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Katie Stone

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Introduction

In *The Time Machine* (1895), when H. G. Wells' unnamed Time Traveller first steps into the London of 802,701 AD he is greeted by the citizens of the future. The first of these is described as "a slight creature – perhaps four feet high," who is swiftly joined by a group of other "pretty little people," who conduct themselves with "a graceful gentleness, a certain child-like ease" (25, 26, 26). This "child-likeness" is not unusual in this new age. The Eloi described here are not the only occupants of the city they inhabit, and the Morlocks – who live beneath the surface and prey on the Eloi during the night – are a similarly "little people" (26). Indeed, the first Morlock whom the Traveller sees is described as "a queer little ape-like figure" (45). The diminutive stature and seeming lack of complex language exhibited by these future Londoners quickly leads the Traveller to conclude that he is the lone adult occupying this period of history.

In this article I examine the role played by the figure of the child in this influential, proto-science-fictional text. Whether or not one is prepared to argue, as Darko Suvin does in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), that all subsequent Science Fiction (SF) should be considered as having "sprung from" *The Time Machine*, this is undoubtedly a text which does grapple with "the conflicting interpretations of temporality" that Elana Gomel, in "Shapes of the Past and the Future: Darwin and the Narratology of Time Travel" (2009), identifies as a key concern of the genre (Suvin 242; Gomel 336). In Wells' writing competing theories of evolutionary time meet, as linear narratives of teleological development vie with their mirror image: narratives of devolutionary decline. Meanwhile Marxist SF critics, such as Suvin, locate the potential for revolutionary temporal breaks in the text, and all of these disparate temporal models are mediated by the science-fictional device of time travel itself. These conflicting temporalities have been much studied in criticism of the text and it is not my intention in this article to attempt to summarise the interplay between, for example, Gillian Beer's reading of *The Time Machine* as "solar myth" and W. M. S. Russell's analysis of the influence of temporal physics on Wells' writing (219). Rather, this article's focus is specifically on the various temporalities evoked by the figure of the child as it is explored in *The Time Machine*.

To this end, I read the figure of the child as a malleable textual device drawn upon to fulfil a wide variety of literary and political functions. As James R. Kincaid persuasively argues in *Child-Loving* (1992): "What a 'child' is [...] changes to fit different situations and different needs. A child

is not, in itself, anything" (5, original emphasis). And yet, this absence of defined characteristics does not imply that childhood is best understood in universal, or timeless, terms. Indeed, Kincaid suggests that the very act of defining children negatively – by their lack of adult characteristics – is a modern phenomenon, best understood as "an institution that can be traced [not] to some primal 'need' but to specific and fairly recent historical developments" (83). This article will thus examine childhood as both what Claudia Nelson, in *Precocious Children and Childish Adults* (2012), has referred to as an "unstable and anxiety-ridden" category, and a historically situated one (7). More specifically my focus is on the temporality of childhood and how, as Carolyn Steedman argues in *Strange Dislocations* (1998), "the lost realm of the adult's past [...] came to assume the shape of childhood from the end of the eighteenth century onward" (viii). I read this association, of childhood with the past, in the context of the racial politics of evolutionary and imperialist thought at the turn of the century. Nelson has noted that texts written during the Victorian period frequently stress "the childlike nature of adult members of cultures deemed less civilised than Britain's" (4). In such writing childhood evokes a vastly different set of associations than those commonly connected with either the Romantic image of the innocent child – referred to by Richard Locke, in *Critical Children* (2011), as "a static icon in a violently fallen world" – or the later Dickensian waifs which have come to represent Victorian childhood (15). I argue that Wells' "precocious children and childish adults," move between these two shifting models of childhood as the Traveller alternately coos over the "very beautiful and graceful [...] but indescribably frail" (Nelson 1, 25) citizens of the future and adopts the manner of the colonising "white man addressing a Negro," who, as Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) reminds us, "behaves exactly like an adult with a child" (19).

