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Divina

proportione di fra Luca Paciolo

Opera a tutti gli ingegni perspicaci e curiosi necessaria. Opera di un studioso di filosofia: di prospettiva di scultura e di architettura: di musica: e di altre matematiche: sua più saggia: sottile: e ammirabile dottrina conseguita: e delectatissima: con varie questioni de secretissima scienza.

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**But They Talk:
Historical and Modern Mechanisms
Behind the Beast Folk's Language in *The Island of Dr. Moreau***

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Abstract: The Beast Folk in H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) use language to raise the fear of human degeneration by revealing the inner animal within humanity. Moreau re-creates the physical mechanisms for speech such as the larynx, but is also able to manipulate the brain to create the necessary structures for speech, previously unique to the human brain, into non-humans. Applying Darwin's theory that the continued use of speech led to the physical and mental changes of humans, the argument can be made that ceasing to use speech would weaken these structures of speech. After Moreau's death, the Beast Folk no longer heed the Law and stop speaking, becoming more animalistic through their silence. Prendick also loses his language after the death of Moreau and Montgomery and begins to struggle differentiating the Beast Folk from humans. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* addresses the Victorian anxiety regarding the use of language as a definite boundary between humans and animals by suggesting that language fails to keep the inner animal of humanity at bay. Neuroscience has linked animal and human sounds revealing the mechanisms responsible for the production and understanding of language creating a new paradigm to explore.

Key words: Wells, Moreau, Language, Science, Evolution, Animals.

The publication of Robert Chamber's *Vestiges of Creation* (1844) and Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) revealed the animal ancestry of humanity and forced Victorians to reconsider what made humans unique from other animals. Language was seen as one such defining characteristic, as F. Max Müller stated, "the Rubicon" separating mankind from the animal world (Müller 1890: 354). H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) pushes against the barriers separating and categorizing man from animal. The Beast Folk are vivisected animals made in the form of

Bonnie Cross

But They Talk: Historical and Modern Mechanisms Behind the Beast Folk's Language in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*

humans, but unable to escape their animalistic instincts. However, what ultimately causes Prendick to hesitate in classifying the Beast Folk as animals is their ability to speak.

Critics such as Bozzetto (1993: 34-44), Halberstam (1995: 1-25) and Hendershot (1998: 69-133) have argued that the Beast Folk may be seen as radicalized Others, representing a colonized country or the oppression of a specific race or gender. Other critics such as Danta (2012: 687-705), Clayton (2007: 569-591), and Brem and Anijar (2003: 22-24) focus on Wells' use of the grafting and surgical alteration in his fiction that predates the science that is now a reality. These critics in particular are concerned with the bioethical issues raised in *Moreau* regarding the treatment of animals. The Anti-Vivisection Act in 1876 limited the practice of vivisection on animals to prevent animal cruelty. In this sense, other critics turn to the *Island of Dr. Moreau* as a warning against science and vivisection and, in the case of critics such as Stiles (2009: 317-339) and Toumey (1992: 411-437), the focus on the mad scientist. Other critics such as McLeane (2002: 43-50) argue that *Moreau* suggests a degeneration of the human species. I intend to take this argument further by arguing that Prendick's silence relates to Darwin's theory of degeneration through misuse. I also intend to focus on the physical and mental alterations Moreau creates through his surgical procedures on the Beast Folk as undermining the uniqueness of the human body which allows the production and comprehension of speech, thus thinning the barrier between human and animal through science.

In *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Prendick is the sole survivor of a shipwreck and is saved by Montgomery, assistant to Dr. Moreau. Prendick travels with Montgomery to Moreau's island and discovers the Beast Folk, mutilated creatures he originally believes are tortured men. Prendick struggles to define these Beast Folk as animals due to their ability to speak and instead calls them a mixture of animal and man such as "Ape Man" and "Leopard Man". The Beast Folk adhere to Moreau's Law, a set of rules that dictates how the Beast Folk should act to keep their status as "men". Prendick runs away from Montgomery and joins the Beast Folk by reciting their Law. He is soon discovered by Montgomery and Moreau, who reveals that these Beast Folk creatures are actually vivisected animals he created in his attempt to determine the plasticity of the body. Moreau laments that these Beast Folk still possess their animal instincts and is working on the vivisection of a puma as his ultimate creation. However, the puma escapes and kills Moreau, resulting in the destruction of the Law. Montgomery is soon killed as well, leaving Prendick the last true human on the island. As the Law fades away, so does the Beast Folks' ability to speak

and they become progressively more animalistic. Prendick too falls silent, but is able to escape by finding a rowboat from the shipwreck. Though Prendick returns to England, he struggles to see the difference between humans and the Beast Folk after his time on the island. He begins to describe humans in animalistic terms and becomes aware of the shackles of humanity.

A result of the thinning of the barrier between humans and animals is the inability to discuss one without the other. Kimberly Benston argues in her article “Experimenting at the Threshold: Sacrifice, Anthropomorphism, and the Aims of (Critical) Animal Studies” that an important result of animal studies is the “uncertainty about how and where to draw species boundaries” (2009: 584). Benston states that “recent work on the philosophical import of human/ animal relations has argued the need to view “the question of the animal” and “the question of the human” as “reciprocal conundrums” (2009: 550). By viewing the human in light of the animal, Benston argues that *Moreau* can be read as an “inquiry into how we produce ‘the human’ by transfiguring ‘the animal’” (2009: 551). In this light, Prendick’s concern regarding the Beast Folk’s use of language reflects a concern regarding the role of language in defining humanity.

