circus in 1934 was because of its emphasis on “drama in the raw.” That, they contended, is what the circus is. “Nine persons out of ten go to the circus to get a thrill, to see men and women flirt with death, and the greater the risk, the better they like it,” Behind Beatty’s, the Wallendas, Mme. Gillette’s and the Zacchinis’ acts—

lie the possibility that something might happen, something not on the program. It’s that, more than any other attraction, that packs’em in at the circus. . . .The big hand goes to the acts in which the performers risk serious injury or death in the event of failure. . . . Take Beatty’s act; it’s sheer courage. . . . He’s got the cats under control, by what at times seems a pretty slim margin. . . All the time the cats are watching for a single sign of his nerve to weaken. . . . A few at a time, he can handle them, but what keeps the customers and their wives gripping the edges of their chairs is the possibility that some day, led by one treacherous beast, the whole pack will turn on Beatty. The thunder of applause that sweeps the Garden as Beatty emerges from the cage and makes his airy bow probably hides many a sigh of relief (New York Sun Apr. 14, 1934: 48).

On April 15, the Sunday Mirror devoted an entire page to “Clyde Beatty Cool in Cage,” The reporter, Lane Sherrard, expected to meet a grim caveman with hard eyes, more at home with animals than people. It proved a shock to find “a very slender, courteous young man with amused gray eyes.” What’s more he admitted he enjoyed talking to people but they did not realize his was an ordinary job like theirs. This nearly knocked the reporter off his chair. “The most modest and profound statement I ever heard made,” continued Sherrard, “was his reply to my question as to whether it took a lot of courage to enter the arena. ‘No, he said,’ anyone could do it who wanted to take the trouble to understand them. That’s the trick. You have to know your animal’” (Sherrard Apr. 15, 1934: 9).

The publicity continued as the *Sun* showed Beatty holding a waif whom he was introducing to one of his caged tigers at the annual circus party for New York’s crippled and orphaned children (“The Very Young Lady and the Tiger” Apr. 16, 1934: 19). The Journal depicted Beatty getting a Secret Agent
X9 badge from Alexander Raymond, who drew the popular daily strip (“Lion Tamer in X-9 Role” Apr. 17, 1934: 13). Since there was no way to stop the journalists, Dexter Fellows decided to cash in on Beatty’s popularity and the current fights to unseat Tammany Hall chieftain, John Curry. The political machine, nicknamed “The Tiger,” had been the seat of power for political bosses like the notorious Boss Tweed. So after an old tiger died peacefully in its cage, Fellows posthumously named him “Boss Tweed,” and said he had pined away after Tammany’s crushing defeat at the polls to Fiorello LaGuardia. Another tiger was quickly dubbed, “John Curry,” after “Boss Tweed” became a rug for Robert Ringling, while the roll over tiger was named, “Fiorello.” But they, “behaved like gentlemen instead of a couple of politicians” (Harrington Apr. 17, 1934: 13 and Joys 1990: 34).

On the 19th, the News picked up the Dorothy Herbert story. Gumpertz announced that he was importing the largest wild animal act in Europe next fall for her to handle. The act, he contended, had seventy lions and tigers. Herbert indicated that she had been experimenting with tigers for some time and they were not very different from untamed horses. “Dorothy, billed as the best known circus girl in the world, will work all winter breaking in her new act.” Next spring she would demonstrate “that a horse girl can know her lions and tigers, too” (New York Daily News Apr. 19, 1934: 27 and Joys 1990: 34).

But the columnists never winked an eye at the rumors. On the 21st, John Chapman in “Mainly About Manhattan,” wrote about Beatty, “the kitty teacher,” and “champ baseball fan.” Beatty in his eagerness to get to the ballgame, had his rollover tiger do two rolls rather than six. Angered she sprang at him, and he got her back in line after a few ticklish moments (Chapman Apr. 21, 1934: 26). The News also pictured Beatty taking a busman’s holiday at the Bronx Zoo with his wife and zoo curator, Raymond Ditmars (“Won’t You Step in Clyde” Apr. 25, 1934). Ed Sullivan of the News queried, “Why Clyde Beatty, the lion tamer, only gets about $20 each time he steps into a cage of thirty lions and tigers (he’s tied to a contract he signed when he was a youngster with the Hagenbeck circus, offspring of the Ringlings)?” (Sullivan Apr. 27, 1934: 60 and Joys 1990: 34).
Beatty later revealed that his low salary was his own fault. He considered it a privilege to work the big cats, in fact, a dream come true. One writer even speculated he would work for nothing more than “three squares” and a dry place to sleep.

Beatty was still enjoying the limelight. He and his bride attended William Fahrenstock, Jr.’s annual circus party held at Bill’s Gay Nineties on East 54th Street. The guests were given large aprons and served beefsteak minus knives and forks (Benedick Apr. 20, 1934: 18). The *New Yorker* reported that Beatty, the guest speaker at the Ohio Society, showed up dressed to kill at the Hotel Pennsylvania—a day late (*New Yorker* Apr. 28, 1934: 17).

Quentin Reynolds wrote a *Collier’s* piece about the five most courageous fighters he knew; Gene Tunney, Bill Terry, Frank Shields, Clyde Beatty, and Eddie Rickenbacker. Reynolds concluded that, “They really ought to be ashamed of themselves; sticking out their chins for punches like that. They’ve got no more right to be alive and yet they laugh and go right back for more. I don’t know, guess they’re all just a little bit crazy—these daredevils with a permanent twinkle in their eyes” (Reynolds Apr. 28, 1934: 10 and Joys 1990: 34).

Meanwhile, the Ringling show had extended its stay at the Garden from three to four weeks. Business ran 30 per cent ahead of the best grosses since 1929, and an air of confidence surrounded the circus. But *Variety* still commented that there “was only one thing lacking in the circus. And that is the lack of sufficient novelty. They repeat year in and year out the same style acts. Names are few. Only Clyde Beatty in recent years coming to the forefront as a billable attraction” (*Variety* Apr. 24: 63 and May, 1, 1934: 55).

Obviously this praise did not thwart Gumpertz in his determination to get rid of Beatty. In the same May edition of *Variety*, he blatantly stated that Beatty and his wild animal act would not be with the Ringling show the following season when it played the Garden. Rather than take Beatty to the Boston date this year, he would be sent directly to Chicago to rejoin Hagenbeck-Wallace in mid-run (*Variety* May 1934: 55). The strategy proved sound. Beatty closed with Ringling on Sunday, opened with Hagenbeck-Wallace for the Tuesday matinee, and by Wednesday night 1,500 were turned away due to an
overflow audience. *Billboard* reported the show would be a near sell-out for the remainder of its run.

Beatty, they conceded, “has a wonderful act and gives the audience the thrill it is looking for” (*Billboard* May 5, 1934 and Joys 1990: 34).

The Gumpertz feud with Beatty seemed foolish at face value, especially when considering Earl Chapin May’s observations in the *Herald-Tribune*. He deemed it lamentable that despite their popularity, fewer lion, tiger, and leopard acts were in circuses. Only a scant dozen such acts were on the road. With only three circuses plying the rails, big cat acts had become too cumbersome for truck shows. Old trainers had found work at amusement parks and zoos, or gone to Hollywood to raise wild animal actors for the movies. No daredevil, ambitious youngsters had a chance. It had come down to two great, established trainers; Clyde Beatty and Mabel Stark. Stark, nicknamed “Crazy Mabel,” already had more years in the arena than any woman, and her endurance record had only been equaled by two living men. Deemed a “suicide trainer,” she had seen contemporary women trainers like Lucia Zora retire, Dolly Castle quit after losing part of a hand to a lion, Ione Carl married and left the circus to help run an orange grove in California, Valecita, a leopard trainer was killed by her charges in her Michigan training barn in 1924, while Adgie and her lions had also retired (May Apr. 15, 1934: 15).

Among the men, Steve Batty had gone into railroad work, Dutch Ricardo married and retired in San Francisco, Louis Roth had an animal farm in Hollywood, Chubby Guilfoyle worked at Snake King’s rattlesnake farm, Franz Woska toiled at the Benson animal farm, and Allen King and Pete Taylor had both dropped out of the business. Of the old-timers only John Helliot and Jules Jacot were still at it after 30 and 25 years respectively (May Apr. 15, 1934: 15).

The world of male trainers was still somewhat competitive, but Beatty, who May called “the Apollo Belvedere of the big cage,” ruled supreme. Beatty has “an all-time record for size and daring in ‘flashy’ cat acts. He takes forty times as many chances as his nineteenth century, bewhiskered progenitors.” Hence he is in and out of the hospital. “Happily,” May added, “while taking chances he takes good care of himself.” The author worried, however, that when Beatty and Stark retired “the gaps they leave may not be filled. Only a few daring souls rise to eminence in their profession. Still fewer
remain long at that eminence. And the opportunities seem to be growing fewer each year” (May Apr. 15, 1934: 15).

Perhaps Gumpertz was convinced Beatty had been over-exposed in New York and that he would be a far more valuable asset in Chicago. There also was the possible problem of jealousy. Circus performers typically labor in relative anonymity, so when Beatty became recognizable to the general public, a feeling of dissension could have flared among the performers.

But the circus season was too hectic and the future too unpredictable for Beatty to worry yet about the loss of the Garden date. In June, his second movie, the serialized Lost Jungle, was released. Variety called it conventional, trite, and implausible, although “Beatty conducts himself fairly well in front of the camera, doing okay on the love interest” (“The Lost Jungle” June 19, 1934: 44).

The New York Times in reviewing it, called him the:

Frank Merriwell of the big top, the shy lover, the scourge of the black-heated, the one-man jungle safari. Too bashful to propose to the gal he loves, she leaves for the South Seas and is shipwrecked. . . .He follows in a dirigible, saves everybody in sight, from everything in sight, and wins the girl. It all has a synthetic look, but the lions and tigers are real, and Mr. Beatty knows his business. The children will sit through it twice (“Lions, Tigers and Mr. Beatty” June 8, 1934: 18).

When the circus moved on to Chicago, Lloyd Lewis of the Chicago Daily News, took the opportunity to blast The Big Cage. He called Beatty a “great dramatist with a cast of killers,” insisting that “one of the blackest marks ever opposite the name of Hollywood. . . . is its failure to make a thriller out Clyde Beatty and his carnivores. How so inept a piece of moving picture work as the recent Big Cage could have been made out of a subject is beyond non-Hollywood comprehension.” He ranted on that with Hagenbeck-Wallace’s ‘beau ideal’s’ every movement is so dramatic that “any film magnate’s little niece could have filmed it with a $2 Brownie Kodak.” Beatty is a great tamer and showman, with the true actor’s “instinct for gathering all eyes upon himself and holding them until he is ready to let them go.” He provides the biggest thrills in a lifetime of circus going. His entrance, in which he fights his way into the arena, already thrills “his audience with the highest-powered prologue I ever saw.” The act itself is “all dynamite and a yard wide.” The act ends with Beatty bringing a tiger down from its perch. “Slowly, hatefully, the tiger glides down from one pedestal to another,” as it approaches, baring its teeth, “Beatty
discards his weapons until he is crouching by it in the tanbark unarmed” (“Lloyd Lewis” May 2, 1934: 31 and Joys 1990: 34).

In August, Beatty arrived on a Sunday in Buffalo, and rescued four boys in a small boat while fishing on the Niagara River. Beatty and his friend, Walter Sweeny, came upon the rowboat caught in the swift current and towed it ashore. The boys, the *Evening News* reported, were almost overwhelmed when they found out who their rescuer was. On Monday the show played to the greatest number of people ever to attend a circus in Buffalo—20,000. The show was called the finest yet—with Beatty’s act the biggest attraction (*Buffalo Evening News* Aug. 13 and 14, 1934; “Clyde Beatty’s Roping” Aug. 14, 1934: 1 and Joys 1990: 34).

A little less than two weeks later, Beatty inadvertently shot himself with his blank gun while battling Sammy during a performance before a capacity crowd in Bay City, Michigan. Blood streamed down his leg, but he finished the act and after treatment went on with the night show. He received repeated medical treatments while still not missing a performance. By the time they showed Ann Arbor on the 28th of August, he was limping badly and there was some doubt he could perform, but he did, and the circus was called truly excellent, “with absolutely no criticism heard from the thousands attending.” But after the evening show, Beatty in extreme pain, could no longer go on and he entered University Hospital where his room was banned to visitors. He was operated on and after ten days, when the chance for infection was passed, he was released (*Ann Arbor News* Aug. 26 thru Sept. 6, 1934 and Joys 1990: 17).

The Washington, D.C. date on September 18th would be special. It marked the first circus parade the capitol had seen in ten years. Beatty, now back with the circus, spent Sunday with Dr. William Mann, director of the National Zoo (*Washington Post* Sept.17, 1934: 3). The next day, the parade proved an enormous success. The *Post* editorialized, “Children crowded the curb; but crowding around them were far more adults. Bureau chiefs and their most mature clerks lined the windows of every governmental office along the route. Serious businessmen and working women deserted their desks to do involuntary homage. There is still some hope, it seems for the Nation; not only are the boys and girls of 1934 just
boys and girls; in the hearts of their elders there still live the boys and girls that used to be” (Editorial. “Tigers and Things” Sept. 18, 1934: 8 and Joys 1990: 17).

Beatty could not miss an opportunity like this so he limped back into the arena after a three-week absence. It was also his wedding anniversary, but for his wife it was not a happy moment. She claimed she was getting increasingly nervous watching him, and the past three weeks had been a welcome time to relax. She wished he would quit and they could have a real home. Harriet disliked meeting her husband’s often wealthy, prestigious non-circus friends when she had to dress in a circus wagon. Her dream that he would tire of the hectic pace of circus life and the tension of placing himself in imminent danger was never to be (Warren Sept. 18, 1934: 12).

The Big Gamble

The eventful season of 1934 gave way to the frantic pace of establishing an entirely new circus over a few months. The remarkable birth of the Cole Bros.—Clyde Beatty Circus meant Beatty had to acquire and train an entirely new act for the 1935 season. The new show had attracted some of the best of the Ringling subsidiary shows’ management and crews along with the most billable act in the circus business.

Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell decided to form the Indiana Circus Corporation, based north of Peru in Rochester, and start their own railroad show with the financial assistance of some Hoosier businessmen and politicians. They quickly announced that they had secured a contract with Clyde Beatty, “the greatest wild animal trainer of all time,” and Allen King, who had been starring in the Standard Oil Live Power Show at the Chicago World’s Fair. The Ringling organization refused to sell as much as a tent stake to the new competitors, although some Peru residents did confiscate some of the abundant surplus Ringling had warehoused for the new circus. Most of the equipment came from the Hall circus farm in Missouri, a depository of defunct shows. Since Ringling owned the majority of possible circus names, the show decided on the still available Cole title. The formation that winter of a 35-car railroad circus was considered one of the epic achievements in circus history. On April 20, 1935 it became the first non-Ringling rail circus to hit the road in four years (Joys 1984: 133-134).
That same month, Ringling’s press release led to the following article in *Business Week*:

The Gumpertz policy is to keep the name of the show superior to any act. He is credited with having built Clyde Beatty’s lion and tiger baiting stunt into a spectacular success. Clyde walked out and joined a rival organization. Mr. Gumpertz was not in the least non-plussed. He still had the lions and tigers which Mr. Beatty was wont to annoy. So what did he do but get Maria Rasputin daughter of the Mad Monk and guaranteed authentic to take over the old Beatty routine. . . The act is going big with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Show. It is said the audience likes the Mad Monk’s daughter just as well as it did Clyde and the animals like her a good deal better (“Three Ring Investments” Apr. 27, 1935: 22-23).

Madame Rasputin proved a fiasco, as did Blacaman, the Mexican animal hypnotist. Finally, Bert Nelson, an established trainer and stand-in for Johnny Weismuller in the Tarzan movies was hired to handle the Beatty act on Hagenbeck-Wallace. When John Ringling North gained family control of the Greatest Show on Earth in 1938, he emphasized his preference for European animal acts “over your whip and pistol boys, pretending to stand in deadly danger while cowing the cats by sheer brutality and the alleged power of the human eye” (North and Hatch 1960: 247). However, before shifting to the Europeans, the show featured one more American trainer, Terrell Jacobs, whom Henry Ringling North described as a “rough and ready character who had lost one eye to a lion [and used] the old fashioned, brutal, whip-and-pistol technique that I hate; but he was very, very, brave (North and Hatch 1960: 247). In 1939 Jacobs worked the largest cat act of all time in America, when he presented between 38 and 52 big cats in a 50-foot arena with Ringling. Some circus fans hoped a feud would begin between Jacobs and Beatty, but “both men laughed them off and remained friends. To put an end to it all, Jacobs said publicly, ‘‘Clyde has done more to advance the animal training profession than any other man’” (Smith in Joys 1984: 281).

In April, Hagenbeck-Wallace and the new Cole show played Chicago simultaneously; the first time in the history of the city two circuses had butted heads. Beatty gained some publicity with his hand-raised cub, Leo, who lived with him in his hotel room, had his own bed, and followed him around like a dog. Leo, had been kept away from other lions and was being trained for movie close-ups (*Chicago Tribune* April 20, 1935).

During the winter of 1936, Beatty did vaudeville dates in Detroit, where he was held over for a second week, as well as in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia (“Clyde Beatty Held Over in Detroit”
Jan. 25, 1936). Later that year, the second of Beatty’s serials was released. In *Darkest Africa*, Beatty had decided to reject modern civilization and set up a camp where he could train the wild animals he captured. He meets, Baru, a jungle boy, with one of the most unappealing physiques of all time. In real life, Manuel King was the son of Texas animal dealer, Snake King, who had provided his son with an animal act of his own. Baru, accompanied by a large ape that is his friend and protector, enlists Beatty’s help in rescuing his sister, Valerie, who has been captured and made the Goddess of Joba, a lost city. Eventually, Beatty and the safari he has organized reach Joba after battling hostile natives, lions, tigers, and the winged Bat Men who protect the city. In Joba, they find that Dagna, the high priest needs Valerie’s influence to retain power. He is assisted in capturing and keeping Beatty, Baru, and Valerie captive by two rival animal traders who secretly believe that there is a fortune in jewels hidden in Joba. Valerie, convinced the situation is hopeless, decides to perform the supreme sacrifice of jumping off a massive pinnacle so that Baru and Beatty will be released. However, her devoted teacher, the elderly Gorn, dons her robe and makes the leap instead. Beatty, Valerie and Baru get loose and escape just in time, as the city, along with the villains, are demolished by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions (Stedman 1964 and Lahue1964).

Interest in serials began at a time when the motion picture industry was making the transition from one- and two-reelers to feature films. Many executives resisted the longer films, while smaller companies found them too expensive to produce. Serials seemed to be a compromise. They did not cost that much per unit, enabling the producer to get financial support, but with a dozen or more installments could surpass a feature in length. The new genre, born in 1914, appealed to audiences, who would return weekly to theaters in order not to miss a chapter. This endeared them to exhibitors. The first American serial was produced by William Selig and dealt with an American girl who inherited a throne in India. The thirteen chapters of *The Adventures of Kathlyn* were filled with animal scenes, which would become a trademark of Selig’s success. The next major serial was a cooperative effort between Hearst newspapers and Pathé; *The Perils of Pauline*. Warner Bros. began a cycle of jungle serials in 1920, which was followed by five more in the next two months. Selig’s entry, *The Jungle Goddess*, was extremely
elaborate and featured 470 animals from Selig’s private zoo, and necessitated the construction of a huge statue of a jungle god that could house 20 lions (Stedman 1964 and Lahue 1964).

Following World War I, serial makers turned increasingly to real life heroes as their stars. Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney, James J. Corbett, Red Grange, Harry Houdini, and assorted Olympic medallists all appeared in serials. The serials also proved extremely valuable in developing the skills of future stuntmen (Stedman 1964 and Lahue 1964).

In 1929, Joseph P. Kennedy, chairman of Pathe, ceased making serials because he believed the cumbersome nature and inflexibility of the new sound stages would make it impossible to shoot outdoor adventures. Universal took up the challenge and became especially famous for their western heroes, like Tom Mix, Tim McCoy, Ken Maynard, Gene Autry, Buck Jones, and John Wayne. The chapter play was also an ideal venue to introduce comic book characters to the screen, such as Tailspin Tommy, in 1935, and Ace Drummond, the following year. Serials could be very lucrative, only costing from $90,000 to $200,000 to make, they often netted over a million dollars, since they typically played in from 8 to 9,000 theaters for 12 to 15 weeks, or “until virtue was rewarded” Will Hays representing the motion picture industry thanked Universal for bringing an estimated 20 million children back to the theatre (Stedman 1964; Lahue 1964 and “Continued Next Week” June 5, 1938).

Youngsters loved the serials and followed the adventures of their heroes with loyalty and respect. It was a shame that some producers only put forth their best, most spectacular efforts in the first three chapters—those shown to the trade for bookings. Even though some critics believe American serial makers missed the opportunity to make better pictures, the films have sociological and historical value since they showed Americans’ increasing fascination with speed; since they were shot outside, they provide a record of changing America; and they spelled out the moral standards of the day (Barbour 1970). But for kids, the serials provided “twenty minutes of hair-raising escapes, spectacular battles, mile-a-minute chases, hidden treasures, secret plans, diabolical scientific devices—all held together by a tenuous and at the same time extremely complicated plot” (Weiss and Goodgold 1972: vi)
Every kid in the audience knew, deepdown, they were smarter that the hero, who continually walked into traps, repeatedly making the same mistakes. Yet they rooted him on against a villain who was always determined to get something; land, treasure, or the world. They were preferable to most action pictures of the day that followed the formula of a battle at the beginning, one in the middle, and a big climatic one at the end. In between there was “love stuff or talk, talk, talk,” The serials had in their favor very little dialogue, lots of action (fights, chases and explosions), and no love stuff. If the plot was weak, who cared, as long as it did not interfere with the action (Weiss and Goodgold 1972: ix).

Beatty’s first serial was made by Mascot, which specialized in the genre. Mascot was founded by Nat Levine, whose serials were known for fast action, deep intrigue, offbeat plots, and good production techniques. Darkest Africa was Republic’s first effort. Republic, the result of a merger of Mascot, Consolidated, Monogram, and several independents, set a new standard of production quality along with a well-established distribution system to theaters in large cities. It allowed directors like B. Reeves Eason, who made Darkest Africa, to hone skills they would use later on in major action motion pictures. Republic, as compared to other serial makers, came to specialize in amazingly fine miniatures created by the Lydecker brothers that put the efforts of the big studios to shame. They were also extremely adept at choreographing fight scenes. By comparison, Columbia’s serials, in which Frank Buck starred in the first production, seemed absurdly exaggerated exercises in perpetual frenzy. Raymond Stedman, in The Serials, quips that Beatty, who “could handle animals as no other human could,” hacked his way through the jungle first to find Cecilia Parker, and then to fund Elaine Shepherd, who were in both cases far more appealing than the quarry Frank Buck tried to bring back. “In fact, when Buck himself, landed in the serial jungle in 1937, it was neither Miss Parker nor Miss Shepherd he pursued, but “the Jungle Menace. To tell the truth old Frank missed out on a lot of fun that went on in the chapter play jungle” (Stedman 1964: 92).

Spinoffs of the serials included Whitman Publishing’s Big Little Books, which were half words (on the even numbered pages), half pictures—either black and white drawings or film stills, on the opposite pages. Beatty was featured in four of these books, which might have proved to be an enduring
venue, if they had not been supplanted by comic books (Stedman 1964). Another spinoff was kids’ serials on radio. Here too, Beatty was a player, with his show, along with Black Hawk, and Mark Trail, replacing Jack Armstrong, Tom Mix and Superman in the early 1950s. These shows ended in 1955, replaced by television adventure series (Stedman 1964).

After two years of establishing the show on the road, the Cole management announced the unthinkable—it would challenge Ringling in New York, breaking the 40-year monopoly Ringling enjoyed in the city.

The fall and winter of 1936-37 were seasons of turmoil for the circus industry. In November, Edward Ballard, former head of the American Circus Corporation was shot and killed by his former partner in Hot Springs, Arkansas. A week later, the Al G. Barnes Circus announced it was not renewing Mabel Stark’s contract. Hagenbeck-Wallace would be pitted against Cole Bros. on the West Coast. Most tragic of all was the death of John Ringling on December 7 (Joys 1990: 34).

The following day, the New York Times announced that the city would be the scene of a circus war—“Cole-Beatty debut to break 40-Year monopoly.” The Times continued that the “undisputed reign over the hearts of children and other circus fans hereabouts that the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus has wielded each Spring is to be challenged next March by a rival organization.” Two earlier attempts at a challenge, one by Sells-Floto, which was then absorbed by Ringling, and one by the 101 Ranch Wild West Show, failed to survive (“Rival of Big Show Plans Circus War” Dec. 8, 1936: 27).

The circus would play the 5,000-seat Hippodrome and would be staged in the manner of Billy Rose’s, Jumbo, which had played there the previous year. Allen Foster, who had choreographed that show would do the same for Cole’s forty-girl ensemble. The “outstanding novelty of the circus” wrote Robert Bulkley, Jr. of the Herald-Tribune, “is that it will be presented in a theater and will feature a ballet troupe of nearly a hundred girls. This is the first time that a circus has been given in a New York theater and is the first attempt to put on a ‘continental’ or ‘intimate’ circus in New York” (Bulkley, Jr. Mar. 14, 1937: 5). Raymond Dean, the show’s advance agent assured the press that Beatty’s animals were still “rough
“and tough” and “will give young and intrepid Mr. Beatty as much of a thrill from inside the cage as the spectators get from their seats” (“Circus Lions Roar” March 2, 1937: 11).

Fellows snorted that any circus outfit had the right to come to the big city, if they like. “Few have liked and fewer still survived the experience.” Fellows indicated they certainly were not worried about the competition (“Rival of Big Show” Dec. 8, 1936: 27. In a more humorous vein, Variety reported that Beatty was in Africa trying to secure a “tyron”—a cross between a tiger and lion that was one-and-a-half the size of a fully-grown lion, while a later issue claimed Beatty would have 70 lions and tigers in the cage. In actuality, Beatty and his wife had been touring Europe for two months, buying animals for the show (“Beatty’s 70 Cats” Feb. 10, 1937: 63 and Joys 1990: 17).

**Return of the Hero**

The Cole circus beat Ringling to New York and ran unopposed most of its date, including the always very lucrative Easter week which began on March 28. Ringling missed the opportunity because of the earliness of the holiday and the resultant conflict with the hockey schedule. Ringling’s attempts to play the Bronx Coliseum also were hampered by the boxing and wrestling cards that held sway at the venue.

Therefore, Cole-Beatty received the type of pre-opening coverage usually afforded Ringling. Publicity shots of elephants, girls on horses, and Beatty posing with his 550-pound lion, Menelik, filled the papers. One well-ballyhooed stunt was Beatty’s plan to stand in a Radio City studio at 7:45 p.m. and give commands to his animals over a microphone. Hopefully it would answer the enigma, “Are wild animals controlled by their master’s voice or by his physical presence and his actions.” Raymond Ditmars told NBC the attempt “should be of great public interest and should answer questions in animal psychology.” Mrs. Beatty was to be in the cage with the animals at the Hippodrome “to help them get along in case Clyde slips in big words the animals don’t get” (Cook Mar. 12, 1937: 12).

The circus arrived in New York at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad freight yards at Eleventh Avenue and Twenty-Fifth Street at 3 p.m. one day behind a snowstorm (“Circus Comes to City in Wake of Snow” Mar. 16, 1937: 25). The radio experiment was tried, and although the cats came to attention at
Beatty’s voice, rather than obeying, they began to fight one another, which proved the trainer’s presence was imperative. WINS would, however, broadcast different aspects of the circus every afternoon for a week (Gross Mar. 18, 1937: 58). Beatty also announced that his wife now had an act of her own in which a lion and tiger rode together on the back of an elephant. He himself had 38 lions and tigers, but he feared them less than New York traffic. “I wouldn’t drive a car in New York for any amount of money” (McCarthy Mar. 12, 1937: 26 and Joys 1990: 34).

