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Cover Page Footnote

Cynthia Rosenfeld is currently an MS student in the Department of Communication at North Carolina State University. The author would like to thank Drs. William Kinsella, Elizabeth Craig, and Lawrence Rosenfeld for wading through the early drafts of this manuscript to offer their feedback. The author also wishes to thank the reviewers and editors who provided valuable recommendations during the revision process.

The Great Divide: What Dr. Moreau Tells Us About Posthumanism and the Anthropocene

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This critique of three films of The Island of Dr. Moreau, a classic story that keeps resurfacing in popular culture, aims to shed light on the geologic era in which we live, the Anthropocene. What do these films reveal about the Western conceptualization of the differences between “human” and “animal,” and what does this conceptualization reveal about the Anthropocene? The post-human analysis primarily employs concepts from Lacan, Derrida, and Eagleton, and includes a detailed look at the role of language. Dr. Moreau’s conceit of human uniqueness (and superiority) fosters the kind of thinking that allows humanity to ignore the natural consequences of its actions. The analysis concludes with a discussion of Haraway’s Chthulucene, a counter to the Anthropocentric speciesism that lead us to the Anthropocene and Dr. Moreau to his island.

Keywords: The Island of Dr. Moreau, Anthropocene, posthumanism, Lacan, Eagleton, Derrida, Haraway

H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, published in 1896, is a fictional tale of a scientist who attempts to surgically engineer nonhuman animals into humans. The novel is credited with creating the “uplift” motif in science fiction, in which a more advanced species intervenes in the lives of a less advanced species to elevate them (Booker, 2014). *The Planet of the Apes* franchise is a successful, contemporary example of this motif, grossing over \$2 billion worldwide (Hughes, 2017).

The Island of Dr. Moreau was critically analyzed by Rohman (2009) to find what the story reveals about human-nonhuman animal distinctions. Rohman argued the novel reveals the fluidity of boundaries between human and other animals. This theme emerges early in the novel, with the protagonist stranded on a lifeboat with two others. Dehydrated and starving, the two other survivors tumble overboard in a fight over who will get to eat whom, a battle to decide the roles of cannibal and food source. Rohman states that this scene depicts the tenuous nature of humanity’s claim of transcendence.

This analysis extends Rohman’s work through an examination of the three major motion picture adaptations of the novel (1932’s *Island of Lost*

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Souls, 1977's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, and 1996's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*). Films based on novels may have a power that transcends the original source; Ingmar Bergman notes, "Film as dream, film as music. No art passes our conscience in the way film does, and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls" (as cited in Georgaris, 2007). Films offer a sense of "being there" that implores audiences to go beyond seeing and hearing to scrutinizing and listening (Barthes, 1977). As creative artifacts, films are poised to offer insights into contemporary hegemonic narratives. The film adaptations of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, a classic story that keeps resurfacing in popular culture, offer a cautionary tale of humanistic hubris, and this critique aims to shed light on the geologic era in which we live, the Anthropocene. Geologists recognize the present era as the Anthropocene, a time marked by humanity's impact on nature (Steffen, Grinewalk, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2011). With this in mind, a tale of a scientist dedicated to converting all life to human form seems a worthy place to investigate the potential causes and consequences of such an era.

Specifically, this paper addresses the questions: *what do these films reveal about the Western conceptualization of the fundamental difference(s) between "human" and "animal"? What does an understanding of the character of Dr. Moreau reveal about how humans have been able to construct the Anthropocene?*

A Posthuman Perspective on Dr. Moreau

This paper approaches the research questions through a Lacanian psychoanalytic, posthuman critique of the movies' title character, Dr. Moreau. Posthumanism is a paradigm that examines phenomena with consideration to how humans and nonhumans are intertwined and both shape and are shaped by each other (Cavell, Diamond, McDowell, Hacking, & Wolfe, 2008; Haraway, 2016; Wolfe, 2003, 2012). In contrast, humanism is any system of thought that centralizes humanity, privileges the welfare of humans, and focuses on human reason and rationality. Posthumanism is not anti-humanism (Lennard & Wolfe, 2017), nor is it a zoophilic or technophilic method of study. Rather, posthumanism is a deconstruction of humanism that problematizes the sharp distinctions separating "culture" from "nature" and "human" from "other." Posthumanistic studies attempt to de-center the human through acknowledgment that nonhumans, both nonhuman animals and the larger nonhuman world (e.g., technology, landscape), have agency to shape human experience. Further, posthumanism does not isolate the human mind from the body. The paradigm looks at human communication, behaviors, and productions as embodied, lived experiences of human systems interacting with other systems and provides a "mode of understanding of the kind of animal we are" (Diamond, 2008, p. 56).

