



CHAPTER 11

Human Intervention and More-Than-Human Humanity in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

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In other words, in a rude and undisciplined way indeed, in an amorphous chaotic way we might say, humanity is even now consciously steering itself against the currents and winds of the universe in which it finds itself.

H. G. Wells, "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" (218)

Ecocritics and animal studies scholars have long recognized the importance of the work of H. G. Wells in exposing the deleterious, often disastrous, effects of human manipulation of the environment. Nowhere is that exposition made more pointedly than in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Lesser known, perhaps, is that Wells's essays on a wide range of subjects express similar concerns about the impact of human intervention on the natural world. My purpose in this essay is to read Wells's corpus as background for locating in *Doctor Moreau* a fascination with a humanity that gestures outward, imagining itself a part of an interrelated world

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in which the question of what it means to be *properly* human is pushed to its epistemological limits. Bio-diverse and bizarre, the humanity—or, rather, humanities (Moreau's, Montgomery's, the Beast Folk's, for example)—that *Doctor Moreau* foregrounds, I believe, speaks to Wells's commitment to conceptualizing humanity as relational, uniting qualities often assigned exclusively to “animal” and “human.” For Wells, “humanity” is a concept difficult to categorize and contain within the limited boundaries of what his contemporaries considered properly human. More specifically, this essay considers Wells's many essays and remarks on science and society and *Doctor Moreau* intertextually to gauge the writer's scientifically informed humanism, which I argue represents a caution against a positivism that reduces rather than respects the diversity and interconnectedness of things. In doing so, I first outline Wells's ideas about science, particularly evolution, as it relates to humans and non-humans, using as an extended example his comments on animal pain. I then undertake several interrelated tasks. First, I identify the theoretical basis for my claims about Wells's fiction and nonfiction as ecological narratives, bound by the conventions of storytelling as well as ideas about evolution and the environment. Second, I track and analyze the struggles of Prendick, protagonist of *Doctor Moreau*, to confront and respond to Moreau's interventionist ideology¹ and to understand the uncanny ways of the Beast Folk. Finally, I argue that Prendick's questioning of the animal-human divide and its presumed ontological status—a skepticism that appears in some of Wells's essays—is bound up with a fascination and grappling with a more-than-human humanity that calls into question the artificiality and singularity of what it purports to be human.

WELLS ON SCIENCE AND INTERVENTION

The quest for science and progress at the expense of ethical concerns can be seen in Wells's comments on (animal) pain. The subject of pain and its relevance to understanding humans and beasts—and the divisions between them—is one to which Wells returns frequently. His views are expressed in his fiction, particularly through the characters in *Doctor Moreau*. In Chapter 14, “Doctor Moreau Explains,” Edward Prendick, protagonist and narrator, discovers that he has mistakenly identified creatures he has previously encountered on the deserted island; they are not “animalized victims” or “animal-men” (53), but instead are what Moreau refers to as “humanized animals—triumphs of vivisection” (71). At this point of the story, Prendick hears from Moreau that his

intellectual curiosity, combined with his belief in the efficacy of “intervention” in matters of environment and nature, has led him to experiment on different animals to gauge their malleability or submission to human will, in order, as Moreau claims, to “find out the extreme plasticity in a living shape” (75). When Prendick presses Moreau to justify his actions, Moreau nonchalantly replies, “[t]he study of Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature” (75). As to what has prompted Moreau’s obsession with getting his creatures to look and behave like humans, the scientist reveals his human-centric indifference to these creatures: “I might just as well have worked to form sheep into llamas, and llamas into sheep. I suppose there is something in the human form that appeals to the artistic turn of mind” (73). Vivisection, to Moreau, is more than a means to discovering “the extreme plasticity of a living shape,” but an assertion of human will—along with its norms and notions of beauty—grafted onto animal flesh and mind. The insouciance of Moreau’s “artistic turn of mind,” and its hellish effects on an island previously unsullied by human contact, does not sit well with Prendick, however, as the latter begins to question the fixity and proper expression of the human.

A cursory look into Wells’s essays on science suggests a stance on pain similar to that of Moreau’s. In “The Province of Pain,”² published in 1894, Wells considers questions such as “[t]he relation of physical pain to the imagination and the emotions” (196) and the nonexistence of “needless pain” (197), concluding with a human-centric view on pain that presupposes a hierarchy of life that relegates animals, especially those reflecting and reinforcing little or no human attributes, to the margins of human empathy. “In such an animal as the dog we may conceive that there is a fairly well-developed moral and intellectual rule, and a keen sense of pain. Going downwards, the mental factor diminishes ... until at last the mental disappears and the impression that would be pain is a momentary shock” (198).

If the idea that (humanized) intelligence and the endurance of pain share an inverse relationship seems evident in “The Province of Pain,” in “Bio-Optimism” Wells explicitly ties the function of pain to natural selection, seeing pain—and the experience of pain—as part and parcel of evolution, if so perceived: “[t]he names of the sculptors who carves [sic] out the new forms of life are, and so far as human science goes at present they must ever be, Pain and Death” (209).

