

CIRCE STORIES:
TRANSFORMATION, ANIMALS, AND NATURAL HISTORY, 1550-1750

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This dissertation argues that works by authors including Gelli, Spenser, Milton, and Swift participate in a previously overlooked tradition of transformation stories, flourishing from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century and re-deploying representations of animals from natural histories. This tradition derives from the innovative re-telling of Homer's Circe episode in Plutarch's dialogue "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti," featuring Gryllus, a former human who prefers to be a pig.

Comparing sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century analogues of Gryllus with representations of animals in natural histories reveals that the Plutarchian literary tradition functions as a major vehicle for arguments about the human/animal relationship, from Gelli's *Circe* (1549), through book 2 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590) and Milton's *Comus* (1634), until the parodic treatment of the Plutarchian tradition in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Often critiquing forms of anthropocentrism, the works of the Plutarchian tradition draw on representations of animals in natural histories in order to define the meaning of characters who desire transformation between human and animal states. Furthermore, new understandings of individual works can be achieved by locating them within the larger literary tradition in which they participate.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bryan Alkemeyer graduated from Cornell University with a Ph.D. in English Literature in May 2012. His research interests include Renaissance and eighteenth-century literature, animal studies, and the history of science. In the 2009-2010 academic year, he was an Exchange Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. He received an M.A. in English Literature from Cornell University in August 2009. He graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, with a B.A. in English in December 2005.

To Mom,
who taught me to read,
and
To Dad,
who taught me to love stories.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

In reproducing early orthography, I have expanded abbreviations and modernized the usage of “i” and “j,” “f” and “s,” and “u” and “v.”

CHAPTER 1

RENAISSANCE ANIMALISM:

A PLUTARCHIAN TRADITION OF TRANSFORMATIONS

Expanding Plutarch's dialogue "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti" into a series of dialogues between Ulysses and eleven talking animals, Giovanni Battista Gelli's *Circe* (1549) inaugurates, I argue, a Plutarchian tradition of transformation stories, distinct from a Homeric tradition of representing Circe's transformations and further developed by many Renaissance works, including book 2 of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590) and John Milton's *Comus* (1634).¹ Plutarch's innovative dialogue adapts Homer's Circe episode by imagining a conversation between Odysseus and Gryllus, a former human who refuses rescue from Circe's island because he prefers his new existence as a pig. Gryllus's desire to be an animal, I demonstrate, belongs to a larger constellation of Plutarchian motifs, which both imagine the disintegration of human identity and challenge the superiority of humans to animals. This Plutarchian constellation contrasts sharply with a constellation of motifs derived from the Circe episode in Homer's *Odyssey*, which emphasizes the endurance of human identity in spite of bodily transformation and thus reinforces distinctions between humans and animals.

My account reveals that stories about complete transformations of humans into animals have a subordinate role in the tradition of Circe stories until the Renaissance revival of Plutarch's dialogue. Stith Thompson's famous *Motif-Index* prioritizes stories of complete transformations

¹ For a survey of the Circean tradition that emphasizes issues of gender and sexuality, see Judith Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994). Yarnall's book is a valuable reference on the history of stories about Circe, and allusions to her, from antiquity through the twentieth century.

by making “*Transformation: man to animal*” a major sub-heading under the category “*Transformation*” while listing “*Partial transformation: animal with human mind*” under the implicitly marginalized category “*Miscellaneous transformation incidents.*”² In contrast to Thompson’s model, my account of the tradition of Circe stories shows that Homeric stories about exclusively bodily transformations have priority over Plutarchian stories about full transformations. Although both Homer’s *Odyssey* and Plutarch’s dialogue become new subjects of fascination in the Renaissance,³ Renaissance writers invert the earlier prioritization of transformation stories as they develop a Plutarchian tradition in opposition to Homer’s model. These literary innovations occur because of a shift in conceptions of human nature; thus, the development of a Plutarchian tradition of transformations relates intimately to the rise of humanist ideals, rejected by the literary descendants of Plutarch’s Gryllus.

The Homeric Tradition of Transformations

As narrated in *The Odyssey*, Homer’s Circe episode emphasizes the disparity between the mental abilities of humans and animals. Odysseus describes Circe’s transformation of some members of his crew into pigs in the following manner:

She struck them with her wand and drove them into her pig pens,
and they took on the look of pigs, with the heads and voices

² Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends*, revised edition, vol. 2 of 6 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1955), D100-D199, D0-D699, D682.3, D600-D699.

³ Plutarch’s works re-enter European culture *ca.* 1400; Homer’s epics begin to circulate widely after the first printed edition of 1488. See Philip H. Young, *The Printed Homer: A 3,000 Year Publishing and Translation History of the “Iliad” and the “Odyssey”* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2003), 79 and 96.

and bristles of pigs, but the minds within them stayed as they had been before.⁴

When Odysseus says that the crew “took on the look of pigs,” he implies that Circe changes the crew’s forms without altering their essential natures. The crew do not become pigs but rather acquire the false appearance of being pigs. Odysseus makes this point explicitly and unambiguously when he says, “the minds within them stayed as they had been / before.” Odysseus imagines the crew’s “minds” as cores of human identity, which survive unaltered beneath the physical exteriors that Circe has transformed. Except for bipedal locomotion, which the above passage neglects to mention, the only human capacity that the crew lose is articulate speech: they now have the “voices”—but emphatically not the “minds”—of pigs.

Other ancient versions of the Circe episode tend to follow Homer on this point and even exaggerate the motif of entrapment that already appears in the transformations of Homer’s Circe. Although Homer’s Circe keeps the transformed crew in “pig pens,” their physical confinement pales in comparison with their mental confinement, their inability to articulate their enduringly human thoughts or to participate fully in human community.⁵ In Virgil’s brief treatment of Circe in book 7 of *The Aeneid*, the poet describes Circe’s island as Aeneas sails by:

Groans can be heard, and roars of angry lions

Fighting against their chains in the late hours,

⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), page 158, lines 238-41. Subsequent citations appear in text by page and line number.

⁵ Yarnall makes a related claim about the victims of Homer’s Circe when she discusses Circe’s “imprisonment of their human consciousness within bodies not capable of expressing it.” See *Transformations of Circe*, 43. Earlier, Yarnall writes, “Odysseus’s men are imprisoned in the bodies of swine with their human consciousness intact and deprived of expression, lacking language and choice” (20). While I regard entrapment as a crucial motif in Homeric transformations, I disagree with the latter statement’s suggestion that Odysseus’s men lose certain mental faculties.

And savage cries of bristly hogs and bears
 In pens, and howls from images of huge wolves,
 Once human: potent herbs from the fierce goddess
 Give them the faces and the fur of beasts.⁶

The “angry” and “savage” displays of the transformed animals might seem to indicate that they have lost their human identities and become feral animals. Likewise, the phrase “Once human,” which presumably applies not just to the wolves but to all of the previously mentioned animals, seems to deny the humanity of these transformed creatures. The poet, however, carefully delimits the extent of their transformations by calling the wolves “images of huge wolves” rather than *real wolves* or simply *wolves*. Like the transformed crew of Homer’s *Odyssey*, who have “the look of pigs,” these creatures have the false appearance of being wolves. Virgil’s speaker also writes that Circe’s victims have “the faces and the fur of beasts,” which, along with Virgil’s “bristly hogs,” recall Odysseus’s emphasis on “heads” and “bristles.” By describing transformation as the bestowing of animal parts on humans, Virgil’s speaker recapitulates the idea that Circe’s transformations alter exterior shape without changing interior nature. The struggles of the transformed creatures are not the attempts of wild animals to escape “chains” or “pens” but the unrelenting protests of human minds that have been entrapped in animal bodies.

In a subsequent retelling, Ovid narrates the Circe episode from the perspective of a sailor who has undergone her transformations, from human to pig and back again. Ovid’s account of the experience of transformation develops Homer’s idea that the transformed creatures have swinish “voices” but human “minds” in a way that asserts even more emphatically—because it is a first- rather than second-hand account—that a human mind persists within the transformed

⁶ Vergil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Sarah Ruden (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), pages 144-5, lines 15-20.

body. In book 14 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which contains three different stories about Circe, Macareus describes his loss of human shape for his former companion Achaemenides, with whom he has just been reunited:

The goddess touched each of us with her wand
 atop our heads. It shames me, yet I'll say it:
 bristles began to sprout all over me,
 and I lost my ability to speak:
 instead of words I only managed grunts,
 my face was turned completely to the ground,
 and I could feel my mouth becoming hard
 and turning into an extended snout—
 my neck grew thick with wrinkles, and that part
 which only recently had held the cup
 was now creating hoof prints in the dirt!⁷

According to Macareus's retrospective narrative, he mentally observes the transformations of his body from a securely human vantage point. He describes many bodily changes that contribute to his loss of a recognizably human shape, but the persistence of his human mind is especially evident in the lines "I could feel my mouth becoming hard / and turning into an extended snout." By calling his transformed mouth a "snout," a word that is conventionally reserved for animals and only pejoratively applied to humans,⁸ Macareus unambiguously asserts that his body takes on the characteristic shape of an animal. The "I" that observes these changes to its "mouth,"

⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Charles Martin (New York and London: Norton, 2004), pages 492-3, lines 394-404.

⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online edition, s.v. "snout" (entry dated 1989).

however, remains human—just as human, in fact, as the “I” that narrates its story to Achaemenides.

The persistence of Macareus’s humanity is likewise evident in the account of his shocked recognition that his hand has become a “hoof.” He portrays the moment of comparing the memory of having a hand, a body part that is almost unique to the bipedal human, with contradictory visual evidence: “that part” “was now creating hoof prints in the dirt!” He observes that he now has the hooves of an animal from his self-same human standpoint: the shock communicated by Macareus’s emphasis on the suddenness of the hand’s transformation (“only recently” vs. “was now”) is the shock of a human mind, bewildered by its inhabitation of a quadrupedal and animal—rather than bipedal and human—body.

Macareus also emphasizes his enduring humanity by narrating his frustrated attempts to speak. He says, “I lost my ability to speak: / instead of words I only managed grunts.” Although Macareus “only managed grunts” upon his transformation, the fact that he continues to try to produce “words” indicates that his mind remains human, and that he continues to wish to be human. As an animal, Macareus lacks the “ability to speak,” but he observes everything that happens to his body from a human perspective and can narrate it in human language to Achaemenides after he regains human organs of speech.

Although the early Christian writers Augustine and Boethius appropriate the Circe episode for their own purposes, their treatments of transformation are also consistent with Homer’s model. In his early fifth-century treatise *The City of God against the Pagans*, Augustine confronts ancient reports of metamorphoses, including the “incredible story of the celebrated

witch Circe, who transformed the companions of Ulysses into beasts.”⁹ Augustine dismisses such transformation stories as affronts to God, who alone has the power to create, including the power to alter bodies:

Demons do not, of course, create real natures. If they do indeed accomplish anything of the kind which we are here considering, it is only in respect of their appearance that they transform beings created by the true God, so that they seem to be what they are not. I do not therefore in the least believe that either the body or the soul can be transformed into the members and lineaments of beasts by the art or power of demons. (843)

Before making this theological point, however, Augustine compares ancient transformation stories to modern (that is, fifth-century) anecdotes about Italian witches. Augustine’s description of the witches’ victims seems to echo Odysseus’s account of the transformation of his crew: “their minds did not become bestial, but were kept rational and human” (843). Despite the unmistakable resemblance of this claim to the description of Circe’s transformations in Homer’s *Odyssey*, Augustine finds ancient precedent for these transformation stories in Apuleius’s *Golden Ass*: “This is what Apuleius, in the work inscribed with the title *De asino aureo*, says, or pretends, befell him: that, having taking a potion, he became an ass, while retaining his human mind” (843). Homer’s prototype seems to influence not only Apuleius’s *Golden Ass* but also anecdotes about transformation in Augustine’s time.¹⁰ Certainly, Circe, to whom Augustine

⁹ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. and ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 842.

¹⁰ On the influence of Homer’s line “the minds within them stayed as they had been / before” on Augustine and on Renaissance writings about witchcraft, see Gareth Roberts, “The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fictions,” in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 189-194. Roberts offers this account of a tradition

alludes at the beginning and the end of his theological treatment of transformation (842, 844), looms large in Augustine's imagination, even though he ultimately rejects the possibility of transforming not only the mind but also the body.

Boethius, meanwhile, appropriates the Circe episode in *The Consolation of Philosophy* in order to set in relief the moralistic Christian perspective of Lady Philosophy, who argues that sin transforms human nature into animal nature. She claims, "whatever departs from the good ceases to exist, so evil men cease to be what they had been before. Of course, the very appearance of the human frame which they still possess shows that they were men; thus, by resorting to wickedness they have lost their human nature as well."¹¹ Lady Philosophy then lists a variety of sins and the symbolically appropriate animals which sinners inwardly resemble. An example of particular relevance to the Circe episode reads: "The one who steeps himself in foul and unclean lusts lingers over pleasures like a filthy sow" (79). As though preparing a transition to the topic of Circe's transformation of Odysseus's men into pigs, Lady Philosophy saves the example about the pig for last. Indeed, only one sentence separates this example from Lady Philosophy's poem about Circe's transformations: "In this sense he who abandons goodness and ceases to be a man cannot rise to the status of a god, and so is transformed into an animal" (79).

Mention of the pig in the context of an argument about transforming the human propels

based on Homer's Circe episode: "A full structural analysis of Homer's archetype in relation to its later and developing versions would be rewarding, but mention will be made only of some characteristic features. The stories begin with arrival by sea in a strange land: [...] As in the *Odyssey*, food is the agent of transformation. Men are transformed by a woman into very particular sorts of domestic animals. Although Homer's Circe has changed men into wolves and lions, it is for transformations of men into swine she is chiefly remembered. Transformation into beasts of burden, especially asses, mark the later analogues and the transformed beasts are to be kept in servitude. These features may be suggested as constituting a Circean narrative configuration" (194). For Roberts's treatment of Apuleius, see 191 and 193.

¹¹ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. and ed. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 78. Subsequent citations appear in text.

Lady Philosophy toward the Circe episode, which she narrates in the form of a poem. In her retelling of the crews' transformations, Lady Philosophy adheres closely to Homer's model, even though her Christian argument about the moral transformation of the human differs sharply from the treatment of transformation in *The Odyssey* and in the works that it inspired. Indeed, the transformations of sin, as described by Lady Philosophy, represent the inverse of Circe's transformations, for they affect the human mind but not the human body. The contrast does not escape Lady Philosophy; indeed, it motivates her recourse to the Circe episode; for the end of her poem explicitly dramatizes the difference between the two treatments of transformation in order to make the point that sin's transformations are more dangerous than those of Circe.

The moment that makes the adherence of Lady Philosophy's poem to the Homeric model unmistakable is Lady Philosophy's adaptation of Odysseus's assertion that Circe's transformations do not affect the mind. Lady Philosophy narrates the fortunes of the crew:

they had turned to swine.
 True voices and true shapes were lost;
 Bereft of human norms,
 Their minds alone endured unchanged
 To mourn their monstrous forms. (p. 80, ll. 28-32)

When Lady Philosophy imagines that the crew "mourn" the transformation of their bodies, she participates in the tradition of representing the discrepancy between human mind and animal body in the distress of the crew: Virgil's transformed humans rattle their chains; Ovid's Macareus says that the story of his transformation "shames me."

Lady Philosophy also repeats two other motifs from the Homeric tradition: the representation of transformation as the acquiring of a deceptive animal appearance, and the

dramatization of the human's frustrated attempts to produce articulate speech. As Lady Philosophy introduces Circe, Lady Philosophy tells the fate of one of Circe's victims: "The likeness of a boar cloaked one" (p. 79, l. 11). When Lady Philosophy says that this human acquires an animal "likeness," she asserts that his new shape falsifies his true identity, as Virgil's poet does when describing "images of huge wolves" and Homer's Odysseus does when saying that his transformed crew have "the look of pigs." Lady Philosophy's reference to a cloak, a garment particularly suited to concealing the wearer's shape, reinforces the suggestion that the animal exterior disguises the human interior.

Describing another of Circe's victims, Lady Philosophy relates, "A third, now partner with the wolves, / Howled when he sought to cry" (p. 79, ll. 15-6). The dramatization of the human's frustrated will to speak closely resembles the statement of Ovid's Macareus. The inspiration, however, may come from Homer's Odysseus, who notes that the transformed crew have animal "voices."

Having carefully observed the Homeric tradition for narrating Circe's transformations, Lady Philosophy contrasts Circe's transformations of the body with sin's transformations of the mind. Lady Philosophy explains,

That hand of Circe was too weak,
Her plants less power impart,
Though human limbs they could transform,
They could not reach the heart. (p. 80, ll. 33-6)

According to the concluding lines of Lady Philosophy's poem, the physical transformations of Circe pale in comparison to the moral transformations of sin:

Man's true strength dwells inside;

The poisons which dehumanize
 Within him now reside.
 These potions deeply penetrate;
 Though bodies feel no pain,
 The deadly wounds which they inflict
 Impact upon the brain. (p. 80, ll. 38-44)

Lady Philosophy figures sins as “potions” to recall Circe’s “Cups charged with magic charms” (p. 79, l. 8), but only so that Lady Philosophy can contrast Circe’s transformations with those of sin, which, while affecting minds but not “bodies,” are comparatively “deadly,” in Lady Philosophy’s view, because they compromise the integrity of the human soul.

Although Lady Philosophy’s discussion of sin offers a significantly different treatment of transformation than the Circe episode, Lady Philosophy observes the Homeric tradition in her depiction of Circe’s transformations themselves. With the exception of Plutarch’s dialogue “*Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti*,” discussed below, revisions to the Circe episode would have to wait for the Renaissance, when some of the period’s most creative writers would become interested in telling stories about Circes who transform not only bodies but also minds—and humans who willingly choose animal existences.

The Plutarchian Tradition of Transformations

Plutarch’s “*Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti*,” dating approximately to the first century CE, offers an alternative representation of Circe’s transformations. In a study of Plutarch’s writings about animals, Stephen Newmyer claims that Plutarch is unique among ancient writers in “his

consistently positive attitude toward animals,” and that “*Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti*” is unique even within Plutarch’s idiosyncratic oeuvre for its estimation of animals above humans.¹² George Boas, who coins the term “theriophily” for the philosophical and literary tradition of elevating animals above humans, traces Montaigne’s famous admiration of animals to Giovanni Battista Gelli’s *Circe* and ultimately to Plutarch, whom Boas regards as the origin of arguments about the superiority of animal intelligence.¹³ Considering Plutarch’s generally unconventional treatment of animals, it is no surprise that his treatment of Circe’s transformations of humans into animals remains unique until the rise of his Renaissance imitators.

In Plutarch’s dialogue, Circe and Odysseus strike a bargain: if Odysseus can persuade one of the transformed creatures, whose linguistic capabilities Circe will restore, that humans are superior to animals, then Circe will return the creature to human form. Circe introduces Odysseus to Gryllus, a pig who has once been a Greek, but contrary to Odysseus’s expectations, Gryllus prefers being an animal and makes lengthy arguments to prove that animals surpass humans in the classical virtues.¹⁴ Defending the opinion of many transformed humans, Gryllus tells Odysseus, “I shall quickly make you see that we are right to prefer our present life in place of the former one, now that we have tried both” (499). Unlike members of the transformed crew in other ancient versions and their Renaissance translations—especially Macareus, who prefaces

¹² Stephen T. Newmyer, *Animals, Rights and Reason in Plutarch and Modern Ethics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 8; 7 and 39.

¹³ George Boas, *The Happy Beast in French Thought of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 1 (“theriophily”), 25 (Plutarch as origin), 28 (Montaigne’s reading of Gelli), but see 25-36.

¹⁴ In the surviving fragment, Gryllus discusses primarily the virtues of fortitude and temperance. The section on prudence is badly damaged, and a conjectural section on justice is entirely missing. For relevant editorial comments on the manuscript, see William C. Helmbold, introduction and notes to “Beasts Are Rational,” by Plutarch, trans. and ed. William C. Helmbold, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 12, The Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1957), 490, 525 n. f, 529 n. f, 532-3 n. a. Subsequent citations of this edition appear in text.

his tale with a confession of shame—Gryllus desires to be an animal. Indeed, he even justifies his choice by pointing out that the transformed crew “have tried both” human and animal states and therefore may know better than Odysseus which is best.

To Plutarch’s Odysseus, however, Gryllus’s preference for an animal existence represents a significant departure from—and vitiation of—his essential humanity. In response to Gryllus’s initial statements about the superiority of animals, Odysseus exclaims, “To me, Gryllus, you seem to have lost not only your shape, but your intelligence also under the influence of that drug. You have become infected with strange and completely perverted notions. Or was it rather an inclination to swinishness that conjured you into this shape?” (499). Odysseus entertains two distinct hypotheses about Gryllus: one speculates that transformation has warped Gryllus’s mind; the other, that pre-existing animalistic traits have rendered Gryllus susceptible to Circe’s transformations. Both hypotheses deny Gryllus’s humanity. In an unmistakable contradiction of his literary original’s assertion that “the minds within them stayed as they had been / before,” Plutarch’s Odysseus suggests to Gryllus that transformation has deprived him of “not only your shape, but your intelligence also.” To Odysseus, Gryllus’s expressions of admiration for animals are “strange and completely perverted notions,” which cast doubt upon Gryllus’s claim to human “intelligence.” Alternatively, Odysseus supposes that Gryllus may have already possessed “an inclination to swinishness” even before his transformation. Presumably, Odysseus intends this hypothesis, which he presents in the form of an insulting rhetorical question, to communicate his contempt for Gryllus, whom Odysseus deems unworthy of the human shape. Nevertheless, when Odysseus quips that Gryllus’s transformation merely makes manifest his essential animality, Plutarch departs from Homer’s model in the same manner as when Odysseus wonders if Gryllus’s transformation has entailed mental changes as well: while Homer’s Circe creates

discordance between minds and bodies, Plutarch imagines transformations that create concordance.

The crucial innovation of Plutarch's dialogue is the introduction of a formerly human character who prefers being an animal. Indeed, the dialogue is frequently called "Gryllus."¹⁵ Plutarch, however, foreshadows Odysseus's perspective on Gryllus even before this famous character's introduction, when Odysseus and Circe first make their bargain. To Circe's implication that animals enjoy a happier existence than humans, Odysseus responds, "This is a new potion of words that you are stirring and drugging for me, Circe. It will certainly transform me literally into a beast if I am to take your word for it that changing from beast to man spells ruin" (493-5). In Odysseus's formulation, believing that transformation from animal to human is undesirable would amount "literally" to transformation from human to animal. Odysseus probably means "literally" in a hyperbolic sense; nevertheless, he equates, metaphorically if not "literally," transformation into an animal with failure to acknowledge human superiority. From Odysseus's perspective, preferring an animal existence to a human one betrays sub-human intellectual faculties.

Plutarch's dialogue remains unimitated until the Renaissance, when works inspired by Plutarch's dialogue abruptly begin to proliferate.¹⁶ Renaissance interest in Plutarch's dialogue is evident as early as 1510, when Desiderius Erasmus includes references to Plutarch's dialogue in

¹⁵ See, for instance, Helmbold, introduction to "Beasts Are Rational," 490. On the dialogue's Latin title, see Newmyer, *Animals, Rights and Reason in Plutarch and Modern Ethics*, 30.

¹⁶ Detecting Plutarch's influence on a variety of Renaissance writers, including Laurentius Valla, Machiavelli, William Browne, Edmund Spenser, Ascanio Grandi, and Juan Luis Vives, Merritt Hughes writes of "the tradition that descended from Plutarch and was running to seed." Merritt Y. Hughes, "Spenser's Acrasia and the Circe of the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (1943), 382, 382-5, cf. 394.

The Praise of Folly.¹⁷ The first Renaissance work to take Plutarch's dialogue as its basis, however, is Giovanni Battista Gelli's *Circe*, published in Italian in 1549 and translated into English by Henry Iden in 1557.¹⁸ Gelli expands Plutarch's dialogue into a series of dialogues between Ulysses and eleven different animals, organized in ascending order generally according to the chain of being, from the oyster to the elephant.¹⁹ In a preface dedicating the work to Cosimo de' Medici, Gelli acknowledges his debt to Plutarch by imagining himself to be "following the steppes of the most learned Plutarche."²⁰ Plutarch's dialogue gives Gelli not only the work's central premise, the bargain between Ulysses and Circe, but also material for many passages, which Gelli borrows from Plutarch's *Gryllus* and assigns to various talking animals.²¹ Plutarch's dialogue also dictates the sequence of topics over the final five dialogues, which feature fortitude (lion), temperance (horse), prudence (dog), justice (calf), and the human's allegedly unique capacity for religion (elephant). Like *Gryllus*, Gelli's lion, horse, dog, and calf argue that animals surpass humans in the classical virtues, and collectively, they treat the virtues in the same order as *Gryllus*. Furthermore, as the final (surviving) lines of Plutarch's dialogue broach the topic of religion,²² so Gelli's final dialogue asserts that animals, "not having the

¹⁷ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, in "*The Praise of Folly*" and *Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Adams (New York and London: Norton, 1989), 4, 35.

¹⁸ On translations of *La Circe* into English, see Robert Adams, introduction to *The Circe of Signior Giovanni Battista Gelli of the Academy of Florence*, trans. Thomas Brown and Robert Adams, ed. Robert Adams (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), xlix.

¹⁹ On the chain of being, see, of course, Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936).

²⁰ Giovanni Battista Gelli, *Circes of John Baptista Gello, Florentine. Translated out of Italion into Englishe by Henry Iden* (Imprinted at London in Poules Churchyarde, at the signe of the holy ghost by John Cawood, printer to the Quenes Majestie, 1557), 7. I have assigned numbers to the pages of this edition, beginning with the title page. Subsequent citations appear in text.

²¹ Adams identifies some, but not all, of Gelli's borrowings from "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti" and other works by Plutarch. See his introduction to *The Circe*, xxiv-xxv.

²² On the ending of Plutarch's fragment, see editorial comments in Helmbold, ed., "Beasts Are Rational," 532-3 n. a.

understanding, have no knowledge at all of the same firste cause, as he [man] hath” (293-4).

The opening of *La Circe* plots its own departure from the Homeric tradition for representing Circe’s transformations. When Ulysses mentions his reluctance to allow his transformed compatriots “so wretchedlye to lede their lyfe in bodies of beastes” (12), his formulation allows for the interpretation that human minds endure within the animal “bodies,” as in Homer’s version of the Circe episode. “The Argument” to Gelli’s *Circe* likewise prepares this interpretation by explaining that transformed creatures refusing the offer of transformation “shoulde remayne, to ende theyr lyves there so in bodies of beastes” (9). When Circe tells Ulysses that she will return to humanity only those creatures who consent, a dialogue ensues that makes evident Gelli’s departure from Homer’s model:

Circe: I wyll not graunte thee this favour, except they also be contented therewith.

Ulysses: Howe maye I knowe this of them, who beinge Beastes, understande not? nor yet canne speake? I doubt that thou mocke me.

Circe: Chaunge not thy mynd, for I shall graunte theym speache.

Ulysses: And shall they have the self same discourse that they had when they were men?

Circe: Yea for lyke as I chaunged them into beastes so shall I cause the knowledge of very men to come into them againe. (13)²³

Emphatically unlike Homer’s Odysseus, Gelli’s Ulysses presumes that Circe’s transformations have altered not only bodies but also minds. Ulysses not only points out that animals cannot speak but also believes that the transformed creatures can no longer “understande,” which suggests a deeper transformation of the human than the Homeric writers depict. Circe must

²³ For ease of reading, I have expanded abbreviated names and altered the layout of dialogue for long quotations from Iden’s translation.

explicitly promise to restore “the knowledge of very men,” in addition to the capacity for articulate speech, to the transformed creatures in order to assure Ulysses that they will be able to engage in productive conversation with him. Finally, Circe herself compares the magical act by which she gives the creatures human “knowledge” to the earlier magical act by which she has transformed them from humans into animals. Her implication seems to be that she now transforms minds from animal to human, just as she has previously transformed bodies and minds from human to animal. Thus, not only the appropriation of Plutarch’s idea of the bargain but also the structure of the initial exchanges between Ulysses and Circe serves to announce a departure from Homeric representations of Circe’s transformations.

Like Plutarch’s Gryllus, Gelli’s transformed creatures also depart from Homeric precedents by using their newly restored speech to express the preference for animal existence. Instead of lamenting his transformation, the oyster rejects the opportunity to return to human form when he tells Ulysses, “I este me more this my contentation then al that ever I mought hope to have at thy handes” (28). The mole, snake, hare, goat, and hind similarly find greater happiness as animals (37, 68, 76, 123, 130).²⁴ Meanwhile, as the lion, horse, dog, and calf rehearse and expand Gryllus’s arguments that animals surpass humans in the classical virtues, they take pride in their animality, quite unlike Ovid’s ashamed Macareus. The lion, for instance, tells Ulysses, “I thinke once there is much more fortitude amonge us, then amonge you, and that we do the workes thereof, with far lesse difficultie then you do. So that perswade me no more that I should become man againe, for I will remaine thus a Lion” (174). The horse, dog, and calf

²⁴ Agreeing with Ulysses that reason makes humans superior to animals, but nevertheless refusing to return to humanity because of the subordination of women, the deer introduces unique complications into Gelli’s exploration of the human/animal distinction. For an excellent treatment of the dialogue with the deer, see Marilyn Migiel, “The Dignity of Man: A Feminist Perspective,” in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 211-32.

make similar declarations about animal temperance, prudence, and justice, respectively (188, 223-4, 245). Even the elephant, who ultimately accepts Ulysses's offer of transformation, initially feels not shame or sadness but ambivalence about his animal state. He tells Ulysses of his transformation by Circe: "I was by her transformd into an Elephante, of the which beinge I am not yet fully resolved, whether it be better then yours or not" (257-8). Since the shame of Macareus and the lamentations of Odysseus's crew originate in certainty about the inferiority of animals, the elephant's initial ambivalence belongs more to the Plutarchian model than to the Homeric one.²⁵

Gelli's transformed creatures also contradict Circe's victims from the Homeric tradition in their attitude toward the faculty of speech. With the partial exception of the hind, none of Gelli's characters experiences the frustration of the will to speak, as do many characters from the Homeric tradition. Although the hind says, "O thanked be the goddes, that I understand the voyce of man: and can speake as I was wont" (127), her enthusiasm for speech fades when Ulysses points out that she must become human to retain the faculty: "I also must be conversant onely with Deare, and we have other meanes to shewe our necessities one to an other, the which are so fewe, and so rare, that they trouble us little" (149). The return of speech excites the hind, but she willingly resigns herself to speechlessness, even suggesting that the advantages of human speech are overrated. In more direct opposition to the motif of frustrated speech in the Homeric tradition, the snake exclaims, "alas I understand and I speake, whether I be tourned againe into man, as I was heretofore: God forbyd this" (42). While Ovid and other writers dramatize Circe's unfitting placement of human minds in animal bodies by portraying her victims in the act of failing to articulate their human thoughts, the snake does not wish to speak. Indeed, the snake

²⁵ The exceptional status of the dialogue with the elephant is the subject of my next chapter.

even fears that the return of speech may foreshadow that unwelcome event: a complete return to humanity.

In the succeeding dialogue, the hare makes a similar complaint: “Alas, what meaneth this? I have agayne the understanding of the signification of the speache of man: Oh my unhappy chaunce, why haste thou brought me agayne unto suche miserie?” (73). As with the snake’s reaction, the hare’s outcries reinforce the impression that Circe has transformed her victims fully into animals, unable to comprehend human speech until she restores the faculty by magic. The hare proceeds, however, to criticize the idea that speech makes humans superior to animals in a way that implicitly redounds on the role of the motif of frustrated speech in the Homeric tradition:

when those of mine owne kynd have any grieffe, I knowe it streight by the voyce, for it is naturall to every beast, to shewe with the varietie of the sound of his voice, whether he be merry or sory. But these such natural voyces shewe me onely theyr grieffe in generall: the whiche kinde of sorowinge, is farre easier to be borne, then the sorowinge of man, who, besides the lamentyng with syghtes and malincolie, and sorowfull accentes, increaseth with shewing his myseries, and the occasion of his grieffe, muche more the compassion, very ofte to them that heare it. (39v-39r)

The hare’s disparagement of articulate speech in comparison to inarticulate utterances inverts the influential position of Aristotle, who writes that the capacity for rational speech elevates the human above other animals, who have the capacity for inarticulate utterance only: “A voice is a signifier of what is pleasant or painful, which is why it is also possessed by the other animals[. ...] But speech is for making clear what is beneficial or harmful, and hence also what is just or

unjust. For it is peculiar to human beings, in comparison to the animals, that they alone have perception of what is good or bad, just or unjust, and the rest.”²⁶ The Homeric writers offer a dramatization of Aristotle’s comments on human superiority when they portray the reduction of the speaking capacity of Circe’s victims to mere voice, which cannot express their enduringly human thoughts. As the hare points out, however, both the “natural voyces” of animals and the articulate speech of humans can express “griefe,” and animals do so without details that the hare finds superfluous or annoying. Since “griefe” is usually the precise emotion that Circe’s victims wish to express following their transformations in the Homeric tradition, the hare’s reflections on animal voices and human speech implicitly satirize the Homeric tradition for attempting to dramatize the superiority of human speech at a moment of suffering, in which the superiority of articulate speech to inarticulate speech, and of human form to animal form, is compromised. Even if the hare’s perspective is flawed, it contributes to delineating *La Circe* from the Homeric tradition on the quite specific point of human speech.

As he converses with the various transformed creatures, Gelli’s Ulysses repeats the view of Plutarch’s Odysseus that transformation from human to animal befits human beings who fail to appreciate human superiority, which represents a radical departure from the Homeric treatment of transformation. In response to the oyster’s disparagement of the human condition, for instance, Odysseus remarks, “Oh my Itacus, when thou loste the shape of man, it should seme thou lost reason also to saye thus” (15-6). Gelli’s Ulysses repeats almost exactly the words of Plutarch’s Odysseus on an analogous occasion: “To me, Gryllus, you seem to have lost not only your shape, but your intelligence also” (499). Using quite similar language, and calling attention to the repetition, Ulysses tells the mole, “O my Moule, it semeth thou shouldest also have done,

²⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 4.

as I sayde to yonder Oyster, that at one time thou lost the shape of man and reason also” (35).

Gelli’s Ulysses also recapitulates the other interpretation that Plutarch’s Odysseus suggests: that an inherent “swinishness,” which Gryllus possesses already in human form, “conjured you into this shape” (499). He makes this point at length after he has spoken with five different animals:

Our wise menne of Gretia are wont to saye, that they, who can be counsailed by them selves, to live well and honestly, are put in the first degree of vertue. And they that can not of them selves, but beleve the counsell of those who are wiser then they, are put in the second degre: but he that can not of him selfe, nor yet will take counsell of others, is thought by them not worthy to be numbred among men. And of this sort are they with whom I have spoken: So that it is no marvaile, though they wyll not become men againe. (126-7)

According to Ulysses, the five former humans with whom he has conversed have always had animalistic qualities; therefore, they deserve their respective transformations into oyster, mole, snake, hare, and goat. Ulysses repeats the sentiment in subsequent dialogues. For instance, in a soliloquy, Ulysses pronounces his judgment on the lion: “Let him then remaine thus a beast without reason, and I will seke, who [...] deserveth more to retourne man, then this felowe dothe” (175). As a final example, Ulysses chastises the horse for the horse’s preference of an animal existence: “If you then be fully thus determined, remaine thou so a beaste still: for truely thou deservest none other beyng then this” (199). The idea that a human can have animalistic qualities, such that the human merits transformation into an animal, is, of course, one of Plutarch’s most striking departures from Homer.

Gelli’s adaptation of Plutarch is unique in its ambitious expansion of the dialogue’s scope

but not in its imitation of Plutarch. Geoffrey Whitney's 1586 *Choice of Emblemes*, for instance, contains an emblem of Circe's transformations, entitled "Homines voluptatibus transformantur."²⁷ The poem accompanying the image instructs the reader:

See here Ulisses men, transformed straunge to heare:
Some had the shape of Goates, and Hogges, some Apes, and Asses weare.
Who, when they might have had their former shape againe,
They did refuse, and rather wish'd, still brutishe to remaine.
Which showes those foolishe sorte, whome wicked love dothe thrall,
Like brutishe beastes do passe their time, and have no sence at all.²⁸

Initially, the poem figures an animal form as a "shape" that humans "weare," as in the tradition influenced by Homer. Likewise, the poem's marginalia refer the reader to passages by Virgil and Ovid, who follow Homer in representing Circe's transformations as physical but not mental. Nevertheless, the poem tells not Homer's but Plutarch's story of transformed creatures who reject the opportunity to return to human form, and the poem concludes by comparing these former humans to "brutishe beastes" without human "sence."²⁹ As in Gelli's much longer *La Circe*, no character named Gryllus appears in this poem; however, it follows Plutarch's model in suggesting that "wicked love" can cause human nature to become animal nature.

With the publication of book 2 of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in 1590, a character named after Plutarch's Gryllus joins his less obvious literary analogues. The final canto introduces the infamous character Gryll, whose name explicitly identifies him as a literary

²⁷ Yarnall provides this translation: "Men are transformed by pleasure." *Transformations of Circe*, 106.

²⁸ Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes* (Leyden: Imprinted by Francis Raphelengius, 1586), page 82, lines 1-6.

²⁹ Yarnall also argues that, in spite of Whitney's marginalia, Plutarch's influence is more decisive. See *Transformations of Circe*, 106.

descendant of Plutarch's Gryllus.³⁰ More importantly, Gryll shares his namesake's preference for existence as a pig rather than a human. Upon restoration to human form, Gryll laments instead of rejoicing and thus becomes an object of contempt for the knight Guyon, who declares:

See the mind of beastly man,
That hath so soone forgot the excellence
Of his creation, when he life began,
That now he chooseth, with vile difference,
To be a beast, and lacke intelligence.³¹

Like Plutarch's Odysseus, Guyon, who likewise desires to save transformed humans from animality, suspects that the preference for an animal form is symptomatic of the loss of human "intelligence." The dialogue ends with the transformation of Gryll back into a pig, which, according to the judgment of the Palmer, brings Gryll's bodily form into accord with his ostensibly animalistic mental state: "Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*, and have his hoggish minde" (2.12.87.8).

John Milton's work contains numerous allusions to Circe.³² Milton tends to follow Homer rather than Plutarch in his treatments of Circe; however, he creates a story of metamorphosis following Plutarch's example in his 1634 masque, known as *Comus*. In the subsequent and more famous *Paradise Lost*, Milton's speaker makes a brief allusion to Circe as he admires Eve's God-given authority over Eden's animals: Eve commands "every Beast, more

³⁰ Spenser's adaptation of Gryllus's name suggests that he read Plutarch's original dialogue. Merrit Hughes reports, however, that since at least 1762, some critics have believed Iden's translation of Gelli's *Circe* to have introduced Spenser to Plutarch's dialogue. See "Spenser's Acrasia," 382, 382 n. 9.

³¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow, London, New York, et al.: Pearson Education, 2001), book 2, canto 12, stanza 87, lines 1-5. Subsequent citations appear in text by book, canto, stanza, and line number.

³² For another scholar's discussion of Milton's treatments of Circe, see Leonora Brodwin, "Milton and the Renaissance Circe," *Milton Studies* 6 (1974), 21-83.

duteous at her call, / Than at *Circean* call the Herd disguis'd."³³ The comparison relies on the Homeric representation of transformation, according to which Circe changes bodies but not minds: Eve's majesty exceeds Circe's because Circe commands only humans "disguis'd" as animals. Eve, in contrast, commands true animals, beings who are relatively alien.

In *Comus*, too, Milton follows Homer's example in his portrait of Circe's transformations, but those of Circe's son Comus betray the influence of Plutarch's dialogue. Introducing Comus as the son of Circe and Bacchus, the Attendant Spirit explains that Comus transforms humans by giving them a magic drink:

Soon as the Potion works, their human count'nance,
Th' express resemblance of the gods, is chang'd
Into some brutish form of Wolf, or Bear,
Or Ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat,
All other parts remaining as they were.
And they, so perfect is their misery,
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
But boast themselves more comely than before,
And all their friends and native home forget,
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.³⁴

When Comus's victims "boast themselves more comely than before," they recapitulate the preference of Plutarch's Gryllus for existence as a pig rather than a human. The Attendant Spirit,

³³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), page 390, lines 521-2.

³⁴ John Milton, *Comus*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), page 91, lines 68-77. Subsequent citations appear in text by page and line number.

furthermore, claims that Comus “Excels his Mother at her mighty Art” (63), presumably because Comus, unlike Circe, depraves human minds. While Circe’s victims lament their transformations in the Homeric tradition, Comus’s victims rejoice at their new forms.

These two traditions of representing Circe’s transformations, Homeric and Plutarchian, coexist in the Renaissance. Translators of ancient Circe episodes, including George Chapman, Arthur Golding, and George Sandys, preserve the well-established tradition that the transformed crew retain their essential humanity.³⁵ Milton observes the distinction between the stories of Homer and Plutarch as he differentiates the Plutarchian transformations of Comus from the Homeric transformations of Circe. As suggested especially by Milton’s example, Renaissance writers understand these two traditions in contrast to one another.

Although Chapman’s translation of *The Odyssey* generally conforms to Homer’s model, it betrays signs of an effort to distinguish its treatment of transformation from that of Plutarch’s newly popular dialogue. In Homer’s version, Odysseus proceeds directly from the crucial assertion that “the minds within them stayed as they had been / before” (p. 158, ll. 240-1) to a narration of the crew’s entering Circe’s pig sties: “So crying they went in” (p. 158, l. 241). In contrast, Chapman’s Odysseus says that the crew “still retained the soules they had before; / Which made them mourne their bodies change the more” before narrating, in the next line, Circe’s driving of the transformed crew into pens: “She shut them straight in sties” (p. 151). Chapman’s interpolation—the assertion that the crews’ enduringly human “soules” make their

³⁵ For the crucial passages, see George Chapman, trans., *Homer's Odysseys. Translated According to the Greeke By. Geo: Chapman* (London: Imprinted by Rich: Field, for Nathaniell Butter, n.d.), page 151, no line numbers; Arthur Golding, trans., *The xv. Bookes of P. Ovidius Naso, Entytuled Metamorphosis, Translated Oute of Latin into English Meeter, by Arthur Golding Gentleman, a Worke Very Pleasaunt and Delectable* (Imprinted at London, by Willyam Seres, 1567), page 177, no line numbers; George Sandys, trans., *Ovid's Metamorphosis. Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Figures by G. S.* (Imprinted at Oxford by John Lichfield, 1632), page 461, no line numbers. Subsequent citations appear in text by page number.

changes in forms “more” distressing—invites the reader to entertain the alternative possibility: the possibility that Circe’s victims might prefer animality. Chapman distances his Circe episode from Plutarch’s theme by emphasizing how much “more” the crew suffer than if they had lost their human “soules” or accepted their animal forms.

Written long before Plutarch’s dialogue became popular or even existed, Homer’s *Odyssey* need not go to the same lengths as Chapman to clarify the nature of the crew’s transformation. Indeed, the rise of interest in Plutarch’s dialogue introduces a new imaginative possibility to portraits of Circe’s transformations: formerly human characters who become animals mentally as well as physically and who prefer animal existence. Of course, Homer’s Odysseus might not even need to say “the minds within them stayed as they had been / before” (p. 158, ll. 240-1) unless he suspects that his audience might otherwise assume the opposite. Nevertheless, the alternative possibility for representing Circe’s transformations, first explicitly entertained and developed in Plutarch’s dialogue, begins variously to fascinate, compel, and haunt the English imagination only in the Renaissance.

Renaissance Views of Human Nature

Plutarch’s dialogue becomes newly compelling as a model for literary works in the Renaissance because of increasing belief in the unique malleability of human identity. An influential source for this conception of the human is Giovanni Pico’s “Oration,” composed in 1486.³⁶ Pico advances his view of the human in the form of God’s explanation of human nature

³⁶ On the work’s influence, original title “Oration,” date of composition, and posthumous publication, see Paul Oskar Kristeller, introduction to “Oration on the Dignity of Man,” by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul

to Adam:

The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. [...] We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.³⁷

The figuration of the human's unique freedom of will as a power of metamorphosis extends through Pico's calling the human "our chameleon," admiring the human's "self-transforming nature," and comparing the human to "Proteus" (225).

As Thomas Greene argues, the point of view represented in Pico's "Oration" departs significantly from Medieval philosophies, which declare human nature to be unchangeable.³⁸ Further illustrating this philosophical shift, Greene quotes Erasmus's epigram "Homines non nascuntur, sed finguntur," which he translates, "men are fashioned rather than born." After proposing Erasmus's epigram "as the motto of the Humanist revolution" (249), Greene declares, "For the first time in a millennium, man saw himself as basically malleable" (250).

In his influential book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt agrees with

Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), especially 216-8 and 220-222.

³⁷ Giovanni Pico, "Oration on the Dignity of Man," trans. Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 225. Subsequent citations appear in text.

³⁸ Thomas Greene, "The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature," in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), 243-5. Subsequent citations appear in text.

Greene's assessment: "in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process."

Greenblatt also makes the relevant observation that "it is in the sixteenth century that *fashion* seems to come into wide currency as a way of designating the forming of a self."³⁹

Greene tends to emphasize the optimistic consequences of the Renaissance conception of human nature: "the surpassing of human limitations" through "education" (250) and "the Humanist path of willed metamorphosis through intellectual discipline" (257). In addition to rendering ambiguous "the upper limits of the fashioning process" (251), however, Renaissance humanism also places the human precariously close to the animal. Greene acknowledges this corollary view, especially when he summarizes Machiavelli's belief that "the vertical flexibility of man is very limited, and such as it is, leads downward to the brute rather than upward to the angel" (257). A more balanced picture of Renaissance humanism, however, would weigh the human's potential for moral ascent in Pico's "universal chain of Being" (223) more equally against the human's potential for moral descent to the "brutish" state of "the lower forms of life" (Pico 225). Balancing the optimism of Renaissance humanism with the pessimism of an often overlooked Renaissance animalism,⁴⁰ scholars should understand Erasmus's epigram "Homines non nascuntur, sed finguntur," which Greene calls "the motto of the Humanist revolution," directly in relation to Geoffrey Whitney's emblem of Circe, which bears the quite similar title "Homines voluptatibus transformantur." Circe's haunting of Renaissance humanism's

³⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2. In the preface and in a footnote, Greenblatt mentions Greene's essay as a particularly important influence on his own book (xiii, 258 n. 3).

⁴⁰ One emblem for the re-thinking of Renaissance humanism as Renaissance animalism might be Sydney Harris's re-imagination of Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* in the 1996 cartoon "Leonardo da Vinci's Dog," reproduced and discussed in Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 7-8.

aspirations, suggested by the seemingly parodic relation of Whitney's emblem to Erasmus's epigram, is no coincidence; for as Merrit Hughes writes, "When the humanists undertook the practical business of education, even the most liberal of them were apt to think in terms of the redemption of youth from the wiles of Circe."⁴¹ Even as humanists celebrate the human's unique potential to ennoble itself through education, they abhor the human's potential to debase itself through indulgence in sensual pleasures, figured—with almost certain injustice to animals—as the transformation of human into animal.

The shift in the conception of human nature occurs contemporaneously with the rise of interest in Plutarch's dialogue about Gryllus, a former human whose arguments in favor of an animal existence challenge Renaissance humanism's unapologetic denigration of animals. As Erica Fudge argues, Renaissance writers make the acknowledgment of human superiority a crucial manifestation of the human's unique capacity to reason: "Without self-knowledge a human is living a life without use of the rational soul; is living, therefore, the life of an animal. And the incapacity to differentiate human from dog represents a failure to exercise the difference."⁴² Plutarch's Gryllus challenges precisely this tautological conception, that failing to recognize human superiority amounts to descending to the level of the animal, when he argues in defense of animal intelligence: "If you do not think that it should be called either reason or intelligence, it is high time for you to cast about for some fairer and even more honourable term to describe it" (527). With such comments, Gryllus appears directly to challenge the philosophical and educational values of the humanists, as Erasmus's Folly also suggests when

⁴¹ Hughes, "Spenser's Acrasia," 386.

⁴² Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 27.

she mentions Gryllus approvingly in a critique of “formal learning.”⁴³ Odysseus, meanwhile, anticipates the orthodox humanist position, as outlined by Fudge, when he suggests that failing to acknowledge human superiority is a manifestation of animality. Much of the interest of Plutarch’s dialogue for Renaissance writers emerges from its testing of the idea that only the acknowledgment of human superiority separates humans from animals, and its dramatic revision of Homer’s representation of transformation in order to make its points.

Demonstrating that Gelli recognizes the peculiar appropriateness of Plutarch’s version of the Circe story to the Renaissance conception of the human, the dedication of *La Circe* opens with an unmistakable summary of the main argument of Pico’s “Oration”:

Among al thinges that are in the universall worlde, moste vertuous and gentle prynce, it semeth that man onely can chose of him selfe, a state and ende after his owne mynde, and walkyng in that pathe, that most pleaseth him, canne rather rule his lyfe freely accordinge to tharbitrement of his owne will, then to thinclination of nature. For if the nature of thinges be diligently considered, to all the special kinds of them, there have bene appointed and wyth an invyolable lawe assigned, by him who is cause of all, certeine boundes, out of the whiche they canne by no possible meanes passe, chaunging into better or worse sort, that beinge, that at the beginning was graunted them. Whereas in the power of man there hath bene frely put an abilitie to chose a way wherin he mought lede his lyfe moste at his owne pleasure. And almost like a newe Prometheus, to transforme him selfe into what he most willed, takyng lyke a Cameleont the colour of al those thinges unto the whiche with thaffecte he is most nyghe. And finally to

⁴³ Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, 34-5.

make him selfe eyther earthly or divyne and to passe over to that state, that to the election of his free wil shalbe most agreable. Whereby it is plainely sene, that whiles men, either by their ill chaunce, or their noughtie choyse, lyve holy bent and occupied in worldly thinges, fixinge their eies in these sensible objectes, without any lifting them uppe to the heavens at all, their condition is verye litle better, then that of brute beastes, or rather they become almost like thother beastes, who whollye lacke reason. And contrary when they wythdrawe them the most they may from thence, and retourne to ther owne true and proper operation, and lifting themselves from things base and earthly, to things high and divine, are broughte to their owne trewe perfection, like unto those happie spirites, who out of this corruptible world, live in contemplation of divine thinges, their life is most happy and blessed. (6-7)

Gelli repeats Pico's assertions about the human's unique power of self-transformation, comparison of the human to a chameleon, and allusion to "Prometheus," which Robert Adams's edition corrects to "Proteus."⁴⁴ After outlining the Renaissance theory of human nature, Gelli declares, "This is the thing most myghty and excellent prince, to helpe others the most that in me lieth, as the proper and true duetie of man is, folowing the steppes of the most learned Plutarche, that in these my present dialogues, I have sought as I have bene best able" (7).

The extent to which Gelli's dialogues undermine, rather than bolster, the humanist position will be the subject of my next chapter, but Gelli's assertion of the relevance of his dialogues to the Renaissance conception of human nature is corroborated by scholarly reflections on Circe's significance in the Renaissance. Merrit Hughes, for instance, writes, "If the distinction

⁴⁴ Robert Adams, ed., *The Circe*, 3. For an argument against the emendation, see Migiel, "The Dignity of Man," 228-9.

between men and brutes was not absolute, and if human reason was not an essentially divine faculty, then men might only too easily lapse to brutal levels in conduct and even in character, and so—in simple though marvellous reality—Homer’s myth of Circe might assume a truly ‘scientific’ as well as ‘historical’ validity.”⁴⁵ In the introduction to his edition of *La Circe*, meanwhile, Robert Adams offers the following meditation on Gelli’s interest in Circe:

As the high priestess of metamorphosis, Circe was bound to be a fascinating figure for the writers of the Renaissance, before whom the wonderful possibilities of psychic mobility were just opening up. The notion that man is inherently a Proteus, a chameleon, an amphibious, multiform creature who can make of himself what he will would have shocked Dante or St. Thomas. I think it would not have been very clear even to Ovid, whose metamorphoses illustrate changes imposed on humans beings by deities or magicians, [...] The characteristic Ovidian metamorphosis is from one fixed shape to another; [...] the new shape is somehow more fitting to the nature of things than the old one. But the idea of an inner election, free and unmotivated (except, maybe, by curiosity), is not, I think, familiar to antiquity.⁴⁶

My own argument takes some of these same contours. Indeed, Adams somewhat anticipates my argument about balancing Renaissance optimism about the human’s potential for transcendence with Renaissance pessimism about the human’s potential for animality when he compares Gelli’s *I Capricci del Bottaio* with *La Circe*: “Gelli’s dialogues between Giusto the cooper and his own soul are one characteristically Renaissance expression of man’s new sense of his flexible, extensible, divisible, transferable, optional ego; the *Circe* dialogues are another” (xli-xlii).

⁴⁵ Hughes, “Spenser’s Acrasia,” 392.

⁴⁶ Adams, introduction to *The Circe*, xli.

I argue more particularly, however, that the shift to viewing human nature as uniquely flexible enables a new mode of representing Circe's transformations, based on Plutarch, rather than on Homer, and never widely adopted until the Renaissance. Emphasizing the distinctiveness of human and animal states, the Homeric constellation of motifs includes the entrapment of a human mind in an animal body, the representation of the animal form as clothing for an enduringly human mind, and the dramatization of the former human's frustrated attempts to speak. The Plutarchian constellation, in contrast, features humans who prefer being animals, who justify themselves by pointing out that they have experienced both human and animal states, who reject human speech, who have perhaps always had animalistic natures, and who may therefore deserve transformation from human into animal. Many Renaissance versions of the Circe episode differ strikingly from ancient and medieval versions in developing motifs originally derived from Plutarch's dialogue about Gryllus, who faces a choice that Renaissance philosophers believe each human must make: the choice between human and animal existences.

CHAPTER 2

REMINDING THE ELEPHANT:

ANIMAL RHETORIC, PATRIOTISM, AND RELIGION IN GELLI'S *CIRCE*

In the dedication of *La Circe* to Cosimo de Medici, Giovanni Battista Gelli claims that his series of dialogues between Ulysses and eleven talking animals adheres to the model of Gelli's source text, Plutarch's "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti," in demonstrating the superiority of humans to animals.¹ According to Gelli, the human alone has the ability "to transforme him selfe into what he most willed."² Gelli elaborates, "it is plainely sene, that whiles men, either by their ill chaunce, or their noughtie choyse, lyve holy bent and occupied in worldly thinges, fixinge their eies in these sensible objectes, without any lifting them uppe to the heavens at all, their condition is verry litle better, then that of brute beastes, or rather, they become almost like thother beastes, who whollye lacke reason" (7). Gelli derives his view of the human, in part, from Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's "Oration" (1486), one of the most influential expositions of Renaissance humanism's conception of human nature.³ Although Plutarch could not, of

¹ The original Greek title of Plutarch's dialogue has been variously translated. On the Latin title, which this dissertation prefers, see Stephen T. Newmyer, *Animals, Rights and Reason in Plutarch and Modern Ethics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 30.

² Giovanni Battista Gelli, *Circes of John Baptista Gello, Florentine. Translated out of Italion into Englishe by Henry Iden* (Imprinted at London in Poules Churchyarde, at the signe of the holy ghost by John Cawood, printer to the Quenes Majestie, 1557), 6. I have assigned numbers to the pages of this edition, beginning with the title page. Subsequent citations appear in text.

³ On the work's influence, original title "Oration," date of composition, and posthumous publication, see Paul Oskar Kristeller, introduction to "Oration on the Dignity of Man," by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), especially 216-8 and 220-222. Thomas Greene has treated Pico's "Oration" as an important departure from medieval views of human nature in "The Flexibility of the Self in

course, have read Pico's "Oration," Gelli implies that Pico's views are endorsed by Plutarch's text. Immediately after rehearsing Pico's arguments about human and animal natures, Gelli declares, "This is the thing, most myghty and excellent prince, to helpe others the most that in me lieth, as the proper and true duetie of man is, folowing the steppes of the most learned Plutarche, that in these my present dialogues, I have sought as I have bene best able" (7). Gelli seems to mean that he intends for his dialogues to encourage readers to exercise reason in order to elevate themselves above a merely animal status. Furthermore, he presumes that Plutarch's dialogue also has this effect.

