

"EXPERIMENTS IN STATEMENT";
THE THEME OF MAN'S INSTINCTUAL LIFE
IN SELECTED WRITINGS BY H.G. WELLS.

by

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ABSTRACT

In the General Introduction to the Atlantic Edition Wells defines his work as "experiments in statement". This study works forward from a consideration of Wells as a "philosophe of the Darwinian Age" (H.G. Wells and the World State, Wagar) and of his concept of the temporary 'experiment' of evolution to a textual analysis of his literary experiment, which he assumed was doomed to a similar impermanence.

The primary metaphysic which emerges from Wells's scientific background, the "philosophical meat and drink" (Wagar) derived from Darwin and Huxley, is a recognition of the vulnerability of human nature, composed as it is of an acquired "moral sense", and a recognition also of an inbred instinctual life, a kind of biological stain with its source in man's animal origins. The artificial nature of human evolution therefore makes it imperative to face squarely the dangers of atavism and the spectre of devolution. Wells never can free himself from this realisation of a biological original sin, and his consequent pessimism and doubt in fact make Wells more anti-Utopian than Utopian, as Van Wyck Brooks suggested as early as 1915, and as Anthony West stated more precisely in a now seminal article written in 1957.

The literary experiment which Wells initiated to express this "urgency within" ranges from the early science-romances to the more patent allegories of the late Thirties. The three main texts chosen for discussion cover the entire period, and therefore emphasise a continuity of theme: The Island of Dr. Moreau (1896), Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island (1928), and The Croquet Player (1936). They also emphasize the general movement

from metaphor to discourse, apparent as Wells feels a more urgent need to transmit his message and to educate. This selection, however, also makes clear the constant qualities of Wells's imaginative writing, the reliance on myth, and the variation of allegorical technique, and in this respect the last two texts — largely ignored by commentators — are deliberately put before the reader for fresh consideration, as evidence that Wells's creative spirit did not necessarily die on dates specified by normative critics. Certain concepts recur throughout these works, and in related texts. For example there is the use of the island myth; of the psychic journey which uncovers man's primitive origins; and of the reality of a pre-historical threat in the present world of war and injustice.

Brief concluding remarks indicate the further treatment of the theme of man's instinctual life, aside from the fantasy and the allegory. This treatment occurs in the roman à thèse, in which contemporary man in realistic situations meets the same threat, unearthing the same damning evidence of his dual nature.

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A Note on Editions

The only fully authoritative edition of Wells's work is the Atlantic Edition, published between 1924 and 1927 by Scribner in New York and by Unwin in London, and personally supervised in all its stages by Wells, who wrote a General Introduction and a Preface to each volume. This Edition is used here but where more accessible editions of individual texts are available these are employed in preference.

1. Introduction.

... the writer confesses his profound disbelief in any perfect or permanent work of art. All art, all science, and still more certainly all writing are experiments in statement [my italics] More in these collected volumes are fantasy, fiction, discussion and stated case, all openly and deliberately experimental, all in essence sketches and trials. This edition is a diary of imaginations and ideas much more than a set display, the record of a life lived in a time of great readjustment rather than of creative achievement.¹

This illuminating passage from Wells's own reevaluation of his career, written for the collected edition of 1924-7, goes a long way to explain the literary phenomenon of a major twentieth century figure. It may be immediately recognized as one of many such impatient statements, about the role of the writer as artist, expressed through caricature, banter and discussion in many of his fictional writings,² and with more precision and elaboration in an article like "The Contemporary Novel",³ but perhaps no more succinctly than in his final letter to Henry James: "I had rather be called a journalist than an artist, that is the essence of it"⁴

Readers and critics may well beg to differ on terms Wells uses to describe his corpus, "sketches and trials", "diary", as they may seem to belittle individual works and groups within his very considerable literary remains. Despite Wells's confidence in the definition of his epitaph, here and on other occasions, the judgement cannot suffice. He seems unprepared and unconcerned to separate the "gold" from the "base metal",⁵ a task which has been eagerly undertaken by a number of critics, with increasing range and scholarship, since his death in 1946. That which Wells himself valued

most in his own work, the novel of ideas — "must the characters in our British and American novels be forevermore cleaned of thought as a rabbit is of its bowels, before they can be served up for consumption?"⁶ — grew increasingly obsolete as the style of Joyce, Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf began to demand attention, and his own work of that kind is today generally regarded as of literary historical interest only.⁷

However unsatisfactory and unacceptable Wells's general statements about art and his particular comments on his writing may seem to be, both at this time of survey (1925), and subsequently to the end of his career, there still remains one accurate and predictable definition of his own composition: "experiments in statement". The "fantasy, fiction, discussion and stated case, all openly and deliberately experimental" is adequately descriptive of his work to this date, and beyond. What he in fact produced, in toto, was a melting-pot of genres, an amazing range of prose narratives and expositions, each item in this range, in some particular, "experimental". And many, but by no means all, of these "sketches and trials" were doomed to the impermanence the terms suggest, and the impermanence Wells seemed to take for granted. The reasons for this attitude to his writing craft are bound up with his own scientific training and his own cosmic view. He was a child of the age of Darwin,⁸ and a student of Darwin's most prominent interpreter, T.H. Huxley. His view of his own existence and that of his fellow man was primarily an acceptance of the accident of his being, and a "profound scepticism about man's knowledge of final reality".⁹ His training and philosophical grounding were deeply embedded and remained a primary influence throughout his life,

as this examination will show with more application at a later point.¹⁰ Suffice it to say that the Wells who "... believed himself ... a temporary device of skin, bones, arteries and ganglia ... involving consciousness and with certain things to do which no one else could do, but when they were done, he would dissolve into dust, finished beyond any hope of resurrection",¹¹ could find no use for "the set and deliberate and dignified work of art the processional dignity of such a collection as that of the works of Henry James".¹² The experimental nature of life as he saw it, and of his own existence, was reflected in his attitude to writing. It was, too, the quality of life, in the biological and anthropological sense, and in the context of human social systems — a concern with evolution, with the possibility of devolution, and with the process of change in general¹³ — which constituted the broad content of his "statement". Professor Isaacs, in his evaluation of Wells's place in twentieth century thought and literature, refers specifically to Experiment in Autobiography as "the autobiography, not merely of an individual, but of a process".¹⁴ This can apply to his work as a whole: a record of process, viewed as such by the 'experimenter'.

The turning point in Wells's literary output is generally regarded as 1910, the year of The History of Mr. Polly and the year before The New Machiavelli.¹⁵ The preceding fifteen years gave us the early science-romances, the short stories, and the social comedies — the surviving, the accepted Wells. Thereafter came the roman à thèse, and the increasing commitment to a universal education programme, both in the pedagogical sense with The Outline of History (1920), The Science of Life (1931), and The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind (1932), and in the

area of political and social commentary, with an ever-watchful eye over the progress and the fate of man. The latter is best represented in Warren Wagar's excellent anthology, H.G. Wells: Journalism and Prophecy, 1893 - 1946. Yet the fact that this collection draws upon material from his very first publication to his very last, should remind us of something which is too easily ignored. As we must accept that Wells's creative and imaginative spirit did by no means entirely atrophy after 1910, so too must we recognize the persistent quality of logical "statement" and thesis from Select Conversations with an Uncle (1895)¹⁶ and the first two full-length works of fantasy, The Time Machine and The Wonderful Visit, of the same year. Practically all his work involves the presentation of theses -- "experiments in statement". There is considerable variation in the degree of 'experiment' and 'statement', and the subjective element, suggested in the opening quotation by "diary of imaginations and ideas" and "record of a life", is apparent throughout, shaping itself around the questions: "What is the drive in me? What has it got to do with other drives? What has it got to do with the spectacle without?"¹⁷

The final phrase of this passage from the General Introduction synthesises the various concepts of 'experiment' and impermanence in a broad view of his age, in the historical and the literary sense, as "a time of great readjustment rather than creative achievement". Wells is now categorized as a novelist "in transition",¹⁸ and he clearly saw himself as a writer and a world citizen in an often confusing and perilous race "between education and catastrophe" in which there was no time to achieve, only to plan and attempt construction.¹⁹

This planning and attempted construction belong wholly to Wells the Utopist, the political and social dreamer. However, the following discussion is to concern itself in terms of theme with the 'bad dreams' of Wells the anti-Utopist and the reasons for them. The dichotomy of Utopist dream and anti-Utopist nightmare provides a convenient base for an understanding of Wells's thought.²⁰ Eugen Weber, in his article, "The Anti-Utopias of the Twentieth Century",²¹ though surprisingly omitting Wells from his survey, passes useful comment on the Utopia and its converse, as "... the strophe and anti-strophe of a chorus constantly commenting on the doings of man. They continue the long debate between society and the individual, order and anarchy, affirmation and denial, every one of these dangerous if pressed too far and needing an antithesis just as potentially violent."²² Wells may be seen as the choric commentator who shifts in sentiment between these poles, but there is a point reached in our exposure to Wells at which we must identify the more characteristic stand.

The most significant assertion in this context has come from the now seminal article by his son Anthony West in Encounter which defined his father's world as one of despair and nightmare: "He was by nature a pessimist, and he was doing violence to his intuitions and his rational perceptions alike when he asserted in his middle period that mankind could make a better world for itself by an effort of will."²³ This view of Wells's philosophy as a continuum of basic scepticism scarcely altering from the grim romances of the late nineteenth century to the final despairing document, Mind at the End of Its Tether, has since West been variously espoused by all the major commentators, Bernard Bergonzi, Warren Wagar,

David Lodge, Richard Costa, and Mark R. Hillegas.²⁴ West's initial reaction against the view that only near death did Wells abandon a facile optimism in science and human progress, is now a widely accepted thesis and needs little amplification here, but will still serve as a source of basic illustration throughout this introduction.

Bernard Bergonzi, reviewing Warren Wagar's anthology, concludes, in his estimation of the import of Wagar's demonstration of the public Wells: "In fact, as Anthony West has shown, Wells had returned to the haunted scepticism of his youth which had produced The Time Machine and The Island of Dr. Moreau. On this view, Wells's active life as a publicist, educator, and designator of Utopias, which Mr. Wagar's book so amply illustrates, was little more than a prolonged parenthesis."²⁵

The term "prolonged parenthesis" and its application constitute perhaps the most assertive redefinition yet of Wells the Utopist and public educator, or at least of the once popular view of that figure. Leaving aside the actual journalism and pamphleteering, the briefest of surveys of his fictional writings will reveal little clear expression of optimism with regard to man and his future. From The Time Machine with its devastating visions of degeneration to the despicable meanness and triviality of Homo Tewler in You Can't Be Too Careful, there is only the shortlived 'jump the counter' spirit of the pre-war social comedies,²⁶ feebly revived in Bealby (1915), and the painful attempt to deify the Mind of the Race in the final chapter of Mr. Britling Sees It Through (1916), and in God the Invisible King (1917) and The Soul of a Bishop (1917). In The Undying Fire (1919) Job Huss's clinging on to hope is to such a degree desperate that the story

in a final analysis seems to chronicle Man's pitiful state and effectively go no further. As Geoffrey West remarks of this period: "Wells had to make an affirmation of positive belief in purpose lest he should fall into an abyss of despair."²⁷ Desperation is indeed the key note of this and other attempts to prevent a more instinctive judgment from holding sway.

A group of novels written between 1911 and 1915,²⁸ The New Machiavelli (1911), Marriage (1912), The Passionate Friends (1913), and The Research Magnificent (1915), represent an attempt to define the possibility of the education of man as an individual, and lay the basis for a new community of man, to educate him away from waste and disorder. However, the stories of Remington, Trafford, Stratton and Benham are stories of struggle and passion. The heroes are dogged by deficiencies in their own nature, and by the strength of irrational impulses. These novels all have a singular atmosphere, or half-known internal strife and feared truths, and in my final comparison, in the conclusion, I have found it useful to set The New Machiavelli and The Research Magnificent side by side in their essence with the three texts on which my study is based.

The Twenties is very much the decade of The Outline of History (1920) and of Wells as a kind of world teacher. His most remembered piece of fiction from this period — which is not to say his most memorable²⁹ — is Men Like Gods (1923), the story of a future Utopia, tumbled upon accidentally by a representative band of contemporaries. Much parodied — it inspired Huxley to reply with a short-story version of Brave New World — the fantasy came to represent the alleged striving optimism of its author, undeterred by the consistently destructive and atavistic path of history

which he had so recently recounted in The Outline. Anthony West reads it otherwise, and this indicates further how misapplied and meaningless is the pejorative, 'Wellsian', still uttered by well-meaning sceptics; [it is] "... an essentially sterile clash between reality and an unattainable ideal. At best it is a cry of distress, a plea for things to be other than they are. Men Like Gods is in reality an altogether pessimistic book." (Encounter, February, 1957, p. 58).

Wells's tone became more readily appreciated with Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island (1928), a savage satire on human nature and human institutions, to be discussed in detail later. Thereafter, in the decade of political commitment, and during the Second World War, Wells turned again to the framework of allegorical method, and the device of fantasy. He analysed the phenomenon of dictatorship in such works as The Autocracy of Mr. Parham (1930) and The Holy Terror (1939), while the patent allegories, The Croquet Player (1936), The Brothers (1937) and Star-Begotten (1938), looked again at the apparently insoluble problem of Man's nature, thrust into close-up by the growing threat of world conflict, and by the Spanish rehearsal for it.

In looking back again to the earliest vision, what, then, seems to be the writer's primary concern? The broad content of his "statements" we have already recognized, is the process and flux of change. The aspect of this which Wells felt should be stressed above all, and be stressed constantly, is referred to obliquely in this remark, again from the Atlantic Introduction:

We have, it is plain, a mind projected here upon the world, amused by the spectacle without, but rather more concerned with the urgency within. /my italics/

André Maurois once described Wells's conception of humanity as "... a giant creature striving, through aeon after aeon, to attain a life of greater happiness and beauty, but always forced back into the pit of ignorance and cruelty."³¹ [my italics] It is an appropriate image, for this "pit of ignorance and cruelty" into which man falls, no matter how hard he strives to escape from it, is the indelible fact of man's origins. A biological inheritance constitutes the "urgency within" at its most primary level.

Dr. Moreau, a caricature of God, here admits to Edward Prendick that certain imperfections are preventing the completion of his experiments, and the final expression of his creation, the moulding of beast to man:

The intelligence is often oddly low, with unaccountable blank ends, unexpected gaps. And least satisfactory of all is something that I cannot touch, somewhere — I cannot determine where — in the seat of the emotions. Cravings, instincts, desires that harm humanity, a strange hidden reservoir to burst suddenly and inundate the whole being of the creature with anger, hate or fear. 32

Forty years later, Wells creates another doctor, Dr. Norbert, to explain to an uncomfortable and uninformed croquet player that:

Man is still what he was. Invincibly bestial, envious, malicious, greedy. Man, Sir, unmasked and disillusioned, is the same fearing, fighting beast he was a hundred thousand years ago. These are no metaphors, Sir. What I tell you is the monstrous reality. 33

This is a brief glimpse of the range of Wells's primary "statement" — the early and the late, from the greater to the lesser metaphor, from the Doctor reminiscent of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, to

one more resembling a modern psychiatrist -- essentially a theory and a belief in the animal origins of Man, derived from Darwin, and a warning of its import for all mankind. "Catastrophe" is a potentiality within man himself; this, Wells claims, man must recognize. He must learn to control the implications of his origins, if he can. "Education", then, is the only defence, if it is a defence at all. This recognition gives Wells his basic scepticism, a scepticism which remains even in his dreams of future stability and organisation. He is aware of man's ignorance of his own nature and feels an imperative need to correct this, and the expression of the need may vary in degree from rational demonstration to frightened despair.

He would no doubt have applauded Robert Ardrey's attempt to outline a "personal investigation into the animal origins and Nature of Man", and to relate man's present to his past. "Man is a fraction of the animal world. Our history is an afterthought, no more, tacked to an infinite calendar. We are not so unique as we should like to believe. And if man in a time of need seeks deeper knowledge concerning himself, then he must explore those animal horizons from which we have made our quick little march."³⁴ However, Wells's "experiment" in expression of these imperatives was to carry him beyond the anthropologist's thesis.

Before examining those texts used in illustration of this discussion, it is useful to clarify further Wells's concepts of human nature, and there is no better authority for this purpose than Warren Wagar's definitive analysis, H.G. Wells and the World State. Wells's relationship to the Darwinian revolution has already been indicated, and

may now be amplified. Wagar describes him as a "philosophe of the Darwinian Age",³⁵ and later elaborates:

Although we was deeply influenced by many other currents in late nineteenth century thought, fundamentally he looked at life through the eyes of a trained biologist. For him the universe was the enigmatic cosmos of late nineteenth-century physics; animate nature was the slaughter and struggle for existence described by Darwin and Huxley; man was a species of animal, Homo Sapiens, of the order Primates, thrown up by an accident of evolution and forced to adapt to its environment or degenerate or perish. A good many modern thinkers have subscribed to these ideas, but for Wells they formed the point of departure and the frame of reference for every other idea. The propositions of physics and biology were his philosophical meat and drink. /my italics/ 36

It is interesting to refer in comparison to the representative scientist in G. Lowes Dickinson's A Modern Symposium (1905), who is, significantly, a biologist, one Charles Wilson: "... biology is one of the disciplines that are building up that general view of Nature and the world which is gradually revolutionizing all our social conceptions."³⁷ He feels that he is speaking for a "new generation", one which has "... a totally new code of ethics; and that code is directed to the end of the perfection of the race."³⁸ Wells was in the vanguard of that "new generation" which held to, adapted, reappraised, or altered more radically the original revolution of Charles Darwin begun in the year of his Origin of Species, 1859,⁴⁰ but he could not be said to share the unqualified sense of mission and confidence which is expressed here. It was Shaw who made a 'religion' of the "new code", who turned 'biology' into 'metabiology' and who, when the Western world was still stunned by the terrible disillusionment of the

First World War, rewrote the 'five books of Moses' in terms of his new faith — Creative Evolution.⁴⁰

Wells's scientific training comes back into focus again here, for as Wagar points out, "... Wells's idea of nature was not so much an exercise in metaphysics as a description from the vantage point of a trained biologist"⁴¹ Shaw, on the other hand, had no scientific background at all; his optimism and metaphysics led him away from Darwin to the earlier Lamarck — and Samuel Butler's extension of Lamarck's theories — and to Bergson's l'évolution créatrice.⁴²

Wells rejected one of the more viciously fatalistic implications of Darwinism, that espoused by the 'imperial' evolutionists with their theories that nature's law made 'natural' war and military competition,⁴³ and therefore excused it. In this he followed T.H. Huxley's acceptance of the dual nature of man, with the defence of ethical nature within man to defeat, where possible, the imperatives of instinctual nature.

This theory is defined in Huxley's Romanes lecture Evolution and Ethics (1893), an essential document for an understanding of the growth of Wells's thought, and a now oft-quoted source for the dialectic of The Island of Dr. Moreau. However, the strength of man's "moral sense", of the "ethical ideal of the just and the good",⁴⁴ or as Wells phrases it in his closely related article, "Human Evolution, An Artificial Process", the "acquired factor, the artificial man, the highly plastic creature of tradition, suggestion, and reasoned thought",⁴⁵ is forever in danger of subversion from within, and, as Wagar remarks, "...there was always the risk that the blind greed and sloth and fear he had inherited from his

animal past would betray human interests and values."⁴⁶

Wells's entrenched reservations about man's ability to control the manifestation of his origins may be further illumined by a comparison with a contemporary writer, one who has already been linked with Wells, in passing, by some commentators — William Golding.⁴⁷

In Golding's essay, "Fable", from The Hot Gates, there is an account of the author's reduction of faith in the "perfectibility of social man"⁴⁸ — prompted in the main by the Second World War and the history of Europe prior to that war — which eventually found expression in the 'fable' of Lord of the Flies. His comments on the nature of man and on the flimsy quality of the imposed 'civilising' process are echoes of Wells's scepticism as defined in "Human Evolution, An Artificial Process", and elsewhere in his theoretical and his fictional writing, in sources already indicated. Golding speaks of the "taboos" which have obscured "the sad fact of his [man's] cruelty and lust",⁴⁹ and continues as follows adding the particular significance of recent history:

Social systems, political systems were composed, detached from the real nature of man They would perfect most men, and at the least, reduce aberrance Why, then, have they never worked? How did the idealist concepts of primitive socialism turn at last into Stalinism? How could the political and philosophical idealism of Germany produce as its ultimate fruit, the rule of Adolf Hitler? My own conviction grew that what had happened was that men were putting the cart before the horse It seemed to me that man's capacity for greed, his innate cruelty and selfishness, was being hidden behind a kind of pair of political pants. I believed then, that man was sick — not exceptional man, but average man. I believed that the condition of man was to be a morally diseased creation and that the best job I could do at the time was to trace the connection between his diseased nature and the international mess he gets himself into.

Wells traces this connection most memorably in Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island and The Croquet Player, though he may interpret "diseased nature" in a biological sense, rather than in Golding's more traditional theological context. However, as Magar so perceptively comments, "Wells in effect preached a biological doctrine of original sin, which turned the Christian teaching inside out but amounted to much the same thing."⁵¹ As Wells proceeds to explain in "Human Evolution", "... what we call Morality becomes the padding of suggested emotional habits necessary to keep the round Palaeolithic savage in the square hole of the civilised state. And Sin is the conflict of the two factors -- as I have tried to convey in my Island of Dr. Moreau."⁵²

To conclude his article, Wells arrives at a definition of education in the light of his theory of the "inherited" and the "acquired" factor. It is the "careful and systematic manufacture of the artificial factor in man."⁵³ Thus he pins faith of a kind in education as "the possible salvation of mankind from misery and sin".⁵⁴ Education was Wells's dream; Moreau was one manifestation of the omnipresent nightmare, and others were to follow with unrelenting frequency until his last manuscript.

Golding admits to a similar dream. "At moments of optimism I have felt that education and perhaps a miracle or two would be sufficient to remove their more dangerous elements. [Golding is referring to "the forces of off-campus history", that is, "a failure of human sympathy, ignorance of facts, the objectivizing of our own inadequacies so as to make a scapegoat."] When I feel pessimistic, then they seem to constitute a trap into which humanity has got itself with a dreary inevitability much as the dinosaur trapped itself in its own useless armour."⁵⁵ Wells has dreamed

up miracles, too, from a comet to a "war to end all war",⁵⁶ but they are not very convincing ones. And he has contemplated the grim record of pre-history, brought it to life as a teacher-historian in The Outline, as a Swiftian satirist in Blettsworthy, and as an appalled and horrified participant in humanity's race to the brink of chaos, in The Croquet Player.

