





The Rhinoceros as 'Mid-Wife to Divine Wonderment' in Edward Topsell's *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes*

Catherine Kovesi


To cite this article: Catherine Kovesi (2022) The Rhinoceros as 'Mid-Wife to Divine Wonderment' in Edward Topsell's *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes*, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art, 22:1, 71-84, DOI: [10.1080/14434318.2022.2075610](https://doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2022.2075610)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2022.2075610>

 View supplementary material 

 Published online: 18 Aug 2022.

 Submit your article to this journal 

 View related articles 

 View Crossmark data 



The Rhinoceros as 'Mid-Wife to Divine Wonderment' in Edward Topsell's *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes*

Catherine Kovesi*

For the armchair zoologist of the early modern period, there were many foreign bodies to behold in wonderment. Thanks to the indefatigable work of Conrad Gessner and his five-volume *Historiae animalium* (1551–58; 1587) with some 3,500 folio pages and a fine collection of woodcuts, those keen to discover, document, reproduce, study, imagine, or simply gaze at the complexities of the animal kingdom had rich resources available.¹ Here not only could they read about the familiar—the hedgehog and the dormouse—but they could wonder at the foreign—the unicorn, the dragon, the lamia, and the ferocious manticore. Fifty years later, in 1607 and 1608, two separate volumes of Gessner's Latin works, together with their woodcuts, appeared in English. These were the product of a devout English clergyman, Edward Topsell, whose *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes* (1607), based on Gessner's first volume, and his *The Historie of Serpents* (1608), based on Gessner's posthumously published fifth volume *Qui est de serpentium natura* (1587), were not only translations but summaries, commentaries, emendations, and at times revisionings of Gessner's work, which brought it thereby for the first time to a broad English readership.² In 1658, after Topsell's death, another edition appeared with both volumes combined into one and with the addition of *The Theater of Insects* by the physician and naturalist Thomas Muffett (1553–1604), whose work, also derived from Gessner, completed the zoological categories of these English volumes.³ While Gessner was a layman—a physician, naturalist, bibliographer, and philologist—whose universalising and encyclopedic goals were reflected in his publications, Topsell, the Protestant cleric, had no such ambitions. His goal instead was a singular one, derived from his primary vocation and purpose in life, the worship of his God. For Topsell, as for others of his time, the natural world was inextricably bound with, as well as providing evidence for, providential history. In this short appraisal of a copy of Topsell's 1607 volume held in the Rare Books Collection of the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne, I wish to focus

*Email: c.kovesi@unimelb.edu.au

in particular on this religious aspect of Topsell's endeavour and to do so through an examination of one of his book's most famous animals, the rhinoceros, which was still, in that period, one of the most foreign of bodies for an English-speaking audience.

Topsell's position in the emerging sciences of natural history is well known and articulated by others.⁴ Broader arguments for the relation between the rise of Protestantism and experimental science were first proposed in the doctoral thesis of Robert K. Merton in 1936,⁵ and this connection has since become a burgeoning field of study.⁶ My purpose here is not to further these debates. Rather, taking Topsell on his own terms, I would like to interrogate the rhinoceros as a perfect exemplar both of Topsell's world view and method, but also, within the context of this special issue's broader focus on 'Foreign Bodies', to analyse the foreignness of the rhinoceros in general in the early modern period, and of the Topsellian representation of this animal in particular. It will be argued that Topsell's representation of the rhinoceros, both in his text and choice of image, perpetuated rather than elucidated its foreignness.

The copy of Topsell's 1607 edition of *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes* in the collections of the University of Melbourne has had a chequered past, which has affected previous attributions of authorship.⁷ Gifted to the Baillieu Library by the Alfred Hart Bequest in 1950, its prior provenance is not known. Whether this volume was bound at the time of its printing is also not clear. Certainly the present cover, in poor condition, is not contemporaneous, but is of pasteboard congruent with covers of the later rather than earlier seventeenth century.⁸ On its spine, curiously, is not the name of Topsell but that of Gessner (figs 1a[s], 1b[s]), though an undated inscription on its flyleaf reads, 'Edward Topsell Chaplaine in the Church of Saint Buttolphe Aldergate' (fig. 2[s]). The title page with publishing details is missing, although we know that the volume was published in 1607 by the printer William Jaggard, official Printer to the City of London from 1611 and better known for his publication, together with his son Isaac, of the First Folio of William Shakespeare's plays. Also missing is Topsell's seven-page dedicatory letter to his employer and patron, 'The Reverend and Right Worshipfull Richard Neile, D[octo]r of Divinity, Deane of Westminster, Master of the Savoy, and Clarke of the King'. This volume begins instead with Topsell's translation of Gessner's two epistles (the first 'concerning the utility of this Story', the second addressed 'to the Reader'), followed by Topsell's own short epistle 'To the Learned Reader'.⁹ Perhaps the lack of these crucial opening pages misled a later binder to presume the work was that of Gessner, and hence the confusing title tooled onto the spine. And perhaps this led another later owner, realising the false attribution, to inscribe very carefully the correct name of the author on the flyleaf. A further possibility, that this flyleaf signature might be that of Topsell himself, is discounted by comparisons with Topsell's autograph signatures extant on various records from his time at St Botolph's (fig. 3[s]).¹⁰

