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Between Ideals, Realities, and Popular Perceptions: An Analysis of the Multifaceted Nature of London Zoo, 1828-1848

ABSTRACT

This article considers the implications of the early development of London Zoo. It gives insight into the differences between the ideal image of the zoo, the real situation under which the zoo was managed, and popular perceptions of the zoo. The discussion explores three areas: the heterogeneous audience of the zoo, the aestheticization of the zoo and its animal displays, and the pedagogy of observing nonhuman animals in the zoo. The zoo’s ideals confronted various difficulties, while the pedagogy of zoo visits, which developed within a frame of natural theology, was subject to various applications. The article argues that these differences were not evidence of the zoo’s failure to consolidate its ideological backbone in Victorian society. It concludes that such divergence characterized the zoo’s unique capacity both to evoke and to receive competing ideals, anxieties and criticism.

How nonhuman animals were perceived in the zoo, especially when it first appeared, is a tantalizing question. It is hard to find a substantial volume of primary sources that would help to carry out this inquiry. However, the digitalization of archive catalogs and the advancement of bibliographical databases have recently enabled searches to be carried out on a rich variety of historical documents—letters and
diaries in particular—in which people recorded their own experiences of the Zoological Gardens of London (London Zoo). By using these new documents, in addition to other types of materials, this essay challenges an assumption that London Zoo was a crucible of the political, scientific, and cultural ideologies that prevailed in society at large. One research approach interprets the nineteenth-century zoo as displaying dominant ideologies of Victorian society such as British imperialism (Jones, 1997). As Burt (2002) has argued, however, this interpretation dismisses the crucial fact that popular attitudes toward the zoo and its animal displays were often mixed and ambivalent. The zoo could convey ideological messages, but they were always subject to various interpretations. This essay thus explores the implications of the difference between the ideals, the realities, and popular perceptions of London Zoo. It then argues that their intricate relations as a whole constituted the zoo’s unique qualities.

The discussion approaches the broader question regarding the essential features of modern zoos (Åkerberg, 2001, pp. 42-43). On the one hand, Hanson (2002) argues that advancement of science, provision of public entertainment, and—in some cases—conservation of endangered species, have rendered the zoos profoundly different from menageries and circuses in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century America. On the other hand, Ritvo (1987), Robbins (2001), and Rothfels (2002) remind us that zoos shared many aspects with menageries, circuses, and even freak shows. In fact, London Zoo came into being amid the increasing variety and popularity of animal spectacles in the city (Altick, 1978).

In particular, the Royal Menagerie of the Tower of London had provided a hybrid resource for scientific inquiry and public entertainment (Hahn, 2003). Therefore, the zoo’s uniqueness cannot be explained through its official statements and functions alone. Instead, it becomes explicit by casting light on three different dimensions of the zoo: how it was idealized, how it was actually administrated, and how its animal displays were perceived. This essay focuses on the earliest stage of the zoo. A number of early private responses were biased in favor of the zoo during this period, because they were written in a mood of enthusiasm surrounding its opening. The limitation on the period covered in this essay, however, enables the comparison of synchronic materials by placing them against the appropriate context of time in which they were produced and communicated.
A Vision of the Bear Pit

The walkway beyond the entrance gate of London Zoo led to a promenade running between lines of shrubs and trees toward its most popular attraction, the bear pit. Until it was demolished around 1900, the bear pit had, for nearly a century, entertained crowds of people, as depicted by George Scharf in one of his *Six Views of the Zoological Gardens of London* (Figure 1).

![A View of the Bear Pit by George Scharf, 1835](image)

By permission of Corporation of London Libraries and Guildhall Art Gallery

The picture shows a gentleman in front of the bear’s den holding out a long stick, at the end of which was stuck a bun. Inside the den, the bear has ascended a fixed pole. Spectators are watching the bear extend an arm and grasp the bun. Scharf was eager to capture a moment in which animals showed their interesting behaviors and attitudes. He also believed that plants, buildings, and a shaft of sunlight would produce important visual effects in the scene. The lithograph is not a straightforward reflection of the zoo at that time. Instead, it exemplified the constructed images of the zoo, which aestheticized the environment in which humans and animals interacted...
harmoniously. It was structured in a way that gained authenticity as topographical lithography and attracted its consumers among a wider social range. Eventually, his *Six Views* became one of the most popular zoo illustrations of the 1830s.

