

Forty-six years have passed since the death of John [Wyndham Parkes Lucas] Beynon Harris in March 1969. (I have bracketed the names he did not use in his private life) During that time, in spite of the fact that his best works – those published under the name "John Wyndham" have remained continuously in print and that he is generally acknowledged as one of the major figure of British and world sf, he has received very little critical consideration.¹ And since Sam Moskowitz's pioneering effort, he has received no biographical attention. This neglect has now ended. In May 1998, the John Wyndham Archive, previously unavailable to researchers, joined the Science Fiction Foundation, Olaf Stapledon, and Eric Frank Russell collections at the University of Liverpool's Sydney Jones Library. It was not until 1992, the year following the death of Harris's widow, Grace, that this material was professionally sorted by Bertram Rota, Ltd., the London antiquarian booksellers. The papers were sorted because "the private collector" who had purchased them at an auction wished to resell them and had appointed Bertram Rota to act as the agent.² In 1997, the University of Liverpool – the first university in the world to offer an MA in sf – undertook to match the asking price on the assumption (correct as it turned out) that the Heritage Lottery Fund would supply most of that amount.

Of particular interest in the Archive are four unpublished novels. Two of these – MURDER MEANS MURDER (retitled BURN THAT BODY) and DEATH UPON DEATH – are detective novels written in the 1930s.³

¹ In his Afterword to an anthology of British sf ("Afterword", in R. Holdstock and C. Priest, eds., *Stars of Albion* (London: Pan, 1979), pp. 233-238, at p. 237), Christopher Priest lists four undeniably influential writers - Wells, Wyndham, Aldiss, and Ballard". I would hazard that, in England at least, "John Wyndham" (because of those "triffids") still remains the best known British writer of sf after H.G. Wells. Arthur C. Clarke would be his only competitor.

² See letters to Ketterer from Anthony Rota dated 17 October 1995, 12 April 1996, and 19 March 1997. It is possible that the "anonymous private collector" was a negotiating fiction and that Bertram Rota, Ltd., had purchased Harris's papers at an auction.

³ According to a slip pasted at the foot of the first page of the surviving bound carbon typescript of the novel titled (on a paper rectangle pasted on the same page) "MURDER MEANS MURDER by JOHN WYNDHAM" (or alternatively titled MURDER BREEDS MURDER in an 11 June 1937 submission letter), that work was composed during the period "8th Oct.-1st Dec. 1935". The bound ribbon typescript has a different title page: BURN THAT BODY by John Beynon. In the Archive, there is a submission letter to Cassell & Co., Ltd. dated 29 April 1938 which uses that title. The bound ribbon typescript of DEATH UPON DEATH has a carefully tipped-in replacement title page with the attribution "by JOHN WYNDHAM". According to slips pasted on the first page of the surviving bound carbon typescript, "DEATH UPON DEATH by JOHN WYNDHAM" was composed during the period "14th Sept.-21st. Nov. 1936". The familiar "John Wyndham" byline apparently originated in September 1950 with the *Amazing Stories* publication of "The Eternal Eve". Presumably, then, the pasted slips and the tipped-

They feature the same Detective-Inspector Jordon who is the protagonist of the detective novel *Foul Play Suspected* (London: George Newnes, Ltd., 1935). Harris's second published novel (it followed the same year, same publisher, sf novel *The Secret People*). After the war and before *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), Harris wrote two unpublished thrillers about post-war Nazi plots to survive and eventually triumph: PROJECT FOR PISTOLS in 1946 (revised in 1948) and PLAN FOR CHAOS (also titled FURY OF CREATION) in 1947 and 1948.⁴ Because cloning is important to the plot, PLAN FOR CHAOS is an sf thriller.

There are also two novel fragments, MIDWICH MAIN and TUEY FLOWER (a late development of the 1955 "Wild Flower"). The more interesting of these, MIDWICH MAIN, is an uncompleted sequel, commissioned by MGM, to what is perhaps Harris's best novel, *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957; filmed by MGM as *Village of the Damned*, 1960).⁵

in page were added after that date when Harris considered resubmitting these novels for publication.

