

THE GORILLOID

I. Of Others

*The first day of the new year incites
our minds to look into the future.*
Guy de l'Estang (1413)

Four thousand centuries have passed. The face of the world has changed, Our continent has been swallowed up by new seas; the glacial waters of the Pole descend as far as the shores of Africa. The only inhabitable regions girdle the globe between the two tropics. All our animal and vegetable species have been transformed during the Quinary period and the majority have ceased to exist. Humankind no longer exists.

On the other hand, several races of apes have been perfected, and among them, the Gorillas, having reached the highest degree of development, constitute the superior being. They live in societies, and their civilization, like their science, is highly advanced.

Now, on the 26.3 of the year 71.9.37, an extraordinary item of news spread, and for two lunes—the day then being thirty-six hours long—the newspapers everywhere have been discussing Professor Sffaty's discovery.

On an exploratory voyage to the North Pole, the illustrious scientist ventured into previously unknown regions. Having reached a latitude of 46^{o1} he encountered a rocky archipelago of Secondary origin, where he wintered. On those islets he collected the fossil bones of vanished species, notably several skeletons of a previously unknown antediluvian ape, which presented strange resemblances to the Gorillas.

The professor even succeeded in capturing a live specimen of one of these "humans"—as he called the prehistoric animal in question.

The news of this event, initially treated with great suspicion, did not take long to spread, and immediately impassioned public opinion in spite of its scientific character. Violent polemics appeared in the newspapers, the question at stake being: Are Apes descended from Humans?

Politics and religion envenomed the debate, which promptly ceased to remain zoological.

A lecture by Professor Sffaty, advertised as being due to take place in the large lecture-hall of the Museum of Karysk, has brought together an enormous and select crowd. People have fought over tickets. Five hundred Gorillas of the noblest birth, the most illustrious apes in politics, finance and the various Institutes, have assembled in the hall, which has been crowded since the doors opened.

The building's surroundings are cluttered with a popular multitude, and one might believe that all Gorillakind is taking an interest, in its conscience and in its dignity, in the questions that are about to be treated in that solemn session.

The auditorium is unsettled; the adverse opinions of materialism and idealism are already manifest with a latent acrimony that the severity of the location is only just retaining within the bounds of decency. The police, affecting to fear a riot, have taken exceptional measures to ensure order in the hall and its surroundings.

While waiting for the lecture to begin, opera glasses are aimed at two twin tables that have been laden with bones.

The moment is approaching; the room is warming up.

Professor Sffaty finally appears.

Prolonged applause and a hostile tumult greet his entrance simultaneously.

He is rather pale but quite calm. His fine bearing and the dignity of his attitude end up holding sway. After only a quarter of an hour, silence is almost reestablished, and the doctor can finally make himself heard.

He speaks.

Messieurs,

Whatever humility imposes itself on the pioneers of Science, who habitually live in confrontation with the most sublime problems and incessantly observe the impotence of effort, I have the conviction today of seeing my tribulations and fatigues recompensed by a discovery of the most fundamental importance, and of presenting to you a document of the greatest possible interest to the history of our race, its origins and its future.

Sensation.

The newspapers of the entire world have already spoken to you about it, perhaps little too hastily. Perhaps too quickly, and perhaps also too categorically, in evaluating the character of this scientific revelation. Is it true as they claim, that I am bringing you our ancestor? In other words, is it true that Gorillas are descended from

¹ 46° is the approximate latitude of Mont Blanc, the highest peak in the Alps.

Humans? Messieurs, let us proceed less rapidly. Such a question is serious, and requires to be resolved as calmly as possible, by means of a very careful examination, with a precise method. That is why, before presenting the strange animal that will be the object of our study to you, it is first appropriate to look back, in order better to explain the conditions of its existence and the environment in which it has been able to manifest itself.

Various movements.

Have no fear, Mesdames; I shall keep this necessary preamble as brief as possible, in order not to irritate you by abusing your patience.

Smiles.

