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A Rational Creature of My Own: Criticism of empire through scientific analogy in the fin-de-siècle novels of H.G. Wells

van Breda, Rhona

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“A RATIONAL CREATURE OF MY OWN”

Criticism of empire through scientific analogy in the fin-de-siècle novels of
H.G. Wells



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

Rhona van Breda
Dr Fenneke Sysling
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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| H.G. Wells | 5 |
| Placing Science Fiction | 7 |
| Markers of the Genre | 7 |
| The Novelty of Scientific Romance | 8 |
| Imperial influences on nineteenth-century fiction | 9 |
| Exploration Literature | 10 |
| Invasion Literature | 11 |
| The Start of Scientific Romance | 12 |
| Historiography | 13 |
| Wells's fin-de-siècle scientific romances | 15 |
| Approach to the Sources | 16 |
| Areas for Contextualisation | 17 |
| Chapter One: The European as Conqueror | 19 |
| The Protagonist | 19 |
| The European Character | 19 |
| Criticism of Anthropologists | 20 |
| Civilisation | 22 |
| Accomplishment as Civilisation | 22 |
| The Past as a Stage | 24 |
| Civilisation without Compassion | 25 |
| Entitlement to Land | 27 |
| Chapter Two: Darwinism and Its Influence | 30 |
| Darwinism | 30 |
| Darwinian Theory | 30 |
| The Theory of Struggle | 31 |
| The Unique Human | 33 |
| Social Darwinism | 35 |
| The Honour of Sacrifice | 36 |
| Miscegenation | 37 |
| The Difficulty of Selection | 38 |
| Chapter Three: Colonisation and Its Technologies | 40 |
| Control of the Colonised | 40 |
| Communications Technology | 40 |
| Bestowment and Transformation | 42 |

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Exploitation | 45 |
| Material Extraction | 46 |
| Human Exploitation | 47 |
| Conclusion | 49 |
| Bibliography | 52 |

Introduction

Faced with the state of the world in the twenty-second century, the protagonist of H.G. Wells's novel *The Sleeper Awakes* declares, 'We were making the future, and hardly any of us troubled to think what future we were making. And here it is!'¹ Wells was an English novelist, who wrote from the age of high imperialism to that of decolonisation after the Second World War. He was aware (and afraid) of the social and technological future of Great Britain, and he expressed these anticipations through a new kind of novel: the science fiction, then called 'scientific romance'. This intertwined ideas of scientific advancement and imperial expansion into a connected notion of progress, but many, including Wells, questioned the morality of actions taken in the name of that imperial-scientific development. His foresight and commentary were admired in his own time, with fellow author Joseph Conrad calling him 'a very original writer [...] with a very individualistic judgement in all things and an astonishing imagination'.² Wells was influenced by his Victorian upbringing, surrounded by ideals of British imperialism but disillusioned by many aspects of it, and this is reflected in his writing and perception of the future.³ What criticisms of empire did H.G. Wells express through his scientific analogies? That is the central question for this thesis. To that end this study will investigate his earliest scientific romances: *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898), and *The Sleeper Awakes* (1899).

Wells did not write merely to satirise or comment, and the influences of imperialism on his work were not simply motifs. Rather, Wells wrote with the explicit intention of education, as he believed that only that could correct his imagined dystopias. With mass appeal, novels existed to serve this purpose. Wells's novels were thus explicit political vehicles. This spread of information was important to him, thus he tried to encourage others in his political circles to publish stories and essays along similar lines.⁴ Together, he thought, they could spread his message, summed up by English professor Frank D. McConnell as: 'Man is under universal sentence of death, but he has it within his power to cheat that cosmic doom.'⁵ The 'cosmic

¹ H.G. Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes* (London: Collins' Clear-Type Press, 1921), p. 63.

² L. Dryden, 'A Note on *When the Sleeper Wakes* and *Heart of Darkness*', *Note and Queries* (2004), 1-9, p. 3.

³ P.A. Cantor and P. Hufnagel, 'The Empire of the Future: Imperialism and Modernism', *Studies in the Novel* 38:1 (2006), 36-56, p. 53.

⁴ W. J. Hyde, 'The Socialism of H. G. Wells in the Early Twentieth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17:2 (1956), 217-234, p. 219.

⁵ F.D. McConnell, 'H. G. Wells: Utopia and Doomsday', *The Wilson Quarterly* 4:3 (1980), 176-186, p. 181.

doom' was socio-political degeneration, and technology was the 'power' to equalise and content everyone.

This connects with the popular idea held by contemporaries that not only was nature formed by God to suit Man's needs, but Man was to reshape the natural world and make the most of its resources. This philosophy affected European perceptions of extra-European peoples: the ability of a people to transform their environment was a crucial marker to judging their degree of 'civilisation'.⁶ Exposure to ways of living contrary to one's own preceded periods of intense anthropological study, followed by reflection on the home society and its form of civilisation, as seen in Wells's and Conrad's protagonists disturbing reflections on their own societies.⁷ This imperial reflection, affected by the possibilities and unknowns of a technological future, formed the structure in which Wells wrote.

It is no coincidence that the large part of Wells's scientific romances was published over a short period at the end of the nineteenth century, the time when the British Empire was nearing its apex, with all the fears of decline and issues of nationalism that accompanied paranoia of maintaining that peak.⁸ Thus, while one can read prophecy into Wells's works, viewing him as one who foresaw issues unlike anyone else, it is important to see him also of the Victorian era. After all, in his visions of thousands of years in the future in *The Time Machine*, nineteenth-century class systems remain, ripe for criticism.⁹ This allows him to comment on his present and its faults, an intention he makes explicit throughout his works. He saw himself as a journalist, before he saw himself as an artist.¹⁰ His words were warnings, and ones that he grew frustrated that people did not take seriously enough to act upon.¹¹ With these intentions in mind, one can use Wells's works – and specifically their scientific analogies – to investigate his criticisms against the imperial-scientific world of the late Victorian era. Specifically, this thesis will scrutinise the criticisms of the European as conqueror, the impact of Darwinism, and colonial exploitation, and how all these contributed to Wells's complaint of selfish and thoughtless inequality on the part of empire. To lay the foundation for these themes, one must

⁶ M. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 308.

⁷ J. Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), p. 4.

⁸ A. Worth, 'Imperial Transmissions: H. G. Wells, 1897–1901', *Victorian Studies* 53:1 (2010), 65-89, p. 67.

⁹ Cantor and Hufnagel, 'Empire of the Future', p. 36.

¹⁰ McConnell, 'Utopia and Doomsday', p. 176.

¹¹ P.A. McCarthy, 'Heart of Darkness and the Early Novels of H. G. Wells: Evolution, Anarchy, Entropy', *Journal of Modern Literature* 13:1 (1986), 37-60, p. 56.

understand who Wells was, where science fiction sat in his contemporary literary landscape, and what has been studied so far on the subject.

H.G. Wells

Wells was born Herbert George Wells on 21st September, 1866, in Bromley, Kent. His family was lower-middle-class, and financial struggle was a running theme of his personal history. His father, Joseph Wells (1828-1910), was a cricketer and former gardener, who owned a sporting goods shop, coaching cricket for additional income. His mother, Sarah Wells (née Neal) (1822-1905) was a lady's maid until her marriage, at which point she helped with shopkeeping. In 1878, Joseph Wells injured his leg and lost the supplementary income of cricket, necessitating Sarah Wells's return to domestic service until 1893.¹² This background elucidates H.G. Wells's fervent interest in Britain's economic situation and his part in the foundation of ideas of welfare state.¹³

Before investigating his political evolution and its influence, it is worth pointing out that Wells has been the object of debate regarding which side of various issues, such as eugenics, he definitively stood.¹⁴ This debate is made redundant when one acknowledges that Wells was not a character, but a person, with all the complexity, contradiction, and mind-changing that go along with that, and many of his apparently 'opposing' views were held at different times in his life. He was a socialist by theory, but he criticised the various breeds of socialism in practice for their lack of action. While his views of inherent biology changed with time, and with contemporary science, his most persistent faith was in the abilities of education. He was, by his own words, proudly English, but he disliked many ideological points represented by British politics, including a smug attitude of invincibility. When it came to empire, he disliked the execution more than the concept and saw it as something to be salvaged for the good of spreading education.¹⁵ In fact, he believed that the world should be united under one government, with science and socialism as rulers.¹⁶

¹² J.S. Partington, 'H. G. Wells: A Political Life', *Utopian Studies* 19:3 (2008), 517-576, p. 517.

¹³ P.A. Cantor, 'The Invisible Man and the Invisible Hand: H. G. Wells's Critique of Capitalism', *The American Scholar* 68:3 (1999), 89-102, p. 90.

¹⁴ P. Coupland, 'H. G. Wells's 'Liberal Fascism'', *Journal Contemporary History* 35:4 (Newbury Park: SAGE Publishing, 2000), 541-558, p. 542.

¹⁵ E.M. Earle, 'H.G. Wells, British Patriot in Search of a World State', *World Politics* 2:2 (1950), 181-208, pp. 183-4.

¹⁶ McConnell, 'Utopia and Doomsday', p. 178.

Wells was raised in a time of shifting perceptions of science, society, and mankind. Seven years before he was born, in 1859, were published *Self-Help* by Samuel Smiles and *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin. These books contradicted each other on man's ability to control his life and environment, and both influenced Wells tremendously. As he participated in debate, he had to engage with these books, which provided the epicentres of social theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁷ As American author Edward Mead Earle explained shortly after Wells's death, Wells put hope in science for its potential to help equalise standard of living, and it distressed him to see that technology used to bring about harm and inequality instead.¹⁸

His professional relationship with science began in 1884, when having failed as a draper's apprentice, he entered the Normal School and studied biology under Thomas Huxley (1825-1895), who famously defended Darwin's theory of evolution in a debate with Bishop Samuel Wilberforce. While having Huxley as a teacher had a phenomenal impact on Wells's perception of the world through a Darwinian lens, he developed at the time a contempt towards science, in line with his socialist contemporaries, believing it to be controlled by anti-socialists.¹⁹ He left the school without a degree,²⁰ and became a teacher, writing scientific-political essays for periodicals to sate his natural urge to spread information for change. His first significant work was 'The Rediscovery of the Unique' in 1891, on science and philosophy.²¹ However, he made his official political debut as early as 1886, when he gave a paper called 'Democratic Socialism' to the Normal School debating society. In it, he described his definition of socialism as 'a banding together of men for the purpose of mutual happiness'.²²

In this way, Wells's ideal state was an organised, balanced entity that acted as omnipotent benefactor, ending the 'muddle' of individualism.²³ However, he did not subscribe to any set socialist group and was very much governed by his own perspectives.²⁴ The principal part of Wells's vision was its urgency. He focused on the short-term looming of disaster and the immediate need to act. With technology producing the possibility of devastating war around

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 182.

¹⁸ Earle, 'British Patriot', p. 183.

¹⁹ P.J. Hale, 'Of Mice and Men: Evolution and the Socialist Utopia. William Morris, H.G. Wells, and George Bernard Shaw', *Journal of the History of Biology* 43:1 (2010), 17-66, p. 25.

²⁰ A. Stiles, 'Literature in Mind: H. G. Wells and the Evolution of the Mad Scientist', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70:2 (2009), 317-339, p. 319.

²¹ Partington, 'A Political Life', p. 520.

²² Ibid, p. 518.

²³ Earle, 'British Patriot', pp. 185-6.

²⁴ Hyde, 'The Socialism of Wells', p. 217.

the corner, action was preferable to debate.²⁵ Using both novels and essays, Wells would educate the masses at speed and turn the world to socialism. That was his mission when he joined the Fabian Society in 1903,²⁶ before he became irritated with its exclusivity and design to exert influence through networking and lectures.²⁷ This came out in his 1906 paper ‘Faults of a Fabian’, in which he presented a vision of a society with around 10,000 members and the aim to ‘make socialists’ through action.²⁸ Wells’s eventual departure from the Society in 1908 was owing to a difference in vision and his incessant criticism.

Wells valued ideas, because these were what would bring about the change to save mankind, and he had faith in the idea of progress being within human control. His main solution came in the form of an organised world order, run by socialism.²⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, he had confidence in an imperial alliance between the United Kingdom and the United States and the potential for this to form a World State.³⁰ Though critical of empire’s lack of consideration for its subjects, Wells’s ideal world was an empire, of a sort. He retained this ideal for his whole life, until his death in 1946, but he grew frustrated that his novels were treated more as novels and not sources for education, for the betterment of mankind. When the political scientist Sir Ernest Barker met him in 1939, Wells famously declared that he was writing his epitaph: ‘Quite short, just this – God damn you all: I told you so.’³¹

Placing Science Fiction

Markers of the Genre

Tom Shippey has observed that science fiction has ‘an interest not just in science [...] but in cultures.’ The meaning of this, with the pluralisation of ‘cultures’, is that science fiction has significant interest in using science to compare and critique cultures, which is one of its major purposes.³² Specifically, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay argues that science fiction was

²⁵ Earle, ‘British Patriot’, p. 182.

²⁶ Coupland, ‘Liberal Fascism’, p. 543.

²⁷ Partington, ‘A Political Life’, p. 523.

²⁸ Hyde, ‘The Socialism of Wells’, p. 218.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

³⁰ Earle, ‘British Patriot’, p. 182.