That Edward Topsell was a clergyman by vocation as well as by profession is clear from his broader publishing record. Of more than the basic statistics of his

life, however, not much is known, not even the precise dates of his birth or death. He was baptised on 3 February 1572 in Sevenoaks, Kent; educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, graduating with a BA in around 1591–92; with his first religious appointment in Hartsfield in 1592. He served as Anglican curate at several English churches, until on 7 April 1604 he was assigned to the position of perpetual curate in the Church of St Botolph without Aldersgate, in the City of London.¹¹ While there, he took on other preferments, including a benefice at Syresham in Northamptonshire (1602–08) and positions as Vicar of Mayfield in Sussex (1605–06) and of East Grinstead (1610–15), and as Chaplain of Hartfield in 1610. He was married to an unknown first wife sometime before 1600, as two children, Mary and Abel, are recorded from 1600 onwards. In August 1612, he married Mary Seaton, a widow. In his epilogue to *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes*, Topsell refers to labouring on the volume despite a 'poore lame Paralyticke right hand' and his impoverishment at the expense of his publishers. Otherwise we know few details of his life. He is presumed to have died either in 1628, when his successor Thomas Booth was named to the curacy of St Botolph, or as early as 1625, the year in which he made his will, and was apparently buried at St Botolph, although the whereabouts of his tomb is not known.¹²

Though he is chiefly remembered nowadays for *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*, Topsell's publishing record both before and after this zoologically oriented oeuvre was clearly focused on religion. In 1596, he published *The Reward of Religion: Deliuered in Sundrie Lectures vpon the Booke of Ruth*, which proved so popular it went through three further printings¹³ In 1599, he published *Time's Lamentation, or an Exposition of the Prophet Ioel in Sundrei Sermons or Meditations*.¹⁴ In 1610, William Jaggard also published *The House-holder: or Perfect Man. Preached in Three Sermons Lately by Ed: Topsell, Preacher at St Bottulphs Without Aldersgate*.¹⁵

This publication record might indicate that *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes* is an anomalous exception to Topsell's main interests and vocation, indicative perhaps of an aspirational, frustrated naturalist. Internal evidence in the text suggests instead, however, a seamless continuation of his religious vision and purpose: a countermand to those of idle inquisitiveness, thumbing the pages of Gessner through curiosity or for entertainment. Of Gessner he concedes, 'He was a Protestant Physitian, (a rare thing to finde any Religion in a Physitian) although St. Luke a Physitian were a writer of the Gospell. His praises therefore shall remain, and all living Creatures shall wnesse for him at the last day.'¹⁶ Nonetheless, he clearly felt such zoological labours were more suited to a cleric such as himself, as he assures the work's dedicatee that this work 'is Divine, and necessarie for all men to know ... and that no man ought rather to publish this unto the World then [sic] a Divine or Preacher.'¹⁷ Affirming it could be read 'with profit and delight' on 'the Holiest days', Topsell stated that the work allowed one to 'passe away the Sabbaths in heavenly meditations upon earthly creatures'.¹⁸

This is not to say that Gessner did not also feel a religious imperative to his work. In his 'First Epistle', as translated by Topsell, Gessner asserted all creatures are worthy subjects of contemplation and that

we cannot but thinke that every story of a beast is like a severall Hymne, to praise the Divine wisdome and goodnes, [...] and we must turne saile and ascend first by things naturall, before we can attaine and reach thinges supernaturall.¹⁹

But religious contemplation of God's creation was not Gessner's prime motivation, even if it might be the epistolary justification of his labours. His work was an encyclopedic endeavour that sought to list, to categorise, and to codify alphabetically all extant knowledge of all beasts—on a par with his herculean bibliographic labours to list every known book in the world.²⁰

Topsell, by comparison, placed religion at the forefront of his endeavour. His 'Letter to the Learned Reader' explicitly compares his method with Gessner's, whose

purpose was to gather all that had beene written of every beast, & to leave the same (as he professeth) like A Dictionary, for the private use of learned men, but also because my purpose was, to shew to every plaine and honest man, the wonderfull workes of God in every beast in his vulgar toongue, and give occasion to my loving friendes and Country-men, to adde of themselves, or else to helpe mee with their owne observations upon these stories [...]²¹

His trope of 'Learned Reader' reveals a broader proselytising Protestant aim of reaching 'every plaine and honest man' in his 'vulgar toongue'; one which encouraged a participatory breakdown of the scholar–layman divide so that all Christian brethren could 'adde of themselves' to the author's sacred endeavour. Starting with a description of the 'Antalope' (fig. 4[s]), and continuing alphabetically until he reached the 'Zibeth: or civet-cat', Topsell restructured the material he derived from Gessner and other authors. Eschewing Gessner's formulaic philological accounts of each beast with their descriptions grouped under separate headings (nomenclature, physical characteristics, habitat, behaviour, properties, sources and stories, use as medicine or food), Topsell instead provided moralising explanatory prefaces, sometimes several pages in length, before proceeding to the known details of each beast derived from his sources, and concluded the volume with a further exposition of his devout aims. While Topsell's zoological descriptions may have lacked originality in comparison with other early modern writers,²² he clearly believed his unique contribution lay in the religious unity and central teleology of his volume.

