Postgraduate English
www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english
ISSN 1756-9761

Issue 09 March 2004

Editors: Anita O'Connell and Michael Huxtable

Saki's Engagement with Evolution, Naturalism and Determinism

Nooshin Elahipanah*

* Royal Holloway, University of London

Saki's Engagement with Evolution, Naturalism and Determinism

Nooshin Elahipanah
Royal Holloway, University of London

Postgraduate English, Issue 09, March 2004

Saki's stories show an engagement with evolutionary theories and determinism from the very beginning of his career. The two short stories "Dogged" (1899) and "The Remoulding of Groby Lington" (1912) are typical in this respect. Both these works focus on decline because to Saki, the notion of evolution as a progressive development is only a delusion. Saki keeps his focus sharply on the problem of the determined self which is constrained by the society and the environment of which it is only an insignificant part. This essay will analyze the two short stories separately, then in part III the two stories will be compared and discussed in evolutionary aspects.

"Dogged",[1] Saki's first published work, which appeared in an obscure London journal *Saint Paul's* in February 1899, centres on the themes of moral degeneration and the seduction of man by evil. It is concerned with the existence of evil in the world and man's capacity for experiencing guilt. Social and religious thoughts are elaborately disguised in the symbolism of the story. If the reader is not aware of the symbolic significance, he may well read and enjoy it as a story about the attachment of a man to his pet. However, Saki embeds symbolism within his realist technique to provoke thoughts beyond the confines of the narrative.

The story begins with the name of Artemus Gibbon, a timid and dull young man who comes into the possession of a spirited fox-terrier. 'He went unsuspectingly to his undoing' (p.1) when in a church bazaar he is bullied by an implacable lady into buying the dog:

> Here it was that the Foreseen and Inevitable stepped in and changed the placid current of his life. He was pounced upon by a severe-looking dame, with an air of one being in authority, who gave him to understand that it was required of him that he should buy a dog. (p. 1).

He is shocked when he understands that the name of the dog is Beelzebub, which means devil or Satan, and also reminds one of one of the fallen angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Beelzebub is literally Ba'al Zebul, "the Lord of the mansion or high house", which refers to the God's temple or to the mountain on which the gods dwelt. Both meanings operate in Saki's story. First, the name refers to Gibbon's demonic possession which is explicitly stated in the last sentence of the story, when his friend asks him: 'Does it belong to you?' he answers: 'I belong to him, body and soul' (p.6).Secondly, it is Beelzebub the dog that is the Lord of the house. Vatter, in *The Devil in English Literature,* writes that Beelzebub, who appears in the synoptic Gospel, goes back to Phoenician fly-God Baal-zebub. In the New Testament, his name is already used synonymously with that of the Devil. Vatter also adds that the etymological derivation is from either Hebrew 'zebul' (habitation) or 'zebel' (filth).[2] The Hebrew derivation here points towards human habitation which in its broad meaning can symbolize civilization. Also it refers to habitation of the Lord. The second derivation, from 'filth' points towards the way in which the story shows moral degeneration.

Artemus is a name from the history of Christianity. Saint Marcellinus and Peter were imprisoned and suffered martyrdom about the year 304, but before their martyrdom they made new converts, including their jailer who was named Arthemius. A situational irony emerges when "Dogged" is considered in this context. This situational irony refers to the inversion of power hierarchy. "Dogged" is a conversion story, but Artemus is converted to his animal nature and set in thrall to the animal kingdom. His conversion is not a noble change but a base one, indicating a reversal of traditional values.Saki contrives a blurring of boundaries between captive and captor by making Beelzebub convert Artemus, therefore reversing the power hierarchy that can be inferred from history of the

name of Artemus.[3] The full name of the protagonist links the name of a saint with the name of an animal. Unlike his holy precursor, Saki's Artemus degenerates towards a base nature rather than evolving into a figure of transcendence and spirituality. The juxtaposition of the name of a saint with the name of an animal (Gibbon) creates an ironic blending of bestiality and spirituality.[4]

Man's descent from spiritual to animal is emphasized through a series of contrasts. Gibbon's relationship to the dog is more than a sentimental attachment to his pet. He is enslaved. The story anticipates what becomes a common theme in Saki's works, the way in which an animal changes the apparently blameless life of its owner. Before buying the dog, Gibbon is an innocent, meek young man but Beelzebub, who is tyrannical and has heroic characteristics, changes his life to dissipation and idleness. The appearance of the devil in the form of dog is reminiscent of Goethe's *Faust* in which the devil first appears as a black poodle.[5]

