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## “GREEN CONFUSION”: EVOLUTION AND ENTANGLEMENT IN H. G. WELLS’S *THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU*

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By John Glendingen

*THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU* (1896) is a richly confused novel, and its complexities and mixed agendas constitute one reason why this remarkable enactment of ideas and theories has received so much, and such varied, critical attention. Its generic, psychological, and thematic disorder does not stand out as much as it might, however, because confusion itself — biological, ethical, epistemological — is one of its subjects.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the text begins with great and misleading attention to accuracy, precision, and narrative control. First, Charles Edward Prendick introduces the manuscript of his now deceased uncle, Edward Prendick, starting with these details: “On February the First, 1887, the *Lady Vain* was lost by collision with a derelict when about the latitude 1° S. and longitude 107° W” (3; Intro.). When Edward Prendick commences the story proper, he begins with similar exactitude, stating what “every one knows” — that “the *Lady Vain* . . . collided with a derelict when ten days out from Callao. The long-boat, with seven of the crew, was picked up eighteen days after by H. M. gunboat *Myrtle*” (4; ch. 1). He then shifts to private knowledge: although four men in the ship’s dinghy were thought to have perished, there were actually only three men in the boat, with he himself as the sole survivor of that group. Here begins his story of what happened between the time the dinghy was last seen and his being picked up, eleven months later, at about the same location — the coordinates for which the nephew also provides. Both narrators maintain their stances of detailed accuracy and objectivity — the nephew will certify the truth of only that part of his uncle’s story he can substantiate — because the story that Edward Prendick tells about the eleven months during which he visits Doctor Moreau’s island is so incredible.

These two layers of purported accuracy and control, grounded in public knowledge, serve to disarm the incredulity of readers. More importantly, they set off, by contrast, a story suffused with the operation of chance in human affairs — as illustrated, for instance, by two ships colliding in a relatively untravelled part of a vast ocean. Throughout *The Island of Doctor Moreau* chance and uncertainty undermine order and knowledge. The novel signifies indeterminacy as the ruling element in the universe and in the human condition, even subverting its own textual authority for telling the truth. Chance, contin-

gency, unpredictability, indeterminacy — these elements, inherent in Darwinism, reflect the novel's involvement with evolutionary theory.

Apart from a quasi-allegorical setup that promotes comparison between Doctor Moreau's scientific activities and evolution, the novel establishes three direct connections to Charles Darwin. First, the protagonist and narrator, Edward Prendick, reveals that he, like H. G. Wells himself, had been the student of the great biologist and evolutionist Thomas Huxley, Darwin's disciple, friend, and champion. A second marker of the story's Darwinian provenance is the placement of Moreau's fictional island in the actual vicinity of the Galapagos, islands that Darwin visited and made famous. Although during his stay there Darwin did not recognize that they and their fauna constituted a virtual laboratory for natural selection, after his return to England they provided crucial hints and evidence for his theory.

A third connection with Darwin is the novel's appropriation of the "entangled bank" that he employs, in the conclusion of *On the Origin of Species* (1859), to summarize and promote his theory of evolution. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* adopts the idea of entanglement to disrupt conventional, optimistic views about humanity and its place in the universe. Responding to the controversies about evolutionary theory that Darwin's work catalyzed and that permeated the late nineteenth century, Wells's narrative follows a negative path in exploring the problematic biological and cultural foundations of human life. It stakes out those areas of confused human self-understanding that will have to be disentangled before society can, perhaps, progress on a firmer basis. The question is, what can be determined in an indeterminate universe, what significant truths might manifest themselves after falsehoods, perceived as such, have been cleared away?<sup>22</sup> Integral to Wells's text, the implications and omissions of the entangled bank fix a heuristic starting point. I will begin with Darwin's famous image and the novel's immediate application of entanglement to signify indeterminacy.

### I.

THE *ORIGIN* DEPLOYS THE ENTANGLED BANK as an image of unity and order so as to resist the negative implications of chaos and disorder inherent in the process of natural selection. In evolution via natural selection, those individuals with variations that give them a competitive edge in given environments will more readily survive, reproduce, and pass along to later generations their adaptive characteristics, which will continue to develop as long as they enhance chances for survival and reproduction. Thus, gradually, one species evolves from another through interplay of internal and external factors. But the process can appear depressingly chaotic because of the incessant competition between individuals and between species for limited resources, because of the death and extinction that result, because of the apparent randomness of the variations upon which natural selection builds, and because of the complexity and instability of the environmental factors that determine which variations offer survival value. Chance appears to rule. Darwin, however, in his first reference to the entangled bank, in Chapter 3 of the *Origin*, argues against chance: "When we look at the plants and bushes clothing an entangled bank, we are tempted [incorrectly] to attribute their proportional numbers and kinds to what we call chance." This attribution is incorrect, he contends, because the proportions

and kinds are in fact established and maintained through a systematic and statistically verifiable process that tends toward order (74–75).

The upbeat conclusion of the *Origin* further develops the entangled bank as a representation of law and order, and of progress as well. It exemplifies the triumph of natural selection, which, because it “works solely by and for the good of each being, [ensures that] all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress toward perfection.” Representing nature as happy and harmonious, the bank elides the struggle, disorder, and waste that, as Darwin makes clear elsewhere, attend natural selection:

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. (489)

Again, it is order, not chance, that governs life, and entanglement in the *Origin* therefore evidences a harmonious ecological interdependence and equilibrium between species.

*The Island of Doctor Moreau* picks up on the negative implications of natural selection that the entangled bank disguises. In Wells’s text entanglement means disorder, not order or harmony: it entails the commingling of objects, processes, and qualities that strike the human mind as incompatible or antagonistic because they upset boundaries and categories; and it points to the limits of knowledge, since the mind, caught in the very processes it tries to understand, is continually confounded by contingencies, like those governing the course of Darwinian evolution, too complex to be anticipated or fully comprehended.<sup>3</sup> Ethics, which according to Wells involve the interaction of evolutionarily determined predisposition with artificial behavioral standards developed for maintaining ideas of social good, is one focus of such problematic entanglement.<sup>4</sup> Another is chance, which subverts reasoned expectations, mixing unreality with reality, the probable with the improbable. One function of ethics is to stabilize human life in the face of an indeterminate universe informed by complexity, chance, and consequent unpredictability, but the beginning of Wells’s novel dramatizes how readily accident or luck, whether good or bad, can overwhelm standards for guiding behavior and assessing truth. The first page of Edward Prendick’s story reinforces this theme through its reference to entanglement.

After correcting the mistake others had made in thinking there were four survivors who had set off in the dingy, Prendick states that “luckily for us and unluckily for himself,” a sailor trying to join the other three had died in the attempt: “He came down out of the tangle of ropes under the stays of the smashed bowsprit, some small rope caught his heel as he let go, and he hung for a moment head downward, and then fell and struck a block or spar floating in the water” (4; ch. 1). The “tangle” that contributes to the sailor’s death, overturning him and whatever expectations he had for escape, inaugurates within the novel a series of images that establish entanglement as a trope.<sup>5</sup> Here as elsewhere the story calls attention not only to how human enterprises become entangled with chance occurrences, but to how good and bad luck themselves become entangled. In this case, the sailor’s death seemingly benefits the three survivors, who have to share their scanty provisions with one less comrade. This episode adumbrates the relativistic, amoral universe that dominates the novel, and the name of the doomed ship reinforces this picture

and the pretensions of humans who ignore it. “*Lady Vain*” suggests the vanity of individuals who think they can entirely control their destinies, the vainness or futility of believing chance can be denied. Also, the ship’s name can be connected to the name-change that Wells, in notes for revisions, proposed for the ship that rescues Prendick eight days after the wreck; the *Ipecacuanha* of the first edition would have become the *Red Luck* had Wells acted upon his intent.<sup>6</sup> Conflated, the two names, the *Lady Vain* and the *Red Luck*, suggest the supremacy of Lady Luck, or Mother Nature, whose hands, in the Darwinian vision of competition, struggle, and death, are red with blood.

But as already illustrated, luck cannot always be bad, however one conceives of it — and it is important to remember that “luck” is subjective, relativistic, and contingent; it is open to different interpretations based on different standards and on its different consequences for different people, and it is changeable over time since what seems good or bad in the present can take on the opposite appearance in light of later, unpredictable developments. Suffering from thirst and hunger like his two companions and finally willing to participate in cannibalism, Prendick’s life is temporarily saved when the three castaways draw lots and one of the others is selected to be eaten. Chance makes Prendick look lucky, and it does so again when the designated victim decides to withdraw from the project, the other man attacks him, they fall out of the dinghy and drown, and Prendick is delivered from the potential aggression of his companions or from an act that appalls him. Although he is left in desperate physical condition, his mere survival turns out to be good, for chance seemingly intervenes in his favor once more. This occurs when the dinghy crosses paths with the *Ipecacuanha*, on which happens to be a man with medical training — Montgomery, Doctor Moreau’s assistant — who saves Prendick’s life. “You were in luck,” he tells Prendick, “to get picked by a ship with a medical man aboard” (6; ch. 2); of course, he is lucky to get picked up at all.

Montgomery contends his saving of Prendick was controlled by chance, “as everything is in a man’s life”; he says he took him on as a patient simply because he happened to be “bored, and wanted something to do.” That Prendick’s is an amateur biologist also seems fortuitous, in that Montgomery’s telling Moreau that “Prendick knows something of science” appears to be the reason, after the bestial captain of the *Ipecacuanha* casts Prendick adrift once more, that Moreau changes his mind and saves the castaway (12, 18; ch. 4, ch. 6). Furthermore, Moreau seemingly affords Prendick better treatment than he would have done had his guest not been the one-time student of Thomas Huxley. But this string of good fortune leads to great and long-term suffering because of the ordeals Prendick undergoes on the island. Also, Prendick’s chance arrival there contributes to problems for its inhabitants as his fate becomes entangled with theirs. In general, then, the early part of the narrative establishes chance, with good and bad luck entwined in involved and unforeseen ways, as a central theme, one that remains equally prevalent throughout the remainder of the novel. At the same time, “Red Luck” is the form of chance accentuated in the story, whose preoccupation is especially with the negative implications of natural selection.

