

**“THE FUTURE IS A RETURN TO THE PAST”:<sup>1</sup>**  
**SPACE, TIME AND MEMORY IN *THE TIME MACHINE***  
**AND THE ISLAND OF *DOCTOR MOREAU***

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Like his most famous character, H. G. Wells could be described as a Time Traveller.<sup>2</sup> From ‘The Chronic Argonauts’ in 1888 to Wells’s last work, *Mind at the End of its Tether* (1945), his work takes as its theme movement of the human race through time, looking back to the furthest past, and forward to the distant future.<sup>3</sup> His Scientific Romances in particular give expression to what W. Warren Wagar terms Wells’s ‘chrononautic habit of mind’, and travel through four dimensions may be seen as a trope in particular of *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896).<sup>4</sup> This characteristic feature facilitates Wells’s extensive critique of his own society and his speculations concerning the future of humanity, which have often proved to be eerily close to reality.

In these two novels, such speculations are built around a framework of narratives of displacement in space and time. Each protagonist is removed from his habitual existence to arrive in an alternative space that is a creation of Wells’s ‘chrononautic’ imagination. In these spaces Wells posits new conceptions of temporality. He recognises that the passage of time is conceptualised through several different historical narratives, or chronologies, each of which has its own perspective and paradigmatic symbols of past and future. Wells isolates these chronologies and deconstructs them by making elements that represent past and future simultaneously share one space, sometimes through the function of memory. These spaces supposedly transcend the limitations of time, thus providing access to eternity.

This study is restricted to Wells’s treatment of temporality on an Earthly plane, despite the fact that other romances (notably *The War of the Worlds*, 1898, and *The First Men in the Moon*, 1901) do consider the potentialities of time and space

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<sup>1</sup>John Huntington, *The Logic of Fantasy: H. G. Wells and Science Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 45.

<sup>2</sup>As, for instance, Wells’s biographers Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie do in *The Life of H. G. Wells: The Time Traveller* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973).

<sup>3</sup>Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), 25; W. Warren Wagar, *H. G. Wells: Traversing Time* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 270-3.

<sup>4</sup>Wagar, 169; H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895), ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005) hereafter *TM*; *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005), hereafter *IDM*.

beyond this context.<sup>5</sup> Focus will therefore fall on Wells's treatment of the Darwinian account of time, and on his use of a timescale corresponding to the scientific history of the planet, here termed the 'cosmic' timescale. However, Wells's use of the Biblical paradigm – a chronology based on the scriptural narrative of Creation to Apocalypse – will also be examined in order to serve as an exemplar of Wells's methods.

Each chronology is conventional in that it is a strictly linear continuum, movement along which is, without the agency of a time machine, restricted to the forwards direction (apart from the temporary psychological disruptions that may be caused by vivid memory or anticipation). The assumption that time may be represented as a mathematical line in this way is essential to the model on which Wells's Time Traveller's theories hinge. He calls this line 'the Time-Dimension' and states that 'our mental existences...are passing along the Time-Dimension with a uniform velocity from the cradle to the grave' (*TM*, 6). The present moment, at which 'our mental existences' reside, is merely a mathematical coordinate, defined only by the extension of past and future away from it in opposing directions. Wells's treatment of time, however, deconstructs the notion that past and future are oppositional or mutually exclusive, effectively denying the present moment, by compromising the junction of past and future.

Wells consistently approached temporality within and against the context of the incontrovertible physical processes of the solar system, positing the 'nebular hypothesis' (*WOTW*, 4) as aetiology and 'such speculations as those of the younger Darwin' in which 'the planets must ultimately fall back one by one into the parent body' (*TM*, 45) as eschatology. He also describes 'the slow cooling of the sun' (*WOTW*, 181), which, according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, eventually causes the 'heat-death' of the planet.<sup>6</sup> This chronology inspires the ending of *The Time Machine*, when the Traveller describes the 'transit of an inner planet passing very near' (*TM*, 85), anticipating Earth's final fate of falling into the hypertrophied sun.

Wells also addresses mankind's evolutionary history. A confirmed Darwinian, he held that *homo sapiens* exists only as part of a continuous arc extending from the mudfish, through the ape, to an unknown future form. Evolution is not 'a pro-

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<sup>5</sup> H. G. Wells, *The War of The Worlds* (New York: Random House, 2002) hereafter *WOTW*; *The First Men in The Moon* (1901), ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Crossley, 'Taking it as a Story: The Beautiful Lie of The Time Machine', in *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine: Selected Essays from the Centenary Conference 'The Time Machine: Past, Present and Future', Imperial College, London, July 26-29, 1995*, ed. George Slusser, Patrick Parrinder and Danièle Chatelain (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 12-26 (24); David Y. Hughes, 'The Garden in Wells's Early Science Fiction', in *H. G. Wells and Modern Science Fiction*, ed. Darko Suvin and Robert M. Philmus (London: Associated University Presses, 1977), 48-69 (51).

human force making things better and better for mankind'.<sup>7</sup> Despite the Traveller's anticipation that future man will 'be incredibly in front of us in knowledge, art, everything' (*TM*, 25), Wells articulates fears that evolution could return mankind to an atavistic, 'degenerate', state. Such fears reached their apotheosis in Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, which appeared in 1895 when Wells was working on *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.<sup>8</sup> However, Wells demonstrates an existing familiarity with the work's content in *The Time Machine*'s contemporary *The Wonderful Visit* (1895), when Dr Crump pronounces an angel to be 'degenerate', having just read 'all about it – in Nordau'.<sup>9</sup>

Wells collapses evolutionary time in his fiction by populating 802,701 with creatures that are simultaneously pre- and post-human. Although Eloi and Morlock are descendants of *homo sapiens*, both exhibit features of man's *antecedents*. The Morlocks are 'ape-like' (*TM*, 44), implying that they are an atavistic form of humanity, and the Eloi also embody a regression, since their non-gendered, consumptive appearance aligns them with the *fin-de-siècle* decadent, often seen as tending towards degeneracy.