It is my contention that, in Wells' writing, the figure of the child is used to reinforce the linear narratives of biological and cultural progress and decline which frame the Traveller as a representative of "the ripe prime of the human race" (56). The supposed inferiority of the Eloi and the Morlocks, who are continually compared unfavourably to the Traveller, is attributed to their temporal distance from him, which in turn is signified by their child-like stature. Wells' narrative suggests that although modern, white, Western man may have resembled these child-like beings in the dawn of humanity's evolutionary history, and though he may resemble them again in the distant future, he does not resemble them now. In much the same way, the adult Traveller may have been a child, and he may have children in the future but, supposedly, he is not currently child-like. Within this temporal logic – in which childhood is excluded from what is presumed to be the modern day pinnacle of civilisation – identification with the figure of the child becomes a shorthand for temporal otherness. This temporal othering via the figure of the child is symptomatic of an imperialist, white supremacist construction of time. From Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's claim that Africa is "the land of childhood," in *The Philosophy of History* (1837) to cultural anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor's identification of "the savage" as "a representative of the childhood of the human race," in *Primitive Culture* (1871) this temporal weaponisation of childhood is shown to act as a transparently racist, imperialist device (109; 284). As Ziauddin Sardar has argued in her "Foreword to the 2008 Edition" of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*: "Evolution itself," as it is deployed within a colonial framework, "moves from black to white" (xiii).

In a text in which time travel is possible, however, the otherness derived from temporal distance is put under considerable pressure. Moreover, despite the role that childhood plays in reinforcing these linear narratives of imperialist progress, the figure of the child is often evoked at moments of temporal disruption in *The Time Machine* – when that which is deemed primitive, savage or animal is brought into proximity with the modern British gentleman. The Traveller may attempt to use the Eloi and Morlocks' child-like appearance and demeanour as a way to stress his superiority over them, but the memory of his own childhood that they evoke, as well as their role as, as John Huntington in *The Logic of Fantasy* (1982) has put it, "his and our distant grandchildren," undermines the security of the Traveller's supposed distance from them (43). The fact that the past and the future are materially accessible to inhabitants of the present in Wells' text only exacerbates this temporal instability. This is made evident in the scene in which the Traveller first introduces the theoretical innovation upon which his time machine relies: that "Time is really only a fourth dimension of Space" (9). Here, the Traveller draws explicitly on the figure of the child, stating:

Here is a portrait of a man at eight years old, another at fifteen, another at seventeen, another at twenty-three, and so on. All these are evidently sections, as it were, Three-Dimensional representations of his Four-Dimensioned being, which is a fixed and unalterable thing. (8-9)

In this formulation time travel is shown to be imbricated in the "inherently ambiguous relationship between adults and children," evident throughout *The Time Machine* (Huntington 44). Childhood and adulthood are represented as inseparable categories, compressed into the figure of the "man at eight years old" (8). In this configuration childhood cannot be kept at a secure temporal distance from adulthood. Rather, child and adult are considered to be continuous with one another, with the possibility of time travel suggesting potential slippages between these two intermingling states. Far from aligning with the "static, highly idealised picture of childhood as a time of primitive simplicity", which Marah Gubar, in *Artful Dodgers* (2009) has associated with constructions of childhood in earlier Victorian thought, the concept of childhood evoked here is one which makes time travel thinkable (vii). This is a childhood which resists any dismissive evocation of either the static or the 'primitive' past. It exists within, and comprises the temporal security of, the modern, white gentleman whom Wells describes and towards whom his narrative is oriented.

The "man at eight years old," cannot, then, be easily incorporated into a linear understanding of historical time as either progress or decline (8). Rather, this image of childhood and adulthood compressed into one another embodies "the mutual presence of the past and future in each other," which Paul Knight and Neville and Stephen Plaice, in their "Translator's Introduction" (1995) to Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (1954-59), have argued lies at the heart of Bloch's utopian philosophy (Plaice et al. xxxi). In Bloch's thought – which profoundly influenced Suvin's definition of SF – temporal compression is central to the disruption of "the banal, automatic belief in progress as such" which characterises capitalist, and I would add imperialist and much evolutionary, thought (199). By acting as a figure who compresses the past and the future into one another, the

child makes travel between them seem possible, thus disrupting the linear temporality of imperial capital. The final section of this article consists of a Blochian reading of Wells' text in which I argue that the imperialist narratives of development which the figure of the child appears to reinforce are in fact incommensurate with the non-linear temporalities that the many child-like figures of *The Time Machine* evoke. Further, I suggest that the ties between the science-fictional imagination and the child felt in Wells' writing offer ways not just of representing, but of actively engaging with, these non-linear, utopian temporalities. Childlikeness in Wells' writing is not merely a descriptor of the occupants of the distant future, themselves so evocative of the distant past. It is a slippery temporal category which accompanies the Traveller on his journeys through the equally slippery temporal paths which make up evolutionary history.

