

Homo Homini Lupus in English Restoration Literature

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Abstract

This article will provide a tour of three of the main works of the English Restoration through the figure of animals. It will analyze the scathing critique of Wilton, Defoe and Swift about the belief of the era of human supremacy over the animal. This comparison will be made by distinguishing the animal personification, the degradation of man and the reflection in the language of the predatory violence of the human being.

Keywords: Animals, Robinson Crusoe, Literature, Restoration, Gulliver's Travels, Mankind

Título: Homo Homini Lupus en la Literatura de la Restauración Inglesa.

Resumen

Este artículo proporcionará un recorrido por tres de las obras principales de la Restauración Inglesa a través de la figura de los animales. Se analizará la crítica mordaz de Wilton, Defoe y Swift acerca de la creencia de la época de la supremacía humana sobre la animal. Esta comparación se realizará distinguiendo la personificación animal, la degradación del hombre y el reflejo en el lenguaje de la violencia depredadora del ser humano.

Palabras clave: Animales, Robinson Crusoe, Literatura, Restauración, Los Viajes de Guilliver, Humanidad.

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In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries three major works of the Restoration period were published in England: *A Satyr against Reason and Mankind*, *Gulliver's travels* and *Robinson Crusoe*. They all direct a truly ferocious and pessimistic critique of the values of society and more specifically of the human race. In these three works we find a common motif that is the animal kingdom. Throughout the centuries, the human being was differentiated from the animal because it was the only one endowed with logos. However, in their interaction with the protagonists and lyrical voice, the animals unmask the bases of human reason making us rethink the question: Who is the true rational animal? In this essay I will address men weakness for power through the eyes of animals.

First, in the work of Defoe we witness Robinson's shipwreck to a land populated mainly by animals. Most of these are wild animals, however, Crusoe calms his fears by pulling the trigger. This opens the first gap between men and animals, revealing the physical weakness of the former regarding the latter. Robinson also makes use of animal skins and even experiments to make a candle, an umbrella and uses milk from goats to make butter. Not all the animals he kills are used as provisions, as he even hunts for fun: "This was game indeed to us, but this was no food" (43). The destructive power of Robinson is reduced to the animals of the island, as he is accompanied by two cats and a dog. Two kinds of animals, which are saved from being served as food since they were considered domestic (or civilized) animals. On the other hand, the company that the dog offered him did not seem to be enough, since what Crusoe wanted was someone to socialize with: "I wanted ... any company that he could make up to me; I only wanted to have him talk to me, but that would not do" (102). On the other hand, the animal kingdom does not act passively either. One of his cats not only shows that he can survive on the island, but also has offspring: "one of my cats, who ran away from me, ... came home about the end of August with three kittens" (163) Despite addressing his cats as his family, he ends up killing the descendants "vermin or wild beasts" just because he felt "pestered"(163). He adopts a parrot and teaches him how to talk in order to meet his social needs "I diverted myself with talking to my parrot, and teaching him to speak; and I quickly taught him to know his own name, . . . 'Poll,' which was the first word I ever heard spoken in the island by any mouth but my own." (189-190). A clear subordination of animals to the human being becomes visible when he refers to poll as "the only person permitted to talk to me." (236), That is, he grants dignity to the bird when he refers to him as a person, and in the same way, he insults himself when he calls himself: "an unfortunate dog, and born to be always miserable" (141). Robinson not only kills animals, but he also deprives them of their freedom as when he builds a cage to poll "the weighty affair of making a cage for my Poll, who began now to be a mere domestic, and to be well acquainted with me. " (177-8). In this way, the survival

capacity of the human being with respect to the animal becomes evident. Robinson not only has to meet his food needs but also social. Although he uses his knowledge to survive also does so to impose his mandate on bland creatures. It is unavoidable to differentiate between animals, which move by instinct, and men who move by the principle of the greatest happiness.

