

***THE WAR OF THE WORLDS CONSIDERED AS A MODERN MYTH***

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Science fiction can arguably be described as a mythology transformed, and an examination of science fiction stories alongside myth can be illuminating – both in the similarities and the differences that are revealed. In the popular and the critical imagination, it has been convenient to assume that there is at least a continuum between the two: Kingsley Amis made this link clear in the title of his study of science fiction, *New Maps of Hell*,<sup>1</sup> Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin<sup>2</sup> devote substantial space to exploring this premise and Albert Wendland presents his definition of science fiction as ‘*fantasy posing as realism because of an apparently scientific frame*’.<sup>3</sup> These historians are hardly unique in their positions, and while many may argue over the nature and extremity of the differences between science fiction and myth, it is broadly assumed that the two are clearly related.

It is not my intention to support or refute this link but rather to argue that there is a definite transformation between the two, and while there are clear differences, there are also vital intersections of the two, particularly in the work of H. G. Wells.

To begin, it is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) that marks a definite change from the systems of myth to the systems of science. The two most important words in that title are ‘Modern’ and ‘Prometheus’: Prometheus stole fire from Olympus and, similarly, Frankenstein stole the spark of life. However, Frankenstein’s theft was conducted through scientific endeavour and while Prometheus was punished by the gods, Frankenstein’s doom followed from his own actions. The implications of these differences are profound.

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<sup>1</sup> Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin, *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 165-68.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Wendland, *Science, Myth and the Fictional Creation of Alien Worlds* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 11 (emphasis in the original).

The borders between myth, legend and fairytale are contested.<sup>4</sup> It is useful to say that as distinguished from epic, legend and fairytale, myth necessarily concerns the Cosmos and human status within it.<sup>5</sup> Brian Aldiss's definition of science fiction comes close to this:

Science fiction is the search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode.<sup>6</sup>

Science fiction is more speculative and open-ended in its intentions than myth, which generally seeks to reveal already established 'facts', but both share an essential didactic intent to broaden one's view of the universe and compel appropriate attitudes. The universe of most science fiction is also one dominated by natural law rather than the caprices of divine entities, leading to fundamentally different concepts of destiny and justice. Also, science fiction can claim to supplant myth in the post-Industrial Revolution world as science has explained universal phenomena more effectively than myth or classical philosophy and technology has accomplished practical superhuman tasks more effectively than magic. However, these differences do not negate any relationship between science fiction and myth, but rather reveal an interesting ambivalence and tension.

Wells's *The War of the Worlds* resembles Greek myth in the sense that 'hubris is clobbered by Nemesis', as Brian Aldiss put it.<sup>7</sup> Although the humbling lessons are provided by nature and providence rather than the gods, they are not dissimilar in mode to those of Greek myth, as is the case with *Frankenstein*. In terms of dramatic function, one can make easy comparisons between the Martians and the goddess Nemesis or the furies.

Suggestive parallels neither begin nor end with the furies. There are numerous sources that could have inspired Wells and he is almost certain to have come across them. He was an avid

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<sup>4</sup> G. S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), 13-29.

<sup>5</sup> Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Aldiss with David Wingrove, *Trillion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction* (London: Gollancz, 1986), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Aldiss with David Wingrove, *Trillion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction*, 26.

reader from the time that he was bedridden with a broken leg in his childhood<sup>8</sup> and later when he visited Uppark in Sussex, where his mother was employed as a housekeeper from 1880, he availed himself of the library there. Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie note that the owners of Uppark, the Fetherstonhaughs, had built a library that was fine and ‘eclectic’.<sup>9</sup> In *Experiment in Autobiography* Wells writes of his discovery of the library as being pivotal in his development.<sup>10</sup> There he discovered art, myth and philosophy, particularly Plato’s *Republic*, along with the complete *Dialogues*.<sup>11</sup> Other texts he read include Voltaire and an unexpurgated *Gulliver’s Travels*. ‘Typical’ inclusions of aristocratic libraries such as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Renaissance philosophy are also likely to have been read. It is clear also that he admired Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, a quote from which adorns the opening of *The War of the Worlds* and he was probably fascinated by the plethora of monsters therein.