Childhood and "Primitive Simplicity"

Before this utopian potential can be excavated, however, the common association drawn between childhood and "primitive simplicity," in both literary and scientific writing of the period, must be addressed (Gubar vii). The colonialist implications of this association can be observed, both in texts which work to define childhood – as in Havelock Ellis' *The Criminal* (1890), where he writes that "the child is naturally, by his organisation, nearer to the animal, to the savage, to the criminal, than the adult" – and in those which take colonialism explicitly as their subject (212). For example, as Richard Brantlinger, in *Rule of Darkness* (1988), has noted, Anthony Trollope continually likened "colonies settled by British immigrants," to "children whom the parent country should expect one day to grow up" (5). The fact that this association – drawn between children and colonised peoples – can be found in texts whose register, subject, and provenance are so various, suggests that it is the linear construction of historical time under which they are operating, rather than the idiosyncrasies of any one discipline, which engenders the connection. This is the construction of time which SF has inherited. As John Rieder, in *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008) has argued, "early science fiction lives and breathes in the atmosphere of colonial history and its discourses," and this history is shown to be one in which childhood is weaponised (3). For a text such as *The Time Machine*, which is so embroiled with the "evolutionary theory" that Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon, in "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms" (2012), has argued is "profoundly intertwined with colonial ideology," the infantilisation of colonised peoples is all the more relevant (2). Indeed, prominent evolutionary biologist T. H. Huxley, who taught Wells at the Normal School of Science, engaged in precisely this kind of narrative: claiming, in "Evolution and Ethics" (1893), that "we," meaning white, Western people, "have long since emerged from the heroic childhood of our race," and thus must endeavour to "be something better than a brutal savage" (86, 82). These, then, are the "temporal logics," which, in "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" (2003), Kodwo Eshun argues, have "condemned black subjects to prehistory," by connecting them with childhood (297).

In these linear narratives – of either progress or decline – the figure of the child is used as a marker of inferiority and serves to bolster the dominance of that which is considered to be civilised. This weaponisation of childhood is evident in *The Time Machine*, where Wells relies on the figure of the child to maintain the Traveller's position as the embodiment of "the ripe prime

of the human race" (56). For example, the Traveller describes himself as "a schoolmaster amongst children" when surrounded by the Eloi and – in a more overt reference to childhood as a marker of devolutionary decline – he theorises that "the childish simplicity" exhibited by the Eloi is a sign that they are actively "sliding down" the evolutionary ladder (29, 55). Here, the Traveller is implicated in precisely the kind of "racial chauvinism" which Kirby Farrell, in "Wells and Neoteny" (2001), has argued dominated evolutionary thinkers' conceptualisation of childhood at the turn of the century (69). Farrell notes that this kind of chauvinism frequently involved the consignment of supposedly less developed nations to the past, where they were connected, "both with children and with the apes popularly imagined to be our ancestors" (69). By describing the Morlocks as "queer little ape-like" figures, and dismissing the Eloi as "being on the intellectual level of one of our five-year-old children," Wells reinforces this connection – using multiple identifiers to signify the 'primitive' past and in so doing temporally othering colonised peoples, humanity's evolutionary ancestors and children simultaneously (45, 27).

This weaponisation of childhood as a marker of the regrettable past, or in Wells' case the regrettable future, is discussed by Sally Shuttleworth in *The Mind of the Child* (2010), her study of the psychology of childhood in nineteenth century Britain. Here, Shuttleworth notes that the child is "a figure who is by turns animal, savage, or female" (4). However, she goes on to stress the difference between the position of the child and that of these analogously connected temporal others. As she points out, the child "is located not in the distant colonies, nor in the mists of evolutionary time, but at the very centre of English domestic life" (4). This proximity to white, Western masculinity grants childhood a unique position from which to challenge the temporal security which an imperialist ideology assures to the British gentleman. Within the various imperialist understandings of historical time which evoke "primitive simplicity" as a marker of temporal otherness the coloniser is presumed to be immune from any temporal fluctuations. However, childhood makes thinkable a variety of nonlinear models of time in which white, Western masculinity is not granted a secure temporal footing from which to distort the "chronopolitical terrain," inhabited by colonised peoples (Eshun 289). As the image of the "man at eight years old" suggests, in *The Time Machine* childhood and adulthood – and thus the 'primitive' past and 'civilised' present – are inextricably linked (8).