Language in *Moreau* ultimately fails to privilege humanity as the more advanced species and reveals that the threat of degeneration of humanity is not approaching but already taking place. The Beast Folk do not grunt and point, but speak discernible English. Animal noises express some form of meaning, the variations in a dog’s bark for example, but as Harrington states in *Medicine, Mind, and the Double Brain: A Study in Nineteenth Century Thought* vocal sounds “were not to be confused with language properly speaking, which was a strictly intellectual capacity, inseparable from human reason and, therefore, unique to human beings” (1987: 216). *Moreau* threatens this unique characteristic of humankind by introducing speaking animals. This threat is not limited to verbal communication, because *Moreau* also transforms the body and brain through surgical procedures. While these changes alter the animals’ original forms, the fact that the perceived gap between man and animal can be crossed through surgical interventions reveals that the level of separation between man and animal is smaller than originally assumed. The *Island of Dr. Moreau* represents the anxiety of the Victorians regarding the ability of language to separate humanity from the animal world.

The threat of non-humans acquiring language is not focused on the speech itself, but through the implication that humanity may not be unique or privileged. As Christine Ferguson

states in *The Brutal Tongue: Language, Science, and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin-De-Siècle*, non-human speakers “might diminish the human identity, by showing its distinguishing capacity for speech to be neither unique nor necessarily dependent on the reason and large cranial capacity of the *homo sapiens*” (2006: 116). Ferguson argues that Wells, a student of Thomas Huxley, found that “most of the subsequently developed features that supposedly distinguished us from animals – language, morality, complex social organization – were artificial rather than biological”, a combination of instinct and chance (2006: 120). Peter Morton states in *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination 1860-1900* that Wells was born well after the publication of *Origin* so “the evolutionary hypothesis [was] just another unquestioned item in his intellectual baggage” (1984: 100). Wells did not question the mechanism behind evolution, but Morton argues that he “sought an escape from the impasse of Darwinism” (1984: 102). Morton argues that the Beast Folk show more humanity through “their rudimentary culture, the legal and theological system (the ‘Law’) in which they are enmeshed, than from anatomical changes” (1984: 218). However, Morton does not take into account that the ability of the Beast Folk to form all of these human-like traits is through language. Moreau cuts and shapes a larynx into his Beast Folk and the final result is an animal that both understands and produces language.

Language is part of the defining characteristics of being a “man” in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, yet the novel begins in silence and this silence is linked to animalistic behavior. Speech is limited after the crash of the *Lady Vain* and instead the shipwrecked men were “thinking strange things and saying them with our eyes” (Wells 2005: 8). Language can do little to help these men who are running out of food and water. It wasn’t until the sixth day after the wreckage that “Helmar gave voice to the thing we all had in mind” (2005: 8). The men did not use verbal communication for several days and when verbal communication is finally used, the men spoke in “dry and thin” voices and tried to spare words (2005: 8). The first use of language is quiet and limited, but the topic is cannibalism. Immediately the use of language is directed towards survival, but at the cost of civilization. Men do not eat each other because it is considered barbaric, while certain animals are accepted as sources of food because they are ranked below humans. By even considering cannibalism, the survivors of the *Lady Vain* have lowered their fellows from personhood to a potential meal. Further, this decision to reduce a fellow crew member to a piece of meat is done through language, the critical characteristic that many argue separates humans

from animals. This use of language endorses the commission of animalistic acts rather than preventing them.

After the attempt at cannibalism fails when both men fall overboard, the resumed silence is once again connected to animalism. Prendick is now alone and laughing on the deck. The laughter is not an expression of humor, but of fear. Prendick is aware of the level to which he and his now deceased crew mates had fallen and he is helpless to change his state. Prendick is saved by a small ship, leading the reader to assume that verbal language will again resume. At first, Prendick and the “youngish man with flaxen hair, a bristly straw-coloured moustache, and a dropping nether lip” sat “without speaking” (2005: 11). The description of Moreau’s assistant Montgomery with a dropping lip may suggest something is wrong with his language or speech. With the entire novel so focused on language, it seems odd that one of the few natural humans would have a slight speech impediment. Montgomery’s voice is described as “slobbering articulation, with the ghost of a lisp,” not fully lisping, which is a human trait, but slobbering which is related to animals more so than humans (2005: 11).

While language has replaced the silence, language becomes linked to animalistic noises. Montgomery does not speak until the sound of a “low angry growling of some large animal” comes from overhead (2005: 11). The timing of the growl with Montgomery’s voice links Montgomery to this violent and angry creature. Montgomery repeats his question, but Prendick’s voice is “inaccessible” at this time (2005: 11). Prendick has lost his voice after his brush with cannibalism, an animalistic act. When Prendick is able to speak, his voice is “hoarse” from his “long silence,” but he is able to answer Montgomery’s questions about his history. There is limited speech on the ship as the captain is drunk and his speech is slurred. The sailors on the ship that rescues Prendick also speak, but these are brief moments in the text. Besides Moreau, Prendick and Montgomery are the only two humans who speak throughout *Moreau*, yet in this scene, both men have their language hindered, Montgomery through his lisp and Prendick through his hoarse throat.

