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HERBERT GEORGE WELLS'S  
*THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU*  
– A REAPPRAISAL OF ITS MYTHOLOGICAL  
TROPES<sup>1</sup>

1.

In the literary studies which have hitherto been dedicated to Herbert George Wells's, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, many different literary perspectives have appeared. However, they either fail to allude to any mythological concepts, or simply marginalise them. It is difficult to find any literary study which would indicate the presence of the myth which lies at the very core of the novel and which engenders its essential meaning<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The current text draws upon the Master's degree thesis written by the author under the supervision of Professor Zofia Zarębianka: „Od homo sapiens do homo biologicus. Obraz biologa i biologii w literaturze XIX i XX wieku” (Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 2007). It is the outcome of an individual study project undertaken under the guidance of the Polish University Abroad of Ignacy Jan Paderewski in London (PUNO), within the framework of doctoral studies. The subject of the research is the function of myths in the works of H. G. Wells.

<sup>2</sup> Whilst carrying out research, the following English text was used: H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, ed. B. Aldiss, London, 1993. Use of this text was necessitat-

Wells's novel is conventionally interpreted with reference to the prevailing socio-cultural framework. The debate between the supporters and detractors of vivisection<sup>3</sup> is commented upon, as are Darwin's revolution<sup>4</sup> and advances in medical surgery and the trepidation associated with its development<sup>5</sup>. Equally, colonialism<sup>6</sup> and entering a new era, the *fin de siècle*<sup>7</sup>, feature as central contexts. A clearly distinct biographical thread emerges in the light of this background<sup>8</sup>. Well's education and interests are recalled, as are his socio-political and journalistic engagement and activities, as well as the influence of Thomas Henry Huxley, under whose supervision Wells studied biology. Literary critics have also sought connections between the world as it is portrayed in his novels, and motifs which are a particular characteristic of British literature, such as islands<sup>9</sup> and the notion of the mad scientist<sup>10</sup>. They frequently make reference to Thomas More's *Utopia*, William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Daniel Defoe's *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, William Godwin's *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, Wilkie Collins's *Heart and Science: A story of the Present Time*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Such perspectives, which are linked solely to historico-literary concepts, can result in a sense of inadequacy. This impression is further compounded on reading the studies which do address the concept of myth in Wells's work.

## 2.

In his studies relating to Wells's novel, the British scholar and critic, Bernard Bergonzi, notes the observations made by a Swiss critic, Richard Gerber, who contends that for Europeans, the remote island possesses positive mythical

ed by shortcomings in Polish translations (e.g. Wydawnictwo CM KLASZYKA – I edition, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> M. Harris, *Introduction*, in: H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, ed. M. Harris, Toronto, 2009, p. 44–50.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23–24.

<sup>5</sup> J. Turney, *Ślady Frankensteina*, tłum. M. Wiśniewska, Warszawa, 2001, p. 90–91.

<sup>6</sup> R. Bozzetto, *Moreau's Tragi-Farcical Island*, „Science-Fiction Studies”, no. 20, p. 40–41.

<sup>7</sup> M. Harris, *Introduction...*, p. 13–14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15–25.

<sup>9</sup> B. Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells. A Study of the Scientific Romances*, Manchester, 1969, p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> See: A. Budziak, *Wyobcowanie rozumu. Postaci szalonego naukowca na tle dziewiętnastowiecznych teorii choroby umysłowej*, „Ethos”, 2015, nr 2 (110), p. 185–206.

connotations, as evidenced by Atlantis, Elysium and Thule<sup>11</sup>. Bergonzi confirms that in Wells's novel, Prendick does indeed perceive his predicament in mythological terms, and sees Moreau as a contemporary reincarnation of Circe or Comus. Bergonzi cites Prendick's utterance, when, overcome by fear, he assumes that Moreau and Montgomery plan, by means of vivisection, to transform him into yet another of their beasts and consign him to *their Comus rout*<sup>12</sup>. According to the critic, such an attitude adopted by the hero gainsays his educational status and leads to mistaken thinking, by which Prendick ends up mythologising his personal experience. However, it seems that it is not the hero who is mistaken, but rather Bergonzi himself, as he suspends this interesting line of literary inquiry. He evokes the figures of Circe and Comus without delving deeper into the significance of their role, although he is certainly not the first to fail to do so<sup>13</sup>. Consequently, failing to make full use of Gerber's reflections and Prendick's intuition regarding myth, Bergonzi understands the island as being simply a reference to the works of Darwin<sup>14</sup>.

