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Abstract: In H.G. Wells's essay "Morals and Civilisation" (1897), Wells argued that the "man beast" had gradually adapted itself to a "corporate existence" finding ultimate expression in the modern city. Whilst the metropolis is often seen as the apotheosis of human-made artifice, Wells's depictions of urban environments in his fin de siècle novels and stories (from *The War of the Worlds* to "The Empire of the Ants") often place animals in a central role. Wells's animal preoccupations provide a vehicle not only for dystopian fears about the city's future, but a vivid reimagining of metropolitan life in the present. In Wells's urban imaginary, human, animal, organic, and inorganic presences meet, clash, and compete.

In H. G. Wells's novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), the book's protagonist Edward Prendick returns to Britain after spending almost a year trapped on a tropical island where horrific experiments have created a community of animal-human hybrids. Yet Prendick's return to London gives him no respite from his beastly visions. "When I lived in London," he relates, "the horror was well-nigh insupportable." "I would go out into the streets to fight with my delusion, and prowling women would mew after me, furtive craving men glanced jealously at me, weary pale workers go coughing by me, with tired eyes and eager paces like wounded deer dripping blood."[1] In short, what Prendick calls the "confusion of cities and multitudes" seems to confront him again with the disturbing animality of human figures. The scene in London is a brief one and comes towards the end of *Moreau*. It is not, ostensibly, an urban novel, and its largely tropical setting and its concern with racial

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physiognomy has, correctly, encouraged a range of postcolonial readings.[2] Yet the confusing, busy city that so disturbs Prendick (he keeps imagining the city crowds transforming into the "Beast Folk" of Moreau's island) is an important interpretative paradigm through which to read Wells's wider representations of metropolitan civilization in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Throughout these writings, Wells would return to a vision of the city, not as the triumphal proof of human victory over nature, but as a picture of disturbing bestiality. Whilst Wells could (and did) figure the city as a space of technological progress, it also became, in his writings, the apotheosis of the late-Victorian Darwinian ecosystem, fought over by competing urban beasts.

For Wells, the city became a focus in these texts for exploring nonhuman forms of life; alternative "civilisations," these life-forms provided both a challenge to the dominance of the late-Victorian imperial metropolis, and a strange parallel to it. The forms of nonhuman life represented by extraterrestrial aliens, parasites, scavengers, and insects highlight the terrifying precarity of the civilized, modern city. Yet the industry, success, and aggression offered by these visions of nonhuman life also hold up a mirror to the busy, bustling, and globally connected city of the fin de siècle. In the novels *The War of the Worlds* (1898), *The First Men on the Moon* (1901), and the short story "The Empire of the Ants" (1905), nonhuman societies form both a threat to urban, cosmopolitan life and a perverse, parodic copy of it. These fictions can of course be read in the context of what Stephen Arata has termed "fearful reversal" narratives, where the return of the colonial repressed threatens the "civilised" metropole (Arata identifies the aliens of *The War of the Worlds* with a "nightmarish vision" of the colonized other).[3] What Wells identifies as the "coming beast" provides a deeper and more foundational challenge to the modern city, however. These texts embody two distinct anxieties for the late-Victorian reader. Firstly, the "ant cities" of the lunar Selenites in *The First Men on the Moon* or the killer ants in "Empire of the Ants" represent an alternative, threatening, and hostile civilization. Secondly, the human city itself is prone to *its own* organic decay in these writings, standing at the mercy of rogue pathogens, microorganisms, and invertebrates. The publication of these fictions in popular, cosmopolitan journals further offers, I argue, an

important insight into the way the nonhuman city is conceived by Wells. The publication of *The First Men on the Moon* and "The Empire of the Ants" in *The Strand Magazine* frames the texts in the context of an urban readership, in which tales of London, popular science (often featuring animals), readers' letters, advertisements, and adventure stories are juxtaposed in a print environment that reflects the city in which *The Strand* was printed and distributed.[4] The publication of these texts in this environment reflects the way in which Wells's stories are dependent on an urban milieu in which assumptions about the stability of the modern city, its culture and institutions, are repeatedly challenged by Wells's disruptive nonhuman antagonists.

Dead London: *The War of the Worlds* and the "Coming Beast"

H. G. Wells's scientific training under T. H. Huxley, Edwin Ray Lankester, and other post-Darwinian biologists made him acutely aware of the fluid and contested nature of evolutionary development. Following Lankester in particular, Wells became interested in the possibilities of species degeneration, which, in his scientific writings of the 1890s, he applied to human development. In *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880), Lankester had identified degeneration as "a gradual change of the structure in which the organism becomes adapted to less varied and less complex conditions of life."[5] Lankester's vision of what he called "*suppression* of form," corresponding to a "cessation of work," seems to have inspired Wells's languid and idle Eloi in *The Time Machine* (1895).[6] Yet the conception of degeneration was also useful to Wells in that it allowed for multiple possibilities in his conception of human—and nonhuman—societies. These societies might be more developed and more sophisticated than the contemporary world that Wells saw around him. In "Zoological Retrogression" (1891), Wells argued that there was "no guarantee in scientific knowledge of man's permanence or permanent ascendency." Everywhere, wrote Wells, was evidence of humanity's "remarkably variable organisation," and that humanity faced a "long future of profound modification"; yet there was no assurance that such modification would have an upward or down-

ward trajectory.[7] Equally, suggested Wells, some seemingly insignificant life-form might supplant humanity as the dominant species on the earth: "the Coming Beast must certainly be reckoned in any anticipatory calculations regarding the Coming Man."[8] As a pinnacle of human social, cultural, and technological achievement, the modern city became important to Wells as a way of exploring the potential ramifications of biological "modifications"; it was a theater where "Coming Beast" and "Coming Man" might compete. In the ruined London of *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Wells creates a cityscape where human and nonhuman bodies, dead matter and living matter, are interlinked parts of the urban scene.

