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The Imitation Phenomenon

By emphasizing the societal components of law, language, and conformity in *The Jungle Book*, Rudyard Kipling analyzes the condition of mankind internally and externally. The internal condition explores the progress of man evolutionarily while the external investigates man in relation to other men. One moment in particular that exemplifies the convergence of these motifs is the point at which the wolf pack ostracizes the feral child, Mowgli. Despite Mowgli's conformity to the wolves in law and language, the lawless animals reject him from their pack:

“‘No man's cub can run with the people of the jungle!’ roared Shere Khan. ‘Give him to me.’

‘He is our brother in all but blood,’ Akela went on; ‘and ye would kill him here. In truth, I have lived too long. Some of ye are eaters of cattle, and of others I have heard that, under Shere Khan's teaching, ye go by dark night and snatch children from the villager's doorstep. Therefore I know ye to be cowards, and it is to cowards I speak. It is certain that I must die, and my life is of no worth, or I would offer that in the man-cub's place. But for the sake of the Honor of the Pack,— a little matter that, by being without a leader, ye have forgotten,— I promise that if ye let the man-cub go to his own place, I will not, when my time comes to die, bare one tooth against ye. I will die without fighting. That will at least save the Pack three lives. More I cannot do; but, if ye will, I can save ye the shame that comes of killing a brother against whom there is no fault—a brother spoken for and bought into the Pack according to the Law of the Jungle.’

‘He is a man—a man—a man!’ snarled the Pack; and most of the wolves began to gather round Shere Khan, whose tail was beginning to switch.

‘Now the business is in thy hands,’ said Bagheera to Mowgli. ‘We can do no more except fight.’

Mowgli stood upright—the fire-pot in his hands. Then he stretched out his arms, and yawned in the face of the Council; but he was furious with rage and sorrow, for, wolf-like, the wolves had never told him how they hated him” (Kipling 38-39).

In Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, first published in 1893, the motifs relating to cultural conformity and societal constructs abound. Characteristic of Kipling, the story is dominated by these themes, examining issues of language, race, law, and political hierarchy. Mowgli in

Kipling's narrative seeks legal and cultural acceptance from various animals through his strict observance of the Law of the Jungle, which provides protection, aid, and belonging. The Law, evoked through language, has the ability to develop familial cross-species ties of kinship and obligations—a multiculturalist as well as colonialist notion. In promoting multiculturalism, Kipling proposes an environment in which there exists potential for relationship or equality between differing cultures. Multiculturalism conveys idealism towards the relational, social, and political aspects of opposing parties in these differing cultures. To analyze *The Jungle Book* from a colonialist perspective, however, nullifies the potential for cultural equality in the dominant society's social and political dominance. Inter-species relations throughout *The Jungle Book* allude to dialectic conformity, nominal significance, and the motif of language in affiliation with "law". The "Law of the Jungle", a code invoked through speech, depicts the exploitation of dialect for one's benefit, pedestalizing dialectic conformity. This, in addition to the meaning of Mowgli's many names as they relate to his heritage and cultural versatility, prompts the analysis of cultural conformity and the aspect of the *Law* of the Jungle in particular. The adaption of literary classics to other mediums, such as film and theater, reinterprets consequent themes, thus warping and elaborating upon a work's initial implications. This is especially true for *The Jungle Book*; the adaptation produced by Walt Disney Productions warps the themes of Kipling's original work. Inspired by Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, this film adaptation produced by Walt Disney Productions in 1967 provokes exploration for the purpose behind the alteration of themes. This explorative endeavor observes the dynamic of American society and the Disney Company as they operate separately and in cohesion, as well as the nature of colonialism and the cultural implications of Kipling and Disney's work. An evolutionary

investigation of these works remarks on the condition and direction of man in intelligence and progress, paralleling the condition of mankind in relation to itself proposed by colonialism, multiculturalism, and, in Disney's case, racism. The Lamarckism proposed by Kipling generates a view of mankind predominantly concerned with learning for the sake of survival, contrasted by Disney's atavism in which the regression that occurs happens as a result of the prioritization of assimilation. Disney's assimilation depicts mankind as abandoning the self in order to adopt another, whereas what Kipling depicts as a skill for adaptive conformity allows mankind to maintain the self as an identity while absorbing and exploiting others. The difference between the two applies to the conversation regarding the condition of man in relation to progress and to race through cross-cultural interaction. Disney's animated adaptation, a culmination of British and Indian culture channeled through an American funnel, reconstructs Kipling's cultural motifs with aspects ranging from technical execution to the embodiment of characters to screenwriting translation. Paul Wells begins his book *Animation in America* with the statement, "Arguably, America has produced four major indigenous art forms. The Western (in film and fiction); jazz; the Broadway musical, and the animated cartoon" (1). Disney's adaptation of *The Jungle Book* utilizes both jazz and the animated cartoon, presenting a work that is thoroughly American as well as British and Indian. Disney's animated adaptation, centering on the theme of conformity, complicates evolutionary perceptions of Mowgli by portraying language as that which one learns for the purpose of assimilation. Disney's film also introduces complex race dynamics in relation to conformity through connotations of representative characters, such as the monkey people and the addition of King Louie. Ironically, the particularly distinguishing marks of American society reshape a story concerning the constructs of society, wholly altering

