

MR. BLETTSWORTHY ON RAMPOLE ISLAND:

"THE STORY OF A GENTLEMAN OF CULTURE AND REFINEMENT"

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I

In his autobiography Wells refers to the "very tepid reception" awarded *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* (1928), a novel he regarded as "another breach of established literary standards," with which he was "mainly content".¹ Though indeed the sales of Blettsworthy may have been disappointing, the novel was in fact recognized consistently in important journals as an indication of a revival of Wells's powers as an imaginative writer. L. P. Hartley, for example, in the *Saturday Review*, discovers the "free manner of the earlier Wells, the directness, the authority, and the vitality".² Edward Shanks, the earliest critic to appreciate the mythopoeic elements of Wells's scientific-romances, finds echoes of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) and remarks that 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".³ And in his biography of 1930 Geoffrey West identifies a "more hopeful development"⁴ in the pages of Blettsworthy.

Among post-war studies of Wells, Antonin Vallentin's *H.G. Wells: Prophet of Our Day* (1950) and J. Kagarlitski's *The Life and Thought of H.G. Wells* (1966) provide substantial and illuminating discussions of this "unfairly neglected novel".⁵ It was Kagarlitski who encouraged David Lodge to evaluate for himself what Wells had described as a "caricature of the whole human world".⁶ In "Assessing H.G. Wells" Lodge confirms the importance of Blettsworthy and describes the work as a "late example in the Wells canon of an anti-humanist moral drawn from the idea of evolution".⁷ Evolutionary theory and speculation informed Wells's scientific-romances and gave them their peculiar energy and originality, and this late exercise in satire and allegory, which looks back especially to the island setting and themes of *Moreau*, retrieves a great deal of that early power and is a reminder of the enduring, the essential Wells.

II

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.⁹

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, as had that earlier traveller and "lost soul", Edward Prendick.

The particular case of "moral inadvertence" broadcast to the world, which 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" to the whole affair, towards the end of the narrative. In the first place the extent of Wells's commitment to 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 stands out as an example of civilized savagery, a signal, possibly, of the devolution of social man. He sees in it a typical, "paradoxical resort to evil on the part of those who are supposed to be its professional antagonists," and frames its significance in this way: "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 civilization".¹¹ 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 civilization. So did the Aztecs before them. But blood is a poor cement for the foundations of a civilization. It is less a cement than a corrosive. There have been civilizations 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".¹² Wells's pre-occupation with the vulnerability of civilization

is again intensified by the spectacle of justice, mercy and reason flouted utterly. He details 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".¹³

These commentaries on the case and on contemporary American affairs may well form a greater part of the inspiration behind *Blettsworthy* than is generally remarked upon. The story begins and ends in England, but the five-year imprisonment in the 'transparency' of Rampole Island is a species of American detention. New York is obliquely identified 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 splint-ered pinnacle of rock rose above her like an upraised arm and hand brandishing a club; the eyes had been rimmed with white and the throat 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 serves as redefinition of America's traditional freedoms in the light of a contemporary social atrocity. In a sense, Sacco and Vanzetti are part of the same catch and are eventually offered for sacrifice.¹⁴

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 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".¹⁵ However, the substance of *Blettsworthy* extends the idea of a 'trial' which "tests" a nation's soul; in the end it is the "soul" of the human species which is put on trial.

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"¹⁶ constitute the ultimate relevance of the story.