Scharf’s career as a scientific and topographical lithographer started in London in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. His earnings relied largely on regular commissions from renowned naturalists including Richard Owen and Charles Darwin, but Scharf was not good at bargaining. On one occasion, he regretted “working too cheap for Darwin”; and on another, he was advised by his friend to “ask a price which may pay you, as they [clients] expect it will come high”. Although Scharf did not make a fortune, he spent his limited pastime to enrich the cultural life of his family, taking them to a wide range of sights and spectacles of London, such as the Royal Academy; the British Museum; the Gallery of Practical Science; and, most frequently, London Zoo. He also attended lectures at the Mechanics’ Institutes and scientific meetings at the Zoological Society. Importantly, many of these metropolitan institutions were established or restructured around the 1820-1830s. Scharf and his family belonged to those social groups that benefited from the growth of cultural amenities in London.

The homogeneous spectators depicted in his picture of the bear pit might represent these social groups or the ascending middle classes. This does not necessarily mean, however, that people belonging to these socio-economic categories dominated the zoo. On the contrary, the zoo was envisioned as a heterogeneous social space, where many people—inclusive of men and women, adults and children—shared the pleasure of interacting with the animals. By eliminating the true diversity of the spectators’ appearance, Scharf presented a harmonious image of the zoo. Critics approved of the way Scharf drew the zoo and its audience (“A very accurate and picturesque print,” 1837). Favorable comments by many journals had an immediate effect on sales, as he recognized that “such Printsellers as would not take any before” asked to sell his lithographs.

The commercial success of his lithographs was related to a new trend of urban topography in the 1820s-1850s. During this period, a specific style of topographical paintings emerged to provide a total picture of the metropolis, and to commemorate London’s reputation for “progress” and “improvement”
(Adams, 1998; Potts, 1998). In topographical books, the zoo was defined as one of the localities that represented the “metropolitan improvements” (Elmes, 1827). A scene of social assemblage was considered to exemplify the height of British civilization, and the enormous collection of animals could be acclaimed as an emblem of London’s expanding commercial network and prosperity. Indeed, a picture of the zoo was an indispensable piece for many topographical publications. The earlier motifs of Scharf’s illustration, which recurred in these books, were later crystallized by T. H. Shephered in his *The World Metropolis* (1851-1855), the canon of the metropolitan topography of the day (Rothfels, 2002, pp. 32-34). Therefore, Scharf’s view of the bear pit, examined against the social context in which it was produced and circulated, suggests three important aspects of the zoo: the presence of harmonious spectators, the aestheticization of the environment in which these spectators interacted with animals, and the opportunity to become familiar with knowledge about the animal world. In what follows, the discussion analyzes how these ideals were created and contradicted and then considers the implication of the gap.

**A Harmonious Audience?**

London Zoo was established by the Zoological Society of London at a north corner of Regent’s Park. Upon opening in 1828, the zoo became a venue for high society. Its role as a backdrop for social display was illuminated by Benjamin Read, a tailor and printmaker (Hyde & Cumming, 2000). Figure 2, one of his prints, displays the latest gentleman’s fashion in the setting of the zoo in 1829.

Apart from the representation of masculine and female elegance, the black bear in the left middle ground was an important component of the picture. The Russian black bear, Toby, had once been a companion animal of the Marquis of Hertford, the former Envoy Extraordinary to Russia. Upon completion of his service, Hertford returned to England with Toby and obtained a sumptuous villa in Regent’s Park (Samuel, 1959, pp. 23-24). Hertford had a lavish lifestyle and later became a model for the Marquis of Steyne in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847). Toby was said to have received moral influence from his “master,” having a refined taste for ale. Presented to the Zoological Society, of which Hertford was an early member, Toby immediately captured
the spotlight. He was depicted as a mascot of the zoo, who received the generous patronage of fashionable crowds.

The zoo’s affiliation with high society, however, by no means excluded other social groups. Like George Scharf, William Tayler, a footman working for a wealthy widow in the West End, benefited from the increasing accessibility
of cultural institutions. He was given a day off on June 28, 1837, and decided to go sightseeing in the metropolis. After his subsequent visits to the National Gallery and the British Museum, he walked through Regent’s Park to London Zoo and strolled there for two hours, “going from one den to another all through the gardens”. He was surprised to notice the number and diversity of animals and, above all, the vitality of animal life. He noted in his diary: “There I saw all sorts of beasts, birds and all sorts of animals all alive” (Wise, 1998, pp. 53-54). It might be assumed that, as people of a lower social status rarely visited the zoo, Tayler became excited about his precious experience in the zoo. Yet, contemporary commentaries agreed that these people were rather visible in the zoo.