Posthumanistic studies serve to de-center the human. Derrida's (1993) critiques of the center and telos provide a means to understand both the

character of Dr. Moreau and the role that anthropocentrism plays in the constructing the Anthropocene. The center is the element that gives order to a structure; it gives meanings to its components, designates permissible interactions, cannot be substituted or eliminated, and is located both within and outside of the structure. In Judeo-Christianity, God is such a center: an idea that structures the world and makes up the world yet exists beyond explanation and understanding. *Telos* is the concept of “an end”—a goal, an ultimate. Derrida (1993) asserts that there is no true center and no true end, rather that phenomena exist in free play with one another. However, the human desire to create both centers and telos is ingrained.

Dr. Moreau is a brilliant scientist and physician who discovers a means to temporarily convert living creatures into another species—humans. He positions himself as the arbiter of what it means to be human through his conversions. As a scientist, Moreau needs to define what constitutes “human” so that he has a measure to gauge the success of his experiments on the nonhuman creatures. Moreau has tasked himself not only with the physicality of converting one species to another but also with the ontological distillation of the essence of humanity. The science and technology that afford Moreau the ability to convert the island’s creatures is one matter. The more pressing matter for understanding the Anthropocene is Moreau’s ideological assumptions that guide his use of said science and technology: the belief that humanity is the telos of animalia.

“Man is the present climax of a long process of organic evolution. All animal life is tending toward the human form,” Moreau tells Mr. Parker, a human brought to the island (Paramount Pictures, 1932). Seeing humanity as the apex of evolution, Moreau—as someone able to create “humans”—positions himself as “God-like” (Paramount Pictures, 1932), a “father” to his creations (Pressman & Frankenheimer, 1996), and a savior who elevates “lower” animals (Paramount Pictures, 1932). Moreau seems to believe he is the center of an island on which animals are able to obtain their telos. Although Moreau cannot be a true center, his beliefs and actions are certainly central to the lived experiences of the creatures on the island and therefore need to be examined.

The Ideas of Father Moreau

Lacanian psychoanalysis (e.g., 1977a, 1977b, 1992) is used to examine the character of Dr. Moreau. Lacanian psychoanalysis differs from the more familiar and humanistic Freudian psychoanalysis (often simply referred to “psychoanalysis”) in that Lacan uses psychoanalysis to illuminate how humans exist in and are part of the world. Approaching Dr. Moreau from a Lacanian perspective, the character’s actions and ideas can be seen as interconnected and co-created by the world in which Moreau exists.

Lacan (1977a, 1977b, 1992) states that beings are born into an Imaginary Order. The Imaginary Order is the world of images, in which infants exist

before they obtain language. In the Imaginary Order, individuals live in a state of illusory bliss: they are fulfilled, delighted, and have a sense of completeness. They feel at-one-with the world and, specifically, their mother. This is the order in which all beings—including Dr. Moreau and his creatures—are born. However, human infants differ from other animals because they are developing in a world always already shaped by a second order, The Symbolic Order.

From the Imaginary Order, humans are forced into the Symbolic Order through the acquisition of language. Language forces separateness because it inherently implies a sense of loss: one would not need words if one felt inseparable from the surrounding world. In the Symbolic Order, individuals learn of their separateness from the world, most significantly from their mother, and their sense of fulfillment is forever lost. This is the birthplace of the unconscious (Evans, 1996; Lacan, 1977a, 1977b, 1992).

Important in the Symbolic Order are the themes of the father and The Law. For Lacan, the father is the figure that divides the infant from the mother and introduces the infant to the rules the infant will obey and the roles the infant will play in the world. These rules and roles create The Law, the fundamental principles of all social relations (Evans, 1996). The Law is fundamentally linguistic and essentially human (Lacan, 1977a). For Lacan (1977a), The Law is what separates humans from nonhuman animals because it instills in humans a code that regulates, and may contradict, “natural” impulses. For example, marriage is a construct regulating, among other things, human sexuality and is made enforceable by a linguistic contract (Evans, 1996). The Law is created in the Symbolic Order, and the Symbolic Order is comprised of society’s ideologies.

