



## “The Ingenious Unravelling of Evidence”:

### Empathy, Extinction, and Wells’s *The Croquet Player*

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Long ago, H. G. Wells saw the future. And like one recent vision, it is a future without *us*.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, as we become increasingly capable of imagining a world without humans, we have also become increasingly attentive to the subject of empathy, in popular culture, the humanities, and the sciences. Involved in this curious relation are parallel phenomena for which our interest increases as their material basis decreases or is culturally disavowed: missing links and cryptozoology, extinction narratives and ancestry research. The archeological search for links in our evolutionary history continues even as kinship with nonhuman animals is increasingly repudiated, and the less scientific search for imagined or exotic animals continues even as the already remote possibility of finding such creatures diminishes as diverse habitats disappear. Similarly, apocalyptic narratives increase even as we collectively behave as if our actions do not hasten our demise, while, at the same time, we seem to have less understanding of our past even as the nostalgic project of ancestry research nets greater corporate profits each year.

In *The Time Machine* (1935), and in a number of essays on evolution or extinction also published in the 1890s, Wells articulated a speculative evolutionary theory, a shockingly naked vision of nature unencumbered by everyday anthropocentrism.<sup>2</sup> His hypnotic, little-known 1936 novella, *The Croquet Player*, continues this story of evolution, turning both to the future’s entanglement with the past and to culture’s entanglement with nature. Prescient, Wells’s novella speaks to the parallel phenomena inhabiting the strange relation between extinction and empathy.

Even many Wellsians aren’t familiar with *The Croquet Player*, though it surely is, as John Hammond ([1998] 2003: xviii) claims in his introduction to the Trent edition, “one of the finest and most carefully

written of his stories.” In the first of the novella’s three movements, Georgie Frobisher, the frivolous player of the title, encounters Dr. Finchatton at the French resort Les Noupets; in the second, Finchatton tells Frobisher the story of the ancient, amorphous evil connected to the paleontological discoveries around the rural village of Cainsmarsh; and in the third, we discover that Finchatton is the patient of the psychiatrist Dr. Norbert, who reframes Finchatton’s tale for Georgie as the world crisis of modernity. The novella is, as the back cover of the University of Nebraska Press edition has it, Wells’s “prophetic, disturbing glimpse of the primitive distrust and violence that gnaw at the heart of the modern world” (2004).

It is not difficult to read *The Croquet Player* as a revision of the concerns elaborated in *The Time Machine*—the celebrated 1895 novel described by Wells in a preface to the 1931 reprint as his “one idea . . . a profound root” (xvii). As Robert Philmus (1998: 427) notes, Wells proclaimed the latter “the book which ‘fairly launched’ him as a writer,” revisiting it in *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* in 1928 and reconceiving it as *The Croquet Player* in 1936. Of course, the world had changed dramatically since the publication of *The Time Machine*. The threat of a second world war led Wells to consider the extinction of humanity not as a distant future but as a possibility inherent in the present, just as the present is inhabited by the past. In this way, we might say that *The Croquet Player* imagines time travel without the machine—a glimpse of the evolutionary history and future written in our bodies.

*The Croquet Player* is plotted along the lines of the best science writing, characterized by Wells (1894c: 301) in his essay “Popularizing Science” as “the ingenious unravelling of evidence.” Science is for him a mystery story, and the line between discovery and hoax, archeology and cryptozoology, metaphor and mysticism can be fine but diffuse. In this sense, the novella also appears as what, in the preface to an omnibus edition of his science fiction, Wells (1934: vii) called “a good gripping dream.” Finding *The Time Machine* “unsympathetic,” the older Wells doubted if “the H. G. Wells of 1894 and the H. G. Wells of 1922 would get on very well together” (1924: xxii). And when he later returns to the concerns of the *The Time Machine*, sympathy and empathy have become central to his fiction. It is, I will argue, particularly significant that the title character of *The Croquet Player* feels no connection to others, especially ordinary people. This missing link between individuals, and groups, parallels the missing link between the human past and the human present—precisely the parallel horror haunting this double and doubling dream.

The West has long been fascinated by missing links, from the American banker William Bowles's (1877) letter to Charles Darwin postulating the existence of a race of "speaking monkeys" who "pollute the blood of better races and impede civilization," to the enormously popular "display" of Ota Benga at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904 and in the human zoo exhibit in the Monkey House at the Bronx Zoo in 1906. Like Wells's earlier *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Croquet Player* is a narrative of science and violence, of how animals and civilization distort and reveal each other. And like that earlier work, *The Croquet Player* presents a fantastic tale, supernatural, embedded in such a way as to maintain distance and deniability (the manuscript found, the tale told), gripping beyond accountability.

In 1912, twenty-four years before Wells published *The Croquet Player*, an amazing discovery was made in England. Charles Dawson, solicitor and amateur archaeologist, brought a number of specimens to Arthur Smith Woodward at the Natural History Museum in London, including fragments of human skulls. These had been found, he claimed, by workmen digging gravel for paths at Barkham Manor, Piltdown, in Sussex. Woodward then joined Dawson's excavation and more remains were found, including a fragment of apelike jawbone with two teeth, more pieces of skull, fossilized animal teeth and bones, flint tools, and a bone implement, in gravel dating from the Ice Age or earlier. The fossil man, whom Woodward named *Eoanthropus*, *the Dawn Man*, was heralded as the missing link. The discovery was generally accepted as genuine, though interpretation of it varied; indeed, the fossil was not definitively confirmed as a fake until 1953 by Kenneth F. Oakley and J. S. Weiner (though a few scientists, such as Gerrit Miller, reached this conclusion decades earlier).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Piltdown remains "one of the most fascinating episodes in the history of paleoanthropology" (Spencer 1990: viii), and "ever since the uncovering of the hoax, amateur and professional sleuths have sought with diligence to expose the guilty party or parties" (xii). From uncovering bones to uncovering bone hoaxes, the pursuit of a missing link has, as Gillian Beer (1996: 121) notes, "the character of quest-romance, but of a modern sort: the quest for the missing link has as its covert goal the finding that the link is *not there*."

Praised as "a symbolic thriller" (Scheick 1995: 12) when it first appeared, *The Croquet Player* bears a structural, as well as thematic, similarity to the Piltdown hoax.<sup>4</sup> It invites us to consider whether, as the title suggests, the tale of the mysterious fear that swept the village of Cainsmarsh may be invented by the croquet player, the man of

leisure himself, rather than, as he claims, recounted to him by the former physician of a small community in the English countryside, Dr. Finchatton. But just as Wells invites us to ask if our frame-narrator is a hoaxer or the “victim” of a mad physician, in the context of a twentieth-century understanding and misunderstanding of Darwinian theory and the rise of fascism in Europe, Wells also invites us to ask exactly who may be afraid of what here, what desire this fear shadows, and why.