⁴ For the composition dates of PROJECT FOR PISTOLS (Harris's version of William Goldman's *Marathon Man* [1974]) and PLAN FOR CHAOS, see Ketterer, "PLAN FOR CHAOS/FURY OF CREATION: An Unpublished Science Fiction Thriller by John Beynon/John Lucas (aka John Wyndham)", *Foundation* 74 (Autumn 1998), pp. 8-25. This uneven, extraordinary novel of 421 typescript pages which, no doubt, will some day be published might best be described as a cross between Wyndham's "Consider Her Ways" (1956) and Ira Levin's 1976 thriller, *The Boys from Brazil* (imagined as "The Girls from Brazil"). New information further confirms my 1948 composition date for PLAN FOR CHAOS. In December 1999 I received from the University of Texas Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center photocopies of the 313-page file of Harris's correspondence with his 1951-59 literary agent Paul Scott (later author of *The Raj Quartet*) of Pearn, Pollinger and Higham, Ltd. The October and November 1951 correspondence (with which the file begins) indicates that a report on PLAN FOR CHAOS by the agency's reader was largely positive, and that it was supposed that this novel would be published by Michael Joseph as the follow-up to *The Day of the Triffids* although there was uncertainty as to whether it should be a John Beynon Harris novel rather than a John Wyndham novel. At that point PLAN FOR CHAOS (which was clearly originally written for an American audience) had not yet gone to Michael Joseph's reader and the eventual report (which I have not seen and which may not survive) must have been negative. (At least one other British publisher, Longman's, also apparently decided against publication.) An earlier version of PLAN FOR CHAOS had been sent to Harris's American agent, Frederik Pohl of the Dirk Wylie Agency, prior to the publication of *Triffids*; an attempt by Pohl to interest *Colliers* (who serialised *Triffids* in 1951) in serializing that version had failed. Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from the fact that the composition of PLAN FOR CHAOS immediately preceded *Triffids* is that the "fury of female creation" theme announced in the alternative title for PLAN FOR CHAOS segues directly into the fear-of-the-female subtext in *Triffids* (and in *The Kraken Wakes*).

⁵ It is a pity that Harris was not able to get beyond the 122 pages of MIDWICH MAIN; set almost sixteen years after *The Midwich Cuckoos*; it breaks off just as the reader realises that the protagonist, Richard Gayford, is under the control of a friend of one of the randomly distributed, apparently alien Children he has been asked to investigate. (For an account of *The Midwich Cuckoos* as the best and

* This essay was originally published in *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* 79 (Summer 2000): 70-84. It is reproduced here (with some corrections and additions) with the permission of *Foundation's* editor Dr. Paul March-Russell.

The original publication carried this introduction:

David Ketterer's work on John Wyndham is well known to Foundation readers. Two previous articles appeared in issues 74 and 75 and we are pleased to welcome this piece on Wyndham's earliest work. It extends, updates and corrects Ketterer's article of the same name in Science-Fiction Studies 78 (1999), pp. 303-311: please note that, as in our earlier pieces by Ketterer (but unlike in the SFS version) titles in small capitals are works which were written but remain unpublished.

From a biographical point of view, of most interest are the more than 350 letters (dated 3 September 1939 – 26 June 1945) that Harris wrote to Grace during the Second World War. After working as a Temporary Civil Servant in Censorship (August 1940 – November 1943), and serving in that office's Home Guard unit (June 1942 – November 1943), Harris served (although at forty he was over-age for a commission) as an NCO with the rank of lance-corporal in the Royal Corps of Signals working as a cipher operator.⁶ According to his army record (summarised for me by Mrs M. McClenaghan of the Ministry of Defence, 7 March 1999), he participated from 11 June 1944 to 4 September 1945 in the follow up to the "D-day" Normandy Landings (6 June 1944). He was demobilised ("Released to Army Reserve") on 6 October 1946. Harris's experience of the Second World War and his memory of the First informed his four famous "Wyndham" invasion catastrophe novels (in the last case the catastrophe is putative): *The Day of the Triffids*, *The Kraken Awakes*, *The Chrysalids*, and *The Midwich Cuckoos*.

But voluminous as the Wyndham Archive is, it does not provide a complete record of Harris's life and career. Unfortunately, he did not keep a detailed diary (as opposed to a small appointments diary) and, on his own instructions, most of his personal papers were destroyed. One of the important omissions in the Archive is what appears to be Harris's first publication, the beginning, reprinted for the first time below, of a weird sf tale entitled "Vivisection". This title is, thanks to this essay, now recorded in the 2001 fullest bibliography currently available, that compiled by Phil Stephensen-Payne.⁷ Mrs Anne Archer, the Librarian at Bedales School, drew my attention to it while I was investigating (on 23 May 1998) what evidence remains of the three very happy years that Hams spent at that pioneering co-educational boarding school (1919-21). "Vivisection" appeared in the second issue (November 1919) of *The Bee: An Independent Journal of Art, Literature, Politics, Science and Music*, edited by pupils Rolf Gardiner and Stephen Bone.⁸ Harris would have been sixteen years old at the time.⁹ "Vivisection" is important not just

most autobiographical of Harris's novels see Ketterer, "A Part of the . . . Family[?]: 'John Wyndham's' *The Midwich Cuckoos* as Estranged Autobiography", forthcoming in Patrick Parrinder, ed., *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia*, Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press; Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001.) pp. 146-77.

⁶ See Sam Moskowitz, "John Wyndham", *Amazing Stories* (June 1964), reprinted in Moskowitz, *Seekers of Tomorrow: Masters of Modern Science Fiction* (1965: Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1974), pp. 118-32 at p. 126, and the Wyndham Archive.

⁷ Phil Stephensen-Payne, *John Wyndham, Creator of the Cosy Catastrophe: A Working Bibliography* (2nd revised ed. Leeds: A Galactic Central. Publication, 1989), item A71, p. 34.

⁸ I am grateful to Mrs. Archer for permission to reprint "Vivisection" here (letter to Ketterer dated 1 June 1998).

