



## “The White Face of Moreau”: Race, Gender, and Animalism in the Literature of the Imperial Campaign

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H. G. Wells’s infamous work of science romance, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (2005 [1896]), explores the boundaries between the human and the animal, while implicitly demonstrating such boundaries to be complicated beyond Moreau’s scientific experimentation and investigation. In this paper, I argue that throughout the text the presentation of Moreau’s ‘Beast People’ rests upon distinctly racialised stereotypes of the Other, such that a blurring of the human and animal is already evident in the imperial and colonial perception of the racialised Other. Further, this dynamic between the Other and the British colonial subject is made abundantly clear in other texts. John Buchan’s protagonist Richard Hannay in *Greenmantle* (2018 [1916]) is representative of the white, upstanding, male colonial figure that much of the imperial project rests upon, similar to Wells’ Prendick or Moreau. Emma Roberts’s work exemplifies a white, British femininity at work in India, supporting the male dominance of imperialism. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (2009 [1997]) is an example of a post-colonial text that explores subjugated femininities and colonial sexualities as they pertain to the larger British imperial project. These texts, together, are demonstrative of the complex and multi-layered operation of imperialism and colonialism as they seek to divide and define categories of people along multiple lines of oppression, including, but by no means limited to, race, gender, class, and sexuality.

I conduct such an analysis with an understanding of Imperialism as articulated by Anne McClintock: “European imperialism was, from the outset a violent encounter with preexisting hierarchies of power that took shape not as the unfolding of its own inner destiny, but as untidy, opportunistic interference with other regimes of power”.<sup>1</sup> McClintock builds on the work of Edward Said<sup>2</sup> to highlight that within imperialism, power structures of gender, race, sexuality, and class interplay to generate a multisided system of hegemony that creates and marginalises a racialised, gendered, and classed Other, coming “into existence *in and through* each other”.<sup>3</sup> Thus, examining imperialism requires an interrogation of varying and alternate sites of oppression that work together, not distinctly, to further the European imperial project. Further, McClintock is unconvinced that “sanctioned binaries - colonizer-colonized, self-other, dominance-resistance, metropolis-colony, colonial-postcolonial - are adequate to the task of accounting for, let alone strategically opposing, the tenacious legacies of imperialism” on the basis that such dyadic concepts fail to recognise the full complexity of hierarchies and power.<sup>4</sup> She makes the case that white women, while subjugated under white men, remain complicit in the oppression and marginalisation of men and women of colour in colonised nations. Each subjectivity is “privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting”, and must thus be understood as such in our analysis.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Wells repeatedly and consistently draws parallels between the Beast People, colonised peoples, and people of colour. Indeed, Timothy Christensen highlights that “‘race’ consistently names, in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as in the sociocultural evolutionist discourses of Wells’ contemporaries, the form of suture that

<sup>1</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 5, original emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 6.

grants an imaginary consistency to evolutionary theory”.<sup>6</sup> In other words, “race provides a structured series of reference points regarding the evolution of society”.<sup>7</sup> In distinctly racialising the characters of the Beast People, Wells parallels the discourses of evolutionary science that use race as a means of distinguishing a narrative of human progression from primitiveness to civilisation. Such a narrative not only features to further the casting of the racialised Other as ‘primitive’, but, in the case of *Moreau* and other evolutionary scientists such as T. H. Huxley, to cast these subjectivities as animalistic.<sup>8</sup> However, as we understand the campaign of imperialism through McClintock, it is thus pertinent to point out that race and the racialised Other were not distinct categories prior to imperialism but rather resulted in conjunction, much like modern systems of class, gender, and sexuality.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious cases of racialised subjectivities in *Moreau* are M’ling and the Ape-Man. It is not difficult to find examples of a distinct use of race in describing these characters. Indeed, when Prendick first sees him, M’ling is described as having a “black face”,<sup>10</sup> and is referred to, repeatedly, as “the black-faced man”,<sup>11</sup> “black-faced creature”<sup>12</sup>, and “the black-faced cripple”<sup>13</sup>. While each of these terms describe the colour of his face, and arguably have little to do with race, as Prendick calls him “the black” his internalised racism is exposed.<sup>14</sup> Immediately, Prendick parallels M’ling with a racialised Other that, unequivocally, has felt the full brutality of European imperialism and colonialism. Furthermore, as Prendick describes M’ling in terms of race, he points to the animalism of his figure and behaviour. This is evident as he refers to his “thick coarse black hair”, “animal swiftness”, and “muzzle”.<sup>15</sup> In the same passage that Prendick calls attention to M’ling’s animal-like qualities, he racialises his characteristics. This generates a distant parallel in the narrative between racialised bodies and animalism, which furthers an imperial representation of a colonised subjectivities as primitive.

