

**THE HOUSE OF PAIN**  
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*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 Fish or Flesh; that is the Law. Are we not men?*  
*Not to claw the Bark of Trees; that is the Law. Are we not men?*  
*Not to chase other Men; that is the Law. Are we not men?*

In 1896, P. Chalmers Mitchell wrote a review of H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, disparaging the body horror of the novel: "It is the blood that Mr. Wells insists upon forcing on us [...] physically disgusting details inevitable in the most conservative surgery; but still more unworthy of restrained art". Today, it would be relatively easy to dismiss *The Island of Dr. Moreau* as an outdated novel, where the figure of the mad scientist betraying nature and tampering with bodies is overtaken by the natural course of events. Where the Victorian morality embodied by Prendick, the narrator, seems quite fragile.

*Frankenstein, The Island of Dr Moreau, Dr Jekyll and Mister Hyde* - all created at a time of intense technological and societal change - seem to reflect a cautionary tale against hubris. There are echoes of Icarus. But also, ultimately, a certain conservatism with regard to what everyone must or should be-remain. The devil is in the details, and equivocality underlies this exhibition project.

P. Chalmers Mitchell's review incriminates a novel in which the representation of surgery appears as a transgression. It responds to the stupefaction that presides over this novel: Darwinism. Not in the sense of competition, but in the sense that your species is not fixed – not in the deep time. All categories of representation then become blurred.

At first, Prendick believes that Dr. Moreau is animalizing humans. He is somewhat reassured by the fact that he uplifts (1) animals. Like a technutopist project. But the traces of animality on these new humans constantly trouble him, reminiscent of the uncanny valley phenomenon. This phenomenon is reversed at the end of the novel, as the narrator sees these same traces all over London, in all passers-by, to the point where he is forced into autarkic exile in the countryside. But above all, there is the pain, the vivisection, the constant impossibility of being in one's own body - in motion. When questioned by Prendick, Dr. Moreau refutes the argument. Pain is merely a relic of animal existence. In front of Prendick, he stabs himself in the leg with a knife and expresses nothing.

Prendick will have allies, enemies and relationships among the Beast Folks. None of them will do anything as ultimately inhuman as this self-mutilation gesture to prove a point. In a way, Dr. Moreau is also the embodiment of another chilling discovery of the time - and still today - the superego and the unconscious.

127 years after this novel, which seems like an uchrony because it is so close in certain respects, The House of Pain exhibition aims to bring together artists and works that question the plasticity of the human body.

(1) The notion of uplift - the first occurrence of which was in *L'île du Dr Moreau* - was to have an important speculative following in science fiction (cf. David Brin).