

in immense stores in the matter all around us, but the power to control and use it is not yet ours. (Soddy 232-33)

Given that knowledge . . . mark what we should be able to do! . . . It would mean a change in human conditions that I can only compare to the discovery of fire, that first discovery that lifted man above the brute. We stand today towards radioactivity exactly as our ancestor stood towards fire before he had learnt to make it . . . This – this is the dawn of a new day in human living. At the climax of that civilization which had its beginning in the hammered flint and the fire-stick of the savage, just when it is becoming apparent that our ever-increasing needs cannot be borne indefinitely by our present sources of energy, we discover suddenly the possibility of an entirely new civilization. The energy we need for our very existence, and with which Nature supplies us still so grudgingly, is in reality locked up in inconceivable quantities all about us. (*The World Set Free* 23-24)

So while it is possible that Rufus's mannerisms are derived from Wells's memory of Huxley's seminar, it cannot be denied that Rufus is to a large degree a fictionalization of Frederick Soddy.

Alex Boulton

## The Myth of the New Found Land in H.G. Wells's "The Country of the Blind"

Literary narratives concerning the wandering of an outsider into a closed valley or new land are prominent in the European literary tradition. To recognise and isolate some of the more common motifs, symbols and secular/religious ideologies which are commonly found in this genre may provide a yardstick against which H.G. Wells's short story in this tradition, "The Country of the Blind" can be considered. A brief examination of the ideas and images contained in the works of authors such as Voltaire, Defoe, Shakespeare, Hobbes, Buchan, Kipling and Haggard is not an attempt to unite under a single aegis the symbol of the Edenic/utopian paradise throughout literary history, but instead a way of viewing the components of this history.

Not surprisingly, certain popular religious, historical and philosophical rhetorics and cultural attitudes are contained in the writings of the aforementioned authors, and I shall address these dominant ideas and beliefs concerning the new found land under the following themes: the treatment of paradise and utopia in Christian and classical mythology; the influence of the Age of Discovery upon perceptions of actual and literary New Worlds; issues of domination; belief in and justifications of European cultural superiority and how this last set of attitudes may affect the portrayal of the protagonist in literary narratives.

The Christian idea of a return to Eden dominates much of the writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the centre of this literature is a belief that there exists – at an attainable geographical point – an area of virgin earth, which will transport its founder back through time to his prelapsarian state. This is a sanctuary, a point at which the corruption of the fallen world can be potentially purged, first by the knight upon a quest, then by the crusader and, latterly, by the voyager/explorer of modern times. Terence Hawkes, in his consideration of *The Tempest* outlines one particular historical moment which shaped the European psyche in its perceptions of an earthly paradise, namely the larger symbolic role played by the colonising of America in the seventeenth century. This involved “. . . the sense, deeply and popu-

larly felt, of the New World as another Eden, replete with an infinity of good things, a terrestrial Paradise, a place of redemption, of everybody's second chance". This oasis/enclave or sanctuary of purity in the fallen world, often stylised as either an Eden or, as in classical mythology, a land-locked Atlantis, has been utilised by writers for widely different motives and yet this symbol, so protean in its nature, is still discernible. The character of Gonzalo in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* articulates such a belief in a Golden Age:

I' th' commonwealth I would by contraries  
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic  
Would I admit. . . .  
No occupation; all men idle, all;  
And women too, but innocent and pure;  
No sovereignty; – (2.1 143-52)

I would with such perfection govern, sir,  
T'excel the golden age (2.1 163-64)

This belief is tied into a much larger web of ideas from our classical inheritance concerning an age of men in an earthly paradise. The Greeks recognised a mythic past of gods and men in a Golden Age which, in Homer's *Iliad*, is acknowledged in the references to the past of Helen and Menelaus in Sparta before the wars and the ancient past described by Nestor – himself a symbol of ancient wisdom and continuity – with the prefixing phrase "Not as men are now. . .". Thus there exists a recapitulation of past glory and an unsullied world prevailing in some of the oldest roots of European literature.