The heterogeneous mixture of the zoo’s audience had political implications in the 1830s. During this period, parliamentary reform, especially the extension of political suffrage, was increasingly debated among the wider public, and tensions between social classes intensified and took the form of political demonstrations and riots. The Reform Act of 1832, which extended suffrage only to wealthy middle-class men, led disillusioned working-class radicals to demand, as Chartists, for further parliamentary reform. The zoo appeared to counterbalance the tensions and conflicts that characterized the turbulent society of the time. In fact, contemporary commentaries stressed that the zoo attracted people from a wide social range, as Ryley (1831) remarked in the Eclectic Magazine:

[I]t is no small part of the pleasure afforded to a benevolent mind, by a visit to these Gardens [London Zoo], to see the fashionable and gay for once so well amused; and, as the higher order of triflers drop off at the close of their morning, to notice those of the lower grades, the artisan and the mechanic, with their families, drinking at once health, pleasure, and useful knowledge in a ramble through these Gardens, after the toil of their day. (p. 179)

The statements idealized the amicable relations between the leisured and the poor. It also epitomized a reformist idea of organizing a harmonious society by providing “rational recreation” for the working classes (Bailey, 1978; Cunningham, 1990). However, this ideal was not so easily realized. There was no consensus, either within the Zoological Society or in the public at large, of how far the zoo ought to be open. As Desmond (1985) has argued,
the establishment of the society and the zoo embraced competing opinions about their prospects and managements. The schism was deepened by political turmoil in the 1820-1830s, when the zoo’s admission policy aroused controversy (“Zoological Society”, 1830; 1837). Advocates for the wider opening were echoed in newspapers and periodicals and appeared to gain public support from those who favored the utilitarian proposition. Accordingly, reformist members of the society suggested admitting lower social groups into the zoo, but their proposals were rejected by a majority of the society who preferred to maintain its exclusivity.

Nonetheless, an attempt to tighten the procedure of public admission hardly succeeded. In principle, until the zoo officially began to admit the general public in 1847-848, it was open only to the members of the Zoological Society and their guests. In practice, however, it was well known to London residents that the zoo’s admission control was not strictly enforced. So great was the ticket availability that rumors abounded that the society circulated the tickets deliberately—via publicans and coach drivers—among those for whom it could not officially admit providing tickets (“Zoological Society”, 1832). After all, in July 1838, the Council of the Zoological Society had to concede that “the admission of improper characters could not be prevented” (“Zoological Society”, 1838, p. 6). Moreover, Charles Knight, an author and publisher of miscellaneous works, advised the readers of his London guide to gain tickets from a nearby tavern or to sneak through under the cover of a group of “legitimate” visitors (Knight, 1843, pp. 258-259). Remarkably, the mode of “illegal” entry not only was known by word-of-mouth but also appeared in print, in a reputable guidebook. Knight recognized that there were an informal market for the zoo tickets and an unofficial route to get into the zoo, neither of which the society dared to jettison.

A visit to the zoo became a familiar form of recreation for a far wider range of people than the proprietor had initially conceived. This was not the direct outcome of the original scheme of the Zoological Society or evidence of the failure of the zoo’s admission system. This indicated that the society held certain flexibility in controlling public access, although its compromising stance appeared to be enforced by public demands. Such versatility served to create an arena in which people became aware of their similarities and differences. In the zoo, spectators were watching each other, admiring the
elegance of fashionable crowds or regarding with suspicion the behavior of vulgar flocks. Their mutual visibility, appreciated or condemned, encouraged them to realize how widely the enjoyment of zoo visits was shared among very different members of the public.

