Abstract: In late eighteenth-century Europe, attempts at defining the human and differentiating it from other species were closely linked to inquiries after its historical origins, and these again were related by a number of writers to the genealogy of language. Among those writers was the Scottish lawyer and philosopher James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, whose theories, especially those on the similarities of man and orang-utan, alienated most of his contemporaries. This essay investigates the consequences of Monboddo’s use of language as a defining trait of the human by first looking at his treatment of the orang-utan on the one hand and of Marie-Angélique Leblanc, the “wild girl of Champagne,” on the other. Both serve as examples where the blurry boundaries of humanity are reached, albeit from two different directions. The orang-utan provoked controversy among his contemporaries and inspired fictional treatments of the “cultivated ape,” the most striking example being Thomas Love Peacock’s Melincourt. The last part of the essay therefore studies Peacock’s novel as a fictional embodiment of Monboddo’s most controversial theory in a satirical framework, where the romantic author employs the enlightenment anthropologist for testing once again the boundaries of humanity.

1. Next of Kin: Apes and Humans

In late eighteenth-century Europe, and especially among the Scottish Enlightenment, there was a growing interest in the nature of human beings. Especially in the emerging field of anthropology, fuelled by a growth in information about foreign cultures in the wake of imperialist and colonial expansion, authors were searching for the essence of the human. What is it that distinguishes humans from their most closely related animal species? How are these relationships to be evaluated? Questions like these led to repeated attempts at a system of classification. These classifications were used on the one hand, most notably and influentially by the German physiologist and physic anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, to differentiate man from man through what ultimately evolved into theories of different races. But in addition to that, and in a way both fascinating and problematic, these classifications were also continued to the edges of humanity and beyond, in attempts to define and to position these edges in the wake of taxonomical systems like that of Carl Linnaeus.

Usually, attempts at defining the human and differentiating humans from other species were closely linked to inquiries after man’s historical origins as a social
species, and these again were related by a number of writers to the genealogy of language. Language became the most important distinctive category of the human, and the interest in investigations of its origin was widespread, not least among Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Hugh Blair, James Beattie or Adam Smith. But by far the most exhaustive and voluminous contribution was that of James Burnett, Lord Monboddo. His monumental work *The Origin and Progress of Language*, was published between 1773 and 1792 in six volumes. This essay wants to investigate the consequences of Monboddo’s use of language as a defining trait of the human, and relate this to the writings of the romantic author Thomas Love Peacock.

The Scottish lawyer and philosopher James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, is usually styled as one of “the more colorful figures” (Land 1976, 423) of his time, or even “one of the more eccentric figures of an age which tolerated much that was strange” (Cloyd 1972, vii). Compared to some of his contemporaries, he suffers a strong neglect, though even E.L. Cloyd, author of the only monograph on Monboddo, admits that there is some justice in this; though, as he continues, “Lord Monboddo was probably not the worst writer of his time; he probably was one of the best thinkers of his time and place” (Cloyd 1972, vii). While some of his theories, especially those on the similarities of man and orang-utan, alienated most of his contemporaries, they are now understood, at least by some critics, to foreshadow Darwin’s theory of evolution (cf. Cloyd 1972, 166-7; Formigari 1974, 287).

Though it was primarily these theories on the orang-utan that caused such a stir after their initial publication and domineered public reception of Monboddo’s work, they are actually not much more than a by-product of his inquiry into the relationship of man and language at the outset of his work. In the first book of his first volume of the *Origin*, Monboddo directly opposes the orthodox Christian beliefs about the divine origin of language as a gift of God, a view that most of his colleagues and friends still subscribed to. Instead, he argued that language is not natural to man, but an acquired habit. The reason for this acquisition, as he explains in the second book, he sees in the development of social structures among early men. Only when humans started to interact in a social group did the need to communicate arise, and with that, language.

The discussion of the orang-utan, the link between man and not-man, is also a link between these two arguments, an in-between that is not easy to locate in several senses. While in the first edition of 1773 it forms the last part of the first book, in the second edition, one year later, an edition that Monboddo heavily revised mainly to answer his numerous critics, he considerably enlarges his arguments and positions them at the beginning of the second book. In both cases, though, he remains unchanged on his principal point: that the orang-utan is of the same species as man.

