

## THE HAND AND THE MIND, THE MAN AND THE MONSTER

Kimberly Cox  
(Chadron State College)

### *Abstract*

This article reads the monstrous hand in Victorian fiction as a parallel for the dangerously different mind and brain. The human hand and brain were perceived by the Victorian scientific community as mutually constitutive and as having evolved in tandem, such that the hand becomes the symbol of human superiority. The hand's dexterity and sensitive nerves of touch capable of effecting the mind's ambition distinguishes it from the paws, claws, and "hands" of animals. Yet, as books on hand-phrenology reveal, not all human hands are the same. Hand-phrenologists equated manual sensitivity with intellect and brain size. The human hand that signifies the superior human intellect is traditionally English, male, educated, upper-middle class, and capable of engaging in "civilised" forms of sympathetic touch with his fellow beings. Humans distinguished themselves from the animals they evolved from with their thinking hands that both act as agents of the mind and brain and communicate knowledge of the world to them. Hands that act on the world through touch but lack the manual sensitivity necessary to facilitate such intercommunication prove monstrous in their inability to form stable social connections necessary to human progress. This article argues that monstrous hands in H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) are those that initially appear human, but reveal through their dulled tactile sense and manual deformity a depraved mind with unnatural brain power. In the figure of Moreau, the monster's hand and the human hand appear interchangeable until his hand is nearly severed, reflecting his brain that sought to evolve beyond human limitation but was still bound by human failing. Monstrosity and humanity overlap in monstrous hands that parallel monstrous minds, problematising the clear boundaries that structured Victorian society and classified the people that comprised it.

No discussion of the Victorian brain would be complete without a discussion of the human hand. Victorians perceived the hand and mind as entirely interdependent and mutually constitutive. Scientists, evolutionary theorists, philosophers, and hand phrenologists alike claimed that human brains evolved with the dextrous use of hands.<sup>191</sup> In

---

<sup>191</sup> See Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature; or, the Origin of Society* (Baltimore: John W. Butler and Bonsal and Niles, 1804); Charles Bell, *The Hand: Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments as Evincing Design* (London: William Pickering, 1833); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1871); Richard Beamish, *The Psychonomy of the Hand; or, The Hand an Index of Mental Development, According to Mm D'Arpentigny and Desbarolles*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: [n.pub.], 1865); T. H. Huxley, 'On the Relations of Man to the Lower

particular, the precision grip and refined sense of touch unique to human hands accounted for humans' superior intellect. While the brain may have acted as the central organ of the mind, from the early nineteenth century on the hand was perceived as an agent of both.<sup>192</sup> As Richard Beamish explains in *The Psychonomy of the Hand* (1865), a popular work on the emerging science of hand-phrenology,<sup>193</sup>

It is scarcely necessary to remind my readers that the intercommunication between the outer world and the brain is by means of a distinct system of nerves, which, more sensitive than the most delicate telegraphic wires, convey all intelligence to the great nervous centre, and transmit from thence the determination of the will to the several points of demonstrative action.<sup>194</sup>

Beamish, drawing on the work of Charles Bell and Mm D'Arpentigny and Desbarolles before him, identifies the nerves of touch located primarily in the hands as the most common agents of such 'intercommunication.' Hands connected the brain and mind to the 'outer world' in a literal sense. A refined sense of touch was understood as essential for the brain and hands to act on and perceive the world.

Situating touch in its Victorian context, Pamela Gilbert explains that the 'touching hand enacts the toucher's will, but the sensing hand troubles distinctions between active and passive, between the touching and the touched.'<sup>195</sup> Victorians understood the human hand as an

---

Animals,' in *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1872), pp. 71-138.

<sup>192</sup> See Stiles for a more complete discussion of the relationship between the brain and mind during the nineteenth century. As she explains, it was the work of Franz Joseph Gall during the late eighteenth century that 'convinced the scientific community that the brain was the organ of the mind, a previously controversial notion' (p. 11).

<sup>193</sup> A term that plays on phrenology, which was the study of character in the shape of the skull. Hand-phrenology was a similar practice that read character in the shape of human hands.

<sup>194</sup> Beamish, p. 1.

<sup>195</sup> Gilbert, par. 1. Victorian understandings of touch prefigured that of contemporary phenomenologists, which Gilbert references here. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains, '[t]he handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching.' Steven Connor elaborates on this idea of the double sensation of touch: 'If you touch your skin [...] then you feel yourself and you feel yourself feeling. You are simultaneously an object in the world and a subject giving rise to itself as it advances to meet the world in that object.' Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the*

appendage capable of touching and sensing simultaneously. In other words, the active hand that touches also proves vulnerable to sensation as it passively experiences that which it touches. According to this view, the brain's capacity to communicate with the world depends upon the sensitivity of the nerves of touch in the hands. A 'touching hand' can act on the world, but a 'sensing hand' requires the brain to register and translate the actions of the world on it. The human hand senses, and the more sensitive the hands, the more sensitive the brain.

Scholarship on the relationship between hands, brain, and mind often focuses particularly on manual monstrosity in the figure of the severed or disembodied hand in late-Victorian Gothic romances that acts with a will of its own, often proving not only a marker of character but also a commodity or fetish object that signifies wider cultural anxieties about social transgression, gender relations, and the imperial project.<sup>196</sup> Overlooked in these studies, however, are hands that remain connected to the body and brain but prove just as threatening. In the context of belief

---

*Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 142; Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 41. See also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>196</sup> Katherine Rowe identifies the disembodied or ghostly hand 'that reaches unexpectedly from the shadows' as that which troubles seemingly stable boundaries between person and object as it reaches across to touch (p. 111). Kelly Hurley offers a largely Freudian reading of Queen Tera's seven-fingered mummified severed hand in Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) that, she argues, 'can be said to symbolise not just the potential immortality of the (white) subject but also the potential immortality of the (white) empire' (p. 182). Aviva Briefel points out that stories about severed hands throughout the century express the common anxiety that a hand might reveal the secrets of its owner's identity whether or not such revelation was desired. However, she also suggests that the absence of racial signifiers questioned the trust put in the hands' unfailing honesty about human character. Finally, Abbie Garrington's study of the severed hand as a Modernist trope claims that the severed hand severs the 'body not only [from] its executive capacities, but also [from] its primary symbol of intentional selfhood and haptic experience' (p. 171). Katherine Rowe, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Hurley, Kelly, 'The Victorian Mummy-Fetish: H. Rider Haggard, Frank Aubrey, and the White Mummy,' in *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain*, ed. Marlene Tromp (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), pp. 180-199; Briefel, Aviva, *The Racial Hands in the Victorian Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Garrington, Abbie, 'Horrible Haptics,' in *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2013), pp. 170-82.

in the evolutionary superiority of humans, and especially of the best of English humans, brain evolution distinguished human from animal and evolved from regressive humans. The hand's sensitivity reflected an individual's place in the hierarchy of evolutionary advancement and in literary representations particularly, a hand's tactile sensitivity acts as a measure of one's neurological and intellectual sensitivity, which becomes a marker of humanity or one's lack thereof. I assert that intact monstrous hands in Victorian literature are those that lack tactile sensitivity and thus the ability to form what were perceived as civilised connections with the world. Their domineering touches grasp without sensing in a sufficiently 'evolved' way. As a consequence, the brains and intellects these hands serve engage with the world in a destructive and callous manner improper to an evolved English human.

This paper argues that we consider hands within literature as another site of commentary on the Victorian brain and mind to which they are attached. Late-Victorian Gothic romances such as H. G. Wells *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) provide key sites to locate this parallel figuration of hand and brain due to the emphasis they place on manual monstrosity. Each text establishes a parallel between deformed hands and mental monstrosity. The hands of Dracula, Queen Ayesha, and Doctor Moreau initially appear human, but become monstrous as their physical deformities, devolution, or near severing figures their hands' insensitivity, bringing to the surface larger cultural anxieties about brains and minds that possess unnatural power of a deviant nature and thus threaten to destabilise social boundaries thought fixed. Monstrous hands enact and reflect brains without empathy in which humanity and monstrosity overlap.

