Reign of the Beast

The Atheist World of W. D. Saull and his Museum of Evolution

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Cover illustration: A spoof of the "Devil's Chaplain", the Rev. Robert Taylor (left, on the podium). His patron, the atheist Richard Carlile, is seen on the right, landing a punch. The wine merchant W. D. Saull funded both men and grounded his evolutionary talks in their dissident sciences. Such pastiches reinforced the prejudices of pious readers, by depicting the moral rot caused by irreligion. The wall posters on the left advertize contraception manuals and licentious memoirs, and a lecture by "Miss Sharples", Carlile's common-law "wife". Taylor's character is being impugned by portraying the mayhem caused by his infidel oratory. Beyond the brawling and debauchery, thieves are shown in the audience (bottom right) and a dagger-wielding agitator (centre). In reality, Taylor's congregations were respectable and attentive.
Etching, in the author's possession, entitled "The Triumph of Free Discussion" (the motto of Carlile's Fleet Street shop selling subversive prints). The caption reads, "A Sketch taken in the Westminster Cock Pit on Wednesday the 24th. of September 1834. Subject A Lecture by the Revd R. Taylor, A.B.M.R.C.S. 'On the importance of Character'."
Cover design by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

9. Damned Monkeys

His wink impertinent, his saucy stare,
His grin ridiculous, his careless air,
His more than idiot vacancy of face,
His monkey arts, and baboon-like grimace.

William Benbow in *Crimes of the Clergy*, adding insult to injury, satirizing a debauched bishop.[1]

For many, it was the monkey that ratcheted up the real horror. The concept of 'monkey' came with a lot of unsavoury baggage, particularly in the years preceding Saull's 1833 shock. No creature, bar the serpent, came with more evil biblical report, and that, mixed with rampant anthropocentrism, coloured the popular perception. It was perfect for spoofing, and often the pompous were the satirical butt. One archetypal joke, long circulating in middle-class circles about London Zoo's wanderoo monkey, exquisitely captured this: the black monkey whipped off the wig of a passing bishop, which it then "profanely transferred from the sacred poll to his own".[2] To make a monkey of a bishop touched on so many uncomfortable themes. But this Gillrayish image ultimately underscored the more than metaphorical irreverence of the monkey's grimacing, human-aping world. Of course, the gibbering, pilfering, comical image made monkeys perfect subjects in political satire.

Even *John Bull* had undergone a face change from stout-hearted yeoman to a broad grimacing baboon.[3] But more usually the radical point was a lack of morality displayed by ministers and macaques alike. As the sharp-tongued Eliza Sharples said at the Rotunda, Court and Church were like Bartholomew Fair, a "raree-show ... with a

1 Benbow 1823, 82.
2 [Broderip] 1838, 92; Broderip 1847, 242.
3 Parolin 2010, 129.

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large number of monkeys, gorgeously dressed menials, clamour and clangour, confusion and cheat, and a general waste of time."[4] One serio-comedy running among co-operators had "monkey, king, or bishop" as glutinous consumers, producing nothing, but stealing their fellows blind.[5] The blunt moral of filching monkeys as a metaphor for capitalist thieves or debauched bishops was recycled endlessly.[6] So if monkeys *had* evolved into men, the progress towards morality had been palpable, and it was destined to be extended into an Owenite future.

The city itself provided a distorting lens through which urban monkeys were judged. They were the slum dweller's accomplice, the degenerate drunk, the pomposity-pricking mimic. They were ceasing even to seem exotic.[7] Jerry the Satyr (showman's slang for a gaudy-faced mandrill) was a favourite at Cross's Menagerie. Here he sat in a chair with his "glass of sling", puffing on a pipe, an "odious ... looking monster".[8] Complaints were common that the streets were "infested" with vagabond Italian boys, picking up pennies grinding organs with their monkeys.[9] Decent women feared to walk alone in the Strand or Pall Mall, because of the "blackguardism that ... crowded round the barrel-organ and the monkey".[10] Monkeys thus became associated with 'street arabs', as they would soon be slated, and the menacing poor.