⁹ Harris apparently wrote an unpublished sf story three years earlier according to a one-page autobiographical essay he wrote in 1938. "John Beynon," he records,

Wrote his first 'scientific romance' at the age of 13. Incorporated every known instrument of war and some unknown (including a flying armoured car and a device for

because it appears to be his first published work; it is important because it presages the Wellsian form of sf associated with the name "John Wyndham" – the titles that would make his fortune. Twelve years would go by before the appearance of the first example of Harris's fiction noted in Stephensen-Payne's bibliography: "Worlds to Barter" by John Beynon Harris in *Wonder Stories* (May 1931).¹⁰ And that story was in the mode of

shooting large fish hooks and lines at Zeppelins).

Continued school career by writing stories when set to write essays, and frequently got away with it.

Was "Vivisection" such a story? Harris's autobiographical statement was enclosed with a 22 June 1938 letter to T. Stanhope Sprigg of the publishers George Newnes, Ltd. See the John Wyndham Archive.

¹⁰ It seems that earlier examples of Harris's fiction – very short stories yet to be located – appeared in London newspapers in 1925 and perhaps later (see Moskowitz, op. cit., p. 120). Describing what he did after leaving Bedales School at age 18, Harris recalled that "At intervals all along I had been doing an occasional story which nobody took . . . Now [around 1925] I tried more seriously, and got one or two short ones taken – short[er]-shorts in daily or evening papers." Harris refers to such publications in his answer to question number 8, one of the thirty questions that Sam Moskowitz, preparing to write his biographical article, sent Harris in a letter dated Jan. 12, 1963 (a mistake for "1964": Harris answered in his letter dated 22 January 1964). I am grateful to the late Sam Moskowitz for generously sending me (on 29 May 1996) photocopies of this correspondence.

I fear that the "one or two" short-short stories published circa 1925 will never be unearthed but, as an incentive, I offer £20.00 for any such story that anyone is able to provide me with a photocopy of.

Harris apparently deliberately suppressed, his mystery novel published in 1927: *The Curse of the Burdens* by John B. Harns. The last of its 62 unpaginated pages (approximately 660 words per page) announces "A new Aldine Mystery Novel is published the Last Day of Every Month, price 4d." The British Library copy of this pulp paperback (with a front cover illustration), the only copy I have seen, is date-stamped 26 February 1927.

The story is told in eighteen titled chapters beginning with "Shadow of the Curse". That curse was called down on the new owner by the old prior of Shotlander Priory when it passed into the hands of Sir James Burden following Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. Two recent Burden deaths in the twentieth century and the disappearance of the protagonist, Dick Burden (and the apparent appearances of ghosts), would seem to be consequences of this curse but are shown to have a naturalistic if very contrived explanation. One Albert Honeyman, a religious fanatic and the son of a very ugly-looking Burden cousin, Mr. Robertson, is responsible. Robertson's ugliness is one of several misdirections; it may however have symbolic point in that, like his association with the foreign element (he lives in France), it could be understood as representing Burden evil, especially greed. The mystery narrative is mixed up with a love story involving Dick Burden, his rival suitor and older brother James (who is swiftly murdered), and Letty Kingsbury.

There can be no doubt that John B. Harris is John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris. The style and convoluted way with plotting (particularly at this early stage) are his. Other identifiable touches include: the opening quarrel between the brothers re the younger brother's request for additional money from their deceased father's allowance which seems to owe something to the opening quarrel between the brothers Orlando (the younger one) and Oliver over Orlando's request for his share of the money allotted in their deceased father's will in *As You Like It*, the Shakespeare play in which the young Harris performed the role of the brother-usurping Duke Frederick while he was at Bedales; Harris and his brother Vivian also lived on an allowance from their father's estate; the resort town setting Easthill-on-Sea on the South coast of England (a likely combination of Eastbourne and Bexhill-on-Sea, places with which Harris was familiar); the description of Letty Kingsbury which is very similar to that of the female love interest in Harris's next three novels (*The Secret People* [1935], *Foul Play Suspected* [1935], and *Stowaway to Mars* [1936]); the emphasis on people putting up in inns and hotels (the judge Sir

the American sf pulp magazines, a supposedly Vernean mode that Harris would come to oppose to the preferable "logical fantasies" or "reasoned fantasies" or "implicatory fiction" of H. G. Wells.¹¹

"Vivisection" is clearly inspired by Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896). Given the title clue, the sequence of two goat-monkey-men, "two little creatures, about four feet high, with black faces and curly hair", and the man-horse "about eight foot high" ("The Master") obviously belongs to Moreau's grotesque menagerie of beast folk. Presumably a conflict is to ensue between Professor Langley, the vivisector (who has invited the narrator-diarist to stay with him), and his hybrid creations led by 'The Master'. Clearly, Harris's tale is essentially a pastiche of Wells's.