In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, under the heading, *Comus*<sup>15</sup>, there is a singularly interesting entry, which provides a new perspective as to how we perceive mythological allusions in Wells's work. Son of Dionysus and Circe, Comus, who is the Greek god of earthly joy, possesses the ability to change human faces into those of wild beasts. Those who succumb to his charms remain unaware of their own ugliness and disregard the strictures of clean living in order to *roll about in the trough of sensual pleasure*. Comus represents anarchy and chaos, and is the one who leads Dionysus's processions. The Greek word *komōs* means 'revelry, merry-making', and refers to the processions held in honour of Dionysus. Therefore, the phrase, *their Comus rout*<sup>16</sup>, can refer not only to Circe and her charms, but also to Dionysus, to whom we shall subsequently return.

Roger Bowen ventures a little further in his studies<sup>17</sup>. In his view, Dr. Moreau, just like Circe, possesses the abilities (his knowledge about botany and elixirs)

<sup>11</sup> B. Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells...*, p. 200.

<sup>12</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau...*, p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Compare: P. Chalmers Mitchell, *Mr. Wells's Dr. Moreau*, „The Saturday Review”, 11 IV 1896, p. 368–369.

<sup>14</sup> B. Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells...*, p. 104.

<sup>15</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Edinburgh, 1877, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 6, p. 238.

<sup>16</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau...*, p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> R. Bowen, *Science, Myth, and Fiction in H. G. Wells's Island of Dr. Moreau*, „Studies in The Novel”, 1976, no. 3, p. 318–335.

and the instruments, such as a magic wand, to transform animals into humans. Bowen believes that Wells skilfully draws from the wellspring of the Promethean myth, and that he proceeds to adapt both these sources to suit his own times, locating them in a topographical setting of isolation – the island, which simultaneously symbolises both the end and the beginning of the world<sup>18</sup>.

In the Victorian age references to myths were commonplace, the most well-known being the story of *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. Many similarities unite Wells's and Shelley's main protagonists; they are both creator-scientists and loners at the vanguard of a new era<sup>19</sup>. The characteristic which differentiates them from the mythical Prometheus is that they are both singularly devoid of any altruistic or charitable feelings, and despise the creatures they have called into being, and whose victims they ultimately become. They are more akin to the myth of Faust, Goethe's hero, who is characterized by an unbridled desire to gain knowledge, to discover the world's secrets and attain moral freedom.

Another Wellsian literary critic, Roslynn D. Hayes, writes about the mythological figure of the fanatical Moreau and sees in him a parody of the Old Testament Creator as well as an allegory for evolution. However, in her interpretation, she limits herself to descriptions such as *theological grotesque* and *malign satyr of scientism*<sup>20</sup>. She compares Wells's protagonist to an alchemist or to Frankenstein, and states that the character functions on a symbolic level, which renders the meaning of the novel universal<sup>21</sup>. This Australian critic acknowledges the mythopoeic potential of the text, but she does not go beyond making a few generalisations. She states that Wells successfully ushers his text into the mythical domain<sup>22</sup>. Similarly to Bergonzi, Bowen and many others, she perceives in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* the presence of ancient myths – islands, creation, metamorphoses, Circe, Comos, Prometheus – but she goes no further.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>19</sup> Compare: E. Planinc, *Catching up with Wells: The Political Theory of H. G. Wells's Science Fiction*, „Political Theory”, 2016, no. 5, p. 637–658, and A. Stiles, *Literature in „Mind”: H. G. Wells and Evolution of the Mad Scientist*, „Journal of the History of Ideas”, 2009, no. 2, p. 317–339.

<sup>20</sup> R. D. Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove. Representations of the Scientist in Western Literature*, Baltimore – London, 1994, p. 154–157.

<sup>21</sup> Eadem, *From Madman to Crime Fighter. The Scientist in Western Culture*, Baltimore, 2017, p. 152–156.

<sup>22</sup> Eadem, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future. The Influence of Science on His Thought*, London and Basingstoke, 1980, p. 35.

Some literary scholars interpret Wells's novel as being a myth in its own right. Roslynn D. Haynes credits *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, as well as *Faust* and *Frankenstein*, as being 'among the great myths of our time'<sup>23</sup>. Edward Shanks thinks likewise<sup>24</sup>. He hails Wells as a creator of myths and texts which can be interpreted on many levels, with the caveat that none of them will exhibit total cohesiveness. He justifies his view by pointing out the elements in the text which have several layers of meaning, such as the remote island, the refusal to abide by the law, the ruthless scientist, the suffering which ensues from the conflict between instinct and superimposed laws, or the return of a beast to its primeval state<sup>25</sup>.

