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**Darwin, Victorian Literature, and the Great Web:
Analyzing and Dismantling the Human Superiority Complex**

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of English

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ABSTRACT

In my essay, I will argue that the discrimination and cruelty humans project towards other humans mirrors the discrimination and cruelty humans project towards other species. A moral justification exists behind the need to discriminate against another human or animal. Therefore, the concept of “morality,” which has long been thought to be the root of man’s “higher” mental capabilities, and which is, I will propose, the cause of racism, sexism, classism, and *speciesism*, is *not* an advantageous, or “higher,” trait. Instead, “morality,” if we classify it in Darwinian terms, is a *disadvantageous* trait that could potentially lead to our devolution and extinction.

I will also claim that Darwin was the first major opponent of speciesism and an anthropocentric model of thinking. Darwin’s plea to sympathize with other animals (as opposed to “moralizing” power over them), is not only written from the viewpoint of a scientist working in the interest of mankind, but also written from the viewpoint of a humanist calling for kinship among all earthlings. Darwin initiated a debate not only scientific, but also humanistic and literary in nature. Consequently, Victorian fiction writers began emulating Darwin’s sympathetic, anti-anthropocentric undertones. Ouida’s *A Dog of Flanders* (1872) and Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877) provide Victorian readers with a revolutionary narrative style, one that takes viewpoint of a non-human animal. Despite the works of Darwin, Ouida, and Sewell, however, speciesism is still practiced today on an even greater level than in Victorian England. This is evident through the global practices of medical experimentation, factory farming, and animal labor.

Ultimately, this essay enters into a discussion with public perception and seeks to dismantle a set of anthropocentric attitudes and values still with us today. Using *The Origin of Species* (1859), *The Descent of Man* (1871), *A Dog of Flanders*, *Black Beauty*, and contemporary scholarship, I will show, through a textual and a critical analysis of each work, how human beings are not at the top of a ladder, but instead part of an interconnected web.

For more than a century, the phrase “survival of the fittest” has been widely confused with Darwin’s theory of natural selection. Coined by Herbert Spencer¹ in 1864, “survival of the fittest” emphasizes that the strongest species should conquer the obstacles in their respective environments and rightly dominate over physically inferior species. Morse Peckham clarifies that unlike natural selection, “a scientific theory about the origin of biological species from pre-existent species” (32), “survival of the fittest” can be “an economic theory, or a moral theory, or an aesthetic theory, or a psychological theory” (32). Given that Spencer and his supporters² regarded “survival of the fittest” as “a law of nature” (394), “a law of God” (394), a “revolution” (393), “valuable” (389), and quite simply “natural” (392), the phrase, and likewise Spencer’s interpretation of *The Origin of Species* (1859), famously influenced industrial capitalism and eugenics. Social Darwinism encouraged various mentalities in the West during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: cut-throat economic competition; the exploitation of factory workers; opposition to state aid for the poor; pseudo-scientific studies of the female brain; and later, as scholar Donal O’Mathuna notes, “the philosophies impacting views of human dignity in the decades leading up to Nazi power in Germany” (2). “Some people,” Philip Appleman claims, “saw the opportunity to take over [Darwin’s] new concepts and exploit them as self-serving rationalizations” (10). Without a doubt, extreme classism, sexism, and racism emerged out of the desire to express superiority over another individual. However, few scholars

¹The American scientist F.A.P. Barnard claimed that the only name comparable to Spencer’s was Newton’s. Other notable scholars have praised “survival of the fittest” and Spencer’s intellectual merits in a similar manner. However, among contemporary scholars who have criticized Spencer’s interpretation of natural selection, the evolutionary biologist Peter R. Grant wrote, “I have thus far referred to survival rather than fitness in order to avoid a misunderstanding created more than a century ago by Herbert Spencer. Spencer erroneously equated natural selection with ‘the survival of the fittest,’ a catch phrase he coined to popularize Darwin’s work” (380).

²Thomas Malthus, John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Edward Youmans, James J. Hill, C.R. Henderson, Francis Galton, and others. See Richard Hofstadter, “The Vogue of Spencer.” *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Philip Appleman. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001. 389-395. Print.

have thus far investigated the parallel between prejudices humans project towards other humans and prejudices humans project towards other species.

