Katarzyna Pisarska

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Reversed Food Chains:

Humanity, Monstrosity and an Evolutionary Utopia in Colin Wilson's *Spider World* Novels

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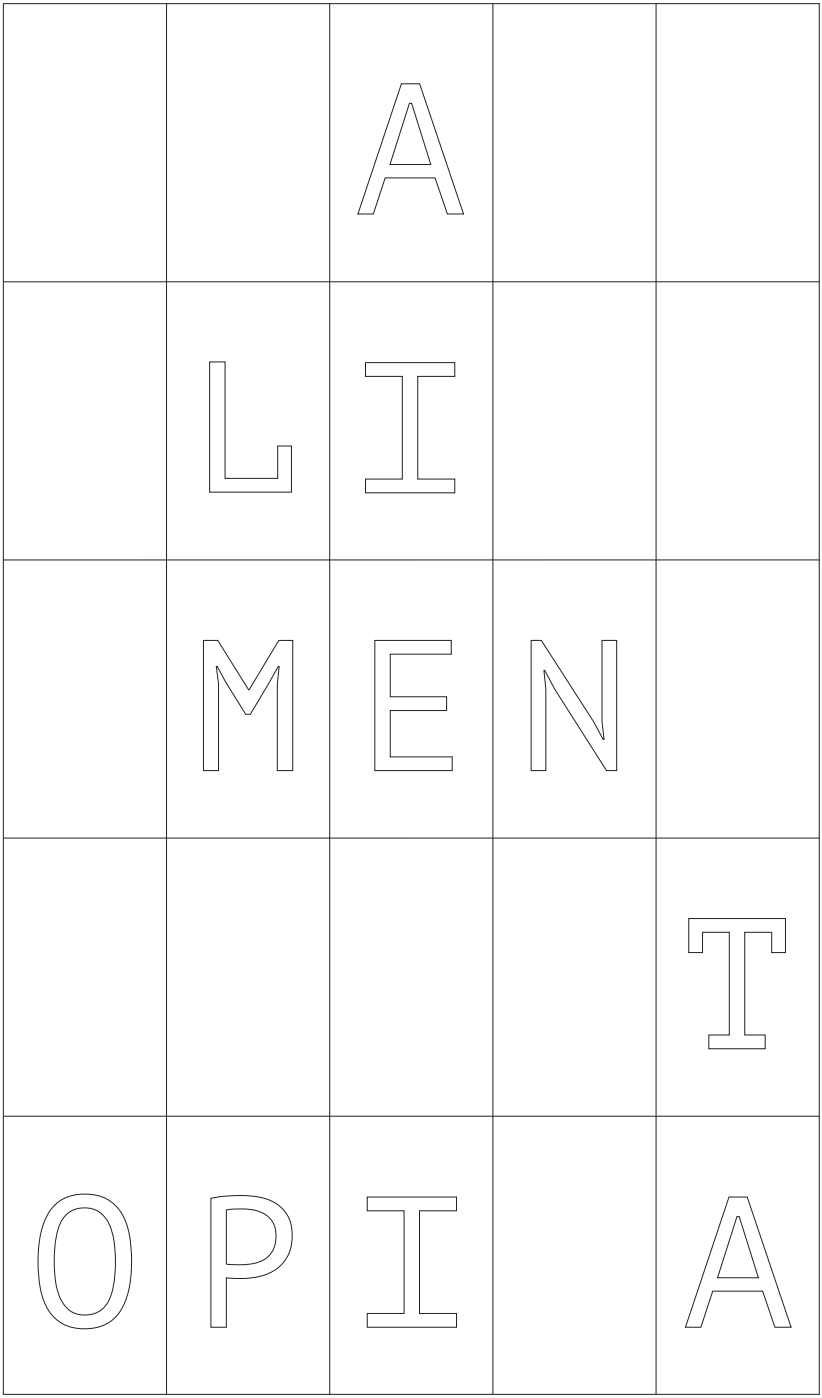
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Autor: Katarzyna Pisarska
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Série Alimentopia

Societies evolve towards the questions they ask. The ALIMENTOPIA project was built upon a set of questions that call for both a critical approach to societies and the imagination of the way these may evolve, from the point of view of food. The *Série ALIMENTOPIA*, published by U.Porto Press as part of *Coleção Transversal*, aims to contribute to the creation of a history of literature and culture focused on how societies produce, distribute and prepare food, taking into account, for the critical reflection on the present and the future, indicators of inclusion, development, and sustainability, at different levels.

The Project *ALIMENTOPIA / Utopia, Food and Future: Utopian Thinking and the Construction of Inclusive Societies – A Contribution of the Humanities*, funded by National Funds through the FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology, and by FEDER Funds through the Operational Programme: Competitiveness Factors – COMPETE 2020 (PTDC/CPC-ELT/5676/2014 | POCI-01-0145-FEDER-016680), brought together 27 researchers from different fields of knowledge (Literature, Culture, Philosophy, Anthropology, Linguistics, Nutrition Sciences, and Psychiatry) who invested in a multidisciplinary study that proved the relevance of the intersection of the field of Utopian Studies with the field of Food Studies.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Colin Wilson (1931-2013), philosopher, novelist and an "Angry Young Man" of British literature, is best known for his works on true crime, mystery and the paranormal. He is also the author of several science fiction novels, among them the cycle *Spider World*, written over the span of sixteen years (*The Tower* [1987], *The Delta* [1987], *The Magician* [1992], *Shadowland* [2003]. Set in a distant future, the cycle begins as a post-apocalyptic vision of Earth governed by giant spiders where surviving humans are hunted, eaten or forced into slavery, and those who are allowed to live are subject to selective breeding and all forms of social surveillance. The novels follow the vicissitudes of Niall, a young boy who sets out to defeat the spiders but turns into an advocate of an inter-species alliance, becoming in the end the ruler of both humans and spiders.

The four novels that comprise *Spider World* integrate into a fictional form the philosophical ideas that Wilson developed over the course of his life and expounded in his numerous publications (see Lachman 2016: 246). Concepts such as the Outsider, evolutionary consciousness, will and receptivity, self-actualisation, Faculty X, the bicameral mind, and the imagination understood as the intentionality of perception are creatively reworked here in the *Bildung* and adventure narrative which maps out the protagonist's transcendence of his initial physical and psychological limitations. But *Spider World* is also an evolutionary tale which toys with Darwin's ideas of natural selection, adaptation and the surviv-

al of the fittest. Its monsters *par excellence* – giant arthropods – look back to the old Victorian fears of the biological devolution and moral decline of man, as the novelistic cycle calls into question our claim to superiority over other species and undermines the stability of such concepts as human, animal and person.

This study analyses the manner in which the novels that make up *Spider World* challenge such popular notions and what it means to be sentient/intelligent, moral and human, humanitarian and monstrous, through the depiction of a world in which evolution and adaptation have dictated a radical shift in the natural hierarchy. This shift is emphatically represented through the reversal of a worldview that conventionally places humans at the top of the food chain. The present study accordingly examines the utopian (both eutopian and dystopian) ramifications of the evolutionary shift mentioned above, locating this discussion in the larger context of consumption and alimentary practices. Furthermore, by juxtaposing the Darwinian outlook with the idea of creative evolution, which Wilson advocated and expanded in his philosophical writings, the study aims to reassess the concept of the posthuman in the light of psychological rather than technological progress.

2. Reversed Hierarchies and (D)evolutionary Futures

The events presented in the *Spider World* series take place four hundred years after the passing of the comet Opik, whose tail of radioactive debris hit Earth and decimated its human and animal population. The apocalyptic event, which caused a severe impact winter, resulted in the destruction of human civilisation and its regression into barbarity. It simultaneously spurred – or so it is initially believed – the evolutionary ascent of the arthropods, namely spiders and insects, which reached enormous proportions, developed sentience and intelligence, and took over the place of humans at the top of the species hierarchy. In the event deceptively similar to the fall of the asteroid which brought about the mass extinction of animal and plant life sixty-six million years ago (the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event), humans, like dinosaurs, lost their privileged position as supreme animals.

Once complacent and comfortable at the top of the food chain, oblivious of the struggle for survival which takes place in nature under their feet, humans are now in its very middle, observing it from close-up and caught in its dynamics. They are conscious participants of natural processes according to which various species kill and devour one another: giant crickets are eaten by giant saga insects, giant pepsis wasps lay their eggs in the bellies of desert spiders, which are then eaten from the inside by wasp grubs. We are constantly reminded of the reversed evolutionary hierarchy, as the overdeveloped arthropods bring the smaller

vertebrates, and humans among them, to a lower level, in spatial as much as in alimentary terms. Free humans have to live under the floor of the desert "like insects" (*T* 12)[1] and they can easily turn into food for once insignificant creatures which have become man-eating predators, such as scorpions, tiger beetles, millipedes, striped scarabs and sagas, but, most of all, the death spiders in their flying balloons, who scour the desert for human prey to be paralysed by their superior will and carried away to the spider city across the sea. The protagonist learns from his grandfather Jomar that the spiders consider human flesh "the supreme delicacy" (*T* 15).

In the desert, human flesh, just as any creature's, serves as food even after being buried, which happens in the case of Jomar. His body is interred deep to keep it safe from insects; however, the following day Niall discovers that the grave has been penetrated by scarabs, which makes him reflect: "In the desert, food was seldom allowed to waste" (*T* 174). However, it is not only dead but also living bodies which can fall prey to such a voracious assault. During their trek across the desert to the underground human city of Dira, Niall, his father and his aunt Ingeld are almost overcome in sleep by bore worms, one-foot-long caterpillar-like creatures which enter the human body through the mouth and feed off the intestines (*T* 124-125).

Freedom from spiders and their predatory and eugenic practices, which will be analysed later in this study, involves hardship. In the first volume of the tetralogy, Niall notes in a truly Darwinian fashion that the life of humans living in the desert resembles that of "most animals under natural conditions, [being] a continuous search for food" (*T* 89). Humanity, scattered in their underground dwellings, struggles for resources, never being able to "live much above starvation level" (*T* 30)[2]. Pushed back in their civilisational progress, humans resort to primitive weapons and methods of water collection, hunting and food gathering. After Niall's family moves into a tiger beetle's burrow at the edge of the desert (having first forcefully "evicted" its previous owner), it becomes easier to find means of subsistence. In comparison with the real desert, the shrub-stepped land close to their new home is "like the Garden of Eden", full of edible fruit, tuber-like roots, hares, suricates, birds and desert locusts (*T* 31)[3]. It is also more dangerous: spider patrols fly more often over these parts, knowing that the "abundance" of food offers a temptation to the free humans living nearby. However, even this new plenitude seems insignificant when compared to the riches of the forest – fruit, game and especially water[4] – in the north country where Niall ventures with his brother Veig and cousin Hrolf:

> To Niall, it seemed incredible that Nature could be so wasteful of such a precious commodity. In the desert, a few drops of water could mean the difference between life and death; so could a single cactus fruit or a sand rodent. This superabundance was intoxicating, but also somehow alarming. (*T* 63)

The three desert dwellers are completely unfamiliar with the edible plants of the forest. After a series of unsuccessful attempts, they decide to trust the feeding instincts of the big forest ants: in this way, they can be certain that the food is not only tasty but also safe to eat (*T* 64, 72). The abundance of food eliminates the species' potential hostility towards one another; the ants are aware of the three men watching them but see no point in attacking the strangers (*T* 65). The colony displays an amazing versatility of feeding habits. Despite their fondness for sweet fruit such as melon, the ants are by no means peaceful vegetarians, as Veig and Hrolf initially speculate. They are carnivores and hunters, which the men soon learn when they see a huge grasshopper being dragged by one of them to the burrow. The ants are also part of the system of protocooperation: they stimulate aphids to produce honeydew (*T* 67), which the three humans eagerly imitate: "As desert dwellers, they found nothing repellent in the notion of eating the product of a green fly's digestive system. They had often eaten far less appetising things" (*T* 67). Last but not least, the ants share the nectar collected from flowers with other ants from the same anthill, extracting the food from their

own bellies. The instinct of mutual help is taken advantage of by hungry impostors like highwaymen beetles which trick the ants into sharing food with them as if they belonged to the ant community. This gives Veig an idea that the ants could be somehow taken home and persuaded to share their food with the members of his family (*T* 68).

Accordingly, the forest ants which grow out of the larvae that Veig steals from a nest in the forest prove useful: they dig down to the watershelf underneath the desert. As a consequence, Niall's family always have water in their burrow. Moreover, the ants possess an extraordinary instinct for food and always bring something home in the upper parts of their bodies, which form natural storage tanks. As anticipated by Veig, they share their findings with the human family as if they were part of their own species, regurgitating the contents of their "larders" (*T* 88-89). Everyday nutrition becomes ever easier for Niall's family when Veig domesticates a pepsis wasp hatched inside a desert spider, which he uses for hunting birds. Its venom, when not injected but eaten, is harmless: it tenderises the flesh of birds, making it delicious (*T* 47). In this way, the domesticated insects contribute to the improvement of the family's diet[5] and to their alimentary security:

> Ever since he was a baby, Niall had become accustomed to a permanent feeling of hunger. Now, with the ants and the pepsis wasp to do their foraging and hunting, they had almost forgotten what hunger was like. From force of habit, they still spent part of each day in the search for food; but it no longer made any difference if they found nothing. (*T* 90)

The aforementioned security takes the family's feeding and as a result also social practices to a different level. Once their immediate need for sustenance is satisfied, they can produce foods that would otherwise be luxurious or wasteful, as happens, for example, with an alcoholic drink made of fermented fruit. Once too exhausted after the whole day of hunting or too hungry to waste their energies on talk, the family can now enjoy their evenings of conviviality, with the men drinking and remembering their hunting expeditions as well as telling legends of the human heroes of old (*T* 90-91). In this way, on the example of the family unit, Wilson shows not only the beginnings of human civilisation, which was spurred by the domestication of animals, among other factors, but also the concept of the hierarchy of needs proposed by Abraham Maslow, who greatly influenced Wilson, and according to whom the more basic needs (e.g. food, shelter, safety/security) have to be satisfied before the satisfaction of higher needs (intimacy, self-esteem, self-actualisation) becomes possible (see Maslow 1943 and Maslow 1970: 35-58).

The above-mentioned variety of food and sociability that we observe in Niall's family unit is presented in even greater proportions in the case of the underground kingdom of Dira, the home city of Niall's mother, Siris, which the young man visits when he is sixteen years old. The presentation of Dira is informed with the Darwinian thesis that the species flourish with the abundance of food and relative lack of danger (see Darwin 2008: 52-56). Already on his first meeting with the Dirans, Niall notices that the men look much bigger and stronger than the men of his own family, apparently as a result of a better diet. His peer Massig is about six inches taller and of a more powerful build, as are many boys who are younger than Niall (*T* 128, 143-144)[6]. It is at a royal feast that Niall can see the astounding abundance of food in Dira, realising that most of the dishes are unfamiliar to him:

> Jomar had told him about fish, but he had never tasted any; now he ate three different varieties, caught in the river that ran into the salt lake. There was also a great deal of meat, most of it heavily salted. (Kazak spoke with pride of their food store, which – he claimed – was so large that they could sustain a six-month siege.) Niall was particularly delighted with a tiny mouse, hardly bigger than the tip of his finger, which was skinned and roasted with some kind of seed; he ate a whole bowlful to himself. The drink was either honeydew diluted with water or fermented fruit juice. (*T* 135-136)

Food security results not only in the physical development of the population but also in Dira's civilisational progress, from community to society, with the development of various crafts (weaving, shoemaking, metalwork) and animal husbandry such as the farming of aphids for honeydew and of grey spiders for silk (*T* 133-134). The Dirans have mastered the use of various tools – metal axe-heads, saws, hammers and pincers which they found in ancient human cities (*T* 134-135), and they have invented a water clock – a bucket of water with a hole in the bottom which takes half a day to empty (*T* 139). They also make use of mineral oil to light the many corridors, halls and chambers of the city (*T* 135), and they have large wells in the lower levels, thanks to which they never lack water for drinking and washing, let alone for the general sanitation system, with dung beetles treating the human waste (*T* 133). The development of the practical side of life in Dira is accompanied by the development of the arts, music and poetry, which can be seen at the feast of King Kazak attended by Niall, when the Dirans sing love songs, laments and ballads, and recite heroic poems (*T* 137-138).

The general welfare, however, comes at a price – total subjection to the will of the king, an alpha male who treats the women of Dira as his private harem, irrespective of their marital status (see *M* 34). As prince Hamna says: "They have husbands, of course. But they are also the king's property – just as we all are. He can choose anyone he likes" (*T* 142). The large number of sexual partners, as happens in nature to the strongest males, guarantees Kazak's reproductive success: at one point Niall learns that the king has about fifty children with different women, which testifies to the Darwinian view that the species' fertility ensures its survival (Darwin 2008: 56; see Claeys 2019: 170).

The habit of obeying authority without questioning and the satisfaction of all needs also appear to be responsible for the Dirans' submissiveness, complacency and easy adjustment to servitude, which are clearly demonstrated by their acceptance of life as servants of the spiders after Dira has been overrun and its surviving citizens taken to the city of the Spider Lord[7]. When Niall and his family are themselves captured by the

spiders and transported overseas, they meet Massig, Niall's friend from Dira, who is now a charioteer satisfied with his lot. When asked by Veig about the possibility of escaping from the spider city, Massig is horrified at the prospect. Even though the spiders eat humans (including many in Dira during the attack), separate husbands from wives and mothers from children, and use repressive measures to illicit absolute obedience (*T* 236-237), Massig argues that life among the spiders is ultimately not so bad:

> At least we get plenty of sunlight. In Dira, we were lucky if we saw the outside world once a month. And the food here is quite good – they like to keep you well fed. And we're allowed to play games every Saturday afternoon. We can apply to change jobs once a year – I'm going to try to be a sailor next year. And of course we retire at forty. […] We don't have to work any more. Instead, we go to the great happy land. (*T* 238)

Massig's excitement about his new life seems understandable given the fact that life in Dira was "a matter of repetition, of *habit*". It was "pleasant and safe", as Niall realised during his visit there, but also "predictable". While Niall enjoyed unhampered mobility living in the burrow and he could explore the whole wide world of the desert and beyond, the Dirans, locked in their underground hideout, could spend their whole lives without ever experiencing "the excitement of discovery" (*T* 150). One of the boys in Dira, Eirek, tells Niall: "Here there's nothing much to do except eat" (*T* 144), highlighting the fact that food in Dira, lavish and abundant, is part of the stifling habit and routine. The Dirans must be saved from boredom by remaining "in a perpetual ferment of activity, like an ants' nest", producing silk and cotton, working in stone, and the like, even if their work does not serve any pressing need (*T* 134). No wonder Massig is satisfied with his lot even if it amounts to slavery: he lives on the surface, eats well, works hard in stressful conditions but is entitled to well-deserved leisure; he can also count on a job rotation as a way of realising personal ambitions.

The acquiescence demonstrated by Massig (who, like most humans in the spider city, does not know that the great happy land means slaughterhouse) is here contrasted with the defiance of the spiders' authority on the part of Niall, and his efforts to find the way of defeating the enemy and restoring humanity to its former domination. Niall is a product of a lifestyle in which few things were habitual and most of them involved adaptation to an ever-changing situation. As opposed to Massig and his countrymen, Niall's intellectual and moral strength was shaped in response to the challenge posed by the difficult circumstances in which he grew up – constant danger and scarcity of resources. This gave him an opportunity to "escape from [him]self, to change and develop" (*T* 150), which reflects Wilson's critique of Darwin's view that hardship functions as an eliminating factor (Wilson 1957: 117). At this stage, however, Niall's attitude towards the spiders follows the Darwinian creed of a struggle for existence. He believes that the survival of humankind can only be ensured at the cost of the annihilation of the enemy species and men's reclaiming of their due evolutionary status and living space.

3. A Utopia of Human Perfection and Productivity

On his return journey from Dira Niall kills a death spider whose balloon was wrecked in a sand storm. In consequence, his home is overrun, his father killed, and he, his mother, elder brother and two younger sisters are taken prisoners and transported to the spider city across the ocean[8]. There Niall can see with his own eyes the totalitarian machine based on selective breeding and social conditioning devised by the new masters for the purpose of controlling their human subjects, who are segregated into servants (commanders/guards and workers) and slaves. Explaining to Niall the rationale behind selective breeding, the female commander Odina points out:

> [Y]ou are savages. You leave reproduction and breeding to chance. Why do you suppose all the commanders look so strong and healthy? Because their parents were carefully chosen. Why are all men so tall and handsome? Because we do not leave their breeding to chance. (*T* 271)[9]

The eugenic utopia of the future praised by Odina has come a long way from modern society, which rejects the notions of natural selection and the survival of the fittest as applicable to men, and instead recognises every human life as precious and worth saving. In the new world, the babies of the servants who are born weak and sickly are killed, to "make sure that the whole race remains strong and healthy" (*T* 271). This practice, which

Wilson shows as horrifying and inhuman, has its historical prototype in infant exposure of ancient Sparta and its literary prototype in a number of nineteenth-century utopian works in Britain and the United States where infanticide was seriously contemplated as a remedy for the degeneration of the human species in line with the eugenic theories of the day[10].

