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‘What on earth was he—man or animal?’: Posthuman Permeability in H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

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Abstract

This article proposes that H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is a significant posthumanist novel that has been overlooked by scholars in both disability studies and animal studies. Although some attention has been paid to how disability and animality function within the text, the existing scholarship remains fixed on the problematic disability-as-animality metaphor, thus refusing to engage with the more subtle nuances of the work. Consequently, this article moves beyond the surface to instead read the permeability of boundaries – among species and spaces – in Wells’s novel as a positive and imperative call for inclusivity.

Keywords

H.G. Wells, Science Fiction, Posthumanism, Disability Studies, Animal Studies

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Introduction

In the third season of the science-fiction television series *Orphan Black* (2015), it is revealed that an annotated version of H.G. Wells's 1896 novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau* contains Professor Duncan's formula for human cloning. Consequently, the novel begins to play a major role in the television series—not only because it contains Professor Duncan's notes but also due to the larger questions the novel raises about ethics and posthumanism. Although *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is one of Wells's lesser-known works among readers—as compared with *The War of the Worlds* (1897), for example—it has become ever more popular among the scientific community (as its prominence in *Orphan Black* suggests). In recent years, scholars[1] have been increasingly interested in how this novel is relevant to current research in molecular biology, genetics, and, in particular, the very timely ethical debates surrounding human-animal chimeras. Surprisingly, however, despite the pervasiveness of concerns regarding disability and animality in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, little has been written on how these subjects might be understood as working collaboratively in the text.

It is worth stressing from the outset that the concept of disability in itself is difficult to define. The ADA's definition of disability focuses on impairment and limitations ("Disability Rights Laws" 2009), whereas disability-studies scholars like Alan Foley (2014) strictly approach

[1] See, for example, Bejamin Hale's "The Moral Considerability of Invasive Transgenic Animals" (2006) and Jay Clayton's "Victorian Chimeras, or, What Literature Can Contribute to Genetics Policy Today" (2007).

disability as a social and cultural construct. While recognizing its limitations, I align most fully with Elizabeth Barnes's (2016) "mere-difference view" of disability that seeks to understand disability as just a different way of being in the world. Barnes's theory radically challenges the historical dehumanization of people with disabilities: segregation, abuse, exploitation, animalization, and permitted little to no rights until the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990. This inhumane understanding of disability has been compounded even further with the rise of modern technology. The relationship between disability and technology has never ceased to be a complicated one, and the presence of disability in science fiction is a clear indicator of this. Accordingly, this paper explores, through the interrelated fields of disability studies and animal studies, how *The Island of Doctor Moreau* addresses matters of difference, inclusivity, and posthuman realities. Relative to how both of these fields work to dismantle dualistic thinking, I argue that, through his attention to the permeability of boundaries—among different species, as well as physical spaces—in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, H.G. Wells offers an early incarnation of posthumanism.

The Space for a Posthumanist Reading

H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is the story of a shipwrecked Englishman, Edward Prendick. Prendick is picked up by a passing ship that is transporting animals to an island belonging to a once renowned but now exiled scientist, Doctor Moreau. While on the island, Prendick becomes increasingly horrified as he is made aware of what Moreau is attempting to do: successfully transform an animal into a human. Nonetheless, the Beast Folk, despite Moreau's efforts, always eventually revert back to their animal state. During his time on the island, Prendick remains at once both disturbed by their grotesqueness and sympathetic to the

cruelty inflicted on them. Finally, upon returning to London, it appears that Prendick himself has reverted to a more animalistic state: he is thought mad by those with whom he shares his adventure, and he is uncomfortable in modern society—preferring solitude and the countryside over the modernity of the city.

While it is clear how this novel might be of interest to animal studies, it is perhaps less obvious how disability studies also figures into a reading of this text. The relationship between disability and animality has a troubled history. As June Dwyer (2014:12) observes, “The negative pairing of persons with disabilities with animals has manifested itself for centuries in derisive metaphor, in the use of caging and physical restraints, and in unethical medical experimentation.” And, yet, due in large part to the work of scholars from both of these fields, greater attention has been given, in recent years, to how the disability-animality connection can be perceived in a more constructive way. Cary Wolfe (2008:110) proposes that by recognizing a hybrid identity as positive, greater progress can be made in the endeavor to move beyond binaries and fear of the Other, as well as the long-standing, though problematic, valorization of autonomy over empathy and respect:

> …what we are compelled to confront in this new work is not so much a ‘new and improved’ theory of the subject (as rights holding agent) as what comes after the subject…And it is in the wake of this ‘after’, I believe, that new lines of empathy, affinity, and respect between different forms of life, both human and non-human, may be realised in ways not accountable, either philosophically or ethically, by the basic coordinates of liberal humanism.