The insubstantiality of our frame-narrator parallels the murky fear inspired by what he has heard, his foggy thought, his claim to need to write to “clear up” this “fantastic and unreasonable” tale, the haunting of a countryside instead of “a haunted house or a haunted churchyard or anything so limited” (CP 9–10). What especially distinguishes this tale isn’t so much its scope as its subject—the haunting of *Homo sapiens* by an ancestor, perhaps a “missing link,” a species of the past that lives on in the present, in the landscape and our bodies, as “a continual overshadowing dread” (10). “It’s bad enough to be haunted by Georgian ghosts, Stuart ghosts, Elizabethan ghosts, ghosts in armour and ghosts in chains,” Dr. Finchatton tells the narrator, for “one has a sort of fellow-feeling for them. They aren’t just spirits of cruelty, suspicion, and ape-like malice. But the souls of a tribe of cave men might be . . . Grisly ghosts.” And, he continues, “if cave men, why not apes? Suppose all our ancestors rose against us! Reptiles, fish, amoebae!” (45). Finchatton here articulates a version of what Beer (1996: 143) calls “the idea of mythic simultaneity,” according to which “information is conceived as continuous, embedded in the body and the unconscious,” even as this very understanding “makes the idea of the missing link an impossibility, since all previous experiences and recollections have been internalized without loss.” As she argues, in “modernism, the missing link was no longer previous, obliterated; it informed the present and troubled it” (144).

## Grisly Ghosts

Wells borrows the phrase “Grisly ghosts” from his own 1921 short story, “The Grisly Folk,” which, much like the embedded narrative of *The Croquet Player*, begins with bones. “Can these bones live?” the narrator asks, and continues: “We see them in museum cases, sorted out in accordance with principles we do not understand. . . . Most of us stare through glass at them, wonder vaguely for a moment at that half-savage, half-animal past of our race, and pass on” (1979: 285). Part anthropology and part fancy, the story presents encounters between “true men” (*Homo*

*sapiens*) and “grisly folk,” another member of the *Homo* group he refers to as “Neandertalers”: “Until quite recently it was supposed that they were true men like ourselves. But now we begin to realize that they were different, so different that it is impossible that they can be very close relations of ours” (286).

Wells associates these grisly folk with all the other “species of pseudo-men,” some of whom made terrifyingly “huge implements, four or five times as big as those made by any known race of true men.” The Chellean giants, with their “sole-shaped blades of stone” (286),<sup>5</sup> lived much earlier than the grisly folk, but Wells connects them with a shared spirit of violence, “long unreasoning memories,” and “very set purposes” (288). Meeting the grisly folk, Wells imagines, “was the beginning of a nightmare age for the little children of the human tribe. . . . The legends of ogres and man-eating giants that haunt the childhood of the world may descend to us from those ancient days of fear. And for the Neandertalers it was the beginning of an incessant war that could only end in extermination” (295), because “Neandertalers thought the little children of men fair game and pleasant eating” (296).

Though such encounters might no longer occupy human memory, according to the story, paleoanthropology and psychoanalysis remind us that

nothing is ever completely lost. Seventy or eighty years ago a few curious *savants* began to suspect that there were hidden memories in certain big chipped flints and scraps of bone they found in ancient gravels. Much more recently others have begun to find hints of remote strange experiences in the dreams and odd kinks of modern minds. By degrees, *these dry bones begin to live again*. . . . A day may come when these recovered memories may grow as vivid as if we in our persons had been there and shared in the thrill and fear of those primordial days; a day may come when the great beasts of the past will leap to life again in our imaginations. (297–98, emphasis mine)

In a sense, the evocation of Ezekiel in the opening of the story suggests a secular prophecy fulfilled in *The Croquet Player*, which figures paleoanthropological discovery as a return of repressed unreason, in turn prophesying a second world war, a day when “recovered memories” grow vivid and “great beasts of the past” live again.

“Grisly Folk” is an example of what Nicholas Ruddick (2009: 2) calls “prehistoric fiction,” a “speculative literary genre dependent

on extrapolations from scientific or quasi-scientific discourse.” This relatively neglected subset of science fiction relies on the idea of human prehistory, the emergence of which dates to the second half of the nineteenth century. Following Glyn Daniel’s study of the subject, Ruddick identifies 1859 as “the annus mirabilis that saw the acceptance by educated people in Britain and France of human antiquity beyond the 6,000 years or so traditionally allowed by the biblical chronology” (5). Of course 1859 makes sense, as the year Darwin published *Origin of the Species*. But as Frank Spencer (1990: 1) observes, by 1860, “there was no scientific consensus on the extent of human antiquity. . . . Indeed, many of those who had supported the movement for human antiquity were plainly suspicious of Charles Darwin’s . . . transmutational thesis.” While by the turn of the century the ideas of Charles Lyell and Darwin were both generally accepted, researching human origins remained a very speculative and ideologically loaded discipline, one “extremely vulnerable to subjective distortions,” Ruddick (2009: 12) writes, “because the objects of its scrutiny are very closely related to the scrutineers themselves. Its history indicates that paleoanthropology is also more vulnerable than most other sciences to serious, long-lasting distortions caused by deliberate fraud.”

According to Ruddick, in the nineteenth century a paucity of physical evidence and “a progressionist mentality” led to the emergence of a simplistic “unilinear ascending sequence of human development, often visualized as rungs on a ladder” (30). As a result, “Victorian prehistorians sought confirmation of the sequence of human evolution in the shape of fossilized ‘missing links’ in the chain, links that clearly revealed the transition between simian and human form” (30–31). Virginia Richter (2011: 58) suggests we can read the search for such links as a figuration of species anxiety, of “a threat” that is also “representative of the pleasure of regression.” Prehistoric fiction tends to “resolve this tension by presenting two sets of missing link figures, one to be exterminated, the other to be assimilated in order to revitalise the jaded civilised man.”

Accepted as a species in 1857, the “Neanderthals” Wells calls grisly folk were considered man-apes,<sup>6</sup> and although in 1863 T. H. Huxley argued that Neanderthals were far more like humans than apes, it was Huxley who popularized the term “missing link” in 1864 (Ruddick 2009: 31). Despite Huxley’s claims, Ruddick observes that

The dehumanization of the Neanderthal man had been completed even before the First World War by the French paleontologist Marcellin Boule, who had assessed the almost complete skeleton of the “Old Man” of La Chapelle-aux-Saints (Corrèze) (discovered in 1908), and had concluded that Neanderthal man had been a bestial, slouching creature, not worthy of a place in the direct line of human ancestry. The expulsion of the Neanderthals from the human lineage opened an awkward gap in the “man-ape” part of the scale. For many in the English-speaking world, this rung was conveniently filled after 1911 by “Piltdown Man.” (57)

Wells's story continues this “dehumanization” of the Neanderthal, but in the service of a particular ideal of humanity. As Richter (2011: 165–66) has it, in the midst of popular and scientific debates about human origins, “which culminated in the craze about the Piltdown forgery, Neanderthal man was installed as a brutish Other,” and it is “this image of the Neanderthal man” that informed Wells's “depiction of the first encounter between these dull, brutish hominids and the true ancestors of man.”