### **The Hand and the Mind in Victorian Popular Science**

In order to understand how a hand can *become* monstrous, we must first attend to why the hand is so directly linked to the idea of humanity. As previously noted, early nineteenth-century discourses on human exceptionalism suggested that the development of the human brain correlated with the evolution of the hand's dexterity and tactile sensitivity. In *The Temple of Nature* (1802), Erasmus Darwin distinguishes the human hand from the paws and claws of animals, establishing a direct correlation between the hand's shape, dexterity, and refined sensibility, and the ingenuity of the human mind:

Nerved with fine touch above the bestial throngs,  
 The hand, first gift of Heaven! to man belongs;  
 Untipt with claws the circling fingers close,  
 With rival points the bending thumbs oppose,  
 Trace the lines of form with sense refined,  
 And clear ideas charm the thinking mind.<sup>197</sup>

‘The hand’ and ‘the thinking mind’ are mutually constitutive in E. Darwin’s figuration because the hand is ‘Nerved with fine touch,’ an observation that suggests a correlation between physiological sensation and neurological development. His emphasis on tactile sensation positions the hand in the Victorian imaginary as an educator of the brain and an agent of the mind, not merely a symbol of or stand-in for either.<sup>198</sup>

By mid-century, the practice of craniometrics, which claimed that the size of the skull and thus brain acted as an index of intelligence, had grown in popularity and had been linked with the degree of tactile sensitivity measurable in hands.<sup>199</sup> Beamish, for example, asserts a direct correlation between manual sensitivity and intelligence when he argues that the ‘marked difference in the development of the corpuscles of touch between man and the lower animals, entirely coincides with the difference which has been found to characterise the *brains* also of man and apes.’<sup>200</sup> Late Victorians believed then that as touch developed in higher order animals such as humans, so did intelligence.

In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin, E. Darwin’s grandson, corroborates such a view of the hand as an active agent of the mind: ‘Man could not have obtained his present dominant position in the world

<sup>197</sup> E. Darwin, Canto III, lines 121-26.

<sup>198</sup> As Peter Capuano explains in his recent book, ‘The Victorians were highly cognizant of the physicality of their hands precisely because unprecedented developments in mechanised industry and new advancements in evolutionary theory made them the first people to experience a radical disruption of this supposedly distinguishing mark of their humanity’ (p.2). I begin with this discussion of hands as perceived by evolutionary theorists in order to argue for attention to the materiality of hands and tactile experience as connected to the perceptions of brain development. Capuano, Peter, *Changing Hands: Industry, Evolution, and Reconfiguration of the Victorian Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

<sup>199</sup> Stiles notes that ‘Cranial measurements were thought to be perhaps the most reliable and “objective” indicator of intelligence prior to the advent of IQ tests’ around 1905 (p. 122). Stiles, Anne, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>200</sup> Beamish, p. 3; italics original.

without the use of his hands, which are so admirably adapted to act in obedience of his will.’<sup>201</sup> Hence, hands not only communicate information about the outside world to the brain, but reflect the superior intellect of human subjects by enacting one’s will on the world. The perceived evolutionary link between the human hand and brain remained dominant throughout the century. Charles Bell’s 1833 treatise lauds ‘The human hand [that] is so beautifully formed, it has so fine a sensibility, that sensibility governs its motions so correctly, every effort of the will is answered so instantly, as if the hand itself were the seat of that will.’<sup>202</sup> Nearly fifty years later in 1880, Thomas Huxley, Wells’ teacher and Darwin’s Bulldog, similarly praises the human hand as a vehicle of the mind, hailing it as that appendage on which our ‘carrying into effect the conceptions of the mind so largely depends.’<sup>203</sup> In short, prominent figures in the field of science during the nineteenth century helped establish a direct link between the human brain, the human hand, and (the) human being.

Wells explicitly identifies ‘The human hand, [. . .] [as] the teacher and interpreter of the brain,’ in ‘The Man of the Year Million,’ a semi-satirical 1893 article for the *Pall Mall Budget* popularising the link between brain and hand.<sup>204</sup> In fact, he goes so far as to hypothesise that, by the ‘year million,’ human evolution will see the body dwindle in size while the brain and hands continue to grow:<sup>205</sup>

The coming man, then, will have a larger brain, and a slighter body than the present. But the Professor makes one exception to this. “The human hand, since it is the teacher and interpreter of the brain, will become constantly more powerful and subtle as the rest of the musculature dwindles.”

Then in the physiology of these children of men, with their expanding brains, their great sensitive hands and diminishing bodies, great changes were necessarily worked.  
(p. 3)

---

<sup>201</sup> C. Darwin, pp. 135-36. Further references given after quotations in the text.

<sup>202</sup> Bell, p. 23. For a full discussion of Bell, see Capuano, Peter J., ‘On Sir Charles Bell’s *The Hand*, 1833’ (2012). *Faculty Publications -- Department of English*. Paper 92. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs/92>

<sup>203</sup> Huxley, p. 103.

<sup>204</sup> H. G. Wells, ‘The Man of the Year Million,’ *Pall Mall Budget* (1893), p. 3 (p. 3). Further references given after quotations in the text.

<sup>205</sup> *Punch* parodies this view in, ‘1,000,000 A.D.’ (25 Nov. 1893), emphasising the popularity of this discussion about the hand’s relationship to the mind.

In Wells' figuration, told in the voice of an imagined professor, the continued development and sensitivity of the hands coincides with the evolution of the human brain. As Anne Stiles explains in *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (2012), the theory Wells espouses was 'based on the most rigorous evolutionary science of [his] day' as well as the Lamarckian hypothesis that 'organs that are frequently used tend to develop more quickly and hence grow larger, while little-used organs wither away and ultimately disappear.'<sup>206</sup> Notably, not only do the hands remain, but they remain 'sensitive,' suggesting that in the 1890s popular perception linked sensitive hands with brain development.

C. Darwin's earlier writings explain this link. He suggests that as long as hands were used primitively for locomotion, hurling stones, and climbing trees by apes and early man, 'Such rough treatment would also have blunted the sense of touch, on which their delicate use largely depends' (p. 136). The hand that belongs to the human species, that is integral to its intellectual and physical evolution of the brain, acts as an agent of the mind, developing it by engaging with the 'outer world' in a particularly sensitive, intellectual mode. Hands' use determines their function and influences brain development.<sup>207</sup>

By the *fin-de-siècle*, hands were considered not only agents of the mind but also indexes of character, markers of intellect, and measure of class standing. Hands hardened by labour reflected more elementary minds while delicate hands with long, slender fingers signified a more sophisticated intellect. Anne McClintock explains in her reading of Arthur Munby's fascination with the hands of working women that 'Hands expressed one's class by expressing one's relation to labor.'<sup>208</sup> Sensitive hands belonged to the educated, genteel classes. Peter Capuano argues in his foundational study, *Changing Hands* (2015), that theories of racial

---

<sup>206</sup> Stiles, p. 119 and 20. For a full discussion of *fin-de-siècle* views on Lamarck's theories introduced in *Zoological Philosophy* in 1809, see Stiles, particularly her introduction (pp. 1-24) and chapter four (pp. 119-155). Stiles argues that Wells was particularly fascinated by 'the Lamarckian idea of unchecked brain evolution,' p. 20.

<sup>207</sup> This view is taken to the extreme in Wells' *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) in the protagonists Cavor's description of the Selenites' process of creating 'Machine hands' responsible for labour such as 'clawing, lifting, [and] guiding,' jobs that require little intellectual curiosity and little dexterity (p. 281). Wells, H. G., *The First Men in the Moon* (Brooklyn, NY: Braunworth and Co., Bookbinders and Printers, 1901).