Eugenics, whose indebtedness to Darwinism cannot be questioned, was developed by Sir Francis Galton (Darwin's cousin) as a scientific response to the problem of the multiplication in society of the least fit citizens, i.e. the poorest classes, whose inferior characteristics were attributed to lesser abilities rather than unequal chances in an age of aggressive capitalist economy[11]. Galton claimed that the state had the duty to interfere with the reproduction of its both fit and unfit citizens, providing evidence in his extremely influential study *Hereditary Genius* (1869) that ability could only be passed on by inheritance and not through education. Encouraging the desirable citizens – those with high abilities, who could successfully fend for themselves and contribute to social welfare – to have more children was called "positive eugenics". The opposite practice, namely limiting the reproduction of the less able, who, in Galton's view, caused the degeneration of the human race and drained society's resources, was called "negative eugenics". The latter, as can be expected, became far more influential (Bowler 1989: 291-292). The key factor in determining a person's abilities was innate intelligence measured by the intelligence quotient (IQ), and, apart from the uneducated poor, the eugenicists' attention was directed at the mentally ill and handicapped. The eugenic movement, which established itself firmly in Britain and America in the first decades of the twentieth century, recommended the institutionalisation, sex segregation and even sterilisation of those who showed substandard results, a solution which was most fully implemented by the Nazis in the 1930s (Bowler 1989: 293; cf. Browne 2007: 123-128 and Paul 2003: 230-231).

In Wilson's spider city the rules of sexual politics concerning human servants are observed with utmost severity according to the best eugenic precepts. The women are separated from the men, marriage and cohabitation are forbidden[12], and the men cannot approach the women's quarters on pain of death. The would-be parents are chosen from among the strongest and the most attractive people, with no emotional attachment between them[13]. The children of the servants are taken from their mothers soon after birth and are raised in state nurseries among the spiders[14]. Mothers cannot see their children more often than twice per year, and the woman who cannot control her emotions when visiting her children must be killed because she suffers from "emotional disease": her condition may infect the others and in consequence produce tainted children (*T* 274)[15]. Niall and his family are horrified to learn from Odina that the bridge that used to connect the nursery and the women's quarters has been blown up to prevent the mothers from seeing their children without permission (*T* 277), and that one woman who refused to leave her child after a regular visit had her head chopped off (*T* 274). On another occasion, Niall learns from Odina that a commander who tried to sneak into the nursery unnoticed to see her baby was publicly executed and eaten (*T* 355).

The state machine, therefore, while ruthlessly toying with human longings and anxieties, aims to eliminate the most basic instincts, reactions and bonds, the result of which can be seen in Odina's indifferent attitude to her three children: "I missed them a little for the first week, then the feeling went away" (*T* 273). The language is adjusted to the new reality. When Siris exclaims surprised: "*You* have children?", Odina retorts: "I have *borne* children, I do not have them" (*T* 273), as she has not seen them since they were born[16]. As for the three different men who fathered her children, Odina would not even talk to them in the street, as they are mere servants used for reproduction and any public exchange would be awkward for both sides (*T* 273). For an insider, like Odina, who was not only raised among the spiders but also brainwashed into thinking like one, the spider city is a eutopia (a good place) – orderly, safe and abundant. For free humans, like Niall and Veig, it is a dystopia, a hell clothed as a paradise, the Garden of Eden which conceals a nightmare (see *T* 275)[17].

The most appreciated value in the spider city seems to be work. Everyone has to work, even the king of Dira (*T* 255), because "idleness is against the law" (*T* 263). The humans (mostly male) are gathered around different professional groups, such as charioteers, agricultural workers, etc. Oversleeping for work or laziness are punishable with exile to the slave quarter and the loss of the servant privileges[18]. Servants who outlive their usefulness and retire are eaten by the spiders[19]. As such, the utopia created by the spiders combines the worst aspects of communism on the one hand and social Darwinism on the other, with its society consisting only of the working class, trained into labour by psychological conditioning and terror, where individuals become expendable as soon as they cease to generate profit.

The insistence on the productiveness of the humans, both as labourers and potential food, which is here teamed with the spiders' eugenic objectives, seems to underlie the servants' obsession with eating. Clearly, food in the spider city is yet another instrument of the spiders' Darwinian policy. The humans may lack freedom or intelligence but they never miss a hearty meal[20]. The servants eat in communal kitchens with large dining halls, and the food consists of soup, a variety of meats, fruit and vegetables. Accompanying Massig to one such kitchen, Niall notes that there is little conversation there, "only the sound of spoons on wooden platters, and the champing of jaws" (*T* 240). Eating is described as a "serious business" (*T* 240), and among the charioteers, with whom Niall, Veig and Siris stay for a while, "eating seem[s] almost a religion" (*T* 234). Upon his arrival in the spider city, Niall hears over and over again that he needs "fattening up" (*T* 233-234), as slim or thin bodies look abhorrent to the workers and commanders[21]. "The masters like us to be strong and healthy" (*T* 224), Odina informs Niall, which fundamentally boils down to what Niall's grandfather, a runaway from the spider city, told him once about the spiders' human farming: "They wanted us fat and stupid" (*T* 172). The servants are big, muscular and strong, but Niall soon finds out that the "magnificent physical specimens" are equipped with "oddly feeble minds" (*T* 209).

Slow-thinking is also a characteristic of the slaves. However, unlike the servants, bred for their beauty and stamina, the slaves – the unfit of the spider city or, as Odina calls them, "the inferior race" (*T* 271) – are often ugly and misshapen, allegedly because their breeding is left to chance. With the exception of those slave children who show unusual intelligence, and thus are killed before reaching adulthood, the slaves are allowed to live to do unpleasant jobs, e.g. at the sewers (*T* 237). Moreover, the spiders need slaves for food: "They love human flesh," explains Odina. "Of course, we also breed cows and horses and sheep. But they say human flesh tastes best of all" (*T* 271)[22], a statement which highlights the position of humans at the same level as cattle[23]. The slaves live their lives according to a mechanical routine, each regarding him/herself as a mere fragment of the crowd, and their somnambulist movements remind Niall of ants. There is a great physical variety among them, as opposed to the servants and commanders, who show strong family resemblance, apparently sharing the same gene pool (*T* 273). Moreover, the slave quarter seems to have more children than adults; many women are also in an advanced stage of pregnancy (*T* 320), which underscores the slaves' unchecked fecundity.

The slaves' mental and physical degradation corresponds to the decline of their part of the city. Niall notices once "impressive structures, now crumbling into disrepair", with skeletons of ancient vehicles rusting in the streets (*T* 375). The lack of civilisation associated with order and hygiene is reflected in the omnipresent dirt and litter; the gutters overflow with scraps of food and domestic rubbish, and the smells filling the slave quarter are connected with the processing of food (cooking) and the natural processes of putrefaction (rotten fruit, sewage, decomposing bodies [*T* 377-378]). Different species live openly side by side, feeding on one another or one another's waste, as can be noticed in the following passage:

> As a child threw down a large piece of bread, a bird swooped past his head and snatched it up. And in a shadowy, deserted alleyway, he saw a large grey rat feeding on a smashed watermelon. It glanced at him with its sharp little eyes, decided he could be ignored, and went on eating. A fraction of a second later, a spider plunged from the sky and landed squarely on the rat; the animal had time only for a pathetic squeak before the fangs plunged home. (*T* 378)

In obtaining food the humans of the slave quarter reveal the same instincts and are subject to the same laws as those governing the natural world: the bigger and stronger take away from the smaller and weaker. This can be noticed in the behaviour of a group of slave children who appear in the street eating lumps of grey-coloured bread. The description of the scene in which a heavily-built boy snatches bread from the hands of two smaller girls while the rest of the children remain indifferent to their plight "eating stolidly, making no attempt to hide their food" (*T* 376), has an uncomfortable naturalistic quality, creating the impression that it is not humans we are reading about but a troop of monkeys (*T* 376).

A similar domination of the fitter over the less fit as relates to eating habits is depicted in the scene in which Niall comes across a communal kitchen for slave workers. The supply of food and its abundance (soup with meat and vegetables, bread, butter, various kinds of fruit) testifies to the state's interventionism – it is not only the provider of jobs but also of alimentation. "The slaves were obviously kept well fed," observes Niall (*T* 379). However, the ways in which this food is consumed and the extent to which the eater benefits from its nourishing properties depends on his or her intelligence, which marks their evolutionary superiority or inferiority. Niall notices that the slaves ignore the rules of hygiene and they do not pay attention to the quality of the food they eat, in contrast with the more intelligent servants relegated to the slave quarter as punishment for their failure to comply with the spiders' laws:

> [T]he cook […] was chopping up a mixture of fruit, vegetables and rabbit meat on a large board; as Niall entered, she poured these into the saucepan, scraping them off with a carving knife. Two late risers came in, yawning and rubbing their eyes. They helped themselves to unwashed dishes piled up in the metal sink and, without the preliminary of washing them, dipped them straight into the cooking pot; neither seemed concerned that their bowls contained a proportion of raw meat and vegetables. […] A tall, red-headed man entered the kitchen. Niall guessed he was a member of the servant class condemned to work as a slave. […] Ignoring Niall, he snatched a bowl from the sink, washed it under the tap and filled it with soup. Unlike the slaves, he took the trouble to dip the ladle to the bottom of the saucepan. (*T* 378-379)

Despite the visible differences between the slaves and the servants, both castes ultimately reflect the brutalisation of the *homo sapiens* and the devolution of the species' mental and/or physical abilities as a result of the spiders' eugenic experiments. Niall is surprised at the servants' stupidity after all the trouble the spiders took to breed strong and healthy children (*T* 275). It is King Kazak who enlightens Niall on the matter: the servants are deliberately bred for stupidity by selective extermination (killing the more intelligent children), which marks a significant departure from the aims of twentieth-century eugenicists promoting the inheritance of intellectual abilities in the human population. However, as a result, the servants produce slaves, deformed and imbecilic, in the tenth generation, so the spiders occasionally have to capture more intelligent free humans in order to improve the gene pool of the degenerating stock. Even though the spiders are aware of the hideouts of the free humans in the desert, they do not kill them all at once because they need them for breeding (*T* 298)[24].

Strangely enough, when visiting the slave quarter, Niall notices that the slaves who are more intelligent and alert are usually small and ugly, while the tall and handsome ones tend to stare into space with

"a blank, imbecilic smile" (*T* 380). Niall's observations coincide with the late Darwinian view that it is not fecundity but intelligence which contributes to "a desirable evolutionary outcome" (Claeys 2019: 170)[25]. Physical beauty and health are not necessarily an evolutionary objective in the case of humans unless these are treated as domestic animals only fit for hard labour or to become food. The spiders' attempts to "breed intelligence out of [humans]", as phrased by Niall (*D* 249), ultimately give the spiders an upper hand in the struggle for existence against the only species that can endanger their survival. In the case of the humans in the spider city it is not the fittest (i.e. the most intelligent and able) who survive but those whose intellectual inadequacy makes them easily controlled into submission.

The impossibility of controlling humans if they enjoy even the slightest physical and mental freedom is shown in the case of the human servants of the bombardier beetles, an insect species which has been living in peace with the spiders for hundreds of years. Under the peace treaty between the spiders and the beetles, all knowledge that involves reading and writing as well as technology is forbidden to the humans. Officially human children cannot be taught to read and write, and the humans cannot use even the simplest machines and weapons. Such orders, however, are clandestinely disobeyed by the servants of the beetles (see *D* 65).

On his first visit to the city of the bombardier beetles Niall is "struck by the friendly and easygoing relations that seemed to exist between the beetles and the humans; unlike the spiders, the huge, armour-plated creatures seemed to inspire neither fear nor veneration; only affectionate familiarity" (*T* 399). As opposed to the terror and insistence on an emotionless society in the spider city, in the city of the beetles the servants can fall in love, get married, have children and live together without obstacles, which can be noticed in the case of Bill Doggins, the beetles' Blaster-in-Chief, and his happy family life with no less than eight wives. Because of the beetles' relative leniency towards their servants, the latter insistently push the limits of their personal freedom imposed by the peace treaty, which also manifests itself in their yearning for the freedom of the mind – inquisitiveness, creativity and the need to preserve and pass on what one knows to others[26]. It is not surprising, therefore, that Niall finds accomplices in his fight against the spiders among the servants of the beetles, not among the intimidated and brain-washed servants of the spiders[27]. Ultimately, it is also the servants of the beetles who, at least initially, prove to be more prepared to live in a free human society, due to their knowledge and their drive for creativity and self-development.

4. Darwinian vs Creative Evolution

4.1. From Instinct to Freedom

In the spider city, Niall uses the expanding metal rod which he found in the great fortress in the desert to open the door of the white tower, a historical museum of the earth built by ancient humans and left to posterity before they fled from the comet Opik in their gigantic space transporters (*T* 314). There an intelligent computer program in the form of a hologram designed to resemble its creator, Torwald Steeg, shows Niall how life on earth came into being and how human civilisation developed.

Already in the initial life forms, the bacteria, Niall can see an instinct to feed and, once all available organic compounds in the sea have been consumed, to produce one's own food through the process of photosynthesis (*T* 326). One creature's food is another creature's poison, but life finds a way to sustain both the fauna and the flora of the earth: the first algae and plants "drink" carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and turn it back into oxygen which is necessary for the survival of first animals. Those, in turn, consume oxygen, which is poisonous to plants, and produce carbon dioxide, indispensable for photosynthesis. The original "immortal" species of amoebas and algae, which have perpetuated their existence by renewing their cellular structure, give way to new species in which the parent dies and the offspring takes over, thus making a more complex evolution possible:

> A creature that goes on living for millions of years falls into a lazy rhythm of existence. It knows how to survive, and that is enough. But when a new creature is born, it knows nothing whatever. It has to fight to establish a foothold. And it has to develop the power to *remember* what it has learned. An immortal creature has no need of memory; it learned the basic tricks of survival millions of years ago... A new-born creature has to pack its learning into a very short period, otherwise it will not survive. The ancient, immortal organisms were mere vegetables; the new life forms were fighters and learners. (*T* 327)

Niall learns that species came into being and transformed through favourable mutations and natural selection; however, those most successful ceased to develop and became static, whereas those less successful continued to struggle and evolve (*T* 328), which coincides with Wilson's belief that challenge is crucial for development (see 1957: 116). After the dinosaurs and the first mammals, Steeg finally shows Niall the rise of humankind, which was spurred by the struggle for existence – obtaining food and trying not to become food. First an ape-man, who has to look for means of subsistence in all kinds of environments, not only in the forest, assumes an upright position and develops the largest brain among the living creatures. Then humans begin to organise themselves into groups to make hunting easier, and the skills involved in hunting and weapon production trigger the further development of the human brain (*T* 330). The use of fire gives another spur to human civilisation: fire is used for chasing animals out of their hiding, for cooking, and for keeping oneself warm. Most of all, however, it produces the "brain explosion" again by obliging humans to form "integrated societies" and "learn the disciplines of a social animal" (*T* 330). The invention of the bow and arrow further facilitates hunting, while the domestication of animals paves the way for a settled way of life and the development of agriculture (*T* 331-332). This stage coincides with the level of man's development in Niall's own times; as Steeg observes: "The spiders have

put back the clock of human evolution by ten thousand years" (*T* 333).

Having learnt of human achievement over the centuries, such as the construction of cities, artistic production, scientific and geographic discoveries, but also of man's criminal streak and propensity for boredom, Niall becomes hopeful that ancient humans will return from the Centauri system to help the humans on earth defeat the spiders. However, the program rules out this possibility: "The law of life is the survival of the fittest. If you cannot defeat the spiders, then you are not fit to survive, and they would deserve to remain the masters of the earth" (*T* 343). What Steeg means by "the fittest", however, is neither the physical force connected to size or muscles, nor adaptation skills, but the power of will and self-control that has its source in the mind, the inner self, which humans can master to the degree unattainable for spiders. Realising his capacity for summoning this inner power by an act of will, Niall is struck by the following revelation which is worth quoting at length:

> And now he could understand why the spiders have never progressed beyond a certain point. Throughout millions of years of their evolution, they have remained passive. This has enabled them to grasp an important secret – a secret unknown to men: that will-power is a physical force. Man had never discovered this because he was too busy using his brain and muscles – the instruments of his will. When a spider lured a fly into its web by the force of its will, it knew that force can be exerted without the use of any physical intermediary. So when the spiders became giants, they developed a giant will-power. Yet even this was a step in the wrong direction. They learned to use the will as men learned to use their muscles; to make reality do their bidding. They directed it *outward*, towards other creatures. But because they had never learned to make active use of their brains, they failed to ask themselves about the source of this power. So they remained unaware of the immense power that lay hidden deep inside themselves. That was

> why they would be superseded by men. That was why they *knew* they would be superseded. That was why the Spider Lord was afraid of men. (*T* 350-351)

In order to fully understand the passage above, one must first recall briefly several key concepts of Wilson's existential philosophy, which was inspired by Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, Alfred North Whitehead's theory of perception, and Abraham Maslow's humanistic psychology, to name just a few major influences.

The basis of Wilson's existentialism is the "intentionality" of consciousness, a concept he borrowed from Husserl, which means that our consciousness is not a passive receiver of phenomena (be it physical or mental) but that in the process of perception it actively "reaches out" to the world: our consciousness is always directed at objects, it is always of or about something (Macey 2001: 202)[28]. This approach has several important implications. Firstly, it disproves "the Cartesian fallacy" (or "the passive fallacy"), according to which man is only "a passive observer of the universe" and all meanings are to be found outside him/herself, "out there" (1972a: 171). The "passive fallacy" is directly connected with "the fallacy of insignificance", the belief advocated by some strands of modern science, literature and philosophy (e.g. Heidegger, Sartre, Camus) that man is at the mercy of (or, as Sartre would phrase it, "contingent on") the hostile or meaningless world, and can control neither his life nor destiny (see Wilson 2019: 15-29; cf. Lachman 2016: 121-123)[29]. Secondly, the fact that our consciousness is intentional (i.e. active, directed like an arrow, and producing mental representations), argues Wilson, means that it "makes its own distortions, quite apart from our natural human tendency to distort the world through our emotions and prejudices" (2019: 38). On the one hand, it implies selection – our consciousness "chooses" objects on which to focus, disregarding other objects or a larger picture for the purposes of safety or efficiency (Wilson 1972a: 89; cf. Wilson 2019: 121)[30]. On the other hand, it means that the way we perceive phenomena is coloured by our emotional states and preconceptions; in short, "our state of being is determined by our thoughts" (2018: 25; cf. 1972a: 88)[31]. "Everyday consciousness is a liar", writes Wilson, and it seldom shows us the world as it really is (2019: 149)[32].

Intentionality (or the will to perceive) most of the time works unconsciously, but we can train ourselves to be aware of its workings. Wilson argues after Husserl that by studying closely how our consciousness works, we can make our mental acts more objective, i.e. we can go beyond our "natural standpoint" to the effect of changing our perceptions and getting an insight into the reality of things (see 1972a: 89-91 and 2019: 53)[33]. This change of perception would entail a change in man's thinking of his own condition and possibilities, resulting not only in greater happiness and psychological and physical well-being (knowing how consciousness works we can coach it into optimism and affirmation)[34] but also in proactivity, increased creativity, and a more meaningful and satisfactory existence driven by a purpose[35].

In this sense, argues Wilson, humans are different from animals because they have an inherent capacity for freedom, their life may not (and should not) be lived merely as a mechanical response to external stimuli such as the need for food, shelter, etc. "Man […] is a purposive animal," Wilson maintains. "He is still an amphibian trying to learn to live on land, but he is approaching a condition when he will cease to be a creature of biological motives – security, sex, dominance – and will regulate all his activities by a primary motive – evolutionary purpose, self-change" (1972a: 138). And according to H. G. Wells, whose views influenced Wilson's understanding of evolutionary consciousness, man is capable of evolving through intelligence in order to access more intellectual, spiritual or mystical modes of being (Wilson 1984: 6).

In the case of the spiders, as Niall learns, the sudden evolutionary leap (which has lasted merely several centuries) seems to have enhanced in the first place the species characteristics related to hunting and feeding processes instead of those connected with introspection and self-awareness, which would have allowed them to grasp the hidden powers of the mind and realise their evolutionary purpose – self-change

to the effect of bridging the gap between an animal and a higher form of being (a superbeing). Their inherent physical passivity in lurking for prey translates into the passivity of their consciousness. If, as Wilson claims, "man is future-oriented", if he craves for "objective reality [and] values beyond himself" (1972b: 220), his preoccupations and interests go far beyond his present biological condition. The spiders, as we can infer from Niall's musings, may have enhanced their willpower but it does not serve the inner drive to self-development, a purpose beyond their immediate physical needs. Rather it is used to assert their biological dominance through hunting and subjection of other species[36]. Niall suspects as much early in the cycle when he telepathically enters the mind of a female tent spider in the desert:

> Spider consciousness was almost pure perception. The spider is the only living creature that spends its life lying in wait, hoping that victims will walk into its trap. All other creatures have to go out and seek their food. So spiders have developed the ability to turn perception into a beam of pure will. As a fly buzzed through the air, the watching spider tried to will it into its web […]. The death spiders had become masters of the earth when they learned that the will-force can be used as a weapon. (*T* 97)[37]

Alimentary atavisms underlie the "intentionality" of the spiders' consciousness, which has grown in strength along with the growth of their bodies, its *outward* direction being aimed at dominating and controlling other beings[38]. Therefore the rapid ascent of the arachnids in the evolutionary scheme is unable to remove the millennia-old instincts and habits related to food upon which their newly developed cognition has been imprinted[39]. Observing his spider captors on the way to the spider city, Niall concludes that, in contrast with the humans, the spiders' existence is focused on catching a prey and injecting it with venom: "They had no other interest in life. Niall could enjoy the scenery and think about distant places, use his imagination. The wolf spiders were indifferent to the scenery, except as a possible source of food, and totally lacked anything that might be called imagination" (*T* 201)[40]. The spiders, for all their intelligence, are still slaves to instinct: as typical predators, they behave with hostility towards their human prisoners when they are hungry and leave the humans in peace or even achieve a state of mutual tolerance with them when they are sated and stop regarding the prisoners as a potential source of meat (*T* 201)[41].

