

At the Edge of the Garden: Nature and Domestication in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain

by Harriet Ritvo

Our species has been characterized in many ways. We are officially *Homo sapiens*, or wise man, less officially *Homo ludens*, or playful man. To Thomas Carlyle we were featherless bipeds, and a rather unimpressive lot. We have been distinguished (by ourselves only, it must be admitted) as the animal that speaks and the animal that laughs, the animal that uses tools and the animal that uses language, although all these distinctions are vulnerable to challenge. We might with at least equal justice be called the animal that classifies, or rather, the animal that discusses classification, since presumably the condition that ultimately drives our own need to classify—the complexity and the amount of information about the physical world that we must process in order to survive—has also required many other animals to develop rough and ready taxonomies of their own.

Although classification seems to be a universal human activity, the categories used for organizing nature and experience have varied widely from time to time and from place to place. It is the existence of some system of classification, rather than its specific content, that is a human constant; the standard by which such systems are implicitly measured is functionality rather than absolute truth. Indeed, the terms in which a culture chooses to analyze the world may reveal as much about that culture as about the external reality they ostensibly describe. Such self-revelation may be most striking when alternative taxonomic systems coexist, either peacefully or in conflict, within a single culture. For example,



Fig. 1. *Adam in Paradise*, engraved by Louis Gérard Scotin after a design by Henri Gravelot and John Baptiste Chatelain, removed from an unidentified eighteenth-century English Bible and rebound in the extra-illustrated Kitto Bible, vol. 1, leaf 119 (Huntington Library).

many of our own most deeply felt categories appear at the beginning of Genesis, where the successive creations of God can also be seen as a series of founding discriminations: heaven and earth; light and darkness; land and water; sun, moon, and stars; grass, herbs, and trees; fish of the sea and fowl of the air; beasts and creeping things of the earth. But these categories are not our only ways of analyzing the physical world or even the ways that have greatest prestige in our culture; over the last four or five centuries, the widely accepted conclusions of astronomers, geologists, and biologists have both refined and contradicted the biblical taxonomy. To complicate matters still further, most of us also carry around a set of what might be called folk categories, which constitute another influential determinant of the way we perceive the world around us.¹

An example of the way these kinds of categories function, which is not only intuitively familiar and persuasive to us but also, according to anthropologists, similarly potent within a wide range of quite different cultures, is the opposition between the wild and the tame, or domesticated.² This opposition can easily function as the first stage of discrimination in any natural taxonomy. It is universally applicable—that is, all living things are subsumed by one of the two categories—and it is ordinarily rather easy to determine where to place any particular item. The appeal of this opposition is further enhanced by its deep anthropocentrism. That is, a system of classification based primarily on the distinction between wildness and domestication is a system that accords the highest significance to the degree to which a given plant or animal has fallen under human influence and has been incorporated into human civilization.

The best indication of the power of this mode of classification within our own culture is not our frequent and automatic recourse to it in practical situations: when we decide what plants to remove from our lawns or what animals to avoid in the woods. On these occasions, there is no persuasive taxonomical competition; we do not care where a given weed fits in the grand scheme of nature. But even in the face of the most vigorous classificatory challenge, the wild/tame dichotomy has often held its own.

Since the middle of the eighteenth century, the most authoritative, if not necessarily the most frequently invoked, method of classifying plants and animals in our culture has been what is ordinarily referred to as scientific taxonomy, the set of embedded, hierarchically organized categories, labeled with binomial latinate nomenclature, that is associated with the work of Carolus Linnaeus. It is hard to overestimate the impact of this system in defining both the biological enterprise of the Enlightenment and the public image of serious students of botany and zoology. Thus the natural history literature of this period was full of assertions to

the effect that whoever could not give a plant or an animal "its true name according to some system . . . does not deserve the name of a naturalist" and that, without scientific classification, naturalists would be "mere collectors of curiosities and superficial trifles . . . objects of ridicule rather than respect."³