In *The War of the Worlds*, Wells would use the apocalyptic vision of a deserted London to examine the blurred boundaries between human and nonhuman, healthy and diseased bodies. In "Dead London," the antepenultimate chapter of the novel, Wells's narrator appraises the devastation that the Martian invasion of Earth has created in the capital city. Ordered around the lamenting cry of the dying Martian ("Ulla, ulla, ulla, ulla": a nonhuman ejaculation repeated throughout the chapter), the writing features human, animal, and alien bodies (living and dead) interacting in a ruined and uncannily deserted urban space. As Vera Benczik has argued, the scene, like other apocalyptic narratives, operates "with a remarkable spatial poetics, connecting human destruction to the demolishing of the urban landscape, with a distinct convergence of the organic body and the architectural structures."[9] For Benczik, Wells's ruined London has an "organic quality" where the urban environment is "an agent in the narrative and transfers certain qualities from the individual and collective human/social body onto the landscape."[10] This conflation of the human "body" with the urban built environment is complemented by a confusion of human and nonhuman organic bodies. The first thing Wells's narrator sees in London is the "tumultuous red weed," the Martian invasive species that has spread across the country. He then comes to a man lying on the ground, "black as a sweep with the black dust" and "helplessly and speechlessly drunk."[11] After this encounter, he finds "about a dozen" dead (human) bodies on the Fulham Road: "one or two had been disturbed by dogs." Thus alien plant "bodies" (the red weed), living (the intoxicated man)

and dead human bodies, and the traces of animal bodies (the dogs) are all met with in quick succession in the narrator's journey through London. Wells's narrator "hurrie[s] past" the corpses as "they had been dead many days." As Benczik contends, this chapter is especially concerned with the language of contagion and disease; we are presented "with the pathology of an alien attack," which spreads "like a virus" across the "body" of the earth.[12] Note the way in which human and nonhuman organic presences contribute to the viral—or bacterial—anxiety in these urban scenes.

Wells presents the downfall of the Martians in this chapter through the depiction of a city that is at once still and empty, chaotic and unpredictable. London is, writes Wells's narrator, "a city of the dead"; it lies "in state," its "black shroud" the sooty dust which covers the city.[13] At the same time, signs of life abound; yet these signs of life are associated with scavenging and parasitical life-forms. After his encounter with the corpses on the Fulham Road, Wells's narrator moves through South Kensington, coming upon an overturned omnibus and the "skeleton of a horse picked clean." He enters a public house, where he finds some biscuits and cheese, but the meat safe now contains "nothing but maggots."[14] Leaving the public house, he heads towards Baker Street, where he sees "a dog with a piece of putrescent red meat in his jaws," and then "a pack of starving mongrels" following in pursuit. After encountering two "motionless" Martians, the narrator sees a third, where "a multitude of black birds" are "circling and clustering" around its metallic hood, pecking and tearing at the "lank shreds of brown" flesh.[15] Life is here, in multitudinous and fecund vitality, but it is an animal life dependent on decay and death. Indeed, it is *nonhuman* terrestrial life—from pathogens, to maggots, to dogs, to birds—which appears to be in the ascendant against the Martians. By contrast, human urban civilization is reduced to "spectral" ruin, the windows of the London houses akin to the "eye-sockets of skulls." Indeed, and paradoxically, that which slays the Martians is "the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared": they were slain, writes Wells's narrator, "after all man's devices had failed, by the humblest things that God . . . has put upon this earth."[16] Wells here returns to the point he had made in "Zoological Retrogression"; that the "coming

beast" may be "a form lowly and degraded" within the terrestrial order.[17] Whilst Darwin had struggled emotionally with the existence and role of parasitical organisms, writing famously to Asa Gray that he could not believe that "a beneficent & omnipotent God" would have "designedly" created the Ichneumonidae [parasitic wasps] "with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars," Wells portrays parasites and scavengers as the most obvious victors in his dystopic vision of the fallen city.[18]

As such, this nonhuman vision of the city is related to the precarity with which Wells viewed urban civilization in his writings of the 1890s and early 1900s. In Wells's writings on the city, its existence is continually related to nonhuman visions of corporate life. At once, these visions could present the risk of the modern city degenerating into "bestial" anarchy and, at the same time offer the possibility of organic "co-operation" for the urban conurbation of the future. In "Morals and Civilisation," an essay published in the *Fortnightly Review* in February 1897, Wells argued that the "man beast" had become gradually adapted to a "corporate existence" which had found its most advanced expression in the modern metropolis.[19] Yet this corporate civilization was innately precarious, dependent on the mental habits of human beings, which had created a sense of civilized morality. If this "mental factor" were to be destroyed, wrote Wells, "the day thereafter would dawn . . . upon our cities . . . but it would dawn no more upon a civilised world." Instead, he continued, he imagined "a grotesque picture of the suddenly barbaric people wandering out into the streets, in their nightgear . . . esurient and pugnacious, turning their attention to such recondite weapons as a modern city affords."[20] Here, a vision of "bestial" urban degeneration was the catalyst for Wells to recommend a new "rational code of morality to meet the demands of modern life," based on his burgeoning scientific and socialist views.[21] The alternative, suggested Wells, was for the "modern city" to become a site of bestial "pugnacious" conflict.

