

Kenneth V. Bailey

"There Would Presently Come out of the Darkness": H.G. Wells's 'Filmic' Imagination

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Introduction

In this paper my four inter-related purposes are: (1) as a preliminary, to outline ways in which Wells's science fiction corresponded to potentialities of the cinema, these potentialities in turn being related to certain emerging scientific concepts; (2) to demonstrate the extent to which Wells's visualising and image-forming function in ways comparable to those by which images are produced and communicated through the media of photography and the film; (3) to examine in some detail how metaphor and narrative devices in Wells have common ground, and indeed common purpose, with certain film techniques - in that they orientate the imagination toward post-Newtonian models of time, space and consciousness; (4) after a concluding and synthesising discussion of *The King Who Was A King*, briefly to consider the extent to which Wells's use of cinema-screen and projection as metaphor reflects a philosophical strand, part-rational, part-intuitive, part-mystical and perhaps only subliminally realised, that is essentially Platonic.

I "...A More or Less Entertaining or Distressful Story Thrown Upon a Cinema Screen"

"A more or less entertaining or distressful story thrown upon a cinema screen." Thus in *Mind at the End of its Tether* does Wells image the mundane experience of life as it has been known, he says, to "countless unsatisfied minds throughout the ages" (Ch.1). It is a direct and specific cinematic metaphor contained in a last work; but in many early works we are made to visualise in a manner that it is appropriate to call 'cinematic'. For example, imagine the following (from 'A Vision of Judgement') as a 'dissolve', and then as an (admittedly anachronistic)

wide-screen effect:

...the old elm tree and the sea view vanished like a puff of steam, and then all about me - a multitude no man could number, nations, tongues, kingdoms, peoples - children of all the ages, in an amphitheatral space as vast as the sky.

And consider, in *The First Men in the Moon*, the cinematic 'fish-eye' effect of Bedford's observation from inside the sphere, its blinds raised on a brilliantly lit scene, of the bursting lunar seed-pods:

...and down the crack of each of (the pods) showed a minute line of yellowish green, thrusting out to meet the hot encouragement of the newly-risen sun...The picture was clear and vivid only in the centre of the field. All about that centre the dead fibres and seeds were magnified and distorted by the curvature of the glass. (Ch.8)

In those two examples not only is the imagery photo/cinematic but each involves a unique audience, a unique 'observer' viewpoint. In the first he is placed beyond and outside space and time. In the second he observes alien phenomena through a protective lens-like screen, a framing terrestrial artefact. The rôle, situation and existential status of this 'observer' are of prime significance in Wells's science fiction.

In 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' Wells employs magic as his device for a game with the film-like phenomenon of reversibility; and again, playfully but speculatively, raises questions concerning the relationship between observer/experimenter and the physical universe. In part Wells may have conceived his small parable as a kind of 'sorcerer's apprentice' warning, actually anticipating Arthur C. Clarke's "Third Law" - that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. But was there also some intuitive prescience that in less than a century the implications of quantum mechanics and probability theory would be leading certain philosophically-minded physicists (and science fiction writers) to involve the very creation and persistence of our universe with the consciousness of the observer?

Be that as it may, the events of this story, its apparently causeless effects and entropic jokes, do conjure with space and time in ways that were also to become distinctive of the cinema. Take, for example, the incident in which Mr Fotheringay, out for an evening stroll, walking stick in hand, decides to experiment with the new-found power of his mind. Moses' rod occurs to him, "but the night was dark and unfavourable to the proper control of large and miraculous snakes". Then, recollecting the story of *Tannhäuser*, he sticks his staff in the

ground and commands it to blossom. It does so. When, instead of saying "Change back" he orders "Go Back," it recedes and entangles its thorns with an approaching policeman, who soon has to be blotted from the scene by instant removal to Hades - or, on reconsideration, to San Francisco. The story was written in 1898, but the succession of images are entirely Disneyesque.

As I hope to establish later, this early 'cinematic' imagery stemmed perhaps rather more from the 'filmic' nature of Wells's visual fantasising than from the actual ingenious but unsophisticated film and magic lantern projections of the 1890s. But at that time and subsequently, and perhaps because his mode of visual fantasising matched the cinema's progressing capabilities, Wells was very cinematically aware. In the 1929 Introduction to *The King Who Was A King*, visualising the cinema's future potential, he wrote that "the picture may flow into and out of a play of 'absolute' forms" and may "pass in an instant from the infinitely great to the infinitely little" - in short, be an instrument in the service of perceptual relativity. He said that before Eastman's 1890 invention of flexible film "not the most penetrating of prophets could have detected in the Zoetrope and the dry-plate camera the intimations of a means of expression, exceeding in force, beauty and universality any that had hitherto been available for mankind."

