

Dickens, London Zoo, and “Household Words”

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Historians Harriet Ritvo and Nigel Rothfels offer insightful analyses of the development and growth of the nineteenth-century European zoo. Ritvo’s work in particular has been invaluable in demonstrating that the London Zoological Gardens (for simplicity’s sake, hereafter “London Zoo” or “the Zoo”) represented “a symbol of English progress and enlightenment” during a period of intense colonial expansion and rivalry among imperial powers (*Animal Estate* 214). But Rothfels adds that alternative accounts of the growth of the European zoo characterize these institutions as “general products of bourgeois sensibilities and economies” (22). Rothfels then traces the rise of the modern zoo as it evolved from the menagerie, a collection of animals associated with a specific monarch or ruler, or a collection exhibited by various individuals for profit and/or display. Modern zoos, in contrast, “privilege scientific endeavor and public education” (19). Even though Rothfels views these two approaches as potentially competing narratives, these conceptions of the modern zoo – as imperial project and as reflection and reinforcement of middle-class ideology – ultimately complement each other extraordinarily well. However, as the symbolic meaning and cultural significance of the Zoo shifted during the mid-nineteenth century, it became apparent that reconciling the promotion of science with the education of the general public – including the working classes – proved a rather daunting task.

Articles about London Zoo as well as references to its attractions abound in *Household Words*, especially in the early 1850s, when popular interest in the institution peaked and as the Great Exhibition, which had a

mission similar to the Zoo's, opened in Hyde Park in 1851. As I argue below, a good many *Household Words* articles about the Zoo deliberately celebrate British imperial power and scientific achievements. But attitudes expressed toward social class remain considerably more nuanced, and it is on this latter subject that I wish to focus much of my energies. Dickens, of course, did not write all of these articles. But Dickens consistently shaped the magazine to appeal to the tastes and values of the middle classes, and in certain respects he attempted to shape their tastes and values. As Anne Lohrli notes, "For all that the reader knew to the contrary, almost any article might be Dickens' own writing."¹ One need not go as far as Lohrli, who claims that the magazine was actually "Dickens' mouthpiece" (12), but Dickens did exert firm editorial control over the magazine.² He not only commissioned most of the articles that appeared, but he often undertook what Lohrli describes as "extensive – and drastic" (15) revisions to ensure a uniformity of style and ideological content. Viewed as a whole, many of these articles from *Household Words* express a relatively uniform position on London Zoo packaged for a middle-class audience and expressing concerns about changes at the Zoo. In particular, these articles articulate a general anxiety that a popular and sentimental view of animals might eclipse the scientific achievements of the Zoo and the cultural authorities that support it.

While I largely concentrate on articles appearing in the early 1850s, it is helpful to begin with an 1856 article written by Dickens that introduces many of the individuals, subjects, and themes important to understanding the shifting cultural significance of London Zoo for the middle-class readers of *Household Words*: "The Friend of the Lions," which appeared in the issue of 2 February. The "Friend" is Sir Edwin Landseer, the celebrated and immensely popular animal painter (later sculptor) and a friend of Dickens of many years, who had requested that Dickens help publicize the need for a new enclosure for the lions in Regent's Park.³ Several *Household Words* articles from this period specifically mention Landseer, who represents a highly respected Victorian authority on animals, ranging from Britain's domestic and game

animals to the exotic animals gathered from remote parts of the Empire. In the article, Dickens never even has to name Landseer, but simply begins with an effusive description of his genius: "WE are in the Studio of a friend of ours, whose knowledge of all kinds of Beasts and Birds has never been surpassed, and to whose profound acquaintance with the whole Animal Kingdom, every modern picture-gallery and every print-shop, at home and abroad, bears witness" (61).⁴ Landseer's social rank and his formal training at the Royal Academy (which included dissecting animals) clearly enhance his position as a cultural authority on animals. This insistent assertion of Landseer's authority holds special relevance at a time when the admission of the general public to the Zoo constituted a major shift in its mission and significance.