³¹ McConnell, ‘Utopia and Doomsday’, p. 176.

³² T. Shippey, *Hard Reading: Learning from Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 90.

‘driven by a desire for the imaginative transformation of imperialism into Empire [...] as a technological regime that affects and ensures the global control system of de-nationalized communications’.³³

By this, Csicsery-Ronay meant the ability of communication to cross national borders in an instant and connect the world in a meta-empire, involving the connections between cultures. Science fiction differentiated itself from other genres for its specific capabilities of social critique using developments in technology.

No single item or motif binds all science fiction together, nor does every breed have the exact same origin, but the various types and works can be associated with each other. As Paul Kincaid has argued, they have a ‘family resemblance’.³⁴ This resemblance must have *some* form, even if abstract, and Thomas Clareson has said that it is a belief in progress that defines the genre: optimistic but warning.³⁵ Less a deliberate theme of genre and more an important point of reading science fiction, Isaac Asimov, master of the genre, wrote that marker the protagonist being the human race, not an individual.³⁶ Furthermore, the apocalyptic situation so popular in these stories is less the literal end of mankind and more the death of mankind’s current state, giving way to modernity and whatever changes future ideas of modernity might bring.³⁷ In this way, as time goes on, science fiction is perceived as either a naïve time capsule or as prophetic. Wells is significant for his steady place in the latter, and his unprecedented imagination and accuracy is what has made subsequent generations name him as important.³⁸ One of his most notable predictions was that of the atom bomb, predicted in his 1914 novel *The World Set Free*, almost two decades before the first atom was split. However, the term ‘prediction’ may be questioned there, as the inventors of the atom bomb, including Leo Szilard, had all read Wells and were to a degree inspired by him.³⁹

The Novelty of Scientific Romance

McConnell called Wells’s novelty an example of conceptual breakthrough.⁴⁰ In the twenty-first century, one can read Wells and see nothing unusual for the genre, but the clichés of

³³ Quoted in D. Seed, ‘The Course of Empire: A Survey of the Imperial Theme in Early Anglophone Science Fiction’, *Science Fiction Studies* 37:2 (2010), 230-252, p. 230.

³⁴ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 16.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁶ McConnell, ‘Utopia and Doomsday’, p. 183.

³⁷ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 123.

³⁸ McConnell, ‘Utopia and Doomsday’, p. 186.

³⁹ See D. Seed, ‘H.G. Wells and the Liberating Atom’, *Science Fiction Studies* 30:1 (2003), 33-48.

⁴⁰ K. Pintér, ‘The Analogical Alien: Constructing and Construing Extraterrestrial Invasion in Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*’, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 18:1/2 (2012), 133-149, p. 134.

science fiction were almost all invented by Wells, and when he was writing, the idea that vastly technologically superior aliens could so swiftly conquer Great Britain – of all places – was absurd and shocking.⁴¹ Wells was innovating the war genre, not deliberately forming conventions, carrying on themes from adventure and invasion stories.⁴² This was for the purpose of a new kind of criticism.

Why have science fiction emerge as the mainstay of the period's satire, if similar satires existed long before? Fredric Jameson argues that it took the place of the historical novel. As their focus on the past became antiquated, historical novels served a purpose different to critique of the contemporary.⁴³ The societal reorientation towards the future allowed the present to become the past for a more direct warning: the world is changing so much that old cycles of lessons may no longer be relevant, and something much worse may come. This was compounded by the ability to have imaginary future societies not line up with contemporary equivalents, allowing criticism to be broad in target and specific in lesson.⁴⁴ Unchecked development of technology and empire can be propagated by or target anyone, in ways as yet unknown. History has shown men of one side or another always coming out on top, but science fiction could emphasise the possibility of human fragility and demise as a whole.⁴⁵ Scientific and social advancements created fears of biological and cultural degeneration, both intertwined and with heavy influences from the rise of natural selection.⁴⁶ Radical new social movements brought the prospect of ground-breaking change to the front door.⁴⁷ However, these changes were already well underway, leaving no time for prevention but for ceasing what was already in motion. Wells himself wrote that it was 'only because the thing was spread over a hundred years and not concentrated into a few weeks' that everyone realised so late,⁴⁸ and being able to compound hundred of years' worth of change into a short story is a unique strength of science fiction, of which Wells took advantage.

Imperial Influences on Nineteenth-Century Fiction

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 136.

⁴² Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 18.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 29.

⁴⁴ Shippey, *Hard Reading*, p. 93.

⁴⁵ C. Manlove, 'Charles Kingsley, H. G. Wells, and the Machine in Victorian Fiction', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 48:2 (1993), 212-239, p. 226.

⁴⁶ J. Glendenning, "'Green Confusion': Evolution and Entanglement in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*", *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30:2 (2002), 571-597, p. 580.

⁴⁷ T.W. Thompson, "'I Determined to Descend": Devolution in *The Time Machine*', *CEA Critic* 63:3 (2001), 13-22, p. 21.

⁴⁸ Quoted in T. Kuchta, *Semi-Detached Empire: Suburbia and the Colonization of Britain, 1880 to the Present* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), p. 43.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argued that ‘the novel, as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other’, by which he meant that imperialism provided the possibilities, dynamics, and information that novels conveyed.⁴⁹ Empire and science, as tenets of progress, were ideals that invited satirisation, the aim of writers for hundreds of years before Wells.⁵⁰ What changed over the nineteenth century was that the development of the idea of ‘progress’ led to books that faced the future, and the fundamental impact was summarised by literary critic Colin Manlove as:

‘In the eighteenth-century novel the protagonist often finds out what he or she is, while in the nineteenth-century novel the process is one of learning what one may become.’⁵¹

The two kinds of story that had the largest impact on the development of science fiction were exploration and invasion stories.

Exploration Literature

One of the earliest kinds of novel with primary inspiration from empire was the imaginary voyage. This kind of story, popularised in the eighteenth-century, was principally used by satirists, who could take their protagonists to made-up lands aesthetically inspired by abroad, and in so doing reflect a distorted version of the writer’s own world.⁵² This was aided by the temporal aspect of spatial travel; the discovered land could reflect the technology of its discoverer’s past. This was an era when travel was often compared to travelling back time, as cultures with vastly different technological capabilities and ideas of civilisation encountered one another, as explained by Johannes Fabian in his book *Time and the Other*. His argument was that anthropologists viewed themselves as further along in time than the people with whom they interacted and enforced the ‘primitive’ stage on their subjects, founded in technology.⁵³

With imperial expansion and changes in perception of the world, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of more colonial themes, as opposed to allegorical journeys of self-discovery. The works of H. Rider Haggard (1856-1926) inspired many imitators in the field of adventure fiction, which consisted of stories in which men travelled to Africa and Asia to claim resources and marvel at exoticism. Sexual imagery demonstrated infiltration and possession, with references to ‘virgin territory’ and imaginary landmarks named for parts of the female body.

⁴⁹ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ McCarthy, ‘Evolution, Anarchy, Entropy’, p. 59.

⁵¹ Manlove, ‘Machine in Victorian Fiction’, p. 214.

⁵² Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 35.

⁵³ J. Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 6-7.

It is important to note that these adventure authors reflected scientific changes as much as they did imperial ones. Haggard's protagonists are not only representative of the imperial centre, but of the associated scientific knowledge, providing the ground for comparison with the superstitious natives. The explorers use their superior technology to acquire submission from those they come across, and they institute 'modern' modes of government to replace the old-fashioned despotisms of their own pasts in the present abroad.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the discovered societies of natives tend to be surrounded by resources desired by the West, with the fictional natives not understanding the value of these or the knowledge of how to use them. As the Europeans do have this knowledge, they are written as entitled to the resources and treasure,⁵⁵ using justifications of real colonial practices. The fiction-writer has the advantage of idealisation for simplification. An example of this is the idea of the 'two tribes'; in an adventure story, the native population is split into a good tribe and a bad tribe. The former are tame, befriend the explorers, and are happy to submit to the foreign, superior law and technology. The 'bad' tribe are violent, often cannibalistic, and will end up under the European heel by force, for their own good.⁵⁶

In adventure works more critical of colonialism than those of Haggard, the interaction serves less as fulfilment of fantasy and more as an opportunity for self-reflection. There exists, seen as early as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, a trope of the disillusioned adventurer returning home and seeing the strange land they just left in what was once homely and familiar. This presents arguments for a universal nature coming into conflict with the dichotomy of civilisation and savagery, with the protagonist's distress derived from their inability to figure out which is better.⁵⁷ This was the clearest way for an author to telegraph that the foreign land that they had written was a version of the home society, by having the protagonist observe a blending of the two.

Invasion Literature

While stories of explorers taking advantage of foreign lands as heroes were well-established, acute fears of military developments inspired the emergence of a new kind of story: invasion. Its literary origin is found in the 1871 defeat of the French by the Prussians and the subsequent release of *The Battle of Dorking* by Lt-Col. George Tomkyns Chesney. The book describes an England conquered and occupied by a foreign power, intended to serve as a warning. The rise

⁵⁴ Cantor and Hufnagel, 'Empire of the Future', p. 37.

⁵⁵ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 22.

⁵⁶ Cantor and Hufnagel, 'Empire of the Future', p. 38.

⁵⁷ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 78.

of empire had led to fears of the fall, seen to result from moral degradation and weakness. The English were losing their ‘Englishness’, and the invasion story was a punishment. As well as weakness, a crucial theme of this sub-genre as it developed over the following decades was that the enemies were within the walls. In Erskine Childers’s 1903 book *The Riddle of the Sands*, the antagonist appears German at first, then is revealed to be English. This is a way to make the reader afraid of the domestic enemy, whether he be a different class or political group or such.⁵⁸ Blame was not only for the foreign. This genre set the stage for Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*, epitomising the fears of the time: that England was becoming complacent and decadent, and that given the crimes that she had committed abroad, it was a matter of time before the tables turned.⁵⁹

The Start of Scientific Romance

Science fiction evolved out of this background by fusing the tropes of adventure fiction with the ever-increasing possibilities of science. While the regular adventure protagonist could metaphorically travel in time through contact with those more primitive, that of a scientific romance could use literal time travel to comment on spatial travel across the globe. Science fiction’s travel into the future was a way to reverse the established trope of comparison, switching the position of the Western protagonist and the reader in the temporal power dynamic.⁶⁰ To use Johannes Fabian’s language, the Western reader becomes the ‘there and then’, no longer in control of the situation as the ‘here and now’.⁶¹ Furthermore, the aforementioned ‘two tribes’ motif can be found in the Eloi and Morlocks of Wells’s *The Time Machine*, though he does subvert it in important and often overlooked ways. The Eloi are the good tribe, and the Morlocks the bad, but the plight of the Morlocks makes them almost righteous in their attacks on the Eloi, and they end the story with as much power as they ever had.

John Rieder has argued that of all the aspects of adventure fiction that led to the emergence of science fiction, none are as important as the ‘lost-race motif’, which he calls ‘fundamentally grounded in [a] collective, colonialist, and imperialist ideology’, and found from Robert Louis Stevenson to Arthur Conan Doyle.⁶² The motif involves the discovery of a new race, who have

⁵⁸ D. Gailor, ‘Wells’s *War of the Worlds*, the ‘invasion story’ and Victorian moralism’, *Critical Survey* 8:3 (1996), 270-276, pp. 270-1.

⁵⁹ W.W. Wagar, ‘H. G. Wells and the Scientific Imagination’, *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 65:3 (1989), 390-400, p. 391.

⁶⁰ Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, p. 37.

⁶¹ Fabian, *Time and the Other*, p. 103.

⁶² Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, pp. 22, 34-5, 47.

a wonderful, advanced civilisation. By the end of the book, it will be discovered that this race is distantly related to the travellers. In the case of regular adventure fiction, they will be descended from an ancient civilisation – Greek, Phoenician, Babylonian, etc. – since isolated from the rest of the world. Though not a feature of Wells’s books selected for this paper, the motif was present in the science fiction of his time. In Hugh MacColl’s 1889 novel *Mr. Stranger’s Sealed Packet*, replete with adventure tropes, the protagonist discovers humanoid Martians with blue skin, who speak a language descended from the Indo-European. When the protagonist’s skin turns blue, it confirms a racial commonality.⁶³ This idea justified the advanced civilisation, fitting in with the contemporary anthropological idea that any significant accomplishment found in Africa must have been the result of a non-African lost race. From the beginning, science fiction was born of imperialist genres and tropes, linked by conception to the themes of empire.

Historiography

Though as replete with idiosyncratic issues as any other kind of source, novels are understood to be useful to historians seeking complexities on the ground, from what they explain and do not explain to the issues that are deemed pertinent to include at all. For colonial historians, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* maintains a particular pride of place for its criticism of imperial morality. However, while professionals in English literature have written much on the imperial histories of various novels, historians have overall been less inclined to allow romances and fictions a place in their historiography. In the case of the imperial and scientific entanglement, this is a great oversight, as the historical developments in these areas had a phenomenal effect on the novels written at the time. The place of novels in discourse is not the central point of this thesis, but the ability of the novel to participate in debate is important to note in order to understand how Wells could view his work as more informative than entertaining. Furthermore, novels do not exist in vacuums once created; not only can historical context elucidate them, but they can add to the context.