These physical attributes lead the Traveller to characterise the Eloi as 'childlike' (*TM*, 24), a quality that compromises their position in evolutionary history. Haeckel's Law states that 'ontogenesis mimics phylogenesis' – that is, development from embryo to adulthood mimics the evolutionary development of a species.<sup>10</sup> The apparently ontogenetically immature Eloi therefore mimic a phylogenetic state that predates that which corresponds to the mature Traveller. They become simultaneously ancestor and descendant, rendering the future a return to the past.

Similarly, the evolutionary past and future are both evidenced on Moreau's island. David Hughes writes that 'there is [on the island] compressed in space and time an evolutionary arc rising with the painful manufacture of beasts into people and then falling with their reversion to animality.'<sup>11</sup> Humans are located within this arc by association with phrases like 'animal comfort' (*IDM*, 50), or their

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<sup>7</sup> H. G. Wells, 'Introduction to the Scientific Romances' (1933), in *H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism*, ed. Patrick Parrinder and Robert M. Philmus (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 240-5 (242-3).

<sup>8</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1895), ed. and trans. George L. Mosse (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Wonderful Visit* (London: Dent, [n.d.]), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Although Haeckel was, unlike Wells, a Lamarckian, his theories were well publicised and discussed, and it is not unreasonable to assume that they had an influence on Wells at a literary level if not a scientific one, as contributing to a general sense of evolutionary timescales; Darko Suvin, 'A Grammar of Form and a Criticism of Fact: *The Time Machine* as a Structural Model for Science Fiction', in *H. G. Wells and Modern Science Fiction*, 90-115 (100).

<sup>11</sup> Hughes, 52.

carnivorous cravings. Prendick's unwittingly ironic comment 'I was so excited by the appetizing smell of [meat], that I forgot the noise of the beast forthwith' (*IDM*, 12) only highlights his animal status, especially given his restoration by something that 'tasted like blood, and made me feel stronger' (*IDM*, 10).

On the island, mankind's relation to the beast is made physically visible. Prendick unconsciously recognises his shared past with the ape-man, since he does 'not feel the same repugnance towards this creature' (*IDM*, 54) engendered by the others. However, the beast creatures do not only signify the past. Prendick mistakes them for animalised men instead of humanised animals – reading them as formerly rather than potentially human, he makes them paradigmatic of anticipated human degeneration.

This Darwinistic perspective is obviously at odds with the teleology posited by Christian orthodoxy, which locates the beginning of mankind's story with Genesis in 4004 BC and its ending with the Apocalypse described in The Revelation of St John.<sup>12</sup> According to the 'pervasive...millennialism' of nineteenth-century theology, this culmination was perceived to be potentially dateable.<sup>13</sup> Thus, unlike the cosmic, the duration of the Biblical chronology could be considered fixed. Fixed, but not final, since Christian eschatology replaces the old world with 'the new Jerusalem' (Revelation 21:2), a place where 'there should be time no longer' (Revelation 11:6), rendering finality an obsolete concept. This eternal space is typologically paralleled with Eden, such that Biblical time begins and ends with a timeless, paradisaal state.

Bernard Bergonzi utilises Biblical archetypes to distinguish between the upper world and lower world of 802,701, noting 'polaris[ation] between opposed groups of imagery, the paradisaal [...] and the demonic'.<sup>14</sup> Drawing specifically on Northrop Frye's work, he identifies the Morlocks and their home with hellish, and the Upperworld with paradisaal, imagery.<sup>15</sup> 'Paradise' signifies both the Edenic past and the Heavenly future, illuminating the non-differentiation of Biblical time within the space. Images of Heaven inhere in the Eloi's communal living spaces,

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<sup>12</sup> Patrick Parrinder, 'From Rome to Richmond: Wells, Universal History and Prophetic Time', in *Perennial Time Machine*, 110-21 (110); *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Sherborne, 'Wells, Plato and the Ideal State', in *The Wellsian: Selected Essays on H. G. Wells*, ed. John S. Partington (BC Oss: Equilibris, 2003), 189-198 (191); Alexander Tyrrell, 'Making the Millennium: The Mid-Nineteenth Century Peace Movement', *Historical Journal*, 21 (1973), 75-95(79), accessed 11 March 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2638449>.

<sup>14</sup> Bergonzi, 53.