They are exactly of the human form; walking erect, not upon all-four, […] they use sticks for weapons; they live in society; they make huts of branches of trees, and they carry off negro girls, whom they make slaves of, and use both for work and pleasure […]. [F]rom the particulars above mentioned it appears certain, that they are of our species. (Burnett 1773, 174-5)
He remains adamant on this position through the storm of criticism and ridicule that he was subjected to, defiantly maintaining two decades later in 1795, in the fourth volume of his second major work, *Antient Metaphysics*: “Of his being a man, there never was the least doubt entertained” (Burnett 1795, 25).

Monboddo was, of course, not the first author to speculate on the kinship of primates and humans. Already in 1690, in Book III of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke considered those “creatures in the world that have shapes like ours, but are hairy, and want language and reason” but suspects them to be different in their essence for this very reason. And nine years later, in 1699, Edward Tyson publishes a book about his dissection of a chimpanzee that Monboddo read carefully, and to which Tyson adds an essay in which he demonstrates that the “Pygmies, Satyres or Sphinges of the Antiens” are, as is stated in the subtitle, “all either Apes, or Monkeys, and not Men, as formerly pretended” (Tyson 1699). Thus, these works, though they pose similar questions, come to radically different solutions.

In this respect Monboddo differed not only from the older authors, but also from contemporaries, like the German Christoph Ludwig Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer acknowledges the outward similarities bordering on identity of the species of (savage) man and ape:

Das eigentliche Thiergeschlecht der Affen – gränzet seiner körperlichen Aehnlichkeit wegen so nahe an das Menschengeschlecht, – daß sonderheitlich zwischen dem Ersten der Affen, dem sogenannten Orangoutang oder Waldmenschen, und dem untersten der vernünftigen Menschengeschöpfe, dem wilden Neger, in beyder Vergleichung, dem äußeren Ansehen nach, fast kein Unterschied zu seyn scheinet. (Pfeiffer 1787, 1)

But he denies any real relationship, mainly because of the ape’s linguistic non-performance:

[A]ber was für eine Aehnlichkeit auch zwischen diesen Affen und einem Neger oder Hottentotten – wirklich statt haben mag; so ist der Abstand, der beyderley Geschöpfe von einander trennt, doch unermesslich, da jener weder denkt noch spricht – diese aber von innen mit dem Denken, und äußerlich mit der Sprache begabt; folglich nicht als Thiere – sondern als Menschen zu betrachten sind. (Pfeiffer 1787, 53)

A similar position is taken by the English minister John Hildrop in his *Free Thoughts upon the Brute Creation* (1743; qtd. in Douthwaite 2002, 22). But where these and authors like John Locke and the anatomist Edward Tyson had seen differences in essence, Monboddo rather argues from capabilities, in accordance with enlightenment conceptions of mankind’s infinite malleability, and with the ideal behind Rousseau’s *perfectibilité* (cf. Douthwaite 2002, 10 and 46). Monboddo makes this very clear, when he repeatedly states that what distinguishes human nature from that of the ape is not the actual possession of higher faculties, but the greater capacity of acquiring them. Though humans have an innate potential for progression, they still have to develop this potential. Therefore they *are* not humans, they have to *become* humans. This Aristotelian insistence on faculties, opposed to more essentialist Platonic arguments, is why he is not in the least disturbed by the
fact that so far no primate has actually learned the use of language, even though he at least concedes this fact to be “strange” (Burnett 1773, 175):

But, suppose he were no where to be found with the use of this faculty, I still maintain, that his being possessed of the capacity of acquiring it, by having both the human intelligence and the organs of pronunciation, joined to the dispositions and affections of his mind, mild, gentle, and humane, is sufficient to denominate him a man. (Burnett 1774, 303)

Negating an essential difference between man and ape was, of course, necessarily considered as an insult to humanity. Even much less radical ventures in this direction had come under attack earlier. Carl Linnaeus was attacked for the sheer fact that he grouped *homo sapiens* together with ‘subhuman’ monsters and the lesser primates. Voltaire had called Rousseau’s *Discours sur [...] l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), on which Monboddo strongly relies in his arguments, Rousseau’s “second book against the human race” (qtd. in Hall 2005, 126). Monboddo as well provoked his share of outrage. James Beattie, for example, wrote to Elizabeth Montagu that Monboddo had “gone further in brutifying human nature than any other author, ancient or modern” (qtd. in Cloyd 1972, 47). Monboddo was well aware of the antagonism he would incite, as he expresses both in his published work and in his private correspondence. In the *Antient Metaphysics* he writes:

> There are, I know, many, who will think this progress of man, from a quadruped and an Ourang Outang to men such as we see them now a days, very disgraceful to the species. But they should consider their own progress as an individual. (Burnett 1795, 32).