There are historical accounts of dogs who personified the devil, where the animal appearance shows the devil's worldliness and the animal nature of demoniac beings; but why is the devil associated with a dog? According to Ziolkowski: 'In the middle ages the ancient beliefs were simply translated into Christian terms. Dogs were attached as a symbol of loyalty to various saints, notably St. Dominic and Saint Bernard[……] Popular etymology regards the Dominican friars as the hounds of God (*domini canes)*' [6]However, Ziolkowski also considers associations between dogs and devils, noting, for example, that dogs have long played a major role in the folklore of power.'[7]Barbara Allen Woods also associates the dog with the devil. She suggests that men feared that the domesticated dog might revert to the bestial state from which it had emerged, becoming once again an evil force, all the more menacing because of its position of trust within the human community. Thus, in many medieval folktales, the devil assumes the shape of a dog in order to insinuate himself into human society.[8] The black dogs go under many names depending on which county they are in. In East Anglia andNorfolk they are called 'shuck' which can be traced back to the

old English *scucca*, meaning Demon.[9] The demon association is sometimes emphasized by the title "Devil Dog".[10] Various ancient gods are also associated with dogs, such as Hekate, Diana and Artemis.[11] The Goddess Artemis is always surrounded by her pack of hounds. Artemus in "Dogged" can also perhaps be seen as an echo of Artemis, the Greek god of hunting, wild nature and fertility whose temple at Ephesus served as both a marketplace and religious institution.[12] Similarly in "Dogged" the church with its bazaar is both a religious institution and a market place. Like Saki's Artemus who is everywhere accompanied by his fox-terrier, Artemis is also 'accompanied and appeased by dogs.'[13]

A further ironical point that emerges from disguising the devil as a dog is the fact that dogs are traditionally very obedient and faithful to humans. Frances and Richard Lockridge write:

> It is easy, indeed, to believe that the dog would very much like to be a man, just as man would like to make himself over in the image of God…This canine desire to do everything the human wishes, to shape his whole life to human rather to canine preference is naturally very gratifying to man.[14]

In "Dogged", however, it is the dog that is the master and who forces Gibbon to do as it wishes.

The story is structured by many binary oppositions. The opposition begins when Gibbon buys a dog. The spirited, active life of the dog and the dull, tame and passive life of Gibbon are contrasted. The second binary opposition is between primitive and civilized. Man's civilized self is in contrast with his animal nature. After buying the dog and bringing it to his house, Gibbon helplessly observes while the dog makes his house chaotic, as Beelzebub represents devil which is frequently identified with the principle of chaos, but Saki's ironic point is that the dog uses the elements of civilization. He is 'snugly ensconced in the only armchair' (p.2) , he settles down in a room furnished 'in a style of Bohemian extravagance' (p.3) and refuses to leave, he jumps into an

empty hansom, refusing to get out, and goes to restaurants. Ironically, the dog adopts the life style of a typical dandy[15]. It has a dandy's pretension to freedom from all human commitment and morality.[16] The reference to bohemianism suggests Saki's rejection of bourgeois values.Bohemia and dandyism often merged because they both had a similar carefree, indolent life style and seemed to belong nowhere in conventional society. They had a haughty attitude towards bourgeois life. Ada Clare, known to New York as The Queen of Bohemia, had stated in 1860:

> The Bohemian is not, like the creature of society, a victim of rules and customs; he steps over them with an easy, graceful, joyous unconsciousness, guided by the principles of good taste and feeling.[17]

And Joanna Richardson, referring to Shelley and Byron, defines Bohemian as having the right 'to escape the social system, to follow a personal moral code, to create his own environment, and develop his originality. They had asserted the right of man to live as he chose.'[18] The reference to 'Bohemian' in "Dogged" marks the beginning of a mocking attitude towards the bourgeois life and middle class which becomes a recurrent theme inSaki's stories.

Many of Saki's protagonists are dandies: for example, Reginald who is the main character of two collections of Saki's short stories *Reginald*(1904) and *Reginald in Russia* (1910), and Comus Bassington the protagonist of *The Unbearable Bassington* (1912). They live a life independent of the values of the middle-class. In following Beelzebub and living in a room furnished in a style of "Bohemian" extravagance, Gibbon in "Dogged" also gradually chooses to lead a life outside the middle-class conventions of the society. Although Gibbon's change in the social view is considered a moral degeneration, he is also no longer trapped in a tedious existence. He is liberated from what is imposed on him by shallow social norms, which force an individual to lead a hypocritical life. But Saki's pessimistic nihilism persuades us that although following instinct is better than yielding to middle-class social norms, no goodness, order or salvation is possible in a

deterministic world. Saki does not believe in the possibility of progress or growth for mankind. After buying Beelzebub, Gibbon notices that 'he had started on a downgrade path that led to no good and peaceful end.' (p. 2) Beelzebub 'wears the yawningly alert air of one who has found the world is in vain and likes it all the better for it' (p. 2) The nice phrase 'yawningly alert' neatly captures the Dandy's attitude to life. Both these sentences indicate the nihilistic pessimism of the narrator. In Saki's story the reader is not led to expect any change for better. If there is any change, it is for the worse.