Even worse were the fighting dens, where baboons, with their ferocious canines, were pitted against bull-terriers. The most famous in the 1820s, Jacco Maccacco, tore apart a succession of prize-fighting dogs at the Westminster pit. Here the classes were forced to mix promiscuously—the mingling scene was even painted by Landseer, and a Cruikshank print shows swells and rabble crowding round the scene of

4 *Isis* 1 (8 Sept. 1832): 474.
5 W. Thompson 1824, 199–200.
6 *Union* 1 (1 Apr. 1842): 4–5; *NMW* 8 (8 Aug. 1840): 90; *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-Operator* (24 Dec. 1831): 4–5; *Crisis* 2 (24 Aug. 1833): 267–68.
7 On the influx of exotic animals into Victorian England, largely as a result of empire, most ending up in aristocratic hands, see Simons 2012; Grigson 2016.
8 Anon. 1830, 216–17; Broderip 1847, 94. In 1831, when the menagerie moved from its "murky dens" to the leafy Surrey Zoological Gardens in Walworth, the "hard drinking" Jerry died within months, a symbol of old debauchery paving the way for Victorian sobriety (*Mirror of Literature* 19 [5 May 1832]).
9 J. T. Smith 1839, 135; C. Knight 1841, 1: 422–23; Mcallister 2013.
10 C. Knight 1864, 2: 26–27. Visitors were astonished at such "sights of daily occurrence" (An American 1839, 50).

carnage.[11] The shrieking spectators comprised the gamut from dustmen and lamp-lighters to "honourables, sprigs of nobility, M.P.'s, ... all in one rude contact, jostling and pushing against each other."[12] Monkeys were forcing class 'miscegenation' at these bloody contests, tearing aside barriers as they tore apart dogs, which made them even more socially suspect. Judgmental attitudes and a civilizational yardstick meant that monkeys came off badly, particularly the "savage Baboon, whose gross brutality is scarcely relieved by a single spark of intelligence".[13] They were culture-debasing, class-mongrelizing creatures, perfect evolutionary grist perhaps for co-operative "scum", but disdained by polite society. When the Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres fell on hard times, the sawdust arenas returned, and, to the disgust of cultured patrons, melodramas and Shakespeare gave way to mandrills and acrobats.[14] What Saull saw as monkey stealth promising a brighter human future, the literati saw as the ever-present threat of social degeneration.

At the new Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park, monkeys were symbolic of the safely caged 'lower' orders. Gentility was the hallmark of the promenading Gardens, not surprisingly because aristocrats were partly responsible for the zoo's founding in 1826.[15] The riff-raff were excluded, the gate fee of 1*s* ensured that.[16] Even then, visitors had to have a Fellow's recommendation. Thus in leafy surroundings, the well-heeled could stroll in peace, "without that nasal offence whereby one is always afflicted in confined collections." And behind bars were the monkeys, different species crammed together pell-mell "like slum-dwellers", and they behaved accordingly, frequently attacking one another.[17]

If disgusting monkeys were becoming better known, apes were another matter. In 1833, when Saull was lecturing, few Londoners had ever seen one.[18] Even then only two types were known, the chimpanzee