Wolfe (2008:117) explains how animal scientist Temple Grandin’s relationship with animals has helped to inform her own self-awareness; he proposes that:

> disability becomes the positive, indeed necessary condition for a powerful experience by Grandin that crosses not only the lines of species difference, but also of the organic and inorganic, the biological and mechanical […] a kind of dramatisation of the category meltdowns identified canonically in Donna Haraway’s ‘Cyborg Manifesto’.

In breaking down the traditional humanist model, posthumanism offers various, and in fact, multiple ways of being. In the introduction to *Posthuman Bodies* (1995:18), Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingstone write,

> What comes after the human is not another stage of evolution but a difference in kind…It is changing its dimensions, not by getting smaller or larger, but being rhythmed across different sets of relations…Posthumanity is not about making an authentic culture or an organic community but about multiple viabilities.

The focus is not on progress in evolutionary terms or binaries of normal/abnormal and human/subhuman, but on recognizing difference and valuing the possibilities of being. And, this dismantling of categories is indeed what I intend to address through a posthumanist reading of H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.

Dywer, in her 2014 article “Leaving *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, How David Wroblewiski’s *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* Reconceives Animality and Disability,” is one of the few scholars to approach this novel through its depiction of these subjects. However, as the title of her article suggests, Dywer (2014:15,20) is eager to leave Wells’s novel behind. She contends that the unease surrounding the Beast Folk, and their embodiment of a “*disabled* humanity,” stems from their “sub-human” state and that Dr. Moreau himself is engrossed in “the contraction of species.” While Dywer does offer a useful starting point, unfortunately her reading situates the novel solely in terms of restrictions and limitations—as is evident by her use of the prefix

"sub" which indicates inadequacy and inferiority. In contrast to this reading, I suggest that more might be gained by approaching the Beast Folk as posthuman, not subhuman, and exploring how the novel works to expand our understanding of posthuman identity. As Sherryl Vint (2007:93) asserts in her reading of animality in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, "The novel…reminds us that the gap between humans and animals [and I would add between the abled and disabled] is not as stable as Moreau would suggest." Therefore, this paper extends the body of existing Wells scholarship by positively drawing attention to the various forms of non-normative embodiment in the text. In order to examine how Wells's novel illustrates the permeability of perceived boundaries, I focus on two primary areas: first, the presence of abnormality (that is, deviation from the perceived "norm") among both the humans and the Beast Folk, and, second, the use of physical space in the novel to represent the difficulties with and ultimately the ineffectiveness of borders.

The Erosion of Boundaries

Even before Prendick reaches the island, he encounters men on the ship that he chooses to describe in terms of physical deformities. For example, within just the course of a few pages, Prendick observes, "a misshapen man…with a crooked back"; and, he even makes mention of Montgomery (Moreau's assistant) having a lisp (2006:64,65). These physical differences, though clearly present from the start of the novel, have been greatly overlooked by previous scholarship—due in large part, of course, to the centrality of the Beast Folk. Prendick's descriptions of those he meets on the island vary: some appear to be more akin to disabled men, while others are clearly more animalistic (2006:73,81). And yet, he himself is uncertain about how to differentiate between the more human and the more animal: is it language, five fingers,

walking upright, eating habits, or simply, the ability to suffer? According to Moreau's Law, which governs the lives of the Beast Folk, to be "Men" means to act like mannered, civilized, able-bodied humans—and, even Prendick himself calls it an "idiotic formula," "the insanest ceremony," and "a mad litany" (2006:95).