**Popular Perceptions of the Animals in the Zoo**

While spectators constituted a significant presence, the main attractions to be seen in the zoo were, of course, the animals. The first prospectus of the Zoological Society proclaimed that the proposed zoological gardens would become completely distinct from ancient Roman circuses, where people indulged in the vulgar spectacle of gladiator-and-beast battles. It stressed that, in addition to the mission of the advancement of zoological science, the zoo would provide the public with amusements that were civilized, moral, and instructive (Bastin, 1970). These original schemes were not directly expressed to the public. This was partly because the leading members of the society were less involved with public relations than with internal political battles to take an initiative of the society’s management. Instead, newspapers and periodicals assisted the elaboration and dissemination of the zoo’s ideals. Shortly after the zoo’s opening, the *Mirror of Literature* described its inhabitants as appearing to “much greater advantage than when shut up in a menagerie”, and as enjoying “the luxury of fresh air, instead of unwholesome respiration in a room or a caravan” (“The Zoological Gardens”, 1828, p. 148). This kind of narrative soon became a cliché.

Importantly, the reference to “the luxury of fresh air” suggests that the critics embraced the prevailing discourse on sanitary reform. In the 1830s, people’s sensibility about smell became stronger, as the sanitary reform movement began to tackle poverty and disease, which had been aggravated by the metropolitan expansion. Reformers targeted air quality, because until the rise of bacteriology in the late nineteenth century, it was believed that the disease was caused by “miasma” or poison in the air exuded from rotting animals, decomposing vegetables, stagnant water, and putrefying soil. Thus, the fear of smell and the obsession for purified air intensified. A remark of Edwin Chadwick, a driving force of sanitary reform, is most revealing: “all smells is, if it be intense, immediate, acute disease” (Porter, 1997, p. 411). Hence, if
one prescription was to eliminate odor, the other was to create a deodorized space in the city.

The public opening of Regent’s Park in 1834 was considered to meet the social demand for fresh air and open space for exercise (Lawrence, 1993, p. 110). The smell of animals, however, concerned inhabitants in the neighborhood. In fact, their protest delayed the zoo’s construction work for the first few years. In 1829, the opposition of John Maberly, MP, who owned St. John’s Lodge in Regent’s Park, led the society to relinquish its plan to prepare the winter repository. This resulted in the loss of some valuable animals because of the cold of the following winter. Moreover, John Nash, the celebrated designer of Regent’s Park, became a strenuous protestor. As an official architect to the Government’s Office of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues, which let the ground for the zoo to the Zoological Society, Nash denounced the zoo for exuding “the noisome smell which frequently assails those who for health or pleasure take exercise round the Circular Road [of Regent’s Park].” Nash substantially delayed the conclusion of the lease contract between the society and the government.

As Nash’s strong opposition suggests, the fear of smells associated with the zoo was understandable, but it had no resonance in travel literature in which the zoo was a popular locality. In literary representation, anxieties about smell disappeared as if the picturesque scenery of Regent’s Park had disguised such concerns. One example of this was revealed in a fictional travelogue for youth, entitled *A Month in London* (1832). The book envisaged that a respectable English gentleman took an American tourist and his two children on a cultural odyssey in London. One day the company visited the zoo, and the children found that the animals were “accommodated with their peculiar food, lodging, and pastimes, as nearly as possible”. This impression contrasted with “the unhappy beasts within the booths of a country fair,” who were “tormented into savage tones of expostulation” (Taylor, 1832, p. 89). No doubt this imagery owed much to the idyllic scenery of Regent’s Park. An anthropomorphic deduction could be drawn that the lives of the animals were as comfortable as those of wealthy residents around the park.

It is worth trying to examine whether individual responses chimed with this optimistic appraisal. The remaining records suggest that a number of visitors were quick to appreciate the zoo’s ideals. On May 22, 1830, a 17-year-old girl,
Anne Chalmers, noted in her diary: “It [the zoo] is a most delightful spectacle, the animals have so much more liberty than in common menageries” (Blackie, 1923, p. 112). The Royal Menagerie at the Tower of London was especially referred to for the comparison. Thomas Sopwith, a civil engineer from Newcastle upon Tyne, upon his first visit to London in March 1830, estimated the zoo to be one of the most interesting places. By contrast, his subsequent visit to the Tower Menagerie ended with disappointment: “as a menagerie the thing was much more confined and insignificant” (Hahn, 2003, p. 236). A similar opinion was expressed by Charles Knight, who researched the habits of animals at Regent’s Park Zoo, the Tower Menagerie, and the Bartholomew Fair. He concluded that the zoo provided much better living conditions than the other two (Knight, 1864, p. 149).