In Topsell's hierarchy of animals, prime position is given to the elephant, not merely for its size, but for what it demonstrates about 'the power and wisdom' of its creator.²³ The elephant's biological characteristics were relatively well known to a European readership, through descriptions and illustrations dating back to ancient times and, from the thirteenth century onwards, in the flesh when the elephant became the diplomatic gift of choice among the rulers of Europe. In 1255 an elephant was gifted by Louis IX of France to Henry III of England; another was



Figure 5. Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes*, 1607, 'Of the Rhinoceros', pp. 594-95. The University of Melbourne, Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Alfred Hart Bequest, 1950, SpC/RB 8CT/15.

gifted by Alfonso V of Portugal to René d'Anjou in around 1477; Cypriot merchants presented one to Ercole d'Este of Ferrara in 1497; John III of Portugal gifted one called Suleyman to Maximilian II in 1551–52; and Hanno the elephant was sent by King Manuel I of Portugal to Pope Leo X de' Medici in 1514. Topsell, therefore, was expounding upon a beast that, if not common, was at least not unfamiliar in Western Europe.

For a curious and thoroughly foreign body, Topsell reserved his energies for what he termed the second wonder of nature, the rhinoceros. This account is found on pages 594–97 of the 1607 volume, with a full plate on page 595 reproducing a woodcut produced in a smaller size in Gessner, which was taken in turn from Albrecht Dürer's famous woodcut of 1515 (fig. 5).²⁴ As Topsell writes in this animal's preface:

[...] he that shall but see our stories of the Apes, of the Dogs, of the Mice, & of other small beasts, [...] he cannot chuse but expect some rare and strange matters, as much unknowne to his minde about the storie of this Rhinoceros, as the outward shape and picture of him, appeareth rare and admirable to his eies: differing in every part from all of beasts, from the top of his nose to the tip of his taile, the eares and eies excepted, which are like Beares.²⁵

Topsell's emphasis on the rhinoceros as a creature both 'rare and admirable', 'differing in every part from all of beasts', places it, together with the elephant, in a clear hierarchy of distinction from all other 'vulgar' beasts. For Topsell, the lack of precise knowledge about the rhinoceros, as of knowledge about many other beasts, is a consequence of postlapsarian man: 'thou must consider since *Adam* went out of *Paradise*, ther was never any that was able perfectly to describe the universall conditions of all sorts of beasts'.²⁶ Aware that the rhinoceros is so foreign as to border on being an invention, he reassures his readers. If further proof were needed that this foreign body exists, he concludes:

I would bee unwilling to write anything untrue, or uncertaine out of mine owne invention; [...] as the beast is strange and never seene in our country, so my eye-sight cannot adde any thing to the description: therefore harken unto that which I have observed out of other writers.²⁷

Lastly to put it out of all question that there is such a beast as this Rhinocerot, the picture & figure here expressed, was taken by *Gesner* from the beast alive at *Lysbon* in Portugale, before many witnesses, both Marchants and others; so that we have the Testimony both of antiquity and of the present age, for the Testimony of the forme and fashion of this beast, and that it is not the invention of man, but a worke of God in nature, first created in the beginning of the World, and ever since continued to this present day.²⁸

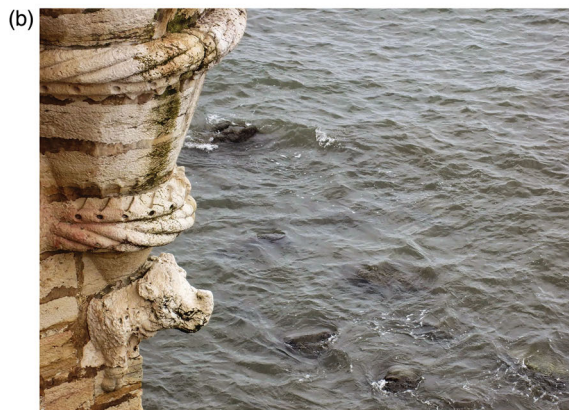
The 'beast alive at Lysbon' referred to here was the first known rhinoceros to have arrived in Western Europe since Roman times and its printed image the first to be widely dispersed. An African rhinoceros is portrayed in the second-century Orpheus mosaic in Perugia, and an Indian rhinoceros appears in the fourth-century mosaic floor of the Villa Romana del Casale near Piazza Armerina in Sicily, but neither of these sites were excavated until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and so would have been unknown in Topsell's day.²⁹ The rhinoceros in the Nile mosaic in the Palazzo Barberini at Palestrina, arguably dated to 100 BCE, was first noticed by the humanist Antonio Volso in 1507, but Topsell seems unaware of it. And although a rhinoceros is depicted in a mosaic of uncertain date on the floor of the Basilica of San Marco in Venice, this image too does not seem to have been widely known.³⁰ The Indian rhinoceros sighted at Lisbon was referred to as Ganda by its Portuguese viewers (derived from the Hindi word for rhinoceros, – गैंडा pronounced *gainda*) but had been christened Ulysses by the sailors of the merchant ship who brought this animal to Lisbon from Goa. Ulysses/Ganda was a supreme diplomatic gift, or more accurately a re-gift, who was to be re-gifted again with disastrous consequences for the animal itself and for detailed examination of its characteristics.