Childish Adults

The proximity between childhood and adulthood in Wells' writing rests, primarily, upon the performative nature of both positions. Although the Traveller's description of himself as a "schoolmaster" surrounded by the child-like Eloi is clearly designed to emphasise his physical and mental superiority when compared to them, it comes at a point in the narrative when he is attempting, unsuccessfully, to learn their language (29). In reality, therefore, it is he who is playing the role of the child and they that of his unwilling teachers. Similarly, although he insists that the Eloi were "like children," in that upon meeting him, "they would soon stop examining [him] and wander away after some other toy," he is immediately forced to admit that "it [was] odd, too, how speedily [he] came to disregard these little people" (30). Far from providing a simple microcosm of evolutionary or historical time – where children are considered to be less evolved, or civilised than

adults – child and adult are thus framed as shifting positions attached to specific behaviours. Indeed, when he cannot find his Time Machine, the Traveller describes himself as, “bawling like an angry child” (36). *The Time Machine* can thus be usefully read in connection with what Gubar has identified as the tendency, among authors of children’s literature working during the fin de siècle, to view “‘child’ and ‘adult,’” less as “binding biological categories and more [as] parts open to players of all ages” (203). Wells’ friendship with Edith Nesbit – whose children’s book *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) documents the travels through time of a group of children who meet a child named Wells in the future – and his description of himself as a “second Barrie,” are here endowed with greater significance (427). If childhood cannot be neatly identified with “a time of primitive simplicity” – as Gubar convincingly argues it cannot be in the work of Golden Age children’s writers such as Nesbit and J. M. Barrie – it follows that the stability of “primitive simplicity” itself, as a marker of temporal otherness, is undermined when it is connected to childhood (vii). If a white, Western, adult man can be childish, what other supposedly primitive, supposedly simple identifiers might he be associated with?

The Eloi and Morlocks’ perceived child-likeness is thus reframed. Although the differences within their biology and culture are still attributed to their temporal distance from contemporary Western society, their likeness to children brings them into close proximity with the representative of that society: the Traveller. The figure of the child here acts as a means to denaturalise the attitude of adult superiority which the Traveller assumes in relation to these small citizens of the future. Not only is he himself shown to be child-like, but the child-likeness of the Eloi and Morlocks is revealed to be a feature, not of their fixed temporal positioning, but rather of his active attempts to cultivate their ignorance. This tendency is nowhere more evident than in the Traveller’s attitude to Weena, the only named Eloi who oscillates in his perception between the position of “a little woman” and that of a figure “exactly like a child” (42, 43). When Weena is weeping out of fear of the Morlocks, the Traveller states:

They were the only tears, except my own, I ever saw in the Golden Age. When I saw them I ceased abruptly to trouble about the Morlocks, and was only concerned in banishing these signs of her human inheritance from Weena’s eyes. And very soon she was smiling and clapping her hands, while I solemnly burned a match. (49)

Huntington notes that it is “concern for Weena’s innocence” which motivates the Traveller here (49). The possibility of learning from Weena, and thus casting her as his teacher, is stifled, not by any inherent incapacity on Weena’s part – she is, after all, exhibiting “signs of her human inheritance” – but by the Traveller’s own adherence to a static model of childhood (49). While he is able to travel through time he thinks of both the Eloi and the Morlocks as existing in a state of “languor and decay” – fixed in time and incapable of transformation (34). And yet, the Traveller’s quickness to extinguish any signs of learning, or teaching, on Weena’s part suggests the instability of her supposed temporal fixity. The reciprocal exchange between this child of the future and modern Man, which does not but

could have occurred here, acts as an example of what Bloch, in *Heritage of Our Times* (1962) called the “gold-bearing rubble” of a text which is otherwise dominated by the decidedly anti-utopian ideologies of imperialism and evolutionary racism (116). To insist on the utopian potential of Wells’ explorations of childhood is thus, as Caroline Edwards has argued in “Unearthing the ‘gold-bearing rubble’” (2013), a way of honouring Bloch’s “unorthodox commitment to unearthing utopian traces within each literary period and form, no matter how seemingly retrogressive” (190).

Childhood and Evolution

This, potentially utopian, temporal instability need not stand in opposition to Wells’ investment in evolutionary biology. While Gubar sets the idea of child and adult being “parts open to players of all ages,” against the notion that they are “binding biological categories” (203), the highly contested field of late nineteenth century evolutionary biology tended to produce categories which were far from binding (230). As Wells wrote in “Zoological Retrogression” (1891): “There is a good deal to be found in the work of biologists quite inharmonious with such phrases as ‘the progress of the ages’” (98). This can be seen, for example, in Huxley’s “Prolegomena” (1894) in which he discusses devolutionary decline, that is “progress from a condition of relative complexity to one of relative uniformity”: a formulation which, as Suvin argues, was highly influential on Wells’ writing (287). While this theory may seem to support an inverted but nevertheless straightforwardly Darwinian understanding of evolution as predicated on genetic inheritance alone, in Huxley’s essay “Evolution and Ethics” (1893) he suggests that this devolutionary progress is open to manipulation. In a final address to his audience he states: “It remains to us to throw aside the youthful overconfidence and the no less youthful discouragement of nonage. We are grown men, and must play the man” (86). Childhood is certainly used as a marker of inferiority here, and Huxley clearly wants to consign it to the prehistoric status of “nonage” (86). However, he sees this consignment as a task which “remains to us” – one which his readers need to individually engage in, rather than one which is built into their biologically determined position in evolutionary time (86).