Those who comprehended the zoo’s proprietorship, however, would disagree. A report by Martin Lichtenstein, the future founder of Berlin Zoological Garden (1844), gained a chilling insight into the economy of animal collection. In autumn 1832, many monkeys died of pneumonia, but it scarcely mattered, because the monkeys were transported every spring from warm regions and could be purchased inexpensively. His report reads: “They [the monkeys] are left dying of severe cold in winter, with the excuse that heating and catering for animals would cost higher than purchasing new animals in spring” (Jahn, 1992, p. 217). As this report implies, no scientific research was conducted to find the methods of keeping foreign animals healthier in confinement, although a veterinary surgeon was appointed to provide a professional care for them (Crisp, 1860, p. 175). If the animals looked fresh and healthy, as noted by the positive reports above, they might represent the same species—but not the same individual—that had been seen in a previous visit. In the zoo’s dairy records, the names of sick and dead animals were registered as frequently as those of new arrivals.

Although Lichtenstein’s report was kept private, dissenting voices were occasionally expressed in public. In February 1836, an anonymous correspondent to The Times criticized the Zoological Society for having done little to improve the condition of the zoo. In the correspondent’s view, the ground remained undrained, the buildings slight and flimsy: “many of the animals,” wrote this critic, “were standing deep in mud and water, and their bodies covered with filth” (“Spectator”, 1836, p. 6). The criticism tended to overstate the situation,
because it was biased against the Tory coterie of the society, who had previously expelled reformist members from the administration. Nonetheless, William Broderip, a Tory-affiliated vice-president of the society, had to concede in his zoo guide published in *Quarterly Review* that the losses of the animals were “considerable” (1836, pp. 318-319). Above all, a literary, guided tour of the zoo by the essayist Leigh Hunt epitomized the ambivalent attitudes toward its animal display. At the beginning of his article in the *New Monthly Magazine*, he was excited by the vitality of animal life in the zoo: “Those animals look as fresh, and strong, and beautiful, as if they were born in a new beginning of the world” (1836, p. 479). When he began to contemplate the meaning of the animal exhibition, however, reflection on the endless life of the animals in captivity as well as on the feeding at the bear pit, which anthropomorphized the animals and made them unnaturally “close” to humans, caused him melancholy (p. 481).

All the same, enthusiasm seemed to outweigh criticism in the earliest stages of the zoo’s development. Spectators were apt to let their attention be captured by the zoo’s total novelty rather than by the smell and filth of the animals, principally because the purpose of their visit was to have fun. There were critics who requested the improvement of the drainage of the ground, and of the ventilation and heating system of the buildings. Yet they believed that the zoo would become, if efficiently managed, a better place for its inhabitants. In this sense, they were idealists in comparison with the leading members of the society, who compromised on many conditions, and with the audience who were generally satisfied with the spectacles and the pleasant ambience of the zoo. Scharf’s view of the bear pit veiled crucial realities of the zoo that the critics denounced, but it also represented the ideals that even the critics would wish to be realized.

### The Pedagogy of Zoo Visits

Private responses to the animals in the zoo were as diverse as those to the zoo itself and therefore reject any attempts at generalization. To quote some samples, however, has the merit of illustrating how people recorded their impressions in their own words. One of the earliest, personal accounts was recorded by Alleyne FitzHerbert, the son of a well-established family in Derbyshire, who was taken to the zoo by his father’s uncle. In a letter to his
father dated March 18, 1828, Alleyne wrote: “Amongst the animals we saw a Lynax [sic] which amused us very much because it was so very angry at us & it grouled [sic] in a very odd manner.”

For Susan Darwin, a sister of the famous Charles Darwin, it was the armadillos who piqued her curiosity by their “pertinacious” walking manner. She asked her brother in July 1833 to bring back a living armadillo from his survey voyage: “I fell in love with an Armadillo I saw at the Zoological Gardens. . . . I wish you w[ould] bring back a pet one home, they trot along so pertinaciously, that I laugh whenever I think of it” (Burkhardt, 1985, p. 324).

Although these accounts were fragmentary, they indicated the writers’ motives to record their own experiences and to make them understood. Thus, however diverse, the personal records testified to the writers’ attempts to give particular meanings to the observed animals, which were communicated not only by writing but also through conversation with friends and families.

