

Folktales and H.G. Wells

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I found it more convenient to discuss sociology in fable. H.G. Wells¹

I

I can best introduce this discussion of folktales and H.G. Wells with a specific study of the folktale background of one particular novel, lifted bodily from my second Presidential Address to the Folklore Society, given on 21 March 1981, on 'Folktales and Science Fiction'.² I there wrote as follows about "a masterpiece by the man who was, by common consent, in the words of Sam Moskowitz, 'the greatest science fiction writer of them all'".³

H.G. Wells wrote *When the Sleeper Wakes* in 1897-8.⁴ In his own words, he "scamped the finish", in the hope of a quick sale, because he was suffering from kidney disease and feared he might be unable to earn for some time.⁵ The whole book gave him great trouble, and even after rewriting it in 1910 as *The Sleeper Awakes* he was never satisfied. While working on it, in January 1898, he wrote to George Gissing: "It's gotten just at the top of my powers or a little beyond em! So I'm midway between a noble performance and a noble disaster". And in the preface to the revised version in 1910, he described it as "one of the most ambitious and least satisfactory of my works".⁶ Whatever its faults, as J.R. Hammond has observed, it shows Wells at the height of his powers as a prophet: "television, broadcasting, aeroplanes, phonetic spelling, urban walkways — all these are described in convincing detail".⁷ Personally, I find it the most exciting of all Wells's novels.

The two versions are identical in respect of the points I shall mention, so I need not distinguish them. The story begins with the Sleeper racked by insomnia, the result of drugs taken to keep awake and write a progressive pamphlet under pressure. He falls into a trance, and wakes two hundred and three years later to a changed world. So far it is the venerable motif of Magic Sleep extending over Many Years.⁸ This goes back at least to the story of Epimenides of Cnossus in Crete, who was sent to fetch a sheep, turned aside for a nap in a cave, and woke up after an interval ranging in different accounts from forty to sixty years.⁹ Epimenides was probably a real person flourishing about 600 B.C.; the story of his sleep was first recorded by Theopompus in the 4th century B.C.¹⁰ The most famous literary example is, of course, "Rip Van Winkle" (1819); according to Alan Bruford, "Orcadians claim that Washington Irving got the basis of the...story from his parents, who had emigrated from Orkney".¹¹ As I.F. Clarke has shown, the Sleeper motif had become a regular means of introducing science fiction stories about the future, beginning with Sebastien Mercier's book *L'An 2440*, published in 1771.¹² The most famous of these books before Wells's was *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, published in 1888 by Edward Bellamy.¹³ This was immensely successful and influential;¹⁴ as Patrick Parrinder has discussed, it provoked William Morris to write *News from*

Nowhere (1890),¹⁵ and as James Gunn has suggested, Wells's book may also have been "written in reaction to Bellamy's vision".¹⁶ Certainly Wells must have known what he was doing when he used the Sleeper motif. He actually mentions Rip Van Winkle in his novel,¹⁷ and he got the starting-point of insomnia from Bellamy, though he utterly transmuted it, presenting with all the force of Shakespeare or Coleridge the agony of sleeplessness.

Wells's Sleeper has been used as titular owner by the manipulators of a giant multinational trust, which has grown until, by the time he wakes, he is "Master almost of the earth".¹⁸ The trust is administered by an unscrupulous oligarchy, who keep the people enslaved in a vast Labour Company. When the Sleeper wakes, the oligarchs try to dispose of him, but the people revolt. The revolution succeeds, with the backing of a discontented oligarch called Ostrog, who is out to become dictator. While Ostrog is consolidating his power, he tries to keep the Sleeper amused; luckily the amusement that attracts him is learning to pilot an aeroplane. Eventually, the Sleeper realises what Ostrog is up to, confronts him, and drives him into flight from the capital, London. The dictator comes back, with barbarian troops from Africa, to attack the democracy the Sleeper is setting up. This is, I believe, the kind of odd specific forecast Wells often got as a fruit of his sustained imaginative efforts to envisage the future. For, thirty-eight years later, the rebel general Franco attacked the Spanish democracy with Moorish troops from Africa, whose barbarian proclivities included castrating the bodies of the loyalist dead.¹⁹ In the Wells novel, with folktale simplicity, the Sleeper takes his aeroplane up to engage Ostrog's air transports single-handed. He wins the battle, but crashes to his death.

Now imagine Wells, ill, anxious, finishing his work, like the Sleeper himself, under pressure. In these conditions, as he came to conclude his story, I believe this, in many ways, most English of writers returned, quite unconsciously, to the root legend of English literature. The groundwork of association was already laid at the beginning of the novel, when the Sleeper forced himself to keep awake for a battle against social injustice. Just so did Beowulf keep vigil to meet and overcome the monster Grendel.²⁰ Near the end of the Old English epic, the old king goes out alone to fight the Firedrake that is destroying his people.²¹ "You soldiers", he tells his men, "may watch from this hill...It is not your business nor any man's but mine to measure strength with the monster".²² As the Sleeper, too, goes out to slay a monster and die, he "would let no other man attempt it", saying: "he who takes the greatest danger, he who bears the heaviest burden, that man is King".²³

Since giving my Address, I have realised that Beowulf is not the only hero associated with Wells's Sleeper King. The Sleeper is first introduced, and falls into his trance, in the neighbourhood of Boscastle, in Cornwall. We are here in Arthurian country, within a few miles of Tintagel, where Arthur was conceived (according to Geoffrey of Monmouth),²⁴ and Camelford, where he died in battle (according to Leland and others).²⁵