In an earlier essay, "Ancient Experiments in Co-operation" (1892), published initially in the *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Wells had turned his attention to nonhuman corporate life, and its potential affinities with the human community, whether in village, town or city. "In the great majority of animals," wrote Wells:

> we have a union of many cells; among the hydrozoa, ascidians and polyzoa these unions again unite into unions of a higher order. In the gregarious assembly of cattle, in the social intercourse of rooks and wolves, and men also, we have the faint beginnings of such a further synthesis, into the herd, the pack, the flock, or the party. How far may we speculate in the future of further developments of the co-operative principle? Certain cities—Jerusalem, Florence, imperial and pontifical Rome—are no mere aggregates, they have a unity and distinctive character, an initiative and an emotion of their own.[22]

Here, Wells draws a parallel between the aggregate structures of microorganisms, the "higher" social collectivities amongst birds and mammals, and the cooperative qualities of the human city. Ancient cities, like Jerusalem, Florence, and Rome, possess "a unity and distinctive character," an "emotion of their own." While in "Morals and Civilisation," the vision Wells provides is of a fragile city poised on the edge of civilizational collapse, in "Ancient Experiments," Wells depicts the human city as simply the latest development among other composite forms. The city becomes for Wells a social organism, at one with a coral reef or a rookery. This is not a city *containing* animals, but a city that *is*, fundamentally, animal, growing organically and developing its own collective emotion and personality. Again, the distinctions between human civilization, artifice and urban development on the one hand (the city) and animal behavior on the other (microorganisms, rooks, cattle), are broken down. Yet, unlike his analysis in *Moreau*, where the collapse of the human/nonhuman boundary is terrifying and destabilizing, here Wells sees the human city as an evolving organic being, connected in its structure and characteristics to nonhuman social forms. Indeed, Wells sees in these organic unions a blueprint for the socialistic commune of the future. This commune will be, writes Wells, "an organism"; it will "rejoice and sorrow" as one whole. Individual human beings will become "limbs" and the new organism will feel collective emotion and pain: "forty writhing as one."[23]

This is at one with Wells's wider social and political explorations in his writings throughout the 1890s and early 1900s. Historically, critical appraisals tended to view Wells's writing of the 1890s as typically pessimistic and his work after 1900 as more optimistic in tone.[24] Yet these approaches have been critiqued; Lyman Tower Sargent, for example,

has emphasized the complex nature of Wells's writing, and its tendency, even in later utopian fictions, to be pessimistic about human nature.[25] Wells's interests in biology allow for a malleable and fluid view of human civilization. In this context, I read Wells's fiction and critical writings of the 1890s and early 1900s as of a piece—across genres, Wells stages multiple visions of societal change, proffering utopian futures and alternative presents. In this picture, the city could be constructed in both artificial and organic terms; as a wonder of progress and as a chaotic "swarming" mass.[26]

In *Anticipations* (1901), for example, a series of thought-experiments in essay form, Wells's vision of the future city coalesced around various, distinct possibilities. The "unusual growth of great cities" which had characterized the nineteenth century might, wrote Wells, result in an ever-greater number of "giant cities." The population of London, he theorized, could be packed into "gigantic tenement houses, looming upon colossal roofed streets": a picture of what Wells calls "swarming concentrated humanity."[27] "Swarming," with its animalistic overtones, was in common usage in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to describe crowded urban spaces; Dickens's *Bleak House*, for example, describes a "swarm of misery" in the impoverished inner city.[28] Yet Wells also envisioned another possible future for the city: that of the suburban metropolis, one that dissipates as it spreads, leaving space for forest, field, and parkland. In reaching to describe the growth of the city, Wells returns in *Anticipations* to the organic language he had used in "Ancient Experiments." The "star-shaped contour of the modern great city," he writes, thrusts "out *arms* along every available railway line, *knotted arms* of which every knot marks a station" (my emphases). Before this century, he continues, "Great Towns" "grew as a puff-ball [a spherical white fungus] swells"; but the "modern Great City" looks like "something that has burst an intolerable envelope."[29] The future suburban metropolis—what Wells calls an "urban region"—will be "far less monotonous than our present English world." Travelling through it, Wells writes, will be a "curious and varied" experience, comprising a kind of synthesis of organic and artificial, natural and built environment. Gardens in "'horsey' suburbs" will give way to "heathery moorlands" and river banks, these in turn segueing into agri-

cultural land, with fields of "grey-plumed artichokes," "white-painted orchard[s]" and "neat poultry farm[s]":

> Through the varied country the new wide roads will run, here cutting through a crest and there running like some colossal aqueduct across a valley, swarming always with a multitudinous traffic of bright, swift (and not necessarily ugly) mechanisms; and everywhere amidst the fields and trees linking wires will stretch from pole to pole.[30]

Central to Wells's vision of the city is the mixing of technological and organic registers; fields and trees are intersected by roads, wires, and telegraph poles. The traffic of "bright, swift" automobiles is, again, figured in animal terms, "swarming" across the roads. Wells's imagined urban region blurs boundaries between country and city, between organic and artificial, human and nonhuman forms. Wells's vision of urban civilization depends upon that civilization's relation to its nonhuman others; "organic" and "artificial" conceptions of human society are interwoven in a prose that destroys oppositions between urban and rural space.