III

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 this elaborate eighteenth century subtitle 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,¹⁷ enacting a similar drama of discovery, displaying the same exactitude in observation, and some of the limited perceptions of that adventurer. However, the hand of Wells, in particular the Wells who had written "The Contemporary Novel" 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 close to George Ponderevo's remarks in the introductory chapter of *Tono-Bungay*: "My ideas of a novel throughout are comprehensive rather than austere". Blettsworthy's 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 in-supportable 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 of *Tono-Bungay* 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. 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".¹⁸

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*, working 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 produce 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 Madeira 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)

Dark 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 process of self-identification. As the above passage suggests, it is in him to face that identity, to enquire and to probe, even 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, 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) 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" again suggest the dilemma of duality, and though the rational, 'ethical' force dominates his imagination during this period, 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" and the degree to which Blettsworthy, or anyone, can lay claim to it, is still highly suspect. And the reason for the suspicion is Wells's constant pre-occupation with 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 environment of civilized appearances, attitudes and ideals, but "daily life was the mark 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 Boer War claims the life of his father, but leaves

"no scars" on the young son's world view; it was "the most civilized war in all history, fought with restraint and frequent chivalry". (29)

Arnold is educated at Oxford and 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. 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. 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 is overcome by a wild physical rage, and 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 a fight and pursuit takes on the character of an over-edited piece of film. It is perhaps not so much the truth of his 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 book, the inexplicable tricks of a disintegrating memory and sense of reality dominate Blettsworthy. As he explains, "my explicit personal narrative must give place here to a vague circumstantial one". (63) There follow six weeks of confusion, an accident, a spell in hospital, and a gradual repossession of faculties.

Neurasthenia is the medical verdict. The genial family solicitor Mr. Ferndyke recommends sea travel as the best form of recuperation so that he may forget his wrecked personal and business life. Youth has suffered a loss; hopefully, manhood can, in part, be recovered. Blettsworthy, however, 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, to whom the novel is dedicated.

The vessel chosen for his 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. His national heritage is represented rather differently on board the "Golden 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 descendent of Davis, the captain of the *Ipecacuanha* in Moreau whom he resembles in his resentment toward the unwelcome

passenger, his crudity and tyranny, and even his red hair.

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 unrealised incarceration". (77)

Blettsworthy's sense of isolation and imprisonment is in part due to his position as sole passenger — and one cultured in a manner alien to the officers with whom he shares ship-board life — and the very quality of humanity presented to him. The officers are cowed by the Old Man, and are in themselves isolated figures, either physically grotesque, or displaying idiosyncrasies of behaviour: "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 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 batted 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, Blettsworthy has already suffered and is to suffer more in a loss of identity which seems a necessary condition of that quest. 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 worldwide 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. 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-luck and evil acts". (106) As Blettsworthy's isolation becomes a "paralysing obsession", so the oncoming chaos manifests itself in external phenomena and events. The ship 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. The burial itself is a blur of sensations: "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)

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. 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 drawn from the idea of Evolution". The derelict is in itself a matching symbol for the Megatheria on the Island, for in both there is not the absolute cataclysm of destruction but "the graceless drift towards a dead end". (205) Man is inextricably caught in the processes of evolution 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 — another echo from *Morau* —

Blettsworthy slowly drifts into a psychic no-man's land 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, in *Lord of the Flies*, is held in a one-sided discussion with the pig's head on the origins of evil, so Blettsworthy is mesmerized and intimidated by the shark, which 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". This is an invitation 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) 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, primitive life, symbolised by the sea, the place of man's origin, got an inevitable hold on the "ethical process", the land, the place where mankind attempted to construct 'civilization'? 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 and what transpires there will demonstrate how inadequate was that first attempt to establish human evolution on land.

IV

The section title, "Rampole Island Comes Aboard", hints that the island may not be real. *Moreau's Island* was, literally, 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 emphasizes 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 promises 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 this control from providing a series of 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 symbolically. Wells animates the whole narrative by connecting clearly and vividly modern man's present civilization and his origins.

