

Homologizing Primates

A health and medical writer in New York, a business friend, once told me (for reasons I no longer recall fifteen or twenty years after the fact): “All people are, are eating and shitting machines.” And while I am today about the age that Diana B. was then, and have had my moments of despair, still I resist dismissing humanity with so base—with such a mechanical image. Every animal may be a machine, but infinite is still the number of organical parts, I think. O, OED, organical: distinguished from mechanical by the slight artful Touch of a single Person. For my part, I tend to see people as more animalic than we generally like to acknowledge. Consider:

From the program *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* a few seasons ago, Stephanie March as ADA Alexandra Cabot: on the one hand, a throwback to Hitchcock’s cool blondes, and yet—so much like a mandrill. That doesn’t mean she isn’t pretty. I’m just discomforted by my attraction. Or take David Caruso, who plays Lieutenant Horatio Caine on *CSI: Miami* (and who happens to be around my age): one of those blue-faced, snub-nosed, red-haired monkeys.

I didn’t begin homologizing primates whenever it was that scientists reported humans and chimpanzees have in common more than 99 percent of genes so much as when I saw, on a TV nature show, a wild chimp seated on a branch, clutching drumsticklike in his right fist a red colobus monkey leg and waving towards his lips from the left a succession of freshly plucked leaves, alternating munches on the meat with nibbles on the greens. And all of a sudden I thought: I’ll have the Spiced Fillet of Beef with Mizuna Salad. Or maybe the Hollywood Thai Beef Salad: there was a recipe in *Self* magazine, June 2006, courtesy of Executive Chef David Linville of the Standard Hollywood, a restaurant that, according to the copy, has a trendy diner feel and serves

celebrities such as Heather Graham and Megan Mullally international treats like this salad with protein-rich lean flank.

Unlike any pursing pursuer David Caruso has ever played, the male *R. roxellana* develops red swellings at the corners of the mouth—they look like a pair of raw fingerlets, or bared dog pizzles; were they fur-covered, they might remind you of the bumps on a buck fawn's skull where antlers will grow when he matures. Safer then to peg David Caruso as a distant relation of Roxellana herself. Consort of the sixteenth-century Ottoman sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, Roxellana had reddish-gold hair and, say some, a snub nose. Let there be no doubt Süleyman the Magnificent was called The Lawgiver. Truth to tell, I had not considered Caruso monkey-puckered when he was on NYPD Blue.

Or I'll squint at the screen when there's someone on with a big face but smallish features, on some boffo americanus show like Dr. Phil—a name, a title, a request, and promise—*Doctor—fill—life—empty—doctor—give—stuff*—and I'll think: worm. Bunch of sensory equipment for what? But only when I'm real low.