

8-2016

Gender Hybridity in H.G. Wells' The Island of Dr. Moreau

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GENDER HYBRIDITY IN H.G. WELLS'
THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Charlotte Rene Powell
August 2016

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

Critical scholarship regarding *The Island of Dr. Moreau* typically concerns themes of evolution and internal corruption. However, the unstudied question of evolution in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* remains the places where Edward Prendick's performances of unconventional masculinity on the island inhabit language used to describe bestial regression and indicate a place where rhetoric regarding evolution and gender intersect. The gap in the critical conversation surrounding the representation of Prendick is an important place where the concept of hybridity and evolution can and should be extended. Through a close reading of Prendick's reactions to events that occur over the course of the novel and his self-referential language, this thesis seeks to draw attention to the de-stabilized representations of masculinity in a novel that literally asks "Are we not men?" By the end of the novel, Prendick's characterization shares language used to describe the Victorian New Woman—a figure who, like Prendick, doesn't embody stereotypical gender roles. Indeed, I argue that Prendick acts as a hybrid figure whose fluidity between various gender roles represents variances in Victorian masculinity and exposes the intersection of evolution and gender in a novel focused on the repercussions of the evolution of "man."

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this Thesis to Holly and Ash. I wouldn't be here without your unfailing love and friendship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my Director, Dr. Kimberly Manganelli, who was always there to provide consistent feedback and guidance. I would also like to thank my fiancé, Justin, for his unwavering encouragement and support over the last two years, even when I wanted to give up.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION:

*“It is a subject which makes the Queen so furious
that she cannot contain herself. God created men and women different –
then let them remain each in their own position.”*

(Queen Victoria, letter 29 May 1870)

In Chapter Ten of H.G. Wells’ novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, “The Crying of the Man,” the protagonist, Edward Prendick, runs for his life back to his “home” on Moreau’s nefarious island to escape the dangerous beast man whom he encounters. Prendick tells us upon entering the house that he is “in a state of collapse.” He goes on to write that Montgomery, the truculent caretaker, “[said] something vague about forgetting to warn me, and asked me briefly when I had left the house and what I had seen.” Prendick replies to Montgomery, “‘Tell me what it all means’ [...] in a state bordering on hysterics” (49). Prendick’s description of the scene reveals widely held beliefs during the nineteenth century that called for a distinction between the spheres of men and women. Many Victorians felt that men could and should leave the home while women should remain inside to maintain their innocence of the vices and self-interests of the outside. Prendick’s plea to Montgomery to “*Tell me what it all means*” relates both his fear and his desire to understand events unfolding *outside* and *within* the compound. Likewise, Montgomery’s and Moreau’s secrecy about the goings-on of the island and Montgomery’s repeated efforts to save and protect Prendick place the latter in opposition

to the other men on the island—men who consistently emasculate Prendick while reifying stereotypical, binary modes of Victorian masculinity. There are numerous instances in the novel where Prendick’s language and actions conflict with generally accepted Victorian attitudes about masculinity and what British masculinity should embody, including the notion that men should possess knowledge of the world. The fact that, for the longest time, Prendick does not understand the true nature of the events occurring without and within the house amplifies the confusion regarding his gendered status in the novel. These moments, as well as Prendick’s performances of nontraditional masculinity, raise crucial questions about what it means to be a man during the Victorian era. Furthermore, Prendick’s characterization exposes connections between evolution and the destabilization of traditional gender roles as his unconventional masculinity engages with rhetoric used to define Victorian anxieties of evolution and internal corruption.

In the novel, Prendick encounters Moreau, a figure who twists Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution and attempts to manipulate the biological structure of life in order to achieve godhood; his dominion and the beast people’s subservience creates one dynamic which Prendick finds himself caught between. During a key conversation with Prendick wherein he finally explains his experiments, Moreau says, “I never yet heard of a useless thing that was not ground out of existence by evolution sooner or later. Did you?” (77). Indeed, the concept of evolution remains at the heart of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Darwin, after studying the Galapagos Islands, published his groundbreaking book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. This important work introduced the idea of natural selection to society. However, it was his treatise *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to*

Sex, published in 1871, that applied his ideas of evolution and natural selection to human beings. Scholars such as Bert Bender have suggested that this later work provoked a significant increase in fiction based on evolution. Roger Bowan, for example, points out that in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, published twenty-five years after *The Descent of Man*, “speculation about evolution is at the heart of the narrative as it is not in [his other novels],” and that his writing, particularly in this novel, is “grounded in his fascination with the theories of Darwinism” (319). Bowen goes on to write that, “In the fluid, metamorphic world of this novel, *no one stays the same*” (330). The character Moreau, through the process of vivisection, attempts to create man from beast and, in the process, constructs the hybrid beast people we see on the island. Much scholarship has examined the beast peoples’ synthetic evolution breaking down over the course of the novel as Darwin’s theory on the natural order of the world prevails. However, the unstudied question of evolution in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* remains the places where Prendick’s performances of unconventional masculinity on the island inhabit language used to describe bestial regression and indicate a place where rhetoric regarding evolution and gender intersect.

In the novel, Prendick fails to represent traditional binary gender roles. During the Victorian era, stereotypical gender roles were perpetuated and reinforced by numerous public figures, including Queen Victoria, and widely affected the general public attitude about the places of men and women. We see this category confusion through his speech, performances, and descriptions of the events unfolding on the island. While biological hybridity is at the heart of the text, Prendick’s vacillation between typical or expected

notions of binary gender roles works against Victorian gender stereotypes, such as the “dandy,” the “angel,” the “patriarch” or “head of the house,” the “muscular Christian,” and the “new woman.” To be clear, this thesis acknowledges that there were exceptions to the general and widely held expectations of binary gender roles many Victorians held during the nineteenth century. I mention these categories in order to position Prendick as a character unable to be categorized by traditional Victorian roles in the first place, especially when the aforementioned labels reify notions of separate spheres between men and women. The presence of separate spheres separating the humans and the beast people act as metacommentary in a novel focused on perpetuating fears of hybridity. In fact, there is no shortage of writing on the scientific consequences of hybridity presented in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*; however, there remains a lack of conversation regarding the distinct gender representations present in the novel and how the boundaries between masculinity and femininity steadily break down.

