

THE WONDERFUL VISIT AND THE WILDE TRIAL

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I.

The Wonderful Visit (1895), as Wells noted in the preface to the Atlantic Edition of the story, employs ‘the method of bringing some fantastically possible thing into a commonplace group of people, and working out their reactions with the completest gravity and reasonableness.’¹ It is a fantastic story in the sense that the protagonist is an angel, who cannot be explained with scientific reasoning. It is also a realistic one since the main narrative is about the exotic figure’s adventure in an English country village, Siddermorton, in the late-Victorian period. Furthermore, this romance is an excellent satire about society.

The satire in the text is effectively achieved by the author’s dextrous use of the fantastic and the realistic features. The narrator of the text does not draw a clear boundary between the fantastic and the realistic. The narrator dismisses the nagging question of possibility and probability of his story: ‘Explanations, I repeat, I have always considered the peculiar fallacy of this scientific age’.² The narrator, by using the writing of fantastic or unexplainable events as an excuse, conveniently draws the line between unexplainable fantasy and undeniable fact:

What had jolted these twin universes together so that the Angel had fallen suddenly into Sidderford, neither the Angel nor the Vicar could tell. Nor for the matter of that could the author of this story. The author is concerned with the facts of the case, and has neither the desire nor the confidence to explain them. (138-39)

A similar narrative technique is employed again in a more complicated way in *The Sea Lady* (1902) which was published seven years after *The Wonderful Visit*. The narrator avoids the troublesome burden of pseudo-scientific explanation about a fantastic figure, the mermaid, by posing as a mere reporter whose narrative is constructed from his interviews with witnesses of the mermaid. The narrator’s seemingly objective narrative is replete with his doubts over the possibility of the existence of the mermaid.³ However he avoids revealing his anxiety to the reader

¹ H. G. Wells, ‘Preface to Volume 1’, in *The Time Machine, The Wonderful Visit and Other Stories* (New York: Scribner’s, 1924), xxiii. See also Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), 112.

² H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine, The Wonderful Visit and Other Stories* (New York: Scribner’s, 1924), 158. Subsequent quotations to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

³ Bruce Sommerville, ‘A Tissue of Moonshine: The Mechanics of Deception in *The Sea Lady*’, in *The Wellsian: Selected Essays on H. G. Wells*, ed. John S. Partington ([Oss, Netherlands]: Equilibris, 2003), 123-30.

through the ambiguity of his stance in explaining whether the narrative is about a fantastic event or a well-planned hoax.

Wells's scientific romances reserve at least one whole chapter for pseudo-scientific explanations. For instance, one of the chapters of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) – titled 'Doctor Moreau Explains' – is given over to Moreau's scientific discourse in accelerating the process of evolution through tissue transplantation. *The Time Machine* (1895) also begins with the Time Traveller's small lecture to his dinner guests on the fourth dimension. Yet, *The Wonderful Visit* is similar to *The Sea Lady* in terms of the textual reliance on fantastic events without scientific features. In both texts, reasonable explanations are happily denied by the narrators on the grounds that they are too fantastic to be explained. In *The Wonderful Visit*, the whole story is related by an anonymous narrator who collects information about the Angel from the villagers and reconstructs the narrative in a half-fictional and half-nonfictional style. Restraining himself from clarifying whether the dubious guest of the Vicar is an angel or a young man called 'Mr Angel', the narrator, posing as a mere collector of information, leaves the intriguing question of the probability of the story to the reader's decision.

The blurred boundary between the fantastic and the realistic generates a narrative field which allows the author to express his own severe comments on society without jeopardising his social status as an emerging author. When Wells wrote and published *The Wonderful Visit* – from May to September 1895 – he had already been received as an author by not only the reading public but also the critics for the generally acclaimed romance, *The Time Machine*. Wells's correspondence to publishers written in the 1890s demonstrates that he was conscious of the reading public's positive responses as well as the artistic values of his works. In a letter in which he was asking for the publication of *The Wheels of Chance* (1896), Wells strongly persuades the editor of the magazine that the book will 'appeal to a certain section of the public.'⁴

John Huntington considers *The Time Machine* as an important book on the grounds that 'it manages to voice Wells's social aspirations and his deep social angers, while still maintaining the decorum required for its author to become a successful writer'.⁵ In the text, Wells can utilise fantasy elements of the romance genre in order to explore contemporary class issues without endangering his social position as an author. Likewise, the fantastic elements of *The Wonderful Visit* make it possible for Wells to describe, mock and satire the chaos of *fin-de-siècle*

⁴ In this letter Wells writes: 'The details of bicycle riding, carefully done from experience & the passing glimpses of characteristic scenery of the south of England, should, I think, appeal to a certain section of the public' (H. G. Wells, letter to an unknown correspondent, 2 January 1896, in *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells: Volume 1, 1880-1903*, ed. David C. Smith [London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998], 256-57 [257]).