In the decade of the 1890s, and as the first moving picture shows opened in London, however, Wells did do some prophesying. Indeed, as he records, he was so aware of the coming technology that in 1895 he and Robert Paul initiated a patent application for a *Time Machine* that, as he puts it, "anticipated most of the stock methods and devices of the screen drama." In the same decade Wells, in 'A Story of the Days to Come,' depicts as existing high above Nineteenth Way (a thoroughfare of moving platforms once called Regent Street) "a vast kinematograph" consisting of glass screens on to which were thrown "gigantic animated pictures," exhibiting hats and fashions, while every hat sales cubicle had its "kinematograph and tinting and compensating mirrors."

II Images; "There Would Presently Come Out of the Darkness..."

Those examples lead me into the second section of this paper, which is concerned with Wells's imagination and the images it produced. It was not so much an awareness of the potential of film technology that was

responsible for the wealth of moving and metamorphosing pictorial imagery in his fiction, as a fortuitous, but fortunate, parallelism between Wells's visual imagination and the cinematic medium.

Roger Manvell in his book *Film* writes "...the essential (cinematic) medium is a moving picture...flat or two dimensional...viewed with the body of the theatre in darkness, so that from the visual point of view the spectator's attention is not distracted from the screen....This brilliantly lit picture in an otherwise darkened hall exercises a distinct hypnosis upon the audience."¹ Now a feature contributory to Wells's creative imagining was the experiencing of what Coleridge (who had similar experiences) called *ocular spectra* i.e. the spontaneous occurrence, often when the subject is in a state of relaxation, of purely mental images seen as clearly as though on the retina. Let Wells in his own words, as he does in his Preface to *The Country of the Blind and Other Stories*, describe how stories would be born out of reveries, as thoughts played around with each other, and as inexplicably some vivid nucleus "would suddenly come out of the darkness":

Little men in canoes upon sunlit oceans would come floating out of nothingness, incubating the eggs of prehistoric monsters unawares; violent conflicts would break out amidst the flower-beds of suburban gardens; I would discover that I was peering into remote and mysterious worlds ruled by an order logical indeed but other than our common sanity.

That, in concrete terms, closely parallels Roger Manvell's description of the cinematic medium, and it is partly on the basis of images so formed that I speak of Wells's "filmic imagination." If we trace its functioning in his fiction we find that, whether the image is incidental or basic to the narrative, it often manifests itself with the involvement of some kind of lens or screen as medium; or it may be simply a vivid projection "floating out of nothingness." Of the former type 'The Crystal Egg' is a prime example. Mr Cave (significant name) intensified "the cool darkness of his little shop" by "covering the crystal in a box perforated only with a small aperture to admit the exciting ray" which caused the crystal to provide glimpses of the (Martian) "visionary world." When first seen this is described as "a moving picture: that is to say, certain objects moved in it, but slowly in an orderly manner like real things, and, according as the lighting and direction changed, the picture changed also." Later, after Mr Cave has improved his viewing conditions, the landscapes correspond strikingly to the type of image Wells describes in that prefatory account of his own eidetic visioning. For example:

The air seemed full of squadrons of great birds, manoeuvring in stately

curves; and across the river was a multitude of splendid buildings, richly coloured and glittering with metallic tracery and facets, among a forest of moss-like and lichenous trees. And suddenly something flapped repeatedly across his vision, like the fluttering of a jewelled fan or the beating of a wing, and a face, or rather the upper part of a face with very large eyes, came as it were close to his own and as it were on the other side of the crystal.

The intermediary lenses may be the eyes themselves, as in 'The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes.' When Davidson's eyes are shut he knows that he is sitting in the dark on the sofa of a room in Highgate; but then he opens his eyes: "And there," said he, "is the sun just rising, and the yards of the ship, and a tumbled sea and a couple of birds flying. I never saw anything so real." The screen may be a book, as in 'The Door in the Wall,' where Wallace speaks of "the living pages of the book" that "were not pictures...but realities." It may be represented as a painted ceiling which is to what Melville in *The Sea Lady*, retelling the Mermaid's account of sub-marine living, likens that "green luminous fluidity in which these beings float, a world lit by great shining monsters that drift athwart it" (Ch.2:2). In 'The Plattner Story' Wells uses glass as a medium and metaphor to convey a distinction between the 'real' world and the hallucinatory one. Plattner compares his feelings "to those of a cat watching a mouse through a window. Whenever he made a motion to communicate with the dim, familiar world about him, he found an invisible, incomprehensible barrier preventing intercourse."