In 1970, a renowned British psychologist, Dr. Richard Ryder, coined the term *speciesism*. Speciesism is the discrimination of any non-human species. In the West, man's self-proclaimed dominion over other animals predates to the Christian Old Testament, where God declares to Adam: "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth...Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you" (Gn 9:1-2). One might assume that anthropocentric thinking is a thing of the past. But like other forms of discrimination, this is not the case. The human race, to this day, still depends on animals for food, clothing, transportation, labor, and medical experimentation. Given our close genetic ancestry to other species and our knowledge of human evolution, is it not just a little absurd that the Biblical quotation I have cited still governs our thinking about animal-human relations? Is it not even more absurd that speciesism directly reflects racism, sexism, classism, and Spencer's concept of "survival of the fittest"?

In considering these questions, it is important that we examine a pivotal moment in Western history. At no other point in Western history was man's place in the world so thoroughly challenged than in the Darwin-influenced Victorian era. Darwin was and in many ways still remains the greatest opponent of speciesism. He challenged the links binding Christianity and the science of the Victorian era. He dismantled the Great Chain of Being, the *scala naturae*, the strict teleological, anthropocentric hierarchy that bound Western thought for centuries. He proposed that man is *not* "higher" than any animal, nor is man (or any creature) an independent creation of God. Rather, he argued man and animal are descendants of other species via natural selection. In other words, man and animal, in his work, are genetically related.

Indeed, for Darwin, man *is* an animal. As he claimed in *The Descent of Man* (1871), humans are not a distinct, “higher” species, and to suggest so is to ignore man’s “indelible stamp of his lowly origin” (254).

Darwin’s publications not only influenced Victorian science but also Victorian literature and, not surprisingly, a budding animal rights movement in Victorian England. Ouida’s *A Dog of Flanders* (1872) and Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877) depict the advanced intuitive processes of two commonly mistreated animals in Victorian England: dogs and horses. The powerful, animal-driven narratives in these works of fiction (narratives in which readers *hear* the voices of a dog or a horse, as opposed to solely the voice of a human speaker) helped shape an animal rights movement which fought to pass extensive legislation in England during the time. Through Darwin’s influence, animals suddenly developed *rights*, were characterized as having *feelings*, and were perceived as *intelligent*. Animal abuse became a crime, doctors questioned the practice of vivisection³, and *humane* treatment extended to non-human species. Thus, literature and Darwinian science worked together to displace humans from a problematic, and in many ways, self-delusional hierarchy. Although traditional views on this subject still held sway, humans were no longer universally believed to be at the top of a great chain, but were instead seen by many in Victorian England as part of a web. This web contained no hierarchy, no single organism at the top. To practice speciesism meant to sever intricate ties to other organisms.

Unfortunately, despite Darwin’s influence on Victorian literature and an animal rights movement that called for the humane treatment of non-human species, speciesism is still the dominant force driving man’s superiority complex. In fact, speciesism is now practiced on a global, mechanized scale. Factory farm animals, for instance, are treated as mere commodities,

³ The action of cutting or dissecting some part of a living organism; *spec.* the action or practice of performing dissection, or other painful experiment, upon living animals as a method of physiological or pathological study. (OED)

slaughtered by the millions in an *inhumane*, disrespectful fashion, a fashion arguably worse than any practiced in Victorian times. Despite the influence of Darwin, Ouida, and Sewell, notable public figures such as Hebert Spencer, John D. Rockefeller⁴, Andrew Carnegie⁵, Carl Cohen⁶, and Jeffrey Alan Gray⁷ defend these practices, primarily on the grounds of *morality*. However, as I intend to argue, this so-called “morality” does not make us superior to other animals. Humans may “moralize” that vivisection saves human lives. Humans may “moralize” that industrially raising and slaughtering millions of animals to feed a hungry growing population is permissible. Yet, humans are the same creatures that can “moralize” that racism or sexism, like speciesism, is right. Indeed, humans often “moralize” that killing other humans (over matters of race, religion, and nation) is justifiable. As Darwin, Ouida, and Sewell reveal, man’s “morals” do not make him superior. On the contrary, man’s morals and man’s desire to exert *power* over other creatures is a *disadvantageous* trait that will, if left unchecked, potentially lead to man’s extinction. Sympathy, *not* morality, is the answer. When we sympathize, particularly in the manner Ouida and Sewell propose we do in their landmark works of fiction, we coexist with all living organisms without a need to assert our “fitness” in the web of life.