Wells’s scientific romances are often populated with the monstrous and the metamorphosed – Morlocks, beast-men, giant ants, Selenites and so on. They are, in their grotesqueness and their symbolic power, worthy rivals to the monsters of myth, with the added appeal that they can be rationalised as possible products of evolution.

About this time, the contest between evolutionary biology and theology produced some strange and desperate attempts at compromise and assimilation, such as Drummond’s *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, which ‘explained’ various Christian dogmas in pseudo-scientific terms – the Virgin Birth was presented as an example of parthenogenesis, for example. A fellow clerk at the South Sea Drapery Emporium, Field, often debated these ideas with Wells.<sup>12</sup> While he ultimately found the Christian teleology untenable, debate by example did exercise his imagination and lead him to wonder about the nature of causality and ‘rightness’ in the Cosmos as expressed in the forms of its productions. ‘In the absence of a God’, he asked himself, ‘what

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<sup>8</sup> H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)*, 2 vols. (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), I, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, *The Life of H. G. Wells: The Time Traveller* (London: Hogarth 1987), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, I, 136-38.

<sup>11</sup> Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, I, 177.

<sup>12</sup> Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, I, 161-62.

was this universe and how was it run?’<sup>13</sup> No doubt it also taught him to see the world as a book from which lessons could be read.

While Wells’s monsters are products of evolution (or its surrogate, Doctor Moreau), all in their intimately corporeal form express ideas. The very word ‘monster’ implies extraordinary significance, being derived from the Latin, ‘monstrum’, meaning an omen (hence ‘demonstration’). Mythological transformations do have clear rationales: for example, the transformation of Arachne, a weaver, into a spider is logical both as a trope and a myth of origin. However, without the explanatory mechanism of evolutionary adaptation, these transformations are what might be called transformations by essential likeness. In Wells we have discussions on the anatomy and evolution of the Martians and the fleshy topiary practised by the Selenites in terms that are rigorously detailed, utilitarian and logical as opposed to allegorical.

The Martians are clearly products of evolution and their lineage as literary creatures within Wells’s own oeuvre is easy to trace, and he drops enough overt clues himself. In Book Two of *The War of the Worlds*, ‘What We Saw From the Ruined House’,<sup>14</sup> his narrator refers to Wells’s own ironically playful Swiftian essay, ‘The Man of the Year Million’ (first published in the *Pall Mall Budget* in 1893). The man of the year million is clearly the direct prototype of the Martians and his development has the smooth logic of a *reductio ad absurdum*. As Wells puts it (in the mouth of the Carlylean ‘Professor Holzkopf’):

Eyes large, lustrous, beautiful, soulful; above them, no longer separated by rugged brow ridges, is the top of the head, a glistening hairless dome, terete and beautiful; no craggy nose rises to disturb by its unmeaningful shadows the symmetry of that calm face, no vestigial ears project; the mouth is a small, perfectly round aperture, toothless and gumless, jawless, unanimal, no futile emotions disturbing its roundness as it lies, like the harvest moon or the evening star, in the wide firmament of its face.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, I, 161.

<sup>14</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Complete Science Fiction Treasury of H. G. Wells* (New York: Avenel Books, 1978), 350.

<sup>15</sup> H. G. Wells, ‘The Man of the Year Million’, in *H. G. Wells: Journalism and Prophecy 1893-1946*, ed. W. Warren Wagar (Boston: Houghton Mifflin / Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1964), 6-8.

Wells shows a strong consistency of imagery here, with a repetition of circles, spheres and domes and the drawing of a simile between the features of the face and a planet. The Martians, as described in *The War of the Worlds* are very similar – round, barely more than heads, possessed of large eyes and ‘hands’. They are incapable of eating solid food and live entirely on one nutritive fluid – in their case, blood.