11 George 1952, 478.
12 Egan 1821, 258–62; J. Brown 1858, 315–17.
13 E. T. Bennett 1829, 141–42, 144; Ritvo 1987, 34.
14 Tristan 1980, 180.
15 Desmond 1985a, 153ff; Åkerberg 2001, 64–68.
16 Minutes of Council, Zoological Society, London, MS, 1 (5 May 1826 to 4 Aug. 1830), ff. 27, 39; Desmond 1985a, 228–29; Åkerberg 2001, 77; Cruchley [1831], 101–03. On the opening up of the gardens from the 1840s, see R. Jones 1997.
17 Charman 2016, 102; Mudie 1836 2: 310.
18 A baby orang-utan had been exhibited in Piccadilly in 1831. Its demeaning caricature of humanity was so off-putting to one "lady of quality" that she turned

and orang-utan, and no adult of either had been seen alive in town. The few tiny tots that had been brought by sea captains and exhibited before the later 1830s had quickly perished in the cold.[19] Those that did survive for a while, like the zoo's chimpanzee Tommy, in 1836, were dressed up and forced into human ways, in his case in a Guernsey shirt (necessary as much for contemporary modesty as warmth), but unseemly clothes merely enhanced his lowly human-mimicking status.[20] Only privileged visitors—aristocrats, savants, and reporters—were allowed behind the scenes to see him, and the eighteen-month-old caused a sensation in the penny dreadfuls. He engendered queasy feelings because of his wrinkly, hairy, parody of a human face. Even the zoo's sympathetic vet confessed he had to overcome his feeling of "dislike, and almost of loathing, when he paid him his usual morning visit".[21] It was the same with the zoo's succession of baby orangs, the first of which went on display in 1837.[22] Away from the public gaze, these babies were 'presented' to aristocrats as one would 'present' a dolled-up commoner at court. One was even 'presented' to Queen Victoria, although, as if to show that class connotations extended to the simian orders, the keeper did not put on her cap, "as he was afraid it might be thought vulgar".[23]

A perceived coarseness was ever-present in these accounts of apes, something enhanced by their working-class clothing, artisan's cap, and sailor's shirt.[24] It was exacerbated by accounts of the ape's amoral behaviour, which called up derogatory images of the 'visceral' working classes. Stupidity also marked them out for some. The aping came without intelligence. London Zoo's vet—himself an expert on domestic

her face: *Cosmopolite*, 19 Jan. 1833, in HO 64/18, f. 734.

19 [Rennie] 1838, 1:63; W. C. L. Martin 1841, 403, 408; Youatt 1836.

20 On dressing apes and forcing human behaviours on them, Ritvo 1987, 31.

21 Youatt 1836, 273.

22 The first was a three-year-old, bought on 25 November 1837 for £105, only to die on 28 May 1839: "Occurrences at the Gardens", Zoological Society, London, MS, 28 May 1839. The ZS had had a baby orang before, but it died before it could be shown: *Proceedings of the Committee of Science and Correspondence of the Zoological Society of London*, Part 1 (1830–1831), 4, 9, 28, 67.

23 Rev. R. S. Owen, 1894 1:193–4; Scherren 1905, 85. On the divergent perception of orang-utans, caged and wild: van Wyhe and Kjærgaard 2015.

24 In the *True Sun* (16 May 1834, 3), an image of a Guernsey shirt under a "threadbare frock" coat was used to spoof the "Gentlemen's Fashions for May", which shows how unseemly such apparel was. *NMW* 9 (6 Feb. 1841): 78, pictured a smuggler in one; Mayhew 1861–62, 1:66.

animals—thought Tommy's mental capacity no higher than a farm animal's.[25] Charles Lyell would not even give apes a dog's sagacity, but then he had probably never seen an orang and he was grinding an anti-Lamarckian axe.[26] The dog was the yardstick of intelligence: obedient and devoted, even 'spiritual'—something that could never be said of apes. Some were even comforted to think that their dogs would join them in heaven.[27] There *were* naturalists who spoke up for the tiny ape's "prudence and forethought".[28] But even this came with a caveat. It only applied to the mentally agile young—with age, and a growing bestial physiognomy, the adult chimpanzee becomes "nothing else but an animal, gross, brutal, and untractable".[29]

