

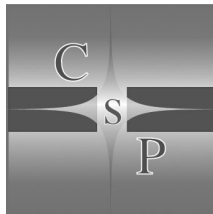
H. G. Wells



H. G. Wells:  
Interdisciplinary Essays

Edited by

Steven McLean



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H. G. Wells: Interdisciplinary Essays, Edited by Steven McLean

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To my Parents



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Steven McLean, June 2008



## INTRODUCTION

H. G. Wells was, as this volume demonstrates, a varied and prolific writer. Perhaps best known for his early ‘scientific romances’, which are generally acknowledged as the pioneers of modern science fiction, he also wrote science textbooks, journalism, short stories, utopias, social novels, futurist speculations, and works of popular history. From the very outset of his intellectual career, Wells was a polymath whose work invites the interdisciplinary perspective generated by the contributors to this collection.

As numerous commentators have noted, there was something of a scarcity of interest in Wells in the years following his death in 1946. The publication in 1961 of two important works, Bernard Bergonzi’s *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances* and W. Warren Wagar’s *H. G. Wells and the World State*, is widely regarded as a pivotal moment in the emergence of modern Wells scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Since the publication of these now classic studies, a growing number of books and articles on Wells have appeared. The essays collected in this volume are intended to reflect something of the current range of interest in Wells.

Since the 1980s there has been an increasing concern with the scientific basis of Wells’s writings, stimulated by a sustained critical focus on the interconnections between literature and science more broadly.<sup>2</sup> In the opening essay of this collection, ‘What the Traveller Saw: Evolution, Romance and Time-Travel’, Sylvia A. Pamboukian examines *The Time Machine* (1895) as a manifestation of a new late nineteenth-century genre immersed in discourses of evolution: the time-travel narrative. Pamboukian considers how earlier time-travel narratives such as William Morris’s *News From Nowhere* (1890) and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888) restrict any radical scientific vision by limiting the evolutionary timescale and relying on romantic tropes. While she finds works such as Richard Jefferies’s *After London* (1885) better represent evolutionary change, Pamboukian concludes that it is only with the publication of *The Time Machine* that this genre is truly able to represent evolutionary change and its dehumanising potential implications.

My own ‘Animals, Language and Degeneration in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*’ continues to investigate the scientific engagement of Wells’s early work, and reveals how his second scientific romance

responds ‘to new theories of the relations between humans, animals and language’. I argue that the linguistic capacity of the Beast People partially endorses the view held by the American naturalist Richard Garner that simian language functions like a rudimentary form of human speech. In the course of my essay, I demonstrate how Wells in the novel resists any enduring distinction between human and animal language by ‘showing human language to be subject to reversion’ as ‘its higher reaches turn into the same forms of gabble as that of the Beastfolk’.

While his rapid succession of scientific romances dominates Wells’s early career, he was concurrently producing purely fantastical and social romances. Included among these non-scientific romances is *The Wheels of Chance*, a story inspired by the cycling craze of the 1890s and published shortly after *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in 1896. Simon J. James, in his ‘Fin-de-Cycle: Romance and the Real in *The Wheels of Chance*’, shows that, while apparently a peculiarity among the author’s early works, the novel no less participates ‘in the aesthetic and political debates that would come to shape, then dominate, Wells’s career’. In particular, James investigates how *The Wheels of Chance* prefigures Wells’s later emphasis on the need for art to instigate social reform. He examines how the romantic aspirations of the protagonists are partially indulged, as Hoopdriver is temporarily alleviated from his draper’s existence. Yet, James argues, the inevitable conclusion of his bicycling adventures forces Hoopdriver – and by extension, the reader – to turn away from fantastic indulgences and towards more concrete political goals.

Having already articulated some of the prevalent scientific and aesthetic anxieties of late-Victorian culture in his fiction, Wells in *The War of the Worlds* (1898) makes a unique contribution to the proliferation of *Fin de Siècle* fictions expressing a fear of invasion. In the fourth essay in this collection, ‘Alien Gaze: Postcolonial Vision in *The War of the Worlds*’, Keith Williams examines Wells’s alien invasion classic as an influential expression of the emergence of a critical ‘postcolonial’ vision. Optical technology was, Williams notes, instrumental to enforcing the imperial project. He demonstrates how the return of a technologically superior gaze by the Martians reverses the impact of visual technology, decentring the imperial subject and forcing the contemporary reader to consider the ethics of British foreign policy. A particular focus of Williams’s analysis is Wells’s fascination with the perception altering potential of visual technology, encapsulated in the descriptions of the Martian heat ray as ‘camera’ like. Williams draws intriguing parallels with other anti-colonial narratives featuring defamiliarised vision and optical

devices, thus supporting his contention that *The War of the Worlds* was central to the emergence of a 'postcolonial' vision.