The other mode or manifestation of this 'cinema of the mind' that I defined - the 'floating out of nothingness' of images with no lens or screen mediating - may be illustrated from an autobiographical passage in an article 'My Dreams' published in *The Leader* in the autumn of 1944:

Years ago I had a waking dream which comes back to my mind today, and I wrote: 'When man shall stand upon this earth as a footstool and laugh and stretch out his hand amongst the stars...'

I wake abruptly to the concussion of an anti-aircraft gun, and lie listening for a little while.

'What nonsense!' I say and roll over and return to the sane World of Dreams.

I have suggested elsewhere that this image, a climactic one in both *The Discovery of the Future* and *The Food of the Gods*, may derive subliminally from Blake's painting, *Albion's Dance*² (just as, I believe there are subliminal infiltrations of Botticelli and Michael Angelo into the imagery of *The Sea Lady*³); but whatever its deep source, it came in

the form of a waking dream; and in its 1944 context it is the case that the ideal of the oneiric world ("ruled by an order logical indeed but other than our common sanity") is rated above the unreason of the 'real' world.

An impressive fictionalisation of the waking dream occurs in *The Wonderful Visit*. The Angel says: "Sometimes when I have been dropping asleep, or drowsing under the noontide sun, I have seen strange corrugated faces just like yours..." To which the Vicar responds:

Sometimes...at bedtime, when I have just been on the edge of consciousness, I have seen faces as beautiful as yours, and the strange dazzling vistas of a wonderful scene that flowed past me, winged shapes soaring over it, and wonderful - sometimes terrible - forms going to and fro... I may be that as we withdraw our attention from the world of sense, the pressing world about us, as we pass into the twilight of repose, other worlds... Just as we see the stars, those other worlds in space, when the glare of day recedes... And the artistic dreamers who see such things most clearly... (Ch.6)

III Time, Space and the 'filmic' Imagination

The Vicar in that chapter of *The Wonderful Visit* trails off into disjointed conjecturing; but he soon embarks on further speculation, consideration of which carries this paper into its third area of discourse - the triple relationship between cinema, the 'cinematic' in the imagination and writing of H.G. Wells, and what has been termed 'the Einsteinian paradigm.' The Vicar supposes a four dimensional geometry: "In which case," he says, "there may be any number of three-dimensional universes packed side by side, and all dimly dreaming of one another. There may be world upon world, universe upon universe... But I wonder how you came to fall out of your world into mine..."

John Huntington in his book *The Logic of Fantasy* has shown how Wells here uses the "two worlds" structure as "a source of imaginative energy" for a "reconsideration" of civilisation.⁴ While this is true, Wells also takes a step further, into the area of metaphysics. When the Angel says: "It almost makes one think that in some odd way there must be two worlds as it were...", the conversation continues:

"At least Two," said the Vicar.

"Lying somewhere close together, and yet scarcely suspecting..."

"As near as page to page in a book."

"Penetrating each other, living each its own life..." (Ch.6)

Thus Wells, at a crucial point in the development of science fiction, elaborates the concept of alternative and parallel universes: a concept

the possible implications of which were also to be displayed in the developing technologies of photography, photographic projection and film. For as Paul Coates has pointed out in a recent essay 'Chris Marker and the Cinema as Time Machine': "the notion of the parallel world is cemented by the emergence of photography, which sifts the detached surface of one time into another like a card reshuffled in a deck" - a method specific to Chris Marker's science fiction film *La Jetée*. Dr. Coates's further contention is that "the theme of time travel corresponds to the notion of parallel worlds."⁵

Let us consider that contention in the light of a definition of "Einstein's Universe" contained in a book of that title by the science writer Nigel Calder: "There is no space outside the universe, and no time either, unless they belong to completely separate universes."⁶ So, we may speculate, if time travel is envisaged as a transference of conscious perception from one four-dimensional 'location' to another, by virtue of both 'locations' existing within a four-dimensional continuum, such transference between worlds or universes existing within a continuum of more than four dimensions may analogously be envisaged. Such transference is now a constant ploy in the black hole studded quantum universe, or universes, of science fiction writers. Isaac Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* and Ian Watson's *Queen Magic, King Magic*, a work of fantasy crossed with science fiction, both sophisticatedly exemplify this; but Wells in his day was assuredly a 'multi-universe' virtuoso.

'The Plattner Story' abounds with impressions of what Wells calls "this other universe." It is one the appearances of which are akin to the eidetic imagery of "ocular spectra," and in trying to convey it visually Wells resorts to the language of photography and projection. It is invisible in our illumined world, though, as it were, superimposed on it.

The narrator has "tried to see something of the Other-World" by sitting for a long space in a photographer's dark room at night. When Plattner (whose right and left became permanently reversed as in a photographic negative) looks into the room of the dying man "it came out quite brightly at first, a vivid oblong of room, lying like a magic-lantern picture upon the black landscape and the livid green dawn." And of the ray that stretches through the swirling Watchers-of-the-Living to the bed of the dying man, Plattner says: "You have heard of a beam of light. This was like a beam of darkness..."