The diary of Sophy Codd, a daughter of the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Middlesex, gives insight into this process. On July 27, 1836, she celebrated her 19th birthday and, next day, made a family visit to the zoo where the recent arrival of 4 giraffes was stirring public sensation. Sophy found the giraffes beautiful and elegant as long as they were still, but when running, they looked “extremely ungraceful.” In the evening at home, she looked into a popular natural history book and summarized in her diary the information she had obtained from the reading. While the diary illuminated her interactive learning process, it served to prompt conversation with her father, from whom Sophy wished to hear a compliment on the improvement in her writing. They might discuss her first impressions about the giraffes afterwards.

Sophy’s diary hinted at a cultural frame within which young learners tried to give meanings to their experience at the zoo. They could consult a kind of juvenile literature that enhanced the educational aspect of a visit to the zoo. It might be tempting to think that the Zoological Society disseminated some pedagogical concepts; however, apart from publishing its monotonous official guides, the society played little part in the promotion of the pedagogy of popular science (Åkerberg, 2001, p. 47). Instead, it was materialized by a substantial body of juvenile books that were produced by evangelical writers, educationalists, and naturalists (Fyfe, 2000; Myers, 1989; Secord, 1985). Many of the authors espoused the value of natural theology—including the great
ladder of being ascending from animals to humans to God. A number of children’s books encouraged the readers to distinguish the animal hierarchy from “lower” to “higher” creatures with the whole picture of the ladder of being revealing the aesthetic unity of God’s design.

Since the zoo was a popular destination for school excursions, children could ideally practice the technique of observation that they had learned at school and at home. One such example was demonstrated in James Bishop’s Stories and Tales of Animated Nature or a Visit to the Zoological Gardens, Regent’s Park (1854). In this juvenile fiction, one Charles Weston instructed his two children to observe the unique characters of each animal in the zoo. For example, he directed his children’s attention to the peculiarities of the waders, their “long feet and spreading toes and rough jagged bill.” He further explained that these characteristics enabled the waders “to seek for and secure their slippery prey in those marshy places where they most abound” (p. 9). Ultimately, the observation of nature would lead to the revelation of God’s design “You see, then, the goodness and wisdom of the Creator in adapting the conformation of the animal world to the end and aim of the existence of the several species of the animal creation” (p. 93).

While Weston and his two children were an idealized family in the fiction, there are two interesting texts that recorded children’s genuine responses from different perspectives: The first was written by an adult instructor, the second by a 15-year-old boy. The diary of Joseph Wilkins, published by the Religious Tract Society in 1840, revealed that he lost control of the conversation with his nephew, Frank, when they entered the promenade leading to the bear pit. Wilkins tried to explain about the plants around them, but Frank quickly noticed people gathering at the end of the walk and held his uncle’s hand to hurry him down to the bear pit. Frank then listened to the story about two keepers being killed by the bear and expressed a doubt about biblical authority, asking “how the wild beasts were managed in Noah’s Ark.” In reply, Wilkins reminded Frank that God made the wild beasts as tame as lambs upon entering the Ark. In Wilkin’s view, the conversation concluded satisfactorily by pointing to God’s design of the world. (pp. 96-99)

All the way through the zoo, however, Frank left Wilkins behind, watching animals in an irregular manner. At the cage of the polar bear, Frank was asked how he should feel if he met the animal on a dark night, but Frank left the
place without giving a reply. Nonetheless, the diary scarcely carried overtones of Wilkins’ irritation at Frank’s impolite behavior. Although the diary was obviously edited as a religious tract, it carried within it an awareness that children’s responses were spontaneous and personal, so needing some direction to turn their thoughts to a popular sense of divine creation.

The other text is extracted from the diary of Richard Doyle, who later became a contributor to *Punch*. Enjoyment of the metropolitan spectacles galvanized his everyday life; an outing to London Zoo on September 18, 1840, was recorded in detail. As with many other visitors, Doyle was struck by the view of the bear pit, as he wrote:

> The bear pit is a square pit of about twenty feet deep and forty-eight in diameter with a stout wooden pole in the middle. It is occupied as the name implies by bears, to the number of three, the limoneux, the brown and the North American Black, who either beg for victuals at the bottom of the pole on their hind legs or on their heads at the top. (Pollen, 1885, p. 115)

This account indicates that Doyle imitated a guidebook-style narrative. With a sly sense of humor, Doyle described one zookeeper, who was working inside a cage of tigers, as though he too was a species on display: “He was sitting on two legs, painting the inside of one of the cages. I was told that although possessed of such remarkable faculties this species it not at all rare” (p. 116). He mimicked the narrative of zoological texts to entertain himself, as well as his parents, who would enjoy reading his diary. He parodied the boundaries that the zoo drew between human and nonhuman animals. The observing eyes of children could turn to human animals too.