Furthermore, as the story progresses, readers perceive that the seemingly able-bodied men on the island—like Prendick himself—are also marginalized and suffer from varying degrees of mental illness. On the island, both Prendick and Moreau feel like outsiders: Prendick as "a bit of human flotsam" and Moreau as an "outcast from civilization" (2006:67,69). Although, it is not just their geographical location that marginalizes them. Prendick is horrified by Moreau's experiments, "monsters manufactured," and his psychopathic disregard for morals (2006:103). Moreau is the epitome of the mad scientist; he is willing to ignore the suffering he is causing all for the sake of science. His figure would be all too familiar to readers at the time, as scientists were often perceived to have an unhealthy state of mind. Anne Stiles writes, "The now-familiar trope of the mad scientist in fact traces its roots to the clinical association between genius and insanity that developed in the mid-nineteenth century" (2009:319). And, Prendick himself is paranoid, anxious, and frequently considers committing suicide. And yet, as is evident in the case of Temple Grandin for example, disability—mental, physical, or otherwise—often allows for a greater empathetic response with animals and other non-human beings. As much as he is loath to admit it, Prendick has an affinity with the Beast Folk, an empathetic response, as he laments, "The crying sounded even louder out of doors. It was as if all the pain in the world had found a voice," and later, he notes, "it was difficult to clear the thing of emotion" (2006:80,133).

Prendick's adventure from the boat, to the island, and back to London is one of continual shock and horror, and yet, the question remains: what generates Prendick's (and readers')

horror? I assert that Prendick's horror does not lie with the Beast Folk themselves, but rather in what they (as well as the humans he meets on his adventure) represent: the undoing of categories. Prendick states:

> I perceived clearly for the first time what it was that had offended me, what had given me the two inconsistent and conflicting impressions of utter strangeness and yet of the strangest familiarity. The three creatures engaged in this mysterious rite were human in shape, and yet human beings with the strangest air about them of some familiar animal (2006:83).

Mason Harris (2003:101) also observes that the horror in the novel seems to arise from its liminality, its ambiguity—particularly in how it depicts its stance toward the role of scientists in Victorian culture, as, in the novel, Wells himself seems to be questioning the "rights" or authority of science. Despite Harris's interest in liminality in the novel, however, he does not give due consideration to the liminality of the Beast Folk themselves: a literal incarnation of a hybrid, an in-between figure, that embodies so much of the anxiety in the novel.

Moreover, while the literal "in-betweenness" of the Beast Folk is indeed frightening to Prendick, he is equally disturbed by the figurative "in-betweenness" of the human characters. Prendick arrives at the conclusion that Dr. Moreau himself is a beast; that Montgomery is "half akin to these Beast Folk, unfitted for human kindred," and that, he himself, "became one among the Beast Folk in the Island of Doctor Moreau" (2006:128,129,135). This is a central point, as it is not necessarily (or exclusively) the Beast Folk who affect Prendick's perception of (post)humanity, rather it is those ostensibly able-bodied figures. Prendick reflects:

I say I became habituated to the Beast Folk, that a thousand things which had seemed unnatural and repulsive speedily became natural and ordinary to me. I suppose everything in

existence takes its colour from the average hue of our surroundings. Montgomery and Moreau were too peculiar and individual to keep my general impression of humanity well defined" (2006: 111).

As Prendick observes, well-defined boundaries are difficult to maintain, and they prove quite frequently to be mere fabrications—especially, as is evident in this novel, in terms of identity and geographical space. Throughout the novel, Prendick regularly makes mention of inner and outer doors, locked doors, and enclosures of various kinds. Prendick is told, "Our little establishment here contains a secret or so, is a kind of Bluebeard's chamber, in fact. Nothing very dreadful, really—to a sane man" (2006:76). This is a compelling statement in itself, as curiosity in the Bluebeard fairy tale leads to the revelation of a horrible secret that is also an undeniable truth. And I argue, and intend to demonstrate here, that the "truth" is indeed a posthuman reality and to realize that is to be "sane." Prendick himself gradually moves from these clear-cut boundaries, to less well-defined space, and eventually to the collision of two seemingly opposite worlds: the island and London. While in the beginning of the novel Prendick watches "the elaborate locking-up of the place," by the middle of the novel he himself holds the key, and, as the story draws to a close, Prendick realizes that there is no "safe" place now; it is all "a trampled space" (2006:76,108,132,133,140). Consequently, when Prendick returns to London, the geographical difference bears little weight as the borders have been breached, and he is now a changed individual.

