10.00-10.30  **Arrivals**

10.30-10.35  Welcome (Dr Steve McLean)

10.35-12.05  **Papers:**

  **Panel 1: - Wells and Politics/History**
  **Chair: Professor Patrick Parrinder**

  **Dr John S. Partington**
  ‘H. G. Wells and the BBC’

  **Dr Richard Toye**
  ‘ “I owe you a great debt”: H. G. Wells’s influence on Winston Churchill’s Political Thought’

  **Rebecca Borden**
  ‘ “And now you expect me to tell you of Germans”: The Importance of Firsthand Accounts of War in *Mr Britling Sees It Through*’

12.05-1.15  **Lunch** (Please note that, although coffee is freely available, lunch is not included in this year’s conference fee. However, there are a number of local eateries within the vicinity).

1.15-2.45  **Panel 2: - Wells and the Scientific Romance**

  **Chair: Dr Steve McLean**

  **Dr Sylvia Pamboukian**
  ‘Without Reservations: Wells’s Time Travel in Context’

  **Halszka Leneń**
  ‘ “As if the real were a mere veil to the fantastic”: The Subversive Dynamics of the Futuristic in H. G. Wells’s Short Stories’

  **Evan Roberts**
  ‘Science, Power and H. G. Wells’ Monstrous Futures’
2.45-3.10  Coffee

3.10-4.40  Panel 3: Wells in Context
Chair: Dr Bernard Loing
Dr Simon James
‘H. G. Wells, Art and the End of Culture’
Emily Alder
‘Social Structure and natural landscapes in H. G. Wells and William Hope Hodgson’
Dr Andrew Shail
‘Wells, Cinema and the Nervous Body’

4.40-4.45  Conference Closes

Directions to Conway Hall

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- from Euston Station: 59, 68, 91, 188
- from Waterloo Station: 1, 59, 68, 188, 521, 243
- from Victoria: 38 (Theobalds Rd, rear side of Hall) London Buses Infoline: 020 7222 1234

Abstracts of Papers

Dr John S. Partington, H. G. Wells Society

H. G. Wells and the BBC

This paper coincides with the pressing of a CD of Wells’s surviving BBC broadcasts by the British Library. Broadcasting emerged in the UK just as Wells was reaching the peak of his popularity as a public figure. In this paper I will summarise Wells’s BBC broadcasts between 1929 and 1943, and suggest that the wireless, like film, arose as a ‘New Direction’ for Wells’s career. Although Wells’s books were much less popular after the Great War (with a couple of notable exceptions), his significance in British and world affairs increased dramatically throughout the interwar period. Although he had met Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, and had visited the Italian king during the Great War, between the wars Wells was a regular at the White House, he interviewed two Soviet leaders, was on friendly terms with the Czech president and premier, and moved in the same circles as the British political elite. Not content (or perhaps disappointed) with the lack of influence his high-level acquaintanceships brought him, Wells was determined to use mass media to get his message across. His move into radio and cinema was not a cynical ploy for attention, however, but rather a continuation of his emergence as a journalist and popular-science writer in the 1890s and the author of middle-brow fiction during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as well as a syndicated journalist of the interwar period. A prophet of such devices as radio and television in his scientific romances, his broadcasting experience was a natural extension to his other work, and one which has received scant research hitherto.


Richard Toye, University of Cambridge

‘I owe you a great debt’: H.G. Wells’s influence on Winston Churchill’s political thought