The unfolding of the narrative in "Dogged", in which surprise elements and unexpected events are generated by the activities of a dog, encourages the reader to relish the disorder brought about by the dog, rather than the conventional order of Gibbon's house. The dog is a threat to civilization and 'the leading of a respectable life' (p. 4), but the reader of Saki's story is manipulated into taking sides with the recovery of Gibbon's animal dimension. Saki'scharacters envy the imperturbable life of the animals which is free from all restrictions.

The third binary opposition is the opposition of evil and good. Beelzebub who represents 'the moral slump of Gibbon' and has 'a reputation for naked and unashamed depravity' (p.2) appears from a religious context, a church bazaar 'opened by a bishop's lady and patronized by the most hopelessly correct people in the neighbourhood' (p.1). The phrase 'hopelessly correct' also acts as a pointer to the reader, since it suggests an ironical, and indeed, subversive attitude towards correctness.

This central opposition between good and evil develops further ironies. The end of the story inverts the beginning. Gibbon owns the dog but at the end the dog is the absolute owner of everything. What appears to be a 'cataclysm' (p.2) in the beginning, becomes trivial at the end. Although Gibbon tries to hide the source of his depravity, Beelzebub, from the outside world, at the end of the story he confesses: 'I belong to him, body and soul' (p.6) The major opposition of the story thus reverses traditional values. Keeping pace with the gradual progress of

Beelzebub, Gibbon has to abandon civilized, ethical restrictions. Beelzebub, a daemonic force, brings reckless vitality into Gibbon's life, but at the same time, the final words suggest this as a Faustian pact, he has sold his soul to the devil. There is a difference between Faust and Gibbon in that Faust eludes the devil, with whom he has made only a wager, not a pact, whereas Saki's character, due to his lack of freedom, cannot escape the Devil. Marlow's Faustus, too, actually signs a pact, becoming Devil-worshipper: "To him [Beelzebub] I'll build an altar and a church" (5, 15). Unlike Dr Faustus who denies his humanity and wishes to be a god, Gibbon, already an animal through its symbolic name, becomes united with an animal at the end, sinking lower in the hierarchy of creation and evolutionary theories that knows man a species in the animal kingdom. Gibbon is neither heroically defiant, nor terrified and repentant because he is a nihilist.

The story raises serious moral problems. Furthermore, the narrative withholds closure between opposing principles. Gibbon is both an animal and a saint. Beelzebub is both Satan and dog. The story sustains the tension in polar irreconcilable oppositions. Saki forces the reader to ask the question but he withholds the explicit answer. What Saki does is to create a structure to make the reader rethink the social norms, to create a puzzle and ask the reader to reinterpret the events entirely. At the same time, Saki's irony has its element of evasion. This is why the story is open at the end. Binary opposition deliberately results in the lack of narrative closure. The story's construction of unresolved conflicts indicates the dilemma resulting from evolutionary debates and the central puzzle of ethics and evolution. The ironic balances and oppositions allow the reader to contemplate a full range of conflicts between ethics and civilization, as well as the conflicting realities of evolution and ethics.

Unlike Saki's later stories such as "Tobermory" (1909) in which there is overt sympathy with animals, in "Dogged" the focus is on the vulnerability of man. This story is more concerned with the plight of man in the world and his relation to church and ethics. If Faustus *sold* his soul to the Devil and gained power of knowledge, modern man, who is nothing but an ape, is forced to the *purchase* of

Satan and loses everything. Dr Faustus surrenders to the temptations of the devil in order to obtain immediate advantages. His eventual loss is to some extent compensated by these immediate advantages. Dr Faustus, like any tragic hero, confronts defeat, but his aim stands high above those factors that defeat him. On the other hand, modern man has gained nothing. Gibbon has not made a good bargain; he 'parted too with his peace of mind' (p. 2). Gibbon, however, is not to blame for his regression from moral civilization to animal nature. He is not free, therefore he is not morally responsible for his action. The story implies that moral judgement cannot be applied when there is no freedom. Beelzebub, too, is not to blame for expanding his domination and changing his owner's life. The title of the story puns on the word 'dogged'. Beelzebub is dogged, that is, obstinate in having its own way. Gibbon is also dogged by his misfortune.

From this an implicit binary opposition appears between determinism and the doctrine of free will. Religious and scientific determinism weigh heavily on Saki's story. Farrell writes: 'Today we assume, with some warrant, that social forces, social factors, social pressures and tendencies play a role similar to that played by the Gods, by Fate and Nemesis , in ancient Greece.'[19] The story tells us that 'The working of inexorable laws sterilized the chance of Gibbon's emancipation' (p.2) The term 'inexorable laws' echoes August Comte (1798- 1857) who believed that society and universe were connected through the inexorable workings of changeless natural laws. The story's plot unfolds the events according to strictly deterministic principles. Gibbon is a 'fate-driven dissipator'. When the dog settles into a room and refuses to leave, the proprietor tells Gibbon that it 'seems as if it was meant like'(p.3) and Gibbon takes 'alarm at the idea of resisting the possible workings of a higher power'(p.3).

