

The Identity of Creatures in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* from Posthumanism Perspective

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Abstract:

This work considers in H.G. Well's novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, based on the Posthumanism perspective, the whole novel narrates from the main character Prendick's perspective as a first person who survived luckily from a shipwrecked and launched in an unnamed and uninhabited island where the only human beings were Dr. Moreau and his assistant Montgomery. They organized a biological laboratory in order to research in vivisection on the topic 'plasticity of living forms' (71)¹ and the experimental subjects are animals. Dr. Moreau devoted his whole life on the topic and during the 'humanizing process' (67)¹, all the animal inhabitants were fear of him and not only did Dr. Moreau transform them into human-like appearance through plastic surgery, but by constantly repeating his laws, he forced their minds into human patterns as well. In a word, Moreau was the law in the island and had the ultimate power in whether take the life of animals. However, his desire to control animals also expressed his fear towards the rapid development of science and technology. Indeed Moreau made a great contribution to the biological research, on the other hand, it is extremely cruel to perform experiments on living animals. An proverb mentioned that: going too far is as bad as going not far enough. Moreau as a biologist died due to puma's revenge attack and they perished together eventually in the end.

Keywords: posthuman, biological evolution, vivisection

1. Introduction

Based on the education we accepted, the traditional education center is on "human being", and this kind of humanistic education and cultivation of people seem to be very narrow today with time flying. For example, in the treatment of animals, the school education always inculcates the concept of human and animal division, besides in the biological classification, experiments are always related to slaughter and consumption of animals. In that case, animals seem to be free to dispose of, they are completely different species from human being. Thus, anthropocentrism illusion that human beings

are special species which seems very unfair to animals, especially those as experimental subjects. In *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, when Moreau was in London, by the journalist's account, some of his experiments were wantonly cruel. As a physiologist, indeed "there was nothing horrible in vivisection(35)¹" and he truly made contributions for the development of science. However, from animals' perspective, he and his vivisection experiments regards animals as objects of empathetic ethics to satisfy human's own vanity. After Prendick was saved to the ship, he went to the deck with Montgomery:

"It was littered with scraps of carrot, shreds of green stuff, and indescribable filth. Fastened by chains to the mainmast were a number of grisly staghounds, who now began leaping and barking at me, and by the mizzen a huge puma was cramped in a little iron cage, far too small even to give it turning-room. Further under the starboard bulwark were some big hutches containing a number of rabbits, and a solitary llama was squeezed in a mere box of a cage forward(14)¹.

Animals were treated very badly on the deck, with the developing of the plots, Montgomery and Moreau in the unnamed island are doing experiments and their biological experiments need animals to be subjects that Prendick by chance exposed.

1. The conception of Posthuman

Because of biological technology, virtual reality, prosthetics, pharmacology, robots, such as genes control the development of technology, human and nonhuman (especially machinery and animal) boundaries become blurred, the traditionally "person" as the center of the ontology, epistemology and ethics has been called into question, academic circles began to discuss how to enter the "human" after the era of problem. This is the origin of Posthumanism as an academic discourse. At the beginning of 21st century, the human race has entered a new process of evolution, which refers as the "Posthuman condition"². As we know, the western educational concept originated from ancient Greece, at the very beginning, was aimed at the perfection of human nature, the pursuit of the knowledge of the supreme good, or the realization of human's natural potential and the pursuit of a happy life.

"It calls for universal cultivation and empowerment towards the best and highest life which man is capable of achieving, using means that are intellectually and morally appropriate. It works in three basic areas of life: fulfilling their potential and tendencies as individuals; to become responsible citizens as member of society; as groups, they enrich and improve themselves by actively participating in the collective achievements of human culture³.

H.G.Well's novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau* tells the story of Prendick, the narrator, after

drifting off to a desert island. One of the human being of the island is a scientist named Moreau, who uses bestial transplants and deformities to create new species of animals.

