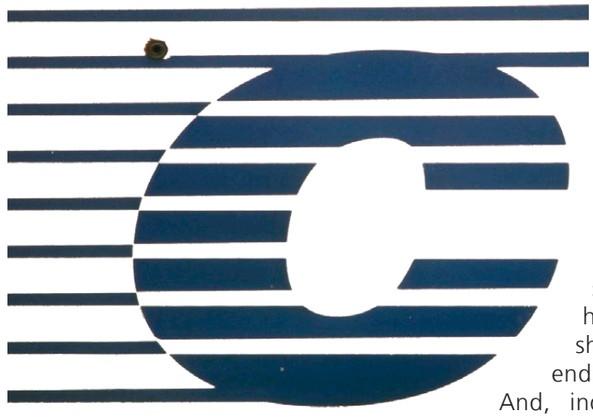
The Cow

The dairy cow is the foster mother of the human race.

W. D. Hoard, 1870
Wisconsin dairyman



Once there was a little girl who had been abandoned in the woods by her wicked stepmother. She had nearly given up all hope, but then she decided to climb a tree

to see if she could not catch sight of some city, village or house where she might go so she would not come to a sad end as food for the wild beasts. And, indeed, in looking around she discovered a little column of smoke. She quickly descended and walked in the direction of the smoke, and in a few hours arrived at the place from which the smoke came. It was a tiny little house where nobody lived except an earth-cow. The little girl went to the door, knocked, and asked to be let in.... [The] earth-cow answered, "Very well, all you need to do is milk me in the morning, and again in the evening.... But remember to be careful not to tell anyone about me! Even if your own sister should come to the door do not let her in and betray my presence here. If you do, I shall lose my life."

Alas, the little girl did betray the good earth-cow who was thereupon slaughtered and eaten. But before she was taken away she instructed the little girl to ask the butcher for the tail, one horn, and one shoe.

> "... and when you have that, go away and plant the tail in the ground, the horn on top of the tail and the little shoe on top of the horn; then leave, and do not return until the third day. And on the third day it will have grown into a tree which in summer and in winter will bear the most beautiful apples anyone has ever seen. And no one will be able to pick them but you alone...."

In this folk-fairy tale recorded in Alsace in the sixteenth century, we recognize many traditional folkloric patterns: from the wicked stepmother to the resourceful little girl, from the secret betrayed, to the magical tree. The earth-cow herself is of particular interest since she so admirably manifests the qualities we have come to associate with the cow: she is a giver, a nurturer, a bringer of aid, a sustainer, and sometimes a sacrificial victim. This representation of the worthy animal is based on lived experience of humans in contact with their bovine associates. It is no wonder then that cows have been, and still are, revered and even worshipped as sacred beings.

A good starting point in thinking of the cow historically, is with the Celts who occupied pre-Roman Europe, including Britain and Ireland. The cattle they kept, descended from the wild auroch, are in fact the ancestors of most European dairy breeds. The Celts left behind abundant evidence of the lives they lived in the company of their animals. Bones provide a major testimony to agricultural practices, hunting, war, and customs involving rituals and sacrifice of animals. We have as well animal images left behind by artists working with stone, bronze, iron, silver, and gold. And finally, even though the early Celts did not themselves leave any written records, their myths, legends, and tales in which animals were accorded a very prominent place, were passed on by singers and storytellers across the centuries. Particularly striking in the picture which emerges from the evidence left by these early people is the very close nature of the bond between them and their animals, both in the routines of their everyday lives and in the realm of creative expression and religious belief.

Among the Celts' domesticated animals, the cow was especially highly esteemed since it could be used as a life-long work animal--clearing and plowing fields, for example--and as a supplier of milk and milk-products. After its death, its meat, hide, horns, and bones--even sinew, fat, and blood--could be utilized. Like cattle, who were valued as workers and producers, sheep too were kept for their milk and wool and both these animals were normally slaughtered only after they had become too old to be useful as living beasts. Pigs, by way of contrast, who neither worked nor produced milk or wool, were routinely slaughtered in their prime; indeed pork was the main meat source for these people. Horses were used as draft or pack animals, but were less favored than cattle since they--like pigs--were not producers. Horses were, however, the star players in the arena of warfare and on the hunt.

In the examples of artistic representation which have survived from the pre-Roman Celtic period, we can see mirrored the sort of human/animal relationships which existed in the real, everyday world. Though the raven, as one who warded off evil, and the wild boar, as an emblem of fierceness and aggressiveness were sometimes depicted on war-gear, it was primarily the horse, the animal who actually participated in warfare, who decorated the Celts' helmets, shields, swords, and scabbards. Cattle, who were giving creatures and of a peaceful nature, were more apt to appear on household items, especially in connection with food: a likeness of the animal's body might form the handle of a ceramic jug, or the uprights of an andiron could be topped by a pair of bovine heads with decorative horns. Cattle also figure prominently in artworks which bespeak ritual and sacrifice. One of the most moving examples is the famous Gundestrup Cauldron, a large vessel from the second or first century B.C. made of silver and decorated with gods and animals of all kinds. On the baseplate of the cauldron the silversmith has portrayed the dying image of a great bull as it sinks to its knees, mortally wounded by a hunter and his dogs. This image has been understood as a representation of a myth of death and re-creation, possibly suggesting that the earth will be nourished by the animal's blood. Bulls or oxen were also sacrificed to purify a town, to ensure that the divine powers would continue to provide for humankind, or to establish a channel of communication between this world and the realm of the supernatural.

Like the Celts, so too the ancient Egyptians at an even earlier period, accorded the cow a special position in their divine bestiary. Perhaps nothing has ever surpassed the powerful visual effect of the images they created of their sacred animals and animal deities--images which still carry the aura of the hallowed and the magical. Hathor, the goddess with whom the cow is associated,

may appear either as a woman or in the guise of the cow itself--but in either incarnation she is at her most glorious when she wears her long, graceful lyre-shaped horns which hold between them the sun disk bedecked with its ostrich plumes. Though she is the mighty goddess of the sky, she is portrayed with the cow's admirable qualities as well. She is the protective, nurturing mother who suckles the infant king, who, in drinking her divine milk partakes of her powers; and she shields from possible harm those who seek refuge beneath her protective body.

Chicago's own story of its life with the cow is a story intimately tied to our history. The most famous single individual among the vast herds of cattle to be associated with this city is without a doubt the cow named Daisy who belonged to Catherine O'Leary and who resided in the barn behind the O'Leary cottage at 137 De Koven Street. Of late some people have tried to debunk the legend that Mrs. O'Leary's cow herself kicked over a burning lantern on the night of October 8, 1871 thereby starting the blaze which grew to be the Great Chicago Fire. But that the fire did begin in the O'Leary barn, no one doubts. Five cows, one horse, and one calf were living in the barn at the time, which contained as well three tons of new timothy hay and several barrels of feed; in an attached shed were two tons of coal and stacks of kindling wood and shavings.

Regardless of how the fire started, it was spotted in its very early stages by several neighbors (the O'Learys were in bed before nine o'clock that night) and straight away reported to the fire department which responded immediately. In fact the highly flammable hay, coal, kindling, and shavings, stored on the O'Leary premises provide a microcosmic picture of the city as a whole--a tinder-box of enormous proportions: wood plank streets, wooden board sidewalks, wood frame buildings, wooden fences, lumber yards, coal yards, shingle mills, a match factory, the gas works. Added to this deadly combustible raw material was very warm, dry weather--and, the prime culprit, a fierce wind. These and a great many other causal factors produced a situation of bedeviled complexity. Nevertheless the legend of Mrs. O'Leary's cow, who by herself was responsible for the grand conflagration, was a story heavily favored at the time--and a century and a quarter later, it continues to be a story which refuses to die.

The Union Stock Yards, which extended west from Halsted Street between 39th and 47th Streets, opened on Christmas Day of 1865, six years before the Great Fire. This famous Chicago institution generated its share of stories too, some of them contained in well-known works by Upton Sinclair (The Jungle) and Bertolt Brecht (Saint Joan of the Stockyards), authors who decried unsafe working conditions and the excesses of capitalism. Other stories of a more folksy nature traveled by word of mouth among stockyards habitués and served to immortalize all manner of stockyards characters, both man and beast. Not to be forgotten, for example, was Phil the trusty "con"-steer, who with "a knowing twinkle in his eye,"--or so it was claimed--carried out his daily job of leading troops of hapless cows to their deaths in the killing pen. Memorable, too, was the menagerie kept by John B. Sherman, manager of the Union Stock Yards for many years, which featured among other oddities and rarities a six-legged hog and a camel-backed cow.

Before the establishment of the Yards there were many small stockyards scattered throughout the city. Too small and inefficient to accommodate the growing meat-packing industry, and undesirable as neighbors due to sanitation problems and an unpleasant stench, their re-location and consolidation as the Union Stock Yards was enthusiastically welcomed. Although it was almost a city in itself, with a post office, a bank, a hotel, a fire department, and its own newspaper, what the Yards primarily consisted of was animal pens, thousands of them,

occupying close to a square mile. There were in addition the big slaughterhouses and packing plants, there was a train station with a system of platforms, ramps, and chutes for unloading animals, and there were train tracks--fifteen miles of tracks in 1865 which by the mid-'80s had grown to over one hundred miles of tracks within the Yards. Here in "The Great Bovine City of the World" there were gathered cattle by the thousands, tens of thousands, and even hundreds of thousands, who in the early days may have been driven overland from as far away as Texas or Wyoming to feedlots in the Midwest and from there by railroad to the stockyards. Gradually as the network of railroads radiating out from Chicago continued to grow, ever larger numbers of cattle were transported from the West directly to the Stock Yards, and in 1892 the number rose to its highest point: three and one-half million animals.