This responsiveness to instinct, which humans have lost by relying excessively on their minds (*D* 56)[42], is also responsible for the spiders' responsiveness to the vibrations of the life force sent out by the empress plant in the great Delta – a force that made them grow into giants and accelerated their evolution. The empress plant, a sentient being from another solar system whom the spiders call Nuada, the "river of life", and worship as the great goddess, was caught as a spore (along with a number of other similar plants) into the tail of the comet Opik when it struck its home planet, known to men as AL (Alpha Lyrae)$_3$. Hibernating over the millennia of space travel, the surviving spores were finally cast into earth, where they took root and grew to enormous proportions as a result of the earth's low gravity. They had to rapidly adapt to the earth's conditions in order to control their swelling bodies, and this struggle to survive resulted in a far higher level of consciousness than they originally possessed (*D* 163). At the same time, in order to protect themselves from being devoured by terrestrial predators which might have liked the plants' delicate, tasty flesh, the plants had to assume direct control over the brains of other living creatures (*D* 164) while simultaneously keeping the pace of their own evolution:

> On their own planet, each plant was confined to a single place; yet their minds could travel anywhere, merely by identifying with the mind of another member of the species. Evolution itself was a tremendous community effort in which every individual played its part. This is why their evolution had come

> to a standstill on earth. There were simply not enough of them to build up the necessary thought-pressure. […] If they were to evolve, the plants needed the companionship of other superbeings like themselves. If such beings did not exist, then they would have to be created. Animals, birds, even trees and plants, would somehow have to be imbued with *more life*. (*D* 164)[43]

The latter task was accomplished by each plant becoming a transmitter of pure vitality – "the life force of the earth itself" (*D* 164), which accelerated the evolution of every species capable of receiving the vibrations. It was the spiders which proved the most successful of all, with their high adaptability and receptiveness to the vibrations, their cellular structure being a good conductor of the life force, and many qualities that they shared with the plants (e.g. patience, caution, determination). Along with their physical growth, the spiders also grew in intelligence and willpower (D 164)[44].

Introducing the empress plants as agents behind the spiders' evolution, Wilson opposes Darwin's mechanistic purposeless concept of evolution with orthogenesis (also called progressive evolution or progressionism), a theory which presupposes the development of organisms towards a specific goal under the influence of some inner force[45]. It is not surprising, given the fact that Wilson's "new foundation" – his new existentialism – is largely indebted to vitalist theories inspired by Henri Bergson's concept of creative evolution. Bergson believed that evolution was a result of a more or less purposive force called *élan vital* (George Bernard Shaw called it the life force)[46] (see Wilson 1972a: 133), a creative drive inherent in humanity. Trying to explain the creation of life and its diversity, Bergson comes up with the idea of an original vital impetus (see Bergson 1944: 94-108), which, assuming life's teleological nature, "must be situated at the origin and not at the end (contra traditional finalism), and it must embrace the whole of life in one single indivisible embrace (contra mechanism)" (Lawlor / Leonard 2016). Another claim of Bergson's is the complexification of life, i.e. "its evolution from the simple original vital impulse into different species, individuals, and organs", which gives rise to "two great opposite tendencies, namely, instinct and intelligence" manifesting themselves respectively in animals and humans (Lawlor / Leonard 2016).

Intelligence is the quality which excluded humans from the evolutionary processes instigated by the life force of the empress plants because their "intelligence had already developed too far to benefit from this crude vitality" (*D* 164). Even though Niall can feel the vibrations of the life force flowing through him, he considers it "somehow vulgar and unsatisfying". Succumbing to it in the case of plants results in more effort and awakening from a "dim, dreamlike" state; in the case of humans, however, it means a degradation of their highly-evolved consciousness (*D* 101), as the force operates on the subconscious level, a level which humans can only access and communicate on in dreams. Revealingly, Niall's conversation with the empress plant can take place only at the level of the subconscious when the young man is asleep:

> The normal curtain of amnesia that separates sleeping and waking had been drawn aside, and he became aware of inner landscapes which, under their shifting dream imagery, were as real and permanent as the world of external reality. […] This was the level of the consciousness that was trying to communicate with his own. The being whom the spiders worshipped as the goddess of the Delta lived permanently on a level that in human beings would have been called the subconscious. That was why she had been unable to communicate while Niall remained awake; to his conscious mind, the speech of the goddess would have been as meaningless as the sound of waves breaking in the beach. (*D* 161)

The passage quoted above rings with Wilson's concept of duo-consciousness, i.e. the existence in every person's brain of the conscious (everyday, rational) mind and the unconscious (hidden, unknown) mind (see Lachman 2016: 189-190). This, in turn, is connected with his

concept of the bicameral mind, the split between the right and left hemispheres which occurred to humans in the process of their civilisational development. Ancient peoples, argues Wilson, were unicameral, their hemispheres remaining in direct and dialogical contact, which resulted in man's close connection to the gods (especially female fertility goddesses). As the split occurred, it entailed the domination of the left hemisphere over the right hemisphere, which Wilson associates respectively with consciousness and the subconscious, and it contributed to the rise of militaristic and patriarchal societies (this phenomenon will be discussed at length later in this study) (see Wilson 1984: 134 ff.).

Stimulating the growth of the animal and plant species on the level of the subconscious, the empress plant seems to have enhanced in many of them their responsiveness to instinct without developing their intelligence, and, consequently, enough self-awareness to put a check on those more basic drives[47]. As a result, Nuada's creations of the most fantastic shapes and sizes (often completely absurd or ridiculous) are solely focused on food and feeding, their adaptation to natural conditions being triggered, first and foremost, by the purpose of hunting and foraging, from electrocuting grass and predatory bushes and trees, to venom-spitting frog-like creatures, to giant two-headed millipedes and transparent rats-cum-lizards, all of them being subject to the ruling (sub)consciousness and its decrees[48]. Niall thus comments on the consumption-driven reality of the plant and animal species in the great Delta:

> Of course, life on earth had always been like this. Left to themselves, living creatures would relax blissfully and sunbathe in the mud. The force behind the evolution had learned the trick of goading them with misery and starvation. Man, at least, had been allowed to evolve slowly, over millions of years – and even that was too fast. But these creatures of the Delta were being forced to evolve a hundred times too fast. That was why life in the Delta had become a sickening, horrifying joke. This evolutionary melting pot was like a sadistic dream. These creatures were being forced to evolve merely so they could destroy one another. Just as the spiders had evolved until they could destroy human beings… (*D* 131-132)

The empress plants, which, as a result of the difficult living conditions on their home planet, have an inherent need to evolve, have learnt by trial and error that it is not only the struggle for survival in an alimentary sense that pushes the clock of evolution forward but also the struggle against adversity, for example another, hostile, species. Niall finds out that a century after their conquest of humanity the spiders stopped evolving – they became lazy and satisfied with their lives of easy feeding and lack of natural enemies. Therefore, the plants invested their energies in the evolution of the bombardier beetles, for which the spiders had always been main foes. The more the spiders tried to destroy the beetles, the faster the beetles developed and the stronger they resisted the spiders. "In the centuries during which the two sides fought for supremacy, both evolved new levels of willpower and intelligence," Nuada explains. "And finally, intelligence and common sense prevailed. When the Master of the beetles proposed a truce, the spiders accepted eagerly. But then, as both sides settled down to the pleasant existence of successful conquerors, their evolution began once again to mark time" (*D* 169).

This seems to coincide with Wilson's own belief that he shares with Arnold Toynbee (an advocate of the doctrine of Challenge and Response) that civilisations and individuals develop not under favourable conditions, as Darwin would have it, but rather when they are faced with adversities, which brings out their best qualities (Wilson 1957: 116; see Toynbee 1947: 60-139; cf. Lachman 2016: 76)[49]. A similar stagnation to that of the spiders and the beetles takes place in the case of the humans in the spider city. For all their beauty and health, the servants, who enjoy peace and security but have no challenges at which to test their intelligence, ultimately degenerate mentally and physically. Their lives, devoid of creativity and imagination, which are innate to their species but eradicated through the spiders' eugenic policies, are marked with in-

ertia and deprived of a higher purpose. This purpose involves the desire for a productive and high-quality existence as well as "the need to know" – a drive which Wilson calls the "evolutionary appetite" (2019: 76-78)[50].

It is this complacence and evolutionary stagnation which comes with the sense of security and comfort that is Niall's concern with reference to humankind. Although initially, with the carte blanche from the empress plant, Niall contemplates the possibility of wiping the spiders off the face of the earth, he ultimately comes to the conclusion that the humans need the spiders to stay alert and to achieve the best there is in them. "Have you never noticed that men are at their best when they have only a limited amount of freedom?" asks the empress plant. "Then they fight and struggle for more. […] If men are suddenly presented with too much freedom, they feel confused and lose their sense of purpose" (*D* 171-172). The plant paints to Niall a vision of humanity's future after the spiders have been eliminated, with people's initial elation and increased energy put to good use: rebuilding the cities and discovering the lost knowledge that has so far been denied to them by the spiders. Eventually, however, the humans will accept their freedom as a given and they will succumb to boredom. "You know that it has all happened before," warns Nuada. "Do you want to make it happen all over again?" (*D* 172)[51].

The above passage echoes Wilson's observations on the "indifference threshold", which he also calls "St. Neot Margin", i.e. the "state in which we can be stimulated by pain (or inconvenience) but not by pleasure", which unblocks our habit-ridden perception and defamiliarises experience for us, making it again fresh and interesting:

> When we think about it, we discover that the 'indifference threshold' plays a profoundly important part in conscious life. […] A man spends his life struggling to achieve something; as soon as he achieves it, he is bored. Man is never so deeply aware of his need for freedom as when he is in chains. Strike off the chains, and his vision of freedom becomes altogether dimmer. (2019: 120)

Elsewhere Wilson opposes Rousseau's claim that "Man is born free, and yet is everywhere in chains". "Man is not born free," argues Wilson, "he is born in chains that are far more degrading and demoralising than loss of social liberty: the chains of boredom and futility. Without a discipline to give him purpose and save him from his own aimlessness, man is nothing" (1957: 136). Accordingly, Niall realises that in order to be ready to assume the responsibility as masters of the world, humans have to first assume greater control of their own minds, which would help them lower their "indifference threshold" and approach life with unwavering energy and optimism, and, in consequence, realise their evolutionary potential. As long as the threat of demise at the hands of the spiders continues to loom large, humans will make every effort to preserve their freedom, physical and moral (*D* 173). And in order to successfully play the game of the species, humans have to evolve to the utmost of their mental faculties. Only then will they be able to meet the challenge of the spiders' own reciprocal evolution.

The idea of man's freedom and its connection with an evolutionary drive, addressed by the empress plant in the above conversation with Niall, brings us to the single most important concept to which Wilson repeatedly returned over the course of his career, namely that of the Outsider. The Outsider in Wilson's understanding is an existentialist figure of exceptional talents and heightened sensitivity, for whom the surrounding world is like a veil which conceals the reality of things, who possesses greater intellectual capacity and imagination than his fellow human beings, sometimes even mystical powers, and who yearns for meaning, spiritual purpose and freedom in a society which is typically hostile to such pursuits (see Lachman 2016: 59). As Wilson argues, "freedom is *not* a social problem" (2001b: 39) but means "release from unreality" (30), namely the suffocating world of materialism and everyday trivia. "Obviously, freedom is not simply being allowed to do what you like," he further writes, "it is *intensity of will*, and it appears under any circumstances that limit man and arouse his will to more life" (30).

Wilson's Outsiders are individuals who can be identified with what Wilson considers the dominant .005 percent of the population, Abraham Maslow's "self-actualisers"[52] and Alfred Toynbee's "creative minority" (a term borrowed from Henri Bergson), i.e. individuals who help their civilisation face a difficult challenge which threatens its very existence and who thereby speed up that civilisation's progress and save it from degeneration (see Lachman 2016: 76). Toynbee argues: "The very fact that the growths of civilisations are the work of creative individuals or creative minorities carries the implication that the uncreative minority will be left behind unless the pioneers can contrive some means of carrying this sluggish rear-guard along with them in their eager advance" (1947: 215). This objective, according to Toynbee, can be realised by two methods, one practical and the other ideal, namely by means of "wholesale social drill" and by means of "imitation of another [superior] personality" (mimesis) respectively (216).

Interestingly, Toynbee's ideas reverberate in Niall's perception of the humans in the spider city following the peace treaty with the spiders and his own establishment as a ruler. Because they have always lived in complete submission, the men and women are "ill-equipped […] to deal with the experience of self-determination" (*M* 35). Niall, like the already mentioned creative .005 per cent of the population who have a pressing need for self-development, does not crave the attention of and control over other people, instead preferring to focus on the expansion of his own consciousness. However, he takes it upon himself to show the humans of the spider city "how to organize their lives and rebuild their city and educate their children", and "to try to breed [intelligence] back into them", so that ultimately they can rule themselves without a ruler (*D* 249).

Simeon, a doctor from the city of the bombardier beetles, aptly notes the need for both drill and mimesis in social life, the latter, as Toynbee argues, being directed at "creative personalities who have broken new ground" (1947: 216): "They'll always need a ruler. Because a ruler's an excuse for laziness, and even intelligent men can be lazy. […] The more you do for them, the more they'll revere and admire you, and insist on looking up to you. They enjoy banging their heads on the pavement" (*D* 249). However, Simeon's words also bring to mind the words of the Grand Inquisitor from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* which Wilson recalls in *Religion and the Rebel* and which lay bare the unwillingness on the part of most people (the Insiders) to assume responsibility for their own inner freedom[53]. Wilson notes:

> But the Grand Inquisitor was right. […] Men do not want "moral self-leadership"; they want "bread and circuses". The men who are capable of carrying the burden of their own freedom are very rare. This is the observation which led Nietzsche to the doctrine that has made him most hated – his "Master-and-slave" morality, which teaches that the human race is divided into masters and slaves: the masters capable of immense will-power, immense suffering, immense self-discipline; the slaves too short-sighted to want anything except material necessities and a leader to obey. (1957: 144)

In order to avoid confusion and laziness resulting from too much freedom they cannot handle, Niall rules out that the men of the spider city should continue to work every day under the supervision of female commanders. He also takes advantage of the humans' "craving for novelty" as a means to "increase their capacity for freedom" (*M* 35). At one point, the servants of the beetles, who are skilled craftsmen and engineers, begin to produce commodities such as lamps, clocks, mechanical toys, kitchen appliances, children's picture books and bicycles, which are new and exciting for the dwellers of the spider city. To make the acquisition of goods possible, Niall introduces brass money with which people are rewarded for their work, which completely changes the economic relations and social practices of the city. The inhabitants find new goals for their "creative" energies: they install municipal lighting, establish businesses like shops and restaurants, and develop public transport

services, thus retracing the civilisational path of ancient humanity and "embarking on an adventure of self-development" (*M* 37):

> And the men and women who walked the streets had a new sense of confidence and responsibility; Niall could see it in their eyes, and it filled him with satisfaction. He had no illusions; he knew that most of them were little better than innocent and greedy children. Nevertheless, it was a beginning. In a few generations – perhaps after Niall's death – they would be capable of shaping their own destiny. (*M* 36)

Niall, as a true Outsider in the Wilsonian sense, is a spokesman of the new existentialism, "a way of thought which, like the religious way, regards man as *involved* in the universe, not just a spectator and observer" (Wilson 1957: 151). Existentialism, writes Wilson, "states that *the most important fact about man is his ability to change himself*", and it is this capacity for inner change that can lead to progress and perfection rather than the mere change of man's environment as postulated by various social reformers (151). In making the creation of a perfected society conditional on the perfectibility of its individual members, Wilson follows into the footsteps of Thomas More, who in his *Utopia* puts the following statement into the mouth of Raphael Hythloday: "[I]t is impossible to make everything good unless all men are good" (2003: 35).

Wilson believes that human beings are capable of managing their own evolution on the level of the mind, effecting and perpetuating evolutionary changes through civilisation and through education (1972a: 137). It is therefore surprising that in *Spider World* Wilson does not show such a complex and systemic evolutionary change, focusing instead on the transformation of the protagonist, the chosen one, and downplaying the possibility of the evolution of the common men, his human subjects, in the education of whom Niall proves disappointingly remiss. As Tredell notes critically, "a chance to rebuild a civilization or build a new one, to disseminate the knowledge of human history gained in the white tower" is wasted in the creation of "a rudimentary consumer society" (2015: 416-417). Approached in this way, as Tredell further argues, the new humans are nothing more than "innocent and greedy children"; they become "docile subjects" to be "manipulated and motivated by money and material goods, encouraged to become consumers rather than active citizens" (418). The attitude which lays emphasis on self-development rather than on prudent governance and effective leadership of those who are not yet ready to transcend their flawed condition of mere bread-eaters is ultimately responsible for Niall's failure to create a true social utopia. A determining factor of this failure is Niall's idleness as a ruler, his condescension towards his subjects and his evasion of duties in the pursuit of his own super-consciousness, which is bound to foment a rebellion followed by a choice of a different, more effective, leader (418). Tredell concludes:

> Of course, to focus on Niall's experience as a ruler could lead the narrative to become entangled in the minutiae of political manoeuvring […] but it seems unfortunate to discard the possibility of envisaging an improved future society – an opportunity Wilson's two early heroes, Shaw and Wells, might have seized on with relish. […] Niall is, once again, the isolated Wilson hero, narcissistic and preoccupied with his own inner states, but here the isolation is greater; the hero is caught up in the pale shadow-play of his own mind. Evading the challenge of envisaging a society in the throes of change, the novel becomes a kind of detective story […] with quasi-magical overtones. (418)

It is possible, however, that Niall's failings as a ruler betray a measure of scepticism on Wilson's part concerning his own existential hopes, which may in fact reflect an ambivalence in his ostensible and vocal optimism. It may be objected that a society solely comprised of Outsiders, all inner-directed and focused on their individual, intellectual and

spiritual development, is ultimately impracticable *as a society* in that it does not foster the establishment of common ground. Unless, of course, it is to be assumed that the further the Outsiders progress in their individual quest for self-improvement, the likelier they are to converge in a shared set of experiences and values.

4.2. Imagination: The Third Evolutionary Force

Pondering humanity's right to seize power over the world, Niall voices his preoccupation with humans' failure to escape boredom and unhappiness which is a direct consequence of their inability to transform their own minds in order to live optimistically and purposefully in all circumstances:

> What right had man to try and take over the earth from the spiders? His past history showed that he was unfit to be master of the earth. All his achievements had failed to make him happy. By the time he had evacuated earth to colonize the Centauri system, he had already proved himself a failure. […] Human civilization had been a failure because man had gained control over the material world without gaining control over his own mind. (*D* 99-100)

It is worth considering the above passage in the light of the concept of the peak experience which Wilson borrowed from Abraham Maslow and developed in his philosophy. The peak experience (PE) is the experience of sudden overwhelming joy, the feeling that the surrounding world and our lives are wonderful, which appears in all psychologically healthy people. It involves the realisation of how lucky or happy we are, which we normally lack, and which makes all our doubts and fears go away. Such peak experiences, according to Wilson, bring exhilaration and optimism about the future but also the feeling of being more awake, of seeing the world beyond our immediate reality – they produce "an overwhelming sense of authenticity, of the *reality* of freedom" (Wilson 1996: 279) – thus proving that we are capable of achieving the state of enhanced consciousness, similar to that of a child on a Christmas day (see Lachman 2016: 6). Wilson believes that peak experiences can be induced at will, that we can train ourselves to experience them to avoid the feeling of futility and boredom resulting from "our inability to feel alive unless we are faced with a challenge", a state which Wilson considers the ever-present "challenge of no challenge", namely a life without problems (Lachman 2016: 283; see Wilson 1996: 277)[54].