This, then, seem from a brief survey of his career as a writer and from an introductory analysis of the origins of his thought, is Wells's primary metaphysic. It motivates the greater and the more vivid, the more analogous and therefore more timeless, part of his fictional "experiment". The following study will examine the degree and variation of this aspect of the "experiment", and will consider those texts which employ myth and allegorical form, and in so doing illuminate rather more the primitive and the anthropological end of what one might call the spectrum of man's instinctual life. At the other end of this spectrum is, more frequently, the roman à thèse and related structures which may bring together the genres of discussion-dialogue and allegory into one whole. Here, the subject is more often what may loosely be called 'social' man, man in society contemporary with Wells, still coping uneasily in real situations with the ramifications of his instinctual nature. From first to last, all men are, in essence, "Cain's Children".⁵⁷

There will be no attempt to observe an arbitrary date where Wells is, on one side, acceptable, and on the other, unacceptable to the normative critic. The three main works discussed are not only from different decades, but from different eras: Moreau of 1896, Blettsworthy of 1928, and The Croquet Player of 1936. The placing of so eclectic a

novelist as Wells in the tradition of the English novel must be limited here to a simple recognition of his position in the broad trend which runs opposite to that represented by Henry James.⁵⁸

It is wiser, and more valuable, if we remain with some of the definitions from the Atlantic introduction, and initiate an essentially descriptive study of some of the "experiments in statement", noting variation in method, emphasis and effectiveness, and explaining as far as possible their contemporary significance. To dismiss Blettsworthy and The Croquet Player, simply because they belong to what is generally regarded as a creative wilderness and a period of commitment to issues totally irrelevant to the techniques of creativity, is to miss two interesting and effective experiments in allegory, to undervalue some of the constant qualities of Wells's writing, and above all to misread the 'whole' Wells, to misunderstand the prominence and force of that primary concern — "the urgency within".

FOOTNOTES

- 1 H.G. Wells, General Introduction, The Works of H.G. Wells, 28 vols., Atlantic Edition (New York, 1924), Vol. 1, p. xviii.
- 2 See W. Warren Wagar, H.G. Wells and the World State (New Haven and London, 1961), p. 239n.
- 3 See An Englishman Looks at the World (London, 1914), pp. 148-169.
- 4 Leon Edel and Gordon A. Ray, eds., Henry James and H.G. Wells (Urbana, Illinois, 1958), p. 264.

G.H. Wells (Geoffrey West) quotes part of this opening passage from the General Introduction in the concluding chapter of his biography, H.G. Wells (London and New York, 1930), p. 254, and comments thus: "That is the view of the man who terms himself journalist rather than artist, not in modesty but because he values a work of art more for its logical statement than its quality of life. Yet even those who accept his standpoint may believe that for many years yet a considerable proportion of his writing will remain a continuously eruptive source of suggestion and inspiration and delight."
- 5 See Robert P. Week's review of Richard Hauer Costa's H.G. Wells (New York, 1967) in English Literature in Transition, X, iii(1967), 167.
- 6 Preface to The World of William Clissold (New York, 1926), vol. 1, p. vi. Compare, "Of Art, Literature and Mr. Henry James" in Boon, Atl. ed. (New York, 1925), p. 454: "In all his [James'] novels you will find no people with defined political opinions, no people with religious opinions, none with clear partisanship or with lusts or whims All that much of humanity he clears out before he begins his story. It's like cleaning rabbits for the table."
- 7 Mark Schorer, in his well-known article, "Technique as Discovery", Hudson Review, I (1948), 67-87, is too sweeping in his application of this sort of classification to Wells. He describes Wells as disappearing, "from literature into the annals of an era" (p. 73). For more specific reference to Schorer, see the appendix on Tono-Bungay.

- 8 R.C.K. Ensor's review of the first volume of Experiment in Autobiography in The Spectator (October 12, 1934), 529, provides a representative Leavisite view of Wells's early influences and the character of his education, which this short extract suitably illustrates: "Suppose ... in addition to a year's biology under Huxley he had done two years philosophy at Oxford or Glasgow under Nettleship or Edward Caird, and had had the experience of reading Kant at an average pace of less than a page an hour"
- 9 General Introduction, p. xvi. See also Wells's Introduction to West's biography, p. xviii: "This world, says Sir James Jeans, is going on for a million million years. I wave the striving immortals onward, and step aside." West later explains: "As a student at South Kensington, he saw, with the effect of a new vision, man's self-importance shrink in the biological, geological, and astronomical perspectives." (p. 104)
- 10 References to Darwin by Wells, explicit and implicit, are countless, but perhaps the clearest testimony to his centrality in Wells's mind is the prominent position given him in The Outline of History. As Christopher Dawson remarks in "H.G. Wells and the Outline of History", The Dynamics of World History (New York, 1962), p. 364: "... Darwin is almost the only man of science, after Newton, who receives serious attention." See The Outline (New York, 1961), pp. 777-779. For an extended discussion of Wells and Darwin, see Otto Barber's unpublished dissertation, "H.G. Wells's Verhältnis zum Darwinismus", Leipzig, 1934, not consulted for this thesis. However, Georg Roppen outlines Barber's investigation briefly in Evolution and Poetic Belief: A Study in Some Victorian and Modern Writers (Oslo, 1956), p. 404 f.
- 11 Vincent Brome, "Shaw v. Wells", Six Studies in Quarrelling (London, 1958), p. 29.
- 12 General Introduction, p. x.
- 13 General Introduction, p. xvii: "Indeed all these volumes are about unrest and change." Geoffrey West, in his biography, comments further on the background which gave Wells the inspiration for all his thought: "Evolution was very much in the air from the '70's to the 90's; at South Kensington under Huxley it was the atmosphere itself." (p. 98).

14 An Assessment of Twentieth Century Literature (London, 1951), p. 21.

15 Also the significant year for Virginia Woolf. See her well known illustration of the difference between the technique of Bennett, Wells, and Galsworthy, the "Edwardians", and that represented by her own work and by Forster, Lawrence and Joyce, the "Georgians", in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", Collected Essays, vol. 1 (New York, 1967), pp. 319-337. Originally a paper read at Cambridge in 1924, and published in The Captain's Death Bed.

For further commentary on "the most productive and interesting period of his career", that is between 1895 and 1910, see Gordon A. Ray, "H.G. Wells Tries to be a Novelist", Edwardians and Late Victorians, English Institute Essays, 1959 (New York, 1960), pp. 106-159.

H.L. Mencken, a severe critic of the so-called Wells in decline, prefers, however, to see the cut-off point in 1912, with the publication of Marriage. "The Late Mr. Wells", Prejudices: First Series (New York, 1923), pp. 22-35.

Henry Seidel Canby, after all the critical disapproval and distress at Wells's pursued experiment in narrative function has been voiced, provides a sane reminder: "His earlier manner led where it was inevitably pointed, to his later manner. Substantially, all his social ideas are implicit in his first fantastic stories, and it is not necessary to read the Fabian essays contemporary with them ... for a careful reader to see in The Time Machine, Dr. Moreau's Island [sic], and The War of the Worlds, all the hopes and fears of humanity which later came out from romance into realism with no more than a natural increase in scope and explicitness." The Saturday Review of Literature (January 24, 1925), 474. Canby is correct in pointing out a certain natural continuity in Wells's experimentation, though, as this thesis demonstrates by the texts chosen for discussion, 'romance' is never left entirely behind.

16 In particular, see "Bagshot's Mural Decorations" and "A Misunderstood Artist", where art as fashion and art for art's sake, respectively, are the 'conversation' topics. For a more detailed consideration of the former, C.C. Nickerson has some valuable interpretations in "A Note on Some Neglected Opinions of H.G. Wells", English Literature in Transition, V, v (1962), 27-30.

17 General Introduction, p. x, and repeated on p. xv.

18 See W.C. Frierson, The English Novel in Transition (New York, 1965), ©. 1942. Purdue University's English Literature in Transition (previously English Fiction in Transition) similarly classifies Wells. (From July 1968, this periodical is edited at Northern Illinois University, Dekalb).

19 Frank Swinnerton, in The Georgian Literary Scene (London, 1951), ©. 1938, p. 50, refers to the many "different instruments" which Wells picked up and let fall during his life -- the Fabians and the League of Nations, for example. One could also view his literary experiments as the picking up and putting down of "different instruments"; a search for an appropriate tool.

It is worthwhile, in this context, quoting Anthony West's remarks in his Encounter article (February, 1957): "From Boon onwards he made increasingly strident attacks on literary values which are, in my view, only partially explicable by his sense that in the state in which the world found itself aesthetics were a luxury for which there was not enough time. my italics It is my view that these attacks, which went along with his reiterated statements that his own work had no literary value, that it was merely journalism, attached to contemporary issues, which would become meaningless inside a couple of decades, reflected a troubled inner sense that there was something profoundly wrong about his own course of development." (p. 59)

20 Mark Hillegas had produced the most recent study of Wells; a philosophical and sociological discussion of his anti-utopianism, and an examination of his influence on Forster, Capek, Zamyatin, Huxley, Orwell and C.S. Lewis. See The Future as Nightmare: H.G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians (New York, 1967).

21 South Atlantic Quarterly, LVIII (1959), 440-447.

22 Ibid., p. 447.

23 VIII, ii (February 1957), 53.

24 John Stewart Williamson's doctoral dissertation -- "H.G. Wells, Critic of Progress: A Study of the Early Fiction", University of Colorado, 1964 -- should be referred to here. Williamson defines Wells's vision of the limits to progress as 'cosmic' and 'human'. It is the latter idea which is investigated in this thesis, with texts chosen beyond the early fiction, as well as from this period of his writing.

- 25 "The Visions of H.G. Wells", New York Review of Books (November 5, 1964).
- 26 This comparatively sunny period of Wells's writing career -- though let us not forget the serious social accusations, implicit and explicit, in these stories -- and the re-appearance of memorable comic skill almost to the very end of his life, inevitably are passed by in a discussion of this nature. Wells's much vaunted comic "exuberance" is not the most central facet of the man. An adequate study of Wells's narrative comedy, however, remains to be done. Robert P. Weeks called for it in his article, "Wells Scholarship in Perspective", English Fiction in Transition, III, i (1960), 12-15, but it remains as yet an area untouched, except for whimsical biographical commentary and well-worn comparisons with Dickens. Kenneth B. Newell's doctoral dissertation (see the bibliography) is concerned with structure and social theme.
- 27 H.G. Wells, p. 195. Wells himself said this of his brush with deity: "My phraseology went back unobtrusively to the sturdy atheism of my youthful days. My spirit had never left it In spite of the fact that it [what he called his "phase of terminological disingenuousness"] yielded Peter's dream of God Among the Cobwebs [from Joan and Peter] and The Undying Fire I wish, not so much for my own sake as for the sake of my more faithful readers that I had never fallen into it; it confused and misled many of them and introduced a barren détour into my research for an effective direction for human affairs." Experiment in Autobiography (Toronto, 1934), p. 578.
- 28 The group nature of these novels is emphasised by the interchange and cross reference of characters from one novel to the next. For example, in Marriage, there is a reference to the Remington-Isobel Rivers scandal (Atlantic Edition, vol. xv, p. 418), and in The Research Magnificent (Atl. Ed., vol. xix, p. 138), Mr. Pope and Lady Beach Mandarin are mentioned.
- 29 Undoubtedly, it is Christina Alberta's Father (1925), a novel largely neglected.
- 30 General Introduction, p. ix.
- 31 King Edward and His Times (London, 1933), p. 230.

- 32 The Island of Dr. Moreau (Harmondsworth, England, 1964), p. 112. Subsequent references to this text will be given parenthetically.
- 33 The Croquet Player (New York, 1937), ©. 1936, p. 89.
- 34 African Genesis (New York, 1967), ©. 1961, p. 11.
- 35 Wagar, p. 4.
- 36 Ibid., p. 62.
- 37 (New York, 1914) ©. 1905, p. 80.
- 38 Ibid., p. 82.
- 39 For a relevant survey of this important background, see Leo J. Henkin, Darwinism in the English Novel, 1860 - 1910 (New York, 1963), ©. 1940, p. 50 et seq.
- 40 That is, Back to Methuselah, subtitled a "Metabiological Pentateuch", published in 1921.
- 41 Wagar, p. 75.
- 42 The main references here are Man and Superman and Back to Methuselah. Vincent Brome's chapter, "Shaw versus Wells", in Six Studies in Quarrelling (London, 1958), provides useful commentary in this context.

In a discussion of Shaw, Robert Brustein quotes Trotsky's wish that "the Fabian fluid that ran in his [Shaw's] veins might have been strengthened by even so much as five per cent of the blood of Jonathan Swift." The Theatre of Revolt (Boston, 1964), pp. 207-208. This is precisely the difference between the quality of their utopist visions.

V.S. Pritchett, commenting with particular reference to Moreau, again stresses the significant difference between the philosophies of the two men: "Evil in Shaw, is curable. He believes in the Protestant effort. He believes that men argue their way along the path of evolution, and that the life force is always on the side of the cleverest mind and the liveliest conscience But to the emotional Wells, the possibility of original sin in the form of the original monkey is always present. The price of progress may be perversion and horror, and Wells is honest enough to accept that."

"The Scientific Romances", The Living Novel (New York, 1947), p. 127.

- 43 See Wagar, p. 73. In The Outline of History (New York, 1961), ©. 1920, Wells makes some slighting references to Kipling in connection with popular misconceptions of Darwinism. He mentions Stalky and Co. and the light it throws on the "political psychology of the British Empire at the close of the nineteenth century" (p. 779).
- 44 Evolution and Ethics (New York, 1897), ©. 1893, pp. 54 and 59.
- 45 Fortnightly Review, vol. 60 (October 1896), 594.
- 46 Wagar, p. 74.
- 47 David Lodge's article, "Assessing H.G. Wells", Encounter (January 1967), 54-61, suggests a connection between the two writers in a discussion of Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island: "The myth of Rampole Island ... like the myth of Lord of the Flies (and Golding, despite the ironic epigraph from The Outline of History to The Inheritors, is very much a literary descendant of Wells) is memorable, not for its topical allusiveness, but for its general implications about the nature of man." Previously, Anthony Pearson had pointed out Golding's possible debt to "The Grisly Folk" for The Inheritors, and "The Strange Case of Davidson's Eyes" for Pincher Martin. See "H.G. Wells and Pincher Martin", Notes and Queries, XII (July 1965), 275-6. Richard Hauer Costa, in H.G. Wells (New York, 1967), pp. 37-39, discusses Moreau and Lord of the Flies briefly. Mark Hillegas, in The Future as Nightmare: H.G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians, remarks in passing that Moreau "looks forward to an important variant on the anti-Utopian theme, William Golding's Lord of the Flies". (p. 38) In a later section of his book, he discusses The Inheritors in the context of Wells anthropological romances.

- 48 The Hot Gates (New York, 1965), p. 86.
- 49 Ibid., p. 87.
- 50 Ibid. Golding follows the general theme in his play, The Brass Butterfly (London, 1958), Act II, p. 58; the Emperor here reproves the enthusiastic inventor, Phanocles, with what Mamilus calls "the last lesson": "A steam ship, or anything powerful, in the hands of man, Phanocles, is like a sharp knife in the hands of a child. There is nothing wrong with the knife. There is nothing wrong with the steam ship. There is nothing wrong with man's intelligence. The trouble is his nature."
- 51 Wagar, p. 74.
- 52 Loc.cit.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid., 595.
- 55 "Fable", The Hot Gates, p. 94.
- 56 I am referring to The World Set Free (1914) with its prophecy of devastating nuclear warfare followed by global reconstruction. C.C. Nickerson discusses the possible intended irony in the use of that well-known and unfortunate phrase, as it appeared in "The Story of the Last Trump", which Wells included in Boon (1915). See footnote 16.
- 57 The final chapter heading in Ardrey's African Genesis.
- 58 As G.S. Fraser begins his section on the novel in The Modern Writer and His World (Harmondsworth, England, 1964) ©. 1953, p. 73: "We can trace the immediate ancestry of the modern English novel back as far as the 1890's, to the work of two novelists who were at opposite poles in their conception of the novel, its form and function

Henry James, then in the full maturity of his powers, and H.G. Wells, then making a brilliant beginning."

W.C. Frierson identifies the same polarity in his description of the two lines of development from Zola (Gissing, Wells, Onions, Beresford, Cannan, Sinclair, Cronin and Greenwood) and from the Paris Group (James, Mansfield, Richardson, Woolf, Swinnerton, Ford and Bowen).
The English Novel in Transition, 1880 - 1940, Introduction, p. xii.

2. Moreau, Blettsworthy, and The Croquet Player:

Three related "Experiments in Statement."

There has been a tendency to avoid breaking up the sequence of Wells's writing, and the supposed chronologically sealed categories of his continuing experimentation in prose narrative, but it is frequently the connections made between texts, remote from each other as they are in that chronological sense, which contribute to a greater understanding of Wells. This is the case with the three works above, though no sustained examination of these three vivid illustrations of man's damnosa hereditas,⁵⁹ grouped together in this way, has been previously attempted. The main references by other critics, though valuable, are few, and extend to little beyond references.

Warren Wagar connects the earliest and the latest -- as I have already done fleetingly in my introduction -- in this way: "In The Croquet Player he returned to the theme of The Island of Dr. Moreau on an even grander scale. As Dr. Moreau's island had been haunted by the Beast-People, now the whole world, symbolized by the village of Cairmarsh, was haunted by the homicidal ghosts of prehistoric ape-men ..."⁶⁰

Wagar also associates the themes of Blettsworthy and The Croquet Player, describing them both as "parables of the world crisis",⁶¹ while Costa sees Blettsworthy as introducing "a note of cruelty not found in Wells since Moreau."⁶² It is however, the most recent Wells bibliography which brings the three titles together in an annotation of The Croquet Player, a

work "... allegorical in intent ... comparable with The Island of Dr. Moreau and Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island."⁶³

The inspiration for the allegory comes from a total vision of evolution and humanity in these books and in other works of his, most relevantly perhaps in The Invisible Man, where again the seeds of danger lie in human nature rather than in cosmic accident; but it is also true that specific demonstrations of human failing, events and incidents in the world at large, can contribute to the formulation of the allegory. It is often said of Wells, the 'contemporary' rather than the 'modern', to use Stephen Spender's analytic scheme,⁶⁴ that he merely lived in, and responded to, a world of newspaper headlines. This is an oversimplification. For Wells the 'headline' is so often the veneer of particularity, of an event caught in time and space, and beneath it he will find a past and a future, as well as a present significance. Both Moreau and Blettsworthy emerged as responses to two of the most sensational newspaper stories in the history of the press. These were the trials of Oscar Wilde and those of Sacco and Vanzetti; the operations of the judicial systems of two great nations, the sophisticated machinery of civilization in motion, demonstrating the tragic inadequacy of Huxley's "ethical process". The origin of The Croquet Player is rather less specific, but no doubt more significant to more people — the rise of European fascism and the futile carnage of the Spanish Civil War, its testing ground. The question of exact political commitment and partisanship on Wells's part has been variously argued, but it is best reserved for a total consideration of this book at a later point.

(a) The Island of Dr. Moreau: The Island Myth.

Wells admitted that the spectacle of Wilde's destruction -- for that is what it amounted to -- was meaningful enough to inspire in him an immediate reaction which had to find form in writing, but the reaction which did materialize grew into an indictment of universal import outside any historical context: "There was a scandalous trial about that time, the graceless and pitiful downfall of a man of genius, and this story was the response of an imaginative mind to the reminder that humanity is but animal rough-hewn to a reasonable shape and in perpetual internal conflict between instinct and injunction."⁶⁵ Within this wider range of meaning, the author's original response to that prolonged, now legendary news story, can be traced in the sketched backgrounds of Dr. Moreau and his assistant, Montgomery. Both men, we are told, have suffered social ostracism;⁶⁶ Moreau was accused of vivisection research by a sensation hunting journalist and Montgomery has been a medical student, his career cut short by society's judgement of what we are to assume was a sexual misdemeanour.⁶⁷ The central meaning of this story, as it unfolds, is savage and deeply pessimistic: "It is written just to give the utmost possible vividness to that conception of men as hewn and confused and tormented beasts."⁶⁸

In the Preface to Seven Famous Novels, which appeared ten years after the second volume of the Atlantic Edition, Wells took a retrospective view: "Now and then, though I rarely admit it, the universe projects itself towards me in a hideous grimace. It grimaced that time, and I did my best

to express my vision of the aimless torture of creation."⁶⁹ Since its publication, critics have emphasized the darkness of its vision. "No other novel of Wells is so completely hopeless," said Norman Nicholson. "... He [Wells] realized that civilization is as frail a thing as human life, that the destiny of the whole earth, no less than that of the least of its inhabitants, hangs by a thread."⁷⁰

Wells called his story a "theological grotesque",⁷¹ and the caricature of God pursuing his "aimless torture" — already illustrated in passing — is at the centre of that story. But beyond the fait accompli of an experimental universe and an experimental creator is the reminder to contemporary homo sapiens of the danger of reversion or degeneration to an earlier stage of that experiment, of the reality and implications of man's duality. This imaginative thesis, which to quote V.S. Pritchett, "takes us into an abyss of human nature",⁷² is worked out in a microcosmic setting — the 'Island with No Name' — and thus makes itself a part of a literary tradition, the island myth, an aspect of the book first elaborated on to any degree by Bernard Bergonzi who was in turn stimulated by Richard Gerber's article, "The English Island Myth: Remarks on the Englishness of Utopian Fiction".⁷³

The literary materials are indeed many, with sources identified in Swift, Defoe, Mary Shelley, Stevenson, Poe and Kipling, with those of Swift and Poe undoubtedly of greatest importance, requiring constant reference through any detailed reading of the book.⁷⁴ However, Wells's unique background, already stressed, surely provides a starting point which

is scientific and not literary; that is, the importance of islands in the advancement of biological knowledge. Before the island in myth, comes the island in history and pre-history.

Gordon Ray, in a recent number of Library, gave provisionally the results of research done at the Urbana Archives; namely, the identification of articles written by Wells for The Saturday Review between 1894 and 1898.⁷⁵ Among those positively identified is one titled "The Influence of Islands on Variation", appearing in the Review the year prior to Moreau's publication.⁷⁶ This short article leads a discussion of "the 'law' of variation ... [as] a prince-consort of the reigning 'law' of inheritance",⁷⁷ and begins with the proposition that there are two cases "where the abeyance of usual conditions of environment results in great variation".⁷⁸ The first is the domesticated environment for animals provided by man, and the second is island life. Wells, after Wallace,⁷⁹ indicates the three classifications of island, "zoologically speaking": the "recent continental" island, like Britain; the "ancient continental" type, like Madagascar; and finally, "there are oceanic islands, isolated peaks rising up from the beds of deep oceans, with no particular connection, geological or zoological, with any mainland." Such an island is Dr. Moreau's — Noble's Isle as Prendick's nephew names it in the Introduction. In isolation of this kind which has been brought about by sinking land masses — Wells's theory would have it — modification, variation and creation of new species would be greatly accelerated. Conversely, the raising of land masses, and the re-formation of continents could bring about a dramatic conflict of previously isolated species, and the inevitable selection of the fittest of these.

A reading of this theoretical demonstration suggests the dramatic potential inherent in it for an imagination as kinetic as Wells's during these, his formative years. Geological accident provides isolation and secrecy, and a remote stage is set for the adaptation of thesis to myth and fiction, where the anonymous processes of evolution become the operation of one man. In terms of the work's gradual formulation, scientific knowledge contributed to theory and statement, and thereafter came the experiment and transformation into a fictional form.