While his early romances brought Wells widespread critical acclaim – Joseph Conrad, for example, responded to the publication of *The Invisible Man* (1897) by terming him the ‘“Realist of the Fantastic”’<sup>3</sup> – Wells himself was determined to establish himself as a *mainstream* novelist. In an early letter to Arnold Bennett, he protested: ‘For me you are part of the Great Public, I perceive. I am doomed to write “scientific” romances and short stories for you creatures of the mob, and my novels must be my private dissipation’.<sup>4</sup> Bernard Loing, in his ‘*Love and Mr Lewisham: Foundations and Sources for a First Social Novel*’, discusses how the composition of *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900) functioned like ‘a period of apprenticeship’ for Wells in his determination to establish himself as a social novelist. He investigates how *Lewisham* elaborates situations and characters introduced in two of Wells’s early short stories. The first of these is ‘A Slip Under the Microscope’ and the second, discovered by Loing himself, is ‘How Gabriel Became Thompson’. By synthesising the ideas found in these narratives with the long tradition of the Bildungsroman in *Lewisham*, ‘Wells the heirless author, was showing his credentials to enter an illustrious family where he intended to stay and become a legitimate member’.

As his confidence as a novelist grew, Wells experimented increasingly with narrative technique and methods of presentation. John R. Hammond, in his wide ranging study of ‘Wells and the Discussion Novel’, contends that Wells was a far more experimental writer than he is typically given credit for. While acknowledging that some of Wells’s later novels bear the hallmarks of hasty composition, he argues that others have been unjustly neglected and deserve broader recognition. The scope of experimentation in the later fiction is such that in *Brynchild* (1937), ‘the most Jamesian of all his novels’, Wells is for once conforming to the standards of literary form prescribed by Henry James. Although novels like *You Can’t Be Too Careful* (1941) contain didactic elements, Hammond finds that Wells is at his most effective as a novelist when his didactic intention does not interfere too much with his literary technique.

While Wells himself increasingly attempted to distance himself from his early fantasies in order to direct critical attention to his present work, some of his later fictions unmistakably recall his scientific romances. *Mr Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* (1928), for example, works in the same tradition of island story as *Doctor Moreau*. However, as Partrick Parrinder points out in his ‘Island of Fools: *Mr Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* and the Twentieth-Century Human Predicament’, *Mr Blettsworthy* ‘displays a

quite different understanding of island biology, island psychology, and island symbolism'. Parrinder considers how *Mr Blettsworthy* supports a psychoanalytical reading, with England representing the Superego and Madeira and, to a greater extent, Rampion Island functioning as the Id. He concludes that the tension in the novel between the islands of Britain and Madeira – and between the hopeful but unreliable voice of Lyulph Graves and the prophetic despair of Arnold Blettsworthy – corresponds to the two voices of hope and despair that Wells wrestled with throughout his life.

Among his many influences, Wells himself repeatedly stressed the importance of Thomas Henry Huxley, who had of course lectured him during his studies at the Normal School of Science (now part of Imperial College, London).<sup>5</sup> In her ‘“Buildings of the New Age”: Dwellings and the Natural Environment in the Futuristic Fiction of H. G. Wells and William Hope Hodgson’, Emily Alder discusses an important facet of Huxley’s influence on Wells. She examines how the portrayal of the natural environment is integral to Wells’s appropriation of Huxley’s ‘ethical’ evolution, and argues that Hodgson – though influenced by Wells – offers an alternative interpretation of Huxley’s ideas. For Alder, works like ‘A Story of Days to Come’ (1897) and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) employ redoubts which secure the continuation of the ‘ethically best’ from the degenerative potential of the ‘cosmic process’ of evolution implicit in the ‘wilderness’ surrounding human dwellings. While she explores how Hodgson develops the notion of the redoubt in ‘The Night Land’ (1912), Alder demonstrates that both he and Wells simultaneously ‘reflect Victorian beliefs that nature also has a positive part to play in human life’.

Though he periodically acknowledged the impact of Huxley in shaping his outlook, Wells was not always explicit regarding the influences on his work. In her ‘H. G. Wells and William James: A Pragmatic Approach’, Sylvia Hardy contends that the magnitude of William James’s influence on Wells was comparable with that of Huxley. She identifies the nucleus of James’s pragmatic method at the core of Wells’s philosophical outlook, thus accounting for James’s enthusiastic response to his work. Hardy detects the influence of pragmatism in a number of Wells’s works, particularly *A Modern Utopia* (1905). In emphasising how James’s distinction between different types of mind would have appealed to the author, Hardy proposes a fascinating explanation for Wells’s repeated insistence that he did not regard himself as an artist.