"Dogged" is a parody of religious determinism. There is no question of ethical choice in the story since buying Beelzebub was imposed on Gibbon. According to Christianity, God permitted a certain freedom of action to Satan, so that he might tempt and plague men. God wanted people to resist the devil by being alert and avoiding moral complacencies. If there were no tempter to resist, they couldn't

achieve their moral deserts. The fact that Beelzebub is a commodity in the church bazaar shows the indispensable place of the devil in the divine design of salvation. The story uses the biting vigour of satire to mock the church, because it keeps Satan alive as an integral part of the church doctrine to frighten people from sin and lead them to virtue. Satan's role is described as 'an angel of God, an executive organ of the supreme deity' … as an adversary to man (not to God!)'[20] However, in the story, man can't escape the sequence of events and their causes. The compelling power of causal factors in human affairs denies the freedom of the will. He is completely determined and fated even in his escape from that self. Gibbon cannot liberate himself from Beelzebub, everything in Gibbon's life shows his amusement with his 'moral slump'. He pursues evil in the form of Beelzebub everywhere, and the final effect of evil is a pathetic helplessness. From Milton to Goethe, writers who wrote about the devil tried to overcome the difficulty of unconscious representation of the devil as the hero of the story, and the Satanic hero still exists in literature as an attractive figure. Saki deliberately makes Beelzebub more powerful than Gibbon. Instead of convincing the reader of the moral nobility of man, he shows cynical insight into human weakness by asserting Satan's power over Gibbon and reducing his moral state. Beelzebub hardly needs to corrupt or tempt him. Gibbon is passive enough to follow him easily into a nihilistic life, isolated and estranged from his friends, living with a feeling of futility.

In the course of the story Gibbon has two encounters with women. First, in the beginning of the story it is a bishop's wife who sells Beelzebub to Gibbon; second, towards the end of the story, after he is enslaved to the dog, he meets a woman in the café who has a magnificent ostrich feathers boa. The woman introduces sensuality and sin-consciousness into Gibbon's life. Both may be alluding to Eve and the fall of man. [21] (In this case, Gibbon may be regarded as Adam).The woman's 'boa of ostrich feathers' (p.5) can be read as a reference to serpent. Beelzebub is attracted by the soft shimmering of the lady's attire and is entangled in the feathers. As Hannes Vatter writes the feathers are reminiscent of

Lucifer's origin and seem to have been a common apparel for stage devil, reminding of their former angelic nature.[22] These two trick Gibbon into sin. The bishop's wife does this by bullying him to take possession of the dog, and the woman in the café does this by kissing him at the end. Despite Gibbon's initial resistance, he succumbs to the allure. He overcomes the internal, as well as the social conflict between desire and taboo, his enthralment being combined with sensual pleasure.

Saki brings together scientific and religious determinism in his work. Gibbon is a puppet. He is at the mercy of nature and far from having any control over it. Even if the story is interpreted on a realistic level, it is clear that man is not distinguished as a higher being. Unlike the religious belief that animals were created to serve the purposes of man, they appropriate man to their purposes in Saki's fiction. According to medieval Christian doctrine, the chain of being ascends from animals through man to the angels and God. 'And out of the ground, the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof' (Genesis 2: 19). When God created the first man and woman, He told them to exercise 'dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth'.(Genesis 1: 28) Saki, however, lived in an age when evolutionary theories put an end to human-dominated hierarchy by placing the monkey as kin to man. Saki is not satisfied with an egalitarian view which includes humankind among the beasts. He puts humans at the mercy of animals that are represented as being more intelligent than humans. Saki's treatment of animal and human rejects the claim that man has a superior moral position. As I have already noted, choosing the name Gibbon blurs human and animal. At the same time, Gibbon can also be read as the helpless victim of supernatural forces of good and evil. He is utterly helpless before the diabolical power of devil that is entrapping and seducing him.

Saki's characters are wholly submerged in their milieux and their fates are determined by circumstances of environment. The natural order is not beneficent to man because its destructive aspects are not controlled. Man is subject to the causal processes of nature in every regard. In this respect,Saki's story should also be read in the light of naturalism. Naturalism was an aesthetic movement in nineteenth and early twentieth century. The main influences were Darwin's biological theories, Comte's application of scientific ideas to the study of society and Tain's application of deterministic theories to literature. Its outstanding figure was Zola who published *Therese Raquin* in 1867. The Naturalists adapted natural sciences, especially, the Darwinian view of nature to literature and art. Zola applied the Darwinian view of man as an animal whose action was determined by his heredity and environment. As a literary movement naturalism was developed out of realism to represent reality without moral judgement. Since 'good' and 'evil' are conditioned by forces beyond human control, they are not susceptible of moral judgement. The assumption of scientific determinism led naturalistic authors to represent the characters in fiction as helpless products of environment. Thus, for example, Hippolyte Taine (1828-93), who popularized Darwin's ideas in France and was a major influence on Zola, attributed human behaviour to the interplay of 'race'(heredity), 'milieu' (environment), and 'moment' (immediate circumstances)[23] In Zola's novels the free will of the characters is radically reduced and their physiological and psychological dispositions, under the pressure of environment or circumstances, are responsible for moulding the individual and determining his acts.