More broadly considered, Wells's ideas on pain, biology, and scientific thinking take on a sense of ambivalence and open-endedness. In his 1914 collection of essays, *An Englishman Looks at the World*, Wells discusses numerous concerns and topics of his times, from technology to empire and from sociology to the ideal citizen. Many of these essays reveal Wells's considered thinking on society, science, and modern humankind. In one of the essays, "The So-Called Science of Sociology," Wells cautions against overconfidence in abstract sciences that detach their scopes of study from the concrete and the specific or individual, stating that, "[t]he naturalist accumulated facts and multiplied names, but he did not go triumphantly from generalisation to generalisation after the fashion of the chemist or physicist" (82). Unlike biology and natural sciences, other branches of science or knowledge production "deal with larger and less numerous individuals" (83). Among these is sociology, which, though not based on the same kind of rigorous experimentation as one finds in the natural sciences, appropriates science's detached objectivity and status as truth. This practice, Wells says, results in eviscerating the richness and singularity of life, obscuring "[the] individuality (heterogeneity) ... [that] is an evolutionary product from an original homogeneity" (83). Indeed, in many of his essays, Wells expresses concern over an inflated optimism in and obsession with humanity and critiques the ways in which the sciences are seen as instruments for human progress and *not* as the neutral means to studying life in its myriad forms and expressions. In "Zoological Retrogression," for example, he identifies a wayward tendency shared "among cultivated people [and] the educated public" (158) to misunderstand and coopt Darwinism into a human-centric, progressivist discourse:

Using their [biologists'] technical phrases and their authorities in an inevitably optimistic spirit, the educated public ... assumes that this 'evolution' will continue with increasing velocity under the supervision of its extreme expression—man. This belief ... receives neither in the geological record nor in the studies of the phylogenetic embryologist any entirely satisfactory confirmation. (158)

The idea that the biodiversity of all things is being flattened into "the great scroll of nature," prostrate and passive, and that human supervision and control in the name of "evolution" and progress is not only sanctioned but inevitable, is a distortion of the concept of evolution that Wells dramatizes and mocks in his fiction, such as in *Doctor Moreau*.

HUMAN INTERVENTION AND STORYTELLING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

While Wells's essays lay out fairly clearly his fears regarding humankind's interference with the environment, none of these has had the staying power or emotional impact of *Doctor Moreau*. However, the conventions of the novel as a genre may mask for some readers the complex ramifications suggested by Wells's fictional description of human intervention in the natural world. For, if what is "real" in the novel depends on what Ian Watt has called "the study of the particulars of experience by the individual investigator ... who, ideally at least, is free from the body of past assumptions of traditional beliefs" (12), Prendick, whose bourgeois sense of man, aesthetics, and animality has made it difficult for him to register—and record—with neutrality what is happening on Moreau's island, is a problematic storyteller at best. The robust biodiversity on Moreau's island, which this essay will soon address, is not to be domesticated by Prendick's narrative, however. But for now, it is important to understand how storytelling as it has been practiced by humans over time, and particularly in the preceding two centuries, has contributed to an anthropocentric view of the world that Wells questions (but does not fully abandon) in his novel. Notwithstanding these limitations, Wells anticipates some twenty-first-century theorists' ideas about the dangers of adopting the ideology of human exceptionalism and assigning to human agency too great a role in shaping the natural world.

Warnings about anthropocentrism are a hallmark of twenty-first-century ecological commentary. For example, Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that contemporary discourses on the Anthropocene have given increased importance to human activity in reshaping the natural world, causing us to "scale up our imagination of the human," creating universalized assumptions or narratives about human agency that are problematically reductive and potentially dangerous. Chakrabarty's ideas are reflected in *Doctor Moreau* in various ways, from Moreau's experiments with animal vivisection and his rationalization of inflicted pain (witness his dismissal of sheep as "animals without courage" which are "no good for man-making" [75])—to more benign exercises of human superiority in the form of pity or paternal care, as exhibited in Montgomery's and Prendick's hierarchical but humane relationships with the Beast Folk.

