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Review of: Julia V. Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Man and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment*

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of a wide range of ideas and texts, but I wonder if he might not have written a better book if, instead of painting with this broad brush, he had sat himself down to extended explication of fewer novels in order to show more than he does at the micro-textual level how his notions of mimesis and knowledge actually and fully play out.

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Julia V. Douthwaite. *The Wild Girl, Natural Man and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. xiii+314pp. US$19; 13.50UK. ISBN 0-226-16056-4.

The Yahoos of the fourth book of *Gulliver's Travels* present an enigma, for it is not certain whether they are the degenerate offspring of European castaways, or autochthonous monsters. Gulliver is never sure how to express this, whether what he has found is a perfect human figure that arouses his horror and astonishment, in all its native nastiness, or its defaced and corrupt descendant, with its sins inscribed on its body. The satire, if satire it is, constantly points at the connections between the gestures of these ape-like creatures and the behaviour of courtiers, lawyers, and politicians, posing the question of priority. Are the beast-like humans the original of humanity, or the repulsive end of it; are the members of civil society the perfection of human nature, or its scandal? Or is there no difference, and is one as bad as the other? And if so, are animals such as horses better than humans?

The enigma haunts the eighteenth century. Although various answers are proposed, the problem reappears as intractably as ever in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* a hundred years later. Whether the manufactured monster is the gruesome and evil outcome of Victor Frankenstein's mistaken attempt to perfect the human figure, or whether it is an abused but unattractive example of primal innocence, are conjectures the novel airs but cannot resolve. In the course of the century, Julia Douthwaite shows, there were many attempted solutions, falling either side of the gap dividing primitivists from perfectionists. Rousseau is the best known of the primitivists. Believing that each stage of the growth of civil society marks a deeper level of corruption among its citizens, Rousseau espoused a theory of education that depended on a hermetic seal between the pupil and society. Thus Émile is taught what is important to humanity while remaining ignorant of what would despoil him of his nature. Rousseau's *Émile ou l'education* (1762) was followed by many

novels about the isolated education of innocents, of which the most famous is Bernardin de St Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788), a creole romance about two young people growing up in the remotest part of Mauritius, absorbing simple lessons of truth and nature. Beaurieu's *L'Élève de la nature* (1763), translated into English ten years later as *The Man of Nature*, follows the same pattern. But in subsequent explorations of solitude as a scene of pedagogy, notably Rousseau's own continuation of *Émile, Émile et Sophie, ou les solitaires* (1780), the results are most unsatisfactory. Sophie proves unfaithful to Émile, and he abandons her and their child. Richard Lovell Edgeworth, father of the novelist, raised his own son Richard like Émile, and he turned out wilful, dissipated, and unhappy. It was such an unfortunate experiment that he set to work with his daughter to produce *Practical Education* (1801), which set out the virtues of a large and socially well-adjusted family as the proper sphere of childraising. The unhappy effect of young people subjected to solitude is, of course, the theme of many Gothic novels, and Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy* (1795) combines the two genres in order to mount a critique of Rousseau similar to Wollstonecraft's. By this time, there was a strong tradition of novels about education, such as Mme de Genlis's *Adèle et Theodore* (1782), and Reveroni de St Cyr's *Pauliska* (1798), which either defend traditional forms of education as necessary methods of improving the young, or expose the horrors of perverse experiments on humans.

Rousseau had been preceded by fictional representations of the advantages of isolation, notably *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and John Kirkby's *Automathes* (1745), and these likewise moved speculations about human nature in two directions. The recovery of innocence on a desert island was a potent myth, but so was degeneration. Lord Monboddo cited Alexander Selkirk, Crusoe's real-life model, as an example of how degeneration occurs under the effects of solitude: losing language, gaining physical agility, and becoming in every respect more like an animal. Monboddo was fascinated by the story of the wild girl of Chalons, another example of a human in the wild exhibiting all the attributes of a feral beast, for it made his case (later to be made more successfully by Charles Darwin) that no impermeable or essential divisions exist between the higher animals and humans. Douthwaite offers a fine account of the wild children that came to public notice in the eighteenth century, including Peter the Wild Boy, who was brought to England in 1726, the year Swift published *Gulliver's Travels*, and who was examined by Swift's fellow Scriblerian John Arbuthnot.

Another advantage of Douthwaite's book lies in the broad division she maps out between, on the one hand, thinkers such as Linnaeus and de Sade, who believed powerfully (although for very different reasons) in the stable and unchangeable forms of nature, and, on the other, those such as Condillac and Monboddo, who used Ovidian metamorphosis as the archetype of natural mutability. Linnaeus understood the divisions between species

to be definite and limited, but evidence from the South Seas brought back by Philibert Commerson and later by Darwin bore out the intuitions of Monboddo, who had foretold that the metamorphosis of species would be confirmed by austral discoveries. In a book with that very title, Restif de la Bretonne celebrated the community of humans and orangutans.

It seems to be a fundamental point of difference between the giants of the Enlightenment whether humans and the human character could be changed by circumstances of climate, geography, transplantion, or solitude, and whether speciation was a perpetual process or the basic outlines of humans and all other species were settled and immutable. Montesquieu, Monboddo, Raynal, and Diderot stand on one side; Hume, Thomas Jefferson, de Sade, and Linnaeus on the other. Douthwaite is to be praised for setting this difference in such a broad spectrum of contexts, so well detailed and so full of hints for further reading. The narrative she offers, however, is necessarily circular, from Gulliver's Yahoos to Frankenstein's monster. Once it became possible for enlightened human beings to consider their capacity for change, and the degree that change might be controlled by themselves, the myth of original innocence seems to mock, and be mocked by, the dream of perfectible humanity. It is perhaps not surprising that the century should witness the rise of theriophily, now known as animal rights, a movement in favour of sympathy with animals that seems coincident with the most profound doubts about the humanity of humans.

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Susan C. Greenfield. *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002. 227pp. US$34.95. ISBN 0-8143-2992-6.

The essays that made up Susan Greenfield's (co-edited) *Inventing Maternity* (1999) demonstrated the malleability of the sentimental, devoted maternal figure. Besides convincing us that one of our richest cultural symbols, the maternal body, is perpetually reinvented, this analysis influentially maintained that motherhood remains a contested site of political discourse.

Addressing the representation of the mother-daughter bond in early novels, the volume under discussion here is a natural extension of this argument. Again Greenfield proceeds from the assumption—which has become codified, partially owing to her own earlier work—that the maternal body is culturally constructed for political purposes. *Mothering Daughters*