The mythic significance of the island is comparatively straightforward, but it may suffice to mention Northrop Frye's definition of "... relatively neutral archetypes, like the island, which may be Prospero's island or Circe's."⁸⁰ Prendick's first reaction is that he is, without doubt, on an island ruled by a Circe figure.⁸¹ Like the 'enclosed garden' motif, the island can be both a haven and a hell, a sacred place or a prison. In Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode, Angus Fletcher comments further on the neutrality of the archetype, after asserting that Golding's islands in Lord of the Flies and Pincher Martin are "hells": "... Allegory is thus not committed either to a good or an evil place of isolation; it can designate either an interior or an exterior plague, depending upon the author's confidence about the world he inhabits ...".⁸² Again, there is no doubt concerning Wells's lack of confidence. The problem is "interior", and the vision is anti-utopist. The economic lessons learned by Crusoe, and the moral and physical challenges met and overcome by the Swiss Family Robinson, and Ballantyne's Ralph, Jack and Peterkin, seem almost to belong to another universe, where certainly the implications of a total "breakdown of insular safety",⁸³ coming from within, would be quite incomprehensible.

Although the island itself is not described with the precision and quantity of detail which, for example, Golding employs in Lord of the Flies,⁸⁴ certain features of it are stressed constantly, and to a purpose. Before Prendick sets eyes on it, he hears much from the foul-mouthed Captain, who suggests the place is far from being a haven. It is an "infernal island" (23), and Montgomery's servant, later identified as M'ling, is a "lunatic a devil, an ugly devil." When the captain finally reaches his destination, and with great satisfaction relinquishes all his responsibility, his utterances are again couched in similar terms: "I've done with this blessed island for evermore amen!" (33) There is at once an identification of this location as a manifestation of hell, and at the same time the as yet unconfirmed suggestion of a perverted 'heavenly' order, the first hint of the parody of creation to follow.

The physical reality of the island is slow to impinge itself on Prendick's consciousness and the awareness of the reader. The island is first sighted after sundown, and the schooner heaves to: "It was too far to see any details; it seemed to me then simply a low-lying patch of dim blue in the uncertain blue-grey sea. An almost vertical streak of smoke went up from it into the sky." The last detail is important, however, and is to be mentioned again. As the nephew explains in the introduction to his uncle's manuscript, "Noble's Isle is a volcanic islet," and this Prendick finds closer evidence of when he is finally rowed toward the shore:

It was low and covered with thick vegetation, chiefly a kind of palm that was new to me. From one point a thin white thread of vapour rose slantingly to a great height, and then frayed out like a down feather The beach was of dull grey sand, and sloped steeply up to a ridge ...

irregularly set with trees and undergrowth. Half-way up was a square piebald stone enclosure that I found subsequently was built partly of coral and partly of pumiceous lava. (39)

The style of the geologist, or that of any experimental scientist, noting down relevant data and recording observation, is reflected here, particularly in that last description. But though Wells may begin with 'data', the meaning of the sub-text gradually emerges: "Some fumarolles to the northward, and a hot spring were the only vestiges of the forces that had long since originated it. Now and then a faint quiver of earthquake would be sensible, and sometimes the ascent of the spire of smoke would be rendered tumultuous by gusts of steam." (117)

This further elaboration of the origins of Moreau's island comes at the beginning of the chapter which succeeds the Doctor's explanation of his theories and his plans, and immediately follows Montgomery's additional explanation that Moreau's "Law", especially among the feline Beast People, "became oddly weakened about nightfall", (116) that instincts suppressed during the day could strengthen with the falling of dusk. The juxtaposition of these narrative sections is skillfully wrought. Prendick, a limited narrator in the manner of Swift's Gulliver, the earnest scientist, who has only time for "an impatient shrug" at Moreau's "sophistry" (105), and cannot as yet comprehend the licence with which Moreau operates on the raw material of Nature, does not see, as yet, the frightening perspectives which the island microcosm is beginning to reveal. The significance of the lingering evidence of primitive origins is surely this: the threat is primeval, dormant, and real, and what is constantly threatened is the full implication of "insular safety", or as Sir James Frazer explains, "... the

depth to which the ground beneath our feet is thus, as it were, honey-combed by unseen forces. We appear to be standing on a volcano which may at any moment break out in smoke and fire.⁸⁵

The threat grows for Prendick. On his arrival he had remarked upon the "dull grey sand" of the beaches. When disaster finally comes and the "stubborn beast flesh" triumphs, with Moreau dead, and Montgomery overcome by madness and alcohol, the vision is changed: "The eastward sea was a featureless grey, dark and mysterious, and between the sea and the shadow, the grey sands (of volcanic glass and crystals) flashed and shone like a beach of diamonds." (157) The light from the sand is of hidden danger, unseen during the day, yet always there, always a beacon for catastrophe. Yet the ever precise narrator places the reference to pre-history, like a responsible recorder, in parenthesis. The irony is still there.

The most powerful working of this pattern of symbolism occurs when the fleeing Prendick, fearing he is to serve in Moreau's laboratory for some ghastly experiment, loses himself in the forest where he eventually meets the "simian creature" previously encountered on his arrival, and is led on a search for food to a ravine peopled by a bizarre community of the half-made, crippled victims of the surgeon's knife. It is in the description of this sulphurous ravine that Wells allows the half-formed and retarded in geological nature — a dormant volcanic rift — to symbolise the abortive experimentation of Dr. Moreau, and, in consequence, the unfinished, "rough-hewn" nature of man: "Presently we came to trees, all charred and brown, and so to a bare place covered with a yellow-white incrustation,

across which a drifting smoke, pungent in whiffs to nose and eyes, went drifting The path coiled down abruptly into a narrow ravine between two tumbled and knotty masses of blackish scoriae ... on either hand the light smote down through a narrow channel into the central gloom." (80-81)

The scene is rich with analogy and suggestion; here is the terrible confirmation of the drunken and largely ignorant utterances of the Ipecacuahna's captain. Prendick is led down the 'coiling' path by his "ape-like companion", into a kind of hades unfamiliar to traditional myth. There is a moment of savage Swiftian humour when the creature articulates thus to the stupefied Prendick; "'Home', said he". The biologist from the halls of Gower Street is "aware of a disagreeable odour like that of a monkey's cage ill-cleaned", and if not to him, yet certainly to us the image of the Yahoo is implied.

The recall of the origin of man and of natural landscape, and what this may signify, is often a pre-occupation of Conrad, and Victory in particular seems to echo some of the suggestions in Moreau. There is the central island motif, with isolation and a threat to "insular safety". The threat comes in the form of three visitors, variously originating from the grave — Jones, with his often described "lifeless manner",⁸⁶ and from the dawn of history, the "simian Pedro"⁸⁷ — who come as "envoys of the outer world evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back."⁸⁸ These three men, Jones, Ricardo and Pedro, roam Heyst's island like spectres from the past, yet they are a reminder, as they are to Heyst, of the permanent dangers of the present.

Another reminder comes from the dormant volcano, which like Wells's "volcanic islet" represents the hidden but active forces which can erupt at any time. Heyst refers to the volcano as a "neighbour ... generally well-behaved",⁸⁹ but on the night of the orgy of bestial violence on the island, the volcano and the gathering storm present a vision perhaps comparable in significance and effect to the skull in The Croquet Player, though without the particularity of reference: "... great masses of cloud stood piled up and bathed in a mist of blood. A crimson crack like an open would zigzagged between them" Closely following at the beginning of the next chapter, we read "the volcano ... took its first fiery expanding breath of the evening."⁹⁰ Wells, like Conrad — to return to the narrative sequence of Moreau — develops patterns of image and action which demonstrate and dramatise the incontrovertible fact of man's origins, and that part of his nature which signals those origins.

The action which takes place before Prendick reaches the island is important, as it serves to present with a fairly rapid sequence of events, covering the first five chapters, two microcosmic settings which, in a sense, rehearse the revelations on the island. Charles Edward Prendick, "a private gentleman", (7) escaping from "the dullness of his comfortable independence" (15) is forced to suffer a shipwreck, an open-boat ordeal, and a rescue which hardly lives up to its name.

Both the Introduction which identifies the story as an authenticated document, and some additional evidence given by Prendick himself in the first two paragraphs of his narrative, establish an initial assertive method. Contrasted with the typical Wells device of juxtaposing

the ordinary and the extraordinary — for example, in The Time Machine, The Wonderful Visit, The War of the Worlds — Prendick's story, after the briefest of preparations, plunges into the remote and the uncanny, and it never returns. The influence of Swift, and indeed of Defoe, in the method of the opening documentation,⁹¹ soon give way to a pervading atmosphere more consistently reminiscent of Poe. The precise and informative narrator remains at the helm of his story; the vision of men as beasts, and hints of Swift's scatology are there, too, but the elements of stark horror, nightmare, haunting and fear go beyond the limits of eighteenth century satire.⁹² There is more unequivocal Swift in the later Blettsworthy.

Prendick's tale is, in essence, the story of a haunting, as much as The Croquet Player, as Wagar suggests. The narrator's account picks its way painfully through a series of memories, and his entire experience is surely a ghastly exercise in race-memory, fleetingly perceived and comprehended.

The suddenness of the shipwreck becomes the endless torture of his first taste of isolation. "It is quite impossible for the ordinary reader to imagine those eight days. He has not — luckily for himself — anything in his memory to imagine with." (10) What Prendick experienced was the first demonstration of human reversion, a loss of human identity, and a revelation of behaviour patterns he could scarcely contend with: "The water ended on the fourth day, and we were already thinking strange things and saying them with our eyes; but it was, I think, the sixth before Helmar gave voice to the thing we all had in mind. I remember our voices — dry and thin, so that we bent towards one another and spared our words." (10-11) There is only a vague hint at what the three men decided, and it is

never put into effect, as the other two sailors fall overboard and drown in their struggle.⁹³ "They sank like stones. I remember laughing at that and wondering why I laughed. The laugh caught me suddenly like a thing from without." (11) Prendick's subsequent weakening and delirium, in which he imagines himself dead, and confuses the events of his rescue, occupy a kind of ante-room of half-known fear and half-perceived knowledge. There has been a sinister preview of the "tasting of the blood", and the "disconnected impression of a dark face with extraordinary eyes close to mine" which will be seen again.

The second microcosm, before the island is finally reached, is Prendick's rescue ship, the Ipecacuanha,⁹⁴ the "ocean menagerie" (20) captained by the grotesque and superannuated Noah, the red-haired Davis who, along with his crew, had, as far as Montgomery was concerned, sailed out of the "land of born fools".⁹⁵(14) On board the trader, the castaway scarcely regains his identity. Montgomery stresses the accident of his rescue, refusing to allow Prendick the comfort of thanking, at least, the "accessible agent".⁹⁶(28) Davis's manner, meanwhile, soon persuades him that he is "... merely a bit of human flotsam, cut off from [his] resources ... a mere casual dependant on the bounty -- or speculative enterprise -- of the ship." (24-25) "Speculative enterprise", the euphemistic definition of twilight commerce, is a further vicious commentary on the process of evolution.

Prendick's introduction to his second temporary existence -- "The Man Who Was Going Nowhere", as the second chapter title reads -- conveys again an element of the sinister in what is often but dimly recalled.

Montgomery's physical features are uncomfortably ambiguous; "... a drooping nether lip watery grey eyes, oddly void of expression." (13) These and other suggestions — for example, his "slobbering articulation" — are repeated at the end of the same chapter, and in addition, when Prendick borrows a set of clothes from him, he discovers that they "... were rather loose for me, for he was large, and long in his limbs." (16) This chapter contains further hints of atavism, imperceptibly directing attention to the vulnerability of Prendick in this respect, not merely to what he sees that is unusual around him.

Bergonzi draws attention to the "... scarlet stuff, iced" (13) which Prendick accepts from the young doctor and swallows with some satisfaction; "It tasted like blood, and made me feel stronger."⁹⁷(14) There are also, repeated on two occasions in this chapter, suggestive juxtapositions of Prendick's growing strength and expressed desire for solid food, meat, and the persistent animal chorus from the cages on deck above his cabin:

I thought slowly. I was distracted now by the yelping of a number of dogs. 'Am I eligible for solid food?' I asked. 'Thanks to me', he said. 'Even now the mutton is boiling.'

'Yes', I said with assurance; 'I could eat some mutton.' (14)

- - - - -
The growling overhead was renewed, so suddenly and with so much savage anger that it startled me.

'What's that?' I called after him, but the door had closed. He came back again with the boiled mutton, and I was so excited by the appetising smell of it, that I forgot the noise of the beast forthwith. (16)

It is not however, going to be so easy to "forget the noise of the beast", nor his smell, nor his appetite, nor his power, when Prendick goes ashore with the "menagerio".

Prendick's memory plays tricks and taunts him again when he encounters Montgomery's servant; "I had never beheld such a repulsive and extraordinary face before, and yet -- if the contradiction is credible -- I experienced at the same time an odd feeling that in some way I had already encountered exactly the features and gestures that now amazed me."

(19) This is not merely the recollection of the face which peered at him as he was hoisted from the life-boat as a subsequent meeting at night, "At the Schooner's Rail", makes clear:

The creature's face was turned for one brief instant out of the dimness of the stem towards this illumination, and I saw that the eyes that glanced at me shone with a pale green light. I did not know then that a reddish luminosity, at least, is not uncommon in human eyes. The thing came to me as stark inhumanity. That black figure, with its eyes of fire, struck down through all my adult thoughts and feelings, and for a moment the forgotten horrors of childhood came back to my mind. Then the effect passed as it had come. An uncouth black figure of a man, a figure of no particular import, hung over the taffrail, against the starlight, and I found Montgomery was speaking to me. (30)

This is a powerful and evocative scene, operating on more than one level of suggestion. Prendick's memory is going back farther than he can even identify with his reference point of "childhood". The significance of the child's nightmare vision is picked up constantly by Wells, specifically in The Outline, "The Grisly Folk", and climactically in

The Croquet Player. Yet the total spectacle of M'ling passes and is lost. What was extraordinary becomes ordinary, "a figure of no particular import", and he finds himself talking to Montgomery. The rapid transformation — and it gives this impression of metamorphosis, rather than a simple switch of attention — acts as a warning of things as they are, and as they are constantly, whatever the persuasive quality of the 'seeming'. As with the 'fear' in "The Red Room",⁹⁸ the reader is in the presence of a permanent condition, one which children may occasionally plumb in nightmare, but which Prendick is to experience in his waking life. But for one more night following this vision he has the comparative 'normality', merely, of "an avenue of tumultuous dreams".

The last we see of Davis alive demonstrates how inadequate and dangerous is the usual attitude to this condition, this biological embodiment of evil. To Davis and his crew it is simply a matter of persecuting M'ling, of finding a convenient scapegoat for something which is omnipresent, and certainly identifiable in Davis himself. The latter finds solutions simple; "Overboard with 'em! We'll have a clean ship soon of the whole bilin' of 'em." (31) But his ship, taken again as metaphor, is no 'cleaner' after the cargo has been discharged; it cannot be. What the pig's head explains to Simon in Golding's fable, — that he is part of him, that he is "the reason why it's no go" — is to be demonstrated clearly enough for the benefit of Prendick, at least, within the confines of Moreau's island.

Prendick's sojourn of nearly ten months concentrates the story of pursuit, both literal and psychic, and the demonstration of reversion, of

the "artificial factor", and of man's duality. Except for the set thesis or "statement", "Dr. Moreau Explains",⁹⁹ Prendick remains at the centre, a psyche receiving fragmented information and interpreting to the best of his ability. He continues to respond to the stimulus of memory, and the earlier sense of déjà-vu becomes one of déjà-entendu when he listens to the three strange boatmen who unload the launch on arrival; "Somewhere I had heard such a voice before, and I could not think where." (41) The name 'Moreau' has a real but lost significance for him, too, at this stage. Once established in his rough quarters in the enclosure, the elements of the puzzle are assembled, and more sense-impressions are received: "... a curious faint odour, the halitus of something familiar, an odour that had been in the background of my consciousness hitherto, suddenly came forward into the forefront of my thoughts. It was the antiseptic odour of the operating-room." (50) He cannot account for the secrecy surrounding what he imagines is straightforward animal vivisection. But "by some odd leap in my thoughts the pointed ears and luminous eyes of Montgomery's attendant came back again before me with the sharpest definition. I stared before me out at the green sea, frothing under a freshening breeze, and let these and other strange memories of the last few days chase each other through my mind." (50)

The relative security of his new island existence allows him momentary relaxation of a kind, but as the reality of the Doctor's vivisection becomes more apparent — "The crying sounded even louder out of doors. It was as if all the pain in the world had found a voice." (54) — so the pleasant if indifferent environment takes on the quality of a world

which is "... a confusion, blurred with drifting black and red phantasms."

(51)

It is during his first flight from the enclosure that he is made literally aware of the metaphor which runs through this story. Lost in the gathering darkness, he is pursued by a 'creature', as yet unidentified: "I thought at first it was fancy, for whenever I stopped, there was silence, save for the evening breeze in the tree-tops. Then when I went on again there was an echo to my footsteps". *[my italics]* The previous effect on his consciousness of the sight of M'ling at the ship's rail is repeated here in more dramatic form. The phenomenon is defined for Prendick at this point, and his fear, the need for his fear, remains. Months later, in England once again, Prendick declares there is still the "shadow ... over my soul". (190) They are different manifestations of the same condition, the same reality.¹⁰⁰ On the dark beach, in terror, Prendick is close to both a past and a present, and close also to an awareness of a connection between the two, which will always be at his back.

The relentlessness of the primitive and the timeless in this island setting is further demonstrated by a series of related image patterns. The sound of the sea is constantly in the ears of Prendick. Earlier during the pursuit by the ape-creature through the forest, he seeks it as a guide, as a kind of refuge; "I listened rigid, and heard nothing but the creep of blood in my ears. I thought that my nerves were unstrung, and that my imagination was tricking me, I quickened my footsteps almost to a run and turned resolutely towards the sound of the sea again." (65) When Prendick

runs away from the enclosure a second time, he lies low in a cane thicket and looks about him. "The wild scene ... lay sleeping under the sun, and the only sound near me was the thin hum of some small gnats that had discovered me. Presently I became aware of a drowsy breathing sound — the souging of the sea upon the beach." (76)

The scene is "wild", yet it sleeps, and the sound of the insects merges into the breathing of the sea, as unfailling as the coursing blood of the listener.¹⁰¹ These primitive rhythms of Nature are important symbols of the inevitable reincarnation of the "brute". Like Golding¹⁰² in Lord of the Flies, Wells, too, associates the idea of rhythm and ritual. It is during his first flight that Prendick witnesses a display of Dr. Moreau's "saying of the Law"¹⁰³ — though unaware of this explanation at the time — and discerns, more positively than before, "the unmistakable mark of the beast". As a temporary 'guest' of the people of the ravine, while fleeing this time [he imagines] for his life from the Doctor, he sees a more exact display: "A kind of rhythmic fervour fell on all of us; we gabbled and swayed faster and faster, repeating this amazing law. Superficially the contagion of these brute men was upon me, but deep down within me laughter and disgust struggled together." (85) The serious Prendick struggles with an undertow of instinct, and his profession of resistance here contrasts ironically with the confessions of a brute-tainted man who walks a stranger amid the London crowds, at the end of his story.

Moreau's "Fixed Ideas" — the nearest to the "ethical process" that the Nietzschean doctor comes¹⁰⁴ — have their artificial regular chant metamorphosed back into deeper, instinctive rhythms, which he admits he

cannot command, and which eventually cause his destruction and plunge the island into a degenerating war.

Animalism, for Moreau's people — as for Golding's school children — begins with the shedding of blood. It is the sayer of the Law who chants; "Some want to follow things that move, to watch and slink and wait and spring, to kill and bite, bite deep and rich, sucking the blood It is bad." (88) The slaughtered rabbit in the forest glade is the first physical sign that the Law has been disobeyed, and brown stains on the mouths of the creatures provide more intimate and frightening evidence for the human masters on the island. Moreau calls an "assembly", but his authority is already weakening, as the Leopard Man, in a short-lived burst of glory, demonstrates.

In this final, grotesque mockery of the order concept of 'civilization', of law and execution of justice, Prendick's memory and awareness is again stirred. He executes the transgressor himself but not before perceiving the truth; "... seeing the creature there in a perfectly animal attitude, with the light gleaming in its eyes, and its imperfectly human face distorted with terror, I realized again the fact of its humanity." (136) And, with the vision of the Beast People grouped about the scene, he at last recognizes the grim perspective; "I had here before me the whole balance of human life in miniature, the whole interplay of instinct, reason, and fate, in its simplest form." (138) To use Rex Warner's terminology, the quality of the allegory moves from the "occult" to the "overt",¹⁰⁵ as Prendick sees the island as a microcosm for the conflict and

"painful disorder" of the life process in general. The "occult" end of this spectrum of definition continues to be represented with psychic revelations of individual human nature, and the personal dreams and fears of Prendick himself. With the disappearance of Moreau, and the departure of Montgomery to seek him out, there is the return of only partly explained fears: "The morning was as still as death. Not a whisper of wind was stirring, the sea was like polished glass, the sky empty, the beach desolate. In my half-excited, half-feverish state this stillness of things oppressed me." (143)

Moreau is dead, and the collapse of order is further assured. His last resting place, atop a pyre with his latest animal victims, is described with gothic emphasis and returns us again to the influence of Poe; " — his massive face ... with the hard eyes open, staring at the dead white moon above ... [and] my eyes upon that ghastly pile of silvery light and ominous shadows" (157)

Montgomery dies, too, and Prendick is alone; "... over all this island there was now ~~no~~ safe place where I could be alone, and secure to rest or sleep. I had recovered strength amazingly since my landing, but I was still inclined to be nervous, and to break down under any great stress." (167-8) His mind is occupied with all the warnings and hints from his erstwhile companions about the dangers of total reversion in the island's macabre populace.

In the penultimate chapter, Prendick chronicles the essence of this process, as he remembers it, lasting a full ten months before he could effect his own salvation. Speech is the first to disintegrate -- as aspect

of reversion in isolation which Golding emphasises in Lord of the Flies and Pincher Martin¹⁰⁶ -- and Prendick recalls vividly the increasing decline of precise articulation, and the final, grotesque, "mere lumps of sound". (179) Each day he goes in fear of new signs of the "explosive animalism" among the beast folk, and more significantly his own decline, noticeable by degrees; "I am told that even now my eyes have a strange brightness, a swift alertness of movement." (181)

The sea sends a means of escape, with the same element of accident and indifference displayed in Prendick's earlier experience, though with the added evocation of sheer horror, again borrowed from Poe, as Raknem identifies precisely. The island slips away out of his vision, and "the lank spire of smoke dwindled to a finer and finer line against the hot sunset. The ocean rose up around me, hiding that low dark patch from my eyes." (188) The island's physical reality indeed fades, but its metaphysical reality never dies. Prendick's nightmares constitute a heightened awareness, too awful to bear in the society of 'men'; "I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls, and that they would presently begin to revert" (189)

Like Mr. Blettsworthy and Dr. Finchatton, he too receives help from "a mental specialist", making this one of Wells's earliest recognitions in his fiction of the psychic drama and significance of animal origin. This, too, emphasises the radical difference between Prendick's reaction and Gulliver's final 'adjustment' problem on his return. Swift's savage misanthropy never strays into the twilight zone inhabited by Wells. The

similarity of situation is, of course, obvious, but Swift's name must not be used too loosely in this kind of association. Prendick cannot easily find help or relief: "Though I do not expect that the terror of that island will ever altogether leave me, at most times it lies far in the back of my mind, a mere distant cloud, a memory and a faint distrust; but there are times when the little cloud spreads until it obscures the whole sky." (190) The essential ideas are here: "memory", "back of my mind", "cloud", and "shadow over my soul", previously quoted.