True, there was no castle at Tintagel in the Dark Ages,²⁶ and Geoffrey probably picked on the place because a castle had just been built there (in the 1140s) by his patron's half-brother.²⁷ True, the location of Arthur's last battle at Camelford was the result of misreading an inscription.²⁸ True, when Robert Hunt visited Tintagel and Camelford in 1863, he "sought with anxiety for some stories of the British king, but not one could be obtained".²⁹ But, for all that, the legend of Arthur has long been important in Cornwall, and especially the legend that Arthur is not dead. In 1113, a Frenchman visiting Cornwall got into trouble for referring to his death.³⁰ About 1300, the Cornish were still reported to be expecting Arthur's return.³¹ They apparently supposed he was living meanwhile in the form of a bird, and a Victorian gentleman who shot at a raven near Penzance was warned by a local he might have shot King Arthur.³² The twentieth-century Federation of Old Cornwall Societies chose as its motto: "he is not dead, King Arthur".³³

In any case, when Wells cycled with Jane to Cornwall in the summer of 1895,³⁴ he might well have had Arthurian associations; and whatever the local folklore, or lack of it, Boscastle was in a thoroughly Arthurian neighbourhood for a literate Victorian. In most parts of England and Wales (and also on the Continent), the legend of Arthur's survival takes the more familiar form of his *sleeping* in a cave, until the day when he awakes to save his people.³⁵ When some Victorian antiquarians visited Cadbury Castle, an old man asked them: "Have you come to take the king out?"³⁶ This is the folktale motif called *Kyffhäuser*,³⁷ after the sleeping-place of the Hohenstaufen Emperor Friedrich I Barbarossa in a similar legend. It fits Wells's Sleeper King like a glove, and thus connects him with a Celtic as well as a Germanic hero.³⁸

There is no evidence that either Beowulf or Arthur was a conscious association to the Sleeper in Wells's mind. However, three decades later, Wells returned, this time quite consciously and explicitly, to Cornish legend, in *The Autocracy of Mr Parham* (written 1929, published 1930).³⁹ This is a comedy about a foolish and ineffectual don who dreams he is a Fascist dictator. Wells "laughed when writing" it, and thought it under-rated; he realised, however, that in this context "reality has outdone fiction since".⁴⁰ The novel is certainly very funny much of the time. The trouble is that a real Fascist dictator is too repellent to be the subject of comedy. Wells cannot help giving his comic hero a certain innocence and some human feelings, and admits on the last page he "has come to feel a curious unreasonable affection for him", which I must say I share as a reader. As a result, Parham begins to recall the Sleeper (he even loops the loop over London),⁴¹ and ends up as the dupe (as the Sleeper was for a time) of a kind of Ostrog, the monstrous General Gerson. But it is the Cornish association that provides an unmistakable link between the two novels.

Parham's dictatorship is eventually challenged by an industrial chemist and a millionaire, who raise to the surface the lost land of Lyonesse, between Land's End and the Scillies, and build there a giant chemical factory. The legendary land of Lyonesse, reputed to contain one hundred and forty churches, was supposed to have been submerged in the exceptionally high tide recorded for the year 1099.⁴² There are in fact signs of subsidence in the neighbourhood.⁴³ Such legends are found in other parts of Cornwall, and in several places in Wales. F.J. North, who studied the

Welsh legends, showed they were probably echoes of losses of small settlements in real inundations in the Bronze Age or Neolithic, post-dated and magnified in medieval folklore.⁴⁴ Lyonesse was connected with Tristan in medieval Arthurian literature; it seems to have been Tennyson who finally located Camelot there.⁴⁵

As a young man, Mr Parham had tramped "by Land's End and along here and so on to Tintagel", with Tennyson in his knapsack.⁴⁶ But when he goes there in his dream, there are no "cities or palaces or knights", and "instead of King Arthur and his Table Round", there are his enemies, who turn out to be the usual Wellsian technologists, representatives of sanity and a bright future for mankind. If one last detail were needed to link together the two novels, the Cornish settings, and the Arthurian legend, it is surely the name of the industrial chemist who foils Parham and Gerson, but dies in this last battle — it is *Camelford!*

II

In my first Presidential Address to the Folklore Society,⁴⁷ I broached the wider topic of folktales and literature. I defined folktales as traditional narratives, handed down in speech as well as usually also in writing, and classified them into myths (folk science), legends (folk history), and fairytales (folk literature), which may, however, share motifs and undergo combinations. On this basis, I made the large proposal that "all worthwhile works of literature have important points of contact with folktales".⁴⁸ In my second Address, I had no difficulty in showing that tales, types and motifs have been freely used, *both consciously and unconsciously*, in science fiction. I hope the few examples in my first section have already shown that this is true of H.G. Wells.

Science fiction and fantasy "together make up imaginative, as opposed to naturalistic, fiction", and they are specially related to the kind of folktales called wonder tales, as naturalistic fiction is to the kind called *novelle*.⁴⁹ Imaginative fiction is what Addison had in mind when, in 1712, he wrote an essay on what Dryden had called "the Fairy Way of Writing".⁵⁰ The adept in this Way of Writing, he asserted, "ought to be very well versed in legends and fables". In my second Address, I showed that an early enthusiasm for hearing and/or reading myth, legend and fairytale was common to many science fiction writers, including four who very kindly answered my specific questions on the subject: (alphabetically) Isaac Asimov, Arthur Clarke, Sprague de Camp, and Brian Stableford. The copious explicit references to folktale motifs throughout Wells's writings make it almost certain that he, too, was early "very well versed in legends and fables". But direct evidence is scanty, and I can find none about his early experience of spoken tales. In his fateful eighth year, when a broken leg procured him the luxury of books, his reading included "the works of Washington Irving", but apparently not the *Tales of the Alhambra*, for, he tells us, "I do not remember that any story books figured during this first phase of reading".⁵¹ But at school a little later, he reports, "I had a mind suitably equipped by my reading for boyish saga telling and would go on interminably".⁵²

The modern science fiction writers showed a special enthusiasm for the folktales of ancient Greece: "the Greek myths were my favourites", wrote Isaac Asimov, "I read and re-read Homer endlessly".⁵³ Wells was different. He was ambivalent about the

classics. He liked Latin; it was for him for a time "the symbol of mental emancipation", and it "braced up" his use of English.⁵⁴ But in writing of Gissing, he is almost as contemptuous of classical education as was Darwin.⁵⁵ It was more understandable in Wells's case, for the sour grapes really had been out of his reach. The only ancient work he seems to have read whole (in translation) was Plato's *Republic*.⁵⁶ "How Plato hated a fact!" wrote Norman Douglas; "was it not he who wished to burn the works of Democritus of Abdera, most exact and reasonable of old sages?"⁵⁷ But, as he pointed out, Plato impresses some teenagers, and Wells read the *Republic* in adolescence.⁵⁸ He was dogged for life by the baleful influence of that abominable book, a sinister undertow of theory beneath his own marvellous insights and foresights, and his almost invariably generous, humane and progressive responses to specific issues.⁵⁹ Hence the strange spectacle of ceaseless gibes at literary art from one of the greatest literary artists who ever lived.⁶⁰ If only he had read Aristotle instead!