Much has been done to contextualise Wells in literary history and explain where his foundational science fiction lies in the milieu of adventure and invasion stories. Notable among these is Denis Gailor’s 1996 essay on the place of *War of the Worlds* in literary history,⁶⁴ and

⁶³ Ibid, pp. 42-3.

⁶⁴ Gailor, ‘Invasion and Victorian moralism’.

other essays on similar placements of Wells reference the same influential books, such as *The Battle of Dorking*. Then, in 1999 Paul A. Cantor wrote:

‘Moreover, at a time when literary criticism has come to focus increasingly on economic, social, and political issues, Wells may deserve a fresh look.’⁶⁵

This comment marked a sea-change in writing on Wells, in which literary scholars used his ‘science fiction situations’ to explore the economic and political problems worrying him, thereby hinting at the wider world. In 2006, Cantor joined with Peter Hufnagel to revisit the practice of placing Wells in the history of adventure literature, but with the addition of investigations into how the Victorian tilt of Wells’s visions of the future contributed to the imperialist shaping of modernism.⁶⁶ This turn was related to an older practice among literary scholars of comparing Wells’s themes and criticisms with those of Joseph Conrad, whose more contemporary stories allowed for clarification of Wells’s analogies. This started in 1986, with Patrick A. McCarthy’s essay ‘Evolution, Anarchy, Entropy’. Since then, a prominent figure of Wells/Conrad scholarship has been Linda Dryden of Edinburgh Napier University. She has been instrumental in bringing forth not only the nuances of the personal friendship between the authors, but how that friendship and mutual admiration affected their novels and resulted in the reflection of each other’s themes.

This thesis aims to address Wells’s line of imperial criticism in his earliest works. The closest that literary analysis has come to covering this point is the small selection of scholars that have connected themes, phrases, symbols, and images of individual novels to contemporary debates. John Glendening and Emma Planinc have written on the links between *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and Darwinism. Todd Kuchta and Karoly Pintér have written similarly about *The War of the Worlds* and the imagery of the savage. In *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, John Rieder does discuss multiple novels and ideas, but is more concerned with laying open the symbology of motifs and discussing how they are shared across science fiction, returning to the original focus of contextualising Wells more through literary developments than imperial history. Thus, there remain two principal holes to be addressed. One: beyond Rieder’s chapter on Wells, the latter’s books have not been properly studied together, which means that connections between themes and criticisms, investigations of different techniques for similar messages, are missed. Two: while references are made in literary essays to historical

⁶⁵ Cantor, ‘The Invisible Hand’, p. 90.

⁶⁶ Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, p. 36.

background, the works are rarely seen as historical expressions of a man's opinions of events that he was experiencing.

Therefore, this thesis aims to historicise beyond those literary connections, and to do so it is important to note how science has previously been addressed as crucial to empire both practically and ideologically. Michael Adas made this the subject of his 1989 study *Machines as the Measure of Men*, in which he explains the use of science to construct a global hierarchy that could justify the European ideology of the civilising mission.⁶⁷ Though born in the industrial era, this lens is not limited to it and has had a sustained presence through to more modern practices of anthropology, with the insistence that the technology Westerners bring to other continents are for the good of those places.⁶⁸ For this thesis, it is important to emphasise a point made by Adas: that European interactions abroad should not be reduced to 'racist exclusivism and condescension', and there existed plenty of terminological and ideological complexities in the contemporary literature.⁶⁹

Wells's fin-de-siècle scientific romances

For the sake of this paper, five of Wells's novels will be put under scrutiny: *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898), and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899). These constitute the corpus of his scientific romances written in the 1890s. His two other novels of the period – *The Wonderful Visit* (1895) and *The Wheels of Chance* (1896) – while both also serving as social critique, are excluded for not being scientific romances. The 1890s have been chosen because this was the period in which Wells did his principal science fiction writing, and his later works of the genre tend to reflect the ideas laid out in his original five. These books have a diversity of intentions and themes in what they address as criticisms, thereby providing a large scope of Wells's opinions. In addition, it was the era of high imperialism, during which the nature of empire changed, and the shrinking of the globe caused by easier communications and transport started to bring home the atrocities committed abroad.

The Time Machine is about a man who travels hundreds of thousands of years into the future, where he finds that mankind has evolutionarily diverged into the Eloi and the Morlocks. The

⁶⁷ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁸ A. Goss, 'Introduction: An imperial turn in the history of science', in A. Goss (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), p. 7.

⁶⁹ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 272.

former are weak, but human-looking, simple herbivores lacking foresight, while the latter live underground, use machines, and eat the Eloi. In his attempts to get his Time Machine back from the Morlocks, the Time Traveller undergoes a transformation into savagery, but he returns to the 1890s in one piece.

The Island of Doctor Moreau tells of Edward Prendick, all but marooned on a Pacific island, inhabited by Doctor Moreau. The doctor is a vivisectionist who seeks to transform animals into humans, to remove the animalistic nature permanently. This results in a primitive community of mutilated animals forming on the island. Moreau is never satisfied and ends up being killed by one of his own creations, allowing the others to revert to their pure animal form.

The Invisible Man is about Griffin, an albino who uses optic science to turn himself invisible. He realises that he cannot do much while invisible and suffers from severe anger. He steals, forces others to steal for him, is unscrupulously violent, and before his death, plans a 'reign of terror'. He is killed when everyone knows to be wary of him, so they are able to work together with the help of scent-driven dogs.

The War of the Worlds tells of Martians invading South-East England and using their superior technology to destroy potential human antagonism. They arrive because of a lack of resources on Mars, and they consume humans by drinking their blood. In the end, they are defeated not by any human effort, but from disease, as they have no immunity to diseases from Earth.

When the Sleeper Wakes is about a man who falls asleep for around two hundred years, and when he awakes, he finds that his estate has gathered so much interest that he is now the ruler of the world. However, the men ruling on his behalf have deepened socio-economical divides and the lower classes have placed the hope for their futures in the Sleeper awakening. This book was written in some haste in 1899, and Wells edited it in 1921. This did not involve changing anything substantial, just trimming and changing the name to *The Sleeper Awakes*; the satire and observations remain.⁷⁰ This paper uses the 1921 version.

Approach to the Sources

The use of novels as primary sources has been appreciated as a way of reading implicit assumptions of certain times and social criticism under layers of metaphor. In the case of Wells, much criticism is explicit, owing to his desire to educate, but even his comments on his books

⁷⁰ Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, p. 5.

sway between seeing some aspects as allegorical and seeing the same as products of fantasy.⁷¹ By making note of the opinions espoused in his contemporary non-fiction scientific and political essays, one can detect where the narrative voice is Wells's own (as in *The War of the Worlds*) and where the framing serves to criticise a narrative voice with which he disagrees (as in *The Time Machine*).

Wells, like all novelists, was influenced by his time and environment in his construction of fictional worlds. Therefore, one should be able to use known history to elucidate Wells's novels and use the novels to elucidate the period. In this way, points and arguments arising in the novels will be used to place Wells in the political and scientific discussions of his time and thus clarify the opinions of a heavily politically-involved individual. They are thus not being used as novels opened for literary criticism and analogy, but as historical sources.

However, appreciation of literary studies that explain analogies is necessary. Much contextualisation for Wells's individual books has been provided by literary academics, who have mentioned contemporary events that affected and inspired him. The historical information is to be taken as distinct but connected to the deep literary analysis. Gailor's study of how *The War of the Worlds* fits in with nineteenth-century literature is able to provide enlightening information on the invasion story genre and the historical events that facilitated it, but his reading sees the book as a way for Wells to attack his upbringing by his mother and the Martians as sexual allegories.⁷² This is not only doubtful as it is, but irrelevant to the study at hand. The literary secondary literature can be used to explain the scientific analogies and place the books in a literary context, which can thence be connected to broader criticism and historical events. Therefore, the method of this thesis must use textual analysis to a certain degree, but then push beyond that into both literary and historical discourse analysis.

Areas for Contextualisation

There are three main aspects of criticism of empire to be seen using Wells's analogies, chosen for this thesis because of their prominence and recurrence to the point of being impossible to ignore in the novels. The method of this thesis has been to search the secondary literature for analyses of instances of these clear novel-born themes. In this way, the literary secondary literature is crucial, because there are many ways in which 'empire' can be conveyed: through

⁷¹ N. Hoad, 'Cosmetic Surgeons of the Social: Darwin, Freud, and Wells and the Limits of Sympathy on *The Island of Dr. Moreau*' in L. Barlant (ed.), *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 191.

⁷² Gailor, 'Invasion and Victorian moralism', p. 272.

narrative, plot, character, and so on. Through the culmination of each, one sees the three major themes that constitute the chapters of this thesis.

First is the idea of the European as conqueror. Wells places different characters, both protagonist and antagonist, in the position of the advantaged, ruthless European. This way, one sees Wells criticise European senses of superiority, particularly in reference to technology and culture, their ability to place themselves in a hierarchy of civilisation that they designed.

The second chapter is about Wells's interactions with Darwinism, as it affected the debate on race. With particular focus on *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, it will be seen how Wells criticised ideals of evolutionary human progress and perfection and how those ideas led to eugenics and the mistreatment of certain groups.

Finally, this thesis will look at colonisation and exploitation: active manners of imperial government that received the most urgent criticism, for their direct impact on human life. This involves looking at material extraction, the use of communications to exclude the colonised, and the human involvement in these processes.

These three areas are recurrently discussed by Wells through scientific analogy, and his engagement involves larger discussions of the day. In this way, reading Wells serves to open up those debates.

Chapter One: The European as Conqueror

Wells's novels intended to inform and convince. They were novels for a European readership. Therefore, they contained entreaties for the European to reflect and question how accurate the perception of himself that he presents is: intrepid explorer, master of the world, destined to bring culture, technology, and civilisation to savages. Wells questions the idea of objectively superior civilisations and villainises the thoughtless intrusion of 'advanced' Others into environments that did not require them. In this way, he criticises the complacent belief in the justice of the 'civilising mission'. Here will be discussed how Wells characterises and analogises the European himself in his criticism, as a selfish, avaricious, inconsiderate character that pretends to care for those he exploits. This was a foundational fallacy that Wells attacked as part of what made European actions abroad unfair: they did not have the inherent right to mastery that they claimed.

The Protagonist

The European Character

The circumstances in which Wells's protagonists find themselves are to subvert the confidence of the reader. The protagonist is thus a man that the reader would have confidence in: the typical man that would undergo an exploration. When in *The Invisible Man* Griffin tells the innkeeper's wife that he is an 'experimental investigator', she is impressed and uses this title to explain away his odd behaviour to her suspicious patrons.⁷³ This reflects the contemporary celebration of men of science as models of manly, Christian virtues, visions of self-discipline.⁷⁴ Griffin ends up contradicting this confidence by proving his abnormality, but he is the only example of the set to be both main character and antagonist. Take then, Edward Prendick, the protagonist of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. He is a biologist and former student of Thomas Huxley, like Wells. He joins Doctor Moreau, isolated on a Pacific island, where the uncivilised natural world can be used as a laboratory, an attitude held in reality by the likes of ecologist E.B. Worthington (1905-2001).⁷⁵ The Time Traveller is in the mould of the explorer-anthropologist, with a desire for adventure and an assumption that he is superior to societies he

⁷³ H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1897), pp. 15, 34-5.

⁷⁴ C. Lawrence and M. Brown, 'Quintessentially Modern Heroes: Surgeons, Explorers, and Empire, c.1840-1914', *Journal of Social History* 50:1 (2016), 148-178, p. 153.

⁷⁵ H. Tilley, 'Conclusion: Experimentation in Colonial East Africa and Beyond', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 47:3 (2014), 495-505, p. 500.

does not recognise.⁷⁶ These are standard roles, albeit subverted by their narratives. The unnamed narrator of *The War of the Worlds* is an educated man, and he does play the part of biologist-anthropologist trying to understand the Martians, but he is simultaneously the subject. The framework is both maintained and undermined.⁷⁷ Wells can thus use his protagonists as objects of both criticism and sympathy, using the latter to push the former, all emphasising an unequal dynamic.

Prendick is a biologist, not an explorer. Twice he laments his lack of practical knowledge, first of botany, later of carpentry.⁷⁸ His lack of physical ability puts him at odds not only with his environment, but with contemporary ideals of men in his position. He is emasculated, as he lacks what Dane Kennedy calls the traits of middle-class masculinity: ‘independence, [...] the dignity of labour, and moral responsibility [...] endurance, and, above all, courage.’⁷⁹ This opposes the pride that actual explorers had in their abilities, who because of their alignment with the aforementioned virtues, often complained about those native members of their retinue who failed to live up to the standard of the explorer.⁸⁰ The bare information of Wells’s protagonists set them up to be in line with the superior complainers, but the reality romanticised in adventure literature is trickier than they would suppose. This undermines the image and accompanying justification of putting other peoples ‘in their place’.

Criticism of Anthropologists

The next stage in the European character’s journey after arrival is the commencement of anthropological study, the attempt to learn about another group of people. Considering that so many protagonists of early science fiction, not just of Wells, have anthropological leanings, there existed a split between those that romanticised and those that criticised. The use of scientific allegory could put contemporary anthropological language and method alongside a replacement of the native with the Englishman, notably in Grant Allen’s 1895 book *The British Barbarians*, about an anthropologist from the future.⁸¹ By reversing the direction of the assumptions, Wells, Allen, and other such authors criticise the complacent anthropological beliefs of Europeans. The beliefs being criticised here are the sort espoused by Karl Marx, when he wrote of Indian villages as being ‘undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative’, homes of

⁷⁶ Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, pp. 44-5.

