

**‘The stubborn beast-flesh grows day by day back again’: Transhumanist Becomings in H.G.**

**Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.**

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The proposed paper explores the transhumanist potentials of the intersection of the human and the bestial via the cipher of H.G. Wells’s 1896 novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. With its depiction of the surgical transformation of animals into human beings (and their subsequent instability and reversal; “The stubborn beast-flesh grows day by day back again” *Moreau* 74), Wells’s novel is a pioneering transhumanist text which explores conflicts between traditional conceptions of the unitary human being, and the onset of scientific theory and practice which renders the human body mutable. Hence, with its manifold of textual images of “beast-people” presented in a scientific context, Wells’s novel provides opportunities to explore questions pertaining to human and animal identities. These explorations are performed via the concept of “becoming-animal” as defined in the writings of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the critical emphasis being upon the nature of Doctor Moreau’s experiments themselves which demonstrate “the study of the plasticity of living forms” (*Moreau* 69). For Deleuze and Guattari, animals serve to rupture notions of identity and sameness; becoming-animal does not mean imitation and should not be thought of as mere identification with an animal, nor is it a psychoanalytic regression or an evolutionary progression, as these ways of relating to the animal attribute to it a fixed identity that lies beyond becoming and change. The hybrid human/animal creations that are the subject of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* allow us to pursue this line of enquiry, facilitating the questioning as to what ‘other’ that the animals become, the risks and consequences of their becoming, and ultimately, what their becomings teach us. To this end, it is demonstrated how *The Island of Doctor Moreau*’s shapeshifting forms can be read in terms of philosophical issues of human/animal transformation (both literal and ideological), and how such issues can be explored and unified through the concept of becoming-animal.

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