When Harris first read *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is unknown – perhaps it was shortly before he wrote "Vivisection". However, in a 1968 interview "Talking to John Wyndham," "Pooter" records that "*The Time Machine* will ever remind him of Derbyshire and the prep school where he came on Wells . . ."¹² Harris moved to

Julius Kingsbury and his daughter Letty live in a hotel (the Warlock Hotel) as Harris, his brother, and his mother Gertrude were wont to do following the separation of Gertrude and her husband George Lucas Beynon Harris in 1911); a strong female character is given a take-charge role (the plucky police superintendent's daughter Rose Ivory); the link between madness and religion points to the anti-religious theme in Harris's later work; and the hints at the relevance after all of a supernatural explanation (if only for its atmospheric impact and because the natural explanation, probably required by the series editor, is a bit of a let-down). In answering Moskowitz's question 10 ("When did you first begin writing, even unsuccessfully, and what type of stories did you write?"), Harris recalled that "when I first tried to get stories published (and didn't) they were mostly uncanny or ghostly. (When I did get any encouragement the loony editors of the period always said: 'But of course it needs a rational explanation at the end.' I still don't understand how their minds worked, but anyhow the stories were very poor.)"

As for the evidence that Harris deliberately omitted *The Curse of the Burdens* from his publications record (presumably because he regarded it as inferior hackwork), I would point to the facts that (1) no copy of the book or reference to it can be found in the Wyndham Archive, (2) when directly asked by Moskowitz about his early career efforts and publications (questions 8 and 10), Harris mentions publishing only the 1925 short-shorts, and that (3) Harris begins his Introduction to a slightly revised reissue of *The Secret People* with this sentence: "This, the author's first book-length story, was written thirty years ago, and tentatively labelled: *Sub-Sahara*" (Harris, *The Secret People*, p. 5).

¹¹ For Harris's denigration of American sf, see the six articles by Harris in Works Cited below. In one of them, "Personally Speaking", he is very specific about his sense of the distinction between American sf and the imaginative work of Wells: "It was Verne who fathered the typical science-fiction of the American magazines. What Wells developed was a type of story which was eventually to produce Karel Capek's play *R.U.R.* (and so give the word 'robot' to the world), lead on to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and even, though Shaw would no doubt contest the suggestion hotly, to the last part of *Back to Methuselah*." Harris associated the term "science fiction" with the Vernean model: "Verne's custom was to take a possible or seemingly 'possible' invention and write an adventure story (full of scientific howlers) around it.

Wells usually started from an impossible concept and went on to write, with a scientist's care for detail, a fantasy about it" (p. 10). (Given his admiration for Wells, one might wonder if Harris eventually favoured "Wyndham" as his authorial last name because of the shared initial "W".)

¹² "Pooter" (Alex Hamilton), "Talking to John Wyndham", *The Times Saturday Review* (16 March 1968), p. 23.

Shardlow Hall, a boarding school in Derbyshire, in 1915 and perhaps he first read *Moreau* around the same time he first read *The Time Machine*.¹³

"Vivisection", itself, is the direct seed of a story that Harris published eighteen years later, and dramatically revised and improved seventeen years after that – a story that, in its reconceived form, is one of his most successful and most reprinted. Since 1954, it is mainly known by its third title, "Una".¹⁴ A bibliography of story submissions, publications, and broadcasts in the Wyndham Archive indicates that, in its original form and under its original title, "The Perfect Creature", it was (I think fairly) rejected by the editor of *Amazing Stories* "as too unoriginal". This may have been in 1935 because three archived letters from T. Stanhope Sprigg, editor at the London publisher George Newnes Limited, reveal that on 3 February 1936 Harris submitted "The Perfect Creature" for consideration for an sf magazine that Newnes were projecting and that he, in his self-disparaging way, mentioned the previous American rejection. That magazine never happened. But Harris's friend, the founding editor of *Tales of Wonder* (1937-42) – the first British magazine of its kind – was grateful to have it for that magazine's first issue which was published in June 1937. The below-the-story-title synopsis – "A Scientist Creates Life . . . and Produces a Monster" (p. 116) – indicates the other original source that the editor of *Amazing Stories* was probably thinking of – Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

¹³ Angel-Louis Pujante, *El Mundo de John Wyndham* (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Barcelona, 1972), p.3. Pujante was working on his Master's thesis (and his unpublished doctoral thesis: *Realismo y ciencia-ficción en la obra de John Wyndham*, University of Salamanca, 1980) while Harris's wife Grace and his brother Vivian Beynon Harris were still alive and thus had the opportunity to ask them to correct the original version of his biographical chapter (thus, for example, Vivian supplied the names of five of the seven schools his brother attended). I am most grateful to A. Luis Pujante for supplying me with photocopies of Grace's and Vivian's responses. In the sentence immediately preceding the two paragraphs quoted from Harris's autobiographical statement in note 9 above, he affirms that he "Still has a great affection for 'The Time Machine', and still thinks of the white marble sphinx from that story as standing on his prep school lawn."