It may seem that the Martians are merely *contingently* round – a disembodied head is inevitably a simple shape after all – but this does not exclude other allusive possibilities that are quite compelling. Jorge Luis Borges, in his fascinating *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, offers a natural history of spherical creatures – and there are others.<sup>16</sup> Wells is likely to have read or referred to most if not all of these sources at one time or another.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato approved the decision of the demiurge to make the world an immovable sphere at the centre of the universe.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, according to the *Timaeus*, the earth is spherical, like the man of the year million, because it has been stripped of its superfluous features, such as a digestive tract. Borges does not mention Plato’s *Symposium*, but therein Aristophanes relates a myth of an original spherical race of hermaphrodites.<sup>18</sup>

Following Plato, there are other references to spherical cosmic beings. An early Christian philosopher, Origen, declared that the souls of the blessed would be incarnated as spheres. The Renaissance Neoplatonists Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno speculated on the idea of the earth as a living being endowed with sentience, as did Johannes Kepler and Robert Fludd. In the nineteenth century, the German psychologist Gustav Theodor Fechner compared the spherical earth to the eye, the most noble of organs, and states absolutely that the stars are angels.

Borges does not refer to Horace, but his well-known phrase from the *Satires*, ‘*totus teres atque rotundus*’ – ‘entire, smooth and round’ – is significant. This metaphor describes an idealised Stoic individual complete in him- or herself and not prey to foreign passions.<sup>19</sup> Wells remarks on the roundness of the head of the man of the year million, his lack of viscera and the

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<sup>16</sup> Jorge Luis Borges with Margarita Guerreiro, *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, ed. and trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 21-22.

<sup>17</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. John Warrington (London: Dent Everyman, 1965), 24.

<sup>18</sup> Plato, *Symposium and Phaedrus*, trans. Tom Griffith (London: Dent Everyman, 2000), 33-36.

<sup>19</sup> Horace and Persius, *The Satires of Horace and Persius*, trans. Niall Rudd (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), Satire II.7, 90.

similar cerebral self-containment of the Martians and their immunity to wild emotion. As the Martians do not speak, the narrator suggests that they are telepathic, indicating that their links are indeed fundamentally of the intellect rather than the body. This is almost an ideal Platonic state of society and discourse. The roundness of the Martians could be seen to be a reflection and cause of their assumed temperament as much as that of Horace's ideal Stoic and Wells's man of the year million.

While we cannot definitely check Wells's own reading against Borges's list, we do know of course that he read Plato intensively and that he must certainly have had an interest in Christian philosophy provoked by his debates with Field. The other authors are likely to have appealed to him and to have been available. Certainly Wells was aware of Fechner, as he was praised by William James in *The Pluralistic Universe*, which Wells reviewed.<sup>20</sup>

This image of spherical beings offers a wonderful intersection of two ideas – first, that a sphere is an image of a higher state and second, that a sphere is a model of a world. The Martians are reddish spheres, not unlike their home world, and there is a hint thereby that they are the direct offspring of the body of the planet itself. The presentation of the second idea naturally gives us the title of the novel and its essential meaning – a war of entire worlds or ecosystems and empires.

One does not have to strain the imagination to see that the Martians are analogous to Victorian Imperialists or evolutionary competitors. However, they are not only a competitor species, they are also a scourge, sent like Nemesis to punish humanity for a crime worse than hubris: blind complacency. This depends upon a principle concern of Wells's – vision. With an author as prolific as Wells, it would be easy to find any pattern one chooses, but observation is a recurring motif. Several stories, such as 'In the Avu Observatory', 'The Plattner Story', 'In the Abyss', 'The Red Room', 'The Strange Case of Davidson's Eyes', 'The Country of the Blind', 'The Crystal Egg', 'The Star' and *The Invisible Man* concern extraordinary or frustrated vision. 'The Crystal Egg' (itself a pendant to *The War of the Worlds*) is particularly witty, essentially telling the joke of a man who looks through a keyhole to find out what lies in the room beyond and sees another eye looking back.

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<sup>20</sup> H. G. Wells, *H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*, ed. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 48n (editors' note).

