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Creating a binary-free world: H.G. Wells and disability studies

by

Brenda Tyrrell

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Literature)

Program of Study Committee:
Jeremy Withers, Major Professor
Sean Grass
Hector Avalos

The student author and the program of study committee are solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2017

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DEDICATION

A woman does not record her debt to the air she breathes in common with everyone else.
Adapted from Olaf Stapledon's remarks about H.G. Wells

This work is dedicated to my friend and mentor, Jeremy Withers. Truly, these pages would not be what they are without your inexhaustible patience, interminable wisdom, and invaluable guidance through these long and challenging (but often rewarding) months. The simple words "thank you" are not enough; yet, they are all I have. Thank you for introducing me to disability studies and Wells, for tolerating my strong-mindedness, for sharing your unquenchable thirst for knowledge, for kicking me out of the saddle (after giving me the wheels to ride), for making my boots lighter, for not putting me in a box, and for *always* having my back. To borrow your words about Wells, it is difficult to overestimate the influence you have had on me, this current work, and my outlook on many other aspects of life. You have *absolutely* played an integral and influential role in my academic journey thus far. And, although this part of our journey together is nearing an end, I look forward to continuing our friendship for many years. Thank you, Jeremy.

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ABSTRACT

My thesis is positioned at the intersection of H.G. Wells and disability studies and discusses two aspects of Wells's expansive literary career: Wells's progressive approach to disability when compared to other authors of his time and how Wells can, and should, be considered an avatar for current disability studies scholarship. In order to accomplish these tasks, I first consider Wells in his own epoch and how he depicts his disabled characters in three different texts. To aid the understanding of the significance of Wells's work, I discuss the deconstruction method of literary theory, as well as examine the normal/abnormal binary in disability studies, to situate the reader in the work of this thesis.

Next, using two short stories, "The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes" (1895) and "The Country of the Blind (1904, 1939)," I discuss Wells's unusual approach to the vision/blindness binary. Similarly, by exploring the novel *Christina Alberta's Father* (1925), I showcase Wells's disruption of the mental health binary of sane/insane. Added to these analyses is a comparison between Wells and his contemporaries who are writing about the same topics (blindness and mental health) and what Wells does that is distinctly different in terms of depicting disability from these other authors, in order to lay the groundwork for the next step of my work.

The second aspect of this thesis is applying the above findings to the current disability studies tenets to reveal where Wells is, in fact, progressive and even anticipatory, in his characterization of his disability. I posit that, through these texts, Wells subverts and destabilizes all binaries of the chosen disability topics he undertakes and, in the process, disrupts the normal/abnormal binary underlying the tenets of disability studies and that are at the heart of the ongoing resistance to the disability studies movement found yet today.

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Firstly, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Sean Grass, and Dr. Hector Avalos, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this project. Both of you contributed in your own unique way to the work between the acknowledgements and final thoughts of this thesis and it was truly an honor to work with each of you.

In addition, I would also like to thank my friends, colleagues, and the English department faculty and staff for making my time at Iowa State University such a wonderful experience, especially Susan Yager and all of the letter-writing and supportive material (and comradery) she has provided over the last few years. Also, no acknowledgment page would be complete without a big nod to the staff at Café Diem: Val, Irene, Devon, Rose, Mike, and everyone else who supplied me with an unimaginable amount of caffeine in various forms, laughter, and support as I struggled through draft after draft of this current work.

I would also like to thank my mother, Verla. She never doubted me even when I doubted myself. She took care of me when I was sick (and tired), unsure, and frustrated and her pride in my accomplishments is a driving force behind all of my successes.

Lastly, I would like to thank my daughter, Savannah. She has stalwartly stood by my side, listening to every draft with patience and helpful suggestions, despite the many interruptions to her life that pursuing my degree has caused. You are, and will always be, my Sunshine.

INTRODUCTION

I told you so. You damned *fools.*
H.G. Wells, *The War in the Air*, 279.

H.G. Wells was a quibbler. He quibbled with George Bernard Shaw about socialism, with Henry James about art and literature, and with British society in general about their presumptuous entitlement concerning issues such as rampant imperialism, flawed education, and debilitating illness. This proclivity for quarrelling culminated in his 1941 preface to *The War in the Air* (1908) as he speculated, "Is there anything to add to [my earlier 1921] preface now?" His response was characteristically Wellsian: "Nothing except my epitaph. That, when the time comes, will manifestly have to be 'I told you so. You *damned* fools.'"[1] Wells certainly did tell his contemporaries: he told them about the coming transportation, technological, and scientific advancements such as the rising onslaught of the motorcar, the splitting of the atom, and the budding of the eugenics tree, thus beginning his "self-appointed task of educating humanity."[2] Unfortunately, his contemporaries rarely listened.

Within Wells's lifetime, he, and British society in general, experienced change on a massive scale. Two of these changes, the growing professionalization of the medical field and the devastating interruption of the Great War on Europe as a whole, presented Wells with an opportunity to explore the significance of impairment and disease in relationship to broader social issues such as the expanding British empire, an arbitrarily defined citizenship, the germinating catastrophic war, and the shifting disabled "gaze" as a result of this war.[3] Wells is certainly not the only British citizen concerned about these changing conditions. In fact, the term

[1] H.G. Wells, *The War in the Air*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2005), 279.
[2] Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H.G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), 1.
[3] This "disability gaze," as Michael Chemers explains it, is one of the components of the social model of disability. He posits that when the abled gaze upon the disabled, and see them as different, the result is the disabling of what was originally an impairment. Michael Chemers, *Staging Stigma: A Critical Examination of the American Freak Show* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 125.

"Condition of England," coined by Thomas Carlyle in 1839, launched a new genre of novels described as "novels which sought to articulate and interpret in the mode of fiction, the changing nature of English society in an era of economic, political, religious, and philosophical revolution."[4] Furthermore, legislation such as the Poor Laws attempted to "define ability in the wake of industrialization and imperial expansion," the emerging field of eugenics "foment[ing] a new and intense scrutiny of 'fitness' in physical and mental capabilities", and much later, the Mental Health Reform Act after WWI, kept the notions of who is abled and who is not at the center of British civic conversation.[5]

The main goal of my project is to analyze a sampling of Wells's substantial corpus in order to highlight his complicated, at times contradictory, progressive thinking about impairment and disease. Due to the vastness of Wells's work, as well as the extended time in which he wrote, the discussion below will specifically examine blindness in the Victorian era and mental health in the Modernist, post-WWI era. In addition, this thesis will examine how Wells utilizes disability differently from Victorian writers, such as Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, and Modernist authors like Virginia Woolf and Wilfred Owen. An example of this difference, as this thesis recognizes, is Wells's sometimes provocative approach to his disabled characters that challenges the fluid binary of normal and abnormal, bringing to mind some tenets of modern disability studies. That is not to say, however, that Wells maintains this unique stance; therefore, this thesis will also consider the effectiveness of Wells's texts as precursors to the modern disability studies movement, as well as Wells's lack of presence in most critical discussions concerning canonical texts related to disability. Lastly, therefore, this thesis considers Alice

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[4] David Lodge, "*Tono-Bungay* and the Condition of England," in *H.G. Wells: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Bernard Bergonzi (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1976), 113.

[5] Jennifer Esmail and Christopher Keep, "Victorian Disability: Introduction," *Victorian Review* 35, no. 2 (2009): 46. This initial law and its following amendments are addressed thoroughly in Martha Stoddard Holmes's *Fictions of Afflictions: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (108-122).

Hall's argument that "[l]iterary writing has the potential to reach large and diverse populations; it also serves a pedagogic function in the sense that it not only documents but also shapes attitudes towards disability."[6] Dickens, Collins, Woolf, and Owen do indeed shape their respective time periods' views on disability. My thesis argues that Wells's vast opus that spans over three literary eras must, at minimum, be considered for its contributions to the field as well.

The intersection of Wells and disability

In the autumn of 1887, Wells experienced a near-fatal football accident, as he described succinctly, yet poignantly, in a correspondence: "I got smashed at football—inside broken—and my circumstances suddenly changed to a barely furnished bedroom, agonizing pains, life destroying haemorrhage [*sic*]…I am a confirmed invalid for the rest of my life [and] I shan't be glad when it is all over."[7] Despite the matter-of-factness of Wells's words, the constant fear of invalidism and an uncertain future lay over Wells for several years, so much so that he, on his doctor's advice, eventually moved from London (away from the smog) and into Sandgate House, where he fully intended to be "wheeled from room to room in bath-chair."[8] The long-term effects of Wells football accident led to sporadic episodes of disability throughout his lifetime, as David Smith points out in the introduction of Wells's *Correspondences*, stating "He [Wells] was prone to influenza and bronchitis…in his sixties he began to suffer from diabetes."[9] Interestingly, in true Wellsian fashion, he finally became so irritated with the whole dying business, he defied even Death itself, as he described ten years later in his short treatise "How I Died:" "I quite

[6] Alice Hall, *Literature and Disability* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 4.
[7] H.G. Wells, *The Correspondences of H.G. Wells*, ed. David C. Smith (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), vol. 1, 66.
[8] H.G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866)* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), 242-243.
[9] Wells, *Correspondences*, xii.

forgot I was a Doomed Man… 'Oh! Death….He's a bore,' I said."[10] In modern disability vernacular, these bouts of illness embody the concept of temporarily able-bodiedness (TAB), which declares that all of us are vulnerable to becoming disabled at any given moment. Because of his own experiences with TAB, Wells's issues with disability, I would argue, are profoundly personal and thus deeply important to him for it is in these representations that we see his protagonists' darkest moments—as we shall see in the coming chapters—and it is in these moments that we best see the whisper of Wells's own fears about the precariousness of ability.