In 'Under the Knife,' a story which peculiarly complements, while

enlarging the imaginative frame of 'The Plattner Story,' the surgery begins with optical similes and with images quite typical of what might be seen coming "out of the darkness." The surgeon's mind is monitored visually by the anaesthetised narrator-patient:

His consciousness was like the quivering little spot of light which is thrown by the mirror of a galvanometer. His thoughts ran under it like a stream, some through the focus bright and distinct, some shadowy in the half-light of the edge.

Later, as the surgeon grows nervous: "It was as if a little picture of a cut vein grew brighter, and struggled to oust from his brain another picture of a cut falling short of the mark." Then, after the disastrous and near-fatal cut occurs, there is in the patient a phase of speculation echoing 'The Plattner Story.' He asks: "Should I find myself suddenly among the innumerable hosts of the dead, and know the world about me for the phantasmagoria it had always seemed?" But this is immediately followed by one of Wells's most remarkable imaginative flights - a flight literally to the edge of the solar system, of the universe and eventually into some other dimension of experience. It starts with a vivid aerial view of the Thames basin, comparable to that in the final chapter of *When the Sleeper Wakes*. It continues through trans-stratospheric and astronautic vistas (comparable to John Glenn's first account of orbital space, sixty-five years later⁷) and on through solar and stellar depths until the consciousness's sense of duration changes and the narrator realises that his "mind was moving not faster but infinitely slower..." There comes a point at which what he calls "the Universe of Matter" (and the time distortion seems to imply that here duration is viewed as a function of consciousness, and that this is a four-dimensional or "rigid" universe) is seen as a spot of light on the curvature of a glittering ring embracing the forefinger of a Hand which seems to hold something described as having "the likeness of a black rod." He asks:

Was the whole universe but a refracting speck upon some greater being?
Were our worlds but the atoms of another universe, and those again of another, and so on through an endless progression? And what was I? Was I indeed immaterial?

In the return to the consciousness of common day, as the Hand vanishes, the black rod remains as a great band across the sky. Wells's biblical phrasing "the thing...had the likeness of a black rod" seems to echo *Revelation* (11.1): "And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and one said, Rise and measure the temple of God..." This rod then may possibly be seen as a symbol of the measure of all of creation. The rod

soon resolves itself into the rail of the bed (which, as in 'The Plattner Story,' has associations with mortality). The shining circle of eternity becomes the face of the clock - a symbol of the measurement of time. Between them shining circle and clock signify the hour which may either be the hour through which the clock hand cycles or that hour signified by Blake when in *Auguries of Innocence* he wrote: "Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,/ And eternity in an hour."

In certain respects 'Under the Knife' and *The Time Machine* offer variations on a single theme. In the latter the traveller-narrator travels through time to find himself environed by the future states of a particular sector of space: e.g. "The big building I had left was situated on the slope of a broad river valley, but the Thames had shifted perhaps a mile from its present position" (Ch.4); in the former the patient-narrator travels through space to achieve a different time-perspective: e.g. "...it appeared as if the time between thought and thought grew steadily greater, until at last a thousand years was but a moment in my perception." Wells's descriptions of the respective journeys complement each other in a way that suggests time to be the complement of space, and space that of time. For example, the time-traveller records events in space; "The twinkling succession of darkness and light was excessively painful to the eye. Then, in the intermittent darkneses, I saw the moon spinning swiftly through her quarters from new to full, and had a faint glimpse of the circling stars" (Ch.3); the out-of-the-body space traveller of 'Under the Knife' records events in time: "...between each separate impression there was a period of many days. The moon spun once round the earth as I noted this; and I perceived clearly the motion of Mars in his orbit." Yet the events are events of the same continuum; both their complementarity and their relativity are attributes of different perceptive emphases on the part of the observer.

Such varying experiential emphases are at once features of a space-time world-view and of the techniques and creations of film. "Between each separate impression there was a period of many days" - what could be more descriptive of time-lapse cinemaphotography? "The twinkling succession of dark and light" - the process of projection is well described here. The coming into focus of the shining circle as it becomes the clock face and of the black rod as it becomes the bed rail have all the characteristics of cross-fade. Leaving aside, however, those technical devices, there are in these stories structural elements which are akin to those of film. *The Time Machine* after its climax of

eclipse/apocalypse becomes a film run in reverse: "...the thousands hand ran back to the starting point, the night and day flapped slower and slower. The old walls of the laboratory came round me. Very gently, now, I slowed the mechanism down" (Ch.12). Mrs Watchett's backward progression across the laboratory is such as can only be seen in reversed film projection; and the same process is implied in the dénouement of 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles.'

