(1) Abstract

This dissertation explores the scientific, political, and cultural meanings of exhibitions and representations of exotic and "learned" animals in early America. These exhibitions, which ranged from the "Lyon of Barbary" and "the Orang-Outang, or Wild MAN of the Borneo" to William Frederick Pinchbeck's famed "Pig of Knowledge," brought natural history to a curious public and, more importantly, served as central points of deduction of human self-understanding. Arguing that social groups struggle over the unstable status of "man" by attempting to establish, contest, or maintain the distinction between the human and the animal, this project demonstrates the centrality of ideas about animals and animality to the formation of individual and social (racial, national and hierarchical) identities in the formative years of the American nation.

(2) Background / Current State of Knowledge

As colonists struggled to define themselves and their societies in a "new world" marked by cross-cultural encounters and interactions, they inevitably imagined boundaries among themselves and between themselves and others--boundaries which frequently centered upon distinctions drawn between "the human" and "the animal." Although early American historians have illuminated how cultural confrontations, negotiations, and exchanges prompted continual (re)examination of individual and collective identities, little of this scholarship has addressed the central role of ideas about animals and animality in shaping conceptions of the self and the other. Apparently, most historians have failed to examine the tremendous practical and symbolic importance of animals in colonial America, despite the fact that an exploration of the ways in which the imagined boundary between "man" and "beast" structured relationships among diverse early American peoples can serve as a powerful lens through which to analyze society and culture.

Many anthropologists, however, have productively followed up on Levi-Strauss' assertion that animals are "good to think," and have investigated how different peoples think, and thought, about different classes of animals. While these scholars have attempted to discover the principles of classification involved in this thinking, and how these principles constituted logical systems of belief and action, most of this work has explored the meanings of animals in non-western cultures, and has treated these meanings as fixed deep structures, not as dynamic systems linked to social and cultural changes.

Fortunately, studies such as Keith Thomas' *Man and the Natural World* and Harriet Ritvo's *The Animal Estate* have begun to historicize these shifting relationships between man and nature in the West, and have contributed to a new cultural history of human-animal relationships. While this research has furthered our understanding of the symbolic and practical meanings of animals in Western societies, the majority of this scholarship has focused on the development of more humane attitudes toward animals without fully examining how ideas about animals and animality shaped definitions of what constituted humanity.

Some recent interdisciplinary scholarship, however, has sought to connect these studies of changes in human attitudes toward the natural world to the question of what it is (or isn't) possible to think in a given time and place. Building on Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* and contemporary analyses of the philosophy of animal rights, Keith Tester's *Animals and Society* has linked Western thought to the ambiguity of human identity and the attendant use of
ideas about animal rights to clarify what is human and moral. Similarly, Steve Baker's pathbreaking study *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* has shown how the often socially marginal and peripheral representations of animals in popular culture play a central symbolic role in Western society, and has raised two questions vital to my own research: "What place does the animal hold in our imagination, and how are we to understand the uses to which our imaginative conception of the animal is put?"

(3) Objectives

This dissertation brings these insights about how ideas of the animal are used to clarify what is human into dialogue with early American social and cultural history. Although there are many ways in which animals served as themes within and symbols of the larger structures and configurations which shaped colonial lives, my project specifically examines how early Americans drew upon experiences with and representations of exhibition animals to clarify issues of cultural identity. These animal exhibitions—which could be found from New England to Savannah in both port cities and backcountry towns—captivated colonial audiences. Assuming a cultural importance far greater than their actual frequency, the dozens of shows of exotic and "learned" creatures that toured British North America (and formed the basis for the now-familiar circus and zoo) served as important symbolic sites of boundary construction and maintenance. Accordingly, my principal objective is to reveal the centrality of these popular entertainments and the ideas about animals and animality that they generated to the ways individuals and groups envisioned racial, gender, class, and national identities during the transition from colonies to republic.