Ostensibly, Well's organic depiction of the city in *The War of the Worlds* appears to share features with contemporaneous utopian or dystopic fictions, such as William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), and Richard Jefferies' *After London* (1885). Morris's utopian-socialist vision of a future London, for example, envisions a city where wild salmon swim in the Thames and Hammersmith has become a patchwork of "wide sunny meadows and garden-like tillage."[31] In *After London*, Jefferies offers a picture of nonhuman flourishing in the wake of the collapse of the city. It becomes, writes Jefferies, "green everywhere" in the first spring "after London ended." The deserted, overgrown land is full of "innumerable mice" and their predators: weasels, hawks, owls and foxes.[32] Yet what separates Wells's depiction from these fictions is a sense of the city *itself* as a non-human organic entity. Morris's and Jefferies's fictions of future London rest on either the complete eradication of the city (Jefferies), or its radical environmental transformation (Morris). The alien invasion of London in *The War of the Worlds*, by contrast, makes manifest the nonhuman actors already operating within its walls: its stray dogs, maggots, birds, and pathogens. Wells's radically

post-Darwinian view of the city allows (at least briefly) for alternative viewpoints of London itself, where the "coming beast" takes the urban stage. Although Wells's view of a deserted, empty city in "Dead London" shares some similarities with Jefferies's apocalyptic vision of a post-urban future, Wells, I argue, draws our attention to its already nonhuman character. In this reading, human city-dwellers are already in competition with the nonhuman organic others who, in Wells's novel, are the true victors over the Martians.

Ant-Cities

Towards the end of *The War of the Worlds*, the character of the artilleryman suggests that the relationship between the Martians and their human prey is of that between "men and ants": "There's the ants builds their cities, live their lives, have wars, revolutions, until the men want them out of the way, and then they go out of the way. That's what we are now—just ants."[33] The artilleryman identifies the ants as city-builders, waging wars and revolutions. In this sense, ants represent a microcosm of human society; Darwin in particular had seen the operation of collective instinct in ants and bees as a parallel to the ways in which human communities functioned. Social stratification among insects, wrote Darwin in the *Origin*, was useful in the same way as "division of labour is useful to civilized man." Yet the identification of ants with the city is also indicative of the animal frameworks through which Wells viewed urban civilization in the 1890s.

Many writers of the nineteenth century reached for the image of the ant as they responded to the changing face of the city. Baudelaire's celebrated vision of a "fourmillante cité" ("swarming" or "ant-seething city") in his "Sept Vieillards" of 1857 framed a crowded, nightmarish Paris as an urban space of ceaseless multiplication, where the "old men" of the title kept being replicated in a fevered hallucination of the city's streets.[34] The ant could represent both the incessant activity associated with urban modernity and the blind, collective instinct of the crowd. In Wordsworth's 1850 *Prelude*, London was described as a "monstrous ant-hill on the plain / Of a too-busy world."[35] For Wordsworth, it was

the sensory shock of "face after face," "the endless stream of men and moving things" that led him to reach for these ant metaphors. By the time Wells used the image of the ant to explore the fate of civilization, the Darwinian insights of the later nineteenth century meant that ants and other social insects were framed not simply as "things"—swarming automata without will or reason—but as social beings possessing a distinct type of intelligence. The social structure of ant colonies increasingly held up a mirror to human concerns and preoccupations, whilst offering (like the Martians in *The War of the Worlds*) an encounter with something frighteningly strange and other.

This is made obviously manifest in Wells's novel *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), where the "Selenites" (the alien inhabitants of the lunar landscape explored by Bedford and Cavor, who construct their own civilization and cities) combine human and insectoid features. Their silhouettes are described as "very human," yet their necks are "jointed in three places, almost like the short joints in the leg of a crab."[36] Later, as Cavor tries to categorize the Selenites, he describes them as "a creature . . . as much insect as vertebrate," with "human and ultra-human dimensions." Bedford, the narrator of *The First Men in the Moon*, adds this gloss:

> [Cavor] does not mention the ant, but throughout his allusions the ant is continually brought before my mind, in its sleepless activity, its intelligence, its social organization, and, more particularly, the fact that it displays, in addition to the two forms, the male and the female . . . a great variety of sexless creatures, workers, soldiers and the like, differing from one another in structure, character, power and use and yet all members of the same species.[37]

In the seventh chapter of *The Origin of Species*, Darwin had found what he called a "special difficulty" in trying to understand the variations in size and function amongst the same species of ant, and in particular the place of "neuter" female ants within a colony, who often "differ[ed] widely in instinct and in structure from both the males and the fertile females."[38] How could these "sterile" working ants, so different from the other ants in the colony, have evolved, wondered Darwin? Darwin hypothesized that the answer lay in the idea of natural selection acting

not only on individuals but on *societies*. Modifications of "structure, or instinct," wrote Darwin, "correlated with the sterile condition of certain members of the community" became "advantageous to the community." Ants, in their city-colonies, developed distinct "castes" with different instincts, suited for different forms of labor, in the same way as divisions of labor were useful for "civilised man." Because ants work by "inherited instincts" rather than by acquiring knowledge, Darwin continued:

> a perfect division of labour could be effected with them only by the workers being sterile; for had they been fertile, they would have intercrossed, and their instincts and structure would have become blended. And nature has, as I believe, effected this admirable division of labour in the communities of ants, by means of natural selection.[39]

Similarly, in *The First Men in the Moon*, there are "not two alike in all that jostling multitude among the Selenites," which differ widely in size and shape. The "intellectual class," for example, have large, distended heads with huge brains, "rendered possible by the absence in the lunar anatomy of a bony skull." Indeed, testifies Cavor, their brains are so large that there is no need for books, records, or libraries, and "all knowledge" is stored in their heads "much as the honey-ants of Texas store honey in their distended abdomens." The "lunar Somerset House [then the headquarters of the Inland Revenue] and the lunar British Museum Library are collections of living brains."[40] Wells's references to London's institutions again reinforce this picture of Selenite society as a kind of parallel to the modern city; yet here institutions of government, learning, and education associated with administrative urban centers are contained within the Selenite brain. Just as the honeypot ant uses certain members of its colony as living food storage, so the Selenites store vast administrative and academic data in their own distended heads. Steven McClean has noted the probable influence on Wells of John Lubbock's study *Ants, Bees and Wasps* (1885), where Lubbock connects the "social organization" and "large communities" of ant colonies to human (urban) civilization.[41]