Like Naturalistic writers, Saki emphasizes man's instinctual nature rather than his moral or rational qualities. He subjects his characters to the overpowering effects of environment and at the same time deprives them of free choice to show how helpless they are. Saki's characters are motivated by strong instinctual desires from within and oppressed by social conventions from without. Similar to what is seen in a naturalistic fiction, every event inSaki's story is the outcome of its antecedents and its surroundings. What occurs is the product of earlier

occurrences. What Hippolyte Taine terms ‘the moment’ or ‘immediate circumstance’ is introduced as chance in Saki’s story.

II

The influence of naturalism is obvious in “The Remoulding of Groby Lington”, the last story in Saki’s *The Chronicles of Clovis* which was published in 1911.[24] Saki presents man and nature, or man and animal, as one without any distinction. The story represents a naturalistic view of man as an animal subject to natural inclination. It concentrates particularly on how environmental factors determine man’s behaviour. At the same time, man is seen as part of nature to which he is bound by his animal instinct. The story indicates that man is a pure product of his environment, and therefore the view of moral choice or free will is reduced to pure determinism as is expressed in naturalism. Saki is specifically interested in determinism which results from environment and the pressure of the present moment.

Groby’s awareness of his surrounding and of himself comes to him when he notices that his caricature, drawn by one of his nephews, resembles his parrot. He resents the idea of his similarity to the bird and decides to get rid of the parrot. As he ponders over his similarity to his pet, the sketch gives him an unwilling sense of identification and oneness with his pet. He comes in touch with the animal part of his nature that had been hidden by civilization. Here we confront again the theme of regression and degeneration instead of progression or regeneration. Groby’s change and adaptation is not towards perfection. He is not evolving towards something better, but is being reduced to the level of an animal. Groby’s lack of any independent self makes him change personality and identify himself with every new pet he owns. Each successive pet awakens in Groby a sense of self based on unconscious association to which he surrenders. This can explain why he does not hate the monkey for killing his favourite parrot. ‘A few hours earlier the tragic end which had befallen his parrot would have presented itself to him as a calamity; now it arrived almost as a polite attention on the part of Fate.’

(p.226).Groby attributes it to Fate, which adds to the deterministic aspect of the story.

Groby's pattern of life is transferred with the arrival of a monkey. Like Gibbon in "Dogged", Groby's life is dominated more by chance than by rational order and control. An example of this is Groby's struggle with a pianist. Groby hears the pianist snoring in the next room for about 'two and a quarter minutes' and then he can't bear it. During the struggle that follows, Groby's candle is overturned and causes a fire. Although Groby is responsible for the lighting of the fire, ironically he is considered to have rescued the pianist. As a further irony "The Royal Humane Society life-saving medal" is given to Groby, a man who has degenerated into a savage beast. The irony of the situation in which Groby is given a medal while he is in fact responsible for the accident, also parodies the comradeship and self-preservation promoted by social ethics. The story is cynical about the idea that brotherhood and cooperation are man's instinctive responses to a threatening natural world and that moral sense is rooted in man's instinct.

The implicit message of the story regarding the struggle between Groby and the pianist might be a parody of the ideas of Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921). In his book *Mutual Aid* (1902), Kropotkin argued that despite the Darwinist concept of the survival of the fittest, cooperation rather than conflict is the chief factor in the evolution of the species. After providing abundant examples of mutual aid among animals, savages and barbarians, and amongst modern associations, he concludes:

> It is especially in the domain of ethics that the dominating importance of the mutual aid principle appears in full. That mutual aid is the real foundation of our ethical conceptions seems evident enough….In the ethical progress of man, mutual support- not mutual struggle- has had the leading part.[25]

How then can we judge Groby morally when his nature is purely shaped by an environment over which he has no control? The story shows him to be deprived of

freedom of choice, and therefore absolved of moral responsibility for his action. Groby is admired for something of which he had no choice and no knowledge.

Saki presents his characters as types comparable to species of animals. Animal imagery in the story emphasizes this comparison: 'bird-like scrutiny' (p. 224), 'parrot- talk' (p. 225), 'monkey language' (p. 228), 'parrot-like existence' (p. 225), 'ape-like rage' (p. 230). These images indicate the animal dimension and bestial side of human nature. Saki shows men to be at the mercy of their instincts.