the work itself. The addition of Disney's classic musical compositions "I Wanna Be Like You" and "Bear Necessities" reflect a perpetual cross-species conformity. The culmination of conformity in "I Wanna Be Like You" contains elements of evolutionary progress and regression, atavism, and racism—contrary to Kipling's initial proposition of Lamarckism, colonialism, and multiculturalism. Within the scenario of conformism proposed by Disney exists an imitation phenomenon in which the three characters of Baloo the bear, King Louie the chimpanzee, and Mowgli each attempt to conform to the other. This interaction exhibits the differences between Kipling and Disney's work on a fundamental level. In this moment, Disney displays mankind as a degenerative and subhuman entity through racism and atavism, contrasting the novel in which Kipling depicts mankind as evolutionary and progressive.

Colonialism and Conformity in Kipling's *Jungle Book*: Language and The Law of the Jungle

The Law of the Jungle in the novel, an all-encompassing moral code that regulates the actions and interaction of all beasts within the jungle, emphasizes the power of communication because of the way in which it presents linguistic manipulation. Young Mowgli in Kipling's narrative was spared from certain death because of a sacrifice made in accordance with the Law of the Jungle on his behalf; his life is devoted to observance of the selfsame Law (14). Through obedience to the Law, Mowgli is enabled citizenship among the Free People, his community of wolves and animals. The Law, then, is a governing force capable of granting life, death, and citizenship through what the Law has already established. It is necessary, however, to invoke the Law through knowledge, which is later depicted as language. Mowgli must first know the law in order to speak it—the speech itself becomes an element which binds the

community of the jungle to legal contract. When Mowgli is kidnapped by the “*Bandar-log*” monkey people, he elicits the aid of a nearby kite, saying, “We be of one blood, thou and I” (59). The same phrase he repeats to a brood of snakes with the “Snake’s Call”, evidently a varying dialect (77). In both instances, Mowgli’s life is spared because of his knowledge of the Law and its authority over jungle animals. Learning the language of another species enables petition for aid, by which the animal must abide according to the Law. Language in *The Jungle Book* is therefore a quintessential form of power because of its connection to the Law.

The Law’s ability to create kinship relationships and promote survival amplifies the significance of language. Mowgli’s petition for help in multiple situations of mortal danger is “We be of one blood, thou and I.” Animals such as the kite and cobras ally to Mowgli because he has been linguistically likened by blood to their species. Mowgli has not literally become a kite or a snake by blood, but rather, through learning their form of communication, he is able to manipulate them. This shows that the Law is predicated not on pretense or deceit, but on mutual understanding through language. Mowgli’s appeals for help to other animals alludes to interspecies interaction, not transformation, because he retains his identity and status as a man, though he likens himself to various species.

Although *The Jungle Book*’s linguistic interaction can be interpreted as promoting multiculturalism, it may also be perceived as a colonial text. Jonathan Rey Lee speculates, “The essential character of the other (its wildness) is inaccessible unless *tamed*—talking lions can be understood if and only if they are sufficiently controlled” (887). Lee asserts that animals’ verbal communication relays a subdued nature, therefore alluding to colonialism. He goes on to observe the colonialist implications of Mowgli’s transition between learning the language to

controlling the animals with their respective languages. The former concept may apply to either the written work or animated adaptation because animals in both mediums speak intelligibly. Mowgli's ability to manipulate animals is entirely absent from Disney's adaptation because linguistic variation and the Law of the Jungle is absent from the reproduction. The absence of Mowgli's manipulation heavily reshapes the colonialist undercurrent of *The Jungle Book*, altering the implications of language in completely different ways.

The sentiment toward the absence of language as portrayed by Kipling in *The Jungle Book* reveals the significance of language to the network of the Jungle. The loose representation of government in Kipling's novel calls themselves the "free people." Other figures opposing the free people are considered lawless, such as Shere Kahn and the *Bandar-log* monkey people. Baloo chastises Mowgli, then informs him about the monkey people,

"'Listen, man-cub,' said the Bear, and his voice rumbled like thunder on a hot night. 'I have taught thee all the Law of the Jungle for all the Peoples of the Jungle—except the Monkey-Folk who live in the trees. They have no Law. They are outcaste. They have no speech of their own, but use the stolen words which they overhear when they listen, and peep, and wait up above in the branches. Their way is not our way...We do not drink where the monkeys drink; we do not go where the monkeys go; we do not hunt where they hunt; we do not die where they die. Hast thou ever heard me speak of the *Bandar-log* till to-day?'" (53-54).

The characterization of the monkeys as thieves and corruptors of other languages depicts them as inherent lawbreakers and anarchists. Their actions cause ostracization from the free people and other animals of the jungle, forming a divide between those who respect language and those who do not. Baloo neglects even giving verbal mention to those who are verbally negligent until they pose a threat to life. Diana Budoyan writes in *The Kipling Journal*, "In Kipling's work monkeys symbolized an ignorant, stupid man with high opinion of himself. Kipling showed how dangerous ignorant people can be without a leader and laws" (31). This

statement is reflected by the immense turmoil caused by the monkey people, who evidently have no respect for the Law or language, when they kidnap Mowgli. The portrayal of monkeys is negative because of their general disregard of language. As Baloo says, the monkey people not only have no language of their own, but they also pervert the language of others by using “stolen words.” This suggests that their uncouth involvement taints the very system in which they rudely participate. The monkeys in this case are opposite to conformists, demolishing the authority to which they are expected to submit. The lawless monkey people exist to dismantle establishments and defy rules, communicated as a linguistic interaction in Kipling’s work. The monkeys represent a culture that is ostracized because it lacks the desire or ability to conform rather than a culture that is discriminated against for its innate differences. This indicates the monkey’s resistance to multiculturalism.