While this tendency has often been deployed in service to a eugenicist programme of supposed racial improvement – including in Wells’ own writing, as the work of John S. Partington suggests – I argue that this deployment is not inherent to an understanding of the child as a malleable figure. While the adaptability of the child’s position is open to such white supremacist manipulations, it also works to destabilise the hierarchies upon which those manipulations are predicated. This is evident, for example, in Wells’ handling of the concept of neoteny, that is “the evolutionary process in which the regulatory system retards ancestral developmental rates,” so that “adult animals [...] retain the increased adaptive flexibility of the young” (Farrell 66). In his study of neoteny in Wells’ writing Farrell argues that “Wells periodically rebelled against ‘adult’ fixity all his life” (72). Thus, when the Eloi exhibit “youthful behaviors such as curiosity,” this can be usefully read as a sign, not of their devolved nature, but rather of their ability to defy linear logics of either maturation or decline by embracing the malleability of childhood (67). As is the case with the utopian peoples whom Wells was to describe in *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), “the retention of immature characteristics,” exhibited by the Eloi, the Morlocks and the Traveller himself, mark them as figures capable of

transformation (429). What form this transformation will take remains an open question, but it is clear here that childhood does not function as a static marker of a fixed evolutionary past. The figure of the child must thus be understood, not as an external category applied to the otherwise fixed timeline of evolution, but rather as a central point of contention within that timeline – one which is evoked when the question of learning, development, or active transformation is raised.

This disruption of temporal fixity, accessed via the figure of the child, can be usefully connected to the utopian aspects of Wells' writing. As Farrell has noted, there is a connection here to Wells' later utopian works. However, the temporality of childhood delineated in these various evolutionary texts can also read in relation to Bloch's "understanding of a non-contemporaneous present" (Edwards 183). This is evident, for example, in Wells' handling of the image of the embryo. In a letter to Henry James in 1913, Wells wrote:

My art is abortion - on the shelves of my study stand a little vaingloriously - thirty-odd premature births. Many retain their gill slits. The most finished have hare lips, cleft palates, open crania. These are my children! (*Henry James* 176)

While his reference to prematurity and abortion is clearly designed to set his work against the perceived maturity of James' literary output, Wells' comment need not only be read as a further reinforcement of the linear narratives of maturation which underpin imperialist models of progress. For one thing, the "gill slits" of these literary children suggest a connection to the embryological studies of Ernst Haeckel, detailed in *The History of Creation* (1884), where he observed that human embryos are "scarcely distinguishable from the tailed embryos of dogs" (176; 295). Another evolutionary thinker who found that the figure of the child disrupted his understanding of linear development, Haeckel theorised that "the history of individual development, or Ontogeny, is a short and quick recapitulation of palæontological development, or Phylogeny" (10). Here, evolutionary development is framed, not as linear transformation moving progressively from the past towards the future, but rather as an iterative process which is begun again, as it were, with each individual's birth. In this light, Wells' description of his literary works as embryos suggests, not their inherent inferiority, but rather their potential for future growth. Moreover, they, like the "man at eight years old," are granted the capacity to collapse the "immense spaces of time," which usually separate one stage of evolution from the next (8; Haeckel 310). Coupled with the influence of neoteny on Wells' writing, and his representation of childhood as performative, this collapsed, iterative, non-linear time works to encourage agential transformation, while threatening the supposed temporal fixity of the 'civilised' adult.