On March 18, the circus opened, but unhappily the front pages of the papers were dominated by the Texas school disaster in which 427 were killed in a gas blast. Still the show opened to good reviews although it became quickly evident that the “fascinating possibility that one of the trapeze artists may land in your lap,” proved a bit disconcerting to the Post reporter used to the vastness of the Garden (Waldorf Mar. 19, 1937). There was “an intimate and informal air about this circus in a theater which combined pageantry an sex appeal,” according to the Herald-Tribune reporter (“Circus Opens” Mar. 19, 1937: 10). Douglas Gilbert of the World-Telegram called the show thrilling and amusing, and a winner. Every act “is high class and big-time and not something dragged off the top shelf of George Hamid’s whistle stop booking lists.” The high spot of the circus, Gilbert insisted, was certainly Clyde Beatty’s performing lions and tigers. The only problem was the staging in which the ring was set so deep, side-seated customers found it difficult to see (Gilbert Mar. 19, 1937: 32 and Joys 1990: 34).

The Sun concurred that the one-ring circus had many merits.

You don’t have to be cross-eyed to take it in. Its aerial acts, performed without the security of nets and within startling reach of the human eye, are almost too daring and dangerous for comfort. . . . There isn’t a dull moment in the show. . . . the piece de resistance, of course, is Clyde Beatty himself, with more dangerous looking lions and tigers than ever, and the thrill increases immeasurably by the fact that much of the audience is close enough almost to count the teeth of the lions and have a look at the tiger’s tonsils (“Little Circus Faces Long Run” Mar. 19, 1937: 21).

John Anderson of the Journal called it grand entertainment. . . . As my cause for going, submit that even a drama critic deserves entertainment when he can find it. . . . It is difficult to decide whether it’s more hair-raising to defy gravity or a cageful of lions and tigers. Plainly both are for reckless people every instant of time, but a cageful of wild beasts is, plainly, more pictorial and dramatic. Old General Gravity just sits there doing nothing much. But tigers snarl, and horses sweat when they smell them being brought
in, and everybody tries to pretend they are sitting on something besides the edge of the seat and a violent imagination. It’s no use. The Clyde Beatty stunt is the works, and the only act you could end such a circus with, I should imagine, except, probably, pandemonium. Like the one and only Popeye, Mr. Beatty ought to come out in favor of spinach. They are real lions, though I wish to heaven they weren’t (Anderson Mar. 19, 1937: 24).

Actually, Variety observed, the Cole name was absent on the Hippodrome canopy. It announced simply, “Clyde Beatty Circus.” Beatty worked 38 cats and the critic noticed scant difference between these and the old Hagenbeck-Wallace lions and tigers. The finale was not only a roll-over tiger, but one that spinned as well (Variety Mar. 24, 1937: 79 and Joys 1990: 34).

The circus was patronized by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, his wife and children, and Governor and Mrs. Hoffman of New Jersey and their family. The event gained fine publicity and the circus announced it would go to three performances a day during Easter week. Bill Farnsworth, sports editor of the Journal noted that,

A war to the death has been declared between the Cole-Beatty circus and the Ringling Bros. Who enter New York shortly. . . Beatty once worked with Ringling but left over a salary squabble, and he told the latter he could run a better circus any day. . . Ringling told him he would starve. . . . Now the Beatty outfit is clicking at the Hippodrome and the Ringlings are gnashing their teeth (Farnsworth Mar. 20, 1937: 13).

In another column, Farnsworth noted that his son had taken to hanging around the stage door of the Hippodrome, so he checked it out and “found 40 ballet girls in the Cole-Beatty circus that out look the chorus of any legit show that has been on Broadway in years” (Farnsworth Mar. 26, 1937: 26).

John Chapman of the News hoped that the Beatty show proved that there is a public demand for a one-ring circus where things are intimate and cozy. Maybe it will give some showmen the idea New York can support a permanent one-ring affair like, for instance, the Cirque d’Hiver or Cirque Medrano in Paris. “I hope so. A circus could be built around a few clowns like [Emmett] Kelly” (Chapman Apr. 4, 1937: 36).

The expensively designed and costumed Cole show kept prices at a reasonable $2.50 maximum, despite the small size of the Hippodrome. The circus broke even, but the publicity it received was far greater than money could buy and would enable it to virtually hammer to death Hagenbeck-Wallace when
it tried to dog its route. Critics raved about the clowns, Emmett Kelly and Otto Greibling, but as usual their best efforts were reserved for Beatty, as if the two-year hiatus had never occurred (Joys 1990: 34).

Noted Broadway historian, Gilbert Seldes, then a reporter for the *Journal*, wrote how his spies from four to nine-and-a-half found Beatty the highlight. “It is reported that Mr. Beatty plays ping pong to relax after a day’s work with ‘the cats.’ . . . My spies don’t think his work tiring; they want to go right in there with him. They say the circus is ‘neat’” (Seldes Mar. 30, 1937: 20).

On the 19th of March, *Journal* cartoonist Burris Jenkins, reported on finally getting enough nerve to enter the big cage with Beatty. He was one of a handful of people who hung around the Hippodrome at one a.m. to watch Beatty break some new cats. Jenkins wrote with as much vigor as he drew.

He jerks open the safety cage and slams it behind him in one motion. Right in his face, cavernous jaws drip, snarling. Green eyes smoldering with hate and fear, watch the little man coming. This master! This relentless enemy, but their master. . . . and then he is in the middle of them. One crack of the whip, one shot from the gun, one electric move of fearlessness, and yellow tawny bodies that could crush his head with a blow cringe snarling into corners before the magnetism of courage. . . . So I’m standing by the safety cage full of relief and admiration as we watch the world’s greatest trainer in action. I have just asked his strikingly pretty blonde wife, if she was nervous while he was in the cage. I had noticed her standing silent and tense, her eyes on the ground nearby. She answered shortly, without looking up, ‘of course’ (Jenkins, Jr. Mar. 19, 1937: 29).

When Jenkins enters the arena, “I see a lioness start for us and realize that nothing stands between me and eternity but Clyde Beatty.” As the lioness dives from her platform, Jenkins is out of the arena, before he even takes another breath (Jenkins, Jr. Mar. 19, 1937: 29 and Joys 1990: 34).

Frank Graham of the *Sun* devoted his entire column to Beatty and his love of sports. “He wanted to play in the infield of the Cubs or win the lightweight championship of the world,” wrote Graham. “But one spring he ran off with the circus. And wound up the biggest big cat trainer of his time. Or any other time maybe” (Graham Apr. 23, 1937: 30). On April 12, the *Post* ran a photo of Beatty with two boxers since they were all known as “tough fighters” (“Getting Tamed by an Expert” Apr. 12, 1937 and Joys 1990: 34).

Hype Igoe of the *Journal* did a full-page photo essay on Beatty. “Looking Beatty right in the eye,” began Igoe in “Twentieth Century Tarzan,”
you’d never dream that he, in turn can look in the eye, the most treacherous animals in the world, lions, tigers, black and spotted panthers, mountain lions, grizzly bears, polar bears, bears of all nations, gorillas, elephants, and hyenas, and make them cringe and back away. Mister Beatty calls them ‘taggers’ those striped cats. You’d take him for a polite bank clerk. He is known as the man with a thousand scars but strange to say, not one of the ‘cats’ has marred his handsome young face yet. We both mentioned it at the same time and, as if by magic, we knocked three times, the nearest bit of wood to us and said, ‘ungerrufen!’ (Igoe Mar. 25, 1937: 30).

The New Yorker observed that since they last interviewed Beatty he is,

Five years older, naturally, and five pounds heavier, which brings his weight up to 149. He now has three rather distinguished looking worry lines on his forehead—the kind of worry lines that contentious lions and tigers give you. His fingernails and street clothes have brightened up considerably, the result we would guess of a recent stay in Hollywood, during which he made three pictures. And he has taken unto him a flaxen-haired wife named Harriet, who has blue eyes and artificial lashes (“Cole King” Mar. 27, 1937).

The writer continued that in 1936 Beatty netted $60,000 and this year hoped to make $70,000—a far cry from what he received on Ringling (“Cole King” Mar. 27, 1937 and Joys 1990: 34).

A couple of days later, Jack Layer of the Journal, who had done a photo essay with Hype Igoe on Beatty, did another photo spread, this time with his lions and tigers. For example, “Yes, me name is Al. I’m the top lion in your act, but I’m gonna tell you something, Beatty. You go in there and strut your stuff at our expense. Suppose that we took it into our noggins to pick a tenderloin or two off your carcass?” (Layer Mar. 31, 1937: 23). The next day, Haenigsen, a Journal cartoonist ran a strip, “Meditation of a Clyde Beatty Lion” (Haenigsen Apr. 1, 1937), which was followed by an essay on Beatty that ran on the Journal’s amateur writers’ page (Dreyfuss Apr. 2, 1937: 35). On April 4, the News featured a well-promoted special full-page, full-color rotogravure of Beatty and Menelik on the front page of the coloroto section (“Menelik and Clyde Beatty in Coloroto” Apr. 4, 1937: 93 and Joys 1990: 34).

Reporters also got a lot of mileage from stories about Beatty’s wife. William Engle of the World-Telegram interviewed Harriet, who said it was “more trying to be a lion tamer’s wife than to be a lion tamer, and she knows because she is both . . . .” There is a peculiar fascination about working with the great cats, she had found. “They are so moody, their irrationalities are so unpredictable, minor emergencies are so continually imminent that the excitement of seeing Clyde in the cage surrounded by a tumbling, guttural mass of them has never left her” (Engle Mar. 31, 1937: 23 and Joys 1990: 34).
On the day Ringling opened in the Garden, the News did a feature on Harriet and her act, devoting the whole center spread of the paper consisted of action pictures of her performance (New York Daily News Mar. 31, 1937: 4, 36-37). The Journal’s magazine section, “Up Swing Street,” column by James Aswell discussed Harriet and Clyde. “The audience wants blood!” claimed Beatty. “Of course they don’t think so, but they do. It’s what makes my act get over. Yet it has pushed me to greater and greater risks. I don’t know where to go from here.” He contended that his act was about as dangerous as it could be and still be done two or three times a day. He enjoys the audience pressure, but does not know what more he can do. “You’ve got to keep on taking bigger and bigger risks and no matter what you did last time, you’ve got to do more next time. It’s like a drug.” Aswell described him as a “wiry terrier” with a “small boy eagerness about his face. . . . Beatty likes the smell of danger—and the smell of lions and tigers, which with him is the same. Maybe Dr. Freud and Dr. Jung could diagnose his case as that of a man with a love of risk like the love some men feel for music or chorus girls or Ming pottery” (Aswell Apr. 17, 1937: 18).

Dale Carnegie in his Five Minute Biographies, observed of Beatty, “If he’s got to die, he’d rather be gored to death than bored to death” (Carnegie 1937). Noted journalist Drew Pearson wrote how surprised he was at Beatty’s size, “[He] looks like a lion cub could knock him over,” as well as his low and pleasant voice and “his eyes—well there seemed to be nothing unusual about them” (Pearson and Allen reprinted in Cole Bros. Circus Program 1937: 4).

Beatty once admitted that he was a “little middleweight against the equal of two heavyweights,” whose razor-sharp claws possessed a swifter, more deadly swing than any pugilist. Any time he felt his ego swell, he just had to remind himself that each succeeding crowd coming to see him “thought that eventually I was going to be killed, and they might be in on it. Some of them probably thought that seeing me get killed would be like some kind of distinction, like attending an execution.” Unlike other trainers, who always claimed nervelessness was a requisite for success with wild animals, Beatty admitted that the arena “is and must be ruled by mass fear. I have said that I am scared constantly. Well so are the cats. There are forty of them, weighing nearly 20,000 pounds. Yet funny as it may seem, they are scared of me,
but being a human being, I am better able to camouflage my fear with bluff, and keep them thinking I'm tough.” He never showed fear in the ring. “If you ever give an inch with animals it would be all over,” he wrote, and added: “But sometimes, it seems when I relax my nerves give way” (Beatty and Wilson 1941: 37). His wife confirmed that after a “perilous scene with an animal Clyde will quiver all night long. His nerves are not of iron” (Randall Feb. 17, 1935 and Joys 1984).

“Now he has the scarifying fact, that he might not satisfy the blood lust of his fans. He felt you could only hoke up an act to a certain point, and then you need real danger. ‘He paused and grinned: ‘I’ve got one card left. I’m playing it here in Chicago. I’m giving them my wife.’” Harriet, who Aswell claimed looked and spoke something like Garbo, had her own very dangerous act, which should sate the fans for a while (Aswell Apr. 17, 1937: 18).

*Everyweek Magazine* ran a full-page article, “Why Clyde Beatty Had to Let His Wife Go in the Lion Cage.” It said that the diminutive, 104 pound Harriet wanted an act. She was scared to death, but she loved it. But she had to cure herself of one bad habit—screaming (Welshimer May, 16, 1937: 1). *Variety* reported that she did a great job handling the cats, “with Beatty, showman that he is, just outside the cage, seemingly with every muscle tense, adds thus another thrill to his wife’s act” (*Variety* Apr. 21, 1937: 61).

As the circus neared the end of its run in New York, it gained more publicity when it played host to 4,000 orphans from 15 city institutions, and it was clear to all observers that Beatty was their special hero. Ed Sullivan called Beatty, “the kid who used to bring garter snakes to school and scare you half to death.” In another column, he mentioned watching Beatty petting a scraggly Sixth Avenue tomcat (Sullivan Mar. 31, 1937: 48 and Apr. 6, 1937: 38). Then on April 8, there was one last publicity stunt that drew the attention of all the papers (Joys 1990: 34).

At 3:50 p.m. following his act, Beatty was arrested by the Humane Society’s Jacob Jacobs, as he left the arena, booked, and released on $500 bail at the West Forty-Seventh Street station. Jacobs claimed that he had watched Beatty for years and had no complaints about the cats’ care, but the prodding and whipping had to go. Beatty indignantly told reporters he would have plenty to say at his court appearance the next morning. Doc Partello, manager of the circus and Sol Strauss, attorney, declared they would help
represent Beatty in court (“Beatty Arrested for Cruelty” Apr. 8, 1937: 7). The flushed trainer acted as if he were in no mood to hear the question, “Is this a publicity stunt?”—no less answer it, claimed the Times (“Beatty Arrested as Cruel to Beasts” Apr. 8, 1937: 21). The next morning, Magistrate Anthony F. Burke, said there was nothing to the case. When told that Beatty wanted to explain his side, the Magistrate smiled and said, “Scram!” (“Clyde Beatty Held Not Cruel” Apr. 8, 1937: 26 and Joys 1990: 34).

Beatty contended that, “The only purpose of the whip is to keep their attention concentrated on me. I defy anyone on my position to hurt those fellows and get away with it—they wouldn’t stand for it. I’ll stake my reputation you can’t find a single mark on any of those cats” (“Big Cats’ Growls” Apr. 8, 1937). Beatty then went into the pressroom and told the reporters, “I’ll take any man in this room in the cage with me and prove to him that most of the time, I simply crack the whip and don’t touch the animals at all. With singular unanimity, the reporters, most of whom have been in the West Side Court for years and are reported to be so hardboiled that their skins would turn an ice pick, declined the invitation.” Beatty continued to explain that welts are often actually scars that the fighting animals gave each other, and the cats were prodded on entering and exiting the arena only to keep them from further fighting (“Beatty is Freed in Cruelty Case” Apr. 8, 1937: 14). The whip, he added, had a cotton popper on its end, which only made noise when snapped, not when hitting an animal. He extended an invitation to enter the arena to Jacobs, so the officer could show him the proper way of handling the animals. At noon, Beatty addressed a luncheon of the Banshees, a group of writers, commentators, and publishers, where he got to explain his case in detail (“Clyde Beatty Freed of Cruelty Charge” Apr. 9, 1937: 19 and Joys 1990: 34). At the end of the trial, the Post reported, “The judge wore a broad smile, the defendant wore a broad smile. The complaining witness wore a broad smile. Everybody was having fun” (“Beatty’s Accuser” Apr. 8, 1937: 21). Bill Farnsworth of the Journal wrote the next day,

They had Clyde Beatty arrested for cruelty to animals. . . . The poor cute little tigers and old-softie lions that he puts through performances at the circus in the Hippodrome . . . Clyde must feel terrible over being such a hard-hearted gent. . . . There was a Jacobs to Jacobs to Jacobs triple play in Beatty’s laughable arrest. . . . I believe it was Inspector Jacobs who had Clyde arrested. . . . When Beatty was dragged to the Forty-Seventh Street Station house, he asked for Detective Jacobs, whom he knows. . . . and Mike Jacobs bailed him out. Also, somewhere along the line we
suspect that Mike Jacobs engineered the arrest. . . As a publicity stunt. . . Anyway, it made the front pages (Farnsworth Apr. 9, 1937: 30).

Of course, Burris Jenkins couldn’t let it lie, and drew a cartoon of the man-eating Yankees, depicted as big cats, called “More Cruelty to Animals,” with a banged up trainer (the Southern Leagues) shouting, “Oh, Clyde! How do you tell’em you ain’t gon’a hurt’em???” (Jenkins, Jr. Apr. 10, 1937: 11 and Joys 1990: 34).

The prize plum of 1937 had to be the *Time* magazine story that landed Beatty on the cover, the first and so far only circus performer to be so honored. He was shown holding a lion cub, with a quote from *The Big Cage*, that “our civilization places too high a valuation on the cute and the cunning.” It referred to Beatty’s contention that hand-raised cubs were extremely cute, but it was their undoing, since nothing was more characterless than a spoiled lion or tiger cub. The writer described the new circus and felt the show,

stepped into another class altogether when a rising curtain disclosed a steel cage, 32 feet in diameter. . . the lights were lowered, a sound like thunder rumbled through, and synthetic lightning glimmered. A big heavy-maned lion loped from the runway into the cage, slithered along an upward-sloping row of pedestals until he was crouched on the highest one. This continued until twenty-five lions and lionesses, fifteen tigers and tigresses were seated. The thrilling act that follows is so thoroughly dramatized and hoked up to get the last tingling thrill from the most distant customer, that the skeptical are likely to be unaware of the act’s real dangers ("Cat Man" Mar. 29, 1937: 44-45).

The reporter, just as those first meeting Beatty in 1931, found him to be still a small town boy—mild, friendly, likeable, and unostentatious—but there was a new confidence in this natural showman. He felt that blasé New Yorkers would not want to wait until the end of the show for his act. “‘After all’, the world’s greatest cat man blandly observed, “most of ‘em must come here to see my act. It was just too long for’em to set there’” ("Cat Man" Mar. 29, 1937: 44-45).

The circus program ran a story reprinted from “The Washington Merry-Go-Round,” by Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen. It claimed that Beatty hoped to go to Munich to buy some hybrid lion-tiger mixes, and also hoped to look into a report that a black tiger had been caught in Singapore. In the story Beatty, who tried to train a new cat in a month’s time, insisted that American audiences liked their acts
rough and raw. The nearer the trainer comes to being eaten alive, the better the show is (Pearson and Allen in *Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus Program* 1937: 4).

During the Chicago run, the *Sunday Tribune* ran a big double page spread on “Who is King of the Beasts?” This type of story, still so common on nature programs today, began by arguing that there are “many contenders for the crown.” For the most part the fighters had to be evaluated on dispositions, size, speed, weight, and sketchy reports of actual combats providing food for forecasting the outcome. The most discussed fight—the lion versus tiger—had plenty of material provided by Beatty’s act. In the arena nine times out of ten, the lion will lick a tiger. The lion’s mane provided too much protection for the tiger to get a clean shot at its rival’s throat. In the wild, lions are often killed by hoofstock, especially the African buffalo. According to Frank Buck, the lord of the jungle is the elephant, against who a lion or tiger has no chance. Although the hippo has some formidable weapons in its tusks, there was not any real data on inter-species brawls involving the animals. In India, leopards, tigers, and sloth bears are the most dangerous animals. Bears were rated with the Alaskan brown bear as number one, followed by the grizzly and polar bears. Too little was known about the gorilla as a fighter, but the orangutan reportedly can pull open a crocodile’s jaws and rip out its throat, while the great ape seizes pythons and bites them to death. It would have no chance with a lion or tiger, however. In an alligator-anaconda battle, the snake killed the ‘gator, but subsequently died from the bites it had received. When bulls and lions were pitted, the bull could defeat a lion raised in captivity, but was quickly killed by a wild lion. The jaguar has great strength and has killed pumas, alligators and horses, but no one knows how it would fare against a lion or tiger. Another questionable fight would pit a killer whale against a great white shark. The article concluded that the two great champions were the elephant and lion, with the elephant because of its formidable size, strength intelligence, and effective weapons, the ultimate champ (Murchie, Jr. Apr. 11, 1937: 1).

On October 27, 1937, the Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus played its final date before returning to its winterquarters. Circus fans traveled from afar--as if by premonition-- to see this last performance. Writing about the date years later, one who was there recalled: “For one shining season the show had reached to great heights and those who were privileged to see it have never forgotten it and to this day
will still declare there has never been anything quite like it thereafter” (Bradbury July-August 1966: 16). The parade alone was a magnificent addition to a show that spanned the nation and earned rave reviews from New York to Hollywood. *Billboard* had said:

As usual Clyde Beatty and his lions and tigers occupy the center of interest and probably for the first time in his career the young showman closes the program. . . . The act bears out the fact that Messrs. Adkins and Terrell have still the biggest drawing card in the circus world. . . . Here is possibly the greatest circus attraction of this era. Instead of his appeal being diluted by perennial appearances Beatty does a reverse. . . by showing up as a considerably punchier item than in his first appearances with the Ringling show several years ago. His film and radio appearances help audience appreciation and have had their effect on him too. He has grown considerably in stature as a showman. He seems to be able to do anything with the cats except make them sing. The display could not be anything but last because no attraction in this layout, could possibly follow and expect to hold audience attention (Bradbury March-April 1966: 20-21).

Buoyed by the successful season, Adkins and Terrell enlarged their winterquarters and planned to put a second show—15-car Robbins-- on the road in 1938. Beatty stayed with Cole and *Billboard* claimed he was doing the most spectacular act in his career as a wild animal trainer with possibly the largest number of cats ever used in an act of its kind. From the start it is filled with thrills and daring fearlessness. Beatty colors his work with dramatic showmanship and is master of the situation at all times. He has two rearing lions this year instead of one, and the roll-over tiger is still one of the highlights of the offering (Bradbury Pt IX 1966: 16).

They also enjoyed the unusual act featuring a lion and tiger riding side by side on an elephant, presented by Harriet (Bradbury Pt. IX 1966: 16).

That summer, *Collier’s* featured an article, “Bars and Stripes,” co-authored by Beatty and Anthony, in which Beatty explained that he had to break with Ringling because he felt he only had nine or ten years to earn enough to support himself and his family for the rest of their lives. He described the difficulties of putting together a new act with a combination of the experienced lions Zack Terrell owned, but were familiar with another trainer’s cues, and some green animals. He had to be much more careful with sullen, quiet animals, than those who acted as if they wanted to tear the arena apart in their youthful exuberance (Beatty and Anthony July 2, 1938: 14).

Later in July, Beatty was the guest columnist for Walter Winchell’s, *On Broadway* column, while the reporter was on vacation. Beatty noted that the big cats don’t attack a trainer for food. “The beef we
feed them is tastier than even the most succulent columnist.” They get 15 pounds a day, he added. He described the cats as very lazy, and that performing annoys them. He warned Winchell that if he planned to substitute for him when he was on vacation, he should wear very light clothing to insure mobility, since armor wouldn’t help, since the big cats can bite through sheet metal. Beatty then made a request from Winchell (“Walter Winchell on Broadway” July 20, 1938: 10A). Last year when he dropped into the Stork Club with his wife,

newspaper people asked me, ‘What was the biggest thrill I ever had?’ When I answered they all kidded me. I said I got a letter saying a chapter from my life story had been selected for inclusion in a set of books called, The New Junior Classics. Writers included Robert Burns, Robert Browning, Aesop, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Charles Dickens. . .

I know I will never be able to make words roll over and leap through flying hoops, but I can’t help recalling the prediction of a family member who would try to frighten me into studying by saying that when I grew up, I wouldn’t be able to read and enjoy the great authors. So tell those reporters, ‘Clyde wasn’t fooling.’ If you don’t, I’ll fix it so you get into more than the normal amount of trouble when you pinch hit for me in the steel arena’ (“Walter Winchell On Broadway” July 20, 1938: 10A).

End of the Dream and Rebuilding

Stimulated by an apparent upturn in the economy, six railroad circuses and five large motorized truck circuses hit the road in 1938. But horrible weather and an unexpected return of financial woes caused two to close in April; a third pulled off the road in May. Unions picketed Hagenbeck-Wallace, Robbins, and King, who tried to elude the problems by playing Canada, but there the economy was equally poor. Cole signed a union contract, but Ringling refused and closed on June 25. Cole hung on in the demoralized atmosphere, advertising itself as “Now, the Greatest Show on Earth.” On July 4, another show closed. Cole battled torrential rains, moved smoothly, and its employees remained loyal, but investors were panicking. Rather than have the circus stranded, they ordered it back to winterquarters in secret. On August 6, the surprised troupe found itself in Rochester (Bradbury March-April 1967: 14 and Joys 1984: 145).

Robbins soldiered on, now facing a horrible heat wave. Six rail cars including Beatty’s act were sent to bolster the show. The Tom Mix and Hagenbeck-Wallace Circuses closed, but Robbins surprisingly was playing to capacity crowds in Georgia. But management decided, again secretly, to pull the plug. The
performers woke up in the Nashville rail yards to the announcement the show had closed and they were all out of a job. The Indiana Circus Corporation declared a debt of $418,338 without a single asset. The winter of 1938-39 was the worst in circus history. Al G. Barnes closed for good, and Jess Adkins, considered by some circus historians as the last great manager, died (Bradbury March-April 1967: 14 and Joys 1984: 145).

Beatty, rather than rebuilding again, took his cats and three elephants in lieu of back pay and incorporated the Clyde Beatty Circus Unit as a basis for a future show. Cole Bros. suffered a disastrous winterquarters fire, reorganized, and toured another eleven years. The loss of Beatty was a void that could not be filled in the public’s mind, and the circus never featured another cat act (Bradbury March-April 1967: 14 and Joys 1984: 145).

Beatty now had nothing but his reputation, and a likeable personality that had won him some very wealthy and influential fans. One, a railroad executive, for example, concurred with his wife that Beatty was “one of the finest young men of our acquaintance.” Frank Walter, a Houston, Texas millionaire and amateur animal trainer who owned 150 animals, presenting an annual circus for underprivileged children, helped Beatty locate and purchase property north of Fort Lauderdale. Beatty had been vacationing in Florida, when he inadvertently ran across the McKillop-Hutton Lion Farm that had been established in 1935 in an abandoned rock pit. The owners had hoped to provide animals for movies, and kept the lions in flimsy chicken wire cages. Beatty had been seeking a place to settle down, train animals, and serve as a winterquarters for his circus, so he bought the farm and some additional land for $85,000.

After playing three months in Atlantic City and a four week fall date in Baltimore, he set to work building a tropical zoo with open grotto displays and featuring cat acts presented by himself, his wife, and assistants, a chimp turn, and an elephant act under the direction of his sister-in-law and her husband. The zoo opened on December 2, 1939. In the booklet describing the zoo, Beatty asserted that when he had traveled across the entire country looking for lions and tigers for his act, he realized that these animals were becoming extinct, and that he should establish a place to breed them. Florida seemed the ideal location for both the animals and as a home for his own family. The Clyde Beatty Jungle Zoo in Fort
Lauderdale, he continued, “is the wonder and thrill spot of all the Southland. It is one of the most picturesque zoological institutions in the world” (Clyde Beatty’s Jungle Zoo [booklet] 1939).