To the very limited extent that Wells is mentioned by Churchill scholars, the two are usually portrayed, rather misleadingly, as antagonists. (This is because, after World War One, the two men engaged in public controversy over British intervention in the Russian Civil War; and Wells satirised Churchill in more than one novel.) In the Wells literature, by contrast, they are acknowledged to have been personal friends, but there is little suggestion of a significant intellectual relationship. Yet substantial unpublished correspondence in the Wells Papers, read in combination with Churchill’s public statements, indicates that there was one. In 1901, Wells published Anticipations. This was a book of predictions about the future, which called for the establishment of a scientifically organised ‘New Republic’. His publishers sent a copy to Churchill, who sent Wells a very long letter in response. ‘I read everything you write’, he told him and added that there was much in the book with which he agreed. Furthermore, Churchill read Wells’s A Modern Utopia (1905) shortly before making his Glasgow speech of October 1906 – a speech that is generally seen as representing a seminal shift towards state intervention in Churchill’s thinking. ‘Especially did I admire the skill and courage with which the questions of marriage & population were discussed’, Churchill told Wells. He also lifted several phrases from the book almost directly into his speech, for example his comment that ‘the State should increasingly assume the position of the reserve employer of labour.’ After that, the men stayed in touch, with some breaks (and the occasional public spat notwithstanding) until Wells’s death in 1946. The proposed paper will tell the story of their personal and intellectual relationship in full for the first time. It will argue that Wells’s work was a crucial, and hitherto unsuspected, influence on Churchill’s political thought.

Rebecca Borden, University of Maryland

“*And now you expect me to tell of Germans*”: The Importance of Firsthand Accounts of War in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*

*Mr. Britling Sees It Through* has not received significant attention by scholars interested in the literary impact of the First World War despite the fact that it was popular with audiences across the reading public and ran to thirteen editions before the end of 1916. As part of a larger project on changes in the way British home front audiences received and evaluated narratives of combat during the First World War, I am interested in the way *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* mirrors an increasing preference for firsthand accounts in the depiction of combat that occurred across both literary and nonliterary genres during the war and has proven an enduring change in the literary expression of modern warfare. Diminished by this shift are official or state-sponsored sources of information, most prominently the press. The war first comes to Matching’s Easy through the newspaper. However, the logic of the novel demands increasingly personal connections to determine the veracity of information about the war. Information is literally carried across the Channel by Belgian refugees, Mr. Direck, and Teddy, and comes to Matching’s Easy in the letters of its residents now at war. Wells’s assessment of the changed hierarchy of information is further demonstrated as Mr. Britling’s own writing moves from pamphlets published for the newspaper audience to essays left unpublished or partially written. The denouement of the novel comes in the form of a private letter, written by Mr. Britling as a grieving father for the grieving parents of a German soldier once loved by the Britlings. It is important to place *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* in the context of this change in narrative authority in order to fully understand how such a change came about, and to recognize the similarity between popular novels and the more extensively examined genres of postwar writing, including war memoirs and autobiographical novels, which were increasingly dominated by firsthand narratives of combat experience.

Rebecca Borden is currently working on a PhD at Maryland University, with a focus on first hand accounts of combat experiences. She holds a BA in History from Yale University and an MA in English from Middlebury College.

Sylvia Pamboukian, Robert Morris University

Without Reservations: Wells’s Time Travel in Context

As critics such as Gillian Beer have noted, mid-Victorian, realist novels commonly employ evolutionary concepts, such as competition and inheritance. In doing so, these novels deploy the epistemological power of science to rationalize cultural divisions between rich and poor, domestic and foreign, male and female. How do late Victorian texts deploy evolutionary language? Do these texts alter or destabilize earlier binaries? More importantly, how does the shift from realism to romance reflect changes in the epistemological status of sciences such as evolution in late Victorian culture?

This paper will explore evolutionary language in late Victorian romance by examining the emergence of a new literary trope most famously exhibited by H.G. Wells, the “time travel narrative.” Romance texts employ time travel in order to juxtapose distinct moments in evolution, including historical, pre-historical, and geological development. Unlike earlier fiction, which relied upon evolutionary language to reinforce current attitudes, Wells’s time travel narrative allows romance to escape the current moment. Such an escape not only offers new narrative possibilities, but its vast historical sweep highlights the relative instability of any single cultural formation over time. However, such activity also problematizes science itself. If knowledge is culturally based and therefore unstable, Well’s science is also a cultural formation that is historically bound and contingent.