<sup>15</sup> Bergonzi, 49-56. See Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (London: Penguin, 1957), 141-50. Although Bergonzi mostly draws on Frye's descriptions of the demonic in this work, Frye also places emphasis on vegetable imagery, the pastoral or Arcadian archetype and the significance of fire as paradisaal or apocalyptic paradigms, all of which are significant in *The Time Machine*.

which substitute for Frye's city which is paralleled with the New Jerusalem and is 'apocalyptically identical with a single building or temple'.<sup>16</sup> However, in that 'the whole earth had become a garden' (*TM*, 30), 802,701 is Edenic. Like Adam and Eve, the Eloi live in a state of innocence which the Traveller loses when he defies the implied prohibition of entering the wells and obtains the knowledge that ultimately forces his departure.<sup>17</sup>

Other features also evoke both Eden and the New Jerusalem, such as the exclusion of death from the landscape. There is no sepulture, crematoria or 'anything suggestive of tombs'; moreover, death seems to be replaced by eternal youth, since 'aged and infirm among this people there were none' (*TM*, 41). It becomes a timeless space, simultaneously first and last. The amalgamation of the two also reoccurs further into the future, in the combination of topoi taken from *Genesis* and *Revelation*. The 'sun, red and very large [...] now and then suffering a momentary extinction' (*TM*, 72) and 'the ocean all bloody' (*TM*, 81-2) are reworkings of the scriptural Apocalypse, during which 'the third part of the sea became blood [...] the third part of the sun was smitten' (Revelation 8:8-12). The ocean of the future, however, also 'rose and fell like a gentle breathing, and showed that the eternal sea was moving and living', recalling 'the spirit of God mov[ing] across the face of the waters' (Genesis 1:2) at the beginning of time.

Such strategies compromise Biblical historical linearity in *The Time Machine*, but such combinations of alpha and omega are familiar to Christian doctrine. Wells draws on hermeneutic models that seek these formulations to create alternative spaces, reprising this technique in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Critical assessments of Moreau's island as a 'perverted paradise' are supported by Montgomery's appropriation of the language of the Biblical past, including the command to 'increase and multiply' (*IDM*, 30), and by Moreau's imposition of a 'Law' that takes a Judaeo-Christian form (*IDM*, 58-59).<sup>18</sup> Moreau creates the beast folk from other animals' bodies, just as Eve comes from Adam's rib, populating an island that is, like Eden, a self-contained world governed by prohibitions with absolute consequences (Genesis 2:17-22).

Whilst these elements inscribe the island with the Genesis myth, its description also abounds in Biblical images of the future, drawn again from Revelation. As in *The Time Machine*, blood imagery is significant, especially in proximity to water, and the 'steamy ravine [that] cut like a smoking gash' (*IDM*, 65) is analogous to 'the bottomless pit' from which arises 'the smoke of a great furnace' (Revelation

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<sup>16</sup> Frye, 144.

<sup>17</sup> Bergonzi, 54.

<sup>18</sup> J. R. Hammond, 'The Island of Doctor Moreau: A Swiftian Parable', *The Wellsian: Selected Essays on H. G. Wells*, 45-54 (51); Jack Williamson, *H. G. Wells: Critic of Progress* (Baltimore: Mirage, 1973), 80.

9:2). Furthermore, the likeness of creatures such as the Leopard-Man and the ‘Fox-Bear Witch’ (*IDM*, 89) to those that appear in Revelation is unavoidable:

The beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion [...] I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast (Revelation 9:2-3).

Thus, in both novels, Wells creates spaces in which linear time conceived in terms of Biblical history ceases to exist, as it does with the evolutionary model. This collapse of linearity results in the obliteration of the present moment. A study of the representation of Prendick’s hut on the island will reveal how this effect is realised in the texts.

Gaston Bachelard holds that enclosed spaces invite coding as homes. They constitute ‘one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms.’<sup>19</sup> However, Prendick describes his new ‘home’ as a ‘Bluebeard’s chamber’ (*IDM*, 32), highlighting its dissimilarity with his previous home life, which ‘assumed idyllic virtue and beauty in [his] memory’ (*IDM*, 97). The inability of the island hut to become homelike in Prendick’s mind is, according to Bachelard’s theorisation, a sign of its failure to assimilate his oneiric past and/or future. Accordingly, it represents only the immediacy of his sojourn. Like the Time Traveller, it holds the privileged position as marker of the ‘present’ moment, distinct from the collapsed timescales in the surrounding space.

The room’s spatial design also suggests this interpretation. It has two doors – one onto the inner enclosure, and one onto the rest of the island. Given the nature of the island’s population, the workshop stands for the past as a point of origination, whilst the wider island is the site of the beast people’s anticipated flourishing future. One door opens onto the past; the other, the future. Spatially, therefore, the room represents the present. However, the past/future opposition on the island is so compromised that ‘the present’ lacks definition, and ultimately the room is destroyed, surrendering to temporal collapse.

Abolition of the present moment excludes the site of indeterminacy at which the relation of past to future can be influenced, thus fixing it into a predetermined pattern. That this relation is, in truth, always unalterable is the thrust of a lost essay by Wells, written in 1891, called ‘The Universe Rigid’. W. Warren Wagar paraphrases its reconstructed argument thus:

All events – each one unique in itself – unfolded in the space-time continuum as the consequence of previous events [...]

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<sup>19</sup> Bachelard, 6.