In yet more subtle ways structures within Wells's narratives compare with those of the sophisticate cinema. The interactions and inter-relationships of past and future may, by master film makers, be established by methods proving to be more affective, more evocative, than the simple interpolated flashback. Such is the use of the sledge named 'Rosebud' in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. In Fellini's *Fellini 8 1/2* the director introduces realistic images of childhood traumas and solaces into his fantasies of the present and so indicates their relentless prolongation into the future. Wells in the texts we have been considering plays with time analogously. In 'Under the Knife,' for example, on the eve of surgery, as the narrator is dozing in Regent's Park, he has a vision of himself dead - "withered, tattered, dried, one eye (I saw) pecked out by birds"; and he sees the park "...through the trees, stretching as far as the eye could see,... [as] a flat plain of writhing graves and heeling tombstones" from which the dead appear to struggle upwards. The resurrection voice he hears crying "Awake!" becomes the "Wike up!" of the park-keeper, a "cockney angel." As he leaves the park and crosses Marylebone Road, still in a maze of thought induced by this succession of oneiric images, he is hit, though he escapes serious injury, by the shaft of a cab. The text continues: "It struck me that it would have been curious if my meditations on my death on the morrow had led to my death that day." In this interpretation of present environment, thought-stream and doomsday, Wells achieves a remarkable filmic effect, which is strongly reinforced by his backward-and-forward juggling with circumstance and tense in that sentence concluding the passage.

The Time Machine offers many examples of textual juxtapositions and contiguities which enhance awareness through time-shock. They occur particularly whenever the Traveller sends his nineteenth-century consciousness back in time to find (Ch.4) an image descriptive of the eight thousand and twenty eighth century - the "Dresden-china type of prettiness" of the Eloi; his attempts (Ch.7) at "a Carlyle-like scorn" of them and their decay, which he compares to that of the Carlovingian

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] kings; the Phoenician-like decoration of the great ruined buildings; the situation of that Palace the face of which (Ch.6) "had the lustre, as well as the pale green tint, a kind of bluish green, of a certain type of Chinese porcelain." The Palace of Green Porcelain stood high above "a large estuary, or even creek, where [he] judged Wandsworth and Battersea must once have been." The chapter (Ch.8) devoted to the Palace of Green Porcelain, so 'atmospherically' central to the story, provides a wealth of such nuances. Take for example the Traveller's discovery there of a sealed box of matches which had "escaped the wear of time for immemorial years." Realising that he has now a weapon against the Morlocks, he commands Weena to join in a celebratory dance:

And so, in that derelict museum, upon the thick soft carpeting of dust, to Weena's huge delight, I solemnly performed a kind of composite dance, whistling *The Land of the Leal* as cheerfully as I could. In part it was a modest *cancan*, in part a step-dance, in part a skirt-dance (so far as my tail-coat permitted), and in part original.

In its temporally eclectic context, paradigmatic of the entire ambience of the Traveller's adventure, the introduction of Lady Carolina Nairne's *the Land o' the Leal* is an ironic master-touch. Its opening stanza, to which we may imagine the Traveller executing his "modest *cancan*" runs:

I'm wearin' awa' John
Like snaw-wreaths in thaw, John
I'm wearin' awa'
To the land o' the leal.
There's nae sorrow there, John,
There's neither cauld nor care, John,
The day is aye fair
In the land o' the leal.

Another incident located within the ruinous Palace, and one similarly suffused with the kind of spatio-temporal irony distinctive of the cinema, occurs as the Traveller, encountering "a vast array of idols - Polynesian, Mexican, Grecian [and] Phoenician," impulsively inscribes his name on a South American soapstone god. It is the future imprint of the remote past on a yet remoter past: paradox made imagistically concrete.

One further correspondence between cinema and Wellsian techniques in the writing of science fiction has been established in Paul Coates's previously cited essay. He there compares both the Time Traveller and the Invisible Man to the viewer of a film. While time-travelling, the Traveller, like a cinema audience sitting in the dark, is invisible. Like

those viewing on the cinema screen events which actually occurred at some other time, the Traveller scans the events of the four-dimensional continuum.⁸ One may add that displacement in space or in an extra-dimensional continuum (alternate world or universe) also results in an analogous 'invisible man' or 'cinema audience' effect - as is the case with Mr Cave in 'The Crystal Egg' and with Davidson and Plattner in their respective alienating experiences.