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 acceptance of the "scarlet stuff, iced" on board the *Ipecacuanha* and acknowledges his own origins, and the origin of evil in man. Later 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 draught of blood. It had been a good guess for survival, but a renunciation of my own stomach, heart, and brain". (172) Set within the comprehensive vision of the book, however, the implication is that his choice was not 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 and degrading social environment 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, the tribe's soothsayer, responds and demolishes the twentieth century, demolishes the ideas of progress and perfection, and reduces life to the basic directions of nature and pragmatism:

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 here and now, the only real world. See it for what it is. (192)

The second major revelation which undermines the narrator's position is witnessed during the expedition to seek the Megatheria, or giant sloth, "clumsy denizens of the prehistoric world", which survive on the uplands of Rampole Island in their hundreds. From discussion and argument, the narrative moves to imaginative demonstration, and the creation of a primitive landscape and a wild creature is reminiscent of the descriptive power of Wells's earliest experiments in fantasy. The return to an 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, 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".¹⁹ In 1925, at Dayton, Tennessee, schoolteacher John Scopes was brought to trial and found guilty of teaching Darwinian evolution, a doctrine contrary to Biblical teaching, and contravening State Law. Conceivably this trial, and the Fundamentalist upsurge in the United States which accompanied it — exemplified 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 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 programme of social reconstruction. 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 creatures and pre-historic 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)

The "harsh realities" are "about" him on the primary level of his recent experience, but ultimately 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, and which make up a 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 pursues him from the security of the camp-fire and sends him fleeing in terror, the terror that Prendick knew at night on the beach of Noble's Isle.

The final element of this chapter is the threat of war between the people of the gorge and those of the upland, which proves 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 Conferences and nothing of the war fever in the years before 1914.

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, but Rampole Island is now disappearing, though 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 to which he returns. 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, 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. 20 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 case 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; only insanity or abnormality can bring about 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".

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. He readjusts to a companionship which counters his pessimistic vision with an optimism which rejects the claims of the Rampole nightmare. This prepares the way for a final dialogue section — a discussion between Blettsworthy and Graves —

which concludes with the 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 Blettsworthy is convinced, for Graves admits: "You are the doubter, always". (347) And neither can the reader be convinced. It is the *doubt* which carries the conviction, which concentrates Wells's imaginative skills to produce this hybrid allegorical fantasy. 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 and vision. For the individual life, he proffers "creative Stoicism". (345) This echoes the final advice for *Candide*, "we must cultivate our garden", and as in Voltaire's text, Graves's advice rings strangely hollow; the evil has been dwelt on too much and too long. Through the entire narrative, Wells has moved from literal and metaphorical expression of an individual psychological condition to indirect and direct commentary on man, the social and political animal. Between the two he makes a connection which cannot be broken.

The reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* marvelled that "after all these years of voyaging, adventuring and battling in the most arduous realms of the mind", Wells had not appeared even "a little exhausted, a trifle *blasé*". He was compelled, as were other commentators, to recall *Moreau*, and in making this vital connection he perhaps should not have been surprised at all to find Wells regarding the world once more and finding it "as incredible as ever". 21 Thirty-two years after writing *Moreau*, years of fevered involvement with the modern world, Wells returned, in *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island*, to the sombre evidence of unchanged human nature, of an unchanged species.

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NOTES

1. *Experiment in Autobiography* (London:Gollancz, 1934), vol. II, p. 501.
2. *Saturday Review* (September 1, 1928), p. 276.
3. *London Mercury* (September 1928), pp. 538-9.
4. H.G. Wells (New York:Norton, 1930), p. 229.
5. H.G. Wells: *Prophet of Our Day* (New York:J. Day & Co., 1950), p. 263.
6. *Experiment*, p. 501.
7. *Encounter* (January 1967), p. 57.
8. For a discussion of *Moreau*, *Blettsworthy*, and *The Croquet Player* as related satires, consult J.R. Hammond, "Three Satirical Novels", *The Wellsian*, II, iii (1968), pp. 16-19, and my own unpublished M.A. thesis: "Experiments in Statement": The Theme of Man's Instinctual Life in Selected Writings by H.G. Wells" (Simon Fraser University, Canada, 1968).

Continued on P. 5