And in a letter to his friend James Harris, the author of *Hermes*, in 1772, he concedes:

> I believe that I shall be thought by many to have sunk our nature too low. For though nobody has a higher idea than I of Human Nature, when it is improved by the Arts of Life and exalted by Science and Philosophy, I cannot conceive it – before the invention of language – to have been in a state much superior to that of the brute. (qtd. in Knight 1900, 73)

He put a lot of effort into further defending his positions against the accusation of irreligion through the second edition of the first volume, adding more material on the orang-utan and on instances of variety among the human species, but the success of these efforts was rather limited, and the changes hardly improved the work, since it needed nothing less than a further addition of material.

The orang-utan, for Monboddo, is man, but man at a very early stage, one in which he has not yet developed his potential (cf. Lovejoy 1933, 278). And the most significant potential not yet developed was, of course, language. For most thinkers of the time, and Monboddo among them, the edges of humanity were guarded by language. The importance that is put on language in the definition of the human is illuminatingly expressed in the anecdote, attributed to Diderot, of the French prelate, the Cardinal de Polignac, who is said to have dared a chimpanzee at the Jardin du Roi: “Speak, and I will baptise you.” Monboddo writes in *Origin:*
[W]ithout the use of reason and speech we have no pretensions to humanity, nor can with any propriety be called men; but must be contended to rank with the other animals here below” (Burnett 1773, 2).

It is this insistence on language that ties together the two directions from which Monboddo closed in on the edges of humanity, because his theories do not only have a strong inclusive conception of who could become human, but also an exclusive tendency that defines the so-called savage out of humanity. In a very revealing passage, he mentions in direct connection “an Ouran Outang, or a mute savage” (Burnett 1773, 186) as showing humanity in its potentiality, something that is not yet human, but could become so through acquiring language.

2. Related but Distant: Savages and *hominis feri*

Because he approaches the edges of humanity from both sides, Monboddo is employing classification leading towards the human as well as away from him. Thus, he not only includes countless examples of animals with “all degrees of sociability and skill” (Cloyd 1972, 68), among them the beaver and the orang-utan, but includes also groups within the category of man that lack these degrees, more or less. While promoting the highest of animals, he at the same time degraded what he saw as the lowest of men in a proto-racist way.

For his hierarchy of races the armchair anthropologist Monboddo, who almost completely relied on travel accounts as scientific sources, followed the contemporary Eurocentric position that measured all ethnic groups unknown to them firmly against themselves, and that saw at the very bottom of the scale the Aborigines of Australia (called New-Hollanders at the time) (cf. Strong 1986, 175). The four-stage model of Enlightenment anthropology that consisted of hunting, pastoralism, agriculture, and commerce, seemed almost not applicable to the Australian Aborigines, according to authors like Thomas Malthus, James Cowles Pritchard, or Monboddo: “The huts of the New-Hollanders are not near so well built as those of the beavers, and serve only for a cover to the head and shoulder, as I am informed by the travellers who have lately been in that country” (Burnett 1774, 420). Undeniably, even the Aborigines could talk, while the orang-utan could not, but Monboddo qualifies this achievement by saying “I can hardly believe that they have invented it, but have learned it by intercourse with some other nation” (Burnett 1774, 421).

Besides the savages, and in some respects even more useful for Monboddo’s purposes, where the so-called wild children, that is, children who supposedly grew up wild, without any contact to other humans, and who therefore came even closer to the natural state of man than the savages. The eighteenth century was clearly fascinated by these boys and girls, and although there was only a handful of cases, they enjoyed wide-ranging coverage in articles, books and pamphlets (cf. Formigari 1974, 279), and earned their own place in anthropological taxonomy as *hominis feri*. For Monboddo, it is the muteness of the wild children that makes them so nicely comparable to the orang-utan, because they apparently share the same “organs of pronunciation,” but did not acquire language, because there was no one teaching
them: “of all those savages which have been caught in different parts of Europe, not one had the use of speech, though they had all the organs of pronunciation such as we have them” (Burnett 1773, 172-3).