But I digress — a not unWellsian activity in non-fiction. My point is that a man who could praise Graham Wallas as "a Platonist and not a Homerist"⁶¹ was unlikely to acknowledge, even to himself, the debt to Greek folktales freely acknowledged by the modern writers. But in fact Wells uses classical references with the facility of a writer familiar with *English* literature, and plainly knew many of the Greek tales. At Up Park in 1887-8 he "read Hawthorne", and since he mentions a winged horse in a letter written at that time, I am sure he read *A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales* (which includes the story of Bellerophon and Pegasus).⁶² Moreover he twice mentions Hawthorne in connection with the title of *The Chronic Argonauts* (an early version of *The Time Machine*) — the original Argonauts also occur in *Tanglewood Tales*.⁶³ As we shall see, Hawthorne may have introduced him to at least one Homeric motif, and made him a Homerist after all.

English legends were another rich source of motifs for Wells. When Hilaire Belloc absurdly accused the author of the *Outline of History* of chauvinism, as well as of copying things from the "wrong" books, Wells had great fun replying. "One can see that base malignant Wells fellow, in his stuffy room all hung with Union Jacks, with the 'wrong'...book flattened out before him, copying, copying; his tongue following his laborious pen".⁶⁴ The real Wells had left the obsessive Union Jacks behind him with his schooldays.⁶⁵ But in the best sense Wells was extremely English, and he aptly characterized both his panoramic view and his point of origin in the title of *An Englishman Looks at the World* (1914). So inveterate an explorer of southern England (and part of the Midlands⁶⁶) must have picked up plenty of good English folklore on his travels, as I have already shown in connection with Cornwall.

Finally, if there is one book abounding rich in folklore that Wells knew backwards, it is the Bible.⁶⁷ His mother would have seen to that, with her religious views, endearingly odd (she believed in hell, but thought perhaps nobody would be sent there except Satan) but intense.⁶⁸ In any case, Wells' scriptural references are frequent and knowledgeable,⁶⁹ and he tells us himself he modelled *The Undying Fire* (1919) closely on the Book of Job, down to the names and the order of the speeches.⁷⁰ In my third section, we shall see Wells using both English legend and the Bible.

It is an interesting question whether Wells knew about the *study* of folktales and folklore in general. Here again, I can find no direct evidence but much to suggest it. He pays high tribute to Andrew Lang's *Social Origins*,⁷¹ but does not seem to have had much if any direct contact with the great folklorist. On the other hand, he certainly did see a good deal of Edward Clodd. They had a close mutual friend in George Gissing, whom Wells first met at a dinner "whither I had gone as the guest of either Grant Allen or Edmund (sic) Clodd (I forget which)".⁷² Wells had much in common with Clodd in the way of biological interests — Clodd's *Pioneers of Evolution* (1897) is still one of the best books ever written on that subject. But Clodd was also President of the Folklore Society in 1895-6, and a member of what Richard Dorson has called the Great Team of British folklorists, at a time of great activity in folklore study.⁷³ It is therefore quite likely Wells was exposed to folklore study as well as folklore.

My analysis of *The Sleeper Awakes* is by no means the only study of the use of folktale material in Wells's fiction. Among the novels, *The Sea Lady* (1902) is explicitly about a mermaid, and rates a mention in Gwen Benwell and Arthur Waugh's classic book on the folklore of these beings;⁷⁴ Wells himself mentions giving the same motif more naturalistic treatment in *The New Machiavelli* (1911).⁷⁵ The short stories are often equally explicit, and Jacqueline Simpson has discussed several of them in a recent letter to me (20th June 1981). As she points out, 'The Stolen Bacillus' (1894) echoes old rumours about well-poisoning or plague-spreading by hated minorities "(e.g. Jews, or in this case Anarchists)"; 'The Door in the Wall' (1906) recalls legends of "people who once enter fairyland but are then expelled for some fault and can never find their way back"; and 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' (1898) and 'The Truth about Pyecraft' (1903) "turn on the unfortunate result of phrasing wishes rashly, because they get carried out quite literally, as in the Three Wishes story". H.W. Stubbs, in a study of underworld motifs in modern fiction, has explored these briefly in a number of Wells's novels and short stories.⁷⁶ Tatyana Chernysheva has also briefly looked at the folktale background of several Wells novels, paying special attention to his attempt to render the motifs in scientifically realistic terms (what I have called scientification).⁷⁷ *The Time Machine* (1895) has attracted much attention from this angle: Stubbs has related it to underworld journeys, Patrick Parrinder has noticed an affinity between the Time Traveller and Prometheus,⁷⁸ and G.F. Dalton has made a point-for-point comparison with a ballad version of the story of Tamlin.⁷⁹

A start has been made, but much remains to be done in the identification of tales, types and motifs in Wells's fiction. In this paper, I have concentrated on three major novels. In my opening section, I considered *The Sleeper Awakes* (with a glance at *Mr Parham*); in the concluding sections I shall look at *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896).

III

Written when Wells was living at Woking, where the story opens, *The War of the Worlds* is perhaps the most topographically precise novel ever written; as J.R. Hammond has observed, "the fast-moving action of the story can be fully appreciated only by reference to a map of the area around Woking".⁸⁰ Wells tells us

he cycled "about the district marking down suitable places and people for destruction by my Martians".⁸¹ With so much detail, an obvious question arises, with no obvious answer in the story itself: *Why did the Martians land on Horsell Common?* This is the riddle I set out to solve.