The symbol of the place that remains uncorrupted is present and reinvented for a purpose in the writings of philosophers in the Age of Discovery. Examples of this include the writings of Sir Thomas More and particularly, in this context, the writings of Voltaire. For the former, the view of man is Christian, passive, and pessimistic. Man is corrupt. Whereas in Voltaire's *Candide*, the author is writing at the height of the Enlightenment where man is perfectible, the immediate future is manipulable and so a question arises about the approach of the traveller to his new found land. Although *Candide* is ultimately philosophical and passive, his optimism is shown to be untenable except back home in his garden. There were other models of that expansionist relationship in the Columbian age, when God's bounty was not a myth but a practical reality. However, what interests me is not the political objective of Voltaire, in his inclusion of the mythic paradise which constitutes an idealised life in

his critique of eighteenth century optimism, but his articulation of the image which bears such close resemblance to the other images of the Utopias expressed in other non-political/philosophical tracts. Literary examples of this tendency to consider such lands and their treatment include, as Terence Hawkes has observed, the character of Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

Prospero's government of his island has many analogues – so the contemporary pamphlets indicate – in the principles of "good" government established by the British colonies in America. The Basic principle involves the redemptive grafting of the "nurture" of civilisation on to the "nature" confronting the colonists. . . . He imposes the "shape" of his own culture, embodied in his speech, on the new world, and makes that world recognisable, habitable, "natural", able to speak his language. Like the gardener, he redeems untouched landscapes by imprinting on it a humanising art. Like Orpheus, he replaces savagery by "civil conversation". Like Adam in Eden, he names things. (211)

Therefore there exists in the cultural philosophy of the colonial power a series of justifications of what domination is, what it represents and how the invaders should view their activities. These concepts can be distilled down to four main ideas: the indigenous population is in some way a cuckoo/non-indigenous culture; the European power of language compels the invader to rule; racial and Darwinist science disqualifies the native from any right to rule; and the biblical and commercial pull of new territory to cultivate demands colonial intervention.

### **The right of ascendancy over a cuckoo culture**

In the ideology of European domination, the land discovered was virgin earth because the explorer/imperialist does not recognise the ownership of land by its existing occupants for a series of reasons. These include a belief that the people they see are not indigenous to that region and are in some way merely squatting in the derelict remains of an ancient Empire, that they constitute in some ways a cuckoo culture. This belief is based upon the premise that the only source of real power or cultural creativity rests in, or has previously rested in, the European or Mediterranean theatre, the known world or, on a global level, the core/metropolitan centre. Whether the culture be Egyptian, Greek, Alexandrian, Phœnician or Roman, the European is always an inheritor of this culture, part of the ancient bloodline of all civilisation which gives the explorer/colonialist certain inalienable rights. This concept is contained, by implication, in the naming of the land as found; to be found presumes that the possession was once lost. Literary examples of this tendency occur almost every time a civilisation is encountered. The European claims that, despite the immediate

information that this society exists outside and beyond the influence of his own European culture, there must – and can only be – some explanation of its existence via the great empires that he recognises as cultural superlatives. For example, Voltaire's Eldorado is a mimetic utopia, that is, it gives life to a certain European philosophical vision of a society guided by the principle of Philosophy, the rule of law, a penal code and a monarch. To this extent the words of Rousseau are anticipated in the words of the King of Eldorado: "I have no right to detain you or any strangers against your will: this is an act of tyranny to which our manners and our laws are equally repugnant: all men are by nature free; you have therefore an undoubted liberty . . . (66)".

In novels where the geographical location is more relevant, for example, the dark continent of Africa, the cultural ties are even tighter, as in Rider Haggard's *She* and *King Solomon's Mines*. The assertions that the original founders of civilisation were a recognisable cultural icon for the European supporting the primacy of western social development is evident in the words of Quartermaine when he postulates: "[in the past] great wizards, who had learnt their art from white men when 'all the world was dark' . . ." (95), and in response to the awe he feels for the great architecture he and his fellow-travellers stumble upon, the protagonist enacts a form of appropriation: "it is very well to call this Solomon's road, but my humble opinion is that the Egyptians had been here before Solomon's people ever set foot in it" (95).

