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THE LANGUAGE ANIMAL - A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO NOVELS IN REGARD TO
LANGUAGE AND ANIMALITY

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ABSTRACT

A variety of historical, philosophical and theological traditions have contributed to the way animals are treated in a society both tacitly and explicitly. This research paper shall explore how animals are treated in *Gulliver's Travels* written by Jonathan Swift and *Heidi* written by Johanna Spyri with regard to language, literature and human/animal gaze, given that animals are excluded from discussions of language and power as they are not, themselves, participants in their own social construction through language. This research paper will also engage with the fact that how language is at the center of this generative process as language plays a critical role in shaping the very thought it purports to express. Language does not merely describe; it constitutes meaning and fundamentally shapes human experience. In illuminating the full capacity of how language shapes the domain of animality, I will shed light on the very question of what it is to be a human being.

Jonathan Swift, wrote *Gulliver's Travels* in the 18th century. Swift was a visionary as back in the 18th century when he wrote this prose, there existed no formal recognition of Animal Studies as a discipline. Swift spoke about the exploitation of animals through the perspective of satirical inversion in book four in *Gulliver's Travels*.

In this section of my research paper, I intend to analyze and put forth two arguments. Firstly, this section will analyze the satirical inversion between humans and animals in *Gulliver's Travels* as a commentary on the eighteenth century England. In the land of the Houyhnhnms, (who represent horses) there were savage human-like creatures called Yahoos (who represent human beings) for whom Gulliver conceived a violent hatred, and a race of horses, Houyhnhnms, meaning 'the perfection of nature'. In addition to this, this section will explore and engage with the question of sexual recognition of the human being as analyzed from the perspective of the 'other'. The work and writings of Swift could envision a future as late as in the 18th century as he shifts the focus of thinking from the human to the animal and that is why it becomes imperative to study *Gulliver's Travels* as a main text for analyzing Animal Studies as a discipline. *Gulliver Travels* comes across as a satirical inversion. Swift has satirically inverted the equation between the animals and the humans. He wants the readers to engage with animals being the point of site for humans in order to include animals as part of the mainstream culture. Swift is training the imagination of the people by acknowledging the presence of animals in an inverted satire as his techniques provide powerful images in the text which make his reader think about the animal-human relationship from the point of view of the animal. Animals do not fall below human beings in the hierarchy but are shown as more powerful and rational creatures in book four. Houyhnhnms are excellent

beings whose grand principle is to cultivate reason and be wholly governed by it. The Houyhnhnms hold periodical meetings at which the difficulties of various sections of the population are discussed and solved. The Houyhnhnms regulate their population and do not indulge in sexual intercourse merely for pleasure. Swift's purpose here is to attribute to horses certain qualities which would normally be present in human beings but which are in reality found as a lack in human beings. The main quality is the reason or the trait of rationality which human beings, according to Swift, do not value enough. Gulliver's reaction to what all he has seen in the land of the Houyhnhnms fills him with so much admiration for them and with so much hatred and disgust for the human race that he has no desire even to return to his family. Part four of *Gulliver's Travels* contains some of the most corrosive and offensive satire on mankind as it rebukes the human race that they see themselves superior to animals. The Yahoos are intended to represent human beings. The very initial description of the Yahoos given to us by Gulliver is repellent as Gulliver further describes them as abominable, and he is both astonished and horrified on seeing the physical resemblance between them and persons of his own race. It is, indeed, a bitter criticism of the human race to represent the Houyhnhnms as being superior mentally and morally to the Yahoos who represent human beings. The Yahoos are brutal, who cannot be taught, and mischievous. The Houyhnhnms, on the contrary, are morally so good that there is no word in their language for lying or falsehood.

The techniques of Swift are powerful as they provide capturing images when Gulliver gives to the master Houyhnhnm an account of the events and happenings in his own country and in other European countries. Gulliver tells his host that war in European countries was due sometimes to the ambition of kings and sometimes to the corruption of ministers. Gulliver speaks of the numerous deadly weapons which the European nations employ for destruction purpose. Gulliver then tells his host about the law-suits that are fought in English courts, and he speaks disparagingly about lawyers and judges. The whole of this account by Gulliver is an exposure of the evils of war and the wickedness of lawyers and judges. Gulliver also says that many people in his country ruin themselves by drinking, gambling, and debauchery; and that many are guilty of such crimes as murder, theft, robbery, forgery, rape, and sodomy.