In addition to assimilating various discourses in his work, Wells himself not only had an incalculable influence on popular literature and culture but also on significant political figures. In the final essay of this

collection, 'H. G. Wells and Winston Churchill: A Reassessment', Richard Toye reveals that – despite their apparent differences – Wells had a definite intellectual influence on Churchill. While he acknowledges the need to remain tentative about this influence in certain instances, Toye shows that Churchill's indebtedness to Wells was most obvious during the Edwardian period, and more especially in his reaction to *A Modern Utopia*. For Toye, Wells's strong direct influence on Churchill during this period explains his decision to support Churchill in the 1908 North-West Manchester by-election. By establishing his influence on a 'doer' like Churchill, Toye reminds us of the material impact of Wells's status as a writer who imagines 'the shape of things to come'.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961); W. Warren Wagar, *H. G. Wells and the World State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961). For an analysis of the opposing approaches to Wells generated by these two studies – and of the possibility of reconciling them – see Robert Shelton, 'Locating *The Time Machine* within (and beyond) the Bergonzi/Wagar Debate', *The Undying Fire*, 1 (2002), 29-42.

<sup>2</sup> See Roslynn D. Haynes, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future, The Influence of Science on His Thought* (London: New York University Press, 1980) and my own *The Early Fiction of H. G. Wells: Fantasies of Science* (forthcoming, Palgrave Macmillan).

<sup>3</sup> Letter to H. G. Wells, dated 4 December 1898, *J. Conrad: Life and Letters*, ed. by G. Jean-Aubry (New York: Doubleday, 1927), pp. 249-50.

<sup>4</sup> H. G. Wells, Letter to Arnold Bennett (1901), cited in J. R. Hammond, *H. G. Wells and the Modern Novel* (New York: St Martin's, 1988), p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> In an appreciation of Huxley written in 1901, Wells recalls the enthusiasm Huxley inspired in him and his fellow students: 'we borrowed the books he wrote, we clubbed out of our weekly guineas to buy the *Nineteenth Century* whenever he rattled Gladstone or pounded the duke of Argyle'. H. G. Wells, 'Huxley', *Royal College of Science Magazine*, 13 (1901), 209-211 (p. 209).



**PART I:**

**EARLY ROMANCES**

# WHAT THE TRAVELLER SAW: EVOLUTION, ROMANCE AND TIME-TRAVEL

SYLVIA A. PAMBOUKIAN

Of all nineteenth-century scientific theories, evolution has received considerable attention from literary critics. George Levine, for example, persuasively argues that Darwinian ‘ideas and motifs’ such as observation, interdependence, abundance, scarcity, and chance were culturally so prominent that they ‘helped shape late-century narrative form’, especially the novel with its abundant characters, interconnected plots, and emphasis on inheritance.<sup>1</sup> In some late-Victorian novels, evolution underscores the fleetingness of human life, as in Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) or Thomas Hardy’s *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), when the protagonist spies a trilobite embedded in a rock as he ponders his own death while dangling over a cliff. In others, evolution represents continuity with the past, as when George Eliot explains Maggie and Tom’s contrasting natures by referring to each child’s inherited Tulliver or Dodson traits in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Still others use evolution to examine individual and familial development over several generations, as when Samuel Butler traces the rising fortunes and waning emotional life of the Pontifex family in *The Way of All Flesh* (published posthumously, 1903). These texts deploy the epistemological power of evolution as a scientific theory to ground their social vision, which often encourages sympathy between classes by displaying the interdependence of supposedly unrelated communities (such as aristocracy and labour) and the commonality of human existence (shared by men and women, adults and children, masters and servants).

During the late nineteenth century, a new narrative form emerges which is also deeply invested in evolution: the time-travel narrative. A brief list of late-century time-travel narratives includes: Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Coming Race* (1871), Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon* (1872), Richard Jefferies’s *After London* (1885), W. H. Hudson’s *A Crystal Age* (1887), Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888), Grant Allen’s ‘Pallinghurst Barrow’ (1892) and *The British Barbarians* (1895), H. G.

Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), and Arthur Conan Doyle's belated *The Lost World* (1912). These texts integrate evolutionary theory with romance rather than with realism (as in earlier novels), since romance enjoyed a late-century resurgence in popularity. While certain critics attribute romance's popularity to imperialism and misogyny, Robert Fraser argues that 'for the advocates of romance, the esoteric and outlandish were newly worthy of attention, not simply because they permitted an escape from commonplace tedium, but because they opened onto the wilder excesses of fact'.<sup>2</sup> Just as Fraser distinguishes between mere escapism and engagement with the 'wilder excesses of fact,' H. G. Wells complains about the 'puerilities of romance' that 'prohibits anything but the superficialities of self-expression'.<sup>3</sup> To Wells, traditional romance offers only an escape into the 'bright, thin, gay excitements of a phantom world' while novels 'reflect and co-operate in the atmosphere and uncertainties and changing variety of this seething and creative time'.<sup>4</sup> Wells contends that the novel is 'an important and necessary thing indeed in that complicated system of uneasy adjustments and readjustments which is modern civilisation. I make very high and wide claims for it. In many directions I do not think we can get along without it'.<sup>5</sup> Since they interact with evolutionary theory, time-travel narratives participate in the 'uneasy adjustments' of a 'seething and creative' modernity rather than offering mere escapism, despite their romantic tropes.

This essay examines Wells's *The Time Machine* in the context of other nineteenth-century time-travel narratives. Many of these narratives incorporate aspects of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory in their depiction of characters, settings, and events; however, these narratives also offer a window into the changing view of evolution during this period. Peter Morton argues that during this period dominant evolutionary theories included a guiding intelligence responsible for development, increasing complexity of species, and the final goal of perfection for all species.<sup>6</sup> These dominant theories appear in a variety of forms and are often questioned by time-travel narratives. Examining this genre also illuminates the tensions between romantic forms, which tend toward escapism, and scientific theory. Each time-travel narrative must attempt to resolve this tension. Finally, this approach clarifies Wells's contribution to this genre. While he did not innovate in using time-travel or evolutionary concepts, Wells develops important tropes that open the genre to new possibilities. Wells introduces machinery to this genre and explores the role of technology in the genre. He also innovates in his presentation of the Time

Traveller himself, which has far-reaching implications both in Wells's own work and in the genre as a whole.

In linking evolution and romance, several time-travel narratives appeal to evolution's epistemological authority as a way to ground a text dominated by romantic forms. For example, William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) describes the experiences of an English gentleman, William Guest, in a quasi-medieval future where free love and communism are celebrated in an Edenic Thames valley. When he awakens in the future, Guest notes the beautiful weather, the clear Thames water, and the salmon nets, all of which seem unusual; however, Guest is more surprised by the 'fourteenth-century' dress of the inhabitants, the absence of industry, and the medieval-looking stone bridge which has replaced an iron bridge over the river.<sup>7</sup> The people are long-lived and youthful in appearance but speak English and appreciate familiar pleasures such as ginger-beer and lemonade (84). An old man, Richard Hammond, and his family orientate Guest to the social conditions of this new world, which is free of crime, poverty, discrimination and marriage. While several events indicate that a long time has passed, such as the oxidization of Guest's silver coins and the return of salmon to the now-clean Thames, the change is implicitly only a few hundred years because humanity and the landscape are very similar to nineteenth-century people and environments. Hammond recollects stories about the change from nineteenth-century social arrangements to the current formations, and familiar buildings, such as the Houses of Parliament, are still standing (49). Yet this Eden is static: as Hammond explains, social formations are ideal and do not change, as no change is needed. As a static Eden, this future is, as Morton argues in his reading of this text, 'free from the taint of evolutionism' because of its 'tight frame of a succession of sunny and placid days'.<sup>8</sup> In the end, Guest awakens in his own home and realises that his glimpse of the future was only a dream, implying that the wholesome social relations and beautiful landscape may truly exist nowhere, as the title suggests.

Similarly, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) depicts Julian West falling into a trance-like sleep in his Boston home only to awaken about one hundred and thirteen years in the future to discover a communist society free of class, capital, and gender inequality. As his hosts, Dr Leete and his family, explain, this society boasts great technical innovations, such as the 'musical telephone' which is akin to a radio and credit cards, along with social innovations, such as universal, free health care. As in *News from Nowhere*, the political vision is indeed radical, but, as in *News from Nowhere*, *Looking Backward* does not present evolutionary change because of its limited timeframe. For example, Julian West identifies his