⁷⁷ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 10.

⁷⁸ H.G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (New York: Stone & Kimball, 1896), pp. 96, 234.

⁷⁹ Lawrence and Brown, ‘Quintessentially Modern Heroes’, p. 153.

⁸⁰ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 245.

⁸¹ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 79.

‘barbarian egotism’, and being an ‘unresisting tool of superstition’.⁸² Such perspectives relied on the incapability of the object to participate in the discussion about itself. Wells expresses the frustrated helplessness of the observed in *The War of the Worlds* when his narrator wonders

‘how much they understood of us. Did they grasp that we in our millions were organized, disciplines, working together? Or did they interpret our spurts of fire, the sudden stinging of our shells, our steady investment of their encampment, as we should the furious unanimity of onslaught in a disturbed hive of bees?’⁸³

Here, Wells criticises the objectivity of the anthropologist’s perspective and reveals his own confidence in the cohesion of native societies. His protagonists attempt (and often fail) to uphold the advice of the Time Traveller: ‘Face this world. Learn its ways, watch it, be careful of too hasty guesses at its meaning.’⁸⁴ The Time Traveller himself is the most egregious disobeyer, not least as the most obvious anthropologist. He repeatedly misinterprets the society in which he finds himself, through his imposition of his own cultural ideals onto a biological situation unfit for them. He is arrogant enough to believe that he can construct theories of everything after little exposure, in which he is meant to mirror real-life anthropologists, who believed native societies easy to understand based on perceived primitive simplicity. This is an instance of literary delayed decoding used as a parallel to anthropological delayed decoding, and in fact this demonstrates the imperial development of that fictional technique.⁸⁵ Just as the anthropologist makes assumptions about what everything means only to be corrected, so too is the reader led to make the same mistake.

The protagonist himself is the set-up for criticism, and how he conducts himself in the story is the arena for Wells to attack the thoughtless scientific extraction of empire, founded in a superiority taken for granted. When the Time Traveller comes across a selection of ‘idols’ from around the world, he writes his name on a South American statue.⁸⁶ This incident does not affect the story and serves only as a mark of the Time Traveller’s claim on a foreign object that he likes. He joins the tradition of entitled European visitors whose knowledge and perception of their values as facts influenced their belief that they deserved others’ goods.⁸⁷ The objects collected in museums are not free of the journey that put them there, with the same meaning in a glass case that they would have being used for their intended purpose. The distance from

⁸² Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 238.

⁸³ H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1898), pp. 138-9.

⁸⁴ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 65.

⁸⁵ Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, pp. 45-8.

⁸⁶ H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (London: William Heinemann, 1895), p. 116.

⁸⁷ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 22.

intention leads to a decrease in reason for being, something Wells articulates when his Time Traveller comes across a dilapidated museum. The artefacts are covered in dust,⁸⁸ and in the society of the presentist Eloi, they have no value. However, Wells's critique goes further: not only do these acquisitions of the British Empire only have awe and value imposed on them, but the British Empire itself is not immutable. While the Victorians have become complacent and believe these spoils of empire to prove their power, Wells argues that there is no entitlement to rule the world, and objects are only evidence of power for as long as that finite power lasts.⁸⁹ The manner of anthropological study is criticised for its foundation on arrogance and assumptions of superiority.

Civilisation

Accomplishment as Civilisation

The European character's superiority of civilisation is based on perspective. Wells was not opposed to ideals of 'perfect civilisation', as his belief in a world state run by scientists testifies.⁹⁰ However, he did use his books to enter the debate of what it was in his own period that made the hierarchy of civilisation. Technological advancement was the usual measurement. The technological accomplishments of non-Western societies would be compared to the West and slotted into a hierarchy of overall development and civilisation.⁹¹ When the Time Traveller explains the science behind his time travel, he compares the discrepancy in technological achievement between 'a civilised man' and 'the savage'.⁹² The irony of the statement is found in the Time Traveller's ignorance. He does not know what it is to live as a 'savage', and so his pride is based on assumptions of civilisation – assumptions that will be challenged as he becomes 'savage' in the future.⁹³ Europeans assumed that their civilisation was superior because there was, as natural scientist Jules Harmand said in the 1900s, 'irresistible certitude' that Europeans had the superior science and technology. This related to a belief in inherent traits that made Europeans mature and curious, thus likely to improve themselves and their situation. This led to the belief that, as technology was equal to advancement, Europeans were the best rulers and best disposed to ruling others, ostensibly to guide them to the same end. There was then a split in attitude, between those who believed that

⁸⁸ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 108.

⁸⁹ Cantor and Hufnagel, 'Empire of the Future', p. 44.

⁹⁰ McConnell, 'Utopia and Doomsday', p. 184.

⁹¹ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 3.

⁹² Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 7.

⁹³ Thompson, 'I Determined to Descend', p. 15.

European guidance was needed to help less developed societies, and those who believed that ‘survival of the fittest’ justified the extermination of those that remained ‘primitive’ and were not seen to contribute to mankind.⁹⁴ Wells, in his non-fiction, argued that civilisation was ‘the artificial factor of mankind’,⁹⁵ thereby putting himself in the former camp, if either, compounded by his confidence in the power of education. However, he did not believe in European technology as unerring progress to be spread; he spends decent space in *The War of the Worlds* describing how the incredibly-advanced Martians have not invented the wheel, a cornerstone of European technology and measurement of others.⁹⁶ This is Wells’s crucial point: civilisation is relative, because technological measurement is relative.⁹⁷ In every book under discussion, the point of interest is one who has found a new way to manipulate their environment, putting the otherwise-superior Englishmen on the backfoot using a character or set of characters that either mirror him or represent what could otherwise destroy him.

Civilisation is not superior technology; technology is a marker or a result. Civilisation itself is a standard of order. The artilleryman of *The War of the Worlds* focuses on the possibility of continuing life, and he presents the list: ‘Cities, nations, civilization, progress – it’s all over.’⁹⁸ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* presents a quasi-civilisation, in which not-quite-humans construct almost-order, and in *The Time Machine*, the future has no sign of organised government or property. A lack of government on European models was a significant indication of African inferiority,⁹⁹ and so similar observations are made by the reader-surrogate protagonists when faced with their new worlds. The science fiction then allows for the self-reflection of the reverse, as in the case of Graham in *The Sleeper Awakes*, when he learns that towns and villages have become hotel-like buildings.¹⁰⁰ His own notions of government are now the savage ones of the past. His ignorance of the new ways of the world put him in the position of the non-Western people complained about for their disregard for punctuality and the order of life. Such was a frequent complaint held against Africans and Indians, who did not work by the same industrial clock as Europeans.¹⁰¹ This all sat in the context of European superiority justifying guidance in the form of colonialism. Wells’s criticism continues to be

⁹⁴ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, pp. 203-4.

⁹⁵ E. Planinc, ‘Catching Up with Wells: The Political Theory of H. G. Wells’s Science Fiction’, *Political Theory* 45:5 (2017), 637-658, p. 650.

⁹⁶ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, pp. 312-3.

⁹⁷ Manlove, ‘Machine in Victorian Fiction’, p. 228.

⁹⁸ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, p. 254.

⁹⁹ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, pp. 298.

¹⁰⁰ Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, p. 143.

¹⁰¹ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 242.

one of relativity and not merely through reversal. When Griffin meets his friend Kemp and explains how he turned himself invisible, he also details various crimes that he has had the opportunity to commit. Kemp responds with horror, exclaiming, ‘in England – to-day. And the man was in his own house, and you were – well, robbing.’¹⁰² The English order was a façade, and actual English people broke it all the time. It was not a matter of inherently good politics. As mentioned above, Wells believed civilisation to be artificial, and its measurement by government was reliant on the relativity of the present. His European agents act ruthlessly in the name of a ‘civilisation’ that is arbitrary.

The Past as a Stage

The recurrent argument-cum-motif of the past as a stage would seem to support this relativity; there is no guarantee of apex, so everyone may appear savage to someone further along. Marx had several ideas of set progression for societies, differing on location for the abilities of those there.¹⁰³ Looking back, Europeans saw their own past as uncivilised, ‘civilisation’ only being in the ever-moving present. As an expression of disdain for superstition and disorder, a man in *The Invisible Man* declares, ‘One might think we were in the thirteenth century.’¹⁰⁴ Again, late Victorian ideas of order and technology are what govern senses of superior civilisation. Furthermore, one sees the use of the scientific romance as able to embrace the connection between technological development, its scarcity, and its ability thus to separate haves and have-nots in a dichotomy of power.¹⁰⁵ It also allows for imaginative (and questionably allegorical) visions of future stages. If present civilisation is the peak, then all that can follow must be inferior.¹⁰⁶ This is a recurrent warning of Wells, most notable in *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*. In the former, the English are mocked for their complacency leading to a loss of the resourcefulness and watchfulness that allowed them to rise to power in the first place;¹⁰⁷ after reaching their civilised apex, they have let their guard down. In *The Time Machine*, humans have evolved into incurious and unintelligent beings or brutish and lemur-like ones. The Time Traveller, appalled, says,

¹⁰² Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 217.

¹⁰³ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 237.

¹⁰⁴ Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 125.

¹⁰⁵ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, ‘I Determined to Descend’, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Manlove, ‘Machine in Victorian Fiction’, p. 235.

‘I, for my own part, cannot think that these latter days [...] are indeed man’s culminating time! [I] saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers’.¹⁰⁸

This reflected contemporary growing fears of what came post-civilisation. Empires were not believed to be eternal, but were known to ‘go soft’ and be destroyed by lesser peoples, who had not had the chance to let down their guards.¹⁰⁹ The longer the British Empire remained strong, the closer the prospect of degeneration, mental and physical, came. The belief that ‘the sun never sets on the British Empire’ was far from universal, especially with the spread of Social Darwinist ideas that argued against the power remaining indefinitely.¹¹⁰ To emphasise this point, with the risk of the Eloi and Morlocks seeming too alien, the Time Traveller himself undergoes a degeneration, as he represents the civilised, arrogant peak of English culture.¹¹¹ He starts sure of his intelligence and capabilities, but after a few days has developed a limp that prevents him from walking erect and has made several presentist, ill-considered decisions, such as wasting matches for the amusement of the Eloi. Here, Wells joins other voices of warning, such as that of zoologist Ray Lankester, whose words in 1890 pre-empt Wells’s faith in education: ‘The full and earnest cultivation of Science [is] for the protection of our race [...] from relapse and degeneration.’¹¹² The general belief in the past as a stage and subsequent fears of the future are thus reflected in Wells’s use of his genre’s ability to bring the future into the present and imagine future stages, pitting the European representative characters against their historic and potential selves.

Civilisation without Compassion

What, then, is the point of portraying futures as warnings, of arguing for a change in manner of civilisation? It is to be remembered that Wells was a socialist with an impoverished background, and his view of the ideal civilisation of his time was that it was unsympathetic. The structure of empire being founded on hierarchies of civilisation had already been criticised by Marx and Frederick Engels, who claimed that colonialism was based on ‘the vilest interests’.¹¹³ This division into uncivilised workers as one people and civilised consumers as another is taken to extreme by Wells (or, at least, the anthropological hypotheses of the Time

¹⁰⁸ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁹ Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, p. 43.

¹¹⁰ M. Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 5.

¹¹¹ Thompson, ‘I Determined to Descend’, p. 13.

¹¹² Hale, ‘Of Mice and Men’, p. 40.

¹¹³ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 236.

Traveller), when the Eloi and Morlocks are explained to be those groups evolutionarily diverged.¹¹⁴ The Eloi, descended from the civilised, are punished for their ancestors' lack of compassion by turning into the prey of the descendants that had once been exploited. Their reliance on inequality is punished by the inequality being reversed. Wells expresses his own sincere fears for the future in *The Sleeper Awakes*, when a man of the future tells Graham (a socialist like Wells) that his ideals are 'worn-out dreams of the nineteenth century',¹¹⁵ and inequality is necessary. In *The War of the Worlds*, the narrator talks about 'a sense of dethronement',¹¹⁶ a realisation that being quashed by superior technology leads to being treated inhumanely, that to be inferior is not to live well.

Wells highlights a conflation between the civilised and the humane, arguing that the former ignores the latter in its practice, though its theory should have them one and the same. Graham is made fearful at the idea that the push of civilisation has made people less compassionate:

'These people were two hundred years further on in the march of civilisation than the Victorian generation. It was not likely they would be less – humane.'¹¹⁷

The Victorian era had seen a rise of a 'culture of compassion', affecting all living things and breeding new waves of conflict against political decisions. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Moreau's villainy does not inherently stem from his vivisection experiments, but from his indifference towards the inferior creatures that he researches, tortures, then tosses away.¹¹⁸ The Martians are described physically as grotesque, something that adds to their evil, but the narrator of *The War of the Worlds* hypothesises that this disgusting appearance could be based on humanity's future: the brain developed at the expense of the body, and rationality developed at the expense of compassion.¹¹⁹ This lack of sympathy facilitates their ruthlessly effective conquest; invasion is possible through lack of compassion. The appearance of the Martians was based on a prediction Wells had made of the future of humanity's evolution, based in the science of his day, particularly that of traits developing at the expense of others. This relates to

¹¹⁴ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 83.