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When Darwin started to publish his findings on natural selection and evolution, he made man’s insignificance obvious and pronounced. Darwin removes man from his high place in the *scala naturae* and places him among the very organisms he has dominated for millennia. In *The Origins of Species*, for example, Darwin begins by asserting that “each species had not been

⁴ See Richard Hofstadter, “The Vogue of Spencer.” *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Philip Appleman. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001. 389-395. Print.

⁵ See Richard Hofstadter, “The Vogue of Spencer.” *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Philip Appleman. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001. 389-395. Print.

⁶ See Carl Cohen, “The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research.” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 315.14 (1986): 865-870. Print.

⁷ See Jeffrey Gray, “In Defense of Speciesism.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. 13.1 (1980): 22-23. Print.

independently created, but had descended, like varieties, from other species” (96). This assertion is notable because it highlights the interconnected nature of *all* life on earth. From the very beginning of the text, Darwin is alerting the reader that all species are mutable and *related*. He moves on to explain how natural selection accounts for the change (or evolution) in species. Organisms containing favorable characteristics are more likely to reproduce and survive in their respective environments; hence, advantageous traits are passed on to progeny. At the same time, organisms with unfavorable characteristics are less likely to survive and pass on their genes. Darwin states, “Natural selection [...] leads to divergence of character and to much extinction of the less improved and intermediate forms of life. On these principles, I believe, the nature of the affinities of all organic beings may be explained” (134). By stressing that all organic beings undergo natural selection, Darwin is providing his reader with a genealogical roadmap, one that challenged the traditions of Victorian scientists and Christians. Each organism is no longer an autonomous creation. Each organism becomes instead an amalgam of another. This was a troubling concept for many Victorians because it solicited the following question: Is man descended from a “lower” animal by means of natural selection?

In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin examines the anatomical and embryological similarities between humans and other animals, thus confirming the premise that “man, like every other species, is descended from some pre-existing form” (175). Again, we see not only a comparison between man and “lower” animals, but a genetic link. Regarding anatomy, Darwin claims “It is notorious that man is constructed on the same general type or model as other mammals. All the bones in his skeleton can be compared with corresponding bones in a monkey, bat, or seal. So it is with his muscles, nerves, blood-vessels and internal viscera” (178). Even on an embryological level, man is no different from other species: “Man is developed from an ovule, about the 125th

of an inch in diameter, which differs in no respect from the ovules of other animals. The embryo itself at a very early period can hardly be distinguished from that of other members of the vertebrate kingdom” (180). These anatomical and embryological descriptions support the theory of mutability. If man, even remotely, shares a similar physiological makeup with a monkey or seal, for instance, man also shares a common ancestor with both animals; at some point in time all three species were *one*. Again, considering embryological relationships, Darwin states:

No other explanation has ever been given of the marvelous fact that the embryos of a man, dog, seal, bat, reptile, &c., can at first hardly be distinguished from each other... Thus we can understand how it has come to pass that man and all other vertebrate animals have been constructed on the same general model. (193-194)

The indistinguishable nature of the embryos should tell us something fascinating. Before birth, man, dog, seal and the other species mentioned are, more or less, the same entities. It is only through further embryological development that these animals become distinct. However, despite physiological similarities, it is worth revealing that humans unquestionably possess complex mental faculties. How, then, can man’s ability to think abstractly, to love, and to feel pain compare to the mental capabilities of other organisms?

Interestingly, Darwin uses the same logic to show how “no fundamental difference [exists] between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties” (214). Like humans, higher animals possess complex emotions. For example, Darwin discusses jealousy and love: “Every one has seen how jealous a dog is of his master’s affection, if lavished on any other creature; and I have observed the same fact with monkeys. This shews that animals not only love, but have desire to be loved” (216). Abstract thinking, or *reason*, is also present, but often overlooked, in animals considered “lower” than man: “When a small object is thrown on the

ground beyond the reach of one of the elephants...he blows through his trunk on the ground beyond the object, so that the current reflected on all sides may drive the object within his reach” (220). Although the concept of *physics* cannot be rationalized by the elephant, the elephant possesses the abstract thought process to bring an object closer; accordingly, the elephant is using reason. Pain is another “higher” mental faculty displayed in animals: “Every one has heard of the dog suffering under vivisection, who licked the hand of the operator” (215). With regard to memory and “keeping time,” Darwin states:

A baboon at the Cape of Good Hope, as I have been informed by Sir Andrew Smith, recognised him with joy after an absence of nine months...Even ants...recognised their fellow-ants belonging to the same community after a separation of four months. Animals can certainly by some means judge of the intervals of time between recurrent events.