home city of Boston by the familiar course of the Charles River and by the headlands of the harbour, 'not one of its green islets missing'.<sup>9</sup> The Bostonians of the year 2000 speak English and are, of course, physically identical to those of 1887, except for their better health due to better social arrangements. Where Morris depicts his utopia as only a vision, Bellamy toys with that convention by depicting West's horror at waking up back in the nineteenth century only to realise that his return is actually the nightmare and that he is still in the future, about to marry his old sweetheart's descendent. Bellamy's playful allusion to utopian dream-visions seems innovative in terms of narrative, just as the communist social vision seems politically radical; however, as static Edens, Morris's and Bellamy's texts do not innovate in terms of evolutionary theory. They limit depictions of biological and geological change by limiting the timeframe. In addition, their use of romantic tropes forecloses upon any radical scientific vision. The methods of travel, a magical sleep and a dream vision, hint at a purely fantastic reading of the story in which a magical sleeper awakens in a strange country peopled by strange natives. Even the strange natives are innocuous, since both men find sage guides, wise old men, who steer them safely through the new society, which presents no problems for the time-travellers. The helpful guide figures undermine evolutionary concepts such as competition, fitness, and extinction, and these harsher aspects of evolution play little part in a utopian vision of happy communism. While the concepts of the time travel and the betterment of society through rational living seems to owe a debt to evolutionary thinking, these romances fail to explore evolution in any serious way.

In *A Crystal Age* (1887), W. H. Hudson better represents the principles of geological and biological development by describing the experiences of a young man, Smith, who has fallen down a cliff and lain unconscious for thousands of years. When Smith awakens, he notices that the steep cliff has become a 'gentle slope', implying that erosion has altered the landscape, and that the birds, dogs, and horses 'did not look altogether familiar', alluding to biological evolution.<sup>10</sup> The people Smith encounters have also evolved: they are virtually asexual, have ethereal voices and function in a bee-hive society with one sexually active queen per house. They are clearly descendents of humanity since they speak English (22). The bee-people's sexless biology is understood by Smith as progress away from bestial sexual reproduction and reinforces the notion that development follows a route of continual progression. As a member of a primitive species, Smith shocks the inhabitants of the future with his sexual desire, his coarse voice (101), and his rough features (120). Just as

in earlier utopias, the society is one of harmony, communism, and equality. Yet, the bee-people also illustrate evolutionary theories of the period, including the malleable nature of species, the progressive trajectory of development, and the great expanses of time involved in this paradigm. However, *A Crystal Age* falters when Hudson exploits the narrative devices of romance in a manner that undermines the scientific complexity. For example, Smith's mode of time travel (sleeping) appears magical rather than scientific. The magical reading is reinforced by the Cinderella plot: Smith is chosen as the mate for the next queen bee (although he accidentally drinks poison and dies before this happens). This undermines Hudson's evolutionary theory since it potentially locates the less-evolved Smith at the top of a more-evolved society. More importantly, just as in *News from Nowhere*, the Edenic setting undermines Hudson's earlier depiction of evolutionary change. Readers learn that the same family has inhabited the house Smith visits for over two thousand years without any natural disasters, changes in climate, developments in language, or new behaviours. Just as in earlier narratives, helpful guides attempt to fit Smith into the new social order; however, Hudson hints at this trope's inappropriateness for an evolutionary narrative. Since Smith is biologically unfit to live in this society, he cannot comprehend it fully and thus accidentally kills himself. On the one hand, the text offers a static Eden while on the other it endorses geology and biology as powerful and universal forces, a text in tension between science and romance.

Richard Jefferies's *After London; or, Wild England* (1885) manifests a similar tension in more concrete form: it is split into two sections. The former is replete with examples of evolutionary theory while the second section describes a hero's romantic adventures. In the first section, readers witness an accelerated version of events in which nature reclaims the English countryside. For example, after civilisation collapses, mice feed in the abandoned granaries and multiply until the hawks, owls, and weasels experience a related increase in numbers.<sup>11</sup> After the predators decimate the mice population, they experience a drop in their own numbers, so the rodent population swells again, and the cycle repeats itself (9). Such incidents recall Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859); for example, Darwin links the abundance of clover in a given region to the population of cats in the area since cats hunt mice, which destroy beehives, and bees pollinate clover. Jefferies also illustrates Darwinian concepts such as hybridity and extinction by describing the extinction of unfit domestic pets, such as poodles, and the interbreeding of the remaining dogs, leading to the survival of only three varieties (12). Like Hudson, Jefferies speculates about geological changes to England's

landscape, including the silting and flooding of the Thames and the Severn, the erosion of dams, and the blockage of canals by water plants, all of which create a vast inland lake. Conversely, the second half of the text depicts the quest of Felix Aquila, a young nobleman in a quasi-medieval society, to obtain enough wealth to marry his beloved. After numerous adventures in various courts around the large, central lake, Felix, who travels in a small boat, finally ventures into the swampy ruins of London, which are polluted to the point of toxicity, where he discovers the treasure that enables him to marry. In addition, his wanderings lead him to discover a new tribe who welcome him as a chief, allowing Felix to found a new English empire with his wealth and his technical innovations, simple, quasi-medieval machines and fences. Featuring a quest, a maiden, a forbidden marriage, treasure, court-life and derring-do, Felix's story seems to be a catalogue of romantic tropes, which contrasts sharply with the evolutionary material of the first section.