One of the key weapons that, according to Niall, the humans have and the spiders do not is imagination, "and willpower is no use without imagination" because "only imagination can tell us *what* to will" (*D* 60). Imagination is the faculty of the left brain, our evolutionary achievement, which Wilson calls "a map-maker", and which is endowed with the power of abstraction and the power to reach beyond the present moment (1984: 158). Despite the spiders' more developed willpower, Niall believes that human beings will conquer them in the end thanks to this single asset. What Niall calls "imagination" is not synonymous with mere fantasy or escapism, the very rudimentary sense of the word. Rather, as Colin Wilson himself understands it, it denotes "the intentional, willed character of perception" (Lachman 2016: 65), or "the kind of mental intensity that can be produced by crisis, when the value of our experience is no longer obscured by boredom and indifference" (Lachman 2016: 107). Wilson regards it (after Gurdjieff) as the third force necessary for human evolution to take place (Wilson 1996: 277), and what he means by evolution here is the evolution of human consciousness to a level at which man truly becomes "a creature of the mind" (cf. Wilson 1996: 275)[55], a mind which can transform itself through thought and imagination (cf. Lachman 2016: 166).

At this point we should return to the already mentioned split between the right brain and the left brain which, as Wilson argues, took place about 3,500 years ago. The development of left-brain consciousness was extremely beneficial from the evolutionary standpoint: while right-brain

consciousness was collective and static (it could not produce individuals of exceptional talents – "Leonardos, Beethovens and Einsteins"), left-brain consciousness was dynamic, conducive to individuation, and able to deal with complex mathematical or philosophical problems. As such, even though it was "more painful and exhausting", causing frustration and criminal tendencies, it has also contributed to the technological and, as follows, civilisational progress of humankind. Left-brain consciousness is also "able to contemplate itself, as if in a mirror", resulting, if only potentially, in more self-awareness and control (Wilson 1996: 271, 280).

The silencing of right-brain consciousness by left-brain consciousness results in modern man's difficulty in inducing "peak experiences", which are dependent on the former, as it is more relaxed and closer to nature. However, as Wilson argues, self-aware as left-brainers are, they can teach themselves how to induce peak experiences at will and convince themselves of their own freedom. In order to keep boredom and negativity at bay, one has to only "maintain a sense of drive, purpose, optimism"; in this way we create "a high degree of inner pressure", not allowing ourselves to become pessimistic and negative (Wilson 1996: 279). Instrumental in this process is imagination, the third force, which can change the status quo created by the other two, antagonistic, forces of excitement and boredom, energy and passivity, optimism and negativity, locked in combat in modern man. "[O]nly imagination can tell us *what* to will," says Niall memorably (*D* 60), and it can make humans will themselves into a peak experience when they finally recognise that their freedom and happiness are there, already existing, in individual as well as global terms[56].

Such a peak experience occurs to Niall after an assassination attempt by the Death Lord, who is afraid of Niall's abilities. Niall uses the thought mirror given to him by the Steegmaster in the white tower, an ancient device in the form of a pendant, which when turned upwards induces purposeful concentration and, as a result, clarity and control. This reminds us of Wilson's insistence on attention as instrumental in our perception of meaning: "In order to grasp meanings, I must 'focus' – concentrate, 'contract' my attention muscles. Perception is intentional,

and the more energy (or effort) I put into the act of 'concentrating', the more meaning I grasp" (1972b: 68). It is "the act of concentration *itself*", Wilson writes further, "that causes this intensification of consciousness" (245), which removes the dullness of the senses, giving us access to higher levels of reality, raising our "worm's-eye view" to a "bird's-eye view", and expanding our perception of meaning.

The worm's-eye view can be compared to the view of a painter standing too close to a canvas and focusing on a small detail, a tiny part, thus losing sight of a larger picture. When the painter steps back and is able to see the whole canvas with its complex relations, he or she assumes a bird's-eye view, a look from above, which "renew[s] [their] sense of purpose" (2019: 152; cf. Wilson 1972a: 82 and Lachman 2016: 147). The two perspectives coincide with two modes of perception described by Alfred North Whitehead, namely *immediacy-perception* (or *presentational immediacy*) and *meaning-perception* (or *causal efficacy*) respectively. Immediacy-perception "works best at close quarters", showing us reality like a microscope, while meaning-perception "works best at a distance", helping us to see wholes and causal relationships, but it dissipates with "every fluctuation in [a person's] mental energy" (Wilson 2019: 71; Wilson 1972a: 161, 164). "To really perceive something, both 'modes' have to be switched on simultaneously," argues Wilson, "and when they converge perfectly upon the object, then we truly 'perceive' it" (2019: 71). In moments of excitement or pleasure, meaning-perception intensifies, but whenever we are tired or anxious, we see things but they seem meaningless to us (71). Wilson argues that immediacy-perception, which animals lack almost entirely, lies at the root of man's evolutionary primacy, but because it is our fundamental mode of perception – like a beam of attention focused on the present – for most of the time man sees himself as a passive consciousness. "[T]he more man develops this faculty of selecting and excluding, the further he retreats from meaning perception," writes Wilson. "This is to say that the more highly developed the intellect, and this faculty for focusing attention, the more the world is seen as meaningless" (1972a: 164).

When Niall activates the thought mirror, at first he feels extreme pain but decides to fight it till the pain actually helps him focus[57]. The two modes of perception come together, creating a lucidity which makes everything around him fascinating, and he recognises the existence of a reality to which he is usually blind. He is struck by the following thought:

> He had never been so conscious of his freedom. He was aware that he could *choose* what to do with his mind – whether to think about his past life, about the problem of the spiders, or whether to simply allow himself to explore this strange, exciting world that surrounded him. Now he could see quite clearly that our human senses are blocked by curtains, and it was within his power to open or close them as he wished. When he focused his attention to admit more light, he experienced an excitement that was like a breeze blowing against his face. This soon expanded into a feeling of almost magical sensitivity. He could see that the branches of the tree outside the window were responding to the dawn wind like a cat purring with pleasure, and that the leaves were not merely rustling, but were speaking a language of their own. (29)[58]

Niall's recognition of the reality of his will, which turns him from a passive subject into an active agent able to exercise and accept his freedom (see Lachman 2016: 122), calls to mind Wilson's criticism of the already mentioned "passive fallacy", a view that humans remain at the mercy of forces against which they cannot win and they have no other choice than to endure them. In biology, this approach can be found in the Darwinian view of evolution, according to which the life of all species, including humans, is subject to random mutations, influenced by the environment and non-teleological. Wilson opposes this pessimistic conception with his "new foundation", mentioned earlier in this study, which draws on the ideas of several philosophers, scientists and writers. From the phenomenologists Husserl and Whitehead he takes the view of an active character of human consciousness. From Julian Huxley and Teilhard de Chardin he derives the view of evolution as an inherent drive to enhance consciousness and freedom ("complexification"). From Shaw and Wells he extracts the concept of "creative evolution" (adopted from Bergson), an inherent drive in all life to transcend itself and "be better than our fathers" (see Lachman 2016: 87, 122-23; Wilson 1972a: 126-150). According to Huxley, the drive to complexification, which used to be unconscious, has begun to be conscious, not yet in all human beings but in those who are more aware of the direction of their evolution and who are thus capable of its conscious execution (Lachman 2016: 123).

This consciousness of the evolutionary process taking place results in the shift of focus – from the physical world and its trivialities to the sphere of the mind, freedom, intellect and the imagination, which de Chardin calls the "noösphere" (as opposed to the "biosphere"). The noösphere is only accessible to humans; animals cannot share in it because, as Wilson claims, their life is governed by present needs like food and shelter. This marks a departure from strict Darwinism, which sees humans as subject to the same natural laws as all other species (1972a: 147-48; cf. Lachman 2016: 123).

The above considerations bring us back to the opposition between instinct and freedom, the former being predominantly connected with feeding patterns in *Spider World* and the latter with the powers of imagination. Discussing the ways of defeating the spiders with his friends from the city of the beetles, Niall has a revelation: it is enough to eliminate the Spider Lord, who gives orders and organises the life in the city, to throw the rest of the spiders, who only do what they are told to do, into confusion and panic, and thus render them harmless. Niall recalls his grandfather's story of Cheb the Mighty, who learnt how to read the minds of humans and who ate his human prisoners, believing it was the only way to understand them:

> Now, although I failed to realise it at the time, my grandfather had given me the key to understanding the spiders. We know that eating someone doesn't help you to understand him. But the whole instinct of a spider is directed towards eating. They spend all their lives sitting in a web, waiting for food. Now the death spiders no longer have to worry about food. But they still spend their lives sitting in their webs. You see, the spiders have no *imagination*. […] Spiders have never had any purpose except to catch food. So they never had any need to develop imagination.
> That is why the life of the spiders is based on obedience. They have no imagination, so they naturally obey orders. (*D* 23)

In the case of humans, imagination works as a catalyst for inner freedom and creativity, as it develops out of the person's need to live with and attain a purpose – it tells them "what to will". It is, as Wilson claims, "a form of intentionality that involves the use of all three modes of experience – immediacy, meaning and conceptual analysis – and, as such, is a part of man's machinery of *purpose*" (1972a: 165). Creative evolution, as MacIntosh argues in her study of Shaw's plays, works in such a way that man feels a need or a desire and he or she "gradually wills into existence" the methods by which to satisfy them (2011: 27). However, in the case of spiders, who, as Niall clearly asserts, are purposeless animals, imagination has never had a chance to come into being, as it has largely been pointless. Each death spider possesses immense willpower but no imagination to tell him/her "what to will" – to envisage a purpose beyond eating and biological domination. The feeding instinct, which is the driving force behind the spiders' actions, is therefore an impediment to their development into "creatures of the mind" rather than physical needs[59].

At this point it is necessary to return to our previous considerations concerning the influence of the empress plants on the fauna and flora of the great Delta. Niall, who can increasingly sense the thoughts of other creatures, is struck by the despair of the species living in the Delta, which are constantly motivated by hunger, as happens with the predator

– a mixture of reptile and mammal – watching him and his companions sleeping around the fire. Niall can feel the animal's imprisonment in the sphere of instincts, which makes it "little more than a killing machine" and which elicits pity and sadness on his part. "It possessed no mental kingdom," muses Niall. "[I]t was trapped in the material world, like a prisoner behind bars. That was why the Delta was so full of violence and cruelty. It was the frustration of starving prisoners" (*D* 131). The species enhanced by the empress plant are not capable of bridging the gap between the biosphere and the noösphere, they are incarcerated in the world of the present, subject to the pressures of the natural environment, without the possibility of liberation through intellect and imagination.

In contrast with animals and the people of a narrow vision preoccupied only with their everyday existence, the new human like Niall is increasingly becoming a "creature of the mind", transcending his present "biological motives", and his activities depend on an inner drive rather than external purposes (Wilson 1972a: 125; cf. Lachman 2016: 123). Niall voices the need for exploring the inner world in the following way:

> Now, at last, he could see the answer to the problem that had been troubling him ever since he arrived in the Delta: why man has always been so dissatisfied with his own life. The answer was obvious: because every man possesses within himself the power to transcend the present and to take possession of the vast domain of his inner being. Man was intended to be the lord of this mental kingdom, not a miserable exile trapped in the ever-changing present. And because all men are born with this instinctive knowledge, no human being can ever be satisfied with the present moment, no matter how completely it seems to fulfil his desires. (*D* 131)

If the imagination, belonging to the "noösphere", is the third power in the evolution of the new man, which endows human life with a sense of purpose, directs our willpower (tells us *what* to will), and induces

peak experiences, which in turn bring the recognition of our freedom, happiness and the real, these latter being usually obscured by our focus on the trivia of everyday life, by boredom and pessimism, it can also lead to visionary experiences, thus allowing man to transcend the personal in the pursuit of the universal (cf. Wilson 1972a: 35). Imagination is instrumental in our achievement of the basic evolutionary goal, namely the development of the telescopic kind of consciousness, which Wilson calls Faculty X. In *The Occult* he describes this "intenser and more powerful form of consciousness" (1979: 46) as follows:

> Faculty X is simply that latent power that human beings possess to *reach beyond the present*. After all, we know perfectly well that the past is as real as the present, and that New York and Singapore and Lhasa and Stepney Green are all as real as this place I happen to be in at the moment. *Yet my senses do not agree*. They assure me that this place, here and now, is far more real than any other place or any other time. Only in certain moments of great inner intensity do I know this to be a lie. Faculty X is a sense of reality, the reality of other places and other times, and it is the possession of it – fragmentary and uncertain though it is – that distinguishes man from all other animals. (1979: 73-74)

To exemplify the operation of Faculty X, Wilson recalls the experiences described in some of his favourite novels. One example comes from Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, in which a madeleine dipped in tea brings back the hero's past as realistically as if it was the present (Wilson 1979: 74). Another example can be seen in Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, whose protagonist, Harry Heller, decides to commit suicide out of boredom and entrapment in an everyday routine, but experiences a moment of inner freedom while glimpsing the eternal ("Mozart, and the stars") over a glass of wine (see Lachman 2016: 63). However, the most convincing instance of the working of Faculty X is

found by Wilson in Arnold Toynbee's account of his contemplation of the ruins of Mistra (Mystras), a town in Greece which was laid waste in the 1812 uprising. Toynbee, a British historian and philosopher, relates that at the sight of the desolate scene his imagination "conjured up" the "total *reality*" of what happened in that place one hundred years before and allowed him to experience his own "momentary communion" with the people involved in it (apud Wilson 1979: 76). Yet another, far more powerful occurrence of this kind took place sometime later, during Toynbee's walk in London, when "he found himself in communion, not just with this or that episode in History, but with all that had been, and was, and was to come. In that instant he was directly aware of the passage of History gently flowing through him in a mighty current, and of his own life welling like a wave in the flow of this vast tide" (77).

Wilson argues that in order to have such moments of "total reality" as Toynbee's experiences described above, insight and logic (i.e. the subconscious and the conscious, the right brain and the left brain respectively) must work together. The meaning generated by our right brain (which, as Wilson claims, is responsible for paranormal phenomena as well as for poetic, aesthetic, mystical and spiritual experiences [see Lachman 2016: 190]) must be controlled and converted into purpose by our left brain (Lachman 2016: 198)[60]. Even more than that, it is the knowledge which resides in the left brain that constitutes the fodder for revelation in moments of Faculty X. Lachman postulates:

> When we speak with only one brain, we may give cognitive assent, but we don't feel the reality of what we are saying, we see it only in 2-D, as it were. Both brains give us a 3-D truth. Someone else with Toynbee would have seen only ruins at Mistra. Because he brought both his knowledge and his imagination together, Toynbee was taken up above the limits of the present. For a moment he stepped out of time and was privy to a reality much greater than what we usually perceive. (2016: 199)

This belief is imaginatively employed in the *Spider World*. In *The Delta*, when Niall experiences the sudden workings of Faculty X in himself, he comes to realise that "these two aspects of his being", namely receptivity and willpower, which here stand respectively for insight and logic, are not mutually exclusive and antagonistic forces, that they could function in perfect equilibrium, in which willpower could have control over receptivity and not destroy it:

> He felt as though he was standing on the threshold of his own inner-domain, looking down on it as he had looked down on the land of Dira from the top of the citadel on the plateau. The whole of his past life was there before him as real as the present moment. And if he raised his eyes, he could become aware of even more distant horizons – of other lives before the present one, and of the lives of all other human beings. (*D* 131)[61]

Niall reaches the state of expanded consciousness in which, as Wilson puts it in *Religion and the Rebel*, "all sorts of other places and other times are revived" (1957: 168), and the present ceases to be a prison in which man desiccates spiritually overwhelmed by boredom and exhaustion. Instead it becomes interwoven into a continuum of times, places and lives, through which man can freely move unchained from the physical world and its stimuli, guided by optimism and a sense of purpose – a true "creature of the mind", not a superman but a properly evolved human being using a full range of his inherent evolutionary capacities[62].

5. Human / Animal / Person / Monster

Already on his voyage across the sea Niall notes that the human servants demonstrate the same kind of indifference as well-trained animals, their faces and minds, which Niall telepathically probes, being completely devoid of individuality. They are beautiful and strong, but their minds are weak and mirror one another like those of insects in a colony: "When he tried to look into the mind of any one of the sailors, it was as if he was looking *through* it, into someone else's, in a kind of infinite regress. It reminded him of looking into the minds of the ants. They seemed to share one another's identity" (*T* 216). Only later does Niall realise that the servants' minds have been tampered with by the spiders, to whom they are fiercely loyal[63]. Interestingly, many of those who are commanders and guards consider themselves spiders, loathing other humans as animals or apes (*T* 282)[64]. When Niall, who has telepathic abilities, visits the nursery where his little sisters were allocated, he is astonished at the fact that the mind of one of the female guards does not work on the normal human level: "This was the strange, watchful passivity of a spider waiting for its prey to fly into the web. Incredible as it seemed, he was looking at a human being whose mind functioned like that of a spider" (*T* 277-278). Niall realizes that the guard's mind must have been moulded from such an early age that it has "taken the imprint of the spider mentality" (*T* 279), which reminds him of Veig's domestication of the pepsis wasp and the ants from when they were larvae "until they were,

in some respects, almost human" (*T* 279)[65]. As such every servant in the city has two selves – one human and the other spider, and as long as the spiders control the latter, thinks Niall, the humans will never rebel[66].

By imagining the possibility of one species acquiring the characteristics of another in the process of upbringing, Wilson shows the porousness of the boundaries separating the established notions of human and animal, which lie at the root of human supremacism. The dyad human/animal is deconstructed not only on the cognitive level (that of self-perception) but also on the linguistic level. For the spiders, the term "human being" is comparable to "pig" in a human language. They also refuse to be called "spiders" by their human subjects, because the term "spider" implies the denigrating position of an insect (*T* 236)[67]. Instead, they are called "masters" and "persons", a term devoid of brutish connotations but being originally applied to human beings[68]. The redefinition of concepts such as human/animal/person is communicated by King Kazak, who decided to cooperate with the conquerors for the sake of his people:

> The spiders are the masters. They can do what they like, whether we agree or not. And although you might not believe this, they're not really as bad as you might suppose. Some of them are quite remarkable people. You should think of them as people, by the way, not insects. They can sense our feelings about them, and don't like being regarded as insects. So get into the habit of thinking of them as people. And they are the masters. They can do what they like. It doesn't bother you to eat a dead bird, does it? Well, it doesn't bother them to eat a dead human. To them, we're only intelligent cattle. Yet I've known people who kept birds as pets – they loved them as much as their own children. The spiders feel the same about human beings. They often get quite fond of us. Now if it's a choice between being eaten and being regarded as a pet, I know exactly where I stand. I prefer to stay alive. (*T* 299)

Kazak's words bring to mind the distinction between "humanized animals", i.e. those kept as pets, and "animalized animals", i.e. those which are bred for consumption (Bourke 2013: 276-277). If humans are treated as animals in the spider city, Kazak wants to ensure that the Dirans escape the spiders' system of mass production of meat and cheap labour, in which women are "turned into breeding machines", "producing a stranger's baby once a year" (*T* 301) as if they were cows or sheep. As opposed to Niall, who at this point can only feel hatred towards the spiders for killing his father and enslaving humankind, Kazak is more perceptive and able to rise above narrow-mindedness and prejudices, seeing immediate benefits in his collaboration with the "enemy". Accepting the spiders' man-eating habits, as long as they are not directed at his Diran subjects, Kazak also admires their human-like intelligence:

> They are highly civilised creatures. They have their thinkers and their artists and their statesmen – I've been talking with their leading statesman all afternoon, a spider called Dravig. You'd be amazed how fascinating these people are, once you get to know them. […] I know what you're thinking – that it's hard to feel friendly towards people who are eating human beings. I feel the same. But if they trust you, they don't mind you protecting those close to you. They accept that as normal and natural. (*T* 302)[69]

In his *Spider World* cycle Wilson ascribes intelligence which results in the creation of culture and manners to a non-human species. It is also intelligence in the emotional sense, one that makes possible mutual understanding between humans and spiders, as in the case of Niall and Dravig, who are telepathically discussing the assassination of Skorbo, the captain of the Spider Lord's guard:

> Insofar as it was possible for a spider to understand a human being, and for a human being to understand a spider, these

> two understood one another. […] There was a silence between them, but it was the silence of understanding. Intelligence had bridged the gap between their two species, so that it was as if both were human or both were spiders. (*M* 20-21)[70]

At this point, it is necessary to recall again Wilson's theory on the evolutionary split between the left brain and the right brain as well as Niall's already mentioned ability to establish balance between willpower and receptivity, which are respectively connected with left-brain and right-brain consciousness. In his book *From Atlantis to the Sphinx*, Wilson argues that one of the qualities of the unicameral consciousness (one in which the aforementioned split has not yet taken place) is the "collective unconscious", allowing for man's close contact with nature and other persons. Another quality is the so-called "group mind", i.e. the united mental powers of individual people working as a collective, which can result in incredible feats such as telekinesis (e.g. moving enormous blocks of stone by ancient pyramid-builders) and telepathic communication (see 1996: 267-273).

These ideas are crucial for our understanding of the spiders in Wilson's novels. Theirs is a unicameral, telepathic society where each member shares in the collective consciousness, feeling and empathising with another – if one spider is killed or suffering, all the others can feel it (see *T* 466, 481, and *D* 145). This explains why the killing of a solitary death spider in the desert, which happens to Niall, alarms its entire species and brings immediate retribution on the killer. Moreover, having direct access to the group mind, the spiders can lock their already mighty individual wills together and exert an unimaginable force, a phenomenon called MRI (multiple reinforcement interaction). At the end of *The Delta*, Niall discovers that the Spider Lord, whom he before imagined as a giant tarantula lurking in the dark, with tremendous willpower and one hundred eyes, is in fact a small aged female spider surrounded by a host of smaller spiders sitting on a web, their many eyes glowing in the dark, whose willpowers operate as one (*D* 227-228).