Wells's modern editors Robert Philmus and David Hughes argue that, "Wells did not think of science and ethics as separate and distinct from

one another" (179); instead, "scientific humanism, for Wells, meant dropping the issue of whether biology justifies us in believing man to be by 'nature' a beast or a starry portent, and instead taking up ... the issue of man in society" (185). Taking a cue from Philmus and Hughes, I read *Doctor Moreau* as describing an imagined habitat of alterity and possibility, in which the human—what is properly or possibly human—is the product of storytelling. More specifically, I analyze *Doctor Moreau* as a narrative space in which Wells gestures toward, and grapples with, a humanity that is not tethered to binary thinking that limits the idea of the human to either "a beast or a starry portent." Focusing on narrative as a means of interpreting Wells's science fiction is not unwarranted, especially when considering the author's views on the novel as a mediating force and practice. Wells makes a case for such a reading in his essay "The Contemporary Novel": "the novel [is] an important and necessary thing indeed in that complicated systems of uneasy adjustments and readjustments which is modern civilization." One "distinctive value of the novel" lies in observing the development of characters—not simply to know their destiny, but to observe their development (*Englishman* 63, 65). Reading *Doctor Moreau* as an unfolding narrative of Prendick's shifting views of the Beast Folk, I argue, reveals an intention that does not so much classify and contain life, as it characterizes life in myriad forms, expressions, and spaces, of which the human is a part. Indeed, the different stories, anecdotes, and lived experiences that comprise *Doctor Moreau*—those of Moreau, Montgomery, the Beast Folk, and Prendick himself—cover a broad range of perspectives, often relational and mutually implicating, that confound binaries and beliefs on which civilized humans depend. *Doctor Moreau*, in short, tells a more luridly bizarre story of life in the Anthropocene than Wells describes in his essay "Human Evolution" (1896): "Sin is the conflict of the two factors [the civilized human and the savage]—as I have tried to convey in my *Island of Dr. Moreau*" (217). The biodiversity on Moreau's island necessitates the failure of a human story. As Prendick narrates the many encounters and experiences on the island, it is clear that the story, as Ronald Edwards argues, "does not hinge strictly upon his [Prendick's] knowledge of the Beast Folk's nonhuman origins ... it cannot be simplistically slotted into good versus bad categories defined by a man versus beast divide" (152). Rather, it becomes clear that the overconfidence of Moreau's humanity is not the subject of the story, but the opening act for a more-than-human humanity that, in making a mess of things,

disorients the human self as it disrupts the order of things on which the logic of the human's right to intervene, improve, and inflict pain depends.

The ethical need to think beyond the human calls for an ecological imagination to rethink agency (who acts) and community (who belongs). In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett advocates that we "question our larger faith in the uniqueness of humans"; if "human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies," then we humans can and should be able "to consult nonhumans more closely" (108). Bennett argues that "encounters with lively matter can chasten [our] fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests" (122). Timothy Morton, too, argues persuasively that nonhuman agents "can't be reduced to their merely human use or exchange value" (*Dark Ecology* 21). Rather than essentialize the human as a species apart from nature, Morton folds the human within "an ecosystem of nonhumans" (71) to suggest an ecological coexistence of things enmeshed, not as discrete entities.³ To imagine an enmeshed coexistence and an assemblage of things, as Morton and Bennett imagine them, is to problematize the notion of the human as the agent of free will and problem-solver against a nature made passive and prostrate to human activity.

The assumed position that humans are free to intervene and meddle with beings and things, nonhuman as well as human, often goes hand in hand with the creation of a master narrative that presents humankind as a species apart from and above nature. In *Doctor Moreau*, Moreau's lecture on vivisection and his ultimate quest for the plasticity of life is an exemplar of this attitude. Although Simon James argues that in *Doctor Moreau* Wells "blurs the barrier between civilization and barbarism by dissolving the barrier between the human and the animal," he qualifies his assertion by noting that the central story is "prefaced by a sceptical frame narrative, as if its assertions too are not necessarily to be believed" and that "there is no physical evidence to support the story" (64–5). Essentially, the frame narrative raises questions about the reliability of Prendick's account of what has happened on the island. However, Prendick's convoluted narrative, which contains Moreau's story and is framed by his nephew's preface, is not supported by "physical evidence," does not mitigate Prendick's desire to capture and make sense of his lived experiences on the island. The layered quality of *Doctor Moreau*, I argue, is more a matter of narrative than of truth; it highlights the ways perception

and intention contribute to storytelling and its plasticity and changing nature. In addition to analyzing the dissolution of the “barrier between the human and the animal” (James 64), it is worthwhile to examine Prendick’s perspective on Moreau’s interventionist science and the ideology behind it. At the same time, it should be noted that Prendick’s views are influenced by a host of perspectives not his own, human and nonhuman, as evident in his conversations and lived experiences with Montgomery and the Beast Folk before and after Moreau’s death.