Chance, however, should be understood as expression of the contingency that permeates phenomena. The forces of the universe are too multitudinous, varied, changeable, and intermixed to allow accurate prediction or explanation of any but the most limited and strictly controlled events. Chance, which we call good or bad luck when the unlikely seems to impact our lives decidedly, is our explanation for occurrences that appear most unpre-

dictable relative to evidently realistic expectations and to limited understandings. But because much of our experience cannot accurately be predicted or explained due to the many complex, uncontrollable, and mostly unseen forces that bear on it, chance occurs as a relatively common feature of our lives. To say that chance rules the universe is therefore to say that contingency governs cognition; our knowing continuously struggles to make sense of an elusive and wayward reality. In his early essays Wells expresses this view of contingency in pointing out how readily some unforeseen, complex, and uncontrollable circumstance, such as radical environmental change or pestilence, might doom humanity (*Early Writings* 130–31, 171–72). The universe that *The Island of Doctor Moreau* evokes is largely contingent. On three occasions Prendick finds himself adrift in a small boat caught in so many circumstances of currents and weather that its future is unpredictable. This situation presents a graphic image of human existence in general, even though most people do not undergo Prendick's extremities of helplessness.

The drifting boat is a prominent motif in the naturalistic fiction common during the period in which Wells wrote his novel; such fiction portrays social and natural worlds where hostile or, at best, indifferent forces beyond their control determine people's fates. One of these forces is chance, sometimes conceived as a sort of implacable antagonist.<sup>7</sup> Much naturalistic fiction actually undermines the idea of chance because of the appearance of design in the improbable unrelenting negativity of its effects. Certainly Prendick's being cast adrift suggests the antagonistic workings of chance, and the unlikelihood of its happening three times indicates authorial design rather than chance occurrences. The story somewhat parts company with naturalism because Prendick is also, against all odds, saved each time; here then is a degree of even-handedness, a balancing of good and bad luck, rather than unrelieved negative determinism. Nevertheless, the novel's overdetermination of chance along with the overall prevalence of bad fortune, exaggerations bespeaking artistic or polemical purpose, at first glance indeed appear to convey a naturalistic or even nihilistic message about the pointlessness of the cosmos and the helplessness of humanity. Over-reacting to his disillusionment in the humanistic ideals that have upheld him, Prendick arrives at such a view, even though he wills himself to hope for good (87; ch. 22). But the novel as a whole, more existential than naturalistic, does not. Rather, it conducts a literary exploration to determine what degree of control and freedom humanity might exercise once it acknowledges that its doings are inextricably entangled with chance and that there is no moral agent outside of itself and its own choices. Although Doctor Moreau is the potential embodiment of this exploration, his daring but confused attempts to overcome the randomness of evolution, by dissociating the human from the animal, constitute a flawed response to a refractory universe.

As prominent as it is, chance is only part of the indeterminacy that saturates the story, emphasizing the perplexities to which the mind is susceptible. Indeterminacy, for instance, governs the novel's treatment of the relationship between humans and animals, another area of uncertainty relevant to evolution. Evolutionary theory complicates the distinction between the two; because humans evolved from animals and bear innumerable traces of this ancestry, there can be no absolute or essentialist gap between them — a point that Darwin makes repeatedly in *The Descent of Man* (1871) and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872).<sup>8</sup> This issue, the entanglement of human and animal, is broached when Montgomery administers to Prendick “a dose of scarlet stuff” that “tasted like blood, and made [him] feel stronger” (6; ch. 2). On the one hand, the reference

to blood recalls that in the dinghy Prendick is willing to defend himself with a knife against anybody who tries to make a meal of him, but that in despair he finally agrees to participate in cannibalism; physical suffering, fear, and the instinct for self-preservation cause him to confront a violent, animalistic part of himself, a dimension he will encounter repeatedly before he escapes from the island. On the other hand, taking the blood-like drink proves positive, strengthening him physically as, no doubt, engaging in cannibalism likewise would have done; our animal nature cannot be denied.<sup>9</sup>

The difference between the two activities is that there exists, against taking the drink, no moral injunction like that which at first keeps Prendick aloof from his companions' cannibalistic enterprise. A preoccupation with ethics is one of the cultural endowments that seems positive because it separates men from animals. When reified as moral law, however, it also causes much suffering, as it does for Prendick, because it forces people to go against the instinctual, elemental part of their own natures or to feel guilty for not having done so. In this sense, morality actually calls attention to animal-like propensities, and it sometimes even exacerbates or warps them because of desire for the release that their expression promises to produce. A related area of confusion is the appearance of moral relativism that occurs when ethical strictures are found inapplicable or conflicted, especially in extreme situations.<sup>10</sup> Prendick believes that killing and cannibalism are wrong, yet circumstances prepare him to engage in both activities. Later he learns how arbitrary moral codes can be when he encounters the Law of the Beast People that Moreau and their situation have created. Only Moreau appears immune to moral injunction, although it can be argued that this freedom contributes to his and Montgomery's deaths; and only Moreau fully accepts moral relativism as he tries, unsuccessfully, to disentangle the human from the animal through whatever means seem most likely to succeed. The unstable interpenetration of the cultural and the natural, the human and the animal, the moral and the amoral comprises a major area of incertitude in Wells's novel.

The early part of the narrative suggests that the existence of Prendick's story itself, not just its content, reflects indeterminacy, expressing itself as an entanglement of contrary, and unverifiable, possible truths. The frame narrator, Prendick's nephew, states that the "only island known to exist in the region in which my uncle was picked up is Noble's Isle, a small volcanic islet, and uninhabited. It was visited in 1891 by H.M.S. *Scorpion*. A party of sailors then landed, but found nothing living thereon except certain curious white moths, some hogs and rabbits, and some rather peculiar rats." Responding to the sailors' account, the nephew comments that his uncle's "narrative is without confirmation in its most essential particular" (3; Intro.). Although the peculiar life forms appear somewhat corroborative, hinting at Moreau's alterations of the animals he had imported, yet it seems likely that the party, arriving several years after Prendick's visit, would have reported signs of human habitation. Prendick reports that Moreau's buildings burned down, but there should remain evidence of his and Montgomery's long residence on the island, including the "square enclosure . . . built partly of coral and partly of pumiceous lava" that protected Moreau's compound (17; ch. 6). Also, the island should have contained many noteworthy skeletons. The crew of the *Ipecacuanha*, which might have supported part of Prendick's narrative, apparently — it is not quite certain — perishes at sea (3, 85; Intro., ch. 21 ).

Perhaps there never was a Moreau or Montgomery on the island; perhaps they, the Beast Folk Moreau creates, and Prendick's adventures among them are all delusions of a mind seriously disturbed by the trauma of a ship-wreck, by extreme physical distress, by

solitude, and by near-participation — or actual participation, for all we know — in cannibalism. The nephew's evidence suggests that the *Ipecacuanha* did indeed pick up the narrator — the ship, with a puma and other animals aboard, had been in the area at the time he disappeared (3; Intro.). But it is possible that, after being set adrift by the tyrannical, besotted captain, Prendick washed up on Noble's Isle and imagined the rest of his story. Prendick had studied biology with Huxley, and it appears that he knew of the vivisectional experiments that Moreau had conducted on animals back in England. And he apparently had experience with a floating menagerie. Therefore, responding to painful and disorienting experiences at sea, including encounters with real animals and with his own animalistic predilections, and to being stranded alone on an island and living on the level of an animal, Prendick unconsciously might have woven prior knowledge into an evolutionary fantasy that objectifies and to a degree explains inner tensions concerning his moral nature. The actual peculiarity of some of the animals on the island may reflect, not the effects of Moreau's experiments, but the relatively rapid evolutionary adjustments that can occur on isolated islands recently populated by immigrant species — a circumstance Darwin encountered on the Galapagos — and the fast breeding character of the creatures in question, possibly descendants of escapees from ships that had visited the island.<sup>11</sup> The local fauna might have provided Prendick with food until he was able to escape in the boat that chances to beach itself there. In view of these considerations, Prendick's attendance upon "a mental specialist" after returning to London intimates a psychological problem more intense than mere post-traumatic anxiety.<sup>12</sup> That this specialist "had known Moreau" (86; ch. 22) could have provided fortuitous reinforcement, or even a further motivation, for Prendick's delusions.

These evidentiary speculations do not prove that Prendick's tale is false, only that its degree of accuracy cannot be objectively determined, that truth and falsehood cannot be disengaged. Regardless of whether or not it is entirely true, his overall story results as much from chance and uncertainty as do the elements that comprise its narrative. It also reminds us that narrative fiction necessarily commingles truth and falsehood, with the human mind predisposed to participate in this entanglement; for example, we are presently treating make-believe characters and their experiences as if they were real, although some of them may not be real even within the logic of the narrative. In a number of respects Wells's novel does not merely depict pervasive uncertainty, it actively enlists readers into it in such a way as to accentuate this aspect of the human condition that most people are quite willing to overlook. Wells is always keen to attack smugness as the first step in perceiving new possibilities.

The rest of this essay will trace entanglement, as signifier of disorder and indeterminacy, through several overlapping contexts: evolutionary theory in the 1880s and '90s; Wells's response to it; the novel's dramatization of this response; and, more specifically, the troping of entanglement within Prendick's story.