The descriptions of the Ape-Man do not diverge far from this pattern. When we are first introduced to the Ape-Man in Prendick’s narrative, we are immediately shown his “black negroid face”,<sup>16</sup> which is later described as “unnatural” and an “ugly brute”.<sup>17</sup> Further, the “simian-creature”<sup>18</sup> is, to Prendick, “little better than an idiot”.<sup>19</sup> Just as Prendick parallels M’ling’s animalism with race, he highlights the Ape-Man’s intellectual inferiority as he shows him to be black. Such a link is not coincidental. Christensen shows that the implication of African bodies within *Moreau* parallels the “multiple, polymorphous, and paradoxical signficiations of the black face and body within turn-of-the-century British literature”.<sup>20</sup> Gustavo Generani argues that this link emulates colonial power within the novel, reifying and employing British colonial dynamics of “master-slave” between Moreau and the Beast

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Christensen, ‘The ‘Bestial Mark’ of Race in ‘The Island of Doctor Moreau’, *Criticism*, 46:4 (Fall 2004), p. 583.

<sup>7</sup> Christensen, ‘The ‘Bestial Mark’’, p. 583.

<sup>8</sup> John Glendening, ‘Green Confusion’: Evolution and Entanglement in H. G. Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 3:2 (2002), 571–597; John McNabb, ‘The Beast Within: H.G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and Human Evolution in The Mid-1890s’, *Geological Journal*, 50 (2015), 383-397; Payal Taneja, ‘The Tropical Empire: Exotic Animals and Beastly Men in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*’, *ESQ*, 39:2–3 (2013), 139–159.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1: An Introduction, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Routledge, 1978); Rebecca M Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (London: Penguin Books, 2005 [1896]), p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Wells, *Moreau*, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Wells, *Moreau*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Wells, *Moreau*, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Wells, *Moreau*, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Wells, *Moreau*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Wells, *Moreau*, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Wells, *Moreau*, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> Wells, *Moreau*, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Wells, *Moreau*, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Christensen, ‘The ‘Bestial Mark’’, p. 591.

People.<sup>21</sup> As he writes such a racially inflected narrative, Wells becomes part of the imperial campaign that relies on racialised evolutionary science to discern a white, colonial subject as superior to the racialised, colonised Other. As many scholars have demonstrated, Wells' participation in the scientific discourse of the late nineteenth-century implicates him in its narratives of racial and species progression.<sup>22</sup> Wells' narrative employment of the hierarchies of race that perforate evolutionary discourse is resultant of his alignment with such science. While *Moreau* purposefully and undoubtedly questions the boundaries between human and animal, it shows these to be already blurred as it continuously parallels racialised Others with animals and animalism. Already in imperial discourses is humanity fringed upon animalism, but the significant determinant of these discourses is that it is not white, European humanity that does so. As such, Wells' novel furthers a racial hierarchy on which imperial evolutionary science is dependent, and promulgates the colonial perspective that white bodies are distinctively separate as sites of analysis to bodies of colour.