The gap in the critical conversation surrounding the representation of Prendick is an important place where the concept of hybridity and evolution can and should be extended. Prendick represents a character who seems to occupy a space apart from recognized gender norms. Studies of gender and evolution intersecting in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* are largely focused on the female puma being experimented on by Moreau. Jennifer Devere Brody, for example, classifies the puma as a hybrid New Woman, and writes: “The females [in the novel] are the lesser copies of a more perfect (in the case of the beast men) original. Perhaps this is the reason that the half-finished female puma rebels and ultimately destroys Moreau” (165). Brody relates the Puma to Eve—a “lesser

copy” of man—as a character who will bring down the established patriarchy. While Brody is focusing on the female beast women like the puma and the intersection of the New Woman with evolution in the novel, her language of hybridity transfers to Prendick. His self-referential language about his own masculinity and status coalesces with language that casts a negative light on evolution. Scholars generally classify the novel as primarily a text on evolution and the Victorian fear of internal corruption, insofar as the novel relates to concerns surrounding the decline of humanity, but through a close reading of Prendick’s reactions to events that occur over the course of the novel and his self-referential language, this thesis seeks to draw attention to the de-stabilized representations of masculinity in a novel that literally asks “Are we not men?” By the end of the novel, Prendick’s characterization shares language used to describe the Victorian New Woman—a figure who, like Prendick, doesn’t embody stereotypical gender roles. Indeed, I argue that Prendick acts as a hybrid figure whose fluidity between various gender roles represents variances in Victorian masculinity and exposes the intersection of evolution and gender in a novel focused on the repercussions of the evolution of “man.”

CHAPTER TWO

SUBVERSIVE NOUNS: LANGUAGE HYBRIDITY AND GENDER:

My reading of Prendick in the novel often revolves around etymology. For instance, Prendick's name is quite literally the combination of "pren," which means to "sew up" or "to fasten," and "dick," which, at the time of the novel's publication, was a slang word for male genitalia. "Hysteric" almost exclusively applied to women; however, the origin of "dick" is based in some notion of identity as a universal signifier for men. For example, the common phrase "Any Tom, Dick, or Harry" acts as a generalization for men. Indeed, one of the entries for "dick" is "rarely applied to a female," and was only applied to a female if she acted in a particularly masculine way. The difference, however, is that "hysteric" arose as an explanation for "peculiarities" of the female sex¹, whereas "dick" only became a specific reference to sex rather than a casual signifier for men centuries after its invention. In one way, we can read Prendick's name as the fastening of maleness. But we can also read it as the fastening of masculinity. Sewing or fastening implies a performance, or an action. Moreover, the action is one of impermanence; a pin or seam can be ripped away quite easily. In the novel, based on the concept of vivisection in order to give manhood to beasts, the main protagonist's name literally means to *add*, either manhood or masculinity. Prendick's name, just like the impermanence of the manhood added to the beasts during Moreau's experiments, implies an unstable affectation or a failed performance.

¹ Meaning "belonging to or of the womb" (OED).

When Prendick left England he was a man of some status with a comfortable income; however, from the sinking of *The Lady Vain* onward, Prendick finds himself stripped of his status and in constant opposition to the men with whom he comes into contact. We know that Prendick has chosen to venture out beyond Britain, but we're unsure why Prendick is on *The Lady Vain* other than that the ship may have been headed to Callao, an emancipated colony of Spain. The first time we see Prendick his ship has already wrecked, and he introduces us to his situation on a dinghy in the middle of the ocean. The dinghy on the open ocean acts as a liminal space for Prendick—the place where his hybridity first develops as he waits between the sinking of *The Lady Vain* and his rescue by the *Ipecacuana*. He is in opposition to the other men (who are both of a lower, working class) on the dinghy, or his temporary house, and only interacts with them when threatened. His survival on the dinghy relies on the other men not choosing to eat him. Once he is alone in the dinghy Prendick passes out and almost dies of dehydration. Upon revival, Prendick once again finds himself in a position of dependence where his class no longer matters. His time on the ocean leaves him a hybrid figure, with no ability to act as the patriarch, to leave his situation, or to be active in his salvation, yet he remains above the beast people. Stripped of his class, Prendick operates in opposition to the traits and responsibilities of a stereotypical Victorian man.

The name of Prendick's first ship, *The Lady Vain*, contrasts with the *Ipecacuana*, the ship that rescues him after the former sinks, and represents Prendick's opposition to the men he encounters on the latter. "Lady" most often references a woman of high class with elevated morals and etiquette due to her status. However, it can also signify a wife

or mistress who rules the household and who generally has dominion over servants or slaves.² “Vanity” is defined, most significantly, in two ways. First, it can refer to something that is fruitless or not worth doing. The second most common use of the term implies a high esteem of self-worth, or excessive pride in oneself.³ The text implies that Prendick starts out from an elevated status with a certain level of pride akin to that of an upper-class woman or wife rather than a gentleman or husband, since the term lady is inherently feminized. However, on the dinghy, the *Ipecacuana*, and Moreau’s island, Prendick cannot act with authority. The *Ipecacuana* saves Prendick and makes a successful voyage. The name of the ship literally means “sick-making plant,” which implies something rudimentary, or low-class (due to its homeopathic nature, rather than using medicine produced by a licensed physician), and the cause of an act typically viewed as vile or disgusting. The crew of the *Ipecacuana* perturbs Prendick due to their behavior, and he finds himself in total opposition to the group of lower-class men who exhibit rude manners. The concept of “lady” and “gentleman” as figures of authority no longer has any bearing on the open ocean or places dominated by other men. The captain declares himself the king of his ship and Moreau has set himself up as the unquestionable head of the island with his own laws. Stripped of his middle to upper-class status as a British man, Prendick becomes an increasingly unstable hybrid character, maneuvering his way through a range of gender roles over the course of the novel.