Having previously been brought into the Symbolic Order himself, Moreau is both a product of and a forceful (re)producer of the Symbolic Order. In failing to consider the creatures he converts as subjects of their own lives, Moreau’s anthropocentric ideology places them within the realm of objects, reinforcing a system of ethics entwined with the Anthropocene—that “nature” is something to be acted upon and best understood in terms of human value. Further, Moreau reinforces the connection of civilization with the masculine and nature with the feminine; thus, in positioning himself as “the creator,” Moreau can be seen as an embodiment of Lacan’s father: violently bringing the creatures into the Symbolic Order through his conversions in the laboratory, aptly called the House of Pain, and maintaining his authority through The Law. In a bit of irony, the terror of Moreau’s transformations was professed by the Sayer of the Law, whose role was to keep the other creatures educated in and governed by Moreau’s Law. “You! You made us in the House of Pain! You made us things! Not men! Not beasts! Part man, part beast! Things,” proclaimed the Sayer of the Law (Paramount Pictures, 1932). Perhaps more horrifying, the violent thrust into the Symbolic Order is a

recursive process for the creatures, as no single conversion is permanent and requires maintenance to persist.

“That Is the Law. Are We Not Men?”

As the father, Dr. Moreau uses the language of The Law to tell his creations what they are not: beasts. The Law tells the creatures how to perform human by not performing animal. In psychoanalysis, The Law “is in fact no more and no less than the Symbolic Order itself” (Evans, 1996, p. 99). Moreau’s law separates humans from other animals, removing humans from the natural world and re-enforcing the idea of humanity as telos; thus, The Law serves as a means to Moreau’s envisioned end. In the 1932 and 1977 films (Paramount Pictures, 1996; Steloff, Temple-Smith, & Taylor, 1977), The Law was the same:

Dr. Moreau: What is the law?

Sayer of the Law: Not to eat meat, that is the law.

Are we not men?

Creatures (in unison): Are we not men?

Dr. Moreau: What is the law?

Sayer of the Law: Not to go on all fours, that is the law.

Are we not men?

Creatures (in unison): Are we not men?

Dr. Moreau: What is the law?

Sayer of the Law: Not to spill blood, that is the law.

Are we not men?

Creatures (in unison): Are we not men?

In the 1996 film, The Law is elaborated,

We all want to walk on all fours, to suck up drink from stream, to jabber, to go snuffling at the earth and claw at bark of trees, to eat flesh or fish, to make love to more than one. These are all bad things. These are not things that men do. (Pressman & Frankenheimer, 1996)

This Law gets no closer to understanding what it means to be human; rather, it only provides more examples of what humanity is not. A function of The Law is to provide the foundational principles of society that make co-existence possible (Lacan, 1992), and yet Dr. Moreau’s Law only provides the most surface-level, superficial instruction.

“We Have the Same Biology, Regardless of Ideology”

“It is one of the functions of ideology to ‘naturalize’ social reality, to make it seem as innocent and unchangeable as Nature itself” (Eagleton, 1996, p. 117). Ideologies reveal what is acceptable and what is not, sense and nonsense, reason and madness, and central and marginal (Eagleton, 1996). Dr. Moreau’s role as both a product and producer of the Symbolic Order warrants an investigation into the system of ideas in Moreau’s world(s). If the

Anthropocene is defined by the impact of humanity, then an understanding of the ideologies guiding humanity is necessary. Moreau's Law and actions reveal ideological beliefs that construct the conceptual boundaries between "human" and "animal."