The new zoo emphasized natural surroundings, and helped nature “preserve its beauty and the weirdness of the jungle.” The privately owned collection included lions, Bengal, Siberian, and Sumatran tigers, elephants, elks, Russian brown bears, water buffalo, chimpanzees, and a rare collection of birds. The zoo contained two lagoons measuring 100 by 300 feet, wild brush and trees, as well as “caves for the jungle beasts and 40 foot waterfalls for its charm.” Beatty planned to breed and train “his ferocious man-eating friends” in the facility. The show would also feature Harriet, “who is a typical American girl who displays the nerve and daringness of the modern lady of today.” She would present an act in which a Bengal tiger rode on the back of a Siamese elephant. When Beatty had first ordered the act, a horrible battle occurred between the tiger and elephant, when the elephant would not allow the willing tiger to mount her back. “But none of these dangers seem to faze the petite and charming Mrs. Harriet Beatty, for she herself must have nerves of steel” (“Mrs. Harriett Beatty” Clyde Beatty Jungle Zoo 1939).

Sadly, in 1942, a tiger killed a keeper at the zoo, jumped into a bear exhibit and was quickly slain. The head keeper Albert Fleet said that the man had been attacked by a tiger that had escaped unbeknownst to the staff. Despite attempts by workers to drive off the tiger, the man suffered fatal injuries and died on his way to the hospital. In another version, Doris the bear, and Tim the tiger had not been getting along since the Russian bear had killed the tiger’s mate two months earlier. While the animals were being fed, Tim clawed at Doris, and the keeper, who had developed a friendship with the bear, tried to break up the fight, only to have the tiger turn on him. Fleet came to the rescue, but it was too late. When the tiger turned back to Doris, the bear killed him (“Tiger Kills Keeper at Clyde Beatty Zoo” Dec. 13, 1942: 6 and “Tiger Fatally Injures Zoo Attendant, Is Killed By Bear” Dec. 12, 1942: 1).

The zoo housed 53 lions, tigers and leopards, and a huge hippo, on loan from Frank Buck. It was considered Fort Lauderdale’s first tourist attraction, and for five good years had excellent mutual support from the city’s officials. But as the city grew, new residents complained of the animal noises. Beatty tried to make adjustments, but eventually lost out and was forced to sell the property. In 1948 it was torn down
and a shopping center built on the property. Harriet was especially heartsick, and declared that she wished to be buried in Fort Lauderdale when she died (Sprague Sept.-Oct. 1973:13).

Beatty had been featured on George Hamid’s Million Dollar Pier in Atlantic City in 1939. During that run, he gained publicity by opening a lion training school. Eleven students signed up the first day which led to a two-page syndicated spread, “How I Became a Lion Trainer in Ten Uneasy Lessons,” by a student, Pat English. The high school junior had begged her mother to allow her to enroll and she finished the course, even though only one in ten male applicants actually completed the program. The following year she was featured with Beatty in the Pete Smith short, *Cat College*, for MGM (English Sept. 24, 1939: 60).

In 1940, Beatty went out successfully with a circus owned by Hamid. Because of wartime limitations, Beatty was forced to link his unit to the Johnny J. Jones Exposition, the largest carnival on the road. It seemed a rather unholy alliance, but it was obviously profitable since *Billboard* commented in its review of Beatty’s new book, “To be vulgar about it, he [Beatty] seems to have a great deal more folding money, a fairly important commodity and an unusual state of affairs for an animal trainer to be in.” He added that Beatty was a “nice guy,” with a “Grade A” reputation. “In the cage he works like three men and when he’s thru, he’s maybe lost five or six pounds and comes out dripping with sweat. For our money, he makes his the hard way, and when he has his own show next season we hope he gathers in plenty of coin” (Traube February 1941: 44).

That year Beatty’s second book, *Jungle Performers*, co-authored by Broadway columnist, Earl Wilson was released. It described his new zoo, and the problems with escapes. He repeated his adventures as a cage boy, and a fledgling trainer when he became aware that there was a fifty-fifty chance of being killed every time he entered the arena. “Lion and tiger cages and the arena became my school, since animals were going to be my world. I had to learn all about them. How I talked to them, understood them, and influenced them would be just as important as how I talked to, understood, and influenced people.” He then discussed Detroit, the killer lion, how he met Harriett, and repeated his story of the Nero attack (Beatty and Wilson 1941).
Beatty remarked that, “my scars made quite a formidable collection, and Quentin Reynolds wrote that he found me not sensitive about them, but even a little proud of them. Maybe so. He added that my right leg looked like a rainbow and that my right thigh was the silliest-looking right thigh he had ever seen” (Beatty and Wilson 1941) This emphasis on scars caused John Stokes to recently analyze the importance and role of scars among trainers,

Like stigmata even—wounds are visible testimonies of an honorable sacrifice ostensibly made for the sake of an audience, but equally endured by the trainers on behalf of their own vocation . . . . the stress on wounds is quite exceptional. It points to a peculiar sense of initiation, a fellowship among trainers, and even more importantly, of intimacy with the animal who has caused the damage (Stokes May 2004: 44).

Beatty went on to discuss Hagenbeck’s assertion that animals are not really as savage as they are believed to be, and that they are often very affectionate. He argued that he had many friends among the lions, tigers, and leopards. Cats he had not seen in years would recognize his voice, purr and want to be petted. Beatty admitted that he had never attained this degree of friendship, but he might if he lived to Hagenbeck’s age, 69. He knew that anyone working with animals had to love them to succeed, but he always found the big cats “treacherous in the extreme” and “sincere friendship difficult.” Perhaps, because the tempo was slower in Europe, and a trainer might take years to train an animal and play with it, as well, friendships were possible. Beatty went on to discuss the death of Nero, the closest to a friend he had among his big cats, and Sammy, the Prodigy. In that chapter Beatty described how similar the big cats were in many of their behaviors to the domesticated cat. He also said he was often asked how he told his animals apart. He replied that when you spend from 12 to 18 hours a day with them there is no similarity whatever. They all differ in the shady of their coats, their physiognomy, their gait, they way they pick up a signal, the shade of their eyes, the condition of their whiskers, and the contour of their bodies. Most important was their alertness since it indicated general intelligence and personality. He regretted the deaths of animals in the arena, especially going along with the fight scene in The Big Cage. He dedicated a great deal of the book to how he and his wife agreed to her having an act, and her subsequent education. “If you ever go into a cage,” he warned,
you will find that no matter how courageous you are, you will be temporarily terror-stricken. This is almost a certain reaction. Standing outside in perfect peace and safety, it is impossible to realize how vastly different it will be when you are face to face with the beasts. They are partly responsible. When you’re outside, they pay you no attention. But when you’re inside they forget the trainer to glare at you—somebody new. . . . with a shudder you realize the cats have no interest now in the trainer—they want you (Beatty and Wilson 1941: 159).

He added that within the arena, the trainer is imprisoned, so he or she must know every foot of it, every step. He must feel his way about, because he can’t pause and look over his shoulder, but must sense all the props’ presence, and exact location (Beatty and Wilson 1941).

The new zoo enabled Beatty to discuss other animals besides the big cats; hippos, chimps, and elephants. He admitted his life choice was not for everyone, since he had only one real vacation, eight weeks in Europe after his very lucrative venture into the vaudeville circuit. But the demands of 4 or 5 shows daily, almost destroyed his health and nerves, necessitating the break. “I certainly have no regrets about deciding, long ago, to make animals my career. For others a life centered around the beasts of the jungle might not be perfect, but for Harriett and me, it has been, and—we are sure—will continue to be just what we wanted” (Beatty and Wilson 1941: 320).

Two chapters of the book, dealing with the importance of the trainer’s body movements in conveying what he wants the animals to do, were later condensed into an article in *Science Digest*.

For the next few years Beatty worked in cooperation with Ray Rogers and Wallace Bros. Circus. He continued to make appearances like his April, 1944 guest spot on *The Chase & Sanborn Hour* with Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. Clyde Beatty “will snap the whip verbally when he bandies words with Mr. Bergen and Charlie” (“Behind the Scenes with Radio Artists” Apr. 23, 1944: 8).

**The Clyde Beatty Circus**

In 1945, Beatty obtained the Wallace equipment and fielded his own circus for the first time. Profitably touring the eastern United States, the show overcame wrecks, floods, blowdowns, and even the theft of the financial nerve center of any circus, the “red wagon,” before returning to its Macon, Georgia winterquarters. Beatty longed to own a railroad show, and finally the ideal situation presented itself when Art Concello, the brilliant circus aerialist, businessman, strategist, and inventor asked Beatty to join him
for a flat salary and percentage. Concello’s Arthur Bros. was renamed the Clyde Beatty Circus, and it struck a bonanza in western Canada where no circus had played in eight years. When the circus reached winterquarters in Nacogdoches, Texas it had racked up 14,315 miles, played 122 cities and given 384 performances. Its profits, in the seven-figure realm, were considered phenomenal. Despite his genius, Concello was a difficult partner, and at the end of the season the two split, with the innovative Concello resuming his stormy career on Ringling, while Beatty purchased the show for cash (Carson, Matthie and Borders May-June 1970: 25-31 and Joys 1984: 195-196).

Beatty continued to perform and was described as,

The one and only Clyde Beatty outstanding personification of intestinal fortitude, presented his assembly of thirty lions and tigers of both sexes in an act that has not now nor never will be duplicated. His control over the denizens of the jungle was extraordinary and unbelievable. The audience thrilled beyond expectation, remained motionless with amazement, mouth agape as he humbled the royal beasts with masterful skill and unlimited courage (Gable Vol. 18 1945: 12)

In November 1950, the Kosciusko, Mississippi Star Herald headline read, “World Famed Animal Trainer Dies on Circus Train in Kosciusko.” It was Harriett, who had suffered for years with heart problems, who died in her sleep at the age of 41, just before the matinee on October 25th. Beatty was not informed until he finished his act. The night show was cancelled and a requiem mass was held in the town before her body was transported back to Fort Lauderdale. In 1934 she had begun working a mixed act of 14 cats, very similar to her husband’s preliminary act in the late 1920s. Later that year she debuted with an act of three lions and three tigers, and in 1936 first showed the act that would be her trademark, a lion and tiger riding side-by-side on the back of an elephant. Occasionally, she still did the cat act (Price May-June 1974 and “World-Famed Trainer Dies” Nov. 2, 1950: 1).

Less than four months later, the Detroit Free Press reported that 3,000 children had witnessed a lion rip a tiger to death at the opening performance of the Shrine Circus. Prince leaped off its pedestal onto the back of Sheba, the star of the act, after which “she dragged her shredded body to her cage and dropped dead from loss of blood.” Beatty said the spinning tiger was the “whole act.” “It’s an awful job and a dangerous one to train one of these spinning tigers.” In addition, the cat has to be temperamentally, “irritable, quick and nervous” (“3,000 Children” Feb. 20, 1951).
A few days later Beatty went on a radio show originating at the Art Institute to describe in full the fatal attack (“Clyde Beatty to Tell of Fight” Feb. 23, 1951). But Prince was unrelenting and soon attacked another tiger when an assistant failed to close the chute that let the tigers into the arena before the lions. Beatty and his crew leveled a fire hose at the battling cats to break up the fight. The injured tiger returned to its cage and Beatty jumped in to stop the blood flow and apply first aid. After the incident, Beatty said he was unsure about Prince’s future. He offered the lion to the Detroit Zoo, but the curator said their big cats were exhibited in groups and there was no room for a single lion. Beatty then took Prince into the arena between shows for a schooling session. Despite hopes that the second tiger would recover, it died the following day (“Clyde Beatty and Prince” March 2: 1 and “Circus Cat Attacks” 3, 1951).

The incident drew letters to the editor deploring the use of wild animals in circuses. “Any circus that contains no wild animal acts is richer, finer and more enjoyable and certainly more humane in its consideration of wild animals” (“Second Tiger Dies” Mar. 5, 1951: 2). Following the attacks at least 6,000 customers had to be turned away each performance from the packed arena after Beatty had five all-out battles with Prince. As the disruptions continued, he quietly replaced Prince with another lion, given the same name.

In the spring of 1951, Collier’s featured an article, “Lions ‘N’ Tigers ‘N’ Clyde Beatty,” that declared:

While it is not a pleasant thought, the prospect of seeing a man eaten alive is irresistible to a great portion of the population and so this summer, something over a million persons will crowd under the bog top to see ‘Clyde Beatty in person in the most dangerous, suicidal, blood-curdling wild animal display ever conceived and performed by man (Small Apr. 7, 1951: 18).

Even after 30 years, Beatty remained “the foremost wild beast subjugator in the world.”

The Beatty show, traveling on fifteen blue and orange cars, was by the summer of 1951 the only other railer besides Ringling. It employed 500 people, and Beatty, himself, had a private car, decorated like a jungle planter’s home, with a painting of a tiger defending her cub, over his desk (Small Apr. 7, 1951: 18).
That same year the Mutual Network launched “The Clyde Beatty Show,” sponsored by Kellogg’s Rice Krispies. Beatty’s role was played by actor Vic Perrin, a regular in radio and television programs like Dragnet and Gunsmoke. Later, Perrin did voiceovers in Johnny Quest and Star Trek. The kids’ program was on three times a week at 5:30. In 1955, Beatty was featured on “The Ohio Story,” a ten-minute radio program sponsored by Ohio Bell featuring a short play about famous Ohioans. Knopf also published, The Edge of Danger; True Stories of Adventure, a compilation of stories by Roy Chapman Andrews, Raymond Ditmars, Jim Corbett, Carl Akeley, as well as Beatty’s, “The Four Killers.”

In June 1951, eight months after Harriet’s death, Beatty married Jane Abel, a singing comedian from San Antonio who he met while she was performing in a night club in Shreveport where the circus was wintering. The following January, they had a son, Clyde, Jr.

A comic book was issued featuring Beatty in 1953, “‘Mr. Circus,’ himself! He travels the sawdust path of the circus grounds into the tangled web of Africa’s darkest jungles . . . for adventure . . . danger . . . and suspense!” That year was a particular good one for circuses, with 35 shows hitting the road. They drew 35 million people, up 20 percent since 1948, and double the attendance of the pre-War years (Kligfeld Oct. 6, 1953: 1). This was occurring despite dire predictions that television would kill the circus. Beatty declared that television could be an asset to circuses. He invited crews from local stations to record the setup and teardown, as well as some aspect of behind the scenes circus life. By giving the public just a taste, the circus enjoyed “noticeable improvement in attendance” (“TV Helps Circus” Feb. 21, 1954: 56A).

After the Academy-Award winning success of Cecil B. DeMille’s, The Greatest Show on Earth, Hollywood went on a circus movie binge. Included was Warner Bros., Ring of Fear, a 1954 release featuring Beatty, his circus, and extremely popular, best-selling detective story author, Mickey Spillane. The circus program highlighted an article by Spillane, the creator of the hard-boiled, cynical Mike Hammer, in which he described his experiences with the show and Beatty, in particular.

Now there’s a man. He’s a guy you don’t describe. You have to see him. You have to watch a cageful of jungle wild animals hating each other and all hoping for the same thing . . . that the guy in there with them comes a little too close or makes one little mistake. Yeah, this you have to see.
This you have to sweat out for yourself. . . . because for those minutes that Clyde Beatty stands inches away from ripping, tearing death, he becomes you . . . and those shaggy manes and starkly white teeth are looking into your face. . . and all you can think of is that you have to be good. You have to be real good. He is great! (Spillane 1957).

In another article, co-star Pat O’Brien, who played the circus manager, said he first met Beatty in 1932 when he was making The Big Cage. He revealed that he had a fondness for circuses caused in part by his cousin, Martin Hines, the first man to ride five horses Roman-style with Ringling and Buffalo Bill. O’Brien declared that, “Many think that only the kids are spellbound by this drama. Take it from me—adults will out-gawk every child in the arena for a closer look at this man who represents circus in its fulfillment.” Beatty, he added, was beloved by everyone who works for him, and had a “strange, magnetic charm that is awesome and compelling and magnetic from the first meeting. It is this combination which makes him conqueror of the beasts he faces. . . (O’Brien Clyde Beatty Circus Program 1954: 9).

Reviews of the picture were not good. Variety asserted that “Both a fine title and a reputable circus have been wasted in Ring of Fear.” The story was half-hearted, contrived and absurd. Beatty and Spillane, both playing themselves, were “casually efficient.” The only scenes that packed a wallop were the actual performances, and the conclusion (“Ring of Fear” July 30, 1954: 18). Another reviewer called the picture “real ham in thick slices” and that Beatty should use his profits “to buy moth killer for his lions. They are pretty frowsy looking.” He concluded by asking how do you get your money back from Warner Bros.? ("Ring of Fear" July 30, 1954: 18).

During the late 1950s, Beatty also became the subject of a Lenny Bruce nightclub comedy routine: “Excuse me, waitress? Yeah, you, honey. Do me a favor, ok? Hand me that empty chair down in front there, yeah, that one, hand it right up here. Thanks.” Lenny holds up the chair by the back legs.

Take a good look at this chair. What do you see? Well, there’s some wood, some upholstery, maybe a little padding, it’s a chair, right? There’s more to this chair than meets our eye. Take Clyde Beatty, the lion tamer, for example. He walks into a cage with five lions, two tigers and a black panther. He’s got a whip. He’s got a gun. He’s got a chair. The lions, fierce and unhappy beasts, hate Clyde Beatty. They would love to jump on his ass, tear him to shreds. But they don’t. Why is that? Are they afraid of his gun? No. What about the whip? Not the whip. It’s the chair. That’s right. You see, they see things differently. They look at the chair and they see all the asses that have sat on the chair. Those asses, they are looking at the lions. Hundreds, thousands of asses. And the lions, they figure they can handle Clyde Beatty, but the asses overwhelm them.
Some day Clyde Beatty is going to go into that cage with a brand new chair, and that will be the end of Clyde Beatty (Gotlieb “An Inappropriate Life”).

However, circuses would soon face a season that mirrored in many ways the disastrous year of 1938. In 1956, the usual difficulties snowballed into an insurmountable obstacle. The problems included rising costs, growing competition from television, a lack of creative management, the population’s move to the suburbs, and the lack of adequate lots to set up on. This was compounded by a return of union troubles. The unions again targeted Ringling and forecasted that the show would fold by August. The prognostication came true, and on July 16, Ringling folded its tent for the last time, and returned to winterquarters. When it emerged from Sarasota the following spring, it was still a rail show but would from then on play only indoor venues. The Wall Street Journal commented that, “They are still calling it Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey but next summer it will be under dull, everyday roofs. . . . The new children will doubtless have new wonders to tell about when they are old. But it makes us feel already wintry to watch old wonders pass into permanent winter quarters” (Stabler Mar. 14, 1956: 1 and “Wintery Summer” July 18, 1956).

The Beatty show, now wintering in New Mexico, began its tour in March but faced bad weather and dismal attendance. As it headed into California, it acquired good radio and television publicity with a breakfast show visiting the lot, a clown putting on his makeup for “Panorama Pacific,” and Jane Beatty visiting another talk show (Frederick Mar. 20, 1956: A10). But the circus could only meet its $5,000 per day nut, six out of forty-three days. The American Guild of Variety Artists turned its attention to the Beatty circus, pulling fifty-five performers off the show, and insisting Beatty pay out $15,000 in back pay. Beatty’s National Circus Corporation had no option but to declare bankruptcy, claiming almost $282,000 in debts to a meager $260 in assets (“End of the Trail” May 28, 1956: 96).

But, just as some old ACC managers had formed Cole Bros. in 1935, now some former Ringling managers, along with two investors, who believed a circus not under canvas was no circus at all, offered to buy out Beatty entirely, but retaining the title and him as the star attraction. Beatty, however, had wisely incorporated his animals and equipment separately, and agreed to sell all the circus equipment
except his act and his name, which he would lease. The deal included an “unbelievable salary,” payment of the big cats’ feed bill, a cageboy crew, transportation, and anything else he needed for the animals. He would receive a new white Cadillac every year, and a new Airstream trailer every other year. During a ten-year “consolidation,” he would be provided with guaranteed insurance against loss of life, sickness, or permanent injury, payable to his wife (Royal, Epilogue by Roger Smith 1973; New York Times Nov. 9, 1958 and Joys 1984: 201-202).

Other, more recent analysis of Beatty’s loss of control of the show, revealed an unbelievably complicated scenario. Beatty had made undisclosed payment agreements, and was still in debt to Concello. His “angel,” Frank Walters, had died in 1950 and willed Beatty his restored circus parade wagons. For a while, Walters’ widow continued to loan seasonal start-up money to Beatty, but after the wagons were destroyed in a warehouse fire, and Beatty, a foolish gambler since his days on the Corporation shows where he wagered his meager salary with the professional grifters, continually bet away the loans, Mrs. Walters cut him off (Talburt Jan.-Feb. 2010:3)

When the circus reopened in late August of 1956, it became, for a short time, the last under canvas railroad circus in America. The show switched its route from the West Coast to the East, and bought the DeLand, Florida fairgrounds as its winterquarters. In 1959, the show was retitled, Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. and emulated its predecessor by playing the New York metropolitan area simultaneously with Ringling’s Garden run. The program reprinted an article that had run 22 years earlier, when Beatty drew accolades from the New York press. Robert Coleman of the Mirror had written:

His is the most exciting, the most dramatic wild animal act I’ve ever seen, and I caught the best of them in Europe and the U.S. I have come to the conclusion: Clyde Beatty is in a class by himself; there is no wild animal trainer that can be compared to him. He leaps into that steel barred arena like Mars, himself, and the impact on the wild beasts and the audience is terrific. . . .Clyde knows his jungle pupils as he knows himself (Coleman Mar. 20, 1937 quoted in 1960 Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus Program. Frank Braden “Move Over Pal”).

The show itself, claimed Billboard, “is all circus. That’s been said about many shows, but seldom has it applied and better than in this case. Take the performance, the management, the rolling stock and equipment, the look of the lot—it’s all real circus” (Parkinson Aug. 29, 1960: 48).
Never Giving Up

Beatty also took the opportunity to exploit national television. In May 1957, he appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show. When Beatty agreed to do his friend’s show, he was very concerned with the footing on the stage, and suggested setting up the arena in the parking lot. But Ed was insistent that his studio audience was too important not to see the act first-hand, necessitating Beatty to change the dimensions of the arena to a long and narrow configuration. During the act, a tiger became startled when its pedestal slid on the slippery surface and she started to try to climb out of the arena. If she reached the top she could have ripped the safety net and jumped into the audience. Beatty had enlisted a lot of cagehands to prod her down if such a mishap occurred. Sullivan quickly retreated into the audience, and began chatting with them, as the act had to be ended quickly (Beatty and Anthony 1965).

During the following years he made repeat appearances on Jack Paar’s Tonight Show. TV columnists noted that, “Jack’s Becoming Fearless—He’ll Interview Clyde Beatty Tonight (Apr. 10, 1958).” Beatty became well acquainted with Paar and discovered he had a great knowledge of wild animals. At one of his guest appearances Beatty mentioned he had three tiger cubs that were about a month old. Jack became extremely enthused and wanted Beatty to come right back with the cubs. A week later, Beatty arrived at 11 p.m. with a friend and the cubs in tow. Since he was not to appear until midnight, he deposited the cubs in a dressing room and headed to a close-by restaurant for a sandwich and beer, first telling Paar’s sidekick, Hugh Downs, where he was. Almost immediately a messenger found him and told him to return to the studio. When Paar had seen the cubs he decided he wanted them on immediately. Beatty knew when Jack became enthusiastic over something, he had a one track mind. He flashed Beatty one of his hurt looks. Paar had had his crew construct a mini-arena with three pedestals for the cubs. Jack wanted to hold the little cats, so Beatty provided him with gloves, and instructions on how to handle the cubs if they became startled by the lights and noise. Jack held them correctly and then allowed his young daughter to hold a cat. Thankfully the spot went very well, and confirmed Beatty’s belief of how overwhelmed people can become by the charm of big cat kittens. They often inquired about acquiring one for themselves, which Beatty always assured them was an extremely bad idea. He believed
that Joy Adamson’s amazing books about Elsa had helped stimulate the demand (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 85).

When he stopped by Earl Wilson’s apartment in New York, Beatty again invited his collaborator to come into the cage with him. Wilson again declined, but added that, “I love Clyde. I am happy to see him with a circus of his own, the only one under tent nowadays. It’s nice to hear that he and Jerry Collins, his partner, are trying to buy Ringling Bros. I wish success to his wife, 6 year old son and his 400 employees” (“Earl Wilson Says” Apr. 21, 1958: 7).

A *Cavalier* magazine article, “Tigers on the Loose,” described in sensationalistic style, the 1929 nighttime tiger escape at the Masonic Temple in Detroit, that had long been one of Beatty’s most iconic stories. The unfinished building offered all types of hiding places for the cat, and even more threatening situation was that the cat could possibly enter a completed floor where guests were sleeping. “Better be damn ready to stop a tiger. He doesn’t fool—can never back up on a tiger or turn and run. He’s be on you in a flash—tearing at your throat—ripping his claws into your back” (Beatty as told to Bill Ballentine Feb. 1958: 22).

Bill Ballantine, cartoonist, author and former circus man himself, also devoted a chapter about Beatty in his book, *Wild Tigers and Tame Fleas*. There is, he believed, a “deep, almost Neanderthal thrill in close communion with wild beasts. You sense this in Beatty. Full face, he has a strong resemblance to his handsome tigers. His large nose hooks and flattens a bit, the nostrils flare high. His cold blue eyes are penetrating; they seem like a cat’s eyes to look through you, rather than at you.” Beatty’s strongest asset, Ballantine concluded, was his style and showmanship. While traveling with the circus, he repeatedly heard the comment, “After ya seen Beatty the rest of them stinks” (Ballentine 1958: 118-119 and Joys 1984: 207-208)

Beatty announced in 1959 that he was planning his own television show and an adventure theme park near Disneyland. He revealed to Wilson that he had never made any money from his old movies, since he had used it to buy more cats, and later sold the television rights, but never received payment.
Restaurateur, Toots Shor, asked him how high he got John Ringling to go with his salary, Beatty replied, $200 per week, “But that was when I would go in for nothing” (Wilson Mar. 30, 1959: 1B).

That spring, Beatty’s circus was playing at Palisades Park, right across from Manhattan in New Jersey, at the same time Ringling played the Garden. In the Wall Street Journal review of the two shows, the critic explained how the Beatty show had some of Ringling’s top acts now on its payroll; Emmett Kelly, aerialist Pinito Del Oro, and the Zachini cannon act. Beatty remained the “durable master of nasty pussies. . . .there’s no doubt it’s a great act, and it even had a spinning tiger in it (must be seen to be believed)” (Cooke Mar. 30, 1959: 10). On November 23, Beatty appeared with Mike Wallace, discussing his opinions of circus audiences.

In 1960, the program introduced Beatty’s act as:

The Greatest Thrill of All Time

In January of 1962, Project 20 did an hour show about life in the backyard of the Beatty show, narrated by Emmett Kelly. In November, when the show played a 34-day Christmas Festival in 1962--it was the first attempt by a circus at a winter date in New York since Barnum in 1872. Beatty appeared as a mystery guest on What’s My Line and in December of the following year, appeared on Johnny Carson’s Tonight Show.

**Defining his Legacy**

Beatty philosophized in a 1962 Sunday feature appearing in the Detroit News, entitled, “Don’t Be Afraid to Live.” People often asked him why he risked his life daily entering an arena with lions and tigers. He would answer, “Who today lives in complete safety,” and ticked off the daily threats we all face.