We can look to the opening of the novel as one instance where Prendick becomes displaced and at the mercy of men. Prendick finds himself marooned with Montgomery

² "lady, n." *OED*.

³ "vain, adj. and n." *OED*

and the others after he shames the captain of the *Ipecacuana*. The situation occurs following Montgomery's argument with the captain over the latter's treatment of M'ling, Montgomery's companion, whom Prendick later learns is a beast-person. The argument between the two men becomes quite heated and Prendick, who senses an untapped violence in Montgomery, tells the captain to "shut up" in an effort to stop the fight. However, as Prendick writes, his censorship of the captain came "at the price of the captain's drunken ill-will." Prendick goes on to say, "When I told the captain to 'shut up' I had forgotten that I was merely a bit of human flotsam, cut off from my resources and with my fare unpaid; a mere casual dependant on the bounty, or speculative enterprise, of the ship. He reminded me of it with considerable vigour" (13). Prendick remains dependent on the men who are taking care of him. His place below men whom he considers to be vile opposes his previous status as an independent traveler with some wealth, which we see when he refers to himself as "human flotsam." Flotsam is another name for a shipwreck, so Prendick is literally calling himself a human wreck. Prendick's position on the second ship, and subsequently the island, represents a figure who has no resources of his own and who entirely depends on the whimsy or mercy of his superiors. Prendick's derelict place in each new environment as a dependent negatively affects his ego or his pride, which often manifests as self-censorship in the novel.

CHAPTER THREE

PRENDICK'S SHAME: GENDER AND PERFORMANCE

After the sinking of *The Lady Vain*, Prendick never regains his elevated status, and his few attempts to act from an elevated status have serious repercussions. For instance, Prendick is initially happy he prevented further argument between Montgomery and the captain, despite the latter's immediate onslaught of insults; however, he quickly regrets his decision when the captain kicks him off the ship once they arrive at the island and Montgomery won't allow Prendick to come aground. Prendick suddenly finds himself begging and pleading with both men to allow him to stay one place or the other, furthering his debased status. He writes, "I even bawled entreaties to the sailors...At last I must confess my voice suddenly broke in the middle of a vigorous threat. I felt a gust of hysterical petulance, and went aft and stared dismally at nothing" (21). In one instant Prendick goes from a passenger on the ship with some hope of returning to his previous status to a frenzied and desperate cast-off. He cries, he begs, and his voice breaks. Prendick again refers to himself as hysterical and eventually realizes he is lower in status than even Montgomery's attendant. While Montgomery once again saves his life, it happens only after he sees Prendick forced into a dinghy and left to die at sea. Prendick is debased and emasculated to the lowest possible place before being taken pity on and saved by a man. This debasement cements Prendick's instability in the novel since he can never be sure when his whole life will change in an instant; his hybridity arises from his continual need to adapt.

In every new scene in the novel, we see Prendick's increased destabilization which illustrates his fluctuating masculinity. According to Brody, "Prendick is unable to remain stable, since the lines of demarcation (however he may cut them—whether it be across the axis of race, place, or gender) will not remain rigid" (168). Brody is discussing how Prendick views the race, status, and gender of the beast people and how, due to their instability, they negatively affect Prendick's worldview. However, Prendick's status and gender also fluctuate as a performance triggered by various moments in the novel. Judith Butler asserts that gender is both fluid *and* performative, writing in *Gender Trouble* that, "In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of the fabricated unity" (338). For Butler, gender identity comes down to how we act, what we say, and what we do in the public sphere. Prendick denaturalizes traditional Victorian masculinity by opting not to perform as one of the stereotypical versions of men handed down by many prolific people during the nineteenth century.

Prendick doesn't perform the traditional masculine gender roles established and propagated by Victorian public figures. At the time the novel was published, many writers and household names during the Victorian period expected British men and women, both inside and outside the realm of the Empire, to act according to the responsibilities and traits described in their public speeches, etiquette manuals, guides, and behavioral books. As the epigraph demonstrates, Queen Victoria was infuriated by the potential comingling of gender roles yet, as a woman and head of state, she both upheld and challenged the traditional and totally unrealistic roles of gender inscribed in

the works of such authors as Ruskin and Ellis. For example, in an 1865 lecture to British society, Ruskin noted: “The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender...” (1). Ruskin’s assertion of man’s activity as his responsibility is an incarnation of a Victorian stereotype: the stern patriarch of the Victorian family, or the head of the house. Moreau and Montgomery come close to representing these stereotypes on the island. For example, Montgomery consistently defends the beast people, such as when he defends M’ling on the ship. He rescues Prendick repeatedly, he holds authority on the island, and he actively goes out searching the world discovering new animals for Moreau to vivisect. Montgomery comes closest in the novel to fulfilling Ruskin’s assertion of masculinity. Moreau evokes yet another example of idealized Victorian masculinity: the muscular Christian stereotype, coined by T.C. Sanders as a way of defining the physical and emotional strength of Christian manhood. The muscular Christian shares many traits with Ruskin’s idea of an active discoverer. The difference lies in his intention to convert those people with whom he comes into contact. Moreau shares attributes with the muscular Christian, but instead of preaching Christian values, he has established himself as God on the island with the beast people muscled into compliance. Montgomery attempts to shame Prendick into participating with the other men by questioning his Christianity; however, the only religion he actively enforces on the island is Moreau’s. Prendick, on the other hand, never takes up authority over the beast people, even after the death of the other men. He does attempt to enforce Moreau’s law after the latter’s death, telling the beast people

“[Moreau] is not dead...Even now he watches us” (127). But he only makes this declaration out of fear for his own survival and not to maintain some farcical evangelism.