The numerous titles Kipling uses to define Mowgli establishes his identity and illuminates his origins. Upon discovering the baby Mowgli, Father Wolf exclaims, “Man! A man’s cub” (6). The use of the indefinite pronoun “a” continues in this passage as others, including Shere Khan, refer to him as “a man cub”. This verbal expression of his identity marks him, later developing into a name. Mowgli’s “man cub” identity becomes his name when Mowgli and Shere Khan debate for the loyalty of the pack. Some of the wolves respond, “Silence, thou man’s cub!” (24). In this context, “man’s cub” is demeaning by implying that Mowgli himself has not warranted status as an adult, and also setting him apart from the jungle animals for his human nature. Although Mowgli is identified as a human in this way, he is also identified as an animal through other names, complicating his persona. Mother Wolf gives Mowgli his first name: Mowgli the Frog (10). His relation to frogs is inspired by Mother Wolf

insulting Shere Khan. As she defends the unnamed Mowgli, she says to Shere Khan, “in the end, look you, hunter of little naked cubs — frog-eater — fish-killer—he shall hunt *thee*” (9).

Thereafter, the child is named Mowgli the Frog by the wolves who raised him for his relationship to the frogs as a hunted species. Rather than depicting Mowgli as an animal of superlative strength, he has received association with an animal of weakness. The tiger, being one such animal of strength, receives a sentence that he will be overthrown by one who is initially associated with weakness. These names—man cub and frog—both relate in the reality of their weakness. It is not until much later and after the defeat of Shere Khan than Mowgli becomes the Master of the Jungle. Through the prediction of Mowgli’s triumph as a frog, he overcomes his identity of weakness.

The diverse number of names attributed to Mowgli deepens his inter-species identity. Several animals become associated with Mowgli. Afore mentioned, Mowgli is named with the frog. The name “man cub” itself carries animalistic connotations in the fact that humankind does not have cubs. The animals, in this sense, are projecting their own animal nature onto Mowgli, who is a human. The combination of the words “man” and “cub” contrast each other in this way. Mother Wolf calls Mowgli “Son” which portrays him as a wolf (22). Bagheera calls Mowgli “Little Brother”, thereby deeming him a panther (17). When Mowgli becomes the Master of the Jungle, he rules the jungle animals as well as relates to them in species. The likening of species that occurs between Mowgli and the animals may also identify with race relations in that they begin to share a common culture and connection of kinship.

The notion that a jungle, inherent chaos and disorder, could be governed by any degree of law like the Law of the Jungle references Darwin's entangled bank metaphor in *On the Origin of Species*. The law of Darwin's entangled bank is described in the process of natural selection:

“It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.”

The law of natural selection “produces” the plants and animals in the entangled bank by regulating and refining them over time. Their existence is a part of the law-system that natural selection proposes. Although Kipling himself disdained Darwin's work, it was a prevalent topic of the Victorian era and relates to the setting and action of *The Jungle Book* (MacDuffie 19). Much like Darwin's entangled bank, the network of animals in *The Jungle Book's* jungle participate in a system of “Law”. Unlike natural selection, the Law of the Jungle is verbally upheld, empowered by the linguistic format of the principles that it presents. The contract that is the Law of the Jungle wages the support of the community and harmony among the animals according to the adherence of the individual to the Law. When this law is broken, as it is with Shere Kahn and the monkeys, the network turns against them. Their punishment is relational: Shere Kahn loses the trust of the free people and the monkeys are ignored altogether. The consequences of natural selection for the animals of the entangled bank are death—failure to survive and reproduce.

As animals converse with Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*, the animal-human barrier is broken down. In Kipling's *The Jungle Book* exists a world in which animals speak with one another as well as humankind in the form of Mowgli—universal communication transcends

realistic limitations between animals and humans. As a result of a story in which all creatures have an ability to reason and communicate with one another, language is no longer a hierarchical distinction between man and beast. The Law, which presents a new realm of linguistic interaction among the creatures of the jungle is limited in its application. Baloo the bear, who teaches the Law of the Jungle to wolves and to Mowgli, possesses the ability to command other animals, yet never does so. Mowgli, on the other hand, uses this ability repeatedly throughout the novel, which distinguishes him. This is a fictional paradigm of communication occurring between varying species continues into the animated adaptation of *The Jungle Book*. The way in which Disney's animated *Jungle Book* film interprets the motifs of communication and language in relation to conformity complicate Kipling's original written work, especially in the context of American culture.