Throughout this interrogation, the cabin is filled with the growls and howls of the other animals aboard the ship, continuing to connect Montgomery with these animalistic noises. Infuriated by the sounds, Montgomery returns to the deck and has a “violent controversy with someone who seemed to me to talk gibberish in response to him” (2005: 12). The cause of Montgomery’s fury over the animal noise is unclear, but he becomes violent and responds to this

gibberish with “blows” (2005: 12). Prendick does not trust that he heard correctly, suggesting a mistrust of his senses after the temporary loss of his language. While Montgomery shouts at the dogs for barking, Prendick believes that Montgomery hits the creature who responded with “gibberish”.

Montgomery is punishing this member of the Beast Folk for his inability to rise to the category of human through his language or stay within the category of animal where he is not expected to speak. The creature exists between these two categories and is punished for his lack of conformity. A similar incident is described by the Ape Man who was punished for “a little thing, a wrong thing once” when he “jabbered, jabbered, stopped talking” (2005: 60). The lack of speaking was not a huge wrong, but a little insurrection. When “none could understand” the Ape Man’s speech he was “burned, branded in the hand” as punishment (2005: 60). The Beast Folk are physically punished for their disobedience. The Sayer of the Law explains that “punishment is sharp and sure” and to avoid this pain, the Beast Folk must “learn the Law. Say the words” (2005: 61).

Language serves as a defining characteristic the Beast Folk use to identify themselves as “men”. The Beast Folk learn the law from the Sayer of the Law, a creature “the size of a man... covered with a dull grey hair almost like a skye terrier” whose voice comes from the darkness of the den (2005: 59). The Sayer of the Law is compared to a dog, yet this creature leads the ritual saying the Law and teaches Prendick the ways of the Beast Folk. Prendick views these creatures as deformed and insane, only participating in the initiation to escape from Moreau. He describes the Law as an “idiotic formula,” but repeats and participates in what is clearly a religious experience to the Beast Folk. They sway and “beat their hands upon their knees” as they repeat the Law (2005: 58). To say the Law is to conform to the rules of what defines Man: “Not to go on all-Fours”, “Not to suck up Drink”, “Not to eat Flesh or Fish”, “Not to claw Bark or Trees”, and “Not to chase other Men” (2005: 59). The Sayer of the Law states that the “want is bad” to break the laws, but the Law prohibits these actions, so to avoid pain, the Beast Folk comply (2005: 60). After the stating of each law the Beast Folk cry, “Are we not Men?” (2005: 58). The Law must be obeyed, but must first be recited, revealing that using language is the first step in becoming a member of the Beast Folk.

Prendick is not a recognized man, by the Beast Folk’s standards, until he has spoken the Law, ranking language above the physical body. The Beast Folk compare their bodies to

Prendick's body and the Ape Man calls Prendick "a live man like me" (2005: 58). This comparison is stopped by the Sayer of the Law who yells "shut up," stopping the flow of speech (2005: 58). The Sayer of the Law prevents the Ape Man from comparing Prendick to himself until Prendick has repeated the Law. After the ritual, the Sayer of the Law seems to consider the Ape Man's statement that Prendick is "a five man" and examines Prendick's hand and five digits (2005: 60). While the Ape Man considers Prendick an equal due to his five fingers, the Speaker of Law only considers him a member of the Beast Folk after he has spoken the Law.

Due to Prendick's use of language, his relationship to the Beast Folk remains in contention throughout the rest of the novel, suggesting that his position as human or animal remains unclear. When he meets the Ape Man and the Satyr Man again, both Beast Folk struggle to place him with Montgomery, "the Other with the whip", and with Moreau, who is the "Master" (2005: 86). The Ape Man argues that Prendick "said he was made" and therefore a member of the Beast Folk (2005: 86). The Satyr Man compares Prendick to Montgomery and Moreau, and calls him "the Third with the whip, he that walks weeping into the sea, has a thin white face" but struggles to identify him with Montgomery and Moreau because Prendick "bled and wept" (2005: 86). Prendick remains silent during this exchange, not associating with either category. The Ape Man continues to identify with Prendick because they both have five fingers, but the Satyr Man points out that "he says nothing" while "men have voices" (2005: 86). The Satyr Man's use of "men" includes both the Beast Folk and the humans at once, but by stating that Prendick does not speak, Prendick is classified as neither Beast Folk nor human. The Ape Man states that Prendick asked about food and "did not know" (2005: 86). This idea of knowledge could refer to Moreau and Montgomery being familiar with the island and not needing help, or the fact that the Beast Folk know what food is safe to eat and where to get food. Due to Prendick's lack of familiarity with the island and his false identification as a member of the Beast Folk, he is ranked below the humans and below even the Beast Folk for his lack of knowledge and particularly his lack of speech.

Prendick's choice to say the Law with the Beast Folk complicates his identity as a man or a member of the Beast Folk, suggesting that language is more important than physical appearance. Prendick becomes a member of the Beast Folk through language, but when Moreau and Montgomery appear at the Beast Folk's den to confront Prendick, the Beast Folk turn against Prendick and attempt to capture him. When he is caught, Prendick walks into the water with the

intent of drowning himself rather than be subjected to the “bestial taint” that he believes has been forced onto the Beast Folk (2005: 66). Prendick pauses when Moreau states that he should “listen to me for a moment... then say what you will” (2005: 67). Yet when Prendick agrees and waits for Moreau’s response, Moreau must resort to rudimentary Latin stating “Hi non sunt homines, sunt animalia qui nos habemus...vivisected” which translates to “these are not men, they are animals which we have...vivisected” (2005: 67). Moreau resorts to another “scientific” language to attempt to explain the origins of the Beast Folk in a language that is inaccessible to the Beast Folk. Despite Prendick’s understanding of Latin, he refuses to believe Moreau. This scene reveals Moreau’s lack of power in language. Prendick believes that the Beast Folk are men because “they talk, build houses, cook”, which are all human characteristics (2005: 67).