In answer to Moskowitz's question number 4 about the "Nature of your schooling" (see note 10 above), Harris responded, "I attended 7 in all. Loathed Nos. 4 & 6, tolerated No. 5, enjoyed No. 7 very much (age 15 to 18). No. 6 was Blundell's and No. 7 was Bedales. In his MA thesis Pujante lists two day-schools - Miss [Mabel] Woodward's Private School (which I have determined was located at 16 Harbome Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, from 1907-1911), and Edgbaston High School for Boys (located at Hallfield, Sir Harry's Road; since 1936 located at 48 Church Road, Edgbaston, and renamed the still Hallfield School; Vivian refers to it as Ridgway's Private School" after the 1889-1917 headmaster William John Patnck Ridgway) – and the preparatory boarding school, Shardlow Hall (which was in Shardlow, Derbyshire, and for which Pujante supplies the 1915 date) where Harris read *The Time Machine*. Loathed school no. 4, described but not named in Vivian's handwritten memoir of his brother (in the Vivian Beynon Harris Archive, the Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool), was Edgbaston High School for Boys (cf. corrections in note 14 below). To make the total of seven schools, I assume that Harris also attended two other, yet-to-be-identified day-schools in Edgbaston, Birmingham. If any readers can supply the missing information, I would be most grateful.

¹⁴ I am grateful to the Wyndham expert, Dr. Kenneth Smith of Regents College, London, for informing me on 7 April 1999 that "Vivisection" reminded him of a published Wyndham story, whose title he could not recall.

"The Perfect Creature" by "John Beynon" comes in five sections. In the first, "The Human Turtles", we learn of the background to "the Dixon affair" in "the village of Membury" (p. 116). The same opening phrases appear on p. 117 of "Una", the 1954 *Jizzle* reprint of the improved version which first appeared (as originally titled) in the January 1953 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Twice as long, better written and realised, funnier, and much more original than the 1937 version, the 1953 text drops the section headings, but it is convenient to treat the two versions together up until the point of Harris's dramatic alteration. Because creatures that look like upright turtles with human arms and legs (much like the recent Teenage-Mutant-Ninja-Turtles of comic-strip, tv and film) have been spotted in Membury and traced to Membury Grant, the home of Doctor Dixon (where Bill, the village poacher,¹⁵ has espied cages and "something" on a table in the newly-added wing), the unnamed narrator and animal-lover Albert Weston, district "investigators – or inspectors, as they call them –" (p. 116) for the SSMA (Society for the Suppression of the Maltreatment of Animals) call on Dixon, who turns out to be the narrator's old biology teacher (a nod to the Bedales origin of this story) who has inherited a fortune.

In the second section, "Alfred's Theory", Alfred announces it as follows: "We have to deal with a super

¹⁵ In the 1953 revision, Bill is provided with a surname - Parsons. This means that in the 1937 story there are two last names ending in "on" – Dixon and Weston – and that in the 1953 story there are three last names - surely a very high proportion – containing the syllable "on". There are, in fact, rather a lot of surnames in Harris's work which end with "on" or include "on". Particularly notable are Josella Playton in *The Day of the Triffids* Mike and Phyllis Watson in *The Kraken Wakes*, and Rosalind Morton in *The Chrysalids*. Since all of the women here named – all love interests – are based on the schoolteacher, Grace Wilson, with whom Harris began a relationship in 1935 and whom he eventually married in 1963, it seems reasonable to assume that the "on" amounts to a covert allusion to her surname. But that would not account so well for the fictional male surnames which include the "on" syllable. What I believe is being signalled is the overlap of Beynon and Wilson, a fictional/lexical acknowledgement of the reality that Harris and Grace had a genuine bond in spite of the increasingly odd fact that they were not married – they were soul mates, born for each other. And perhaps they were even genuinely related as cousins? This fantasy overlay is reflected in the cousins' relationship between Johnny Farthing and Freda Darl in Harris unpublished 1948 novel PLAN FOR CHAOS, and in the cousins relationship between David Storm and Rosalind Morton in *The Chrysalids* (see. Ketterer, PLAN FOR CHAOS/FURY OF CREATION: An Unpublished Science Fiction Thriller by John Beynon/John Lucas (aka John Wyndham), *Foundation*, 74 (Autumn 1998), pp. 8-25, at pp. 13, 22, 25). Harris's father, George Beynon Harris, separated from his mother Gertrude in 1911 when Harris was eight. This father (at the back of the unknown, absent or alien fathers in Harris's work), born in South Wales at Port Eynon (hence "Beynon" – from Eynon or son of Eynon) and with a "dark" Welsh life preceding his mid-life move to Birmingham and marriage to Gertrude Parkes, essentially disappeared from Harris's life and became a figure of mystery. And hence Harris's fantasy that he and Grace might be related via some unidentified relative in his father's side. The shared syllable "on" signified that idealized "true relationship and the true love that Harris and Grace also shared. For more biographical information about Hams - a rare commodity - see Vivian Beynon Harris's memoir "[My Brother,] John Wyndham (edited by David Ketterer, *Foundation*, 75 (Spring 1999), pp. 5-52) and my essays on *Chocky* ("John Wyndham and 'the Searing Anguish of Childhood': From 'Fairy Story' to *Chocky*", *Extrapolation* 41 (Summer 2000), pp. 85-101) and *The Midwich Cuckoos* (cited in no., 5, above). (The identification of the *real* cousin with whom Harris was "in love" before he met Grace – reflected in the relationship between cousins Derek and Phillida in *Foul Play Suspected* – must await the publication of my in-progress essay, John (Wyndham) Beynon's Case for Rape in *Stowaway to Mars*.)"

vivisectionist" (p. 119). In 1953 he makes a similar pronouncement with a preliminary "I think . . . !" (p. 122). The narrator thinks that Alfred's imagination has been overstimulated by reading Wells's *Island of Doctor Moreau*. You expect to go to the Grange and be greeted by a horse walking on its hind legs and talking about the weather (p. 120; cf. p. 123).