Examining Plutarch's dialogue, and especially comparing it with Gelli's series of dialogues, suggest that Gelli's comments on the similarities of *La Circe* and "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti" may be mistaken or even disingenuous. In Plutarch's text, Circe grants Gryllus, a Greek whom she has transformed into a pig, the ability to speak so that he may debate the merits of human and animal existences with Odysseus. Gryllus makes numerous arguments for the superiority of animals, especially arguments that animals surpass humans in the virtues of fortitude and temperance. Although the dialogue survives only as a fragment,⁴ Gryllus makes

Renaissance Literature," in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), especially 242-9. For other discussions of Pico's influence on Gelli, see Robert Adams, introduction to *The Circe of Signior Giovanni Battista Gelli of the Academy of Florence*, trans. Thomas Brown and Robert Adams, ed. Robert Adams (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), xxvii; and Marilyn Migiel, "The Dignity of Man: A Feminist Perspective," in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 227-9.

⁴ On lacunae and possible lacunae, see William C. Helmbold, introduction and notes to "Beasts Are Rational," by Plutarch, trans. and ed. William C. Helmbold, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 12, The Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1957), 490, 525 n. f, 529 n. f, 532-3 n. a.

such lengthy and compelling arguments that it is doubtful that Plutarch's text endorses human superiority as unproblematically as Gelli's dedication to *La Circe* suggests.

A significant discrepancy in the endings of "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti" and *La Circe* deepens the impression that Gelli has overstated, perhaps strategically, the similarity of his dialogues to Plutarch's original. At least in the surviving fragment, Plutarch's dialogue ends with an exchange about religion:

ODYSSEUS. But consider, Gryllus: is it not a fearful piece of violence to grant reason to creatures that have no inherent knowledge of God?

GRYLLUS. Then shall we deny, Odysseus, that so wise and remarkable a man as you had Sisyphus for a father? (531-3).

William Helmbold, the editor of the Loeb edition, explains that this exchange may or may not represent the end of the dialogue. Indeed, he notes that the majority of scholars speculate that Plutarch's original dialogue proceeds for some time. Helmbold, however, also relays Reiske's paraphrase of Gryllus's cryptic response, which reveals Gryllus's comment to be offensive enough, in Helmbold's opinion, to serve as a plausible end to the whole dialogue: "If those who do not know God cannot possess reason, then you, wise Odysseus, can scarcely be descended from such a notorious atheist as Sisyphus."⁵ Whether Gryllus and Odysseus continue their arguments or not, Gryllus's reference to a human atheist seems to undercut Odysseus's incipient attempt to base an argument for human superiority to animals on the capacity for religion.

Gelli's dialogues treat the subject of religion at several points, but despite Gelli's avowed intentions of "following" Plutarch's example, *La Circe* departs radically and unmistakably from "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti" in the conclusion, when the eleventh and final talking animal,

⁵ Helmbold, ed., "Beasts Are Rational," 532-3 n. a.

Aglafemos, an elephant and former philosopher, accepts Ulysses's arguments for human superiority, returns to human form, rediscovers an innately human knowledge of religion, and praises the creator for returning Aglafemos to humanity. Although Gelli's text does adhere to the model of Plutarch's fragment in foregrounding the topic of religion at the conclusion, the dialogue with the elephant departs radically from Plutarch's dialogue and from Gelli's preceding dialogues, which feature animal speakers who, like Plutarch's Gryllus, refuse to return to humanity. Offering ten rewritings of Plutarch's dialogue followed by a final, radically different dialogue, Gelli clearly has found Plutarch's original plot inadequate to his purpose, which Gelli declares to be demonstrating human superiority.

Although comments from other Renaissance readers corroborate Gelli's statements about the similar meanings of his and Plutarch's dialogues, such comments reflect unpersuasive interpretations of the texts. In the preface to a 1603 translation of Plutarch's "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti," Philemon Holland asserts,

the intention of *Plutarch* was to shew that the intelligence and cogitation of God, is the onely true priviledge prerogative and advantage which men have above beasts: howbeit, left he hath this worke imperfect, even in that very point, which of all other is hardest, and impossible to be proved by him or his like: for what sound understanding, apprehension, or conceit could they have of God, who knew not at all the true God?⁶

Ignoring Gryllus's aforementioned challenge to Odysseus's conception of the innately religious human, Holland believes that Plutarch's dialogue treats religion as the sole factor distinguishing

⁶ Philemon Holland, introduction to "That Brute Beastes Have Use of Reason," by Plutarch, in *The Philosophie, Commonlie Called, The Morals Written By the Learned Philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Printed by Arnold Hatfield, 1603), 561.

humans from animals. Henry Iden, meanwhile, overlooks the possibility of a satirical interpretation of Gelli's final dialogue when, in the dedication to his 1557 English translation of *La Circe*, Iden recapitulates Gelli's platitudes about human superiority. Like Gelli, Iden expects readers may "see herein howe lyke the brute beast, and farre from his perfection man is, without the understanding and folowinge of dyvyne thynges."⁷ In the formulations of Iden and Gelli (as translated by Iden), human superiority to animals seems more precarious than in Holland's formulation, for Iden and Gelli, like Plutarch's Gryllus, note that not all humans are religious. Nevertheless, Gelli, Iden, and Holland all agree that Plutarch's dialogue dramatizes human superiority, and Gelli and Iden claim that Gelli's *Circe* does so, as well.

Although Iden and Holland corroborate Gelli's statements about the meaning of *La Circe* and its relationship to Plutarch's dialogue, Gelli's comments ignore important features of his own and Plutarch's dialogues and overestimate the continuity between the forms of Gelli's series of dialogues and their ancient model. Gelli has expanded Plutarch's original dialogue into a series of eleven dialogues, with ten essentially Plutarchian dialogues and one concluding dialogue that is emphatically anti-Plutarchian in its plot and formal structure. Although the elephant, the featured animal of this final dialogue, departs from the model of Plutarch's Gryllus in agreeing to return to human form, the elephant's decision does not function as a simple endorsement of human superiority, as Gelli claims. Rather, the contrast between the structure of the final dialogue and the pattern established by the preceding dialogues highlights the features of the dialogue with the elephant that seem necessary, formally, in order to produce the conversion of the animal speaker. The predictability of the elephant's conversion undercuts the

⁷ Henry Iden, dedication to *Circes of John Baptista Gello, Florentine. Translated out of Italion into Englishe by Henry Iden* (Imprinted at London in Poules Churchyarde, at the signe of the holy ghost by John Cawood, printer to the Quenes Majestie, 1557), 3. I have assigned numbers to the pages of this edition, beginning with the title page.

arguments about human superiority that Ulysses makes and that the elephant—too enthusiastically, because too predictably—accepts.

The elephant's enthusiastic return to humanity also satirizes notions of human superiority because contemporaneously influential natural histories regard elephants as quite close to humans in rationality, linguistic ability, persuadability, affiliating themselves with a native land, mnemonic ability, and religion. The concept of the elephant as the animal that most closely approaches—and perhaps matches—the mental abilities of the human provides a crucial context for the atypical formal features of Gelli's final dialogue with the elephant. The fact that the elephant is the only animal in Gelli's *Circe* to return to human form is no accident. Indeed, beliefs about the human-like qualities of elephants both determine Gelli's decision to make the only animal to return to human form an elephant and undercut the significance of Aglafemos's conversion from an animal into a human, since the human differs so little, according to natural historians, from an elephant. Natural historical concepts of elephants have clearly motivated many formal irregularities of the dialogue with the elephant, but Gelli also suppresses many important ideas or stories about elephants, such as their successful uses of rhetoric and their religious practices.⁸ Through this paradoxical invocation and disavowal of material from natural histories, Gelli seems not to dispute certain commonplaces about elephants but rather to dramatize the distortion of knowledge or beliefs about animals that is necessary to produce Renaissance humanism's concept of the human as distinct from and superior to animals. When Gelli's talking animal adopts Ulysses's arguments about human superiority and returns to his human form, Gelli undermines—rather than endorses—the arguments that the elephant's return to humanity is supposed, by both the elephant and Ulysses, to clinch.

⁸ I am grateful to Ian Duncan for challenging the attempt of an earlier draft to assimilate Gelli's elephant to the religious elephants of natural histories.

The Anti-Plutarchian Form of the Dialogue with the Elephant

The previous chapter places Gelli's *Circe* firmly in the Plutarchian, as opposed to the Homeric, tradition for narrating stories of Circe's transformations. Gelli's dialogue with the elephant, like each of his other dialogues, is fundamentally indebted to Plutarch's model, but it can be described as anti-Plutarchian in the sense that it deploys the conventions of "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti," observed in Gelli's first ten dialogues, in inverted forms. Through these inversions, Gelli's dialogue with the elephant represents the elephant's conversion as depending not on Ulysses's arguments but on authorial decisions in the characterization of the elephant and the plotting of the dialogue. In other words, Gelli foregrounds the fact that the elephant's return to humanity is governed by the formal logic of *La Circe*, not by the logic of any claims about human superiority. Although these inversions turn out to have reference to contemporaneous beliefs about elephants and thus are overdetermined (not chosen by the whims of the author alone), a formal analysis of the dialogue with the elephant provides a necessary precursor to contextualization of the dialogue with other writing about elephants and illuminates Gelli's own exploration of Plutarchian conventions through inversions, which have the effect of foregrounding the ways that those conventions shape expectations about predictable or otherwise plausible results to dialogues between Ulysses and the talking animals. Even before contextualization with beliefs about elephants, the dialogue with the elephant seems to undercut Aglafemos's conversion by making Aglafemos easily persuadable and thus rendering the dialogue too predictable.

The dialogue with the elephant has many formal features that distinguish it from the earlier dialogues and foreshadow Ulysses's success in persuading the elephant to return to human form. The fact that the dialogue with the elephant is the final dialogue, which has the function of bringing the series to a satisfactory or unsatisfactory conclusion, already arouses suspicions that the dialogue may end exceptionally with the conversion of the elephant. Moreover, the opening of the dialogue portrays Ulysses on the brink of despair: he concludes, "it shall then be best since Circes hath alreadye restored my companions and shippes, and they tarye onely for me, that I returne home, and lose no more time, where I can not see that I might do any profit at all" (253-4). Just as Ulysses has despaired of winning his wager with Circe, he notices the elephant: "But what beast do I see of such unmesurable gretness walking on the se strond? it is an Elephant" (254). The elephant interrupts Ulysses's defeated trudging toward his ships, and Ulysses's use of the conjunction *but* suggests that his spotting of the elephant poses a contradiction to the despairing thoughts interrupted by the appearance of the elephant. When Ulysses resolves to talk with the elephant, he reasons, "if I could finde but even one onely who would by my meanes become man againe, I shuld not thinke to have spente these my travailes in vaine" (255). The remark about the possible futility of Ulysses's "travailes" in debating with the transformed creatures redounds on the series of dialogues as a whole: *La Circe* may seem pointless if Gelli does not cause the final dialogue to depart from the pattern of the preceding dialogues, in which the transformed creatures adamantly refuse to return to humanity, especially since Gelli has declared in the dedication that he intends to dramatize the superiority of humans to animals.

Even before the elephant speaks, Ulysses suspects that the elephant has been human, a suspicion that seems to be dictated less by plausible inferences about the elephant than formal

demands. Ulysses hails the elephant, “Tell me Elephaunt, yf thou were a man, (as I thinke thou wer) before thou haddest this shape, what thou were” (255). Ulysses has anticipated the formerly human identities of animals in the previous dialogues only when Circe has directed Ulysses to specific creatures, as with the oyster and mole (13-4), snake (41), hare (73), and goat (84), or when the creature has displayed an interest in Ulysses’s talking aloud, as with the dog—who, at any rate, hails Ulysses first (201-2)—and the calf (227). On his own initiative, Ulysses hails groups of deer and lions, on the chance that one of them may have been a Greek (127, 152). With the remaining creature, the horse, Ulysses declares, “the beholdinge him hath taken me in such sort, that I would desier that he, who was chaunged into him, had ben a Gretian, that I might doo him this benefite” (182). Ulysses hopes—rather than suspects—that the horse has formerly been a Greek because he admires the horse’s beauty, which is odd, since returning the horse to human form would destroy the admirable equine traits that cause Ulysses to hope that the horse has been human. Ulysses has a similar thought about the elephant: “howe glad I would be, that he who was turned into him, had bene a Gretian, his countenance hath caused me to love him so much by beholdynge hym” (254). By the time that Ulysses hails the elephant, however, this hope inspired by the admiration of beauty has become a more strongly asserted suspicion that the elephant has once been human. The irrationality of this inference causes it to seem like a heavy-handed intervention by the author, to foreshadow Ulysses’s victory, rather than a plausible development in Ulysses’s thought process. Ulysses admits to being desperate to find “but even one onely who would by my meanes become man againe” (255) immediately after noting the elephant’s beauty and immediately before hailing the elephant, but Gelli first gives this need to Ulysses and then answers it in order to conclude the dialogues in a manner satisfactory for readers.

Another unique point of the dialogue with the elephant is that the elephant continues to identify with his former vocation, philosophy, even after his transformation. When he introduces himself as the philosopher Aglafemos of Athens, the elephant uses past-tense verbs, as though disavowing his former identity: “I was a Gretian, and of the most famous citie of Athenes, where I studied philosophye a very longe time, and my name was Aglafemos” (255). Immediately thereafter, however, the elephant asks Ulysses’s to explain his curiosity about the elephant’s former identity: “But tell me now why thou askest me this? for thou knoest that Philosophers seke none other thing then to knowe the occasion of all things, to quiet and satisfye that desire of knowing, that every one hath by nature” (255). The elephant claims still to have the philosopher’s characteristic inquisitiveness, which suggests that Aglafemos’s mind as an elephant is quite similar to his mind as a human. Ulysses’s response makes the suggestion explicit: “Oh thanked be the goddes infinitely, that at the last I have founde one lover of the truthe: and one that maye truely call him selfe manne” (255). Because Aglafemos is a “lover of the truthe”—which, of course, is a translation of the Greek *philosopher*—Ulysses asserts that Aglafemos may already claim human status, even in his animal form. Moreover, Ulysses’s phrase “at the last” once again foreshadows that the elephant’s unique characteristics will lead to a successful conclusion, by Ulysses’s standards, to the dialogue.

Although the elephant’s introduction has already betrayed the endurance of a human self-concept, the elephant asks Ulysses to explain his excitement about the elephant’s vocation and his belief that the elephant is different from the other animal interlocutors: “And what causeth thee to thinke that I should be better able to perceive then they? and why saiest thou that I deserve more then they to be called man?” (256). After citing Aglafemos’s “profession” (256), Ulysses provides a lengthy reflection on the special significance of a philosopher:

they with whom I have spoken, some being plowmen, some fishers, some phisitions, some lawyers, and some gentlemen, the ende of whom semeth to be chiefly profit and delight, will remaine thus bestes, in the which being they thinke to finde mo commodities, and mo delightes appertaining to the body, then they doo in the humaine being, though they greatly deceive them selves: wheras thou being a Philosopher, the ende of whom is only the knowledge of the truth, wilt make none accompt of the plesures of the body, to obtaine the plesure and perfection of the mind. The which thing is the very operation of human nature: wherby working as man, thou deservest to be so called: but not they that worke like beastes. (256-7)

Ulysses's conception of the human as a being devoted to mental rather than physical pursuits coincides with the philosopher's dedication to contemplation, making the philosopher seem like the most human human, or perhaps the only truly human human. Since the elephant professes to have a philosophical mindset even following his transformation, Ulysses credits him with a "human nature," in spite of his elephant form. Before the elephant accepts or even hears Ulysses's arguments for human superiority, the elephant seems to have crucial attributes of the human.

These attributes, suggesting that the elephant is already in some ways human, create the expectation that the elephant will accept Ulysses's offer to return to human form. The elephant also deviates from the examples of the earlier animals in other ways that affect his choice but that less obviously portray him as already human-like. (We shall see, however, that these traits find a crucial context in discourse comparing elephants to humans.) With the partial exception of the hind, who regards humans as superior to animals but nevertheless prefers being an animal to

being a woman,⁹ the animals before the elephant consistently express an inalterable preference for animal existence. The oyster, the first animal interlocutor, warns Ulysses of the futility of arguing near the beginning of their dialogue: “go not about to counsell me with thone, that I leave so many commodities, the which I now in this state so happely enjoye without any thought at al, nor to perswade me with thother that I shoulde retourne man, synce he is the most unhappye creature, that is in all the worlde” (15). Likewise, the calf, the animal immediately preceding the elephant, declares near the beginning of his dialogue, “I wil remaine in this state” (228), for transformation, the calf explains to Ulysses, has saved the calf from “a thousande evils, of the whiche humaine lyfe, so much haboundeth, that it hath bene called by some of your wise men, the great see of miseries” (228-9). In contrast to these animals, who have already passed judgment on humanity and remain resolute in their unfavorable evaluations, the elephant tells Ulysses that he has not yet decided how his former human state compares to the animal state that Circe has given to him: “I was by her transformd into an Elephante, of the which beinge I am not yet fully resolved, whether it be better then yours or not” (257-8). Indeed, the elephant seems relatively eager for Ulysses to persuade him of the superiority of humans to animals, for he tells Ulysses, “I wil therefore harken by what reason thou thoughtest to do me a mooste greate benefitte in restoring me the humaine beinge: and if it shall be such as may prove unto me, that your being is better then ours, (as it semeth that thou thinkest them,) this nature lefte, and I becomen man againe, I will gladly retourne with thee into my cuntrye” (256). Perhaps in the spirit of fairness, Ulysses makes a promise that is symmetrical to that of the elephant: if the elephant persuades him of the superiority of animals to humans, Ulysses “will praye Circes, she

⁹ The hind says, “Alas the being a reasonable creature is not the cause that I will not retourne into my former state: but that I must become a woman againe” (130). For a compelling account of the exceptional dialogue with the deer, see Migiel, “Dignity of Man,” 211-32.

will transfourme me al so into one of these beastes” (258-9). The response of the elephant is unexpected and telling: “I will not binde my selfe hereunto, for though it seme that I much care not to become man againe, I felte so great an alteration and travaile in my transmutation, (an occasion that I now agre not so easelye to chaunge this state againe) I finde not yet in dede in this state so many commodities, that I may judge it better then yours” (259). Unlike the earlier animals, who offer many reasons for preferring animal states to human ones, the elephant’s only objection to returning to a human state is that he finds transformation unpleasant. He specifically says that he does not recommend an animal existence to Ulysses; and while the elephant has no desire to return to human form, it is not because of a resolute judgment against human existence, as with previous animals, but because of an objection to experiencing another transformation, an objection that seems and proves relatively easy for Ulysses to surmount.

While speeches by the talking animals account for most of the substance of the earlier dialogues (the dog is perhaps the most voluble), the elephant often simply listens to long speeches setting forth Ulysses’s views of human and animal natures. Occasionally, the elephant attempts a refutation, which Ulysses immediately counters. In general, the elephant speaks in order to ask Ulysses questions, prompting further speeches, and in order to assent to Ulysses’s arguments. Indeed, significantly before the elephant converts to Ulysses’s point of view, and thus to humanity, the elephant has already responded to Ulysses’s arguments about human nature with various forms of agreement, ranging from expressions of understanding to admiration of human nature, on six occasions. After Ulysses compares sensuous knowledge, shared by humans and animals, with reason, possessed only by humans, the elephant is clearly impressed: “Truely this way of knowinge, is very playne and distincte” (278). The elephant responds to subsequent speeches on human superiority with unambiguous expressions of admiration for the human, such

as “A mervellous propertie of the humaine understandinge” (282) and “O most happy condition of humain nature” (283). By the time that the elephant fully assents to Ulysses’s argument, he has come to regret that he has ever been an elephant: “No more, no more Ulisses, cause me nowe to leave this beastyshe nature, and to become man agayne, for my losse was to great, to have bene so longe tyme converted by Cyrces into an Elephante” (289). The uncertainty of the elephant about the comparison of the human and animal states makes it relatively easy for Ulysses to persuade the elephant and inculcate this feeling of remorse for his animal state.

The easy persuadability of the elephant leads directly to other unique features of the dialogue, but we shall see that many of these features are not merely logical corollaries of the elephant’s easy persuadability but rather find a context in writing about elephants. The elephant, of course, is the only animal to return to human form. Uniquely, and importantly, since the elephant is the last animal, the elephant ratifies Ulysses’s views of human superiority: “Oh, what a fayre thyng, Oh, what a marveyulous thing it is to be a man! Oh how well I nowe knowe it better then I did before, for I have proved the one and the other” (290). This remark provides an example of the inverse and mirror-like relationship of the dialogues of oyster and elephant, for the oyster tells Ulysses, at the beginning rather than the end of their dialogue, that his knowledge of both human and animal states gives authority to his rejection of human existence: “let us reason frendly a little togethers, and thou shalt see yf I that have proved thone life and thother, can shewe thee that, that is trewe that I saye” (16). This argument, made by both oyster and elephant, but for contrary purposes and at opposite ends of their respective dialogues, originates in Gelli’s source text, Plutarch’s dialogue “*Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti*,” in which the talking pig Gryllus, speaking for all of the former humans, tells Plutarch’s Odysseus, “I shall quickly make you see that we are right to prefer our present life in place of the former one, now that we have

tried both.”¹⁰ Gelli anchors the dialogues with the oyster and the elephant in Plutarch’s dialogue by having both animal speakers appropriate Gryllus’s argument about the transformed creatures’ knowledge of human and animals states, but Gelli gives the reference an anti-Plutarchian significance in the dialogue with the elephant, who makes Gryllus’s argument at the end, not the beginning, of the dialogue and who uses the argument to endorse human, not animal, existence. While Gryllus and the oyster make the argument about having experienced both human and animal states in order to declare their uncompromising refusal to return to humanity, the elephant makes the argument after acknowledging human superiority and returning to his human state.

The Elephant in Gelli’s Chain of Being

Already, exploration of unique formal features in the final dialogue, the dialogue with the elephant, has proved to be impossible without analysis of comparisons of humans and animals. The relationship between *La Circe*’s formal concerns and Renaissance beliefs about humans and animals seems even more profound after a study of Gelli’s adaptation of the chain of being to provide an order for the series of animal speakers: oyster, mole, snake, hare, goat, hind, lion, horse, dog, calf, and elephant. While the chain of being gives the order to the first half of this series, Gelli thwarts expectations based on the chain of being beginning with the lion, the first animal to base an argument for animal superiority on one of the cardinal virtues. At this point, the hierarchy of virtues, instead of proximity to the human, gives order to the animal speakers, until the dialogue with the elephant, who agrees to return to human form. By making the

¹⁰ Plutarch, “Beasts Are Rational,” trans. and ed. William C. Helmbold, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 12, The Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1957), 499. Subsequent citations appear in text.

elephant the final animal, and by making the elephant the only animal to return to human form, and by giving the elephant so many human-like properties (as discussed above), Gelli seems to place the elephant closest to the human in his version of the chain of being.

Other scholars have noted, though sometimes overestimated, Gelli's reliance on the idea of the chain of being, but I provide a new account of the sequence of Gelli's dialogues, especially by treating each of the final five animal speakers as having a unique claim to be the most human-like animal, based on conceptions of animals recorded in natural histories. Tillyard, for instance, has written of Gelli's *Circe*,

The whole work is based on the idea of the chain of being, and the question of the beasts' metamorphosis is dependent on their position in it. Ulysses begins with the oyster (who had been a fisherman before his change), the lowest of the animals, and has of course the least chance of success. He goes up the scale of beasts with ever higher chances and in the end succeeds in persuading the king of the beasts, the elephant, to resume human form.¹¹

In general, I agree that Gelli uses the chain of being to set up a structure of increasing expectations that Ulysses will succeed in each successive dialogue. I depart from Tillyard,

¹¹ E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 26. For my skepticism about Tillyard's calling the elephant "king of the beasts," see a subsequent note. Like Tillyard, George Boas overlooks the strangeness of the sequence of the last five dialogues in his comments about Gelli's chain of being. See *The Happy Beast in French Thought of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 28. Robert Adams notices but dismisses, for the most part, the strangeness of the sequence of the last five dialogues: "He [Gelli] takes for granted that there is a scale of relative nobility among the creatures, from lowest to highest; and in the course of the dialogues Ulysses proceeds along this scale from oyster to the elephant, according to a broad if not exactly rigid progression. The dog and the bullock are brought in after, but not therefore in a position of intellectual or social superiority to, the lion. There seems to be no distinct rationale for this irregularity. (Perhaps, as man was to be demonstrated the supreme creature in the scale, Gelli had dramatic reasons for not making the scale too rigid, lest man's place in it be too obviously assured beforehand.)" Adams, introduction to *The Circe*, xxvi.

however, by arguing that each of the final five talking animals has a plausible claim to be the most human-like animal and that Gelli implicitly renders a judgment in favor of the elephant by placing the elephant last and by making the elephant the only animal that already has enough human-like qualities to embrace Ulysses's arguments about human superiority.

The order in which Ulysses converses with the first six animals conforms to the placement of animals in the chain of being and establishes the scale of increasing expectations that Tillyard has also described. After both the mole and the oyster have refused to return to human form, Ulysses has the following exchange with the mole:

Ulysses: conseyder what beastes you are, for yf you wer perfit in dede, I woulde saye that you hadde some reason.

Mole: Why, what dooe we lacke?

Ulysses: What do you lacke? Thoyster the sense of smellinge and hearynge, and that that is more, the abilitie to move frome one place to another: And thou the syghte. (35)¹²

When Ulysses asserts that the mole and the oyster are not "perfit" animals, he draws on Aristotelian conceptions: "it is sense perception primarily which constitutes the animal. For, provided they have sense perception, even those creatures which are devoid of movement and do not change their place are called animals and are not merely said to be alive. Now the primary sense in all animals is touch."¹³ The mole and even the oyster meet Aristotle's minimal criterion for animal status, but Aristotle's *History of Animals* mentions the mole and "the ostracoderms,"

¹² For ease of reading, I have expanded abbreviated names and altered the layout of dialogue for long quotations from Iden's translation.

¹³ Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. R. D. Hicks, in *Aristotle's "De Anima" in Focus*, ed. Michael Durrant (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 24.

the class including oysters, together as examples of “imperfect creatures” that lack sight.¹⁴

Ulysses attempts to undermine the mole’s satisfaction with his animal state by pointing out that the mole and oyster lack capabilities of higher animals. The oyster and the mole are not “perfit,” in the sense of “Having all the essential characteristics, elements, or qualities” of the prototypical animal.¹⁵ Recapitulating and thus endorsing Ulysses’s point about the deficiencies of the oyster and the mole on a formal level, Gelli makes the oyster and the mole share the first dialogue, while assigning each of the other creatures a dialogue of their own. Indeed, Gelli’s pairing of oyster and mole may reflect the direct influence of Aristotle, who also treats these two animals together because of their blindness.

The third animal, the snake, is the first animal speaker in the dialogues that possesses the capacity for locomotion and all five senses. Because the snake lacks legs, however, Gelli places the snake lower in the chain of being than the quadrupeds, who make their debut in the immediately subsequent dialogue, featuring the hare. The lack of legs also causes Ulysses to classify the snake among the imperfect creatures, although the snake apparently occupies a high enough position, in Gelli’s mind, to merit a dialogue of his own. Following the dialogue with the snake, Ulysses beseeches Circe, “cause me to speake with some other, for I thinke not that all have so lost the true knowledge of resonne, as these three have, to whom I have spoken, whom truly thou hast not chaunged into such an unperfect kinde of beastes, without a cause, sins they lyke men have so imperfect a discourse” (72-3). Clearly, Ulysses expects that the so-called

¹⁴ Aristotle, *The History of Animals*, trans. D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson (eBooks@Adelaide: The University of Adelaide Library, 2007), book 1, chapter 9, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/Aristotle/history/>. For Aristotle’s definition of “ostracoderms,” see book 4, chapter 1. On Aristotelian distinctions between imperfect and perfect animals, see Katharine Park, “The Organic Soul,” in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 467, 467 n. 5.

¹⁵ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “perfect” (entry dated 2010).

perfect creatures, with whom he now proposes to speak, will have a proportionally greater ability to understand and to accept his arguments for human superiority.

The order of the dialogues with the hare, goat, and hind, seems relatively unremarkable and uncontroversial, except that the dialogue with the deer represents an important moment in the sequence not only because the deer, as the sixth of eleven animal speakers, represents the midpoint of the series, but also because the deer is the only animal, other than the elephant, to concede human superiority. The deer, however, refuses to return to humanity because she will not submit to patriarchy again: “I am thus an Hynde, of as much auctoritie at the least as the male” (146). The placement of the deer above the goat, and the consequent implication that the deer is closer to the human, perhaps reflects a literary tradition of figuring women as deer—as in Wyatt’s “Whoso List to Hunt” and Petrarch’s sonnet beginning “Una candida cerva.”

Following the dialogue with the deer, the chain of being recedes in importance as an organizing structure for the dialogues, and Gelli arranges the ensuing dialogues according to the sequence of topics in Plutarch’s “Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti” and according to a hierarchy of cardinal virtues, each of which Gelli provides with an appropriate animal exponent, according to the representation of each animal in natural histories.¹⁶ In Plutarch’s original dialogue, Gryllus argues that animals surpass humans in the cardinal virtues, beginning with fortitude (501-11). After Gryllus concludes his arguments about animal fortitude, Odysseus prompts Gryllus to pass on to “temperance, the next in order” (511). Gryllus obliges (511-525) and then proceeds to a treatment of “Animal intelligence” (525), or prudence (525-31). The fragment ends with Gryllus’s skeptical comment on human religion (533).

¹⁶ Compare my discussion with that of Marilyn Migiel, who writes that, because of the lion, horse, dog, and calf’s interest in the cardinal virtues, “these animals have even been seen as symbols of the four cardinal virtues. The reader is encouraged to see these animals as ones that are ‘higher up’ in the chain of being.” “Dignity of Man,” 218.

Gelli divides Gryllus's arguments by topic and delegates them to different animal speakers. Gelli also intercalates a treatment of justice, which is missing from the surviving fragment of Plutarch's dialogue. The lion's arguments for animal superiority primarily concern fortitude, the first virtue that Gryllus treats. Although Gelli gives the next animal, the horse, Gryllus's argument that humans have conceded the superior fortitude of animals in metaphors, such as "lion-hearted" (Plutarch 509; cf. Gelli 186), Gelli's horse proceeds to a much lengthier discussion of animal temperance, just as the section on temperance follows the section on fortitude in Plutarch's fragment. The dog then adopts Gryllus's strategy of citing anecdotes to demonstrate the superiority of animal prudence, although Gelli's dog and Plutarch's Gryllus choose different examples (Plutarch 525-31; Gelli 207-12). After the dialogue with the dog, Gelli inserts a treatment of justice, which the calf introduces to Ulysses as the preeminent virtue: "Saye not your wyse men, that Justice is an assemble of all vertues, and that she conteyneth them all in her, geuyng to every thyng the rightnesse, and rule, with the which they shoulde use them selves?" (231). Gelli's calf perhaps thinks here of Plato, whose *Republic* asserts, "to cause justice to be present is to establish the parts within the soul as governing and being governed by each other according to nature."¹⁷ Finally, Gelli adapts the conclusion of Plutarch's fragment by making religion emerge as a seemingly decisive difference between human and animal near the end of the dialogue with the elephant. Gelli also prepares the transition from justice to religion near the end of the dialogue with the calf, when Ulysses admonishes the calf, "thou shalte see howe farre thou deceaveste thy selfe, to saye that you are more juste then we: for justice gevinge to every body, that that is his, yeldeth fyrste to the goddess, that honoure, that is

¹⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. R. E. Allen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 145-6. Tillyard claims that Renaissance writers generally regard justice as the preeminent virtue. *Elizabethan World Picture*, 28.

due unto them. And this, whether it be parte of her, or an especial virtue, appoynted and fastened unto her, is called by us religion” (246). Ulysses’s claims that justice, the preeminent virtue, begins in the relationship between the human and the divine and that religion should perhaps even be regarded as a virtue distinct from justice elevates religion to a unique position and creates an impression of ascending in a hierarchy of virtues as the calf’s treatment of justice gives way to the elephant’s re-discovery of religion.

Only when the elephant agrees to return to human form does the chain of being return as an organizing principle, suggesting that the elephant is the closest animal to the human being. This last set of five animal speakers each function as plausible candidates for the position closest to the human, and Gelli seems to opine in favor of the elephant by placing the elephant last in the series, by giving the elephant many human-like traits, and by making the elephant the only creature to return to human form.

In the dialogues with the lion, horse, dog, and calf, Gelli has given each cardinal virtue an animal exponent that seems appropriate according to Renaissance natural history’s representations of the animal, eventually compiled in Edward Topsell’s English appropriation and expansion of Conrad Gesner’s natural history.¹⁸ In each case, the natural historical fact or theme that has motivated Gelli’s selection of a particular animal remains unremarked in Gelli’s text itself. Gelli has followed natural history’s representation of lions as animals who “excell in strength and courage” (Topsell 464) by making fortitude the predominant concern of his lion.

¹⁸ Topsell acknowledges his debt to Gesner on the ninth page of the unpaginated prefatory materials, counting from the title page: “I have followed D. Gesner as neer as I could, I do professe him my Author in most of my stories.” Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (London: printed by William Jaggard, 1607). Subsequent citations appear in text. On the relationship of the natural histories of Topsell and Gesner, see William B. Ashworth, Jr., “Natural History and the Emblematic World View,” in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge, England; and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 316.

Likewise, Gelli's making a horse the mouthpiece of temperance matches Topsell's regarding of temperance as one of the two primary principles of equine nature: "the naturall constitution of a Horsse, is whot and temperate. Whot, because of his Levity, and Velocity, and length of life; temperate because he is docible, pleasant, and gentle towards his maister and keeper" (329).

Gelli's decision to make prudence the dominant concern of the dog is motivated by an influential, ancient anecdote about canine intelligence, known as "Chrysippus's dog." In this often repeated anecdote, a dog determines that its quarry has taken one of three paths by ruling out the other two.¹⁹ Montaigne re-tells this anecdote in his *Apology for Raymond Sebond* and claims that the dog's choosing of a path by a process of elimination provides proof of animal rationality: "Convinced by this reasoned conclusion, it did not sniff at the third path; it made no further investigations but let itself be swayed by the power of reason. Here was pure dialectic."²⁰ Although Topsell unambiguously calls the dog a "creature without reason" (141), he later on the same page rehearses the anecdote of Chrysippus's dog, which he introduces, perhaps skeptically, by saying, "*Aelianus* thinketh that Dogges have reason, and use logick in their hunting" (141).

Confirming that this popular anecdote accounts for Gelli's making the exponent of animal prudence a dog, Gelli has named his dog Cleantos. This name alludes unmistakably to Cleanthes, the ancient Greek philosopher who convinced Chrysippus to join the Stoics and who

¹⁹ For a sketch of the place of "Chrysippus's dog" in debates about animal intelligence from antiquity through the early modern period, see Simon Blackburn, "animal thought," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Online ed. (Oxford University Press, 2008). On Chrysippus's original anecdote, see Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 21. On references to Chrysippus's dog among Renaissance writers, see Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 96, 101-3, 182.

²⁰ Michel de Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, in *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), 517.

preceded Chrysippus as their leader.²¹ In short, Gelli names his dog after the mentor of Chrysippus, who gives his name to the famous anecdote about canine logic. Gelli does not suggest that the transformed Cleanthes is the original of Chrysippus's anecdote, for Gelli's Cleantos becomes a dog only upon arriving on Circe's island, from which Cleantos never returns to be noticed by his former compatriots. Nevertheless, the name "Cleantos" provides evidence that the anecdote about Chrysippus's dog motivates Gelli's selection of a dog to discuss prudence.

Gelli's dog provides a particularly interesting, but by no means unique, example of Gelli's tendency to use commonplaces about animals, especially from natural history, to motivate his creative decisions while simultaneously omitting explicit references to these motivating beliefs, themes, and anecdotes. Gelli's dog mentions numerous examples of animal prudence, in the following order: ants, spiders, wasps, bees, birds in general, cuckoos, eagles, cranes, partridges, swallows, magpies, storks, elephants, camels, deer, bears, horses, dogs, snakes, and fishes (207-12). Gelli's Cleantos provides specific examples of behaviors exemplifying prudence for each of these animal groups, with six exceptions. Because humans hold snakes while prophesying, "when you will sette foorthe wisdome" (211), as Cleantos says to Ulysses, Cleantos considers that humans themselves have conceded the prudence of snakes. In the cases of bees, elephants, camels, horses and dogs, Cleantos claims that their prudence is so familiar to humans that he need not provide specific examples (208, 210, 211). Thus, Cleantos omits the anecdote about Chrysippus's dog, even though this anecdote probably springs to mind

²¹ For basic information about Cleanthes and Chrysippus, see Simon Blackburn, "Chrysippus" and "Cleanthes," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Online edition (Oxford University Press, 2008); and Julia Annas, "Chrysippus" and "Cleanthes," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, Online edition (Oxford University Press, 2009).

as an important example, or perhaps even the crucial example, of canine prudence for many of Gelli's readers and for Gelli himself, who has made the exponent of prudence a dog because of this influential anecdote.

The omission of this anecdote seems especially ironic because Gelli has Cleantos emphasize his canine identity in the very moment of omitting reference to Chrysippus's dog. Cleantos mentions dogs by using a first-person plural pronoun, emphasizing his membership in the canine group: "Of the wisdom of the horse, and of ours, I will not speake: because I am sure it is most knowen unto you, havinge continuall conversation amongst you" (211). Glossing over the most famous anecdote of canine wisdom while emphasizing his canine identity, Gelli's dog indirectly increases the impression that that the anecdote about Chrysippus's dog has motivated Gelli to give arguments about animal prudence to a dog. It is possible that Gelli means for readers to understand that Cleantos does not know about Chrysippus's famous anecdote because Chrysippus has not yet recorded it when Cleantos leaves Greece, but the fact remains that Gelli has both relied upon and suppressed Chrysippus's anecdote in composing the dialogue with the dog.

The calf's concern with justice is likewise motivated by a suppressed theme, which Topsell not only records but reserves for an especially important moment: the conclusion of his entry on the ox. Recourse to Topsell's entry on the ox is appropriate for contextualizing Gelli's dialogue with the calf, for as Topsell explains, "A Calfe, is a young or late enixed Bull or Cow" (88). As he concludes his entry on the ox, Topsell relates the following anecdote, which he attributes to Vegetius: "on a time Justice was so offended with men because they imbrewed every altar with the bloud of Oxen and cattell, that therefore she lefte the earth, and retired back againe to dwell among the starres" (88). This fable suggests that the practice of sacrificing oxen

does not comport with human dependence on oxen laborers, which Topsell remarks at the beginning of his entry on the ox (84). Sacrifices of oxen offend rather than appease the goddess Justice, for she presumably believes that humans have failed to show proper gratitude to and respect for their animal laborers. This myth explains Gelli's choice of an ox as an exponent for justice. Indeed, the myth even exemplifies the calf's claim that, among humans, "the more part do unjustly" (234), making Gelli's calf himself an implied rebuke to human morals. Since the calf never tells this specific story, however, Gelli has once again suppressed explicit reference to the commonplace that has led to his identification of an animal with a particular virtue.

In addition to featuring the cardinal virtues, the dialogues with the lion, horse, dog, and calf, along with the final dialogue with the elephant, each offer a different criterion according to which the featured animal becomes plausible as a candidate for the position closest to the human. The foregrounded characteristics structure the individual dialogues, each of which begins with Ulysses's remarking on the special attributes of an animal in ways that draw upon, without explicitly acknowledging, natural historical material. The animal characteristics also structure an argument that emerges over the sequence of dialogues; for as the animal speakers refuse to return to human form, Gelli rejects the corresponding criteria for proximity to humanity, until the elephant's unprecedented decision to return to humanity establishes the elephant as the animal that most closely approaches the human.

Anticipation of the lion's return to humanity is higher than with any of the previous animals because of the lion's reputation for preeminence among the quadrupeds. In Topsell's entry on the lion, Topsell says that the lion is "justly stiled by all writers the King of beastes" (456) and remarks that lions exhibit "in al things a Princely majesty" (463). This view places the lion near the human because of the Renaissance belief, described by Tillyard, "that within every

class there was a primate.” Examples of primates include “the dolphin among the fishes, the eagle among birds, the lion among the beasts.”²² These primates occupy transitional points in the chain of being and have symbolic relationships to other primates: “a primate in one class of creation must be an important link in the chain as being closest to the class above it and must also correspond to a primate in another class” (Tillyard 79). Thus, if the quadrupeds are immediately beneath humans in the chain of being, then calling the lion the “King of beasts” positions the lion most closely to the human.

Gelli invokes the lion’s characteristic majesty by making the lion the only animal whom Ulysses fears to approach, but significantly, Gelli never uses the phrase “king of beasts,” even though it motivates Gelli’s representation of the lion and creates the impression that Ulysses has encountered an animal who quite closely approaches human status. On the point of asking if any among a lion pride come from Greece, Ulysses momentarily loses heart:

peradventure there maye be some one amongst these Liones that I see come
towardses me. But what doo I? Who knoweth, troublinge them, whether they will
hurte me, or not: the which they would not do, yf I disturbe them not, yf they be
not provoked thereunto by hunger? And although Cyrces hath tolde me, that I
should have no feare of any beast, that is within thys her Island: I can not yet but
have some feare of these, theyr countenance is so horrible, and fearefull. (152)

Ulysses’s dread of the lions registers the majesty of the “king of beasts” without giving the lion that familiar title. Gelli’s omission of this common representation of lions is all the more significant because Gelli adheres so closely to the natural historical tradition for representing the

²² Tillyard, *Elizabethan World Picture*, 27. Subsequent citations appear in text. Tillyard claims that some Renaissance writers favor the whale over the dolphin and the elephant over the lion (26-7), but Tillyard’s main example of the conception of the elephant, rather than the lion, as “king of beasts” is Gelli’s *Circe* (26-8), which never attributes that title to any animal.

lion in another respect. Ulysses's speculations about the impact of hunger on the likely behavior of the lions almost exactly resemble claims about the impact of hunger on lions in Topsell's natural history: "A Lyon while hee eateth is most fierce and also when he is hungry, but when he is satisfied and filled, hee layeth aside that savage quality, and sheweth himselfe of a more meeke and gentle nature, for that it is lesse danger to meete with him filled then hungry, for he never devoureth any till famine constraineth him" (462). The similarity between this quotation and Ulysses's own meditations proves that Gelli has drawn on natural historical material about lions and corroborates my claim that Gelli has deliberately suppressed the most distinctive attribute of the lion, while expecting readers to take this attribute into account as they anticipate that Ulysses may make his first rhetorical victory.

After the lion refuses to return to humanity and thwarts the expectations created by the lion's status as "king of beasts," Gelli presents a series of animal speakers who each possess a unique claim to proximity to the human and who function as plausible claimants to the lion's usual position in the chain of being, until they all, with the exception of the elephant, refuse to return to humanity. The first animal after the lion, the horse, lays claim to the position closest to the human because of a reputation for unsurpassed nobility. Topsell declares the horse "the most noble and necessary creature of all foure-footed beasts, before whom no one for multitude and generality of good qualities is to be preferred, compared or equaled" (281). This use of *noble* in the sense of "Having qualities or properties of a very high or admirable kind" is characteristic in two ways: it exemplifies *The Oxford English Dictionary's* claim that *noble*, in this usage, appears "Freq. in the comparative and superlative, denoting superiority to other things of the same name," and it conforms to several sample quotations in applying specifically to the horse.²³ Thus,

²³ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. "noble" (entry dated 2010).

Topsell, not idiosyncratically, singles the horse out among the quadrupeds for special distinction and implicitly places the horse immediately beneath the human in the chain of being. Gelli's Ulysses makes similar remarks about the uniqueness of the horse: "Se yonder coming towardes me a very fayre horse: oh what a fayre beast it is: truely nature besides man, hath put all her knowledge in this" (182). Although Gelli's Ulysses does not call the horse noble, at least in Iden's translation, he admires the horse in terms that place the horse second only to the human.

The next animal, the dog, has a uniquely loyal relationship to the human. For Topsell, the dog is special among animals for unconditional obedience and devotion to a human master:

There is not any creature without reason, more loving to his Maister, nor more serviceable (as shall appeare afterward) then is a Dogge induring many stripes patiently at the hands of his maister, and using no other meanes to pacifie his displeasure, then humiliation, prostration, assentation, and after beating, turneth a revenge into a more fervent and whot love. [...] They meete their maister with reverence and joy, crouching or bending a little, (like shamefast and modest persons:) and although they know none but their maister and familiars, yet will they help any man against another Wilde beast. (141)

Gelli adapts such conceptions of dogs by making the dog the only animal deliberately to approach Ulysses and initiate conversation with him. As Ulysses reasons aloud about human superiority to other animals, he interrupts himself at three moments to note the progress of the dog, who begins to speak immediately after Ulysses's third remark, reversing the roles of human and animal in the other dialogues, in which Ulysses greets the animals and asks them to identify themselves:

But what would this Dogge, that commeth thus towards me? and beyng by lyttle and lytle commen nigh me, standeth then so styll? Truely he should have done it willingly, folowing his nature, the which is very frendly to man, and for that he should see them very seldome in this place. (201)

Alas see howe this Dogge taketh pleasure in beholding me, and marke if it seme not, by the gestures that he maketh, whyles I reason thus with my selfe, that he understandeth all that I saye, truely he canne not have donne it for any other cause. (201-2)

But what will this Dogge with me, that he maketh so much of me? ha, ha. O howe frendly and faythfull is this beaste to man. (202)

Twice, Ulysses remarks on the dog's unique friendliness to humans, and his first remark imagines that the dog craves human company. Gelli's dog distinguishes himself from the other animals in his curiosity about Ulysses and overtures of friendship toward him. When the dog "maketh so much of" Ulysses, causing Ulysses to laugh, it seems plausible that Gelli intends readers to infer that the dog has licked Ulysses, or performed some other characteristically canine antic.²⁴ In the subsequent dialogue, the calf also approaches Ulysses, who observes that the calf "commeth so safelye feding towards me" (226), but the calf's approach seems incidental: the calf happens to meander toward Ulysses as the calf grazes. Furthermore, while Ulysses notes that the calf "hath stande still to harken unto me, even as thoughe he understode

²⁴ Robert Adams's edition also infers that the dog licks Ulysses, for Ulysses wonders, "what designs has this dog upon me that he's licking and caressing me so?" Robert Adams, ed., *The Circe of Signior Giovanni Battista Gelli of the Academy of Florence*, trans. Thomas Brown and Robert Adams (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 124.

me” (227), much like the dog, the calf does not initiate conversation. The dog, in contrast, deliberately approaches Ulysses and engages him in conversation. The seeming interest of the dog in Ulysses’s monologue about human superiority, and the dog’s affection for humans, even strangers—as in Topsell’s claim that dogs will defend unfamiliar humans—creates an expectation that the dog may also depart from the patterns of other animals by accepting Ulysses’s offer of transformation.

The calf makes another claim on the position closest to the human because of its service to humans as a beast of burden. The horse does not become England’s primary beast of burden until the eighteenth century; both oxen and horses commonly serve as beasts of burden in the sixteenth century.²⁵ Accordingly, Topsell praises the horse as “the most noble and necessary creature of all foure-footed beasts” (281) but asserts the importance of oxen at greater length and more emphatically:

The morall uses of this beast, both in labour and other things doth declare the dignity and high account our forefathers made heereof, both in vintage, harvest, plowing, carriage, drawing, sacrificing, and making Leagues of truce and peace; in somuch as, that if this fayled, al tilage and vintage must in many places of the world be utterly put down; and in truth, neither the Foules of the aire, nor the Horsse for the battaile, nor the Swine and Dogges could have no sustenance but by the labor of Oxen: for although in some places they have Mules, or Cammels, or Elephants, which help them in this labour, yet can there not be in any Nation a neglect of Oxen. (84)

²⁵ Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England* (London: Continuum, 2007), 183-5, 209.

Gelli betrays that he conceives of the ox, more than the horse, as a beast of burden when the oyster calls physical labor “an arte of oxen, who alwaies laboure, and when they can no more, are then knocked on the hed with a betell” (22-3).

Likewise, Gelli’s Ulysses regards the calf primarily in terms of the ox’s special role as a laborer:

But alas see what a faire Calfe this is that commeth so safelye feding towardes me: O, what fiercenes sheweth this beast in his forehead? and notwithstanding howe gentle yet he is, and how he suffereth man to handle him: surely we are not little bounde to nature, that she hath made this beast, for it is plainely sene, that she hath made hym for that he should take from man a great parte of his paines, he beinge of suche strength, and therewith so easye to be handled. (226-7)

Gelli’s drawing upon natural history’s portrait of the ox in order to have Ulysses deliver a speech on the unique qualities of the ox, which also happen to give the ox a uniquely important relationship to humans, creates anticipation that the ox may also differ from the preceding animals by accepting Ulysses’s offer of a return to human form.

Gelli likewise introduces the elephant with Ulysses’s reflections on its uniqueness among animals. Topsell writes, “There is no creature among al the Beasts of the world which hath so great and ample demonstration of the power and wisdom of almighty God as the Elephant: both for proportion of body and disposition of spirit” (190). Topsell also compares the elephant to “a living Mountain” (190). Ulysses likewise remarks the elephant’s size and regards it with awe: “what beast do I see of such unmesurable gretnes walking on the se strond? it is an Elephant, if I through the farre distaunce, that is betwene us, be not deceived. O howe great is the varietie of nature, in the production of beastes” (254).

More crucial than the belief that “Of all earthly creatures an Elephant is the greatest” (Topsell 192) is the elephant’s reputation for intelligence exceeding that of other animals and approaching that of the human. Of the elephant, Aristotle declares, “It is very sensitive, and possessed of an intelligence superior to that of other animals.”²⁶ Pliny’s natural history, which was widely read in the Renaissance,²⁷ ranks the elephant above all other terrestrial animals in both size and intelligence: “the Elephant is the greatest, and commeth nearest in wit and capacitie, to men.”²⁸ Accordingly, Pliny discusses the elephant immediately after the human. Topsell, meanwhile, writes, “There is not any creature so capable of understanding as an Elephant” (196).

The elephant’s reputation for human-like intelligence motivates Gelli’s decision to make the only animal to return to human form an elephant. This decision seems especially significant because Ulysses’s arguments in favor of human superiority turn on the human’s unique intellectual abilities. In the dialogues with the lion, horse, dog, and calf, the other creatures who seem to be plausible candidates for the position nearest to the human, Ulysses repeatedly tells the animals that their seemingly virtuous behaviors do not indicate true virtue because animals lack reason. For instance, Ulysses tells the lion, “fortitude is a meane, determined with reasonne, betwene boldenes and feare, for cause of the good and the honest. Howe can it then be founde among you, synce you have not the judgement of reason, that can fynde this meane?” (167).²⁹

²⁶ Aristotle, *History of Animals*, book 9, chapter 46.

²⁷ On the popularity of Pliny’s natural history during the Renaissance, see Brian Cummings, “Pliny’s Literate Elephant and the Idea of Animal Language in Renaissance Thought,” in *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures*, ed. Erica Fudge (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 171.

²⁸ Pliny, *The Historie of the World*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Printed by Adam Islip, 1601), volume 1 of 2, book 8, chapter 1, page 192. Subsequent citations of this volume appear in text.

²⁹ Cf. 193 (horse/temperance), 219 (dog/prudence), and 243-4 (calf/justice).

With the elephant, who has once been a philosopher, Ulysses makes an elaborate argument about the superiority of human reason to animal intelligence. At the crucial moment of his argument, Ulysses presents a conception of human nature obviously though anachronistically derived from Pico's "Oration." That is, Ulysses presents the former philosopher with Renaissance philosophy's position on the human. Ulysses even remarks the particular relevance of his forthcoming arguments to the elephant's former identity by saying, "because thou art a Philosopher, I will procede with thee philosophically" (259). Ulysses's use of the present-tense "art" is telling and problematic; for he credits the elephant with a command of philosophy even though Ulysses has previously reserved reason for humans exclusively. The elephant agrees to return to human form after Ulysses answers an objection about the potential for the human's unique power of self-determination to go wrong. According to Ulysses, "all our errorrs, depende finally, by those partes of nature: that we have without reason, together and in common with you: and not by those by the which we are men." (289). According to Ulysses, Pico's "self-transforming" human would only choose an animalistic existence because of animalistic qualities that the human has. Uniquely human reason, in contrast, leads a human to choose a higher form of life.

This paradoxical definition of the human is characteristic of Renaissance humanism. Erica Fudge describes the contradictions in Renaissance understandings of the human in the following way:

If an animal is the thing that a human is not, and yet a human can cease to be (or never become) the thing it is, then an animal is something much more than other: it becomes kin. In early modern England, writers offered a way around this conundrum, but the solution did not clarify human status, it clouded it. Already

confusingly both born and made, natural and cultural, now humans emerge not as superior to animals, not even as animals, but as beings who are simultaneously human and animal.³⁰

Similarly, in a chapter on Pico's "Oration," Giorgio Agamben writes, "The anthropological machine of humanism is an ironic apparatus that verifies the absence of a nature proper to *Homo*, holding him suspended between a celestial and a terrestrial nature, between animal and human—and thus his being always less and more than himself. [...] The humanist discovery of man is the discovery that he lacks himself."³¹

When Gelli's elephant accepts Ulysses's arguments, which are indebted to Pico, and expresses the desire to return to humanity, Gelli produces a version of this paradoxical Renaissance definition of the human, but with especially ambiguous consequences. On the one hand, Ulysses convinces the elephant, who has been a philosopher, to adopt, or re-adopt, the Renaissance view of the human as the creature with the unique ability for self-determination. This seems to endorse Pico's view of man, as Gelli suggests that he intends to do in his dedication. Indeed, immediately upon his return to human form, Aglafemos exclaims, "Oh, what a fayre thyng, Oh, what a marveyulous thing it is to be a man! Oh how well I nowe knowe it better then I did before, for I have proved the one and the other" (290). Aglafemos not only expresses enthusiasm for humanity in these lines but also inverts a motif from earlier dialogues and from Plutarch's "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti," the model for Gelli's series of dialogues. In Plutarch's dialogue between Ulysses and Gryllus, a Greek whom Circe has transformed into a pig, Gryllus tells Ulysses that Gryllus and his fellow transformed creatures can best evaluate the

³⁰ Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning*, 60.

³¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 29-30.

merits of human and animal existences because they have experienced both states: “I shall quickly make you see that we are right to prefer our present life in place of the former one, now that we have tried both” (499). Gelli’s oyster adapts Gryllus’s words to express to Ulysses the oyster’s own conviction in the superiority of animal existence to human existence: “thou shalt see yf I that have proved thone life and thother, can shewe thee that, that is trewe that I saye” (16). Similarly, Gelli’s horse declares, “so much as I loved the beyng man, and not a beast, whiles I was a man: so much it woulde greve me, now that I have proved this other lyfe, to retourne from a horse to a man” (183). Regardless of whether a transformed creature explicitly voices such a sentiment, however, the oyster’s initial recapitulation of Gryllus’s argument informs each of the dialogues in which a transformed creature compares humans unfavorably with animals. Aglafemos, meanwhile, invokes the argument about knowing both human and animal states not at the beginning of his dialogue with Ulysses, as with the oyster and horse, but at the end of the dialogue, after Aglafemos has returned to human form. By inverting the Plutarchian convention in the final dialogue, Gelli seems to use Aglafemos to challenge the judgments that Gryllus, the oyster, the horse, and other transformed creatures have made about humans and animals.

On the other hand, by making the only animal to agree to return to human form an elephant, Gelli also seems to endorse ideas that elephants approach the human in intelligence, the faculty in which humans supposedly distinguish themselves most markedly from animals. Indeed, if we read the dialogue with the elephant in the contexts of the history of writing about elephants and the Circean tradition of transformation stories, we see that Gelli’s treatment of the elephant may undermine the notion of the unique human, despite Gelli’s declared intentions and the overt representation of the elephant in the final dialogue. As we shall see, elephants were

supposed to approach humans in three capacities that are crucial to both Renaissance conceptions of human nature and the themes of transformation stories in the Circean tradition: rhetoric, memory (especially of one's native country), and religion. As we shall see, bipedal form is the only human-like characteristic that elephants are supposed in the Renaissance unambiguously to lack, but Gelli treats bipedalism in such a manner that he makes it inseparable from the human capacity for religion. Gelli suppresses, satirizes, or otherwise rejects these human-like characteristics of elephants in his dialogue with the elephant; but they motivate him to make Aglafemos an elephant; and he surely knew that readers would be familiar with contemporary conceptions of elephants. Thus, Gelli's dialogue with the elephant, far from endorsing Renaissance views of human superiority, may use the example of the remarkably human-like elephant in order to dramatize the falsifications to beliefs about elephant nature that are necessary in order to continue believing that the human has points of uniqueness that make the human unambiguously superior to other animals.