Montgomery comes to Prendick’s rescue multiple times in the novel, which illustrate Prendick’s helplessness and his inferiority to one of the three powerful men in the novel. For instance, in the first few chapters Montgomery saves Prendick twice from the ocean and from near death as he administers the “blood” like concoction that revives him after his time stranded in the dinghy (6). Prendick describes Montgomery, saying, “This man, it seemed to me, had come out of Immensity to save my life,” and when he chooses to thank him, Montgomery replies, “You had the need, and I had the knowledge” (16). This conversation harkens back to Ruskin’s assertion that a part of man’s activity is to guard women from any outside dangers (68). Montgomery has the ability, as a man with power, to do something that Prendick could not achieve. Prendick’s description of the rescue is an example of the contrast of his characterization with the characterizations of the other men, and how those men often emasculate him in the novel.

Prendick often serves as the moral compass on the island which illustrates his inferiority to the other men within the novel and represents one role he performs once his status as an upper-class British man is stripped away. Prendick has to perform differently than he did before the sinking of *The Lady Vain* if he wants to survive, which he learns after being kicked off the *Ipecacuana*. His criticism of the captain was bold and dominant and had poor results. However, that doesn’t change the fact that he disapproves of almost every single event that happens in the rest of the novel, which he consistently comments on in his narrative. Instead, Prendick attempts to chastise the men using appeals to

morality, which was one responsibility granted to Victorian wives. He remains below the men in status, yet he enjoys the privilege of staying within the compound and having status above the beast people. Prendick repeatedly questions the acts of the men around him and criticizes Moreau's behavior. Moreau defends himself to the distraught Prendick, saying, "I have seen more of the ways of this world's Maker than you—for I have sought his laws, in *my* way, all my life, while you, I understand, have been collecting butterflies," which is a reference to Prendick's prior dabbling in the "soft sciences" (77). Moreau's accusation is that Prendick cannot possibly understand his more complex work – a man's work. But Prendick is not satisfied. Indeed, at the beginning of Moreau's lecture to him on his experiments, Prendick writes,

"It is the puma," I said, "still alive, but so cut and mutilated as I pray I may never see living flesh again. Of all vile—"

"Never mind that," said Moreau. "At least spare me those youthful horrors...Now be quiet while I reel off my physiological lecture to you."

And forthwith, beginning in the tone of a man supremely bored, but presently warming a little, he explained his work to me. He was very simple and convincing. Now and then there was a touch of sarcasm in his voice. Presently I found myself hot with shame at our mutual positions.

(73)

Moreau's increasing warmth might be the result of the alcohol he consumes over the course of the conversation. Indeed, the other men in the novel often consume alcohol, whereas Prendick abstains. His abstention becomes a point of turbulence between himself

and Montgomery after Moreau's death.⁴ Moreau's warmth could also be a result of his obvious self-absorption which comes out as he speaks about his work to Prendick. The rather one-sided conversation above continues with a pompous, drawn out explanation from Moreau. The scene is saturated with patronizing language from Moreau directed at Prendick. First, Moreau interrupts him which indicates the superiority he maintains over Prendick, and Moreau dismisses Prendick's opposition to the vivisection as "youthful horrors." His language signals the innocence Prendick displays with Montgomery in Chapter Ten when the former runs back to the house, fearful of the things he has seen on the island. The terms "bored," "simple," "convincing," and "sarcasm" also illustrate the superiority Moreau feels over Prendick.

The dominance Moreau assumes over Prendick and his emasculation of Prendick (which results in the latter's shame) in the conversation arises from the fact that Moreau has set himself up as a god on his very own island. While many Victorian scientists were busy making astronomical advancements in physics and medicine, the fictional Dr. Moreau concerned himself with the gruesome practice of vivisection. Once discovered and pushed out of decent society for his experiments, Moreau continues his practice on animals local and afar with the help of Montgomery. Moreau's ultimate goal is to physically alter the species of the animals he experiments on, rather than try to change their sex or gender. Yet, Moreau remains unable to adequately (according to his own standards) produce a successful vivisection on a female. As Brody puts it, "[the novel] represents flexible or 'flaccid' feminine figures" who are the "essence of instability"

⁴ This point is discussed in the following section.

(164). Brody's language is an insightful overture to reading Prendick as fluid—the flaccid male in the jungle—representing the flexibility or hybridity of his gender. Perhaps the most critical aspect of this scene comes from Prendick when he thinks, “Presently I found myself hot with shame at our mutual positions.” This concept is crucial to my reading of Prendick, a character whose actions are motivated by the shame he feels. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's writing on affect theory and performativity describes how a person reacts to outside triggers they experience or see (like a deformity on another person) which then affect that person's emotions, resulting in a reaction (such as a blush or an aversion of eyes). In her writing on shame, Sedgwick explains, “[shame] makes identity. In fact, shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstructing and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating...[shame's] very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable” (36-37). She goes on to say, “Shame, it might be said, transformational shame, is *performance*” (38). Many of Prendick's performances are instigated by his transformational shame for being stripped of his class and suddenly thrust on an island where he finds himself at the mercy of other men's pity.