What Is Acceptable vs. What Is Not

Dr. Moreau's Law reveals little of what is acceptable and focuses, instead, on what is not acceptable. The most extensive version of the Law, found in the newest of the three films, reveals that animals are not to walk on all fours, suck up drink from stream, jabber, snuffle at the earth, claw at trees, eat flesh or fish, or make love to more than one (Pressman & Frankenheimer, 1996). At a minimum, this means performing human consists of possessing the ability to walk on two feet, drinking from a container, speaking properly, avoiding playing in nature, avoiding harming nature, being vegetarian, and being monogamous. Singer (1975) addressed how checklists of performing humanity ultimately reveal attitudes of speciesism (prejudice or discrimination based on species membership), as they do not hold up under scrutiny. For example, many humans eat meat, and several species of animals are herbivorous. Yet, it is doubtful Moreau, or anyone else, would see a person consuming steak and a sheep grazing grass and proclaim the sheep to be more humanlike.

Dr. Moreau seems more aligned with the father of psychoanalysis, Freud, than a fellow natural scientist, Darwin, in his understanding of *Homo sapiens*. Freud describes the origin of law, governing what it means to perform human, as being a sacrifice of animality. When humans engaged in "organic repression," we both broke free of and were uplifted from our animal origins. From that repression of the animal, moral behavior could emerge. However, as evidenced in the above dissection of Moreau's conception of humanity, we see that when people look for chasms of distinction between human and animal, for hallmarks of enacting humanity, we fall short. As Wolfe (2012) states, "'man' has to *already* exist to find that which is repugnant and in need of repression and thus to rise above it, Freud's search for the origin of law simultaneously marks its own impossibility" (p. 9). Moreau's ideology reveals it is acceptable to cherry pick principles of Darwinian evolution: Moreau sees we are continuous with all other life forms physiologically but rejects continuity with other life forms in mentality or emotionality.

Sense vs. Nonsense

It is through his actions that Dr. Moreau reveals what makes sense in the ideology of his island. For example, after Moreau converts a bear to a human, the "new human" is subjected to a test. The just-converted human has to walk past a caged bear; this catches the "new human's" attention, and

he stops to acknowledge the bear. When the caged bear licks the hand of the “new human,” Moreau whips the “new human” (for having a connection with the bear) and proclaims angrily, “You are human! You are human” (Steloff et al., 1977). His creation failed to assimilate to the doctor’s Symbolic Order. Although not spelled out in his Law, an ability to connect with animals reveals one to be more unified with nature than is allowable—or possible—in Moreau’s Symbolic Order. Given the inability to exchange thoughts via language, an affinity for nonhuman animals could reveal a person to be more sensitive to nonverbal communication and to intersubjectivity. This privileging of images and connection with nonhuman others belongs in the Imaginary Order. For Moreau, affinity for nonhuman animals is infantile gibberish, nonsense.

Reason vs. Madness

For Dr. Moreau, reason is progress; it is the use of speech to create society and laws. The pity and empathy exhibited by the protagonist—a shipwrecked foreigner on Dr. Moreau’s island—are understood by Moreau to be personality traits of madness. Moreau scolds the protagonist for his concern for the “new humans.” Pity is a hurdle to reason, to the progress of making animals human, according to Moreau (Steloff et al., 1977).

Dr. Moreau’s ideas illustrate Nietzschean philosophy. It is through the Will to Power that humans can move *beyond human* or superhuman, *Übermensch* (Nietzsche, 1883/1999). Thus, Moreau seeks to establish another “uplift”—the raising of lower humans (those chiefly concerned with compassion) to higher human status (those who can overcome compassion to focus on science and progress). If compassion is a stumbling block to making animals human, then compassion must be an animal trait. Logic should take precedence over emotion.

Central vs. Marginal

Language, discussed further in the next section, is revealed to be the central feature of humanity for Moreau. Other aspects—using tools, standing upright—are marginal. The spoken word is privileged above all other abilities (Eagleton, 1996).

The centrality of verbal language is revealed in a scene in which Dr. Moreau decides to temporarily convert the protagonist, this time named Andrew Braddock, into an animal (Steloff et al., 1977). The doctor needs Mr. Braddock to enter an animal state so that when he becomes human again, he can report what he knew, felt, and thought. Although this is Moreau’s first attempt to convert a human into a (nonhuman) animal, he has some clear expectations of what Braddock will experience when he becomes animal: (a) his way of thinking will change; he will begin thinking in images; (b) words will become meaningless; and (c) he will lose control over his emotions (Steloff et al., 1977).