This conjures an image that harks back to the last sentence of "Vivisection". Alfred "had become so full of the 'wanton torturing of our dumb friends' by 'the fiendish wielders of the knife' and the 'shuddering cries of a million quivering victims ascending to high heaven', that there was no holding him" (p. 120; cf. p. 124). The narrator assures Alfred that "this gentleman is Professor Dixon and not Doctor Moreau" (p. 121; cf. p. 127). Alfred, however, is adamant: "I call it vivisection – vivisection" (p. 121; cf. p. 127).

In the third section, "The Professor's Claim", Dixon explains that he has not distorted living forms: "I have *built* them" (p. 122; cf. p. 128). He has found "the life force" (p. 122; cf. p. 129); in 1953 this becomes a secret method of animating a different kind of life. He has created the parts out of a synthetic material. He does not deal with dead or living bodies; he is *not* a vivisectionist. The term is not used but he is actually a creator of cyborgs. In the fourth section, "The Demonstration", Dixon explains his decision to build "the perfect creature, or as near to that as one's finite mind can conceive" (p. 123; cf. p. 131). "I call him Number One [. . .] the first of his kind" (p. 124). It is at this point that the 1953 text diverges sharply from that of 1937: "I call her Una (. . .) the first of her kind" (p. 134). His 1953 construction is female. However, she looks much the same as Number One: "a sharply conical carapace, six feet high, poised upon three short cylindrical supports" (p. 125; cf. p. 135 - "sharply" is replaced by "dark" to exchange a phallic suggestion to a vaginal one). They both have all-round vision thanks to three eyes, and four arms "half way up" (p. 125; cf. p. 135) – the upper two are delicate, the lower muscular. Number One weighs "between six and seven hundred pounds" (p. 126); Una, however, weighs "over one ton" (p. 137). To justify the three legs, Dixon explains that "The tripod is an efficient support adaptable to any kind of ground" (p. 126; cf. p. 137).

In the last section, "End of the Monster", Dixon, exasperated by Alfred's continuing accusations, unlocks Number One's cage after pointing out that "Number One is carnivorous and does not mind his food raw" (p. 126). Chased by Number One, Alfred heads for the river because he figures that the monster, never having seen or experienced water will assume that it can support his weight. So the story ends with Number One (and Dixon) in the river while Alfred swims to shore where he poses this question. "I suppose there's no chance that he gave the dammed thing gills, is there?" (p. 127).

The 1937 story is clichéd, gimmicky, somewhat humorous, and novel only in Harris's departure from Frankenstein's and Moreau's recourse to dead or living flesh and bone. In 1953, by making the monster female and having her fall immediately and madly in love with Alfred, Harris adds wholly new dimensions of human

interest and humour. To read "Vivisection", the 1937 "Perfect Creature", and the 1953 "Perfect Creature" / "Una" in sequence is to appreciate the evolving spurts whereby Harris's talent developed.

After introducing Una in the 1953 version, which is bylined "John Wyndham", the creature speaks: "That one will do. I like his glass eyes" (p. 135). Dixon explains that he has "promised her a mate" (p. 138) after warning the two inspectors about her "somewhat short temper" (p. 135). Una tries to grab Alfred: "Give him to me! I want him!" (p. 139). Dixon wonders, "could I have overdone the hormones a bit?" (p. 140). Clearly, at this point two further intertexts are relevant: *King Kong* and *The Little Shop of Horrors*. The party retreats as Una goes berserk and breaks out of her cage. She grabs Alfred and flees with him to a bridge crossing a river. But the bridge gives way under Una's immense weight, and once again Alfred is able to swim to safety. However, Alfred now intends to change his profession: "he now finds it difficult to look a cow, or indeed, any female animal, in the eye without a bias that tends to impair his Judgement" (p. 147).

There is a logical, next-step relationship between *Moreau*, "Vivisection", and "The Perfect Creature" on the one hand, and Harris's best known novel, *The Day of the Triffids*, on the other. *Moreau*, "Vivisection", and "The Perfect Creature" combine the human and the animal; the triffid conception might be said, in at least one respect, to combine the human and/or animal with the vegetable. Triffids are plants with "legs" - three legs, like the tripods Number One and Una. Unlike any known form of vegetable life, they are ambulatory. It is because of their three "leg" roots that they are called "triffids". And as originally and finally imagined, these triffids are not Venusian plants but the product of Russian genetic engineering.¹⁶

Harris's early career as an sf writer – a quasi-American sf writer – was inspired in 1930 by his coming upon the American pulp magazine *Wonder Stories* in the lounge of the Penn Club, a London Quaker-based residence, then in Tavistock Square, where (with a war-time interval) Harris lived from 1925 to 1963.¹⁷ Over the next twenty years while Harris wrote mainly for the American magazines, and in the "Wyndham" years that followed, he elaborated his distinction between the various varieties of American sf and the "logical fantasies" of H.G. Wells. Wells's mode he believed to be preferable on both aesthetic and commercial grounds. He realised that, if he could take up and develop the form that Wells had abandoned, there was the possibility of a much wider audience than the readership of the American pulp magazines. In 1951 *The Day of the Triffids* proved him correct. But "Vivisection" is evidence that, in emulating Wells, he was also returning to the mode of what seems

to have been his modest first publishing success.