Towards the end of the novel, the world of the Selenites is described by Bedford as a "strange," "wonderful" yet threatening civilization: "a

strange race with whom we must inevitably struggle for mastery." Such rhetoric highlights the New Imperialist framing around which Wells's lunar ant-city must be seen; published initially in *The Strand Magazine* between 1900 and 1901, the novel's serialization coincided with the course of the Second Boer War that Britain was fighting in South Africa (which itself took place at the same time as the United States's war in the Philippines). As a number of critics have noticed, Bedford's capitalist and social Darwinist narrative stance is satirized by Wells. In particular, Bedford's values are jingoistic and imperialistic. In one of the early scenes on the moon, for example, intoxicated by a strange lunar fungus, Bedford says to Cavor that they "must annex this moon. . . . There must be no shilly-shally. This is part of the White Man's Burden. Cavor—we are—*hic*—Satap—mean Satraps!"[42] Although Victorian imperialists were ambivalent about cities, they remained the focus of "civilising" attempts to develop and extend British colonies. Bedford's talk of annexation and the white man's burden (a reference, of course, to Kipling's poem of 1899) would fit into a Victorian view of the city, in John MacKenzie's words, as "the location of civilization . . . and for the development of a bourgeois cultural modernity."[43] In British imperial planning, cities, as MacKenzie argues, could have different functions. Whilst in settler-colonial contexts (such as Australia and Canada), the city was often constructed on "European models," elsewhere urban conurbations were designed to "create [an] ethnic separation" which maintained British superiority.[44]

Later on, Cavor describes the customs of the Earth to the "Grand Lunar," the ruler of the moon. He describes the "Anglo-Saxons" as "the large and influential section of the people of the earth to which I belonged." Both Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" (first published in 1899), and the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxonism, promoted by figures like Theodore Roosevelt, were current concerns at the time of *The First Men in the Moon*'s publication. In this vision, the wars fought by Britain in South Africa and the United States in the Philippines were both seen as efforts to advance the cause of "Anglo-Saxon" civilization across the globe. That Cavor and Bedford's expedition to the subterranean ant-cities of the Selenites can be read as an ill-fated colonial expedition seems to be supported by the pessimistic, Conradian ending of the

novel. In the final paragraph of the book, Bedford sees a "vivid dream" of Cavor (who has been left behind on the moon) "struggling in the grip of a great multitude of those insect Selenites." In Bedford's vision, Cavor is forced backward "out of all speech or sign of his fellows, for evermore into the Unknown—into the dark, into that silence that has no end." The ending seems to parallel the celebrated closing lines of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which sees the Thames appearing to flow "into the heart of an immense darkness."[45] Conrad's novella was first published in 1899, the year before Wells started work on *The First Men in the Moon*. Wells's admiration for Conrad's work certainly included *Heart of Darkness*, and Linda Dryden speculates that Wells may have commented on the story as Conrad drafted it in 1898–99 (Wells and Conrad became neighbors in Kent in late 1898).[46] Both Wells and Conrad were preoccupied with the city as a locus of civilizational advance or collapse, with, for example, London and Brussels featuring in *Heart of Darkness* as morally compromised imperial metropolises.

In "The Empire of the Ants" (1905), also published in *The Strand*, such concerns are made even more obviously manifest. "The Empire of the Ants" (a story about a deadly and hyper-intelligent species of ant spreading across Brazil) seems, as Charlotte Sleigh has argued, to echo the language and concerns of Conrad's novella. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlowe likens the Africans he encounters to "ants," "mov[ing] about" a "rocky cliff" with "mounds of turned-up earth."[47] "The Empire of the Ants," writes Sleigh, similarly performs a series of colonial anxieties, yet this time explicitly through the prism of tropical entomology. The rhetoric of both Conrad's and Wells's fictions not only manifestly emerges from the racist world-views of European colonialism but can also be viewed, Sleigh contends, in the context of late-Victorian studies of tropical ant colonies and of tropical insects in general. These studies, she argues, increasingly revealed an "anxiety about the tenability of Empire."[48] Research in the late nineteenth century had established the disease-carrying potential of mosquitoes and flies: tropical insects were increasingly seen as a major threat to the work of empire.[49] The antagonists of Wells's story were based on two species of aggressive ant found respectively in Africa and Asia, and South America. These ants, writes Sleigh, were collectively known as "army ants." Wells's story, with its

evocation of "empire" in its very title, and its focus on a militaristic and colonizing force of insects, holds up a strange mirror to the imperial activities of the British and other colonial powers in the Global South.

Yet Wells's story may also be read in terms of its engagement with notions of metropolitan civilization and its opposites. As in Conrad's novella, "The Empire of the Ants" draws contrasts between the metropole and the "immense," "interminable" tropical forest. Holroyd, the English engineer in the story who joins a Brazilian ship making its way down the Amazon, muses: "in England he had come to think of the land as man's":

> In England it is indeed man's, the wild things live by sufferance, grow on lease, everywhere the roads, the fences, and absolute security runs. In an atlas, too, the land is man's, all coloured to show his claim to it. . . . He had taken it for granted that a day would come when everywhere about the earth, plough and culture, light tramways and good roads, an ordered security, would prevail. But now, he doubted.