The chief feature of Horsell Common is a pair of bell barrows.⁸² They are listed in L.V. Grinsell's account of the Surrey barrows.⁸³ But they are *not* mentioned in Grinsell's authoritative *Folklore of Prehistoric Sites in Britain*,⁸⁴ and he has told me categorically there are *no* legends about them.⁸⁵ However, these barrows must have reminded Wells of another group of barrows, on Treyford Hill, a few miles from Midhurst and Up Park. Wells lived in this district in 1880-81 and in 1883-4, in his impressionable teen-age years. Midhurst had been the home of his mother's father, and his parents had met in service at Up Park, where his mother returned as Housekeeper in 1880. Wells "had taken to Midhurst" and wrote, "Midhurst has always been a happy place for me". At Up Park, he had much to do with the staff, a perfect source of local legends. He liked the West Sussex countryside, and must have tramped over Treyford Hill.⁸⁶

The five Treyford Hill barrows *do* have a legend, which has been collected by Jacqueline Simpson.⁸⁷ They are called the Devil's Jumps. The old Norse god Thor was resting on the hill, when the Devil came and disturbed him by jumping from one barrow to another. When Thor protested, the Devil jeered at him for being too old to jump. Thor hurled a huge stone at him, which caught him in mid-jump, and "he took himself off double quick" and never returned. To facilitate the link between the Sussex and Surrey barrows, the same legend is told in Surrey, of a group of five natural hills on Thursley Common, between Hindhead and Farnham.⁸⁸ In Simpson's words, "one could hardly have wished for a nicer example of Motif A 162.3, 'Combat between Thundergod and Devil'".⁸⁹ And this, I believe, is the combat that lies at the heart of the War of the Worlds. To establish this, I have to find the Devil and the Thundergod represented as antagonists in the novel.

The Devil is easy to find. Everything about the Martians is diabolical. The scene outside the window of the narrator's house is exactly like a Bosch view of hell. The people scrambling out of the scalding river are described as "like little frogs",⁹⁰ as Dante described the sinners emerging from the boiling pitch in Malebolge.⁹¹ The scene on the Great North Road strongly suggests a throng of damned souls, and is described as "this — hell".⁹² The Martians are beings from another sphere. Their hellish weapons include red heat-rays and black smoke; an eerie green smoke rises from their impact craters, always described as pits. Bats periodically flutter about them. The scenes when they feed are hellish indeed. Their machines are described as like crabs or spiders.⁹³ Their spacecraft are described as falling stars; ten shots are fired altogether, but the fifth falling star plays a special part in the novel, since it traps the narrator in the ruined house. I have no doubt Wells was at least unconsciously influenced by Chapter 9 of the Book of Revelation, where "the fifth angel sounded" and "I saw a star fall from heaven" and "there arose a smoke out of the pit" and out came things like locusts or scorpions to torment human sinners, under their king Abaddon, the demon who corresponds to Bunyan's Apollyon (the subject of Wells's imaginary talk with the mole cricket about space and the littleness of man, one of his earliest essays).⁹⁴ The weak-minded curate's apocalyptic ravings are thus entirely to the point.

There is further evidence that the Devil was in Wells's mind at the time of the novel's composition. In his autobiography, Wells reproduced a number of the little sketches he called "picshuas". He drew them in the intervals of writing, and attached importance to them — "not really an efflorescence but something very fundamental to this brain-story".⁹⁵ The picshuas are therefore a valuable clue to his state of mind when writing. Now only two of the picshuas reproduced in the autobiography contain devil imagery: both were drawn at Woking.⁹⁶ One contains a printer's devil and an "envious hostile reviewer with a forked tail". The other is actually drawn on a letter from Pearson's office,⁹⁷ asking to see the remainder of *The War of the Worlds*. The picshua involves a favourite Wells pun on "tail" and "tale".⁹⁸ Wells scribbles a paraphrase of the publisher's letter: "very nice tale so far. But do you mind taking the end out of the inkpot before I decide". He draws himself as a horned imp, dipping his tail in the inkpot. First he takes it out with a devil's arrow-tip: this is rejected by the publisher. Then he puts it back, and withdraws it with a round spidery ending suggestive of Martians or their machines. This "tale" is accepted and chopped off, and Wells goes off with a bag of money.

If the Martians represent the Devil, what about their adversary? This is quite clearly an old god of Earth, namely Jehovah, who sends the bacteria to destroy them — "slain, after all man's devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in His wisdom, has put upon this earth". Specifically, "the destruction of Sennacherib had been repeated".⁹⁹ This is of course a reference to Sennacherib's threatened attack on Jerusalem in 700 B.C., which never came off because "it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses" (2 Kings, Chapter 19, v.35; cf. 2 Chronicles, Chapter 32, v.21). According to Herodotus, the Egyptians claimed responsibility for the same miracle, naturally on behalf of their own gods. Sennacherib was just the man to provoke a coalition of gods against him; even among Assyrian kings, he was not renowned for considering other people's religious susceptibilities, he was hated throughout Mesopotamia for burning the sacred city of Babylon, and he was very appropriately beaten to death with idols by his undutiful sons.¹⁰⁰ On the edge of the city of Lachish, which Sennacherib had been besieging, a mass grave was excavated in 1948, with 2000 skeletons hurriedly thrown in;¹⁰¹ the Assyrians really did make a sudden retreat, according to their own records, and there very probably *was* an epidemic. In any case, Wells would naturally have assumed the same fate befell his Martians and Sennacherib's host.