The story that Moreau shares with Prendick is traditionally human-centric. It favors science and human intervention in the name of knowledge production, where human action renders nature inert and animal agency irrelevant, if not altogether nonexistent. Vivisection, as Moreau tells Prendick, is not simply a means to an end—“You begin to see that it is a possible thing to transplant tissue from one part of an animal to another or from one animal to another” (72)—but an end in itself as well—“You cannot imagine what it means to an investigator, what an intellectual passion grows upon him [me] (75).” From time to time, however, Prendick questions the infallibility of Moreau’s claims, especially when Moreau justifies his fixation on the human as an ideal form and expression of life or when he tries to explain away human mind and all of its complexity in broad strokes, as he argues:

In our growing science of hypnotism we find the promise of a possibility of replacing old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafted upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas. Very much indeed of what we call moral education is such an artificial modification and perversion of instinct; pugnacity is trained into courageous self-sacrifice, and suppressed sexuality into religious emotion.⁴ (73)

Obviously, Moreau’s explanation does not always add up; its hypotheses and analogies are not so much for rational comprehension as for ready or forced consumption. Prendick’s hesitations and doubts warrant a closer look. They represent, among other things, a disengagement from Moreau’s overconfidence in science and his mythologizing of vivisection, and a growing curiosity “to see the whole adventure out, a queer impersonal spectacular interest in myself” (54). When Prendick learns exactly what Moreau is doing, “the two of them settle down for one of the great intellectual cage-matches in literature ... pitting the reform-sympathetic intellectual against the physician” (Edwards 92).

The debate—if we can call it that—between Moreau and Prendick is one-sided and laced with Moreau’s didactic pronouncements. Prendick’s responses to Moreau reveal a general sense of incredulity and shock rather than a need to intellectually engage with Moreau’s scientific turn of mind.

Prendick’s decision to stay alive has less to do with science—and its interventionist impulses—and more to do with a curiosity to make sense of and narrate—if only for himself—what happens on the strange island, such as his everyday interactions with the Beast Folk, and how he becomes acclimated to nonhuman or more-than-human ways of being and seeing. In Chapters 15 and 16, “Concerning the Beast Folk” and “How the Beast Folk Tasted Blood,” Prendick finds himself increasingly drawn to the humanized animals: “That these man-like creatures were in truth only bestial monsters, mere grotesque travesties of men, filled me with a vague uncertainty of their possibilities that was far worse than any definite fear” (80). Even though “these man-like creatures” are categorically animal, they stand as “grotesque travesties of men”; hence, their unknown qualities and “possibilities” bewilder Prendick. If initially anthropocentric, Prendick’s narrative soon becomes less certain and singular, interwoven with the images and voices of the Beast Folk. Although he claims not to be able to describe them in detail (82), what he manages to describe has an impact on him as an observer. Unlike Moreau, Prendick does not look at the vivisected animals as inert experiments subject to human will. Through close observations, Prendick discovers that despite their “increased intelligence” and the presence of “Fixed Ideas implanted by Moreau in their minds,” they remain instinctually “at war with Moreau’s convenience” and are never stable entities (80–1). Even though Moreau has invented “the Law,” a set of tenets and prohibitions to further condition his experiments beyond where vivisection cannot intervene, Prendick notices an agency in the animals—and their ability to influence others—that cannot be eradicated. Montgomery confirms this: “the Law, especially among the feline Beast People, became oddly weakened about nightfall ... they would dare things they never seemed to dream about by day” (81). These beasts are agents in the sense that Adam Trexler describes agency in species. Species are not merely social constructs created by humans to classify and control the world: “they do things in the world” (23). Prendick’s focus on the animals’ agency, an agency independent of Moreau’s will, reveals the extent to which animals are capable of private thought, secrecy, and

noncompliance, what the animals can hypothetically or actually do, and the fact that the three humans on the island are as controlled by the Beast Folk as it is true the other way around. By seeing Moreau's animal as autonomous (if temporarily subjugated) beings, Prendick learns to see the limits of human intervention as acculturation, while sensing that his own way of seeing, his ability to arbitrate or define what is purportedly human, is colored by a prolonged proximity to the animals: "my eye became habituated to their forms, and at last I even fell in with their persuasion that my own long things were ungainly" (82).

Prendick's later admission that "my inexperience as a writer betrays me, and I wander from the thread of my story (85)" signals a narrative difficulty for him; he has difficulty in discerning what is his story *and* what is not. At this juncture, he is unclear on the actual subject matter of his narrative. The commingling of perspectives and their way of influencing one another, in fact, has already taken place earlier in the novel. Prendick, having lived among Moreau's humanized animals for some time, confesses to becoming "habituated to the Beast People, so that a thousand things that had seemed unnatural and repulsive speedily became natural and ordinary to [him]" (84). Complicating this anthropomorphic view, Moreau's creatures, too, have become aware of Prendick's existence and his strange status on the island. Questioning Prendick's position as "a third with a whip," the Ape-Man asks, "Was he not made [by Moreau]?" The Satyr-Man fixes his gaze on Prendick, stating with perceptivity normally accorded only to humans, "The Third with the whip, he that walks weeping into the sea, has a thin white face. ... Yesterday he bled and wept" (86). This chance encounter between men and beasts, with insecurity on one side and insolence on the other, highlights not only Montgomery's contingent status as an enforcer—he is "the Other with the whip" not "the Master"—but also the diminished authority that the Law has on the Beast People. Once the objects of human intervention, the Satyr-Man, the Ape-Man, and others lurking in the jungle gradually assume their (altered) subject positions, daring to pose questions, refusing to believe humans, and tasting blood. Later, when confronted by Moreau for consuming flesh, the Leopard Man finally revolts, as Prendick witnesses: "the Leopard-Man, released from Moreau's eye, had risen from his knees, and now, with eyes aflame and his huge feline tusks flashing out from his curling lips, leapt towards his tormentor" (91). Prendick's difficulty in keeping his (anthropocentric) narrative on track, I argue, is due to the animal agency exhibited by