This 'privileged' viewpoint, which is also that of the spectator of a film, is frequently deployed by Wells as a 'distancing' device in association with those vivid eidetic-like glimpses which link his imagery so closely to that of photography and the film. He uses it, for example, in two different modes in *The First Men in the Moon* (Ch.24). The Grand Lunar studies the strife-ridden planet of *homo sapiens*, detached from it yet using Cavor's eyes and memory. "Make me see pictures. I cannot conceive these things," he says; and Cavor does just that, in terms and tableaux prefiguring those visualisations created by Wells some thirty years later for the panoramic sweeps of his film scenario *The King Who Was a King*. The other 'privileged' viewpoint in *The First Men in the Moon* is that of Bedford who, returning to earth in the sphere, suspended between two worlds, has the idea that he is actually "out of space and time, and that this poor Bedford was just a peephole through which I looked at life" (Ch.19). The succession of pictorial memories - "Bedford rushing down Chancery Lane...coat tails flying out" etc. have entirely a peephole/illuminated screen effect. Throughout that episode we are made acutely aware of the relativity of time, a relativity that the effects of the cinema, as these complement the influences of post-Einsteinian physics and Eastern metaphysics, have subliminally impressed upon audiences. This awareness is most strongly experienced when with Bedford we look from darkness out to earthshine, as a viewer might look from stalls to screen. This is how he recalls the journey: "Sometimes it seemed as though I sat through immeasurable eternities like some god upon a lotus leaf, and again as though there was a momentary pause as I leapt from moon to earth. In truth, it was altogether some weeks of earthly time."

Such a 'celestial' perspective from outside mundane space-time is also fancifully approached in the introductory chapter of 'The Story of the Last Trump':

Down fell the trump, spinning as it fell, and for a day or so, which seemed but moments in heaven, the blessed child watched its fall until it was a glittering little speck of brightness...

Then, when it turns up at a shop in the Caledonian Market, Wells lifts

his reader into the 'privileged spectator' situation:

The third instrument that was pitched upon by Briggs for the trial was the strange trumpet that lay at the bottom of the window, the trumpet that you, who have read the Introduction, know was the trumpet for the Last Trump.

When the "truncated trump" sounded, though the whole world for a moment "saw (the Lord God and all His powers) as one sees by a flash of lightning in the darkness," it is only Mr Parchester, the rector, who is privileged (or condemned) for a time to retain the vision. For him: "The curtain had been snatched back for an instant; it had fallen again, but his mind had taken a photographic impression of everything that he had seen." That spectacle of "the grave presences, the hierarchy, the effulgence, the vast concourse" has a cinematic as much as a photographic aura, and it has about it also something of that "other" or "alternative" world identity. Mr Parchester felt its presence "as though the vision still continued, behind the bookcases, behind the pictured wall and the curtained window..."

Synthesis: *The King Who Was A King*

It is significant that when Wells concentrates attention on the actual craft and opportunities of film-making - and I turn now again to consider *The King Who Was A King* - he looks to Hardy's *The Dynasts* as a model: that epic which starts with, as Hardy describes them, "certain impersonated abstractions and intelligences called spirits" looking down on the teaming, toiling, warring scene of Earth. Wells, in his Introduction, quotes from it: "The nether sky opens and Europe is disclosed as a prone and emaciated figure"; and quotes another passage descriptive of the slow movement of "flexuous and riband-shaped" patches in the landscape - which prove to be armies on the move. Wells opens his own *Prelude* with the title giving place to "a slow drift across the screen, like a drift of sunflecks under trees" (Ch.2:1). Music is invaded by a rhythmic tapping as the drift swirls and opens to show an early flint-tool maker, who gradually changes to become a metal-worker hammering on an anvil, and who then is duplicated by a superimposed figure, so that the original appears to split into *Man the Maker* and *Man the Destroyer*, the two of them wrestling for possession of a woman and of the spear that the *Maker* has created.

This is followed by an approach to Earth, and then to New York, from space - rather on the lines of the Hardy example quoted. If Wells's *Prelude* were translated into actual film footage it might also

