Plentiful Desolations: Anthropocentric Bias and the End-World Ecologies of H. G. Wells and William Hope Hodgson

Steve Asselin, University of Winnipeg

The wasteland is a conventional device of contemporary apocalyptic science-fiction, typically synonymous with the inherent struggle for life to survive on a paucity of resources in a hostile environment. But hostile for whom? Anthropocentric concerns over the ease of human habitation have led to extent ecozones like deserts, swamps and oceans to be designated as wastes. This, however, eclipses the fact that these environments are home to diverse fauna and flora well-adapted to their environments, which from an ecological standpoint are deserving of being valued in-and-of themselves instead of for the use-value they can provide for humanity. The same anthropocentric bias is at work in depictions of fictional, post-apocalyptic wastelands, which (understandably) focus on the ability of human characters to survive in changed circumstances, and not on the possible value of the environment itself. In this paper, I will demonstrate how this bias operates – and can potentially be overcome – by turning to one of the most extreme examples of hypothetical wastelands in science-fiction: the environment of the end of the world. Specifically, I will be examining the end-world ecosystems depicted by H. G. Wells in *The Time Machine* (1895) and William Hope Hodgson in *The Night Land* (1912). My reasoning in selecting these texts is twofold: first, these texts present a world altered not through sudden calamities but through the action of Deep Time, allowing for the possibility of gradual evolutionary adaptation; and secondly, the language of these *fin de siècle* novels marks a moment in which earlier definitions of a wasteland as a merely uncultivated space exists simultaneously with the more contemporaneous sense of a wasteland as uninhabitable. The novels' narrators condemn these environments as waste in spite of their actual descriptions of said ecosystems, demonstrating that the designation of an environment as a wasteland is just as much a by-product of human activity – cognitive, aesthetic and ideological – as material waste is. Yet both novels feature a depth of interaction between character(s) and environment – including flora, fauna, and even post-humans beyond the narrators themselves – that allows a nuanced or even contrapuntal examination of their perceived wastelands and makes possible an attempt to break out of anthropocentric thinking. The existence of such lifeforms, even at the periphery of the texts' narration, shows that both conception of the wasteland as lifeless or even the narrower expression of the wasteland as hostile to humanity depends on inherently culturally determined assessments of what life is valuable and what defines humanity and its needs.

To foreground the hostility of characters towards wastelands, this paper draws upon of fusion of postcolonialist and ecocritical perspectives that becomes possible when examining the extreme environments represented in science-fiction. Specifically, ecocritics and other scholars of the environment have utilized the ideas of Otherness and othering, whereby an observer defines their self by opposition to another, articulated by such postcolonial scholars as Gayatri Spivak to argue that non-human nature is itself an Other. In this view, 'nature's otherness' indicates a fundamental gap between human conceptions of the environment that are inherently about its use-value to us versus nature 'as non-instrumentally valuable in virtue of its otherness … [as] an "end in itself," … and not just a means to our own human ends' (Hailwood 2014: 20). This recognition of nature's own inherent worth is all the more challenging when dealing with wastelands, environments that lack human utility, and which are further defamiliarized in the end-world ecologies of Wells and Hodgson, as these environments, though Earth-bound, are nonetheless rendered alien by the passage of Deep Time. While some ecocritics like Jonathan Bate evince a preference for 'mimetic' texts with an 'emphasis on truth to nature and experience,' as opposed to the imaginative 'emphasis on difference from nature and experience' and wonder found in speculative fiction (2000: 69), James McKusick has shown that a speculative setting or metaphysical overly does not preclude the ecocritic from practicing their 'stubbornly literal' examination of the physical world in which fantastical action takes place (2010: 211). Timothy Morton, in *Ecology Without Nature* (2017), suggests that there is no material Nature accessible outside of cultural constructions (and anthropocentrism), by which logic the end-world ecologies of Wells and Hodgson are just as representative of human logic and bias towards nature's otherness as any representation of extent environments. It is this insistence on the ideological work of fictional ecosystems that allows Pak to state that '[t]erraforming stories' in which Earth or other planets are rendered more suitable to human habitation in a process that inherently destroys what existed before – itself the same manifestation of the 'colonial urge' to redefine space critiqued by Spivak – always foreground 'the otherness of nature' in the opposition between the extent environment not being valued and the one which humans wish the bring into being via ideological and technological work (2016: 18, 43).

This paper builds on the identification of Otherness in alien ecosystems (as in Pak) or animals that inhabit them (as in the work of Alder and Mieville, discussed below), but I focus on the process by which the ideological work of Othering is seeded into the text and can thus be revealed. The argument in this paper rests upon the recognition that the fictive environments of these text are doubly constructed: first by the author who has created these ecosystems via worldbuilding for their narrative, and secondly by the narrators who describe such ecosystems to the readers, as mediated by their language and prejudices. This dual construction can be roughly equated to Spivak's worlding and othering, inasmuch as it creates an account of an environment even as it renders it strange and alien through the overlay of ideology. It is in the gap between these two constructs that we find the potential for overcoming anthropocentric bias, as the reader perceives a more fulsome version of this ecosystem than the narrative can, or chooses to, describe. In many ways this gap, and the lesson in anthropocentrism it expresses, is easier to detect in the depiction of a fictional environment. Its existence it is already the product of the creative processes of its author, and thus easier to apprehend because there is a sympathetic imagination behind this environment, and because even the most thorough worldbuilding is necessarily limited, as compared to the reality of our contemporary environment. Thus, we can witness the imperial urge manifest in the narrators of Wells and Hodgson's linguistic reconstruction of the environment to elicit the complicity of the reader even as they betray themselves through the contradictions in their renderings. Unlike Pak's terraformers, however, these lone narrators carry little more than their ideology into the apocalyptic, end-world ecologies in which they venture, and so largely lack the apparatus for reforming the environment—as we will see, the only change they can bring is via destruction.

