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Review of Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert and Susan Wiseman, eds., *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies, and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period.*

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Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert and Susan Wiseman, eds., *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies, and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. 269 pp. ISBN 0312220383.

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Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert and Susan Wiseman have managed to capture in the title of this volume the attraction—but also the slight sense of vertigo—produced by studying a topic which is, in a real way, all boundary. Beginning with what appears to be a clear and discrete topic, *At the Borders of the Human*, the title continues with a list of objects which are radically dissimilar in kind: *Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy*. The essays deliver on this promise to explore the notion of humanity through the definition of its limits in physical, mental, geographical and even disciplinary terms during the period of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. The result is a collection of essays which are uniformly engaging when taken individually, and which touch on an astonishing range of concerns while convincingly cohering in the main.

Questioning definitions of the human is an endeavor which inevitably leads to the theories of Donna Haraway, and this volume is no exception. Fudge, Gilbert and Wiseman praise Donna Haraway's work in the introduction. While Haraway theorizes the breakdown in a capitalist computer age of traditional dichotomies which oppose human to machine and to animal, her analysis has proven productive for scholarship in other periods as well. As the editors point out, however, where Haraway celebrates the demise of paternalistic myths of origin and strident definitions of gender and genus, most early modern thinkers strove to uphold strict categories and clear demarcations. Indeed most of the contributions to *At the Borders of the Human* document and analyze the anxiety which arose when society was confronted with an Other that was not quite other enough. And yet one exception to this reasoning is to be found within the volume in Jonathan Sawday's "'Forms Such as Never Were in Nature': the Renaissance Cyborg." Sawday offers an important corrective to Haraway's assumption that the rise of cyborgs became possible only in response to the recent increased autonomy of machines. Sawday persuasively argues that the relationship of machines to humans in the early modern period was structured by the perception that human nature was oppressively controlled by instinct and emotion. In comparison, the machine offered a liberation from messy human drives and affiliations. Sawday's work offers a useful reminder of the shifting valuations which attach to oppositional pairs even when the terms subsist over a long period.

While the essays are organized in rough chronology, I believe a thematic rearrangement highlights the main ideas which emerge from this volume. Isolating and reordering the essays which deal with the bestiality of humanity, for example, demonstrates the disturbing ability of a single limen to encroach ever farther into what originally seemed secure human territory. Susan Wiseman, in "Monstrous Perfectibility: Ape-Human Transformations in Hobbes, Bulwer, Tyson," discusses the problematic nature of a species distinction which, in the mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries, could not be isolated in internal anatomy. This ambiguity was compounded by a classification system which insisted on fine gradations rather than absolute distinctions, inviting speculation about transformations. The social, political and mythological language which informed the scientific discourse on monkeys reinforced their ambivalent status as "like" humans, an expression which maintained the slightest distance while emphasizing

similarity. Indeed, sensational stories of feral children, explored in detail in Michael Newton's essay, seemed to provide an intermediary step between ape and human. Their appearance suggested that humanity resided in a learnable trait such as rationality or language and was not inherently connected to form. Paradoxically, the very existence of a human species could therefore be read as evidence of the successful perfection of the ape, and thus proof of an essential human bestiality.

While Wiseman deals with animals both human and simian, three of the included authors—Ruth Gilbert, Margaret Healy and Mary Peace—address the bestiality of human sexual passions. While Gilbert focuses on the fascination of the seventeenth century with the sexual abnormality of hermaphrodites, Healy and Peace bring abnormality closer to home. In her “Bodily Regimen and Fear of the Beast: ‘Plausibility’ in Renaissance Domestic Tragedy,” Healy analyzes the way in which human sexuality could become demonic in seventeenth-century drama. These plays frustrate those critics who seek anachronistic psychological motivations, depending instead on the contagion of overpowering sexual urges, which can enter the body through over-consumption or can travel from person to person. The aetiology of aberrant sexual behavior thus involves both immorality and disease, each acting upon the other. The humoral imbalance which could lead to a beast-like lapse in social mores, could be guarded against through a strict regimen which included sensible eating, refraining from drink and banishing sexual thoughts. Mary Peace records the results of a similar fear of the disruptive power of sexuality in the eighteenth century, when female sexuality in particular was pathologized so that constraint could be packaged as cure. Peace explores the paradoxical collusion of two contradictory tendencies: (1) femininity, characterized by sensitivity, figures the civilizing mission of culture itself while at the same time (2) actual women require the harshest of educations to repress naturally immoderate desire. As Peace concludes, for writers like Rousseau “the nature of women is culture” (255). The failure of faith in uncultivated female nature therefore ironically coincides with pessimism about the value of civilization.

The border between human and beast, which in Wiseman's essay distinguished human from ape, has shown its capacity to intrude into ever deeper human territory, first calling into question the humanity of aberrant sexual anatomy, then deviant sexual behavior and finally natural sexual desire. In a final interiorization of bestiality, Erica Fudge's “Calling Creatures by Their True Names: Bacon, the New Science and the Beast in Man” moves away from issues of sexuality, locating Bacon's ambivalent understanding of the relationship of human to beast in his depiction of the irrational child.

I have chosen to emphasize this theme here to highlight the achievement of *At the Borders of the Human* in demonstrating how the problematic nature of border cases quickly renders all aspects of the human problematic. Another thread running through many of the works in this collection also deserves attention, however; one of the most productive avenues explored by *At the Borders of the Human* could be described as disciplinary. In particular, two works on the New World explore not only the racist implications of European definitions of humanity, but also the threat to theories of knowledge which accompanies confrontation with difference. Brian Cummings's “Animal Passions and Human Sciences: Shame, Blushing and Nakedness in Early Modern Europe and the New World” analyzes the challenge to European convictions about human universals which arose from their first encounters with Native Americans as a result of the

natives' lack of genital shame. In a striking demonstration of resistance to revising old conceptions, Jean de Léry insists after observing the Tupinamba in Brazil that shame is one of the laws of nature "which on this particular point is by no means observed among our poor Americans" (48 n. 28). The concept of a natural law which can be *disobeyed* is a solution which saves European claims to universality by blaming the natives for a near-criminal failure to comply. This dynamic of positing a universality which was nonetheless exclusive was still at work centuries later, as Jess Edwards demonstrates in "The Doubtful Traveller": Mathematics, Metaphor, and the Cartographic Origins of the American Frontier." Europeans claimed access to universals through the pure science of mathematics implicit in cartography, while relegating Native Americans' knowledge to the inferior particularity of experience. In fact, however, maps at this time were collections of metaphors and rhetoric, which crowded the margins or even usurped the central cartographic space in an attempt to render the new as familiar, comfortable and, indeed, particular.

The essays in this collection, in spite of their extreme diversity, provide joint evidence for two important and related points. First, any and every aspect of the human can, through an act of marginalization, be relocated at a border. Second, such relocations, despite the veneer of objective science, are motivated by anxiety precipitated by an encounter with otherness, combined with a desire to protect cherished ideas about oneself.