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## The Science of Degeneration in Stoker's *Dracula* and Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*

### Cover Page Footnote

Alessandra Albano graduated from Cornell University in Spring 2017 with a B.A. in English Literature, a concentration in literature and politics, and a minor in Psychology. She is currently pursuing her Masters in English and American Literature at New York University. Her current academic interests include the depiction of race in Victorian literature and the relationship between late eighteenth and nineteenth century literature and medicine. She hopes to continue to research the exchange between science, society, and literature to elucidate the influence of scientific theories upon literary innovation during the nineteenth century.

**The Science of Degeneration in Stoker's *Dracula*  
and Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau***

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The publication of Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, at the time of British conquest of foreign lands inhabited by other races, led to an increasing interest in the development of the different variants of human species. Scientific theories at the time were employed to justify social hierarchies abroad and at home as being in accord with the natural order. Scientific theories of degeneration were being employed to explain the inferiority of the mentally ill and criminals, and to support the malleability of the human mind and body. often performed through the controversial process of vivisection. Furthermore, in an attempt to align the mentally ill

and criminals with a degenerated form of the human species, scientists were developing theories which supported criminal atavism.

In 1876, Cesare Lombroso further developed his theory of criminal atavism by studying the corpses and skulls of known criminals to accumulate a set of physical characteristics which could identify a criminal as mentally and physically inferior. These specific traits were believed to be evidence of less developed human forms and indicative of a possibility for human regression: “The criminal is in atavistic being, a relic of a vanished race. This is by no means an uncommon occurrence in nature. Atavism, the reversion to a former state, is the first feeble indication of the reaction opposed by nature to the perturbing causes which seek to alter her delicate mechanism” (*Criminal Man*, 135). This definition of criminal atavism allows for the intrusion of external forces, such as disease or foreign traits, to alter the human race and cause regression. The belief in the malleability of the human form created anxiety about human physical and mental superiority and a fear of profound regression to a more primitive form of human species who lack the ability to reason and maintain social hierarchy.

This language of mental and physical deterioration became imbedded within the fiction of the late 1800s, reflecting an increasing anxiety as the British were forced to question their belief in their own racial and mental superiority. It has been argued that the central reason for the connection between literature and science at the fin de siècle

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was the vagueness of such scientific theories which invited their application to any person or movement who threatened traditional Victorian social values. For example, Max Nordau's Degeneration Theory was employed to deem social deviants within the British Empire, including foreigners, as criminals or lunatics: "Degeneration theory emerges within the discourse of Empire, too, as it acts to give a name and reason to the savagery of Empire, and a justification for the need to control that space and its 'child-like' inhabitant" (Marshall, 7). Specifically, in H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the language of degeneration is employed to reflect the fear of human mental and physical regression that may occur when coming into contact with a foreign other. Both novels encapsulate a societal fear of the deleterious effects of infiltration by a foreign being which may ultimately lead to a less developed human.

In his publication entitled, *Degeneration* (1895), Max Nordau states:

If degeneration is deeper, and ego-mania is stronger, the latter no longer assumes the comparatively innocent form of total absorption in poetic and artistic cooings, but manifests itself as an immorality, which may account to moral madness. The tendency to commit actions injurious to himself or society is aroused now and then even in a sane man when some obnoxious desire demands gratification, but he has the will and the power to suppress it. The degenerate

ego-maniac is too feeble of will to control his impulses, and cannot determine his actions and thoughts by a regard to the welfare of society (Nordau 259).

As made evident through these novels, behind theories which established distinct criteria for racial hierarchization and mental superiority, a major societal concern with the ways in which a regression of the human species could manifest flourished. Ultimately, when a human regresses, often after contact with a foreign other, he descends into a state of madness which renders him primitive. Moreover, this regression may result in the domination of primitive sexual or narcissistic impulses for immediate gratification that ignore the needs of others or society as a whole. This fear of a regression into madness where an individual is solely subject to their primitive instincts pervades both novels.