Now in the autobiography, Wells twice refers to Jehovah as a thunder-god,¹⁰² and his narrator thanks the destroyer of the Martians by raising his hands to the sky. The enemy of the diabolical Martians thus really was a thunder-god, who punished them well for their Jumps across space. But there is a much more striking piece of corroborative evidence. Apart from one lucky gunshot, the Martians seem invincible until they are destroyed at the end of Book 2. But, at the end of Book 1, they suffer one set-back: two of their fighting-machines are destroyed in a suicide attack by a British warship — the torpedo-ram *Thunder Child*.*

*Dr Russell has omitted one other appearance by the thunder-god in the novel. The narrator returns to Woking, and sees the Martians' Fighting Machines for the first time, in the middle of a thunderstorm (Bk I, Ch 10). — Ed.

In the heart of Victorian England — in the very gardens of Buckingham Palace, was one of the most disturbing pictures ever painted. In 1842, the Prince Consort commissioned eight frescoes for a summer house, to deal with the subject of Milton's *Comus*. One of the painters approached was Edwin Landseer.¹⁰³ Ironically, he made his fortune apparently catering to the Victorian demand for sentimental pictures of pets, especially dogs. Hence the story (alas! apocryphal) of Landseer asking Sydney Smith to sit for him, and the great wit replying: "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?"¹⁰⁴ But Landseer's involvement with animals was really sinister and intense. Asked to look at a very savage dog tied up in Lord Rivers's yard, "he crawled up to the animal on his hands and knees, and snarled so alarmingly that the dog, overcome with terror, suddenly snapped his chain, jumped over the wall, and was never seen again".¹⁰⁵ His obsession with the human in animals and the animal in man ended in alcoholism and insanity. For the royal summer-house, he produced *The Rout of Comus*, in which the evil magician is surrounded by a horrifying band of animal-headed men and women, in which Landseer's art and his obsession reached their peak.

Landseer's great picture is not, of course, the only treatment of this theme in Victorian art and literature. It dominates, for instance, George MacDonald's gloomiest novel, *The Princess and Curdie* (1882). But by far the best match in literature for Landseer's writhing human animals is the closing chapter of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, when the narrator Prendick, returned from his shattering experience on the island, sees "the animal surging up through" all the people he meets. The whole novel is a realisation of Landseer's dreadful vision. Wells knew Landseer's work well, and described him as one "who could put human souls into almost every sort of animal".¹⁰⁶ Wells's father had even served as a model for Landseer, when the painter visited his employer (he was then a gardener). Wells must have been inspired in his novel by a reproduction of *The Rout of Comus*. Prominently figuring in the picture are an ape-man, a *prostrate* leopard-man, and a horrible brute, at the magician's right hand, who might have served as model for Prendick's *bête noire*, the hyaena-swine-man. And in Chapter 11, Prendick refers to the humanized animals of Moreau and Montgomery as "their Comus rout".

Now the earliest human societies were organized in intermating matrilineal clans.¹⁰⁷ The core lineage was therefore female, and males came in to mate from other clans. Under stressful conditions, they were liable to be sacrificed and eaten, as happened until recently in one tribe in Brazil studied by Francis Huxley. Each clan claimed descent from an ancestral figure *both* human *and* belonging to a particular animal species. Sometimes the privileged male (brother of the senior female) who ran each clan would mask and disguise as the human-animal ancestor for sacrifices and other rituals. But there was also a tendency to regard one's own clan as *really* human, and all other clans as *really* animals of various species. So in works of art the clan was represented by its core lineage of women, with a variety of animals to symbolize the mates and victims brought in from other clans.

As the patrilineal system began to take over, this powerful image of *the lady and the beasts* began to be reinterpreted.¹⁰⁸ The real rulers and executioners of the matrilineal clans were male, but a fantasy now emerged of a dangerous female

killing her mates, despised as outsiders and therefore animals. In the Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh, which must have originated in the 3rd millennium B.C., the goddess Ishtar woos the hero, who rejects her because of the way she has treated her animal lovers.¹⁰⁹ Later still, the image gave rise to a widespread folktale motif, the Witch who Transforms her Lovers into Animals.¹¹⁰ The earliest example is the story of Circe in the *Odyssey*, who transformed the hero's companions into beasts, and whom he overcame and mated.¹¹¹ When Milton developed the shadowy figure of Comus, with his rout of human animals, he made him the son of Circe.¹¹²

As Chernysheva rightly observes, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* stems "from the most ancient folktale metamorphoses".¹¹³ But we can be more specific: it stems from the story of Circe. In *Tanglewood Tales*, Hawthorne chose to tell this one episode of the *Odyssey*, with a brief introduction about the Laestrygonian cannibals, and we have seen Wells almost certainly read this book as a young man. His novel contains several references to the Latin and Greek classics. It begins with the hero escaping from cannibalism. He is stranded on an island where, like Odysseus and his companions, he sees a plume of smoke rising. Where they saw animals behaving in a human way, he sees apparent human beings behaving in an animal way. However, for much of the time (and the action turns on this) Prendick thinks Moreau and Montgomery are turning human beings into animals, like Circe on her island. In fact Moreau is trying to turn animals, very cruelly, into human beings, and he is a man: it is a kind of parable of a perverse extreme of patrilineal development. But the repressed witch is lurking on the first page of the book, in the guise of the names of two ships — the *Lady Vain* and that most monstrous of distorted matrilineal witch-symbols, the Gorgon *Medusa*, who turned men, not to animals, but to stone.

In tribal societies, if other clans are sub-human animals, other tribes are even more so. In civilized societies, Aristotle taught that Greeks owed barbarians no more than they owed wild animals, and in the heyday of Negro slavery the Negroes were said to be nearer to apes than to man. The conception of one human species, profoundly different from other animals, was only precariously achieved by the beginning of the 19th century.¹¹⁴ Then came Darwin. Whatever the superficial arguments, his real crime in the eyes of reactionaries was not to derive man from animals — everyone did that unconsciously — but to derive us *all from the same animal group, the primates*, and by *gradual evolution* rather than the sudden transformations of folktales. In *Princess Ida*, with the unerring insight of the great writer, Gilbert suggested woman was not descended from an animal, but man *was* — thus recalling the original matrilineal image of lady and beast. But the racist reaction was more sinister, consisting in ceaseless attempts to derive the main racial groups from different animal origins, for instance different ape stocks.¹¹⁵ And there have also been recurrent attempts to dispute the principle of gradual evolution, and suggest fortuitous jumps and "supermutations" — De Vries in the early 20th century, Goldschmidt in the 1930s, most recently the "cladists".¹¹⁶ Ironically, it was in the late nineteenth century that the folklorists (Lang and Frazer) and field-workers (Baldwin Spencer and Haddon) began to discover the system of totemic human-animal confusions underlying the whole reaction.