¹¹⁵ Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, p. 227.

¹¹⁶ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, p. 237.

¹¹⁷ Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, pp. 69-70.

¹¹⁸ E.B. Elce, '“Never mind the dog”: Experimental Subjects in H. G. Wells' *The Island of Moreau* and Wilkie Collins' *Heart and Science*', *The Wilkie Collins Society*: <https://wilkiecollinssociety.org/never-mind-the-dog-experimental-subjects-in-h-g-wells-the-island-of-doctor-moreau-and-wilkie-collins-heart-and-science/> (accessed 19th February 2022).

¹¹⁹ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, p. 209.

the Victorian praise of the ‘normal man’ and fear of the pathologised ‘genius’. The argument is that when the brain is the focus of development, the result is ‘moral insanity’.¹²⁰

The issue of compassion towards *fellow men* was so important to Wells, because he believed that at the core, the civilised man and the savage were the same. Civilisation is artificial; education can bring everyone to the same level. The notion was not new to Victorians that there might have been a universal human nature that remained across time and distance.¹²¹ The new emphasis on technology led to investigations of why the Europeans, if they were by nature the same, had become superior, and many assumed it a result of the surrounding natural environment.¹²² This is the question prompted by Moreau’s leopard-man, who exhibits both animal and human traits, and the line is unclear between his (manipulated) nature and the quasi-culture in which he lives.¹²³ He reflects the argument that different environments had led to the construction of different tools, leading to different technologies of different effectiveness, some of which were superior to others.¹²⁴ Prendick exhibits disdain for fully-human Montgomery for being ‘half akin to these Beast Folk’, treating them as all parts of the same human nature.¹²⁵ However, both of them, Prendick and Montgomery, exhibit the same degeneration into the animalistic. Neither, by the end, are any better off than the other, but Montgomery embraces his similarity with the animal-people, while Prendick tries to fight it and maintain an illusion of superiority.¹²⁶ The same degeneration happens to the Time Traveller, who has more in common with the ape-like Morlocks at the end of his stay than with the people he shares cigars with at the beginning.¹²⁷ Wells demonstrates the blurred line between the civilised and the savage through these examples, criticising the idea that the civilised man is so different from the other that his nature will not let him become the same.

Entitlement to Land

As mentioned, a key mark of civilisation is the ability to manipulate one’s environment to benefit oneself. In the imperial sense, this involves, as Wells writes, ‘not [...] a triumph over Nature, but a triumph over Nature and the fellow-man.’¹²⁸ Nature providing for man became

¹²⁰ Stiles, ‘Literature in *Mind*’, pp. 333-4.

¹²¹ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, p. 22.

¹²² Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 6.

¹²³ Glendening, ‘Green Confusion’, p. 586.

¹²⁴ A. Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 67.

¹²⁵ Wells, *Doctor Moreau*, p. 203.

¹²⁶ Glendening, ‘Green Confusion’, p. 590.

¹²⁷ Thompson, ‘I Determined to Descend’, p. 14.

¹²⁸ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 84.

the world providing for the European, because he was the one with the technology to manipulate the environment more than anyone else could. French engineer Michel Chevalier (1806-1879) wrote that man made nature into a ‘docile slave’ to serve his own well-being,¹²⁹ and so the European would make the world to serve his well-being. In rhetoric, the British Empire was to see ‘nature’ and ‘fellow-men’ as two different things, for the latter were to be ‘liberated’, not ‘used’.¹³⁰ Considering his socialism, all Wells’s books make some degree of reference to the ‘ownership’ of the exploited classes by the elites. It is most obvious in *The Time Traveller*, in which the evolution of humans into non-homo sapiens allows for them to be seen as more animalistic, and therefore more part of ‘nature’. In this natural context, ownership and exploitation of humans becomes just another part of using the environment to a certain group’s advantage.

Beside this natural humanity (and the according mock-excusability for exploitation) Wells puts his figures of master and exploiter: the Time Traveller, Doctor Moreau, Griffin, the Martians, and the ruling councils of the future. Each entity acts in arrogant control of the environment, unbound by laws but able to enforce their own, if they desire, and without any thought for the people they affect, or even considering them as people to be affected. Paul A. Cantor and Peter Hufnagel make the observation of the Time Traveller that ‘separated from his homeland, he apparently no longer feels bound by its laws either’ and allows himself the freedom to murder.¹³¹ The future is his land, which he owns because he is the most civilised being there, with the most knowledge of technology, and he feels no impetus to consider the Eloi or the Morlocks. When Griffin stays with his friend Kemp, he orders Kemp around, and Kemp says, ‘Barred out of my own bedroom, by a flagrant absurdity!’¹³² Wells uses these figures to emphasise the dissonance between the rhetorical liberation and what is seen from the other side. Colonial rule arbitrated under the declaration of ‘for the natives’ own good’, but as it assumed the native too inexperienced to know what was best, it did not heed the feelings, wants, and experiences of those that it affected.¹³³ Wells asks the reader to imagine themselves on the other side, with violent foreigners acting like they know best and ignoring the difficulty of enforced new ways of life.

¹²⁹ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 214.

¹³⁰ Earle, ‘British Patriot’, pp. 188-9.

¹³¹ Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, pp. 44-5.

¹³² Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 153.

¹³³ Tilley, ‘East Africa and Beyond’, p. 499.

The foundational justification for the control that Europeans had over other peoples was their superiority. The same applied to the class hierarchy within Britain. While Wells did believe in a potential omnibenevolent elite to rule the world, he disliked the self-assured thoughtlessness of the ruling populations. He used his novels to put a mirror before the Europeans and question whether they were as righteous and entitled to rule as they claimed, and whether their civilisation was as objective as they believed. The protagonist in a Wells novel is the vehicle for the reader, in the understanding that the reader is a Western European of an imperial state. He addresses the entitlement of the anthropologist and questions the arbitrary nature of the justification of civilisation. Perhaps they did not always know best, and perhaps their generosity was actually selfishness. If so, they lacked an *inherent* right to control others, and Wells implored them to reflect, consider others, and treat them fairly.

Chapter Two: Darwinism and Its Influence

Science fiction has always claimed a position to discuss contemporary socio-political issues and scientific developments. It is therefore no wonder that race, a social and scientific focal point from the mid-nineteenth century to the Second World War, would receive such attention in the genre.¹³⁴ The rise of Darwinism and its ideological progeny drastically altered not only the debate around race but its influence on the practices of colonial governments. Darwinism provided frameworks for race with scientific basis, allowing for new ease of justification, in the belief that if something is upheld by scientific theory, then it is valid to act upon. This was crucial in the development of ideas of eugenics, rooted in the Darwinian terms of ‘survival of the fittest’. Here will be addressed Wells’s attitude towards Darwinism and its use as justification for mistreatment of racial groups, especially in the form of eugenics.

Darwinism

Darwinian Theory

Many racial arguments of Wells’s time, including his own, were rooted in Darwinism. In 1859, Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published *On the Origin of Species*, and in 1871, *The Descent of Man*, which formed the cornerstones of Darwinism. The term ‘Darwinism’ is difficult, because it constitutes many theories, which can be picked and chosen,¹³⁵ and modern Darwinism has collected the arguments of other biologists, distinguishing it from the original form.¹³⁶ Even Wells’s own Darwinism lost its Lamarckian confidence in the inheritance of acquired traits *while* he was writing *Doctor Moreau*. Nevertheless, Darwin’s crucial argument was his ‘one general law, leading to the advancement of all organic beings, namely multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die’.¹³⁷ Based on this foundation, in 1894 Wells wrote in an essay:

‘In the book of nature there are written [...] the triumphs of survival, the tragedy of death and extinction, the tragi-comedy of degradation and inheritance, the gruesome lesson of parasitism, the political satire of colonial organisms.’¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 98.

¹³⁵ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Hale, ‘Of Mice and Men’, p. 19.

¹³⁷ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, p. 25.

¹³⁸ Glendening, ‘Green Confusion’, p. 592.

Nature reflects the uncontrollable obstacles and crises of human political spheres, leaving room for analogy, including the ‘book’ metaphor. Both nature and politics are difficult to predict, but despite chaotic appearances, nothing happens without prompt and consequence. Darwin spent a lot of time arguing against theories of chance.¹³⁹ ‘Survival of the fittest’ was not chance, but based on order and the logic of those best suited to an environment.

The argument is that any mutation that gives advantage *in a particular environment* heightens chance of survival and reproductive success, increasing the chance of spreading the mutation in a population. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin confessed that his previous theories had not put enough emphasis on environment alongside ‘survival of the fittest’.¹⁴⁰ This key Darwinian argument is expressed by Wells when the Time Traveller observes that ‘an animal perfectly in harmony with its environment is a perfect mechanism’.¹⁴¹ Doctor Moreau complains that his efforts to force evolution are stymied, as ‘the things drift back again: the stubborn beast-flesh grows day by day back again.’¹⁴² The animals have already been ‘naturally selected’ and are perfectly adapted to their environment, so Moreau’s attempts to over-evolve them end with them being drawn back to their perfectly-adapted state. This functions as a colonial analogy, reflecting Wells’s belief that native societies were best left alone, already being adapted to their own unique environment. On the other hand, it was generally believed, including by Darwin and Wells, that the European environment had facilitated a struggle that led to evolutionary, then technological, advancement. Darwin suggested that the fertile land of native societies had not posed them enough challenges.¹⁴³

The Theory of Struggle

‘Survival of the fittest’ is a key junction of biological Darwinism meeting socio-political thought. Considering that Wells was a student of Thomas Huxley, a biologist known as ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’ for his devotion to Darwinism, it is no wonder when the Time Traveller says:

‘What, unless biological science is a mass of errors, is the cause of human intelligence and vigour? Hardship and freedom: conditions under which the active, strong, and subtle survive and the weaker go to the wall;’¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Ibid, pp. 572-3.

¹⁴⁰ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, p. 26.

¹⁴¹ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 81.

¹⁴² Wells, *Doctor Moreau*, p. 141.

¹⁴³ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁴ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 52.

It is important to note that Darwin wrote that his use of the phrase ‘struggle for existence’ was largely metaphorical, referring to the effort to produce and protect progeny.¹⁴⁵ It did not mean, as many used it, that to thrive was to conflict with and disadvantage others. Darwin did argue that the struggle would ‘be most severe between individuals of the same species’, as they require the same resources,¹⁴⁶ and this would influence the emergent Social Darwinism. Nevertheless, thinkers using this structure, such as British sociologist Benjamin Kidd (1858-1916), focused on human struggle between races, not among Europeans, their Scramble for Africa, and the continuous wars for territory on the continent itself.¹⁴⁷ It was, however, appreciated that intra-European competition had contributed to the rise of certain powers. As the Time Traveller says: ‘Strength is the outcome of need’.¹⁴⁸ Wells further makes the point of power from struggle in *The War of the Worlds*, when he makes an example of English complacency with the reminder that their power arose from a struggle since lost.¹⁴⁹ In addition, the invasion of the Martians and the resultant struggle make the point that one might call the extermination of non-Western peoples part of the ‘struggle for existence’, but the ‘moral bankruptcy’ of the view is obvious when it is the English on the receiving end of it.¹⁵⁰ Struggle is necessary for strength, but it should not lead to a doctrine of ‘might is right’.

Wells agreed with many contemporary thinkers that the risk of forgoing struggle was degeneration. One must remember that he wrote novels as a social service, because he believed the ideas he expressed in them would help prevent degeneration. In Darwinism, a species can degenerate when it overadapts while others continue to struggle, which is central to *The Time Machine*’s portrayal of the overadapted Eloi.¹⁵¹ This fantasy evolution argues that if the British were brought to the tropics, where they would not need to struggle, Darwinism dictates that they would transform into natives.¹⁵² The animals on Moreau’s island are perfectly adapted, so insist on ‘degenerating’ from their human form to one that will prevent their extinction.¹⁵³ In Huxley’s language, this is ‘retrogressive metamorphosis’, in which a complex animal, one with much variation and individuality, becomes uniform, something that must be possible for

¹⁴⁵ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 25-6.

¹⁴⁷ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 219.

¹⁴⁸ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁹ Manlove, ‘Machine in Victorian Fiction’, p. 235.

¹⁵⁰ McCarthy, ‘Evolution, Anarchy, Entropy’, pp. 47-8.

¹⁵¹ Thompson, ‘I Determined to Descend’, p. 14.

¹⁵² Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, p. 42.

¹⁵³ Glendening, ‘Green Confusion’, p. 580.

mankind too.¹⁵⁴ Already other peoples could be perceived as undifferentiated ‘dying races’, but with retrogressive metamorphosis, the same fate could befall the Western man too.

The Unique Human

Darwinism was sometimes at odds with contemporary anthropology, as it put humans on continuums that included animals, resisting static categorisation of either.¹⁵⁵ Darwinism supported the idea of ever-possible transformation and that there was no evidence that evolution had ceased in the present day. Wells exhibits this in his assumption that humans would evolve and could divide into two new species in *The Time Machine*.¹⁵⁶ Darwin wrote that ‘species are not immutable’, thus while he argued against taxonomist categorisation, he acquiesced that they were merely convention.¹⁵⁷ Because humans had evolved from animals and maintained similarities, it was impossible to provide an ‘absolute or essentialist gap between’.¹⁵⁸ These blurred lines are the central motif of *Doctor Moreau*. Notable is the line: ‘The creatures I had seen were not men, had never been men. They were animals, humanised animals’.¹⁵⁹ It is significant that Prendick, a student of Huxley, would make such an observation, considering that all humans are ‘humanised animals’. The continuum is important, because if true for humans and animals, it must be true for races too. Distinctions made by the likes of French naturalist and anthropologist Julien-Joseph Virey (1775-1846), who compared Africans to apes, *as opposed to humans*,¹⁶⁰ are rendered meaningless if concrete division is only conventional.