Prendick often self-censors various events in the novel, which arises from the shame he feels about those events. Many scholars have discussed self-censorship as an effect of shame. Tom Smith writes, “anticipation of the censor shapes texts' very composition, and texts inscribed with prohibitions in turn constitute writers' identities. Moreover, self-censored texts share certain formal features with shame, particularly

difficulties in communication, reflected in a text's silences..." (189). Leslie Boldt also discusses the parallels between self-censorship and shame as a formation of identity in *Silence and Silenced: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. In regards to the relationship of censorship and gender, self-censorship in auto-biography has been heavily linked to female authors, especially those authors from England, due to their potential shame if society were to read explicit details that would ruin their reputations.⁵ The first time we see Prendick reacting out of shame in the novel comes before he ever meets the captain or discusses the vivisection with Moreau. After the sinking of his original ship, he refuses to call "the proposal" that the other men on the life raft come up with cannibalism, referring to it instead "as the thing we all had in our mind" (2). In the novel, Prendick is writing to us in the first person. His anticipation of others reading his account results in his silence. Montgomery, on the other hand, is quite happy to discuss the event, when he pointedly says to Prendick, "...you know I'm dying to know how you came to be alone in the boat" (6). Additionally, the captain of the ship openly calls Prendick a cannibal. Montgomery's and the Captain's willingness to discuss the cannibalism versus Prendick's modesty serves as another contrast of Prendick with men in positions of power in the novel.

Other examples of self-censorship in the novel and another place in the novel where gender and evolution become intertwined arise from Prendick's descriptions of the female beast people. Prendick's disapproval of their existence is expressed in a way that he never applies to the male beast people. Wells' novel portrays a disproportionately small number of female characters in comparison to male characters. However, despite

⁵ *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory* by Mary Eagleton

their small number, several incidents occur when the subject of female beast people arise. These times are often described with odd and disjointed speech. Prendick tells the reader that “The females were less numerous than the males, and liable to much furtive persecution in spite of the monogamy the Law enjoined” (85). Not only are the female beast people fewer in number, they are also sexually pursued and violated by the male beast people. They’re also aware of their awkwardness: “...these weird creatures—the females I mean—had...a distinctive sense of their own repulsive clumsiness” (87). The female beasts know they aren’t supposed to be mock humans and struggle the most with Moreau’s transformation. Moreau supplies an explanation for their awkwardness and decrease in number. He tells Prendick that the female beasts, like the puma, are substantially harder to transform due to some inner stubbornness. Moreau goes on to tell Prendick, in regards to the female puma, that “[he has] worked hard at her head and brain” (82). Moreau fights to keep the puma from regressing back into an animal and to eliminate bad behavior (like hunting and eating rabbits on the island). Many Victorians, through avenues such as published etiquette guides, similarly worked hard to restrict the autonomy of Angels so that they didn’t become New Women. The latter were often depicted as lascivious and disease-ridden as common prostitutes. However, the New Woman figure is a complex and fascinating character. Just as the puma is only one kind of cat, the femme fatale is only one representation of the New Woman. Moreau’s failure to control the puma and the inability of those Victorians who sought to restrict the evolution of gender roles share the same sentiment.

Prendick disapproves of the beast women for acting against traditional boundaries of Victorian womanhood; yet, he consistently acts against the same traditions and stereotypes placed on Victorian masculinity. New Women who were not interested in being or remaining domestic angels (or in the case of the female beast people, to loosely quote Homi Bhabha⁶, mimic human women) were looked down upon by a large chunk of society and often had to deal with ruined reputations. Victorians who disagreed with women possessing sexual autonomy sought to censor and shame those same women. When the beast people begin regressing, just as Moreau warned Prendick that the “stubborn beast flesh” would, Prendick becomes particularly disgusted with the females, writing:

They were reverting, and reverting very rapidly. Some of them—the pioneers, I noticed with some surprise, were all females—began to disregard the injunction of decency—deliberately for the most part. Others even attempted public outrages upon the institution of monogamy. The tradition of the Law was clearly losing its force. (130)

Prendick states that he can “pursue the disagreeable subject” no further, illustrating his modesty which contrasts with Montgomery’s and Moreau’s willingness to discuss the gritty details of events in the novel. This palpable act of self-censoring takes place as Prendick criticizes the “savage” women of the island. The female beasts, already alert to their own awkwardness, are the first to cast off the restrictions placed upon them by a male society; Moreau, Montgomery, and the male Sayer of the Law are all dead and can

⁶ From *The Location of Culture*.

no longer enforce their obedience. Moreover, the female beast people are now the ones violating sexual monogamy, whereas before they were pursued and violated by the male, humanized beast people. As someone with no authority on the island (or outside the “house”), Prendick chooses to look down on the female beast people. Their sexual reawakening and reversion offends him, just as the New Women who enjoyed sexual autonomy offended many Victorians who were determined to maintain a traditional, patriarchal society.

Throughout the novel, Prendick relies on and is subservient to the patriarchal figureheads, such as Moreau. The latter, who has been shamed and evicted from England, sets himself up as a god on the island and begins making citizens. Once they are “complete,” Moreau sends them out into the village and makes them follow his Law. If they fail or refuse they will face more torture in the “House of Pain.” Prendick’s (and the beast people’s) submission to Moreau and Montgomery is a legal one born out of necessity for survival. When Prendick meets up with the beast people they do not immediately recognize him as a human man. The ape man introduces Prendick to the others as a “man like me” (60). Because they do not understand that he isn’t like Montgomery and Moreau, the beast people take Prendick in and make him learn the Law. The Law’s repetitive nature is both haunting and hypnotic and the “prohibitions” overwhelm Prendick, who states: “a kind of rhythmic fervor fell on all of us; we gabbled and swayed faster and faster, repeating this amazing law” (61). The question “Are we not men?” is repeated throughout the Saying of the Law. The rhetorical question is meant for the beast people, yet Prendick also participates. The fact that the beast people don’t

immediately consider Prendick a superior and human man reveals that his personage directly opposes Montgomery's and Moreau's. Prendick briefly considers the beast men his fellows due to their mutual subservience to Moreau and Montgomery, which leads to his shame later for demeaning himself.