Despite the grim business which was carried out in the slaughterhouses--"the sledge blow to the head and the knife slash to the throat" that the animal received upon entering, followed by the journey of its carcass down the "disassembly" line--the Stock Yards became a major tourist attraction. In the words of The Chicago Tribune of 23 December 1875 celebrating the Stock Yards' tenth anniversary, "strangers visiting the city would as soon think of quitting it without having seen them as the traveler would of visiting Egypt, and not the pyramids...." To keep the grim business from causing undue harm to people or animals required the constant vigilance and active efforts of many groups: labor unions to protect workers from exploitation by owners; city, state, and citizen groups to protect air and water from noxious pollutants, and consumers from unhealthy products; the Humane Society and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to protect the ultimate victims of the whole operation from unnecessarily grievous treatment. The Stock Yards' boom years were in the 1880s, though they continued to thrive through the period of the First World War. Only after the end of the Second World War did changed market forces bring about the decentralization of the meat-packing industry and consequently by 1971, after 106 years in operation, the Union Stock Yards closed.

If the helpful Little Earth-Cow is a folk fairy-tale character, and the powerful Hathor a mythic animal deity of ancient Egypt, and if Catherine O'Leary's cow played a legendary role in the story of the Great Chicago Fire--who or what were the 300 cows put on parade in our city in the summer of 1999? Do they belong to the realm of myth, legend, or fairy tale? Why did people love those cows? Why did they flock by the million to Chicago's downtown to photograph them, stroke them, sit on them--and especially, just look at them? How are we to understand the attraction these life-sized and imaginatively painted fiber-glass bovines held for

citizen and visitor alike, whatever their age, race, gender or economic class? To begin to answer these questions we have only to recall the age-old appeal that is also affirmed by A Chicago Bestiary: the combination of art, the city, and animals. It has also been suggested that the appeal of the Chicago cows has something to do with what they represent:

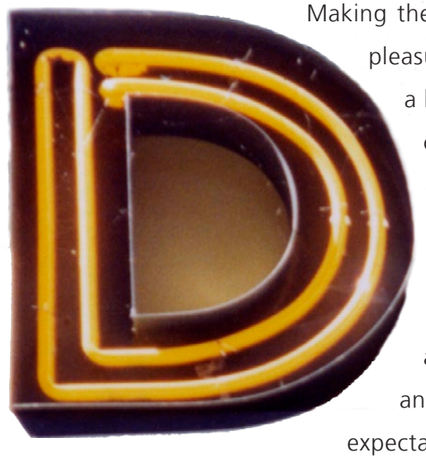
> They are large but non-threatening, maternal, nurturing and friendly. They're familiar but because they are not part of our day-to-day life, their presence in the city causes surprise.... The way they're juxtaposed against buildings and plazas, as well as placed in street median strips, in gardens, on bridges... makes it as if the cows have become a part of the city themselves.

Unfortunately, the Cow Parade has gone by (it lasted only from June 15 to October 31, 1999) but the alert street-stroller can still see individual cows at scattered locations throughout the city: for example, the Nine Spotted Lady Bug Cow who is climbing up the face of the Talbott Hotel or the beautiful bronze rendition standing outside the Chicago Cultural Center as a representation of all the cows in the parade. And you can always look at their pictures in Cows on Parade in Chicago.

Elsewhere in the city, you can view the original entrance to the Union Stock Yards in its original location, though the stockyards are long-gone. "The Stone Gate," its official name, was designed by Daniel H. Burnham and John W. Root in 1879, and features at the top of its main archway the sculpted head of a shorthorn bullock modeled on "Sherman," the prizewinner of the 1878 Chicago Livestock Show. A bronze cast of the bullock's head is on display in the Chicago History Museum, as is "Mrs. Catherine O'Leary Milking Daisy," an endearing painting by Norman Rockwell, much favored by viewers. Finally, not to be missed, in the museum café is the original Stockyard Arch, a masterpiece in terra cotta which features an impressive array of stockyard animal likenesses.

The Dragon

> The dragon is the spirit of change, therefore of life itself, taking new forms according to its surroundings, yet never seen in its final shape…. The dragon reveals himself only to vanish.
>
> Okakura Kakuso, Book of Tea, 1906



Making the acquaintance of China's mythical animals is a special pleasure. Imagine such creatures as a nine-tailed white fox, a kneeling hare, a trance-dancing toad, or a three-legged crow of the sun. These amazing beasts were courtiers who belonged to the retinue of The Queen Mother of the West (ca. 500 B.C.), herself a fabulous being with a panther's tail and a tiger's fangs--who, however, on occasion did appear in her "civilized," i.e. human, aspect. In a land where lowly animals, including toads and hares, appear in such marvelous guises, what high expectations might one have for the greatest creature of them all--the Chinese dragon?

Though we hear often enough that Chinese dragons are "good" and Western dragons are "bad," this is only a partial truth. In fact there are so many Chinese dragons, possessing so many different traits and qualities, that generalizations about them inevitably fall short of the mark. Perhaps a better approach to this complex animal would be through the Chinese zodiac, where the creature's many admirable traits are described, but its reprehensible qualities are acknowledged as well. Astrology manuals are a rich source of information on dragons and their nature, and in them entries such as the following can be found:

> The Dragon is the sign of Power and Magnificence. When he flies abroad wreathed in smoke and fire he can be seen from 100,000 paces. The people flock to his call and the mighty tremble in their palaces for fear of his wrath. He is the guardian of wealth and wears it like a shining armour. When the Dragon mounts to heaven, the rains come and prosperity follows. The Dragon is generous and forgiving. His rage is as lightning, but it soon passes…. The Dragon is magnificent but can be deaf to wise counsel. The Dragon prefers battle to diplomacy.

Significantly, the dragon was present at the Creation--if not precisely from the very beginning, it was indeed attendant when the time came to create human beings. This feat was accomplished by Nü Kua, a goddess who possessed a dragon's body and a human head. It was she who formed the first "black-haired" people from mud and yellow earth. She is also given credit for mending the azure sky, torn at the time, and for setting aright the four leaning poles which hold up the sky. Once she had completed her work, Nü Kua rode off in a thunder-carriage pulled by one pair of winged dragons and one pair of hornless, green dragons. She guided these steeds with halters made of yellow clouds. The white dragon calf, who also accompanied the goddess and her carriage was, given its tender age, not harnessed but allowed to fly about freely.

Once the world was formed and set on its course, dragons continued to exercise their power: water and drought were at their command; darkness and light obeyed them. In one of China's greatest myths, the Myth of the Flood, dragons played key roles. Occurring in many versions and involving several generations of characters, the myth has its roots in the distant past when the mortal Kun on the advice of his friends, a horned owl and a black tortoise, attempted to steal a hoard of magic soil from the Yellow Emperor, a divine being. Though Kun, the would-be hero, had acted with the best of motives, i.e. to save the world from a terrible flood by casting the magic earth into the rising waters, the Yellow Emperor showed no mercy and had him put to death. Wondrously, though Kun's body was lifeless, inside his belly his young son, Yü, was growing, and after three years he issued forth in the form of a dragon. This creature spread its powerful, new wings and soared up into the still dark, stormy skies. Straight for the abode of the Yellow Emperor he flew and there he asked forgiveness for his father's act of theft. At the same time, he requested permission to continue the work of fighting the flood, again using the magic self-renewing soil. Yü had by now assumed his human form, and when the Emperor granted his wishes he also provided him with two assistants: a tortoise to carry the earth and a dragon to lay out the water courses. The three set off on their mission and together they were able to overcome the flood and miraculously reconfigure the land, creating new beds

for rivers, new shores for lakes and seas. Never again would the land be destroyed by flood.

Chinese dragons are virtually always associated with water and make their homes at the bottom of lakes and rivers, or even in wells or damp caves. Though they can be unpredictable like water itself, usually they can be counted upon to sleep in their watery abodes in winter (China's dry season) and in the spring to ascend into the skies in order to release the gentle rains. It is during the summer, when from on high the dragons engage in battles, that they cause heavy thunderclouds to gather, lightning to strike, and fierce rainstorms to ensue. The appearance of one of these fighting dragons, particularly if red or black, is considered to be a bad omen, above all when one is wounded in battle and tumbles down to the earth and dies. In earlier times this would have been understood as a foreshadowing of an Emperor's death, or even the fall of a dynasty, since dragons were associated with the royal families and many emperors were sons of dragons.

Given the great power of dragons, it is little wonder that down through the ages myths and legends have told of people who have sought to garner that power for themselves in some way, perhaps by offering the dragons those things they like, roasted swallows, for example, or dumplings--so that they will exercise their traditional powers to bring down the beneficent rains. For the same reason they have spared dragons from the presence of things they dislike: centipedes or iron in any form. In the area of medical matters, since the early days there has been a strong belief in the curative capabilities of dragons' bones, teeth, and skin. Curiously, it has been held that dragons periodically cast off not only their skins, but also their bones, which retain great healing powers. Dragon bones may be of any one of five different colors: blue, white, red, black, and yellow, each effective against a particular malady. When the bones are carefully prepared by specified methods of soaking, drying, powdering, and mixing, and administered according to color, the corresponding ailing organ (liver, lungs, heart, kidneys, and spleen, respectively) can be expected to benefit. Dragons' teeth have been deemed effective in dealing with the mind as well as the body, and are especially to be recommended as a means for driving off "beings that kill the vital spirit," or to

"quiet the heart and calm the soul." Even dragon spittle, though not effective as a healing substance, has been highly prized both as a perfume and as a special ink used for writing on tablets of jade, gold, or quartz-crystal.

Images of dragons are central to Chinese art. The creatures' graceful, curved shapes intricately embroidered with threads of silk, gold, and silver adorn the elegant robes of the royalty. Magnificent dragons sculpted in stone, clay, and bronze grace the eaves and roofs of buildings as well as tombs, pillars, and pedestals, and stunning dragons are carved in relief from a variety of materials, their bodies fluidly fitting the space on panels, thrones, gates, balustrades, and screens. Less venerable, perhaps, but no less appealing are the enormous dragons made of cloth, bamboo, and paper which are carried in processions through the streets on the fifteenth day of the first month of each new year. Traditionally a large red lantern representing the sun is carried in front of the dragon who, to the accompaniment of music, drums, firecrackers, and general noise from the lively crowd, chases it and threatens to swallow it. Doubtless with good reason it has been claimed that, "No other creature in the world has had such a far-reaching influence on the minds of so many people."

