NO-ONE'S ARK

Exotic animal acts are still widely thought of as typically part of the circus experience. Indeed, before television, cinema and the internet existed, and when long-distance travel was well beyond the means of ordinary people, circuses were the only way to see exotic animals. However, now that information, images and documentaries are so abundantly available at the click of a computer mouse, keeping animals such as elephants, lions, tigers and monkeys as part of a travelling show may start to look rather outdated. This article examines the ways in which different audiences look at circus animals over time and in different contexts, and what this may mean for the animals themselves.

The circus as we know it today has emerged from what was essentially a showcase for colonial conquest. Imperial expansion made it possible to capture exotic animals on a large scale, and, in the nineteenth century, curiosity about these animals and the places they came from was sparked by popular natural history and explorer narratives. These stories about the exploits of intrepid adventurers were an important way of expressing and reinforcing the belief that the colonisation of other peoples' countries was legitimate. As James R. Ryan writes:

> An interest in pursuing zoological "specimens" for private and national collections was fostered by both the dramatic upsurge in the popularity of natural history and the proliferation of popular literature and images of hunting in Britain, which frequently pictured the hunter as a manly adventurer and hero of Empire. (Ryan, "Hunting with the Camera" 204)

Mary Louise Pratt, in turn, focuses on natural history as both a means and an end of colonisation, whereby "journalism and narrative travel accounts . . . were essential mediators between the scientific network and a larger European public. They were central agents in legitimating scientific authority and its global project alongside Europe's other ways of knowing the world, and being in it" (Pratt, 29). Adrian Franklin identifies several themes in "the colonial big game hunter stories", which were "ostensibly for children and teenagers" (Franklin, 43). These were "the naturalisation and dominance of Europeans in places such as Africa and India; the aggressiveness and danger of wild animals; the heroism of the hunter" (Franklin, 43). He describes the implications in connection with the zoo, which not only shares its roots with the circus, but also has much in common with it in terms of the demonstration of particular human-animal relations. Franklin writes: "Contemporary zoos housed these animals as dangerous captives (cages emphasised prison bars); like prisoners of war, they were put on public display for the entertainment of the victorious" (Franklin, 43). Unlike zoos, however, circus acts portrayed the imagery of colonial travel narratives more vividly. The "manly adventurers and heroes of Empire" depicted in travellers' tales came to life in the circus arena, particularly in performances involving big cats.

Accordingly, William M. Johnson's analysis of the history of animal entertainment, *The Rose-Tinted Menagerie* (1990), describes one very vivid performance by the famous nineteenth-century lion tamer Isaac Van Amburgh:

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No-One's ARK Exotic Animal Acts in the Circus

> Dressed in jungle fatigues, and wielding a whip and firing blanks from his pistol, he would stride into the cage, deliberately baiting and taunting the animals to bring out as much ferocity and jungle savagery as he could, whereupon he would proceed to bully them into submission. His pièce de résistance was forcing the lions to approach and lick his boots as the ultimate sign of his conquest and the animals' abject subservience. (Johnson, Ch.1.3)

Harriet Ritvo, referring to the zoo, suggests that "the most powerful visual expression of the human domination of nature was the sight of large carnivores in cages" (Ritvo, 47), and Ryan illustrates the role of big cats in nineteenth century photography. He discusses a picture of Lord Curzon, who, standing "at the head of the slumped tiger, clutching his gun," assumes "the conventional stance of the victorious huntsman and landowner" (Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 103). Ryan points out that Curzon's "confident pose symbolized British authority over India at the moment when Britain's Empire was at its zenith" (Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 130) and illustrates that big cats, especially lions and tigers, were popular symbols for the colonies from which they were taken.

