

**Disability and Race in British Literature, 1580-1833**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(English Language and Literature)  
in the University of Michigan  
2021

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## Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank Jan Burgess, Senia Vasquez, Thea Bude, Denise Looker, and Lisa Curtis, our departmental staff, without whom I would have been utterly lost.

Thank you to my dissertation committee, whose faith in me and my unruly long eighteenth-century allowed me to create something I'm truly proud of. Thank you to Michael Schoenfeldt, for all the support and feedback you gave me over the years, for your in-depth mentorship, and for our long meandering meetings! From Shakespeare, Marlowe, teaching, career goals, our family backgrounds, sports, to the *X-Men*— our conversations have always had such range! Thank you to Adela Pinch, for helping me work through so many of my drafts, and for the way you balanced direct feedback with caring support. I could always rely on you to help me navigate the intricacies of the PhD, and for last minute meetings when I was feeling nervous! Thank you to Peggy McCracken, for always posing questions to help me reframe my thinking through difficult topics, and for the nuance you helped me develop in my scholarship. Thank you to David Porter— your class helped ground so many ideas for me, and your feedback allowed me to see new directions for my chapters. And thank you to Remi Yergeau: you helped me figure out how to articulate questions and ideas, and your feedback helped me develop how to frame and develop my arguments. Your mentorship gave me the confidence to use more scholarship from disability studies in my research, and I'm so proud of what I was able to create. Additionally, thank you for the support you have shown me as I've navigated my own disability related issues at the university.

Thank you to Tobin Siebers; your introduction to disability studies helped me recognize myself as disabled—and that that identity was one that I could embrace joyfully as I became part of a crip community. It is a part of myself that I have come to love deeply through a politics of disability justice, and it has completely changed my life.

Thank you to Marjorie Levinson, whose early support and interest in my scholarship helped me shape the contours of my dissertation. Thank you to Aliyah Khan—the work I did in your class set the foundation for the first dissertation chapter that I wrote. Thank you to the University of Michigan librarians, whose help has been invaluable.

Thank you to Robert Anderson, Bailey McDaniel, Kevin Grimm, Jeffrey Insko, Ed Hoepfner, Brian Connery, Kevin Laam, Annie Gilson, and Cynthia Ferrera at Oakland University. I have never experienced the kind of intense support and mentorship that I had at Oakland—I would not be where I am today without your guidance. You all made me feel like I had a whole team rooting for me and believing in me.

Thank you to my partner, Russ Schwartz, whose love sustains and invigorates me. Thank you so much for taking care of me, Russ. Thank you for being there when I was tearing my hair out as I wrote this dissertation, thank you for endlessly proofreading my work, thank you for quietly bringing me food and tea as I worked, thank you for being the most loving and supportive being I have ever met. You are my favorite.

Thank you to my closest friends for the way they have loved and cared for me throughout these years. Thank you to Morgan Gogo Macri, thank you so much for your friendship. Knowing that I can always turn to you as a confidant has meant everything to me. Thank you to my dearest friend Mateo Alzate for always being there for me, to listen, to help me think through things, to hold my hand after surgery. Being your friend has brought so much joy to my life, and I'm so

excited just to \*know\* you. Thank you to Sarah Plummer, my fellow destroyer-of-dojos: you will *always* be my friend. We've helped each other through a lot of pain, and I'm grateful to have you in my life. Thank you to Maryam Aziz for always having my back and for hyping me up.

Thank you to my fellow scholars and interlocutors: Mika Kennedy, Crystal Li, Ben Plummer, Esther Grace Witte, Shannon Walton, Annie Bolotin, Cecilia Morales, Kyle McCormick, Sunhay You, Irene Inatty, Elise Naggy, Kyle Grady, Nikki Roulo, and Ai Binh Ho. Thank you to my MH crew: Kiyaar, Joules, Leo, Zero, Ivanko. My friendships with you all have given me so much joy and a sense of community. Thank you to my climbing pals who helped keep me centered: Kelsey McCormick, Elizabeth Harlow, and Sarah Jane Kerwin. Thank you to my fellow Covid Caucus members Ryan Glauser, Jared Eno, Kathleen Brown, Sarah Yeager, Garima Singh, Jeff Lockhart, Simeone Neumann, Sarah Bork, and Lucas Chalhoub. Thank you to my dear students of ENG124, ENG125, Shakespeare's Plays, and British Literature to 1660: it was a joy and an honor to be your instructor.

Thank you to my family, who don't always know exactly what it is that I do but love me anyway. Thank you Dad, Bob and Nina, Lauren, Zach, Malcolm, and Scarlett.

And finally, thank you to Balazs, Leonid, and Miklos. You are the most wonderful cats in the world.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	vii
Abstract.....	viii
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
Race.....	4
Disability.....	11
Chapters.....	19
Chapter 2 Disability and Race in <i>The Tempest</i> .....	24
Disability and Race.....	26
The Tempest.....	33
Chapter 3 “Making Signs”: Travel Literature, Philosophies of Language, and Deaf Education Manuals.....	51
Travel Narratives.....	54
Making Signs and Philosophies of Language.....	60
Oralist Pedagogies.....	67
Origins of Language.....	90
Francis Williams and Poetic Language.....	99
Conclusion.....	107
Chapter 4 : <i>Frankenstein</i> , Slaughterhouses, and Blood.....	109
Slaughterhouses.....	114
Blood Transfusions.....	120

Blood in the Vitalism Debates .....	135
Harvey and Shelley .....	144
Frankenstein .....	145
Chapter 5 : Coda .....	154
Bibliography .....	164

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Wall E. DVD. United States: Disney, 2008. ....	12
Figure 2: William Hogarth, Scene from Shakespeare's The Tempest, 1735. ....	41
Figure 3: John Bulwer, Chirologia, 1644.....	76
Figure 4: Artist unknown, Portrait of Francis Williams, circa 1745 .....	102



## Abstract

*Disability and Race in British Literature, 1580-1833*, examines the ways Both Spanish and English peasants and lower classes were regarded as intrinsically different from the nobility in which concepts of disability and race are deployed as human disqualifications in literary, medical, natural historical, and travel texts written between 1580 and 1833, the year Britain abolished slavery in its colonies. This long chronological spread allows me to demonstrate how informal taxonomies are recruited by empire in the service of defining, differentiating, and hierarchizing human bodies in the production of a “civilized” British subject. Using disability studies and critical race theory, my project specifically looks at how medical and colonial discourses work together to construct concepts of disability and race in ways that are at some points mutually constitutive and at others mutually aligned, often through references to animality. In the periods and discourses that I examine, disabled and racialized people are aligned in consistent but unexpected ways to stabilize definitions of the human, reflecting how white able-bodied British writers wanted to see themselves in an era of nascent nation and empire building.

Across this chronological spread, I focus on three distinct cases of dehumanization and pathologization as they entail issues of race and disability, particularly around bodily difference and language use and ability. In the second chapter, I examine the way in which discourses of race are figured through the language of disability by looking at texts by George Best, Robert Burton, and Ben Jonson before centering my discussion on William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

Covering the works of Rene Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Bulwer, John Wallis, and John Wilkins, my third chapter demonstrates how discourses of disability and race were aligned in the construction of Enlightenment ideals of reason expressed through language. I examine the way in which “making signs” is deployed in deaf education manuals and travel literature as able to communicate reason. I consider the way in which race intersects with what Stephanie Kerschbaum refers to as the “presumed wholeness of a hearing identity” to analyze the writings of both deaf instruction manuals and the reception of the poetry of Francis Williams, a black Jamaican scholar who wrote poetry in Latin. In my fourth chapter, I demonstrate the deep continuities of thought between early modern scientific research and Romantic-era concerns surrounding health, disease, and blood. I argue that, in *Frankenstein*, Victor conceives of the creature in terms of pathology by examining the use of the slaughterhouse in the novel and the history of blood transfusion experiments. I use these histories to provide a matrix of meaning to understand how both health and disease are constructed through biocultural significations of blood. In the Coda, I do a comparative analysis of Caliban and Frankenstein’s Creature to consider the way in which eloquence intersects with the stigmatization surrounding disability.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

*Disability and Race in British Literature, 1580-1833*, examines the way in which concepts of disability and race are deployed and aligned in literary, medical, natural historical, and travel texts written in the long eighteenth century. Methodologically, this long view of history presents different discursive formations in which both disability and race are recruited across this chronological spread: at times intersectional, and at other times aligned or parallel. My dissertation makes several distinctive contributions by bringing together disability and race in a long view of history. First, it allows me to demonstrate how hierarchies of human difference are recruited by empire in the service of defining, differentiating, and hierarchizing human bodies in the production of a “civilized” British subject. Second, it enables me to establish how the work of differentiation is connected to the pathologizing and animalization of both disabled and racialized bodies. Lastly, it authorizes my examination of the way such pathologies were thought of as transferable through methods such as blood transfusions and ingestion. Although important scholarship has been produced on the connections between race and gender, conduct, and religion, scholarship has not yet adequately addressed the ways in which race and disability are connected. In this dissertation, I attempt to begin filling in that gap— although much work remains to be done.

The development of informal and formal hierarchical taxonomies during this time period occurs alongside an interest in — and anxiety about — a categorization of species that differentiates the human against non-human animals, and that racialized and disabled people are

often positioned as test cases that define the human. A recurrent theme throughout the works I discuss in my dissertation is the invocation of the animal as a human measurement. In taxonomic schemes, this often entails lengthy enumerations of both differences and similarities between apes and humans; in philosophies of language, it marks anxieties around using language as criteria of human status. As a barometer of the limits around which the human was defined, the animal is also invoked at key moments to *de*-humanize certain groups of people, often on the basis of disability or race. I define “race” as a social relationality structured through shifting power relations and interstitial beliefs relating to human difference, religion, class, gender, and language. In each chapter, I look at a different type of disability and racialization as they relate to either forms of bodily difference or language use and acquisition. I argue that neither disability nor race is deployed as a static form of categorization; rather, both are discursively mobile. This discursive mobility is central to understanding both disability and race as culturally constructed; my project specifically looks at how medical and colonial discourses work together to construct concepts of disability and race in ways that are at some points *constitutive* and at others mutually *aligned*. By carefully policing the limits of the human, early modern British thinkers positioned racialized and disabled others in a binary opposition against the human, effectively homogenizing physical difference and variation as “other.”

In this dissertation, I use both disability studies and critical race theory as primary modes of analysis. This project began with my observation that many of the racialized figures in early modern and eighteenth-century works are described through the language of disability. Deformity, disease, and impairment become racialized under certain circumstances, as when George Best refers to blackness as an “infection,” or when Jean Bodin writes that “we see men as well as plants degenerate little by little when the soil has been changed, and it is for the same

reason that fire and sun color men black.”<sup>1</sup> Bodin here relies partly on a geohumoral framework of race that attributes different bodily and mental qualities to geographic regions to describe blackness as the product of a deteriorating body, corrupted by its environment. In doing so, he rhetorically positions Africa as a site of disease and deformity. He continues: “because self-control was difficult, particularly when plunging into lust, they gave themselves over to horrible excesses. Promiscuous coition of men and animals took place, wherefore the regions of Africa produce for us so many monsters.”<sup>2</sup> Premised on racial stereotypes about promiscuity, Bodin dehumanizes Africans as the product of human/animal copulations. Geoffrey Goodman would repeat a similar claim in 1616, declaring that “Monsters are rare and seldom appear to us . . . [although] Affrica be a fruitfull mother of monsters.”<sup>3</sup> Although these formulations rely partly on geohumoralism, they also naturalize race as a set of characteristics that have been reproduced through generations of “degenerate” bodies and animal couplings.

Although animality is an undercurrent throughout each chapter, this dissertation does not seriously investigate the status of animals or utilize animal studies theory. Instead, I am interested in the ways in which humans are positioned in relation to animals, and how animalizing tropes are deployed in a dehumanizing way in the texts that I examine. For instance, David Turner writes, "Dwarfs were sometimes referred to as 'apes,' and other deformed or crooked people as 'monkeys.' Such analogies marked out deformity as stigma, a spoiled identity

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History* (1566). Trans. Beatrice Reynolds. *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion*. Eds. Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 94.

<sup>2</sup> Bodin, 96.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Goodman, *The Fall of Man, or the Corruption of Nature, Proved by the Light of Our Naturall Reason*. (London, 1616), 23.

that threatened to contaminate the integrity of the species itself."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, I take up animality to demonstrate the way in which discourses of race and disability are inflected through references to non-human animals.

## Race

In the past two decades, vital and groundbreaking work has been done on race in early modern England. Works such as Ania Loomba's *Gender, Race, and Renaissance Drama* (1989); *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (1994), edited by Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker; and Kim F. Hall's *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (1995); Arthur Little's *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Revisions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice* (2000); and Ania Loomba's *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (2002), to name just a few, have formed the foundation on this research. However, despite the publication of many major monographs, scholarship on early modern race faces many challenges. As Peter Erickson and Kim F. Hall write in "'A New Scholarly Song': Rereading Early Modern Race" in a special issue of the *Shakespeare Quarterly* dedicated to race:

the recursiveness of early modern race studies, where the importance of race is either ignored altogether or subject to an unhealthy back-and-forth in which scholars focusing on race confront the same (already addressed) questions and pushback from editors, readers, and audience members whose only investment in race seems to be disciplinary. Many scholars genially dismissive of race know little of the extensive scholarship on race—in either its early modern or modern form. . . . After years of being on the forefront of questions of early modern race

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<sup>4</sup> David Turner, "Disability Humor and the Meanings of Impairment in Early Modern England." *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*. Eds. Allison Hobgood and David Houston Wood. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013): 52-72; 61.

and colonialism in particular, the conversation in the world of Shakespeare had clearly stalled.<sup>5</sup>

As Erickson and Hall continue, "Initial opposition to early modern race studies . . . was encapsulated in the single word 'anachronism' and informally deployed as a scare tactic and conversation stopper."<sup>6</sup> As Kyle Grady reminds us in his comparative analysis of Othello and Colin Powell, "Othello, Colin Powell, and Post-Racial Anachronisms," contemporary hang ups about race frequently leak into historical analysis of race:

A pervasive misconception that racialism is unambiguous often precludes an investigation of those ubiquitous, less overt systems of racism that intersect with ancillary social mechanisms and ostensibly mitigating factors . . . Whereas in the contemporary moment this notion takes the form of post-racialism, this trend in early modern scholarship could be said to employ a pre-racial orientation.<sup>7</sup>

By flattening racism into an overt, "unidimensional and definitive matter" while simultaneously tokenizing figures such as Othello, Colin Powell, and Barack Obama as figures of post-racial progressiveness, scholars neglect to attend to the nuanced forms of racialism in both the early modern and the contemporary moment.

Claims of anachronism when dealing with race in early modern England engaged on a multi-dimensional front meant to produce deflection from the topic. Although early modern English conceptions of race are different from contemporary American understandings of race, this does not mean that race did not exist at all. Indeed, as Ania Loomba argues in *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, limiting definitions of race to only those that appeal to biology oversimplify historical and contemporary understandings of race:

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<sup>5</sup>Peter Erickson and Kim F. Hall, "'A New Scholarly Song': Rereading Early Modern Race." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67.1 (2016): 1-13; 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Erickson and Hall, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Kyle Grady, "Othello, Colin Powell, and Post-Racial Anachronisms." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67.1 (2016): 69-83; 69.

The rise of modern racism is often seen in terms of a shift from a cultural (and more benign) to a more biological (and inflexible) view of racial difference. But although the biological understanding of race made it more pernicious, we should be wary of positing a simple opposition between nature and culture or suggesting that a ‘cultural’ understanding of race is somehow benign or flexible. In fact, what we call ‘race’ and what we call ‘culture’ cannot be readily separated, especially during the early modern period when a people’s inferior culture implied a biologically inferior people.<sup>8</sup>

In this way, religion and nationality are often racialized in the early modern period. We see this interconnection perhaps most poignantly in the term “blackamoor,” which fuses together religion and skin color in a way that cannot be untangled; in fact, Loomba argues that the word “Moor” itself is an “amalgam of both religious and color difference.”<sup>9</sup> Rather than prioritize one category over the other, Loomba reminds us that it is important to see how both religion and skin color were understood as mutually constitutive: “it is sometimes suggested that hatred and fear of Muslims was *more* important than colour prejudice in English culture. . . . religion should not obscure or undermine the place of somatic difference; instead, we need to locate how the two come together and transform each other in the early modern period.”<sup>10</sup> Although it is important for scholars to understand individual categories of difference, we should also be cognizant of how these categories inform and intersect each other.

In the early modern period, the term “race” could refer to one’s family or household, religion, lineage, class, nation, disability status, or other human categories. However, as seen in the religious and racial linkage in the term “blackamoor,” many of these meanings were connected through sexuality and reproduction. Loomba argues that “sexuality is central to the idea of ‘race’ understood as lineage, or a bloodline, because the idea of racial purity depends

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<sup>8</sup> Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 38.

<sup>9</sup> Loomba, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Loomba, 46.



upon the strict control of lineage. . . . but in every case, the boundaries of [a] group could only be guarded or expanded by carefully regulating sexual behaviour, especially that of women.”<sup>11</sup>

Sexuality and reproduction connect seemingly disparate types of social organization that fall under the heading “race” at multiple levels. For instance, one’s class is also a product of one’s lineage or bloodline; class thus becomes incorporated under “race” through the same mechanism as lineage by a second degree. Further, as Loomba explains, the term “blue blood” of the nobility is:

a translation of the Spanish *sangre azul*, which was claimed by several aristocratic families who declared they had never been contaminated by Moorish or Jewish blood, and hence had fair skins through which their blue blood could be seen. Thus blue blood is closely related to the idea of racial purity or *limpezia de sangre* which developed as the Inquisition sought to identify ‘pure’ Christians as opposed to those who had been ‘contaminated’ by mixing with Jews and Moors, or ‘New Christians’ who were converted Moors and Jews. All over Europe, the nobility were often understood as a ‘race’ distinct from ordinary folk, and colonial relations drew heavily upon pre-existing notions of class difference, although they also restructured the relationships between classes within Europe.<sup>12</sup>

Loomba further reminds us that in feudal societies, class was understood as inherited and rooted in blood, rather than an attribute that could be shed through upward social mobility of any kind. Class and race or ethnicity are thus linked through the concept of “blue blood” and racial purity; it “not only defines a certain economic section of the people in terms of their skin colour, but also suggests that their characteristics are transmitted from parents to children.”<sup>13</sup> Both Spanish *and* English peasants and lower classes were regarded as intrinsically different from the nobility, perceived as dark, rude, unrefined, unintelligent, and barbaric.

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<sup>11</sup> Loomba, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Loomba, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Loomba, 33.

Although biological racism did not come into existence until the nineteenth century (the concept of “biology” itself did not come into existence until the nineteenth century either), understandings of race and racism have always been and continue to be multivalent, working across different areas of sociality at once. As Etienne Balibar theorizes, “biological or genetic naturalism is not the only means of naturalizing human beings and social affinities” because culture itself “can also function like a nature, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individual groups *a priori* into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin.”<sup>14</sup> Racism is never rooted solely in concepts of biology, but is visible through the way it:

inscribes itself in practices (forms of violence, contempt, intolerance, humiliation and exploitation), in discourses and representations which are so many intellectual elaborations of the phantasm of the prophylaxis or segregation (the need to purify the social body, to preserve ‘one’s own’ or ‘our’ identity from all forms of mixing, interbreeding or invasion) and which are articulated around stigmata of otherness (name, skin colour, religious practices).<sup>15</sup>

Balibar sees race and racism as co-constitutive with nationalism; racism is “constantly emerging out of nationalism, not only towards the exterior but towards the interior.”<sup>16</sup> Balibar’s contemporary work on racism and nationalism provides an important link to understanding *early modern* understandings of racism as tied to emergent notions of British national identity. Felicity Nussbaum has similarly argued that the effort to define British national identity was tied to efforts to define the human by explicitly defining the human as *civilized* in terms that are

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<sup>14</sup> Etienne Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. Eds. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein. Trans. Etienne Balibar and Chris Turner. (London: Verso, 1991): 17-28; 22.

<sup>15</sup> Balibar, 17-18.

<sup>16</sup> Balibar, 53.

gendered, racialized, ableist, and culturally British.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in *Things of Darkness*, Kim Hall argues that British writers used tropes of Blackness as a way to define and organize proper gendered behaviors. She writes:

Tropes of blackness were discovered by white English writers (both male and female) to be infinitely malleable ways of establishing a sense of the proper organization of the Western European male and female in the Renaissance: notions of proper gender relations shape the terms for describing proper colonial organization. Further, the English/European division of beauty into ‘white’ or ‘black’ not only served aesthetic purposes but supported an ideology that still continues to serve the interests of white supremacy and male hegemony.<sup>18</sup>

As a result, white British women function to mediate difference and propriety as concern for “the whiteness of English women and the blackness of African men (and the mixture of both) projects onto the bodies of white women the anxieties of an evolving monarchical nation-state in which women are the repository of the symbolic boundaries of the nation.”<sup>19</sup> And as Michael Hechter reminds us, "Nation-building in its earliest stages might better be thought of as empire building."<sup>20</sup> Barbara Fuchs adds that "Nation-states coalesce, that is, through overland expansion, annexing adjacent territories and gradually achieving legitimacy. Overseas expansion continues this project, sharpening the distinctions among emerging nations as they compete for colonies."<sup>21</sup> Through competition with other European empires, and with Spain in particular, and through

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<sup>17</sup> Felicity Nussbaum. *Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 65.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Fuchs, "Imperium Studies: Theorizing Early Modern Expansion." *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval through Modern*. Ed. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren. (New York: Palgrave, 2003): 71-90; 73-4.

exploration and subsequent colonization of non-European, non-white countries, the British come to define themselves, in Balibar's words, through "stigmas of otherness."<sup>22</sup>

Nussbaum, Hall, and others have focused specifically on the intersection between race and gender in their analyses; much less time has been spent considering the intersection between race and disability. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am primarily interested in the ways stigmas of otherness, particularly stigmas of race and disability, express themselves through classifications of the human. For Balibar, classification is indeed one of the first steps in the process of racialization:

First of all, there is the fundamental operation of *classification*— that is, the reflection within the human species of the difference that constitutes it, the search for criteria by which men can be said to be 'men': What makes them so? To what extent are they so? Of what kind are they? Such classification is presupposed by any form of hierarchical ranking . . . Classification and hierarchy are operations of naturalization *par excellence* or, more accurately, of projection of historical and social differences into the realm of an imaginary nature. But we must not be taken in by the self-evident character of the results. 'Human nature,' closely shadowed by a system of 'natural differences' within the human species, in no way represents an unmediated category.<sup>23</sup>

In the early modern period, we see this process of classification establish hierarchies of white supremacy and ableism in travel narratives and early taxonomic and scientific writings. Through an oppositional and binary logic of difference, whiteness and able-bodiedness emerge as the "original" from which degeneration occurs.

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<sup>22</sup> Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes, in their introduction to *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities*, similarly write: "Monsters emerge in the early modern period as just such crucial definitional Others in the processes of European self and nation formation; at the same time, they constantly threaten the very identities they help to define." *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monsters*. eds. Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Balibar, 55-6.

## Disability

The social model of disability considers the ways in which society is organized to create disabilities through negative attitudes, exclusion, legal and institutional barriers, and structured, inaccessible environments. Importantly, it does not locate lack or inferiority as a characteristic of the *body*, but rather how the body is interpreted and constructed. As Lennard Davis writes, "the disabled body is not a discrete object but rather a set of social relations."<sup>24</sup> Davis further distinguishes between an impairment and a disability. He writes:

Disability is not so much the lack of a sense or the presence of a physical or mental impairment as it is the reception and construction of that difference. Contemporary theoreticians of disability distinguish between an impairment and a disability. An impairment is a physical fact, but a disability is a social construction.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, he writes, "lack of mobility is an impairment, but an environment without ramps turns that impairment into a disability."<sup>26</sup> Disability, defined in this way, is both socially and *environmentally* constructed. For instance, in the 2008 movie *WALL-E*, all human characters aboard the spaceship use mobile, levitating chairs to move through their environments along light paths on the floor. Because the environment of the spaceship is specifically constructed to

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<sup>24</sup> Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Lennard Davis, "Dr. Johnson, Amelia, and the Discourse of Disability in the Eighteenth Century." *"Defects": Engendering the Modern Body*. Eds. Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 54-74; 56.

<sup>26</sup> Davis, "Dr. Johnson," 56.



Figure 1: Wall E. DVD. United States: Disney, 2008.

accommodate chair users, rather than walkers, the environment is also a paragon of accessibility: here, walking impairments are not a disability.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, as Thomson reminds us, “Printed information accommodates the sighted but ‘limits’ blind persons. Deafness is not a disabling condition in a community that communicates by signing as well as speaking.”<sup>28</sup> Leonard continues:

For the sake of argument, I define physical disability as a disruption in the sensory field of the observer. Disability, in this sense, is located in the observer, not the observed, and is therefore more about the viewer than about the person using a cane or a wheelchair. The term *disability* is a categorization tied to the development of discourses that aim to cure, remediate, or catalog variations in bodies. Thus, disability is a part of a continuum that includes differences in gender, as well as bodily features indicative of race, sexual preference, and even of class.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, the film represents the use of these chairs as a form of “laziness” produced by out-of-control consumerism.

<sup>28</sup> Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Davis, “Dr. Johnson,” 56.

In the texts that I consider in this dissertation, disability is constructed through representational discourse in plays, travel texts, and medical treatises, as well as through legal structures and laws.

The distinction between impairment and disability is useful insofar as it helps us highlight the ways in which built structures (including discursive, legal, and physical structures) are not inherently neutral, but built around specific bodies and abilities. It also exposes the way in which power is built into such environments through the *exclusion* of certain bodies and abilities. At the same time, however, theorists such as Alison Kafer have pointed out that the distinction between an impairment and a disability are not always useful. She writes that the social model of disability, "in its well-intentioned focus on the disabling effects of society, it overlooks the often-disabling effects of our bodies. People with chronic illness, pain, and fatigue have been among the most critical of this aspect of the social model, rightly noting that social and structural changes will do little to make one's joints stop aching or to alleviate back pain."<sup>30</sup> In other words, there are times when the impairment *itself* is disabling, especially in instances of chronic pain. Susan Wendell also reminds us that social factors can also *create* impairments and disabilities:

In this direct sense of damaging people's bodies in ways that are disabling in their environments, much disability is created by the violence of invasions, wars, civil wars, and terrorism, which cause disabilities not only through direct injuries to combatants and noncombatants, but also through the spread of disease and the deprivations of basic needs that result from the chaos they create.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the extreme violence of war and terror, more mundane environments such as an unsafe workplace, "abuse and neglect of children, low public safety standards, the degradation of

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<sup>30</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. (Bloomington, IN: 2013), 7.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 36.

the environment by contamination of air, water, and food, and the overwork, stress, and daily grinding deprivations of poverty”<sup>32</sup> can also create disability. It is this lens, for instance, through which I examine Caliban in Chapter 2: Disability and Race in *The Tempest*. Caliban is disabled in multiple ways, one of which is the chronic pain he experiences as a result of Prospero’s violence when Caliban refuses to comply with his demands.

Formulating constructions of disability in the early modern period is challenging because it is a period of *transition*: the religious model certainly continued as a newer medical model took its roots. Both models co-existed, their discourses influencing and contesting each other. As Deutsch and Nussbaum write:

In the medieval period, miracles and prodigies were imagined to be at once part of the natural order and divine signs from God, but in the early modern period this preternatural realm of strange events and unusual beings began to provoke multiple interpretations. As the miraculous event was redefined as a natural fact, cultural meaning was constructed and contested upon evidence . . . The cause of a monstrous birth might be both the bestiality of the parents *and* divine displeasure at such sinful acts.<sup>33</sup>

Importantly, the medical model was assisted not simply by medicine itself, but by the work of natural historians and comparative anatomists who sought to evaluate and classify natural life and variable bodies. This transformation, which Thomson refers to “a narrative of the marvelous to a narrative of the deviant” in which “wonder becomes error” worked in both models, religious and medical, however, to “reveal.” As has been remarked numerable times, the word “monster,” which people with disabilities and deformities were frequently referred to as, comes from the Latin *monstra*, meaning to warn, show, sign, or demonstrate. As portents under the religious model, “monsters” “revealed” God’s divine plan; as anomalies under the medical model, they

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<sup>32</sup> Wendell, 37.

<sup>33</sup> Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum, “*Defects*”: *Engendering the Modern Body*. Eds. Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 6.



“confirmed, repudiated, or revised what humanity imagined as the order of things.”<sup>34</sup> As such, they played an important role in defining what is and isn’t human for early modern scientists and readers.

Although there have been some claims that discussing disability in the early modern period is anachronistic, as Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood argue in their essay "Ethical Staring: Disabling the English Renaissance," "the notion of early modern disability is not anachronistic because human variation, though conceived of and responded to diversely, has always existed."<sup>35</sup> In the early modern period, disability was also a legal status that determined whether one qualified for government aid. As Linda Woodbridge explains, disability played an important role in separating the “deserving” from the “undeserving” poor. She writes:

Writers on poverty always made an exception for the disabled: disability was the only legitimate alternative to hard work. In a sample tally of the parish poor in *An Ease for Overseers of the Poor*, the column headed 'Defects' lists 'palsy,' 'idiot,' 'lame,' 'deaf,' 'diseased,' 'dumb,' 'bedrid,' and 'blind' as sample defects and recommends as a basic principle of poor relief 'that they may have a proportional allowance according to the continuation and measure of their maladies and miseries.' The emphasis on disability rests on the underlying assumption that anyone physically capable of work will be able to find work.<sup>36</sup>

Lindsey Row-Heyveld argues that the centering of disability as “deserving” of aid led to the “specter of feigned disability” and the fear of counterfeit disability among vagrants who would otherwise be “undeserving.” Row-Heyveld writes, “In an escalating cycle, the increased policing of boundaries between the deserving and undeserving poor justified the fear of counterfeit disability, and the fear of counterfeit disability flourished because of the increased policing of

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<sup>34</sup> Thomson, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, "Ethical Staring: Disabling the English Renaissance." *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*. Eds. Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood. (Ohio State University Press, 2013), 1-22; 7.

<sup>36</sup> Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature*. (University of Illinois Press, 2001), 23.

those boundaries.”<sup>37</sup> The result of this escalation was a lasting association between disability and fraudulence: “Although disability was consistently presented as the only legitimate qualification for charity, disability was never believed to be truly deserving of charity.”

Although there are scholars that use terms such as defect or deformity as analytic terms for their subjects, I employ *disability* and *disabled* as my terms of analysis to signify my approach to understanding bodily difference within systems of power and discourse. While such scholars are interested in understanding the terms of disability from the historical perspective of their primary sources and to avoid anachronism, I worry that this in fact reproduces the power dynamics they supposedly seek to make visible. As Thomson writes, “By examining the ‘disabled figure,’ rather than discussing the ‘grotesque’ or ‘cripple’ or ‘deformed,’ I hope to catapult this analysis out of a purely aesthetic context and into a political one.”<sup>38</sup> David T.

Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder take a similar approach:

Unlike the terms *handicapped* and *crippled*, which suggest inherent biological limitations and individual abnormalities, this collection employs a definition of disability that denotes the social, historical, political, and mythological coordinates that define disabled people as excessive to traditional social circuits of interaction and as the *objects* of institutionalized discourses.<sup>39</sup>

Although terms such as “deformity” or “infection” allow for a rhetorical facility across the topics that I discuss, I have deliberately used “disability” as my analytic key term to highlight the social and political ways in which disability and race are constructed. As Hobgood and Wood argue,

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<sup>37</sup> Lindsey Row-Heyveld, *Dissembling Disability in Early Modern English Drama*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Thomson, 15.

<sup>39</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*. Eds. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 2-3.

insisting on disability as a term of analysis is important to avoid flattening scholarship. They write:

'Disabled' was indeed an operational identity category in the English Renaissance, though it continues to be misidentified, or at the very least underexplored, in early modern scholarship. Many useful and important, though discursively and theoretically inflexible works, insist on inertly conceptualizing the marvelous, monstrous, and deformed, for instance, to describe early modern bodily difference. [We resist] limiting early modern disability as such.<sup>40</sup>

Although my primary sources do often use terms such as “deformity” and “infection” to describe human beings, I position these terms under the umbrella of “disability” to avoid the way in which such language could otherwise naturalize such differences as inherently defective or lacking.

Importantly, although I use disability as a lens of analysis in this dissertation, I do not mean to claim that any of the characters or people I cover would have necessarily identified as “disabled” as an identity category of group membership. Rather, I use disability studies as a mode of analysis to examine the ways in which, in the texts that I consider, the body is subject to disabling violence, dehumanized, made extant to the legal system, and subject to oralist pedagogical practices. As Kafer explains, examining disability in a capacious way allows us to rethink what is possible:

Thinking through this collective 'we,' this forging of crip communities, means accounting for those who do 'have' illnesses or impairments, and who might be recognized by others as part of this 'disabled we,' but who do not recognize themselves as such. This group would include the largest proportion of disabled people: those folks with hearing impairments, or low vision, or 'bum knees,' or asthma, or diabetes who, for a whole host of reasons, would claim neither crip identity nor disability. . . . One answer to these questions is that it doesn't matter whether such people claim crip or not: rethinking our cultural assumptions about disability, imagining our disability futures differently, will benefit us all, regardless of our identities.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hobgood and Wood, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Kafer, 13-14.