⁵ John Huntington, 'The Time Machine and Wells's Social Trajectory', in *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine*, ed. George Slusser, Patrick Parrinder and Danièle Chatelain (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 97-109 (97).

England without the risk of being accused of attacking the social codes promulgated by the late-Victorian middle-class readership. The year 1895 was an eventful one in English history, and has been characterised by two events: the introduction of Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892) to English readers, and the trial and conviction of Oscar Wilde. Diagnosing *fin-de-siècle* geniuses in art and literature as degenerate, Nordau condemned Oscar Wilde as an English counterpart of the French Decadent artists.⁶ The conviction and imprisonment of Wilde helped to justify Nordau's accusation and signalled the eternal triumph of late-Victorian philistines. Written after the English translation of *Degeneration* and during Wilde's trial and conviction, *The Wonderful Visit* features two important events within the ambiguous narrative form. It demonstrates Wells's reaction against Nordau's *Degeneration* and, as John Stokes briefly mentions, it also satirises and at the same time defends *fin-de-siècle* Aestheticism by alluding to Wilde's conviction in the text.⁷

II.

On the 1 May 1895, Wells wrote to Dent, saying that he had written 10,000 words of *The Wonderful Visit* and that 'I could probably let you have the complete story by the end of this month'⁸ and in early September of that year Wells published it.⁹ Oscar Wilde was convicted on 8 April of the same year and imprisoned in late May. Even though there is no clear record of the exact date when Wells completed the romance, it is obvious that *The Wonderful Visit* was written during the Wilde trials and published after his imprisonment. What Wells achieves in this romance is to expose the late-Victorian philistines' hysterical reaction against anything unconventional.

The narrator's collection of the villagers' various opinions about the Angel lays bare the social assumptions that if an object is unknown to society, it should be defined and categorised by social authorities. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault avers that in nineteenth century pathology, 'the formation of objects' of discourse is carried out by such authorities as medicine, penal law, religious authorities, and literary and art criticism.¹⁰ These authorities participate in formulating discourses within 'discursive relations' or 'discursive

⁶ Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. George L. Mosse (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 317.

⁷ John Stokes, 'Introduction', in *Fin de Siècle / Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Stokes (London: Macmillan, 1992), 4.

⁸ H. G. Wells to J. M. Dent, 1 May 1895, in *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, 239-40 (239).

⁹ J. R. Hammond, *An H. G. Wells's Chronology* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 26.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1989), 46: 'Medicine defines madness as an object; the penal law applies such notions as criminality and heredity to these objects. The religious authority practises the direction of conscience with a view of understanding of individual; literary and art criticism considers the work as a language that had to be interpreted'.

fields' which consist of language, social institutions, subjectivity and power (Foucault 1989, 46). The subject, which is both observing and speaking of an object, is also governed by the discursive field. In late nineteenth-century England, as Foucault continues, journalism and literature were added to the authorities in discursive fields (Foucault 1989, 46).

In *The Wonderful Visit*, the villagers project onto the Angel conventions such as their reading habits and class background. Relying on the concept of degeneration promulgated by Nordau and Cesare Lombroso, the village doctor, Dr Crump, when he first sees the Angel, considers him as effeminate, mad, deformed and degenerate, and later he accuses the Angel of being a fraud or a criminal. Lombroso links the deformed body of man with criminality. Applying and developing Lombroso's idea, Nordau maintains that mental development is closely related to physical growth, and consequently, the deformed body signifies the tendency of degeneracy and madness.¹¹ Dr Crump diagnoses the Angel as 'a mattoid' and finds the Angel's insanity in his deformed body: 'Marks of mental weakness. [...] I've just been reading all about it – in Nordau. No doubt his odd deformity gave him an idea' (155). Mrs Jehoram, who is 'the autocratic authority in Siddermorton upon all questions of art, music and belles-lettres' because her late husband was a minor poet, judges the Angel as a genius of music in disguise (213). The village's aristocrat, Lady Hammergallow, guesses that the Angel is the Vicar's hidden son by projecting Nathaniel Hawthorne's romance, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) into the situation. All of these interpretations of the Angel represent nineteenth-century authorities which attempt to find objects of their discourse and categorise them, and then make them definable and visible. The Angel becomes the object of their discourses, and their act of interpreting the Angel is the 'formation of the object'. Hence, by juxtaposing the characters' reading habits and class backgrounds with their judgements, the text reinforces the context of the village authorities' search for the object of their discourse.

