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**Language, Science, Society, and the Line between Human and Animal in Swift's
Gulliver's Travels and Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau***
A Thesis Presented

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis examines line between human and non-human animals in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Both *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* examine this separation through the prism of language, societal views of animality, and biology. Looking back at the history surrounding the idea that man is separate from, and superior to, animals, one finds that it can be traced back in western tradition to the Bible, and is so ingrained in our language that it is difficult for narrators such as Lemuel Gulliver and Edward Prendick to recount their experiences when they see this separation fall apart. This concept is traced through time, and the events and attitudes surrounding the authorship of these books are examined in order to determine possible influences in penning these tales. The language of narration is dissected, and the use of language between characters in these stories is explored to demonstrate that ultimately, in *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, human speech, outward appearance, and ancient beliefs are

superficial, inconsequential differences between humans and animals. In these tales, our inner workings and biology paint a picture of unity between man and other animals.

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The main conclusion arrived at in this work, namely that man is descended from some lowly organised form, will, I regret to think, be highly distasteful to many.

-Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*

Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* shook up the understanding of where humans fit into the natural order of the world after being published in 1859. For centuries humans had believed they occupied a special stratum in the scheme of the world, apart from, and superior to, other life on Earth. Of the things on Earth that lived, and possessed the ability of locomotion, there were humans, and then there were animals; this was a clear, hard dichotomy that can be seen represented in ancient texts such as The Bible, and still has its defenders today. In the years subsequent to the publishing of Darwin's work, people struggled, and still do, to come to terms with the implications that arose from it: that people are animals as well, and have evolved from other life forms rather than snapping into existence as supposedly superior beings. So long had this latter belief been held, that the perceived separation between man and animal has been ingrained in the English language, and therefore presents an even greater difficulty to the acceptance of man being just like other animals than belief alone would supply. In H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, published in 1896, Wells probes the line between animal and human that Darwin had rendered permeable a mere 37 years earlier. However, Wells was not the first author to call the human/animal dichotomy into question. In 1726, some 133 years before Darwin's work, Jonathan Swift's fictional travel narrative, *Gulliver's Travels*, appears to question the same

distinction between animal and human. In fact, both *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* examine this separation through the prism of language, societal views of animality, and biology, and show that ultimately human speech, outward appearance, and ancient beliefs are superficial, inconsequential differences between humans and animals. Our inner workings and biology paint a picture of unity between man and other animals.

A Long Standing Separation

In order to fully examine the split that language has created between humans and other animals, it is important to understand how long this concept has existed in the human consciousness. Tracing the words 'human' and 'animal' back, one finds that the roots of this concept in English stretch back almost a thousand years to 1119 (OED); as indicated by the Oxford English Dictionary, the etymology of the word 'human' comes from the Anglo-Norman *humeigne* which is defined as "of or belonging to people (as opposed either to animals or to God)" (OED). Likewise, the etymology of 'animal' indicates the word comes from the Anglo-Norman *animal* which means "living creature, beast (excluding man)" and still carries, to this day as its second listed definition "In ordinary or non-technical use: any such living organism other than a human being" (OED). However, upon farther investigation, one will discover that the history of this separation stretches much further back. According to new findings by Karel van der Toorn, the Hebrew Bible, and specifically *Genesis* was written sometime between 500

and 200 b.c.e. She explains that the date of *Genesis* “can be circumscribed more narrowly as that of the scribal workshop of the Second Temple, active in the period between 500 and 200 b.c.e. The propagation of the books that were to constitute the Bible originates with the same institution” (van der Toorn 2). In the book of *Genesis*, one can get a glimpse of what is perhaps one of the most influential, if not also the earliest, instance in western tradition of a demonstration of the belief that man is separate from the animals. In the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, God establishes a hierarchy of living creatures saying, “Let us make man to our image and likeness: and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts, and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth. And God created man to his own image” (Gen.1.26-27). The claim of Adam being created in God’s divine image, and his literal declaration of dominion over animals, sets in motion, in Christian countries, the concept of human separation from and superiority to other animals. Shortly after creating man, God proceeds by forming “out of the ground all the beasts of the earth, and all the fowls of the air, [He] brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: for whatsoever Adam called any living creature the same is its name. And Adam called all the beasts by their names, and all the fowls of the air, and all the cattle of the field” (Gen.2.19). Adam’s act of naming the animals carries with it two powerful implications. First, it reinforces man’s superiority to animals in that he was chosen to establish what the other creatures are called, and demonstrates his higher ranking in the eyes of a deity. Second, it highlights the superiority of man through his use of language; his ability to give the animals names is a potent symbol as words and names carry great weight in human society.

Around the same time that *Genesis* is being written, Plato and Aristotle were planting the seeds that would grow into the concept of the Great Chain of Being. Arthur Lovejoy, in his work *The Great Chain of Being*, explains that Plato originally starts by looking at otherworldliness and this-worldliness and develops the Idea of the Good. In grappling with this idea, Plato determines that “The Good is ‘not only, to all things known [i.e., by us] the cause of their being known, but also of their existence and their reality’” (Lovejoy 46). Plato therefore establishes the claim that existence is superior to non-existence, putting into play the idea of a system of ranking. This concept of a system of ranking, which determines the hierarchy of all existence from God on down to non-living materials, lives on in various forms after Plato. Aristotle made Plato’s concept more specific. He argued that “all quantities – lines, surfaces, solids, motions, and in general time and space – must be continuous, not discrete” and Lovejoy explains that because of these concepts, “[Aristotle] is responsible for the introduction of the principle of continuity into natural history” (Lovejoy 56). Even so, in his work *Parts of Animals*, Aristotle drew a distinction between man and other animals explaining, “Man is the only animal that stands upright, and this is because his nature and essence is divine’ (Aristotle 367). It seems that Aristotle was torn between believing in a hard distinction between human and non-human animal, and, as Lovejoy suggests, the observation that there exists “a shading-off of the properties of one class into those of the next rather than a sharp-cut distinction between them. Nature refuses to conform to our craving for clear lines of demarcation” (Lovejoy 56).