However, one can be critical of Shanks's stance. In the light of Myriam Watthée-Delmotte's claim that in literary texts, myths play *a positive role in demarcating their meaning*<sup>26</sup>, Shanks's contention can be considered as lacking in precision. Given the numerous volumes of works which are alluded to in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and the resultant wide range of interpretations, Roger Bozzetto<sup>27</sup> considers the text to be a work of fiction which encompasses *a mythical dimension*<sup>28</sup>. He remains unconvinced as to whether the text can be designated a myth, but the mere fact that it invokes many myths and borrows certain elements from them, such as the motif of the island castaway, initiation, primeval man (with reference to Genesis), provides a sufficient reason for him to wonder whether Moreau becomes a myth in his own right. In his further reflections he turns to the aspect of the myth as it relates to the civilising of *barbarians* by Europeans in the context of colonialism<sup>29</sup>.

As can be seen, the approach of the above-mentioned critics does not fulfil the conditions required by a separate and distinct category of interpretation.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> E. Shanks, *The Work of Mr. H. G. Wells*; also: *First Essays on Literature*, Glasgow – Melbourne – Auckland, 1973, p. 148–171.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 160–161.

<sup>26</sup> M. Watthée-Delmotte, *Mythe, création et lectures littéraires. Questionnements et enjeux des études sur l'imaginaire*, in: *Mythe et création. Théorie, figures*, ed. È. Faivre d'Arcier, J.-P. Madou, L. Van Eynde, Saint-Louis, 2005, p. 35, cited in: M. Klik, *Teorie mitu. Współczesne literaturoznawstwo francuskie (1969–2010)*, Warszawa, 2016, p. 197.

<sup>27</sup> R. Bozzetto, *Moreau's Tragi-Farcical Island...*, p. 34–44.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 38–39.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 40–41.

However, it is evident that Wells's text lends itself to such a categorisation. It is therefore worthwhile to assume the role of the detective, and investigate the text in the search for new mythological tropes. Given the constraints of the scope of this article, this will be limited to drawing attention to certain mythological motifs, rather than exploring their function.

### 3.

**B**efore embarking on any further analysis of Wells's novels, a few words about methodology. The research methods of John White<sup>30</sup> and Marie Miguet-Ollagnier<sup>31</sup> have served as an inspiration for the author's analysis as presented here. White's method is to select the places where the most interesting allusions are most frequently to be found, such as: title; prologue; epigraph; chapter headings; names of main protagonists; metaphors; index of characters, etc., to name but a few. This facilitates the process of putting forward interpretative hypotheses, by revealing the prefiguration of a myth which emerges either in its precise form, or as distorted, fragmentary or condensed<sup>32</sup>.

Marie Miguet-Ollagnier, in turn, adopting a mitocritical approach, recommends using the *method of diffused attention*<sup>33</sup>, in order to grasp the details or field of nuances, which allow for the formulation of a working hypothesis, that can become positively verified through the bringing together into one entity of previously unconnected elements of a work. It is necessary to focus on identifying the barely perceptible elements of the myth in allusions, aspects of the setting, the plot, and the characteristics of the main protagonists, which might be identical to those of mythical figures or to the names of secondary characters. Other members of the French School are of a similar opinion, although the emphasis might vary. According to Pascal Auraix-Jonchière, the presence of one mythical *image* suffices to affect the work's meaning<sup>34</sup>. However, Pierre Brunel<sup>35</sup> suggests that, *the mythical motif present in a literary work can recall an entire mythical tale. In such a case, the motif becomes the manifestation of a myth within*

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<sup>30</sup> J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel*, Princeton, 1971.

<sup>31</sup> M. Miguet-Ollagnier, *Introduction*, in: eadem, *Mythanalyses*, Paris, 1992.

<sup>32</sup> J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel...*, p. 27–31.

<sup>33</sup> M. Miguet-Ollagnier, *Introduction...*, p. 13. Compare: M. Klik, *Teorie mitu...*, p. 243.

<sup>34</sup> P. Auraix-Jonchière, *Isis, Narcisse, Psyché entre lumières et romantisme*, Clermont-Ferrand, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> P. Brunel, *Le mythe de la métamorphose*, Paris, 1974, p. 11.

a text<sup>36</sup>. Jean-Yves Tadié claims that the writer, rather than referring to a myth explicitly, can introduce it implicitly<sup>37</sup>, *in the form of a shower of sparks*<sup>38</sup>.

Marcin Klik, with reference to Polish mitocriticism, believes that one of its priorities is to locate the allusions to myths in literary texts and then analyse the influence of their connotations on the whole meaning of a given text. In his opinion, it is these hidden myths which often provide the interpretative key, allowing for a true understanding of the original message<sup>39</sup>.

The American literary scholar and critic, Joseph L. Blotner, concurs with the above-mentioned premisses. His standpoint is that if significant systematic analogies are detected in a literary text, and they shed light on the world as it is presented, the text can be interpreted under the categorisation of a myth. He adds that within the power of the myth lies the ability to disclose fully and clearly what may appear fragmentary and only partially revealed in the text<sup>40</sup>.