While Prendick certainly underwent physical changes on the island—as he recalls, "I am told that even now my eyes have a strange brightness, a swift alertness of movement"—what is most interesting about his return to London is how he now interacts with modern society (2006:139). Prendick confesses:

> I look about me at my fellow-men. And I go in fear…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 know this is an illusion; that these seeming men and women about me are indeed men and women, men and women forever, perfectly reasonable creatures, full of human desires and tender solicitude, emancipated from instinct and the slaves of no fantastic Law—beings altogether different from the Beast Folk. Yet I shrink from them, from their curious glances, their inquiries and assistance, and long to be away from them and alone (2006:143).

Prendick, now aware of the multiplicity of identity, is unable to regard his fellow humans in the same manner in which he did before his visit to the island. Furthermore, in this dissolution of boundaries, he himself does not know where he stands, and it seems that binaries like sane/insane and human/animal prove inadequate (2006:142-143). And, in a society that is not able to move beyond these dualistic notions, Prendick has no choice but to "wander alone, like a sheep stricken with the gid" (2006:143).

Here, while I have reflected on the instability of boundaries in the novel—both in terms of human and animal, and abled and disabled, as well as in the delineation of geographical space—I have not, at least explicitly, made a claim for whether the text treats this erosion of categories as positive or negative. As Harris (2003:101) notes, the response to *The Island of Doctor Moreau* has been far from uniform: some have read it as a text that supports vivisection, while others, reading it in a markedly different manner, have grouped it alongside anti-vivisectionist literature. Harris (2003:101) himself writes, "I suggest that in composing this Gothic science-fiction story Wells found the temptation to evoke the horrors of vivisection too strong to resist, and that in doing so he undermined the authority of science more thoroughly

than he intended." In his analysis Harris manages to avoid the question altogether of whether Wells's novel challenges the existing order or not. It seems that Harris is suggesting that Wells used the subject material because it made for a compelling horror story, and that the more obvious anti-vivisectionist message or critique of scientists was an unintended result. I, nonetheless, contend that it is more complicated than Harris appears willing to admit.

It is difficult to simply dismiss the note that follows the last chapter of Wells's novel; it reads:

> Strange as it may seem to the unscientific reader, there can be no denying that, whatever amount of credibility attaches to the detail of this story, the manufacture of monsters—and perhaps even *quasi*-human monsters—is within the possibilities of vivisection (2006:143).

If Wells is indeed suggesting that hybridity is possible, then what is the underlying purpose, assuming there is one, of his novel? Is Wells preparing readers for a future of hybrid beings, and, furthermore, is he offering any sort of indication of his stance toward posthuman beings? Chris Danta (2012:687) suggests:

> While orienting us towards a posthuman future, Wells uses the ancient form of the folktale to demonstrate that humans are irreducibly animals. He blends science fiction and folktale anachronistically in his novel so that his reader might recognize in Moreau's vivisection a form of anthropomorphism that is monstrous or grotesque for being literalised.

Unlike the harmless talking animals one finds in folktales and fables, Danta believes that Wells's depiction is grotesque in its literalness—thus placing Danta with a host of other scholars who are all interested in reading Wells in terms of horror, the grotesque, and unethical science

experimentation. Not reading posthuman possibility in a positive light, Danta (2012:687) argues that, "Moreau is relevant to any discussion of scientific chimeras […] not just because it anticipates their development, but also because it speculates upon the possible consequences of this type of scientific research."

Thinking outside the vivisection debates of the 1800s and the discussion of scientific chimeras today, I assert that Wells's novel speaks beyond controversial medical research to larger conversations about animality, disability, and posthuman acceptance. Admittedly, my reading of the text is more positively constructed than that which has been put forth in previous scholarship. However, by continually returning to the *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as a text full of possible racist and eugenicist imagery, we are occluding other readings of this text that are increasingly valuable: not only in terms of H.G. Wells scholarship but also in light of the continued reluctance to move beyond dualistic thinking. While, in this paper, I do not want to presume Wells's authorial intent, I maintain that, due to the strong thematic presence of erosion that pervades *The Island of Doctor Moreau,* it is difficult to accept that Wells was unconscious of its presence or that he was only using it for the sake of story. The question remains, however, as to whether Wells's novel embraces the disruption to the perceived normal, thus welcoming the possibilities of a posthuman future, or not.