Prendick’s main concern is the fact that “these animals *talk*”, once again suggesting that ultimate distinction of animals and humanity is through language (2005: 72). Prendick acknowledges that the Beast Folk build houses and cook their food, yet it is their ability to understand and produce language that Prendick has the most difficulty accepting. However, Moreau argues that “a pig may be educated” and the “great difference between man and monkey is in the larynx” (2005: 72-73). Moreau’s Beast Folk are most disturbing in the sense that it is “the larynx, not the brain or the soul, that is the source of human intellect” (Ferguson 2006: 124). Moreau’s statement also argues that the physical and structural form of the human being is easily replicable. By focusing on the throat as the main source of language, Moreau is entering the debate about the organization of the human body and the evolution of language. Both sides of this argument are expressed by Chambers and Darwin.

Chambers (1844: 312) argues that language occurred because the organization of the human throat was “ready for use, a constitution of the atmosphere adapted for the sounds which that organization was calculated to produce, and, lastly, but not leastly...a mental power within, prompting to, and giving directions for, the expression of ideas”. Basically, Chambers argues that humans learned to speak because of the arrangement of the speech organs and an increased mental ability. Chambers argues that due to the physical organization of the human body, it would make sense that humans would “utter sounds, and also came to attach to these conventional meanings, thus forming the elements of spoken language” (1844: 312).

Reversing Chamber’s argument, Darwin’s theory is that humans began to use their voices to express thoughts and feelings towards other humans, such as courting and social

communication. As “the voice was used more and more, the vocal organs would have been strengthened and perfected through the principle of the inherited effects of use,” thus coming to the organization they appear in the human species now (2006b: 810). Darwin states that he “cannot doubt that language owes its origin to the imitation and modification, aided by signs and gestures, of various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man’s own instinctive cries” (2006b: 810). While offering different theories regarding the origin of language, both Chambers and Darwin reflect on the uniqueness of the human body to create this organization for articulate speech.

Moreau skips over the evolutionary processes that both Chambers and Darwin argue is responsible for human speech and removes the unique quality of mankind by manufacturing the system through surgery. Hardy argues that *Moreau* “shows a vastly speeded-up version of the evolutionary process”, skipping the evolution of the physical organization over time (2003: 202). Moreau’s surgical changes to the bodies of the Beast Folk threaten to break down the distinct quality of humanity, suggesting that the process of evolution that allowed mankind to advance can be replicated in a few hours of surgery. In his essay “Human Evolution: An Artificial Process”, Wells states (1975: 214) that mankind has not “*undergone anything but an infinitesimal alteration in his intrinsic nature since the age of unpolished stone*” (original emphasis). In fact, Wells argues that the only recent evolution mankind has undergone is in the development of ideas, through education and language. In this sense, the Beast Folk pose an even greater threat by acquiring language, as Wells’ states that “in Education lies the possible salvation of mankind from misery and sin” (1975: 219). Wells may be arguing in *Moreau* that learning to utilize language may also allow other non-humans the possibility of rising up if education is not properly used by humans.

Moreau speeds up the evolutionary process proposed by Chambers and Darwin through the changes in the structure of the brains of the Beast Folk, suggesting that the unique human brain, the organ responsible for the advancement of the human species, can be copied in a few hours of surgery. Moreau argues that “the mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily”, which implies that the brain may be molded and controlled as Moreau changes the animal’s body. Moreau also states that similarity to a physical graft on the body, mental grafts may be created using “moral education” as “an artificial modification and perversion of instinct” (Wells 2005: 73). M. Pruner-Bey notes that Paul Broca’s discovery of the area of the brain responsible for producing language “establishes the anatomical basis for the most imposing

difference between man and animal” (Harrington 1987: 51). By 1861 Broca had collected a series of case studies identifying the area in the left hemisphere of the brain, now called Broca’s area, responsible for the production of speech (Kolb-Whishaw 2009: 11). In 1872, Carl Wernicke discovered the area behind Broca’s area, now referred to as Wernicke’s area, as responsible for the understanding of speech (2009: 12-13). These two areas of the brain collaborate for the production and comprehension of speech and are unique to the human brain.

These changes in the brain of the Beast Folk cannot prevent the fact that “the stubborn beast flesh grows, day by day,” revealing that Moreau cannot completely remove instinct (Wells 2005: 77). It is these “cravings, instincts, desires that harm humanity, a strange hidden reservoir to burst suddenly and inundate the whole being of the creature with anger, hate, or fear” (2005: 78). This image of the animal becoming overwhelmed with these emotions is not unlike Prendick’s panicked response when he flees from Moreau and Montgomery. Prendick does not consider the situation rationally as he has no knowledge of the layout of the island or its inhabitants. Prendick’s only desire is to get away from his perceived enemies. Prendick’s fear reveals that the animalistic qualities in humanity are still in existence and Moreau’s desire to “burn out all the animal” is impossible when he is basing the creation of his “rational creature” on humanity (2005: 78). Moreau’s inability to “burn out the animal” of the Beast Folk and Prendick’s instinctive desire to run away shows that the animal within the human remains as well. Darwin stated that the ability to create language came through the “imitation and modification” of “various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man’s own instinctive cries” thereby suggesting that, at its core, there is animalistic heritage within our language as well as our bodies (2006b: 810).