#### 4.

The title of Wells's novel directs our attention to the figure of the doctor and to the unidentified topographical setting. We have Moreau and the island. Moreau, a famous scientist, breaks the law by carrying out illegal experiments on animals, and having become infamous, escapes from his country. He chances upon an island, where he presumes he will be able to continue peacefully with his work, creating living beings. Ever the true professional, he avails himself of the tools and methods which demand a steady hand and a keen eye. His knowledge and skills enable him to bring to life human-animal creatures.

Some of the features of the world as presented in Wells's novel, such as the storyline and the character presentation, can be read as references to the myth of Daedalus<sup>41</sup>. There are basically two versions of the Daedalus myth, which begin to diverge at the point where Daedalus makes it possible for Pasiphae to have a relationship with a bull. In the first version, Daedalus constructs a labyrinth

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<sup>36</sup> Quotation from M. Klik, *Teorie mitu...*, p. 191.

<sup>37</sup> J.-Y. Tadié, *Le récit poétique*, Paris, 1994, p. 147.

<sup>38</sup> Formulated by M. Klik, *Teorie mitu...*, p. 191.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>40</sup> J. L. Blotner, *Mythic Patterns in „To the Lighthouse”*, „Publications of the Modern Language Association of America”, 1956, no. 71, p. 547–562.

<sup>41</sup> The following article was consulted for this article: W. Markowska, *Mity Greków i Rzymian*, Warszawa, 1979.

on Minos's behest, in order to imprison the Minotaur (M. Dancourt, P. Grimal, W. Kopaliński, J. Parandowski, W. Markowska). In the second version, the king of Crete imprisons Daedalus and his son in an already existing labyrinth, from which they are freed by Pasiphae or manage to escape without any external intervention (R. Graves). In the first version, Minos imprisons Daedalus in the labyrinth only after he has helped Theseus, and pursues him once he has helped Theseus escape; in the other version, he chases him after Daedalus has helped Pasiphae satisfy her unnatural desires. Other versions differ in a number of details, such as the implements found by Daedalus, or the plot sequence once Talos had been slain. Some say that Daedalus fled before his trial; others claim that he was sentenced to exile.

The Cretan story pertaining to the myth of Daedalus was widely-known within the mainstream of European culture at the time. This aspect was researched by Michele Dancourt, in whose opinion, it was from all the series of sequences, which together make up the most comprehensive story about the Athenian master, that the above-mentioned segments entered into the *repertoire of the everyday*. This occurred when the feats of Daedalus became so widely-known, that the myth *lost its narrative cohesion*<sup>42</sup>.

Consequently, the way in which the plot and Wells's titular protagonist were constructed underwent a transposition due to the cultural context and time setting. Doctor Moreau, like his hypotextual prototype, is a genius sculptor, constructor and builder. However, he works in a different sphere, that of biology, and bestows shape and novel functions to the body, as opposed to stone: *To that – to the study of the plasticity of living forms – my life has been devoted*<sup>43</sup>. Moreau possesses creative skills which are denied to others. Those who are able to glimpse his amazing, fantastical creations, react with disbelief, horror and wonderment, as did those who encountered Daedalus's animate statues.

Both Wells's protagonist and Daedalus disregard authority, power and the law. The former is cast out of his country after his research methods come to light; the latter is banished after murdering Talos. Prendick is of the opinion that, were the doctor to relinquish his research, he could regain society's acceptance, but this is a price too high to pay for those, *who have once fallen under the*

<sup>42</sup> See: M. Dancourt, *Dédale et Icare. Métamorphoses d'un mythe*, Paris, 2002, p. 85–107; quotation from M. Klik, *Teorie mitu...*, p. 198.

<sup>43</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau...*, p. 69.



*overmastering spell of research. He was unmarried, and had indeed nothing but his own interests to consider...*<sup>44</sup>. Once again, there is a distinct similarity with Daedalus, also unmarried, who discards all social restraints, and riven by hubris, sees in the youth a threat to his own actions.

Another example of the unbridled pride of both protagonists is how they see themselves as playing the role of gods. Flying with the aid of wings, Daedalus proclaims, *Am I not equal to the gods?*<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, they appear as gods in the eyes of others: Moreau is hailed by the monsters he has created: *His is the House Pain. / His is the Hand that makes. / His is the Hand that wounds. / His is the Hand that heals*<sup>46</sup>, and Daedalus is hailed a god by those who see him fly. The exiled biologist, in parallel with Daedalus, who decided to remain in the Cretan king's safekeeping, which guaranteed him security and relative freedom, settles on a nameless island, where, with impunity, he devotes himself to his scholarly passion: *The place seemed waiting for me*<sup>47</sup>.