Man is defined as a social animal, but another ironic aspect of the story is that the social environment in which Groby lives consists of animals. This story is prefaced by a quotation: 'A man is known by the company he keeps'[26] However, to begin with, Groby is described as a man who prefers 'the seclusion of his own house' (p.224) to the company of his brother and his family whom he visits unwillingly. We are told that he 'forgot or ignored the existence of his neighbour kinsfolk' (p.224), and that Groby doesn't like to 'sacrifice his comforts and inclinations on the altar of family sociability' (p. 224). Thus, he pays them a 'hurried pilgrimage' (p.224) every six months to escape the accusation of neglecting his brother's family; and yet, he is described as a 'good-natured, kindly dispositioned man' (p. 224) At the same time, the story ironizes religious and moral obligations through the use of words such as 'altar', 'pilgrimage' or 'sacrifice'. As the story proceeds, the 'company' he keeps is first a parrot, then a monkey and later, a tortoise. If 'man is known by the company he keeps', then Groby's animal companions point to an important aspect of his character. He has an animal self which overwhelms his social self. He is already alienated from the social structure and his relatives and neighbours. His fundamental attachment to his pets places his life more in the animal kingdom than in the human realm. He reverts to an animal level, unable to control his instinct. As a repeated theme in Saki's stories, society thwarts man and cuts him off from his awareness of his connections to non-human nature.

Groby's growing alienation makes him hostile to the outside world which eventually evolves into overthrowing a respectable civilized life. He begins an animal-like rebellion against his fellows, while he himself precipitates into isolation and egoism. He becomes asocial and a supreme egotist. His strange behaviour increases the repulsion between him and his neighbours who regard him as insane. It leads him to commit acts of savagery. He gnashes his teeth at a servant and throws another servant half-naked into a bush, although the servant had considered 'the arrival of Groby with relief, as promising moral and material support' (p. 228) He throws lozenges at a lady in church, and attacks a pianist. Alienation, the isolation of the individual, and anxiety about man's loneliness in the universe were themes that always attracted Saki and appeared in many of his later stories, like "The LostSanjak" (1910) and "The Hounds of Fate" (1911). Saki's main characters are often not as much representatives of society as individuals apart from it.

"The Remoulding of Groby Lington" draws upon evolutionary theory to represent man's place in nature and to expose his paradoxical state after the advent of evolutionary theories. Groby's change appears to be a dramatic transformation which simply speeds up the evolutionary idea of gradual change. As demonstrated earlier, Saki never establishes any hierarchical differentiation between human and animal. What distinguishes Groby from his monkey? What distinguishes the two species? One answer to this question is to be found in the work of George J. Romanes, a friend of Darwin who published *Animal Intelligence* in 1886. There he refers to what Darwin calls 'the principle of imitation':

> It is proverbial that monkeys carry this principle to ludicrous lengths, and they are the only animals which imitate for the mere sake of imitation, as has been observed by Desor, though an exception ought to be made in favour of talking birds. The psychology of imitation is difficult of analysis, but it is remarkable as well as suggestive that it should be confined in its manifestations to monkeys and certain birds among animals, and to the lower mental levels among men.[27]

Saki's characterization of Groby is parodic confirmation of these ideas. In Saki's story it is not a monkey, but a human being who imitates. There are three different kinds of imitation in the story: physical, linguistic and behavioural. First Groby notices that he resembles his parrot. After the death of the parrot he owns a monkey and imitates it. Even his language is 'parrot-talk' and 'monkey-language'. After the death of the monkey his brother brings him a tortoise and Groby becomes as slow as a tortoise. Saki's use of the monkey and the parrot in the story might even suggest his familiarity with *Animal Intelligence.* Darwin writes:

> The principle of imitation is strong in man, and especially in man in a barbarous state. Desor has remarked that no animal voluntarily imitates an action performed by man, until in the ascending scale we come to monkeys, which are well-known to be ridiculous mockers.[28]

Darwin here talks about the ascending scale to monkeys. He shows a similar sense of hierarchy when he says that the principle of imitation is more pronounced in so-called barbarous man than in civilized men. Darwin also discusses 'the homologies which he [man] presents with the lower animals [……] the reversions to which he is liable' according to which men can be placed 'in their proper position in the zoological series. We thus learn that man is descended from a hairy quadruped […..] This creature would have been classed amongst […..] monkeys.'[29] From this, the question of classification emerges. Groby commits acts of savagery. Is Groby more like a monkey or a barbarous man? Groby has reversions to his earlier likeness but what is his place in the zoological series? Saki's answer or representation of his character shows that he is more like a monkey, through his extreme parody of the logic of Darwinian thinking.

The role of language as a means of communication and as something which distinguishes man from animals is an important element of the story. The choice of a parrot as a pet is obviously significant. Man is a talking animal; and the only

animal that can imitate man's speech is the parrot. ButGroby's communication with his neighbours is described as no better than parrot-talk:

> What was the sum total of his conversation with chance-encountered neighbours? "Quite a spring day, isn't it?"… Strings of stupid, inevitable perfunctory remarks came to his mind, remarks that were certainly not the mental exchange of human intelligences, but mere empty parrot-talk. One might as well salute one's acquaintances with "Pretty Polly. Puss, puss, miaow!" (p. 225)

It is implied that social language is phatic and shallow. It fails man in establishing a proper communication. Saki's characters use language in a way which is merely phatic, conventional and imitative.