Well, I’m used to my lions and tigers. I admit they’ve given me some bad times. Still I know them and know how to handle them—usually.
Animals have fascinated me since boyhood, when I had my own backyard circus. I’ve worked with them all my life. You can bet I enjoy my job or I wouldn’t have it. In fact, any other kind of work would be dull to me. So dull, I would lose my interest in life, which is the worst kind of death.

Danger? No job, no life in the world is without it. I think the important thing is to do the thing we like best and gamble on the risks. By doing that we master the uncertainties in life. We reach self-realization.

Life becomes a full-time, worthwhile adventure (Beatty Jan. 25, 1962).

That same year, *Newsweek* described Beatty’s act when he played the 55th Annual Shrine Circus in Detroit. They emphasized that the “star performers were real lions, real tigers and a battered, scar-crossed man of 58 who faces more danger each working day than a white hunter would meet in a year of safaris. His name, of course, is Clyde Beatty.” They called his act as one of the rare illusions of show business because it is more convincing the closer it is seen. The viewer could also see why performing with the big cats was addictive, and why Beatty always pushed possible retirement out of his mind.

Nerve and courage are plainly essential. For all his skills, Beatty has been clawed or bitten a hundred times and severely mauled on a half-dozen occasions. Both his forearms are laced by long claw scars and spotted with tooth marks. A deep scar runs the length of his right thigh, crisscrossed by smaller ones. He was in a coma twelve days after a lion seized him and carried him around the ring. His right eye is developing cataracts after repeated backlashings from his own whip. . . .Why does Beatty go on. . . .it is more than money. As the star of a dozen jungle movies, sometimes zoo operator and partner in the profitable over-the –road Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, Beatty is well enough fixed to keep himself in pretzels and tigers. ‘Every year, I keep telling my wife this is gonna be the last. But it’s like getting something by the tail. I can’t let go. It never gets monotonous. Like today, when Brutus came in today, maybe you noticed he circled out front. He was looking for Buddy, up on the perch. Brutus was looking around for him to say ‘c’mon, lets get this guy’ (“King of the Cat Men” Feb. 18, 1963: 92).

Beatty wrestled with the possibility of dying in the ring. After the Wallendas fell during the Detroit Shrine date in 1962, where Beatty was also on the bill, he became even more mindful of the audience he had always played to. “I think they come to see death. I don’t think they wish it. That’s too horrible. But after the Wallendas fell. . . .we didn’t have any standing room in that arena that seats 15,000 people (“King of the Cat Men” Feb. 18, 1963: 92).

In Bernard Gavzer’s syndicated AP piece, Beatty added:

‘I want them to see me up close. I want them to see the cats right up to me; to be close enough to smell the cats. I don’t think about the people when I’m in there. I don’t know if there are a hundred or a thousand in the audience. I really don’t. It doesn’t matter how many. I’ll give them anything. I’ll give them everything.’

‘But not that one thing.’
And then Clyde Beatty laughs. He is a man of action, not of philosophic contemplation. He doesn’t really like to talk about death. Danger, yes. Death, no.

And yet death, is like some monster cat—neither lion or tiger alone but something of both—that sits unseen at every performance, licking its chops, waiting its turn (Gavzer Jan. 13, 1963: 7-1).

Gavzer went on to describe the act

The show is almost classic in its unfolding. Beatty is about the same as thirty years ago. Curly hair—one errant curl dancing on his forehead. The ringmaster makes pretty much the same old standard spiel, warning the audience to remain seated. . . . Beatty materializes in a spot of light and the arena swells with a rolling fanfare. . . . He looks bigger than life, not 5’6”, ageless with the vigor of youth, not 58, pound for pound, a match for any superbly muscled lion.

The band comes to life. It plays the storm scene from Rossini’s *William Tell Overture*. Pulses quicken. . . in the big cage lions already prowl. There’s Buddy the topmounter, Pharo, the Brothers Sultan and Brutus. Leo enters. Simba enters. Then King and Caesar and Congo. Last is Henry. . . .Now the Bengal tigers, Ravel’s *Bolero* accompanies them. Saber leads, with Rajah, Prince, Princess, and Frisco following. Beatty puts his talent and ability against the wily tigers and lions, always mindful of the audience—not in numbers but in what he feels it wants (Gavzer Jan. 13, 1963: 7-1).

In May of 1963, Beatty’s early collaborator and friend, Edward Anthony, was observed in the back yard of the circus sitting on a folding aluminum chair and scribbling in a notebook as he began work on Beatty’s final book, *Facing the Big Cats*. The selling point for the book was the hoped for acquisition of a white tiger. Beatty had become as enthused as “a young school child” when Theodore Reed, director of the National Zoo, showed him the only specimen in the United States. The extremely rare animal had been a gift to President Eisenhower from an Indian maharajah. Beatty had neared a deal for a tiger of his own, but the agreement very disappointingly fell through. Anthony, however, was still able to convince Doubleday to publish what was to be Beatty’s final memoir (Orr circusfun.org and Price July-August 1974: 13-14).

The book had a different tone from his earlier works, perhaps reflecting the public’s gradually changing attitudes about the treatment of animals, or Beatty’s own mellowing and no longer seeing a need to portray his big cats as murderous monsters. He asserted that he was very opposed to declawing the big cats since it seemed to change their personalities. Since it was as natural for them to sharpen their claws as to breathe, declawed animals became frustrated. Beatty wanted to set the record straight by explaining
that he had never trained an animal that had undergone the operation, nor would he ever consider it a viable alternative (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 4-7).

Beatty insisted that he did not believe in killing animals and did not hunt, but that hunters have told him that tigers are harder to track and take down than lions, whose insatiable curiosity proves their downfall. The differences between lions and tigers continually interested the public, especially which would win in a fight. Beatty found the lion extremely intelligent, and although the tiger was also intelligent, the striped cat did not seem to have the same capacity calm appraisal of a situation, which puts him at a disadvantage in a fight with a lion. Psychologically, people seem conditioned to believe that the tiger is the mightiest of the big cats, perhaps because the lion has a more regal, gentler, wiser look. The tiger, however, has great respect, even often out-and-out fear for a lion. A lion is aware of the tiger’s avoidance of a confrontation, which in turn enhances its sense of superiority, and adds to its advantage in a fight. Both cats are remarkably fast, and can cover 40 feet in a spring. A tiger has a slight edge in maneuverability, but a lion uses its superior power in a calculating way, utilizing tactics that will wear the tiger down by making it paw weary (Beatty and Anthony 1965).

He argued that despite being criticized for utilizing a whip and blank pistol, trainers who intend to dedicate themselves to the profession must begin with a love of animals.

The crack of the whip and the bark of the blank cartridge pistol are so synonymous with my work in the arena that I am regarded by some as a tough guy who likes to push animals around. It comes as a surprise to some that I love these animals and that the big cats and I have had a lot of fun together over the years.

To some of the cats I am another animal, a formidable one they don’t seem able to figure out. True, I am one against many, but one that puzzles and awes them because I am a creature equipped with advantages no other animal has; that something I use as a shield (the chair), that long snakelike device (the whip) which makes that cracking sound, and that other noisemaker the blank revolver.

It is because of the basic, savagery that causes them to revert to type when you least expect it that I have to play this game of keeping them off balance. For as fond as I am of these rough, tough, wonderfully endowed playmates of mine, I simply cannot afford to trust them fully.

Some people never cease to be puzzled by my position that, although I do not place complete reliance on my cats I love them. Nature has endowed them with certain Jekyll-Hyde qualities, and that is something the animal trainer must accept. It is not unusual for a lion or tiger that tries to wreck me one day to show affection for me the next. There are those who believe that an animal that behaves that way is “two-faced” and should be removed from the act. To me it merely reaffirms the to be expected mercurial characteristics of basically savage creatures (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 197, 211).
He continued:

More than once I have confused people by referring to a lion or tiger as a friend. Without any illusions about their trouble-making potential, a trainer develops a friendship for his animals. It is possible to love them without fully trusting them. There are little ways in which these big ferocious beasts convey that they have confidence in you and trust you—to a point. [They] are friends that have to be carefully watched. It doesn’t alter your affection for them—to some extent, it must be admitted because they help you earn a living. But there is more to it than that. A bond that is hard to describe without seeming somewhat maudlin. . . . The big cats, even the wildest and potentially the most dangerous of them—have a way of subtly getting under your skin. In both the wilds and captivity they are creatures of moods. The unpredictability of these moods is what gives them their never-ending fascination. Not even the greatest animal psychologist in the world can say with absolute certainty if the big cats are motivated more by the kind or the cruel side of their nature (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 131, 138).

He admitted that when he was young and reckless, he thought only of pleasing an audience, and engaged in a kind of daredeviltry that verged on show-offism. As he matured in his outlook he had decided to remove lionesses from his act, since the females when in heat caused so many disruptions and fights. Tigresses on the other hand, were far more inhibited and did not cause the same kind of stress among the cats.

When young and comparatively new to animal training, your only thought is to make audiences happy regardless of the circumstances. Experience has a way of putting things into perspective. The more you learn about the game, the more you find yourself thinking in terms of what is best for the animals and adjusting to circumstances in a manner that sometimes means putting on a show that is less exciting than you would like it to be (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 114).

After discussing his reading of Darwin’s books as well Martin Johnson’s observations of lions in the field. He concluded that:

I am glad that there is so much activity today in the field of animal psychology and that so many men of reputation are trying to learn more and more about what goes on in the minds and emotional apparatus of animals, both tame and wild. Years ago I said in an interview that while it might seem like reaching for the moon, I felt that some day we would achieve close communications with wild animals and learn how to exchange thoughts with them on a systematic basis. Since I made that statement, man has decided the moon is quite reachable and I am becoming more and more optimistic about fairly full-scale communication with animals (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 298).

In the introduction of his work on the emotions of animals, Darwin urged fellow scientists to place greater stress on the observation of the behavior of live animals, rather than just studying dead specimens. This emphasis on the animal as a living being with distinct behaviors and emotions is why
Beatty found Darwin so relevant and important. We could realize man’s oneness with the animal kingdom through the expression of his emotions, since, according to Darwin, “the great part of human behavior is basically emotional,” and without this understanding “many urgent social problems will remain distorted.”

Beatty said he was under no illusions about the contributions an animal trainer could make to the science of animal behavior, but perhaps the phenomena he had observed for so many years could shed some light on a behavioral problem involving the big cats, that some animal psychologist was trying to solve (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 299).

Anthony later summed up the four main factors that led to Beatty’s rise to preeminence: a love of wild animals; a warm, friendly approach to them; an intuitive knowledge of their mental processes; and utter fearlessness (Anthony July 1965: 54).

On New Year’s Eve, 1963, Beatty made an appearance as the marshal of the Orange Bowl Parade. He rode in a howdah on the back of the show’s largest elephant that had been featured in the Doris Day, Jimmy Durante film version of *Jumbo*. The original plan was to have Beatty hold a tiger cub in each hand, an idea he decided unwise, since even holding one cub during the lengthy parade proved a challenge (Beatty and Anthony 1965: 116).

In 1965, Jane Beatty co-authored a children’s circus book, *Davey's Adventures with the Clyde Beatty Circus*. The book was illustrated with photographs with ‘Davey,’ a boy spending a few weeks of his summer vacation with the circus, depicted by Beatty’s son, Clyde, Jr. When Davey first meets Beatty, he “felt his heart swell until it seemed too big for his chest. For once a sense of awe paralyzed him. Yet Mr. Beatty looked like any ordinary person—he was so friendly and informal.” Later, a cage boy discloses that [Beatty] “‘really enjoys his work. Guess he must enjoy puttin’ his strength and will against those wild beasts. But that’s what life is. Anyway you look at it—big or small—it’s always a challenge.’ Challenge—it meant you had to stand up against forces as big as yourself—maybe bigger. And it meant you had to give life everything you had.” Davey decides, “Clyde was a real live legend. Just as the knights of old, he combined courage and bravery whenever he was in the arena with the big cats.” Later in the story Davey concludes that, “Perfection was more than mere muscle control. It had to do with
timing and love of your work. Heart and muscle were the winning combination. You had to follow through, that, he knew was why Clyde was tops” (Beatty and Pinchot 1965: 79 and Joys 1984: 208-209).

During the season of 1964, Roger Smith, joined the Beatty show as a cageboy, and was soon promoted to manning the chute, and acting as Beatty’s personal driver and typist. Smith had first seen Beatty perform when he was a boy in 1947, and it became his life goal to work with the big cats, so being able to spend so much time with his boyhood hero was a dream come true. Beatty’s fifteen-minute battles in the big cage had long given youngsters summer long dreams of running away to join the circus and made every dog and cat in the neighborhood the subject of souvenir whip and cap pistol training sessions. After corresponding with Beatty during the winter and spring of 1964, requesting a position, Smith landed the job. In a letter Beatty outlined what his duties as a cageboy entailed:

Here’s a few of the things he does, besides working around the arena doing the act. First thing in the morning, he sees that the ground and space where the arena will be located is completely level and no holes, and if the grass is too high then it must be mowed. He keeps all props repaired and painted including guns and whips, looks after my wardrobe and boots, drives my car and trailer and takes care of them, it seems like a lot of work, but after you get the hang of it and the routine it’s not so much, the most difficult job will be working around the arena during my act. This will take a little time, in learning my movements and knowing the animals. . . (Smith in Joys “Reminiscences of a Cat Man” 1984: 286).

Smith’s salary from the show was $15 per week, which Beatty asked to be raised to $20 after two weeks. His tip from Beatty was between $15 and $25 a week, and he “saw him regularly tip the waterman, the electrician, and everyone else who did anything for him in the old circus tradition.”

Luckily for me, he was an impatient driver and liked to be driven wherever he went, although he sometimes surprised me and took the wheel himself, humming cheerfully too himself and driving at breakneck speeds. So it was that I knew firsthand where he went and what he did, and wherever or whatever it was, being the kind of man he was, he always included me in his plans as a startled and grateful companion (Smith in Joys “Reminiscences of a Cat Man” 1984: 282).

Beatty had begun seeing doctors in Philadelphia, but the diagnoses were indeterminate. To Smith he still seemed “a man of vigorous health, a real man’s man, with full and hearty appetites, who enjoyed vivid interests in life and had a great sense of fun.” He thoroughly disliked hunting, but was obsessed with deep-sea fishing. He also loved to wager, placing bets on every sporting event he knew of, frequented the tracks, and was wellknown in Las Vegas. In fact, he had mused, after reading Ovid
Demaris’s, *The Green Felt Jungle*, why he had not been included in the list of high rollers. Smith noted that Beatty enjoyed a cold bottle of Michelob, but that he never saw him order more than one drink. “On a circus lot, if you drink, everyone knows it, talks it up, and you become another circus lush—specifically, another drunken cat trainer” (Smith “Reminiscences of a Cat Man” 1984: 282-284).

In public, Beatty was quiet and gracious; he never drew attention to himself, waited in turn for service and was polite with his hosts. I have been with him in little diners along the road, barbershops, hotel dining rooms, and neighborhood bars where he liked to sip V.O. and soda and enjoy his Friday night fights. If he enjoyed his fame, he seemed more comfortable remaining unrecognized in public and never sought special treatment. I used to enjoy watching him eat. It was a ritual in those small roadside diners: he invariably ordered a bowl of hot soup (almost any kind) and a hamburger—plain bun, not toasted, and a slice of raw onion—accompanied by coffee with a touch of cream. He felt lucky when he found a place with good Mississippi River catfish and ate generously of this favorite. The fun in sharing these pleasures with him was that each of them seemed to him a happy adventure. He was one of those special people who knew how to live and relished living (Smith “Reminiscences of a Cat Man” 1984: 283-284).

Beatty never encouraged his children to follow his footsteps. He sent Harriet’s daughter, Albina, to Hillsdale College, but she quit after her mother’s death in 1950, subsequently married a circus employee Beatty thoroughly disliked, and had a small independent animal act of her own. His first daughter, Joyce, remained in Peru and was active in the Circus City Festival, youth circus, and historical museum, as are his granddaughters and great-grand children. His son attended Cal Northridge as an art major, and became relatively well known as a surfer and innovative shaper, incorporating a tiger head in his signature boards.

Beatty always regretted his own lack of formal education. But following his death, Edward Anthony wrote in tribute:

A little known fact about Clyde Beatty is that he was a brilliant naturalist, without benefit of schooling. He had more first hand information about wild animal behavior and psychology than any of the scientists in the field, to whom he deferred because of his respect for their scholarship and erudition and their dedication to his favorite subjects, zoology and natural history (Anthony July 1965: 54).

The cats never got Beatty; like Frank Buck, he would die of a far more lethal killer. In the summer of 1964, he underwent surgery for stomach cancer at the University of Chicago’s Billings Hospital. He recovered sufficiently to make the circus season opener in Long Island the following spring.
As the show settled in to its long road season, Beatty, though weak, worked his full act, sometimes even three performances a day.

When discussing this drive or obsession to remain in the ring, authors typically cite Beatty and Mabel Stark as examples. They loved the circus with its adventure, excitement, and hardship, but they also were captivated by the thrill and excitement of stepping into a cage with magnificent felines, facing the danger every day of being mauled to pieces, and never really knowing what would happen. The challenge was the affirmation of their superiority over brute force. Perhaps this was childish, or perhaps it satisfied their egos, or some more elemental need (McMullin Jan. 1976: 22).

Roman Proske, another wild animal trainer, wrote in his autobiography, of the opportunity and privilege of working with the big cats. He reminded readers that all the time a big cat is kept in its cage, prevented from exercising its natural behaviors, desire keeps mounting up. “It keeps building up and building up, until the moment comes when he can express all this pent up explosive force in one murderous onslaught.” He insists that an enraged wild beast has tremendous power, an insensibility to pain, and seems unimpressed by barriers. Why then does a person become a wild animal trainer? It could be lack of sense, vanity or exhibitionism, or a chemical need in some people for the drug we call danger, the sensation of fear. I know in my own case that after moments of the greatest danger—when moments seemed hours and fear possessed me utterly—I have always felt delightfully refreshed. On the other hand when I retired from the steel arena after 40 years. . . and the shock of fear and danger was removed, I suffered as cruelly physically and mentally as any confirmed drug addict deprived of his narcotic (Proske 1956: 201).

In the spring of 1965, Beatty began the season in Long Island, emaciated and weakened. As the show moved out on tour, reporters followed his progress, disturbed at what they saw. One of them, Guy Friddell of the Richmond (Va.) News Leader, returned to the circus that had thrilled him so much as a boy.

That night just before his entrance, I watched him, dressed in dazzling white, move down the floodlit line of cages on the mammoth trailer truck in the darkness behind the Big Top, inspecting the animals, speaking to them, extending his whip to rub a lion’s broad muzzle, as if it were a lazy dog’s. He walked very slowly. . . Beatty’s roving dark eyes saw a boy edging up to him, and smiling, he doubled up his big square fist, and pushed it toward the child’s chest. Encouraged, another boy move forward, and Beatty put an arm across his shoulders (Friddell May 10, 1965).
The insiders knew how hard and dangerous it was for Beatty to fight the cats that night, but he was never better. After the act, sweating profusely he put on an old robe and draped a towel over his head.

He ducked under the rope that guarded the long row of cages atop the trailer-truck bed. He and the lions and tigers were alone. Beatty, his cowled back to the rest of the world, moved close to the first cage. A fierce striped face peered out at him. Beatty raised his gloved hand high to the tiger. Watching from the darkness behind the rope, I couldn’t decide whether it was a salute, a quieting gesture, a communion of kind, or what. But, at cage after cage, he stopped, and lifted his gloved hand high. At one cage, a tiger reared on his hind legs, and snarling, raised his forepaws, Beatty in gentle parody, raised both his hands, and the tiger sank down. At another cage, Beatty reached in and chucked the chin of a tiger that had been known to purr at him in affection in the midst of action in the big cage. Finally there was one lion left, a faded old fellow. The little man raised his hand to the last big cat. It looked, I decided, like good-bye (Friddell May 10, 1965).

His wife, who in fourteen years of marriage had only watched him perform less than a dozen times, urged him to retire. Beatty vowed he would never quit, although he admitted that his recuperation from his stomach surgery the year before “was the worst thing that ever happened to me,” but finally when the show reached Salisbury, Maryland, he was forced to return to his Ventura, California home to rest and recuperate, insisting he would beat his disease and be back. His daughter, Joyce Ferguson from Peru, Indiana, spent two weeks with him, claiming it was just a casual visit. She was amazed that he was up and around and making future plans. Before returning home, she went to see his elderly mother in Bainbridge. But on July 6, Beatty hemorrhaged severely and was rushed to Community Memorial Hospital. Jane issued the announcement that her husband was suffering from terminal cancer of the esophagus, and added: “He is fighting against a fatal enemy with a courage he showed throughout is life.” To him, however, she never revealed the hopelessness of his condition, and hospital officials announced he was putting up a “terrific fight.” On July 19, thirteen days after he entered the hospital, he seemed to rally. But shortly after his wife left the room, at about the time the matinee would have started, he died. On learning of his death, she said, “He was magnificent. He was the greatest animal trainer in history and the greatest circus performer of all times.” The family asked that anyone wanting to remember him, should make a donation to their favorite children’s charity. At the nearby Thousand Oaks training center, fellow animal man, Chet Juczyk, said Beatty had been his idol. “You can’t compare him to anyone. He was the best. His audiences always sat on the edge of their seats. He had big animals and plenty of them.
He was fabulous. He really put it over” (Ventura Star Free Press July 7-23, 1965 and Pfening, Jr. July-August 1965: 4).

Beatty was eulogized at his funeral by Pat O’Brien. The honorary pallbearers included Ed Anthony, Lowell Thomas, Earl Wilson, Walter Winchell, Jack Dempsey, and Spencer Tracy, as well as circus greats, Emmett Kelly, Karl Wallenda, and George Hanneford. He was interred in Hollywood’s Forest Lawn, the last resting place for so many legends (Ventura Star Free Press July 7-23, 1965 and Pfening, Jr. July-August 1965: 4).

During his lifetime, Anthony estimated that Beatty gave 30,000 performances, traveled over a million miles, and played before 40 million people, there is no way to count how many saw his films or read his books. The biggest crowd was 103,000 at the Nebraska State Fair, and the smallest, one, in a downpour at his Florida zoo. He was a man of candor, and thoroughly disliked hokum. When a magazine writer spoke of his ‘hypnotic eye,’ he answered, “Thanks for the compliment pal. I could use a hypnotic eye in my business and if you know where I can buy one at a decent price, please let me know.” Anthony recalled that Laemmle wanted to make him into a cowboy star, and a fight promoter guaranteed he wouldn’t lose a fight for a year if he signed with him. Jack Dempsey once claimed that, “Clyde Beatty had more pure guts than anyone I’ve ever known. He puts more pure action into a single season than most fights do in a whole career” (Anthony July 21, 1965: 54).

Beatty always loved kids, Anthony remembered, giving them autographed photos, and helping them sneak into the big top. Toward the end, he had lost considerable weight and was down to 126 pounds, but he never lost any of his cheerfulness. One day, ticket sales necessitated a third show, and he seemed too weak to do even one, but with busloads of kids coming from orphanages and institutions, he did all three. After the second show, he took Anthony and his wife to dinner, ate almost nothing, but assured them that, “I’m going to lick this thing” (Anthony July 21, 1965: 54).

Anthony also found Beatty a “brilliant naturalist,” with enormous first hand information about wild animal behavior and psychology than anyone in the scientific field. But he always deferred to these scientists because of his lack of formal training and an admiration of their scholarly dedication to his
favorite subjects; zoology and natural history. Anthony once gave him a copy of Darwin’s, *The Expressions of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, the ‘bible’ of Julian Huxley and other naturalists.

Beatty thoroughly enjoyed it and called it a great book, but hesitantly said he had found a mistake. Darwin had written that tigers don’t purr, and Beatty had one that did, in fact he had it purr for Anthony.

“But please,” he pleaded, “don’t say anything in our book about my having found this error. After all it’s a minor one. The reviewers would laugh their heads off at the idea of a mere animal trainer, claiming to have found a mistake in so remarkable a book” (Anthony July 21, 1965: 54).

Anthony said Beatty admitted that he was a dope, working for Ringling for $100 per week, or $7.14 a performance. As time progressed he developed an entente cordiale with the Big One, and had even been asked in 1962 by their management to star in the show they planned for the New York World’s Fair. Beatty flirted with the idea, but turned it down because of commitments to his show (Anthony July 21, 1965: 54).

Friends had always encouraged him to get into a safer field, but he believed we were always surrounded by possible danger from the bathtub to icy, hazardous roads, and that any other job would have been dull to him. Beatty always demonstrated great devotion to his wife and son, and was probably AT&T’s greatest customer, calling them nightly while he was on the road and listening to play-by-play descriptions of his son’s baseball games (Anthony July 21, 1965: 54).

Perhaps it was fitting that Buck and Beatty, who shared such humble origins, who ambitiously created such dynamic and lasting persona, living lives that most people could only imagine, creating self-images reflecting their Gatsby-esque drives for success, would in the end not die in some spectacular blaze of glory, but make full circle, and die in the same mundane way in which they were born.

The *New York Times* wrote at his passing that for forty years Clyde Beatty had pushed his luck to the limit and “carried on a dramatic intense and chilling flirtation with death—a flirtation that left him scarred, clawed, and spotted with fang marks. It was a flirtation, too, that made him a symbol of the eerie, bizarre world of the circus, a world of hokum and high drama, of show biz and sudden death” (“Clyde Beatty, 61, Animal Trainer” July 20, 1965: 33).
Time magazine eulogized him in an article, “King of the Beasts.”

Forty magnificent, monsters, menacing man-eaters miraculously mingled. The signs used to say. That was in the 30s, when ‘circus’ was a word with magic, when kids impatiently waited through the year until the big tent went up again and what they waited for most was the instant when a trim, 5 ft. 6 in. man, dressed in spotless white shirt and breeches with soft leather belt, bounded into the spotlight of the center ring and doffed his pith helmet. Then, whip in hand, a steel-reinforced chair plus blank-loaded pistol in his left, he would summon the first ferocious cat into the cage.

That was Clyde Raymond Beatty, King of the beasts, the greatest trainer in the world.

It was a time when the jungleers Martin and Osa Johnson drew crowds to see the movies they took in Africa and Hunter Frank Buck drew cheers for bringing ‘em back alive.

But Beatty never sentimentalized over his beasts. “You can never be certain that a lion or tiger won’t hook you if it has the opportunity,’ he explained. ‘Big cats are wild by nature, even if they are born in captivity. They never develop any affection for their trainer, no matter how gentle he may be with them’ (“King of the Beasts” July 30, 1965).

Beatty always pushed his luck, fatalistically claiming, “Oh, I know they’ll get me some day.” “They never did, though. Instead last week in Ventura, California, at about the time the matinee would have started, cancer finally clawed to earth the man who could never abide being called an animal tamer, ‘If they are tamed,” he always said, ‘there is no act!’” (“King of the Beasts” July 30, 1965).

The UPI story read:

Clyde Beatty’s death has closed another chapter in the America that was, but is no more.

To a youngster in any of a thousand hamlets of this vast country in the 1930s, the name Clyde Beatty alone conjured stirrings of adventure and mental pictures of such exotic places as Africa, India and the jungles of South America.

Without the hypnotic lure of television, the young of that depression-scarred era lived in a world half- Clyde Beatty. . . a man in riding breeches and pith helmet with a pistol at his side and a whip and chair in either hand facing up to a snarling lion . . . The picture is as fresh as ever. But with the death of Beatty. . . a little of the America that was died (“Beatty Death Closes an Era” July 20, 1965).

The El Paso Herald Post editorialized that although there were still some celebrated animal trainers, especially in Europe. “Somehow, as any old circus fan will know, there is none whose act seemed quite as dangerous, quite as exciting, quite as death-defying, quite as breath-taking, quite as chilling, quite so much the ‘greatest’ as the performances of the old master, Clyde Beatty” (“The World’s Greatest” July 21, 1965: B2).