Daedalus invented a means to combine man and beast, with the Minotaur becoming its offspring. Moreau created hybrid human-beasts. Both protagonists adopt a similar attitude to their creations, that of rejection. Moreau admits, *They only sicken me with a sense of failure. I take no interest in them*<sup>48</sup>. They both transgress boundaries and shatter taboos in order to satisfy their deranged desires: Moreau, his own, Daedalus, the perverted desires of Pasiphae.

Like Daedalus, Moreau possesses the ability to think logically. Prendick is struck by the fact that the doctor does not espouse pragmatic objectives, but is driven to carry out seemingly pointless research, which only leads to the need for ever more answers to ever more questions. Moreau confesses:

*I went on with this research just the way it led me. That is the only way I ever heard of research going. I asked a question, devised some method of getting an answer, and got – a fresh question (p. 72) [...] I have gone on, and there is still something in everything I do that defeats me, makes me dissatisfied, challenges me to further effort (p. 75) [...] But I will conquer yet. But I am drawing near the fastness (p. 76)*<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> W. Markowska, *Mity...*, p. 270.

<sup>46</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau...*, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>49</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau...*

## 5.

The image of Moreau, blundering around from one unknown to another, evokes yet another significant feature – the labyrinth. This meandering structure is recalled, and serves as an instance of metonymy, with its figurative meaning conveying a sense of powerlessness, limitation and captivity, as experienced by the biologist, as he loses himself in his tangle of hypotheses. A labyrinth can also represent learning and the process of investigative research with its experimentation and trial and error, as being reflected in the architectural components of a labyrinth with its thickets, snares and entanglements.

It should be remembered that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, surgery, as a medical discipline, was still problematic<sup>50</sup>. Therefore, Wells's protagonist, against the backdrop of this historical, cultural setting, embarks on a perilous course of study about life, which can be designated as labyrinthine. In order to achieve his goal, he must keep moving forward, one step at a time towards that ultimate *central chamber* where the domain of secrets, the very *sacrum* are to be found, bringing enlightenment and metamorphosis<sup>51</sup>, and subsequently to return, transformed, to the domain of the *profane*<sup>52</sup>. The medium which allows Moreau to enter into this labyrinth and to embark on his journey, is his laboratory. There the two spheres of the sacred and the profane that converge. The operating table joins the list of objects which are linked within an extensive semantic field of *centres*, as seen in the Tree of life, the well, the fountain or the temple, which are all conventionally symbols of power and immortality. Use of these forms of labyrinth are common in 20<sup>th</sup> century prose<sup>53</sup>. This *centre* is considered as the intersection point of three spheres: Heaven, Earth and Hell, or the sphere of the gods, both living and dead<sup>54</sup>. Attaining goals similar to reaching the *central chamber* and linking the various spheres within his creative work, are important for Moreau. However, the area of his initiation becomes his trap, and ultimately, the place of his death.

<sup>50</sup> Compare: J. Thorwald, *Triumf chirurgów*, tłum. A. Bandurski, J. Sczaniecka, Kraków, 2009, especially section entitled: *Białe plamy*, p. 13–252.

<sup>51</sup> Compare: K. Kowalski, Z. Krzak, *Tezeusz w labiryncie*, Warszawa, 2003, p. 65–67.

<sup>52</sup> We can presume that, just as Daedalus planned to leave the island, so Moreau was planning to announce the results of his experiments in England, was probably paving the way for a return journey.

<sup>53</sup> Compare: E. Rybicka, *Formy labiryntu w prozie polskiej XX wieku*, Kraków, 2000, p. 16–18.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

The labyrinth can also be understood as a kind of game, *in that it presents a puzzle, a mental challenge which needs to be solved*<sup>55</sup>. Doctor Moreau is a game-player, lives in a constant state of tension, and remains undaunted by setbacks. He is convinced that, one day, he will triumph, (*I will conquer yet.*)<sup>56</sup>. Prendick expresses a similar thought when he says: *he was so irresponsible, so utterly careless. His curiosity, his mad, aimless investigations, drove him on*<sup>57</sup>. Generally speaking, the rules of a game, like Moreau's experiments, are not directed at any gain. What counts is the participation and the pleasure it brings. In this instance, it is the paradigm of natural science studies which determine the rules and bring together the element of logic with the element of chance, as in the confirmation or negation of research hypotheses.

The symbolic meaning of the labyrinth in Wells's novel can be interpreted in several more ways. The intertextual connections hamper any interpretation of the text, in as much as any attempt to pinpoint an unequivocal meaning feels like losing one's way along winding corridors. In the case of Daedalus, he created a labyrinthine structure in order to imprison the monstrous bull-man. Moreau imprisons the hybrid beings he has created within the walls of hypnosis, in the corridors of inculcated beliefs and laws: *they had certain Fixed Ideas implanted by Moreau in their minds, which absolutely bounded their imaginations. They were really hypnotised*<sup>58</sup>. In that sense, the labyrinth fulfils the same function as the Cretan construction, which is to set apart the monsters and guarantee the safety of those who had a hand in their creation. Doctor Moreau's very act of creation and the hybrid nature of the animal beasts bring to mind the figure of the Minotaur.