While there are many late Victorian time travel narratives, including *After London, The Coming Race, News from Nowhere, The Time Machine, The Wonderful Visit* and *The British Barbarians*, this paper will focus on those that, like *The Time Machine*, openly employ time travel to
attack rigid social hierarchies formerly rationalized by evolutionary language. These texts suggest a radically different view of science by recognizing the binaries that underpin science’s epistemological authority in our culture: advanced and primitive, familiar and strange, superstitious and scientific. Therefore, they offer a glimpse into the complex and dynamic relationship between science and culture during the late Victorian period.

Sylvia Pomboukian holds a PhD in English and Victorian studies from Indiana University. She has presented several conference papers, has published articles, and is currently working on a book on Doctors in Nineteenth-Century literature. Sylvia is employed at Robert Morris University.

Halszka Leneń, Olsztyn University, Poland

“As if the Real Was a Mere Veil to the Fantastic”: The Subversive Dynamics of the Fantastic in H. G. Wells’s Short Stories

This paper proposes to look into the use of the fantastic element as a generator of multiple literary tensions in H. G. Wells’s short stories. We shall consider how the motifs of fantastic intrusion or confrontation in these texts are reflected on their compositional level and to what artistic ends they are used.

The presented analysis demonstrates that the use of fantastic device results in stylistic tensions, that it works through juxtaposition of points of view, and that it dynamises the structure of the fictional world by highlighting its artistic patterning. The paper makes references to some widely observed phenomena in Wells’s short story criticism, like the figure of “the little man” and the structure based on opposition. In addition to its tensional nature, the Wellsian fantastic also turns out to be self-reflexive in nature. The study leads to the conclusion that the fantastic is employed in Wells’s short stories not only as a suspense-bearing plot element but also as a potent literary device which serves genre re-dynamisation of fiction.

The complex compositional strategies, employed by Wells in his apparently playful shaping of the fantastic, reveal a constant focus on artistic effect in these short stories. The fantastic element is exploited by Wells as a generator of various literary tensions, including the supra-generic tension between mimetic and fantastic fiction. In all these techniques, Wells utilizes the property of literature defined by Yury Tynanov in “The Literary Fact”, namely that “literature is a dynamic speech construction”. Wells’s use of the fantastic serves as a vehicle of this typically literary “need for ceaseless dynamism”.

Halszka Leneń works in the Humanities Department of Warmia and Mazury University in Olsztyn, Poland, where she teaches British literature and Practical English. She graduated from the University of Gdansk in 1996. Her MA thesis on Thomas Hardy was supervised by Prof David Malcolm, PhD. Halszka is preparing a PhD dissertation on H. G. Wells’s use of artistic structures in his short stories. She presented papers at English Literature Conferences in Poland and has published several reviewed articles in various recognised Polish publications.

Evan Roberts, University of Swansea

Science, Power and H. G. Wells’ Monstrous Futures

This paper is entitled ‘Science, Power, and H. G. Wells’ Monstrous Futures’. In it, I will show how monstrous prophetic spectres of warfare and revolution haunted the imagination of the imperial British fin de siècle, adding new scientific dimensions of fear to an already over-determined literary symbolism of monstrous historical change. For while Wells’s scientific romances drew upon this widespread dread that the steadily-encroaching future would herald an apocalyptic loss of bourgeois power, his greatest contributions to this literature lay in his powerful usage of contemporary science, especially evolutionary theory. All this would be epitomised in the recurring Wellsian idea of an essentially amoral, endlessly changing natural world remaining indifferent, if not actively hostile, to human dreams of dominion over it. When considered in this savage futuristic guise, moreover, history itself appears to be fundamentally inhuman in its chaotic, uncontrollable reactions to scientific attempts
to control and exploit such power. In turn, I contend that bourgeoise culture also feared historical change as threatening the power of imperial capitalism, and that, in Wells, scientific power appears simultaneously as both a potential saviour and destroyer. Through analysing The War of the Worlds, for example, I shall examine how these fin-de-siècle concerns anticipate the future scientific horrors of the First World War, especially since both Martian and British weaponry alike appear monstrous in Wells’s text. I shall then show how The Time Machine first shows human history in its death-throes, before showing the increasingly monstrous results of a relentless post-human evolutionary process. Finally, I shall conclude with the monstrous scientific outcasts of The Island of Doctor Moreau and the Invisible Man, who personify how fin-de-siècle science had become an engine of historical change to an unprecedented degree, being both the bedrock of Britain’s imperial power and a potential tool of its downfall.