Also the author demonstrates that no matter how hard the characters attempt to define the identity of the Angel, the text presents their wondering and reasoning from a distance. In contrast to Dr Crump's attempt to frame the Angel in the discourse of degeneration and to define him as degenerate, the text describes the process in which the Angel is degenerated from a highly evolved creature to a human form after his short stay in the human world. The text asserts that the world of humans is less-evolved in comparison with the land of the Angel, and thus it mocks Dr Crump's prejudice.

Thus, the text can be read as a fable of the public's discourse formations which is broadly about the unknown and revolutionary, and more specifically about late nineteenth-century Aestheticism, Decadent writers and sexual issues

¹¹ See George L. Mosse, 'Max Nordau and His Degeneration', in *Degeneration*, by Max Nordau, trans. and intro. George L. Mosse (London: University of Nebraska Press), xx-xxi. See also, Nordau, *Degeneration*, 15-18.

which had begun to emerge as public discourses through Oscar Wilde's scandal in 1895. According to the biographies of Wells and his autobiography, he did not have a close relationship with Wilde.¹² However, Wilde is known to have acknowledged uniqueness in Wells's prose and Wells paid tribute to Wilde in return. Wilde drew W. E. Henley's attention to Wells's essays and short stories.¹³ In addition, according to David C. Smith's research, Wilde asked Robert Ross to send him Wells's recent books to read in Reading Gaol, and after Wilde's death, Wells played an important role in obtaining the funds to raise the monument on Wilde's grave in the Père Lachaise cemetery.¹⁴ Wells also remembered that Oscar Wilde was one of those who liked his essay, *The Rediscovery of the Unique* (1891).¹⁵ Wells's review of Wilde's drama, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), testifies to his high estimation of 'humours dealing with [Victorian] theatrical conventions'¹⁶ remarkably demonstrated in Wilde's play. Wells's approval of Wilde as a literary figure is also shown in his proposal to include Wilde as a member in the Academy of Letters, which was considered by the Academy on 6 November 1897.¹⁷

Wells deplores the philistinism of the late-Victorian public opinion of literature. In his review, 'Jude the Obscure' (1895), Wells writes:

No novelist, however respectable, can deem himself altogether safe to-day from a charge of morbidity and unhealthiness. [...] They outdo one another in their alertness for anything they can by any possible measure of language contrive to call decadent.¹⁸

¹² Records about Oscar Wilde and his letters show that the emergent young writer Wells did not attract Wilde's attention so much. For instance, to Frank Harris's question about Wells, Wilde simply answers, 'A Scientific Jules Verne'; see Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde: Including My Memories of Oscar Wilde by George Bernard Shaw and Introductory Note by Lyle Blair* (Westport: Greenwood, 1958), 279.

¹³ John Batchelor, *H. G. Wells*, 8: 'Henley commissioned *The Time Machine* partly because Oscar Wilde had recommended Wells to his attention'.

¹⁴ David C. Smith, 'Introduction', in *Select Conversations With an Uncle*, by H. G. Wells, ed. David C. Smith and Patrick Parrinder (London: University of North London Press, 1992), 9-17 (10-11; 16).

¹⁵ H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866)*, 2 vols. (London: Gollancz / Cresset, 1934), I: 359: 'Harris broke up the type of that second article ['The Universe Rigid'] and it is lost, but one of two people, Oscar Wilde was one, so praised to him *The Rediscovery of the Unique*, that he may have had afterthoughts about the merits of the rejected stuff'.

¹⁶ H. G. Wells, 'The Importance of Being Ernest', in *H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism*, ed. Patrick Parrinder and Robert M. Philmus (Sussex: Harvester, 1980), 27-31 (27).

¹⁷ Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, eds., *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 1002n.

¹⁸ H. G. Wells, 'Jude the Obscure', in *H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism*, 79-82 (80).