Around 55 b.c.e., Cicero wrote *De oratore* and in a fleeting thought makes it clear in what way the Chain of Being had developed in the interim. Like the distinctions

drawn between man and other animals in the bible, his brief brush with the topic shows strong demarcations between human and “beast.” In his argument for the importance of eloquence in speech, he states “For the one thing that most especially sets us above animals is that we converse with each other, and that we express our thoughts through speech. Who, then, would not rightly admire this ability... to surpass other human beings in the very thing which especially makes humans themselves superior to beasts” (Cicero 65). This idea is precisely the one most often challenged by both Swift and Wells who present fictions in which animals speak foreign languages, as would be expected from people in other lands, or are able to speak English once provided the biological tools to do so. Swift’s education at Trinity College Dublin made him familiar with the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero at a time when many other institutions were moving away from teaching the classical thinkers (Moss). Wrestling with the ideas proposed by those whom he studied and the expansion of knowledge in his time would have helped to shape some of the questions raised in his tale about the distinctions we make between man and other creatures. Similarly, Wells would have also studied these thinkers and would have had the benefit of the scientific advancements of the Victorian period, and his own background in biology, in order to craft his book to support the challenge that Darwin had leveled against classical thought.

The Climate of Authorship

Swift and Wells, of course, wrote in distinctly different time periods, especially in terms of science; one anticipated Darwin's discoveries and the other wrote in a world shaken by them. Additionally, these two authors came from drastically different backgrounds. As indicated by Margaret Atwood's introduction to *The Island Of Doctor Moreau*, H.G. Wells was, himself, a man of science. Atwood points out "he studied [biology and zoology] under Darwin's famous apologist, Thomas Henry Huxley... [and] graduated with a first-class degree" (Atwood XV). This meant that he had a good sense of the inner workings of animals (including humans), and would have been aware of the debates that raged in the sciences over vivisection. Vivisection is the practice of performing surgery on live animals for the purpose of learning about their biology; these surgeries were often performed with limited anesthetization, if any at all, in order to see the standard operation of internal organs and musculature. During the Victorian period, there were great disagreements in the scientific field over the morality of studying live animals in this fashion. These debates would have provided one more reason for Wells to clearly draw the link between man and other animals, in order to illustrate the barbarism inherent in vivisection; if human and non-human were seen as just different classes of animals, perhaps scientists would be less inclined to perform vivisections.

Swift did not possess the scientific background that Wells did. Instead, he served as the Dean at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. A devout member of the Anglican Church, he was also very aware of politics, philosophy, and contemporary thoughts of the time, all necessities for a satirist of his caliber. In his book *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*, Keith Thomas writes about

how the perceived gap between humans and other animals began to narrow in the sixteenth century (Thomas 121). He states, "There is no doubt that it was the observation of household pets which buttressed the claims for animal intelligence and character... It is against this pet-keeping background that we should view the growing tendency in the early modern period for scientists and intellectuals to break down the rigid boundaries between animals and men which earlier theorists had tried to raise" (121-122). While people who thought this way were just starting to appear around the time Swift lived, and this dissolving of the human/animal barrier was not part of the standard belief system of the time, there is some evidence that he may have been exposed to these thoughts. Viscount Bolingbroke, with whom Swift frequently corresponded, had been one who held some of these beliefs. Bolingbroke, in essay LXIII from a collection of his works, writes about man being a religious creature: "Greater powers of reason, and means of knowledge have been measured out to us than to other animals, that we might be able to fulfil the superior purposes of our destination, whereof religion is, no doubt, the chief. The elevation and preeminence of our species consist in the former alone. But though they are great, they do not take us out of the class of animality" (Bolingbroke 348). Both before and during Swift's life the concept of man's animal nature was floating in the ether, ready for him to seize.

Despite these drastically varied backgrounds, both Swift and Wells successfully tear down the dividing wall between human and non-human animals, albeit for different reasons. In Wells's work, he presents the issues of taxonomy and language through Edward Prendick's narration, by way of shifting pronouns and labels, slippery naming conventions, and Prendick's inability to ultimately make a perfect separation between

animal and human in his life on the island and beyond. Wells also relies on the advances and deeper understanding gained through the Victorian interest in science which fueled that period in order to probe the gap that traditionally existed between man and other creatures. In Swift's book, Lemuel Gulliver shares many of the same problems as Prendick, but in addition to the challenge of grappling with the question of whether or not others are human or animal, he often feels the need to assert his humanity himself. Gulliver also struggles with labels, both for himself and the others he encounters, and brings to light the importance humans place on spoken language in the identification of human vs. non-human animal, and how this dichotomy is ultimately tied up in human language itself.

Issues in the Language of Narration

When examining *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *Gulliver's Travels*, it is important to note the effect that the first-person narration has on both the shaping of the story and providing the perspective for the reader. Both novels allow the audience to dwell in the minds of these men, thrown into a strange place and forced to rediscover man's position in the world. It is also noteworthy that both of the central first-person narrators, whose observations these books revolve around, have some degree of a special relationship with biology. Gulliver is educated, and goes on his voyages, primarily as a surgeon. Although limited by the science and learning of his time, he is, no doubt, a man that has a good understanding of the physical structure of humans,

and, likely, other animals. Prendick represents a well-educated biologist in the Victorian era. He, like Gulliver, would possess a level of understanding and knowledge of the inner-workings of animals that the average reader would not possess. This provides both characters with a situated ethos that gives them authority to recognize the blurred lines between animal and human, and suggests it is more meaningful when they have difficulty maintaining a language to express what they are discovering.