Instead, thinks Holroyd, in the forests of Brazil human beings are at best "an infrequent precarious intruder" and the animals are "the masters here."[50] As Sleigh contends, Holroyd's doubts here embody a "British pessimism" about the fate of empire and its precarity. Holroyd's "ordered security" is based around "western," metropolitan notions of civilization: "plough and culture," trains, and roads.[51] What if, he thinks, the ants were to reach a similar degree of civilization, making them "lords of the future and masters of the earth"? The ants might, Holroyd muses, start to "store knowledge," "use weapons, form great empires, sustain a planned and organized war."[52]

The publication of "The Empire of the Ants" in *The Strand* provides an important context for Wells's story. For *The Strand* itself, launched in 1891, had developed a periodical culture forged out of strange juxtapositions: stories of London high-life placed hand in hand with nonfictional political reportage and biographical sketches, scientific (often biological) essays published alongside pseudo-ethnographic studies of people groups in the British colonial empire. Indeed, *The Strand's* arguably most famous byproduct, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, could be said to embody these juxtapositions, combining an interest in

scientific method, a focus on upper middle-class metropolitan life, and a dim awareness of the mysterious and varied realms colonized by the British imperial state. Of course, *The Strand*'s very moniker spoke of its location at the heart of central London (in Burleigh Street, off the Strand itself). Whilst the magazine was "a peculiarly urban artefact," it also spoke to a readership interested in international politics, world travel and scientific enquiry.[53] In January of 1905, for example (the year *The Strand* published "The Empire of the Ants"), readers could lose themselves in "A Woman in It," a story of high society and jewel theft in London's Regent Street. They could then go on directly to read a piece about the life cycle of the lobster moth, complete with detailed photographs.[54] Will Tattersdill has read the illustrated magazines of the fin de siècle as providing a unique crucible for the birth of science fiction; these magazines, argues Tattersdill, answered "an increasing commercial appetite for curiosities of all kinds," placing scientific reports and fictional forms in "material proximity." Furthermore, magazines like *The Strand* showed an "observable tendency . . . to resist definitive classification."[55] I would add that this tendency to juxtapose "curiosities" is characteristic of the urban culture (in particular, the culture of London) out of which these magazines grew: a place of science and art, commerce and crime, government and anarchy.

Such juxtapositions between different subjects and tones meant that the content of "The Empire of the Ants" was ideally suited to *The Strand*'s sensibility. The aim of *The Strand*, as articulated in an 1898 advertisement in *The Times*, was to be "light, up-to-date, entertaining, well-illustrated, and educative." Different parts of the magazine were designed to appeal to different readerships, potentially within the same family: "Your children, Sir, will keep quiet for hours if you take home a copy of the Strand Magazine. It is full of pictures. . . . Your wife, too, will like the Strand Magazine because of its well-chosen, attractive stories."[56] As Christopher Pittard has pointed out, the commercial marketing of the *Strand* was clearly designed to attract adult male consumers, but on the understanding that the magazine would appeal to the rest of the family: "*read* by the family, but *bought* by the man."[57] The varied component parts of *The Strand*—"attractive" stories, plentiful illustrations and "educative" pieces on history, science and other sub-

jects—did not contradict the fundamentally urban character of the magazine. For George Newnes, *The Strand*'s publisher, the "tide of life" flowed "fullest and strongest and deepest" in the center of the city; the Strand itself was a connecting highway, running between the West End and the City of London.[58] London was a focal point for the magazine because of the *Strand*'s location and readership; but it also acted as a hub of exchange, where fantastic stories could be gathered from all points of the globe.

In this context, animals featured in the magazine in varying roles: as scientific studies, as entertainment, or as threatening adversaries. In the same issue as "The Empire of the Ants," for example, "The Life Story of a Fighting Bull" followed the escapades of El Cuchillo, a bull in the fighting rings of Andalusia. Cuchillo is clearly the object of fascination and sympathy in the piece, and the text concludes with the crowd cheering and throwing hats into the ring as the bull retires to pasture after his last fight; Cuchillo is acclaimed as a "long-horned hero" and a "splendid" fighter.[59] Animals also featured heavily in the "Curiosities" section of the magazine, where readers would contribute photographs and pictures of interest. For example, also in the December 1905 issue, Walter Fry has sent in a photograph of the head of an angler fish placed outside a public house in Hastings, commenting on the fish's ability to lure its prey into its "capacious mouth."[60] Post-Darwinian, biological insights into species adaptation is here combined with the kind of curious "tit-bit" that was the magazine's stock-in-trade.

In this context, Wells's animal tale echoes the educative tone of these diverse pieces, whilst at the same time offering a sense of fantastic and exotic threat. In the comfortable urban milieu of *The Strand,* Wells's killer ants allowed readers to examine, as Holroyd does in the story, the fragile and precarious position of the "civilized" metropolis. As with Wells's other urban beasts, the ants offer both threat and mirror. After all, they are—like the British—an "empire," creating their own form of civilizational structure. At the end of the story, Holroyd, like Prendick and the beast folk, cannot get the ants out of his mind. They have "got into his brain":

Figure 1. From the "Curiosities" section, *The Strand*, December 1905.

> [Holroyd] has come back to England with the idea, as he says, of "exciting people" about them "before it is too late." He says they threaten British Guiana, which cannot be much over a trifle of a thousand miles from their present sphere of activity, and that the Colonial Office ought to get to work upon them at once. He declaims with great passion: "These are intelligent ants. Just think what that means!"[61]