these creatures, who call into question Prendick's ability to apprehend and narrate the bizarre situation in which human intervention has gone awry and become nightmarish. Moreau's vivisection and implantation of ideas into his creatures are but manipulations of life from which his humanized animals evolve or regress. Even a nascent awareness of animal agency and its potential escapes Moreau. But its effect on Prendick is crucial and far-reaching, as evident in his actions on the island after he survives Moreau and Montgomery and in his altered sense of self and human society during and after his time on the island.

GRAPPLING WITH A MORE-THAN-HUMAN HUMANITY

Doctor Moreau can be read as a cautionary tale against what Wells criticizes as a misunderstanding of the evolutionary notion of survival of the fittest, which he sees as having devastating effects on biodiversity and the environment. "For it is altogether false to find the nexus of life, and its changes, in competition alone," Wells writes in "Ancient Experiments in Co-Operation"; perceiving a single figure amid a host of similar creatures "battling at the too narrow portals of survival ... is a horrible conception, as false as it is evil" (187). By way of concluding his essay, Wells entertains "a fascinating line of speculation." He posits that there is in nature "the co-operative principle" (191), one that folds the human into a larger collective. As Wells writes, "there are certainly enough facts accumulated by biologists to necessitate very considerable modification of our conceptions of individuality" (193). The idea that the human need not define or defend its singularity against nature, but instead exercise an ethical imagination of cooperation, of becoming one with (nonhuman) others, points toward a more capacious concept of self/identity that finds resonances in recent scholarship on ecocriticism as well. Timothy Morton's theory of ecological thought, for example, has a Wellsian ring to it, when he calls for an "interconnectedness [that] results in more uncertainty," an ecological mode of thought that attends to "the effects of the discontinuous mind ... denying that humans are continuous with nonhumans" (*Ecological Thought* 59, 62). In *Dark Ecology*, Morton pushes the non-identitarian ecological thinking further, arguing that we should think of "species not as a thing we can point to, but as something like the aurora, a mysterious yet distinct, sparkling entity" (24). Morton's idea resonates with the concluding sentiment of *Doctor Moreau*, when Prendick seeks refuge in "the clear nights in the study of

astronomy,” where his thinking on humanity can roam free in an atmospheric environment untouched by men, an alternative space wherein lies the potential of another humanity, infused with “a sense of infinite peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven” (131).

Indeed, in bringing together a range of diverse perspectives, human and nonhuman alike, *Doctor Moreau* orchestrates a cacophony of voices to highlight the difficulty of flattening a biodiversity of thought and feeling into sets of binaries. In the novel, the putative animal-human divide is, from time to time, obfuscated or rendered less important by day-to-day coexistence, as evident in Montgomery and Prendick’s conversations with one another and their interactions with Moreau’s creatures. Living in proximity to the Beast Folk and accustomed to their ways of being, for example, Montgomery no longer values human society or the idea of human civilization. As one human among strange creatures on the island, Montgomery has formed habits of mind that allow him to see some of Moreau’s creatures as companions, such as M’ling. Montgomery’s familiarity with nonhuman companionship, in turn, contributes to his thinking about what is human and what is normal. For his part, Prendick takes notice of Montgomery’s unorthodox attitudes toward humans and animals: “I was affected by Montgomery’s attitude toward them. He had been with them so long that he had come to regard them as almost normal human beings. ... In fact, he did not like men” (83). Though awareness of the individual peculiarities of Montgomery and Moreau prevents Prendick from developing a “well defined” (84) impression of humanity, Prendick nonetheless recognizes small changes within himself, and the ways in which his seeing and being become attuned to a lurid environment charged with more-than-human energies and emotions. Prendick’s *adjusted* ways of seeing and thinking, in fact, are noticeable—if not fully so—prior to his conversation with Montgomery in Chapter 15.