bear an uncanny resemblance to the opening of the Kubrick/Clarke film *2001; A Space Odyssey*, which was to be made forty years later. Note well, though that the drift of sunflecks eddying and whirling away on the black screen, with primitive figures then emerging from the darkness, has the true character of eidetic imaging; and the book's central sequence, 'A Vision of Modern War,' bears that stamp even more markedly. It starts (Ch.5:1) with Paul (the Claverian king) sitting in reverie. He is, Wells says, not at first sleeping or dreaming. He is shown as progressively lost in shadow, but then reappears (Ch.5:3), as Wells conceives it, as a projection of his own meditation, enthroned but in great darkness. In that darkness newspapers start to fly around him, drooping and curling, becoming like a snowstorm, but then changing into swiftly passing aeroplanes. The subsequent action abounds in symbolic metamorphoses: "The black smoke of a bursting shell takes the form of [Clavery's patriotic emblem] a leopard rampant." The head of the leopard, grown monstrous to wrestle with Paul, "becomes like the head and face of [the Foreign Minister, Monza] the Evil Man." Here the devices are semi-dream devices. Elsewhere fantastic yet symbolic patternings simply take over the screen, replacing, but then giving way to realistic settings and action. Thus when (Ch.7:3) Dr Harting exhorts Himbesket to "put the flags and emblems in their places," he waves his hand and the leopard appears, glorious and enormous, superimposed on the whole picture. It is quickly made to shrink to a fragment of architectural decoration supporting a lamp. Behind the lamp appears textile material embroidered with leopard designs, while a tin toy leopard on wheels rolls across and out of the picture. At this point "the rest of the bric-a-brac falls apart to show the loggia of the Palace that looks out upon the city of Clavopolis." Wells's imagination had long been adept at such transformations. Compare that sequence in *The King who was a King* with some of the imagery of 'The Magic Shop' - its obscuring sheets of crumpled paper rising from the counter and its animated marching lead soldiers; or compare them with the hallucinatory reappearances and camouflages of the deceased lepidopterist in 'A Moth: Genus Novo'; or with the many metamorphoses of 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles.'

The King who was a King has interest as a document of its time, and as an experimental scenario, though barely readable as a novel. Its characters are, as Wells in his Introduction professed them to be, lay-figures, abstractions of sociological and political import. Nevertheless, its content and method serve my present purpose well in that they offer

material for a synthesis of much that I have been trying to express; and supremely so in its conclusion. In almost our last glimpse of Paul, Wells's "King Everyman," he is standing on the palace loggia as night descends, gesturing towards the stars: the very image that Wells uses symbolically so often, and which, as we noted earlier, he recalls as having first come to him out of a waking dream. Finally, after that gesture of hope and purpose towards the stars, we see Paul and Helen as Man the Maker and Woman the Protector and Sustainer air-borne against a starry sky. As the text states, "they are flying toward the audience": a reminder that this all unrolls before the 'privileged' spectator sitting in the dark, to whom it comes just as many of Wells's most vivid images came to him "out of the darkness" (Ch.7:3).

Throughout I have, in pursuit of this important feature in Wells's craft, laid some stress on what John Livingston Lowes (with reference to Coleridge) called "a subliminal reservoir, thronged with images which had flashed upon the inner eye..."⁹ But of course Wells also deliberately gathered images, and rationally allotted them their rôles, from many quite consciously recollected sources and experiences. In his book *H.G. Wells* Michael Draper suggests that Wells brings Kew Gardens into service as a setting for the Eloi;¹⁰ and that in *The First Men in the Moon* Wells's intention to refer to Plato's Cave is confirmed when Cavor and Bedford awaken to find themselves "bound in a dark enclosed space, able to see only the outline of a Selenite cast on the far wall as it opens a door behind it."¹¹ The light, Wells writes (Ch.11), had "the quality of a bluish light falling on a white-washed wall." The captives manage to look over their shoulders to see the actual Selenite silhouetted against the glare of a sapphire vista. This may be an excellent example of the coincidence of conscious metaphor with what I have termed 'cinematic' imagery. I would suggest that here Wells, as he often did, wove together the subliminally powered, eidetically-tintured image and the intellectually sought-for one.

Wells, indeed, in respect of both ideas and images, displayed some suspicion of and hostility to the powers and intrusions of "Ghostland." In *Star-begotten* (Ch.8:5), through his mouthpiece Keppel, he inveighs against man's tendency "when his intellectual eyes feel the glare of truth" to "lose focus and slither off into Ghostland," which he describes as "as a universe of imaginary emanations" lying "side by side with actuality" (Ch.8:5), overlapping yet different from reality. Keppel says: "That's my main charge against the human mind; this persistent confusing dualism. The last achievement of the human mind is to see

life simply and see it whole." That endeavour motivated Wells intellectually and ethically; but as many of his 'cinematic' images and metaphors reveal he was not himself free from the confusion; not sure of the human mind's ability to locate reality; for, as he contends in his last work, *Mind at the End of its Tether*.

The more [the searching imagination] strives the less it grasps. The more strenuous the analysis, the more inescapable the sense of mental defeat. The cinema sheet stares us in the face. That sheet is the actual fabric of our Being. Our loves, our hates, our wars and battles are no more than a phantasmagoria dancing on that fabric, themselves as unsubstantial as a dream. (Ch.1)

He there implies that there exists something which he calls "the searching imagination" which observes, but is not the same thing as the "fabric of our Being," that phantasmagoria-populated cinema screen. He presents a metaphysical image not far removed from the metaphor of Plato's screen - Plato who had no cinema, so for him it had to be shadows on the wall of a cave.