## II.

THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY produced an entangled bank of evolutionary theories. Darwinism mutated in a variety of ways, rival evolutionary theories struggled against its dominance, and various highbred varieties appeared. In his biology textbook, first published in 1893, H. G. Wells offers a lucid explanation of Darwin's basic ideas without

commenting on this contextual confusion. Nevertheless, he was well aware of the scientific controversies surrounding evolution. Wells faced the same hodge-podge of evolutionary claims and counter-claims, interpretations and investments that met any serious student of the subject. That Darwinism should fragment into different lines of thought, lending itself to various and contradictory agendas, is understandable. Although it sounds simple enough, evolution via natural selection links a surprising number of components and implications. Ernst Mayr's analysis of Darwin's theory, for example, breaks it into five separate theories expounded by means of five facts and three inferences (36–39, 72). Moreover, in part because of this complexity, Darwin's ideas enable multiple inferences about natural and human reality; George Levine identifies nine of these — three primary and six secondary — that together constitute “a sort of gestalt of the Darwinian imagination” especially relevant to creative writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (14–20, 13).

Therefore fiction writers preoccupied with Darwinism could seize upon any one or combination of the sort of elements identified by Mayr and Levine, employing their own versions of Darwinism and its significance, either in acceptance, rejection, or some divided response. Moreover, some evolutionary theories were largely non-Darwinian — most prominently, the “neo-Lamarckian” versions that challenged Darwinism late in the century — and these also entered the mix. Knowingly or not, writers such as Wells could selectively apply these evolutionary variants not only because of the complexity and suggestiveness of Darwin's theory in interaction with its competitors, but because so many aspects of evolutionary thought touched upon equally complicated, ideologically charged social issues — religious, philosophical, anthropological, economic, and political. In the case of Darwin, this suggestiveness partially derives from the character of his writing, which frequently employs figurative language to express processes and ideas inaccessible to direct observation or verification, thus lending itself to multiple interpretations: “It is the element of obscurity, of metaphors whose peripheries remain undescribed, which made *The Origin of Species* so incendiary — and which allowed it to be appropriated by thinkers of so many diverse political persuasions. . . . The presence of *latent meaning* made *The Origin* suggestive, even unstoppable in its action upon minds” (Beer 100).

In short, evolutionary theory in general, with its openness to ideological investment, promotes confusion by offering an abundantly entangled set of potential influences for any narrative that, like *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, seriously applies evolution to other areas of concern. But the confusion in Wells's text is especially great because it registers many influences additional to evolution. As Elaine Showalter notes, “The psychological, literary, social, and intellectual sources of *The Island of Dr Moreau* are enormously complex” (77). Nevertheless, evolution is central, and an important dimension of the text's evolutionary complexity is its simultaneous representations of the largely contradictory evolutionary theories of Darwinism and Lamarckism. This entanglement constitutes a focus of scientific and philosophical contention in the novel.

In *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809) J. B. Lamarck presents his theory that species evolve because individuals, in striving to meet their needs in response to changing environments, produce inheritable modifications to relevant features; over generations volition continues to compound these changes, improving the effectiveness of adaptations. Lamarck's stress on the formative role of environment is similar to Darwin's, who also accepts the idea of acquired characteristics — heritable changes occurring within just one

generation because of the use and disuse of parts — but only as a secondary factor far less significant than natural selection. Darwin, however, does not embrace the Lamarckian implication that mind, through volition and the making of intelligent choices, drives evolution — that life possesses this mental, virtually inherent tendency toward progress.<sup>13</sup> It is true that Darwin sometimes makes evolution sound essentially progressive, since *The Origin* figuratively employs purpose and teleology to mitigate the negative overtones of the randomness, struggle, and death inherent in natural selection; the prime example of this strategy occurs at the end of *The Origin*, where the entangled bank obfuscates as much as it explains.

Unwilling to accommodate itself to natural selection for either substantive or rhetorical purposes, the neo-Lamarckism that arose toward the end of the century was generally more stringent and doctrinaire than Darwin's form of Darwinism, since the reemergence of Lamarckism in intensified terms in the years following the publication of *The Origin*, and peaking around the turn of the century, was primarily a reaction against Darwinism. Much as Darwin's followers had elaborated on "Darwinism," changing the master's emphases and adjusting his explanations, neo-Lamarckism built on Lamarck's ideas in a variety of ways (see Bowler 62–64). What most varieties had in common, however, was opposition to natural selection and allegiance to inherited characteristics acquired through use and disuse. The neo-Lamarckian advocate most relevant to literature was Samuel Butler, a novelist and scientific outsider whose long-term efforts to supply an alternative to what he saw as the undirected, materialistic process of natural selection led him to a form of Lamarckism. This he expressed in non-fiction works that ended up influencing even some scientists. His stance is encapsulated in the title of one of his books, *Luck, or Cunning, As the Main Means of Organic Modification?* (1887). Like some of the other Lamarckians of his time, Butler extracted from Lamarck the idea that the desire to evolve is innate, expressing itself through the purposeful acquiring and development of new characteristics as part of an intelligence-driven process. This position led him to a vitalism in which a life force works through evolution for human betterment; George Bernard Shaw was Butler's most famous convert to this metaphysical line of thought.

Wells did not share Butler's vitalistic notions, but like him he sought in Lamarck's theory sanction for the idea of human progress — although not assured progress — and for the primacy of intelligence in evolution. What particularly attracted Wells to Lamarckism was its suggestion that evolution might occur rapidly, since an organism's successful adaptive efforts could be immediately expressed and elaborated upon in the next generation; in this scheme, unlike natural selection, change did not have to wait upon the slow, undirected process of variation, competition, and selection in which many generations are needed for appreciable change to occur. In particular, Wells, with his life-long commitment to education, found in Lamarckism a way in which learning would be quickly compounded, and appropriately applied, as lessons learned in one generation became innate in the next. In this way accumulated wisdom would lead inevitably to rapid social betterment. People simply needed education-enhancing environments.

In the 1880s, however, the ultra- or neo-Darwinism of August Weismann undermined the Lamarckism of some evolutionists while, in reaction, pushing others further into the neo-Lamarckian camp. Wells was among of the former. Anticipating genetics, Weismann propounded his germ plasm theory of inheritance, arguing that characteristics are transmitted from parents to offspring through self-contained units — which Weismann correctly

associated with chromosomes — that remained unchanged by any influences on the parents' lives.<sup>14</sup> Only natural selection, he argued, influences the fate of the germ plasm, determining whether or not the organisms that carry it will survive to become parents and propagate their genetic material, sexually combining it to create new variations for selection to work upon. Not only did Weismann's theory directly shore up natural selection, making it the one and only cause of evolution, a position not even Darwin was willing to adopt, but his experiments seemed to disprove its rival, the mechanism of acquired characteristics.<sup>15</sup> The effect on Wells was to end his hope that humans might rapidly evolve into intellectually superior forms capable of conquering social problems. While he was finishing *Doctor Moreau*, or shortly thereafter, Wells's essay "Bio-Optimism" (1895) announced his change of mind; prior to 1895 he had dismissed Weismann's ideas, but now they strengthened his opposition to naïve "bio-optimism," which neo-Lamarckism seemed to sanction, and confirmed his acceptance of natural selection, however unpalatable its workings.<sup>16</sup>

The short-term effect of Wells's conversion was to reinforce the qualified pessimism that, despite his recent belief in the educational potential of rapid evolution, had for some time colored his thinking about mankind's future. In a series of essays in the early 1890s he had challenged Victorian complacency by arguing that humans are no less immune to extinction, and no more significant for the universe, than any other species. Likewise, he called attention to regression or degeneration, in which over a number of generations organs or organisms revert to forms or behaviors resembling those they had assumed during earlier stages of evolution (see "Zoological Retrogression" [1891], *Early Writings* 158–68). Such could be the fate of humans, an idea at the heart of Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895).

Late Victorian society witnessed a spread of concern about degeneration or decay — of society, races, species, even the cosmos itself.<sup>17</sup> This anxiety fed discordantly on fear that socioeconomic progress could not be sustained and suspicion that such progress was already eroding much of traditional cultural value. Along with other sciences, biology provided support for such concern. Weismann made biological degeneration an important part of his theory, maintaining that regression results whenever an environment allows the pressure of natural selection to relax (see Gayon 147–53). He may have had some impact on Wells's thinking in this matter, but a nearer and earlier influence was Thomas Huxley, who did not share Darwin's generally optimistic outlook on the long-term, unimpeded workings of natural selection (for example, see Huxley 80–81).<sup>18</sup> Darwin contended that degeneration was adaptive, a de-emphasizing of features that, while once beneficial, had become superfluous or impedimental because of changed environmental conditions. Darwin nevertheless allowed that some retrogression might result from disuse, the explanation favored by Lamarckians, although in general they did not greatly stress degeneration. For Darwin, Huxley and Wells it was a significant and widespread phenomenon, and the latter two perceived it as a threat to humanity. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* gives full play to the threats of degeneration and extinction that Wells already acknowledged but that the abandonment of Lamarckian optimism accentuated.