Elephant Orators

In his version of the Circe episode, Gelli draws on the traditional characterization of Ulysses as an exceptionally persuasive orator. For instance, in *The Odyssey*, Athena praises Odysseus's rhetorical skill: "you are fluent, and reason closely, and keep your head always."³² Like Plutarch, Gelli gives Ulysses the rhetorical challenge of defending human superiority. As we shall see, Gelli puts this rhetorical scene within the context of claims in Renaissance rhetorical manuals that the capacity for rhetoric itself distinguishes humans from the other

³² Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), page 206, line 332.

animals. Ulysses is particularly qualified to appear as the hero of the dialogues because he excels in this most properly human pursuit of rhetoric. His persuasion of the elephant to return to human form, however, tends rather to undermine notions of human superiority than to bolster them, for Ulysses's ability to triumph over the elephant depends upon conceptions of elephants in natural histories as creatures who possess the rhetorical capacity, which is supposed by the rhetoricians to be exclusively human. By making the only character convinced to return to human form an elephant, Gelli dramatizes the distance between the rhetoricians' definitions of humans and the natural historians' claims for the similarity of elephants to humans. In the very act of conceding the superiority of humans to animals, Gelli's elephant character dramatizes the proximity of elephants to humans, and thus the fragility of the notions of human superiority that Gelli's elephant has accepted.

The bargain between Circe and Ulysses turns upon persuading the transformed creatures to return to human form, and Gelli explicitly invokes the traditional characterization of Ulysses as a skilled orator at significant structural moments in the series of dialogues. When Ulysses initiates conversation with the oyster, his first animal interlocutor, he proposes that the oyster return to human form and receives this response: "Folowe that no farther Ulisses, for this thy wisdome and eloquence, for the which thou art so much prayesd amongst thy Grecians, have no force at al with me" (15). Ulysses's famous "wisdome and eloquence," which perhaps create expectations that he will ultimately succeed in persuading the transformed creatures to return to humanity, are invoked just after the salutations of Ulysses and the oyster in the very first dialogue. Of course, the oyster warns Ulysses that his "wisdome and eloquence" will not succeed in convincing the oyster to return to human form, and this warning foreshadows the failures of ancient epic's heroic orator to persuade most of the transformed creatures to return to their

former lives as humans. The oyster's warning also introduces the theme that rhetoric alone may be insufficient to bring the transformed creatures back to humanity.

At the end of the first dialogue, which contains the conversations with both the oyster and the mole, Ulysses reflects upon his own reputation as an orator. He doubts his own rhetorical abilities but then blames his failures with the oyster and the mole upon the intellectual deficiencies of those creatures:

I know not wel whether I wake, or dreme: yf I wake truely I am no more the same
Ulysses that I was wont to be, sins I have bene able to cause neyther of these
twayne to beleve the trueth. And I heare tofore was wonte to perswade to my
Gretians, what so ever I my selfe listed. But I think the default to come of them:
for I have chaunced on two, who are not able to understand reason. (38)

This passage constitutes yet another structurally significant moment—the end of the first dialogue—at which Gelli invokes the traditional characterization of Ulysses as a skilled orator. Gelli's Ulysses defines himself so thoroughly in terms of the rhetorical abilities for which he is reputed in epic that he questions his self-sameness upon his failures with the oyster and the mole. (Interestingly this self-doubting comparison causes Gelli's Ulysses to differ significantly from Homer's Ulysses.) The failures of Gelli's Ulysses are all the more disturbing because he believes that he has failed in spite of having "truth" on his side, whereas in the past he has easily convinced his countrymen to adopt an arbitrary viewpoint—"what so ever I my selfe listed"—regardless of its truth. It is a crisis for Ulysses because he now finds himself unable to convince others of what he believes to be the truth, which should presumably be easier than compelling assent to an arbitrary or self-interested perspective, as Ulysses claims to have done with great facility in the past. Ultimately, however, Ulysses explains the outcome of the dialogues not by

doubting his rhetorical powers but by inferring that the oyster and the mole lack the capacity “to understand reason.”

The characterization of Ulysses as an exemplary orator recurs in the final dialogue, after the elephant has returned to human form. In contrast to the oyster, who acknowledges Ulysses’s rhetorical skill but asserts his imperviousness to it, the elephant gratefully attributes his return to humanity to Ulysses’s rhetorical skill: “Ulisses I thanke thee moost highlye, that thou haste with thy learning caused me to knowe the trueth, and with thine eloquence hast allured me to folowe it” (290). The comments of the oyster and the elephant have an inverse and mirror-like relationship: the oyster, the first animal interlocutor, announces his imperviousness to Ulysses’s rhetorical ability near the beginning of their dialogue; the elephant, the last animal interlocutor, attributes his return to humanity to Ulysses’s rhetorical ability near the end of their dialogue. The elephant’s different response does not so much undercut the validity of the oyster’s perspective as expose the logic that governs the organization of Gelli’s dialogues and the formal elements that are necessary to produce different but plausible results in each dialogue.

One essential formal element is the characterization of the transformed creatures as amenable or impervious to persuasion. As in Ulysses’s earlier comments about the influence of rhetoric on the talking animals, the elephant regards human superiority as “the trueth,” but according to the elephant, his recognition of that truth depends on Ulysses’s “eloquence,” as Ulysses suggests when he doubts himself, not on the creature’s own intellectual capabilities, as Ulysses suggests when he blames the oyster and the mole for their recalcitrance. Although the elephant exclusively credits Ulysses’s “learning” and “eloquence” for his transformation, the elephant’s transformation also depends upon his characterization as a uniquely persuadable creature, a characterization corroborated in natural history’s treatments of elephants.

Both Ulysses and Gelli's elephant, once persuaded, define truth and reason in ways that assume the superiority of humans to animals. After failing to persuade five creatures to return to humanity, Ulysses accuses Circe of tricking him by not returning all of the mental faculties of the transformed creatures, as she has promised to do at the outset of the debates (13):

I doute, that thou hast not restored to them with whom I have spoken, the power holely to discourse, as thou hast done the speache, accordinge as thou promisedst me, I have found them so farre distaunt from the truthe: and yf thys were soo, I should thinke thou haddest much deceyved me. For there is none of them that judgeth it not better, to be a beast then a man, the whiche I would never beleve they would saye, yf they coule use reason truelye. (125-6)

Paraphrasing Ulysses's complaint as a syllogism exposes the circularity of his reasoning: reason is uniquely human; reason, as both a fact and an act of thinking, dictates that humans are superior to animals; the transformed creatures refuse to return to human form; therefore, they lack the reason that is proper to humans. Ulysses's suspicion that Circe has lied is less significant than his taking for granted the idea that reasonableness depends upon recognizing the superiority of humans to animals because humans alone have reason. This conception of reason suggests that no transformed creature could accept Ulysses's offer to return to human form without already possessing human reason, which would, in this view, qualify the transformed creature as already human by the most crucial criterion for humanity.

The elephants' acceptance of this view of reason is a crucial moment in his conversion back to humanity, but the above analysis suggests that the elephant must already have uniquely human qualities, by Ulysses's logic, in order to be persuaded. Ulysses tells the elephant:

he who knoweth that man is none other thing, then a reasonable creature, knoweth that every man is reasonable: and he who knoweth that a beast is none other then a corporall substaunce, animate of a sensitive soule: knoweth that every Dogge, and every Horse beyng a beast perceiveth. And besides this he is sure, that that, that he knoweth, is so: and he can not be deceyved: for he knoweth it by hys proper cause, forasmuche as the being man is cause, that this and the other perticuler man understandeth: and the beyng a beaste is occasion that this Dogge and that Horse perceiveth. (277)

Once again, the tautology of Ulysses's perspective becomes especially apparent through paraphrase: being human, as opposed to animal, means being reasonable, which means knowing that all humans are reasonable, and knowing it by the infallible workings of reason, which humans have by virtue of being human.

To Ulysses's claims, the elephant responds, "Surelye I beginne to knowe, that this your intellectuall knowledge, is far more noble, for the certeyntie thereof, then our sensitive knowledge is" (277). However, this response, and the elephant's ultimate conversion, have the effect of satirizing rather than endorsing human superiority, for the tautology of Ulysses's claims undercuts their plausibility even as the elephant claims, often enthusiastically, to be convinced. Two explanations seem possible: either the elephant, alone among the transformed creatures, possesses reason, which is supposed to be uniquely human; or the elephant, alone among the transformed creatures, is easily duped by Ulysses's rhetoric. Both explanations, we shall see, draw upon contemporaneous beliefs about elephants; and both explanations compromise belief in the unique qualities of the human.

Comparing statements about Ulysses's characterization as an effective orator by the oyster, the elephant, and Ulysses himself, and comparing comments by Ulysses and the elephant about the role of rhetoric in persuading audiences of the so-called truth of human superiority, suggest that the ability to be persuaded represents an important characteristic of the human. The role that Gelli gives to rhetoric in *La Circe* matches treatments of rhetoric in influential rhetorical manuals of the sixteenth century. These manuals repeatedly make the claim that rhetoric elevates humans above other animals, both defining the human in terms of supposedly unique intellectual abilities and imagining that rhetoric has played a crucial role in the founding of human civilization. Examining these rhetorical manuals suggests that Gelli has assimilated the preeminent orator of Greek epic to the ideal Renaissance orator, who persuades humans to become human. By convincing the elephant to return to human form, Gelli's Ulysses reenacts the foundational victory of orators in establishing humans as fully human, but in a new context in which inconsistencies in beliefs about humans and animals add further difficulties to the logical problems already afflicting the idea that a creature must already have crucial human qualities in order to become fully human.

The conception of eloquence as a faculty that distinguishes humans from the other animals and enables humans to overcome their own animal natures appears in numerous rhetorical manuals of the sixteenth century. For instance, in his 1523 *Praise of Eloquence*, Philip Melanchthon declares, "For my part, I do not see how people are even going to seem human to others if they cannot explain what they are thinking or follow that which is spoken correctly."³³ In this view, the capacity for language is not enough to distinguish humans from animals, just as talking does not make the transformed creatures of *La Circe* human. In addition to speaking,

³³ Philip Melanchthon, *The Praise of Eloquence*, in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, trans. and ed. Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 101.

humans must be able to speak persuasively and to recognize when others have done so. Without these rhetorical skills, humans risk confusion with animals.

The construction of rhetoric as humanizing also provides the basis, in many rhetorical manuals, for narratives about the origin of human civilization. Thomas Wilson's 1553 *Art of Rhetoric*, for example, relates that post-lapsarian humans "lived brutishly in open fields" until divinely inspired orators "called them together by utterance of speech and persuaded them what was good, what was bad, and what was gainful for mankind."³⁴ Thanks to their capacity to be persuaded by eloquent speech, post-lapsarian humans rise above their animal existences: Wilson writes, "they became through nurture and good advisement, of wild, sober; of cruel, gentle; of fools, wise; and of beasts, men" (176). For Wilson, rhetoric distinguishes humans from animals: post-lapsarian humans live immorally, which supposedly makes them like animals, but the capacity to persuade and to be persuaded enables post-lapsarian humans to acknowledge and pursue a better, properly human way of life.

George Puttenham's 1589 *Art of English Poesy* contains a similar account of the origin of human civilization. Before the advent of eloquent speech, Puttenham writes, "the people remained in the woods and mountains, vagrant and dispersed like the wild beasts, lawless and naked, or very ill-clad, and of all good and necessary provision for harbor or sustenance utterly unfurnished, so as they little differed for their manner of life from the very brute beasts of the field."³⁵ Shared appreciation for and responsiveness to eloquent speech, however, enables humans to differentiate themselves from the animals that they would otherwise resemble. Poetry,

³⁴ Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric*, in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 175. Subsequent citations appear in text.

³⁵ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 204. Subsequent citations appear in text.

which Puttenham calls “the first rhetoric of the world” (206), unites humans in “their first assemblies” (204). These gatherings, in which poets recite compositions for an audience, are incipient civilizations, and Puttenham claims, “The profession and use of poesy is most ancient from the beginning, and not as many erroneously suppose, after, but before any civil society was among men” (204). Once again, the capacities to deliver and to respond to eloquent speech not only are uniquely human but also play crucial roles in a narrative about how human beings overcome their animality.

This conception of rhetoric is far from unique to Wilson or Puttenham. As Wayne Rebhorn notes, Wilson and Puttenham derive their narratives from ancient texts by Cicero, Quintilian, and Horace.³⁶ These narratives can be seen to exemplify Fudge’s and Agamben’s claims about the paradoxes of Renaissance understandings of the human, in addition to providing a crucial context for the debates between Gelli’s Ulysses and the eleven talking animals.

By persuading the transformed creatures to acknowledge human superiority and to return to human form, Ulysses hopes to repeat the narratives according to which primeval orators have convinced humans to abandon animal existences in favor of properly human ways of life. After Ulysses has futilely advanced his case to five creatures, his explanation of the intractability of the creatures resembles an incipient version of rhetoricians’ narratives of the origin of human civilization:

Our wise menne of Gretia are wont to saye, that they, who can be counsailed by them selves, to live well and honestly, are put in the first degree of virtue. And they that can not of them selves, but believe the counsel of those who are wiser then they, are put in the second degree: but he that can not of him selfe, nor yet

³⁶ Wayne A. Rebhorn, ed., *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 175 n. 5, 204 n. 3.

will take counsel of others, is thought by them not worthy to be numbred among men. And of this sort are they with whom I have spoken: So that it is no marvaile, though they wyll not become men againe. (126-7)

Although Gelli's Ulysses does not tell a fully developed origin story, his arguments provide the basic materials for a script that closely resembles the subsequent narratives of Wilson and Puttenham. Ulysses explains the transformed creatures' desires to remain animals by reflecting that amenability to persuasion distinguishes humans from animals. The creatures refusing transformation into humans lack the crucial trait that enables the creation of human civilization in Wilson's and Puttenham's narratives. Ulysses imagines himself, meanwhile, as a member of an elite class of humans, like Wilson's inspired orators and Puttenham's poets, who are agents rather than patients of persuasion. Allowing oneself to be persuaded, however, is an adequate criterion for human status for Ulysses, Wilson, and Puttenham. When Gelli's dialogues repeatedly give not-quite-human creatures the opportunity to accept or to refuse humanity, they play out rhetoricians' stories of the origin of humanity at the level of individual characters.

Of course, to consent to return to humanity, the transformed creatures must already be amenable to persuasion, and only the elephant, who still seems human in many ways, possesses the persuadability that is supposed to distinguish human from animal. As I argue above, only the elephant is willing, and even eager, to hear Ulysses's arguments. At the moment of his persuasion, the elephant declares, "No more, no more Ulisses, cause me nowe to leave this beastyshe nature, and to become man agayne, for my losse was to great, to have bene so longe tyme converted by Cyrces into an Elephante" (289). Since Aglafemos agrees to return to humanity because of a newfound appreciation of the "losse" that he has suffered, his conversion to humanity ostensibly confirms Ulysses's arguments about human superiority. However, in the

elephant's amenability to persuasion, the elephant already possesses a supposedly crucial attribute of the human—an attribute that decides the difference between human and animal not only in common constructions of rhetoric but also in the bargain that Ulysses strikes with Circe. Further undermining the elephant's endorsement of human superiority, natural historians frequently portray the elephant as an animal with rhetorical capabilities. Thus, the trait that enables Aglafemos to accept Ulysses's arguments turns out not to be properly human, which compromises the hierarchy of human over animal envisioned by the rhetoricians and Ulysses. Indeed, Gelli has arguably made the only animal to return to humanity an elephant with the awareness of this natural historical tradition and with the intention of dramatizing the conflict between rhetoricians' celebration of rhetoric as uniquely human and natural historians' recognition of rhetorical capacities in elephants.

The elephant's responsiveness to rhetoric emerges unmistakably in an anecdote that Topsell borrows from Plutarch. Topsell relates, "*Plutarch* affirmeth, that in Rome a boy pricking the trunk of an Elephant with a goad, the beast caught him, and lift him up into the aire to shoote him away and kill him: but the people and standers by seeing it, made so great a noise and crye thereat, that the beast set him downe again faire and softly without any harme to him at all; as if he thought it sufficient to have put him in feare of such a death" (210). Although the humans in this anecdote address the elephant with only inarticulate sounds, they succeed in communicating their objections to the elephant's manifest intention to kill the boy. For Topsell, the elephant's change of mind testifies to the elephant's sense of justice: the elephant overcomes his initial outrage and settles on a punishment that is proportionate to the boy's crime. Indeed, Topsell has earlier affirmed that elephants have a conception of justice when he writes, "*Antipater* supposeth that they have a kinde of divination or divine understanding of law and

equity” (208). (Interestingly, the religiosity of the elephant is also apparent in this sentiment.) Since the crowd convinces the elephant not to kill the boy, however, Plutarch’s anecdote also testifies to the elephant’s human-like capacity to be persuaded to abandon one course of action for another.

Pliny’s natural history contains an anecdote in which humans and elephants switch roles in the rhetorical scene. According to Pliny, Pompey hopes to impress the Romans with the spectacle of elephants slain by human gladiators, but the elephants, on the point of death, do something that Pompey does not expect. Realizing the futility of continuing to fight for their lives, the elephants address the audience:

But those Elephants of *Pompey* being past all hope of escaping and going cleere away, after a most pittifull manner and ruffull plight that cannot be expressed, seemed to make mone unto the multitude, craving mercie and pitie, with greevous plaints and lamentations, bewailing their hard state and wofull case: in such sort, that the peoples hearts earned againe at this piteous sight, and with teares in their eies, for very compassion, rose up all at once from beholding this pageant, without regard of the person of *Pompey* that great Generall and Commaunder, without respect of his magnificence and stately shew, of his munificence and liberalitie, where he thought to have woon great applause and honour at their hands; but in lieu thereof fell to cursing of him, and wishing all those plagues and misfortunes to light upon his head; which soone after ensued accordingly. (bk. 8, ch. 7, p. 196)

In Cicero’s account of this combat, he says that the crowd experiences “an impulse of

compassion, a feeling that the monsters had something human about them.”³⁷ Cicero claims that the crowd attributes human characteristics to the elephants; as Martha Nussbaum explains, Cicero specifically says that the humans acknowledge “*societas*,” which Nussbaum translates as “a relation of commonality,” between themselves and the elephants.³⁸ Cicero, however, does not figure the elephants as agents who actively solicit or arouse the crowd’s empathy. In contrast, Pliny’s account makes the elephants orators who not only move the crowd by expressions of their suffering but also succeed in turning the crowd against the tyrant Pompey, who has arranged a spectacle that the crowd now regards as unjust for its exploitation of human-like beings. The alleged impact of these elephant orators on human politics drives home the point that their command of rhetoric approaches or equals that of human orators.

Gelli’s elephant, who attends to Ulysses’s arguments and assents to them too easily, possesses an exaggerated version of the elephant’s characteristic persuadability but lacks the rhetorical prowess of Pliny’s elephant orators. Gelli, nevertheless, uses the elephant’s name to make an implicit and ironic reference to elephant orators. The name “Aglafemos” derives from two ancient Greek words: the prefix derives from the word for “splendid”; the suffix, from the word for “utterance prompted by the gods,” or more generally, “speech.”³⁹ Aglafemos’s name thus means something like “splendid speaker,” with the suggestion that Aglafemos speaks with divine inspiration, as he supposedly does when he gives thanks to the creator immediately upon

³⁷ Cicero, “Letter 24,” in *Letters to Friends*, trans. and ed. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1:175-7.

³⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, Mass.; and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 325.

³⁹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Sir Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 11, 1925. For assistance with translating this name, I am grateful to an anonymous library patron at the University of California, Berkeley, and to Lindsay Sears.

his return to human form.

Viewed in the context of natural history's rhetorical elephants, however, Aglafemos's name becomes ironic, for Gelli has made his elephant not an agent of persuasion but an exceptionally tractable patient. Gelli intends for his readers to notice the difference between Aglafemos and the intelligent and rhetorically skilled elephants of natural histories, to whom Aglafemos's name alludes. Calling attention to Aglafemos's departure from typical representations of elephants, Gelli suggests that Aglafemos's transition from elephant to human only becomes impressive if beliefs about the considerable intelligence and rhetorical abilities of elephants are suppressed, as they are in the rhetorical manuals of the sixteenth century. As Gelli produces his subtle critique of Renaissance humanism, such rhetorical manuals become objects of satire.

Elephant Memory and Homelands

Ulysses's bargain with Circe not only gives rhetoric a primary role in deciding the difference between animal and human but also equates the desire to return to human form with the desire to return home. In his opening speech, Ulysses declares to Circe, "the love of my country, and the desyre, (after soo long wandring) to see my most dere frendes, stirre me continually to depart from the, and to retourne to mine owne house" (11). Ulysses opens the dialogues by claiming that he has recalled his homeland and friends "continually," and he expects that the transformed creatures retain their sense of belonging to their native country and share his desire to return home. Ulysses says to Circe, "But before my departure, I would gladly knowe yf amonge those, whome thou hast transfourmed into Lyons, Wolves, Beares, and other

beastes, there be anye Gretian?" (11). Subsequently, he explains the reason for this question: "The cause whye I have asked thee mooste faire Circes, yf amongst those whom thou haste transfourmed into beastes, there be anye Gretian, is for that I would desyre to obtaine by my requeste at thy hande, that they myghte be restored unto their humayne beyng, and I lede them agayne with me into their owne countrey" (12). In both of these quotations, the verb tense in the phrase "there be anye Gretian" reveals that Ulysses still counts the transformed Gretians as his compatriots. Ulysses's ambition is not merely to restore his compatriots to human shape but also to return them to Greece, where they can once again participate in a human national community. Accordingly, the dialogues conclude only after Ulysses finds a transformed Gretian willing to return to his former shape and eager to return to his country.⁴⁰ Addressing Aglafemos, Ulysses speaks the work's closing lines: "Then let us go, for I desier no thing else: and I perceive alrely [*sic*] that the goddes (alwayes favourable unto him, that seketh after the beste sorte he can to be lyke unto them) geue us newe windes, very apte and prosperous for our navigation" (295). Gelli's dialogues are complete not upon a transformed creature's return to humanity, but only upon the commencement of the return voyage, which Ulysses has desired since the opening of the dialogues.

As we shall see, Gelli's *Circe* treats patriotic sentiment as a crucial aspect of humanity. Aglafemos, the only animal who displays this sentiment, is also the only animal who receives transformation into a human. As with rhetorical ability, however, elephants are imagined to possess a concept of a native country and to be able to remember their native country after departing from it, so traits that are supposed to be uniquely human once again turn out to be

⁴⁰ I follow Iden's text in using the now obsolete term "Gretian" to mean "A native or inhabitant of Greece; a Greek." See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. "Grecian" (entry dated 1989). For clarity, I use "Greek" only to refer to the Greek language. Occasionally, I use "Gretian" as an adjective, but always to refer to a national, not linguistic, community.

shared by elephants, undermining the significance of Aglafemos's physical transformation from elephant to human.

While Ulysses regards the transformed Gretians as compatriots, the animals generally introduce themselves in ways that indicate that national affiliation presupposes humanity and that the temporarily restored ability to speak the Greek language does not qualify them as members of the Gretian community. To identify himself, the oyster declares, "A Gretian I was, before I was changed into an Oyster" (15). Although the mole subsequently describes the oyster as "this other Gretian" (29), which implies that the mole conceives of not only the oyster but also himself as Gretian, the mole introduces himself to Ulysses unambiguously, and with nearly the same language as the oyster: "A Gretian I was whiles I was man" (29). The goat subsequently introduces himself to Ulysses in the same words: "A Gretian I was whyles I was man" (104). Except for altering the syntax and adding an indefinite article, the horse repeats the statement again: "I was a Gretian whiles I was a man" (185). The hind introduces herself somewhat differently, but she nevertheless agrees that she has lost her membership in the Gretian community upon her transformation. After Ulysses reveals his nationality, the hind says, "I lykewise was of Gretia, but I was a woman, before I was thus changed by Circes into an hynde" (128).⁴¹ Less emphatically than these animals, but no less clearly, the lion tells Ulysses, "I was a Gretian" (153), and the elephant says, "I was a Gretian, and of the most famous citie of Athenes, where I studied philosophye a very longe time, and my name was Aglafemos" (255). In all of these cases, the use of the past-tense "was" indicates that the animals no longer identify themselves as Gretians. Moreover, the oyster, mole, goat, hind, and horse explicitly declare what

⁴¹ The word "woman" can only describe a human; throughout its history, it has meant "An adult female human being." *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. "woman" (entry dated 1989).

the lion and the elephant also imply: they have lost their national affiliations at the moment of their transformations. According to the animals, national affiliation is a human prerogative.

Gelli elaborates the distinction between speaking Greek and being Gretian particularly in the dialogues with the lion, dog, and calf. The lion tells Ulysses, “I was a Gretian, as thou also shouldest be, yf the speach that thou speakest be naturall to thee” (153). The understanding of Greek that the lion has temporarily regained enables him to recognize Ulysses as a Gretian. Even though Greek is “naturall” to both Ulysses and the lion in the sense that it is their native language, the talking lion still does not believe that his affiliation with the Greek linguistic community qualifies him for membership in the Gretian national community. Indeed, the lion’s use of the past tense in the phrase “was a Gretian” disavows his former Gretian identity. The dog and the calf similarly recognize Ulysses as a Gretian based on his speech while disavowing their former affiliations as Gretians. The dog confides, “I knewe thee by thy tongue” (202), but then expresses his desire for Ulysses to join him in an animal existence, to be “transformed by Cyrces into some beaste as I am” (203), which would entail the loss of both Greek speech and Gretian status. The calf identifies himself to Ulysses as being “of the selfe same countrye that thou also art, yf that that thou speakest be thine owne proper language” (226), but then refuses to return to Gretia by saying, “where one is well there is hys countrye” (227). With this re-definition of “countrye” in relation only to the calf’s own contentment, the calf utterly rejects membership in—and responsibility to—a wider community, which is crucial to Ulysses’s understanding of “countrye,” the ideal that motivates him to converse with the transformed creatures before he leaves Circe’s island for Greece.

Ulysses counts the transformed creatures as Gretians, in spite of their animal forms, until the middle of the dialogues, when he accepts the perspective of the transformed creatures on

their national identity: that they no longer count as Gretians. Ulysses perseveres, nevertheless, in his attempt to return the transformed creatures to humanity and the Gretian community. Prior to the dialogue with the lion, Ulysses's invitations for animals to identify themselves by their countries of origin almost always use forms of *to be* assuming that the transformed creatures retain their national affiliations. When Ulysses meets the oyster, he says, "I also woulde call thee by thy name yf I knewe it. But if thou be a Gretian as Cyrces hath tolde me, it may please thee to tell it me" (14-5). Ulysses's use of the subjunctive form "be" implies that the oyster is a Gretian even now that he has become an oyster. Likewise, Ulysses addresses the mole: "I may cause thee to retourne man, and deliver the from this place and to leade thee agayne with me, into thy countrye, so that thou be a Gretian as she [Circe] tolde me" (29). Ulysses tells the snake, "it is in my power to make thee retourne man, for Cyrces whom I have praied, for the love I beare unto you, because we are of one country, hath graunted it me" (43). When the hare asks what motivates Ulysses's questions about the hare's human past, Ulysses answers, "The love that one naturallye beareth unto those that are of hys Countrey, and this hath caused me to desyre of Cyrces, to restore unto all my Gretians, the shape of man. And for that I understode by her, that thou were one of them, I would do the this pleasure: because I also am a Gretian, and am called Ulisses" (75-6). Ulysses uses the past-tense "were" to refer to the hare's national identity, but only so that the verb tense of the subordinate clause agrees with the tense of the main clause, which reports a past event, Circe's comments about the hare. More indicative of Ulysses's view of the hare is his declaration "I also am a Gretian," which affirms that Ulysses and the hare share a national affiliation. The significance of the phrase emerges especially clearly by contrast with the hind's subsequent statement to Ulysses that she "lykewise was of Gretia" (128). With "lykewise" or "also," the hind and Ulysses compare animal and human, but the hind's "was"

indicates that she no longer identifies herself as a Gretian, whereas Ulysses's "am" indicates that he regards the hare as no less Gretian than himself. Ulysses continues to assume that Gretian status survives transformation when he calls to the goat: "Goate, O Gote, harken I praye thee, yf thou be a Gretian as Circes hath tolde me" (104).

Repeatedly in these statements, Ulysses attributes the information that the animals are Greek to Circe, but in each case, he misconstrues what Circe has intimated about the animals. At the beginning of the dialogues, Ulysses tells Circe, "I would gladly knowe yf amonge those, whome thou hast transfourmed into Lyons, Wolves, Beares, and other beastes, there be anye Gretian?" (11). Although Circe's response, "Yea there are manye my most dere Ulisses" (11), uses a present-tense form of *to be* and thus implies that transformation has not altered the animals' identities as Greeks, Circe is generally quite clear that the animals have lost their claims to membership in a national community. When Circe directs Ulysses to the oyster and the mole, she very specifically says that they "*heretofore were men and Gretians*" (14; my italics). Linking humanity and Gretian identity but placing "Gretians" after "men," the zeugma in this clause makes humanity a pre-condition for national affiliation, though Ulysses misses the suggestion. Of the snake, Circe similarly says, "as I remember me, he whome I chaunged into her, was a Gretian" (41). Circe recalls the nationality of Cleomenes, who has become a goat, with even greater confidence: "he also (as I well remember) was a Gretian" (104). As she encourages Ulysses to speak to each of these creatures, Circe consistently uses past-tense forms of *to be* and implies that the animals have lost their former national affiliations. Circe even distinguishes the snake from "he whome I chaunged into her," as though the snake and the Greek physician Agesimus have entirely different identities. A similar but implicit distinction between human and animal underlies each of Circe's remarks about the former nationalities of the transformed

creatures, but Ulysses repeatedly misunderstands Circe and assumes that the transformed creatures continue to be Gretians.

In the case of the hare, Ulysses's misunderstanding is particularly dramatic. Circe says only, "I have graunted him to speake" (73); she does not even mention the hare's nationality. Ulysses, nevertheless, assumes that Circe's remark means that the hare numbers among "all my Gretians" (75). While Circe merely means to convey to Ulysses that the hare speaks Greek, Ulysses misunderstands Circe's remark to mean that the hare has continued to belong to the Gretian national community in spite of his loss of human form. Ulysses has not yet learned to distinguish the animals' command of Greek from their former Gretian identities, a topic broached in the pivotal dialogue with the lion and pursued further in the dialogues with the dog and the calf.

In the first five dialogues, Circe directs Ulysses to his animal interlocutors, and Ulysses mistakenly assumes that Circe thinks of them as Gretians. When the oyster answers Ulysses's "if thou be a Gretian as Cyrces hath tolde me" (14-5) with "A Gretian I was, before I was chaunged into an Oyster" (15), the oyster may intend to correct Ulysses, especially if a reader of the dramatic dialogues imagines emphasis on the oyster's "was," as might plausibly occur in staging the dialogues or reading them aloud. The mole and goat similarly seem to correct Ulysses in their introductions, making the contrast between the perspectives of Ulysses and these animals particularly stark.

In the remaining dialogues, Ulysses meets his animal interlocutors without any directions from Circe, but beginning with the dialogue with the lion, Ulysses adopts the perspective, shared by Circe and the animals themselves, that national membership depends upon humanity. The dialogue with the hind follows the dialogue with the goat; but since the hind rather than Ulysses

broaches the topic of nationality by asking, “Arte thou a Gretian” (128), Ulysses makes no statement revealing his own preconceptions about animal nationality in this dialogue. When Ulysses addresses a pride of lions in the ensuing dialogue, however, he says, “tell me is here anye of you, who, whiles he was man, was a Gretian?” (152). When Ulysses has previously asked animals to identify themselves as Gretians, he has used forms of *to be* indicating that he identifies the animals as Gretians in the present. The meeting with the lions is the first occasion in which Ulysses uses a past-tense form of *to be* to talk about a transformed creature’s national affiliation. The clause “who, whiles he was a man, was a Gretian” even resembles quite closely the earlier statements of the mole and goat and the subsequent statement of the horse. After one lion answers, “I was a Gretian, as thou also shouldest be, yf the speach that thou speakest be naturall to thee” (153), Ulysses lapses into his prior mode of thinking by responding, “Yea, I am also a Gretian” (153). Although the lion distinguishes his former status as a Gretian quite explicitly from Ulysses’s current status as a Gretian, Ulysses’s “am also” overlooks the difference between the animal and human and repeats an error that Ulysses has made when he tells the hare, “I also am a Gretian” (76).

Despite this lapse in his conversation with the lion, Ulysses clearly distinguishes animal from human in the subsequent dialogues with the horse, calf, and elephant. Awestruck by the beauty of the horse, Ulysses remarks, “the beholdinge him hath taken me in such sort, that I would desier that he, who was chaunged into him, had ben a Gretian” (182). Ulysses not only uses the past-tense “had ben” to describe the horse’s status as “a Gretian” but also explicitly differentiates the horse from the human “who was chaunged into him.” The resemblance of Ulysses’s remark about the horse to Circe’s earlier remark about the snake—“he whome I chaunged into her, was a Gretian” (41)—drives home the point that Ulysses has converted to

Circe's view that animals do not have national identifications. Ulysses also adopts Circe's language as he resolves to approach the calf—"I will see, if he, who was changed into him, was by chance a Gretian" (227)—and as he contemplates the elephant—"howe glad I would be, that he who was turned into him, had bene a Gretian" (254). Carefully differentiating between animal and human identities, Ulysses now understands that transformation into an animal eliminates national affiliation.

Providing further evidence of the change in Ulysses's perspective, he uses past-tense forms of *to be* when he asks the horse, calf and elephant to identify themselves by nationality. Addressing the horse, he asks, "what councieman were thou, before thou wer thus made by Cyrces?" (182-3). He similarly inquires about the calf's nationality: "who were thou, and of what place, before thou haddest this shape?" (227). Ulysses implores the elephant, "Tell me Elephaunt, yf thou were a man, (as I thinke thou wer) before thou haddest this shape, what thou were" (255). In addressing these three creatures, Ulysses specifically inquires about their identities "before" their transformations. Moreover, he uses past-tense forms of *to be* and thus discontinues his earlier practice of asking an animal, such as the oyster, "if thou be a Gretian" (12). This shift in Ulysses's perspective becomes apparent in the dialogue with the lion and is evidenced in every subsequent dialogue, except for the dialogue with the dog, who hails Ulysses, takes the lead in making introductions, and thus prevents Ulysses from framing a question about the dog's country of origin.

Considering the dialogues as a whole, it seems likely that Gelli has deliberately structured them so that Ulysses changes his perspective in the dialogue with the lion. In the first five dialogues, Ulysses believes that the transformed humans may still be Gretians. This is certainly true of the dialogues with the oyster, mole, and goat, and it is arguably true of the third and

fourth dialogues, which feature the snake and the hare, respectively. In the dialogue with the hind, which represents the midpoint of *La Circe*, the hind divulges her nationality before Ulysses can question her about it. Therefore, this dialogue cannot be categorized among the preceding or subsequent dialogues with certainty. The ambiguity of this dialogue, however, enables Gelli to balance, approximately, the number of dialogues in which Ulysses assumes the transformed humans are Gretians with the number of dialogues in which Ulysses doubts that an animal can belong to a national community. Although Ulysses does not ask about nationality in the dialogue with the dog, he specifically asks if the transformed animals have formerly been Gretians in the other dialogues from the last half of *La Circe*. Ulysses does lapse into his former way of thinking in the dialogue with the lion, but that fact reinforces the interpretation that Ulysses develops a new way of thinking about nationality near the middle of *La Circe*: judging by the questions that he poses to the animals, Ulysses reverts to his old view only in the seventh dialogue, when he has just begun to test his new hypothesis that nationality is an exclusively human prerogative.

Two dialogues, in similar structural positions, address the topic of national affiliation at length, and they both highlight the importance of the desire to return home, which is the goal of both Homer's Odysseus and Gelli's Ulysses and which is eventually recognized as a criterion of humanity by Gelli's Ulysses. When Ulysses hails the goat, the following dialogue ensues:

Ulysses: Goate, O Gote, harken I praye thee, yf thou be a Gretian as Circes hath tolde me.

Goat: A Gretian I was whyles I was man, and my name was Cleomenes of

Corinthe: but nowe am I not, neyther yet would I be.

Ulysses: What, arte thou perchaunce ashamed of thy contrye?

Goat: Not so: For there is none peradventure more honorable then that, in all the worlde.

Ulysses: What is that then, that thou wouldeste not.

Goat: Become man agayne. (104-5)

Using the past-tense verb “was,” the goat no longer claims membership in the Gretian nation. Indeed, the goat quite specifically declares that his identity as a Gretian has ended simultaneously with his humanity. He disavows both his personal human name and the designation “of Corinthe,” which has previously affiliated him with a specific civic community. The goat’s denials of his past identifications become especially emphatic when he says, “nowe am I not,” a statement distinguishing the speaking goat from his former identity as “Cleomenes of Corinthe.” Although the goat has temporarily regained the ability to speak Greek, the goat uses that ability to disavow his membership in the Gretian national community, which depends upon belonging to the human species, as the goat makes clear in the excerpt. Declaring, “neyther yet would I be,” the goat has no desire to become a Gretian once again. In response to Ulysses’s inquiries, the goat clarifies that his statements are motivated not by any special animosity toward Greece—indeed, he admires Greece more than any other country—but rather by his absolute refusal to “Become man agayne.” Despite his admiration for Greece, the goat has no desire to be a Gretian because national affiliation requires a return to humanity, which the goat refuses.

The calf occupies a structural position analogous to that of the goat: in both cases, the dialogues precede an exceptional dialogue (the dialogue with the only former woman, in the case of the goat; the dialogue with the only creature to return to human form, in the case of the calf). Moreover, the fifth dialogue, the dialogue with the goat, is the last dialogue in which Ulysses clearly mistakes the animal speaker for a Gretian, and the tenth dialogue, the dialogue with the

calf, is the last dialogue in which the animal speaker refuses to return to Greece. Ulysses and the calf discuss patriotic affiliation, and the reasons that the calf does not wish to return home, at length:

Ulysses: Calfe, tell me, (as he who may do it, geve thee that thou most desirest) who were thou, and of what place, before thou haddest this shape?

Calf: Even of the selfe same countrye that thou also art, yf that that thou speakest be thine owne proper language.

Ulysses: Then thou shouldest desire alsoo to returne to see Gretia thy countrye againe, aswell as I doo,

Calf: No truelye. For where one is well there is hys countrye: but this commeth of the beinge that I nowe have, that thoughe I might well, I woulde in no wise become manne agayne, and havynge to remaine thus as I am, this is so fruitfull and so pleasaunt a place, that I wil in no wise chaunge it.

Ulysses: Doeth no remembraunce at all move the, either of kindred, or of frendes, that thou lefte there in the countrye, to desyre to se them againe, or at the least the country it selfe, the love wherof is so great, that there have benne manye, who for cause thereof, have not pardoned anye thinge, even unto their owne life.

Calf: And thys is one of the bourdens that man hath, to have almost alwaies mo thoughtes, and mo cares in his mind, because of his kindred, of his frendes, or of his country, then he hath of him selfe: the whiche causeth that I wil remaine in this state, where I thinke not, or most litle, but for my selfe, whereby I live without any thought at al, togethers with thothers of my kind, never being troubled by them. (227-8)

The calf identifies himself to Ulysses as being “of the selfe same countrye that thou also art,” but the calf’s use of the present-tense form of *to be* departs only superficially from the practice of many other animals, who use past-tense forms of *to be* to distance themselves from their identities as humans and Gretians. The question that Ulysses poses asks specifically about the calf’s human past, and the calf uses the present-tense “art” to acknowledge that Ulysses currently belongs to the national community to which the calf has originally belonged. The calf emphasizes the similarity between himself and Ulysses when the calf says that he and Ulysses come from “the selfe same countrye,” but it is only the calf’s former self that is Gretian.

From this common origin, Ulysses incorrectly infers that the calf also shares his wish to return to Greece, and two conflicting perspectives on national affiliation emerge in the following exchange. Ulysses’s patriotism entails, first, a wish “to returne to see Gretia.” Memory of human fellowship and “the country it selfe” motivate that wish. Finally, patriotic affiliation manifests itself as selfless commitment to an ideal, to such an extent that humans risk or sacrifice their lives for their countries. The calf offers an alternative perspective on homeland: it is “where one is well.” Because he is content on Circe’s island, the calf has no desire to return to Greece with Ulysses. As Ulysses questions the calf, Ulysses hypothesizes that a deficient memory may explain the calf’s refusal to return to Greece. If Ulysses is correct, the full implications of that fault of memory become clear as the calf describes concern for others and for country as “one of the bourdens that man hath.” Having lost memory of his compatriots, the calf regards affiliation with a community as unpleasant; indeed, the calf’s ironic use of the word “bourdens” suggests that the calf may prefer the physical burdens with which humans load cattle to the psychological burdens of caring about others. Accordingly, the calf’s conception of home refers only to the well-being of the isolated individual—it is “where *one* is well” (my italics)—while Ulysses’s

conception of home refers to the relationships of the individual to other human beings and to the abstraction “country,” which defines a community of humans living in proximity to one another and sharing a language as well as social and political institutions. The calf has the company of “thothers of my kind,” a phrase that acknowledges the calf’s sense of belonging to a species, but otherwise the calf imagines himself as an isolated individual: “I thinke not, or most litle, but for my selfe, whereby I live without any thought at al, togethers with thothers of my kind, never being troubled by them.” The calf denies not only his former national affiliation but also any kind of affective identification with other creatures, including his human family and friends as well as his animal fellows. From the perspective of Ulysses, the calf has an insufficiently vivid memory, especially of his human past, but the calf views the lack of communal affiliations as an advantage of an animal existence: as a calf, he never worries about “being troubled” by the plights of others. To Ulysses, though, the calf does not have merely a different concept of home; the calf no longer has a home at all: “even as you have not made anye distinction of thine, and mine, so also have you no country” (247).

The Circe episode of Homer’s *Odyssey* offers a precedent for treating the lack of a desire for homecoming as a fault of memory, but not as a crucial component of humanity. In Chapman’s translation of *The Odyssey*, Circe offers food and drink to members of Odysseus’s crew, “But harmefull venoms, she commixt with these; / That made their Countrey vanish from their thought.”⁴² Richmond Lattimore’s modern translation of *The Odyssey* agrees that Circe gives the crew “malignant drugs, to make them forgetful of their own country.”⁴³ Preceding their

⁴² George Chapman, trans., *Homer's Odysseys. Translated According to the Greeke By. Geo: Chapman* (London: Imprinted by Rich: Field, for Nathaniell Butter, n.d.), page 151, no line numbers. Subsequent citations appear in text by page number.

⁴³ Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), page 158, line 236. Subsequent citations appear in text by page and line number.

transformation into pigs, the vitiation of the crew's memories represents a significant alteration of their normal faculties but not a loss of their essential humanity. Chapman is quite specific that the transformed crew "still retained the soules they had before" (151). Chapman's translation accurately represents the original text's assertion that the crew have become animals only in bodily form: "the minds within them stayed as they had been / before" (Lattimore p. 158, ll. 240-1). Furthermore, to corrupt the memories of the crew, Circe uses a magical agent distinct from the "rod that wrought / Their transformation" (Chapman p. 151). Circe's use of one magical agent to corrupt the crew's memories and another to transform them into animals supports the interpretation that the first change remains distinct from—and incomparable to—the subsequent change, which makes a profound alteration in the crew's bodies.⁴⁴ Since the crew never lose their human "soules" (Chapman) or "minds" (Lattimore), the alteration of their memory does not deprive them of their human ontological status, as their transformations deprive them of their human forms. When Gelli uses the lack of a desire to return to Greece to figure the talking animals' loss of humanity, and makes the loss of national affiliation concurrent with the loss of humanity, he adapts the treatment of memory in *The Odyssey* in a way that reflects the intervening influence of Plutarch's dialogue, which, as the previous chapter argues, innovates the Circe episode by imagining that humanity is precariously close to animality.

Gelli's treatment of memory also relates to early modern commonplaces about the differences between the mnemonic faculties of humans and animals. As Erica Fudge explains,

⁴⁴ Leonora Leet Brodwin offers a similar account of the distinction between forgetting homelands and becoming animals in Homer's Circe episode: "The brutish transformation is the result of a drugged condition which enslaves but does not destroy the human mind. The drug causes its victims to forget their native land, but the subsequent brutish enslavement, symbolized by the wand, does not destroy all human remorse over their condition, however powerless their wills may be to effect a return to their native freedom." See "Milton and the Renaissance Circe," *Milton Studies* 6 (1974), 23.

early moderns follow Aristotle in distinguishing between “sensitive memory” and “intellective memory.” While both humans and animals have sensitive memory, only humans have intellective memory, which enables recall “in the absence of a sensory prompt,” involves the use of reason, requires an act of will, and relates to the capacity for religion. A perhaps surprising entailment of the volitional nature of intellective memory is that the human has a moral obligation to remember its points of superiority to animals: “part of the responsibility of all individuals is not only to use memory it is also to know themselves. [...] Without self-knowledge a human is living a life without use of the rational soul; is living, therefore, the life of an animal. And the incapacity to differentiate human from dog represents a failure to exercise the difference.”⁴⁵ Thus, in a circular fashion, the human is distinct from and superior to other creatures to the extent that the human believes in this definition of the human and perpetuates it in the human’s uniquely intellective memory. In viewing the calf’s disavowal of national affiliation as a fault of memory, Ulysses places the calf’s egocentrism within a broader discourse about the differences between human and animal mnemonic faculties.

Indeed, this treatment of memory is typical of Renaissance Circe stories belonging to the Plutarchian tradition, to the extent that it should be regarded as one of the primary elements in the constellation of motifs inspired by Plutarch’s *Gryllus*. In regards to Spenser’s *Gryll*, Guyon declares,

See the mind of beastly man,
That hath so soone forgot the excellence
Of his creation, when he life began,
That now he chooseth, with vile difference,

⁴⁵ Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning*, 24-7.

To be a beast, and lacke intelligence.⁴⁶

Likewise condemning victims of transformation for forgetfulness of their human pasts, the

Attendant Spirit of Milton's *Comus* describes Comus's animal-headed hybrids:

they, so perfect is their misery,
 Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
 But boast themselves more comely than before,
 And all their friends and native home forget,
 To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.⁴⁷

The Attendant Spirit likens Comus's victim to pigs specifically because they do not desire to return to "their friends and native home." Similarly, when Spenser's Palmer pronounces, "Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*, and have his hoggish minde; / But let us hence depart, whilest wether serves and winde." (2.12.87.8-9), the Palmer distinguishes himself and Guyon from the "hoggish" Gryll, who does not share their desire to return home. Indeed, Spenser ends book 2 with the Palmer's pronouncement about the weather for the return journey, which recalls the final lines of Gelli's *Circe*, spoken by Ulysses to Aglafemos: "Then let us go, for I desier no thing else: and I perceive alrely that the goddess (always favourable unto him, that seketh after the beste sorte he can to be lyke unto them) geve us newe windes, very apte and prosperous for our navigation" (295). Alone among Gelli's talking animals and in contrast to Spenser's Gryll, Aglafemos recalls his human past and joins his rescuer on the voyage home.

The fact that only the elephant returns to humanity and to his homeland in Gelli's *Circe*

⁴⁶ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow et al.: Pearson Education, 2001), book 2, canto 12, stanza 87, lines 1-5. Subsequent citations appear in text by book, canto, stanza, and line numbers.

⁴⁷ John Milton, *Comus*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), page 91, lines 73-7.

ends up undercutting Aglafemos's acceptance of human superiority, however, because natural historians credit elephants with the concept of a native country and with exceptional memory, including memory of their homeland. For Topsell, elephants are remarkable for their patriotic attachments: "They have a wonderfull love to their owne Countrey" (196). This patriotic attachment extends not only to a particular place but also to the community to which an elephant belongs, for Topsell claims, "They are so loving to their fellowes, that they will not eat their meat alone, but having found a prey, they go and invite the residue to their feastes and cheere, more like to reasonable civill men, then unreasonable brute beasts" (196). As Gelli does by making the elephant the only transformed creature to return to humanity, Topsell affiliates elephants more closely with humans than with other animals. Topsell furthermore writes, "*Cicero* affirmeth that they come so neare to a mans disposition, that their small company or Nation seemeth to overgoe or equall most men in sence and understanding" (209). The statement not only acknowledges elephants as a "Nation" but also aggrandizes elephant intelligence beyond the human average.

Writings about elephants frequently describe their exceptional intelligence as a matter of memory. As an example of the human-like intellectual powers of elephants, Pliny writes, "they remember what duties they be taught" (bk. 8, ch. 1, p. 192). The use of the word "remember" in Philemon Holland's Renaissance English translation makes it clear that the elephant's intellectual powers are framed specifically in terms of memory. Similarly, Topsell writes of elephants, "they are apt to learne, remember, meditate, and conceive such things, as a man can hardly performe" (206). When Topsell refers to "this beast, who hath such a memory as is attributed unto him" (209), he not only notes the elephant's reputation for memory but also affirms that the reputation is deserved. As an example of elephant memory, Topsell relates,

“*Antipater* affirmeth that he saw an Elephant that knewe againe and tooke acquaintance of his maister which had nourished him in his youth, after many yeares absence” (209).

Most importantly for interpreting Aglafemos’s role in Gelli’s *Circe*, the elephants of the natural histories remember and long for their homelands if they depart them. Topsell relates the following fact about elephants: “*Pliny* and *Solinus* affirme, that they will not goe on shipboord, untill their keeper by some intelligible signe of oath, make promise unto them of their returne backe againe” (198). Pliny’s natural history, to which Topsell refers, emphasizes the idea that elephants’ requiring oaths testifies to their religious capacities: “they are thought to have a sense and understanding of religion and conscience in others; for when they are to passe the seas into another countrey, they will not embarke before they be induced thereto by an oath of their governours and rulers, That they shall returne againe” (bk. 8, ch. 1., p. 192).⁴⁸

Throughout Gelli’s work, lack of desire to return home indicates that a transformed creature has become an animal completely. Indeed, forgetting in general is one of Gelli’s favorite ways for describing what has occurred to the former humans upon transformation, for Ulysses tells the intractable horse, “If thou be then fully thus determined, remaine thou so a beaste still: for truly thou deserves none other being then this, synce thou sufferest thy selfe to be so much guided by the sence, that thou remembrest no more the lighte of reason” (199). In this passage, Ulysses frames the loss of humanity as a loss of memory. As with persuadability, however, memory—including memory of and longing for a native land—turns out to be a capacity that humans share with elephants, according to natural histories. Gelli counts on readers to think of

⁴⁸ Of course, the idea that elephants require oaths also depends on beliefs that elephants possess linguistic faculties. Pliny writes of elephants, “they understand the language of that country wherein they are bred” (bk. 8, ch. 1, p. 192). Topsell similarly remarks, “they grow to understand the *Indian* language” (205). For a discussion of elephant language, see Cummings, “Pliny’s Literate Elephant,” 164-85.

portraits of elephants in these natural histories as Aglafemos returns to humanity and then embarks on his journey home, and to realize that *La Circe's* overt celebration of supposedly unique traits of the human, including memory and patriotic affiliation, is made possible only by suppressing contemporaneously held beliefs about elephants.

Elephant Religion and the Bipedal Human

When Aglafemos returns to humanity, the capacity that he most conspicuously regains is the religious capacity. After thanking Ulysses for persuading Aglafemos to return to human form, Aglafemos declares,

for that it semeth to me that nature hath shewed me that it apperteyneth unto man so to doo, turning me unto that first mover of this whole worlde, who being the cause of all thinges, must also be the fyrste, and principall cause of that, that hath chaused of me: and that I finally having knowen the imperfection of al other creatures, and the perfection of the humaine nature, am become man againe: I geve him infinite thankes. (290-1)

After Aglafemos says a prayer of thanksgiving, he and Ulysses discuss Aglafemos's religious promptings:

Ulysses: Thou hadst not this knowledge of the first cause of this hole world, whiles thou livedst in that body of a beast.

Aglafeimos: No: but as sone as I was become man againe I felt it spring in my mind, almost as my natural propertie: or rather to say better, I felt it return into me

again. For before I was transformed by Circes into an Elephante, I remember that I had it. (293)

When Aglafemos declares that religious feelings, which he has forgotten while an elephant, return simultaneously with his transformation into a human, as though religion were a “natural propertie,” inseparable from the human, Aglafemos establishes religion as a crucial difference between animal and human.

Aglafemos’s claim becomes problematic, however, when his conversation with Ulysses is compared with the terms of the bargain that Ulysses and Circe have previously established and with Renaissance beliefs about elephants. After Circe proposes to change the transformed creatures back into humans if Ulysses can persuade them of the superiority of a human existence, Circe promises to restore the mental faculties of the transformed creatures so that Ulysses may engage them in debate:

Circe: I shall graunte theym speache.

Ulysses: And shall they have the self same discourse that they had when they were men?

Circe: Yea for lyke as I chaunged them into beastes so shall I cause the knowledge of very men to come into them againe. (13)

When Circe compares the magical act by which she has transformed humans into animals to the magical act by which she will now restore human mental faculties to the transformed creatures, she implies that the transformed creatures will become human again according to every criterion but shape. Throughout the dialogues, however, the transformed creatures lack such essential attributes of the human as persuadability and national affiliation. Furthermore, while Circe promises to return “the knowledge of very men” to the transformed creatures, Ulysses’s careful

questioning of Aglafemos reveals that Aglafemos has lacked “knowledge of the first cause” as an elephant. The repetition of the word “knowledge,” the same word that Circe has used in her earlier promise, drives home the point that the transformed creatures do not, in fact, regain every aspect of their humanity when Circe enables them to speak, reason discursively, and recall their former “knowledge.” Likewise, Aglafemos’s sense that religious awareness returns like a “natural propertie” of the human conflicts with Circe’s unambiguous statement that she will return “the knowledge of very men” to the transformed creatures.

One plausible interpretation of this discrepancy is that Circe has deliberately tricked Ulysses. Ulysses himself confronts Circe with suspicions of her honesty after he has spoken with five creatures:

I doute, that thou hast not restored to them with whom I have spoken, the power holely to discourse, as thou hast done the speache, according as thou promisedst me, I have founde them so farre distaunt from the truthe: and yf thys were soo, I shoulde thinke thou haddest much deceived me. For there is none of them that judgeth it not better, to be a beast then a man, the whiche I would never believe they would saye, yf they coulde use reason truelye. (125-6)

Ulysses takes human superiority too much for granted; however, Circe’s assurances do not, ultimately, allay suspicions of her honesty because she repeats the problematic word “knowledge”:

Truelye thou shouldest have reason to thinke I had deceived thee, yf I had so done. For those thinges should never be promised, that one eyther would not, or could not do: For thone commeth of noughtines, and the other of foolyshnes. And

therefore knowe thou Ulysses, that whyles thou spakest with them, they had the selfe same knowledge, that they had whiles they were men. (126)

Aglafeamos, unmistakably, does not have the “selfe same knowledge” as a talking elephant that he has had as a human. Thus, Aglafeamos’s evaluation of Circe as a “noughtie inchauntrire” (295) and his fear of “some newe deceite” (295) may be justified, even by Circe’s own, earlier remarks about “noughtines.” Alternatively, Aglafeamos may conceive of religiosity as a form of “knowledge” only because of the leading questions of a paranoid Ulysses, or Aglafeamos may be otherwise mistaken in contrasting the mental states of human and elephant.

Aglafeamos’s claim to have recovered the religious capacity upon his return to humanity is problematic regardless of Circe’s honesty, however, because of the religious faculties attributed to elephants in natural histories. Pliny’s natural history remarks that elephants “have in religious reverence (with a kind of devotion) not only the starres and planets, but the sunne and moone they also worship” (bk. 8, ch. 1, p. 192). The religious capacity of elephants is one of many examples of Pliny’s claim that, of animals, “the Elephant is the greatest, and commeth neerest in wit and capacitie, to men” (bk. 8, ch. 1, p. 192). In accordance with this view of the elephant, Pliny places the entry on the elephant first among the entries on animals, which begin immediately after book 7, a book on the human. Sharing Pliny’s admiration for the elephant, Topsell writes, “There is not any creature so capable of understanding as an Elephant” (196). Once again, religion is a particularly important example of the uniqueness of elephants: “They have also a kinde of Religion, for they worshippe, reverence, and observe the course of the Sunne, Moone, and Starres” (207). In addition to elephants’ religious interest in astronomy, Topsell describes other religious behaviors of elephants, including supplications, in which elephants seem “to pray for a devine blessing” (207), and funeral rites, in which elephants “bury

and cover the dead carcases of their companions, or any other of their kind” (208). Aglafemos’s claim that religion is uniquely human is ironic not only because of his status as a former elephant, an animal supposed to have religious practices, but also because of the statement that he now, as a human, can “remember” that he has been religious “before I was transformed by Circes into an Elephante.” Not only religion but also memory is a faculty in which the elephant is imagined, by natural historians, to excel, but Aglafemos presents his time as an elephant as a period of forgetfulness—especially of religion.