The two-part structure of the text highlights the tension between science and romance; however, the narrator's distinctive voice, which blends objectivity and legend, successfully unites the two. For example, the narrator, a sage guide to the new world, describes London as the place about which 'the old men say their fathers told them' (1). Such language mimics the opening of a fairy tale. The narrator describes trains as 'certain machines worked by fire, they traversed the land swift as the swallow glides through the sky, but of these things not a relic remains' (27). The words 'fire,' 'swallow' and 'relic' imply a magical mode of transport, although, of course, readers know that trains are technological. The narrator speculates that 'most of those who were left in the country were ignorant, rude, and unlettered. They had seen the iron chariots, but did not understand the method of their construction, and could not hand down knowledge they did not themselves possess' (33). Because readers know that the fantastic machines are quite real, these objects come to embody both science and fantasy, the commonplace facts of modern life and also the rarity and elusiveness of scientific knowledge. In depicting modern technology as the source of a future society's legends, Jefferies offers readers a sense not only of the fleeting nature of civilisation but of the malleability of cultures that other texts, such as *News From Nowhere*, do not offer. Rather than appealing to evolution's epistemological power as a way to explain or to stabilise cultural formations, Jefferies's blending of science and romance in the narrator's voice destabilises cultural formations by undoing binaries such as truth and fiction, science and superstition, fact and belief. The narrator's voice represents a synthesis of the evolutionary section with the romance section and implies the limits of

human knowledge, including scientific knowledge. While Felix does not travel in time per se, the text's representation of accelerated evolution over long periods of time present scientific knowledge as culturally bound, contingent, and ultimately futile before the power of evolution.

David Y. Hughes identifies Grant Allen as a major influence on Wells, noting that *The Time Machine* mentions Allen by name.<sup>12</sup> In *The Time Machine*, the Time Traveller awakens after his first nocturnal encounter with the as-yet-unknown Morlocks and believes that he has seen ghosts. He wonders what era they date from, imagines how the population of ghosts has increased since his own time, and calls this idea 'a queer notion of Grant Allen's'.<sup>13</sup> Allen's 'queer notion' originates in the short story 'Pallinghurst Barrow' (1892), in which a man walking on an ancient barrow one night encounters several ghosts dating from between the Stone Age and the sixteenth century, each of which conducts itself appropriately for its own era. Unlike the ghost story premise of 'Pallinghurst Barrow', Allen's *The British Barbarians* (1895) is a time-travel narrative that describes a twenty-fifth century, time-travelling anthropologist's adventures in nineteenth-century England. The time-traveller, Bertram Ingledew, attacks British assumptions of evolutionary superiority by equating nineteenth-century England with the so-called primitive cultures of Africa and the Pacific. As Nick Freeman notes, the novel's representation of British society 'is both part of the *fin-de-siècle's* love-hate relationship with suburbia and, in its use of anthropological investigative techniques, an attempt to hoist pseudo scientific complacency with its own petard'.<sup>14</sup> For example, Philip Christy, the first Englishman Bertram meets, is surprised and offended by Bertram's assertion that Britain ought to adopt coinage with printed, decimal denominations, unlike the idiosyncratic shilling, crown, florin, and guinea. Christy asserts that ' "you're [Bertram] in a civilised country, not among Australian savages" '.<sup>15</sup> Later, Bertram finds that he cannot wander the streets freely on Sunday wearing a tweed suit or rent rooms without suitcases because of the 'taboo' and 'poojah' of 'Respectability', a 'very great fetich [sic]' (29). Fearing arrest because of his tweed suit, Bertram wonders whether 'Respectability' is a ' "religious or popular, not an official or governmental taboo [...] Will the people in the street mob me for disrespect to their fetich [sic]?" ' (41). When Christy argues that there are no taboos or poojahs in England, Bertram concludes that 'it was one more proof to him of the extreme caution necessary in all anthropological investigations before accepting the evidence even of well-meaning natives on points of religious or social usage, which they are often quite childishly incapable of describing in rational terms' (50). Bertram compares the

private ownership of land in Britain to customs of Samoa, Polynesia and West Africa, where given fruits are tabooed to the chiefs (62). He compares British mourning customs to Swaziland death taboos (85) and British courtship rituals to New Ireland practices of keeping girls in cages before marriage (92). Thus, Bertram's assessment of English taboo and poojah equates English customs with (to nineteenth-century readers) 'primitive' African and Pacific social formations, attacking the notion implicit in Philip Christy's conversation that British culture is more advanced than other nineteenth-century cultures.