Topsell optimistically advised that in its capturing, a rhinoceros 'is taken by the same meanes that the *Unicorne* is taken, for it is said by *Albertus*, *Isidorus*, and *Alunnius*, that above all other creatures they love Virgins, and that unto them they

will come be they never so wilde, and fall a sleepe before them, so being asleepe they are easily taken and carried away'.³¹ However, in reality, a rhinoceros not only posed difficulties in the capturing, but also in its transport and upkeep. Of the eight rhinoceroses known to have reached Europe in the period from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, all were the single-horned Indian rhinoceros, rather than the two-horned African rhinoceros (both white and black)³² or the smaller Javan and Sumatran rhinoceroses (one of which was sighted by Marco Polo, who believed it to be a rather ugly unicorn).³³ A mature Indian rhinoceros weighs three tonnes, and its transport to Europe in this period required that it be tethered to the deck and then endure an arduous boat trip from the coast of India, around the Cape of Good Hope, up the west coast of Africa, and thence to Europe. The Indian rhinoceros Ulysses/Ganda, together with its keeper, Ocem, was gifted by Muzaffar Shah II, sultan of Gujarat (r. 1511–26), to the Portuguese governor of Goa, Alfonso de Albuquerque. Alfonso in turn decided that such a beast would make a magnificent gift to his overlord, King Manuel I of Portugal. And so, aboard the *Nossa Senhora da Ajuda*, Ulysses/Ganda set sail for Portugal and, after 120 days of travel, was offloaded at the port of Lisbon to wonder and acclaim on 20 May 1515 and then shackled at the king's Ribeira Palace.

At least one anonymous sketch and account of Ulysses/Ganda is known to have been made during this period: a rather crude woodcut accompanying a little poem by Giovanni Giacomo Penni, now in the Biblioteca Colombina in Spain. But after a few months, King Manuel decided to follow his previous gift of an elephant to Pope Leo X de' Medici with this most foreign and wondrous of animals.³⁴ In December 1515, the hapless rhinoceros was collared with velvet adorned with carnations and roses and tethered once again to the deck of a ship, this time bound for Rome.³⁵ The ship docked at Marseilles, where Francis I of France and his queen Claude were introduced to this mighty animal.³⁶ But, before the ship could reach its final berth, it was shipwrecked off the coast of Genoa and, being tethered to the deck, Ulysses/Ganda drowned. Although its carcass eventually came to shore and was apparently stuffed so that at least its dead body could be sent to the pope, there is no record of any taxidermied rhinoceros in the papal or other collections of the period.³⁷ So, though Europeans now knew that the rhinoceros did indeed exist, the opportunity for a detailed examination of its anatomy had been lost. A touching memorial to Ulysses/Ganda was carved into the base of a tower on Lisbon's port fortification, the Torre de Belém (completed 1520), from which the animal looks wistfully out to sea (figs 6a, 6b [detail]).

Undeterred by the lack of any close examination of this foreign body, two Nuremberg artists produced woodcuts of Ulysses/Ganda in 1515—Hans Burgkmair and Albrecht Dürer. Dürer had been sent an account and sketch of Ulysses/Ganda by the Lisbon-based German printer Valentin Ferdinand, and it is presumed that Burgkmair also saw this information. There is also in the Vatican Library a pen and ink drawing of a rhinoceros dated 1515 which has similarities with different aspects of both Dürer's and Burgkmair's prints, which Monson has argued might be based on an original source drawing.³⁸ Burgkmair's animal is



Figures 6a and 6b. Unknown, Carving of Ulysses/Ganda, Torre de Belém, Lisbon, before 1520 (details). Photo: Edit Rimoczi.

recognisably a rhinoceros, albeit with a hairy chin, a line of hair along its spine behind its ears, and heavy armour plating replete with tufts of hair. While only one copy of Burgkmair's print is known to have been made (fig. 7),³⁹ Dürer's