Probably it made sense to Saull, depicting dim, servile, thieving, hovel-apes perfecting into smart, moral Owenite autodidacts. But high society, with its heraldic pomp and respectable ancestry, looked for something more regal in its blood line and was hardly going to be receptive. In 1830, as Saull started his evolutionary talks, Satyrs and Troglodytes were often little more than freak-show exhibits; the growing trade in freaks—side-show abnormals pushed aside as grotesque and exploited as "not 'us'"[30]—only confirmed their status. Cartoonists would make great play of apes in their lampoons of national hate figures: negroes, Irishmen, revolutionists, and so on.[31] Apes themselves were something to be despised. These mimics were playing tricks with accepted norms. To say, as Saull did, that they were actually our grand-parents disrupted the fixed social boundaries. He was trying irrationally and suspiciously to make an ostracized hate-figure into a family relative, which, if nothing else, was unabashed social effrontery.

For Saull's infidel cadre a sub-artisan ancestor was acceptable: it showed progress as the ape was pulled up by its bootstraps.[32] But to the

25 Youatt 1836, 274; Ritvo 1987, 35–39 on the competing claims of dogs and apes.
26 C. Lyell 1830–33, 2: 61.
27 Epps [1875], 558, 560–61.
28 Rennie 1838, 70; Broderip 1835, 164.
29 *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* 30 (Jan. 184): 7; Richard Owen 1835, 354–55.
30 Tromp 2008, x.
31 Curtis 1997, 102. For an attack by the Chartist Henry Vincent on a hated dignitary, the Mayor of Newport, for his simian looks and moral defects (accompanied by a woodcut picturing him as a chimpanzee), see Scriven 2012, 178.
32 Saull's friend, Pierre Baume, was to buy a monkey himself years later: Cooter (in press) *The Man Who Ate his Cats*, ch. 19; Holyoake 1906, 1: 219.

upper crust, the notion that they had climbed from ragged-trousered satyr to Hetherington's "scum" to get where they were was repellent. Contemporary images of the immoral and irrational ape, mocking the divine countenance, made casting it as a blood relation an uphill struggle. Apes were grotesqueries with a dimmed intelligence, a thieving nature, and a farcical face, creatures sculpted in jest, as Smith seemed to imply, or in blasphemous derision.

If anything, the monkey image was even worse for men of the cloth at this moment, for biblical exegetics suggested that apes might even have a Satanic strain to them.

From Suspect to Satanic—A *Monkey* Bible

The monkey's religious reputation was plummeting. Satyrs had always been the hairy demons of the Bible, a sickening amalgam of man and beast, and monkey satyrs had long been in bad theological odour. In medieval manuscripts and bestiaries, they had a malevolent aura, but the ape's meaning had slowly transformed through the centuries. Portrayed initially as Lucifer, even as the tempter Christ in the desert, the ape ended up representing a lustful sinner, the fallen man, himself hunted by Satan. As boundary creatures, they stood not only between man and a mocking, soul-less world, but between sin and redemption. However, this diabolic image had all but faded by the Renaissance, as the ape was secularized as the fool, now to be "regarded with less horror and more bemused tolerance".[33] After this, monkeys settled down to caricature the stupid side of human creation.

Then in the early nineteenth century, the monkey suddenly regained its old infernal garb. It came with the publication of perhaps the most famous biblical commentary of the century, the polyglot Wesleyan Dr Adam Clarke's eight-volume text (1810–1826). Dr Clarke was a scholar of prodigious learning, whose familiarity with ancient scripts meant that his linguistic studies took him to some startling areas. The beast that tempted Eve, the *Nachash* in Hebrew, was not a serpent, in his view. It was an ape.[34] And after tempting Eve, the orang was deprived of its

33 Lach 1970, 2: 177; Vadillo 2013.
34 A. Clarke 1837, 1: 46–47.

voice in punishment and cursed to drop onto all fours. Clarke was no ordinary Methodist. A lover of science, he pushed it rather flamboyantly into his criticism, and, quite atypically, he reached out to the gentlemen savants. Like Saull after him, he became a fellow of the Geological and Antiquaries Societies, and this engagement meant his views broke out of the narrow Wesleyan confines. His analysis was notorious among ministers and engendered volumes of heated commentary. Orientalists rejected a baboon in Eden, while among naturalists Dr Clarke's Eve-seducing ape was equally scorned.[35]