Despite all the experimentation and several decades of work, Moreau is unable to understand *the labyrinth of thoughts* of his created beings. Through his experiments he seeks to discover the connectors which would lead him to the secrets of their intelligence, instincts, feelings and emotions. Moreau's own *Minotaurs*, just like their mythical prototype, are the offspring of his sick passion, and in turn, are ostracised by their creator. Instilling fear among the people, they become the enemy and are enclosed within a kind of labyrinthine hypnotic state, so that what remains of their animal state and is non-human can

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>56</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau...*, p. 76.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

be kept under control. It is only after Moreau's death that they regain the possibility of returning to their original state. The remaining protagonists in Wells's novel are lost in the *labyrinth* of their own existence. Just as Moreau set himself a goal, and blundered his way through, never actually achieving it, so Montgomery and Prendick remain disorientated and unable to find a sense of meaning in their lives. Each of the three biologists flounders in his own labyrinth. For Moreau and Montgomery, the labyrinth turns out to be a trap, which claims their lives, as they go astray, never finding that *central chamber*. Prendick continues to flounder in his *labyrinth* even on his return to London. It is as if his meeting with the pitiless vivisectionist has led him into the very depths of its murkiest passageways.

## 6.

This all begs the question as to why Daedalus was successful, even if partially so, whilst Moreau met with disaster. The primary meaning of the myth is derived from Daedalus's rationalism, whereas in the case of Moreau, the dominant theme is that of madness. It is interesting to note how much attention is paid in Wells's novel to pursuits, rituals and sacral overtones, as well as to the motif of the beasts' deification of Moreau. When seeking an answer, it is worth taking into consideration the allusions contained within the names which have been assigned to the animal beasts. Many of these creatures have names formed from the names of animal species, such as Hyena-swine or Leopard-man. Only one alludes to the mythical world par excellence, and that is the name of Satyr. As is widely known, the Satyrs joined the processions of the god of wine and fertility, and it is this notion that directs us to Dionysus, the mythical figure popularised in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche.

In one of the chapters of Wells's novel, we observe a suggestive scene which conjures up an image of the Great Dionysia. We learn about the train of events from Prendick, who addresses the reader directly, *Imagine the scene if you can*<sup>59</sup>. Prendick, Montgomery, M'ling and Moreau halt at the top of an amphitheatre where Moreau blows a cowherd's horn, producing an echo<sup>60</sup>. In this setting of the amphitheatre three human characters remain and take part in a peculiar

<sup>59</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau...*, p. 87.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86–89. Neither before or later we see Moreau directly addressing the beasts he has himself created. He only does so when, by blowing a horn, he summons them to a peculiar type of court.

ritual (in keeping with the convention of only three actors in the ancient Greek theatre). At the sound of the horn, the Satyr is the first to make an appearance, in order to writhe and grovel with the other creatures. Chanting the song of the laws as instituted by Moreau, all the assembled creatures proceed to fling white dust over their heads. The instrument used by Moreau has the important function of hypnotising the creatures, and at its very sound, the creatures run up to the doctor, prostrate themselves before him and pay an ecstatic tribute.

In ancient times, the amphitheatres where the Dionysia were most often held, were located on hilltops which were deemed appropriately shaped by nature for such occasions. The cowherd's horn used by Moreau brings to mind the ancient Greek *keras*<sup>61</sup> which was often played at Dionysian rituals. Consequently, Wells's protagonist can be identified with Dionysus himself. Just like the orchestra in the theatre of Dionysus, the Beast Folk have to maintain a distance from the main *actors* of about 27 metres. They sing songs, led by the Sayer of the Law, who is the counterpart of Corypheus, the choir leader in Ancient Greek theatre. The songs are reminiscent of dithyrambs which, in ancient times, were performed by the choir, whilst dressed as animals. These passionate songs, full of pathos, eulogized the sufferings and joys of Dionysus. In Wells's novel, they are to be sung to worship the figure of Moreau. Dionysus, the wandering god, came to Greece from beyond the seas, and promulgated a cult to himself. Similarly, Moreau is a stranger from beyond the waters, who equally proclaims a cult to himself. After Moreau's death, a promise is made as to his resurrection. He is to reappear on the island, thus confirming his god-like status, as once did Dionysus, the wandering god who was repeatedly revived and reborn.