Representations of disability in literature: where Wells falls

Disability studies spent its beginning years in constant turmoil. Questions such as who defines normality, who qualifies to write as a disability scholar, where disability studies lies in critical discussions, and other crucial decisions were constantly rending the fabric of disability studies. In fact, yet today, it remains unclear whether this unrest has been resolved. For example, highly regarded disability studies scholar Lennard Davis describes such a difference of opinion in *Bending Over Backwards*:

> When I discussed the idea of clouding the issue of disability identity, a prominent disability scholar advised me not to pursue this line of thinking. 'We're not ready to dissolve disability identity. We're just beginning to form it,' [Davis retorts:] If disability studies were to ignore the current intellectual moment and plow ahead using increasingly antiquated models, the very basis for the study of the subject could be harmed by making its premises seem irrelevant, shoddily thought through, and so on.[11]

With this argument, Davis sounds eerily like Wells attempting to bring his contemporaries around to his line of thinking. By this I mean, Wells's ambiguous stance in regards to the concept of normality anticipates a significant concern in current disability studies as well: the

[10] Wells, "How I Died," in *Certain Personal Matters* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), 184.

[11] Lennard Davis, *Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 10.

lack of agreement among even its own scholars on how to approach the study of disability. The point here is not to disparage the scholars and tenets of disability but, instead, to offer this consideration: if the concept of disability is hard to pin down for its own scholars, it is unreasonable to hold the general public accountable for their resistance and misunderstanding towards disability. However, it is also important to note that our modern understandings of the term disability cannot be applied to the epoch Wells is initially writing in.

Esmail and Keep note that "many popular novelists [of the Victorian era] put the personal and social challenges faced by characters with disabilities at the heart of their texts, making the trials of Tiny Tim and Edward Rochester among the best known in the language."[12] Undoubtedly, Dickens's texts offer abundant representations of disabled characters, not only in Tiny Tim but also such characters as Mrs. Clennam (*Little Dorritt*, 1855) and Silas Wegg (*Our Mutual Friend*, 1864). Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), as well as novels like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Wilkie Collins's *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), and R.L. Stephenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) also deal with disability, each in its own way. More insidious references to disabled characters appear in works such as Joseph Conrad's *The Nigger of 'Narcissus'* (1897) and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1897). After the Great War, texts such as Wilfred Owen's WWI poems (published posthumously in 1920), George Bernard Shaw's play *Heartbreak House* (written in 1919, first performed in 1920), and, most recognizably, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *On Being Ill* (1926) began to address the mental health concerns of a generation that had known tragedy on an unprecedented scale.

However, one name that is conspicuously left off the usual roster of authors addressing (dis)ability is Wells. A tangible example of this failure of disability scholars to recognize Wells's

[12] Esmail and Keep, "Victorian Disability," 46.

contributions to the field is Martha Stoddard Holmes's short list of disabled characters in Victorian British literature.[13] Dickens is listed eighteen times, followed closely by Collins at fifteen; Wells is listed once. More recently, David Waterman's work on post-WWI literature mentions Owen, Woolf, and Bernard Shaw; Wells is, again, barely acknowledged despite the fact that one of the chosen texts for my study (*Christina Alberta's Father*) is published within mere months of *Mrs. Dalloway* and addresses the same mental health concerns as Woolf's novel.[14] This lack of representation of Wells's works troubles not only the field of disability studies but also impedes a comprehensive image of disability in Victorian and post-WWI society, especially given Wells's growing public voice during that time.[15] Clearly, there is no lack of scholarship in the particular intersection of disability in Victorian literature, raising the question of what exactly Wells, and this project, can add to this already vast body of scholarship.[16] The answer is twofold. First, Wells brings a unique twist to the representation of disability by including what may initially seem like ill-placed humor and a sense that possibly these characters are not in need of treatment but of acceptance.[17] This different perspective,

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[13] Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 197-99. As Holmes offers with her disclaimer that "(t)his is a far from exhaustive list," I acquiesce that there are many texts that do not receive representation in my short introduction. The work listed for Wells is "The Country of the Blind"; however, Holmes perceives only the villagers, not Nunez, as disabled, which is problematic given Wells's attempt to destabilize normality.

[14] David F. Waterman, *Disordered Bodies and Disrupted Borders: Representations of Resistance in Modern British Literature* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.), 1-34.

[15] Patrick Parrinder sums up Wells's public voice, stating: "By the 1920s, Wells was not only a famous author but a public figure whose name was rarely out of the newspapers." H.G. Wells, *The Country of the Blind and Other Selected Stories*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin Books, 2007), xi-xii.

[16] A cursory list of this type of scholarship include Stoddard Holmes's *Fictions of Afflictions,* Mary Klages's *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America*, Marlene Tromp's *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain*, Meegan Kennedy's *Revising the Clinic: Vision and Representation in Victorian Medical Narrative and the Novel*, and Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Madness and Civilization.*

[17] It is important to note that, despite the popular belief that many disabled characters are represented as greedy and villainous, not all disabled characters during Wells's epoch are wholly negative. A fine example of other authors utilizing a more positive representation of disability can be found in Collins's *Poor Miss Finch* and (later in 1904) Rudyard Kipling's *They*. Both of these so-called impaired characters use their blindness to their advantage in regards to their enhanced sensory perceptions and what advantages these enhanced senses bring to their lives. Wells's own Mr. Preemby (*CAF*) is an example of a more positive view of the mental health spectrum.

along with his deliberate subversion of what his readers consider abnormal and normal, offers a refreshing angle to the current field of disability studies. This is not to say that Wells does not seek out a cause or cure for the disabilities he represents in his works, only that he also often adds the patient-view to the medical model, which may initially seem like a contradictory observation given the previous sentence. However, it is exactly these contradictions that lead to my argument that Wells's stance on disability is ambiguous at best (problematic at worst) but that this fact does not negate his work as unworthy of consideration in the ongoing conversation between disability and literature.[18]

Exploding the Binary

In order to support my claim that Wells was doing something different and unique with his texts, a discussion about binaries themselves is required. For this conversation, we look to Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher credited for the deconstruction model of literary theory that, in essence, challenges all other theories of its time. Notably, this thesis's work is grounded in deconstruction. By this I mean that deconstruction necessitates a double-reading—one to proffer a stable interpretation, the second to challenge that same stability. For instance, on the surface, *CAF* initially appears as a social commentary on mental health after WWI, which it undeniably is. However, a second, closer reading shows Wells's cunning at insisting that his readers ponder the possibility that while Preemby is indeed a unique character is he, in fact, mentally ill? In other words, the stability of the binary between mental health and mental illness is at risk. Robert Dale Parker clarifies further that the purpose of this second reading is that it

[18] Edward Wheatley describes how the medical model "constructs disability as a deficit or a pathology that requires correction or cure." Wheatley, "Medieval Constructions of Blindness in France and England," in *The Disability Studies Reader* 4th edition, ed. Lennard Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 64.

"goes beyond the capacity of the system to confine it to one meaning or set of meanings."[19] In this instance, the binary cannot hold because, as Lennard Davis points out: "[t]he term 'disability' [in this case, mental health], as it is commonly and professionally used, is an absolute category without a level or threshold. One is either disabled or not. One cannot be a little disabled any more than one can be a little pregnant."[20] To clarify, Davis's remarks are directed towards the oft-misunderstood definition of disability as a *stable* category with clear rules on who belongs where and on which side of the (dis)ability dichotomy. With Derrida's deconstruction, the rigidity of this binary topples. We can apply the same concept to the normal and abnormal binary.

If we think about binaries in terms of normality, then there is what may initially present as an inherent tendency by humans to assume that normal is correct and abnormal is not. Or that there is an ideal body to which every other body must be compared. If the Other body fails or "falls away from" this concept of the ideal body, it is considered abnormal—there is no give between the two (very rigid) sides.[21] As Parker points out, to have abnormal, there must be a normal to compare it to and vice versa.[22] However, Derrida troubles this assumption by claiming not only that "[t]here *is* no natural, originary body" but that there is "almost always" an inherent "protection of [the] 'natural' normality of the body" on the part of (normal) humans.[23] The result of this so-called protection, Derrida posits, is that "in the name of this organic and originary naturalness of the body we declare…[a] war against these artificial, pathogenic, and foreign

[19] Robert Dale Parker, *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 89.