When Prendick lived in the biological station, he heard the painful howl of puma: "They were painful at first, but their constant resurgence at last altogether upset my balance(38)¹." Post-humanism is opposed to the humanization of animals, the principle of moral and legal equality to animals, human attributes to animals. This is still the way of anthropocentrism, which denies the particularity of animals⁴. In the process of creating new species, Moreau's innovation caused the beasts' resistance and he eventually died in a puma's attack. Moreau surgically transformed quadrupeds into bipeds, instilling human habits like social habits, and performing certain human functions. He even operated on the animals' vocal cords and taught them to talk. Moreau took advantage of the fear of the beasts to make them obey him. The beasts have their religion, and Moreau himself became their god and the tyrant of the island. Moreau has the intellect of a good scientist, but his desire towards authority makes him completely dehumanized while trying to create human beings through vivisection. Prendick later escaped from that crazy island, but it was hard to escape from the psychological influence of that world. Human is not the centre of the world, human and animals should live together peacefully without sacrificing animals in order to satisfy human desires.

2. Under the humanizing process

The variability of species was one of the great discoveries of nineteenth century in the biology study. Darwin established the fact that all species, including humans, change over time. A conflict between the idea of species variability and human values and emotions are shown from the novel. The slaughter of the Island of the Beast by a mad physiologist and its transformation into a place of human semblance is one of literature's most enduring nightmares of scientific horror.

What is the origin of life? With careful observation and rich imagination, Darwin described the evolution of species from simple to complex, from single to numerous. Just as a tree grows new branches, in the course of biological evolution, new species branch out from the original one. No matter human beings or animals, all of us are born with desire. In H. G. Wells's novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, on the one hand, Dr. Moreau's experiments indeed made a great contribution on the biological research ; and his experiments transformed animals to human-liked appearance besides, the graft also revealed his study of the plasticity of living forms succeed. But his endless desire made

him eager to gain more from his bestial folk.

Moreau and his assistant Montgomery did vivisection experiments in the “House of Pain” but at first Prendick had no idea about what they were focusing on. A morning, Montgomery forgot to lock the door inward towards the yard of the enclosure. And Prendick heard a cry not from the puma but was a human being in torment while having breakfast. So he opened the door saw “something bound painfully upon a framework, scarred, red, and bandaged(50)¹”. Then old Moreau appeared with a white and terrible face, gripped Prendick’s shoulder and flung him back into his room. Prendick thought that was the vivisection of men and he himself was also in danger. Whereas, Moreau explained to him that the hoarse cry he heard is from a puma not a human being, following with his explanation towards Prendick that he is focusing on the surgery that could “humanized animals--triumphs of vivisections(71)¹” . The concept of “Chimera” could apply to the bestial folk Moreau created. “Chimera” this word from Greek mythology, “the Chimera was a fearsome, fire-breathing monster with a lion’s head, a goat’s body, and a dragon’s tail”.⁵ It can also refer to “an individual, organ, or part consisting of tissues of diverse genetic constitution,⁵” in H. G.Well’s novel, Dr. Moreau in the unnamed island presents a tale of a mad scientist has vivisected animals to create new-beings⁶ which is also for his own sake.

“He said that was so, and processed to point out that the possibility of vivisection do not stop at a mere physical metamorphosis. A pig may be educated. The mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily. In our growing science of hypnotism we find the promise of a possibility of replacing old inherent instinct by new suggestions, grafted upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas...Moral education.”(73)¹

However, on the other hand, because of Moreau’s selfish desire, the variability of species and ecological system in the island was destroyed. Moreover, Moreau ruled the bestial people based on human being’s way of living and he even expected the bestial to obey the moral in human beings’ society. That psychological activity could also be seen as a fear towards the development of technology, thus he created a series of laws for bestial folk in order to stand out the central position of himself. In *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Dr. Moreau indulged his passion for scientific research and created a mixture of man-beast monster, whose cruelty to animals in the process of experiments completely violated the ethical responsibility of a scientist. This novel intends to make people re-examine the relationship between human beings and other living beings. When human beings master the ability of creation, they could create out of everything and realize the value of life, but at the same time, they also bring double pain to other

lives and even aggravate the inequality between human beings and others. It is impossible for a man to be sane after got used to play the role of God, so did Moreau. He created the "House of Pain" to stop bestial folk from tasting blood and live as a human being. Beside, requested them to build a human-liked social system. In the process of stubborn his authority, he forced the bestial man to learn the law which made by himself and stressed that no one can escape from being punished by the law if he did wrong.