<sup>208</sup> McClintock, Anne, "'Massa" and Maids: Power and Desire in the Imperial Metropolis,' in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 73-131 (p. 99)

degeneration, often associated with contemporary issues about class and race, were linked with the discovery of the gorilla in the 1840s, which was viewed as the missing link between animals and humans because of not only skeletal similarity but also because their paws had a similar shape and the same number of bones as human hands. As a result of this manual similarity, Capuano argues that 'large palms and short fingers were interpreted' by hand-phrenologists such as Beamish 'not only as indicators of a propensity to handle shovels, pick-axes, and barrows, but as signs of animality itself.'<sup>209</sup> Animals and the labouring classes had smaller minds because they possessed elementary hands with concomitantly duller tactile sensitivity.

The hand, however, was not merely perceived as an agent of the brain and mind. Bell, among others, theorised self-consciousness as emerging from an awareness of tactile sensation seated in the hands. As Bell explains,

The knowledge of external bodies as distinguished from ourselves, cannot be acquired until the organs of touch in the hand have become familiar with our own limbs; we cannot be supposed capable of exploring anything by the motion of the hand, or of judging of the form or tangible qualities of an object pressed against the skin, before we have a knowledge of our own body as distinguished from things external to us. (p. 146)

To know oneself is to touch oneself. Human consciousness associated with brain development emerges when an individual reaches out to touch an object or being and recognises it as distinct from the self. Consciousness is a physical process that emerges from the sensations arising from tactile experience.<sup>210</sup> The hand is a particularly important sense organ because it allows the human to distinguish Self (human,

---

<sup>209</sup> Capuano, pp. 136-137. See particularly the section in chapter five titled, 'Animals with Hands,' pp. 130-138.

<sup>210</sup> This notion dates back to the Abbé de Condillac's *Traité des sensations* (1754) in which he theorises the sense of touch as intimately connected with the emergence of a specifically characterised type of conscious thought: 'Placing its hands on itself, it will discover that it has a body, but only when it has distinguished the different parts of it and recognised in each the same sentient being. It will discover there are other bodies when it touches things in which it does not find itself.' Abbé de Condillac, *Condillac's Treatise on the Sensations*, trans. Geraldine Carr (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, School of Philosophy, 1930), p. 86.



sensitive, educated, large-brained) from Other (animal, insensate, uneducated, small-brained).<sup>211</sup> Humans were defined by the nineteenth-century scientific community as those beings possessed of evolved brains evinced in their great dexterous, sensitive hands. Thus, hands become monstrous when their insensitivity imperils their brain's ability to communicate and connect with the rest of the human species.

### The Manual and the Monstrous

Much as the self is generally conceived of in singular terms, discussions of the hand within nineteenth-century evolutionary discourse frequently reference *'the human hand'* rather than *'human hands'* or *'hands'* (see for example the writings of E. Darwin, Bell, and Wells cited earlier). Jacques Derrida's reading of *'Heidegger's Hand'* in *'Geschlecht II'* notes the singularity assigned to the hand and the mind in order to establish a clear correlation between the monstrous and the manual: *'he [Martin Heidegger] always thinks the hand in the singular,'* Derrida explains, *'as if man did not have two hands but, this monster, one single hand.'*<sup>212</sup> Derrida suggests that *the hand* (in its singularity) possesses a grotesque quality that simultaneously reveals it as no prehensile organ but rather a sign (*le monstre*) of human thought.<sup>213</sup>

In *What is Called Thinking* (1968), Heidegger suggests that humans utilise *the hand* as a *'monstration'* of thought.<sup>214</sup> The hand for Heidegger

---

<sup>211</sup> Briefel complicates the Victorian idea that the hand was a truthful marker of identity. She argues that the increasing prevalence at the end of the century of novels and short stories about hands' *'readiness to betray the secrets of identity'* responded to the developing sciences of chiromony, palmistry, and fingerprinting that noted *'the dishonesty of the face and the necessary honesty of the hand'*: a face can lie where a hand cannot (p. 15, 4). However, she continues to assert that race proved a problematic category of distinction; aside from colour, no specific characteristics associated with the hand distinguished categories of race beyond a shadow of a doubt.

<sup>212</sup> Jacques Derrida, *'Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand,'* in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, trans. John Pleavey Jr (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), pp. 161-96 (p. 182; italics original).

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166. See also p. 168.

<sup>214</sup> I use *'monstration'* in the Derridean sense. In *'Geschlecht II,'* Derrida notes that there exists no word capable of directly translating the French *monstrosité* into English as that which both warns and shows. The closest is our "monstrosity," which holds a completely different connotation. Because of this, Derrida suggests the use of the term *'monstrate'* from the English *'demonstrate'* as that term capable of denoting that which shows or reveals: *'The hand is monstrality [monstrosité], the proper of man as the being of monstration,'* *Ibid.*, p. 169.

is the sign of human intellect and separate from ‘our bodily organism,’ connected more directly to the brain because of its tactile sensitivity:

The hand is a peculiar thing. In the common view, the hand is part of our bodily organism. But the hand’s essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp. Apes, too, have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands. [...] Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands.<sup>215</sup>

According to Christopher Johnson, in Heidegger’s lecture, ‘the humanity of the human, that which sets it apart from the rest of so-called “nature”—its monstrosity—[...] reside[s] in the human hand.’<sup>216</sup> The human hand simultaneously appears as a monster (a sign and a warning) and monstrates (shows and reveals) evolved human intelligence. The term ‘monster’ has its roots in the Latin words ‘*monstrer*’ (to show) and ‘*monere*’ (to warn). Thus, a monster functions as both a sign (a Derridean ‘mostrality’ [*monstrosité*]) and, more specifically, a warning (a monstrosity). The hand is a monster of the brain in all senses of the term.

According to Alexandra Warwick, in contrast to the visibly Othered freak-show monsters of the 1850s, after Darwin, ‘the monster that is most feared is the invisible one; the man whose apparently normal exterior hides intellectual deformity.’<sup>217</sup> Victorian literature regularly prefigures such mental monstrosity—residing in the brain and often depicted as either madness or genius—through descriptions of hands that initially appear ordinary but are later associated with either physical or genetic abnormalities. According to Stiles, ‘Wells held the widespread view that genius usually accompanies physical or psychological deficiency,’ embracing the views of criminologists such as Cesare Lombroso who

---

<sup>215</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Collins, 1976), p. 16.

<sup>216</sup> Christopher Johnson, ‘Derrida and Technology,’ in *Derrida’s Legacies: Literature and Philosophy*, eds. Simon Glendinning and Robert Eaglestone (Routledge, 2008), pp. 54-65 (p. 59).

<sup>217</sup> Alexandra Warwick, ‘Ghosts, Monsters and Spirits, 1840-1900,’ in *The Gothic World*, eds. Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp. 366-75 (p. 369). Criminals would be included among these types of monsters largely because of the difficulty Victorians like Cesare Lombroso had classifying criminals and thus specific criminal qualities according to visual markers.

states that ‘The man of genius is a monster.’<sup>218</sup> I argue that such physical and psychological deficiency is figured in the monstrous hands that populate late-Victorian Gothic romance.

As Capuano shows in his reading of Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861), mid-century scientific discourse on the hand racialised, gendered, and classed the sense of touch, linking more refined tactile sensitivity with the English male elite.<sup>219</sup> The labouring hand carried signs of that work on the surface of its skin, which often became sun-stained, hardened, and scarred with the daily grind of factory labour, rendering the nerves of the fingers less sensitive; conversely, the genteel hand appeared pale, slight, delicate, and soft, and its nerves were thus thought more sensitive. Characters in late-Victorian fiction that possess monstrous hands often have a dulled sense of touch associated most often with manual monstrosity linked with animality, race, or gender deviancy. Not only did the Victorians pathologise madness and the immorality of the lower classes, but they ‘pathologised genius and upheld the mediocre man as the evolutionary ideal.’<sup>220</sup> The hand, as identified in scientific discourse, signified a particular version of humanity.