Interestingly, it is Wells's long-standing commitment to socialism, cooperation, and reason that predisposed him toward historically speculative explanations for human violence, explanations at once seemingly biological and divorced from human biology. Ruddick (2009: 58) recognizes that no one in the period looked harder for clues about the Great War in prehistory than Wells, who blamed the origin of war itself on “the rise of irrational beliefs during the Neolithic period.” But his view that “Wells's loathing for the Neanderthals seems too excessive to have a scientific rationale” (59) inclines him to read “The Grisly Folk” as a “political allegory,” with “the Neanderthals represent[ing] the destructive force of selfish individualism.”<sup>7</sup> If Wells's antipathy does seem irrational, that visceral response itself might seem to preclude an allegorical reading. In this light, we might consider “The Grisly Folk” as a narrative of displacement. As Richter (2011: 166) suggests, “Wells opposed the ‘ancestor-less’ first men, always already human, to the ‘others’ who are made to carry the whole burden of an animal heredity.” Certainly, in *The Croquet Player* this biological horror isn't simply symbolic, and cannot be dismissed as mere metaphor.

## The Player

How does the seed of the “The Grisly Folk” grow into *The Croquet Player*? Why does Wells choose this unlikely narrator to frame his story of a grisly haunting? Patrick Parrinder (2004: 32) notes that Wells’s title references Odette Keun’s “H. G. Wells—The Player” (1934), a sharp, personal review of his autobiography, arguing that *The Croquet Player* exhibits conflicting aspects of Wells’s thought:

These two figures of obsession, the manic and the depressive, the schizophrenic Messiah and the neurotic man of science, are set off against the insouciant croquet player who has no pretensions to foresight and is ruled, instead, by the most insipid of social conventions. Georgie Frobisher, who shares one of Wells’s own forenames, may perhaps be seen as a projection of a further side of his author’s personality, that of the entertainer, the enthusiastic amateur games-player, and writer of social comedies. (Not only was Wells the son of a cricketer, but two years before *The Croquet Player* his former mistress Odette Keun had lampooned him in an article entitled “H. G. Wells—The Player”).

While Wells takes his title from Keun’s review, I will argue that he answers this character assassination with a complex demonstration of the importance of empathy. Indeed, Wells makes the narrator central to an understanding of the embedded, competing narratives of the text.

Clues to the mystery of his textual existence are provided by the narrator himself, and the fact that his introduction fills one of the novel’s four chapters indicates the importance of his character for the novel as a whole. Describing himself as “one of the best croquet players alive” and “a first-rate archer,” he adds, “one is neither of those things without a considerable amount of discipline and balance in one’s makeup” (*CP* 10); but he also says, “[I am] a trifle effeminate and ridiculous because I make croquet my game” and “everybody calls me Georgie in an affectionate manner” (11). Georgie is “just a little inclined to be what the Americans call a sissy,” with “soft hands and an ineffective will” (13). In at least three senses, then, the narrator parallels the “insubstantial” or liminal subject of the doctor’s story. He occupies a space that defies binary gender roles; he devotes himself to “harmless and fruitless activities,” infantilized by a “ridiculous” game; and he transcends the ground of ordinary life: “self-indulgent and dependent,” rich by virtue of his aunt’s wealth, he takes “inferiors for granted, servants for granted, and the general good behavior of the world” for granted (12–13). By his own



light, he represents “the floating cream of humanity” (14)—as far from a Neanderthal as a member of the *Homo* group could be. But although Georgie is frightened by Finchatton’s story, he believes, or wants to believe it, just as many want to believe that a sasquatch roams the wooded expanses of Oregon or “Bigfoot” the swamps of Georgia—and just as Wells wanted to believe the origins of war are so far in our past they are almost outside our biology.

And yet in *The Croquet Player*, a missing link or grisly ancestor is closer to us than we want to acknowledge—aggressively present and ugly, sharper than the images of cryptozoological evidence or the furry smile of the sasquatch in *Harry and the Hendersons* (1987). And though this creature of bone and spirit is astonishingly ancient, it is not to be misread as eternal, as does the high-church curate at Marsh Havering, the Reverend Mortover. Mortover tells the doctor that the source of the mysterious dread of Cainsmarsh is, in fact, diabolical possession, and that the marshes must thus be exorcised. Finchatton reads Mortover’s interpretation as of a piece with the fanaticism that causes bloodshed in Belfast, brutal class warfare in Liverpool, and violence in Spain, action driven not simply by belief but by fear: “Endemic panic, that was the contagion of the marshes” (56). But whether this contagion is viral or psychic, Dr. Finchatton isn’t sure. But it is the old vicar’s (the low churchman’s) strangely concrete, exegetical theory of the origins of this malign force that echoes through the text: “The evil was in the soil, he declared, *underground*. He laid great stress on the word ‘underground.’ . . . There was something mighty and dreadful, buried in Cainsmarsh. Something colossally evil. Broken up. Scattered all over the Marsh” (40). This evil is stirred up by drainage works and, here, archeological digs:

“Graves—graves everywhere!” And some of the ancient people, he said, were “petrified.” You found stones of the strangest shapes. Abominable shapes. . . .

At a jump he was denouncing Darwinism and evolution. It was remarkable how life-long controversies had interwoven with his Cainsmarsh distress! Had I seen the museum at Eastfolk? he asked.

He talked of the bones exhibited there. . . . Giants, he insisted. Look at what they call implements there! Axes, spears—nothing but huge weapons for killing and killing. “Murder stones” he called them. The murder stones of giants. (41–42)

He had got the children of Cain and the cave men and the mammoths and the megatheria and dinosaurs all jumbled up in the wildest confusion. It was a storm of preposterous nonsense. And yet—and yet, you know. (44)

After his conversations with the vicar and the curate, Finchatton consults the curator of the local museum, the archeologist who unearthed the bones on the marsh:

“There were Neanderthalers and—But let me show you our special glory!”

He led me to a locked glass cupboard in which was a thick louring beetle-browed skull, that still seemed to scowl from its empty sockets. Beside it was its underjaw. . . . The little curator watched me as I surveyed his prize specimen and marked the snarling grin of its upper jaw and the shadowy vitality that still lurked in the caverns whence its eyes had once glared upon the world.

“That might, I suppose, be our ancestor?” I said.

“More probable than not.”

“That in our blood!” I said.