Thus the universe was ‘rigid’ in the sense of its being predetermined at every instant [...] from the perspective of an omniscient mind, the universe was fixed, frozen, and immutable.<sup>20</sup>

Their misinterpretations of the provenance of the Beast Folk, Eloi and Morlocks imply that the novels’ protagonists do not have an omniscient perspective from which the universe appears ‘rigid’. Their positions correspond with Wells’s nominalist argument that ‘everyday reality is the only reality we can know, and that our ideas are only approximations to the truth, more and more liable to fail the more abstractly they are applied.’<sup>21</sup> Their ability to correctly interpret the relation between past and present is compromised because their world-view is temporally contingent rather than omniscient.

This is foregrounded in *The Time Machine*, in which the Traveller is conscious of his Victorian provenance: ‘more brightly clad people met me in the doorway, and so we entered, I, dressed in dingy nineteenth century garments, looking grotesque enough’ (*TM*, 26). He interprets the portals to the Lowerworld as wells, displaying the urge to rationalise the landscape according to nineteenth-century categories despite his realisation of ‘the oddness of wells still existing’ (*TM*, 30).<sup>22</sup> Likewise, his initial response to 802,701 is to ‘jump at the idea of a social paradise’ (*TM*, 32), but in doing so, he resorts to the political language of his own time, somewhat simplistically characterising the Eloi’s society as ‘Communism’ (*TM*, 29), perhaps recalling the Utopian pastoral vision of a socialist England displayed in contemporary texts like William Morris’s 1890 *News From Nowhere*.<sup>23</sup> The inadequacy of his narrow perspective is reflected in the need to constantly re-evaluate 802,701. He revises his Utopian theories several times before reaching the hypothesis that he propounds to his guests – with the proviso that ‘it may be as wrong an explanation as mortal wit can give’ (*TM*, 79).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wagar, 32.

<sup>21</sup> Sherborne, 192.

<sup>22</sup> Parrinder suggests a pun on the name of the author here, which might suggest Wells’s awareness that, himself a Victorian, he too is an anachronistic presence in 802, 701. See Patrick Parrinder, *Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 37.

<sup>23</sup> William Morris, *News From Nowhere and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 101, 98.

<sup>24</sup> Such an implied acknowledgement of cultural contingency in the novels is a fundamental argument in favour of the view that Wells’s romances are intended principally as cultural or social critique, or warning. The significance of social criticism in these novels is accepted in this study, and the effects produced by juxtaposing collapsed conventional timespans with a nineteenth-century perspective certainly deserves examination in this regard. However, it is the aim of this study to analyse the ways in which Wells manipulates time and space to create

This proviso elucidates Wells's treatment of time and space in the novels and, furthermore, helps identify them as fundamentally pessimistic. The apocalyptic ending of the Traveller's journey and Prendick's inability to readjust to normal society lead critical opinion towards viewing the novels as expressions of an essentially negative world view.<sup>25</sup> In the final analysis, such criticism is legitimate, but it is nevertheless simplistic to see these works merely as exercises in pessimism.

Wells's preoccupation with the fate of mankind is well known, and obviously addressed in these texts. In Parrinder's words, they 'alternate the ideas of hope and despair [...] release and submission [...] predetermined life and Utopian life'.<sup>26</sup> Through this alternation, Wells subjects his vision to the re-evaluative processes that the Traveller undertakes as his adventure unfolds and his various hypotheses prove to be flawed. Wells's argument in 'The Universe Rigid', that world views are personally contingent, means that accurate prediction depends on an omniscient or near-omniscient level of individual knowledge – a level that transcends the limitations of human life. As discussed above, Wells interrogates various models of time and space in the hope that one of them will provide a new perspective that will call into question his bleak view of the future. Thus the novels oscillate between a resilient hopefulness and its (ultimately triumphant) disappointment.

When writing these novels, Wells was a chronic invalid, living in the shadow of his (supposedly) imminent death. Parrinder's study of Wells begins with the 'hypothesis [...] that Wells made himself into a creative writer by looking into his own imminent death and projecting his imagination beyond that death', and argues that 'Wells's novels return again and again to the need for transcending the given conditions' of life.<sup>27</sup> Without suggesting that the novels are autobiographical, it is nevertheless possible to read the dynamics of hope and despair revealed in Wells's treatment of time and space partly as a response to his fear of 'nothingness' after death.<sup>28</sup>

Katrina Harack argues that 'to travel through time is to confront the impossibility of synchronous presence and absence, to enact the impossible', a paradoxical situation that permits Wells to sustain projection beyond

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a structure through which such a critique is made possible, rather than to illuminate the actual content of that critique.

<sup>25</sup> Bergonzi, 22; Williamson, 21.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Parrinder, *H. G. Wells* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970), 22-3.

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Parrinder, 'The Time Machine: H. G. Wells's Journey through Death', in *The Wellsian: Selected Essays on H. G. Wells*, 31-44 (34), *H. G. Wells*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866)* (London: Gollancz; Cresset, 1934) 299-300.

‘nothingness’.<sup>29</sup> Time travel becomes a method of ‘circumvention and bypassing of the ravages of time’, because it allows Wells to collapse chronologies, erasing the present moment.<sup>30</sup> A time traveller dissolves into the non-time that time-travel creates, overcoming the boundaries of human life without physically passing through them. Such transcendence is sought by his protagonists, who both encounter symbolic deaths before reaching their destinations. The Traveller compares his experience to that encountered by ‘a suicide who holds a pistol to his skull’ (*TM*, 18) whilst Prendick remembers ‘a persuasion that I was dead, and that I thought what a jest it was they should come too late by such a little to catch me in my body’ (*IDM*, 9).