[20] Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995), 1.

[21] The prefix ab- is Latin for away, from, or down from. Also, Davis offers a fascinating history on the impetus of the ideal body in his *Enforcing Normalcy*, 24-25.

[22] Parker, *How to Interpret Literature*, 374.

[23] Jacques Derrida, "The Rhetoric of Drugs," in *Points…: interviews*, *1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Pamela Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 244.

aggressions."[24] These aggressions manifest as an abnormality to the "natural" or "ideal" body.[25] Notably, Wells talked back, if you will, to the assumptions that first, there is only one choice on the disability spectrum (abled or disabled) and second, because of this inflexibility, there is only choice to make concerning the Other—i.e. cure (sometimes in the form of annihilation). We witness his deconstruction most conspicuously in "Country"; however, a second reading of most any of Wells's texts affirms that there are hints of this subversion of any and all binaries throughout Wells's corpus.

An overview of the project

The project itself is organized into two chapters focusing on two particular aspects of disability: change in vision and disruption of mental health. Chapter One focuses on the blindness and vision dichotomy, using two of Wells's early short stories: "The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes" (1895) and "The Country of the Blind" (1904, revised 1939).[26] In these stories, Wells distorts vision in a non-traditional way. For instance, in "Davidson's Eyes," the protagonist begins the story as an abled laboratory worker until a lab accident leads to his conditional blindness. The result of this accident puts Davidson in the disabled (i.e. abnormal) position and he remains there throughout the text, or at least until his vision difficulties resolve and his able-bodiedness is re-established. Conversely, in "Country," Wells writes his narrative in a way that causes the reader to question the assignations of who is normal and who is not within the village of the blind. For example, Nunez enters the village as the only sighted occupant and the villagers (and potentially the reader) view him as the disabled one, subverting the assigned

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[24] Derrida, "The Rhetoric of Drugs," 244. Here, Derrida is referring to the introduction of drugs into this originary body; however, I believe, this same belief is applicable to the normal body in comparison to the perceived abnormal body.

[25] Derrida, "The Rhetoric of Drugs," 244. Emphasis mine.

[26] The two dates associated with "The Country of the Blind" will be addressed in the subsequent chapter.

definitions of abled and disabled. The subversion is nearly the opposite of how Wells presents Davidson's situation in the previous story even though both narratives deal with blindness. Wells's further revises the original ending in 1939, with an entirely different outcome. Questions of who qualifies for citizenship and treatment of vision impairment are recurrent themes in these two stories, which opens up the discussion of these same motifs in contemporary disability studies. Notably, Wells ultimately falls into the trap of the relegating his disabled characters to either cure or destruction; however, I argue that this disparagement does not detract from his forward-looking position on disability as it relates to the current tenets employed in disability theory.

Chapter Two works as a chronological bridge, connecting Wells's late-Victorian writing to his more Modernist, post-World War I work. The central text for this chapter is Wells's 1925 *Christina Alberta's Father* (*CAF*), which challenges readers' definition of mental stability, as well as highlighting the significant shift in the way people viewed disability after World War I. For example, physical disability (acceptable wounds) quickly became an honor, a corporeal symbol of national loyalty and service after the war, whereas mental disability (unacceptable wounds) was regarded as a challenge not only on the afflicted's family but also society in general, which raised many new issues. In *CAF*, Wells examines the injustices of both the patient and the family in terms of rights and citizenship, as well as the fallacies of the mental health laws in place at the time of the novel, and the appalling conditions that patients are exposed to during their (often involuntary) stay at the asylums. As with the second chapter, these same injustices remain present at varying degrees in contemporary mental health issues, a fact also discussed in this chapter.

The scope of this project is, most assuredly, daunting. The chosen texts of this study cover three eras (late-Victorian, Edwardian, and Modernism), speaking not only to Wells's long literary career, but also to his unrelenting tenacity, to bring the underbelly of social issues to the surface, even though he falters at times, The success of Wells's determination to be the voice of reason for his contemporaries remains questionable; however, his pioneering contributions to the current struggle in disability to not only build its own canon of literature but also to establish its own identity is undeniable. Of course, he was not alone in writing about disability, as we shall see in the following chapters. However, I argue, many of his contemporaries continued to write within the binary of normal and abnormal. Even when they created more positive disabled characters they Othered those characters, still setting them apart as different from 'us,' the abled. Wells wanted to abolish this binary altogether. Another way to put this is that, ultimately, Wells wanted a disease-free world but when the impossibility of that utopia sinks in, he settled for the hope of creating a world where the binary blurred and melded. This stalwart hope of achieving a world where binaries such as normal and abnormal do not exist shine through his forward-thinking approaches to blindness and mental health. In the end, this thesis hopes that by bringing attention to these approaches in both Wellsian texts and disability scholarship, Wells's attempt, as this introduction's opening reminds us, to tell us all will continue. Now, if we will only pay attention.

CHAPTER 1

THE DISRUPTION OF VISION: FREAK ACCIDENTS AND FUTILE KINGS

That slow nightfall, that slow loss of sight, began when I began to see.
Jorges Luis Borges, "Blindness," 108

The character Medina-saroté emphatically announces at the end of the 1939 version of Wells's "The Country of the Blind" that "it must be very terrible to see."[27] With this statement, she directly addresses the fundamental struggle within the story: lines are drawn between the blind and the sighted, with each side seeing the other as disabled, as the failing part of an otherwise perfect society, as the group that must be oppressed, cured, or destroyed. This chapter discusses what appears to be the rigid binary of blindness and vision, how Wells deconstructs this binary and, in the process, destabilizes what is considered normal and abnormal in terms of sight. Alongside of this discussion, I also consider Wells's work amongst two other notable authors, Wilkie Collins and Rudyard Kipling, and use them to foreground how Wells portrays his disabled characters in a significantly different manner than many of his peers. Both Collins (in 1872) and Kipling (in 1904) address British attitudes towards the blind (and the disabled in general) through their texts and it is to these texts I turn to support my claim that Wells's work does indeed represent something unique and noteworthy. Despite Wells's progressive views, however, he also approaches blindness and, by default, disability in general, with a problematically normative view; therefore, I also explore the possibility that, at least in certain regards, Wells was not necessarily more progressive than a Collins or a Kipling. I end the

[27] H.G. Wells, "The Country of the Blind" (London: Golden Cockerel Press, 1939), 30. As mentioned in the introduction, there are two dates associated with this story, to be explained below. This story will henceforth be identified as "Country." Also note that, unless otherwise indicated, all citations will be from the 1939 version.

chapter by exploring how this fact should, or should not, influence his consideration as an early avatar of disability advocacy.

To support the above stated goals, a brief summary of the adjunct texts for this chapter will be useful. Wilkie Collins's *Poor Miss Finch* (1872) tells the story of a woman who spends much of her young life blind from cataracts. She undergoes treatment to regain her sight, which is temporarily successful. However, due to the stress of extenuating circumstances (in the form of manipulation only possible because of her blindness), she reverts back to blindness, which is depicted by Collins as the desired response from the blind when presented with the option of sight, as indicated when Miss Finch says, "[d]on't cry about my blindness…the days when I had my sight have been the unhappiest days of my life…you people who can see attach such an absurd importance to your eyes."[28] In the end, the misunderstandings are sorted out and Miss Finch remains (happily) blind.

Similarly, Rudyard Kipling creates his own story of a blind protagonist in "They" (1904). Notably, this story is published in the same year as Wells's first version of "The Country of the Blind" (henceforth, "Country"), which makes it particularly attractive for this chapter. Structurally, the stories are remarkably similar, both starting with beautifully described locations that are remote and hard to access except by pure coincidence. However, Kipling adds a supernatural twist to his story in that his blind heroine is also a caretaker of sorts to dead children, which she can only *hear*, whereas the narrator, who endures the pain of losing his own child, can *see* the children. This supernatural element becomes important to the conversation concerning the enhancement of the other senses as a result of blindness, a topic discussed below. Both of these texts are pivotal when analyzing where Wells's work offers a *sui generis* glimpse into the instability of the concept of normality.

[28] Wilkie Collins, *Poor Miss Finch* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1873), 440-441.