Earlier in the novel, Prendick finds himself much disturbed by the crying sounds of the puma that is being subjected to Moreau’s tortuous vivisection. The cries from the suffering animal seem strangely articulate—therefore humanly relatable. It is “as if all the pain in the world had found a voice”—such that Prendick soon finds himself in agony vicariously: “I flung aside a crib of Horace I had been reading, and began to clench my fists, to bite my lips, and pace the room” (38). Prendick’s empathizing with the puma suggests a repositioning of his humanness that attunes itself to animal pain, to the extent that his learned distancing

from animals, reinforced by abstract human knowledge, fails to rationalize the pain of the puma. This newfound awareness of a more-than-human humanity, I argue, is responsible for Prendick's killing of the Leopard Man later, when he sees Moreau's creature, unable to escape any longer Moreau's punishment for tasting blood, "crouched together into the smallest possible compass, his green eyes turned over his shoulder regarding [him]" (94). The Leopard Man's appeal to human understanding and "the fact of its humanity" command Prendick's respect. He fires a bullet into the Leopard Man's head, despite hearing Moreau shouting in the background, "Don't kill it, Prendick ... Don't Kill it!" (94).

Concluding that Prendick has lost all sympathy for the Beast Folk after his failing to save the puma and killing of the Leopard Man, Ronald Edwards writes that Prendick retreats from sympathetic contact with Moreau's creatures, beginning with "that full and sudden flip that starts in Chapter 17. After six weeks pass ...he has adopted Moreau's idealized view of Man" (162). Prendick's failures, Edwards argues, open up opportunities for the reader—"you and me"—"to challenge the Man/Beast divide in precisely those places we cling to it"; it is up to the reader "to make the connection that Prendick could not" (162–3). Edwards finds Prendick's disillusionment stated clearly in Chapter 17, "A Catastrophe," when Prendick writes, "I had lost every feeling but dislike and abhorrence for these infamous experiments of Moreau's. My one idea was to get away from these horrible caricatures of my Maker's image, back to the sweet and wholesome intercourse of men" (97). However, rather than accepting what Edwards refers to as Prendick's "ending in utter exceptionalism" (162), it is important to recover from Chapter 17 and the rest of the novel a multiplicity of voices and perspectives that comprise Prendick's full narrative on the island. That is, while Prendick's "dislike and abhorrence for these infamous experiments of Moreau's" is apparent, this affective response can also be seen as momentary and situational, not permanent and totalizing as Edwards argues. For, as the remaining chapters reveal, Prendick soon becomes "one among the Beast People in the Island of Doctor Moreau" after the death of Moreau and Montgomery (118), an intense time when Moreau's "infamous experiments" become unique individuals with complex personalities. During this time, Prendick also senses animal qualities within himself that alters his behaviors and ways of seeing as a human.

The second half of *Doctor Moreau* also represents a shift in perspective and voice from that of human superiority to that of an artificially

modified biodiversity. In Chapters 20 and 21, “Alone with the Beast Folk” and “The Reversion of the Beast Folk,” dialogue between Prendick and the vivisected beings increases. The Dog Man, the Ox-Boar Man, the Hyena-Swine, the Ape-Man, and others function as individual characters with human qualities, not as representatives of a generalized concept of animals devoid of agency or intention, on which Prendick’s humanity and superior position must depend. This part of the novel also witnesses Prendick’s civilized humanity deteriorate as he begins to use brute force. The Hyena-Swine’s resistance to Prendick’s threats of force in Chapter 20 is a case in point. Physically strong and defiant, unlike others “afraid of [Prendick’s] cracking red whiplash” (114) and dubious of Prendick’s claim that he is now in charge of all on the island after the deaths of Moreau and Montgomery, the creature refuses to bow down to Prendick. The Hyena-Swine attempts to assert his freedom, challenging both Prendick’s status as Master—“Who are *you*?” the Hyena-Swine asks (115)—and the very idea of submission itself.

Interestingly, however, the Dog Man’s choice to remain submissive to Prendick represents another animal perspective that frustrates the animal-human antagonism between the Hyena-Swine and Prendick. The Dog Man’s wish to be near the new Master, I argue, should not be dismissed as the result of brainwashing, because in this character we witness an ability to acclimate oneself to different ways of thinking and affiliation, irrespective of one’s identity. When the Dog Man says to Prendick that the Beast Folk are “mad,” “fools” for believing their former Master is just like them, the vivisected animal is conscious of his own distancing from his pack as a deliberate choice. His statement to Prendick that, “I know, Master, I know” (119), is not made out of fear. Here, the Dog Man’s loyalty to Prendick shows a penchant for human companionship (or domination) that nonetheless suggests a modicum of animal agency and will. Radically different from the Hyena-Swine, the Dog Man adds another dimension to the psychological complexity of Moreau’s menagerie. From the Hyena-Swine’s rejection of human authority to the Dog Man’s preference to align himself with a human, the Beast Folk demonstrate agency and decision-making.