With this philosophical-biological debate, Wells uses *Doctor Moreau* to attack the idea of the human as unique, as an analogy for the white man as unique. The Beast-People exhibit human behaviours to demonstrate their uncertain place: walking erect, talking, and thinking. The latter is conflated with rationalisation, which leads to the comparisons of Africans to animals based on perceptions of an inability to reason. Moreau declares that the division between man and animal is that animals act on pain.¹⁶¹ In his non-fiction essay ‘The Province of Pain’, Wells merges this sentiment with Darwinism by arguing that as the brain develops in animals, they

¹⁵⁴ Stiles, ‘Literature in *Mind*’, pp. 332-3.

¹⁵⁵ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism*, p. 68.

¹⁵⁶ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁷ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, p. 30.

¹⁵⁸ Glendening, ‘Green Confusion’, p. 575.

¹⁵⁹ Wells, *Doctor Moreau*, p. 128.

¹⁶⁰ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 298.

¹⁶¹ Wells, *Doctor Moreau*, p. 134.

are slower to react to stimuli, thus evidencing thought before action.¹⁶² Almost every non-human animal would react quickly, too quickly to have time to think, evidencing action on instinct. As humans had more developed brains, they would think before acting, and would therefore take more time to react to the stimulus. Moreau takes this idea too far, not only with erroneous dichotomies of animal/human and able/unable to stifle instincts, but by the hypocrisy and impossibility of his ideal ‘human’: one that cannot feel pain. All humans react to pain, leaving the attainment of Moreau’s ‘humanity’ impossible not only for the Beast-People, but the men too.¹⁶³ However, because the men – Moreau, Montgomery, and Prendick – are so obviously men and are the ones in power, they do not need to prove anything. The unattainable standard for the human, to not feel pain, is only imposed on the Beast-People, because their humanity is something that needs to be proven. They are seen as failures when they still feel pain – or, rather, Moreau sees himself as a failure when his creations feel pain – but the entire ideal of the human without pain is absurd and untrue anyway. When the animals revert away from this imposition, it is a liberation. Wells wrote after *Doctor Moreau* was published that he had intended to show that the ideals of morality and civility were invented practices ‘to keep the round Paleolithic savage in the square hole of the civilized state’.¹⁶⁴

The biological belief in humanity as an end point, and the social idea that all civilisations had a set direction, came from the faulty idea of progress. In the modern day as well as in Wells’s age, evolution is often erroneously perceived as a vertical trajectory of development, with humans as the most advanced thus far.¹⁶⁵ This contradicts the core of Darwinism, in which every animal is perfectly evolved to its surroundings, all equally advanced for their situations. The trajectory of progress, however, is what allows for perceptions of inferior animals and, thence, inferior races. Africans were disdained for not having changed as much as Europeans,¹⁶⁶ thereby placing them further back on the trajectory. Wells wrote in his non-fiction that he believed humans had not evolved biologically since the Paleolithic, and that all differences since then were down to the evolution of ideas.¹⁶⁷ Neither can be deliberately manipulated, and the lack of (biological) trajectory means that efforts to force progress are efforts to force change. One of the most striking lines in *Doctor Moreau* is Moreau’s:

¹⁶² A. Bishop, ‘Making Sympathy “vicious” on *The Island of Doctor Moreau*’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 43:2 (2021), 205-220, p. 210.

¹⁶³ E.E. Snyder, ‘*Moreau* and the Monstrous: Evolution, Religion, and the Beast on the Island’, *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 2:2 (2013), 213-239, p. 218.

¹⁶⁴ Planinc, ‘Catching Up with Wells’, pp. 647-8.

¹⁶⁵ Thompson, ‘I Determined to Descend’, p. 13.

¹⁶⁶ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, pp. 245-6.

¹⁶⁷ Hale, ‘Of Mice and Men’, p. 39.

‘Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain, I say, ‘This time I will burn out all the animal; this time I will make a rational creature of my own!’¹⁶⁸

His attempts to make men fail because Darwinian evolution is not founded on intelligent deliberation and no planned drive exists towards a predetermined apex. Wells did believe that deliberate measures could be taken for political change,¹⁶⁹ but that is not the same as believing that peoples were placed on a trajectory of mental and civilised progress. However, the line between the biological and social implementations of Darwinism was not always clear-cut.

Social Darwinism

Social Darwinism involves the addition to the tenets of basic Darwinism another assumption: ‘determinism extends to not just the physical properties of humans but also to their social existence.’¹⁷⁰ There has been debate over the influence of Social Darwinism when compared to Darwinism proper, with case studies implying that its role has been over-exaggerated.¹⁷¹ Darwin’s responsibility has also been questioned, as his arguments supported mental ability differentiating races and interracial struggle having influenced evolution,¹⁷² and those that condoned hierarchies and miscegenation laws abroad called on Darwinism as their support.

One can see criticism of the Social Darwinist view of ‘lesser race’ extermination as an inevitable result of social natural selection in the character of Moreau. He claims ruthless abandon is natural, as a way to absolve himself of his cruelty.¹⁷³ This is a comment on the literalisation of Darwin’s ‘struggle for existence’. Huxley was accused of misrepresenting the metaphor in a manner that necessitated humans disadvantaging other humans.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, human society was not split neatly, like other animals, and debate arose within the community of Darwinists over what the human ‘unit’ would be – nation, race, etc.¹⁷⁵ These demonstrate the difficulty of turning biological observation into political theory.

Although Wells demonstrates at times opinions in line with perceptions of Social Darwinism – his fear of ‘weak’ members of the population affecting the quality of the rest – he exhibits contempt for those that dismiss whole races or classes. In *The Sleeper Awakes*, the dismissive

¹⁶⁸ Wells, *Doctor Moreau*, p. 144.

¹⁶⁹ Glendening, ‘Green Confusion’, p. 579.

¹⁷⁰ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, pp. 30-1.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹⁷² Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 308.

¹⁷³ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 110.

¹⁷⁴ Hale, ‘Of Mice and Men’, p. 22.

¹⁷⁵ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, pp. 33-4.

way in which Graham is told that workers ‘murdered a Chinaman [...] and left the rest of us in peace’,¹⁷⁶ is a criticism of the selfish thoughtlessness that denounced other races as unimportant. Similar counter-Social Darwinism is found in *The War of the Worlds*, when the Martians are vanquished not by the strength of the British race (as would be in line with the genre) but their biological weakness to Earth bacteria.¹⁷⁷ This was part of a fully biological advocacy of Darwinism, without the fifth assumption, resisting the structures put into politics.¹⁷⁸ Moreau is Wells’s main means of showing the dangers of warped Darwinism, when observation becomes cruel action.

The Honour of Sacrifice

From supporter of eugenics Francis Galton’s 1883 *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*, there was a great debate over what to do about the physical decline of the English body, leading to the creation of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904.¹⁷⁹ Wells wrote during the prime of this discussion. For many, (including Wells, to an extent) the solution was to remove from the pool of possible parents those that would produce mentally and/or physically weak offspring. This was eugenics. Though often associated with Social Darwinism, people could support or condemn eugenics separately. One could believe in Social Darwinism but not think it man’s place to decide who thrives and who does not, or one could believe that groups within society should be sacrificed without founding that belief in ‘survival of the fittest’. The fear of degeneration that led to support for eugenics did not have to centre around natural selection. The transformation of Britons into tropical islanders in *The Time Machine* reflects the fear of ‘going native’, that Europeans would be enticed by the native way of life, lose their self-discipline, and marry equally undisciplined non-European women.¹⁸⁰ The Eloi have become so tropicalised that they have lost all the markers of civilisation and have ‘forgotten their high ancestry’.¹⁸¹ As the notion of the ‘dying race’ seemed to have been evidenced in native societies, a fear arose that what James Poskett calls the ‘underlying quality of whiteness’ would wear away and make Europeans just as liable to fade.¹⁸² The empire provided new opportunities for degeneration, and Wells wavered on his opinion on what measures were acceptable to prevent it.

¹⁷⁶ Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, pp. 107-8.

¹⁷⁷ C. Keep, ‘H.G. Wells and the End of the Body’, *Victorian Review* 23:2 (1997), 232-243, p. 240.

¹⁷⁸ McCarthy, ‘Evolution, Anarchy, Entropy’, p. 47.

¹⁷⁹ Keep, ‘End of the Body’, p. 236.

¹⁸⁰ Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, p. 42.

¹⁸¹ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 103.

¹⁸² J. Poskett, ‘Racial Science’, in A. Goss (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), p. 39.

In 1894, Huxley wrote the essay ‘Evolution and Ethics’, which argued that while the current state of civilisation had required mutual aid, if it allowed the unfit to prosper, the overall fitness of society would diminish. Wells was influenced by this work, for though he did criticise racial eugenics, in the 1890s he advocated the ‘sterilisation of failures’ *within* a society.¹⁸³ He called ‘the modest suicide of incurably melancholy or diseased or helpless persons [...] a high duty rather than a crime.’¹⁸⁴ However, there were limits. When the artilleryman in *War of the Worlds* expresses these ideas, that ‘It’s a sort of disloyalty, after all, to live and taint the race’,¹⁸⁵ he is portrayed as being unreasonable. The narrator, as the reader surrogate, disagrees with him. There is a limit to what is morally acceptable when managing within a society, even as Wells would continue to advocate the management of ‘People of the Abyss’ into the 1930s, albeit softening with time.¹⁸⁶ Manner of management was important to him, even at the turn of the century, as he supported voluntary sterilisation but was against killing and ‘lethal chambers’, which were supported by many of the socialists with whom he surrounded himself.¹⁸⁷ While the contradictions and nuances of Wells’s opinions on eugenics in Europe have been worthy of several studies, such as those by John S. Partington and P.J. Hale,¹⁸⁸ it is more important here to emphasise that he was morally opposed to eugenics that targeted people based on their race. This was made explicit in his paragraph on the extinction of the Tasmanians in *War of the Worlds*,¹⁸⁹ against the argument that the death was deserved.

Miscegenation

An international concern at the turn of the twentieth century was the mixing of races. Debate impacted Australian politics with the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act, which reacted to fears that ‘black races’ could dilute ‘white stock’.¹⁹⁰ In *Doctor Moreau*, the animal elements of the Beast-People are described as ‘taints’ throughout. Though this refers to the result of vivisection, the language reflects that of the miscegenation debate. The more subtle aspects of the discussion also find their way into Wells’s novels; it was fear of miscegenation that fostered the adventure literature trope of the native lover of the protagonist having to die to prevent the conundrum of loving her, a trope of Weena’s role in *The Time Machine*.¹⁹¹ She becomes the

¹⁸³ Hale, ‘Of Mice and Men’, p. 27, 41.

¹⁸⁴ L. Dryden, ‘*The Inheritors*, H.G. Wells, and Science Fiction: The Dimensions of the Future’, *Conradiana* 46:2/3 (2017), 103-120, p. 114.

¹⁸⁵ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, p. 259.

¹⁸⁶ Partington, ‘A Political Life’, p. 521.

¹⁸⁷ Hale, ‘Of Mice and Men’, pp. 44-5.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 41.

¹⁸⁹ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁰ Poskett, ‘Racial Science’, p. 40.

¹⁹¹ Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, pp. 39-40.

Time Traveller's companion, whom he wants to take back to the 1890s with him, but who dies in the course of the story.

At the other end of the debate from those afraid of the degeneration of 'white stock' were those that believed that miscegenation would strengthen races. In 1894, Harry Johnston, High Commissioner for Central Africa, suggested encouraging miscegenation of South Asians and Africans, hoping that the perceived strengths of each race would overpower the other's weaknesses.¹⁹² Wells believed in natural selection's freedom for women to choose male partners, the above examples of miscegenation-related language in his novels being examples of criticism, and he furthermore evidenced a love of diversity. He was part of the fin-de-siècle group that imagined a future with diverse populations of equals.¹⁹³ Throughout *Doctor Moreau*, Wells tries to convince Prendick that difference is good and natural, that sympathy is better than disgust.¹⁹⁴ In *The Sleeper Awakes*, he calls the masses 'wonderfully diversified',¹⁹⁵ and proceeds to emphasise this by listing the various races encountered several times. In this case, he was in the minority of people not only accepting of, but thrilled by the prospect of diversity.

The Difficulty of Selection

One of Wells's most significant criticisms of eugenics, shared with Darwin and Huxley, was the difficulty in discerning aim. Prendick asks Moreau 'why he had taken the human form as a model'.¹⁹⁶ This relates to the Darwinian aversion to seeing evolution as a progression leading to the *homo sapiens*. If Moreau claims to act as nature, why choose this end point in particular? As Moreau's actions reflect the hopes and failings of the eugenics movement's artificial selection: what is the ideal racial endpoint that the eugenicists are after? As established, Darwinism argues that there is no single 'perfection', only perfect adaptation, and no intelligent direction.¹⁹⁷ Moreau's deceptive aimlessness is part of his tragedy of never being satisfied. Again, one thinks of his striking declaration that 'This time I will burn out all the animal'.¹⁹⁸ He is more aware of what he does *not* want the animals to be than what he *does* want. All he knows is that they should not feel pain and be recognisable as the animals that they were. This aligns with the muddy ideal of 'racial perfection' through morality, in which the forbidden

¹⁹² Tilley, 'East Africa and Beyond', p. 496.