In Swift's work, Gulliver travels to lands where the difference between the animal and the human being is emphasized. The first encounter with animals occurs in the kingdom of Brobdingnag where he has to face two rats, however he goes unpunished. Swift seems to wink at the theory of evolution (which is impossible since this was formulated a century later) when he talks about a monkey which has captured him: "he took me for a young one of his own species, by his often stroking my face very gently with his other paw" (150) Although the monkey does not hurt Gulliver, it is decreed that the monkey will be sacrificed and that the monkeys will no longer be allowed in the palace. We ascertain how the human being is imposed on the animal, ending his life and carrying out a very implausible action. Another example of subordination is when Gulliver goes to the academy of Lagado where they try to "employing spiders, the charge of dyeing silks should be wholly saved" (226). Gulliver arrives in the country of the Houyhnhnms where the ruling class are the horses. The first encounter that he has with beings of his race is not so fortuitous: "I never beheld, in all my travels, so disagreeable an animal, or one against which I naturally conceived so strong an antipathy". (281-2) Again he commits the same error as Crusoe when referring to animals with the name of person when they are carrying out a rational action "like persons deliberating upon some affair of weight" (283) "the inhabitants of this country were endued with a proportionable degree of reason, they must needs be the wisest people upon earth", and not as what they are, animals. However, Gulliver's stay there makes him want to separate himself from yahoos: "I begged he would forbear applying that word to me" (300). The contempt for yahoos increases when Gulliver relates their values to his Houyhnhnm master "I endeavoured to give some ideas of the desire of power and riches; of the terrible effects of lust, intemperance, malice, and envy ... he would lift up his eyes with amazement and indignation" (309) and their system of governance: "our institutions of government and law were plainly owing to our gross defects in reason, and by consequence in virtue; because reason alone is sufficient to govern a rational creature; which was, therefore, a character we had no pretence to challenge, even from the account I had given of my own people; although he manifestly perceived, that, in order to favour them, I had concealed many particulars, and often said the thing which was not. (329-330)". This causes Gulliver expulsion from their land. His reunion with his family results in a repulsive encounter for the traveller, who, continues using the noun "animal" as a derogatory appellation: "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" (372) Therefore, to cover his longing for the kingdom of the Houyhnhnms decides to buy two horses. The animals in this story seem to be the only rational animals, being able to distinguish the bad governance and values of the Inlays. Swift gives the animal kingdom the good judgement of which human beings are so needy.

Finally, Wilmot denounces the vain human pretensions of virtue and wisdom and makes a comparison with the animal kingdom. From the beginning we find the rejection of the human being, which he defines as "prodigious creatures": "I'd be a dog, a monkey, or a bear, Or anything but that vain animal, Who is so proud of being rational". He goes on to refer to man's reason as an "ignis fatuus of the mind," He goes on praising the animals because he considers that our reasoning ends when we have finished a certain action, while animals make use of it constantly: "But thoughts are given for action's government; Where action ceases, thought's impertinent: Our sphere of action is life's happiness, And he that thinks beyond, thinks like an ass." Besides, animals are much wiser than the people since they get everything they resolve to "Tis evident beasts are, in their own degree, As wise at least, and better far than he. Those creatures are the wisest who attain, By surest means, the ends at which they aim." In addition he also differentiates men from animals in which men are evil by nature, yet animals move by instincts and not by evil: "Which is the basest creature, man or beast? Birds feed on birds, beasts on each other prey, But savage man alone does man betray." Within human beings also insists that the most despicable are those who hold positions in government or clergy, as they move by greed and desire for power: "If so upright a statesman you can find, Whose passions bend to his unbiased mind, Who does his arts and policies apply To raise his country, not his family, Nor, whilst his pride owned avarice withstands, Receives close bribes through friends' corrupted hands— Is there a churchman who on God relies; Whose life, his faith and doctrine justifies? Not one blown up with vain prelatic pride, Who, for reproof of sins, does man deride". Finally, he uses the names of man and beast as synonyms of being rational and being irrational respectively "If such there be, yet grant me this at least: Man differs more from man, than man from beast." Although he has railed against men and placed above animals, he maintains the idea that human nature will always be more prestigious than animal's.

In short, Swift, Defoe and Wilmot have demonstrated how the human being has the ability to impose himself thanks to the power that gives him a weapon or a social power and how the animal kingdom attacks another being just for its instincts of survival. Although these three works differ in the degree of attack on human reasoning, they are similar in satirizing the human flaws and introducing animal examples. That is why the phrase of Plauto homo homini lupus reflects the philosophy of these three works, relating the human similarity with beasts, although it is true that we differ from them the ability to ration, man tends to give it up too assiduously and the animal shines through its commitment to the members of its specie.

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