Gelli alludes to religion at several points in his dialogues, even before the elephant’s return to humanity, at which point religion emerges as a supposedly crucial, but actually spurious, distinction between humans and animals. The snake, for instance, explains to Ulysses that what deters humans from suicide is “The fearing to go into a worser state, for the feare that many have put you in, by writing of the kingedome of Pluto” (65). Ulysses responds, “I see thou art so obstinate, that thou wilt never be hable to perceive reason: wherefore I will dispute no more wyth thee, and chiefly because I have sene in this laste, that thou haste altogether lost thy knowledge, begynning to doubte of religion, thynges even convenyente to a beaste as thou arte” (65-6). To Ulysses, the snake’s implication that accounts of the afterlife have been fabricated signals the snake’s lack of religion, which Ulysses interprets as a deficiency in the snake’s “knowledge”—specifically, a deficiency in memory—and as a sign that this former human deserves his new animal form.

Religion also becomes a conspicuous topic at the end of the dialogue with the calf, where it receives much the same treatment as at the end of the dialogue with the snake. Advancing an argument for the superiority of humans to animals, Ulysses claims that animals lack religion, that they “not onely know not the goddess, but also have no thought or beliefe at all that they be, not

having the discourse of reason” (246). Ulysses adopts the perspective that he has previously taken in the dialogue with the snake: religion is a manifestation of reason, which humans but not other animals possess. After the calf attempts to rebut Ulysses’s arguments, Ulysses maintains that animals have “no knowledge” (247), thus repeating the configuration of religion as a matter of knowledge from the dialogue with the snake and anticipating the configuration of religion in the dialogue with the elephant.

Insisting that animals do have religious practices, the calf’s rebuttal draws unmistakably upon natural history’s accounts of elephant religiosity, yet the calf never names elephants explicitly, even though the calf does mention birds and, recognizing religion in beings more distant from humans, plants:

there are amongst us of those, who do reverence to the sonne, every mornynge when they aryse, acknowledgyng hym for the greatest minister of nature: and amonge the berdes, of those that as sone as the mornynge appeareth to them upon our Orizon, thanking him, and tournng them selves towards him, put forth theyr notes: but what speake I of us that are animate, fyndinge also amonge herbes, of those who honouring him, tourne theyr leaves continuallye, and theyr flowers towards his sighte. (246-7)

This account of solar worship conforms quite closely to descriptions of elephants in natural histories, such as Topsell’s account that elephants “reverence the Sunne rysing, holding up their trunke or hand to heaven, in congratulation of her rising” (207). While Gelli’s calf uses birds to exemplify animal religion, his argument is shaped by natural history’s treatments of elephants as animals with exceptional and human-like religious practices.

Aglafemos's enthusiastic celebration of his return to humanity exaggerates the differences between elephant and human: in the natural histories, the elephant lacks almost nothing of humanity except for bipedal form. Refusing to separate the human form from certain capabilities of the human, especially the religious faculty, Gelli departs from the natural history's portraits of elephants and expects readers to notice the ironizing effects of those departures. His treatment of the elephant's return to humanity dramatizes the falsifications of natural history that are necessary to create the idea of a human who has unique capacities distinguishing the human from animals. In particular, Gelli renders ironic the idea that the human's bipedal form is inseparable from the human's religious faculty—an idea that looms large in Aglafemos's reflection on his return to humanity, in a long literary tradition of transformation stories, and in Renaissance philosophies of human nature, which Ulysses anachronistically rehearses and which Aglafemos can be presumed to have studied during his human past as a philosopher.

The creation story in Plato's *Timaeus*, which is also a story of transformations, provides an early and influential example of the treatment of religiosity as inextricable from the human's bipedal form.⁴⁹ I call this configuration “the fetishization of the human form” because it attributes symbolic significance to the human shape in a way that seems unwarranted by natural history's assertions about animals, especially elephants. Near the end of *Timaeus*, the title character declares,

We should think of the most authoritative part of our soul as a guardian spirit

⁴⁹ Keith Thomas writes, “Since Plato a great deal had been made of man's erect posture.” *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 31. Commenting on a Renaissance appropriation of Plato's views of human bipedalism, Erica Fudge argues that the Renaissance recognized only “invisible differences” between humans and animals: “The body, then, was not a central source of difference, and even when the human physique was invoked to reiterate distinction this physical difference was always merely a sign of the other, more significant, mental division.” *Brutal Reasoning*, 7-8. This essay offers a different perspective.

given to each of us by god, living in the summit of the body, which can properly be said to lift us from the earth towards our home in heaven, as if we were a heavenly and not an earthbound plant. For where the soul first grew into being, from there our divine part attaches us by the head to heaven, like a plant by its roots, and keeps our body upright.⁵⁰

By “the most authoritative part of our soul,” Timaeus means the rational soul, the highest of the three varieties of soul—the others are the sensitive and the vegetative souls—and the one that distinguishes humans from animals in classical thought.⁵¹ For Timaeus, the human’s possession of a rational soul accounts for its uniquely bipedal posture. Imagining that the head houses the rational soul, Timaeus entertains two complementary notions: the rational soul draws the human form “upright” as it aspires toward its heavenly place of origin, or the rational soul anchors the head in the heavens, just as the “roots” of a “plant” secure it to the earth. In either case, the relationship between the unique properties of the human, bipedal posture and rational soul, is no coincidence for Timaeus: the rational soul actually causes the human form to stand “upright.”

Because the rational soul is inseparable from bipedal posture in Timaeus’s account of the origin of the universe, humans also lose their distinctive shapes and become various kinds of animals when they fail to exercise their uniquely human intellectual capacities. After a misogynist description of the degeneration of some men into women, Timaeus places birds immediately next to humans: “The race of birds was produced by a process of transformation, whereby feathers grew instead of hair, from harmless, empty-headed men, who were interested

⁵⁰ Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. and ed. Desmond Lee and T. K. Johansen (London and New York: Penguin, 2008), 88. Subsequent citations appear in text.

⁵¹ This model of the three souls, associated especially with Aristotle, is well known and widely recognized as influential. See Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 30-1; and Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning*, 8.

in the heavens but were silly enough to think that the most certain astronomical demonstrations proceed through observation” (90). These humans lose their human shape because of intellectual deficiencies: they are “empty-headed” and “silly.” However, they retain an approximately bipedal body type and gain wings that enable them to fly, presumably because, as humans, they have remained “interested in the heavens” and have therefore forsaken the heavenward aspirations of the human in a minimal, though decisive, way: their interest in astronomy has nothing of religion.

The terrestrial animals deviate even more dramatically from the human:

Wild land animals have come from men who made no use of philosophy and never in any way considered the nature of the heavens because they had ceased to use the circles in the head and followed the leadership of the parts of the soul in the breast. Because of these practices their fore-limbs and heads were drawn by natural affinity to the earth, and their fore-limbs supported on it, while their skulls were elongated into various shapes according to the particular way in which each man’s circles had been crushed through lack of use. (90)

Timaeus’s discussion of animals fetishizes the human form because it explains the quadrupedal forms of animals with reference to their loss of human intellectual powers, which occurs especially through neglect of “philosophy.” The implication that philosophy is a special vocation of the human recurs in Gelli’s *Circe*, in which only the philosopher returns to human form.

After discussing the land animals, Timaeus treats the aquatic animals, which he regards as the lowest forms of animal life: “they live in the depths,” Timaeus claims, “as a punishment for the depth of their stupidity” (91). Once again, properties of human and animal bodies—in this case, the properties that suit fishes and other aquatic creatures for their habitat—originate in

mental properties, such as degrees of intelligence. Timaeus emphasizes this integral relation between mind and body when he concludes, “These are the principles on which living creatures change and have always changed into each other, the transformation depending on the loss or gain of understanding or folly” (91). Transformations that bring bodies into symbolic accord with minds explain the existence of various human and animal species.

This logic, of course, characterizes the Plutarchian tradition, as opposed to the Homeric tradition, of transformation stories, for one of the innovations of Plutarch’s “*Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti*” is to imagine the relationship between mind and body of a transformed creature as concordant rather than discordant. Plutarch’s Odysseus tells Gryllus, “you seem to have lost not only your shape, but your intelligence also under the influence of that drug. You have become infected with strange and completely perverted notions. Or was it rather an inclination to swinishness that conjured you into this shape?” (499). Comparing Plutarch’s dialogue with other treatments of transformation suggests that the distinction between biped and quadruped may be especially important.

Another creation myth, the story of Prometheus’s creation of humans in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, makes claims about the human form similar to those of Plato’s Timaeus. In Arthur Golding’s Renaissance translation, the relevant verses read:

And where all other beasts behold the ground with grovelling eye,
He gave to man a stately look replete with majesty
And willed him to behold the heaven with count’nance cast on high,
To mark and understand what things were in the starry sky.
And thus the earth, which late before had neither shape nor hue,

Did take the noble shape of man and was transformèd new.⁵²

In this passage, the physical difference between human and animal forms reflects the difference in their intellectual vocations and places in a divinely ordained hierarchy. When the poet says that “beasts behold the ground with grovelling eye,” he constructs animals as beings whose quadrupedal posture tends to direct their gaze downward. The object of the quadrupedal gaze, “the ground,” represents the realm of sensory experience to which animals are confined by their lack of a rational soul.⁵³ The “grovelling eye” of the quadrupeds both expresses their servility, their subordination to the human, and represents their inability to engage in philosophical speculation, which the poet, like Plato’s *Timaeus*, associates with contemplation of “the heaven.”

The human, in contrast, has a bipedal posture that allegedly directs the human’s gaze towards this symbolic realm of reason. The poet explicitly says that Prometheus both has designed the human to stand upright and has charged the human to “understand what things were in the starry sky.” The relationship between the human’s bipedal form and the mandate to “understand” is no mere coincidence: in the poem, the human’s upright posture both enables and represents the capacity for rational thinking, which the poet figures as the contemplation of “the starry sky.” The poet describes “the shape of man” as “noble” and attributes “majesty” to the human appearance because the bipedal form cannot be divorced from the human’s capacity to reason, which elevates humans above animals.

Gelli’s *Ulysses* reflects similarly on the distinction between quadruped and biped before conversing with the dog:

Yf nature (as our wyse men of Gretia saye) desyer that every thinge should come

⁵² Arthur Golding, trans., *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, ed. Madeleine Forey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), book 1, lines 97-102.

⁵³ Erica Fudge discusses early modern beliefs about animal consciousness; in particular, “animals exist only in the present.” *Brutal Reasoning*, 24, but see 7-38.

to his ende and perfection: from whence then commeth it, that she hath geuen so great power, to these our senses, that they drawe continually unto the earthe, this our mynde? and kepe it almooste always occupied in these earthlye thinges (as it is with this fellowe that was changed into an horse, with whom I spake even nowe) so that we are lytle different from brute beastes: who, for that they have theyr ende in the earth, wer all made by nature, with theyr face tourned towardes the same, and man onely with the face tourned towardes heven, to geve him to understand, that he shoulde continually lyft up him selfe thereunto: and beholding the operations of those devine substaunces, to obteyne a felicitie that maketh him more then a man. (200-1)

As with Ovid's verses, from which this passage is almost certainly derived, the distinction between quadrupedal and bipedal forms is also a distinction in mental capabilities. Furthermore, the bipedal form is treated not merely as a symbol of the human's intellectual potential but as an integral part of it.

After Aglafemos's return to humanity, he also remarks on the significance of the human's special shape: "I begin to thinke that this firste cause having loved him, above all other thinges, as the making him more noble then any other beast doth plainely declare, that his ende, shall not be like unto thend of other beastes [illegible word] not having the understanding, have no knowledge at all of the same firste cause, as he hath" (293-4). Comparing Aglafemos's finding the human "more noble" than animals with Ovid's passage about "the noble shape of man," which Ulysses has rehearsed in an earlier dialogue, suggests that Aglafemos means that the human's unique bipedalism is the physical manifestation of the human's unique "knowledge" of

religion.⁵⁴ Of course, Aglafemos's status as a former elephant, a creature supposed by natural historians to have religion, undermines Aglafemos's claim to have recovered religion upon transformation into a human and, consequently, the construction of bipedalism that Aglafemos repeats from other transformation stories.

Aglafemos's ironic rehearsal of the commonplace about the human's bipedal shape mocks not only a tradition of transformation stories but also Renaissance philosophy's definition of the human, in which transformation figures conspicuously. Elaborating the view that the human, unlike any other creature, has a "self-transforming nature" (225), Pico writes,

if you see one abandoned to his appetites crawling on the ground, it is a plant and not a man you see; if you see one blinded by the vain illusions of imagery, as it were of Calypso, and, softened by their gnawing allurements, delivered over to his senses, it is a beast and not a man you see. If you see a philosopher determining all things by means of right reason, him you shall reverence: he is a heavenly being and not of this earth. If you see a pure contemplator, one unaware of the body and confined to the inner reaches of the mind, he is neither an earthly nor a heavenly being; he is a more reverend divinity vested with human flesh. (226)

Gelli's Ulysses draws unmistakably upon this passage as he makes the arguments that finally convince Aglafemos to return to human form:

If he [the human] will geve him selfe wholly unto the belly: holding his countenance, and face continually fixed on the earth, he shall become as one that perceiveth nothinge, and like to the plantes: and if he shal drowne him selfe to much in the sensitive pleasure, he shall become like the brute beastes: but yf he

⁵⁴ Instead of "as the making him more noble then any other beast doth plainely declare," Adams's edition has "as his nobler posture sufficiently declares." Adams, ed., *The Circe*, 178.

lyfting his face towards heaven, playing the philosopher, shal consider the beautie of the heavens, and the marveylous order of nature, he shall change him self from an erthly beast, unto an hevenly creature: and if he, dispising all the impediments of the body, shall attende to beholde the divine thinges, he shall make him selfe almost a god. (288)

This account of Pico's "self-transforming" human conflates several activities: raising the eyes, engaging in philosophy, contemplating the stars, and aspiring toward divinity, all of which are frequently said to be enabled by the human's uniquely bipedal posture. In the natural histories, however, elephants not only have the capacity for religion but also the interest in celestial bodies—Topsell says, "they worshippe, reverence, and observe the course of the Sunne, Moone, and Starres" (207)—that is characteristic of the human intellect according to Timaeus, Ovid's speaker, Gelli's Ulysses, and Pico. By making the elephant a former philosopher and the only talking animal to return to human form, Gelli invokes the natural histories' accounts of human-like elephants in a way that makes ironic Aglafemos's enthusiasm for the unique attributes of humanity, especially the bipedal form, which Aglafemos has perhaps (anachronistically) learned to view as inseparable from the capacity for religion under the influence of Renaissance humanism and the ancient transformation stories which Renaissance humanism adapted.

Conclusion

To convince Aglafemos to return to human form, Ulysses must remind Aglafemos of unique capacities of the human, such as rhetoric, national affiliation, religion, and philosophy. By making Aglafemos an elephant, a former philosopher, and the only animal to return to human

form, Gelli draws on natural histories that credit elephants with human-like capacities but uses the implied reference to this material, which Gelli expects his audience to recognize, to render ironic those arguments about human superiority that Ulysses advances and Aglafemos accepts. Furthermore, the ideas that Ulysses reminds Aglafemos of religion, and that Ulysses restores Aglafemos's uniquely human intellect, are themselves problematic as accounts of Aglafemos's transformation from elephant to human, for the natural histories admire elephants for their memory and intelligence. Thus, Gelli's series of Plutarchian conversations with ten animals and an anti-Plutarchian conversation with an eleventh animal uses contemporaneous conceptions of elephants to expose the problems with positing a symbolic accordance between human form and intelligence, as do transformation stories, including Plutarch's influential dialogue, and Renaissance philosophy, especially as elaborated by Pico. Gelli's *Circe* thus adopts Plutarchian conventions, but only ironically, in order to criticize some key tenets of Renaissance humanism.

Before endorsing the elephant as the most human-like animal by having only the elephant return to human form, Gelli's *La Circe* considers several other animal candidates for that position: the lion, horse, dog, and calf, who are each human-like according to a different criterion. Gelli makes not one of his eleven talking animals an ape, nor do any of the animals mention apes, despite relating anecdotes about numerous animal species that resemble humans or seem to surpass them in some capacity. Gelli's story of human-animal transformations belongs to a period before the rise of interest in the similarities in the forms of human and ape. Indeed, the ape would not become the object of European interest until the eighteenth century, when the revolutionary work of anatomist Edward Tyson illuminated the especially close resemblance of

humans to apes.⁵⁵ The ape would not be officially classified in immediate proximity to the human until Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* of 1735.⁵⁶

Because the conception of the ape as the most human-like animal is relatively modern, the ape's absence from *La Circe* is conspicuous to modern—but not early modern—readers. The following chapter, however, features an animal that is conspicuously absent from Gelli's *Circe* even by early modern standards: the pig. For while Plutarch's Gryllus, the original of Gelli's animal speakers, is a pig, that animal appears nowhere among the animal speakers of Gelli's *Circe*, with consequences to be explored in the following chapter on Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Milton's *Comus*.

⁵⁵ On the revolutionary role of Tyson's work, see H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, The University of London, 1952), 336. For more information about the new and increasing prominence of the ape in eighteenth-century conceptions of the human/animal relation, see Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 225-31; and Laura Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes: Humans and Other Animals in the Modern Literary Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), especially 27-63.

⁵⁶ On Linnaeus's taxonomic innovations, see Phillip Sloan, "The Gaze of Natural History," in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, ed. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995), 121.

CHAPTER 3

THE MANY CREATURES IN CIRCE'S STIES:

PIGS IN SPENSER'S *FAERIE QUEENE* AND MILTON'S *COMUS*

Giovanni Battista Gelli's *Circe* is remarkable among adaptations of the Circe episode for its diverse cast of animals. The animals with whom Ulysses speaks include, in order, an oyster, mole, snake, hare, goat, hind, lion, horse, dog, calf, and elephant. Two animals, nevertheless, are conspicuously absent from this cast of animal speakers. Gelli's early modern readers may have been undisturbed by the ape's absence, and may have been less likely than modern readers to think it anomalous, because of the aforementioned fact that apes become prominent in European comparisons of humans with animals only after the publication of Edward Tyson's *Anatomy of a Pygmie* in 1699.¹ Already in the early modern period, however, the pig's absence would have been striking to readers because of the role of pigs in Gelli's most important source texts: Homer's *Odyssey* and Plutarch's "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti."² In *The Odyssey*, of course, each transformed member of Odysseus's crew becomes a pig. In "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti," the only talking animal with whom Odysseus converses is likewise a pig. Gelli's omission of a pig

¹ On the revolutionary role of Tyson's work, see H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, The University of London, 1952), 336. On the new and increasing prominence of the ape in eighteenth-century conceptions of the human/animal relation, see Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 225-31; and Laura Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes: Humans and Other Animals in the Modern Literary Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), especially 27-63.

² Iden's translation of Gelli's *Circe* has no references to apes and only three references to pigs. See Giovanni Battista Gelli, *Circes of John Baptista Gello, Florentine. Translated out of Italian into Englishe by Henry Iden* (Imprinted at London in Poules Churchyarde, at the signe of the holy ghost by John Cawood, printer to the Quenes Majestie, 1557), 61, 136, 229. I have assigned numbers to the pages of this edition, beginning with the title page.

speaker thus constitutes an arresting departure from these two ancient models, despite their other, significant differences. This departure calls out for explanation, which this chapter provides as it addresses the decisive, though not always obvious, role of pigs in two other early modern Circe episodes: book 2 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Milton's *Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*, more commonly known as *Comus*.

Explaining Gelli's departure from his ancient sources is all the more urgent because the absence of a pig speaker is not unique to his re-telling of the Circe episode. Jean de La Fontaine's fable "Les Compagnons d'Ulysse" ("The Companions of Ulysses"), which resembles Gelli's *Circe* in expanding Plutarch's dialogue between Odysseus and Gryllus into a series of dialogues with multiple animal speakers, betrays more particular debts to Gelli in its featured animals. Of Circe's victims, La Fontaine's speaker relates,

leur corps et leur visage

Prennent l'air et les traits d'animaux différents:

Les voilà devenus ours, lions, éléphants;

Les uns sous une masse énorme,

Les autres sous une autre forme;

Il s'en vit de petits: *exemplum, ut talpa*.

every body and face, furthermore,

Of divers beasts took on the looks and features,

Bears, lions, elephants among the creatures.

Some possessed enormous mass;

Others formed a different class.

Some were small; for example, like the mole.³

References to the mole and elephant indicate that La Fontaine's "Companions of Ulysses" revises material from Gelli's *Circe*, which unusually numbers a mole and elephant among Circe's transformed creatures. Furthermore, for the animal speakers of "The Companions of Ulysses," La Fontaine chooses a lion, bear, and wolf (p. 314-5), the same three animals that Gelli's Ulysses explicitly mentions at the opening of *La Circe*, when Ulysses asks Circe, "yf amonge those, whome thou hast transfourmed into Lyons, Wolves, Beares, and other beastes, there be anye Gretian?"⁴ Unlike Gelli's *Circe*, however, "The Companions of Ulysses" has no creature who chooses to return to human form, even though La Fontaine mentions the elephant, the only animal to return to human form in Gelli's *Circe*. This oblique reference to Gelli's elephant calls attention to an important discrepancy between "The Companions of Ulysses" and its literary predecessor.

Regarding the Circe of *The Odyssey*, Gareth Roberts has written, "it is for transformations of men into swine she is chiefly remembered." In elaborating his definition of "a Circean narrative configuration," however, Roberts broadens the category of animals that he deems appropriate to a Circe story beyond pigs to include other "domestic animals": he writes, "Transformation into beasts of burden, especially asses, mark the later analogues."⁵

My own analysis of Circe stories, which distinguishes between Homeric and Plutarchian constellations of motifs, does not suggest that any animal, or class of animals, is uniquely or

³ Jean de La Fontaine, "The Companions of Ulysses," in *The Complete Fables of Jean de La Fontaine*, trans. and ed. Norman B. Spector (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), page 592, lines 35-40 (French); page 593, lines 35-40 (English).

⁴ Gelli, *Circes of John Baptista Gello*, trans. Iden, 11.

⁵ Gareth Roberts, "The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fictions," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 194.

particularly appropriate to Circean transformation stories. Indeed, my survey of the Homeric and Plutarchian traditions in chapter one has already introduced a wide variety of non-humans featured in Circe stories, including not only an array of animals but also the animal-headed creatures of Milton's *Comus*. Nevertheless, I argue that avoidance of the pig, as in Gelli's *Circe* and in La Fontaine's "Companions of Ulysses"—or conversely, significant emphasis on the pig, as in Plutarch's dialogue and in book 2 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, which reinvents Plutarch's Gryllus as the infamous Gryll—tends to shape a work's overall implications about the relationship between humans and animals. In particular, I argue that Renaissance Circe episodes that focus on pigs incline readers to form negative interpretations of human-to-animal transformations, and disapproving judgments about formerly human characters who now prefer animal existences. It is easier to condemn a human who desires to be a pig than one who desires to be any other animal, because of the extent to which the pig functions as the inverse of the human in early modern thought. Thus, I argue, Renaissance works that focus on pigs tend to uphold the anthropocentric doctrines of Renaissance humanism to a much greater degree than works that omit pigs.

Indeed, the omission of pigs often coincides with, and arguably contributes to, a work's overall agenda of challenging anthropocentric views. As the previous chapter argues, Gelli's elephant ultimately opines in favor of human superiority, but that decision seems ironic because it is made possible by capacities believed, by natural historians but not Renaissance philosophers, to belong jointly to humans and elephants. When Gelli's Ulysses uses humanist arguments to persuade the elephant to return to humanity and to philosophy, the elephant's former profession, readers familiar with natural histories may detect an ironic implication that Renaissance philosophers must falsify views of elephants in order to construct their concept of

the unique, superior, philosophical human. Comparisons of humans and pigs, we shall see, function quite differently from comparisons of humans and elephants: while comparisons of humans and elephants—in Gelli, the natural historians, and Montaigne⁶—lend themselves to critiquing humanist theories, comparisons of humans and pigs have tended to bolster them.

The anti-anthropocentric implications of “The Companions of Ulysses,” meanwhile, have been explored in an ingenious essay on fables by Frank Palmeri. Palmeri’s essay identifies a subclass of “anti-allegorical fables” or “autocritical fables,” which “turn away from representing animals as allegorical figures of humans” and thus seem to criticize the role of animals in most fables.⁷ Citing a fable recorded by Plutarch and featuring a talking wolf “as the prototype of the autocritical fable,” Palmeri lists the main features of fables in this class: a human and animal converse with one another; the animal character is not merely “an allegorical representation of a human being”; and the animal voices a perspective critical of humans (86). These unusual features contribute to an implied critique of “most of the conventional workings of fable” (86). Palmeri traces versions of this fable from Aesop to eighteenth-century writers, including La Fontaine, whose “Companions of Ulysses,” Palmeri notes, contains not only the prototypical wolf but also two other anti-allegorical animal speakers (88-91). Palmeri argues, “this fable, like the others, resists converting animals into emblems of humans, and contests the presumptions of an anthropocentric vision” (91).

⁶ Montaigne develops one of his most frequently quoted anti-humanist assertions in relation to observations about elephants: “But so many of their actions bring elephants close to human capacities that if I wanted to relate in detail everything that experience has shown us about them, I would easily win one of my regular arguments: that there is a greater difference between one man and another than between some men and some beasts.” Michel de Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, in *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), 520.

⁷ Frank Palmeri, “The Autocritique of Fables,” in *Humans and Other Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Culture: Representation, Hybridity, Ethics*, ed. Frank Palmeri (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 83, 84. Subsequent citations appear in text.

Palmeri suggests that part of the power of anti-allegorical fables comes from their “elevating of the wolf, in conventional fables the most violent and brutal animal, to the same moral level as” Pythagoras or other human philosophers (94). The talking wolf’s perspective is especially compelling because of its plausibility: Palmeri explains that the animals of anti-allegorical fables “do not speak as human beings might in a comparable situation; rather, they express what might be the moral judgments of the animals about their treatment by humans” (84). Moreover, the talking wolves base their arguments on comparisons of humans with wolves: humans take the same actions for which they condemn wolves, or even commit worse versions of these actions, such as eating sheep, whom “shepherds claim to protect” from predators, particularly wolves (88, but see 86-9).

I suggest that it is significant that none of Palmeri’s anti-allegorical animal speakers are pigs,⁸ especially since the pig seems to be a good candidate for the rehabilitation that the anti-allegorical fables accomplish for the wolf. As the remainder of this chapter demonstrates, perspectives imagined to be generated by pigs—or by the allegedly pig-like natures of some humans—have humanist rather than anti-humanist functions because of the irredeemably negative significance of comparisons of humans to pigs in the early modern imagination.

Early Modern Interpretations of the Pig

The pig’s presence or absence in early modern Circe stories seems especially conspicuous and significant because of evidence that early modern people recognized the pig as

⁸ The pig occurs in one of Palmeri’s anti-allegorical fables, Jonathan Swift’s “Beasts’ Confession to the Priest.” But as Palmeri argues, that fable carries out its anti-anthropocentric agenda without employing animal speakers who are themselves anti-allegorical (95-6).

the animal with the greatest degree of physical similarity, at least internally, to the human. In *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, Michel de Montaigne writes,

The animals most like us are the worst and the ugliest of the bunch: the one with an outward appearance and face closest to ours is the baboon;

Simia quam similis, turpissima bestia, nobis!

the one with inwards and vital organs closest to ours is the pig.⁹

In an edition of Montaigne's works, M. A. Screech attributes the Latin quotation to Ennius and gives a translation: "That vilest of beast, the monkey—how like us!"¹⁰ Using the same quotation, Edward Topsell also juxtaposes pig and ape in the entry on the pig in *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*:

Now concerning the severall partes of Swyne, it is most certaine that inwardly they do more resemble a mans body then an Ape, for as al writers do affirme, that outwardly the proportion of Apes come nearest to men, according to the Poet's verse;

Simia quam similis turpissima bestia nobis.

So on the other side a Swynes Anatomy doth more lively expresse the inward members and seate of life, and therefore our predecessours did first of all dissect a Swyne, and then a man, for the Swine was an example or introduction to the other.¹¹

The similarity of the two passages gives the impression that Montaigne and Topsell are

⁹ Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, 539.

¹⁰ M. A. Screech, trans. and ed., *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, in *The Complete Essays*, by Michel de Montaigne (London: Penguin, 2003), 539.

¹¹ Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (London: printed by William Jaggard, 1607), 665. Subsequent citations appear in text.

rehearsing commonplace understandings of pigs and apes, and of the different modes of physical similarity to the human that each creature represents. Topsell even acknowledges the commonness of these views by introducing them as things that “al writers do affirme.” Although the presence of Ennius’s quotation comparing humans and simians in the passages of both Montaigne and Topsell might suggest a cultural foregrounding of the ape, both writers assert that pigs resemble humans internally more closely than apes do. The impression that Topsell, especially, is more interested in the similarity of humans and pigs than in the similarity of humans and apes is strengthened by his claim that the pig has offered the best anatomical “introduction” to the human and by the fact that the passage occurs in Topsell’s entry on the pig—not in his entry on the ape.

The idea that, of all the animals, the pig—not the ape—is the best anatomical analogue for the human may seem strange to modern readers. H. W. Janson has argued, however, that the conception of the ape as the animal that most closely resembles the human gains currency only after the 1699 publication of Edward Tyson’s *Anatomy of a Pygmie*: “The publication of Tyson’s book marks the formal entry of the anthropoid ape into the consciousness of Western civilization. As Tyson’s biographer, M.F. Ashley Montagu, has pointed out, the importance of the work is such that its author deserves to be placed on a par with Vesalius and Darwin.”¹² When Topsell dismisses the resemblance of the ape to the human as superficial and treats the pig as the animal with the greatest anatomical similarities to the human, Topsell voices a perspective that seems to have been widespread in western Europe before Tyson revolutionized natural history with his anatomical study of the ape.

As early moderns believed that the internal anatomy of the pig quite closely resembled

¹² Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 336.

that of the human, they also used the pig as a metaphor for corporeal vices, particularly dirtiness, intemperance, and gluttony. From this summary statement, which I justify with examples below, it might seem that the pig is a particularly reviled animal in early modern culture. Topsell, however, carefully distinguishes the pig's behavior, which is appropriate to the pig, from pig-like behavior, which is inappropriate to the human. In making this distinction, Topsell exemplifies Erica Fudge's claim that Renaissance writers generally evaluate the actions of humans, but not animals, according to moral criteria. "Virtue requires reason," Fudge explains,

and vice results from the failure to be reasonable; in humans this is not because there is no reason to operate but because the human has been seduced by passion, by desire, and has abandoned the reasonable faculties. The logical outcome of this understanding of vice is that animals are different from humans because animals never had reason to abandon in the first place. Because of this, animals cannot be vicious. This declaration of human inferiority is a product, paradoxically, of the logic of human superiority.¹³

Even though Topsell compares immoral humans to pigs, he conforms to this general Renaissance trend of differentiating rational and morally culpable humans from irrational and thus amoral animals when he implies that the traits for which the pig is infamous suit the animal but not the human.

Another helpful framework for understanding early modern treatments of pigs can be derived from Mary Douglas's famous anthropological study of dirt. To understand the significance of dirt, Douglas explains, we must overcome our modern tendencies to conceptualize dirt in medical terms, shaped by knowledge of germs that does not arise until the

¹³ Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 66.

nineteenth century:

If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously systematic systems of purity.¹⁴

Douglas's argument provides a way of understanding early modern treatments of the pig, in particular, as a categorically different kind of creature than the human. As we shall see, when Topsell describes repulsive behaviors or characteristics of pigs, he nevertheless tends to view these behaviors and characteristics as appropriate to a pig, in a way that they can never be for the human.

As the above paragraphs indicate, my ensuing argument about comparisons of humans with pigs treats the pig itself as a quite unambiguous creature, unlike the arguments of some other scholars. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have discussed the limitations of treatments of pigs as hybrid figures by Mikhail Bakhtin and Edmund Leach. Stallybrass and White write, "Bakhtin's major advance in 'thinking pigs' was to recognize that the pig, like the fair itself, had in the past been *celebrated* as well as reviled."¹⁵ Stallybrass and White also explain that, for Leach, "the pig transgresses major oppositions and co-ordinates in the cultural grid" (46-7).

¹⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 44.

¹⁵ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 44. Subsequent citations appear in text.

After noting that Leach assumes a rural setting for pigs when, in fact, pigs have been increasingly prominent in cities since the sixteenth century (48), Stallybrass and White summarize the work of Fraser Harrington, who demonstrates, in Stallybrass and White's words, that "the pig was symbolically shifted from the ambivalent law of the fair to the unambivalent law of the slum" (49). While Harrington's work helps to illuminate the limitations of treatments of pigs as ambiguous creatures by Bakhtin and Leach, Stallybrass and White ultimately depart from Harrington's thesis, as well: "we would suggest that the pig, like the fair, is a site of competing, conflicting and contradictory definitions. It is not that pigs go to town and lose their rural ambivalence. It is rather that, in different domains of discourse, 'pigs' are constructed according to different grids or sets which, in the social ensemble taken as a whole, are often brought into conflict with each other" (49). Stallybrass and White further remark "how often aspects of the human world are coded through perceived homologies with the pigs' world, particularly those qualities which are denied or negated as being supposedly antithetical to the civilized world (dirt, greed, indiscriminate appetite)" (59). My own argument likewise treats humans and pigs as oppositional figures in early modern discourse and maintains awareness that such oppositions are created discursively—by natural history, for example. Furthermore, my readings of *The Faerie Queene* and *Comus* call attention to the pejorative function of comparisons of humans to pigs, as Stallybrass and White do when they discuss the ways in which "the pig could be the symbolic instrument, and even the victim, of demonization" (56, but see 53-6). At least in the sources that I examine, however, comparisons of humans to pigs condemn humans but not pigs themselves, who remain beyond reproach for reasons mentioned above.

Moralistic comparisons of humans to pigs threaten human identity especially because of

beliefs, evident in Topsell and Montaigne, that the pig is the closest anatomical analogue for the human. Michael C. Schoenfeldt has argued that Galen's influential theories of the four humors gave early modern Europeans a paradigm in which body and soul are not entirely separate, as they become for Descartes and his successors.¹⁶ Schoenfeldt indicates that temperance, in particular, is a term that tends to elide corporeal status and moral or spiritual status for early modern thinkers:

In its emphasis on temperance as a central strategy for the maintenance of physiological and psychological health, locating both at the mid-point of unhealthy extremes, Galenic physiology provides a compelling model of just how good health could emerge from good living. As temperance became a central ethical virtue for the Renaissance, health assumed the role of a moral imperative, just as it still is in many ways for us. Illness in turn was perceived as a symptom of immorality. (7)

In a chapter on Spenser, Schoenfeldt further explains that humoral theory promotes “an aggressively materialist notion of self”: “In the most literal way, you are what and how you eat. Under this regime, temperance assumes a double urgency: it is a virtue that not only exhibits proper ethical conduct, but also actively alters the moral condition of the self that practices it” (60). I suggest that the anatomical resemblance of humans and pigs would have been particularly troubling, from a Galenic Renaissance perspective, because the resemblance suggests that humans may also have other qualities deemed appropriate or natural in pigs but intemperate or otherwise immoral in humans. For the Renaissance, it is the human, not the pig, that is an

¹⁶ Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2-3, 8-11. Subsequent citations appear in text.

ambiguous creature. As A. O. Lovejoy explains in a chapter on eighteenth-century treatments of the chain of being, the human “is, in a sense in which no other link in the chain is, a strange hybrid monster.”¹⁷ Giorgio Agamben identifies a similar view of the human in the Renaissance philosophy of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. According to this view, not unique to Pico, the human is “suspended between a celestial and a terrestrial nature, between animal and human.”¹⁸ Even though the pig itself is not the object of moral condemnation, various early modern beliefs conspire to make the human seem precariously close to a pig-like existence, which is regarded as contemptible for the human.

Although Topsell’s treatment of the pig emphasizes its reputation for dirtiness, he gives dirtiness a moral significance only when it is a characteristic of humans. Establishing the dirtiness of pigs explicitly in opposition to the cleanliness expected of humans, Topsell writes, “even as a man is delighted in washing or bathing, so doth swine in filthy wallowing in the mire; therein is their rest, joy, and repose” (670). The analogy amounts to a strikingly clear demonstration of Douglas’s point that definitions of dirt depend upon categorization. While Topsell contrasts the cleanliness of the human with the “filthy wallowing” of the pig, he also compares the human’s experience of “bathing” to the pig’s experience of “wallowing,” suggesting that the pig needs mud to experience the healthful emotions of “rest, joy, and repose.” Indeed, Topsell makes his point about pigs and humans to explain the immediately preceding advice about the treatment of older sows: “at that time it is good to let them go to rivers, fennes, or miery places” (670). Topsell’s use of the word “good,” whether in reference to the humans who allow pigs to wallow or in reference to the effect of wallowing on pigs, drives home the

¹⁷ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), 199.

¹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 29.

point that Topsell has no moral objections to the dirtiness of pigs: indeed, humans' mud is their bath water. Topsell similarly prevents a moralistic interpretation of the pig's dirtiness when he writes, "The nature of this beast is to delight in the most filthy and noisome places" (675).

Despite the emphasis on the extreme dirtiness of the pig's favorite environments, attributing the wallowing of pigs to their "nature" treats the pig's dirtiness as a matter of fact, not morality.

Admittedly, Topsell also makes a remark suggesting that the pig's reputation for dirtiness may be at least slightly exaggerated: "Another point of a good swineheard, is to sweepe oftentimes the sty, for although such be the nature of the beast that it defileth all things, and will be wallowing in the mire, yet will she also be very desirous of a cleane lodging, and delight much in the same" (673). Even as Topsell acknowledges that pigs are capable of appreciating cleanliness, however, he reiterates the pig's reputation for dirtiness.

When Topsell discusses the swine's indiscriminate and voracious eating habits, he likewise avoids passing unfavorable moral judgments. For instance, Topsell remarks the indiscriminate eating of pigs: "They eat also flesh, and abstain not from fat Bacon, and herein they differ from most of the ravening creatures, for Dogges will not taste of Dogges flesh, and Beares of Beares, yet will Hogges eat of Swines flesh, yea many times the damme eateth hir younge ones: And it is found that swine have not abstaind from the flesh of men and children" (667). Although Topsell seems to criticize the pig as an especially intemperate and indiscriminate eater by listing meats from which pigs do not "abstain" and by comparing pigs unfavorably with other animals, Topsell concludes the paragraph by writing, "we ought not to marvel as at a monstrous or prodigious thing, but rather acknowledge a naturall voracity, constrained in them thorough famine and impatience" (667). Topsell makes this remark most directly in reference to sows' eating their children, a behavior that he normalizes by attributing it

also to hens; but because of the comment's placement at the end of the paragraph, it seemingly applies to all of the previously described eating habits of pigs. Explaining that the pig obeys "a natural voracity," Topsell regards the eating habits of the pig as inevitable and thus unsusceptible to moral judgments.

Topsell does not condemn pigs even when he provides graphic examples of eating so immoderate that it endangers a pig's health. When Topsell writes, "such is the ravening intemperancy of this beast to swil in whatsoever is pleasant to his taste, that many times in drinking of Whaye their bellies grow extended above measure, even to death" (669), Topsell emphasizes the excessiveness of pigs' eating: pigs display "ravening intemperancy," indiscriminately and self-indulgently eat "whatsoever is pleasant," and consequently become distended "above measure." This description is the occasion for recommending the salutary intervention of the pig-keeper: pigs who have consumed too much whey must "bee dieted by a wise keeper, and driven up and downe not suffered to rest till it flow foorth againe backward" (669).

Topsell also frames the pig's capacity to become grotesquely fat as an advantage for the humans who eat pigs. Topsell writes that pigs "grow so fat, that many times they cannot stand on their own legs their bodies be so heavy, nor go any whit, so that if they are to be removed, they are not to be droven but to be carried in a cart" (668). While grotesque, the image of pigs too fat to walk is actually less nauseating than anecdotes, related by Topsell, of notoriously fat pigs, especially the two that follow:

Crescentiensis reporteth of an other *Lusitanian* Swine, which after the death, weighted five hundred seventy and five pounds, and the Lard of that Hogge was one foot and three fingers broad. And the like may be said of a Hogge at *Basill*,

nourished by a certaine Oile-man, in whose Larde or fatte, after his death were found manie passages of mice too and fro, which they had gnawed into his body without the sence of the beast. (668)

Particularly the pig fat enough to be oblivious to an infestation of mice is unforgettable.

Predictably, Topsell explains the pig's fatness as a product of its indiscriminate eating, but considering the grotesque quality of his descriptions of fat pigs, Topsell's turning of the pig's fatness to the advantage of humans is less predictable:

There is not any beast that can better or more easilie be accustomed to al kinds of food, and therefore doeth verie quicklie grow fat, the quantitie and stature of their bodie considered, for whereas an Oxe or Cowe, or Hart, and such like Beasts aske long time, yet a Swine which eateth of all sorts of meate, doth very quickly even in a moneth or two or three at the most, prove woorthye the knife and also his maisters table. (668)

Topsell's appreciation of the pig's exceptional capacity for fatness resembles Topsell's more explicit gratitude for a sow's large litter: "it seemeth a speciall worke of God which hath made this tame beast so fruitfull, for the better recompence to man for her meate and custody" (671). Despite Topsell's images of grotesquely fat pigs, Topsell appreciates the pig's ability to become fat quickly because it makes the pig a valuable source of food for humans. Indeed, comparison with Topsell's comments on large litters suggests that he regards the pig's fatness as a sign of God's providence.

Despite the pig's disgusting habits, Topsell suggests that the pig plays an important, even miraculous, function in the natural world. Addressing concern that the pig's indiscriminate eating and poor hygiene make the pig unsuitable for human consumption, Topsell writes,

And if any man aske how it commeth to passe, that swine which both feed and live so filthily, should be so nourishable to the nature of man; some make answer, that by reason of their good constitution of body, they turne ill nutriment to a good flesh: for as men which be of a sounde, perfect, and healthy disposition or temperature, are not hurt by a little evil meat, which is hard of digestion; even so is it with well constituted and tempered swine, by continuall feeding upon evill things, they grow not onely to no harme, but also to a good estate, because nature in process of time draweth good out of evill. (679)

Topsell repeats the idea that pigs eat indiscriminately—he acknowledges that they eat many “evill things”—but Topsell claims that the pig converts repulsive foods into “good flesh,” which conduces to their health and ultimately makes them suitable for human consumption. The moral drawn by Topsell—that “nature in process of time draweth good out of evill”—may seem incongruously lofty in comparison with the disgusting eating habits that the moral explains. Nevertheless, when Topsell marvels at the pig’s ability to convert “evill things” into “good flesh,” he views the pig’s admittedly disgusting habits as objects of not reproach but amazement. Ironically, the pig’s intemperate eating demonstrates the remarkably “tempered” nature of the pig’s body, which derives sustenance from an indiscriminate diet.

Although Topsell does not censure pigs for their characteristic habits, he does unambiguously condemn humans by comparing them to pigs. Of the pig, Topsell writes, “This beast is a most unpure and uncleane beast, and ravening; and therefore we use (not improperly) to call *Obscæne* and filthy men or women, by the name of Swyne or Sowes” (674). The first clause remarks ways in which the pig is an exceptional animal: “a most unpure and uncleane beast, and ravening.” Outside of the context, in which Topsell repeatedly expresses admiration

for the capabilities of pigs, the adjectives certainly sound condemnatory. The second clause does contain a condemnation, but one directed not at pigs but at the “*Obscæne* and filthy” humans who allegedly resemble them. A common etymology, dating to antiquity, traces the Latin *obscaenus* to *caenum*, which means “mud, filth.”¹⁹ Topsell clearly has this etymology in mind as he discusses the convention by which pigs, who notoriously wallow in the mud, serve as figures for obscene humans. Although the formulation “we use (not improperly) to call” acknowledges that the comparison between humans and pigs is a matter of convention, the parenthetical aside “(not improperly)” asserts the justness of the comparison.

Indeed, Topsell has previously claimed that the Christian god himself has authorized the comparison. Instructions for the proper care of pigs give way to moralizing about human behavior:

turn your Hogs to moist places where they may picke up worms, and suck up fat fenny water, which thing is above al other things gratefull to this beaste, for which cause it pleased the Holi-ghost in scripture to compare the pleasure that beastly men take in sinning to the wallowing of swine in the mire. *The Dogge* (saith *S. Peter*) is returned to his vomit, and the Sow that was washed to wallow in the mire. (667)

As in the other excerpt comparing humans and pigs, Topsell begins by noting the pig’s penchant for dirtiness: nothing pleases the pig more than mud. Far from condemning the pig for this predilection, Topsell encourages humans to bring their pigs to the muddy locations that they enjoy. Then, Topsell considers comparisons of humans to pigs, at which point “the wallowing of swine in the mire,” which is healthy and desirable for the pigs themselves, becomes a figure for

¹⁹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “obscene” (entry dated March 2004).

“the pleasure that beastly men take in sinning.” Derived from a bible verse, the comparison has no lesser authority behind it, for Topsell, than “the Holi-ghost.” In its biblical context, the verse especially condemns sinners who have repented only to sin again:

if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are againe intangled therein, overcome, the latter end is worse with them then the beginning. For it had bin better for them not to have knowen the way of righteousnesse, then after they have knowen it, to turne from the holy commandement delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb: The dog is turned to his own vomit againe, and the sowe that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.²⁰

Loving sin too much to abstain from it, these recalcitrant sinners supposedly resemble pigs, who naturally and habitually “*wallow in the mire*” (Topsell 667). That behavior is unobjectionable in the pig, but the metaphorically analogous behavior in humans receives the highest and most unambiguous censure imaginable for early modern Europeans—the censure of the Christian deity, who also endorses the comparison of sinful humans to pigs.

Such comparisons inform Topsell’s interpretation of the Circe episode from Homer’s *Odyssey*. By treating the Circe episode in the entry on the pig, Topsell bears out the claim of William B. Ashworth that “knowledge of animal symbolism was considered an essential aspect of natural history” between 1550 and 1650.²¹ Topsell broaches the subject of the Circe episode in a desultory manner:

And there are many fictions of the transforming into swine. *Homer* faineth that

²⁰ 2 Pet. 2:20-2 (Authorized Version, 1611).

²¹ William B. Ashworth, Jr., “Emblematic Natural History of the Renaissance,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and E. C. Spary (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21, 36.

the companions of *Ulysses* were all by *Circes* turned into swine, which is interpreted in this manner; *Circe* to signifie unreasonable pleasure, *Ulysses* to signifie the soule, and his companions the inferior affections thereof, and so were the companions of *Ulysses* turned into swine by *Circe*, When unreasonable pleasures do overcome our affections and make us like swine in following our appetites. (675)

Topsell provides an early modern precedent for my argument's emphasis on the particular significance of the pig, which is variously present and absent, in re-tellings of the Circe story.

By way of contrast, consider interpretations of the Circe episode by Servius and Natale Conti, who overlook the significance of pigs. Servius's interpretation, as summarized by George Sandys in his commentary on book 14 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, maintains that Circe "by her lascivious arts drew many from a morall life to a brutish; and therefore said to have changed them."²² Like Topsell's interpretation, this interpretation gives Circe's transformations moral significance, but it accords no special meaning to the pig. Indeed, in Servius's interpretation, as relayed by Sandys, the pig does not even receive mention: attention is focused on the transition "from a morall life to a brutish," not on the transition from a human form to a specifically swinish form.

Conti's discussion of Circe in his *Mythologiae* (1567) also minimizes the significance of pigs. Conti writes,

each one of Ulysses' men was turned into a different kind of brute animal,
depending on the repulsive vice he embraced. Those who lusted after sensual

²² George Sandys, trans., *Ovid's Metamorphosis. Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures by G. S.* (Imprinted at Oxford, by John Lichfield, 1632), 480. I have reversed the original document's use of regular and italicized typeface. Subsequent citations appear in text.

pleasure became pigs, the angry types became lions or bears, and the rest also became animals matched to their vices. We can tell from what Homer wrote about Ulysses that these were the ideas the ancients wanted to convey when they made up these stories.²³

Although Conti claims to adhere closely to the text of Homer's Circe episode, Conti deviates from Homer in suggesting that Odysseus's crew become many kinds of creatures, instead of pigs only. Conti, moreover, does not appreciate that transformations of humans into pigs may represent a special case, one that differs consequentially from transformations of humans into other animals. Most importantly, Conti provides a decidedly non-Homeric interpretation of the significance of human-animal transformations when he insists upon the correspondence between each human's individual "vice" and the animal that the human becomes.

Relaying Conti's views of Circe immediately after those of Servius, Sandys makes sense of a passage from Conti's chapter "On Circe" (bk. 6, ch. 6) that otherwise seems to digress from the chapter's subject. As Sandys explains, Conti writes that Circe

deformes our soules with all bestial vices; alluring some to inordinate *Venus*; others to anger, cruelty, and every excesse of passion: the Swines, the Lyons, and the Wolves, produced by her sensuall charms; which are not to bee resisted, but by the divine assistance, Moly, the gift of *Mercury*, which signifies temperance. So the fortitude and wisdom of *Ulysses*, preserves him in the midst of vices against their strongest invasions; when some of his Companions are devoured by the *Cyclops*, some destroyed by the *Læstrigonians*, and others converted into

²³ Natale Conti, *Mythologiae*, trans. and ed. John Mulryan and Steven Brown, vol. 2 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), book 6, chapter 6, page 476. Subsequent citations appear in text.

beasts by *Circe*: their head strong appetites, which revolt from the sovereignty of reason (by which wee are onely like unto God, and armed against our depraved affections) nor ever returne into their Country (from whence the soule deriveth her cælestiall originall) unlesse disenchantèd, and cleansed from their former impurity. (480)

Treating a variety of animal forms similarly as symbols of “excesse of passion” or lack of “temperance,” Sandys accurately repeats Conti’s demotion of the pig from its prominent position in Homer’s *Circe* episode. Sandys’s condensed discussion of Conti, however, helps to illuminate the significance of the section of Conti’s chapter “On *Circe*” in which Conti discusses other episodes from *The Odyssey* (bk. 6, ch. 6, pp. 476-7). Sandys’s summary makes it clear that Conti overlooks the significance of not only the pig but also transformation, for Conti finds the same moral in the *Circe* episode, Sandys explains, as in other episodes from *The Odyssey* that do not feature transformation. Although Sandys seems not to find Conti’s interpretation objectionable, a satisfactory account of *Circe* stories must address what I would argue is their central, distinctive element: transformation of humans into animals.

In spite of Conti’s own claims, not Homer but Plutarch provides the precedent for Conti’s treatment of transformation, in which the moral state of humans can qualify them for transformation into animals. After Plutarch’s Gryllus declares pigs superior to humans, Odysseus responds, “To me, Gryllus, you seem to have lost not only your shape, but your intelligence also under the influence of that drug. You have become infected with strange and completely perverted notions. Or was it rather an inclination to swinishness that conjured you into this

shape?”²⁴ Plutarch’s Odysseus outlines two ways of regarding Gryllus and his later analogues, who prefer to be animals rather than humans. Odysseus’s first suggestion is that these creatures have begun to prefer animal existences concurrently with transformation. This suggestion provides the basis for accusations that Gryllus’s Renaissance analogues have forgotten their humanity. Such accusations occur frequently in Gelli’s *Circe*, discussed in the previous chapter. The second suggestion of Plutarch’s Odysseus is that Gryllus has always had “an inclination to swinishness.” The Greek word rendered here as “swinishness” is “συνίας” (498), which does indeed refer to actual, not merely metaphorical, piggishness: it relates to *συνος* (“swinish”), *σως* (“a swine, pig, a hog, boar or sow”), and *υς* (“a swine, pig, both boar and sow, esp. of the tame kind”).²⁵ The English words *swine* and *sow* derive from the Greek word *υς*, as well as from the similar Latin word *sus*, which has become the scientific name for the genus including the familiar pig (*Sus scrofa*).²⁶

William Helmbold, the Loeb editor, emphasizes the superficiality of Gryllus’s change in a note that paraphrases Odysseus’s insult: “That is, you were always a swine. It is only your shape that it is altered.”²⁷ My argument, in contrast, emphasizes Plutarch’s innovative suggestion that Gryllus’s shape has finally been brought into accord with his nature, which, according to Odysseus, is that of a pig.

Philemon Holland gives an interestingly misleading version of Odysseus’s theories about

²⁴ Plutarch, “Beasts Are Rational,” trans. and ed. William C. Helmbold, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 12, The Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1957), 499. Subsequent citations appear in text.

²⁵ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1861), 1405, 1448, 1583.

²⁶ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “sow” and “swine” (entries dated 1989).

²⁷ William C. Helmbold, ed. and trans., “Beasts Are Rational,” in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 12, The Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1957), 499 n. a.

Gryllus in his 1603 translation of Plutarch's dialogue. Holland seems to misunderstand Odysseus's second hypothesis, and the way in which it turns on Gryllus's status as a pig:

It seemeth *Gryllus* that the potion which you dranke at *Circes* hands, hath not onely marred the forme and fashion of your bodie, but also spoiled your wit and understanding; having intoxicate your braine, and filled your head with corrupt, strange, and monstrous opinions for ever; or els some pleasure that you have taken by the acquaintance of this body so long, hath cleane bewitched you.²⁸

In this translation, Odysseus's second theory becomes another version of the first theory, that Gryllus has changed mentally as well as physically. The second theory of Holland's Odysseus differs from the first theory only in imagining mental transformation to have taken a longer amount of time and in attributing that transformation to a different cause: sensual indulgence instead of a magic drink. Holland's Gryllus becomes pig-like in mind either upon or after transformation; he has never been pig-like before. Furthermore, Holland's Odysseus refers only obliquely to Gryllus's status as a pig when Odysseus mentions "this body." In contrast, Plutarch's Odysseus explicitly asserts that Gryllus may have always been a pig, even when Gryllus has had a human shape. Holland's error affiliates his translation with Renaissance interpretations of the Circe episode that likewise underestimate the particular significance of the pig.

The second suggestion of Plutarch's Odysseus provides a precedent for treatment of the pig in the Circe stories of Renaissance writers, who develop the idea that Gryllus figures have always been pigs more fully. Plutarch's Odysseus does not pursue the theory. Indeed, Gryllus

²⁸ Plutarch, *The Philosophie, Commonlie Called, the Morals Written by the Learned Philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Printed by Arnold Hatfield, 1603), 564.

rejects both of Odysseus's theories and rebukes him for interrupting their debate by resorting to insults: "if it is your pleasure to discuss the matter instead of hurling abuse, I shall quickly make you see that we are right to prefer our present life in place of the former one, now that we have tried both" (499). Even though the suggestion that Gryllus has always been a pig can probably not be dismissed so easily from the minds of readers, Odysseus never mentions the theory again. For Spenser and Milton, in contrast, the idea that a human may have an essentially animalistic nature—specifically, a swinish one—becomes the core of their Circe stories.

Gryll's "hoggish minde": Spenser's Paradigm of Intemperance

Book 2 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, which features the virtue of temperance, closes shortly after a character, named Gryll after Plutarch's Gryllus, expresses his desire to live as a pig rather than a human. I argue that Spenser's portrait of Gryll retrospectively shapes nearly every example of intemperance in book 2: intemperate characters are repeatedly condemned by comparisons to pigs, although some of those comparisons are implicit or otherwise subtle. To support this argument, I first examine the relationship of book 2 to Plutarch's dialogue, and to Renaissance definitions of human nature that make Plutarch's dialogue newly compelling for Renaissance writers, including Spenser. I focus especially on Spenser's re-invention of Gryllus as Gryll. Then, I analyze other episodes from book 2 that mention pigs or transformation explicitly, or relatively explicitly: episodes involving the Idle Lake, the episode about Malegar's army, and the episode in which Amavia recounts the degradation and murder of Mordant. I argue that Spenser's treatment of Gryll orients readings of these scenes, in which intemperate creatures either become pigs or occupy the place of the pig. Finally, I discuss examples that do not invoke

pigs in obvious ways but nevertheless turn out to rely on comparisons of humans to pigs to condemn intemperate humans: the Mammon episode, Belphoebe's brief but significant chastisement of Braggadocchio and Trompart, and the narrator's characterization of Archimago. Archimago's characterization in the first canto is probably the example that seems most peripheral to book 2, but I demonstrate that even this example needs to be understood in relation to the treatment of Gryll in the final canto.