The wild child Monboddo was most strongly involved with was Marie-Angélique Leblanc. Leblanc was most likely a Sioux from the Wisconsin area, who had been bought by a French woman as a small child, and then transported via Labrador to France. There she must have managed to escape, and spent some years alone in the woods, until she was sighted in September 1731 close to the village of Songi, clothed in rags and wielding a short club. She was captured once more, and then underwent a rigorous process of civilization in which she acquired the French language, but lost her amazing strength and agility as well as her teeth; a process that ended in a convent with the reclusive life of a nun, only now and then interrupted by visitors who had been made curious by one of the numerous sensational pamphlets that recounted her life. One of these visitors was Monboddo.

In his writings, he uses the wild children, and especially Leblanc, as the link between ape and human. In his *Antient Metaphysics* he writes about Leblanc:

> The last step of this progression I likewise saw, and it was a great one. It was the wild girl [...] who came from a country where the people had learned to articulate very imperfectly indeed, but sufficiently to communicate their wants and desires. (Burnett 1795, 33)

Through the wild children, Monboddo was able to complete his system of uneasy classification, proving that the great chain of being held, but at the same time effectively blurring the edges of humanity. As Julia Douthwaite writes: “By stressing the parallel between the wild girl’s bestial traits and the orangutan’s human traits, Monboddo revealed the permeability of the classification of ‘man’ and ‘beast.’” The taming of Leblanc “resembles a journey through evolutionary time – an evolution that is not physical but social” (Douthwaite 2002, 46), and, one has to add, linguistic.

### 3. Romantic Apes

This questioning of the edges of humanity through the discussion of natural men, whether they be wild children, savages, or apes, inspired, some twenty years and not a few illusions about mankind’s *perfectibilité* later, a number of fictional treatments of the “cultivated ape.” Some of these allusions were rather passing in character, as in Isaac D’Israeli’s satirical novel *Flim-Flams! or, The Life and Errors of My Uncle and the Amours of My Aunt!* (1805), where the Shandean narrator tells how his uncle Jacob, among his many follies, attempted to educate an orangutan to be a Christian.

Similarly short is the apish appearance in William Jerdan’s *Six Weeks at Long’s, By a Late Resident* from 1817 (for discussion of the authorship cf. Dyer 2006, 189). This novel, “a sort of portrait gallery of London society” (Joukovsky 1980), has a caricature of Shelley in the character of Periwinkle, who is thus introduced into the narrative:
There comes Mr. Periwinkle, the atheist, who brought up an ape in the country, with the idea of making it speak and act as a human creature. He believes, with Monboddo, that apes are a species of men; and, in short, has so little reason, feeling, knowledge, or virtue, that he once went to [l]oggerheads with a deist; and because he was worsted in the argument, took revenge, by seducing both his daughters! (Jerdan 1817, II, 200)

Later, he is talking about the death of this ape, “a most interesting creature, who was developing prodigious powers of sagacity and human intellect, when the everlasting sleep seized him” (Jerdan 1817, III, 8). Periwinkle then reads an epitaph he has composed on the ape, where he turns the idea of the ape’s propensity for imitation around, so that “men to mimic them appear. / The beaux [...] Resemble monkies, and their shapes / Are most excessively like apes” (Jerdan 1817, III, 10). The company is not amused, and quickly turns to other topics. Only three weeks later and thus excluding the possibility of simple imitation (cf. Joukovsky 1980), Thomas Love Peacock’s second novel *Melincourt* was published, where another parody of Shelley is to be found, and where the cultivated ape and the theories of Lord Monboddo take centre stage.

Peacock who, in the words of Marilyn Butler, “has never persuaded the world of his seriousness” (Butler 1979, 2), followed his first, comparatively light-spirited novel *Headlong Hall* two years later with *Melincourt*, written during the most intensive phase of his friendship with Percy Shelley. This, together with a number of other indicators, might quickly lead the reader who is familiar with Peacock to suspect that the main protagonist of the novel, Sylvan Forrester, is a precursor of *Nightmare Abbey*’s Scythrop Glowry and also modelled on Shelley. But while they share some characteristics, the more immediate model in this case is James Burnett, Lord Monboddo himself.¹ Many of his personal habits are shared by the Scottish judge, and he is made to voice countless opinions from Monboddo’s works, especially his *Origin of Languages* and his *Antient Metaphysics* (cf. Butler 1979, 77). Thus a person in the novel characterizes Forrester as “always railing at civilized life, and always holding forth in praise of savages and original men” (Peacock 1963, II, 118). And while the savages have no fictional representative in the novel, Forrester’s best friend and constant companion is an ape, an ape with the most accomplished and polite manners, whom he makes first a baronet, and later, in a brilliant satire on the British electoral system, an MP, and who goes by the name of Sir Oran Haut-Ton.