The basis of natural systems of scientific taxonomy in the eighteenth century—that is, the principle governing the grouping of individual species into such higher taxa as genera, families, and so forth—was (as it is, *mutatis mutandis*, at present) the anatomical and other physical similarities of the plants or animals being classified, which were taken to indicate their systematic affinities. Implicit in this principle or method was an objective view of the natural world—that is, the assumption that plants and animals would be described and classified on their own terms rather than to accommodate any human agenda (except, perhaps, the grand one of classifying everything). Thus the popular naturalist Richard Brookes exemplified the practice of his time when, in his *Natural History of Quadrupeds*, he used a range of physical characteristics to group mammals, with foot conformation pre-eminent. This method yielded the following order: horses (undivided hoofs); ruminants (cloven hoofs); the hippopotamus, elephant, and others (anomalous hoofs); camels; monkeys (the first of the animals without hoofs); humans; cats; dogs; weasels; hares; the hedgehog, armadillo, and mole (divided feet and long snouts); bats; and, finally, sloths. But in the synoptic introduction to this multi-volume work, where his methodological consciousness might be presumed to be highest, Brookes also introduced a competing taxonomy that both ignored and undermined the structure he had so carefully established. He asserted that "the most obvious and simple division . . . of Quadrupedes, is into the Domestic and Savage."⁴

If he was inconsistent, however, Brookes was also representative. Well into the nineteenth century, naturalists writing for both popular and specialized audiences routinely (and without acknowledgment or even, perhaps, specific awareness of inconsistency) interpolated the folk distinction between wild and tame into their ostensibly scientific systems of classification.⁵ Many used domestic animals as taxonomic models, typically claiming that "each class of quadrupeds may be ranged under some one of the domestic kinds," so that domestic animals simultaneously exemplified and limited the range of mammalian possibilities.⁶ Sometimes the categories of wild and domestic might be perceived as so disparate that they required a connecting link (on the analogy of the great chain of being); thus, as one English interpreter of the great French naturalist Buffon put it, "as the cat may be said to be only half domestic, he forms the shade between the real wild and real domestic animals."⁷ William Jardine, the editor of the influential and popular *Naturalist's*

Library series, which made authoritative zoological scholarship widely available at a reasonable price in the 1830s and 1840s, similarly privileged relationship to humankind over physical characteristics when he revised a colleague's placement of the "subgenus *Taurus* [that containing domestic cattle] last in the series of Bovine Animals. We have treated it first, as containing animals of the most importance."⁸

And if divisions based on the dichotomy between wild and domestic came into explicit conflict with divisions based on the principles of scientific taxonomy, sometimes it was the latter that gave way. Thus, when Edward Bennett admitted in 1829 that "it would . . . appear . . . impossible to offer" a physical description of the domestic dog that would distinguish it from the wolf and other wild canines, he did not conclude that they should all be considered a single species. Instead, to reify the division based on domestication, he introduced a new and circular criterion: "it is to the moral and intellectual qualities of the dog that we must look for those remarkable peculiarities which distinguish him."⁹

It is at least as easy to put the garden on the tame, or domesticated, side of the ledger as it is to classify the wolf as a wild animal. In the view of contemporary archaeologists, the domestication of the human species was associated with the emergence of residential settlements, and it is likely that the domestication of plants and animals was an early consequence of this initial self-taming.¹⁰ Or, as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge more bluntly put it in 1832, in a book entitled *Vegetable Substances Used for the Food of Man*, the domestication of plants not only separated humankind from "the inferior orders of animate creation," but also constituted the barrier between civilization and savagery.¹¹

The first cultivation was doubtless more like agriculture than like gardening, but indisputable gardens, explicitly contrasted with the surrounding wilderness—often by means of protective and defining walls—are attested early in our cultural tradition. The paradise of Genesis is described as a garden, and, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, our word *paradise* derives ultimately from an ancient Persian term meaning enclosure or park; its cognate in modern Arabic similarly continues to mean both garden and paradise. The earliest sense of the English word *garden* recorded in the *OED*, dating from the fourteenth century, also refers to an enclosed space, one specifically devoted to the cultivation of flowers, vegetables, or fruit. In the course of the eighteenth century, the denotation of the word *garden* expanded in several senses. That is, it acquired additional (if somewhat subtly discriminated) meanings and also, with the advent of landscape gardening, it began to refer to much larger territories.¹² By 1806, Humphry Repton could lament the confusion generated by the application of the word *gardening* "alike . . . to the park, the lawn, the shrubbery, and the kitchen garden," despite the fact

that, in his view, the difference between these varied gardens was as great as that “between horticulture, agriculture, and uncultivated nature.”¹³ But even as the meanings of *garden* diversified—and as the imitation of nature became an increasingly desirable goal for gardeners—gardening remained securely, as Repton’s statement indicated, on the domesticated side of the line between wild and tame.

