

Vivisected Language in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

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While the possibilities for scientific thought in nineteenth-century England seemed infinite, the moral climate of the time could not be reconciled with the pursuit of knowledge by any means whatsoever, and thus limitations were placed on scientific practice. One such set of limitations was the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876, which restricted the use to which live animals could be put in scientific experimentation. According to the Act, the physical suffering of a 'living

vertebrate animal' should be minimal and is justified only if it serves a purpose in the pursuit of 'physiological knowledge' or the 'alleviation of suffering'.¹ In other words, the bodily violence must be able to be reconciled, not only with the moral code, but also with the corresponding 'body' of knowledge and lead ultimately to its fulfilment, its completion. Fragmentation is necessary for wholeness or, as Christine Ferguson phrases it, 'the price of wholeness [...] is disintegration'.²

In her essay 'Decadence as Scientific Fulfillment', Ferguson aligns nineteenth-century scientific positivism in general, and particularly experimentation on bodies, with the 'decadent' literary movement (with which *The Island of Doctor Moreau* has been categorised³) because each relies on a degeneration or fragmentation of organic or 'natural' wholeness (or at least a deterioration in the belief in such a unity) in order to generate an inorganic or artificial one – a 'body' of knowledge or the 'body' of a fictional text, a narrative. In the case of decadent literature, particularly when science enters into the plot, even the created 'bodies' oftentimes fail to cohere, and we are offered fragmented texts like Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*.

The decadence of Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* appears as a vivisection that happens both within the story, in Dr. Moreau's laboratory, and *as* the 'operation' of the text itself. As Moreau works upon the creatures' bodies, so the text performs its own vivisection in the language that constitutes it. Wells has employed figurative language so excessively that, as in a dream, the reader cannot seem to find a coherent figure or a familiar scene. This is not because the characters and setting are fantastical, but because, as this article will demonstrate, they are mangled beyond recognition, just like Moreau's subjects. 'Literary' vivisection occurs through the use of tropes like personification, through which the scenery becomes animate; as well as metonymy, catachresis, and synecdoche, through which certain body parts are substituted for others, perform functions alien to them, and serve to define the whole. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is thus a story of the interrelation of literary and scientific vivisection, the two

¹ 'Cruelty to Animals Act, 1876', *British and Irish Legal Information Institute (BAILII)*, <http://www.bailli.org> (accessed December 10, 2005), sec. 3 (1).

² Christine Ferguson, 'Decadence as Scientific Fulfillment', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 117.3 (2002), 477.

³ By Bernard Bergonzi, for one, although, as Bergonzi points out, Wells 'was temperamentally alien to the self-conscious aestheticism [...] of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley'. Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1961), 2.

‘operations’ violently intertwined. It demonstrates the interruption of science’s attempts at logical coherence by its recourse, not only to the physical fragmentation of its subjects, but also to the tropic – what I would name the ‘savagery’ of the metaphor.

In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Wells has thus fashioned a ‘tropical’ world in more than one sense; it teems not only with organic ‘life’, but also with the figurations that make these elements at once discernible and unfamiliar. The inhabitants of this world, the ‘Beast People’, are the discarded progeny of Dr. Moreau’s attempts to create a ‘rational creature’ solely from animal parts, to generate a figure of rational coherence (a ‘body of knowledge’) from fragmented organic material. The medium through which such an endeavour must occur is language; it is linguistic articulation which allows for the passage from ‘matter for thought’ to ‘logic’ and also assures that this passage is a violent one, a ‘suture’ rather than a bridge. While Moreau believes that he can ‘operate’ through and upon the linguistic medium, it becomes apparent that his operations are merely one manifestation of the linguistic violence to which the entire novella falls prey. It seems fitting, then, that the bodily organ responsible, scientifically, for linguistic articulation will not only figure prominently in Moreau’s work (as a figure in its own right, in the character of M’Ling [‘my tongue’]), but will also remain, in both its most rudimentary form, as the experience of ‘something soft and warm and moist’ sliding along the surface of the skin, and in its articulation, as the story itself, after the death of Moreau and the total destruction of all of his work.⁴