In the third volume of the cycle, Niall is invited to take part in a meeting in the hall of the Spider Lord and he is granted the honour to become part of the general consciousness that unites all spiders. The meeting is in fact the trial of a group of disobedient spiders who hunted and fed on the humans in spite of the prohibition of such practices inscribed in the recent treaty between the spiders and the human beings. The sentence is death, and Niall can witness how the collective will inflicts physical damage on the guilty, crushing their bodies and turning them into a mass of mangled, bleeding flesh. Niall comes to understand that the strength of the spiders' willpower comes from the immense power of this collective mind, whereas human willpower is weak, because the sense of connection with another human is weak – each human lives alone in a kind of prison cell (*S* 116), a price we pay for the individuality involved in the evolutionary predominance of left-brain consciousness. This topic will be discussed later in this study.

Yet another quality whose superiority Niall frequently notes is the spiders' communication, in which "meanings [are] conveyed instantaneously, and with a precision beyond the power of language", as opposed to the "crudity and clumsiness of human speech" (*M* 23) – an evident function of the right brain, which is considered non-verbal, intuitive and visual (see 1984: 131-132)[71]. The spiders also possess something akin to photographic memory, being able to communicate their past in the form of images, which is more immediate and true to life (unmediated by words) but also demanding for humans used to communicating things in a language which is structured rhetorically. Having no written records, the spiders keep the minds of their great ancestors alive by means of the life energy provided by young spider priests, who revive the memories of the distinguished dead in times of need.

The spiders, therefore, seem to communicate their "mental experience" directly, without spoken or written symbols, an achievement that was applauded by philosophers and linguists from Plato onwards[72]. Niall, however, advocates the superiority of writing as a way of registering experience and speech, which he finds more useful and convenient. He

states it in his conversation with Quisib the Wise, an ancient spider statesman whose spirit is kept alive to preserve his memories despite Quisib's own preference for death:

> It is true that writing could not capture the richness of your memories. But it could duplicate all the essential facts. […] There was a time when human beings did not possess writing. But they possessed speech, and minstrels and storytellers memorized accounts of great deeds, and kept them alive for generation after generation. Then writing was invented, and it became possible to keep records. From that time on, man was able to know his own history. Now all the known history of the human race is contained in the records of the white tower. (*M* 358)[73]

Niall regards the spiders' dislike of writing as a form of laziness which prevents a person from doing something just because the task seems boring. This reluctance or inability to meet "the challenge of no challenge", i.e. the life of trivia, duty or drudgery, and maintain a sense of purpose without relaxing one's will and succumbing to spiritual inertia, is also typical of most men. In *A Criminal History of Mankind*, Wilson recalls an observation made by the American neuropsychologist Roger Sperry that the right brain (our "intuitive hemisphere") works more slowly than the left brain, the "you", which deals with the world and seems to be always rushing. As a consequence, the two hemispheres "are always losing contact":

> Every time "you" become tense or anxious or over-tired, the gap between them increases and life begins to take on an air of unreality. This is because it is the business of the right brain to provide experience with a third dimension of reality. And it can only do this when the two halves are, so to speak, strolling side by side. (1984: 156)

However, humans are capable of extreme concentration, a focus on detail, which slows down the left brain and makes it work at the same pace as the right brain to the extent that the whole experience becomes "interesting" (1984: 157). Wilson thus comments on the relationship between the split of the human brain and civilisational progress:

> With this new detachment from nature, man began to study it with a critical eye and observe its habits. […] These remarkable discoveries reveal the impact of man's newly acquired "bicameralism". The earliest farmers were undoubtedly interested in the sun and moon; but they would not have dreamed of doing anything so boring as measuring angles and calculating distances. Yet this was one of the most important consequences of bicameralism; it meant that people often did "boring" things merely to escape from boredom – a paradox with which we are all familiar. The result was the discovery that calculation and measurement give us a new power over the physical world. (1984: 145)

Niall accordingly argues that there have been those few among his people – reminiscent of Toynbee's "creative minority", the creative .005 per cent, and Maslow's self-actualisers, individuals whom Wilson calls "the evolutionary spearhead of the human race" (2004: 215) – who were not lazy and who, owing to their unwavering will and determination, can be credited with building human civilisation:

> It was these men who kept the records of history, and made maps of the stars in the sky, and studied the laws of geometry – all activities that most humans considered boring. That is how men came to build great cities and to conquer the earth – by doing things that you consider boring. It is only by doing things that they consider boring that men can cease to be slaves and learn to become masters. (*M* 359)

The conflict between the pictorial/telepathic and the written/verbal ultimately boils down again to the difference between the spiders' predominantly right-brain and humans' predominantly left-brain consciousness. Niall finds fault with the spiders' complacency to live in the present, without any interest in the past, which, by implication, also involves little interest in the future. Their way of retrieving the past from oblivion is often faced with the resistance of the spirit who, like Quisib the Wise, only wants to rest in peace. Such occasions also involve the collective effort of the spiders' minds. In contrast, the human dead from the past "speak" through legends transmitted orally from generation to generation (like Niall's grandfather's stories), and through written texts, which can be made easily accessible to all literate people over the centuries[74].

Wilson argues that the invention of writing around 3000 BC resulted in the development of consciousness (i.e. self-awareness) connected with the left brain: "Writing – whose purpose is the storage of information – drove man into a new kind of complexity, […] that undermined the [unicameral] mind" of our primitive ancestors (1984: 133-134). Niall recognises the fact that writing (which, together with speech, is the domain of the left brain) contributed to human progress. If it is possible to record knowledge of sciences, medicine, building, agriculture, poetry and the like, this knowledge can also be more easily disseminated, without lacunae and corruptions produced by prejudiced retellings or memory failures. It is less graphic but conveys all the facts. And if this written knowledge is widely circulated, it lies at the foundations of all developed societies and thus (in)directly influences the relations of subjection and power. Last but not least, the written word can become "the third force", accelerating the mental and social evolution of individuals and societies. Wilson notes:

> A talented left-brain individual, like Thales or Pythagoras or Plato, produces important ideas, and these are disseminated by means of writing, influencing far more people than even the most charismatic shaman. It was with the aid of the New Testament and the Koran that Jesus and Mohammed went on to conquer the world.
>
> The problem with left-brain consciousness is that it creates frustration, which in turn produces criminals who take out their frustrations on the rest of society. Yet one single book like the *Morte d'Arthur* – written in prison by a man who was both a brigand and a rapist – can change the sensibility of the whole continent. After the invention of the printing press, talented individuals could influence millions. Since the 1440s, when Gutenberg invented the printing press, it would be possible to write the history of western civilisation in terms of important books – beginning with Luther's 95 theses and his translation of the Bible. (1996: 272-273)

The impact of the written word can therefore be seen as one possible reason why the Spider Lord is so afraid of the contents of the white tower (a museum housing records of humankind's achievements), and of books, almost all of which are burnt by his order. Books have the ability to inspire thoughts and arouse powerful emotions, conducive to fomenting social discontent and a pursuit of freedom. Therefore, like ancient technologies, they can be instrumental in restoring humans to their dominant position[75].

Interestingly, technology is yet another prism through which Wilson presents the difference between right-brain and left-brain consciousness, as well as interrogates the questions of humanness and monstrosity. At one point, Niall argues that the spiders have no imagination, that they cannot create but only appropriate, as has happened with many human achievements, the most important of them being cities (*T* 347). Indeed, the spiders do not possess technologies in the human sense, resulting from scientific observation, experimentation and industrial production. In contrast, their technologies are ecological, showcasing factors like closeness to nature, responsiveness to instinct,

understanding one's fellow creatures and other living beings, and an almost mystical awareness of life networks – qualities typically associated with the right brain.

The two major spider inventions shown by Wilson are fear-probes and flying balloons. Fear-probes are spying devices by means of which the spiders detect human colonies under the floor of the desert, as "the searching will of the death spider seemed to have some quality that amplified [human] feelings and released involuntary bursts of fear" (*T* 16). Adults train their will to take control of their emotions (belonging to the domain of the right hemisphere); children, however, incapable yet of such an effort, have to be drugged into sleep by means of the juice from the carnivorous ortis plant (see T 16-17)[76]. The balloons, in turn, are made of spider silk and wood, and they are propelled by a lighter-than-air gas exuded by the water creature Porifera Mephitis, also called the skunk-sponge or the porifid. The porifids are put in closed water tanks, darkness and enclosure working as stimuli to the production of gas. The creatures share the collective consciousness, which makes them aware of one another even if they are on different balloons; in this way, they are able to maintain the same distance between their craft as well as the same altitude. The spiders can easily influence take-offs, landings and flight routes simply by controlling the creatures' less developed "minds" (*D* 471)[77].

In contrast, human technologies, an achievement of their left brain, are often shown as non-sustainable and destructive, as happens for example with the Reapers, a deadly weapon of mass destruction produced by ancient humans with the help of a nuclear technology[78]. Towards the end of the first volume, Niall and several men from the city of the bombardier beetles find an old fortress in the spider city, seize the Reapers hidden there, and use them on the attacking arachnids. They kill three thousand spiders and cause permanent injuries in many others, thereby demonstrating to the Death Lord that the spiders will never be safe as long as the free humans exist. The site of the massacre, which Niall and his friend Doggins visit several days later, resembles a crater, with charred earth and vaporised rock, filled with thousands of decaying bodies of their eight-legged enemies, and even Niall, determined to destroy the spiders, is shocked at the result of his own actions (*D* 38)[79].

The spiders' efforts to "breed intelligence out of humans" can be attributed to their fear of this intelligence, as it has been invariably connected with ruthlessness and destruction (e.g. the Reapers). Niall notices immediately that the humans of the spider city are "of low degree of intelligence but in no way hostile" (*T* 133). Peace and lack of crime were achieved through genetic modification instead of mental effort and discipline. This evolutionary shortcut produced a "perfectly" peaceful human society, however, at the cost of intellectual degradation and civilisational impasse.

As opposed to the spiders, the bombardier beetles are not afraid of human intelligence; they are fascinated by human achievement but also by man's destructiveness. They derive extreme pleasure from the watching – over and over again – of old films documenting acts of human violence: the artillery bombardments and trench warfare of the First World War, the blitzes of the Second World War, the dropping of the nuclear bombs on Japan, as well as recordings of various demolitions (*T* 392-393)[80]. "They have always defended themselves by explosions – therefore, to them, explosions are beautiful," explains Steeg. "The chief business of their servants is to devise tremendous explosions. To do this, they need a fairly high degree of intelligence" (*T* 352). And high intelligence fosters a desire for freedom, even if it means destruction.

At the council of the beetles, the Spider Lord, farspeaking through one of his female commanders, demands that Niall and his accomplice Doggins be turned over to the spiders and punished by death, criticising the beetles' permissiveness as follows:

> You know, as we do, that these human creatures were once masters of the earth. That was because our ancestors and yours were small enough to be ignored. But we also know that they spent all their time quarrelling and killing one another. They were incapable of living in peace. Finally, the gods grew tired of them,

> and made us masters. And ever since then, the earth has been at peace. […] You may feel that it would make no difference to let one of our enemies go free. But if human beings ever cease to be our servants you would soon learn the difference. These creatures are not capable of living in peace. They would not be content until they were the masters and you and I the servants. (*T* 492)

It does not take Niall long to understand the rationale behind the Spider Lord's concern and the errors of his own ways:

> I used to wonder why the spiders hated men so much. I thought it was because they were monsters. Then I found out the real reason: because they were afraid of us. They regarded us as the monsters. They had to enslave us because they believed we threatened their existence. And nothing that has happened since then has made them change their minds. (*M* 46)[81]

The dyad human (meaning civilised, non-violent, peaceful) vs monstrous (meaning warlike, bloodthirsty, barbarous, horrifying) is steadily deconstructed throughout the cycle. When Niall becomes angry at the empress plant for favouring a species that murdered, devoured and enslaved their fellow creatures, the plant answers back: "Then how can you favour your own kind? They were murdering, enslaving, and devouring their fellow creatures long before the spiders. They murdered and enslaved their enemies and bred animals for food. How can you say they are better than the spiders?" (*D* 168). Niall learns from the empress plant that the human heroes from old tales – Ivar the Strong, Skapta the Cunning, Vaken the Wise – were in fact butchers of their own people and spiders alike. They conquered, killed and enslaved, feeding their lust for power and carnage with the slaughter of the weak. They resorted to subterfuge and manipulation, using desert spiders to spy on the death spiders in their own cities long before Cheb the Mighty, a great Spider Lord from the past, started using his human servants to infiltrate human communities[82].

In the legends explaining the downfall of man that Niall hears from his grandfather, Cheb the Mighty, who is said to have conquered men by learning the secrets of the human soul, is pictured as a hundred-eyed giant monster, a cruel, vindictive, voracious, Pharaoh-like king, taking advantage of human emotions and weaknesses, devouring prisoners, orchestrating public executions (eatings) of rebellious human clans, and practicing justice in a manner which presupposes collective responsibility for individual crimes (one hundred humans for one killed death spider) (*T* 14, 91-93). However, when Niall, recently made ruler of the spider city, converses with the spirit of Cheb in the third volume of the cycle, he learns that the Spider Lord was in fact smaller than an average human being, cunning but with a sense of humour, and by no means a ruthless bloodthirsty man-eater but a protector of his people, who would have wanted to live in peace with the humans. In the language of images, Cheb projects to Niall some hair-raising scenes of massacres that humans brought on spider males, females and children. Niall can see the spiders being hunted in their own settlements by men who wanted lands and power, ambushed and then burnt alive or battered to pulp. "My people are peace-loving and unsuspicious. All they wanted was to be allowed to live without fear," says Cheb, but humans were vengeful, cruel and greedy, and kept attacking and killing them wherever the spiders settled (*M* 335). Paradoxically, the cruelty and belligerence of the humans produced a stimulus to the spiders' development into a formidable enemy:

> The spiders were already evolving at an accelerated rate; now their misery and hatred concentrated the powers of the will. Within a few generations, they had developed a poison strong enough to kill the largest man or horse, and a will-power capable of paralysing a man in his tracks, and preventing him from moving until he had been injected with venom. This was how the spiders became the deadliest creatures on the planet – out of a desperate need to prevent their extermination by human beings. (*M* 334)[83]

Prejudice and scorn, which dehumanise another species and lead to violence – two perennial flaws of human nature which characterised the rulers of old and speeded their demise – are not extinct, and can be found among Niall's friends and accomplices from the city of the bombardier beetles, and more specifically, in Bill Doggins. Even though Doggins is a helpful and likeable man and they become friends, Niall often finds himself perturbed by Doggins's yearning for the kill. It is Doggins who suggests taking possession of the ancient Reapers and who seems to be most determined to use them in confrontation with everyone who opposes him: the spiders, the creatures of the Delta, even the empress plant and the life force it emits, which Niall finds very disturbing (*D* 61)[84]. Doggins is a human supremacist who dismisses the spiders as crawlies and "black bastards" (see *T* 223, 262), and mocks the beetles' benevolence and integrity in keeping the Peace Treaty (see *D* 37). Once he can exert mind-control over another species, he becomes ruthless, as happens, for example, with a swarm of flies upon which he tests his thought-mirror: he makes them fly in circles for such a long time that he exhausts them to death (*D* 44-5)[85].

The above observations corroborate Wilson's idea that human history has been "fundamentally a history of crime", besides being also a history of creativity (1984: 7). He attributes the rise in cruelty and gratuitous violence in man to the already discussed breakdown of the unicameral mind[86], the origin of this new ruthlessness being traceable to the left-brain ego, which started asserting itself towards the end of the second millennium BC (Lachman 2016: 223-224). Unlike unicameral, intuitive man, stressed and impatient left-brain individuals, ready to resort to whatever means in order to achieve the necessary goal, were no longer in harmony with the surrounding world. The ability to rise above the present moment and to look at the world objectively, which came with the bicamerality of the brain, resulted in our civilisational development – science, philosophy, literature, arts – the already mentioned "noösphere", which makes us "specifically human". However, the same detachment from the world – from the right brain, i.e. one's intuitive side, one's *god* – also involved a shift in the perception of others, be it human or animal: they could be treated as objects, "*less real* than ourselves or our tribe" (Lachman 2016: 225). As a consequence, the appearance of the bicameral mind fostered our capacity for cruelty and aggression to proportions unobserved before (Lachman 2016: 225). In the words of Arthur Koestler, whose ideas greatly influenced Wilson's work on the topic, "[t]he creativity and pathology of man are two faces of the same medal, coined in the same evolutionary mint" (apud Lachman 2016: 225)[87].

The key concept here is the concept of the "Right Man" (or the "violent man"), i.e. a man "driven by a manic need for self-esteem", who lives in a world of his own idealistic delusions, detached from reality, who is convinced of his own infallibility, and who is not capable of taking criticism or resistance without aggression (Wilson 1984: 66; cf. Lachman 2016: 223). According to Wilson, most of the world's history has been written by such Right Men, despots and dictators like Genghis Khan, Caligula, Nero, Ivan the Terrible or, more recently, Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini. All of those tyrannical individuals were ready to eliminate everyone who opposed them with fierce cruelty, they were a law unto themselves, regarding their own wishes as superior to any other concerns. However, as Wilson argues, those people usually ended miserably, becoming "half insane", due to their "over-indulged feelings" (1984: 6; cf. Lachman 2016: 223). Moreover, as Wilson postulates, the left-brain delusion of righteousness, when taken to the level of society or polity, may result in a kind of general paranoia and "spiritual arthritis", or "slow exhaustion" (1984: 143, 144), as in the case of such militaristic societies as Sparta or North Korea. It may also manifest itself in all kinds of depravity and bloodshed, such as those accompanying the ultra-materialistic view of life characteristic of ancient Rome, which led to the Romans' "ruthless pursuit of personal power and gain" (Lachman 2016: 226; cf. Wilson 1984: 178 ff.).

The above considerations find their way into *Spider World* and Wilson's depiction of Shadowland, a city of human exiles under a volcano.

Niall visits Shadowland in the last volume of the cycle, looking for a cure for his dying brother, Veig, who was deliberately infected by the spies of Shadowland's ruler, the karvasid (also called the Magician). The history of the settlement as well as its present organisation leaves no doubt about the destructive potential of man and his inclination to do evil. The city's founder, Captain Sathanas, and his faithful band, who escaped from Korsh (the spider city) when it was conquered by the death spiders, are a perfect example of the ruthlessness and single-minded determination with which human beings have been asserting their domination over their own and other species. Niall learns that though they themselves were refugees grieving for their lost families and friends, they did not show any pity to others, exterminating and enslaving them in the process of constructing their new home. Sathanas' band hunted the indigenous sentient species of the mountain, the troglas, for meat and skins, to the point of extinction (*S* 318). They also organised raids on the nearby human settlements, abducting women to bear their children and men to build the underground city as slaves (*S* 174). Moreover, the thirteen descendants of karvasid Sathanas used science and alchemy in their attempt to control the population of Shadowland and realise their deranged fantasies without consideration for their fellow creatures. They experimented with the human body and mind: they created the freak show that Niall can see in the palace museum; abominations like men with square or egg-shaped heads; or the super-brain that lived outside the human body and went insane as a result of excessive stimulation (*S* 277).

Women are especially oppressed in Shadowland: most of them, particularly those living in the centre of the city, close to the karvasid's palace, have their tongues cut out in childhood and have to communicate telepathically because the old karvasid, a misogynist tyrant, cannot stand noise (*S* 224-225)[88]. Some women have round eyes because the karvasid at one point thought it made them look cute and attractive (*S* 233). Some women were also made sterile in the past to keep down the population of Shadowland, but something went wrong and infertility spread to all the sex, as a result of which no child has been born in Shadowland for the last twenty years (*S* 249). Because marriage, partnerships and long cohabitation are discouraged or forbidden in Shadowland[89], older women who cannot find lovers are constantly frustrated, suffering from the excess of sexual energy, additionally stimulated by a rejuvenating drug they have to take (*S* 322).

The society, built on and kept by its rulers in fear of the spiders, seems to be collapsing under "a rising tide of boredom" (*S* 282), hopelessness and infertility, even though, on the surface, attempts are made to keep the citizens busy and "satisfied" with their lot. In order to stave off a potential rebellion, "new goals, new purposes, new distractions" (*S* 361) are devised by the karvasid for his subjects. He invents reality machines which respond to people's imagination; however, the situation deteriorates because Shadowlanders, imprisoned under the volcano, begin to dream about distant places shown to them by the machines. The karvasid then creates an arson squad to start fires at the outskirts of the city so that the people are busy putting them out. The workers are urged to superhuman efforts to complete the city walls by the incentive to move to a higher social class, and the troops are drilled all the time in anticipation of the spiders' attack, which never comes (*S* 361). However, the society, turned into a military and labour camp, and at the mercy of external stimuli to keep boredom at bay, remains in a state of ennui, under the surface of which seethe frustration and an unrealised desire for change. In this respect, Shadowland is very much like Dira.