In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, right from the onset of Edward Prendick's journey and his first encounter with one of Doctor Moreau's creations, he demonstrates a great deal of difficulty deciding how to refer to those around him. The first of the creations that Prendick meets is M'ling, Montgomery's attendant. He initially describes M'ling as "a misshapen man, short, broad, and clumsy, with a crooked back, a hairy neck, and a head sunk between his shoulders" (Wells 13). Upon first viewing M'ling, Prendick believes he is a human, albeit one not described in particularly flattering terms. Then over the course of a single sentence he refers to M'ling's mouth as both "suggestive of a muzzle" and a "human mouth" (13). Several more times he refers to M'ling as a "black-faced man" (13), until, when pondering again his "grotesque ugliness" refers to him as a "black-faced creature" (14). Initially, it may seem like Prendick's reaction to M'ling is due to the racial climate in the 1890's; many Europeans at the time would regard people with dark skin as sub-human. However, Prendick soon displays the same unease with other of Moreau's creations that do not possess M'ling's complexion. These examples, from within minutes of meeting the first of Moreau's creations, and from before Prendick is informed of the nature of M'ling, are telling of the trouble that Prendick has throughout his entire narration in regard to the barrier, created

by language, fabricated between human and non-human. Prendick is literally at a loss for words that accurately describe M'ling, because M'ling straddles the line that separates 'man' and 'animal.'

Prendick displays further evidence of the difficulty with assigning labels, and additionally pronouns, to those around him when he encounters the Leopard Man. Wandering in the woods, pondering the appearance of M'ling's ear, Prendick is caught off guard and he records, "then suddenly upon the bank of the stream appeared something – at first I could not distinguish what it was. It bowed its head to the water and began to drink. Then I saw it was a man, going on all fours like a beast! He was clothed with bluish cloth and was of a copper-colored hue, with black hair" (Wells 39-40). Once again, in his encounter with one of Moreau's creations, he is forced to struggle with the false dichotomy between man and animal, and has difficulty being consistent. Certainly, with his being distracted in the woods, it is understandable that he would be initially confused about what had appeared before him; the use of the pronoun 'something' is reasonable until a positive identification is made, as is the use of 'it,' but throughout his experience with the Leopard Man and the other of Moreau's creations, this identification is in flux. After noticing that the Leopard Man is wearing clothing, Prendick is able to perceive the 'beast' as a 'man.' Even so, the original thought process triggers something in Prendick and suddenly he starts to display many characteristics that the reader may identify with a prey-animal. He thinks, "every shadow became something more than a shadow, became an ambush, every rustle became a threat" (41); this begs the question: if in Prendick's estimation there is a sliding scale between human and beast, as his constant shifts in labeling indicate, what

is he at this moment? Reason and instinct get the best of him. Rather than call out to the stranger in the manner of a person, he instead “thrust [himself] violently – possibly even frantically – through the bushes” in fear, as an animal would from its predator (41). Language is an indication of humanity to Prendick and he does not use it in this moment. He makes this view of language clear in a statement made later when grappling with the nature of Moreau’s creatures: “They talk... They were men” (67). In this instance, the animal in Prendick is exposed, and he begins again to view the Leopard Man first as a fellow animal, “I wheeled round upon *it* and struck at *it* as *it* came up to me” (47 italics mine), then as a hybrid “animal-man” (47).

Through this constant shifting in his labeling of the Leopard Man, and Prendick’s own slip into more instinct-driven behavior, he still tries to hold on to the animal/human dichotomy which complicates his narrative. Directly after his escape from the Leopard Man, and subsequent to his referring to Moreau’s creation as an “animal-man,” he asks Montgomery “what was that thing that came after me. Was it a beast, or was it a man” (49). Despite referring to the Leopard Man as a ‘thing’ he is still willing to believe that it could, in fact, be a man, and the conjunction ‘or’ indicates that it *must* be either one or the other, as in his mind they are mutually exclusive. In truth, his inability to differentiate between ‘man’ and ‘animal’ is something that can be seen throughout his entire account.

After being informed that Moreau’s creations were, in fact “animals – humanized animals – triumphs of vivisection” (71), one would think that the issues Prendick has with referring to them simply as animals, or calling them by their original component parts, as he does the “Horse-Rhinoceros creature” (83) or the “Hyena-Swine” (92),

would end. However, for the vast majority of the creations he continues to struggle with nomenclature, still referring to them as hybrids such as “Swine Men,” “Ape Man,” and “Saint Bernard Dog Man” (83) in spite of their inhuman origin. It is clear that he is at an impasse between deciding whether these creations are animal or human, which slowly takes a toll on the dichotomy which he had been sure of before he stumbled upon the island. In fact, when later referring to the Horse-Rhinoceros, one of the creations he is not even willing to attach the word ‘man’ to, he states that “seeing the creature there in a perfectly animal attitude, with the light gleaming in its eyes, and its imperfectly human face distorted with terror, [he] realized again the fact of its humanity” (94). Even after acknowledging the clear relationship between this hybrid animal and the humanity he saw in it, his language hinders his bridging the divide between beast and man.

Additionally, his indecision can be seen when instead of referring to Moreau’s creations collectively as animals, or creatures he often uses the terms “Beast Men” (83) or “Beast People” (82) or even “Beast Folk” (83). While all three of these terms suggest a blurring of the line between animal and man, the use of ‘people,’ or especially ‘folk,’ in his hybrid labels suggests something not simply just human about them, but also connotes a warmth in his feelings towards them that borders on familial. He sees the link connecting man and other animals, but wrestles with the words necessary to solidify it. By complicating these animal/man labels, and showing the difficulty Prendick has even referring to these creations, Wells is able to call words into question that are often taken for granted, such as ‘person,’ ‘animal,’ and ‘beast.’