In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, the violence of vivisection is used to spin an intricate relational complex amongst text, body, language and mind, using tropic devices which themselves break down as the boundaries between the former elements are breached. These morphings eventually degrade into a vagueness and obscurity, as the race to show the human form to be the ideal of existence ends in failure for both of the violent characters: Prendick, the ‘logic-chopping, chalky-faced saint of an atheist’ (124), and Moreau, the body-chopping, white-faced god of a scientist. The devolutionary process at work in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* moves back through the biological and moral human-animal distinctions, through all pretensions

⁴ H. G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (New York: Bantam, 1994), 139. All further references to this novella are to this edition and are contained parenthetically in the text.

to articulate speech and rational thought, to the interminable movement of a protective, warm tongue and a vague fumbling with the pieces of dead ideals in black ink.⁵

The Vivisected Text

The theme of vivisection pervades *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. It affects not only the animals on which Moreau performs his experiments, but also the narrator, the ‘natural’ environment of the island, the speech of the characters, and even the form of the text itself. The narrator, Edward Prendick, is vivisected, body and mind. This long and torturous process begins before he has even met Dr. Moreau, when he and two other men are starving in the dingy of the *Lady Vain*: ‘It is quite impossible for the ordinary reader to imagine those eight days. He has not – luckily for himself – anything in his memory to imagine with’ (2). Already, Prendick’s experiences are things which are injected or inserted into him, in this case into his memory. Once rescued, Prendick begins to receive injections in his body: ‘I’ve put some stuff into you now. Notice your arms sore? Injections’ (6). When he arrives on the island and begins to explore, the torture really begins: ‘I thought that my nerves were unstrung. [...] I completely lost my head with fear. [...] I felt a pain like a knife at my side’ (48, 50). Later, ‘a growth of thorny plants with spines [...] stabbed like penknives’ (59) and he ‘rose with a torn ear and bleeding face’ (70) and plunged into a ‘boiling stream’ (71). These adventures lead to Prendick’s ‘own ultimate undoing’ (75).

There is also an indication that Prendick’s senses have been wounded, or perhaps that the senses *are* merely wounds. Dr Moreau explains that ‘[i]f you wound the optic nerve you merely see flashes of light, just as disease of the auditory nerve merely means a humming in our ears’ (84). And indeed many of Prendick’s sense descriptions seem to be ‘disconnected impressions’, as the following examples indicate: ‘I saw through a bluish haze [...] here and there a splash of white or crimson’ (41); ‘I was startled by a great patch of vivid scarlet on the ground’ (43); ‘We came to [...] a bare place covered with a yellow-white incrustation, across which went a drifting smoke. [...] Blotches of green and crimson drifted across my eyes’ (62); ‘I listened, rigid, and heard nothing but the whisper of the blood in my ears’ (48); ‘I ran [...] my heart beating in my

⁵ Pascale Krumm notes that ‘Darwin asserts that, of all species, man alone holds the capacity for language, yet in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* the Beast-Folk can speak. [...] Similarly, Darwin maintains that only man has an ethical system, but once more, the theory is perverted and turned upside down, as Moreau is totally devoid of this so-called

ears, and then, hearing nothing of Montgomery or his man [...] the only sound near me was the thin hum of some small gnats' (58). Splashes of colour and flashes of light, indistinct impressions, and whispering, humming, and beating in the ears – all of this suggests the wounding of the sense nerves that Moreau describes above.

Like the vivisection of Moreau's other victims, 'this condition did not come all at once' (110). It is a long, slow, torture that Prendick endures. The story is being told from the point of view of a creature who is being slowly, tortuously, and above all *consciously* altered. The narrator is undone, taken apart, and then patched together with bits and pieces from other sources. Yet it is not as if he began as any kind of 'whole'. He begins adrift, 'human flotsam', barely existing (14).