The narrator's account of intemperance's ability to transform the human affiliates book 2 with Plutarchian treatments of transformation and with the Renaissance theories of human nature that happen to coincide with the Plutarchian precedent. In the opening stanza of the ninth canto, Spenser's narrator assumes the pulpit:

Of all Gods works, which doe this world adorne,
 There is no one more faire and excellent,
 Then is mans body both for power and forme,
 Whiles it is kept in sober government;
 But none then it, more fowle and indecent,
 Distempred through misrule and passions bace:
 It growes a Monster, and incontinent
 Doth loose his dignity and native grace.
 Behold, who list, both one and other in this place.²⁹

The idea that immoral or improper conduct changes the human physique repeats and develops the theory, originally suggested by Plutarch's Odysseus, that Circe's transformations give her

²⁹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow, London, New York, et al.: Pearson Education, 2001), book 2, canto 9, stanza 1, lines 1-9. Subsequent citations appear in text by book, canto, stanza, and line numbers.

victims forms that suit their natures. Plutarch's *Odysseus* suggests this possibility when he sarcastically remarks, "To me, Gryllus, you seem to have lost not only your shape, but your intelligence also under the influence of that drug. You have become infected with strange and completely perverted notions. Or was it rather an inclination to swinishness that conjured you into this shape?" (499). Insinuating that Gryllus's transformation has brought his shape into accordance with a preexisting "swinishness," *Odysseus's* final, sarcastic question proposes an interpretation of Circe's transformations that departs markedly from that of Homer's *Odysseus*, who insists that Circe changes only the shapes of his crew: "they took on the look of pigs, with the heads and voices / and bristles of pigs, but the minds within them stayed as they had been / before."³⁰ Homer's Circe creates discordant combinations of animal body and enduringly human mind; Plutarch's Circe, at least as imagined in *Odysseus's* insult, harmonizes an already animalistic mind with an animal body, more appropriate to Gryllus's nature than the human shape. Imagining that the body "growes a Monster" to match a human's moral status, Spenser's account of the effects of intemperance treats transformation according to a Plutarchian, not Homeric, model.

Like other Plutarchian treatments of transformation by Renaissance writers, the opening stanza of the ninth canto also participates in the theories of human nature that render Plutarch's Circe episode newly compelling in the Renaissance. The exposition of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's concept of the human takes the form of a speech that God delivers to Adam:

Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form,

³⁰ Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), page 158, lines 239-41.

and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us.³¹

In his own voice, Pico describes the human's uniquely "self-transforming nature" (225) and proceeds to define other creatures according to their distinctive, fixed attributes:

For it is not the bark that makes the plant but its senseless and insentient nature; neither is it the hide that makes the beast of burden but its irrational, sensitive soul; neither is it the orbed form that makes the heavens but their undeviating order; nor is it the sundering from body but his spiritual intelligence that makes the angel. (226)

Although Pico regards physical form as inconsequential throughout this passage, the immediately subsequent passage catalogues the myriad discrepancies that can exist between a being's human form and its nature:

For if you see one abandoned to his appetites crawling on the ground, it is a plant and not a man you see; if you see one blinded by the vain illusions of imagery, as it were of Calypso, and, softened by their gnawing allurements, delivered over to his senses, it is a beast and not a man you see. If you see a philosopher determining all things by means of right reason, him you shall reverence: he is a heavenly being and not of this earth. If you see a pure contemplator, one unaware of the body and confined to the inner reaches of the mind, he is neither an earthly nor a heavenly being; he is a more reverend divinity vested with human flesh. (226)

³¹ Giovanni Pico, "Oration on the Dignity of Man," trans. Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 224-5. Subsequent citations appear in text.

Especially because of the allusion to Calypso, accused of proffering visual “illusions,” the passage treats physical shapes as misleading appearances that disguise the true natures of seemingly human beings. In the Plutarchian transformation stories, however, Circe’s role is to rectify one class of discrepancies, discrepancies between human form and animal nature, by giving seeming humans the animal forms that suit their animalistic natures. While sharing a Pico-like premise that human nature is malleable, the Plutarchian stories do not dismiss physical form as inconsequential. Instead, they use magical figures, inspired by Plutarch’s Circe, to bring physical forms into accord with the natures of allegedly animalistic human characters.

Although the first stanza of the ninth canto of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* does not unambiguously state that the human is the only “self-transforming” creature, the stanza’s assertion that human form and nature is malleable across an exceptionally wide range seems adequate to affiliate the stanza with Pico’s views. The narrator declares that, among god’s creatures, “There is no one more faire and excellent” than the temperate human; conversely, there is “none” “more fowle and indecent” than the self-indulgent human. Imagining extremes of behavior as well as form, the narrator specifically says that “mans body,” which has “dignity and native grace,” “growes a Monster” through intemperate comportment. This account adapts Pico’s theory of human nature’s malleability by varying a human’s physical form in accordance with its nature. Admittedly, the narrator’s most explicit comparison of humans with animals emphasizes the creator’s special regard for human welfare:

And is there care in heaven? and is there love
 In heavenly spirits to these creatures bace,
 That may compassion of their evilles move?
 There is: else much more wretched were the cace

Of men then beasts. (2.8.1.1-5)

Nevertheless, the opening stanza of the ninth canto explicitly remarks the wide range over which human form and nature are malleable, in a way that recalls and adapts Pico's views. Since Spenser's narrator never describes animal form or nature as malleable, it is moreover possible—even probable—that Spenser's narrator, like Pico, regards malleability as an exclusively human attribute.

The crucial passage on Acrasia's transformations occurs in book 12, when animals assault Guyon and the Palmer as they escort the captive Acrasia out of her bower. Guyon and the Palmer have previously encountered these animals upon their arrival at the bower, but on that occasion, the Palmer, wielding his magical staff, pacifies the animals without commenting on their nature. Upon encountering the animals a second time, the Palmer explains to Guyon,

These seeming beasts are men indeed,
Whom this Enchauntresse hath transformed thus,
Whylome her lovers, which her lustes did feed,
Now turned into figures hideous,
According to their mindes like monstrous. (2.12.85.1-5)

An earlier passage, introducing the reader to Cymochles, makes Acrasia's culpability in depraving humans even more explicit:

His dearest Dame is that Enchaunteresse,
The vyle *Acrasia*, that with vaine delightes,
And ydle pleasures in her *Bower of Blisse*,
Does charme her lovers, and the feeble sprightes
Can call out of the bodies of fraile wightes:

Whom then she does transforme to monstrous hewes. (2.5.27.1-6)

While Homer's Circe alters only bodies, Spenser's Acrasia alters both "bodies" and "sprighes," in this passage, or "mindes," in the prior passage. Noting this departure from Homer, A. C. Hamilton claims that Acrasia "is worse than Homer's Circe" and attributes Spenser's deviation from Homer to the influence of the already quoted passage in which Conti writes, "each one of Ulysses' men was turned into a different kind of brute animal, depending on the repulsive vice he embraced" (bk. 6, ch. 6, p. 476).³² Questioning this judgment of Acrasia in comparison to Circe, I prefer to suggest that the transformations of these two figures are differently objectionable. Circe's transformations are objectionable because they unfittingly place a human mind in an animal body. George Chapman emphasizes the unpleasantness that presumably attends such an existence in his translation of *The Odyssey*, which relates that the transformed crew "still retained the soules they had before; / Which made them mourne their bodies change the more."³³ Acrasia's transformations, in contrast, are objectionable because they entirely, or almost entirely, change humans into animals, which amounts, in Spenser's terms, to moral degradation of the human. Since Acrasia creates beings whose bodies accord with their minds, however, it is possible to argue that Acrasia's transformations are less objectionable than those of Circe. Indeed, Acrasia's transformations ultimately keep distinct the categories of human and

³² A. C. Hamilton, ed., *The Faerie Queene*, by Edmund Spenser (Harlow, London, New York, et al.: Pearson Education, 2001), page 200, note to 2.5.27; page 286, note to 2.12.85.5.

³³ George Chapman, trans., *Homer's Odysseys. Translated According to the Greeke By. Geo: Chapman* (London: Imprinted by Rich: Field, for Nathaniell Butter, n.d.), page 151, no line numbers. Judith Yarnall makes a similar but somewhat problematic point about the transformations of the crew by Homer's Circe: "The imprisonment of their human consciousness within bodies not capable of expressing it seems a particularly vindictive twist." See *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 43. Subsequent citations appear in text. Yarnall elsewhere emphasizes the ultimately helpful—even decisive—role of Circe in Odysseus's safe homecoming. See especially 21-2.

animal—believed, by characters like Plutarch’s Odysseus, to be confounded in creatures who prefer animal existences to formerly human existences. Perhaps for this reason, the Palmer endorses at least one of Acrasia’s acts of transformation, as we shall see in the following discussion of Gryll. Spenser’s inclusion of a character named Gryll, obviously derived from Plutarch’s Gryllus, justifies the second way in which I would revise Hamilton’s view. I suggest not that Spenser derives his treatment of transformation from Conti, but rather that Spenser, like many Renaissance authors including Conti, writes under the influence of Plutarch’s recently re-discovered dialogue “*Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti*,” the first Circe story to introduce the emphatically un-Homeric idea of a fitting transformation from human to animal.

Spenser all but announces a more particular relationship between book 2 of his *Faerie Queene* and Plutarch’s dialogue “*Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti*” by naming a character Gryll, after Plutarch’s Gryllus. Like Plutarch’s Gryllus, Spenser’s Gryll is a human who finds, after transformation, that he would rather be a pig than a human. While Plutarch’s Gryllus expresses his preference for existence as a pig by refusing the opportunity to return to human form, Spenser’s Gryll expresses his similar preference after being returned to human form against his will. After relating how the Palmer uses his magical staff to restore the many victims of Acrasia’s transformations to human forms, Spenser’s narrator not only introduces Gryll but also singles him out for further consideration:

But one above the rest in speciall,
 That had an hog beene late, hight *Grylle* by name,
 Repyned greatly, and did him miscall,
 That had from hoggish forme him brought to naturall. (2.12.86.6-9)

By imagining that Gryll laments his return to human form, Spenser deploys a motif that I have

previously identified in surveying the Homeric tradition of Circe stories, but Spenser gives the motif the opposite function. In chapter 1, I have argued that Homeric stories routinely affirm the continuing humanity of transformed creatures by narrating that those creatures attempt to express grief in human language yet produce only animal sounds. When Spenser's narrator says that Gryll "Repynded greatly," Spenser has Gryll perform the characteristic lamentations of the victims of Circe's transformations—but upon transformation into human shape instead of upon transformation into animal shape, and thus with human language instead of with animal vocalizations. As in the Homeric stories, lamentation registers the discrepancy between physical form and inward identification, but the preference expressed in Gryll's lamentations inverts the preference of Homeric protagonists like Ovid's Macareus. Even if Gryll, along with the narrator, recognizes the human shape as the "naturall" one, Gryll still longs for a "hoggish forme."

In a Homeric story, Gryll's desire to have the shape of a pig would be perverse, in comparison with the desire of Macareus, for instance, to return to human form, but it would not necessarily represent a departure from humanity, imagined as a mental quality that endures in spite of bodily transformations. In book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*, however, Spenser places Gryll's desire for transformation in the context of the Plutarchian tradition, in which mental changes correlate with physical changes. Spenser invokes the Plutarchian tradition not only by naming Gryll after Plutarch's Gryllus but also by writing a moralistic condemnation of Gryll that develops themes originating with Plutarch's Odysseus. Book 2 ends with Guyon and the Palmer's conversation about Gryll:

Saide *Guyon*, See the mind of beastly man,
That hath so soone forgot the excellence
Of his creation, when he life began,

That now he chooseth, with vile difference,
 To be a beast, and lacke intelligence.
 To whom the Palmer thus, The donghill kinde
 Delightes in filth and fowle incontinence:
 Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*, and have his hoggish minde;
 But let us hence depart, whilest wether serves and winde. (2.12.87.1-9)

Just as Plutarch's Odysseus speculates that Gryllus prefers existence as a pig because Gryllus has already evinced "συνήλιας," or "swinishness," as a human (498, 499), the Palmer suggests that Gryll wants to be a pig because of "his hoggish minde." Guyon, too, condemns Gryll's choice, but in a way that develops the first of the two theories of Plutarch's Odysseus: the theory that Gryllus has lost his human mentality upon transformation. Unlike the Palmer, who suspects that Gryll has always been essentially pig-like, Guyon suggests that Gryll has "forgot the excellence" of his former humanity. Additionally, the "vile difference"—difference here means "discrimination"³⁴—for which Guyon condemns Gryll is an example of what Erica Fudge has identified as a widespread tendency in the Renaissance to conflate claims to human ontological status with belief in a hierarchy of human over animal. Fudge explains, "Without self-knowledge a human is living a life without use of the rational soul; is living, therefore, the life of an animal. And the incapacity to differentiate human from dog represents a failure to exercise the difference."³⁵ In these remarks, which refer particularly to a quotation from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Fudge emphasizes the paradoxical Renaissance conception of reason both as the quality that elevates humans above animals and as a quality that consists in regarding

³⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. "difference" (entry dated 1989). See also Hamilton, ed., *Faerie Queene*, page 286, note to 2.12.87.4.

³⁵ Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning*, 27.

humans as superior to animals. Guyon declares Gryll unworthy of human status by the latter criterion when Guyon contemns the “vile difference” that Gryll reveals in desiring to be a pig.

Although the comments of both Guyon and the Palmer contribute to placing Gryll within a Plutarchian tradition in which some apparently human creatures have animal natures and therefore deserve animal forms, the Palmer, who develops the second hypothesis of Plutarch’s *Odysseus*, seems to correct Guyon, who develops the first hypothesis of Plutarch’s *Odysseus*. By putting the Palmer’s authority behind the second hypothesis, Spenser emphasizes the role of Gryll’s piggishness in making him contemptible. While Guyon discusses Gryll with the general terms “beast” and “beastly,” the Palmer says that Gryll has a specifically “hoggish minde.” Moreover, the Palmer’s declaration that “The donghill kinde / Delightes in filth and fowle incontinence” invokes images of dirtiness and indulgence that are quite specific to pigs.

Even the clause “Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*,” while seemingly personal to Gryll, refers to the pig because of a complex relationship with the details of Plutarch’s “*Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti*.” In Plutarch’s dialogue, Gryllus is not the original name of Odysseus’s interlocutor. When Odysseus asks Circe for the name of the pig with whom Odysseus will converse, Circe says, “What’s that to do with the issue? Call him Gryllus, if you like” (497). According to the editor of the Loeb edition, “Gryllus”—“*Γρυλλων*,” in the original Greek (496)—means “Grunter” or “swine.”³⁶ Stephen Newmyer, meanwhile, has suggested the translation “Oinker,” as well as “Grunter.”³⁷ Corroborating these translations, Liddell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* defines γρυ, the first three letters of Gryllus’s name, as “*a grunt*, like that of swine” and *Γρυλλος* as “*a pig, porker*,” though it also notes a few other uses of *Γρυλλος*, including its use by Diogenes Laertius as the

³⁶ Helmbold, ed. and trans., “Beasts Are Rational,” 497 n. b.

³⁷ Stephen T. Newmyer, *Animals, Rights and Reason in Plutarch and Modern Ethics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

“name of father and son of Xenophon.”³⁸ In sum, Plutarch’s Circe gives Odysseus’s interlocutor a name that refers to the type of animal that he has become. In spite of evidence that “Gryllus” was used at least occasionally as a name for humans, Plutarch’s Circe withholds the original, human name of her talking animal and provides Odysseus instead with a name that clearly refers to the creature’s new status as a pig.

Spenser not only modifies “Gryllus” to “Gryll” but also allows readers to believe that the creature known as Gryll has always had that name, as perhaps he has. While the name of Plutarch’s Gryllus, translated as “Oinker” by Newmyer, unmistakably identifies Gryllus as a pig for an audience that reads ancient Greek, the name *Gryll* indicates piggishness only to those members of Spenser’s audience who know ancient Greek or who recognize Gryll as an analogue of Plutarch’s Gryllus. If Spenser had named his Gryllus figure “Oinker,” Spenser would have adhered more closely to Plutarch’s model and indicated more clearly, for an English audience, that the name had been applied to the Gryllus figure only after transformation. Instead, Spenser also allows an alternative view: that the creature known as Gryll has always had that name. When the Palmer says, “Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*,” the Palmer can thus be understood to say both “Let this human be the kind of creature that he has always been” and “Let a pig be a pig.”³⁹

The ambiguity of the Palmer’s declaration develops the theme introduced by Plutarch’s Odysseus when he asks Gryllus, “Or was it rather an inclination to swinishness that conjured you into this shape?” (499). In this sarcastic question, Odysseus makes not Circe but Gryllus’s “inclination to swinishness” the agent of his transformation. Likewise, Spenser’s Palmer ultimately attributes Gryll’s transformation into a pig to Gryll’s own essentially swinish nature.

³⁸ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1861), 301.

³⁹ Compare my paraphrases with that of Hamilton: “let Grille be himself, i.e. a hog.” Hamilton, ed., *Faerie Queene*, page 286, note to 2.12.87.8.

In regard to the Palmer's pronouncement, Schoenfeldt has claimed that the Palmer treats "what appears to be a magical metamorphosis from a man to a beast" as "a simple act of predication."⁴⁰

I agree that the Palmer's formulation downplays the Palmer's agency in Gryll's transformation. Indeed, I regard this disavowal as crucial to the Plutarchian nature of book 2 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, since Plutarchian transformations bring outward shape into accordance with inner nature.

I further suggest that the Palmer's pronouncement develops Plutarch's own treatment of Gryllus in a way that intensifies the moralistic assertion that the transformed creature has always had a swinish nature. Although Plutarch's Odysseus makes a similar comment about Gryllus, Spenser strengthens this interpretation, in part by changing *Gryll(us)* from a name that Circe assigns after Gryllus's transformation into a name that, while referring to pigs, has always belonged to Gryll. In other words, Spenser's treatment of the name *Gryllus* increases suspicions that the transformed creature has always been contemptible—suspicions that Plutarch introduces, but then undercuts by having Gryllus reprimand Odysseus for making insults. Furthermore, by saying, "Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*, and have his hoggish minde," the Palmer declares Gryll to be reprobate, and this quality has particular relevance to the pig because of the biblical verse, quoted by Topsell, that compares recalcitrant sinners to wallowing pigs: "The dog is turned to his own vomit againe, and the sowe that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire."⁴¹ This moralistic formulation elaborates the significance of Gryll's incorrigible desire to be a pig, since incorrigibility itself is a characteristic that provokes comparisons of humans with pigs—

⁴⁰ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 72.

⁴¹ 2 Pet. 2:2 (Authorized Version, 1611). Hamilton notes the relevance of this bible verse to Gryll. See *Faerie Queene*, page 286, note to 2.12.87.8. By showing that the verse figured prominently in natural history's view of the pig, my account provides additional justification for, and enables fuller appreciation of, the verse's relevance.

particularly dirty pigs—in the early modern period. The obstinacy of Gryll’s desire—above and beyond the fact that his desire is to be a pig—corroborates interpretations that Gryll is essentially swinish.⁴² Gryll’s ineradicable piggishness, then, sustains Guyon and the Palmer’s contempt for Gryll even as it favors the Palmer’s view over that of Guyon.

After the Gryllus episode, which, I argue, retrospectively shapes every episode in book 2, the episodes involving the Idle Lake most obviously use the connotations of the pig to condemn intemperate characters. Although Phaedria reveals the lake’s name simultaneously to Cymochles and the reader quite early in canto 6 (2.6.10.2), the fullest description of the lake occurs at the end of the canto, when Atin jumps into the lake to prevent his master Pyrochles from madly drowning himself. As the narrator describes the lake, both Atin and Pyrochles become laughable, largely because they occupy the position of the wallowing pig:

Into the lake he lept, his Lord to ayd,
 (So Love the dread of daunger doth despise)
 And of him catching hold him strongly stayd
 From drowning. But more happy he, then wise
 Of that seas nature did not him avise.
 The waves thereof so slow and sluggish were,
 Engrost with mud, which did them fowle agrise,
 That every weighty thing they did upbeare,
 Ne ought mote ever sinck downe to the bottom there. (2.6.46.1-9).

The lake, it turns out, contains not water but mud, and the narrator creates an especially vivid

⁴² The word “pigheaded,” though, enters the English language by 1637, some time after the publication of *The Faerie Queene* but only shortly after the composition of *Comus*. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “pigheaded” (entry dated 2006).

image of the condition of Pyrochles and Atin by saying that that the Idle Lake “did them fowle agrise.” The resemblance of Pyrochles and Atin to pigs seems particularly strong because of this vivid image of dirtiness and because idleness, for which the lake is named, is a commonly remarked characteristic of pigs. Moreover, once the narrator has explained the impossibility of drowning in the Idle Lake’s mud, the most accurate word for the activity of Atin and Pyrochles in the lake may well be *wallowing*. Thus, Spenser condemns Pyrochles’s self-destructive rage and Atin’s rash decision to jump into the lake by subjecting both characters to a mud bath, which inevitably associates them with pigs, especially but not only because of Gryll’s prominent role in the final canto of book 2.

Although Spenser never places Cymochles, Pyrochles’s brother, in the Idle Lake, the Idle Lake provides a crucial referent for the narrator’s negative judgments of Cymochles in canto 5, just before Cymochles becomes the first character to reach the Idle Lake in canto 6. Believing that Guyon has killed Pyrochles, Atin travels to Acrasia’s bower in search of Cymochles. The narrator’s descriptions of Cymochles draw on the constellation of images surrounding the pig. For instance, the narrator relates, “*Atin fownd Cymochles sojourning*” (2.5.28.1). Cymochles’s “sojourning” is especially remarkable because “ydle pleasures” (2.5.27.3) figure conspicuously among Acrasia’s temptations and because Cymochles’s idleness anticipates the Idle Lake.

Continuing to describe Cymochles, the narrator declares,

he has pourd out his ydle mynd
 In daintie delices, and lavish joyes,
 Having his warlike weapons cast behind,
 And flowes in pleasures, and vaine pleasing toyes,
 Mingled emongst loose Ladies and lascivious boyes. (2.5.28.5-9)

The narrator does not mention mud explicitly, but *wallowing*, as if in mud, describes the situation of Cymochles as he “flowes in pleasures.” Indeed, *The Oxford English Dictionary* explains that *wallow*, in the sense “To roll about, or lie prostrate and relaxed in or upon some liquid, viscous, or yielding substance,” also carries suggestions of “sensual enjoyment or indifference to defilement.” This definition relates to the more abstract use of *wallow* to mean “to take delight in gross pleasures or a demoralizing way of life.”⁴³

A subsequent stanza strengthens the association of Cymochles with the pig by continuing to picture his idle wallowing and adding excessive consumption to a growing list of Cymochles’s pig-like behaviors. The narrator catches Cymochles in voyeuristic enjoyment of half-naked women:

He like an Adder, lurking in the weedes,
 His wandring thought in deepe desire does steepe,
 And his frayle eye with spoyle of beauty feedes;
 Sometimes he falsely faines himself to sleepe,
 Whiles through their lids his wanton eies do peepe. (2.5.34.1-5)

I do not mean to dismiss entirely the overt comparison of Cymochles to a snake, but it is important not to miss the stanza’s references to characteristics of the pig. The line imagining Cymochles to “steepe” his “thought in deepe desire” continues earlier intimations of wallowing. Furthermore, pretending “to sleepe” is another form of idleness, though it is exacerbated by “deceipt,” associated with snakes (as in a story too famous to mention) rather than pigs and explicitly condemned by the narrator later in the stanza (2.5.34.8). Finally, when the narrator says that Cymochles “feedes” his eye, the narrator broaches the topic of excessive consumption,

⁴³ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “wallow” (entry dated 1989).

a phenomenon commonly associated with pigs. Indeed, Spenser devotes the stanza's final line to the idea of gluttonous consumption: the narrator deems Cymochles "dronke with drugs of deare voluptuous receipt" (2.5.34.9). The word "dronke," in particular, condemns Cymochles by likening his self-indulgence to excessive drinking.

What clinches the association of Cymochles with the pig is a line that unmistakably anticipates the Idle Lake. When Atin reaches Acrasia's bower, Cymochles is said "in still waves of deepe delight to wade" (2.5.35.2). The following book echoes the image of "still waves" in descriptions of the Idle Lake, especially the reference to its "slouthfull wave" (2.6.18.7) and the description of it as an "ydle flood" (2.6.41.9). The mud of the Idle Lake thus comes to represent the "deepe delight" that Cymochles enjoys, and construction of Cymochles as wallowing, like the pig, becomes nearly inevitable.⁴⁴

Cymochles wallows metaphorically, not actually in the mud of the Idle Lake, like his brother Pyrochles at the end of canto 6. Spenser has already abased Pyrochles in a similarly concrete manner when the narrator introduces Pyrochles and uses implicit comparisons of Pyrochles to a pig in order to condemn his excessive anger, which remains the cause for condemnation of Pyrochles as he attempts to drown himself in the Idle Lake. When Occasion incites Furor and Pyrochles to quarrel with one another, Furor subjects Pyrochles to an indignity: "He cast him downe to ground, and all along / Drew him through durt and myre without remorse" (2.5.23.3-4). Furor characteristically treats his victims in this manner, for at Furor's first appearance, Furor drags the vengeful Phaon through the dirt: "A mad man, or that feigned mad to bee, / Drew by heare along upon the grownd, / A handsom stripling with great crueltee"

⁴⁴ The meaning of Cymochles's name is another relevant, though not crucial, detail. Hamilton explains that Cymochles's "name derives from *κύμα*, wave." See *Faerie Queene*, page 194, note to 2.4.41.

(2.4.3.5-7). The language of these passages suggests a comparison of Furor's victims to pigs, since Furor's victims are covered in dirt and are led—dragged, actually—by someone who, like a human keeper, walks upright. Topsell suggests an even deeper connection between pigs and angry humans when he writes, “They which have foreheads, eyelids, lips, mouth, or Necke, like Swyne, are accounted foolish, wicked, and wrathful” (674). The association of anger with a swinish appearance in humans corroborates the argument that Spenser's allegorical representations of Furor suggest a (damning) comparison of Furor's victims to pigs. Moreover, after Pyrochles succumbs to Furor, the Palmer advises Guyon not to rescue Pyrochles because he “Deserves to taste his follies fruit, repented payne” (2.5.24.9). The Palmer's judgment—that Furor's dragging Pyrochles through the mud is fit punishment—anticipates the judgment that the Palmer passes on Gryll when he suggests that a swinish existence is a fit punishment for Gryll's intemperance. The Palmer's judgments make the case of Gryll, whose swinishness is unmistakable, parallel the case of Pyrochles, whose swinishness is less manifest.

Although the besiegers of Alma's castle, led by the spectral general Malegar, do not uniformly resemble pigs in their physical forms, the pig nevertheless provides an apt analogue for these intemperate creatures, as well. The physical forms of most of the besiegers of Alma's castle combine parts of humans with parts of a variety of animals, including owls, dogs, deer, snakes, apes, birds, and toads (2.11.8-13). Among the creatures that assault the bulwark of hearing are “Some like wilde Bores late rouzd out of the brakes” (2.11.10.5). The besiegers of the bulwark of taste include “some fashioned in the waste / Like swine” (2.11.12.5-6). Although wild and domestic pigs receive explicit mention, Spenser's narrator does not explicitly accord the pig-like creatures any special status among Alma's enemies. Hamilton, however, has regarded the pig as the crucial figure in the stanza in an editorial note explicating a pun in the following

clause: “so deformd is luxury, / Surfeat, misdiet, and unthriftie waste” (2.11.12.7). According to Hamilton, Spenser writes “unthriftie waste” in reference to the fact that “the vice [luxury] is embodied in the waistless swine.”⁴⁵ Thus, the pig, and particularly its characteristic fatness, turns out to be crucial to the stanza’s condemnation of luxury.

In addition to being the dominant figure in this stanza, the pig may represent those intemperate creatures who have forms resembling other animals. The narrator begins the stanza introducing assailants of the bulwark of taste with a comparison that redounds on Malegar’s entire army: “And that fourth band which cruell battry bent, / Against the fourth Bulwarke, that is the *Taste*, / Was as the rest a grysie rablement.” (2.11.12.1-3). *The Oxford English Dictionary* cites these lines as an example of the use of the now obsolete word *grisy* to mean “Horrible; grim; grisly.”⁴⁶ The word “grysie,” however, also recalls “that great griesy lake” (2.6.18.7)—that is, the Idle Lake. Here, “griesy”—or, with modernized spelling, *greasy*—refers to the Idle Lake’s muddiness.⁴⁷ The “grysie rablement” that assaults Alma’s castle may well be an army covered in mud, like bathers in the Idle Lake or wallowing pigs. Strengthening this suggestion, the narrator calls Malegar’s army “grysie” in the same stanza that mentions the domestic pig. Although the narrator says that the assailants of the bulwark of taste, including the pig-like creatures, resemble the other dirty members of Malegar’s army, I speculate that the pig originally generates the

⁴⁵ Hamilton, ed., *Faerie Queene*, page 263, note to 2.11.12.4-8.

⁴⁶ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “grisy” (entry dated 1989).

⁴⁷ In an editorial note, which acknowledges that the 1596 edition of book 2 has “griesly” instead of “griesy,” Hamilton nevertheless defends the interpretation that “griesy” refers to the lake’s muddiness, as well as its “horrible” nature. See *Faerie Queene*, page 206, note to 2.6.18.7. For Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki’s remarks on the greater reliability of the 1590 edition, see their “Textual Introduction,” in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow, London, New York, et al.: Pearson Education, 2001), 21-2. *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives Spenser’s description of the Idle Lake as an example of a use of *grisy*—“Horrible; grim; grisly”—while acknowledging the discrepancy between the 1590 and 1596 editions. Online ed., s.v. “grisy” (entry dated 1989).

conception of Malegar's intemperate army as dirty. That is, the narrator, claiming that pig-like creatures resemble other dirty members of Malegar's army, inverts the direction of the comparison without entirely concealing the pig's role in generating it.

Mordant, the first of Acrasia's victims to come to Guyon's attention, also resembles—and may even have temporarily become—a pig. In canto 1, Amavia provides an account of her redemption of Mordant from Acrasia's vices:

Him so I sought, and so at last I fownd
 Where him that witch had thrall'd to her will,
 In chaines of lust and lewde desyres ybownd
 And so transformed from his former skill,
 That me he knew not, nether his owne ill;
 Till through wise handling and faire governaunce,
 I him recured to a better will,
 Purged from drugs of fowle intemperaunce:
 Then meanes I gan devise for his deliverance. (2.1.54.1-9)

When Amavia claims to have cured Mordant through purgation, she may offer not merely a metaphor for Mordant's moral redemption but a description of a medical intervention necessary to restore Mordant to "a better will." As Schoenfeldt has explained, Renaissance thinkers, relying on Galen's theory of the four humors, tend to conflate morality and health.⁴⁸ Several examples of treatments through purgation corroborate Schoenfeldt's subsequent claim that "most illness in the period is imagined to derive from the body's inability to rid itself of excess humors" (13-4, 31). Although Schoenfeldt's reading of the scene with Amavia and Mordant does not discuss her

⁴⁸ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 7. Subsequent citations appear in text.

treatment of Mordant through purgations (44-5, but see also 46, 47-8), the scene provides further evidence for Schoenfeldt's point that temperance "not only exhibits proper ethical conduct, but also actively alters the moral condition of the self that practices it" (60). Because humoral imbalance is associated with both pathology and immorality, the purgations by which Amavia cures Mordant can be understood as interventions necessary, both morally and medically, to bring Mordant from a state of overindulgence—compared to inebriation, since Amavia says that Acrasia "makes her lovers drunken mad" (2.1.52.1)—to a state of proper moderation.

I suggest, more particularly, that Amavia's account of her redemption of Mordant renders him comparable to a pig, an animal supposed to have an appetite so unrestrained that it endangers the pig's own health. Of the pig, Topsell writes, "such is the ravening intemperancy of this beast to swil in whatsoever is pleasant to his taste, that many times in drinking of Whaye their bellies growe extended above measure, even to death, except that they bee dieted by a wise keeper, and driven up and downe not suffered to rest till it flow fourth againe backward" (669). Like the pig, Mordant indulges in sensual pleasures without restraint. Even though his behavior is detrimental to his well-being, he seems unable to regulate his appetites. No less than the pig, who requires the intervention of "a wise keeper," Mordant needs the "wise handling" of Amavia in order to recover. In the cases of both Mordant and the pig who has consumed too much whey, the cure takes the form of a purgation. Moreover, Topsell's image of the pig-keeper driving his pigs "up and downe" until they vomit seems like an apt description of Amavia's treatment of Mordant: she seeks him out in Acrasia's bower; takes charge of his behaviors, ultimately driving him toward their home; and induces vomiting in the process. What generates this coincidence in imagery is the implication that Mordant, like the pig, lacks the will to temper his own desire for pleasure.

Spenser drives home the comparison of Mordant to a pig by having Amavia say that he has been “transformed.” In the passage, the word refers most immediately to Mordant’s shocking loss of self-mastery, but the word also demands that Mordant’s intemperance be understood in the terms of the first stanza of canto nine, which asserts that intemperate behavior causes physical transformations. Moreover, the assertion that Acrasia has “transformed” Mordant inevitably recalls the humans whom she is revealed to have transformed into animals in the final canto, especially the only individuated victim of Acrasia’s transformations, Gryll, who has been—and still wishes to be—a pig. Because the pig figures especially prominently in the representation of Acrasia’s transformations, it seems likely that Mordant’s transformation can be understood to make him comparable to the pig, and to place him and Amavia in the relation of pig and keeper.

Having treated episodes that refer relatively explicitly to pigs, I now propose to demonstrate that the pig underlies many other and seemingly disparate images of intemperance. For instance, the constellation of images for greed in the Mammon episode evokes the pig, though not explicitly. When Guyon meets Mammon, the narrator describes Mammon as both dirty and gluttonous: the mail that Mammon wears is “darkned with filthy dust” (2.7.4.3), and in counting his money, Mammon is said “to feede his eye / And covetous desire with his huge threasury” (2.7.4.8-9). Refusing Mammon’s temptations, Guyon declares that wealth defiles its possessor: “Regard of worldly mucke doth fowly blend, / And low abase the high heroicke spright” (2.7.10.5-6). These lines adapt the pig’s characteristic wallowing in the mud to condemn human materialism. The association of greed with mud continues when Guyon compares wealth to “mucky filth” (2.7.15.8) in a river. The narrator also condemns Pilate by describing him as dirty, a judgment with which Pilate concurs. After the narrator relates that Pilate has “hands most

filthy feculent” (2.7.61.4), Pilate memorably laments, “The whiles my hands I washt in purity, / The whiles my soule was soyld with fowle iniquity” (2.7.62.8-9). Spenser’s representation of Pilate adapts material from the gospel of Matthew. Doubting that Jesus has committed any crime yet desiring to placate those demanding Jesus’s crucifixion, Pilate, Matthew relates, “tooke water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see yee to it.”⁴⁹ By giving Pilate hands that are not merely dirty but “feculent” and by having Pilate remark that his symbolic hand-washing “soyld” his “soule,” Spenser condemns Pilate for disavowing moral and legal responsibility for Jesus’s case. As Spenser juxtaposes the image of Pilate’s hand-washing with the image of soul-staining, he gives greater weight to the latter image by reserving it for the stanza’s final alexandrine. Although “feculent” causes Pilate’s dirtiness to exceed that of many other intemperate or otherwise immoral characters, Pilate does not surpass the dirtiness expected of pigs. In Topsell’s entry on the pig, he writes, “they love the dung of men” (669). Thus, in addition to inverting the biblical image of hand-washing, Spenser’s images of Pilate’s dirtiness condemn Pilate by likening him to the quintessentially dirty pig.

The image of gluttonous eating recurs, as well, especially when Guyon contrasts an idealized age of moderation with “later ages,” when

pride, like corn-fed steed,

Abusd her plenty, and fat swolne encrease

To all licentious lust, and gan exceed

The measure of her meane, and naturall first need. (2.7.16.6-9).

Explicitly, the passage represents pride as a horse,⁵⁰ but the reprehensible behaviors of this horse,

⁴⁹ Matt. 27:24 (Authorized Version, 1611).

⁵⁰ *The Oxford English Dictionary* offers no other plausible referents for “steed” in this passage. Online ed., s.v. “steed” (entry dated 1989).

such as overeating and growing fat, are characteristic behaviors of the pig. The passage's evocation of the pig is strengthened by its proximity to Guyon's comparison of wealth to "mucky filth," which occurs in the immediately preceding stanza. Likewise, Guyon meets Tantalus, whose punishment involves perpetual hunger and thirst (2.7.58), immediately before Pilate, whose punishment involves perpetual dirtiness. Indeed, throughout the Mammon episode, frequent alternations between images of mud and images of eating adumbrate the pig, even when the metaphors explicitly refer to seemingly distant objects or creatures, such as a river or a horse.

Although Belphoebe makes only a brief appearance in book 2, she delivers a lecture condemning sybarites by comparing them to pigs. Her speech, especially its beginning, is eloquent and memorable:

Who so in pompe of prowde estate (quoth she)
 Does swim, and bathes him selfe in courtly blis,
 Does waste his dayes in darke obscuritee,
 And in oblivion ever buried is. (2.3.40.1-4)

My theory that Belphoebe compares sybarites to pigs explains an oddity of the quatrain. In the first two lines, Belphoebe imagines "pompe of prowde estate" and "courtly blis" as liquids in which the sybarite "Does swim" or "bathes him selfe," respectively. In the quatrain's final line, however, Belphoebe chooses the word "buried," not *drowned*, and thereby imagines the sybarites covered with earth, not immersed in liquid, as in the first two lines of the quatrain. If Belphoebe means, however, to compare sybarites to wallowing pigs, then her use of both liquid and solid imagery seems appropriate to mud, like the mud that composes the Idle Lake. The verb "bathes" turns out to be ironic, and in its inversion of cleanliness and dirtiness, draws on the idea, recorded by Topsell, that mud is to pigs as water is to humans in order to suggest that humans

should not indulge in the pleasures, compared to mud, that Belphoebe describes. Moreover, Belphoebe delivers this speech in rebuttal of Braggadocchio's misguided admiration of her: "The wood is fit for beasts, the court is fitt for thee" (2.3.39.9). As Belphoebe inverts Braggadocchio's hierarchy of "court" over "wood," she also associates "court," rather than "wood," with "beasts"—specifically pigs—in order to condemn humans who live in luxury. Belphoebe's formulation anticipates the association, noted by Hamilton and discussed above, of pig-like creatures with luxury in the description of Malegar's army.

Finally, I close my analysis of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* with an example featuring Archimago, a major villain in book 1 but a relatively minor villain in book 2. Spenser's narrator gives the following description of the evil wizard:

For all he did, was to deceive good knights,
 And draw them from pursuit of praise and fame,
 To slug in slouth and sensuall delights,
 And end their daies with irrenowmed shame. (2.1.23.1-4)

If a modern reader imagines any animal referent for this passage, it is more likely the slug than the pig. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, however, can help to illuminate the anachronism of such a reading and the urgent relevance of the pig. As used by Spenser in the above passage, *slug* means "to lie idly or lazily." Etymologists have associated this verb with two Norwegian nouns, *slugg* and *sluggje*, meaning "a large heavy body" and "a heavy slow person," respectively. Adhering closely to the Norwegian usage, the English noun *slug* means "A slow, lazy fellow." The noun *slug* begins to denote "A slow-moving slimy gasteropod or land-snail" only in the early eighteenth century.⁵¹ Thus, Spenser's "slug" would not cause early modern readers to think

⁵¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. "slug, n.¹" and "slug, v.¹" (entries dated 1989).

of the familiar slimy pest, but they might think of the wallowing pig, the type of idleness and immobility, due to excessive fatness, for early moderns.

Likewise, the earliest documented use of the noun *sloth* to name the now familiar “arboreal mammal of a sluggish nature” occurs in 1613.⁵² This meaning of *sloth* not only postdates the publication of *The Faerie Queene*, if only slightly, but also seems unlikely in the context of Spenser’s passage. *The Oxford English Dictionary* records, however, the fifteenth-century use of *sloth* and *slothe*, possibly forms of the more common *slough*, to mean “A miry or muddy place.”⁵³ Considering Spenser’s frequent use of archaic words, he may have intended “slouth” to conflate the moral vice with mud, in which pigs characteristically wallow. Even without this possible linguistic connection, however, Spenser’s Lake of Idleness explicitly connects sloth with mud. Furthermore, the line “To slug in slouth and sensual delights” bears some resemblance to lines from a poem by Alexander Montgomerie: “let me not sleep in sleuth, / In stinking sty with Satans sinfull swyn.”⁵⁴ These lines make explicit the association of sloth and the pigsty, which remains implicit in Spenser’s line about Archimago. Incidentally, Montgomerie’s lines also provide further evidence for the affiliation of Cymochles, who pretends to sleep so that he can spy on naked women, with the pig.

Finally, the narrator’s description of Archimago matches a later description of Phaedria, a villain who sails the Idle Lake and who plays a more central role in book 2. The narrator comments on Phaedria’s flirtation with Guyon in her boat: “So did she all, that might his constant hart / Withdraw from thought of warlike enterprize, / And drowne in dissolute delights

⁵² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “sloth, *n.*¹” (entry dated 1989).

⁵³ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “sloth, *n.*²” and “slough, *n.*¹” (entries dated 1989).

⁵⁴ Alexander Montgomerie, “A godly Prayer,” in *Alexander Montgomerie: Poems*, ed. David J. Parkinson (Edinburgh: The Scottish Text Society, 2000), 1:8, lines 41-2.

apart” (2.6.25.5-7). It is almost impossible not to think of the Idle Lake under Phaedria’s boat when the narrator says that Phaedria wishes to “drowne” Guyon in pleasures. Thus, these pleasures become comparable to mud, submersion in which becomes tantamount to wallowing, like a pig. Because of the similarities in the villainous agendas of Phaedria and Archimago, the Idle Lake colors the characterization of Archimago and strengthens implications that he assimilates his victims to pigs. Spenser thus condemns the knights whom Archimago tempts away from their quests by imagining them in the place of the wallowing pig.

As these numerous and widely varying examples indicate, to be intemperate in book 2 of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* is almost always either to become a pig, or otherwise to occupy the place of the pig. Gryll, though treated only briefly and in the final canto, orients Spenser’s treatments of intemperance throughout book 2.

“To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty”: Comparisons of Comus and his Creatures to Pigs

Unlike Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Milton’s *Comus* never alludes to Plutarch’s Gryllus by name. Nevertheless, *Comus* belongs to a tradition of transformation stories based upon Plutarch’s “Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti,” and represents another example of the reception and adaptation of Plutarch in the Renaissance. Milton’s Plutarchian story, however, features Comus rather than Circe and attempts to distinguish Comus from earlier Circe figures, especially in the expository material presented by the Attendant Spirit. As we shall see, a primary way in which Milton attempts to distinguish his Comus story from the Circe stories of Homer and Plutarch is by decentralizing the role of the pig, which is prominent in *The Odyssey* and “Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti.” Ultimately, however, comparisons of humans to pigs underlie most of the

masque's pronouncements about Comus and his transformed creatures, which suggests that the pig, or the symbolism of the pig, remains crucial to the masque.

The older brother's speech about transformations caused by sin implicitly affiliates *Comus* with Plutarchian treatments of transformation. After explaining that "oft converse with heav'nly habitants" can alter "th'outward shape" and render it "immortal" (p. 101, ll. 459, 460, 463), the older brother tells his younger brother,

when lust

By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,

But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,

Lets in defilement to the inward parts,

The soul grows clotted by contagion,

Imbodies and imbrutes, till she quite lose

The divine property of her first being. (p. 101, ll. 463-9)

The older brother's speech is, of course, indebted to Pico's account of the human's "self-transforming nature."⁵⁵ As though recognizing the older brother's adaptation of Pico's views, the younger brother responds, "How charming is divine Philosophy!" (p. 101, l. 476). Pico also provides a precedent for negative evaluations of humans who lead animal existences; Pico writes, "if you see one blinded by the vain illusions of imagery, as it were of Calypso, and, softened by their gnawing allurements, delivered over to his senses, it is a beast and not a man you see" (226). Milton's *Comus*, however, features not Calypso but Circe's son Comus as an agent of animalization, and animalization affects not only a creature's nature, as in Pico, but also a creature's physical form, as in other Plutarchian transformation stories. When the older brother

⁵⁵ Pico, "Oration on the Dignity of Man," 225. Subsequent citations appear in text.

says that sin “Imbodies and imbrutes” the soul, he suggests that these changes are corporeal and amount to a transition from human to animal.

Although the Attendant Spirit introduces Comus by comparing him to his mother Circe, the Attendant Spirit also differentiates Comus from Circe in ways that place Comus’s transformations in the Plutarchian tradition that appealed to so many Renaissance writers, beginning with Giovanni Battista Gelli. Upon first mentioning Circe, the Attendant Spirit asks, “Who knows not *Circe* / The daughter of the Sun?” (p. 91, ll. 50-1).⁵⁶ In contrast, the Attendant Spirit has begun his biography of Comus by promising, “I will tell ye now / What never yet was heard in Tale or Song / From old or modern Bard, in Hall or Bow’r” (p. 91, ll. 43-5). These lines frame the character Comus as Milton’s original creation, in contrast to the Circe figures of earlier writers. The inspiration for Comus certainly derives from Homer’s Circe; the Attendant Spirit even emphasizes the similarity between Comus and Circe by calling Comus “a Son / Much like his Father, but his Mother more” (p. 91, ll. 56-7). Milton, however, contrasts Circe and Comus by having the Attendant Spirit remark on the fame of Circe and the anonymity of Comus. Comus turns out to differ from Circe in some profound ways, many of which indicate that Milton relies on the Plutarchian tradition as he invents his character Comus. Circe and Comus may even be considered to represent the Homeric and Plutarchian traditions, respectively.

Sean Keilen has provided a wider context for the Attendant Spirit’s differentiation of Milton “From old or modern Bard”—and indeed, a wider context for *Comus* as a whole—in an essay about Milton’s adaptation and revision of literature by ancient and early modern predecessors, especially Virgil and Shakespeare. Claiming that ancient writers use Circe “to depict the process of imitation as a confusion of things that should be kept apart,” Keilen writes,

⁵⁶ Gareth Roberts uses this quotation as evidence that “Circe is ubiquitous in Renaissance culture.” “Descendants of Circe,” 187-8.

“I intend to show that for Milton the myth of Circe may have illuminated not only the practice of imitation but also the hybridity of England’s vulgar eloquence in a similar way.”⁵⁷ Although Keilen claims that Circe plays a central role in *Comus*, and that Milton’s Circe episode “follows Homer and Virgil in putting the most basic distinctions into question” (160), the final section of Keilen’s essay emphasizes Milton’s deviations from earlier works. After quoting the Attendant Spirit’s claim for Milton’s originality (161), Keilen introduces “two scenes in which Milton is remarkably ingenious in his efforts to differentiate the *Maske* from its classical and vernacular models” (163). While I admire Keilen’s ensuing discussion of the Lady (163-70), which entails an insightful and compelling account of the replacement of Homer’s *moly* with Milton’s *haemony* (170-1), my argument about Plutarch’s influence on Milton and the role of the pig in *Comus* provides examples of ways in which earlier Circe stories shape Milton’s *Comus* story—in spite of Milton’s attempts to differentiate his work from earlier Circe stories.

One difference between *Comus* and Circe is that *Comus* transforms only the heads of humans into those of animals, while Circe transforms the entire human body. The Attendant Spirit explains that each of Circe’s victims “lost his upright shape, / And downward fell into a groveling Swine” (p. 91, ll. 52-3). The lines indicate that Circe changes the human form completely into the form of an animal, specifically a pig, and they emphasize that Circe’s transformations make a bipedal creature—with “upright shape”—into a quadrupedal one. Indeed, the lines recall the treatment of bipedalism in the account of Prometheus’s creation of humans in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*:

And where all other beasts behold the ground with grovelling eye,

He gave to man a stately look replete with majesty

⁵⁷ Sean Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence: On the Renaissance Invention of English Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 155. Subsequent citations appear in text.

And willed him to behold the heaven with count'nance cast on high,
 To mark and understand what things were in the starry sky.⁵⁸

When the Attendant Spirit contrasts the “upright shape” of the human with the “groveling” form of animals, the Attendant Spirit suggests that Circe’s transformations should be understood in the terms of Ovid’s speaker, who regards the bipedalism of the human, no less than the human’s mandate to “understand” unearthly “things,” as an integral part of humanity. Milton’s adoption of the word “groveling” from Arthur Golding’s translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* drives home the relevance of Ovid’s treatment of bipedalism. After establishing that Circe’s transformations change bipedal creatures into quadrupedal ones, the Attendant Spirit describes Comus’s transformations, which change only the head and thus create human-animal hybrids that remain bipedal. The Attendant Spirit explains the transformations of Comus’s victims:

their human count'nance,
 Th' express resemblance of the gods, is chang'd
 Into some brutish form of Wolf, or Bear,
 Or Ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat,
 All other parts remaining as they were. (p. 91, ll. 68-72)

Because Comus’s transformations only affect the head, his victims remain bipedal. His transformations thus contrast starkly with those of Circe, whose transformations, as the Attendant Spirit very specifically explains, change bipedal humans into quadrupedal pigs.

The Attendant Spirit explicitly contrasts Circe and Comus when he says that Comus “Excels his Mother at her mighty Art” (p. 91, l. 63). The reason that the Attendant Spirit

⁵⁸ Arthur Golding, trans., *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, ed. Madeleine Forey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), book 1, lines 97-100. Subsequent citations appear in text by book and line numbers.

estimates Comus's powers above those of Circe becomes clear as the Attendant Spirit provides further information about Comus's transformations, implicitly placing them in the Plutarchian tradition as opposed to the Homeric one. Immediately after explaining that Comus's transformations affect only the head, the Attendant Spirit says the following of Comus's victims:

And they, so perfect is their misery,
 Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
 But boast themselves more comely than before,
 And all their friends and native home forget,
 To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty. (p. 91, ll. 73-7)

Unlike Circe's victims in *The Odyssey*, Comus's victims delight in their changed forms. When they "boast themselves more comely than before," they repeat the preference for a non-human form and existence that characterizes Plutarch's Gryllus. Like Gelli, Milton also has his transformed characters forget their human pasts upon or soon after transformation, whereas Homer's Circe episode has Odysseus's crew become "forgetful of their own country" before their transformation and without suggesting that such forgetfulness erodes the crew's essentially human mentalities, which not even Circe's transformations vitiate.⁵⁹ When Milton and Gelli move the forgetting of the past to make it concurrent with or subsequent to transformation, they revise Homer's Circe episode along Plutarchian lines. The Attendant Spirit declares the "misery" of Comus's victims "perfect"—that is, the Attendant Spirit can imagine no worse state—because

⁵⁹ Homer, *Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Lattimore, p. 158, l. 236. Leonora Leet Brodwin also recognizes the distinction between forgetting homelands and becoming animals in Homer's Circe episode: "The brutish transformation is the result of a drugged condition which enslaves but does not destroy the human mind. The drug causes its victims to forget their native land, but the subsequent brutish enslavement, symbolized by the wand, does not destroy all human remorse over their condition, however powerless their wills may be to effect a return to their native freedom." See "Milton and the Renaissance Circe," *Milton Studies* 6 (1974), 23.

Comus's victims have changed to such an extent that they regard their animal-headed forms as superior to their original human forms and embrace a life of heedless "pleasure." Comus "Excels his Mother at her mighty Art" (p. 91, l. 63), in the Attendant Spirit's opinion, because Circe works Homeric transformations that alter only forms, while Comus works Plutarchian transformations that alter both forms and mental attributes, such as values and morals. Comus's ability to cause inner transformations makes him more powerful than Circe, and more threatening, in the eyes of the Attendant Spirit.

Another way in which Comus seemingly differs from Circe is that he creates a variety of new forms, instead of a single type. As the Attendant Spirit narrates the meeting of Bacchus and Circe, Comus's parents, the Attendant Spirit asks,

Who knows not *Circe*
 The daughter of the Sun? Whose charmed Cup
 Whoever tasted, lost his upright shape,
 And downward fell into a groveling Swine.⁶⁰

This summary ignores an interpretative tradition imagining Circe to have transformed humans into not only pigs but also other animals, especially wolves and lions. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Eurylochos fears that Circe "will / transform the lot of us into pigs or wolves or lions."⁶¹ Odysseus, in contrast, describes the lions and wolves near Circe's home simply as "lions, and wolves of the mountains, / whom the goddess had given evil drugs and enchanted" (p. 157, ll.

⁶⁰ John Milton, *Comus*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), page 91, lines 50-3. Subsequent citations appear in text by page and line numbers.

⁶¹ Homer, *Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Lattimore, page 163, lines 432-3. Subsequent citations of this translation appear in text by page and line numbers.

212-3). Roberts takes for granted that “Homer’s Circe has changed men into wolves and lions.”⁶² Yarnall, more convincingly, maintains that the status of the wolves and lions “is left ambiguous” by Homer (82) but not by subsequent imitators, especially Virgil (82, cf. 11). Virgil’s brief Circe episode includes humans who have been transformed into pigs, lions, and wolves, as well as bears, a species not mentioned by Homer.⁶³ Plutarch’s dialogue also imagines that Circe transforms humans into a variety of animals, even though Plutarch eventually foregrounds the pig. At the opening of the dialogue, Plutarch’s Odysseus asks Circe, “whether there are any Greeks among those whom you have changed from the shape of men into wolves and lions” (493). When Circe proposes a debate between Odysseus and the transformed creatures, Odysseus asks, “How can they argue with me or I with them so long as they are asses and hogs and lions?” (495). Gryllus subsequently accuses Odysseus of being “frightened that she [Circe] may, before you know it, turn you into a pig or a wolf” (499). Three animals other than pigs are mentioned in these quotations, the first of which does not mention the pig at all.

Milton’s Attendant Spirit, thus, misconstrues Circe as someone who transforms humans exclusively into pigs. Furthermore, the Attendant Spirit frames his account of Circe’s transformations in the form of a rhetorical question, as though he expects or permits no disagreement with his account’s prioritization of the pig.

The Attendant Spirit’s description of Comus’s transformations, meanwhile, emphasizes their variety. When the Attendant Spirit says that Comus gives humans “some brutish form of Wolf, or Bear, / Or Ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat” (p. 91, ll. 70-1), he lists many different animals and, by repetition of “or,” implies that the list could go on. The pig appears as

⁶² Roberts, “Descendants of Circe,” 194.

⁶³ Vergil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Sarah Ruden (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), pages 144-5, lines 15-20.

one among many examples of an animal shape that Comus bestows upon humans, but awarding the pig no special prominence, the Attendant Spirit mentions the pig in the penultimate position in the list, not first or last. Milton's stage directions for the first appearance of Comus and his transformed minions likewise describe them as "a rout of Monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild Beasts" (p. 80). Neither the pig nor any other animal receives special mention. Indeed, Milton's adjective "wild" presumably excludes the domesticated pig, which figures so prominently in the Circe episode, at least as retold by the Attendant Spirit. The Attendant Spirit may even use the word "Hog" to raise questions about whether he means to refer to domesticated pigs at all, for in the seventeenth century, "hog" ambiguously names both wild and domesticated varieties.⁶⁴

Despite the contrast that *Comus* establishes between the animal forms created by Circe and Comus, characters repeatedly describe Comus's transformations with language associated with the pig—specifically, the domesticated pig. Although the Attendant Spirit compares Comus's crew to "stabl'd wolves, or tigers at their prey" (p. 102, l. 534), in conversation with the Lady's brothers, the Attendant Spirit prefers to compare Comus's crew to pigs in his crucial introduction of readers to Comus. After the Attendant Spirit has listed the variety of human-animal forms created by Comus, and after the Attendant Spirit has explained that Comus transforms heads but not bodies, the Attendant Spirit concludes his description of Comus's victims:

And they, so perfect is their misery,
 Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
 But boast themselves more comely than before,

⁶⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. "hog" (entry dated Nov. 2010).

And all their friends and native home forget,

To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty. (p. 91, ll. 73-7)

Although Comus's minions have the heads of a variety of animals, the Attendant Spirit declares that each individual's preference for a no-longer-human form is accompanied by a heedless pursuit of "pleasure," comparable to the abandon represented specifically by the wallowing pig. The proverbially dirty pig—Topsell, for instance, notes, "it pleases the holy ghost in scripture to compare the pleasure that beastly men take in sinning to the wallowing of swine in the mire" (667)—provides the privileged figure for the moral depravity of all of Comus's victims. While they have the heads of many different creatures, the pig in its sty represents them all. The implied comparison of the transformed humans to domestic pigs is especially significant in the case of any creature with a head like that of a "wild" rather than domesticated "Hog." According to Topsell, wallowing in mud is more characteristic of domesticated pigs than wild boars: "they love not so much to wallow in the mire, as the tame and Domestical swine" (696). Therefore, the Attendant Spirit's use of the "sensual sty" as a homogenizing image for the moral depravity of the transformed creatures undermines attempts by the Attendant Spirit and Milton's stage directions to differentiate Comus's transformations from those of Circe by decentralizing the domesticated pig.