Language and Conformity in Disney's *The Jungle Book*

Although Disney held low esteem for the integrity of an original work and critical or academic conversation, his studio's interpretation and animated reproduction of *The Jungle Book* nonetheless juxtaposes the themes and morals of Kipling's classic 1893 novel. Critic Richard Schickel describes Disney's regard for analytical response in his biography of Walt Disney, *The Disney Version*, "characteristic of [Disney's] response to most criticism...he repeated variations on the statement 'we make the pictures and then let the professors tell us what they mean'" (Schickel 156). Disney's neglect of political and critical commentary may have promoted political and social neutrality, however it does nullify the numerous critical analyses of Disney's animated works.

By examining Disney's inattention to Kipling's linking of language and the Law, varying commentaries become apparent regarding evolutionary theory. Kipling portrays linguistic ability as Mowgli's pivotal skill for the purpose of survival in the jungle. Contrasting this is the Mowgli character in Disney's recreation strives to actually become jungle animals in an inward sense. These varying perspectives portray opposing implications. Professor Allen MacDuffie of the University of Texas describes Mowgli's coming-of-age tale as an evolutionary narrative, "We may read the story of Mowgli's ascent to 'Master of the Jungle' as not simply a story of growth but also a narrative in which a Lamarckian mnemonics informs the developmental trajectory" (21). In the process of learning and acquiring skills, Mowgli resembles an evolutionary figure of Lamarckism and refined product of natural selection (22). Kipling's studious, Lamarckian Mowgli contrasts Disney's Mowgli, who endeavors to become the animals by altering his human mentality and lifestyle—an evolutionary regression that essentially implicates atavism. Disney's Mowgli no longer concerns himself with the Law or language that formerly allowed him to thrive in Kipling's rendering; his primary concern is adopting the primitive mannerisms of bears and monkeys. By the end of the story, Disney's Mowgli has reclaimed his humanity by becoming enamored with a girl in the man-village. This shows that the desire for reproduction is the cause that alters Mowgli's atavistic trajectory, being both a mechanism promoting natural selection and an indicator of evolutionary success.

Disney's *Jungle Book* complicates the racial significance of Mowgli's many names in Kipling's *Jungle Book*. In the Disney version, Mowgli's names are "Mowgli" and "man cub". Although the animalistic quality is communicated when he is called "cub", more direct names indicating his cross-species character, such as "the frog", "Little Brother", or "Son", are

excluded. Nominally, Mowgli is primarily affiliated with humanity, being labeled as the offspring of man. In deed, however, Mowgli is perpetually striving to become the animals, observed in his imitation of Baloo the bear following an informal adoption. The distinction between Kipling and Disney's works in this scenario is that Kipling attributes Mowgli the status of an animal through conformity whereas Disney's Mowgli aspires to attain such a status, seemingly without success. His motivation in Disney's adaptation is to discover a place of belonging, whereas in Kipling's novel he is welcomed by those who raise him. These names present differing origins for Disney's atavistic Mowgli who strives to become the animals and Kipling's Lamarckian Mowgli who learns skills from the animals to promote his own survival. Disney's atavistic Mowgli begins as a man, descending to the level of an animal for the sake of acceptance in the jungle. Kipling's Lamarckian Mowgli begins as both man and animal, adopting whichever title best serves him for advancement and survival throughout the novel. Lamarckian Mowgli shifts racial identities by going to the man village when he is ostracized from the wolf-pack for being a man and again when he is ostracized by the man village for the benefits of his feral upbringing. He assumes identities of those with whom he is seldom associated by speaking their languages as well, preserving his life in the case of his call to the kite for help.

The medium of animation lends itself to the breakdown of inter-species barriers because common grounds of monolingual communication unifies the various species of animals in Disney's *Jungle Book*. In an animated film, a panther is able to communicate in English alongside humans, bears, and monkeys alike, rather than being bound strictly to realistic limitations of communication. Traditionally, animals have been the subjects of animation for their physically expressive potential. Schickel describes this phenomenon within

the origins of animation, “there was a fairly firm belief that only animals were suitable as characters, since their spontaneity and physical characteristics made them almost automatic caricatures when they were placed in human postures and predicaments” (101). *The Jungle Book* is a novel in which animal characters dominate the plotline and are able to verbally communicate with one another. In addition to a tiger arguing with wolves or a panther conversing with a bear, the intelligent force of humankind traverses animal-human barriers in the figure of Mowgli.

The animated medium exploits this paradigm through voice actors and projected images of animals. Animation in its composition parallels the novel in that it is entirely constructed from the imagination and capabilities of its authors, whereas live-action film is a record of pre-existing subjects. This fictional basis of film disconnects the language-speaker relationship, creating a new degree of removal. The one speaking is no longer directly connected to the image on screen. All characters are a man-made facade. Rather than relay a story illustrating an imaginary world, actors and artists combine skills to present a reenactment of such a story. Through the image presented on screen, humans assume the speaking roles of animals. Had Bagheera been speaking in a panther dialogue before, such a thing can no longer be assumed under the constraints of an animated film. Conversely, animals exhibit human qualities and personalities. The shell of an animated animal-façade is filled with the character, dialogue, and interaction of a human. The characters of *The Jungle Book* are less animals who can talk than they are humans who bear an animal suit. The same applies to Kipling’s novel—all of the animals are joined in the humanness of their interaction. In this context, the notion that Mowgli would interact with the animals on an intellectual level becomes much less far-fetched.