A further point to examine is Wells' portrayal of the female Beast People and their function within the novel. In order to find proof of their existence on the island, one must comb through the narrative with close attention for they are few and far between. In fact, none of the female characters, Beast People or human, are given a voice and remain very much in the background. In a long list of the varying Beast People, Prendick identifies the Leopard Man, the Silvery Hairy Man, the Saint Bernard Dog Man, the Ape Man, the Swine Men, and M'ling. Among these, he recognises "a Swine Woman" - note that she is singular in comparison to the Swine Men's plurality - an "old woman made of vixen and bear" and "several other females".<sup>23</sup> McClintock shows that women, under imperialism, "are typically constructed as the symbolic bearer of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to agency".<sup>24</sup> In their silence, the female Beast People mimic the role of white women and women of colour alike under colonialism as subservient to men, and ultimately as lesser than the white men, such as Prendick, Moreau, and Montgomery, that take charge of the society they live in. Significantly, they do so in order to reify the sense of a strong nation within men. While the male Beast People are described in animalistic terms, Prendick draws attention to the "lithe" bodies of the female creatures, with "slit-like" eyes and "curving" nails and a "more than human regard for the decencies and decorum of external costume".<sup>25</sup> The female Beast People, thus, are represented as having instinctive notions of femininity and womanhood, and, more particularly, white femininity and womanhood. In a peculiar paradox, the male Beast People are paralleled to men of colour and 'savage' masculinities, while the female Beast People are paralleled to white women. If we are to follow McClintock, this reifies her point that gender is a power structure imperative to imperialism. Wells' female Beast People must reify colonial femininities for if they don't, they suggest that women's subjugated position under patriarchal colonialism not natural but is, in fact, constructed and thus mutable. While femininity is shown to be natural even in animals and the Beast People, its operation in human civilisation is protected. This formation of gender is indelibly tied to the constructions of race within the text as they rely heavily on European constructions of masculinity and femininity.

Such an imperial reliance on gender is evident in John Buchan's protagonist Richard Hannay. Buchan presents an account of male identity that cannot be "separated from his exploration of the role power in the formation of a national identity strong enough to protect itself from outside dangers, and the representation of men and male subjectivities in which

21 Gustavo Generani, 'The Island of Doctor Moreau by H. G. Wells: A Pre-Freudian Reply to Darwinian Imperialism', *English*, 67:258 (2018), p. 250.

22 Gretchen Braun, 'Empathy, Anxiety, and the Boundaries of Humanity: Vivisection Discourse and The Island of Doctor Moreau', *Studies in the Novel*, 51:4 (Winter 2019), 499-522; Chris Danta 'The Future Will Have Been Animal: Dr Moreau and The Aesthetics of Monstrosity', *Textual Practice*, 26:4 (2012), 687-70; E. E. Snyder, 'Moreau and the Monstrous: Evolution, Religion, and the Beast on the Island', *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, 2:2 (2013), 213-239.

23 Wells, *Moreau*, p. 83.

24 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 359.

25 Wells, *Moreau*, p. 84.

which that nationhood finds its most immediate human line of defence”.<sup>26</sup> Nathan J. Waddell highlights notions of empowered femininity and homosexuality as those primary threats against which Hannay defends the British nationhood in *Greenmantle*, personified through Hilda von Einem and Colonel Ulrich von Stumm.<sup>27</sup> It is also no coincidence that both of these figures are already paralleled with the enemy in being German. As Sunil Iyengar points out, Buchan’s concerns about British identity extended far beyond that of the war as he participated in government as a Member of Parliament.<sup>28</sup> In his exploration of male identity and masculinity through Richard Hannay, Buchan demonstrates just how central ideas about gender are to the imperial campaign. Positioning the primary antagonists of the novel as female and (implicitly) homosexual reifies the points on which strong male identity is able to define itself: not-female and heterosexual. In *Moreau*, the male figure of Doctor Moreau is defined as masculine in his ability to control his subjects along lines of race and gender; in *Greenmantle*, Hannay’s masculinity is defined in his ability to ward off threats of femininity and homosexuality. Both are instances in which gender is imperative to the formation of a (white) male imperial subject.