Like other time-travel narratives, *The British Barbarians* represents evolution as progressive. A superior creature, Bertram deplores Victorian attitudes towards prostitution, divorce and child custody and argues that ' "if there is an injustice or a barbarity possible, I might have been sure the law of England would make haste to perpetrate it" ' (179). He claims that his society is governed by logic, reason and respect for others, whether in matters of property, family, or sexuality. This society is ' "a very, very long way off; and I can't even tell you where it is or how you get there" ' (175). The British people Bertram encounters recognise his 'distinct air of social superiority, [...] [and] innate nobility of gait and bearing' (2). Philip Christy is 'fascinated' by Bertram (25) and calls Bertram ' "a better man than me [...] higher and clearer and differently constituted" ' (126). Similarly, General Claviger claims that ' "He [Bertram] fascinates me" ' (123). Always graceful, Bertram easily picks up an angry landlord, Sir Lionel Longden, and carries him out of Philip Christy's sister, Frida's, path (76). Frida notes that Bertram 'regarded in very truth the Polynesian chief and Sir Lionel Longden as much about the same sort of unreasoning people – savages [...] to be treated with calm firmness and force, as an English officer on an exploring expedition might treat a wrathful Central African kinglet' (76). Frida describes Bertram as 'a civilised being in the midst of barbarians, who feel and recognise but dimly and half-unconsciously his innate superiority' (77). Conversely, Robert Monteith, Frida's Scottish husband, displays a 'savage thirst for vengeance' toward Bertram because 'his coarser nature was ill adapted to recognise that ineffable air as of a superior being that others observed in him' (191). Robert is 'pure Caledonian' (46) with the 'keen clear sight' of his 'highland ancestors' (187) and with the capacity for bitter jealousy, that 'lowest and most bestial of all the vile passions man still inherits from the ape and tiger' (192). Bertram calls Scotland 'a country exceptionally given over to terrible superstitions, fashioned by a race of stern John Knoxes', and he compares the Scots to the Africans as particularly fetishistic, another deliberate attack on British claims of racial superiority

made all the more pointed since Robert's wealth derives from imperialist trade in African palm oil (54). When Robert Monteith shoots Bertram in a fit of jealousy over Frida, a blue flame exits Bertram's body instead of blood and takes Bertram's shape as his material body dissolves. The ghostly shape explains that Bertram must return to the "'TWENTY-FIFTH CENTURY'", leaving Frida with the hope that Bertram will return for her but in deep despair (195). Allen's use of block capitals reinforces the superiority of the future compared with the relative primitivism of Victorian England, Africa, the Pacific islands, and Scotland.

*The British Barbarians* is similar to *The Time Machine* in its depiction of technological, repeated time travel and in its central figure of the scientific traveller. Unlike time-travel narratives that describe only one journey, Bertram implies that he and others have travelled repeatedly in time. Indeed, Bertram's sudden appearance in suburban Brakenhurst implies a technological mode of travel that readers only later learn is from the future: initially, Bertram simply puzzles Christy because he appears seemingly out of nowhere. Bertram explains that he brought only one suit which he ' "was lucky enough to secure from a collector at home" ' (27) and that he forgot that shops close on Sunday because he ' "read it in a book on the habits and manners of the English people" ' but ' "one never recollects these taboo days" ' (31). Since Bertram often refers to customs of Africa and Oceania, he implies that he has travelled repeatedly in both time and space (42). Bertram's repeated travels in time differentiate between the ghost story pretext of 'Pallinghurst Barrow' and the time-travel narrative, without direct presentation of these other journeys or of time travel itself. Since Bertram's time-travelling is not revealed until the end of the text, time travel retains the mystery associated with earlier narratives. Just as in other time-travel narratives, readers compare the flawed nineteenth century and an ideal future through conversations between Bertram and his friends, Frida and Christy, in which Bertram obtains explicit instructions about mourning customs, chaperoning unmarried girls, trespassing, and marriage, while explaining his own advanced views on these subjects. However, this narrative inverts the usual pattern in which a nineteenth-century person visits the future, instead bringing a man of the future to the nineteenth century. Similarly, *The Time Machine* focuses on a traveller who makes repeated journeys in time, both backwards and forwards. Wells also reveals the mode of time-travel, the process of evolution, and the inherent mystery of futurity.