In the above-mentioned scene in the amphitheatre, Moreau-Dionysus initiates a chase after the Leopard-Man, who has transgressed the laws dictated by the doctor. This animal-man is to be caught alive, and his punishment is to be cast into the *hell* of yet another vivisection in the House of Pain – the laboratory. Moreau, like Dionysus, who is often depicted in the company of wild cats, draws particular attention to those animals who undergo frequent vivisection, such as the puma and the Leopard-Man. Moreau, the vivisectionist, is like Dionysus-Zagreus, the *Great Hunter*<sup>62</sup>. In the scene depicting the pursuit of the

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<sup>61</sup> Compare: M. L. West, *Muzyka starożytnej Grecji*, tłum. A Maciejewska, M. Kaziński, Kraków, 2003.

<sup>62</sup> See: M. Eliade, *Dionizos, czyli błogostan odnaleziony*, in: idem, *Historia wierzeń i idei religijnych*, t. 1: *Od epoki kamiennej do misteriów eleuzyńskich*, przeł. S. Tokarski,

Leopard-Man, there is a parallel with the cult of Dionysus relating to the need for a ritual offering, which repeats the fate of Dionysus himself, who, as a child, was torn to shreds by the Titans.

Karl Kerényi, in his book on Dionysus<sup>63</sup>, explains that in ancient times, it was customary to tear to shreds animals which had been caught alive. He writes about lions and bulls which had been caught and then constrained:

*It is hard for us to believe that the participants of these wild Dionysia would first tear apart these enormous animals with their teeth, and then eat them raw. However, this monstrous ritual is clearly described in accounts of Dionysus's feast day, which took place on Crete every two years*<sup>64</sup>.

An encounter with Dionysus, as with Moreau, was meant to be cathartic. Mircea Eliade has analysed the most dramatic episode in the myth of Dionysus, where the Titans caught up with the god-child and then tore him to pieces: *they threw him into a pot, boiled and then roasted him*<sup>65</sup>. The critic points out that cooking in a pot or passing through fire formed part of the rites of initiation. Doctor Moreau submerges the victims of vivisection in a bath of burning pain, so as to burn out what remains of the animal in them, *Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain I say, 'this time I will burn out all the animal; this time I will make a rational creature of my own!'*<sup>66</sup>. Thus purified, the creatures transition from their former species to the new.

In the opinion of Mircea Eliade, Dionysian ecstasy constitutes *a complete release, the attainment of freedom, a dispensation from all prohibitions, rules and conventional moral and social norms*<sup>67</sup>. It is precisely in such a state that we encounter Moreau, totally committed to his mad passion, living on a nameless island, existing beyond the realms of good and evil. In his madness, he experiences the ecstasy which this madness brings. He admits to Prendick that he has become overcome by such passion, delight and longing, as Prendick could never even imagine. Wells's protagonist pays no heed to any boundaries or norms, but follows his desires in the pursuit of knowledge. Without the slightest hesita-

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Warszawa, 1988, p. 230–239; K. Kerényi, *Dionizos. Archetyp życia niezniszczalnego*, tłum. I. Kania, Kraków, 1997, p. 58–114.

<sup>63</sup> K. Kerényi, *Dionizos...*, p. 86.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> M. Eliade, *Dionizos, czyli błogostan odnaleziony...*, p. 238.

<sup>66</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau...*, p. 76.

<sup>67</sup> M. Eliade, *Dionizos, czyli błogostan odnaleziony...*, p. 234–235.

tion, he hurls himself into the pursuit of the puma which has escaped from the laboratory and races through the jungle, trying to capture the enraged animal.

Just like the revellers at the Great Dionysia, Prendick also takes part in ritual *mysteries*. Together with the inhabitants of the island, he repeats the songs praising Moreau and swaying and hitting his knees with his hands, all in a state of ecstasy. At the same time, he does not change his view of Moreau, whom he sees as mad and inscrutable. According to Prendick, Doctor Moreau went mad as a result of the experiments he has been conducting, as in the instance when he thrust a knife into his thigh, and as in the case of Dionysus being reborn from the thigh of Zeus, it is suggested that he felt no pain. Another analogy with Dionysus is the way Moreau manipulates people, so that they carry out his commands. He hypnotises the animals, and imposes on them his own societal norms. Dionysus dies torn to shreds. Walter Otto commenting on the death of Dionysus, points out that the hunter becomes animal prey, and he who once tore to shreds, is now himself torn apart<sup>68</sup>. In one of the versions of the myth, two Amazons tear his arm<sup>69</sup>. In Wells's novel, Montgomery and Prendick find Moreau's body after he had been killed by the puma. His face is turned to the ground, his wrist is almost severed from his hand, and his grey hair is stained with blood.