Landseer's reputed love of animals did not prevent him from enjoying hunting, an activity traditionally reserved for the upper classes and which allowed him opportunities to study horses, dogs, and a wide variety of game animals – both dead and alive. Beryl Gray claims that, from the perspective of the twenty-first century, Landseer might be regarded as "morally ambivalent" (7), but hunting clearly caused no moral dilemmas for Landseer or other formally trained artists of his day. In addition to hunting, access to London Zoo and various natural history museums afforded him many opportunities to observe a wide variety of animal specimens. In the article, Landseer tells Dickens that anyone doubting that lions in captivity experience daily pain from cramped and uncomfortable cages and pens should

go to museums and colleges where the bones of lions and other animals of the feline tribe who have lived in captivity under similar circumstances, are preserved; and you will find them thickly encrusted with a granulated substance, the result of long lying upon unnatural and uncomfortable planes. (62)

Keeping exotic animals alive in England's climate proved highly challenging; as a consequence, there was a steady supply of animal carcasses to be dissected, experimented upon, or prepared for display in

some fashion. Frederick Knight Hunt notes in an 1850 article in *Household Words* that the Zoo routinely donated bodies of dead animals to the English College of Surgeons (“What There Is” 466). In fact, there were so many specimens that the Zoological Society’s Museum could not accept all of them – especially since these specimens were supplemented by thousands more sent by diplomats, naturalists, and explorers from across the Empire. From its origins the Zoological Society had operated its own museum, first at separate locations and then in a building in Regent’s Park, as part of its educational and scientific outreach. Even though many members of the Society strongly supported the Museum, its collection of bones, skins, seashells, and other specimens could never quite compete with the growing collection of living exotic animals in Regent’s Park. By 1850, the Society voted to transfer the contents of the Museum to the British Museum (Ito 116), and by 1855 the Society’s Museum had closed entirely (Charman 312), signaling a significant reorientation of the Zoo’s mission and its overall cultural significance. Thus, it stands to reason that in 1856 Dickens emphasizes the conditions of *living* animals in his article. While some *Household Words* readers almost certainly visited natural history museums, living animals at this point assumed the highest significance in promoting the Zoo’s middle-class ethos and its celebration of British power and dominance.

In the context of this article, Landseer offers several highly complimentary observations about the value and significance of the Zoological Society as a prelude to calling for a new facility for its lions.⁵ As Dickens describes him, Landseer imaginatively addresses the Zoological Society as he paints:

You are a society that has established in England, a national menagerie of the most beautiful description, and that has placed it freely and in a spirit deserving of the highest commendation within the reach of the great body of the people. You are a society rendering a real service and advantage to the public, and always most sensibly and courteously represented by your excellent MITCHELL.

Then why (proceeds our friend), don't you treat your
Lions better? (61)

"Mitchell," another Victorian authority on animals who turns up regularly in *Household Words* articles, is David William Mitchell, the first salaried Secretary of the Zoological Society beginning in 1847. Mitchell, an Oxford graduate, had made a name for himself in the mid-1840s as an ornithologist, but it was his administrative and marketing skills that proved invaluable to the Society. The Zoological Society had opened its Gardens in 1828 as a private institution that admitted only members of the Society and their guests. These admission policies unambiguously bolstered the Zoo's symbolic function as a physical manifestation of Britain's affluence and scientific superiority. As Takashi Ito explains, through these policies as well as through the social and educational activities reserved for its elite members and guests, the Zoological Society "attempted to foster an air of exclusivity, rank and elegance" (117). In effect, the Zoo displayed the nation's wealth, power, and technological ingenuity as much as it displayed exotic animals.

However, by the mid-1840s, the institution's finances grew increasingly precarious, and, after internal debates concerning admission policies, the Society made the highly consequential decision to open the gates to the general public – with reduced fees for children and, on certain days of the week, for adults as well.⁶ Mitchell, as Secretary of the Society, was widely credited with saving the institution through these new policies, as well as his practice of aggressively seeking out new and unusual animals for the growing collection. Mitchell then promoted these new acquisitions through extensive advertising and through cultivating relationships with members of the press, who in turn enthusiastically chronicled the Zoo's latest acquisitions for eager readers. What Landseer describes as the "national menagerie" had become "within reach" of the public in several ways. By the mid-1850s, Regent's Park became more easily accessible due to an expanding system of public transportation that connected the Zoo to working-class London neighborhoods (Ito 87-88). Additionally, the Zoo's new admission policies opened the gates to

members of the middle and working classes, whose very presence might be considered a positive reflection on Britain. As Ritvo puts it, “Serious interest in the Regent Park’s Zoo among the vulgar was both an agent and an index of their improvement, and hence another symbol of English progress and enlightenment” (*Animal Estate* 214). Yet, as Rothfels notes, “However much zoos employ educational signage and special exhibits, most people still go to the zoo because it is fun, not because it is educational” (38). Thus, these changes generated a certain amount of concern as the Zoo began to transform from an educational and cultural institution reserved for an élite few to a public amusement grounds open to all classes. In fact, several *Household Words* articles express considerable anxiety about the changing nature of the cultural work of the Zoo in Victorian society at mid-century.