Kipling has his heroes recognise a similar continuity of great tradition in "The Man Who Would be King," and also adds the existence of a patriarchal esotericism, connecting Alexander with the stonemasons of Egypt through the inclusion of Freemasonry in the narrative. Addressing the members of his newly-founded Lodge, Dravot says, "I know that you won't cheat me, because you're white people, sons of Alexander – and not like common black Mohammedans. . ." (267). Later he announces that he will make an empire because "These men aren't niggers; they're English! Look at their eyes – look at their mouths. Look at the way they stand up. They sit on chairs in their own houses. They're the Lost Tribes, or something like it, and they've grown up to be English" (269). The European is an inheritor because he shares a heritage with the founders of the ancient/original empire and ipso facto the indigenous occupants have no legitimate claim to the land because he is the inheritor, and the occupiers are squatting on his land. Furthermore, with no obvious sign of the indigenous people moving, the inheritor is within his rights, as a member of the chosen people, to subordinate, expel or enslave the current occupants.

### The right of ascendancy via language

The land becomes his land via another European claim to succession, based upon the power of language. The power to articulate is the source of self-enfranchisement and the imperialist sees this as an index of humanity. In the confrontation between the imperialist and the Cuckoo Culture the status of being human may be the only guarantee against enslavement.

This superiority via language gains much of its support from the opening of the Bible: "In the beginning was the word. . .". The word represents God, therefore by extension, it confers a power upon language, raising its users to the status of the quasi-divine! To define, understand and articulate are sacred. The power to describe allows the speaker to inscribe not only his ideas and his culture, but also to inscribe his presence upon the landscape. His history is written in the land because he has been granted all dominion and power.

The idea of linguistic superiority appears in many seminal texts of the early modern period. This voice of language and its conferring of manhood is asserted by Cicero, for whom language is one of the crucial ways of distinguishing between men and beasts. "The one special advantage we enjoy over animals," he claims, "is our power to speak with one another, to express our thoughts in words" and in the seventeenth century, this relationship was explored in Hobbes's political tract, *Leviathan*. As Terence Hawkes observes, such attitudes are evident in Shakespeare's image of Caliban:

. . . Elizabethan-Jacobean civilisation had a clear cut view of the nature and function of the spoken language in social life. The prime, and more forcefully expressed notion was of speech as the unifying and civilising force amongst men. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues that language actually confers manhood, and keeps bestiality at bay. Without it "there had been amongst men neither Commonwealth, nor society, nor Contract, nor Peace, no more than amongst Lyons, Bears and Wolves".

### The biological right of ascendancy

The other more familiar mode of moral justification for the domination of new-found lands is found within the ideas of Darwinism, ethnocentrism and racialism. The very fact of the invaders' military, technological or socio-political development defines the invader as superior and, if this recognition is combined with beliefs in white Aryan superiority, then the act of domination is almost a moral necessity. This phenomenon

has its expression both in the creation of Aphra Behn's "Noble Savage" Oroonoko, and in the racist assertions of John Buchan's protagonist in *Prester John*: "The Bible says that the children of Ham were to be our servants". The protagonists in both texts are subjected to the European standards of criticism: the former manages to be heroic, even at times a Christ figure, despite his blackness; whilst the latter though educated and patronised by white society, cannot escape his inherent baseness which "come of being black". These successes and failures are dictated by the interpretation through European codes of practice as if such codes were universal, infallible and "ethical".

### The divine and capitalist right of ascendancy

Not only were inherent human features such as racial identity justifications for expansion, but so also were activities such as trade and commerce, which played their part in reinforcing the desire for new land and justifying its retention. The European idea of man as cultivator or trader has some of its roots in the story of Christ's Galilean disciples and some in the Book of Genesis. The fishermen, who were commanded to go out and "Be fishers of men", encounter and grapple with a world with the innate knowledge of their predestined role, as inheritors of God's bounty, to capture men for God and also cultivate God's gift to man through husbandry. Their status as fishermen becomes an indicator, whether intended or not, for future Christians that the pious and blessed come not from the ranks of Kings, but from the fishermen and the farmers. Examples of this belief can be found in much of the religious writing of the middle ages, in texts such as Langland's *Piers Plowman*, in which man emulates the hierarchies of the Divine in the earthly kingdom and fulfils his predetermined role, which is not to rule earth as King but to plough his half acre. When this relationship with God, Man and Land is transferred to the expanding Columbian world, the Christian must direct his efforts towards the lands of the heathen and cultivate both their physical and metaphysical natures as part of the Divine plan. If this paradigm is combined with the absolutism of man as described in Genesis – a key definition in itself – then the position of the imperialist cultivator is rendered incontrovertible:

And God made the beast of earth after his kind. . . . And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (Genesis ch 1 25-26)

By such Biblical justification the act of invasion, occupation, imperialism and colonialism cease to be merely a religious obligation, a part of the Christian destiny, but become a hallowed quest, a crusade, with its momentum coming directly from the words of God.

It is Defoe's Crusoe who provides a cautionary exemplar of the foolishness of, and punishment for, transgressing and deviating from the straight path to salvation in accordance with the dictates of God. As the narrator reflects, when offered slaves for his Brazilian plantation,

This was a fair proposal it must be confessed, had it been made to anyone that had not had a settlement and plantation of his own to look after which was in fair way of coming to be very considerable and with a good stock upon it. But for me that was thus entered and established and had nothing to do but go on as I had begun for three or four years more, and to have sent for the other hundred pounds from England, and who in that time, and with little addition, could scarce have failed of being worth three or four thousand pounds sterling, and that increasing too; for me to think of such a voyage was the most preposterous thing that ever man in such circumstances could be guilty of. (43)

The colonial explorer/cultivator of land consumes the physical landscape and in the process of this agricultural realignment he wants to superimpose upon the new land not only his methods of husbandry but also his social formula. For some, the punishments for not treating the inheritors' new found land with the same reverence as the adventurer-coloniser are severe. For Robinson Crusoe the sentence is death or exile if nature does not bend to his will, the will of the European cultivator. As Defoe's narrator describes his confrontation with the birds which damage his crop, the reader cannot help reflecting upon the parallels between treatment of the native birds and that meted out to native peoples throughout imperial history. This is brought home to the reader by the relish with which the narrator compares the birds' fate with that of a criminal's in London; note the resonance of the personal pronoun "we", which does not signal culpability but a powerful fraternity and justification for penal retribution – even genocide:

I was so provoked that I could not have the patience to stay till more came on, knowing that every grain that they ate now was, as it might be said, a peck-loaf to me in the consequence; but coming up to the hedge, I fired again, and killed three of them. This was what I wished for; so I took them up and served them as we serve notorious thieves in England, viz., hanged them in chains for a terror to others; it is impossible to imagine. . . . that this should have such an effect as it had. . . . but in short, they forsook all that part of the island, and I could never see a bird near the place as long as my scarecrows hung there. (117)

### Literary embodiments of the right of ascendancy

The characterisation of the protagonist in many of these imperialist novels is often a

good indicator of texts' orientation toward some of the ideas already outlined. He comes from a tradition of men who represent superlatives of every quality elevated in western society, for example, the Greek man who, faced with the quest/test of confrontation with a new land "rises to the occasion", as does Leo in Rider Haggard's *She*. There is another protagonist who comes from an equally strong literary tradition, that is the hero as prodigal son: the man who is redeemed by his experiences or actions. For such characters, the experience of discovery becomes in some ways a rite of passage from ignorance/foolishness/corruption to a state of knowledge/enlightenment/perception. The adventure becomes a formative experience for gaining atonement or redemption which enables the character to "better himself"; this is as true of Peachy and Danny, the loafers in Rudyard Kipling's story "The Man who Would be King" as it is of Robinson Crusoe.