The adaptation of literature to animation incurs varying connotations, which particularly affect the interpretation of language. Paul Wells writes in his essay “Analysing Animated Adaptation” about animation as a mode for mental visualization,

“Animation is the most appropriate language by which to express the mental visualizations of images suggested by literary forms because its qualities are those which incorporate the hybridity, instability, and mutability of the perception of textual allusion. An animated film can condense material so that an image can operate simultaneously as a retrieval of image forms, as a deployment of symbolism and metaphor, and can provide incidence of penetration, all while effectively transposing the literary source” (Wells, Adaptations 201).

According to Wells, the process of transposing a literary source can have symbolic implications. Such is the case in *The Jungle Book* with language as a symbol. The parameters of adaptation as a medium obscures fictional literature’s ability to simultaneously communicate in two languages. An animal may be described as speaking one manner or language, yet its speech is given in English. An example of this is a conversation between Mowgli and Bagheera, a translated interaction containing the characteristics of foreign language:

“‘We be of one blood, ye and I,’ said Mowgli, giving the words the Bear accent which all the hunting-people use.
 ‘Good, Now for the birds.’
 Mowgli repeated, with the Kite’s whistle at the end of the sentence.
 ‘Now for the Snake-People,’ said Bagheera.
 The answer was a perfectly indescribable hiss...” (35).

Mowgli’s initial phrase is relayed in English, coupled with the accent of the hunting-people, to communicate that the words spoken were not literally “we be of one blood, ye and I,” but something incomprehensible to English speakers. Because the message of Mowgli’s words has already been communicated, a literary silence is observed and substituted purely with a description of the jungle language that is evidently being spoken. Modern film lacks the ability to communicate through insinuating language by omitting dialogue without actually

projecting a degree of foreign language with subtitles, due to the combination of auditory and visual information. Disney's Mowgli is thus restricted to his native tongue which, in Disney's case, is English.

Although animals and humans alike are united under the umbrella of the English language in Disney's film, varying dialects of speech separate them into opposing parties. Because the medium of film conveys particular aspects of language as vividly as or more so than literature, such as dialect and speech mannerisms, cultural subtleties become more evident. For example, in Disney's film, Shere Kahn and Bagheera are distinguished by their refined upper-class British accents. *Popular Culture Review* gives attention to the black English slang of King Louie and the monkeys in Disney's *Jungle Book* with expressions like "Lay it on me," "Cool it," and "C-r-a-z-y" (23). Though they technically speak the same language, these groups do not socially associate with one another, the monkeys being labeled with a stigma as social pariahs. The cultures of each of these groups juxtapose and complement one another in a film concerned with cross-cultural conformity. Mowgli's moderate American accent lies in between the extremes of the monkey swingers and British cats, showing a potential to relate to either group. The neutrality that Mowgli poses echoes his ongoing pursuit of conformity in the fact that he is able to relate to figures of varying extremes on the linguistic and cultural spectrum.

An aspect of *The Jungle Book* unique to Disney's animated film is the breaking of verbal oaths. Unlike Kipling's novel, the adaptation centers on trust and promises. Mowgli first trusts Bagheera by riding on him in the night. When Mowgli expresses his desire to return to his wolf family, Bagheera confesses that he is taking Mowgli to the man village for his protection. After Baloo realizes his inability to protect Mowgli from Shere Khan, he exclaims his intention to also

take Mowgli to the man village. Mowgli, who has now been twice deceived, escapes by running into the cover of the jungle. A hypnotic Kaa then persuades Mowgli that he is trustworthy with the song "Trust in Me" though he conceals his intention is to consume him while asleep. When Mowgli narrowly escapes, he meets a group of vultures who sing the song "That's What Friends Are For". The premise of the song is that friends exist to cheer their friends up and stick with them "to the bitter end". Unfortunately for Mowgli, the harmonizing vultures speedily depart when Shere Khan arrives to sing the last line, rendering the whole song tragically ironic.

Mowgli's caretakers and friends have all deserted him and he is left with a string of broken promises. The breaking of oaths trend in Disney's version communicates that Mowgli's end goal is maintaining relationships built upon trust, contrasting the novel in which Mowgli's end goal appears to be survival within the jungle itself, though belonging is a theme. Disney presents a Mowgli whose survival is preserved by his animal caretakers and chance, while Kipling's Mowgli exploits the animals to slay Shere Khan.

Parts of the conformity motif of Disney's *Jungle Book* has been interpreted as flagrant racism. Scholars Karen Cihra, Janet Joseph, and Terry J. Martin published in *Popular Culture Review* detailing the perceived racist subtext of the film entitled "Racism in Walt Disney's *The Jungle Book*". In the article, King Louie and his monkey hoard, who identifiably represent African-American culture, are supposedly despised by the other animals for their projected race. The article suggests that the animation alludes to their African-American identity through Black English slang, jazz music and scat singing, and stereotypical depictions of blackface minstrelsy. Louie's desire to transcend his sub-human condition is interpreted as the struggle for civil rights in the United States (24). Louie is depicted in ways that are stereotypes of African