A passage Wells added to his novel late in the writing process particularly signals his shift away from Lamarckism.<sup>19</sup> In Chapter 15, Montgomery tells Prendick that Doctor Moreau's creations do not transmit their altered characteristics to offspring: "There was no evidence of the inheritance of their acquired human characteristics" (53; ch. 15). If new characteristics cannot be inherited, then, as already discussed, rapid intellectual evolution

apparently could not occur. Wells's brief interpolation evinces a significant disillusionment, one that plays into the already confused evolutionary picture that the novel absorbed from its complex scientific and intellectual environment. Near the center of the textual confusion, however, lies a tension between the natural selection that Wells now fully accepted as preeminent and the Lamarckism that he abandoned during the writing of his novel. As frequently noted, qualities of Doctor Moreau and his experiments reflect the workings of natural selection. Symbols and figurations of complex referents, however, are multivocal; they suggest more than their overt associations or their authors' intentions and so lend themselves to self-contradiction. This instability of the non-literal no doubt pertains to the complexities of Moreau's character and activities, which, although they evoke natural selection in some respects, also carry implications contrary to natural selection, some of them distinctly Lamarckian in their overtones.<sup>20</sup> In general, this confusion arises from the likening of incommensurable operations — scientific experimentation and evolution. The Lamarckian inflections of Moreau's activities, however, are prominent enough that they do not seem merely the incidental results of an unwieldy comparison of artificial and natural processes. A degree of order in disorder can be established by looking at the Moreau material as a hazy evolutionary allegory torn between two contrary impulses that, during the novel's composition, were important intellectual concerns for Wells.

On the one hand, Doctor Moreau's efforts to evolve animals into humans suggest a dark but generally accurate reading of Darwinian evolution because his project appears largely open-ended, subject to chance, and associated with struggle, suffering, and death.<sup>21</sup> And natural selection does bear an extravagant experimental quality; variations continually undergo environmental testing and prove worthy of survival or not. Moreau encourages his identification with the negative view of natural selection, stating that "'The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature'" (49; ch. 14), and Prendick's final assessment of Moreau summarizes this same connection: "he was so irresponsible, so utterly careless! His curiosity, his mad, aimless investigations, drove him on; and the Things were thrown out to live a year or so, to struggle and blunder and suffer, and at last to die painfully. They were wretched in themselves, the old animal hate moved them to trouble one another" (63–64; ch. 16). On the other hand, Moreau's investigations appear non-Darwinian because they are not precisely aimless; whatever his methods, he pursues the goal of creating rational life freed from physical limitations, and he learns as he goes along. Mind, intent, choice, and education inform the process, and these are qualities important for Lamarckism. Thus Moreau's project is Lamarckian in his effort not only to bring about rapid evolution, but to create evolutionary order in place of Darwinian randomness. Another Lamarckian overtone associated with Moreau is his great self-sufficiency and capacity for innovation. These qualities betoken the positive individualism that Lamarckians perceived as underpinning their form of evolution in which acquired characteristics result from the insight and efforts of individual aspirants; Darwin stressed individuality and individual struggle, but not so much the conscious choice-making involved in individualism. Finally, Moreau detects in the Beast People an inherent "upward striving" (51; ch. 14).<sup>22</sup> This tendency suggests the vitalistic strain in Lamarckism that upholds the idea that animals somehow strive to evolve.

Darwinism and Lamarckism agree in some regards pertinent to the story. For example, in their different ways both recognize degeneration, which, as Moreau acknowledges

and as we see occurring at the end of the novel, is the fate of his creations: they inexorably return to their animal characters. But because this reversion represents failure for Moreau, it reinforces the controverting of Lamarckian tendencies implicit in his creations' inability to pass along their changes to offspring. Furthermore, according to Weismann's neo-Darwinism, degeneration occurs whenever the struggle for survival slackens. To the degree that he personifies natural selection, Moreau manifests this explanation of degeneration, for once he creates his beings, he largely ends his involvement in their lives and they revert; similarly, once the hand of natural selection is removed degeneration begins.

Overall, evolution through natural selection outweighs Lamarckism, but the picture is far from clear. Moreau's surgical and psychological manipulations of animals create a confused nightmare of evolution, and one can speculate that it was a nightmare from which Wells wished to awake. *Doctor Moreau* signals not only a shift between largely contrary ways of interpreting evolution but a shift in Wells's opinion about the fictional attention evolution merits in the first place. If it is of no relevance to the future because acquired characteristics cannot be inherited, or, as he sometimes argued, because in humans it had come to a stop, then evolution has little bearing for an author immersed in a plethora of more relevant ideas and interests.<sup>23</sup> Thus at some point in composing his novel, Wells, always a seeker of clarity and order, may have begun trying to disentangle himself from evolutionary theory by objectifying its complexities and stressing its inapplicability. If such were the case, then he shared this desire for self-emancipation with a number of characters in his fiction.

In his essay "Disentanglement as a Theme in H. G. Wells's Fiction," Robert P. Weeks identifies Doctor Moreau with the many other figures in Wells's stories who try, with initial but temporary success, to escape from "a world enclosed by a network of limitations and dominated by the image of a man driven by a profound, and, at times, an irrational desire to escape. Although the network appears at first to be impenetrable, the hero finally succeeds in disentangling himself . . . but ultimately he experiences defeat in the form either of disillusionment or of death." Wells's fiction depicts such attempts to escape from limiting contingencies but refuses to downplay the difficulties that sometimes make them appear noble even when they fail. It presents, as Weeks says, "a tough hopefulness" expressed through the "tension in Wells's fiction between excessive optimism and chastened optimism, between promise and threat, and between fulfillment and defeat" (440, 444).

Regardless of Wells's conscious intentions in telling the story as he did, *Doctor Moreau* appears to announce its author's effort to extricate himself from the snarls of evolutionary theory, an effort in which he would be more successful than most of his characters in their quests for freedom. In later works he was free to transmute Lamarckian optimism and Darwinian pessimism into a cautionary vision of a possible ideal future always in doubt. Following *Doctor Moreau* and his rejection of Lamarckism, with the hope it held out, he would dismiss evolution as a major fictional theme — although he continued to accept Darwinism and the idea of the indeterminate universe it fosters. Henceforth he would focus on education. Because contingency renders the future unknowable, education becomes imperative in a universe where nothing is assured but little is precluded. Individuals are subject to limitations dangerous not to acknowledge, but humanity as a whole is potentially less limited than individuals; Wells believed that collectively people can accomplish much when they honestly assess their constraints and possibilities.

*Doctor Moreau*, however, provides no clear or positive cause for optimism. It is, relative to Wells's career, a transitional text especially wrapped up in contrary concerns, as the author's divided reactions to the novel indicate. Later in his life Wells characterized the story as a satirical fantasy or romance with a story line not to be taken quite seriously.<sup>24</sup> However, in the immediate wake of its publication Wells argued against critics who had questioned the efficacy of Doctor Moreau's methods of altering animals, contending that they are not unrealistic at all.<sup>25</sup> He clearly did not find fanciful the possibility of changing an animal's character through amputation, grafting, transfusions, vaccination, hypnosis, and "excisions" to alter "physical passions" (*Doctor Moreau* 45–47; ch. 14). In fact, Wells had already argued the plausibility of such procedures in his essay "The Limits of Individual Plasticity" (1895) (*Early Writings* 36–39), which uses Moreau's ideas and language.<sup>26</sup> What he does not argue anywhere is that these methods can produce evolution; accordingly, in the story they are not evolutionary except on the level of allegory or satire, and there they constitute only temporary evolution.

Wells's resistance to scientific criticism of his novel, in contrast to his later, generally cavalier assessment, points to its situation somewhere between realism and satirical fantasy. It is realistic in the way science fiction is generally realistic: even though the science that underpins the story does not fully exist in the form depicted, it is presented as plausible because founded on principles and terminology taken from current scientific theory and practice known to many readers. Moreover, the physical and temporal setting is unremittingly realistic, while the sincere and detailed horror of Prendick's involvement in his story also points toward the earnestness of presentation associated with realistic fiction. The rudimentary society of the Beast Folk, however, with its overt exaggerations and distortions of human culture, is fanciful. This is most obvious in their chanting of the laws, which, because they are negative injunctions ascribed to Moreau as a semi-divine authority, extravagantly parody the Mosaic Code. The realistic and the fantastic, with its allegorical and satiric weight, do not quite mesh; Prendick continually records his own sense of unreality as the fantastic and realistic intermingle in grotesque ways. There is always a sense of disjunction that contributes to the novel's disquieting atmosphere.<sup>27</sup> This disequilibrium is one reason, I suspect, why the story has been ascribed to so many different genres and why Wells made so many adjustments to it; he must have realized that it contributed to a thematic and generic muddle, however much it enabled a dramatically effective mood.

Indeed, Wells's many interests and intentions, some of them undergoing change, so complicate the story that it is pointless to insist upon just one meaning or implication. Not that this is a weakness: *Doctor Moreau* tells, on the literal level of character and plot, an interesting and coherent story; imaginatively it offers a compelling and impressively thorough investigation of late nineteenth-century evolutionary theory; and, like all competent fiction, it excels in posing intriguing questions in lieu of offering simple answers. In this last respect, it is superior to much of Wells's later, more tendentious work. None of this means that the novel lacks some primary implication offering a degree of coherence, but it can only be inferred by disengaging it from those areas of disorder and limitation that the novel foregrounds; I will return briefly to this matter at the end of the essay.

The point of this section is that the novel treats the confusions of evolutionary theory but also signals Wells's desire for what *Doctor Moreau* fails to accomplish: disengagement from the ambiguities of evolutionary theory — from what Weeks characterizes more

generally as the Wellsian goal of disentanglement from limitations. Moreau tries to free humanity, and himself first of all, from the evolutionary traces of its animal ancestors and thereby create a wholly rational creature, but his character is too enmeshed in the novel's evolutionary confusions to allow him this release. Indeed, the text's handling of evolution casts an incapacitating net of indeterminacy over all its characters by destabilizing those binary oppositions that help people make sense of their world. These include chance and design, doubt and knowledge, man and animal, nature and culture, amorality and ethics, degeneration and evolution, pessimism and hope. The novel's reconfiguration of Darwin's entangled bank foregrounds these confusions.