In *The Time Machine* (1895), Wells uses innovative tropes to resolve the tension between romance and evolutionary theory.<sup>16</sup> The time machine itself is a new trope that replaces earlier, supernatural time-travelling

devices, such as sleeping, visions, and ghosts. While Allen's *The British Barbarians* mentions a technological time-travel device, Wells presents that device as simply another new technology. For example, the Traveller tinkers with his time machine like any owner of a mechanical gadget, such as a bicycle, which must be assembled prior to use: "when the putting together was nearly done, I found that one of the nickel bars was exactly one inch too short, and this I had to get remade; [...] I gave it a last tap, tried all the screws again, put one more drop of oil on the quartz rod, and sat myself in the saddle" (13). The sensations associated with riding the machine appear similar to other modes of transport: motion sickness, "switchbacks" and fear of a "smash" (14). As any new bicyclist might, the Traveller stops his machine too quickly at first and falls off (15).<sup>17</sup> When he encounters the child-like Eloi, the Traveller recalls that he has to remove the operating levers to prevent accidental activation, although it is the Morlocks who actually steal the machine, disassemble it, and clean it just as if it were any other machine (56). While the time machine's similarity to other modes of transport distances *The Time Machine* from earlier, supernatural stories, Wells also discredits supernatural narratives in his frame tale. For example, when the Traveller sends a small-scale model of the machine into the future, his guests initially treat the model's disappearance as if it were a magic show: the narrator wonders whether the whole thing is a 'trick' and the Traveller encourages his guests to "satisfy yourselves there is no trickery. I don't want to waste this model and then be told I'm a quack" (7). The narrator describes the model's disappearance as an illusion in a magic show: "there was a breath of wind, and the lamp flame jumped. One of the candles on the mantel was blown out, and the little machine [...] became indistinct, was seen as a ghost [...] and it was gone – vanished!" (7). The flickering lights and allusions to ghosts and vanishing seem to imply that the disappearance is a trick, akin to the familiar disappearing tricks of a magic show. The Medical Man claims that he has witnessed magic shows and fraudulent séances before, and he attributes the machine's disappearance to the flickering candles (10). He alludes to the Traveller's own fraudulent séances when he calls the time-travel experiment a "sleight-of-hand trick" and asks, "are you perfectly serious? Or is this a trick – like that ghost you showed us last Christmas?" (9) The Medical Man is ready to credit modern technology with the power to trick him, but he rejects the notion of the supernatural. In the context of late-Victorian culture, the invention of a new machine that opens hitherto unknown territory appears not only possible but also plausible, and the time machine

is introduced as yet another new invention that piques the bystanders' intellectual curiosity and excitement.

The time machine's mechanical nature also supports the evolutionary content of the text by allowing readers to visualise continual geological and biological change over a vast timeframe. After his adventures with the Eloi and the Morlocks in the year 802,701, the Traveller continues forward ' "stopping ever and again" ' until he reaches some point past the year three million before returning to his own age (59). At his first stop after leaving the Eloi and Morlocks, the Traveller notices that he is no longer in the England he recognises but on a strange beach thickly encrusted with pink salt under a twilight sun where lack of oxygen causes him difficulty breathing (58). This journey proves that the Eloi's lush Eden is necessarily short-lived because of the cooling of the sun, the erosion of the land, the extinction of many animals and plants, and the changes in the atmosphere. Without any trace of the Eloi or of the Morlocks (or of humanity in any recognisable form), this nightmarish landscape is occupied by a new species of giant crab, one of whom grasps the Traveller as a potential meal (58).<sup>18</sup> Any familiar elements of civilisation or of 'England' have disappeared, leaving only an unfamiliar landscape and ecology. The Traveller describes a final vista over thirty million years in the future: icy, dark, and barren (59). In the midst of an eclipse by an unfamiliar planet, the sun itself has become bright red, colder, and closer to the earth (59), and life appears to have become extinct except for some green slime and a football-sized shape that flops in the icy waves (60). As Morton claims, the dominant view of evolutionary theory during the nineteenth century includes the concept of continual improvement of species, but Wells undermines this view of evolution by depicting the flopping creature in the waves, who may indeed be the representative of a humanity that has regressed to simple form rather than progressed to greater complexity.<sup>19</sup> Since the time machine is a new sort of transportation technology, Wells (unlike Jefferies, Hudson, and Morris) is able to represent the continual state of flux inherent in evolution through repeated journeys in time. While the romance plot involving the Traveller's rescue of Weena and their subsequent relationship is certainly prominent in the middle section of the text, this relationship does not dominate the text as a whole. The journeys into the far future attach the awe and the wonder of romance to the sublime earth itself and to the power of evolution rather than to an individual traveller or to a particular group of characters, as is the case in earlier texts.

The sublime landscapes of the dying earth are not the only romantic elements in the text: the events of 802,701 include romance as well. As in