Evan David Roberts is completing his PhD on ‘History, Power and Monstrosity from Shakespeare to the Fin de Siècle’ at the University of Wales, Swansea, and trying to find future academic work. He also achieved an MA in English and a First Class BA in English and History at Swansea, as well as presenting papers at several other international academic conferences. As well as H. G. Wells, his research interests include Shakespeare, Romanticism (especially Keats and Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein), fin-de-siècle adventure fiction, Oscar Wilde, and science fiction in general, especially comic books (e.g. Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman), and Doctor Who.

Dr Simon James, University of Durham

H. G. Wells, Art and the End of Culture

H. G. Wells’s view of the artist is one that alters substantially in the course of his writing career. He claimed that, ‘one could not be in a room with [Henry James] for ten minutes without realising the importance he attached to the dignity of this art of his. But I was disposed to regard a novel as about as much an art form as a marketplace or a boulevard. You went by it on your various occasions.’ Wells’s desire to make art instrumental rather than autonomous attempted to recast the role of the writer and of literary creativity in the face of, as he saw it, impending social calamity. ‘Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe,’ he wrote in 1920’s The Outline of History. The threat of catastrophe increasingly drove Wells towards the role of prophet and public intellectual. As the professedly detached work of his modernist contemporaries turned further inward, defining and exploring subjectivity and representing individual consciousness, Wells’s scope broadened, to the utopian reconstruction of a World State (with arguably harmful consequences for the literary merit of much of his later output). For Wells, art must be directed towards the establishment of a better world or it has no value; yet the new world he envisages would no longer have need of this kind of art at all. Wells, like Plato, ultimately banishes poets from his utopia. This paper will consider Wells’s representation of high culture and the artist from the ‘wilderness of rotting paper’ in The Time Machine to the In the Days of the Comet’s Beltane bonfire of the world’s libraries through Boon and the dispute with James, to his collaborations on The Outline of History.

Dr Simon J. James is Senior Lecturer in Victorian Literature at Durham University. He is the author of Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing (Anthem, 2003) and of articles on Gissing, Charles Dickens and H. G. Wells. He has edited four Wells novels for Penguin Classics, and is currently writing a study of Wells and high culture.

Emily Alder, Napier University

Social structures and natural landscapes in H. G. Wells and William Hope Hodgson

William Hope Hodgson, a relatively little known writer of Gothic fantasy and scientific romance in the early 1900s, was strongly influenced by H. G. Wells, especially by The Time Machine. Hodgson and Wells were members of the Society of Authors at the same time and it has been claimed that they met and corresponded. However, we know that Hodgson read the work of Wells, and his debt to Wells is revealed in some of their shared thematic preoccupations. In particular, both authors question the place of the human race in the future of our planet.
This paper will examine, in the work of Wells and Hodgson, humanity’s struggle to create a lasting civilisation in defiance of natural biological and geological forces. In utopian and dystopian tales about the future, structures of civilisation often take the form of a city or building, both providing a refuge from the hostile outside world and asserting humanity’s domination over the natural environment. In Wells’s novels *The Time Machine* and *When the Sleeper Wakes*, and Hodgson’s novel *The Night Land* (published 1912), humanity’s continual battle to subjugate nature is played out through the creation and downfall of architectural structures. These structures contain social order which is opposed to chaotic nature, representing humanity’s futile or partially successful attempts to forge a future and purpose for itself against inexorable and indifferent natural forces.

This paper will attempt to locate these three novels within the context of the *fin-de-siècle* in which they were conceived and written. It will argue that, through the juxtaposition of orderly social and architectural structures and the wildness of the natural landscape, these novels reflect cultural anxieties such as social and biological evolution, degeneration, the heat death of the sun, and uncertainty over humanity’s place in the universe. Both authors use buildings and social organisation to explore how humanity may combat the dangers facing them and to symbolise humanity’s fate.