THE LIMITS AND ETHICS OF REALISM

In “The Contemporary Novel,” Wells argues that “[i]t is only slowly that we have developed the distinction of the novel from the romance, as being a story of human beings” and that “[t]he novel is a story that

demands, or professes to demand, no make-believe. The novelist undertakes to present you people and things as real as any that you can meet in an omnibus" (67). The realism that attends the novel, a mode of representation that renders "people and things" in everyday life as the stuff of "no make-believe," however, functions as a human-centric lens (with its blind spots) that, I argue, contributes to Prendick's reticence and his decision not to fully acknowledge the blurring of the animal-human divide and his grappling with a more-than-human humanity in *Doctor Moreau*. Simon James has observed that while "writers of late Victorian fiction attempted to liberate themselves from [the] burden of responsibility," it seems certain that none "could have been unaware of the responsibility ... attributed to them for the effect of their work on readers" (8). In *Doctor Moreau*, I argue, Wells tries to convey to his late Victorian readers the limits and ethics of a realism that subscribes itself to entrenched ideas of the normal, a mode of representation that elides, if not renders invisible, the alterity and fullness of the (animal) Other, a prejudice of which Prendick is guilty to some extent. In some way, *Doctor Moreau* reveals an epistemology through which individuals apprehend the world as human-centric, as always already devoid of animal agency, which accounts for the feelings of discomfort and difficulties in Prendick's "realist" take on what has transpired on Moreau's island. Nonetheless, the different animal voices and perspectives that fill the last part of Prendick's narrative necessitate a change in Prendick's perceptions of self and otherness, such that Prendick cannot chronicle what transpires on the island in the form of realism that preempts possibilities of (animal) otherness. With Moreau and Montgomery gone, the vivisected animals grow to assert their agency. Their expressions mimic humanness with increased intensity, variety, and frequency; the story, whatever it is, is theirs as much Prendick's, a fact that the latter seems to have registered, if not fully acknowledged.

In the penultimate chapter, Prendick reports that, "In this way I became one among the Beast People in the Island of Doctor Moreau." Yet despite it being "the longer part of [his] sojourn upon this Island of Doctor Moreau" (121), Prendick intentionally omits details from his narrative: "I prefer to make no chronicle for that gap of time," he writes. "There is much that sticks in my memory that I could write. ... But they do not help the telling of the story" (121). Collectively these statements can be interpreted as an act of intervention, one that attempts to restore the centrality of the human author and his preference

for coherence and credulity. Prendick's curtailment notwithstanding, in this chapter the reader is provided with vivid descriptions of the Beast Folk and their unique ways of being, from the Ape-Man's penchant for fancy words and sayings and "the proper use of speech ... 'big thinks'" (122) to "attempted public outrages upon the institution of monogamy" (123). This period of coexistence also reveals in Prendick an animalized humanness that he himself is unwilling to disclose fully, as evident in this and the final chapter. "I, too, must have undergone strange changes," he confesses; "My clothes hung about me as yellow rags ... [m]y hair grew long, and became matted together. I am told that even now my eyes have a strange brightness, a swift alertness of movement" (124). These details make explicit a change in his own humanity as he comments on the animals' "dwindling shreds of their humanity" (124). Here again, Prendick's reticence—in the form of narrative intervention—tries to limit if not omit outright a more-than-human humanity that persists to influence him until "even now"; what he previously refers to as his "inexperience as a writer" and a tendency to "wander from the thread of my story" (85) now becomes more a response to a slowly changed humanity in him that renders more difficult the task of chronicling history as humankind's story alone.

"THE MAN ALONE"?

Feelings of alienation abound in the final chapter of *Doctor Moreau*, "The Man Alone." Having successfully escaped Moreau's island, Prendick finds himself unable to re-inhabit London as his old self. His inability to feel at ease among people back among the city's population is worth a closer look. The yearning for civilization and normalcy that modern society embodies—"My fellow-creatures," Prendick calls them earlier in the novel, "from whom I was thus separated, began to assume idyllic virtue and beauty in my memory" (97)—is replaced by a diffuse but pervasive sense of paranoia. This disorienting feeling causes Prendick to compare his "fellow-creatures" in London with Moreau's, attributing an animality in the city dwellers and questioning the state of human civilization that London supposedly embodies. "They say that terror is a disease," Prendick confesses, "and anyhow I can witness that for several years now, a restless fear has dwelt in my mind, such a restless fear as a half-tamed lion cub may feel" (130). What Prendick refers to as "the terror of the island" (130), I argue, bears the indelible mark

of a more-than-human humanity—and its ways of seeing and apprehension—such that London, with all its hustle and bustle and civilized niceties, appears to Prendick a jungle of sorts, a modern, normalized version of which he has managed to escape. London, in other words, is haunted by Prendick's memories of Moreau's island. The “restless fear,” with its animal affects and analogies, also prompts Prendick to see the metropole and its inhabitants with fresh eyes. Everywhere he goes, Prendick cannot help but attribute an animality to his fellow men and women: “I would go out into the streets to fight with my delusion, and prowling women would mew after me, furtive craving men glance jealously at me, weary pale workers go coughing by me with tired eyes and eager paces like wounded deer dripping blood” (131).