## 7.

Henryk Markiewicz contends that transposition is one of the possible filiations between a literary work and a myth. He explains it as: *myths in their entirety, or their components, being transferred into a different social-cultural time dimension, and reinterpreted*<sup>70</sup>. In the light of this theory, the correlation between Daedalus, Dionysus and Wells, should be discerned against the backdrop of the theory of evolution and its impact on the cultural scene at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also linked to the keenly-felt sense of unease experienced by artists of the time when confronted by the ever-increasing might of science.

It can be seen from the preceding analysis that a reappraisal of the mythical tropes, such as the plot layout, the island motif, the names of secondary characters, references to Dionysus and ancient theatre, all lead to a new understanding of Doctor Moreau's character. He appears as an exceptional biologist. On

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<sup>68</sup> W. F. Otto, *Dionizos. Mit i kult*, tłum. J. Korpanty, Warszawa, 2020, p. 115.

<sup>69</sup> A. M. Kempniński, *Słownik mitologii ludów indoeuropejskich*, Poznań, 2003, p. 109.

<sup>70</sup> See: H. Markiewicz, *Literatura a mity*, in: idem, *Literaturoznawstwo i jego sąsiedztwa*, Warszawa, 1989, p. 71–72.

the one hand, he possesses the attributes of the mythical Daedalus: he creates hybrid beings; he grapples with the enigmas of human nature; he distinguishes himself by his artfulness and intelligence; he succumbs to hubris. On the other hand, just like Dionysus, he possesses the potential of a god of metamorphosis, of wildlife, of fertility and rebirth, and falls into a creative frenzy. The attribution of characteristics of mythical figures to those created by Wells differs somewhat from those previously indicated by literary critics regarding intertextual correlations with other myths. The previous connections made could be termed a kind of *anastomosis*, or interlacing of closely allied *mythical series*<sup>71</sup>, such as Prometheus – alchemist – Frankenstein. In this instance, we are dealing with an example of *syllipsis* through the grafting of two separate myths. Doctor Moreau, having the characteristics of both Daedalus and Dionysus, is a rationalist and a madman, at one and the same time. This results in his possessing boundless power to transcend the limitations of human nature. The biologist-creator falls into a creative madness, forgetting human ethical responsibilities. By establishing his own set of moral laws, he departs from all common sense. Within that context, Doctor Moreau assumes attributes of the diabolical.

In Moreau, Wells creates a figure of contradictions and opposites. This is evident in his dual nature with its human and godlike attributes: mortality – rising from the dead; servant – master; dependence – independence; behaving outside the law – being the source of law; craftsman – creator. Moreau comes under the influence of contradictory experiences: pride and embarrassment; the constraints of existing social norms and the need to establish new ones; success and failure; creative frenzy and impotence; the pressures of time and existing *beyond time*, which all create a sense of unremitting tension.

Wells introduces a new dimension to his character. Moreau-Daedalus becomes the driving force behind progress and finds himself at the centre of the circle of never-ending returns. After the doctor's death, Montgomery and Prendick announce his forthcoming return. This theme constitutes the true sense of Wells's vision of the biologist and biology. Wells's Dionysus returns in an amplified form, as the progress of science cannot be halted. Ultimately, the choice between treading along the path of progress, and standing still, does not exist. The fulfilment of the prophecy that one day we will create something perilous and monstrous, is only a question of time, and in our contemporary studies, we no longer ask, *whether?*, but only *when?*

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<sup>71</sup> See M. Klik, *Teorie mitu...*, p. 214.



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## WYSPA DOKTORA MOREAU HERBERTA GEORGE'A WELLSA – PONOWNA OCENA JEJ MITOLOGICZNYCH TROPÓW

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł jest reinterpretacją obecności tropów mitologicznych w *Wyspie doktora Moreau* Herberta George'a Wellsa. Autor rozpoczyna od przedstawienia spostrzeżeń o dotychczasowych interpretacjach tej powieści. Po zaprezentowaniu kontekstów, w jakich zazwyczaj się ją odczytuje, uwaga zostaje skierowana na omówienie stanowisk badaczy (m.in. Bergonziego, Bowena oraz Haynes), którzy poszukują związków pomiędzy interesującym autora artykułu utworem a mitami. Wśród przywoływanych stanowisk znajdziemy odniesienia m.in. do Kirke, Komosa i Prometeusza. Autor – posiłkując się metodami badawczymi Johna White'a oraz Marie Miguet-Ollagnier – wskazuje miejsca, w których najczęściej występują odniesienia do mitu o Dedalu i Dionizosie. Tym samym poszerza dotychczasowy stan badań o nowe wątki mitologiczne. W konkluzjach autor artykułu zwraca uwagę na potrzebę odczytania utworu Wellsa w kontekście funkcjonowania zauważonych przez niego odniesień mitologicznych w świecie przedstawionym powieści.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Herbert George Wells, *Wyspa doktora Moreau*, Dedal, Dionizos, mitopeja