My goal in this dissertation, then, is not to “claim” such persons or characters would have identified “as disabled,” but rather to think through systems and discourses that are disabling. Similarly, following scholars such as Hobgood, Wood, Garland, and others, I resist reading disabled characters as purely rhetorical or metaphorical. As Garland writes:

The disparity between ‘disabled’ as an attributed, decontextualizing identity and the perceptions and experiences of real people living with disabilities suggests that this figure of otherness emerges from positioning, interpreting, and conferring meaning upon bodies. . . . If we accept the convention that fiction has some mimetic relation to life, we grant it power to further shape our perceptions of the world. . . . Most disabled characters are enveloped by the otherness that their disability signals in the text.<sup>42</sup>

Such “otherness” indeed informs how the body is read and understood, and functions to elaborate a discourse of disability through its stigmatization.

Disability studies is a useful analytical framework to understand some forms of early modern racialization because of the way in which it attends to the pathologization of difference. As Ellen Samuels writes in *Fantasies of Identification*, “Fantasies of identification are haunted by disability even when disabled bodies are not their immediate focus, for disability functions as the trope and embodiment of true physical difference.”<sup>43</sup> Disability is a master trope through which physical difference is described and marked as aberrant, a citation through which the body is understood. Importantly, I do not mean to suggest that race “is” somehow a disability, or that disability is a more salient feature of oppression and difference than race. Instead, I examine the ways in which race is constructed through the language of disability to demonstrate the ways in

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<sup>42</sup> Thomson, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Race, Gender*. (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 3.

which discourses of disability and race were aligned in the long eighteenth century. As Thomson writes:

integrating disability does not obscure our critical focus on the registers of race, sexuality, ethnicity, or gender, nor is it additive . . . considering disability shifts the conceptual framework to strengthen our understanding of how these multiple systems intertwine, redefine, and mutually constitute one another . . . Integrating disability clarifies how this aggregate of systems operates together, yet distinctly, to support an imaginary norm and structure the relations that grant power, privilege, and status to that norm.<sup>44</sup>

Because the texts that I take up in this dissertation construct race through the language of disability, I use *both* critical race theory *and* disability studies to understand how the people and figures that are represented are caught in multiple structures of power and discourses.

## Chapters

Chapter Two, “Disability and Race in *The Tempest*,” intervenes in early modern race studies by arguing that early modern discourses of race are often figured through the language of disability as “defect” or “infection.” My work utilizes the social model of disability, which Lennard Davis describes as “not so much the lack of a sense or the presence of a physical or mental impairment as it is the reception and construction of that difference.”<sup>45</sup> Because disability is “a categorization tied to the development of discourses that aim to cure, remediate, or catalog variations in bodies,”<sup>46</sup> the social model also allows us to make sense of the way in which early modern writers often framed Blackness as a “defect,” the impossible cure to which was

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<sup>44</sup> Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory.” *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Feminist Disability Studies (Autumn 2002): 1-32; 4.

<sup>45</sup> Davis, “Dr. Johnson,” 54-74; 56.

<sup>46</sup> Davis, “Dr. Johnson,” 56.

“whiteness.” It also allows us to understand how people with disabilities and deformities as well as non-white people are recruited into discussions of monstrosity: disabled people and non-Europeans both become defined as animalistic or monstrous “varieties” of able-bodied whiteness. By looking at the way in which descriptions of Caliban’s body are over-determined by race, deformity, and animality, I argue that *The Tempest* constructs Caliban’s disability, racialization, and ambiguous species status as suitable for enslavement at a time when England was beginning to demonstrate its interest in colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade.

Because discourses of disability and race did not have a single, coherent form, my third chapter, “‘Making Signs’: Travel Literature, Philosophies of Language, and Deaf Education Manuals,” demonstrates how disability and race were positioned as *aligned*, rather than constitutive, in the construction of Enlightenment ideals of reason expressed through language. I examine the way in which “making signs” is deployed in deaf education manuals and travel literature as able to communicate reason. Although almost all deaf people would have used a sign language, these signs were considered “dumb” — as in, inarticulate and lacking voice, as often only articulate *sound* was taken as the measure of “reason.” At the same time, white able-bodied men are portrayed in travel narratives as “making signs” during moments of cultural encounters to communicate complex political and economic ideas. As British oral speakers, their reason is never in question, and their signs are never “dumb.” Contrariwise, non-European languages are represented as “primitive,” explorers claim that some Native Americans speak mostly in manual signs, and Africans are compared to parrots who can mimic language but who do not *possess* language. Chapter Three ends with an examination of the reception of the poetry of Francis Williams, a free Black Jamaican scholar who wrote poetry in Latin, travelled to Europe, became a citizen of Britain, and set up a free school for Black children in Jamaica.

Despite his accomplishments, writers such as David Hume and Edward Long routinely dismissed Williams' poetry as mere "parroting," rather than the skillful execution of "real" language.

In Chapter Four, "*Frankenstein*, Slaughterhouses, and Blood," I demonstrate the deep continuities of thought between early modern scientific research and Romantic-era concerns surrounding health, disease, and blood. I argue that, in *Frankenstein*, Victor conceives of the creature in terms of pathology; his project is to "banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!"<sup>47</sup> I present a history of slaughterhouses and blood transfusion experiments to understand the medical production of the creature's body as a blood transfusion recipient. I first argue that Victor's visits to the slaughterhouse for body materials are most likely for blood, and consider how this might reshape the creature as a human-animal hybrid. Underpinning this discussion, I demonstrate that slaughterhouses were closely associated with death, disease, and blood; whereas a history of blood transfusion experiments — beginning in the 1660s — presents an opposing axis on which blood is associated with life, invigoration, health, and virtue. Because the source of the creature's generation is transfused and tainted animal blood, the creature thus rests on multiple planes of ambiguity: human and animal, dead and alive, healthy and diseased. I use these histories to provide a matrix of meaning to understand how both health and disease are constructed through biocultural significations of blood. Although this chapter deviates from the way in which I discuss disability and race in earlier chapters, it similarly seeks to highlight the ways in which deviance and virtue are constructed as natural attributes of the body, and specifically through blood.

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<sup>47</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 23.

In this dissertation, I use disability studies as a method to examine different forms of racialization. Disability studies provides an opportunity to consider not only physical difference, but also the way in which physical differences are stigmatized and pathologized. As Thomson notes:

Because disability is defined not as a set of observable, predictable traits— like racialized or gendered features— but rather as *any* departure from an unstated physical and functional norm, disability highlights individual differences. In other words, the concept of disability unites a highly marked, heterogeneous group whose only commonality is being considered abnormal.<sup>48</sup>

In the texts that I examine in this dissertation, Blackness and disability are positioned *not* as a neutral form of physical difference— but one that is inferior and pathologized as a form of physical, mental, and social deviance.

By representing disabled bodies as a “lack” or “deficiency,” negative constructions of disability inherently carry a normative imperative. As Thomson notes:

disability is a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions. Disability, then, is the attribution of corporeal deviance— not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do.<sup>49</sup>

It should not be surprising, then, that in the texts in which I examine Blackness and disability there appears a concurrent compulsion to “cure,” “fix,” or “improve” such bodies. In *The Tempest*, Prospero and Miranda attempt to “improve” Caliban by teaching him their language and manners. In Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Blackness*, Niger brings his daughters to the shores of Albion to “cure” their Blackness and make them white. In eighteenth-century British deaf instruction manuals, authors attempt to “fix” their students’ deafness by teaching them to speak

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<sup>48</sup>Thomson, *Extraordinary*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Thomson, *Extraordinary*, 6.



orally and lip read, rather than cultivating the sign languages they already employed. Connecting these texts is the construction of a social and bodily imperative of white able-bodiedness.

Across these chapters, disability and race are entangled through invocations of the animal through discourses of monstrosity, animality, and language acquisition. Importantly, bodily comportment/appearance and language ability are two of the primary categories that are deployed most consistently throughout this period. In the periods and discourses that I examine, disabled and racialized people are aligned in consistent but unexpected ways to stabilize definitions of the human, reflecting how white able-bodied British writers wanted to see themselves in an era of nascent nation and empire building.

## Chapter 2 Disability and Race in *The Tempest*

In the scholarship on *The Tempest*, the island has been variously located in the Mediterranean<sup>50</sup>, the Caribbean<sup>51</sup>, America<sup>52</sup>, and Ireland<sup>53</sup><sup>54</sup>. This scholarship has been important, in part because it often works to develop the way in which the play is concerned with early colonialist pursuits. At the same time, however, by attempting to determine a precise location for the island, and therefore also trying to understand Caliban's *cultural* location, we miss how the play is *also* concerned with hybridity and ambiguity. As Ania Loomba notes, "Caliban's 'vile race' indicates an amalgam of location, religion, culture, language, sexuality, and physique, all of which were part of the discourse of 'race' which was to remain volatile and variable in years to come."<sup>55</sup> However, scholarship has not yet adequately examined the way in which Caliban's "vile race" is also figured through the language of disability. In this chapter, I

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<sup>50</sup> Jerry Brotton, "'This Tunis, sir, was Carthage': Contesting Colonialism in *The Tempest*." *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*. Eds Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 23-42; and Julia Reinhard Lupton, "Creature Caliban," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.1 (April 2000), 1-23.

<sup>51</sup> James E. Robinson, "Caribbean Caliban: Shifting the 'T' of the Storm," *Comparative Drama* 33.4 (Winter 1999/2000), pp. 431-53.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Frey, "*The Tempest* and the New World," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30.1 (Winter 1979): 29-41; and Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986).

<sup>53</sup> David J. Baker, 'Where is Ireland in *The Tempest*?' *Shakespeare and Ireland: History, Politics, Culture*. Eds. Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 68-88.

<sup>54</sup> For possible geographical coordinates of the island, see Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 23-55.

<sup>55</sup> Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35.

also examine Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, George Best's *A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie*, and Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* and *The masque of Beauty*. By looking at these texts through a disability studies framework, I argue that race is not only figured as a threatening disease and deformity, but that whiteness is positioned as a "cure" for Blackness.

Although my reading of *The Tempest* does regard Caliban as a colonized and racialized other, I do not attempt to locate Caliban in a specific place or culture, aside from knowing that his mother is from Algiers. Instead, I consider the ways in which the ambiguity surrounding Caliban is productive in harnessing together the discourses of race and disability. Early modern racialization takes place through a variety of mechanisms; I demonstrate that race, in these texts, is figured through the language of disability. Much work has been done on race and gender in the early modern period; however, there remains a large gap in examining the ways in which race and disability interact with each other as constructed categories of difference. My definition of race in the early modern period draws from Ian Smith, who writes that "'race' is less a unitary identity than a relationship predicated on difference in privilege, power, and perceived agency that reinforces a distinct status for an authorized subject."<sup>56</sup> This understanding of race is particularly useful for *The Tempest* and examining the way in which Prospero's authority is established through his enslavement of Caliban, whose labor he extracts under the threat of corporal punishment.

It is this corporal punishment, and the chronic pain that it entails for Caliban, that I read as one way in which Caliban is constructed as disabled in the text. In this chapter, I work with

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<sup>56</sup> Ian Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 12.

Alison Kafer's political/relational model of disability. In the political/relational model of disability, Kafer explains that:

the problem of disability no longer resides in the minds and bodies of individuals but in built environments and social patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies, minds, and ways of being. . . . Under a political/relational model of disability, however, the problem of disability is located in inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and ideological systems that attribute normalcy and deviance to particular minds and bodies.<sup>57</sup>

Although I do not look at inaccessible environments in this chapter, I *do* look at the ways in which ideologies were constructed around race and disability that position Caliban as “deviant.” Further, this chapter is invested in the ways in which social relations as determined by power function to both pathologize and racialize particular bodies and ways of being, particularly in the writings of George Best and Robert Burton. More specifically, I examine the ideological structure that relies on the already-stigmatized status of disability and disease as one aspect of racialization. For Caliban, whose body is overdetermined by disability, race, animality, and Prospero's lasting marks of punishment which leave him marked with “stripes,” such ideological structures work together with power to produce the conditions of his enslavement.

### **Disability and Race**

Although discourses on disability and race are distinct enough for each to borrow from each other, they also overlap considerably in literature on “monsters and prodigies.” Both groups are lumped together into a heterogeneous and yet undifferentiated category of “monsters”; this convergence is largely accomplished through animalization and the maternal imagination. The “monstrous” thus represents highly diverse groups of people, and, as Susan Hiller writes, it is

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<sup>57</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. (Bloomington, IN: 2013), 6.

“against this difference the characteristics of self and society are formed and clarified.”<sup>58</sup> As such, “monstrous” literature gives us a negative outline of the development of Western European norms about the body: its number of arms and legs— and their correct shape, its height, its appropriate amount of hair, its gait and posture, its genitals, and its skin color.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson refers to this negative outline as “the normate”: “the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate’s boundaries.”<sup>59</sup> Against the bodies of deviant others— disabled, non-white, and female—the normate emerges as “. . . the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings.”<sup>60</sup> To define “the human” is to *limit* the possibilities of what is human. In the early modern period, these limits were bound to emergent notions of British national identity that conceived of the body as both fair/white and abled. Because the “normate subject emerges . . . only when we scrutinize the social processes and discourses that constitute physical and cultural otherness,”<sup>61</sup> the texts I consider in this chapter cover a range of genres that address physical and cultural otherness and constitute the discursive field through which the body’s contours are scrutinized for human status.

The “aberrant,” deviant, or simply non-normative body circulates in early modern texts as anchors through which the normate is defined and known. Because disability functions as a primary framework for human difference,<sup>62</sup> early modern conceptions of race relied heavily on the language of disability to describe physical difference. As Thomson writes:

Because disability is defined not as a set of observable, predictable traits— like

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<sup>58</sup> Susan Hiller, *The Myth of Primitivism*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 8.

<sup>60</sup> Thomson, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Thomson, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Thomson, 8.

racialized or gendered features— but rather as *any* departure from an unstated physical and functional norm, disability highlights individual differences. In other words, the concept of disability unites a highly marked, heterogeneous group whose only commonality is being considered abnormal.<sup>63</sup>

In the early modern period, whiteness itself can sometimes function as a physical and functional norm, particularly in discourses around fairness and complexion. As Kim Hall notes, the "semantic shift" of the word "fair" to refer to a light, as opposed to a dark, complexion "appears just at the moment of intensified English interest in colonial travel and African trade" in the 1550s.<sup>64</sup> Hall argues:

it is England's sense of losing its traditional insularity that provokes the development of 'racialism.' This moment of transition-- England's movement from geographic isolation into military and mercantile contest with other countries-- sets the stage for the longer process by which preexisting literary tropes of blackness profoundly interacted with the fast-changing economic relations of white Europeans and their darker 'others' during the Renaissance.<sup>65</sup>

Complexion brings together discourses of both racialism and humoral health in the way that it attributes different types of health and illness to different geographical locations and peoples. For instance, in *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton describes Jews as having "goggle eyes" and that their complexion, "voice, pace, gesture and looks are likewise derived from all the rest of their conditions and infirmities" and passed along by "propagation."<sup>66</sup> Burton also writes more broadly of the connection between hereditary diseases and complexion. Because "corruption is derived from the father to the son," Burton worries that, in England, "by our too much facility in this kind, in giving way for all to marry that will, too much liberty and indulgence in tolerating

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<sup>63</sup> Thomson, 24.

<sup>64</sup> Kim F. Hall. *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>65</sup> Hall, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Ed. Holbrook Jackson. (New York, NY: New York Review Books, 2001), 211-2.

all sorts, there is a vast confusion of hereditary diseases, no family secure, no man, almost, free from some grievous infirmity or other,” that it may come to pass that “our generation is corrupt . . . many feral diseases raging among us.”<sup>67</sup> However, there are other peoples that he imagines as free from disease:

in all ages there should be (as usually there is) once in six hundred years, a transmigration of nations, to amend and purify their blood, as we alter seed upon our land, and that there should be, as it were, an inundation of those northern Goths and Vandals, and many such-like people which came out of that continent of Scandia and Sarmatia (as some suppose) and overran, as a deluge, most part of Europe and Africa, to alter for our good our complexions, which were much defaced with hereditary infirmities, which by our lust and intemperance we had contracted. A sound generation of strong and able men were sent amongst us, as those northern men usually are, innocuous, free from riot, and free from diseases.<sup>68</sup>

Burton imagines an earlier time in which the British were “defaced with hereditary infirmities” before the introduction of “northern men” who “amend[ed] and purif[ied] their blood”-- as well as their complexions.<sup>69</sup>

Burton, like many authors of the period, is clearly influenced by the geohumoral theory that different climates affect bodies in terms of both their health and morality. Later, for instance, he writes, “I read of those isles of Cape Verde, fourteen degrees from the Equator . . . one calls them the unhealthiest clime of the world, for luxes, fevers, frenzies, calentures.”<sup>70</sup> Here, the climate *itself* is unhealthy— it affects both natives and travellers. In the previous page, however, the healthy bodies produced by northern climates *retain* their health outside of their climate and are able to “cure” an entirely new set of people with the introduction of their blood through

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<sup>67</sup> Burton, 211; 216.

<sup>68</sup> Burton, 213.

<sup>69</sup> Ian Smith discusses the way in which early modern British attitudes toward their ancient past is also premised on anti-blackness in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Burton, 239.

reproduction. In other texts, Blackness is treated as and referred to explicitly as an “infection.” In *A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie*, George Best writes:

I my selfe have seene an Ethiopian as blacke as a cole broughte into Englande, who taking a faire Englishe woman to Wife, begatte a Sonne in all respectes as blacke as the Father was, although England were his native Countrey, & an English woman his Mother: whereby it seemeth this blacknesse proceedeth rather of some naturall infection of that man, which was so strong, that neyther the nature of the Clime, neyther the good complexion of the Mother concurring, coulde any thing alter.<sup>71</sup>

Best uses this story to argue that climate doesn't play a role in determining one's race; he concludes: “therefore we can not impute it to the nature of the Clime.”<sup>72</sup> What is interesting about this story, in addition to Best's dismissal of a geohumoral theory of race, is that, unlike the accounts of maternal imagination which produced Black children from white parents, Best's narrative describes a white parent and a Black parent. In the Aristotelian tradition, the male sperm was thought of as being the “active” and dominant agent in conception, while the female material was passive. Here, however, Best is clearly surprised that the white, English woman's reproductive capabilities weren't active or powerful enough to overwhelm that of her Black partner's, tiering race above sex as a determining factor. Instead, Best interprets the dominance of the Black male partner *not* as a product of biology, as in the Aristotelian tradition, but as “some naturall infection of that man.” Later he continues: “And the most probable cause to my judgemente is, that this blacknesse proceedeth of naturall infection of the first inhabitants of that Countrey, and so all the whole progenie of them descended, are still poluted with the same blot of infection.”<sup>73</sup> For Best, it is Blackness itself that is an “infection.” It is not the active principle

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<sup>71</sup> George Best, *A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie*. (London: Printed by Henry Bynnyman, 1578), 30.

<sup>72</sup> Best, 30.

<sup>73</sup> Best, 31.



or the dominance of the male sperm that shapes a man's children, but rather a "polution" that is passed down through his "progenie." As Hall argues in regards to this passage:

Both the complexion of the 'faire English woman' and the clime are characterized as 'good,' which immediately positions white/black on the same conceptual grid as the good/evil dichotomy. His formulation also associates England with whiteness, because 'the nature of the Clime' is rhetorically associated with the 'good complexion' of the mother. To heighten the threat of blackness, it is paradoxically seen as invisible, as an infection, a troping that works to naturalize the difference between the black man and his white wife.<sup>74</sup>

Although Best positions Englishness and Blackness as mutually exclusive categories in this passage, he also presents Blackness as a *threat* to Englishness in the form of an "infection" that even one of England's own "faire" women could not stop from spreading.

In Best's narrative, race and disability are thus impossible to distinguish from each other: race here is presented *as* disability. By constructing Black skin as a disability or "infection," Best implies that the absence of such an infection is *white* skin; Black skin thus emerges as "disabled white skin" in this formulation. As "infection," disability threatens the integrity of *other* bodies, and specifically the British populace if such couples continue to reproduce a "whole progenie" which may be "poluted with the same blot of infection." By categorizing Blackness as a disability, the threat of disability is the fulcrum upon which Best is able to pose *Blackness* as a threat to the white British body: disability is the structure through which Blackness "spreads" or "polutes."

Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty* reinforce the idea of Blackness as a defect or infection, as well as the idea that certain races are able to "cure" others. Whereas Burton imagined "northern men" purifying the blood of England, and whereas Best figured Blackness as an innate infection immutable to the climate and complexion of England,

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<sup>74</sup> Hall, 12.

Jonson combines both ideas. As Sara B. T. Thiel notes, *Masque of Blackness* draws on “existing cultural constructions that associated whiteness with beautiful civility and blackness with disfigured barbarity.”<sup>75</sup> *The Masque of Blackness* begins with Niger claiming that nothing, not even death, can change the Black color of his daughters’ skins and the fixed nature daughters’ Blackness is repeated several times: “Since Death hir selfe (hir selfe being pale & blue) / Can neuer alter their most faith-full hew.”<sup>76</sup> The daughters lament their Blackness after learning that it is actually fairness that is considered beautiful, and not Blackness. However, the moon goddess, Aethiopia reveals that Britannia has the power to blanch their skin and make them white; Britannia, “whose Beames shine day, and night, and are of force / To blanch an Aethiope, and reuiue a Cor’s / His light scientiall is, and (past mere nature) / Can salue the rude defects of euerie creature.”<sup>77</sup> The blanching of the Aesthiope’s skin is situated alongside Britain’s ability to “salue the rude defects of euerie creature.” Although *Masque of Blackness* demonstrates that a “sustained focus on the relationship between external temperature and physiology clearly connects the work to prevalent climate theories of the period,” it also uniquely isolates Britain as able to provide the transformation the daughters seek. Britain is repeatedly associated with fairness throughout the masque, which as Hall notes “references . . . the new status of England as the seat of a growing empire and the significance of its identity as Britannia . . . This pride in the revival of an ancient Britain is continually yoked to the glorification of whiteness.”<sup>78</sup> *Masque of Blackness* begins with Best’s assumption that Blackness is immutable, but it ends with Burton’s

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<sup>75</sup> Sara B. T. Thiel, “Performing Blackface Pregnancy at the Stuart Court: *The Masque of Blackness* and *Love’s Mistress, or the Queen’s Masque*.” *Renaissance Drama* Volume 45, Number 2 (Fall 2017), 211-236; 226.

<sup>76</sup> Ben Jonson. *The Masque of Blackness and The Masque of Beauty*. (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2007), 9.

<sup>77</sup> Jonson 12-13.

<sup>78</sup> Hall, 133.

belief that complexion can be transformed or “cured.” In *Masque of Beauty*, the title of which already positions beauty in opposition to Blackness, the daughters emerge as “An Aethiope washed white.”<sup>79</sup> Britain itself, like Burton’s “northern men,” “purifies” the blood and complexion of the daughters. In other words, not only is whiteness figured as the absence of disease, but in the *Masques* complexion itself is figured as disease or cure.

## **The Tempest**

Although Caliban’s racial status is ambiguous, I, like many other scholars, read him as a racialized and colonized figure. I argue that Caliban’s racialization occurs through the language of disability and deformity. Referred to as “dark,” “deformed,” frequently in pain, and with ambiguous animal traits, Caliban is constructed as disabled, racialized, and barely human.

Although many of the examples I have analyzed so far construct race through the language of disability, Caliban is an exceptional aberration. Deformity and animalization are taken literally in Caliban’s physicality—he is not simply insulted as dog-like, but his actual species determination is blurred across dog, fish, and human. *The Tempest* constructs Caliban’s disability, racialization, and ambiguous species status as suitable for enslavement at a time when England was beginning to demonstrate its interest in colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade.

Rather than focusing on race, location, or colonialism, Mark Thornton Burnett analyzes Caliban through the lens of disability. Through close reading, Burnett makes note of the way that disability is figured throughout the text; he writes:

*The Tempest* is primarily concerned with ‘disability’ and ‘imperfection’ in all of their manifestations. Time and time again the drama’s metaphors return to playing

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<sup>79</sup> Hall, 26.

variations on physical ailments, flaws and compromises. Miranda affirms that Prospero's 'tale' would 'cure deafness' (I.ii.106); Ariel claims that the shipwrecked party has arrived without a 'blemish' (I.ii.43); Ferdinand, stained with a 'canker' (I.ii.416) of grief, refused earlier offers of marriage because of 'some defect' (III.i.44) in the 'women' (III.i.43) to whom he was introduced; and Prospero regrets his 'infirmity' (IV.i.160). Throughout, it would appear as if the material body is an inherently unstable property in danger of becoming a 'monsterized' version of its potentially more perfect self.<sup>80</sup>

Burnett's analysis of the way in which the text uses monstrosity to construct Caliban, and its ongoing interest in disability throughout the play, is indeed illuminating and important—and I am in agreement with him about this. However, Burnett buttresses this argument through the suppression of colonial elements in the text, which, because they are unignorable, he attempts to diminish in importance. On the one hand, Burnett writes that "Caliban's unassimilable alterity has been understandable only through the tried and trusted tropes of contemporary travellers' tales."<sup>81</sup> However, he then argues that Caliban is described more in terms of deformed and/or poor Englishmen than in terms of colonial others: "For Caliban is marked more by his local colourings; in particular, he is assessed within the conventions of English ballads, many of which were devoted to describing either a 'strange fish' or a 'monstrous birth.'"<sup>82</sup> What Burnett fails to notice is that the English borrow from their native "others" to describe colonial others, especially in terms of disability and deformity. Burnett goes on:

Stephano initially places on Caliban's 'monstrosity' a colonial focus. His immediate points of reference are 'savages and men of Ind' (II.ii.57). In Stephano's simultaneous references to 'tricks' (II.ii.57), however, there is an echo of Prospero and his 'Iuglers cheats,' suggesting that the butler's imperial identifications take second place to his role as an ironic showman. Thus, in assuming that the form beneath the gabardine has 'four legs' (II.ii.58-9) but only

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<sup>80</sup> Mark Thornton Burnett, *Constructing 'Monsters' in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 140.

<sup>81</sup> Burnett, 133.

<sup>82</sup> Burnett, 135.

one head, Stephano regards Caliban not so much as a New World ‘monster’ as a conjoined twin — a type of *eusomphalien pygopage* or *syncephalus ectopagus*.<sup>83</sup>

In order to make his argument, Burnett has to constantly suppress the importance of the textual evidence that Caliban is figured as a colonial other. It also requires him to ignore that Caliban is an actual brown person that Prospero finds on an island and literally enslaves. Highlighting the way in which Caliban is figured as disabled or monstrous need not come at the price of diminishing the colonialist figurations in the play. Loomba reminds us of the way that scholarship can sometimes privilege one axis of identity, such as religion, over another, such as race: “religion should not obscure or undermine the place of somatic difference; instead, we need to locate how the two come together and transform each other in the early modern period.”<sup>84</sup> So, too, we need not use disability to obscure the very real way in which Caliban is racialized in the text.

Burnett is right in pointing out the frequency of language referring to disability, deformity, and ailments in the play. At the same time, such figurations of disability are constantly intersected with Caliban’s race and status as a native islander. Caliban and Sycorax’s racial and national heritage is clearly important to Prospero, as we learn from his conversation with Ariel:

Prospero: Where was she born? Speak. Tell me.  
Ariel: Sir, in Algiers.  
Prospero: O, was she so? I must  
Once in a month recount what thou hast been,  
Which thou forget’st. . . .  
. . . Thou, my slave,  
As thou report’st thyself, was then her servant;  
And for thou wast a spirit too delicate  
To act her earthy and abhorred commands,

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<sup>83</sup> Burnett, 136.

<sup>84</sup> Loomba, 46.

Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee<sup>85</sup>

Prospero evidently finds it necessary to remind Ariel *once a month* not only of what Sycorax did to Ariel (thus prompting the reminder of how Prospero then *saved* him), but *where Sycorax is from*, as though Sycorax's racial background were necessary to understand the wrongdoing done to Ariel. Irene Lara points out, however, that we only ever hear Sycorax's story as ventriloquized through Prospero, and never from Sycorax herself; rather, Sycorax exists within the play as a haunting absence. When Caliban says "This island's mine by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak'st from me . . .,"<sup>86</sup> Lara reminds us that

Prospero's taking of the island goes hand in hand with his taking of Sycorax. Within the colonial modus operandi, Sycorax could very well have been raped and/or murdered, as many native women were literally taken from their children by the colonizers. The implication is that Prospero's success in colonizing the land depends on also taking Sycorax: her soul, culture, knowledge, history, literacy.<sup>87</sup>

Because Sycorax is "a symbol of actual women of color whose historical agency has been negated,"<sup>88</sup> her story "exemplifies the power of the storyteller to narrate the past in ways that justify the present and shape the future. In alliance with feminist, subaltern, decolonial, queer, and other 'minority' studies, a language of Sycorax challenges this type of monolingualism practiced by dominant groups who have the power to narrate *official* history."<sup>89</sup> Ariel may no longer be confined in a tree, but he is certainly not free: Prospero's claims as liberator disguise his power. And it is Ariel's request for liberty that seems to, at least monthly, prompt Prospero's retelling of Sycorax's story. Because his colonization and life on the island depends on also

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<sup>85</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Eds. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), I.ii.260-274.

<sup>86</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.331-2.

<sup>87</sup> Irene Lara, "Beyond Caliban's Curses: The Decolonial Feminist Literacy of Sycorax" *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9.1 (2007): 80-98, 85.

<sup>88</sup> Lara, 81.

<sup>89</sup> Lara, 83.

taking Sycorax, Prospero's retelling of Sycorax's story also functions as a way of re-legitimizing his own power *through* this "official history."<sup>90</sup> Although Caliban's race is not nearly as remarked upon as his other physical differences, Prospero makes it clear that Sycorax's, and thus Caliban's, race is frequently at the forefront of his thoughts. We might also assume that, because *The Tempest* is a play, the constant *visual* reminder of Caliban's skin color might negate the need to continually comment upon it—a point that I will comment further upon later.

Furthermore, Caliban is figured not only in the language of disability, but also in the language of animality and monstrosity. After recounting Sycorax's death, Prospero says "Then was this island / (Save for the son that she did litter here, / A freckled whelp, hag-born) not honored with / A human shape."<sup>91</sup> The lines are meant to indicate that no other humans have touched the island since Sycorax died except for Caliban, but Caliban's human status is undermined at the same time as it includes him, recuperated only in a double negative. Sycorax "did litter here," rather than *gave birth to* Caliban, who is described again in terms of animality as a "freckled whelp." Indeed, he is frequently described as both puppy and fish. As Trinculo says when he first sees Caliban:

What have we here? A man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fishlike smell; a knit of not-of-the-newest poor-John. A strange fish. Were I in England now (as once I was) and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man; any strange beast there makes a man. When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian. Legged like a man, and his fins like arms.<sup>92</sup>

In this passage, the figurative ambiguity surrounding Caliban abounds. Caliban is questioned as both man and fish, dead and alive, a strange beast, and a dead Indian. In this passage alone, it is

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<sup>90</sup> Peter Hulme makes a similar point about Prospero as "colonial historian" (Hulme, 125).

<sup>91</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.281-4.

<sup>92</sup> *Tempest*, II.ii.24-32.

clear that the discourses of animality (“fish”), monstrosity (“a strange beast,” as well as the sustained taxonomic ambiguity), and race (“a dead Indian”) are inseparable. When Stephano finds Caliban and Trinculo under Caliban’s gaberdine, he has a parallel reaction, first asking “Have we devils here? Do you put tricks upon’s with savages and men of Ind?” before continuing:

This is some monster of the isle with four legs, who hath got, as I take it, an ague. Where the devil should he learn our language? I will give him some relief if it be but for that. If I can recover him, and keep him tame, and get to Naples with him, he’s a present for any emperor that ever trod on neat’s leather.<sup>93</sup>

Importantly, both Stephano and Trinculo’s first reactions to Caliban are to kidnap him so as to bring him back to Europe for display—at a freak show at an English fair, for Trinculo, or as a present for an emperor or king, for Stephano.

Even after viewing Caliban in full light, both Stephano and Trinculo continue to refer to Caliban in terms of animality and monstrosity. When Trinculo is later chastising Caliban, he says: “Why, thou debauched fish thou, was there ever man a coward that hath drunk so much sack as I do today? Wilt thou tell a monstrous lie, being but half a fish and half a monster?”<sup>94</sup>, and later calling him a “puppy-headed monster. A most scurvy monster.”<sup>95</sup> “Scurvy” here functions not only to imply that Caliban might have a disease common to sailors with a vitamin C deficiency, a now obsolete meaning as an adjective, to be “covered with scurf; suffering from, or of the nature of, skin disease; scurfy, scabby,” perhaps again referring to Caliban being fish-

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<sup>93</sup> *Tempest*, II.ii.62-67.

<sup>94</sup> *Tempest*, III.ii.24-28.

<sup>95</sup> *Tempest*, II.ii.149-50.



like and scaly<sup>96</sup>. Somewhere between a man, a puppy, a fish, deformed, alive or dead, Caliban emerges from these ambiguities as a monster born of taxonomic ambiguity. Furthermore, Stephano refers to him as a “moon-calf.”<sup>98</sup> Definitions for "moon-calf" range from "a false conception" to "A born fool; a congenital idiot; a simpleton" to "A deformed animal; a monster," or a "mole"—“An abnormal mass within the uterus”<sup>99</sup>, or shapeless mass in the womb. The first English translation of Pliny’s *Natural History* described a mooncalf as “a lump of flesh without shape, without life, . . . Howbeit, a kind of moving it hath.”<sup>100</sup>

Trinculo’s reference to Caliban as “puppy-headed” might be a reference to cynocephali, a supposed race of dog-headed people in Ethiopia and India. In *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris: or, the Anatomy of a Pygmie*, Edward Tyson describes them as an animal-human link in creation: “Some Animals are of an intermediate Nature, between a Man and Quadrupeds, as Apes, the Cebi, and Cynocephali.”<sup>101</sup> Tyson, referencing the ancient Greek physician Ctesias, writes:

certain Men, who have Heads like Dogs, are cloathed with Skins of wild Beasts, speak no Language, but bark like Dogs, and thereby understand one another. They have Teeth larger than Dogs; and Nails like Dogs, but longer and rounder. They dwell up in the Mountains, as far as the River Indus; they are black and very just, as are the other Indians with whom they are mixt.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> The *OED* also includes a seventeenth century entry that describes the flesh of a leper as “scurvy.”