Once the reader senses that the narrator is himself vivisected, it becomes clear that every element of the text is susceptible to vivisection, and is indeed victimised by its violence. Thus 'the steamy ravine cut like a smoking gash' (73) through the forest, and the rampage of the puma through the forest leaves its foliage in the same plight, as 'crushed and broken bushes, white rags torn from the puma's bandages, and occasional smears of blood on the leaves of the shrubs and undergrowth' (115). Even the plants bear the marks of vivisection; they are broken, bloodied, and bandaged, just like Moreau's victims. As Peter Kemp writes, '[w]hile shrieks and sobs shrill out from the laboratory [...] the island around it runs with blood.'⁶ Weapons that are supposed to have their own functions can only act like the scalpel: 'Then, cutting like a knife across the confusion, came the crack of a revolver'. Fire is merely blood and tattered skin, 'flickering threads of blood-red flame [...] a spurt of fire jetted from the window of my room' (127, 129). The adjective 'sharp' is used in the novella no less than 16 times, with regard to speaking, looking, turning, etc., in addition to the numerous references to things which cut and stab, are 'concise' and 'acute'. The body of the narrative itself falls prey to this 'vast pitiless mechanism' which 'seems to cut and shape the fabric of existence' (110). In this short text, there are at least sixty-seven ellipses and almost 250 hyphens, some terminal and some interrupting the line of the narrative with additional information, as if the scalpel were piercing and slashing at the very fabric of the text. Mark Hennelly even extends this destruction to the reader, stating that 'Wells's

uniquely human value.' Pascale Krumm, 'The Island of Dr. Moreau, or the Case of Devolution', *Foundation*, 28. 75 (1999), 56.

⁶ Peter Kemp, *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Ape*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan / St. Martin's, 1996), 21.

exploratory surgery is often self-inflicted, but operates most effectively on the unanesthetized reader'.⁷

Not only is the text torn open in various places, but, as many critics have noted, the narrative is also a 'patchwork' of different discourses, one grafted upon another. The point of agreement amongst critics on the 'hybridity' of the text involves the mixture of the literary (mythic, fictive) and the scientific (factual, logical). Pascale Krumm writes that 'it contains elements of the robinsonade, the gothic, the horror, the naturalistic, and the detective story, yet its main motif rests on mythobiology'.⁸ Roger Bowen sees the text as a 'merging' of the 'realms of mythology and science',⁹ and Nicoletta Vallorani discusses the 'mutual contamination between biology and literature'.¹⁰ While the literary and the scientific might be considered uncomfortable bedfellows, their crossing in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* reveals their compatibility; each relies on linguistic violence, on the manipulation and recombination of fragmented matter, to constitute itself.

The two 'matters' for vivisection – bodily and linguistic – are linked through the extensive use of tropes throughout the text. There is a sense in which everything conforms to a certain becoming-body. The ocean is given legs with which 'to keep pace with us' (8), its 'long waves [...] running with us' (11), and lungs to give 'a drowsy breathing sound – the sougling of the sea upon the beach' (58). Even the landscape is endowed with body-parts, like 'the shoulder of the cape' (49), 'the shoulder of a weedy bank' (59), and 'the lip of a long creek' (102), and animal actions, as when 'the horizon with the sail above it danced up and down' (3), 'the wild scene about me lay sleeping silently under the sun' (58) and 'the moon crept down from the zenith' (142).

As one big laboratory for vivisection, this novella is full of disconnected body parts. Many of them seem to take upon themselves the function of other parts or perhaps even the whole of the body. Metonymy and catachresis become methods and ends of vivisection. For instance, hands and eyes can speak. When Prendick is stranded in the boat with two others from

⁷ Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., 'Reader Vivisection in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*', *Essays in Arts & Sciences*, 9 (1980), 217.

⁸ Krumm, 51.

⁹ Roger Bowen, 'Science, Myth, and Fiction in H. G. Wells's *Island of Dr. Moreau*', *Studies in the Novel*, 8 (1976), 320.

¹⁰ Nicoletta Vallorani, 'Hybridizing Science: The "Patchwork Biology" of Dr. Moreau', *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, 46 (1997), 247.

the *Lady Vain*, the three are ‘thinking strange things and saying them with [their] eyes’ (2). And later, ‘the hands in the launch shouted derisively’ (22).

The ‘mind’ and its contents also form part of this obsession with tropic substitution. The mind has its own movements, and its contents take on the actions and functions of bodies, with arms and legs and minds of their own, as the following excerpts demonstrate: ‘My mind must have been wandering’ (3); ‘My imagination was running away with me’ (137); ‘I [...] let these and other strange memories of the last few days chase each other through my mind’ (36); ‘the most horrible questionings came rushing into my mind. They began leaping into the air, first one and then the other, whooping and grunting’ (45). Phrases, memories and questionings run and jump and chase each other as if they are characters unto themselves.