It is possible to suggest that the hybrid terms used by Wells, presented through Prendick’s narration, were not intended to blur the line between animal, but were used

for shock value. Harriet Ritvo, in her essay “Our Animal Cousins,” writes, “Crossbreeding has always tended to engage both vulgar and learned curiosity, and the results of miscegenation commanded wide audiences... Most reported hybrids involved nonhuman animals... [although] Humans, too, could be the objects or the originators of passions that transcended or violated the ostensible species barrier” (Ritvo 53-55). While Ritvo’s charge is reasonable to level against Wells, who was by most accounts a middlebrow author, the permeability of the line between animal and man in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is not blurred only in the vivisected animals, but in human characters as well. Upon Prendick’s return to San Francisco, he speaks about the people around him in the same terms he applied to Moreau’s creations. He states he “could not persuade [himself] that the men and women I met were not also another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls” (Wells 130). If Wells had intended to be sensationalistic by describing Moreau’s creations as ‘Beast People,’ rather than calling into question the animal nature of humans, it would not have served him to use the same terms to talk about men and women living in San Francisco. Prendick is a man who could no longer see the difference between human and non-human animal because the walls that language and society have built to separate the two were torn down over the course of his adventure; those creatures that he had previously thought of as animals had shown how razor thin the divide had been between themselves and humans, and Prendick revealed how he would act like other animals when taken out of his comfort zone.

In *Gulliver’s Travels*, Gulliver has a similar experience with the difficulty of, or perhaps the reluctance to, acknowledge labels, upon encountering the Yahoos.

Gulliver, when first stumbling into Houyhnhnmland, notes that he is “resolv[ed] to deliver [him]self to the first Savages [he] should meet,” and as such, is prepared with gifts to give to the natives that he anticipates he will meet (Swift 207). He fully expects an encounter with humans, even noting that he sees “many Tracks of human Feet” along with those of “cows” and “horses,” yet when he sets eyes upon the Yahoos, he instantly identifies them as “several Animals in a Field” (207). It is curious that Gulliver jumps directly to the conclusion that they are animals in spite of the human-like description he provides of them:

Their Shape was very singular, and deformed, which a little discomposed me... Their Heads and Breasts were covered with a thick Hair, some frizzled and others lank; they had Beards like Goats, and a long ridge of Hair down their Backs, and the fore-parts of their Legs and Feet, but the rest of their Bodies were bare, so that I might see their Skins, which were of a brown buff Colour. They had no Tails, nor any Hair at all on their Buttocks, except about the *Anus*; which I presume, Nature had placed there to defend them as they sat on the Ground;... they had strong Claws before and behind, terminating in sharp points, and hooked.... The females were not so large as the Males, they had long lank Hair on their Heads, but none on their Faces, nor anything more than a sort of a Down on the rest of their Bodies, except about the *Anus* and *Pudenda*. Their Dugs hung between their Fore-feet, and often reached almost to the Ground as they walked. The Hair of both Sexes was of several Colours, brown, red, black, and yellow. (207)

Dissecting this detailed description, it seems that Gulliver is, in fact, simply describing naked, unkempt humans. The only parts of this description that sound like non-human characteristics are the beards that he claims look like those belonging to goats, and the fact that rather than using the word ‘nails,’ he refers to the Yahoos’ nails as ‘claws;’ his word choice is arguably a result of his later deciding that Yahoos, and other humans, are indeed animals, as his narration is a recounting of his journey rather than a real time

account. Therefore, his diction has less to do with the appearance of the Yahoos, which is decidedly human, than with his shifting world view as a result of his travels. There is nothing about this depiction of Yahoos that stands out as a clear marker of them being any animal other than a particularly hairy race of people and the only indication that they may be anything but human is bound up in Gulliver's attempt to resolve his inner turmoil through language.

Additionally, Gulliver, like Prendick, had a great deal of trouble acclimating himself to England upon his return from his travels, and, in fact, does not ever seem able to properly readjust to being home. He states "At the Time I am writing it is Five Years since my last return to *England* " (Swift 266), yet his belief that humans and Yahoos are the same creatures, and both are savage animals, has not diminished with time. In fact, the letter he writes to his cousin, which serves as a preface/advertisement for the book, had to be written after his tales were penned and contains the most damning evidence that he feels humans are nothing more than the Yahoos at home, as opposed to those met traveling. When rescued by Don Pedro and his crew, he reflects "When they began to talk, I thought I never heard or saw anything so unnatural; for it appeared to me as monstrous as if a Dog or Cow should speak in England, or a *Yahoo* in *Houyhnhnm-land*" (262), but at this point not even speech can persuade Gulliver to accept there being a difference between the Yahoo and Humanity. Even his own family appalls him as if he were to sit and have dinner with a group of barnyard-animals. He states that even after five years his wife and children "dare not presume to touch [his] Bread, or drink out of the same Cup, neither was [he] ever able to let one of them take [him] by the Hand" (266). He is willing to teach them what he learned from the

Houyhnhnm so long as he finds them “docible Animals” (270), but that is the most credit he will give them. Even this allowance required his examining himself in a mirror to “habituate [himself] by time to tolerate the site of a human Creature” (270). The emotions Gulliver expresses about other humans are not due to cruelty or anger at individuals -- indeed his hatred is even turned upon himself -- but are a result of the shift in worldview that was prompted by the realization that human beings are just another set of animals in the grand scheme of the world.