<sup>97</sup> “scurvy, adj.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/173951](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/173951)

<sup>98</sup> *Tempest*, II.ii.100-102.

<sup>99</sup> “mooncalf, n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/121906](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121906). “mole, n.4.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/120839](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/120839).

<sup>100</sup> Caius Plinius Secundus, *The Historie of the World*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: A. Islip, 1601), 163.

<sup>101</sup> Edward Tyson, *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris: or, the Anatomy of a Pygmie*. Facsimile Ed. Ashley Montagu (Dawsons of Pall Mall, London, 1966), 5.

<sup>102</sup> Tyson, 41.

Although this passage may not help us understand Caliban's fish-like traits, it does provide a clearer image of what Trinculo means by "puppy-headed." They are likened to animals so thoroughly that it becomes difficult to determine whether this is simply a racist portrayal of a culture of humans, or an entirely mythical non-human race ("heads like dogs," "teeth larger than dogs; and nails like dogs"). In an earlier musing on the cynocephali, Tyson describes the taxonomic dilemma: "For tho' the Philosopher [Aristotle] makes them only a sort of Ape or Monkey, yet there have been those, that would impose them on the World for a Race of Men; . . . tho' Galen tells us, they are much less like a Man, than an Ape is; For they can scarce stand upright, much less walk or run so."<sup>103</sup> Whether or not they are actually human determines the meaning of the following information we are given: they are "black and very just, as are the other Indians with whom they are mixt." It is unclear if the description is meant to indicate that the cynocephali are simply other Indians with different physiological features, or if they, like the pygmie, are an entirely different species that have sexual relationships with humans.<sup>104</sup> Like Caliban, their human status is unclear.

Although we don't know exactly how Caliban was portrayed on the early modern stage, we do have a number of clues to work from. Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan's *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* and Lauren Eriks Cline's "Becoming Caliban: Monster Methods and Performance Theories" both document Caliban's performance history.

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<sup>103</sup> Tyson, 7.

<sup>104</sup> Because Tyson draws from various sources to describe the cynocephali, his description of them is staggered by reference, and sometimes contradictory. Later, we learn that Tyson considers them a kind of baboon: "Now what sort of Monkey these Cynocephali were, I shall not at present enquire; that they are of the Monkey-kind is evident, because they have Tails: and Aristotle tells us, that they are bigger and stronger, and therefore I make them of the Baboon-kind. . . . 'Tis sufficient to my present purpose that they are a sort of Monkeys, and not Men, as formerly represented" (Tyson, 44).

Cline’s essay compares theater reviews of Caliban’s performance, noting that, in the early twentieth century, “A dark face seemed so appropriate as to excite no comment, while a white one was rejected out of hand,” suggesting “that certain performances have the potential to naturalize relationships between abjection and blackness.”<sup>105</sup> Nineteenth-century performances,



Figure 2: William Hogarth, *Scene from Shakespeare's The Tempest*, 1735.

while still ambivalently racialized, tended to focus on Caliban’s animalistic traits, drawing inspiration from animals as diverse as monkeys, fish, seals, and reptiles. Prior to the nineteenth century, we have far less information. William Hogarth’s *Scene from Shakespeare’s The Tempest* (ca. 1736–1738) depicts Caliban as short statured, with a forehead that both slopes downward

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<sup>105</sup> Lauren Eriks Cline, “Becoming Caliban: Monster Methods and Performance Theories.” *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*. Ed. Valerie Traub. (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2016), 709-23; 714.

and has a flap of skin moving upward toward into his hairline, large ears, a red gaberdine that seems sewn into his arm, and legs that become green scales at the calf and descend into webbed reptilian looking feet. His skin is tawny and noticeably darker than Prospero, Ferdinand, or Miranda's. Michael Bard Saenger persuasively argues that the costumes for Caliban and Ariel are likely costumes that were re-used from a sea pageant put on by the London aldermen for Prince Henry in 1610. Noting that Trinculo describes Caliban as "legg'd like a man: and his fins like arms!"<sup>106</sup>, Saenger argues that the "most straightforward reading of this line would be a description of green sleeves and trousers with fins attached to them, precisely what one would imagine for Amphion" of the sea pageant.<sup>107</sup> Saenger argues that it is possible that the acquisition of these costumes may have inspired Shakespeare to write *The Tempest* in the first place and wonders if "[p]erhaps Shakespeare found Caliban just as Prospero and Miranda did, a mute monster, and taught him how to speak."<sup>108</sup> Although these costumes may very well have been the inspiration for the characters, it is interesting to note that Saenger rhetorically reduces the character of Caliban to his costume—that is, a form of materiality and objecthood, reproducing Miranda's assumption that Caliban is "mute" and lacks language.

Ian Smith's historical analysis of the various techniques used to represent non-white skin on the early modern stage provides a way to unpack some of the ambiguous features of Caliban's appearance. Cloth, animal skins, and later, cosmetics, were all were all utilized for theatrical racial cross-dressing. Imitation of Black skin "was achieved through the use of cloth—

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<sup>106</sup> *Tempest*, II.ii.33-41.

<sup>107</sup> Michael Bard Saenger, "The Costumes of Caliban and Ariel qua Sea-Nymph" *Notes and Queries* 42.3 (1995), 2.

<sup>108</sup> Saenger, 2.

pleasance, defined as 'a fine gauzelike fabric'— covering the face, neck, and extremities."<sup>109</sup>

Smith argues that the black cloth materializes the absent Black subject on stage as an epidermal prosthesis; although textiles and leathers may have been “less subtle from the point of view of verisimilitude, but more ideologically expressive in the representation of the Black body in its stark materiality and tangible objecthood.”<sup>110</sup> Even as cosmetics improved and were used more frequently, theaters continued to use black cloth to represent non-white skin in productions as late as 1836. Shakespeare references this stage practice in *Othello* when Cassio regrets having drunk too much: “O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should with joy, pleasance, revel and applause transform ourselves into beasts!”<sup>111</sup> By “juxtaposing ‘joy’ and ‘pleasance’ — [which] seem[s] to operate synonymously to express delight in the revels, [the pun] gives way to the primary material and textile meaning of ‘pleasance’ and its somatic role in masque culture” while simultaneously demonstrating that “the textile and animal skin tradition had migrated to become part of [Shakespeare’s] dramatic vocabulary in the public theater.”<sup>112</sup> If we consider the way that textiles and, more importantly for *The Tempest*, animal skins, leathers, and furs were used to portray non-white skin, Caliban’s portrayal, especially as depicted by Hogarth, becomes more complicated. As a character that is described and often portrayed with significant animal features, the textiles used to create Caliban’s body become oversignified with both race *and* animality in ways that are impossible to separate. As I mentioned earlier, in Hogarth’s painting, Caliban’s gaberdine seems to be literally

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<sup>109</sup> Ian Smith, "Othello's Black Handkerchief" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64.1 (Spring 2013), 1-25, 10.

<sup>110</sup> Smith, "Othello," 10.

<sup>111</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice. The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edition. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), II.iii.265-67.

<sup>112</sup> Smith, "Othello," 12.

emerging from or sewn into his skin. Composed of several different types of textiles, pleasance *and* animal skins, in addition to the cloths that make up Caliban's clothes, this effect is most likely the result of having attached the gabardine to the pleasance. The connection between the gabardine and Caliban's skin is further unified through its color palate: Caliban's skin color is approximately the same shade as the cloth around his waist and the color of Prospero's robes. Rather than layering the costuming over the pleasance and animal skins, the costume is all one piece, flattening the difference between skin and clothes as a brutal ensemble of the materiality that produces Caliban's enslavement.

Prospero and Miranda are clear in voicing their perception that Caliban's physical and behavioral differences are innate and immutable qualities; as Prospero declares, Caliban is "A devil born, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains, / Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost; / And, as with age his body uglier grows, / So his mind cankers. I will plague them all, / Even to roaring."<sup>113</sup> For Prospero, Caliban's monstrosity is located within his body, whose "nature" resists Prospero's supposedly "humane" care. Indeed, his mind mirrors his body which "cankers" as Caliban grows uglier. Prospero later re-emphasizes this perception to Alonso when he says "[Caliban] is as disproportioned in his manners / As in his shape."<sup>114</sup> Miranda views him similarly:

Abhorred slave,  
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,  
Being capable of all ill. I pitied thee,  
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour  
One thing or other. When thou didst not (savage)  
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like  
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes  
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,  
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures

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<sup>113</sup> *Tempest*, IV.i.188-193.

<sup>114</sup> *Tempest*, V.i.289-291.

Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou  
Deservedly confined into this rock,  
Who hadst deserved more than a prison.<sup>115</sup>

For Miranda, Caliban's "abhorred" nature as a "slave" prevents him from learning any kind of goodness; as part of a "vile race," whatever goodness he learns is perverted through his innate evil nature. Prospero and Miranda's equation of Caliban's physical appearance and his manners and behavior are not necessarily surprising: in Galenic medicine, the mind, body, and environment are all connected. For most scholars, there is an extreme importance placed on the *environmental* aspect that helps to shape one's character; climate and food are capable of producing different temperaments. Here, however, despite Prospero and Miranda's efforts to provide "humane" care and imprint a stamp of goodness, Caliban's "nature" resists. As Patricia Akhimie notes, conduct, education, and the capacity for self-improvement were also racialized issues in the early modern period:

Immutability, a pitiable condition, was then associated with visible, bodily marks that were themselves immutable and understood as inherited and thus natural. This focus is informed by recent scholarship on the early modern belief that somatically marked identity categories such as race and sex might be altered or challenged by means of humoral, climatological, or sartorial change. Alongside these concepts of mutable identity stood an 'ideology of cultivation' — a set of commonly held beliefs about the moral and material benefits of self-improvement through the practice of good conduct. This set of beliefs seemed to allow equal access to upward mobility, but in fact served the interests of a dominant social group: literate, landed men. I shift the focus of the ongoing debate about malleable social identity from the potential malleability of the self by recognizing that not all subjects are thought to have the same capacity for self-transformation.<sup>116</sup>

As a result, "some individuals were imagined to be capable of moving between groups by means of cultivation—the employment of strategies for self-improvement through coded conduct—

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<sup>115</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.350-61.

<sup>116</sup> Patricia Akhimie, *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference: Race and Conduct in the Early Modern World*. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 8.

others were imagined to be incapable of this feat.”<sup>117</sup> Caliban’s physical differences— his deformities and cankers, which described as the result of his mother’s sexual congress with the devil— are naturalized and reinforced by his inability for self-improvement or change. The markings of punishment that Prospero leaves on his body in the form of “stripes” and “honeycombs” from whippings and pinches further create what Akhimie refers to as “somatic markings” that leave the trace of both punishment and Caliban’s incapacity to improve in a way that Prospero finds suitable. For Caliban, racialization *is* shown as immutable and unchanging, and in fact, defiant of white European behavioral norms.

At once a miscarriage and a fully born son; a misshapen human, a fish, and cynocephali; a “devil born” as well as “got by the devil himself,”<sup>118</sup> Caliban’s enslavement is both conditioned on his physical differences and punished with disability. While Prospero sees Caliban’s misshapen body and manners as grounds for enslavement, he continually threatens to punish him with intense pain. Prospero threatens him with “cramps,” “side-stitches” and pinches “As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging / Than bees that made ‘em”<sup>119</sup>; Caliban complains that “sometime am I / all wound with adders, who with cloven tongues / Do hiss me into madder.”<sup>120</sup> Later, when Prospero chastises Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo for attempting to plot against him, he tells Ariel: “Go, charge my goblins that they grind their joints / With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews / With aged cramps, and more pinch-spotted make them / Than pard or cat o’mountain.”<sup>121</sup> At the same time as Prospero and Miranda insult Caliban for his inability to

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<sup>117</sup> Akhimie, 8.

<sup>118</sup> *Tempest*, IV.i.188; I.ii.319.

<sup>119</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.125-129.

<sup>120</sup> *Tempest*, II.ii.12-14.

<sup>121</sup> *Tempest*, V.i.258-261.



“improve,” Prospero also continuously keeps Caliban’s body in a state of chronic pain and injury.

Both the island’s location and Caliban’s cultural status are taxonomically ambiguous and messy, and this messiness is indicative of the early modern period’s yoking together of the multiple discourses of disability and race to inform one another. Morton Luce describes his frustrations with Caliban’s chaotic physical description when he says, “if all the suggestions as to Caliban’s form and feature and endowments that are thrown out in the play are collected, it will be found that the one half renders the other half impossible.”<sup>122</sup> Indeed, Caliban is both human, and everything *but* human. Charles Frey reads *The Tempest* within the context of New World travel narratives, because “they provide models of Renaissance experience in the New World.”<sup>123</sup> Peter Hulme similarly reads the island in a New World setting, but, importantly, structures his reading around the way in which the developing vocabulary around the New World borrowed and re-imagined words already associated with the Mediterranean— specifically, the moves from “tempest” to “hurricane” and “anthropophagi” to “cannibal.” Hulme writes that the “island is the meeting place of the play’s topographical dualism, Mediterranean and Atlantic, ground of the mutually incompatible reference systems whose copresence serves to frustrate any attempt to locate the island on a map.”<sup>124</sup> Tied to the island by birth, Caliban similarly encompasses both discourses; Hulme writes:

As a ‘wild man’ or ‘wodehouse,’ with an African mother whose pedigree leads back to the *Odyssey*, he is distinctly Mediterranean. And yet, at the same time, he is, as his name suggests, a ‘cannibal’ as that figure had taken shape in colonial

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<sup>122</sup> Morton Luce, “Introduction” to *The Tempest* (London, 1938), xxxii.

<sup>123</sup> Frey, 34.

<sup>124</sup> Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), 108.

discourse: ugly, devilish, ignorant, gullible and treacherous— according to the Europeans’ description of him.<sup>125</sup>

Caliban, like the island, is a hybrid creature: his characterization comes from at least two traditions of travel narrative (Mediterranean and Atlantic) and in his taxonomic status (creature and human). Although it is tempting to try to determine precisely *what* and *who* Caliban is, we are left with conflicting information, pulling in opposing directions. In this way, *The Tempest* stages a moment in which these discourses converge, as older and more established discourses attempted to bear the weight of new experiences with the New World of the Atlantic.

Julia Reinhard Lupton reads the connection (and conflict) between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic with a slightly different nuance, as a result of Caliban’s exceptionality. She writes:

As a monstrous exception to the human norm, Caliban's creatureliness propels him into the conceptual space occupied by ideas of national and racial difference, eliciting a long line of culturalist readings of his oppression. Yet Caliban's exceptionality, both deeply singular and highly indeterminate, also prevents him from becoming the articulate representative of a single race or culture, be it Atlantic or Mediterranean.<sup>126</sup>

For Lupton, Caliban’s hybridity, and therefore his exceptionality, between Mediterranean and Atlantic, prevents him from representing either. Instead, as an aberration, he becomes encoded in national and racial difference that produce his abjection. Lupton, in her reading of Caliban, emphasizes the way in which “creatureliness” functions to produce both national and racial difference as “a monstrous exception to the human norm.”<sup>127</sup> She writes that, particularly in theological traditions in the West, “creatureliness has served to localize a moment of passionate passivity, of an abjected, thinglike (non)being, a being of subjected becoming, that precipitates

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<sup>125</sup> Hulme, 108.

<sup>126</sup> Julia Reinhard Lupton, "Creature Caliban" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.1 (April 2000), 3.

<sup>127</sup> Lupton, 3.

out of the divine Logos as its material remnant."<sup>128</sup> As abject creature, rather than fellow human, Caliban is more suitable to Prospero as his slave. This follows John Mair's argument in *In Secundum Librum Sententiarum*, that "it is clear that some men are by nature slaves, others by nature free"<sup>129</sup> — or the idea that some humans are physically and/or mentally inferior and must be ruled by others. As Smith notes, race functions as "a means to organize social and international relationships using the currency of some distinguishing human feature to lend an air of natural, inevitable legitimacy to purportedly self-evident principles of disparity and inequality"<sup>130</sup> Caliban's ambiguous ethnicity and nationality produce a convenient way to project a negative image of white British nationalism: he defines what they are *not*— dark, "deformed," and barely human. As a result, Caliban takes on what Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life"— that is, "the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*"<sup>131</sup> "Bare life" is life which is devoid of all political capacity, autonomy, or citizenship— it is life that can be killed but not *murdered*. Although "killing" and "murdering" refers to the same act, a "murder" only occurs when committed against a human person who is legally, and in this case taxonomically, recognized as such. For Caliban, recognition as *either* citizen or subject are impossible goals: only ambiguously described as human, Caliban exists in the state of exception that is slavery under Prospero.

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<sup>128</sup> Lupton, 2.

<sup>129</sup> John Mair, *In Secundum Librum Sententiarum* (1519). *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion*. Eds. Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 77.

<sup>130</sup> Smith, *Barbarians*, 12.

<sup>131</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.

In this chapter, I have examined the way that early modern English writers attributed health and illness to geographic locations and the humans that lived there. In doing so, I have argued that one way English writers racialized others was through the language of disability—primarily as an “infection,” “defect,” or “deformity.” I then focused on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and the way that Caliban is racialized and dehumanized through deformities, cankers, animal-like appendages, and chronic pain. By examining the way in which Caliban is constructed through somatic markings, I have argued that to regard Caliban as an “Abhorred slave,” Prospero must first regard Caliban's difference as “deformity” and racial inferiority through the logic of natural enslavement.

### Chapter 3 “Making Signs”: Travel Literature, Philosophies of Language, and Deaf Education Manuals

This chapter considers the way in which philosophies of language contributed to both harmful oralist pedagogies and defenses of slavery. I demonstrate how disability and race were positioned as aligned in the construction of Enlightenment ideals of reason expressed through spoken and poetic language. The assumption that only *spoken* language is the sign of reason circulated in philosophies of language in the works of authors such as Rene Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and others— and this idea had several consequences. The first is that, because only *spoken* languages are the sign of reason, sign languages 1) are “dumb” insofar as they are not connected to reason and 2) are not languages at all. For instance, although almost all deaf people would have used a homesign system, these signs were considered “dumb” or inarticulate, as only articulate *sound* was taken as the measure of “reason.” At best, these philosophers considered sign languages “primitive” sub-languages— more natural to the body, but simultaneously less “civilized.” This cultural alignment of sign language with “primitiveness” led writers such as Bernard Mandeville and Jean Jacques Rousseau to assume that other humans that they saw as “primitive” must also use sign language— such as Native Americans. I examine how eighteenth-century philosophies of language deployed two key ideas: the idea that “making signs” was “dumb,” lacking in rationality, and did not count as real language; and that real language could be “parroted” by non-rational non-human creatures or machines. These two concepts had consequences for both deaf people and Africans whose languages were considered as illegitimate by white British writers. By aligning spoken language

with civility and signed language with savagery, European writers drew connections between deaf people and cultures they saw as “uncivilized” such as Native Americans and Africans.

Philosophies of language were invested in language as that which separates humans from animals— only humans have reason, and only humans express that reason through language. But because there *are* animals that have or can *mimic* language, philosophers sought to make further distinctions on what constitutes rational human language. The last half of this chapter discusses how this need to further qualify human language from animal mimics was applied to Africans by defenders of slavery, who sought to reduce their articulations to parroted mimics. I examine the poetry of Francis Williams, a free Black Jamaican man who wrote poetry in Latin, and the way in which the reception of his poetry coincided with defenses of slavery. I argue that, in these texts, ableism and white supremacy function as an alliance around the question of who is counted as human, who is denigrated as sub-human, and whose language is considered legitimate.

This chapter is split into several parts. In the first section, I look at the way in which “making signs” is shown as communicating reason in early modern travel literature. In the second section, I then trace the ways in which philosophies of language, specifically in the works of Descartes and Hobbes, use deaf people as a rhetorical tool to theorize a connection between language and rationality from which deaf people themselves are excluded. Instead, deaf people instead signify the “lowest type of man” and are represented as in close proximity to animals. Importantly, these works produce the idea that only *spoken* language is considered as a sign of reason. In the third section, I demonstrate the way in which oralist pedagogies are premised on the assumption that only spoken language is the sign of reason by looking at instruction manuals for teaching deaf students. In the fourth section, I examine the way in which philosophers of language frame sign language as a “primitive” language and Rousseau’s racialized hierarchy of

languages. And in the fifth section, I examine the reception of Francis Williams' poetry and the flexibility philosophers of language use to adapt to racial exclusions of language and reason.

Like the previous chapter, this chapter builds on Alison Kafer's political/relational model of disability by examining ideologies and discourses that produce stigmatization of particular kinds of bodies and ways of being— in particular, around deafness and attitudes toward sign languages. I also work more explicitly with the social model of disability, which differentiates between an impairment and a disability. Whereas an impairment is a fact about the body, a disability is the result of inaccessible environments and a lack of accommodations. As Susan Wendell explains, "I see disability as socially constructed in ways ranging from social conditions that straightforwardly create illnesses, injuries, and poor-physical functioning, to subtle cultural factors that determine standards of normality and exclude those who do not meet them from full participation in their societies."<sup>132</sup> In this chapter, I consider the deaf students as disabled because they are not given accommodations, i.e. they are not allowed to use sign language.<sup>133</sup> This is important and specific to Britain; for instance, in eighteenth-century France, instructors *did* accommodate deaf students by allowing them to learn and use sign language. Charles-Michel de l'Épée, a hearing instructor who was taught to sign by other deaf people, founded a school for deaf students that focused on sign language. This tradition was carried on in France by instructors like Roch-Ambroise Cucurron Sicard, and then to Laurent Clerc, who brought such systems to the United States. L'Épée stressed the importance of allowing deaf students to

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<sup>132</sup> Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 3.

<sup>133</sup> Importantly, many contemporary deaf theorists do not necessarily consider deafness a disability, but a culture, and signify this by capitalizing the "D" in "Deaf." Environments in which everyone uses sign language, for instance, are not disabling for Deaf people: the accommodation (sign language) is already the norm. In this chapter, I do not capitalize the "D" in "deaf" because the environment I discuss does not provide these accommodations.

communicate in their own language and challenged the attitudes and practices of his contemporaries in England.

## Travel Narratives

In *The Journal of Christopher Columbus During his First Voyage*, Columbus documents his encounters with indigenous natives of America and the Caribbean, many of which are accomplished through “making signs.” Importantly, these signs are never presented as “dumb.” Early modern and eighteenth-century travelers and merchants often used provisional sign languages to facilitate travel and trade in lieu of a universal or common language. Gestural signs were an important tool to work across language barriers— to ask for directions, to make purchases, and to establish peaceful relations and treaties. By signs, they communicate directions, information about natural resources and their locations, when traders will arrive, political jurisdiction, and disputes between islands. The complexity of these conversations varies, and the indigenous peoples are portrayed as responding back with signs as well. Columbus writes, “I saw some with marks of wounds on their bodies, and I made signs to ask what it was, and they gave me to understand that the people from other adjacent islands came with the intention of seizing them, and that they defended themselves.”<sup>134</sup> This term, “making signs,” is always left vague; we are left to trust what Columbus reports to be as an accurate interpretation of an effectively redacted conversation. This act of interpretation is carried throughout his representations of the indigenous cultures he encounters; at another point, he interpolates an

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<sup>134</sup> Christopher Columbus, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus During his First Voyage, (1492-93) and Documents Relating to the Voyages of John Cabot and Gaspar Corte Real*. Trans. Clements R. Markham. (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1893), 38.



indigenous government as a monarchy when he writes that a “native king” tells them of the Caribes; the Admiral responds, “by signs, that the Sovereigns of Castille would order the Caribs to be destroyed, and that all should be taken with their heads tied together.”<sup>135</sup> How did he communicate this? Occasionally, the admiral simply speaks in his own native tongue, as when he reports that the natives of San Salvador island should “bear faithful testimony that he, in the presence of all, had taken, as he now took, possession of the said island for the King and for the Queen, his Lords making the declarations that are required.”<sup>136</sup> What does it mean to “bear faithful testimony” in a language they did not speak? Communication is represented as if fully transparent and instantaneous across language barriers in the text.

Such redactions were common in early modern travel literature. As Randall C. Davis observes:

A particularly curious phenomenon is that many of the English accounts often describe instances of intercultural communication— sometimes involving rather abstract concepts— without explaining the method of exchange. One is left with perplexing questions about just how Anglo-American writers derived certain information— often presented with unwavering confidence—regarding Native Americans.<sup>137</sup>

This tactic of presenting summarized interpretations of conversations as straight-forward representations of complex intercultural communication often involved interpolating indigenous social structures within a European framework. The account of Sir Francis Drake's 1577-1580 circumnavigation of the globe in Richard Hakluyt's 1589 *Principal Navigations* features a similar moment of communication. The author writes Drake's encounter with Native Americans:

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<sup>135</sup> Columbus, 137.

<sup>136</sup> Columbus, 37.

<sup>137</sup> Randall C. Davis, "Early Anglo-American Attitudes to Native American Languages." *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period*. ed. Carmine G. Biase. (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 231.

They made signs to our general to sit down, to whom the king, and divers others made supplications, that [Drake] would take their province into his hand, and become their king, making signs that they would resign unto him their right and title of the whole land, and become his subjects.<sup>138</sup>

As with the encounter described in *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, the signs made to communicate these complicated political conversations are redacted from the report. As Davis notes, "the chronicler naturally attributes English terms and European concepts (such as *king*, *title*, *subjects*) to an imagined native perspective. English eloquence makes translation unnecessary; native and English are depicted as 'on the same page,' as it were, as the natives are presumed to subordinate themselves happily to English rule."<sup>139</sup>

Travelers, and chroniclers of travels, continued to communicate by "making signs" well into the eighteenth century. On his voyage with Captain Cook, English naturalist Joseph Banks, when writing about thefts that occurred in Otahite, writes: "The chief then took me by the hand to the other end of the house where lay a large quantity of their cloth; this he offered to me piece by piece, making signs that if it would make amends, I might take any part or all. I put it back, and by signs told him that I wanted nothing but our own, which his people had stolen."<sup>140</sup> The contents of this conversation seem quite complicated, and Banks never refers to having learned a signed system of language. Occasionally, Banks is more transparent about the difficulties of speaking across language barriers. When approaching Savu Island, Banks writes: "After a very short stay the lieutenant returned, bringing word that he had seen Indians, in all respects, as colour, dress, etc., much resembling the Malays; that they very civilly invited him ashore, and

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<sup>138</sup> Richard Hakluyt, *Voyages and Discoveries: The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*. (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 182.

<sup>139</sup> Davis, "Native American Languages," 233.

<sup>140</sup> Joseph Banks, *Journal of the Right Honorable Sir Joseph Banks During Captain Cook's First Voyage in H.M.S. Endeavour in 1768-71 to Terra Del Fuego, Otahite, New Zealand, Australia, The Dutch East Indies, Etc.* ed. Joseph D. Hooker. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1896), 76-77.

conversed with him by signs, but neither party could understand each other."<sup>141</sup> This is a rare exception; in almost every instance, sign language is represented as capable of communicating rational thought. The ultimate purpose of these conversations is connected to colonial endeavors— exploring and acquiring more land, discovering exploitable natural resources, establishing trade, and collecting flora and fauna for scientific development. In this context, sign language is presented as a rational, abstract, and efficient way to discuss complicated political matters and interpersonal relationships. In travel narratives such as these, characters often make first contact with other nations by “making signs” — as native oral speakers, their reason is never in question, and their signs are never “dumb.”

Despite the wealth of travel literature that portrays sign language as deeply complex and expressive of reason, in many oralist language manuals for the deaf, writers insist that signs are “dumb.” One of the primary concerns of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers of language was to demonstrate the relationship between reason, language, and speech; in these writings, *spoken* language comes to function as the sign of reason. But the sign languages used in travel texts troubles this widespread idea. Immanuel Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) points to some clues; he writes: “Is there anything vicarious in the senses, that is, can one sense be used as a substitute for another? There may be. One can evoke by gestures the usual speech from a deaf person, *granted that he has once been able to hear*”<sup>142</sup> (emphasis added). Kant grants that men who *used* to be able to speak and hear can communicate by gestures, and see this as a suitable “substitute” for oral speech. But then he continues: “If the person is born deaf, however, the sense of seeing the movements of another's organs of speech

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<sup>141</sup> Banks, 332.

<sup>142</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 47.

must convert the sounds, which his teacher has coaxed from him, into a feeling of the movements of his own speech muscles. But he will never attain real concepts, since the signs necessary to him are not capable of universality.”<sup>143</sup> Whereas gestures are a fine “substitute” for oral speech for those who *used* to be able to hear, Kant feels very differently about those deaf from birth. Kant does not seem to consider the possibility of a rich and robust sign language for those who were *born* deaf, but immediately turns to how the deaf must learn to *mimic* speech by observing “the movements of another’s organs of speech.” But even if this does qualify as a suitable “substitute” for the speech of the hearing, as those born deaf “will never attain real concepts.” Spoken language is the sign of reason— but even when deaf people *do* speak, they strangely remain excluded from reasonability: “Persons born deaf, who must therefore remain speechless, can never arrive at anything more than an analogue of reason.”<sup>144</sup> As an “analogue of reason,” Kant seems to suggest that those who are born deaf might mimic a mechanical performance of reason, but that they never “achieve” reason.

These two ideas— that spoken language is the sign of reason, and that reason can be mimicked by false mechanical performances— reverberate through oralist language instructions for the deaf and defenses of slavery that proliferated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If spoken language is the sign of reason in these texts, we might also consider the way that sign language, unaccompanied by speech, functions as a “sign” of disability. Stephanie Kerschbaum writes in "Signs of Disability, Disclosing" that signs of disability are:

embodied, behavioral, affective, material, and/or discursive, and their perceptibility is intimately tied to the constellations . . . between environments, beings, and artifacts. Perception is a carefully-chosen word here . . . to describe the sorts of things people might notice as they interacted with others: seeing lips moving, hearing voices, smelling scents (soap or shampoo, someone’s lunch,

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<sup>143</sup> Kant, 47.

<sup>144</sup> Kant, 42.

cigarette smoke), feeling textures of clothing or skin, tasting food or beverages—and more.<sup>145</sup>

Kerschbaum's essay is centered on the presence of yellow diamond shaped signs that read "Deaf Person in Area" in white suburbs. The function of the sign is presumably to alert drivers to be more careful, as deaf persons may not be aware of a car coming; however, Kerschbaum notes that, as a deaf person, "*because* I know that I won't hear a car coming, I always look."<sup>146</sup> What, then, is the function of the sign? Kerschbaum continues:

[My interlocutors] also draw stark contrasts between hearing *ability* and deaf *inability*. When I point out that in my college town people regularly walk around with earbuds or large headphones over their ears, I am presented with a generous belief in the ability of those people to perfectly apprehend their surroundings. These defenses of hearing ability co-occur with presumptions of deaf inability to move safely through a neighborhood, necessitating the sign. Here again, the sign discloses a persistent cultural orientation to disability as a threat, in this case, to the presumed wholeness of a hearing identity.<sup>147</sup>

Here, the “presumed wholeness of a hearing identity” leads Kerschbaum’s interlocutor to assume that hearing people, even while temporarily unable to hear their surroundings while wearing headphones, are able to navigate streets and crosswalks safely, while maintaining that deaf persons, acting under the same conditions, cannot. For Kant, a “presumed wholeness of a hearing identity” includes the ability to reason. As a result, for Kant, hearing people who use sign language are capable of both having and communicating reason, whereas deaf people who use sign language will only ever achieve “an analogue of reason.”

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<sup>145</sup> Stephanie L. Kerschbaum, "Signs of Disability, Disclosing." *Enculturation*. 11.12.2019. <http://enculturation.net/signs-of-disability-disclosing>

<sup>146</sup> Kerschbaum.

<sup>147</sup> Kerschbaum.

## Making Signs and Philosophies of Language

Unlike the signs made by hearing travelers to communicate across language barriers, philosophers of language generally defined and restricted “language” as referring specifically to *spoken* languages. “The deaf and dumb” are frequent figures in these texts, used to test their theories as the “lowest type of man” to distinguish humans from animals in regard to rationality as expressed through language use. Philosophies of language were intrinsically linked to philosophies of mind and logic, political philosophy, and reflections on early human life and the origins of language. For these thinkers, language is also a defining attribute of being human: it is what makes us “rational animals.” Philosophies of language sought to define the relationship between language and mental reasoning: *spoken* language comes to function as the sign of reason. Philosophers further distinguished between the mechanical or functional *ability* to speak— which we share with other animals such as parrots— and spontaneous and creative language that only humans have<sup>148</sup>. Defining the relationship between spoken language and mental reasoning abilities this way helped to produce ableist, racist, and pro-slavery writings that sought to delegitimize non-oral and non-European modes of language. If only *spoken* language can be understood as the sign of reason, philosophers excluded deaf people from attaining full human status as “rational animals” and ignored the complexity of sign languages. At the same

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<sup>148</sup> Recent scholarship in animal behavior has questioned the stability of the human/animal language divide. On parrots, see: Irene M. Pepperberg, "Cognitive and Communicative Abilities of Grey Parrots" in *Applied Animal Behavior Science* 100.1-2 (2006): 77-86; and "Abstract Concepts: Data from a Grey Parrot" in *Behavioral Processes* 93 (2013): 82-90. On finches learning syntax, see: Caroline A. A. van Heijningen et. al.: "Rule Learning by Zebra Finches in an Artificial Grammar Learning Task: Which Rule?" in *Animal Cognition* 16 (2013): 165-175. On macaque and marmoset monkeys, see: Benjamin Wilson et. al.: "Auditory Artificial Grammar Learning in Macaque and Marmoset Monkeys" in *The Journal of Neuroscience* 33.48 (2013): 18825-18835.

time, theorizations on function ability for language versus cognitive ability for language to explain how animals such as parrots could speak were picked up by pro-slavery writers to dehumanize Africans by claiming they were of lesser intelligence than white Europeans.