I turned half round and looked at the monster askance and, when I spoke again, I spoke, as if he also might be listening. I asked a score of amateurish questions. There had been countless generations of him and his kind, I learnt. His sort had slouched and snarled over the marshes for a hundred times the length of all recorded history. In comparison with *his* overlordship our later human rule was a thing of yesterday. (58–59)

This “special glory” seems very much like a missing link, a cousin to the “Dawn man” Piltdown was supposed to be. Such a link in the paleoanthropological chain would offer material evidence of human-ape/ape-human ancestry and the continuity of the species. Evidence that we are subject to the same laws of nature. In the novella, Dr. Finchatton imagines it as evidence that that which we have laboriously erected, as Freud has it, to defend ourselves against nature, is a fragile veneer covering a “bestial” biology.

And so the horror stirred by these bones is, arguably, a horror of the earth itself, extending beyond the vicar and the curate to “men of science.” Dr. Finchatton, for instance, describes the scene: “There crouched the marshes under the moonlight and the long low mists

seemed to have stayed their drifting at the slam of the door against the wall. As if they paused to listen. And over it all was something, a malignant presence such as I had never apprehended before" (46–47). Where Finchatton attributes his dread to the ghosts of ancestors, the curator's explanation is philosophical or, in his terms, metaphysical:

We have poked into the past, unearthing age after age, and we peer more and more forward into the future. And that's what's the matter with us. (63)

We have broken the frame of the present and the past, and the long black past of fear and hate that our grandfathers never knew of, never suspected, is pouring back upon us. And the future opens up like a gulf to swallow us up. The animal fears again and the animal rages again and the old faiths no longer restrain it. The cave man, the ancestral ape, the ancestral brute, have returned. So it is. I can assure you I am talking realities to you. It is going on now everywhere. . . . The world is full of menace—not only here. (64)

What figures most in the novella, however, is not the cruelty of nonhuman animals but, rather, cruelty to them. Importantly, such cruelty was noted as a key symptom of the dread by the old vicar near the beginning of the text who, near the end, finally attacks his wife. And, in the end, it is the cruelty to animals that finally unnerves the doctor: "I came upon something dreadful. It was a dog that had been beaten to death. . . . It wasn't simply dead; it was battered to a pulp. With some blunt heavy instrument. There couldn't have been a whole bone left in it. Somebody must have rained blows upon it, a frantic whirlwind of blows" (66–67). In the excessive violence of a "whirlwind of blows" we see a total loss of reason, the falling away of the "humane" behavior we prefer to see as a mark of our humanity.

While the kind, or *humane*, treatment of nonhuman animals defines what it means to be human, these nonhuman animals are viewed as "brutes," as the very creatures capable of excessive, *unreasonable* violence:

"More and more did the threat of that primordial Adamite dominate me. I could not banish that eyeless stare and that triumphant grin from my mind, sleeping or waking. . . . It became as vast as a cliff, a mountainous skull in which the orbits and hollows of the jaw were huge caves. . . . In the foreground

I saw his innumerable descendants, swarming like ants, swarms of human beings hurrying to and fro, making helpless gestures of submission or deference, resisting an overpowering impulse to throw themselves under his all-devouring shadow. Presently these swarms began to fall into lines and columns, were clad in uniforms, formed up and began marching and trotting toward the black shadows under those worn and rust-stained teeth. From which darkness there presently oozed something—something winding and trickling, and something that manifestly tasted very agreeable to him. Blood.”

And then Finchatton said a queer thing. “Little children killed by air-raids in the street.” (69–70)

While Wells was writing *The Croquet Player* the Spanish Civil War began; little children were indeed killed by air-raids in the streets, and, horribly, regarded from such heights like so many insects, “innumerable descendants, swarming like ants.” Starting with bones, escalating to human swarms falling into a great army, this sequence seems a nightmare echo of the passage in Ezekiel alluded to in “The Grisly Folk”: “And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? . . . So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army” (37: 3–10).

Surprisingly, there is very little critical work on the *The Croquet Player*; the longer studies, such as John Batchelor’s *H. G. Wells* (1985) and William Scheick’s *The Splintering Frame: The Later Fiction of H. G. Wells* (1984) mention it only briefly. I suspect this is due, in part, to its limited availability; first printed in the United Kingdom in 1936 and the United States in 1937, it was not reprinted again in the United Kingdom until the Trent edition in 1998 (and then 2003) and the University of Nebraska Press edition in 2004. What work there is tends to read it as a psychological exploration of a range of attitudes toward modernity and the rise of fascism in Europe that led up to World War II. Joanne Wood (1999: 493), for example, notes that Wells, “well aware of the negative potential of Darwinian contingency, views history as an irrational force,” so that in *The Croquet Player*, “the very fact of history’s presence in the body can produce madness. The strangely unsettling narrative imagines the modern mind as being haunted by history, specifically by the Darwinian tenets of evolution.”<sup>8</sup> While Wood argues Wells “enabled the revolutions in form that decisively launched twentieth-century modernism” (490), John Hammond’s introduction to the Trent edition places the novella squarely in the tradition of the modern novel,

emphasizing the friendship between Joseph Conrad and Wells and the horrifying representation of human “bestiality” ([1998] 2003, viii) shared by *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *The Croquet Player*.

At this point it is worth reminding ourselves that “bestiality” and “animality” aren’t identical, particularly because Hammond (among others) conflates the two concepts. He argues that Wells’s “profound” conviction of “man’s animality, his conception that *Homo sapiens* was a transitory phase in the evolutionary process,” is a “conviction that man was essentially unchanged since the age of unpolished stone, that civilisation was a veneer which could be rolled back at any time to reveal the animal beneath” (xviii). An idea of animality does indeed undergird Wells’s fantasy, but one which interrupts a reading of it as an allegorical opposition to reason. In the context of *The Croquet Player* the phrase “ingenious unravelling of evidence” suggests not only mystery stories or crime fiction or science writing—narratives solved or resolved by reason—but also the unraveling of reason itself, the failure of that by which mysteries are laid to rest like bones in the earth. Mystery is all around us; the material world is deeply complex and inherently entangled. Animals are all around us and *inside* us too.

The idea of animality in the novel is, like the idea of reason itself, too dialectical to allow for a univocal reading. It both participates in and challenges the “bestial” discourse of nature, particularly in the way “evidence” itself is presented in the novel, moving from Georgie to Finchatton to Norbert. The form of this movement, from foolish dilettante to “infected” medical man to speculative man of science encourages us, as readers, to embody a more complex, ecological view of humanity. Wells counts on *us* to become the final frame of the story. The utopian socialist, the visionary who cannot but help wish more for us, counts on us to counter a religious reading of the world as “evil” and its scientific counterpart of nature as “bestial.”