Wilson depicts the society of Shadowland as a dictatorship clothed as democracy, which combines elements of communism on one hand and oligarchy on the other. It is fiercely stratified, its social structure matching its spatial organisation: the highest level for the privileged; two levels down for menial workers; and below, in the mines, the lowest castes, prisoners and outcasts (see *S* 247, 260-262). The people of Shadowland are obligated to participate in communal activities: solitude and pensiveness are discouraged and punished because "in a happy community like theirs, nonparticipation was perceived as a criticism, which introduced a note of discord" (*S* 290). Twice a year, at a ball in

the karvasid's palace, the managers and supervisors have to report the completion of the work plan, with some workers being rewarded for their superhuman efforts with promotion to a higher class, and others being castigated for laziness or negligence with flogging, imprisonment or forced labour in the mines (*S* 289-294). Over those events presides the karvasid himself, an allegedly benevolent and loving ruler; in reality, a despot craving power and despising his people, who exercises mind control and takes advantage of the telepathic communication among his subjects which allows human sentiments to be shared instantaneously in applause for his actions (see *S* 287-288).

In this context, the name of the founder, Sathanas, sounds ominous, as Shadowland is indeed like hell. One cannot help thinking that the practices of the karvasids with respect to their subjects do not differ much from those of the spider lords with respect to humans before Niall became the ruler. The upper classes of Shadowland are beautiful but empty-headed, just like the spider servants, the lower classes are abused, brutalised and forced to live on the margins of the society, like the slaves of the spider city[90]. Additional aspects include: the experiments with human reproduction[91], appearance and psychology; the eradication of human bonds and instincts; the system of state nurseries in times when children were born (see S 263); and prohibitions imposed on citizens' mobility and other social rights, namely marriage and family[92]. Only that the spiders did that for the preservation of their own species, while the karvasids did it out of perverse curiosity or the intention of preserving their own power. No wonder, when asked by their guide if he enjoyed the tour of Shadowland, Niall's spider companion, Captain Makanda, answers obliquely that "[he] found it very instructive" (*S* 265)[93].

The figure of the last karvasid is built on the already mentioned concept of the Right Man, a paranoid tyrant whose left-brain ego brooks no opposition or disagreement[94]. The karvasid lures Niall to Shadowland in order to subjugate him to his will and take his place as the ruler of the spider city. This would allow the Shadowlanders to travel and it would thus dissipate social frustrations which threaten the karvasid's power. At an annual ball, nevertheless, the karvasid refuses to negotiate with Niall as his equal; instead, he wants the younger man to kneel before him and kiss his hand in subjection. Niall refuses, and for this he is struck unconscious and thrown into prison (*S* 296). However, the imprisonment of the envoy from the spider city causes public discontent: the crowd of citizens who have hoped that a peace treaty with the spiders will be signed and the Shadowlanders will finally be free to go wherever they want demand that Niall be released and peace be made with the spiders, which causes the karvasid's rage and yearning for revenge:

> This glimpse into sadism was a new experience for Niall. When he had first come to the spider city he had believed that the spiders took pleasure in cruelty; now he knew that it was only a form of the satisfaction predators take in disabling their prey. But in the Magician he could sense a murderous sickness that went beyond anything he had ever encountered. The Magician had fed on power until it had turned him into a monster. This monomaniac had indulged his whims until he had come to believe that his will was a law of nature. To Niall's astonished perception, he seemed to have lost all contact with reality and gone insane. (*S* 344)

Like all tyrannical Right Men, the karvasid sees other people's actions that he does not approve of as a personal betrayal (cf. Lachman 2016: 223): he blames Typhon, the prefect of Shadowland and his trusted advisor, for announcing the peace treaty with the spiders without consulting him first, and claims that it was "a calculated piece of treachery" (*S* 323). After the karvasid's death at the hands of the creature boca, which he enslaved and used as a weapon against his "enemies", Niall ponders the old man's tyranny as being "a more intense form of the negativity that afflicted the human race" (*S* 364), and which, in the light of Wilson's theory, results from our broken connection with the world, the domain of the right brain, which accompanied our evolutionary rise. The in-

ability to look beyond one's left-brain ego, which results in the lack of empathy and identification with another being, teamed with impatience to realise one's goals at all costs, which leads to cruelty and, ultimately, to the misery of madness and loneliness – these are characteristics latent in all humans, characteristics which terrified the spiders and made them determined to enslave humankind in the first place (*S* 364).

The above considerations about man's left-brain ego bring us back to the question of the intentionality of perception, and, more specifically, to the concept of the "natural standpoint"[95], i.e. the way our mind selects information, "creates" a particular picture of the world and believes this picture to be true (Wilson 1972a: 89-91). In order for the world to appear to us as it really is, undistorted by our prejudices, we need to temporarily suspend our "natural standpoint", which results in objectivity and detachment, but also, on a higher level, in an identification with the other. Initially, Niall's "natural standpoint" involves a picture of the world in which humans are pitted against the spiders, and one species' domination inevitably means the other species' subjection or elimination. The empress plant, which does not take sides and which represents the evolutionary ideal of "reading the universe without prejudice" (see Wilson 1972a: 91), forces him out of his natural, anthropocentric, standpoint and makes him see his own species and the spiders objectively. "We have to fight [the spiders]," Niall finally decides. "But on their own terms. And sooner or later, we have to learn to live with them" (*D* 192)[96].

Another experience of this kind occurs to Niall during the already mentioned trial of Skorbo's man-eating accomplices, when he is allowed to become part of the spiders' collective consciousness[97]:

> Like all human beings, Niall had spent his whole life seeing things from his individual standpoint, like a man sitting alone in a small room; even when closest to others he felt aware of his solitariness. He had taken it for granted that this was what it meant to be alive. Now, suddenly, he was no longer alone; he was a part of a network of other beings, as aware of their existence as he was of his own. The bewildering thing was that his sense of identity had vanished; he had *become* the spiders who surrounded him, while his own identity had somehow become divided amongst them. Yet when he looked inside himself, wondering at this loss of individuality, he realized with surprise that his identity was still there, as it always had been. It was his sense of being himself, of being Niall, that had disappeared. And now he understood that this had always been an illusion, that he had never been Niall. Niall was merely a set of misconceptions. (*M* 140-141)[98]

Niall juxtaposes the egotistic attitude of human beings with that of the chameleon men, the spirits of nature encountered by him on the way to Shadowland, who have assumed a physical form owing to the life force emitted by the empress plant. As opposed to humans with their inclination for cruelty, mistrust and pessimism, the chameleon men believe in the benevolence of the world and its permeating life force (*S* 364). They function as mental connectors between creatures of lower intelligence (e.g. trees, plants, worms, snakes, etc.), bringing to them a sense of unity and mutual awareness, thus being responsible for harmony in nature (*S* 63). This ability comes with a specific understanding of the earth – not "flat", cartographic and scientific, as in the case of humans, but one that comes from their identification with the world and feeling of its hidden forces (*S* 56), an ability proper to right-brain consciousness.

Niall develops a similar ability by achieving the state of deep relaxation, a state of at once profound rest and alertness, in which his "galloping" left-brain mind slows down, and he can notice a reality that has so far been denied to his senses, "a world of rich life-forms of which he normally was unaware" (*S* 39)[99]. By eating the crunchy earthy roots given to him by the chameleon men, which work as drugs opening the doors of perception, he experiences the dissolution of his waking-life identity and becomes one with his surroundings, sensing the vibrations of the life force in all animate and inanimate matter (see *S* 35-39). Niall

drinks water with an earthy flavour which not only quenches his thirst but also makes him indifferent to and even enjoy the feeling of cold and hunger. Moreover, the liquid, in contrast to alcohol, makes him more alert and slows down his heartbeat, inducing a state below the point of deep relaxation. In consequence, "the sheer headlong movement of [Niall's] consciousness" adjusts its pace to "the slow, casual movement" of the consciousness of the chameleon men, making communication possible and sensitising Niall to the wealth of the world to which human senses are normally blind (*S* 40). Elsewhere Niall remarks that "the liquid brought him closer to his companions, so their minds were as real to him as his own," working as "a form of communion wine" (*S* 61-62). The earthy water also seems to foster the opening of Niall's consciousness to the consciousness of all the animal and plant life around him: later in the novel he realises that he is "changing into a different kind of human being, a type that could actually share the minds of other beings, as well as spiders and chameleon men" (*S* 120).

Niall's experiences again call to mind Wilson's ideas on the bicameral mind expounded, for example, in *Frankenstein's Castle. The Right Brain: Door to Wisdom*. In this book Wilson insists that we must recognise in ourselves the existence of two selves: one rational, everyday self, and the other intuitive, unknown self, involved in the "other mode of consciousness" – "the deeper, more relational consciousness responsible for our poetic, aesthetic, and mystical experiences" (apud Lachman 2016: 190). More specifically:

> The right brain's mode of perception was richer, deeper; it provided *meaning*, allowing into consciousness all the "irrelevant" detail that our left-brain purposive consciousness filtered out. It was the kind of perception that informed Robert Graves's method of "looking sideways at disorderly facts to make perfect sense of them," and which allows us to appreciate the beauty of a symphony or painting. The right brain's preference for patterns was the source of the bird's-eye view, that feeling of being *above* the immediate moment and the freedom from the limitations of the present it gave. It provided that feeling of vague but vital significance, reaching out into the distance, the "promise of the horizon," that was the essence of Romanticism. It saw the forest, while the left brain was fixated on the individual trees. (Lachman 2016: 190)[100]

Niall can only now understand why he has always felt somewhat alienated from the world, why his human life has seemed odd and unfamiliar, as if he has been obligated to play by rules nobody explained to him beforehand: "it was because half of reality was missing, that part below the point of deep relaxation" (*S* 40). What Niall means by that is the "other mode of consciousness", in which we see meanings behind things and phenomena. While the right brain adds freshness, newness and meaning to our perception, the left brain makes everything ordinary and unrelated, editing out all the richer and deeper impressions provided by our inner self (see Lachman 2016: 190). Most of all, however, Niall enters a transcendent state in which his instinctual powers operate on a par with his intellectual powers. He reconnects with his deepest nature and his subconscious becomes conscious – in a word, he develops Faculty X (see Poulos 2011: 223).

Fundamental in this context is the concept of the robot, an evolutionary mechanism in our brain which allows us to do certain, usually less relevant, things mechanically, or "thoughtlessly", so that we can invest greater energy and attention into other, more important, tasks (see Lachman 2016: 155). However, we very often become too dependent on this robotic consciousness and we lose touch with our life, its richness and essence, leaving the living to our "servant", the robot, instead of doing it ourselves, as masters and agents[101]. The realisation of the human inability to step out of their robotic consciousness and switch to the "other mode of consciousness" comes to Niall during his stay with the chameleon men:

> [The chameleon men] seemed deeply thoughtful. And this, Niall realized, distinguished them from human beings. All of the human beings he had ever known, he would scarcely describe any of them as thoughtful except under rare circumstances. On the contrary, humans seemed to feel that happiness was *not* being thoughtful. Yet they admired thought, and regarded their great philosophers among the most remarkable human beings. Why, then, did they go to so much trouble to achieve states of thoughtlessness? (*S* 35)

"Thoughtlessness" here means robotic consciousness, which turns existence into a chain of routine actions, drudgery and pessimism bound to the present moment. Wilson claims, however, that the "apparent 'ordinariness' of the world is a delusion created by the robot", and that it is in the moments of optimism and joy, "absurd good news" or peak experiences, that we can really see the nature of reality. This inner freedom is best achieved, argues Wilson, "through *intellect*, through knowledge" (apud Lachman 2016: 260). As he writes elsewhere, we need to be aware of what our thoughts are centred on, and the best way is to centre them on "the knowledge that our glimpses of non-robotic consciousness are glimpses of truth" (apud Lachman 2016: 340), thus employing our left brain – the nagging critic and "leveller" of reality – to the task of controlling and endorsing the dimension of meaning provided by our subconscious, i.e. the often silenced right brain. In short, we can be freed from the robot by Faculty X.

The above ideas are echoed by Niall's musings at the close of *Shadowland*, when he realises that unless humans "grasp", i.e. consciously recognise and accept, the secret that the world is ultimately good, that life is interesting and exciting, and that they are free and happy, they will continue to be imprisoned in what Wilson calls "upside-downness" – "a condition in which [o]ur faith in reason gives way to emotionality and our optimism to negativity" (Lachman 2016: 254):

> Could man ever realize that he was the chief cause of his own misery and misfortune, that a mere habit of negative-seeing, and a lack of the courage to date to abandon it, had trapped him in a destiny of conflict and self-mistrust? Could he ever grasp, as Niall could now grasp so clearly, that an enormous optimism was justified? (*S* 364)

According to Wilson, real happiness comes with objectivity, which involves freedom from emotions which run high and make us lose a sense of control (Lachman 2016: 254). In contrast, optimism and purposeful life can activate our latent powers (255). As such, the mind is used "to increase the powers of the mind", and "our freedom to create more freedom" (340). It is through attention, concentration and excitement that humans can strengthen their consciousness and take it to a higher level, where they will no longer be plagued by pessimism and self-doubt, and be slaves to the robot. They will become "sheer intention" and achieve the final stage of evolution into the true "creatures of the mind". As Wilson concludes in *Super Consciousness: The Quest for the Peak Experience*:

> Because my sense of meaning would be so deep, my interest in everything so great, that I would have passed the point where "regress" or collapse is possible. I would be sustained by sheer perception of meaning. And for the human race, this would be the decisive step to becoming something closer to gods. (2009: 207-208)

This almost godlike condition can be interpreted as Wilson's own take on the posthuman, which is a far cry from the understanding of this concept by transhumanism and posthumanism, which typically advocate the enhancement of our bodies and minds by means of science and technology, either digital technologies or genetics and bioengineering. Rather than blending human and machine, or changing

our anatomical, genetic or molecular structure, we should, as Wilson claims, realise our full *human* potential by means of a disciplined training of our minds on the path to rediscovering their hidden powers. This takes us back to Wilson's belief that man as "a creature of the mind", that is "man in the proper sense", is yet to come into being; as he exists now, man is "merely a missing link between an animal and a true man" (1972a: 150). The author's engagement with the vocabulary of evolutionism once again proves significant. The control of consciousness is the key to achieving happiness, accomplishment and a new dimension of freedom, to transcending ourselves as individuals and as a species, and as such, its purpose is truly utopian.

6. Conclusion

In his work *Eupsychian Management*, Abraham Maslow, Wilson's longtime influence and psychological authority, states: "There is no Garden of Eden, there is no paradise, there is no heaven except for a passing moment or two" (apud Hallman 2010: 70). In this way, Maslow dismisses the idea of an ultimately perfect state as unfeasible in the light of the human propensity for always pursuing what is greater, better and more perfect than the things available at the present moment – a quality which Wilson calls "an evolutionary appetite". Maslow imagines an insular culture comprised of 1,000 self-actualisers which would be sheltered from any outside interference. This culture would become as good as the people that were part of it, i.e. as good as their human nature would allow it to become. As Hallman observes: "The important part was to note that the utopian spirit was really an attempt at psychological improvement. In other words, utopia wasn't a place at all. 'We might, if we wished, call it «planning.»' The perfect world became a state of mind" (2010: 70). This utopian state of mind was called Eupsychia[102], and it was characteristic of self-actualisers, that is of people of exceptional motivation, mental as well as physical health, sense of justice, and perfectibility (apud Hallman 2010: 70).

The utopian possibilities connected with the right psychological, or eupsychian, training are voiced by Wilson in his *Introduction to the New Existentialism*. "Man has the technical resources for creating a world-

wide Utopia" (2019: 121), he writes, but humans must take control over their consciousness in order to fight against boredom, passivity and egotism, which will allow them to reconnect with other human beings and the world[103]. Commenting on the emergence of a new type of consciousness characteristic of the Wilsonian Outsiders, Steve Taylor sees its evolutionary progress "beyond the separate ego" as manifest in the moral and social changes of the last two hundred and fifty years:

> [In the mid-eighteenth century], a new wave of empathy seemed to emerge, a new ability to sense the suffering of other human beings – and animals too – and a new emphasis on the *rights* of other individuals. This led to the women's movement, the animal rights movement, the anti-slavery movement, more humane treatment of disabled people and homeless children, and the abolition of brutal forms of punishment. The empathy spread to nature too, resulting in the Romantic movement, based on the feelings of ecstasy and transcendence which nature induced. More recently, this new sense of connection to nature has given rise to the environmental and ecological movements, a return to the empathic and respectful stance towards nature of many of the world's indigenous peoples. The old duality between the ego and the body – and the sexual repression this gave rise to – has begun to fade away too, resulting in a more open attitude to sex and the human body. And of course, over the last decades we have also had the "Aquarian Conspiracy" – a massive upsurge in interest in eastern spiritual traditions, and self-development. (2011: 90)

Taylor regards this "collective intensification of consciousness" and a "progression towards a more integrated, less pathological state" as manifestations of "an evolutionary change" (2011: 90), which, when brought to the level of society, can result in a global utopia, anticipated by Wilson. The outcome of Wilson's existential method will be a society of free

people, driven by a constant urge to live disciplined and conscious lives, to pursue "endless vistas of new knowledge and powers" (Wilson 2019: 122), to rise above their limitations and supersede their moral failings, to create and improve, to do better than their fathers. Most of all, however, it will be a society of happy and accomplished individuals, based on sympathy and empathy, and free from oppression and exploitation of others, including the natural world[104]. In Niall's development in the *Spider World* cycle, Wilson presents man's spiritual journey towards this new kind of consciousness driven by an incessant evolutionary appetite. It is the consciousness of an Outsider who by taking full control of his intentional acts (in the sense postulated by phenomenology) has solved the chief existential problem, namely "the fundamental alienation of beings from the source of power, meaning and purpose" (Wilson 2019: 160)[105].

Michael Marder and Patrícia Vieira argue that existential utopia originates in "the experience of displacement and dislocation, the realisation that the world one inhabits is imperfect, or, in the words of Novalis, that […] 'The world is the *essence* of an imperfect life'" (2012: 38). Wilson would find this statement pessimistic and indicative of the "passive fallacy", which is not surprising, as the point of reference here is Heidegger's existential philosophy, which "take[s] man's 'contingency' to be a basic fact of human existence" (Wilson 2019: 12). Both Heidegger and Wilson lament man's loss of "authenticity" of existence and express the need to be "reconnected to reality" (see Wilson 2018: 177-178), to be cured of what Heidegger calls "the forgetfulness of existence". However, they propose different ways to achieve this. A sense of objectivity related to a person's condition, which involves stepping outside his or her "natural standpoint", can be attained in Heidegger's view only by confronting death, for "to face death reawakens man to the horizons of possibility beyond the present" (Wilson 2019: 118). Wilson, on the other hand, sees the solution to the problem in the phenomenological analysis of consciousness, which can lead to complete self-control and, in consequence, to the transformation of consciousness (see Lachman 2016: 81), a consciousness which in the case of most people is voluntarily

restricted (see Wilson 2019: 119). As opposed to Heidegger's existentialism, Wilson's existentialism is inherently optimistic because like Romanticism, in his opinion, it sees man as much more than he has always thought himself to be (2019: 94). Moreover, he believes in the existence of "*a standard of values external to everyday human consciousness*" (Wilson 2019: 151), which contradict our sense of contingency and underlie man's machinery of purpose. And it is "a deep sense of purpose" that drives authenticity, as opposed to futility, contingency and purposelessness, which are the stock of inauthenticity (151). Wilson claims:

> The pre-condition for any human effort is a vision of success. Man is never so strong, so enterprising, so endlessly resourceful, as when his aim stands clearly in front of him, to be achieved by a definite number of determined strides. To "work without hope" is almost a contradiction in terms, for work without hope is work without real drive, without momentum. (2019: 94)

Wilson's postulate of working "with hope" brings to mind Fátima Vieira's discussion of the contemporary utopian genre, which she sees as a catalyst for human transformation. "By establishing horizons of expectations," argues Vieira, "(with the inevitable awareness that they will never be reached), utopias guide man to the reinvention and the reconstruction of humanity, and thus lead him to his emancipation" (2010: 23). Vieira sees "an immeasurable and perennial desire" as the *raison d'être* of the survival and of the dynamisation of the utopian ideal, which is a process rather than a constant (2010: 21). Last but not least:

> [U]topia has become a strategy of creativity, clearing the way for the only path that man can possibly follow: the path of creation. By incorporating into its logic the dynamic of dreams and using creativity as its very driving force, utopia reveals itself as the (only possible?) sustainable scheme for overcoming the contemporary crisis. (2010: 23)

By showing the eupsychian development of one individual, Wilson implies the possibility of such development at a more general level. The realisation of this utopian ideal, i.e. creating a society of Outsiders driven by a set of common universal values, involves a revolution in the ways we think about ourselves and the world. This revolution is bound to result in the emergence of a more active and relational form of consciousness which will re-establish a sense of connection with our own and other species at a level that transcends the basic instinctual drives involving sustenance and violence. Last but not least, by giving the idea of creative evolution the form of an imaginative construct that is *Spider World* itself, Wilson shows that the utopian impulse or desire is also an expression of the perennial evolutionary drive to self-improvement, an exercise in creativity, and, as such, it embodies the power of imagination in reinforcing a sense of purpose, which in turn, by way of feedback, propels imagination to rise to even greater heights in picturing hopeful futures for humanity. Wilson's new existentialism, which underlies every word of the *Spider World* tetralogy, is a utopian philosophy insofar as it establishes "the horizons of expectations" and makes creativity instrumental if not to reaching those horizons then, at least, to working towards approximating them. "Creation is always connected with self-development, because it is connected to the meaning of human existence" (2019: 81), Wilson writes memorably in *Introduction to the New Existentialism*. If creativity is truly utopia's "driving force", and if it is also the ultimate expression of our humanity, being a product of the imagination, the third evolutionary force, the evolution of the utopian genre is a manifestation of the evolution of human consciousness, whose process is captured over time in works of fiction like *Spider World*.