"Punishment is sharp and sure(61)¹... Some want to follow tings that move, to watch and slink and wait and spring, to kill and bite, bite deep and rich, sucking the blood...It is bad(60)¹." "Not to chase other Men; that is the Law. Are we not Men? Not to eat Flesh or Fish; that is the Law. Are we not Men?(61)¹" "His is the House of Pain. His is the Hand that makes. His is the Hand that wounds. His is the Hand that heals."(59)¹

Morrow sought to become a creator, replacing the authority of God, humanizing his creation and emphasizing it as the highest level of evolution. Another typical creator is one of Mary Shelly's masterpiece *Frankenstein*. The creature from Frankenstein's creation, in order to obtain human identity, killed Frankenstein's brother, and framed the maid of the Frankenstein family. Frankenstein told his father and the judge about his creation and the crimes of the monster, but they all thought he was insane and no one believed him to be sane. The monster successfully made Frankenstein abandoned by human society, lost his family and friends, lost the trust of human beings, and became a social outcast. Frankenstein's creation of man not only failed to give his creation a human identity, but also deprived him of it. The monster with its own crimes, began to stand in its own position to judge its relationship with human beings. The creature's address towards Frankenstein became "man" who also develops a sense of self in its confrontation with humans--no longer seeks to integrate into an external, alien human world. In the same degree, after Moreau's death, the creatures in the island showed a state of disorganization and exhibit bestiality. Eventhough with the plot development, the Bestial society that Morrow was so passionate about and committed to did not materialized. He brain-washed the bestial folk in order to deification himself. Moreau made the bestial folk to convinced that he is the only authority in the island and the one who could charge their lives. He put himself in the same position with god and intended to do "monster manufactured(71)¹" only by following his inclinations. Which led the bestial folk's resistance and Moreau himself eventually died due to the manipulation of orders.

3. Conclusion:

With the development of post-human supernatural and literature and art, the progress of human society has been unstoppable. We should also criticize such forces while supporting this supernatural tendency. The "double-edged sword" effect of human science and technology is well known to all. While enjoying and yearning for beauty brought by science and technology, we are also enduring our own criticism of the contradiction in reality. Social and technological trends are focusing on the formation of a new self-concept in which the "natural" human appearance and the "natural" human character are being replaced by a growing notion of recreating a supernatural human self. The advancement of high technology drives the process of "globalization". With the integration of electronic media, people increasingly feel that the appearance of "globalization" has become a powerful ideology. High-tech virtual simulation of artificial and the future, gene mutation, plastic, remote communication and at the same time, has brought the human sensory meet efficient also brings human spiritual alienation and the change of living environment, these false reality and the future of the supernatural, has become the common value seeking points, make people familiar with the local culture and spirit faces a crisis of meaning and value of nothing. Their uncertainty also brings people lack of faith and spiritual emptiness. We cannot help but see that the development of science and technology, while bringing people efficient development, breaks down the naturalization of the universe, the mystery of life thinking and the social ecological environment of "poetic habitat", seriously dilutes the human emotions in the original nature. We also know that in the near future, technological advances will force us to develop new morals, and that our future will require the creation of a new moral structure that will provide the framework within which people can make a wide range of choices. These alternatives will emerge at a time of genetic change and widespread use of computers. For the reconstruction of our bodies and minds, we will be faced with not knowing what is good and what is not, but both good and bad. The limits of life will no longer be fixed, we must have a new moral imagination to adapt to it, and this is what confuses us.