Interrupting their conversation, and the fog of unreason, Dr. Norbert takes over as Finchatton leaves, offering Georgie an explanation for Finchatton’s story:

“Animals,” he said, “live wholly in the present. They are framed in immediate things. So are really unsophisticated people. . . . But we men, we have been probing and piercing into the past and the future. We have been multiplying memories, histories, traditions; we have filled ourselves with forebodings and plannings and apprehensions. And so our worlds have become overwhelmingly vast for us, terrific, appalling. Things

that had seemed forgotten for ever have suddenly come back into the very present of our consciousness. . . . Man is still what he was. Invincibly bestial, envious, malicious, greedy. Man, Sir, unmasked and disillusioned, is the same fearing, snarling, fighting beast he was a hundred thousand years ago. These are no metaphors, Sir. . . . The brute has been marking time and dreaming of a progress it has failed to make. Any archeologist will tell you as much; modern man has no better skull, no better brain. Just a cave man, more or less trained. . . . Civilization, progress, all *that*, we are discovering, was a delusion. Nothing was secured.” (CP 88–89)

Norbert’s explanation “began like pseudo-science and philosophy, but gradually it became more and more a booming, disconcerting exhortation” (88). He, too, he admits to Georgie, was “infected” by Finchatton’s tale: “Today all over the world, *intellectual men are going mad!* They are dithering, because they realize that the fight against this cave man who is over us, who is in us, who is indeed us, is going against these imaginary selves” (91). Tellingly, Georgie confesses that it was Norbert, not Finchatton, who made him feel “like that wedding guest who was gripped by the ancient mariner.”

This is how Wells breaks the frame of his own embedded narrative, of our reading-present: he encourages us to see *both* Norbert’s version of the theory of “breaking the frame of our present” (63) and Georgie’s reaction to this quasi-fascist exhortation as deeply problematic:

“Do as I have done and shape your mind to a new scale. Only giants can save the world from complete relapse—and so we—we who care for civilization—have to become giants. We have to bind a harder, stronger civilization like steel about the world. We have to make such a mental effort as the stars have never witnessed yet. Arise O Mind of Man!” (He called me that!) “Or be forever defeated.”

I wanted to say I preferred to be defeated without making any fuss about it, but he gave me no chance to say that. For now indeed he was fairly raving. There was even a touch of froth on his lips. He paced up and down and talked on and on, in a fine frenzy.

I suppose from first to last throughout the ages decent people of my sort have had to listen to this kind of thing, but it seemed to me beyond all reason that I should have to listen to it. (92–93)

Norbert's repetition of "giant" here is telling, for the other giants in this tale are the very grisly folk, the "cave man" and "the ancestral ape" (64) he opposes. From the late nineteenth century on the critique of capitalism, of its dehumanization of "modern man," has in a few instances turned half-circle, arriving at its own dehumanizations, becoming what some German thinkers called "the socialism of fools." The phrase, widely attributed to August Bebel,<sup>9</sup> referred to the anti-Semitic reaction to capitalism as a Jewish conspiracy; in the 1930s this reaction fed fascism and its terrifying call to power. Even if "The Grisly Folk" may be read as an anticapitalist allegory, as Ruddick contends, *The Croquet Player* is certainly much more: anticapitalist, antifascist, and complexly humanist.

Earlier I argued that it was Wells's long-standing commitments to socialism, cooperation, and reason that, at least in part, predisposed him toward historically speculative explanations for human violence. At the same time, this commitment to the mitigation of human suffering fuels the authoritarian tendencies we see in texts like *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933). Reconciling Wells-the-social-progressive with Wells-the-authoritarian-man-of-science has long been a problem for Wells scholarship. In *The Intellectual and the Masses*, John Carey (1992: 150) refused to split him into the "good" and the "bad" Wells, arguing that he knew "that adequate control must involve a degree of interference, extending to every living person, which would outrage old-world concepts of individual freedom. He sees that in an overpopulated world human beings are a plague. It was not easy for him to reach these conclusions." Wells's vision to eliminate suffering would itself, Carey suggests, involve "widespread death and suffering":

A transitional period of "grim systematization," dictatorially imposed by the ruling élite and lasting perhaps many years, would be necessary before mankind was ready for happiness. But after that would come the green world. Mankind would live rationally in a pollution-free global garden, with the population kept below the safety limit of 2,000 million. Education would eliminate religion. Poverty, war, and disease would be obsolete. The world's forests would grow again. Biological research would multiply plant varieties. Animal species would be preserved in vast wild-life parks, closed to humans. (151)

For Philip Coupland (2000: 542), Wells's thought was a strange interplay of creation and destruction, leaving him to "seek 'liberal' ends by means which were anything but."

As he wrote in the 1934 revised edition of *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*, the world situation demanded a “militant form of the open conspiracy,” an “overt and definite world organization of will and aim.” As has been shown, an authoritarian élite without scruples about using violence was a long-established aspect of Wells’s theory of revolutionary praxis, but it was the notion of a formally organized political movement that was the novel element of Wells’s approach in the early 1930s which led him to link “fascist” means to “liberal” ends. (545)

Wells’s authoritarian streak is bound up with his socialism, his hope for people and other animals, even his antifascism. The contradictions in his history, science, or social policy appear in his fiction, *The Croquet Player* in particular, as an enlivening complexity. Indeed, for Carey (1992: 140), Wells’s doubts about a scientific program of progress “persistently enrich his fiction,” a view elaborated by Ben Clarke (2015: 187):

Despite their accessibility, his novels possess a radical openness. Their juxtaposition of multiple forms, voices and ideas enables them to function as discursive structures that generate questions they cannot answer. This counters Wells’ own claims to authoritative judgement, and suggests a democratic politics founded upon the recognition of difference at odds with his declared conception of effective government, which emphasizes expert consensus. . . . His importance, as both a writer and a thinker, lies in his contradictions, the ways in which his work questions itself, . . . in which an authoritative voice is destabilized, undermining the idea of narrative or political closure.

This, then, is the accomplishment of *The Croquet Player*. Perhaps more than any of Wells’s other great fictions, it commands our engagement and requires our empathy.

And it calls for a complex, dialectical reading. We see reason turning back upon itself to embrace unreason, as Norbert—the novella’s figure of the intellectual—attempts to create his own mythos. For John Huntington (2004: 106), *The Croquet Player* “sets up a dialectic between the fantasy of primitive reversion (fascism being one of the forms of reversion) and the rationality of science. Dr. Norbert’s bullying rationality, though it debunks the childish idea of a haunted



landscape, itself becomes totalitarian and oppressive." In his reading, the story's end stages a "dazzling duet" in which neither Frobisher nor Norbert "achieve dominance," and the "elliptic and self-contradicting suggestiveness" of the novel as a whole "approaches the ambiguous art of high modernism" (106–7). This reading, however, fails to account for the fundamental importance of how Georgie reacts to what he hears.