### III.

DURING THE EARLY PART OF HIS STAY on Moreau's island Prendick, not yet aware that Moreau's helpers were created from animals, sustains more and more uncertainty about his situation: "What could it mean? A locked enclosure on a lonely island, a notorious vivisector, and these crippled and distorted men?" (22; ch. 7). Then, already disturbed by the ordeals he has undergone and confused by the strangeness of Moreau's activities and his bizarre workers, he becomes more distressed as he listens to the agonized screams of the puma upon which the doctor is operating: "It was as if all the pain in the world had found a voice." He is agonized by a pity he admits he would not have felt had he known of the torture but it had remained silent and unobtrusive (24; ch. 8). He is further upset, it appears, by the suspicion that his pity is merely a conventional learned response rather than expression of an inherently ethical human nature; here he encounters again the issue of moral relativism that self-preservation and cannibalism had broached early in the story. Understandably, when Prendick flees the compound to escape the puma's cries, he perceives a world that, although potentially a tropical paradise, appears to him a confused hell reflecting his cognitive and ethical turmoil: "But in spite of the brilliant sunlight and the green fans of the trees waving in the soothing sea-breeze, the world was a confusion, blurred with drifting black and red phantasms" (24; ch. 8).

Twice in his story he calls the jungle a "green confusion" (27, 65; ch. 9, ch. 17): he projects his mental state onto nature, and nature itself, when interpreted apart from comforting ideologies and evasions, readily enables a confused experience fraught with indeterminacy. Prendick's confusion results from the inability of his internalized cultural nature any longer to impose order on an external nature that encourages the disruption of mental and moral categories. The ultimate source of confusion is Prendick's mind, which, unable to assimilate his experiences to his self-conceptualizing codes and constructs, must interpret the external world as confusion. With its resistances to vision, orientation, and movement, and with its dizzying superabundance of phenomena, the jungle is the form of nature that most readily promotes confusion and entanglement.<sup>28</sup> John R. Reed notes this connection of the jungle and mental entanglement within Wells's life and work:

Wells never felt comfortable with jungles, which serve him as a consistent metaphor for entanglement, confusion, and a threateningly abundant disorder. As obstructive undergrowth, the jungle represented an impediment to progress; as an environment for hostile predators it signified the dread characteristics of man's unenlightened state. Thus the jungle

could be both an external condition signifying frustration and difficulty, and an internal condition of fear against the outbreak of fierce impulses and instincts.

Reed adds that, as an obstacle and as the locus of beasts and bestiality, the jungle was “daunting” and “terrifying” for Wells. The jungle, however, is balanced by the inclusion, in a number of Wells’s works, of the garden, the site of natural and cultural coherence. It is probably derived, Reed says, from Huxley’s metaphorical application of the garden in the “Prolegomena” to *Evolution and Ethics* (35).

In *Doctor Moreau* there is no garden. The significance of this absence, I believe, is that in his novel Wells confronted his own terrors and uncertainties, including uncertainties about what he had learned as the student of Huxley; it was a way of clearing the air before he went on to other matters. Because he was openly and imaginatively confronting his own “bogle” (to use Montgomery’s word [31; ch. 10]) and facing his own jungle, participating in a psychological exercise of great personal import, Wells was led into a probably unanticipated project — the artistic challenging of his own intellectual positions, as he does both in reassessing the relative merits of Darwinism and Lamarckism and in representing the mental flaws in a scientist who actually articulates many of his pet scientific theories and notions.<sup>29</sup> The result is a “green confusion” — a phrase confusedly conflating color and psychology — that signifies entanglement both as a theme and as a condition of nearly every aspect of the novel. Chapter 9, “The Thing in the Forest,” in particular dramatizes entanglement through its adaptation of Darwin’s entangled bank.

In chapter 8 Prendick calls his mental state a “tangle of mystification” (22). Echoing the tangle of ropes at the beginning of the novel, entanglement again serves as emblem of indeterminacy — of the unpredictable and unknowable in a world of mixed phenomena. Furthermore, it introduces the series of Darwinian tangles in chapter 9, where Prendick’s encounter with the Leopard-man, the most dangerous and elusive of Moreau’s creations, raises his bewilderment to an even higher level. Robert Philmus comments on one of these references to entanglement, a passage in which Prendick, on his way back to Moreau’s compound, enters “another expanse of tangled bushes” (28; ch. 9). Philmus’s annotation of this passage speculates that “[t]he ‘tangled bushes’ are perhaps meant to recall Darwin’s ‘tangled bank’ as an image of the complex involvement of species with each other in the evolutionary struggle” (93n33). However, it should be added that there are numerous instances of entanglement in the chapter, with the word “tangle” itself, in one form or another, appearing a number of times as the narrator describes his bewildering experiences.

The chapter begins with a virtual parody of Darwin’s entangled bank. Having escaped from Moreau’s compound and the puma’s cries, Prendick comes upon a “narrow valley” with a stream: “the rivulet was hidden by the luxuriant vegetation of the banks save at one point. . . . On the farther side I saw through a bluish haze a tangle of trees and creepers.” After his former dismay, Prendick finds the scene “pleasant,” and he falls “into a tranquil state midway between dozing and waking.” “Then suddenly upon the bank of the stream appeared Something — at first I could not distinguish what it was. It bowed its round head to the water, and began to drink. Then I saw it was a man, going on all-fours like a beast” (25; ch. 9). By appearing upon a literal entangled bank within this carefully established scene, the Leopard-man raises, through the observer’s interpretive confusion, the same

questions that had perplexed so many readers of *The Origin of Species*: what is humanity and how does it relate to other creatures?

Prendick feels this confusion as he and the creature look at one another: “staring one another out of countenance, we remained for perhaps the space of a minute” (25; ch. 9). Perceiver and perceived, self and other, are intertwined in such a complex and unsettling manner that it leaves in doubt Prendick’s own identity. Whose face is whose? Both are “out of countenance.” Later on Prendick encounters, in the Beast People’s ritualistic chanting of their code, the ambiguous mixture of assertion and uncertainty in the refrain, “Are we not Men?” (38; ch. 12). In his meeting with the Leopard-man, Prendick faces the seemingly inverse but essentially same question: is he not an animal? Materializing in the midst of a dream-like state and in the context of profound uncertainty, the Leopard-man represents a primordial embodiment of Prendick’s unconscious as the narrator faces his own evolutionary legacy and experiences the consequent disarrangement of his ontological and moral identity.

The eerily close connection between Prendick and his antagonist is stressed later in the chapter as they follow parallel paths, stopping and starting together, with the Leopard-man keeping just out of his sight in the vegetation, at one point partially “hidden by a tangle of creeper” (27; ch. 9). Symbolically, Prendick is stalked by an animal nature that he does not wish to acknowledge as his own. And yet, significantly, later in the novel Prendick proprietarily refers to this nemesis as “my Leopard-man” (54; ch. 15).<sup>30</sup> As Prendick’s double, the Leopard-man incorporates those primitive elements in the narrator that have continually been forced upon his awareness since the shipwreck; it is as if the creature and the other Beast Folk as well actually emerge from his own nightmarish fantasy — which quite possibly they have if, as discussed earlier, Prendick’s story is largely delusional. That the Leopard-man is the first and most powerful of Moreau’s creations to revert to its animal ancestry makes it a particularly strong assertion of Prendick’s atavism.

The confused interrelationship between stalker and prey intensifies when Prendick’s thought is paraphrased so that the pronoun “he” can refer to himself or the Leopard-man: “What on earth was he — man or beast?” Immediately afterwards the narrator, in trying to answer the question, to break through the tangle of identities enveloping man and beast, forces his way through “a tangle of . . . bushes,” confronts the other, gazes into his eyes, and demands, “Who are you?” The Leopard-man is unable to meet Prendick’s gaze or answer the question: “No!” he said suddenly, and turning went bounding away . . . through the undergrowth” (27; ch. 9). The creature cannot answer because it is unsure of his own identity, being both man and animal, and, as a symbolic projection, it cannot reveal itself to a consciousness unwilling to accept its own animal nature, an unwillingness that Prendick demonstrates repeatedly.

The Leopard-man unsettles not only the distinction between man and animal, but more generally that between culture and nature. Is it primarily the product of culture or nature? Are humans primarily the product of culture or nature? What, in fact, is nature apart from cultural interpretations of it? Can culture legitimately conceive of the non-cultural at all? Prendick’s stalker represents a disquiet about the status of the self that most people have experienced to one degree or another; the narrator must have brought it with him before circumstances raise it to a pitch too intense entirely to ignore. As Jill Milling puts the matter, “the combinational creature is the product of a metaphorical process that discovers relationships between contrasting human and animal characteristics; the partial

transformation of these related opposites into the image of the beast-man symbolizes a union of or conflict between nature and culture rooted in man's uncertainty about his own nature and his place in the universe" (110).<sup>31</sup> This conflict expresses itself as a feeling of disorientation entailing the intermixture of "everyday reality" with radically contradictory qualities usually concealed beneath constructions of the normative.

In particular, Prendick's initial encounter with the Leopard-man recalls Freud's characterization of the uncanny as an experience of "dread and creeping horror" that occurs "either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem to be confirmed" (249, 248). Prendick's buried infantile life, dating from a pre-linguistic stage prior to his self-definition as "human," emerges — along with a "primitive belief" in the co-identity of the human and animal worlds — to unsettle ego boundaries. The result is a doubling in which the sense of his conventional self struggles with an emergent one that is both familiar, because it is his, and unfamiliar because it has been repressed. This is the experience that Prendick describes when, in an episode sandwiched between his first encounters with the Leopard-man, he witnesses three of Moreau's creatures who prompt "two inconsistent and conflicting impressions of utter strangeness and yet of the strangest familiarity" because of their unaccountable mixture of animal and human traits (27; ch. 9). All of Prendick's experiences on the island occasion similar confusions of mixed ideas and perceptions that confound beliefs about everyday reality.