The "threat" of the ants to British colonial possessions rests both on the ants' difference to, and parallel with, European civilizational and imperial structures. As Sleigh makes clear, ants troubled white colonists in a peculiar way. In the racist-colonial mindset, the ant seemed to share a "brutishness" with subject peoples under the yoke of imperialism in Asia and Africa yet at the same time mirrored the "complex social order" of European cultures. As explored here, the apotheosis of that order was the modern city: yet, in Wells's early fictions, these urban structures are precarious and fragile, prone always to descend into bes-

tial anarchy or to be overrun by threatening nonhuman actors. In Sleigh's words, "nothing whatsoever about the progress of civilization may be assumed."[62] The ants, the story tells us, have "occupied plantations and settlements," driving "men out completely."[63] The story's narrator compares the work of ants with the construction of "London Bridge," and concludes by hypothesizing that by "1950 or ' 60 at the latest" the ants will have completed the "discovery of Europe." The story's reference to "London Bridge" in this passage again highlights the importance of the urban conurbation in Wells's vision. Indeed, the advance of the ants may be read as an explicit parallel to the hegemony of western, European, metropolitan "civilisation." As Sleigh points out, Wells's use of the word "discovery" "up-ends the received history in which European man 'discovers' the Americas."[64] Organized into "a single nation" and wielding advanced weaponry, the ants subvert the expectations of the advance of European colonial cultures at the moment of their greatest expansion, the moment of New Imperialism.

Yet 1905 was also a year of anxiety for the future of European colonial ascendancy. In May of that year, Russia had been comprehensively routed by Japan in a humiliating military defeat—a vast European empire defeated by a non-European power. Despite Britain's alliance with Japan, much popular discourse at the time painted Japanese forces as fundamentally alien. Newspaper rhetoric emphasized the racial otherness of Japanese culture; *The Daily Telegraph*'s Bennet Burleigh described them as of "belated Malay origin." Ian Hamilton described the victory of Japan in terms of "the overlapping of two stages of civilization": warlike and modern.[65] B. W. Norregaard described Japan as "an alien people" who had come under the "influences of Western civilization."[66] Thus Wells's story came at a moment of particular tension within the imperial project(s): American expansion in the Caribbean and Pacific, and the French full conquest of Algeria (1903) were recent, yet the 1904-5 war between Russia and Japan had raised anxieties over the future of European colonialism. "The Empire of the Ants" both performs a racialist rhetoric that views non-European cultures as other and alien, even nonhuman; yet at the same time the story questions and deconstructs these assumptions.

Conclusion: "Queer Habitats"

In Wells's collaboration, late in his writing career, with the biologist Julian Huxley on the textbook *The Science of Life* (1931), the writers sketch out what they call "queer habitats." Here, "out-of-the-way modes of life" may thrive, in habitats "provided directly or indirectly by man."[67] The authors mention sewage farms, for example, where a "rich fauna" may be found. Similarly, urban water systems, if left untreated, could yield "surprising results." In 1886 in Hamburg, they record, a "huge fauna" lurked "under the city streets": eels "up to a foot in length," sticklebacks, clams, and sponges could all be discovered in the urban water pipes. But this "biological Eldorado" was not sustainable; and in 1892 Hamburg was the victim of a huge cholera outbreak, over eight thousand people dying in two months.[68]

In this vision, the city, as in Wells's earlier fiction, was both a space of wonder and biological anxiety. The "advance" of human civilization, represented at its zenith by the modern western city, was also subject to forces of chaos and disorder: overcrowding, epidemics, societal breakdown. The "crowding of human beings into cities," wrote Wells and Huxley, "like the crowding of animals in their times of over-multiplication, give new openings to disease":

> The city is the fosterer of commerce and architecture, of learning and the arts; but until it is disciplined and controlled, it is also the opportunity of the bacterium. Freedom of intercourse and communication stimulates both trade and thought; but it gives disease-germs new facilities for rapid spreading. . . . Thus the growth of civilization has been marked by a trail of plagues.[69]

Captured in this paragraph is an encapsulation of the competing forces present in the urban visions Wells had presented in his early writings. The city is the center of culture and finance: but it is also an arena in which pathogens can flourish. As in Wells's earlier work, the opportunities and growth offered by the modern city are paralleled by the march of the "bacterium." Again, the city is a theatre for competing organic forces, and urban humans are compared both with the crowding of "over-multiplying" animals and with rapidly spreading "disease-

germs." Yet Wells and Huxley also recommend that the city be "disciplined and controlled," so that it does not fall prey to bacteria and other pathogens: this vision of discipline and control stands in contrast to the depictions of city space Wells had articulated in his earlier fictions. In those works, Wells's urban beasts had highlighted the inherent instability of modern urban civilization and had deconstructed modern claims of civilized progress. In Prendick's fevered imaginings of bestial London, and in the scenes of urban, interspecies chaos which the narrator of *The War of the Worlds* encounters towards the end of the novel, Wells had seemed to draw attention to the innate fragility of the modern city. This was a fragility which could not be mended with control and discipline. As with the revelation of the vast watery menagerie under Hamburg's streets, Wells's fictional cities were always marked by the lurking "coming beast."

NOTES

1. H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (Penguin, 2012), 133.
2. See, for example, Timothy Christensen, "The 'Bestial Mark' of Race in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*," *Criticism* 46, no. 4 (2004): 575–95; Rebecca Weaver-Hightower and Rachel Piwarski, "The Gothic Uncanny as Colonial Allegory in The Island of Doctor Moreau," *Gothic Studies* 20, no. 1–2 (2018): 358–72.
3. Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 108, 109.
4. See Will Tattersdill, *Science, Fiction and the Fin de Siècle Periodical Press* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–27.
5. Edwin Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (Macmillan, 1880), 32.
6. The Time Traveller says of the Eloi that he has never met people more indolent or more easily fatigued. *The Time Machine*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (Penguin, 2005), 28.
7. H.G. Wells, "Zoological Retrogression," in *H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*, ed. Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (University of California Press, 1975), 158-68 (158, 168).
8. Wells, "Zoological Retrogression," 168.
9. Vera Benczik, "The Urban Wasteland in H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*," in *Utopias and Dystopias in the Fiction of H.G. Wells and William Morris*, ed. Emelyne Godfrey (Palgrave, 2016), 141–56 (143).
10. Benczik, "Urban Wasteland," 146.
11. H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (Penguin, 2005), 163.