For this is the means by which we make the turn, by which we become the fourth "frame." At stake isn't only Georgie's damning description of Norbert but his reaction to the unreason Norbert represents. When the reader ought to be horrified by Georgie's lack of empathy, Huntington reads him as a mere foil, insisting on "moderation, compromise, and good manners at all costs" (106). When Georgie *himself* ought to be horrified, he is only indignant that "decent people" of his "sort" should have to listen to "this kind of thing." What is the "thing" here? The violent content of Norbert's raving or simply the indecorousness of Norbert himself? Georgie's general lack of empathy is, I argue, the key to the tale. He treats Norbert almost as if he belonged to a different species, as if he were seeing himself, as he told us at the outset, as the "floating cream of humanity." As Huntington argues, he "treats Finchatton's narrative as a pure fiction that he can enjoy" (101). Georgie was spellbound by the story but unmoved by Finchatton himself. It was a ghoulish entertainment, but Norbert's tirade isn't entertaining. Quite the reverse—he points a finger at Georgie, demanding his involvement in the fate of humanity. Norbert would have the player stop playing.

Empathy is the energy of this novella; it is integral to our ability to be gripped by it, horrified by it, compelled to find a way through its layers and turns to a world in which people matter. It is empathy that may interrupt the dialectic of Enlightenment or, as the novel has it, the recurring return of the view of human nature as bestial, in religious, scientific, or psycho-mythological terms. We have such a frivolous, "unreliable" narrator so that Wells may rely on us. This is the humanism of the text. What Huntington (2004: 105–6) sees as "a paradox at the heart of Wells's own Darwinism" is, I think, the complexity of a humanism uneasy with itself, as this suggests: "Our vaunted civilization, an 'epiphenomenon' according to T. H. Huxley, is merely a veneer that the mind has built over savagery. Yet Huxley and Wells would argue that we are not savages; we can and must think our way through these dark matters."<sup>10</sup> But just thinking one's way often leads nowhere, as in much of Wells's thinking about the future, which leads either to utopia

or extinction. What is important and unusual about *The Croquet Player* is its refusal of this binary, and its reliance on empathy to complicate (if not deconstruct) bestializing notions of both “savagery” and civilization. Neither Les Noupets nor Cainsmarsh are real places.

## Empathy, Extinction, and Ancestry

Let us return for a moment to Wells’s comment, in his preface to volume 1 of a 1924 collected works, that *The Time Machine* now seems to him to be “unsympathetic” to humanity, that he doubted if “the H. G. Wells of 1894 and the H. G. Wells of 1922 would get on very well together.” In *The Time Machine*, *Homo sapiens* have evolved into two separate species, one of which exploits the other, keeping them like herd animals. As countless readers and critics have noticed, this framing of the future speaks to present class politics, to the dehumanization within capitalism. While Wells found his younger evolutionary thought lacking in sympathy for the species, it is nonetheless a vision that depicts the consequences of our lack of sympathy for each other: we become meat or, perhaps, we bifurcate, our bodies becoming meat for our darkened, distant minds—a lack of empathy figured as a strange mind/body dualism. While we can understand *The Croquet Player* as, in part, a move to distance himself from his earlier work, it is also a continuation of the concerns of that early work: it is empathy that makes us human. In Finchatton’s story, the core of the novella’s layered drama, extinct ancestors, like the missing link, threaten our capacity for empathy and thus our extinction.

Of course, the long-standing fascination with missing links speaks to both a persistent need for and a persistent fear of nature—of the wild, outside and inside our bodies and cultures. It is through biophobic obsession with “the missing race” that Bowles’s first letter to Darwin, dated May 17, 1877, articulates a theory that the crisis of “barbarism” in his century is rooted in our bestial history:

I think I can point out this missing race, show where and how it lives, and that it is owing to its influence upon humanity that the enlightenment of the 19th Century is not what it ought to be. . . . They live in our midst, these speaking monkeys, . . . and by the intermingling of their impure and animal blood, they repress the strong tendency to good. . . . Is it not within our daily experience to meet men and women—so called—

who are cruel, selfish, licentious and imitative, having all or a portion of these monkey attributes—and no other qualifications to distinguish them from the monkey tribe, except the power of speech? . . . But a question now arises as to how this inferior race came to occupy the position it does in our midst? . . . We often see what we call retribution, overtaking us even here below, for the wrong we commit, and the infliction in question may have been sent as a punishment to the nations for the crime of slavery itself and those which it entails.

Bowles's letter reads a little like the 1988 John Carpenter movie *They Live*: in place of aliens from above taking over the world we have "speaking monkeys" overtaking us "from below." Here it is the animals of the earth, represented by monkeys, themselves racist stand-ins for ethnic others, that visit the sins of the father upon the son.

The slippage in the nineteenth-century discourse between race and species that we see in Bowles's letter persists in the way other races are imagined as other species in the bestializing discourse of anthropology through the 1930s. In *Dark Vanishings* (2003), Patrick Brantlinger examines how narratives about "primitive races" often were intertwined with anxiety about white (as human) "devolution" about how the "white race is 'passing' while one or more of the colored races may supersede it" (191). As Brantlinger describes it, "a variation of the 'decline of the West' theme stressed that, through the civilizing process itself, the white race was committing suicide. The masses, so it was frequently claimed, were swamping the classes and subverting traditional values. Western civilization or indeed the entire human species was said to be devolving into its opposite, as in H. G. Wells's *Time Machine*" (191–92). This isn't to imply that Wells's novel portrays racist fears, however guilty his teacher Huxley was of mixing Darwinian theory and social Darwinism in *Evolution and Ethics* (1890).<sup>11</sup> It is merely to demonstrate the biophobia often at work in missing link and extinction discourses, a phobia that sometimes takes the form of pseudospeciation (the figuring of "other" ethnicities as other species).

But what of biophilia? The idea of the missing link also works against the threat of extinction, reflecting the biophilic desire for the "man-ape/ape-man" of the past, the desire for continuity with the rest of living nature and evolutionary history. If extinction amounts to the disruption of such continuity, perhaps we can imagine the idea of missing links as a search for reassurance against our end.

In “On Extinction” (1893), Wells characterizes the struggle for existence as the highest form of drama, and seems to empathize intensely with those species left behind: “The life that has played and lost, comes at last to the pitiless judgment of time, and is slowly and remorselessly annihilated. This is the saddest chapter of biological science—the tragedy of Extinction. In the long galleries of the geological museum are the records of judgements that have been passed graven upon the rocks” (1893b: 623). He concludes the paragraph with an audible sigh: “Save for the riddle of their scattered bones, it is as if they had never been.” Here, Wells passionately refused to associate evolution with progress: “In the living world of to-day the same forces are at work as in the past. One Fate still spins, and the gleaming scissors cut. In the last hundred years the swift change of condition throughout the world . . . and the consequent ‘swarming’ of the whole globe by civilised men, has pushed many an animal to the very verge of destruction” (624). While nature itself neither progresses nor regresses, individual species do rise and fall, and in this passage, as in *The Croquet Player*, we have an image of humans as swarming insects, of evolutionary “success” as overpopulation and overconsumption. This matters to Wells; the human-caused sixth mass extinction drastically alters the global ecosystem and what it means to be human, for we cannot be who we are without the plants and animals with whom we’ve coevolved. Consider the terrifying vision of the “Professor” in “The Man of the Year Million” (1893a):

“The animals and plants die away before men, except such as he preserves for his food or delight, or such as maintain a precarious footing about him as commensals and parasites. . . . When he learns to do the work of chlorophyll without the plant, then his necessity for other animals and plants upon the earth will disappear. . . . There comes extinction. In the last days man will be alone on earth, and his food will be won by the chemist from the dead rocks and the sunlight. . . . The irrational fellowship of man will give place to an intellectual co-operation, and emotion fall within the scheme of reason. . . . And so at last comes a vision of earthly cherubim, hopping heads, great unemotional intelligences, and little hearts. . . . We must imagine these creatures,” says the Professor, “in galleries and laboratories deep down in the bowels of the earth.”