The ‘operation’ of the text through these tropes, the association of the literary with the violence of scientific practice, brings the pain and torture of vivisection into language, gives it a ‘voice’, and allows for Prendick’s one ‘aesthetic’ objection to Moreau’s experiments: the experience of listening to the screams of the vivisected puma, which does not bother Prendick on ‘principle’ (after all, he too is a ‘man of science’) nor on sight, but because ‘all of the pain in the world had found a voice’ (40).

Doctor Moreau Explains

Pascale Krumm writes that,

biology wants to investigate, for example, how a bird sings and why it does. Since *The Island of Dr. Moreau* is an extended literary essay on biology in general and evolution in particular, the proximate and the ultimate causes figure in the novel with these two questions: ‘how does Moreau accomplish his experiments?’ and more importantly ‘why does he conduct them?’.¹¹

¹¹ Krumm, 59.

Krumm goes on to explain that while both Prendick and the reader are given a lot of information on *how* Moreau conducts his experiments, neither are given a clear idea of *why*. Yet it is the very question – why? – that poses the problem for Moreau, since it involves not only a question of morality, but more importantly for this discussion, one of trope. Krumm’s example is a case in point. When biology asks why a bird sings, the only possible answer is the one in which the bird’s singing is personified, explained through the use of ‘humanity’ as a metaphor for all of creation. In other words, the answer to the why question in biology is never literally answered, only figuratively. As Jill Milling writes, ‘the combinatorial creature is the product of a metaphorical process that discovers relationships between contrasting human and animal characteristics’.¹² The vivisection that Moreau enacts on his Beast Men is not merely ‘biological’, but also, and perhaps primarily, linguistic, and not only because his creations can talk. It is the connection between biology and language itself that drives Moreau’s obsession.

While much of the chapter, ‘Doctor Moreau Explains’, finds its echo in Wells’ essay ‘The Limits of Individual Plasticity’, the reason Wells gives for pointing out the possibilities of such physiological alterations is to free the individual from the ‘mere subservience to natural selection’, from a course predetermined by heredity, the ‘whole story’ mapped out in advance.¹³ Moreau admits of no such purpose for his own work. Rather than liberating the individual human being from biological determinism, his goal is to ‘burn out all the animal’, to ‘make a rational creature of my own’ (89). This indicates, not a move toward individual freedom, but rather towards a certain ‘purity’ (albeit a decadent one), freedom from the ‘why’ question haunting science, making everything conform to an ‘ideal’ human rational form, a ‘body’ of knowledge perfectly coincident with its ‘matter’. After all, if everything has the form of humanity, then the answers to the ‘why’ are no longer tropic, but literal, or so it might seem. Thus it is the very ‘plasticity’ in the relation between the literal and the figurative that Moreau wishes to ‘push to its limits’ (83, 85), to create a body (text) that exists purely, untainted by the ‘unclean’ relationship between literal and figurative, between the practical, experimental pursuits of science, and the

¹² Jill Milling, ‘The Ambiguous Animal: Evolution of the Beast-Man in Scientific Creation Myths’, in *The Shape of the Fantastic*, ed. O. H. Saciuk (New York: Greenwood, 1990), 110.

¹³ H. G. Wells, ‘The Limits of Individual Plasticity’, in *H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*, ed. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley: University of California, 1975), 36.

moral-allegorical projection of ends,¹⁴ and thus to erase the initial schism, the bodily-linguistic fissure, that makes such an artificial logic possible.

That he must go about things in this way was not always clear to Moreau, however. He apparently tried other avenues and quickly realized that they were much too dangerous. One of his creations was a linguistic monster:

It only got loose by accident – I never meant it to get away. It wasn't finished. It was purely an experiment. It was a limbless thing with a horrible face that writhed along the ground in a serpentine fashion. [...] It lurked in the woods for some days, doing mischief to all it came across. [...] The man had a rifle, and when his body was found one of the barrels was curved into the shape of an S. [...] After that I stuck to the ideal of humanity. (88)

As an attempt at another type of liberalisation, this monster turned everything into letters, like the 'S' of the gun barrel. Without the minimal restraints of the human form, it seems, linguistic creation becomes purely destructive.