One notable difference to establish early between Wells and both Collins and Kipling to establish early is the initial introduction of each character. Both Kipling's female protagonist in "They," and Collins's Miss Finch are exaggeratingly elevated through disability to an almost celebrity status (i.e. inspiration porn).[29] For example, when we are introduced to Miss Finch, the narrator describes her as "a solitary figure in a pure white robe [who] was bending over the flowers in the window…I was irresistibly reminded of the gem of that superb collection—the matchless Virgin of Raphael, called 'The Madonna di San Sisto.'"[30] What is most interesting about this description is that it directly belies what Collins wrote in his introduction stating his desire to depict Miss Finch as "doing or saying what persons afflicted as she is have done or said before her."[31] Comparing the main character to the Sistine Madonna resists what Collins believed he was doing in creating a more positive representative of a disabled person. The result, instead, is a character now elevated above even earthly standards of normality that is counter-productive to representing "blindness as it really is."[32]

In contrast, Wells's villagers are also introduced in unusual garb ("garments of llama cloth") but, as Nunez notes, "there was something so reassuringly prosperous and respectable in their bearing."[33] Even as Nunez enters the village, he observes the precision and functionality of the village itself, noting that "[s]heds… stood against the boundary wall…the irrigation streams ran together into a main channel down the centre of the valley, that debouched into a little

[29] This neologism was coined by disability activist Stella Young in 2012. She defined inspiration porn as "an image of a person with a disability…doing something completely ordinary…carrying a caption like 'your excuse is invalid.'" Stella Young, "We're not here for your inspiration," *The Drum* (Australian Broadcasting Company, Sydney), July 2, 2012.

[30] Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*. Interestingly, Kipling does not give his female lead a name—she is only referred to as "Miss" by her staff and "the blind woman" by the (male) narrator. Kipling, "They," 357, 347.

[31] Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, accessed March 6, 2017, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3632/3632.txt.

[32] Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, accessed March 6, 2017, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3632/3632.txt.

[33] Wells, "Country," 16.

lake."[34] As the description continues, Wells builds his "Country" in a much more realistic representative of what disability can look like in this epoch. Additionally, the village is constructed in a way that highlights Wells's anticipation of accessibility issues found in today's environment: "a number of paths paved with green, grey, black and white, and each with a curious little kerb [*sic*] at the side."[35] What Wells describes here are textured sidewalks and curbs to allow blind people increased independence as a result of increased accessibility, a topic that remains contentious yet today within the disabled world. Another notable difference between Wells's and Collins's lead characters is that of gender. Collins's narrator (through much of the novel) is a woman and his main character is a woman; whereas both Wells's narrator and main character are male.[36] None of this commentary is to say that Collins did not create a powerful representation of blindness in 1872—his Miss Finch is undeniably a strong representation of both feminism and disability. Wells, however, not only foresees accessibility issues in disability, he also constructs a world where such issues do not exist.

"The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes" (1895 takes an entirely different approach to vision.[37] In this story, he adds a unique angle in that Sidney Davidson can still see but he experiences what I call "conditional blindness": he sees in two different locations, as well as two different times, creating yet another binary for Wells's characters. When looking at the two stories side-by-side, they are vastly different in relation to Wells's understanding of the stability

[34] Wells, "Country," 15.

[35] Wells, "Country," 16. It is important to note that, initially, it seems as though Wells is reverting into a normative gaze here because he notes the color of the stones. However, Nunez is sighted and, at this time, he does not know that the villagers are blind.

[36] While this variance seems trivial, an argument may be made that Collins (and Kipling) intentionally chose female leads to inspire a doubling of empathy, if you will. By this I mean that adding "the woman card" to disability enhances the protagonists' Otherness, potentially playing on the already heightened emotions readers feel towards a disabled character.

[37] H.G. Wells, "The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes" in *The Country of the Blind and Other Science-Fiction Stories*, ed. Martin Gardner (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), 57-66. Henceforth, this story will be referred to as "Davidson's Eyes."

of the vision/blindness binary when he writes each story. By this I mean that Wells does not necessarily *subvert* the binary in "Davidson's Eyes" (as he clearly does in "Country") but he does recognize that the binary is not as stable as one might think, a recognition I will return to in the analysis of "Davidson's Eyes."

Of particular interest in these stories is what Wells does with the other four senses when vision falters. For example, we see Davidson's increasing—though not always successful when compared to the blind villagers in "Country"—dependence on his other senses when his vision difficulties begin. Hearing, taste, smell, and, especially touch, all are enhanced when the sense of sight is affected. As disability studies scholar Lennard Davis points out, there is a distinct correlation between the senses and disability:

> Disability exists in the realm of the senses. The disabled body is embodied through the senses. So there is a kind of reciprocal relationship between the senses and disability. A person may be impaired by the lack of a sense—sight, hearing, taste, or even touch…yet, paradoxically it is through the senses that disability is perceived.[38]

If what Davis posits is valid, then there is a direct link between how disability is perceived and the role of the senses in that perception; it is this link that is crucial to this chapter. This "sensory criticism," as Hector Avalos posits, is "not only possible, but also necessary to gain a better appreciation of how biblical authors conceptualize and treat human embodiment."[39] Although Avalos is, of course, speaking specifically of biblical texts, these concepts may be applied to literature as a whole and are especially pertinent to my discussion of the enhancement of the peripheral senses within these short stories. Notably, Wells is not alone in his quest to highlight his blind protagonists' heightened senses. Both Collins's Miss Finch and Kipling's Blind

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[38] Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995), 13.

[39] Hector Avalos, "Introducing Sensory Criticism in Biblical Studies: Audiocentricity and Visiocentricity," in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies,* ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Boston: Brill, 2007), 58. Avalos describes sensory criticism as "premised on the idea that concepts and expressions involving the body and its senses are valuable features for study," 47.

Woman exhibit this increased sensory perception.[40] For example, Kipling's Blind Woman hears the narrator's motor-car approaching from a distance and Miss Finch tells her caregiver, Madame Pratolungo, "[y]our voice says to my ears what your face says to my fingers."[41] Given these examples, Wells's work with the senses is mundane and an argument might be made that Wells's story is actually quite dull when compared to Kipling's over-compensation of his protagonist's perceived disability by giving her a voice that "would have drawn lost souls from the Pit, for the yearning that underlay its sweetness."[42] Despite the distinct variances between Wells's and Kipling's stories and the manner in which Wells performs his disruption of vision, the underlying purpose of both "Davidson's Eyes" and "Country" (and even "They") is the same: they both serve as a platform from which Wells chooses to address imperialism, citizenship, and healthcare of the late-Victorian era.

Freak accidents: "The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes"

In this short story, researcher Sidney Davidson experiences a subversion of vision after a freak laboratory accident: when his eyes are open, he sees what is later determined to be a parallel reality. He describes seeing images such as "waves…[and] a remarkably neat schooner"; conversely, when his eyes are closed, he observes, "I'm in England again. And we're in the dark."[43] Davidson's conditional blindness lasts three weeks and, as we follow his traversing between time and space, we also witness his terror, confusion, and increasing dependence on his co-workers and loved ones for meeting his basic needs. Ironically, in a story that bears his name, Davidson quickly becomes a supporting cast member as the scientists in the story attempt to

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[40] I will refer to Kipling's female protagonist as the Blind Woman (as Kipling does); as far as I can tell, Kipling never gave her a Christian name.

[41] Kipling, "They," 343. Wilkie Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, 20.

[42] Kipling, "They," 344.

[43] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 58, 61.

observe and cure his vision struggles.[44] Davidson's vision eventually returns to normal but not through anything the scientists do; his sight corrects itself. The denouement of Davidson's adventure occurs two years later at a dinner party, when Davidson discovers that the ship and the island he sees in his supposed hallucinations are indeed real and that "while he moved hither and thither in London, his sight moved hither and thither in a manner that corresponded, about this distant island."[45] The story ends with the narrator, Bellows, speculating on the reasons for Davidson's conditional blindness: "[e]xplanation there is none forthcoming, except what Professor Wade has thrown out," a theory involving Wells's beloved Fourth Dimension and "a kink in space" theory, which Bellows dismisses as "mere nonsense."[46]

Notably, Wells does not initially label Davidson's condition as loss of vision. By not employing a label, Wells creates another instance where the vision/blindness binary is not as stable as assumed. In other words, Davidson is not blind—he can still see—however, the disruption of the norm is still upsetting to Davidson and his fellows because his sight is not normal. Because of this divergence, Bellows and the other scientists are not quite sure what to call Davidson's plight and describe it instead in various other ways such as "the transitory mental aberration," "the thing that happened," and "seizure" (which seems particularly odd because the vision disturbance lasts three weeks—an extended amount of time for a seizure).[47] Moreover, this extrasensory vision may be considered not just a devastating curse but also a positive boon.

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[44] Clare Walker Gore discusses this pushing away of disabled characters in her introduction to *A Noble Life*, noting, "If they are allowed to have a narrative trajectory of their own, it tends to be towards a cure for their difference, or towards an early death that removes the 'problem' of their existence." Dinah Mulock Craik, *A Noble Life*, ed. Clare Walker Gore (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2016), 8.

[45] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 66.