The power of inversion is deep seated in fourth book in *Gulliver's Travels* as it provides an archetype of satirical inversion, where men are the servants of horses and since countless other utopias have used the device to demonstrate the absurdity of our own institutions. It is during Gulliver's fourth journey that Swift's satire reaches its pinnacle, where 'Swift put his most biting, hard lines, that speak against not only the government, but human nature itself' (Glicksman, *Perceptions of Satire in Gulliver's Travels*, 120). In this journey, as Gulliver comes to the land of the Houyhnhnms, who are creatures that look like horses but have the ability to reason. Also in this land are the Yahoos, of which Gulliver could only say that "Upon the whole, I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal, nor one against which I naturally conceived so strong an antipathy" (Swift, *Gulliver's Travels, IV*, 263). With great irony, Swift brings Gulliver into contact with a Yahoo once again. 'My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed in this abdominal animal a perfect human figure' (Swift, *Gulliver's Travels, IV*, 269-270). Indeed, Gulliver finds that the only difference between himself and the Yahoo is the Yahoo's lack of cleanliness and clothes; otherwise, a Yahoo would be indistinguishably human. With this line, Swift's satire achieves its goal, and shows that the flaws of humanity are overwhelming, and let to continue, result in a total degradation of the human. In addition to this, Gulliver, leaving the Houyhnhnms, says that he 'took a second leave of my master, but as I was going to prostrate myself to kiss his hoof, he did me the honor to raise it gently to my mouth.' (Swift, *Gulliver's Travels, IV*, 466). Gulliver kisses the hoof of the horse and this scene in the prose dismantles the thought that only human beings can dominate animals. Here, Houyhnhnm horse, who was Gulliver's master, was kissed on his hoof by him. From the perspective of Animal Studies discipline, this scene reveals and unveils a new perspective which Swift has been able to create for his readers. Satiric inversion is dominant and it shifts the positioning for the animal to humans and vice versa. He has employed this technique to portray in the society that how human beings treat and exploit animals. In addition to this, he has also been successful in reversing and bringing about a shift in the matrix of a long historical context which we as human beings associated animals with. Swift was indeed so thorough a satirist that many of his early readers misread the section on the Houyhnhnms. They were so enamored of reason that they did not realize that Swift was metamorphosing a virtue into a vice. In Book IV,

Gulliver has come to idealize the horses. They embody pure reason, but they are not human. Literally, of course, we know they are not, but figuratively they seem an ideal for humans. This prose shows the dynamics of domination of horses on the Yahoos and hence, it inverts the entire long standing history of domination of human beings on animals.

In contrast to the Houyhnhnms, Swift presents their precise opposite: 'Yahoos, creatures who exhibit the essence of sensual human sinfulness. The Yahoos are not merely animals; they are animals who are naturally vicious' (Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, IV, Swift describes them in deliberately filthy and disgusting terms, often using metaphors drawn from dung. The Yahoos plainly represent Mankind depraved. Swift, in fact, describes the Yahoos in such disgusting terms that early critics assumed that he hated Man to the point of madness.)

The satirical inversion between human beings and animals is dismantling the boundaries in a very threatening and violent manner. Gulliver describes the Yahoos as 'deformed . . . Their heads and breasts were covered with thick hair . . . but the rest of their bodies were bare . . . They had no tails and often stood on their hind feet ...'(Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, IV, 420). Gulliver's intense interest in the state of his clothes signals a deep-seated anxiety about his identity, or lack thereof. Significantly, the moment when he is discovered being naked in the novel is a deeply troubling and humiliating experience as he is assaulted by an eleven-year-old Yahoo girl as he bathes in the pool. This incident suggests more than mere prudery as Gulliver associates nudity with extreme vulnerability, even when there is no real danger present as a pre-teen girl is hardly a threat to a grown man, at least in physical terms. The state of nudity reminds Gulliver of how nonexistent he feels without the reassuring cover of clothing. As the female Yahoo approaches the pool he feels being sexually recognized by her and this comes across as a real threat as the entire scene is about the animal and the human. Swift makes a radical attempt to let his readers know that we should not take animals for granted. He portrays to his readers that animals cannot and should not be taken as a given for exploitation.