"Vivisection" combines Wellsian sf with Wellsian and non-Wellsian horror. The way in which the diarist's apprehensions are aroused during his train journey to Dartmoor by his conversation with an apparent "inhabitant of these parts" suggests the influence of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Nevertheless, the "J.W.B. Harris" who is credited as the story's author is a clear avatar of the later "John Wyndham". The Wyndham style – urbane, civilised, wryly humorous – is immediately recognisable. The feigning of documentary realism, of course, characterises the sf of Wyndham as much as that of Wells. Harris seems not that different a personality from the narrators and leading characters of his major novels, and the diarist of "Vivisection" seems pretty much a grown-up version of the sixteen-year-old Harris. Harris did not gain an Oxford BA but he did study law with an Oxford tutor.¹⁸

How might Harris's career have developed had he directly continued with the Wellsian mode of "Vivisection"? It's impossible to say. But as things turned out, Harris was able to combine the motifs and plotting techniques he learned from his American apprenticeship with the Wellsian model and so claim the originality of providing essential bridges not only between British and American sf but between the British "scientific romance" and the many varieties of "science fiction" which followed.¹⁹ Harris became more than just a superior Wells clone; he became his own man, "John Wyndham", with a voice and vision of his own.²⁰ In all probability, then, we can be glad that whatever ambitions might have been associated with his early Wellsian mimicry were aborted, just as "Vivisection" itself is cut short. What we have is only "Part I". There are no succeeding parts in the six succeeding issue of *The Bee*. Whether or not Harris wrote a succeeding part, or succeeding parts, I do not know.²¹

¹⁸ Moskowitz, op. cit., p. 119.

¹⁹ Leslie Flood, Harris's friend and a specialist dealer in fantasy (one-time owner of the Fantasy Book Centre in Bloomsbury), points to the American debt with regard to *The Day of the Triffids*: "by utilizing a couple of unoriginal ideas with his Gernsback-trained attention to logically based explanatory detail and realistic background, together with his new [post-war] strongly developed narrative style, 'The Day of the Triffids' became one of the classics of modern speculative fiction, surviving even a mediocre movie treatment": "Introduction" to *The Best of John Wyndham*, ed. Angus Wells (London: Sphere, 1973), pp. 7-11, at pp.9-10.

²⁰ I speculate in the concluding "Wyndham and the Winds of Change" section of my essay on *The Midwich Cuckoos* that "wind" references in much of "Wyndham's" work constitute a signature cryptogram. The one such reference in "Vivisection" might be regarded as prefiguring this development: "The wind rustled in the tree-tops and alone broke the silence."

²¹ I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a 1997-2000 Research Grant which has covered the expenses related to my Wyndham investigations.

¹⁶ See P. Schuyler Miller (guest reviewer), "The Reference Library: Surveying British Science Fiction", *Astounding Science Fiction* (February 1954), pp. 104-13, and Stephensen-Payne, op. cit., p. 35).

¹⁷ In 1938 the Penn Club moved to its present location, 21 Bedford Place, near the British Museum: David C. Maxwell, *The Penn Club Story: A Celebration of the First 75 years of an Independent Quaker-based Club in Central London* (London: The Penn Club, 1996), pp. 19-20.

Vivisection

PART I.: being the diary of EDWIN LUNST, Esq., B.A.,
OXON,

October 3rd.

I spoke to-day with Professor Langley upon the possibilities of Vivisection; but from remarks he made, I do not think he knows much of it. His ideas are too wild to be practical. However, he has asked me to stay with him at his house, in a wild part of Dartmoor, and offer him advice on his work.

October 5th, 10 p.m.

I arrived here after an interesting journey in the train from London. I entered into conversation with a man, whom it appears is an inhabitant of these parts. I mentioned that I was coming here, and he regarded me with a most peculiar look, as if I had committed a sin in doing so. My host received me very graciously; I have a comfortable room and have retired to bed early, being tired after my journey.

October 6th, 7 a.m.

I couldn't sleep well last night because of the yells and cries of animals; not plain, ordinary animals such as one hears at the Zoo, but mixed; there was one which sounded like a combination of a lion's roar and the bellowing of a bull and other curious noises. Suddenly arose a most frightful scream of pain, the sound of a tortured soul. The wind rustled in the tree-tops and alone broke the silence. I rushed upon the landing; all was dark; but it was not so silent now; in the distance I could hear the trot of a pony, in the house. Nearer and nearer it came, until it began to ascend the stairs, but now I found the switch of the light and pressed it; I saw before me not a pony, but two beings with the hindquarters of a goat, and the top part bearing a strong resemblance to a man. They stood upright and glared at me, with their chins kept well in and their small pointed beards against their chests. One stretched forth a misshapen hand, like a monkey's, towards me; instinctively I turned off the light and tearing into my room, locked the door.