This statement targets contemporary philistine authorities, who frame every artist – from Thomas Hardy to Wilde – as being acquainted with ‘morbidity’ and ‘degeneracy’. There is another subtle allusion to the Wilde trial in the 1924 introduction to the Atlantic Edition of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Wells revealed that in writing this romance, he had been thinking of the trial of Wilde:

‘The Island of Doctor Moreau’ was written in 1895, and it was begun while ‘The Wonderful Visit’ was still in hand. There was a scandalous trial about that time, the graceless and pitiless downfall of a man of genius.¹⁹

This recollection clearly demonstrates that the Wilde trial and the writing of *The Wonderful Visit* overlapped and the former’s sudden downfall immensely impacted the young Wells.

Throughout *The Wonderful Visit*, the formation of the contemporary discourse of Aestheticism and Decadence, strengthened by Oscar Wilde’s trial, is implied in the villagers’ various opinions about the Angel. The discussion between Mrs Jehoram and Mrs Mendham indicates the reference to Wilde’s conviction:

‘Yes. But the story is plausible. If this Mr Angel were someone very clever and eccentric –’

‘He would have to be *very* eccentric to dress as he did. There are degrees and limits, dear’ [...]

‘You see, dear,’ said Mrs Jehoram, putting down the opera-glass. ‘What I was going to say was, that possibly he might be a genius in disguise.’

‘If you can call next door to nothing a disguise.’

‘No doubt it was eccentric. But I’ve seen children in little blouses, not at all unlike him. So many clever people *are* peculiar in their dress and manners. [...] No – I cling to the genius theory. Especially after the playing. I’m sure the creature is original. Perhaps very amusing. In fact, I intend to ask the Vicar to introduce me.’

[...]

‘I’m afraid you’re rash’ said Mrs Mendham. ‘Geniuses and people of that kind are all very well in London. But here – at the Vicarage.’

‘We are going to educate the folks. I love originality. At any rate I mean to see him.’

¹⁹ H. G. Wells, ‘Preface to Volume 2’, in *The Works of H. G. Wells: Atlantic Edition, Volume II: The Island of Doctor Moreau [and] The Sleeper Awakes* (New York: Scribner’s, 1924), ix-xiii (ix).

‘Take care you don’t see too much of him,’ said Mrs Mendham. ‘I’ve heard the fashion is quite changing. I understand that some of the very best people have decided the genius is not to be encouraged any more. These recent scandals....’

‘Only in literature, I can assure you, dear. In music...’ (213-15).

These two quotations demonstrate that Wells deliberately insinuates Wilde’s conviction in the text without mentioning his name. Their conversation revolves on several issues: eccentricity in dress, a genius in disguise, a genius in music and the recent scandals in literature. Mrs Jehoram’s reference to clever people in outlandish dresses and with eccentric behaviours echoes Nordau’s condemnation of Wilde as the ‘English representative among the [degenerate and decadent] “aesthetes”’. In particular, Nordau reviles Wilde’s eccentric costume as a symptom of hysteria and degeneracy.²⁰ Mrs Mendham’s conservative statement that ‘some of the very best people have decided the genius is not to be encouraged any more,’ and Mrs Jeroham’s assurance that the recent scandals are in the milieu of *littérateurs*, and not in that of the musicians, clearly imply the Wilde case.

The Angel’s ambiguous sexuality also suggests the *fin-de-siècle* decadent aesthetes’ wilful violation of the philistines’ conventional ideology of clear-cut sexuality: masculinity in men and femininity in women. As Ed Cohen argues, by the time of Wilde’s conviction, Wilde had been considered as not only ‘the sexual deviant’ but also ‘a new “type” of male sexual actor: “the homosexual”’.²¹ Wells playfully infringes the sexuality of the Angel and in doing so allegorises the Angel as Wilde.

The narrative seems to confirm the Christian idea of angels as holy and asexual beings as clearly mentioned in the Bible. According to the explanation of Wells’s angel, which echoes the gospel of St Mark,²² in the world of angels the division between males and females does not exist: ‘there is neither pain nor trouble nor death, marrying nor giving in marriage, birth nor forgetting’ (127). However, by parodying St Mark’s statement, Wells embeds dubiousness and ambiguity with regard to the matter of the sexuality of angels, which is marked in literature. Wells’s narrator makes it clear to the reader that the Angel of his narrative is not the holy creature described in the Bible. It is the angel of Art; it is ‘neither the Angel of religious feeling nor the Angel of popular belief’ (141). It is the sensual figure depicted in Italian Renaissance painting and sculpture: ‘the Angel of Italian art, polychromatic and gay’ (143). The angels of Italian

²⁰ Nordau, *Degeneration*, 317.