While Moreau chooses the human form for 'artistic' reasons (allying himself with the decadents both in the separation of the 'art' from all moral concerns and in the belief that any artistic form is good, no matter how hideous), Prendick tries to maintain the human form as moral ideal, keeping it separate from the Beast People: 'My fellow-creatures, from whom I was thus separated, began to assume idyllic virtue and beauty in my memory' (111). But Prendick is unable to retain this view of humanity, for once he returns to London, he finds only Beast People: 'with my return to mankind came, instead of that confidence and sympathy I had expected, a strange enhancement of the uncertainty and dread I had experienced during my stay upon the island. [...] I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another, still passable human, Beast People' (154). At this point, it is not clear which is the literal and which

¹⁴ The name 'Moreau' is interesting here, since it sounds like the French plural *moraux*, 'morals,' but it is spelled like the French *morceau*, 'piece,' which would be a perfect name for a vivisector, except that Moreau is missing the 'c', as if vivisection has been to work even on his name, extracting the 'c' to bring in the moral dilemma. Roslynn D. Haynes sees Moreau's name as 'a condensation of "water of death"' (R. D. Haynes, 'The Unholy Alliance of Science

the figurative, whether his impressions on the island lent to the figuration of his ‘fellow-creatures’ as Beast People, or whether humanity lent the figure to the Beast People. The ‘why’ of Moreau’s experiments, coupled with Prendick’s impressions upon returning to ‘real life’ in England, have less to do with a question of sanity than with a question of trope.

The origin of Prendick’s confusion – his inability to hold a fixed image of ideal humanity due to a ‘shiftiness’ of language – is also that of Moreau’s failure. Moreau himself admits that even the creations which seem the most ‘human’ leave something to be desired: they are ‘failures’,

there is still something in everything I do that defeats me, makes me dissatisfied [...] always I fall short of the things I dream. [...] And least satisfactory of all is something that I cannot touch, somewhere – I cannot determine where – in the seat of the emotions [...] a strange hidden reservoir to burst suddenly and inundate the entire creature with anger, hate, or fear. (88-89)

If Moreau cannot find this ‘hidden reservoir’, it is not because he has not delved far enough inside the living organism. If he cannot ‘touch’ this ‘something’, ‘somewhere’, it is because in this tale ‘emotions’ do not come from inside the organism; rather, they surprise it from without, and the most notable example of this does not involve necessarily ‘anger, hate, or fear’, emotions which have a definite object, but rather a more ‘inappropriate’ emotion: laughter.

Laughter first occurs at the beginning of the novella, when a struggle breaks out between the other two passengers of the dingy, and ‘the two fell upon the gunwale and rolled overboard together. They sank like stones. I remember laughing at that and wondering why I laughed. The laugh caught me suddenly like a thing from without’ (3). And when Montgomery is explaining to Prendick more about the Beast People that Moreau has created, he says that ‘none could laugh’ (94). And yet, in the scene in which all of the Beast People, plus Montgomery, Moreau and Prendick, are chasing the Leopard Man, all *do* laugh: ‘I heard the Satyr laughing’, ‘the Wolf-Bear, laughing into my face with the exultation of hunting [...] The Hyena-Swine [...] every now

in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *The Wellsian*, 11 [1988], 14). Either way, there is at least one letter missing, indicating that vivisection has been at work on the name.

and then puckering its muzzle with a snarling laugh' (99, 106-07). From this seeming contradiction, one could only state that laughing is not a capacity, not something that a particular creature or type of creature owns, but is always rather inappropriate, striking the creature from without (and thus not something that can be 'operated upon' by the vivisector). And the creature who laughs (*L'homme qui Rit*), who can be affected by this force from without, must itself be inappropriate, surprising itself from without, susceptible to a shifting of its own borders, a certain 'incontinence'.