Finally, when considering the hardship in drawing a distinction between humans and animals in these two novels, it is important to note the reflective nature of the narrations. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is not a first person narration that is being recorded concurrently with the action of the book, but is instead written several years after Prendick’s experience in the past tense. This is important to acknowledge, because although his shifting pronouns and changing labels make sense before Prendick reveals to the reader that the creations are vivisected animals, after this information is imparted there is no real reason for his uncertainty in nomenclature. The only reason for him to struggle with what to call Moreau’s creations in a reflection that is penned long after the events is because he still has difficulty binding his experience and his narration together due to the long-standing division of human and animal in language and his preconceived dichotomy. Had Prendick’s world view not been shaken by his experiences on the island, the inconsistency in his expression of the story would be unexplainable. His prolonged exposure to the undeniable truth that man is simply another animal, and the concept that the traits that humans believe separate us from

non-human animals can, in fact, be imparted onto other creatures, impacts his ability to use English to effectively convey what he has seen, as it is inadequate for the task.

Gulliver's narrative functions similarly, although his difficulties manifest themselves not through a fluctuation in pronoun use, but as a total shift in his estimation of the value in human life. While *Gulliver's Travels* also takes the form of a narrative written after his adventures have run their course, Gulliver no longer seems to grapple with a human/animal dichotomy; his realization that humans and yahoos are the same creatures, and therefore both men and yahoos are animals, seems like a given to Gulliver at this point. His tone is rather matter-of-fact when discussing the yahoos of his country as he has long since decided they are one and the same. Additionally, throughout his tale he discusses using both human and Yahoo parts to furnish his needs. At one point he uses hair shaved off the face of the king of Brodbignag to make a comb (116), not unlike the way boar hair is used to make brushes, but this casual use of humanoid parts may not put up any red flags; no one was harmed and Gulliver was simply making the best of a resource that would be washed away. However, Gulliver makes show of the fact that Yahoos, human in all but name, are no better than cattle. He nonchalantly recounts:

When my clothes were worn to Rags, I made myself others with the Skins of Rabbits, and of a certain beautiful Animal about the same size, called *Nnuhnoh*, the Skin of which is covered with a fine Down. Of these I likewise made very tolerable Stockings. I soled my Shoes with Wood which I cut from a Tree, and fitted to the upper Leather, and when this was worn out I supplied it with the Skins of *Yahoos* dried in the Sun. (253)

This presentation is utterly shocking unless there is no longer a difference in his mind between human and non-human animals. In the same breath that he discusses

skinning rabbits and other animals, he discusses making leather from Yahoos. After meeting the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos, Gulliver, who claimed he “abhorred” the spectacle of a public execution (111), does not think twice about skinning a Yahoo for shoes and then writing about it for presentation to the general public. Gulliver, forced through his experiences to realize that humans are animals, loses touch with many of the things that he believed made him who he was. Perhaps, rather than being driven to madness as Gulliver was, Swift wanted to teach his audience to accept this truth. As is suitable for a satire, Gulliver acts as the model for how a person should not react to this information; Gulliver abandons his values, mistreats his wife and children, and shows little appreciation to Don Pedro when he is rescued at sea. The ability to accept the truth and continue on living in the same fashion one has previously lived is likely the lesson that Swift would have wanted to teach.

The Role of Spoken Language

Based on the description Gulliver provides of the Yahoos, it is not likely that his initial judgment of their non-human status is due to their physical appearance. A clothed Yahoo in Europe would not stand out in a crowd based on his looks alone. In fact, when Gulliver is forced by his Houyhnhnm master to strip, the Houyhnhnm determines him to be exactly like a Yahoo in form, aside from a few superficial features (219). If the issues with Gulliver’s assigning of labels do not stem from appearance, then one is left to consider why he may initially consider the Yahoos non-human

animals rather than humans. In order to determine how he made his judgment, it may prove useful to first examine his initial interaction with the Houyhnhnm. Upon his first glimpse of a Houyhnhnm, Gulliver remarks, "I saw a Horse walking softly in the Field" (Swift 208). After some non-verbal greetings and physical contact from Gulliver, he says, "this Animal seeming to receive my civilities with Disdain shook his Head" (208). At this early point in their interaction, Gulliver very clearly thinks of the Houyhnhnm as an "animal;" the Houyhnhnm looks like a horse, and behaves more or less like a horse; he is an animal in Gulliver's eyes. It is not until the Houyhnhnm makes sounds that Gulliver starts to question the nature of this "animal" in front of him. He states "Then he neighed three or four times, but in so different a Cadence, that I almost began to think he was speaking to himself in some Language of his own" (208). While Gulliver is still convinced that the Houyhnhnm is a horse, evidenced by the statement "While He and I were thus employed, another Horse came up," he is still intrigued by the vocal display that sounds like language. It is not until the two creatures started "neighing several times by Turns, and varying the Sound" that he decided that they sounded "like *Persons* deliberating upon some *Affair of Weight*" (209 my emphasis). He was still wary about the nature of the "Brute Beasts" (209) until they displayed neighing and gestures "not unlike those of a Philosopher," whereupon he "at last concluded, they must needs be *Magicians*" (209). It becomes more clear after his introduction to the Houyhnhnm that it is not appearance -- that they look like horses-- but language that Gulliver is focused on. Much like Cicero's statement about spoken language being the defining characteristic in the separation of animals and humans, it is the fact that the Houyhnhnm were using

language that made Gulliver assume that they were more than animals; they were, in his estimation, humans using magic to appear as animals.