Dr. Moreau's contemplation of what will happen as Braddock becomes animal illuminates a great deal. Dr. Moreau indicates that animals live in the Imaginary Order, the world of images. Further, as adults, that Imaginary Order is marginal to our human existence. Images have been superseded by words, and it is the Symbolic Order—the world of words—that allows one to control emotions, and controlling emotions is what distinguishes reason from madness. This positions language as the hallmark of the Symbolic Order.

Surface vs. Depth

For Dr. Moreau, the physical attributes of humanity are superficial. “Human” is less distinguished from “animal” by visible differences (e.g., hands and feet, less body hair) than by language. “If in my tinkering, I have fallen short of the human form by the odd snout, claw, or hoof, it is really of no great import,” he says (Pressman & Frankenheimer, 1996). Consistent with the Symbolic Order, once one enters the Symbolic Order, signs hold greater importance than images. Language and the rule of law are the hallmarks of the uniquely human Symbolic Order. Bringing animals into the Symbolic Order by imparting language and rules on them makes them human. On the island of Moreau, biology and genetics say less about humanity than symbol systems do.

Language: Talking Heads

Eagleton (1996) helps make sense of the role of language in Moreau's conceptualization of humanity. He writes that humans are both defined and limited by their signs: words. We use language to construct our concepts of self, but because there is no inherent meaning in language, we are not fully represented in the words we use to describe ourselves. Language envelops and eludes us. All language can offer is a way to understand what one is not. At the same time, we are logophilic, clinging to the words that separated us from the state of bliss experienced in the Imaginary Order. Language can be used to distance “ourselves from our sense of own bodily life and our capacity to respond to and imagine the bodily life of other” (Diamond, 2008, p. 53). Because the modern alphabet has no sensorial reference point—for example, the word *water* has no visual or audible connection to the material substance of water, unlike picto- and ideograms of the past—language serves to turn humanity's focus inward, toward its own abstract representation of the Earth (Abram, 1996).

It was not until the 1996 film that speaking in words (instead of “jabbering”) was added to *The Law*. Although this might indicate that the two earlier representations of Dr. Moreau found walking upright to be a greater hallmark of humanity than speaking, evidence from the earlier films suggests otherwise. The 1932 Moreau positions giving animals speech as his great accomplishment. The 1977 Moreau distinguishes the population

on the island between people and “creatures without human speech,” and says that humans were chosen above all animals and given speech. Further, the principal sign that a creature was regressing from human back toward its former species is that words would begin to lose meaning. It seems that for these two interpretations of Moreau, phonocentric ideology—that speech is the rigid boundary between humans and other animals—was so all-consuming that he did not think to include it in *The Law* (Eagleton, 1996; Derrida & Wills, 2002). It was a given that if a creature could speak like a human, it would.

Consistent with Lacan’s Symbolic Order, Dr. Moreau believes words structure our thoughts and even our unconscious. Because the sense of self is constructed through words (Eagleton, 1996), it is a frightening thought to lose words, to lose one’s self, even to return to a seeming state of bliss in the Imaginary Order. Once an “I” has been constructed, a return to the Imaginary Order is impossible.

When Dr. Moreau performs the procedure to turn Braddock from human to animal, Braddock expresses anger, horror, and fear. Moreau labels Braddock’s expression of anger as a sign that he is becoming animal. Further, Moreau denies Braddock food. Once sufficiently hungry, the doctor offers Braddock a live rat as a test: will he take the rat, eat it, and therefore confirm his status as an animal? At first, it seems Braddock will take the live rat, but he stops himself: his refusal to kill and eat the rat confirms his identity as human. After refusing to accept the rat as his dinner, Braddock engages in what is, for the ideology of Moreau, the ultimate act of humanity—he tells Moreau a story from his childhood. For Moreau, humans are *Homo narrans*, and storytelling is a quintessentially human act (Fisher, 1984; Niles, 1999). Mortified at his failure to change Braddock into an animal, Moreau yells, “Damn it, Braddock! Let go [of your humanity]! Let go” (Steloff et al., 1977).

Again, language is shown to be the crown jewel of human authority, the seat of distinction between human and animal (Derrida & Wills, 2002). Language is not only what sets humans apart but is also a prerequisite for consideration and compassion (even if compassion is considered “madness” on the island). The protagonist encounters many caged animals and hears many animal cries of pain before he learns of the doctor’s experiments. However, the ethical line for him is crossed when he is able to speak to the new humans. “Those poor things out there in the jungle, those animals, they talk” (Paramount Pictures, 1932).