Messieurs, everything leads us to believe that the boreal regions, presently covered by an immense Ocean, were not always sunk beneath the glacial waters. We know, and no one any longer disputes it, that the polar zone was once much less extensive, and that in the first ages of the world, when the terrestrial globe knew no seasons, the average temperature at the poles was equal to that of the tropics, and certainly far superior to that which we enjoy today in our equatorial climes. That certainty has been acquired by Science.

However, the hypothesis, more contestable and more contested, of a vanished continent, which occupied that portion of our planet in the epoch when the zone of polar ice scarcely descended below the forty-second degree of north latitude, is another matter. Those problematic lands, which legend calls Europides, or Europe, would have spread out in the place where the ice of the Europic Ocean now extends, and the rare islands that we see, scattered over that vast sea, would simply be the summits of its highest mountains, still emerging to attest the previous existence of a continent that is no more.

Let us hasten to say that the existence of a continent is still no more than a hypothesis—a logical hypothesis, corroborated by all the notions of geology, but which has not, to date, been scientifically demonstrated by authentic vestiges, the only evidence that we can admit. For you can easily understand that it is permissible to say: ‘The sea once covered the continent on which we reside, and has built us this fatherland—here are its traces!’—but it is less easy to go to study, at enormously profound submarine depths, the vestiges of an ancient terrestrial life. And although we observe experimentally that everywhere the land is, the sea was, we cannot establish by the same method that land surged forth where the sea hollows out—but we can at least suppose it, by analogy. Continents have their vicissitudes. No one is unaware that, since the creation of the globe, all the land presently visible and known, was by turns abandoned and repossessed, left once again by the sea that subsequently came to reoccupy it, and the successive layers of the terrestrial crust are here to certify this perpetual alternation.

A commencement of lassitude appears to be affecting the audience, whose members are utterly uninterested in geological considerations, and want to hear something else. Estimating that the preamble is too long, several ladies are shifting in their seats and fanning themselves. The explorer pays no heed. He continues calmly.

That a Europe, or Europides, existed is therefore probable. One can even assert that, to some extent, the discovery of the Gorilloid that we have bought back is a further argument in favor of the thesis.

In fact, Messieurs, a constant harmony reigns in nature between all the various manifestations of life; animals and vegetables alike exist in a direct relationship with the environment they inhabit. You know that, and every one of you has been able to observe it many times over while taking walks. Species, in the animal kingdom as well as the vegetable, corresponding to the climates of their respective regions, are appropriate to them, in a sense denouncing them. Regions that are damp or dry, cold or hot, elevated or low-lying, have their particular flora and fauna.

Now, that law of propriety is manifest in many other effects, less familiar but no less logical; what is true for temperatures, altitudes or hygrometric conditions is also true for space: the proportions of extent exercise their influence on forms of life, and that influence imposes itself like that of any other ambient condition. The population of islands cannot and does not resemble that of continents; they have their own inhabitants and always will. Large herbivores correspond to abundant pasture; fast-moving animals such as deer, reindeer or horses suppose the deployment of large surfaces, without which they would not be able to live or develop normally—and, let us also say, without which they could not be born. A bird with a large wingspan is conclusive evidence of distance, as a fish is conclusive evidence of water.

If, therefore, we encounter, in insular locations, the fossils of species that I shall call continental, we can affirm without hesitation that the islands were formerly an integral part of a continent, from which they were separated by some cataclysm.

Such is precisely the case with the Alpians that we have just explored. Our collection of fossils, gathered among the rocks of the boreal region, attests to the existence in those desolate regions of a once-prosperous continent. You can, at your leisure, examine these specimens of fossil bones, which the ice has conserved for us over several thousand centuries, and which will subsequently be classified at the Museum. But henceforth, and most of all, the strange simian that you will shortly contemplate, the last survivor of a world, will appear to you and cannot fail to appear to you, as the witness of a lost continent, and perhaps of a level of culture that seems to have been quite advanced, not only physically but also intellectually.

Movements. The explorer addresses a few whispered words to his assistant, who steps back. Prolonged agitation in the auditorium.

Before then...

Various movements Murmurs.