¹⁹³ Worth, 'Imperial Transmissions', p. 84.

¹⁹⁴ Bishop, 'Making Sympathy "vicious"', p. 211.

¹⁹⁵ Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, p. 45.

¹⁹⁶ Wells, *Doctor Moreau*, p. 133.

¹⁹⁷ Snyder, 'Moreau and the Monstrous', p. 214.

¹⁹⁸ Wells, *Doctor Moreau*, p. 144.

actions are clearer than the encouraged ones.¹⁹⁹ Wells did believe in human-designed *moral* progress,²⁰⁰ but a just society is easier to define than a ‘perfect race’. Part of Moreau’s fable is that his ‘perfect’ human – his perfect race – is unattainable, yet he punishes the animals for not being able to live up to it.²⁰¹ Wells takes issue with this aspect of eugenics: there is no solid end, thus no clear way of getting there, thus failure is inevitable.

The scientific interest of Wells’s science fiction made it the perfect arena to criticise the science behind imperial arguments, in the misuse of Darwinism to support racial eugenics. By intensifying the racial arguments of his day – creating a human/animal dichotomy in *Doctor Moreau*, for instance, as opposed to a white/native one – Wells demonstrated places of ill-logic that he perceived, non sequiturs in connecting biology to politics, and the moral absurdity of racial justification for killing.

¹⁹⁹ Bishop, ‘Making Sympathy “vicious”’, p. 208.

²⁰⁰ Snyder, ‘*Moreau* and the Monstrous’, p. 236.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

Chapter Three: Colonisation and Its Technologies

In his 1987 book *The Age of Empire*, historian Eric Hobsbawm argued that the Eloi and the Morlocks represented the ‘parasitism at the centre’ of empire.²⁰² One race lives an idyllic existence at the expense of the lives and labours of the other. Certainly, one of Wells’s main arguments is that imperial centres parasitically exploited the resources of colonies and forced the colonised to live emotionally impoverished lives under the guise of help. The act of extraction serves immediate and long-term purposes. The immediate is the acquisition of the resource, and the long-term is a lack of internal strife. In the case of the empire, this is the opinion, shared by Cecil B. Rhodes and Vladimir Lenin alike, that empire to an extent relieved the internal tensions of the home country. Furthermore, by limiting the ability of the exploited to participate in discourse, using advanced technology inaccessible to those not in the loop, the positions of colonised and coloniser were better entrenched. By creating an additional, lower class of workers to exploit, the nation could create an element of privilege within its working classes and align their interests better with the middle and upper classes, all benefitting from those exploited and excluded abroad.²⁰³

This was the final stage of the imperial process of acquisition of power: colonisation by exclusive forms of technological communication, consolidation of power, and exploitation of resources. This was the time when the imperial power hoped to reap the benefits of their endeavour, both moral and material. Naturally, this was idealistic, and imperial powers were often frustrated by the refusal of subjugated peoples to conform to the new regime. However, even when efforts succeeded, careless methods and avaricious intentions left colonising efforts open to criticism. Ever sensitive to exploitation, particularly of the economic kind, Wells used his novels to satirise structures of colonial power and, as with his other themes, reverse the situation onto the European reader to emphasise the moral horror inflicted on others. To see this sentiment of unfairness, here will be studied the use of technology to govern around the wishes of the colonised, the human exploitation of other humans, and inconsiderate material extraction.

Control of the Colonised Communications Technology

²⁰² Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 27.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, pp. 26-7.

To enforce the new political structures, empires relied on advances in communications technology, such as the telegraph and the railway, which bypassed natives. The importance of this communications technology is prominent in Wells's work, owing to his strong belief in the potential of technology and his position writing during a time of intense communications advancement.²⁰⁴ There were new methods of everything: transport, journalism, education, sending messages. Wells saw the potential for unity and division with these technologies and wished to support the former while offering warnings.²⁰⁵ For Wells, and many others of his time, communications technology created the structure of society, hence the importance of its failure in *The War of the Worlds*.²⁰⁶ Every one of Wells's books places value on communications technology, even those with an absence of it. Moreau's lack of communication with the outside world is deliberate, demonstrative of his isolation from civilisation. The main instance of communications technology is the memory Prendick has of a newspaper article, through which he associates Moreau with vivisection. In *The Invisible Man*, it is again a newspaper that alerts people to Griffin's dangerousness and leads to his downfall.

Communications technology take up much more prominent roles in *The War of the Worlds* and *The Sleeper Awakes*, both in ways to criticise its use by rulers. At Wells's time of writing, small groups of Europeans were able to govern vast areas of colonised land using the quick technology of telegraph, railways, and steamships. The European's ability to administrate effectively added to their sense of duty to do so on behalf of others.²⁰⁷ In *The Sleeper Awakes*, Wells details how language differences have decreased, allowing for easier communication, and 'a great part of the earth' speaks English,²⁰⁸ a testimony to the expanse of the British Empire and its educative technologies. In *The War of the Worlds*, the Martians have more advanced communications and transport technology, and they too aim to use this advantage to the end of subjugation.²⁰⁹ The advantages in speed and certainty that the advanced technology provided was credited by Wells in his non-fiction for the success of the European powers,²¹⁰ so it follows that his exaggerated aliens and future humans derive their power of subjugation from the same. In *The Sleeper Awakes*, Wells creates a society in which 'telephone,

²⁰⁴ Worth, 'Imperial Transmissions', p. 67.

²⁰⁵ Earle, 'British Patriot', pp. 187-8.

²⁰⁶ Worth, 'Imperial Transmissions', p. 73.

²⁰⁷ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 204.

²⁰⁸ Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, p. 145.

²⁰⁹ Worth, 'Imperial Transmissions', p. 71.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 66.

kinematograph and phonograph had replaced newspaper, book, schoolmaster, and letter,' and 'to live outside the range of the electric cables was to live an isolated savage'.²¹¹ This mimics the forced imposition of communications in colonies, the ability to strip those refusing to conform with their ability to live in the new world, and the new structure of society being imposed by the networks of communication only accessible through technology. The use of the metaphor 'an isolated savage' is significant in that equivalency. *The War of the Worlds* further emphasises the exclusion of technology by making the Martian telepathic. Their ability to communicate without letting the English know that any message has been exchanged mirrors the use of telegraph in places such as British India, through which the colonial government could plan dealings with the population without interception.²¹² Wells uses his scientific imagination to find the next step; as telegraphs and telephones allow the shrinking of space and time to immediacy,²¹³ telepathy shortens them further to instancy. Historian of science and professor of English Laura Otis has made the observation that the octopus-like appearance of the Martians physicalises the 'centralized webs [that] 'wired' empires'.²¹⁴ While rather literary, and doubtfully Wells's intention with the design, this is an amusing demonstration of the accepted inherent connection of empire with being 'wired'. In these cases, the use of fictionally advanced technology is not so much used for criticism as for warning of the exclusivity and that the power may not remain in European hands.

Bestowment and Transformation

These technologies of communication were not only used to enact governance, but to bring to fruition the 'civilising process', as the ostensible reason for colonisation. This involved the bestowment of European knowledge and ideals onto the native population and a desired consequent transformation into the civilised. In *The Time Machine*, Wells appears to mock the idea by saying that it will all come to naught in several thousand years, when 'the nations, languages, literatures, aspirations, even the mere memory of Man as I knew him, had been swept out of existence.'²¹⁵ However, the importance placed on the transformation of the colonised amongst Wells's contemporaries should be noted. While many believed that Africans in particular would be incapable of comprehending everything needed for civilisation, those that pushed expansion, such as sociologists Benjamin Kidd and H.H. Johnston, justified their

²¹¹ Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, p. 144.

²¹² Worth, 'Imperial Transmissions', p. 72.

²¹³ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 259.

²¹⁴ Worth, 'Imperial Transmissions', pp. 71-2.

²¹⁵ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 103.

arguments with the development of the colonised areas.²¹⁶ They stressed how Western technology had the potential to fix the social and economic problems faced by societies such as China.²¹⁷ Wells did agree with the potential of technology to enact change; his criticism came more from the enforcement of culture than the spread of technology to aid economies. Moreau is a satire of those men like French administrator Georges Hardy, who saw the advanced European technology as a way to ‘enlighten’ natives and replace their ‘superstition’ with liberating knowledge.²¹⁸ Wells saw the evangelising use of technology as misuse, modifying the ‘artificial factor’ of civilisation without helping the more immediate self-rule and economic issues.

The process of taking control of a colony involved the construction and configuration of systems of governance. The approach varied according to power and colony, but all involved the imposition of European structures and officials. Among Wells’s corpus, political construction is crucial to *Doctor Moreau*, *The Time Machine*, and *The Sleeper Awakes*. It is more obvious in *Doctor Moreau*, with the clear parallel of the white men irresponsibly experimenting civilisation on Beast-People forced to obey and accept the justification for their physical and emotional torture.²¹⁹ The Beast-People do run their own society, because Moreau only cares about the process of transformation, not the repercussions. However, that society is based on the desire to mimic ‘human’ society, and the foundations are implied to have been provided by Montgomery. This is a critical parallel of the idea that ‘native’ people needed the guiding hand of white men, as a ‘mature’ race²²⁰ – critical because Moreau is the villain rightfully murdered by his own creation.

The Beast-People have ‘the Law’, which is a series of repetitions based around making animalistic actions, such as walking on all fours, illegal. All ‘men’ must follow it to be ‘men’, as Prendick is told, ‘He must learn the Law’, when the Beast-People see him as a human.²²¹ Earlier in the book, while the characters are on the ship, Wells establishes the lack of absolute law by having the ship’s captain state that he is the law on his ship. This sets the stage for the later perspective of the Beast-People’s laws as not as absolute as the Beast-People believe; the laws imposed by the white men on their ‘natives’ being rules made up and enforced by people

²¹⁶ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 286, 220.

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 232.

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 230.

²¹⁹ Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 106.

²²⁰ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 307.

²²¹ Wells, *Doctor Moreau*, p. 106.

for their own standards and purposes.²²² The chanting of the Law is supposed to be unnerving in its context, an interesting contrast to ‘The Law of the Jungle’ in Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*. Also said by animals, Kipling’s is a positive endorsement of law and order, as opposed to evidence of a vain effort to become human.²²³ Kipling was very much a proponent of the European-as-teacher idea, as epitomised in his poems ‘Kitchener’s School’ and ‘The White Man’s Burden’.²²⁴ This teacher-parent role of empire was largely accepted by the elites taking on the teacher role, with the process of raising the ‘native’ even compared to the process ‘to become human’,²²⁵ just as the Beast-People are told they should desire. Beyond the tonal criticism within *Doctor Moreau*, one can tell that Wells was not convinced of the righteousness of English modes of government to enforce themselves on colonies from his socialist criticisms in essays and his wry remark in *The Invisible Man*: ‘The Anglo-Saxon genius for parliamentary government asserted itself; there was a great deal of talk and no decisive action.’²²⁶

Furthermore, Wells uses *Doctor Moreau* to display the cost of the futile civilising process for those on the receiving end. Not only is the endeavour destined to the failure of reversion, owing to Darwinian adaptation, but the actual transformation of the puma into a woman – the savage society into civilisation – is agonising, with its crying disturbing Prendick to such an extent that he runs into the jungle to escape it. The agony of the transformation is so crucial to the story, and its villainisation of Moreau, that the central chapters are ‘The Crying of the Puma’, ‘The Thing in the Forest’, and ‘The Crying of the Man’.²²⁷ Prendick’s distress worsens when the puma has crossed a human threshold and is ‘a human being in torment’,²²⁸ because as the puma is civilised, the vivisection, experimentation, and control of Moreau becomes not only less justifiable, but repugnant. The sacrifice of an old way of life for a new one imposed by foreign invaders was not an easy matter of shedding, as complaints of the obstinacy of native peoples would imply. Wells criticises Moreau’s indifference to his subjects’ suffering as a criticism of the dissonance between the impatient attitudes of Europeans and the painful coast of civilisation on the ground: the loss of one’s traditions, status, and worldview. Nor does the pain stop after the transformation:

²²² Snyder, ‘Moreau and the Monstrous’, p. 217.

²²³ R. Bowen, ‘Science, Myth, and Fiction in H. G. Wells’s *Island of Doctor Moreau*’, *Studies in the Novel* 8:3 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 318-335, p. 320.

²²⁴ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, pp. 271-2.

²²⁵ Lawrence and Brown, ‘Quintessentially Modern Heroes’, p. 169.

²²⁶ Wells, *The Invisible Man*, pp. 54-5.

²²⁷ Hoad, ‘Cosmetic Surgeons’, p. 196-7.

²²⁸ Wells, *Doctor Moreau*, p. 90.