> And dragons, real dragons, essential both to the machinery and the ideas of a poem or tale, are actually rare. In northern literature there are only two that are significant, the dragon of the Völsungs, Fafnir, and Beowulf's bane....
>
> J. R. R. Tolkien in "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics"

A world away from China and its dragons, in the Nordic lands of pre-Christian times, poets sang of the deeds of heroes and of their adversaries: formidable dragons and other monsters. Even if the earliest versions of these tales have been lost forever, we have nonetheless inherited a part of the riches of the Norse myths, Icelandic sagas, and Germanic heroic poems. Some of what has come down to us is only fragmentary; yet thanks both to chance and to dedicated efforts of people known and unknown, we are still able to read texts from those early

days, including one of the great foundation works of poetry in English, Beowulf.

In this tale the hero confronts no fewer than three monsters—one of them a dragon. As a young man his first challenge comes from Grendel, a creature at home in the dark murky depths of an underwater cave, who is drawn to the edges of human civilization because

> It harrowed him
> to hear the din of the loud banquet
> every day in the hall, the harp being struck
> and the clear song of a skilled poet
> telling with mastery of man's beginnings,
> how the Almighty had made the earth
> a gleaming plain girdled with waters;
> in His splendor he set the sun and the moon
> to be earth's lamplight, lanterns for men,[56]

In a clash of worlds, Beowulf defeats Grendel, the "murdering, guilt-steeped, God-cursed fiend" in hand-to-hand combat. Grendel's mother, "that swamp-thing from hell," demonstrates a self-sacrificial family loyalty when the very next night she seeks revenge for her son's murder. She, too, is dispatched by Beowulf. It is only as an old man, after reigning wisely and justly for fifty years, that Beowulf is finally called upon to meet the dragon. This richest of creations of the human imagination is much more than a standard foe--greater, mightier, unfathomable, fate itself. Fate exercised a primary force in the lives of the Northmen, and knowing that they could never cheat their fate, they had only their unyielding will and noble courage to rely upon, in their war with a hostile world. Thus Beowulf, the best of heroes is filled with ominous feelings of foreboding, as he meets "that old harrower of the dark."

> When the dragon awoke, trouble flared again.
> He rippled down the rock, writhing with anger
> when he saw the footprints of the prowler who had stolen
> too close to his dreaming head....
>
> The hoard-guardian
> scorched the ground as he scoured and hunted
> for the trespasser who had troubled his sleep.
> Hot and savage, he kept circling and circling
> the outside of the mound....
>
> So the guardian of the mound,
> the hoard-watcher, waited for the gloaming
> with fierce impatience...
>
> then, to his delight,
> the day waned and he could wait no longer
> behind the wall, but hurtled forth
> in a fiery blaze.[58]

With fate playing a portentous role, the outcome of the contest is deadly for both Beowulf and the dragon. A noble life is lost and a hostile adversary destroyed.

The famous dragon in the medieval German saga, The Lay of Siegfried, Fafnir by name, is not the scourge of the land that Beowulf's dragon is. Nevertheless he is responsible for having committed certain evil deeds, and the fact that the god Odin himself suggests to Siegfried a strategy for killing the dragon identifies him unmistakably as the enemy. Fafnir's chief vice is greed, but he is not wantonly destructive--and so far as we know he certainly never eats human beings. Fafnir began life as a giant, but he was once so overcome by his avaricious desire for gold that he was driven to kill his father and force his brother into exile, so as to gain sole possession of the treasure he had owned jointly with them. Thereafter, however, he does nothing but guard his gold, and in due course while carrying out this sedentary project, he turns into a dragon. Siegfried the Völsung kills him at the bidding of Regin, the brother in exile, in order to avenge the father's death. When the hero bathes in the dragon's blood it renders his skin impervious to penetration by the weapon of any foe; and the bit of blood which touches his tongue enables him to understand the language of birds--two factors which work in his favor on his path to fame and glory.

The story of Saint George and his dragons evolved over time. During the bloody persecutions against Christians carried out by the Emperor Diocletian (ca. 300 AD), George was thrown into prison where he was tortured and eventually executed for refusing to deny his faith. For this brave and steadfast stance he was venerated as St. George, with a large and enthusiastic following in both the Eastern and the Roman churches. It was not until the thirteenth century, however, that a legend began to circulate linking St. George with the dragon. The story appealed to the popular imagination and acquired more and more intriguing details as it continued to travel by word of mouth. George grew ever braver and more selfless, and the dragon ever more wicked. The horrible creature was, according to reports, "wont to prowl about the city walls, poisoning all who came within reach of its breath." To appease its fury townspeople offered their sheep or even their own children. But thanks to the good St.

George, the dragon is always slain and everyone gives praise to God.

Gradually over the course of the Middle Ages, the dragon came to be identified with Satan, "that old serpent, called the Devil, the great, red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns," (Revelations of St. John 12: 3 and 9). Thus in slaying the dragon the saint vanquishes the very embodiment of evil itself. Romantic notions associated with knights in shining armor rescuing beautiful princesses from horrible, threatening dragons also crept into the story, and fairy-tale endings of "living happily ever after" were appended.

Lest it be thought that dragons thrived in ancient times and died out with the Middle Ages, brief mention must be made of a dragon or two whose stories are of relatively recent vintage--classics nonetheless. In The Hobbit (1937) by J. R. R. Tolkien, a book deemed "One of the most influential of our generation," Bilbo Baggins and a company of dwarfs set off to find Smaug the Magnificent and his hoard of gold. This dragon, also referred to as Smaug the Tremendous, Smaug the Mighty, and Smaug the Dreadful, among other names, is in fact an accomplished conversationalist and it is with regret that the reader learns of his death and consequent silencing--even if his sumptuous treasure is thereby made attainable to the company seeking him.

The Reluctant Dragon, eponymous hero of the book (1898) by Kenneth Grahame, is like Smaug, a practitioner of the fine art of conversation. When he is not discoursing with someone, this fellow spends his time writing poetry and taking snoozes, though whenever an opportune moment presents itself, he points out that it is due to his reluctance to fight, over the course of his centuries-long life, that he has the pleasure of being here now. The Reluctant Dragon wins not only the sympathies of the other characters in the story but the sympathies of the story's readers as well, and in this perhaps, he is not so different from his dragon ancestors of long ago.

Not surprisingly, Chinatown is the best place for dragon-spotting in Chicago. Not to be missed are the company of light-pole dragons, the dragons gracing the Dragon Gate, the splendid dragon statue representing his zodiac sign, who, along with eleven other animals comprise the complete Chinese zodiac display, the big, bright red parade dragon at the Chinese-American Museum, and finally, the Nine Dragon Wall, a dynamic rendering of a great group of dragons in full-color array. Occasionally, when Wagner's Siegfried is being performed, Fafnir makes a spectacular on-stage appearance at the Lyric Opera. And at the Art Institute St. George can always be found in the very act of spearing his opponent, the dragon. There are, in fact, two

renderings of the story, both from the early fifteenth century. In large format and bold colors the Spanish painter Bernardo Martorell portrays St. George mounted on his magnificent white horse and together man and beast vanquish an exceedingly evil-looking dragon. Hanging on the same wall is a contrasting work by an unknown German artist whose St. George, appearing on the right-hand panel of a small gold-framed altarpiece, faces his dragon alone. Finally, gone, but not forgotten (and actually living on, right here in the Chicago bestiary), is the dragon who for one summer was in residence at the Lincoln Park Zoo (2004). Surrounded by lovely flower beds, he comprised a welcoming-committee-of-one, as his striking chartreuse form spelled out the word ZOO for the approaching visitor.

The Elephant

There is no creature among al the Beasts of the world which hath so great and ample demonstration of the power and wisedome of almighty God as the Elephant: both for proportion of body and disposition of spirit... it is admirable to behold...

Edward Topsell, 1607
Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes

The elephant truly does have many human admirers. From a child's very first visit to the zoo to see the enormous elephant with its huge flapping ears and its amazing questing trunk, or perhaps from the earliest impressions of exciting circus elephants performing astonishing feats, or possibly from the first time a little boy or girl hears Babar the Elephant read aloud, this admirable animal captures the imagination. And the fascination is not a passing childhood fancy. The more we learn about elephants and their ways, the more reason we have to admire these splendid beasts.

Elephants are social creatures and live in stable groups made up of related adult females and their immature offspring. Each of these family groups, usually consisting of no more than ten individuals, is led by a wise old matriarch who sees to the well-being of her troop and passes on her knowledge to the younger elephants. The family members stand by each other, whatever the circumstances. When a young female delivers her first calf, her more experienced aunts and sisters gather round and encourage and assist the mother and the newborn. If an elephant is ill or wounded, the others cluster about and do not let it fall--rather they support it in a standing position by pressing themselves against it from either side. Elephants show a

special concern for their dead. Their first reaction is to attempt to arouse the body by using their trunks and feet to hoist it or hold it. When these efforts fail they quietly stand guard over the body, sometimes for days. They also tear up grass and dig up dirt to cover the dead animal. Even years after the death of a family member an elephant coming upon the bones will carefully touch and stroke them with its trunk, lift them up, and move them around.

The intensity of the relationships among elephants and the pleasure they take in one another's company can be seen from the following description of the meeting of two related families after they had been apart for a few days.