It seemed that devilry was to be added to debauchery. The Carlileans milked his cursed ape for all it was worth, and the "*monkey* Bible" in the mid-1820s had become a laughing-stock.[36] Carlile plundered Clarke mercilessly, and hardly a *Republican* went by without a citation. But it was one of Carlile's assistants who had the last laugh. The "humble mechanic" John Clarke (the Dr's namesake) was himself an ex-Methodist, and now a scoffing infidel. He too knew chapter-and-verse: "our walking Bible", they called him,[37] although, on being sentenced to Newgate prison, the "walking Bible" found himself "chained to a certain place, as Bibles of old were".[38] The 'chained Bible' made good use of his prison term. Despite the terrible conditions, he wrote a series of sixteen letters to Dr Adam Clarke. These were published piecemeal, and then as a 316-page book, known to the faithful as *Letters to Dr. Adam Clarke* (1825). The leading radical publishers brought out their own editions and the book was reprinted constantly, with a result that *Letters* became standard infidel fare and could be seen in every radical catalogue.[39] The atheists now had their own elaborately deconstructed commentary, which Carlile considered "one of the best examinations of the Bible extant".[40]

For partisans, the 'chained Bible' had bested the good Doctor. Irreverence laced with erudition marked his onslaught on the ape tempting Eve, or eating dust, or going around on its belly. His *Letters*

35 *MNH* 2 (Mar. 1829): 118; Richard Owen 1850a, 240–41; Richard Owen 1849–84, 1: 151–52. For the original criticism: Wait 1811; Bellamy 1811.
36 J. Clarke 1825, 75.
37 *Newgate Monthly Magazine* 1 (1 Oct. 1823): 61; *Republican* 10 (30 July 1824): 124. There is little on John Clarke in print; the best account is McCalman 1975, 76–78.
38 *Republican* 11 (11 Mar. 1825): 305.
39 Saull's friend James Watson printed his own edition, as did Joshua Hobson—the Owenites' printer—and James Guest in Birmingham.
40 *Republican* 14 (4 Aug. 1826): 128.

became a freethought classic, and Dr Clarke's commentary was the excuse for so many other dissidents to make a monkey of biblical exegetics.[41] Had *they* suggested that Eve was "seduced by a baboon", one atheist ventured, they would have been incarcerated for blasphemy.[42] Such was the feeling among Saull's infidel friends.

Incessant squibs meant that the sacred seemed to be being profaned by the mere mention of the word "monkey". At this moment, an infidel invoking an ancestral monkey might sound like he was jesting, as Smith hinted, or more seriously that he was invoking our satanic origins. Dr Clarke was killed by the cholera outbreak in 1832, just as Saull started promoting his monkey-man, but the revered Methodist had enabled the pauper presses to add more ignominy to the ape's sordid aura. It left mankind's monkey heraldry multiply suspect in many eyes, just as Saull was advocating it. Saull gave an unwholesome new meaning to man's fallen estate, or to being born in sin. A Satanic origin was the most damnable of all ancestries. There was something sordid, distasteful and, for the devout, sacrilegious about the suggestion, especially as it fell from the mouth of an indicted blasphemer. By racking up the profanation, Saull was making it difficult for any but ultra-materialists to join him at this moment.

41 Benbow 1823, 159; *Isis* 1 (12 May 1832): 211; *NMW* 8 (18 July 1840): 34; R. Cooper 1846, 45–46; *Reasoner* 8 (30 Jan. 1850): 25.

42 *Investigator* 1843, 10; *Reasoner* 16 (5 Feb. 1854) Supplement, 104–05.