I propose that the figure of Edward Prendick embodies both the inevitableness of and accompanying cultural anxiety—not Wells's necessarily—about such breakdowns. By rendering Prendick a character who is at first horrified at hybridity, then empathetic, and ultimately changed physically, emotionally, and relationally, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* presents readers with a response cycle that is eerily accurate in its construction. The move from fear to empathy to change that Prendick undergoes in the novel does not suggest that the erosion of categories is

an occasion for sustained dread. Rather, one must move beyond fear and anxiety, to empathetic understanding, and, ultimately, to a place in which the previous way of life—one constructed around binaries and boundaries—is neither desirable nor possible.

H.G. Wells and Victorian Proto-Posthumanism

A posthumanist close-reading of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is made more persuasive here by stressing how the historical context, Wells's proto-posthumanist stance, and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* relate. In the mid- to late nineteenth century, the question of where humans came from and where they were going was a major concern that was brought forth in evolutionary theory, eugenics theory, the vivisection debates, and general discussion on the supposed dichotomies between modern and primitive, natural and unnatural, and, perhaps most obviously, between science and religion. Concerning Wells's own views on these subjects, John S. Partington (2000:98) contends that Wells was neither a eugenicist nor a racist (as some have proposed), and, similarly, that Wells's response to Francis Galton's eugenics theory reveals that Wells did not support either the idea of "selective" breeding or the Darwinian "survival of the fittest" model. With due consideration to the fact that Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* had been published in 1859, and evolutionary theorist Thomas Huxley was Wells's own teacher in the 1880s, Wells's Beast Folk can be read as manifestations of anxiety about the revelation that human beings might have descended from animals. Likewise, Wells's novel depicts a failed experiment in which the transformation from animal to human eventually results in the return to animal form—a horror that can be assumed to have entertained at least a few minds during this time period. Speaking of Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, as well as texts like Robert

Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Lyn Pykett (2001:209) writes:

> All of these tales dramatize the degenerationist fears that arose from late nineteenth-century evolutionary thought in the natural and social sciences. On the one hand, there was a fear of degeneration as regression…On the other hand, there was a fear that degeneration was the consequence of…over-civilization.

Reading Wells's novel as imperial gothic, Pykett (2001:208), from a postcolonialist standpoint, asserts that, "Moreau's beast-men are represented as savage, primitive, black, colonized subjects." Nonetheless, as I am arguing here, Wells's Beast Folk, especially with regard to the prevalence of permeable boundaries in the novel, can also be read as progressive posthuman figures that depict multiple ways of being—certainly a radical notion in Wells's day and for many in today's society as well. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* troubles the notion that evolutionary progress is linear—if the trajectory is animal to ideal human, then what space is there left for the disabled? Similarly, although contemporary society prefers to think of itself as far removed from a distant, seemingly more inhumane past, it is worth noting that just within the last year, much has been brought forth in the "designer babies" debate.[2] If progress means living in a world in which one can design the "ideal" human, it means living in a world that leaves little room for difference, and seemingly no room, at all, for disability. With an awareness of Wells's more progressive views in mind, I contend that his cast of characters in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*—physically disabled humans, the Beast Folk, and the marginalized, though outwardly able-bodied, humans in the novel—warrants further attention.

[2] For reference, see James Gallagher's 2015 article "Designer babies debate should start, scientists say" on the *BBC News Website*.

With disability studies, as well as animal studies, and their interest in examining hierarchical structures and deconstructing binaries, it is no surprise that they work well together alongside posthumanist readings of literature of the fantastic. Pykett (2001:194) writes:

> …the fantastic is itself a liminal and transgressive mode, concerned with and moving between borderlands and boundaries: the boundaries of the conscious and the unconscious; the rational and the irrational; the 'civilized' and the 'primitive'; the religious and secular; the material and the numinous; the natural and supernatural; the self and the not-self. The fantastic is an interrogator of established categories.

This mode of interrogation—specifically as it relates to narratives of abled/disabled and human/animal—although clearly evident in Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, is present in other writings of his as well. Although within the scope of this paper I do not have sufficient space to demonstrate how this manifests in his other texts, it is, at least briefly, worth mentioning a few of the more notable ones.

Both Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898) have been read as texts that deal with posthuman identity. In her reading of Wells's *The Time Machine*, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2015:175-176) writes:

> Wells shrewdly uses expectations of what this future world could be, to depict a utopia in which human culture has tamed nature [...] it takes the vision of unequal physical development seriously, as something that would disturb the idea of a single humanity.