But by the eighteenth century, and indeed considerably earlier, establishing the location of that line—or the determinants of that location—may not have been as simple as Repton’s confident differentiation of the wilderness from the garden and the farm indicated, especially if the principle of discrimination was broadened to include not only the fact of cultivation but the character of what was cultivated. That is, perhaps for the sowers of neolithic crops, whose fields were surrounded and threatened by the omnipresent forest or jungle or desert, the figurative lines between wilderness and their protected enclosures were as clear and firm as the literal ones. Only unquestionably domesticated plants were allowed to grow within the defended area; all else was excluded. But, even here, some lines may have been a little blurry. That is, all domesticates were once wild, including the utilitarian wheat, barley, peas, and lentils of the earliest Old World agriculture.¹⁴ And if the original farmers were constrained in their choice of cultivars by harsh economic and environmental necessity, as civilization developed people began to derive aesthetic as well as practical rewards from their plots and fields. Novelty for its own sake became, as it has remained, a horticultural desideratum and as a result the history of gardening is, among other things, a continuing chronicle of new species appropriated from the wild.¹⁵ (The histories of plant and animal domestication have many parallels, but in this respect they are quite different, even though, with the exception of the dog, the domestication of animals also has a neolithic origin; few animal species, however, have been domesticated since that period.¹⁶)

As gardens became more elaborate—and as gardeners desired to stock them with plants that were not only attractive and novel but exotic—the line between the domesticated and the wild became more difficult to draw. At what point did a species cease to be wild? Was the simple incorporation within a cultivated setting enough to establish that a line had been crossed? In that case, to use terms from the contemporary vernacular, how would “weeds” or “volunteers” be classified? And if conscription into the toils of horticulture did not necessarily change the nature of the appropriated species—that is, if a species could be simultaneously cultivated and wild—perhaps these appropriations subtly redefined the taxonomical status of the garden itself. That is, the garden wall might cease to function as the boundary between cultivated land and the

wilderness. And since the garden has historically constituted a powerful symbol of civilization itself, any such redefinition might well indicate a shift in fundamental assumptions about the relation between wildness and domestication.

For most of the history of gardening, to pose this series of questions might be to put things a bit dramatically. New domesticates generally constituted a trickle rather than a stream—not enough to upset any symbolic or taxonomic appereçances. And in any case, from a western European perspective, exotic introductions were often derived from the ancient gardening cultures of the Middle East. Thus, however great the novelty of the oranges and saffron that, as their English names suggest, came home with the Crusaders or of the tulips that caught the fancy of seventeenth-century Amsterdam, they were incontestably domesticated.¹⁷ But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that trickle became a torrent; and other things changed as well.

As Europeans discovered and claimed territories in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas, they packed up the botanical and zoological productions of those regions, brought them home, and attempted to introduce them, as appropriate and possible, into familiar domestic settings. Thus gentlemen who could afford it began to keep pet monkeys and even, if they were so inclined and very well off, private menageries. The botanical novelties included food crops like the potato as well as such ornamental domesticates as camellias and peonies, but many of the exotic new trees, shrubs, and flowers had not been cultivated in their previous habitats.¹⁸ These imports were, one way or another, crowded into what were termed “gardens.” Thus, not only did gardens incorporate increasing numbers of exotic species, but the term *garden* itself ultimately expanded to include yet another sense—seen most clearly in the term *zoological garden*, of which the word *zoo* is a shortened form, but also implicit in the term *botanical garden*—suggesting not a cultivated territory walled off from the wilderness but a territory in which wildness was walled off from the surrounding civilization. This additional complexity did not, however, imply paradox. The new gardens seemed analogous to or continuous with the old ones. For example, Humphry Repton’s early nineteenth-century catalogue of the gardens at Woburn Abbey replicated in words the apparently unproblematic juxtaposition presented by the grounds themselves, where the following series was grouped around the hothouses: “The terrace and parterre near the house. The private garden. . . . The rosary, or dressed flower garden. . . . The American garden. . . . The Chinese garden. . . . The botanic garden for scientific classing of plants. The animated garden or menagerie. And lastly the English garden, or shrubbery walk, connecting the whole.”¹⁹