Ailise Bulfin has noted that 'the late Victorian period and … particularly … its popular culture' is marked by an apocalyptic trend whose 'negative … thinking ran' counter 'to the period's more prevalent belief in the stately, inevitable progress of humanity in general' (2015: 82), whether the disaster was natural (like the ever-popular asteroid strike) or anthropogenic (such as early climate change fiction). Writers of the *fin de siècle* were in the new position of knowing, based on the work and speculations of scientists of the period, that even in the absence of such sudden calamities, the sheer unavoidable entropy that the sun like all 'other stars must eventually cool and burn out' doomed the Earth to becoming a wasteland in the long run (Parrinder 1995: 29). These scientists included figures like Lord Kelvin and Sir George Darwin, on whom Wells based portions of his future vision (per his preface to the 1931 edition), and Wells himself sought to reconcile the various scientific estimates for the Earth's anticipated lifespan in *The Outline of History* (1919) (39-40). Hodgson, writing over a decade after time machine, was also familiar with the geological and thermodynamic theories of Lord Kelvin, Charles Lyell and Hermann von Helmholz (Davidson 2013: 103; Murphy 2019: 225). Brett Davidson uses the term 'long apocalypse' to differentiate Deep Time end-world fantasies from the 'millennial apocalypse' of more sudden catastrophes (2013: 107). He connects *Time Machine* and *The Night Land* through their exploration of the apocalyptic implications of Deep Time, claiming that Hodgson not only 'owes much to Wells' but that *The Night Land* is a 'direct repudiation of the [scientific] polemic of *The Time Machine*' through the overlay of esoteric mysticism onto Deep Time (2013: 111). The pairing of Deep Time (and Deep Space) with conceptual wastelands has etymological resonance: the word waste derives from the Latin *vāstum*, which signifies both a void and an immensity, from which is also derived the terms "vast" and "vastness" ('Waste'). The vastness of time and space easily correlated, for the Victorian and Edwardians, with emptiness—of life generally, and humanity specifically. Deep Time made the planetary conditions that enabled human life transitory: Earth was once unsuitable for human life, and it shall be again.

The wastelands envisaged by the scientists of the late nineteenth century and the writers who were inspired by them differed greatly from the way wastelands were defined at the outset of the nineteenth century, reflecting a broader linguistic shift in the way the term has been used since the industrial revolution. The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of 'wasteland' reflects this change in parlance insofar as it now encompasses two different and potentially contradictory connotations: 'Uncultivated and uninhabited or sparsely inhabited. Sometimes with stronger implication: Incapable of habitation or cultivation; producing little or no vegetation; barren, desert' ('Waste'). It is the second, broader definition of the term to which we are most accustomed to using today, one that is especially common in (post-)apocalyptic science-fiction. But in the nineteenth century, the older, narrower definition of a wasteland could and did refer to environments evidently lush with life animal and vegetable, such as dense forests and swamps. What differentiates, but also ultimately reconciles, these two conceptions of the wasteland are anthropocentric concerns regarding the ease of human habitation and exploitation. Post-apocalyptic wasteland scenarios are typically defined by the scarcity of resources and the struggle for survival of human characters, while the forests, grasslands, and similar environment have the potential to be made suitable to human habitation but only with a certain amount of labour and capital – which, before the industrial revolution, was considerable. The industrial revolution and enclosure movement in nineteenth-century England specifically targeted 'the common fields, marshes, and "waste" lands', leading poets such as John Clare to mark "with elegiac melancholy the gradual disappearance" of these environments (McKusick 2010: 204). Romantic poets like Clare and Coleridge are closely identified with the start of ecocritical theory, and McKusick identifies in their defense of so-called wastelands an attempt to bridge an 'epistemic gap' between the perceived utility of a landscape, and the idea that an environment had its own intrinsic value (2010: 211). They do this by detailing 'knowledge of the local flora and fauna [and] acute awareness of the interrelatedness of all lifeforms,' sometimes in spite of their own speakers, such as the obtuse Ancient Mariner and his violence and disgust towards the animals he encounters (McKusick 2010: 204, 211). It is this same ecocritical awareness of peripheral biomes, whose detection requires that we look past the 'epistemic gap' or anthropocentric biases of their literary observers, that I wish to locate in the fictive end-world ecologies of Wells and Hodgson.

Christina Alt considered the exercise, by Wells and others, of constructing fictive ecosystems for science-fiction narratives emblematic of a growing ecological fascination at the turn of the century (2014: 30). These ecosystems are marked by relationships between lifeforms (like predator/prey) and environments that characterized contemporary ecological investigations, such that readers could easily imagine these environments possessing their own persistent existence outside of the narrators' presence. Yet contemporary ecological writings still place an 'emphasis on the practical usefulness of ecological work to human life,' as the nascent discipline demonstrated its value to science by making nature of value to humanity (2014: 31). The narrators of Wells and Hodgson exemplify this perspective by their simultaneous desire to be precise cataloguers of the environments they encounter, no less so than contemporary colonialists sought to catalogue the human and non-human aspects of foreign environments, while also condemning the ecosystems they encounter for their lack of utility to (anatomically modern) humanity. Trying to see past potential anthropocentric biases is always a challenging concept when characters, writers, readers, and critics are all necessarily human; we must try to observe humanity and its interactions with environments from a place removed outside of anthropocentric value systems. This is an epistemic shift that science-fiction is well-suited to, as the common science-fictional device of alienation seeks to create just such a remove between the audience and their immediate reality, usually – when best executed – to enable critical self-evaluation.