Americans in the “libidinal impulses” and “lack of intellect” (25). To associate these traits with the African-American culture references the tradition of blackface minstrelsy. Paul Rogin describes of the history of blackface minstrelsy in race relations as a way to sanction sexual aggression (Rogin 184). Rogin cites the ways in which the advent of blackface minstrelsy established particular stereotypes of African-Americans, “White men portrayed blacks on the American stage before the revolution as bestial figures of low comedy. In the first native musical, *The Disappointment* (1767), a blacked-up white actor plays the vain, greedy, cowardly role that was already the blackface stereotype” (27). Some of the first blackface characters exemplified vices and negative characteristics, much like King Louie. An observation is made by Rogin concerning the Disney Company’s history with blackface, “The most ubiquitous cartoon character of all, Walt Disney’s white gloved and blackfaced Mickey Mouse, was copied from *The Jazz Singer*” (Rogin 29). Although *The Jungle Book* was released at near the end of the civil rights movement, the authors of “*Racism in Walt Disney’s The Jungle Book*” pose a sufficient argument for the racist undercurrent of the Disney Company’s addition of King Louie as a character and his conformist desires. Mary Zimmerman, after producing *The Jungle Book Musical*, responds in 2013 to the perceived racist undercurrents of the story,

“I challenged the assumption that King Louie is a derogatory depiction of a black man given that what is on the screen is only an ape, drawn in a style consistent with all Disney animation of the period, voiced by a white musician, singing to a little Indian boy...It is more accurate to say that the ‘race’ of the animated King Louie is in the eye of the beholder...”

While this argument may have assured the public that Zimmerman’s intentions in reproducing *The Jungle Book* were not racist, the work speaks for itself. “*Racism in Walt Disney’s The Jungle Book*” dissects the subliminal and, in many cases blatant, the story by first identifying the

monkey characters as African American and thereafter arguing its roots in stereotypical racist depictions of African Americans. In Zimmerman's scenario, however, race is not strictly limited to the eye, but can also be alluded to via cultural connotations through language. Paul Wells perceives traditional black caricature and stereotyping within early animation as a commonality:

"Racial stereotyping in the USA was familiar, almost reassuring to white audiences in its popular fictions and entertainment, and continued to be so until the 1950s... [It portrays] the temptation of excessive physicality, over-determined sexuality and sexual practice, gambling, drinking, etc. Black caricature is ultimately the reflection of the apparent prohibitions placed upon white desire" (Wells 216-217, *Understanding Animation*).

The black caricature over time has been exploited to explore marginal activities of society, therefore creating subsequent stereotypes the African American within the realm of animation and entertainment at large. King Louie being depicted as a libidinal character fulfills this stereotype regarding black caricatures in addition to being clearly branded as a black figure by dialect. Louie's marginal status in relation to the other animals of the jungle resonates with this sentiment.

Ironically, a story in which it is frowned upon to misrepresent the language of another translates the narrative into the language and bias of its own culture. The racial tension created by Disney's depiction of the monkeys and King Louie shows American cultural bias imposed upon the original story. This interaction between Disney and Kipling is emblematic of the interaction between the *Bandar-log* and the Free People. It also reveals information about the condition of mankind in external interaction—Disney's work represents distinct groups of English-speaking culture as they interact with one another. Kipling's work proposes the

distinction between beasts on the basis of their relationship with the Law. To make this comparison allows man to be either identified by their ethnicity or moral standpoint.

“I Wanna Be Like You” and “Bare Necessities”: the Conformity Motif

Disney’s film elevates American culture through the multicultural elements in its musical numbers. In combination with the story’s British-Indian roots, Disney’s melting-pot reinterpretation resembles the multi-cultural nature of *The Jungle Book*. The *Bandar-log* monkey people of Disney’s animation sing the jazz song “I Wanna Be Like You” with a segment of scat dialogue. Jazz, an innately American genre of music, resembles nothing of the British-Indian story. Considering Disney’s musical soundtrack, there are not distinctly Indian musical elements in “I Wanna Be Like You” or “The Bare Necessities”, two of the most popular songs of the film.

The American melting pot ideal is reflected within the theme of inter-species relations of *The Jungle Book*. This ideal represents a culture composed of the convergence of many cultures. Mowgli becomes able to imitate any animal in Disney’s version, forgoing his species to “become” another. The musical compositions in particular reflect the theme of conformity. “The Bare Necessities”, describing the way of bears, informs Mowgli that he may follow the lifestyle. The visual performance during this song illustrates Mowgli struggling to follow Baloo’s actions. Ironically, after Mowgli renounces his humanity to become a bear, he is kidnapped by monkeys, who sing “I Wanna Be Like You”, a song in which the aspiration of the singer, King Louie, is to become human by learning from Mowgli. During the song, a mesmerized Baloo disguises himself in a costume which enables him to swing-dance with King Louie. This develops

a three-way triangle of imitation: Mowgli imitates Baloo in “The Bare Necessities”, King Louie imitates Mowgli in “I Wanna Be Like You”, and Baloo imitates King Louie during “I Wanna Be Like You”. This triangular conformity creates an imitation phenomenon, in which each character abandons their respective identities to adopt another. The imitation phenomenon in Disney’s adaptation here depicts cross-species mingling and conformity, whereas Kipling emphasizes understanding between the independent species by the Law of the Jungle. Motivation for this conundrum in Disney’s triangle of conformity varies; King Louie desires status and power, which is revealed when he says, “I’ve reached the top and had to stop and that’s what’s been botherin’ me,” then asks Mowgli for the secret to obtaining fire. Mowgli desires belonging. Baloo conforms because of a momentarily mesmerized fascination with jazz music. These varying motivations produce the same action, which is conformity, causing a circular dynamic.