From the very first lines of *The War of the Worlds*, the Martians are presented as watchers, high and in terms of metaphor, vast. They live on a distant planet and use telescopes, but he compares them to human scientists peering through microscopes at tiny bacilli. When they are seen by the narrator, he draws attention to their large eyes and of course their primary weapon is a more terrible version of the petrifying gaze of the gorgon, the Heat Ray, which is fired from a 'camera-like' projector (this in itself recapitulates the idea held by some early philosophers that the eye functioned by sending out rays rather than receiving them). In one of the most fascinating episodes of the novel, the narrator and the Curate are trapped in a basement, spying on the Martian encampment, trying desperately to see without being seen, and all the time the narrator is trying to understand the Martians. Even the most straightforwardly dramatic episode, the battle between the *Thunder Child* and the Martians, is related from the viewpoint of a spectator rather than a participant. At one level this belittles the role of men at the mercy of vast forces but it also valorises the thinking eye.

The Martians can be understood as biologically logical and also as morally and metaphysically symbolic beings. What Wells has done with his spherical Martian monsters is to create very powerful and unsettling symbols through a process of reification.

To reify is to remove from an organic or complex relationship one feature and to present it as entire and integral of itself. This can be a form of extreme physical reduction, an idea explored by Wells in a number of essays such as 'Zoological Retrogression', published in 1891.<sup>21</sup> Reification is not however necessarily a reduction in significance or power; indeed, an isolated quality becomes all the more clear as the expression of a single principle. This is the case with Medusa, whose significance is increased by her disembodiment when she becomes entirely a deadly gaze. The Martians lack much of their viscera but because they are unnecessary their absence is no loss. In being only heads with hands, their 'vast and cool and unsympathetic' intellects are drastically emphasised. Virtually disembodied like Medusa, they too are possessed of a deadly gaze – in this case, their quasi-optical weapon, the Heat Ray.

Wells as a moralist moves beyond descriptions of imperialism getting its comeuppance and it is worth noting here a concept of fate, chance and justice that is quite 'mythological'. The Freudian understanding of the myth of Oedipus is that Oedipus's murder of his father and

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<sup>21</sup> Wells, *H. G. Wells*, 158-68.

marriage to his mother are expressions of unconscious desire; however this would not have been an obvious or useful interpretation to a Greek mind conditioned to think of the *Deus ex Machina* as a demonstration of the absolute authority and capriciousness of gods with mere mortals. Oedipus is not an everyman but a hero who becomes a king, and he is toppled at the height of his pride because of acts committed in the past, the significance of which he was unaware. It is the realisation of the illicit nature of his marriage to a woman who is revealed to be his mother that is a horrible and genuinely surprising consequence of his hubris rather than his initial motive. The horror of the Martian invasion – and this is a point made repeatedly throughout the novel – is that it is a *surprise* and Wells condemns humanity for its complacent assumption of mastery.

Wells's position – and this is an innovation as a fundamental premise of most science fiction – is that humanity has no right to ignore the essential inhumanity of the Cosmos. This is repeated again and again in his scientific romances and is indeed articulated in the concluding chapter of *The War of the Worlds*:

The broadening of men's views that has resulted can scarcely be exaggerated. Before the cylinder fell there was a general persuasion that through all the deep of space no life existed beyond the petty surface of our minute sphere. Now we see further. If the Martians can reach Venus, there is no reason to suppose that the thing is impossible for men, and when the slow cooling of the sun makes this earth uninhabitable, as at last it must do, it may be that the thread of life that has begun here will have streamed out and caught our sister planet within its toils.

Dim and wonderful is the vision I have conjured up in my mind of life spreading slowly from this little seed-bed of the solar system throughout the inanimate vastness of sidereal space. But that is a remote dream. It may be, on the other hand, that the destruction of the Martians is only a reprieve. To them, and not to us, perhaps, is the future ordained.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Wells, *The Complete Science Fiction Treasury of H. G. Wells*, 387.