The challenge of avoiding anthropocentric bias in environmental description while still communicating cogently from one human to another is similar to the narrative challenges faced by authors who try to represent environments at the extreme end of time in a way that both does justice to such a temporally foreign setting, yet remains accessible to their contemporary audience. Both novels send into these environments anatomically modern humans (AMHs) whom readers will recognize as akin to them physically and culturally, but this tool also means the narrators will be inevitably out of step with the future environments they encounter. This effectively replicates the epistemic gap between audience and setting within the story itself in the encounter between narrator and environment. Youngs draws attention to the number of times in which the Traveller has ‘difficulties in relating his experience’ of the future, casting about for suitable language and analogies to make himself understood to his Victorian audience (both those gathered in the Traveller’s home, and Wells’ own audience) (2013: 108). Hodgson, by contrast, chooses to illustrate the epistemic gap through the use of pseudo-archaic prose – as, for instance, in this encounter with the monstrous fauna of the Night Land: ‘And oft I did look backward, and smelt the air, that I know whether it did be a monster Slug-beast that chased us; but there did be no worseness of the smell, to tell me aught’ (Hodgson 2018: 248). The difficulty of this prose, and the role it likely played in limited Hodgson’s popular appeal, is brought up by seemingly every critic of Hodgson (see Murphy 2019: 236-8). Lovecraft, no stranger to florid prose, thought of the book as ‘one of the most potent pieces of macabre imagination ever written’ but also decried the ‘painful verbosity, repetitiousness … and an attempt at archaic language [which is] grotesque and absurd’ (156). However, Murphy presents this linguistic difficulty as a key function of the novel’s weirdness, ‘a set of stylistic and formal strategies centred on the problem of how to refer or represent the non-/un-/ab-human,’ (2019: 236) and, I would add, the post-human. The internal justification for the pseudo-archaism of *The Night Land*’s language is its narrator, a seventeenth-century man who remembers the adventures of a reincarnation of his soul millions of years into the future. This narrator is unnamed in the text, but conventionally referred to in criticism as X, after the title of the abbreviated American version of the novel, *The Dream of X* (Davidson 2013: 107). It is a mix of science-fiction and Edwardian esoteric mysticism as opposed to Wells' purely scientific methodology to enable the journey.

Both authors make recourse to the same literary device, the narrative frame, to bridge the temporal and epistemic gap between their audience and the setting of their texts. However, the distance of a narrative frame also adds uncertainty to the narrative, and both texts showcase this potential narrative unreliability. Hodgson's esoteric narrative frame can impact our sense of the narrator's credibility, even before we consider that he essentially possesses two sets of biases through which he reads the environments he encounters: seventeenth-century aesthetics and morality on the one hand, and on the other the racial chauvinism of the far-future culture of his counterpart. *Time Machine* likewise uses its frame to present the Traveller as potentially unreliable, most notably in 'the narrator and his peers' uncertainty as to whether to accept the hero's account at all' (Youngs 2013: 113). Indeed, the Traveller often makes assumptions about the future environments he encounters that prove to be wrong, leading us to 'infer that future revelations will force further revisions, making us cautious in our reception of the Traveller's theories' (Youngs 2013: 112). We cannot therefore be certain that the final account of these environments provided by the Traveller is one that would stand up to more extensive scrutiny. However, the Traveller's assumptions always privilege the absence of life rather than its presence, and a simplicity of ecology and culture rather than complex systems. As such, any further revisions would likely be in favour of greater and more complex life. And just like X, the Traveller's 'descriptions and interpretations of what he sees are clearly culture-bound and he is therefore limited in what he is able to apprehend of the objects themselves' (Youngs, 2013: 121), or, in this case, of the lifeforms. While unreliable narrators are not a necessary precondition to acknowledging anthropocentric biases, these early literary experiments in post-human ecologies use familiar forms of narrative uncertainty to signpost the need to look beyond the narrators' limited viewpoints.

These narrators often reduce landscapes to wastelands and living creatures to things because they lack the means to understand and articulate their settings, and their rejection of the inexpressible is couched in a pejorative moral and aesthetic lexicon. In Wells' case, the

Traveller's motion through time allows for the observation of the supposed degeneration of the landscape as the pressures of Deep Time transform the area around London into environments less useful and more hostile to human life – in other words, into wastelands. The portion of the novel dealing with the Eloi and Morlocks does not significantly engage with geological time; the physical characteristics of the planet, like climate, are essentially unchanged. It is when the Time Traveller makes an additional jump mid-way into the future (in the deleted chapter later published as 'The Grey Man') that he begins to note physical changes in the environment: 'Hill and valley, sea and river—all … had melted into ... an uneven stretch of cheerless plateau' (Wells 'Further Vision' 178). In consequence of the cooling of an 'orange sun, shorn of its effulgence,' the ground is now 'covered with a sparse vegetation, and grey with a thin hoarfrost' (178). While not yet a barren wasteland, the language he uses emphasizes the increased absence of life and the conditions that enable it. The published *Time Machine* resumes with the Traveller racing to the end of the world, a perpetual twilight' where the red sun emits only a 'dull heat' (Wells *Time Machine* 83-4). The moon has vanished (more absence), the sky is no longer blue, there is no wind, and the ocean is (seemingly) dead and motionless. The Traveller describes this end-world landscape as a 'dim… desolate beach,' a 'desolate slope' and an 'abominable desolation' (82-3), invoking the language of the wasteland as void. It is also inhospitable to the AMH constitution of the narrator: the 'bitter cold' and 'thin air that hurts one's lungs' nearly causes him to lose consciousness, which would result in fatal hypoxia or hypothermia (83-4).