Projection beyond death necessarily entails erasure of selfhood, since it removes the parameters that define individual life. When the Traveller believes himself to be marooned in the future, he becomes ‘a strange animal in an unknown world’ (*TM*, 36). As Harack explains, ‘he is ultimately unable to handle the strain of confronting himself “out of time”, of seeing himself in the alterity of the future’, a state that she aligns with ‘the alterity of death’.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, he is denied identity, known only as ‘The Time Traveller’. Colin Manlove notes that it is this feature that defines him, since he ‘*has* no environment, he simply travels’.<sup>32</sup> Prendick’s experience on the island also causes him to lose self-definition. He admits that he ‘must have undergone strange changes’ (*IDM*, 124) during his sojourn, and by the time he escapes he is as ‘queer to men as [he] had been to the Beast People’ (*IDM*, 130). Obliteration of the individual self is conducive to Wells’s schema, since he is not seeking the personal immortality promised by Christianity but the placement of his own death within a chronology that provides permanence on a universal scale, thereby minimising the significance of the individual. Such permanence is sought in regeneration from decay, a secular life after death, in structures external to the actual person, such as natural laws or social systems.

In *The Time Machine*, Wells posits various timelines as regenerative, transcendent structures, and then rejects them in the face of cosmic end-determination. The Biblical chronology is the most sophisticated example of this process, and provides a paradigm for his treatment of the other collapsed chronologies.<sup>33</sup> Wells’s suggestions of parallels between the creation and Apocalypse are powerfully executed, and despite the Traveller’s disapprobation of

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<sup>29</sup> Katrina Harack, ‘Limning the Impossible: Time Travel, the Uncanny and Destructive Futurity in H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*’, in *H. G. Wells’s Fin-de-Siècle*, ed. John S. Partington (Frankfurt: Lang, 2007), 7-16 (7).

<sup>30</sup> Parrinder, *Shadows of the Future*, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Harack, 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Colin Manlove, ‘Charles Kingsley, H. G. Wells and the Machine in Victorian Literature’, in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 48 (1993), 212-39 (231), retrieved 4 March 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2933891>.

<sup>33</sup> Wagar, 154-5.

conditions in 802,701, there is no definitive evidence that the system they represent cannot be regenerative. The Traveller admits that the detested Morlock is ‘heir to all the ages’ (*TM*, 46), implying that a Biblical future *could* come to pass, but through the Morlocks instead of the Eloi.

Further into the future, whilst ‘the sense of abominable desolation that [hangs] over the world’ (*TM*, 83) suggests that Biblical regeneration is no longer a possibility, the implantation into the scene of imagery from Genesis causes it to oscillate between creation and destruction, so that neither vision is allowed to develop. For example, what the Traveller perceives as a rock is revealed to be a crab in a futuristic version of the Biblical transformation of earth into living creature, which is then reversed as he travels further: ‘my eye had been deceived [...] the black object was merely a rock’ (*TM*, 84). Eventually the vision succumbs to despair. The final description of the sea is of ‘weltering blood-red water’, evoking the end of this world rather than the generation of a new one and negating the earlier association with Genesis. All consolatory creative potential is metamorphosed into its opposite, disappointing the hopes of transcendence it initially held out.

This is also the pattern of Wells’s treatment of evolutionary chronologies. The apparent degradation of humanity through its bifurcation into two species notwithstanding, Wells seeks to find potential in the creatures of 802,701 for evolutionary hope for mankind. However, the Traveller himself dooms humanity by refusing to give equal consideration to all evolutionary avenues by automatically privileging the Eloi. A possible reason for the Traveller’s inclination towards the Eloi lies in Kollmann’s theory of neoteny, which appeared in 1884, and describes the system whereby:

the regulatory system retards ancestral development rates so that in humans – in fact the whole primate order – neotenates still look and act like juveniles when they are reproductively adult. The process of retarded allometric development produces adult animals that retain the increased adaptive flexibility of the young.<sup>34</sup>

That the Traveller seeks to exploit the ‘adaptive flexibility’ that ought to accompany the Eloi’s neoteny is revealed when he describes his role in learning to communicate with the Eloi as ‘schoolmaster’ (*TM*, 28) rather than pupil, implying that it is they who assimilate new concepts and not himself. However, the Eloi are intellectually ‘on the level of one of our five-year-olds’ and the Traveller is bitterly disappointed by their mental underdevelopment, wondering if he has ‘built the time machine in vain’ (*TM*, 25). Nevertheless, ‘however great their intellectual degradation, the Eloi had kept too much of their human form not to claim [his]

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<sup>34</sup> Kirby Farrell, ‘Wells and Neoteny’, in *Perennial Time Machine*, 65-75 (66).