‘Before, they had been beasts, their instincts fitly adapted to their surroundings, and happy as living things may be. Now they stumbled in the shackles of humanity, lived in a fear that never died, fretted by a law they could not understand; their mock-human existence, begun in an agony, was one long internal struggle, one long dread of Moreau—and for what?’²²⁹

Wells criticises here the argument that colonisation was for natives’ own good, when he argues that they are left confused and afraid of their rulers. These are rulers who – like Moreau, the Martians, and the councils in *The Sleeper Awakes* – have an emotional distance from their subjects, ignoring the cries of the puma in favour of pursuing their established goal to control and transform.

From this cultural torture arises the threat of resentment, and from that Wells echoes the voices of nationalists in the colonies to warn that there may come a time when power would switch. European thinkers claimed that, to an extent, this was what they wanted: part of the civilising process meant bringing the colonised to a point at which they would no longer need the coloniser’s guiding hand. Governor of Bombay Mountstuart Elphinstone expounded this idea in the early nineteenth-century with regards to India, but it was an easier argument to make when that time was, as he said, an ‘immeasurable distance’ away. As high-ranking Indians were educated into the European sphere, their nationalism gained a form that fit with European practices, and so their potential to be at the stage for independence was more immediate.²³⁰ At that point, reluctance to relinquish power became more obvious, as well as the necessity on the other side for drastic measures. While present in *Doctor Moreau* through the need for the carnivorous animals to break out of their conditioning, the theme is also present in *The Sleeper Awakes* and *War of the Worlds*. In the latter, one finds the character of the artilleryman, who envisions a period of survival under Martian heel, before humans learn to master their advanced communications, transport, and weapon technologies. At that point, he says: ‘*swish* comes the Heat-Ray, and, behold! man has come back into his own.’²³¹ The power of the science fiction analogy is notable here, because with the English fighting against the grotesque alien invader, the reader has little choice but to support the idea of rebellion as evidently correct. Wells asks the reader to reflect on the real difference between the evident righteousness of the English against the Martians and the desire of the colonised to free themselves from the English.

Exploitation

²²⁹ Ibid, p. 177.

²³⁰ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, pp. 202-3.

²³¹ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, p. 261.

Material Extraction

Centuries before Wells wrote, men such as Dutch lawyer Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and English judge Thomas More (1478-1535) justified the extraction of materials by saying that native peoples that did not manipulate the environment did not use it, and unused lands had ‘no property in them’. This meant that there was no moral impediment to the seizure of land and resources.²³² Benjamin Kidd was one of many voices that argued that some of the most fertile lands were inhabited by people that let them go to waste, by which was meant that they did not manipulate and extract from the environment. This was not only a matter of obtaining those resources, but as argued by Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle in 1840, it was a moral obligation to prevent the waste of resources provided by God.²³³ This was the popular argument against which Wells positioned himself, as the socialist sympathiser with the exploited.

Wells approaches the issue of material extraction principally in *The War of the Worlds*, but it is also an underlying theme of *The Time Machine* and *The Invisible Man*. Wells does not urgently concern himself with it, because his main issue is the misuse of humans – his problem would be the forced labour of people in mines, rather than the extraction itself. Nevertheless, he includes the issue in his reverse-colonial narrative to emphasise the injustice of an invader ravaging one’s resources. He details that when the Martians look at Earth from Mars, to plan their invasion, they see, ‘our own warmer planet, green with vegetation and gray with water, with a cloudy atmosphere eloquent of fertility’.²³⁴ They see what the Europeans saw – ‘foodstuffs, plant fibers, and minerals’²³⁵ – yet it is ominous, because England is the one with the coveted resources. In reality, the direction of the extraction was justified by the biological and cultural hierarchies,²³⁶ but Wells’s endeavour remains to elicit sympathy by reversal of situation through scientific fantasy, with the end goal being kinder treatment, even if people continued to believe in hierarchy. This is also a theme in his other novels, but he hints at material extraction in a lesser way. The Time Machine is made of colonial materials: nickel, ivory, and rock crystal.²³⁷ It encapsulates the fin-de-siècle period: a piece of exaggerated Western science and technology built from materials extracted from overseas.²³⁸ The focus of the European is on the wonder of the technology; the journey of the materials are hardly

²³² Rieder, *Colonialism and Science Fiction*, p. 31.

²³³ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, pp. 217-9.

²³⁴ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, pp. 5-6.

²³⁵ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, p. 205.

²³⁶ Tilley, ‘East Africa and Beyond’, p. 497.

²³⁷ Wells, *The Time Machine*, pp. 15-6.

²³⁸ Cantor and Hufnagel, ‘Empire of the Future’, p. 54.

considered beyond a recognition of their exoticism, and Wells's recurrent endeavour is to spark the first thought for that side, to push against the immediate instinct to argue that the situation abroad would be different or justifiable.

Human Exploitation

Wells's socialist passion puts most emphasis on the exploitation of people, an issue seen in various guises in all his novels, from the experimentation of *Doctor Moreau* to the Labour Forces of *The Sleeper Awakes*. The Time Traveller believes it 'natural' to assume that the underground world of the Morlocks was created to serve the Eloi.²³⁹ This reflected the perceived place of colonised people to work and be part of the natural tool for the use of the empires. As it related to the civilising mission, this was a moral endeavour to discourage idleness and teach people how to look after themselves. However, this rhetoric was betrayed by the force that took the form of taxes and corporal punishment, among other measures, demonstrating that there was more to gain than the improvement of the people.²⁴⁰ This discrepancy between ideology and practice was explored by other writers of the time, such as Joseph Conrad (1857-1924), and Wells emphasises the hypocrisy of the ideology in *The Sleeper Awakes*, with the propagandist Babble Machines. In his other works, he shows parallels of the practices in the assumption that his reader is already working in a framework of familiarity with the rhetoric. He therefore allows himself to focus on the analogy, through which he describes an extremity of his socialist perspective. When expounding on the dynamic of the Eloi and Morlocks, he describes the latter as:

'Workers getting continually adapted to the conditions of their labour. Once they were there, they would no doubt have to pay rent, and not a little of it, for the ventilation of their caverns; and if they refused, they would starve or be suffocated for arrears.'²⁴¹

This refers to the 'working classes' as a whole: the group within British society and the global working class, which was the exploited periphery. In *The Invisible Man*, Griffin forces Marvel to do his bidding under threat of death, and Marvel is terrified, as he represents the lack of choice that the working classes have. The global working class connection is clearer in *Doctor Moreau*, particularly with the character of Montgomery's manservant, who represents the subservient work that welcomed those that did acquiesce to civilisation. It is yet clearer again in *The Sleeper Awakes*, which has the Black Labour Force as a principal plot point. The council

²³⁹ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 81.

²⁴⁰ Adas, *Machines as the Measure*, pp. 257-8.

²⁴¹ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 83.

wish to bring black police from South Africa to deal with the rebels violently,²⁴² displaying a continuation of racialised work. The police are hired based on their race, for a future in which certain races are still ‘used’ for perceived strength, brutality, and obedience. These police are objects at the metropole’s beck and call, to do what they are unwilling to do. In every example, one sees the centrality of the inconsiderate and imploration to think of the possessed abroad not merely as a tool.

The crux of Wells’s criticism is the mistreatment of people. Among his major concerns are the use of communications technologies to go above the heads of the colonised, the role of humans in the exploitation of other humans, and inconsiderate material extraction. Throughout his novels, he addresses the thoughtlessness of colonial administration by constructing fictional situations in which the underdogs are brought to the reader’s immediate attention, as opposed to being a faceless mass hundreds of miles away. He criticises the higher level of colonisation by painting the process as inhumanly painful and not as worthwhile as claimed. He criticises the exploitation of resources by bringing attention to the sacrifices necessary for the nice things enjoyed in Europe. From an impoverished background, Wells was sensitive to any exploitation of people or enforcement of disadvantageous lifestyles by the powerful, and he extended his sympathy on that matter to those that had been colonised.

²⁴² Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, p. 220.

Conclusion

H.G. Wells wrote novels, but he perceived himself less of a storyteller and more a political activist. His books therefore consisted of criticisms and implorations: criticisms of arrogance and implorations for equality. As one that had been affected by poverty and the inhumane decisions of the elite that claimed to know best, Wells sympathised with the plight of the colonised, as they were contorted into an arbitrary mould of civilisation and became tools of the imperial centre. He used the parameters of science fiction to entreat his European readership to reflect on the actions that they supported under the justification of superiority. Science fiction allowed one to threaten that this was a possible future, to exaggerate the morally repugnant, and to create plausible situations in which the roles of advantaged and disadvantaged were reversed. Each book's main analogy and connecting message of inequality are clear:

In *The Time Machine*, the scientific fiction is founded on real evolutionary principles: that humans could split into Eloi and Morlocks. It allows the Time Traveller to remark on how though he acts like an anthropologist abroad, he is interacting with Britons, his own descendants. Furthermore, Wells explains how the Eloi and Morlocks were created: how the Eloi were originally the elite and have since become the prey for those they exploited. That is a clear socialist warning to those in power that if they do not treat their current inferiors, global and local, as equals, then there will come a time when the exploited have their revenge.

In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, the analogy makes the European civilising process a vivisection, the imperial government a scientist, and the colonised animals adapted and content in their environment being forced to transform to appease the never-satiated ideals of the scientist. The benefit of the science fiction is that it allows Wells to make what he views as ideologically repugnant into the physically repugnant. Moreau's actions are wrong because they are so gruesome and unnatural, and that is how Wells criticises the unjust absurdity of the civilising mission, for not considering the wants and needs of those affected, only the ideals of the perpetrators.

In *The Invisible Man*, a detailed scientific description, based around the use of light, explains how Griffin turned himself invisible, allowing Wells to use an invisible man to parallel larger invisible forces of capitalism. Griffin uses his invisibility to steal and intimidate, until those exploited band together to destroy their enemy. This is particularly socialist, with the heavy messages against capitalism and the emphasis on what can be done if the disadvantaged work together.

In *The War of the Worlds*, the principal technique is the reversal of roles, using science fiction to create a situation in which the European protagonist is the one being subjugated and colonised. Wells ensures that the reader is reminded throughout of the Englishness of the setting, ensuring that they must support the English and therefore the colonised. The colonisers become monstrous aliens, obviously immoral, and the injustice becomes clear because it is the community of the reader experiencing it. This is also the novel in which Wells explores the inequality and terror that comes from knowing that invaders can communicate without any way of one knowing what they are saying, a commentary on the use of the telegraph.

Finally, in *The Sleeper Awakes*, the extended sleep allows Wells to place a man with a Victorian way of thinking into his vision of what he believed to be a plausible future. One again sees the running socialist trope of the masses rising up, this time not as a warning to those in charge, but a rallying call to the exploited. Metropolitan heterogeneity is praised as a strength, with much of the scientific aspect surrounding potential future technologies. The focus is that capitalist elites will only become more oppressive, empires more global, and the inequality must be remedied.

In these ways that Wells took advantage of his science fiction genre, one can see how his criticism addressed the major themes discussed. Each novel contains a parallel to the European conqueror, placed in an analogy that mocks the self-assuredness of superiority in civilisation and the resulting entitlement to others' societies. By technology and culture, the West claimed to be superior, and Wells not only criticised that way of thinking as founded on the arbitrary, but he argued through his novels that the 'benevolent guide' was selfish and ignorant. This gave Europeans no right as they were then (i.e. not living up to Wells's socialist utopia) to enact their will abroad.

Wells then attacks the scientific, Darwinian justification. As a Darwinist in the biological sense, he argued against poor treatment of races based on arbitrary categorisation and that there was no scientific guarantee of the White Man or even humanity as whole continuing to inherit advantages. Darwinian progress did not exist, and one should not rely on biology but on education to improve the world. This education, Wells believed, had nothing to do with race. His order was that Darwinism be used for its intended purpose of observing change in species over time, not as crude justification for racial hierarchies.

Having criticised the justifications and ideologies, Wells argues against the active colonisation itself. He condemns attempts to transform all societies into a Western mould as impossible, the

claim to and extraction of resources as thoughtless, and the enforcement of all this on real human lives as immoral. He condemns the attitude towards the colonised that they are one group, able thus to be dehumanised and ruled without consideration. To convey this, he imagines situations of extremes, taking advantage of the medium of the novel to paint villains and victims.

H.G. Wells believed in equality and the power of science to bring about a utopia. Unfortunately, he saw those in power as using technology to further inequality. Crucial is Wells's urgency and sympathy, considering his impoverished background. Desperate to liberate the downtrodden and equalise standard of living, but powerless and frustrated with his political peers, Wells wrote his novels as propaganda for his way of thinking: radically egalitarian and confident in science. His main criticism is of the injustice of inequality, of colonised people not being treated like people (and the working classes of Britain being treated similarly), and of how Europeans should have used their technology to do what they said they would: improve people's lives. Instead, they were doing more harm than good. He used science fiction techniques to express the criticism of unfair inequality, to implore the Europeans to use their advantageous position for good. A scientist, he intensified the science of his day in his fiction into the horrific, using these immoral extremes to point the finger at what his contemporaries were doing abroad. From agonising transformations into incomplete and unhappy Western men to the incomprehensible brutality of alien invaders, Wells utilised science fiction to elucidate the injustice of unequal and cruel treatment of people just for being racially, culturally, or scientifically 'inferior'. He sought to inspire in his readers the fear and action that he gave the Time Traveller, when he warned: 'No doubt it will seem grotesque enough to you – and wildly incredible! – and yet even now there are existing circumstances to point that way.'²⁴³

²⁴³ Wells, *The Time Machine*, p. 81.

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