On an individual level, penetration by a foreign being causes one to become irrational, impulsive, and submissive to corporal desires, in essence, one who presents the symptoms of madness or a wild animal. In *Dracula*, Mina explicitly mentions the theories of Lombroso and Nordau to classify Dracula as a criminal: “The Count is a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him, and *qua criminal* he is of imperfectly formed mind. Thus, in a difficulty he has to seek resource in habit” (Stoker 343). The Count, as a foreign criminal, possesses attributes such as cleverness and resourcefulness, yet like a criminal or a lunatic, he is selfish and incapable of more

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intricate intellect. In the words of Dr. Van Helsing in the novel, Dracula possesses a “child-brain,” one that functions on routine and replication. Furthermore, the descriptions of Transylvania and his Castle serve to depict Dracula as frozen in the past: “Jonathan Harker’s diary powerfully establishes Transylvania and Dracula as a distillation of primitive evolutionary stages- i.e., stages conceived as fundamentally inferior morally and properly belonging to the distant past” (Glendening, 131). Consistent with scientific theories of evolution, Dracula as a criminal and foreign entity, is a primitive human form possessing a partially developed brain and divergent physical qualities.

The initial employment of a language of degeneration to denote a descent into primitiveness which manifests as madness is revealed in the opening letters of Jonathan Harker. Despite an abundance of warning signs from the Transylvanian peasants, Harker remains resolute in his decision to reach the Castle to conduct business with the Count. Gradually, Harker discovers that the Count’s has trapped him within the Castle, leading him to experience vehement emotion:

When I found I was a prisoner a sort of wild feeling came over me. I rushed up and down the stairs, trying every door and peering out of every window I could find; but after a little the conviction of helplessness overpowered all other feelings. When I look back after a few hours I think I must have

been mad for the time, for I behaved much as a rat does in a trap (Stoker 32).

Harker's frantic reaction to his realization of entrapment after contact with Dracula is compared to an animal like state of bewilderment and submission. The occurrence of an instinctive regression towards a state of animality indicates that Harker has lost touch with his rationality. It is only after he has performed such senseless actions that he is able to conclude that he must have been "mad for the time." After rationally assessing his agitation, Harker states, "I am, I know, either being deceived like a baby, by my own fears, or else I am in desperate straits; and if the latter be so, I need, all my brains to get through" (Stoker, 32). This realization that contact with the Count has the potential to cause mental regression into a child-like state causes him to realize the urgent need for him to maintain his own mental stability.

To further evaluate degeneracy in *Dracula*, it is critical to analyze Dr. Seward's mental patient, Renfield, who is initially introduced as "an undeveloped homicidal maniac," (Stoker, 77) demonstrating how the language of regression was applied to institutionalized mental patients. "Undeveloped" indicates the regressive and primitive mindset of his patient. Renfield's primitive desire to ingest smaller animals in order to acquire "strong life," reflects the archaic human instinct to ingest life in order to sustain life. Throughout the novel, a degradation into a primitive state is associated with physical waning and mental instability. In William Atiken's *The Science and*



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*Practice of Medicine*, the definition of a homicidal maniac is one who is completely driven by unrestrained and primitive impulses, yet has the capacity to appear sensible and careful in his affairs:

Such homicidal impulse and attempts (of assaults) of the most persistent and dangerous kind may coexist with a perfect knowledge of right and wrong, and their bearings on human actions- with perfect ability also to manage business affairs, though of a complex pecuniary character with perfect propriety in maintaining most of the relationships, or of discharging most of the social or public duties of life- with deportment often the most polished and gentlemanly, the most considerate and kind (Aitken 182).

At times throughout the novel, both Renfield and the Count appear sane and capable of human communication and even friendship. For example, when Dr. Seward introduces Van Helsing and the other men to his patient, Renfield appears completely rational: “I was so astonished, that the oddness of introducing a madman in an asylum did not strike me at the moment; and besides, there was a certain dignity in the man’s manner, so much of the habit of equality, that I at once made the introduction” (Stoker 246).

Perhaps, as Dr. Seward indicates, it is Renfield’s parcel of reasoning which does in fact distinguish him from an animal, but certainly does not imply a human with a fully developed brain: “How well the

man reasoned; lunatics always do within their own scope” (Stoker 79). This notion of ingesting the life of another to gain a new and invigorated life is similar to the ceremony of communion in the Catholic Church. The climactic moment of the Catholic mass involves ingesting the body, represented by a wafer, and blood, represented by wine, of Jesus Christ to attain new life. Throughout the novel, idolatry and other elements of the Catholic Church are profoundly associated with primitiveness. An example can be seen in the superstitions of the peasants whom Harker encounters on his way to Dracula’s castle:

One by one several of the passengers offered me gifts, which would take no denial; these were certainly of an odd and varied kind, but each was given in simple good faith, with a kindly word, and a blessing, and that strange mixture of fear-meaning movements which I had seen outside the hotel at Bistritz- the sign of the cross and the guard against the evil eye (Stoker 14).