A great deal of meaning is packed into these two paragraphs. First, mankind has suffered terribly under the Martian assault, but it has gained greatly in wisdom. Wells suggests the possibility of great optimism in the vision of the Cosmos that has been gained through the Martian invasion. However, this Cosmos is also ruled by destiny cloaked in the guise of contingency. The hidden nature of fate and judgement and the open display of its consequences is as significant here as it is in the myth of Oedipus.

This sense of strong determinism is also indicative of a common rhetorical theme in Wells in that there is a choice of two extremes offered, with the decider being the choice of knowledge or ignorance. Knowledge produces the triumphant outcome, while ignorance leads to inevitable disaster. *The War of the Worlds* then is a heartfelt moral drama, with the worst sin identified as ignorance, which is shown to be akin to hubris, and the greatest virtue – because of its great utility – being scientific knowledge.

To the classical mind, consequences follow in the nature of reward and punishment. In the godless Cosmos of an evolutionist, especially after Darwin, fate and consequence operate in a fundamentally different manner, emerging from a chain of causality. A god can be angered, appeased, tricked or persuaded but nature cannot. Nature is to a Darwinist ‘vast and cool and unsympathetic’.

Wells struggled mightily with the questions of causation, justice and pain. Essays such as ‘The Universe Rigid’ and ‘The Rediscovery of the Unique’ (submitted to the *Fortnightly Review* in 1891) were fundamental attempts to understand the workings of fate in a Godless Cosmos. In the first, Wells tells us in his autobiography that he addressed a proposal by Max Planck that, knowing the initial conditions of all particles exactly, then one could in theory predict the absolutely determined history of the entire Cosmos in absolute detail thereafter<sup>23</sup> (the essay was unpublished and only a secondary account is available). This would suggest therefore a universe governed entirely by causality as rigid and unyielding as basic arithmetic, however complex its eventual expression. In this scenario, free will cannot exist, except as an illusory consequence of lower physical and chemical activities in the brain.

The second essay suggested that there might be an ‘individuality’ to atoms and their consequent unpredictability which might therefore allow a form of idiosyncratic will through the

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<sup>23</sup> Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, II, 221-22.

workings of chance. This objection, he later realised, was unsatisfactory, but his ideas continued to develop around the apparent contradiction of free will and physical determinism.<sup>24</sup> His ultimate position stated that a 'pragmatical view of nature leaves a working belief in causation intact [...]. There never has been, it seems, exactly the same cause and exactly the same effect'.<sup>25</sup>

This struggle between freedom and causality is a major factor in Wells's scientific romances. The Time Traveller, having seen a bleak future, must live with the knowledge that it is as unalterable as the past. This universal rigidity can only be escaped through a different knowledge of time, something that Stephen Baxter demonstrated with his sequel to *The Time Machine*, *The Time Ships* (1995), in which multiple histories are possible.

In the Wellsian Cosmos, causality may be rigid, but uniqueness opens chinks into which choices may be forced. The 1896 essay, 'Human Evolution, An Artificial Process' contrasts the lack of advance in our somatic evolution since the Stone Age with the possibilities of our cultural evolution, which does proceed through swiftly acquired characteristics. Doctor Moreau is ultimately unable to alter the essentially bestial nature of his subjects, as it is implied that the bestial nature of human beings themselves cannot be easily transcended, but it nonetheless is culture and education, as Wells argues in 'Human Evolution', that must be able to do this. Our somatic inheritance is fixed from birth according to Darwinian principles and again, as is the case with the 'rigid' cosmos, all life and choice after that instant are simply the solution of an equation whose factors have already been set, and with each generation the process begins again from an only incrementally altered position with the enormous energy of a lifetime of learning and self-improvement essentially worthless. This paradox would naturally have distressed Wells, an epitome of self-improvement over class destiny and yet also a rationalist devoted to the clarity and rigor of science as he knew it. It is the concept of humans as beings with two strands of inheritance that provided a solution to this dilemma. On the one hand we are bound by the workings of Darwinian inheritance but on the other hand *culture* is an effective substitute for the Lamarckian mechanism of acquired characteristics that allows adaptation and improvement to be preserved and enhanced through generations.