Messieurs, I understand your legitimate impatience, and it flatters me, as a proof of the powerful interest that you are kind enough to attach to my discovery, but the presentation of the Human cannot usefully be made if it is not preceded by an osteological examination of earlier specimens: the skeletons of yesterday, rather than the living specimen of today, will permit us to judge the degree of advancement reached by the race in the times of its prosperity. I shall pass over that study as rapidly as possible, in order to return to it in a future lecture, but it is impossible for me to omit it, however anxious I am to please you!

The professor steps back to the tables on which the fossils bones are placed.

Messieurs I tell you that the Gorilloids to which we have given the name Humans were not unconscious brutes. The dimensions of their skulls prove it, no less than the opening of the facial angle. Among all the animals species that are or have been alive, only one facial angle is as widely open: ours.

Various sensations. The scientist, his arm outstretched, lifts up a human skull and displays its profile triumphantly. His attitude, a trifle over-theatrical, is emphatic, and some people seem inclined to consider it provocative; that impression is accentuated when the lecturer, turning to a blackboard standing behind him, shows thereon the human angle and the gorillan angle, which are identical. Pointing to them each in turn he says:

Theirs, then; ours, now. It's the same.

Prolonged movements.

The dentition, analogous to ours, attests an omnivore; this mammal held itself, as we do, in a vertical position, only utilizing its hind limbs for walking; it was a bimane!

Sensations.

Finally, the presence of certain osseous apophyses, the detailed study of which I shall not impose upon you, undeniably proves the progressive atrophy of organs once possessed the first specimens of the species, but which gradually disappeared as the race as refined—such as, for example, the vestige of a caudal appendage, which the Human skeleton presents, as ours does.

Murmurs, protests.

The professor affects not to hear them, pauses briefly, and continues:

We therefore find ourselves, without a doubt, in the presence of an advanced civilized, albeit degenerate, species, which occupied, before ours, continents anterior to ours: a superior species like our own, perhaps capable of abstract thought, and perhaps having had arts and sciences like ours!

I shall have said everything about this point, Messieurs, when I have added to these summary remarks the assertion of one fact, and one only, which with doubtless seems to you rich in possible deductions: these bones have not been collected in a native state in the soul of the Quinary epoch, as were those of the animals we found; they were buried in tombs of carved stone. Humans buried their dead!

Prolonged sensation.

Thus, Messieurs, Humans lived in society. Furthermore, they built. An agglomeration of sand and calcareous matter, compressed between the stones of tombs, which serves to hold them together, clearly appears to be, not a natural product, but the work of an intentional fabrication. Thus, Humans possessed industries. Living in society—as proved by the association of the tombs—they were able to group their houses like their tombs, and constitute cities...don't laugh, Messieurs, I'm not affirming it yet, but I say that they could have: the hypotheses, although not demonstrated, is at least plausible, and logic authorizes it! When we have searched the sea-bed—and we will search the Europic Sea, where the cities are submerged, as I am convinced they are, for want of proof to the contrary—and have brought back into the light those miserable remains of a vanished epoch, of a doomed species, then, doubtless, you will no longer be laughing. The irony of incredulity—which is to say, of ignorance—will be forced to admit, with us, with reason, with common sense, that one art supposes all the arts, that the possibility of one renders all the others possible and necessary, if there is time enough to attain them, and that it is evidence of a retrograde mind, in no way noble but merely closed, in no way proud, but simply vain, to refuse to conceive the possibility of races that are, or once were, equal to ours.

Enthusiastic applause from some benches. Whistles. Protests. The applause is redoubled. Tumult.

The honor of Gorillakind...

New interruption. Animal cries. The professor makes as if to withdraw. In the face of that threat, calm is gradually reestablished.

Messieurs, I am not polemicizing here; I am practicing science. There are some who are scornful of my thinking, who have been able momentarily to attribute to me the malevolent intention of offending the susceptibilities of others. I respect all beliefs, in the desire to see mine respected in return, and I do not consider that the verities acquired regarding the evolution of animal species are incompatible with any notion of the

divinity, or that they cast a slur on legally recognized religions. I repeat that I am not making a political point here...