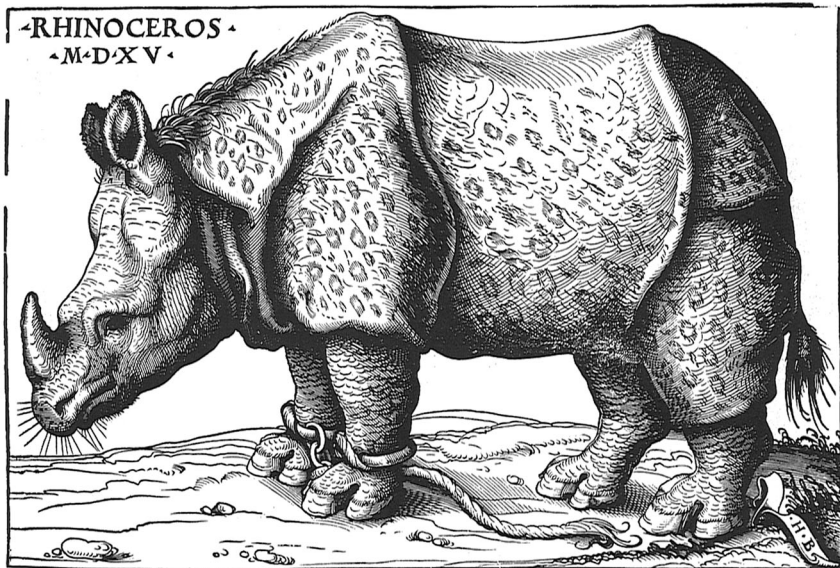


Figure 7. Hans Burgkmair, *Rhinoceros*, 1515, woodcut, 22.4 × 31.7 cm. Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna, inv. no. 1934/123. Wikimedia Commons.

single-leaf woodcut, despite being a more unusual and anatomically incorrect depiction of the animal, has become one of the most iconic and reproduced images of Western art.⁴⁰ Dürer's preparatory drawing for his woodcut is in the British Library (fig. 8), and a first edition of the resulting print is in the National Gallery of Victoria (fig. 9[s]). Dürer's image depicts a strangely armour-plated beast, and famously provides it with a second, small, spiral horn in the middle of its shoulder blades, pointing forwards. Though Gessner notes that he had seen another image of this rhinoceros in addition to Dürer's, it was the latter's that he included in his *Historiae animalium*.⁴¹ That neither Burgkmair, nor Dürer, nor Gessner give anatomically correct details of the rhinoceros has led some to surmise that the inaccuracies were already present in the original lost image sent from Lisbon. As Silver, Leitch, and Parshall have argued, Dürer's image used the Renaissance notion of *conterfeit* (*abkondertfet* is the word used by Dürer) to indicate that, although the image was created in the absence of the actual specimen, it was an image with antecedents (whether in text or image), and had been copied closely.⁴² Glynis Ridley has suggested that Dürer's strangely be-horned, embellished animal was not created out of ignorance, but reflects instead a deliberate strategy to portray Ulysses/Ganda as though covered in armour such as that worn by battle horses, thereby saying 'more about the accoutrements of kingship and war than about the nature of the species'.⁴³ Ulysses/Ganda had, after all, been a gift of and for sultans, kings, and popes and, Ridley argues, was represented accordingly.



Figure 8. Albrecht Dürer, *Rhinoceron* 1515, drawing, pen and brown ink, 27.4 × 42 cm. British Museum, London, SL,5218.161. Creative Commons.

Perhaps Ridley’s theory also explains the use of Dürer’s image by the later Medici who memorialised the magnificent gift that never arrived. Leo X’s great-nephew, Alessandro de’ Medici, Duke of Florence from 1532 to 1537, devised a personal emblem with the assistance of Paolo Giovio, modelled on Dürer’s print and with the motto ‘*Non bueloo sin vencer*’ (‘I shall not return without victory’) (fig. 10[s]).⁴⁴ And Dürer’s rhinoceros featured in the western niche of the grotto of animals created in about 1551, possibly by Cosimo Fancelli using a model of Baccio Bandinelli, for Cosimo I de’ Medici’s Villa di Castello, near Sesto Fiorentino (fig. 11[s]).⁴⁵

In 1577 another rhinoceros arrived in Lisbon—a female called Abada (derived from the Malay word for rhinoceros, *badak*). She survived for at least eleven years, successively in the menageries of kings Sebastian I and Henry I of Portugal, and then of Philip II of Spain and Portugal. However, although an engraving of Abada was made by Phillippe Galle in Antwerp in 1584, providing more realistic details and omitting Dürer’s infamous dorsal auger-like horn, his image did not gain much traction (fig. 12[s]). When the Spanish engraver, goldsmith, and anatomist Juan de Arphe y Villafaña (1535–1600) included both a description and print of a rhinoceros among his descriptions of four-footed animals published in 1586, it was Dürer’s version he reproduced, albeit with a slightly flattened dorsal horn placed slightly further back.⁴⁶