This development was not a simple consequence of the age of explo-

ration. That is, the opportunity to possess and adopt these exotic species resulted from the great voyages of discovery: but the fact that Europeans felt inclined and empowered to exploit this opportunity had a different, although not entirely unrelated, source. It is very difficult to date such unbounded occurrences as shifts in attitude or sensibility but it seems clear that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a series of radical changes in the relation of human beings (or at least European human beings) to the natural world. Whereas at the beginning of this period natural forces had been perceived as largely out of human control, by the end of it science and engineering had made much of nature seem more manageable. Advances in natural history, especially in taxonomy, as well as in natural philosophy (that is, physics) and chemistry, had extended human intellectual mastery, making the natural world seem less mysterious and, at least in some sectors, more predictable. On a more pragmatic level, the development of improved navigational technology, of agricultural machinery and techniques of soil analysis, of medical techniques like smallpox inoculation, and of more precise and powerful weaponry made people feel less vulnerable to the caprices and assaults of nature.²⁰

These scientific and technical developments were paralleled in the political sphere, at least in Britain, by the increase of British influence in those areas of the world—Asia, Africa, and North America—where nature was perceived to be wildest. The resonance between intellectual mastery and less metaphorical modes of dominion was more often assumed than acknowledged, but it occasionally found concrete and explicit expression. For example, the distinguished naturalist Thomas Pennant wrote regretfully in a preface of 1784, “this Work was designed as a sketch of the Zoology of *North America*. I thought I had a right to the attempt, at a time I had the honor of calling myself a fellow-subject with that respectable part of our former great empire; but when the fatal and humiliating hour arrived, which deprived *Britain* of power, strength, and glory, . . . I could no longer support my clame [*sic*] of entitling myself its humble Zoologist.”²¹ Thus, in response to political upheaval, Pennant weakened his assertion of scientific possession by making it more diffuse. That is, he apparently assumed that, although the physical possessors of a particular territory might also own the intellectual rights to it, the largest, supernational ranges were available to all; and so he expanded his focus to include the entire circumpolar fauna, and entitled the resulting work *Arctic Zoology*.

Once it had become the subject of at least intermittent domination rather than a constantly menacing antagonist, nature could be viewed with affection and even, as the scales tipped more to the human side, with nostalgia. This shift had wide-ranging cultural consequences. For

example, it has long been commonplace to observe that the art and literature of the eighteenth century show an increasing aesthetic appreciation of nature, and even of wildness. Thus in 1753 one rather retrograde critic of the emerging practice of landscape gardening, which reflected this altered sensibility, complained that "our present artists in GARDENING far exceed the wildness of nature"; he found grounds fashionably landscaped to give the impression of nature rather than art "the most offensive that can be imagined."²² Even mountains, which had previously been abominated as hideous, were rehabilitated as sublime. Travelers sought them out rather than, as had been their previous habit, avoiding them. So completely did mountains shed their formerly sinister aura that they were even incorporated, in the diminutive form of rockeries, into many gardens. The popularity of these domesticated alps continued to grow well into the Victorian period, by which time several large firms, with alternative philosophies as far as geological accuracy was concerned, competed to fill the parageological needs of British gardeners.²³

Other indicators, both homelier and more pervasive, testified still more persuasively to the changed relation between human beings and nature in eighteenth-century Britain. One such signal was the emergence of pet-keeping as a widespread practice among ordinary people. Although the domestication of dogs and cats had a long history in Britain, they had generally been kept to perform such useful chores as catching mice or scaring off thieves; even the elegant dogs that adorned aristocratic portraits usually earned their keep by hunting or coursing. There were a range of social sanctions against keeping animals simply for companionship, from the gentle disapproval that Geoffrey Chaucer (echoing ecclesiastical authorities of the time) expressed for his prioress, who traveled with "smale houndes," to the terrible deaths suffered by old women whose affectionate relations with their "familiar" animals served as evidence that they were witches.²⁴ Well into the eighteenth century, Humphrey Morice, a gentleman of some distinction who had served as a privy councillor, wished to provide for the maintenance of his aged dogs after he died. Because he feared public opinion, however, he chose not to include this bequest in the main body of his will, hiding it instead in a secret codicil.²⁵