Nineteenth-century audiences would have understood Van Amburgh's submission of the lion—known as "The King of Beasts" and "the symbol of Africa" even today —on those terms. In this way, circuses used the natural world to enact and illustrate social values and attitudes as much as imperialistic politics. Animal acts fulfilled a triple function in this regard: first, they symbolised political control of the colonies; second, they allegorised the supposed social and evolutionary superiority of white Europeans over indigenous, colonised peoples; and third, they embodied human mastery over animals and legitimated the colonisation of nature. Janet M. Davis writes that some early twentieth century animal acts were in fact very explicitly linked to colonial politics: "Trainers likened animals from tropical zones to people of color from nonindustrial societies over which Europe and the United States held financial, military, and strategic control" (Davis, 159). In the same vein, Carl Hagenbeck, circus owner, zoo founder, animal trainer and "the leading supplier of wild animals to zoological gardens and circuses", exhibited indigenous people and "the animals with which they were associated" together, "because there seemed to be a natural affinity between the two" (Mullan and Marvin 85, 86). His *Völkerschauen*, exhibitions of so-called "nature peoples" were a "huge commercial success" (Mullan and Marvin 85, 87).

In today's circuses, growling and menacing big cats are still commonly part of the repertoire. The 1997 documentary *Fast, Cheap and Out of Control*, which includes footage of the US Clyde Beatty Cole Brothers Circus's animal trainer Dave Hoover, demonstrates that big cat acts based on intimidation with whips, sticks and gunshots are familiar circus imagery even today, and circus websites and fansites emphasise the dangerous and menacing character of the big cats. According to the German Circus Krone, for example, the performer Martin Lacey "emphasises the danger of their majesties and lets them hiss and menace in a spectacular fashion" (Circus Krone, "Martin Lacey JR.," my translation). Similarly, the rhino act of Circus Barum, which operated until late 2008, drew explicity on the legacy of colonial imagery, as Sandro

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Montez, dressed in a safari outfit, stood triumphantly on the rhino Tsavo's back, demonstrating dominance and control (Circus Barum). The question, then, is why this kind of imagery is still popular, even though times have changed considerably. One answer to this question lies in the fact that the rhinoceros Sandro Montez stood on until so recently is a member of a highly endangered species: the way exotic animal acts are promoted to today's audiences has also changed.

Since decolonisation and the advent of television, the circus is no longer needed in its role as colonial showcase. Moreover, social and environmental changes mean that animal acts based on dominance and control lack much of the authority and appeal they might have had a century ago, unless they can be legitimated and explained in different ways, especially when using endangered species such as tigers and rhinos. Consequently, "conservation" is the key word in the promotion of circuses today. The image of the circus as a Noah's Ark is immensely popular. It appears on the websites of large commercially successful circus enterprises such as the German circus Krone (Circus Krone, "Krone Zoo") and the US Carson and Barnes Circus ("Help the Ark, Help the Animals"), as well as Siegfried and Roy's Las Vegas tiger act ("Modern Ark of Noah Mural in Secret Garden a Tribute to Siegfried and Roy"). In fact, the so-called "Ark" of Circus Krone now includes former Circus Barum's rhino Tsavo, who, Circus Krone proclaims, is a "symbol for the protection of the fellow members of his species" ("Auftritt Tsavo", my translation). Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey established the Centre for Elephant Conservation in 1995, and René Strickler, a well-known animal trainer from Switzerland, whose operation is a mixture between zoo and circus, also stresses his conservation efforts.

However, a look behind the seductive facade of circuses, their webpages and their advertising materials, reveals that, despite their public promotion as a supposed Noah's Ark, the sponsoring of alleged conservation projects by circuses is extremely sparse and appears to be no more than a token gesture to address public concerns. Accordingly, Tom Dillon, conservation biologist and "director of the Species Conservation Program" for the WWF (WorldWide Fund for Nature), criticises Ringling Bros.' so-called conservation efforts (MacDonald 14-5). He comments: "It's nice they've put money into Thailand's captive elephant program, but putting the money into conservation of wild elephants would be a better use of the funds" (cited in MacDonald 16). Confronted with the question why Ringling Bros. does not "redirect its efforts from breeding elephants [in Florida] to habitat conservation," a spokesperson for Ringling Bros. responds: "Habitat is another thing. We're not a conservation organisation. We're a circus responsible for the care of our animals" (cited in MacDonald 16).

One of the more obvious examples is that of the Garden Brothers Circus in the USA, who proclaim their commitment to "preserving and protecting all animals", which evidently manifests itself in nothing more than the suggestion that their commercial use of an endangered species for entertainment may "inspire just one person at every performance to protect and preserve wildlife" (Garden Brothers Circus).