Just as the figurative language of the text causes shifts in meaning through which body parts, their 'operations', etc., become confused, so this theme of 'boundary-crossing', a disruption of borders, carries throughout the plot. Because of this, 'incontinence' is one of the problems that many characters in this story fight against. The whole first section of the novella seems to revolve around an obsession with in-corporation and ex-corporation. Always quite concerned about his own empty stomach, Prendick is clearly a part of a larger process of digestion and indigestion, being ejected from two ships, one of which is called the *Ipecacuanha*, a herb which is used to make people vomit.¹⁵ Not only is the ship full of refuse, but her captain is a drunkard and in the spirit of the ship effectively vomits obscenities at Prendick: 'With that I brought the downpour on myself. [...] I do not think I have ever heard quite so much vile language come in a continuous stream from any man's lips before' (14). After this, Prendick becomes known as 'Mr. Shut Up' – and rightfully so, as he says as little as he can about himself, advises Montgomery to do the same and claims to be an 'abstainer'. Once Prendick is allowed to land on Moreau's island, he is still considered to be a danger to the 'integrity' of the processes of which he becomes a part: 'This, the grey-haired man told me, was to be my apartment, and the inner door, which, "for fear of accidents," he said, he would lock on the other side, was my limit inward' (33). Prendick must not pass beyond a certain point, over a certain threshold, and neither must anything else pass over the same threshold in the other direction 'for fear of accidents', for fear of incontinence. As John Glendening asserts, this anxiety 'entails the commingling of objects, processes, and qualities that strike the human mind as incompatible or antagonistic because they upset boundaries and categories'.¹⁶ These anxieties prove to be warranted, as the

¹⁵ 'Indigestion rages through [Wells's] fiction like an epidemic' (Kemp, 7).

¹⁶ John Glendening, "'Green Confusion': Evolution and Entanglement in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30. 2 (2002), 573.

breaching of the enclosure leads to a breakdown of all boundaries; the ‘masters’ die, the beasts begin to break the Law and revert to animal form, Prendick becomes ‘one among the Beast People’, and even language itself begins to degenerate. (139)

Devolution / Evolution

At this point, language itself seems to become the main ‘character’, the remainder of the novel concerning its degeneration. What emerges then is an interesting dynamic amongst the tongue, dead bodies, and the written page. Previously, the tongue, in the character of M’ling, may have been separate from the (whole) body, and yet it was itself embodied; it had a certain ‘mineness’, even if the ‘my’ of possession was cut short through the excision of the ‘y’ and the insertion of the apostrophe (the excision and grafting of vivisection). The separation of the tongue made speech difficult, sometimes ‘inaccessible’, yet always there was a sense of loyalty; M’ling was a dog-man who ‘loved nothing so much as to be near him’ (96).¹⁷ Yet in spite of this loyalty, there was still some doubt on the part of the man: ‘I’m not so sure of M’ling. [...] I think I should know him’ (101). It is with the ‘disposing of the mangled remains of M’ling’ that the printed page emerges: ‘they came back, hurrying and fearful, to the margin of the water, leaving long wakes of black in the silver [...] as I watched them disposing of the mangled remains of M’ling’ (134-35). After the death of the Moreau-god, the death of the man, Montgomery, and his tongue, M’ling, there is nothing left but for their remains to be disposed of in black lines of print.

Yet the tongue has not completely relinquished its position next to the man. Even though it seems that Prendick can only arm himself with pieces of dead bodies, ‘some specked and half-decayed branches’ (138), he wakes to the following: ‘I heard something breathing, saw something crouched close together beside me. I held my breath, trying to see what it was. It began to move slowly, interminably. Then something soft and warm and moist passed across my hand’ (139). It is the interminable movement of the tongue, no longer ‘mine’, yet still obsequious, affectionate, warm and alive. It is another dog-man, who calls Prendick ‘Master’

¹⁷ One point should be noted here. Before this description of M’ling’s loyalty, the figure of the vivisected dog has already been directly associated with, in fact confused with, language: ‘On the day of its publication, a wretched dog, flayed and otherwise mutilated, escaped from Moreau’s house’ (35). The ordering of this sentence implies that it is the dog that is published, thus making the dog a piece of writing.

because he has seen Prendick 'write'; he saw the printed page that Prendick created when 'disposing of the mangled remains of M'ling'.¹⁸

Soon the Beast People lose language almost entirely. Prendick exclaims, 'Can you imagine language, once clear-cut and exact, softening and guttering, losing shape and import, becoming mere lumps of sound again?' (144). Yet even at this point the tongue remains loyal to some extent, saving Prendick from the wrath of the Hyena-Swine:

I was startled by something cold touching the skin of my heel, and starting round found the little pink sloth creature blinking into my face. He had long since lost speech. [...] He made a moaning noise when he saw he had attracted my attention [...] presently it occurred to me that he wished me to follow him [...] and suddenly in a trampled space I came across a ghastly group. (147-48)

Once the Hyena-Swine is dead, Prendick realises that he is still vulnerable, definitely not 'Master' for all. The earlier 'writing' that Prendick accomplished with the disposal of M'ling is replaced by Prendick's attempts to make a raft, to bind together the 'black ruins of the enclosure' (147). But he fails at this, and must use a boat that washes ashore, containing two dead men whose bodies 'fell to pieces' (150). Again, it seems that Prendick can only accomplish an act of writing with the use of dead bodies.

When he finally returns to 'civilization', Prendick finds only a mirror of the violence of the island. One wonders at this point where the trusty tongue has gone, since Prendick shuns the society of humans, and surrounds himself with 'wise books' (156). It seems, in fact, that he has forgotten this loyal servant, as he instead praises the 'sense of infinite peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven'. But it must not be forgotten that it is the starlight which 'loosens one's tongue', sets it free, allows it to speak (17). These 'glittering hosts' also 'pierce' like the

¹⁸ Hennelly discusses this relationship between what is dead and cold, and what is warm and alive, but he describes it as a conflict between the 'naturalistic' and the 'vitalistic', as 'the clash between opposing world views: on the one hand, a cold, naturalistic, "silly ass" of a universe, to use Montgomery's repeated phrase, and on the other, a vitalistic, almost Romantic world view' (230).

scalpel: ‘the little stars one by one pierced the attenuated light’ (47). So their ‘protection’ cannot be entirely peaceful. Like Moreau, they must be ‘hosts’ who say, ‘you are uninvited’ (28).¹⁹

The relationship set up in the beginning amongst mind, body, language, and text has been altered. No longer is it a matter of metonymy or personification or even catachresis, since there are no longer any determinate body parts, forms or functions to substitute for one another. Figuration *has* been pushed to its limits and all that is left are remains: dead body parts, tongues which no longer speak and a vague blundering with dark inky lines, attempting to put them together, make them coherent, form them into something that can carry one back to a civilization which no longer exists except as a morphing figure of the nightmare of figuration itself.²⁰

Yet one might call this an ‘evolution’ of sorts, one that emerges in the transformations effected through the whirlwinds of the three great chase scenes in the novella. After the first chase, Prendick is no longer afraid of Moreau, but he is afraid of the Beast People, as he realises the animals in the ‘men’. The second chase ends in Prendick’s realisation that Moreau’s experiments involve ‘wantonness’, and as a result Prendick is no longer afraid either of Moreau or of the Beast People, because he now recognises the humanity in the beast: ‘seeing the creature there in a perfectly animal attitude, with the light gleaming in its eyes, and its imperfectly human face distorted with terror, I realized again the fact of its humanity’ (108). After the third chase, he realises that ‘an animal may be ferocious and cunning enough, but it takes a real man to tell a lie’ (142). Thus he faces the Beast People ‘very much as an actor passing up the stage faces his audience’ (133). The need to be an actor follows Prendick, even when he is back to ‘civilization’: ‘[I] professed to recall nothing that had happened to me between the loss of the *Lady Vain* and the time when I was picked up again – the space of a year. I had to act with the utmost circumspection to save myself from the suspicion of insanity’ (154).

The first two chase scenes merely end in two sides of a pointless debate: animal-human or human-animal, the animal in the human or the human as animal. Either way, the difference between the animal and the human, at the level of the scientific, or even the moral, is merely a

¹⁹ Haynes sees the ending in an even more pessimistic light. She writes, ‘Thus Prendick comes, finally, to represent a more subtle and hence, ultimately, a more insidious Moreau, maintaining a regimen which might, on the surface, be considered entirely respectable and appropriate to a scientist’ (23).

²⁰ As Vallorani notes, ‘the realistic landscape acquires an impressionistic flavor and Prendick’s words become more and more confused, unable to depict a scientific experiment somehow gone wrong and metamorphosed into a nightmare’ (254).

question of the free animal or the one in chains. The Beast People demonstrate this point when they quickly revert to almost-normal animal status once Dr Moreau is dead.