This mental presence gives Prendick's vision a new dimension — less startling perhaps than that in "The Strange Case of Davidson's Eyes", but more universal, more relevant and urgent — as this oft-quoted passage demonstrates:

I would go out into the streets to fight with my delusion, and prowling women would mew after me, furtive craving men glance jealously at me, weary pale workers go coughing by me, with tired eyes and eager paces like wounded deer dripping blood, old people, bent and dull, pass murmuring to themselves, and all unheeding a ragged tail of gibing children. (190-191)

Prendick sees this ghastly composite picture of man-beast — from the cat-like women to the concentrated simian image of straggling children — because, by virtue of one man's surgical skill, he has seen the personification of the brute in man, and in seeing this he has been made aware of "the animal within us".(200) He has held the memory of the race in eleven months of real nightmare. He may end his story "in hope and solitude", but the "solitude", so fearfully understood and experienced, must necessarily govern the "hope". At one point on Moreau's island, he feared he would be operated on, and cast out to join the bestiary, "... a lost soul to the rest of their Comus rout".(74) But he is now, necessarily, a "lost soul".

FOOTNOTES

59 Henkin comments on the "fatalistic shadow of damnosa hereditas" with reference to Moreau, p. 195.

60 Wagar, p. 75.

61 Ibid., p. 44.

62 Costa, p. 141. Antonina Vallentin makes a very similar comment in her earlier critical biography, H.G. Wells: Prophet of Our Day (New York, 1950), p. 265: "The note of cruelty, previously struck in The Island of Dr. Moreau and The Invisible Man, is heard again."

J. Kagarlitski, whose comments on Blettsworthy will be referred to at a later point, recalls Wells's short story, "The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes" (1895) as well as Moreau. See The Life and Thought of H.G. Wells, trans. by Moura Budberg (New York, 1966), p. 194.

63 H.G. Wells: A Comprehensive Bibliography, The H.G. Wells Society (London, 1968), ©. 1966, p. 37.

64 The Struggle for the Modern (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), pp. x and 71-72. Spender regards Wells and Snow as early and recent examples of 'contemporaries'; writers who "see the changes that have taken place in civilization as the result of developments of scientific technology, and think that, on the whole, the duty of writers is to enlist their art to support the cause of progress." (x) In other words, as Spender later amplifies, the 'contemporary', or the 'Voltairean I' of Wells and Shaw, "acts upon events", whereas the "'modern I' of Rimbaud, Joyce, Proust, Eliot's Prufrock is acted upon by them." (72)

65 Preface to Vol. II of The Works of H.G. Wells (28 vols.), The Island of Dr. Moreau, The Sleeper Awakes (New York, 1924), p. ix.

66 Wells's stand on the controversial issue of vivisection can be found in Vincent Brome's record of the Shaw-Wells battle. See Six Studies in Quarrelling (London, 1958).

In Marriage (1912), the skeleton in Trafford's cupboard proves to be his father's involvement in a vivisection scandal. Atlantic Edition vol. xv (New York, 1926), p. 203.

- 67 "Why am I here now — an outcast from civilization — instead of being a happy man, enjoying all the pleasures of London? Simply because — eleven years ago -- I lost my head for ten minutes on a foggy night'." (28)
- 68 Preface to Vol. II of Atlantic Edition, p. ix.
- 69 (New York, 1934), p. ix.
- 70 H.G. Wells (London, 1950), pp. 37-38.
- 71 Preface to Vol. II of Atlantic Edition, p. ix.
- 72 The Living Novel (New York, 1947), p. 126.
George Connes represents a less common response to this novel in Étude Sur La Pensée de Wells (Paris, 1926), 86-91. Connes begins his discussion thus: "Il y a deux façons d'envisager L'Ile du docteur Moreau: on peut la prendre au sérieux, même au tragique; et on peut s'en amuser; nous inclinons vers la seconde." His dubious analysis rests on such surprising statements as this: "Et enfin, l'oeuvre n'a pas écrite dans une période du pessimisme, mais au contraire par un Wells débordant d'exubérance, dans cette période riche de bonne humeur et de joie de vivre dont les contes sont le produit le plus distingué." The briefest of surveys of Wells's short stories of the period would reveal the gross simplification inherent in this view.
- 73 Critical Quarterly, vol. I, no. i (1959), 36-43. Bernard Bergonzi refers to Gerber's article in the initial stages of his discussion of Moreau. See The Early H.G. Wells: A Study of the Science Romances (Toronto, 1961), p. 100.
- 74 See Ingvald Raknem, H.G. Wells and His Critics (Trondheim, 1962), pp. 395-397, for the most comprehensive survey of literary influences. Some of the identifications have been variously contested: for example, Hillegas disagrees with Bergonzi's view of Moreau as a Frankenstein figure, (see Bergonzi p. 108: "He is Frankenstein — the would-be creator of life — in a post-Darwinian guise".) and consequently disagrees with Henkin, who interprets the novel as "... in the laboratory tradition of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein". (p. 265) Hillegas cannot accept the implication of the "alchemical-Frankenstein interest in science as a kind of magic to get something for nothing. Moreau is a far more sinister creature than the mediaeval Faust or Mary Shelley's Frankenstein". (p. 27) He prefers to see in Moreau "the foreshadowing of the ruler of the modern scientific state."

A reading of Wells's article, "The Limits of Individual Plasticity", The Saturday Review (19 January, 1895), 89-90, supports Henkin and Bergonzi for the greater part, as this passage illustrates: "We overlook only too often the fact that a living being may also be regarded as raw material, as something plastic, something that may be shaped and altered, that this, possibly, may be added or eliminated, and the organism as a whole developed far beyond its apparent possibilities." (p. 90) However, in the penultimate paragraph of the article there is seen room for Hillegas' argument: "In our growing science of hypnotism we find the promise of a possibility of replacing old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas. Very much indeed of what we call moral education is such an artificial modification and perversion of instinct; pugnacity is trained into courageous self-sacrifice, and suppressed sexuality into pseudo-religious emotion." (p. 90)

The question of source in Moreau, and elsewhere in Wells, is treated under the heading "Originality or Plagiarism" in Raknem's study. The implications of this approach are contested by David Y. Hughes, "H.G. Wells and the Charge of Plagiarism", Nineteenth Century Fiction, xxi (June 1966), 85-90. Hughes reminds us that "... where there is a tradition, the dichotomies of 'originality' versus 'plagiarism' are over simple since most literary effects become common property and originality becomes a function of their use." (p. 89).

- 75 Library, vol. 16 (1961), 29-36.
- 76 The Saturday Review, (17 August, 1895), 204-205.
- 77 Ibid., p. 204.
- 78 Ibid., p. 205.
- 79 For a brief and relevant indication of the importance of A.R. Wallace, see Henkin, p. 49.
- 80 "The archetypes of Literature", Myth and Method: Modern Theories of Fiction, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961), p. 162. This chapter by Frye is taken from material contained in Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, New Jersey, 1957), for this reference, specifically, pp. 156-157.

- 81 See Bergonzi, p. 104: "Prendick assumes that Moreau is a modern version of Circe or Comus." At the beginning of Chapter 11, "The Hunting of the Man", Prendick fears he will be transformed by surgery, and sent off to join "... the rest of their Comus rout". (p. 74)
- 82 (Ithaca, New York, 1964), p. 214 n.
- 83 Gerber, Critical Quarterly, 1, i (1959), p. 40.
- 84 Golding, in expressing his fascination for the island stories of Stevenson and Wyss, speaks of the concretion of the myth in these terms: "An island must be built, and have an organic structure like a tooth." See "Island", The Hot Gates (New York, 1965), p. 109.
- 85 "Psyche's Task" (1913), cited in "Cultural History", The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature, ed. Richard Ellman and Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York, 1965), p. 532.
- 86 Victory (New York, 1928), ©. 1915, p. 112.
- 87 Ibid., p. 285.
- 88 Ibid., p. 329. For a relevant analysis of Victory, see Stanton de Varen Hoffman, "Conrad's Menagerie: Animal Imagery and Theme" Bu.R., XII, ii (1964), 59-71.
- 89 Victory, p. 193.
- 90 Ibid., pp. 355 and 356. The suggestion of earlier, powerful forces on Golding's island is also made in the descriptions of the strange pink rock formations which Ralph, Jack and Simon explore on their first expedition together: "Some unknown force had wrenched and shattered these cubes so that they lay askew, often piled diminishingly on each other." And it is one of these large pink boulders which the three boys send crashing down the hill-side, "like an enraged monster", an act which suggests that the animal forces in their own nature are below a tissue surface. Lord of the Flies (Harmondsworth, England, 1964).

- 91 See the Preface to Vol. II of the Atlantic Edition, p. ix:
"... and the influence of Swift is very apparent in it." Raknem,
again, gives precise identification, pp. 395-397.
- 92 Bergonzi would perhaps seem to be too cautious in identifying the
influence of Poe.
- 93 Raknem refers to Poe's "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym",
p. 396.
- 94 The species of plant providing the emetic drug of the same name;
an example of Wells's exercise in Swiftian scatology, but not without
rather more sinister undertones.
- 95 The characterization of Davis may be influenced by Poe's delineation
of the heartless Captain Block.
- 96 Bergonzi expands on this detail, see p. 102.
- 97 Ibid., p. 102.
- 98 "'The worst of all the things that haunt poor mortal man', said I;
'and that is, in all its nakedness -- Fear! Fear that will not
have light nor sound, that will not bear with reason, that deafens
and darkens and overwhelms." The Short Stories of H.G. Wells
(London, 1952), © 1927, p. 456.
- 99 See Bergonzi, p. 104 et seq., for a full explication of the
philosophical importance of this section of the narrative, adapted
from early article, "The Limits of Individual Plasticity". See
footnote 74.
- 100 See Carl Jung, "The Psychology of the Unconscious", The Collected
Works of G.C. Jung, trans. R.F.C. Hull, 17 vols. (New York, 1953),
vii, pp. 29-30: "And indeed it is a frightening thought that man
also has a shadow side to him, consisting not just of little weak-
nesses and foibles, but of a positively demonic dynamism
Blindly, he strikes against the salutary dogma of original sin,
which is yet so prodigiously true."

- 101 Golding creates identical imagery in Lord of the Flies. While Simon crouches in his silent glade, we read: "The deep sea breaking miles away on the reef made an undertow less perceptible than the susurrations of the blood." (p. 55)
- 102 The rhythmic rise and fall of the sea, "like the breathing of some stupendous creature ... the sleeping leviathan" (p. 101), the rhythm of the day's cycle, "the slow swing from dawn to dusk" (p. 55), merges into the tribal chants and dances of Jack and his hunters, the "wordless rhythm" (p. 88).
- 103 Recognized by Bergonzi (p. 103) as a parody of Kipling's "Law of the Jungle", from the Second Jungle Book. Raknem cites an earlier acknowledgement in New Statesman and Nation (September 4, 1943), 154.
- 104 See Aldous Huxley, Island (New York, 1962), p. 199: "God said, 'Let Darwin be', and there was Nietzsche, Imperialism and Adolf Hitler." The connections here are interesting: Bergonzi points out that the Nietzschean 'transvaluation of values' is suggested in the motives of Dr. Moreau, though, as he explains, it is not known whether Wells saw the Tille translation of Thus Spake Zarathustra, which was also published in 1896. In The Croquet Player, written under the shadow of European fascism, Wells makes a more tangible link in this context.
- 105 "The Allegorical Method", The Cult of Power (London, 1946), p. 109. Warner differentiates between the attempt "to give vigour and vividness to a definite belief", and "to attempt fantastically to throw some light on what is beyond the ordinary reach of words." (pp. 109-110) Though a sharp line cannot be drawn between the two methods, Warner cites Bunyan and Swift as representing the former, and Dostoevsky, Dickens, Melville, Kafka, the latter. As Moreau demonstrates, Wells is capable of working in both areas.
- 106 In Lord of the Flies, there is a gradual substitution of animal response; Robert "squeals" and Piggy "grunts", Percival Wemys Madison, in his terror of the dark and its mysteries, is reduced to "inarticulate gibbering". Laughter becomes "bloodthirsty snarling", and animal articulation is complete as the wolf-pack scours the island for Ralph, "ululating", and the 'boy' is driven from the thicket, "screaming, snarling, bloody."

It is in Pincher Martin that the rock-bound sailor holds desperately on to speech as "proof of identity", the only quality of being which stands between him and total disintegration.

Bergonzi comments on the importance Moreau gives to the "gift of speech" as the major differentiation between man and monkey. See p. 110.

(b) Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island: The Psychic Journey.

The Reverend Rupert Blettsworthy, the rector of Harrow Hoeward, his nephew recalls, would occasionally have his faith in the fundamental good of man assailed by the daily fare of the newspaper columns:

All men meant the same thing really and everyone was fundamentally good. But sometimes people forgot themselves. Or didn't quite understand how things ought to be explained. If the Origin of Evil troubled my uncle but little, he was sometimes perplexed I think by the moral inadvertence of our fellow creatures. He would talk over his newspaper at breakfast to his wife and Miss Duffield and me, or with our frequent guests at lunch or dinner, about crimes, about the disconcerting behaviour of pitiful ungracious individuals, murders, swindlers and the like. 107

If Arnold Blettsworthy's early mentor was unable to discern connections between the "Origin of Evil" and the daily testimony of "moral inadvertence", at least his nephew has ample opportunity to come to some relevant conclusions after his succession of literal and psychic experiences, clearly related to those of the much earlier Edward Prendick.

The particular case of "moral inadvertence" broadcast to the world, which — as has already been indicated — must be considered as an important background source for Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island, is the Boston trial of Sacco and Vanzetti. It is misleading in the context of the book itself, and when one considers Wells's close concern with the history of the case, to recognize only — as David Lodge does — "a casual reference"¹⁰⁸ to the whole affair, towards the end of the narrative. In the first place,

the extent of Wells's commitment to the integrity of the lives of those two Italian immigrants, whose story began in April 1920 with the alleged robbery and murder and ended in August 1927 with their execution, was considerable and manifest. Sufficient reference may be found summarized in two essays from the collection, The Way the World is Going (1928):

"Outrages in Defence of Order. The Proposed Murder of Two American Radicals" (©. May 29, 1927), and "Some Plain Words to Americans. Are the Americans a Sacred People? Is International Criticism Restricted to the Eastward Position?" (©. October 16, 1927). Wells, in the first article, clearly implies that the case for him stands out as an example of civilized savagery, a signal, possibly, of the devolution of social man, giving the lie, once again, to progress. He sees in it a typical, "paradoxical resort to evil on the part of those who are supposed to be its professional antagonists," and sets its significance in this kind of framework: "It is an affair more dismaying from some points of view even than the long tale of atrocities on which the Fascist dominion in Italy rests today. It calls for the closest study on the part of everyone who is concerned with the present development of our civilisation."¹⁰⁹ The perspectives Blettsworthy becomes aware of on the imaginary Rampole Island are echoed, though with more specific application, in this concluding evaluation: "Too many Americans, I fear, believe that a little blood-letting is good for their civilisation. So did the Aztecs before them. But blood is a poor cement for the foundations of a civilisation. It is less a cement than a corrosive. There have been civilisations before the present

one in America, and for all the blood they shed so abundantly upon their high places they have gone and are buried and stuff for the archaeologist."¹¹⁰ Wells's pre-occupations with the vulnerability of civilisation as a viable concept are again intensified by the spectacle of justice, mercy and reason flouted utterly.

He goes into more detail concerning his personal engagement in the affair in the second of the articles cited; the appeal which he, Galsworthy and Bennett signed, and which drew a prolonged response from "wrathful Massachusetts citizens" and assurances from these same people that they had "'consigned' various of my unimportant writings to 'the garbage can' and [had] otherwise treated them with contumely."¹¹¹

These two commentaries on the case and on contemporary American affairs in general — and here one might add from the same collection, "The New American People: What is Wrong with It?" (May 15, 1927) — may well form a greater part of the inspiration behind Blettsworthy than is generally remarked upon. The story begins and ends in England, but it is not necessarily very easy to decide quite how 'English' are the institutions and codes which suffer the barbs of satire in Blettsworthy's five-year imprisonment in the 'transparency' of Rampole Island — in fact, New York, the identification of which is first hinted at when the captive Englishman is rowed ashore, "into a sort of fiord winding through cliffs":

Guarding this, as it were ... was a strange freak of nature, a jutting mass of rock in the shape of a woman with staring eyes and an open mouth; a splintered pinnacle of rock rose above her like an upraised arm and hand brandishing a club; the eyes had been rimmed with white and the threat of the mouth had

been enhanced by white and red paint, suggesting teeth and oozing blood. It was very hard and bright and ugly in the morning sunshine. This, I was to learn, was the Great Goddess welcoming her slaves. The savages stopped the canoe ahead of her and raised their paddles aloft in salutation. The forward paddler held up a fish, an exceptionally big one. Another leant back towards me, lifted my head by the hair as if to introduce me to the divinity, and then threw me back among the rest of the catch. (163)

This grotesque vision of the Statue of Liberty — its face and mouth reminiscent of the primordial skull in The Croquet Player — might well serve as re-definition of America's traditional freedoms in the light of contemporary social atrocity. In a sense, Sacco and Vanzetti are part of the same catch and are eventually offered for sacrifice.¹¹²

In the work itself, the "casual reference" occurs in Section 13 of the fourth chapter, under the title "Old Horror Recalled". Blettsworthy is now re-integrated — but barely — into the society of men, and has since his return experienced what the same society was preparing for during his long mental disorientation, the First World War, "the frame of all contemporary reality". The allegorical correspondence is by now well established and, indeed, heavily stressed. In one of many expository passages in the fourth chapter, he describes the renewed stresses upon his mind, "produced by the trial, the appeals, the prolongations and delays, the re-trial and the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in Massachusetts" (326). The case and its implications are briefly discussed before he proceeds to describe, with a vividness and immediacy generally lacking in

this last chapter, the reclaiming of his mind by the landscape of Rampole Island, now the scene of a trial and an execution:

The circle of the Ancients had been reinforced by various judges and lawyers and strange, strong-jawed biters of cigar-ends and chewers of gum And those two men perpetually on their way to execution I saw in the likeness of two commonplace, luckless, excuse-making visionaries, who had come to the island as cheap, ill-trained missionaries from some source unknown. My fancy dressed them in shoddy clerical garb. Sacco looked puzzled and dark and sullen, but Vanzetti had the mild face of a dreamer and his eyes were fixed on the lip of sunlit green between the cliffs and the ribbon of the sky. I saw the pair of them very plainly. If I could draw, I could draw their portraits even now as though they were before me. (329)

Blettsworthy's nightmare covers the six years of their march to "the Reproof and their doom". (330) The execution is appropriately a mass killing, and it is also a cannibals' feast at which everyone shares: "Such is the cruel over-emphasis of these visions; they magnify verities into monstrosities." (330-331) He is forced to accept the sacrifice before the Temple of the Goddess, a sacrifice which reminds him of the carnage he witnessed in the real hell of the Western Front. At this point, the other world slips away and he escapes the awful implications of the common feast.

The magnification of "verity" into "monstrosity" is precisely what, in part, Wells creates in this oddly mixed fantasy. In this respect, the stimulus of a contemporary event, a "verity" like the Boston trial, is of vital importance. Wells compared it at one point with the Dreyfus case, where "the soul of a people is tested and displayed".¹¹³ However, the

substance of the particular fiction which derives from this degree of concern and awareness extends the idea of a 'trial' which "tests" a nation's soul. As in Moreau, it is the "soul" of the human species which is put on trial, and as in the earlier story the trial takes place in an island microcosm — though here it is a mental dreamland and not an actual location discovered and mapped by the Royal Navy.

It is not, then, merely, a "casual reference"; it is necessary to realise the potency of this topical allusion first, and then we may be quite prepared to agree with Lodge when he goes on to stress that the "general implications about the nature of man"¹¹⁴ constitute the ultimate relevance of the story.

The eclipse of Wells's influence as a writer came about by his own virtual retirement from the field into the social and political arena, by the pronouncements of Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence in the Twenties and the changes wrought by their own fiction, and by the oversimplified left-wing contempt for the alleged 'utopist' Wells in the Thirties. His decline was hastened by the kind of chronological categorization already criticized in this argument. This eclipse was largely explicable and largely justified — the "experiment in statement" was often cumbersome and uninspiring — but it did mean that worthy "experiments" were neglected or incorrectly classified, and Blettsworthy is clearly one such work.

The closest critical perspective on this satiric fantasy is in West's biography of 1930. In his final chapter West "marks a more hopeful development"¹¹⁵ in its pages but finds the 'generalising' and 'desiccating'

effects of symbolism clash with the 'individualising' and 'animating' effects of satire. He finds this duality is resolved in The Autocracy of Mr. Parham (1929), "Wells's best story, as such, since 1914."¹¹⁶ West goes on to predict that this may well prove Wells's final form: "Satire is the natural medium for the artist — such as Swift, Voltaire, Anatole France — whose purpose and attitude are primarily intellectual."¹¹⁷ The admixture of symbolism and satire will be discussed later with closer reference to the text, but it may suffice here to note West's undue praise of Parham, an inferior novel, which Wells, too — in another of his surprising self-judgements — found worthy of special mention,¹¹⁸ and West's suggestion that satire may be the natural medium for Wells's "intellectual" purposes. In Blettsworthy, again, we will find need to refer, at greater length than in Moreau, to the influence of Swift — and also to Voltaire, to whom the book is dedicated¹¹⁹ — but estimations of 'Wells the satirist, in the tradition of ... and so on, must be made with care. There are points at which satire on human nature and human social structures becomes obsessed with a darker nightmare, a less intellectually conceived vision which makes Swift's cathartic laughter and scatological misanthropy seem almost rational. It is this added dimension which is perhaps clouding the real character of Blettsworthy for West, though at least he acknowledges its singularity.