Some people did, nevertheless, keep companion animals without apparent fear of public censure. For example, ladies attending the court of Henry VIII were allowed to bring their lapdogs, and King Charles II, like many of his royal relatives, was renowned for his fondness for toy spaniels.²⁶ What these flamboyant early pet-owners had in common was privileged status in terms of both money and rank. This meant, on the crudest material level, that they could afford to maintain animals that did not earn their keep. It also gave them sufficient independence to

ignore any criticism or derision that might be directed their way. And on a deeper level, they may have enjoyed a metaphorical security—a feeling of supremacy over nature—that was as unusual as their exalted social position.

For animals, even thoroughly domesticated pet animals, have always symbolized the natural world, and incorporating one into the intimate family circle would have supposed an attitude of trust and confidence that few ordinary British citizens of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and even much of the eighteenth centuries were able to muster. Pet-owners probably saw the non-human world as a less threatening and more comfortable place than did most of their contemporaries, who understood their relationship with the forces of nature primarily as a struggle for survival. Thus pet-keeping did not become widespread until this struggle had been mitigated by scientific, technological, and economic developments. Only at that point could ordinary people interpret the adoption of a representative of the elements (however tame and accommodating) as a reassuring proof of human power and domestic security, rather than as a troublesome reminder of human vulnerability.²⁷

With a few unnerving exceptions, of course, even the most exotic or alien plants symbolized the power of nature less assertively than did the most familiar and tractable animals. The exceptions were plants that seemed able to transcend their vegetable limitations—the so-called sensitive plants and the still more thought-provoking carnivorous plants. They received a disproportionate share of attention on the part of naturalists and others, although, perhaps significantly, not as potential garden material. After all, no matter what its shape or content, the garden was still constructed as a place of repose and retreat;²⁸ anything presenting a threat, whether to physical security or, as in the case of these liminal plants, to taxonomical equanimity, would have been out of place. And the power of even plants to threaten was not limited to the kind of aesthetic or intellectual or metaphoric challenges posed by the exotic imports. At the same time that they were being integrated into British gardens, the reciprocal donations of domesticates and weeds brought by European colonists to the temperate regions of North America, South America, Australia, and southern Africa were permanently transforming the indigenous flora in a process that Alfred Crosby has characterized as “ecological imperialism.”²⁹

Thus, the extent to which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gardens were occupied by plants that evoked the wildest and most exotic parts of the globe was an indicator of the extent to which those territories and environments had ceased to inspire uneasiness. Like the dogs and cats whose presence began to enhance rather than to undermine the secure coziness of the domestic hearth, alien plants were increasingly adopted

as garden pets.³⁰ This change in horticultural practice reflected the attitudes of gardeners as well as the availability of plants. For example, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Timothy Nourse recommended that a number of foreign plants be included in the pleasure gardens of a country house, as long as they could resist "the Injuries of our Climate," but he specified almost exclusively imports from Spain, southern France, and other Mediterranean locations traditionally associated with ancient civilization rather than with wildness.³¹ Three-quarters of a century later, however, as Horace Walpole celebrated "the introduction of foreign trees and plants" from much further afield, especially from the swamps and mountains of North America, which had "contributed essentially to the richness of colouring so peculiar to our modern landscape," he noted that most of these species had been grown in Britain in the previous century, but only in specialized or scientific gardens.³² He was uncertain whether aesthetic or technical reservations on the part of ordinary gardeners had accounted for their earlier neglect.