The specifically utopian character of this particular mode of non-linear time is evident when read alongside Bloch's comparable depiction of embryonic figures. In an essay on the topic of country fairs, Bloch discusses Gottfried Keller's *Dream Book* (1848). In this novel, Keller describes a country fair which features a display of "the shapes of the evolving human being from the smallest embryo to the fully developed foetus" (quoted in Bloch "Better Castles" 182). Despite the rather

ghoulish nature of this display, Keller claims that “the little fellows actually represented the hopeful youth of the assembly” – a sentiment reiterated by Bloch who argues that “there is a piece of frontier here, set at reduced admission, but with preserved meanings, with strange-utopian meanings” (182). Here, the embryo embodies both the future, in the form of the “frontier,” and the past, with its “preserved meanings” (182). Far from distancing adult from child, past from future, by affixing them to the familiar, linear narrative of development, the embryo, and by extension the child, is thus shown to be a way of conceiving of non-linear temporalities. Nor is this a unique moment in Bloch’s writing in terms of his reliance upon the figure of the child as a significant temporal category. Indeed, his magnum opus, *The Principle of Hope*, (1954-59) ends with a description of utopia, or “real democracy, without depersonalisation and alienation,” as a state “which all men have glimpsed in childhood,” but to which “no one has yet been” (1376). The utopian future, which does not yet exist, is here accessible only to those who engage with the temporal positioning of the child. Again, the idea that the figure of the child could be simply left behind in a fixed past – or used to demonstrate the fixity of the devolved future – is shown to radically oversimplify the play of memory and anticipation which constitute the decidedly non-linear understanding of historical time which childhood, thus explored, evokes.

Colonialism and the Land of Childhood

The temporality of childhood – specifically the compressed time evoked by these embryos – can thus be used to undermine the teleological progress narratives which the figure of the child elsewhere appears to support. As Bloch argues, the child, when viewed through a utopian lens, is able to “find affinities in ancient events, as if they were not ancient at all, but new proclamations” (*The Principle* 121). This is not, however, to say that these progress narratives are not felt in Wells’ writing. For example, in the scene in which the Traveller first addresses his guests upon his return from the future, he invites them to “conceive the tale of London which a negro, fresh from Central Africa, would take back to his tribe” (41). This invitation is clearly meant to create anticipation for his tale of an implied magnificent future. He exclaims: “Think how narrow the gap between a negro and a white man of our own times, and how wide the interval between myself and these of the Golden Age[!]” (41). Here the distance between Africa and Britain is explicitly given in terms of time, with Africa representing the primitive past while the “white man” is compared to the citizen of the future. Moreover, this temporal distancing is further compounded by the fact that the future of 802,701 AD fails to live up to the Traveller’s expectations (41). The Traveller’s momentary identification with this imagined tribesman – in which, as Rieder puts it, Wells invites “the colonizers [to] imagine themselves as the colonized” – is undercut by the citizens of the future, who refuse to fit into his preconceived notion of futurity as an exaggerated version of white, Western modernity (5). As Rieder argues “in his dealings with the Eloi [the Traveller] seems more like a European confronting the enigmatic inhabitants of savage Africa,” than an African tourist in London (87). It is they who are likened to “the animal, to the savage,” while his is the voice of reasoned adulthood – he is considered to be a citizen of the true “Golden Age” (Ellis quoted in Nelson 58; 41).

This understanding of time – in which children, colonised peoples and humanity's evolutionary ancestors are wrongly made analogous – can be traced back, not only through the history of evolutionary thought, but through that of Marxist philosophy. While it is not within the purview of this article to engage in a lengthy analysis of Wells' socialism, it is important to stress that the Marxist models of history which impacted his writing do not necessarily stand in opposition to this linear narrative of imperialist progress. As Robert Young argues: "Marxism's universalising narrative of the unfolding of a rational system of world history is simply a negative form of the history of European imperialism" (33). Thus, while it is certainly true that, as Roger Luckhurst has argued in his 2017 "Introduction" to *The Time Machine*, Wells uses the Eloi to satirise the "privileged progressive world of political radicals," while the Morlocks are used to represent "a literal and metaphorical urban 'underground' of devastating poverty" (xvi, xvii), Wells' class-based critique does not distance these "queer little ape-like figures" from the imperialist racism which can be traced back through Marxist thought to the work of Hegel (45). Charles C. Verharan, in "The New World and the Dreams to Which It May Give Rise" (1997), has argued that Hegel can be understood as the thinker who "articulates [...] most clearly and powerfully" the "insult," that is the imperialist model of history Wells is drawing upon when he uses his imaginary African to symbolise the primitive past. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837), Hegel describes "Africa" as "the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night" (109). Like Wells' Eloi and Morlocks in their state of "languor and decay," Hegel sees "Africans" as being in stasis (34). As he puts it: "As we see them at this day, such have they always been" (116). In this way he marks himself out as what Bloch terms, a "cycle-dialectician of the past or, which amounts to the same thing, of that which is eternally occurring" (*The Principle* 245).