Gothic romances of the Victorian *fin-de-siècle* take up the question of one’s relative humanity in depictions of monstrous hands and their unsympathetic touches. If a clasp of the hands was perceived as a marker of a highly developed brain able to engage in fellow-feeling, as popular articles on handshaking suggested, then the inability to enter into a sympathetic embrace with a fellow creature calls one’s humanity into question.<sup>221</sup> Labouring classes, which consisted of racialised bodies of people like the Irish, were represented with hands similar to those of gorillas because they were less evolved according to the scientific community. Returning to Wells’ novella, for instance, neither Moreau nor

---

<sup>218</sup> Stiles p.134; Lombroso, Cesare, *The Man of Genius*, ed. Havelock Ellis (London: Walter Scott, 1891), p. viii. Stiles argues that it was Lombroso who ‘solidified the identification between genius and criminality that became a popular theme among late-Victorian scientists and novelists’ (p. 129).

<sup>219</sup> See Capuano, *Changing Hands*, particularly chapter five, pp. 127-151. For an earlier version, see Capuano’s article, ‘Handling the Perceptual Politics of Identity in *Great Expectations*,’ *Dickens Quarterly*, 27.3 (2010), pp. 185-208.

<sup>220</sup> Stiles, p. 126.

<sup>221</sup> For example, an article titled ‘Hand-Shaking’ in Charles Dickens’s popular periodical *All the Year Round* (1870) claims that ‘[t]he custom of hand-shaking prevails, more or less, among civilised nations,’ and an article in another periodical similarly asserts that ‘[w]ith the march of intellect, shaking has progressed likewise.’ ‘Hand-Shaking,’ *All the Year Round*, (Apr. 1870), pp. 466-69 (p. 467); ‘On Shaking Hands,’ *London Saturday Journal* (Oct. 1841), pp. 213-14 (p. 213).

his Beast People shake hands and all are described at some point as having a dulled tactile sensitivity and thus an implied less than civilised nature. In the case of the Beast People, their manual deformity parallels their clear intellectual inferiority, which Victorians associated with stunted brain development. The case is more complicated with Moreau himself, however. Moreau's monstrosity stems from his disavowal of sensitivity figured in his failure to give the Beast People human hands. Even though he appears to exhibit the characteristics of superior hand and brain, Moreau fails at the imperial project, fails to make any contribution to science, and ultimately fails at creation, unable to shape the Beast People's hands into sensitive organs capable of developing their minds. His nearly severed hand at the novel's end is a commentary upon the state of his brain, nearly detached as it is from the emotional qualities associated with the heights of the human species to which he aspires.

According to contemporary theoretical writing about monstrosity, a monstrous body challenges our understanding of what is human by functioning as a sign of the limits of such a definition.<sup>222</sup> Monstrous hands similarly challenged Victorian understandings of race, class, and gender as stable categories of classification. The Beast People's misshapen hands gesture towards their humanity while concurrently marking them as animal. Edward Prendick, the narrator of *Moreau*, notes immediately upon meeting them that they had 'malformed hands, lacking sometimes even three digits.'<sup>223</sup> He identifies these creatures as possessed of hands even as he is struck by those hands' abnormality. The Beast People trouble the Victorian ideal of humanity even as they seem to define its limits. The Ape-Man, for example, threatens English imperial humanity by 'assum[ing], on the strength of his five-digits, that he was [Prendick's] equal, and was forever jabbering at [him], jabbering the most arrant nonsense' (p. 195). The Ape-Man's assumption of equality threatens Prendick's masculine sense of self as an English intellectual set apart from the lower orders of existence. The Ape-Man's monstrous hands that come so close to approximating human ones disrupt this hierarchy by forcing Prendick to confront the reality of human plasticity: If the Ape-Man's

---

<sup>222</sup> See *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace*, eds. Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996) and Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: SAGE, 2002).

<sup>223</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau: A Critical Text of the 1896 London First Edition, with an Introduction and Appendices*, ed. Leon Stover (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., Inc., 1998), p. 112. Further references given after quotations in the text.

hands can be made human, what is to keep Prendick's from becoming animal?

Other *fin-de-siècle* texts too raise such questions by invoking manual monstrosity as a sign of a dangerously different mind or brain. Much like the Ape-Man's hands threaten Prendick's English masculine distinction, Dracula's hands prove a similar threat to Jonathan Harker. Bram Stoker's Dracula has become the most iconic of Victorian monsters known primarily for his dangerous appetite. Yet, his hands suggest his moral and mental degeneracy long before we know he can bite.<sup>224</sup> Shortly after arriving at the castle, Jonathan takes note of them:

Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in the firelight, and they had seemed rather white and fine; but seeing them now close to me, I could not but notice that they were rather coarse—broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point.<sup>225</sup>

We have established that Victorians viewed the human hand as that which is 'Untipt with claws' and 'with sense refined,' so how then do we classify Dracula's hands? They initially appear human, 'rather white and refined,' but upon closer inspection they begin to blur the boundary between human and animal, civilised and primitive, sensible and senseless as the Beast People's do.

Jonathan describes what hand-phrenologists termed an 'elementary hand.'<sup>226</sup> According to *Chiero's Language of the Hand* (1894), an elementary hand 'naturally belongs to the lowest type of mentality. In appearance it is coarse and clumsy, with large, thick, heavy palms, short fingers, and short nails.'<sup>227</sup> The only difference between this description and Jonathan's is that Dracula has 'long' and 'fine' nails 'cut to a sharp point.' *The Hand Phrenologically Considered* (1848) addresses nails,

---

<sup>224</sup> See Stiles for a reading of the influence of neuroscience on Dracula.

<sup>225</sup> Stoker, Bram, *Dracula: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Reviews and Reactions, Dramatic and Film Variations, Criticism*, eds. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1997), p. 24. Further references given after quotations in text.

<sup>226</sup> See Beamish and Chiero, *Chiero's Language of the Hand*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Nicholas and Co., 1900).

<sup>227</sup> Chiero, p. 27.

situating them as analogous to claws in animals.<sup>228</sup> Yet, it suggests that an elementary hand with long nails speaks to ‘a higher type of organisation’ and also recalls the ‘hands of witches, demons, and sorcerers who tend to have elongated fingers ‘armed with long nails or claws, like the toes of lower animals.’<sup>229</sup> Such a hand positions Dracula on the border between a human and a supernatural being possessed of an evolved brain but with a nature more closely linked with the animals it evolved from. It also links him, labouring classes, animals, and the threatening supernatural unknown together. Furthermore, Dracula’s hairy palms warn of masturbatory tendencies: growing hair in the centre of the palm was an old wives’ tale told to keep children from onanism.<sup>230</sup> His hand is the sign of mental degeneracy as well as a cause of it. Similar to the Beast People’s that can only approximate without ever duplicating human hands, Dracula’s monstrous hands reveal him as a threat to the social order because he is a creature that can pass as human when he desires. As Stiles argues of scientific discourses such as biology, sexology, criminology, and evolutionary theory, I assert that studies on hands and their social and scientific functions also contributed to the ‘destabiliz[ation] [of] prevailing ideas about what it meant to be human.’<sup>231</sup>

Unlike severed hands that act as agents independent of human will and are fully severed from their human connection, Dracula’s monstrous hands, like Moreau’s, act on his own volition, betraying his dangerous designs to corrupt Jonathan’s mind by stimulating his appetite for fleshly pleasure as fully conscious. Jonathan describes Dracula’s touch as ‘cold as ice—more like the hand of a dead than living man’ (p. 22). Dracula’s hands, like the Beast People’s and Moreau’s, generate fear specifically in the moment of contact. When ‘something cold touched my hand. I started violently’ (p. 115), Prendick explains of his first tactile encounter with the

---

<sup>228</sup> *The Hand Phrenologically Considered: Being a Glimpse at the Relation of the Mind with the Organisation of the Body* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1849), p. 68. See also Briefel for a discussion of nails and Orientalism in chapter three, pp. 78-101.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69; 68.

<sup>230</sup> Arnold Labrie notes the same, also explaining that ‘the Darwinian ape, because of his lassitude, is inclined to masturbate.’ Arnold Labrie, ‘Purity and Danger in Fin-de-Siècle Culture: A Psychohistorical Interpretation of Wagner, Stoker, and Zola,’ *Psychoanalytische Perspektiven*, 20.2 (2002), pp. 261-74 (p. 266). This myth about growing hair in the centre of the palms is, however, erroneous; even Charles Darwin notes that ‘it is a significant fact that the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet are quite naked [in the human foetus], like the inferior surfaces of all four extremities in most of the lower animals’ (p. 25).