Prendick's participation in the Saying of the Law most immediately symbolizes the main story arc of evolution gone wrong and the potential regression of humanity, yet the more subversive implication of this scene becomes Prendick's confrontation of his failure to perform as a traditional masculine figure. This moment in the novel hinges on the word "man." Indeed, this scene exposes a pivotal section where evolution and gender intersect. Even the female beast people use the term "man" when reciting the Law. The term "man," rather than "human," places primacy on masculine gender and carries a distinct personhood that Moreau wishes to create; the beast people walking on two legs and looking humanoid isn't enough for him. Moreau wants (or rather needs) the beast people to perform as men with all of the accompanying stereotypes surrounding traditional, socially acceptable, Victorian behavior which spurns his creation of the Law. Moreau wants to recreate a functioning English society, so he needs his citizens to act in accordance with the stereotypical rules and restrictions imposed on British people. When Prendick performs the Saying of the Law he asks himself if he is a "man." The beast people are not truly human and, therefore, cannot be Moreau's idealized "men." The scene becomes a moment of irony since we understand that the answer is meant to be "no." Therefore, Prendick's participation becomes a moment where the text suggests he fails as a stereotypical representation of masculinity. The further implication of

Prendick's failure signals a place where gender and evolution intersect. The beast people don't readily identify Prendick as a "man," whose only frame of reference are Montgomery and Moreau. Prendick's failure to perform traditional masculinity, like the other men, has made him more animalistic in the beast people's eyes.

Montgomery also notices the differences between himself and Prendick, which motivates him to question Prendick's masculinity and furthers the divide between them. There is a poignant exchange between Prendick and Montgomery upon the loss of Moreau. Montgomery wails, "You're a solemn prig, Prendick, a silly ass! You're always fearing and fancying. We're on the edge of things" (112). Montgomery's words not only act as a portent of his own demise but also signify Prendick's hybridity. Here we see feminizing language attributed to Prendick by Montgomery. "Prig" was one synonym for a dandy, a figure who was often viewed as lacking traditional masculinity by those Victorians who consistently reified stereotypical hegemonic gender roles. Prendick also refuses to drink with Montgomery several times to the latter's chagrin (112). Indeed, throughout the novel Prendick is offered alcohol then refuses, labeling himself an "abstainer" (27). Yet Montgomery and the other men are shown quite often consuming alcohol. This difference is made a point of contention between Prendick and Montgomery in the scene preceding Montgomery's death, when Prendick writes:

"Damnation!" [Montgomery] exclaimed, at some petulance of mine.

"Can't you see I'm in a worse hole than you are?" And he got up and went for the brandy. "Drink," he said, returning. "You logic-chopping, chalky-faced saint of an atheist, drink."

“Not I,” said I, and sat grimly watching his face under the yellow paraffin flare as he drank himself into a garrulous misery...(112)

In the following scene, Montgomery says that M'ling is more of a man than Prendick because he takes “his liquor like a proper Christian” (112). As Montgomery calls out to the beast people “Drink, and be men!” (113), he is characterizing Prendick’s failure; Montgomery cannot make the connection that a man might behave differently, hence the insult “logic-chopping,” because even the beast men partake. When Montgomery questions Prendick’s masculinity and perceives him to fail, the beast men are able to succeed. The beast peoples’ successes don’t fill Moreau’s vision of an evolved, humanoid, stereotypical Victorian male; but Montgomery sees their willingness to drink as evidence of their gendered masculinity versus Prendick who, by his refusal, emasculates himself in Montgomery’s opinion.

The deaths of Moreau and Montgomery leave Prendick in a tail-spin and trigger a rapid descent in his status, similarly to the way he loses his status from the first dinghy to the island. He declares his new place on the island, writing, “I became one among the Beast People in the Island of Dr. Moreau,” which harkens back to the scene where they thought he was also a beast person (125). Prendick’s position on the island begins to alter as the “gradual intrusion of a new and strange world is for Prendick a gradual change of consciousness, a remapping of mental territory” (Bowen 327). Not long after making his declaration of equality, Prendick realizes that considering the beast-people his peers means the forfeiture of his remaining status, and he becomes ashamed. Chaos ensues, and what little control that remained from Moreau and Montgomery disintegrates as the beast

people return to their former condition, or as close to their former conditions as they can get. Their regression is detailed by Prendick when he writes:

It would be impossible to detail every step of the lapsing of these monsters; to tell how, day by day, the human semblance left them; how they gave up bandagings and wrappings, abandoned at last every stitch of clothing; how the hair began to spread over exposed limbs; how their foreheads fell away and their faces projected; how the quasi-human intimacy I had permitted myself to with some of them in the first month of my loneliness became a horror to recall. (130)

Prendick's language indicates his shame for ever considering the beast people his peers. With the male monarch dead, order becomes unruly. Before Moreau and Montgomery died, Prendick was afforded some authority as a human living in Moreau's compound. However, Prendick can't act the moral compass to dead men and has no desire to stay among the beast-people and critique their behavior. Prendick starts referring to the beast people as "monsters," no longer affording them any sense of humanity. The beast people have been degraded so low in Prendick's opinion that his mere friendliness with them before is now something horrible to consider. The only beast person he will associate with is the dog-man. Prendick attempts to establish his own household with his servant the dog-man by living in a reconstructed shelter on the island away from the other beast people, which illustrates his meager attempts at returning to his former position as someone on the island with just enough status to be above the beast people but not enough to rule them completely. Once the dog-man is killed, Prendick finds his already

feeble position on the island destabilized completely and he changes roles, actively seeking out salvation. His new attitude about his place on the island and his description of the following weeks demonstrate his ability to adapt and shift his performances of masculinity.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESTROYING THE HOUSE: REDEFINING THE VICTORIAN SANCTUARY:

On Moreau's island there are two spheres: the compound where the humans live and the village where the beast people live, and Prendick finds himself caught between both as his hybrid masculinity doesn't allow him a position in either place. The apartment Prendick stays in within the compound is comfortably furnished with nice furniture, classical books, and large windows that look out into a courtyard. The home, especially for many Victorians during the nineteenth century, is often viewed as a sanctuary⁷. The compound remains enclosed with a big wrought-iron gate to keep out the dangers on the island. However, the beast people, who associate the compound with the torturous vivisection practiced on them by Moreau and Montgomery, refer to Prendick's new shelter as the "House of Pain." For the beast people, the dangerous sphere becomes the house while the outside remains their only sanctuary. In a novel fixated on critiquing the separate spheres of man and beast, the fact that the "civilized" space where the humans live is called the "House of Pain" (especially given the primacy Victorians placed on the home as a shelter from the evils of the outside world) serves as an intriguing lens from which we can analyze Prendick's performances, since his actions and performances of masculinity in the beginning of the novel are motivated by the security he feels from his ability to stay in the reconstructed Victorian sanctuary that separates him from the

⁷ For Victorians, "the home was a place of harmony and spiritual sustenance, far removed from the callous self-interest of the marketplace. Texts in this category take up issues relating to prescribed gender roles for men and women and the division between private and public spheres" (Norton 476).

dangerous beast people. However, his performances of masculinity drastically change after the destruction of the compound.

Once Prendick witnesses the vivisection and becomes aware of the atrocities taking place in the room adjacent to his apartment, he realizes that the compound has never been, and can never be, a sanctuary; the loss of the sanctuary alters Prendick's opinions and, subsequently, his actions on the island. After everyone goes in search of the leopard-man, who has been killing rabbits and violating the law, Prendick discovers him first and shoots him so that he doesn't have to go back into the house (98). The compound no longer represents a safe space for Prendick. However, he also finds no comfort in the sphere of the beast people's village. Prendick soon discovers that he has burned down the compound, the repercussion of which thrusts him into the sphere of the beast people (116). After Moreau's death, Montgomery goes off in a drunken haze. Prendick's destruction of the "House of Pain," however unintentional, acts as the catalyst which sends him into his new role living out amongst the beast people. Prendick realizes that he cannot live with them in safety because they are not his fellows and are already reverting to animals in the absence of authority. However, since he burned down the compound he must create a new house. For the purpose of shelter, he converts an old, abandoned hut. Prendick writes,

I passed [the beast people] and went down into the shadows and odors of the almost deserted ravine. In an empty hut I feasted on some fruit, and then, after I had propped some specked and half-decayed branches and sticks about the opening, and placed myself with my face towards it, and

my hand upon my revolver, the exhaustion of the last thirty hours claimed its own, and I let myself fall into a light slumber, trusting that the flimsy barricade I had erected would cause sufficient noise in its removal to save me from surprise. (123)

He attempts to reconstruct a house to occupy, but Prendick's converted hut and "flimsy barricade" fails to represent the proper Victorian domesticity and comfort he was able to grasp onto while still living in Moreau's compound, even at the price of his consistent emasculation by Moreau and Montgomery. Indeed, Prendick uses decayed materials in his construction. The dead and rotting branches act as metaphor for the dying viability of Prendick successfully reoccupying the Victorian home.

After Moreau's and Montgomery's deaths, Prendick has the ability to perform the stereotypical masculinity reified by the men, to become the colonizer, to explore the island, and to master the beast people; however, he fails to fill the vacuum of power on the island or to even reclaim the status he possessed before the sinking of *The Lady Vain*. Prendick's attempts to reoccupy the home in his imitation of a shelter, instead, further separate him from Victorian conventions of masculinity. Prendick finds comfort in the "routine and feminine," because he knows that while he was in the compound, however bored he was (often skipping weeks of time in his narrative because of inaction) and despite his disgust of Moreau's vivisection, he at least had a big gate and walls that separated him from the beast people and that kept him marginally safe.⁸ Prendick, once

⁸ In the nineteenth century, many felt that if a man did choose to go back into the home it would essentially be considered a form of devolution to prior modes of thought. Garton writes: "Historians of masculinity and manliness...have urged us to see the public and private spheres as permeable and interdependent

again, occupies a liminal space. His hut, falling apart and in the middle of a ravine, is a similar space to the first dinghy. He tries to recreate a house and even takes on a servant but in no way attempts to take control of the beast people. His performance of masculinity never embodies the patriarch. Instead, he maintains the emasculated status imposed on him by Moreau and Montgomery. However, his recreated domestic sphere fails, and Prendick realizes the urgency in escaping the island. He adapts, and in the next chapters we see a new Prendick who actively attempts to save himself and who allows his appearance to become wild and unruly. Prendick's actions throughout the novel traverse multiple Victorian stereotypes of men and women, at times reflecting, and at other times directly opposing, them. This new incarnation is the second to last version of Prendick we see in the novel.