By the time Walpole was speculating along these lines, however, the situation had changed completely, and not only in the parks and parterres of the wealthy. The inventory listed in the 1782 catalogue of John Kingston Galpine, who styled himself "Nursery and Seedsman," suggested a much broader market for exotics. Galpine's nursery was located in deepest Dorset, about fifteen miles from Poole and, because the transportation network of the period precluded long-distance shipment of nursery plants, his customers must have been exclusively local.³³ This neighborhood clientele apparently supported the maintenance of a stock of "the most Useful and Ornamental Hardy Trees, Shrubs, . . . Herbaceous Plants, Fruit-Trees, Garden Seeds, . . . [and] Flowering Shrubs," which required twenty-five closely printed pages simply to list.³⁴ The various plants were listed by genus, then species and variety, which meant that they were listed first by latinate or scientific name, and then by English name. A certain number of the proffered species, especially among those listed under the rubrics "Green-house Plants" and "Hot-house and Dry Stove Plants," were noted to have "no English name," suggesting that, on the one hand, they were particularly new or unfamiliar and, on the other, that these qualities might constitute an attraction for potential purchasers. Many others advertised their exotic provenance in either their latinate or their English names; thus the catalogue is full of such items as the "American upright honeysuckle," the "Red Virginian Cedar," the "Rosa Pensylvanica," the "Phlox Carolina," the "Hottentot Cherry," the "Juniperis Bermudiana," the "African Milkwort," the "Mexican Lily," and the "Madagascar Periwinkle."³⁵

This trend continued to accelerate in the nineteenth century as intrepid plant collectors explored Britain's expanding colonial empire, sometimes

at considerable personal risk. One hothouse gardening manual reminded its stay-at-home readers that they were benefiting from the labors of "many highly intelligent and talented travellers [who] have fallen victims either to the pestilential climate, the wild beasts of the country, or the treachery of . . . the equally wild aborigines."³⁶ The North American introductions of the previous century were augmented by orchids and waterlilies from the jungles of South America and alpine plants from the mountains of Africa and northern India. Because these new arrivals were awaited by a growing body of enthusiastic amateur gardeners, many of modest means, obscure nurseries throughout Britain were apt to stock the latest and rarest exotics.³⁷ According to one recent historian of the Victorian garden, so prevalent and influential were some early nineteenth-century introductions that for the first time the content of the preferred flora began to determine the form of gardens rather than vice versa. In particular, gardeners increasingly designed their beds to exploit "subtropical weeds," as David Stuart has characterized them—*verbenas*, *calceolarias*, *geraniums*—which, unlike the traditional garden flowers that stopped blooming in mid-August, provided brilliant color until they were killed by autumn frosts.³⁸

If the eager incorporation of individual exotic plants or species into British gardens demonstrated an increasing inclination to view the wild as a source of entertainment or relaxation, the grouping of foreign plants according to their geographical provenance may have signaled the more assertive side of this reconstituted relationship with wild nature. As Repton's description of the grounds at Woburn suggests, the practice of designating particular areas for Chinese and American gardens originated in the eighteenth century, as part of the elaborate landscaping of large estates.³⁹ But as a result of the nineteenth-century democratization (or at least bourgeoisification) of horticulture, this practice trickled down and it became possible for any middle-class hobbyist to construct a miniature empire in the back garden, representing at least the globe's temperate zones. And with the invention of the glassed-in Wardian case early in the nineteenth century, which made it much easier to transport delicate plants, and the popularization of greenhouses, hothouses, and the habit of keeping potted plants in the house, the domestic empire could easily expand to include a slice of the tropics as well.⁴⁰

On their much smaller and more informal scale, private Victorian gardens seemed to echo the mission of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, which had been reorganized about 1840 as a "great popular yet scientific establishment."⁴¹ At that time Parliament had constituted this century-old collection of exotic plants as a "national garden," the center of a network of subsidiary gardens at home and in the colonies that would "aid the mother-country in every thing that is useful in the vegetable king-

dom," relating to "medicine, commerce, agriculture, horticulture, and many valuable branches of manufacture," as well as providing botanical information on "points connected with the founding of new colonies."⁴² In the fulfillment of this charge, Kew Gardens supplemented its extensive outdoor plantings of hardy exotics with houses devoted to Australian plants, to palm trees, to exotic pines, to tropical water-plants, to orchids, to cacti, to rhododendrons, and to plants from New Zealand, among many others—a horticultural synecdoche for the entire globe. And botanical imperialism was more than an official pursuit; it also attracted crowds of visitors (allowed to walk on the grass, but not to touch the plants), many of whom were doubtless in search of ideas they could apply at home. Their snowballing numbers, which grew from just over 9,000 in 1841 to almost 400,000 in 1857, offered a persuasive index of the appeal to the Victorian public of orderly, predictable, and accurately labeled wildness.⁴³