The vivid scene Dickens creates in his article apparently existed only in his imagination, and thus the symbolic implications of the animal he deliberately chooses to represent alongside the lions are worth considering. As Dickens describes the scene, Landseer paints Dickens as the model for a rat-catcher while a live English bulldog sits nearby. Like the lions, the bulldog is symbolically connected to Britain itself, and Dickens repeatedly emphasizes the bulldog’s strength, ferocity, and tenacity as characteristics of this distinctively English breed. However, as Ritvo notes, the breed’s popularity diminished considerably after bull-baiting became illegal in 1835 (*Animal Estate* 108). By the middle of the century, the bulldog increasingly became associated with members of the working classes, a stereotype reinforced by Dickens, since an actual rat-catcher, presumably the dog’s owner, waits outside for the session to conclude. If the bulldog can be considered in symbolic terms, then Landseer’s interactions with him might also be regarded as having some symbolic weight as well. Landseer constantly orders the dog about – at one point slapping him across the jowls to refocus his wandering attention. Later, Landseer fearlessly rolls the dog over to examine his muscular chest while checking some anatomical detail important to the portrait. Dickens states that Landseer’s knowledge of animals has an almost preternatural

dimension – “All dogs feel that our friend knows all their secrets” (61) – and eventually Landseer’s piercing gaze prompts the bulldog to confess his “last base action” (61) in a manner that only Landseer can understand. At that point, Dickens contends the bulldog transforms for a brief moment into a “spectacle of dejection,” inviting comparisons to the “bouledogue” (62), the ridiculous and inferior breed offered by effete French rivals. In short, this scene obliquely touches on several ways in which imperial rivalries and concerns over class position might be connected to the Zoo’s evolving function in British culture.

In the midst of all this activity, Landseer snatches up a piece of charcoal and in a matter of a few moments sketches a pair of lions, with Dickens pronouncing them “the majestic King and Queen of quadrupeds. The British Lion is no longer a fictitious creature in the British coat of arms” (62). Twice Dickens asserts that the lions are “British,” although obviously the animals that lived (however briefly) in Regent’s Park originated from the far reaches of the Empire.⁷ As symbols, they are nevertheless considered British, and the successful display of these animals, including keeping them in good health, reflects positively on Great Britain as a whole. Especially in the early years of the Zoo, there were serious ongoing concerns about the high mortality rate among the lions and other big cats.⁸ The deaths of these animals – potentially a sign of the Zoo’s failure to control and master nature – could be turned to the advantage of the Society, since these bodies provided naturalists and artists opportunities to dissect and perform various experiments. However, as the nature and purpose of the display of animals shifted for a new audience and with a new cultural significance, keeping lions alive and in good condition assumed paramount importance.

In describing the woefully inadequate facilities for the lions, Landseer contrasts them with the comparatively luxurious accommodations built in Regent’s Park a few years earlier for the hippopotamus. If one animal might be singled out as the catalyst for the Zoo’s financial recovery at mid-century, it would have to be the famous hippopotamus, named Obaysch for the island in the White Nile on which he was captured. Richard Horne’s