In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Wells says wise and true things at several levels. At the simplest level, he says that sadistic experiments do not produce satisfactory results — a principle I was able to establish more than half a century later.¹¹⁷ At the most deeply symbolic level, he is perhaps saying that extreme perversions of the patrilineal kinship system will not work. But he is also bringing support to Darwin. Good pupil of Huxley that he is, Prendick “did not feel the same repugnance” towards the ape-man “that I had experienced in my encounters with the other Beast Men”.¹¹⁸ In this he resembles Edgar Rice Burroughs, who treasured a copy of *The Descent of Man*,¹¹⁹ and differs markedly from Kipling.¹²⁰ Finally, the book shows once and for all that sudden transformations are impossible: Moreau’s horrible experiment utterly fails, and the beasts revert to beasts. So much can a great writer do when he brings into the modern world the imagery of an ancient folktale.

Notes

(In the case of books, references are to editions used by me)

1. H.G. Wells *Experiment in Autobiography* (London, 1966) Vol.2, p.654.
2. *Folklore* 93 (in press). It will also be reprinted in *Foundation*.
3. S. Moskowitz *Explorers of the Infinite* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1963) p.34.
4. J.R. Hammond *An H.G. Wells Companion* (London, 1979) p.94.
5. Wells (n.1) Vol.2, pp.582-4.
6. Hammond (n.4) pp.96,94; R.A. Gettmann (ed.) *George Gissing and H.G. Wells* (London, 1961) p.79, and cf. also pp.69-70.
7. Hammond, *ibid*.
8. Motif D 1960.1. This and other motif references are to S. Thompson *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Helsinki, 1932).
9. (Sir) J.G. Frazer (transl. and comment.) *Pausanias's Description of Greece* (London, 1913) Vol.2, p.121.
10. Frazer (n.9) pp.121,123; cf. E.R. Dodd *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston, Mass., 1957) pp.141-2; for Theopompus, see H.J. Rose *A Handbook of Greek Literature* (London, 1964) p.310.
11. A Bruford “Some Aspects of the Otherworld” in: V. Newall (ed.) *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1980) pp.147-52, quotation p.148.
12. I.F. Clarke *The Pattern of Expectation, 1644-2001* (London, 1979) pp.2,27,37.
13. J. Gunn (ed.) *The Road to Science Fiction* (London, 1977-9) Vol.1, p.312.
14. *Ibid.*; Clarke (n.12) pp.161-4.
15. P. Parrinder “News from Nowhere, *The Time Machine* and the Break-up of Classical Realism” *Science-Fiction Studies* 3 (1976) pp.265-74.
16. Gunn (n.13) Vol.1, p.314. Wells was profoundly influenced by Bellamy’s book. Both *In the Days of the Comet* (1906) and *The Dream* (1924) — two books Wells himself put “in the same class”, Wells (n.1) Vol.2, p.500 — are transparent re-workings of Bellamy’s idea. In the first chapter of *Looking*

Backward, Bellamy has a set-piece description of the world in the late 19th-century. He uses the metaphor of a coach, with the rich aboard and the poor pulling in harness: passengers are in constant fear of being thrown off to join the pullers. In Chapter 3, Section 7 of *In the Days of the Comet*, Wells attempts a similar picture of the late 19th-century world. For once, he is less vivid than his model, using abstract words like “Security” and “Insecurity” in place of Bellamy’s coach imagery. But he betrays his source clearly when he suddenly writes of the Secure, in their dread of Insecurity, “always lashing themselves by new ropes” — evidently to avoid falling off Bellamy’s coach.

17. In Chapter 2, both versions.
18. Chapter 18, both versions.
19. H. Thomas *The Spanish Civil War* (Harmondsworth, 1965) pp.86-7,122-4, 196,273,319 (n.2).
20. *Beowulf* 10; I do not read Anglo-Saxon, and used the translation by David Wright (London, 1970) p.43.
21. Ostrog’s police burn women alive.
22. *Beowulf* 35; Wright (n.20) p.86.
23. Closing chapter, both versions.
24. *Historia Regum Britanniae* 8.20.
25. R. Hunt *Popular Romances of the West of England* (London, 1916) p.310.
26. L. Alcock *Arthur’s Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1973) p.249.
27. V. Newall “Introduction” in: T. Deane and T. Shaw *The Folklore of Cornwall* (London, 1975) pp.9-45, especially p.27; C.A.R. Radford “Romance and Reality in Cornwall” in: G. Ashe (ed.) *The Quest for Arthur’s Britain* (London, 1971) pp.59-77, especially pp.61-3.
28. Alcock (n.26) pp.164-5.
29. Hunt (n.25) p.303.
30. R.S. Loomis “The Oral Diffusion of the Arthurian Legend” in: R.S. Loomis (ed.) *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1959) pp.52-63, especially pp.53-4.
31. R.S. Loomis “The Legend of Arthur’s Survival” *ibid.* pp.64-71, especially p.65.
32. Hunt (n.25) pp.308-9; Loomis (n.31) p.65; Newall (n.27) p.22.
33. Newall (n.27) pp.22-3.
34. Wells (n.1) pp.543-6.
35. B.L. Jones *Arthur y Cymry: The Welsh Arthur* (Cardiff, 1975) pp.85-91; (Sir) J. Rhys *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (London, 1980) Chapter 8; Loomis (n.31) p.68-70.
36. *Ibid.* pp.69-70.
37. D 1960.2 (see n.8).