(218)

As these passages reveal, the extraordinary emotional and mental powers displayed by man are also prevalent, to some degree, in other animals. Darwin, however, still attempts to analyze an animal’s mental powers from a *human’s* point of view. Here is where Ouida and Sewell become so important to the Victorian critique of speciesism. Both provide compelling and convincing insights into animal emotions and thought processes; they give readers the “beast’s” perspective—the “beast’s” narrative.

Ouida’s *A Dog of Flanders*⁸ gives Victorians a literary outlook on a “lower” animal’s intricate behavior. After Jehan Daas and Nello save a dog’s life, Patrasche, the dog, returns the favor and pulls the milk cart: “Patrasche, before the old man had touched the cart, arose and walked to it and placed himself betwixt its handles, and testified as plainly as dumb show could do his desire and his ability to work in return for the bread of charity that he had eaten” (6).

⁸ Although *A Dog of Flanders* is not narrated by a dog, it still follows the third-person perspective of Patrasche.

Aside from behaving affectionately, Patrasche empathizes with Jehan Daas. He *understands* that pulling the cart “was becoming hard work for the old man [Jehan Daas]” (6). Empathy, or the ability to identify with his guardian’s struggles, subverts Patrasche’s conventional status as a “lower” animal. In fact, Patrasche, who is “but a dog” (3), is far more compassionate and intuitive than the story’s human characters. He is the only character who recognizes Jehan Daas’s inability to work and Nello’s passion for art. And, in times of distress, Patrasche comforts his guardians.

As the story progresses, and as we begin to hear the dog’s *voice* (his thoughts expressed by words on the page), Patrasche’s sentience becomes more prevalent. When Nello comes out of the church, either “very flushed or very pale” (10), Patrasche articulates, in his mind, some concern:

What troubled him [Patrasche] was that little Nello always looked strangely when he came out...What was it? wondered Patrasche. He thought it could not be good or natural for the little lad to be so grave, and in his dumb fashion he tried all he could to keep Nello by him in the sunny fields or in the busy market-place. But to the churches Nello would go. (10-11)

The dog realizes that Nello’s low spirits are linked to the church. He attempts to lead his young guardian away from the church and towards better environments (i.e. the “sunny fields”).

Moreover, Ouida uses the words “troubled” and “wondered” to shape Patrasche’s *intuition* and *voice*, two mental powers which characterize “higher” beings, or humans. Here, the dog’s feelings for his friend are unmatched. We see in the end that Patrasche refuses to eat after Nello’s disappearance: “He had only one thought—to follow Nello. A human friend might have paused for the pleasant meal...but that was not the friendship of Patrasche” (29). Patrasche’s friendship

transcends humanity; it is a *love* so complicated, yet so genuine, that it cannot be measured by human standards; it is a love that severs the hierarchy between man and beast. Through Patrasche and Nello's death, however, the story draws on a larger conclusion: human and dog are equals. Ouida states "The arms of the boy drew close again to the body of the dog. 'We shall see His face—there,' he murmured; 'and He will not part from *us* [my emphasis]...'" (32). Nello suggests that God "will not part" from him or his dog. It can be assumed that Patrasche will also go to heaven; he is, like Nello, part of the universe. This conclusion not only challenges anthropocentric thinking—and speciesism—but undermines it altogether. As a whole, Patrasche's behaviors reflect intelligence and a strong emotional bond with other characters. A skeptical reader might ask if Ouida's depiction is an accurate or true portrayal of animal behavior and psychology. To this, I would argue that most of us understand little of the animal mind and cannot accurately validate what is "true" animal behavior. Ouida calls attention to the same observations and reflections as Darwin, namely that animals possess incredible intuitive characteristics that go unrecognized because of man's need to stress his own importance. Ouida urges Victorians to rethink the categorization (or hierarchical discrimination) of "lower" animals.

Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* portrays a similar level of emotional sophistication and intelligence in horses. Unlike Ouida's story, however, Sewell's narrator is a "lower" animal. Beauty's voice drives the entire novel. Everything is seen through a horse's eyes, felt through a horse's sensations, and understood through a horse's thoughts. Sewell is attempting to give readers a horse's point of view, and this technique is not merely allegorical. Although the novel contains human characters and dialogue, the reader ultimately gets a deeper understanding of a horse's consciousness. In Chapter Twelve, Sewell gives us insight into this consciousness. John Manly wonders why Beauty does not cross the bridge. He says, "Come on, Beauty, what's the

matter?” (59), and Beauty, addressing the reader, replies, “Of course I could not *tell him* [my emphasis], but I knew very well that the bridge was not safe” (59). Considering once more Patrasche’s ability to detect Nello’s distress, we find an animal whose instincts remain unexplained by human reason. Since Beauty stops suddenly, John grows suspicious. Beauty cannot “tell” his guardian what is wrong, which seems to suggest man’s overemphasis on language. This scene shows readers how a horse’s judgment, which is just as complex as oral language (if not more), can surpass even a man’s. After John discovers that the “bridge is broken in the middle” (59), he praises Beauty for saving his life. Beauty then remarks, “Master said, God had given men reason, by which they could find out things for themselves, but He had given animals knowledge which did not depend on reason, and which was much more prompt and perfect in its way, and by which they had often saved the lives of men” (60). John’s attitude towards animals is revolutionary. He implies that an animal’s intelligence, which does not depend on reason, is in no way inferior to man’s intelligence. In other words, animals are not more or less intelligent than man, even though some of the traits linked to intelligence, such as intuition, are more *complex* (or not well understood by humans). Animals possess a *different* kind of intelligence, one that is undervalued by society. In any case, the acknowledgement of Beauty’s emotions and mental powers gives the reader some idea of a “lower” animal’s unappreciated complexities.

Let us turn now to the subject of intelligence, specifically *man*’s intelligence, and explore why the segregation of man and other species by mental powers is theoretically absurd. In *Descent*, Darwin claims, “We have seen...that man bears in his bodily structure clear traces of his descent from some lower form; but it may be urged that, as man differs so greatly in his mental power from all other animals, there must be some error in this conclusion” (213). There is

a perception, as Darwin hints, that man is mentally more advanced than other species. This perception, however, is largely untrue. Although man's intellectual capacities (language, problem-solving, the ability to use science, the belief in God, reason, etc.) are phenomenal and different from those of other species, man is not *more* intelligent than his animal counterparts. Our definition of intelligence is one crafted by human standards. Animals merely possess an alternative form of intellect, as shown in Patrasche and Beauty's characters, and Darwin admits that there "is no justification for placing man in a distinct order" (225). Nor can "spiritual powers," or religion, be "compared or classed by the naturalist" (223). In other words, humans should not classify themselves in terms of mental faculties or their "spiritual" beliefs; classification should, according to Darwin, be based on structural faculties. Darwin best summarizes this argument with an example: "On the whole, the difference in mental power between an ant and a coccus is immense; yet no one has ever dreamed of placing these insects in distinct classes, much less in distinct kingdoms" (223). The distinction between a human's intelligence and Patrasche's or Beauty's, for instance, is analogous to the mental distinction between an ant and a coccus. Consequently, Darwin concludes that "in determining the position of man in the natural or genealogical system, the extreme development of his brain ought not to outweigh a multitude of resemblances in other less important or quite unimportant points" (224). By not classifying man according to mental faculties, Darwin jettisons the notion that man is "special." Like all creatures, man has a common ancestor, and his thought processes are the products of natural selection. But one question still remains unanswered: How can man, having acquired such extraordinary emotional and mental capabilities, be perceived as a *devolving*, dying, or "lower" species because of his ability to "moralize" speciesism, as my argument

insinuates? In order to answer this, we must expose man for his most “beast-like” cruelties towards other living organisms.

Darwin proposes that man’s greatest achievements—for instance, language and the discovery of fire—are “the direct results of the development of his powers of observation, memory, curiosity, imagination, and reason” (201); the development of these powers implies that man has evolved to a level of great complexity. Following this conclusion, there is room to suspect that man is “more evolved” than other species. But what if these powers which characterize humans as “superior” under Christian dogma, pre-Darwinian science, or social Darwinism, make humans inferior to other species? What if the very development of our curiosity, imagination, reason, etc. is actually a mechanism of devolution? Are humans *more* savage because they possess these phenomena? Darwin mentions in *Origins*, if I may repeat it, that “Natural selection...leads to divergence of character and to much *extinction* [my emphasis] of the less improved and intermediate forms of life” (134). Could it be that all of our wars, our intolerances, and all the cruelty we project towards animals (and towards each other) result from powers we deem developed and advanced? Could our imagination, which has led to the construction of religion, which, in turn, has led to countless wars (and continues to be the cause of war), be classified as a *disadvantageous* trait, a trait slowly leading to our demise, to our “*extinction*”? Could reason and morality, which we esteem as our supreme powers, also be identified as unfavorable qualities? In *Descent*, Darwin argues:

It deserves attention that with mankind the conditions were in many respects much more favourable for sexual selection during a very early period, when man had only just attained to the rank of manhood, than during later times. For he would then, as we may safely conclude, have been guided more by his instinctive passions, and *less by foresight*

or reason [my emphasis]. He would have jealously guarded his wife or wives. He would not have practiced infanticide; nor valued his wives merely as useful slaves; nor have been betrothed to them during infancy. (243)

Sexual selection and the ability to pass on genes are hindered by reason. Reason also enables man to discriminate, to create hierarchies, to treat women as “slaves.” Infanticide, a cultural construction, considered permissible in many societies, is the product of man’s so-called “superior reasoning.” Could these powers, which define man, be obsolete? Are we actually less evolved because of our awesome mental capabilities? The answer is yes to all. I implore my readers to go online and open three separate windows: one window with sketches from American slave ships, one window with photographs from the Holocaust, and another window with pictures from factory farms. The living, breathing organisms depicted in these images are treated like useless commodities; they are cramped into small spaces, piled onto one another, physically mutilated, forced to watch the agony of their fellow creatures, slaughtered by the thousands and millions, and eviscerated until nothing is left of their bodies except the pollution that plagues the air, the soil, and the waters. I say this only to draw upon a visual connection, a reoccurring theme in human history. Whenever we believe we are superior to other organisms, we attempt to apply our control. Worse, we try to justify it with morals, with thinking which we deem “higher.” But paradoxically, the powers characterizing man as superior, complex, and oftentimes “good,” actually bring out the beast in him.

In Ouida and Sewell’s works, the depiction of animal cruelty exposes man’s savagery and gives credence to my claim that man can be judged as morally and intuitively “lower” than other species. Ouida argues that “[Patrasche] had been fed on curses and baptized with blows. Why not? It was a Christian country, and Patrasche was but a dog” (3). In view of traditional thinkers,

religion is considered a product of man's "higher" mental faculties. The *scala naturae* places man above dogs; thus, according to Ouida, there is agency to treat Patrasche, a "lower" creature, inhumanely under Christian doctrine. Ouida continues: "The life of Patrasche was a life of hell. To deal the tortures of hell on the animal creation is a way which the Christians have of showing their belief in it" (3). Man's morals, which are based on a religion that sanctions the exploitation and domination of animals, are therefore corrupt and "lower" than Patrasche's empathy for his guardians. Additionally, Ouida depicts Patrasche's former guardian as barbaric: "This man was a drunkard and a brute... His purchaser was a sullen, ill-living, brutal Brabantois...and left Patrasche to draw the load as best he might, whilst he himself lounged idly by the side in fat and sluggish ease" (3). The physical description of the drunkard makes him appear less superior and more primitive. He displays no compassion for a living creature. And from what we observe later in the novel, it can be assumed that Patrasche, a creature with no conception of hierarchy, no reason to "moralize," is the more *humane* of species. Unlike the brutal drunkard, Patrasche treats other species (i.e. humans) with respect. In *Black Beauty*, Sir Oliver, another horse, claims his tail was cut off "for fashion" (47). He asks Beauty, "What right have they [humans] to torment and disfigure God's creatures?" (48). "Fashion," a cultural construction, a product of man's reason, is comparable to infanticide, as Darwin mentions above. Because humans use *power* over beings that cannot fight back, they treat them as meager objects. Again, Victorian writers place humans under a vile light. Man preys on organisms he deems weak. Both stories, in the end, convey human characters (excluding John Manly, Jerry Barker, Nello, Jehan Daas, etc.) as less compassionate and far more savage than "lower" animals.

To many Victorian animal rights activists, vivisection represents the worst treatment of animals. It is the total disregard for sensitivity towards other life forms and the epitome of man's

beast-like, “lower” behavior. In *Reckoning with the Beast*, James Turner argues “Vivisection—‘a remnant of primitive savagery’— ‘engenders cruelty or indifference to suffering. Therefore it reverses the order of the refining forces of civilization” (97). Vivisectors, according to Turner, are not men Victorians would consider immoral, but men of *science*, men of healing, doctors, or the “educated” class. It is daunting for Victorians, and especially fervent antivivisectionists, to imagine “men called on for comfort in the pains of childbirth or the hour of death” (97) inflicting excruciating pain upon other creatures. How could an “educated person remain coldly insensible to the quivering appeal of an anguished dog?” (96). Surprisingly, vivisectors do not see themselves as “inverted” healers, but rather as eradicators of human disease. Science and medical progress, not religion in this case (as argued earlier), serve as justifications for hurting animals. Human lives, vivisectors assert, are more important than the lives of “lower” animals. Prolonging human life is a “higher goal” (110). Turner poses the following dilemma:

Confronted with the choice, few people would flinch at sacrificing hundreds of animals to save a human life. Perhaps this was merely self-interest. But, even as a matter of principle, which was the greater cruelty: to outlaw vivisection to protect some thousands of animals, or to sacrifice them to prevent the “mental and moral anguish” as well as pain “wrought through disease in millions of men and women”? (111-112)

This dilemma is obviously a valid one to deliberate. Antivivisectionists, on the other hand, posit an equally applicable approach to treating human ailments—prevention:

“They [antivivisectionists] offered a practical alternative in the flourishing and respected field of public health or sanitary medicine. Cleaning up the slums, improving sewerage, providing pure water supplies, upgrading diet, and reducing intemperance and vice were

real answers...Sanitation had probably done more to improve health in the previous half-century than all of clinical and experimental medicine” (99).

Still, even though antivivisectionists offer sensible advice, and even though preventative care is demonstrated to be superior, scientists continue live experimentation on animals for the benefit of alleviating human pain. To make matters worse for the Victorian antivivisection movement, an antitoxin, deriving from vivisection, proves effective in treating diphtheria: “The world owed this life-giving discovery directly and irrefutably to experiments on living animals” (115). The question we are left to ponder, then, is this: Is the life of a human being more important than the life of an animal?

In “All Beings that Feel Pain Deserve Human Rights,” Richard Ryder approaches this predicament with an argument calling for the sympathy of pain, not speciesism. He builds on Darwin’s conclusion that humans and animals are connected:

Since Darwin we have known we are human animals related to all the other animals through evolution; how, then, can we justify our almost total oppression of all the other species? All animal species can suffer pain and distress. Animals scream and writhe like us; their nervous systems are similar and contain the same biochemicals that we know are associated with the experience of pain in ourselves. (1)

Pain, according to this statement, is what all organisms share. To inflict harm and to not sympathize with another being’s physical suffering would be illogical and heartless. Concerning the scenario in the previous paragraph (i.e. whether it would be right to practice vivisection in order to relieve the pain of humans), Ryder would argue that “inflicting 100 units of pain on one individual is...far worse than inflicting a single unit of pain on a...million individuals...In any situation we should thus concern ourselves primarily with the pain of the individual who is the

maximum sufferer” (2). One creature should not suffer so unbearably to relieve the miniscule discomfort of a single human being. Nor should millions of animals suffer to relieve a small ailment of man’s, since both animal and man *feel* pain. Yet humans still justify vivisection on the grounds that “painients⁹ are not the same species as [themselves]” (2). Carl Cohen, a professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan, is a prominent proponent of speciesism. In an article on biomedical research, he claims the harsh treatment of animals is not only morally justifiable, but also “right” and natural to the human conduct of life. Furthermore, morality can only be extended to other humans, since morals, according to Cohen, are not possessed by other animals:

I am a speciesist. Speciesism is not merely plausible; it is essential for right conduct, because those who will not make the morally relevant distinctions among species are almost certain, in consequence, to misapprehend their true obligations...Humans owe to other humans a degree of moral regard that cannot be owed to animals. (867-868)

Similarly, Jeffrey Alan Gray asserts that speciesism is universal and ought to be defended, not criticized: “I would guess that the view that human beings matter to other human beings more than animals do is, to say the least, widespread. At any rate, I wish to defend speciesism” (22). Ryder would argue that to not sympathize with other animals would be to treat our relatives as “unfeeling things” (2). Ryder would also respond with the following scenario:

[If] aliens landed on Earth and turned out to be far more powerful than us...[would we] let them—without argument—chase and kill us for sport, experiment on us or breed us in factory farms, and turn us into tasty humanburgers? Would we accept their explanation that it was perfectly *moral* [my emphasis] for them to do all these things as we were not of their species? (2)

⁹ “Pain-feeling,” or any organism that feels pain.