In *Sleeper* and *The Time Machine*, Wells offers a future in which botanical, geological, and evolutionary forces combine to advance humanity’s destruction, in contrast to the organic harmony with nature envisioned by writers such as W. H. Hudson and William Morris. However, while Hodgson acknowledges the eventual prevalence of natural forces that Wells saw as imminent, his optimism enables him to suggest a future that runs somewhere between the futility of Wells’s apocalyptic vision and the dream-like harmony of pastoral utopia.

Emily Alder is a PhD student in the School of Creative Industries at Napier University, Edinburgh. She is being supervised by Dr Linda Dryden and Professor Alistair McCleery. Emily graduated in 1999 with a BA (Hons) in English Literature from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and has worked at Napier as an administrator since 2001. She began her PhD began in 2003 on a part-time basis, with an estimated completion date of June 2008. The focus of Emily’s thesis is early twentieth century writer of horror and fantasy fiction William Hope Hodgson (1887 – 1918), looking at his place in the Gothic tradition and in the development of science-fiction, including examination of the influence of H G Wells on his writing.

Andrew Shail, St Anne’s College, Oxford

**Wells, Cinema and the Nervous Body**

Wells’s short stories ‘The Plattner Story’ (April 1896), ‘The Crystal Egg’ (May 1897), ‘The Stolen Body’ (Nov 1898) and ‘The New Accelerator’ (Dec 1901) all bear the imprint of the arrival of cinema (in the UK from Feb 1896) in its various discursive incarnations, and this paper will situate ‘The New Accelerator’ as a product of the imaginative possibilities precipitated by both the chronophotography of Etienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge and the cinematograph. Under the clear influence of chronophotography’s revelation of previously unseen realities, Wells presents the speed of the ‘accelerated’ protagonists as an experience of Folkestone and its inhabitants as *slowed down*, Gibberne and the narrator perceiving time from the point of view of the spectator of instantaneous photography technologies rather than as participants in it.

Nonetheless, this story revisits chronophotography in the light of cinema’s radical new epistemology of time. Experienced no longer as the ability to vary the speed of a time record but as the record of a duration, ‘instantaneous’ photography as it was figured by cinema in 1901 was not a series of stills that proved that movement was constituted of increments but a series of movements too fast even for ‘instantaneous’ 1/25000 of a second exposures to break down. So it is with Wells – Gibberne and the narrator are privy not to chronophotography’s stopped moment, but to the understanding of total continuity of movement precipitated by cinema, perceiving not increments but tiny portions of movement.

In spite of cinema’s sheer formal indexicality, I will argue, Wells’s use of nerve discourse in explaining the invention of the ‘Nervous Accelerator’, his use of ideas of nervous stimulation and exhaustion, and his narrator’s contemplation of “the subtle and complex jungle of riddles that centres about the ganglion cell and the axis fibre”, encode the flip side of the cinematic image in its earliest years, documenting the uncanny sense of movement attending the cinematic body, a body described throughout the period of early cinema as a nervous automaton. My paper will situate Wells’s account of nerve force as an implicit compensation for the neurasthenia of the cinematic body.
Andrew Shail is News International Research Fellow in Film at St Anne’s College, Oxford University. He has published on the cinematic body in *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded* (2005), male feminism in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (2004), the waxwork shop of horrors in *Multimedia Histories* (2006), the introduction of the term ‘fan’ into British English in 1911, *Orlando* and cinema, and the film ‘vamp’ in *Menstruation: A Cultural History* (Palgrave, 2005), which he also co-edited. He is working on two monographs, one of the influence of cinema on modernism and one on the origins of the modern super hero, and current articles cover intermediality in DVD practice, early British film stars and the earliest theories of adaptation. He is co-editing a collection on the cinematograph in fiction 1895-1915 with Stephen Bottomore.