Prendick's lack of a family is one first important indication of his "failure" to live up to stereotypical Victorian ideals. The differences of Victorian masculinity are as varied as those of Victorian femininity, and yet much writing and public opinion have focused, in particular, on the patriarch. According to Margaret Markwick,

Victorian men have been commonly believed to be harsh, stern fathers, subjugating their families by exploiting their legal, financial and often their physical powers over their dependents. They have been viewed as emotional illiterates, domestic despots, bolstering their phallogocentric view

domains, integral to the social order. By the late nineteenth century, however, there seems to have been a greater shift towards a greater distinction between the public and the private for professional men, with a consequent pull towards a homosocial and imperial world of adventure and manly achievement, and a related denigration of home as routine and feminine" (41). For a large number of Victorians, the roles of men shifted so that, as Ruskin would say, men left the home life to the women and occupied themselves with "activity."

of the world in the men-only institutions of their professions, bastions of the privilege of their sex. Their era has been seen as the age of the stiff upper lip, when feelings, especially sexual feelings, were kept firmly under wraps. This stiff upper lip, so necessary to survive the daily floggings of the English Public School, has been closely linked with the Age of Empire, when Britain ruled the world...(15)

The childless, single Prendick immediately does not fit into Markwick's characterization of the "stern father". We are not informed as readers whether this is by choice or happenstance, but by the end of the novel Prendick's decision to forgo a family is decidedly his own. As Markwick mentions above, at the end of the nineteenth century, "Britain's overseas empire grew to encompass nearly one-fourth of the earth's terrain, [which brought] a sharper consciousness of national identity to the British people" ("The Victorian Age" 475). Britain's increasing colonization meant that the need for more British citizens in order to populate their colonies was great. A British son or daughter choosing not to procreate became a source of anxiety among society. Prendick's characterization, particularly his appearance at the end of the novel, his destruction of the "House of Pain," his unmarried and childless status, and his self-imposed solitary at the end of the novel in many ways reflect the rhetoric used to describe the "new woman"—a central figure of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Like the New Woman, Prendick's performances at the end of the novel speak to Victorian concerns of people refusing to participate in stereotypical familial motions during a time when Britain was sending its fathers and sons out into the world to propagate the British Empire.

Prendick challenges the attitudes and opinions handed down to Victorians from many people in power by neither maintaining a single, traditional gender role, nor reproducing British offspring. In regards to the female beast people, Brody writes, “No longer could such female figures be trusted to reflect stolid Englishmen” (169). An important factor in the Victorian fear of a rise of female autonomy was women not only choosing not to have children and propagating British society, but also that those women *would* reproduce and participate in their own form of natural selection. Instead of creating British citizens interested in maintaining traditional values, their children would, like their parents, tarnish the reputation of the stereotypical British gentleman and lady. The larger consequence of female autonomy and Victorians choosing not to reproduce, or to reproduce likeminded children, was that the more the British colonized, the more they needed new citizens to send abroad—citizens who would keep up the image Queen Victoria and others wanted to maintain. Many Victorians felt New Women who didn’t participate in reproduction seriously compromised Britain’s ability to maintain its colonial ubiquity. Prendick has actively chosen to forgo his ability to further his British bloodline. The first half of the twentieth century would see a rapid decline in colonization and a subsequent restructuring of the values of a national British identity, as it transformed from “the empire on which the sun never sets” to a new Britain, post-colonization.

The emergence of Prendick from Dr. Moreau’s island is bittersweet since he can’t find comfort among society and, therefore, still fails to reclaim the status he possessed

before the beginning of the novel. In the last chapter the reader finds Prendick back in England disgusted with his fellow “human beings,” writing,

...a restless fear has dwelt in my mind, such a restless fear as a half-tamed lion cub may feel. My trouble took the strangest form. I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls; and that they would presently begin to revert, to show first this bestial mark and then that...I feel as though the animal was surging up through them; that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale...I shrink from them, from their curious glances, their inquiries and assistance, and long to be away from them and alone. (138)

Prendick takes up a life away from the traditional Victorian home. This choice comes from his fear that all mankind is internally corrupt—a side effect of living on the island. He can no longer live among society, instead choosing to live a life of solitude, reading “wise” books and studying astronomy. Prendick’s performance of gender doesn’t fulfill stereotypical definitions of a man or woman’s role in Victorian society. The theme of failing to assimilate is reflected in multiple British texts where the protagonist has gone out beyond Britain and undergone a transformation of the mind and who then occupies an uncertain position among society. On one hand, he has managed to survive the scientific atrocities of the island where many failed. On the other hand, he is left completely disillusioned about the motivations and ambitions of mankind and can no longer tolerate

other people's company. For Prendick, there is no longer such a thing as "mankind" anymore; everyone in his eyes is a hybrid person. Prendick's view that everyone is a hybrid person exposes the irony of an era caught between enormous advances in science, travel, and technology and desires, perpetuated by the monarchy, to maintain traditional values and lifestyles.

Prendick's shifting performances of gender over the course of the novel embody the same rhetoric used to describe fears of internal corruption. The language used to describe the devolution from man to beast is interchangeable with the rhetoric used to characterize the New Woman and other figures who resisted hegemonic gender. Prendick's life, by the end of the novel, reflects one kind of sanctuary Victorian women chose if they left the home for an existence not subsumed by the duties of marriage. Wells wrote a novel aimed at exposing the dangers of evolution through the lens of Prendick, and yet his protagonist fails to maintain consistent, traditional ideas of Victorian masculinity. The men who do reify Victorian stereotypes of masculinity, such as Moreau, Montgomery, and perhaps even the captain of the *Ipecacuana*, die. Meanwhile, Prendick, the character who remains in constant opposition to the other men in the novel, remains fluid, adapts his performances to each new situation, and survives. Prendick's shifting performances of masculinity and the characterizations of the other men in the novel demonstrate the ineffectual and unrealistic ideals of stereotypical gender roles. Prendick's characterization signals his identity as a New Man, a figure who, like the New Woman, doesn't reify stereotypical gender roles. Indeed, his very hybridity remains the only constant in a novel determined to expose the instability of "man."

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