Therefore, Renfield and Dracula’s exigency to consume life is aligned with the archaic methods and superstitions of the Catholicism, the religion most likely embraced by the peasants.

This categorization of Renfield as a “homicidal maniac” can be applied to Dracula who is also believed to be a primitivized human, specifically, a living being who has lost their humanity, dubbed the “Undead.” This conception of the “Undead” is illustrated in Harker’s exclamation upon seeing the Count scale the wall, “What manner of man is this,

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or what manner of creature is it in the semblance of man?" (Stoker, 40). According to the novel, a vampire is an individual who exists not only in a state in between life and death, but also in between an ideal human and a brute primitive form. Although the Count possesses human characteristics, his ability to scale the walls and even to control animals demonstrates his primitive nature. The appearance of a criminal who possesses the ability to scale walls was documented by Lombroso, who acquainted himself with a member of an infamous Italian gang called Vilella, to bolster his science of criminal anthropology. According to Lombroso, "the man possessed such extraordinary agility, that he had been known to scale steep mountain heights bearing a sheep on his shoulders," (Cesare Lombroso, *Introduction*) indicating the characteristic trait of nimbleness associated with criminals and animals in order to compare them to a more primitive human form dependent on impetuous physical action rather than reason to escape capture.

Although Dracula, like Renfield, is vicious and gains vitality from the blood of others, he possesses the ability to appear sociable and rational. Since Dracula does not have any servants in his employment, Harker is initially pleased with the food and level of comfort at the Castle, and Dracula's ability to be generous and hospitable. Dracula is cautious and cunning, asking Harker questions about London even though it is apparent that he has already meticulously studied the city and British customs and has arranged his financial

affairs there. Although Dracula does ask Harker questions regarding the British legal system, his knowledge of Britain exceeds Harker's knowledge of Transylvania, indicating his rationality.

The fear of mental and physical degradation and a gradual shutting down of the senses resembles the process of sleep. Sleep and states of semi-consciousness symbolize the mental deterioration of a primitivized human who is incapable of controlling their actions. These semi-conscious states allow Dracula to penetrate the mind as well as attack the bodies of his victims. Since sleep is a gradual regression into a state of unconsciousness where one lacks agency, it seems to serve as an ideal place for an attack of a foreign other. Although sleep is not the same as degeneracy since it is temporary, and one can awake restored and enlivened, in the novel, the concept of sleep is complex. Sleep permits Dracula to infiltrate the unconscious minds of his victims, afflict their bodies, and cause them to awaken enervated and in a sense, degenerated. The process of dying and then transforming into a vampire is an overall gradual degeneration of human physical vitality and mental rationality into a more primitive form in which one must rely on fundamental instincts for survival. Therefore, the heightened awareness surrounding sleep and states of semi-consciousness in the novel reflects a greater societal concern for the gradual degeneration of the human body as well as mental regression into a state of primitiveness. Sleep as a state of vulnerability is initially presented in Harker's first encounter with the three vampiric

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women. He is unable to distinguish between sleep and wakefulness:

The fair girl went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth (Stoker 43).

In this instance, the connection between primitiveness and hypersexuality, especially associated with women, is evident since she is lustily encroaching upon Harker. This portrayal of a woman is indicative of the societal fear of the differences in regression between the opposite sexes. Evidently, female regression culminates in a sexual insatiability. This proposes the idea of a reverse Victorian society, in which the current societal restraints on women are severed, resulting in an unbounded female sexuality and a powerless and irrational man who is subject to his corporal desires. This fear of female liberation as a threat to Victorian society reflects the New Woman movement, which is alluded to in the novel in Mina Murray's journal: "Some of the 'New Woman' writers will someday start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in future to accept, she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it too!" (Stoker 98). This scene with

Harker and the three women acts as an extreme example of the New Woman movement. Harker's reaction of pleasure to this hypersexual woman indicates his desire to surrender to his primitive sexual instincts, yet because he has not been initiated into a process of vampirization, he retains some human rationality, which also causes him to feel disgust at the encounter.