<sup>231</sup> Stiles, p. 10.

Beast People and Jonathan cannot ‘repress a shudder’ (p. 24). Dracula’s hands are not the disembodied hands of unseen labour that confront those touched with the reality of exploitation; rather, these are the hands of the Other that risk contaminating through contact because they cannot always be distinguished readily.<sup>232</sup> Though a sentence later Jonathan describes this ‘shudder’ to Mina, his fiancée, as ‘a horrible feeling of nausea’ (p. 24), Victorian audiences could not have helped reading the erotic possibility encoded in the term ‘shudder,’ which often appeared alongside the words ‘excitement’ and ‘pleasure’ or stood in for ejaculation itself.<sup>233</sup> Dracula’s manual monstrosity encapsulates the way the Count troubles English imperial humanity; he possesses human consciousness, acts only on his own diabolical ambition, and cannot be distinguished from English subjects when he chooses to hide his nature. His icy touch reveals him to be an Other that is dangerously desirable; he is the *unheimlich*, that which reveals the limit of our ability to make the clear distinctions so important to Victorian society.

I argue that Dracula’s hands reveal this monstrosity in their insensitivity to Jonathan. Dracula’s touch contaminates, transmits, imposes, dominates, but does not feel; Jonathan’s response has no physiological effect on Dracula, much as the Beast People seem insensate to Prendick’s horror and Moreau claims a numbness to the Beast People’s pain. A monstrous hand reveals a mind unaffected by empathy in a hand unaffected by sympathy. Dracula’s hands threaten to contaminate Jonathan with his own appetite, revealing the intellectual vulnerability of a seemingly ideal, mediocre Englishman at the centre of the imperial project. Jonathan’s susceptibility to Dracula’s monstrous touch and depraved appetites destabilises the boundary between human and Other and queries the value placed on brain development as the defining factor

---

<sup>232</sup> See Rowe and Hurley, Kelly, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>233</sup> Though Johnson’s dictionary defines this term as ‘to quake with fear,’ it was popularly used in pornography and literature more generally to indicate an overwhelming reaction to erotic pleasure. Perhaps the most well-known use of the term is in William Yeats 1923 poem, ‘Leda and the Swan’ in which “shudder” describes the swan’s ejaculation but also relates to Leda’s fear.’ A lesser-known example of its use during the Victorian period appears in the first volume of the pornographic magazine, *The Pearl* (1879), in a story entitled *Lady Pokingham, or They All Do It*: “Ah! Oh! Rub harder, harder—quicker,” she gasped, as she stiffened her limbs out with a kind of spasmodic shudder.’ Peter Childs, “History is a Nightmare”: Symbolism and Language,’ *Modernism* (New York: Psychology Press, 2000), pp. 187-208 (p. 208); ‘Lady Pokingham, or They All Do It,’ *The Pearl*, 1 (1879), n.p.

of human distinction.<sup>234</sup>

Like *Dracula*, H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) positions monstrous hands as a direct threat to English masculine superiority defined by brain power. Ayesha, the immortal witch-queen of the lost African civilization of the Amahaggar, initially appears to be the most beautiful of human women. Yet, her hands and their brutal, supernatural touch question the relationship between brain evolution, English masculinity, and imperial power. In her reading of mummified hands in Haggard's fiction, Hurley notes that 'Freaks were thought to exist at the very limits of human identity and thereby to call into question what it meant to be a human subject in a human body.'<sup>235</sup> Laura Chrisman asserts that, in imperial romance fiction of the *fin-de-siècle*, 'the economy and the body [are] primary determinants of subjectivity' when read through the lens of Fredric Jameson whom, she argues, asserts that 'The human sense of existence is [...] entirely and directly constituted by the sensations of the physical body' such that sensations that the psyche cannot make sense of are often linked with the colonial world and thus are 'unbridgeably "other."<sup>236</sup> I argue that Ayesha's hands reveal her as an Other as *Dracula's* reveal him to be, and that they also prove the primary locus through which Haggard's novel questions the limits of human subjectivity.

Ayesha, like *Dracula* and the mad-scientist, possesses a super-human brain with unmatched power that proves threatening because consumed with ambition and desire. She seeks to conquer England and possesses power enough to do so, apparent in her use of her hand as the conduit of her mind. As Leo Vincy, one of the novel's protagonists, springs at her in fury, she 'stretched out her hand again, and he went staggering back [...] he felt as though he had suddenly received a violent blow in the chest, and, what is more, utterly cowed, as if all the manhood had been taken out of him.'<sup>237</sup> Her upraised hand allows her to touch Leo's body

---

<sup>234</sup> I must thank Nathaniel Doherty for the countless drafts that he read as I worked through this idea and that of the connection between the hand and brain. His feedback was invaluable to this article.

<sup>235</sup> Hurly, p. 183. Among these she notes 'the vampire-mummy, the beast-people, the beetle-woman, the fungus-man, the tentacle body, the prehistorical survivals, [and] the ape-man' as examples of 'phantasmatic liminals' that offer such a challenge (p. 183).

<sup>236</sup> Chrisman, Laura, *Rereading the Imperial Romance: British Imperialism and South African Resistance in Haggard, Schreiner, and Platje* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>237</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *She: A History of Adventure* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), p. 225. Further references given after quotations in the text.



with her mind, channelled through her hand, shrivelling his heroic spirit.

To make clear the link between her hand, brain, and monstrous nature, by the narrative's end Ayesha's 'most beautiful white hand [...] with long tapering fingers, ending in the pinkest nails' has 'turned dirty brown and yellow [...] nothing but a claw now, a human talon resembling that of a badly preserved mummy' (p. 142, 291). Both Dracula's and the Beast People's hands recall such a description. Ayesha's transformation into a 'dirty brown and yellow,' ape-like rag—a clear referencing of her imagined racialised, animal origins—delivers Leo from the power and allure her 'beautiful white hand,' in the singular, once wielded while also touching on contemporary anxieties about devolution; her monstrous hand alerts readers to the racially tainted brain that lurks beneath her seeming whiteness. Additionally, her hand devolves when she dies and her brain loses control. Her beautiful hand monstrous in the power it wields becomes visibly monstrous in its deformity when her brain has been bested.

Like Moreau, the power her hand holds as the singular organ of her will proves tenuous and is divested after she emerges as a direct threat to English imperial masculinity and the nation that relied on its stability. In contrast to Ayesha and Dracula's hands, Moreau's unfeeling touch and the activities of his hand render visible his horrific past, forced by the English medical society to either exile himself or give up his gruesome experiments. While Stiles argues that, through narratives such as *Moreau*, Wells sought to 'lend mad geniuses an element of humanity denied them in many other discussions of the subject,' I assert that in the case of Moreau Wells rather sought to test the limits of humanity by exploring those aspects of character conspicuously absent from narratives of scientific genius.<sup>238</sup> I agree with Stiles that Moreau 'has evolved far enough to compromise his emotional sensitivity,' but I would press this assertion further to suggest that Moreau's insensitive use of his hands queries the value Moreau places on callousness as evidence of an evolved intellectual state.<sup>239</sup> His domineering touch reflects a brain without sympathy. In contrast to Dracula and Ayesha who are 'conquered' by English muscle, Moreau proves more threatening because his downfall results from the distortion of his undeniably English brain and intellect.

## The Man and the Monster

---

<sup>238</sup> Stiles, p. 135.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

Wells positions Moreau as possessing *the* hand in the Derridean and Heideggerian sense. As many critics have noted, the Beast People deify Moreau, but what often escapes critical attention is that they do so by locating his power in his singular hand—‘the Hand’ (p. 118).<sup>240</sup> Given the fundamental alignment of Victorian masculinity with the model of ‘God the Father’ and the identification of the objective’ scientific gaze with ideals of masculine divinity (the ‘god-trick’ that ‘fucks the world’), the failure of Moreau’s hand reveals his monstrosity specifically as a lack of mental or neurological capacity.<sup>241</sup> Fellow-feeling and the emotional sensitivity it conveys through touch plays a definite role in defining the Doctor’s deficits.