38. Is it too far-fetched to connect the Cornish conception of Arthur as a bird with the Sleeper's triumph and death as an *aviator*?
39. Hammond (n.4) p.116; Wells (n.1) p.501.
40. *ibid.* Wells took only four years, and a few months of Hitler, to realise this!
41. Book 3, Chapter 5.
42. Hunt (n.25) pp.189-93.
43. *Ibid.*
44. F.J. North *Sunken Cities* (Cardiff, 1957), *passim*.
45. Newall (n.27) pp.27-9.
46. Book 5, Chapter 6.
47. "Folktales and the Theatre" *Folklore* 92 (1981) pp.3-24.
48. Russell (n.2).
49. *Ibid.*
50. *The Spectator* No.419.
51. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, p.78.
52. *Ibid.* p.89.
53. Letter from Isaac Asimov to W.M.S.R., 28 November 1980, cited in Russell (n.2).
54. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, pp.152,140, cf.215.
55. *Ibid.* Vol.2, pp.570-72, cf. Vol.1, p.339; for Darwin see W.M.S. Russell "Biology and Literature in Britain, 1500-1900.3. The Parting of the Ways" *Social Biology and Human Affairs* 45 (1980) pp.52-71, especially p.57.
56. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, p.138.
57. *Old Calabria* (Harmondsworth, 1962) pp.323-4.
58. Not all teenagers; probably because I was luckier than Wells in my education, I reacted to the *Republic* with instant loathing, and read a paper to my school's political society (in 1942) on the *Republic* as a Fascist tract. I was then unaware of Douglas's classic summing-up.
59. E.g. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, pp.177-9, Vol.2, pp.657-61,735, but examples abound throughout Wells's non-fiction. Since I wrote this paragraph, an excellent paper has appeared on the tension between Wells's platonism and his own "intuitive mistrust of totalitarian thinking" — Michael Draper "Wells, Plato and the Ideal State" *The Wellsian* No.4 (1981) pp.8-14.
60. E.g. Wells (n.1) Vol.2, pp.541-2,601,620-25.
61. *Ibid.* Vol.2, p.599.
62. This book inspired Kingsley to do better and write *The Heroes* — B. Colloms *Charles Kingsley* (London, 1975) p.205; S. Chitty *The Beast and the Monk* (London, 1974) p.179. Certainly *The Heroes* is better, but Hawthorne's book also delighted me as a child, and includes a number of tales omitted by Kingsley.
63. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, p.309, Vol.2, p.516.
64. H.G. Wells *Mr Belloc Objects* (London, 1926) p.5.
65. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, pp.99-100.
66. R. Hampson "H.G. Wells and the Staffordshire Potteries" *The Wellsian* No. 3 (1980) pp.1-5.
67. For the folklore of the Bible, see e.g. (Sir) J.G. Frazer *Folklore in the Old Testament* (London, 1923); J.R. Porter "Folklore between the Testaments" *Folklore* 91 (1980) pp.133-46; D. Brewer "The Gospels and the Laws of Folktales: a Centenary Lecture" *Folklore* 90 (1979) pp.37-52.
68. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, p.48. Wells liked this sentiment so much he gave it to the dear old mother of the hero of *In the Days of the Comet* (Chapter 10), written in the year of his own mother's death.
69. E.g. Wells (n.1) Vol.2, pp.676 (St. Paul), 740 (Hosea).
70. *Ibid.* Vol.2, p.499.
71. *Ibid.* Vol.2, pp.476,650 — A. Lang *Social Origins* and H.H. Atkinson *Primal Law* (London, 1903).
72. Wells (n.1) Vol.2, p.567. His slip means nothing more than his habitual carelessness about details (in his non-fiction). Clodd and Wells are among the half-a-dozen friends most often mentioned in Gissing's diary between 1896 and 1902: P. Coustillas (ed.) *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England. The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1978) index, s.v. Clodd, Edward, and Wells, H.G., pp.599 and 616. Another close mutual friend was Grant Allen: Wells (n.1) Vol.2, pp.546-52; W.M.S. Russell "Biology and Literature in Britain, 1500-1900.2. The Victorians" *Biology and Human Affairs* 44 (1979) pp.114-33, especially pp.128-31.
73. R.M. Dorson *The British Folklorists. A History* (London, 1968) Chapter 7.
74. *Sea Enchantress* (London, 1961) p.258.
75. Wells (n.1) Vol.2, pp.468-9,473-4.
76. "Underworld Themes in Modern Fiction" in: H.R. Ellis Davidson (ed.) *The Journey to the Other World* (Ipswich and Cambridge, 1975) pp.130-49, especially pp.139-40.
77. "The Folktale, Wells, and Modern Science Fiction" in: D. Suvin and R.M. Philmus (ed.) *H.G. Wells and Modern Science Fiction* (London, 1977) pp.35-47. She is wrong in thinking folktale motifs or motif-clusters are absent in Jules Verne; I have mentioned some in my second Address (n.2).
78. "The Time Machine: H.G. Wells's Journey through Death" *The Wellsian* No. 4 (1981) pp.15-23, especially pp.20-21.
79. "Unconscious Literary Use of Traditional Material" *Folklore* 85 (1974) pp.268-75, especially pp.270-71. For Tamlin, or Tamlane, see K. Briggs *A Dictionary of Fairies* (Harmondsworth, 1977) pp.449-53.
80. Hammond (n.4) p.91. He obligingly supplies the map on p.93. Grant Allen,