Moreau further compares humanity to animals when he states that Prendick is “an animal, thinking a little less obscurely what an animal feels” (Wells 2005: 73). Huxley states that brutes do not “possess our intensity of consciousness, and though, from the absence of language, they can have no trains of thoughts, but only trains of feelings, yet have a consciousness which, more or less distinctly, foreshadows our own” (1899: 237). Huxley, Wells’ mentor, claims that without language, animals cannot have trains of thought, but instead have trains of feelings which can be related, or, as Huxley argues, foreshadow mankind’s consciousness. Moreau states that Prendick’s thought process is closer to an animal’s train of feelings rather than conscious thought.

Moreau clearly places animals and the Beast Folk below humanity, carefully maintaining a level of separation between humans and animals, despite his attempts to remove that very separation through his experiments. Sherryl Vint argues in “Animals and Animality from the Island of Moreau to the Uplift Universe” that Moreau “asserts his own humanity by forcing nature to submit” (2007: 87). Moreau forces nature to submit by vivisection and grafting animals to fulfill his desire to determine the plasticity of a living creature. Vint argues that it is only through the “assertion of the human/animal boundary” that science can occur, because the consequences of scientific research include fulfilling “human potential” and “the exploitation of animals is a necessity” (2007: 87). This argument becomes more complicated by the decadent nature of Moreau’s experimentations. Ferguson argues in her article “Decadence as Scientific Fulfillment” that decadent science “by its nature, seeks knowledge that is not recuperable, that has no use and is in fact pure waste” (2002: 476). Instead of using the knowledge gained through the successful grafting and surgery, Moreau becomes obsessed with creating a human-like creature. Ferguson states that decadent science “transformed mainstream scientists’ desire for useful, utopian knowledge into a lust for abstract, amoral truth, for the murky, horrifying stuff at the center of being” (2002: 476). Moreau has no plan or interest in the Beast Folk once he becomes dissatisfied with his work and leaves them to their community.

While the Beast Folk are contained on the island, there remains a possibility that the Beast Folk could interact with humanity. Though Moreau taught the Ape Man for a few months, he chose to leave him with the Kanakas, the islanders. The islanders are afraid of him at first, but “his ways seemed so mild and he was so abject, that after a time they received him and took his education in hand” (Wells 2005: 76). In the case of the Ape Man, he was able to gain an understanding of reading and “some rudimentary ideas of morality” (2005: 76). However, the Ape Man lost his voice at the jeers of the islanders and climbed up a tree “gibbering” at the Kanakas (2005: 76). To Moreau, this setback only further revealed the inner animalistic quality that he had yet to remove from his creations.

Moreau argues that right after their creation, he views the Beast Folk as “indisputable human beings”, but soon enough he begins to see the human “persuasion” fading, which suggests that degeneration is occurring quickly after the Beast Folk are made (2005: 78). Moreau first calls them “indisputable” as human beings, but upon seeing the reality of his creation, focuses only on the animalistic qualities. He calls the area where the Beast Folk live a “travesty of

humanity”, and claims they live a “mockery of rational life—poor beasts!” (2005: 78-79). Because the Beast Folk are not human, their attempts at humanity only make their animalism more prominent. Despite the fact that the Beast Folk have the Law, “build themselves their dens, gather fruit and pull herbs – marry even”, they still have “the souls of beasts, beasts that perish – anger and the lusts to live and gratify themselves – yet they’re odd” (2005: 79). Even Moreau seems unclear how to define his creatures due to their complexity.

The Beast Folk’s language is equally complex; though clearly not at the human level, the speech of the Beast Folk combines parrot-like speech with more complex ideas. Prendick notes when speaking to the Ape Man, “his chattering prompt responses were, as often as not, at cross-purposes with my question” and while “some few were appropriate, others quite parrot-like” (2005: 56). Darwin states in *Descent of Man* that “every one knows, parrots can talk”, but only man has the “large power of connecting definite sounds with definite ideas” (2006b: 809). The Ape Man enjoys “jabbering the most arrant nonsense” at Prendick because he felt “on the strength of his five digits” that he is on equal terms with Prendick (Wells 2005: 122). However, the Ape Man only speaks “arrant nonsense”, not connecting sounds with ideas as Darwin defines as articulate language.

Prendick finds the Beast Folk’s language becoming more similar to human speech and thought, despite their animalistic bodies. He states that the one quality he did enjoy about the Ape Man’s speech is his “fantastic trick of coining new words” (2005: 122). The Ape Man’s creation of new words removes the limitation of the parrot-like speech. The creation of new words reveals some understanding of the makeup of language. The Ape Man is associating new sounds to make his own meanings. Prendick does not understand the meaning behind these new words, thus suggesting that the Ape Man is unable to express the connection between the new word and its meaning to Prendick. However, the Ape Man’s experimentation with new words raises a new concern that the Beast Folk could create their own language and set of meanings. Prendick clearly cannot understand what the Ape Man is trying to communicate and states that the Ape Man thought that “to gabble about names that meant nothing was the proper use of speech” (2005: 122).