The protagonist's view of the landscape is similar in virtually all the texts so far mentioned. The new found land either represents territory that has been or could be cultivated and is therefore considered useful to the explorer and the country from which he has come, or territory that appears to the white man as some kind of obligation – land that he must acquire and rule. Voltaire's *Candide* sees the kingdom of Eldorado in terms of utility: "The country appeared cultivated equally for pleasure and to produce the necessaries of life. The useful and agreeable were here equally blended. . ." (59). "Possibly," he concludes, "this is the part of the globe where everything is right, for there must certainly be some such place" (61). Alan Quartermaine's vision in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon Mines* is defined in terms of obligation: "For my mind," he claims, "however beautiful a view may be, it requires the presence of a man to make it complete" (36). This vision of power and assumption/presumption of the heroes' right of ascendancy to rule are common in many other narratives. The self-assurance of self-acknowledged grafting loafers is evident in the dreams and unfortunate reality of Kipling's Daniel Dravot, who takes on the mantle of ruler with consummate ease: "You are my people," he tells the people of Kafiristan, "and by God . . . I'll make a damned Nation of you or I'll die in the making" (207). A little later, assurance becomes hubris: "I won't make a Nation,' says he. 'I'll make an Empire!'" (269).

It is now possible to attempt an informed study of H.G. Wells's text, "The Country of the Blind" in the light of the literary traditions, motifs and ideologies which have influenced and dictated the portrayal of the protagonist, the indigenous peoples and the responses and assumption of the reader throughout the literary tradition I have

outlined. Wells adopts many of these assumptions and myths as is seen in the portrayal of the valley, the valley people and the wanderer. By sometimes remaining faithful to the conventions of this tradition and sometimes inverting their symbolism, Wells produces a story that in many ways opens up the traditional colonial narrative to an inspection of its composite parts.

### Literary embodiment of the rights of ascendancy?

The protagonist of Wells's narrative is a mountaineer, in some ways a displaced great white hope, who steps into the breach when a member of a walking party is killed. The protagonist's act casts him as a character willing to adapt and improvise, one who possesses, perhaps, even a youthful, engaging or at least open mind. This creation of character is formulated in a specific description: "He was a mountaineer from the country near Quito, a man who had been down to the sea and had seen the world, a reader of books in an original way, an acute and enterprising man" (170). To extract a few of the details from this description is to see the characterisation of an open mind, perhaps a liberal, a man who is learned by his membership of a literary culture. He is not made average by these descriptions but, fully endowed with the benefits of his culture and placed "midway between the mean and the great", he embodies all that his culture can instil in a man, the product of an English upbringing. Likewise, the reader of Wells is encouraged by the above definition to see the protagonist as hero before the journey begins. He represents an acceptable social and philosophical formula before being subjected to the ravages of the alien culture. A nagging doubt that this is not a European is dismissed as this prototype hero, despite the textual evidence, is so characteristically western and white that we do not question the race of an inhabitant of "a country near Quito" or the likelihood of his literacy.

### The divine and capitalist right of ascendancy?

Wells's protagonist initially sees the landscape in the same terms as many before him, and yet we should not allow this portrayal of character to colour our perspective prematurely, because – as will be seen later – it is exactly this initial narrative device which proves to have been a decoy, employed later in the protagonist's assumed superiority, that makes possible the violent change from narrative type (of the kind already discussed) to antitype, and it is this change that makes the reading of "The Country of the Blind" such a profound experience:

The valley, he said, had in it all that the heart of man could desire – sweet water, pasture, and even climate, slopes of rich brown soil with tangles of shrub that bore an excellent fruit, and on one side great hanging forests of pine. . . . rich green pasture, that irrigation would spread over all the valley space. (168)

It seemed they knew nothing of sight. Well, all in good time he would teach them. . . (176) [he] thanked god from the bottom of his heart that the power of sight had been given him. . . (179). They little know they've been insulting their heaven sent kind and master. I see I must bring them to reason. (178-79)

The belief in the power of reason, so venerated in the European ivory tower of knowledge, and the predominance of "I", a belief in the self, at first represents European endeavour but all too soon becomes hubris born of a rehearsed imperialist arrogance and naivete. The gift of sight so linked to the right to rule, the prominence of the personal pronoun "I" and the belief in the value of reason are all reworkings of the assertions found in many of the passages already cited. Through this comparison, we begin to view the protagonist's struggle not as that of a liberator but that of a converter. There are powerful allegorical references to vision and blindness in western Judæo-Christian literature, as for instance, in the importance of sin and Divine punishment in Saul's conversion in the bible, or, in literature, the connections established between blindness and political and social corruption in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In "The Country of the Blind" the lack of sight is seen as directly responsible for a depletion in brain capacity.