However, as Bloch's analysis implies, this is not the only model of time which Marxist philosophy offers. Indeed, Bloch continually positions this Hegelian understanding of history in opposition to his own child-centric, utopian, non-linear temporalities. For example, in *A Philosophy of the Future* (1963) Bloch critiques "the location to which [...] Hegel assigned the Near-Eastern civilizations" (135). Where Hegel claims that the regions of "India and China," were "immersed in the past," Bloch argues that "their influences were felt quite contemporaneously," and denounces Hegel as a "developmental philosopher[s]" (135). Moreover, in his efforts to combat "the notion of history as a teleological progression," which Susan Buck-Morss, in "Hegel and Haiti" (2000), has ascribed to the "element of racism implicit in official Marxism," Bloch draws on the figure of the child (850). It is insofar as Hegel engages with the utopian potential of youth that Bloch values his conception of historical time. For example, when Hegel writes that "it is [...] not difficult to see that our time is a time of birth and transition to a new period," Bloch notes that "where there is a time of 'birth', there is also the womb of a real Possible from which it springs" (quoted in Bloch *The Principle* 246). Here, then, in Bloch's estimation, Hegel has tapped into "the Front of the world process," where new, utopian futures are "born" (247). It is this child-centric version of "utopian hiddenness which exists in embryo or In-itself, and which bursts through again at every stage of the Hegelian process," that Wells' "premature births" evoke (140; Wells, *Henry James* 176).

This is not to say that the mere mention of childhood in either Hegel's or Wells' writing is inherently utopian. For example, Hegel compares "a baby's first breath," which "after a long period of silent nutrition, breaks the gradualness of merely continuing growth – a qualitative leap – and the baby is now born," to "a flash which all at once erects the structure of the new world" (quoted in Bloch *The Principle* 139). This comparison, wherein history is framed as a series of qualitative leaps, is read by Bloch as a sign of Hegel's position as a "non-philosopher of the future" (245). Bloch writes that "the flash of the new beginning," described here, is "merely" a question of "opening up, where the closedness of what is opening up has long since been decided" (139). Rather than acknowledging the utopian potential of the partially born or unborn child – which in Bloch's writing acts as a reminder of "how much youth there is in man, how much lies in him that is waiting" – Hegel uses the child as a marker of absolute, progressive change from one state to another (195). Here, there is no room for the dialogue between adulthood and childhood which Wells' childish adults exemplify, nor for the mutual coexistence of adult and child within each other, suggested by the image of "the man at eight years old" (8). If such child-centric, non-linear temporalities were, however, taken into account, Hegel's designation of Africa as "the land of childhood" would take on new meaning (109). Rather than proving what Babaca Camara has termed "The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa" (2004), by reinforcing a sense of history as "some steadily-rising mountain-slope," a utopian reading of childhood promotes an understanding of time as "far more like a footway worn by leisurely wanderers in an undulating country" (Camara 82; Wells, "Zoological Retrogression" 93).

From Leisurely Wanderer to Agent of Utopianism

It is important to stress that nonlinear temporality is not in itself a guarantee of either utopian or decolonial potential. For example, when Wells uses the contemporary African traveller as an emblem of the supposedly primitive past the anachronism created is entirely in line with an imperialist project. By compressing past and present together into the person of this imaginary African visitor to London, and then transposing both into the future, Wells aligns himself with the dominant, imperialist strand of evolutionary thought. This compressed time is not that of either Bloch's "future in the past," nor Eshun's "chronopolitical" (*The Principle* 9; 289) Afrofuturist innovations. Rather it is representative of the way in which, as Rieder puts it, "colonialism made space into time" (6). Moreover, these imperialist non-linearities often also draw on the figure of the child. Indeed, the association of the child with colonised peoples, with animals and with humanity's ancestors, is a prime example of this kind of anachronism. As W. B. Drummond elaborates, in his *An Introduction to Child Study* (1907), this was an era in which:

The philologist [...] turns to baby linguistics in the expectation of gaining a better understanding of the origin of human speech. The anthropologist, unable to discover a living representative of primitive man, turns to the child as his nearest representative. The archaeologist finds valuable material in the child's attempts to draw. (4)

Childhood's fluctuating relation to time is not necessarily, then, a sign of utopian potentiality.