Through Lucy's transformation into a vampire, there is a wavering between states of vitality and weakening which reflects the dominant conception in science of the instability of the human species and the possibility to manipulate the human mind and body to render it more primitive or advanced. The germ for Lucy's initiation into the process of vampiric transformation lies in her tendency to somnambulate, and it is during one of these episodes in which the Count initially gains access to her. In her diary, Mina documents the instance where she followed Lucy out into the night. She claims,

When I bent over her I could see that she was still asleep. Her lips were parted, and she was breathing- not softly as usual with her, but in long heavy gasps, as though striving to get her lungs full at every breath. At first she did not respond; but gradually she became more and more uneasy in her sleep, moaning and sighing occasionally (Stoker 99-100).

The paradox of pain and pleasure is substantiated in the contradiction between Lucy's moaning and sighing. Moaning seems to indicate pain, but could

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also signify a longing, perhaps a sexual longing for the Count, alongside sighing, which can be indicative of pleasure and fulfillment.

After being infiltrated by the Count, Lucy's strength increases at nighttime, where she appears vitalized and possesses a primitive fierceness:

At times, she slept and both Van Helsing and I noticed the difference in her, between sleeping and waking. Whilst asleep she looked stronger, although more haggard, and her breathing was softer; her open mouth showed the pale gums drawn back from the teeth, which looked positively longer and sharper than usual; when she woke the softness of her eyes evidently changed the expression, for she looked her own self, although a dying one (Stoker 158).

The animal like quality of sharp teeth which is enhanced while asleep supports the notion that a state in which one lacks agency and self-awareness will inevitably regress to a reliance upon primitive instincts. Like the Count, her rigor will no longer be manifested in her waking body during the daytime, rather her primitive vitality will dominate at night. As in Harker's encounter with the three vampiric women in the Castle, as Lucy progresses in her transformation into a vampire, she also attains a sexualized beauty. The struggle which the men experience in restraining their sexual desire also connotes a primitivizing of the men after encountering a vampiric Lucy. Throughout the novel, there are various instances where the men assert dominance by contending that they possess

the power to defeat the Count and prevent him from preying upon the women, yet they continuously fail, often times due to an inability to resist sleep. This failure to satisfy their social roles is symptomatic of social degeneration through sustained contact with a primitivized other. There is a fear that continued contact with foreigners will lead to an uprooting and eventual dissolution of rigid social roles, resulting in an unrestrained primitiveness.

A dissolution of social constraints during sleep not only serves as a gateway into primitiveness and madness, but also permits access for a foreign other. While the Count is able to invade Lucy during her somnambulant states, Doctor Van Helsing, a foreigner from Amsterdam can track the Count through hypnotizing Mina. Hypnotism, as a state between waking and sleeping, allows Van Helsing to gain access to Mina's subconscious which is inextricably bound to the Count. Stoker's decision to employ hypnotism as a form of communication between Van Helsing and the Count reflects the extensive exchange occurring between literature and science at the time the novel was written:

Scientific orthodoxy and literary authority were constantly in flux throughout the nineteenth century/ To investigate literary mesmerism is to unveil the reactions and responses, the interventions and influences of one of the key forms of knowledge that the Victorians used to define their sense of self and society (Willis and Wynne 7).



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The concern with hypnotism throughout various novels published in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century including *Dracula* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* illustrates the influence of science upon literature, especially a domain of science such as hypnotism which was believed to be a door to the unconscious. The science of hypnotism is employed as a literary technique to allow the reader access to the Count's intentions and reinforces the conception of the mind as well as the body as subject to regression and manipulation by an external force.

The fact that Mina devises the plan for her hypnosis on a night filled with restless sleep and at a time when the Count is most active, solidifies their connection and reduces Mina to a more primitive state. It is also valuable to consider the gender dynamics at play in the initial scene of hypnotism since this developing method to treat madness was applied to women more often than to men. It would seem inconsistent with societal norms if the Count decided to mentally communicate with one of the male figures: "Misogyny permeates much of the mesmeric literature, particularly as female mesmeric knowledge was often perceived as emasculating. In addition, the conception of the female as a passive agent tended to reinforce gender hierarchies" (Willis and Wynne 9).

With earnestness, Mina, as the only woman of the group, entreats Van Helsing to hypnotize her since it appears to be a time sensitive procedure:

Gradually her eyes closed, and she sat, stock still; only by the gentle heaving of her bosom could one know that she was alive.

The Professor made a few more passes and then stopped, and I could see that his forehead was covered with great beads of perspiration. Mina opened her eyes; but she did not seem the same woman. There was a far away look in her eyes, and her voice had a sad dreaminess which was new to me (Stoker 313).