sympathy' (*TM*, 62). Ironically, however, it is the Morlocks who have retained a modicum of *homo sapiens*' intellectual capacity: not only do they maintain machinery, but they plot to trap the Traveller, and 'had even partially taken [the time machine] to pieces whilst trying [...] to grasp its purpose' (*TM*, 80). This ought to provide evolutionary advantage, but the Morlocks are not regarded as potentially regenerative human descendants because of their likeness to man's apelike ancestors, which means that 'it was impossible [...] to feel any humanity in the things' (*TM*, 67). This difficulty in acknowledging the human inheritance of the Morlocks in spite of the frequent descriptions of them as 'human' animals ('human spider', *TM*, 46, or 'human rats', *TM*, 74), is as irrational as the view of Weena as 'more human than she was' (*TM*, 64), a view obviously derived from emotional connection. This divergent response to the Eloi and Morlocks can be explained by theories of the memory. The Traveller naturally chooses to place his hopes on the species which accords most with his own – which, since he is now far in the future, exists only as a memory. Glendon Schubert tells us that in the process of remembering, 'emotion comes *first* [...] and is subsequently overlaid with consciousness.'<sup>35</sup> The Traveller's choice of Eloi over Morlock, therefore, is primarily based on an emotional instead of intellectual response. Emotion colours his recollection of the conditions of the nineteenth century, so that his memory of mankind in general necessarily resembles more the Eloi than the Morlocks, thus erroneously rendering the Eloi the appropriate species on which to pin the hopes of nineteenth-century man. Evolutionary history must therefore fail to provide solace because whilst the capability for progressive adaptation has been lost in the Eloi, the Traveller abjects and destroys the creatures that *have* retained this quality, and might therefore offer a 'progressive' evolutionary future for man.

Addressing this evolutionary timescale, Wells must locate his story in the extreme future, yet 'the ruined buildings of the age of the Eloi and Morlocks are culturally continuous with our own civilization.' Parrinder accommodates this implausibility by arguing that the year 802,701 is 'a brilliantly executed palimpsest', in which two different eras are superimposed in one space. One represents the 800,000 years required for evolutionary processes; the other, the 800 years corresponding to the period between the high points of the Roman Empire and the Carolingian dynasty. The classical architecture and clothing of the Eloi's world visually link them to the ancient Roman Empire, whilst the Traveller associates them with the 'Carolingian kings' (*TM*, 57). These references seem to vindicate Parrinder's assumption that Wells draws explicitly on Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88), which posits growth and decline as natural historical processes. In this work, 'the afterlife of ancient Rome was traced as far as the Renaissance' as Gibbon 'charts the causes of the decay that

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<sup>35</sup> Glendon Schubert, 'Psychobiological Politics', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 16 (1983) 535-576, 549, retrieved 11 March 2009. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3227395>]

leaves a rich and powerful civilization in ruins'.<sup>36</sup> Although, like Nordau, Gibbon places emphasis on the decline of a decadent empire, the point at which his text ends implies the renewal of classical civilisation in the form of ascendant Renaissance culture. Thus the Gibbonian model of history has a cyclical quality, whilst also demonstrating a linear chronology, since each civilisation is replaced by a different one, indicating movement along a sequential progression. The link with the Carolingians is significant because Gibbon describes the decline of the Holy Roman Empire under their rule as reflecting the fall of the Roman Empire of which it was seen to be the natural successor. Thus Wells seems to be placing emphasis on the disintegration of civilisation in 802,701, but within the context of a historiography that promises future restoration. However, not a single mark of civilisation remains at the end of the journey into the future, implying that whilst the Gibbonian vision of decay has been realised, it has, like the evolutionary chronology, failed to give rise to a new Renaissance, resulting in the final dissolution of all civilisation on Earth.

Parrinder's analysis characterises 802,701 as a composite of different ages. It is therefore part of a world that bears relation to the Traveller's whilst remaining essentially different to it, in that whilst one is characterised by a conventional, linear model of time, the other rejects this model – rejects, indeed, the discrete existence of 'the present moment' on which linear temporal experience depends. This fundamental difference problematises John Huntington's 'two-world theory', since it compromises the reader's impulse to 'set up a static antithesis and then to fill in the relation between elements' between the two worlds.<sup>37</sup> Huntington's argument implies that it is the *nature* of an assumed continuity between the worlds that is uncovered, yet if the two worlds are essentially discontinuous in their temporal structures, this assumption is liable to produce false conclusions. That the Traveller is subject to this effect can be seen when the role of memory is examined in relation to his experiences at The Palace of Green Porcelain.

In a world generally characterised by vertical dichotomies, the Palace disrupts the binary by passing from above ground to below not by vertical movement but horizontal.<sup>38</sup> It is oppositional to the spatiality of 802,701 because, as its likeness to 'some latter-day South Kensington' replete with 'the old familiar glass cases of our own time' (*TM*, 65) reveals, it does not belong in 802,701 but to the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is a space which promises continuity between the two temporal worlds – indeed, the Traveller's comment that he 'should have been glad to trace the patient readjustments by which the conquest of animated nature had been attained' (*TM*, 66) through the natural history section demonstrates his assumption

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<sup>36</sup> Parrinder, 'From Rome to Richmond', 116, 114, 118.

<sup>37</sup> Huntington, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Huntington, 46-7.

<sup>39</sup> Parrinder, 'The Time Machine: H. G. Wells's Journey through Death', 38.

that the museum's function had been precisely to record the history of that continuity. In fulfilling this function, the museum would mirror the role of memory in rationalising experience by relating it to already familiar models. As Lowenthal writes, 'we need the past [...] to cope with present landscapes. [...] Features and patterns in the landscape make sense to us because we share a history with them.'<sup>40</sup>

However, 'because they seem more comprehensible, images from the past often dominate or may wholly replace the present.'<sup>41</sup> The Traveller allows the remembered nineteenth century to overwhelm 802,701, imagining that the Palace will insulate him from its unpalatable realities. However, because the continuity that leads him back to the nineteenth-century is in fact chimerical, he instead puts himself and Weena within the grasp of the Morlocks, confronted with conditions that belong definitively in 802,701.