²¹ Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1-2.

²² Mark, 12: 25: ‘For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.’ See *The Bible: Authorised King James Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 62.

Renaissance are sexually ambiguous: depending on the perspective, they can be seen as masculine females and at the same time as effeminate males. Against the author's intention, Gabriel's answer to Adam's question in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) generates the ambiguity about Angels' sexuality rather than the plain answer.²³ Wells develops the elusiveness of the literary angel's sexuality in his playful representation of the Angel in this romance.

The manner in which *The Wonderful Visit* presents him to the reader shows that the Angel is an effeminate male rather than a masculine female. When the narrator explains the difference between the Angel of religion and the Angel of his narrative, he specifies that the former has a female sexuality and the latter a male sexuality. The angel of religious feelings is 'alone among the angelic hosts in being distinctly feminine' (141-42). On the contrary, the narrator presupposes that 'the Angel the Vicar shot' is male by giving him a male pronoun: 'He comes from the land of beautiful dreams'; 'at best he is a popish creature' (143). It is also described that he has never seen women. When he sees Mrs Mendham and her daughters, the Angel says, 'How grotesque, [...] And such quaint shapes!' (145). His ignorance of 'the ladies' insinuates that his world is devoid of females and this produces the dynamic of a sexuality initiated only by males. During his sojourn in the village, he falls in love with Delia. This also leads the reader to believe his gender to be male.

Even though it is not expressed in the text explicitly, Mendham's suspicion of the discreditable relationship between the Vicar and the Angel suggests homoerotic attachment. Here is the Curate's conversation with his wife:

'Foreign looking, with a big bright coloured face and long brown hair... It can't have been cut for months!' The Curate put his studs carefully upon the shelf of the dressing-table. 'And a kind of staring look about his eyes, and a simpering smile. Quite a silly looking person. Effeminate.'

'But who *can* he be?' said Mrs Mendham.

'I can't imagine, my dear. Nor where he came from. He might be a chorister or something of that sort.'

'But why should he be about the shrubbery... in that dreadful costume?'

'I don't know. The Vicar gave no explanation. He simply said, "Mendham, this is an Angel."'

'I wonder if he drinks... They may have been bathing near the spring, of course,' reflected Mrs Mendham. 'But I noticed no other clothes on his arm.'

The Curate sat down on his bed and unlaced his boots.

²³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Essex: Pearson, 1988), Book VIII, 614-29.

‘It’s a perfect mystery to me, my dear’ (Flick, flick of laces.)
 ‘Hallucination is the only charitable—’
 ‘You are sure, George, that it was *not* a woman.’
 ‘Perfectly,’ said the Curate.
 ‘I know what men are, of course.’
 ‘It was a young man of nineteen or twenty,’ said the Curate.
 ‘I can’t understand it,’ said Mrs. Mendham. (175-76)

Behind the dialogue between Mendham and Mrs Mendham, the text implies a homosexual relationship between the Angel and the Vicar. Until the end of their conversation, the couple remain puzzled. Yet, by making the simple couple ponder, the author leads the reader to notice the connotation of the unspeakable affair between two men.

Mendham’s inference that the Angel could be a chorister boy is also a textual reference to the tendency of Decadent literature to tackle homoerotic love. The dubious relationship between the Vicar and the Angel – or chorister boy – is the subject-matter of the short story, ‘The Priest and the Acolyte’, anonymously published in the decadent magazine, *The Chameleon* (1894),²⁴ and which was also used by the prosecutors against Wilde in his trial.²⁵ Also, the acolyte in this short story is described as ‘a small white figure – there, with his bare feet on the moon-blanching turf, dressed only in his long white night-shirt’.²⁶ Likewise, the narrator of *The Wonderful Visit* describes the Angel as a ‘slight of figure, scarcely five feet high, and with a beautiful, almost effeminate face’, and to be ‘robed simply in a purple-wrought saffron blouse, bare kneed and bare-footed’ (141). Even though there is no evidence that Wells read the story, the description of the effeminate and young acolyte’s dress and appearance are similar to the way in which the Angel’s attire and appearance are depicted in *The Wonderful Visit*.