Because philosophies of language are connected to so many different realms of philosophy, I will be limiting my attention in this chapter to examining how early modern and eighteenth-century thinkers wrote about the relationship between language and thought, “articulate sounds” in human vs. non-human language, and their reflections on the origins of languages before shifting to the ways in which these theories of language were taken up by writers such as John Bulwer, William Holder, and John Wallis, who engaged with those theories as they wrote about oralist language instruction for the deaf. Importantly, most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers did not distinguish between gestural and signed language. Whereas gestural language encompasses a range of motions that most people are familiar with, such as nodding in agreement, waving to say hello, or shaking a fist to mean anger, signed language refers to a full system of language that includes grammar and syntax.

As it relates to deafness, I include in my discussion Descartes’ and Hobbes’ theories on the way in which language is connected to reason. Because it was often assumed that deaf people were also “dumbe” and incapable of reasoning, the relationship between language and reason that is established by these authors is important. The slippage of “dumbe” as meaning “unable to speak” and “incapable of reasoning” was already established by the early modern period, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites both types of usages during this period. “Dumbe” might refer to being "Destitute of the faculty of speech"; "Applied to the lower animals (and, by extension, inanimate nature) as naturally incapable of articulate speech"; "Without the power of making their voice effectively heard; without any voice in the management of affairs"; "Saying nothing

to the understanding; inexpressive, meaningless; stupid, senseless"; or "Foolish, stupid, ignorant (chiefly of persons)."<sup>149</sup> This slippage is revealing: although “mute” also means “destitute of the faculty of speech,” writers of this period often preferred the term “dumbe.” As Lennard Davis notes:

The Deaf have always resented the term 'dumb' because of its double connotation of 'mute' and 'stupid.' In fact, the double meaning of the word reveals the audist bias that to be without spoken language is to be without intelligence, like a 'dumb' animal. . . . In reality, when audist culture speaks of someone who is 'deaf and dumb,' it is confusing two issues—the reception of signs and the production of signs. Since it is assumed that the dominant sign production will be oral and sign reception will be aural, then the deaf are seen as bereft of language, hence humanity. The term 'animal' or 'animalistic' is the most frequently used to indicate a life without spoken language. But if sign production is seen as written or printed, and if sign reception is seen as reading or signing, then the deaf are fully capable of fitting into that world.<sup>150</sup>

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers frequently imagined speech as that which separated humans from other non-human animals, in large part because speech was often, as we see in Descartes' work, understood as the *sign* of reason. In this way, “reason” becomes the deferred referent of speaking ability.

For Descartes, the body is a machine, and it is only reason, through the acquisition of language, that makes a human distinguishable from a machine or non-human animals. Descartes describes many of the processes of the body as “automatic,” such as breathing, digesting, and the circulation of the blood, insofar as these processes take place unconsciously. However, it is not simply the “machinery” of humans which endows them with language, and thus rationality.

Descartes wants to establish that language is more than the functional capability of speech:

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<sup>149</sup> "dumb, adj. and n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/58378](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/58378). Accessed 17 July 2019.

<sup>150</sup> Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. (London: Verso, 1995), 118.



although parrots or machines may be able to reproduce the sounds of spoken language, Descartes would say that they do not, in fact, *have* language. This is a distinction between *having* language and *using* language. He writes: “if there had been such machines, possessing the organs and outward form of a monkey or some other animal without reason, we should not have had any means of ascertaining that they were not of the same nature as those animals.”<sup>151</sup> For Descartes, non-human animals and machines share a similar ontological status: both exist as “automata,” following the instincts dictated by the machinery of their bodies or the “disposition of their organs.”<sup>152</sup> As such, Descartes proposes a test to distinguish between non-human animals and machines as both are purely material; neither machines nor animals have rational souls:

they could never use speech or other signs as we do when placing our thoughts on record for the benefit of others. For we can easily understand a machine’s being constituted so that it can utter words, and even emit some responses to action on it of a corporeal kind, which brings about a change in its organs; for instance, if it is touched in a particular part it may ask what we wish to say to it; if in another part it may exclaim that it is being hurt, and so on. But it never happens that it arranges its speech in various ways, in order to reply appropriately to everything that may be said in its presence, as even the lowest type of man can do.<sup>153</sup>

Because it is possible to make a machine physically *capable* of speech, Descartes introduces a kind of Turing test for language ability. Speech alone is not what distinguishes humans from non-human animals and machines; rather, it is *spontaneous* and *creative* speech, capable of responding “to everything that may be said in its presence.”

At several points, Descartes uses “the lowest type of man” as a final evaluation to test the distinctions he proposes between humans and animals/machines. He continues:

we may also recognize the difference that exists between man and brutes. For it is a very remarkable fact that there are none so depraved and stupid,

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<sup>151</sup> Rene Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol. 1. Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 116.

<sup>152</sup> Descartes, 116.

<sup>153</sup> Descartes, 116.

without even excepting idiot, that they cannot arrange different words together, forming of them a statement by which they make known their thoughts; while on the other hand, there is no other animal, however perfect and fortunately circumstanced it may be, which can do the same. It is not the want of organs that brings this to pass, for it is evidence that magpies and parrots are able to utter words just like ourselves, and yet they cannot speak as we do, that is, so as to give evidence that they can think of what they say. On the other hand, men who, being born deaf and dumb, are in the same degree, or even more than the brutes, destitute of the organs which serve the others for talking, are in the habit of themselves inventing certain signs by which they make themselves understood by those who, being usually in their company, have leisure to learn their language.<sup>154</sup>

Just as “even the lowest type of man” is capable of producing spontaneous and creative speech, here Descartes further specifies that even humans who do *not* have the “organs” still produce spontaneous and creative language by “inventing certain signs.” The “depraved and stupid,” the “idiot,” and the “deaf and dumb” all seem to function interchangeably here as the “lowest type of man” for Descartes’ purposes. Importantly, however, Descartes *does* recognize manual sign language *as* spontaneous and creative language— that is, as evidence of a rational soul.

Contrariwise, although magpies and parrots are physically *capable* of speech, “they cannot speak as we do, that is, so as to give evidence that they can *think* of what they say” (emphasis added). The distinction Descartes is making here is that, for animals, speech is an “automatic” process, and *not* the product of *thinking*; their vocalizations are either biological outputs or trained.

For Descartes, language is a means of communicating and representing already-formed thoughts and concepts that exist within the mind: creative use of language is the *sign* or evidence of thought. For Hobbes, on the other hand, all thought and language derives from sensory experience of the outside world. Hobbes writes: “*Singly*, [thoughts] are every one a *Representation* or *Apparence*, of some quality, or other Accident of a body without us; which is

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<sup>154</sup> Descartes 116-7.

commonly called an object.”<sup>155</sup> We experience thoughts as mental “representations” of objects we have sensed with our body (through sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch). Although we may creatively manipulate and imagine representations of objects in our mind to think of new or altered objects, “the Originall of them all, is that which we call Sense.”<sup>156</sup> Without these sensory impressions, “there is no conception in a mans mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of Sense.”<sup>157</sup> Whereas Descartes suggests that we cannot trust the senses, Hobbes’s materialist philosophy understands sensory perception as our means of accessing, thinking, and talking about the world.

For Hobbes, speech functions as a memory device and communication aid that allows humans to build a society. He writes: “the most noble and profitable invention of all other, was that of Speech, consisting of *Names* or *Appellations*, and their Connexion; whereby men register their Thoughts; recall them when they are past; and also declare them one to another for mutuall utility and conversation.”<sup>158</sup> Words are labels that we have applied to mental representations of objects, by which we are able to “recall them when they are past” and “declare them to one another” in conversation. “Without which,” he continues, “there had been amongst men, neither Common-wealth, nor Society, nor Contract, nor Peace, no more than amongst Lyons, Bears, and Wolves.”<sup>159</sup> For Hobbes, like Descartes, language then functions to distinguish between humans and non-human animals; however, he arrives at this distinction from a different route. For Descartes, creative and spontaneous language is itself the criteria for human status; for Hobbes, language is that which enables humans to build “Common-wealth,” “society,” “contract,” and

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<sup>155</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 85.

<sup>156</sup> Hobbes, 85.

<sup>157</sup> Hobbes, 85.

<sup>158</sup> Hobbes, 100.

<sup>159</sup> Hobbes, 100.

“peace”-- the absence of which leaves us no different than “Lyons, Bears, and Wolves.”

Language, then, is not in and of itself the distinction between humans and non-human animals; rather, it is what *allows* for the commonwealth that distinguishes humans from animals.

By conceptualizing language as a memory device, Hobbes also presents language as necessary *for* thought, rather than as the site *of* thought. He writes:

By this imposition of Names, some of larger, some of stricter signification, we turn the reckoning of the consequences of things imagined in the mind, into a reckoning of the consequences of Appellations. For example, a man that hath no use of Speech at all, (such, as is born and remains perfectly deafe and dumb,) if he set before his eyes a triangle, and by it two right angles, (such as are the corners of a square figure,) he may by meditation compare and find, that the three angles of that triangle, are equall to those two right angles that stand by it. But if another triangle be shewn him different in shape from the former, he cannot know without a new labour, whether the three angles of that also be equall to the same. But he that hath the use of words, when he observes, that such equality was consequent, not to the length of the sides, nor to any other particular thing in his triangle; but onely to this, that the sides were straight, and the angles three; and that that was all, for which he named it a Triangle; will boldly conclude Universally, that such equality of angles is in all triangles whatsoever; and register his invention in these generall termes, *Every triangle hath its three angles equal to two right angles*. And thus the consequence found in one particular, comes to be registered and remembered, as an Universall rule.<sup>160</sup>

Hobbes, like Descartes, uses people who are born deaf as a tool for explaining his philosophy.

For a person born “deafe and dumb” who “hath no use of speech at all,” each sensory impression is a *unique* sensory impression, for “if another triangle be shewn him different in shape from the former, he cannot know without a new labour.” Without the word “triangle,” two individual triangles remain as distinct and unique sensory impressions to the person without language; it is the word or concept of “triangle” that unites them. Assigning sensory impressions of objects to a

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<sup>160</sup> Hobbes, 103-4.

label such as “triangle,” then, allows speakers to unite “particular” experiences to a “universal” rule that they can easily apply to new sensory experiences.

Hobbes is interested in showing how spoken language provides the ground for reasoning, and he does this by building upon his theory of language from the individual units of single words, to the way in which words are strung together to make a “consequence,” to how “consequences” are added together to create logical “syllogismes.” Unlike Descartes, who understands creative and spontaneous language as the *sign* of reason, Hobbes theorizes that language is what makes reasoning *possible*: “For Reason in this sense, is nothing but *Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts; I say *marking* them, when we reckon by our selves; and *signifying*, when we demonstrate, or approve our reckonings to other men.”<sup>161</sup> For Hobbes, reason is the manipulation of language (“general names agreed upon”) by creating syllogismes through the “adding and subtracting” of “Consequences” or statements. We use this process of reasoning to signify both to ourselves and to others, and for Hobbes this is the foundation of political society. Whereas for Descartes language is the *sign* of reason, for Hobbes, language is the medium through which reason takes place. Hobbes’s framing of both language as the apparatus of reason and of deaf people as having “no use of speech at all” demonstrates how his construction of reason specifically excludes deaf people. Instead, deafness functions as a *foil* to reason.

## **Oralist Pedagogies**

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<sup>161</sup> Hobbes, 111.

Oralist pedagogies were the predominant form of deaf language instruction in England, and were premised upon the idea that only *spoken* language is the sign of reason. Alongside Enlightenment theories of language, the eighteenth-century saw a simultaneous rise in print culture, literacy, and schools for deaf students. We have no records before 1700 for deaf instruction having ever existed anywhere in Europe; by 1789, there were twelve schools, and by 1822 there were sixty. As Margaret Winzer notes, “Almost since its inception the education of deaf people has been marred by divisive controversy concerning the most appropriate modes of communication.”<sup>162</sup> This controversy centered on teaching deaf students sign language systems (the manualists), versus teaching deaf students to speak orally and practice lip reading (the oralists). The British (and eventually American) emphasis on oralist pedagogy had lasting effects: oralist pedagogical methods became the main form of education for deaf students. This tradition lasted well into the nineteenth century and it is still used in some schools today, despite a wealth of literature that demonstrates that deaf students experience a better quality of life and education when communicating through sign.

Some scholars see the increased interest in schools and manuals for deaf education as connected to the rise in print materials and literacy. As J. Paul Hunter notes, “literacy in the English-speaking world grew rapidly between 1600 and 1800 so that by the latter date a vast majority of adult males could read and write, whereas two centuries earlier only a select minority could do so.”<sup>163</sup> Lennard Davis argues that in order for reading to become consolidated as a solitary activity, eighteenth-century readers had to “become deaf”: “That is, to read requires

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<sup>162</sup> Margaret Winzer, *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*. (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 36.

<sup>163</sup> J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*. (New York: Norton, 1990), 65.

muteness and attention to nonverbal signs. Writing and reading became the dominant forms of using sign language, the language of printed signs, and thus hearing readers and deaf readers could merge as those who could see the voice of the words."<sup>164</sup> Understanding deafness as a form of sensory engagement that does not involve sound, Davis offers us a way to imagine deafness as a way of interacting with print materials.

Nicholas Mirzoeff connects the rise of print culture directly with the rise of schools for deaf students by highlighting how new print technology made teaching written language to deaf students easier. The rise of print culture itself was “an important factor in making deaf sign ‘visible’ as a communicative system” both by the ability to reproduce signs *in print*, but also by a culture of thinking organized silent and visual communication: reading.<sup>165</sup> In France, the Abbé Charles-Michel de l'Épée was one of the first prominent instructors of deaf students to publish on his methods from a manualist tradition— that is, l'Épée did *not* attempt to teach his students to speak orally. L'Épée instead used “writing to educate the deaf in a fashion that could only have been conceived in the print era, for he used metal plates to teach spelling, each bearing one letter. Thus, by using the same metal plates in the construction of different words, he instilled the notion of the alphabet to students for whom sound had no meaning.”<sup>166</sup> Print materials can be seen as an important historical moment of accommodation in deaf education. Mirzoeff points to how the legacy of deaf people working with print materials and printing presses began in this period: “By 1791, the deaf were sufficiently skilled compositors and proof readers that they were

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<sup>164</sup> Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. (London: Verso, 1995), 62.

<sup>165</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Silent Poetry: Deafness, Sign, and Visual Culture in Modern France*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 33.

<sup>166</sup> Mirzoeff, 33.

printing the scholarly *Journal des Savants* at the deaf school.”<sup>167</sup> Deaf presses produced newspapers, pamphlets, and books for both hearing and deaf audiences.

Richard Nash contextualizes seventeenth- and eighteenth-century interests in teaching spoken language to deaf students in terms of taxonomic constructions of human identity within natural history. Nash argues that British instructors for deaf students focused specifically on an oralist pedagogy because they were motivated by anxieties around human identity. He writes:

[Within] a framework of a natural history that defines ‘humanity’ in part by vocal capacity, the perceived need to translate from ‘gestural language’ to spoken language takes on the familiar colonialist garb of the missionary. Gestural language might be recognized as sufficient to communication, while still remaining insufficiently ‘human,’ according to a taxonomy that privileged speech.<sup>168</sup>

Recognizing gestural or signed language as a “natural language” or legitimate language would therefore defy “the taxonomic criteria that distinguished human from beast on the basis of spoken language.”<sup>169</sup> Nash argues that not only were British oralist pedagogies connected to taxonomic criteria of the human, but in fact most instructors used rudimentary taxonomies as teaching aids for their students, as I will discuss in more detail later. This natural history was importantly part of a colonialist project that affected both deaf people in Britain and Europe, as well as non-European peoples the British encountered and sometimes colonized.

However, natural history alone does not account for why British pedagogies centered on an oralist education: the French were equally interested in naturally history and taxonomies of the human, and yet French pedagogies for deaf students in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries focused on manualist instruction. Part of this difference may have to do with religious

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<sup>167</sup> Mirzoeff, 33.

<sup>168</sup> Richard Nash, *Wild Enlightenment: The Borders of Human Identity in the Eighteenth Century*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 76-7.

<sup>169</sup> Nash, 76.



differences between England and France: French sign language instruction to deaf students began in Catholic monasteries. Disabled, and especially deaf, children were sometimes put into the care of monasteries. Because Catholic monks often went through long periods of absolute silence, they often employed sign languages to communicate in the absence of spoken language. Catholic monks, then, were some of the first teachers of sign language to deaf children. Etienne de Fay, born around 1669, was one such child, who spent his life in the monastery and eventually took on deaf students of his own.<sup>170</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider the way in which religious differences may have impacted instruction for deaf students, the dissolution of British monasteries in the sixteenth century can be seen as contributing to the difference between the British oralist tradition versus the French manualist one.

A number of writers interested in philosophy of language focused their inquiries specifically on deafness and instruction for deaf students, such as John Bulwer, William Holder, and John Wallis. Bulwer published two spoken language manuals intended for instructors of deaf students, as well as potentially deaf readers themselves: *Chirologia: or the Naturall Language of the Hand* in 1644, and *Philocophus: Or, The Deafe and Dumbe Mans Friend* in 1648. *Chirologia* presents gestural and sign languages as a contender for a universal language, whereas *Philocophus* is a manual to teach deaf students lip reading and oral speech. The mid-1660s saw a sudden development for universal language schemes that would attempt to resolve two main issues: 1) the gap between sign and referent so that signs would no longer be arbitrary or flawed and 2) cultural language differences that made contact and trade more difficult between nations. A universal language would be composed of signs and sounds that immediately invoked their

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<sup>170</sup> Bernard Truffaut, “Etienne de Fay and the History of the Deaf.” *Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and their Sign Languages*. Eds. Renate Fischer and Harlan Lane. (Hamburg, Germany: Signum, 1993): 13-24; 13.

referent through a natural connection so as to be intuitive to new speakers. John Wilkin's *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (1668) explains that a real universal character "should not signifie *words*, but *things* and *notions*, and consequently might be legible by any Nation in their own Tongue; which is the principal design of this Treatise. . . . that some way might be found out to represent things by such peculiar *signs* and *names* as should express their *natures*."<sup>171</sup> Inspired by somewhat mistaken assumptions about Chinese characters, Wilkins wanted to create a system of language in which written characters represented their referents directly. Importantly, Wilkins also thought the language should also *look* how it *sounds*: "For that *Difference* which there is in very many words betwixt the *writing* and *pronouncing* of them, mentioned before. *Scriptio est vocum pictura*: And it should seem very reasonable, that men should either speak as they write, or write as they speak."<sup>172</sup> Wilkins is clear about the benefits of such a universal language: "Besides that most obvious advantage which would ensue, of facilitating mutual Commerce, amongst the several Nations of the World, and the improving of all Natural knowledge; It would likewise very much conduce to the spreading of the knowledge of Religion."<sup>173</sup> This is a language suited for commercial interests; but it is clear that it would also function for scientific colonialist projects through which "Natural knowledge" was often obtained as well as imperial ones through "the spreading of the knowledge of Religion."

Whereas Wilkins' universal language scheme is spoken and written, Bulwer proposes gestural or sign languages for this goal. *Chirologia* is primarily a compilation of cultural and

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<sup>171</sup> John Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*. (London: Printed for Sa: Gellibrand, and for John Martin, Printer to the Royal Society, 1668. Facsimile. Ed. R. C. Alston. Menston, England: The Scholar Press Limited, 1968), 13.

<sup>172</sup> Wilkins, *Real Character*, 18.

<sup>173</sup> Wilkins, n. p.

literary examples of gestural language. The text opens with a series of poems that imagine gesture as a “natural” language of humans: "The Tongue and heart th'intention oft divide: / The Hand and Meaning ever are ally'de."<sup>174</sup> The status of the hand as a *part* of the body seems to contribute to its honesty; although the tongue “speaks” words, the sound of those words is “divided” from the heart. For the hand, motion and meaning are “ally’d”: the body and the word are not separated by sound. By understanding gesture as natural to the *body*, rather than a product of *culture*, gesture can transcend the cultural boundaries of spoken language: "All Tribes shall now each other understand, / Which (though not of one lip) are of one Hand, / Chiologie redeems from Babels doome, / And is the universall Idiome."<sup>175</sup> Although “Babels doome” linguistically separated humans from each other, all humans share the same human body. “Chiologie,” or the study of the hand, is here presented as the study of the hand’s *language*. Gestural language is thus understood as a natural to the body as “Natures silent motions.”<sup>176</sup>

Bulwer continues:

[The hand] speakes all languages, and as an universall character of Reason, is generally understood and knowne by all Nations, among the formall differences of their Tongue. And being the onely speech that is naturall to Man, it may well be called the Tongue and generall language of Humane Nature, which, without teaching, men in all regions of the habitable world doe at the first sight most easily understand. This is evident by that trade and commerce with those salvage Nations who have long enjoy'd the late discovered principalities of the West, with whom (although their Language be strange and unknowne) our Merchants barter and exchange their Wares driving a rich and silent Trade, by signes, whereby many a dumb bargaine without the craft Brocage of the Tongue, is advantageously made.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> John Bulwer, *Chirologia: or the Naturall Language of the Hand. Composed of the Speaking Motions, and Discoursing Gestures thereof*. (London: Printed by Tho. Harper, 1644), n. p.

<sup>175</sup> Bulwer, *Chirologia*, n. p.

<sup>176</sup> Bulwer, *Chirologia*, n.p.

<sup>177</sup> Bulwer, *Chirologia*, 3-4.

For Descartes, it is specifically because language is *not* natural or instinctive, but creative and spontaneous, that allows it to demonstrate reason. For Bulwer, no such distinction exists—reason itself is naturalized, and it is only *because* of this naturalization that Bulwer is able to present gesture as a universal language. Gesture can be used “without teaching” and understood by “men in all regions of the habitable world.” Although *Chirologia* is a more positive portrayal of gestural and sign languages, by positing sign languages are more “natural,” Bulwer also participates in tropes about the “primitiveness” of sign language— a point that I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Bulwer makes it clear that he views gesture as “the only speech and generall language of Humane Nature.”<sup>178</sup> The book is prefaced by a series of poems that represent gesture as a “universall idiome” through which diverse linguistic groups can come to understand each other. Bulwer sees gestural language as rooted in the body, and it is the body and its universality that ensures that the likewise “universall idiome” of gestures are also shared and easily recognizable. One of the underlying assumptions here, of course, is that our bodies *are* universally normative. Universality here is constructed with a specific type of body in mind— presumably the bodies of middle and upper class men who are able to travel as merchants to “salvage nations,” with whom Bulwer imagines a gestural language most useful.

Importantly, *Chirologia* is not a book specifically interested in deafness. Bulwer presents gestural language as a universal language that functions as a bridge between differences in oral languages based on its “natural” connection to the body. Sign language as used by deaf people is primarily used only as evidence of the efficacy of Bulwer’s proposal of a universal sign language:

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<sup>178</sup> Bulwer, *Chirologia*, n.p.

Which may be more confirm'd by that wonder of necessity which Nature worketh in men that are borne deafe and dumbe; who can argue and dispute rhetorically by signes, and with a kinde of mute and logistique eloquence to overcome their amaz'd opponents; wherein some are so ready & excellent, they seeme to want nothing to have their meanings perfectly understood.<sup>179</sup>

Because reason itself is “natural” for Bulwer, reason will manifest itself in humans regardless of hearing status. Manually signed language is thus capable of “logistique eloquence.” The gestural language that Bulwer presents in *Chirologia*, however, is primarily emotionally expressive—used to refer to more ephemeral communicative acts, rather than a language that is rooted in a grammatical structure and extensive vocabulary. For instance, he writes that “To wring the Hands is a naturall expression of excessive grieffe” and that “To clap the raised hands one against another, is an expression proper to them who applaud, congratulate, rejoyce, assent, approve, and are well pleased, used by all Nations.”<sup>180</sup> Bulwer’s presentation of a gestural language, then, is not a fully developed language of vocabulary and grammar, but seems rather to point to the possibility of its communicative properties that are already familiar to most hearing persons.

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<sup>179</sup> Bulwer, 5.

<sup>180</sup> Bulwer, *Chirologia*, 28; 30.



Figure 3: John Bulwer, *Chirologia*, 1644

*Philocophus: Or, The Deafe and Dumbe Mans Friend* is dedicated to “Sir Edward Gostwicke, of Wellington, in the County of Bedford, Baronet, who was deaf and mute.”

*Philocophus* considers more deliberately the social conditions of deaf people than does

*Chirologia*— although Bulwer builds on ideas he began there. As Brenda Brueggemann notes:

Bulwer is credited with founding the 'elocutionary movement' in the history of rhetoric with his elaborately detailed descriptions (and prescriptions) of what the hands, body, and face could do in the act and art of persuasion in his two treatises on 'the art of the hand.' We now also know that he was one of the earliest English deaf educators and, even more significant, we now also know that he had a deaf daughter whose name happened to be *Chirolea*.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Brenda Jo Brueggemann, *Deaf Subjects: Between Identities and Places*. (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 19.

*Philocophus* offers a more nuanced presentation on sign language and its uses, possibly because Bulwer had developed connections with more deaf people by this point— both Gostwicke, as well as Bulwer’s own adopted daughter.

*Chirolgia* presents sign language as a universal panacea for both hearing and non-hearing people to overcome various types of communication barriers. He writes: "What Babell did denie / To Lips and Eare, Th'ast given the Hand and Eye; / Hast reconcil'd the World, and its defect / Supply'd, by one unerring Dialect."<sup>182</sup> Bulwer imagines sign language here and elsewhere as compensatory both for a world divided by “Babell” as well as those with hearing impairments. In *Philocophus*, his idea that the hand is “another tongue” gets worked into a kind of synesthesia through which the senses are represented as performing a kind of sensory translation.<sup>183</sup> In a prefatory poem, he writes:

How all the Sences have one common Stocke.  
Shewes how indulgent Nature for each sence  
Wanting, allows a double recompence.  
How she translates a sence, transplants an Eare  
Into the Eye, and makes the Optiques heare.  
Inoculates an Eare with sight; whereby  
It shall performe the office of an Eie.<sup>184</sup>

Because the senses all come from “one common Stocke,” they can “recompence” or “translate” sensory perceptions outside their usual functions in such a way that “transplants an Eare / Into the Eye” through the *visual* sense of gestural or signed language. In the prefatory dedication, he

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<sup>182</sup> Bulwer, *Chirolgia*, n.p.

<sup>183</sup> Bulwer, *Chirolgia*, 2.

<sup>184</sup> John Bulwer, *Philocophus: Or, The Deafe and Dumbe Mans Friend. Exhibiting the Philosophicall verity of that subtile Art, which may inable one with an observant Eie, to Heare what any man speaks by the moving of his lips. Upon the same Ground, with the advantage of an Historicall Exemplification, apparently proving, That a Man borne Deafe and Dumb, may be taught to Heare the sound of words with his Eie, & thence learne to speak with his Tongue.* (London: Printed for Humphrey Moseley, 1648), n.p.

writes, “What though you cannot expresse your mindes in those verball contrivances of mans invention; yet you want not speech, who have your whole body, for a Tongue, having a language more naturall and significant.”<sup>185</sup> Through the gestural language and bodily synesthesia that Bulwer describes, the “whole body” becomes a “tongue.” We might consider this insight as a form of Deaf-gain; as H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph J. Murray explain:

In the face of sensory loss, we may better appreciate the dynamic and pliable nature of the mind and the human will to communicate and to form community. In this light, deafness is not so much defined by a fundamental lack, as in hearing loss, but as its opposite, as a means to understand the plenitude of human being, as *Deaf-gain*. Deaf-gain . . . is the notion that the unique sensory orientation of Deaf people leads to a sophisticated form of visual-spatial language that provides opportunities for exploration into the human character.<sup>186</sup>

Bulwer’s consideration of language outside of hearing leads him to extol the possibilities of visual-spatial language. Sign language allows Bulwer to expand how and what he understands as language: the entire body and all of its senses are recruited in the process of both making and interpreting meaning.

Despite endorsing manually signed language as a legitimate, more natural, and often more sophisticated language than orally spoken languages, *Philocophus* is a manual to teach deaf students lip reading and oral speech. In the dedicatory preface, Bulwer writes:

Insomuch as being sollicited on your behalfe by a worthy Friend of yours (who had observed you not onely to be affected but seemingly edified upon the sight of the Alphabets of my *Chirologia or naturall language of the hand* which hee had presented you with, to an endeavour of accomodating them more to your use), I was enforced ingeniously to confesse, I could not improve them to any considerable advantage for you, since you already can expresse your selves so truly by signes, from a habit you have gotten by using always signes, as wee doe speech: Nature also recompencing your want of speech, in the invention of signes to expresse your conceptions. Yet a while after having well observed by your

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<sup>185</sup> Bulwer, *Philocophus*, A3-4.

<sup>186</sup> H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph J. Murray, “‘Deaf-gain’ and the Future of Human Diversity.” *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, Vol. 2. Eds Marc Marschark and Patricia Elizabeth Spencer. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 210-225.



multiplying signes and gestures, that you earnestly desired to unfold your lips to an orall elocution; seeming as if you accounted your dumbnesse to be your greatest unhappiness.<sup>187</sup>

Acknowledging that Gostwicke's sign language was already more sophisticated than what Bulwer had presented in the *Chirologia*, Bulwer claims that Gostwicke "desired to unfold [his] lips to an orall elocution." Bulwer even conceptualizes an academy for deaf students, which he describes specifically in the language of accommodations, before confessing that everyone with whom he had shared this idea had laughed at him.<sup>188</sup> Having thus abandoned his idea for the academy for the moment, he writes: "In the meane time for the enlarging of your Charter, and to bring you into a neerer incorporation of society and communion with us: I here commend unto you the Accommodations this Art holds out."<sup>189</sup> And it is here where Bulwer's objective becomes more clear: the manual never promotes oral language as superior as its *raison d'être*; rather, the book seems to be a lamenting acknowledgment of the way in which deaf people are excluded from cultural and legal realms of society. To be brought into a "neerer incorporation of society and communication with us," of course, implies that Gostwicke is not yet incorporated, but excluded. Because sign languages were often viewed as illegitimate, it is only through orally spoken language that Gostwicke can gain access a society that privileges and is structured around hearing.

*Philocophus*, although not a substitute for a testimony of an actual deaf person, provides insight to contemporary attitudes toward deaf people, and challenges that deaf people faced in the period. Bulwer goes into detail about the ways in which deaf people are excluded from daily social and legal life:

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<sup>187</sup> Bulwer, *Philocophus*, A4-5.

<sup>188</sup> Bulwer, *Philocophus*, A6.

<sup>189</sup> Bulwer, *Philocophus*, A6.

The condition that they are in who are borne deafe and dumbe, is indeed very sad and lamentable: for they are looked upon as misprisions in nature, and wanting speech, are reckoned little better then Dumbe Animals, that want words to expresse their conceptions.<sup>190</sup>

It is here where the slippage between “dumbe” as in “mute” and as in “lacking reason” becomes most apparent by invoking “Dumbe Animals.” As “misprisions in nature,” he laments that deaf people are devalued or viewed as mistakes.<sup>191</sup> In fact, Bulwer makes a non-exhaustive list of things from which those who were born deaf are excluded:

A deafe and dumbe man cannot be a witsesse in those things which are perceived by the sense of hearing. [. . .]  
A deafe and dumbe man understanding nothing, is compared to an Infant. [. . .]  
A dumbe and deafe man cannot alienate among the living, for he is like to a dead man. [. . .]  
A man deafe and dumbe by nature, cannot make his last Will and Testament.  
A deafe and dumbe man cannot appoint his Executors of his last Will and Testament.<sup>192</sup>

On these last points, Bulwer clarifies, "But if he be not mute or deafe by nature, and hath learnt to Paint or Write, hee may make his Testament. Yet some say that in making a last Will, there is neede of an articulate voyce, and that signes will not suffice."<sup>193</sup> Although there are some instances in which deaf people were allowed to sign to an interpreter at court, Bulwer makes it clear that this was not always the case. In these laments, Bulwer’s motivation for drawing up a manual on lip reading and oral speech for the deaf becomes more clear: there were often material legal consequences for not being able to engage with a hearing community on their own (oral) terms. Under the law, Bulwer writes, a deaf person is “compared to an Infant,” and if he is

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<sup>190</sup> Bulwer, *Philocophus*, 102.

<sup>191</sup> The *OED* defines “misprision” as “Malformation, regarded as a mistake on the part of Nature; an instance of this.” “misprision, n.1.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/119877](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/119877). Accessed 24 July 2019.

<sup>192</sup> Bulwer, *Philocophus*, 104.

<sup>193</sup> Bulwer, *Philocophus*, 105.

unable to satisfactorily prove that he is capable of reason to a judge, “he must have a Guardian appointed to him, it being left to the arbitrament of the Judge to determine whether he hath understanding or no.”<sup>194</sup> The degree to which language, and specifically oral language, was viewed as the sign of reason, then, had real and material consequences on the lives of deaf people.