His experiences seem all the more unsettling because Prendick, a civilized man cultivated with ideals of human dignity and justice, from the first is consistently forced to confront a natural order whose overwhelming imperative is the Darwinian struggle to survive. For example, he comes upon the three Beast Folk in "a kind of glade . . . made by a fall; seedlings were already starting up to struggle for the vacant space: and beyond, the dense growth of stems and twining vines and splashes of fungus and flowers closed in again" (26; ch. 9). Prendick is threatened not only with his own death, but with a realization that life and death appear of little significance because they are so profuse and interfused in the new world he inhabits. The setting in which he stumbles upon the bloody, decapitated body of a rabbit, newly killed by the Leopard-man, illustrates this extravagant indeterminacy of life and death: "I was startled by a great patch of vivid scarlet on the ground, and going up to it found it to be a peculiar fungus, branched and corrugated like a foliaceous lichen, but deliquescing into slime at the touch. And then in the shadow of some luxuriant ferns I came upon an unpleasant thing — the dead body of a rabbit covered with shining flies" (25–26; ch. 9). Prendick's fussy scientific vocabulary cannot disguise the implication that life in general is an inhuman(e) affair "scarlet" with blood and, because inseparable from non-life, of no definitive status. In its confounding of human conceptualizations life is as alien seeming as the strange fungus, which lives upon and readily devolves into death, and as ephemeral as the rabbit that sustains the life of flies. Again Prendick confronts a Darwinian nature of confused boundaries and entangled categories.

This mental confusion intensifies as the Leopard-man stalks him and it grows dark: "Prendick's nightmarish experiences in the forest dramatize in physical terms his loss of conceptual clarity. As darkness closes in, all things melt together 'into one formless blackness' [Wells, *Doctor Moreau* 28]. He is then pursued through the forest by an unclassifiable creature (the *Thing*)" (Seed 9). Appropriately, the narrator calls himself "perplexed" (in two editions of the novel) and then "hopelessly perplexed" (28n[c], 29;

ch. 9), using a word derived from Latin forms for “involved, confused, intricate” as well as “interwoven” and “tangled” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). At first a matter of entangled categories, his perplexity is exacerbated by his dangerous connection to the Leopard-man who, in reverting to its animal nature by overcoming the moral strictures that Moreau had inculcated in him, represents a psychological as well as a physical threat to Prendick, who is in danger of following the same path.

The Leopard-man calls into question not only Prendick’s psychological condition, but Moreau’s as well. Why would he create something potentially so dangerous? One possible answer is that carnivores are often more intelligent than other animals, thereby offering greater potential for further intellectual development. Moreover, the Leopard-man, the disfigured puma that eventually kills Moreau, and the other once and future carnivores pose, in the innate savageness of their natures, a greater challenge and thus greater potential satisfaction for a man obsessed with shaping beasts into rational, civilized creatures. There remains, however, the more fundamental question of why he wishes to perform these conversions in the first place. As an expression of individual psychology, Doctor Moreau and his activities are no more consistent than they are as evolutionary figurations confusedly mixing Darwinism and Lamarckism. His motivation is particularly equivocal.

Moreau’s explanations of his activities appear as mixed as everything else in the novel. Nicoletta Vallorani expresses the matter well: “Wells’s discourse on evolution as voiced by Moreau maps out a scientific landscape whose value, in terms of narrative effect, is to be seen in the creation of multiple levels of ambiguity, endlessly duplicating the controversial nature of the Darwinian theory itself” (248). One level of ambiguity involves Moreau’s two explanations for his activities: he wants to see how far he can go in artificially evolving the physical forms of life — of pushing “plasticity” of form to the utmost — and he wants to evolve life beyond the necessity of experiencing pain. He mingles these ambitions in his explanations to Prendick, but their relationship to one another remains uncertain and contradictory. “I wanted — it was the one thing I wanted — to find out the extreme limit of plasticity in a living shape” (48; ch. 14), Moreau states, but his preoccupation with overcoming pain means that ultimate plasticity cannot be his only main goal; form and feeling are of two different orders. It can be argued that finding the limit of plasticity will perhaps entail establishing the limits of pain, that “plasticity” is mental as well as physical; but the matter is unclear. Moreau’s emphasis on pain is also problematic because of his actual procedures and outcomes. He may indeed be devoted to improving life by creating beings that can rationally control their own fates and transcend pain, and his dedication and daring in pursuing this seemingly noble end are perhaps incorporated in the apparent name of his domain, Noble’s Isle. The same name, however, also points ironically to the nature of his creations thus far. These natives are anything but noble savages, and the pain that Moreau wishes to transcend dominates their lives. In their creation Moreau subjects them to unbearable agonies, and then he turns them lose to lives of suffering.

Furthermore, Moreau’s emphasis on pain weakens his assertion that only by chance did he select the human form as the ideal toward which he would work — “He confessed that he had chosen that form by chance” (47; ch. 14). When Moreau talks about physically and mentally overcoming pain, it is human pain and human evolution to which he refers, and so the evolution of humanity seems to be his real objective: “so long as pain underlies

your propositions about sin — so long, I tell you, you are an animal”; “with men, the more intelligent they become . . . the less they will need the goad [of pain] to keep them out of danger”; “[t]his store which men and women set on pleasure and pain . . . is the mark of the beast upon them — the mark of the beast from which they came!” (47, 48; ch. 14). Moreau’s chief concern therefore is with man and how to evolve him into a higher form; this evolution, directed by intellect, suggests Lamarckism rather than the Darwinism that Moreau’s and Prendick’s stress on the role of chance and cruelty in the doctor’s procedures seems to indicate. Unable to operate on actual humans, Moreau consciously, not by chance, strives to create the more-than-human by first of all moving animals toward humanity; he attempts to encompass the whole evolutionary process, from animal to man and from man to superman.

Moreau’s explanation of his project reveals that he is far from being the objective practitioner of pure, open-ended research he claims to be. His sticking a knife into his thigh to demonstrate the possibility of painlessness hints at a considerable egotistic investment — that it is especially for himself that he seeks an ideal of pure intellect unencumbered by bodily limitations. The evolving of animals objectifies his wish to evolve himself, and his willingness to inflict excruciating pain — scientifically unnecessary since he might have anesthetized his subjects (Fried 110) — emphasizes his intellectual and physical control over his victims and hence his exalted status in being entirely free from the great pain he inflicts and witnesses.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, a sadistic assertion of semi-divine agency underlies the baptismal imagery with which Moreau invests his acts of metamorphosis: “Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain I say, ‘This time I will burn out all the animal; this time I will make a rational creature of my own!’” (51; ch. 14). The phrase “my own” and the four other first-person references are telling. Moreau is the primary focus of Moreau’s work, and the acid-like process that obsesses him represents a longed-for burning away of his own perceived insufficiencies. The binary logic behind the process of eliminating “the animal” implies that his goal is the god-like one of creating the human or super-human, not just some form chosen at random.

As would-be creator of evolved humans, an obsessed scientist beset by self-deceptions and mixed motives, Moreau resembles Victor Frankenstein, to whom a passage deleted from an early manuscript version of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* alludes.<sup>33</sup> He is also reminiscent of Frankenstein because he cannot control the consequences of his activities. Despite Moreau’s assurance and self-control, the “green confusion” that reigns on the island ultimately represents, not just Prendick’s perplexities, but the contingencies that overwhelm his host as well. Events in which chance colludes with Moreau’s fallibility attest to his inability to exercise complete dominance over his experiments. Of the agonized legless monster that spread death and destruction, Moreau says, “It only got loose by accident — I never meant it to get away” (50; ch. 14). The escapee prefigures the puma-creature that eventually breaks free and kills Moreau. The doctor also errs by allowing Montgomery to import rabbits as a food source for them, since this act contributes to the dangerous reversion of some of his creatures to predation and intractability (58; ch. 16). And the chance that brings one of Huxley’s former students to the island, and influences Moreau to let him stay, places Prendick, while still convinced that Moreau is making animals out of people and not vice versa, in a position to stir up the beast-folk to rebellion against their creator (43; ch. 13). Like the world itself, the island is an imperfect laboratory, unable to contain the chaos inherent in any complex system subject to manifold variables.

The “painful disorder” that Prendick perceives in Moreau’s world (64; ch. 16) mirrors that of Darwinian nature, but it appears even more disorderly because, as already noted, it is figuratively combined with elements contrary to natural selection. As practitioner of an artificial Lamarckian form of evolution intelligently directed toward the creation of ultra-rational supermen, Moreau tries to impose goals on a developmental process while at the same time contradictorily avowing an ideal of pure, undirected experimentation closer to Darwinism. The same confusion occurs in his assertion that pain is “a useless thing that [will be] ground out of existence by evolution sooner or later” (48; ch. 14). This process intimates natural selection, but the idea that pain will become useless is predicated on his belief that life will first become intelligent enough to recognize sources of harm and consciously act so as to avoid them. Again, the realization of this intellectual evolution depends, not on chance and a struggle for survival, but on his intellect; this intellect though proves inadequate for producing such evolution.