Words arise because something needs to be expressed, which means there is something lacking (Lacan, 1992). One asks for a drink of water because one is thirsty. According to Lacan, language creates the ultimate sense of missing—the realization that one’s unity to a caregiver is gone—and is also the tool that will forever be employed to try, futilely, to fulfill that emptiness.

The implications of privileging language as the boundary between human and animal is problematic for two reasons. First, like the issues presented by Moreau's laws, it raises many questions about the humanity of *Homo sapiens*. "Whatever criteria we choose, we will have to admit that they do not follow precisely the boundary of our own species," writes Singer (1975, p. 19). If spoken word is the hallmark, then what are the implications for someone who is an infant or unable to speak because of psychological or physiological reasons? Does Dr. Moreau's ideology consider them nonhuman animals? If it is decided that the ability to speak is not an important marker and that of course the non-speaking person qualifies as a human animal, then the importance of the "speaking" marker as a distinguishing feature has just been negated. What, then, is the next boundary?

Second, human language is an anthropocentric, logophilic conception of communication that does not hold up under scrutiny (Derrida & Wills, 2002; Kulick, 2017). Modern language is anthropocentric because it is built on an alphabet that systematically removed nature from its characters and substituted abstract, human-created characters (Abram, 1996). For example, a pictogram may draw a series of arches to represent a mountain chain, and an ideogram may use a jaguar to represent speed. Both the pictogram and ideogram have natural, earthly reference points. The Semitic alphabet, though more abstract than picto- and ideograms, still maintained a connection to the natural world. For example, the first letter, aleph, was depicted as an oxen head, as aleph was the Hebrew word for ox. The Greek alphabet took the letter, turned it over so that it no longer resembled an ox head, and called it *alpha*, which had no nongrammatological meaning, no earthly connection (Abram, 1996).

Language—though symbolic—both constructs lived reality and stems from biological reality. Lacan wrote of the distinction between the symbolic (e.g., father/authority figures) and the real (e.g., one's biologic father) (Evans, 1996). Humans may have created the Symbolic Order through their abstract symbol system; however, humans do possess a biological, real capacity to create such a symbol system. Variation found in the human FOXP2 gene, a gene significantly related to speech and language development, is associated with the human brain being wired for complex communication, including speech and language (Enard et al., 2002). However, the presence of FOXP2 proteins in most species (e.g., other mammals, songbirds, reptiles, and fish) suggests the difference between human and nonhuman animal communication is in degree rather than kind, perhaps best evidenced in the calls of songbirds or echolocation of bats, each with variations on the FOXP2 gene (Li, Wang, Rossiter, Jones, & Zhang, 2007; Wohlgemuth, Adam, & Scharff, 2014). Moving beyond the FOXP2 gene, social animals are known to share information about their group and their surroundings, such as the dance of the honeybee or the unknown mechanism through which schools of fish act in synchrony. This communication has been shown to extend even

to creating specific cultures in orcas, crows, and primates (de Waal, 2016). Given the problematic issues of making language the great divide, it is no surprise that the boundary between human and animal falls apart in each film, and language alone is insufficient to maintain Dr. Moreau's power. In each telling, Moreau resorts to brute physicality to enforce The Law: a whip, electrodes, threats of returning the creatures to the House of Pain. The contradiction of a person needing to resort to physical violence to make creatures live a non-violent life seems to elude the doctor.

Dr. Moreau “Is Dead”

In each of the films, Dr. Moreau's power is contested when the creatures discover that the doctor himself does not abide by The Law, thus de-centering him (Derrida, 1993). Moreau either orders one creature to kill a human (Paramount Pictures, 1932), kills a human himself (Steloff et al., 1977), or is revealed to have been “correcting” his “children” by implanted transmitters that allow him to administer painful shocks (Pressman & Frankenheimer, 1996). Violating The Law causes Moreau's association with the center to weaken (Derrida, 1993), leading to two realizations for the creatures: (a) The Law was an inaccurate depiction of what it means to be human; and (b) if The Law is demonstrative of the *telos*, then humanity is not the *telos*. Thus, the law created by the center is revealed to be false, and so the center itself is shown to be false (Derrida, 1993). This realization enables the creatures to question their existence and Moreau's “right” of power. Like any subject of power, they come to understand that they have been acted upon, but they also contain the agency to act (Foucault, 1982).