Antonin Vallentin, in the first full-length post-war study of Wells, H.G. Wells: Prophet of Our Day (1950), discusses in some detail "Wells's unfairly neglected novel", finding it "marked by a new seriousness,

a more vigorous approach to reality", and with a style ... more biting than heretofore, the incisive phrases [driving] with tooth and claw into the very heart of the human problem."¹²⁰

It was next taken up at any length by Kagarlitski in The Life and Thought of H.G. Wells (1966). The Russian scholar, an earlier editor of Wells, adds illuminating perspectives on much of Wells's work, including Blettsworthy.¹²¹ His comments encouraged David Lodge to test the validity of the recommended resurrection, and he found in its favour, though preferring his own reasons for a recognition of the book's importance, namely a later example in the Wells canon of "an anti-humanist moral drawn from the idea of evolution".¹²²

These post-war commentaries — few in number but consistent in their approval and recognition — in fact merely return to the responses of Blettsworthy's contemporary reviewers. Wells was wrong, or at least forgetful, when he described in his autobiography the book's "very tepid reception".¹²³ A perusal of six representative English national periodicals — The Saturday Review, The Spectator, The London Mercury, The New Statesman, Time and Tide, and The Times Literary Supplement — reveals a unanimous recognition of a revival in the imaginative powers of its author. L.P. Hartley, for example, finds "the free manner of the earlier Wells, the directness, the authority and the vitality".¹²⁴ Edward Shanks, an earlier appreciator of Wells's mythopoic qualities, in First Essays in Literature,¹²⁵ though lamenting the loss of the "old method", can

say "yet the old method has here a better innings than for many years past
.... There is grit in the writing, stuff one can feel between one's
teeth"¹²⁶ "Here is Wells at his best",¹²⁷ begins The Spectator
reviewer, and ends on the hope that this is not the last we have seen of
Arnold Blettsworthy. Elizabeth Bibescu, writing for The New Statesman, fights
a personal prejudice against "That dreary non-man's land, that last resort
of tired satire — allegory",¹²⁸ and a personal preference for "the first
three-quarters of Christina Alberta's Father", but is drawn to praise his
"vivid ... unencumbered"¹²⁹ prose and the sustained "coloratura" effects
throughout the book. Vera Brittain, in Time and Tide, refers to the
publisher's claim that it signals Wells's "return to fiction 'plain and
unadorned' and that the story may be regarded ... as thriller, fantasy,
romance or even realism",¹³⁰ and after a personal investigation of the
sociological implications and the patterns of symbolism, concludes: "This
book may be recommended to all Mr. Wells's admirers, for it reflects every
aspect of his many-sided powers."¹³¹ Finally, The Times Literary Supplement
reviewer opens confidently: "His long career of swift and prolific literary
production has done nothing to dull the freshness of Mr. H.G. Wells's eye.
Opening Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island ... it was hardly possible not to
wonder whether, after all these years of voyaging, adventuring and battling
in the most arduous realms of the mind, its author would not prove at least
a little exhausted, a trifle blasé. But not a bit of it: he looks out today
upon the world in which he lives and finds it as incredible as ever."¹³²

Like Shanks, this reviewer is forced to recall Moreau, and it is this central connection which gives the answer to the questions why Wells is not blasé, why he does find the world still "incredible". Thirty-two years after writing Moreau, years of fevered involvement with the modern age, Wells is still amazed and horrified to see that the world is still the same. In Blettsworthy he returns to the sombre evidence of unchanged human nature, of an unchanged species. The vision this time has, perhaps, more Swiftian 'laughter', but this should not divert our attention from the same underlying fears, nor should the concluding record of old wounds healed, and the predicted brighter future, be in anyway taken as decisive.

Having established this critical perspective, it is convenient now to begin an examination of the narrative sequentially in terms of its theme and accommodating form.

Wells sets this work unambiguously in the eighteenth century novel tradition on the title page, by elaborating a subtitle which almost seems to substantiate Walter de la Mare's explanation in another but related context; "Authors of the eighteenth century delighted in copious sub-titles. They had one signal merit; they saved the reader further trouble."¹³³ Here it is in its entirety:

Being the Story of a Gentleman of Culture and Refinement who suffered Shipwreck and saw no Human Beings other than Cruel and Savage Cannibals for several years.

How he beheld Megatheria alive and made some notes of their Habits.

How he became a Sacred Lunatic.

How he did at last escape in a Strange Manner from the Horror and Barbarities of Rampole Island in time to fight in the Great War, and how afterwards he came near returning to that Island for ever.

With much Amusing and Edifying Matter concerning Manners, Customs, Beliefs, Warfare, Crime, and a Storm at Sea.

Concluding with some Reflections upon Life in General and upon these Present Times in Particular.

The story which follows is divided into four chapters, or in effect books, in the manner of Gulliver's Travels, each of the chapters defining a different area of the narrator's experience: his initial problem of adjustment among his fellow men, and his history up to the point of his drastic disorientation; the symbolic journey to redefine his identity and the sombre lessons learned from this; his life and adventures on Rampole Island, and finally the return to the 'real' world, with questions answered and assessments made. Arnold Blettsworthy leads the reader through this narrative -- a "new Gulliver" as The Spectator reviewer called him,¹³⁴ enacting a similar drama of discovery, displaying the same exactitude in observation, and both the true and the limited perceptions of the eighteenth century adventurer.

However, the hand of Wells, in particular the Wells who had written "The Contemporary Novel" and to a great extent had re-directed his own path of fiction since 1910, is made evident within a very few pages. The

Narrator outlines his birth and parentage, indicating the influences visited on him by his mother and father, and of the former he says: "To her ... I must owe my preference for inclusive rather than concise statement" (6), an admission remarkably like George Ponderevo's stated in the introductory chapter of Tono-Bungay: "My ideas of a novel throughout are comprehensive rather than austere."¹³⁵ This comment is extended and suggests itself clearly as an authorial preference for a particular purpose and method of fiction: "... her mind could not rest satisfied so long as a statement was in any way incomplete ... How well I understand! I too understand how insupportable inexpression may become." (6)

As Ponderevo's opening clarification suggests a certain ranging looseness of narrative to come, and is yet belied by the studied symbolic structure which a reading will demonstrate, so this rather more oblique warning does not seem justified, at least for the first three chapters. In the final chapter, the weight of these early hints is felt, and the progression of the whole work from metaphor to discourse may be fully realised.¹³⁶ (This progression, in capsule form here, is a scaled down version of the general direction of Wells as a writer, though, as has already been mentioned, such an exact perspective should not be relied upon too heavily.) The temptation, or rather the need -- the imperative need of the conscious educator -- not to rest with statements incomplete, is more than apparent in what The Spectator calls "an unnecessary and inartistic conclusion."¹³⁷

Before the degree of "telling" increases and takes over almost entirely in the concluding chapter, and the import of the story is carried by this "inclusive" statement, the narrative rests on often subtle and

complex metaphorical description and setting. To begin with, in Blettsworthy's account of his family history, and his own growth to manhood, there are a number of themes and images, reminiscent of those in Moreau, carrying a potent sub-text beneath the often urbane utterances of the narrator.

The first suggestions of "the dark fountains of my being" (228) and the later realisation that "... the cruelty of the universe was in me as well as about me" (301) emerge in the narrator's account of his mixed parentage. His father's family, "very scrupulous ... and gentle" (3), was long-established: "a family of cultivators and culture", spreading its unostentatious influence throughout the quiet counties of the West Country, accumulating wealth but doing so in the best possible taste. Arnold's "entirely legitimate" (6) birth was a product of the union between an heir of a family whose name had been recorded in the Domesday Book and a woman "of mixed Portuguese and Syrian origin, with a touch of the indigenous blood of Madeira, where I was born." (6) Some of what he owed to his mother has already been illustrated, but there is more, and of greater thematic significance:

Moreover, I surely owe to her something even more alien to the Blettsworthy stock in my sense of internal moral conflict. I am divided against myself — to what extent this book must tell. I am not harmonious within; not at peace with myself as the true Blettsworthys are. I am at issue with my own Blettsworthyness. (7)

This indication of a kind of schizophrenia, a clear division of inherited characteristics, is stressed repeatedly in these early pages. Significantly,

the claims of his mother's ancestry seem to be of less weight because of her early death and his dim memories of her. She fades into the shadows of the past, and a five-year-old Arnold is brought from Madeira¹³⁸ to Cheltenham and the care of an aunt. The memory he does retain of her is confused with one of a tornado which swept the island: "Two clouds of apprehension mingled and burst in dreadful changes. I remember seeing trees and hours most shockingly inverted and a multitude of crimson petals soddened in a gutter, and that is associated confusedly with being told that my mother was dying and then dead." (7)

The dark, southern passions are here given symbolic representation in this natural montage of his mother's death, but the "crimson petals" are not lifeless and the storm has not blown itself out. The storm in Chapter Two is a prelude to Blettsworthy's tortured progress of self-identification. As the above passage suggests, it is in him to face that identity, to enquire and to probe, if the realisations are halting and reluctant. His parental background conveniently represents the universal significance of human duality, and the experiences which make up his story provide the proof of this duality.

In recalling his move to an English rural peace,¹³⁹ and the guidance of "The Good Broad Churchman", Blettsworthy sees a transition from darkness to light. He arrived, "a small indeterminate plastic creature, which might have become anything. But there inevitably I became the Blettsworthy I am today." (14) The naive belief in the strength of the "ethical process" moulding and covering the raw material of human nature

seems ironical when recalled with some of the revelations which are to follow; "... the Blettsworthy I am today" is to be duly shown. But for a number of early, sunny years, his Uncle's influence was appreciated with a comfortable but limited vision: "It was like awakening on a bright morning merely to see him. Everything in my life before his appearance had been vague, minatory, and yet unconvincing; I felt I was wrong and unsafe, that I was surrounded by shadowy and yet destructive powers and driven by impulses that could be as disastrous as they were uncontrollable. Daily life was the mask of a tornado." (14)

The "personal magic" (15) of his Uncle made the world seem a safe place, and restored confidence in the "fundamentally good". The God he had known in Madeira — "a subtropical passionate Dios, hot and thundery" (16) — becomes "the confederated shadow of my uncle, a dear English gentleman of a God, a super-Blettsworthy in control, a God of dew and bright frosty mornings, helpful and unresentful the God of a world that was right way up." (16) These "two divinities" are again suggestive of the dilemma of duality, and though the rational, 'ethical' force dominates his imagination at this time, he is driven to reconsider: "Was it no more than a dream?" (17)

The appreciative nephew catalogues all that his uncle taught him. The rector becomes almost the embodiment of the civilizing process, yet in some degree unseeing or unwilling to see. The Franco-German War had been the last major conflict, and he was convinced there could be no chance of further animosity, especially with Queen Victoria's grandson on the Imperial Throne of Germany. These were, indeed, "golden Victorian days among the Wiltshire hills." (26)

Arnold is convinced: "in spite of the frightful adventures that have happened to me and the dark streaks of fear and baseness that have been revealed in my composition, [I became] an essentially civilized man."

(26) The reader may be rather more convinced, too, than he would be in response to such a statement from Edward Prendick, but the concept of 'civilization', the degree to which Blettsworthy, or anyone, can lay claim, is still highly suspect. And the reasons for the suspicion is the constant pre-occupation of Wells, man's animal origins, here alluded to with a deceptive casualness and humour:

Had you met me in my flannels on the way to the practice nets in Sir Willoughby Denby's park you would no more have suspected that my mother was Portuguese and Syrian with a dash of Madeira than the remoter ancestors of the Blettsworthys had hair and tails. So completely had the assimilative power of our Blettsworthy countryside worked upon me and civilized me. (28)

The "plastic creature" would seem quite secure in this civilized environment of civilized appearances, attitudes and ideals, but "daily life was the mask of a tornado", and the tornado — a real and symbolic part of his experience — was, in turn, masking de facto qualities of human life. Arnold Blettsworthy's exotic origin is merely a symbol of humanity's saurian ancestry.

Meanwhile, the world goes by, in the form of the Boer War which claims the life of his father, and leaves "no scars" on his young son's world view, seeming to be "the most civilized war in all history, fought with restraint and frequent chivalry." (29)

Arnold's Oxford education comes and goes, and he remains in the civilized shadow of his alma mater in partnership with a friend, Graves, together endeavouring to start a chain of bookshops. It is in these circumstances that he develops his relationship with Olive Slaughter, a girl he had met as an undergraduate, in a manner reminiscent of other such encounters elsewhere in Wells's fiction, in particular The New Machiavelli.¹⁴⁰ This semi-autobiographical realisation of an adolescent dream is loosely conceived, and unconvincing as only Wells can be in relating affairs of the heart.¹⁴¹ The precision and bite of the narrative at this point is temporarily lost, and we see these hurriedly recounted events merely as a device for bringing about the narrator's first collapse. He discovers Olive in the act of betraying him, in the arms of his friend and business partner. From that moment, to quote the authorial voice in The Autocracy of Mr. Parham, we see the truth in the statement that "no percipient creature has ever yet lived in stark reality".¹⁴² For Blettsworthy, with the evidence of betrayal writhing absurdly and inelegantly on the bed before him, loses his grasp on the 'real' world: "At that my memory halts for a time. I do not know through what black eternities I lived in the next few seconds." (47-48) He momentarily loses himself in a wild physical rage, demonstrating Remington's "red blaze"¹⁴³ and recalling Benham's lonely fit in the hotel suite.¹⁴⁴ He becomes aware for the first time of being unaware of the sequence of his actions. There are mysterious gaps in his memory, and the scene of fight and pursuit takes on the character of an over-edited piece of film. It is perhaps not so much the truth of supposed friend's disloyalty which is alarming for him, but the discovery of his own reaction to the experience.

From here to the end of the first chapter, or book, the inexplicable tricks of a disintegrating hold on reality dominate Blettsworthy's recollections. As he explains: "My explicit personal narrative must give place here to a vague circumstantial one". (63) After an aimless bicycle ride in pursuit of an elusive personal identity, and an inevitable accident, there comes a six-week confusion of events, which culminates in a Norwich infirmary bed, and a gradual repossession of faculties: "The memories returned like a reassembling school. They got into their places, nodding, shouting out names, and calling to one another" (66)

Neurasthenia is the medical verdict. The genial family solicitor Mr. Ferndyke recommends sea travel as the best recuperative cure, to forget the wrecked personal and business life behind him. Youth has suffered a loss. Hopefully, manhood can, in part, be identified. Ferndyke even urges him to write about his coming travels; "Like Conrad?", queries Blettsworthy. In the second chapter, his voyaging and what he discovers belong to the same dark world as so many of Conrad's sea tales.

The narrator sails into further disillusion, isolation and terror; his journey is an exploration of the ways of the world, and the nature of man, and his findings are universal, like those recorded in the travels of Candide.

The vessel chosen for the narrator's therapeutic escape indicates immediately a level of suggestion which relates to the social and cultural particularity of the book's early section. The young Blettsworthy's vision

of England had been of an orderly social pyramid, a west-country version of the Bladesover System, imposing security and correctness with a gentle firmness.¹⁴⁵ His national heritage is represented rather differently on board the "Goldon Lion"; the irony of the name is surely deliberate. The ship is a common tramp steamer, a "vibrating shuttle of salted and rusting iron", (88) at the beck and call of commercial empire, and its crew a collection of eccentrics led by a descendant of Davis, whom he resembles in his resentment toward the unwelcome passenger, his crudity and tyranny, and even his red hair.¹⁴⁶ Wells is again employing the 'ship of fools' motif, an enforced microcosm continually reflecting the nature of man, and allowing us to arrive at such definitions through the particular isolation, the specific mental crisis of the narrator.

The ship is a less neutral archetype than the island and it takes no time at all for the "Golden Lion's" solitary passenger to respond to his new environment, to recognize the paradox of the "open sea": "And I felt that night that I had come out into something vast, whereas I was for the first time in my life a prisoner." (76) The growing awareness of an expanse of ocean at odds with a minute area of floating territory is recorded in a series of both abstract and tactile impressions: "You go below, come up again, pace the restricted deck, feeling that you savour immensity. You turn in and sleep. The creaking dawn seeps into your darkness and makes the swinging oil-lamp smoky yellow Everything is engaged in mysteriously pivoted motions and slowly changing its level towards you. The sky outside and the horizon have joined in that slow unending dance.

You get up and dress staggeringly, and blunder up the gangway to the deck and clutch the rail. Water. An immeasurable quantity and extent of water about you and below, and wet and windy air above; these are the enormous and invisible walls of your still unrealized incarceration." (77)

Blettsworthy's sense of isolation is in part due to his position as sole passenger — and one cultured in a manner alien to the officers he shares ship-board life with — and the very quality of humanity which presented itself to him. The officers were cowed by the Old Man, and were in themselves isolated figures, either physically grotesque, or displaying idiosyncrasies of behaviour in some way: "The Engineer, by all rights and traditions, ought to have been a Scotsman, but instead he was a huge, dark, curly-headed, strongly Semitic type, with a drooping lip (a common description in Wells, and as in Montgomery's case, possibly hinting of atavism) and an accent he seemed to have baled up from the lower Thames. The first officer was a thin, small, preoccupied, greyish individual, with a gift for setting sententious remarks in wide stretches of silence. He picked his teeth a good deal, and agreed with the captain in everything, even before the captain had finished saying it." (81) Meanwhile, the society of the fore-castle remains a world apart — "... all the reminders I had of the lower class in our little sample of human society" (79) — and a world underground: "It was as if some intense quarrel was insecurely battened down and might at any time flare up again should that tension be relaxed." (79)

Landfall proves in no way a release. Blettsworthy's experience at Recife and Rio recalls the "delusion of immanent emancipation" felt on his original departure from London. At Recife, after failing in a desperate

attempt to revive a sense of community with his fellow men he is driven to ask: "Am I a lost soul? Do I hate mankind?" (92) Like Prendick, another quester after appalling truths, who in a sense becomes trapped in that quest, Blottsworthy has already suffered and is to suffer more in a loss of identity which seems a necessary condition of his eventual 'success'. Such is the nature of the truth which is found.

In Rio, his situation worsens: "I prowled through the city's prosperity asking if this multitude which seemed so pleased and gay could really be human and not realize my desolate need for humanity. Or was all this place no more than a collection of animated masks that looked like a friendly community?" (107)

Ferndyke's advised cure has proved to be as effective as Candide's world-wide travels. The range of reference and experience provided has asserted the reality of a total community, a species, united in the same weaknesses; there are no great differences, no reassuring surprises. The oppressive realisation of "this ill-omened, lonely and limitless voyage" (102) forces his growing sense of alienation to a crisis point, experienced in part during the vivid storm sequence described before the arrival at Rio. Ironically, at this time, he feels he has foolishly turned his back on his "proper world" (102), but his eventual return to that world will find scarcely any justification for the use of the epithet "proper".

The accuracy of the narrator's direct address to the reader — "For in truth, the story I have to tell is at its core a mental case" (99) — is demonstrated following the call at Rio, on the ship's last voyage: "We went into Rio and Rio pushed me and my shipmates back into the sea with no

more ado than Pernambuco, and after that the "Golden Lion" smelt strongly of coffee and a mixture of rum and vegetable decay, and steamed into ill-luke and evil acts". (106) As Blettsworthy's isolation becomes a "paralysing obsession", so the oncoming chaos manifests itself in external phenomena and events. The "prison" becomes a "clanking prison" (108) on a journey she will not finish. The "ugly melody" (109) of the engines seems to match the "swinging rhythm" (103) which was running through Blettsworthy's mind just before his non-encounter with Rio: "abnormal, normal, normal, abnormal" (103) The appearance of the Engineer's revolver, and the cry in the darkness, indicate the growing unrest of the crew. A man dies from "overstrain" and is buried at sea.¹⁴⁷ The occasion of the burial is described: "Dimly ... I became aware of the gathering physical storm that enveloped this mental one Even as I looked up those edges became a clutching claw and seized upon the sun, and all the watery world about us was suffused with a dark coppery glow. The deck passed into a chilly shadow and every figure and shape upon it was touched with an inky quality. The leeward sky by contrast became still clearer and brighter and whiter than before." (119) "Normality, abnormality"

Mutiny and killing follow the ravages of the storm, and the single passenger remains absolutely alone aboard a derelict "Golden Lion". In the passing of time he slips into meditation, fantasy and delirium.¹⁴⁸ But before his final breakdown he can recognize the lesson that experience has taught him thus far: "This deathbed on a sinking ship is merely the end of over-confidence. Destiny has always been harder and sterner than we have seen fit to recognize Ten thousand pollen grains blow to waste for one

that reaches a pistil." (145) Here again is the "anti-humanist moral", pointed out by Lodge, "drawn from the idea of Evolution". The derelict is in itself a matching symbol for the Megatheria on the Island. For in both illustrations, there is not the absolute cataclysm of destruction, the "the graceless drift towards a dead end".¹⁴⁹(205) Man is inextricably caught in the processes of evolution, and in this book as in so many others by Wells, these processes are seen as essentially indifferent or aimless in their operation, and doomed in their direction. The one pollen grain that succeeds is to be even held in doubt with the revelations which are to come.

Talking to himself, holding himself in conversation, in an attempt to maintain the identity of speech — an echo from Moreau and another reminder of Golding — Blettsworthy slowly drifts into a psychic no-man's lands where fantasies and buried fears prey upon the mind. The shark which he had seen rolling on the deck at the height of the storm returns as a permanent companion in nightmare. He admits he has an "idiosyncrasy" about sharks, but it would appear to be rather more than this.

As Golding's Simon is held in a one-sided discussion with the pig's head on the origins of evil, so Blettsworthy is intimidated by the shark, which proves to be another manifestation of the "echo" to Prendick's footsteps and the shadow which stalks the inhabitants of Cainmarsh, though here presented with less shadowy suggestion and more "statement", in the manner of Aesop, yet still relying on a metaphorical interpretation. What the shark is implying when it invites Blettsworthy to join it in the sea — where "life at its best was bold and free and frank and fundamental" (154) — "to

learn what reality is", is a return to primitivism, a self-wrought reversion. Blettsworthy recalls the shark's arguments about the creatures which had left the sea to live upon the land: "but that, he declared, was merely a retreat from active living". (154) (One is reminded of Wells's estimation of man's evolutionary state as that of an uneasy amphibian, in his introduction to Experiment in Autobiography.)¹⁵⁰ The delirious castaway challenges the creature, suggesting the victory could be his: "'This game ends my way,' snapped the shark." (155) The argument ends in an undignified struggle and a waking from this hinterland which he judges "one of my saner dreams". (156) Sane, yes, inasmuch as the central dilemma is faced, on a subconscious level, but this catharsis is not of reassuring value in itself, as some uncomfortable and basically unanswerable questions remain. At one point the narrator paraphrases the shark thus:

It was not for the land to teach the sea how
to live. (154)

Has, then, the primitive life, symbolised by the sea, the place of man's origin, got an inevitable hold on the "ethical process", the land, the scene of mankind's attempts to construct 'civilisation'?¹⁵¹ The entire sea journey is in fact a return to the origins of life, a journey which moves progressively closer to that origin. The island is a demonstration of how inadequate was that first attempt to establish human evolution on land, and in its atemporality, therefore, is as relevant a comment on human nature as it is on contemporary society.

"Rampolo Island Comes Aboard": this section heading is a clue to the uninformed first reader that the island may not be real. On Moreau's

Island, the physical location was Prendick's prison, but he was fast creating his own mental prison by the end of the story, and virtually confesses to this in the last pages of his manuscript. The phenomenon of self imprisoned by self, of the distortion of the real world by mental disorientation, and the transporting of sense experience to another dimension of the mind, is here given full play. The island comes to Blettsworthy; one part of the mind takes over from another, and he slips into a long "interpretative reverie" (261). The savages who take him off the derelict, "chewing slowly and steadily with their heavy jaws", are in fact a team of American research biologists, but this 'reality' is not appreciated for five years.