On the same day the Oakland Tribune claimed:

An era has passed with the death of Clyde Beatty. With the possible exception of Frank (“Bring ‘Em Back Alive”) Buck, no other personality dealing with wild animals has so captured the
America people as did the little man from Ohio. He was a professional in every sense of the word—and in a class by himself. . . . since the public’s entertainment tastes have undergone such drastic changes in recent years, another wild animal trainer like Clyde Beatty is not likely to be produced in the foreseeable future. He was a remarkable showman (“Clyde Beatty” July 21, 1965: 22).

The *Daily Reporter* (Dover, OH) reminisced that,

Down through the years, Beatty was impersonated in backyard circuses by boys and girls alike, even if their ‘wild animals’ were pet dogs and cats. Thus, he not only thrilled millions of children who visited the big show, but he also was the inspiration for playacting that was wholesome and kept the ‘performers’ out of mischief.

Death to the wild animal trainer causes a great number of us to pause and reflect on our childhood and the great thrill it was to go to the circus and see . . . the one and only Clyde Beatty (“Clyde Beatty” July 21, 1965: 4).

In the editorial, “Clyde Beatty, Raw Courage,” the *Gastonia Gazette* said that,

Death had to come and get Clyde Beatty.

He wouldn’t give up, he had looked into the red eyes of death so many times that he figured that this time, too, would only leave claw-marks on his back.

It was the tiger of cancer that finally bore him down, something that none of the hundreds of animals he had trained had ever done successfully. . . . the world has lost a brave and capable man, a man who knew how to thrill in the truest sense of the word” (“Clyde Beatty, Raw Courage” July 21, 1965: 4).

During his illness, and then after his death, Beatty’s act was taken over by his assistant, Joseph “Red” Hartman. When Beatty died, reporters kept asking what it was like, and Hartman said he didn’t know what to tell them. “If your brother dies, your father died, you think you could just give a little speech that’d tell what he was like? You couldn’t do it, and neither can I.” Just one of the reasons he was the greatest was he had learned to take care of the cats, the equipment, and himself, every minute. “There were plenty of others. You take any great entertainer, great poet, any great man, and you’ll never figure out all the things that made him that way. At least I never could, and I worked with Clyde a long time [12 years]. He was a professional, you know what I mean by that? His job was to please the crowd, and he never let anything get in the way of it. He could go into the cage feeling so sick that most men would go to bed. But if you were sitting in the crowd, you’d never realize it” (Donovan “The Show Must Go On But Beatty’s Missed.” No date, Red Hartman collection).

The performers and staff of his circus learned of his death at about 6:15 p. m. There was a full house, but no announcement was made, since they felt Beatty would have wanted it that way, and the
ringmaster said he didn’t feel he could have made it anyway. Hartman had joined the show in 1948, and became Beatty’s assistant in 1956. The difference was that, “Hartman needs to learn that the public can and must be tamed like lions. . . .” He does his job very well, “But for him the audience doesn’t exist, Beatty, on the other hand, is always conscious of the watching audience and the bravery it wants to feel through him.” Hartman, said he was the first to admit that “who can ever be a Clyde Beatty! No one. No one” (Duffy July 1965). The following year Hartman moved the act to Jungleland in Thousand Oaks, where he joined with the legendary, Mabel Stark. Dave Hoover would take over the Beatty act.

Hoover, a Middletown, Ohio native and Air Force veteran, who also worked a mixed fighting act, had a wry self-deprecating sense of humor that endeared him with fans and interviewers. Like Beatty, he insisted the key to the American style of training was bluff. “They don’t know why I’m not afraid of them. Of course, I really am afraid of them, but they don’t know that. The animal doesn’t realize how strong he is, and he doesn’t know how weak the trainer is.” The cats don’t always respond in a split second, but first think about it, and then usually respond to the trainer’s cue. While working as a circulation manager for a Cincinnati newspaper, Hoover, a self-admitted animal nut, bought three young lions, which he taught himself to train (“Close Encounters of the Cat Kind” Valentine Archives, 1979-1984).

On the first anniversary of his death, Beatty’s hometown Chillicothe Gazette editorialized that his end “was believed by many to be an end of an era in circus history. It was a belief that will not come true, at least not in our time—circus men say. . . . nor will the name or the image of the valiant Ross Countian be dimmed in memory” (Leasure July 22, 1966). This was more than mere pride in a local boy who had made good, for Beatty created an indelible image that has become synonymous with wild animal trainer. His single-minded drive made him epitomize the three-part characterization of the trainer. To those who dislike wild animal acts, he was the ultimate villain, who exploited the dominance of man over beasts. His tools—the whip, chair, and blank gun—were the cruel symbols of a proud, unfair, relentless bully. Others dismissed him as a fool, or daredevil, whose over-optimism and courage carried him to reckless extremes in a basically frivolous occupation.
As one former fan reminisced, Beatty was one of the most recognizable performers of his generation. Early in his career there were three possible outcomes to his act: He could triumphantly exit to wild applause, make a mad dash to the exit, or be dragged out after a mauling (Holsather July 21, 2005).

Of course, he was also a hero, in all three senses of the word: an invincible conqueror with almost magical power, the self-made small town boy and, finally, the audience-oriented splendid performer. If it is true he aroused the basest instincts of the crowds he sought to please, he also represented what has been considered the most American of qualities: a defiance of nature and insurmountable odds. Twelve years after his death, the lead story in the circus that bore his name claimed:

No one has ever entered the large steel arena and paralleled the showmanship and veracity of . . . Clyde Beatty, still considered the world’s most extraordinary wild animal trainer. . . . As a mere animal groom, the least applauded and most obscure circus chore, [he] was all eyes and enthusiasm. He would see the world and later the world would see him. . . . Always ready to the rescue, full of self-confidence and unabashed theatrics, [he] swiftly catapulted to circus fame. Within a mere decade, [his name] was synonymous with wild animal training. The best and most exciting ever seen under the Big Top!

The circus today continues to carry the name of the most astonishing sawdust sensation ever. . . . the master of sneering, sinister jungle beasts—the one and only Clyde Beatty (Digney1977).

Noted Iowa painter and avid circus enthusiast, Byron Burford, made “the Olympics of the art world,” when four paintings and several prints were accepted at what is considered the world’s most important art show, the Venice Biennalle. One of them was Homage to Clyde, 1966, depicting Beatty taking a last bow while four cats rear up on their pedestals behind him (“UI’s Byron Burford to have Paintings Exhibited in Italy” Jan. 24, 1968: 4A). Beatty was also included in Bobbs-Merrill’s Childhood of Famous Americans series, with Katherine E. Wilkie’s, Clyde Beatty, Boy Animal Trainer.

When Beatty had sold his show in 1956, he licensed the buyers to use his name. In 1958, this deal was reaffirmed with the Acme Corporation for ten years. If Beatty died or was disabled, all rights, title, and interest were vested to his wife. When this agreement expired in 1968, another ten-year contract with weekly payments was drawn up, but in 1977, Acme acquired a federal registration for the trademarked title unknown to Beatty’s widow. The contract expired again the following year, and an oral agreement was made to pay her $1,000 a week for the 30-week season. After 23 weeks, the payments were stopped and negotiations failed. A lawsuit in California ruled that a name could not survive death. However, the
decision was appealed and heard in the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Florida in 1983. The California ruling was overturned since Beatty had exercised his right of publicity during his lifetime, creating secondary meaning, and this had been transferred to his wife. Unlike Bela Lugosi or the Marx Brothers who had not made their names into a product they promoted during their lifetimes, Beatty’s name did not become part of the public domain (Acme Circus Operating Co., Inc. v Jane Beatty Kuperstock. 711 F.2d 1531, Aug. 15, 1983).

By historical coincidence, the circus Beatty first joined was the last--after 90 years of continuous use--to utilize the Van Amburgh title, which has not been used since. Beatty’s own name became part of a title in 1935 and was not dropped until almost 70 years later.

The traditional circus remained fascinating to artists and writers. In a 1996, article in American Heritage, David Black relates his feelings while visiting the Beatty-Cole show. He argues that sex and danger, the impulse to create life and to end it, is the “hidden moral of the circus” (Black Sept. 1996)

Men and women who risk themselves as we watch trigger atavistic impulses in us; they are our sacrifices to danger, which more and more is being eliminated from our world. Elemental lust—the desire we all share to edge as close as we can to death—vicariously, if opportunity or courage is lacking—in order to remind ourselves what we will lose when we lose our lives (Black Sept. 1996).

This moody, philosophic aspect appeared again when in 1998, Oscar-winning film-maker, Errol Morris, along with Oscar-winning cinematographer, Robert Richardson, combined to make a elegiac documentary, Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control. Sequences from Beatty’s films along with recent footage of the circus that then still bore his name, were used as unifying elements. The film is about four obsessed loners, two of whom are looking forward; the robot-maker, who believes robots will someday reproduce and take over the world, and the naked mole rat expert, who thinks these perfectly adapted animals who live like an ant colony will survive when most life on earth becomes extinct. They are contrasted with a topiary creator whose artistry requires unbelievable patience in a world where very few any longer care, and a wild animal trainer, Dave Hoover, the chosen successor of Clyde Beatty, who admittedly has never been able to achieve a fraction of his hero’s success. Morris points out in an interview that Hoover
Talks about becoming a Clyde Beatty. Not just the lion tamer, not just the circus performer, but Clyde Beatty. I hope that line preserves the richness of what he is saying. It was his desire to become a romantic hero, a romantic figure. Like Clyde Beatty who himself was modeled after romantic figures of the 19th century. To preserve a kind of romanticism that is on the wane or that may be altogether gone: that world of men with pith helmets and natives with spears in the jungle. There is something sadly and sickly sweet about his whole idea of confronting the jungle: in this case, in 20th century America (Interview with Errol Morris).

Morris notes that Hoover knows that not only is Beatty dead, but that the world that produced him is gone. There is something ephemeral. His world will soon no longer exist. “Clyde Beatty is dead, but he didn’t die by being devoured by wild beasts, which I guess is the way is the way all great lion tamers should go. He died of cancer. He went not with a bang, but a whimper.”

Morris finds the footage unbelievable, when Hoover comes out of his trailer and kneels down to play with his kitty cat.

He is training animals to the very end, but this case it is a kitty cat. He not only tells you at the end that Clyde is dead, but that the whole world that produced Clyde Beatty is gone. He doesn’t believe that circumstances exist for another Clyde Beatty to come into being. The world is different, the past can never be recaptured. It can never be reclaimed, his world is over not just in the sense of his own life, but his dream as well (Torotello Nov. 5, 1997).

Morris found it a heartbreaking moment. “I find it very, very moving.”

Morris’s voice is heard only once in the film, when he asks Hoover, does he miss Clyde Beatty? “He was a great performer and a great trainer,” Hoover says, fingers pressed together, tip to tip, “and I don’t think there’ll ever be another one. Certainly not me.” His eyes twinkle, and close, and the film cuts to Beatty, “smiling in slow motion, turning to the camera, performing a half-nod for his adoring crowd.” The closing sequence of the film is a combination of elephants leaving the tent at the present day performance along with scenes from Darkest Africa: the fires and volcanic eruptions. “The end of the world. A clown dashes beneath the big top, screaming, fleeing from the skeleton attached to his back.” Morris believes he produced in these closing scenes, “a magical realm, a realm outside time.” It is an elegy. There are things dying as we speak, we are growing older and the world is changing (Torotello Nov. 5, 1997).

Another critic believes those old Clyde Beatty serials form Hoover’s memory; “it’s a past he’s trying to catch up to. It’s an odd dream of transcendence. To me it’s the central irony of the film—all
these characters are trying to create something outside of time. Something larger than themselves.

Something immortal.” Morris admits that he thought a lot about William Butler Yeats’, poem, “The
Circus Animal’s Desertion,” while contemplating the film. In the poem, Yeats looks back on his work and
likens his poems to circus animals that have been on show his entire life, but now have deserted him
(Bush Oct. 5, 2001).

Roger Ebert called the documentary one of the ten best films of the year, and it was voted the best
documentary of the year by the New York Film Critic’s Circle. Ebert believes that all four men have the
same goal: “to control the world in a way that makes them happy.” Morris weaves their dreams together
with music and images, into a meditation. “To watch the movie is to reflect that no matter how hard we
work, our lives are but a passing show.” Hoover, for example, has, according to Ebert, lived his life in the
shadow of a man he readily acknowledges as his superior: Clyde Beatty. As we watch images from
Darkest Africa, Hoover utters that there never will be another Clyde Beatty. “It is clear that Beatty
captured Hoover’s imagination at an early age. . .that Hoover is a lion tamer because Beatty was, so that
in a way, Hoover is carrying out Beatty’s programming” just like Brooks’ robots, or the mole rats.
“Life, “ he adds, “is a little like lion taming, wouldn’t you say? There we are in the cage of life, armed
only with a chair and a whip, trying to outsmart the teeth and claws. If we are smart enough or know the
right lore, sometimes we survive, and are applauded” (Ebert).

Others see the film more simplistically; as a message about man’s attempt to win against nature,
which was represented by Beatty’s bravado style that, “I am the greatest man in the world going in with
these savage beasts” (Annas Sept. 14, 1994). This same conclusion is drawn by another critic that argues,
“chaos could always be contained by the will of a strong white man.” Beatty with a whip and gun had
nature bow down before him, and these men’s attempts to tame nature are both exciting and frustrating
(“Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control”).

Beatty, like Van Amburg, also became a political metaphor for the National Review, the
conservative magazine founded by William F. Buckley, Jr. in 1955. W. H. Von Dreele, used the iconic
Beatty image in three poems, the first which appeared in 1981.
The Big Cats
Though Haig may paw, Weinberger bang,
And Meese and Baker show a fang,
A lion-tamer never quails
Despite the snarls and switching tails;
For if the cats could calculate
The trainer’s heading for the gate,
There’s chaos in the cage ahead.
At least that’s what Clyde Beatty said
(Von Dreele April 17, 1981: 404).

In 1990, he composed another:

It Beats Clyde Beatty
Like a lion trainer whose
Cold eye makes the big cats choose
Stools and chairs to squat upon
As the circus fans turn wan,
George Bush made those UN cats Hop to with long-distance chats

Sixteen years later, the image still worked:

Rove Roars Back
Clyde Beatty always said technique
Is what keeps circus lions meek;
And Last week, sprung from limbo, Karl,
Whip snapping, countered every snarl
(Hilary’s still the meanest cat)
Emitted by a Democrat.
Incredibly, Karl cowed the pack,
By then on stools, touting Iraq
(Von Dreele July 17, 2006: 35).

In 2002, the Fromm Foundation at Harvard commissioned the San Francisco Contemporary Chamber Players’ piece, “Clyde Beatty is Dead.” It was reviewed as having fractured patterns, with an intricate and elegant undercurrent. Because of clarity of detail and imagination, it was deemed the most successful and interesting piece of the evening. The Mexican born composer, Carlos Sanchez Gutierrez was a professor of composition at the Eastman School of Music who has received all kinds of prestigious awards during his career (Eastman School of Music).
The Future of Wild Animal Acts

Former wild animal trainer and now zoo director, David Tetzlaff, recently discussed the future of the wild animal act in America. He described a vastly changed world than the one in which Beatty gained so much fame.

‘Are circuses cruel?’ I have lost track of how many times I have heard that question. . . The first thing I do is look at the animals themselves. I don’t care if it’s a zoo, the circus, the horse barn or your living room: animal care should be Job One any place. I’ve seen circus animals that were in magnificent shape and I have seen zoo animals that I think deserved better care. And vice versa. Then I watch the relationship between the animals and their trainer. Do the animals respond willingly or does each trick look like a reluctant effort? Then I want to know if the animals have an opportunity to play or exercise in between shows? European circuses have been proactive for decades in providing an opportunity for their animals to be active when not performing. They build up big “playpens” for their cats and bears and fence off large areas for the elephants so they are not chained on the picket all day. Are the animals provided any enrichment? Those are things that create mental or physical stimulation. American circuses have done this to some degree but sadly for some its been too little too late.

I don’t think I was ever a circus fan but I was a fan of the big cat shows. . . that was my profession albeit in a static not a traveling environment. Those men and women were my peers. Those were the kind of animals I knew inside and out. That was then, this is now. These days I suppose you could say I am a retired big cat trainer who has become a zoo administrator. I haven’t done what is a legitimate cat show in sixteen years. Our guests still ask about the cat shows, all these years later, on almost a daily basis. But are such shows a thing of the past? Probably. Do I miss those days? Absolutely. I had the privilege of working with some of the most beautiful and regal animals on the planet. I spent fifteen years working cats in our shows down here and at the Cedar Point theme park in Ohio.

Yes, it was difficult and dangerous work that sometimes came with a heavy price. I had my share of stitches. But the rewards far outweighed the risks. I had close relationships with every one of the sixty leopards, tigers, lions, jaguars, and cougars I trained. I hand fed them as cubs, tended to them throughout their lives and wept bitterly when they died.

Nowadays I believe Naples Zoo, and all zoos, should be in the position to teach our guests to appreciate animals for what they are, not for what we can teach them to do. I think it is far more important for the public to know how close to extinction some species are and how they can support the work of those entities, in and outside the wild, that are working to save wild animals and wild places where they live.

So what’s the future of the circus? The circus with human performers will live on but I think animal acts will fade away. It’s already happening and those who don’t believe it are kidding themselves. Most of the best trainers are retired or have gone on to that great arena in the sky. The big shows used to have over forty big cats and carry more than twenty elephants. The circus that we recently saw had just six big cats and only three elephants. The very few animal acts left are simply here to witness the last gasp of a once popular profession (Tetzlaff Jan. 29, 2010).

Clyde Beatty with Nero (The Big Cage 1933)

Beatty on cover of Time (March 29, 1937)
CHAPTER 5.

THE SUCCESSORS

Marlin Perkins

If Buck had a successor that nearly approached his iconic status it was Marlin Perkins. In July 1947, Perkins made the cover of *Time* magazine as “one of the fastest rising zoo directors in the country: lean, gray-haired, R. Marlin Perkins, who has devoted most of his 42 years to studying, mothering, training, understanding, exploiting and explaining specimens of the animal kingdom from blacksnakes to baboons.” As head of the small, accessible Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, he was enjoying a boom in business, with attendance expected to reach a new high of 3 million (“By the Lake” July 7, 1947).

Zoos were “solidly founded on the eternal attraction that the animal kingdom has for man.” When the Chinese built the first zoo in 1100 BC, they called it an “intelligence park.” In the 20th century, *Time* continued, zoos remain an intelligence park for some, as well as a menagerie and circus, a place for lovers, for old men who want to sit in the shade, and for children with their “insatiable search for knowledge.” Every zoo tries to be unique; Philadelphia argues it is the oldest, Chicago’s Brookfield boasts about the quantity of animals it has—49 kangaroos and 29 different species of antelope, St. Louis has the most animal shows, while the National Zoo has rarities that were gifts to Presidents of the United States. Lincoln Park’s attractions were Heinie, a male chimp, who gained attention through a “terrifying stomp” followed by spitting in the face of the closest visitor. There also were Dillinger, the savage 18-year-old lion, and Judy, the 39-year-old elephant that loved cough drops. Of course, the biggest draw was Bushman, the gorilla, who the AZA called the “most outstanding and most valuable single animal of its kind in any zoo in the world,” worth more than $100,000. Much of his
appeal was his menacing look, but “he generally seems playful, happy and well-adjusted” (“By the Lake” July 7, 1947).

W.L. “Pa” Buck had circulated the story that he had been in negotiations in a village in French Cameroon to acquire the baby gorilla. When he met an impasse, the only answer was a bit of magic, so he removed his false teeth, wiped his mouth while inserting them back in, and smiled at the natives. This sealed the deal. Later, Perkins found out that Presbyterian missionaries had actually raised the young gorilla, and sold him when he became too large to handle (Perkins 1982). Perkins often helped feed Bushman and the great gorilla took a liking to him. This was attributed to a “natural thing; any good animal man could explain it. The feeling was mutual. To Perkins, man is a creature to talk and drink with; animals live to be understood” (“By the Lake” July 7, 1947).

Perkins, the son of a circuit judge, was born in 1905, and grew up in Carthage, Missouri and Pittsburg, Kansas. Perkins and his mother both contracted pneumonia when he was just seven. She died, while he survived. His patient and sedate father allowed him to capture and bring home wildlife as a boy. At 14 Perkins was sent to a military academy in Missouri. After an instructor ordered Perkins to throw out his pet snakes, his father allowed him to finish high school in Carthage. Following high school, he worked at odd jobs for a while before enrolling in the University of Missouri in animal husbandry where Perkins found the classes he took on zoology and evolution far more interesting than those of his major. He became determined to make wild animals his career, and dropped out of school after two years to get a job at the St. Louis Zoo, where in just two weeks he quickly rose from working on the grounds to becoming a relief keeper. He subsequently attended more classes at Washington University, intently reading books on herpetology, ornithology, and mammalogy (Perkins 1982).

Soon his knowledge and interest in snakes gained him the reptile keeper’s job. The zoo’s meager collection consisted of five indigenous snakes and one ten-foot python. To build up the collection, Perkins set out to collect snakes from the surrounding states. He found catching snakes one of the easiest things in the world; “just grab them behind the heads so they can’t bite and stuff them in a sack” (Perkins 1982).
Perkins’ boss loved his enthusiasm. George Vierheller had a reputation that he would do almost anything to attract crowds to the zoo. Unlike Hornaday, who insisted a zoo was a place of education and science, Vierheller was a showman. He christened a baby elephant with champagne, force-fed the python in public using a fire hose and 14 pounds of ground rabbit, and built a theater, where his costumed chimps counted, smoked, rode bicycles, played cards, and drummed. He also had a lion-tiger act, along with elephant performances. The spotlessly clean zoo pioneered some early barless exhibits and was one of the first zoos to exhibit pandas. A gorilla, the director had acquired from Hagenbeck’s was flown over on the *Graf Zeppelin* (Perkins 1982).

Perkins’ demonstrated his ambition by building up the reptile collection, thus gaining favor with the director, but in 1928 he almost died after being bitten by a gaboon viper while trying to remove parasites from the snake’s back. Despite quickly incising his finger and sucking out the venom, his arm swelled quickly to twice normal size and began to turn black. Even after receiving anti-venom and strychnine, his condition worsened. Luckily, he became one of the few humans to survive the bite, and after intense treatment left the hospital three weeks later (“By the Lake” July 7, 1947).

After becoming the curator of reptiles at the zoo, Perkins was asked to give a speech at a local civic organization. He read the boring academic paper that was way over the head of the listeners to speak extemporaneously in the future, since audiences want to be amused. This was a lesson he never forgot (Perkins 1982).

Perkins left St. Louis ten years later to become director of the Buffalo Zoo. There he found a zoo that had been allowed to deteriorate into a rat infested, filthy institution with the worst animal buildings he ever saw; dark, dingy, and with double-decker cages. After cleaning it up, he doubled the animal population to 800 animals, and built a state of the art reptile house with natural habitat displays. He found himself in a constant battle with the city over the budget, and had to support himself by starting an animal feed business on the side. When the director position at Lincoln Park opened up, Perkins quickly seized the opportunity (Perkins 1982).
In Chicago, he immediately began to modernize and brighten up the facility, re-labeling exhibitions, and setting up a ‘Zooanswer Shop,’ that answered questions posed by visitors. He gained the respect of the staff by jumping in and did any necessary odd job including cleaning out elephant skulls for exhibit and de-scenting skunks. He mingled in with the crowds and listened to the comments of visitors. Perkins found they paid no attention to the labels, which had been written as mini natural histories, so instead he had labels installed that answered what he heard them wondering; the age, weight, length of gestation, range, voice, life expectancy, and number of young born at birth. With elephants he added personal histories, and with Bushman he described where the gorilla’s natural habitat, his weight on arrival, how fast he had grown, and his favorite amusements (Perkins 1982).

In 1947, when the *Time* article appeared, zoos were desperate for animals after the wartime shutdown on trade. Prices; however, were prohibitively high for many species that Perkins wanted to add to the collection. But Perkins’ future plans still included building the best new reptile house containing the most extensive snake collection in the world. The old reptile building was converted into an exhibit describing the natural history of animals. “Everything in the animal kingdom stems from water, and if you could show the relation between animals step by step, it would be wonderfully educational. Just think—you start out with microscopic life, go on with sea worms, and pretty soon you have the whole blooming animal kingdom there in front of you” (“By the Lake” July 7, 1947).

Perkins acquired four more baby gorillas in West Africa, one so tiny it only weighed ten pounds. On the flight back, the flight crew became so enamored with the animals that the captain allowed one young gorilla to hold the wheel while the plane crossed the Atlantic. Perkins, however, avoided any insight or commentary on how these young apes had been captured (Perkins 1982).

In 1944, he published the first of four books, *Animal Faces*—beautiful photographic studies, shot by him of animals’ heads and faces. He hoped to show that the calm of the mountain sheep, the “supercilious” expression of the llama, and the “joyless austerity of the drill baboon, ‘Presbyterian,’ could go far in proving the author’s concern that the faces of animals are just as revealing as those of human beings” (Anderson Apr. 16, 1944: BR8).
Although Perkins had gained some national fame as a zoo director, he achieved his greatest renown through his willingness to pioneer the newest medium, television, earning him the sobriquet, the granddaddy of all TV wildlife programs. Like his mentor George Vierheller, Perkins insisted the lifeblood of a zoo was publicity and promotion. From the first time he saw experimental television, he thought it was the key to wildlife promotion and zoo success. He urged keepers to make ‘pets’ of their charges so the animals could easily be transported, handled, picked up, and touched when they appeared on programs. Initially there were two half-hour productions: Visit to the Lincoln Park Zoo and Zoo Parade, one for local and the other for national audiences (Perkins 1982).

Perkins’ locally aired program on WBKB originated live from the studio and was targeted at the approximate 300 televisions that existed in Chicago in 1945. Four years later, this program was re-titled, Zoo Parade (Boorstin May 15, 1986: 30). That same year Perkins was forced to order a bear shot, that the Chicago mayor had won in a football wager with the San Francisco mayor, when the animal broke out of its cage, climbed a fence, and headed toward a crowd of visitors (“Zoo Kills Mayor’s Bear” Oct. 22, 1949: 4). By 1951 Zoo Parade, now carried by 43 stations, became one of the most popular programs on television airing on Sundays from 4:30 to 5 p.m. on NBC. The program won its first award in 1951 from TV Forecast magazine, the precursor to TV Guide. Subsequently it won for Best Children’s Show, Best Educational Show, and Best Family Viewing Show.

Critics felt his remarks were far more enlightening than any label on an exhibit. The special stars of the show were a three-year-old chimp, a three-and-a-half year old orangutan, and a 3-year-old gorilla, since their features were more “mobile and expressive,” than those of other species. Perkins tried to give his shows a purpose by, for example, exposing myths about animals. He allowed small, non-poisonous snakes to bite him on air, insisting their bites were no more painful or dangerous than that of a kitten. However, before airtime in April 1951, Perkins was bitten by a rattlesnake forcing a Lincoln Park zoologist to substitute for him while he sought medical treatment (Adams Sept. 16, 1951: X13 and “TV Rattlesnake” April 2, 1951: 27).
In 1952, *Zoo Parade* began to incorporate on-site films shot by Jim Nash, a package designer for the sponsor, Quaker Oats’ Ken’l Ration Dog Food (Nagle Nov. 9, 1952: F9). Earlier in the year, the show had won a *Look Magazine* TV Award presented by Bob Hope on the *Kate Smith Evening Hour* (*New York Times* [Ad] Jan. 9, 1952: 36). Perkins also came out with his second book, *One Magic Night: A Story From the Zoo*, a Christmas tale for four to eight-year-olds about animals gaining the ability to talk for an hour each Christmas Eve, but unwisely using their limited opportunity only to brag, until a meek little Italian donkey reminded them of the meaning of Christmas and her important role (Buell Dec. 7, 1952: BR50).