> They began walking slowly, feeding as they went, arriving at the edge of the woodland at midmorning. On reaching this spot Teresia [the fifty- seven year old matriarch of her family] called several times but got no response. She and her group were eager to rejoin Slit Ear [her family's matriarch, age forty three] but they did not know where she was.
>
> They walked west until they arrived at an area of acacia trees. Here Teresia stopped and rumbled. She instantly got a response from about a quarter of a mile away. This was definitely Slit Ear, and Tia and Tess answered as well. [The group was] clearly excited, with heads held high and ears lifted. They shifted their course slightly and, almost running, plunged down into the swamp and up the other side.
>
> Suddenly ahead of them was a group of elephants running out of the trees and coming straight for them. Teresia stopped for a moment in alarm, then recognized Slit Ear and both groups ran, rumbling, screaming, and trumpeting toward each other. The younger animals had moved ahead of Teresia, but when the two groups came together, Slit Ear ignored the others and pushed through them to reach Teresia and greet her. Both elephants raised their heads up into the air and clicked their tusks together, wound their trunks around each other's while rumbling loudly, holding and flapping their ears in the greeting posture. They whirled around and leaned and rubbed on one another.[62]

The caring behavior that elephants manifest toward one another, and the pleasure they take in each other's company have inspired in the human community a deep respect and fondness for elephants. So, too, have their great strength, dignity, intelligence, and loyalty. We are not surprised then to find that from earliest times elephants have been represented in many art forms. In medieval European bestiaries, for example, the elephant was a favorite character, along with the similarly admirable horse, dog, and bee.

The bestiary elephant is frequently depicted in the worthy guise of dragon-slayer, thus enacting single-handedly the combined roles traditionally attributed to a Christian knight and his noble horse. Visual depictions of the dragon threatening the virtuous elephant give concrete embodiment to his evil nature. The dragon breathes fire, is diabolically striped, and his tail is wickedly looped, while the elephant, personifying goodness, is often shown--alone or aided by a family member--bravely attempting to ward off the evil attacker. The elephant first seeks to trample the wicked dragon to death, but if the monster manages to gouge out the elephant's eyes and entwine itself in a strangle hold around his neck, the elephant, in dying, nevertheless manages to defeat the dragon: he falls on top of it, and with his heavy body crushes it to death. Another guise in which we encounter the bestiary elephant is as a Christian warrior, carrying in his howdah (also called "castle" or "tower") a band of Christian knights as they do battle against the infidel or the devil himself. Though the European bestiarists of the eleventh and twelfth centuries had never seen an elephant, they were familiar with classical texts telling of Alexander the Great and Hannibal who had enlisted trained war elephants in the ranks of their armies. With a bit of imagination, then, they wrote the good beast into their stories of the Christian Crusades. The accompanying illustrations of the "elephant and castle" showed a creature--always with a trunk, to be sure--but displaying any number of other fanciful, non-elephantine characteristics. The image of the elephant faithfully carrying his castle has exhibited remarkable staying power, and even today—even in Chicago—he can still be seen on the sign above the entrance to an Elephant and Castle pub.

It is noteworthy that throughout elephant lore the admirable animal is almost without exception pictured as virtuous--even if not always in the strictest sense, victorious. In a traditional trickster tale from Africa, rather than the wicked dragon it is the wily hare with whom the elephant must contend. Yet despite the fact that in the end the hare gets the best of everyone, it is a mark of the elephant's goodness that all the members of the animal community, from the bushbuck to the leopard, count him as their friend and come to his aid in his struggle against the hare.

Even in contemporary American urban folklore the elephant is presented as a "good guy." A legend continues

to be passed by word of mouth, and occasionally it actually surfaces as a newspaper report, about a circus that came to town. As the story one of the circus elephants wandered away and while strolling the city streets happened to notice a red VW Beetle that was parked in the vicinity. Taking advantage of the opportunity, the animal sat down on the vehicle for a brief rest. The explanation from the circus which agreed to pay for repairing the crushed car was that its elephant is not a destructive animal, but rather mistook the little red Volkswagen for the red metal stool it customarily used in one of its circus acts.

Myths of elephants' origins and exploits which appeared in the distant past in India have found their way into the traditional lore of cultures throughout Southeast Asia. We hear tell, for example, that once elephants had wings and flew through the sky; they could at that time also change their shapes, just as clouds do. Because of an unfortunate mishap, however, they were one day deprived of these capabilities and henceforth required to walk the earth. Nevertheless they retain a connection to the clouds and are revered as bringers of beneficent rain. The popular Hindu god Ganesha is portrayed with a human body and an elephant's head, specifically an emblem of sagacity, associating him as well with other admirable qualities of the elephant including strength, docility, dexterity, and longevity. The son of Shiva, the Cosmic Creator and Destroyer, Ganesha is venerated as the god of auspiciousness and good fortune and is customarily invoked at the outset of any important undertaking: building a house, taking a journey, or writing a book.

From early times the Asian elephant has been associated with royalty--as testified to by images and tales from India and other southeast Asian countries including Burma, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Thailand. What better way for a ruler to display his grandeur and majesty than to ride upon a regally caparisoned elephant at the head of a grand procession? Elephants' association with royalty is the subject of The Matanga-Lila a book by one Nilakantha, written in Sanskrit somewhere in India at an early but unknown date. Its chapters note in great detail just what it is that constitutes an elephant of royal status, both physically and in terms of character; they also give advice as to how such a superior elephant is to be cared for and handled. In Chapter II, "On Favorable Marks" we read that

> A vehicle for a king is an elephant... whose body is smooth and swarthy, colored dark like a sword, or else ruddy with the sheen of gleaming spots.... With a large, long, round neck, trumpeting with a roar like clouds full of water, with... honey-colored eyes, with a trunk like a tree stem.... Provided with twenty toenails... gifted with strength, spirit, and fortitude....[64]

In Chapter VIII, "On Marks of Character" we are told further that an elephant of royal status is god-like

> one who is pure, whose body is fragrant with odors like honey, milk, sandlewood, or the flowers of the mango; who is fond of peace, and friendly to all elephants; composed, fond of bathing, right minded...[65]

Aside from their fragrance or actual god-likeness, it has recently been observed that elephants possess artistic talent. One outstanding example among elephant painters is Ruby, who lives at the Phoenix Zoo and whose works, signed by Ruby herself, are featured at a local gallery and are highly esteemed by collectors. In addition, the Thai Elephant Orchestra has a first-of-its-kind CD to its credit. The six-member group presents a varied repertoire performed on larger, sturdier versions of those traditional Thai instruments which lend themselves to being played by an elephant's trunk. These include, among others, slit drums, the gong, renats (member of the xylophone family), the thundersheet, and (though non-traditional, very effective) the harmonica. The elephant performers reportedly had a wonderful time producing the music--just as audiences, human or otherwise, have a good time as they listen to the music.

When things go well for elephants, they have an enviable existence indeed: with abundant rainfall and good habitat they eat lush grass and drink fresh water, wallow in mud and give themselves dust baths, rest in the shade of trees or cavort in the sunshine. When they need the assistance of their fellows they are immediately at their side. Unfortunately the earth

is not a paradise and the elephants have many difficulties to cope with. Drought is a perennial problem and if it is of long duration it can seriously reduce an elephant population.

Natural phenomena--weather or predators, for example--are minor troubles, however, compared to the havoc being wreaked on elephant populations by man. In spite of their admirable qualities and regardless of their representation in human works of art, in the world today the creature is victim not only of traditional spearings and poisonings but also of modern automatic weapons and land mines, which are far more lethal. The grim reality is that the elephant is faced with extinction.

Unlike the dinosaurs' disappearance which occurred when an extra-terrestrial body collided with the earth, the elephants' impending doom is wholly attributable to human activity. In Africa the decimation has been brought about primarily through the mass slaughter of elephants carried out for the purpose of ivory acquisition. Though the destruction of these creatures has been going on for centuries, it has been escalating so furiously, that in the 1980s more elephants were killed than in any prior decade. In Asia the cause lies more with habitat destruction: deforestation resulting from the pressures of an ever-expanding population of humans and their ever-increasing economic endeavors. The elephants' plight is dire indeed. The reasons for this are known; so, too, are the steps that must be taken to reverse the momentum of the elephants' decline. The question remains as to whether the human will is sufficient to the challenge.

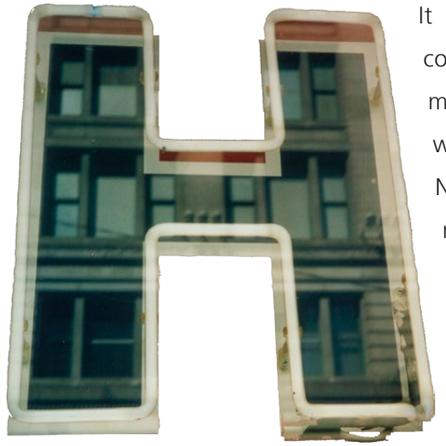
The beautiful pair of African elephants who share the Stanley Field Hall of the Field Museum of Natural History with the Haida totem poles, and since the year 2000, also with Sue, the Tyrannosaurus rex, were themselves victims of Western hunters, or euphemistically, "collectors." Fortunately the practice of killing animals for purposes of display and exhibition was discontinued quite some time ago, and today the Field Museum and other such institutions carry out their research with the aim of protecting wild animals and their habitats. One might hope that as museum visitors gaze at these two huge beasts, whose place of origin was the open savannahs of Kenya, they might ponder the current plight of elephants in their struggle to survive. The museum also houses an Asian elephant, or rather a skeleton of an Asian elephant, which though very impressive, is also disorienting. An elephant in skeletal form shows no evidence of trunk or ears. How unelephant-like.

Now that Tatima, Peaches, and Wankie have left us, there are no elephants living at the Lincoln Park Zoo. This is a great loss. There does remain, however, a particularly lovely, small-scale sculpture of a pair of the creatures—a mother with her calf. By the Chicago sculptor, George Suyeoka, it still stands next to the enclosure formerly occupied by elephants. Across the street from the zoo is a very nice small park whose playground features animals sculpted in metal, one of which is an appealing baby elephant. And not to be missed, is Chicago's own Elephant & Castle Pub, located right in the middle of the Loop. It is our city's contribution to carrying on the tradition of the name and the emblem: both the sign overhead and the excellent etched glass pane in the front door boast likenesses of the pub's namesake—the elephant, faithfully bearing his castle.