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Index

Notes

1. In the course of this study, the titles of the four *Spider World* volumes, i.e. *The Tower*, *The Delta*, *The Magician* and *Shadowland*, will be referenced respectively as *T*, *D*, *M* and *S*.
2. At one point, Niall describes the existence of his family as "a continuous misery of thirst, starvation and burning heat" (*T* 23).
3. One of the real treats in the desert is the opuntia fruit.
4. We learn that for lack of water Niall's family have to chew on succulent tubers in order to avoid dehydration (see *T* 28). Also, they can get water from the cup of the waru plant: it is icy cold and tastes like champagne in comparison with the water they have in the burrow. However, every source of water in the desert has to be protected; therefore, the desert dwellers know that they cannot drain the plant of all its reserves because it will die. Having tasted the chilly dew of the waru plant, Niall has "strange racial memories […] of a golden age, when water was plentiful, and men were not forced to live under the floor of the desert like insects" (*T* 12).
5. The improved diet fosters good health. Owing to the honeydew nectar and fruit brought by the ants, Niall's younger sister Runa "within a few weeks was transformed from a tiny, skinny child with arms like twiglets into a chubby little girl whose face was as round as the moon" (*T* 89).
6. Niall's self-esteem is seriously shaken when he overhears Merlew, the daughter of King Kazak with whom he becomes infatuated, dismissing him as a "skinny boy" in a conversation with Ingeld. The fact that "[t]o a king's daughter, he [is] bound to look underfed and undersized" makes Niall feel embarrassed and humiliated (*T* 154).
7. Nicolas Tredell writes: "Dira is *too* secure and comfortable; it helps to ensure that human beings remain the slaves of the death spiders" (2015: 386). This observation calls to mind Wilson's opinion on civilisation as protecting humans from danger but stifling them with boredom (2019: 109).
8. By having the protagonist travel by sea to the utopian land, Wilson follows a typical narrative pattern of classical utopian texts dating back to Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Similarly, Niall's journey to Shadowland,

which leads him under the surface of the earth, is a motif we can find, for example, in the anonymous utopia *A Voyage to the World in the Centre of the Earth* (1755) and later, in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's utopian romance *The Coming Race* (1871). As in earlier utopias, the journey between the two worlds involves not only a physical boundary – the sea in *The Tower* and a wall, a mountainous country and a descent under the volcano in *Shadowland* – but also a set of oppositions, i.e. familiar/unfamiliar, free/prisonlike, etc. Moreover, the presence of guides – Odina, Massig, Doggins, Steeg and Gerek – who familiarise Niall with the topography and laws of the spider city and Shadowland, represents the well-established utopian convention which introduces dialogue and heteroglossia (for a comprehensive analysis of the structure of the utopian genre see Blaim 2013).

9. Odina's attribution of reproductive imprudence to savagery and of artificial selection of desirable traits to civilisation contradicts Darwin's own observations made in *The Descent of Man*:

> With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health. We civilised men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor-laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment. There is reason to believe that vaccination has preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed to small-pox. Thus the weak members of civilised societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man. It is surprising how soon a want of care, or care wrongly directed, leads to the degeneration of a domestic race; but excepting in the case of man himself, hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed. (1981: 168)

10. Infanticide of the weak or deformed is postulated e.g. in Alex Newton's *Posterity, Its Verdicts and Its Methods: or, Of Democracy A.D. 2100* (1897), and Mrs George Corbet's *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future* (1889) (Claeys 2018: 296). Also in Ellis James Davis's *Pyrna: A Commune; or, Under the Ice* (1875), unhealthy or disabled children are exterminated, while in Robert Ellis Dudgeon's *Colymbia* (1873) infanticide is practised as a way of avoiding inborn defects (Claeys 2009: xviii-xix). However, as Claeys notes, this eugenic theme can be traced back to the beginnings of the utopian tradition. In Plato's *Republic*, the elimination of unfit children constitutes one of the methods of preserving "the purity of the race". In turn, in Thomas More's *Utopia*, engaged couples can see each other naked in order to ensure that there will be no hereditary physical defects (2009: xvi). Similarly, in Doni's *I Mondi* (1552), deformed children are thrown into a well after birth (see Davis 1983: 69).

11. One other major contribution to this line of thinking comes from Herbert Spencer's philosophy (or its appropriation by others), which discriminates between civilisations or peoples which are fitter and those that are less fit, and, in a laissez-faire perspective, between the economically fit and unfit (see Bowler 1989: 287-289).

12. This rule, however, does not seem to apply to female commanders. At the end of the first volume, Odina, who has developed feelings for Niall, tries to dissuade him from escaping from the spider city so that he can become her husband. She asserts that it is her privilege as a commander to marry whoever she likes (*T* 408), the right to marry and live together being apparently contingent on a person's position in the social hierarchy.

13. The public display of love or physical attraction (called "bundling") between the "wrong" people, i.e. those who are not physically well-matched, is unlawful and thus punishable by fifty lashes or cutting off one's ears (*T* 270).

14. Similar aspects can be found in early modern and nineteenth-century utopias. The family is abolished in Doni's *I Mondi* and Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1602). In the latter text, men and women are mated in such a way as to produce the fittest children. Children are taken from their mothers, at a different age, and entrusted to the state for their upbringing and education in *I Mondi* and in Andreae's *Christianopolis* (1619). In Carne-Ross's *Quintura: Its Singular People and Remarkable Customs* (1886), similarly, all children are cared for by the state. See Davis 1983: 69, 72, 78; and Claeys 2018: 298.

15. The women servants, like females of most animal species, are mated with the strongest males and they have to give birth to babies fathered by complete

strangers every year (see *T* 300-301). However, for all the reproductive exploitation and ruthlessness experienced by women, they are revered in the spider city, in line with the biology and behavioural traits of the master species. Among the spiders the female is more important than the male; therefore, the spiders regard the patriarchal human norms which turn women into house slaves as "deeply offensive to their natural instincts" (*T* 235). While men are separated in different parts of the city and assigned to physical labour, women are housed together in the centre of the city and "trained to be masters". As Massig explains to Niall and his family, the women of Dira, being used to their subordinate position, will have to be "re-educated" so that they can "assume their new role as masters" with respect to their husbands (*T* 235). In contrast, among the servants of the beetles, who enjoy more freedom and maintain traditional patterns of social life like marriage, family and the upbringing of children, gender relationships remain unchanged: men are still in charge, both in the private and the public sphere, while women meekly perform their traditional gender roles which involve child-rearing and house-keeping (*T* 396).

16. A similar elimination of family bonds and affection occurs in *Swastika Night* by Katharine Burdekin. There is no marriage or cohabitation between the sexes. Women bear children to strangers, and male babies are taken away from their mothers at the age of eighteen months to be brought up by male carers (see 2016: 9-10). However, in contrast to the spider city, where the women have a higher position than the men, in the fiercely patriarchal Nazi society depicted by Burdekin the women are treated as subhuman, often referred to in animal terms (see 2016: 9-11).
17. My understanding of the terms *utopia*, *eutopia* and *dystopia* follows the typology of Lyman Tower Sargent (1994: 9).
18. Odina says that "the servants would die rather than become slaves", as the forfeiture of their rights makes them completely vulnerable and involves humiliation (*T* 281). However, Niall notices that the degradation also triggers a feeling of resentment against the spiders and inspires the servants' awareness of freedom, which makes them Niall's potential allies. Moreover, the demoted servants are treated almost as gods by the slaves; they are allowed to choose the best food and the prettiest slave women. None of those servants really wants to go back to their own caste. Last but not least, they prefer assignments like farm work and food gathering, which offer the greatest degree of freedom from the spiders' supervision (see *T* 382).
19. Only a few people know the truth about the "great happy land", like Kazak and his daughter Merlew, who are "in the secret" (*T* 299). However, unlike Niall, they do not care about what happens to the rest of the humans as long as they can protect the people of Dira against death and exploitation. Likewise, most servants of the beetles partake in the conspiracy of silence, content with their own lot, either concealing or living in denial of the spiders' man-eating habits (see *D* 17). This means that some humans are in fact complicit in the spiders' dystopian policies regarding other humans.
20. Interestingly, the abundance of food is shown in *Spider World* as largely connected with thwarted self-development and mental limitation. Niall himself tends to eat sparingly, especially in situations requiring clarity of mind, as "too much food would make him sleepy" (*T* 294). Elsewhere in the cycle he observes that "the normal sense of satisfaction that followed food was a dulling of the senses, which was the opposite of the sense of mental alertness that seemed an essential part of happiness" (*S* 36). The role of food in Dira as a factor contributing to the omnipresent habit and routine which stifles self-development has already been mentioned.
21. Niall can read the thoughts of one of the dockers at the sight of his mother, Siris, whom he has always considered very beautiful: "What a skinny woman – I wouldn't like to kiss her…" (*T* 226). By the same token, a commander in Kazak's house perceives Siris as "repulsively skinny and unfeminine […] as if Siris had been physically transformed into a kind of ape" (*T* 282).
22. The change in the spiders' feeding habits, i.e. prohibition of the consumption of human flesh, has an important consequence: many slave bodies which would otherwise have been eaten by the spiders are thrown into the river without a burial and they wash up the mudflats of the marshes. There they become the prey of the ghouls – the vampire spirits – who take possession of them in order to attack humans and suck their life force (*S* 57).
23. Niall learns that no slave can sleep in the same quarters as the previous night; in this way, nobody notices when a slave goes missing having been caught by

the spiders and eaten (*T* 450). Servants, on the other hand, are relatively "safe" in this respect, except for a situation in which they break the law, for example, go out after dark or try to enter the women's quarter (*T* 272).

24. Kazak's own bargaining card in his relations with the spiders is his intelligence: the spiders need intelligent people they can trust to organise and run the human population of the spider city (*T* 302).
25. In this sense, the fittest (i.e. the most intelligent and able) were at a disadvantage; it was the poor, allegedly the least intelligent and able, who were more likely to survive and evolve by the very reason of having many offspring (Claeys 2019: 170; cf. Paul 2003: 220).
26. The beetles' fascination with human intelligence and their "mild yoke" which can breed free-thinkers may be the reason why the spiders do not allow their own servants to talk to the servants of the beetles (see T 263). At the same time, the beetles and the spiders have created a slave exchange system in which intelligent men from the city of the beetles, just as the captives from the desert, are mated with attractive women from the spider city in order to breed more intelligent children and prevent the decline of the servant race (*T* 352).
27. The servants of the beetles also possess more individuality. Whereas the spiders' servants have only one, proper, name, the servants of the beetles have both name and surname, which is "an old tradition" (*T* 236).
28. Quoting from *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: "As indicated by the meaning of the Latin word *tendere*, which is the etymology of 'intentionality,' the relevant idea behind intentionality is that of mental directedness towards (or attending to) objects, as if the mind were construed as a mental bow whose arrows could be properly aimed at different targets." In other words, "[t]o say of an individual's mental states that they have intentionality is to say that they are mental representations or that they have contents" (Jacob 2019). Even though this meaning of intentionality should not be confused with its everyday understanding as "purpose" or "goal" (Macey 2001: 202), Wilson seems to blend the two meanings – directedness and purposiveness – in his philosophy.
29. This approach coincides with the Darwinian and neo-Darwinian view of life as governed by random mutations, as subject to the pressures of the environment and as inherently purposeless (Lachman 2016: 122).

30. Wilson compares man in such a situation to a blinkered horse (see 2019: 152, 160).
31. If we were raised in the conviction that the world was a dark and inimical place, or if we are sad and frustrated, this pessimism will affect our perception of reality; it will thwart our energy and spoil our chances for a happy and accomplished life. Other "prejudiced" mental states that Wilson mentions are "rationalizing and wishful thinking" (1972a: 88).
32. Wilson exemplifies the distorting quality of human consciousness by means of several illusions, among them the Müller-Lyer illusion: two parallel lines of the same length which at first glance seem different to the human eye because one is double-headed and the other double-forked. Another famous illusion is the picture in which one can see either a white vase or two black faces turned towards each other, depending on the focus (see Wilson 1972a: 87).
33. Following Husserl, Wilson believes that the process of perception, in which meaning is grasped by a directed and focused consciousness, is effected by means of a "Transcendental Ego", the "I" superior to the "I" of our everyday consciousness. If we could access our "Transcendental Ego" on a permanent basis, we could consciously manage our "intentional" acts and control the way we perceive reality. This ability is especially important for our development of the active kind of expanded perception, which "involves a heightened sense of power and purpose as well as meaning" (Tredell 2015: 42). Wilson claims that Husserl's "Transcendental Ego" is synonymous with "the drive to complexification"; in fact, evolution itself is the "hidden achievement of the transcendental ego" (1972a: 194). Elsewhere, Wilson argues that man's "alienation from the source of power, meaning and purpose" can be blamed on the division between our "passive consciousness" and our "intentional subconscious mind" (2019: 161), the latter being clearly synonymous with the "Transcendental Ego".
34. This aspect will be discussed later in this study in relation to Abraham Maslow's concepts of the peak experience and self-actualisation.
35. Niall shows resilience to the "passive fallacy" and the "fallacy of insignificance" from an early age. He possesses "a curious sense of optimism

about the future", a conviction that his fate is not predetermined by his circumstances as a desert dweller. He is aware of his freedom to change his life; even though he has always taken for granted that he would become a hunter, he refuses to be obsessed with luck as necessary for a hunter's success. Believing in luck means "being at the mercy of chance", and he knows that his life is not contingent on external factors, is not "at the mercy of chance". The "sense of power inside his head" produces "a glow of optimism, an expectation of exciting events" (*T* 37) (cf. Tredell 2015: 383).

36. Lachman writes: "But the will for Wilson is not simply a matter of brute assertiveness, of having one's own way at the expense of others; his critiques of wilful individuals such as the Marquis de Sade and Aleister Crowley make this clear. The will for Wilson is not enough; it does not work in a vacuum and is directly related to our perception of *meaning*" (2016: 7).
37. At one point, Niall notes that spider intelligence, though often remarkable, is "less subtle" than human, the reason for this being the spiders' evolution. The spiders are more straightforward, honest, possessing no ability to bluff one's way in their interaction with other representatives of the same species. It is because they have never had to fight for survival against other spiders; instead, they have waited patiently for food in their webs (*S* 113). Therefore the feeding habits are the determining factor in the rise of spider intelligence. In the case of humans, intelligence was forged in conflict with other humans, coming into the same equation with crime.
38. In the last volume of the cycle, Niall concludes that the spiders have "achieved their evolutionary superiority through the power of the will"; therefore, a spider attributes "immense importance to dominance", and will always resent another spider who has ever opposed him/her (*S* 117).
39. Niall notices that the spiders eat only living things, namely freshly hunted prey, whose life force they enjoy and absorb (*T* 201).
40. Such a complete subjection to instinct is even more pronounced in the case of lower spiders like the aforementioned tent spider, which sits in her web waiting for prey. The female is subject entirely to instinct, so much so she would rather eat herself than feed her own young. Niall forces her with the power of his own mind to drop food to her children at the cost of her own unappeased hunger (*T* 179).
41. The wolf spiders are slaves to the death spiders; their inferior position and tasks (soldiering, guarding, capturing) changes their feeding habits: they have to build nets to catch their prey because it is the most effective way, though by nature they prefer to hunt and catch insects. As slaves, they have to adjust their habits to the overarching objectives of the spider aristocracy.
42. The increased reliance on the mind makes humans detached from the world of nature, to which they naturally belong. It involves the development of abstract thought and creativity, but also impatience and egocentrism.
43. The condition of the empress plants, driven by an inner impulse to evolve and being conscious of their evolutionary purpose, testifies to Julian Huxley's claim that "[a]s a result of a thousand million years of evolution, the universe is becoming conscious of itself, able to understand something of its past history and its possible future" (1957: 13).
44. The accelerated evolution, which enhanced the spiders' willpower, has its shortcomings, as Niall notes, watching captain Makanda's nausea at the energy emitted by a crystal in the trolls' cave:

    > In most species, evolutionary development takes place over such a long period that qualities like instinct, will, and intelligence develop in parallel. In the spiders, the brutal war against human beings had led to a completely disproportionate development of willpower. This meant that the spider's capacity to absorb and adjust to experience was limited in comparison to its capacity for dominance and self-discipline. The captain could be compared to a person with a small stomach, who finds that anything more than a limited quantity of food makes him feel sick. This, Niall realized, was why spiders were so prone to seasickness – they lacked the ability to adjust to the tossing of the waves. And the waves of energy transmitted by the crystal were not unlike a stormy sea. (*S* 164)

45. Bowler defines orthogenesis as follows: "Literally, the term means evolution in a straight line, generally assumed to be evolution that is held to a regular course by forces internal to the organism. Orthogenesis assumes that variation is not random but is directed towards fixed goals. Selection is thus powerless, and the species is carried automatically in the direction

marked out by internal factors controlling variation" (1989: 268). As such, it is orthogenesis with its telos of a higher form, rather than Darwinian evolution with its random mutations, that is synonymous with progress.

46. According to MacIntosh:

> The Life Force concept of George Bernard Shaw contains the central idea that Life is a vital force or impulse that strives to attain greater power of contemplation and self-realization. Creative Evolution is the manner in which the Life Force strives to reach this perfect state of contemplation as it continually creates something better and greater beyond the life forms already developed. The Superman is a symbol of the superior race of men that will evolve in the future. (2011: 10)

47. One of the products of the accelerated evolution is the mobile squid fungus, which, as Niall finds out, comes into being from the bodies of dead spiders. At one point, Niall watches a squid fungus eating Cyprian, his dead companion from the city of the beetles. Tuned into its "predatory consciousness", Niall senses its complete absorption in the process of feeding and digestion (*T* 450-451). Interestingly, the fungus also consumes dead spiders, which, given its origin, turns it into a "cannibal species" (see *D* 40). Odina, on the other hand, tells Niall that the fungus is very tasty and can be cooked and eaten by humans (*T* 409). What we are dealing with here is therefore a circle of mutual consumption in which the spiders eat humans, the humans eat squid fungus, which is basically a dead spider, and the fungus eats both humans and spiders.
48. Simeon warns his companions that the plants can read their minds, sense if they feel tired or weak, and take advantage of it: "So the most important thing to remember in the Delta is to try to stay in the right state of mind. If you don't, you may never get out again" (*D* 133). What Simeon advocates, therefore, is the awareness of the intentionality of perception, which can be consciously influenced in order to remain in the state of optimism and self-control, defying the "passive fallacy", i.e. the belief that one is at the mercy of chance and the hostile environment. In the Delta, "[m]ind power is more important than fire power" (*D* 85).
49. The combination of the concept of the life force (*élan vital*) and Toynbee's theory of Challenge and Response can be seen in Niall's conversation with his friends from the city of the bombardier beetles about the nature of the force which has its epicentre in the Great Delta. When Simeon asks if the force is intelligent, Niall answers as follows: "Not in our sense. As far as I can see, its single purpose is to produce more life. And it does that by making things struggle. That's the chief problem with living things – they reach a certain point of discouragement, then they give up. This force stops them from giving up so easily…" (*D* 60).
50. According to Wilson, "the power behind human evolution has been man's intuition of *freedom*, and his identification of freedom with knowledge" (2019: 161).
51. The empress plant only verbalises what Niall already knows and what he acknowledged at the end of the first volume in his conversation with Saarleb, the Master of the bombardier beetles. Niall, as a true Wilsonian Outsider, explains to Saarleb that he would never be able to serve the spiders because of his deep-entrenched yearning for freedom. However, the Master does not understand his logic, claiming that being alive means being free. "That may be true for beetles and spiders," answers Niall, "but it is not true for human beings. We seem to have a kind of… of freedom function. […] It is a feeling that our minds can be free as well as our bodies" (*T* 489). The more oppressed humans feel, the more they long for freedom.
52. Self-actualisers regard creative work as an end in itself. "They are more interested in exploring and actualizing their own creative potential than in dominating others. A philosopher, a scientist, a poet, a mystic, or a composer can express his or her dominance through the work itself" (Lachman 2016: 118).
53. In this context it is worth mentioning the concepts of inner-directedness and outer-directedness that Wilson borrowed from the American sociologist David Riesman in order to discuss the problem of the vanishing hero in modern literature. "The inner-directed type of man," writes Wilson, "is the man with pioneer qualities; in an expanding and changing society he can cope with the confusion because he possesses the self-discipline to drive towards a goal he has himself chosen" (2018: 45). His fundamental quality, according to Wilson, "should be a higher intellectual and moral perception" as well as a sense of inner freedom which guides all his actions (191, 199). The aforementioned qualities characterize the true hero who, as can be expected,

coincides with Wilson's Outsider. "The other-directed man", on the other hand, "demands security, and all his desires and ambitions are oriented towards society", a definition which may as well apply to Wilson's Insiders (45).