*Zoo Parade* was aired for the first time in color in 1954, but since all of NBC’s color programming originated in the Colonial Theater in New York, Perkins presented an episode based on protective coloring using animals borrowed from the Bronx Zoo (Wohman Jan. 24, 1954: X13).

*Zoo Parade* proved extremely lucrative to the Lincoln Park Zoo by stimulating increased attendance and income for the parent Park District, but in 1955, Perkins resigned briefly as zoo director in a dispute over royalties. He was told not to appear on NBC in any films or projects, so he televised his shows from Los Angeles, Seattle, and the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo. Just a month later, Perkins returned to his job, receiving retroactive pay, but the number of programs per year was cut back to 22 from 52 (“Zoo Parade Edict” Sept. 25, 1955: 72 and “Perkins Still Zoo Head” Oct. 26, 1955: 63). That fall, Perkins’ third book, *Marlin Perkins’ Zoo Parade*, published by Rand McNally made the bestseller list for children’s books (“Children’s Best Seller” Nov. 13, 1955: BRA 53).

In December, Perkins took another pioneering step when he announced that nine films had been made from an expedition to Nairobi National Park in Kenya he had taken with his assistant, Jim Hurlbut. They had been accompanied on the trip by television columnist John Crosby who wrote about their experiences. The programs offered a sense of immediacy as Perkins’ and Hurlbut’s commentary was taped as they watched the animals in action from a Jeep during the actual filming. They planned programs on annual migrations and the humane capture of animals for zoos, as compared to ‘the cruel and heinous devices used by poachers to catch animals in the park,’” such as a horrible ring of spikes that an elephant
could inadvertently step in. As the elephant walked the spikes dug deeper and deeper into the flesh, leading to infection, eventual death, and easy acquisition of its ivory (New York Times Dec. 9, 1955: 49).

Perkins’ popularity made him the recipient of a long-term contract of between 15 to 19 years from NBC. Only Milton Berle’s 25-year contract was longer. However, David Sarnoff’s practices came under the scrutiny of anti-trust regulators and in 1957 Zoo Parade was cut from the program lineup, although re-runs were still aired. In addition, Perkins still presented two or three one-hour color specials shot on location (Shepard Sept. 26, 1956: 55 and “Television” Sept. 12, 1957: 49).

One of the specials dealt with the upper Amazon. Perkins, together with famed herpetologist, Ross Allen, captured freshwater dolphins as well as bushmasters, fer-de-lances, and the mussurana, a snake that eats other snakes. They acquired amazing footage of the snake attacking, constricting and eating a fer-de-lance. Perkins was awed at the diversity of life found in the Amazon and wondered “why man would want to disturb that glorious tropical rainforest and the millions of creatures and plants that live there.” He also encountered the Yaguas and learned about their skill with blowpipes and darts dipped in curare. He bought a pipe and quiver of darts, and later enjoyed demonstrating to his friends the skills he had learned from the tribe (Perkins 1982: 134).

In 1962, NBC brought back Perkins in the new Wild Kingdom series. The half-hour show was to be televised at 3:30 on Sunday afternoons. Originally filmed both at Lincoln Park and on site, Perkins was able to continue the project when he gained the directorship of the St. Louis Zoo following the retirement of Vierheller, and the Chicago Park District’s unwillingness to match St. Louis’s offer (Shepard Aug. 4, 1962: 63). The first show featured an expert on raptors and the art of falconry—Jim Fowler—who later became Perkins’ sidekick on the series. Today, Fowler is the chairman of the prestigious Explorer’s Club and a recipient of their highest honor.

Perkins served as the zoologist on an expedition organized by Sir Edmund Hillary and sponsored by the World Book Encyclopedia to the Himalayas in search of the Abominable Snowman. The 55-year-old Perkins, undertook a vigorous workout regimen to prepare himself for the adventure. The expedition was unable to find any legitimate relics or physical evidence proving the existence of the yeti. The pelt
proved to be that of the rare blue bear, while scalps, which were later examined at the Field Museum, proved to be manufactured. The footprints were actually the four paws of a fox (Perkins 1982).

*Wild Kingdom* debuted with a show highlighting the results of the expedition and described other animal myths. However, the media critic Jack Gould was disgusted by the handling of the commercials, “In most jarring style Dr. Perkins abruptly twisted his narrative on nature into a series of plugs for a life insurance company. A cleaner separation of editorial and advertising content would make the show more palatable” (Gould Jan. 11, 1963: 5). Ironically, this was the agreement Perkins had made with the Mutual of Omaha board chairman when he agreed to sponsor the show. Perkins felt uncomfortable doing ordinary advertisements since he believed being a zoologist gave him no special authority to endorse a product, but the way the ads were blended into the narrative seemed more agreeable to him (Perkins 1982). Four years later, in discussing two programs on animal behavior, Gould again brought up his strong dislike of the commercials (Gould Oct. 14, 1969: 95).

At the St. Louis Zoo, Perkins was able to accomplish more of his goals, such as constructing a miniature railroad actually used to transport people, as well as hire the first full-time veterinarian, and an educational coordinator. He also established ties with the new Barry Commoner Center for Environment at Washington University, constructing a building where oat grass was grown hydroponically, supplying the zoo with a ton of fresh cut grass daily (Perkins 1982).

In 1965, Perkins’ published a book aimed at children from 9 to 12, based on his trip to the Kalahari describing his observations of the Bushmen and their strong link to nature. The title, *I Saw You From Afar*, was a very complimentary greeting among the Bushmen (Berkvist May 9, 1965: BRA 21). Later trips included one to the Great Barrier Reef of Australia where he was able to film three gray reef sharks attacking a tuna, and how they did not actually bite off chunks, but instead rotated their bodies to tear off pieces of flesh (Perkins 1982: 71).

By 1974, the *New York Times* reported on the popularity of wildlife films on television. They facetiously believed that “the Dark Continent of Stanley and Livingstone must be wormy with cameramen, directors and technicians today” (Smith “The Swiftest Animal in the World” *New York Times*).
Feb. 8, 1974: 23). But Perkins was interested in North American wildlife as well, establishing a 2,500-acre sanctuary outside of St. Louis to insure the protection, conservation, and survival of wolves. The zoo also helped sponsor the International Symposium for Threatened and Endangered North American Wildlife held in Washington, D. C. The meeting was opened by Jimmy Stewart’s reading of Albert Schweitzer’s, _Reverence for Life_ (Perkins 1982).

After retiring from the zoo in 1970, Perkins devoted his time to _Wild Kingdom_. Professional photographers shot footage all over the world, it was then edited (generally one foot was used for every 30 feet shot), and a script written. Perkins made the introductory and closing remarks, as well as the narration. _Wild Kingdom_ won four Emmys as well as the first Communications Award presented by the National Wildlife Federation. A survey indicated that 61 per cent of viewers questioned were strongly or at least moderately influenced in their views and knowledge about animals from the program. This was a higher percentage than any other wildlife or nature program received (Perkins 1982: 186).

Perkins remained very active, going on an elephant safari in India, learning scuba techniques so he could make an episode about the calving grounds of the humpback whale, and traveling to Tanzania where he studied chimps with Jane Goodall and other researchers. He ventured to Lappland to observe the reindeer drive, to Papua, New Guinea to learn about crocodiles, watched sharks from submersibles, and fulfilled a boyhood dream when he traveled to Komodo to observe the giant monitors that his hero, Douglas Burden had written about in the first issue of _Natural History_ (Perkins 1982).

Shortly before Perkins died in 1986, WNYC-TV in New York produced a one-hour program reporting on the extent that some moviemakers would go in animal abuse to capture a desired effect, allowing expediency to overrule decency. They cited the western, _Heaven’s Gate_, and Warren Beatty’s, _Reds_, as both using trip wires to gain spectacular effects of horses falling, resulting in the deaths of a number of animals (Corry Mar. 24, 1986: C18).

Fakery was another technique, exemplified by Disney’s concocted narrative of lemmings committing suicide because of over-population in _White Wilderness_ (1958). But Perkins was not exempt either, and the program described how in one case, he had tied a string to a water moccasin’s tail, threw
him out into a pond, and repeatedly reeled the snake in until an annoyed alligator attacked it. When asked to comment, the seriously ill Perkins said, “I’d like you to stop your camera right now, please.” Skepticism seemed to be justified after another filmmaker admitted that faking is a “fundamental tool of the wildlife film industry” (Corry Mar. 24, 1986: C18).

Less than two months after this report Perkins died at the age of 81 of lymphatic cancer. He was called the “zookeeper who became a household name as America’s television safari guide.” His “reedy voice and his white hair often set against a zebra striped Jeep with a herd of water buffalo lumbering by in the background, became familiar to millions world-wide (Boorstin May 15, 1986: 30). Perkins reached his largest audience in 1974, when *Wild Kingdom* was broadcast over 224 stations, reaching an audience of 34 million (Whemey MBC Museum of Broadcasting).

Malamud considered *Wild Kingdom* “inappropriately intrusive,” merely reinforcing audience expectations with scenes of trapping, chasing, and physically interacting with wild animals. Since the filming of wildlife first began, nature has been seen as too slow and un-dramatic for the modern temperament. Movies, and then television, have shown nature as conforming to the narratives, pace, and style the audience expects, producing an extravagant “animal opera,” for armchair naturalists (Malamud 1998: 253).

Yet, Perkins always wanted to be considered a serious scientist and an advocate for the professionalization of zoo jobs. He was thrilled at receiving an honorary Doctor of Science from the University of Missouri, and claimed to be overwhelmed when in 1978 the AZA presented him with a special award:

> In recognition of his meritorious service to the wildlife of this earth and to the zoological professions: by educating the public to the wonders of wild things and wild places through the presentation of their true stories; by putting to rest the myths and misunderstandings which hamper an acute awareness of the wonders of nature; by fostering a conservation ethic and by presenting wildlife appreciation and stewardship as worthy and noble precepts, and by depicting through his own example, the zoo culturist in a learned, dignified, and exemplary fashion, thereby ennobling the profession (Perkins 1982: 188-189).

Compared to many of his predecessors and those who followed him in promoting wildlife, Perkins was relatively subdued. He always seemed to be a zoo man first, and although he enjoyed his
travels, he never expressed the same drive to return to the romance of a remote jungle camp, take walks in
the forest, and escape from civilization back into the wild, that peppered Buck’s books. His
autobiography, *My Wild Kingdom*, is actually boring, with Perkins writing in tedious detail about
expeditions—the exact number of cameras, amount of film, types of lenses—as well as his zoo and
television experiences, giving credit to almost every keeper, camera man, assistant, and anyone else he
can name, that the actual exciting or unique moments of his wildlife experiences are buried.

The programs were more exciting, with a signature feature being footage of Perkins and
increasingly his assistant, “pursuing and at times physically engaging with the wildlife-of the week,
whether that meant mud-wrestling with alligators, struggling to get free from the vice-like grip of a
massive water snake, running from unexpectedly awakened elephants or seemingly angered sea lions, or
jumping from a helicopter onto the back of an elk in the snows of Montana” (Whemey MBC Museum of
Broadcasting). Since the programs were edited to emphasize the dramatic, comic, or dangerous interplay
between con-specifics, species, or humans and animals; they drew criticism from some zoologists and
environmentalists for stressing entertainment rather than scientific education.

Yet *Wild Kingdom* reflected in precisely these ways many of the dominant ecophilosophical and
ecological tenets of its day. Set ‘out in nature,’ as one reviewer put it, and structured around the
actions and thoughts of protagonists who have left the ordered world of the zoo to explore the
unpredictable and often alien landscape of nature, *Wild Kingdom* echoed the conservationist idea
of the natural world and the human world as, at best, separate but equal kingdoms (Whemey
MBC Museum of Broadcasting).

Thus, Perkins can be seen as a pioneer and a throwback. He wanted to be considered a
professional scientist who advocated the preservation of species and ecosystems, yet he used the new
medium of television to present to the public the same vicarious thrills of safely watching wild animals in
action, and intrepid humans finding themselves in precarious situations in the wild. He opened a floodgate
of nature programming on television, as well as a continuing argument regarding narratives, messages,
faking, and sensationalism.

Gunther Gebel-Williams

Much of the negative image surrounding Beatty was the result of Ringling advertising the trainers that succeeded him after he departed the show and became a rival. The European trainers that became their mainstay were promoted as “anti-Beattys.” For example, when the excellent French trainer Alfred Court made his debut in 1940, the Ringling ad read:


Court and his assistants, in their memoirs indicated that they too, had been severely attacked and had had many violent confrontations with the cats, but this is not what was stressed in the ads. Happy to be able to escape wartime Europe with their animals, they provided audiences with a different type of presentation that appealed to some circus historians who took the publicity to heart. They claimed Court could “soothe the savage beast” through kindness, a soft voice, and patience, without firing blanks into an animal’s face, “snapping vicious whips,” or poking chair legs into their eyes. Henry Ringling North wrote that Court was not a “whip and pistol bully boy,” cowing the cats by “sheer brutality” (North and Hatch 1960: 247-248 and Joys 1984: 159, 165). Actually Beatty and these trainers never engaged in any verbal confrontations, both saying they respected each others work.

Although Ringling presented a long line of excellent trainers, none would really touch the imagination of American audiences until Gunther Gebel-Williams made his debut with the 99th edition of The Greatest Show on Earth in 1969.
Born in the Silesian village of Schweidnitz in 1934, Gunther, along with his mother and sister, fled to western Germany when his father, a theatrical set designer, was drafted into the German army and sent to the Siberian front. The end of the war found the family impoverished and living on Care packages. When Gunther’s mother gained a job with Circus Williams as a seamstress, the twelve-year-old left school and became an apprentice in the show. When his mother left the show, Gunther, overcome with grief, stayed on under the tutelage of the show owner, Harry Williams. He was initially trained as an acrobat and Roman rider, and at 15 filled in for his mentor in his first solo appearance. But by the end of 1949, Gunther began to learn the techniques of horse and elephant training. Two years later when the circus was playing England, Harry Williams died after being injured in an act recreating chariot racing. In 1952, Harry’s wife, Carola asked Gunther, then 18, to join her in managing the circus and gave him the family name. The move proved to be a good one, and Gunther kept expanding his training horizons. By 1960 he had put together an act consisting of two elephants and two tigers. By the time he reached thirty, Gebel-Williams had been honored with awards for his outstanding horsemanship, his elephant act, and as an all-around performer (Joys 1984: 181-182; Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Gunther Gebel-Williams Farewell Tour Media Guide 1989 and Gebel-Williams 1991).

His burgeoning reputation led Irvin Feld, the owner and producer of Ringling, to invite Gebel-Williams to perform for The Greatest Show on Earth. When Gunther hesitated out of loyalty, Feld bought the entire circus for $2 million dollars. The offer proved too good to turn down, so Gunther, his new wife, 30 fellow performers, nine tigers, 38 horses, and 12 elephants set sail to the United States. When the show debuted in 1969 at the Venice, Florida winterquarters, Gebel-Williams made four separate appearances and won the acclaim of the press. Ringling’s press releases introduced him as “A Breed Apart. Gone are the whips, chairs, and pistols of yesterday’s heroes Clyde Beatty and Mabel Stark. In their place a new hero has emerged. A kinder, gentler Circus star whose unique mastery over wild animals has dramatically changed the concept of wild animal training forever. He is Gunther Gebel-Williams, The Greatest Wild Animal Trainer of All Times.” Later that year he was featured in the first of many annual hour-long specials of circus highlights broadcast by NBC. Like Beatty, he became a favorite interview subject for

In order to keep the show fresh, Gebel-Williams continually improvised, introducing an act consisting of three tigers, two horses, and an African elephant in 1970, and began to train an act featuring fifteen leopards, three panthers, and two pumas in 1974. Two years later, he commanded three rings of elephants and horses using only his voice. After finally perfecting the leopard act, it debuted in 1977 with what would become his trademark, a leopard named Kenny after Feld’s son, draped around his neck. This iconic image was featured on an American Express ad and led to Gunther’s own CBS special, “Lord of the Rings.” Two years later, Gunther became a citizen of the United States, and the following year introduced his first white tiger. In 1981, he had another NBC special, “My Father, the Circus King,” in which his son, Mark Oliver, described his relationship with his father and led a back-stage tour. Gebel-Williams added a trained giraffe to his presentations the next year. During the next few years Gunther taped a “Liberty Minute” commemorating the centennial of the Statue of Liberty, and appeared as a celebrity presenter at the Emmy Awards. He began his farewell tour in December of 1987, and was honored by many cities and organizations during the tour, as well as being the subject of an in-depth study on ABC’s 20/20 (Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Gunther Gebel-Williams Farewell Tour Media Guide 1989 and Gebel-Williams 1991).

Ringling said, regarding these final appearances, that, “his gentleness, his kindness, and his innate ability to communicate with even the wildest animals quite simply overwhelmed American audiences.” They called him a “charismatic, versatile superstar,” who also was the “hardest working performer in the circus.” Unlike other trainers, Gebel-Williams spent “sixteen hours a day, eleven months of the year” caring for, rehearsing, or performing with “’his guys’ the menagerie to whom he is absolutely devoted. He is inexhaustible and delights in his work. ‘The animals are my friends. Caring for them makes me their friend too.’” His trademark was his “patience and perfectionism,” and he asserted that, “‘You can’t rush an animal. Like children, each animal is different and you must earn their respect and know their needs.’”
This does not mean the animals were not dangerous, and although Gunther was mauled many times, requiring a total of over 500 stitches, and having his teeth knocked out and his lips heavily scarred, he never missed a performance during his twenty years with Ringling. ‘“Working with and training the animals is a beautiful thing,”’ states Gebel-Williams. ‘When an animal’s brainpower is enhanced, life becomes more natural, easier, more pleasant,’ he adds. ‘To get inside the head of an animal and communicate, that is wonderful. That is what I live for’” (Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Gunther Gebel-Williams Farewell Tour Media Guide 1989).

When Gebel-Williams joined the Greatest Show on Earth, he came under the very astute promotional ability of Irvin Feld, who before purchasing the circus had been a rock music impresario. For Gunther, he helped create the dazzling-costumed peroxide blond sex symbol that Time called a “manic, peroxided Tarzan,” when at the climax of the act he straddled a tiger that had leaped on the back of an elephant and saluted the audience (“Big Cat” May 24, 1971: 67).

In a perceptive essay, acclaimed author, William Hoagland, called Gebel-Williams the best all-around animal man to come to America in twenty years. First he works alone with his cats, as lithe and as on top of things as Clyde Beatty once was, but with a gentle, fertile, inventive delight, a sinful, delicious intimacy, and frank joy—he works like a genius, in other words. . . . He could go on playing with them forever. . . . but all pleasures must end, the fourteen elephants come on and he gives them a run for their money as well, with a Peter Pan grin, a crucifix bouncing on his bare chest. In his slippers, he roller skates on their backs. . . . This fellow treats them like mothers or sisters, however, or maybe overgrown tigers. He leaves leeway for their bashful grace, does practically all the directing with his voice alone, and runs and runs like the wind in order to be everywhere at once (Hoagland 1970: 64-65).

As with Beatty earlier, reporters were surprised at how small Gebel-Williams was in person. McCandlish Phillips of the New York Times thought he looked tall and strapping from the audience. “It is therefore surprising to find out there is actually little of him. . . . a mere hors d’oeuvre for a tiger. He stands 5 feet 6 and weighs 137 pounds. What shape he takes in the eyes of the tigers is wholly imponderable. Perhaps he looks 10 feet tall to them. In any case he enjoys mastery over the beasts that has nothing to do with his stature.” He added that in the center ring “in purple tights, gold boots and a fire-flashing jacket of imitation diamonds. . . .[he] looks like a prince of some impossible kingdom” (Phillips May 10, 1971: 28 and Joys 1984: 184).
John Culhane, also of the Times, remembered that, “When I was a boy, I read a terrific book called Tarzan and the Golden Lion. Now this guy in the giant cage looked like a combination of ‘Tarzan’ and the ‘Golden Lion.’ His long golden hair looked like a lion’s mane. His hard muscled physique looked like Tarzan’s and his bright red boots and tights, his jacket that glitters like gold and the big golden cross on his chest, all added up to my idea how a Lord of the Jungle should dress” (Culhane May 13, 1973: 15). Other writers have described him as having a satanic grin, a cloven-hoofed, urchinish, and inspired look. He has been called a sex symbol with a “presence wired for sensuality—flowing yellow locks, revealing tights, bare chest, smile, charisma” (Kirkpatrick Sept. 26, 1977: 89). One female columnist even believed he was “the embodiment of what the Creator had in mind for the human race. . . He’s almost too good. It’s difficult to believe he was born of woman” (Reed Jan. 8, 1981: 38 and Joys 1984: 188, 192).

His interpretation, between the bravado and flash of the fighting act and the slow, solemnity of the tableau acts, is a skillful blend of great speed, and a technique that makes it all look easy like a great ballet dance, matador, or skier. Like the cats, he is “cool, insouciant, and very self-possessed. Thus the cats, seemingly so right for him in temperament, have a peculiar rightness for him” (Schickel Aug. 1971: 22-23).

Gunther said he preferred tigers, although they were creatures of emotion and mood, like “the proverbial hundred flowers. There are no leaders for the trainer to watch; any one of them will stick out a paw and the earth may become his sky.” He described them as very quick, and when they fought, equally quickly one cat can be killed. He called them unreliable, solitary, uncooperative, self-absorbed, willful, and foolish. . . “very much animal.” He denied any ‘mystical ties’ to his animals. “’That’s not very romantic, but it is not so. No man can have a mystical relationship with a wild animal. All I can try to do is love them, respect them, and above all, try to understand them” (Phillips May 10, 1971: 28; Hoagland July 1971: 130; Culhane 1973: 15, and Schickel Aug. 1971: 22).

Gebel-Williams earned about $85,000 a year in 1977, and was provided with a trailer, motorcycle, and tutor for his children. He found every day in America a holiday, was quite frugal with his money, although when home in Florida he drove a Rolls-Royce, and according to Ringling clown, Peggy
Williams, the “essence of Gunther Gebel Goober Gimlets Williams” was so easy. “Most kids dream they run away to join the circus. This man, Goob, joined the circus to become a kid. And he never stopped being one. Absolute” (Kirkpatrick Sept. 26, 1977; 89-90).

After his retirement, Gunther planned to remain in an administrative position with Ringling. He said he would miss his oldest animals, especially the elephants that he had been together with for 40 years. He vowed he would never give them to another trainer or see them sold off. “This is not going to happen to my guys. If that happens, I’d buy them back and put’em in a big place and we’ll be together for all time. For sure” (Dean July 13, 1989: 1).

Gebel-Williams retired when he was still in excellent physical shape, and insisted he wanted to go out on top, not hobbling into the ring on a cane. His only regret, he laughed was the bleached blond hair, “once it caught on we were stuck with it” (Collins Feb 7, 1989: C13). At the time of his retirement he was still working with 21 elephants, 38 horses, 22 tigers, 4 zebras, 3 camels, and a couple of llamas.

Nine years after he retired, The New York Times took another look at Gebel-Williams, now a vice-president, part owner, animal welfare supervisor, and general trouble-shooter with Ringling. He admitted that his childhood was not only ravaged by war time, but by a father who was a drunk and beat his mother, who in turn beat him, before contracting with the circus for her son to be hired as an usher, unbeknownst to him. The circus in wartime Germany was a place for the unwanted to be dropped off. It was not surprising that the traumatized boy bonded with animals. He also admitted his appeal in the center ring was based on charisma, courage, and sex. And that he was quite a womanizer, although family was always No. 1. While still performing, he had to face some criticism from the budding animal rights advocates, especially the popular author and television personality, Cleveland Amory, who founded The Fund For Animals. By 1999, the movement had grown much stronger, and Gunther, who insisted he always trained his animals with positive reinforcement, was irate. “Once there was a time the circus came to town and the children followed it dancing, but these days the children are more likely to be given coloring books by the animal rights people that feature a circus elephant weeping, and the trainer might be singled out for abuse” (Wadler Apr. 9, 1999: B2).
Mark Oliver, Gunther’s son, had taken over the tiger and elephant acts under his father’s supervision, but in 2000 his father underwent surgery for a cancerous brain tumor. Kenneth Feld, the owner of The Greatest Show on Earth, said that, “Gunther single-handedly changed the face of animal training while setting the standard of performance for circus performers throughout the world. He inspired an entire generation of Americans with his unique and special bond with animals, changing forever the relationship between animals and mankind. He did it without threats or brute force.” In Gebel-Williams’ 1991 autobiography, Untamed, he insisted he had “never been stricken with the man-against-beast syndrome. Rather I built a world around the animals with whom I worked, and in it I was their father and they were my children.” He developed a kind of mutual respect with the animals. Like Beatty he argued he was a trainer and never a tamer (Gebel-Williams 1991).

On July 19, 2001, Gunther Gebel-Williams died in his home in Venice, Florida, from a cancerous brain tumor. It was on the same date as Clyde Beatty had died 36 years earlier (Severo July 20, 2001: B7). Unhappily, Gunther’s funeral was marred by animal rights activists dressed in red devil’s outfits. In 2005, an eight-foot tall bronze statue on a three-foot marble pedestal of the trainer was erected at the Venice, Florida train depot, the city’s first publicly commissioned artwork. Members of PETA quietly protested, one of the five was dressed in an elephant costume. They hoisted signs that read “Gunther Beats Animals.” PETA requested if they could erect a crying and shackled elephant statue nearby to “counter the shameless promotion of a man who spent his entire life terrorizing animals with whips, bullhooks and food deprivation” (Quinlan Dec. 6, 2005). Shortly after his father’s death, Mark Oliver, now married and the father of a son, also retired, unwilling to defend himself against the continuous complaints issued by the activists.

Today, circus fans still argue over who was the better trainer, Beatty or Gebel-Williams. On David Lewis Hammarstrom’s blog, the circus historian and author recounts that, “I saw Beatty when I was young enough to be riveted to his every move in the cage. I don’t remember having ever sat as still and fixated during an entire act as I did that time. Every single moment, the audience was wondering, will he get out alive? . . . Clyde Beatty created dramatic tension. That was the premise to his greatness.”
What he liked best about GGW was his, “Agile way with elephants.”

I realize there have been better trainers, I just liked his easy elegance and those voice commands, even if they were illusory. There are a number of cage trainers I would place above GGW, mainly because I suppose Gunther was a bit too fey to generate the sort of drama I enjoy from a wild animal act. Too elegant. Which is the very reason why he was so perfect for a new era dominated by audiences wanting ultra-humane imagery. He connected perfectly with his time, and the Ringling production and public relations teams did a brilliant job of packaging and ballyhooing him to the public. Irvin Feld’s greatest hour.

“For theatrics I would pick Clyde Beatty any day ” (“Big Cage Showdown” Showbiz David Blog. Comment posted Mar. 13, 2008).

Hammarstrom went on to say that circus acts do not come through well when recorded. “When we are there, we watch performers survive by their skill in the present tense, in the flesh. It is not illusion (even if some of the theatrics are just that), for we sense that anything can happen. The greats bring a distinctive personality to the ring” (“Big Cage Showdown” Showbiz David Blog. Comment posted Mar. 13, 2008).