In the book, "The Animal That Therefore I Am." written by Jacques Derrida, he insists that the wars being raged over animal life are wars also about "what we call 'thinking'" And he adds, 'The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there' (Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p.25). In my opinion, it is very interesting to engage with this thought as to "who is seeking whom" keeping in mind the animal and human distinction. Considering that if animals can look and they look at us, hence, we can imagine that animals think about us and this mere thought shifts the dynamics for what it means to be human for human beings as the site of focus is not the human but the animal this time. Reading philosophers and reading theories we can gain ground on the fact that no one has exclusively entitled human beings to be enjoying the exclusivity of "thought". Swift pushes the human limits and this site where thinking has turned back on itself to become undone that animal being human or nonhuman is said to emerge.

Thomas Nagels in his essay, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" establishes a point that though the bat's body and physical habits appear alien but they still function like a computer. Secondly, they also have a conscious experience and if we humans have difficulty imagining that experience, the lack is our own. He equates "the human" and the body with "the animal." Nagel indirectly informs the human species that it is crucial that we begin to recognize the limits of our own subjectivity. Nagel deconstructs the human-animal divide along the lines of subjectivity. In addition to this, Derrida writes, 'It is not that the animal has a lesser relationship, a more limited access to entities, it has another relationship. But the difficulties are already piling up between two values incompatible in their 'logic': that of lack and that of alterity'(Derrida, *Thinking Animals*, 125).

In Derrida, *The Animal Therefore I am*, he talks about the instance of mutual acknowledgment, of "being seen" by "the" animal, which further spurs a moment of self and mutual recognition as well as desire, placing sexual and species difference into crisis: 'Should I show myself naked when...looking at me, is the living creature they call by the common, general, and singular name the animal? Henceforth I shall reflect (on) the same question by introducing a [full-length] mirror.... The same question then becomes whether I should show myself but in the process see myself naked (that is, reflect my image in a mirror) when, concerning me, looking at me, is this living creature, this cat that can find itself caught in the same mirror... But cannot this cat also be, deep within her [sic] eyes, my primary mirror?' (Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 50-51)

In the eye opening moment when Derrida is blind to anything but a singular vision of 'otherness,' sandwiched between the shame of his humanness, and the suffering humans cause to animals. Instead of embracing the numerous intersections of the animal gaze, as Derrida reads that moment, becomes a closed self-referential circuit, leading him back to thinking about his own human body, apparently oblivious to the larger implications of his cat's biological femaleness in relation to his own maleness. Given that he stands there naked before his cat, mightn't he have contemplated not only what it means to be human, but presumably what it also means to be a biologically male human body as illuminated through the gaze of the [feminine] cat? 'The very self-consciousness of his own shame blinds him to true engagement in a potentially affective moment, which instead turns phallogocentric, and returns him to himself, his humanity, and ultimately his maleness' (Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 234).

Swift is trying to make us think about the animals we have always taken for granted. He creates numerous new divisions and classifications keeping the site of animal as the focal point and trains the human imagination in accepting a new field of study called the Animal Studies and how this field is inherently connected to every other field.