Though Shelley was in this case less present as a fictional character, he was still very present during the course of the work’s composition, and not least because of the poet’s strong influence, the novel became much more weighty than its predecessor, both in terms of the seriousness of its subject matter, the level of political anger that is being displayed, and, unfortunately, its sheer size. Almost all commentators on the novel have agreed that it is too long, weighed down by a slow-moving tail of long conversations after the goal of the main action of the plot,

¹ Shelley himself was also influenced by Monboddo. He ordered the *Origin* from his bookseller on December 24, 1812. Cf. Notopoulos 1944. Joukovsky 1980 discusses Shelley’s potential belief in Monboddo’s ideas about the humanity of apes.
the union of the hero and heroine Sir Forrester and Anthelia Melincourt, is all but accomplished. A comment like that made by Felix Felton, that “[t]hose who skip Melincourt skip some of the best of Peacock” (Felton 1973, 120) sounds like a rather desperate attempt to save what is of worth in the novel from the experience of reading it.

But if there is a general agreement about the novel’s weaknesses, there is an even more unanimous agreement about one of its strengths, namely the character of Sir Oran Haut-Ton. Praise for the creation of Sir Oran begins with the earliest assessments of the novel. The reviewer of the Literary Gazette, for example, writes that “In truth, this ape […] is the most conspicuous character in the work, and we should almost say, the hero of it” (Anonymous 1817, 132). More recent critics echo this view, calling Sir Oran “the most memorable and amiable of Peacock’s characters” (Butler 1979, 77) and the story of his election to Parliament “[t]he high points of the book” (Burns 1985, 48).

Sir Oran Haut-Ton, who is chivalrous, a hearty drinker and a talented flute player, certainly seems to have acquired every human skill—except speech. He is the only one that remains silent in a novel of conversations in whose very form heteroglossia is firmly and unmistakably inscribed. All of Peacock’s novels are multi-voiced, with their tendency towards pure dialogue and controversial discussions. In most cases, the rather thin romance plot is frequently interrupted by elaborate disputes on any conceivable topic, from the relationship of sugar consumption and the slave trade to the evils of paper money, critical reviewing and the gradual improvement or degeneracy of mankind. For all the different opinions in these domineering dialogues the author creates fictional embodiments, who are seldom much more than walking mouthpieces. They are usually based on one or more real life persons, and Peacock is extracting and adapting them both from personal experience and from their published works. These characters are usually identical with the opinions they express, most of them diametrically opposed to each other, and most of the time they do nothing else but talk and, occasionally, drink. The viewpoint of the satirist in this verbal and carnivalesque marketplace of opinion is very hard to pin down and thus poses a constant vexation for many of his critics. This might, for example, be the reason behind Mills’ more negative view on Sir Oran, whom he sees as “a clumsy way of introducing the qualities of the Natural Man” (Mills 1969, 99). In Mills’s opinion, with the creation of Sir Oran, “Peacock wavers between the serious and farcical, attempting irreconcilables” (Mills 1969, 99). Unwilling to credit the ambivalence as a necessary element, he has to judge it as a fault.

In the case of Forrester and Monboddo, the situation is complicated even further, because here Peacock adds another or a different layer of heteroglossia through his excessive use of footnotes. While he usually incorporates verbal quotations from other authors directly into the conversations of his characters, whenever Forrester voices opinions derived from Monboddo, what he says is repeated through quotations from Monboddo, and sometimes Rousseau, in footnotes that more often than not fill more than half the page. Determining a clear relationship
between all these voices is all but impossible. Disregarding the footnotes, though, will necessarily lead to heavy misreading, as Lord Byron proved, when he falsely supposed after a rather careless perusal of the novel (he even forgot the title later on), that the character of Sir Oran was based on the tame bear that Byron had held when at Cambridge.\footnote{Peacock denied this supposition unmistakably: “I thought neither of Lord Byron’s bear nor of Caligula’s horse. But Lord Byron was much in the habit of fancying that all the world was spinning on his pivot” (qtd. in Joukovsky 2001, 187). Interestingly, a similar connection was made by Jerdan, where Periwinkle’s epitaph is followed by the description of Lord Leander, about his friendship with a bear (Jerdan 1817, 11).}