We first meet the Beast People when Prendick flees from Moreau’s compound fearing that he too will be vivisected. During Prendick’s interactions with the Beast People, we are introduced to ‘the Law,’ a performative hymn that they learn from a missionary who sought to civilise them and that they reinterpret to reflect the submission to Moreau that they must display to avoid returning to Moreau’s ‘House of Pain’ (p. 118):<sup>242</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> See Galia Benziman, ‘Challenging the Biological: The Fantasy of Male Birth as a Nineteenth-Century Narrative of Ethical Failure,’ *Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 35.4 (2006), pp. 375-95 (p. 385); Michael Parish Lee, ‘Reading Meat in H. G. Wells,’ *Studies in the Novel*, 42.3 (2010), pp. 249-68 (p. 263); and Helen Sutherland, ‘Monsters, Morality and Religion,’ in *Creating Monstrosity, Discovering Humanity: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, eds. Elizabeth Nelson, Julian Burcar, and Hannah Priest (Oxford, UK: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), pp. 217-227. They all address Moreau as a scientist who usurps, assumes, and/or parodies the power of God, but none attend to his all-powerful Hand worshiped by the Beast People.

<sup>241</sup> Haraway, Donna J., ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,’ in *Simians, Cyborgs, Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 183-201 (p. 189). In her discussion of situated knowledges within science, Donna Haraway explains the ‘god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere’ claimed by scientific disciplines as objectivity (p. 189). I reference her concept here because she discusses this claim to objectivity as a masculinist position, and I suggest that Moreau attempts, but fails, to assume a similar position.

<sup>242</sup> The chant concludes with the quotation above and begins with the following said by the Beast People in unison while swaying:

‘Not to go on all-Fours; *that is the Law*. Are we not Men?’

‘Not to suck up Drink; *that is the Law*. Are we not Men?’

‘Not to eat Flesh nor Fish; *that is the Law*. Are we not Men?’

‘Not to claw Bark of Trees; *that is the Law*. Are we not Men?’

‘Not to chase other Men; *that is the Law*. Are we not Men?’ (p. 117; italics original)

“*His* is the House of Pain.

“*His* is the Hand that makes.

“*His* is the Hand that wounds.

“*His* is the Hand that heals.” (p. 118; italics original)

The rhetorical structure of this lyric converts Moreau’s hand into *the* Hand of the Judeo-Christian god who made men in his own image; the Beast People look reverentially on Moreau whose singular Hand, with a capital ‘H,’ possesses the power to ‘make,’ ‘wound,’ and ‘heal.’ Leon Stover notes that this chant recalls the old testament God: ‘See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.’<sup>243</sup> The ‘hand’ stands as a metaphor for power in the Bible, and the Beast People’s chant that reinterprets it makes concrete the power of God into the literal hand of the scientist. Moreau’s powerful hand enacts the will of his brain. Though Moreau possesses *the* hand associated with the English mind, whether or not it is human and indicative of a more evolved intellect proves a vexing question. It becomes clear, as his relation with and investment in his creations is revealed, that Moreau himself may be the most dangerously unclear being on the island—the monster that renders English imperial humanity as an ideal always already tainted.

Galia Benziman has read *Moreau* as a fantasy of male birth, emphasising that while male scientists may have the power to create, they always fail at parenting.<sup>244</sup> I suggest that Wells’ novella figures Moreau’s creative potential as a scientist as a kind of monstrosity born of mental-neurological failings. Moreau does, to an extent, successfully shape his creations in his image, but their deformed hands and deadened tactile

---

<sup>243</sup> Deuteronomy 32.39. It also resembles Job 5.18: ‘For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole.’ This suggests that the power believed to reside in God’s hands is a prevalent theme in the Old Testament linked with the idea of judgment. However, Deuteronomy 32.39 is spoken by Moses while warning his people of the judgment that God may visit upon them if they worship false idols, which is reminiscent of the Kanaka missionary who taught this chant to the Beast People in the hope of preventing them from falling into the same sin against which Moses warns his people.

<sup>244</sup> She also points to Frankenstein and his monster as an example. See also Steven Lehman, ‘The Motherless Child in Science Fiction: “Frankenstein” and “Moreau,”’ *Science Fiction Studies*, 19.1 (1992), pp. 49-58 and Elaine Showalter, ‘The Apocalyptic Fables of H. G. Wells,’ in *Fin de Siècle, Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1992), pp. 69-84.

sensitivity are reflections of the Doctor's own lack of sympathy and the monstrosity of his paternity. Stiles notes that 'While the genius described by Victorians was definitively male, his [Moreau's] masculinity was undermined by the suggestion of hysterical effeminacy and his refusal of heterosexual procreation.'<sup>245</sup> Moreau's hands are monstrous because of what they attempt to create and, specifically, how they fail to do so.

Moreau attempts to reproduce outside of the heterosexual mode of procreation; Elaine Showalter terms this 'celibatory reproduction': a mode that denies the female role in reproduction and often seeks to reproduce itself rather than create something new.<sup>246</sup> Franco Moretti notes that 'one of the institutions most threatened by monsters is the family.'<sup>247</sup> Moreau's monstrosity is thus revealed in his hands but associated with his brain; he is a genius who threatens the family by refusing to engage in heterosexual procreation or the sympathetic family bond. Showalter suggests that these anxieties about changing gender relations, including the role of masculinity, were associated with the emergence of the New Woman, who threatened English masculinity and the family and nation through it: 'the highly publicised decline in the national birthrate' led to a reevaluation of the traditional female role such that 'medicine and science warned that such ambitions [outside of the home] would lead to sickness, freakishness, sterility, and racial degeneration.'<sup>248</sup> The genius or mad scientist, like the New Woman, becomes Other—ill, monstrous, racialised—by threatening English masculinity, the English family, and thus Victorian society.

The Doctor lacks the care-giving touch that Benziman identifies as required to complete the Beast People's transformation into fully realised 'humanised animals' (p. 147). Moreau's hands most dramatically materialise his monstrous nature through this failure. The Beast People's manual deformities, suffered at the Hand of Moreau, reveal Moreau's inhumane scientific interest in 'the plasticity of the living form' (p. 133). The failure of his effort forces readers to question the clarity of the vision

---

<sup>245</sup> Stiles, p. 133.

<sup>246</sup> Showalter, Elaine, 'The Apocalyptic Fables of H. G. Wells,' in *Fin de Siècle, Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1992), pp. 69-84 (p. 75). Dracula's reproduction of himself and his vampiric appetites in the bodies of his vampire brides and Lucy is another example that she provides.

<sup>247</sup> Franco Moretti, 'The Dialectic of Fear,' in *Signs Taken for Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York and London: Verso, 2005), pp. 83-108 (p. 78)

<sup>248</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Little, Brown Book Group Limited, 1992), p. 39.

Moreau claims when first describing his work to Prendick.<sup>249</sup> The failed creation of the Beast People suggests not only the plasticity of human and animal shapes but also the threat represented by uncontrolled intellectual curiosity and brain development associated with it. Moreau views himself as divine, but his drive towards intellectual progress through vivisection overshadows his reason and destabilises this otherwise convincing image of English imperial masculinity (imagined as scientific rationality and ultimate procreative control). Moreau's monstrous hands create grotesque, abhuman amalgams that he then rejects for their inhumanity.<sup>250</sup> Ultimately, this is a rejection of his own brain reflected back.

As a result of Moreau's failure, the Beast People end up with misshapen hands that lack tactile sensitivity and recall the distorted appendages of Dracula and Ayesha that we discussed above. While most critics have focused on the Beast People's acquisition of language as the mark of their humanity, and their loss of it as the sign of their regression into animality, I argue that by emphasising the Beast People's tactile insensitivity the text marks them as inherently inferior abhumans.<sup>251</sup> If

---

<sup>249</sup> Wells transplants this quotation about the plasticity of human form directly from his essay, "The Limits of Individual Plasticity," published a year earlier in 1895.