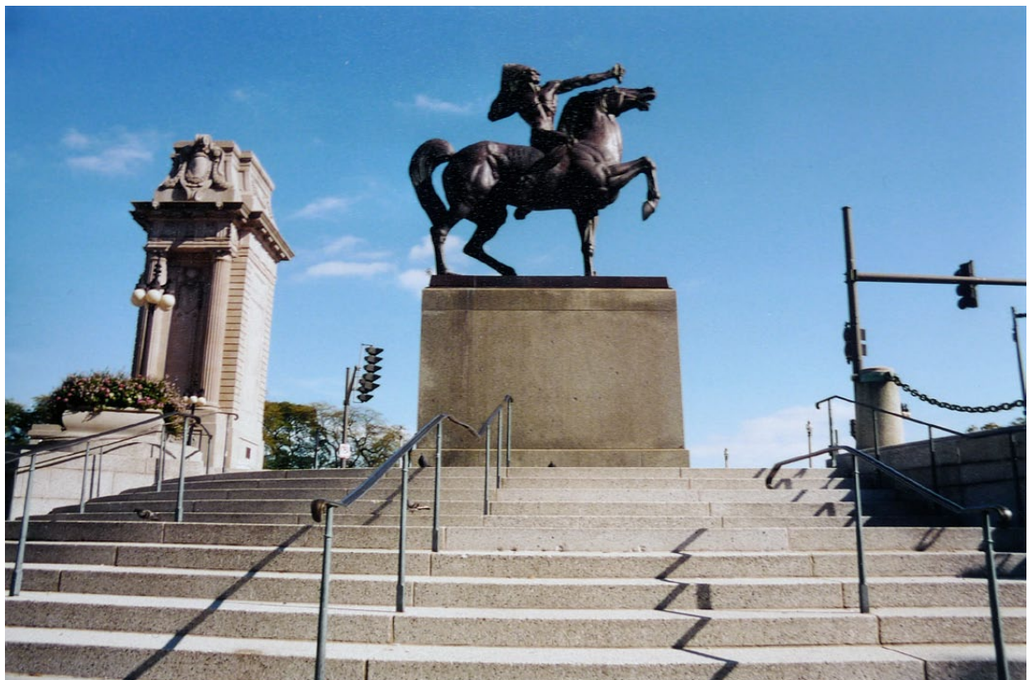
The Horse

I will not change my horse with any that treads but on four pasterns.... When I bestride him, I soar, I am a hawk: he trots the air; the earth sings when he touches it; the basest horn of his hoof is more musical than the pipe of Hermes.

William Shakespeare, Henry V



It has been plausibly suggested that if the Spanish conquistadores--and their horses--had been met by mounted Aztec battalions in 1519, the outcome of the war between the Europeans and the inhabitants of the New World might well have been different. Indeed, many eye-witness accounts including the one by Pedro de Castañeda testify to that effect: "Horses are the most necessary things in the new country, since they frighten the enemy most, and after God, to them belongs the victory." While horses have played an important role in warfare throughout recorded history, in this encounter their position was unique. The Spanish horses accompanying Cortés as he entered a continent at that time horseless, were in fact the descendants of horses who had lived and thrived and evolved in isolation in North America over a period of at least thirty million years. The first of these animals to emigrate to Europe arrived there twenty-five million years ago. Horses continued to dwell on the North American continent in large numbers, and continued to make forays into Europe. Three million years ago they moved for the first time across Beringia into Eurasia. Subsequently, however, within three hundred years after the Clovis people had migrated out of Asia and into North America, they hunted all the remaining horses



to extinction, leaving the continent horseless for the first time in over forty-five million years. Thus the seventeen horses that arrived with Cortés were actually setting foot on the continent of their evolutionary birth.

In the writings of Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the scribe who accompanied Cortés on his Mexican conquest, we find a richly detailed listing of all seventeen horses telling us about the appearances of the individual animals (including a colt born aboard ship), their special skills, their names, and the names of their owners. In Díaz's account we read, too, the legend of El Morzillo, Cortés's own heroic black stallion, famous for his brave and noble deeds of long ago. It is said that El Morzillo is still visible on clear, moonless nights deep in the waters of the Honduran Lake Tayasal where he waits for the return of his master who many centuries earlier had been compelled to abandon his horse when it injured a leg and could not travel overland to the waiting Spanish ships.

Other explorers from Spain brought additional numbers of horses to Mexico, Florida, and the American Southwest, and over the course of the next two centuries the descendants of the newly-arrived animals (actually, in a sense, "returnees") again populated vast expanses of

the continent. Though the Spanish had attempted to maintain sole ownership of these animals by prohibiting the sale of horses to American Indian people, the effort proved altogether futile because many horses entered the market, and great numbers of others escaped, or were stolen or abandoned. An extensive trade network was established among Indian groups living on the Great Plains which facilitated the animals' proliferation across the entire area.

The Spanish horses acquired by the Great Plains tribes can be traced back to the horses brought over from North Africa in the year 711 when the Moors invaded the Spanish peninsula. Called "Barbs," (from Barbary, though many had Arabian blood as well) they were a small, swift, and hardy breed, which stood in contrast to Spanish horses of that time, who were bred for strength and size, to enable them, among other things, to bear the weight of a knight in armor, and the weight of their own equestrian armor as well. The speed and agility of the Moorish horses appealed to the Spaniards as did the style of horsemanship practiced by these newcomers, and both were to have a lasting effect on Spanish horses and riders. Once in Indian possession, these horses became the progenitors of the line which produced the Indian pony. "A small, wild breed, tough and serviceable," according to one European observer, the Indian pony--commonly a pinto--was widely admired for its "almost inexhaustible stamina."

The Great Plains proved an ideal environment for horses and, welcomed by the Indians, the animals quickly transformed the people's way of life. Though some groups clung to their sedentary horticultural practices and others became only seasonally nomadic, for many tribes the desire for horses represented a compelling force that produced a culture, not only centered economically on an equestrian way of life, but a culture in which the horse was respected and revered on a symbolic, spiritual level. Successful horse-raiding and skillful riding were greatly prized, and the possession of beautiful horses was the highest goal. Thus upon the death of an individual, the favorite horse would often be sacrificed to accompany the departed into the next world.

Among the Great Plains tribes to forsake horticulture altogether in order to become fully equestrian nomadic bison hunters and horse-traders and horse-raiders, were the Cheyennes, the Lakota and Dakota Sioux, the Crows, the Arapahos, the Kiowas (including the Kiowa-Apaches), and the Comanches. The latter two were the greatest of the Indian horsemen in the eyes of a number of observers who in their admiring reports never failed to describe

the facility with which the rider could drop to one side of a running horse, not exposing any more than the sole of a moccasin to the enemy, and shoot arrows under the horse's neck.

Before they acquired horses, the Plains Indians had walked the land, hunted on foot, and used dogs to transport their belongings. With the arrival of the horse not only did the lifeways of the people change--the situation for the bison changed too, as did the entire grassland ecology. When they had the area to themselves, bison roamed freely from one abundant pasture to another, instinctively moving on before the grass was over-grazed. In the presence of horses, however, and later cattle and other livestock, this grazing rhythm was interrupted and a competition set in which gradually depleted the previously lush grasslands. Scarcity of pasture was only the first in a long series of developments which led to the near-extinction of the bison. Indian hunters on horseback, able to kill many more animals than Indian hunters on foot, reduced and weakened the herds as they satisfied their own needs. Much more devastating, however, was the Europeans' demand for buffalo robes, which the Indian people procured

for them in exchange for firearms, ammunition, metal utensils, and other items of European manufacture, vastly increasing the numbers of animals killed. Ultimately the Europeans took matters directly into their own hands, and as the railroad pushed into the Great Plains area, they undertook a systematic project of extermination. Within a period of a very few years they had annihilated the bison herds, and therewith they put an end to the Great Plains Indian horse culture.

Though in many ways this culture has been destroyed, crowded out by an expansionist, triumphalist invading culture, nonetheless something of its sensibilities and values remains. Stories which have survived about the gods, the people, and the animals retain their power, and enable the listener to envision, even if darkly and at a distance, that world as it once existed. The traditional tales and rituals of the Native Americans expressed a profound sense of a spirit life dwelling in all of nature: in the wind and the rain, the rocks and the rivers, in grass, flowers, and insects, in buffalo and horses. Indian people used animals' names for their own names: Crazy Horse, Conquering Bear, Little Raven, Eagle Heart, or the names of other natural phenomena: Gray Thunder, Rising Sun. They also blurred the line between human and non-human animals by creating such combinations as Buffalo Bird Woman or Old Man Coyote. Indeed, their tales frequently feature instances of an animal husband or wife for a human partner or of a tribe's welcome acceptance of the assistance of animal helpers.

In the creation stories shared by many of the Plains Indian peoples there is a recognition of dependence upon animal life and animal power. The stories often portray the creation of the earth as a joint undertaking by the sky powers and the water powers, who are aided by a group of animals--ducks or other water birds, and turtles, frogs, or lizards. These creatures dive down underwater and bring up primal mud, from which the Creator Sun is able to fashion the earth. The stories the Plains Indians tell of everyday life incorporate animal characters in the same way as do their stories of origin, the settings and the particular animals often directly reflecting the realities of the plains environment. The coyote, as a favorite trickster figure, is among the most popular, but buffalo, bears, rabbits, ravens, turkeys, dogs, and even porcupines all put in appearances. As does the horse.

The Navahos told a story of the Sun-God, Johano-ai, and his horses, a story which speaks as well of the people and their horses. Each morning the God leaves his home in the east and travels across the skies to his home in the west.

> He carries with him his shining gold disk, the sun. He has five horses--a horse of turquoise, one of white shell, one of pearly shell, one of red shell, and one of coal.
>
> When the skies are blue and the weather is fair, the Sun-God rides his horse of turquoise, or the one of white shell, or the one of pearly shell. But when the heavens are dark with storm, he mounts the red horse or the horse of coal....
>
> When any horse of the Sun-God trots or runs, he raises not dust, but pitistchi. It is glittering grains of mineral, such as are used in religious ceremonies. When a horse rolls and shakes himself, shining grains of sand fly from him. When he runs, not dust, but the sacred pollen offered to the Sun-God is all about him....
>
> A Navaho man sings about the horses of the Sun-God in order that he, too, may have beautiful horses. Standing among his herd, he scatters holy pollen and sings the song for the blessing and the protection of his animals.