54. Wilson argues that the development of civilisation has largely removed from human life the element of "challenge and crisis", the confrontation of which accelerates evolution by making people rise to the utmost of their abilities (1984: 665). "Too much security becomes boredom," Wilson writes elsewhere, "and boredom leads to a decline in vitality. Man has surrounded himself by walls, and has built his narrow 'human world' as a centre of security; but security has begun to stifle him" (2019: 109). This belief finds its way into *Spider World*. Showing to Niall the history of humankind, Steeg talks about the invention of the peace machine by ancient humans, a device which puts an end to wars and violent crime. However, after a period of peace and security, humanity succumbs to boredom, and out of boredom people start committing crimes again. Steeg blames this state of affairs on human evolution, which progressed too quickly: "It had taken [man] more than a million years to change from a cave dweller into a city dweller, but a mere seven thousand years […] to change from a city dweller into a space explorer. […] All his instincts were directed towards struggle, and he felt suffocated by his comfortable peaceful civilisation" (*T* 341). The coming of the comet Opik was a challenge that brought an awakening and the mobilisation of world's human reserves to build space transporters (*T* 341).
55. The evolution of consciousness is used here in the sense proposed by Owen Barfield, namely that human consciousness is not stable but developing in time. This means that the consciousness of ancient man differed from ours, as will probably the consciousness of people in the future (see Lachman 2014: 1).
56. Wilson recalls the case of a young mother (reported by Maslow) who was sitting and watching her husband and children eating breakfast. Suddenly a beam of sunlight came through the window, and the woman realised how much she loved her family and how lucky she was. The happiness had always been there, however, unrecognised. "But the sunlight made her *aware* that she was lucky," writes Wilson, "and she went into the peak experience. The peak experience depended upon achieving a kind of bird's-eye view that made her conscious *of what she already possessed*. The same is true of the next step in human evolution. It has already happened. It has been happening for the past 3500 years. Now all we have to do is recognise it" (1996: 281).
57. Interestingly, Niall's first achievement when using the mirror is memorising the map of the spider city which seems "complicated and undigestible", but is absorbed "hungrily" by his mind, "as his stomach might absorb food" (*T* 354). Also, when turned inward, the mirror intensifie[s] his thoughts and feelings; when turned outward, it works as a reflector, "beaming his thoughts and feeling to other people", influencing their thoughts and actions (*T* 383).
58. Elsewhere, observing how his concentrated mind releases its energy in a wave of power while using the mirror, Niall is astonished that "his mind had exactly the same power as his hands: not merely to grasp, but to *change* things" (*T* 385).
59. As Wilson argues, "man has a choice of a purpose that cannot exist for animals, he can choose to devote himself to evolutionary purposes or confine himself to his everyday animal purposes" (1972a: 140), and imagination is instrumental in this choice.
60. Insight and logic can here be equated with relationality and intentionality, which Wilson sees as indispensable elements of perception. The former is "the meaning experience", the latter is "the will experience". "They are intimately related," Wilson submits, "in that relationality can be increased by an act of intentionality, and meaning, in turn, stimulates and guides intention" (1972b: 257).
61. In this single passage, Wilson illustrates his idea of meaning as a web of relationships which can be expanded by "an apprehension – not a mere intellectual awareness – of realities other than those of immediate sense-data", an apprehension inherent in Faculty X (Tredell 2015: 39). Such an expanded perception of meaning is directly connected with the feeling of joy and a sense of freedom which Wilson associates with the already mentioned "peak experience" (Tredell 2015: 51). The operation of Faculty X in inducing peak experiences is illustrated in the following passage from *The Delta*:

    > [A]s he stared down into the clear water, which reflected the paling sky, he experienced the illusion that he was back in the shallow stream in the country of the ants. It lasted only for a fraction of a second, but it filled him

> with a strange feeling of pure joy. And as he splashed the water over his body, he glimpsed the source of this delight. It was as if a door had opened, permitting him a sudden vision of an immense inner wonderland. In that moment, he understood why the vibration of the Delta flowed past him and left him unmoved. It was because he already possessed inside himself this enormous source of joy, and its intensity was far higher than that of the underground force of the Delta. Unlike the trees, his life was not confined to the present moment; every joy he had ever experienced was carefully preserved in his inner wonderland, waiting to be relived with all its original intensity. It was the realization that, unlike plants and animals, human beings are the masters, not the slaves, of time. (*D* 102)

62. Niall experiences the working of Faculty X with increasing frequency over the course of the cycle, which marks his evolution into a superhuman. This ability becomes especially pronounced in the last volume, *Shadowland*, after he meets the nature spirits called the chameleon men. He enters the mental world of those spirits, who "clearly possessed a far more powerful faculty for remembering the reality of other times and places than human beings". As a result, he can not only listen to their conversation about what is happening in nature miles away but he can actually be mentally transferred to those places to see the animals' activities (*S* 64). Another instance of the working of Faculty X occurs to Niall in the hut of the hermit Jan Sephardus, which stands in the centre of a vortex of force. This force makes the stones of the pinnacle towering over the hut alive to the effect that they record everything that has ever happened there, and "[a]ll Niall ha[s] to do [is] to open himself to this knowledge and absorb it" (*S* 132). From the hermit's mind "imprinted on these surroundings as he might have imprinted his spirit on the words of a manuscript" (*S* 134), Niall learns the history of humankind following the Great Migration, i.e. the flight of humanity from the comet Opik, before the spiders took over the rule over earth. He "watches" the decline of civilisation and its slow restitution from barbarism to the new Middle Ages. At one point, from the window overlooking the valley below, he can see a band of horsemen led by a warlord from the past. Niall knows that the horsemen, seeming solid and real, are "a product of his brain – an imaginative creation", but only insofar as they are not from the present. He is in fact looking into the past, having a similar experience as Toynbee at the ruins of Mistra, being able "to grasp the reality of other times and places" (*S* 135).
63. When Niall is taken to the palace of the Death Lord (*T* 246), his escort, a female Commander, prostrates herself on the floor and enters the room of the Death Lord on all fours like an animal, a position of subjection and degradation from the human perspective.
64. The attitude of the female commanders to other humans is reminiscent of the Nazi division of people into supermen and subhumans (itself connected with the theoretical framework of social Darwinism), which inevitably involves the reduction of the latter to the position of the lowest and most despicable life forms. The female commanders consider themselves a master race, being deliberately cruel to their human subjects and not shying away from inflicting physical pain on them. Odina, as Niall notes, has no imagination – she cannot imagine the suffering of others, which calls to mind the arguments of the third Earl of Shaftsbury and Adam Smith that imagination fosters sympathy, allowing one person to experience another person's suffering (Bourke 2013: 71-72). Another female commander regards free humans like Niall as "savages", "a contemptible form of animal life", and she is "convinced they [have] an unpleasant smell" (*T* 282).
65. In his *Utopia*, Thomas More depicts a reversal of the above situation, namely the animals which consider themselves human. It is not the hens which brood the eggs but the Utopian farmers who make the chickens hatch by keeping the eggs at a stable, warm temperature: "As soon as they come out of the shell, the chicks recognise the humans and follow them around instead of their mothers" (2003: 44).
66. Strangely enough, even if not distinctly spider-like, the minds of the servants are devoid of typically human thought processes like self-scrutiny or self-awareness. Niall finds them blank, "a mere response to [their] physical sensations" (*T* 209), as if they were in the state of permanent absent-mindedness, and used to being invaded by their masters.
67. Wilson is not consistent on this point, as spiders are arachnids in class, not insects; both, however, belong to the phylum Arthropods.

68. The spiders reveal deeply entrenched speciesism with regard to humans. After the peace treaty with the humans, which prohibits man-eating, many spiders feel confused because to them human beings are slaves, and their lives are "as unimportant as those of the lowest kind of insect" (*M* 37). They are "human vermin" (*M* 37), "human lice" (*M* 38), by no means equal to the spiders. A few spiders, namely the captains of the guard Skorbo and Makanda and their minions, out of contempt for humans, defy the orders of the Spider Lord and continue their man-eating practices. They have a larder, which "smells like a butcher's shop" (*M* 150), in which humans hang in cobweb cocoons under the ceiling, like food stored for later use. The victims are mostly slaves, as they are "not really considered human" (*M* 145), so Skorbo and Makanda decide they do not break the law by eating them. The hunger for human flesh is here combined with sadism and perversity, qualities unusual for simple predators. Skorbo, for example, likes making human children scream. Moreover, hunting intelligent humans, "who were not merely fat and succulent, but […] who possessed a certain strength and enterprise, some degree of leadership quality", gives both Skorbo and Makanda an additional thrill, "a delight that in human beings is associated only with sex", an excitement which is more important than food and drink (*M* 143).
Wilson attributes sadism to "*an inflated ego*", to "self-absorption and lack of imagination". At the same time, he argues that animals "lack all the basic qualifications for crime", i.e. egoism, infantilism and sex (for them, sex is "as natural as eating and defecating") (1984: 103). However, in the case of Makanda, who refuses to accept his guilt as a murderer, we can notice the workings of the ego and a childish conviction of being snubbed: the belief in his privileged aristocratic position, connected with resentment at the lack of proper respect for him on the part of the other death spiders due to his smaller size. This results in "a certain rebelliousness" (*M* 143). Considering the fact that killing humans gives Makanda a kind of sexual pleasure, Wilson's claim that "there is a sexual component in all crime" with the criminal "committing indecent assault on society" may well apply to the captain, who is disappointed with the spider society for treating him unfairly. All the above considerations suggest that the spiders are more human in their ways than it is believed, and their evolution is also leading to the development of the left-brain ego, with all its potential benefits (e.g. creativity) and drawbacks (propensity for gratuitous violence and premeditated crime). Moreover, Makanda's efforts not to be crushed by the spiders' collective willpower, but to fight in order to stay alive at all costs, hails a new type of spider, clearly endowed with left-brain individualism and "a freedom function".
69. Kazak's appraisal points to the fact that the spiders, while still exhibiting many typically animal drives, seem to possess their own "evolutionary appetite", to learn, create and organise their social life. See my earlier comments on spiders, criminality and freedom in note 68.
70. Tredell argues that from early on Niall reveals "a capacity for empathy and understanding" which extends to the spiders (2015: 381).
71. The bombardier beetles communicate by means of feelers; their movement is imitated by the human servants by means of fingers close to their faces, in a manner similar to a sign language. In contrast, the spiders do not have an obvious form of communication – they implant an idea, a suggestion in the minds of their brainwashed servants, controlling them in the same way as they control lower animals like porifids. However, this method can work against them. If another powerful mind – a human mind – assumes control over their servants' minds, it can stir a rebellion (*T* 279-280).
72. As opposed to human perception, which is selective and often "overlooks" things (see note 32 on optical illusions), the spiders' perception registers a complete picture, with an almost photographic accuracy. During his "conversation" with Quisib, Niall receives information about past events in the form of images; however, a great deal of important data eludes him. It is Grel, a young spider who was present in the caves and witnessed the "conversation", who later relays the images to Niall and draws his attention to the lacunae (*M* 380-381).
73. In the end, using his authority of ruler appointed by the goddess, Niall releases Quisib from his promise to remain alive, at the same time promising to record the latter's memories in writing, which, as we can expect, will be a skill to

master by the spiders just as telepathy will have to be learnt by humans.

74. In *A Criminal History of Mankind* Wilson writes: "Language is a left-brain function, and [man] could use language to store his past experience instead of forgetting it. He could even pass it on from generation to generation. Homer was not alive at the time of the Trojan war; but the whole experience had been preserved in language, and Homer was able to write it down two centuries later, so that Greeks in the time of Aeschylus and Sophocles could elaborate it into great dramas" (1984: 654). Elsewhere, Wilson notes that the development of language allowed human beings to break free from the confines of time: "Language 'fixes' experiences, and places the experience of the past on equal footing with the experiences of the present" (2019: 162). The next step in this "conquest of time" was the development of imagination, which could produce a "mental image" of past experiences besides "labelling" them in words (163).
75. In Steeg's account of human history, the invention of the printing press and the spread of the written word made people "think for themselves" and shake off the tyranny of the Church (*T* 337).
76. Apart from its soporific properties, the juice from the ortis plant also has a fortifying effect. Thanks to it, Niall's little sister Mara becomes a strong and confident child (*T* 169).
77. When Niall's consciousness becomes identified with that of the porifids (which he finds "closer to sleep" [D 75]) during his night flight to the Great Delta, he experiences relaxation and calm about his situation, which results from his detachment from his left brain, the source of "eternal vigilance and tension". He realises that the porifids can see in the dark owing to some low-frequency energy which bounces back from objects and makes them "visible", a capacity that Niall has always neglected in himself, relying instead on his eyes and ears (*D* 75).
78. In the white tower, Niall uses a food synthesiser and he finds the food it produces "excellent". This makes him observe that "[m]en who could eat such food every day must have lived the life of gods". Steeg, however, bursts his bubble: "[T]he life of gods consisted in appreciation of being godlike, and the men who created the food synthesiser were totally preoccupied with trivial problems. They were no more godlike than King Kazak or your own father" (*T* 321). What Steeg means is that food for the body is less important than food for the mind; it is an emblem of man's preoccupation with everyday life and immediate biological needs rather than with higher pursuits, with physical indulgence rather than mental discipline.
79. The Reaper represents "a completely negative power", its purpose being destruction (*T* 439); even Doggins is afraid of its power to change the world (*T* 437). The Reapers in the Great Delta are used by Niall and his companions for cutting a clearing through the trees and killing the dangerous frogmen. Unsurprisingly, the empress plant does not approve of such power and the Reapers have to be thrown away so that the group can safely leave for home.
80. No wonder another name for the city of the beetles is Crashville.
81. On his first meeting with the Spider Lord, Niall can sense that the death spiders gathered in the hall watch him with a mixture of fear and loathing, as if he was some "noxious poison insect" (*T* 283). Later he is surprised to learn that spiders dislike humans in the same way as humans dislike spiders and poisonous snakes: "They saw him as a disgusting, pale-skinned, venomous creature who threatened their lives, and every one of them would have been delighted to plunge its fangs into his throat" (*T* 465).
82. It was in fact one of those loyal humans who suggested to the Spider Lord that the fattest and most stupid human slaves should be bred like cattle, while clever ones should be killed long before they reached adulthood.
83. The history of the ruthless human kings and the spider opposition to their methods of extermination calls to mind the changing fortunes of the Assyrian empire described by Wilson in *A Criminal History of Mankind*. The Assyrians, pursuing "a policy of frightfulness", i.e. intimidation, destruction and slaughter (which Wilson attributes to the assertion of the left-brain ego), with respect to the peoples who opposed their imperial aspirations, were finally defeated and erased from human memory for centuries by the coalition of the subject states who had suffered fierce persecution at the hands of the Nineveh kings (see 1984: 139-141).
84. Doggins's use of a Reaper to kill a ground squid in the Delta becomes an emblem of the humans' misconception and misappropriation of power: "After all, the ground squid was a horrible and dangerous creature; no one could blame Doggins for killing it. Yet there had been no need to destroy it. Doggins had killed it because it aroused in him a feeling of fear and re-

vulsion. He had killed it to exorcise this fear, instead of trying to conquer it with his mind" (*D* 99).

85. It is telling, therefore, that Doggins disappears from the picture when Niall is made the leader of the spiders and men. His place in Niall's life is taken by Simeon, a doctor from the city of the bombardier beetles, whose respect for life and conciliatory attitude make him a better companion and advisor to someone who now has to work towards mutual understanding and cooperation between the two species.
86. According to Wilson, "crime is essentially a *left-brain* way of achieving objectives" (1984: 141).
87. Steeg tells Niall that crime and civilisation were born at the same time, the former being man's response to the safety and boredom involved in a civilised life (see *T* 334-335).
88. This aspect of Shadowland calls to mind an underground dystopian society in Joseph O'Neill's *Land Under England* (1935), in which telepathy is used as a form of social control; needless to mention giant "lassoing" spiders hunting the people of the land in packs (see 2018: 278-285).
89. Wondering why in Shadowland marriage is regarded as shameful and degrading, Niall comes to the following conclusion: "The impulse to marry is based on the biological instinct to have children. In a land where women had become sterile, such an impulse could only lead to deep frustration". Therefore the Shadowlanders, and especially women, are conditioned into thinking of marriage as embarrassing (*S* 281).
90. Even the assessment of workers in Shadowland echoes the treatment of servants in the spider city before Niall's rule. Just as "lazy" workers end up in the mines, disobedient and lazy servants of the spiders can lose their privileges and be demoted to the position of slaves (cf. *T* 281).
91. One of the most important discoveries made by the karvasid in this field was "unconscious conditioning" – a process by which the genes could be influenced by the unconscious mind, which, in turn, could be accessed by means of vibrations (*S* 276).
92. The area close to the entrance to Shadowland is patrolled by a moog, a golem-like guard. Gerek, Niall's guide in the city, explains: "Sometimes people try to escape to the upper world", which surprises Niall because " '[e]scape' seemed to imply prison" (*S* 254).
93. The guards in Shadowland have "virtually blank" minds and "flat, almost metallic" voices, which reminds Niall of the commanders in the spider city, "trained to behave and think mechanically". He cannot help comparing the regime of the karvasid with that of the Spider Lord (*S* 215).
94. The karvasid's paranoia manifests itself in his constant fear of attack or betrayal. He has mechanical eyes installed in the corridors of his palace to be able to see who is coming (*S* 274). Also the decision to have the wall built around the city "in this empty land" strikes Niall as odd, as there was nobody to keep out (*S* 212).
95. Husserl calls this mechanism "bracketing" (Wilson 1972a: 91).
96. It is an (un)expected conclusion to his early intention to understand the minds of spiders in order to conquer them. Understanding how someone thinks and feels involves leaving one's "natural standpoint", and instead of domination, it can result in empathy. Niall experiences it when his mind becomes one with that of the desert tent spider, whose actions are entirely ruled by instinct: "This was perhaps the strangest realisation of all. He was experiencing a sensation like love for a creature that lived by eating live insects" (*T* 180).
97. Tredell argues: "This is part of Wilson's answer – imaginary, but, in his view, feasible – to the condition he explored 36 years before, in his first published book, *The Outsider*. The individual escapes isolation by linking with others through a telepathic network that avoids the awkwardness of actual relationships, and his (in Wilson it is generally a male) essential identity is conserved while the 'set of misconceptions' that constitutes his usual idea of himself vanishes" (2015: 411).
98. Niall experiences a similar connection while travelling with Captain Makanda to Shadowland. The spiders do not need to speak, even telepathically, because they constantly feel the presence of other spiders and have access to their minds. By simply walking side by side with the Captain, Niall "soon began to know more about him than if they had talked all the time" (*S* 114; cf. *S* 120).
99. This passage exemplifies Wilson's belief in the relational nature of human consciousness. Niall's left brain adjusts its pace to that of the right brain, which activates meaning-perception, i.e. the perception of a particular thing "in the widest possible field of relations" (apud Power 2011: 83).

100. Clearly, left-brain and right-brain consciousness coincide with the two modes of perception – immediacy and meaning – distinguished by Whitehead. With meaning-perception operating in tune with immediacy-perception, a person feels him/herself to be a part of a larger organism (see Wilson 1972a: 170), which explains Niall's transformation into a being who can relate to other creatures. Moreover, such moments of insight, when the two modes operate in harmony, bring to us an awareness of a meaningful relationship existing between ourselves and nature (Wilson 1972a: 160). This, in turn, reminds us of the transcendent states of consciousness which Wilson discusses in his other book *Beyond the Occult*. Such states are characterised by "a powerful sense of a unity of life", the "ability to apprehend reality directly", optimism and "deep ecological conviction" (Poulos 2011: 220-221).
101. I refer here to the passage from Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Axël* which Wilson often quoted with respect to the robot: "As for living, our servants will do that for us" (cf. Lachman 141).
102. By analogy to *eutopia* (a good place), eupsychia can be understood as a good state of mind, or, in Manuel's words, "an optimum state of consciousness" (1978: 2).
103. Wilson, therefore, postulates what Frank E. Manuel calls the "utopia of the independent fulfilled *moi*", which can be traced back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and noticed in many later theories of self-actualisation. However, as opposed to Rousseau, for whom the fundamental traits of the "I" were "moral conscience, religious wonderment, and emotional candour" (Manuel 1978: 8), for Wilson it is "evolutionary consciousness", i.e. "a delight in the process of education, of *Bildung*, of growth and development, of using the mind and finding a sense of power and control in that use" (Lachman 2016: 135).
104. In *The Age of Defeat*, Wilson discusses the characteristics of the Outsider hero. One of them is a life lived "out of a sense of [inner] freedom". "Such a man would recognise all life as sacred," writes Wilson, "as all is involved in the same struggle towards expression of its own freedom" (2018: 191).
105. In this special way, the story of Niall can be seen as an instantiation of the monomyth described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (see Campbell 2004).

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