[46] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 66. Nicholas Ruddick notes in his edition of *The Time Machine: An Invention* that "[t]he idea for the device [Wells's time machine] first came to him at college from undergraduate speculations about a mysterious fourth dimension. He elaborated upon this idea slowly until his time machine became a metaphorical vehicle for exploring the future of the human race. This exploration would become part of a lifelong project for Wells." H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine: An Invention*, ed. Nicholas Ruddick (Toronto: Broadview Literary Texts, 2001), 11.

[47] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 57.

Wells applies what McRuer calls a compulsory able-bodiedness to his character and, as a result, Davidson is automatically placed in the Other position, considered "less than" and "disabled" when, truly, he has a form of sight that far exceeds the other character's in many ways.[48] Davidson "see[s] too much" and this variance puts him in the unique position to "live visually in one part of the world, while one lives bodily in another."[49] If this idea of increased power on Davidson's part stands then, Davidson has the potential to challenge the other men. It is within this passage that Wells pushes back on the rigid distinction of being either blind or sighted. By this I mean that Davidson is not technically blind: he has multiple layers of sight. This super-ability, in turn, allows him to become a more powerful player in his own story but, curiously, he does not. He chooses instead to permit his own disabling, allowing the men (and Bellows' sister) to care for him until he "complete[s] his cure by taking exercise and tonics."[50] While initially this decision resists my claim of Wells's progressive approach to disability, upon closer inspection, Davidson can also be considered Wells's third option, if you will. In other words, he does not want to "supercrip" Davidson, but, at this point, he does not necessarily want to cure him either (although he eventually does).[51] In the parlance of deconstruction, Wells introduces play and instability into the binary, experimenting with other variations of sight to show that Davidson does not have to be either sighted (normal) or blind (abnormal); there are other options available to him in regards to how (and where) he sees.

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[48] Robert McRuer, "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence," in *The Disability Studies Reader,* 4th edition, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 355. McRuer, adapting Adrienne Rich's coining of the concept of compulsory heterosexuality (defined as "the impression—explicit or implicit, that people should be heterosexual or else something is wrong with them) towards the study of disability, observes that this compulsory able-bodiedness is "produced and covered over, with the appearance of choice…in which there is actually no choice."

[49] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 61, 66.

[50] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 64.

[51] Alice Hall defines "supercrip" as "the stereotype of the 'superhuman' person with disabilities whose technologised body and power eclipses any sense of human vulnerability." She then elaborates on the risk to this stereotype: "while potentially empowering, often simply substitute problematic traditional perceptions of people with disabilities, as subhuman, for an equally unrealistic image, of the superhuman." Alice Hall, *Literature and Disability* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 168.

Interestingly, a direct result of this helplessness on Davidson's part leads his fellows to interpret his (in)actions as a side effect from the parallel vision, in the form of lowered capacity for intelligence. This assumption by his fellows is seen during an interaction with Wade who informs Davidson that "[y]ou are alive and in this room of Boyce's. But something has happened to your eyes. You cannot see; you can feel and hear, but not see. Do you follow?"[52] Although Wells does not specify Wade's tone or volume, the reader gets the impression that Wade is shouting at Davidson. It is unclear why Wade believes he needs to tell Davidson, who is presumed intelligent due to his work in the laboratory prior to the accident, that he cannot see. Surely Davidson has deduced this; yet, Wade and the other fellows humor his so-called hallucinations and dismiss his fears, which only encourages Davidson's fear and dependency. This easy dismissal and belittling attitude towards Davidson, the disabled person, reappears not only in "Country" when Nunez assumes the villagers need a King because they cannot see, but also in what modern disability scholars perceive as an assumption of low intelligence for people with physical or unseen disabilities.[53] In all three cases, the act is demeaning, which may lead to, as we see with Davidson, a lack of agency and a distorted perception of impaired persons.[54] However, there is another alternative reading here in the form of Wells inserting some (ill-placed) humor into the situation. Wells frequently used satire and wit to defuse the tenseness of whatever contentious situation he was addressing. We see Wells employ this technique in "Country" and in *Christina Alberta's Father* discussed in the following chapter. One must adapt to Wells's witticism, however; otherwise, analysis like the following depicts Wells as an author

[52] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 60.

[53] An example of Nunez's insistence that the villagers require a sighted king appears on p.22: "[t]hey little know they've been insulting their heaven-sent king and master. I see I must bring them to reason." Wells, "Country," 22.

[54] Interestingly, in "Country," we see the opposite effect on the perceived-as-disabled villagers. They remain unshakable in their belief that there is no such word as "see," and, in turn, trouble the disability binary.

who has, in fact, little tolerance or understanding for the disabled. The specific section I refer to is Davidsons's initial reaction to his skewed vision. His initial belief is that not only is *he* dead but his co-workers are as well: "Old Boyce! Dead too! What a lark!"[55] Clearly, this is a devastating situation for Davidson; however, Wells (seems to) make light of it. I offer that this disregard of Davidson's fear serves to enhance the reactions of the others around Davidson. By this I mean that, regardless of how scared and dependent Davidson is, the scientists' focus remains not only on the expensive equipment being destroyed but also on how they can cure him. This apathy towards the person experiencing the aberration, along with the need to cure this aberration continues in the contemporary era and, although Wells's attempt at humor is potentially affronting initially, his recognition of this disregard as it applies to disability is, nonetheless, progressive.

Seeing with blind eyes

Another area that Wells shows his progressive sensitivity towards disability (through Davidson) is by calling attention to the discrepancies between what sighted people believe blind people see and what the blind actually see. Comparing a section of the lecture "Blindness" by the more recent writer Jorge Luis Borges to a section of "Davidson's Eyes" is particularly illuminating because it highlights a Wellsian twist to the current medical model. Borges was not born blind but, as we see in the epitaph to this chapter, his vision deteriorates slowly. Borges describes this deterioration as "a slow nightfall" that begins in 1899 and lasts until that "pathetic moment" in 1955 when he loses his vision altogether.[56] Borges adds "people generally imagine the blind as enclosed in a black world," an interesting comment when compared to the

[55] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 60.

[56] Jorge Luis Borges, "Blindness," in *Seven Nights*, trans. Eliot Weinberger (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 108.

descriptions of Wells, Collins, and Kipling on what the sighted believe the blind can see. In these authors' depictions of blindness, we also see a blindness trope that presages what Borges verifies, nearly sixty years later, on the misconceptions of *both* the abled and the disabled to what the other sees.[57] For instance, both Miss Finch and the Blind Woman have a strong aversion to dark colors, especially purple.[58] The Blind Woman explains, "[t]hat color hurts," whereas, Miss Finch experiences her "own blind horror" to any darker color.[59] Additionally, the belief that blind people only see darkness is also addressed by Borges who observes that "one of the colors that the blind—at least this blind man—do not see is black; another is red…I, who was accustomed to sleeping in total darkness, was bothered for a long time at having to sleep in this world of mist, in the *greenish or bluish mist*, vaguely *luminous*…the world of the blind is not the night that people imagine."[60]

Wells's Davidson experiences something surprisingly similar. At one point in the story he describes experiencing, despite his blindness, how "[t]he moon gave a jump up in the sky and grew *green* and dim, and the fish, faintly glowing came darting around me—and things that seemed made of *luminous* glass, and I passed through a tangle of seaweeds that *shone* with only an oily lustre…the moon grew *greener* and darker, and the seaweed became a *luminous purple-red*."[61] Although Wells has no direct knowledge as to what the blind might experience, what he suggests in "Davidson's Eyes" is remarkably close to what a blind person may see—and it is not blackness, according to the experiences of the truly blind Borges. This revelation counters the

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[57] Borges, "Blindness," 107.

[58] Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, 20-21 and Kipling, "They," 349. Notably for this discussion, Kipling attaches his lead's dislike of dark colors to the emotions the narrator experiences as a result of British imperialism. She "sees" his disgust as he reflects, "I was silent, reviewing that inexhaustible matter—the more than inherited (since it is also carefully taught) brutality of the Christian peoples, beside which the mere heathendom of the West Coast nigger is clean and restrained." Kipling and Wells, at least, choose blindness as a platform on which to address concerns of the expanding British Empire.

[59] Kipling, "They," 349. Collins, "Poor Miss Finch," 20.

[60] Borges, "Blindness," 107-108. Emphasis mine.