Like with Lucy, the Count connects with Mina in this semiconscious state, but, in this instance, it is Dr. Van Helsing who is acting as a foreign other to penetrate the subconscious. In order to understand Mina's mental and physical descent into a primitive state of madness, it is valuable to analyze what that behavior implies:

We have of late come to understand that sunrise and sunset are to her times of peculiar freedom; when her old self can be manifest without any controlling force subduing or restraining her, or inciting her to action. / At first there is a sort of negative condition, as if some tie were loosened, and then the absolute freedom quickly follows; when however the freedom ceases the change-back or relapse comes quickly, preceded only by a spell of warning silence (Stoker 330).

These episodes indicate a lack of restraint and poignant impulsivity, similar to what deems Renfield as a "homicidal maniac." Since Mina has not fully entered into the process of vampiric transformation, she still retains aspects of her fully human self and rationality, but quickly relapses into

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a mad state. This sudden change into a degenerated mental state reflects the societal fear of the unpredictability of the regression of humanity.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* posits that natural forces, such as contact with a foreign other and lack of agency in states of semi consciousness, can instigate the primitivizing of the human species. However, in H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, it is the will of the mad scientist to manipulate the body and mind to select desired traits. The publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) propelled British society to confront the notion of the natural evolution of the human species, which led them to question the origin of reason and human morality: "The key is man's power of accumulative selection: nature gives successive variations; man adds them up in certain directions useful to him. In this sense he may be said to have made for himself useful breeds" (Darwin, 34). Man's manipulation of nature, specifically animals of a lesser form certainly influenced Wells' development of his character of Dr. Moreau who is a firm proponent of vivisection. This controversial scientific process conceived of the human body as mechanical, made up of varied parts which could be dismantled. According to Claude Bernard,

to uncover the inner or hidden parts of the organisms and see them work; to this sort of operation we give the name of vivisection, and without this mode of investigation, neither physiology nor scientific medicine is possible; to learn how man and animals live,

we cannot avoid seeing great numbers of them die, because the mechanisms of life can be unveiled and proved only by knowledge of the mechanisms of death (Bernard 99).

In order for science to progress and better human kind, Bernard and other proponents of vivisection believed that by manipulating and even annihilating lesser forms of life, it was possible to discover the mechanisms of human life which was considered superior. Vivisection was considered a unique process which could allow scientists access to vital knowledge of the human body and further physiology and the treatment of disease. Essentially, this reasoning mirrors that of Renfield, Dr. Seward's mental patient in Stoker's *Dracula*: to prolong human life, it is necessary to sacrifice lesser forms of life.

Moreau's success in vivisection is in part due to his belief that one's ability to feel pain and allow that pain to dominate and restrain action makes one an animal:

In my view- in my view. For it is just the question of pain that parts us. So long as visible or audible pain turns you sick; so long as your own pain drives you; so long as pain underlies your propositions about sin- so long, I tell you, you are an animal, thinking a little less obscurely what an animal feels. (Wells 126)

Surrender to the sensation of pain is animalistic and an indicator of a primitive human. Prendick's sympathy with the puma and other vivisected

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animals depicts him as more primitive and subject to the control of his emotions.

Moreau's belief in "the plasticity of living forms," does not solely include the physical, but also mental manipulation:

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 superseding old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas. (Wells 125)

By stating that a pig's ability to learn is similar to that of the human due to similar mental structure allows him to consider animal forms and human forms as equivalent. Reducing the human ability to learn to that of a pig is indicative of similar mental structures which allow for reason and place the human form as exchangeable to that of the animal. Both forms are subject to manipulation through the power of suggestion.

*The Island of Dr. Moreau* demonstrates the anxiety surrounding the malleability and the likeness of the human species to lesser animal forms by nourishing the idea that through vivisection, it is indeed possible to physically manipulate animal forms to transform them into more advanced humans. The difficulty and confusion in discerning between animal and human forms experienced by the protagonist, Prendick, introduces the notion that humans and lesser animal forms are more alike than an English readership would want to believe. The emphasis on racialized facial features reflects the

dominant notion at the time that the European race was superior to the African race. Thus, since Africans would be considered as more primitive and less distant from animals on an evolutionary scale, the Beast People possess more African like physical features:

In some indefinable way the black face thus flashed upon me shocked me profoundly. It was a singularly deformed one. The facial part projected, forming something dimly suggestive of a muzzle, and the huge half-open mouth showed as big white teeth as I had ever seen in a human mouth. His eyes were blood-shot at the edges, with scarcely a rim of white round the hazel pupils. (Wells 78)

The descriptors employed to paint a picture of one of the Beast people are reminiscent of Stoker's description of Count Dracula and other "undead" individuals. Throughout *Dracula*, there are constant references to "red gleaming eyes," (Stoker, 99) "white sharp teeth," and as Dracula being surrounded by "piteous howling of dogs" (Stoker, 50). Moreover, Dracula is described by Harker as possessing animal like qualities, including excessive body hair, pointed ears, and

the mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel looking, with peculiarly sharp teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor. (Stoker 22)

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The intense focus on the deformed mouths in both descriptions is reflective of the science of the time which often specifically highlighted this portion of the face as different to establish white European superiority. For example, in Lombroso's "Criminal Man," he describes criminals as possessing:

The Mouth. This part shows perhaps a greater number of anomalies than any other facial organ. This muscle, (canine muscle) which is strongly developed in the dog, serves when contracted to draw back the lip leaving the canines exposed. The lips of violators of women and murderers are fleshy, swollen and protruding as in negroes. (*Criminal Man* 242)

Regarding the teeth, Lombroso remarks, "In 4% of (of criminals) the canines are very strongly developed, long, sharp, and curving inwardly as in carnivores" (*Criminal Man* 242). Pointed ears are another common physical trait between the Count and the Beast people. The principle difference between these two accounts seems to be complexion. The Beast People possess dark skin while Dracula and his victims possess "extraordinary pallor." This difference in complexion reflects leading scientific theories at the time which articulate climatological differences as the source for varying racial complexion. This understanding of racial difference as determined by climate initially began in the 1700s but continued to develop as imperial conquests expanded.

Although the Beast People may resemble humans in their physicality, their cognitive abilities

are regressed. They are under the control of Dr. Moreau and do not fully possess the mental capacity for independent thought and rationality. In the ritual scene, the Beast People gather together and recite the Law:

Not to go on all-fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men?

Not to suck up Drinks; that is the Law. Are we not men?

Not to eat Flesh or Fish; that is the Law. Are we not Men?

Not to claw the bark of Trees; that is the Law. Are we not Men?

Not to chase other Men; that is the law. Are we not men? (Wells 114)

This recitation is similar to that of a creed or a moral code usually dictated by religious or social institutions. However, the fact that each statement of the creed terminates in a question points to a certain ambiguity, essentially, asking, what is it exactly that distinguished Man from Animal? Man indeed still does possess the ability to go on all fours and perform the actions the Beast people are told not to do. Therefore, this creed is suggesting that there is in fact not a profound difference between primitive and rational man, but rather, an instilled set of social structures which make man believe he is more advanced. Due to their mental inferiority, the way in which they learn how to behave is through cognitive recitation and repetition, similar to how Van Helsing described Dracula, and not through their own actions, further rendering them as degenerated forms who are



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unable to produce their own ideas. Additionally, the creed serves as a structure created by Dr. Moreau, a “superior” white European male, to keep the Beast People under control, supporting the notion that mentally ill and colonized people need to be under strict authority to ensure that they do not continue to regress into a state of primitive madness.

After their leader, Dr. Moreau dies, there is indeed a gradual regression to a more primitive state among the Beast people:

Some of the others seemed altogether slipping their hold upon speech, though they still understood what I said to them at the time. (Can you imagine language once clear cut and exact, softening and guttering, losing shape and import, becoming mere lumps of sound again?) And they walked erect with increasing difficulty. They held things more clumsily; drinking by suction, feeding by gnawing, grew commoner every day. They were reverting and reverting very rapidly. (Wells 167)

Mental regression is exemplified through the Beast People’s loss of the ability to manipulate sounds to produce language for communication and expression. Often, scientific theories at the time suggested that human aptitude to produce language distinguished them from beasts and deemed them as superior. Perhaps what is most appalling about this passage is the rapidity in which the Beast People, without a cognitively advanced leader to command them, regress into animality. This suggests that the

human species could regress suddenly and further obfuscates the divide between animal and man.