The fact that language was the factor which Gulliver employed to determine between human or “animal” becomes important when one examines the parallel in behavior between Gulliver and the Yahoos. The line between human and animal is further blurred by Gulliver’s initial interaction with the Houyhnhnm. When Gulliver encountered the Houyhnhnm, his reaction was to “reach [his] hand Towards [the Houyhnhnm’s] Neck, with a Design to stroke it, using the common Style and Whistle of Jockies” (208); he makes a completely non-verbal attempt to connect with what he thought was a horse. Similarly, when the Yahoo approaches Gulliver, just minutes before his encounter with the Houyhnhnm, the Yahoo “lifted up his Fore-paw, whether out of Curiosity or Michief” (208). This gesture is exactly how Gulliver greets the Houyhnhnm. It is no coincidence that both the supposed “animal” and Gulliver each address another creature non-verbally, and are then judged to be lesser creatures. Gulliver eventually addresses them verbally, saying “Gentlemen, if you be Conjurers, as I have good Cause to believe, you can understand my language” (210), once again expecting language to be both the factor that would prove that they are human, and that understanding this language will be possible as a result. The two Houyhnhnms are struck by Gulliver’s appearance, but ultimately make no response to him, discussing the likelihood of his Yahoo nature between themselves. It is not until Gulliver “endeavoured to practice this word upon [his] Tongue” that they “were silent” and “were both visibly surprised” (210). It is apparent that the Houyhnhnms view Gulliver’s use of language as

an indication that he may be more than an animal as well, or at least one worth studying.

In her essay “Gulliver as Pet and Petkeeper: Conversations with Animals in Book 4,” Ann Cline Kelly speculates that Swift may have been interested in the concept that not only humans, but other animals, as well, may use language, and that the pressure that we put on language as a separation between humans and other animals may not be as powerful as we think. She writes that “one of Swift’s favorite writers, Michel de Montaigne” questions “his relationship with his cat in *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* (1595)” (Kelly 327). She quotes Montaigne, who says, “[cats] may reckon us to be brute beasts for the same reason that we reckon them to be so...,” not because each does not possess a language, but because it is not shared (327). One can easily see how Swift could have applied this concept to his writing of both part two and part four of *Gulliver’s Travels*. In fact, in part two, this is precisely how Gulliver is able to identify himself as being something other than an animal to the Brobdingnagians.

When Gulliver is first spotted by a Brobdingnagian, he could see, and seemed to think it reasonable, that the large man considered him an animal. He states that the giant farmer “considered a while with the Caution of one who endeavours to lay hold on a small dangerous Animal in such a manner... as I myself have sometimes done with a *Weasel in England*” (Swift 83). Gulliver’s reaction, fearing for his life, was to “speak some Words,” after which the farmer “appeared pleased with [his] Voice and Gestures, and began to look upon [him] as a Curiosity, much wondering to hear [him] pronounce articulate Words, although he could not understand them” (83). This is not, however, enough to convince the Brobdingnagian of Gulliver’s non-animal nature, but rather as a

curiosity and a “rational Creature” (84). In fact, the farmer’s discovery is heralded in town as his finding “a strange Animal in the Field about the bigness of a *Splacknuck*, but exactly shaped in part like a human Creature; which it likewise imitated in all its Actions; seemed to speak in a little Language of its own, [and] had already learned several Words of theirs” (90-91). The important distinctions in this description of Gulliver are “imitated” and “seemed.” The townsfolk are willing to believe that an animal has been found, and that it can put on the airs of humanity, such as mimicking speech, but was still an animal.

This is an important distinction being made by the Brobdingnagians in regard to language and one that is touched on in Harry Miles Johnson’s article *The Talking Dog* from the journal *Science*. In this article, which was an early look at the possibility of animal language, Johnson cites Oskar Pfungst, who explains three different definitions of speech that one needs to consider in the case of a dog that appeared to possess a limited German vocabulary. Pfungst proposes

three definitions of speech: first, properly, as the use of vocal sounds to convey to the listener an idea experienced by the speaker; secondly, more loosely, as the production of vocal sounds learned by imitation, but used without knowledge of their meaning to the hearer; and thirdly, as the production of vocal sounds not imitative of human speech, having no meaning to the speaker, but producing in the hearer illusions of definitely articulated, spoken words, uttered to convey meaning. (749)

Despite the fact that the reader is aware that Gulliver has the ability to use language -- in fact, he seems almost absurdly proficient at learning languages far removed from the European ones that he had previous knowledge of -- when Gulliver is first taken in by the farmer it would not be apparent to the Brobdingnagian that he had any real mastery

of language. It is likely that in his estimation, Gulliver's vocalizations fit the third definition of speech. Given the fact that to the farmer's ear the words were unintelligible and may have only had a cadence that he interpreted as speech-like, it is not likely he could determine if Gulliver actually spoke or if he simply made noise reminiscent of speech; much like a pet owner that speaks to their dog and thinks they hear an intelligible response when the dog barks back, Gulliver has proven little to the farmer of his verbal skills at this point in time.

Over the course of part two, through further experience with the Brobdinagians, Gulliver is able to climb through the three levels of speech, as defined by Pfungist, in the eyes of the Brobdignagians. Shortly after Glumdalclitch starts to point out objects and tell him the names in her language, Gulliver is able to "call for whatever [he] had a mind to" (90). He is learning how to speak their tongue, but still they speak of him as an "animal" and he is forced to perform as such. Even Glumdalclitch, who sees the process of his learning their language, compares him to a "Lamb" that was given to her temporarily as a distraction (91). Gulliver works through "Speeches [he] had been taught" and is asked questions by Glumdalclitch "as far as [his] Understanding of the Language reached" (92). However, with the limitations of his verbal capabilities, to the people of that country, he looked like no more than an animal that has been taught a repetitive act to perform with no actual understanding of what he is being asked or is saying. This is reminiscent of a parrot which has a set number of phrases it can repeat, yet no one listening to it would assume it had true understanding of the meaning behind the language.