The difficulty of 'filling in the relations between [temporal] elements' thus enforces the separation between the novel's real (nineteenth-century, linear) and metaphorical (palimpsestic) timescapes. This is what renders it fundamentally pessimistic, because it refuses to allow evasion of end-determination through transference from the actual to the figurative planes of existence.

However, in his epilogue, Hillyer refuses to accept such an outlook.<sup>42</sup> He asserts that 'the future is still black and blank' and that if the Traveller's tale is true, 'it remains for us to live as though it were not so' (*TM*, 91). This injunction can be interpreted as expressing the belief that the narrative is not immutable fact but a warning that functions as the stimulus for positive (social) change. Whilst this is a legitimate reading of the novel, the text by its narrative structure and open ending limits the prospect of this positive change being realised.

At the end of the novel, the Traveller again disappears into time, promising to return within half an hour. Hillyer records this event as occurring three years previously, and since the Traveller is in possession of a time machine, if he were ever to return, he could have done so within the promised time regardless of the length his sojourn in other eras. Therefore, it seems that he has disappeared from the nineteenth century forever (if such a term is appropriate in this context). This physical disappearance transforms his tale into a literal experience, despite the fact that the dual timescales in 802,701 plainly render it a metaphorical space. Robert Philmus argues that the Traveller 'must go back into the Fourth Dimension. Since he cannot accept the "prophecy" as metaphor, he must disappear into the

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<sup>40</sup> David Lowenthal, 'Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory', *Geographical Review*, 65 (1975) 1-36 (5), retrieved 11 March 2009. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/213831>]

<sup>41</sup> Lowenthal, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Hillyer is the name often ascribed by critics to the narrator of *The Time Machine*, based on the Time Traveller's comment that he 'seemed to see Hillyer for a moment' on his return journey (77).

dimension where it “exists”.<sup>43</sup> The effect of this transformation is to preclude the possibility that any change capable of altering the conditions of the future will be effected, because if this were the case, such conditions would not have existed for the Traveller to experience them. By refusing the metaphorical nature of the story, this pessimistic vision is made irreversible.

This is also the effect of Wells’s disruption of the normal temporal relationship of narrator to reader. A structure that is repeated in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, the frame narrative allows a present-day writer/redactor to transmit a narrative about the past, in which the future is remembered by someone who no longer exists in the present. This ‘deconstruct[ion of] the very notion of linear narrative representation’ helps to define the plots not as conjecture but as belonging to a latter-day prophetic genre, since the travellers both claim to have experienced rather than imagined or dreamed the future.<sup>44</sup> This provides the novels with the same epistemological status as the prophecies of Ezekiel or Isaiah, in which visions are literal experiences, despite their highly symbolic or typological content. By placing the novels in this category, Wells imbues the events in their pages with a sense of immutability, that they are part of a predetermined pattern much like a Christian teleology.

Such arguments seem to cement the case for Wells as pessimist, but, appearing only a year after the publication of *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* represents another attempt at reconciling a belief in the eventual decline of the universe with the hope of transcending this belief. The superimposition of evolutionary and Biblical timescales on the island permits Wells to draw analogies between them by associating the beast folk’s progress with the scriptural narrative, and their characteristics with the moral status of mankind. The definitive event is the beast folk’s fall from grace after breaking Moreau’s prohibition of eating meat. This act, the tasting of blood, gives them knowledge of their carnality, thus reinstating the law of survival of the fittest. It is clearly analogous to the Biblical fate of mankind after the tasting of the apple and expulsion from Eden. Since it is this that introduces death to the world, it is unsurprising that Wells should make it the fulcrum of his novel, on which both timescales turn. The analogue is given further significance in the light of the pseudo-consumptive Wells’s ‘dread of tasting the peculiar tang of blood’ in his mouth.<sup>45</sup>

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, such attempts to synthesise the theological and the evolutionary were not unusual, and Wells had frequently

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<sup>43</sup> Robert M. Philmus, ‘The Logic of ‘Prophecy’ in *The Time Machine*’, in *H. G. Wells: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 56-68 (67).

<sup>44</sup> Larry W. Caldwell, ‘Time at the End of its Tether: H. G. Wells and the Subversion of the Master Narrative’, in *Perennial Time Machine*, 137-49 (141).

<sup>45</sup> Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, 301.

debated the place of Christian morals and teleologies in a post-Darwinian world.<sup>46</sup> He refuted that the two were reconcilable, holding that evolution disregards teleological or ethical aims. Therefore it must be understood that, far from assimilating evolution into Christian mythology, Wells is investigating Darwinism's capacity to *supersede* Christianity as the basis of a potentially generative, transcendent world-view.