C. B. Davis in *Theatre Journal* observes that:

PETA has been so successful at disseminating the bad trainer meme that for many people I spoke to, it filters out all but the most negative information about training or use of animals. For these people, all training is, a priori, a bad thing. There is nothing in any of the PETA literature I have pored over that addresses what would actually happen to the big cats and elephants that are currently performing if they were freed from the circus. There are no remaining habitats for any species of big cats that are beyond human influence or active management, and there are very few well-funded, legitimate refuges for retired performing animals. Contrary to the romanticized vision of the wilderness, big cats have always shared territory with humans. Nature comes before culture, but the concept of nature as pure presence is a cultural product of civilization [Richard Dawkins introduced memes in *The Selfish Gene* (1976) as a basis for discussion of evolutionary principles in explaining the spread of ideas and cultural phenomena.] (Davis 2007: 611).

To this Davis adds

To grossly oversimplify, the big cat show has undergone a gradual evolution from applauding the human performer for simply getting in and out of the cage alive, to histrionic displays of bravery and dominance, to more and more gently cueing the animals to perform carefully taught ‘tricks’—now referred to by trainers as ‘behaviors.’ Regardless of the ethical stance one takes on animals in entertainment, any activity this dangerous, difficult, expensive, and time-consuming requires explanation beyond a tendency to enact patriarchal dominion and Anglo-imperialism or a spectacular response to anxiety about human superiority in the wake of Darwin’s new theory (Davis 2007: 547-48).
Davis concludes that the big cat act is surviving precariously, but that its background, along with campaigns against it have long-standing economic and historic roots. The protests have so far failed at crucial points, but “now more than ever threaten to relegate the icon of the lion-tamer to the once under-erasure status of blackface minstrelsy—an extinct genre that has in recent years been acknowledged by historians as central to the formation of American popular entertainment (Davis 2007).

Davis notes that today,

Most animal trainers and animal rights activists hold and express diametrically opposed versions of the ‘truth,’ both claming their own view to be informed, compassionate, and even reasonable. I qualify ‘reasonable’ because both trainers and animal rights activists have ultimately utopian goals that, if explicitly stated, seem impossible and eccentric to mainstream sensibilities. The philosophical bottom line of the animal rights movement is a utopian vision in which humans would have as little effect on animal life as possible. From this point of view, all training and inclusion of animals in entertainment is, a priori, cruel. Yet the reply of the culture of wild animal trainers is that they are committed to the equally utopian idea of positive, mutually beneficial interaction between people and animals. For trainers, this interaction consumes the greater part of their everyday life, demanding an uncompromising level of commitment if the animals are to be presentable to the public in entertainment contexts. Animal rights activists counter that spectators at a circus or cinema see only a distorted and denatured image of humiliated and enslaved creatures that bear little resemblance to animals in the wild. The great majority of people find themselves somewhere between these extremely contrasting positions, concerned about the welfare if not the rights of animals, but as likely to become a vegan and give up their pets as they are to become intimately involved with wild animals. More than in any previous period, popular culture today continues to favor and perpetuate negative images and narratives of trainers—a recurrent theme in the endlessly rerun Simpsons, as well as in the news media, and talk shows. Hooking into powerful memes, the politics of animal rights has infected the discourse of animal welfare, resulting in mostly negative consequences for both animals and those who work them (Davis 2007: 612).


**Discovery and Animal Planet**

Animal Planet and Discovery have attempted to create an iconic hero through their programming. As a Discovery spokesmen said in 2002, “You don’t have Marlin Perkins standing on a hill pointing to the animals. You have a guy who jumps into the water to wrestle crocodiles. They have taken Wild Kingdom into the 21st century” (Moore June 3, 2002).

Animals, it seems, suddenly are not cool enough for Animal Planet. Consequently, the niche cable station that has dedicated itself to furry, slimy, and scaly creatures since 1996 is rallying around a brand-new slogan: “Animal Planet. Surprisingly human.” … its execs insist that they’re not losing focus, just trying to change perceptions. “Animal Planet is not only about animals. . . . ,” they say in a news release announcing the new slogan. “It’s about people . . . and
real compelling human stories made more intense, more fun, more frightening, more alive, and more entertaining because of the world we share with animals” (Barney April 26, 2010: D3).

The presenters include Canadian Dave Salmoni, an “apex predator expert,” who presents Rogue Nature, Shaun Ellis, the Wolfman, who infiltrated and became part of a wolf pack in a wildlife park in England, Eugene Cussons, who is the Sanctuary director of the Jane Goodall Institute’s, Chimp Eden, and Brandon MacMillan, an animal trainer with a canine obedience school, who, because he needs an adrenaline rush, returns to wild animals to feel that he is truly alive (Animal Planet).

These programs are augmented by revenge films like, Animal Armageddon, with programs on “Nature’s Wrath,” “Hell on Earth,” and “Doomsday,” a re-booting of Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom, with each episode hosted by a different expert, and River Monsters, a seven-part series presented by biologist and “extreme angler,” Jeremy Wade, who travels worldwide to track down stories about fish that supposedly prey on humans. Paul Watson, of Sea Shepherd, a self-proclaimed ‘eco-pirate,’ wages Whale Wars to end illegal whaling and promote marine conservation. He was named one of Time’s environmental heroes of the 20th century in 2000. The Discovery Channel’s, Bear Grylls of Man vs. Wild, is a native of the Isle of Wight, who is a veteran of the British army version of special forces, was the youngest British climber to scale Mount Everest in 1998, circumnavigated the UK on jet skis, and crossed the North Atlantic in an inflatable (Animal Planet).

Animal Planet’s next venture will involve Ric O’Barry. A few years ago, O’Barry became part of the Oscar-winning documentary The Cove. New York Magazine called it part movie and part environmental experience as the crew attempted to infiltrate the cove in the Japanese town of Taiji, where dolphins are captured for marine mammal parks, and the excess animals are slaughtered, even though the meat is dangerously contaminated with mercury. Dolphin kills in Japan have been documented before, but this is an illegal hunt in a national park, with the additional danger of yakuza, or organized crime involvement (“The Cove’s Richard O’Barry on Secret Dolphin Slaughter” Jan. 16, 2009).

In August, SeaWorld rejected the condemnation it received in The Cove, arguing that since 1993, no U.S. theme parks have imported animals from drive fisheries, and that in the 1980s, they had actually
“saved” some animals from Japanese drive fisheries. The dolphins seen today are either captive born or rescued distressed animals. O’Barry replied, “This is an industry of hypocrites, and I hope that this film exposes them.” The HSUS concurred, seeing a connection, especially since Americans also own Polynesian and Caribbean theme parks. O’Barry went on, insisting that marine animal parks do not sensitize audiences or heighten awareness and respect for marine mammals; in fact, there are 50 dolphinariums in Japan. The director of The Cove, Louis Psihoyes, said that the film should speak for itself. “It’s a bigger crime against nature than we ever expected” (Abramowitz Aug. 1, 2009).

After The Cove won the Oscar for best full-length documentary, the most satisfying result was that it was scheduled to be shown in five major Japanese cities in May or June, 2010, and later extended to twenty more. O’Barry believed this would shut down the cove permanently (Crandall Apr. 5, 2010).

The film, a three-year, $2.5 million venture, was the brainchild of friends, Louie Psihoyes, a National Geographic photographer, and Netscape founder, Jim Clark, who as dive buddies had spent ten years traveling around the world and seeing at first hand the degradation of the oceans. The result was that Clark launched the Oceanic Preservation Society, and Psihoyes began planning four documentaries about endangered oceans. While attending a marine mammal conference in 2005, he met O’Barry, an “endearing, obsessed activist.” O’Barry told him about $2 billion captive dolphin business and invited him to Taiji. The result was 610 hours of film footage, and The Cove (Abramowitz Aug. 1, 2009).

Animal Planet stated that The Cove was a moving, powerful, and challenging film that belongs on their network. They called O’Barry a fascinating man with an important mission and remarkable stories to tell. The Cove will become an unscripted series called Dolphin Warriors, with episodes produced by O’Barry’s son, Lincoln, who is also planning a biopic about his father. At Taiji, the killing has moved out of the cove and is conducted further off shore (Dehnart Mar. 9, 2010 and Kaufman Mar. 11, 2010).

One of Animal Planet’s favorite presenters is Jeff Corwin, who has a master’s degree in natural resources conservation and B.S.’s in biology and anthropology. Even before his television career took off, Corwin addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations on the need to conserve tropical rainforests. The Massachusetts native, with an on-screen presence that veered from “thoughtful biologist
to mischievous kid,” was able to draw 1.01 million viewers—a high for cable in 2001. His youthful inspirations were Marlin Perkins, David Attenborough, and Flipper. In one episode, Corwin stressed the importance of standing still when facing angry elephants, “What you do privately in your underpants is your business. You don’t run away.” Corwin frequently uses humor to make a point, for example when he met digitally created, “Giant Monsters” like megatherium and smilodon comparing them to the endangered Florida panther. His goal is to make conservation issues entertaining through dynamic, unconventional showmanship. Corwin, Slate claimed, with his die-cast jaw, has mastered the trick of being both rugged and cuddly. In 2004, he won his first Emmy for the kids’ series, Jeff Corwin Unleashed, and was named one of People’s 50 most beautiful people in 2002 (“Jeff Corwin” May 13, 2002; Barr Nov. 7, 2003: 23; Berger Feb./Mar. 2003; Cohen Dec. 14, 2001, and Scanlan April 4-17, 2005: 22).

Jack Hannah

For the majority of the public probably the most iconic wildlife personality is Jack Hannah. When People selected him as one of its 50 most beautiful people in 1996, the magazine reported that when Cosmo editor, Helen Gurley Brown, invited him to her office, “My staff went berserk. . . . he’s devastatingly sexy.” Bo Derek agreed, claiming “he was born lucky,” physically “he’s a 10.” Betty White was wild about his “firm, strong hands,” and claimed he was the only person that could put a beetle on your shoulder and you’ll hold still for it. “All that animal magnetism also dumbfounded sponsors of his syndicated show, Animal Adventures.” The sponsors expected an audience largely of children and what they got was an audience dominated (49 %) by women between 18 and 64. When visitors kept looking into his office window at the Columbus Zoo, he posted a sign, Homo sapiens. Eats Food. On exhibit 8 to 5 (“Jack Hanna” May 6, 1996: 163).
Jack Hannah was born in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1947, the son of a successful real estate man. His father purchased a non-working farm to raise his family on and named it after Jack and his brother and sister. Jack claimed he was always interested in animals and began collecting them as a child. By eleven he was helping out the family veterinarian. He later claimed that, “If you can somehow enjoy cleaning out their cages, then you know you genuinely love animals.” After graduating from Muskingum College in Ohio, Jack returned to Tennessee, married, and opened a pet shop, “Pet Kingdom,” in Knoxville featuring many exotic species and a petting zoo. The family farm had also turned into a private zoo complete with lions, llamas, deer, buffalo, elk, chimps, and a talking mynah—all purchased through the mail for cash, no questions asked, and with few regulations. He ran into what he called a “messy problem” when a little boy had his arm bitten, or pulled off by a lion, after he stuck the limb through a chain link fence at Hannah’s private zoo. Hannah also contracted hepatitis from an infected chimp. Following the incident, he gave his lions to Wolfgang Holzmaier, a lion trainer with the Ringling circus. Hannah remarked that he thought the circus lions and tigers were the healthiest big cats he had seen, and were treated like champion show dogs (Hannah and Parker 2008).

In 1973, he became director of the small Central Florida Zoo in Sanford. Five years later he accepted a similar position at the Columbus Zoo, where he remained until 1992 and still serves as director emeritus. When Hannah arrived at the Columbus Zoo, he found it had a great deal of potential with its large 400-acre site. The existing zoo was very run down, but the leery, skeptical staff had one thing in common with Jack, they all cared very much for animals. If the zoo had gained any notoriety it was through its renowned collection of gorillas. The problem was the great apes never had a chance to be outside. Hannah also was disconcerted by the competitiveness among zoos, and their failure to share information, which only made the animals the losers in the long run (Hannah and Parker 2008).

His national break came when he was invited to appear on Good Morning America in 1983 where he made many friendships and became a regular guest. After his first appearance with David Letterman in 1985, Hannah also became a popular guest on Larry King, Ellen DeGeneres, and ET. In 1992, he began to host the long-running syndicated series Jack Hannah’s Animal Adventures. This was followed in 2007 by
the syndicated *Hannah’s Into the Wild*, an unscripted show, in which Jack and his family traveled all over the globe. Hannah promised the show would be action packed, unpredictable, full of remarkable animals and scenery, as well as good fun (“Jack Hannah.” Official Website). In 2008 it won an Emmy as Outstanding Children’s Series.

With the launching of this new program, *Television Week* called Hannah “one of television’s most well-known, well-respected and well-loved personalities.” For 14 seasons, he has “charmed and engaged millions of viewers, shared his love of animals and inspired greater understanding of the world in which we live through his animal adventures” (Pursell Dec. 18, 2006).

To make the Columbus Zoo a success, Hannah reached out to the community helping local people with escaped or trapped animals, and assiduously courted local business leaders for their support. He both increased attendance in ten years from 350,000 to one million, and the budget from $1.7 million to $7 million. A 1985 levy vote was approved by a 70% margin. The zoo adopted the Disney theme park standards of cleanliness, friendliness, interesting exhibits, and an enthusiastic staff. Every year Hannah tried to offer a new ride or attraction, with major exhibitions opening every two or three years. Newborns were also a draw, especially if they were ‘high profile’ animals. Visitors, who typically anthropomorphize animals, feel like they are part of a family event (Hannah and Parker 2008: 118).

Prior to his national network appearances, Jack appeared on a local television show, *Hannah’s Ark*, along with his 11-year-old daughter. The program, consisting of 48 episodes, aired for two years. This was followed by a local series consisting of one-hour wildlife specials about different geographic regions. Hannah leaped at the opportunity to be on national television, since he hoped his appearances would enable him to promote and raise the public’s awareness of the Columbus Zoo, just as Joan Embrey had helped launch the San Diego Zoo into its number one ranking through her appearances with Johnny Carson (Hannah and Stravinsky 1989).

His appearances on Letterman were played for laughs and led to Jack being cast as a ‘character.’ The spots have an unplanned, helter-skelter air, but their spontaneity, and Hannah’s willingness to bring on stage ‘pay-off’ animals, has led to his inclusion on the guest roster for sweeps week. He says he
always follows the Disney quote, “I’d rather entertain and hope people learn, than teach and hope people are entertained.” Matt Roberts, a long time producer of *The Late Show*, observed that, “Jack’s an unusual mix of someone who has always made us feel that everything’s going to be safe and at the same time created the illusion of spontaneity and mayhem” (Hannah and Parker 2008: 162).

Recently Hannah, who lives part of the year in Montana, had a house built in Rwanda, where he claims to have fallen in love with the country and the people. He found the love, kindness, and forgiving nature of the Rwandans, inspiring. He says he finds no greater joy than giving back to the people and wildlife (Hanna and Parker 2008).

Hanna remains a firm believer in zoos and their five goals; conservation, education, rehabilitation, research, and recreation. He reminds people that zoo animals are still wild animals, and possess all of their defensive and aggressive tendencies. To handle a wild animal you must thoroughly understand the behavior and predictability or unpredictability of the species and the particular individual. Some animals enjoy interaction, while others should not be touched under any circumstance. Even normally tractable animals can become defensive or aggressive, while prey animals are typically shy, easily frightened, and need peace and calm. He warns that anything with teeth can bite, anything with claws can scratch, anything with horns can gore, and anything with talons can tear. “And anything that is wild is wild.” Any mistake can be fatal. “A wild animal is like a loaded gun, capable of going off any time” (Hannah and Parker 2008: 99).

Hannah has come under attack by PETA and other animal rights activists for his television appearances that they deem the ‘pimping’ of wild animals. Baby animals, the critics contend, are prematurely torn from their mothers, carted across the country, subjected to studio lights, and crowds—a totally unnatural, alien environment. The steady supply of babies end up being the target of one-liners by witty talk show hosts. One supplier, Stump Hill Farm in Ohio, has been cited repeatedly by the USDA according to PETA. Hannah’s appearances only encourage the exotic pet trade, with unwanted animals winding up as roadside attractions, in canned hunt clubs, or killed for their pelts or organs. They urged
people truly concerned about animal welfare to write to the networks urging them not to have these kind of appearances on their programs (“You Don’t Know Jack.” Sept. 28, 2006).

Hannah agrees that he always faces a possibility that an animal will be stressed when taken out of a familiar environment, but that he is especially careful in his selection, which he does only after consulting with keepers, curators, and vets. He believes he is doing more good by educating the public, increasing their interest in animals, and possibly converting some to the side of conservation, than any possible bad effects on the animal. Live animals are the best salesmen, he adds, and none have been injured in their appearances (Hannah and Parker 2008 and Hannah and Stravinsky 1989).

His personal assistant once reminded Jack that, “everyone needs a little privacy, so I tried to convince Jack to wear jeans and a t-shirt on occasion, so he would be harder to recognize in public. However, I don’t think he even owns a pair! Jack’s safari outfit isn’t his costume, it is truly part of his identity” (Hanna and Parker 2008: 167).

This persona has become an integral part of his philosophy.

I would be honored if by presenting a person with a glimpse of the wonders of the animal world, I have carried on the legacy of inspiring a dreamer—a budding conservationist, an animal enthusiast, a TV adventurer—as Marlin Perkins did in me (Hanna and Parker 2008: 192).

Following a 2010 SeaWorld incident in which a trainer was killed by a killer whale, Ric O’Barry called for a Federal investigation into possible violations of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (Morgan Feb. 25, 2010). Jack Hannah spoke out for SeaWorld, on a three-day battle with O’Barry on CNN, insisting that many people find the show the best experience in their life. Hannah added that Tilikum was a very successful breeder. He had killed, but he likened working with these animals to going into outer space and said it is worth the risk for posterity. He called the research conducted at SeaWorld invaluable, especially if whales become critically endangered in 20 to 30 years. The organization spends millions on rescuing whales and conducts reintroductions whenever possible. Hannah added that he didn’t “know what stress is to a whale,” but that he had been visiting SeaWorlds for over thirty years and the animals “seem very, very happy.” He also had worked with Dawn Brancheau, the trainer who was killed, on his wildlife show. “She was the best there was at what she did.” Trainers are a small exclusive group like
astronauts or Olympians. “Her work was her legacy and should be kept alive” (“Jack Hanna Takes ‘Hat Off’” Early Show, CBS News Feb. 25, 2010).

(Illustration p. 452: Jack Hanna, Jack Hanna Official Website, 2010).

**Steve Irwin**

If Jack Hanna is the heir apparent to Marlin Perkins, the question remained if another wildlife icon could arise that would successfully capture the public’s imagination by combining the international stardom of a Van Amburgh, the ability for self-promotion and the romanticizing of the wild of a Buck, and the daring recklessness of an unaffected small town boy like Beatty.

The answer was yes, and the star was Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter. Irwin was considered The Discovery Channel’s breakaway star, “a personable Australian with Barney Rubblesque good looks,” who “trots the globe to wrestle crocodiles and dangle poisonous snakes by the tail—evading bite after bite—narrating breathlessly and popeyed as if reading a scary story to a three-year-old.” He offers up a conservationist message, and the lesson that “animals can kill you,” interspersed with some arcane facts (Vivanco Mar. 2004).

His retro-approach drew critics who felt that his program attracted some 200 million viewers in 60 countries through “long-standing and problematic tropes of adventure, danger, man-over-nature, and even the spectacular figures of fictional and real adventurers of another era,” and the “visualization of environmentalism-as-adventure” (Vivanco Mar. 2004: 7).

Luis Vivanco adds that Irwin is not a scientist, nor does he claim to be one, but is as some fans call him, “a naturalist on crack.”
His life seems a perpetual eco-adventure, roaming wilderness areas in search of whatever unique or threatened wildlife he can identify, grabbing and holding the world’s most venomous snakes by their tails, and—his trademark activity—wrestling crocodiles, sometimes single-handedly, to ensure their safety, as he says, from poachers by placing them in zoos (Vivanco Mar. 2004: 6).

Vivanco contends that,

adventures and adventurers have long been lurking in environmental philosophy and activism, and Irwin’s macho flamboyance (and apparent insanity that is tempered by his expertise in handling dangerous animals) makes for the latest and most visible manifestation of this long-standing tendency (Vivanco Mar. 2004: 6).

His adventures are rooted in a kind of virility or potency reminiscent of Tarzan; total reliance on oneself, and “self-conscious moral piety” on behalf of wildlife and natural habitat that “unites Steve Irwin’s unique ability to commune with animals and raise awareness and knowledge about species that most people are usually hostile to in order to promote their conservation” (Vivanco Mar. 2004: 7).

The adventurer, Vivanco continues, engages the exotic and unknown, encounters danger and risk, often for the purpose of revealing some “other,” in this case animals and their environment. Irwin’s message is that animals are dangerous, but humans are far more dangerous to them. As an extreme adventurer, he is less of an outsider to nature than most people. Vivanco agrees with other philosophers that the ‘dangerization’ of the environment promotes a consumerist armchair ethic toward wildlife (Vivanco Mar. 2004: 9).

He also believes Irwin was creating a cult of the individual, not a cult organized around his eco-political messages, and that his perceived madness, accidents, and outrageous stunts are what draw audiences rather than his message of conservation. The program “is appealing precisely because it creates a fantasy world that seems so real.” Vivanco concludes that

Animals are wild and potentially dangerous—and while a true adventurer would try to cross over into that world, most of us are content to let a proxy do it. . . his is a ‘savage osmosis,’ that nature itself taught him how to travel the world, using their technical abilities, handle the problems for us. Maybe the best we can do is continue to bear witness to his efforts on television, or visit our nearest Discovery Channel store and buy Crocodile Hunter souvenirs in hopes that he might dedicate some of the proceeds to helping wildlife around the world. Or perhaps it is safest to just keep watching (Vivanco Mar. 2004: 25).

In 2000, Entertainment Weekly claimed that the “cartoonish Aussie zookeeper Steve Irwin and his American wife/sidekick Terri” had developed a sort of cult following of viewers that get caught up on
their bravado and melodrama. While most series use long lenses, “we get right up,” so that the audience feels in the middle. “Now that’s escapist TV” (Limpert Jan. 21, 2000: 115 and Snierson Nov. 10, 2000: 65). By 2001 people were willing to pay as much as $625 for an autographed Crocodile Hunter doll, and $1,500 for an autographed khaki shirt once worn by Irwin (“Australia’s Zoo…” EBay June 22, 2001).

Irwin’s acceptance international had been pioneered by fellow Australian, Paul Hogan, who in the role of Crocodile Dundee combined the paradoxical characteristics of the larrikin—a clownish, outlandish person who disregards social convention, and the bushman with his wide range of outdoors skills. Dundee was an expert with a knife and rifle, could knock out a man with a single punch, live off the land, and hypnotize a buffalo (Gillard 2006: 125-128).

Irwin’s parents were avid naturalists. His mother was the true “Australian pioneer woman,” who dedicated her life to her family and the rehabilitation and conservation of wildlife. In his first book, The Crocodile Hunter, Irwin, in her honor, said, “I’ve adopted your strength, your passion and enthusiasm, your dedication and commitment, and will honor your presence by continuing to push forward as hard and as fast as I possibly can, to ensure the survival of our precious wildlife, the wilderness, and in essence, the human race” (Irwin 1997: dedication).

His father, a successful plumber, was a serious herpetologist, who presented his son with a twelve-foot scrub python. In 1973, his parents opened the Beerwah Reptile Park on property they had bought in northern Queensland. Irwin claimed his father’s, “passion, enthusiasm, and skill” with even the most venomous of reptiles, were an “innate, God-given ability, which unbeknownst to me, was also in my veins, heart, and soul” (Irwin 1997: 8, 2001).

His parents were especially interested in catching and relocating crocodiles to protect the reptiles from humans. They gave demonstrations in the zoo—renamed The Australia Zoo—to show the public crocodilian ambush techniques and their lightning fast strikes, hoping that education could help in crocodile conservation (Irwin 1997, 2001).

Irwin and his wife, Terri, who had assisted in her family’s construction business in Oregon, and then started her own rehabilitation center for cougars, said it was their goal “To open everyone’s heart to
love and care for wildlife for generations to come.” If you can’t “get wilds into people’s hearts,” there is no chance at saving animals, “since people don’t want to save something they don’t know” (Irwin 1997, 2001: 202).

They gained their greatest fame with their dedication to crocodiles, which Steve admired. “Crocs always should rule! We just need to understand their rules.” “Crikey, I love crocodiles, and the more I understand their complex family structure, the easier they are to love.” The Irwins explained that their work was to challenge those who maintained “medieval attitudes” such as: “The only good crocodile is a dead one,” “The only good shark is a dead one,” “There’s a snake—kill it”—and make such attitudes extinct (Irwin 2001: 92, 155).

They used their zoo to respond to individual animals in emergency situations, and insisted that at the zoo, the needs of the animals always came first, the team second, and the visitors, third. With “incredibly happy and healthy animals,” the team had higher morale and passion for their work. This all transferred over to a better experience for the visitors (Irwin 2001: 188).

Irwin began his television career in 1990, with the aim of his documentaries to make the viewer feel right beside him as he got closer and closer to wildlife. He wanted to bring the “misunderstood and feared” animals directly into the viewer’s house, so that they could share and learn about wildlife (Irwin 1997, 2001).

When the series was picked up by Animal Planet, the cable network had only 200,000 paying subscribers, in a year this had climbed to seven million, and in 2006 reached 70 million. Irwin’s energy and popularity caught the attention of Jay Leno, and he appeared 14 times on his late night program. Leno claimed that he had never met anyone with such an enthusiasm for life (Wamsley Sept. 6, 2006).

Irwin plowed the profits from his zoo, television program, and appearances back into conservation. He also followed the advice he received from Bruce Willis and made a movie. The resultant MGM film, The Crocodile Hunter: Collision Course used no CGI, stuntmen, or faked stunts. Although not a critical success, it grossed $35 million. In 2004, Irwin invested $40 million in his zoo, and in 2006 purchased 90,000 acres of habitat in Queensland in order to preserve it. Australian conservationist Dr.
John Walmsley said Irwin understood that the only way to save wilderness over the long run was to buy it. “That was Steve’s plan. He would profit from his unique understanding of wildlife. He would use that profit to benefit wildlife. He would buy wilderness” (Wamsley Sept. 6, 2006).

Although Irwin never attended college, his knowledge of reptiles, in particular, impressed professional scientists, and even Scientific American ran a lengthy interview with him. Dr. Leo Smith of the American Museum of Natural History said he was a true biologist, not just a television personality. While the lead scientist for the Nature Conservancy said “he absolutely counts as a naturalist and conservationist,” and that people who say otherwise are jealous of his success. The vice president of the World Wildlife Fund concurred, saying he “charismatically brings conservation to life” (Zabarenko Yahoo News Sept. 6, 2006). But it was his sense of showmanship that got him the money he needed to preserve the land. He had signed with Disney to make a 3D Imax movie, and planned to operate a $40 million Australian themed zoo in Las Vegas, featuring up to 20 saltwater crocodiles. For three months of the year, he would appear personally to wrestle crocodiles three times a day (Bakker 2006: 89 and Shears 2006: 162).

Irwin was well aware of the power of his enthusiasm. The Discovery Channel’s Clark Bunting, who had first taken a chance with Irwin, loved Steve’s “realness.” He knew television’s power was not to tell you what to think, but to tell you what to think about. “And he did that better than anyone I have ever seen by concentrating on, focusing on, conservation and education.” He was not a dry academician, “but could reach out and grab us by the lapels—pull us all through the screen and we were all standing three feet behind him” (Bakker 2006 and Shears 2006).

On September 4, 2006, at the age of 44, Irwin was in the process of filming a series with the grandson of his childhood idol Jacques Cousteau when he was killed by the barb of a bullnose stingray that became embedded in his heart. When Irwin pulled out the barb, it tore the vessels and led to his death. Although the episode was filmed, the tape was subsequently destroyed. Only three people in Australian history had previously been killed by stingrays (Bakker 2006 and Shears 2006).
His biographers noted that, “Everybody in Australia, it’s said, will remember where they were when they heard that Steve Irwin had died.” In the great Aussie tradition he had been both ‘larger than life’ and ‘an ordinary bloke.’ Russell Crowe called him, “The Australian many of us tried to be” (Bakker 2006: 8 and Shears 2006).