It is not until his introduction to the king and queen of Brobdingnag that Gulliver is truly treated as one that can speak “properly.” Although the Queen had to give “great Allowance for [his] Defectiveness in speaking, [she] was however surprised at so much Wit and good Sense in so diminutive an Animal” (96). It is the fact that Gulliver, at this point of his stay in Brobdingnag, is able to convey ideas about the society he comes from to a listener who asks him questions that allow him to convince them that he may be more than a speechless “animal” like a *Splacknuck*. The king, whom Gulliver describes as “learned” and “educated in the Study of Philosophy,” ultimately accepts him because when questioning Gulliver he “received rational Answers, no otherwise defective than by a Foreign Accent, and an imperfect Knowledge in the Language” (97). It is the exchange of ideas, Pfungist’s mark of true language, that separates these interactions from the ones that Gulliver formerly had with the residents of this land.

Doctor Moreau’s Prendick experiences his own confusion with the concepts of speech and vocalization and how they affect perception of the distinction between animal and man. The first indication of this occurs shortly after he arrives on Moreau’s island. In the chapter titled “The Crying of the Puma,” Prendick hears “A sharp, hoarse cry of animal pain.... Its depth and volume testified to the puma” (Wells 37). Hearing the noise at this point, he is able to identify the source as the puma he had seen earlier, and he does his best to ignore the cries. However, over the course of the day the sound continues and starts to change which takes a toll on him. He explains: “The emotional appeal of these yells grew upon me steadily, grew at last to such an exquisite expression of suffering that I could stand it in the room no longer.” But upon leaving, “The crying sounded even louder out of doors. It was as if all the pain in the world had

found a voice.... it is when suffering finds a voice and sets our nerves quivering that this pity comes troubling us” (38). It is this shift from a “cry of animal pain” to a “voice” that sends Prendick away from the shelter. By the time he finally returns, in the chapter titled “The Crying of the Man”, the sound he hears “is not the cry of the puma” (51). The result of Moreau’s work makes the sound more human, and therefore unbearable, to Prendick. Although these sounds are emanating from the same creature strapped to Moreau’s operating table, the sound becoming recognizably more ‘human,’ something that can now be identified by the word ‘voice,’ is what shifts his perception in this situation; this is the first sign that Prendick puts a great deal of stock in the ability to speak being a defining characteristic between humans and other creatures.

Perhaps even more evident than the psychological effect that a shifting in sound had on Prendick, is his reaction to those vivisected animals that hold conversations with him. Fleeing from Moreau, he encounters what he initially describes as a “simian creature” who calls out to him (54). But, after this creature addresses Prendick, yelling out “You... in the boat,” Prendick makes the assessment, “He was a man then... for he could talk” (55). This is very much the same thought process that Gulliver went through in encountering the Yahoo and the Houyhnhnm. Although the Houyhnhnm, and, in this case, the simian creature do not appear the least bit human, the use of a language is enough to convince the narrator that they are more than ‘animal.’ Similarly, when Doctor Moreau is explaining to Prendick the types of experiments being performed on the island, and that all of the Beast Folk have non-human origins, again the ability to speak is the action that Prendick objects to other animals being able to do. He questions Moreau -- “But... These things – these animals *talk!*” (72) -- because animals

possessing language is the one thing he has difficulty wrapping his brain around.

Moreau explains the many similarities between humans and other animals, pointing out that “the great difference between man and monkey is in the larynx... in the incapacity to frame delicately different sound-symbols by which thought could be sustained” (73). In this statement, Moreau makes it clear that humans have more in common, biologically, with other animals than they do defining differences. In demonstrating these strong links between humans and other animals, Wells, who would know the truth behind Moreau’s claims of similarities between the biology of humans and non-human animals, wants to solidify the thoughts and findings of his contemporaries in the minds of his audience.

The Question of Racial Stereotyping

It may be argued that the ambiguity with which Prendick describes M’ling as both human and creature stems from the fact, not that he is an animal vivisected to resemble a human, but that Prendick sees him as a member of an inferior race of humans. Jonathan Marks, in his essay on The Great Chain of Being from the *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, which looks at the effect that this concept may have had in the history of racism, writes that some eighteenth-century scholars of natural history argued, “science seemed to link the other races to apes through measurements of the skull and face, at least [those] concerned with justifying the practice of slavery by dehumanizing Africans. Rejecting Biblical literalism, the poligenists (believers in

multiple origins of people) separated the human races” (Marks 70). While it is possible to argue that M’ling fits the mold created by this primitive science, in order to make this leap, it would require ignoring the way that other characters are referred to in the very same scene. The captain, a “red-haired man,” i.e. likely European in decent, knocks M’ling to the deck, who is again being referred to as a “black-faced man.” Prendick then labels the dogs snapping at M’ling’s face “brutes” (Wells 15). On the very next page Prendick observes about the captain, that “the brute was drunk” (16). Here, only a few pages after identifying the black-faced M’ling as both animal and human, Prendick does the same with the European captain. This appears to be a strong indication that Prendick’s trouble speaking about M’ling in terms of a human or non-human animal stems not from issues of race, but from greater questions of what, if anything, separates man from animal.