The visual montage of dance in “I Wanna Be Like You” communicates conformism and evolutionary concepts with visual activities. King Louie begins singing “I Wanna Be Like You” while gesturing to Mowgli who is seated on Louie’s throne. Mowgli’s assumption of Louie’s throne visually reflects the superiority as a human that Louie desires. Louie believes that conforming to humanity, represented in Mowgli, will solve the problem of his stagnant kingship. Near the end of the song as Bagheera is attempting to rescue Mowgli, Mowgli follows King Louie and his monkey servant in a line, dancing. Following this image, Baloo, disguised in a hula skirt using coconut shells to resemble a primate, begins dancing with King Louie. The dancing literally executes the chorus of the song, in which one party has learned to walk like the other; Mowgli’s movements are the same as the monkeys dancing ahead of him in the train.

This hints at evolutionary theory because of the growing likeness of primates striving to gain humanity.

In addition to primates crossing human-animal boundaries, humanity in the character of Mowgli has degenerated. In the final recitation of the chorus, the triangular relationship of conformity which links all of the characters in a singular, continuous pursuit of one another denotes a reversal of roles for all characters involved. Baloo, disguised as an ape, sings “I wanna be like you” with King Louie to echo animalistic desires concurrent with his ape-like guise. The next frame shows Mowgli dancing with a monkey similar in size, evoking the accompanying lines “I wanna walk like you”.

The lyrics of Disney’s pop hit, “I Wanna Be Like You”, reflect the theme of conformity.

The chorus of the song repeats:

“Ooh-bi-doo, I wan'na be like you
I want to walk like you, talk like you, too
You see it's true, an ape like me
Can learn to be like you, too”

The song lyrics of the chorus above strongly capture the conformist message that Disney constructs. Line one is an expression of the desire to mimic or become. The second line elaborates in that the desire is to appear and sound similarly in addition to the initial desire for similarity. These two lines are linked in their communicated message and meaning. Change occurs in line three when it is expressed that the singers believe conformity is a realistic possibility. In the third line, the one to whom the chorus is directed is addressed in the second person. The first and second line use “you” as an object, whereas the third line elicits the mutual agreement or response of the “you” to a projected observable truth. The communication to the object of conformity on the basis of observed truth poses that both

parties have capabilities of reason. Whether the capability of reason is that which allows the subject to conform to the object is not clear. The second half of line three with line four attributes the presumed truth of the subject's ability to become to its learning capabilities. The subject in this case, being an ape aspiring to become a human, references evolutionary theory. The ape somehow can already conceptualize and foresee itself entering into the evolutionary process. Conformity, then, is preceded by visualization, which in turn is preceded by desire.

The scat singing in "I Wanna Be Like You", a musical method associated with jazz music, references African American culture. In the context of the song, it also shows the primitive qualities of the monkeys in comparison to the other animals of the jungle. Slang permeates the first line of the chorus with the scat phrase "ooh-bi-doo" and contraction "wan'na". The monkey chorus follows lyrics of the chorus with the scat dialogue "scooby-dooby-dooby" and "shoo-be-de-doo". Scat singing by definition of the Oxford English Dictionary is "a style of improvised singing in which meaningless but expressive syllables...are used instead of words" (oed). Scat, then, as it relates to language is valued primarily for its percussion and melody, rather than the depth of its lyrical composition, as there are no comprehensible words. The monkey hoard singing in scat depicts them as wordless creatures, lacking in humanity. Baloo, imitating the monkeys, ejaculates pseudo-scat dialogue with King Louie when they dance, showing his conformity to their species in speech and appearance. Preceding the monkeys' scat singing, they are able to converse, though they do so minimally. When Baloo asks for a fly to be shooed away from his nose, the monkey on his belly hits his face with a plank, revealing that the monkey understands Baloo's request and chooses to mock him while Mowgli is gagged by the hoard in the trees. They use speech to mock Baloo thereafter.

Film itself, being a performance, lends itself to this concept of mimicry and conformity. To learn to “walk” like another character is to mimic the visual and physical mannerisms, to talk is to mimic the auditory. Both of these aspects exist within the medium of animation—visual and auditory mimicry. The animator reproduces a constructed movement that resembles pre-existing, familiar figures like monkeys, humans, or wolves. The novel, contrarily, is an imagined scheme executed through words and description. From the perspective of the audience, both modes are illusionary, but one produces an audio-visual experience to convey a story and the other relies solely on written communication.