Hodgson's prose is likewise unrelentingly negative towards the end-world environment of *The Night Land* and the various species that inhabit it, invoking a vocabulary of physical, aesthetic, and metaphysical revulsion. The first introduction to the physical environment of the Night Land sets the tone of the rest of the novel: it is a 'black monstrosity' that contains 'hideous mysteries' (23). Indeed, this end-world environment arises not merely through the physics of Deep Time, but as a supernatural struggle between 'Evil Forces' and 'Other Powers,' the latter aligned with the AMHs who contrast as a refuge a massive arcology called the Last Redoubt (30). As non-human environments by definition, wastelands are typically ungodly – but where this is a simple absence of the divine in favour of scientific materialism in *The Time Machine*, the Night Land is both physically and *meta*physically hostile to humanity. *Night Land*'s narrative frame means that the history of the intervening period is provided retrospectively, rather than observed, and cloaked by mythology as millions of years have elapsed since 'the early days of the earth, when the sun, maybe, still gloomed dully in the night sky of the world' (24). The narrator chronicles how the sun lost its intensity and gradually died out and how human science breached the barriers of reality to allow entry to evil forces. Most of humanity, excepting the ancestors of the Last Redoubt, descended into 'lawlessness and degeneracy,' allying themselves with 'grotesque and horrible creatures … bred out of all space and Outward Dimensions' (27-29) – or in other words, emergent from the vastness of Deep Space and Deep Time. This history portrays the emptiness of the wasteland as contagion: the horrifying vastness of space and time has infected the material world, requiring humanity to seal itself off. So, too, the Night Land itself: any who wish to venture beyond the Last Redoubt must make special preparations, including suicide pills, to inure themselves against the spiritual devastation of the Night Land. This spiritual peril is matched with a physical one: just like Wells' end-world beach, this is an environment of '*literal* toxicity' (Johnson 2016: 547; original emphasis), as the landscape's many geysers, fumaroles, ash-clouds and miasma can be lethal to the humans of the Redoubt. Per Alder, 'the material environment' of the Night Land 'is animated into a metaphor for the precariousness of the human existence – barely surviving on … a world that is truly other' (Alder 2013: 91) due to the wasting forces of Deep Space and Deep Time. Biology, metaphysics, and aesthetics are inexorably combined to present a Manichean future in which all things positive are contained within the Redoubt and everything beyond is irredeemably negative.

Yet despite the invocation of the wasteland and cognate terms, these environments are not barren: both vegetation and animal life have adapted to the environments of the future, and the supposed hostility of the landscape is mostly hostile to modern humans. The Traveller describes the landscape of 802701 as 'a tangled waste of beautiful bushes and flowers, a long-neglected yet weedless garden' (26), highlighting the continued use of the narrower definition of wasteland and its inherently contradiction: thriving life coexisting with a feeling of disuse. The Traveller's expression recalls Darwin's entangled bank and its heady evolutionary potential, and highlights that 802701 is a transitional period in the planet's fictive biological future. The cultured vegetation and lack of animal life are a result of human action long before this time, as humanity attempted to turn the world into a garden by placing scientific crafts above the gradual natural process of evolution. Yet evolution has nonetheless asserted its dominance, as seen in the changes wrought on a humanity (the Eloi and Morlocks) now hapless to control its biological fate. This is mirrored by the renewed, evolutionarily productive chaos of the entangling vegetation. The next leap into the future in the deleted chapter confirms that evolution, not design, has reasserted its dominance, as animal life appears to have returned in the form of a lagomorph, a rabbit-like creature, and its arthropod predator. These are creatures that could be described as ‘animal monsters’ per Alder, as despite the Traveller’s attempts to analogize the creatures to known animals, they are ‘strangely bodied species previously unknown’ to all forms of human knowledge (Alder 2017: 1083). Alder argues that such ‘[a]nimal monsters reveal the limits to scientific mastery over the natural world,’ (2017: 1084) referring here to the bounds of human knowledge, and so the inherent otherness of a nature that has produced such beast. The creatures of this chapter physically embody this insurmountable boundary, as the scientific skills of future humanity have nonetheless failed to control biology, which has given rise to monsters. This is reinforced by the Traveller’s discovery that the lagomorph is a vestigial form of humanity. Human attempts to control animal life have simply resulted in a breakdown between these categories, and the acknowledgment of humanity’s own past, present, and future animality.

The ‘desolate beach’ (82) also has its own ecosystem, though the Traveller is slow to realize it. The first animal life he perceives is ‘a thing like a huge white butterfly,’ but any thought of beauty is banished by ‘a harsh scream … so dismal’ that it makes the Traveller shiver (82-3). The scream reinforces the *thing*-ness of this creature, its monstrous divergence from the butterfly analogy. Before this, the only ‘trace of life that [he] could see at first was the intensely green vegetation’ on some ‘harsh reddish’ rocks, vegetation evolutionarily adapted to ‘grow in a perpetual twilight’ like ‘forest moss or the lichen in caves’ (82). These rocks turn out to be ‘monstrous crab-like creature[s]’ (83); the Traveller, repeatedly mistaken about the Eloi and Morlocks, now struggles to even recognize what qualifies as life in this distant time. Here too, the Traveller’s language is distinctly negative: he calls the crab-things ‘monsters,’ ‘ungainly’ and ‘blotched,’ as well as ‘sinister,’ ‘evil,’ and ‘foul,’ invoking both aesthetics and morality to condemn these post-human animals (83). The Traveller fears and resents these creatures, as they very nearly caught hold of the Traveller, yet such predatory behaviour shows us that these animals occupy a distinct ecological niche. In this brief sojourn on the dismal beach, readers can glimpse an ecosystem made up of multiple species (including a symbiotic or parasitic relationship between the crabs and the vegetation that grows on them), however coloured by the Traveller’s loathing for the post-human environment and its monstrous animals.

Alder reminds us that ‘a cultural shift towards recognizing animals as subjects in their own right’ was underway at the turn of the twentieth century, and in staging encounters with weird and remote ecosystems, ‘animal subjectivity and the creatures’ right to exist in their own space are … exposed’ despite ‘anthropocentric interpretations’ of those animals (Alder 2017: 1084, 1093). While Alder is referring here to two Edwardian stories exploring fictive ecosystems in the upper atmosphere, the principle still applies to the weird and *temporally* remote settings of Wells’ beach and Hodgson’s Night Land. To alienate animals by rendering them monstrous is also to Other them, but the recognition of such Otherness comes with the realization that these creatures and their environments do not exist to serve human needs, a key step in recognizing anthropocentrism. Unfortunately, where the protagonists of the stories Alder examines compete with the perilous animals in this environment, treating them with a form of equality if only as rivals, Wells’ and Hodgson’s end-world explorers use the lexicon of the wasteland to minimize and dismiss the ecosystems they encounter even in the midst of their own peril. The Traveller almost recognizes the disconnect between his own language of absence and ecological reality when, after his final jump through time, he says the beach ‘*seemed* lifeless … save for its livid green liverworts and lichens’ (84, emphasis mine). In one breath, we see that the articulation of a lifeless wasteland is based on human values – utilitarian and aesthetic – rather than the actual presence of life. Nor is it accurate, as the Traveller again discovers his initial impressions are mistaken. He at first ‘fancied I saw some black object flopping’ on the shore, but dismisses it as ‘merely a rock’ after it stops moving (84). He readily assumes his ability to recognize life (based on motion, a thin criteria) despite having already made this error with the crab-things. He is forced to acknowledge this ‘round thing, the size of a football perhaps’ with ‘tentacles trail[ing] down from it’ when it unmistakably starts ‘hopping fitfully about’ (85). Merely looking at it causes the Traveller to feel as though he ‘was fainting,’ nominally a physiological response to the thinner air of the end-world. The juxtaposition of language signalling illness – he experiences ‘deadly nausea’ and on seeing the thing feels ‘sick and confused’ (ibid) – is also an expression of the revulsion the Traveller feels for this thing he cannot describe, not even by analogy as he did the butterfly- and crab-like animals. These ecosystems only register at the periphery of his vision (and awareness), and he is subsequently unable to define or even observe them forthrightly. Instead, he is overwhelmed by a ‘terrible dread of lying helpless’ (ibid) in this environment as this entity, in its lack of definition, could pose any kind of threat to him., causing him to leave this time period before making any further observations.

X likewise minimizes the presence of life in the Night Land even as he fears the threats it poses. Although frequently described as a ‘desolation’ (i.e., 32, 49, 112, 133, etc.), a ‘waste’ (280, 353), and generally ‘a wild and stark and empty place,’ (144), the Night Land teems with life – just not of the sort the narrator values. Unlike *Time Machine*, the planet here retains its geological intensity (attested to by volcanoes and geysers) even after solar death. The Night Land is itself a deep chasm opened by some tectonic cataclysm, where geothermal heat still permits a habitable environment, as the surface of the Earth has long since frozen over. This supposed wasteland is actually an oasis of life within a greater wasteland defined by a complete absence of potential for life. X comes across several ecosystems populated by oversized, altered versions of modern-day animals and, as weird fiction, entities whose nature – or sentience – are ultimately impossible to ascertain. These ecosystems are largely based on thermal vents and forests grown from sulfuric seas in which ‘new animal forms of life [are] evolving,’ and thus represent ‘the primal environment from which all life emerged and will ultimately return,’ just like the end-world sea of *The Time Machine* (Alder 2013: 91). But X is ambivalent, at best, about the potential life that emerges from an environment he has been raised to view as corrupt. Most of the recognizable animals are species typically given negative connotations in western traditions, ‘spider-crabs and monstrous scorpions’ (193), ‘mighty spider[s]’ (171), ‘rat creature[s]’ (175), ‘Monster Slug[s]’ (253), ‘snake[s] … so thick as a man in the body’ (254); or else familiar species rendered monstrous, such as ‘monstrous Night Hounds’ (26) and ‘half-bird monsters’ (281). They all have their various predator/prey relationships, and X is at pains to describe how these post-human ecologies appear to function. But just like the Traveller, X is selective about what he chooses to recognize as living environments, dismissive of ecosystems that are not as obvious in scale and plenty. For instance, he claims ‘we never to see aught of life in all that great and desolate Gorge’ he must traverse in both directions, a wasteland-as-barren within the broader wasteland-as-hostile-to-humanity of the Night Land (353). Yet by his own account, it is populated by snakes, spiders, rats, and ‘other matters [that] did move among the rocks,’ such that he keeps his weapon close to him (170). He acknowledging through the primal need for safety the existence of life his biases would otherwise not recognize as such.

It is with good reason that China Miéville draws on the language of *The Night Land* to define the abcanny as the horror of the 'unrepresentable and unknowable,' something wholly alien to prior experience and frames of reference, as opposed to the uncanny, where horror is derived from a perversion of the familiar (2012: 381). Our narrators attempt to make familiar the far-future animals they encounter through analogy, but it is always tentative as the addition of the description 'thing' to various monstrous animals they encounter demonstrates. This is a catch-all term that is effectively a surrender to the unknown. And this tactic—of making sense of the Other through likeness to the known – fails the further from the familiar times and places these characters travel. A good demonstration of this distancing effect is found in the growing prominence of the tentacle – that appendage Alder calls 'a metonym for the radical new body-shapes marking the weird monster' (2017: 1088) – over the course of *The Time Machine*. Kemp argues that the tentacle represents the Traveller's increasing biological alienation from other living beings (and a fear of being consumed by such evolutionary Others) (26-28). When the Traveller first encounters the Eloi, he describes their touch as 'soft little tentacles upon my back and shoulders' (24). Though the Eloi are shortly shown to be non-threatening, the moment is echoed when, on the beach, he 'felt a ticking on [his] cheek,' which turns out to be 'the antennae of another crab monster' behind him, which registers as a clear predatory threat (83). Tentacles are the defining feature of the ultimate thing on the beach, which he likewise views as dangerous and disgusting. The linguistic similarities between the encounters with the Eloi, the crabs, and the final thing suggests that these encounters with future biological alterities operate along a spectrum of alienation. The horror that comes with moving through the vastness of future time is a motion from the uncanny to the abcanny. The encounter with the Eloi and the Morlocks can be characterized as uncanny, because the Traveller recognizes both human biology and social structures, albeit defamiliarized. The lagomorph of the deleted chapter pushes that uncanny resemblance to its limit; the horror here stems largely from the extent to which humanity has become unrecognizable, and so ventures into the realm of the abcanny. The giant crabs and butterflies of the end-world ecosystem are likewise uncanny versions of familiar species, bordering on the abcanny – they are 'a thing like' (82) known animals, rather than true instances of said animals. Finally, the betentacled thing flopping about on the terminal beach is a full expression of the abcanny.

Animals of weird fiction are also considered monstrous because ‘they flourish in environments in which humans are unfit and cannot dominate,’ (Alder 2017: 1084), explaining their unusual forms and positioning them as ecological competitors (and predators). But as the inclusion of human-derived species like the Eloi and Morlocks in the list above shows, fantasies of Deep Time and the long apocalypse often include versions of humanity that *have* adapted to supposed wasteland environments. This subverts the conception of the wasteland as lacking human utility, as what humanity finds useful in its environment is subject to change over (deep) time just as humanity itself is. But human variants who have adapted to end-world environments are, like the animals, also condemned as monstrous Others by the AMH narrators. Already, in 802701, the Eloi and Morlocks are reduced versions of humanity: the Eloi are ‘pretty little people’ (44-5) and the Morlocks ‘queer little ape-like figure[s]’ and ‘white Things of which [he] went in terror,’ with the capitalized ‘Thing’ another instance of the abcanny inability to define the weird (human) creature, and the fear such un-identification provokes (44-5, 60, 83). Most critics believe we are meant to identity with the Traveller as a colonial agent in these ecosystems and agree with his language excoriating both post-humans as degenerate (cf. Youngs 2013: 114-6, 118). The Morlocks are to be condemned for their physical appearance and cannibalism, a frequent trope of imperialist discourse, while the Eloi are condemned for their ornamental ‘unproductiveness,’ the same ‘justification for appropriating … land’ from other cultures during Europe’s imperialist expansion (Youngs 2013: 111). Despite the plentiful flora of 802701, the Traveller describes ‘the Earth’ as a ‘waste garden’ because there is no ‘agriculture,’ nor ‘hedges’ delineating the land into parcels of property (30). This runs counter to the nineteenth-century enclosure movement, which sought to ‘rationalize the existing patchwork of land ownership’ in which ‘the common fields and “waste” land’ were available to the rural poor in favour of clearly delineated and fenced-in plots that would incentivize ‘capital-intensive agriculture’ (McKusick 2010: 77). In this view, property rights—and their physical manifestations in barriers—are a precondition to the proper use of land, and so the Traveller’s identification of ‘communism’ (Wells 2005: 29) the Eloi’s collective, untended gardens rather than individual houses with their parcels of lands with is a further sign of degeneration manifest in the landscape.

Yet the Traveller’s perception of the land as wasted is not accurate, by his own account the Eloi gather fruits for their meals and use flowers for aesthetic pursuits, and so they are adapted to their environment – and vice versa, as the fruits and flowers have all been designed to require no cultivation effort from the Eloi. Waste, here, reflects the lack of intensive labour: the land has human utility, but its potential is not being maximized along typical nineteenth-century capitalist guidelines. The 'waste' of 802701 exists only in the narrator's projections of what a proper environment – and proper humanity – ought to be. The Morlocks are likewise well-adapted to underground life and have secured themselves a consistent source of food in the Eloi. On the cooling Earth of the deleted chapter, the only human presence is the 'little creatures' like 'rabbits, or some small breed of kangaroo' with vestigial human features (Wells 'Further Vision' 179). For Kemp, *Time Machine*'s post-humans are 'designed to discredit … the hopeful belief that life must steadily improve' and the 'complacent equation of evolution with amelioration' (12). But this view reiterates the error of the narrator, superimposing moral and aesthetic values on blind evolution. Shocked though the Traveller may be by these creatures, there is nothing to suggest that they are maladapted to their environment, even if they are a prey species. The biological family tree branching from modern humanity has not dead-ended over the aeons covered by the text: this is an evolutionary success.

This narrow definition of humanity and human utility is even more apparent in *The Night Land*, whose wasteland is inhabited by a wide variety of post-humans. Because the novel mixes science and theology, these humanoids – collectively referred to as Ab-Humans – are presented as both biological retrogressions and corruptions of the human form by evil powers. There are clear racial implications in the animalistic language used to describe ab-humans, invoking *fin-de-siècle* fears over 'degeneracy and miscegenation' (Hurley 2001: 145). For instance, there is a race of giants, 'fathered of bestial humans and mothered of monsters' (29); 'very brutal and monstrous' shaggy men (191); the 'very horrid men … called wolf-men' (220); 'Yellow Beast-M[e]n' with four arms and sucker mouths (228), and other variants still. The most dangerous of these humanoid antagonists are the caveman-like 'Humped Men,' who are 'monstrous thick and mighty of the neck and shoulder [like] human bulls' (157). The constant analogy to animals in the descriptions of post-humans render them as Other not just through divergent evolution but because, like the lagomorph of the Time Machine, it blurs the boundaries between species. Ab-Humans appear universally hostile to the narrator and other humans, but the narrator is heavily biased as the representative of a culture that has devoted itself to isolation from this environment, and which tells stories of 'mighty and lost races of terrible creatures, half men and half beast, and evil and dreadful … who made war upon the Redoubt' (28). Johnson echoes the narrator in suggesting these ab-humans and other Night Land creatures evolved in such radically different circumstances to AMHs that they possess no ‘recognizable social and ethical motivations, but unfathomable impulses, bizarre nocturnal logics’ (544), and the sealed and self-contained pyramid functions as a physical metaphor for the absolute gulf between the self and Other.

For the narrator, these entities represent a fall from true humanity, similar to the Time Traveller’s attitude towards the Eloi and even more so the Morlocks; they occupy the lower rungs in a racial hierarchy that prizes the biologically modern humans of the Redoubt. X claims there is a ‘Force or Spirit of the Human’ that causes humanity to retain its form, and conversely can be lost and ‘made monstrous or diverse by foul or foolish breeding’ leading to ‘dread Monsters … both Man and Beast’ (348). This (somewhat tautological) stance positions the humans of the Last Redoubt as the only true humans. X further denies that ‘Man … have been truly a Fish, or aught truly be different from a Man,’ denying evolution in both the past and future, willing only to concede that humanity may once have been ‘so brutish as the Humpt Men’ (349). Rather than gain humanity from animality, he only acknowledges the possibility of losing humanity to bestiality, and consequently views evolution as a net loss. As Hurley has observed, X’s ideas about evolution are ‘ambivalent’ and ‘confused’ and sometimes even ‘accepts some degree of abhumaness with equanimity,’ despite thorough condemnations of the same elsewhere in the text (145-6). He concedes that the ‘many and diverse … creatures which had some human semblance’ may possess ‘intelligence, mechanical and cunning,’ and even ‘machinery and underground ways … to secure to themselves warmth and air’ (an echo of the Morlocks). But these ab-humans are to humans as ‘wolves set in comparison with tender children’ by the fact that they inhabit the Night Land and are thus tarred by its peril and malignancy (29). Yet all appear adapted to survive in the Night Land, and based on X’s observations, some like the Humped Men have their own cultures that involve hunting local fauna and crude residences. This is why Johnson declares ‘[t]he future belongs to the Ab-humans who, it would seem, are the Earth’s true children’ (2016: 550). The abhumans have adapted to this world, which far from lacking human utility is capable of simultaneously sustaining numerous humanoid species.

Unlike the abhumans who have become part of this post-human ecology, AMHs are atavisms, endemic to the artificial environment of the Redoubts. The conflation of evolution with degeneracy have led them to maintain the normative human form against any evolutionary pressures by sealing themselves off from the exterior environment and carefully controlling the interior one. In refusing to be modified by ‘Circumstance’ and ‘Condition,’ AMHs are living fossils, evolutionary throwbacks simply by virtue of having stood still biologically speaking for millions of years even as the rest of the world changed and adapted. ‘[T]he last millions [years] of the world’ have been an ‘utter terror’ for them because they are increasing maladapted to their environment (348, 25). This scenario turns on its head Victorian and Edwardian fears of atavisms representing earlier or devolved human states living amongst them, by imagining an environment of such widespread degeneration that civilization itself is now atavistic – and therefore doomed to extinction. Though it may take several million years more, eventually the ‘Earth-Current’ that protects the Redoubt will fail and its residents will be ‘helpless to … the Abundant Terror’ that lurks about the pyramid (31). They know themselves doomed but will not act to alter their fate because they view all change as degradation, which is why Murphy pronounces ‘entropy [as] the ultimate fate of the material universe and … the human spirit’ in his reading of Hodgson’s cosmology (231). But the Night Land, with its diverse population of both human and non-human animals, and ongoing evolutionary potential, is positioned against entropy, so long as we do not share the pejorative attitude of X and his culture.

The presence of these atavistic humans in future ecosystems they do not understand is perilous to all parties involved, as their insistence on reading environments through an anthropocentric lens prove dangerously disruptive. Those humans from the Redoubt who venture into the Night Land are almost invariably slain by its perils, and by their very presence rile up the so-called monstrous elements of the Night Land against the Redoubt. X’s journey to rescue his lover is a constant deadly struggle, and in returning to the Redoubt causes it to become besieged. The Traveller, too, is repeatedly endangered by creatures he has no familiarity with—including the Morlocks and the end-world crabs that nearly seize him. Yet the Traveller’s presence in future environments consistently results in the death of various post-humans. His attempt to use fire from matches (like the Traveller, a technology not of this time) as a distraction against the Morlocks results in a forest fire that kills the Morlocks, his Eloi companion Weena, and very nearly himself. Youngs calls the Traveller’s desire to kill the Morlocks “a show of atavism,” a bloodthirsty impulse inappropriate for a Victorian gentleman (2013: 119). Yet the Traveller is indeed an atavism in this time period, and just as perilous in this environment as the Victorians feared contemporary supposed atavisms would be in corrupting British cities and polities and endangering its inhabitants (Hurley 2001: 138-9, 142). In the deleted chapter, his need to satisfy his curiosity regarding the small hopping animals leads him to strike one with a rock so he can examine it; the wanton violence of this action only hits him when he realizes that the creature is a human descendant. He is subsequently attacked by a giant centipede, and while he escapes the arthropod, the post-human he stunned is devoured. X in *The Night Land* is likewise a walking slaughterhouse, using his advanced weaponry to carve a bloody path across the various environments between the two pyramids. He usually acts in self-defence, but the trigger for the events of the novel is the presence of AMHs in the Night Land. Both characters intervene in local ecosystems with a 'violence' that substitutes for 'any sustainable attempt to understand or handle the exotic … environment' which Alder identifies with imperial exploration (2017: 1087), and thus with confrontations with the Other. It is fortunate for these environments, then, that they are so hostile to AMHs as to preclude any long-term presence by these interlopers.

The Traveller's ultimate fate, narratively penalized by exile and death somewhere in the breadth of Deep Time, is a final indication that the reader is not necessarily meant to align with his perspective. In contrast to the general gloom with which the Traveller narrates the far-future portions of the novel, Wells himself believed that the 'enormous prospect of the past' (and thus the future) only upsets those beholden to 'a Sumerian legend' – for scientifically-minded persons, Deep Time actually offered 'humility and illimitable hope' (qtd. in Kemp 1982: 140). In *The Outline of History* (1919-20), Wells says that '[n]ot only is Space … empty, but Time is empty also,' but this makes 'Life … like a little glow … in these void immensities' (qtd. in Parrinder 40). The humility and hope derived from the confrontation with Deep Time, and therefore from *Time Machine*, is that life should be prized because it is so rare. The Traveller's abhorrence of the empty epochs at the end of time shows he has an inkling of this lesson. However, in his contempt for the post-human Eloi and Morlocks and disgust of far-future animals, manifest in his repeated endangerment of the lifeforms he encounters, he demonstrates a lack of humility towards life, rejecting for largely aesthetic reasons what should be celebrated for its uniqueness and resiliency. Yet it is worth keeping in mind how often the Traveller has been mistaken in his assumptions about life and the environment, and how limited his snapshots of the future are, temporally and geographically (he never moves far beyond the site of London). It is possible, therefore, for the text's frame narrator to find hope beyond the Traveller's bleak account: sceptical of the Traveller's interpretations of human nature if nothing else, he considers that 'the future is still black and blank – a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places' where the

Traveller stopped (91). Such language draws on the idea of the wasteland in its benighted size, but *ignorance* is not the same as *emptiness*. The narrator clings to the comfort of 'two strange white flowers' gifted to the Traveller by Weena and the 'gratitude and mutual tenderness' they represent as a testament that the wasteland of the future is, in fact, full of life to value—if only one looks past the biases of the interpreter. Oliver Tearle, writing about *The Night Land*, defined this simultaneity of wasteland and plenty as 'a void that is somehow full, a vast world of nothingness which is yet everything there is,' because these far future settings are made up by millions of years of decomposition and disintegration, and so the very dust of these worlds contain all prior forms of life (2010: 122). And still both *Time Machine* and *The Night Land* represent empty spaces constructed and filled by human imagination, and so both the end-world setting and the authorial act of depicting it are full of creative potentiality. Both Wells and Hodgson acknowledge the peril of remaining static, biologically and aesthetically, before the inevitability of change, dramatized in these novels against the scale of Deep Time. By allowing us to see past the pejorative pall cast by their narrators, they suggest that it is also in our power to change our perspectives on such change, away from judgment on anthropocentric grounds and towards valuing life on its own merits. And if this is true even at the end of the world, in these most hostile and alien examples of nature's otherness, then all is needed to bridge the epistemic gap is the sympathetic imagination to recognize the inherent worth of our contemporary environment.

Reference List

Alder, Emily, 'Always Sea and Sea: *The Night Land* as Sea-Scape,' *Sargasso: The Journal of William Hope Hodgson Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2013, pp. 89-101.

——, '(Re)encountering monsters: animals in early-twentieth century weird fiction,' *Textual Practice*, Vol. 31, No. 6, (2017), pp. 1083-1100.

Alt, Christina, 'Extinction, Extermination, and the Ecological Optimism of H. G. Wells,' *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, eds. Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, (2014), pp. 25-39.

Bate, Jonathan, *The Song of the Earth*, London, Picador: 2000.

Bulfin, Ailise, 'The Natural Catastrophe in Late Victorian Popular Fiction: "How Will the World End?"' *Critical Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (2015), pp. 81-101.

Davidson, Brett, ‘The Long Apocalypse: The Experimental Eschatologies of H. G. Wells and William Hope Hodgson,’ *Sargasso: The Journal of William Hope Hodgson Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2013, pp. 102-116.

Hailwood, Simon A., *How to Be a Green Liberal: Nature, Value, and Liberal Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, 2014.

Hodgson, William Hope, *The Night Land: A Love Tale* [1912], *The Night Land and Other Perilous Romances*, ed. Jeremy Lassen, New York: Night Shade Books, 2018.

Hurley, Kelly, ‘The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson,’ *Gothic Modernisms*, eds. Andrew Smith & Jeff Wallace, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp. 129-149.

Johnson, Keith Leslie, ‘The Extinction Romance,’ *MODERNISM / modernity*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2016), pp. 539-553.

Kemp, Peter, *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Ape: Biological Themes and Imaginative Obsessions*. London: Macmillan, 1982.

Lovecraft, H.P, ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature,’ *At the Mountains of Madness*, ed. China Miéville, New York: Modern Library, 2005, pp. 103-182.

McKusick, James, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Miéville, China, ‘On Monsters: Or, Nine or More (Monstrous) Not Cannies,’ *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2012), pp. 377-392.

Morton, Timothy, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Murphy, Timothy S., ‘Labor of the Weird: William Hope Hodgson’s Fantastic Materialism,’ *Science-Fiction Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2, (July 2019), pp. 225-249.

Pak, Chris, *Terraforming: Ecopolitical Transformation and Environmentalism in Science Fiction*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016.

Parrinder, Patrick, *Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995.

Spivak, Gayatri, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York: Methuen, 1987.

Tearle, Oliver. ‘Dustopian Fictions: William Hope Hodgson and the Thing to Do,’ *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (2010), pp. 121-131.

‘Waste,’ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2020. oed.com/view/entry/226028. Accessed 20/07/2020.

Wells, H.G., *The Time Machine* [1895], ed. Patrick Parrinder, London: Penguin Books, 2005.

——, ‘The Further Vision,’ *The Definitive* Time Machine*: A Critical Edition of H. G. Wells’s Science Romance*, ed. Harry M. Geduld, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 178-180.

Youngs, Tim, *Beastly Journeys: Travel and Transformation at the Fin De Siècle*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013.