The tendency of his creatures to revert particularly stymies Moreau. It may be true that his failures, as is often the case in scientific experimentation, would have eventually lead to the success had he been able to continue his work and correct his errors, but his confused motives, obsession, and limited knowledge of himself and the future preclude continuation. They cause him to be as entrapped by circumstances as are Prendick, the beast-folk, and Montgomery as well, all of whom suffer consequent physical or mental retrogression. The humans in the story are no better off than are the sub-humans. The Beast Folk dramatize the condition of humanity, precariously clinging to what civilization it has attained, ever at the mercy of a confused, complex universe as likely to support as oppose suffering, degeneration, and extinction. After the puma kills Moreau, the body of the scientist who had tried to distance himself from his creations ends up ironically entangled with dead Beast People: “[on] the pile of wood and faggots . . . Moreau and his mutilated victims lay, one over another. They seemed to be gripping one another in one last revengeful grapple” (72; ch. 19). Everyone’s fate is entangled with that of the other participants in a drama of elusive import and unpredictable consequences.

The entangled bank exemplifies a confused universe again in chapter 16, where it informs the hunt for the Leopard-man that occurs after Prendick reports to Moreau the creature’s dangerous reversion. This episode evidences the connection between hunters and hunted, men and monsters, all ensnared in the same biological and environmental contingencies. Prendick detects in Moreau lust for capturing the malefactor and exultation in his own power akin to that of the enthusiastically participating Beast People (60; ch. 16). The description of the chase through entangling vegetation further accentuates the connection between its human and partially human participants in an uncongenial natural world; both enter “a dense thicket, which retarded our movements exceedingly, though we went through it in a crowd together — fronds flicking into our faces, ropy creepers catching us under the chin, or gripping our ankles, thorny plants hooking into and tearing cloth and flesh together” (61; ch. 16). When Prendick describes the final cornering of the quarry he once again employs terms of entanglement. This scene recalls his earlier experience of himself being a hunted animal when, mistakenly believing himself fodder for Moreau’s experiments, he hides in an entangled bank reminiscent of the one where he first sees the Leopard-man: “I scrambled out at last on the westward bank, and with my heart beating loudly in my ears, crept into a tangle of ferns” (34; ch. 11). The final cornering of the Leopard-man echoes both this scene and the creature’s stalking of Prendick in chapter

9. As the prey cowers “in the bushes through which [Prendick] had run from him” earlier in the story, the pursuers surround the creature within this “tangle of undergrowth” (62; ch. 16). Thus throughout the novel scenes of entanglement, entailing parallels in plot as well as in imagery, enmesh its various characters in the same complexities of mixed circumstances and fragmented understandings.

Finally Prendick spots the cornered Leopard-man “through a polygon of green, in the half darkness under the luxuriant growth.” On this occasion Prendick momentarily acknowledges the connections between himself and this other that hitherto have been only implicit in his descriptions: “seeing the creature there in a perfectly animal attitude, with the light gleaming in its eyes and its imperfectly human face distorted with terror, I realised again the fact of its humanity” (62; ch. 16). Recognizing their shared identity, and in a setting momentarily freed from the negative imagery of entanglement, Prendick mercifully shoots the wretch. “Poor brutes,” he says afterwards, and he goes on to express great empathy for the Beast Folk (63; ch. 16). These moments of grace, of positive self-transcendence, do not endure, however. The reverting Beast Folk become despicable to Prendick, and he ultimately identifies with other beings only as fellow victims of a meaningless, mixed-up world full of constraints on human freedom.

That Prendick spots the Leopard-man through a “polygon” points to these constraints upon both pursuer and prey. A polygon, a shape with a number of angles and facets, is a rather strange, technically precise word to apply to a gap in vegetation; it indicates both multiple-sidedness and straight lines. But if we connect the two-dimensional polygon — the form the opening might assume from Prendick’s vantage point — with its three-dimensional relative, the polyhedron (a “solid bounded by polygons” — *American Heritage Dictionary*), Wells’s figure takes on evolutionary significance relevant to the novel. Stephen J. Gould explains that the polyhedron is the shape that Francis Galton, Darwin’s cousin and a man whose work Wells would have known, uses to express the idea that natural selection can mold an organism into a great but still limited number of forms; the possibilities are like the facets of a polyhedron, onto any one of which the evolutionary pressure of natural selection might tip it. Galton employs the polyhedron in discussing the malleability of man and other species under selective breeding; Gould connects this discussion to Darwin’s treatment of what the *Origin* calls the “plastic” qualities of domesticated animals that breeders use to shape them to their specifications (Gould 382–85). Moreau says that he has dedicated his life “to the study of the plasticity of living forms” (46; ch. 14). Thus the Leopard-man’s enclosure within a polygon hints at the plasticity Moreau employs in his “breeding” of the creature but also the natural limitations on Moreau’s activities, constrained by inherent predisposition. That the Leopard-man has reverted underscores these limitations. For Wells, possibilities are always entangled with constraints, and progress necessitates a realistic assessment of both. In *Doctor Moreau*, however, the constrictions that surround its characters severely circumscribe their scope for freedom, an interpretation of reality to which Prendick ends up fully subscribing after circumstances have victimized him repeatedly.

At the end of chapter 16 Prendick addresses entanglement one last time, but translates it from natural into cultural terms. Now it is machinery that, through its unfathomable complexities, represents confusion and helplessness for all the actors alike: “A blind Fate, a vast pitiless Mechanism, seemed to cut and shape the fabric of existence; and I, Moreau (by his passion for research), Montgomery (by his passion for drink), the Beast

People with their instincts and mental restrictions, were torn and crushed, ruthlessly, inevitably, amid the infinite complexity of its incessant wheels” (64; ch. 16). Normally conceived in opposition to nature, culture, in a further breakdown of conventional categories and binary oppositions, signifies the same contingent reality as does the green confusion of entrapping vegetation. In this light, the imagery is even more crushingly pessimistic than it appears at first glance, implying that the cultural environment is no more likely to support human aspirations than is the natural world, since their terms are interchangeable. Both are unremittingly “Darwinian” — this is the lesson that devastates Prendick.

#### IV.

THE READER, HOWEVER, need not fully subscribe to the disillusionment of a man who ends up as an unhinged, frightened, and possibly untruthful misanthrope.<sup>34</sup> Despite its many confusions, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* functions well as a cautionary tale whose manifest exaggerations and distortions highlight the dangers of ego, of self-isolation, and of evasion of reality — unsympathetic and indeterminate though it may be — through science, religion, or any other means. It offers a sobering diagnosis of the human condition but not a prescription for despair, for only by recognizing constraints upon its autonomy might humanity free itself, to some degree, from what Wells characterizes as the impeding “currents and winds of the universe in which [humanity] finds itself” (*Early Writings* 218).<sup>35</sup> Wells’s novel fully attests to the perplexities of entanglement within the Darwinian universe, but, as both Prendick’s own condition and his characterization of Moreau’s and Montgomery’s failures suggest, humans contribute to “infinite complexity” through their own ignorance and bad choices.

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#### NOTES

1. The novel’s mix of attributes has allowed various commentators to identify it as satire, parody, parable, fable, allegory, myth, fantasy, fairy tale, romance, burlesque, tragedy, comedy, tragi-comedy, farce, and science fiction. Two years before the appearance of *Doctor Moreau*, in his discussion of evolution in the *Text-Book of Biology*, Wells virtually predicted such a melange for any thorough-going fictional treatment of evolution that he might produce: “In the book of nature there are written . . . the triumphs of survival, the tragedy of death and extinction, the tragi-comedy of degradation and inheritance, the gruesome lesson of parasitism, the political satire of colonial organisms. Zoology is, indeed, a philosophy and a literature to those who can read its symbols” (1: 131).
2. As Bozzeto says, Wells’s scientific romances, including the novel in question, “clearly present themselves as fictions that encourage a figurative reading, [but] they do not proceed by assertion or lend themselves to a dogmatic reading; instead they leave open the question they deal with, prompting reflection more than eliciting an answer” (38). Nevertheless, after reflection has been prompted over the course of the story, *Doctor Moreau* does suggest some provisional answers to the questions it raises.
3. Wells accepted the natural disorder attendant on Darwin’s theory but found the theory itself, especially because of its comprehensiveness and explanatory value, to entail considerable

order. “[B]y drawing together strands from all disciplines and relating them in one unifying theory, [Darwinian evolution] seemed to him to symbolize order itself. The desire for order became a life-long craving in Wells, brought up in a world of confusion and incompetence” (Haynes 21). It is important to recognize this longing for order, even the latent presence of order, that lies beneath the confusions of *Doctor Moreau*. In his *Text-Book* Wells assured readers that “[w]ith an increasing knowledge of the facts of the form of life, there gradually appears to the student the realization of an entire unity shaped out by their countless, and often beautiful, diversity” (1: 132).