### The biological right of ascendancy?

"Much of their imagination had shrivelled with their eyes," Nunez reflects (177). To see is automatically, via social programming, perceived as good, virtuous or advanced whereas to be without sight somehow ungodly, corrupt or backward and perhaps in this case a sign of racial, that is colour, discrimination without all the baggage that comes with it? – although in this case it will not escape the reader's notice that the disabling affliction of the valley members is phrased and portrayed in exactly the same form as other authors chose to portray the affliction of being black! This becomes particularly significant when considered in the light of other novels within the adventure-writing tradition. If these associations are pertinent, then the narrative has established itself as part of the tradition of colonial writers and heroes, and yet we shall see that there are significant differences. Far from the expected denouement, the protagonist is defeated and persecuted for the very sense that, he assumes, sets him apart and elevates him. In Wells's break from the genre, the civiliser is called uncivilised and infantile (ie. without language) and is forced to flee from a society that does not recognise the gift he wishes to offer/profit by. Surely this is a refusal by Wells to restate the frustrations of Caliban: "You taught me language and my profit on it / I know how to curse" (*The Tempest* 1.2)

At this point it is useful to compare Wells's use of language, his depiction of the indigenous population and its relation to the protagonist with the narrative conventions common in imperialist literary ideology.

### The right of ascendancy via language

One pillar of imperialist literary ideology that Wells tackles is the enfranchising power of language and its power to confer manhood. The relationship of the outsider to language is inverted; in the typical colonial adventure story the invader was a prophet but in "The Country of the Blind" he is awarded the same status as the one he initially ascribes to the indigenous population, that of the backward or arrested in development. Ironically, it is Nunez who becomes the hubristic babbling Nimrod. He is regarded by the tribal elders as possessing an "unformed mind" which has "got no senses yet" (178); in the rationale of their social system he is: "A wild man – using wild words. . . . Did you hear that – *Bogata*? His mind is hardly formed yet. He has only the beginnings of speech" (176). "He said Nunez [the outsider] must have been specially created to learn and serve the wisdom they had acquired and that for all his mental incoherency and stumbling behaviour he must have courage, and do his best to learn" (178). Also, he experiences the rhetoric or racial purity that caused the Portuguese to be ostracised, evident in such texts as Buchan's *Prester John*. The social response to the act of intermarriage is dismissal, disgust and an act of violence: "they held him as a being apart, an idiot, incompetent thing below the permissible level of man. . . . The young men were all angry at the idea of corrupting the race and one went so far as to revile and strike Nunez" (187).

### The right of ascendancy over a cuckoo culture?

The initial description of how the occupants of the valley turned to the outside world for a cure to their blindness and, in particular, the account of what they believe was its cause could be seen as patronising, and yet the description is so familiar and knowing in its sincerity that the reader finds their waywardness endearing, as an adult observing the antics of a relation's child.

It was to seek some charm or antidote against this plague of blindness that he had with fatigue and danger and difficulty returned down the gorge. In those days, in such cases, men did not think of germs and infections but of sins. (168)

This description not only fulfils a narrative purpose of explanation but also ironises and inverts the imperialist narrative. The country of the blind is occupied by a nominal cuckoo culture of settler refugees from the outside world (by the mere fact of

remaining unknown, the culture is vulnerable to the rhetoric of ascendancy contained in the colonial paradigm). The implication of this is that the civilised man, if placed in a vacuum, loses sight of his civilising heritage and, disturbingly, this population of men, because of a mere fifteen-generation gap, is both savage and civilised, presenting an insoluble dilemma to the invader who seeks to dominate and rule. The dilemma is: how can a man be self-assured and confident of the longevity of his cultural inheritance, which leads him to believe he can enlighten, if the savages he confronts are his brothers, but have lost their way in only fifteen generations? Like the blind people, he is not open to knowledge, in the sense that his belief in the great gift of sight, which he attempts to bestow upon them, is greeted with the same contempt as he greets their conclusion that the only way to liberate him is to remove this very gift. The two responses become indeterminable from each other; the assumption of a known self in a polemic with other is rejected as the polemic collapses. The true horror emerges when the reader realises that the attempts to blind Nunez, far from being a barbaric act, find a justification amongst some of the central tenets of imperial rhetoric. In the well-honed imperialist paradigm, there exists a multiplicity of biblical justifications for its proponents' actions in the name of conversion and the greater glory of God – such as “If they right eye offends thee, pluck it out”. Part of Wells's genius is that he allows the reader to read both parties' arrogance and dogmatism. Therefore we question the relevance of the mountaineer's gift that we previously considered so sacrosanct. By this act, we are questioning the previous 400 years of European imperialist history, in the sense that the gifts we bestowed may have been about as appropriate to the tribes of the non-European world as the concepts of vision and lack of vision to a nation which cannot comprehend sight. As Wells writes:

“Has no one told you, ‘In the Country of the Blind the One-eyed man is King?’”  
“What is Blind?” asked the blind man carelessly [ie. without a care] over his shoulder.” (134)

Wells creates irony on many levels by aping the proverbial Pilate when he asked “What is Truth?”. He relates this glib foolishness of an unbeliever, in the Christian myth, to the ignorance and rejection of truth by the blind in his story and also parallels the fear and frustrated rejection of the news of sight, by the blind, with their past fear and frustration of being blinded some fifteen generations before.

Wells is thus creating a maelstrom of resonance and repercussion which functions internally within the tale and externally bridging the gap between the two motifs, therefore allowing them to exist and function simultaneously. Because this Christian myth is referred to through the sentence structure, not by name, the reader is not

distracted by a new set of allusions and is left to ponder the core of the dilemma. Truth is reinvented as sight, which provokes two questions: is the importance of sight relative to more than ownership of it, and does it have to be relevant before it is precious? In these considerations, the reader's thoughts return to a consideration of the relevance of knowledge given to all invaded peoples throughout the colonial world. The reader questions the rhetoric that damned Pilate's dismissal of Truth and, once he does that, he may see the hubris of man on both sides, and a common Human nature in which there exists no hierarchy or superiority of the Christian over the pagan/native. In this interrogation, Wells avoids naivete and over-simplicity by superficially making culpability not a thing that is apportioned but one that is shared, and yet he allows European avaricious culture to damn itself in an act of unsuspecting cannibalisation when he guides the reader's ethical conclusions. Wells writes in the full knowledge that our literature venerates ideas of cuckoo culture and a Eurocentric social genesis. Culpability which is seemingly shared by the invader and the invaded is actually apportioned to the former because, in this case, the invaded is simply a dislocated manifestation of the invader, albeit by some 15 generations. Therefore, Wells ironically turns the self-justifying cult of the imperialist invader upon itself, and in this trial the conqueror is conquered!

The reflections of the fleeing Nunez serve as a fitting epitaph to imperialists' attempts to occupy the new found land. Although he recognises that the horror he felt at the prospect of being blinded would be exactly the horror and powerlessness that the indigenous peoples would feel by being governed by a race who had an extra sense, that of sight, he refuses to admit that he is not necessary or beneficial to the Blind's society, and, in the grip of failure, resorts to a tried and tested formula of religious dogma: “It seemed to him that before this splendour he, and this blind world in the valley, and his love, after all, were no more than a pit of sin” (145). This is Wells's narrative tour de force, portraying the confident imperialist buoyed up by his rhetoric, of the superiority of colour and knowledge, coming into contact with an alien environment that places no value upon his treasures or his offer to make them subordinate for the greater glory of empire. In this situation, almost unprecedented in colonial history, Nunez does not return with an army to take power by force or commit acts of genocide, but provides a looking glass through which to see the inverted picture of the gifts of western civilisation being not only violently rejected but rejected with complete impunity.

Therefore, in H.G. Wells's “The Country of the Blind”, the visionary is cast out, the

invader becomes the interloper and the ideology of the imperialist is turned upon itself in both an ironic and provocative way. The irony may be short-lived but the horror is profound and haunting. Unpredictably, in a seemingly familiar imperialist literary formula, it is the western reader with all his cultural baggage and iconoclasm, who is made to run and hide, to protect what he treasures, and justify and interrogate his own right to life under the gaze of an unrelenting, voracious and ruthless power, the ideology and practice of subordination and domination.

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