Holder’s *Elements of Speech: An Essay of Inquiry into the Natural Production of Letters: with an Appendix Concerning Persons Deaf & Dumb* is an oralist manual to teach deaf students to speak that diverges greatly from Bulwer’s attitude toward deaf students and issues. Its method, and many oralists methods like it, focus on teaching mouth and tongue positions to deaf students to mimic in order to form words, as well as teaching lip reading. Holder, like Descartes and others, considers speech as that which separates humans from animals. He writes:

But of all other, there is none for this use comparable to the variety of instructive Expressions by Speech, wherewith Man alone is endowed, as with an Instrument suitable to the Excellency of his Soul, for the most easie, speedy, certain, full communication of the Infinite variety of his Thoughts, by the ready Commerce between the Tongue and Ear. And if some Animals, as Parrots, Magpies, etc. may seem to be capable of the same discriminations, yet we see, that their souls are too narrow to use so great an Engine.<sup>195</sup>

Holder’s thoughts do not appear dramatically different from Descartes’. Both emphasize that speech separates humans from animals, and that this difference is not *anatomical*: although parrots and magpies *can* “talk” or vocalize, Holder argues that the souls of such animals “are too narrow to use so great an Engine” and Descartes argues that despite speaking, animals do not “give evidence that they can think of what they say.” However, Descartes is clearly interested in

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<sup>194</sup> Bulwer, *Philocophus*, 109.

<sup>195</sup> William Holder, *Elements of Speech: An Essay of Inquiry into the Natural Production of Letters: with an Appendix Concerning Persons Deaf & Dumb*. (London: Printed by T. N. for F. Martyn Printer to the R. Society at the Bell without temple-Barr, 1669), 6.

presenting language as a sign of reason— of being able to “think of what [one] say[s],” whereas Holder presents his interest in language slightly differently— in terms of its “use.” For Holder, animals are anatomically *capable* of speech, but their “souls are too narrow to *use* so great an Engine” as language (emphasis added).

In that same passage, Descartes’ discussion of sign language *aligns* deaf people who use sign language within a larger human community *distinct* from animals and animal communication—because all humans, hearing and non-hearing, are possessed of reason in a way that animals, Descartes argues, are not. In Holder’s presentation, we see the opposite:

Common life is full of this kind of significant Expressions, by Knocking, Beckoning, Frowning, Pointing and the like; and Dumb persons are sagacious in the use of them. And even Brute Animals make use of this artificial way of making divers motions to have several significations, to Call, Warne, Chide, Cherish, Threaten, etc. especially within their own kinds.<sup>196</sup>

Whereas Descartes aligns deaf sign language users to hearing spoken language users through their common use of reason, Holder aligns deaf sign language users to “Brute Animals.” In fact, to make this alignment, Holder’s presentation of *animal* language is far more generous than that of Descartes: Descartes does not grant animals any linguistic ability— whether spoken or signed: at best, animals can mimic sounds or motions, but they are performed without reason or understanding. Holder, on the other hand, claims that animals *do* make “significations”: “to Call, Warne, Chide, Cherish, Threaten” all seem to be “creative” and “spontaneous” expressions that fulfill Descartes’ definition of language.

And it is specifically language in its spoken form that Holder is interested in as “the most easie, speedy, certain, full of communication of the Infinite variety of his Thoughts” which takes place “between the Tongue and Ear.” Whereas Descartes is willing to grant that those born deaf

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<sup>196</sup> Holder, 5.

“are in the habit of themselves inventing certain signs by which they make themselves understood by those who, being usually in their company, have leisure to learn their language,” Holder is primarily motivated by presenting spoken language as a superior method of communication over sign language since his goal in this manual is to teach spoken language to those who are deaf. Unlike Bulwer, who presented gestural language as a universal language capable of transcending oral linguistic differences, and who posited that “although Speech and Gesture are conceived together in the minde, yet the Hand first appearing in the delivery, anticipates the Tongue,”<sup>197</sup> Holder emphatically favors oral communication as more “easie, speedy, certain.” Privileging spoken language thus underlies an oralist pedagogy. Indeed, later in the manual when Holder covers a finger alphabet, it becomes clear who Holder imagines this manual is *for*:

And you may, when you please, have the recreation of surprising those with admiration, who shall hear the Deaf person pronounce whatsoever they (though with privacy) shall desire, without your seeming at all to guide him with your Eye or Mouth, otherwise than by beckoning to him to speak, whilst you secretly describe it with your fingers.<sup>198</sup>

In this passage, the deaf student is figured as a source of entertainment for a hearing audience. The tutor presents the deaf person to another hearing companion, who is then “surpris[ed] with admiration” at the deaf student’s ability to recite what the tutor is silently signing to him through a finger alphabet. The deaf student, of course, does not share in the entertainment (as he is its source) because it is presented specifically in a form that he cannot enjoy: sound. Interestingly, this is the only portion of the manual in which Holder seems interested in communicating with a

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<sup>197</sup> Bulwer, *Chirologia*, 4.

<sup>198</sup> Holder, 153-4.

deaf student in the accessible language of signing: when it is presented as benefitting a hearing audience, and in this case, in the form of a parlour trick.

Holder privileges spoken language over signed language, in part, because he views spoken language as the *primary* form of language, and written or signed language as *secondary* forms of language. He writes: "the Original of these Signes for Communication is found in *Viva voce*, in *Spoken Language*"<sup>199</sup> and that "Language is a Connexion of Audible signes, the most apt and excellent in whole nature for Communication of our Thoughts and Notions by Speaking. Written Language is a description of the said Audible Signes, by Signes Visible."<sup>200</sup> Written language, then, is only a "description" of the "original" spoken language of "audible signes" — a point that Holder repeats several times throughout the manual.

In 1670 and 1698, John Wallis published his letters on oralist instruction using similar methods to Holder in the *Philosophical Transactions*. Wallis is specifically focused on deafness, but like other writers, he is also necessarily interested and engaged with philosophies of language. He writes:

To teach a person who cannot Hear, to Pronounce the Sound of Words: There is that other, of teaching him to understand a Language, and know the signification of those words, whether spoken or written, whereby he may both express his own sense, and understand the Thoughts of others: without which the latter, that former were only to speak like a Parrot; or to write like a Scrivener, who understanding no Language but English, transcribes a piece of Latin, Welsh, or Irish; or like a Printer of Greek or Arabick, who knows neither the sound nor the signification of what he printeth.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Holder, 9.

<sup>200</sup> Holder, 63.

<sup>201</sup> John Wallis, "A Letter of Dr. John Wallis to Robert Boyle Esq; concerning the said doctor's essay of teaching a person dumb and deaf to speak, and to understand a language; together with the success thereof: which letter though written many years since, was but lately obtain'd to be inserted here, it being esteemed very well worth to be preserv'd and communicated for publick use." *Philosophical Transactions*. Vol. 5 Issue 61. (London: *Royal Society*, December 1670), 1088.

Because Wallis presents himself as presenting a method of teaching *language* (as opposed to teaching specifically a *spoken* language), his letter also touches on the nature of language itself. Like Descartes, he distinguishes “real” language from that which is simply mimicked without thought “like a Parrot” or a “Scrivener” who writes without understanding the signs that he makes. Implicit within this passage is the Cartesian idea of language as a *sign* of reason; Wallis positions his goal at teaching the deaf to “*understand* a Language” (emphasis added), rather than simply mimic its sounds.

Whereas Holder seems to acknowledge manually signed language *as* a language, although not necessarily a legitimate or “speedie and certain” one, implicitly through his constant invocations on the superiority of *spoken* language, Wallis does not acknowledge manually signed language as a language at all. In these letters, he consistently seems to assume that those who are deaf have no language at all, as his plan is “to Teach a person Dumb and Deaf, to Speak and to Understand a Language.”<sup>202</sup> His method is thus not to teach deaf students *just* to speak, but to teach “*a* Language” wherein no other is present. He continues:

For it is very certain, that no Two Languages can be so much different the one from the other, but that the knowledge of the one will be subservient to the gaining of the other: not only because there is now a common Language, wherein the Teacher may Interpret to the Learner the signification of those Words and Notions which he knows not, and express his own Thoughts to him; but likewise (which is very considerable,) because the common Notions of Language, wherein all or most Languages do agree, and also so many of the Particularities thereof as are common to the Languages he knows already, and that which he is to learn, (which will be very many,) are already known; and therefore a very considerable part already dispatched, of that work which will be necessary for the teaching of a First Language, to him who as yet knows none.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Wallis, “A Letter,” 1087-8.

<sup>203</sup> Wallis, “A Letter,” 1089.

Here Wallis comments on how, despite vast differences between languages, knowing a first language is an aid to learning a second language. Drawing on what the student already knows, the teacher of a second language draws from what is “already known” and “dispatched,” whereas the teacher of a first language is working with a student who “as yet knows none.” Wallis provides this anecdote to describe the difficulties in teaching deaf students to speak, but also reveals that he doesn’t consider manually signed language to be a language at all: the deaf student is “him who as yet knows none.” However, only a page later, Wallis reveals that he clearly recognizes when his students are making signs: "And if, by writing to one who understands a Language, it be thus difficult to give Instruction, how, without the help of Hearing, he may utter those Sounds, it must needs increase the Difficulty, when there is no other Language to express it in, but that of Dumb signs."<sup>204</sup> Sign language is not quite recuperated here as an actual language— Wallis reveals that his students do, in fact, make signs, yet they are not quite a language, only “Dumb signs.” In fact, Wallis’s students were probably using a system of homesigns. Homesigns are often used by families or small communities when a deaf child is born or adopted by hearing and non-signing parents as a rudimentary form of communication of manual gestures, generally with little to no input from an outside source language. Scholars have shown that homesign systems use the grammatical categories of noun, verb, adjective<sup>205</sup>;

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<sup>204</sup> Wallis, “A Letter,” 1090.

<sup>205</sup> S. Goldin-Meadow, C. Butcher, C. Mylander, M. Dodge, "Nouns and Verbs in a Self-styled Gesture System: What's in a Name?" *Cognitive Psychology*, 27 (1994): 59–319.



morphological paradigms<sup>206</sup>, recursion<sup>207</sup>, and sentence structure<sup>208</sup>. Homesign systems have been observed all over the world and are quite common; as Joseph C. Hill et. al. explain, “many, if not most, Deaf children start out as homesigners for the first few years of their lives (before they go to school) because they have limited exposure to the spoken language used in their family or the sign language of the Deaf community.”<sup>209</sup> Although Wallis is clearly able to identify that his students are signing and communicating, he dismisses them as “Dumb signs.” Here we encounter again the slippage between “dumb” as in “Destitute of the faculty of speech” and “dumb” as in “Saying nothing to the understanding; inexpressive, meaningless; stupid, senseless”; or “Foolish, stupid, ignorant (chiefly of persons).” The signs are “dumb” insofar as they are not *spoken*— as, again, according to Descartes and others, only *spoken* language is connected to reason—, but Wallis also seems to be implying that they are also lacking in meaning, as they do not function as a “first language” that Wallis could otherwise use an aid to teach a “second language” that is spoken.

Like Holder, Wallis eventually reveals who he imagines as benefitting from teaching deaf students to speak orally. He writes:

Nor can I promise, nor indeed hope, that how Accurately soever he may learn to speak, he should be able to make so great Use of it as others do. For since that he cannot hear what others say to Him, as well as express his own Thoughts to Them; he cannot make such use of it in Discourse as others may. And though it may be thought possible, that he may, in time, discern, by the motion of the Lips,

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<sup>206</sup> S. Goldin-Meadow, C. Mylander, C. Butcher, "The Resilience of Combinatorial Structure at the Word Level: Morphology in Self-styled Gesture Systems." *Cognition*, 56 (1995): 195–262.

<sup>207</sup> S. Goldin-Meadow, "The Resilience of Recursion: A Study of a Communication System Developed Without a Conventional Language Model." *Language Acquisition: The State of the Art*. Eds. Wanner, E and Gleitman, LR. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 51-77.

<sup>208</sup> SBVD Phillips, S. Goldin-Meadow, PJ Miller, "Enacting Stories, Seeing Worlds: Similarities and Differences in the Cross-cultural Narrative Development of Linguistically Isolated Deaf Children." *Human Development*, 44 (2001): 311–336.

<sup>209</sup> Joseph C. Hill, Diane C. Lillo-Martin, Sandra K. Wood, *Sign Languages: Structures and Contexts*. (London: Routledge, 2018), 118.

visible to the Eye, what is said to him . . . yet this cannot be expected, till at least he be so perfectly Master of the Language . . . For, that the Eye can actually discern all the varieties of Motion in the Organs of Speech, and see what Sounds are made by those Motions, (of which many are Inward, and are not exposed to the Eye at all,) is not Imaginable.<sup>210</sup>

Although the deaf student who learns to speak orally will at best be able to “express his own Thoughts” to others, Wallis explicitly cannot promise that “how Accurately soever he may learn to speak, he should be able to make so great Use of it as others do.” Because lip reading is so difficult, and because many vocalizations proceed from areas within the mouth that are not visible to the eye, learning to speak orally and attempting to lip read will not accommodate deaf people to actually enter into spoken conversation. Like Holder, Wallis’s methods seem to be focused on benefitting a hearing audience, rather than empowering deaf students. Alexander Popham and Daniel Whaley, both deaf, were two of Wallis’s students, whom he brought before the Royal Society, and later to the king, to demonstrate the success of his methods on oralist instruction. In the letters, they are figured as “marvels” and products of *Wallis’s* success, rather than as successful and autonomous in their own right. We might see both this and Holder’s parlour tricks as an example of what David Hevey calls “enfreakment.” As Rosemarie Garland Thomson explains, enfreakment “emerges from cultural rituals that stylize, silence, differentiate, and distance the persons whose bodies the freak-hunters or showmen colonize and commercialize.”<sup>211</sup> Holder and Wallis both used deaf students, trained to speak on command, before audiences to further their *own* scientific careers and status. Stylized and constructed as

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<sup>210</sup> Wallis, “A Letter,” 1095.

<sup>211</sup> Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error— A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity.” *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. Ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996): 1-22; 10.

“marvels,” these performances center deafness as an oddity of entertainment for hearing audiences.

In Wallis’s 1698 letter, he goes into more detail on the specifics of his method, which he mostly condenses as a form of teaching vocabulary. He writes:

’Tis then most natural (as Children learn the Names of Things) to furnish him (by degrees) with a Nomenclator . . . And these digested under convenient Titles; and placed (under them) in such convenient Order (in several Columnes, or other orderly situation in the Paper,) as (by their Position) best to express, to the Eye, their Relation or Respect to one another. As, Contraries or Correlatives, one over against the other; Subordinates or Appurtenances, under their Principals. Which may serve as a kind of Local Memory.<sup>212</sup>

Wallis is essentially describing vocabulary lessons as a form of taxonomy-making, through which nouns are named and arranged “best to express, to the Eye, their Relation or Respect to one another.” He continues: “Thus, (in one Paper) under the title Man-kind, may be placed, (not Confusedly, but in decent Order,) Man, Woman, Child, (boy, girle;).”<sup>213</sup> Although Wallis describes this notebook as a “Dictionary,” it is also clearly a taxonomy meant to also communicate relationships and expressions of power through hierarchical ordering. As Nash argues, “Wallis’s pedagogic goal was itself shaped by a commitment to the Royal Society’s (taxonomic) construction of knowledge.”<sup>214</sup> Wallis’s project, then, is not simply about teaching spoken language to deaf students, but also embedding a system of taxonomic order and hierarchical relationships *within* that form of language instruction. Examining British oralist pedagogy thus allows us to see the way in which language pedagogy and acquisition are activated to disseminate and create structures of power.

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<sup>212</sup> John Wallis, “A Letter of Dr. John Wallis to Mr. Thomas Beverly; Concerning his Method for Instructing Persons Deaf and Dumb.” *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society of London. Volume 20, Issue 245. (London: *Royal Society*, January 1698), 355.

<sup>213</sup> Wallis, 1698, 355.

<sup>214</sup> Nash, 76.

## Origins of Language

Philosophies of language often attempted to understand the origins of language: how humans first came to speak, what primitive speech was like, and how humans came to more sophisticated forms of speech. In many of these theorizations of the history of human language, writers position sign language as a “primitive” form of language that was more rooted in the sensual and survival instincts of the body. In *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), Bernard Mandeville writes that “wild people must have an instinct to understand one another, which they lose when they are civilized.”<sup>215</sup> Civilization and language coincide, and this codependence, for Mandeville, is due to the way in which civilization “teaches” men “new desires” and “appetites.” In the absence of these, a human couple of “untaught nature” “would not only be destitute of language, but likewise never find out or imagine that they stood in need of any; or that the want of it was any real inconvenience to them.”<sup>216</sup> In the absence of the new desires and appetites that come with civilization, Mandeville imagines that there would be no real need to speak. He continues: “When a man’s knowledge is confined within a narrow compass, and he has nothing to obey but the simple dictates of nature, the want of speech is easily supplied by dumb signs.”<sup>217</sup> The “simple dictates of nature,” then, are less complicated, and less in need of speech, than the “taught” desires of civilization. Simpler needs, such as those required for basic survival, can be communicated through less complicated “dumb signs.”

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<sup>215</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees and Other Writings*. Ed. E. J. Hundert. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 182.

<sup>216</sup> Mandeville, 183.

<sup>217</sup> Mandeville, 183.

Mandeville positions gestural language as more primitive than spoken language in a few different ways. Firstly, he describes it as only a transitional step to “real” language, which is spoken. Imagining a primitive human couple again, Mandeville writes that “a wild pair would make themselves intelligible to each other by signs and gestures, before they would attempt it by sounds.”<sup>218</sup> This is, in part, because Mandeville, like Bulwer, understands gestural language as more “natural” than spoken language, which is a product of civilization: “and it is more natural to untaught men to express themselves by gestures, than by sounds.”<sup>219</sup> Secondly, gestural language is more natural to “fiery tempers”:

Horatio: From what you have said, it should seem that action is not only more natural, but likewise more ancient than speech itself, which before I should have thought a paradox.

Cleo: Yet it is true; and you shall always find, that the most forward, volatile, and fiery tempers make more use of gestures, when they speak, than others that are more patient and sedate.<sup>220</sup>

It is only through civilization that humans become less “volatile” and “fiery” — that is, less brute-like — and forms of language reflect this transition. “Natural” then comes to signify the “volatile, and fiery tempers” of brute-like humans as well as the gestural language they use to communicate.

Like Mandeville, Jean Jacques Rousseau sees gestural language as more primitive than spoken language. He writes: “Although the language of gesture and spoken language are equally natural, still the first is easier and depends less upon conventions.”<sup>221</sup> Both gestural and spoken languages are “natural” — although it isn’t clear here what is meant by “natural” — gestural

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<sup>218</sup> Mandeville, 183.

<sup>219</sup> Mandeville, 183.

<sup>220</sup> Mandeville, 183.

<sup>221</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Origin of Language*. Trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 6.

language relies less upon “conventions” — or more specifically, it need not be taught to be understood. “Convention” is translated verbatim from the French, and the words have similar meanings. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “convention” as “The act of convening; the action of coming together, meeting, or assembling” and “Agreement, conventional usage; an agreement or covenant between parties” or “an agreement creating legal relations” and “General agreement or consent, deliberate or implicit, as constituting the origin and foundation of any custom, institution, opinion, et.c, or as embodied in any accepted usage, standard of behaviour, method of artistic treatment, or the like.”<sup>222</sup> The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French dictionary *Littré* defines “convention” as “Terme de droit. Accord de volontés entre deux ou plusieurs personnes,” as “Dans le langage général, ce qui est convenu entre les hommes,” and as “Assemblée exceptionnelle des représentants d'un peuple, ayant pour objet d'établir une constitution ou de la modifier.”<sup>223</sup> These meanings suggest an agreement between people as made law and which define relationships; an agreement which is artificial insofar as it is not instinctive, but must be *arrived* upon: the agreement itself must be made explicit for a convention to exist. I pause to meditate on this word because Rousseau returns to it again and again as he considers different types of languages. For Rousseau, language does not exist among isolated humans; language exists as conventions *between* humans in groups. This is similar to Hobbes, who views language as that which creates the *possibility* of groups coming together to build the commonwealth.

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<sup>222</sup> "convention, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/40714](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/40714). Accessed 27 June 2019.

<sup>223</sup> “A term of law. Agreement of wills between two or more persons,” “In general language, what is agreed between men,” and “Exceptional assembly of representatives of a people, whose object is to establish a constitution or do modify it.” Littré, Emile. *Dictionary of the French language, Supplement*. <<convention>> Paris, L. Hachette, 1878. Electronic version created by François Gannaz. <http://www.littre.org>

Rousseau also distinguishes between gestural and spoken language in terms of use: while gestural language can fully articulate the physical needs of survival, the more nuanced language of passion and complex ideas requires spoken language. Rousseau writes:

if the only needs we ever experienced were physical, we should most likely never have been able to speak; we would fully express our meanings by the language of gesture alone. We would have been able to establish societies little different from those we have, or such as would have been better able to achieve their goals. We would have been able to institute laws, to choose leaders, to invent arts, to establish commerce, and to do, in a word, almost as many things as we do with the help of speech. Without fear of jealousy, the secrets of oriental gallantry are passed across the more strictly guarded harems in the epistolary language of salaams. The mutes of the great nobles understand each other, and understand everything that is said to them by means of signs, just as well as one can understand anything said in discourse. M. Pereyra and those like him who not only consider that mutes speak, but claim to understand what they are saying, had to learn another language, as complicated as our own, in order to understand them.<sup>224</sup>

This passage reveals how capacious Rousseau considers what constitutes as “physical” needs: not merely that which is required for basic survival, but fully developed societies, laws, arts, and commerce. Rousseau also grants sign language the status as a “real” language here, “as complicated as our own” and capable of transmitting “anything said in discourse.”

In many ways, then, it appears that Rousseau recognizes the legitimacy of signed language in ways that some of his contemporaries did not. However, he reaches this stance primarily through veneration of the “primitive,” which becomes more apparent as he makes cultural comparisons between languages. This first becomes apparent when he considers animal language:

Animals have a more than adequate structure for such communication, but none of them has ever made use of it. . . . That those animals which live and work in common, such as beavers, ants, bees, have some natural language for communicating among themselves, I would not question. Still, the speech of beavers and ants is apparently by gesture; i.e. it is only visual. If so, such

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<sup>224</sup> Rousseau, 9.

languages are natural, not acquired. The animals that speak them possess them a-borning: they all have them, and they are everywhere the same. They are entirely unchanging and make not the slightest progress. Conventional language is characteristic of man alone. That is why man makes progress, whether for good or ill, and animals do not. That single distinction is far-reaching. It is said to be explicable by organic differences.<sup>225</sup>

Animals have the visual language of gesture, which Rousseau defines as “natural” insofar as they are “not acquired” — they do not need to be learned— “they all have them” and “they are everywhere the same,” “unchanging and make not the slightest progress.” Although some animals also make vocalizations to communicate, Rousseau would classify these as “inarticulate sounds” that occur outside of conventional language. “Conventional language,” which only humans have, requires some kind of learning— either through formal instruction or access to a linguistic environment. Humans have law and agreement, and these principles are intrinsic in our language.

As we saw earlier, Rousseau believes that in humans, gestural language “depends less upon conventions,” which implies that it does have *some* dependence on convention. The question is: to what degree? If “conventional language” is defined simply as language which operates by formalized and agreed upon laws — of grammar, of vocabulary— then Rousseau seems to be positing that some portion of sign language is expressed through these laws, and some portion does not. The answer to this question, although not necessarily “solvable,” becomes more clear as Rousseau compares languages between cultures. On “primitive language,” he writes: “In primitive times the sparse human population had no more social structure than the family, no laws but those of nature, no language but that of gesture and some inarticulate sounds.”<sup>226</sup> For primitive, early humans, language does not exist because *laws* do not

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<sup>225</sup> Rousseau, 10.

<sup>226</sup> Rousseau, 31.



exist. Gestural language, here relegated to an even more diminutive form of “real” language, exists only as it can without any conventions whatsoever. Rousseau writes that primitive humans who used sign language were “not bound by any idea of common brotherhood and, having no rule but that of force . . . An individual isolated on the face of the earth, at the mercy of mankind, is bound to be a ferocious animal. He would be ready to do unto others all the evil that he feared from them.”<sup>227</sup> Sign language is figured as a language predicated on isolation, fear, and hostile aggression. The movement from signed language to spoken, and then written, language is presented as one of entering into bonds with other humans. Importantly, Rousseau also imagines this process as one of empathy: “We develop social feeling only as we become enlightened.”<sup>228</sup> Rousseau imagines spoken language itself as the glue which binds humans together, without which we are only “ferocious animal[s]” who lack both “social feeling” and rationality, attacking other humans out of fear. In the absence of spoken language, the signed language of primitive humans is not simply private but isolating, and its signers sub-human.

In the footnote to this passage, Rousseau adds:

Genuine languages are not at all of domestic origin. They can be established only under a more general, more durable agreement. The American savages hardly speak at all except outside their homes. Each keeps silent in his hut, speaking to his family by signs. And these signs are used infrequently, for a savage is less disquieted, less impatient than a European; he has fewer needs and he is careful to meet them himself.<sup>229</sup>

Although Rousseau is mistaken about the nature of Native American languages, he sees their usage of sign language as evidence of their primitive state: sign language is the mechanism that Rousseau uses to racialize language. “Genuine” languages must exist under a more formalized

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<sup>227</sup> Rousseau, 31-2.

<sup>228</sup> Rousseau, 32.

<sup>229</sup> Rousseau, 31; fn 2.

social arrangement than the family structure; domestic ties are here distinct from “laws.” And this is important as Rousseau does not view Native Americans as having “societies” or “laws.” In the absence of the formalized social arrangements of societies and laws, Rousseau imagines that the Native American has no need for “conventional” language. Native American speech is just barely resuscitated as an exception: they “hardly speak at all except outside their homes.” Within the hut, Native Americans speak only by the gestural language of “signs.” Similar to Mandeville who sees civilization as producing more “taught” desires, Rousseau imagines Native Americans as less civilized, and therefore having fewer of the needs that would necessitate language.

The footnote itself also simply functions to elaborate what is meant by “the sparse human population” of “primitive times” which lacks social structure, laws, and language. Although Rousseau began this section to consider languages of early humans— a *temporal* and *historical* exploration of language— he then expands this to make a *geographic* and *cultural* argument about language: that Native American languages are “primitive.” This is an early example of what Johannes Fabian refers to as a “denial of coevalness” in anthropology, which he defines as “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse.”<sup>230</sup> Fabian highlights the anthropological tendency to situate the subject of a study as being part of an “earlier” or “more primitive” time than the producer or scholar. Rather than understanding different cultures as changing and developing in different ways according to their own needs, a denial of coevalness presumes that historical time moves along a trajectory of unquestioned progress— and importantly, that there is only one version of progress (that of the producer of anthropological

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<sup>230</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 31.

discourse). The producer thus “looks back” at the subject according to the producer’s own measure of what constitutes “progress” and posits the subject at an “earlier” time in historical development: they are not “coeval.” Rousseau’s construction of Native Americans as primitive function to produce them as an analog for the primitive *human* upon which his musings rest. While Europeans exist on a time-scale which expresses civilization and progress, Rousseau imagines Native Americans in a static, unchanging environment — much like the environment in which he imagines the gestural language of animals — through which he can project an imagined past. In this way, we begin to see the way in which philosophers of language implicitly imagine a subject who is both able-bodied and hearing as well as white and European as the real recipient of the historical development of language— language which is fully “conventionalized” and legitimate.

Rousseau then develops a hierarchy of written languages along a scale of primitiveness and civility, through which he views the culture itself. Similar to the way in which signed language functions absent of sound, Rousseau sees the “development” of language as a process that brings written markings closer to their auditory sounds. He writes that the “primitive way of writing was not to represent sounds, but objects themselves whether directly, as with the Mexicans, or by allegorical imagery, or as the Egyptians did in still other ways.”<sup>231</sup> The second stage begins to represent sound, but is also structured by “convention” and “law”:

The second way is to represent words and propositions by conventional characters. That can be done only when the language is completely formed and an entire people is united by common laws; for this already presupposes a twofold convention. Such is the writing of Chinese; it truly represents sounds and speaks to the eyes.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Rousseau, 17.

<sup>232</sup> Rousseau, 17.

And the third, and most developed way for Rousseau, is a system of written language arranged by an alphabet: “The third is to break down the speaking voice into a given number of elementary parts, either vocal or articulate, with which one can form all the words and syllables imaginable.”<sup>233</sup> In this third stage, Rousseau sees the alphabet as a cypher to the sound of words “vocal or articulate”: each letter corresponds to a sound that is spoken in the word. As such, this final stage represents a marriage of writing and sound: writing’s ability to *mirror* articulate sound is revealed as the basis on which Rousseau sees development and civility. Rousseau sees the development of a language as parallel to its social structure:

These three ways of writing correspond almost exactly to three different stages according to which one can consider men gathered into a nation. The depicting of objects is appropriate to a savage people; signs of words and of propositions, to a barbaric people, and the alphabet to civilized peoples.<sup>234</sup>

Rousseau thus moves from an argument about language to one about nations and cultures: language becomes the conduit of hierarchical racialization. For Rousseau, it is written language’s connection to articulate *sound* that determines its civilized status. Because Rousseau views signed language as the most primitive possible language on this scale, he assumes no relationship at all between signed language and written language: the underlying assumption here is that written language is *premised* on a relationship to spoken language. Rousseau’s hierarchy of written languages, and their reliance on an oral equivalent, is important because Rousseau understands language as a *sign* of a culture’s civility. He writes, “Apply these thoughts to primitive men and you see the reason for their barbarity.”<sup>235</sup> Because Rousseau assumes that signed language is necessarily a private non-conventional language, he takes it as the “reason for

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<sup>233</sup> Rousseau, 17.

<sup>234</sup> Rousseau, 17.

<sup>235</sup> Rousseau, 33.

their barbarity.” The signed language that he relegates to the domestic hut of the Native American is essentially a private one: only languages that are spoken between intra-familial communities are “conventional”-- and it is only these conventional languages that can take on a written form.

### **Francis Williams and Poetic Language**

This racialized portrayal of language ability— and its relationship to “civility” and reason— is not unique. By aligning spoken language with civility and signed language with savagery, European writers drew connections between deaf people and cultures they saw as “uncivilized” such as Native Americans and Africans. In a pamphlet published in 1783, Perier, an instructor at the Institute for the Deaf in France, wrote that “The Deaf-Mute is always a savage, always close to ferocity, and always on the point of becoming a monster.”<sup>236</sup> Comparing the deaf to the “savages” of Africa, he continued: “the deaf will be restored to civilization, just as the men of color are about to be restored to their rights” following the recent French abolishment of slavery. Perier believed that only by being “taught language”-- and taught specifically from the hearing instructors at the Institute— could deaf children be “restored to civilization.”

At the same time, however, thinkers like Kant insisted that even after being taught “a language,” the deaf “can never achieve more than an analog of reason.”<sup>237</sup> The idea that the deaf might learn speech or sign language but remain incapable of creative, spontaneous, and independent thought persisted. We see this same logic applied to non-deaf Africans who

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<sup>236</sup> quoted in Mirzoeff, 62.

<sup>237</sup> Kant, 42.

achieved success in European writing styles and languages. In his essay “Of National Characters” (1758), David Hume uses the machine/parrot trope quite explicitly:

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient GERMANS, the present TARTARS, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are NEGROE slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.<sup>238</sup>

This passage begins with a polygenetic understanding of race, a view that posits that human races have different species origins, to buttress the judgment of white superiority. A series of assumptions cascade from this judgment: that “civility” has a universal, rather than a culturally and temporally specific, rule of conduct— and that only whites have achieved it; that no other races have developed manufactures, arts, or sciences; and that slavery is a state in which one could reasonably demonstrate “symptoms of ingenuity.” But Hume has clearly heard of an exception to this judgment: a man in Jamaica “of parts and learning.” Hume is referring to Francis Williams (1700-1770), a free Black Jamaican scholar who wrote poetry in Latin, travelled to Europe, became a citizen of Britain, and set up a free school for black children in Jamaica. Hume quickly reduces these accomplishments: he is “like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.” Like many of the authors who wrote on language, Hume makes a distinction

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<sup>238</sup> David Hume, *The Philosophical Works*. Eds. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875), 253.

between understanding and possessing language versus *mimicking* language “like a parrot”: a difference between knowing language and being functionally and anatomically capable of language. This trope, used by philosophers of language, authors of deaf language instruction manuals, and those interested in supporting racialized social systems, functions to isolate white oralist language as the sole expression of reason. As William Guthrie writes in *Geographical, Historical, and Commercial Grammar* (1770), “the inhabitants [of the continent of Africa] were in the same rude situation near 2000 years ago in which they are at present, that is, *they had nothing of humanity about them but the form*”<sup>239</sup> (emphasis added). Guthrie uses a similar denial of coevalness to Rousseau: he sees the history and culture of Africans as static. Discounting the existence and quality of African science and arts, he declares that they are only human “in form”: they may be able to functionally mimic— like a parrot— but Guthrie denies Africans reason, creativity, or ingenuity.

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<sup>239</sup> William Guthrie, *A New Geographical, Historical, and Commercial Grammar; and Present State of the Several Kingdoms of the World*. (Dublin: J. Williams and J. Exshaw. 1770, reprint 1780), 607.