In my belief, one in which I feel Ryder may concur, the only justification for killing an organism would be survival; after all, if we think of the order of life from an evolutionary perspective, carnivores must prey on other living organisms for sustenance (Darwin would also agree that carnivores, over a long period of time, evolved physical characteristics to help them hunt and kill for food). But Ryder seems to suggest that a certain type of pain is *not* justifiable—the mechanized slaughter, torture, experimentation, and mass distribution of animals. No “moral” can justify the infliction of such intolerable pain. Turner claims that at the onset of industrial capitalism¹⁰, “Economic competition provoked much of the notorious brutality of the lower order. But it affected not only the poor; too often it drove their social superiors to maltreat their own animals” (56). The moment we treat animals as “mere machines” (56) for the “sordid love of gain” (56) and establish an excuse for speciesism, is the moment we begin mercilessly killing other species and each other. All life must be valued and pain must be faithfully acknowledged.

Nonetheless, an unsettling thought remains. If one accepts my arguments, man’s place in the Great Chain is overturned; the very dogmas of Christianity and pre-Darwinian science are deconstructed. These dogmas, however, defined the European world for centuries. Without Christianity, without a cohesive moral framework, however flawed and problematic, how is man supposed to survive? Sympathy and cooperation are the answers—as Darwin, Ouida, and Sewell would agree—not the moral codes prescribed by religion or reason. In “Emotionalist Moral Philosophy,” George P. Landow explains:

If human beings are not innately evil, if they do not bear the burden of original sin, then some other factor must explain why the overwhelming majority of them suffer from

¹⁰In 1900, Andrew Carnegie said, “A struggle is inevitable and it is a question of the survival of the fittest” (Hofstadter 387). In 1915, John D. Rockefeller similarly claimed that the “growth of a large business is merely the survival of the fittest” (Hofstadter 392). The growth of industry, as implied by these quotations—and the idea that industry represents a competitive struggle amongst the “fittest” classes of man—corresponds to the escalating mechanical exploitation of animals deemed “lower.”

poverty, ignorance, and illness. The answer, many late 18th-century thinkers decided, lay in the system: people were good, but the system (of government, religion, and society) made them evil and unhappy. Change the system, change the person. (1)

Darwin, Ouida, and Sewall find fault in a system. Labeling man as “superior” creates discrepancies and leads to society’s ills. Morals do not, then, improve our chances of survival. As John Manly, *Black Beauty*’s human guardian, says, “There is no religion without love, and people may talk as much as they like about their religion, but if it does not teach them to be good and kind to man and beast, it is all a sham...” (64). Sympathy for our fellow animals becomes even more important than religion. For if humans are not kind towards animals, it is impossible for humans to be kind towards each other. As Jerry Barker, another guardian of *Beauty*’s, says, “[W]hen a good driver and a good horse, who understand each other, are of one mind, it is wonderful what they can do” (178). Cooperation between man and horse sets aside prejudice and hierarchy; man is free to work with, rather than work against, a creature related to him. On a similar note, Darwin admits “The main conclusion arrived at in this work [*Descent*], namely that man is descended from some lowly organized form, will, I regret to think, be highly distasteful to many” (253). *Descent* certainly disturbed Victorian scientists and Christians, but only because man viewed himself as the greatest of all beings. When Darwin links man to savagery and malevolence, however, Victorians find themselves questioning their outlooks of the universe:

For my own part I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper, or from that old baboon, who descending from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs—as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers

up bloody sacrifices, practises infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions. (253-254)

Man, who “still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin” (254), belongs to an interconnected web, not a great chain. If man is not sympathetic or cooperative, and if man does not acknowledge his “lowly origin,” he remains “lower.”

The Victorian era was mutable because the *scala naturae* was challenged. Man was not only displaced from his throne by Darwin, but also by some of the best writers of the era. By taking science out of the religious realm, Darwin returned humans to their origins. Victorians began to understand their places in the world and their relationship to other animals. In turn, a doctrine that was once perceived as *natural* was exposed for what it really is—a mechanism for control, a system that holds humans back and leads to much destruction, abuse, and prejudice towards other forms of life. Darwin says, “False facts are highly injurious to the progress of science, for they often endure long” (244). When humans declare superiority and fail to recognize the complex world before their eyes, they destroy their chances of finding *real* truth. Progress cannot be attained unless man chooses to think beyond his prejudices, beyond what the masses call “facts.” Man must use his phenomenal intellect to his advantage. Alleging dominance and treating his fellow beings cruelly will only degrade him to the lowest level. Once man acknowledges his origins and his place among the Great Web, he can look forward to a brighter world where all creatures coexist happily and equally.

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