It is equally not enough to say, as Butler does, that the footnotes “are surely meant to seem engagingly dotty” (Butler 1979, 76). For Bryan Burns the function of these footnotes is “to tease the reader, to make him uneasy as to the links between fact and fiction” (Burns 1985, 55). But furthermore, it can hardly be by chance that this multiplication of voices inevitably happens whenever the one single character among Peacock’s numerous and very often over-eloquent creations is mentioned, who never utters a single word. The question of language, of speech, is still very much at the centre of the discussion of man, natural or not.

Most critics read Sir Oran as an authentic character. Thus, Burns explains his violent outburst at the farcical election by referring to his psychology: “something within him repudiates the charade in which he has been involved” (Burns 1985, 61). Yet Sir Oran is, like the other characters in Peacock, much less a realistically drawn person than an artificial entity constructed of discourse, of ideas and opinions. And unlike the others, he is twice removed from the immediacy of speech, and through that of any claim to authenticity: not only does he not have a voice of his own, he is, as the footnotes make clear, constructed not of spoken, but written discourse.

Also, one has to remember that the main source text for Sir Oran, Monboddo’s writing, is methodically characterized by nothing so much as by his naïve and stubborn credulity in the veracity of his sources, all written texts themselves. Monboddo constantly cites as scientific evidence travel narratives that date all the way back to Herodotus. And finally, one should also consider the name of Sir Oran Haut-Ton, the comic potential of which is derived out of the disparity between its spoken and its written form. Thus Sir Oran, the supposedly most natural man, becomes the most mediated through texts, and therefore the most unnatural.\footnote{This could be contrasted productively with E.T.A. Hoffmann’s text about the cultivated ape Milo from his Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier, published three years earlier. Milo is, in many respects, the opposite of Peacock’s Sir Oran. Though he shares the former’s story of capture and subsequent learning, he is not only able to master the acquisition of language easily, but also that of writing. Thus, he is able to tell his story himself. In Monboddo through Peacock, language would have been, for the monkey, the ultimate outward expression of his essential humanity – an expression that neither the real nor the fictional one is ever able to make. In Hoffmann’s story, the actual and practical language acquisition might not be a problem for the ape – but then it is also no real answer to the question of essential humanity. Rather, language as well as polite manners is here seen as nothing but apish imitation – an imitation that, instead of expressing man’s essential humanity, tries to veil the fact of his essential animality.}
This doubting of language through mediation seems to be very much opposed to the proselytizing spirit of Peacock’s text-derived dialogues with their seemingly Shellean hopes of improving mankind by persuading them of ‘the truth.’ It seems opposed, but only if one hopes to distil out of Peacock’s heteroglossia one single, unified authorial position, a ‘real key to Peacock,’ one that not only identifies different and opposed speakers and sources, but also gives their synthesis. But the never-ending dialogicity of Peacock’s novels defies any such closure, denying his readers any ‘real’ characters behind their speech performances, thus making language essential to humans, but also hardly expressive of any essential humanity. Sir Oran marks a high point in this play with language and the ideas (or ideals) of humanity, a play that contains a chain of supplementation of written texts that centres on the absence of any language: muteness.

Peacock puts a pseudo-scientific “learned ape,” a construction of written text, into the plot of the usually fantastical genre of a romance. Insofar as he uses the relationship between primates, humans, and language to investigate the edges of humanity, he shares a common ground with Monboddo. But where Monboddo’s scientific earnestness had opened him, unintentionally, to ironic readings and to ridicule, the irony is already deeply inscribed into Peacock’s fictional reworking of the theme. Where Monboddo sees capabilities and perfectibilité, Peacock sees inadequacies and the grotesque. Where Monboddo cites to create scientific authenticity, Peacock’s use of citation is an extra-layer of his irony. Thus, when the learned ape is transposed from pseudo-science to fiction, the insult to humanity develops into something that is not less cutting, but much more entertaining: a good laugh.

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