This is a prophecy of the end of empathy, and so the end of humanity, “changed beyond recognition. Yet the Professor is reasonable enough,

his facts are current science, his methods orderly. The contemplative man shivers at the prospect, starts up to poke the fire, and the whole of this remarkable book that is not written vanishes straightway in the smoke of his pipe." Long before *The Croquet Player*, Wells insisted that reason just isn't enough. For him, the image of "man" conquering nature is not an image of humanity at all.

In his 1891 essay, "Zoological Retrogression," Wells considers that nature may be "equipping some now humble creature with wider possibilities of appetite, endurance, or destruction, to rise in the fullness of time and sweep homo away into the darkness from which his universe arose. The Coming Beast must certainly be reckoned in any anticipatory calculations regarding the Coming Man" (253). And in "The Extinction of Man: Some Speculative Suggestions" (1894b), he sketches something like such a beast:

In no case the record of the fossils show a really dominant species succeeded by its own descendants. . . . In the past we have the evidence of the fossil *Paradoxides* [a crustacean] that creatures of this kind may at least attain a length of six feet, and, considering their intense pugnacity, a crab of such dimensions would be as formidable a creature as one could well imagine. And their amphibious capacity would give them an advantage against us. . . . And so far as zoological science goes we must, at least, admit that such a creature is an evolutionary possibility.

This animal is akin to the "monstrous crab-like creatures" ([1935] 1992: 94) dominating the last days on earth in *The Time Machine*. In "The Extinction," he continues: "Even now, for all we can tell, the coming terror may be crouching for its spring and the fall of humanity be at hand. In the case of every other predominant animal the world has ever seen, we repeat, the hour of its complete ascendancy has been the beginning of its decline" (1894b). As he has it in another 1894 essay, "The 'Cyclic' Delusion," "The recurrence of living things is also illusory. . . . We live in an eddy; are, as it were, the creatures of that eddy. But the great stream of the universe flows past us and onward" (1894a: 506).

Of course, human beings are subject not only to the long-term forces of evolution, but also to the immediate acceleration and devastation of modernity. We are our own worst enemies. It is for this reason that Wells periodically clung to Huxley's ([1893] 1947: 82) idea of "ethical evolution": in contrast to "survival of the fittest" it aims for "the fitting of as many as possible to survive." In the twentieth century it seemed

increasingly likely that we were actively accelerating the process of our departure from the earth, long before giant crabs or the like “rise up” to sweep us back into the “darkness” of time. On one level, however, the idea of “ethical evolution” betrays the Darwinian legacy Huxley and Wells helped to popularize. In 1893, Wells rightly disarticulates any notion of progress from the workings of evolution, but the Wells of the 1930s is absorbed by questions of human survival—questions driven by hope and fear, by the acceleration of science and technology, and by the stagnation of real social, economic, and political progress (like the reduction of suffering) in the postwar period. In *The Science of Life* (1930) Wells exemplifies the problem with Huxley’s “ethical evolution”; it fundamentally separates human beings from the rest of the biotic community: “When we reach man, Evolution does in part become purposeful. It has at least the possibility of becoming purposeful, because man is the first product of Evolution who has the capacity for long-range purpose, the first to be capable of controlling evolutionary destiny” (Wells, Huxley, and Wells 1930: 428). Here we see a turning away from Darwin’s greatest achievement, the scientific demonstration of human continuity and kinship with the rest of the animal world. Nature is not a chain of being or a hierarchy of intelligence of which humans are the pinnacle, and we are certainly not capable of controlling evolutionary destiny, however much we are capable of killing off and altering a great many species, including our own. The misguided belief that we are capable of such control, and his genuine hope that we can rescue our species from unnecessary suffering and an accelerated oblivion, are together at the heart of Wells’s authoritarian strain. And it led him toward eugenics. As John Partington (2003: 74) argues:

While Wells consistently rejected positive eugenics, claiming that the creation of an ideal type was antithetical to the principles of Darwinian evolution and arguing that competitive selection was a prerequisite for species advance, he felt that negative eugenics, the prevention of “congenital invalids” and certain anti-social types from breeding, and the employment of euthanasia against severely “diseased” new-borns did have a role in a scientifically-organised society. . . . Wells’s eugenic advocacy, however, could not be viewed in isolation but was intrinsically linked to his more immediate social policy concerns.

Eugenics disappeared from Wells’s writing after 1905, and though it returned in the 1930s with the idea of “ethical evolution,” it was later

firmly rejected: "In terms of human improvement, education was Wells's first and last hope. He considered negative eugenics as an inquiring biologist was perhaps bound to do, only to ultimately (though after many years of considering its value) dismiss it as a breach of human rights. . . . Wells, as an old man of 78, did not want to pass away with the taint of Galtonian eugenics upon him" (79).

If human continuity with other animals implies our eventual extinction, perhaps the new fascination with ancestry research might—strangely—make that extinction (and even individual deaths) seem less real. Going back to the past might be one way we try to escape the future; the astounding new popularity of ancestry research suggests as much. In the midst of the Sixth Mass Extinction, intense interest in ancestry is no longer confined to genealogical societies (such as the New England Historical Society with its office on the fashionable Newbury Street of Boston) or the search for aristocratic heritage, as millions of people have now watched genealogy mystery shows like the BBC/PBS series "Who Do You Think You Are?" or used online services like Ancestry.com.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps it goes without saying that the more uncertain the future seems, the more we cling to an idea of the past. In an age when what we have called wilderness has all but disappeared from the earth, when the earth appears wholly mapped and continually surveyed from space, the idea that the future is knowable seems paradoxically less and less tenable in light of the incalculable ramifications of global warming on a climate system whose workings are themselves incalculable—however much we are generally certain that the future will bring vast destruction and massive death. We just aren't capable of apprehending the infinitely complex ecological and evolutionary effects of our actions. As that awful future looms larger and larger, the craze for a family tree in full leaf is suggestive of our fear of change and of our stubborn refusal to acknowledge its reality—another example, as Wells might see it, of the "cyclic delusion." In this context, it seems all too apt that *The Croquet Player's* embedded depiction of the past as a source of environmental and bodily contamination is framed as a present marked by the insufficiency of reason and failure of empathy.