A story told by the Sioux Indians about the death of Sitting Bull, the holy man and leader of their nation, does not fail to include an account of his horse's response to the bloody events. Just prior to the massacre of Wounded Knee in December 1890, an attempt to arrest Sitting Bull as he slept in his cabin on the Standing Rock Reservation met with resistance on the part of his friends. In the commotion which ensued they exchanged fire with the police, and Sitting Bull's horse, a trained circus horse which had been a gift to him from his friend Buffalo Bill Cody, hearing the shooting thought it was back in the circus during the Wild West Show.

> It began dancing and prancing, sitting on its haunches and raising up its front legs, jumping around, bowing, curtsying, doing all the tricks it had been taught. In this way it honored its dead master in the only way it knew. All who saw it said that the horse was possessed, wakan, in the spirit way, because it was unhurt even though it had danced through a hail of bullets. The white horse kept dancing for a while after the fight was over and the bloody scene was silent. Thus Tatanka Iyotake, the great Sitting Bull, and his favorite white horse became part of the legend of our people.

Another group of horses to inspire storytellers were the wild horses of the Great Plains and the West. By the turn of the nineteenth century in addition to the horses which belonged in Indian or European herds, there were some two million wild horses running free. This marked the high point for the wild horse herds, but it was not to last. Fences and railroads encroached upon their space, hunters reduced their numbers, government programs eliminated others, and in a mere twenty-five years their population was diminished by half. Legend has immortalized some of those wild creatures, however, none more gloriously than the "Great White Stallion of the West." This phantom horse, reported to be a descendent of two horses who broke loose

from the Coronado expedition herd, was seen by many though conquered by none. Renown for his extraordinary grace, his supernatural speed and endurance, the steed was marvelous in every respect.

> Gleaming white, almost iridescent, his silky coat shone like silver in the sunlight, dazzling the eyes of the beholder. Noble was his delicately formed head, regal and full of fire his sparkling eyes. His beauty defied description.

This horse who fired the imaginations of untold numbers of seekers, lives on in the realm of legend as the Ghost Horse of the Plains, the Snow White Pacer, the Stallion of Solitudes, the Deathless White Mustang, and the Milk-White Steed of the Prairies.

Standing magnificently silhouetted against the sky are two of Chicago's finest horses, who bear on their backs a pair of Indian riders, The Spearman and The Bowman. These figures, both the human and the equine, forge a link between ourselves and a particular past, representing as they do, populations from earlier times when the Illinois tallgrass prairie had not yet been plowed under and planted with corn, and the land as it stretched westward from Chicago was whole--before fences and before railroads. The statues with their great energy and power create a frame for Buckingham Fountain, located immediately to the east where its tall, white spray of water is backed only by the sky above Lake Michigan. It is a grand setting--and when the horses were temporarily removed for cleaning and restoration, their absence created a vast emptiness in the streetscape. Fortunately they were returned to their familiar pedestals in splendid form--and in time to welcome in the new millennium. Our horses were designed in 1926 by Ivan Mestrovic, a Yugoslavian artist who was living in Chicago at the time; they were cast in bronze in Yugoslavia the following year. Though many Lakefront strollers no doubt see the horses only by daylight, to return to view the pair illuminated at night is also rewarding. Then, with the play of light and dark, another version of their equine beauty presents itself. A few miles up the Lakefront stands another bronze equestrian statue, a dignified Sioux chief astride his alert Indian pony. The spirit of this sculpture is somber, since in enacting its title, "A Signal of Peace," it invites the viewer to regard it against the historical record of a long series of broken peace treaties.

Rabbits and Hares

The hares addressed a public meeting and claimed that all should have equal shares, lions and hares alike. The lions retorted, "A good speech, Hairy-Feet, but it lacks claws and teeth such as we have."

Aesop

In those days the creatures were obliged to look out for themselves, most especially those that didn't have horns or hooves. Br'er Rabbit now, didn't have any horns or hooves so he had to be his own lawyer.

Uncle Remus

The rabbit, being equipped with neither armor nor weapons, seems to have survived throughout the ages on the strength of its wits alone. Notwithstanding the derogatory "Dumb Bunny" label in common usage in English, or an occasional tale in which the animal finds itself outwitted by an even more nimble thinker (as in Tolstoy's "The Hedgehog and the Hare" for example), the overwhelming evidence, based on lore both time-honored and far-flung, is that rabbits are clever creatures indeed. If we restrict ourselves to America, historically and geographically, the leading role among rabbits, both literary and folkloric as well as those from popular culture, belongs to Brer Rabbit, whose quick wits are matched by his equally agile tongue. This rabbit stars in the tales told by African Americans from earliest slave times.

As has been pointed out by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps in the introduction to a classic collection of African-American folklore,

> While the masters of slaves went to some length to get rid of tribal languages and some tribal customs, like certain practices of sorcery, they accepted the animal stories as a harmless way to ease the time or entertain the master's children. That the folk tales of these Negro slaves were actually projections of personal experiences and hopes and defeats in terms of symbols appears to have gone unnoticed....
>
> The American Negro slave, adopting Brer Rabbit as hero, represented him as the most frightened and helpless of creatures.... But the slaves took pains to give Brer Rabbit other significant qualities. He became in their stories by turn a practical joker, a braggart, a wit, a glutton, a lady's man, and a trickster. But his essential characteristic was his ability to get the better of bigger and stronger animals. To the slave in his condition the theme of weakness overcoming strength through cunning proved endlessly fascinating.

Among those bigger and stronger animals in Brer Rabbit's extended community, is Brer Bear, who, like the Rabbit is a farmer. As luck would have it, Brer Bear has acres and acres of good bottom land, but Brer Rabbit has only a small sandy-land farm. Brer Rabbit is thus compelled to rent an additional bit of land from Brer Bear. A stiff bargaining session ensues but finally an agreement is reached. "So," says Brer Bear, "I takes der top of de crop fer my sheer, en yer takes de rest fer yer sheer." Convinced that he has put one over on Brer Rabbit, Brer Bear confidently awaits the sharing of the crop when harvest time comes. Alas, he is to discover that Brer Rabbit has planted potatoes, resulting in nothing but vines for him whose share is the top of the crop. According to the terms, Brer Rabbit digs his potatoes and carries them home to his family. When Brer Rabbit asks for a rental deal for the following year, Brer Bear chooses the bottom of the crop as his share, but he loses again when Brer Rabbit plants oats. The third year, having learned the hard way, Brer Bear strikes a tough bargain.

> "dis time I'se gwine ter hab der tops fer my sheer, en I'se gwine ter hab de bottoms fer my sheer too. "You, Brer Rabbit, he continues, "would git de middles."
>
> Brer Rabbit he worry en he fret, he plead en he argy, but hit do no good.
> Brer Bear sez, "Take hit er leave hit."

No wonder the listeners cheer for Brer Rabbit when the storyteller relates to them a discovery Brer Bear makes later in the season, "he cuss and he say, 'Dat derned little scoundrel! He done went en planted dat fiel' in corn.'"

The lively and spirited Brer Rabbit is of course not satisfied with a single victory over Brer Bear, who though he is much bigger and stronger, is admittedly not too smart. Brer Rabbit cannot rest until he has managed any number of outwittings of others of his fellows. Sometimes his victims are hapless creatures seemingly randomly chosen: poor Brer Terrapin ends up trapped at the bottom of a well after he allows himself to be lured by the rabbit into the bucket hanging by its chain; a whole clan of affable frogs is coaxed into digging a big sand pit only to serve as dinner for Brer Rabbit's friend, Brer Coon. Usually, however, Brer Rabbit has a particular reason for selecting those whom he plans to outwit. This is especially true of Brer Fox, who has a certain reputation for cleverness himself and thus presents a special challenge. Once, for example, Brer Rabbit persuaded Brer Fox to participate in a scheme which enabled the hungry rabbit to steal Brer Bear's freshly caught fish, while in the end the blame for the crime falls upon the unfortunate Brer Fox, who sadly loses a perfectly good pair of shoes in the process--and forfeits his reward of fish.

Only occasionally does Brer Rabbit get himself into trouble. Once he steals Brer Wolf's magic hoe--a hoe which does all the garden work by itself, but Brer Rabbit is unable to control the magic, and the hoe uproots his whole garden. Still, Brer Rabbit is not one to take chances when the risk is too great. He learned this lesson from the example of Ole Sis Goose. One day when she was minding her own business and enjoying a swim on the lake, a fox who had been lying in wait in the reeds reached out and grabbed her by the neck. "Hold on there, Brer Fox," she cried. "I have as much right to this lake as you do! We're going to take this matter to court and see if you have the right to break my neck and pick my bones." And so they went to court. When they got there,

> the sheriff, he was a fox, and the judge, he was a fox, and the attorneys, they were fox, and all the jurymen, they were foxes too. "Now, my children, listen to me: when all the folks in the courthouse are foxes, and you are just a common goose [or a rabbit] there ain't going to be much justice for the likes of you."

Yet even in the face of packed courts and a lack of horns and hooves, the Rabbit has been able to thrive. His secret weapon is none other than his tongue, which he has learned to use with infinite adroitness. Rabbit's only rival in the art of talk--or is he perhaps a model?--is the Signifying Monkey. This clever creature is both a practitioner of the art of Signifyin(g) and the embodiment of its spirit, and as such a key figure in the African-American oral tradition. Signifyin(g) is a way of talking that relies on implication and indirectness, sometimes termed "double-voicedness." Thus the underlying meaning of an utterance can be obscured by its surface. Constructing such sentences with their multi-leveled meanings requires a great deal of skill on the part of the speaker; it also takes skill to unravel the puzzle as it is presented with

all its many implications. If a hearer fails to "get it," it can cost him dearly. This is often the case when the scheming Monkey or the crafty Rabbit are practicing their linguistic arts on their unwitting neighbors. Tradition has it, for example, that the Monkey got to talking with the Lion one day and by means of the slyest of implications (not to mention exaggerations and lies) he brought about a fight between the Lion and the Elephant. This in effect toppled the King of Beasts from his throne--not because of the damage inflicted by the Elephant, though that was not insignificant, but because the Lion gullibly took the Monkey's Signifyin(g) at face value and failed to grasp its implications.