Munro's pen name, "Saki", is the name of a group of monkeys in tropical South America.[30] Tom Sharpe and Will Self identify Saki withGroby's monkey[31]. But, as we all know, an artist does something that an animal is unable to do. He uses language in a way which is not merely phatic. In Saki's case, he writes short stories to critique the society. The story can function as a source of revelation to give the reader a new sense of vision, to see himself differently in his relationship to his environment, his neighbours, his pets and his relatives. Groby's awareness of himself comes to him when he notices his caricature, thus art is represented in the story as the instrument by which a sophisticated form of communication and self-reflexivity takes place.

III

There are many similarities between this story and "Dogged", published twelve years earlier, and to some extent "Dogged" anticipates the themes in "The Remoulding of Groby Lington". In both stories chance as a governing factor behind the story's events intervenes and brings man and animal face to face. The animal disrupts the calm life of its otherwise innocent owner and stimulates the dormant bestial instinct within his nature. In each case the acquisition of a new pet makes the central character aware of his animal self. The reader sees what they are

first, then what they become, and is conscious of the dramatic disparity between the two. Both stories deal with the difficulty of making moral choices in a deterministic world, "Dogged" emphasizes religious and scientific determinism; "The Remoulding of Groby Lington" emphasizes biological and environmental determinism. Grobby and Gibbon are both tragic characters as well as comic heroes. After acquiring the pet they are guided solely by instinct, unable to deny their instinctual desires. Each story sets up a balanced opposition within itself. The two stories together form a matching pair. In both the reader sees the overlap and confusion between human and animal. Civilization is confronted with and replaced by nature. In both stories what seems to be catastrophic first, turns out to be easily accommodated and becomes part of the identity of the protagonist. Both stories deal with the subject in a purely ironic way and both are open-ended. The comparison between human and non-human, or between humanity and animality has been a source of deep interest for Saki from his early fiction. His human characters are on the borderline between the human and the animal kingdom. But "Dogged" is preoccupied with good and evil, whereas "The Remoulding of Groby Lington" is preoccupied with right and wrong, a distinction which is more difficult to perceive. The story of Groby, published four years before Saki's death indicates that Saki's pessimistic attitude and his cynicism of human nature and naturalistic determinism increased towards the end of his writing career. In the character of Groby, Saki reduces the gap between animal and human, and sharpens the antagonism between man and society (not between man and animal). His later writing shows a more cynical disbelief in the perfectibility of man. But Saki also indicates that the behaviour of human beings is too complex to be understood either by natural scientists who, ignoring man's spiritual needs, regarded him as a species, or by moralists who ignored man's instinctual needs.

As we have seen, "The Remoulding of Groby Lington" is also related to Darwinian principles through its reference to adaptability with nature. The monkey that is brought from the Western Hemisphere dies 'under the influence of a northern climate' (p.230). It is unfit for survival in a new environment. Also,

Saki's terminology in "Dogged" indicates his familiarity with evolutionary theory. Words such as 'struggle', 'laws of environment' and 'canine' are words used in scientific texts of biology or natural science and were commonplace in evolutionary controversy.

In his article 'The Brilliant Young Man' Saki writes:

> Here is another fine antithesis, taken from another 'brilliant young man' apropos of the writings of the late Professor Huxley: 'His was an age of faith without belief, ours of belief without faith'[…..] For my part, I have thrown away all dull books of crabbed philosophy, and deeper than did every plummet sound I have drowned my Darwin.[32]

The mocking attitude towards Huxley and the explicit dissatisfaction with Darwin indicate that Saki regarded evolution as running backward. He regards evolutionary theories as lacking any permanent scientific basis, calling them 'crabbed philosophy'.

Saki established an ironic distance from the views generated by the opinion making classes, but as an intellectual he was highly receptive to the new ideas from the realm of science. The tension between faith and science, or between belief and knowledge was not new, it is seen in Dr Faustus too, but evolutionary theories intensified this tension. Saki's painting a vivid picture of two characters, one with the name of an ape (Gibbon), the other behaving like an ape (Groby), indicates his view toward evolution. Saki was aware of the incongruity between religious ideas and the theory of evolution. He believed that morality is incompatible with the brute origin of man. If man is only an intensified animal, there is no way to moralize the connection between evolutionary ideas, social theory and Christian doctrine. For Saki, life was a struggle for existence which was bound to end in man's defeat because man's life and his actions are determined by environment. If we accept Darwin, the moral sense will turn out to be a mere developed instinct.Saki makes his characters (like Gibbon and Groby) give up those motives by which people attempt to live noble and virtuous life.