Not only the Attendant Spirit but also Comus assimilates the victims of his transformations to pigs. Upon hearing the approach of the Lady, Comus predicts, "I shall ere long / Be well stock't with as fair a herd as graz'd / About my Mother *Circe*" (p. 93, ll. 152-3). Comus's lines recall the lines from Homer's *Odyssey* in which Circe locks the newly transformed members of Odysseus's crew into pigsties and feeds them the characteristic diet of pigs: "So crying they went in, and before them Circe / threw down acorns for them to eat, and

ilex and cornel / buds, such food as pigs who sleep on the ground always feed on” (p. 158, lines 241-3). As he conjures this image, Comus represents his minions, who have the heads of myriad creatures, as domesticated pigs. Moreover, he emphasizes the likeness of his creations to those of Circe, even though his animal-headed hybrids could never be mistaken for pigs, while Circe’s victims do become indistinguishable in appearance from pigs in both *The Odyssey* and in the Attendant Spirit’s somewhat misleading account. Homer’s Odysseus relates that his crew “took on the look of pigs, with the heads and voices / and bristles of pigs” (p. 158, ll. 239-40); similarly, the Attendant Spirit says that each of Circe’s victims “downward fell into a groveling Swine” (p. 91, l. 53). Comus’s victims do not resemble pigs in appearance, but he nevertheless makes the comparison.

The Lady also assimilates Comus’s human-animal hybrids to pigs as she condemns their morals and refuses to join Comus’s band. When the Lady calls Comus’s victims “ugly-headed Monsters” (p. 106, l. 695), she acknowledges their weird status as neither humans nor animals. The Lady’s most emphatic condemnation of Comus and his minions, however, compares them all to pigs for their transgressions against the “holy dictate of spare Temperance” (p. 108, l. 767), the same virtue embodied by Spenser’s Guyon, who must allow the unrepentant Gryll to remain a pig on Acrasia’s island:

swinish gluttony

Ne’er looks to Heav’n amidst his gorgeous feast,

But with besotted base ingratitude

Crams, and blasphemes his feeder. (p. 108, ll. 776-9)

As Topsell’s natural history makes clear, “gluttony” is one of the most distinctive characteristics of pigs, as imagined by Renaissance writers and readers, and the Lady makes the comparison of

Comus and his friends to pigs explicit and unmistakable with the qualifier “swinish.” Indeed, this word directs readers to imagine the personification “gluttony” as not a human but a pig, as does the positioning of “gluttony” in a dependent yet ungrateful relation to a human “feeder.” This human-pig relation provides an apt metaphor, according to the Lady, for the hedonistic lifestyle of Comus and his crew, who lack appreciation for the provisions of the creator.

The figure of the pig does not disappear, however, with the metaphor’s application to Comus and his crew. While the line “Ne’er looks to Heaven amidst his gorgeous feast” condemns those humans who do not give thanks to the creator for their meals, it also recalls the distinction that Ovid’s speaker makes between bipedal humans, who “behold the heaven” (1.99), and quadrupedal animals, who “behold the ground with grovelling eye” (1.97). In an earlier appropriation of the same Ovidian passage, the Attendant Spirit establishes the pig as the most properly “groveling” animal by saying that Circe deprives each of her human victims of his “upright shape” (p. 91, l. 52) and turns him “into a groveling Swine” (p. 91, l. 53). When Comus and his minions refuse religion, they refuse something imagined by Ovid to be possible for the human specifically because of the human’s bipedal form. Thus, in the Lady’s moral terms, Comus and his minions are quite like—and perhaps might as well be—the most characteristically “groveling” type of quadruped: the pig.

Comparisons of Comus and his crew to pigs underlie other disapproving statements of the Lady. Upon overhearing the seemingly drunken revelry of Comus and his crew, the Lady says, “I should be loath / To meet the rudeness and swill’d insolence / Of such late Wassailers” (p. 94, ll. 177-9). The “swill’d insolence” that the Lady abhors refers quite explicitly to pigs. Since the sixteenth century, the noun *swill* has meant “Liquid, or partly liquid, food, chiefly kitchen refuse, given to swine; hog-wash, pig-wash.” Accordingly, the verb *swill* has meant “To

drink freely, greedily, or to excess, like hogs devouring ‘swill’ or ‘wash,’” as well as “to tipple, booze.”⁶⁵ Topsell uses the verb *swill* to name a mode of consumption characteristic of pigs when he writes, “such is the ravening intemperancy of this beast to swill in whatsoever is pleasant to his taste” (669). Topsell connects the unrestrained, eager drinking of pigs quite directly to the drinking of alcohol when he says that pigs “will drink wine or beer unto drunkenness” (668). Even before the Lady has met Comus and his crew, her inference that they are drunk leads her to compare them with pigs.

The “rudeness” that the Lady attributes to Comus and his crew also refers to the pig, though less obviously. Topsell records a proverb in which the pig represents the epitome of ignorance: “in Latin they say *Sus minervam*, when an unlearned dunce goeth about to teach his better or a more learned man, then doth the Hog teach *Pallas*, or as we say in English, the foule Sow teach the faire Lady to spin” (676). The phrase “*Sus Minervam*” means “A pig (teaching) Minerva.”⁶⁶ This Latin proverb and its vernacular English analogue both imagine an incongruous encounter between a pig and a female figure, in which the pig comically attempts to instruct the goddess or “faire Lady,” whose knowledge surpasses that of the pig. William Helmbold suggests that the Greek version of this proverb has a “possible application” to Plutarch’s “*Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti*”: “We have here, then, a Boetian pig instructing the favourite of Athena.”⁶⁷ It could be argued, however, that this proverb gives a fundamental structure to Plutarch’s dialogue, on which Milton’s *Comus*, in turn, is based.

⁶⁵ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “swill, n.²” and “swill, v.” (entries dated 1989).

⁶⁶ H. T. Riley, ed., *Dictionary of Latin Quotations, Proverbs, Maxims, and Mottos, Classical and Medieval, including Law Terms and Phrases* (London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1856), 450.

⁶⁷ William C. Helmbold, introduction to “Beasts Are Rational,” by Plutarch, trans. and ed. William C. Helmbold, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 12, The Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1957), 490 n. a., 489-90.

Milton's Lady resembles "the faire Lady" of the proverb in more than name, for she also understands herself to be harassed by ignorant, pig-like creatures. She upbraids Comus,

Thou hast nor Ear nor Soul to apprehend
 The sublime notion and high mystery
 That must be utter'd to unfold the sage
 And serious doctrine of Virginitie,
 And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know
 More happiness than this thy present lot. (p. 108, ll. 784-9)

As a virgin, the Lady also resembles the Minerva of the original Latin proverb, and the Lady's oldest brother compares the Lady to Minerva in an earlier speech about "wise *Minerva*," the "unconquer'd Virgin" (p. 100, l. 448). Thus, the "rudeness" for which the Lady condemns Comus and his minions, and the Lady's contempt for Comus for attempting to convert her to his allegedly foolish hedonism, fit the paradigm of the proverb about the pig who presumes upon Minerva or an English lady.

The Lady's contemptuous attitude emerges especially in response to Comus's offers of food and drink, the latter of which would transform the Lady into an animal-headed creature. Scornfully, the Lady asks, "And wouldst thou seek again to trap me here / With lickerish baits fit to ensnare a brute?" (p. 106, ll. 699-700). Although the Lady mentions no specific "brute," the pig's reputation for gluttony would presumably make it particularly susceptible to "lickerish baits." When the Lady rejects Comus's offer of food and drink, she thus rejects a form of indulgence that she tends to regard as characteristic of pigs, as with her already cited phrase "swinish gluttony." The Lady also lectures Comus on the appropriate comportment toward food: "And that which is not good, is not delicious / To a well-govern'd and wise appetite" (p. 106, ll.

704-5). The restraint that the Lady advocates is established in stark contrast to the behavior of pigs, for nothing could be further from indiscriminate, pig-like consumption—Topsell remarks the pig’s “continual feeding upon evil things” (679)—than the Lady’s “well-govern’d and wise appetite.”

Driving home the extent to which the pig represents immoral sensuality in *Comus*, imagery related to pigs is conscripted to represent the entire material world, in opposition to the heavens. In the Attendant Spirit’s opening speech, he contrasts his home in the heavens with

this dim spot,
Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care
Confin’d and pester’d in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail and Feverish being,
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives
After this mortal change, to her true Servants
Amongst the enthron’d gods on Sainted seats. (p. 90, ll. 5-11)

The Oxford English Dictionary lists Milton’s use of *pinfold* as an example of an “extended use” of the word to mean “a place of confinement,” “pen,” or “trap.” More properly, the word denotes “a pound for animals.”⁶⁸ The prevalence of references to pigs throughout *Comus*, and especially the Attendant Spirit’s subsequent use of the phrase “sensual sty” (p. 91, l. 77), make it almost inevitable that the figuration of Earth as a “pinfold” conjures the image of a pigsty, specifically. Likewise, a reference to pigs can be detected in the phrase “low-thoughted care” because the Attendant Spirit’s subsequent claim that Circe changes each human victim’s “upright shape” into

⁶⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “pinfold” (entry dated June 2006). Merrit Y. Hughes gives the following definition for *pinfold* in his edition of *Comus*: “literally, a pen for animals.” See *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, by John Milton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 90 n.

the form of “a groveling Swine” (p. 91, l. 53) invokes the Ovidian distinction between bipedal humans, who “behold the heaven with count’nance cast on high” (1.99), and quadrupedal animals, who “behold the ground with grovelling eye” (1.97). To be “low-thoughted,” in the symbolism of Milton’s *Comus*, is to be like a “groveling Swine.” Accordingly, the Lady indicts a personified “swinish gluttony” for “besotted *base* ingratitude” (p. 108, ll. 776 and 778; my italics). Finally, the Attendant Spirit says that, in descending to Earth, he must “soil these pure Ambrosial weeds / With the rank vapors of this Sin-worn mold” (p. 90, ll. 16-7). Dirt and “rank vapors,” of course, loom large in descriptions of the pigsty, providing further, corroborating evidence that the Attendant Spirit regards Earth as a pigsty, specifically.

Refusing the offer of a non-human shape and existence, Milton’s Lady represents the antithesis of Comus’s band, who seem like pigs to her, and of Plutarch’s Gryllus, who prefers to be a pig rather than a human. Unlike Gryllus and his literary descendants, the Lady cannot claim to base her decision on firsthand experience of both human and animal states, but the Lady’s decision seems justified to the extent that Milton succeeds in persuading readers to acknowledge similarities between Comus’s band and the reviled pig. Plutarch’s Odysseus pioneers but then abandons this *ad hominem* strategy. Milton, in contrast, emphasizes the reviled status of the pig and assimilates Comus’s band to pigs throughout *Comus*, with the result that Comus’s band seem incontrovertibly deluded and depraved in preferring non-human forms. Ironically, Milton departs most from his ancient sources not in diversifying the cast of animals, as the Attendant Spirit’s exposition suggests, but rather in unrelentingly emphasizing the piggishness of his transformed creatures.

William Browne’s *Inner Temple Masque* (1614), which features Circe, provides an instructive contrast to Milton’s *Comus*, for not merely a pig but specifically Gryllus, identified

by name and attributed to Plutarch, plays a conspicuous role. Circe's victims, who have been transformed fully or partially into a variety of creatures, make their first appearance to the accompaniment of a song, which begins,

Come yee whose hornes the cuckold weares,
 The whittoll too with asses eares,
 Let the Wolfe leave howling,
 The Baboone his scowling,
 And *Grillus* hye
 Out of his sty.⁶⁹

The following stanza uses another couplet, with a new pair of rhyming words, to reinforce the association of Gryllus with the pigsty: “Nor *Grillus* scoffe / From the hogge troughe” (p. 18). The song's fourth and final stanza expresses a wish for any audience member who disapproves of the antimasque: “May he still lye / In *Grillus* sty / Or weare for ever the Asses eares” (p. 19). That is, the song hopes that any disapproving audience member will himself come to resemble an animal, either by placement in Gryllus's characteristic abode or by partial transformation into an ass, like Midas. The stage directions, however, seem ignorant of a crucial distinction between Homer's and Plutarch's treatments of transformation as they identify the creatures of the antimasque as “such as by *Circe* were supposed to have been transformed (havinge the mindes of men still)” (19). Indeed, even as the stage directions carefully identify the source of the character Gryllus, they continue to assimilate Gryllus to the Homeric model, in which transformation affects bodies only, by including “*Grillus* (of whom *Plutarch* writes in his *Moralles*) in the shape

⁶⁹ William Browne, *Circe and Ulysses: The Inner Temple Masque*, ed. Gwyn Jones (Great Britain: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1954), page 18, no line numbers. Subsequent citations appear in text by page number.

of a hogge” (21) among the cast for the antimasque. After dancing with the other creatures, Gryllus abruptly disappears and then becomes the subject of a new song, making him an even more conspicuous character in Browne’s masque:

Grillus is gone, belike he hath hearde
 The dayry-maid knocke at the trough in the yearde.
 Through thicke and thinne he wallowes,
 And weighes nor deptes nor shallowes.
 Harke how he whynes:
 Run all ‘ere he dines,
 Then serve him a tricke
 For being so quicke,
 And lette him for all his paines
 Behold you turne cleane off
 His troughe,
 And spill all his wash and his grains. (21)

Despite the stage directions’ implication that Gryllus is a human in an animal body, the song gives Gryllus the pig’s qualities, especially gluttony, and characteristic behaviors, especially wallowing. The song then develops comparisons of humans to Gryllus, continuing earlier implications that some audience members may deserve transformation into pigs:

And now ‘tis wish’d that all such as hee
 Were rootinge with him at the trough or the tree.
 Fly, fly, from our pure fountains
 To the dark vales or the mountaines.

Liste some one whynes
 With voice like a swines,
 As angry that none
 With *Grillus* is gone,
 Or that he is lefte behinde.
 O let there be no staye
 In his waye,
 To hinder the Boare from his kinde. (22)

The song urges any pig-like humans to follow Gryllus's example and depart. Undesirable behavior in the audience is condemned not only by calling upon images of pigs in general but also by comparing humans with Plutarch's Gryllus in particular.

Milton's Circean masque, in contrast, distinguishes clearly between Homeric and Plutarchian motifs, associating the former with Circe and the latter with Comus. In this way, Milton seems to have been a more astute reader and adapter of Homer's and Plutarch's Circe episodes. Unlike Browne, however, Milton offers no clues that explicitly affiliate his masque with Plutarch's dialogue. Whereas Browne's admittedly less sophisticated adaptation of the Circe episode foregrounds the pig Gryllus and acknowledges, in stage directions, Gryllus's provenance, the expository matter delegated to Milton's Attendant Spirit underestimates the role of the pig in Milton's masque. Readers who trust the Attendant Spirit to provide guidance for comparing the transformations of Comus with those of Circe miss the crucial, unacknowledged role of Plutarch's Gryllus in generating the central concepts and moralistic judgments of Milton's masque.

Conclusion

Although Milton seems interested in distinguishing Comus's transformed creatures from the pigs that, according to the Attendant Spirit, are typical of Circe's transformations, Milton, no less than Spenser, compares immoral humans, including Comus's transformed creatures, to pigs. These comparisons of immoral humans to pigs decide debates about the relative merits of human and animal existences in favor of humans and thus bolster humanist philosophy. Indeed, comparisons of immoral humans to pigs can even be said to foreclose such debates, which occupy the majority of Plutarch's dialogue and Gelli's *Circe* but which barely occur at all in book 2 of *The Faerie Queene* and *Comus*.

The absence of pigs is not adequate, of course, to create a critique of humanist philosophy. Because of the irredeemably negative significance of comparisons of humans to pigs in early modern thought, however, avoiding pigs may be necessary in order to produce and sustain the critiques of humanism in transformation stories such as Gelli's *Circe* and La Fontaine's "Companions of Ulysses."

CHAPTER 4

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE HOUYHNNHM:
ETHICAL TREATMENT FOR HORSES IN *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

While the next chapter treats Gulliver as an ironic Gryllus figure, this chapter acknowledges that *Gulliver's Travels* broaches the topic of the ethical treatment of animals more urgently than earlier transformation narratives in the Plutarchian tradition. At a few moments, Gelli's *Circe* does consider the human treatment of animals. For instance, the oyster, a former fisherman, remarks, "I would have willyngly put my selfe to any more heinous occupation, so that I mought not have labored, esteming it to be an arte of oxen, who alwaies laboure, and when they can no more, are then knocked on the hed with a betell."¹ Although the oyster's remark resembles an observation that Swift's Gulliver makes about horses, *Gulliver's Travels* develops a complex argument about the human treatment of horses, whereas Gelli's *Circe* addresses the human treatment of animals in a relatively desultory way.

As Swift's Gulliver concludes his travelogue, he promises "To lament the Brutality of *Houyhnhnms* in my own Country, but always treat their Persons with Respect, for the sake of my noble Master, his Family, his Friends, and the whole *Houyhnhnm* Race, whom these of ours have the Honour to resemble in all their Lineaments, however their Intellectuals came to degenerate."² As this quotation indicates, Gulliver's experiences among the houyhnhnms, the rational equines

¹ Giovanni Battista Gelli, *Circes of John Baptista Gello, Florentine. Translated out of Italion into Englishe by Henry Iden* (Imprinted at London in Poules Churchyarde, at the signe of the holy ghost by John Cawood, printer to the Quenes Majestie, 1557), 22-3. I have assigned numbers to the pages of this edition, beginning with the title page.

² Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (New York: Norton, 2002), 249. Subsequent citations appear in text.

that he encounters on his final voyage, prompt him to extend ethical treatment to horses upon his return to England. According to Christian theology, Cartesian philosophy, and other influential contemporary European perspectives, unique attributes of the human, such as ensoulment, reason, and language, justify the exploitation of other animals.³ Gulliver departs significantly from these perspectives by regarding the “Brutality” of English horses as a subject for “lament” and by suggesting that horses are entitled to “Respect.” Furthermore, when Gulliver uses the word “Persons” in reference to horses, he attributes to them a subjective status that is usually reserved for humans alone.⁴

Gulliver’s unorthodox attitude toward horses originates in his confusion of horses with houyhnhnms, whom Gulliver frequently describes as “Noble” (225) or “admirable” (218). Although Gulliver notes the discrepancy between the intellectual abilities of horses and houyhnhnms, he considers horses and houyhnhnms members of one species because of their physical similarities. He remarks that horses “resemble” houyhnhnms “in all their Lineaments” and accounts for their intellectual differences with a theory of degeneration. Gulliver does not even refer to houyhnhnms and horses by different names; he uses the word “*Houyhnhnms*” for both types of equine. He resolves to respect horses “for the sake of” the houyhnhnms, as though admiration for the houyhnhnms entails a new comportment toward horses—and as though horses

³ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 30-6.

⁴ Two definitions of “person” seem relevant to Gulliver’s use of the word: “The self, being, or individual personality of a man or woman” and “the body regarded as distinct from the mind or soul.” *The Oxford English Dictionary* includes both definitions under the heading “A human being, and related senses.” See Online ed., s.v. “person” (entry dated June 2010). Mary Midgley points out that the modern conception of a person as “a rational being, capable of choice and therefore endowed with dignity, worthy of respect, having rights” derives from Kant. See *Utopias, Dolphins, and Computers: Problems in Philosophical Plumbing* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 111. Gulliver’s pre-Kantian usage of “person” nevertheless seems both to give horses a human-like status and to imply that this status entitles them to ethical treatment.

participate in houyhnhnm nobility by virtue of the equine form that they share.

Gulliver's equation of houyhnhnms and horses is problematic not only because his theory about equine degeneration is conjectural but also because the assertion that the resemblance of horses to houyhnhnms ennobles horses is arbitrary. Gulliver might just as plausibly have made the opposite claim: that the resemblance of houyhnhnms to horses degrades the houyhnhnms. Indeed, in the analogous case of the relationship between humans and the intellectually inferior yahoos, whom the houyhnhnms believe to have degenerated from humans (249), the physical resemblance of the two species degrades humans instead of ennobling yahoos. Further illustrating the asymmetry in attitudes toward the two pairs of physically similar species, no character in *Gulliver's Travels* ever suggests better treatment of yahoos because of their similarity to humans.

Such problems and inconsistencies indicate that Swift means to satirize the conflation of horses with houyhnhnms that motivates Gulliver's newfound "Respect" for horses; however, part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* ultimately recommends better treatment for horses in another way. In imagining the houyhnhnms, Swift draws upon traditional representations of the horse as the noblest animal and dramatizes their incongruity with the contemporary treatment of horses as beasts of burden. Considering part 4 in terms of the particularly problematic place of the horse in European culture not only demonstrates that part 4 undermines common justifications for the exploitation of horses but also provides an explanation for Swift's decision to model his rational non-humans on horses, rather than any other animals. Furthermore, an analysis of part 4 in these terms reveals an unusual, pre-modern perspective on animal welfare, for the ethical claims of horses in part 4 are generated primarily by a critique of inconsistencies in discourse about horses—not by assertions about the ontological status of horses, which Swift satirizes Gulliver

for making.⁵

Modern arguments for animal welfare almost invariably begin from premises about the ontological status of animals.⁶ This pattern is evident already in Jeremy Bentham's influential assertion that, with animals, "the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?"⁷ Continuing the utilitarian tradition, Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) belabors an ontological distinction between animals and objects after citing Bentham's famous question: "A stone does not have interests because it cannot suffer."⁸ In *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), meanwhile, Tom Regan proposes that a creature has "inherent value" if it meets his "subject-of-a-life criterion," which requires a creature to have certain psychological faculties.⁹ Addressing limitations of earlier theories of animal welfare, Martha Nussbaum's *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (2006) continues to emphasize the ontological status of animals: her neo-Aristotelian "capabilities approach," she writes, "wants to see each thing flourish as the sort of thing it is."¹⁰ Despite significant differences among these

⁵ For a different account, see Sarah Wintle, "If Houyhnhnms Were Horses: Thinking with Animals in Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*," *The Critical Review* 34 (1994): 3-21. Wintle's essay considers part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* "a prototypical text in the animal rights movement" (17) because confusion of horses with houyhnhnms tends to recommend better treatment for horses (see especially 12-3, 17).

⁶ Throughout, I use "animal welfare" as a general term for all philosophies advocating ethical treatment of animals. For a more typical use of "animal welfare" to name the utilitarian perspective, understood in opposition to the rights-based perspective, see Tom Regan, "The Rights of Humans and Other Animals," *Ethics & Behavior* 7.2 (1997), 107.

⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation. Printed in the Year 1780, and Now First Published* (London: Printed for T. Payne, and Son, at the Mews Gate, 1789), cccix n. Thomas discusses Bentham's question as an influential example of the eighteenth century's "new emphasis on sensation and feeling as the true basis for a claim to moral consideration." See *Man and the Natural World*, 176, 180.

⁸ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1990), 8.

⁹ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 243.

¹⁰ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, Mass.; and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 349.

approaches, they all begin from premises about the ontological status of animals, as though such premises are fundamental to the modern engagement with animal welfare.

Over 50 years before Bentham poses his famous question, Jonathan Swift broaches the topic of the ethical treatment of horses in part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift's satire of human attitudes toward horses anticipates later interest in the ethical treatment of the horse, which becomes one of the first non-human species to receive legal protection in England in 1822.¹¹ Swift, however, avoids the ontological premises that become inevitable for the modern animal-welfare movement, from Bentham to the 21st century. Instead, Swift focuses on hypocrisies specific to the human-horse relationship, suggesting that human beliefs about equine nobility do not accord well with the exploitation of horses as menial laborers. In the following discussion, I argue that the horse is uniquely placed in European culture not only to motivate Swift to model his society of rational non-humans on horses, rather than on any other animals, but also to generate Swift's pre-modern engagement with animal welfare, which satirizes inconsistencies in representations of the horse in particular instead of making claims about the ontological status of animals in general. To position Swift's distinctive approach, I analyze representations of the noble horse in natural histories and an equestrian manual by William Cavendish before offering a reading of part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels*. In the conclusion, I speculate on the potential value of this reading not only for literary critics but also for the animal-welfare movement's historians and activists.

The Natural History of the Horse

¹¹ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 149.

R. S. Crane has already offered a persuasive but nevertheless incomplete explanation of the significance of horses in part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels*. He argues that Swift's portrayal of the houyhnhnm/yahoo relationship, which inverts the human/horse relationship, is motivated by the logic books that Swift studied at Trinity College, in which the horse appears as the favored example of the irrational animals and the primary foil of the human, the rational animal.¹² Crane detects a direct statement of Swift's intent to challenge these textbook definitions of humans and horses in two of his letters to Alexander Pope.¹³ In a letter dated 29 September 1725, Swift writes, "I have got Materials Towards a Treatise proving the falsity of that Definition animal rationale, and to show it should be only *rationis capax*. Upon this great foundation of Misanthropy (though not Timons manner) the whole building of my Travells is erected."¹⁴ In a letter dated 26 November 1725, Swift also mentions the definition of the human as the rational animal: "I tell you after all that I do not hate Mankind, it is vous autr[e]s who hate them because you would have them reasonable Animals, and are Angry for being disappointed. I have always rejected that Definition and made another of my own."¹⁵ Since Swift writes these letters in the months prior to the publication of *Gulliver's Travels*, Crane persuasively argues that Swift intends to invert the commonplaces of logic textbooks as he creates his society of talking equines and domesticated anthropoids.¹⁶

As Crane suggests, the logic textbooks provide an important context for the prominent

¹² R. S. Crane, "The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas," in *Reason and the Imagination: Studies in the History of Ideas, 1600-1800*, ed. Joseph Anthony Mazzeo (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 243-9.

¹³ Crane, "The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas," 250.

¹⁴ David Woolley, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.* (New York: P. Lang, 1999), 2:607.

¹⁵ Woolley, ed., *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 2:623. I reproduce the bracketed "e" from Woolley's edition.

¹⁶ Crane, "The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas," 250.

role of horses in *Gulliver's Travels*, but his argument can be extended on two fronts. First, the logic textbooks pose the same interpretative dilemma that they supposedly solve for the literary text. Crane cites the logic textbooks to explain why Swift explores human nature in relation to the horse rather than another animal, but the deployment of horses in the logic textbooks also demands explication.¹⁷ The logic textbooks cannot provide a simple answer to questions about the significance of horses in *Gulliver's Travels* because all of these texts participate in a broad and complex cultural phenomenon: the exploration of human identity specifically in relation to horse identity. Second, the range of sources that Crane cites suggests that he believes that the horse has had a timeless significance in Western culture. Crane derives his earliest example of the comparison of humans with horses from Porphyry's *Isagoge*, dating to the 3rd century CE, and his latest example from Narcissus Marsh's *Institutio logicae*, originally published in 1679.¹⁸ While the similarity of these chronologically distant texts is striking, the relationship between humans and horses has varied over time; and the deployment of the comparison of humans with horses has a different meaning depending on its historical context. To understand the significance of Swift's houyhnhnms, readers need to understand the history of the human relationship to horses in England around the publication of *Gulliver's Travels* in 1726.

That history is complex, but five developments seem particularly important. First, as Keith Thomas explains, Europeans exploited animals for labor to a far greater extent than the peoples of other continents, and even among European countries, England was notable for its exploitation of animal labor.¹⁹ Thomas writes, "Nowhere in Europe was this dependence upon

¹⁷ For a helpful discussion of the problems with using historical documents to explain features of literary texts, see Jean E. Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," *English Literary Renaissance* 16.1 (1986), especially 18, 24-7.

¹⁸ Crane, "The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas," 247-51.

¹⁹ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 25.

animals greater than in England, which, certainly by the eighteenth century and probably much earlier, had a higher ratio of domestic beasts per cultivated acre and per man than any other country, save the Netherlands.”²⁰ Second, English monarchs, beginning with Henry VIII, deliberately cultivated England’s horse stock for their military campaigns, and Elizabeth I even established a Special Commission for the Increase and Breed of Horses in 1580.²¹ As a result, England’s horses, which were below international standards in 1500, improved noticeably in strength and size by 1700.²² Third, these changes, though small in the history of the horse’s evolution,²³ altered patterns of animal exploitation in England: while both oxen and horses commonly served as animal laborers around 1500, improvements in horse stock caused the horse to emerge as England’s primary beast of burden by 1750.²⁴ Fourth, the introduction of coaches to England in the 1550s led to revolutions in transportation that expanded the exploitation of horses.²⁵ Londoners could travel around the city by hackney cab soon after 1600.²⁶ Furthermore, Peter Edwards writes, “By the end of the seventeenth century coachmasters had established a national network of coaching services, running throughout the year and at fixed times.”²⁷ Fifth and finally, Edwards shows that horses were increasingly subjected to ill treatment over the early modern period. The practice of gelding horses became significantly more popular in England

²⁰ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 26.

²¹ Joan Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England: For Service, for Pleasure, for Power* (University of Reading, 1978), 12-3, 15-6, 26; Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England* (London: Continuum, 2007), 7-8, 180.

²² Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England*, 26-7; Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 7-8, 180.

²³ For a useful and accessible account of the horse’s evolution, see Stephen Budiansky, *The Nature of Horses: Exploring Equine Evolution, Intelligence, and Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1997), especially 16-38.

²⁴ Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 183-5, 209.

²⁵ Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 213.

²⁶ Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 226.

²⁷ Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 233.

during the 17th and 18th centuries.²⁸ In addition, horses were broken and forced to mate at younger ages, despite the warnings of agricultural and equestrian manuals.²⁹

In sum, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the horse becomes increasingly prominent in what Rosi Braidotti would call England's "zooproletariat."³⁰ As Edwards writes, "Mankind exploited horses in numerous ways, to the extent that early modern society would not have functioned very effectively without them."³¹ England was particularly notorious for its treatment of horses,³² which were well on their way to becoming the preferred beasts of burden as Swift composed *Gulliver's Travels*. Horses would continue to be especially conspicuous victims of human cruelty in the generations after Swift: Harriet Ritvo remarks that horses were "the most frequent victims of prosecuted offenses against the animal protection laws" that were instituted in the 19th century.³³

Well before horses receive legal protection, however, Swift perceives the exploitation of horses to contradict with the horse's reputation as the noblest animal. When Swift exposes this contradiction in part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels*, he implicitly critiques the representation of horses in natural histories, which tend to use equine nobility to justify the exploitation of horses, as though the natural histories deem the treatment of horses to be consistent with the high admiration that horses conventionally receive.

Although *Gulliver* suggests that the similarity of horses to houyhnhnms ennobles horses and entitles them to better treatment from their English masters, nobility is already one of the

²⁸ Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 46-7.

²⁹ Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 49, 242-3.

³⁰ Rosi Braidotti, "Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others," *PMLA* 124.2 (2009), 528. Provocatively, Braidotti's neologism acknowledges animals as an exploited socioeconomic class.

³¹ Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 241.

³² Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 100.

³³ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 145.

most essential characteristics of the horse in natural histories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, the idea of the noble horse is so enduring that it survives two revolutions in the study of living things in this period and appears with surprising continuity in such representative and important works as Edward Topsell's *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (1607), Joannes Jonston's *Description of the Nature of Four-Footed Beasts* (1650), and the comte de Buffon's *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, published in successive volumes beginning in 1749. Only with Buffon, and then only inconsistently, does the nobility of the horse create the unorthodox ethical obligations that Gulliver feels. For earlier natural historians and often for Buffon, as well, equine nobility works paradoxically to justify the exploitation of horses as laborers.

The first revolution in the study of living things occurs less than 20 years before Swift's birth; the second, during his lifetime. According to William Ashworth, Renaissance natural historians "see an animal as a symbol, a character, in some greater language of nature."³⁴ This "emblematic" paradigm of natural history is characterized by "the belief that every kind of thing in the cosmos has myriad hidden meanings and that knowledge consists of an attempt to comprehend as many of these as possible."³⁵ Like Michel Foucault, Ashworth locates a shift to a new paradigm of natural history at the publication of Joannes Jonston's *Description of the Nature of Four-Footed Beasts* in 1650.³⁶ For Foucault, Jonston's natural history marks the transition from viewing living creatures as symbols for interpretation to viewing them as objects

³⁴ William B. Ashworth, Jr., "Emblematic Natural History of the Renaissance," in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and E. C. Spary (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36.

³⁵ William B. Ashworth, Jr., "Natural History and the Emblematic World View," in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 312.

³⁶ Ashworth, "Natural History and the Emblematic World View," 317. Ashworth points out that Foucault mistakenly dates Jonston's text to 1657 rather than 1650 (330 n. 41).

for systematic classification.³⁷ Ashworth offers a similar account of this paradigmatic shift: “naturalists abandoned the entire associative framework and began to focus on description and anatomical investigation, with the ultimate goal of a natural system of classification.”³⁸ The second revolution in the study of living things occurs inside this classificatory paradigm. As Phillip Sloan argues, Carolus Linnaeus inaugurates a significantly new stage in natural history in 1735 when he becomes the first scientist to place human beings among the other animals in a taxonomic scheme.³⁹

Remarkably, both admiration of the horse’s nobility and justification of the horse’s servile role survive these considerable disruptions in the practice of natural history. This conjunction is foregrounded, though not recognized as paradoxical, in the opening paragraph of Topsell’s entry on the horse.⁴⁰ He declares, “we must needs account it the most noble and necessary creature of all foure-footed-beasts, before whom no one for multitude and generality of good qualities is to be preferred, compared or equaled, whose commendations shal appeare in the whole discourse following” (281). Topsell also writes that the horse has “a singular body and a Noble spirit, the principal wherof is a louing and dutifull inclination to the seruice of man” (281). Elisabeth LeGuin has claimed that “Characterizations of horses as noble and quasi-human” arise

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 128-9, 144-5.

³⁸ Ashworth, “Emblematic Natural History of the Renaissance,” 35.

³⁹ Phillip Sloan, “The Gaze of Natural History,” in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, ed. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1995), 118, 121.

⁴⁰ Ashworth takes Conrad Gesner’s *Historia animalium* (1551-8) as his primary example of the “emblematic” paradigm because of its unrivalled popularity. See “Emblematic Natural History of the Renaissance,” 17. In a dedication, Topsell acknowledges his reliance on Gesner: “I have followed *D. Gesner* as neer as I could, I do professe him my Author in most of my stories.” See *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (London: printed by William Jaggard, 1607), ix. I have assigned Roman numerals to Topsell’s unnumbered pages of prefatory materials, beginning with the title page. Subsequent citations appear in text.

from their “extremely resourceful resistance to subjection, a quality long associated with moral integrity in humans.”⁴¹ For Topsell, in contrast, the nobility of the horse consists in its happy obedience to human beings, not in freedom from servitude. When he calls the horse “the most noble and necessary creature,” Topsell yokes together praise of the horse’s nobility and a claim about its value to humans, as though the exploitation of horses is entirely consistent with equine nobility.

This conception of the horse depends on Topsell’s interpretation of the creation story in Genesis. In this respect, Topsell resembles the many early modern writers who find theological justifications for the exploitation of animals.⁴² The account of creation in Genesis lists three types of terrestrial animals: “cattell, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth.”⁴³ Claiming to follow Genesis, Topsell suggests a rudimentary classification of the terrestrial animals into three groups, with “cattell” classified as “*Iumentum*” (v). This category dates at least to the fourth-century Basilus, who, a fourteenth-century follower explains, “calleth tame beastes *Iumenta*, and sayth, that they be beastes graunted and ordeyned to vse and to helpe of mankinde.”⁴⁴ As “the most noble and necessary creature of all foure-footed-beasts,” the horse is the foremost member of the *jumenta*, an entire class of animals that God has created specifically to perform labor for humans.

Even though Jonston’s *Description of the Nature of Four-Footed Beasts* marks the shift from an interest in animal symbolism to a more recognizably modern interest in scientific

⁴¹ Elisabeth LeGuin, “Man and Horse in Harmony,” in *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World*, ed. Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 184.

⁴² Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 17-25.

⁴³ Gen. 1:24 (Authorized Version, 1611).

⁴⁴ Quoted in Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 93.

classification,⁴⁵ Jonston represents the horse much as Topsell does. While Topsell organizes his entries alphabetically by animal, Jonston explains in a preface that his natural history proceeds according to a sophisticated classificatory scheme that organizes animals into increasingly small groups based on their anatomical similarities.⁴⁶ Despite Jonston's effort at systematic organization, concerns other than those of objective science determine the placement of the horse at the beginning of his natural history. Jonston writes, "Wee begin with the *Horse*, which hath the preeminence among the labouring beasts, called *jumenta* from *juvando*, or helpfulnesse" (1). Jonston's assertion that the horse "hath the preeminence among the labouring beasts" perpetuates the conception of the horse's unrivaled nobility, as does his decision to give the horse pride of place in the sequence of entries in his natural history. Singling out the horse as the foremost member of the *jumenta*, Jonston also recapitulates theological arguments for the exploitation of horses—in spite of his supposed dedication to the objective classification of animals.

Although Buffon's work post-dates *Gulliver's Travels*, his incoherent treatment of equine nobility and servitude contrasts instructively with Swift's sharp delineation of hypocrisies in the human-horse relationship. Buffon continues the tradition of foregrounding the human/horse relationship well beyond the rise of interest in the human/ape relationship, which increasingly preoccupies Europeans in the eighteenth and succeeding centuries.⁴⁷ As Sloan explains, Buffon

⁴⁵ Ashworth, "Emblematic Natural History of the Renaissance," 35.

⁴⁶ John Johnston, *A Description of the Nature of Four-Footed Beasts*, trans. J. P. (Amsterdam: printed for the widow of John Jacobsen Schipper, and Stephen Swart, 1678), vii. I have assigned Roman numerals to Jonston's unnumbered pages of prefatory materials, beginning with the title page. Subsequent citations appear in text.

⁴⁷ H. W. Janson argues that European preoccupation with apes dates to Edward Tyson's *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris* (1699). See *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, The University of London, 1952), 336. On the new prominence of the ape in discussions of the human/animal relationship in the eighteenth century, see also Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 225-31; and Laura Brown,

rejects the approach of Linnaeus, who classifies humans with apes, and instead organizes living things according to their degree of familiarity to humans: “The creatures closest to man in terms of this ‘relational’ epistemology are those of most immediate epistemological acquaintance—the familiar domestic animals and plants near to us in our own locality and climate.”⁴⁸ Considering the increasing dependence of early modern Europeans upon horses, it should not be surprising that Buffon’s natural history proceeds from the entry on the human to the entry on the horse, with only a general discussion of animals and a more specific introduction to domesticated animals in between the two entries.

Compared with Topsell’s and Jonston’s works, Buffon’s natural history displays considerably more ambivalence about the exploitation of horses as laborers. Instead of using the biblically inspired category *jumenta* to classify the horse and other domesticated animals, Buffon enjoins the natural historian to distinguish carefully between the natures of animals and the identities that they develop under domestication: in the section titled “Of Domestic Animals,” Buffon writes, “it is the duty of the naturalist to examine them with care, and to distinguish those facts which depend solely on instinct, from those that originate from education; to ascertain what is proper to them from what is borrowed; to separate artifice from Nature; and never to confound the animal with the slave, the beast of burden with the creature of God.”⁴⁹ Implicitly rejecting the concept *jumenta*, which does make an animal’s identity as “beast of burden” coincide with its identity as “creature of God,” Buffon introduces the possibility of critiquing not only the

Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes: Humans and Other Animals in the Modern Literary Imagination (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), especially 27-63.

⁴⁸ Sloan, “The Gaze of Natural History,” 129-30. For Linnaeus’s classification of humans alongside primates and—more oddly—sloths and anteaters, see 121.

⁴⁹ Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular*, trans. William Smellie, 2nd ed., vol. 3 of 9 (London: printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1785), 301-2. Subsequent citations of this volume appear in text.

treatment of domesticated animals but also the institution of domestication itself.

Following the method outlined in “Of Domestic Animals,” Buffon’s entry on the horse distinguishes the wild horse from the equine subject of domestication—often in ways that reflect unfavorably on the exploitation of horses as laborers. To discover the horse’s nature, Buffon considers horses that have become wild again in the new world:

Examine those horses which have multiplied so prodigiously in Spanish America, and live in perfect freedom. Their motions are neither constrained nor measured. Proud of their independence, they fly from the presence of man, and disdain all his care. They search for, and procure the food that is most salutary and agreeable. They wander and frisk about in immense meadows, and collect the fresh productions of a perpetual spring. Without any fixed habitation, or other shelter than a serene sky, they breathe a purer air than in those musty vaults in which we confine them, when subjected to our dominion. Hence wild horses are stronger, lighter, and more nervous than most of those which are in a domestic state. The former possess force and dignity, which are the gifts of Nature; the latter have only address and gracefulness, which are all that art can bestow. (308)

While Buffon’s admiration of wild horses develops earlier conceptions of horses as noble, the passage seems to reject assumptions that serving humans befits equine nobility. Buffon’s inference that wild horses feel “Proud of their independence” attributes to horses a nobility that becomes explicit at the end of the passage, where Buffon admires the “dignity” of horses. The attitude of “disdain” that wild horses take toward humans not only provides further evidence of equine nobility but also dramatizes the inconsistency between that nobility and domestication.

Especially because of the extent to which Buffon admires wild horses, he seems to

lament their domestication when he writes, “The slavery of the horse is so ancient and so universal, that he is rarely seen in a natural state” (307). Buffon’s description of the domesticated horse emphasizes the indignities of equine exploitation:

When employed in labour, he is always covered with the harness; and, even during the time destined for repose, he is never entirely delivered from bonds. If sometimes permitted to roam in the pasture, he always bears the marks of servitude, and often the external impressions of labour and pain. His mouth is deformed by the perpetual friction of the bit; his sides are galled with wounds, or furrowed with cicatrices; and his hoofs are pierced with nails. (307)

Although these intimations of equine suffering anticipate Bentham’s approach to animal welfare, the passage also criticizes the treatment of horses by contrasting the domesticated horse’s many “marks of servitude” with the wild horse’s nobility.

In Buffon’s strongest assertion of the horse’s nobility, he suggests that the horse resents its subhuman status: “He elevates his head, as if anxious to exalt himself above the condition of quadrupeds. In this noble attitude, he regards man face to face” (329). This striking image, in which human and horse confront one another “face to face,” suggests that the exploitation of horses is inappropriate to their human-like nobility.

In many other passages, however, Buffon reverts to the claim of the earlier natural histories that the horse is a natural servant for humans. Despite his characterization of wild horses, Buffon also declares “horses to be naturally of gentle dispositions, and much disposed to associate with man” (313). Buffon even insists that horses “seem uniformly to prefer bondage to liberty” (313). This claim is impossible to reconcile with admiration of wild horses and tragic portrayals of domestication in other passages of Buffon’s text.

For Louise E. Robbins, Buffon provides an important example of newly incoherent attitudes toward animals in eighteenth-century France. She writes, “Alongside language lauding domination and domestication, a contradictory strain became widespread in the eighteenth century—often in the very same texts—that portrayed animals as victims of the human race and exalted the freedom and independence of wild creatures.”⁵⁰ The new trend included sympathy for the servile existences of domesticated animals and admiration for the nobility of wild or incompletely domesticated species, such as the elephant.⁵¹ Robbins’s work enables us to understand Buffon’s incoherent treatment of the horse as a local example of “seeming contradictions” that “were not peculiar to Buffon” but rather “pervaded the literature on animals.”⁵² Furthermore, Robbins suggests that “the good master and happy servant model” can account for some inconsistencies in eighteenth-century attitudes toward domestication: “According to this model, animals would be content in a subservient position as long as they were properly handled.”⁵³

Robbins provides important contexts for Buffon’s treatment of the horse, but I would suggest that the horse occupies an especially paradoxical position by the eighteenth century because the long tradition of representing the horse as noble contrasts so dramatically with increasing exploitation of horses as beasts of burden over the early modern period.⁵⁴ While

⁵⁰ Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 189.

⁵¹ Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots*, 189-95. Robbins claims that this trend is stronger in France than in England (6, 195).

⁵² Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots*, 195.

⁵³ Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots*, 195-6.

⁵⁴ Donna Landry makes a somewhat similar claim about a particular breed of horses: “although they might at first seem entirely incompatible, nobility and brutality were the defining characteristics of Eastern blood horses and their progeny in eighteenth-century England. No other animal, except the human laborer, suffered from such a contradictory identity.” *Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins

Topsell and Jonston do not worry that the exploitation of the horse might not befit its nobility, Buffon's text betrays signs of anxiety about the inconsistency between admiration of horses and their treatment by humans, especially when Buffon imagines that the horse's up-turned head signifies its noble desire to transcend "the condition of quadrupeds" and claim the dignity usually reserved for the bipedal human. Likewise, contradictions between the horse's reputation and its treatment become almost impossible to ignore when Buffon writes, "the manners of a horse originate entirely from his education, which is accomplished by a care and industry bestowed by man upon no other animal; but he is amply rewarded by the perpetual services of this noble and laborious creature" (313). The pairing of "noble and laborious" as attributes of the horse verges on irony, as does the fact that the noble horse is the primary object of human efforts at domestication.

Asserting that admiration of equine nobility entitles horses to ethical treatment, Gulliver's final perspective on horses critiques common tendencies to admire the horse's nobility while justifying the exploitation of horses as laborers. Deliberate and forceful, Gulliver's critique contrasts markedly with the incoherent perspective of Buffon's later text. Admittedly, Gulliver is also an object of satire—not only because he misidentifies horses with houyhnhnms but also because he ignores the horse's own reputation for nobility as he claims that horses are ennobled by their resemblance to the houyhnhnms. Laughter at Gulliver's seeming ignorance, though, ultimately redounds on the natural histories; for if horses themselves are supposed to be such noble beings, then they also deserve more dignified treatment.

University Press, 2008), 6, see also 126. In contrast, my argument shows how horses, as a species, occupy a paradoxical position. For Landry's reading of *Gulliver's Travels* in relation to ideas about Eastern horses, and ideas about differences between Western and Eastern treatment of horses, see especially 123-48.

Teachable or Reasonable?: A Debate about Equine Intelligence

An equestrian manual by William Cavendish anticipates Swift by recognizing the contradiction between equine nobility and the exploitation of horses, but unlike Swift, Cavendish fully endorses the subordination of horses to humans. Born near 1590, Cavendish was a patron of literature, music, and science; a prominent Royalist general in the English Civil War; and an internationally renowned trainer of horses.⁵⁵ In 1658, he published a French equestrian manual, *La méthode nouvelle et Invention extraordinaire de dresser les chevaux*, which eventually appeared in English translation as *A General System of Horsemanship*.⁵⁶ According to Karen Raber, Cavendish's scientific aspirations distinguish his equestrian manual from those of other early modern writers, except for Antoine de Pluvinel.⁵⁷ Cavendish's manual also has special historical interest because he is early modern England's preeminent horse trainer, the only one to command respect abroad as well as in England.⁵⁸ These circumstances make Cavendish's perspective on horses—and especially on equine intelligence—uniquely authoritative and valuable.

Cavendish makes his crucial statement on equine nature in a section entitled “The

⁵⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Online ed., s.v. “Cavendish, William, first duke of Newcastle upon Tyne” (by Lynn Hulse), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4946> (entry dated 2004).

⁵⁶ In 1667, he published a second equestrian treatise, *A New Method, and Extraordinary Invention, to Dress Horses*. While this title is an English translation of the title of his French treatise, Karen Raber points out that the two treatises are otherwise different and should not be confused. See ““Reasonable Creatures”: William Cavendish and the Art of Dressage,” in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 63 n. 4; and “A Horse of a Different Color: Nation and Race in Early Modern Horsemanship Treatises,” in *The Culture of the Horse: Status, Discipline, and Identity in the Early Modern World*, ed. Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 241 n. 1.

⁵⁷ Raber, “Horse of a Different Color,” 226-7, 231-3.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 83.

Epitome of Horsemanship.” He writes, “The horse being, after man, the most noble of all animals (for he is as much superior to all other creatures as man is to him, and therefore holds a sort of middle place between man and the rest of the creation) he is wise and subtile; for which reason man ought carefully to preserve his empire over him, knowing how nearly that wisdom and subtilty approaches his own.”⁵⁹ Cavendish shares with the natural historians the conception of the horse as the noblest animal, but he treats the horse’s nobility as a threat to human dominance, not as a justification for the exploitation of horses. Although Cavendish recommends the maintenance of human authority, he perceives that authority as fragile. While the nature of the horse guarantees human authority for the natural historians, it challenges the stability, if not the legitimacy, of that authority for Cavendish.

Cavendish’s acknowledgement of the horse’s “wisdom and subtilty” illuminates the role that intelligence plays in conceptions of the horse as the noblest animal. In the natural histories, admiration of the horse’s teachableness contributes to impressions of equine nobility; yet natural historians differentiate equine intelligence from human reason and imply that equine intelligence is valuable in so far as it suits horses for service to humans. Topsell characterizes the horse in the following manner: “the naturall constitution of a Horsse, is whot and temperate. Whot, because of his Leuity, and Velocity, and length of life; temperate because he is docible, pleasant, and gentle towards his maister and keeper” (329). Choosing not to imagine a horse without a human “maister,” Topsell claims that the horse is naturally “docible”—that is, “Apt to be taught; teachable, docile; submissive to teaching or training, tractable.”⁶⁰ Jonston makes similar claims for horses when he writes, “Unto their *inward sences*, their witt, teachablenesse, memory, love,

⁵⁹ William Cavendish, *A General System of Horsemanship*, vol. 1 of 2 (London: printed for J. Brindley, 1743), 122. Subsequent citations appear in text.

⁶⁰ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “docible” (entry dated 1989).

and faithfulness towards their masters, chastity, and courage doe belong” (4). Buffon praises the horse as “Uniformly obedient” in the first paragraph of his entry (307), but with characteristic ambivalence, he subsequently writes that gelding produces “gentleness, tranquility, and docility” in horses (378).

In the mid-seventeenth century, the significance of the horse’s teachableness becomes a major point of contention between Cavendish and Descartes. In the history of European philosophy about animals, Descartes is well-known for viewing animals as machines.⁶¹ In a letter to Cavendish dated 23 November 1646, Descartes offers an account of animal training consistent with this view of animals.⁶² Descartes primarily addresses the case of the talking bird because of his belief that thought reveals itself only in “words, or other signs that are relevant to particular topics without expressing any passion.”⁶³ Nevertheless, Descartes includes the horse among his cast of remarkably teachable—but nevertheless unthinking—animals:

If you teach a magpie to say good-day to its mistress, when it sees her approach, this can only be by making the utterance of this word the expression of one of its

⁶¹ See, for instance, Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 148-9.

⁶² Scholars regard this letter as a crucial statement of Descartes’s views on animals and an important document for the growing field of animal studies. It has been excerpted in Linda Kalof and Amy J. Fitzgerald, eds., *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007), 59-60. Likewise, in a 2009 issue of *PMLA* featuring articles on animal studies, Laurie Shannon identifies the letter as one of three documents in which “Descartes develops the *bête-machine* doctrine.” See “The Eight Animals in Shakespeare; or, before the Human,” *PMLA* 124.2 (2009): 478 n. 6. The other two are a letter to Henry More, which Kalof and Fitzgerald also excerpt, and the fifth part of *A Discourse on the Method*.

⁶³ René Descartes, “From the Letter to [the Marquess of Newcastle], 23 November 1646,” in *Descartes: Philosophical Letters*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 206. Descartes’s *Discourse on the Method* claims that actions, as well as language, can provide evidence of rationality. See *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One’s Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. and ed. Ian Maclean (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 46-7. The letter to Cavendish, however, reduces the domain of reason’s expression to language alone.

passions. For instance it will be an expression of the hope of eating, if it has always been given a titbit when it says it. Similarly, all the things which dogs, horses, and monkeys are taught to perform are only expressions of their fear, their hope, or their joy; and consequently they can be performed without any thought.⁶⁴

In this account of a magpie's training, the magpie has learned not to perform a greeting but to express its hunger automatically by the words "good-day." Although the "mistress" may delight in the illusion that the magpie welcomes her arrival, the magpie's "good-day" has no more significance than an inarticulate squawk, or any vocalization prompted by the mechanical workings of the passions. Once Descartes has addressed the case of animals capable of imitating human speech, he even more confidently dismisses the intelligence of other commonly trained animals, such as "dogs, horses, and monkeys," who lack the human capacity for language in far more obvious ways than magpies.

Cavendish, in contrast, not only acknowledges the intelligence of horses but asserts that it is the same in quality—and quite close in quantity—to human intelligence. Contradicting Descartes's account of animal training, Cavendish makes the following assertion about the horse:

If he does not think (as the famous philosopher DES CARTES affirms of all beasts) it would be impossible to teach him what he should do. But by the hope of reward, and fear of punishment; when he has been rewarded or punished, he thinks of it, and retains it in his memory (for memory is thought) and forms a judgment by what is past of what is to come (which again is thought;) insomuch that he obeys his rider not only for fear of correction, but also in hopes of being cherish'd. But these are things so well known to a complete horseman, that it is

⁶⁴ Descartes, "From the Letter to [the Marquess of Newcastle], 23 November 1646," 207.

needless to say more on this subject. (12)

Cavendish agrees with Descartes that “hope of reward” and “fear of punishment” motivate animals; but he argues that reward and punishment can only affect the horse’s behavior because they provoke rational thought. The parenthetical asides noting manifestations of equine “thought” give the impression of Cavendish administering corrections to Descartes, the subject of the first parenthetical aside, and the passage thus suggests that Descartes, no less than the horse, requires instruction from the trainer.

Rejecting Descartes’s belief that rationality is coterminous with language, Cavendish writes, “Altho’ horses do not form their reasonings from the ABC, [...] they draw their reasonings from things themselves” (12). In his evaluation of equine intelligence, Cavendish attributes little importance to the linguistic limitations of horses. Indeed, despite the prominence of language in human education, evoked by Cavendish’s reference to “the ABC,” he compares the horse to a human pupil in his treatise’s first paragraph: “the horse is dress’d in the same manner that children are taught to read. The horse is taught first to know, and then by frequent repetition to convert that knowledge into habit. It is in like manner in what men learn” (11). While Descartes and the natural historians distinguish the horse’s teachableness from the human’s rationality, Cavendish’s recognition of the horse as a pupil makes rationality consist in the teachableness that humans and horses share.

Although Cavendish concedes that “the horse [has] less understanding than his rider” (105), he regards equine rationality as a matter of fact when he asserts “that a horse’s reason is to be wrought upon” (13). Cavendish also addresses “the Logicians distinction of reasonable and unreasonable creatures” (131), which, as Crane has shown, features the horse and influences

Swift during his composition of *Gulliver's Travels*.⁶⁵ Expressing contempt for “the Logicians,” Cavendish declares, “were they as good horsemen as scholars, they would have made another distinction” (131). As he claims that “horsemen” understand horses better than “scholars” do, Cavendish rejects commonplaces about the differences between human and equine intelligence.

Cavendish’s belief in the similarity of humans and horses entails an attitude toward equine exploitation that differs significantly from that of the natural historians. Rejecting the conception of the horse as the human’s natural servant, Cavendish writes, “subjection is not agreeable to a horse, nor to any other creature that I know; not even to men, who obey only because they cannot help it” (142). He also writes, “Force subdues men, as well as beasts. If the wisest man in the world were taken by a savage people, and put to draw in a cart proportion’d to his strength, and if he were beaten when he refused to do his duty, would not he draw just as a horse does when he is threaten’d?” (12). Cavendish tests common justifications for the exploitation of horses as laborers by imagining “the wisest man in the world” in the position of the beast of burden. Cavendish does not invert the human/horse hierarchy, for the human serves “a savage people,” not a species of rational equines like Swift’s houyhnhnms. Nevertheless, this imaginary scenario invites humans to identify with equine experience and drives home Cavendish’s point that docile obedience is a rational response to exploitation and punishment—not an aspect of the horse’s noble nature.

Cavendish does not recommend the emancipation of the horse from human rule; but his acknowledgment of the human-like qualities of the horse does seem to entail ethical treatment for horses. He declares, “The whole therefore is to make the horseman and his horse friends, and bring them to will the same thing” (105). This ideal of interspecies friendship departs

⁶⁵ Crane, “The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas,” 245-9.

significantly from orthodox perspectives about the qualitative differences between humans and animals.⁶⁶ A relevant and arguably influential passage from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* declares, "there can be no friendship, nor justice, towards inanimate things; indeed not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as slave. For master and slave have nothing in common: a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave."⁶⁷ For Aristotle and his followers, humans can neither befriend animals nor be morally accountable for their treatment of animals because humans and animals are qualitatively different kinds of beings. Even if Cavendish supports rather than challenges the hierarchy of human over horse, his regard for the horse as a potential friend to the human makes the horse a being that deserves much better treatment than a "living tool" that can be used without compunction.