Topsell too not only reproduces a mirror of Dürer's print via Gessner but, ironically, uses the image to disprove earlier accounts about the number and location of horns on a rhinoceros. This reinforces Leitch's argument that books 'such as natural histories, relied on images to authorize their claims, reinforcing, in turn, the authority of the accompanying images'.⁴⁷ Not knowing that different species of rhinoceros have different numbers of horns, Topsell writes, 'Eucherius saith that the *Rhinocerot* hath two hornes in his nose, but that is utterly false, as you may see by the picture'.⁴⁸ His first possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the fifth-century bishop Eucherius might simply have been using two horns figuratively to suggest great strength, or made a simple error in their placement:

[...] if it must needs be litterall, *it is apparent by the picture* that there is another little horne, not upon the nose, but upon the wither of the beast, I meane the top of his shoulder next to his necke, so that the error of *Eucherius* lyeth not in the number, but in the place [...]⁴⁹

Dürer's anatomical inaccuracy regarding the little dorsal horn was thus given credence by Topsell over and above written accounts from ancient authorities. And it is partly due to the popularity of both Gessner's and Topsell's works and their widespread distribution, as well as the liveliness and vivacity of Dürer's image, that this anatomically incorrect depiction was propelled to an ever-increasing audience.

It has been convincingly argued that woodcuts with their explanatory texts, such as Dürer's *Rhinoceros*, belong to the tradition of the *wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities, and that they were for 'both instruction and delight' as well as simple curiosity.⁵⁰ But curiosity for its own sake was explicitly shunned by Topsell. As he concludes his volume:

I have intended nothing but his glory that is the Creator of all [...] and if I thought that hereby the world would not be the more provoked to acknowledge and obey his sovereign Maiestie, whilest that they behold as in Eden the assembly of all known and unknown Beasts, but read the stories to feed curiositie, and behold their figures as Children do Babies, I would not onely desist and go no farther, but also wish that this worke were buried in Oblivion, and the poore lame Paralyticke right hand which wrote and endited [sic] the same, were severed from the bodie.⁵¹

The beasts within his text were intended for a very particular role by this pious clergyman:

Therefore (well minded Readers,) herein you shall satisfie your owne consciences and harts, when the visible thinges of the world, doe lead you to the invisible thinges of God, and all these rowes and ranks of living Four-

footed-Beasts are as letters & Mid-wives to save the reverence which is due to the highest (that made them) from perishing within you.⁵²

Topsell's rhinoceros, a body as foreign to a European sensibility and knowledge as it was possible to be, was expounded and explicated so that it too could function as a midwife to reverence of the Divine.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Meredith Hinze, who first alerted me to this edition of Topsell in the Rare Books Collection of the Baillieu Library, to the Baillieu Rare Books librarian, Susan Millard, for her suggestions, and to Anna Welch, curator of Rare Books at State Library Victoria, who alerted me to the 1658 copy of Topsell held in the SLV and who saved me from several errors. I am also grateful to the anonymous readers for their suggestions.

Supplemental data

Supplemental data for this article is available online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2022.2075610>

Notes

1. Conrad Gessner, Guillaume Rondelet, Pierre Belon, *Historiae animalium*, lib. I–III (Zurich: Christoph. Frochoverum, 1551–58). The woodcuts of the *Historiae animalium* were also published separately as *Icones animalium* in 1553 and 1560, and the *Icones avium* in 1550 and 1560; a fifth volume on serpents, *Qui est de serpentium natura ex variis schedis et collectaneis ejusdem*, was published after Gessner's death (Zurich: J. Carroum, 1587). For Gessner's biography see Hans Wellisch, 'Conrad Gessner: A Bio-Bibliography', *Journal of the Society of the Bibliography of Natural History* 7 (1975): 151–247. For a discussion of the *Historiae animalium*, see, among many others, Laurent Pinon, 'Conrad Gessner and the Historical Depth of Renaissance Natural History', in *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Gianna Pomata and Nancy Siraisi (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2005), 241–67. For his images, see in particular Sachiko Kusakawa, 'The Sources of Gessner's Pictures for the *Historia animalium*', *Annals of Science* 67, no. 3 (2010): 303–28; see also Florike Egmond and Sachiko Kusakawa, 'Circulation of Images and Graphic Practices in Renaissance Natural History: The Example of Conrad Gessner', *Gesnerus* 73, no. 1 (2016): 29–72.

2. Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes: Describing the True and Lively Figure of Every Beast [...] Collected out of All the Volumes of Every Conradus Gesner, and All Other Writers to This Present Day* (London: William Jaggard, 1607); and *The Historie of Serpents; or The Seconde Booke of Living Creatures* (London: William Jaggard, 1608).

3. Edward Topsell, *The History of Four-footed Beasts and Serpents: Describing at Large Their True and Lively Figure, [...] Whereunto Is Added The Theater of Insects; or, Lesser Living Creatures, as, Bees, Flies, Caterpillars, Spiders, Worms, ect., a Most Elaborate Work by T. Muffet* (London: G. Sawbridge, T. Williams and T. Johnson, 1658 [printed by E. Cotes]). A copy of this 1658 edition is held in State Library Victoria, RARESF 598.12 T62.