An example of Rabbit's Signifyin(g) can be noted in the following short tale which is of recent vintage and thus without the "Brer" in use as a title. But whether he makes his appearance without a title, or instead adopts the up-to-date "Mr.," we have no trouble recognizing Rabbit and his linguistic tricks. Indeed, he is able in one final sentence of exemplary indirectness and implication to Signify on all three of the other characters.

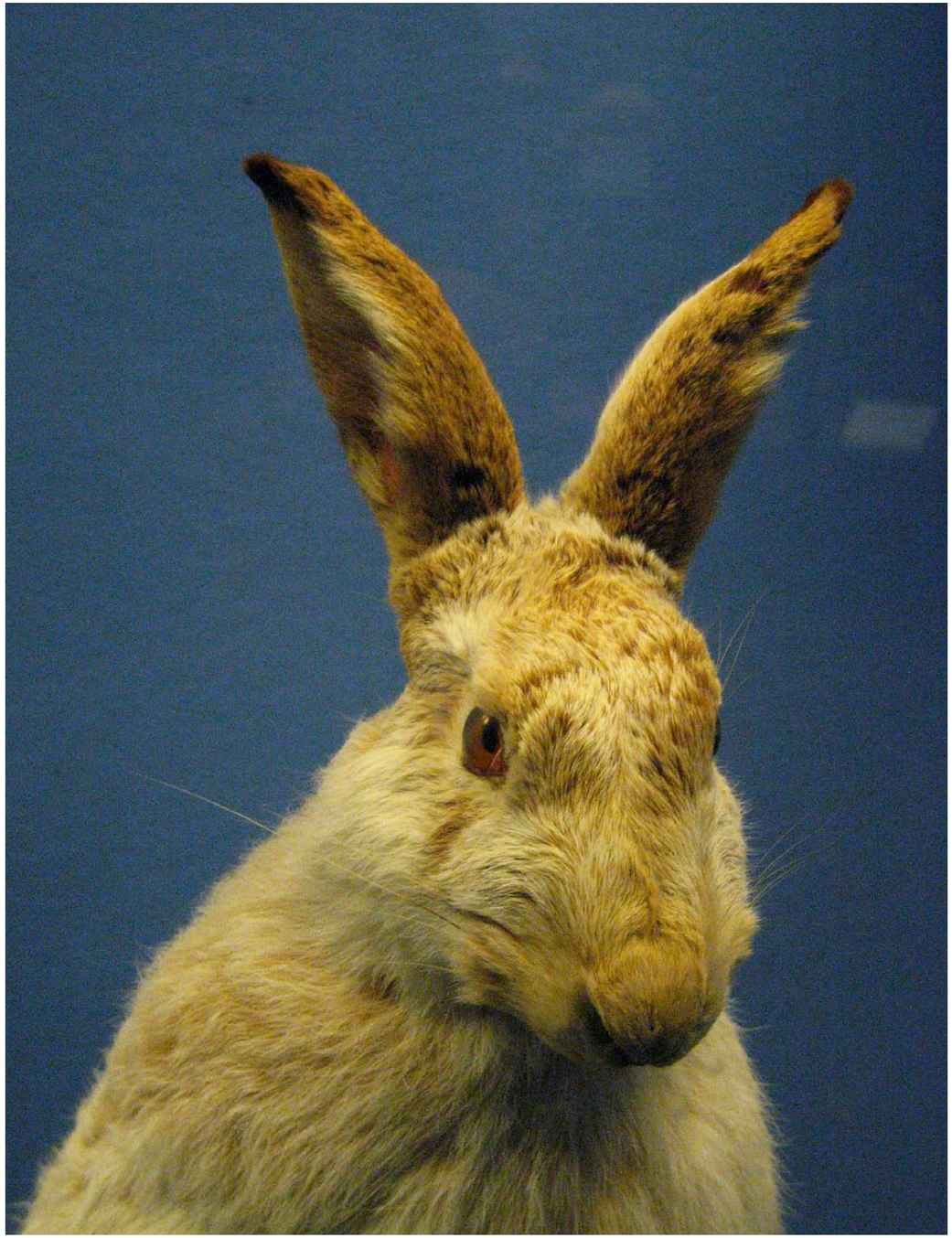
Mr. Rabbit Is Back

> This is the story of a Turtle, a Buzzard, and a Rabbit. They were buddies, and they went on a walking spree one day, and came across a tract of land--about six thousand acres that they could purchase for two hundred dollars--which they did. But the land was very barren and wouldn't grow anything. It had to be fertilized in order to make anything grow on it, so they started talking about where they were going to get this fertilizer and how they were going to get it. And the Turtle said, well, he couldn't go get it because he was so slow that it would take him years to go get it and come back. The Buzzard said he couldn't go because the fertilizer would ruin his beautiful feathers, so that didn't leave anybody but the Rabbit. He, being the fastest one in the group, he was chosen to go and get the fertilizer.
>
> He did--and when he returned he didn't recognize the land, because the Turtle and the Buzzard had discovered oil on the place and had become very wealthy, had built a lovely mansion and everything. The Rabbit went to the front door and rang the bell. The butler came and he asked for the Turtle.
> The butler said, "Who?"
> He said, "The Turtle, where is the Turtle?"
> He said, "You mean, Mr. Tur-tell? Mr. Tur-tell is out by the well."
> He said, "Well, where is the Buzzard?"
> He said, "Mr. Buz-zard? Mr. Buz-zard is out in the yard."
> The Rabbit said, "Well, you tell Mr. Tur-tell who's out by the well, and Mr. Buz-zard, who's out in the yard, that Mr. Rab-bit is back with the shit!"

Another rabbit of infinite wit is Bugs Bunny who, during the 1940s and 1950s, was wildly popular with moviegoers, adults as well as children. Orson Welles comments on this as

narrator of the compilation film, Bugs Bunny Superstar (1965). "Bugs was a special character to the people back then," he says, "a symbol of great strength. Unarmed except for his wit but always a winner, it didn't matter what the odds were." In fact the Bunny is not victorious in every single episode, but his high spirits and quick-wittedness, his snappy comebacks and bag of tricks certainly make him seem like a winner. And they certainly account for his ability to survive.

One trait in particular which works to the Rabbit's advantage is his unwillingness "to go out and bedevil anyone for mischief's sake alone." As Chuck Jones, a primary Bugs Bunny animator emphasizes, "Bugs must always be provoked." Thus we observe that in the Looney Tunes-Merrie Melodies world, not being an aggressor pays off. It is because Bugs innocently minds his own business and only becomes involved in risky contests when provoked by some



outside force, that he prevails. In Acrobatty Bunny Bugs is down in his rabbit hole, asleep in his bed when a circus comes to town. Overhead tent stakes are pounded in the ground, circus wagons roll, a herd of elephants lumbers by, and finally the lion cage is positioned directly over the rabbit-hole's entrance and the lion sniffs and roars down the hole. "That does it," the Rabbit finally says as he makes his exit. "I'll teach that wise guy up there a lesson he'll never forget." The pattern is fixed; the particulars change. In Racketeer Rabbit Bugs stops at a deserted house to spend the night. No sooner has he put on his nightcap and settled down, than two gangs of criminals descend on the place and a fierce shootout erupts. Before long one gang manages to rub out the other--at which point they turn on the Rabbit and take him captive. A Hare Grows in Manhattan introduces the Bunny cheerfully tapdancing his way down the sidewalk when he is set upon by a pack of vicious canines. His usual "What's up Doc?" is altered to fit the situation: "What's up Dogs?" he asks, but they are not interested in conversation. In the face of such adversity it is, of course, only right for Bugs Bunny to respond with his most daring and imaginative survival tricks. If at the cartoon's end his opponents happen to be lying battered on the ground, or are in tow on their way to the police station, at least a justice of sorts has been done; for the moment the world is in order again.

The ultimate defensive tactic of this wily creature, however, is his phenomenal ability to impersonate. This skill has deep roots in traditional folklore, where the "shape-changer" is always a powerful and admired character. In Hair-Raising Hare Bugs Bunny's talents as an impersonator are the only thing standing between him and certain death, i.e. his being eaten by a monster. No wonder he gives a tour de force performance. His famous routine as manicurist-to-a-monster ("'My, I'll bet mahnsters lead innteresting lives.' I said to my girlfriend just the other day, 'Gee, I'll bet mahnsters are innteresting,' I said...") is augmented with his act as a stand-in for a lamp, his passing himself off as an ancestral portrait, becoming a soft-shoe dance artist, enacting a jousting knight, and pretending to be a tourist packing up his golf clubs and suitcase. Finally, the Rabbit speaks directly to the audience, thereby acknowledging his own awareness that he is acting a role (as Bugs Bunny); he then declares himself a Hero (and proceeds to enact a hero making his exit from the monster's dwelling).

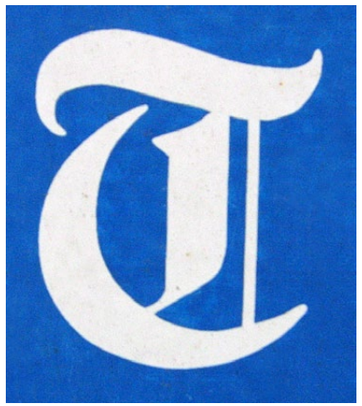
Bugs also has the temerity to impersonate Wagner's Brunhilde on two occasions: initially, briefly, in Herr Meets Hare (1945) and later, outrageously, as female lead in What's Opera Doc? (1957). He also makes a memorable appearance as a classical pianist in Rhapsody Rabbit where he performs Liszt's "Second Hungarian Rhapsody" (with the occasional help and hindrance of a

mouse). These musical offerings extend the Rabbit's repertoire as impersonator beyond that of survival techniques, giving a performance that shows a kind of genius that is at the same time a parody of that genius.