Hoaxing suggests ambivalent desire; it protests its cleverness too much. The "real or fake" story within *The Croquet Player* isn't simply a projection of internal alienation onto the environment. It is, rather, a recognition that we carry the environment, in its myriad otherness, in our bodies. We also enslave, consume, and kill off our present biological kin in genocidal numbers, even as the search for undiscovered animals,

including missing links and imaginary creatures, escalates. Just as we might imagine a great-great grandfather to be the father we wish we had, the understanding soul, the temperamental match, fascination with missing links is misplaced or, rather, displaced. In midst of the Sixth Mass Extinction, it seems like disavowed biophilia: the feeling of kinship, of coevolution with the other creatures of the earth. This disavowal is rooted in our ambivalent relationship not simply to what we call nature but to culture—the belief that culture or, as Wells has it, civilization, makes us humane, superior, or happy and the fear that it renders us corrupt, robotic, or miserable. Empathy, as both a capacity and an idea, is the key that connects these desires and discourses. As the character of H.G. Wells confesses at the end of the 1979 movie *Time After Time*, “Every age is the same. It is only love that makes any of them bearable.”

## §

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## Notes

1. Most notably, *Time*'s number one book of 2007, Alan Weisman's *The World without Us*.

2. Including “On Extinction” (September 1893), “The Man of the Year Million” (November 1893), “The Extinction of Man” (September 1894), and “The Cyclic Delusion” (November 1894).

3. See Frank Spencer's *Piltdown: A Scientific Forgery* (1990):

The period between the two World Wars witnessed the discovery of several important human fossils which contributed to the changing theoretical ethos of human paleontology[;] it is contended that the recovery of the human cranial remains at Swanscombe, in Kent, England, by Alvan T. Marston in 1935–36, and his subsequent attempts to equate this find with those at Piltdown had in fact been the prime mover in the eventual collapse of the Piltdown fraud. (xvii)

See also the debunker's joint publication, Kenneth F. Oakley and J. S. Weiner's “Piltdown Man” (1955).



4. It also resembles some more obviously cryptozoological hoaxes, such as the one perpetrated by a team of Japanese climbers in 2008 who announced finding the footprints of a Yeti in the Dhaulagiri mountains of Nepal (Ramesh 2008), though perhaps not the less sophisticated Bigfoot discovery of the same year, widely reported in the US media (many of which had live coverage of the press conference held by the two Georgia “boys” who discovered the creature), which turned out to be a rubber gorilla suit. There is a line connecting cryptozoology to legitimate archeological anthropology, a continuum on which one finds arguments such as this one made by Grover Krantz, former professor of anthropology at Washington State: “*Gigantopithecus blacki* had a modern representative, the legendary Bigfoot” (quoted in Nickell 2011: 40).

5. “While varying considerably in size,” writes Spencer (1900: 9), “these Chellean implements were seen to be more or less amygdaloid or almond-shaped. . . . Boucher de Perthes had called these core-tools, ‘haches,’ or hand-axes, whereas Mortillet characterized them as simple ‘hand-hammers.’”

6. “But what of the ‘ape-man?’” asks Ruddick (2009: 31):

In 1868 Ernst Haeckel, the German evolutionist, has published his brilliant, though dangerously overassertive, popular exposition of man’s place in the new Darwinian cosmos, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (translated as *The History of Creation* in 1876). In it, he stated that the remains of an *Affenmensch* (ape-man) would one day be found. He even named this putative creature *Pithecanthropus alalus* (speechless ape-man) and located its probable home in the former continent of Lemuria, now mostly sunk beneath the Indian Ocean.

7. Ruddick (2009: 58) argues that “Wells strongly suggested that our Stone Age ancestors would have been justified in deliberately ethnically cleansing the Neanderthal submen from Europe.” However strong his aversion, the phrase “ethnically cleansing” doesn’t make sense here.

8. Wood (1999: 494) continues:

Here the idea that the body’s plasticity somehow remembers previous forms (an idea made only more strange by the fact that modern science verifies it, in the presence on human gene codes of vestigial DNA for our ancestral forms) underscores the moral Wells draws from Darwin: to have a body is to be the product of historical accident, haunted by the past but also by the body’s unforeseeable future. . . . As with the remote Paleolithic ancestor in *The Croquet Player*, the horror of the Martians in *The War of the Worlds* is their physical lack of kinship with humanity: the vision of this future body bears as little resemblance to our contemporary forms as those of the remote past.

9. The phrase is widely attributed to Bebel, but he may have only popularized the term.

10. At the same time, Ruddick (2009: 89) writes of Huxley that “no nineteenth-century thinker was more committed to demolishing the prejudices generated by the scriptural account of human origins,” observing that “it was Huxley who in *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* concluded that there was no ‘cerebral barrier’ between man and ape” (152).

11. Discussing colonialism, Huxley posits the infamous “garden metaphor” (see Feder 2008). “Huxley’s key example,” of such a colonial garden, Brantlinger (2003: 11–12) writes, “is Tasmania, a colony from which the aboriginals were supposedly totally eradicated by 1876, so he clearly has in mind the elimination of unwanted savages. Huxley was far from alone among Victorian scientists and intellectuals in believing that ‘the process of colonisation presents analogies to the formation of a garden which are highly instructive.’” Despite his ties to Huxley and his early period of advocating eugenics as a way to eliminate illness and unattractive qualities from the species, Wells’s attitude was not the same. Indeed, he has said that his inspiration for *War of the Worlds* (1898) was a conversation on “the discovery of Tasmania by the Europeans—a very frightful discovery for the native Tasmanians!” (quoted in Brantlinger, 15–16). It is telling that Wells’s *War of the Worlds* subverts the usual colonizing chain of events: it is the invaders, not the natives, who succumb to a disease for which they lack immunity. Employing “inferior” in the context of scientific and technological development, the novel itself explicitly calls our attention to European guilt, to “the ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals . . . but upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians . . . were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?” (Wells 1898: 14).

12. Ancestry.com, for example, holds in excess of 16 billion records with over three million subscribers, earning profits in the hundreds of millions. As Forbes (2017) reported two years ago, “Ancestry.com DNA Database Tops 3M, Sales Rise to \$850M Ahead Of Likely 2017 IPO.” And as Gillian Beer (1996: 121) notes with respect to English heritage sites, “The heritage industry, now, fills some of the same space [as the fascination with the missing link], a warding-off that has all the appearance of a coming too near. . . . They are yet manifest forgeries or pastiches, even declaring themselves as such. They shroud the past, precisely by offering it a fresh coat of (acrylic) paint.”

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