Despite this failure to fully communicate many of his ideas, the Ape Man is able to explain what he calls “big thinks” in comparison to “‘little thinks’ – the sane every day interests”, again revealing a more complicated understanding of language (2005: 122). Prendick separates the Ape

Man's "big thinks" from parrot-speech and the Ape Man's desire to tell the other Beast Folk what he has learned does suggest that he takes joy in language. Again this raises the threat of the Beast Folk creating their own language and Prendick takes part in creating this new language by inventing "some very curious 'big thinks' for his especial use" (2005: 122). Prendick is not concerned about the Ape Man's interest in language because he comes to think of him as possessing "the distinctive silliness of a man without losing one jot of the natural folly of a monkey" (2005: 122). This combination furthers the hybridity of the Beast Folk to Prendick as he now sees both man and beast within their bodies and through their language.

The turning point in the Beast Folk's use of language occurs after Moreau's death as the power of the Law, the only force keeping the Beast Folk speaking, fades. These creatures believe they are men because they adhere to these laws and speak them out. Bozzetto argues in his essay "Moreau's Tragi-Farcical Island" that due to the Law, the Beast Folk may "no longer follow their instincts" and instead they are "to be subjected to a life which is foreign to them and which runs contrary to all of their natural inclinations" (1995: 40). Bozzetto argues that the Law is only a "vener," a cover for the animalistic tendencies that all the Beast Folk harbor (1995: 40). When Moreau confronts the Beast Folk for breaking the Law, several Beast Folk, particularly those composed of predators, proceed to look guilty and ashamed. After Moreau's death, the vener falls completely, and the Beast Folk slowly resume their natural inclinations. The Beast Folk adhere to the Law to avoid punishment, but this does not prevent the desires that go against the Law from occurring. The immediacy of disavowing the Law suggests that the instincts of the Beast Folk outweigh their ability to maintain a social order.

With the end of the Law, the humans lose their power over the Beast Folk and this process begins with the use of language. The Sayer of the Law, the member of the Beast Folk most strongly connected to the use of language, becomes silenced in his final act to kill Montgomery. The Sayer of the Law is found on top of Montgomery "still gripping Montgomery's throat with its curving claws" silencing the Law for the final time (Wells 2005: 110). The Sayer of the Law seemed limited to its task of the ritual introduction and repetition of the Law. However, it seems fitting that the Sayer of the Law takes part in the destruction of the Law's final enforcer. Besides an obviously vulnerable place on Montgomery's body to attack, the throat represents the final silencing of the Law and of the Beast Folk's reverence and fear of the "Other with a Whip". After the death of Montgomery, Prendick orders the Beast Folk to place the body into the sea,

but in giving the order he had a “break” in his voice, indicating the break of power in his language (2005: 114).

Prendick’s “break” in his ability to use language marks his loss of power over the Beast Folk. Prendick orders the Beast Folk to bow before him, but this command is met with resistance and he is forced to shoot to keep them at bay. Prendick refers to the submissive Beast Folk as “serfs,” whom he can dismiss and call at will without fear of attack (2005: 115). The choice of the word “serfs” indicates humans, but low-ranking humans who serve him as their master. However, Prendick does not gain Moreau’s “sceptre,” but instead becomes identified as “a mere leader among my fellows” (2005: 117). Within a few pages Prendick goes from ruling the Beast Folk as a lord over serfs to becoming a fellow member of the Beast Folk. Unable to raise himself above the Beast Folk, Prendick is forced to return back to the Beast Folk’s den to eat and sleep, and in doing so officially “became one among the Beast People” (2005: 118). The Dog Man, Prendick’s most loyal companion calls him, ‘Master,’ but also recognizes him as the “Other who walked in the Sea is – as we are”, placing Prendick in-between categories of human and therefore Master, while still labeling him as Beast Folk (2005: 119).

With the destruction of the Law, the Beast Folk cease using language and they become more animalistic, while Prendick is still able to utilize language to prevent the Beast Folk from attacking him. The last line of dialogue is from Prendick who argues that, “an animal may be ferocious and cunning enough, but it takes a real man to tell a lie” (2005: 120). This seems ironic as language has served to reveal the truth about the Beast Folk, but the only way Prendick can prove to himself that language belongs to humans alone is through his ability to lie. Prendick tells the Beast Folk that “the Master and the House of Pain will come again” and “woe be to him who breaks the Law!” (2005: 120). Prendick knows that Moreau is dead and with him the Law will die too, but lies to the Beast Folk in hopes that they will leave him alone. Prendick’s assertion that only a “real man” can lie suggests that Prendick is associating mankind with complete control over language. Lying is complicated. To lie, a person must understand the truth and have the ability to alter it in some form that is beneficial to the liar. There is no indication that the Beast Folk can lie. There is no denial when Moreau accuses a member of the Beast Folk of breaking the Law. In this sense, Prendick’s argument that telling a lie is only possible by a true man means that only someone with power over language can use it to lie.

The Beast Folk quickly begin to lose their humanity after the Law fails, and with the fall of the social order, the remnants of humanity begin to quickly fade while the animalistic qualities become stronger. Prendick remains with his Dog Man, but soon begins to refer to this creature as his “St. Bernard Dog Man,” progressing to “St. Bernard Brute.” The removal of the term “man” correlates with the loss of the Dog Man’s speech. When Prendick finds him murdered by the Hyena-Swine, he calls his faithful friend “my St. Bernard creature” (2005: 125). The Dog Man becomes a faithful pet and his name loses the term “man”, signifying that Prendick loses sight of the humanity within this creature once it stops speaking to him.