This rapid mental and social degeneration is especially evident in the female creatures. This depiction of women as more easily susceptible to primitivizing and madness reflects the scientific reasoning of the time which insinuates that female minds and bodies are weaker and more prone to deterioration in the absence of external structure. This logic implies that the female sex is more primitive and has a greater inclination to more rapidly regress:

Some of them- the pioneers in this, I noticed with some surprise, were all females- began to disregard the injunction of decency, deliberately for the most part. Others even attempted public outrages upon the institution of monogamy. The tradition of the Law was clearly losing its force. I cannot pursue this disagreeable subject. (Wells 167)

The females are freed from the creed and become aggressively sexual similar to the vampiric women in Stoker's *Dracula*. The disgust Prendick experiences, like the horror the men experience in *Dracula*, results from the connection between insatiable sexual desire and primitiveness. According to Lombroso, it is this exact quality of sexual urgency for women which characterizes a prostitute as savage:

The very precocity of prostitutes- the precocity which increases their apparent beauty- is primarily attributable to atavism. Due also to it is the virility underlying the

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female type; for what we look for most in the female is femininity, and when we find the opposite in her we conclude as a rule that there must be some anomaly. And in order to understand the significance and the atavistic origin of this anomaly; we have only to remember that virility was one of the special features of the savage woman. (*The Female Offender* 112)

This account of female regression as intrinsically linked to heightened sexual desire and enhanced physical beauty is manifested in both Mina and Lucy after contact with the Count. Sexual ferociousness is considered a male trait, connected with virility, but when it is prominent in a female, she is considered to be barbaric. This association between women with great sexual interest and primitiveness is in part why Prendick is filled with disgust at the sight of the severing of monogamous relationships instigated by the female Beast People. As a male in a society which insists on female sexual restraint, Prendick is intrinsically attracted to feminine sexual temerity, and it is their deviant behavior which he finds unbearable, ultimately preventing him from pursuing “this disagreeable subject.”

Perhaps the most striking example of mental regression is evident in Prendick himself, who, after failing to manipulate the Beast People also begins to descend into a state of animality:

I too must have undergone strange changes.  
My clothes hung about me as yellow rags,  
through whose rents showed the tanned skin.

My hair grew long and became matted together. I am told that even my eyes have a strange brightness. A swift alertness of movement. (Wells 168)

Prendick's mental regression is made evident in his inability to devise an effective plan to escape. He often spends his days watching the absent sea which mirrors his thoughtless mind. Like Dr. Seward's patient, Renfield in Stoker's *Dracula*, outbursts of wild frustration mark his descent into a mental primitiveness: "Sometimes I would give way to wild outbursts of rage, and hack and splinter some unlucky tree in my intolerable vexation. But I could think of nothing" (Wells 170).

When Prendick returns to civilization, he is shrouded in gloom and unable to see the world as animated and filled with purposeful people:

Particularly nauseous were the blank, expressionless faces of people in trains and omnibuses; they seemed no more my fellow creatures than dead bodies would be, so that I did not dare to travel unless I was assured of being alone. And even it seemed that I too was not a reasonable creature, but only an animal tormented with some strange disorder in its brain which sent it to wander alone, like a sheep stricken with gid. (Wells 173)

Pendick's experience with the frailty and malleability of human life causes him to see his fellow humans as thoughtless animals, inhabiting a meaningless cycle of life. His desire to retreat from urbanization likens Prendick to a mental patient,

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even more specifically, to Renfield in *Dracula*. While Prendick searches for life and meaning through books, Renfield, as a more primitivized and institutionalized mental patient, fuels his quest for life by consuming small animals. For Prendick, cognitive immersion through a pursuit of knowledge seems to save him from a retreat into a primitive animality, while Renfield believes he can triumph over human meaninglessness by ingesting other forms of life.

Scientific theories of the origin of human life propelled 19th century English society to confront their evolutionary history. As imperialism flourished and contact with foreigners became inevitable, scientific theories were applied to justify racial classification as well as account for deviant social behavior at home. Scientific theories such as Lombroso's Criminal Atavism and Nordau's Degeneration Theory explained the inferiority of criminals, foreigners, and the mentally ill. The pervasiveness of such scientific theories throughout 19th century society indubitably infiltrated the literary imagination as evidenced in novels such as Stoker's *Dracula* and Well's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Although 19th century scientific theory is suffused with inaccuracies, it is compelling to think about the potential stagnancy of literature if writers did not incorporate the scientific understanding of the mystery of human life. Ultimately, this exchange invites readers to consider the interplay between society, science, and literature today.

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