The Human-Horse Relationship in "A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms"

When Gulliver returns to England from Houyhnhnmland, he adopts a posture of friendship toward horses similar to the one envisioned by Cavendish.⁶⁸ Gulliver, however, elevates horses to a more fully human status:

The first Money I laid out was to buy two young Stone-Horses which I keep in a good Stable, and next to them the Groom is my greatest Favourite; for I feel my

⁶⁶ Thomas discusses the belief of early moderns that animals are qualitatively different from, and absolutely inferior to, humans under the heading "human uniqueness." See *Man and the Natural World*, 30-6.

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, ed. T. E. Page, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 497.

⁶⁸ In "Before the Houyhnhnms: Rational Horses in the Late Seventeenth Century," Betsy Bowden presents evidence that Swift may have read Cavendish's equestrian manual and quotes passages that she deems especially relevant to *Gulliver's Travels*. See *Notes and Queries* 39 (237), no. 1 (1992): 38-40. Whether or not Swift knew of Cavendish's text, it provides many points for comparison with Swift's treatment of the horse.

Spirits revived by the Smell he contracts in the Stable. My horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four Hours every Day. They are Strangers to Bridle or Saddle, they live in great Amity with me, and Friendship to each other. (244)

Although Gulliver's purchase and keeping of these two horses testify to their subordination, he does not subject them to the treatment that horses usually receive. Instead of exploiting horses as laborers, Gulliver talks with them. His choice of "Stone-Horses" registers his objection to the practice of castrating horses. Similarly, his decision not to subject his horses to "Bridle" or "Saddle" implies that he regards even riding a horse as an inappropriate form of exploitation.

Talking with his horses "at least four Hours every Day" and declaring that they "understand me tolerably well," Gulliver seems comically indifferent to their intellectual and linguistic deficiencies as he accords them a status usually reserved for the human. Nevertheless, part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* ultimately suggests that admiration of equine nobility entitles horses to better treatment, regardless of whether they can reason or speak. Swift dramatizes the hypocrisy of exploiting the noble horse as a beast of burden by having Gulliver describe the treatment of English horses in the context of an inverted horse/trainer relationship with the houyhnhnm master and by implicitly contrasting justifications for the exploitation of horses with the more logically consistent justifications for the exploitation of yahoos.

Swift positions Gulliver in an inverted horse/trainer relationship over the course of his initial interactions with the houyhnhnms. In his first encounter with a houyhnhnm, Gulliver expects the houyhnhnm to be a normal horse and comports himself accordingly: "I took the Boldness, to reach my Hand towards his Neck, with a Design to stroak it, using the common Style and Whistle of Jockies when they are going to handle a strange Horse" (190). Since

Gulliver compares himself to “Jockies”—that is, horse-traders or horse-racers⁶⁹—he may intend to ride or otherwise tame the houyhnhnm. Indeed, Gulliver subsequently expresses his desire for the houyhnhnm “to let me ride upon his Back” (192). Gulliver and the houyhnhnm reverse roles, however, when Gulliver attempts to quit the interaction: the houyhnhnm, “observing me to steal off, neighed after me in so expressive a Tone, that I fancied myself to understand what he meant; whereupon I turned back, and came near him, to expect his farther Commands” (191). As Gulliver responds to the houyhnhnm’s call and puts himself at the houyhnhnm’s disposal, he takes the position of a docile horse in relation to a human handler. The inversion of the horse/trainer relation in this scene is especially dramatic and unmistakable because it follows Gulliver’s failed attempt to use rudimentary techniques of horse-handling on the houyhnhnm.⁷⁰

Tracking the changing names by which Gulliver designates this houyhnhnm, the first one that he meets, also demonstrates that Gulliver adopts the posture of horse to trainer in relation to the houyhnhnm.⁷¹ Before mounting evidence of houyhnhnm rationality forces Gulliver to abandon his preconceptions about equines, he simply calls the houyhnhnm “a Horse” (190). Upon the arrival of another houyhnhnm, Gulliver distinguishes them from each other by color: the first houyhnhnm becomes the “Dapple-Gray” (191) or “grey Steed” (191); the second is the

⁶⁹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “jockey” (entry dated 1989).

⁷⁰ In a similar reading of this scene, Wintle argues that the houyhnhnm interacts with Gulliver like a human buying a horse, thus inverting Gulliver’s initial approach to the houyhnhnm. See “If Houyhnhnms Were Horses,” 9-10.

⁷¹ Gene Washington’s different analysis uses Gulliver’s names for and descriptions of the houyhnhnms as evidence that Gulliver progresses through “three stages” of perspectives on them. “Natural Horses → the Noble Horse → Houyhnhnms,” *Swift Studies: The Annual of the Ehrenpreis Center* 3 (1988), 95, but see 91-5. Washington believes that the houyhnhnm master in particular belongs to a cultural tradition of the “noble horse,” which Washington defines as a horse, usually grey, who “does not perform labour” (94). Showing that natural histories attribute nobility to horses in general and treat nobility as consistent with exploitation, I come to different conclusions, especially about the houyhnhnm master’s outrage at the treatment of English horses, which Washington briefly relates to his concept of the “noble horse” (95).

“brown Bay” (191). The word “Steed,” which designates a mount,⁷² betrays Gulliver’s conception of the houyhnhnm as a domestic animal. Furthermore, when Gulliver distinguishes the two houyhnhnms by their colors, he participates in discourse about horse coloration, which Topsell, but not Cavendish or Buffon, regards as an indicator of a horse’s quality and serviceability (Topsell 295-6; Buffon 359; Cavendish 20).⁷³ These names for the houyhnhnms are thus typical of the ways that Europeans talk about horses; in particular, they reflect an interest in the utility of equines to humans.

As the surprisingly rational behavior of the houyhnhnms erodes Gulliver’s preconceptions, he continues to call them horses but begins to concede to them some of the supposedly unique attributes of the human. After arriving at the houyhnhnm’s home and observing his relations with his servants, Gulliver calls him the “Master Horse” (194), a title that acknowledges his membership in a complex society with socioeconomic gradations and institutions analogous to those of English society. Gulliver observes that the houyhnhnms keep many of the same domestic animals that the English keep, such as asses, dogs, and cows (194). He also notes that the houyhnhnms employ yahoos to perform tasks that horses perform in England: “About Noon I saw coming towards the House a kind of Vehicle drawn like a Sledge by four *Yahoos*. There was in it an old Steed, who seemed to be of Quality” (196). Betraying enduring prejudices about equines, Gulliver refers to the visitor as a “Steed” even though the yahoos, not the houyhnhnms, are clearly the means of transport. Nevertheless, Gulliver attributes “Quality,” or high socioeconomic status, to the visitor,⁷⁴ and he admires the “great Civility” with

⁷² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “steed” (entry dated 1989).

⁷³ Pointing out that Gulliver always refers to the houyhnhnms by their coloration rather than by proper names, Wintle claims that he never overcomes his tendency to view them as horses. See “If Houyhnhnms Were Horses,” 13.

⁷⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Online ed., s.v. “quality” (entry dated June 2010).

which the master houyhnhnm entertains his guest (196). According to Thomas, early moderns regard “polite education, ‘civility’ and refinement” as important indices of the human’s superiority to the animal;⁷⁵ therefore, Gulliver credits the houyhnhnms with a human-like status by acknowledging that they possess customs of politeness. Furthermore, S. E. Whyman relates, “By the late seventeenth century, calling upon one’s friends in a carriage became an important expression of London sociability.”⁷⁶ Therefore, the arrival of a houyhnhnm in a yahoo-drawn carriage not only challenges Gulliver’s notions about the proper relation between anthropoids and equines but also drives home the similarities between houyhnhnm society and English society in 1710, the year of Gulliver’s fourth voyage (Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* 187).

As long as Gulliver continues to assimilate the houyhnhnms to the familiar category “Horse,” however, he recognizes parallels between houyhnhnms and humans without giving up the notion that he, as a human, occupies a privileged position in the human-equine relationship. While the phrase “Master Horse” suggests that houyhnhnms have social distinctions comparable to those of Europeans, it also suggests that houyhnhnm society consists of mere horses, from whom humans remain distinct and to whom humans remain superior. In the moment that Gulliver begins to refer to the aristocratic houyhnhnm as “my Master” (198), he no longer considers himself a human observer of a society of horses, and he gives up his culture’s hierarchy of human over equine. Indicating the importance of this change in appellation, Gulliver inserts a parenthetical acknowledgement of it: “(for so I shall henceforth call him)” (198). Only now, as Gulliver begins to receive instruction in houyhnhnm language and to assimilate to houyhnhnm society, does he revoke his classification of the houyhnhnms as animals and subordinate himself, a human, to their non-human authority.

⁷⁵ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 37. See also 36-41.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Edwards, *Horse and Man*, 216.

Despite the influence of houyhnhnm language on Gulliver's re-evaluation of houyhnhnm intelligence, the phrase "my Master" invests the aristocratic houyhnhnm with the authority of not only the school-master but also the horse-trainer, whom Cavendish compares to a school-master when he writes, "the horse is dress'd in the same manner that children are taught to read" (11). Interpreted in this way, the phrase "my Master" locates Gulliver in an inverted human-horse relationship at the same time that it evokes a model of the human-horse relationship in which the capacity for language is relatively unimportant for distinguishing humans from animals. While horses do not receive the same instruction in language that Gulliver receives, comparing Gulliver with Cavendish's depiction of the horse as a pupil strengthens the impression that Gulliver has entered an inverted horse/trainer relationship with the aristocratic houyhnhnm.

Gulliver's description of the mistreatment of horses in England works to expose the contradiction between equine nobility and the exploitation of horses because it occurs within the context of this inverted horse/trainer relationship. Gulliver narrates his conversation with the houyhnhnm master:

I owned, that the *Houyhnhnms* among us, whom we called *Horses*, were the most generous and comely Animal we had, that they excelled in Strength and Swiftness; and when they belonged to Persons of Quality, employed in Travelling, Racing, or drawing Chariots, they were treated with much Kindness and Care, till they fell into Diseases, or became foundred in the Feet; and then they were sold, and used to all kind of Drudgery till they died; after which their Skins were stripped and sold for what they were worth, and their Bodies left to be devoured by Dogs and Birds of Prey. But the common Race of Horses had not so good Fortune, being kept by Farmers and Carriers and other mean People, who

put them to greater Labour, and fed them worse. I described as well as I could, our way of Riding, the shape and use of a Bridle, a Saddle, a Spur, and a Whip, of Harness and Wheels. I added, that we fastned Plates of a certain hard Substance called *Iron* at the Bottom of their Feet, to preserve their Hoofs from being broken by the stony Ways on which we often travelled. (203)⁷⁷

Gulliver begins by admitting that Europeans believe the horse to be superior to other domestic animals; and he says, “I owned,” to take embarrassed responsibility for the treatment of horses that he subsequently describes, as though he perceives an inconsistency between admiration of horses and their degradation by humans.

Swift exaggerates this impression of inconsistency when the houyhnhnm master takes the treatment of horses as an affront to his own equine nobility. The houyhnhnm master responds to Gulliver with “some Expressions of great Indignation” (203). Gulliver later relates, “it is impossible to represent his noble Resentment at our savage Treatment of the *Houyhnhnm* Race, particularly after I had explained the Manner and Use of *Castrating* Horses among us, to hinder them from propagating their Kind, and to render them more servile” (204). The “great Indignation” and “noble Resentment” of the houyhnhnm master dramatize a contradiction between the horse’s reputation as the noblest animal and the treatment that horses typically receive from humans. While Swift creates the houyhnhnms by extrapolating from conceptions of the horse as noble, Swift turns representations of the horse against themselves by having an exaggeratedly noble equine condemn the use of other equines as beasts of burden. The outrage of the houyhnhnm master thus exposes a discrepancy in discourse about horses, which tends to admire equine nobility while justifying equine exploitation.

⁷⁷ Thomas finds this passage such a compelling representation of the contemporary treatment of horses that he quotes it in *Man and the Natural World*, 100.

Gulliver's speech also recommends better treatment for horses because he delivers it from the new position that he has adopted in his initial encounters with the houyhnhnms: the position of the horse in relation to the trainer. After recounting his reluctance to tell the houyhnhnm master about the exploitation of horses, Gulliver writes, "he insisted in commanding me to let him know the best and the worst: I told him, he should be obeyed" (203). The word "commanding" recalls the scene in which Gulliver first adopts the posture of the obedient horse by awaiting the houyhnhnm master's "Commands" (191). The recurrence of the word "command" places Gulliver's description of the exploitation of horses in the context of his horse-like subordination to an equine master. This positioning of Gulliver and the houyhnhnm master as horse and trainer causes the human to occupy the subordinate place of the horse and calls on the human to justify the treatment of horses to an equine authority, who represents the equine nobility that cannot be reconciled with the exploitation of horses.⁷⁸

In his society's defense, Gulliver resorts to the argument that the horse's teachableness differs qualitatively from the rationality of humans and houyhnhnms. Of horses, he admits, "they were indeed sensible of Rewards and Punishments; but his Honour would please to consider, that they had not the least Tincture of Reason any more than the *Yahoos* in this Country" (204). Gulliver takes Descartes's position exactly: horses have passions that render them teachable, responsive to "Rewards and Punishments," but they utterly lack "Reason," a capacity distinct from and superior to mere teachableness. Once again, however, Gulliver's positioning as a horse and the positioning of the houyhnhnm master as a trainer undercuts justifications for the

⁷⁸ Wintle offers another explanation for the ethical obligations that Gulliver's description creates. Claiming that Gulliver's description constitutes "the first full life history of a horse in literature," she argues that the narration of equine experience in a form with which humans can identify implicitly extends "an invitation for the reader [...] to feel a sense of moral responsibility—to recognise human responsibility for animal suffering." See "If Houyhnhnms Were Horses," 13-4.

exploitation of horses as laborers.

Like the horse of the natural histories, Gulliver receives praise for his remarkable intelligence at the same time that his admirer credits him with only teachableness, not rationality. Gulliver reports the houyhnhnm master's initial evaluation of him: "He was convinced (as he afterwards told me) that I must be a *Yahoo*, but my Teachableness, Civility and Cleanliness astonished him; which were Qualities altogether so opposite to those Animals" (198). Even as Gulliver's intelligence impresses the houyhnhnm master, he labels it "Teachableness" to distinguish it from rationality, which he assumes to be an exclusive property of the houyhnhnm. Likewise, Gulliver reports that the houyhnhnm master wonders "how I was taught to imitate a rational Creature" (199). Even as he acknowledges Gulliver's resemblance to "a rational Creature," the houyhnhnm master regards that resemblance as a function of Gulliver's teachableness, not rationality. Because they occur in the context of an inverted human/horse relationship, remarks about Gulliver's teachableness satirize commonplaces about equine intelligence.⁷⁹ By imagining the linguistically capable Gulliver in the position of the horse, Swift exaggerates arguments that discount equine intelligence and, like Cavendish, redefines language as a form of the teachableness that humans and horses share.

Swift's text does not allow the distinction between teachableness and reason to manage the proximity of equine and human intelligence, as it does for Descartes and the natural historians. Richard Nash, who relies exclusively on the natural history of John Ray, offers the following explanation of the relevance of the horse's reputation for teachableness to part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels*: "repeatedly, descriptions of Gulliver and the Yahoos are filtered through the

⁷⁹ For a comparison of the houyhnhnm perspective on Gulliver to European perspectives on parrots, see Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 20-1. I prefer to emphasize Gulliver's positioning as a horse.

lens of Ray's foremost quadruped, the horse. [...] Frequently in the fourth voyage, human and Yahoo reason is questioned in terms of the equine/Houyhnhnm category of 'docillimum.'⁸⁰ While Nash implies that the houyhnhnms differ from humans in conceptualizing intelligence in terms of teachableness instead of rationality, I argue that the houyhnhnms distinguish their own rationality from Gulliver's teachableness and thereby assume a perspective analogous to that of Descartes and the natural historians, who distinguish the horse's teachableness from the human's reason. Swift subjects arguments about equine teachableness to satire by recasting them from the houyhnhnm's perspective on Gulliver, whom readers know to be rational according to orthodox definitions of the human. The houyhnhnm's misconstrual of Gulliver's intelligence introduces the possibility that humans have similarly misconstrued the horse's intelligence, especially because Swift so explicitly locates Gulliver and the houyhnhnm master in a horse-trainer relationship.

Despite this suggestion that humans have underestimated equine intelligence, the ethical claims of horses in part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* rest less on the ontological status of horses than on inconsistencies in the human-horse relationship. Indeed, Gulliver's claim about the ontological status of horses does little to excuse or even to address the hypocrisies that have become so conspicuous in his conversation with the houyhnhnm master. Swift further criticizes these hypocrisies through his portrayal of the yahoos, who perform many of the tasks that horses perform in England. While natural historians praise horses for their teachableness and for their noble willingness to serve humans, the houyhnhnms regard the yahoos as almost entirely "indocible" (228) and "averse from Labour" (235). One houyhnhnm explains that the houyhnhnms have "brought them [the yahoos] to such a degree of Tameness, as an Animal so

⁸⁰ Richard Nash, *Wild Enlightenment: The Borders of Human Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 109-10.

savage by Nature can be capable of acquiring; using them for Draught and Carriage” (229). Gulliver comes to a similar conclusion about yahoo nature: “By what I could discover, the *Yahoos* appear to be the most unteachable of all Animals, their Capacities never reaching higher than to draw or carry Burthens” (224). These justifications for the exploitation of yahoos indicate that the tasks of the beast of burden befit only the most unintelligent and ignoble animals. The houyhnhnms have rarely, if ever, made any species other than the yahoo perform the role of the beast of burden—not even the ass, which one houyhnhnm describes as “a comely Animal, easily kept, more tame and orderly, without any offensive Smell, strong enough for Labour” (229). Comparing the remarkably teachable horse with “the most unteachable” yahoo suggests that Gulliver and the houyhnhnms underestimate the intelligence that the yahoos display in performing the tasks of the beast of burden, but it also points out contradictions in European attitudes toward horses: if horses are supposed to be noble and teachable animals, then it is logically inconsistent and ethically problematic to employ them—as the English increasingly did—for menial tasks, such as “Draught” and “Carriage.”

Conclusion

Swift’s treatment of equine nobility identifies a contradiction in the discourse about horses that most other writers, such as the natural historians and Cavendish, do not perceive. For Topsell and Jonston, the nobility of the horse is entirely consistent with its exploitation. Writing after Swift, Buffon occasionally considers equine nobility to conflict with the horse’s servitude to humans, but Buffon does not elaborate this theme fully or consistently. As we have seen, he defends human supremacy by recapitulating the argument that horses are natural servants for

humans. Cavendish offers an alternative interpretation of equine nobility when he claims that the proximity of horses to humans threatens human dominance. Cavendish somewhat anticipates Swift by decoupling the conception of the horse as noble from the conception of the horse as a servant, and Cavendish's debate with Descartes anticipates the animal-welfare movement's interest in the ontological status of animals. Cavendish, however, does not regard the subordination of horses as an ethical problem or as a form of hypocrisy. Indeed, he declares, "man ought carefully to preserve his empire" (122).

Writing in the wake of a dramatic increase in the exploitation of horses, Swift critiques typical discourse about horses when he re-deploys ideas about equine nobility in order to present them in contradiction to the use of horses as beasts of burden. Swift's approach to animal welfare places less emphasis on the ontological status of animals than on hypocrisies involved in the treatment of horses, in particular. Ultimately, this approach would not prove influential for the rise of the animal-welfare movement, which has depended on the ontological premises evident in Bentham's famous question about animal capacities for suffering. Nevertheless, just as studying modern proponents of animal welfare sets in relief a distinctive, pre-modern approach in *Gulliver's Travels*, studying Swift's satire exposes a possible limitation of the modern approach. Instead of focusing so exclusively on claims about animal ontologies, which have been difficult to prove to skeptical audiences, modern thinkers might also look for inconsistencies between beliefs about animals and their treatment. As Swift's example demonstrates, identifying such contradictions can produce arguments for improving the treatment of at least some animals—arguments that need not wait for questions about animal ontologies to be posed, much less resolved.

CHAPTER 5

BECOMING HOUYHNNHM:

PARODY OF CIRCE'S TRANSFORMATIONS IN *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

When Gulliver begins to affiliate himself with equines instead of humans near the end of *Gulliver's Travels*, he recapitulates the Gryllus figure's characteristic preference for a non-human existence—but without ever experiencing transformation. The first intimation of Gulliver's resemblance to Gryllus occurs when Gulliver declares his intention to spend the remainder of his life in Houyhnhnmland. Gulliver writes, "I had not been a Year in this Country, before I contracted such a Love and Veneration for the Inhabitants, that I entered on a firm Resolution never to return to human Kind, but to pass the rest of my Life among these admirable *Houyhnhnms* in the Contemplation and Practice of every Virtue; where I could find no Example or Incitement to Vice."¹ Gulliver not only recapitulates Gryllus's preference for a non-human existence by affiliating himself with non-humans but also provides a version of Gryllus's argument that animals surpass humans in the classical virtues.

Furthermore, Gulliver begins to behave in characteristically equine manners, which suggests that Gulliver desires an equine form to suit his admiration of and identification with the houyhnhnms. Gulliver reports the reactions of his fellow Europeans to these equine behaviors upon his return to England: "my Friends often tell me in a blunt way, that *I trot like a Horse*; which, however, I take for a great Compliment: Neither shall I disown, that in Speaking I am apt to fall into the Voice and manner of the *Houyhnhnms*, and hear myself ridiculed on that account

¹ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (New York: Norton, 2002), 218. Subsequent citations appear in text.

without the least Mortification” (235). Although Gulliver claims to admire the houyhnhnm culture, especially its morality, he does not merely embrace houyhnhnm values but also attempts to re-make his body upon an equine model as he approximates the quadrupedal locomotion of the houyhnhnms and imitates their characteristic vocal productions.

While Gulliver never experiences transformation into a horse, Swift dramatizes Gulliver’s new identification with an equine rather than human community by contrasting Gulliver’s comportment toward his family, especially his wife, with his attitude toward his horses. Of his reunion with his wife and children, Gulliver writes, “I must freely confess the sight of them filled me only with Hatred, Disgust and Contempt, and the more by reflecting on the near alliance I had to them” (244). Immediately after recording his disgust at his reunion with his family, Gulliver explicitly identifies two horses as his most cherished companions:

The first Money I laid out was to buy two young Stone-Horses which I keep in a good Stable, and next to them the Groom is my greatest Favourite; for I feel my Spirits revived by the Smell he contracts in the Stable. My Horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four Hours every Day. They are Strangers to Bridle or Saddle, they live in great Amity with me, and Friendship to each other. (244)

While humans, except for the groom, repulse Gulliver, he claims that a relation of “Amity” exists between himself and his horses, which once again affiliates him with equines rather than humans, including even his family. In sharp contrast to his lengthy conversations with horses, Gulliver barely endures discourse with his wife. Near the end of his narrative, he confides, “I began last Week to permit my Wife to sit at Dinner with me, at the farthest End of a long Table, and to answer (but with the utmost brevity) the few Questions I ask her” (249). While Gulliver

finds it painful to hear his wife's answers to questions that he himself has posed, he enjoys the companionship of horses so much that he spends four or more hours with them each day. The distance that he maintains between himself and his wife likewise contrasts with his proximity to horses in their stable.

Arguing that Gulliver experiences a frustrated desire for transformation, I offer an alternative to approaches suggesting that Gulliver departs from humanity in a significant way. Deleuze and Guattari describe a state of "becoming-animal" that obeys a "principle of proximity or approximation" but that amounts to more than "a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification."² As an example, they discuss "wolf-children," in which case "It is useless, then, to raise the objection that the dog-child only plays dog within the limits of his formal constitution, and does nothing that another human being could not have done if he or she had so desired" (273-4). By Deleuze and Guattari's own admission, the ambiguous yet, they insist, real state of "becoming-animal" differs from a true human-animal transformation: "There is a reality of becoming-animal, even though one does not in reality become animal" (273). An account of Gulliver in Deleuze and Guattari's terms might suggest that he experiences a becoming-houyhnhnm, that his equine behaviors test or even transcend the limits of his human identity.

Jonathan Lamb has interpreted Gulliver in a similar manner in an essay on stories about alienation from humanity. Lamb identifies Gulliver as an example of a character who undergoes the "metamorphosis that arises from unlimited sympathy with animals."³ Although Lamb relates

² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 272, 237. Subsequent citations appear in text.

³ Jonathan Lamb, "Gulliver and the Lives of Animals," in *Humans and Other Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Culture: Representation, Hybridity, Ethics*, ed. Frank Palmeri (Aldershot, England; and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 177. Subsequent citations appear in text.

his approach to Hardt and Negri's work on "anthropological exodus" (170), his claim that Gulliver experiences a human-horse transformation has affinities with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming-animal." Lamb believes that Gulliver departs significantly from humanity "by becoming as far as is possible a horse" (170). Lamb calls this change a "transformation" (170) or "metamorphosis" (177), and he credits Gulliver with "knowledge of what it is like to be a horse" (175). Remarking that "Gulliver's friends deem him like a horse only in the sense that he performs horse" (176), Lamb suggests that their view of Gulliver is unsatisfactory, just as Deleuze and Guattari are unsatisfied with the explanation "that the dog-child only plays dog." This approach suggests that Gulliver is not quite human after his experiences among the houyhnhnms.⁴

My argument, in contrast, places *Gulliver's Travels* in the Plutarchian tradition of transformation narratives, in which context Gulliver appears not to depart significantly from humanity, whereas earlier analogues of Plutarch's Gryllus, who are transformed in accordance with their desires, do. Swift invokes the literary tradition of metamorphosis when Gulliver mistakes the houyhnhnms for transformed humans near the beginning of part 4. Initially baffled by the surprisingly rational behavior of the island's equines, Gulliver relates, "I at last concluded, they must needs be Magicians, who had thus metamorphosed themselves upon some design" (191). Although Gulliver ultimately rejects this hypothesis, it implicitly invites readers to consider Gulliver's narrative in relation to the tradition of transformation narratives. Indeed, part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* conforms to a remarkable degree to Gareth Roberts's criteria for "a Circean narrative configuration." His list of Circean formal elements includes "arrival by sea in a

⁴ Philip Armstrong similarly claims that Gulliver departs from humanity at the end of part 4: "Gulliver [...] is no longer human; neither has he become an animal, properly speaking." *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 10-1.

strange land” and the transformation of male humans into “very particular sorts of domestic animals,” by which Roberts means not only pigs but also “beasts of burden, especially asses,” which he finds to be more typical of later Renaissance versions of the Circe story.⁵ Although no character experiences transformation in “A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms,” Gulliver entertains the prospect of human-horse transformations upon his initial encounters with the houyhnhnms and eventually seems to desire transformation so that he can be an equine instead of a human. These references to transformation all involve horses, which, as domestic animals and beasts of burden, meet Roberts’s criterion for the kind of animals that Circe stories feature, even though Roberts remarks the prominence of pigs and asses, rather than horses.

Swift may have encountered the Plutarchian tradition of transformations, in particular, in a variety of sources, such as Plutarch’s original dialogue “Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti” or book 2 of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, but a new English translation of Gelli’s *Circe* also became available in 1702, just 24 years before the publication of *Gulliver’s Travels*. This translation by Thomas Brown is an important event in the history of the English reception of Gelli’s *Circe*, for it had previously been available in only one English version, translated by Henry Iden almost 150 years earlier in 1557.⁶ At the very least, the publication of a new translation of *La Circe* suggests that there was broad interest among early eighteenth-century English readers in stories about humans who would rather belong to another species, such as Swift’s Gulliver and all of Gelli’s transformed animals except the elephant. At the most, Swift may have composed part 4 of

⁵ Gareth Roberts, “The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fictions,” in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 194.

⁶ According to Robert Adams, “Gelli’s *Circe* has been three times translated into English: by H. Iden (1557); by Brown (1702); and by H. Layng (1744).” See Adams’s introduction to *The Circe of Signior Giovanni Battista Gelli of the Academy of Florence*, trans. Thomas Brown and Robert Adams, ed. Robert Adams (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), xlix.

Gulliver's Travels with *La Circe*, perhaps as recently translated by Thomas Brown, in mind.⁷

Indeed, there is a striking resemblance between Gulliver, a human who wishes for the shape of a horse, and Ulysses's equine interlocutor in *La Circe*, who explains, "While I was a man, I liked my condition well enough, and had a very low opinion of beasts; but now I have tried their way of living, I am resolved to live and die a horse."⁸ Gulliver never receives the transformation that he desires, but he shares with this possible literary predecessor the preference of an equine existence to a human one, which makes them both analogues of Plutarch's Gryllus, whether or not Swift knew of Gelli's horse or intended Gulliver to resemble him.

Although Gulliver continues a literary tradition that originates with Renaissance appropriations of Plutarch's Gryllus, Gulliver also departs from the model of earlier Gryllus figures in ways that redound satirically on key elements of the tradition. By making Gulliver desire to be a horse, a particularly admired animal, Swift makes Gulliver's preference for a non-human existence more sympathetic or understandable than that of Spenser's Gryll, who has a more conventionally contemptible desire to be a pig. Indeed, evidence that Swift has deliberately substituted the horse for the pig suggests that Gulliver's admiration of equines may function to expose the anthropocentric use of pigs in earlier Circe stories, as discussed in chapter three. Swift has further complicated his Gryllus figure's desire for transformation by inventing a species of rational equines. In general, earlier narratives imagine transformations between relatively distinct states of human and animal, but transformation into a houyhnhnm would not

⁷ Although Robert Adams doubts that *La Circe* or Brown's recent translation had any significant influence on *Gulliver's Travels*, it is difficult to dismiss the resemblance that he notes between an Italian phrase of Gelli's horse, "ne dire tal volta quello che non è," and the memorable houyhnhnm phrase, "to say the thing that is not." See Adams, introduction to *The Circe*, xlvii-xlviii.

⁸ Giovanni Battista Gelli, *The Circe of Signior Giovanni Battista Gelli of the Academy of Florence*, trans. Thomas Brown and Robert Adams, ed. Robert Adams (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 113. Subsequent citations of this edition appear in text.

cause Gulliver to cross any ontological boundary. Gulliver desires but does not receive this superfluous transformation, which seems to imply criticism of the way that earlier narratives, such as Gelli's dialogues and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, achieve closure by bringing mental affiliation and physical form into correspondence, according to common beliefs about the significance of bipedal and quadrupedal forms. Despite the existence of magic in part 3 of *Gulliver's Travels*, part 4 has no Circean figure who can grant Gulliver's wish for an equine form.⁹ Swift especially highlights the use of transformation to resolve earlier narratives by sending an untransformed Gulliver back to his human community, with whom Gulliver enacts a paradoxical version of the Gryllus figure's typical forgetting of humanity as he attempts to affiliate himself with the houyhnhnms while constantly recalling his human identity. *Gulliver's Travels* thus satirizes premises entailed by the use of transformation to resolve debates about human and animal existences in earlier texts.

Human-Horse Transformations

Swift has developed a relatively anti-anthropocentric Plutarchian narrative by making Gulliver desire to be an equine, a particularly admired animal, rather than a pig, the animal that the relatively contemptible Gryllus figures of Spenser and Milton desire to become. Swift calls attention to the substitution of horses for pigs in his ironic Circe story by having Gulliver remark the absence of pigs among the fauna of Houyhnhnmland. Wishing to counter his houyhnhnm teacher's opinion that yahoos are the only animals that like to be dirty, Gulliver comments,

⁹ I am grateful to Laura Brown and Ian Duncan, who have encouraged me to clarify my claim that Gulliver's transformation is thwarted by pointing out the conspicuous absence of Circe from part 4.

I could have easily vindicated Human Kind from the Imputation of Singularity upon the last Article, if there had been any *Swine* in that Country, (as unluckily for me there were not) which although it may be a *sweeter Quadruped* than a *Yahoo*, cannot I humbly conceive in Justice pretend to more Cleanliness; and so his Honour himself must have owned, if he had seen their filthy way of feeding, and their Custom of wallowing and sleeping in the Mud. (222)

This passage renders conspicuous Swift's exclusion of pigs from the island's fauna.¹⁰ That exclusion seems especially significant because Swift has populated the island with many other familiar domestic animals, including dogs (194), cats (228), cows (194, 231), and asses (194, 229). The passage moreover invokes conventional interpretations of the pig as a symbol of dirtiness, gluttony, laziness, and other corporeal vices, which earlier writers, especially Spenser and Milton, use to condemn humans who prefer to be animals.

By making the virtuous houyhnhnms unfamiliar with pigs, Swift not only implies that equines have taken the place of pigs in his version of the Circe story but also reprises symbolic distinctions between horses and pigs from natural history. In particular, Swift draws upon animal symbolism from the paradigm of natural history that William Ashworth has called "emblematic."¹¹ In this paradigm, which Michel Foucault elucidates in his discussion of Renaissance views, natural sympathies exist between some living creatures while others are

¹⁰ For a comparison of yahoos to pigs, see Sarah Wintle, "If Houyhnhnms Were Horses: Thinking with Animals in Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*," *The Critical Review* 34 (1994), 7-8.

¹¹ William B. Ashworth, Jr., "Natural History and the Emblematic World View," in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. by David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 305, 312-3, 328 n. 26; William B. Ashworth, Jr., "Emblematic Natural History of the Renaissance," in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and E. C. Spary (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36.

antithetical beings.¹² Topsell, whose *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (1607) conforms to this paradigm, treats the horse and the pig as antithetical creatures. He writes, “This also in stabling of your horssees must be avoided, namely the sties of Swine, for the stinke, the breath, the gruntling of hogs, is abhominable for horssees, and nature hath framed no simpathie or concorde betwixte the noble and couragious spirite of a horsse, and the beastlie sluggish condition of a swine.”¹³ Finding the pig more “beastlie” than the horse, Topsell portrays the horse as a “noble” aristocrat, the pig as the most animalistic of the animals. While Topsell praises the horse’s “couragious spirite,” he reviles the pig for its “sluggish condition”; and he claims that horses cannot tolerate the presence of such inferior animals. Swift seems to have observed Topsell’s warning against sheltering horses near pigs by populating the imaginary island of Houyhnhnmland with many species of domestic animals except for pigs.

Swift’s substitution of horses for pigs complicates the evaluation of Gulliver’s desire for transformation. Many earlier Gryllus figures want to forsake their humanity in order to become pigs. Even when these figures make persuasive arguments for the superiority of the animal state, the moral value of their desires for transformation is relatively unambiguous to anyone who accepts the conventional symbolic interpretation of the pig. Plutarch’s Odysseus tells Gryllus, who prefers remaining a pig to becoming a human again, “You have become infected with strange and completely perverted notions. Or was it rather an inclination to swinishness that conjured you into this shape?”¹⁴ Spenser’s Palmer comes to a similar conclusion about Gryll:

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 23-4.

¹³ Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (London: printed by William Jaggard, 1607), 303. Subsequent citations appear in text.

¹⁴ Plutarch, “Beasts Are Rational,” trans. and ed. William C. Helmbold, in *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 12, The Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1957), 986.

“The donghill kinde / Delightes in filth and fowle incontinence: / Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*, and haue his hoggish minde.”¹⁵ Although Milton’s *Comus* transforms the heads of his victims into those of many different animals, the Attendant Spirit compares them all to pigs when he says that they “roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.”¹⁶ Even as humans, these *Gryllus* figures allegedly have the properties of pigs, such as “swinishness” or a “hoggish minde,” and their indulgence in corporeal vices resembles the “filth and fowle incontinence” of pigs. From the perspective of the Attendant Spirit, the debauched revelries of *Comus*’s victims amount to living in the domestic pig’s characteristic environment, the “sty.” In these Circean narratives, the pig provides the central figure for the moral depravity of humans who desire to be animals.

In contrast, influential seventeenth- and eighteenth-century treatments of the horse describe it as the noblest animal. The opening paragraph of Topsell’s entry on the horse declares the horse “the most noble and necessary creature of all foure-footed-beasts, before whom no one for multitude and generality of good qualities is to be preferred, compared or equaled” (281). An equestrian manual by William Cavendish not only repeats this claim about equine nobility but also explicitly positions the horse as the animal nearest to the human: “The horse being, after man, the most noble of all animals (for he is as much superior to all other creatures as man is to him, and therefore holds a sort of middle place between man and the rest of the creation) he is wise and subtile; for which reason man ought carefully to preserve his empire over him, knowing how nearly that wisdom and subtilty approaches his own.”¹⁷ The horse likewise seems to

¹⁵ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow, London, New York, et al.: Pearson Education, 2001), book 2, canto 12, stanza 87, lines 6-8.

¹⁶ John Milton, *Comus*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), page 91, line 77.

¹⁷ William Cavendish, *A General System of Horsemanship*, 2 vols. (London: printed for J. Brindley, 1743), 122. Subsequent citations appear in text.

approach human status in a statement by Buffon: “He elevates his head, as if anxious to exalt himself above the condition of quadrupeds. In this noble attitude, he regards man face to face.”¹⁸ Buffon’s image suggests that human and horse are almost equal, not only because the horse meets the human’s gaze instead of bowing its head in deference but also because Buffon believes that this posture expresses the horse’s aspiration to transcend “the condition of quadrupeds,” as though the horse wants to claim human-like status and perhaps even to walk upright.

Because of the polar opposition between the noble, human-like horse and the reviled, bestial pig, it is more difficult to criticize Gulliver for desiring to become an equine than it is to criticize Spenser’s Gryll and other characters in more traditional narratives for desiring to become pigs. Providing further evidence that the desire to become a horse is relatively—and perhaps uniquely—sympathetic, Gulliver’s desire to become a houyhnhnm extends a pre-existing tradition in which admiration of horses motivates desires for transformation. Although the earlier works treat human-horse transformation as a somewhat comical prospect, they also suggest that the horse’s especially admired status among animals makes the desire for transformation into a horse relatively plausible.

In the opening of *The Apology for Poetry* (1595), Philip Sidney recalls a conversation with John Pietro Pugliano, who served the Emperor Maximilian as “an esquire in his stable.”¹⁹

After extolling horsemanship, Pugliano delivers an encomium on horses themselves:

Then he would add certain praises, by telling what a peerless beast the horse was,

¹⁸ Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular*, trans. William Smellie, 2nd ed., vol. 3 of 9 (London: printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1785), 329.

¹⁹ Philip Sidney, *The Apology for Poetry*, in *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, 2nd ed., ed. David Damrosch, vol. 1B, *The Early Modern Period*, ed. Constance Jordan and Clare Carroll (New York et al.: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 2003), 969. Subsequent citations appear in text.

the only serviceable courtier without flattery, the beast of most beauty, faithfulness, courage, and such more, that if I had not been a piece of a logician before I came to him, I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse. (969)

In Sidney's account, only conventional distinctions between humans and animals save him from desiring transformation into a horse. Noting that the horse appears as the standard example of an irrational animal in logic textbooks, such as Porphyry's influential *Isagoge* of the 3rd century CE, R. S. Crane has argued that Swift inverts commonplace definitions of humans as rational animals and horses as irrational animals by inventing the houyhnhnms, a species of rational equines.²⁰ As "a piece of a logician," Sidney has presumably read commonplace definitions of humans and horses in logic textbooks, and he implies that recalling them enables him to prefer humanity to animality, in spite of Pugliano's idealization of the horse. Only the logical commonplaces contravened by the houyhnhnms prevent Sidney from fully anticipating Gulliver's desire for an equine form.

Although Sidney ultimately prefers humanity over animality, admiration of horses propels Sidney, like Gulliver, toward the possibility of transformation. Admitting that Pugliano's enthusiasm for horses might "have persuaded me to wish myself a horse," Sidney affiliates their conversation with the literary tradition based on Plutarch's "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti," in which characters are transformed in accordance with their beliefs about human and animal states. As Pugliano urges Sidney to view the horse as "a peerless beast," Pugliano rehearses commonplace conceptions of the horse as the noblest animal. Such notions make a desire for

²⁰ R. S. Crane, "The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas," in *Reason and the Imagination: Studies in the History of Ideas, 1600-1800*, ed. Joseph Anthony Mazzeo (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 243-50.

transformation into a horse relatively understandable, in comparison, for instance, with Gryll's desire to be a pig in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Even though the claim that Sidney barely avoids desiring to become a horse seems comical, the prospect of a human-horse transformation emerges somewhat plausibly from conventional admiration of horses.

This comic yet plausible connection between extolling horses and desiring transformation appears again in one of Ben Jonson's poems, dedicated to the horse trainer William Cavendish.²¹ After five heroic couplets on Cavendish's skill with his horse, Jonson's speaker effuses, "Nay, so your Seate his beauties did endorse, / As I began to wish my selfe a horse."²² According to the speaker, Cavendish's "Seate," an equestrian term for riding skill,²³ enables recognition of the horse's "beauties," which in turn inspire the speaker with a desire to be a horse. The speaker does not make this comment casually; rather, he places these lines prominently at the midpoint of the poem, as the sixth of ten heroic couplets. The speaker begins the couplet, and the second half of his poem, by exclaiming, "Nay," which sounds like "neigh," suggesting that he, like Gulliver, expresses admiration of horses by imitating their characteristic vocalizations.

Of course, the fact that the speaker desires to be not a horseman but a horse seems laughable. Furthermore, the speaker provides further reflections on his desire to be a horse that redound ironically on the socioeconomic status of poets:

And surely had I but your Stable seene
Before: I thinke my wish absolv'd had beene.

For never saw I yet the Muses dwell,

²¹ On Cavendish's fame as a horse trainer, see Peter Edwards, *Horse and Man in Early Modern England* (London: Continuum, 2007), 83.

²² Ben Jonson, "An Epigram. To, William, Earle of Newcastle," in *The Poems of Ben Jonson*, ed. Bernard H. Newdigate (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1936), page 166, lines 11-2.

Subsequent citations appear in text by line number.

²³ See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. "seat" (entry dated 1989).

Nor any of their household halfe so well. (13-6)

Remarking the relative luxury in which Cavendish's horses live, Jonson makes his desire for transformation the occasion for a self-deprecating comment about poets. Nevertheless, the admirable horse motivates a desire for transformation in ways that most other animals could not. It is difficult to imagine that a pigsty, for instance, could inspire the comical yet plausible envy that Jonson confesses at the sight of Cavendish's stables. Furthermore, Jonson specifies that he desires transformation prior to his tour of Cavendish's stables, so that he sustains a connection between admiration of horses themselves and the desire for transformation. Admiration of horses makes Sidney's and Jonson's desires for transformation seem understandable and plausible, unlike Gryll's desire to be a pig, which seems contemptible and misguided.

Perceived proximity of human and horse motivates a similar treatment of human-horse transformations in an equestrian manual by Cavendish. Even though Cavendish does not imagine a human who desires transformation, the nearly human intelligence of horses propels Cavendish toward this hypothetical scenario: "If the wisest man in the world were put into the shape of a horse, and retained his superior understanding, he could not invent more cunning ways (I question if so many) to oppose his rider, than a horse does" (142). Cavendish offers a Homeric treatment of transformation, in which human form but not mind changes, but he does not use transformation to dramatize the discrepancy between human and animal intelligence. Instead, he claims that a true horse is indistinguishable from a transformed sage, except that a horse might be more capable than a sage of thwarting a human master.

This view of the horse as a transformed sage recapitulates a theme from an earlier passage, which also dramatizes equine intelligence by placing "the wisest man in the world" in the horse's position: "If the wisest man in the world were taken by a savage people, and put to

draw in a cart proportion'd to his strength, and if he were beaten when he refused to do his duty, would not he draw just as a horse does when he is threaten'd?" (12). This passage presents the typical behavior of work horses as rational responses to their treatment; indeed, even "the wisest man in the world" would behave in the same way.

When Cavendish recasts this theme by imagining a human-horse transformation, he offers an intensified dramatization of his belief that horse intelligence approximates human intelligence: "The horse being, after man, the most noble of all animals (for he is as much superior to all other creatures as man is to him, and therefore holds a sort of middle place between man and the rest of the creation) he is wise and subtile; for which reason man ought carefully to preserve his empire over him, knowing how nearly that wisdom and subtilty approaches his own" (122). Although this statement estimates equine intelligence beneath human intelligence, unlike passages comparing horses favorably with "the wisest man in the world," Cavendish's view of the horse as the animal most similar to the human underlies his treatment of human-horse transformations, which has a reciprocal relationship with treatments by Sidney and Jonson. Whereas Cavendish's human-horse transformation asserts that horses have human or possibly even super-human levels of intelligence, Sidney and Jonson's desires to become horses emerge relatively understandably, in comparison with desires to be other types of animals, from the human-like status of horses. Cavendish inverts the logic linking admiration of horses with human-horse transformations in a way that shows why desires to be horses are relatively justifiable.

Human and Houyhnhnm Forms

When Gulliver desires transformation into an equine, he is in distinguished literary and equestrian company. Gulliver's desire for transformation differs from that of his predecessors, however, because Swift has extrapolated from conceptions of the horse as the noblest animal in order to create the houyhnhnms, a species of fully rational equines. Since the houyhnhnms have intellectual abilities that equal or possibly rival those of humans, Gulliver's transformation into an equine would not necessarily entail crossing an ontological boundary between human and animal. Indeed, Gulliver's affiliation of himself with the houyhnhnms enacts a version of colonial narratives of "going native" in which the non-Europeans have non-human shapes. Imagined in a context with rational non-humans, Gulliver's thwarted desire for a non-human form functions to satirize assumptions about the human shape that have subtended earlier transformation narratives, especially the assumption that the human's bipedal form expresses the human's unique intellectual abilities.

Gelli's *Circe* provides an example of a treatment of the human shape as inseparable from the human's supposedly unique mental or spiritual faculties. In the final dialogue, the philosopher Aglaphemus explains the significance of the human shape after giving thanks to the creator for his transformation from an elephant back into a human: "I begin to believe that this first cause, loving man above any of his other creatures, as his nobler posture sufficiently declares, will not bring him to the same end as the other animals, who have no share of understanding and so no knowledge at all of the first cause, as man has" (178). Aglaphemus not only distinguishes the human and animal forms by referring to the human's "nobler posture" but also implies that the human's bipedal form is inextricable from other points of human superiority: the human alone has "understanding" and "knowledge" of the creator. Indeed, Aglaphemus believes that the human's bipedal form "declares" the superiority of the human: the

creator has given the human alone a bipedal form in order to show that he has endowed the human with special intellectual abilities.

La Circe introduces the ontological distinction between bipedal human and quadrupedal animal at the beginning of the work and sustains it in the final dialogue in a way that seems to endorse Aglaphemus's enthusiasm for the human shape. When Circe proposes to restore humanity to any of her victims whom Ulysses can persuade of human superiority, Ulysses asks, "But how shall I be able to know their minds, since as beasts they can neither understand my speech nor answer it?" (11). Circe acknowledges ontological differences between humans and animals when she responds that she will use magic to enable the animals to engage Ulysses in debate: "Never fear that, for I will restore to them their speech" (11). Ulysses then asks, "And shall they be able to discourse as rationally as they could do when they were men?" (11). Circe answers, "Yes, indeed, for as I changed them into beasts, so by my means they shall be restored to all the knowledge they had as real men" (11). Circe compares the magical act by which she restores her victims' mental faculties to the original magical act by which she has transformed them into animals, as though the return of speech and reason might entail a second transformation. The speaking and reasoning animals do not, however, qualify as "real men"—and not just because they lack the human shape. Although Circe promises to restore "all the knowledge" of her transformed victims, Aglaphemus tells Ulysses that he regains his "knowledge" of religion only upon his return to human form: "as soon as I became man again, I felt it spring in my mind, almost like a natural property" (178). As an alternative to a reading in which Circe duplicitously breaks her promise to give back "all the knowledge" of her victims, I argue that the separation of the religious capacity from the human's bipedal form is inconceivable in the world of *La Circe*.

In my assertion that the fetishization of the human form is an important aspect of early modern anthropocentrism, I depart from the argument of Erica Fudge in her book *Brutal Reasoning*. According to Fudge, early modern Europeans believed in “a physically invisible difference between humans and animals”: recognizing anatomical similarities between humans and animals, they maintained that the rational soul distinguished the human. Although Fudge quotes a 1582 redaction of Platonic attitudes about the upright posture of the human, she dismisses arguments about the distinctively human shape because “even when the human physique was invoked to reiterate distinction this physical difference was always merely a sign of the other, more significant, mental division.”²⁴ I suggest instead that the overvaluation of various properties of the human body—the treating of the human body’s characteristics, such as erect carriage, as signs of human intellectual superiority—constitutes a fetishization of form that is important to understanding the early modern period’s attitudes toward humans and animals in general and to interpreting Swift’s satire in particular.

It is useful to locate this cultural phenomenon in relation to Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which uses a hypothetical human-animal transformation in order to refute common prejudices about the human shape. Locke refers disapprovingly to the overestimation of the significance of the human form when he writes, “’Twill perhaps be said, that no Body thinks that the Shape makes any thing immortal, but ‘tis the Shape is the sign of a rational Soul within, which is immortal. I wonder who made it the sign of any such Thing.”²⁵

The subsequent paragraph introduces a transformation narrative to develop the argument:

²⁴ Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 7-8.

²⁵ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 4th ed. (1700), ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), book 4, chapter 4, section 15, page 571. Subsequent citations appear in text.

To shew that according to the ordinary way of Reasoning in this Matter, People do lay the whole stress on the Figure, and resolve the whole Essence of the Species of Man (as they make it) into the outward Shape, how unreasonable soever it be, and how much soever they disown it, we need but trace their Thoughts and Practice a little farther, and then it will plainly appear. The well-shaped *Changeling* is a Man, has a rational Soul, though it appear not; this is past doubt, say you. Make the Ears a little longer, and more pointed, and the Nose a little flatter than ordinary, and then you begin to boggle: Make the Face yet narrower, flatter, and longer, and then you are at a stand: Add still more and more of the likeness of a Brute to it, and let the Head be perfectly that of some other Animal, then presently 'tis a *Monster*; and 'tis demonstration with you, that it hath no rational Soul, and must be destroy'd. Where now (I ask) shall be the just measure; which the utmost Bounds of that Shape, that carries with it a rational Soul? (book 4, chapter 4, section 16, page 572).

At the same time that Locke uses a transformation narrative to ridicule the idea of a correspondence between the human form and the capacity for reason, he does argue that the human form plays the crucial role in defining the human species:

And whatever is talked of other definitions, ingenuous observation puts it past doubt, that the *Idea* in our Minds, of which the Sound *Man* in our Mouths is the Sign, is nothing else but of an Animal of such a certain Form: Since I think I may be confident, that whoever should see a Creature of his own Shape and Make, though it had no more reason all its Life, than a *Cat* or a *Parrot*, would call him still a *Man*; or whoever should hear a *Cat* or a *Parrot* discourse, reason, and

philosophize, would call or think it nothing but a *Cat* or a *Parrot*; and say, the one was a dull irrational *Man*, and the other a very intelligent rational *Parrot*” (book 2, chapter 27, section 8, page 333).

Locke claims that physical form trumps all other considerations in distinguishing species from one another: a human without reason remains a human; a philosophical animal remains an animal.²⁶ In a later discussion of the human, Locke writes, “’tis the Shape, as the leading Quality, that seems more to determine that Species, than a Faculty of Reasoning, which appears not at first, and in some never” (book 3, chapter 11, section 20, page 519). Even though Locke attributes such importance to shape, he does not fetishize the human form, by my criteria, because he does not make the human shape symbolic of the mental faculties normally reserved for the human, as his transformation narrative makes clear. Dissociating reason and physical shape, Locke can imagine the existence of two categories of beings besides rational humans and irrational animals: irrational humans and rational animals.

Swift’s houyhnhnms resemble Gelli’s transformed humans because they, too, possess animal bodies and human capacities for rational speech, but no magic is necessary to make the houyhnhnms speak or talk. While Gelli’s Circe must use magic to enable conversation between humans and animals, the houyhnhnms have their own language, which Gulliver learns through mundane strategies for language acquisition: “I pointed to every thing, and enquired the Name of

²⁶ Laura Brown also concludes that Locke defines the human solely by its proper shape in her reading, which focuses on the parrot. She writes, “‘*Man*’ acquires his identity as an animal ‘of a certain Form’ by means of his simultaneous separation from and identification with the rational parrot, whose possible proximity to man as an ‘intelligent rational’ being makes him the test case for human identity.” *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 247. Brown supports this argument by analyzing an anecdote, related by Locke, in which a parrot engages in dialogue with a human. As Brown demonstrates, the parrot’s approach to human rationality leaves only the distinction of shape between the two species (247-9). For different conclusions about Locke’s definition of the human, see Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 20.

it, which I wrote down in my *Journal-Book* when I was alone, and corrected my bad Accent, by desiring those of the Family to pronounce it often” (198). Indeed, Gulliver learns the language of the houyhnhnms just as he learns the language of the Lilliputians, Brobdingnagians, and other peoples that he encounters during his travels.

Not only their language but also their characteristic concerns distinguish the houyhnhnms from horses, whom they physically resemble.²⁷ In a study of talking animals in fables, Frank Palmeri identifies a genre of “anti-allegorical fables,” in which the talking animals are not merely figures for human beings: “they do not speak as human beings might in a comparable human situation; rather, they express what might be the moral judgments of the animals about their treatment by humans. The animals in these self-critical fables speak from the subject position of their species.”²⁸ Unlike the animal speakers in these fables, the houyhnhnms do not verbalize the perspectives and experiences of horses, for the houyhnhnms have never heard of horses—or the Europeans who exploit them—before Gulliver’s arrival. Because the concerns and interests of the houyhnhnms are not those of horses, the houyhnhnms should not be regarded as talking animals, but as a species of rational beings with—in defiance of anthropocentric assumptions—equine forms.²⁹

²⁷ R. S. Crane offers a critical precedent for distinguishing houyhnhnms from horses and yahoos from humans by treating the houyhnhnms and yahoos “as two concrete species of animals: existent species for Gulliver, hypothetical species for us.” “The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas,” 243.

²⁸ Frank Palmeri, “The Autocritique of Fables,” in *Humans and Other Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Culture: Representation, Hybridity, Ethics*, ed. Frank Palmeri (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 83-4.

²⁹ Compare my argument with that of Armstrong, who discusses the houyhnhnms’ “displacement of rationality from the human form” and concludes, “Gulliver’s fourth voyage is the satirist’s most extended disruption of the relationship between the human body and language as a marker of rational thought.” *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 10, 20. Arguing that the houyhnhnms (and yahoos) defy contemporary human/animal distinctions, Armstrong writes, “They are something more like Locke’s ‘shape of an ass with reason’, which the philosopher

In addition to language, the houyhnhnms have an autonomous culture that resembles European culture in many ways. For instance, their social structure is organized hierarchically into relations of master and servant. As Gulliver observes when he admires the houyhnhnm master's "great Civility" (196), the houyhnhnms also have customs of politeness. Keith Thomas has argued that early moderns regard "polite education, 'civility' and refinement" as important indices of the human's superiority to the animal.³⁰ Further underlining the similarity of houyhnhnms to humans, the houyhnhnms are governed by "a Representative Council of the whole Nation" that convenes at regular intervals (227). Thus, the houyhnhnms not only govern themselves but also relate to time in a playful way that, Fudge shows, early moderns associate exclusively with humans.³¹ Finally, the houyhnhnms have domesticated many of the same animals that Europeans keep, such as asses, dogs, cows, and cats (194, 228), though not—as previously noted—pigs (222).

Swift may even have indicated that his rational equines have a human-like status in his name for the species. In the Norton edition of *Gulliver's Travels*, Albert J. Rivero notes the resemblance of the words *human* and *houyhnhnm* even though he believes that *houyhnhnms* sounds like "*whinnims*."³² Unconventionally but ingeniously, Armstrong offers an alternative pronunciation, one that "suggests the reversal" of human and horse: "'Houyhnhnm,' presumably, should be pronounced like the word 'human' (with the final consonants swapped)."³³ Especially

insists must be considered 'different from either that of man or beast . . . a species of an animal between, or distinct from both'" (10).

³⁰ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 37, but see also 36-41. I discuss the topic of "civility" at several points in this chapter. Thomas's context for it is relevant throughout.

³¹ Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning*, 21-4.

³² Albert J. Rivero, ed., *Gulliver's Travels*, by Jonathan Swift (New York: Norton, 2002), 192 n. 5.

³³ Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 8.

if Armstrong is correct, Swift has named his rational equines by altering the word *human*, as if to emphasize the challenge that the houyhnhnms pose to the contemporary concept of the human.