The loss of language deteriorates Prendick’s relationship to the Ape Man as well, revealing that even the more advanced use of language of the Beast Folk deteriorates. The Ape Man’s “jabber multiplied in volume, but grew less and less comprehensible, more and more simian” and therefore less human to Prendick (2005: 122). Prendick addresses the reader with the question “can you imagine language, once clear-cut and exact, softening and guttering, losing shape and import, becoming mere lumps of sound again?” (2005: 122). This is clearly Prendick’s fear for himself as well, as he does not speak again for the duration of the novel. The loss of language places Prendick at the same level as the Beast Folk. As Prendick falls silent, he embodies the Victorian fear of degeneration.

In *Origin of Species* Darwin defines “reversion” in terms of “domestic varieties, when run wild, gradually but certainly revert in character to their aboriginal stocks” (2006a: 458). Darwin argues that, with reversion, comes a return to the “aboriginal stocks”, a return to the more primitive forms of the animal. While he describes this process as gradual, Darwin also argues that this reversion is a certainty after being released into the wild. Darwin states “that use in our domestic animals strengthens and enlarges certain parts, and disuse diminishes them; and that such modifications are inherited” (2006a: 536). The advantage of having certain body parts is reflected through natural selection, where successive generations continued to pass on their genetics to their offspring (2006: 536). Darwin states that “in some cases we might easily put down to disuse modifications of structure which are wholly, or mainly, due to natural selection” (2006a: 537). Darwin cites beetles in Madeira that are born without wings and argues that wings were de-selected due to increased chances of survival from not being “blown out to sea” (2006a: 537). Darwin also cites the lack of eyes in subterranean and cave dwelling animals as examples of degeneration due to disuse. The risk of inflammation for subterranean animals provides a reason

for the benefit of not having eyes, while the crabs that inhabit caves in Styria and Kentucky are born without eyes even if the eyestalk remains (2006a: 538). Darwin argues that the loss of the crab's eyes is "wholly to disuse" rather than an alleviation of a possible injury (2006a: 538). Darwin argues that "natural selection will always succeed in the long run in reducing and saving every part of the organization, as soon as it is rendered superfluous, without by any means causing some other part to be largely developed in a corresponding degree (2006a: 545).

Darwin's theory of reversion is not limited to animals. In *Descent of Man*, Darwin relates the idea of reversion to humans. He argues that "the simple brain of a macrocephalous idiot, in as far as it resembles that of an ape, may in this sense be said to offer a case of reversion" (2006b: 847). Here Darwin provides an extreme version of reversion, where a human is noticeably different from the norm. However, Darwin also cites the variation of muscle structure, the formation of the uterus, and extra ligaments in muscle as less obvious signs of reversion (2006b: 849-850). This would be disconcerting for the Victorians in the sense that they may possess a reversion in their body and not be aware of it.

Wells is clearly concerned with the progress of human evolution. Wells states explicitly in his essay "Human Evolution" that humanity has not evolved except for an "infinitesimal" amount" (1975: 214). Glendening argues in "Green Confusion: Evolution and Entanglement in H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*" that Wells' essays "challenged Victorian complacency by arguing that humans are no less immune to extinction, and no more significant for the universe, than any other species" (Glendening 2002: 580). Once again this idea is attacking the notion that humanity is a privileged species that has become the most advanced of all the other animals in the world. Yet this idea that humans may be degenerating brings the animal ancestry uncomfortably closer and suggests that despite the new science and technology, humanity remains, or worse yet, is coming closer to the animal world rather than advancing further from it.

The process of humans evolving from our animal ancestors has been, as Moreau notes, "a thousand years in the making", implying that the human is not yet complete, but also suggesting that humanity is still malleable (Wells 2005: 78). However what is disturbing about Moreau's comment is the fact that he is also discussing the remnant of the animal within the Beast Folk as "a strange hidden reservoir" that he cannot remove or control (2005: 78). Within this context, Moreau may be implying that humanity could also possess this hidden reservoir of animal instincts that cannot be removed. Wells' interest in Darwin's definition of degeneration is also

seen in the regression of the Beast Folk's use of language. The Beast Folk are the result of vivisection and don't seem to have any threats to their survival other than the predator Beast Folk. These creatures even reproduce strange pink bunny-like creatures that are spread through the island. Moreau speeds up the process of evolution through his use of vivisection and grafting to create new Beast Folk, creating a creature outside of natural selection through science. The Beast Folk adhere to the Law to maintain order until Moreau's death. After Moreau dies, the Beast Folk lose the need for the Law, and the lack of order dictating their actions results in the loss of their language.