In its complex presentation of wild nature and human control, as well as in its simultaneous appeal to scientific, technical, and popular constituencies, Kew resembled the other prominent national garden of its time. The Regent's Park Gardens of the Zoological Society of London also conflated scientific investigation and display with instructive and patriotic entertainment. Indeed, although it was operated by a private society (albeit significantly subsidized by the official donation of the site), the London Zoo had from its beginnings functioned explicitly as both a symbol and an agent of British power. It was founded by the very successful imperialist Sir Stamford Raffles (also the founder of Singapore); among the rationales set forth in the early fundraising was Britain's shameful lack of an institution for the study of living exotic animals, despite being "richer than any other country in the extent and variety of our possessions," while its neighbors could boast "magnificent institutions" devoted to this purpose.⁴⁴

The collection was large enough to allow the animals to be arranged in taxonomical order—the entire vertebrate series, as it was often conceived, enclosed within a single set of walls.⁴⁵ The royal family considered the London Zoo a metaphorical extension of its domains, so that, for example, Queen Victoria routinely consigned to it "the stream of barbaric offerings in the shape of lions, tigers, leopards, &c., which is continually flowing from tropical princes."⁴⁶ And the public participated by taking to its heart a succession of what were called "zoo pets," mostly elephants and chimpanzees but on at least one occasion a hippopotamus. All were impressive (either in size or mental power) but not overtly menacing or independent; all represented territories primarily populated by humans who were also considered to be uncivilized—indeed, native attendants occasionally constituted part of the display.⁴⁷

Thus these public Victorian gardens symbolized, among many other things, a definitive shift in the balance of wilderness and civilization. In part this shift was simply quantitative—the fact that the global variety of wild plants or animals could be persuasively represented within a London enclosure, however large, suggested that the default category had changed. And if wildness had become an exception, easily circumscribed and controlled at least by British civilization, then not only was it no longer much of a threat but it might seem to be threatened—endangered, as we now call it—in its turn. In this context it is not surprising that, toward the end of the nineteenth century, the term “wild garden,” no longer oxymoronic, emerged to describe several rather oddly assorted horticultural trends, from radically informal landscaping, to the realistic re-creation of exotic landscapes, to the rescue and preservation of native British plants.⁴⁸ Gardens had become simply places of protection. And perhaps the categorical opposition they enacted had also changed: no longer wild/tame but living/dead. After all, most modern gardens, no matter what they nurture, are surrounded by concrete.

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NOTES

1. Perhaps these should be characterized as “an additional set of folk categories,” since the biblical categories also fall under this rubric.
2. See, for example, Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York, 1982); and Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966).
3. Carolus Linnaeus, *Miscellaneous Tracts*, trans. and ed. Benjamin Stillingfleet (London, 1759), xx-xxi; and R. Pulteney, *A General View of the Writings of Linnaeus*, preface by W. G. Maton (London, 1805), 11.
4. Richard Brookes, *The Natural History of Quadrupeds* (London, 1763), 1:xi, xxvi.
5. For further discussion of the conflation of scientific and other taxonomies, see Scott Atran, *Cognitive Foundations of Natural History: Towards an Anthropology of Science* (Cambridge, 1990); and Harriet Ritvo, “New Presbyterian or Old Priest?: Reconsidering Zoological Taxonomy in Britain, 1750-1840,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 3 (1990): 259-76.
6. Oliver Goldsmith, *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (London, 1774), 2:302.
7. Louis LeClerc, Comte de Buffon, *Barr’s Buffon* (London, 1797), 6:13.
8. William Jardine, *The Natural History of the Ruminating Animals, Part II* (Edinburgh, 1836), 236.