lively and detailed account of the hippopotamus's capture, transport to England, and arrival at the Zoo appeared in *Household Words* in early August of 1850. The first part of Horne's article describes in restrained comic fashion how the acquisition of the hippopotamus represented not only a public relations victory for the Zoo but a British diplomatic and technological triumph as well. Horne explains that the Pasha of Egypt had been persuaded to provide the hippopotamus only after being offered meticulously bred English greyhounds and deerhounds in exchange (French hounds having earlier proven sadly lacking in Egypt's unforgiving climate [Charman 299]). Horne's account of the capture of the hippopotamus also reveals certain rhetorical and stylistic similarities to the popular hunting narratives of the day (including various articles that appeared in *Household Words*).⁹ As Ritvo argues, "the association of the big game hunter with the march of empire was literal as well as metonymic" (*Animal Estate* 254). In this case, even though the hunters were members of the Egyptian army, they were nonetheless doing the bidding of British authorities while securing a living trophy and impressive symbol of British imperial strength. Moreover, Horne rhetorically connects the expedition to British big-game hunters by alluding to Roualeyn George Gordon-Cumming (known as "The Lion-Slayer"), who that same year published his best-selling *Five Years of a Hunter's Life in the Far Interior of South Africa* and opened a popular and long-running exhibit of hunting trophies that was included in the Great Exhibition.¹⁰ The allusion appears in a brief but vivid account of how the Egyptian hunters killed the hippopotamus cow as a prelude to capturing her young calf, prompting Horne to admit there is "something pathetic" (446) in how these events transpired. As nineteenth-century accounts confirm, this method was standard procedure for obtaining live animals, since it was typically easier to manage and transport young animals instead of full-grown adults. In this case, the death of the cow proved regrettable, but it was considered insignificant when compared to what Horne blandly calls the "interesting and valuable" (445) young hippopotamus. As we have already seen, a conventional Victorian view of animals saw few

contradictions in considering exotic animals as objects of sport and scientific study at the same time. Both living animals at the Zoo and dead animals in various states might nevertheless be considered "trophies," organic versions of other "spoils of Empire" that offered compelling evidence of British imperial might and superiority.¹¹ But the emergence of a "public pet" that enthralled all of London was soon to complicate that perspective.

In Horne's article, the detailed narrative of the transport of the hippopotamus also constitutes an impressive demonstration of British affluence and technological superiority. Horne reports that the expedition made use of two cows and ten goats to provide milk for the unweaned animal; the ship's cow was eventually commandeered as well (448). Horne also relates that the *Ripon*, the English-built paddle steamer that transported Obaysch from Alexandria, had been equipped with a four-hundred-gallon water tank, fitted out in Southampton "from a plan furnished by Mr. Mitchell, Secretary of the Zoological Gardens" (447). Horne further notes that the expedition spared no expense in filling this tank every other day with *fresh water*, a significant portion of which was supplied by condensation collected from the boat's engines, a minor detail that nevertheless underscores the ways in which British scientific achievements and material resources represent the focus of much of this narrative. Moreover, Horne's account describes at some length the ministrations of the Arab keeper who served as the "attendant and interpreter" of the hippopotamus (448). In the nineteenth century, it was common for European zoos to incorporate exotic keepers in native dress into their display of animals as additional evidence of imperial power.¹² In this instance, Horne emphasizes the great care with which the keeper, Hamet Safi Cannana, supplied every need of the young hippopotamus, sleeping next to him on the voyage and keeping him content (and thus under control) by feeding him a steady supply of dates, his favorite treat. The keeper actually became something of an attraction in his own right, and his role in the process becomes yet another sign of British affluence and ingenuity.

As an additional means of highlighting the Zoo's display of wealth, power, and technological superiority, Horne offers a catalog of learned and socially elite authorities present to receive the hippopotamus upon his arrival in London. These authorities include editors of natural history journals, artists covering the event for the press, and other dignitaries and scientific experts on animals. Horne, for example, notes the presence of Lord Brougham, former Chancellor of England and the author and editor of various works on natural science, Richard Owen (about whom more below), Thomas Bell of the Royal Society, and Mitchell. Toward the end of the article, Horne relates that a hunt for a female hippopotamus has already begun, and he excitedly anticipates the "unrivalled fame of possessing a royal pair" and the hope of "progeny" (449). As it turns out, Horne's words proved prophetic since Obaysch, who lived until 1878, thrived surprisingly well in England and eventually sired one of the first hippopotamus calves born in Europe.¹³ Despite his excited, gushing language, Horne states with some chagrin that "our indefatigable energies and matchless wealth often exhibit themselves in eccentric fancies" (449). After spending so much time and energy insisting upon the power and technological skill of the English in being able to afford such an extravagance, the self-conscious concluding paragraphs express a certain amount of anxiety over the changing mission of the Zoo. Surely Horne does not mean to suggest that authorities such as Mitchell and Owen are indulging in "eccentric fancies." Rather, he worries that the public's obsession with the hippopotamus may not be productive in promoting a serious middle-class ethos or supporting the powerful symbolic associations of the Zoo.