Lacan (1997a) wrote of a third order, the Real, which exists beyond the Symbolic Order. In the Real, there is no absence (e.g., no sense of lacking), and there is no differentiation between self and nonself. The Real is what exists outside language and outside of symbolization. The Real is impossible to imagine and impossible to integrate because the Symbolic Order—the world of words—has ruptured the Real (Evans, 1996). The Real links us to our brute physicality (Evans, 1996), our biology beyond our society. The creatures proclaiming The Law is “no more” (before killing Dr. Moreau) can be seen by the moviegoer as a fantasy: a fantasy of being able to return to a previous state of fulfillment, before language and The Law. Proclaiming the end of the law could also be a fantastical notion of having traversed the Symbolic, transcended the Law and reaching the Real. The creatures seem to believe that killing the divider will either reunite them with their Imaginary Order selves or enable them to reach the realm of the Realm. Can the act of the creatures ending The Law, thus rejecting Symbolic Order, enable entrance to the Real? This is an unimaginable question to we who still exist in the “world of things.” According to Lacan (1977a, 1997b, 1992), after an individual is brought into the Symbolic Order, one is changed; there can be no return to a fictive state of paradise in which one once lived. Ending

Moreau's life is an act of struggle against The Law and the ideology imposed on them; also, it is a struggle enacted against the closest entity representing that power (Foucault, 1982).

The question that the three movies do not answer is whether either a return to the Imaginary Order or ascendance to the Real is possible for the creatures. When they revert back to their animal-selves without further treatments from the doctor, will the adulterated sense of self prevail or will they be able to return to their natural state in the Imaginary Order? Lacan (1977a) states that humans, even as they develop in the Imaginary, are always already exposed to the Symbolic; they are being raised in the Symbolic world of humans by parents who have already been brought into the Symbolic. The nonhuman animals of the island, before Moreau, lived in a world without the Symbolic Order. Has their exposure to Symbolic Order left them forever changed? Will their futures be always already determined by their exposure to The Law? How deep does the animals' exposure to humanity run? In sum, what the movies do not show us is what an end to the Anthropocene might look like.

Regardless of the Order they find themselves in, Dr. Moreau, the self-appointed organizing and orienting center of the island, has been killed, abolished, de-centered. Whenever a center is diminished, the possible play within a structure has changed (Derrida, 1993). "To go on two legs is very hard. Perhaps four is better, anyway. We have to be as we are . . . not as father tried to make us," says The Sayer of the Law following Moreau's death (Pressman & Frankenheimer, 1996).

Are We Not Animals?

Less drastically than Moreau, the critique offered in this paper can be applied to all humans, who are simultaneously created by and (re)creating the Symbolic Order. Lacan (1992) states that it is through language that people learn what they are not. Once children start to obtain words, they are told what they are (e.g., a girl) and what they are not (e.g., a boy). They are the child (not in power), not the parent (the one in power). Words tell people all the things they are not and all the things they cannot do. One of the taken-for-granted "cannot"s is that it is impossible for people to "talk" to animals. Derrida and Wills (2002) claim that Western society has privileged language as the great divide—an insurmountable boundary—between humans and other animals. Kulick (2017) agrees and states that research seeking to address human-nonhuman animal communication faces an uphill battle because it challenges human uniqueness. Further, attempts to teach nonhuman animals human language—often through signing, as with Koko the gorilla—fail because the assumption that "language" means "human language/speech" does not consider the breadth of definitions available for "language" (Kulick, 2017). When we fail to grasp in other life forms

the foundations of our own language, we reject our animality and the role of evolution in our development, and we (re)create the Symbolic Order.

Where Do We Go from Here?: Staying with the Trouble of the Irreparable

The ideology depicted in the Dr. Moreau narrative offers an insight into the Anthropocene. The evidence for a geologic era defined by the presence of humanity includes the significant amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the alteration of other element cycles (e.g., nitrogen), the modification of terrestrial water cycles, and Earth being in its sixth major extinction (and the first caused by a biological species) (Steffen et al., 2011). The Anthropocene may be labeled as such due to the negative effects humans have had on the environment, but Moreau's conceit of human uniqueness fosters the kind of thinking that allows humanity to ignore the natural consequences of its actions. If humans are exceptional and superior, then the Earth exists to benefit humanity.