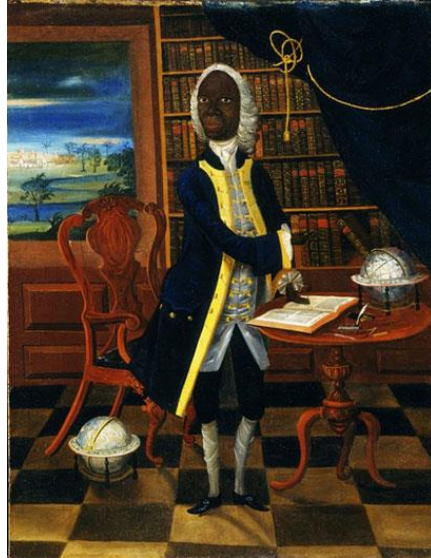


Figure 4: Artist unknown, Portrait of Francis Williams, circa 1745

Samuel Estwick, in his *Considerations on the Negroe Cause Commonly So Called* (1772), engages with Hume and Guthrie. The pamphlet is a response to Lord Mansfield after a court case over the question of if, upon arriving in England, an enslaved person immediately became free. Estwick's writings are pro-slavery and argue for the compatibility of slavery with English law. One aspect of his argument rests on distinguishing white men from black men on the basis of moral reasoning. Estwick quotes the passage on Williams in full before adding:

Thus Mr. Hume marks the difference betwixt the several species of men, by their natural capacity or incapacity of exerting in degree the rational powers, or faculties of the understanding; which is the distinction that Mr. Locke makes between man and brutes. I distinguish man from man by the moral sense or moral powers; and although a Negroe is found, in Jamaica or elsewhere, ever so sensible and acute; yet if he is incapable of moral sensations, or perceives them only as beasts do simple ideas, without the power of combination, in order to use (which I verily believe to be the case); it is a mark that distinguishes him from the man who feels and is capable of these moral sensations, who knows their application and the purposes of them, as sufficiently, as he himself is distinguish from the highest species of brutes.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Samuel Estwick, *Considerations on the Negroe Cause Commonly So Called, Addressed to the Right Honourable Lord Mansfield, Lord Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench, & By a West Indian*. (London, 1773), 79.



Despite Williams' ability to "parrot" the "faculties of understanding," Estwick posits that moral sense requires a finer degree of reasoning and that this is what distinguishes "man from man"—and this distinction is as great as that which separates humans from "the highest species of brutes." Citing and building off Guthrie's portrayal of the inhabitants of Africa, Estwick writes, "nor have I been able to find one author, by whom I could discover that there was any sort of plan or system of morality conceived by these tribes of Africa, or practiced among them. Their barbarity to their children debases their nature even below that of brutes."<sup>241</sup> Here again we see the comparison between Africans and "brutes." Estwick's comparison of Africans to "brutes" is important, because the weight of his argument rests on the idea "that Negroes under the law should not be considered as human beings,"<sup>242</sup> but *only as property*. Although Locke had proposed the "faculties of understanding"—or reason—as that which separates humans from animals, and that language is the sign of such "internal conceptions"—for Hume and Estwick, the connection between language and reason is broken once it is applied to a black man. Language alone proves insufficient as proof of Williams', or any other African man's, humanity; the sign is broken.

Edward Long's *The History of Jamaica* (1774) includes a chapter that introduces Williams and his poetry. The work itself attempts to give a political, social, geographic, and economic account of the island and largely functions as a colonialist text and defense of slavery. Although Long claims that he wants to present Williams "impartially," he writes that he "shall leave it to the reader's opinion, whether what they shall discover of his genius and intellect will be sufficient to overthrow the arguments, I have before alleged, to prove an inferiority of the

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<sup>241</sup> Estwick, 80.

<sup>242</sup> Estwick, 71.

Negroes to the race of white men."<sup>243</sup> Williams' poetry is thus presented as a test of his humanity. Long presents both Hume's and Estwick's appraisals of Williams in his introduction before claiming that Williams "was pitched upon to be the subject of an experiment, which, it is said, the Duke of Montagu was curious to make, in order to discover, whether, by proper cultivation, and a regular course of tuition at school and the university, a Negroe might not be found as capable of literature as a white person."<sup>244</sup> Although as Vincent Carretta notes, Williams was unlikely "to have needed the patronage or financial support of the duke of Montagu, as Long asserts without corroborating evidence."<sup>245</sup> Long's presentation of Williams' intellect as the product of a white *experiment* in which he is the *object* of study functions to reduce Williams' accomplishments—they are not his own, but *Montagu's* work in "producing" him—but also interpolate Williams' intellect into a specifically white frame of reference; intellect is proven through mastery of "literature as a white person." Within Long's larger defense of slavery, Williams' success or failure—again, on white terms—to produce poetic language is taken of a sign of his rational capacity—a determining factor that pro-slavery writers used to defend the enslavement of humans. As Carretta writes, "For Long and his sympathizers, if Williams could be denied the title of poet, he could be denied the status of being fully human."<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica: Or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of the Island: with Reflections on Its Situation Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*. (London: Printed for T. Lowndes, in Fleet-Street, 1774), 475.

<sup>244</sup> Long, 476.

<sup>245</sup> Vincent Carretta, "Who Was Francis Williams?" *Early American Literature* 38.2 (2003): 213-237; 221.

<sup>246</sup> Carretta, 216-7.

Later in his life, Williams returned to Jamaica and opened a school for black children—a significant contribution, as no other schools accepted black children. Long writes of one of Williams’ pupils: "but of this youth it may be said, to use the expression of Festus to Paul, that 'much learning made him mad.' The abstruse problems of mathematical institution turned his brain; and he still remains, I believe, an unfortunate example, to shew that every African head is not adapted by nature to such profound contemplations."<sup>247</sup> Alongside efforts to “prove” that Africans had inferior intellects to whites, pro-slavery writers often included warnings like these: that African minds could not “handle” scholarly training, that it would drive them “mad.” As Robert Boucher Nikkols, an abolitionist writer, explains: "The stupidity of negroes is . . . urged by the friends of slavery as a plea for using them as brutes; for they represent the negroes as little removed above the monkeys, or the oran-outang, with regard to intellects."<sup>248</sup> Nikkols exposes how slavery was the driving force behind attempts to portray Africans as animalistic and of lesser intellect: to dehumanize and “use them as brutes.”

In each of these works, Williams’s poetic skill is invoked in defenses of slavery. Each of these works also begins with the *assumption* of white superiority: this assumption of superiority expands across civility, ingenuity, arts, sciences, moral reasoning, and intellect, until it includes even the human: Williams is merely “like a parrot.” As Betty Joseph explains, narratives like Long’s “have historical fingerprints that reveal that Reason was often in the service of colonialism when it posited a universal human as a constitutive exclusion—an act of differentiation where the pretension of internal cohesion depends on the exclusion of non-

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<sup>247</sup> Long, 476.

<sup>248</sup> Robert Boucher Nikkols, *Letter to the Treasurer of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. (London: James Phillips, 1787; 2nd ed., 1788), 46.

Western others.”<sup>249</sup> Although Williams performs reason in the way that white Europeans defined it, he is always already excluded from a theory of reason that is grounded in white supremacy and colonialism. In this way, Kerschbaum’s “presumed wholeness of a hearing identity,” which serves as a corollary to the belief that deaf people are more generally “deficient,” might also be understood as a presumed wholeness of a *white* identity.

Kim F. Hall has examined the way in which Africans were compared to parrots in early modern painting. She writes:

Not only are parrots associated with profit . . . but the parrot, along with the ape, figures prominently in discussions of racial difference as Englishmen try to tease out the difference between African and Englishman. However, the parrot figures in misogynist treatises as well, in which women are said to be incapable of autonomous speech, able only to mimic the language of *mankind*.<sup>250</sup>

Although Hall’s focus is on the intersection of race and gender, it is clear that the parroting trope is applied to Black men as well. Early modern and eighteenth-century painters and writers used the parroting trope to deny the existence of legitimate African language more broadly. As Ian Smith argues in *Barbarian Errors*, “In the dawning era of English exploration, African contact literature not only revealed an appreciable cross-cultural linguistic difference, but also averred that its documentary subject was brutish and, hence, lacking in that most humanizing faculty, speech.”<sup>251</sup> Because language was defined as an autonomous, spontaneous, and creative exercise of reason— and therefore proof of humanity— defenders of slavery trivialized African language as a form of non-human mimicry.

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<sup>249</sup> Betty Joseph, “Worlding and Unworlding in the Long Eighteenth Century.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 52.1 (2018): 27-31; 29.

<sup>250</sup> Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 244.

<sup>251</sup> Ian Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 13.

## Conclusion

White able-bodied European constructions of reason were predicated on language, but also included mechanisms through which they could still deny reason to people based on language ability or race. This rejection of certain language users as having reason is, in Hobbes' conception, also a rejection of those peoples to the commonwealth: if language is what allows for the existence of the commonwealth, the rejection of certain language users is also a refusal to allow those individuals full participation as political subjects. In this way, deaf people and Africans get cast as Descartes' "the lowest type of man"-- likened to animals and barely recuperated as fully human. As noted in Bulwer's *Philocophus*, deaf people were frequently denied legal rights, and slave traders and pro-slavery writers' rejection of African intelligence and reason was used as a justification for chattel slavery. This is not to suggest that those two conditions are equal— they clearly are not— but rather to demonstrate the *flexibility* of constructions of reason to exclude others based on bodily difference. The trope of "parroting," for instance, happens frequently throughout works both on deafness and in the writings on Williams' poetry. Descartes and Holder both present the parrot as a kind of test-case for defining language: it is possible to recreate the sound of words without understanding what they mean. However, neither author uses the parrot simply to demarcate a line between human and animal language or vocalizations; instead the parrot is used as a *link*. The parrot's proximity to language provides a mechanism of dehumanization: language is the sign of reason, but the exclusion of the parrot functions as a conceptual caesura to rationalize the exclusion of other humans and languages as well. Adjacent to language, the parrot provides a denominator to identify the

“lowest type of man,” a way of reducing signs used by deaf persons as expressions of alarm used by “brute animals,” or as a way of illegitimizing non-white eloquence as mere “parroting.”

Language ability is thus revealed as a ruse. Rather than trouble the use of language as a defining human characteristic, mechanical or animal language *reinforces* White able-bodied constructions of reason by offering exceptions to the rule: parrots do not have language, they merely mimic. By applying the logic of mimicry to humans, eighteenth-century writers construct reason not only through what Kerschbaum calls a “presumed wholeness of a hearing identity,” but an identity that is also specifically white.

## Chapter 4 : *Frankenstein*, Slaughterhouses, and Blood

That the Creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is constructed from various materials and bodies is well known and commented on; what is less frequently commented on is that some of the materials used in the construction are from *animal* bodies. Indeed, "slaughter houses" are among the locations cited that Victor visits to collect materials; however, no other mention is made of animal parts used in the construction of the Creature, or in its general constitution, which is probably why so many critics have neglected it. In this chapter, I will consider slaughterhouses in their eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century context in which they were closely associated with death, disease, and in particular, blood. By analyzing how closely associated slaughterhouses were to the enormous amounts of blood they produced, as well as the poor waste management that allowed the blood to trickle and pool into the streets and alleys, I will ultimately argue that the material Victor collects from the slaughterhouses is specifically blood. I am obviously taking something somewhat silly (how one would have literally constructed a human-like body) very seriously, but in doing so I hope to provide new ways of thinking about the Creature's human/animal hybridity, and specifically what it means that the Creature's *blood* was non-human.

This chapter diverges from previous chapters in some ways insofar as it performs an investigation into the way *health* was constructed through bio-cultural understandings of blood. In this chapter, I examine the Creature's body as a *medical production*— one that relies on the purported therapeutic benefits of blood transfusion as bestowing both life and health. As a result,

this chapter utilizes both the medical model of disability— which understands disability as an individual problem that is natural, self evident, and in need of medical intervention. As Alison Kafer writes, "The medical model of disability frames atypical bodies and minds as deviant, pathological, and defective, best understood and addressed in medical terms."<sup>252</sup> Unlike most medical interventions, the Creature's very *existence* is the intervention. At the same time, however, I continue to engage in Kafer's political/relational model of disability by focusing on the ways in which ideologies around animality, slaughterhouses, and waste contribute to the way in which the Creature is pathologized.

Many critics have examined the assemblage of the Creature in terms of the heterogeneity of its parts. Chris Baldick considers the very fact of the Creature's monstrosity as deriving from this heterogeneity by examining its construction in the context of Romantic aesthetics in which beauty is considered in terms of the relation of parts to wholes. Baldick explains that "any living 'whole'—whether a plant, a poem, or a nation—was always more than a mere aggregation of its constituent parts."<sup>253</sup> Further, harmony was required to give "life" and form to the whole from otherwise "lifeless parts": "*Frankenstein* takes its place within this pattern of Romantic contrasts between lifeless parts and living wholes, partly as a dramatization of that principle of inorganic aggregation."<sup>254</sup> The integrating principle that turns "lifeless parts" into "living wholes" determines the moral character of the organism. Baldick explains:

the beauty of the whole can arise only from a pure vital principle within, to which all subordinate parts and limbs will then conform. The parts, in a living body, can only be as beautiful as the animating principle which organizes them, and if this 'spark of life' proceeds, as it does in Victor's creation, from tormented isolation

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<sup>252</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. (Bloomington, IN: 2013), 5.

<sup>253</sup> Chris Baldick, "Assembling *Frankenstein*." *Frankenstein*. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996): 173-183; 174.

<sup>254</sup> Baldick, 174.



and guilty secrecy, the resulting assembly will only animate and body forth that condition and display its moral ugliness.<sup>255</sup>

The “animating principle” which would function to harmonize, and perhaps even give beauty to, the “living whole” of the Creature is corrupted by the “tormented isolation” and “guilty secrecy” of Victor’s labor. The conditions of labor and creativity are reflected in the final product of the Creature’s “moral ugliness.”

Like Baldick, Peter Heymans, in *Animality in British Romanticism: The Aesthetics of Species*, is also interested in the Creature’s ugliness, but in the context of how taxonomic systems, especially those which define the human, are shaped by aesthetic concerns. In particular, Heymans is interested in the way that human/animal hybridity was read as a threatening ugliness that “undermines the subject’s centralized, unitary identity and creates a hybrid creature, fragmented between its humanity and animality.”<sup>256</sup> In Romantic aesthetics, the sublime and the beautiful function to *contain* that threat posed by ugliness and hybridity “whereby the sublime operates as a repressive mechanism domesticating the ugly and transfiguring it into an easy-to-handle object of beauty.”<sup>257</sup> Against the repressive Romantic aesthetics of Burke and Kant, Heymans argues that “More liberal Romantics such as William Blake and Mary Shelley . . . interpret hybridity and its resistance to biological representation as a moral opposition to the oppressive and homogenizing subjectivities promoted by the family and the state.”<sup>258</sup> On *Frankenstein*, he writes:

Bearing in mind that Frankenstein fabricates his creature with both human and non-human body parts, it seems plausible to say that human identity for him is not a question of a single metaphysical or anatomical essence, but arises in the

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<sup>255</sup> Baldick, 175.

<sup>256</sup> Peter Heymans, *Animality in British Romanticism: The Aesthetics of Species*. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 14.

<sup>257</sup> Heymans, 12.

<sup>258</sup> Heymans, 15.

tangled interplay between biological, socio-cultural and moral factors. What defines us as human, in his view, is our biological embeddedness in the social ecology of the family and our innate capacity for moral and rational action. . . . What Shelley's novel captures . . . is the tremendous extent to which these social, moral and biological taxonomies are shaped by aesthetic principles.<sup>259</sup>

What is interesting to me about Heymans's argument is this casual and unexamined claim that the creature is made of "both human and non-human body parts." Heymans himself is not interested in the "non-human body parts," that he mentions; rather, Heymans argues that the creature's monstrosity is an effect of the fact that he is *ugly*. Heymans continues:

throughout the novel *Frankenstein* mobilises an aesthetic vocabulary to appraise social relations (domesticity is beautiful), evaluate moral integrity (criminals are ugly), and define biological status (hybridity is pretty disgusting). As a physical reflection of social, moral and biological law, beauty thus also serves a cohesive function.<sup>260</sup>

To be clear, Heymans is not interested in how the creature's ugliness is *constructed*, but rather the way in which evaluations of the creature's ugliness rhetorically position him outside the human species. Whereas Heymans takes it as his starting point that the creature is part animal, in my essay I will be focusing on *how* the creature is part animal.

Anne K. Mellor, in *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* and elsewhere, analyzes Victor's creation in terms of patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial desires for power over women and nature. She writes:

Frankenstein's scientific project is clearly an attempt to gain power. Inspired by Waldman's description of scientists who "acquired new and almost unlimited powers," Frankenstein has sought both the power of a father over his children, and, more omnipotently, of God over his creation. More subtly yet more pervasively, Frankenstein has sought power over the female. He has "pursued nature to her hiding places," in an attempt not only to penetrate nature and show how her hidden womb works but actually to steal or appropriate that womb. To usurp the power of reproduction is to usurp the power of production as such. Marx identified childbirth as the primary example of pure, or unalienated, labor.

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<sup>259</sup> Heymans, 119.

<sup>260</sup> Heymans, 120.

Victor Frankenstein's enterprise can be viewed from a Marxist perspective as an attempt to exploit nature or labor in the service of a ruling class. Frankenstein wishes to harness the modes of reproduction in order to become the acknowledged, revered, and gratefully obeyed father of a new species. His project is thus identical with that of bourgeois capitalism: to exploit nature's resources for both commercial profit and political control.<sup>261</sup>

Mellor sees Victor's pursuit of knowledge through the production of the Creature in the context of class struggle that exploited both the proletariat working class and women. Mellor then analyzes Victor's labor, and the materials of his labor, as analogous to the dehumanizing process of factory labor:

Among these resources are animal and human bodies. Collecting bones and flesh from charnel-houses, dissecting rooms, and slaughter-houses, Frankenstein sees these human and animal organs as nothing more than the tools of his trade, no different from his other scientific instruments. In this sense he is identical with the factory owner who gathers men, his disembodied "hands" as Dickens's Bounderby would say, to manipulate his machines. We can therefore see Frankenstein's creature, as Franco Moretti has suggested, as the proletariat, "a *collective* and *artificial* creature," dehumanized by the mechanized modes of technological production controlled by the industrial scientist and, in modern times, by the computer.<sup>262</sup>

In Mellor's reading, the "animal and human bodies" become the "disembodied hands" of factory workers who are dehumanized and alienated from their labor. Like Heymans, Mellor acknowledges that the Creature is, in part, made of animal parts, but only insofar as it allows her to explain Victor's indiscriminate attitude toward the materials of his production. Although acknowledging that the Creature is constructed of both human and non-human parts has allowed both Heymans and Mellor to make important contributions to the body of work on *Frankenstein*, neither have taken up the non-human aspect of the Creature *as such*.

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<sup>261</sup> Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fictions, Her Monsters*. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 112.

<sup>262</sup> Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, 112.

We know that the creature must be a human/animal hybrid because of the locations where Victor collects materials for its body: the graves of churchyards, “bones from charnel houses,” slaughterhouses, and the “dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials.”<sup>263</sup> But what, precisely, was Victor gathering from slaughterhouses? And what did “slaughterhouses” evoke for nineteenth-century readers? Tim Marshall has done important work in illustrating the historical context of the dissecting room, anatomy laws, and grave robbing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in his analysis of *Frankenstein* to illustrate the stigma attached to surgeons and dissections. By placing *Frankenstein* in the context of the anatomy laws of the period, Marshall’s work allows us to understand that the bodies that Victor used in the construction of the creature were necessarily those of murderers and paupers, and further, that the bodies of those murderers and paupers necessarily contribute to the monstrosity of the creature. I would like to do something analogous to Marshall’s work by placing *Frankenstein* in the context of early nineteenth century slaughterhouses which *also* provided the materials for the construction of the creature and therefore necessarily contribute to its monstrosity.

## **Slaughterhouses**

Shelley was writing during the beginning of the transition from private slaughter houses to public abattoirs, a movement that was accompanied by worries of health and hygiene. In his history of British slaughterhouses, Ian MacLachlan writes, "Abolition of London's private

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<sup>263</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 34.

slaughter-houses was motivated by the congestion created by livestock in city streets, the nuisance of slaughter-house refuse in residential neighbourhoods and public health concerns about diseased meat in the food supply."<sup>264</sup> These private slaughter houses were “typically small facilities that were owned and operated by independent butchers and located behind or beneath a retail meat shop,” often in residential areas.<sup>265</sup> As Chris Otter explains:

When contemporaries used this word ‘slaughterhouse’ . . . they did not refer to a structure built with the explicit purpose of killing animals and dressing carcasses. They simply referred to any building in which slaughter happened to take place. So there was usually nothing technically or architecturally distinct about the slaughterhouse, as this 1876 report from South Shields makes clear: ‘Many of the slaughter-houses are absurdly small, the ventilation is generally described as deficient, bad, very bad, or non, while in a considerable number there is no water-supply (tap) within the slaughterhouse.’ Elsewhere, we find references to ‘sheds’ or ‘old washhouses’ being used for slaughter.<sup>266</sup>

Despite frequent calls for reform, the private slaughterhouse persisted throughout the nineteenth century, as Otter here makes clear.

Because many slaughterhouses were simply located in the homes of butchers, many of the houses lacked proper waste-management technologies, such as ventilation and running water.

Neighbors complaining about the buildup of waste were therefore quite common:

The filth, garbage, and impurities of every description generally to be found in slaughter-houses, in almost every stage of decomposition, contribute their quantum of deadly exhalations to the atmosphere of the slaughter-house, and then, after having impregnated the neighbourhood with offensive and unwholesome effluvia, are consigned to the sewers, by which they are ultimately conveyed to the Thames, to increase the noxious exhalations from its banks, or, detained in their progress through those notoriously defective channels, to breathe forth at every loophole putrescence and disease!<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Ian MacLachlan, "A Bloody Offal Nuisance: The Persistence of Private Slaughter-houses in Nineteenth-century London." *Urban History* 34.2 (2007): 227-254; 227.

<sup>265</sup> MacLachlan, 227.

<sup>266</sup> Chris Otter, “Civilizing Slaughter: The Development of the British Public Abattoir, 1850-1910.” *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse*. Ed. Paula Young Lee. (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008): 29-51; 90.

<sup>267</sup> Quoted in MacLachlan, 238.

For a scientist such as Victor who sought to understand “the structure of the human frame, and, indeed, any animal endued with life,”<sup>268</sup> the opportunity to examine animal waste “in almost every stage of decomposition” would have been a boon. As Victor explains to Walton: “To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. I became acquainted with the science of anatomy; but this was not sufficient; I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body . . . I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel-houses.”<sup>269</sup> Indeed, the slaughterhouse was in fact a site of knowledge for scientists, as Otter explains: “The slaughterhouse had always functioned as a source of knowledge of animal pathology and, by implication, physiology. The abattoir clearly intensified this process, providing the curious zoonologist (one who studies the diseases of animals) with a seemingly limitless supply of anatomical eccentricities.”<sup>270</sup> In addition to the “vaults and charnel-houses” that Victor visits, the “filth” and “garbage” of the slaughterhouses would have also provided materials not only for the *construction* of the body, but also for the research required *prior* to its construction.

In addition to the nuisance of bad smells emanating from the slaughterhouses, the “deadly exhalations” were considered a threat to public health by proponents of the miasma theory of disease—the idea that pollution, disease, and poisonous or noxious vapors circulated in the air of certain environments. As MacLachlan notes, the miasma theory of disease was used to justify calls to move private slaughter houses *outside* the city where they would pose a lesser public health threat: “In the view of adherents of the miasma theory of disease, the decomposition of

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<sup>268</sup> Shelley, 31.

<sup>269</sup> Shelley, 31.

<sup>270</sup> Otter, 99.

slaughter-house waste posed a public health hazard. Abolition of private slaughter in urban areas and the establishment of suburban public abattoirs was justified to reduce exposure to the miasma."<sup>271</sup> Otter's history of nineteenth century slaughterhouses focuses on the ways in which the lack of proper waste-management became a public health issue in discourses of civility and civilization. Many of the reforms attempted not necessarily to change the process of slaughter at all, but rather to remove it from public sight: "the history of meat in the modern West can be summarized thus: civilization develops by consuming more meat but devoting more effort effacing the gory evidence of its production."<sup>272</sup> Both the slaughter as well as the blood it produced were considered threats to civility:

Chroniclers of urban disorder were obliged to mark their civility with predictable expressions of horror, as they depicted rivulets of blood and the cacophony of death cries reverberating through dank alleyways. Their rather monotonous discourse tells us one thing: the public presence of blood was becoming a problem worth commenting on at length.<sup>273</sup>

And because slaughterhouses were located in residential neighborhoods, they posed a particular threat to the developing "sensibilities" of the children who lived nearby, as one writer records: "In some localities it became almost a pastime for young children of both sexes to frequent the slaughter-houses, and witness the death-struggles of the butchers' victims. This familiarity with scenes of blood was justly considered as having an immoral influence."<sup>274</sup> Seen as a public nuisance, slaughterhouses were associated with other unpleasant aspects of society as they "infected and barbarized those around them, mysteriously stimulating drinking, fighting, and prostitution,"<sup>275</sup> threatening the sensibilities of their residential neighbors.

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<sup>271</sup> MacLachlan, 238.

<sup>272</sup> Otter, 103-4.

<sup>273</sup> Otter, 91.

<sup>274</sup> A Darbyshire, "On Public Abattoirs." *The Builder* 33 (1875), 113.

<sup>275</sup> Otter, 91.

Furthermore, slaughterhouses were associated not just with the production of meat, but intrinsically connected with death. The putrid smells from blood, manure, and other animal waste were thought of as capable of transmitting disease and death, leading William Farr to cite both “slaughterhouses and rank churchyards” together as contagious threats of “miasma.” This association was widespread, as Otter notes:

In his impassioned tirade *The Rookeries of London*, Thomas Beames described the smell from a knacker’s yard: “The stench from such a Necropolis, or colony of the dead, is dreadful,—must feed disease, and, when fever breaks out, aid its ravages!” More sober medical writers concurred. “It is not the slaughtering only which is objectionable,” declared the *Lancet* in 1872, “but the offal-selling, blood-collecting, and catgut-spinning, which are productive of a state of atmosphere that is, at all events, offensive, if it cannot be demonstrated to be positively unwholesome.”<sup>276277</sup>

In his poem “A Description of a City Shower,” Jonathan Swift also illustrates this mixture of blood, disease, and death associated with the slaughterhouse:

Filth of all hues and odors seem to tell  
What street they sailed from, by their sight and smell.  
They, as each torrent drives with rapid force,  
From Smithfield or St. Pulchre’s shape their course,  
And in huge confluence joined at Snow Hill ridge,  
Fall from the conduit prone to Holborn Bridge.  
Sweepings from butchers’ stalls, dung, guts, and blood,  
Drowned puppies, stinking sprats, all drenched in mud,  
Dead cats, and turnip tops, come tumbling down the flood.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Otter, 92.

<sup>277</sup> Although much of Otter’s analysis focuses on the mid-nineteenth century, and therefore *after* the publication of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, he notes that much of the concern surrounding the lack of waste-management of the slaughterhouses had in fact began several centuries earlier: “Concerns about the corruption and putrefaction associated with slaughter were voiced well before the emergence of the Victorian public health movement. According to the eminent antiquary Thomas D. Hardy, during the reign of Henry VII the parishioners of St. Faith’s and St. Gregory’s were ‘Greatly annoyed and distempered by corrupt airs engendered in the said parishes, by occasion of blood and other foulis things by reason of the slaughter of beasts and the scalding of swine [. . .].’ The sight of slaughter and blood, as well as the smells, also aroused civilized disgust” (94).

<sup>278</sup> Jonathan Swift, *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*. Eds. Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 55-63.



The rain washes out the city, but in the process displays “dung, guts, and blood” as they flow from the butchers’ stalls, leaving a trail behind them. When Shelley includes slaughterhouses among dissecting rooms, churchyards, and charnel houses, then, it is in part because slaughterhouses were already so closely associated with death, human or otherwise, that its presence in the list of locations does not necessarily call attention to itself.

Not only were slaughterhouses closely associated with death, but also with the enormous amounts of blood they produced. For instance, Louis-Sebastien Mercier writes of the slaughterhouses in Paris that “The rue-du-Pied-de-Boeuf has a number of dirty little alleys that are soaked in the blood of slaughtered animals. Some of this collects in puddles, the rest trickles in small streams to the Seine.”<sup>279</sup> In fact, when Paris attempted to geographically consolidate its slaughterhouses in La Villette, the quarter was nicknamed “La Cité du Sang,” or the city of blood. The closeness of this association is important, because it is likely that Shelley included slaughterhouses in the list of locations Victor visits to collect materials for the body *specifically* to obtain blood.

The materials used to construct organs and muscles could have been easily obtained from dissecting rooms, and Victor tells Walton that he “collected bones from charnel houses.”<sup>280</sup> Because Victor also claims that he “selected his features as beautiful,”<sup>281</sup> it seems likely that the materials used to construct or assemble the Creature’s outer appearance would have likewise come from other humans, despite the ultimate failure of those materials to confer beauty on the Creature in its final form. *Blood*, however, would have been difficult to obtain from either of

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<sup>279</sup> Louis Sebastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* Vol. 5. (Amsterdam: Neufchatel, 1782), 103.

<sup>280</sup> Shelley, 34.

<sup>281</sup> Shelley, 35.

these places, as blood coagulates soon after death and is then difficult to extract any substantial amounts from the body. As John Hunter notes, “it becomes a matter almost of surprise, how little [blood] is commonly found in the dead body.”<sup>282</sup> Although blood would have been difficult to obtain from the dissecting room or the charnel house, then, it would have been *abundantly* available from slaughterhouses. Throughout the nineteenth century, “the poleaxe remained the predominant method of stunning cattle before bleeding,”<sup>283</sup> during which the blood was either collected to be used for British blood pudding recipes, or else drained and collected along the streets and alleyways.

What is important about the slaughterhouses in *Frankenstein*, then, is that they are associated with death, disease, and immorality. But even more importantly, because slaughterhouses were so closely associated with the enormous amounts of blood they produced (and failed to properly manage as waste), it is likely that Shelley imagined them as supplying the blood used in the construction of the Creature’s body. This seems important; as a hybrid creature composed of both human and animal parts, what is “animal” about Victor’s Creature cannot be discretely isolated as an organ, a limb, or even identifiably animal-like features such as bear teeth or wolf ears; rather, the animal component of the Creature is his blood which circulates throughout his entire body.

## **Blood Transfusions**

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<sup>282</sup> John Hunter, *Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-Shot Wounds*. (London: Printed for Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, Paternoster-Row; and E. Cox and Son, St. Thomas's Street, Southwark, 1828), 89.

<sup>283</sup> Otter, 92.

Whereas the first part of this chapter deals with the historicization of slaughterhouses in order to argue that it is specifically the Creature's *blood* that is non-human and animal, the second part will focus on bio-cultural meanings of blood, the role of blood in debates on vitalism, the history of medical experiments on blood up to 1818, and will probe into the question of what it *means* that his blood was non-human. Additionally, this section will cover the history of blood transfusions between the mid-seventeenth-century and the early nineteenth-century. These blood transfusion experiments, and the commentary surrounding them, reveals the way in which blood functioned in the scientific and public imagination as a bodily fluid containing physical, behavioral, and moral information that it could then "transfuse" to others.

William Harvey published his discovery of the circulation of blood in 1628: *De Motu Cordis*, or *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood*. His work is obliquely alluded to in *Frankenstein* when Waldman says of modern scientists (contra the ancients): "But these philosophers . . . have indeed performed miracles. . . . they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe."<sup>284</sup> When describing observations of experiments he performed on living animals so as to discern the precise moment of death, Harvey notes that blood continued to circulate for a time even after the death of the "heart." He writes:

Nay, has not the blood itself or spirit an obscure palpitation inherent in it, which it has even appeared to me to retain after death? and it seems very questionable whether or not we are to say that life begins with the palpitation or beating of the heart. The seminal fluid of all animals—the prolific spirit, as Aristotle observed, leaves their body with a bound and like a living thing; and nature in death, as Aristotle further remarks, retracing her steps, reverts to where she had set out, and returns at the end of her course to the goal whence she had started. As animal generation proceeds from that which is not animal, entity from nonentity, so, by a retrograde course, entity, by corruption, is resolved into nonentity; whence that in animals, which was last created, fails first; and that which was first, fails last.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Shelley, 29.

<sup>285</sup> William Harvey, *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals*. trans. Alex Bowie. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), 30-31.

Harvey muses here that a “prolific spirit” is the source of life and animation of the body, life which may exist before *and* after the first and final beats of the heart. This prolific spirit moves through the body via the blood and produces “entity from nonentity.” At death, this prolific spirit recedes from the body, retracing its original steps, until even the heart has stopped. Despite the apparent death of the heart, the blood itself still retains some movement, and in fact the heart can sometimes be resuscitated. For instance, Harvey writes of resuscitating a pigeon’s heart by applying pressure:

Experimenting with a pigeon upon one occasion, after the heart had wholly ceased to pulsate, and the auricles too had become motionless, I kept my finger wetted with saliva and warm for a short time upon the heart, and observed, that under the influence of this fomentation it recovered new strength and life, so that both ventricles and auricles pulsated, contracting and relaxing alternately, recalled as it were from death to life.<sup>286</sup>

When Harvey says, “has not the blood itself or spirit an obscure palpitation inherent in it, which it has even appeared to me to retain after death?” then, he means that if the sign of life is made visible by the motion of the heart, life should then die entirely with the death or cessation of movement of the heart. But in the case of the pigeon, he observes that it is possible to revive the pigeon’s heart even after it has ceased to beat; therefore, under Harvey’s framework, “life” is located not in the heart, but in the blood itself.

Harvey’s discovery of the circulation of the blood provided an understanding of blood that led to the blood transfusion experiments of the 1660s in England and France. Prior to Harvey, blood was understood as travelling a linear, one-way route through the body. However, proving that the blood circulates throughout the body allowed physicians to imagine the ways in which blood is in *communication* with and nourishes the body. Without this understanding of

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<sup>286</sup> Harvey, 29.

blood circulation, blood transfusion cannot happen, as it would not have made sense under a Galenic model. The necessity of understanding blood through a Harveyan model as the basis of blood transfusion experiments is evident in the differing attitudes toward blood transfusion between England and France. Whereas British physicians were eager to attempt blood transfusion experiments, with the exception of Jean Denis, the French were extremely reluctant because they did not adapt to the Harveyan model until much later than England.