9. Edward Bennett, *The Tower Menagerie* (London, 1829), 85-86.
10. Peter J. Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species* (New Haven, 1988), 3.
11. Quoted in Tom Carter, *The Victorian Garden* (London, 1984), 8.
12. According to Joan Bassin, the term *landscape gardening* did not emerge until the end of the eighteenth century ("The English Landscape Garden in the Eighteenth Century: The Cultural Importance of an English Institution," *Albion*, 11 [1979]: 17).
13. Humphry Repton, *An Inquiry into the Change in Landscape Gardening* (1806; rpt. Farnborough, Hants., 1969), 9-10.
14. Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge, 1986), 17, 21.
15. See generally John Fisher, *The Origins of Garden Plants* (London, 1982); and Richard Gorer, *The Development of Garden Flowers* (London, 1970).
16. For comprehensive treatments of this subject, see Juliet Clutton-Brock, *A Natural History of Domesticated Mammals* (London, 1987); and Frederick E. Zeuner, *A History of Domesticated Animals* (New York, 1963).
17. Owen Barfield, *History in English Words* (1967; rpt. Stockbridge, Mass., 1985), 137; Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York, 1987), 350-54.
18. On the introduction of the potato to Europe, see Redcliffe Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato*, rev. and ed. J. G. Hawkes (Cambridge, 1985), chaps. 6-9. For private menageries in Britain see Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), chap. 6. On the influence of the Chinese gardening tradition on European horticulture, see Gorer, *Development of Garden Flowers*, 52ff.
19. Repton, *An Inquiry into the Change in Landscape Gardening*, 11-12.
20. For a richly documented overview of this shift, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York, 1983), chap. 6.
21. Thomas Pennant, *Arctic Zoology* (London, 1784), 3.
22. Francis Coventry, *The World*, No. 15 (1753) in *The Genius of Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820*, ed. John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, (London, 1975), 274.
23. David Stuart, *The Garden Triumphant: A Victorian Legacy* (New York, 1988), 26-27; Brent Elliot, *Victorian Gardens* (London, 1986), 189-90.
24. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: General Prologue*, Fragment 1, Group A, ll. 146-47.
25. Dix Harwood, *Love for Animals and How It Developed in Great Britain* (New York, 1928), 216.

26. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 102, 107-8.
27. Harriet Ritvo, "The Emergence of Modern Pet-Keeping" in *Animals and People Sharing the World*, ed. Andrew N. Rowan (Hanover, N.H., 1988), 19-20.
28. See, for example, Bassin, "The English Landscape Garden," 25-28. She suggests that political vicissitudes may have made at least some eighteenth-century gardens retreats from the changing social realities outside the gates.
29. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*, esp. chap. 7.
30. On plants and gardens as pets, see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (New Haven, 1984), chaps. 3 and 4.
31. Timothy Nourse, *Campania Foelix: or A Discourse of the Benefits and Improvements of Husbandry* (1700), excerpted in Hunt and Willis, *The Genius of Place*, 103-4.
32. Horace Walpole, *The History of the Modern Taste in Gardening* (1771-80), excerpted in Hunt and Willis, *The Genius of Place*, 314.
33. John Harvey, "Introduction" to John Kingston Galpine, *The Georgian Garden: An Eighteenth-Century Nurseryman's Catalogue*, ed. and intro. John Harvey (Wimborne, Dorset, 1983), 11-12.
34. *Ibid.*, *Catalogue*, title page.
35. *Ibid.*, 3-19.
36. Williams, *Stove and Greenhouse Flowering Plants*, quoted in Carter, *Victorian Garden*, 93.
37. Stuart, *Garden Triumphant*, 146-47.
38. *Ibid.*, 148-49.
39. At least in the case of American plants, the practice also reflected the exigencies of soil chemistry, since many of the imports required a distinctively acid soil, referred to at the time as "peat" or "bog" soil. See Stuart, *Garden Triumphant*, 66; and Maria Jackson, *The Florist's Manual* (1816) quoted in Fisher, *Origins of Garden Plants*, 248.
40. Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, 18, 28.
41. W. J. Hooker, *Kew Gardens, or A Popular Guide to the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew* (London, 1858), 9.
42. Quoted in Hooker, *Kew Gardens*, 11. For an extended discussion of the relation of Kew to British imperialism, see Lucille H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanical Gardens* (New York, 1979).
43. Hooker, *Kew Gardens*, 11.
44. John Bastin, "The First Prospectus of the Zoological Society of London: A New Light on the Society's Origins," *Journal of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History*, 5 (1970): 385.

45. Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 218.
46. "The Zoological Gardens," *Quarterly Review*, 98 (1855): 245.
47. Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 226-30.
48. Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, 194-96.