[61] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 63. Emphasis mine.

belief many sighted people have that living with blindness means living in total darkness, a belief that contributes to sympathy and, often, pity towards blind people. It appears that living with the ability to see some color is more acceptable than living in total darkness, even to Borges who sought medical treatment in hopes of being able to see "that great color [red]" again.[62] There is certainly nothing wrong with Borges pursuing treatment; however, this example of a person assumed to be living in complete darkness seeking treatment provides a complicated glimpse into the contemporary medical model, in that Borges himself seeks out a cure, or at least a correction, for his blindness, instead of the medical profession, or society as a whole, forcing treatment upon him. Borges, incidentally, also reminds readers that "[b]lindness has not been for me a total misfortune; it should not be seen in a pathetic way. It should be seen as a way of life: one of the styles of living."[63] This is an interesting statement on Borges's part, given that he describes the moment of his vision loss as "pathetic" (378).[64] There is an additional similarity between Borges and the character Davidson: Davidson does not appreciate this hallucinogenic kaleidoscope of colors, much like when Borges admits that he has to acclimate to the baffling array of incandescence he faces when he tries to sleep. In fact, Davidson reacts in horror to his psychedelic journey to the other side of vision by "positively [weeping]" and begging for his fiancé to get him "out of this horrible darkness."[65] What is interesting to note, however, is that once Davidson begins to regain his sight (and lose the darkness), he searches out the darkness. Wells writes: "[b]ut as that odd island of his began to fade away from him, he became queerly

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[62] Borges, "Blindness," 108.

[63] Borges, "Blindness," 114.

[64] Borges, "Blindness," 108. Incidentally, after Wells's death in 1946, Borges wrote: "Of the vast and diversified library he left us, nothing has pleased me more than his narration of some atrocious miracles: *The Time Machine*...They are the first books I read; *perhaps they will be the last*." Borges was well on his way to total blindness at this time. His admiration of Wells's work, however, is clear: "I think they [Wells's works] will be incorporated…into the general memory of the species and even transcend the fame of their creator or the extinction of the language in which they were written." Borges, "El Primer Wells," in *H.G. Wells: The Critical Heritage* ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 332. Emphasis mine.

[65] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 62.

interested in it. He wanted particularly to go down into the deep sea again, and would spend half his time wandering about the low-lying parts of London, trying to find the water-logged wreck he had seen drifting."[66] Collins's Miss Finch experiences something remarkably similar during the time she momentarily regains her sight. When faced with her supposed beloved, she "almost wished [herself] blind again" when she is not swept off her feet in his embrace: "[h]e took me in his arms; he held my hand in his. In the time when I was blind, how I should have felt it…[I] shut my eyes to try and renew my blindness and put myself completely as I was in the old time."[67] She concludes her rumination by asking, "Can the loss of my sense of feeling be the price that I have paid for the recovery of my sense of sight?"[68] The message is evident from both authors: blindness does not necessarily translate into abnormality or a condition to be avoided at all costs. However, because of the social construction of disability, this condition must be sought out in secret or allowed only when restoring sight has been attempted. Conversely, true to his tendency for destabilizing the norm, in Wells's "Country," the blind regard vision as a "terrible thing," whereas the sighted see blindness as a "horrible darkness" but continue to seek it when the darkness disappears from their lives.[69] In any event, Davidson's darkness fades away completely after he gets married and "behave[s] like an ordinary citizen again," bringing up another important social issue to both Wells's epoch and the current disability movement: citizenship.[70]

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[66] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 64.

[67] Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, 355-356. It is important to note the Miss Finch has been tricked in believing the man she faces is her beloved when, in fact, it is his twin brother.

[68] Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, 356.

[69] Wells, "Country," 30 and Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 62.

[70] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 64.

Citizenship qualifications in "Davidson's Eyes"

P.E. Matheson, a contemporary of Wells, opens his 1897 treatise "Citizenship" with this observation: "By citizenship I mean the duties and rights that each member of a political society has towards the state of which he forms a part."[71] Citizenship directly links the expanding British empire to the subjugation of intellectually and physically disabled people of our own current time, as evidenced by the debates that continue to rage over how much capacity one needs to be considered a citizen. In any event, as a result of the dangerously expanding reach of late-Victorian imperialism, questions regarding citizenship during Wells's epoch are in constant flux and the citizens of Britain are unsure of how to accept these new responsibilities. Returning to Matheson, he explains the uncertainty of citizenship rights: "[w]ith the growth of our foreign possessions we have entered into a new and wider world, in which we have not yet fully realized the duties and responsibilities which our citizenship carries with it, any more than we have yet fully adapted our organs of government to the new conditions."[72] The conquest of foreign locations exposes late-Victorian society to exotic religions, strange taboos, and unfamiliar bodies. The influx of these different and strange (to English society) practices, Matheson argues, threatens the British population as a whole due to a destabilization of expected societal norms. Many of these unfamiliar (and colonized) bodies were displayed for public viewing with the increased popularity of the freak show, that experienced its "rise and fall" in the years between 1840-1940.[73] Seeing these new and "different" body forms undoubtedly influenced what British society considered normal. Similarly, this type of misunderstood cultural and physical variance

[71] P.E. Matheson, "Citizenship," *International Journal of Ethics* 8, no. 1 (1897): 22. Like Wells, Matheson wrote about social issues during the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras, including *The Theory of the State* (1885) and *National Ideals* (1915).

[72] Matheson, "Citizenship," 31.

[73] Robert Bogdan, "The Social Construction of Freaks," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 23. Bogdan defines freak shows as "formally organized exhibition of people with alleged physical, mental, or behavioral difference at circuses, fairs, carnivals, and other amusement venues," 23.

can be found in the contemporary disability movement, as questions of who has what right continue to appear in court case after court case involving both the intellectually and physically disabled individuals of modern times, a topic that will resurface in the next chapter.

Marcia H. Rioux discusses contemporary citizenship in a 2002 essay as it relates specifically to the intellectually disabled, defining citizenship as "a dynamic relationship along three complementary dimensions: rights and responsibilities, access, and belonging."[74] She further elaborates that "[t]he meaning of citizenship touches on the definition of the community and the conditions of inclusion and exclusion—that is, who belongs under what conditions…[.] Citizenship presumes equality between citizens, as well as equality in the way in which the state operates in relation to individuals."[75] As Rioux points out, however, "a citizen also has to have both the right *and the capacity* to participate. Disabled people tend to lack both."[76] Based on Rioux's observations, there are clearly multiple facets of citizenship and, because of these varying attributes, I address two separate aspects of citizenship in my thesis. For example, this first chapter addresses citizenship in terms of what Rioux identifies as "who belongs under what conditions" and the following chapter considers civil rights and social citizenship. That being said, we see Sidney Davidson embody this lack, most notably when he begins to act like an "ordinary citizen" again.[77] The actions that qualify him for citizenship, according to Wells's narrator, are that "[h]e was able to get up and steer himself about, feed himself once more, read, [and] smoke."[78] In other words, when he is no longer disabled, no longer "far worse than being blind…absolutely helpless…fed like a newly-hatched bird, and led about and undressed," he

[74] Marcia H. Rioux, "Disability, Citizenship and Rights in a Changing World," *Disability Studies Today*, ed. Colin Barnes, Mike Oliver, and Len Barton (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002), 216.
[75] Rioux, "Disability," 217.
[76] Rioux, "Disability," 216. Emphasis mine.
[77] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 64.
[78] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 64.

then qualifies for re-entry into British citizenship.[79] Until that happens, however, Davidson is destined to be an incidental in the story that carries his name while the other researchers dismiss his fears as inconsequential next to the quandary he presents with his "best authenticated case in existence of real vision at a distance."[80] These details in the story not only hint at questions of patient rights but also more recent complications between disability and citizenship. Rioux notes that:

> Welfare laws and disability benefits in many countries still require that disabled people *prove* that they are permanently incapable of working (limiting the right to work) and require that people live in designated housing and receive social programmes through the agency that filters the state benefits as a condition of receiving them (limiting the right to choice of personal life-style or self-determination).[81]

Wells had no way of knowing in 1895 the impact imperialism and the consequential questions of citizenship will have on the current tenets of disability; however, he provides a striking example in Davidson of the disadvantages faced by those considered abnormal or disabled when questions of who should be included, or excluded, in citizenship and community arise. As Rioux indicates above, a person must have the right *and the capacity* to enjoy the rights of citizenship.[82] In Davidson's case, when his *capacity* is troubled by his conditional blindness, two important questions present themselves. First, does he lose his right to remain a citizen without all of his senses, and two, if his sight does not return to its previous state, but his other senses fill in the gap, will he be able to regain citizenship? These questions are not so simple to answer when sensory-impaired persons must validate their "capacity" to meet the requirements of citizenship. When Wells, through Davidson's predicament, raises these questions, we see most clearly his worry about citizenship and a hint of his anticipatory glimpse into the forthcoming citizenship

[79] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 61.
[80] Wells, "Davidson's Eyes," 66.
[81] Rioux, "Disability," 221. Emphasis mine.
[82] Rioux, "Disability," 217.

debates that continue to resurface in contemporary discussions of who belongs where and with what rights.