However, at the beginning of this third chapter, the realisation of an actual island and its inhabitants is at best cloudy: "... I must admit that I never did feel even at the time that it was all there. Even in the early days of my captivity I had my doubts." (162) Again, in a direct address to the reader he apologizes for the inevitable "obscurity" and "disconnectedness" of the narrative from this point forward. The author's commentary on the process of reproducing the story emphasises his reliance on the vagaries of memory: "Since my memories have to be told in fragments, given like peeps into a book opened here and there, the reader may be a little incredulous of some of the things I have to tell." (162)

The character of the narrative does indeed alter here. The related personal history, the first crisis, the sea journey — all these are developed more or less in sequence, with suggestive hints and motifs scattered beneath a vigorous descriptive surface. The authorial preamble at the beginning of

this next stage augurs greater and more apparent control of narrative, the setting up of situations ripe for discussion, analysis and allegorical correspondence, and the planning of a series of analogies. Yet the pervasive suggestion of mental fog drifting and clearing over the gross landscape, the continuing sense of uncertainty and unreality, prevents these artifacts from hardening into functional emblems and no more. Social and military institutions are clearly satirized on this 'island', but behind the satire on contemporary phenomena lies a view of human nature — in turn based on the implications of evolution — which is rendered through symbol. West's distinction and complaint is not really valid in this context. Wells animates the whole by connecting so clearly and so vividly modern man's 'civilisation' and his origins. The one adds its own particular "statement" to the other; each one illumines the other.¹⁵²

Believed a madman, "by their standards", Blettsworthy becomes a "Sacred Lunatic" in this 'primitive' society and so inherits a security none other enjoys. But this is not before a significant interrogation takes place, at which he is asked to choose between a bowl of "boga-nut milk and blood":

I sit like a Buddha musing. I choose the blood,
and amidst signs of friendship and rejoicing I
am made to drink. The vegetarian milk is flung
contemptuously away." (168)

In doing so he repeats Edward Prendick's like demonstration and acknowledges his own origins, and the origin of evil in man. A little later on he looks back upon the events which gave him "place and prestige" (173): "How readily had I done the expected thing! At the last moment of my trial I had turned

from the milk to the draught of blood. It had been a good guess for survival, but a renunciation of my own stomach, heart, and brain." (172) Within the total vision of the book, however, the implication is that his choice was not purely and simply a self-aborred gesture for survival.

Undeterred, the heir of an ancient west country family determines to win these people from their "cruelty and filth". (173) The confrontations which emerge as a consequence of this determination owe much to Gulliver's defence of the civilisation he had come from in Gulliver's Travels Book II, Chapter 6, with his account of the state of Europe rendered for the benefit of the King of Brobdingnag, and further remarks made on politics and warfare in Chapter 7. In Swift, as in Wells, the irony falls back heavily on the defenders and apostles of faith, and the civilized world is made to look absurd.

In the section headed "Discourse with the Five Sages", Arnold Blettsworthy of Lattmeer rebels against his sordid situation and displays "an altogether novel spirit of self-assertion" (182), his 'Gulliverian' confidence and pride. Taking advantage of his special privilege as Sacred Lunatic, he casts off his ceremonial skins and launches into "an impromptu panegyric of civilization and all that it had done and could do for mankind" (190), drawing upon the teachings and philosophy of his uncle. The elders of the tribe listen in silence until the end, when Chit responds and demolishes the twentieth century, demolishes the ideas of progress and perfection, and reduces life to the basic directions of nature and pragmatism, removing, to use Golding's analogy again, the trousers from civilized man:

'There is no such world There never was such a world. There never could be such a world, for men are not made that way You are a dreamer, an insane dreamer, and you are passing through life in a dream The real world is about you here and now, the only real world. See it for what it is. (192)

The second major revelation to undermine the narrator is caused by the expedition to seek the Megatheria, or giant sloth, "clumsy denizens of the prehistoric world", which survived on the uplands of Rampole Island in their hundreds. From discussion and argument, the narrative moves to imaginative demonstration, and the creation of a landscape and a creature which is reminiscent of the descriptive power of the early science-romances. The return to such a perverse elaboration of his central concern with evolutionary theory — rendered in such deliberate and imaginative detail — may possibly have its inspiration in yet another trial which must have caught Wells's attention and reminded him that Darwin's discoveries had not only lost their relevance for some people, but that for certain communities in the southern states of America they had never gained recognition. In his essay, "The New American People: What is Wrong With It", written in May, 1927, the year in which Blettsworthy was being put together, Wells comments in a survey of America's various claims to progress: "The fundamentalist controversy displayed great areas of the United States as being mentally twenty years behind Western Europe."¹⁵³ In 1925, at Dayton, Tennessee, schoolteacher John Scopes was brought to trial and found guilty of teaching Darwinian evolution, a doctrine contrary to the Bible, and therefore contravening the State Law. Conceivably this trial, and the Fundamentalist

upsurge in general in the United States at this time -- represented by Bryant's The Menace of Darwinism (1921) and The Bible and Its Enemies (1921) most notably -- added the iconoclastic vigour to this particular section of Blettsworthy.

These incredible creatures who have dominated animal life on the island -- another extension of the theory in "Islands and Variation" -- and are slowly devastating a landscape, destroying all vegetable life, are not merely, as Blettsworthy muses over the campfire during the hunt, suggestive of institutions, of "lumpish legacies of the past". This association -- a correct but a superficial one -- leads him to wax enthusiastic about a "Winding up of the Past" (207) and some radical social reconstruction programme. But at this point, significantly, his musings are interrupted by an attack from one of these beasts, sudden, terrifying and with a degree of violence and living danger which immediately undercuts the simple correspondence between pre-historic (actual) creatures and pre-historic (pejorative) human institutions:

Its little eyes reflected the glow of our fire and shone, two spots of red light in the midst of that advancing blackness There was nothing for it but a bolt into the scrub I could feel the hot reek of my pursuer's breath on my bare back And now it was I realized how fast a Megatherium in a mood of destructiveness could get over the ground I ran with my hearing intent upon the crashing rhythm that followed me. After each leap I seemed to get away for a few seconds and then came the bound and the brute had smashed down again close on my heels. (209)

Blettsworthy escapes much chastened; "... my vain imaginations about ...

starting the civilized world anew ... were completely scattered and disposed of among the harsh realities about me." (211)

These "harsh realities" are "about" him on the primary level of his recent experience, but in a final analysis they are 'within' him. This deceptively moribund beast has proved very much alive and dangerous; the power of primitive life has once again been demonstrated. These vivid scenes go a long way to illustrate the reality of human deficiencies, savagery and barbarity, which make up the institutions which Blettsworthy was so concerned about, which make up the institution or system which sent the Italian immigrants to the electric chair. No sweeping reform of social structures is enough, can be enough. This is the sombre lesson learned on the ravaged, moonlit uplands of Rampole Island. What Blettsworthy, as Plain Man, has to contend with is what, metaphorically, pursues him from the security of the camp-fire and sends him fleeing in terror, the terror that Prendick and Finchatton knew.

The final set-piece in this chapter, ordered into sequence, is the threat of war between the people of the gorge and those of the upland, an opportunity for satire on the military mind and military objectives. The Sacred Lunatic, in a role fast losing its unhindered security, protests the foolishness of these preparations, and reaches back into a memory which knows only of the Hague Conference and nothing of the pre-First World War fever.

The urgency of the 'real' situation begins to assist the gradual dissipation of his reverie, and the solid walls of his mental prison fade occasionally to a mysterious transparency: "I would lift my eyes to the

rocky walls above me and it would seem to me that they were pierced by phantom windows and bore strange devices and inscriptions written in letters of fire, and I would look again and behold it was nothing more than facets and roughnesses of the rock touched by shafts of the sinking sun."
(222)

War is declared, and the Sacred Lunatic turns away in despair. His final breakthrough into the world he had left behind five years previously is effected by the love for a woman, Weena, a member of the tribe -- the name and the manner of her rescue recall The Time Machine -- and so the cycle is complete, as this was also the cause of his first crisis. Rampole Island disappears, but not irrevocably, and an apartment in Brooklyn Heights takes its place.

The last chapter -- that is, that part of it which follows the explanation of Dr. Minchett, 'Chit' of Rampole Island, and the concluding revelation of Blettsworthy's that the island "was only the real world, looming through the mists of my illusions" -- is a loose and hurried elaboration of the correspondence between the narrator's psychic existence and the world he returns to. Prendick's experience is tested only briefly and very effectively. The final chapter of the later book covers an excessive amount of ground. The war itself is signal evidence of the validity of his interior visions,¹⁵⁴ and almost seems to pick up the threads of Blettsworthy's earlier travels and trials in the real world. The flavour of Candide returns again. Where the nightmare persists, the force of the narrative is maintained. Perhaps the most effective scene is a chance meeting with the Captain of the "Golden Lion" in a London restaurant. He has not changed, but the war has enabled him to satisfy his frustrated ambitions, for

now as captain of a 'Q' ship he can thrill to the hunt of fellow human beings -- legally. His macabre stories delight him anew in the telling, but leave the man he once tried to murder appalled: "He stuck his forearms on the table and held knife and fork erect as he recalled this and that savoury item of the wonderful anti-submarine story. And I realized more than ever I had done, that Rampole Island had indeed now spread out and swallowed all the world." (297)

Similarly, the re-appearance of the Island, in part integrated with the real world of events, as with the instance of Sacco and Vanzetti, acts as a forceful symbol, perpetually a "shadow" hindering communication, and yet perpetually a necessary reminder:

I have never to forget Rampole Island, I feel,
I have to settle my account with it. Until
that account is settled, the island lies in
wait for me. (325)

Here is one of the important paradoxes of the story, one now much dwelt upon in modern fiction, poetry, and drama; the aid of insanity of 'abnormality' in gaining a true vision of the modern predicament. One is reminded of this cryptic exchange from Candide: "'Why was this world formed at all?' asked Candide -- 'To drive us mad', answered Martin."¹⁵⁵

The conclusion of the story is made unwieldy by the encounter with his old Oxford business partner, and rival for the attentions of Olive Slaughter, Lyulph Graves, and his readjustment to a companionship which counters his pessimistic vision with an optimism rejecting the claims of the Rampole nightmare. This prepares the way for a final dialogue section -- a

discussion between Blottsworthy and Graves — which concludes with the expressed confident hope that "Rampole Island ... will pass away" (347) and that there will be an emancipation of the future from "the blunders of the past". (346) However, we are not led to believe that Blottsworthy is convinced, for Graves admits: "You are the doubter, always." (347) And neither can the reader be convinced.¹⁵⁶ It is the doubt which carries the conviction, which concentrates Wells's imaginative skills to produce this hybrid allegorical fantasy, with initial mythic overtones. The loss of narrative power in the final chapter may be traced to a persistence in delineating the love interest — which marred the end of Chapter One momentarily — and the re-introduction of Graves, a figure at this stage of the story representative of the popular image of Wells, a feebly resurrected mouthpiece, suggesting the resolution of the individual's crises and conflicts in a common cause. For the individual life, he proffers "creative Stoicism". (345) This is reminiscent of the final advice for Candide: "...we must cultivate our garden",¹⁵⁷ and as in Voltaire's text, Graves's advice rings strangely hollow. The evil has been dwelt on too much and too long for us to return peaceably to personal slogans of this nature.

In the entire narrative, Wells has moved from literal and metaphorical expression of the individual condition to indirect and direct commentary on man, the social and political animal. Between the two he makes a connection which cannot be broken. Eight years later, in the midst of new European conflicts, further demonstrations of the social animal at play, this connection is examined again, and again with reference to the evidence of evolution. The form of The Croquet Player is more unified, shorter, its

message more direct, but it remains undeniably a vivid work of imagination, worthy of comment and analysis.

FOOTNOTES

- 107 Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island (Toronto, 1928), p. 21
Subsequent references will be given parenthetically.
- 108 "Assessing H.G. Wells", Encounter (January 1967), 57.
- 109 The Way the World Is Going (London, 1928), 240-241.
- 110 Ibid., p. 250.
- 111 Ibid., p. 257.
- 112 There is one other fleeting reference to an 'actual' victim of a perverted justice, namely Charlie Chaplin. In his account of what he found to occupy his time while ashore in Rio, the narrator recalls his frequent visits to the cinema: "Those were the days when Charlie Chaplin was shown freely and abundantly without any fuss." (107)
- 113 The Way the World Is Going, p. 255.
- 114 "Assessing H.G. Wells", p. 57.
- 115 H.G. Wells (New York, 1930), p. 229.
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 Ibid.
- 118 Experiment in Autobiography, p. 421.
- 119 Specifically: Dedicated
to the Immortal Memory
of
CANDIDE

- 120 Vallentin, p. 263. Her entire discussion, pp. 263-7, works towards a comparison with Parham.
- 121 See pp. 194-199.
- 122 "Assessing H.G. Wells", 57.
- 123 Experiment in Autobiography, p. 421. Wells mentions this novel, Parham, and Men Like Gods in the same context: "I wish I could at times hear of people still reading these three stories. They got, I think, a dull press." (p. 422).
- 124 The Saturday Review, vol. 146 (September 1, 1928), 276.
- 125 (London, 1923), pp. 148-171. Bergonzi refers to Shanks' pioneer evaluation in The Early H.G. Wells, pp. 18, 42, and 61. Edward Shanks was himself the writer of an anti-utopian fantasy, The People of the Ruins, a Story of the English Revolution and After (1920).
- 126 London Mercury, 18 (September 1928), 538-539. Shanks, too, recalls Moreau in this review.
- 127 "Our Sacred Lunatic", The Spectator (September 1, 1928), 269.
- 128 "The Genius of Mr. Wells", The New Statesman (September 22, 1928), 734.
- 129 Ibid., p. 733.
- 130 "Symbolism in Man and Nature", Time and Tide (August 31, 1928), 817.
- 131 Ibid., p. 818.
- 132 The Times Literary Supplement (September 6, 1928), 630.
- 133 Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe (London, 1947), p. 7.

- 134 Loc.cit.
- 135 (Boston, 1966), p. 11.
- 136 A further hint comes at a later point when, in describing his life in Oxford after graduation, he recalls his varied ambitions at the time, which included a desire to write: "I was not unmindful of the social issues of the time, and determined that a strain of moral and humanitarian purposiveness should underlie the perfect artistic expression of whatever I decided to do." (36)
- 137 Loc.cit.
- 138 The significance of an island location may again be noted.
- 139 This particular setting, unusual in Wells's fiction, is probably based on his early teaching experience at Wookey, Somerset in the Winter of 1880, under the tutelage of his Uncle Williams. It may be gathered from Experiment in Autobiography, pp. 96-99, that his brief stay gained much from the influences of his uncle, though rather different influences from those delivered from Rupert Blettsworthy to his nephew: "A facetious scepticism which later on became his [Wells's] favourite pose may owe a great deal to Uncle Williams." (p. 99).
- 140 See "the dark girl of Penge", The New Machiavelli (Harmondsworth, England, 1966), 55-58, a typical 'affair'.
- 141 This is not to ignore the success Wells can show in his creation of pathos and comedy out of relationships between men and women. The New Machiavelli would illustrate the former, and Kipps and Mr. Polly the latter.
- 142 (New York, 1930), ©. 1929, p. 250.
- 143 The New Machiavelli, p. 15: "I do not know where I might not have ended but for this red blaze that came out of my unguarded nature and closed my career for ever."

- 144 The Research Magnificent, Atlantic Edition, vol. xix (New York, 1926), © 1915, p. 358.
- 145 See p. 18 for an extended description of a hierarchy which linked God, by numerous ranks, to the local magnates and landowners.
- 146 See p. 80: "He was a sturdy, square-faced, ginger-haired individual, with sandy eyelashes and a bitter mouth. His little grey-green eyes regarded me poisonously."
- 147 This is a further example of perversion of authority, the lies of those exercising authority, and the hidden injustice — a miniature trial and execution at sea.
- 148 Like Prendick adrift in the open boat, at the whim of indifferent forces symbolised by Montgomery and Dr. Moreau, Blettsworthy is yet another piece of flotsam, though giving more direct voice or 'statement' to his predicament: "So far as the species is concerned there need be nothing left. Life can always begin again. Birth and death are the warp and woof of its process; it is like a fraudulent tradesman who can keep going by destroying his accounts. I was just a discarded obligation, a bilked creditor, a repudiated debt." (149).
- 149 See Ardrey, p. 155: "We are evolutionary failures, trapped between earth and a glimpse of heaven, prevented by our sure capacity for self-delusion from achieving any triumph more noteworthy than our own self-destruction."
- 150 Experiment, p. 3: We are like early amphibians, so to speak, struggling out of the waters that have hitherto covered our kind, into the air, seeking to breathe in a new fashion and emancipate ourselves from long accepted and long unquestioned necessities. At last it becomes for us a case of air or nothing. But the new land has not yet definitively emerged from the waters and we swim distressfully in an element we wish to abandon."

Colin Wilson uses this passage in two of his philosophical works to illustrate the growth of the "New Existentialism". See Introduction to the New Existentialism (Boston, 1967), p. 124, where Wilson goes on to compare de Chardin's concept of "biosphere" and "noösphere" (The Phenomenon of Man) with Wells's idea of the physical world and "the country of the mind". The gist of this example and argument is repeated in The Strength to Dream (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 97-100.

- 151 Kagarlitski refers in passing to the sea and the shark, as signifying a world his Uncle had neglected to explain: "The idyllic cradle of life is also the kingdom of the shark. His uncle had quite forgotten about the shark." (197)
- 152 Henkin's implied objection to Blettsworthy -- the only comment he makes, in a final summarising chapter -- seems to be based on a very tired reading: "In Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island (1928) Wells followed Doyle to the discovery of a land peopled with prehistoric monsters; but these are simply pegs on which the author hangs his usual sociological moral." (p. 267) The "moral" is first biological, and dramatically so. One is reminded of two similar briefly described scenes, from Kipps (1905) and The War in the Air (1908). In the former, Kipps is wandering in the Crystal Palace grounds and finds a striking resemblance between the outdoor life-size model Labyrinthodon and Chester Coote, with the obvious sociological implications. In The War in the Air, Bettridge's flying machine is housed near the model of the megatherium in the same park. These giant reminders of pre-history are man-made and static, and more obviously, convenient pegs for Wells's moral. The same cannot be said for the creature on Rampole Island.
- 153 The Way the World Is Going, p. 238.
- 154 The battle scenes and conditions at the Front may be compared with those described in the letters of Mr. Britling's son.
- 155 trans. Robert M. Adams (New York, 1966), p. 47.
- 156 L.P. Hartley is one such reader: "Personally, I think the despondent Mr. Blettsworthy of the island and the war, convinced of ineradicable flaws in human nature, more likely to be right than his sanguine friend." The Saturday Review, 276.
- 157 Candide, p. 47.

(c) The Croquet Player: The Theme of Pre-History.

"... at the turn of the century, Wells had carried his reader into the future. At the end of the 'twenties, 'thirties and 'forties, he was more inclined to remind us of our primitive past."¹⁵⁸ Whether the future is that of The Time Machine or the past that of Elettsworthy, the moral drawn is the same, as the exact juxtaposition of A Story of the Stone Age and A Story of the Days to Come demonstrates.¹⁵⁹ In fact, both early and late — though Kagarlitski's general proposition is true — Wells was drawn back to a vision of pre-history, and its lessons for modern men.

Two years before the publication of Moreau, Wells's "Aepyornis Island" appeared in the Pall Mall Budget.¹⁶⁰ This short story, drawing again upon evolution and the author's training in biology, shows the influence of a primitive past thrusting itself upon the present, in the form of a supposed long extinct species of bird, the roc of Sinbad's legend, holding a modern adventurer at bay for two years on a lonely desert island. The story is told by the adventurer, a hired collector for a naturalist, to Wells, who records the narrative, even adding a footnote¹⁶¹ for the reader's benefit — another feature of the assertive method, and thus includes himself in the fiction as a convenient ear for the speaker's anecdotal, conversational tone. Butcher, as he is perhaps appropriately called, is a jocular but callous individual, who records his part in the expedition to recover the eggs of the Aepyornis from a coastal swamp on Madagascar with an unfeeling egotism demonstrated by the account of his treatment of the "heathen" native helpers, and his attempted murder of one of them.¹⁶² The situation foreshadows

the Quap episode in Tono-Bungay, where George Ponderevo records — but with a sensitivity and awareness quite lacking in "the man with the scarred face" — how he became oppressed by the primitive nature of his remote environment¹⁶³ and the meanness of his purpose, and was reduced to the state where brutal murder can be committed.

Butcher is deserted, drifts away in a canoe with its precious cargo of eggs, and is eventually cast ashore on an atoll. After a symbolic storm — "One great roller came writhing at me, like a fiery serpent" (267) — he is left with the "disarticulated skeleton" of his canoe, and the remaining egg, which hatches the day after the storm. The bird, while young, is almost a companion, but, "... about the second year our little paradise went wrong." (269) The "idyll" ends and the island becomes a place of pursuit and perpetual danger, made 'safe' only when Butcher succeeds in trapping and killing the creature. However, as the narrative ends with the suggestion there may be more such phenomena, we are reminded that the "damned anachronism" (270) has the habit of making its appearance at any time and dislocating the arch of evolutionary 'progress'.

When the drifting Butcher held the last egg to his ear and fancied he heard "blood pulsing" (266) though "... it might have been the rustle in my own ears, like what you listen to in a sea shell", he was — though quite incapable of understanding it — 'tuning-in' to an omnipresent under-current of instinctual life, which may manifest itself in the form of an absurd "anachronism" like the aepyornis, or, what is more important, and what the bird symbolises, in the cruel and irrational behaviour of a human being like Butcher. Even in an apparently light yarn,¹⁶⁴ told with humorous

vigour by a deliberately limited narrator who is lacking in any sympathetic intensity, Wells's concerns with the relevance of the past, essentially a pre-historical past, in the present, are readily discernible.

The central metaphor of "Aopyornis Island" becomes a less removed demonstration and statement in "The Reconciliation", a story first published as "The Bulla" in 1895.¹⁶⁵ Two men, Findlay and Temple, meet again after a space of some years to effect a reconciliation. The cause of their original breach was a quarrel over a woman, though no specific details are given. In the course of a single evening the reconciliation ends in murder. In toto, it seems a story in a hurry; the incorporation of recorded past event to explain the present situation is not always achieved convincingly or elegantly. The action is set in Findlay's study, the place of work of a man who has achieved "eminence in comparative anatomy", and the atmosphere of this miniature museum of primitive and lower forms of life is effectively described: "Now and then the fire flickered and stirred, sending blood-red reflections chasing the shadows across the ceiling, and bringing into ghostly transitory prominence some grotesque grouping of animals' bones or skulls upon the shelves." (553) This setting remains the strongest feature of the story — a vivid and sinister record of the animal world displayed about the darkened study, a silent testimony to the violence that takes place there.

On their return from the music-hall the two men enter this grotesque arena, and Findlay fumbles with the lamps: "His hand was unsteady, and he had some difficulty in turning up the wicks; one got jammed down, and the other flared up furiously." (553) This imbalance of light and strength

surely foreshadows the upsurge of instinctual aggression which is to re-awaken finally their old enmity. Flushed with drink, the two men turn a boxing bout into a fight to the death with Temple having succumbed to hiding a mammal's ear-bone, the innocent door-stop, in his glove. The lesson of the fight is indicated by a very explicit narrator making quite sure the reader recognizes which aspect of man's dual nature is defeated in this exemplum and which is victorious: "Temple's upper lip was cut against his teeth, and the taste of blood and the sight of it trickling down Findlay's cheek destroyed the last vestiges of restraint that drink had left him, stripped of all that education had ever done for him. There remained now only the savage man-animal, the creature that thirsts for blood." (557)

The deed is done. Temple, in horror, throws the "diabolical thing" (558) away from him, and "To Temple's excited imagination it seemed to be lying at exactly the same spot, the sole and sufficient cause of Findlay's death and his own." (558) It is a nice irony that Temple, years away from the anatomy studies he once shared with his one-time friend, should mistake at the beginning of the story the bulla for a human brain-pan. Once again, man's origins have returned to deny his evolutionary superiority. This is not just a murder; it is every murder.¹⁶⁶

Wells's interest in man's primitive past, specifically as an historian and an archeologist, may be noted in "A Story of the Stone Age" from his early period, and in "The Grisly Folk" (1921),¹⁶⁷ as well as in the first two books of The Outline of History, regarded by many as the most vivid portion of the book, the most successful at recreating the past.