Only a few weeks after Obaysch's arrival, Horne produced a very different kind of piece entitled "Zoological Sessions (Exclusive)," published in *Household Words* in the 28 September 1850 issue. By this point, the young hippopotamus had become "a fashionable furor" (6), and in the article Horne imagines various anthropomorphized Zoo animals offering testimony for members of the Zoological Society early in the morning (before the general public has been admitted for the day). As the

brazen "Marmozet Monkey" complains, it is "the favouritism shown to the fat water-pig" (5) that so upsets them. The article includes a catalog of some of the Zoo's most famous animals, but, similar to the article just discussed, it also catalogs the learned authorities present at the session. While some of the more ridiculous human figures are fictional, others are respected authorities on animals, including Landseer and Bell, among others.

It is Richard Owen who most vigorously defends himself against these charges. Owen is another figure mentioned in several *Household Words* articles; moreover, Dickens developed a friendship with him and invited Owen to write a series of articles from the perspective of Zoo animals, although Owen produced only one.¹⁴ Owen's credentials as an anatomist and naturalist were formidable, having been trained as a surgeon at the University of Edinburgh and at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Only the year before the publication of this article he had accepted the position of conservator of the Hunterian Collection at the Royal College of Surgeons (*Household Words* published an article later that same year on the Hunterian Museum and the curious human and animal specimens that it held [Knight, "The Hunterian"]). Moreover, Owen, along with Mitchell and William Yarrell, another well-known naturalist, constituted the Society's Committee for the Purchase of Animals (Charman 287), and thus Owen was instrumental in the acquisition of the hippopotamus as well as other animals at this time of the Zoo's remarkable growth and increased notoriety. Owen offers a flustered, somewhat comical defense of the treatment of the hippopotamus, who, he explains, "had not presumptuously put himself forward, or employed any means, open or sinister, for obtaining public favour" (8). The Black Bear, up to this point one of the most popular attractions at the Zoo and, not surprisingly, one of the most outspoken detractors of the hippopotamus, complains that Owen had published a "learned account of the swimming swine" (8), and the Bear notes Owen was one of the first visitors to observe the hippopotamus upon his arrival at the Zoo. Owen counters by stating that he has no favorites among the animals and that he cares for them all equally – living

or dead. Furthermore, he explains that he has recently participated in the dissection of an elephant and a rhinoceros from the Zoo that had put his own health at risk (8). Oddly, Owen later returns to the topic of dissection, noting in an off-hand way that he will most likely dissect all of the animals present. Even the most well-known and beloved animals housed at the Zoo did end up being dissected – by Owen or other learned authorities – including the hippopotamus.¹⁵ The source of the rather dark humor lurking around the edges of this article is the seeming disjunction between the emerging view of Zoo animals as beloved public pets as well as objects of scientific study, an irony that, in the context of the article, seems entirely lost on Owen. Still, this article suggests a sea change is coming in which sentimentality toward animals overshadows their scientific value and broader cultural significance.

Dickens himself could not resist commenting on the hippopotamus craze that swept London. Earlier that spring, shortly before the arrival of Obaysch, Dickens utilized a versatile metaphor that allowed him to deal with a variety of subjects. In April, he penned “Perfect Felicity. In a Bird’s Eye View,” which serves as an introduction to three related articles that followed, each titled “From the Raven in the Happy Family.” Twenty-first-century readers might assume that the phrase “Happy Family” represents a playful description of the bird’s tumultuous existence in a large Victorian family (perhaps modelled on Dickens’ family, which had its own pet ravens over the years).¹⁶ However, in the 1850s the phrase “Happy Family” refers to a popular form of street entertainment in which a variety of small animals and birds were exhibited together in the same large cage.¹⁷ While the phrase, common enough during this period, serves as a useful rhetorical launching pad for Dickens to comment on a broad range of human social issues (since human society as a whole might be considered a “Happy Family” in which underlying tensions continually threaten to erupt), its close connection to the exhibition of animals in the Victorian Age seems entirely relevant in this context. In the final “Happy Family” article, Dickens has the Raven call attention to the growing fascination with the hippopotamus:

Ronald D. Morrison, "Dickens, London Zoo, and 'Household Words.'"