As demonstrated in the above pages, Wells achieves several purposes with "Davidson's Eyes." He presents his concern with the ever-expanding British empire, and the consequential issues of citizenship attached to it, through a subversion of Davidson's sight. He also establishes a link between the citizenship issues in "Davidson's Eyes" and the continued struggle of defining citizenship for people of disability that is currently happening. Additionally, he demonstrates the misunderstanding between the blind and the sighted as to what the other sees when he describes Davidson's harrowing journey under the sea. At the same time, Wells provides a foreshadowing of sorts when, nearly sixty years later, we see a very similar description in Borges's depiction of when he begins to lose his sight. Lastly, Wells provides a nuanced picture of the collaboration between the senses—when Davidson's sight is troubled, he starts relying on his other senses, albeit quite timidly. Throughout these conversations, Wells's deconstruction of the vision/blindness binary reveals a recognition on Wells's part that this binary is not as stable as other authors such as Kipling and Collins believed it to be, a recognition that is a definite precursor to the instability of the normal/abnormal binary seen in contemporary disability studies.[83] Also, where Wells shows an intense interest in the pragmatic issues of disability such as citizenship, the other authors tend to include a sense of excessive elevation and a supernatural flavor to their blind heroines which, in turn, damages their realistic depictions of blindness.[84]

[83] Kipling, and especially Collins, do indeed question the binary; however, with their disabled heroines, they tend to over exaggerate the other side of the binary, bestowing them with almost supernatural powers. This tendency does not translate into understanding the spectrum of the binary, just the other side of the binary.

[84] One particular aspect of Collins's novel that remains problematic for this reader is his exclusion of a positive portrayal of disability for *all* of his characters. A prime example of this exclusion is found in Oscar who, because of a series of events, acquires a blue-tinged skin tone that is disturbing for a majority of the sighted characters but he is deemed appropriate for Miss Finch because she cannot see his blue skin. In fact, when Miss Finch gains her sight, Madame Pratolungo notes that "[h]is [Oscar's] face *may* be a disappointment to her." Collins, 432.

A futile king: "The Country of the Blind"

"The Country of the Blind" requires a much more complicated introduction than "Davidson's Eyes." Wells first published "Country" in *The Strand Magazine* in 1904 and then reprinted it in 1911, 1925, and 1927 without changes. However, in a 1939 version, Wells added approximately 3,000 words and significantly changed the ending. The print run of this version was minimal, a meager 280 copies issued by Golden Cockerel Press.[85] To complicate matters, not only are there two published versions with significantly different endings, but there are several unpublished versions located at the H.G. Wells Papers at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, in which "at least one version is missing, since there is no MS authority for the story's published ending."[86] Both published versions report the adventures of the sighted Nunez as he stumbles upon a village of blind people hidden away in the mountains of Ecuador. Wells uses this plot, ultimately, to subvert the blind vs. sighted binary by representing Nunez as the disabled character, as the person "hardly formed" and with senses "still imperfect."[87] In both stories, Nunez eventually becomes acclimated to the village and the ways of the blind, but it is with great resistance. He truly believes that "[i]n the Country of the Blind, the One-Eyed Man is King"; unfortunately, the villagers are not cooperating with his grand schemes, leading to the continual struggle between Nunez and the villagers to establish power (and upsetting the disability binary in the process).[88]

The two published versions of 1904 and 1939 begin to diverge, however, when Nunez falls in love with the blind Medina-Saroté and the villagers offer him the opportunity to become

[85] Patrick Parrinder, "Wells's Cancelled Endings for "The Country of the Blind," *Science Fiction Studies* 17, no. 1 (1990): 75.
[86] Parrinder, "Cancelled Endings," 72.
[87] Wells, "Country," 19.
[88] Wells, "Country," 17.

"a quite admirable citizen" (i.e. become blind like them) through the proposed enucleation.[89] In the 1904 version, Wells gives the reader a glimpse into the anguish and doubt that patients might experience as they face a surgery that will blind them permanently. Wells replaces this section with an ellipsis in the 1939 version, changing not only the outcome of the story but the reader's view of Nunez as well. An even more significant change between the stories is their endings. In the 1904 version, Nunez leaves the village, only presumably to die on the cliff-face, happily staring at the stars. The ending of the 1939 version is more complex: Nunez escapes with Medina-Saroté to live happily-ever-after, after an unsuccessful attempt to save the villagers from an impending landslide which obliterates the village. The significance of these various differences will be a focus of the discussion below.

A complicated analysis

Current disability and Wellsian scholars tend to favor the 1904 version of "Country." Perhaps one reason for this partiality may be Wells's own words in the 1939 preface: "[b]ut for various reasons it is our custom to treat the first version of a short story as final."[90] In other words, according to Wells at least (and against common editorial practice today), the first version is the most trustworthy in regards to the author's purpose. However, Wells himself expresses misgivings about the 1904 version: "I have always had an uncomfortable feeling about this story; I have run it over in my mind in bed, on walks and other unsuitable occasions, and at last I sat down to it and gave quite a new twist to it, as you will see in this volume."[91] Wells goes on to defend this change, adding, "[t]he value attached to vision changes profoundly. It has been

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[89] Wells, "Country," 34.
[90] Wells, "Country," 7.
[91] Wells, "Country," 8.

changed because there has been a change in the atmosphere of life about us."[92] That the 1904 version is consistently viewed as the authoritative account is noteworthy, and problematic, when approaching this text through a disability studies lens. In this account, we see only Wells's initial treatment of blindness and not his increasing frustration with the infinite complacency he sees in his contemporaries in regards to stances on imperialism and citizenship. Two important points differentiate the 1904 version from the 1939 version: in the former, the village (and, thus, the villagers) are allowed to survive and Medina-Sarotè's de-evolution from impairment to disability. Nunez wanders out of the village, to his presumed death, and the villagers continue on with their lives. In terms of disability, Nunez's exit signals the defeat of normalcy: the blind (disability) triumph, whereas in the 1939 version, they are destroyed. Given what we see in other late-Victorian texts dealing with disability, the 1904 survival of the blind (compared to their utter destruction in 1939) represents a radically different outcome for the presumed-disabled, a definitive explosion of the vision/blindness binary. In short, Wells, in direct conflict with other writers of this time, allows his impaired heroes to remain untouched by the medical and societal constraints that would sanction otherwise. In particular, Miss Finch must try her hand at sight before Collins allows her to be satisfied in her blindness. Additionally, the Blind Woman admits that she only hears the dead children (who are "the only thing that makes life worth living") because she "[has] no right" to bear children.[93]

But Wells remained dissatisfied with the 1904 ending and this frustration resounds in the 1939 version. In this later adaptation, Wells saves Nunez and his sight but the cost is high. Wells

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[92] Wells, "Country," 8.

[93] Kipling, "They," 345, 358 respectively. Martha Stoddard Holmes supports this claim in her *Fictions of Afflictions*, explaining the concerns "fueled by Victorian medical science's concern about the transmission of physical illness and impairment, which made it irresistibly interesting to imagine a disabled woman as a sexual being, but far too alarming to allow to reproduce." Holmes, 7. Wells subverts this fear by allowing Medina-saroté to bear *sighted* children but she only gets these children in the 1939 version; nonetheless, when compared to the sweet torture Kipling's heroine is subject to, Wells remains progressive.

destroys the village of the blind and all of its inhabitants (minus one) and we witness Medina-Sarotè devolve from what Wells's narrator first describes as impaired to disabled. At first blush, Medina-Sarotè's rescue seems insignificant; however, it is, in fact, another opportunity for Wells to deconstruct the prescribed definitions of normal and abnormal. While in the village, Medina-Sarotè is viewed as normal within her society. It is only when she escapes with Nunez that her agency is removed, as evidenced by this observation: "It was plain she loved her [sighted] children…She had never been able to love and protect them as she had once loved and protected Nunez."[94] When Nunez takes her from the village, he becomes her savior in one sense and her condemner in another; she is the lone survivor of the village, yet by removing her, Nunez unintentionally disables her—she loses all the *accoutrements* from her village that allow her accessibility. Additionally, similar to Nunez's experience in the village, she does not desire any form of adjustment to her vision and, just as Nunez is offered the opportunity to become normal by having his eyes removed, Medina-saroté refuses to go to the "oculists" because, as she tells the narrator's wife, "the loveliness of *your* world is a complicated and fearful loveliness."[95] She does not want to see and Nunez does not want to be blind, hence, another example of the binary and role reversal in "Country." As mentioned above, this approach is wholly different than the required attempt to cure noted in *Poor Miss Finch*. Conversely, by not analyzing these two versions parallel to each other, it is impossible for scholars to understand Wells's proto-disability views in both the medical and social models of current day disability theory.

To return to our discussion of how scholars tend to neglect the 1939 version, an interesting example of this neglect is seen with David Bolt, founding editor of the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies,* who acknowledges that "Country" is "praised by

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[94] Wells, "Country," 44.
[95] Wells, "Country," 45.

disability scholars as a radical portrayal of a land in which all the inhabitants are unsighted and order their lives on the basis of their four senses, meaning the one sighted character, Nunez, is at a disadvantage."[96] Nevertheless, by confining his analysis of "Country" to the 1904 version, Bolt is severely limiting his overall understanding of the story and its complex publication history in not addressing the significant change that takes at the end of the 1939 version and how this change affects Wells's evolving views on the vision/blindness binary. Additionally, even as Bolt lauds Wells's "radical portrayal," he glosses over the anticipatory disability studies work Wells does within the pages of "Country."[97] Without looking at the entire evolution Wells's thinking undergoes on the topic of blindness, metaphorical or literal, Bolt (and many other scholars) only provide a partial glimpse into Wells's thinking with regards to blindness and to current disability theory.

