Throughout this course, a recurring theme has been the conflict between science and its predecessors, religion and magic. While science is usually cast as the diametric opposite of the mystical forces, there may be a closer relationship between science and magic than meets the eye at first. By comparing literary practitioners of science and magic, one may observe the common ground between the two forces. Furthermore, once this relationship is established, one may even extrapolate and infer something about the nature of magic in the mundane world.

Dr. Moreau, of H. G. Wells’ The Island of Dr. Moreau, is closely associated with science, but it would only take a small shift in perception to view him as a magician. Oliver Haddo, of W. Somerset Maugham’s The Magician, defined magic as “the art of employing consciously invisible means to produce visible effects” (Maugham 34). As the most accomplished practitioner of magic encountered during the course, his definition certainly carries the most weight. There is nothing in this definition that does not also describe Moreau. Certainly, the most obvious accomplishment of Moreau’s is the physical change of form from animal to humanoid. This is hardly magical, as it represents the visible means of surgery affecting the visible result of shape. Moreau’s magic is in the more subtle means used to affect the Beast Folk’s behavior.
Having changed animals into humanoids, Moreau then begins his real work - suppressing their animal instincts. To this end, he uses hypnotism and religious awe, both of which are quite invisible. According to Wells, hypnotism is the means Moreau uses for “replacing old inherent instincts by new suggestions” (76). This is surely not the Vegas lounge act, swinging watch chain, “you-are-getting-sleepy…act like a chicken” type of hypnotism portrayed by mainstream media. Consider Milton Erickson’s hypnotherapy: duplicating the subject’s breathing, vocal tonality, posture, and expression in order to create rapport (“History of Ericksonian Hypnosis,” 2007). In this altered state of rapport, the subject is more prone to suggestion. In theory, once this rapport is established, the practitioner can then make subtle changes to his own physiology, which the subject will unconsciously mimic. To the casual observer, nothing has transpired, but the practitioner has used forces that simply weren’t perceivable or measurable in Moreau’s time. No one in the modern day would deny the existence of breathing patterns, vocal tone and timbre, or other subtleties. At the turn of the century, however, it would simply go by unnoticed. Thus, the invisible power of hypnotism affects the very visible behavior of the animal in human shape.

Moreau’s most effective weapon is the power of religious awe, which he uses to reinforce moral education in his creations. He openly admits that moral education of any kind is “modification and perversion of instinct” (Wells 76), so his goal for the use of religion is clearly exposed. He claims to be “a religious man…as every sane man must be” (Wells 77), so he is familiar with the effect that religion has on the suppression of instincts in humans. He only needs to connect a few mental dots to imagine the effect it would have on his Beast Folk. It is brilliantly simple to use the force that he is …
Works Cited