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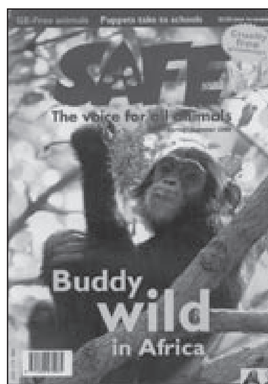
No-One's ARK Exotic Animal Acts in the Circus

NO-ONE'S ARK

Ernest Albrecht echoes this line of reasoning in connection with Circus Flora, which, he argues,

> . . . is able to call attention to the plight of endangered species, like the elephant, by introducing one particularly endearing member of that species to the public . . . Audiences are within touching distance of Flora the elephant. Such involvement serves to make audiences more receptive to the materials printed in the show's souvenir booklets and informational pamphlets. (Albrecht, 213-4)

According to Albrecht, it is the circus' founder Ivor David Balding's "concern" over Flora that demonstrates a "social conscience" (Albrecht, 112). However, by the circus's own admission, Flora was, in fact, taken from the wild. The website informs that the circus "was named after Flora, the orphaned baby African elephant Balding had rescued . . . when ivory poachers in Africa killed her mother" (Circus Flora, "History"). Furthermore, the circus' website and its mission statement make no particular mention of any contribution to species conservation (Flora the elephant has now retired in any case, but the circus logo still includes elephants and thrives on Flora's legacy. This precise approach is now being mirrored by the only New Zealand circus that still uses an exotic animal: the Loritz Circus, which recently acquired New Zealand's last remaining circus elephant, proclaims on its webpages specifically devoted to Jumbo that she was an orphaned elephant whom "nobody cared for" and who was saved "from certain Death [sic]" by becoming a circus elephant in New Zealand. According to the circus, Jumbo now lives in "a wonderful new home, full of luxuries" (Loritz Circus, "Jumbo the Elephant - My History").



In this way, circuses attempt to evoke the idea that their travelling animal shows are practically natural spaces for wild animals, even better than nature itself. Nowadays, circuses go to some lengths to explain to their audiences that their animal acts are merely choreographed natural behaviours, and yet they do very little to substantiate those claims. In 2005, Ringling Bros. attempted to validate their argument by showing a series of photographs of captive elephants in various strange poses, such as headstands (Ringling Bros. "At Play and In Performance"). New Zealand's largest animal rights organisation SAFE (Save Animals From Exploitation) frequently contrasts images like this with campaign materials that show chimpanzees in their natural habitat. These are the result of SAFE's very successful campaign to free Buddy and Sonny, two circus chimpanzees who now live in an animal sanctuary in Zambia as part of a larger group of chimps. What is telling about the promotional materials of circuses is that pictures like this are typically missing; circus websites do not show pictures of free-ranging wild animals. This is not surprising: pictures of wild animals simply would not verify the circuses' claims. Wild elephants do not do headstands, and chimpanzees do not ride bicycles.

No-One's ARK Exotic Animal Acts in the Circus

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The Loritz Circus appears to be an exception of sorts, as it provides a link on its Jumbo website to the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust ("Jumbo the Elephant – Elephants in New Zealand and World"), a genuine organisation committed to rearing orphaned rhinos and elephants, and re-integrating them back into the vast areas of the Tsavo Park in Kenya. Displaying this link on their site suggests that Loritz Circus supports the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust and its aims; it also implies that Loritz Circus are familiar with the work of the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust and have carefully thought about their own way of treating Jumbo in this context. With subtlety, the Loritz Circus seems to compare the supposed rescue of the orphaned elephant Jumbo with the work of the Kenyan charity in this way; it appears that the way the circus keeps and trains Jumbo is somehow just like the work of the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust with orphaned elephants. However, this trust will clearly have nothing to do with the Loritz Circus. After seeing a video of Jumbo tethered in her trailer and swaying her head back and forth, Dame Daphne Sheldrick wrote:

> As an internationally recognised world authority on these animals I can categorically state that the stereotypic swaying of a miserable captive indicates psychotic behaviour caused by trauma and stress . . . [T]he training of circus elephants is brutally cruel. I would hope and expect the New Zealand authorities to take corrective measures regarding the elephant named "Jumbo", whose stereotypic behaviour indicates profound stress, boredom and unhappiness. I would hope that they make amends by allowing her, and others like her, a more humane quality of life somewhere where she at least has the companionship of others and where every day of her life is not sheer torture ("Sheldrick").