In this section of my research paper, I will engage and argue that how *Heidi* is a relevant text from the perspective of Animal Studies is an 18th century text written by Johanna Spyri. *Heidi* comes across as a book that celebrates life, and the freedom of the spirit and the restorative powers of the open air and the nature. In *Heidi*, children learn to thrive in the natural world and the fear of death is renounced. The powers of nature and healing are central to this story along with the theme of the tragedy of a child who cannot walk but who is miraculously cured by the power of animals, plants and animal products. In this story, healing occurs in the nearly enchanted place where the orphaned child, Heidi has experienced her first taste of freedom amidst her birds, dog and goats. The freedom which she experiences is the freedom of an unhindered self-expression as she freely communicates with her animal friends without sabotaging her self-expression in the plot of the novel. Clara, the invalid girl learns to walk again when she learns to trust in the process of nature and surrenders herself in the care of goats, birds and Heidi's dog. The distinction between Animal Studies and Rousseau's philosophy of Nature Studies makes a clear distinction in *Heidi* as when Clara learns to walk again, we are asked to believe that this is the result of a quick nature therapy. In the words of Heidi's grandfather she has 'made the effort and won the day.' (Johanna Spyri, *Heidi*, 123). There is a contradiction which exists here as we as readers can gain ground on the fact that if it was not for Rousseau's philosophy of the nature therapy then is it the case that from the perspective of Animal Studies Clara could not have been cured? Animal Studies comes across as a tougher discipline as compared to Nature Studies. The former is not about rural/urban divide, it is not about curing yourself. It is a discipline which makes you go back into yourself and use yourself as a platform to generate yourself back unlike Nature Studies where mountains and waterfalls do the needful.

Nature Studies provides the standard, expected happy ending for children and for critics and commentators, the issue of walking/not walking in this novel is most often understood as merely a symbolic representation of the psychological healing of unhappy children. Kids who are orphaned, unloved and with too many adult-imposed restrictions on their lives which further expose the rural/urban divide. In such a reading, illness and the eventual cure of the disabled child are not recognized as significant issues in themselves but as the metaphorical equivalent of sadness, powerlessness and dependency. Such a reading of *Heidi* gives Clara to us a motherless girl, loved by her grand mamma and her father but locked in the dark, unnatural world of the town. She lives in the city of Frankfurt, surrounded by bricks and mortar in a place where one can hardly see the sky. Her illness makes her passive and excludes her from the possibility of rebellion and misrule. Though Spyri's motive is healing and redemption, hence Clara must be made whole. But is going back to nature the only way to heal? Coming from the frame of Animal Studies, the horizon of ideas is driving ambition in a certain direction. This discipline is exclusively not about redeeming the human soul but also about how one goes about looking at things from the site of the animal. How the site of the animal becomes the focal point of this field. Clara stands on her own two feet and she is for the first time truly herself. The animals in *Heidi* work as a sight for her healing as her interaction with these lovely creatures brings her back to life.

On Heidi's first day in the mountains with her grandfather, everything delights her starting from the clean spare hut with a place for everything, her cozy bed in the hayloft where she can lie looking out of a round

window and see right down the valley, the shrill whistle which means that grandfather's two goats are home and the best of all the delicious meal of golden toasted cheese, bread and fresh milk drunk from a round bowl. The next morning she roams the mountain with Peter and the goats and is amazed at the colors and the beauty that night when she sees her first sunset, she thinks that the rocks are on fire and is amazed at the beautiful, crimson snow. She feels complete sense of happiness in her new home like the goats and the birds, the flowers and the insects, Spyri's child is a part of nature and she gambols around like a little, strong, brown goat, she eats good, simple food and grows and blossoms like the flowers. The Puritan idea of the child as a soul to be saved or damned was losing its power by this time and thinkers like Rousseau, were already developing ideas about the naturalness and the simplicity of children. Children were unspoiled until adults made them so and in order to grow into the ideal adult, they needed a childhood in which they could develop a body which was strong and active and a mind unclouded with prejudice. It was Rousseau's follower Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), who developed the idea of the child as an organism like any other natural species. Childhood was a process, and the organic child needed to grow and develop naturally through action and play. Froebel proposed the idea of schools for very young children, places which would nurture and develop the young. He called them 'Kindergartens', literally children's garden, also known as nurseries.