According to Linda Dowling, in late-Victorian society, ‘the decadent dandy’ was considered as the parallel to the masculinity of the ‘new women’.²⁷ Through George Harringay’s comment on the Angel’s appearance, the text implies that the Angel’s long curly hair is a strong reference to the features of decadent dandyism: ‘It’s the effeminate man who makes the masculine woman. When the glory of a man is his hair, what’s a woman to do? And when men go running about with beautiful hectic dabs’ (223). Harringay’s complaint reflects the uneasy late-Victorian response to the chaotic states of contemporary sexuality. With the

²⁴ [John Francis Bloxam], ‘The Priest and the Acolyte’, in *The Chameleon* (London: Gay and Bird, 1894), 29-47.

²⁵ Merlin Holland, *Irish Peacock & Scarlet Marguess: The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003), 68-73.

²⁶ [Bloxham], ‘The Priest and the Acolyte’, 34.

²⁷ Linda Dowling, ‘The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 33 (1979), 434-453 (435; 444).

frequent reference to the Angel's costume as 'a peculiar costume', 'a very defective costume' (161), his long and curly hair could also be a strong allusion to Wilde's own provoking Dionysian locks and excessive hairstyles for which he was famous.

However, the Angel's dandy-like costume is not under the author's attack. The Angel's simple dress is contrasted to the typical late-Victorian costume represented by the gentlemanly outfit of the Vicar and the Curate Mendham. In order to do this, Wells provides a directory of the items which the Angel is to wear: 'a shirt, rippled down the back (to accommodate the wings), socks, shoes – Vicar's dress shoes – collar, tie, and light overcoat' (147). Also, Wells juxtaposes the scene, in which the Curate Mendham's conversation with his wife (quoted above) takes place, with the scene of the Curate's undressing. By describing the process in which Mendham unclothes in detail, and by contrasting the Curate's contempt against the Angel's simple attire with his own endlessly layered garments and all the accessories such as the boots, the collar and the studs (175-76), Wells expresses his detestation of the late-Victorian culture of over-dressing.

Furthermore, Wells believes that like the confining social institutions, the clothes also restrict human freedom. For instance, in *Joan and Peter* (1918), Wells comments on women's dress in the Victorian age as restricting. In this novel, Wells affirms that the over-dressing is the cause of Dolly's death. When she falls into the sea by accident, she was 'tugged back by her clothes' and until she dies, the dress is described as 'a leaden burden'.²⁸ Through Dolly's reasoning, Wells contemplates: 'Could she get some of them off? Not in this rough water. It would be more exhausting than helpful. Clothes ought to be easier to get off; not so much tying and pinning'.²⁹ Like Dolly's dress, the Angel's Victorian garment becomes his prison and threatens to suffocate him. When putting on the vicar's coat, he feels pain on his wings. Also the Angel 'looks less radiant in the Vicar's clothes, than he had done upon the moor when dressed in saffron' (147). After wearing the vicar's suits for a while, the Angel's wings, the symbol of freedom, become degenerate and thereby he is wrapped by the human world as he desperately exclaims: 'This world [...] wraps me round and swallows me up. My wings grow shrivelled and useless. Soon I shall be nothing more than a crippled man' (254). Hence, the narrative allegorises the Victorian garment as the prison confining the Angel in the human world.

Nordau suggests that it is the duty of philistine physicians and elitists to recognise the degenerates that contaminate society at a glance and banish them from the healthy body of the community.³⁰ Considering himself to represent 'the

²⁸ H. G. Wells, *The Works of H. G. Wells: Atlantic Edition, Volume XXIII: Joan and Peter: The Novel of an Education I* (New York: Scribner's, 1927), 80; 81.

²⁹ Wells, *Joan and Peter*, 80.

³⁰ Nordau, *Degeneration*, 556: 'It is the sacred duty of all healthy and moral men to take part in the work of protecting and saving those who are not already too deeply diseased'.

Man of Science’,³¹ the healthy and moral physician propounded by Nordau, Dr Crump thinks that he is the person who can prevent the Angel from corrupting the healthy villagers. The local doctor’s attempt to find evidence of the Angel being a clever impostor reveals the limitation of his understanding:

‘Oh! But come!’ said the Doctor. ‘You’ll tell me next your official robes are not white and that you can’t play the harp.’

‘There’s no such thing as white in the Angelic Land,’ said the Angel. ‘It’s that queer blank colour you get by mixing up all the others.’