How can man live with dignity and find order and meaning in a universe that forbids him freedom? Moral views falsely assume in man a freedom he does not possess. Man is biologically determined by instinct and externally determined by social forces. He is reduced to the level of a will-less animal. In Saki's stories there is no emphasis on man's uniqueness in the nature. Man is like an animal. He also lacks freedom of the will, and therefore, he must not be held responsible for his action. Saki's characters are products of scientific determinism. The character's action is a chain, a causation in his personal life and linked to a vaster chain of causation in the public world. His actions are not self-generated, but caused instead by the external social or supernatural forces in the world outside the self. The character's change is attributed to his environment and not to conscious choice.

Endnotes

[1] "Dogged" is not in Saki's complete edition. It appears in a an edition selected by Peter Haining, Short Stories 2, Saki (London: Dent, 1983). All the page references are from this book.

[2] Hannes Vatter, The Devil in English Literature (Switzerland: A. Francke AG Verlag Bern, 1978) 30.

[3] There is another Arthemius in the history of Christianity who was a bishop of Sens in the 6th century.

[4] Hilary who is mentioned as Artemus's friend is also the name of a saint of 4th century. Since his friend is called a 'disciple' in the story (p.6) Saki's Artemus as a saint can be considered the founder of the cult of instinct.

[5] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, Faust, trans. Randall Jarrel (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976) I. 56.

[6] Theodore Ziolkowski, Varieties of Literary Thematics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 92.

[7] *Ibid.* 90.

[8] Barbara Allen Woods, The Devil in Dog Form: A Practical Type –Index of Devil Legends. Folklore Studies, 11. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959).

[9] http://www2.Prestel.co.uk/aspen/sussex/blackdog.html

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] Theo Brown, "The Black Dog in English Folklore", Animals in Folklore (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1978) 48.

[14] Frances and Richard Lockridge, "The Anthropomorphic Cat", in Joseph Klaiths Animals and Man in Historical Perspective (New York and London: Harper & Row, 1974) 114.

[15] Harriet Ritvo writes that in 19th century some dogs were characterized as aristocratic, noting in this context that the Fox-Terrier Chronicle (1883-1906) was the only nineteenth-century periodical devoted to a single breed of dogs. It covered a terrier 'elite' the way that newspapers and other periodicals covered human high society. Cf. Harriet Ritvo, The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) 89-90.

[16] In some parts of Britain, for example in Cornwall, there are various tales of the Devil's pack of Dandy (or Dando) dogs. www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/bdogfl.htm

[17] Quoted in: Allen Churchill, The Improper Bohemians (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1959) 25.

[18] Joanna Richardson, The Bohemians La vie de Boheeme in Paris 1830-1914(London: Macmillan, 1969) 21.

[19] James T. Farrell, 'Some Observations on Naturalism, So Called, in Fiction' Reflections at Fifty and other Essays (London: Neville Spearman, 1956) 152.

[20] Hannes Vatter, The Devil in English Literature 61.

[21] In another story by Saki, "Eve and the Forbidden Fruit" , which centres on the determinism of the original sin, Eve is called 'dogged' because at first she refuses to eat the forbidden fruit and then she yields. This story was published in Peter Haining's Short Stories 2. On page xvi of the introduction Haining writes that 'it is an uncollected story by Saki, discovered among his papers', therefore, the date of the story is not known.

[22] Hannes Vatter, The Devil in English Literature 190.

[23] Brian Nelson, introduction to: Emil Zola, Therese Raquin (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993) x.

[24] All the page references included in the parenthesis in the text are from The Complete Saki (London: Penguin, 1982). This story is one of the few that appeared in a collection without having been published in a newspaper first.

[25] Peter Kropotkin, Mutual Aid, A Factor of Evolution (London: Penguin Books, 1972) 250-51. Considering the fact that Saki published The Rise of the Russian Empire in 1900, and he was a correspondent in Russia in 1904, it is most probable that Saki was familiar with the Russian Darwinists.

[26] Tom Sharpe attributes this quotation to Euripides. See Tom Sharpe, Introduction, The Best of Saki (London: Pan Books, 1976) p.13. This is the only story in Saki'scollection which is prefaced by a quotation.

[27] George, J. Romanes, Animal Intelligence (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1886) 477.

[28] Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981) 44.

[29] *Ibid.,* p. 389.

[30] A. H. Fitzgerald, “Saki” Notes and Queries (London: Oxford University Press, 1947) 17.

[31] Tom Sharp, Introduction, The Best of Saki (London: Pan Books, 1976) 14.

Will Self, Introduction, The Unrest-Cure and other Beastly Tales (London: Prion, 2000) xv.

[32] *Westminster Gazette,* 16 January, 1904, p. 2.

First Response

This is a succinct and very well-structured paper. The close readings of the two animal stories are full of telling observations. These are all brought together in a lucid and convincing synthesis about Saki's intellectual context and his grimly comic stance on life.