The earliest narrative, discussed by Leo Henkin as an "anthropological romance",¹⁶⁸ takes us back to a southern English landscape of 50,000 years ago, and the drama of a man called Ugh-Lomi who discovers the uses of a flint-headed axe, and teaches the horse to be his servant. The five-part narrative presents a series of tableaux displaying danger, challenge and achievement, with Ugh-Lomi as a kind of early Everyman and an early epic hero rolled into one. Yet this cycle of struggle is played out in an atmosphere of primitive terror and, as the narrative concludes, drawing away from the specific drama to the general picture, to the representative glimpse of the evolution of a species, the tone almost becomes that of a Biblical historian, and a story of individual achievement is lost in a general fight for survival: "Thereafter for many moons Ugh-Lomi was master and had his will in peace. And on the fullness of time he was killed and eaten even as Uya had been slain." (714) The heroic element and the pride in human achievement is undercut by this suggestion of an indifferent, determined process, and is rendered suspect further when read in conjunction with the sequel. This takes us on into the future, one which offers no intrinsic improvement. The hope that "perhaps — men will be wiser ..." (805) is not pursued by either Elizabeth or Denton as the sun sinks and the day cools.

"Can these bones live?" (607) So Wells queries at the beginning of "The Grisly Folk", expressing the same fascination for the evidence of our heritage which lies beneath our feet, the same realisation of a past immediacy, as Golding does in his occasional piece, "Digging for Pictures".¹⁶⁹ Wells, however, would not appreciate Golding's sensitivity to the "days of innocence" buried below and the "wickedness" of the world above. If anything, he would

see an inevitable duplication of a biological condition — call it sin — and would weep no tears for a fall from grace, or a ruination of the noble savage.¹⁷⁰

"The Grisly Folk" begins as an historical article, describing the neanderthalers and the true man, and their remote relationship. The article then moves into a dramatisation of a meeting between these two species — again taking the converse of Golding's viewpoint — returning finally to the historian's perspective. The piece is interesting in the context of this argument inasmuch as it suggests — in non-dramatic terms — the relationship between the true man and his ape-man ancestor, which is extended with cruel irony and near hysteria by the tormented victims who tell their story of the Cainmarsh hauntings in The Croquet Player. Wells speaks of "the beginning of a nightmare age for the little children of the human tribe Their steps were dogged. The legends of ogres and man-eating giants that haunt the childhood of the world may descend to us from these ancient days of fear." (698) Prendick, Blettsworthy and Finchatton all experience this nightmare as full-grown men. Wells wonders at those ancient conflicts and their final victory, and our relationship with this ancient past:

Except perhaps for some vague terrors in our dreaming life and for some lurking elements of tradition in the legends and warnings of the nursery, it has gone altogether out of the memory of our race. But nothing is ever completely lost. Seventy or eighty years ago a few curious savants began to suspect that there were hidden memories in certain big chipped flints and scraps of bone they found in ancient gravels. Much more recently others have begun to find hints of remote strange

experiences in the dreams and odd kinks
in modern minds. By degrees these dry
bones begin to live again. (620)

The "dry bones" come to life in the archeological digs around Cainmarsh, and the "memory of the race" is activated again, breaking "the Frame of Our Present".¹⁷¹ A scientific and historical fascination for the past is overtaken once more by misgivings about man's inheritance which simply cannot be quelled, and which emerge here in "a sort of ghost story, but not an ordinary one." (10)

An introduction to The Croquet Player via the above texts identifies the content and its place in Wells's continuity of scientific interests and of his associated fears, and it also suggests the derivation of the story's form from the techniques of Wells's shorter fiction and the short story itself. Wells, in fact, for the basic structure of The Croquet Player, returns to his earliest forms of fiction, and except perhaps for a loosening of the narrative in the final chapter, "The Intolerable Psychiatrist", achieves a unique compactness and an imaginative intensity. David Garnett remarks, "I was greatly moved by it and I put it with the best things that H.G. ever wrote."¹⁷² Certainly, in the context of the 'thirties, the "myth" of Cainmarsh, a welt-angst expressed through fable,¹⁷³ leaves his other writings of this decade far behind.

The parable Wells constructs in The Brothers (1938), another variation on the Cain myth, set in an imaginary country playing out the actual drama of the Spanish Civil War, is stilted with discussion and argument between the extreme left and the extreme right,¹⁷⁴ and yet buoyed paradoxically with

what one reviewer called "the Great Ruritanian tradition of co-incidence."¹⁷⁵ The brothers, Ratzel and Bolaris, realise they should be fighting for higher common principles instead of for polarised factions, but they realise too late, and they perish in their own conflict, with their dreamed plans out of sight, lost in the smoke. And the reason the future is out of sight, is that man remains "... an untrained, unquickened animal; animal still; a greedy, cowardly animal whose only loyalty is a disguised Narcissism."¹⁷⁶ The story has some things to commend it,¹⁷⁷ but the ultimate weakness of this rather more specifically political "experiment in statement" is pinpointed well here by The New Statesman and Nation reviewer: "But the truth about fables of this kind is that they exceed the limits of a philosophical dissertation, and fall short of successful fiction."¹⁷⁸

The Camford Visitation (1937), another short work, is a satire on higher education, of the kind represented (for Wells) by Britain's two senior universities. However, the satire ranges wide — predictably — and somewhat erratically, bringing down everything in sight from student political participation to T.S. Eliot. There is little total impact. Only in the prediction of a coming catastrophe for the 'uneducated' human race, as "the burning rubbish of worlds that might have been",¹⁷⁹ does the narrative really work toward a single purpose. The use of a 'cosmic voice' suggests the need for external help to educate and save mankind, a theme which is developed in the important Star-Begotten of the same year, a fantasy to be referred to briefly in a concluding commentary.

With his full length fiction of this period there is little to remark upon of any significance, save to draw attention to Wells's continued reduction of the fascist mentality in The Holy Terror (1939), an occasionally

effective life-study of a world dictator, a product of the home shores.

The Croquet Player remains a singular work. It is not easy to be exact about its inspiration, nor about Wells's political stand at the time, other than to acknowledge his hatred of fascism. The date of its appearance is undoubtedly a key, as Armand Pierhal made clear when he introduced the book to French readers: "Datée à dessein, de 1936, elle se réfère à cette fureur qui semble s'être emparée de notre monde et qui risque de la précipiter dans l'abîme."¹⁸⁰ David Garnett, who saw the manuscript and took it to Chatto and Windus on Wells's behalf, felt sure that it was "inspired by the horror which H.G. felt for what was going on in Germany under the Nazis."¹⁸¹ Kagarlitski, on the other hand, is assured of its relevance to the Spanish conflict: "This work, written in the years of the Spanish Civil War, laid bare the cowardly policy of non-intervention. Wells appealed to all honest people to fight the 'ghosts of Cain's swamp' — the barbarism of Fascism and obscurantism."¹⁸² Spain is referred to once when Finchatton recalls his interview with Mortover, the high Anglican priest, when the latter proclaimed his fierce intention of overcoming the evils of the Reformation: "... and in that instant I understood why men are killed in Belfast, Liverpool and Spain." (55) The vicious religious and political battleground of Spain is brought into the same context as the more obscure scenes of theological rivalry, Belfast and Liverpool. The essential problem is not Spain's alone, and the degree of the strife there must not obscure other conflicts nor the identical causes lying beneath all these conflicts. Frobisher, the croquet player, cannot see the connection between these three geographical names and the Cairmarsh haunting, and it is

his kind of "non-intervention" -- an ignorance, an apathy, an unpreparedness to face reality -- which Wells is hitting at, rather than any national policy he may or may not find fault with. The ugly spectre of European fascism operating in various places and under various names undoubtedly provides an almost definitive vision for Wells, and it is a vision which has to be explained in terms of a human, not a mere political, condition, and of the origins of that condition; thus it is anthropological in essence.

The first of the four chapters, "The Croquet Player Introduces Himself", following a brief mention of the two people he has been talking to, and the 'ghost' story related to him, demonstrates clearly enough the background to and the nature of a representative 'non-intervener', probably the most severely limited of all Wells's narrators. He describes himself as "having had an exceptionally uneventful life" (12), missing the experience of the Great War (which at least Blettsworthy did not), thus placing himself in a generation unaware of the reality of a past war, and by implication ignorant of the possibilities of future strife. So hard does Wells try to put everything which is wrong into this narrator, that the latter seems to show at times an almost uncharacteristic self-awareness in revealing these weaknesses; "I have led a life largely of negatives and avoidances. I have been trained to keep calm and civil and not react excitedly to surprises. And above all to regard only ordinary decent everyday things seriously." (12) And yet the voice is somehow convincing -- the "soft hands and ... ineffective will" -- for the voice is that of a generation, part of the "floating cream of humanity", (14) those used to material security, and is in a sense choric in its function, as well as fulfilling the barest of

individual roles, that of the listener who scarcely understands, and is not stimulated to ask any questions purposofully and consistently himself.

Having identified himself — and Wells having identified the kind of audience he is trying to reach — the narrator slips into the background and prepares to relate his first encounter, with Dr. Finchatton, in the relaxed "vermouth and seltzer" world of Les Noupets.

"The Haunting Fear in Cainmarsh" is the core of the ghost story, and a descriptive and atmospheric tour de force. It is this chapter which in itself is a short story of typical structure: two men, one the narrator, engage in conversation (in a post-prandial kind of situation), and the second man forces his particular narration on the attention of the narrator, who after a brief description of this interlocutor, allows the latter's narrative to constitute the story from this point forth, with little interruption.¹⁸³

Dr. Finchatton's account of his early breakdown and retirement from city hospital work recalls the inability of Blettsworthy to cope with the fact of a harsh world: "A time came when the morning paper could upset me so as to spoil my work for the day." (26) He runs away to the village of Cainmarsh, because he cannot face the modern world, which speaks to him in terms of "war" and "bombing", and thinks that country peace will effect a cure: "I would have laughed if you had told me that I had come into a haunted land." (27) He has as little hope as Blettsworthy of escape.

Cainmarsh was not, he relates, the most likely area for any psychic disturbance to take place, and yet "... it is in just such a flat, still atmosphere perhaps — translucent, gentle-coloured — that things lying

below the surface, things altogether hidden in more eventful and colourful surroundings, creep on our perceptions" (29) The place has a strange stillness, but for "the sound of the wind and the sea ... like the world breathing in its sleep." (30) The same images found in Moreau are repeated here with the same connotations, but as Wagar says, this is on a "grander scale".

Stories of murder and fratricide -- the significance of the village's name is readily apparent -- come to light, and the first personal reactions to the local atmosphere, Finchatton records, "insomnia" and "evil dreams". His descriptions are Poesque in their insinuating sense of a man trapped in awful reality:

Fear pursued me out of those dreams. The nightmare quality hung about me and could not be shaken off. I was awake and still dreaming. Never have I seen such sinister skies as I did on those night excursions. I felt such a dread of unfamiliar shadows as I had not known even in childhood. There were times on those nocturnal drives when I could have shouted aloud for daylight as a man suffocating in a closed chamber might shout for air. (32)

The villagers begin to show signs of a similar persecution; there is the old woman who flung the clock at "dreadful nothingness" (35) and there is the farmer who blasted his own scarecrow to bits with his shot-gun. No one goes out after sundown.

Feeling, "not simply exposed to incalculable evile, but ... threatened by them" (37), Finchatton seeks an explanation of this apparent collective psychosis from Rawdon, the old vicar. This interview is superbly conceived. The vicar speaks of "... something -- wrong -- wrong and getting worse. Something evil," (37) and all the while the evidence of

his grotesque age and the manner of their huddled furtive conversation, "like men who cower in a cave" (40), suggest physically the atavism which the 'explanation' of the terror confirms: "I remember those opening words very plainly and his bleary old eyes and the bad teeth in his sagging mouth. He came and sat down quite close to me with one long bony hand cupping his hairy ear." (37)

The evil he identifies as "below the surface underground" (40), the legacy of a primeval past, disturbed and unearthed by the plough and by archeologists, stones of "abominable shapes" (41), weapons and "murder stones" (42). The vicar becomes hysterical and launches into a diatribe against high-church blasphemy, judging the collective obsession to be "the punishment of Cain." (43) At this point, where an age of cave-men and extinct creatures is mixed with Old Testament history, Finchatton remembers he was forced to protest the distortion, yet there was an unanswered question: "But it was the suggestion that this haunting something was something remote, archaic, bestial" (45)

Finchatton returns home from this interview, and his fears return anew. This is why "it is not an ordinary ghost story"; the identity of the ghost is the identity of man's ancestry, and the idea is too novel and too macabre to bear. The infection grows, and his eyes even metamorphose what they see: "There was an old man bending down in a ditch doing something to a fallen sheep and he became a hunched, bent, and heavy-jawed savage." (46) The "malignant presence" (47) of the marshes is everywhere. It is Prendick's perspective on his return to civilisation, but magnified ten-fold, and inspired by no lengthy isolation from the world of men." **X NOT SO!**

Here the narrative breaks; the proposition has been set within this vivid metaphor and the whole imaginative structure tightened to an almost unbearable pitch. With a brief -- and uncannily unreal -- return to the hotel terrace, "with everything bright and clear and definite" (51), the doctor continues his story with "The Skull in the Museum".

Before he visits the Eastfolk museum Finchatton sees the Reverend Mortover, the Anglican whom the elderly vicar had regarded as an enemy opposed to the struggling forces of good. Mortover offers different reasons for the phenomenon of the marshes, seeing only "diabolic possession", devils which have to be exorcized. Whatever the theological interpretation, the doctor at least recognizes common symptoms, in these priests, in the villagers, and himself -- "endemic panic". In a final attempt to wrest a rational explanation for this nightmare, Finchatton visits the museum and its curator. A prize exhibit, proudly displayed, is the almost complete skeleton of the ancestral ape. The doctor notices "the snarling grin of its upper jaw and the shadowy vitality that still lurked in the caverns whence its eyes had once glared upon the world." (59) Even the earnest archeologist knows of the mystery of Cairmarsh, and what is more believes in it, seeing a metaphysical truth hidden in the bones and remains he has collected. He describes the vicar's and the priest's instinctive though unscientific grasp of this truth, and rephrases the problem: "We have broken the frame of the present and the past, the long black past of fear and hate that our grandfathers never knew of, never suspected, is pouring back upon us. The animal fears again and the animal rages again and the old faiths no longer restrain it. The cave man, the ancestral ape, the ancestral brute, have returned." (64)

The presence has to be fought, but Finchatton's last day and night in Cainmarsh disable him almost entirely. A savagely beaten dog, and finally the breakdown of Rawdon the vicar and his attempted murder of his wife, inspire one last apocalyptic dream, a vision of the "primordial Adamite", which makes the unbreakable connection between the world of 1936 and the pre-historic past buried beneath that world's surface:

It became as vast as a cliff, a mountainous skull in which the orbits and hollows of the jaw were huge caves In the foreground I saw his innumerable descendants, swarming like ants, swarms of human beings hurrying to and fro, making helpless gestures of submission or deference, resisting an overpowering impulse to throw themselves under his all-devouring shadow. Presently these swarms began to fall into lines and columns, were clad in uniforms, formed up and began marching and trotting towards the black shadows under those worn and rust-stained teeth. From which darkness there presently oozed something — something winding and trickling, and something that manifestly tasted very agreeable to him. Blood. (69-70)

Cainmarsh — the world — is defined. Man's duality leads to self-destruction, sacrifice and death. Finchatton takes the advice of the museum curator, and seeks the help of a mental specialist — as Prendick and Blettsworthy had done — a Dr. Norbert who has a clinic at Les Noupets and thus the narrative returns to the framework of the whole story.

The remainder consists of an initial encounter with Dr. Norbert, a break until the next day, and a final harangue of the croquet player by Norbert. The move from metaphor to discourse is again apparent, and had the effect of the original narrative immersion in the Cainmarsh nightmare not been so thorough and so convincingly delineated, the effect of the metaphor would dissipate altogether in this final chapter, "The Intolerable Psychiatrist".

The croquet player's imagination is indeed held by the story he has heard; he clothes the skull in a "phantom lip ... dark aggressive blood-shot eyes and beetling brows (81) a brutish revenant", (82) and his croquet loses some of its style. However, he is not to be entirely lifted from the essential apathy of his kind of world, the sort of world which — as Dr. Norbert exacts from him in confession -- rates The Times crossword and the sports columns above "the things that have made Finchatton mad". (85)

Dr. Norbert reduces the reality of Cainmarsh to an hallucination, but draws the same lessons: "Man is still what he was. Invincibly bestial, envious, malicious, greedy. Man, Sir, unmasked and disillusioned, is the same fearing, snarling, fighting beast he was a hundred thousand years ago Just a cave man, more or less trained. There has been no real change, no real escape." (89) And so he raves on, victimizing the croquet player with his fevered oratory, proclaiming personal responsibility for everyone to strive for, "that true civilization, that disciplined civilization, that has never yet been achieved. Victim or Vigilante. And that, my friend, means you! I say it to you! You!" (95)

But we have learned that Norbert is infected too, and that he is displaying something approaching the kind of panic and aggressive hysteria that Finchatton witnessed. There is the distinct possibility that Wells, as in the lighter satiric All Aboard for Ararat (1940), is indulging in self-parody. In All Aboard, with Wells as Noah Lammock, this is gentle yet incivive. Here, with the character of Dr. Norbert, the self-parody is bolder, more self-lacerating and cynical. Wagar identifies Norbert as a Wells's mouthpiece, but in this case there may be another example of what David Lodge

identified in Tono-Bungay: "Tono-Bungay is not the only one of his imaginative works which disturbingly questions the meliorism of his public self."¹⁸⁴

Of Wells's characters Kagarlitski remarks: "They have to rack their brains themselves. They hazard guesses, sometimes they guess correctly, sometimes not, but they come to real knowledge only through their own experience."¹⁸⁵ Both Prendick and Blettsworthy strive far toward this knowledge with their shattering experience, but after only a faint spark of recognition the croquet player stops guessing and trying to learn. His attempt to face reality is feeble, and he eventually gives up, preferring to keep his croquet appointments. Yet his weakness cannot come under too harsh an attack. As he slips back into his own ethos of croquet hoops, tennis lawns, maiden aunts, and crossword puzzles, so the mental specialist rants on into a future which, represented by the polarity "Victim, Vigilante", offers no sanity or real security either.

As David Garnett defines Wells's vision: "He saw quicker and farther than other men. He cared greatly for mankind and he was intensely aware of the speed with which man is increasing his powers over nature, and aware that while more intelligence is urgently needed, the cave man is in our midst, unchanged and perhaps unchangeable."¹⁸⁶

The idea of "unchangeable" human nature led Wells to recast the Martian invasion of 1898 in Star-Begotten (1937), sub-titled "A Biological Fantasia". The Martians are now "tutors", not "invaders", in an earlier, less sinister version of John Wyndham's The Midwich Cuckoos (1957). But behind the playful Biblical parody in naming the parents of the central 'star-begotten' Joseph and Mary, behind the satire of contemporary affairs,

lies what The New Statesman and Nation called "the most mature of his fantasies",¹⁸⁷ and its admission of that "graceless drift towards a dead end", the failure of the evolutionary process in the human species on this planet. Joseph Davis, a romantic historian of the old school, is forced by the pressure of his own doubt to abandon his magnum opus, "The Grand Parade of Humanity" — a symbolic farewell. Professor Keppel defines failing civilization, the stalemate situation where neither the Norberts nor the croquet player can effect a rescue, in these terms: "... war, pervading and increasing brutality"¹⁸⁸ the entire dominance of the violent, common mind, the base mind."¹⁸⁹

Where the world cannot help itself, evolution is re-inspired by Martian cosmic influence. As Keppel explains: "What I am talking about is not a revolution; it is a new kind of behaviour; it is day-break."¹⁹⁰ Where the world is — and this echoes Mr. Preemby's symbolic experience in Christina Alberta's Father — "a lunatic asylum crowded with patients prevented from knowledge and afraid to go sane",¹⁹¹ the only answer is extra-terrestrial aid, or "planetary psycho-therapeutics."¹⁹²

The dark forces of Moreau receive a new definition. The danger and the threat, the pursuing spectre of the past, all dominate the present human condition. The Second World War which broke two years later discouraged him to the point of cutting away all literary elaboration upon this final statement, and in 1945 there is very little more he can say than this:

The writer is convinced that there is no way
out or round or through the impasse. It is
the end. 193

Education has failed. There has been no miracle.

FOOTNOTES

- 158 Kagarlitski, p. 195.
- 159 The pre-historical tale appeared serialised in the Idler, May - September, 1897, and the story of the future in the Pall Mall Magazine, in the same year. More than once, in the sequel, the stone age is recalled, and by implication, man's progress critically reviewed: "Little beasts that snapped and snarled, snapping and snarling, snapping and snarling, generation after generation." The Short Stories of H.G. Wells (London, 1952), © 1927, p. 384.
- 160 Christmas Number, 1894.
- 161 Namely: "No European is known to have seen a live Aepyornis, with the doubtful exception of Macer, who visited Madagascar in 1745." Short Stories, p. 303.
- 162 As his personality emerges through his narration, he may be compared with "the sunburnt man" who tells his story in "Jimmy Goggles the God" (1898), another 'civilised' westerner who tangles with a 'primitive' culture.
- 163 Butcher recalls his admiration for the vision of the swamp under the sunset: "All black and blood-red it was, in streaks — a beautiful sight. And up beyond the land rose grey and hazy to the hills, and the sky behind them red, like a furnace mouth." Short Stories, 262-3.
- Subsequent references to this and other short stories will be given parenthetically.
- The episode in Tono-Bungay referred to here demands more detailed discussion. See the appendix.
- 164 In reply to Anthony Jackson's article, "Science and Literature", The Times Literary Supplement (July 27, 1967), where Jackson referred hastily to Wells's "naive optimism", Brian Aldis had this to say: "Even in his most jocular short stories ("Aepyornis Island" for example) Wells was more ironical than casual critics allow." The Times Literary Supplement (August 3, 1967), 707.

- 165 Weekly Sun Literary Supplement, December 1, 1895.
- 166 The murder of Raut by Horrocks in "The Cone" (1895), a crime of jealousy and pitiless savagery, played out against a symbolic background of roaring blast furnaces, may be considered in the same light. The true horror of both stories is in the timelessness of the acts; they have the quality of ritual.
- 167 First published as "The Grisly Folk and their War with Men", Storyteller Magazine, April, 1921.
- 168 Henkin, pp. 176-7.
- 169 The Hot Gates, pp. 61-70.
- 170 See Golding's quotation from Wells's Outline prefacing his own novel, The Inheritors. The difference in viewpoint becomes clear enough — that Wells regards homo sapiens as the necessary successor to the savage neanderthal, and Golding sees the former as bringing corruption and casting out innocence — but, perhaps more important, the basic similarity has already been pointed out with reference to Wagar's analysis.
- 171 The Croquet Player (New York, 1937), p. 63. Subsequent references to this text will be given parenthetically.
- 172 "Some Writers I have known: Galsworthy, Forster, Moore, and Wells", Texas Quarterly, vol. 4, no. 3 (1961), 202.
- 173 As Dr. Norbert explains Finchatton's 'illness': "He is troubled beyond reason by certain things and the only way in which he can express them even to himself is by a fable." (pp. 83-84).
- 174 This is emphasised even more in the title of the French translation by Armand Pierhal, Frère Rouge et Frère Blanc. The novel is introduced to French readers by Martine Renier in Les Annales (August 25, 1938), 201-5.