His programs on Animal Planet were diametrically opposite those that called the viewer to “worship at the temple of nature,” and instead “celebrated the excitement of getting down and dirty with wildlife at its wildest.”

It was obvious from the outpouring of grief around the world that “the Crocodile Hunter, an uncomplicated boy from the bush, had touched and changed lives.” The Daily Telegraph wrote that, “a sudden chill has come unexpectedly, a coldness not born of the weather but out of sadness. For yesterday a great source of warmth, a bouncing ball of radiant energy in human form was lost forever.” He seemed all boundless energy and activity, “we thought he was superman, that he was indestructible” (“Ball of Fire” Sept. 5, 2006).

Of course, Irwin would also come under fire. Trevor Bakker admits that he probably made lots of mistakes, but he was hurt by criticism that insisted he would hurt animals or his family. He also was seen as a representative of the “old” Australia in his khaki shorts, and old-fashioned language, rather than the modern country. But Bakker points out Irwin was not just a simple Aussie stereotype, but a complex, flawed, interesting, non-drinker (Bakker 2006: 9, 92).

The 2004 incident in which he held his infant son Bob while feeding the crocodiles drew intense criticism especially since it closely followed the image of Michael Jackson holding his son over a balcony railing. The other incident involved an investigation whether Irwin had broken international law by getting too close to wildlife while filming in Antarctica (Bakker: 95-96).

At his death PETA announced that he had died like he lived, provoking and antagonizing wild animals, sending a dangerous message to kids. Unlike the restrained Jacques Cousteau, Irwin was a “cheap reality TV star,” and exploiter of wildlife. Germaine Greer, an Australian known for fighting for issues like women’s rights, said it was no surprise that ‘lion tamer’ Irwin “came to grief.” She argued that
animals need space, and habitat loss is the principal cause of species loss. But there was “no habitat that Irwin didn’t barge into—no matter how fragile or finely balanced.” There was “not an animal he was not prepared to manhandle.” The animal world “has finally taken revenge, “but probably not before a whole generation of kids in shorts seven sizes too small has learned to shout in the ears of animals with hearing ten times more acute than theirs, determined to become millionaire animal-loving zoo-owners” (Shears 2006).

But in most editorials and tributes, Irwin was a wildlife hero. The Sydney Morning Herald said, “Folklore says heroes are born with a python in one hand and a baby crocodile in the other, a modern jungle boy sans loincloth who could commune with nature” (Mann Sept. 5, 2006). Phillippe Cousteau with whom he was filming when he died, said Irwin was a remarkable individual and that his grandfather would have loved him (“Cousteau” CNN Sept. 6, 2006).

The New York Times editorialized that he was 44 going on six, but that there were far worse ways to view the natural world than through the eyes of a child. “If the energetic wonderment of the Crocodile Hunter has seeped into the brains of significant numbers of children—as it did that of some, who went trick or treating as Mr. Irwin last year, who turned six with a crocodile cake, who wears khakis and boots and fills notebooks meticulous drawings of reptiles—then Mr. Irwin used his 44 years remarkably well” (Downes Sept. 6, 2006: A18). Jack Hanna called Irwin, “The greatest communicator in the history of the business,” and felt PETA’s criticism had scraped the bottom of the barrel (Pangoris Sept. 18, 2006 and Penhollow Sept. 16, 2006).

John Wamsley wrote

As we become bored with each wildlife celebrity, the next one had to be more exciting. Steve Irwin was the latest. He was also the best. There is a void between the human and natural worlds. He was the greatest wildlife communicator, helping everyone see the beauty in species scorned by most. However, as his audience demanded more and more, he gave more and more. He pushed the limits further and further. He was excited by wilderness and the oceans are the last wilderness.

Perhaps he did not understand the oceans as well as he had the land. Perhaps his reflexes had slowed. Or perhaps it was just a matter of responding to the increased demands of a television audience. He has paid the ultimate price. Yet if he had his life over again I’m sure he would have been the same (Wamsley Sept. 6, 2006).
It is hard to believe there will ever be another as brave as Irwin. Maybe the only way he will be bettered will be by digital enhancement. But then that has already commenced (Wamsley Sept. 6, 2006).

*USA Today* editorialized that Irwin’s death was less significant than the accomplishments of his life. “Irwin was a showman and self-promoter. But more than anyone else, he popularized and mass-marketed the cause of wildlife preservation. Now that was a truly amazing stunt” (“Father: Steve Wouldn’t Have Wanted” Sept. 5, 2006). *The Los Angeles Times* called him a “daredevil, a performer, a celebrity, a bit of a ham—and one of the most effective advocates for nature preservation in the world.” He took the “staid reverence” of Marlin Perkins and made the subject of wildlife into an “extreme sport,” acting like a “fire breathing evangelist for animals” (“The Daredevil Conservationist” Sept. 9, 2006). *The (Toledo) Blade* concurred: “You only had to watch his show for five minutes to see that he adored the creatures he met and described, and his show was a sermon to conservation and love of nature” (“An Explorer to the End” Sept. 8, 2006). *The Boston Globe* called him “brash,” “audacious,” and having a “compelling presence.” His loss was sad but somewhat “Irwinesque.” Nature is powerful and unpredictable, but death is real. “If he could, Irwin might say something outrageous, but still apt, about his own death. It might be his trademark, “Crikey!” uttered after close or harrowing animal encounters. And that word would be a celebration of the tremendous power that one quirky, hyperkinetic individual has to effect how others see the world” (“The Crocodile Handbook” Sept. 6, 2006).

Irwin’s family turned down the offer of a state funeral, opting for a secret burial and a campfire service at the zoo. They did agree to a worldwide televised memorial originating at the zoo’s “Crocoseum.” Russell Crowe, Kevin Costner, Hugh Jackman, Justin Timberlake, and Cameron Diaz were among the celebrities that remembered Irwin. The Discovery Channel acknowledged they owed him a huge debt and named the garden space in front of their Silver Springs, Maryland world headquarters in honor of him. There was a tribute from the indigenous people of Australia, and the Prime Minister stated that Irwin had pioneered one of the great movements in modern environmentalism in Australia, the private nature park. Steve’s father said, “I would like you to grieve for the animals; the animals have lost the best friend they ever had. And so have I” (Shears 2006).
Steve Irwin had always thought he would die young, but in a car or plane accident and not from an animal attack. However, it was always a possibility. He once said, “I have no fear of losing my life. If I have to save a koala or a crocodile or a kangaroo, or a snake, mate, I will save it.” And reinforced it with another comment, “Even if a big old alligator is chewing me up, I want to go down and go ‘Crikey!’ just before I die. That would be the ultimate for me” (Shears 2006: 176 and Bakker 2006).


But the wild things cried,

“Oh please don’t go—we’ll eat you up—we love you so! (Sendak, 1963).

Hartford Courant, September 6, 2006 (editorial page)
Conclusion

Utilizing the concept of wilderness and the wild, the men that this paper explored have been able to advantageously create images of themselves as heroes able to confront the “other.” Van Amburgh, Buck, Beatty, and Gebel-Williams constructed their persona for personal fame. Perkins, Hanna and Irwin used their success to also further their favorite projects. Repeated appearances on television by Perkins and Hanna vaulted their respective zoos—St. Louis and Columbus—to the top of the popularity charts, just as Joan Embry had done for the San Diego Zoo through her frequent appearances with Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show*. Irwin, before his death, was establishing a new precedent in that his promotional activities not only benefited his own zoo, but he used his monetary rewards to purchase land for conservation. Acquaintances insisted that he had done more for the preservation of land and species in Australia than the federal government had achieved in decades.

Hanna and Irwin also diverged from the earlier norm by no longer taking on the super hero image of the earlier personalities. Part of the earlier heroes appeal had been their ability to exist in two worlds—as dapper and mild mannered men who could cope easily with civilization—but then become the safari-clad heroes who could enter the wild and look a lion or tiger in the eye without flinching. But recently Hannah and Irwin set a new precedent, never appearing in public except in their expedition garb. They presented an image that they were never comfortable in civilization and were always ready to jump back into their natural habitat, the “wild.”

The maintaining of a wall between wilderness and civilization is still important, even to such a noted scientist-explorer as Alan Rabinowitz of the Bronx Zoo, who as director of the Pantera project, works tirelessly to set up preserves in some of the most dangerous regions of the world to insure the survival of the big cats, despite suffering from a chronic type of cancer. A profound stutterer, who could only comfortably talk to the big cats at the Bronx Zoo as a boy, Rabinowitz confesses that from “the earliest time, I wanted to challenge myself against odds and explore wild places. . . I also wanted to be a voice for animals” (“A Voice for the Animals” July 8, 2010).
Rabinowitz who was mentored by the noted explorer and naturalist, George Schaller, who did pioneering studies of the Serengeti lion, gorillas, and pandas, claims he feels a close bond with animals but that he still fears and respects them. He is often angered by television shows on which people claim they can truly bond with wild animals to where they can touch or sleep among them. They eventually, he contends, will be mauled or killed. He has come face to face with tigers, lions, and jaguars, and he admits he was frightened since they are a different species from us.

There is a wildness about them. . . . and I feel great fear. Now fear was definitely a part of the menagerie of feelings that ran through me. But I also felt flattered to be in the presence of this unbelievable wildness that we don’t feel during our everyday lives. Could I bond with them? I almost—in a way, yes, and yet in a way, I almost learned the opposite. By spending so much time in the jungle with these wild cats I also came realize there would always be a wall between us, a wall that couldn’t be breached because we were two different worlds, worlds that could come together on certain things but that just had to be apart on others for both of us to live properly within this larger world (“A Voice for the Animals” July 8, 2010).

The almost spiritual construction of the wild as a delicately balanced ecosystem also contributed towards attitudes about wild animals being removed and placed into captivity. A wild animal in a circus or zoo was like a misplaced fragment of an intricately balanced system. Its removal was immoral, unnatural, and broke the wall dividing wilderness and civilization, threatening the integrity of a delicate ecosystem. This feeling of misplacement is evident in Thomas French’s description of the arrival in Tampa in 2003 of a cargo of young elephants who had been placed temporarily in a game preserve in Swaziland and were now bound for the Lowry Park Zoo. The elephants either had to be moved or be killed because overcrowding had resulted in habitat destruction.

Mick and his family run the game reserves in Swaziland. . . . He is tired of the long and bitter debate over this flight—the petitions and the lawsuits and denunciations from people who have never seen for themselves what was happening within the game reserves. There simply was not enough room for all the elephants anymore, not without having the trees destroyed, the parks devastated and other species threatened. The only options left were to move some elephants out of the parks or kill them. He has heard the protests insisting that for the elephants any fate would be preferable to a zoo. That it would be better for them to die free than live in captivity. Such logic makes Mick shake his head. All this talk of freedom, as if it were some pure and limitless river flowing through the wild, providing for every creature and allowing them all to live in harmony. On an overcrowded planet, where open land is disappearing and more species are slipping toward extinction every day, freedom is not so easily defined. As far as Mick can tell, nature cares about survival, not ideology. And on this plane, the elephants have been given a chance.
He has visited the zoos where they are headed. He is confident they will be treated well. But there is no telling how they will adjust to being taken from everything they know. Wild elephants are used to roaming the bush for miles a day. They are intelligent, self-aware, emotional animals. They bond. They rage and grieve. They remember.

What will they do when they realize their days and nights are encircled as never before? When they understand, as much as they can, that they will not see Africa again? Either they have been rescued. Or enslaved. Or both. . . .

At the zoo, every day is another lesson in what it means to live in a world where there are no more pure choices. . . . The same tangle of reactions twists inside you as you walk through the rest of the zoo, seeing all the animals collected inside these walls. Joy vies with regret. Delight is weighted with guilt.

All zoos even the most enlightened, are built upon an idea both beguiling and repellent—the notion that we can seek out the wildness of the world and behold its beauty, but that we must first contain that wildness.

Zoos argue that they are fighting for the conservation of the Earth, that they educate the public and provide refuge and support for vanishing species. And they are right.

Animal rights groups argue that zoos traffic in living creatures, exploiting them for financial gain and amusement. And they are right.

Caught inside this contradiction are the animals themselves, and the humans charged with their well-being. . . . The keepers must come to terms with their own ambivalence. They love animals and are deeply attached to the ones in their care. But their attachment does not blind them to the moral complexities of what they do. . . . (French Dec. 2, 2007).

Elephants had always been the key to success for any menagerie, zoo, or circus in the United States since 1796 when the first elephant, Old Bet, arrived in the America. Very early, close observers of the captive animals noted the amazingly complex personalities of elephants and their remarkable intelligence and understanding. The intelligence, loyalty, and sense of fair play attributed to elephants also had its reverse side, for when elephants behaved aggressively or killed their keepers or trainers, they were treated like human criminals, suffering deportation, or death by firing squad, public hanging, or electrocution.

Recently as more and more is being learned about the complex social life and sophisticated communication system of elephants in their natural habitats, both scientific experts and activists condemned the keeping of elephants in captivity. Rather than the anticipation and excitement that marked the docking of a ship carrying a cargo of wild animals from distant, romantic lands, or the thrill associated with the early morning arrival of a large circus and its menagerie, the maintaining of these animals in captivity is met by disgust, disapproval, and threats from many animal rights activists.
Since the enactment of the Endangered Species Act, wild animals are rarely imported legally, and are typically obtained through trades among zoos participating in Species Survival Programs (SSPs) and Taxon Advisory Groups (TAGs), who closely follow the genetic and breeding histories of captive animals.

To critics like veterinarian and activist, Michael Fox of the HSUS, wild animal training presents the cultural norm of the domination of animals to children.

Humans mastery over the powerful beast and willful control over its wild instincts is a parody of the repression and sublimation of human nature and personal freedom—under the Protestant work ethic for ‘the good of society.’ It may also reflect the Puritanical fear of our own impulsive Dionysian Nature, of our ‘base’ and ‘beastly’ passions which must be controlled. In denying this spontaneous and beautiful side of our own nature, we deny it as well to the captive wild and domesticated animals under our dominion, through training (which is a parody of childhood education to conformity and obedience), selective breeding and rearing programs (Fox 1986: 8).

Even if the trainer really loves animals, once he begins the performance, it is all about domination. Fox asserts that domination does not come from love, but fear. “Most fundamentally, performing animals, therefore, are an expression not of human love and understanding but of fear, ignorance, and the desire for power and control” (Fox 1986: 8).

As with the whole complex world of the confrontation of humans and wild animals there is another diametrically opposite opinion as expressed by one of the foremost experts on elephants in captivity, Alan Roocroft.

But since training is an art in the most profound sense of the term, the same compulsion that draws persons to pursue any art, from music to architecture, is a basic factor in the motivations of the animal trainer: he or she has to train animals as a sort of personal imperative and is willing, therefore to endure the disciplines and sacrifices that mastering any art entails. This is certainly the case in working with elephants. One must be drawn, powerfully, toward association with these animals, not for egocentric reasons, but out of intense fascination with them, for training of elephants is an open-ended experience and a lifetime is too short a span of time to accumulate all that an association with the elephant can teach. The learning process is both reciprocal and, to all extents, inexhaustible (Roocroft and Zoll 1994).

The world of captive wild animals has always been influenced by both politics and the pervading philosophical and cultural attitudes; however, today the issues are even more complexly entangled with the growth of instant communications, un-researched ‘news,’ and the diverse ways animals, especially charismatic species, can quickly arouse emotions. Thrown into this mix is the continuous competition for
money and a voice, pitting animal and environmental protection organizations, zoos, aquariums, and theme parks against one another as they strive for primacy.

The American zoo largely developed in the 40 years between 1890 and 1930. Zoos, like museums, were institutions whose very existence seemed to speak for themselves. Just as the museum managed objects for contemplative enjoyment, the zoo performed a similar function by managing animals for civilization. Zoos would be the “symbiotic demonstration of science and art working in unison for the nation’s advantage. The zoo was a paradise or Garden of Eden, where contented animals could live out their lives and reproduce without fear. The zoo offered the best example of harmony of beauty and utility, a fulfillment of the dream of all progressive Americans (Stott 1981: abract).

Zoo audiences have always been dominated by unsophisticated viewers—these proverbial “children of all ages” typically ask any zoo employee they see; do you go in with the animals (usually they are asking about the big cats, apes, or bears); do they bite; would they kill me if I went in with them; can they get out; along with an occasional wish to go into an enclosure to pet or hug a tiger or lion or polar bear, or communicate with a gorilla. Zoo professionals will laughingly remark that the three things that “turn on” zoo crowds are poop, sex, and imagining the outcomes of deadly fights between fearsome predators.

As zoos were forced to compete with other visual media, they introduced the appeal of emotionalism, romance, and imagination to exhibits, and they gradually came to occupy a middleground between science and showmanship, high and low culture, wilderness and the city. Zoos became a form of theater—closely emulating Disney’s successful foray into the creation of a themed zoo with its Animal Kingdom. Zoo design has always been geared primarily for the public rather than the animals. Since total simulation of the wilderness is impossible, the goal becomes to create vistas that try to outdo nature, compressing so much visual ‘eye candy’ into a small space, that nature seems dull in comparison. Better yet there is an animal, or many animals in every vista (Hoage and Diess 1996 and Auslander World Class Archives).
The concept of the imminent danger of the wild, the continuing romance with Africa and its charismatic megafauna, and the mysterious, sultry jungles of Asia, all influenced zoo design and advertising. For a brief instant, the visitors—often clad in safari clothes themselves—could enter the wild—the “other”—and transform themselves into the iconic conquerors of the wilderness of their imagination.

The idea of the iconic hero has never completely died out. Even if the names of Buck and Beatty may be largely forgotten, their image and legacy is indelibly part of our culture. They were able to satisfy the public’s demand for wild animals, often barely under control. Buck demonstrated how cool self-control, knowledge of the wild, and the ability to react quickly when the unpredictable arose enabled him to capture the deadliest animals of Asia and successfully bring them back to American zoos and circuses. Beatty provided live audiences with the unprecedented vicarious thrills they craved—safely watching wild animals behaving the way they always dreamed they did—growling, roaring, crouching, slinking, aggressively ready to fight or attack.

C. B. Davis in his study of the theatrics of the big cat act sees it surviving precariously, and that its background—along with campaigns against it—have long standing economic and historic roots. Although protests to eliminate these act have failed at crucial points, they “now more than ever threaten to relegate the icon of the lion-tamer to the once under-erasure status of blackface minstrelsy—an extinct genre that has in recent years been acknowledged by historians as central to the formation of American popular entertainment (Davis 2007: 606).

With increasingly fragmented entertainment and communication venues, a Buck or Beatty may never capture our collective imaginations as these two did, but their image: safari clad—britches, open shirt, holstered revolver by the side, and coiled bullwhip; unafraid of whatever the jungle throws at them—lives on in movie action heroes like Indiana Jones, and in real life heroes like the late Steve Irwin.

As Steve Neale asserts, the idea of adventure—seeking out the unexpected or extraordinary—did not die out with the knights errant, or with merchants or pirates, or with the spread of empire, nor with the remarkable careers of Buck and Beatty. As long as films and television and imagination exist, no matter how spectacular the special effects, there will always be room for action adventure, with a lone hero
exhibiting his or her extraordinary physical skills and mental determination in gaining their seemingly unattainable objective (Neale 2000).

Buck was not one of the faceless, nameless collectors who made it possible to safely enjoy the wild in zoos and circuses, he was someone the public could relate to as a bridge between the wild and everyday life, just as his successors; Perkins, Irwin and Hannah. Beatty presented himself in the image of the adventurous explorer, not a gladiator like Van Amburgh, who could tame and civilize the unruly and wild, or in the ornate braided band master style uniform of the German Hagenbeck and British Bostock trainers who carefully ‘directed’ their charges to form eye-pleasing tableaus. Beatty’s cats, he insisted were never tamed. In Beatty’s world the wild could never be removed from the great cats as he constantly reiterated. When he entered the arena it was a man entering the realm of the wild—the big cage was where the wild things were. He fought his way into the arena, gained fleeting control, and then escaped out of the wild into civilization, as a lion threw itself against his escape door in contempt.

Zoo keepers still dress in modifications of these outfits, and total immersion zoos like Disney’s Animal Kingdom display their tigers on various parts of a romantically decaying Indian palace, while safari-clad re-enactors hunt down villainous poachers. Zoo gift shops are full of safari action figures complete with gear to capture wild animals in the imaginary jungles of thousands of children’s imaginations.

When famed wild animal trainer Gunther Gebel-Williams died, Ringling set up a website for tributes, providing fans a way to e-mail their reminiscences of Gunther. Thousands replied, many saying how seeing him live was one of the highpoints of their childhoods, and others indicating how watching him perform had led them to seek careers in which they would be involved with animals as behaviorists, zookeepers, veterinarians, or conservationists. This outpouring of grief was even more evident following Steve Irwin’s death. We will never know how far-reaching the effects were of Buck and Beatty’s careers on subsequent generations.

The reality of individuals being able to confront and control wild animals has always drawn critics and skeptics. Van Amburgh was accused of de-clawing his big cats and his successors were
condemned for brutally breaking the spirits of their animals, drugging or de-fanging them, or utilizing freakishly tame hand-raised animals. Nature filmmakers were caught faking prey-predator interactions by using penned or tethered animals, while zoos were described as ‘wildlife pimps’ by PETA. But despite these criticisms, for an increasingly large number of Americans their only contact with the ‘wild’ or ‘wilderness’ is through television, movies, books, zoos, and increasingly computer sites like YouTube. The wall between “civilization’ and ‘wilderness’ has grown. Americans—especially children—have little knowledge of even where their food comes from. Mechanized farms have turned animals into non-entities. When urban sprawl, combined with wild animal adaptation to changing environments, leads to urban populations confronting bears, raccoons, opossums, deer, and coyotes, the result as if Pan—the frightening denizen of the ancient woods—had escaped to cause “panic” in suburbia. Here were animals that could destroy our pets, devour our expensive landscaping, or kill us, and our children. If they were not quickly removed or killed, city officials would face “pandemonium.”

Zoos became the largest popular culture source for information about the animals and habitat. Zoo visitors far outstripped the numbers of viewers watching Nova (about five million), or a cable nature show (about one million). Public zoos in the United States—many which were built between the 1930s and 1950s are only on their second generation of keepers and administrators. Largely operated, at least in part by cities and counties, zoo jobs were once plums for longtime supporters of a political boss. In many ways the animal rights movement has kick-started zoos and aquariums into serious self-study, cooperation, and professionalization. The welfare of the animals comes first for the zookeepers, who are now largely college graduates who have served several internships before landing a position. Animal handling protocols, conferences, advanced schools, scientific research, on-going explorations of animal behavior, welfare, and enrichment to enhance animals’ psychological and physical well-being are now accepted and expected practices. The people entering the field are extremely devoted to the cause of animal well-being and species conservation, often using their vacation times to put into practice their expertise and learn more by assisting at animal sanctuaries or research stations around the world.
Yet zoos are totally artificial worlds designed according to culturally constructed images of the natural world and of creators of images of that world. Visitors enter an environment populated by animals chosen by humans to live in enclosures created by human design and displayed for human enjoyment. Animals classified as “wild” are made dependent on humans and made to be visible, in fact the visibility of animals—many, like gorillas not normally seen by humans—is the central feature of zoos. Zoos are conceived by human imagination and controlled by human effort. Their changes in exhibit design mirror changing human attitudes toward animals and the natural world. Zoos, because they display living animals, are deemed by the majority of their visitors as popular culture venues descended from menageries, fairs, and amusement parks that have always provided entertainment instead of intellectual edification. Rather than seeing each specimen as an exquisite representative of evolution, adaptation, and natural selection, the public categorizes it as funny, ugly, cute, fierce, disgusting, or frightening. The zoo, like the museum, is a very complex cultural institution in that it defines animal-human relationships just as the museum defines the public’s relationship to art (Marvin 1993).

Zoos justify their expensive, often sensational, heavily marketed multimedia exhibits as the only way to attract and hold viewers’ attentions. Fears continue to exist that the increasing tension between what zoos do to gain public support through entertainment—often anthropomorphizing species, and what they do to justify their existence—to preserve species and educate the public—will place those interested in animals and science in conflict with those most interested in budgets and public relations and prevent zoos from becoming as good as they could be.

Recently the AZA conducted multi-zoo surveys to learn more about their visitors and what they expected and learned from their zoo visits. The visitors were found to fit into a number of categories: those seeking a social experience, curious explorers, who seek out the new and surprising, tourists, hobbyists who feel they share a close tie with the zoo, and “spiritual pilgrims” who seek quiet and reflection. The findings also revealed that more emphasis needed to be placed on animal welfare, conservation, and natural history messages. The study quoted research that showed “spending time in nature is critical for the development of an environmental ethic and in promoting healthy children. For
urban dwellers, we may be their best ‘nature experience’—a strong marketing point. The most controversial part of the study were the statistics indicating that the zoo experience had supported and reinforced 61% of the visitors’ values and attitudes about conservation, 42% felt zoos and aquariums played important roles in conservation, education, and animal care, while 57% felt their visit strengthened their connection to nature (Falk, Reinhard, and Vernon 2007).

A subsequent journal article by five academics challenged the conclusions, finding at least six major threats to methodological validity. They argue that there remains no compelling evidence for the claim that zoos and aquariums promote attitude change, education, or interest in conservation in visitors (Marino, Lillienfeld, Malamud, Nobis and Broglio 2010: 126-138).

Zoos also have begun to look at Chris Mooney and Sheril Kirshenbaum’s book, *Unscientific America: How Scientific Illiteracy Threatens Our Future*. The journalist-scientist team highlights the anti-intellectual tendencies of the American public—especially the politicians and journalists that contribute to the polarization, and the scientists themselves, who have failed to communicate “and have so ceded their critical place in the public sphere to religious and commercial propagandists.”

For every five hours of cable news, less than a minute is devoted to science; 46 percent of Americans reject evolution and think the earth is less than 10,000 years old; the number of newspapers with weekly science sections has shrunken by two-thirds over the past several decades. The public is polarized over climate change—an issue where political party affiliation determines one’s view of reality—and in dangerous retreat from childhood vaccinations. Meanwhile, only 18 percent of Americans have even met a scientist to begin with; more than half can’t name a living scientist role model (Mooney and Kirshenbaum 2009: abstract).

Zoos, so intent on maintaining visitor numbers and spending, and trying to assure levy passage, have avoided all the trigger terms like global warming and evolution. They try to be accepted as serious scientific institutions that engage in important research and conservation of species, yet they avoid using the keystone concept of evolution in any of their educational interpretations.

Ironically, however, zoos have become the best possible source for iconic wild animal heroes like Perkins, Hannah, and Irwin to emerge. To be a successful media star meant the urge for success would subject him or her to the demands and scrutiny of the press and the public, and necessitate the individual’s willingness to engage in publicity events, personal appearances, and endure countless interviews. Among
the great majority of animal people—often self-described as anti-social and far more at home in a field setting or in the company of wild animals than in answering the inane questions of reporters and interviewers, trying to avoid sounding too ‘scientific’—the necessary sacrifices to achieve fame, even if it could possibly benefit financially the animals they strove to protect, seemed an abhorrent form of prostitution. Yet in a culture fixated with celebrities and stars, perhaps this willingness to create an image like Jack Hanna’s, and “edu-tain” the public, becoming the hero of children and the envy of adults who yearned for escape from their humdrum lives, is the only way to successfully purvey a message of habitat preservation, conservation, and the importance of ‘green’ practices.
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Notes

The quotes from the beginning and end of some sections come from:


Some sections of Chapter 4 on Clyde Beatty appeared in different form in:
