“Shocking His Readers out of Their Complacence”: Gothic and Fantasy Tropes in H.G. Wells' *fin-de-siècle* Science Fiction Novels.

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this thesis is to identify Gothic and fantasy tropes in four *fin-de-siècle* novels by H.G. Wells – *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man*, *The First Men in the Moon* and *The Food of the Gods* – and to examine their rhetorical effects within the framework of science fiction. More precisely, my project was inspired by Kelly Hurley's analysis of the thematic similarities shared by the science fiction and Gothic genres during the *fin-de-siècle*, and by Darko Suvin's definitions of science fiction and of the Gothic as being rhetorically antithetical. Through an analysis of how the two thematically compatible but rhetorically antithetical genres interact in the novels, I evaluate the potential responses that could be expected from readers, and compare these responses to the contemporary reception of the work. My research is based on the idea that Wells' novels promote a social message based on Darwinian theory and socialism, and that he uses the combination of SF and the Gothic in order to lead his complacent readers to intellectual conclusions by first drawing their attention through shock and terror. This study will seek to determine whether the author's use of the Gothic ultimately benefits the works by enhancing their social message, or if it results in the contrary effect.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire vise à identifier les tropes gothiques et fantaisistes dans quatre romans de la *fin-de-siècle* par H.G. Wells – *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man*, *The First Men in the Moon* et *The Food of the Gods* – et d'examiner leur effet dans ces romans de science fiction au niveau rhétorique. Plus précisément, ce projet fut inspiré par l'analyse qu'a faite Kelly Hurley des ressemblances thématiques entre la science fiction et le gothique au tournant du vingtième siècle, et par l'argument de Darko Suvin selon lequel la science fiction et le gothique seraient antithétiques au niveau rhétorique. À travers une analyse de l'interaction entre ces deux genres compatibles au niveau thématique, mais théoriquement incompatibles au niveau rhétorique, j'évalue les réponses potentielles que l'on peut attendre des lecteurs de ces romans, et je compare ces réponses théoriquement possibles aux la réception contemporaine réelle de ces œuvres. Ma recherche repose sur l'idée que Wells tentait de promouvoir dans ses romans une réflexion sociale basée sur les théories darwiniennes et sur le socialisme, et qu'il utilisait la combinaison de la science fiction et du gothique afin de mener ses lecteurs vers des conclusions intellectuelles par le biais d'un éveil brusque causé par le choc et la terreur. Cette étude tente de déterminer si l'utilisation du gothique faite par l'auteur mène vraiment ses lecteurs à porter davantage attention aux thèmes contenus dans les romans, ou si, au contraire, ces tropes ne font qu'engendrer une réponse émotive chez le lecteur.

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INTRODUCTION

From his *fin-de-siècle* science fiction novels to his socialist and socialist realist fiction and non-fiction, H.G. Wells' work can be read as an ongoing discussion focused on the progress and survival of mankind and civilization. A former pupil of biologist T.H. *Huxley, W*ells developed an ambiguous relationship with Darwinism: as a scientist, he saw the human race as one hopelessly struggling for progress and species predominance in a context of great uncertainty; as an individual, he recoiled before the bleaker implications of evolutionary theory: the randomness of human evolution, the animality still present within us, the imminent possibility of socio-biological degradation and devolution, and the applicability of the threat of extinction to the human species. For Wells, progress was not to be taken for granted, and technology, also, had to be developed carefully, for a blind faith in it may prove to be dangerous: "these new powers, inventions, contrivances and methods, are not the unqualified enrichment of normal life we had expected. [...] We are only beginning to realize that the cornucopia of innovation may perhaps prove far more dangerous than benevolent" (Wells, *The Fate* 15).

If, in the earlier fiction texts, Wells can be said to be hinting at many current and potential problems, we can see in the later novels that the author projects and experiments with alternative social models in order to try to cope, at least philosophically, with these biological and social issues. Some critics such as Jack Williamson argue that Wells' later utopian fiction results from *desperate* pragmatism (23, 29, 38), while others such as Bernard Bergonzi claim Wells had a genuine hope for humankind towards the end of his life (121). Alternately, Jean-Pierre Vernier argues that the early "sociological fables[1] were continuous in

1 The labels "sociological fable," "scientific romance" and "science fiction novel" are all used to describe the same works that are the objects of study of this thesis. As Leon Stover writes, "H.G. Wells himself called them scientific romances, a retrospective term coined in 1933 after

thought with the later nonfiction"[2] (Stover, *The First* 2), and that therefore the first texts did not express pessimism, but rather a desire to awaken his fellow citizens of the world, and to illustrate the issues and tasks that are at hand. Could it be that Wells was simply ambivalent, both positive and negative? Clearly, there is an undeniably ambiguous quality in the authorial intention behind the texts I've chosen to study – but that does not make them less interesting. In fact, Darko Suvin suggests that "the interest of Wells's writings lies precisely in the ambiguities and tensions between his awareness of the possible or perhaps even probable doom of the human species and his humanistic commitment to intelligent collective action against such a catastrophe" ("Introduction" 13).

Based on the contents of *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, a work written a few decades after the novels at the centre of this study, it would seem safe to assert that, towards the end of his life, Wells expressed both optimism towards the possibilities that awaited a united world community, and pessimism because of his awareness of the greedy and violent human nature that stood in the way of the realization of this essential social project. In other words, there is in the latter Wells a belief in the necessity of urgent pragmatism, and a great doubt as to whether the complacent human species will step up to meet the challenge it does not fully acknowledge: "If *Homo sapiens* is such a fool that he cannot realize what is before him now and set himself urgently to save the situation while there is still . . . some freedom of movement and action left in the world, can there be any hope that in fifty or a hundred years hence, he will be collectively any less of a fool?" (311)

Some critics have mistaken Wells' increasingly pragmatic literature as a sign of increasingly positive feelings towards the future. The author himself

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the advent in 1926 of science fiction as a publisher's category in the American pulp magazine industry. From that juvenile genre he resolved to keep a lexical distance, on the grounds that his own work had the more lofty purpose 'to discuss sociology in fable'" (*The First Men* ix).

2 Most critics rely on Wells' nonfiction in order to interpret his fiction, as the latter is thought to express the ideas stated in the former. This is why the two are compared on the same level here. Wells is better known for his famous non-fiction works at the end of his career, whereas his most memorable first texts remain his science fiction novels, which is perhaps why Stover and Vernier chose to compare the two instead of remaining only within one genre.

claims he has gone from a sort of detached awareness to a full consciousness of the events that were to come:

> We were carried along by habit and that false sense of security which the absence of fundamental crises engenders. . . . It was still possible in *The Time Machine* to imagine humanity on the verge of extinction and differentiated into two decadent species . . . without the slightest reflection upon everyday life. . . . To a large extent, I shared that detachment. . . . But as one [story] followed another I found I was less and less interested in the artistic business of making the tale plausible and more and more in the scientific interest of making it probable. . . . [With *Anticipations* (1900), m]y sense of the importance and reality of the future increased. (Wells, *The Fate* 82-85)

This increasing awareness, combined with Wells' mixed feelings about the abilities and intentions of his fellow citizens, located somewhere "between at the best a cautious and qualified optimism and [his] persuasion of swiftly advancing, irretrievable disaster" (*The Fate* 293), is clearly visible in the novels at the core of this study. Regardless of whether Wells was truly optimistic or pessimistic in the end, one thing is certain: for the author, complacence and stagnation were the worst enemies of man. As Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes write, "[t]he moral lesson that nature surely teaches is that fixity is fatal. Man himself, when he becomes rigid in his thinking, impervious to the 'opposite idea,' also becomes incapable of change, loses his adaptability, and verges towards extinction" (*Early Writings* 109).

Gothic, the *Fin-de-Siècle* and Darwinism

Influenced by Kelly Hurley's book *The Gothic Body* on degeneration and the *fin-de-siècle*, I have come to read Wells' late-19th-century novels with a particular interest in Gothic tropes and Darwinian themes — more precisely an interest in the author's use of the Gothic to investigate the ramifications of Darwin's statements and the impact these have had on the collective psyche. The *fin-de-siècle* Gothic isn't an exact repetition of its 18th-century cousin. Hurley sees

this variety of Gothic "as a genre centrally concerned with the horrific re-making of the human subject, within a general anxiety about the nature of human identity permeating late-Victorian and Edwardian culture, an anxiety generated by scientific discourses, biological and sociomedical"[3] (Hurley, *The Gothic* 5). According to Hurley, both the Gothic literary genre and Darwinian theory "feed off each other," creating monsters from one another: "Darwinism opened up a space wherein hitherto unthinkable morphic structures could emerge; the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic occupied that space and pried it open further, attempting to give shape to the unthinkable" (7). The Gothic, being a genre that coerces readers to lose all certainty about the reality that surrounds them and to imagine the return of repressed monstrosities, is a remarkably suitable vehicle for the discussion and illustration of Darwinian thought. Indeed, "Darwinism described the natural order as a disorder, within which species identity was characterized by admixture and flux rather than integrity and fixity. Similarly, the Gothic represents human bodies as between species: always-already in a state of indifferentiation, or undergoing metamorphoses into a bizarre assortment of human/not-human configurations" (Hurley 10).

So, if it seems unlikely that a genre such as the Gothic – a mode in which terror, horror and monstrosity are central tropes – could be compatible with a scientific product, it appears clear that the imagery and reflections produced by Darwinian theory associate naturally with the excess, terror, fantasy and tragedy proper to the Gothic and its monstrous forms and tropes. In *Darwin's Plots*, Gillian Beer writes that "Darwin's theories, with their emphasis on superabundance and extreme fecundity, reached out towards the grotesque" (qtd in Hurley, *The Gothic* 60). But these are not the only grotesque aspects of Darwinism. Indeed, as Hurley writes, "[t]he narrative of Darwinian evolution could be read as a supernaturalist or Gothic one: evolutionary theory described a bodily metamorphosis which, even though taking place over aeons and over multiple bodies, rendered the identity of the human body in a most basic sense –

[3] More precisely, this refers to recent discoveries and research in the fields of evolutionary theory, criminal anthropology, entropy, degeneration theory and the unconscious, according to Hurley.

its distinctness from 'the brute beasts' – unstable" (*The Gothic* 56). The human is therefore a monster *en devenir* or already a monstrous concoction. To quote Hurley again, "the [human] body is . . . always already abhuman, a strange compilation of morphic traits, fractured across multiple species-boundaries" (92). The spread of Darwinian thought also encouraged – or was believed to encourage – immoral behavior and social degradation, in addition to fear of biological retrogression, for "[t]he new conceptions threatened the very bases of belief on which right conduct seemed to rest" (Wells, *The Fate* 20).

At a more obvious or surface level, the Gothic vocabulary is particularly well suited to express Wells' concerns and thoughts on social and biological degeneration. When the author begins to ponder the atrocities that await the too complacent human species, his writing becomes terribly dark and dramatic, as we can see here in the conclusion of *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*:

> The coming barbarism will differ from the former barbarism by its greater powers of terror, urgency and destruction, and by its greater rapidity of wastage. . . . Mankind which began in a cave and behind a windbreak will end in the disease-soaked ruins of a slum. . . . I see [Man] being carried less and less intelligently and more and more rapidly, suffering as every ill-adapted creature must suffer in gross and detail, along the stream of fate to degradation, suffering and death. (310-12)

Even in his non fiction, the social scientist in Wells expresses himself via a tragic and gloomy tone that makes Graveyard poetry[4] seem comforting. Here, Wells is obviously not seeking to produce an effect of pleasant melancholy as the graveyard poets did, but rather to produce an immediate awareness and a sense of urgency. Blending science fiction, Gothic and fantasy can be risky, however: the sharp awakening the author seeks to produce in the reader by enhancing cognitive estrangement with terror will not necessarily occur; in fact, the contrary result may be the outcome of the amalgam of literatures that many look to for entertainment or escapism. Before moving on to a more in-depth discussion on the

[4] Graveyard poetry is an 18th-century poetry movement that is one of the precursors of the first wave of Gothic literature in the 1700's.

rhetorical implications of the presence of Gothic tropes within Wells' SF novels, it seems appropriate at this point to establish the theoretical framework of my thesis project in order to familiarize the reader with the definitions that I will be using throughout my analyses.

Science-Fiction, Gothic & Fantasy : Working Definitions & Theoretical Framework

1. Science-Fiction

According to Darko Suvin, science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement *and cognition*, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (*Metamorphoses* 7-8; my emphasis). In other words, SF may use settings, objects and beings that are "dissonant with the reader's experienced world" (Mendlesohn 5), but these elements will answer to a set of laws and will be depicted as possible, credible within this set of laws.

Carl Freedman specifies that this cognitive criteria could be more appropriately called a "*cognition effect*" (18), because the set of laws governing the strange elements can also differ from our own, can also be strange, and so, what is important is that these laws have a "cognition effect" on the reader, meaning that these laws are consistent and understandable, or form a "knowledge system," in the words of Hurley (*The Gothic* 16), throughout the work of fiction. Also, the purpose of the estrangement provided by SF is not to render *our* world *unrecognizable*; it increases our awareness and improves our perception of it, as critic Paul Alkon explains (170-171). As SF worlds are coherent in themselves, they invite readers to analyze them and, in turn, analyze their own world by comparing and contrasting. In this sense, science fiction is meant to stimulate the intellect, not overwhelm or merely entertain readers with strange worlds.

Not all readers, however, will fully appreciate this intellectual opportunity, which is why it can be interesting to analyze the strategies used by science fiction writers to invite these intellectual readings, to see how these strategies interact in

the text, and to discuss to what extent these strategies can be expected to work. In Wells, for example, we find that different writing modes like the Gothic and fantasy are combined with SF to enhance the novel's effect on readers – in addition to a noticeable amount of passages in which the author's message is explicitly stated via the voice of the narrator. But does this really work, or does it result in the reader being simply more distracted – or worse, confused? Before moving on to my discussion about the effects that such a blend of strategies can be expected to have on the readership, I will present briefly my understanding of fantasy, the Gothic, and their interaction with SF at the rhetorical level.

2. Fantasy & the Gothic

Many critics often confuse *fantasy* and *the fantastic* and use them alternately as synonyms. However, I cannot consider them as anything else but distinct, as I will be working with strict definitions of both terms. In his book *The Fantastic*, Tzvetan Todorov defines the genre as that which

> occupies the duration of [the] uncertainty [felt by the reader and/or the character when he is forced to find either a natural or supernatural explanation for the event he is facing]. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (25)

Maupassant's *Le Horla* perfectly embodies Todorov's definition of the fantastic: when strange events haunt the protagonist every night, the reader and the character are left to wonder if the latter has gone insane or if there are really supernatural forces at work in the guest's bedroom. Fantasy, however, is a genre which presents to the reader alternate worlds whose empirical laws, if there are any, are out of our grasp, and where magic and the supernatural are common[5].

[5] Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and the more recent *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling are both examples of fantasy. While reading about Frodo's adventures, the reader will not begin to wonder if Frodo is crazy or if Gandalf really does have magical powers. All the supernatural and magical elements of Tolkien's trilogy must be accepted as facts (facts within the fiction, of course) by the reader who wishes to appreciate and fully understand the quest of the fellowship of the ring.

According to Suvin, fantasy is "a genre committed to the interposition of anti-cognitive laws into the empirical environment" (8). By this, Suvin means that the fantasy fiction is a world that we can see and feel is governed by unknown or irrational laws – or anti-cognitive rules that appear to us as being more magic than scientific.

Following Suvin's theoretical definition of science fiction as the literature of cognitive estrangement, we can see that SF is rhetorically similar neither to fantasy nor the fantastic. As Hurley writes in *The Gothic Body*, in SF, "there is no confrontation of the models of reality . . . for the text commences in and develops an 'alternate' reality" (16)[6]. This alternate reality presents coherent empirical laws which are different from but equivalent to ours. Where the fantastic shows "[breaches in] the knowledge systems of the text's culture" (Hurley, "British" 204), fantasy fiction is not concerned with knowledge systems at all, and therefore creates an *anti-cognitive estrangement*. While nothing prevents a motivated reader from analyzing and interpreting fantasy fiction in an intellectual manner, this anti-cognitive rhetoric usually stimulates emotional responses rather than a rational perspective.

The Gothic, specifically a genre akin to the fantastic and to fantasy, is known to favor emotional—sometimes even physical—responses over intellectual ones, and shock over cognition, but it may still draw attention to important issues by inducing these emotional responses. The degree to which a novel eschews cognition depends in part on the type of Gothic it embodies: terror Gothic or horror Gothic. According to Ann Radcliffe, in "On the Supernatural in Poetry," "[t]error and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and

[6] By this Hurley does not mean to say that "there is no confrontation of models of reality" between the SF text and the reader's reality – this confrontation is what makes SF a significant genre that coerces readers to question their own world. What Hurley means here is that there is no unexplained, irrational irruption within the SF world, as there is in the fantastic. The SF world is coherent: its laws can be understood – in other words, the differences it presents are rationalized, explained. In this sense, Hurley agrees with Suvin that SF, the fantastic and fantasy are rhetorically different, if not antithetical. But where Suvin will try to distance SF from fantasy and the fantastic (and the Gothic explicitly), claiming that the former is a superior genre, Hurley will focus on the *thematic compatibility* between the fantastic, *fin-de-siècle* Gothic and 19th-century SF, and will argue that the Gothic shows potential for stimulating more than just emotional and physical responses.

awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (150). Whereas horror paralyses the reader, terror demands some mental activity from the reader, who questions the plot, characters, and perhaps the rules governing the fictional world. In this manner, terror Gothic is much less anti-cognitive than horror Gothic is.

The *fin-de-siècle* Gothic leans more towards horror: "More graphic than before, the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic manifests a new set of generic strategies . . . which function maximally to enact the defamiliarization and violent reconstitution of the human subject" (Hurley 4). Whereas defamiliarization used in the SF context will encourage readers to ponder their world by inducing them to question the differences between it and the fictional universe created by the author, the defamiliarization found in the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic will negate all the boundaries and facts known by the reader and re-situate him into a frightening, unfamiliar, unintelligible world in which he is a random, monstrous concoction. In its late-Victorian form, the Gothic mode or genre uses graphic and grotesque imagery in order to explore and illustrate the more frightening and less socially acceptable aspects of new discoveries in the natural and social sciences – namely in biology, psychology and criminal anthropology –, provoking predominantly visceral rather than intellectual responses from the reader.

In fact, according to Hurley, "the Gothic served not only to manage anxieties about the shifting nature of 'the human' but also to *aggravate* them" (6, my emphasis). The reception of Wells' first books shows a clear tendency towards emotional, rather than intellectual, responses in the readers' reactions to the horrid tropes he used: "The atrocities of Dr. Moreau disgusted [the critics], and blinded them to any merits in the book" (23), Ingvald Racknem writes in *H.G. Wells and his Critics*, adding that "[h]enceforth his name was associated with what was 'horrid', 'creepy', and 'unpleasant'" (25). These reviews will be observed in more detail and in larger numbers later on in this thesis, but it seems clear at this point that Gothic tropes have a tendency to work only to some extent for Wells: they attract the reader's attention, but do not necessarily guide the reader to understand

the authorial intention – the socialist message — that lies beyond the giants, monsters, and hybrid creatures.

Gothic & SF: rhetorically antithetical, but rhetorically compatible?

The distinct genres of science fiction, Gothic and fantasy do share similarities. The "strange property or the strange world" (Wells qtd in Suvin 208), which is a basic literary requirement of SF, is also at the heart of fantasy; both literatures rely on a form of *estrangement*, simply put. From aliens to dragons, from flying saucers to flying carpets, and from Martians to Narnians, many readers may see no fundamental difference at all. Science fiction and the Gothic, which Baudou describes as a sub-genre of fantasy, also become very close thematically as the new sciences of the 19th century uncover frightening revelations about humankind, life on earth and the cosmos. Indeed, while some Victorian SF works focus on inspiring new technologies and evoke wonder and excitement, other works, influenced by Huxley's views on Darwinism, Nordau's views on degeneration and decadence, and Lombroso's criminal anthropology (including the study of atavism), express worry and apprehension before the potential downfall of the human species. The late-19th-century authors were haunted by the bleak images of human mutation, reversion, and extinction, and, even in SF texts, they turned to Gothic writing in order to channel their anxiety, as the genre was a pertinent choice to express the grotesqueness produced by the new Victorian biological theories. These scientific theories not only put a certain emphasis on monstrosity and abhumanness, they also touch many important Gothic themes: for example, the weight of the past (due to the human species' ever present animal past), and the temptation to resort to taboo behavior (due the attack on Creationism and on the concept of man as being the intelligent, perfect, moral being at the centre of God's project). To quote Hurley, "[d]egeneration theory . . . not only reversed the narrative of progress . . . . It also accelerated the pace of the narrative, emphasizing the mutability and flux of human bodies and societies. Degeneration, in other words, is a 'gothic' discourse, and as such is a crucial imaginative and narrative source for the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic" (*The Gothic* 65). If

science fiction is often used to reflect on our present and future social and biological conditions, the Gothic appears when these reflections produce the feelings of boundless terror and nauseating anxiety that theories such as degeneration theory may provoke.

While it is true that science fiction and fantasy fiction are both considered as "littératures de l'imaginaire" (as Québécois magazine *Solaris* describes them), and while critics such as Brian Aldiss go as far as to claim that SF is "characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould" (*Billion Year* 8), Suvin will state firmly that fantasy or Gothic and SF are *rhetorically* antithetical and that these genres must be distinguished. While critics such as Kelly Hurley, Donald Lawler and Judith Wilt argue for a *thematic* closeness between the Gothic and SF during the *fin-de-siècle* – namely because 19th-century science "describes the unpredictable strangeness of the natural world"[7] (Hurley, "British" 192) and unveils frightening, distorted and hybridized representations of the human body and mind–, I do agree with Suvin that the Gothic (as well as fantasy) and science fiction are *rhetorically* antithetical in theory, as separated genres.. But what happens when an author uses Gothic tropes in conjunction with a science fiction setting? Can these opposites blend to create an even more powerful medium, or does their union cause nothing but confusion?

So far, Hurley has produced Darwinian Gothic readings of two of Wells' SF novels, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The Time Machine*. I am interested in not only identifying Gothic and fantasy tropes in other novels by Wells, but *especially* in examining their rhetorical effects within the framework of science fiction. While Wells seeks to encourage his readers to reflect upon key biological—and moral—issues, one may wonder if his message is at all received when he uses tropes commonly thought to be paralyzing and anti-cognitive. Although J.-P. Vernier states that "the Wells of the 1890's was certainly less interested in conveying an explicit message than in shocking his readers out of their

7 Indeed, studying the *fin-de-siècle* culture, scientific discourses and literature in parallel, Hurley finds a "surprising compatibility of empiricism and supernaturalism at [that] historical moment" (5). H.G. Wells himself notes in *The Fate of Homo Sapiens* thirty years after the *fin-de-siècle*: "the world as I see it to-day is altogether more marvellous, mysterious and profound" (12).

complacence" (75), there is a strong possibility that the readers were ultimately horrified, period, for horrific imagery will not necessarily lead a reader to rational conclusions.

The success of the use of Gothic tropes within an SF text may depend on the reader's sensitivity to the work's cognitive rhetoric. If the reader is receptive in this way, the Gothic tropes can enhance the effect of the SF novel, strengthening the reader's intellectual interest and involvement in the story by also reaching him at the most basic, emotional level: "The textual affect that masses itself around the beast people [in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, for example,] is intensified as much as possible by a series of typically Gothic devices: the prolongation of uncertainty and suspense; descriptive passages marked by their vagueness and obscurity; narrative elisions, evasions, and discontinuities" (Hurley, *The Gothic* 18).

Structure of the Thesis : Main Argument & Chapter Divisions

I will be examining the presence of Gothic and fantasy tropes within four *fin-de-siècle* novels by Wells: *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Food of the Gods*, and *The First Men on the Moon*. I am of course aware that Wells himself did not consciously write within the genre of SF in the 1890's, nor did he seek to apply Suvin's concept of "cognitive estrangement." The aforementioned works were, however, identified as SF retrospectively and I will be treating them as such. My project is concerned with questions such as: how is the reader expected to react rationally and pragmatically to novels which feature tropes known to cause terror, paralyzing horror and anxiety? What were Wells' intentions in using such tropes? How did readers react to the novels? I will be doing close readings of the four novels in order to analyze the likely responses expected from Wells' readers. I will also consult contemporary reviews of the books, as well as Wells' statements about his intentions. Finally, my research will be guided by readings of theory and criticism focused on Wells, the selected novels, science fiction, the Gothic, Darwinism and narratology.

The thesis will be divided into four chapters, each one examining the rhetorical effect of the Gothic and fantasy tropes within one novel. Chapter 1 will

focus on *The War of the Worlds*. A well-known story of a brutal alien invasion and of humanity's struggle for survival, *The War* evokes not only the Darwinian principle of natural selection, but *human* cruelty and monstrosity as well: the vampiric Martians mirror the humans' colonial past while foreshadowing their biological and technological future. The ultimate defeat of the Martians shows not so much the triumph of the human collectivity but that of the cruel, arbitrary forces of nature and evolution. Beyond the horrific tropes presented to emphasize the affect produced by the novel, we have many possible interpretations or possible sociological goals to choose from. The opening lines of the novel direct the reader towards the questions of the relative insignificance of man, of a possible large-scale struggle for survival and of the many hypothetical forms of species evolution. Leon Stover argues that the Martians, as well as the united human front, represent the Wellsian ideal of the Saint-Simonian socialist society working as one efficient machine towards a common end – the survival and the thriving of its civilization ("Introduction" 11, 16, 27). But does this novel, often viewed first and foremost as a "masterpiece of fright" (Brooks, "Introduction", *The War* xii), truly manage to coerce readers into a sociologically-inclined reflection rather than only a passive, emotional reaction?

Chapter 2 will be dedicated to *The Invisible Man*, a tale of a selfish scientist who enters the realm of forbidden knowledge and becomes a ghostly, mad, murdering menace wishing to set up a "Reign of Terror." If Wells is favourable to science and believes society's progress partly rests on the work of geniuses, he obviously condemns the individualistic pursuit of intellectual and scientific progress as embodied by the protagonist. According to Ingvald Racknem, Wells' goal in writing this novel was to demonstrate that without the will to cooperate with and to open up to fellow citizens, scientists became a threat rather than a positive addition to their community. But, unfortunately for Wells, the critics mostly interpreted the text through a Gothic lens: "failing to grasp what [Wells] was driving at" (28), they merely compared the protagonist in the *The Invisible Man* to "a monster as devoid of moral sentiment as the one created by Frankenstein" (1897 review in *The Dial*, qtd in Racknem 28). The horrible temper

and actions of Griffin were the focus of contemporary critics, and the social message of Wells was once again overshadowed by darker interpretations, as in many reviews of and commentaries on *The War of the Worlds* and the striking *Island of Dr. Moreau.*

Chapter 3 will look at *The First Men on the Moon* and the themes of civilization and anthropomorphism discussed in the context of 19^{thC} SF through a Gothic lens. While the order and peace present in the Selenite Lunar society described in the novel are admirable, the protagonist, Bedford, realizes that social progress may cost humans their intellectual and physical freedom and individuality—in other words, their humanity. Here, social and biological progress *seems to be* both appealing and repulsive to Wells, who creates a society that is both flawless and flawed, monstrous in its specialization. According to Stover, "[above] all, *The First Men on the Moon* is a utopian fantasy on the rationalization of society in accord with Saint-Simonian *industrialisme*" (*Men* 9). In other words, although Wells' utopia is clearly illustrated and explained, its uncanny and monstrous implications may easily disgust those to whom the author's message is addressed.

Finally, chapter 4 will feature a discussion of *The Food of the Gods* focused on the topics of scientific responsibility and progress, biological mutation, genetically modified organisms, and adaptability. A nutritional formula that causes not only growth but gigantism in plants, insects and humans, the Food increases the threat of extinction and the threat of the reversal of the biological hierarchy, at the same time as it is viewed as having interesting, positive possibilities. This novel, among all four, perhaps best shows Wells' ambiguous relationship with scientific and technological progress and experimentation. But even Wells' least horrific fable provoked seriously negative reactions: it "was read as a shocking and dangerous story" (Racknem 56) by some critics, who were displeased not only by the prevalence of monstrous gigantism and excess, but also by the author's apparent condoning of a socialist rebellion that would overthrow the economic and social systems in place.

To summarize, in all four novels, the attention of the reader is focused on monstrosity: it is the Martians, an invisible man, the Selenites and the genetically-altered humans, animals and plants that are supposed to bring forth Well's socialist utopia. Instead, they often inspire fear, not only because they are simply different and/or gruesome in their appearance and in their actions, but mostly because monstrosity –or estranged forms-- symbolises and reveals what has been repressed. In Wells, the monsters may very well force the readers to face their repressed fears concerning the randomness of biological evolution as well as the social implications of the progress of science and the capitalist economy. However, as these fears come back to the surface, readers will not necessarily look for constructive alternatives; instead, they may recoil under the effect of paranoia and anxiety.

The Gothic is considered by many critics to be both a radical and a conservative mode. On one hand, it is stylistically bold and excessive. On the other hand, it never clearly suggests radical alternatives; it sharpens the senses and the nerves rather than the intellect and the desire for change. Because the Gothic is, stylistically, shocking and attention-grabbing, it can be tempting for an author with a revolutionary message to deliver to use its frightening tropes. But is it really possible to "[shock] readers out of their complacence"? Aren't acute paranoia and irrational fear worse than complacence? By examining the presence of Gothic tropes in the aforementioned novels with the help of genre theory and narratology, this study will seek to determine whether H.G. Wells' use of the Gothic ultimately benefits the works by enhancing their social message, or if it results in the contrary effect. I believe that this project could potentially revise the newly-emerging understanding of the relationship between the Gothic, science fiction and anxiety towards degeneration in the *fin-de-siècle*.

Although my thesis project owes much to Hurley's work, it is not a continuation of it, as my research does more than apply the principles stated in *The Gothic Body* to the four novels I've chosen to investigate. My thesis will differ from Hurley's work by focusing on the *rhetorical differences* in addition to the thematic overlap between the Gothic and science fiction, and by showing that

the hybrid genre of science fiction and Gothic is more ambivalent than has been previously claimed. Also, where Hurley is interested in the impact of 19th-century scientific discoveries on the definition of the nature of the human and human civilization during the fin-de-siècle, I am interested specifically in Wells' interpretation of the implications of these theories for the *future* of mankind. In other words, where Hurley studies the trauma resulting from the immediate redefinition of the human body and mind via *fin-de-siècle* Gothic texts (mostly graphic horror Gothic), I am interested in how Wells reflects on what the human body and society *could become* in the future and in how Wells borrows from the 19th-century Gothic to write meaningful yet shocking SF. And where Hurley looks at the *fin-de-siècle* as a time of new awareness via the trauma of the redefinition of the human, I am examining how Wells uses Gothic tropes in his SF novels in order to transform that awareness into pragmatism, into collective action. My research will also differ from Racknem's and Stover's by not only discussing the reception of the novels in relation to their socio-cultural context and by studying the gap between the authorial intention and said reception, but also by investigating the rhetorical cause of such a gap and such a reception, i.e. the use of Gothic tropes within the science fiction genre.

CHAPTER 1
THE WAR OF THE WORLDS: WELLS' DARWINIAN MARTIANS

> "Historically, however, science fiction is in large part a response to the cultural shock created by the discovery of humanity's marginal position in the cosmos."
> – Mark Rose, *Alien Encounters*

> "There are no morals to be drawn from nature; nature, Huxley would eloquently argue in Evolution and Ethics, is an ethical horror."
> – John Huntington, *The Logic of Fantasy*

The War of the Worlds has been infamous ever since Orson Welles caused hysteria with his striking rendition of the story via a radio broadcast in 1938. Today, the name is a synonym for over-the-top special effects, paralyzing terror and mass entertainment. In his introduction to the 1898 science fiction novel, author Bruce Brooks describes *The War* as a "masterpiece of fright" and even goes as far as to claim that the book is "a prototype, not for the science fiction novel, but for the horror novel," citing various literary strategies, and comparing Wells to the likes of Stephen King and M. Night Shyamalan. However, if, "[in] outline, the story sounds promising only in a sensational way" (Aldiss, *"Introduction"* xvi), Wells' authorial agenda goes beyond scaring his audience.

As Leo J. Henkin writes, "Darwin's evolutionary thesis, natural selection, is Wells' explanation both for the coming and the extinction of the Martians. . . . With the objectivity of the scientist Wells draws the analogy of man's utter and ruthless destruction of inferior races to gain a place in the sun" (256). In fact, mankind's social and biological past, present and future are echoed by the Martians. Their violent methods represent the human past, tainted with warfare and colonial violence. Their unexpected vulnerability (they crush humans effortlessly, but they die at the hands of bacteria) echoes the vulnerability humans don't suspect – or refuse to suspect – in themselves. Finally, their gruesome, minimalist appearance, their advanced technology, and their ruthless collective strategy give the readers an idea of things to come following the logic of social, biological and technological evolution.

In this sense, readers can somewhat identify with the Martians, and yet they are naturally repulsed by them and frightened by what they imply at many levels. Frank D. McConnell writes: "They are ourselves, mutated beyond sympathy, though not beyond recognition. . . . The Martians, then, represent not the simple danger of the monstrous and the unknown, but rather the danger of what we ourselves might become" (130). I would tend to reformulate McConnell's statement and argue that the danger of the "monstrous and the unknown" is not unrelated to "the danger of what we ourselves might become," as it is this monstrosity and this unknown quality exactly that make our future so suddenly frightening. Of course, in addition to identifying with the aliens, the readers are also expected to identify initially with the human characters: their "[serenity] in their assurance of their empire over matter" (Wells, *War* 1) reflects the readers' unawareness or refusal to acknowledge reality. However, the reader may eventually distance himself from the complacent human characters in the novel after understanding humanity's precarious place on Earth and in the Universe, and after understanding that this precariousness results in part from complacence.

Of course, the violence, the enhanced technology and the gruesome monsters contained in the book may seem over-the-top and purely fantastical to those readers who only pay attention to the surface value of the book. In Wells, however, the story is not meant to be fantastical; if the novel aesthetically borrows tropes belonging to the Gothic genre, tropes which are usually expected to produce anti-cognitive reactions (i.e. emotional rather than rational and pragmatic reactions) in readers, the author intends for *The War* to be as realistic and mind-opening as possible: "The technical interest of a story like *The War of the Worlds* (he asserted in 1920) lies in the attempt to keep everything within the bounds of possibility. And the value of the story to me lies in this, that from first to last there is nothing in it that is impossible" (Wells qtd in Vernier 72). The monstrous aliens are "possible" because they are the product of evolution; their technology and efficient invasion result from collective work and progress in craftsmanship. That being said, Wells does recur to the Gothic quite frequently in *The War*, so much so

that one may wonder if the tropes used to frighten readers out of their complacence and to redirect their attention towards pressing social and biological matters do not rather end up scaring the audience into further inaction and away from the desired intellectual response. This is especially problematic if Wells is recurring to the paralyzing Gothic horror tropes instead of the more cognitive Gothic terror ones. What are, therefore, the Gothic tropes used in *The War*, how are readers expected to react to them, how was Wells using them, and how successful was he in using anti-cognitive tropes for cognitive purposes, or, in other words Gothic tropes in a science-fiction context?

On the Overlap of Cognitive and Anti-Cognitive Literary Strategies in *The War*

As Brian Aldiss notes, Wells wrote his early novels in a "fertile period for Gothic horrors" (*"Introduction"* xvi). In the late 1890's, it is particularly tempting for a science-fiction author to borrow from the Gothic writing mode: both genres find common ground, at least thematically, as scientific experiments and theories lead to gruesome possibilities and discoveries. So, if science is usually a key to knowledge and wisdom, science also becomes a key to more uncertainty, to fluctuating states and blurred boundaries: the more we try to know, the less the things we know are certain. However similar the genres may be thematically, this marriage of cognitive science fiction and anti-cognitive Gothic tropes causes concern for many scholars, namely because of their diametrically opposite cognitive effect:

> Bernard Bergonzi … finds that in some cases the mixture of approval and horror has a vitiating effect on the effectiveness of the fiction. But, at least, in *The War of the Worlds* and *The First Men on the Moon*, the cross-cutting application of the grotesqueness of the Martians, the mingling of mythic self-projection and revulsion from a possible future image of mankind saves these books from mere didacticism, enriching them by enabling them to avoid simple allegory. (Harpham 173)

Where critics like Bergonzi admit that the mixture of horror and SF can be beneficial to the text *in some cases*, others like Darko Suvin remain skeptical about the use of anti-cognitive tropes—such as Gothic tropes—in the literature of cognitive estrangement that is SF: according to the scholar, this addition of horror and/or terror tropes "degrades estrangement to a formal, surface sensationalism that first shocks the bourgeois but then rejoins him" (Suvin ix). But how is an author to depict justly the terror and anxiety that an apparently increasingly occult, strange and fascinating science is causing in the *fin-de-siècle*, other than by recurring to Gothic tropes? As the science of the 1890's seems to be constantly threatening the masses with inconceivable horrors and uncertain futures, it seems most suitable to use the Gothic, a mode recognized for its expression of social anxieties before unknown threats or uncertain circumstances. With this dilemma in mind, we move on to *The War of the Worlds*, a work which clearly expresses the paralyzing concerns of the late 1890's with a mixture of a now iconic SF theme – the alien invasion – with quite strong Gothic horror *and* terror tropes.

"The theme of *The War of the Worlds*, the physical destruction of society, or at least the dissolution of the social order, was one of the dominant preoccupations of the *fin de siècle* period," writes Bergonzi (131). According to Gothic scholars such as Hurley and Punter, the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic rose from its 18th-century grave in order to address concerns such as these, to explore this disturbing bond between science and "the prevalent feeling . . . of imminent perdition and extinction" (Nordau qtd in Bergonzi 131). As Vernier writes, "[e]volution is . . . connected, at the level of the imagination, with the threat of death coming from outside the human universe" (82). If the Gothic serves to express the full power of this threat, science fiction also has a role here in carrying this idea one step farther, for, if "[d]anger and pain await man in the future, . . . they also have a positive value because they act as a stimulus for human intelligence" (Vernier 76). Hence the minor but no less significant character of the milkman in *The War of the Worlds* expressing the thought that "we might learn a thing or two" from the Martian monsters (56), as surprising as it may seem. And indeed, many things could be learned from the tentacled visitors from Mars, from

their efficient social organization in which their strength as a species lies, to the less palatable information they carry about human nature and humanity's future. As Patrick Parrinder notes, "In *The War of the Worlds* science-fictional estrangement is the vehicle of a horrifying, reflexive self-knowledge about imperialism" ("Introduction," *Learning* 12-13) – and, we may add, about the struggle for survival – or the concept of natural selection – that affects the dominant species just as much as it does the small.

Of course, the Gothic tropes have another purpose than that of illustrating the horrific concepts unleashed by 19th-century science—more important than that purpose, in fact. This purpose is to shock readers out of their complacence, to coerce them into performing an important self-reflexive evaluation, and to encourage them to question and rebuild the foundations of their society in order to be better prepared for the future. But it goes without saying that, as a member of the human race he so severely critiques, Wells has mixed feelings about his own statements: "His satisfaction at the destruction of the false bourgeois idyll is matched by his horror of the alien forces destroying it" (Suvin, "Introduction," in Suvin and Philmus 27). This ambivalence, these mixed feelings, which combine utter terror with the need to inform and to induce intellectual and pragmatic reactions, also justifies Wells' use of anti-cognitive Gothic tropes within the cognitive genre of SF.

On the readers of *The War of the Worlds*

In *The War of the Worlds*, Wells recurs to Gothic horror and terror tropes which have the potential to provoke strong emotional responses and, possibly, depending on the type of reader, an intellectual response as well. However, if this potential is in the text—and we know Wells aimed to both shock *and* stimulate the intellect—, was it picked up by the reader? Was the novel well received, and if not, why not? Because of its shocking ideas, or because of the shocking literary strategy employed to draw attention to these ideas?

According to Stockwell, we could expect the typical reader of Wells to come to *The War of the Worlds* with an understanding of—and an interest in—its

major themes, concepts and issues. Those readers seeking entertainment would more likely be drawn to Verne: “Crudely, there is a cerebral, educated tradition from H.G. Wells, and a populist, sensational tradition from Jules Verne” (Stockwell 9). If the reviews of the novel show that this statement is more or less correct in the case of *The War* —most reviewers appreciated the book and discussed its implications pertaining to science, evolution and otherness, but many did so at the surface-level—the work was nonetheless considered as a shocking horror story by many, and the complexity of its message was not at all fully grasped by the majority.

Among the positive and insightful reviews, we find an interesting anonymous review in *The Academy Review* in 1898. In his appreciation of the novel, the critic not only comments on the literary and scientific competences of Wells (66-67), but also appreciates the eye-opening quality of the text which, in his view, destroys the immutable myth of anthropocentric supremacy: “Naturally, the view that beings immeasurably superior to man exist upon Mars is repugnant, but we see by the words quoted that the astronomers are being forced to accept it” (67). Although this review is not all encompassing as far as the multidimensionality of Wells' message goes, it touches upon the idea that readers – even scientists – must be shocked out of their complacence.

Ingvald Racknem has noted mixed reviews: while the book has generally received good press and was considered as a strong, successful work (30), it has nonetheless noticeably horrified many readers and disappointed several critics. Racknem notes that one critic from *The Athenaeum* wrote that Wells “trusted 'solely to the effect of his blood-curdling ideas without taking the trouble to give them distinction'” (31). Additionally, “[some] critics found the war one-sided, and the book to be full of morbid horror, cheap emotions, terrible red murder, and destruction” (31). While some critics and reviewers found the popular novel to be “one of the most distinctly individual achievements of our time” (34), others labeled *The War of the Worlds* “as a scientific shocker, as an inferior work, or as a product suggesting lost opportunities” (34). If the existence of such divergent views is interesting, one must not automatically find comfort in the fact that the

book was positively received by many. In fact, Racknem deplores that the work was mostly appreciated at the surface level: “It is even more remarkable that almost every American and English critic should completely miss the implication of the fable and fail to see the significance of some more important incidents in the story” (33). Whereas some readers did not grasp the novel's main point, perhaps due to their focus on aesthetic rather than rhetorical elements, others refused to take the work seriously: as Kemp notes, “Gosse, for instance, also in 1897, haughtily deplored Wells' slide away from science: 'Mr Wells might have risen in it to the highest consideration, but he prefers to tell horrible stories about monsters'” (206). Finally, the novel may have also been considered as an unpleasant read because it makes it difficult to sympathize with any of the characters, whether it is the complacent, weak humans, or the violent, ruthless Martians. Aldiss notes that, in fact, “we are not invited to sympathize with the stricken humans [because] we have no sympathy for the invaders either. What the Martians are, we may become” (“Introduction” xxi).

The Themes Behind the Monsters, Gore and Violence

Those readers who associate *The War of the Worlds* instinctively with the Gothic horror or terror genres are not completely wrong. The number of Gothic tropes present in the novel, combined with the choice of many powerful tropes, is certain to destabilize and frighten. And so, if the novel shocks, it is no accident: it is what Wells had intended, in part. However, the author clearly expected more from his readers—an intellectual response, a deep philosophical reflection oriented towards a true understanding of the human condition and of the need to act upon these reflections. There are, in fact, three major themes that Wells intended his readers to pay attention to, and a sufficient amount of passages express this intention and this expectancy very clearly.

First, the reader is meant to reflect upon the randomness of evolution and the potentially forthcoming struggle for survival. Indeed, if the Martians are to be read as representative of the human capacity for supremacy, they also indicate that humanity’s future is always under threat, and that this threat can come from

unexpected sources. “The humbling of man,” Patrick Parrinder writes, “is completed when, in the most brilliant of Wells’s ironic denouements, the release of the world is accomplished by the lowliest of terrestrial creatures, the micro-organic bacteria” (*H.G. Wells* 29). Mankind may not always be the dominant race, and its potential downfall is both in and out of the human species’ hands – it could be a product of human complacence and ignorance, and of natural law, the most random of laws. The narrator of the novel also makes a clear reference to an article on evolution and natural selection about half-way through the novel (139), which draws the reader’s attention to this important issue.

It is also made clear once again at the end of the novel that one is meant to learn from the Martian invasion: “it has robbed us of that serene confidence in the future which is the most fruitful source of decadence, the gifts to human science it has brought are enormous, and it has done much to promote the conception of the commonweal of mankind” (Wells, *War* 299). If the narrator underlines two crucial Wellsian ideals here – the move from complacence to awareness, and the move from an individualistic to a unified humanity – the reader must still be cautious when it comes to placing his entire trust in science. While it is true that Wells thought that the salvation of mankind depended on a scientifically oriented society, he has always warned his readers against a blind faith in science. As Jack Williamson has noted, “[the] pitiless Martian onslaught has convinced the narrator that progress does not increase goodness” (59). In fact, progress, like goodness, will demand a constant effort and a clear objective on the part of the human societies that wish to move on towards a durable future.

Finally, the reader is also expected to reflect upon the attitude one must have to face and deal with this future. Most of the main characters in *The War of the Worlds* are flawed in this department. The narrator, an observer who is slowly getting shocked out of his complacence, does not necessarily represent a model one should emulate. The Artilleryman, on the other hand, “is a complete idler” (Bergonzi 138); he “is the kind of revolutionary Wells dreaded the most, the revolutionary whose real interest is to perpetuate, rather than render obsolete, the class distinctions that warp society” (McConnell 140). In addition to a passive

character and a conservative character under the guise of a fighter, we are also shown a hysterical curate, whose role in the novel seems to be to present religion as conceptually unable to deal with the future, and to contribute to the general atmosphere of tension and panic in the novel. His attitude is not, for obvious reasons, to be emulated either. Only in a few places does Wells hint, through the narrator, at the necessity to unite as one front in order to fight for and to preserve humanity: as the humans start fighting back, the narrator exclaims, "Did they grasp that we in our millions were organized, disciplined, working together?" (139) This is followed shortly after by another proud remark by the narrator on the fact that the citizens were finally "[fighting] side by side" (161). It is at this point in the novel that it is emphasized that all nations and all classes share – and have always shared – the same fate in the end.

Gothic Terror and Horror from Outer Space

In *The War of the Worlds*, Wells seems to be shocking his readers on two different levels. At the more obvious level, we have the aliens' monstrous appearance and behavior; death, destruction and gore; gloomy settings and dark atmospheres; mass hysteria, apocalyptic scenes and chaos; nightmares and nightmarish visions; and the direct threat of extinction. On a higher or more abstract level, the reader is forced to face direct comparisons between the Martians and humans, and realize, perhaps in horror, that their inhuman behavior is really human. The 19th-century British reader's own fear of the unknown and fear of invasion also contribute to making the book even more frightening. Finally, the disturbing conclusions of Darwinian theory find an echo in the narrator's rapprochement of the Martians and humans on the evolutionary scale. I will be analyzing each of these categories in further detail in the following pages.

What is perhaps most remembered by the readers of *The War of the Worlds* is not the darkness of the settings or the madness of a particular character, but the monstrous appearance and behavior of the aliens. Their appearance alone is not only a source of terror, but disturbs man's anthropocentric understanding of the universal hierarchy: "I think everyone expected to see a man emerge –possibly

something a little unlike us terrestrial men, but in all essentials a man. I Know I did" (26). The human's potential for conceiving of difference is highly limited; difference, in fact, is conceived from resemblance: we cannot conceive of something intelligent and superior that has absolutely no aspects in common with us. Here, the narrator is confused because the Martian is conceptually placed outside of our anthropocentric capacity to understand the world surrounding us.

There is textual evidence that proves that Wells didn't want his aliens to be frightening only at the conceptual level; the long description of the Martians' horrible physical features is clearly meant to induce unpleasant feelings in the reader:

> The peculiar A shaped mouth with its pointed upper lip, the absence of a chin beneath the wedgelike lower lip, the incessant quivering of the mouth, the Gorgon groups of tentacles, the tumultuous breathing of the lungs in a strange atmosphere, . . . –above all, the extraordinary intensity of the immense eyes— were at once vital, intense, inhuman, crippled, and monstrous. There was something fungoid in the oily brown skin, something in the clumsy deliberation of tedious movements unspeakably nasty. (Wells, *War* 27)

In this quote, the reader will notice that none of the facial traits of the Martian correspond to the human face: even if the aliens are meant to be interpreted as a sort of mirror to the humans, their distorted traits – the pointed instead of rounded lips, the absence of a chin, etc. – send back an image we do not understand and in which we do not recognize ourselves. The adjectives and terms used by Wells - "quivering," "tentacles," "tumultuous breathing," "fungoid," "oily," "inhuman," "crippled," etc. - give the Martians an undeniably repulsive, monstrous quality that makes the suggestion of their similarity to humans completely nauseating. Additionally, the frightfulness of the extra-terrestrials' appearance is then often insisted upon by the narrator, in comments such as "But the horror of them!" (Wells, *War* 46) As Kemp writes, "the Martian countenance is fairly lavishly equipped with mouth, and horrified attention keeps being drawn towards these dribblingly expectant orifices…" (Kemp 24). But the image of the Martian as it is

described in *The War of the Worlds* was not conceived at random; in fact, it is based almost word for word on Wells' discussion on the aspect of the man of the future in his essay "The Man of the Year Million": he would have "[eyes] large, lustrous, beautiful, soulful; [the head,] a glistening dome terete and beautiful; . . . the mouth is small, . . . jawless, . . . no futile emotions disturbing its roundness" ("a certain speculative writer" qtd in Wells 29). This speculative image is based on the fact that, as time goes by, the human becomes less and less animal, and more and more pure, machine-like: "We notice this decay of the animal part around us now, in the loss of teeth and hair, [etc.] . . . Man now does by wit and machinery what he once did by bodily toil. . . The coming man, then, will have a larger brain, and a slighter body" (Wells qtd in Fitting 133-136).

However, the Martians do not only represent our future biological and physical state; already, we resemble them. Indeed, when considerable emphasis is placed on their repulsive eating habits, the aliens seem completely abominable to the reader: "To make this horror complete, the Martians not only invade Earth but feed vampire-like on humans, injecting 'the fresh, living blood of other creatures' directly into their veins; while completely ignoring or disregarding any sign or possibility of intelligence on the part of humans" (Fitting 134). However, in turn, this horror is emphasized via a comparison between the Martians' gruesome choice of sustenance, and the human race's carnivorous ways (Wells, *War* 208).

Of course, Wells does offer an evolutionary logic behind the making of these monsters, but what is to say that this sticks with the readers? As Wolfe explains in *The Known and the Unknown*, "Wells goes to some pains to offer an evolutionary rationale for his Martians in *War of the Worlds* … but the actual description of the monsters is clearly intended to frighten first and appear scientific afterwards" (202). If anything, the "evolutionary rationale" that Wells provides makes the Martians only more frightening, for it makes them a possibility, and a possibility that could transform humanity's future as well. As the human race strives for efficiency and progress and distances itself from its prehistoric past, the minimalist, cold, machine that is the Martian may indeed be a conceivable –if horrendous- future model for humans: their intellectual

development over their physical embellishment, their lessened need for sleep, their lack of desire and lack of need to eat, digest and copulate is indeed a possible projection of the future human machine. It seems nonetheless daunting that these "sluggish lumps" (Wells, *War* 78) represent not only improvement but supremacy over the current human form, bugs and slimy creatures usually being considered as lesser, weak and trivial.

If Wells' intention was to frighten first and then induce thinking, as Wolfe argues, one may wonder what we are to do with this fear. Does the monstrous appearance of the beings serve a purpose other than to shock, even outside the context of Darwinian theory? According to Jeffrey Harpham, "the use of the grotesque has two functions in Wells" (171): if, on one hand, they "represent aberrations," for they are, according to our standards and our conception of advanced beings, deformed, "this deformity is in a sense a mark of distinction, even integrity or purity" (171), for the Martian physiognomy is reduced to a minimalist, utilitarian body. Of course, if beauty is in the eye of the beholder, to use a clichéd phrase, then so is monstrosity. The aliens, Harpham argues, are "grotesque insofar as we regard them with horror or disgust"—this negative perception of the Other is of course encouraged by the author, who chooses his vocabulary wisely, with emphasis on the gooey, the bloody and the gruesome.

Using a writing mode more typical of Gothic terror and horror than of the SF genre, Wells also puts a particular emphasis on death, destruction and gore in *The War of the Worlds*, insisting always on the "the full power and terror of [the] monsters" (Wells, *War* 123). In *The War*, death is ubiquitous, always surrounded by a disturbing darkness, and always the outcome of an overwhelming alien military force. The Martians are so efficient at being "agents of death" that, in fact, death seems to be assuming a life of its own: as the narrator relates in disbelief, "I stood staring, not as yet realizing that this was death leaping from man to man in that little distant crowd" (Wells, *War* 34). No one is spared in this war for survival; but what differentiates this war from those featured in other war novels or from other SF novels is really the Gothic colour of the vocabulary that Wells uses to describe the scenes featuring death or the dead: in one chapter, for

example, “three persons at least, two women and a little boy, were crushed and trampled there, and *left to die amid the terror and the darkness*” (Wells, *War* 42; my emphasis). Instead of using typical terms like “alone and forgotten,” Wells insists on terror and darkness, hinting at the loss of cognitive boundaries and the sense of doom caused by the Martian's presence on Earth. Joining a dark, anguishing context (a terror Gothic strategy) to a graphic description of two women and a child's death (a horror Gothic strategy), the author reaches his readers both at the physical and emotional levels, perhaps at the expense of any productive intellectual conclusions at that moment in the book. Later on in the novel, Wells uses another strong “multi-level” Gothic trope when the narrator claims, “My imagination was full of *those striding metallic monsters*, and of *the dead body smashed against the fence*” (Wells, *War* 75; my emphasis). Where the “striding metallic monsters” have an overwhelming, sublime quality to them, the dead body, in contrast, is presented in a graphic, violent manner. The combination of the contrasting varieties of terror and horror Gothic has a both paralysing and nauseating effect. Quite often, in fact, the things and people left behind by the Martians are not only dead or broken, they are burned to a crisp, totally annihilated, cremated: at one point in the novel, the narrator speaks of “burned meat” (82) and “charred bodies” (87) and claims he sees “not a living thing left upon the common, and every bush and tree upon it that was not already *a blackened skeleton* was burning” (Wells, *War* 82; my emphasis). Wherever the Martians go, they leave behind graveyards, skeletons, blackened remains, and lifelessness.

Throughout his novel, Wells will usually use the Gothic in small doses, colouring a short description here and there; however, there are also those long passages in which the author creates unbearably dark sections that take despair, destruction and hopelessness to a whole new level:

> One may picture, too, the sudden shifting of the attention, *the swiftly spreading coils and bellying of that blackness advancing headlong*, *towering* heavenward, *turning the twilight to a palpable darkness, a strange and horrible antagonist of vapour striding upon its victims*, men and horses near

> it seen *dimly*, running, *shrieking*, running headlong, *shouts of dismay*, the guns suddenly abandoned, *men choking and writhing on the ground*, and the swift broadening out of the opaque cone of smoke. *And then night and extinction*—nothing but *a silent mass of impenetrable vapour* hiding its dead. (Wells, *War* 147; my emphasis)

In this passage, Wells makes the inescapable terror and death, and the ghostly, supernatural ubiquity of the aliens, suffocating; overwhelmed, the reader cannot avoid acknowledging the gravity of the situation at hand. The strategy used by Wells here is simple. He enumerates, accumulates descriptive terms and verbs with a dark connotation: words like *darkness*, *blackness*, *strange*, *silent* and *horrible* contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty; terms like *towering* and *impenetrable* provoke the sensation of powerlessness in the reader; the "swiftly spreading coils" disgust the reader; finally, terms like *shrieking*, *choking*, *writhing*, and *extinction* show the reader that there is no possible positive outcome ahead, only pain and horrible death. Taken alone, the impact of these terms is negligible, but in this enumeration, the cumulative effect is powerful. Wells does not go as far as to use an emotionally excessive Gothic writing mode filled with exclamation points, but the effect of the passage is overwhelming nonetheless. Whether or not the reader becomes aware of his vulnerability and of the need to prepare for a potential downfall of mankind after reading this passage remains to be proven.

In addition to using many Gothic terror tropes, Wells does not shy away from pure, physical, tangible horror and gore, and that is true both in his descriptions of the violence done to humans by Martians and vice versa: "The shell burst clear in the face of the Thing. The hood bulged, flashed, was whirled off in a dozen tattered fragments of red flesh and gritting metal" (Wells, *War* 99). Later on in the novel, as chaos ensues, the policemen are described as "breaking the heads of the people they were called out to protect" (Wells, *War* 148-49). In calling our attention to dead bodies, even, Wells is not content with describing that the individuals died in a fire or that there are numerous corpses; the author insists on describing just how mutilated, dehumanized, the said bodies are: the

narrator speaks of "a number of scattered dead bodies of men, *burned horribly about the heads and trunks but with their legs and boots mostly intact*" (195, my emphasis). The mere picture of these anonymous legs and boots leading to a charred lump of unrecognizable substance is pure, nauseating horror. And yet, it has an intellectual purpose as well: the disintegration of the concept of the human as we know it and its replacement by something new. The disintegration of the human body was a popular conceptual exercise in the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, mainly as a reaction to the Darwinian theories according to which we not only have animal *origins*, but that the animals we have evolved from are still part of us; there are still biological traces of them within us. (see Hurley, *The Gothic Body*).

As mentioned before, the Martians leave behind them nothing but graveyards, and these graveyards form the setting for many of the narrator's explorations, reflections and escapes. From one city to another, the portrait of the surroundings is almost always the same and often cemetery-like: "the countless ruins of shattered and gutted houses and blasted and blackened trees that the night had hidden stood out now gaunt and terrible in the pitiless light of dawn" (84). Towards the end of the novel, as the narrator is unknowingly walking towards a specimen of the defeated Martian race, there is also a particular emphasis on terms like "bones," "skulls," "skeleton"; the narrator also speaks of himself as "the last man alive," unaware that he is really about to be confronted with the last Martian alive, which is shutting its eyes on the graveyard it itself has crafted.

Otherwise, the setting is described like the charred corpses which decorate it, burned and stained with blood: "The aspect of the place in the dusk was singularly desolate: blackened trees, blackened, desolate ruins, and down the hill the sheets of the flooded river, red-tinged with the weed. And over all—silence. It filled me with indescribable terror to think how swiftly that desolate change had come" (Wells, *War* 245). The red weed is obviously meant to evoke the image of bloodstains. According to Mark Rose, the color red also evokes the "diabolic," "hell," "bloody competition." Everything else is often simply "black, the color of void and death" (Rose 73), whether we speak of the charred houses, trees and bodies, or of living creatures visiting the human-Martian cemetery at the end of

the novel: “a multitude of black birds was circling and clustering about the hood” (Wells, *War* 280). Black, the color of death, void and extinction, permeates the novel.

As opposed to SF and its cognitive approach, the Gothic not only often features emotion, such as fear, terror and despair, rather than intellectual reflection, it also enhances its anti-cognitive effect by emphasizing the unknown and confusion. After his close encounters with the extra-terrestrial other, the narrator often finds himself lost and disoriented: “But it passed and spewed me, and *left the night about me suddenly dark and unfamiliar*” (Wells, *War* 35; my emphasis). As one would expect from one suffering at the hands of gruesome and ruthless invaders from outer space, the main character is shrouded in nothing but fear and is devoid of reason: “The fear I felt was no rational fear, but a panic terror not only of the Martians, but of the dusk and stillness all about me.... Once I had turned, I did not dare look back” (Wells, *War* 36). The situation at hand clearly does not have a cognitive effect, at least not on the narrator: “Our situation was so strange and incomprehensible that for three or four hours, until the dawn came, we scarcely moved” (198). According to Wolfe, if the unknown is generally a source of worry, in this particular case we are correct to worry, for, from this unknown springs a terrible intelligence and an unpalatable truth:

> The barrier separating known and unknown in such stories is penetrated not necessarily by human beings, but often by the invading aliens, who cross the unknown into mankind’s awareness and thus circumscribe its rational universe. The unknown becomes the more fearsome through the knowledge that it contains an intelligence other than our own, and that to that intelligence, *we* are part of the unknown that remains to be appropriated. (Wolfe, *The Known* 205)

The fear of the unknown caused by the Martians is double, for they represent at once an external threat (war, cause of the extinction of the human species) and an internal one (evolution and physical transformation). They also tapped into another type of fear that was very present in the 1890's: the fear of invasion (Bergonzi 135). In fact, according to Kemp, the choice of this theme was for

Wells an effective manner to increase his chances of awakening some form of awareness in his complacent readers: "Wells's variant on the [invasion novel] formula displays the need for international co-operation by subjecting the human species to extra-terrestrial invasion. Like its models, though, it is designed to drive its readers out of a smug sense of security" (Kemp 148). Of course, as has been stated a few times already in this chapter, whether inducing large doses of fear in his readers will lead them anywhere beyond being plain frightened or entertained or not remains debatable. It largely depends on the individual reader.

Manifestations of the unconscious realms of the mind also have a predominant place in Gothic writing, for they often feature unfiltered, taboo and/or repressed thoughts or images. In *The War*, not only does the reader have access to the narrator's nightmares and nightmare visions, these are tinted with madness, terror, death… and even the rising undead: "Of a night I see the black powder darkening the silent streets, and the contorted bodies shrouded in that layer; they rise upon me tattered and dog-bitten. They gibber and grow fiercer, paler, uglier, mad distortions of humanity at last" (301). As in the passage describing the carnage caused by the Martians, this passage combines the worrisome and disquieting atmosphere of Gothic terror with descriptions in the fashion of graphic horror; if different readers are sensitive to different elements – either physical or emotional stress – Wells increases his chances of shocking – or haunting – a maximum number of readers with this doubly Gothic strategy. Even after the death of the last "ullaling" Martian, the main character finds himself submerged with a deep feeling of insecurity and paranoia, hence the dark flashbacks and nightmares. And even in busy, bustling London, the narrator feels haunted, not exactly by the ghosts of the individuals deceased, but by *the* ghost of a civilisation, of a society that is dead in his mind, no longer eternal, immutable, invincible: "I go to London and see the busy multitudes in Fleet Street and the Strand, and it comes across my mind that they are but the ghosts of the past, haunting the streets that I have seen silent and wretched, going to and fro, phantasms in a dead city" (Wells, *War* 301-02).

The buildings and cities in the novel are also "dead." After the Martians' passage, the city of Chobham itself is described as being completely lifeless (87), with its deserted houses, overturned carts and abandoned objects. Chapter eight of book two is itself titled "Dead London," and in it, the narrator describes a chilling setting:

> Nothing but this gaunt quiet. London gazed at me spectrally. The windows in the white houses were like the eye sockets of skulls. About me my imagination found a thousand noiseless enemies moving. Terror seized me, a horror at my temerity. In front of me the road became pitchy black as though it was tarred, and I saw a contorted shape lying across the pathway. (Wells, *War* 279)

Wells uses a simple strategy – simple but certainly effective for imaginative, visual readers – in order to evoke once again the deadly future that looms ahead. The "pitch black" and "empty silence" added to the imagery of skeletons and ghosts contribute to add a certain cognitive void to the passage. Why so much darkness, silence and unknown in Wells' discussion of the impact of Darwinian theory on humankind and human nature? Nothing is certain anymore. The concepts we had built, like the buildings and cities we had built and organized to affirm our mastery of our situation and nature, are shattered. In the destruction of the stable ideals of Man and human civilisation, we now see that nature does not have laws; it is lawless.

In response to this revelation of this lawless nature, Man finds himself lost, trapped into a state of panic. The buildings described in the novel echo not only the trope of death but also the trope of madness, evoking this panic in which Britain has been plunged. As the narrator describes "[s]ickly yellow lights [going] to and fro in the houses," we can see a reference to the few small sparks of life that are left here and there, running aimlessly, guided only by madness and confusion. The trope of the ghost evokes what was lost or what now seems conceptually blurry. Buildings in *The War of the Worlds* can also be ghostly, as in this description: "Once the light was eclipsed, and *the ghostly kitchen doorway* became absolutely dark" (Wells 200). This attribution of ghostly features to cities

and buildings is not only frightening in itself, especially for those readers with a vivid imagination, but it may also, for those who read the novel with a particular attention to the concepts of extinction and social collapse, serve as a metaphor for the "death" of human civilization as we know it, as the houses and cities which mark social progress are now but mere phantoms. In *The War of the Worlds*, London stands as both a "city of the dead" (Wells 276) and as the death of the city. Kemp makes an interesting comment in relation to Wells' use of *real* cities and recognizable suburbs instead of anonymous, fictional towns: "Much of the book's shock effect comes from juxtaposing Armageddon and suburbia. … To shake complacence by sending tentacles snaking into the pantry while the neighborhood gets smashed to smithereens was, of course, just what Wells wanted" (147). Similar novels sometimes feature nameless cities as a tactic that indicates to the reader that the story being told could happen anywhere; by using concrete names, Wells indicates that this story can happen to "YOU, the Londoner" or "YOU, the villager from Chobham." When particular cities are named, the impending catastrophe described is harder to brush aside. As John St-Loe Strachey writes, "[the] vividness of the local touches, and the accuracy of the geographical details enormously enhances the horror of the picture. When everything else is so true and exact, the mind finds it difficult to be always rebelling against the impossible Martians" (31).

Echoing the Gothic excess and raw emotion, *The War* features many apocalyptic and chaotic scenes and dialogues. Like the strategy of geographical accuracy, these passages reach out to the reader's fears of apocalypse by presenting characters that express the same fears. Wells does not tone down anything so that the reader can sit back and reflect immediately on the philosophical, social and bio-historical implications of the events at hand. In *The War of the Worlds*, all hell breaks loose, and even archetypes of faith and patience – religious figures – are turned into nervous wrecks overcome by terror and an impending sense of doom: "Why are these things permitted? What sins have we done? . . . This must be the beginning of the end. . . . The end!" cries the curate, gone mad (110—112). And as death springs from one object to another, so does

fear: “The contagion of such a unanimous fear was inevitable. . . . The man was running away with the rest, and selling his papers for a shilling each as he ran—a grotesque mingling of profit and panic” (132). As Bergonzi explains, “the Martians establish the ‘Reign of Terror’ that the Invisible Man could only dream of—and on an infinitely larger scale” (Bergonzi 125). But how does this terror reach the reader, exactly? The Gothic tropes are not the only textual elements here; realism and attention to detail are what really make the “furious terror of the people” (168) so tangible and so contagious for the reader: “Combined with (the) accuracy of physical observation is an equally precise sense of time, of the hour-by-hour sequence of events; the two elements together produce the feeling of intolerably mounting tension which dominates the first part of the book” (Bergonzi 127).

As we have seen in the previous pages, Wells uses many scare tactics or “shock tactics” that are *immediately* accessible to or that have an immediate effect on the readers: the monstrosity, cruelty and unnatural efficiency and power of the aliens; the gory descriptions of killing and corpses; the gloomy, graveyard-like settings and the dead cities; the ubiquity of darkness and the unknown; the unbearable tension, the contagious terror of the masses, the strong apocalyptic feel, etc. But the author also seeks to shock his readers via more abstract or conceptual methods. In this case, it is not the elements themselves but the thoughts they produce in the reader which really shock and frighten him and shatter his emotional and psychological boundaries.

Gothic Concepts and Effects Between the Lines

From the very beginning of the novel, Wells establishes a complex relationship between the Martians and the humans. The author makes it very that clear that, although the human race is physically, mentally and technologically inferior to the Martians, the threatening aliens also represent humankind’s past, present and future--in a much less pleasant manner than Dickens’ ghosts, of course. The resemblance set between the humans and the aliens is not meant to be flattering or purely comparative—the goal here is not to say that the humans are

technologically advanced or that they also are generally capable of violence—but to be truly guilt-inducing. Humans are and have been exterminators as well; they cannot blame the Martians for anything they have not done in principle:

> [B]efore we judge of them too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals . . . but upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants. (Wells, *War* 4-5)

The return of a dreaded and repressed past is an important Gothic trope, and this reminder of humankind's disturbing past, presented with the face of monstrosity, no less, is certain to disturb any conscientious reader. The Martian monsters are a mirror in which the human sees his own monstrosity. Peter Fitting argues that this return of the repressed past is in fact not only guilt-inducing, it's also a form of role exchange in which suddenly the ones who had the upper hand find themselves plunged into the nightmare of being hunted down by a frightening Other:

> If Wells's monsters are seen not only as a displaced figure of contemporary attitudes towards the racial Other, but as a return of the repressed—in this case the 'guilty conscience of imperialism', the memory of centuries of subjugation, slavery and murder—then not sleeping has its advantages. These monsters may be seen not only as a projection of the fear of the other but as a transposition of the nightmares generated in the indigenous peoples of Africa and Australia as well as the Americas as their lives and culture were torn apart and destroyed by the European invaders. (Fitting 140)

Through the monsters, Wells attacks British readers' complacence by forcing them to remember their own horrible past behavior, a past behavior for which they have not paid the price – yet. Of course, in acknowledging this past, they must also acknowledge the possibility of a future in which they may face the same fate as the one they have imposed on their fellow humans. Finally, the reader is shamed into realizing that the unity the monstrous Martians show contrasts greatly with the

disunity humans show: nowhere in the novel do we see Martians preying on their own kind. In other words, the humans are not only monstrous in their resemblance with the aliens, they are monstrous in comparison to them – monstrous individuals in a monstrous society.

If, in this newfound repulsive monstrosity, the reader finds some sense of power nonetheless[8], this reassurance is quickly shattered by the fact that, unlike the Martians, the humans are weak and vulnerable because they are fundamentally ignorant: not just ignorant by choice, but maintained in a state of ignorance by the media they look to for information. Right from the beginning of the novel, we see the important role the media plays in keeping this blissful ignorance as is: “Yet the next day there was nothing of this in the papers except in the *Daily Telegraph*, and the world went in ignorance of one of the greatest dangers that ever threatened the human race” (Wells, *War* 6). In this situation, it is not the characters who feel fear or anxiety, as they are unaware of what awaits them, but the reader – granted that he knows what is to come, either from reading a summary of the story, from hearing about it from fellow readers, or simply from reading *The War* a second time. Indeed, it is the reader, not the character, who feels great anxiety in knowing that we are most often unaware of the grave and unexpected dangers that threaten—or are about to threaten—us, as he is the one who sees the grave events unfolding in towns and cities filled with ignorance and unawareness. As Asker writes, "Wells warns: 'Even, now, for all we can tell, the coming terror may be crouching for its spring and the fate of humanity be at hand'. It should be stressed that Wells' tone suggests he is speaking seriously and is not merely encouraging the kind of sensational feelings that consort well with the sales of books" (Wells, H.G. "The Extinction of Man" in *Certain Personal Matters*, London, 1898, p. 172, qtd in Asker 19). In *The War of the Worlds*, Wells not only denounces complacence, he also confronts the newly aware readers with the horrible truth that they are an insignificant group of individuals living in a manipulative society that is unaware by choice, and that all this time they are possibly under the microscope

8 In our habit of constant denial, it is tempting and reassuring to think, “Well, if we are powerful monsters like the Martians, then, at the very least, no other species can hope to dethrone us.”

of another powerful, strange species. “The contrast between the greatness of the Martian intelligence and the littleness of mankind that dominates the novel’s opening recalls the familiar contrast between the greatness of the cosmos and human littleness” (Rose 71). The sky itself is both devoid of answers and full of dark possibilities, leaving the reader in an increasing state of anxiety: “Near it in the field, I remember, were three faint points of light, three telescopic stars infinitely remote, and all around it was the unfathomable darkness of empty space” (Wells, *War* 8). The “three faint points of light” shining softly in the blackness of space draw our attention as clues to unlocking the story of our future – but this story is not one many people would like to know. If humankind’s past and present are depicted in a dark and pessimistic tone in *The War of the Worlds*, its future is no less frightening. Both its physical integrity and its place on Earth—in the Universe, even—are threatened by the random and cruel forces of Nature, which Huxley has once described as nothing less than an ethical horror, and scientific and technological developments which, although theoretically in the hands of humans, seem to have more and more of a life of their own.

As Jean-Pierre Vernier writes, “Thus change, whether due to science or to nature, is presented as leading to horrifying results: the Martians and [Dr. Moreau’s] Beast Folk were certainly meant to produce in the reader the same kind of reaction” (Vernier 75). What is ironic is that the monstrous result the reader fears is what he is left to hope for in the end, as the other scenario involves extinction. Indeed, there seem to be two possibilities for humans as far as biological and social development are concerned: on one hand, the human race may remain the dominant race and evolve into a perfected but physically monstrous breed; on the other, it may be supplanted by another species favored by the laws of evolution and regress to the status of a lower life form. In many instances in the novel, as the Martians are taking the upper-hand, the reader may notice various examples of human characters crouching and crawling, like animals or insects (200-201). Even the curate, whose role as a religious character is supposed to be associated with reassurance and order, becomes reduced to an incapacitated, animalistic figure: “The curate, I found, was quite incapable of

discussion; this new and culminating atrocity had robbed him of all vestiges of reason or forethought. Practically he had already sunk to the level of an animal" (224). The narrator, although he does not regress to the state of animalism as does the curate, also recognizes he has lost his place as a privileged, superior being: "I felt . . . a sense of dethronement, a persuasion that I was no longer a master, but an animal among the animals, under the Martian heel" (241). This "sense of dethronement" is not the end of the story though, as the Martians do not simply push their competitors aside: they eliminate them. This type of war is inevitable, according to Suvin: "Wells vividly testifies that a predatory state of affairs is the only even fantastically imaginable alternative" (213). These intentions are made clear as early as the middle of the book: the narrator speaks of "the swift liquefaction of the social body" (148) and remarks that the Martian presence signifies "the beginning of the rout of civilization, of the massacre of mankind" (171). Only at the end of the novel is the reader relieved from the immediate threat of extinction, but that does not mean that he is relieved of the burden of reflecting on the current nature of humankind and its fate. Wells encourages this reflection by showing a pensive narrator reliving and pondering the recent events, rather than ending his novel with a spectacular finale or a cliff-hanger. There is no guarantee, however, that the readers' attention span will last long enough for him to give much thought to what follows the denouement of the story of the Martians.

In general, Wells' strategy of blending science fiction and Gothic tropes is promising, but the blend in question is perhaps unbalanced in *The War of the Worlds*. Of course, the strategy adequately matches his intentions: the author seeks to make his readers aware of a situation they refuse to acknowledge by shocking them and by making them realize the gravity of the situation. In this sense, the use of terror in a science fiction context is justified, for the intellectual reading stimulated by the context of cognitive estrangement is enhanced, intensified and made more urgent, more important, by the addition of Gothic tropes. However, in *The War of the Worlds*, the application of the strategy does not succeed entirely, for the Gothic tropes overpower the intellectual aspect of the book. Firstly, Wells plays on too many of the readers' fears at the same time: the

fear of reprisal for past violent behavior, the fear of biological mutation or impurity, the fear of an uncertain future (versus the safe future promised by religion), and the fear of dethronement and extinction, and, to add an acknowledged contemporary fear, the fear of invasion. Secondly, Wells uses a variety of surface-level Gothic tropes (terms related to monstrosity, death, ghosts, cemeteries and so on, which frighten without needing an analysis) in addition to emphasizing "Gothic" concepts, or ideas with monstrous implications, quite often and in detail (the narrator discusses regression to animality, human extinction, etc). These concepts are meant to be met with an intellectual mindset, but the accumulation of them and their situation in a book filled with Gothic tropes and tension, results in the contrary effect. Finally, Wells makes a noticeable number of his Gothic passages twice as strong by combining Gothic terror with Gothic horror: the Martians are not just powerful, frightening and apparently invincible, they also leave behind them burned, bloody, mutilated corpses. All of this considered, Wells manages to shock his readers without a doubt. However, the majority of readers seem to have stopped at this level. In *The Science Fiction of H.G. Wells*, McConnell writes, in reference to the character of the panicking curate, "Terror, Wells seems to be saying, is the most inefficient response to the terrible" (139). Unfortunately, it seems, Wells has provoked the reaction he was dreading the most.

CHAPTER 2
THE INVISIBLE MAN:
A MEANING THAT SLIPS THROUGH OUR FINGERS

> The annihilation of this world is the only future alternative to its present state; the present bourgeois way of life is with scientific certainty leading the Individualist *homme moyen sensuel* toward the hell of physical indignity and psychic terror, yet this is still the only way of life he can return to and rely on, the best of all the bad possible worlds. – *Darko Suvin*, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction

James Whale's 1933 version of *The Invisible Man* remains one of the most enduring icons of the horror film. Featuring a lone scientist turned insane madman, the movie shows that invisibility can be even more gruesome and frightening than the worst of disfigurations, and leaves its audience with an unbearable feeling of vulnerability. The original novel by H.G. Wells is also chilling: while we are not confronted with shocking images on a big screen, its protagonist, Griffin, terrifies the readers with his murderous thoughts and his twisted intentions. Juxtaposing science-fiction with Gothic and fantasy tropes, Wells was able to explore the tropes of the invisible man and of the mad scientist while appealing to his readers' emotions and intellect. Where the SF context of the book serves as a cognitive background for the author's reflections on society and human nature, the Gothic tropes allow the reader to explore the darker subtleties of the human mind, provoke the reader's attention, and force the reader to admit the anxiety and insecurity which lie under his apparent complacence. At once human, monster and animal, Griffin expresses a murderous rage which is fed by both the desire for a social revolution and the primal, individualistic urge to triumph above all. The man who used to be a lower-class, ridiculed scientist, becomes an icon of almost unlimited power. No longer a part of human society, no longer subjected to its norms, the Invisible Man seeks to instate another order, this time based on fear and revenge: a Reign of Terror. One may wonder if Griffin's behavior really is purely selfish, or if it serves a higher purpose. And even if it does serve such a socially-inclined purpose, whether or not Wells

believes we should condone the scientist's methods remains debatable. Science is not portayed in the best light in the novel. Not only does scientific experimentation lead to mischief in *The Invisible Man*, it also causes the protagonist to lose his humanness, physically, mentally, and socially. As a strong believer in the potential of science, Wells is not criticizing this source of knowledge and advancement in itself; he is, however, warning his readers against the dangers of a blind faith in – and a careless use of – science. In the novel, Griffin ultimately becomes alien to others as well as to himself, a terrifying prospect, and a great concern in the 1800's. As Brian Aldiss writes in *Three Billion Year Spree*, "Both the Industrial Revolution and evolution have brought a marked sense of isolation to humanity in general: isolation from one another—and from Nature, so often seen in science fiction as an enemy to be conquered, as if we were no longer ourselves a part of the natural world" (17).That *The Invisible Man* has gained much attention due to its originality and frightening content appears to be undeniable. Unfortunately, it also seems that the authorial ambivalence which makes the text so rich—Wells' conflicted attitude towards the Invisible Man—is lost due to the author's frequent use of strong Gothic tropes in the novel. Indeed, much attention is drawn to the motifs of madness and terror, provoking a mainly emotional response from the reader, while the philosophical reflections on society, justice and genius are obfuscated, for the untrained reader at least, by the heavy Gothic flavour of the book. Only those readers familiar with Wells' thought, or those accustomed to see the genius behind an apparently mad protagonist in similar novels, will grasp the full sense of the author's work.

In order to determine to what extent Wells' juxtaposition of anti-cognitive Gothic and fantasy tropes with the cognitive SF genre undermined the social or philosophical value of the text, I will first discuss the contemporary popular and critical reception of *The Invisible Man*. I will then proceed to an analysis of the Gothic and fantasy tropes the novel contains, as well as the clues left by Wells pointing towards a more ambivalent meaning than what the surface-level may imply. Finally, in light of the study of both the reception of the novel and the rhetorical aspect of the text, I will argue that the presence of the Gothic has more

weaknesses than it has strengths within *The Invisible Man*, as it easily draws the reader's attention towards the text, but then limits the reader's grasp of the complex, multi-layered, ambiguous message the book contains.

Reception & Major Themes

According to Ingvald Racknem, most critics did not understand the fundamental message carried by Wells' 1897 novel. Indeed, the academic goes as far as to claim that

> the critics' understanding and interpretation of the underlying idea in this story seem hopelessly inadequate [and that one] is tempted to maintain that they neither grasped its purpose nor discovered the moral of its fable . . . . The critics, failing to grasp what [Wells] was driving at, regretted the slightness of the tale, and complained that its hero was 'a monster as devoid of moral sentiment as the one created by *Frankenstein*.' (Racknem 28)

While monstrosity and murder are highly significant motifs in the novel, it seems that the critics discussed by Racknem refused to understand *The Invisible Man* beyond the surface-level: in other words, if the meaningful Gothic tropes that were too obvious to be missed were quite obviously noticed by contemporary readers, few made the effort to delve into their meaning, even less so into the authorial ambivalence they expressed. Even worse, "[m]any reviewers . . . simply dismissed the romance as a failure, finding that Wells had treated an old theme in an unoriginal manner" (Racknem 28)—while any serious student of Wells will grasp that *The Invisible Man* isn't a story "about" invisibility *per se.* Finally, several critics went a little further in their appreciation of the tale and noticed a tragic tone to Wells' novel, but they yet again failed to reflect on the purpose of the presence of such a tone:

> Those who failed to read it with understanding dwelt on the tragic figure of Griffin and on how his unkindliness developed into humanity, declaring that these last scenes were as vivid and gruesome as anything Wells had done. Griffin's development *is* tragic, and in his fury of destruction he is terribly

> vivid; but failing to realize that this was part of the plot, they regretted that he should develop into a maniac. [One] reviewer discovered that, in the hunt of his maddest of anarchists, Wells's power of setting some incredible horror in the most everyday surroundings served him well. (Racknem 29)

Most reviewers, then, responded to the novel *emotionally* rather than *intellectually*, which is already an indication, in my view, that the fantasy and Gothic horror/terror tropes present in the novel are perhaps too overwhelming for the work to benefit the general reading public. The purpose hidden behind all the tragedy and horror is perhaps not as easily unlocked as Wells would have hoped. In *H.G. Wells*, J.D. Beresford merely considers the novel as an "[essay] in pure fantasy" (18), as are, according to him, many of Wells' other books. He compliments the fiction for its realism in its answer to the question "What could a man do if he were invisible?" (19), as if this question was the sole purpose guiding the book of an intellectual writer like Wells.

Contemporary reviews of *The Invisible Man* are scarce, and most the reviews I have used for this chapter have been compiled by Racknem. Of course, it is obvious that if Racknem's claims and criticism of the contemporary critics and reviewers of Wells depend on studies of the author's fiction and non-fiction, they also depend on his own interpretation of the novel, which seems to me to be correct but also rather limited in light of later contributions by Leon Stover, which I will be discussing subsequently. Racknem writes, "without social sense on his part, and without cooperation with others, his discovery, regarded only as an advantage *against* the rest of men, proved in the end useless and destructive to him. This is the moral of the story, in which Wells' main concern was the relation of science to society" (28). On one hand, the critic justly draws attention to Wells' ambivalent attitude towards science and his condemning of individualism in a time that requires a collective lucidity and action: in this sense, it is true that selfishness destroys the value or purpose of genius. On the other hand, he does not mention the possibility of the author's *identification* with the protagonist and his

conflicted attitude towards the "lone genius"[9]—for Wells firmly believes the destiny of man lies in revolution, and if the lone genius is often condemned, he is also needed and can sometimes, if not often, bring more good to a society than the complacent masses themselves can. As Gregory Benford writes, "the question that seems to interest Wells is how to think about cozy human civilization, by studying how a genius, even a crazed one, puts pressure upon society" ("Afterword" 175). This statement seems crucial to me, especially after taking into consideration the aforementionned writings of Leon Stover:

> *The Invisible Man* [can be considered] as one of the Victorian novels of political terrorism animated by a hatred for parliamentary democracy . . . . Wells expected readers to pick up on the cover art of the London first edition, . . . a line drawing that alludes to a famous Carlylean saying . . . : 'You cannot fight the battle in dressing gown and slippers'. The battle is that for social justice, directed against the sham justice of the democratic order. (Stover, *The Invisible Man* 9)

Stover's idea that *The Invisible Man* is a novel about terrorism (among other things), and that it features Wells' ambivalent views on individual revolutionary characters, seems to have escaped the attention of many of the authors' contemporary readers. This inattention can be surprising if we consider the fact that "Wells' readers were familiar with this literary tradition [of novels of political terrorism]" (Stover, *The Invisible Man* 8). If Wells did believe that the fate of humankind lay in a revolution and that visionary individuals could be the starting point of this revolution, it is hard to believe that the author condoned revolutionary terrorism, however, when one reads from *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*. Wells writes clearly, "The man who in a breath will say 'I am a democrat' and also 'I am a rebel' is simply a fool" (58). While it is true that the author was against the existing "democracy" in which citizens barely participate and in which human relations are anything but democratic, Wells still defended a society governed by science in which all citizens knowledgeably played their part. Wells' views on tyranny are pretty clear in *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*: "A

[9] Benford, "Afterword" 177

democracy needs to be in a state of perpetual vigilance against the specialist. From Cæsar to Stalin democracy has been trapped into one-man tyrannies by crises" (60). Finally,Wells did not advocate placing our blind trust in men of science, even less in one single man of science: "It is *science* and not *men of science* that we want to enlighten and animate our politics and rule the world" ("The Idea" 113). And this science must be used in the interest of all; it is not meant to be the springboard for an angered individual. Stover's statement describing "science [as] a revolutionary force of individual guerilla fighters" in Wells' novels contradicts Wells' statement almost word for word.

It seems certain that the author wanted readers to reflect on terrorism, on the individuals that choose that method and on marginalized individuals who, like Benford wrote, "put pressure on society" (175); it is also highly probable that, as a misunderstood genius and a man of science, Wells identified with Griffin to a certain degree – this is the extent to which I will agree with Stover. There is no proof that the novel condones the acts of individual terrorists fighting for "the greater good," as Stover writes in his critical edition: "The terrific irony here is that the misunderstood Invisible Man represents the statist force that will indeed liberate mankind from its babel and impose a unified heaven on Earth: the Wellsian world-state" (footnote 82 in Wells, *The Invisible Man* 73). To prove his point, Stover remarks on Wells' admiration for socialist revolutionaries in many instances in the introduction to his critical edition, and then redirects readers towards later works of fiction such as *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), in which terrorists "build the Modern State" (footnote 187 in Wells, *The Invisible Man* 140). But *The Shape of Things to Come* is a work of speculative fiction – it does not pretend to predict the events of the future, nor does it stand as a model for what Wells would like to see happen. It is a book that represents what *could possibly* happen. In fact, in light of *The Fate of the Homo Sapiens* and short articles like "The Idea of a World Encyclopedia," it is the opposite idea that stands out: a universal movement for education, a universal movement for progress. Griffin resembles more closely what Wells describes in the more pessimistic chapter called "Decadent World" in *The Fate of the Homo Sapiens*:

"The coming barbarism will differ from the former barbarism by its great powers of terror, urgency and destruction, and by its greater rapidity of wastage" (310).

Following this discussion of the reception and critical interpretations of the work, in my subsequent analysis, I will consider that the message of the novel represents the failure of this tyranny of the specialist, while also discreetly inciting the reader to reflect upon the need to further integrate specialists into our society in order to produce meaningful knowledge and actions via *collaboration*. Specialists, left on their own, separated from the rest of society, do not possess the necessary competencies to function in any society. As Wells writes in "The Idea of a World Encyclopedia" in 1936, "A distinguished specialist is precious because of his cultivated gift. It does not follow at all that by the standards of all round-necessity he is a superior person. Indeed by the very fact of his specialization he may be less practised and less competent than the average man" (112). I will also be keeping in mind Wells' comment on barbarism in relation to the character of Griffin as I believe that the protagonist should be studied from the standpoint of *fin-de-siècle* concerns such as regression, degeneration and decadence.

The variety of existing interpretations goes to show that Wells' work of fiction was probably only very well understood by a portion of educated readers, correspondents and friends who read the book while keeping in mind Wells' political and scientific opinions, no more. Many readers will have picked up on the critique of humanity's blind belief in – or selfish use of – science but will not necessarily have associated the character of the mad, murdering scientist-turned-terrorist with the reflection Wells seems to want his readers to make on the complexities of revolutionary behavior or the need to better integrate geniuses.[10] As for the general public who devoured penny dreadfuls and, later on, pulp fiction, Wells was a master of scandal and horror, and remains to this day associated, by many, with brutal alien invasions, giant ants and monsters.

That is not to say that it is incorrect to associate Wells with horror and fantasy imagery, but rather that surface-level readings of Wells invite an incorrect

[10] This is the case with Racknem's interpretation, as well as with my original interpretation before reading and pondering Stover's critical edition of the novel.

or incomplete perception of the value of his early works—a shock-value, rather than a philosophical one—for most readers do not make the effort to unlock the many levels of meaning of the Gothic and fantasy tropes they contain. In the following section, I will be analysing these tropes in order to assess their rhetorical effects and to evaluate their contribution to Wells' social message.

Gothic Tropes in *The Invisible Man*

An important Gothic staple present in *The Invisible Man* is monstrosity. A merely frightful and revolting trope at the surface level, the trope of the monster is usually rich with meaning, and that is no less true in Wells' 1897 scientific romance. In *The Invisible Man*, monstrosity typically generates shock and revulsion in the reader: "It was worse than anything. Mrs. Hall, standing open-mouthed and horror-struck, shrieked at what she saw, and made for the door of the house. Everyone began to move. They were prepared for scars, disfigurements, tangible horrors, but *nothing*!" (Wells 39) The element of surprise is obviously lost on the reader here, for any reader will have picked up on the protagonist's condition by simply reading the title. However, if the reader is not necessarily shocked by the fact that Griffin is invisible, the descriptions of his bandaged face, of the characters' reactions to his appearance and of the scientist's actions later in the novel most certainly affect him. Also, the surprise related to the protagonist's monstrous "appearance" is not unimportant even if it is not shared by readers: it goes to show that the results of humanity's obsession with "progress" and with scientific advancement can have not only horrid consequences, but consequences of an unexpected and inconceivable kind of horridness.

Indeed, with Wells' great interest in Darwinism and degeneration theory in mind, we can understand that Griffin's monstrosity may not just be a reminder that science can lead to frightful consequences: it is also a reminder that although the concept of "human" is theoretically stable in our minds, in reality, physical and mental evolution and devolution can occur randomly—at any time, in any manner, for a variety of reasons. Indeed, "[if] man has evolved out of lower forms, why may he not regress to a bestial condition?" (Asker 16) Although the

protagonist does not physically come to resemble an *animal* as do the victims of Dr. Moreau in Wells' previous work, he does certainly regress or devolve: he loses his human traits, becoming nothing recognizably human, except for his voice and for the clothes he occasionally wears. As for his mental state, there is a clear regression towards animality: as Griffin becomes further disconnected from his community, his thoughts turn towards primal instincts such as hunger, thirst and murder. "The man's become inhuman, I tell you," Kemp exclaims when pursued by the Invisible Man (147). Earlier in the novel, Griffin's assistant, Marvel, claims that "He is at present at large . . ."—this echoes not only news announcements about wandering murderers, but also warnings about dangerous wild animals on the loose. In the late 1800's criminality was strongly associated with a form of animal retrogression. According to Cesare Lombroso, a contemporary of Wells known for his work in criminal anthropology, the "criminal is an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals" (qtd in Punter 22). In *The Invisible Man*, the lone genius is further excluded from human society because of his invisibility; once forced outside the set of social norms, the character reverts to anger and regresses, giving in to his most violent impulses.

These reflections on the pessimistic side of Darwinian theory can be an end in themselves, or a means to an end: if Wells' main concern is our careless pursuit of scientific victories, there may be an important reflection to be made concerning the relationship between linear scientific progress, on one hand, and random human evolution/devolution on the other hand. Firstly, scientific evolution does not guarantee progressive human evolution, and it is in fact frightening to think about the consequences of an increasing, almost unlimited scientific power placed in the hands of a more bestial humanity. With a ubiquitous, increasingly powerful technology comes a sense of ubiquitous danger, and this is in part what the Invisible Man represents, more obviously to Kemp towards the end of the novel: an invisible, but ubiquitous threat.

Tension and angst linked to terror before the unknown is also a recurring motif in the novel. The word "terror" itself is mentioned repeatedly throughout

The Invisible Man: the narrator speaks of "the abject terror on his perspiring face" (78), of a "voice shrieking with terror" (80), "a face of terror" (165), and, finally, Griffin's "Reign of Terror" (142). The recurring theme of terror has two functions throughout the novel: on one hand, it is used to set and sustain a frightening tone and to create apprehension about the future, to unsettle the comfortable masses; on the other hand, according to Stover, it also refers to La Terreur of the French Revolution. He writes in a footnote related to the major discussion between Kemp and Griffin: "Note that the author puts a good face on 'Reign of Terror', in capital letters, when Griffin alludes to that phase of the French Revolution" (176). I will be discussing these two functions of the theme of terror in this order.

The feeling of terror and uncertainty is sustained throughout the novel not only through the repetition of the word "terror" and through the featuring of death, murder and monstrosity, but also through the sporadic or secondary use of other Gothic and fantasy tropes as well as scenes of mass panic, amongst other elements. Among these sporadically used Gothic motifs we find the trope of the ghost. The Invisible Man is often compared to a ghost, as in "There wasn't the ghost of an arm" (27), or, in the words of the detective following Griffin's tracks, "It's just like the foot of a ghost, ain't it?" (119) The narrator also describes how "the bed clothes gathered themselves together, leapt up suddenly into a sort of peak, and then jumped headlong over the bottom rail" (33), once again showing a ghost-like feature in Griffin. Later on in the novel, the protagonist's ghostly countenance takes on more frightening proportions:

> On the landing he saw something and stopped astonished. The door handle of his own room was blood-stained . . . . The feeling that is called 'eerie' came upon him . . . . Suddenly, with a start, he perceived a coiled and bloodstained bandage of linen rag hanging up in mid-air, between him and the wash-hand stand. (85-86)

If, in the beginning of *The Invisible Man*, the protagonist's invisibility is described in a grotesque yet somewhat humorous way, this characteristic becomes more frightening and threatening when Griffin begins to get "blood on his hands," both in the figurative and literal sense. The fact that he cannot be seen is initially

comic and interesting, if also grotesque, but becomes an unbearable threat towards the end of the novel.

The reader may notice other subtle references to Gothic images, such as when the protagonist first exposes his bandaged head: the narrator then speaks of "the stranger's skull-like head" (21). Such references to Gothic imagery do not necessary generate as much fear as the other motifs previously mentioned, but, as obvious references to the Gothic writing mode, they help to at least maintain the terrifying tone or atmosphere of the novel nonetheless. Griffin's gloomy and heartless description of his father's funeral, for example, also fulfills this function, in addition to contributing to the reader's perception of the protagonist as inhuman. There are also several moments in this novel (36, 58, 66) in which the general atmosphere is closer to that of a Gothic novel than that of an SF one, as in this passage: "No one ventured upstairs. How the stranger occupied himself is unknown. Now and then he would strike violently up and down, and twice came an outburst of curses, a tearing of paper, and a violent smashing of bottles" (36). In this passage, there is an undeniable emphasis on the terror and tension caused by the unknown and the strange that does not have the cognitive feel of the typical SF novel. In fact, the beginning of the novel features a more anti-cognitive form of estrangement, as we only find out the cause of Griffin's invisibility on page 60. Before that mark, the invisibility could very well have supernatural causes, and the villagers' superstitious attitude (23) and belief in witchcraft as a cause for anything strange (34) emphasizes this possibility. Finally, in addition to the tropes of the ghost, the invisible and the unexplained, Wells also refers to the trope of the nightmare in order to ensure a permanent feeling of tension and apprehension in the reader. "Such children as saw him at nightfall dreamed of bogies" (21), the narrator explains in his initial physical descriptions of Griffin. The protagonist also recalls a frightful nightmare later on in the novel during his conversation with Kemp: "I was being forced towards [my father's] grave. . . . I realised I was invisible and inaudible. . . . I struggled in vain, I was forced over the brink, the coffin rang hollow as I fell upon it" (125-126).

Terror isn't just something that is felt by the characters and the readers of the book; it is also a politically charged term. Stover argues that the recurrence of the concept of terror and of the expression "Reign of Terror" is to incite the reader to reflect on terrorism, anarchy and social revolution, and not just in the habitual, automatically negative manner, but from a distant, more unbiased, philosophical standpoint – this is not to say that Wells condones terrorism *per se*. This function of terror in the novel is evidently less accessible to the general reading public, as the strong Gothic horror and Gothic terror tones of the novel initially encourage a surface-reading more than anything else, and as the only explicit references to such a concept by the protagonist himself[11] are contrasted with accusations of madness by his adversary, a rational doctor in good standing – not to mention all the accusations of madness by the villagers: "'He's not only invisible,' he said, 'but he's mad! Homicidal!" (Wells 65) Griffin's plans to reverse the social order, flawed as it is, are easily viewed as selfish and inhuman—one only has to remember his recollection of his relationship with his father, from whom he stole money and whose funeral he attended with the utmost indifference—instead of socially or collectively inclined. Unless the reader is aware of Wells' conflicted admiration for the lone, misunderstood propagandist, which the author himself is, and of Wells' hatred of the current social order and his wish for a social revolution (although he wishes a revolution diferent from the one Griffin proposes), he will not likely sympathize much with the apparently mad anarchist. To the general reading public, the Invisible Man is simply a bitter scientist gone mad, a character who evokes revenge, death threats and random executions—the reference to the French Revolution and its benefits amid all the terror and murder is truly obscure, if not invisible, to the untrained eye.

The idea that the scientist is simply mad and vengeful is also sustained by the narrator's remark following the protagonist's attempt to convince Kemp of the purpose of his mission: "in the morning *he was himself again*, active, powerful,

[11] Griffin details his plans as a terrorist in his conversation with Kemp, for example: "Not wanton killing, but a judicious slaying. The point is, they know there is an Invisible Man . . . . And that Invisible Man, Kemp, must now establish a Reign of Terror" (142). There is also a clear statement of the Invisible Man's terrorist intentions in the letter he sends Kemp after their meeting (153).

angry, and malignant, prepared for his last great struggle against the world" (152). The reader can hardly sense that Griffin has a positive purpose or that he is in control of himself, especially when the protagonist has previously said such things as "I was just only beginning to realize the extraordinary advantage my invisibility gave me. My head was already teeming with plans of all the wild things I had now impunity to do" (115), or "I experienced a wild impulse to jest, to startle people, to clap men on the back, fling people's hats astray, and generally revel in my extraordinary advantage" (116). Of course, these remarks express Griffin's initial enthusiasm while he is still impressed and satisfied with his discovery. He also still shows a conscience at this point: "But I knew too clearly the terror and brutal cruelty my advances would evoke" (122). It is only when the lone scientist realizes that he is in fact no longer human according to popular standards that he begins to lose the pity he initially had for his acquaintances and the passerby, and that he plunges into what appears to be a state of madness. His contact with his fellow humans provokes moments of mass panic rather than resulting in productive communication and collaboration: "Somebody in full flight trod heavily on [Hall's] finger. He yelled, struggled to regain his feet, was knocked against and thrown on all fours again, and became aware that he was involved not in a capture, but a rout. Everyone was running back to the village" (64-65). This scene, in addition to generating stress for the reader, also expresses Wells' disappointment with the masses' misunderstanding and rejection of the different worldviews proposed by visionary scientists and thinkers.

What is interesting about the theme of madness in *The Invisible Man* is that it both helps and undermines Wells' social message; it both takes away from and contributes to its depth and complexity. It is relevant that both Griffin himself and the other characters—major characters like Thomas Marvel and minor characters such as Cuss—are potentially mad in the novel. As soon as page 65, the protagonist is labelled as insane and out of control: "Save yourself! He's gone mad! . . . He's fighting mad! Mad!" is what Cuss cries when the true nature of the Invisible Man is revealed. But even earlier than this, the other characters begin to doubt their own sanity when they encounter, without knowing it, the invisible

scientist: the same Cuss wonders "Am I mad? . . . Do I look like an insane person?"(24) As the reader is aware of the fact that there truly is an invisible being among the staff and customers of the Coach and Horses, he also knows that characters such as Cuss are not mad. To the secondary characters, of course, "[the] unnerving possibility of one's own madness is preferable to the still more unnerving one of supernatural agency disrupting known, familiar realities" (Hurley, *The Gothic* 15). With this quote from Hurley in mind, it is easy to consider the trope of madness in *The Invisible Man* not just as a means to contribute to the tense and uncertain atmosphere of the story, but also as a way to force the reader to recognize that he also refuses to question the established norms that make up the "reality" he "knows." In Wells' novel, the protagonist is not wanted; the characters are increasingly hostile towards him and refuse to believe in his true identity, as he cannot be classified within familiar categories: "Narnsense! 'tas some conjuring trick" one of them exclaims (40). Similarly, the comfortable, complacent masses refuse to consider the most groundbreaking social, philosophical and biological theories about the future of human nature and of civilization, as these possibilities are inconceivable to them, however true they may be. In other words, the madness of the characters can be read as a simple panic, or it can be read as a refusal to recognize truths which exist beyond the established norms. Where "pure" science-fiction incites the reader to question the norms he believes in by proposing another coherent set of norms, the blend of Gothic, fantasy and SF allows Wells to push the reader to question the established norms by forcing him to admit that there are sometimes elements outside our set of norms which are beyond our understanding until we change the way we perceive our environment.

If one reads *The Invisible Man* with attention and makes the effort to interpret the meaning of the Gothic and fantasy tropes it contains, it will appear clear that Wells is inviting his audience to question their perception of reality. At first glance, a scene like this may appear as purely fantastical and could be typical of an 18th-century Gothic novel: "[Mrs. Hall] could hear the murmur of voices for the next ten minutes, then a cry of surprise, a stirring of feet, a chair flung aside, a

bark of laughter, quick steps to the door . . . . Then she heard the stranger laughing quietly, and then his footsteps came across the room. She could not see his face where she stood" (24). Earlier on in the novel, the same character has the impression of having witnessed something terrible, but that moment remains an impression, an illusion to her:

> Everything was ruddy, shadowy, and indistinct to her, the more so since she had just been lighting the bar lamp, and her eyes dazzled. *But for a second it seemed to her* that the man she looked at had . . . a vast and incredible mouth that swallowed the whole of the lower portion of his face. It was the sensation of a moment: the white-bound head, the monstrous goggle eyes, and this huge yawn below it. (9, my emphasis)

Though this moment produced a strong impression in her mind, Mrs Hall refuses to believe in its reality. The man had only *seemed* a certain way to her, but he could not possibly be that way. By trying to stick to reason, the character, ironically, unconsciously preserves a completely incorrect perception of the reality around her, of her true situation. It is only when Griffin strips—or removes strips of bandages—to reveal his invisibility that Mrs Hall is forced to change her perception, to admit that reality is not as it seems, and that her previous reality was in fact an illusion. The shock will obviously be too great for her to bear.

In conclusion, although most contemporary critics seemed oblivious to Wells' message, the educated reader familiar with the author's thoughts on science *and* politics will understand that the author's use of Gothic tropes helps the text to carry its ideological function of criticizing humanity's blind faith and trust in science, as well as mankind's penchant towards individualism. Any student of Wells cannot be oblivious to these pillars of Wellsian thought and literature. According to Darko Suvin, "[science] is the true, demonic master of all the sorcerer's apprentices in Wells, who have . . . brought about destructive powers and monsters" (Suvin and Philmus, "Introduction" 20), and in Wells' early novels, the reader can definitely see science as a force too great to be handled or controlled completely, as a force with a life of its own. The Wellsian scientist is rarely—if ever—in control of his inventions, or at least not of the

consequences of his inventions. Wells is definitely expressing a message of caution to his contemporaries. On a similar note, the critique of individualism should be just as obvious to any serious reader of Wells. As Patrick Parrinder writes in *H.G. Wells*, the author "argues in his doctoral thesis that the conditions under which the illusion of selfhood was biologically convenient no longer exist [and that men] now need to be less conscious of themselves as individuals and more conscious of their membership of a species with a common, collective purpose" (13).

What can be less obvious to a reader vaguely familiar with Wells and completely unclear for the general reading public is that although Wells condemned individualism, he did also believe in the virtues of the lone genius or revolutionary, as he was himself an influential and yet often misunderstood propagandist in his time. Such an identification with the protagonist is shown in the author's efforts to make Griffin's behavior understandable, almost acceptable within circumstances, for the reader: as Stover notices in his annotations to *The Invisible Man*, for example, towards the end of the novel, Wells writes, "Now this, to the present writer's mind at least, lifts the murder out of the realm of the absolutely wanton" (151). But this sympathy, even if it is present in the text, will not appear as obvious to just about any reader, for it is subtle, while both scientific experimentation and the greedy "isolated scientist" (Benford 176) are great sources of fright in the novel and are presented in a negative light. The Invisible Man's terrifying, excessive persona will warn the reader of the harmful excesses present in his own society without necessarily indicating that the opposite of excessive behavior – lack of drive and action – is just as harmful. If, therefore, the Gothic and fantasy tropes help to express a message of caution concerning humankind's obsession with science and individualistic values, and encourage the reader to change his perception and to question his beliefs,—they clearly obfuscate the authors' ambivalent feelings towards the lone anarchist terrorist, an ambivalence which gives the text its true depth and interest.

CHAPTER 3
THE FIRST MEN ON THE MOON: SOCIALISM IN LABYRINTHS OF DARKNESS

> "I do not regard the organisation of all mankind into one terrestrial ant-hill, into Cosmopolis [a one-world state], as a Utopian dream, as something that fantastically might be. I regard it as the necessary, the only possible continuation of human history." - H.G. Wells, quoted in Leon Stover's "Editor's Introduction" to *The First Men in the Moon.*
>
> One possibility is that man through his own doing would bring about conditions where the laws of nature would determine his extinction, or that he would be transformed beyond recognition in the course of evolutionary change. – Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes, *H.G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*

"What for one writer, from his point of view, might be the ideal society, might for another be the opposite," Leon Stover writes in his introduction to his critical edition of Wells' *The First Men in the Moon.* The idea stated by Stover lies at the very core of the problem that literary critics, academics and readers from the general public alike have been trying to solve: what are we to gain from Wells' rather dystopian utopia, the Selenite moon? What did Wells expect from readers by creating an inhuman world-state which runs apparently smoothly, but is filled with monstrosity and horror? Is the Selenite system really the "only possible continuation of human history," as Wells wrote, or was the author warning us of the inevitable, drastic measures that are to be taken if the human community does not move out of its complacence and towards a global-oriented pragmatism quickly? There is a debate whether the Selenite moon is something we should strive for or if it is something we will be stuck with, to state matters more simply. And what is left to be saved when the only way to preserve humanity is to leave behind most – if not all – of our human characteristics behind? Finally, does Wells increase his chances of having his social message

understood by his readers by using Gothic wording, or does he confuse them by amplifying the monstrous aspects of the Selenite society, the inevitable future of humankind?

In this chapter, I will argue that the grotesque and shocking imagery used by Wells fulfils the usual task of shocking the reader out of his complacence, as it does in his other *fin-de-siècle* novels – but what differentiates this novel from the two others studied so far, *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man*, is that a more analytical or intellectual reading is not only possible or implicitly encouraged, but truly made inevitable. Indeed, while it is certain that Wells spares us no horror when it comes to the Selenite individuals and their state, these gruesome elements are accompanied by obvious and frequent commentaries on evolutionary theory, and by clear comparisons between the humans and the Selenites on the political, economic and social levels, making it clear that *The First Men in the Moon* is not just a shocking novel, but also a reflection on socialism and evolution. However, since the Gothic horror and terror tropes used in the novels are quite strong, they have encouraged divergent interpretations within the literary community: while some critics like Stover see in the Wellsian moon a utopia, a condoning of a world-state economy and a critique of individualistic capitalism, others such as Arnold Bennett have interpreted the book as a *dystopian* critique of the excesses of industrialism[12]. These divergent interpretations support the opening quote from Stover: even the best society realistically conceivable can create monsters in the mind of the reader; for every social model there is a group who disagrees with what the human community chooses to sacrifice in order to guarantee itself a future. An ideal state where nothing is sacrificed is not possible, except in the fictions that do not seek to engage with the problems of the real world, and this is not the type of fiction Wells writes. The question that the author wishes the readers to ask themselves is: will individuality and humanness be sacrificed for the well-being of a perfectly

12 In "Herbert George Wells and his Work," in the Stover edition of *The First Men in the Moon*, 264-273. Bennett believes that "Wells' powerful and sinister projection of the lunar world" can be interpreted as "a deeply satiric comment upon this our earthly epoch of specialization" (267).

rational state-economy, or will free will and individual happiness triumph above all, at the risk of jeopardizing the world-economy and the concept of human civilization?

Some readers may wonder why Wells makes the Selenite society so shockingly monstrous if it is in reality a model towards which we are to strive. Those readers who believe Wells is proposing a *utopia*, especially, are correct in their affirmation that there is a contradiction between the concept of a utopian model that would serve humankind, and the horrible lack of humanness that said model requires in order to function. Essentially, those readers who do grasp the philosophical implications of the novel may wonder if the presence of Gothic tropes is justified in such an intellectual text, and if it does not undermine rather than promote Wells' socialist views. There are two answers to these questions. Firstly, as attentive readers will realize while reading *The First Men in the Moon*, Wells' novel does not only function as a representation of a necessary state model; it is also a work that promotes, as any other good science fiction novel will, perspective shifts and reflections via comparisons. The scientist Cavor's encounter with the supreme Selenite authority, the Grand Lunar, incites the reader to question how one can judge things as monstrous: following our reading of this encounter, we realize that if we are horrified by what is different in other societies, we grow accustomed to horrors innate to our own society. While it is true that the Selenite lunar state shocks the reader through its brutal elimination of individuality, the Earth is also shown as a source of horrors and incoherence, with its inter-state wars and competitive, ravaging, private-profit mentality.

The second justification for the presence of Gothic horrors in a plea for the establishment of a rationalized, global state is, of course, the humanness of the writer himself. Readers must always be aware that Wells' books are written by both a rational, Darwinian intellectual, and by a frightened human individual, used to profit from the comforts of the social model he criticises in such a vitriolic manner. Since a society devoid of free will, spare time or any other manifestation of individuality is bound to horrify any human being, Wells' excessive use of monstrosity and other Gothic tropes represents the ambivalent feelings inspired in

him by a projected social model which combines an enviable, coherent, global efficiency, on one hand, and humanly intolerable levels of privation and monstrous deformity through the physical evolution and adaptation necessitated by this society, on the other. Finally, the reader must remember that the Selenite society is meant to induce reflections on what type of society is necessary to perpetuate human civilisation; it is not meant to be compared to a utopia in which humans indulge in individualistic pleasures in a context of infinite comfort and limitless resources.

Although the presence of Gothic tropes in *The First Men in the Moon* is justifiable and well accompanied with clear pro-socialist commentaries, many critics have failed to see the "utopian" nature – or positive qualities – of the Selenite society. As Stover writes, "[critical] opinion . . . rejects this utopian notion. That it is Cavor . . . who judges the moon as a 'wonderful social order' is taken as decisive evidence of satiric intent. Only a mad scientist like Cavor could idolize such a cruel and deindividualizing system . . ." (9). Stover believes that Cavor is, on the contrary, admired by Wells, and he justifies this claim by citing the following passage: "[there] is a necessary unworldliness about a sincere scientific man [and] he is too preoccupied with his research to plan and scheme how to make money out of it" (qtd in Stover 10). However, I believe that many readers could also interpret this descriptive passage as another confirmation of Cavor's madness, or of his lack of connection with the real world.

As with any other Wellsian novel featuring an invention and an interesting combination of science and fantasy, a considerable number of readers focused not on the ethical and social-economical qualities of the society (or societies) presented in the novel, nor on the monstrous appearance of their inhabitants, but rather on the scientific plausibility of the novum it features. The reception of *The First Men in the Moon* was no different, with a considerable portion of readers arguing about the properties and realism of Cavorite – the gravity-defying substance invented by Cavor – rather than about the physiognomy of the Selenites or their application of socialism. A pleasantly impressed Richard Gregory wrote in the scientific magazine *Nature*: "it is worth reading the book with minute care

to see if one cannot catch Mr Wells in any little scientific slip. Some writers are so easy to catch that the game is not worth playing; but Mr Wells is a worthy opponent" (183). J.D. Beresford argues the opposite, stating that Wells' novel is "little more than a piece of sheer exuberance" (*H.G. Wells* 27). Beresford then passes but a brief, superficial judgment on the Selenite social model: "The picture of this highly developed state, however, is not such as would tempt us to emulation. As a machine, it works; as an ideal it lacks any presentation of the thing we call beauty" (27-28).

If this goes to prove, to a certain degree, that many Englishmen were more preoccupied with the future of science than with their own futures because of their deep unawareness or complacence, we can rest assured that most critics paid attention to the social model presented in the novel – and to the creatures that made up that society – in more detail. The critical commentaries on the Selenite society and physiognomy express many degrees of interpretation and appreciation. The debate as to whether *The First Men in the Moon* is a utopia or a dystopia remains unresolved. Where some critics see a satirical romance or a philosophical reflection, others see a shocking horror novel. According to Ingvald Racknem,

> [t]he *Spectator* critic and a few others were shocked by its coarseness and found it uniformly uncomfortable and destitute of comic and even of cheerful relief. . . . Being disgusted with the Selenites, they did not see that these were scientific monsters comparable with the Martians and, like them, products of an evolution different from ours. And they failed to see that the more terrifying scenes in the book are relieved by some amusing chapters and by the most wonderful descriptions of the flight through space and the climactic changes on the moon. (48-49)

Nonetheless, those negative comments put aside, the novel was generally well received, as it was considered "good science fiction" (Racknem 48) and less shocking in general, or "more palatable" (*ibid*). Indeed, in his commentary "Herbert George Wells and his Work," Arnold Bennett writes: "Here, in the guise of romance, is a serious criticism of life, and this sober philosophic spirit decked

in the picturesque colours of fantasy pervades all the latter part of the book, growing more and more impressive . . . .” (in Stover, *The First* 268). We see here in Bennett's comment both a philosophical and a formal appreciation of Wells' lunar adventure. However, when *The First Men in the Moon* is interpreted not as a horror novel, but as a philosophical reflection, as is the case with Bennett, we may still wonder if the novel is interpreted correctly. Indeed, while it is true that *The Moon* isn't *just* a “masterpiece of horror,” I doubt that we can truly extract the full meaning of the Wellsian work by casting aside the Gothic, an element that is aesthetically important and possibly rhetorically determinant. If horrific imagery is not the final goal Wells had in mind, this imagery is crucial to the interpretation of the novel, as it is at the heart of many questions. For example, if it is clear that the Selenite society represents our future, it remains debatable whether it must be seen as the ideal society that will save us, or rather as the dreaded fate that awaits us. In other words, it is important to reflect upon what Wells had in mind when he created the Selenite society, and why he used Gothic tropes in conjunction with the reflections on socialism and evolution presented in the novel.

Before we move on to a discussion of Gothic tropes, we will briefly take a closer look at Wells' views on socialism and evolution in his nonfiction and at how these apply – or are illustrated – in the novel. In *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, Wells writes: “Now, I have always had a particular contempt and dislike for the mind and character of Karl Marx, a contempt and dislike that have deepened with the years” (109). If the author believed in socialism, the Marxist variety, based on the triumph of the working class, did not correspond to his ideals. Rather, he advocated the Saint-Simonian type of socialism, a form of socialism relying on a logical, efficient, scientifically planned, industrial society. According to Stover, “[the Morlocks] show how disastrous it would be for the fate of civilization should a Marxist-driven labour movement triumph. This horrible future will not, however, come to pass if the other socialism gets the upper hand . . . ” (“Editor’s Introduction”, *The First Men in the Moon* 23). This other socialism is the one we find in a somewhat caricatured manner – or in a “burlesque” fashion, to quote the author himself – in Wells' lunar society.

In many instances in the novel, we find unflattering reflections of human civilisation and its careless science, anti-social customs, private-profit capitalism and wasteful warring habits;[13] when Cavor describes to the best of his ability the ways of Men to the Grand Lunar, he himself comes to the conclusion that the current state of Man is one of "social savagery" (157). In "Human Evolution, An Artificial Process," Wells states a similar conclusion (1896); he states that if humankind has evolved in terms of social structures and technology, *individual* men have not:

> the average man of our society is now intrinsically what he was in Palaeolithic times. Regard his psychology, and particularly his disposition to rage and controversy, his love of hunting and violent exercise, and his powerful sexual desires. At present normally a man's wordly interests, his welfare, and that of his family, necessitate a constant conflict to keep these dispositions under [control]. (215)

Man's individualistic, primary impulses have not been left behind; they are merely contained by a set of social stresses or social norms contrary to their nature. And this is partly because society still *allows for* a dangerous number of anti-social, individualistic desires and actions. What humankind really needs to evolve and thrive as a society is a more collaborative, collective type of model. According to Brian Stableford,

> [t]he most obvious model available to us of a radically different mode of social organization is, of course, the ant-hive, and this was used by Wells for the first-ever study of alien society in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). The notion was then repellent, and it continued to be so for many years. (132)

This "repellent" society that we find in *The First Men in the Moon* seems dystopian to us because it completely casts aside a set of principles that are dear to us: individualism, free will, freedom of action and thought, etc. Wells was not,

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13 For example: "Sooner or later [the secret about the Selenites' resources in gold] must come out, even if other men rediscover it. And then . . . Governments and powers will struggle to get hither, they will fight against one another and against these moon people. It will only spread warfare and multiply the occasions of war. In a little while, in a very little while if I tell my secret, this planet to its deepest galleries will be strewn with human dead. Other things are doubtful, but that is certain. It is not as though man had any use for the moon. (102)

however, advocating the transformation of people into robotic slaves. As he writes in "Morals and Civilization," "in Socialism, we have a very complete theory of social organisation necessarily involving a scheme of private morals. . . . And yet one may dream of an informal, unselfish, unauthorized body of workers, a real and conscious apparatus of education and moral suggestion, held together by a common faith and a common sentiment, and shaping the minds and acts and destinies of men" (228). It seems clear in this passage that Wells does not want the future society to consist of unconscious, working drones – and, most likely, the passage in which we do find "prostrate figures sleeping under an opiate until the moon had need of them" serves not as a representation of an ideal, but as a purely literary device which allows the protagonists to examine the Selenites for the readers' benefit. In his annotations in the critical edition of *The First Men in the Moon*, Stover notes that Wells lamented the many political, cultural and social divisions among human societies. "In the moon," Stover writes, "such problems are resolved in the realization of a truly organic and universal state" (254). It is this idea, and not necessarily the grotesque details that serve to describe it, that Wells mostly wants his readers to remember in the end. That being said, the grotesque and the Gothic serve an important function in the rhetorical aspect of the text.

From distracting readers completely from the issue at hand, to drawing their attention to it, the Gothic tropes found in *The First Men in the Moon* can have various effects depending on what kind of reader opens the book – the potential of these rhetorical effects being obviously greater for readers with a training in literary study or with a firm grasp of Wellsian thought. To the general reading public and to some critics, the book may appear to be a work of pure horror, regardless of the narrator's frequent allusions to evolutionary theory, and socialism, among other issues, for the Gothic imagery and tone of the novel are quite overwhelming. For readers interested in pure entertainment, the socialist message Wells is advocating may be blurred by these powerful tropes. However, if these dark tropes are interpreted to the fullest extent of their intended rhetorical effect, the reader will find that they deliver a complex and rich meaning. Beyond

their ability to shock the reading public out of its complacence, the Gothic motifs and style used by Wells in this lunar adventure serve both to facilitate a perspective change in the reader through their illustrations of horror and monstrosity, and to express the ever present underlying Wellsian ambivalence towards humanity's projected future. Indeed, if the author's own proposed utopia is illustrated with such frightening creatures and customs, it can only mean that the changes he foresees as necessary will necessarily come with the sacrifice of a certain level of comfort—material, psychological, social—, and that the necessary biological, social and economic changes he puts forth nonetheless provoke a noticeable degree of disgust, fear and uncertainty within him.

The first category of Gothic tropes that will be studied relates to the psychological: tropes such as excessive expression, fear of specters, nightmares and the confusion between reality and dreams, paranoia, fear of the dark, and madness. While the novel begins in a rather light-hearted way, the concretization of the trip to the Moon signals the beginning of another type of story. This is not going to be a fun, carefree lunar adventure. Even before Cavor and Bedford are trapped within the cold lunar sphere, the reader is confronted with a persistent feeling of insecurity and uncertainty typically found in Gothic literature:

> I do not remember before that night thinking at all of the risks we were running. Now they came like that array of specters that once beleaguered Prague, and camped around me. The strangeness of what we were about to do, the unearthliness of it, overwhelmed me. I was like a man awakened out of pleasant dreams to the most horrible surroundings. I lay, eyes wide open; and the sphere seemed to get more flimsy and feeble, and Cavor more unreal and fantastic and the whole enterprise madder and madder every moment. (Wells 23)

At first glance, this passage should instill in the reader a sense of panic, uncertainty and disorientation – this is the emotional reaction usually expected from readers of more sensationalist literatures. Here the character is shocked out of his complacence, realizing with what blind confidence he has always unfortunately acted. To his horror, the world around him is no longer

characterized with that usual impression of permanence and stability. While the Gothic writing mode can initially provoke panic, a reader trained in literary studies – or simply familiar with Wellsian thought – can interpret this extract in a more analytical manner. Indeed, the narrator's awakening echoes the reaction Wells wishes upon his readers: being shocked out of one's complacence and into an increased awareness of one's true environment.

Similarly, in many parts of the novel, the protagonist describes the world surrounding him as dream-like, nightmarish or unreal: “But for the faintness of our hunger and the drying of our throats that crawling would have had the quality of a very vivid dream. It was so absolutely unreal. The only element with any touch of reality was these sounds” (53). Again, while the trope of the “unreal” may initially cause confusion and disorientation, it can be suggested that it is used here to force the reader to realize that our sense of reality versus illusion is often faulty. What Wells may be meaning to indicate here is that, in the face of new or unknown elements, we are slow to realize or accept their reality – we are rarely immediately pragmatic about new elements that are situated outside of our intellectual grasp, as in dreams. In a later section of the novel, the narrator, in the middle of an armed fight against a group of Selenites, exclaims: “And behold, they had smashed like wax and scattered like chaff, and fled and vanished like the creatures of a dream!” (100) Again, this description gives the Selenite an unreal quality; as the creatures break down into random lifeless materials (wax, chaff) and vanish, they seem to go from being living alien creatures to being mere fabrications modeled by the human hand and mind. It is as if the narrator had never really believed in them, as if the magic that animated them had suddenly vanished.

In their journey towards the center of the lunar sphere, the protagonists of *The First Men in the Moon* are often left in the dark – literally and metaphorically. Once in the hands of the Selenites, Bedford narrates: “. . . we were in darkness and amidst strange, distracting noises . . . I thought of the cupboard into which I had been thrust at times when I was a child, and then of a very dark and noisy bedroom . . .” (61-62). Such descriptions continue as the protagonists move on

towards the center of the Moon: the narrator mentions “the dark side of the moon,” “a thousand dark things that beset me,” “their darkened sides, now that the reflection of the tunnel wall no longer lit them, merged indistinguishably in the darkness beyond” (78-79). By using the trope of darkness often, it seems that Wells is trying to tell the reader than in the future human society, nothing will be recognizable; it is impossible to find any landmarks that will guide us and tell us where we are in the Selenite caves: we are “in the dark” in the new world that has nothing to do with the former.

In *The First Men in the Moon*, the writing style adopted by Wells often mirrors the excessive, emphatic style of the Gothic, as in these two descriptions of the “abominable blackness below” (85) and its strange creatures: “And all those things that are chasing us now, beastly men of leather – insect men, that come out of a nightmare!” (85) This style is used again only a few pages later: “And behold, they had smashed like wax and scattered like chaff, and fled and vanished like the creatures of a dream!” (100) This form, characterized by an emotional statement ending with an emphatic exclamation point, is typically found in Gothic literature, from the romances of Ann Radcliffe to the detective fictions of Poe. It is meant to overwhelm the reader, to accelerate his heartbeat, to make him feel the gravity of the situation as the protagonist would feel it. The reader is not meant to be reassured at this stage. The rhetorical effect of the Gothic semantic field on page 107 alone is quite overwhelming: on the same page, the narrator speaks of “darkness,” “blackness,” “void,” “death,” even “absolute death.” It seems that the only sense of resolution at this point revolves around a certain doom for the protagonists. The overwhelmed reader may, at this point, be tempted to put *The First Men in the Moon* aside for a few minutes and to escape to the “real” world and its mind-numbing comforts and luxuries – the irony here is that the potential doom illustrated in the novel echoes the potential doom Wells predicted for his contemporaries, were they to remain in the same state of complacence. There is no escape possible; the fear provoked by the novel is the first step towards awareness. Indeed, if Wells seeks pragmatic thought in his readers, he also wants his readers to pass first by the initial stage of nauseating fear, the fear that comes

with the sudden consciousness of impending doom – little amounts of fear would leave the readers merely entertained and comfortable. This motivation could explain the use of the aforementioned emphatic sentences written in the Gothic style. That being said, the reader must do the extra work of seeing a parallel between the doom the protagonists face, and the bleak fate that may await humankind – his kind. In this case, the SF context and content of the novel – related to the Selenite's social organization – will be the source of this reflection; the Gothic tropes serve here to emphasize, through the provocation of fear, the urgency of the situation at hand and the shocking aspect of the great sacrifices that must be made. This fate, the reader must realize, also awaits those who do not share their consciousness with others, those who know in isolation, as we see with Cavor completely at the end of the novel:

> I see, almost as plainly as though I had seen it in actual fact, a blue-lit dishevelled Cavor struggling ever more desperately and hopelessly as they swarm upon him, shouting, expostulating, perhaps even at last fighting, and being forced backward step by step out of all speech or sign by his fellows, for ever more into the Unknown—into the dark, into that silence that has no end. (Wells 161)

The reader who fully realizes the responsibility Wells is giving him will not only stay away from the state of complacence he once knew, but will also seek to awaken the same awareness and attitude in his compatriots.

In addition to the dark and threatening atmosphere created by the author's lexical choices and the occasional borrowing from the Gothic writing style, the reader is confronted with settings that range from unwelcoming and gloomy to purely fantastical and out of control. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonists are introduced in a derelict setting: “And where the port had been were the levels of the marsh, sweeping round in a broad curve to distant Dungeness and dotted here and there with tree clumps and the church towers of old medieval towns that are following Lemanis now towards extinction” (3). At first glance, such a description will merely serve to create an intriguing mysterious atmosphere, a literary device appreciated by those seeking

entertainment via fiction above all. The reading public accustomed to Wells' prized themes will immediately pay attention to the word “extinction” and see in this description a metaphor for the current world going “towards its death.” The human traditions are failing, and falling, slowly, but certainly. Found in a book by H.P. Lovecraft, a similar description would have pointed towards the author's conviction of the ephemeral quality and insignificance of humankind. H.G. Wells is less drastic in this sense but nonetheless hints towards mankind's insignificance and great vulnerability in the universe – symbolized by the trip to the moon in the lunar sphere powered by Cavorite – and in his own natural environment later on in the novel. Describing the lunar surface, Wells incites the reader to realize the power and violent quality of the Earth's own ecosystems: “Imagine it! Imagine that dawn! The resurrection of the frozen air, the stirring and the quickening of the soil, and *then this silent uprising of vegetation, this unearthly ascent of fleshliness and spikes*” (42, my emphasis). By rendering the lunar surface as monstrous and untamable, Wells reminds his readers of the power of Nature and of the possibility that Nature can always evolve too. This possibility, in turn, also undermines the stability of Man’s reign, as this reign depends not on an adaptation to Nature but on the submission of Nature to the control of Man. The use of terms like “unearthly ascent” and “spikes” increases the frightening aspect of this possibility.

In *The First Men in the Moon*, Wells often directly associates descriptions of the Selenite physiognomy and society with commentaries inspired by the themes of evolution and socialism, allowing the reader to see that these unpalatable descriptions have a purpose beyond that of simply shocking and disgusting the audience. For example, the Selenites come in various grotesque shapes and dimensions that are justified by their bodies’ adaptation to their lifestyle and occupation:

> If, for example, a Selenite is destined to be a mathematician, his teachers and trainers set out at once to that end. . . . His brain grows continually larger, at least so far as the proportions engaged in mathematics are concerned; they buldge ever larger and seem to suck all life and vigor from the rest of his frame. (143)

The transformations the Selenite bodies go through are emphasized (and occur in the course of the individuals' lifetime) so that they are more obvious to the reader; they are also so grotesque, however, that they make self-sacrifice to a specialized (or Saint-Simonian) world-economy unappealing. The socialist, scientifically-planned organization of the Selenites is also contrasted with the wasteful ways of the individualistic and disorganized humankind: "'You mean to say,' [the Grand Lunar] asked, seeking confirmation, 'that you run about over the surface of your world – this world whose riches you have barely begun to scrape – killing one another for beasts to eat?'" (158) If the readers pay attention to these commentaries as they progress in the novel, the monstrous descriptions of the Selenite physiognomy and society will make sense to them: they are the product of biological and social-economic evolutions. The only matter left to investigate and discuss, then, is why Wells would make the Selenites and their society so *unappealing* if their social model is that which will save humankind from failure and extinction.

Indeed, Wells makes no effort to make all things Selenite – their appearance, their planet, their social system, their odd livestock (the Mooncalves), etc – attractive to the readers, hence lowering his chances of getting the latter to understand that the society presented is something they should actually strive for to a certain extent. Fear, of course, is a normal reaction to the presence of aliens in an SF text, especially when these are compared to humans. As Suvin writes in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, "aliens are a scary, alternative human future" (209) – it is not only their appearance but especially their closeness with us that is most frightening. When monsters show human traits, they force the readers to question the nature – the mere existence, even – of the boundary that separates them from other species... or from future mutations. In *The First Men on the Moon*, this boundary seems ever so unclear, as, on one hand, Cavor speaks of the "inhuman effect of their appearance" (142), and, on the other hand, he comments that "[a]ll of them had the grotesque and disquieting suggestion of an insect that has somehow contrived to burlesque humanity" (139). That these Selenites show, in turn, exaggerated, individual mutations among their species (according to their

specialization) is also worrisome, as it questions the meaning of the word "species" as we know it. "The horror of the spectacle," Hurley writes, ". . . lies in the indifferentiation of the monstrous body, an indifferentiation that serves most notably to defamiliarize human identity" (*The Gothic* 23). Indeed, the comparison between a monstrous body and a human may very well encourage the reader to situate it within "a fantastic range of morphic possibilities" (23). In the case of the Selenites, what is most frightening is that, it is hinted that the biological and social evolution they have gone through is not unlike the one *we* may need to face, sooner or later – and maybe sooner than later. Indeed, as their physiognomy and their social model are praised for their efficiency and intelligence by Cavor, and are often paired with reflections on the "superficiality" and "unreasonableness" of man (156), it appears clear that one social mode seems more viable than the other to the author. It also appears clear that humanity will be radically transformed should it go through a similar evolution. As Hurley writes, "the 'Beast' may lurk ahead in the future, the monstrous product of some process of evolution no one can now foresee; or it may now even be developing quietly is some dark region of the globe as yet uncharted" (59).

This potential monstrosity is reminded to the reader via the much-used trope of the monster. Upon his characters' arrival on the Moon, Wells immediately sets a threatening atmosphere by mentioning the presence of "thick skinned-monsters" (32) and of "unseen creatures" (54). He then proceeds to describe a specimen of the Selenites' livestock, focusing on its "almost brainless head, with its fat-encumbered neck, its slobbering, omnivorous mouth, its little nostrils, and tight shut eyes" (55). Its mouth is also described as a "vast red pit" (55). Whether or not these "monsters of mere fatness" (56) actually represent the lazy, content and complacent humans could be an interesting hypothesis to examine; in this thesis, they are only considered as unsettling creatures that serve as precursors to the arrival of the Selenites, which are of greater interest here. It is only after this that the first Selenite is unveiled; the creature is presented to the reader as an unappealing, monstrous, somewhat ant-like, somewhat anthropomorphic, amalgam of disproportioned insect parts. According to Gary K. Wolfe, "The

vulnerability of form is only one of the hidden fears that science fiction monsters represent, but it is one of the most powerful. . . . [T]he ways in which people interact with ['nonhuman life'] and are reminded of their own humanity (or 'humanness') by it constitute one of the genre's most enduring and fascinating terms" (*The Unknown* 185). Wells then reinforces the readers' feeling of disgust and estrangement by referring to the Selenites with expressions such as "in the doorway stood a grotesque outlined silhouette"(64), "their grotesque faces" (70), and "such a monster as Dürer might have invented"(65). If Wells' goal is to *shock* readers out of their complacence, there are of course many ways in which he could attain this. Suvin provides an interesting comment as to why the use of the grotesque is so effective: "The various aliens represent a vigorous refashioning of the talking and symbolic animals of folktale, bestiary, and fable lore into Swiftian grotesque mirrors to man, but with the crowning collocation within an evolutionary prospect. Since this prospect is temporal rather than spatial, it is also much more urgent and immediate than Swift's controlled disgust" (211). The word "mirror" is key here. If the *justification* behind the Selenite's appearance is evolution and adaptation, one of the most important *purposes* of this difference in physiognomy is to allow the readers to see themselves, and to see themselves differently: "The aliens—utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers—are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for this world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one, virgin womb and alchemical dynamo: the mirror is a crucible" (Suvin 5). This idea of the "mirror" is also hinted at by the human characters themselves, who are often staring into the faces of the Selenites, trying to make sense of them, trying to see their own humanness in them:

> It seemed as though it wasn't a face; as though it must needs be a mask, a horror, a deformity that would presently be disavowed or explained. . . . There was a mouth, downwardly curved, like a human mouth in a face that stared ferociously. . . . At the time, my mind was taken up by the mad impossibility of the creature. (Wells 64)

The words “mask,” “horror,” and “deformity” show the protagonists’ inability to conceive of an intelligent, superior species with a face other than the human face. “I think that our incurable anthropomorphism made us imagine there were human heads inside their masks” (72), the narrator later comments. The “downwardly curved” mouth of the Selenite is human-like, but it expresses a feeling of hostility, almost as if the Selenite was also angered at the prospect of intelligence bearing another face. The mirror invites a comparison, but those who look into it are confused.

The voyage to the Moon also provokes reflections even deeper than those on society and physiognomy – it additionally encourages the reader to reflect upon the possibility to tame human nature enough so that it will function in a selfless, scientifically-calculated application of socialism. Through the eyes of Cavor and Bedford, we see too clearly that there always remain untamed monsters in the depths of the moon, monsters which perhaps stand for the untameable impulses in the human subconscious. From the very beginning of the book, we feel threatened by the presence of “unseen creatures” (54). This indicates that we must pay attention to what we see on the Moon as well as to what we *don't see* – but may still cause problems - in the Selenite society. Later on in the book, we are confronted with horrendous creatures that are in every way opposite to the controlled, socially-inclined Selenite system, as Cavor comments:

> The caverns and passages are naturally very tortuous . . . [so] not infrequently Selenites are lost forever in their labyrinths. In their remoter recesses, I am told, strange creatures lurk, some of them so terrible and dangerous that all the science of the moon has been unable to exterminate them. There is particularly the Rapha, an inextricable mass of clutching tentacles that one hacks to pieces only to multiply; and the Tzee, a darting creature that is never seen, so subtly and suddenly does it slay . . . . (133)

These passages not only express the persistent presence of untamable human impulses and irrational, greedy instincts, but that they also show that we can never be too vigilant, even in an apparently totally controlled and flawless system. Our tendency to complacence is so great that many readers were perhaps too quick to

judge the Selenite society as a perfectly controlled machine. There are always pitfalls we must be conscious of; we must always be in a state of alertness and awareness, always on our guard.

The feelings of horror, and especially of terror, are also encouraged in the reader by Wells by the means of a repetition of the terms themselves, from the beginning of the novel until its very end. For example, the narrator describes "the strangest sensation conceivable, floating thus loosely in space, at first indeed horribly strange, and when the horror passed, not disagreeable at all, exceedingly strange!"(28) In this one sentence alone, we find the word "strange" twice, in addition to "horror" and "horribly." These words alone help keep the reader focused on the strangeness of the Selenites and on the terror they inspire. Later in the novel, the protagonists are said to have "crawled in terror"(54); the use of the word crawl is very interesting: it metaphorically increases the impact of terror on the protagonists by reducing their physical height (they feel smaller), and it also hints at the main characters' evolutionary past by describing them as crawling beasts, as inferior animals crawling before something they do not understand and cannot conceive of. As D.B.D. Asker writes in "H.G. Wells and Regressive Evolution,", "[h]uman evolution depended very directly on moral struggle *against* the animal from which we have sprung. The alternative to this struggle, passive progressivism, could lead to regressive evolution" (18). If this comparison with the animal kind does not really bother the 21st-century reader, it did leave quite an impression on the early 20th-century readers who were constantly exposed to debates on retrogression, devolution and atavism, all inspired by Darwinian theory. No longer pure, privileged creatures of God, humans, those readers had just been told, still had traces of their animal past in them, and also had enormous potential for random, monstrous mutations.

Finally, the tropes of fear and terror are mentioned several times again in the novel – for instance, when Bedford notices that Cavor's "pale and terrified face was ghastly in the blue light" (76), and once more, when Bedford describes how "[o]nce again an unreasonable horror reached out towards [him] . . . and passed" (153) – but perhaps the most interesting occurrence of the trope of terror

occurs at the very end of *The First Men in the Moon*, when Cavor meets the Grand Lunar, the Selenite leader. Where before, humans were terrified by the chillingly efficient Selenite social model, here, it is the Grand Lunar who is shocked by the horrors created by the incoherent and wasteful humans: "The Grand Lunar was so incredulous that he interrupted the translation of what I had said in order to have my verification of my account. [He and his translator] particularly doubted my description of the men cheering and rejoicing as they went into battle" (158).

One of the main goals of SF is to encourage a perspective shift in its readers; often, in order to facilitate this effect, writers of SF will feature characters who embody such perspective shifts or who provide clear, alternative views on customs or popular ideologies. If, for the most part of the novel, the Selenite society and its inhabitants could be qualified as horrors, the Grand Lunar allows Cavor – and the more open minded and receptive readers – to realize that the current human society is equally – if not more – monstrous. That is, if one focuses on global ecology and a socialistic imperative, rather than on individual happiness, freedom and capitalistic profit. The lesson of *The First Men in the Moon* is probably not that horror is relative – that would be justifying just about every crime and war activity. In fact, I would be ready to argue that one of the messages that Wells intended to share in this novel is that every type of civilization comes with a price. Furthermore, the price we must pay to save our *society* in the long-term is the rejection of the pursuit of our short-term, *individual*, *anti-social* pleasures and habits. This is a sacrifice that seems very horrible to the British at the turn of the 20th century, as society was not yet showing signs of an irreversible tendency towards devolution and extinction. It is easy for individuals to forget their debt to and dependency on society, the society that permits their individual comfort to be even possible... until that same society vanishes. Of course, the Selenite society isn't perfect and in fact, both the human and Selenite social systems are criticized – or show elements that can be criticized – in the novel. However, since Wells views the salvation of human civilization as a priority, he obviously admires the calculated, logical, socialistic Selenite model.

The questions that the readers must face and answer is: what will be the cost of the salvation of humanity, how much will this cost increase as we wait to act, and, most importantly, are we ready to pay that price?

Perhaps the Selenite system isn't a beautiful model, but it is efficient and viable, and, for Wells, it is not unlike the technocratic and socialistic model that could possibly save mankind as a global civilization, rather than as a collective of individuals with individual concerns. Our world is dying away, and we must brace ourselves, for a drastic change is upon us. As the "Wellsian narrator faces the unknown" (Parrinder, *Shadows* 120), so does the Wellsian reader. Wells' message is in fact clearly stated here:

> Fragmentary and tantalizing as the matter constituting this chapter is, it does nevertheless give a vague, broad impression of an altogether strange and wonderful world—a world with which our own must now prepare to reckon sooner or later. This intermittent trickle of messages [Cavor is sending Bedford] is the first warning of such a change in human conditions as mankind has scarcely imagined before. In that planet, there are new elements, new appliances, new traditions, an overwhelming avalanche of new ideas, a strange race with whom we must inevitably struggle for mastery—gold as common as iron or wood. (148)

With the mention of "this chapter," we can see that Wells speaks directly to the reader, and inviting him to draw a parallel between the world-state of the Selenites, and the "change in human conditions" that he must prepare for. We have seen Wells intervene directly in the previous novels,[14] but here, Wells is not just giving the reader clues as to what his opinion may be: it is clearly stated, in a long, detailed passage.

Of course, the necessary changes predicted by Wells are terrifying, even to the author who is predicting them, but this blend of awareness and terror is just what is needed to reach the readers; an indifferent intellectual would not reach as many souls. As Wolfe writes in *The Known and the Unknown*, "[t]he tension

[14] For example, when Wells notes that the murder perpetrated by Griffin in *The Invisible Man* was not committed without any justification at all, therefore hinting at the fact the author may have ambivalent, not purely negative, feelings towards the protagonist.

between understanding and panic has long been one of the hidden sources of science fiction's power" (Wolfe, *The Known* 186). By adding Gothic elements to *The First Men in the Moon*, Wells gave his novel the power to do much more than just shock readers out of their complacence. The Gothic tropes of monstrosity, terror, the unknown, the uncanny and darkness express the deep ambiguity felt by Wells – and many of his contemporaries – before the necessary choices and the inevitable social, economic and biological changes that were to take place in the future. Where Wells is committed to salvaging human civilization with scientifically calculated plans of technologically and socially viable global orders, he is also terrified of the changes – the physical and psychological dehumanization – that this human civilization will have to face to survive. In order to preserve itself, this human society must necessarily evolve into something else, something potentially horrible by current standards – or, in the words of Brian Stableford, "the only way to escape the predicament of the near future will be to *become something different*"(133). This ambiguity does not make Wells' novel less strong. In fact, according to Suvin, "such virtuosity cannot mask the fundamental ambiguity that constitutes both the richness and the weakness of Wells. Is he horrified or grimly elated by the high price of evolution (*The Island of Dr. Moreau*)? Does he condemn imperialism (*The First Men in the Moon)* or only dislike being at the receiving end of it (*The War of the Worlds*)?" (*Metamorphoses* 216)

Of course, readers insensitive to such ambiguities will not benefit much from the presence of Gothic tropes, except maybe in terms of pure entertainment. The portrayal of Cavor as a quasi-mad scientist overshadows the scientist's positive role as an agent of perspective shift in the novel. Additionally, the monstrous description of the Selenites obfuscates the fact that their ant-like appearance may be hinting at a positive quality: as Stover writes, "[a]nts have from classical times been taken as heroes of discipline and models of civic virtue . . . ." (*The First* 16). Even if Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. makes a good point when he argues that "[t]he grotesque obstructs the mind from completing its effort of quick understanding, arresting it when it wishes to get on with its routine of knowing,

and forces it to learn something it is not sure it wants to know" (*On the Grotesque* 78), it remains that some readers are not sufficiently intellectually involved with the novel to acknowledge this reflection. In theory, the "reader/perceiver who is shocked by a sudden estrangement from habitual perception . . . [is likely] to suspend [his] confidence in knowledge about the world, and to attempt to redefine the real in thought's relation to nature" (*On the Grotesque* 71). In this sense, Wells' use of grotesque monsters to encourage a perception shift in his readers is excellent – but its real efficiency depends on the readers in the end.

The Selenite society is neither utopia nor dystopia. As Wells wrote a few decades after publishing the book, "[he did] not regard the organisation of all mankind into one terrestrial ant-hill, into Cosmopolis [a one-world state], as a Utopian dream, as something that fantastically might be. [He] regard[ed] it as the necessary, the only possible continuation of human history" (qtd in Stover, "Editor's Introduction" to *The First Men in the Moon 16*). The lunar ant-hill is an efficient system, based on the logic of a necessary global plan. The utopian or dystopian quality of the novel is in the eye of the beholder. According to Carl Malmgren,

> Utopias are predicated on, among other things, the beliefs that humans can work together rationally to shape their social life.... Dystopias, on the other hand, are rooted in 'a basic distrust of all social groups', which can envision self-realization only in terms of alienation, conflict, and the surplus of consciousness attendant upon the former.... The more general dystopian move consists in asserting the rights of the individual.... (80)

For this reason, we should not argue that Wells' monsters serve to produce a dystopian image. The Selenites' social organisation is closer to what Malmgren defines as utopian: they work together, united in one organic system driven by reason, and not by base passions or emotions; they show a complete trust in social groups. One could argue, however, that the *reader* could interpret the labour-driven Selenites as being alienated, and their system, as dystopian. Wells' true dystopia, though, is the decadent state that would naturally spring from the persistence of our complacent and individualistic ways (Wells, *The Fate* 296-312).

The monstrosity of the Selenites is not at all an indication of a dystopian quality in the lunar state. In the words of Wolfe, "[t]he icon of the monster . . . represents that aspect of the unknown that yields the greatest potential for the advance and maturation of the species" (*The Known* 223). The monster, in other words, is, simply put, something different, something other. It shocks us because its image does not adhere to our current physical, biological or social standards, but, as it is our current standards that are driving us more and more rapidly towards a "decadent world," to quote the name of the last chapter of Wells' *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, we may start considering the monstrous as what might save us – in one form or another. At the time he wrote *The First Men on the Moon*, Wells was gradually turning "from shocking men out of their complacence to holding out ideas toward which they should strive," according to Hillegas (57). The Selenite monster represents this gradual change, as it both shocks and shares the secret to a more durable state via its monstrous, oddly deformed body.

So far, then, *The First Men in the Moon* seems to show the most efficient combination of Gothic and SF in the novels studied in this thesis. Where grotesque descriptions are used to emphasize the differences found in the Selenite physiognomy and society and to ensure that the reader pays attention to them, the narrator always provides rational explanations which show that these terrible descriptions are not to be read at the surface level. There is also ample commentary on the evolutionary, political, social and economic rationales which explain the state or nature of the Selenites and which can also explain the future social and biological changes we must envisage. In *The First Men in the Moon*, therefore, the Gothic assists the message of the novel: where the reader's attention is drawn through shock and terror, there is always, either simultaneously, or subsequently, stimulus for intellectual reflection.

CHAPTER 4
THE FOOD OF THE GODS:
THE GREAT, THE SMALL, THE INSIGNIFICANT

> "To think that of all that a harmless-looking discovery in chemistry may lead to! . . . He grasped how profoundly the order of the universe had changed for him." - H.G. Wells, *The Food of the Gods*

> "The first writer who opened wide the doors to folktale in the genre that later come to be called *science fiction* was H. G. Wells." - Tatyana Chernysheva, "The Folktale, Wells, and Modern Science Fiction"

In "H.G. Wells and Regressive Evolution," D. B. D. Asker writes that Wells' mentor "Huxley . . . did not see man's future as necessarily progressive" (17). The scientist's influence could not be better reflected in Wells' works than in *The Food of the Gods*, a novel in which the invention of a special food supposed to propel mankind into a bigger and better future fails and leads the reader to the conclusion that the future is not – and never was – in the hands of Man at all. Whereas the food, Herakleophorbia IV, "expresses humanity's determination to control its environment and direct its own destiny" (Malmgren 5), the outcome of the story shows us the hopelessness of such a determination through a particular, sometimes confusing blend of science fiction, fantasy tale, ironic humor, and some borrowings from the Gothic. Additionally, if the fantasy aspect of the fiction – the trope of the giant – leads the reader to question the power Man truly holds on his destiny, the Gothic tropes and undertones of the book direct the reader even further, towards a more terrible concept: they shatter his impossible dreams of a permanent human species. Indeed, as the giant insects, animals and plants rise and threaten to subdue humankind, one who reads *The Food* as more than just mere entertainment is left to wonder if Man will have a place at all in the future.

Themes of *The Food of the Gods*

As mentioned before, Wells blends several genres, including the Gothic, in order to examine a handful of significant themes throughout the book. The theme

of scientific responsibility is an important one in *The Food of the Gods*. A most worrisome fact that Wells underlines is that while we place our trust in science, the scientists themselves – the supposed bringers of the future – are not always entirely aware of what they are doing. Bensington declares to his colleague Redwood: "Until I saw these chicks, Redwood, I don't think I began to realize – anything – of the possibilities of what we were making. It's only beginning to dawn upon me . . . the possible consequences" (20). Such an attitude is far from reassuring, particularly when combined with the careless risk-taking that takes place throughout the novel: the Skinners – a couple of "perceptibly aged," "extremely dirty" (12) and uneducated farmers – are given the responsibility to administer the previously untested and potentially dangerous food to the chicks at the experimental station; the scientist Redwood feeds his own child the formula, unaware of the long-term effects and strength of the Food; etc. The theme of scientific responsibility is a recurring theme in SF: as science takes on a greater place in our lives, as we feel increasingly dependent on it, we feel suddenly vulnerable, and we suddenly worry that science could become a source of threat or of danger. Combined with terror Gothic, SF novels and short stories explore the more worrisome aspects of science and its practitioners – the dangers of its limitless possibilities, the consequences of the potential incompetence or carelessness of men of science, the use of powerful discoveries in order to attain questionable objectives, etc. – and provide frightening illustrations of these issues.

In *The Food of the Gods*, we see an audacious formula that not only exceeds its creators' expectations, but truly takes on a life of its own: "And presently, '*Jab!*' a fresh supply of the Food of the Gods *was let loose* to wreak its powers of gigantry upon the world" (61, my emphasis). Wells is not, of course, writing against science; however, while his hopes rest on the advancement of science, he is profoundly aware that this tool, especially in the hands of Man, can have dangerous short-term and long-term consequences. In other words, in *The Food*, "we find a basic imaginative incoherence arising from an unresolved conflict between mistrust of scientific possibilities and a whole-hearted acceptance of these possibilities" (Bergonzi 121). Science, in other words, is as

much the key to our salvation as it can be the key to our perdition. In *The Food of the Gods*, the pandemic effect of Herakleophorbia IV invites a Gothic reading because it shatters the safe categories that organized our knowledge of the human body and of the natural world: indeed, if the categories organizing the world as we perceive it seem stable, one simple formula can unleash giants and unimaginable monsters from the ashes of things we know – or thought we knew. Punter writes in *The Gothic*, "science did not just offer reassuring ways of locating and defining difference; it could also function in various ways as a transgressive and disruptive force, transgressing the stability and integrity of the human subject" (42). As scientific discovery and experimentation unfolds, the definition of humanness becomes progressively blurry and develops a monstrous potential.

This frightening, monstrous potential may be what saves humankind, however. Indeed, according to critics such as Stableford (69-70) and Williamson (40), if the giants are the accidental product of Herakleophorbia IV, this group seems to be the only one who fits Wells' requirements for the social revolution that will save human civilization – they represent the new, mobilized, well-educated, socialist-minded generation the author describes in "Human Evolution, An Artificial Process":

> In the future, it is at least conceivable, that men with a trained reason and a sounder science, both of matter and psychology, may conduct this operation far more intelligently, unanimously, and effectively, and work towards, and at last attain and preserve, a social organization so cunningly balanced against exterior necessities on one hand, and the artificial factor in the individual on the other, that the life of every human being . . . may be generally happy. . . . [In] Education lies the possible salvation of mankind from misery and sin. (218-19)

The new generation of giant humans is wiser and better educated than the common man; even the less educated and exploited Caddles knows social injustice when he sees it: "You little people made [the laws] before I was born. You and your law! What I must and what I mustn't. No food for me to eat unless I work as a slave, no rest, no shelter, no nothin'" (164). No other character

denounces the corrupt nature of the current democratic order as loudly as Caddles. The poor classes stay silent; the scientists scratch their heads before the explosion of the Herakleophorbia IV pandemic; the politicians are focused on winning more votes – in this context of indifference, of general complacence, the young working class giant pounds his rage before this strange system that perpetuates class inequalities and injustice.

It may be difficult for readers to accept this idea of salvation via monstrosity or accidental mutation, though, and for two reasons. Firstly, humans are conservative when it comes to defining humanness – the humanness they want to preserve is the one they see in themselves, not in an *other* form. In placing the future of Man in the hands of the wise, revolutionary giants, Wells signals a threat to the stability of the current human order. The reader's individual survival instinct may take over his species survival instinct as the new generation meets at the end of the novel, causing him to react *against* the giants Wells seemed to be regarding in such a positive manner.[15] Critic J.D. Beresford writes in his reading of *The Food* that "[he] find[s] a quality of reasonableness in the little people's antagonism to the blundering superiority of those giants" (31). Secondly, placing one's trust in the accidental result of a scientific experiment that took on a life of its own means agreeing to place Man's future in the hands of powerful tool that is neither controlled nor understood by humans, although it was created by them. The novel features a conservative, reactionary young man who exhibits these concerns: "As well make treaties with a tiger! They want things monstrous – we want them sane and sweet!" (139) Considering that the new generation of giants represent the Wellsian ideal, this display of a fear of change and of loss of control is a risky tactic on Wells' part: on one hand, in contrast with the great giants, it is meant to appear as ridiculously reactionary; on the other hand, since it is doubtful that humankind would appreciate it if a new class of different humans gained a

[15] Before being cast away by the humans, the giants apply themselves in their education and perform community service without being asked – they express two qualities dear to Wells: they are educated and community-minded. At one point, one giant youth said: "'Doing nothing's just wicked. Can't we find out something the little people *want* done and do it for them – just for the fun of doing it?' 'Lots of them haven't houses fit to live in,' said the second boy." (132)

prominent place in the socio-political order and suddenly decided to start a revolution, this fear most probably hit home for many readers.

Reception and Interpretation

The readers slightly familiar with Wellsian thought who keep these themes in mind will probably feel confused before these central characters. On one hand, the giants facilitate the continuation of human civilization (a positive aspect from an anthropocentric point of view); on the other, they are errors, accidents, freaks of nature, monsters created by a scientific experiment gone out of control. Of course, they are not as repulsive or violent as Frankenstein's monster, but they nonetheless threaten the human society in place somewhat by their mere presence; they are, more precisely, both a blessing and a threat to humankind due to their difference and revolutionary intentions. According to McConnell, "The gigantism of *The Food of the Gods* . . . is Wells's difficult act of thinking his way through to a utopian vision that might satisfy both his rational expectations for the future of society and his apocalyptic hopes for the future of mankind" (170). The ambiguity caused by the portrayal of the giants is therefore to be expected, and it is also normal that the following questions remain unanswered: are the giants to be considered as a positive accident or as a negative one? Has science rendered a service or a disservice to humankind in this case? And there is also much confusion due to the fact that in this novel, the key to salvation is also the key to perdition: Herakleophorbia IV gives birth to a new generation of great, revolutionary humans, but it is also behind the threat coming from the proliferation of giant, powerful and invasive species of insects, plants and animals. "It is a mighty, truly apocalyptic, conclusion for a very strange book," McConnell writes, "and "since its first publication, readers have been ill at ease, undecided how, exactly, to take *The Food of the Gods*. We end with the ringing assertion that mankind's future is gigantic, Promethean, literally godlike. But the book opens—and proceeds for some hundred pages—in a resolutely comic tone" (166). Where the Gothic may bring some ambiguity or confusion to SF texts which state their ideas less explicitly, in this book, the Gothic is used discretely as far as the giants – the main focus of the book - are concerned (though one could

attribute a Gothic quality to what the presence of the giants imply, i.e. the possibility of mutation or extinction in the future), and the reader is left confused because the novel explicitly states its urgent socio-political message in a light-hearted, sometimes comedic text that suddenly becomes apocalyptic in the end. What is important here? What is Wells stressing? Interestingly, without a considerable quantity of Gothic tropes framing the question of the giants, the reader is confused as to the degree of importance of these giants, and is much more perturbed by the aggressive manifestations of mutant animals and insects, until it becomes clear at the end of the novel that the giants intend to start a revolution.

In his book *H.G. Wells*, J.D. Beresford doubts that the trope of the giant is well-chosen. In addition to being a confusing character for the reader because of its status as a "monster" and as a scientific accident, the giant, Beresford finds, is in the same relationship with nature as the humans were before Herakleophorbia IV was invented: "If we grant that this 'insurgent bigness' must conquer the world, the final result is only humanity in the same relation to life that it now occupies" (30). Although this is true, one must not forget that Wells was also – if not more – interested in the Man of the future versus the Man of the present. Many critics argue, in this sense, that the giants *and* the little humans are both important symbolically – as mentioned before, the *The Food of the Gods* truly illustrates two different classes of men, a socialist-minded one oriented towards the future, and a conservative one on the road to perdition. Reviewer Frederick Headley is correct, though, in drawing our attention to the fact that if the author's thoughts are turned towards the future and that he "pictures an ideal state, [he] cannot show us how it is to be realized" (206).

Although the giants do pose a threat to the little humans once it is made clear that they are a very distinct social group physically and ideologically,[16] they are never really *frightening* monsters as such. In fact, the terms "monster" and "monstrous" are used so often – almost abusively – in the descriptions of the

16 – At first, the giants *do* try to improve work and life conditions for the poor, women, etc (132), but the little humans refuse their "outrageous" propositions.

giants that they essentially lose their initial impact, their "terrifying" quality: the giants are monstrous, what they manipulate or fabricate is monstrous (we read about "monstrous blocks of chalk," "monstrous banks of Earth," etc (135)) – even what they *desire* is monstrous. "They want things monstrous – we want them sane and sweet," (139) says a follower of the conservative politician Caterham. Even the innocent Caddles, who stands for the silent, oppressed lower-class, is described as a "monstrous simpleton" (160), while it is the authorities and the aristocracy who treat the poor creature in a monstrous manner, exploiting and insulting him daily.

The human giants in *The Food of the Gods* are not frightening Gothic characters, but sympathetic SF characters borrowed from fantasy stories, myth and lore: they attract sympathy from selfless individuals, they attempt to communicate with the smaller humans in order to improve their life conditions,[17] and are described as admirable, wise and well-educated. In his overuse of the word "monster" and its related terms, Wells, it can be suspected, was attempting to normalize monstrosity, or, in less shocking terms, difference which can initially be labeled as monstrosity or monstrous. Greatness will come from difference; so, physical greatness represents that difference.[18] As "enhanced humans," the giants in *The Food of the Gods* can be both attractive and repulsive to the readers, even to those who decide not to side with them. In comparing themselves with the giants, the readers may initially feel like they can learn from them, but this feeling can be outweighed by the fear of what the giants *represent* – the changes and sacrifices necessary for a revolution that will preserve humanity, or at least some of it.

Monstrosity takes on a whole other meaning – and a much more Gothic connotation – when it comes to the other manifestations of gigantism, i.e. those found in the insect, animal and plant species. They will worry the readers much

[17] Please see note 15.

18 This is an interpretation that Stableford, Williamson and McConnell defended (69-70, 41, and 166). Parrinder has also noted that "Wells later pointed out that the story represents the conflict of large-scale and small-scale forms of human organization" (Parrinder, *H.G. Wells* 43). In this case, the small-sized people represent the large-scale organization, the source of resistance, whereas the giants represent the small-scale organization.

more as they are out of control and pose a direct threat to humans and to the ecosystem as it is now (i.e. human-friendly). And as we read in *The Food of the Gods*, it is not the larger species we need to worry about, but the smaller species with a shorter reproductive cycle – species like the suddenly frightening wasps and rats we see in the novel:

> The true heirs of the future are the small, fecund, and precocious creatures; those obscure, innumerable plastic species that die in myriads and yet do not diminish, that change this way or that as the pressure of necessity guides. The large predominant species flourish so long as the fight suits them, but when the battle turns against them they do not retreat, they perish. (131)

If the giants pose a threat towards the end of the novel when the little humans refuse to collaborate with them, this option to work together is never a possibility as far as the increasingly threatening giant wasps, rats, chickens, and the other species exposed to Herakleophorbia IV. Where the giants are made reassuring by their education, reason and will to communicate, the giant animals and insects are pure objects of terror and in order to represent them, H.G. Wells resorts to a clearly Gothic writing mode: "Once a yellow-striped monster dropped towards them and hung for a space watching them with its great compound eyes . . . . Down in a corner of the field, away to the right, several were crawling about over some ragged bones that were probably the remains of the lamb the rats had brought from Huxter's farm" (48). If the use of the word monster is less effective at this point in the novel due to the frequent repetitions of the word, the image of giant wasps crawling over the leftover bones from the lambs they had eaten is certainly a shocking one. Here Wells reminds the reader that the current order in the animal hierarchy is impermanent, and that if Man does not necessarily regress first, oft-forgotten species may make a terrible ascent in the evolutionary ladder. In order to coerce the readers into considering this possibility, Wells uses rather graphic scenes – scenes that most certainly leave their mark – several times, shifting from Gothic terror to pure Gothic horror. We need only to think of the "puppy [that] was killed and torn to pieces near Whitstable under the very eyes of its mistress" (23), or of "Mr. Skinner and his friends [as they] shudder in horror at the thought that Mrs. Skinner . . . might have been eaten [by a giant hen]" (31).

These scenes most probably serve to compensate for the otherwise generally light-hearted tone of the novel; if Wells sought to make his book more palatable to readers, the matter at hand deserves the reader's attention no less, and the mission to shock these readers out of their complacence is still relevant.

Not only does the author need to shock the readers out of their complacence, the implications of these creatures are truly terrifying, hence the pertinence of using such a writing mode: "Taking off from the ideas Wells would have learned from Huxley and from the intellectual milieu of the new science,[19] Wells attempted to present a picture of regressive evolution and of sudden and horrible spurts of rapid evolution by barbaric lower forms of life" (Asker, "H.G. Wells and Regressive Evolution" 18). If the giant plants, creatures and humans are clearly SF concoctions in this sense, the representation of the first two has a clearly Gothic tone. The chapter titled "The Giant Rats" illustrates this very well; the scene in which a doctor on horseback is attacked by a group of giant, bloodthirsty rats emerging from the dark woods reads like a cross between Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and H.P. Lovecraft's dark imagination. After this scene, it seems that there is not one moment in which the characters can claim to feel safe. In fact, as Huntington explains in *The Logic of Fantasy*, "[the] opposition between civilization and nature in these tales is not there to be settled; it is a perpetual tension inherent in the human condition" (37). If the little humans sought to escape this tension with the help of the Herakleophorbia IV formula, this plan backfires as Nature also benefits from the concoction, reminding Man that his natural environment can always be a threat, and that the degree of the threat can vary exponentially. What Herakleophorbia IV really shows, in the end, is that greatness is not the sole property of Man, and that the futures of all forms of life are always in the hands of Nature, and always in the most accidental manner.

The stress caused by this tension between Nature and Man is transferred onto the reader with the help of passages featuring moments of mass panic (88-

[19] Evolutionary theory and its implications.

89). Additionally, passages describing the boundless power of Nature under the influence of Herakleophorbia IV sustain this tension by borrowing from the mode of Gothic excess: "There would be a panic, there would be a struggle, and the salient evil would be fought down again, leaving always something behind, in the obscurer things of life – changed forever. Then again another acute and startling outbreak, a swift upgrowth of monstrous weedy thickets, a drifting dissemination about the world of inhumanly growing thistles, of cockroaches men fought with shotguns, or a plague of mighty flies" (94). This borrowing from the Gothic style perpetuates the tension and fear felt by the reader by cumulating images of excess and inconceivable horror; it is a style perfectly suited to describe a natural order gone out of control, changed forever. The image of the men fighting giant cockroaches with guns is a particularly vivid, frightening image – the disgust traditionally associated with the cockroach probably greatly contributes to the feeling of horror the image produces. From a well-intentioned project and an unfortunate, careless mistake, the invention of Herakleophorbia IV moves from outbreak to pandemic, rendering the world apocalyptic, at least in the eyes of Man (93-95). The excessive, apocalyptical aspect of the new natural order could not be better described than with Gothic imagery: as David Punter writes in *The Gothic*, "where the classics[20] offered a world of clear rules and limits, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and uncivilized" (7). "Excess," "exaggeration," "wild" and "uncivilized" are four terms that describe perfectly well the natural environment after its emancipation from the hegemonic control of Man.

Of course, some passages in the novel that are characterized by exaggeration and excess are not scary at all; instead, they serve as humorous moments: "The chief immediate reaction to this astonishing irruption of gigantic poultry upon the human mind was to arouse an extra-ordinary passion to whoop and run and throw things, and in quite a little time almost all the available manhood of Hickleybrow, and several ladies, were out with a remarkable

[20] The classics refer here to the literature of reason, self-mastery and order promoted by the Age of Enlightenment, which took place just before – and probably in part provoked – the appearance of the Gothic novel.

assortment of flappish and whangable articles in hand" (29). These humorous passages are not meant to undermine the seriousness of Wells' message concerning the place of Man within Nature; instead, as many readers have found novels like *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The War of the Worlds* unpalatable, these humorous passages act as light moments which allow the reader to become aware of the importance of the themes Wells is discussing without being completely overwhelmed. Where some critics will argue in favor of this blend of horror and humor, others such as McConnell will judge it as confusing for the reader; Hillegas goes even further in that direction, claiming that he would have preferred a humorous fable from beginning to end: "*The Food of the Gods* [is] a fable so seriously flawed by an unwarranted shift from a brilliantly comic beginning to a serious and prophetic end that its influence is slight and we can ignore it entirely" (25).

In *The Food of the Gods*, Wells stresses not only the fluctuating nature of the ecosystems and the possibility of the ascent of a new species; he also draws attention to the fact that the human civilization is already losing its pace, a fact that most people have not noticed – or refuse to notice. The recurring tropes of dereliction, darkness and nightmares respectively express the concepts of a lost past, an unclear present, and a frightening future. Though the beginning of the novel is indeed, as Hillegas finds, humorous, as was that of *The First Men in the Moon*, there is nonetheless a distinctly derelict quality about the setting Wells imagined for the testing of Herakleophorbia IV, a setting that is introduced in the very first pages of the novel:

> He found the place he seemed in need of at Hickleybrow, near Urshot in Kent. It was a queer little *isolated* place, in a dell surrounded by *old pine woods* that were *black and forbidding at night*. A humped shoulder of down cut if off from sunset, and *a gaunt well with a shattered penthouse* dwarfed the dwelling. The little house was *creeperless, several windows were broken*, and *the cart shed a black shadow at midday*. It was a mile and a half from the end house of the village, and its loneliness was very doubtfully relieved by *an ambiguous family of echoes*. (13, my emphasis)

This passage is highly evocative, rich in Gothic imagery. The old, dark, abandoned house, surrounded by nothing but shadows and strange whispers, is

reminiscent of 19th-century ghost stories and of the narratives revolving around hidden secrets and dark past histories in Lovecraftian writings. As a setting for a scientific experiment supposed to propel mankind into the next phase of its history, it foreshadows nothing good. In fact, it signals the already derelict state of the human civilization the scientists are trying to save, and warns the reader about the strange things that are about to emerge from those dark shadows – some things not quite human, and much more terrifying things as well. The word "shadows" is often repeated throughout the novel; interestingly, it frequently accompanies the term "monster" or "monstrous." Towards the end of the novel, the shadows still stand before the little humans and the giants: "There followed a great stillness. The darkness that veiled the giants seemed to look thoughtfully at him" (188).

Another noticeably Gothic description of a setting occurs before Redwood's arrival at the cavern occupied by the giants at the end of the novel; by this time, the reader will have had witnessed plenty of terrors, horrors and deceptions. The environment described is silent, empty, and devoid of promises except that of death: "Everything was very dark under the starlight, and the whole world crouched mysteriously and was gone without a sound. Not a breath stirred the flying things by the wayside; the deserted, pallid white villas on either hand with their black unlit windows reminded him of a noiseless procession of skulls" (182). This description is reminiscent of the portrayal of the dead cities in *The War of the Worlds*. Although the passage pretty simply describes nightfall at the surface-level, a metaphorical reading indicates that it translates Redwood's anxieties concerning the downfall of the world he knows: the villas are "deserted," "pallid," skull-like; they symbolize an aspect of the human civilization that is already dead and gone. The surreal meeting with the giants in the cave also leads Redwood to question the reality of the environment that surrounds him and to imagine an even more nightmarish reality were he to awaken suddenly: "He would wake through bloodshed and battle, to find his Food the most foolish of fancies, and his hopes and faith of a greater world to come no more than the colored film upon a pool of bottomless decay" (192). In this

passage, it appears clear that Redwood's apprehensions about the future come in two phases or categories: there are those worries that he dares admit to himself, and there are those that he dare not imagine, those which can only manifest themselves in his mind in the form of a nightmare – except this nightmare would not be a dream; it would represent the awakening *from* a dream. Hopefully, when coming across this passage, the reader will realize that the reality he currently wakes up to is still enviable, and that it is still time to act now, rather than when, to quote a similar passage in *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, humanity will find itself "along the stream of fate to degradation, suffering and death" (312). Will the little humans survive the revolution of the giants? This becomes doubtful. Do the giants themselves really stand a chance to defend and maintain the presence of some form of humanity on Earth? This is not certain. The question here is no longer what *kind* of humans will survive, but if any type of human will survive at all.

With the Gothic writing mode interacting with an SF framework, moments of absurd humor, and the fantasy trope of the giant, it seems redundant to state that the readers had a lot of rhetorical strategies to deal with in order to make sense of *The Food of the Gods*, and not all of them have managed to do so successfully. Those who have rarely agree on the book's meaning, for it is rich with ambiguity and subtlety – yes, subtlety, even with giant creatures. Some interpreted the work allegorically, with "the 'Food' and the 'Giants' being only symbols" (Racknem 54); many did not appreciate the fiction, judging it as a "frank caricature" at times, and claiming that "one cannot go very far with the reform of humanity with an equipment of contempt and a new drug" (55). Reviewers and readers even disagreed on the quality of Wells' writing, some stating that the author "had it more under control" (55) where others found "carelessness" and "negligence" (55). Likewise, some appreciated the fact that he was addressing all classes, while others shook their heads in disapproval before what they recognized as an encouragement towards rebellion and revolution. Though the giant animals and insects are more threatening and frightening than the giants, not much attention is paid to them; it seems that they are but the

prequel to the giants, which is what the book is "really about" if one reads the comments of the reviewers, critics and readers. Even today, it seems, our extinction or descent to an inferior biological class are taboo concepts; they are easily put aside when one is given the opportunity to discuss the pros and cons of a class of enhanced humans instead. "*The Food of the Gods*," Racknem reassures us, "was better understood than his earlier works" (57), adding, however, that the book failed to be as read as its famous predecessors.

The most exciting discovery about the novel, as far as this research is concerned, was that an *absence* of serious Gothic tropes[21] around the main focus of the book – the giants – seems to lower their capacity to keep the reader truly interested in them. The reader's focus – should he be reading the book for thrills – is more likely to switch to the mutant insects and animals and to the collapse of the natural order, as these topics are described with a Gothic terror flavor that signals a great threat to the humans and that draws the reader's interest and keeps him interested. This is not to say that the reader does not pay attention to the giants at all; what is meant by this is that without any major Gothic tropes associated to them (this differentiates them from the Martians, Griffin and the Selenites), they do not seem to represent any form of threat in the reader's view, at least not at first. Only at the end are the giants associated with more important Gothic terror tropes, and this is when their revolution is about to be announced. Then only, there is a sudden increase in tension associated with the giants, a tension that the reader does not necessarily welcome.

Whereas a too great quantity of Gothic tropes risks obfuscating the novel's intellectual message, their absence from the descriptions of the giants for the most part of the novel is what causes confusion at the end of the novel when, suddenly, their new political agenda is revealed. Where a constant presence of Gothic tropes would have *guided* the reader towards the "apocalyptic" end of the novel, to cite McConnell, the sudden switch from light-hearted humor and adventure to visions of Gothic horror creates a shock that has confused many readers. Then again, it is

[21] I say serious, because the word "monster" is repeated several times in relation to the giants, but this trope loses its meaning when the good-hearted nature of the giants is revealed.

difficult to imagine how more Gothic tropes could have been used in relation with the giants, considering that they are good-natured and that they really do resort to their “plan B” at the end of the book. It does seem safe to affirm, however, that it is not, in this case, the Gothic genre alone that creates confusion or an unpleasant shock in the reader, but rather the awkward blend of humor, political commentary, SF, fantasy, the Gothic and reflections on science that confuse the reader. In seeking to make his novel more palatable, Wells ended up making his ending even harder to digest for many readers.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to determine whether H.G. Wells' use of the Gothic and fantasy ultimately benefits the four chosen *fin-de-siècle* SF novels by enhancing their social message, or if it results in the contrary effect. By conducting a thorough analysis of the rhetorical effects of the Gothic and fantasy tropes contained in *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man*, *The First Men in the Moon*, and *The Food of the Gods*, I have come to realize that the answer to this question – and the question itself – is far from being simple, as it depends on more than the Gothic tropes in question, and it varies considerably from book to book, and from reader to reader.

In *The War of the Worlds*, the number and the strength of the Gothic tropes (Gothic horror and Gothic terror combined) present in the novel is quite overwhelming. The reader looking for thrills and chills rather than for an intellectual stimulation can easily ignore the latter, for it is obfuscated by the recurring images of terrifying tripods, monstrous octopus-like Martians, scattered charred and mutilated bodies, and bleak, demolished, ghost-like cities. Academics who value the literatures of estrangement will know that the novel is far from being just a horrific novel, and many critics have underlined the book's interesting illustrations of the dangers of complacence, the non-ethical nature of mankind, the possibility of biological retrogression or mutation, and the threat of extinction. Critics such as Leon J. Stover have even gone as far as seeing the Martians not just as monsters which shed light on the threats and dangers that await us ("Introduction" 10-11), but also as positive-role models that represent the victory of the intellect over the emotional, the advancement of technology for the benefit of the community rather than for the individual, and the triumph of the socialist-minded organization. These academics and critics have the advantage of coming to the books with prior knowledge of the content of the story and of Wells' concerns. This knowledge, my analysis shows, is the key to reading beyond the surface-level of the book, which otherwise does not openly invite a deeper reading. While Wells does leave obvious philosophical comments to the reader's attention, they are quickly overshadowed by the gruesome and terrifying effects

which were, ironically, meant to draw attention to them. The inattentive reader will close the book with an increased heartbeat, but only because of what happened to the fictional characters, not because he has realized what could happen to him and his species.

In *The Invisible Man*, the dosage of Gothic tropes is much more appropriate (less overwhelming), though the author's initial reluctance to expose the scientific reason behind Griffin's invisibility initially encourages the reader to understand the text as fantastic rather than as SF; in other words, the cognitive estrangement featured in the book initially appears under the guise of anti-cognitive estrangement, and *The Invisible Man* appears to the reader as an entertaining mystery romance rather than as an intellectually stimulating reflection on the goals of scientific experimentation, political revolution and terrorism.[22] Of course, a fiction novel that would open on such themes would not necessarily hold the attention of as many readers, but the fact that it starts in a setting that is thematically and rhetorically different from its ends places the true mission of the book in peril. Also, if the number and strength of the Gothic tropes used in this book is much less overwhelming than they were in *The War of the Worlds*, they do not allow the novel to express Wells' ambivalent feelings[23] towards the protagonist correctly. Instead, they strongly accent Griffin's negative qualities, denying the character the complex analysis he deserves, and making him seem to the "common" reader but a monstrous, vengeful, murderer full of hatred. Read in conjunction with knowledge of Wellsian values and ideals, the Gothic tropes should lead the reader to understand that what is condemned is not the character's potential, but what he does with this potential.

Out of all the novels studied, *The First Men in the Moon* shows the most successful blend of Gothic tropes with a science fiction context. First frightened

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[22] This is important because the genre of the book often determines the reader's approach to it. In the words of Stableford, "the emblem which labels a work . . . tells [the reader] something about *how* it is to be read" (69).

[23] On one hand, Griffin is a man of science of great intelligence who develops revolutionary intentions; on the other hand, he works alone and seeks to use his scientific discovery in order to initiate a Reign of Terror. While Wells despises the current pseudo-democratic world order, he condemns tyrannies, no matter the ideology they defend, and advocates a revolution based on the scientific re-education of all citizens and on the equal contribution of all these citizens to the new social order.

by the appearance of the Selenites, by the chaotic ecosystem of the moon and by the anthill organization of the Selenite world-state – all described with Gothic and grotesque illustrations –, the readers are then familiarized with the shockingly different creatures via the rationale of evolutionary theory, of the importance of adaptability, and of the sacrifices that need to be made and of the durable practices that need to be adopted in order for a civilization to survive. In other words, where the Gothic is used to shock the readers out of their complacence, to draw their attention to the important matters discussed in the novel, and to emphasize the difference between the human societal mode and that of the Selenites (the Selenites are made monstrous in their difference in order to accentuate the traits that distinguish their strange but more durable society), there is always a rational commentary to accompany this use, either simultaneously or subsequently. If the rationale given to explain the Selenites' horrid appearance and customs does not please the reader, it nonetheless acts as a stimulus for intellectual reflection.

However, in his desire to emphasize the need for more selfless, collective actions on the part of his fellow citizens, Wells presented to the readers of *The First Men in the Moon* creatures that embodied this trait to the extreme (the creatures are completely selfless, and some are drugged when not needed), and this was badly received. In writing *The Food of the Gods*, Wells opted for a more light-hearted tone, blending in scenes of Gothic horror and terror in a text mostly marked by comedy, absurdity, political reflections and reflections on science. Where the Gothic tropes are used to demonstrate that science can to lead to horrible accidents, that the current species hierarchy can be destabilized and that biological mutation is always a possibility, the giants are discussed with more light-hearted language.[24] In this sense, the Gothic almost seems cast aside in the novel: while there are scenes with mutant animal and insect species that are described with a quite strong Gothic horror flavour, the main focus of the book is on the giants and on the revolution they propose to bring forth. The Gothic tropes actually related to this new generation of super-humans are few and far between.

[24] Although the term "monster" is used constantly to refer to the giants, their reputation as serviceable and well-intentioned beings removes any frightening connotation from this term.

In *The Food of the Gods*, then, the Gothic serves to draw attention to the negative aspects of science, whereas Wells' political ideas are emphasized via a political discourse and via educated human characters that are made physically more obvious to the reader. So, if the Gothic does not overshadow Wells' socialist message in this novel, it does not really serve to promote this message either – except perhaps by making the revolutionary giants appear in a very positive light in comparison to the gruesome mutant insects and the vicious, giant rats it describes!

All in all, there is no scientific equation linking the Gothic tropes and the science fiction genre: the result of their combination depends on the explicitness of the message of the novel, on the type and the quantity of Gothic tropes used, on the frequency of the authorial interventions throughout the novel, on the shock-value of the novum itself (a shocking novum does not need to be accompanied by a plethora of strong Gothic tropes) and on the reader's prior knowledge and expectations. If my research has not provided a universally applicable answer as to whether the Gothic tropes benefitted the selected novels or not, it did however show that the answer to this question is more complex than Darko Suvin claims in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction.* Where Suvin claims that the Gothic and science fiction are rhetorically antithetical, and that the Gothic "degrades estrangement to a formal, surface sensationalism that first shocks the bourgeois but then rejoins him" (Suvin ix), my research shows that these "rhetorically antithetical" tropes are not rhetorically *incompatible* and that they can complement each other very well, as in *The First Men in the Moon*. Granted that the anti-cognitive Gothic tropes are not used in excessive amounts or with exaggerated emphasis[25] (otherwise they overwhelm the reader emotionally and paralyze his faculties), they do not undermine the intellectual quality of the SF texts; rather, they support it and promote it by drawing the reader's attention to the crucial ideas they contain. The SF novel, therefore, is not "degraded" simply by the mere *presence* of Gothic tropes, as Suvin claims, but rather by an imbalance

[25] This is the case with the passages combining powerful Gothic terror with gruesome Gothic horror tropes in *The War of the Worlds*, for example.

between the amount of Gothic tropes and the amount of intellectual stimulus in the text.

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