



Reading Zoos: Representations of Animals and Captivity

Randy Malamud

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A caged animal in the heart of the city, thousands of miles from its natural habitat, neurotically pacing in its confinement . . .

Zoos offer a convenient way to indulge a cultural appetite for novelty and diversion, and to teach us, albeit superficially, about animals. Yet what, conversely, do they tell us about the people who create, maintain, and patronize them, and about animal captivity in general?

Rather than foster an appreciation for the lives and attributes of animals, zoos, in Randy Malamud's view, reinforce the idea that we are, by nature, an imperial species: that our power and ingenuity entitles us to violate the natural order by tearing animals from the fabric of their ecosystems and displaying them in an "order" of our own making. In so doing, he argues, zoos not only contribute to the rapid disintegration of our ecosystems, but also deaden our very sensibilities to constraint, spatial disruption, and physical pain.

Invoking an array of literary depictions of animals, from Albee's *Zoo Story* and Virginia Woolf's diaries to the films of Harold Pinter and the poetry of Marianne Moore, **Reading Zoos** links culture, literature, and nature in an engaging and accessible introduction to environmental ethics, animal rights, cultural critique, and literary representation.

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