12. Benczik, "Urban Wasteland," 147.
13. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, 165.
14. Wells, *The War of the Worlds,* 165.
15. Wells, *The War of the Worlds,* 167–68.
16. Wells, The War of the Worlds, 168.
17. Wells, "Zoological Retrogression," 168.
18. Letter to Asa Gray, 22 May 1860. Darwin Correspondence Project, University of Cambridge, https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-2814.xml.
19. H. G. Wells, "Morals and Civilisation," in Philmus and Hughes, *H. G. Wells: Early Writings*, 220–28 (221).
20. Wells, "Morals," 221.
21. Wells, "Morals," 227.
22. H. G. Wells, "Ancient Experiments in Co-operation," in Philmus and Hughes, *H. G. Wells: Early Writings*, 187–93 (191).
23. Wells, "Ancient Experiments," 191.
24. See, for example, Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances* (University of Toronto Press, 1961).
25. Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Pessimistic Eutopias of H. G. Wells." *The Wellsian* 7 (1984): 2–18.
26. Such organic views of the city can be linked to Wells's reading of Herbert Spencer's essay "The Social Organism" (1860). Spencer saw human society—including the city—as connected to biological structures: "society is a growth, and not a manufacture." Herbert Spencer, *Essays: Scientific, Political & Speculative* vol. I (Williams and Norgate, 1891), 265–307 (269).
27. H. G. Wells, *Anticipations* (Chapman and Hall, 1902), 40.
28. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford University Press, 1998), 236.
29. Wells, *Anticipations*, 45 (my italics).
30. Wells, *Anticipations*, 61–62.
31. William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. Clive Wilmer (Penguin, 2004) , 42, 61.
32. Richard Jefferies, *After London: Or Wild England* (Duckworth & Co, 1905), 1, 7.
33. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, 152–53.
34. "The Seven Old Men," in *Baudelaire in English*, ed. Carol Clark and Robert Sykes (Penguin, 1995), 123–24.
35. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Penguin, 1995), 259. Indeed, Wells would also use this metaphor in *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), later published as *The Sleeper Awakes*, where the mega-city London of the future is described as an "anthill." See *The Sleeper Awakes*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (Penguin, 2005), 125.
36. H. G. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (Penguin, 2005), 84.
37. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*, 173–74.
38. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* [1859] (Vintage, 2009), 243.
39. Darwin, *Origin of Species,* 248–49.
40. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*, 182.

41. See Steven McClean, *The Early Fiction of H. G. Wells* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 134.
42. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*, 78. Bedford's colonizing ambitions reflect Cecil Rhodes's desire, as reported by W.T. Stead, to "annex the planets if I could". See *The Last Will and Testament of Cecil John Rhodes*, ed. W.T. Stead (William Clowes and Sons, 1902), 190.
43. John MacKenzie, *The British Empire Through Buildings: Structure, Function and Meaning* (Manchester University Press, 2020), 83.
44. MacKenzie, *British Empire Through Buildings*, 84.
45. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, in *Youth/Heart of Darkness/The End of the Tether*, ed. John Lyon (Penguin, 1995), 47–148 (148).
46. See Linda Dryden, "A Note on *When the Sleeper Wakes* and *Heart of Darkness*." *Notes and Queries* 51, no. 2 (2004): 171–74.
47. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 63.
48. Charlotte Sleigh, "Empire of the Ants: H. G. Wells and Tropical Entomology." *Science as Culture* 10, no. 1: 33–71 (34).
49. In 1909, four years after Wells's story was published, the Entomological Research Committee was established by the Colonial Office. See Sleigh, "H. G. Wells and Tropical Entomology," 37.
50. "The Empire of the Ants," in *The Complete Short Stories of H.G. Wells*, ed. John Hammond (J. M. Dent, 1998), 585–97 (588–89).
51. Sleigh, "H.G. Wells and Tropical Entomology," 64.
52. Wells, "The Empire of the Ants," 589.
53. Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late-Victorian Detective Fiction* (Ashgate, 2011), 73.
54. "A Woman In It," *The Strand*, January 1905, 23–34; "The Life-Story of the Lobster Moth," *The Strand,* January 1905, 35–40.
55. Tattersdill, *Fin de Siècle Periodical Press*, 1, 19.
56. Advertisement in *The Times*, January 1898. Cited in Pittard, *Purity and Contamination,* 67.
57. Pittard, *Purity and Contamination,* 67.
58. Cited in Pittard, *Purity and Contamination,* 73.
59. "The Life Story of a Fighting-Bull." *The Strand*, December 1905, 672–78 (678).
60. "Curiosities." *The Strand*, December 1905, 795–800 (796).
61. Wells, "The Empire of the Ants," 596.
62. Sleigh, "H. G. Wells and Tropical Entomology," 64.
63. Wells, "The Empire of the Ants," 596.
64. Sleigh, "H. G. Wells and Tropical Entomology," 64.
65. Bennet Burleigh (1905) and Ian Hamilton (1907), cited in Alexander M. Nordlund "A War of Others: British War Correspondents, Orientalist Discourse, and the Russo-Japanese War 1904-5," *War in History* 22, no. 1 (2015): 28–46 (32).
66. Cited in Nordlund, "A War of Others," 33.
67. H. G. Wells, C. P. Wells and Julian Huxley, *The Science of Life* (Cassell and Company, 1931), 554.
68. Wells, Wells, and Huxley, *The Science of Life*, 554.
69. Wells, Wells, and Huxley, *The Science of Life*, 609.