And yet, the idea that contemporary adulthood is embroiled in these childish fluctuations does open up the possibility of an active, utopian disruption of the temporality upon which imperialist thought relies. In these various imperial anachronisms the colonising subject remains aloof from the compressions and disfigurations of time. The child, Wells' African traveller, and his child-like citizens of the future may all be forced together into a distorted prehistory, but the white Westerner is presumed to be immune from such fluctuations. However, by filling the future with children; by putting childhood at the centre of his science-fictional reimagination of time as a fourth dimension; by making his Traveller so continually child-like, Wells removes any possibility of secure temporal ground from which to observe these, safely distant, temporal others. Nor does this temporal insecurity stop with the Traveller. In Wells' novella, which is introduced by a frame narrative in which the Traveller recounts his adventures to his guests, those who create and consume science-fictional stories are heavily implicated in the temporal fluctuations provoked by the figure of the child.

This is best illustrated by the Traveller's first meeting with the Eloi, discussed in the introduction to this article. Here, the Traveller attempts to communicate to the Eloi that he has come from the past and, "hesitating for a moment how to express time, [he] pointed to the sun" (26). He then receives an immediate response from one of the "quaintly pretty little figure[s]" around him, who succeeds in "astonish[ing]" him by also pointing to the sun and "imitating the sound of thunder" (26). This leads the Traveller to immediately conclude that this Eloi is "on the intellectual level of one of our five-year-old children," as he believes that he has just been asked whether he "had come from the sun in a thunderstorm[!]" (27). Not only does the Traveller deny the possibility that this Eloi was also using the sun as a marker of time – the very thing which he professed to be trying to communicate – he also dismisses the idea that the Eloi is engaging in a science-fictional enterprise comparable to his own. When confronted with the fantastic nature of reality, in the appearance of a time traveller, this Eloi speculates in an equally fantastic manner as to how such a reality may have come about. This connects him to both Wells and the Traveller, who entrances his friends back in London with various non-realist stories, as remembered by one guest who asks whether the time machine is "a trick – like that ghost you showed us last Christmas" (15). Whether it is more or less 'childish' to ask whether a stranger in your land has travelled through space rather than time is thus beside the point. What is clear is that even when the Traveller makes his way through "the mists of evolutionary time," and arrives in the distant future, the fantastic tales of his London drawing-room are there to greet him, if only he would listen (Shuttleworth 4).

By casting this Eloi as a possible creator of SF, Wells renders viable the suggestion that both he, the Traveller, and the SF reader are just as implicated in the fluctuations of nonlinear time as this child-like citizen of the future. Here the ability to question, and potentially intervene in, the nature of time is shown to be reserved to the Traveller, not because of his superior genetics or his civilised, scientific knowledge, but because he refuses to acknowledge any speculations which do not originate with him. This determined refusal to engage in a meaningful exchange – reminiscent of the Traveller's attempts to stifle Weena's knowledge – denaturalises the temporal security which he believes himself to enjoy. Much like the Traveller's description of the speculations, anticipations, and memories which make up everyday thought as examples of time travel, the Eloi's curiosity

here detaches time travel from the narrative of technological and imperialist progress which has culminated in the invention of the titular time machine. No longer is the manipulation of time the sole preserve of the white, male, Western intellectual when these smaller, quotidian travels through a time whose linearity they actively subvert is taken into account. As the Traveller himself puts it: "We are always getting away from the present moment" (11).

The history of SF criticism is a history of critics attempting to endow the genre with political and literary legitimacy, often via narratives of linear development. However, when, for example, Suvin distinguishes "mature SF" from the "compost heap of juvenile and popular sub-literature," from which the genre has supposedly developed, he fails to account for the kind of utopian time travel which these temporally unstable, child-like figures make thinkable (10, 22). To consign childhood to the regrettable past is not a politically neutral position. Nor is it one which a reading of *The Time Machine* which focuses on the "gold-bearing rubble" beneath the imperialist surface can sustain (*Heritage of Our Times* 116). By bringing together Wells' writing with Blochian philosophy, evolutionary biology, and decolonial critiques of imperialist time I hope to have contributed to the project set out by Eshun "to force together separated systems of knowledge, so as to disabuse apparatuses of knowledge of their innocence" (297). I argue that it is the "man at eight years old" (8) who refuses to be neatly affixed to any given point in time, who makes this process, of the decolonisation of time, thinkable (8).

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BIONOTE

Katie Stone is a PhD student at Birkbeck, University of London, UK. Her thesis explores childhood and utopianism as imagined in Science Fiction. Katie is co-director of the London Science Fiction Research Community and co-editor of a special issue of *Studies in Arts and Humanities Journal* titled "Utopian Acts."