This construction of gender within imperial narratives does not limit itself to advocations and explorations of masculinity and the colonial male identity. Rather, it diverges into accounts of an imperial femininity. Emma Roberts, in ‘The Rajah’s Obsequies’, explores such themes and structures. In her “more conventional *sati* poem”,<sup>29</sup> Roberts portrays two women who stand on the funeral pyre of their late husband as part of the *sati* ritual, one more willingly than the other.<sup>30</sup> In her description of the Indian landscape, prior to when the reader first encounters the two women, Roberts omits the presence of people. Indeed, the landscape is empty. Máire n’ Flathœin suggests this is to present India as a “canvas for pleasantly exotic elements of still life”, a space of imagination and exploration for the British colonial mindset. Indeed, it is in this empty space that Roberts explores colonial femininity, which, in the chapter titled ‘Bengal Brides and Bridal Candidates’ from her text *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindoostan*, she presents as a means to support and develop the male colonial project.<sup>31</sup> Priya Shah states that for Roberts, the value of women lay in “their ability to inculcate bourgeois values in the home and restrain their husbands’ wayward desires”.<sup>32</sup> In portraying *sati* as representative of faith and religion in India, Roberts produces a commentary on the need to protect femininity as the subject of male ritual and desire. However, she does while understanding such protection to come from men and male power. As such, she positions women and femininity as necessarily subjugated to men under imperialism, and furthers the concept of a submissive femininity as imperative to effective colonialism, much as Buchan and Wells demonstrate strong masculinity to be a pillar of such a campaign.

Indeed, Arundhati Roy also explores such femininity as part of imperialism, though from a postcolonial and more contemporary standpoint.<sup>33</sup> For Tracy Lemaster, “the novel’s intersecting ideologies on femininity and the nation-state show that the female subject’s situation corresponds within race and caste hierarchies”.<sup>34</sup> Like McClintock, Roy shows that gender is indelibly tied to race and class/caste under imperialism and as such cannot be

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<sup>26</sup> Nathan Joseph Waddell, ‘Paranoia, Power, and Male Identity in John Buchan’s Literary War’, (unpublished master’s thesis, University of Birmingham, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> John Buchan, *Greenmantle* (Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Sunil Iyengar, ‘The Borders of the Possible’, *The New Criterion* (September 2019), 73-75.

<sup>29</sup> Máire n’ Flathœin, ‘India and women’s poetry of the 1830s: Femininity and the picturesque in the poetry of Emma Roberts and Letitia Elizabeth Landon’, *Women’s Writing* 12:2 (2005), p. 11, original emphasis.

<sup>30</sup> Emma Roberts, ‘The Rajah’s Obsequies’, in *Oriental Scenes, Dramatic Sketches and Tales, With Other Poems*, ed. by Emma Roberts (Calcutta: Norman Grant, 1830), pp. 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> Emma Roberts, *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindoostan, with Sketches of Anglo-Indian Society* (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1835).

<sup>32</sup> Priya Shah, ‘Barbaric Pearl and Gold’: Gendered Desires and Colonial Governance in Emma Roberts’s *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindoostan*, *Studies in Travel Writing*, 16:1 (2012), p. 39.

considered without account of other structures of marginalisation. Indeed, Lemaster continues to explore how, in *The God of Small Things*, the woman's body is portrayed as a site of nation-building as it contains within in it the possibility to reproduce the nation.<sup>35</sup> In exploring a predominantly female family and household, Roy intentionally renders femininity both as a site of reproduction and the nation, and as a means of subversion to patriarchal colonialism. In the continuous gender transgressions of Rahel and Estha, and the consequences they often face for it, Roy retrospectively demonstrates the fragility of masculinity as dominant, and thus furthers a postcolonial interrogation of gender and race as pillars of imperialism.

In each of the four texts I have discussed, race and gender prove to be imperative structures of power that interplay within imperialism, and are systems on which such imperialism heavily relies. H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* employs racial stereotypes and discourse to portray the Beast People and thus evidences a larger participation within colonial rhetoric as evidence of evolutionary science. John Buchan's *Greenmantle* furthers such a campaign by aligning gender and masculinity explicitly with notions of the nation and citizenship, a theme further demonstrated within Emma Roberts' writing. Arundhati Roy, in *The God of Small Things*, presents a postcolonial exploration of these themes, and consequently demonstrates that such structures and perspectives have continued throughout modern history. By understanding gender, race, and class to be mutually constitutive, as McClintock instructs us to, we can perform intersectional and effective analyses of imperialism that account for multiple marginalisations and how they interact on a foundational basis.

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<sup>33</sup> Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009 [1997]).

<sup>34</sup> Tracy Lemaster, 'Influence and Intertextuality in Arundhati Roy and Harper Lee', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 56:4 (2010), p. 793.

<sup>35</sup> Lemaster, 'Influence', p. 794.

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