- 175 Ronald Lewin, London Mercury, 38 (March 1938), 555.
- 176 The Brothers (New York, 1938), p. 61.
- 177 There is a memorable demonstration of satiric power in the delineation of three representative influences in this civil struggle; Istom, "the Big Money of the conspirators", the Duke of Carnavera Credora, and Fayle, the priest.
- 178 (February 12, 1938), 262.
- 179 The Camford Visitation (London, 1937), p. 68.
- 180 Annales (June 10, 1937), 578.
- 181 Garnett, p. 202.
- 182 Kagarlitski, p. 201.
- 183 The narrative technique of "The Triumphs of a Taxidermist" (1894), "A Deal in Ostriches" (1894), and "The Flying Man" (1893).
- 184 Language of Fiction, p. 242.
- 185 Kagarlitski, pp. 66-7.
- 186 Garnett, p. 202.
- 187 V.S. Pritchett, New Statesman and Nation (June 19, 1937), 1007.
- 188 Star-Begotten (New York, 1937), p. 164.
- 189 Ibid., p. 166.
- 190 Ibid., p. 184.

191 Ibid., p. 185.

192 George Roppen, in Evolution and Poetic Belief: A Study in Some Victorian and Modern Writers, is very illuminating in his commentary on this work. Initially, however, his remarks on Shaw provide a useful lead into an understanding of the theme: "Shaw's apotheosis of man ... represents an ideal which is not so much a fulfillment of human nature as a liberation from it." (p. 397). This is what Wells is moving towards in Star-Begotten. As Roppen says at a later point, it is "... not a Utopia, but, something in the manner of the middle plays of Back to Methuselah". (p. 440) The Ancient's vision of a time when there are "no people, only thought", does not seem very far removed.

"Wells ceases to insist on ethical effort", concludes Roppen, and queries with some justification: "perhaps it amounts to a rejection of the human being." (p. 442)

193 Mind at the End of Its Tether (London, 1945), p. 4. See also The Last Books of H.G. Wells: The Happy Turning and Mind at the End of Its Tether (London, 1968), a publication of the H.G. Wells Society, edited, with an introduction and appendix, by G.P. Wells. The two parts of Mind at the End of Its Tether are placed here for the first time in correct chronological order thereby giving a clearer idea of the last stages of Wells's thought. In the Introduction, G.P. Wells is concerned to dispute the "alleged change of heart" (p. 7) and to stress that his father's spirit never broke utterly. However, he does not attempt to gloss over his father's continued dread of mankind's failure.

3. Conclusion

This study has concentrated selectively on Wells's fantasies, and with the main texts chosen, has demonstrated a certain thematic continuity over the whole period of his writing career. In these, allegory and myth are employed to bring into focus the reality of man's instinctual life, and this reality may be dramatised in the isolated environment of the island, either a 'real' location as in Moreau or a mental landscape as in Blettsworthy, or a nightmare territory such as the village of Cainmarsh in The Croquet Player. At its most vivid and memorable, the theme of man's shadow side, his irrefutable origins in the animal world, receives definition in writings of this kind. Here man's anthropological past haunts the present, often breaking "the frame of the present" dramatically, and turns the real, contemporary world upside down, undercutting the concepts of progress and virtue.

The other end of the "spectrum of instinctual life", where social man, rather than man as an anthropological exemplum, fights for but fails to win a better world for mankind, is represented by the group of novels already listed in the Introduction. This will not be the place for an extended examination of the particular kind of "experiment in statement" which is found in The New Machiavelli or The Research Magnificent, to name the two most central examples. However, at least passing reference to them will help, in these concluding remarks, to confirm Wells's ever present concern with the dangerous imperatives in human nature. In such works as these they threaten

and block the pioneer, reforming spirit of man battling with the problems of a contemporary world. Both Remington and Benham are involved in personal quests for the finer life; Remington, more specifically a political reformer, and Benham, more of a metaphysician, a remoter figure whose thoughts and life history are ordered and arranged in a complex narrative structure¹⁹⁴ by a friend and biographer. Remington speaks directly to us of a life which "shows no consequence but failure, no promise but pain",¹⁹⁵ and describes the downfall of his career, and the destruction of his personal life by uncontrollable forces within him. A personal and political dream becomes a melancholy exile in Italy, and at times he records the grim persuasions of a nightmare which extends beyond his own story of eventual failure. The industrial and commercial giant which Remington tries to tame and lead forward to justice and a more meaningful strength, one dark night on a walk between Vauxhall and Lambeth Bridges, suddenly loses its immediate and future significance: "'These things come, these things go', a whispering voice urged upon me, 'as once those vast unmeaning Saurians whose bones encumber museums came and went rejoicing in fruitless lives'"¹⁹⁶ This 'saurian nightmare' is constant with Wells, and in the story of Remington's collapse we have the same intimations of pre-historic exempla. And as the theories and the plans break one by one, we can begin to see how the flimsy structure of "ethical nature" is placed so precariously over an unchanging sub-structure of human nature and human passions. Remington provides a vivid metaphor for this central condition of life when he recalls his Cambridge philosophy teacher, Codger:

It was a wonderful web he had spun out of that queer big active childish brain that had never lusted nor hated nor grieved nor feared nor passionately loved, — a web of iridescent threads. He had luminous final theories about Love and Death and Immortality And all his woven thoughts lay across my perception of the reality of things, as flimsy and irrelevant and clever and beautiful, oh! — as a dew-wet spider's web slung in the morning sunshine across the black mouth of a gun. 197

The irony is that Remington, who "lusts", "hates", "grieves", "fears" and "loves" in full measure, is to be an object lesson in human vulnerability himself.

Another such vulnerable hero is Benham in The Research Magnificent, with plans "comprehensive but entirely vague"¹⁹⁸ to eradicate Fear, Indulgence, Jealousy and Prejudice from the human psyche: "Only by the conquest of four natural limitations is the aristocratic life to be achieved."¹⁹⁹ Human nobility of this kind is remote in experience as Benham discovers time and time again, and especially on his journeying in the strife-torn Balkans.²⁰⁰ In the real world of Macedonia, Benham's party discovers the silence of a massacred village: "The sunlight had become the light of hell. There was no air but horror. Across Benham's skies these fly-blown trophies of devilry dangled mockingly in the place of God. He had no thought but to get away."²⁰¹ Benham can get away from specific geographical locations, but he cannot remove himself from what this scene symbolises, however far he develops his meliorist theories, nor can he separate his own nature from the evidence of general human nature made obvious to him on numerous occasions and in numerous circumstances. His death, caught absurdly between crossfire in a labour riot in Johannesburg — "He stared in front of him with

a doubtful expression, like a man who is going to be sick"²⁰² — brings to an end the "Research Magnificent" and, despite the extent to which the "research" is outlined in this long work, the hero's 'aristocracy' appears such a futile gesture, and with the devilry ultimately triumphant, the struggle and the quest seem set, retrospectively, in an almost Manichean context.

Van Wyck Brooks comments on the Wells here of this type, and identifies the author's motives and fears, with an application which supports the view I have been developing of a theory of man's instinctual life, irrevocable and grim:

Most of his heroes (typified in The New Machiavelli) come to grief through the blind irrational impulses within themselves. And he is equally haunted by what he has called the "Possible Collapse of Civilization". I do not know how much this is due to an evangelical childhood, in which Time, Death and Judgement are always imminent; how much to an overbalancing study of science at the expense of the humanities; how much to an overdeveloped sense of the hazard that life is; and how much to plain facts. But there it is: it has always been a fixed conviction with Wells that man personal and man social is dancing on a volcano. 203

One can imagine Wells crying like Benham, "'Oh, God! Give me back my visions! Give me back my visions! Give me back my visions!'"²⁰⁴ But the visions and the dreams evaporate, the "silences" do not respond to the prayer, and a nightmare can return instead. The volcano is always there.

Wells's response to this "urgency within" takes forms as various as The New Machiavelli and The Island of Dr. Moreau. His earlier "experiments

in statement" as represented by such works as Moreau are intrinsically more rewarding to readers, as they are more clearly experiments in metaphorical statement and are timeless in their appeal. Some of those texts which retain the metaphor to a striking extent have been discussed in this study, and they demonstrate the persistent energy of Wells's allegorical and mythic techniques. But the trend towards discourse is there, and the reasons for it, as expressed here by Wells in the Preface to Seven Famous Novels (1934), carry a nagging and disturbing relevance for our generation:

The world in the presence of cataclysmic realities has no need for fresh cataclysmic fantasies. That game is over What human invention can pit itself against the fantastic fun of the Fates ...? Reality has taken a leaf from my book and set itself to supersede me. 205

To repeat Dr. Norbert's assertion:

Man, Sir, unmasked and disillusioned, is the same fearing, snarling, fighting beast he was a hundred thousand years ago. These are no metaphors [my italics], Sir. What I tell you is the monstrous reality. (89)

- 194 The Research Magnificent, Atlantic Edition, vol. XIX (New York, 1926, © 1915), pp. 8-9: "This collection of papers was not a story, not an essay, not a confession, not a diary. It was nothing definable. It went into no conceivable covers. It was just, White decided, a proliferation." The narrator, in commenting on White's task as an editor and compiler of Benham's work, draws attention to Wells's own problem in controlling the total construct.
- 195 The New Machiavelli (Harmondsworth, England, 1966, © 1911), p. 76.
- 196 Ibid., p. 215.
- 197 Ibid., p. 88.
- 198 The Research Magnificent, p. 267.
- 199 Ibid., p. 336.
- 200 The violence and gruesome evidence of ingrained human barbarity is reminiscent at times of some of the bloody sensations encountered on Candide's travels. This is in response, in part no doubt, to the contemporary actuality of the Balkan Wars, and the running sore of Balkan brigandage.
- 201 Ibid., p. 260.
- 202 Ibid., p. 439. This is an ironic parallel to the early incident in Benham's life, when as a schoolboy he had deliberately challenged the territoriality of a bull in order to take a short cut: "Then he had sat on the fence and declared his intention of always crossing the field so long as the bull remained there. He had said this with white intensity, he had stopped abruptly in mid-sentence, and then suddenly dropped to the ground, clutched the fence, struggled with heaving shoulders, and been sick." (pp. 10-11) His "stout heart" and "weak stomach" reflect again the unease of dual man. His mother had referred to him as "just a little unbalanced" (p. 4), and in this respect he is representative of the tragedy of man's dual state. Benham's struggle against the devilish powers of atavism, from the strange standpoint of the "righteousness of the Stoic who has read Nietzsche", as The Times Literary Supplement reviewer described it (September 30, 1915, 329), fails because it seems the "limitations" he tried to root out were "natural".

Edouard Guyot, in H.G. Wells (Paris, 1920) has an excellent chapter on this book, "A La Recherche d'une Aristocratie", pp. 193-235. He concludes: "Et la vie prend sur Bonham la revanche absurde et puérole qu'elle s'assurera toujours sur ceux qui veulent le dominer. Cette aristocratie meurt d'une mort accidentelle et vulgaire. L'ironie du sort veut que ce pacificateur de peuples, cet annonciateur du Royaume de Dieu, qui sera en même temps la République de l'Humanité, périsse dans une rixe, au coin d'une rue, d'une balle perdue." (p. 235).

203 The World of H.G. Wells (New York, 1915), p. 48.

204 The Research Magnificent, p. 148.

205 Preface, p. x:

APPENDIX

The Quap Episode in Tono-Bungay: "An expedition into the realms of undisciplined nature".

David Lodge, whose chapter on Tono-Bungay in Language of Fiction is the most persuasive and searching of the recent critical re-examinations of this novel,²⁰⁶ identifies the tradition in which Wells wrote as the 'Condition of England novel'. Lodge mentions in an initial survey²⁰⁷ Disraeli's Coningsby, where the term is first used.²⁰⁸ He adds the subsequent most important works of this genre: Sybil (1845), Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1855), Dickens' Hard Times (1854), Charles Kingsley's Alton Locke (1850) and Yeast (1851), and George Eliot's Felix Holt (1886). This is, broadly, the "industrial novel", so named and so listed in a chapter synopsis by Raymond Williams in Culture and Society.²⁰⁹ The theme of Tono-Bungay clearly draws upon this tradition, and an understanding of the novel in toto begins with an awareness of these sources. It is a metaphorical study, built on the patterns of a bildungsroman, of the phenomenon of economic growth and decay. England becomes the central 'character', a 'patient' suffering from the debilitating effects of such 'Napoleons' of commerce and industry as Uncle Ponderevo. The narrative follows the signs of sickness and disease from the decay of the Bladesover system to the ugly proliferation of London, and the "huge and abandoned masses of the Crest Hill House",²¹⁰ a suitably gross epitaph to the "enterprise and promise" of an age.

The adventure which is undergone in an attempt to avoid this ruin is a disastrous expedition to the west coast of Africa to retrieve marketable quantities of a mysterious mineral called "quap", a "festering mass of earths and heavy metals" (183), which Gordon-Nasmyth assures them provides a key to greater wealth and power. This episode, long felt to be a readable, exciting but appliqué section of narrative, is now more generally appreciated as an integral part of the novel's symbolic structure.²¹¹ The substance called quap is sought by a motley commercial expedition, a secret affair directed from the plush executive suite in the Hardingham Hotel, in twentieth century business London. Significantly, it is sought "in one of the dark places of the earth", and its entire story is constructed around the disease syndrome, which dominates the narrative.

Gordon-Nasmyth describes the region as "a forgotten kink in the world's littoral, of the long meandering channels that spread and divaricate and spend their burthen of mud and silt within the thunderbelt of Atlantic surf, of the dense tangled vegetation that creeps into the shimmering water with root and sucker." (183) This is Mordet Island, the home of quap²¹² as George is later to find and describe it. Nothing lives here; even the vegetation is bleached and dead; nothing, that is, except the quap:

But there is something -- the only word that comes near it is cancerous -- and that is not very near, about the whole of quap, something that creeps and lives as a disease lives by destroying; an elemental stirring and disarrangement, incalculably maleficent and strange. (268)

This 'cancer' affects the minds and bodies of the Maud Mary's crew, spreads 'disease' among them, and eventually on the return voyage, off the Cape Verde

Islands, it eats through the hull of the ship, sending her to the bottom, along with "the last chance of Business Organisations" (275). The condition of Uncle Ponderevo's England has been one of disease, a disease which "lives by destroying". The journey to the dark continent reveals finally the sinister underside of commercial empire. This, however, is not all that is revealed. The "elemental stirring ... maleficent and strange", the destructive energy of quap, is more than a symbol for a social condition. It represents what Kayerts and Carrier discover in themselves in Conrad's Outpost of Progress, the rehearsal for Marlow's and Kurtz's discoveries in Heart of Darkness. George Ponderevo's sea journey to the mythic littoral of Mordet Island is related to the journeys made by Edward Prendick and Arnold Blettsworthy. They are penetrations "into the realms of undisciplined nature" (264), revealing the force and activity of instinctual life processes, the shadow side of human nature. As George says in retrospect: "I found out many things about myself and humanity in those weeks of effort behind Mordet Island" (270). He learned to be ruthless with those who worked under him, and to hate them: "But I hated all humanity during the time that the quap was near me" And he killed a man, with "the malaria of the quap" (267) already in his veins.

The narrator recalls Gordon-Nasmyth's original business proposition put to his uncle and himself in the Hardingham Hotel, and the adventurer's graphic description of the exotic places which helped feed western business concerns with raw materials. To his listeners, these locations had previously seemed "as remote as fairyland or the Forest of Arden" (185), yet Nasmyth's telling brought them closer, "... like something seen and forgotten

and now again remembered" (185). The reality of quap grows, its metaphorical significance already emerging slowly from the dimness of a memory which both Prendick and Blettsworthy tap: "So it was quap came into our affairs, came in as a fairy-tale and became real at last I saw with my eyes the heaps my imagination had seen for so long and felt between my fingers again the half-gritty, half-soft texture of quap, like sanded moist sugar mixed with clay in which there stirs something --

One must feel it to understand." (187)

The journey begins at Gravesend. Everything about the town and the docked vessel is dirty and sordid; everything is "under dingy skies, in narrow dirty streets". (255) In this setting, in these new and demoralising conditions, George can say: "I realised that I was a modern and civilised man". (255) The journey ahead will demonstrate the inadequacy of these presumptions.

The Maud Mary provides again a microcosm of an ailing and vulnerable society. The Roumanian captain comments directly, and frequently, on what is wrong with England's condition: "Madame Grundy! Eet is all limited and computing and self-seeking. Dat is why your art is so limited, youra fiction, your philosophia, why you are all so inartistic. You want nothing but profit. What will pay!" (262) But the foul weather, the darkness, and the oblique references of the narrator tell us more of the real character of this journey, of the real character of the human condition which the journey is to explore. It is an experience which has no normal dimensions; it is timeless: "You must not imagine they were ordinary days, days I mean of an average length; they were not so much days as long damp slabs of time that

stretched each one to the horizon, and much of that length was night."

(262) The old world now becomes remote, and the new is seen in a distorted perspective: "I lived a strange concentrated life through all that time, such a life as a creature must do that has fallen in a well. All my former ways ceased, all my old vistas became memories." (264) This "well" is Ponderevo's own peculiar hades, yet is at once a common hades representing a common condition. The elements themselves provide almost the characteristics of a nether world:

Through all these days the weather was variously vile, first a furnace heat under a sky of scowling intensity of blue, then a hot fog that stuck in one's throat like wool and turned the men on the planks into colourless figures of giants, then a wild burst of thunderstorms, mad elemental uproar and rain. (269)

But the nether world is within George, too, manifested in the dangerous spiralling of hatred for all those around him, in his "inflamed imagination" which brings him nightmares of his uncle's violent death, and, decisively, in the slaughter of a native, like "the killing of a bird or a rabbit". (272) The deed, though committed with a detachment reminiscent of Mersault in Camus' The Stranger²¹³ — "I went to him not as one goes to something one has made or done, but as one approaches something found" (272) — leaves finally the impression of primitive savagery, with the "swollen and mangled carcass" (273) worried by some forest animal, and finally dragged from the shallow grave by the man's own people.

The murder is the defining action in this episode. George, the "modern and civilised man", confronts the primitive, and the primitive in his own nature triumphs. The entire episode, though maintaining the

metaphorical demonstration -- in fact, extending it, giving it a new definition -- of England's social condition, primarily reminds us of the unchanging reality of the human condition beneath, upon which the 'modern' world rests so precariously.

The "bankruptcy" of his uncle's empire which George discovers on his return to civilisation can be said to define man's moral sense, a moral sense which provides a grim vision in the final pages of the novel: "Far out to the north-east there came the flicker of a squadron of war-ships waving white swords of light about the sky. I kept them hull-down, and presently they were mere summer lightning over the watery edge of the globe" (317) There is at once a fleeting prophecy of future conflict, representing the uneasy years of war scare and proliferation of military strength, and a reminder of a permanent condition, under the guise of "summer lightning", a permanent instinctual and elemental drive which ultimately mocks George's aspirations, as his own invention, the destroyer X2, undercuts his faith in science and progress.²¹⁴

FOOTNOTES

- 206 The criticism which can be said to have broken new ground in evaluation of this major work — broadly, in a demonstration of its thematic unity and symbolic structure — began with Kenneth B. Newell's article, "The Structure of H.G. Wells's Tono-Bungay", English Fiction in Transition, iv. ii (1961), 1-8. Newell's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Structure in H.G. Wells's Dickensian Novels", Penn., 1964, has an appendix on Tono-Bungay as well as a brief chapter devoted to it, but the original article is the more valuable source. Nowall was followed by Lawrence Poston — "Tono-Bungay: Wells's Unconstructed Tale". College English (March, 1965), 433-438 — who appears to have written in complete ignorance of Newell's work, but nevertheless extends his survey usefully in places, in particular with his comments on the quap expedition as near "Conradian allegory". Bernard Bergonzi's critical introduction to the Riverside edition (Boston, Mass., 1966), leans heavily on Lodge's study, "Tono-Bungay and the Condition of England", Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel (London, 1966), pp. 214-242, but, of specific interest, explores the question of Wells and Conrad and the account of the Maud Mary's African adventure.
- The brief history of this critical concern is put in perspective by Richard Hauer Costa in "H.G. Wells's Tono-Bungay: Review of New Studies", English Literature in Transition (Summer, 1967), 89-96.
- 207 Language of Fiction, pp. 216-17.
- 208 G.F.C. Masterman borrowed the phrase for his sociological 'diagnosis', The Condition of England (London, 1909), a work which acknowledged Wells's fictional study. Tono-Bungay was first published in serial form by Ford Madox Hueffer in the first issue of the English Review (December, 1908), but Masterman had been able to read the page proofs of the entire novel before the general public had the opportunity, and in his own book quoted freely from Wells.
- 209 (London, 1958), p. 99.
- 210 Tono-Bungay (Boston, Mass., 1966), p. 284. Subsequent references to this text will be given parenthetically.

- 211 See Lodge, p. 234 n.: "The only critic [that is, other than Lodge himself] who, to my knowledge, has recognized the thematic connection between the 'quap' episode and the rest of the novel, is Gordon A. Ray, 'H.G. Wells Tries to be a Novelist', Edwardians and Late Victorians, English Institute Essays, 1959, edited by Richard Ellman (New York, 1960), p. 147."

Bergonzi praises Lodge's evaluation in his introduction to the text, but still feels that readers must accept the possibility that the episode is a "brilliant improvisation", despite its maintained metaphorical significance. Costa concurs with Bergonzi's qualifications.

- 212 Possibly, the name 'Mordet' is derived from the french mordre, to eat into, to corrode.

In the same context it is interesting to examine the possible sources of 'quap'. There is the scatological sense of 'crap' and the variation 'crop', meaning "swollen protuberance or excrescence" (O.E.D.). Closer to Wells's use is 'quab', a "bog or marshy spot" (O.E.D.), and the clearly related verb, 'quap', to "beat, throb, palpitate, quiver" (O.E.D.). The sense of the word can be seen to range from excremental undertones to the suggestion of sinister energy contained and thriving in this strange substance. It is this idea of energy, hidden yet ever present and active which has most bearing on this episode in particular.

- 213 Bergonzi comments thus in his introduction: "It seems to me possible that in this scene Wells was being more than merely sensationa; it looks forward to characteristic modes of experience of the later decades of this century, when violence was to become inextricably part of the texture of human life in many societies." (xviii)

- 214 The ambiguity of the destroyer symbol is best discussed by Lodge, pp. 241-2. He begins by tackling Mark Schorer's early interpretation in "Technique as Discovery", Hudson Review, i, i (1948), which views these final pages as an undermining of the entire novel's social perspective, and concludes decisively: "By choosing a destroyer as his symbol, Wells indicates that in a social order given over to decay and death, even the impersonal achievements of science will be ironically double-edged; and they will hasten and confirm, rather than alleviate, the incurable condition of England." (p. 242)

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