Applause.

...and I deem that the honor of the Gorillan species cannot reside in a jealous exclusivism, but, on the contrary, in the glory of thinking and seeking the truth, whatever it may be, on any subject whatsoever.

Dogmas inform us that the World was created for us and for us alone. Let us leave the dogmas there, I shall not dispute them; but let us at least recognize that, if such a conviction has been able to arise in our minds, analogous minds might have had it before us, and might have it after us. Who knows what the Alpien Bimanes of whom these are the relics, the Humans, might have thought about these matters? Who knows whether this Gorilloid species might not have arrived at its full development, while our ancestors, still primitive, were living in the caves of the prehistoric age, and who can tell whether its members might have professed, in our regard, an exclusivism analogous to the one on which we now pride ourselves in our turn? Who can tell whether they might have had, like us, dogmas and gods, and faith in their immortal souls?

Gentlemen, let us not pass judgment on things unknown, for fear of making temeritous judgments. The beings I am showing you might have believed themselves to be great. They are no longer. Respect their ashes! A few thousand centuries ago, the creatures that I have discovered thought, loved, suffered and desired, but it now requires the science of another race merely to establish that they existed!

These beings, superior to all known animals, reigned over themselves and over the globe, in the distant epochs when the habitable portion of our planet had not yet been reduced to the intertropical zone. Their domain was vaster than ours, but perhaps their notion of good and evil was identical to ours. How did they disappear? The law of evolution that had fashioned them logically, degenerated them logically, and when environmental conditions ceased to be in harmony with the species' organism, they died out logically.

When, shortly, we compare these two skeletons with the survivor that you are going to see, you will comprehend the slow regression of a grandeur that has attenuated, a strength that is exhausted, a race that is on the brink of extinction.

Applause. The professor turns and makes a sign to his assistant, who receives his instructions and leaves the room. The session is suspended briefly. Animated dialogues in the hall.

The assistants return, carrying a sort of cubic cage on a stretcher, covered with a sheet; they deposit it on a large table next to the podium and hang a placard on it: DO NOT TOUCH.

Lively movement of curiosity. Silence is completely reestablished. Opera-glasses are aimed at the veiled cage. The professor approaches and slowly lifts the edge of the sheet. He leans toward the cage, shaking his head in an amicable manner, as if to reassure the captive beast.

He opens the door of the cage.

The Human appears.

On the invitation of the professor, who encourages it with a hand gesture, the Human crosses the threshold and advances across the table.

Cries of surprise, followed by words rapidly exchanged in low voices.

The Human is clad in an ample bearskin cloak. It measures about one meter ten. Its head, enormous and pale, is speckled—its face as well as his head—with sparse hairs, dirty white in color. The blinking eyes, which seem to be those of an albino, are protected by long white lashes. Its expression is one of fright. Its torso and limbs are invisible beneath the draped cloak.

The professor leans toward the specimen and gently, by means of gestures, invites it to take off its cloak. The animal is visibly reluctant. In spite of the specimen's resistance, the professor proceeds to undress it himself.

A further cry of astonishment goes up in the auditorium.

The Human is completely naked; its upper body is weak and flat, as if crushed, but the abdomen is swollen and sticks out. The arms, extraordinarily short, terminate in minuscule hands with spatulate fingers. The short and knock-kneed limbs have enormous attachments. The entire body, dull gray in color, is striated with white hairs similar to those on the face.

The Human, embarrassed under the gazes of the crowd, turns its head to the right and the left, anxiously, as if seeking a refuge.

The opera-glasses study it; the dialogues become more animated. In many places a scarcely-scientific laughter shakes the powerful shoulders of aristocratic Gorillas. The ladies, keenly amused by the examination of the grotesque little male, whisper among themselves. A few scientists, who have come on to the stage, touch the Human, open its mouth, tap it on the back, work its joints, and examine the texture of its skin and the nuances of its hair with magnifying glasses.

(TO BE CONTINUED)