4. In his essay “Human Evolution, an Artificial Process,” Wells states that “what we call Morality becomes the padding of suggested emotional habits necessary to keep the round Paleolithic savage in the square hole of the civilised state. And Sin is the conflict of the two factors — as I have tried to convey in my *Island of Doctor Moreau*” (*Early Writings* 217).
5. In a parallel passage, Wells changed the word “mass” to “tangle” in the incomplete, early version of the novel (see Wells, *Doctor Moreau* 101n[m]), although nowhere else does he mention entanglement in this manuscript. I believe the change was a late one that serves as a thematic bridge to his revision of the story as *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. This first version is called simply *Doctor Moreau*, the new emphasis on “Island” perhaps reflecting the revised story’s emphasis on entanglement and hence on a more fully described island setting replete with jungle vegetation (see n28 below). Moreau’s island represents, in effect, an evolution from the aridity of Darwin’s Galapagos to the lushness of his entangled bank.
6. See Philmus’s note on the subject of the name change (Wells, *Doctor Moreau* 89n1). Ipecacuanha, an emetic, indicates the repulsiveness of cannibalism and, more generally, basic and unpleasant biological realities. As such it functions as a reminder of Prendick’s animal nature, the recognition of which he tries and fails to purge while he unwillingly voids those ethical certainties that have upheld his life.
7. The novels of Thomas Hardy, which are full of Darwinian elements, particularly enact this role. Presiding as a malevolent agent with a perverse sense of humor, chance became increasingly pronounced in his narratives, nearly always frustrating the needs and aspirations of his characters.
8. For example, Darwin writes, “there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties” (*Descent* 35). Montgomery’s assistant, who is the most advanced, sympathetic, and ambiguous of the Beast People, seemingly represents this convergence of man and animal through his name, M’ling, which suggests a mingling of natures. But the two natures of the Beast People do not meld smoothly, any more than they do in the humans that they, on one level, represent. Wells’s early essays suggest that the development of language, culture, and ethics encourages this uneasiness by allowing both the drawing of a distinction between man and beast and the discomfort that results when the distinction, as it often must, begins to break down. Wells therefore encourages readers to recognize culture as the artificiality it is, freely choosing to give it their allegiance because of the advantages it confers, while consciously selecting the behavioral standards that will best allow it to function. Our animal natures are a foundation to build upon, not to eradicate.
9. Overall, the taking of the drink functions as an anti-communion, emphasizing brutality, preoccupation with the physical, and isolation. It is an appropriate herald for what Prendick will experience on Moreau’s island.
10. Wells stresses the relativistic character of morality in his essay, “Morals and Civilization” (*Early Writings* 220–28).
11. Wells writes about this acceleration of evolution on islands in a 1895 essay, “Influence of Islands.” See Bowen 322–24 on the mythic and scientific implications of the island setting.
12. According to Showalter, “The introduction [by Prendick’s nephew] . . . places the story in a psychological context, and offers an invitation to the reader to consider the tale as a

- hysterical hallucination, the result of a repressed trauma. The nature of that trauma has to do with cannibalism.” Showalter goes on to analyze Prendick’s experiences in relation to the Medusa affair, in which survivors of a shipwreck, abandoned on a raft, engaged in cannibalism. Showalter concludes that Prendick may well have done likewise (81).
13. Dawkins states that “there was a dose of mysticism in Lamarck’s actual words — for instance, he had a strong belief in progress up what many people, even today, think of as the ladder of life; and he spoke of animals striving as if they, in some sense, consciously *wanted* to evolve” (289).
  14. Today we know that external conditions can in fact produce genetic mutations.
  15. Weismann cut the tails off of successive generations of mice to demonstrate that the acquired characteristic of taillessness could not be inherited. Some Lamarckians felt the experiment was flawed because it was not the volition of the mice that produced the alterations.
  16. “Bio-Optimism” maintains that “Natural Selection grips us more grimly than it ever did, because the doubts thrown upon the inheritance of acquired characteristics have deprived us of our trust in education as a means of redemption for decadent families.” Emphasizing the dark side of natural selection, Wells adds that “[t]he names of the sculptor who carves out the new forms of life are . . . Pain and Death. And the phenomena of degeneration rob one of any confidence that the new forms will be in any case or in a majority of cases ‘higher’ . . . than the old” (*Early Writings* 208, 209). Given these views, Wells could not look for human improvement via physical evolution or inheritable mental changes brought about through education. Therefore, from this point on, Wells stressed cultural, rather than physiological, change.
  17. Asker discusses Wells and *Doctor Moreau* in regard to degeneration; Greenslade’s book is a recent broad treatment of the subject in relation to British literature.
  18. Huxley also influenced Wells to admire pure research, to view scientific investigation “as an open-ended voyage of discovery, full of unpredictable discoveries” (Desmond 540). Moreau’s methods constitute a parody of this attitude.
  19. Philmus points this out in the introductory essay to his excellent variorum edition (xvii), which reflects his reconstruction of the novel’s complex compositional history in light of the many and varied *Moreau* manuscripts and editions that he sorts out. Appropriately, the textual history is as complex and, in some instances, as uncertain as the various constituents of the story.
  20. As a literal character and as a personification at once of two forms of evolution, Moreau is a confused enough figure. But he is even more so because he also represents the Old Testament creator and law-giver, thereby introducing into the novel a theological dimension that has received much critical attention (for example, see Beauchamp). Moreau, like the novel as a whole, is impressive in offering resistance to simple interpretations.
  21. Moreau says to Prendick, “I went on with this research just the way it led me. . . . I asked a question, devised some method of obtaining an answer, and got — a fresh question. . . . You cannot imagine the strange, colourless delight of these intellectual desires! The thing before you is no longer an animal, a fellow-creature, but a problem!” (48; ch. 14).
  22. Moreau, however, attributing it in part to a sort of sublimation, negatively interprets this striving as “part vanity, part waste sexual emotion, part waste curiosity” (51; ch. 14). In this characterization, only curiosity, a mental quality that can lead to purposeful and positive action, relates to Lamarckism.
  23. Wells arrived at the view that physical evolution, because of its slowness and because of the modern maintenance of those with defects, was essentially at a standstill (see *Early Writings* 213–15). Combining this idea of arrested development with his identification of humans as animals, Wells refers to man as the “culminating ape” (217).

24. In his preface to the second volume of *The Works* (Atlantic Edition), Wells refers to the novel as “a theological grotesque” entailing a “flaming caricature” of humanity — presumably a reference to the Beast People (ix). Elsewhere he calls it “an exercise in youthful blasphemy” (*Wells's Literary Criticism* 243).
25. See *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, “Appendix 6. Wells in Defense of *Moreau*” (197–210), in which Philmus covers this subject, incorporating Wells’s published reactions to the negative reviews his book had received. In his responses Wells argues for the scientific plausibility of Moreau’s experiments.
26. The essay derives from the first version of *Doctor Moreau* and its chapter, “Doctor Moreau Explains” (Wells, *Doctor Moreau* 128–35).
27. According to Haynes, the disjunctive elements and inconsistencies of the novel allow it to take on mythic resonance: “Despite the apparent realism of the novel — and the recoil of Wells’s contemporaries from its vivid pictures of horror testifies to its atmosphere of authenticity — Wells’s success in creating the sense of a mythical dimension in the novel resides in its very ambiguities. The images do not reinforce each other, and the resultant blurred and composite picture seems to bespeak a complexity all the more striking because of the clarity of the details” (39–40).
28. The first version of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* makes little note of jungle vegetation. The jungle, however, became indispensable to his revision as Wells discovered his theme of mental entanglement in relation to evolutionary theory; this discovery is hinted at, I believe, by his addition of the word “tangle” to the first page of the original, manuscript version of the story (see n5 above).
29. Moreau voices or implies a number of ideas and attitudes that Wells advocates in his early essays. These include the importance of vivisection, organic forms’ extreme “plasticity” or malleability, the possibility of eliminating the need for pain, the definitive influence of speech in the development of humanity, the insignificance of humankind from a cosmic perspective, and moral relativism. Recognizing such convergence, a minority of critics have interpreted the presentation of Moreau as largely or entirely positive. In the introduction to his informative 1996 critical edition of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Stover adopts such a position, reading Moreau as a Wellsian saint. A novel, however, is a work of imagination, not a direct transcription of intellectual positions. My view is that the text expresses Wells’s creative response to many desirable and undesirable possibilities summed up especially in the confused ideas and behaviors of Moreau. He is as much a dysfunctional hybrid psychologically as any of his creations is physically, and this is primarily why he fails. In particular Moreau personifies contradictory evolutionary positions, including his author’s interest in both Lamarckism and Darwinism, one an intellectual blind alley and the other a vital truth with little to offer to human aspiration.
30. In two editions of the novel the phrase reads “the Leopard Man,” without the possessive adjective (Wells, *Doctor Moreau* 54n[c]).
31. A response to such uncertainty is to try to fix one’s identity in relation to an Other defined by qualities, generally negative ones, calculated to somehow inflate the self through comparison. Prendick attempts this maneuver, especially at the end when he most wants to avoid identification with the degenerating Beast Folk, whom he now calls “Beast Monsters” in some editions of the novel (Wells, *Doctor Moreau* 86n[h]). The susceptibility of Moreau’s creatures to this treatment parallels that of natives to the constructions imposed upon them by colonizers. In an her essay dealing with *Doctor Moreau* in terms of imperialism and gender, Hendershot asserts that “the fact that Wells’s ‘savages’ are made by Moreau and not found by him appears to be an explicit foregrounding of European perceptions of and epistemological creation of natives rather than any statement about non-Europeans *per se*. In other words, Wells moved toward a deconstruction of European perceptions of the

- Imperial Other" (6). This reading meshes with my position that the novel destabilizes any number of conventional understandings about nature, humans, and human practices, thereby involving itself, not in just a gloomy, unproductive recording of injustice and suffering, but in the positive project of pointing toward alternatives.
32. Not anesthetizing the animals he operates on does help keep him in power since it causes the Beast People to associate him with pain and thus fear him greatly as a creator both powerful and cruel.
  33. See Wells, *Doctor Moreau* 105nn[c]–[e]; 138n5.
  34. As with Gulliver, to whom he is often compared (for example, see Hammond), Prendick ends up in a dubious condition. Upon his return to England he “gave such a strange account of himself that he was supposed demented. Subsequently he alleged that his mind was a blank from the moment of his escape from the *Lady Vain*” (3; Intro.). Prendick begins to perceive his fellow humans as repulsive and dangerous beasts, consults a mental specialist, and withdraws from society into solitude.
  35. This quotation comes from Wells’s essay, “Human Evolution, an Artificial Process” (1896), published the same year as *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. In it he argues that only “the artificial factor,” accumulated knowledge disseminated through a selfless commitment to wide-spread education, can free humanity to pursue, in a rational manner, the happiness of itself and other forms of life. This factor is prominently absent from the novel.

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