Coleridge, following Goethe, said that all men born are either Aristotelians or Platonists; but he allowed anomalies and gradations, for he said that Francis Bacon "who never read the works of Plato taught pure Platonism," and that Emmanuel Kant belonged to the Aristotelian School "but with a somewhat nearer approach to the Platonic."¹² Wells had read Plato - the *samurai* are true children of the first Books of *The Republic*; but Wells the encyclopaedist, and Wells of 'The Rediscovery of the Unique,' Coleridge would surely have placed in the Aristotelian camp, while allowing "a somewhat nearer approach" to the Plato of the last Books of *The Republic* and *The Phaedrus* in many of the imaginative and speculative works we have been examining.

That third century follower and completer of Plato, Plotinus, who used light and mirrors in his metaphors as freely as Wells used light and lenses, said that "beauties of the world of sense" were "images and shadow-pictures, fugitives that have entered into matter"¹³ and that "Beauty is of the Divine and cometh only Thence,"¹⁴ echoing Plato in teaching that "the Beauty sprung from this world is, itself, a copy of That [Other]."¹⁵

Wells in *The Happy Turning* (Ch.9) defined "a Beauty" as "God, a being in itself, serene, untroubled, above all the accidents of space and time" - this in 'The Divine Timelessness of Beautiful Things,' the last chapter of a last work. To evidence Wells's "somewhat nearer approach to the Platonic" and to emphasise the extent to which his

cinematic "other world" imagery seeks a glance "beyond the cave," I close with two quotations, one from a final and one from an early work. In the last sentence of *The Happy Turning* Wells dreams of to where that turning might lead:

There shines a world 'beyond good and evil,' and there in a universe completely conscious of itself, Being achieves its end.

And in *The Wonderful Visit* the persecuted Angel rested on a cliff top: the Angel who with his fiddle had created for the Vicar "the vision of that great and spacious land...[where] there is...no space like ours, no time as we know it": the land, as the Vicar learned, glimpses of which "all the beauty in our art is but a feeble rendering." The Angel lay there staring out at the coloured cliffs and the glittering, foaming sea: and as he watched he remembered with infinite longing the rivers of starlight and the sweetness of the land from which he came. A gull came gliding overhead, swiftly and easily, with its broad wings spreading white and fair against the blue. And suddenly a shadow came into the Angel's eyes, the sunlight left them, he thought of his own crippled pinions and put his face upon his arm and wept.

Notes

1. Roger Manvell, *Film* (Revised edition), London (Pelican Books), 1946, p.29.
2. K.V. Bailey, 'The Road to Cheasing Eyebright', *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, Montpellier (l'Université Paul Valéry), 1989, pp.45-49.
3. *Ibid.*, pp.41-42.
4. John Huntington, *The Logic of Fantasy*, New York (Columbia University Press), 1982, pp.21-27.
5. Paul Coates, 'Chris Marker and the Cinema as Time Machine', *Science-Fiction Studies*, 14:3 (1987), pp.307-315.
6. Nigel Calder, *Einstein's Universe*, London (BBC), 1979, p.145.
7. John Glenn et al., *Into Orbit*, London (Cassell), 1962, p.192 ff.
8. Paul Coates, *op.cit.*, pp.308-309.

9. John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, London (Constable), 1927, p.312 (Picador Edition 1978).
10. Michael Draper, *H.G. Wells*, London (Macmillan), 1987, p.56.
11. *Ibid.*, p.36.
12. Coleridge, *Select Poetry and Prose*, ed. Stephen Potter, London (The Nonesuch Press), 1933, pp.683-685. These thoughts were expressed in a letter written from Highgate to J. Gooden, January 14, 1820.
13. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, Tr. Stephen MacKenna, London (Faber and Faber), 1969 (4th edition), p.59. The metaphor appears in 'Beauty', the Sixth Tractate of the First Ennead.
14. *Ibid.*, p.433. This and the following quotation are from 'On the Intellectual Beauty', the Eighth Tractate of the Fifth Ennead.
15. *Ibid.*, p.429.

John Allett

The Durkheimian Theme of Suicide in *Tono-Bungay*

It would be difficult to prove a direct influence of the famous French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), upon H.G. Wells. No substantial references to Durkheim, for example, appear in Wells's own works of sociological speculation. Nor is any such indebtedness suggested in the major biographies of Wells. Nevertheless, Wells's own keen interest in the then nascent discipline of sociology is well-documented, as is the fact of his membership in the Sociological Society (founded, May 1903), where Durkheim was an occasional guest speaker and generally an important influence.¹ This would suggest that Wells had both the inclination and the opportunity to better acquaint himself