4. See for example Gordon L. Miller, 'The Fowls of Heaven and the Fate of the Earth: Assessing the Early Modern Revolution in Natural History', *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 9, no. 1 (2005): 57–81; James J. Bono, *The Word of God and the Languages of Man: Interpreting Nature in Early Modern Science and Medicine*, vol. 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), especially 183; and Helen Parish, "'Every Living Beast Being a Word, Every Kind Being a Sentence": Animals and Religion in Reformation Europe', *Religions* 10, no. 7 (2019): 421.

5. Robert King Merton, 'Science, Technology, and Society in Seventeenth Century England', *Osiris* 4 (1938): 360–632, and *Science, Technology, and Society in Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

6. See, among others, Steven Shapin, 'Understanding the Merton Thesis', *Isis* 79 (1988): 594–605; Peter M. Hess, 'Natural History', in *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction*, ed. Gary B. Ferngren (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 195–207; Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626–1660* (London: Duckworth, 1975); Peter

- Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Gordon L. Miller, 'Beasts of the New Jerusalem: John Johnston's Natural History and the Launching of Millenarian Pedagogy in the Seventeenth Century', *History of Science* 46, no. 2 (2008): 203–43; and Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
7. The University of Melbourne, Rare Books Collection, Alfred Hart Bequest, 1950, SpC/RB 8CT/15.
8. I am grateful to Anna Welch and Richard Overell for advice as to the probable dating of the cover.
9. Prefatory material, unpaginated.
10. See for instance MS/01453/001 'Vestry minute book 1601–52', and also MS 01454/101–102 'Churchwardens accounts 1608–11 and Parish apprenticeship indentures 1604–47'. I am grateful to Andrew Lott at the London Metropolitan Archives for locating these signatures for me, and to Christian Algar at the British Library for searching for other possible signatures.
11. Sidney Lee, 'Edward Topsell', in *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*, 1904, citing Richard Newcourt, *Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense* (London: B. Motte, 1710), i. 916; George Leyden Hennessy, *Novum Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londinense* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898), 105. This DNB entry was superseded by that of G. Lewis, 23 January 2004, revised 3 January 2008. See also Virgil B. Heltzel, 'Some New Light on Edward Topsell', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1938): 199–202.
12. The two DNB essays differ on his date of death. Lee's date of 1638 used the incorrect date that a successor to the curacy was made. Lewis's date of 1625 is that most often repeated by others. Clare Jackson, the Women's Worker at St Botolph's, kindly searched for his tomb without success and provided a list of rectors and perpetual curates for the relevant years.
13. *The Revvard of Religion: Deliuered in Sundrie Lectures upon the Booke of Ruth, Wherein the Godly May See Their Daily and Outwarde Tryals, with the Presence of God to Assist Them, and His Mercies to Recompence Them ...* (London: printed by John Windet, 1596, 1597, 1601; further edition, London: printed by W. Stansby, 1613).
14. Published in London by E. Bollifant for G. Potter. Second edition printed by W. Stansby for N. Butter in 1613.
15. [London]: printed [by W. Iaggard] for Henry Rockyt, 'and are to be sold at his shop in the Poultry, vnder the Diall, 1610'.
16. Topsell, dedicatory preface, unpaginated. Version accessed from the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, Early English Books Online, <https://www.proquest.com/books/historie-four-footed-beastes-describing-true/docview/2240889773/se-2?accountid=12372>.
17. Emphasis mine.
18. Ibid.
19. 'The First Epistle of Doct. Conradvs Gesnerus before his History of Foure-footed-Beastes, concerning the vtility of this Story', in *ibid.*, unpaginated.
20. Conrad Gessner, *Bibliotheca universalis* (Zürich: Christoph Froschauer, 1545), an annotated listing of some 12,000 works in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew by 3,000 authors.
21. Topsell, 'Letter to the Learned Reader', unpaginated.
22. Charles E. Raven, *English Naturalists from Neckam to Ray: A Study of the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 167, 218, 223–26.
23. Topsell, *Beastes*, 190.
24. Gessner, lib. I, 953. Because their images are printed from Dürer's original, which faces right, Gessner's and Topsell's both face left.
25. Topsell, *Beastes*, 594.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 596.
29. The Orpheus mosaic at Santa Elisabetta in Perugia was first uncovered in 1875 and fully excavated in 1925–26. The first professional excavations at Villa Romana del Casale were made by Paolo Orsi in 1929, followed by Giuseppe Cultrera in 1935–39 and Gino Vinicio Gentili between 1950 and 1960.
30. Catherine Kovesi, 'Gigi Bon, the Rhinoceros, Venice, and the Unbearable Heaviness of Being', *Luxury: History, Culture, Consumption* 8, no. 1 (2021): 15–17. The precise date of this mosaic is unknown. Hermann Walter, in his 'Per datare il Rinoceronte nel pavimento musivo della Basilica di S. Marco in Venezia', *Studi umanistici piceni* 23 (2003): 253–60, argues for a date no earlier than the mid-nineteenth century. However, the eighteenth-century pen and ink drawing of the mosaic floor by Antonio Visentini (now in the Procuratoria di San Marco) on which he bases his argument has since been shown to have several sections that were filled in inaccurately.
31. Topsell, *Beastes*, 597.
32. As to why African rhinoceroses were not obtainable for Europeans in the early modern period, see Glynis Ridley, *Clara's Grand Tour: Travels with a Rhinoceros in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 4–6.
33. Marco Polo (Rustichello da Pisa), *The Travels*, Book 3:9.
34. For the descriptions of Ganda made in Lisbon, see T.H. Clarke, *The Rhinoceros from Dürer to Stubbs: 1515–1799* (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1986), 16–27.
35. Ridley, *Clara's Grand Tour*, 86.
36. Ibid., 87.
37. Luís de Matos, 'Forma e natura e costumi del rinoceronte', *Boletim internacional de bibliografia Lusobrasileira* I (1960): 390, n. 196.
38. Jim Monson, 'The Source for the Rhinoceros', *Print Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2004): 50–53.

