



# Wild and Dangerous Performances: Animals, Emotions, Circus

*Peta Tait*

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## **Wild and Dangerous Performances: Animals, Emotions, Circus** Peta Tait

Elephants, lions, tigers and leopards evoked fascination and awe, fear and excitement in the twentieth-century circus. *Wild and Dangerous Performances: Animals, Emotions, Circus* explores what happened when big cats roared on cue and elephants danced together. Acts in live circus and cinema reveal how humans anthropomorphize animals with their emotions. Trained animals became caught up in scientific precepts from Darwin on emotions and in opposition to animal performance.

This history considers acts by Carl Hagenbeck, Frank Bostock, Alfred Court, Clyde Beatty, Mabel Stark, Patricia Bourne, Damoo Dhotre, Gunther Gebel-Williams and others in leading international circuses. Their acts featured: Nero, the horse riding lion, Rajah, the wrestling tiger, Sonia, the waltzing leopard, and Champion, lying like a fur collar across the trainer's shoulders. Descriptions of animal performers were vivid and moving, but completely contradictory. Animals embody a phenomenology of transacted emotions and feelings in culture, recently exemplified by Christian, the lion. Contributing to the growing scholarship in animal studies, this fascinating study has much to offer to anyone interested in circus animal performance, performance history, animal emotions and animal rights and ethics.



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