<sup>250</sup> Though critics traditionally refer to the Beast People as "nonhuman," both Kelly Hurley and Neville Hoad offer alternative terms for addressing their racial status. Hurley identifies the Beast People as 'abhuman'—invoking Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection—in order to denote a 'not-quite-human subject,' while Hoad refers to the Beast people as 'unhuman,' explaining that one must first be human to be 'inhuman' while 'non-human' can also designate inanimate objects. Neville Hoad, 'Cosmetic Surgeons of the Social: Darwin, Freud, and Wells and the Limits of Sympathy on *The Island of Doctor Moreau*,' in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 187-218 (p. 213, n.5); Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 55. I will refer to Moreau's creatures as abhuman "Beast People" throughout to highlight what, I argue, their monstrosity comes from: their blurring of what was once thought a clear boundary between human and nonhuman, and their expansion of reproductive possibility—Moreau procreates on his own without a woman.

<sup>251</sup> Lennard Davis argues in his study of disability that nationality and full citizenship is linked with language, and that, 'Because people are interpellated as subjects through language, because language itself is a congealed set of social practices, the actual dysfunctionality of the Deaf is to have another language system.' Here, the Beast People have access to language and yet they are still positioned as outsiders, disabled by their manual deformity and lack of tactile sensitivity. Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York and London: Verso Books, 2014), p. 78.

the hand expresses human intellect by acting on it as Heidegger and nineteenth-century scientists conceive, then the Beast People are always already marked as abhuman even if their appearance and language can approximate the human form and human behaviour. The Beast People do not possess *the* hand, but rather bestial hands that mark their racial inferiority.<sup>252</sup> The Beast People's unrefined tactile sense denies them not only the capacity to fully experience the world, but also to engage in sympathetic touch with each other, possibly referenced in their inability to form a sustainable community.<sup>253</sup>

However, Prendick's need to distinguish these creatures from humans like himself reveals an underlying fear of similarity. If animals can be made into human-like creatures, then humans can revert to their animal origins: brains, like hands, can degenerate.

When Prendick returns to England, he fears that his 'discoverers thought [him] a madman,' 'an animal tormented with some disorder in its brain,' even as he looks on the people of England and 'feel[s] as though the animal was surging up through them' (p. 203, 205). Prendick cannot distinguish whether he or the people around him are anymore human—or animal—than the Beast People that he escaped. Thus, even as the text marks the Beast People's hands and brains as deficient, in so doing it challenges not only the human as a stable category but also the other class and social divisions on which Victorian society was based.

Moreau's hands prove similarly unable to engage in reciprocal manual contact, revealing a detachment from the fellow-feeling that was supposed to unite English men when they clasped hands.<sup>254</sup> As Moreau himself claims when Prendick questions him about the pain vivisection inflicts, 'Sympathetic pain—all I know of it, I remember as a thing I used to suffer from years ago' (p. 141). In Moreau's mind, truly evolved people do not experience either bodily pain or pleasure and they have no regard for such sensations in others. Yet, the writings of Bell, for example, identify both pleasure and pain as essential to the continued development of the human psyche: 'Finally, as to man, we shall be led to infer that the pains and pleasures of mere bodily sense (with yet more benevolent

---

<sup>252</sup> For a discussion of the Beast People's racialization, see Timothy Christenson, 'The "Bestial Mark" of Race in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*,' *Criticism*, 46.4 (2004), pp. 575-95.

<sup>253</sup> While they live together in a city-like structure of their creation, there is always a sense of animal competition exemplified in their final devolution into their bestial selves. Without the Kanaka missionary, they cannot maintain their community.

<sup>254</sup> Interestingly, the text never describes a handshake between Moreau and Prendick. This absence further supports my reading of Moreau's insufficient sensitivity.

intention) carry us onward through the development and improvement of the mind itself, to higher aspirations' (p. 15). Moreau is a threatening figure because he reveals a fundamental contradiction between the man of science he so closely resembles and the good English man he so dramatically fails to be.

As it turns out, his power to 'make,' 'wound,' and 'heal' is not as consequential as the Beast People believe. He explains to Prendick, 'The human shape I can get now, almost with ease, [...]; but often there is trouble with the hands and claws—painful things that I dare not shape too freely' (p. 146). This essential point of hypocrisy indicates the distorted nature of his thinking. While Moreau denies his capacity to sympathise with the pain felt by his creations, he still shies away from working their hands extensively because they are such 'painful things.' Though Moreau claims to have evolved past pain and sympathy, this reaction to the intensity of the Beast People's suffering and his consequent inability to shape perfectly their hands signifies detached scientific rationality and sympathetic fellow-feeling at odds in the man of genius. Since the Beast People are modelled after Moreau's own form, their misshapen hands and dulled tactile sensitivity come to render visible Moreau's own inner distortion.<sup>255</sup> The Doctor's well-developed brain aspires to divinity but fails to measure up to humanity in spite of itself.

The emblem of his paternal authority and divine masculinity that yet fails to bring adequate sensitivity to his mind and brain, Moreau's hand is ultimately defeated and maimed by the female puma, his last and most promising creation. The puma's vengeance reveals Moreau's hand as

---

<sup>255</sup> Cesare Lombroso notes in his 1876 study *Criminal Man* (trans. 1911) 'that 4.1 percent of criminals have serious malformations of the hand' (p. 307). In addition to manual deformity, Lombroso was also interested in physical sensitivity, often testing this by measuring tactile sensitivity in the hands. Lombroso 'believed that physical insensitivity correlated with emotional and moral insensitivity' (p. 401). According to Lombroso's research, '[a]ll travelers know that among the Negroes and savages of America, sensitivity to pain is so limited that the former laugh as they mutilate their hands to escape work, while the latter sing their tribe's praises while being burned alive' (p. 69). He 'suspect[ed] that criminals are less sensitive to pain than the average man,' and further asserted that complete insensitivity to pain (analgesia) usually appears among the criminally insane, and assumed that colonial subjects were criminal because of their race (p. 206). Thus, based on Lombroso's theory of criminality, Moreau's self-professed insensitivity to pain and the Beast People's own lack of tactile sensitivity suggest that both possess criminal instincts. In other words, Moreau's insensitivity to pain connects him with the animal nature of the Beast People rather than positioning him as more evolved, as Moreau would have us believe. Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

a failed, monstrous parody of the hand of God because in that it carries no real creative power for, as Prendick notes, 'As soon as [his] hand is taken from them, the beast begins to creep back' (p. 147). Moreau dies with '[o]ne hand [...] almost severed at the wrist' (p. 178). Benziman, Coral Lansbury, and Thomas Cole have read this passage as the resurgence of the feminine in a novella that not only absents the female, but only depicts it as subjugated and exploited by science, in the figure of Moreau.<sup>256</sup> Showalter identifies the vivisector as 'a fin-de-siècle scientist who attempts to separate reproduction from female sexuality' and 'replac[e] heterosexual reproduction with male self-creation.'<sup>257</sup> If Moreau tries, like a god, to create human forms from nonhuman ones, then the female puma, whom Showalter identifies as 'a New Woman figure,' renders Moreau's failure to reproduce the human form visible.<sup>258</sup>

The puma emerges from Moreau's House of Pain 'not human, not animal, but hellish, brown, seamed with red branching scars, red drops starting out upon it, and the lidless eyes ablaze' (p. 171). The puma's 'brown' skin and animal form establish a textual link between animality, race, and sex in this instance. The inclusion of blood, standing in for dangerous, uncontrolled female sexuality, carries this image even further towards a threat to English masculine superiority, which Victorian society positioned at the centre of their conception of humanity. As Ayesha's touch betrays an enormously powerful brain beyond control, so too does the puma's near severing of Moreau's hand suggest a power that exceeds his hold in a literal sense. She bests his brain as she does his hand.