The above texts confirmed the divergence between juvenile literature and children’s perceptions. The former prescribed a comprehensive understanding of nature, often within a theological frame, while the latter underlined spontaneous responses. The difference suggests that pedagogical ideas were open to interpretation, according to the diverse expectations of the spectators. While the pedagogy of zoo visits justified a family outing to the popular resort, it helped to define the appropriate range of orthodox knowledge about nature. As revealed in the diaries of Wilkins and Doyle, however, children gained their own perspectives and excited their fanciful imagination, through the observation of real animals, through the conversation with friends and
families, and through the reading of natural history books. It was this very diversity that attracted a broad range of people, who had varied motivations in their minds when visiting the zoo and mixed impressions when they observed the animals there.

**Conclusion**

This essay has explored the gaps between the ideals, the realities, and the popular receptions of London Zoo at its earliest stage. George Scharf’s picture of the bear pit casts light on three particular themes upon which the differences appeared most explicitly: the heterogeneous audience of the zoo, the aestheticization of the zoo and its animal displays, and the pedagogy of observing animals in the zoo. Apart from the zoo’s admission control, upon which the Zoological Society had to compromise with the public demands for its wider opening, the society was not actively involved with the promotion of the zoo’s ideals. Instead, they were elaborated by commentaries in newspapers and periodicals and by juvenile literature that expressed pedagogical notions of learning natural history. However, the ideal images of the zoo often confronted dissenting voices and were contradicted by the real situations under which the zoo was managed. The pedagogy of zoo visits was framed largely within the related concept of natural theology, but practically it was subject to various applications.

These differences should not be taken as evidence of the society’s failure to consolidate its ideological backbone and to clarify its public rationale in Victorian society. On the contrary, it was the mixed nature of human responses to the zoo—idealization, appraisal, excitement, disappointment, critical reflection, and melancholic thought—that, as a whole, distinguished the zoo’s multifaceted nature. No other animal spectacles in Victorian society attracted such diverse and abundant popular reactions. The zoo’s individuality could not be defined simply by the ideological messages it could convey or by its official mission for science, education, and public entertainment. It was also characterized by its capacity both to receive and to evoke competing ideals, anxieties, and criticism. One important reason for the zoo’s successful development was that it adapted, if not perfectly, to the different motivations and expectations of the spectators. While the Tower of London ceased to exhibit caged animals in 1835, London Zoo thrived into the Victorian era. Although
there were many twists and turns to the story of its further development, the
zoo had already presented its multifaceted nature when it first emerged in
society.

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Notes

1 Correspondence should be sent to Takashi Ito, Department of Area Studies,
University of Tokyo, Komaba 3-8-1, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-8902, Japan. Email:
t.ito@mac.com. Thanks to those who contributed to the discussion at the British
Society for the History of Science Annual Conference, Leeds, July 2005, at which
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referees for their productive comments and suggestions.

2 A subject search in library/archive catalogues, via the “A2A” online database and
Creaton (2003), proved particularly helpful in this regard.

3 National Portrait Gallery Archive. Scharf Journal. draft letter inserted in volume
2 dated August 23, 1839.

4 National Portrait Gallery Archive. Scharf Journal. December 12, 1836; June 30,
1838; Scharf Correspondence, C. J. Hullmandel to Scharf dated “Thursday 25 Oct.”.


6 The National Archives. WORK 16/724. Maberly to Milne and Joseph Sabine dated
October 13, 1828.

7 The National Archives. WORK 16/725. John Nash to Alexander Milne dated May
25, 1830.

8 Derbyshire Record Office. D239 M/F/7012. Alleyne FitzHerbert to Henry FitzHerbert
dated March 18, 1828.

9 London Metropolitan Archives. ACC/2042/022/1. Journal of Sophy Shirley Codd,
ff. 26-27.

10 The Society alleged the diary to be a genuine record of this man’s life. Although
it is hard to discern whether this claim was true, the object of the publication was
to teach the readers how best to learn from a visit to London without succumb-
ing to the enchantment of metropolitan vices.
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(Unpublished manuscripts referred to in the endnotes above are not listed here.)

“A2A—access to archives.” http://www.a2a.org.uk/ (online resource).


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