To some extent, the creatures in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* is the existence of "other" different from human beings, which can be called the "Cyborg" of the 19th century. Western scholars mostly regard "Cyborg" as a kind of "superhuman", which means that organisms (humans) combine their bodies with non-organisms (machines) in order to transcend their own limitations, so as to change the natural life cycle of organisms, or create a human-like individual with "superhuman abilities" by using biological gene technology. However, the technology has also led to a new human question -- what is

the boundary between human and post-human? When the bestial folk has begun to possess human emotions and desires, how should human beings treat them? How to deal with the creatures human being created? H.G. Wells did not explicitly ask or answer this question. He was first and foremost a novelist, not a philosopher, so he let his characters in the story do the asking for him. One of the main character Dr. Moreau showing readers the miserable end of his life : he shot the puma to death and was killed by puma's counterattack.

“At last we drew near the westward extremity of the island. We came upon the gnawed and mutilated body of the puma, its shoulder-bone smashed by a bullet, and perhaps twenty yards further found at last what we sought. He (Moreau) lay face downward in a trampled space in a cane-brake. One hand was almost severed at the wrist, and his silvery hair was dabbled in blood. His head had been battered in by the fetters of the puma. The broken canes beneath him were smeared with blood. His revolver we could not find. Montgomery turned him over.”(105)¹

Dr. Moreau's provocative attempt to tamper with the laws of biological reproduction and evolution in nature ended in failure. His experiments had devastating consequences for himself: he died at the hands of the monster he had created. And by the end of the story, the Beast people are finally restored to their natural nature as animals. They began to disobey the "laws" made by Moreau and their physical features began to return to their original characteristics.

“They held things more clumsily; drinking by suction, feeding by gnawing, grew commoner every day. I realized more keenly than ever what Moreau had told me about the ‘stubborn beast flesh’. They were reverting, and reverting very rapidly.”(123)¹ “It would be impossible to detail every step of the lapsing on these monsters; to tell how, day by day, the human semblance left them; how they gave up bandagings and wrappings, abandoned at last every stitch of clothing; how the hair began to spread over the exposed limbs; how their foreheads fell away and their faces projected; how the quasi-human intimacy I had permitted myself with some of them in the first month of my loneliness became a horror to recall.” (123)¹

As the Bestial people's nature was restored, the strange world that Moreau had created was destroyed by death. The failure of Moreau also proved that the law of nature is irreversible, the power of nature is strong, and any attempt to reverse or overstep the law of nature is doomed to failure. When human beings' behaviors violate the ecological and ethical laws of nature, nature will punish the perverse actors with disastrous consequences. At the same time, nature will also use its own power to tamper with the

correct, making the whole ecological world move forward in accordance with its inherent natural laws. The development of science and technology should not violate the law of natural development and ignore the ecological ethical law of nature, but should follow the law of ethical value of nature. The progress of scientific and technological civilization in human society should be based on the integrity of the ecological ethical law of nature. The separation of scientific research from ethical laws, the neglect of ecological responsibility to nature, and the willful disobedience of the development laws of nature will eventually bring destructive consequences to the whole nature including human beings.

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- [6] *The Island of Dr. Moreau* was published three years after 'Evolution and Ethics,' and displayed parallels speaking to the pessimistic view regarding evolution and the necessity for bioethics (Haynes 26). Outside literature, there was an increasing awareness that animal rights should be observed and cared for even by scientists in the laboratory. It is mentioned by Stewart Richards that the justification for vivisection has been debated in Britain for over a hundred years, and the Antivivisection movement occurred throughout the 19th century, originating from France (28). By 1876, 'practical' physiology was a standard subject for medical students, but the 19th century was an era of enhanced sensitiveness about pain, and the physiologist's dilemma on the morality of vivisection came from the Victorian's conception that it was evil to cause suffering (32-33). To many Victorians, the ethical inconsistency shown in scientists was alarming. The anti-vivisectionists feared that animal experiments might lower society's standard of moral behavior and lead to human experimentations (52).