Proving that humans are not immune to the effects of degeneration, Prendick also devolves. Consistent with the feeling of haste and the quickening of the process of evolution, Prendick devolves quickly after only spending one year on the island. Prendick argues that he has also "undergone strange changes" and that his clothes hang about him (2005: 124). The lack of muscle in his body shows that Prendick has devolved in his physical form, becoming smaller than he was when he first arrived on the island. He now wears "yellow rags, whose rents glowed the tanned skin", as his hair grew long and matted (2005: 124). Prendick becomes hairy with darker skin, linking him once again to the Ape Man and the Sayer of the Law. His eyes also change and gain "a strange brightness, a swift alertness of movement" (2005: 124). Prendick must be more aware of movement and possible threats, suggesting that he has lost his position as the top predator of the food chain. Prendick cannot gain Moreau's title of "Master" or Montgomery's title of "The Other with the Whip", but instead becomes one of the Beast Folk through his initiation into the Law and subsequently his physical changes and his loss of language.

Language continues to be silenced even after Prendick escapes the island. When Prendick is able to escape the Beast Folk, now described as "Beast Monsters", Prendick "refrained from telling" his tale and "professed to recall nothing" when he is asked about his time on the island (2005: 128). Prendick describes his pity for the Beast Folk for their "shackles of humanity" as they "lived in a fear that never died, fretted by a law they could not understand", but now he shares in that fear after he returns to civilization (2005: 95). Prendick lived by the Law which made the Beast Folk appear to be more human, but this process only dehumanized Prendick.

After his silence on the island, Prendick feels haunted by language. He claims he may have "caught something of the natural wildness of my companions" and describes himself filled with a "restless fear as a half-tamed lion cub may feel" (2005: 130). This description not only places

Prendick as an animal, but a baby animal, portraying a level of helplessness. He begins to see the “bestial mark” in the people around him and feels “the animal was surging up of a reasonable soul”, fearing the degeneration process (2005: 130).

What is more disturbing about this passage is the not the fear of the possibility of degeneration, but the fear that degeneration is already happening. He states that he “could not get away from the men; their voices came through the windows, locked doors were flimsy safeguards” (2005: 131). Similarly to the Leopard Man cornered and frightened by the shouts and screams of the hunting Beast Folk, Prendick feels threatened by the language of the city seen in his need to protect himself against language. He describes women as “mewling” and children as “gibing”, a sound he had previously associated with the Ape Man (2005: 131). Many animals use vocal sounds to communicate, but articulate speech has been repeatedly argued to be unique to humans, yet Prendick no longer associates humanity with articulate language.

Moreau suggests that language may fade into the primeval form of humanity through Prendick’s inability to view the sounds created by his fellow humans as language. Müller argues that “not till we understand the real nature of language shall we understand the real nature of the human Self: language remains the primeval and never-ending autobiography of our race” (Dawson-Lightman 2012a: 155). *Moreau* raises the concern that the human species will fall as silent as the Beast Folk and revert to sounds and noises to communicate. The church does not escape from this animalism, and the priest is described as having “Big Thinks even as the Ape Man had done” (Wells 2005: 131). Prendick begins to question his own identity as a man as “it seemed that I, too, was not a reasonable creature, but only an animal tormented” (2005: 131).

Instead of bettering the world, language in *Moreau* succeeds in revealing the hidden animal within all of us. Hardy (2003: 200) argues that Wells was “convinced that the spoken (and written) word has a profound influence on human thinking, can change human behavior, and thus bring about a better world”. Hardy states that *Moreau* is “marked by a lack of communication”; however, there is not a lack of communication of knowledge in the sense that Moreau explains why he is on the island and explains the process of creating another member of the Beast Folk (2003: 206). Instead, communication fails to avert the catastrophe of the island and also fails to better the world. Communication fails to prevent the sailors from considering, and almost carrying out, the act of cannibalism. Language is one of the outward manifestations of rational human thought. However, in *Moreau*, language is often abandoned for baser instincts,

such as Prendick's desire to run instead of confronting Moreau about the island. When language is used to explain what is occurring on the island, the only result is to reveal the apathetic Moreau and his desire to re-create the human from the combination of animals. As humans are naturally empathic creatures, language only serves to represent Moreau, one of the three actual humans featured in *Moreau*, as inhumane.

Language in the *Island of Dr. Moreau* is not a deciding factor in identifying humanity, but instead, complicates the very definition of human. The Beast Folk's use of language, while not eloquent, suggests that the use of language alone does not define a human. Instead, the Beast Folk's voice reflects the lack of humanity through the thin level of separation between man and animal. Prendick re-enters society only to feel the shackles of humanity that held the Beast Folk. His awareness of his animalistic qualities also makes him aware of these shackles.

As with Bozzetto's description of the veneer of the Beast Folk's Law, Prendick becomes aware of his own animalistic qualities. He becomes "marked", in his awareness and is unable to live in the city surrounded by fellow humans who are unaware of their bestial mark. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* represents the failure of language to raise humanity above the animals. As Wells argues that mankind has not made any significant evolutionary progress, then there must be a downward slide in evolution occurring in this tale. Wells argues in "Human Evolution" that language and education could create a better world, but in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* this knowledge is misused and only serves to focus on the degeneration of the human species and of the bestial mark that remains prominent despite attempts to cover it.

New studies focusing on language evolution and development have been published over the years and reveal more and more similarities between humans and animals. Bird songs are now linked to human language through vocal learning (Berwick *et al* 2011). Similarly Dolphins have been found to use vocal learning through group communication (Janik 2013). Also the ability for primates to learn sign language, also suggests that language may not be limited to humans alone. Perhaps it is this fascination between human language and animal sounds that keeps the Beast Folk, these talking animals, these monsters, so relevant to us despite the hundred years that has passed from its publication. The more human the animal appears, the more monstrous it becomes to us.

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