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<sup>24</sup> Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, II, 222-24.

<sup>25</sup> Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, II, 225. Wells, *H. G. Wells*, 4-6 and 50-56.

The classical sense of morality arises from a sense of deference to the superior propriety and the maintenance of boundaries (the aforementioned myth of Prometheus and his punishment is a good example). Wells's morality is fundamentally utilitarian and anti-classical: travel to other worlds would be fantastic or improper to a classically or mediaevally inclined person (such as C. S. Lewis), but to Wells this transgression is absolutely necessary for the sake of growth and survival and it is therefore good. While the Martians might in a Swiftian manner be ironically presented as 'right' or at least deserving of sympathy by the narrator (and their motivation to invade for the sake of survival is one that we would use ourselves), it is our duty not to accept the punishment from these nemeses but to resist it. Oedipus could not escape the trap of his fate because it had already closed about him before he was even aware of it but humanity can now escape its own, greater traps because it can – and therefore must – see them.

Thus there is a marked difference between science fiction and myth but this apparent difference is not necessarily a complete separation. Where they appear to be alike they are deploying similar tools in a similar manner, and where they are different the two modes still demonstrate their close relationship with the epistemological substrate of their societies. Myth arises and operates in a cosmology dominated by divine maintenance and fiat and science fiction – or at least Wellsian science fiction – generally expresses or addresses an opposite understanding of a materialistic and apparently Godless Cosmos.

It can be argued that notable works of 'science fiction' do not fit this model and the works of C. S. Lewis can be raised as counter-examples, as they were written in explicit contradiction of Wellsian ideas (see especially *That Hideous Strength* where Wells himself is maliciously parodied as 'Horace Jules'<sup>26</sup>). However, without being trite, it must be said that Lewis was consciously writing with reactionary intent and that his works are fantastic, not science fictional. It is therefore necessary to mark a distinction here between science fiction and fantasy, however much some fantasy may adopt the scenery and stage props of science fiction.

Wells's followers have at least an instinctive understanding that monsters can appear not merely as interesting and colourful additions to the landscape, but strike resonances and instruct as allegory once did. Wells may have noticed a coincidental congruence between his Martians and certain mythical creatures, or he may have deliberately enhanced this convergence himself.

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<sup>26</sup> C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (London: Bodley Head, 1960), 419-31.

In either case, their horrifying and didactic effect is multiplied by their troping of such monsters as Medusa and such beings as Aristophane's hermaphrodites.

Mary Shelley subtitled *Frankenstein* as 'The Modern Prometheus' with the intention of alluding to classical myth. The fact that Frankenstein's punishment was delivered as a direct consequence of his own flaws rather than a conscious divine judgement brings us inevitably to the fundamentally scientific thinking of Wells. *The War of the Worlds* is vital to the development of science fiction because it contains monsters that, while they must be understood as being akin to those in Classical myth and Renaissance allegory, can also remain plausible in the new environment of scientific thought. Moreover, they and their actions are intrinsically tied up with the universal operation of natural law as revealed by science – in this case, evolution. It is vital too in that while he rejected the overt divine interventions and contingencies of myth, he did *not* reject the idea that a meaningful story should continue to speak intrinsically and forcefully of issues which the narrow-minded might dismiss as 'abstract' or 'metaphysical'.

Wells's monsters can be seen to be as much in the mode of Classical monsters as much as they are creations of scientific extrapolation and it is also in its dramatic mode not far removed from myth. Wells's genius lay in his ability to revive elements of an 'outdated' mythical mode that would otherwise be untenable in a post-Industrial Revolution society dominated by new, vigorous utilitarian philosophies such as science, socialism and capitalism, all of which claimed to base their legitimacy on an accurate understanding of the laws of the universe. Wellsian science fiction represents a fundamental change in the mythic form, but it also represents in its changes, a preservation of the essence of myth.