39. Hans Burgkmair, *Rhinoceros*, 1515, woodcut, 22.4 x 31.7 cm. Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna, inv. no. 1934/123.
40. For the longevity and influence of Dürer's image, see Clarke, *Rhinoceros*, esp. Chapter 1; F.J. Cole, 'The History of Albrecht Dürer's Rhinoceros in Zoological Literature', in *Science, Medicine and History: Essays on the Evolution of Scientific Thought and Medical Practice, Written in Honour of Charles Singer*, ed. E. Ashworth Underwood (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 337–56; Stephanie Leitch, 'Dürer's Rhinoceros Underway: The Epistemology of the Copy in the Early Modern Print', in *The Power of the Image in Northern European Art, 1400–1700: Essays in Honour of Larry Silver*, ed. Debra Taylor Cashion, Henry Luttkhuizen, and Ashley D. West (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 241–255; and Andrea Bubenik, *Reframing Albrecht Dürer: The Appropriation of Art, 1528–1700* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 100–103. Dürer's image also influenced Salvador Dalí's sculptures *Rhinoceros Cosmique* (1950) and *Rhinoceros Habille en Dentelles* (1956).
41. Kusukawa, 'Sources of Gessner's Pictures', 311.
42. Leitch, 'Dürer's Rhinoceros Underway', 244–47; Larry Silver, 'Cultures and Curiosity', in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence: The Proceedings of the 32nd International Conference on the History of Art*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2008), 243; and Peter Parshall, 'Imago Contrafacta: Images and Facts in the Northern Renaissance', *Art History* 16, no. 4 (1993): 554–79.
43. Ridley, *Clara's Grand Tour*, 88–90.
44. Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo dell'imprese militari et amorosi* (Venice: appresso Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1557). For the illustration see the 1559 edition, 49.
45. Marco Masseti, 'Sculptures of Mammals in the Grotta degli Animali of the Villa Medici di Castello, Florence, Italy: A Stone Menagerie', *Archives of Natural History* 35, no. 1 (2008): 100–104.
46. Juan de Arphe y Villafañe, *Varia commensuracion la escultura y arquitectura* (Seville: 1585–87), Book 3, *De los animales de quatro pies*, 'El Rinoceronte'.
47. Leitch, 'Dürer's Rhinoceros Underway', 242; Susan Dackerman, *Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Art Museums, 2011); Sachiko Kusukawa, *Picturing the Book of Nature: Image, Text, and Argument in Sixteenth-Century Human Anatomy and Medical Botany* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011); Katherine Acheson, 'Gesner, Topsell, and the Purposes of Pictures in Early Modern Natural Histories', in *Printed Images in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Michael Hunter (Farnham, UK and Burlington, Vt: Ashgate, 2010), 127–44.
48. Eucherus, *Instructionem ad Salunium libri duo. Leber 2, caput 12: de bestii*, in J-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus Latinae* (Paris: Garnier, 1865), vol. 50: 773–826.
49. Topsell, 597. Emphasis mine.
50. Silver, 'Cultures and Curiosity', 244; Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The Master of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 174–94; Peter Parshall, 'Art and Curiosity in Northern Europe', *Word and Image* 11 (1995): 352–72; Edward Peters, 'The Desire to Know the Secrets of the World', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 4 (2001): 593–610; Barbara Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Enquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Marjorie Swann, *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); R.J.W. Evans and Alexander Marr, eds, *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007); and Paula Findlen, 'Inventing Nature: Commerce, Art and Science in Early Modern Cabinets of Curiosities', in *Merchants & Marvels: Commerce, Science and Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Paula Findlen and Pamela H. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 297–323.
51. Topsell, *Beastes*, 'An Epilogue to the Readers'.
52. Ibid.