A similar claim about the Yahoos being nothing more than “inferior” humans from Gulliver’s stand point could be made, but only by accepting a portion of the evidence that Swift’s tale provides. Gulliver does make a statement that would lead one to believe that his judgment is based on race; when discussing a Yahoo, and the limited physical differences between he and them, states: “The Face of it indeed was flat and broad, the Nose depressed, the Lips large and the Mouth wide. But these Differences are common to all Savage Nations where the Lineaments of the Countenance are distorted by the Natives suffering their Infants to lie groveling on the Earth, or by carrying them on their Backs, nuzzling with their Face against the Mother’s Shoulders” (Swift 213) . These lines certainly make it appear that Gulliver is likening the Yahoos to people from the “savage” nations, playing into the English belief that people from lands

the English colonized were nothing more than animalistic humans, a lower species than the English on the Chain of Being. R.W. Frantz, in his essay "Swift's Yahoos and the Voyagers," points out that there is evidence Swift was "fond of voyage accounts" (Frantz 49) that included awful characterizations of natives from other lands, not unlike the ones made by Gulliver (53). However, it is important to note that, much like Prendick's inability to identify M'ling as human or animal, Gulliver's difficulty springs from something far more complicated than simple ethnocentrism. This becomes evident later when he exclaims, "I could no longer deny, that I was a real *Yahoo*" (245). This statement demonstrates that the declaration of Yahoo, and man, being an animal is not limited by place of origin or physicality. He even goes on to extend this charge, confessing "When I thought of my Family, my Friends, my Countrymen, or Human Race in general, I considered them as they really were, *Yahoos* in Shape and Disposition, only a little more civilized, and qualified with the Gift of Speech" (255). Based on the themes running throughout *Gulliver's Travels*, it would seem that this final characteristic is the one that had formerly stood as the trait that had separated humanity from other animals, but that had been torn down during his stay in Houyhnhnm-land. Had Gulliver just been adopting the English attitude about foreign nations, he would have simply written the Yahoos off based on their facial structure, which he noted was more akin to that of "savages;" however, Gulliver, upon further consideration, decides that he, himself, his family, and all Englishmen were, indeed, no different than the Yahoos, and like the Yahoos, who are unarguably animals, man is also labeled as such.

Looking Ahead

Looking at only a sliver of the long history of ideas and the misunderstandings about the perceived chasm separating humanity from other animals, a look which, admittedly, only considers a minor portion of Western thought, it is understandable that the basic concept that we are not fundamentally different or more special than the life around us is guaranteed to face pushback. These concepts have a lineage that can be traced back through a significant portion of recorded history, and manifest themselves in the roots of language itself. After *Origin of Species* was published, the concept that humanity is wholly separate from the animal kingdom around us was shattered. As Darwin admitted, the idea that we evolved from another life form, and therefore are no different from the other creatures around us, was, and still is, “highly distasteful to many persons.”

The first order of business for human-kind, after literally unearthing observable evidence, is to change the way language portrays the complex relationship that we share with our environment, and our fellow animals, and Wells was ready to take the first step in this direction. In contrast to the heavy-handed treatment of other themes in Wells's novel, such as questioning the nature of religion and discouraging the practice of vivisection, Prendick's narration provided a subtle attack on the dichotomy between man and animal. Wells, in being precise with Prendick's imprecision, is able to let his message fly under the radar. In turn, this gentle prodding of Prendick's diction allows Wells to start to alter one of the primary ways that people perceive the world around them, through language. If the narrator has a meaningful struggle to express himself, it has the effect of making the reader question what he may understand about the same

topic; if the character having these experiences cannot suitably record them, one is left to ponder what the cause of the difficulty may be. The hybrid nature of Dr. Moreau's creations starts Prendick down the path of linguistic confusion, but his recognition that his countrymen are no different than the animals he spends time with on the island is clear by the time he returns to civilization.

While Gulliver faced similar issues with his own struggle to recount his tale, the actual use of spoken language became a much more central concept in Swift's book. For Wells, granting the ability to speak English was no more difficult than providing the tools for vocalization, a simple physical manipulation of the vocal chords and brain would provide what was required, and every living thing essentially has similar equipment to start with. For Swift, interspecies language is possible, but has to be learned much like Gulliver learned the languages of all the lands he visited, whether the inhabitants were humanoid or not. The Houyhnhnm may never possess the vocal chords to speak English, although this is not necessarily certain as Gulliver was the inferior animal and as such was required to learn their language, but nevertheless they did possess a language which positioned them above those that did not have a language of their own.

The need to hold onto this separation still persists today. Dr. Con Slobodchikoff, in his book *Chasing Doctor Doolittle*, writes that "the term *animal language*" is controversial because,

according to many scientists and linguistic professionals, language is the last gulf that separates us from all of the other animals. Over time, all of the other barriers have fallen by the wayside. Not too long ago, people thought that we were the only tool users, the only ones with culture, the

only ones with a sense of self. All of that has crumbled as we have found out more and more about other animals... So all we have left to cling to – that makes us special and separate, that sets us apart from all of the rest of the natural world – is language. (Slobodchickoff 2-3)

Through his research, Slobodchickoff has demonstrated that animal language not only exists, but is far more robust than most would assume. His work with prairie dogs reveals prime examples of the complexity of animal language. He and his students have worked to decode prairie dog alarm calls, among other animals, and were shocked with the level of information that the prairie dogs were sharing with each other. They possessed

something like a grammar. They have parts of their calls that are noun-like: human, coyote, dog, hawk. They also have parts that are adjective-like: yellow, blue, green, big, small. And they have verb-like and adverb-like parts: running fast, walking slowly. These parts can be recombined in different ways, depending on the identity of the predator, the physical description, and the speed of travel (60).

The implications of these findings are staggering when looking at *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Not only did Swift explore the concept that humans are animals before it was commonly accepted, but both Swift and Wells considered the reality of animal language, which is only being proven now. It is fascinating to consider how far ahead of their time these two writers were and how today's understanding of man's place in the natural world may have altered the shape of these two novels, or, perhaps, how these two novels ultimately may have played minor roles in shaping this understanding.

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