Swift exposes European assumptions about the human form in Gulliver's initial encounters with the houyhnhnms. In order to account for the behavior of these rational, horse-like beings, Gulliver proposes two hypotheses, which he entertains in alternation. The first hypothesis concedes the human monopoly on reason but positions the houyhnhnms as animals who must have proportionately more intelligent human masters. The second hypothesis, which we have already encountered, proposes that the houyhnhnms are humans who have transformed themselves into horses by magic. While the first hypothesis credits the houyhnhnms with some intelligence, it still refuses to promote them to the status of the human because they lack the distinctively human form. The second hypothesis, meanwhile, resorts to magical explanations so that Gulliver can continue to fetishize the human form, even in the confrontation with non-human beings who display all of the intellectual properties of the human. While both of the hypotheses attempt to salvage Gulliver's belief in human superiority, Gulliver seems to prefer the second hypothesis—the hypothesis about transformation—in those moments when he feels most threatened by the similarity of the houyhnhnms to humans.

Before he meets the houyhnhnms, Gulliver regards reason as an exclusive prerogative of the human form. Observing what appears to be a conference between two horses, Gulliver reports, "I was amazed to see such Actions and Behaviour in Brute Beasts, and concluded with myself, that if the Inhabitants of this Country were endued with a proportionable Degree of Reason, they must needs be the wisest People upon Earth" (191). Because of their equine shape, Gulliver initially assumes that the houyhnhnms are normal horses, whom he classifies among the "Brute Beasts." Commonly applied to animals as early as 1475 and as late as 1849, "brute"

means “Wanting in reason or understanding.”³⁴ Whether or not that adjective accurately describes horses or other animals, it certainly cannot apply to the houyhnhnms, as their “Actions and Behaviour” demonstrate to Gulliver. Gulliver therefore decides to credit the houyhnhnms with a small amount of reason, but only so that he does not have to promote the houyhnhnms, who seem rational, to the human’s place—so that he can continue to suppose that the hierarchical relationship of human over horse that exists in England also prevails on the island. Despite their seemingly rational behavior, Gulliver refuses to acknowledge the houyhnhnms as “the Inhabitants of this Country.” He reserves the dignity of that phrase for a human population which, he imagines, must surpass the houyhnhnms in intelligence to the same degree that English humans surpass horses.³⁵

As the houyhnhnms inspect and discuss Gulliver, he begins to suspect that they possess more than the modicum of reason with which he has credited them. In fact, their “various Gestures, not unlike those of a Philosopher” (191), provide evidence of intelligence comparable to that of not just any human being but specifically the “Philosopher,” the figure who represents the unique potential of human intellect in transformation narratives including Gelli’s *Circe*, where the only creature to return to human form is a philosopher (157). Gulliver’s previous hypothesis, which metes out reason to humans and animals in “a proportionable Degree,” seems

³⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. “brute” (entry dated 1989).

³⁵ Gulliver’s encounter with the houyhnhnms poses a crisis in terminology similar to one that would ensue, Mary Midgley imagines, upon the discovery of aliens. Considering the semantic territory covered by *person*, Midgley writes, “How complete is its link with the human bodily form? What, for instance, about intelligent alien beings? Could we call them persons? If not, then contact with them—which is certainly conceivable—would surely require us to coin a new word to do the quite subtle moral job which is done at present by ‘person.’” Slightly later, she notes, “C. S. Lewis, describing a planet where there are three distinct rational species, has them use the word *hnau* for the condition which they all share.” *Utopias, Dolphins, and Computers: Problems in Philosophical Plumbing* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 111. Gulliver displays similarly anthropocentric prejudices in his resistance to recognizing the houyhnhnms as the island’s “Inhabitants” or as “a People” (see below).

inadequate to account for the fully fledged reason that the houyhnhnms display.

Judging from Locke's already cited remarks about parrots and cats, he would simply regard the houyhnhnms as philosophical horses. Gulliver, in contrast, refuses to dissociate reason from the human form. Instead, he reasserts the human monopoly on reason by regarding the houyhnhnms as humans who have transformed themselves into horses. Gulliver explains, "Upon the whole, the Behaviour of these Animals was so orderly and rational, so acute and judicious, that I at last concluded, they must needs be Magicians, who had thus metamorphosed themselves upon some design" (191). Gulliver has already witnessed magic in Glubbudrib, so magical explanations have some plausibility within *Gulliver's Travels*. Nevertheless, Gulliver resorts to a magical explanation so that he need not attribute a human capacity for reason to beings that look like mere "Animals." According to the transformation hypothesis, the houyhnhnms are humans: they are not equine beings with human-like intelligence but human beings with magical disguises. The hypothesis thus upholds human superiority to animals.

The houyhnhnms decide to take Gulliver to an aristocratic household, and in spite of mounting evidence of the houyhnhnms' rationality, Gulliver vacillates between his original hypotheses. As he approaches the houyhnhnm habitation, Gulliver says that he "began to be a little comforted, and took out some Toys, which Travellers usually carry for Presents to the Savage *Indians of America* and other parts, in hopes the People of the House would be thereby encouraged to receive me kindly" (193). Not believing that beings shaped like horses can build houses, Gulliver expects to meet "the People of the House," the human beings whom the horses serve. Invoking narratives about encounters between European explorers and non-European peoples, Gulliver prepares—quite deliberately—to play the role assigned to him by these narratives. His prejudices about the houyhnhnms' shape blind him to the fact that he has already

encountered the natives of the island. His belief that humans are superior to animals and his conception of the horse as a domesticated animal make him expect that equines, regardless of their intelligence, must necessarily have human masters.

When Gulliver enters the house and observes houyhnhnms “employed in domestick Business” (193), he returns even more explicitly to his first hypothesis. Gulliver remarks, “They seemed but ordinary Cattle, however this confirmed my first Opinion, that a People who could so far civilize brute Animals, must needs excel in Wisdom all the Nations of the World” (193). Although the houyhnhnms perform household tasks that only humans perform in England, their physical resemblance to “ordinary Cattle,” to the domesticated horses of England, convinces Gulliver that the houyhnhnms must have human masters. When Gulliver sees the houyhnhnms in the place of humans, he does not acknowledge their mental capacities as equal to those of humans. Instead, Gulliver regards the houyhnhnms as “brute Animals” whose remarkable behavior testifies less to their own intellectual capacities than to the admirable “Wisdom” of the “People” who have trained them. Gulliver does not perceive the houyhnhnms as his intellectual equals, either: even if they possess some reason, the houyhnhnms remain inferior to both Englishmen and the conjectural humans of the island.

Even so, Gulliver becomes increasingly troubled by the prospect of horses that perform all of the functions of human servants. He confesses, “that a Man of Quality should be served all by Horses, was beyond my Comprehension” (194). What is even further beyond Gulliver’s comprehension is that equine beings might be worthy of recognition as “a People”—that the houyhnhnms have reason and a civilization of their own in which they figure as the men, even the men “Of Quality.” So that he need not recognize non-human beings as “a People,” Gulliver once again invokes a magical explanation: “I then absolutely concluded, that all these

Appearances could be nothing else but Necromancy and Magick” (194). Gulliver does not explicitly mention transformation here, but he clearly suspects that some type of magical deceit accounts for the incongruity between the houyhnhnms’ equine forms and their human-like rationality. In fact, Gulliver fails to acknowledge houyhnhnm rationality because of a magical act of his own: the investment of the human shape with a phantasmatic symbolic value.

In none of his previous voyages has Gulliver doubted the rationality of the peoples that he has met because they have all possessed recognizably human forms, despite any physical differences from Gulliver, such as differences in size. Making this point explicit, Gulliver eventually tells the houyhnhnm master that his “Ship was made by Creatures like myself, who in all the Countries I had travelled, as well as in my own, were the only governing, rational Animals” (202). When Gulliver reflects on the relativity of size in the account of his visit to Brobdingnag, where the inhabitants are twelve times larger than him, the human form constitutes the unacknowledged ground for Gulliver’s comparisons of Lilliputians, Europeans, and Brobdingnagians: “It might have pleased Fortune to let the *Lilliputians* find some Nation, where the People were as diminutive with respect to them, as they were to me. And who knows but that even this prodigious Race of Mortals might be equally overmatched in some distant part of the World, whereof we have yet no Discovery?” (73). As he extrapolates from his experiences in Lilliput and Brobdingnag, Gulliver draws a series of analogies in which Lilliputian, Brobdingnagian and European exchange positions. Gulliver is a Lilliputian to the Brobdingnagians but a Brobdingnagian to the Lilliputians. If a conjectural “People” of proportionately smaller size than the Lilliputians and proportionately larger size than the Brobdingnagians exist, then the Lilliputians are Brobdingnagians from the perspective of the smaller people just as the Brobdingnagians are Lilliputians from the perspective of the larger

people.

Gulliver could extrapolate even further, but the important point is that what enables the series of substitutions is the human form shared by Lilliputian, Englishman, and Brobdingnagian, regardless of size.³⁶ Gulliver does not privilege any one perspective—the European perspective, for example—as the standard from which the others deviate. To Gulliver, the Lilliputians may be small humans and the Brobdingnagians may be large humans, but Gulliver is the small human to the Brobdingnagians and the large human to the Lilliputians. No one group of people—Lilliputian, Brobdingnagian, or English—defines the size proper to the human.

Gulliver's encounter in the fourth voyage with a species of rational non-humans illuminates the role that the human form has played throughout the first three voyages: it has trumped all differences among the foreign peoples that Gulliver has encountered, such as differences in size, and has made them all recognizable to Gulliver as human. I would go so far as to suggest that Swift has organized Gulliver's voyages deliberately so that the *Travels* culminates with the exposition of the fetishization of the human form in Gulliver's initial hypotheses about the houyhnhnms. In this sense, part 4 is central to the meaning of *Gulliver's Travels*.

The houyhnhnms, moreover, turn out to have beliefs about themselves that invert the biped/quadruped binary: that is, they fetishize the equine form. Therefore, Gulliver and the houyhnhnms pose reciprocal dilemmas to one another.³⁷ In the encounter between human and

³⁶ For a different view of a Brobdingnagian as a “nonhuman giant,” see Lamb, “Gulliver and the Lives of Animals,” 170.

³⁷ My claim about the reciprocal perspectives of humans and houyhnhnms is consistent with the observations of several other critics. Crane writes, “The world of animals in Houyhnhnmland, in other words, is divided by the same basic differences as the world of animals in Europe. Only, of course [...] it is a world in which the normal distribution of species between ‘rational creatures’ and irrational ‘brutes’ is sharply inverted, with horses [...] in the natural place of men, and man-

houyhnhnm, there is an opportunity for Gulliver and the houyhnhnms to debunk prejudices about bipedal and quadrupedal forms in their respective cultures: just as Lilliputian, European, nor Brobdingnagian defines the size proper to the human, neither human nor houyhnhnm defines the shape proper to a rational being. Gulliver, however, adopts the perspective of the houyhnhnms and even desires an equine form to match his new perspective, in spite of the discovery that reason does not depend upon possessing a human or equine form. By having Gulliver enact a thwarted version of narratives about Gryllus figures who desire non-human shapes while making Gulliver's desire emerge from admiration of another rational being, Swift intensifies his satire of beliefs in symbolic correspondence between physical form and spiritual or intellectual qualities.

Gulliver provides a glimpse of the houyhnhnms' self-conception when he defines their name for themselves. Gulliver explains, "The word *Houyhnhnm*, in their Tongue, signifies a *Horse*, and in its Etymology, *the Perfection of Nature*." (199). When Gulliver translates "houyhnhnm" as "horse," he suggests that the houyhnhnms define themselves by their characteristic shape, just as Locke defines the human as "an Animal of such a certain Form." Furthermore, just as Locke finds the resemblance of the human to the ape too insignificant to qualify them as one species—as Brown argues, Locke's definition of the human "assumes a

like creatures [...] in the natural place of horses." "The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas," 244. Richard Nash writes, "the Houyhnhnms clearly try to frame him [Gulliver] in their own system of natural philosophy, only to be troubled by this quality [his rationality]. For in Houyhnhnm natural philosophy, the Yahoo is not so much an ape or orang-outang, but is instead a 'nonhorse.'" *Wild Enlightenment: The Borders of Human Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 110. Armstrong writes, "From the Houyhnhnm point of view, Gulliver's ability to speak signifies only a partial and subordinate rationality, precisely because it is inappropriately separated from its natural—that is, equine—bodily form." *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 20. Armstrong argues that Gulliver occupies the same problematic position for the houyhnhnms that the parrot occupies for Europeans (20-1).

separation between man and ape”³⁸—so the houyhnhnms distinguish themselves from another equine, the ass, even though the physical resemblance of the two species presumably accounts for one houyhnhnm’s admiration of the ass as “a comely Animal” (229).³⁹

The houyhnhnms do not, however, regard their possession of both an equine form and rationality as a mere coincidence. Fancying themselves “*the Perfection of Nature*,” the houyhnhnms believe that there is some special connection between their bodily form and their capacity for reason. Their fetishization of the equine form becomes especially obvious in their interactions with Gulliver. Gulliver records the houyhnhnm master’s reaction to the news that humans dominate equines in Europe:

He said, if it were possible there could be any Country where *Yahoos* alone were endued with Reason, they certainly must be the governing Animal, because Reason will in Time always prevail against Brutal Strength. But, considering the Frame of our Bodies, and especially of mine, he thought no Creature of equal Bulk was so ill contrived, for employing that Reason in the common Offices of Life. (204)

Initially, the houyhnhnm master seems willing to admit that reason could manifest itself in a human form just as well as an equine one. The very fact that he can consider “Reason” as an abstraction, as he does when he figures the relationship between Europeans and horses as a contest between “Reason” and “Brutal Strength,” suggests that the houyhnhnm master may not fetishize form. Ultimately, however, the houyhnhnm master claims that the human form does not befit a rational mind. He does not merely find fault with humans for lacking the physical strength

³⁸ Brown, *Fables of Modernity*, 246.

³⁹ It is interesting that human natural historians, in contrast, regard other anthropoids as ugly (e.g. Topsell, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*, 4).

to carry out the dictates of reason, for he objects to the human's "Bulk" less than to the fact that it is "ill contrived." The description is vague, but something about the arrangement of Gulliver's body makes it difficult for the houyhnhnm master to imagine it as a habitation for reason.

A plausible referent for the phrase "ill contrived" is Gulliver's bipedal form, which differentiates Gulliver not only from the houyhnhnms but also from the yahoos, to whom the houyhnhnms and Gulliver often compare humans. According to Gulliver, the houyhnhnm master includes his bipedal form in a list of Gulliver's other physical faults:

it was manifest I had neither the Strength or Agility of a common *Yahoo*, that I walked infirmly on my hinder Feet, had found out a Contrivance to make my Claws of no Use or Defence, and to remove the Hair from my Chin, which was intended as a shelter from the Sun and the Weather. Lastly, that I could neither run with Speed, nor climb Trees like my *Brethren* (as he called them) the *Yahoos* in this Country. (219)

Betraying a quadrupedal bias, the houyhnhnm master describes Gulliver's only two feet as "hinder Feet." Since he regards Gulliver's manner of walking as precarious or even sickly, it seems likely that Gulliver's bipedal posture accounts, to a large extent, for the houyhnhnm master's doubts that beings like Gulliver can possess reason. In this respect, the houyhnhnm master contradicts early modern perspectives conflating human rationality and bipedal form.

When the houyhnhnm master first discovers that Gulliver wears clothes, he claims to be less interested in Gulliver's physical form than in his intellectual capabilities. Gulliver relates the houyhnhnm master's sentiments: "he was more astonished at my Capacity for Speech and Reason, that at the Figure of my Body, whether it were covered or no" (201). While the houyhnhnm master's indifference to Gulliver's body might seem to contradict the argument that

the houyhnhnms fetishize form, the houyhnhnm master's surprise at Gulliver's "Capacity for Speech and Reason" depends upon equine-centered prejudices.⁴⁰ According to the houyhnhnms, Gulliver should be "a brute Animal" (198) because he lacks a houyhnhnm's characteristic form, which is supposed to be a symbolic expression of houyhnhnm mental capabilities. Even if the houyhnhnm master claims indifference to Gulliver's body, his surprise at Gulliver's displays of reason betrays his fetishization of the equine form.

In the encounter between Gulliver and the houyhnhnms, there is an opportunity for European and houyhnhnm to reconceptualize themselves and their relation to animals. In particular, both Gulliver and the houyhnhnms should find it difficult to continue to fetishize their own forms after meeting each other. In an early conversation between Gulliver and his houyhnhnm master, it seems possible that both parties will recognize the limitations of their own perspectives. When the houyhnhnm master questions Gulliver about his boat, Gulliver's answer compares the houyhnhnm perspective on yahoos with the human perspective on horses without privileging either perspective:

I went on by assuring him, that the Ship was made by Creatures like myself, who in all the Countries I had travelled, as well as in my own, were the only governing, rational Animals; and that upon my Arrival hither, I was as much astonished to see the *Houyhnhnms* act like rational Beings, as he or his Friends could be in finding some Marks of Reason in a Creature he was pleased to call a *Yahoo*, to which I owned my Resemblance in every Part, but could not account for their degenerate and brutal Nature. (202)

⁴⁰ Armstrong offers a similar reading: "From the Houyhnhnm point of view Gulliver's ability to speak signifies only a partial and subordinate rationality, precisely because it is inappropriately separated from its natural—that is, equine—bodily form." *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 20.

The perspectives of the houyhnhnms and of Gulliver appear not equally valid but equally flawed; for just as the houyhnhnm defies easy categorization as human or horse for Gulliver, so Gulliver defies easy categorization as houyhnhnm or yahoo for the houyhnhnms. To account for the anomaly posed by the houyhnhnms, who “act like Rational Beings” in spite of their equine shape, Gulliver would have to de-fetishize the human form. To resolve the reciprocal dilemma posed by Gulliver, who displays “Marks of Reason” in spite of his self-confessed “Resemblance” to a yahoo, the houyhnhnms would have to de-fetishize the houyhnhnm form. With the new recognition that the world includes not just humans and horses or houyhnhnms and yahoos but all four species, Gulliver and the houyhnhnms should no longer be able to believe that their respective forms represent their rationality.

The houyhnhnms, however, ultimately assimilate Gulliver to the yahoo category; as the houyhnhnm master explains, the houyhnhnm government even bases their decision to exile Gulliver on their construction of Gulliver as a yahoo: “the Representatives had taken Offence at his keeping a *Yahoo* (meaning myself) in his Family more like a *Houyhnhnm*, than a Brute Animal” (235). Gulliver, meanwhile, does overcome his anthropocentric perspective—but only to adopt the analogous species-centered prejudices of the houyhnhnms. Providing a parenthetical explanation of the word “*Yahoo*,” Gulliver seems to imply that the houyhnhnm council has made a mistake about his identity; however, he subsequently appears to have adopted the houyhnhnms’ perspective to such an extent that he agrees with their identification of him as a yahoo and with their decision to banish him: “I knew too well upon what solid Reasons all the Determinations of the wise *Houyhnhnms* were founded, not to be shaken by Arguments of mine, a miserable *Yahoo*” (236).

Wishing for transformation into a houyhnhnm, Gulliver rejects his former view of the

bipedal form in favor of the houyhnhnm view of the quadrupedal form, in spite of the fact that both views have been invalidated by the encounter of human and houyhnhnm.⁴¹ Gulliver functions as an ironic Gryllus figure because he believes that he, no less than earlier figures who desire to be animals, requires transformation when he is already ontologically similar to a houyhnhnm.

Gulliver's Incompletely Forgotten Humanity

Gulliver relates that he has begun to affiliate himself with the houyhnhnms not long before he recounts his exile from Houyhnhnmland, as though Swift intends to test the implications of Gulliver's identification with equines by sending him back to his human community. Even though Gulliver does not receive the transformation that he desires, he displays a version of the forgetting of humanity that characterizes earlier Gryllus-like figures. For instance, in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Guyon condemns Gryll:

See the mind of beastly man,
That hath so soone forgot the excellence
Of his creation, when he life began,
That now he chooseth, with vile difference,
To be a beast, and lacke intelligence.⁴²

As Gulliver takes a houyhnhnm-like perspective on his fellow Europeans, he similarly seems to

⁴¹ As Richard Nash observes, "One of the ironies of book 4 hinges on the ease with which Gulliver is taught (more accurately, trained) by Houyhnhnms, while the Houyhnhnms themselves remain stubbornly resistant to learning from Gulliver anything that contradicts what they already 'know.'" *Wild Enlightenment*, 110. Nash cites Gulliver's eventual self-identification as a yahoo as a local example of this general trend (115).

⁴² Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, book 2, canto 12, stanza 87, lines 1-5.

have forgotten his human past, especially his European education. Gulliver's forgetting of humanity is ironic, however, because his attempts to affiliate himself with the houyhnhnms betray signs that Gulliver simultaneously recalls his human past, often in ways that motivate more intense disavowals of his human identity and community. In this way, contextualizing Gulliver within the tradition of transformation narratives about humans who prefer to be animals generates a new reading of Gulliver's disturbing alienation from other humans at the end of his travelogue. While earlier Gryllus figures become animals and seem to forget their humanity, Gulliver's frustrated desire for transformation manifests itself in claims to have forgotten humanity that paradoxically rely on memories of Gulliver's human past, often because of details that Gulliver seeks to suppress. These paradoxical claims sustain Swift's satire of the idea, on which Gulliver remains fixated, that physical form and reason have a symbolic correspondence.

Gulliver's meeting with Captain Pedro de Mendez and his crew, Gulliver's first encounter with Europeans after his departure from Houyhnhnmland, serves as an instructive example of Swift's dramatization of logical inconsistencies in Gulliver's attempt to maintain the houyhnhnm perspective, especially because the scene parallels Gulliver's initial encounter with the houyhnhnms, when anthropocentric prejudices have prevented him from recognizing the houyhnhnms as human-like beings. Just as the sight of equines in conversation has once surprised Gulliver because of his belief in the irrationality of all non-human animals, he now marvels at the prospect of conversation among humans: "When they began to talk, I thought I never heard or saw any thing so unnatural; for it appeared to me as monstrous as if a Dog or a Cow should speak in *England*, or a *Yahoo* in *Houyhnhnm-land*" (241). Likewise, Gulliver has admired the "great Civility" (196) that the houyhnhnm master shows to a dinner guest. Now, when Captain Pedro de Mendez offers Gulliver a meal in his cabin, Gulliver "wondered to find

such Civilities from a *Yahoo*” (241). Finally, just as Gulliver has once credited the houyhnhnms with only a small degree of reason, the captain’s example now causes Gulliver to modify his houyhnhnm-derived belief that all creatures other than houyhnhnms are irrational: he “spoke so very movingly, that at last I descended to treat him like an Animal which has some little portion of Reason” (242). In each of these three instances, Gulliver regards fellow Europeans in the same way that he has initially regarded the houyhnhnms.

Of course, an obvious fact prevents Gulliver’s houyhnhnm-centered perspective from corresponding exactly to its homologous human-centered equivalent. When Gulliver first arrives on the island, his expectations about equine behavior derive entirely from his knowledge of horses. Even though those expectations betray anthropocentric prejudices, Gulliver at least has the excuse that he has never previously encountered the houyhnhnms and so has never confronted such a startling contradiction to his anthropocentric beliefs about the differences between bipeds and quadrupeds. Gulliver could not excuse his surprise at the behavior of the Europeans at the end of part 4 in the same way: when he turns his newly adopted, houyhnhnm-centered gaze upon Don Pedro and his crew, he has intimate knowledge of the European community as one of its former members.

Swift emphasizes this discrepancy. For instance, while Gulliver claims to feel the same surprise at the conversation among Don Pedro and his crew that he has felt at a conversation among houyhnhnms, Gulliver already knows Portuguese. In fact, Gulliver remarks, “I understood that Language very well” (240). When Gulliver first hears a houyhnhnm speak, he can plausibly claim to doubt whether the houyhnhnm is making sounds typical of horses or “speaking to himself in some Language of his own” (190). As a fluent speaker of Portuguese, though, Gulliver already knows, prior to his encounter with Don Pedro’s ship, that the

Portuguese are capable of language. He can only feel surprise at the conversation among Don Pedro and his crew if he suppresses his memories of Europe, but Swift dramatizes the fact that Gulliver remembers his European past by having him boast about his command of Portuguese.

Swift creates a similar paradox by having Gulliver introduce himself to the Portuguese sailors as “a poor *Yahoo*, banished from the *Houyhnhnms*” (240). Even if Gulliver has come to think of himself as a yahoo, he must know that the words “yahoo” and “houyhnhnm” have no significance in Portuguese. By identifying himself in the houyhnhnms’ terms, Gulliver not only expects the Portuguese to be familiar with the houyhnhnm language but also seems to forget the European conceptual categories that he supplants by using the houyhnhnms’ terms. He seems less interested in making himself intelligible to the Portuguese than in taking the perspective of a houyhnhnm. Despite having once held European beliefs about equines and humans himself, Gulliver acts as though he is ignorant of the European perspective and of the inscrutability of the terms “houyhnhnm” and “yahoo” to his audience. At the same time, and with the exception of these two terms, Gulliver speaks to the sailors in Portuguese, a language that he has learned during his former life as a member of the European community.

Gulliver’s fluency in Portuguese signals that he has not forgotten his homeland and his former European perspective as entirely as he claims, and so does his choice of creatures with which to compare the Portuguese. According to Gulliver, the conversation with the Portuguese “appeared to me as monstrous as if a Dog or a Cow should speak in *England*, or a *Yahoo* in *Houyhnhnm-land*” (241). Gulliver has chosen the dog and the cow as examples of English creatures that do not speak, but Houyhnhnm-land has dogs and cows that do not speak either (194). The only animals that speak in Houyhnhnm-land but not anywhere else are equines. If Gulliver wants to contrast England and Houyhnhnm-land, as his sentence construction suggests,

then he should choose the horse as his example of an animal from England. The fact that Gulliver does not choose the horse, the seemingly inevitable example, once again dramatizes the way that the memory of his former perspective, which Gulliver tries to suppress, interferes with the integrity of his current perspective. He knows from firsthand experience, as the houyhnhnms themselves do not, that horses differ quite remarkably from houyhnhnms, but now Gulliver so fervently desires to resemble the houyhnhnms that he suppresses the most shocking difference between Houyhnhnmland and England: the difference in the linguistic capabilities of their equines, which has shocked Gulliver himself upon his arrival in Houyhnhnmland.

Other ways in which Gulliver replays his first encounter with the houyhnhnms in his meeting with Don Pedro and his crew also betray an implausible forgetting. Gulliver has never seen equines invite their friends to dinner, so the houyhnhnms' politeness surprises him in a way that Don Pedro's should not. Gulliver has presumably shared many meals with Europeans; therefore, he has already participated in the meal-time "Civilities" (241) at which he now claims to marvel.

Finally, when Gulliver credits Don Pedro with "some little portion of Reason" (242), he recapitulates a hypothesis that he has originally made about the houyhnhnms, the hypothesis that unusually intelligent equines must have human masters of proportionally greater intelligence. To apply this hypothesis to Don Pedro, though, Gulliver has to suppress the memory of his self-conception as a European. He has to forget the perspective from which the behavior of the houyhnhnms once seemed so surprising and from which Don Pedro's behavior would appear unremarkable. Gulliver's explanation for Don Pedro's deviation from typical yahoo behavior closely resembles his first explanation for the houyhnhnms' deviation from typical horse behavior, but the hypothesis becomes more problematic in its application to Don Pedro because

Gulliver seems to forget the perspective that generated the original hypothesis. If he has fetishized the human form out of ignorance, he now fetishizes the equine form without this excuse. In all of these ways, Gulliver displays an incomplete or frustrated forgetting of his European past.

Similar contradictions inhere in Gulliver's description of the reunion with his family. Gulliver writes, "I must freely confess the sight of them filled me only with Hatred, Disgust and Contempt, and the more by reflecting on the near Alliance I had to them" (244). Gulliver's feelings of "Hatred, Disgust, and Contempt" for humans resemble the feelings that yahoos excite for the houyhnhnm master, who remarks that the yahoos have a "strange Disposition to Nastiness and Dirt, whereas there appears to be a natural Love of Cleanliness in all other Animals" (222). Gulliver likens himself to the houyhnhnms by equating humans with yahoos and reviling both species, but his expression of emotion also betrays his ineradicable difference from the houyhnhnms: he hates humans "more" than the houyhnhnms can because of his "near Alliance" with them. At the same time that Gulliver imitates, even surpasses, the houyhnhnms in hatred of yahoos and humans, his excess emotion betrays the memory of his affiliation with humans.

Similarly, Gulliver relates, "As soon as I entered the House, my Wife took me in her Arms, and kissed me, at which having not been used to the Touch of that odious Animal for so many Years, I fell in a Swoon for almost an Hour" (244). Gulliver's faint seems to signal that he feels an involuntary revulsion for humans, a revulsion at least as authentic as that of the houyhnhnms. He accounts for the traumatic impact of his wife's embrace, however, by explaining that he is no longer accustomed to physical contact with her. That explanation betrays the fact that Gulliver has memories of his wife that should enable him to view her as something other than an "odious Animal." He may claim, "when I began to consider, that by copulating

with one of the *Yahoo*-Species I had become a Parent of more, it struck me with the utmost Shame, Confusion and Horror” (244); but this expression of regret is also a reminder of a former perspective from which fathering children seemed desirable.

After recounting his fainting spell, Gulliver explains that he has continued to abhor humans over the five years that have passed since his reunion with his family: “During the first Year I could not endure my Wife or Children in my Presence, the very Smell of them was intolerable, much less could I suffer them to eat in the same Room. To this hour they dare not presume to touch my Bread, or drink out of the same Cup, neither was I ever able to let one of them take me by the Hand” (244). In his initial encounters with the houyhnhnms and in his meeting with Don Pedro, meals have afforded Gulliver with opportunities to observe the “Civility” of beings that he regards as irrational. While meal-time civilities have thus far been occasions for acknowledging the rationality of others, Gulliver claims to experience his most intense revulsion for his family during meals. Even once he allows his wife to join him at the dinner table, he must take the following protective measure: “the smell of a *Yahoo* continuing very offensive, I always keep my Nose well stopt with Rue, Lavender, or Tobacco-leaves” (249). During the meal, Gulliver neither notes the civility of his human companion nor displays the civility that he has admired in the houyhnhnms or Don Pedro. He claims that he has not been “able to let” a family member hold his hand, as though he has attempted to overcome his revulsion for humans but has nevertheless continued to perceive his family from the houyhnhnm perspective. At the same time, Gulliver fails to recognize that he behaves with less civility than his wife, whom he reviles as an irrational yahoo, even though he has taken civility as a sign of rationality in the past. While his houyhnhnm-like revulsion for humans has proved to be enduring, Gulliver’s refusal to re-evaluate his wife’s rationality is surprising, not only because of

his memory of her but also because of his quite different reflections on the behaviors of houyhnhnms and humans at prior meals.

Gulliver claims to hope that he will overcome his aversion to humans, but even that claim is undermined by his unsuccessful attempt to suppress the memory of his human past. He writes, “although it be hard for a Man late in life to remove old Habits, I am not altogether out of Hopes in some time to suffer a Neighbour *Yahoo* in my Company without the Apprehensions I am yet under of his Teeth or his Claws” (249). Gulliver intends this statement to indicate that his aversion to yahoos is involuntary and irresistible: he has “Hopes” of overcoming the fear of yahoos, but in spite of his efforts, he remains unable to feel comfortable or even safe in their presence. He explains the recalcitrance of his fears by invoking commonplaces about the difficulty of changing “old Habits,” especially at an old age. When Gulliver makes this claim at the age of approximately 60, he has feared yahoos for less than ten years.⁴³ Compared with the amount of time that Gulliver has thought of himself as a human and prided himself on his humanity, his aversion is a new rather than an old habit. Furthermore, even if this aversion does qualify as a somewhat old habit, he has acquired it in his early fifties—at an age not much younger than the age at which he now claims to be unable to alter it. If Gulliver can alter his perspective as radically as he supposedly has in Houyhnhnmland, then he could presumably alter his attitudes and behaviors again. As much as he might like to conceal the recent date of the change in his perspective, Gulliver cannot forget the long years during which he has held human-centered rather than houyhnhnm-centered views. Gulliver’s enduring memories of humanity belie his attempts to adopt the houyhnhnm perspective.

⁴³ Based on Gulliver’s account of his life in the opening pages of his travelogue, he seems to be about 38 when he begins his first voyage in 1699 (15-6). His fourth voyage begins in 1710 and ends in 1715, and he writes his account five years later (187, 244), which brings him to the age of approximately 59.

Spenser's Gryll receives an animal form to correspond with the forgetting of his humanity: "Let *Gryll* be *Gryll*, and haue his hoggish minde," is the Palmer's verdict.⁴⁴ In contrast, Gulliver can neither forget his humanity nor receive the change of form that he desires. Indeed, an analysis of Gulliver's desire for an equine form demonstrates that it is riven by the same contradictions as the other aspects of his newly adopted houyhnhnm-centered perspective. Gulliver writes:

By conversing with the *Houyhnhnms*, and looking upon them with Delight, I fell to imitate their Gate and Gesture, which is now grown into an Habit, and my Friends often tell me in a blunt way, that *I trot like a Horse*; which, however, I take for a great Compliment: Neither shall I disown, that in Speaking I am apt to fall into the Voice and manner of the *Houyhnhnms*, and hear myself ridiculed on that account without the least Mortification. (235)

According to Gulliver, his characteristically equine manners of moving and speaking have originated in his admiration of the houyhnhnms, and they signify his proximity to the houyhnhnms. Gulliver's use of the verb "to fall to" indicates that he has acquired his new mannerisms by accident, but he clearly prides himself on his resemblance to equines. Having remade his bipedal human body on the houyhnhnm model, Gulliver maximizes the correspondence between his identification with the houyhnhnms and his physical form even though he never transforms into an equine.

As Gulliver knows, however, his equine behaviors have a different significance for the members of his European community. As Thomas notes, injunctions against animal-like behaviors appear frequently in early modern conduct manuals, such as the important *De civilitate*

⁴⁴ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, book 2, canto 12, stanza 87, line 8.

morum puerilium of Desiderius Erasmus.⁴⁵ Erasmus singles out the horse in particular for unflattering comparisons in remarks such as “It is unfitting that some laughing neigh like a horse” and “drink not like a swill-bottle, not supping or smacking with the lips like a horse.”⁴⁶ Erasmus urges readers to follow norms of manners by comparing the bad manners of humans to the characteristic behaviors of animals. According to Thomas, “Erasmus’s decisively influential textbook on civility had made differentiation from animals the very essence of good table manners, more so even than differentiation from ‘rustics.’”⁴⁷ Likewise, Gulliver’s friends think that they need only point out Gulliver’s resemblance to a horse in order to bring him to the embarrassed self-recognition that will motivate him to correct what they perceive as violations of the code of manners.

Gulliver finds the comparisons of himself to an equine just; but they do not persuade him to modify his comportment because he has a secret referent for his equine behaviors: the houyhnhnms, of whom his fellow Europeans remain ignorant. Gulliver knows how his peers interpret his equine movements and vocalizations because he has shared their European education; but he nevertheless decides to take their censure of his characteristically equine behaviors as “a great Compliment.” His imitation of the houyhnhnm form is structurally similar to his use of houyhnhnm terms in his conversation with the Portuguese sailors: Gulliver ignores European norms of intelligibility at the same time that he betrays memories of the European perspective. Instead of concluding from European and houyhnhnm perspectives that form is incidental to rationality, Gulliver persists in walking and talking like a houyhnhnm because he

⁴⁵ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 37.

⁴⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium*, trans. Robert Whittington, 2nd ed. (London: Imprinted by John Byddell, 1540), 11, 30. I have assigned numbers to Erasmus’s pages, beginning with the title page.

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 37.

mistakenly thinks that having an equine body would make his identification with the houyhnhnms and his separation from humans complete.

Conclusion

Part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* develops themes from the tradition of Plutarchian narratives, but in ways that mark the end of that tradition's ability to offer a compelling account of the human/animal relation. Whereas earlier works use magical transformations so that characters who want to be animals can become animals, Swift gives Gulliver a desire for a non-human existence while portraying Gulliver as enduringly human. Gulliver's departure from the pattern of earlier Gryllus figures perhaps reflects a shift from Renaissance to Enlightenment definitions of the human. For instance, while Pico's definition of the human as "self-transforming" imagines a correspondence between mental states and physical forms,⁴⁸ Locke imagines a transformation of the human in order to suggest that no necessary relationship exists between mental attributes and physical shape. In the Renaissance, Fudge argues, acknowledging human superiority is an important element of human identity.⁴⁹ Perhaps for Swift, desiring a non-human existence seems to be merely a type of human experience, common not only to the typical Gryllus figures of the Plutarchian tradition of transformations but also to the characters who have preceded Gulliver in imagining, but not experiencing, transformation into an equine.

⁴⁸ Giovanni Pico, "Oration on the Dignity of Man," trans. Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 225, but see also 226.

⁴⁹ Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning*, 24-7.

EPILOGUE

THE AFTER-LIFE OF THE CIRCE NARRATIVE:
 TRANSFORMATIONS IN *THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU*

Although I argue that Swift's parody in part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* represents an endpoint for the Plutarchian tradition of transformations, it continues to shape conceptions of humans and animals in a much later work, H. G. Wells's *Island of Doctor Moreau*. In this novel, the scientist Moreau has changed animals into human-like creatures through vivisection, but the protagonist Prendick initially suspects that Moreau has changed humans into animal-like creatures. Through a crucial allusion to Milton's *Comus*, Wells affiliates Prendick's suspicions with the Circean tradition and positions Moreau's scientific experiments in opposition to magical transformations of humans into animals. Although this opposition seems to distinguish Moreau's experiments from Comus's transformations, it also invites comparison of Wells's novel with the Circean tradition. Despite an apparent disavowal of the literary tradition of magical human-animal transformations, the novel often imagines humans and animals in terms derived from that tradition, providing an example of the way that the literary tradition of transformations may continue to haunt ostensibly scientific paradigms of the human/animal relation.

The allusion to *Comus* occurs just after Prendick mistakes the vivisected puma for a transformed human and begins to fear that he may become Moreau's next experimental subject. Of Moreau and his assistant Montgomery, Prendick writes, "These sickening scoundrels had merely intended to keep me back, to fool me with their display of confidence, and presently to fall upon me with a fate more horrible than death, with torture, and after torture the most hideous

degradation it was possible to conceive—to send me off, a lost soul, a beast, to the rest of their Comus rout.”¹ With this allusion, Wells suggests that Prendick’s interpretation of the human-animal hybrids as former humans has been shaped by his reading of Milton’s *Comus*, in which a male Circe figure, to whom Prendick compares Moreau and Montgomery, transforms the heads of humans into those of animals. When Prendick accuses Moreau of changing humans into animals before a crowd of the human-animal hybrids, Prendick relates, “They seemed, as I fancied then, to be trying to understand me, to remember something of their human past” (67). In previous chapters, I have identified the forgetting of humanity as a key motif in the Plutarchian tradition of transformations. Prendick would have encountered this motif in *Comus*, in which the Attendant Spirit complains that Comus’s victims

Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
But boast themselves more comely than before,
And all their friends and native home forget,
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.²

Prendick interprets Moreau’s hybrid creatures in terms derived, in part, from *Comus* when he believes that they have forgotten their former humanity. Furthermore, Prendick’s fears of transformation may include the fear that he, like Comus’s victims, would ultimately forget his human identity and develop the Gryllus figure’s characteristic preference for his new state.

The literary origin of Prendick’s fears seems especially striking because Prendick prides himself on his scientific education: “I had spent some years at the Royal College of Science, and

¹ H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005), 52. Subsequent citations appear in text.

² John Milton, *Comus*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), page 91, lines 74-7. Subsequent citations appear in text by page and line numbers.

had done some research in biology under Huxley” (29). Prendick even compares himself with Moreau when he reflects, “Yet surely, and especially to another scientific man, there was nothing so horrible in vivisection as to account for this secrecy” (35). Paradoxically, Prendick eventually draws conclusions based on transformation literature in spite of his scientific pretensions.

Prendick’s account of his encounter with the swine people provides further evidence for the influence of *Comus* and other transformation literature by using piggishness to represent animality in general and by making symbolic distinctions between biped and quadruped. Early in the novel, Prendick witnesses a ritual of three swine people:

Suddenly, as I watched their grotesque and unaccountable gestures, I perceived clearly for the first time what it was that had offended me, what had given me the two inconsistent and conflicting impressions of utter strangeness and yet of the strangest familiarity. The three creatures engaged in this mysterious rite were human in shape, and yet human beings with the strangest air about them of some familiar animal. Each of these creatures, despite its human form, its rag of clothing, and the rough humanity of its bodily form, had woven into it, into its movements, into the expression of its countenance, into its whole presence, some now irresistible suggestion of a hog, a swinish taint, the unmistakable mark of the beast. (42)

Although Prendick has not yet expressed fears that Moreau has been transforming humans into animal-like creatures, such a transformation narrative seems incipient in Prendick’s speculation that animal traits have been “woven into” the human-shaped creatures. The description of the creatures as having “a swinish taint” likewise suggests that formerly human beings have been imbued with animal qualities. Indeed, Prendick continues,

I stood overcome by this realization, and then the most horrible questionings came rushing into my mind. They began leaping into the air, first one and then the other, whooping and grunting. Then one slipped, and for a moment was on all fours, to recover indeed forthwith. But that transitory gleam of the true animalism of these monsters was enough. (42)

It is no coincidence that Prendick's encounter with the swine people, in particular, precipitates "the most horrible questionings" that eventually culminate in the accusation that Moreau has transformed humans into animals. Indeed, Wells links the two scenes by having Prendick repeat the reference to "a swinish taint" when he accuses Moreau of giving humans "some bestial taint" (66). The idea that "true animalism" manifests itself in quadrupedalism and, more specifically, in piggish qualities has an influential precedent in the tradition of transformation stories. As we have seen, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* influentially contrasts the rational human with quadrupedal animals, who "behold the ground with grovelling eye."³ Perhaps because the pig seems to be the most characteristically "grovelling" animal, many writers, including Plutarch and Spenser, have compared irrational or depraved humans with pigs, in particular. The use of human-pig transformations to represent all human-animal transformations is particularly striking in *Comus*, the Plutarchian text to which Wells's novel explicitly alludes, for the Attendant Spirit says that all of Comus's victims, who have the heads of diverse animals, "roll with pleasure in a sensual sty" (p. 91, l. 77). Wells's episode with the swine people thus provides further evidence that Prendick's suspicions about the beast people are shaped by his familiarity with transformation literature, especially *Comus*.

³ Arthur Golding, trans., *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, ed. Madeleine Forey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), book 1, line 97. Subsequent citations appear in text by book and line numbers.

As Moreau corrects Prendick's misconceptions, Wells presents Moreau's experiments as the inverse of Comus's transformations. When Prendick accuses Moreau and Montgomery of changing humans into animals before a crowd of the human-animal hybrids, Prendick continues to assimilate Moreau's experimental subjects to the transformed humans of *Comus*. Prendick yells, "They were men—men like yourselves, whom you have infected with some bestial taint, men whom you enslaved, and whom you still fear" (66). After Moreau convinces Prendick to come inside for an explanation, however, Prendick realizes, "The creatures I had seen were not men, had never been men. They were animals—humanized animals—triumphs of vivisection" (70-1). Moreau's experiments represent the inverse of Comus's transformations because Moreau changes animals into human-like creatures whereas Comus changes humans into animal-like creatures. Wells dramatizes the inversion of Prendick's perspective on the hybrid creatures by echoing but negating the accusation, "They were men—men like yourselves," in the admission, "The creatures I had seen were not men, had never been men." Moreover, the phrase "triumphs of vivisection" affiliates the hybrid creatures with scientific experimentation, in sharp contrast to magical transformations, like those effected by Comus.

Moreau's explanation represents a pivotal moment in the novel, in which the tradition of magical transformations is disavowed in favor of a relatively modern, scientific perspective on humans and animals. Even Moreau's ostensibly scientific account of his experiments, however, bears signs of the influence of the tradition of transformation stories. Moreau tells Prendick, "These creatures you have seen are animals carven and wrought into new shapes. To that—to the study of the plasticity of living forms—my life has been devoted" (71). Moreau seeks the power of transformation through a mastery of surgical techniques, but his library, which Prendick has previously examined, reflects not only his scientific approach but also possible literary

inspirations. Moreau's library contains, Prendick notes, "an array of old books, chiefly, I found, surgical works and editions of the Latin and Greek classics—languages I cannot read with any comfort" (32). Homer's *Odyssey* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* probably number among the ancient works that appear alongside the surgical guides. Indeed, Moreau boasts, "It's not simply the outward form of an animal I can change" (72), as though he recalls that Homer's Circe changes only the bodies of humans into those of animals: "the minds within them," explains Homer's Odysseus, "stayed as they had been / before."⁴ Moreau repeats his higher claims for vivisection in response to Prendick's astonishment that the vivisected creatures can speak: "He said that was so, and proceeded to point out that the possibilities of vivisection do not stop at a mere physical metamorphosis" (72). This account of Moreau's experiments affiliates his practice of "vivisection" with a literary tradition of "metamorphosis," especially because of the use of that word. Since Moreau seems to imply that his transformations differ from the merely physical transformations of Homer's Circe, his ostensibly scientific experiments seem to participate in the Plutarchian tradition of transformations.

Although Moreau's account of his experiments develops modern biological perspectives, especially that of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, by affiliating the human with the ape, Moreau also recurs frequently to motifs or themes from the Plutarchian tradition of transformations. After Moreau describes his early, failed experiments on "man-making" (75), he explains that he has his first success with a gorilla: "Then I took a gorilla I had, and upon that, working with infinite care, and mastering difficulty after difficulty, I made my first man. All the week, night and day, I moulded him. With him it was chiefly the brain that needed moulding" (76). Moreau's implication that gorillas are especially similar to humans belongs to evolutionary biology's view

⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), page 158, lines 240-1.

of the human/animal relation, which the narrative endorses by choosing a gorilla to become Moreau's "first man," as though this transformation is easier for Moreau to achieve than other animal-human transformations. Prendick relays some of Moreau's similar remarks about another simian: "the great difference between man and monkey is in the larynx, he said, in the incapacity to frame delicately different sound-symbols by which thought could be sustained" (73). As noted in previous chapters, defining a boundary between human and simian represents an approach to considering the human/animal relation that becomes widespread in the eighteenth century.⁵ Evolutionary biology, of course, provides Wells with more recent reasons to emphasize the human/ape relation.

When, however, Moreau explains that his human-gorilla hybrid "began with a clean sheet, mentally; had no memories left in his mind of what he had been" (76), the Plutarchian motif of forgetting intrudes upon Moreau's seemingly modern and scientific account. Initially, Moreau suggests that the hybrid creature has the mental state that humans originally have in the Enlightenment philosophy of John Locke, who compares "the Mind" to "white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*."⁶ The subsequent invocation of a Plutarchian view of mental transformation as forgetting—having "no memories" of a past identity—suggests that Moreau's modern, scientific enterprise of "man-making" continues to be shaped by the tradition of magical transformations. Likewise, when Moreau makes the point that he can alter minds as well as

⁵ As previously mentioned, H. W. Janson dates this approach to Edward Tyson's 1699 *Anatomy of a Pygmie. Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: The Warburg Institute, The University of London, 1952), 336. And once again, on the new and increasing prominence of the ape in eighteenth-century conceptions of the human/animal relation, see Laura Brown, *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 225-31; and Laura Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes: Humans and Other Animals in the Modern Literary Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), especially 27-63.

⁶ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 4th ed. (1700), ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), book 2, chapter 1, paragraph 2, page 104.

bodies, he gives a telling animal example: “A pig may be educated” (72). The unexpected reference to pigs, which recalls the earlier episode with the swine people, seems inconsistent with Moreau’s relatively modern, scientific remarks about mental similarities between humans and simians and indicates the enduring influence of transformation literature, especially *Comus*, in which the pig functions as a synecdoche for all animal species and as a symbol for intemperance. Moreau’s ambition to educate the pig, who presumes to teach Athena in the proverb discussed in chapter three, may represent another way in which Moreau hopes to improve upon the transformations of Circe figures: Moreau intends for his science to conquer even the gap between the human and the pig, conventionally imagined, as we have seen, to be recalcitrant and intemperate. Still, transformation literature shapes that supposedly scientific aspiration.

The influence of transformation stories also accounts for an inadequately explained aspect of Moreau’s experiments: his idealization of the human form. Moreau claims to be committed to “the study of the plasticity of living forms,” but in truth, he seems more specifically committed to transformations of quadrupeds into bipeds. Prendick invites Moreau to remark on this discrepancy:

But I asked him why he had taken the human form as a model. There seemed to me then, and there still seems to me now, a strange wickedness in that choice.

He confessed that he had chosen that form by chance. ‘I might just as well have worked to form sheep into llamas, and llamas into sheep. I suppose there is something in the human form that appeals to the artistic turn of mind more powerfully than any animal shape can. (73)

Moreau hides or is himself unaware of the extent to which his transformation project is determined by distinctions between quadrupedal animal and bipedal human, as conceived throughout the tradition of transformation stories.

Other passages in the novel likewise perpetuate an association of bipedalism with the unique mental abilities of the human. When the beast people recite their Law, they begin, “Not to go an all-Fours; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?” (59). The fact that the command to walk upright appears first in the litany suggests a view of bipedal locomotion as fundamental to human identity. Significantly, Prendick perceives the “true animalism” of the swine people only when one falls “on all fours” (42). Despite Moreau’s unconvincing claim that sheep-llama transformations would have been equally interesting, his animal-human transformations repeat the quadruped-biped distinction from the transformation tradition. Indeed, they reinforce that distinction, for the creatures gain or lose human-like mental abilities in accordance with their degree of bipedalism. Thus, when the beast people begin to revert to animals, Prendick observes, “My Dog Man imperceptibly slipped back to the dog again; day by day he became dumb, quadrupedal, hairy” (123). The bipedal form thus continues to function in Wells’s novel as a symbol of the human’s unique intellectual properties, despite Moreau’s seemingly modern remarks about the small differences between humans and simians.

Prendick, too, recurs to beliefs about the symbolic significance of the human form at the end of the novel. Like Gulliver, Prendick feels alienated from humanity after his encounter with beings that fail to conform to his expectations about bipeds and quadrupeds. Upon his return to England, Prendick explains, “I could not persuade myself 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; and that they would presently begin to revert, to show first this bestial

mark and then that” (130). Prendick’s fetishization of the bipedal form is evident in the phrase “outward image of human souls,” which suggests that a relationship exists between the human shape and an intangible property of the human, ensoulment. Indeed, what Prendick finds most disturbing is the possibility that seeming humans might not have human natures. These creatures would reveal their inhumanity, upon reversion, through the appearance of “first this bestial mark and then that,” and earlier remarks make it clear that Prendick regards quadrupedalism as a particularly significant indicator of animality.

To assuage his fears, Prendick explains, “I spend many of the clear nights in the study of astronomy. There is, though I do not know how there is or why there is, a sense of infinite peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven. There it must be, I think, in the vast and eternal laws of matter, and not in the daily cares and sins and troubles of men, that whatever is more than animal within us must find its solace and hope” (131). This passage, which appears in the novel’s final paragraph, betrays a debt to the transformation tradition in its suggestion that contemplation of the heavens distinguishes humans from animals. In Plato’s *Timaeus*, quadrupeds are originally humans who are transformed when they forsake religion, astronomy, and philosophy.⁷ Ovid’s narrator claims that the creator gives humans a bipedal form so that they may “mark and understand what things were in the starry sky” (1.100). Similarly, Gelli’s Aglafemos claims to regain the capacity for religion simultaneously with the human form.⁸ The conclusion of Wells’s novel thus repeats earlier statements linking the bipedal form with the supposedly unique heavenward aspirations of the human. No less than Moreau’s ambition to

⁷ Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. and ed. Desmond Lee and T. K. Johansen (London and New York: Penguin, 2008), 90, but see 88-91.

⁸ Giovanni Battista Gelli, *Circes of John Baptista Gello, Florentine. Translated out of Italion into Englishe by Henry Iden* (Imprinted at London in Poules Churchyarde, at the signe of the holy ghost by John Cawood, printer to the Quenes Majestie, 1557), 293-4. I have assigned numbers to the pages of this edition, beginning with the title page.

change animals into humans, Prendick's reactionary attempt to locate a securely human identity in astronomical pursuits is shaped by the treatment of the human's bipedal form in earlier transformation literature.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have identified a coherent yet overlooked tradition of transformation literature about human or formerly human characters who want to be animals. These characters are based on Gryllus, who chooses to be a pig rather than a human in Plutarch's innovative re-telling of Homer's Circe episode. A Plutarchian literary tradition of Circe stories originates in the Renaissance with Giovanni Battista Gelli's *Circe* (1549), continues with works such as book 2 of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590) and John Milton's *Comus* (1634), and concludes with Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), in which Gulliver's frustrated desire for transformation into a houyhnhnm represents a newly complicated and parodic version of the typical Gryllus figure's desire to be an animal. Distinct from a transformation tradition based on the Circe episode in Homer's *Odyssey*, the Plutarchian tradition functions as a literary vehicle for arguments about the human/animal relationship across the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries.

Variously bolstering or challenging human-centered assumptions, these arguments emerge from the Plutarchian literary tradition's re-deployment of representations of animals in natural histories. Indeed, I have repeatedly argued that Plutarchian works oppose natural history's views of animals to forms of anthropocentrism, evident in philosophy and in human-animal relationships, as they establish the meaning of the human-animal transformations that

they feature so conspicuously, especially at their endings. In the final dialogue of Gelli's *Circe*, for instance, Gelli seems to contrast Renaissance philosophies of human nature with natural history in order to dramatize the extent to which contemporary beliefs about elephants must be falsified in order to produce the very enthusiasm for human superiority that Aglafemos, ironically, expresses upon his transformation from elephant to human. Natural history's treatment of the pig, meanwhile, provides a context for understanding how Spenser and Milton deploy commonplace, denigrating comparisons of humans to pigs in order to promote negative evaluations of characters who want to be animals (in the case of Spenser's Gryll) or animal-like creatures (in the case of Milton's animal-headed beings). Although Spenser's and Milton's contributions to the Plutarchian tradition endorse anthropocentric views, their use of contemporary beliefs about pigs sets in relief the oppositional relationship between forms of anthropocentrism and natural history's views of animals in other Plutarchian works. Drawing on conceptions of the horse as a particularly noble animal in order to create an imaginary species of rational equines, Swift generates both a pre-modern argument for the better treatment of horses and a parody of the Gryllus figure's typical desire for an animal existence. Refusing to conclude part 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* with a human-animal transformation, as in the Plutarchian works of Gelli and Spenser, Swift seems to mock the Plutarchian tradition's use of transformation as a literary device for resolving debates about humans and animals.

The meaning of the ending of *Gulliver's Travels* emerges from its relationship to earlier works in the Plutarchian tradition. Indeed, I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation that full appreciation of individual Plutarchian works depends upon locating them within the larger tradition of transformation literature in which they participate. A compelling interpretation of Gelli's dialogue with the elephant must recognize that Gelli has expanded Plutarch's dialogue

about a pig who refuses to return to humanity into a series of dialogues in which ten animals recapitulate Gryllus's decision to remain an animal and the final animal, the elephant, dramatically but perhaps too predictably inverts this pattern by accepting an opportunity to return to humanity. Furthermore, comparing Gelli's dialogues with the later Plutarchian redactions of Swift and Milton illuminates the role of the pig in the tradition. As we have seen, Gelli and Swift focus attention on admired animals and avoid the reviled pig, which seems to enable them to develop less anthropocentric interpretations of human-animal transformations, or of the desire for such transformations. Viewing *Gulliver's Travels* in relation to the Plutarchian tradition also generates a compelling new interpretation of its ending: Gulliver's paradoxical alienation from other humans, including his family, becomes intelligible as an incomplete, and therefore ironic, version of the forgetfulness of humanity for which earlier Gryllus figures are often criticized.

Thus, this project on transformation literature and natural history improves our understanding of many literary works, including such canonical works as *The Faerie Queene* and *Gulliver's Travels*. Furthermore, the example of H. G. Wells's *Island of Doctor Moreau* suggests that fantasies about human-animal transformations may continue to play an unacknowledged or insignificantly appreciated role in figurations of the human/animal relation—well after Swift's parody signals an end to the overt appeal of the Plutarchian tradition's conventions. As the above reading of Wells's novel suggests, the literary tradition about humans who want to be animals may have had a powerful and lasting influence on the imagination, especially the imagination of human and animal beings.

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