- in his posthumously published story "The Thames Valley Catastrophe" (*Strand Magazine* December 1901), describes the destruction of the Thames Valley by natural causes (a fissure eruption), and his hero's escape, in almost as much detail, adroitly advising his readers "to follow out my route on a good map of the period" (i.e. the period before the eruption). The story has recently been reprinted in: A.K. Russell (ed.) *Science Fiction by the Rivals of H.G. Wells* (Secaucus, N.J., 1979) pp.11-24. Allen's narrator, like Wells's, ends his Odyssey in North London. I do not know when this story was written; it was probably inspired by *The War of the Worlds* rather than *vice versa*. Wells said he got the idea for his novel on a country walk with his brother; Moskowitz has suggested there may have been some stimulus from the publisher Cyril Arthur Pearson, who serialized it, and that the choice of Mars may have been suggested by a novel of Pearson's leading staff author, George Griffith — "George Griffith — Warrior of If" in: G. Griffith *The Raid of Le Vengeur* (with material by G. Locke and S. Moskowitz, London, 1974) pp.6-47, especially p.37. But Mars was an obvious choice for a war story. None of this affects my argument.
81. Wells (n.1) Vol.2, p.543.
 82. F.R. Banks *Surrey* (Harmondsworth, 1956) p.161; A. Locke *A Short History of Woking* (Woking 1980) p.4.
 83. "An Analysis and List of Surrey Barrows" *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 42 (1934) pp.26-60, especially p.41.
 84. (London, 1976).
 85. I am most grateful to him for this information.
 86. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, Chapter 2, Sections 2-3; Chapter 3, Sections 6-7; Chapter 4, Section 3. Quotations on pp.139 and 171.
 87. *The Folklore of Sussex* (London, 1973) pp.61-2; "Sussex Local Legends" *Folklore* 84 (1973) pp.206-23, especially pp.211-12.
 88. Jacqueline Simpson kindly gave me this information, in a letter of 20 June 1981. She cites L. Collinson Morley *Companion into Surrey* (1973) p.68, and B.E. Cracknell *Portrait of Surrey* (1970) p.235.
 89. Simpson (n.87, *Folklore*) pp.211-12.
 90. Book 1, Chapter 12.
 91. *Inferno* Canto 22.
 92. Book 1, Chapter 16.
 93. Book 2, Chapter 2.
 94. R.M. Philmus and D.Y. Hughes (ed.) H.G. Wells: *Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction* (London, 1975) pp.19-21 ("A Talk with Gryllotalpa" — 1887).
 95. Wells (n.1) Vol.2, pp.620-21, also p.439.
 96. *Ibid.* Vol.2, pp.555-6; cf. text, p.553.
 97. See n.80.
 98. See Wells (n.1) Vol.2, p.560, where the same pun is used (undiabolically) in another picshua.
 99. Book 2, Chapter 8.
 100. G. Roux *Ancient Iraq* (Harmondsworth, 1980) pp.294-9.
 101. W. Keller *The Bible as History* (transl. W. Neil, revised J. Rehorck, transl. B.H. Rasmussen; London, 1980) p.261.
 102. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, p.96; Vol.2, p.570.
 103. C. Lennie *Landseer* (London, 1976) pp.117-19; I.B. Hill *Landseer* (Aylesbury, Bucks., 1973) p.33, with a reproduction of Landseer's picture.
 104. Lennie (n.103) p.93.
 105. J.G. Millais *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais* (London, 1899) p.44.
 106. Wells (n.1) Vol.1, p.55.
 107. For the evidence for the statements in this paragraph, see C. Russell "Kinship Symbols and their Evolution" *Social Biology and Human Affairs* 45 (1981) pp.119-44; C. Russell and W.M.S. Russell "The Social Biology of Totemism" *Biology and Human Affairs* 41 (1976) pp.53-79; "Space, Time and Totemism" *Biology and Human Affairs* 42 (1977) pp.57-80; "Kinship, Monkeys and Man. 1" *Biology and Human Affairs* 43 (1978) pp.1-31; "Kinship, Monkeys and Man. 2" *Social Biology and Human Affairs* 46 (1982) pp.37-65; W.M.S. Russell and C. Russell "The Social Biology of Werewolves" in: J.R. Porter and W.M.S. Russell (ed.) *Animals in Folklore* (Ipswich and Cambridge, 1978) pp.143-82, 260-69.
 108. For this image, see e.g. G. Levy *The Gate of Horn* (London, 1963) pp.223-5.
 109. N.K. Sandars (transl.) *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Harmondsworth, 1960), pp.83-5.
 110. Motif G 263.1. For examples of, and variations on, this motif, see D. Page *Folktales in Homer's Odyssey* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973) Chapter 3.
 111. *Odyssey* 10.133-454.
 112. J. Carey and A. Fowler (ed.) *The Poems of John Milton* (London, 1968) p.179; E.H. Visiak *The Portent of Milton* (New York, 1968) p.104.
 113. Chernysheva (n.77) p.38.
 114. Russell and Russell (n.107, 1976) pp.55-6.
 115. Cf. J.S. Haller *Outcasts from Evolution* (London, 1971) Chapter 3.
 116. Cf., on these aberrations, E.B. Ford *Ecological Genetics* (London, 1964) pp.233-4; L.B. Halstead "Museum of Errors" *Nature* 288 (1980) p.208. There are, of course, sudden outbursts of change and adaptive radiation when a new regulating mechanism opens up new ecological opportunities, but this perfectly Darwinian process has nothing to do with "supermutations".
 117. W.M.S. Russell and R.L. Burch *The Principles of Humane Experimental Technique* (London, 1959) pp.155-7 and *passim*. Cf. also T. Rosebury *Microbes and Morals* (St. Albans, 1975) pp.83-4. Wells may have been personally

influenced by the sounds from the butcher's yard next door to the family's Bromley home, where the animals spent the night before they were slaughtered: Wells (n.1) Vol.1, p.40. Such impressions are important; I.J. Guillotin may have been inspired to invent his machine for relatively humane executions because his family lived near a place of execution and his mother miscarried after hearing the screams of a criminal broken on the wheel: A. Soubiran *The Good Doctor Guillotin* (transl. M. MacCraw; London, 1964) p.23.

118. Chapter 11.
119. I. Porges *Edgar Rice Burroughs* (New York, 1975) Vol.1, pp.135,213,561; E.B. Holtsmark *Tarzan and Tradition* (London, 1981) pp.82-3.
120. W.M.S. Russell and C. Russell (n.107) p.177.

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