Wells represents Moreau both as a creator-God, before whom the beast folk worship 'bowing on knees and elbows' (*IDM*, 89) and as an amoral force 'as remorseless as Nature' (*IDM*, 75). His decision to mould animals into *human* forms is entirely arbitrary and he confesses to have never 'troubled about the ethics of the matter' (*IDM*, 75). Like Nature, he lacks emotional connections with his creations, even criticising Montgomery's interest in them. Moreau claims that his indifference derives from transcendence of pain, which he describes as 'such a little thing' (*IDM*, 74) compared to the possibilities of science. He dissociates himself from the body which is 'the mark of the beast from which [man] came' (*IDM*, 74-75). Wells articulates through Moreau the notion that 'pain underlies [man's] propositions about sin' (*IDM*, 73) and that therefore man's moral sensibility is located in his evolutionary origins. Indeed, the beast folk seem (at least initially) amenable to living according to a pseudo-moral law, fearing 'the House of Pain' as the site of punishment for transgression (*IDM*, 91). Thus Wells, to a degree, reappropriates the animal as the seat of morality, suggesting that Darwinian man may be conducive to, or even a foundation for, the imposition of ethical or social structures that could mimic the moral structures of religion. These structures might then replace the kind of eschatology that in religion defies the limitations of time and inspires hope.

Because the beast folk represent both past and future versions of mankind, they reveal the link between the beginning and ending of the species, a linkage which is given a specific implication by its scriptural analogy. The first story of the Bible sets in motion the events that inevitably lead to the Apocalypse at its conclusion, yet that ending is also inscribed with the creation of a new Eden. In applying this formulation to evolutionary processes, Wells suggests that rather than origination necessitating ending, the reverse may be true, and that biological retrogression might herald a renewal of the species.

He is, however, unable to let this conclusion stand. Wells the atheist cannot admit a Moreau-like God figure into his world-view, and so he must search for morality within human nature itself, a search which is disappointed by the reversion of the beast folk. The animalism of the beast folk (and, by implication,

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<sup>46</sup> Brett Davidson, 'The War of the Worlds Considered as a Modern Myth', in *H. G. Wells's Fin-de-Siècle*, 41-50 (42-3).

of mankind) fits them to adhere to a moral code, but this adherence is meaningless without an external, omnipotent being who defines the terms of such a code. Once Moreau is dead, it is plain that the beast folk cannot be kept from reverting, 'the tradition of the Law [...] losing its force' (*IDM*, 123), revealing their apparent morality to be inscribed rather than inherent.

Moreover, there is little evidence that adherence to moral codes will actually result in the transcendence of earthly limitations (in fact, Moreau's attitude that a pain-based morality is meaningless 'save in this little planet, this speck of cosmic dust' (*IDM*, 74) implies the opposite). The notion is again a function of the faith that Wells disavows, and demands, if not an actual deity, then at least the existence of a space in which moral force supersedes natural laws. Unlike the Traveller, Wells cannot allow such spaces to really exist. Thus the island ceases to represent a viable alternative to mortal, mundane existence. Prendick expresses this position as 'the unspeakable aimlessness of things upon the island' (*IDM*, 95). He recognises what has already been suggested to the reader through Wells's technique of collapsing time in space – that the world is fixed in a predetermined scheme that precludes any real transcendence. Immediately after this epiphany, the dead rabbit is discovered and the chain of events that leads to Moreau's death and the degeneration of the beast folk begins, the text succumbing at this point to Wells's bleaker thoughts about the natural conditions of the world. Having overcome death by arriving on the island, Prendick realises that its immortalising non-time is an illusion. The temporal stasis gradually erodes, reinstating standard time and returning the beast folk to a chronologically contingent rather than transcendent existence. As the fantasy of an eternal space is deflated, Prendick puts to sea in a reversal of his earlier symbolic death and returns to the nineteenth century.

However, once home, he is unable to separate the future he has already witnessed on the island from the present-day world, fearing always 'the animal was surging up [...] that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale' (*IDM*, 130). Struggling to convince himself that 'these seeming men and women [...] are indeed men and women [...] emancipated from instinct and the slaves of no fantastic Law', (*IDM*, 130), he is nevertheless, like Wells, beleaguered in a position where his perception of the present is overwhelmed by his bleak vision of the future. Rationalisation cannot quell Prendick's apprehension, and he 'shrink[s]' from other men, 'long[ing] to be away from them and alone' (*IDM*, 130). In this, he merely expresses in subdued form the desires enacted in both novels to transcend the conditions of a normal human existence, in favour of an erasure of the self through which these conditions may be overcome or forgotten.

In spite of Prendick's obvious psychological disturbance, the ending of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is slightly less pessimistic than that of *The Time Machine*. Prendick articulates the conflict played out throughout these two novels.

He is loath to capitulate to his vision of final dissolution, stating that ‘I hope, or I could not live. And so, in hope and solitude, my story ends’ (*IDM*, 131). This is the true motivation behind Wells’s treatment of space, time and memory in these novels – to extend beyond mankind’s natural limitations, to struggle against despair. In this, he responds not only to the conditions of human existence as discovered by Darwin, Nordau or Gibbon, but to the frailty and transience of his own body. Wells’s grand visions are of worlds in which civilised humanity achieves a state that transcends the end-determined restraints of time and mortality. All eventually give way to an ultimately pessimistic revelation, but these early novels, in their vacillation between optimism and pessimism, give us a glimpse of the hopeful drive for change and regeneration that becomes the core of Wells’s *oeuvre* later in life. It also renders them, as much as they are science fiction, adventure story or social critique, intensely psychological dramas of the war between time and eternity, reality and wish fulfilment, and despair and hope.