In this moment, the text cements the representation of Moreau's brain, hand, and touch as monstrous because it has created nothing but a scarred and terrifying body, proving Moreau himself neither the right kind of human nor an animal, and certainly not godlike. Moreau's nearly severed hand is a metaphorical presentation and embodiment—a monster—of his mind's failure. If his is supposed to be the hand that 'makes,' 'wounds,' and 'heals,' then the puma's near severing of it subverts Moreau's power and locates the central problem of the novel in the hand itself as an expression of his mind, deformed long before.

---

<sup>256</sup> See Benziman; Coral Lansbury, 'Gynaecology, Pornography, and the Antivivisection Movement,' *Victorian Studies*, 28.3 (1985), pp. 413–437; and Thomas Cole, "I Have Worked Hard at Her Head and Brain": Dr. Moreau and the New Woman,' in *The Sex Is Out of This World: Essays on the Carnal Side of Science Fiction*, eds. Sherry Ginn and Michael G. Cornelius (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2012), pp. 134–51.

<sup>257</sup> Showalter, 'Fables,' p. 72. Cole, following Showalter, reads the island itself as female, or at the very least feminised.

<sup>258</sup> Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 179



Moreau's hand remains indeterminate: human in form but nearly a classic, severed monster. Unlike Dracula who is undead and Ayesha who is immortal, Moreau is revealed to be simultaneously human and other, a perverted mind in a camouflaged body. Even as he aspires to divine scientific authority he fails to leave anything behind for all his own trouble and the Beast People's suffering because his disavowed sensitivity to their pain dooms his project to decay because their brains will never have the stimulating sensitivity to the world that the human hand provides.

Moreau projects his emotional and intellectual insensitivity onto his creations in their insensate hands and in their intellectual dullness. While careful attention has been paid to the symbolism of severed hands in fiction of the Victorian *fin-de-siècle*, I argue that monstrous hands that remain connected to bodies and act as agents of brains and minds deserve similar consideration. Monstrous hands that cannot engage in sympathetic touch enact and constitute the brain and mind to which they are attached. If *the* human hand can become the hand of the monster, then the human brain is open to a similarly dangerous pattern of degeneration. Moreau's nearly severed hand reflects a brain nearly severed from its human(e) potential, one that should aspire to a more highly evolved state but that is ultimately crippled by his limitations. The Victorian hand allows literature to reflect, in concrete images, the invisible workings and character of the brain it serves but has failed to nurture.

#### Bibliography

Beamish, Richard, *The Psychonomy of the Hand; or, The Hand an Index of Mental Development, According to Mm D'Arpentigny and Desbarolles*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: [n.pub.], 1865).

Bell, Charles, *The Hand: Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments as Evincing Design* (London: William Pickering, 1833).

Benziman, Galia, 'Challenging the Biological: The Fantasy of Male Birth as a Nineteenth-Century Narrative of Ethical Failure,' *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 35.4 (2006), pp. 375-95.

*Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace*, eds. Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996).

Briefel, Aviva, *The Racial Hands in the Victorian Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Capuano, Peter, *Changing Hands: Industry, Evolution, and Reconfiguration of the Victorian Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

———. 'Handling the Perceptual Politics of Identity in *Great Expectations*,' *Dickens Quarterly*, 27.3 (2010), pp. 185-208.

Childs, Peter, "History is a Nightmare": Symbolism and Language,' *Modernism* (New York: Psychology Press, 2000), pp. 187-208.

Chrisman, Laura, *Rereading the Imperial Romance: British Imperialism and South African Resistance in Haggard, Schreiner, and Plaatje* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

Christenson, Timothy, "The "Bestial Mark" of Race in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*,' *Criticism*, 46.4 (2004), pp. 575-95.

Cohen, William, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

Cole, Thomas, "I Have Worked Hard at Her Head and Brain": Dr. Moreau and the New Woman,' in *The Sex Is Out of This World: Essays on the Carnal Side of Science Fiction*, ed. by Sherry Ginn and Michael G. Cornelius (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2012), pp. 134-51.

Condillac, Abbé de, *Condillac's Treatise on the Sensations*, trans. by Geraldine Carr (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, School of Philosophy, 1930).

Connor, Steven, *The Book of Skin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Darwin, Charles, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2 vols (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1871).

Darwin, Erasmus, *The Temple of Nature; or, the Origin of Society* (Baltimore: John W. Butler and Bonsal and Niles, 1804).

Davis, Lennard J., *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York and London: Verso Books, 2014).

Derrida, Jacques, 'Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand,' in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, trans. John Pleavey Jr (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), pp. 161-96.

Garrington, Abbie, 'Horrible Haptics,' in *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2013), pp. 170-82.

Gilbert, Pamela K., 'The Will to Touch David Copperfield's Hand,' *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 19 (2014), DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.695>.

Haggard, H. Rider, *She: A History of Adventure* (New York: Modern Library, 2002).

'Hand-Shaking,' *All the Year Round* (Apr. 1870), pp. 466-69.

Haraway, Donna J., 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,' in *Simians, Cyborgs, Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 183-201.

Heidegger, Martin, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Collins, 1976).

Hoad, Neville, 'Cosmetic Surgeons of the Social: Darwin, Freud, and Wells and the Limits of Sympathy on *The Island of Doctor Moreau*,' in

*Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 187-218.

Hurley, Kelly, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

———. ‘The Victorian Mummy-Fetish: H. Rider Haggard, Frank Aubrey, and the White Mummy,’ in *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain*, ed. Marlene Tromp (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), pp. 180-199.

Huxley, T. H., ‘On the Relations of Man to the Lower Animals,’ in *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1872), pp. 71-138.

Johnson, Christopher, ‘Derrida and Technology,’ in *Derrida’s Legacies: Literature and Philosophy*, eds. Simon Glendinning and Robert Eaglestone (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 54-65.

‘Lady Pokingham, or They All Do It,’ *The Pearl*, 1 (1879), pp. 13-26.

Lansbury, Coral, ‘Gynaecology, Pornography, and the Antivivisection Movement,’ *Victorian Studies*, 28.3 (1985), pp. 413-437.

Lee, Michael Parish, ‘Reading Meat in H. G. Wells,’ *Studies in the Novel*, 42.3 (2010), pp. 249-68.

Lehman, Steven, ‘The Motherless Child in Science Fiction: “Frankenstein” and “Moreau,”’ *Science Fiction Studies*, 19.1 (1992), pp. 49-58.

Lombroso, Cesare, *Criminal Man*, trans. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter with assistance from Mark Seymour (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

———. Lombroso, Cesare, *The Man of Genius*, ed. By Havelock Ellis (London: Walter Scott, 1891).

McClintock, Anne, "Massa" and Maids: Power and Desire in the Imperial Metropolis,' in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 73-131.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

———. *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. by Claude Lefort, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

Moretti, Franco, 'The Dialectic of Fear,' in *Signs Taken for Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York and London: Verso, 2005), pp. 83-108.

———. 'On Shaking Hands,' *London Saturday Journal* (Oct. 1841), pp. 213-14.

Rowe, Katherine, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Shildrick, Margrit, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: SAGE, 2002).

Showalter, Elaine, 'The Apocalyptic Fables of H. G. Wells,' in *Fin de Siècle, Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1992), pp. 69-84.

———. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Little, Brown Book Group Limited, 1992).

Stiles, Anne, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Stoker, Bram *Dracula: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Reviews and Reactions, Dramatic and Film Variations, Criticism*, eds. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1997).

Sutherland, Helen, 'Monsters, Morality and Religion,' in *Creating Monstrosity, Discovering Humanity: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring*

*Evil*, eds. Elizabeth Nelson, Julian Burcar, and Hannah Priest (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), pp. 217-227.

Warwick, Alexandra, 'Ghosts, Monsters and Spirits, 1840-1900,' in *The Gothic World*, ed. by Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp. 366-75.

Wells, H. G., *The First Men in the Moon* (Brooklyn, NY: Braunworth and Co., Bookbinders and Printers, 1901).

———. *The Island of Doctor Moreau: A Critical Text of the 1896 London First Edition, with an Introduction and Appendices*, ed. by Leon Stover (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., Inc., 1998).

———. 'The Man of the Year Million,' *Pall Mall Budget* (1893), p. 3.

———. *The War of the Worlds* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1898).