Once both of these options have been surpassed, there is still something remaining for the one who calls himself human: he can lie. Since he has no proper existence, and since his scars are more than skin-deep, more than bodily or moral, he has no place to which to regress. He cannot simply take up being an animal again, nor can he be a god, utterly transcending his fleshly nature.

If Moreau's experiments are at all successful, it is in their revelatory nature. They bring to light the hybridity of the human condition itself – not part animal and part human, but the ultimate trope, the one who can never be himself, the one who must 'act' like this or that, shift from one form to another with no one 'true' form. If it was so difficult for Moreau to get it right, it is because there is no true human form – the creatures he manufactures are 'missing' just this. Since Moreau himself is armed merely with surgical knowledge, he can only make physical changes and thus only affect emotional and behavioural qualities which can be altered in this way. So it is not surprising that certain things elude him and that his alterations are ephemeral. Once he is dead, his creatures revert to the patchwork of animal parts that they always were. Their language and the 'Law' had merely to do with education and conditioning through the threat of excruciating pain, so even these things retreat when the 'stubborn beast flesh' grows back (87). It is as if everything that Moreau inflicted on his creations were merely physical scars which were able to heal once he died. Moreau's one success was Prendick – only he kept the scars inflicted on him by Moreau. This, it seems, is the difference between the human and the animal, a certain inability to heal.

Thus it is not the mere ability for speech that separates the human from the animal – it is the tropic quality of his very existence, and his recognition of this fact, his longing to be invited, to find a host. Language is not something grafted on to the human being, but rather a scar in his very being, something that will always connect his goals, ends, morals, to this piecemeal creature, never able to be what he is, only able to assume the stage, to lie as well as he can, to realise that he is always merely 'human flotsam', drifting in and out, into in-corporation, and

back out into ex-corporation, sometimes steadfast, sometimes incontinent, but always finding himself unawares, taken by surprise, his emotions arising from the outside.²¹

And so he attempts to write, to create himself through the creation of his own fiction, while always attesting to the scars that make the fiction the only truth he has. His is thus the story that remains after the tragedy – like that of the *Lady Vain* – and the ‘rescue’ – like that enacted on the survivors of the *Lady Vain*.²² There is another survivor and another rescue, the survival and rescue of the one who is always already out of his body, rescued only ‘by chance’, witness to unspeakable tortures, stranded, outcast, uninvited.

In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Wells suggests that beside the tragedies and catastrophes, the morals and conventions and pretensions of human being, beyond its histories and sciences and its humanities, there is another story, the story of the writing of the fiction of human-being. It is sad and bloody and full of fear and wanton destruction. As Glendening writes, ‘Prendick’s fussy scientific vocabulary cannot disguise the implication that life in general in an inhuman(e) affair “scarlet” with blood and, because inseparable from non-life, of no definitive status’.²³ Even Wells himself writes of this book that ‘it is written just to give the utmost possible vividness to that conception of man as hewn and confused and tormented beasts’.²⁴ But here and there a bit of light pierces through the fabric, a little speck of peace, an invitation from a tiny glittering ‘host,’ to partake of existence in spite of all.

²¹ While I would agree with Christine Ferguson’s assertion that ‘[r]ather than becoming human through its speech, the articulate animal testifies to the fact that language is an artefact of a bestial past rather than an evolutionary attainment’ (Christine Ferguson, *Language, Science, and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* [Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005], 9), I have here made a distinction between the capacity for language (which, no doubt, involves a recognition of language’s ‘brutality’) and the ‘human’ quality of being always already ‘tropically’ riven asunder.

²² In the first paragraph of his account, Prendick writes, ‘I do not propose to add anything to what has already been written concerning the loss of the *Lady Vain*. As everyone knows, she collided with a derelict when ten days out from Callao. The long-boat with seven of the crew was picked up eight days after by H. M. gun-boat *Myrtle*, and the story of their privations has become almost as well known as the far more terrible *Medusa* case. I have now, however, to add to the published story of the *Lady Vain* another as horrible, and certainly far stranger’ (1).

²³ Glendening, 587.

²⁴ Quoted in D. B. D. Asker, ‘H. G. Wells and Regressive Evolution’, *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters*, 12. 1 (1982), 25.