I lay shivering from fright, in my bed, listening for any sound of movement from the monsters outside, but I heard none, and composed myself, as best I could, for sleep. Once I heard a faint cry, but nothing else, and the rest of the night passed quietly.

10p.m.

Who was ever in such a state? I feel as if I was living in a Chamber of horrors. Of all strange places I was ever in, this is undoubtedly the strangest. As I came down this morning, I was confronted by a man-servant, who conducted me to the breakfast-room, where an excellent meal was laid out for me.

Half way through, I suddenly remembered that I had left lying upon my dressing table, my watch and a case containing notes to the value of forty pounds. Not being willing to risk their safety in such a strange house, I

rushed to my bedroom, burst in and stood amazed at what I saw; for making the bed, were not ordinary English housemaids, but two little creatures about four feet high, with black faces and curly hair; they each wore a light blue garment, which hung right from their shoulders to the ground at their feet. They moved with short, stumpy motions and conversed in peculiarly throaty accents and, though I could not quite distinguish what they said, it sounded vaguely like English.

Returning downstairs, I finished my breakfast, and took up my paper. When I had been reading for some little time the man-servant came in to clear the table and brought a note from Professor Langley, whom it appeared, was very busy, and asked me to entertain myself as I liked.

There is a beautiful garden, laid out in an old-fashioned style with a walled garden, about two hundred yards square.

As I walked over the velvety lawn, I thought I saw somebody or something move in the bordering trees, and advanced to investigate.

Out of the trees came a most ridiculous figure. It was about eight feet high and had very short legs in comparison with its body, on its head was an old straw hat, and its raiment consisted solely of an overall. "Hallo!" remarked this apparition in a peculiar voice, "what do you want?" To say I was scared, is to put it mildly. So dumbfounded was I that I could not say a word. The creature advanced, "Can you not speak?" it demanded, slowly; whereat I said, "Who are you, and where do you live? For thought I, surely this is some lunatic, some freak of nature; but it merely said, "The Master," and turning, it ambled off through the trees.

I stared after it and then at the ground before me. I wondered what size its feet were, to be in proportion with the rest of its body, it must take at least. . . .

The prints upon the ground were those of horses hooves; no others were visible.

J. W. B. HARRIS.

Works by John Beynon Harris Cited Above

The Curse of the Burdens. By John B. Harris. Aldine Mystery Novels No. 17. Pulp paper cover coloured illustration by Bert Wardle. London: The Aldine Publishing Company, Ltd., 1927. New attribution.

The Day of the Triffids. By John Wyndham. London: Michael Joseph, 1951. Reprinted regularly by Penguin Books since 1954.

"Guest Editorial: The Pattern of Science Fiction". By John Wyndham. *Science-Fantasy* 3 (Spring 1954), pp.2-4.

"Has Science Fiction a Future?" By John Wyndham. *Radio Times* 182 (30 January 1969), pp. 27-28.

"The Perfect Creature". By John Beynon. *Tales of Wonder*, 1 (June 1937). Revised and extended as "Perfect Creature" by John Wyndham, *Fantasy and Science Fiction* (January 1953); reprinted as "Female of the Species" by John Wyndham, *Argosy* (October 1953); reprinted as by John Wyndham in *Shadow of Tomorrow*, ed. Frederik Pohl (New York: Doubleday, 1953); reprinted as "Una" by John Wyndham in John Wyndham, *Jizzle* (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1954), pp. 117-47, in John Wyndham, *Tales of Gooseflesh and Laughter* (New York: Ballantine, 1956), and in *Best SF 2*, ed. Edmund Crispin (London: Faber & Faber, 1956.; and reprinted as "The Perfect Creature" by John Wyndham in *The Best of John Wyndham*, ed. Angus Wells (London: Sphere, 1973), pp. 70-89, re-issued and reprinted as *The Man From Beyond and Other Stories* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), pp. 60-86.

"Personally Speaking". By John Wyndham. *News of the World* (18 September 1966), p. 10.

"Science Fiction: The Facts". By John Wyndham. *TV Times*, no. 347 (22 June 1962), p. 11.

The Secret People. By John Beynon Harris (with an Introduction by John Wyndham). Revised reissue. 1935; New York: Lancer Books, 1964.

"Vivisection". By J. W. B. Harris. *The Bee: An Independent Journal of Art, Literature, Politics, Science and Music* I (November 1919), pp. 29-30. The eight issues of this journal (July 1919-December 1920), "Produced by Members of Bedales School" and edited by Rolf Gardiner and Stephen Bone, were collected as a single volume printed by The Morland Press Ltd., 190 Ebury Street, London SW1.

"Why Blame Wells?" By John Beynon. *Fantasy Review* 2 (December 1948-January 1949), pp. 14-15.

"Why This Cosmic Wild West Stuff?" *The British Scientifiction Fantasy Review* I (April 1937), pp. 11-12.