In many important ways, Prendick's experiences on Moreau's island have instilled in him a tendency to make connection between things, and his extended cohabitation with the Beast Folk, too, has given him a glimpse into a mutually constitutive relationality between animals and humans. It is akin to a non-identitarian sensing of the world, what Timothy Morton calls “ecognosis,” a way of “realizing that nonhumans are installed at profound levels of the human—not just biologically and socially but in the very structure of thought and logic” (*Dark Ecology* 159). Indeed, for Prendick terms like “human” or “animal” are no longer discrete, unchanging categories of animate life, but instead describe everyday behaviors and patterns of thought subject to context and acculturation. The passive consumption of ideas in libraries, the delivery of sermons in chapels, and the resigned suffering of laborers—all of them remind Prendick of Moreau's creatures, victims of a (human) will and conditioning that abuses and takes away their agency and freedom of thought. The mechanized routines of city life, and the unthinking ways in which they are being carried out, are signs of an emptied-out humanity devoid of agency and will. In witnessing it, Prendick cannot help but question his own place in human society as well: “Particularly nauseous were the blank expressionless faces of people in trains and omnibuses; they seemed no more my fellow-creatures than dead bodies would be, so that I did not dare to travel unless I was assured of being alone” (131). Prendick's uneasy observations of and distancing from his “fellow-creatures” in London reaffirms what he has learned on Moreau's island—that humanity, from time to time, does not so much describe as prescribe human behavior, rendering (human) life passive, mechanistic, and unthinking and that animality, or animacy, is vitality and dynamism

eviscerated in the development and progression of a putatively civilized human society. The constant comparison between Moreau's creatures and Prendick's "fellow-creatures," too, suggests an apprehension of the interconnectedness of things, a relational way of seeing that disorients and delimits the self. If "[e]cological awareness is dark, insofar as its essence is unspeakable" and "compels us to recognize the melancholic wounds that make us up" (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 110), Prendick's feelings of alienation attest to his reckoning with an entanglement of life that brings together—makes a mesh of, to use Morton's word (*Ecological Thought* 30)—identities and categories, such that he no longer sees humans or animals as mutually exclusive entities. Prendick's preference to be alone and away from "fellow-creatures" also points to his gradual disenchantment with a humanity that, in subscribing to an evolutionary logic that favors competition over coexistence, thwarts possibilities of thriving for many other beings. "The Man Alone," the last chapter of *Doctor Moreau*, highlights the melancholy of a person who is grappling with a more-than-human way of thinking about his (human) self and society, an inclusive gesturing toward the unknown and not-yet-known that, ironically, finds no audience. Invoking a celestial out-there, a cosmic openness, Prendick ends his narrative on a note of uncertainty and curiosity:

There is, though I do not know how there is or why there is, a sense of infinite peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven. ... There it must be, I think, in the vast and eternal laws of matter ... that whatever is more than animal within us must find its solace and its hope. ... And in hope and solitude, my story ends. (131)

This effect of "in hope and solitude" reveals that Prendick has, however imperfectly, come to see that there may be something beyond conventional ways of regarding what is human and what is not. "[I]n hope and solitude" is no facile humanistic optimism, but an honest reckoning with an entrapment of the here-and-there or this-versus-that that sanctions or censors the very idea and thriving of a life in the name of humanity. If, as Wells says, the "attainment of an unstable and transitory perfection only through innumerable generations of suffering and 'elimination' is not necessarily the destiny of humanity" ("Human Evolution" 219), *Doctor Moreau* reveals, on the one hand, the failings of human intervention, a violence endorsed by scientific positivism and human-centrism,

and imagines, on the other, an alterity of thought and sensorium that recognizes and respects, however imperfectly and not urgently enough, the biodiversity of life and every animate being's right to exist and evolve in its own way.

NOTES

1. I use the term "intervention" as a descriptor for behavior that goes beyond the typical anthropocentric belief that humankind has a right to use natural resources for human ends. "Interventionists" like Doctor Moreau believe that humans have a right to alter nature, not simply exploit it for their benefit or amusement.
2. Included in *H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*, edited by Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes. Many of the essays cited in this chapter are included in this volume.
3. See Timothy Morton's *The Ecological Thought* (2010), particularly "Chapter 1: Thinking Big," in which he offers the idea of "the mesh" to envision a network of interconnectedness of lives and things. "The mesh," as an ecological site in which lie "infinite connections and infinitesimal differences" (30), enables us to "explore the paradoxes and fissures of identity *within* [emphasis his] 'human' and 'animal'" (41).
4. See also Wells's essay "The Limits of Individual Plasticity," published in 1895, for the full passage quoted above. In the essay, Wells's thinking on vivisection and hypnotism, quite enthusiastic, is similar to that of Moreau's, a position that Wells in *Doctor Moreau* revisits, but with a measured ambivalence, as exhibited in Prendick's views on pain and torture.

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