The two Rabbits posed in front of the John Hancock Building possess a Brer-Rabbit or Bugs-Bunny-like vitality as they sport and march on their respective pedestals. Named The Cricketer and The Drummer (creations of sculptor Barry Flanagan) they, like all rabbits, are without horns and hooves. Yet somehow their spunk and dynamic display of energy enable them to hold their own against the grand, landmark John Hancock as backdrop while they turn its spacious plaza into their playing field and parade ground. (To see these rabbits, look closely at the picture here--or scan your own memory—but do not go to the Hancock Plaza. The rabbits, alas, have exited that scene.) As for rabbits that one can visit—the Field Museum has an extensive collection of rabbits from far and near, the star of the group being the white-tailed Jackrabbit, an animal that once inhabited parts of southern Wisconsin, though apparently not Illinois. This fine fellow is joined in his display case by other kinds of Jackrabbits, cottontails, and one appealing little pygmy rabbit.

The Thunderbird

> The totem poles told of the mythological beginnings of the great families, at a time before time, when animals and mythic beasts and men lived as equals, and all that was to be was established by the play of raven and eagle, bear and wolf, frog and beaver,thunderbird and whale.
>
> William Reid, Out of the Silence



The cedar tree was a gift of the gods, and the people blessed by this tree were the Northwest Coast Indians: the Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida, the Bella Bella and Bella Coola, the Kwakiutl, Nootka, Makah, and Coast Salish. The cedar is beautiful in itself, "with a magnificent flared base tapering suddenly to a tall, straight trunk wrapped in reddish brown bark, like a great coat of gentle fur, with gracefully sweeping boughs, and soft feathery fronds of gray green needles." The wood was soft enough so that the huge trees could be felled using wooden wedges and stone axes, and could be carved--intricately and precisely--into totem poles, as well as canoes, house posts, masks, blanket boxes, and many other objects. A further characteristic of cedar wood which suited it particularly well for totem poles is that it is permeated with natural oils making it one of the longest lasting of all woods--even in the rainy Pacific Northwest.

The work of creating a totem pole began with finding the right tree, one approved by the chief for whom it was to be carved. It was most opportune if it were located near the beach so that after it was felled, trimmed, and peeled (and often partially hollowed), it could be skidded down to the water and towed to the village where it would later stand. There it was shaped with an adze which gave its surface an appearance similar to that seen on hand-hammered precious metals. Next, the chief specified which animals should be represented on the totem pole: perhaps a wolf, a raven, a sealion, and a thunderbird--each pole was different. Ancestral crests as well as figures from nature and myth were chosen, since for these people who had no written language, it was the totem poles that expressed their history and their stories from generation to generation.

While the style of carving varied to some extent from tribe to tribe as well as from artist to artist, the Northwest Coast totem poles were carved according to a highly-developed system for the organization of form and space, lending them an appearance--powerful and altogether unique--such that they could not be mistaken for anything other than what they were. Among the traditionally accepted design characteristics, of primary importance was the continuous formline pattern delineating the main shapes. Blank spaces were rigorously avoided, and animal motifs were imaginatively shaped to fill them. Naturally occurring materials were used to produce black, red, and blue-green paints which became the accepted colors for decorating totem poles. Conventionalized forms of eyes, ears, claws, feathers, and fins marked the artworks in striking and distinctive ways. The animal forms on the poles were sometimes rendered realistically: the beaver's tail was virtually always finished with representative cross-hatching or scaling and his two upper incisors were prominent and identifiable. In other cases the images were highly stylized: paws were given eyes, fins were made to resemble ears, heads were doubled--all in the name of fitting the animal to the wooden surface it occupied. The dynamic tension between realistic and stylized elements, the strength of the bold formlines, and the harmony between the cedar pole's shape and texture, and its carved animal features, resulted in one of the most awe-inspiring of artistic creations.

Perhaps the totem pole's earliest form was that of the house post, a functional structure located in the house interior supporting the roof beams. These posts, like the later, more elaborate totem poles, displayed carved and painted crests as well as figures from local legend. Eventually house posts appeared on the exteriors of the houses as well, at the corners or framing the entryway. An early form of the free-standing totem pole was the mortuary pole which was topped by a totem animal associated with the individual whose ashes were held in a crypt carved at the back of the pole. Memorial poles were erected in honor of persons both dead and living, normally by or for a chief. The heraldic or family pole seems to have originated with the Haidas who lived on the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Guaii) and from there it spread to the

other pole-carving Nations. With these heraldic poles the art form achieved its most glorious manifestation. Master craftsmen created tall and stately monuments, displaying a rich array of animals from the natural and supernatural worlds: there were ravens and grizzly bears, frogs and mosquitoes; there was Wasgo (part wolf, part killerwhale) and there was Thunderbird. All beautifully carved and handsomely painted, they stood along the shore in front of the village houses, facing the vast open sea and backed by the deep, mist-shrouded forest.

Among the great company of animals to appear on the poles, the Northwest Coast tribes often granted pride of place to the mighty thunderbird, one of the most powerful of all spirits, who stood grandly at the apex of the totem pole with his great multifeathered wings outspread. This mythic creature lives alone in the snowy mountain peaks and he clothes himself in robes of clouds. His mighty voice is the thunderclap; the beating of his powerful wings, the wind storm. He darkens the sky with the shadow of his great body and when he flashes his eyes, lightening streaks across the heavens.

Thunderbird's mortal enemy is the killerwhale and the two animals have fought many battles. Sometimes in these fierce struggles they have uprooted stands of trees, thereby creating forest clearings and open meadows. Once upon a time when the people were suffering from a cruel famine, Thunderbird caught a killerwhale in his powerful talons, carried it through the sky, and gave it to the hungry people. At another time long ago, Thunderbird actually removed his feathered cloak and, in the guise of a man, began building a house of beautifully hewn cedar timbers and planks. When his house was finished he made its furnishings: carved and decorated cedar boxes, chests, bowls, and dishes, as well as baskets and mats woven of cedar bark. Next he caught a great many salmon and smoked and stored his catch; he picked ripe berries and dried them, harvested seaweed and pressed it into cakes. All this he did to teach people how to live and thrive on this earth, since at that time they were dwelling miserably in caves with hardly anything to eat. Upon first seeing all of Thunderbird's wonderful furnishings and food, the people tried to steal them and carry them off. But Thunderbird created a mighty storm, flashing lightening from his eyes and turning the sky pitch-black. The people were so frightened they dropped their stolen goods and suddenly recognized that it was the revered and mythic being, Thunderbird himself, who was in their midst. It was then that they understood the lessons he had come to teach them.

Usually Thunderbird is a force for the good, as in the above stories, but there is another type of tale--versions of which are shared by several Northwest Coast tribes--where we find

him in the role of culprit: once he kidnapped a child, and on another occasion he abducted a neighbor's wife. In response to these deeds, the other creatures joined together and agreed to take revenge on Thunderbird. Working collectively they built a whale of wood and smeared it liberally with pitch. They then launched the result of their handiwork upon the ocean waters. When Thunderbird flew over, he was deceived into thinking that he saw a real whale, whereupon he swooped down to clutch it in his claws. Alas he was held fast by the pitch, drifted out to the high seas, and eventually sank from sight into the watery depths.

These stories belong to the great treasury of myths and legends which, over the centuries, the Northwest Coast native peoples have expressed orally through tale-tellings and visually through totem pole carving. Elements of these two expressive art forms are brought together in traditional ceremonies which play a vital part in the cultural life of the people. The annual winter ceremony, for example, features song and dance by performers whose masks, like the totem poles, are carved likenesses of crest animals and creatures from the natural and supernatural worlds. Robed or costumed and using carved rattles as well as masks, the

dancers, often illuminated by firelight, move to percussive and chanted rhythms, as the tales are retold and re-enacted. Accounting deeds of ancestral and mythic beings--inhabitants of the sky world, the mortal world, the undersea world, and the spirit world--these stories tell the people of the earth's beginnings and of their own beginnings and history. They speak of the people's closeness to the mythic world and to nature. These are the same stories spoken by the totem poles as they silently stand, sentinel-like, preserving in their imagery the wisdom and magic of the culture that created them.

Chicago's Thunderbird, with his handsome tufts of curled head-feathers, piercing eyes, and powerful beak, perches atop a forty-foot totem pole in Lincoln Park with his splendid wings outspread. Backed by a small grove of deciduous trees, he gazes out onto the flow of traffic on North Lake Shore Drive. He has occupied this location since 1929, though the pole's date of origin is thought to be turn-of-the-century. It is the work of Kwakiutl Indians living in Alert Bay on Vancouver Island and is, of course, carved from a cedar tree. Besides Thunderbird, the pole features a whale clutched by the tail in the great bird's claws, and at the base a large sea monster, sculpin-like in appearance with its round eyes and toothy grin. There are two human figures as well: a man rides on the whale's back while a small face peeps from its blowhole.

Because the rigors of Chicago's weather continue to inflict damage on the totem pole, it has required extensive maintenance over the decades. Finally in 1985 it became necessary to replace the pole altogether. Tony Hunt, a Kwakiutl master carver was commissioned to create a new pole--an exact replica of the original--and it is this pole which now stands at the Lincoln Park site. Thus its presence and that of its animal figures--like those standing along the shoreline of the Northwest Coast--still remind viewers of a world once filled with animal spirits and mythical beings.

The Field Museum is also home to a number of fine totem poles including poles with the thunderbird's likeness. Foremost among these is the glorious Haida pole standing in Stanley Field Hall. The huge thunderbird, with wings folded, shares the pole with a powerful raven and a supernatural sea grizzly. At the top of this pole three watcher-figures are positioned--originally so as to keep a guardian eye out over their town (Xaina on the Queen Charlotte Islands where the pole was acquired in 1902). At the bottom of the pole is the opening which once served as the doorway to a village house.

Thunderbirds in other guises in the Field Museum's collection include a Kwakiutl headdress carved from cedar, painted, and decorated with cedar bark and featuring Thunderbird's characteristic ear-like plumes and hooked beak, as well as an unusual Nootka ceremonial cape with Thunderbird painted in red and black clutching in his talons the killerwhale, ever his enemy.