(4) Design and methodology

In order to chart the role of ideas about animals and animality in the construction of individual and social identities in early America, this dissertation centers upon animal exhibitions as sites and moments where human-animal boundaries were constructed, questioned, or transgressed. My first chapter argues that Western society has drawn heavily on symbolic ideas involving animals, and that the immediate subject of these ideas is frequently not the animal itself, but rather a human subject drawing on animal imagery to make a statement about human identity. I then turn to excavate exhibitions of exotic animals from 1735 (when the colonies had been sufficiently "settled" to allow for the cultivation of entertainment) until 1774 (when the First Continental Congress prohibited entertainments and diversions to strengthen the revolutionary cause). Drawing upon diary and journal accounts, broadsides, and newspapers, chapter two describes these exhibitions and their proprietors in detail, tracing the importation and travels of these animals and their handlers, the venues (taverns, marketplaces, private dwellings, and college commencements) in which they appeared, and the strategies used to attract the public. Exploring how these itinerant exhibitions made natural history literature tangible, I also analyze what people thought about with these animals, for while a common curiosity served to level social distinctions, audiences approached these creatures with different interests (gentlemen naturalists would study and illustrate these creatures; proprietors often complained about how "the rabble" would taunt the animals), and venues themselves were socially stratified ("proper ladies" had their own "respectable" viewing areas and the options of private showings; slaves and free blacks could only attend some shows on Saturday mornings).
In the third chapter, I focus extensively on exhibitions of primates, building upon Dr. Alexander Hamilton's comparison of a black woman with a performing baboon in his 1744 *Itinerarium*. Because they foregrounded many troubling similarities to humans, primate exhibitions engendered fierce speculation about man's place in the great chain of being while contributing to the development of theories of racial inferiority central to the institution of slavery. This blurring of the boundary between man and beast was perhaps most exemplified by human spectacles, such as those shows that featured performing Native Americans, and in the selling of racial "others" at the slave market.

Chapter four makes connections between animals and politics during the revolutionary period, and highlights the increasing utility of representations of exhibition animals in the intensifying conflict between the colonies and the crown. Through an examination of British and American satirical prints (one depicts the British, the French, and American patriots competing to lure "The Curious Zebra" --representing the colonies--into their respective menageries), political writings (such as Herman Daggett's "The Rights of Animals"), and public rituals (like tarring and feathering, which dehumanized Tories by turning them into geese), I show how animal material served a political strategy which sought to involve people emotionally in the revolutionary cause and broaden the reach of resistance to imperial authority.

In the fifth chapter, I chart the return of exhibitions and entertainments after the revolution, examining "new" exotic creatures (such as America's "first elephant" in 1797) and the growth and spread of traveling menageries. Linking animal exhibitions to the development of museums and specifically "American" natural history texts for children, I explore the importance of these shows to the emergence of an "instructive amusement" in the early republic. I also show how these exhibitions provided writers and engravers with new and politically useful symbols in the context of American nationalism, a process exemplified when Thomas Jefferson shipped a stuffed moose to France to combat European beliefs in the degeneracy of the "new world."

The early national period also saw the emergence of shows of "learned" animals, such as the "Pig of Knowledge" and the "Sagacious Dog." Chapter six illustrates how these trained creatures (which could spell, tell time, and do math) demonstrated man's dominance over nature while enabling their proprietors to capitalize upon the ways such performances raised questions about the uniqueness of human rationality. Challenging Euro-American conceptions of self and other, these sagacious animals played a prominent role both in the debates over the rational citizen in the early republic and in the emergence of an enlightened entertainment which distinguished proper society from those prone to manipulation by vulgar spectacle.

(5) Potential significance of the research

By mobilizing largely unexamined materials and recent scholarly interest in the ways in which ideas about animals and animality structured conceptions of the self, society, and the other to the study of early American history and culture, my dissertation offers a new way of thinking about the formative period of the American nation. Building upon scholarship concerned with boundary formation, transgression, and maintenance, my exploration of the scientific, political, and cultural meanings of these popular uses and representations of exotic and "learned" animals also contributes to the historical understanding of the construction and contestation of racial, gender, hierarchical, and national identities in colonial America and the early republic.

(6) Progress to date and schedule for completion
To date I have compiled much of the secondary and theoretical literature on human-animal relationships in a draft of my introduction, and have largely completed the research for my chapter on learned animals. In June, I will present these findings to the Third Annual Institute for Early American History and Culture conference in my paper "The knowledge he apparently possesses: William Frederick Pinchbeck's Pig of Knowledge and Enlightened Entertainment in the Early Republic." This summer I will complete my archival work at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester and in Philadelphia, where I have received an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellowship at the Library Company of Philadelphia and a Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies grant for research at their affiliated institutions. With the support of a Dissertation Fellowship, after returning to the Twin Cities in September, I will spend the next academic year drafting and revising my dissertation for defense in Fall Quarter 1998.

(7) Key references