In the 1660s, members of the Royal Society began conducting blood transfusion experiments and publishing their results in *Philosophical Transactions*. Scholarship has largely ignored seventeenth and eighteenth-century experiments and writings on blood transfusions, and by charting its history in this section, I hope to fill that gap. In "Tryals Proposed for the Improvement of Transfusing Blood of One Live Animal into Another," Robert Boyle defines a series of questions to define the experiments:

1. Whether by this way of transfusing blood, the disposition of individual animals of the same kind, may not be much altered? (As whether a fierce dog, by being often quite new stocked with the blood of a cowardly dog, may not become more tame, and vice versa?)
2. Whether immediately upon the unbinding of a dog, resplinisht with adventitious blood, he will know and fawn upon his master, and do the like customary things as before? And whether he will do such things better or worse at some time after the operation?
3. Whether those dogs, that have peculiarities, will have them either abolisht, or at least much impaired by transfusion of blood? (As whether the blood of a mastiff, being frequently transfused into a blood-hound, or a spaniel, will not prejudice them in point of scent?)
4. Whether acquired habits will be destroy'd or impair'd by this experiment? (As whether a dog, taught to fetch and carry, or to dive after ducks, will after frequent and full recruits of the blood of dogs unfit for those exercises, be as good as them, as before?)  
[.....]
8. Whether a dog, that is sick of some disease chiefly imputable to the mass of blood, may be cured by exchanging it for that of a sound dog? And whether a sound dog may receive such diseases from the blood of a sick one, as are not otherwise of an infectious nature?

9. What will be the operation of frequently stocking an old and feeble dog with the blood of young ones, as to liveliness, dulness, drowsiness, squeamishness, etc., and vice versa?
10. Whether a small young dog, by being often fresh stockt with the blood of a young dog of a larger kind, will grow bigger, than the ordinary size of his own kind?  
[.....]
13. Whether the operation may be successfully practis'd, in case the injected blood be that of an animal of another species, as of a calf into a dog, etc. and of a cold animal, as of a fish, or frog, or tortoise, into the vessels of a hot animal, and vice versa?
14. Whether the color of the hair or feathers of the recipient animal, by the frequent repeating of this operation, will be changed into that of the emittent?
15. Whether by frequently transfusing into the same dog, the blood of some animal of another species, something further, and more tending to some degrees of a change of species, may be effected, at least in animals of near kin?
16. Whether the transfusion may be practis'd upon pregnant bitches, at least certain times of their gravidation? And what effect will it have upon the whelps?<sup>287</sup>

These questions not only provide a framework for the perimeters of blood transfusion experiments, but also reveal some of Boyle's beliefs about blood. Many of these questions refer to the ability of blood to contain and transfer physical and behavioral characteristics from donor to recipient—both natural and acquired. Blood here is imagined as carrying a variety of physical characteristics (species, size, color of hair or feathers), but also habits, skills, dispositions, and temper, as well as health or disease. Evident throughout this framework of hypothesis is the belief that blood transfusion has the ability to *transform*: it is the *nature* of that transformation that these questions seek to answer. As writing on transfusions and transfusion experiments began to take place, blood-as-medicine came to signify youthfulness, liveliness, and health. One author, who describes methods for blood transfusions, writes: "The most probable use of this Experiment may be conjectured to be, that one Animal may live with the bloud of another; and

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<sup>287</sup> Robert Boyle, "Tryals Proposed for the Improvement of Transfusing Blood of One Live Animal into Another." *Philosophical Transactions* 1.22. (London: The Royal Society of London, 1666): 385-8.

consequently, that those animals, that want blood, or have corrupt blood, may be supplied from others with a sufficient quantity"<sup>288</sup>. For this author, not only is it possible for blood to be “corrupt,” but it is possible for *healthy* blood to *cure* corrupt blood.

Another author, who describes methods for blood transfusions, writes: "The most probable use of this Experiment may be conjectured to be, that one Animal may live with the blood of another; and consequently, that those animals, that want blood, or have corrupt blood, may be supplied from others with a sufficient quantity"<sup>289</sup>. For this author, not only is it possible for blood to be “corrupt,” but it is possible for *healthy* blood to *cure* corrupt blood. Richard Lower, in his *Treatise on the Heart*, elaborates “Every one . . . is not equally qualified to receive the blood of others, and no treatment is so useful that its rash and unsuitable administration does not easily bring it into disrepute,” and is not appropriate for “Patients, whose blood is definitely putrid and has been long corrupt, or is very deeply tainted by a poisonous ferment from without, those, too, whose viscera are polluted and spoilt, as sometimes happens in cases of scurvy, venereal disease, leprosy, poisoning, or long-continued illness, cannot hope for any benefit or help from transfusion.”<sup>290</sup> This is because “The impure blood, in its repeated passage through the viscera, imparts to them its defect and its pollutions, corrupts their ferments, and finally taints them with its own character and properties, so that fresh blood, substituted from without from however healthy an animal, by circulating constantly through the same organs, will pick up the disease and quickly degenerate into the same condition, just as wine soon picks up a smell and

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<sup>288</sup> “Considerations About this Kind of Experiments.” *Philosophical Transactions* 1.20. (London: The Royal Society, 1666), 358.

<sup>289</sup> “Considerations,” 358.

<sup>290</sup> Richard Lower, *A Treatise on the Heart*. (Birmingham, Alabama: The Classics of Medicine Library, 1989), 191.

defect from a mouldy vessel.”<sup>291</sup> Likewise, Harvey writes that “Whence it appears that the contagion impressed upon or deposited in a particular part, is by-and-by carried by the returning current of blood to the heart, and by that organ is sent to contaminate the whole body.”<sup>292</sup>

Because blood circulates throughout the body, through its “viscera,” Lower and Harvey theorize that blood becomes corrupt with contact with any other part of the body that is subject to “corruption” or illness.

Many of the essays on blood transfusion experiments on animals report that the recipient animal is revived by the transfusion. M. Denis writes that a weak dog, after "having been supplied the next morning with the blood of a calf, recover'd instantly his strength, and shew'd a surprizing vigor."<sup>293</sup> Another author writes, "I was present, when M. Gayant shew'd the transfusion of the bloud, putting that of a young dog into the veins of an old, who, two hours after, did leap and frisk; whereas he was almost blind with age, and could hardly stirr before."<sup>294</sup> Even more surprising is an account first published in the Italian journal *Giornale de Letterati*, which describes an experiment in which he transfuses the blood of a lamb into the veins of an old and deaf spaniel:

13 years old, who had been altogether deaf for above 3 years, so as what noise soever was made, he gave not any sign of hearing it. He walked very little, and was so feeble, that being unable to lift up his foot, all he did was to trail his body forward. . . . Two dayes after [the transfusion] he went abroad, and ran up and down the streets with other dogs, without trailing his feet, as he did before. . . . But that, which is more surprizing is, that from that time he gave signes, that he began to hear, returning sometimes at the voice of his masters. The 13th of June

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<sup>291</sup> Lower, 191-2.

<sup>292</sup> Harvey, 75.

<sup>293</sup> M. Denis, "An Extract of a Letter of M. Denis Prof. of Philosophy and Mathematicks to M. \*\*\* Touching the Transfusion of Blood, of April 2. 1667." *Philosophical Transactions* Vol. 2. (London: The Royal Society, 1666): 453.

<sup>294</sup> "Extract of a Letter, Written from Paris, Containing an Account of Some Effects of the Transfusion of Bloud; And of Two Monstrous Births, etc." *Philosophical Transactions* Vol. 2. (London: The Royal Society, 1666): 479-80.



he was almost quite cured of his deafness, and he appeared without comparison more jocund than he was before the operation. At length, the 20th of the same month he had wholly recovered his hearing.<sup>295</sup>

In each of these experiments, the animal is described as expressing renewed strength and vigor, as if the blood transfusion not only revived the recipient, but also seemed to transfuse the youth itself of the donor as the experimenters seem to conflate liveliness with youthfulness. Anita Guerrini suggests that “[i]n this age of therapeutic bloodletting the concept of injection led soon to the notion of renewing and invigorating old or diseased blood with an infusion of new, healthy blood.”<sup>296</sup> If relieving the body of contaminated or unhealthy blood could cure a patient, its corollary of *infusing* healthy blood could impart therapeutic benefits as well.

The experiments and writings around blood transfusion in England were mixed with a sense of jovial rivalry toward similar experiments going on in France. English and French scientists shared their experimental reports and tried to learn from each other, but also critiqued and argued over transfusion methods. One author describes Gaspar de Gurye de Montpoly’s theories of blood:

He supposes, that the blood of every animal is endowed with its peculiar temper, and contains in the aggregate of its parts, different natures, principles, figures, and event a different center. Whence he concludes, that two substances thus differing, and containing plenty of spirits, are not reducible to one and the same center, nor to one and the same body without fermentation; and that this operation may prove of danger to him, that shall have admitted into his veins a strange blood (wont to be free in its native vessels) without passing through those degrees, that must give it impressions suitable to the temper and functions of the vitals of the recipient.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> "Two Extracts out of the Italian Giornale de Letterati; The One, about Two Experiments of the Transfusion of Blood, Made in Italy, the Other, Concerning a Microscope of a New Fashion, Discovering Animals Lesser than Any Seen Hitherto." *Philosophical Transactions* Vol. 3. (London: The Royal Society, 1668): 840-42; 841.

<sup>296</sup> Anita Guerrini, "The Ethics of Animal Experimentation in Seventeenth-Century England." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50.3 (1989): 391-407; 403.

<sup>297</sup> "An Account of More Tryals of Transfusion, Accompanied with Some Considerations Thereon, Chiefly in Reference to its Circumspect Practice on Man; Together with a Farther

The author then uses this theory of blood to explain the failure of the French experiment involving several dogs in which one died:

Whence it seems evident to this writer, that the too large intromission of new blood was predominant over the native, and as 'twere, overwhelm'd it. Whence he again inculcates the dangerousness of infusing too much blood at once, in regard that such blood being now separated from the principle of life it had in the emittent, and as yet destitute of the stamp necessary to live the life of the recipient, it could not be moved and assimilated by the live blood, which remained in the recipient.<sup>298</sup>

He concludes then that large transfusions are dangerous, and that they should instead aim to give smaller transfusions more frequently to allow the transfused blood to assimilate to the native blood.

Several blood transfusion experiments were also performed on human subjects. In 1667, Jean Denis performed the first animal-to-human blood transfusion in Paris. As Guerrini explains, “Denis believed that animal blood would have superior therapeutic value to the blood of a healthy human. He believed that the temperate-living animals produced purer, more wholesome blood than humans; and by analogy with nutrition, animal blood would be more easily assimilated than human.”<sup>299</sup> More specifically, Denis believed that temperate climate *domestic* and *docile* animals had more wholesome blood than humans, and aimed to produce this docility in his human subjects—all of whom suffered some type of “madness.” Denis completed several animal-to-human blood transfusion experiments with apparent success until one of his patients died in January of 1668, leading France to impose a ban on blood transfusion experiments on humans.

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Vindication of this Invention from Usurpers." *Philosophical Transactions* Vol. 2. (London: The Royal Society, 1666): 517-525; 518.

<sup>298</sup> “More Tryals,” 520.

<sup>299</sup> Guerrini, “Ethics,” 403-4.

These early blood transfusion experiments are important because of their long-lived popularity, which is evident through the retelling and re-imagining of blood transfusion experiments throughout the eighteenth century. Thomas Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*, a Restoration comedy and scientific satire, first produced in 1676, includes a scene in which Sir Nicholas and Sir Formal describe a blood transfusion experiment that Sir Nicholas had once performed on a "mangy spaniel" and a "sound bull-dog":

Sir Formal: "Indeed that which enfus'd upon the operation was miraculous; for the mangy spaniel became sound, and the sound bull-dog, mangy.

Sir Nicholas: "Not only so, gentlemen, but the spaniel became a bull-dog, and the bull dog a spaniel.

Sir Formal: "Which considering the civil and ingenuous temper and education of the spaniel, with the rough and untaught savageness and ill-breeding of the bull-dog, may not be undeservedly challenge the name of a wonder."<sup>300</sup>

In Sir Nicholas's experiment, both dogs are emittent and recipient and receive the blood of the other. In this rendition, not only do the dogs take on the traits of the other, but seem to literally *become* the other, as "the spaniel became a bull-dog, and the bulldog a spaniel."

In "An Epistolary Poem to Richard Pockrich, Esp," written in 1743 but not published until 1769, Thomas Newburgh describes Pockrich's thoughts and observations on blood transfusions in a footnote to the poem (although there is no evidence that neither Newburgh nor Pockrich, an Irish musician, ever performed or witnessed any blood transfusion experiments):

Mr. Pockrich has often declared his Opinion that human Life may not only be prolonged, but perpetuated . . . Among other Experiments that have been try'd for this Purpose, he mentions the following: Take an inflex Tube in the Nature of a Scyphon, fix it at the extreme Ends in the Veins of two different Persons to be open'd to receive them, the one youthful, adult, and sanguine, the other aged, decrepid, and wither'd. . . . The redundant fermenting Blood of the one, will immediately flow like Wine decanted into the empty shrivell'd Veins of the other. The effects will be found no less uncommon than surprising. The wither'd Skin Braces, the Flesh plumps up and softens, the Eyes sparkle, the Visage blooms,

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<sup>300</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *The Virtuoso, A Comedy*. (London: Printed for Henry Herrington, 1691), 19-20.

and the Blood is invigorated with new Supplies and vital Warmth. When the Blood or Spirits begin to fail, or any Symptoms of Mortality do approach, the Experiment is only to be repeated, and so on, with equal success *ad infinitum*. 'Tis a common practice in Housewifery, to renew strong stale Beer for twenty, thirty, or any other Number of Years. Why not the Fluids of the human Body be renew'd in like Manner? 'Tis certain the Experiment has been try'd on other Animals with Success and if such creatures have happen'd afterwards to die, it has been wholly owing to the Neglect of the propos'd Discipline.<sup>301</sup>

Pockrich's ideas, summarized here by Newburgh, describe blood transfusion as providing the means to effectively live forever—to “prolong” and “perpetuate” life through transfusions any time the “Blood or Spirits begin to fail, or any Symptoms of Mortality” repeated “*ad infinitum*.” In addition to wanting to discover the principle of life, Shelley's Victor Frankenstein also imagines discovering a method to effectively cure humans of death and disease: “If I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!”<sup>302</sup> The inclusion of Pockrich's experimental “method” as well as the “observations” of the experiment function to add authenticity to this most likely entirely fictional account. Further, as John Fleetwood has noted, Pockrich went so far as to propose a Bill to Parliament “which would provide that a person could be legally declared dead when he reached 999 years, and that among others the local clergyman might claim the fees he would normally receive for the burial service.”<sup>303</sup> In Pockrich's imaginative vision of the future, then, a person would continue living beyond 999 years of age, but would no longer have any political rights it seems.

Thomas Pennant, writing in 1793, summarizes Edmund King's blood transfusion experiments with some of his own added thoughts:

The blood of a healthy young spaniel was conveyed into the veins of an old

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<sup>301</sup> Thomas Newburgh, “An Epistolary Poem to Richard Pockrich, Esp.” *Essays Poetical, Moral and Critical*. (Dublin: Printed by Alex M'Culloch, 1769), 234-5.

<sup>302</sup> Shelley, 23.

<sup>303</sup> John Fleetwood, “Early Work with Blood Transfusion.” *The British Medical Journal* 4.5582 (1967), 803-804.

mangy dog, who was perfectly cured, in less than a fortnight. The blood of a young dog was transfused into one almost blind with age, and which, before, could hardly move: the latter did in two hours leap and frisk, and yet the young dog, which received in return the blood of the old or distempered, felt no sort of injury. Would that the same experiment could be extended to the human species! And, should the change be effected on the mind as well as body, how unspeakable would be the benefit to the whole race! Not only every loathsome disorder would be done away, but every folly, meanness, and vice, changed to their opposite virtues, by a due transfusion of worthy plebeian blood.<sup>304</sup>

Pennant imagines blood not only capable of curing physical ailments and diseases, but indeed bestowing behavioral and moral virtues onto its recipients. Pennant's reporting, like those of many others, seem to conflate several different stories of blood transfusion into its narrative. For instance, *The Times* of London, in March of 1791, writes:

The following facts have been sent to us for publication:

The blood of a bull dog was transfused into the veins and arteries of a male lamb—the lamb in about two hours being in apparent good health was turned into a paddock where there were sheep, cows and bullocks. But instead of flocking with his own species, he flew at the nose of a bullock, and pinned him fairly to the ground.

The blood of a hawk, was transfused into the veins of a dove, and the dove immediately killed his mate, and picked her bones.<sup>305</sup>

Unlike the reports in the *Philosophical Transactions* that conduct experiments to transfuse the blood of the docile animal into that of the more agitated, the *Times* claims that the reverse is possible as well. The report moves between these slightly more plausible claims to more ridiculous and fantastical ones; for example: "The blood of a duck being transfused into the veins of the renowned Doctor Godbold—he waddled about the room crying out quac, quac, quac." Although these reports seem obviously false and fabricated, blood transfusion experiments were conceived of in precisely these terms: as transfusing not only blood but the physical and behavioral characteristics of the donor to the recipient. And in 1794, Erasmus Darwin proposed

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<sup>304</sup> Thomas Pennant, *Some Account of London*, 3rd Ed. (London, 1793), 374.

<sup>305</sup> *The Times*. Iss. 1948 (London, England: March 10, 1791), 2.

blood transfusions as a potential cure for nervous fevers in *Zoonomia*: "Might not the transfusion of blood, suppose of four ounces daily from a strong man, or other healthful animal, as a sheep or an ass, be used in the early state of nervous or putrid fevers with great prospect of success?"<sup>306</sup>

Although blood transfusion experiments were less frequent in the eighteenth-century, the idea that they could impart therapeutic benefits to recipients continued to circulate.

It was not until 1816 that John Leacock performed blood transfusion experiments and established the need for species compatibility. Two years later, in 1818, the year *Frankenstein* was first published, James Blundell would return to Leacock's work and re-introduce the practice of blood transfusions on humans<sup>307</sup>, advocating that "in . . . transfusion on the human body, the human blood alone should be employed."<sup>308</sup> Although Leacock never published his dissertation on blood transfusion, Blundell published a number of works on his research into blood transfusion as a treatment for uterine hemorrhage.<sup>309</sup> As Matthew Rowlinson notes, in Blundell's experiments, "a male donor, often the patient's husband, provides blood to replace that lost by a woman in childbirth."<sup>310</sup> And as Anne Marie Moulin has noted, because women's blood was

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<sup>306</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; or the Laws of Organic Life* Vol. 1 3rd Ed. (Boston: Thomas Andrews, 1809), 291.

<sup>307</sup> See P. J. Schmidt and A. G. Leacock, "Forgotten Transfusion History: John Leacock of Barbados." *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 325.7378 (2002): 1485-1487; and James Blundell, "Experiments on the Transfusion of Blood by the Syringe." *Medical Chirurgical Transactions* Vol. 9, (1818): 56-92; and James Blundell, "Some Remarks on the Operation of Transfusion." *Researches, Physiological and Pathological*. (London: E. Cox and Son, 1825): 63-146.

<sup>308</sup> James Blundell, *Researches Physiological and Pathological Instituted Principally with a View to the Improvement of Medical and Surgical Practice*. (London: E. Cox, 1825), 92.

<sup>309</sup> James Blundell, *Observations on some of the more Important Diseases of Women*. Ed. Thomas Castle. (London: Printed for E. Cox, St. Thomas's Street, Southwark, 1837).

<sup>310</sup> Matthew Rowlinson, "On the First Medical Blood Transfusion Between Human Subjects, 1818." *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*.

considered of a lesser quality and thought to be less plentiful, women were rarely donors in the early blood transfusion experiments of the nineteenth century.<sup>311312</sup> Rowlinson writes:

Human transfusion was thus from the beginning a medical technique that embodied gender hierarchy, not only because of the relations of donors and recipients of transfused blood, but also because the emergence of transfusion as a part of obstetrical practice corresponded historically with the rise of obstetrics itself as a medical specialization and the displacement of the midwife by the male professional as the normal attendant on childbirth in the middle and upper classes.<sup>313</sup>

The gendered vitalism of blood and the practices in which blood was transfused (obstetrics) both work to produce this hierarchy. It is perhaps worthy of note that it is only when the need for species compatibility is established that blood transfusion in obstetrics emerges, as well as the more codified version of the gendered hierarchy of blood's vitality.

Importantly, in early injections and transfusion experiments, scientists used quills, which were later replaced with a silver or gold tube, referred to as pipes.<sup>314</sup> These instruments insured that only a very small amount was ever injected into the recipient, which is undoubtedly why early blood transfusion patients were able to survive the experiments. It was not until 1901 that Karl Landsteiner discovered human blood types, allowing for safer blood transfusions. When a patient receives the wrong blood type, there are two bodily responses that may occur. The lesser and less fatal response is that the patient experiences fever, aches, chills, and a burning sensation at the injection site. The immune system will then break down the foreign red blood cells, and

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<sup>311</sup>“Le mari est généralement le donneur, les femmes sont rarement sollicitées, car leur sang est jugé moins abondant . . . et de moindre qualité” Anne Marie Moulin, *Le dernier langage de la médecine: Histoire de l'immunologie de Pasteur au Sida*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), 154.

<sup>312</sup> I have not found any evidence that women were blood donors prior to the nineteenth century.

<sup>313</sup> Rowlinson.

<sup>314</sup> See: G. A. Moge, “Centenary of Hypodermic Injection.” *The British Medical Journal* 2.4847 (1953): 1180-1185.

the liver and spleen will filter them out of the body. In the event of a fatal response to incompatible blood type transfusion, the following will happen:

The most severe reactions involve an intravascular hemolysis; the donor [red blood cells] are destroyed by the recipient's antibodies while they are still inside blood vessels. Such reactions involve antibodies that strongly activate complement, which in turn lyses the donor [red blood cells]. Hemoglobin is released into the plasma and excreted in urine (hemoglobinuria), turning the urine a dark brown color. Bilirubin, a metabolite of hemoglobin usually secreted into bile by the liver, instead accumulates in the blood causing jaundice. Massive activation of complement can cause shock, as can the large amounts of tissue factor released by [red blood cell] debris that triggers an uncontrollable clotting cascade (disseminated intravascular coagulation).<sup>315</sup>

Interestingly, jaundiced skin is, in fact, one of the characteristics of Frankenstein's creature: "His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of the muscles and arteries beneath."<sup>316</sup> In her article "*Frankenstein, Racial Science, and the Yellow Peril*," Anne K. Mellor argues the yellow skin, in addition to several other details, functions to racialize the creature. She writes, "A yellow-skin man crossing the steppes of Russia and Tartary, with long black hair and dun-colored eyes—most of Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century readers would immediately have recognized the Creature as a member of the Mongolian race, one of the five races of man first classified in 1795 by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach."<sup>317</sup> Mellor's argument is persuasive and it is not my goal here to indicate otherwise; however, I think it is possible that the creature's yellow skin has *two* functions: both to racialize, and to indicate his status as a blood transfusion recipient.

Because the creature's blood came from slaughterhouses, his blood undoubtedly came from several different animal donors—most likely cows and sheep. To prevent coagulation, the

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<sup>315</sup> Laura Dean, "Blood Groups and Red Cell Antigens." National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health. (Bethesda, MD, 2005): <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK2265/>

<sup>316</sup> Shelley, 35.

<sup>317</sup> Anne K. Mellor, "*Frankenstein, Racial Science, and the Yellow Peril*." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23.1 (2001): 1-28; 2-3.



blood would be need to be taken at the time of death—or at the moment of the animal’s slaughter, a moment of intense fear and anger. If we understand contemporary understandings of blood as capable of transfusing the physical, moral, and perhaps even emotional dispositions of the donor, the significance of the creature’s blood becomes more clear: the creature’s life is in many ways *defined by* fear and anger. This fear and anger, I argue, comes not only from the creature’s lived experiences with other humans, but from the blood derived from animals at the moment of their slaughter.

### **Blood in the Vitalism Debates**

In addition to being able to carry biological and acquired traits from one body to another, blood also played a role in the vitalism debates of the eighteenth-century and Romantic period. Vitalism debates revolved around the question of life—whether it is something that exists in matter itself, or something superadded to it. Vitalists attempted to understand what differentiated a dead body from a live one; how the body carried out unconscious automatic functions like the circulation of the blood and digestion; and how the body maintained its integrity against foreign substances—for instance, how the stomach differentiated between food and the body itself. Because vitalism and the life principle were often framed in terms of “animation,” the debate necessarily rested on a conflation between life, animation, soul, and the will, and it is not always possible to disambiguate them.

After Isaac Newton published his work on gravitational forces in *Principia Mathematica* (1687), physiologists were inspired to think about what unseen forces might also exist in the body. Physiologists were eager to explain bodily processes that had long eluded them—physical

processes that were carried out unmediated by the brain such as the circulation of the blood, respiration, physical reflexes, and digestion. If taxonomy had previously split the world into the animate and inanimate, vitalism debates considered what *gave* life to the animate: the physical organization of beings, unseen vital forces, a superadded quality, or something that living beings imbibed—like the air itself? If it were mere organization, what separated a dead body from a live one? If it were something that existed in the matter, where in the body was it located, and how did it bestow life? Many physiologists speculated that the life or vital principle is located in the air we breathe and transmitted through the body via the blood. Others like Herman Boerhaave, Albrecht von Haller, and Robert Whytt believed that the life principle exists within the nervous system; for Boerhaave and Haller via animal spirits that activated the muscles, whereas Whytt believed animation to be the result of an act of communication between the nervous system and the spinal cord.

In the Romantic period, the debate became focused on mechanism versus vitalism, although this distinction often did not exist in the early to mid eighteenth century.<sup>318</sup> The main actors of the vitalism debate of the Romantic period were John Abernethy and William Lawrence. Sharon Ruston summarizes their positions succinctly: “Abernethy believed that life did not depend on the organization of the body but existed as a material substance ‘superadded’ to the body. His opponent, Lawrence . . . perceived life as simply the working operation of all

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<sup>318</sup> For works that cover the vitalism debates more thoroughly, see: Marilyn Butler, “*Frankenstein and Radical Science.*” *Frankenstein*. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 404-415; Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Robert Mitchell, *Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Robert E. Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism: British Natural Philosophy in an Age of Reason*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970).

the body's functions, the sum of its parts."<sup>319</sup> Further, because Lawrence's materialist position was influenced by French materialists, Abernethy considered Lawrence's position to be dangerously politically radical and atheistic. In 1819, Lawrence published his most radical book, *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man*, which led to his suspension as surgeon from Bridewell and Bethlem hospitals, and Lawrence was forced to retract statements he made in the book and promised to "suppress and prevent" its circulation to be reinstated as a surgeon, and the book was withdrawn.<sup>320</sup> Ironically, because Lawrence had lost the copyrights to the book due to its "blasphemous, seditious and immoral" content, *Lectures* subsequently flourished in pirated editions.<sup>321</sup> Many scholars have covered the ways in which Shelley's *Frankenstein* was influenced and in conversation with the vitalism debates of Abernethy and Lawrence, giving context to the way in which "giving life" to the creature mirrored vitalistic theories.<sup>322</sup> Although the vitalist debate between Abernethy and Lawrence has provided an important context to understanding the construction of the creature's body and Victor's aggressive materialism in *Frankenstein*, I would like to focus on a slightly earlier vitalism debate between John Hunter and John Thelwall.

Hunter was a powerful influence for Abernethy and Lawrence, and both sought to better interpret his work to understand the "living principle" of the body through their own writings.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 10-11.

<sup>320</sup> Anon. *Monthly Magazine*, 53 (1822b), 524-44.

<sup>321</sup> Ruston, 20.

<sup>322</sup> In fact, William Lawrence was Percy Shelley's physician.

<sup>323</sup> For more on Abernethy, see: John Abernethy, *An Enquiry into the Probability and Rationality of Mr. Hunter's Theory of Life: being the subject of the first two anatomical lectures delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons, of London*. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1814); *Physiological Lectures, Exhibiting a General View of Mr. Hunter's Physiology, and of his researches in Comparative Anatomy, delivered before the Royal College of Surgeons, in the year 1817*. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1815); and *The Hunterian Oration for the Year 1819, delivered before the Royal College of Surgeons, in London* (London: Longman,

Both Hunter and Thelwall sought to understand how “life” exists in the body: Hunter considered the blood to be the “living principle,” whereas Thelwall reinterpreted life not as a noun, but as an action. The debate between Hunter and Thelwall also provides another path to understanding the role of blood in the scientific and cultural imagination in addition to those provided by writings on blood transfusion experiments—in transfusions, blood was imagined as vivifying and invigorating the recipient, whereas in the writings of Hunter and Thelwall, blood is imagined as the *living principle itself* for Hunter, and a communicative fluid which *produces* action and thus life in the body for Thelwall.

In the late eighteenth century, debates around vitalism polarized materialism and vitalism, at which point vitalism came to represent a conflation between “life” and “soul,” rather than animation. For instance, in his *A Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-shot Wounds* (1792), Hunter describes a vitalism *against* a materialist standpoint that would emphasize organization. He writes: “Without some such principle [as the living principle of the blood], all we have been examining is like dissecting a dead body without having any reference to the living, or even knowing it ever had been alive.”<sup>324</sup> At this point, materialism no longer signified life as an inherent property of matter, as it had earlier in the century, but rather an anatomical understanding of the body’s organization. As Hunter writes above, organization alone

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Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1819). For more on Lawrence, see: William Lawrence, *A Short System of Comparative Anatomy, translated from the German of J. F. Blumenbach; with numerous additional notes, and an introductory view of the classification of animals by the translator* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1807); *An Introduction to Comparative Anatomy and Physiology; being the Two Introductory Lectures, delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons, on the 21st and 25th of March, 1816* (London: J. Callow, 1816); and *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man, delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons* (London: J. Callow, 1819).

<sup>324</sup> John Hunter, *Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-Shot Wounds*. (London: Printed for Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, Paternoster-Row; and E. Cox and Son, St. Thomas's Street, Southwark, 1828), 96.

cannot account for life, because a dead body shares the same organization as a live one. Hunter writes: “But mere composition of matter does not give life; for the dead body has all the composition it ever had: life is a property we do not understand: we can only see the necessary leading steps towards it.”<sup>325</sup> Organization does not give life, then; life is a “property” of living bodies. Similarly in *Frankenstein*, Victor first produces an organized body before attempting to give it life; Victor recollects: “I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet” and later describes working toward “the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body.”<sup>326</sup> In both instances, the completeness of the body is implied by its readiness to receive life in its current “lifeless” or “inanimate” state.

If life *were* a property of mere organization, one might wonder at what point a body’s organization might be considered “complete” enough for life. Indeed, one might imagine the completeness as a normative body; however, many bodies live perfectly well without both legs or arms, or in the absence of certain organs. Hunter thus describes life not derived from organization, but organization as arising from life: “organization, and life, do not depend in the least on each other; that organization may arise out of living parts, and produce action, but that life can never rise out of, or depend on organization.”<sup>327</sup> It is life itself that *produces* the organization of bodies; it is *life* around which an organized body forms itself. Not only then does Victor endeavor to usurp the power of reproduction, but reverses the relationship between organization and life by *first* producing a body before then giving it life.

The principle of life that Hunter urges other physiologists and surgeons to examine is blood. Hunter writes “To conceive that blood is endowed with life, while circulating, is perhaps

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<sup>325</sup> Hunter, 115.

<sup>326</sup> Shelley, 35.

<sup>327</sup> Hunter, 98.

carrying the imagination as far as it well can go; but the difficulty arises merely from its being fluid, the mind not being accustomed to the idea of a living fluid.”<sup>328</sup> For Hunter, the fluidity and motion of the blood are of utmost importance, specifically because the blood *ceases* to circulate after death. Although blood “retains its fluid state while circulating, and even for a long time when at rest in the living vessels, and coagulates when the vessels or the body dies, it might naturally be supposed that it was the life of the body or vessels which kept it fluid,” Hunter stresses that blood sometimes coagulates in a *live* body as well: “there is, therefore, something more than the mere situation of the blood, surrounded with dead parts, that allows of coagulation; and that must be a something in the blood itself.”<sup>329</sup> In other words, Hunter takes the circulation of blood as the sign of life, and its globalized coagulation in the body as the sign of death. Further, he argues that it is the blood itself that has the power to maintain or cease fluidity, rather than the body acting on the blood: “for I have reason to believe, that blood has the power of action within itself, according to the stimulus of necessity; which necessity arises out of its situation.”<sup>330</sup> It is not the blood *responding* to the death of the body, but blood itself that has “the power of action”; the body responds to the blood.

The circulation of the blood is important to Hunter not only as the *sign* of life, but also because it *communicates* life to other parts of the body. He writes:

One of the great proofs that the blood possesses life, depends on the circumstances affecting its coagulation. While the blood is circulating, it is subject to certain laws to which it is not subject when not circulating. It has the power of preserving its fluidity, which was taken notice of when treating of its coagulation; or, in other words, the living principle in the body has the power of preserving it in this state. . . . If the blood had not the living principle, it would be, in respect of the body, as an extraneous substance. Blood is not only alive itself, but is the support of life in every part of the body; for mortification immediately

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<sup>328</sup> Hunter, 97.

<sup>329</sup> Hunter, 28-9.