The story of Dr. Moreau reveals the irreparable threat of extinction, a supreme crime against nature (Cox, 1982). By converting various species to *Homo sapien*-esque creatures, Moreau is engineering the extinction of biodiversity on his island. Conceiving humanity as the ultimate goal of all life forms, Moreau threatens the loss of all uniqueness: the loss of a complex human language, for it cannot be notable if it is universal; the loss of aesthetics offered by diverse life forms; the loss of a functioning ecosystem, dependent on the evolution of its natural inhabitants; and the loss of an opportunity to understand better the evolution of humanity by studying the behaviors, anatomies, and physiologies of nonhuman animals in their natural states.

All three films maintain the premise that Dr. Moreau's procedures are not permanent and that without further intervention, the creatures will revert back to their nonhuman animal form. This part of the narrative offers hope, the opportunity for the knowledge of the consequences of the irreparable (Cox, 1982) to persuade Moreau to make a different choice.

If humans are always already shaped by the Symbolic Order, how do any of us, let alone Dr. Moreau, go about making choices different from those that have lead us to the Anthropocene? Haraway (2016) suggests that language can be a path out of our current ecological trouble, starting with abandoning the title of the Anthropocene. In rejecting the title, Haraway does not dispute the impact humans have had on Earth and other species; rather, she suggests the title is problematic because it serves to install humanity as Earth's center. In its place, she recommends titling the current era the Chthulucene, named for a spider that builds its web in the trunks of redwood trees.

The Chthulucene can be envisioned as an era in which the interspecies hierarchy is flattened, and all lives are understood to be interwoven, interdependent, and symbiotic (Haraway, 2016). One method Haraway suggests for accomplishing the Chthulucene is maintaining mindfulness of

our language. Given the power of language to shape our reality, “It matters the ideas we use to think other ideas” (Haraway, 2016, p. 34). Haraway does not shy away from new vocabulary (e.g., *response-ability*, for cultivating an ecology of practices; *sym-poiesis*, for collectively producing systems) when the existing vocabulary falls short of capturing her intent. A second method to bring about the Chthulucene is “making kin,” or extending our web of relations beyond not only our own ancestry but also our own species. Haraway reveals this possibility by reminding us, “All earthlings are kin in the deepest sense” (Haraway, 2016, p. 161).

The Chthulucene is a counter to the Anthropocentric speciesism that led us to the Anthropocene and Dr. Moreau to his island. Moreau brings his creatures into an existence that is founded on the two co-dependent beliefs that species can be sorted into hierarchies and that humans are the peak of the species pyramid. That belief system proves to be his undoing. Moreau, a product of the Symbolic Order, *could* be a mirror image of ourselves. However, we have the (response)ability to think other thoughts.

Conclusion

Dr. Moreau’s worldview is not an outdated mindset but one that exists today in the transhuman belief that the human race can evolve beyond its current limitations through technological advancement (Hauskeller, 2017). Some transhumanists argue there is a moral imperative to help animals transcend their limitations and “uplift” them to a human-like existence (Hauskeller, 2017).

Dr. Moreau is a fictive character, which makes for a more comfortable critique of his actions. Reality, on the other hand, is difficult; it is difficult to acknowledge the horror of what we do to nonhuman animals, and it is horrific how we blur it from our consciousness (Diamond, 2008). In reality, many species have already come and gone, have been lost due to anthropogenic extinction (Steffen et al., 2011). Seeing the consequences of human actions, however, there is an opportunity to avoid Moreau’s fate. We can think different thoughts, use different words, and see different images than Moreau. By acknowledging the inseparable interdependence of all earthlings, we can come down from our perilous position atop the species hierarchy we created. Once our species is able to leave the confines of the prison of searching for uniqueness, perhaps it will allow the Anthropocene to come to an end.

Lacan (1977b) states that repetition is not a behavior determined by habit or learned from experience. Rather, what gets repeated is what a person has failed to grasp, has yet to reconcile. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* has been re-told many times. It is time we grasp this story, so it need not be told, again.

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