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Animal rights and welfare organisations campaigning against circuses focus much of their efforts on drawing attention to the conditions of the animals behind the scenes and beyond the glamorous illusions. The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Peta) Germany, for example, display pictures of circus animals on their website designed to alert the public to the inadequate environment that circuses provide for them. One photo shows a group of elephants who are evidently being mistreated with a bullhook by a handler. A close look at their head-dress reveals that these are in fact the famous Circus Krone elephants; the very elephants about whom trainer Jana Mandana once commented: "Coercing these playful and intelligent animals won't achieve anything at all" (Circus Krone, "Jana Mandana," my translation). Similarly, SAFE responds to the self-promotion of circuses as happy spaces of fun and entertainment with images that clearly show the confinement of animals. With New Zealand's last remaining circus lions and monkeys now, finally, retired, SAFE focuses on Jumbo and provides video footage and photos of her pulling at the chain around her foot and swaying her head. They clearly show Jumbo's lack of freedom and isolation from others of her own species. Images like this belie the claim of circuses that their animals are their "friends," their "family" and their "colleagues" (see Schwalm, p.87). Friends, family and colleagues do not normally live in small cages, chained at their feet.

While circuses try to send the message that watching their animal acts is a way of supporting conservation, an increasing proportion of the general public is attracted to the idea that wild animals should live their lives as naturally as possible. This is a patently different view from the one Albrecht portrays, who claims that "animal rights activists, many of whom belong to [Peta] . . . insist that the only proper way to handle animals is to allow them to return to their natural state at once" (Albrecht, 204). On the contrary, organisations such as Peta and SAFE recognise that circus animals can never be released back into the wild, their "natural state", but, instead, should at least be allowed to live the rest of their lives in appropriate sanctuaries.

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The view that exotic animals do not belong in circuses is also supported by scientists in the field, such as the Amboseli Elephant Research Project. By their own description, their "combined experience represents almost 300 person-years of work with free-ranging, wild African elephants", and the scientists involved are "the acknowledged leading experts in the field". In their statement on circuses, they write:

> It is our considered opinion that elephants should not be used in circuses. Elephants in the wild roam over large areas and move considerable distances each day. They are intelligent, highly social animals with a complex system of communication. . . No captive situation can provide elephants with the space they need for movement or with the kind of social stimulation and complexity that they would experience in the wild. Elephants in circuses are bought and sold, separated from companions, confined, chained and forced to stand for hours and frequently moved about in small compartments on trains or trucks . . . In short, they are treated as commodities, as objects to provide entertainment for humans. The circus experience has nothing to do with the reality of elephant life and behaviour. . . We believe that such intelligent, socially complex and long-lived animals should be treated with respect and empathy. An elephant's place is in the wild with its relatives and companions. The totally unnatural existence for captive elephants in a circus . . . is a travesty. To allow this practice to continue is unjustified and unethical (Amboseli Elephant Research Project).

Still a prominent entertainment form in Europe and the USA, for example the popularity of exotic animal acts as part of travelling circuses is waning, as public awareness of and compassion for the animals' needs grows. Spectators are beginning to look with compassion, and are more likley to judge what they actually see (animals

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in small cages) than what they are told to see (human-animal friendships and species conservation). It is a case of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Circuses that use exotic animals are banned in an increasing number of places. These include India, Costa Rica and Austria, and the Loritz Circus, which bought New Zealand's last circus elephant Jumbo from the Whirling Brothers Circus, is no longer welcome on council land in Dunedin, Nelson and Wellington. Instead, more and more creative circus acts emerge that use only human performers, such as the Cirque de Soleil or the Australian Circus Oz, which "features animals that are 100% human" (Circus Oz, "About the Show"). If the example of Jumbo, New Zealand's last and lonely exotic circus animal is anything to go by, the days of travelling animal shows are numbered.

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Exotic Animal Acts in the Circus

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