<sup>330</sup> Hunter, 31.

follows, when the circulation is cut off from any part, which is no more than death taking place in the part, from the want of the successive changes of fresh blood. This shews, that no part of the body is to be considered as a complete living substance, producing and continuing mere life without the blood: so that blood makes one part of the compound; without which life would neither begin nor be continued.<sup>331</sup>

Blood is not “extraneous” to the body, but is the life of the body itself, and “preserves” the life of the body in its circulation. The visual and evidentiary proof that Hunter provides is the mortification of body parts when deprived of blood: no part of the body can survive without its support and “successive changes of fresh blood.” Hunter understands blood as not only embodying the “life principle,” but also as *communicating* the life principle throughout the body: “and not only is the blood alive in itself, but seems to carry life every where.”<sup>332</sup> Hunter’s thoughts on blood are not far removed from those who experimented on blood transfusion a century earlier; in both instances, blood is a communicative force that carries vitality, liveliness, or life itself. Hunter also believed that blood revealed aspects of a person’s character: “What are called different temperaments have their muscles redder, or paler; the darker the colour of the skin, hair, &c. of any one species, I believe the blood is in proportion redder.”<sup>333</sup> Not only does the blood contain information about temperament and physical appearance, but Hunter claims also that this information is reflected in the *shade* of its redness.

A year after Hunter’s publication of *A Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-shot Wounds*, John Thelwall published *An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality*, positioned largely as a response to Hunter’s *Treatise*, specifically his sections on blood. Thelwall’s central concern is to understand vitality as a way of discerning between life and death. He writes:

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<sup>331</sup> Hunter, 107-8.

<sup>332</sup> Hunter, 108-9.

<sup>333</sup> Hunter, 60.

Before we can possibly derive any sort of information from this antithesis, it is necessary that we should be instructed how life and death may be accurately discriminated; for how are we to make comparisons between objects which we are unable to separate from each other? But even this has never successfully been attempted; for though there are certain signs (as putrefaction, etc.) by which the death of the animal may be demonstrated; yet, as it is not even pretended that putrefaction is the act of *vital dissolution*,—or, in other words, that the body which is not putrid is necessarily alive—death must have taken place, independently of any such change; and we are, therefore, just as much in the dark as ever with respect to the ultimate test by which the *presence of life* may be ascertained.<sup>334</sup>

Whereas Hunter understood coagulation of the blood and mortification of the body as the visible sign of death, Thelwall points out that bodies may be dead without demonstrating mortification or putrefaction—death occurs before these processes take place. Thelwall also criticizes Hunter’s claim that the life principle exists in blood; he writes:

when the blood, or any very considerable portion of it, is drawn away, the vital functions of the animal will cease: but, unfortunately for this theory, these functions will also cease, without the proportion of this fluid being at all diminished: and as there are also several other parts entering in the composition of the animal, which, if subtracted, even in part, resign the body to inevitable destruction, we might as well say, that the stomach thereof, or the kidneys, or the liver thereof, is the life thereof, as that the blood is to be so considered.<sup>335</sup>

Thelwall reveals Hunter’s conflation of *correlation* with *causation*, but also importantly diminishes the central importance of blood to the body but remarking on other organs necessary to sustain life. Thelwall here moves away from the common vitalist maneuver that attempts to isolate a “vital principle” or “life principle” to a discrete location in the body, and suggests that rather than understand life or vitality as a property, it might be better understood as an *action*. He writes:

Life, then, in the animal, we will say, is that state of action, by which the functions, or any of the functions of the animal, are carried on. . . . I proceed,

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<sup>334</sup> John Thelwall, *An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality*. (London: Printed by T. Rickaby, 1793), 6-7.

<sup>335</sup> Thelwall, 15.



therefore, to add, that, previous to the existence of life, the body must have attained a specific organization; and that Life, or, in other terms, the Vital Action, is induced by the application of proper stimuli: thus, then, life in the animal is that state of action (induced by specific stimuli upon matter specifically organized), by which the animal functions, or any of them, are carried on.<sup>336</sup>

Unlike Hunter who understood organization as arriving from life, Thelwall argues that there is a “union” between Vital Action and “Specific Organization.” Thelwall here is not positing the existence of an organized body *before* life; rather, his formulation of vitality as an action, rather than a property, requires the presence of *simultaneous* organization/body and life. In other words, life, as a vital action, cannot *act* without an organized body with which to express its action: they are co-dependent.

Importantly, although Thelwall did not believe blood to have a vital “property,” he did agree with Hunter that blood communicated to the rest of the body. Thelwall writes that blood is the “medium, by which alone the stimuli necessary for the production and sustainment of Life can be absorbed and properly diffused through the organized frame.”<sup>337</sup> As Robert Mitchell explains, “For Thelwall, blood functioned as a communication medium, in the sense that it transported and diffused stimuli throughout the body—yet *what* it communicated was precisely the stimuli of life itself.”<sup>338</sup> This stimuli is what is necessary to *produce* Vital Action in other parts of the body. Thelwall writes:

I consider the Blood, independent of its nutritive power, as the specific medium by which the stimuli must be conveyed to the different parts of the organized frame, so as to produce the Vital Action. This Blood, then, in its passage through the Lungs, collects a something, which generates a specific heat . . . which it diffuses through the whole vascular system, and then (exhausted of its vivifying

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<sup>336</sup> Thelwall, 38.

<sup>337</sup> Thelwall, 21.

<sup>338</sup> Robert Mitchell, *Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 150.

power) returns again to the lungs, to exhale whatever noxious particles it may have collected, and to inhale a fresh portion of the same vivifying principle.<sup>339</sup>

Thelwall suspects this “fresh portion of the same vivifying principle” might be electrical fluid extracted from the air, but importantly, the role of both blood and air is here reduced to its *communicative* ability to *produce* action, known as Vital Action, in a way that mobilizes the entire body.

By considering the writings on blood transfusion experiments and the role of blood in the vitalism debates in relation to each other, it's possible to see the matrix of meaning surrounding blood in both these contexts as both separate but converging. In addition to containing information about an individual's disposition, acquired habits, temper, and virtues, in the writings on blood transfusion experiments, transfused blood is repeatedly described as conferring liveliness, health, youth, and vigor to the recipient. In the vitalism debate between Hunter and Thelwall, a similar matrix is produced: blood's liveliness and vigor is purified as blood becomes the “living principle” itself for Hunter, whereas Thelwall understands it as the communicative fluid through which life is circulated throughout the body and produced through action.

## **Harvey and Shelley**

William Harvey's *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals* enjoyed a rich publication history after its initial debut. In the seventeenth century alone, it was published under various editions at least fifteen times, including two English translations, and an additional four

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<sup>339</sup> Thelwall, 39.

editions in the eighteenth century, including another English translation.<sup>340</sup> This publication history suggests that his work was well known beyond scientific circles, and that his popularity endured well into the nineteenth century. In 1784, William Hunter published *Two Introductory Lectures*, which covered the history of knowledge of the circulatory system, beginning with Plato, that covered Harvey's work, as well as work published after him. In 1792, John Hunter, William's younger and more famous brother, published *Treatise on the Blood, Inflammation, and Gun-Shot Wounds*, which provided an updated account of the circulatory system. William Lawrence, who was friends with the Shelleys, published *An Introduction to Comparative Anatomy and Physiology* in 1816, which also covered the circulatory system and referred to both John and William Hunter's texts. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley notes how philosophers "have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe," which reveals that she had some awareness of scientific discoveries and conversations around the blood and its circulation.<sup>341</sup> Additionally, Shelley was most certainly aware and fluent in the vitalism debates, which used much of the same language and imagery of blood as invigorating, life-giving, virtuous, and "alive."

## **Frankenstein**

In this chapter, I have highlighted a neglected area of *Frankenstein*: the inclusion of slaughterhouses in the list of places in which Victor collects materials for the creature's body. To

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<sup>340</sup> See: Geoffrey Keynes, *A Bibliography of the Writings of Dr. William Harvey, 1578-1657*. 3rd Edition. (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1989). This count does not include editions in languages other than Latin or English, or the publications of the collected works of Harvey in *Opera Omnia*.

<sup>341</sup> Shelley, 29.

think about how slaughterhouses contribute to the creature's body and create meaning, I have provided a history of early blood transfusion experiments and examined the role of blood in the vitalism debates of the eighteenth century. In doing so, I've attempted to cover the matrix of ways blood functioned in the social and scientific imagination, and specifically to highlight the ways in which blood is associated with both life, as in the transfusion experiments and vitalism debates, as well as decay, filth, and disease, as it is in descriptions of slaughterhouse waste.

The word "blood" is used frequently throughout the novel—twenty times to be exact, and an additional four references to the "pulse"—to refer to actual blood in the veins, to violence and bloodshed, to its status as an object of inquiry in science, to signify life and death, to signify lineage, and to express emotionality. It occurs most frequently in the context of violence, life and death, and emotion, but many of these categories overlap. For instance, when Walton is remarking upon the weather in Russia to his sister Margaret, he writes, "for there is a great difference between walking the deck and remaining seated motionless for hours, when no exercise prevents the blood from actually freezing in your veins."<sup>342</sup> Or slightly later, when describing the character of the master of the ship: "he will not hunt (a favorite, and almost the only amusement here), because he cannot endure to spill blood."<sup>343</sup> In this instance, blood functions to signify both violence *and* the death it produces. Similarly, when the creature asks Victor for a female creature, he threatens: "If you comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends."<sup>344</sup> Here, blood is figured as that which death consumes through violence, which is echoed again later in the novel when Victor notes: "as if to shew me that he

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<sup>342</sup> Shelley, 9.

<sup>343</sup> Shelley, 11.

<sup>344</sup> Shelley, 68.

was not yet satiated with blood, he had murdered Clerval immediately after the enunciation of his threats."<sup>345</sup> The creature is certainly out for blood, but he is out for more specifically for *Victor's* blood: his family. The creature only murders those who make up Victor's inner circle—family that is literally connected by blood— and Clerval, whom Victor claims as *part* of his “domestic circle.”<sup>346</sup> For the creature, blood as violence is nuanced: it is both the blood that is shed through murder, but also the blood that bonds family, Victor's family, together.

Blood is also used in ways that express emotionality as a bodily experience. When the creature is speaking, he invokes blood to express emotions anger, hurt, and vexation. After the debacle at the De Lacy house, the creature notes that “the fever of my blood did not allow me to be visited by peaceful dreams.”<sup>347</sup> Later, the creature confesses to Walton: “I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on. Even now my blood boils at the recollection of this injustice.”<sup>348</sup> However, when Victor and Walton are speaking, they invoke blood to describe intense fear. When Victor hears Elizabeth scream when the creature attacks and then kills her, he says: “As I heard it, the whole truth rushed into my mind, my arms dropped, the motion of every muscle and fibre was suspended; I could feel the blood trickling in my veins, and tingling in the extremities of my limbs.”<sup>349</sup> Victor's description of fear and despair at instantly understanding that Elizabeth has been killed is telling: blood and the animation of the body are intimately linked. The blood reduces to a “trickle” as his body freezes into a kind of suspended animation—his “every muscle and fibre was suspended” even while the blood still produces a “tingle” in his limbs. Although Victor's blood is still “vital” and

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<sup>345</sup> Shelley, 136.

<sup>346</sup> Shelley, 21.

<sup>347</sup> Shelley, 96.

<sup>348</sup> Shelley, 160.

<sup>349</sup> Shelley, 140.

“alive,” it has temporarily ceased to produce animation. In a letter to Margaret, Walton expresses a similar emotionality of blood: “You have read this strange and terrific story, Margaret; and do you not feel your blood congealed with horror, like that which even now curdles mine?”<sup>350</sup> In this instance, the horror “congeals” and “curdles” his blood—that is, the blood coagulates, it transforms from a fluid liquid to a non-moving solid. For both Victor and Walton, the creature produces an emotion that mirrors the horror of his own body: whereas the creature’s blood was reanimated by Victor from non-moving to moving, the blood of Victor and Walton change from moving to non-moving.

Thinking of Victor Frankenstein’s creature’s blood in terms of its source (slaughterhouses) and its potentially vitalist role in producing life and animation in the body allows us to consider new ways in which its monstrosity is constructed. The creature’s *vital source* of life is, in fact, waste produced by slaughterhouses, waste described as “putrescence and disease,” “filth,” “garbage,” as a threat to both public health and civility. Although blood transfusion experiments were thought of as having the ability to invigorate the recipient with liveliness, health, and even-temperedness, the creature experiences quite the opposite: his body invokes death, disease, and fear. Indeed, Victor himself continues to refer to the creature as a “demoniacal corpse” even after he has given him life.<sup>351</sup> Despite the creature’s human appearance, his “yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath”—and presumably also scarcely covered the blood pumping *through* those arteries and muscles<sup>352</sup>; the creature’s animality, his animal blood, is visible even from beneath the masquerade of human skin and features. Victor reflects his disgust at the creature:

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<sup>350</sup> Shelley, 151.

<sup>351</sup> Shelley, 36.

<sup>352</sup> Shelley, 35.

Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.<sup>353</sup>

Again comparing the creature to a corpse, or here, a “mummy,” Victor notes that the true terror of the creature’s ugliness was only made apparent once his body was finished and received animation— “but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion.” If we consider the role of blood in the vitalism debates—for Hunter as the vital principle itself, for Thelwall as that which *produces* Vital action in the body—then it is specifically the animation of the *blood*, and thus the creature’s animality, that turns Victor’s stomach. In fact, immediately after the above quoted passage, Victor reflects: “I passed the night wretchedly. Sometimes my pulse beat so quickly and hardly, that I felt the palpitation of every artery.”<sup>354</sup> The thought of the creature’s beating heart circulating animal blood causes Victor to become aware of his *own* heart and pulse.

Victor is quite clear that he does not consider the creature human, but the creature’s non-human status seems to derive from more than the fact of its animal blood. When Victor visits the spot where William was killed, Victor sees the creature:

A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon to whom I had given life. . . . Nothing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child. *He* was the murderer!<sup>355</sup>

What Victor notes in this scene is the creature’s “gigantic stature” and his “deformity,” which are “more hideous than belongs to humanity.” “Gigantic stature,” is itself, of course, a type of

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<sup>353</sup> Shelley, 36.

<sup>354</sup> Shelley, 36.

<sup>355</sup> Shelley, 50.

deformity. Victor has already established several times that he finds the creature ugly, but what draws his attention here is his *form*— “nothing in human shape.” It is the creature’s non-normative body, here constructed as deformed in its gigantism, that excludes him from human status. At the same time of this exclusion, however, Victor hails him as a political subject—the creature did not simply “kill” William, he “*murdered*” him. Victor concludes his thoughts on the creature’s guilt, his non-human status is again invoked: “Justine, and indeed every human being, was guiltless of this murder.”<sup>356</sup> The ambiguity of the creature’s nature is made clear here: although he is excluded from natural-historical taxonomical human-status, he is reclaimed as a subject of human politics and laws.

The creature in fact straddles several ambiguities: alive and dead, human and animal, citizen and stateless—and it is precisely these ambiguities that mark the creature as abject. As Julia Kristeva notes in her work on abjection, “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”<sup>357</sup> In particular, the abject is that which does not respect borders between life and death and human and animal. As Sophie Gee has written, abject matter is “marked by indistinctness between life and death or proliferation and rot” and that the “confusion, or conflation, of life and death is the very confusion of which the abject consists.”<sup>358</sup> Further, she notes: “Objects of moral disgust have ‘excessive vitality or vitality whose unfurling is misplaced’; they arouse the feeling of ‘life in the

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<sup>356</sup> Shelley, 53.

<sup>357</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>358</sup> Sophie Gee, *Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination*. (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2010), 8; 11.



wrong place.”<sup>359</sup> The creature, as a reanimated composition of of dead human and animal bodies, exemplifies “life in the wrong place.” Dead human and animal bodies become abject in the form of the creature because they are prevented from persisting and putrefying *as* waste; by imbuing them with life, Victor creates *animated* waste. Kristeva further states that the “abject confronts us . . . with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal.”<sup>360</sup>

Similarly, Martha Nussbaum has written on the way that specifically *animal* waste and proximity to animality and mortality defines the abject, noting that “In all societies . . . disgust expresses a refusal to ingest and thus be contaminated by a potent reminder of one's own mortality and animality.”<sup>361</sup> The abject in fact expresses a nexus of ambiguities between life and death, human and animal that the creature embodies. The creature is not only “contaminated” by mortality and animality, but he is also *constituted* of it.

That the creature’s blood is *animal* blood is important, then, because it destabilizes order: vitality (alive or dead) and taxonomic (animal or human). To create a human out of animal material— specifically livestock and food waste, puts even the food chain in question. How do we understand a creature as human that may also be composed of the food we eat, part cow, part sheep? The question is not entirely academic; indeed scientists are currently exploring ways to transplant pig hearts to human patients<sup>362</sup>. In this chapter, I have referred to the creature as a blood transfusion recipient; but he is, of course, much more than that. His entire body is the product of organ, bone, tissue, and blood transplants; he is, more than anything else, a collection

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<sup>359</sup> Gee, 8.

<sup>360</sup> Kristeva, 12.

<sup>361</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “‘Secret Sewers of Vice’: Disgust, Bodies, and the Law” in *The Passions of Law*. Ed. Susan Bandes. (New York: NYU Press, 2001): 19-62; 25.

<sup>362</sup> See “Why Pig Organs Could Be the Future of Transplants.” *Time*. February 26, 2018. <http://time.com/5159889/why-pig-organs-could-be-the-future-of-transplants/>

of transplants— but lacking an original, underlying body onto which they are grafted, this assemblage becomes monstrous. He is, in this way, adrift: a confusion of parts. If we understand his blood as an agent which puts the body in communication with itself, as some eighteenth-century and Romantic vitalists did, how can the creature’s blood, itself cacophonous, communicate with the confusion of his body? What common language could such a body come to speak? For Shelley, that language is one of pain, isolation, and rejection. The creature’s relationship with Victor mirrors the language of his own body in this way: a body at odds with itself, fragmented and isolated in its individual grafted pieces.

By mapping out how discourses of transfusion and vitalism contributed to early nineteenth-century bio-cultural meanings of blood, I offer new interpretative methods for thinking about *Frankenstein*. Although Victor may seem like a megalomaniac in his pursuit to create a “new species,” his disease to “Banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!” comes from a history of thinking of blood in precisely these terms: as vivifying and life-giving.<sup>363</sup> Blood transfusion was imagined as having the power to “renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.”<sup>364</sup> Indeed, Victor describes the process of creation as “*infusing* life into an inanimate body”<sup>365</sup> (emphasis added). When Victor assures us that he is not “recording the vision of a madman,” it is in large part because Shelley draws from a scientific tradition of imagining both blood and life as functioning in precisely the terms that Victor describes.

In this chapter, I have provided a history of slaughterhouses to demonstrate how closely they were associated with death, disease, and especially blood due to poor waste management

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<sup>363</sup> Shelley, 23.

<sup>364</sup> Shelley, 33.

<sup>365</sup> Shelley, 35.

systems before the introduction of public abattoirs in the nineteenth century. With no running water or drainage in place, blood from slaughterhouses simply ran through the streets. I have contextualized slaughterhouses in order to argue that their inclusion in the list of locations Victor visits to collect materials for the creature's body is specifically for blood. Additionally, I have provided a history of blood transfusion experiments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a way of exploring the different forms of signification of blood. This chapter thus bookends the historical time frame of my dissertation as a whole—the early modern period, the eighteenth century, and the Romantic period—and underlines the importance of taking a long view of history to produce and examine these contexts.

These histories produce a matrix of meaning: in the context of the slaughterhouses, blood signifies death, disease, filth, and immorality; in the context of blood transfusion experiments, blood signifies life, invigoration, health, and virtue. Both contexts are integral to understanding *Frankenstein*: Victor's initial motivation to construct a human is to discover a means of "banish[ing] disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!"<sup>366</sup>; in other words, he begins the experiment with the context of blood transfusion experiments, in which infusing a constructed body with blood will render it alive, invigorated, healthy, and virtuous. However, because the *source* of the blood is the slaughterhouse, the transfused blood is tainted with the death and immorality of the slaughterhouse, which is then carried with the creature into life. The creature thus rests on two planes of ambiguity: human and animal, dead and alive.

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<sup>366</sup> Shelley, 23.

## Chapter 5 : Coda

In Chapter 3, I discussed how oral language ability was used as a defining feature of the human. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers were invested in human taxonomy, often around the basis of spoken language ability as a sign of human reason. Philosophers further distinguished between the mechanical or functional *ability* to speak— which we share with other animals such as parrots— and spontaneous and creative language that only humans have. The idea that reason could be mimicked by false mechanical performances, as seen in parrots, was also used in pro-slavery texts to *deny* the language ability, eloquence, and human reasoning. I examined the reception of Francis Williams’ poetry as an example of when this criteria of the human is revealed as a ruse: although Williams’ performed “creative and spontaneous language” in his Latin poetry, white writers dismissed his eloquence as mere “parroting.” Thomas Herbert further links African language with animality explicitly in *Some Years Travels Into Divers Parts of Asia and Afrique*, where he writes that “their language is apishly sounded (with whom tis thought they mixe unnaturally).” A century later, early anglo black narratives (whether written by the authors themselves or dictated) were accompanied by prefatory notes in which a white editor vouched for the legitimacy of the work; only a white authority could be thought of as conferring truth-status to narratives. Language ability is deployed as an achievement of human status, requiring the policing and authorization of white writers and editors.

Rather than functioning as the form of human criteria that it is rhetorically positioned as, discourses around language ability are a red-herring that defer the problem of racism. In the texts

that I examine in this dissertation, neither language ability nor eloquence improves the material status of its speakers and signers. Both *Frankenstein* and *The Tempest* depict or re-tell a pedagogical practice of language lessons, through which the character is meant to “improve” in a way that is morally affected. Whereas the creature takes it upon himself to learn language with the hope that it will make him more palatable to humans, for Caliban the lessons are delivered by his enslavers. Although both characters master eloquence, the achievement does not improve their lives; they are regarded not as humans, but as speaking monsters.

In *Frankenstein*, the creature is deeply eager to learn language and demonstrates significant self-discipline. But it is also through language that he learns that he is an outcast to humans. When the creature first takes residence next to the De Lacey cottage, he is still quite “young” -- he has not yet existed very long. Observing the family through a crack in the wood, he notes:

I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it.<sup>367</sup>

The creature notices that words have the ability to *affect* and *change* the recipient— they produce tangible effects of pleasure or pain. This is important to the creature, because he desperately seeks to change the way people react to him. The creature’s perception of and desire for language specifically as a “god-like language” reveals the similarities he shares with Victor: the desire for control. Whereas Victor desires control over life and death, the creature desires control over the way in which he is perceived. In fact, the creature hopes that, through the power of

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<sup>367</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 77.

language, he will be able to win the love of the De Lacey family. The creature explains: “although I eagerly longed to discover myself to the cottagers, I ought not to make the attempt until I had first become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure.”<sup>368</sup> For the creature, language initially holds the promise of admission to human status: “I imagined they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanor and conciliating words, I should first win their favour, and afterwards their love.”<sup>369</sup>

It is with Safie’s arrival that language finally becomes accessible to the creature as he listens to her language lessons. As though embedded into the language itself, the creature learns of human society: “While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood” as well as “all the various relationships which bind one human being to another in mutual bonds.”<sup>370</sup> Upon learning of the way in which rank, descent, and noble blood structure human relations, the creature inevitably learns what he lacks: a family. Language, he realizes, is tied to human love and kinship. It is only later when he discovers Victor’s notes in his jacket pocket that he begins to understand his “accursed origin.”<sup>371</sup> Despite learning that his own creator had rejected him in horror, the creature maintains his belief that his mastery of language will enable the De Lacey family to perceive him as human and deserving of love. The creature first presents himself to the elder De Lacey father, believing that the father’s blindness will allow him to better accept the creature. And indeed—the father does accept him; he responds: “I am blind, and cannot judge

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<sup>368</sup> Shelley, 78.

<sup>369</sup> Shelley, 79.

<sup>370</sup> Shelley, 83, 84.

<sup>371</sup> Shelley, 91.

your countenance, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere. I am poor, and an exile; but it will afford me true pleasure to be in any way serviceable to a human creature.”<sup>372</sup> Believing he is speaking to a fellow human, the De Lacey father accepts and extends compassion to the creature, desiring to help him. The spell of human acceptance is broken once Felix returns, sees the creature, and attacks him.

Like the creature, Caliban has also mastered language. Although most of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is written in verse, Caliban’s ability to speak in verse is notable because it is a form *only* reserved for characters with high social status in Shakespeare’s works. When Stephano and Trinculo fear the sounds of the island, Caliban finds their beauty:

Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises,  
Sounds, and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.  
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,  
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,  
The clouds methought would open and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me, that, when I waked,  
I cried to dream again.<sup>373</sup>

These lines are some of the most beautiful lines in the entirety of *The Tempest*. We also know that Caliban has useful knowledge sets, even before he had ever encountered Prospero and Miranda. When describing his initial relationship with Prospero, Caliban says, “And then I loved thee / And showed thee all the qualities o’ th’ isle, / The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile.”<sup>374</sup> It seems clear that without knowledge of fresh water and fertile soil, Prospero

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<sup>372</sup> Shelley, 94.

<sup>373</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), III.ii.133-141.

<sup>374</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.336-338.

would not have survived on the island; Caliban's knowledge is in fact vital. Caliban's knowledge and eloquence seem connected to his relationship with the island.

Prospero and Miranda, however, claim full responsibility for Caliban's language abilities.

Miranda claims:

I pitied thee,  
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour  
One thing or other. When thou didst not (savage)  
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like  
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes  
With words that made them known.<sup>375</sup>

Although Miranda claims that Caliban did not speak before her arrival with Prospero to the island, this seems unlikely. Given the timeline that Prospero presents, Caliban would have spent several years on the island with his mother before Prospero arrived—time in which he would have most certainly picked up language from her. Caliban knows, for instance, that his mother worshipped Setebos as well as at least some basic information about the deity.<sup>376</sup> But we also know that even if Caliban did *not* have language, he clearly could communicate his *meaning*—Prospero would not have survived long without the information Caliban gave him about the island's fresh water and fertile soil. In other words, it seems clear that Caliban *did* “know [his] own meaning.” Instead, it was Prospero and Miranda who did not know his meaning, and attributed this language difference to “gabbling” nonsense.

Trinculo's reference to Caliban as “puppy-headed” further reinforces this flattening of language difference. Of the puppy-headed cynocephali, Edward Tyson writes that “they understand what is said to them, tho' they cannot speak themselves. But by their Barking, and their Hands and Fingers, they signifie their Minds, as Deaf and Dumb Men do.”<sup>377</sup> The tendency

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<sup>375</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.352-357.

<sup>376</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.372-373.

<sup>377</sup> Tyson, 41.



of colonists to privilege some languages and cultures while devaluing others is palpable here, as the cynocephali “speak no language” but “understand one another.” Because their language is figured as “barking,” it is devalued as being a non-language altogether, despite the fact that it allows them to communicate with each other. Finally, the non-status of their language is reiterated (“they cannot speak for themselves”) before it is undetermined (“But by their Barking, and their Hands and Fingers, they signifie their Minds”) before they are likened to people with disabilities (“as Deaf and Dumb Men do”). Tyson’s comments on the speaking abilities of the pygmies and other “ancient” creatures are revealing in the way that they position the human. Tyson writes: “I do not find therefore any good Authority . . . that the Pygmies ever used a Language or Speech, any more than other Brutes of the same Species do among themselves . . . Had the Pygmies ever spoke any Language intelligible by Mankind, this might have furnished our Historians with notable Subjects for their Novels.”<sup>378</sup> Language is only recognizable as language that is “intelligible by mankind”; human status is therefore always already assumed by intelligible speakers, rendering all languages that are unintelligible to English and European audiences as non-human and non-language.

Caliban, like the cynocephali, is “puppy” or dog-headed, and although he is not described as barking or making signs with his hands and fingers, his language is similarly de-valued by Miranda. Caliban’s language is described here as “gabble like / A thing most brutish,” and Miranda assumes that he doesn’t know his “own meaning.” Because she is incapable of recognizing his language, she assumes he has none, and teaches him her own. As Stephen Greenblatt has pointed out, linguistic colonization is an integral part of conquest. In the Americas, linguistic colonization was aided by the ideology that Native Americans lacked both

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<sup>378</sup> Tyson, 12-13.

culture and language: “This illusion that the inhabitants of the New World are essentially without a culture [and language] of their own is both early and remarkably persistent, even in the face of overwhelming contradictory evidence.”<sup>379</sup>

Miranda attributes her perception that Caliban cannot be morally improved by her lessons to his “vile race.” She claims that he is an “Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take, Being capable of all ill.”<sup>380</sup> When Miranda’s pedagogy fails to “print” onto Caliban’s character, he receives the imprints of “pinches” instead: Prospero threatens: “I’ll rake thee with old cramps, / Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar, / That beasts shall tremble at thy din” and that he will leave Caliban “pinched / as thick as honeycomb.”<sup>381</sup> In other words, the failure of Caliban’s education results not simply in a lack of improvement, but in corporal punishment designed to enslave and force him to comply with Prospero’s demands. The education that was meant to improve Caliban’s propriety and morals only succeeds in equipping him with the tools to rebel against them: “You taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!”<sup>382</sup> Caliban’s foul speech is one proof that he has not achieved the “improvement” Miranda hoped for him. Importantly, Prospero’s speech and manner, although sometimes foul, are never used as proof of *his* need for improvement. As Miranda explains to Ferdinand, “My father’s of a better nature, sir, / Than he appears by speech.”<sup>383</sup> Although both Caliban and Prospero are in similar positions insofar as they have both been usurped of a title and power, and although both are clearly capable of both

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<sup>379</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17.

<sup>380</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.350-352.

<sup>381</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.368-370; 328.

<sup>382</sup> *Tempest*, I.ii.363-365.

<sup>383</sup> *Tempest*, II.i.494-495.

eloquent and foul speech, it is only Prospero whose “better nature” is taken for granted. Caliban’s language ability and eloquence fails to grant him human status. For Caliban, sharing a language with Prospero and Miranda only seems to assist in his enslavement, as Prospero delivers orders to him, and he curses them for teaching it to him. As Ian Smith writes, “Caliban knows that in reality he had little ‘profit on’t’ (1.2.365) and that language training was designed to indoctrinate and inculcate as well as provide a ready medium for the issuing of orders concerning the various domestic duties that as a slave laborer he must carry out on pain of torture.”<sup>384</sup> For Caliban, language is disciplinary rather than liberatory.

For both Caliban and the creature, language is presented as a medium through which they can self-improve and achieve human status. As I argued in Chapter 3, however, language ability and eloquence as gateways to human status are a ruse: those who have been exempted from human status remain outcasts despite their eloquence. Neither the creature nor Caliban seem to experience any material benefits to learning language or achieving eloquence. Peter Brooks refers to the predicament that *Frankenstein*’s creature finds himself in as “the opposition of sight and language, of the hideous body and the persuasive tongue”<sup>385</sup>-- although it could just as easily be applied to Caliban. Brooks notes that the creature is the most eloquent character in the novel: “This hideous and deformed creature, far from expressing himself in grunts and gestures, speaks and reasons with the highest elegance, logic, and persuasiveness. As a verbal creature, he is the very opposite of the monstrous: he is a sympathetic and persuasive participant in Western culture.”<sup>386</sup> Brooks’s analysis, perhaps unintentionally, devalues those who do not communicate

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<sup>384</sup> Ian Smith, “Where We Were Capital, or Lessons in Language: Finding Caliban’s Roots.” *Shakespeare Studies* 28 (2000): 252-256; 253.

<sup>385</sup> Peter Brooks, “What Is a Monster? (According to *Frankenstein*)” in *Frankenstein*, ed. J. Paul Hunter. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012): 368-390; 371.

<sup>386</sup> Brooks, 371.

through oral language but through “grunts and gestures.” Brooks reinforces the failed promise of *Frankenstein*: that one who has been outcast from humanity due to the stigmatization of their deformity may *overcome* and persuade others to accept them through eloquence. This failure is the result of a logic that assumes deformity must be “overcome” at all— the failure is attributed to the creature, rather than the world around him. In effect, this opposition implies that the creature is responsible for his own dehumanization and *inability* to overcome visual prejudice. Both the creature and Caliban were always already excluded from human status as deviant bodies.

Narratives of “overcoming disability” are common in stories told and written by non-disabled people. As Simi Linton writes, the phrase implies that “the person has risen above society’s expectation for someone with those characteristics. Because it is physically impossible to *overcome* a disability, it seems that what is *overcome* is the social stigma of having a disability.”<sup>387</sup> To accept this notion that one may “overcome” a disability is to “accept the implication that the group is inferior and that the individual is unlike others in that group.”<sup>388</sup> However, the narrative of “overcoming a disability” leaves the social stigmatization of disability intact by emphasizing an individual’s achievement and exceptionality *from* the disability. This ultimately reinforces notions of what a “normal” body is, rather than complicating it. By emphasizing language ability and eloquence as avenues through which we might be able to consider the creature or Caliban as “human,” we end up supporting the stigmatization through which their dehumanization occurs in the first place.

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<sup>387</sup> Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*. (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>388</sup> Linton, 18.

As spontaneous and creative elocutionists, both Caliban and the Creature both meet Descartes's criteria for human language and reasoning. However, like Francis Williams, neither are seen as "human" in their respective narratives. Language ability, and indeed eloquence, are both revealed as a ruse: constructions of reason and language ability are malleable to the interests to those in power. Although neither are accused of "parroting," both are represented as threats to white able-bodied authority— that is, to Prospero and Victor. This is made most explicit in *The Tempest* around Caliban's threats to "usurp" Prospero's status as owner of the island. Additionally, Prospero and Victor both fear that Caliban and the Creature will reproduce, creating a more numerous and potentially stronger "race" than that of humans. As Stephanie Kerschbaum notes, signs and rhetoric that define disability as lacking in "wholeness" disclose "a persistent cultural orientation to disability as a threat." For Caliban and the Creature, their hetero-species bodies function to locate them as both "lacking wholeness" and as a perceived threat.

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