Spyri's emphasis in *Heidi* on the health-giving properties of the mountain air and fresh milk for the invalid goes hand in hand with the belief that Clara began to walk because when she fed the goats she experienced the pleasures of independence, of caring for something else rather than always being cared for. The assumption here is, of course, that there can only be an independent mind where there is a healthy body. As the orphaned child, Heidi is taken up the mountain by Dete to live with her grandfather, who is nicknamed 'Alm Uncle'. On the way, she sheds her clothes one by one, shedding the old life where she was not wanted and loved. She is a homeless child in search of a home. She spends everyday with Peter on the mountains tending the goats and Heidi is the only character in the novel who remains barefoot throughout. Her grandfather wears shoes along with Peter but she is the only human being who does not in the novel. She keeps walking on sharp rocks and runs after goats even in cold weather with bare feet. The reality behind being barefoot portrays her relationship with the nature, other people and life itself. In a larger context she does not wear shoes as clothes, shoes, etc, make one civilized and on the contrary being barefoot symbolizes being uncivilized and its more close to nature. Moreover, clothes and shoes become really important as they are markers of civilization whereas Heidi being barefoot indicates that she wants herself to be identified with goats and the birds. She does not want to conform to the civilized ways of living and feels one with nature when she removes her clothes and remains barefoot. Jacques Derrida in his book, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, described a moment of being naked in the presence of this cat, with the cat looking back at him. He described a sense of discomfort, even shame from this experience of having his naked body gazed upon by his cat. Derrida saw that he was not so much looking as he was being looked at, and not by some global category of "animal", but by an all-too-present, staring feline. Derrida continues, always returning to the cat, his cat, the specific cat staring at his naked body and he reminds us that the experience of being looked upon by an animal is almost never the vantage point from which animals are talked about in both science and philosophy. Instead, the gaze is repeatedly and consistently from the human eyes upon the body of the animal. As human beings we are the observers, and from the position of looking upon the animal we also find ourselves with the privilege of being the ones who name, who examine, and who interpret the animal. The scientific and philosophical eye never expects the animal to be examining the examiner. Drawing from this, when we see *Heidi* being barefoot we can gain ground on the fact she is not thinking from the site of the human but is happy to place herself on the site of the animal. Moreover, she is seen as someone who is not trying to mix up with the nature but she becomes the nature herself. As Derrida says, 'there is no pure and simple 'as such' there is no "man" as such, there is no "the animal" as such. Always, therefore, Derrida urges: It is not just a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power It also means asking whether what calls itself human has the right rigorously to attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the pure, rigorous, indivisible concept, as such, of that attribution'. (Jacques Derrida, *Animal Man*, p.135)

She communicates to her goats and her dog deconstructing the barrier of language and her communication is responded back by her animal friends. In addition to this, there is no one world which Heidi claims and calls it her own. She interacts with the world of animals and since that is her world now where even a dog or a squirrel has a point of view and she being their protector makes space for appreciating and accepting all their point of views too. Hence, we can say that in this novel the animal and *Heidi* cannot be differentiated from each other on the basis of this single characteristic of having different worlds. In other words, Heidi is more than just a five year old child who loves animals and nature and as Derrida explains, 'drawing an op-positional limit [between Animal and Man] itself blurs the differences not only between man and animal, but among animal societies—there are an infinite number of animal societies, and, within the animal societies and within human society itself, so many differences' (Derrida, *Animal Man*, p.139). There are so many different experiences of the world and no one world as such which exists on the basis of one singular approach.

Throughout her stay in Frankfurt Clara tries to be a good friend to her but her stay in Frankfurt is a stay of great unhappiness as she wanders out of the house and gets lost, misses meals, doesn't understand the rules and when she gets a bundle of kittens to the house, Fraulein Rottenmeier who is the acerbic housekeeper calls Heidi an utter barbarian and warns her to lock her in the cellar with the cats and black beetles. There is presence of utter pain in her statements to the child and this is what happens to a homesick, desperately unhappy child who learns to lock all her feelings inside her so that no one perceives her sorrow and in this process she now becomes the metaphorical bird locked in the cage. When she tries to catch a glimpse of the sky she can see nothing but walls, windows and stony treats. For Heidi, healing means something which cures everything and makes everything well. Clara's health begins to improve almost from her first breath of mountain air and from her first lunch in the mountains she takes a second helping of golden toasted cheese and many references are made after this to her increased appetite and the 'high life-giving mountain air' gives Clara new energy and she wants to stay forever in this 'great stillness' and beauty of the mountains. Drawing from the field of Animal Studies, *Heidi* becomes an indispensable text to read as the animal becomes the site of inquiry in *Heidi* and hence when the site shifts from the animal to the human, that is where the field of Animal Studies gains significance as there are new ways of thinking which are now emerging keeping the animal the point of focus.

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