I wonder what there is, new and strange, that you *wouldn't* lionise, as you call it? Can you suggest anything? It's not a hippopotamus, I suppose. I hear from my brother-in-law in the Zoological Gardens, that you are always pelting away into the Regent's Park, by thousands to see the hippopotamus. Oh, you're very fond of hippopotami, ain't you? You study one attentively, when you *do* see one, don't you? You come away, so much wiser than you went, reflecting so profoundly on the wonders of creation – eh? (505)

The last lines in particular call into question the significance of the public fascination with the hippopotamus. At one level, the tirade might be dismissed as a simple comic interlude, with the caustic raven railing about a range of human foibles and expressing jealousy over the immense popularity of the hippopotamus. But the mocking lines about humans eagerly studying the hippopotamus and reflecting upon the "wonders of creation" suggest some degree of concern that the bourgeois ethos attributed to the Zoo may not be the primary reasons for the Zoo's attractions any longer. Moreover, a few weeks later in October 1850 Dickens published "The 'Good' Hippopotamus." The article ostensibly describes how the keeper who accompanied the hippopotamus from Egypt is getting up a collection for a monument to the animal. While the article represents a broad political satire of the frivolous erection of monuments of various kinds, it also gently ridicules the obsession with the hippopotamus and his keeper and also appears to question the educational function of the Zoo for the middle and lower classes. The Zoo has become almost indistinguishable from the Happy Family.

Richard Horne's "Elephants. Wholesale and Retail," which appeared in *Household Words* in May 1851, describes the Zoo's next major acquisition. Only near the end of the article does Horne relate how a pregnant Indian elephant (named, apparently, both Bibi Sahibeh and Katimeh, but later given the Western name "Betsey") came to be purchased in Bengal. After her female calf was born, the elephants were then shipped to England with great care and at considerable expense, once again emphasizing the technological skill and boundless resources of Britain.

Although these were not the Zoo's first elephants, the novelty of the female elephant nursing her calf proved irresistible to Zoo visitors (as well as offering a stark contrast to the "pathetic" circumstances surrounding the capture of the young hippopotamus). But, rather than focusing on the elephants and their charming domestic habits, Horne devotes the majority of his article to describing a scientific and social "*conversazione*" held at the Zoological Gardens, attended by various scientific and government dignitaries and their spouses to participate in what Horne characterizes as "a train of elephantine reflections, at once historical, military, artistic, social, and, in some degree, sentimental" (229). Even though the *conversazione* was held in the vestibule of the elephant quarters, Horne offers essentially no details about the actual elephants, instead blandly noting the "interest" and "admiration" that elephants tend to generate "whether we regard them as ministering to the grandeur of state occasions, to the luxuries and amenities of private life, or in the more arduous capacity of theatrical performers" (233). Horne's conception of the cultural work of elephants seems much more in line with the *conversazione* and stands in sharp contrast to the general public's interactions with them.

In the penultimate paragraph of the essay, matters take a significant turn, as Horne strongly endorses the intelligence and moral character of Indian elephants over African elephants in what twenty-first-century readers must consider explicitly racialized terms:

Bibi Sahibeh is of the finest Asiatic breed. You may see it in the noble edifice of her forehead; you may see it, in the very old-looking face of her infant daughter. The outline of the head and countenance of an Asiatic elephant, is declared by the best judges to present as great a difference to that of the African elephant as there is between a European and Negro. Be it also observed, that nearly all the great elephantine events which have just now been described, in affairs of state, in war, in histrionic art, and general skill, have related, almost entirely, to the Asiatic races. (234)¹⁸

Horne's specific reference to the physical features of Europeans and Africans may connect this article to Victorian racial theories that emerged at precisely this same time.¹⁹ As previously noted, the Zoo already displayed quite literally the racial differences among human beings in the form of the exotic keepers. But in Victorian culture the terms "race," "breed," and "species" basically appeared interchangeably – and in a rather astonishing variety of contexts. Moreover, all three of these terms were applied to animals and humans alike.²⁰ Ritvo offers compelling evidence that even before the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* the lines separating humans and animals proved extremely unstable and porous ("Our Animal Cousins"), a condition reflected in shifting and imprecise terminology. Even a quick (and admittedly unscientific) search for the term "race" in the pages of *Household Words* and the *Household Words Narrative*, restricted to the year 1850, reveals the term to be roughly synonymous with "type" or "classification." At times, the term designates ethnic categories in humans (as in the "race" of Negroes or white Europeans), but it is also utilized to designate nationality (as in the British or Australian "race"). Moreover, the term is also applied to occupations or professions (for example, the "race" of post-office clerks, nurses, or newspaper editors). In other instances, "race" serves as a general substitute for social class, as seen in the term being applied to the "race" of criminals or paupers or to a distinguished family lineage. Finally, various writers in the pages of *Household Words* freely apply the term to animals as well, as in the "race" of horses, spiders, and pigeons, among others. The term twenty-first-century readers might expect to find in a discussion of animals – "species" – does appear, although less frequently, and can be applied to both animals and humans, but also to a range of other categories (such as a "species" of tax, literature, fraud, or government). Thus Horne's praise for the Asian elephant invokes elements of ethnicity but also national origin and class position, and it is from this rather convoluted perspective that he protests that the "ancient dignity" of the Asiatic elephants is insulted by the "continual presentation of pennyworth of little dirty cakes and quarters of sleepy oranges" (235). At this point, his concern obviously