‘Why, my dear Sir!’ said the doctor, suddenly altering his tone, ‘you positively know nothing about the Land you come from. White’s the very essence of it.’

[...]

‘Look, here,’ said Crump, and getting up, he went to the sideboard on which a copy of the *Parish Magazine* was lying. [...] ‘Here’s some *real* angels,’ he said. [...]

‘Oh! But really!’ said the Angel, ‘those are not angels at all.’

[...]

‘If these are angels,’ said the Angel, ‘then I have never been in the Angelic Land.’

‘Precisely,’ said Crump, ineffably self-satisfied; ‘that was just what I was getting at.’ (95-96)

This scene demonstrates that the two interlocutors live in different worlds, and accordingly, they can not comprehend each other. Since the doctor has no insight into understanding the world of fantasy, he thinks of what the Angel said, ‘then I have never been in the Angelic Land’, as evidence to accuse the Angel of being deranged, or as a clever fraud. Here, the doctor speaks the language of the ‘authority’ of the human world, and the Angel answers the doctor’s question by using the knowledge of his fantastic world. What is ‘natural’ to the world of the man is ‘unnatural’ to the world of the Angel. This is also noted in the second trial of Wilde:

Gill: Is it not clear that the love described related to natural love and unnatural love?

Wilde: No.

Gill: What is the ‘Love that dare not speak its name’?

³¹ This is the title of chapter 13 of *The Wonderful Visit*.

Wilde: [...] It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it.³²

From the perspective of the human world, the Angel is not ‘natural’, so in the world of the law, art is not ‘natural’. Accordingly, like the Angel, who should be removed from the land of the humans, the artist Wilde should be mocked and put in the pillory. Like Wilde, the Angel has to choose between two options as Dr Crump concludes: ‘either clap you into a prison, if you go back on your story, or into a madhouse if you don’t’ (245). Here, Dr Crump repeats Nordau’s solution to the degenerate decadent: ‘The normal man, with his clear-mind, logical thought, sound judgement, and strong will [...] leaves to the impotent degenerates at most the shelter of the hospital, lunatic asylum, and prison, in the contemptuous pity’.³³ The late-Victorian penal authority diagnoses Wilde’s scandal as a symptom of moral subversion, which the healthy middle class should face and fight against.

The Angel’s banishment from the village clearly hints at Wilde’s ostracism and downfall. At the beginning of the story there are implications that the narrative accuses society of hatred for anything different according to its rules. The following passage implies that society’s attempt to eliminate the eccentric creatures should be considered a criminal act:

In the name of Science. And this is right and as it should be; eccentricity, in fact, is immorality – think over it again if you do not think so now – just as eccentricity is one’s way of thinking is madness (I defy you to find another definition that will fit all the cases of either); and if a species is rare it follows that it is not Fitted to Survive. The collector is after all merely like the foot soldier in the days of heavy armour – he leaves the combatant, alone and cuts the throats of those who are overthrown (127).

Here, the narrator derides Nordau’s and his fellow scientists’ false accusation of *fin-de-siècle* Aestheticism. The rare and eccentric species mercilessly crushed by the soldier-like scientists represent the artist falsely condemned and banished by the philistines. Like the eccentric species, the Angel – and Wilde – are defined as degenerate, mad and immoral, and are ‘overthrown’ by authorities of society: specifically, science and religion.

In *The Logic of Fantasy*, John Huntington argues that this romance can be seen as ‘a reconsideration of [civilisation, rather than a] satire on it’, and since the world that the Angel comes from is not a concretely realised antithesis of the

³² Chris White, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999), 57.

³³ Nordau, *Degeneration*, 541.

human world, the reconsideration remains an ideal.³⁴ As Huntington points out, the Angel's land remains a pure fantastic world in the text. Yet, what the critic does not notice is the importance of the pure fantasticality of the Angel and his land because the text achieves satirical effects through using the fantasticality of the story. By demonstrating that the Angel comes from the fantastic world and by describing the way the village authorities desperately endeavour to define the Angel from their limited points of view, Wells in fact succeeds in making a statement about fictionality of social authorities' discourse about social issues. Furthermore, through the subtle allegorisation of the Angel as Wilde, the text satirises contemporary reactions to Oscar Wilde's scandal and decadent poses.

³⁴ John Huntington, *The Logic of Fantasy: H. G. Wells and Science Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 26.