Reiterating the value of such inquiry, Thomsen (2015:176) asserts, "…with the growing pace of technological inventions, and a plethora of ways of selecting, developing and maintaining humans, the possibility of radically different kinds of conditions for different segments of humanity cannot be easily written off." Similarly, in his reading of *The War of the Worlds*,

Christopher Keep (1997) examines how Wells troubles the notion that evolutionary progress is equivalent to disembodiment and the eradication of difference—a very problematic, though dominant, viewpoint from the perspective of disability studies. Both Thomsen and Keep read Wells’s work as complicating the concept that progress and being are either linear or singular. Furthermore, although Keep does not explicitly mention disability in this earlier article (1997), it is the focus of a later piece written with Jennifer Esmail: “Victorian Disability: Introduction” (2009). Here, they begin by discussing one of H.G. Wells' s other works, a lesser-known short story, "The Country of the Blind” (Esmail and Keep). Of which, Esmail and Keep (2009:46) observe, “The text plays upon many aspects of the Victorian preoccupation with the nature of ability and its relationship to contemporary discourses of citizenship, education, health, and aesthetics.”

Finally, out of all of Wells’s nonfiction writings, the one that has received the most attention from a posthumanist standpoint is *A Modern Utopia* (1905)—which, in truth, is more of a nonfiction/fiction hybrid. Wells’s unique utopic vision—one that allows for both progress and stability—is the subject of John S. Partington’s (2000) “The Death of the Static: H.G. Wells and the Kinetic Utopia.” Like Partington, Thomsen (2015) too is intrigued by the kinetic energy of Wells’s utopia. She (Thomsen 2015:211) contends, “with regard to H.G. Wells’ idea of a modern and perpetually evolving utopia, the utopia is always challenged by the ways in which the life of the individual differs from the ongoing structures of the collective.” As Thomsen (2015) observes, Wells’s writings regularly reflect an interest in evolution not in terms of linear progression but in the growth that results from challenging the existing order. Wells’s singular utopia both acknowledges and allows for human fallibility and variance. And, due to this attention to the individual over the collective and energy over stagnancy, Wells’s utopic vision

aligns with the ongoing goal of both animal studies and disability studies: to be actively aware of and motivated by the need for inclusivity.

Before concluding, it is worth remarking on a subject that has been largely ignored in scholarship surrounding this novel: Wells's own disability. Keep, in his influential 1997 article "H.G. Wells and the End of the Body," includes excerpts from Wells's autobiography, *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934). These excerpts communicate Wells's struggle with his own "inferior" or degenerated body—a result of growing up poor and suffering health-wise because of it (Keep 1997:236). Of one of the excerpts included, Keep (1997:236) writes:

> Wells's evident distaste for his own corporeality, his attempt to distance himself from his body ('it had become'), and his insistence on it as 'inferior,' show the extent to which his understanding of himself as an embodied subject was overdetermined by the discourse of degeneration.

And yet, as previously mentioned, Keep's article does not once mention the term *disability*—understandable here perhaps due to the fairly recent development of disability studies. However, what is not accounted for, is why other scholars have neglected to consider how Wells's own struggle with a "non-normative" body can figure into our reading of novels like *The Island of Doctor Moreau*—which, like many of his other works, deals so clearly with the failure of binaries to account for posthuman identities.

In the Victorian era, progress was aligned with perfection and the human, while deterioration was affiliated with the imperfect and the animal. However, when the dualistic system collapses, when identity is revealed to be not so easily understood, the question remains: what comes after? As I have articulated here, a driving tension in H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is the desire for and continual upset of boundaries. In drawing attention to the

physically disabled humans, the Beast Folk, and the seemingly able-bodied humans, I have argued that Wells complicates the notion of what it means to be human—forcibly pushing us toward posthuman realities. In a similar way, through attention to physical space in the novel, I have proposed that Wells continually demonstrates the ineffectiveness of boundaries. Ultimately, this paper hopes to address and inevitably frustrate questions of what it means to be animal, to be human, and to, as many in the disabled community do, identify one's self as existing in a more hybrid state outside of normative embodiment. Reading *The Island of Doctor Moreau* through a posthuman lens shows us a future that does not eradicate disability because it suggests regression; rather, in Edward Prendick's embodiment of the animal and the human, the non-disabled and the disabled, the civilized and the savage, Wells presents us with a single character and multiple ways of being—one that neither the Victorian era nor the present day have yet come to accept.

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