originates from the reactions of the vulgar crowds who flocked to the Zoo to observe and interact with these animals. In contrast to the elite *conversazione*, these new conditions, Horne suggests, stand at odds with the Zoo's purported cultural mission.

A final set of *Household Word* articles on the Zoo and its animals must suffice for my present purposes. One of the most famous and popular attractions of this period proved to be John Gould's exhibition of mounted hummingbirds, which were displayed to visitors in a specially constructed building on the grounds of the Zoo. The exhibition opened in the summer of 1851 at the same time as the opening of the Great Exhibition and represented an unabashed attempt to capture part of the increased tourist trade in the capital. *Household Words* covered the opening of the exhibition in the lead article for 21 June 1851, "Tresses of the Day Star," attributed to both Charles Knight and Dickens in the *Household Words* Day Book.²¹ While the article rather artfully describes selections from Gould's extensive collection, its primary message seems to be the supreme triumph of natural science as a discipline. Knight and Dickens emphasize that this collection must not be considered the result of Gould's simple "enthusiasm" for birds: "The passion for collecting and preserving rare objects of nature has raised natural history into a science. It has enlarged the domain of the useful and the beautiful" (289). Gould's exhibition proved very successful for the Zoo (and for Gould personally), and clearly Knight and Dickens attempt to shape the public's reaction to the collection along traditional lines articulated by Ritvo and Rothfels. But this article focused on mounted birds stands in sharp contrast to the way the magazine covered one of the next major *living* curiosities that the Zoo acquired just a couple of years later. This acquisition was an anteater, which attracted the attention of *Household Words* even before Mitchell had worked out the details of the animal's purchase from some enterprising Germans, who were displaying it out of their shabby lodgings in Bloomsbury. Henry Morley enthusiastically describes the animal as "a zoological wonder; a thing never before seen in Europe; an animal more eccentric and surprising than the Hippopotamus" (162). Once purchased by the Zoo, the anteater lived only a few months, but its fame at

least for a time outpaced the notoriety of the hippopotamus and the elephant family. This pairing of articles suggests that a popular and sentimental view of animals continued to compete with the scientific and élite cultural values ascribed to London Zoo and promoted in the pages of *Household Words*. As much as Dickens and his staff might celebrate the triumph of "the useful and the beautiful," living animals, especially those from exotic regions across the globe, continued to attract growing crowds of patrons at London Zoo and change its cultural significance.

This case study demonstrates that Animal Studies and Victorian literary studies have much to offer one another. Periodical writings, with references to obscure topics that have long lost their currency, present special challenges to twenty-first-century readers. In some cases, the symbolic meanings for animals and for human interactions with them (as seen in the references to the "Happy Family," to choose just one example) obscure literal animals and the conditions of their lives. As we see in the analysis above, the symbolic functions of animals often do have unmistakable value and significance for readers in the twenty-first century. As Ritvo and other historians have amply demonstrated, Victorian culture often utilized discussions of animals to explore such topics as the expansion of the Empire, the rise of science, and the maintenance of class and racial boundaries (among others). Moreover, the cultural contexts through which humans consider animals remain crucial, as we see here in exploring the highly symbolic significance of London Zoo. Still, I would argue that these articles from *Household Words* reveal the beginnings of a broader cultural shift, as the middle classes began to consider actual animals in Victorian culture as distinct living beings instead of things. For twenty-first-century readers who have perhaps embraced some elements of Animal Rights, the tendency of Dickens and other contributors to anthropomorphize and ventriloquize Zoo animals may seem disturbing or unduly limiting. Yet the enthusiastic responses of middle-class readers of *Household Words* and visitors to the Zoo offer a clear sign that progressive attitudes toward animals and their treatment were slowly becoming more mainstream by the 1850s.