The moment of King Louie gaining human standing shows evolutionary progress beside Mowgli’s atavistic progress. Upon meeting, Mowgli, who is still outraged by his kidnapping attempts to punch King Louie with his fists. Louie seizes Mowgli’s hand, saying, “Let’s shake, cousin.” Midway through the song after King Louie’s music and dance performance, Mowgli comments, “Gee, Cousin Louie, you’re doing real good!” This interaction shows that King Louie’s performative models of identity, impersonation of mankind with makeshift finger instrumentals and unsophisticated dancing, have qualified him for Mowgli’s approval. Approval surpasses mere acceptance in that Mowgli has accepted Louie as his “cousin”, a term for a blood relative. This relationship was initiated by King Louie and later reciprocated by Mowgli. Unlike the novel, in which language qualifies Mowgli for kinship with other species, this interaction shows an additional component: verbal acceptance of kinship expressed following physical and linguistic likeness. The figure must learn to both walk and talk, apropos to the genre of film in which physical movement is visually evident whereas in literature it is not.

The song “Bear Necessities” contains aspects of both the atavistic and Lamarckist Mowgli. In one song, Mowgli is learning essential survival mechanisms and skills while simultaneously developing animalistic behaviors, which may be interpreted as either regression or progress. Beginning the song with its chorus, Baloo sings,

“Look for the bare necessities
 The simple bare necessities
 Forget about your worries and your strife
 I mean the bare necessities
 Old Mother Nature's recipes
 That bring the bare necessities of life”

The first word of the song is a directive commanding Mowgli to look, or search. This action promotes the survival instinct as the primary goal. Simplification in this song is simultaneously a learned process and regressional act. Whether this advances Mowgli or not seems to be an apparent contradiction. The second directive confuses this concept further in that it commands Mowgli to forget. If Mowgli forgets strife and it benefits him, perhaps this is evolutionary. On the other hand, the act of Mowgli forgetting may be considered loss for the fact that he is losing information in order to become a bear or shed emotional strain. Mother Nature is also a figure in the chorus, depicted as a provider of simple needs. As Mowgli and Baloo assume a hunter-gatherer role throughout the song, the Mother Nature figure provides fruit, ants, and even objects to scratch oneself on. This view of Mother Nature sharply contrasts Darwin’s entangled bank, in which certain figures pass their genes to the next generation while others do not. Throughout the song, Baloo bends trees and lifts rocks to obtain food, manipulating his surroundings for personal benefit, while Mowgli struggles to do the same.

In conclusion, the theme of linguistic conformity in Kipling's *The Jungle Book* projects various potential interpretations. The motif of language depicts dialect as a tool by which Mowgli may manipulate various species. The concept of manipulation by exploiting the language of another entity alludes to colonialism. Through the study and application of the dialects of animals in the jungle, the figure of Mowgli also promotes multiculturalism. The fact that Mowgli needs to learn language in order to survive and thrive evokes Lamarckism. Contrasting linguistic fluidity, the linguistic perversion of the monkey characters not only refuse to conform, but pervert the languages of others. Mowgli's many names contribute to his perception of inter-species identity. As language promotes survival for its capability for kinship alliances, the animals of the jungle are united in their fight to survive, mimicking Darwin's entangled bank metaphor. As animals form alliances and converse in *The Jungle Book*, realistic barriers of communication dissolve, creating a common ground for the animals.

Disney's animated adaptation contrasts the foundation Kipling laid in many ways, thus reinterpreting the motif of language. An initially Lamarckian Mowgli translates into an atavistic Mowgli by shifting from a student of language to a student of animalistic behavior. Where Kipling automatically associates Mowgli with animals, the Mowgli of Disney is defined by his striving endeavors. Language in the animated adaptation breaks down inter-species barriers by factors of commonality, such as the projection of voice actors and limitations to the English language. Although these similarities alter the perception of language, distinct dialects influence the perception as well, such as Black English and British English, which to the investigation of racial components within Disney's adaptation.

The musical influence in Disney's *Jungle Book* animation too informs the theme of conformity. Being that America itself reflects a blend of cultures, the American adaptation through Disney studios displays notions of cross-cultural conformity. "I Wanna Be Like You" visually and verbally represents conformity. This is especially referenced in the three-way triangle of imitation between Baloo, Mowgli, and King Louie, a conundrum which signifies racism and atavism through blackface minstrelsy.

The comparison of Disney and Kipling's work provokes analysis regarding the condition of mankind inwardly and relationally. The way in which evolutionary theory interacts with both versions of the story pertains to the inward condition of mankind. Kipling's narrative depicts man as an evolving force, whereas Disney depicts man as a diminishing force or static entity. This also relates to the relational, or "outward", condition of mankind. The argument that has been made for the racism in Disney's adaptation of *The Jungle Book* presents mankind participating in perpetual conformity. Kipling's *Jungle Book* contrasts this by associating mankind with colonialism and multiculturalism, thus proposing that mankind has the ability to conform for gain or survival. The conformity in either scenario exists, yet by comparing the two, varying outlooks on the condition of mankind exist. Whether subliminally or blatantly, Disney proposes the stagnancy of mankind through the evolutionary perspective as well as striving conformism within the imitation phenomenon. Comparatively, Kipling conveys mankind's potential in learning, growth, and by applying Lamarckian elements in conjugation with colonialist and multiculturalist action. The two works contrast one another in order to provide these analyses of the condition of man.

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Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) investigates colonialism and Lamarckism through the motif of linguistic conformity. By adapting these stories to animation in 1967, Walt Disney Productions developed an imitation phenomenon of perpetual conformism which reinterprets Kipling's motif in a way that is racist as well as atavistic.