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Notes

¹ Throughout this essay, I have relied upon Lohrli to determine the authors of these articles, as recorded in the *Household Words* Office Book. Lohrli notes that, with very few exceptions, the magazine's articles appeared unsigned (although it was sometimes possible for readers to ascertain the author through the context).

² John M.L. Drew has questioned "the orthodox view of Dickens' editorial omnipresence" (121), especially considering the active and sometimes independent editorial contributions of sub-editor W.H. Wills.

³ For background on this request, see Slater (3:351).

⁴ Digital images of the full run of Dickens' periodicals may be found at *Dickens Journals Online*.

⁵ This new facility was not completed until 1876 (Vevers 140-41).

⁶ See Ito for an overview of the changing admission policies (117).

⁷ In this case, they originated from Mozambique and South Africa (Slater 3:351).

⁸ Ritvo reports that the "average lifespan of its first lions, tigers, leopards, and pumas was about two years, which meant that one of them died each month" (*Animal Estate* 223).

⁹ For example, that same summer, Alexander Mackay published articles on fishing and hunting in Canada, based on his experiences as a young man (see "How We Went Hunting" and "How We Went Fishing"). In December of the same year, John Capper, who spent many years as a journalist in India, published "The Art of Catching Elephants" in *Household Words*. While the ostensible purpose of catching elephants was to domesticate them for work, the process involved shooting the animals least likely to be domesticated, which Capper describes in vivid detail.

¹⁰ Just a few months earlier, *Household Words Narrative* had published a brief review of this book as an example of "travel and adventure" literature. According to the review, the book is "filled with astonishing incidents and anecdotes" sure to keep readers "breathless with excitement" ("Narrative of Literature" 143).

¹¹ For an analysis of the Earl of Derby's role in collecting animal skins as well as live animals, see Colley.

¹² For an extended discussion of how the German Carl Hagenback displayed both animals and human beings considered to be exotic, see Rothfels (esp. 81-142).

¹³ *Household Words* later covered the arrival of a female hippopotamus in 1854 (see Costello). Obaysch did not sire any offspring until after Dickens' death, although the popular press covered the subject enthusiastically at the time. Vevers notes that the *Times* published an obituary for Obaysch on 13 March 1878 (85).

¹⁴ See "Justice to the Hyæna." See also Owen's article "Poisonous Serpents" in November 1852, in which he describes the effects of poisonous snakebites following the death of a keeper who had allegedly handled a cobra while intoxicated. Owen uses this event to comment on social class, referring to the "countless calamities befalling the weekly-wage classes plainly referable to intoxication" (187).

¹⁵ Obaysch's obituary records that the hippopotamus was dissected by the Society's prosector (Ververs 85), who provided a report to the organization.

¹⁶ See Johnson on Grip and his successor (294-95). Troy Boone uses the Raven articles as well as Grip the Raven in *Barnaby Rudge* to support his assertion that "Dickens renders human and nonhuman characters as equivalent inhabitants of an environment – and crucially, equivalent not only physically but also intellectually" (105).

¹⁷ Owen briefly mentions Happy Families, drawing a distinction between such exhibitions and modern zoos ("Poisonous Serpents" 188). Mayhew includes a lengthy interview with the proprietor of a "Happy Family," who provides a brief history of his trade as well as his own experiences (214-19). See Slater for a brief analysis of the way in which Dickens makes use of this metaphor to satirize various elements of British society (II:189). Also see Altick, who discusses Matthew Arnold's use of a similar reference in *Culture and Anarchy*, noting that the term had "lasting jocose connotations" (139-40) through much of the century.

¹⁸ Despite Horne's strong opinions on the superiority of Asian elephants, Jumbo, the African elephant who arrived in 1865, became one of the Zoo's most beloved animals.

¹⁹ See, for example, Patrick Brantlinger's discussion of Robert Knox's *The Races of Men*, published in 1850 (21-22).

²⁰ Recall Dickens' use of the term "tribe" in his article on Landseer (62).

²¹ Lohrli explains the article "was not an actual collaboration," but was penned by Knight and then revised by Dickens (334).

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