Citizenship and the tenets of disability studies within "Country"

To begin now with a close analysis of the text proper, I first want to assert that Wells's approach to blindness in "Country" presages the more contemporary views of the social constructions of normal and abnormal. This being said, Wells's approach is not necessarily consistent. One area of this inconsistency appears in Wells's foreshadowing of the medical model that "constructs disability as a deficit or a pathology that requires correction or cure," a model that Wells presages in his depictions of Nunez and Medina-saroté.[98] Within "Country," this requirement appears after Nunez falls in love with Medina-saroté and his captors offer him the cure of removing "those irritating bodies" [i.e. his eyes] which involves a "simple and easy

[96] David Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness: A Re-reading of Twentieth-Century Anglophone Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 84.

[97] Bolt, *Metanarrative*, 84.

[98] Edward Wheatley, "Medieval Constructions of Blindness in France and England," in *The Disability Studies Reader,* 3rd. ed., ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 1997), 64.

surgical operation…[and] then he will be perfectly sane, and a quite admirable citizen."[99] From these words, it becomes clear that, in order to be an accepted citizen, Nunez must consent to surgical intervention, which he initially does. Significantly, Wells gives Nunez two outcomes in regards to this surgery: in 1904, rather than face blindness, Nunez escapes and likely dies on the mountain; in 1939, he escapes with Medina-saroté while the entire village is destroyed around them.[100] Either way, this "plague of blindness" must be avoided at all costs.[101] A close examination of Wells's word choice reveals that Nunez would rather be dead than blind, which speaks volumes to the stigma and stereotypes of blindness both in Wells's time and in our own, much like the example of what the blind can see from the "Davidson" section. For example, the word "plague" invokes images of impending death, alarming decay, and looming catastrophe. When Wells attaches this word to the condition of blindness, he implies two things: that blindness is contagious, and that it is devastating. Moreover, after their escape, Medina-saroté mysteriously no longer carries the mutation that creates the blindness, evidenced by their four *sighted* children; the blindness gene that "marred" the villagers' happiness for approximately fifteen generations mysteriously disappears.[102] In both endings, however, sight is preferable to blindness, because Wells assesses, through his normative gaze, that blindness is not normal and, therefore, must be cured or eradicated. The instability of this binary happens when Wells continues to allow Medina-saroté the *choice* to remain blind, despite the pressures from her

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[99] Wells, "Country," 34.

[100] Wells's wording is ambiguous in regards to whether Nunez is indeed dead in the 1904 ending: "But he [Nunez] heeded these things no longer, but lay quite still there, smiling as if he were content now merely to have escaped from the valley of the Blind, in which he thought to be King. And the glow of the sunset passed, and the night came, and still he lay there, under cold, clear stars." H.G. Wells: *The Country of the Blind and Other Selected Stories*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 310. Please note that this edition is the 1904 version.

[101] Wells, "Country," 10.

[102] Wells, "Country," 10. Please refer to footnote 68 to recall Martha Stoddard Holmes's observations concerning disabled women and bearing children.

community. Granted, Miss Finch also has this choice; however, she only reverts back to blindness because her treatment failed, which is a significant difference.

Shifting momentarily away from a discussion of the story's connection to the medical model, I would like to turn to a discussion about citizenship as it relates to this story. As prefaced in the previous section, the status of citizenship during Wells's time period is a volatile topic. Further, this chapter is concerned with the aspect of citizenship that Rioux identifies as "the definition of the community and the conditions of inclusion and exclusion—that is, who belongs under what conditions."[103] We are privy to a glimpse of the capricious state of citizenship in "Davidson's Eyes"; however, it is in "Country" that we see Wells subtly build his case for how to achieve citizenship within the British empire. Wells's narrator mentions Nunez's citizenship twice: first, when he writes that "[s]o Nunez humbled himself and became a common citizen of the Country of the Blind" and second, when the village doctor promises that Nunez will become a "perfectly sane, and quite admirable citizen" *after* he has the surgery that will permanently blind him.[104]

If we hold to what Rioux argues about the relationship between citizenship and community, Nunez's evolving citizenship should not be surprising. He comes to the village, presumably, an already fully enfranchised citizen of Bogota. However, after his escape and consequent return to the village, he "humble[s]" himself to become a "common" citizen.[105] The language here is important: the words "humble" and "common" both indicate a lowering of status. It is only after Nunez lowers his expectations of citizenship that he begins to value the community that has formed around him. But, it is important to remember the reason Nunez feels

[103] Rioux, "Disability," 216.

[104] Wells, "Country," 30, 34.

[105] Wells, "Country," 30. Interestingly, in 1904, Wells does not use the adjective "common" before citizen that he attaches in the 1939 version. Again, his growing exasperation with his contemporaries may play a part in this particular decision.

his status has been lowered: his new community is filled with the blind (i.e. the disabled), who he considers incapable of being his equal simply because "[they] are blind and [he] can see."[106] This last mention of the abled and disabled binary reminds us that Wells again is deconstructing and complicating what society deems normal. Particularly interesting to note, however, is that this Othering on Nunez's part is not a one-way street and this exception highlights where Wells differs the most from Kipling and Collins. Both of these latter authors strictly adhere to the sighted (normal)/blind (abnormal) binary, never considering that in order to equalize (i.e. destabilize) this binary, a radical shift is needed. Wells accomplished this transformation by putting the perceived abnormal in the normal position in the binary. For example, even after Nunez lowers himself to become a citizen of the village, the elders will only consider Nunez a citizen after he has "those irritating bodies" removed. In other words, he must become blind to be considered a full citizen (i.e. normal) in their society, to "raise him from his servitude and inferiority to the level of a blind citizen."[107] Additionally, we see Wells distorting not only what is abnormal versus normal and sighted versus blind, we also see him using these criteria as a platform to encourage his contemporaries to consider who deserves citizenship, an area, I argue, that Kipling and Collins neglect in their respective stories.

The consideration for citizenship continues to be hotly-debated even today in the arena of disability. Rioux points out that "[t]he disabled status has almost universally been a condition that has been used as a rationale for disentitling people from citizenship based on an ethical argument of who is deserving."[108] In "Country," the question of who is deserving of citizenship remains unanswered as a result of Wells's imploding binary. For Davidson to qualify for citizenship, he must be able to dress himself and smoke; for Nunez to do so, he must consent to

[106] Wells, "Country," 28.
[107] Wells (1904), "Country," 344.
[108] Rioux, "Disability," 217.

undergoing a horrific, potentially lethal, surgery. The extreme change between the two stories mirrors Wells's increasing frustration with his contemporaries in regards to British imperialism and its effect on the current political climate.[109] In "Country," Nunez makes his imperialistic agenda known from the beginning, as he remembers "all the old stories of the lost valley and The Country of the Blind…through his thoughts ran this old proverb…'In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King.'"[110] In other words, when Nunez recognizes that the villagers are blind, his thoughts immediately go to how he can plunder their resources, to borrow Withers's phrase, much like the England Wells is critiquing. Wells, however, quickly smites Nunez's machinations, putting him in the Othered positions. Attempting to plunder the villagers' resources may well cost Nunez his eyes. In any event, despite his growing frustration, Wells's treatment of who determines citizenship remains progressive when presented next to current disability theory conversations touching on this same question of who deserves citizenship. Indeed, for the blind villagers, only a cure for Nunez's abnormality will earn him citizenship, which provides a direct link between the concept of the current medical model, which favors a cure or treatment, rather than acceptance, of an impairment and, potentially, inhibiting the right to citizenship. Again, Wells alone is considering these issues, which makes his work valuable to current disability studies. Given all this, we might assume that Wells is a supporter of the medical model; however, in true Wellsian form, Wells problematizes this assumption.

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[109] As Jeremy Withers (rightly) points out in his discussion about the rubber extracted from the Congo to develop a new type of bicycle tire in 1888, Wells had strong anti-imperialistic tendencies. Withers notes that "rubber was a lucrative colonial commodity at the time, and depicting its failure [in *The War of the Worlds*] the way Wells does suggest that England is not, in fact, becoming stronger and safer through its plunder of resources from far-flung colonies. In "Country," however, Wells again subverts another binary: colonizer/colonized i.e., the potentially colonized is placed in the powerful position, whereas the colonizer is left stunned to his Othered position. Jeremy Withers, *The War of the Wheels: H.G. Wells and the Bicycle* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 62.

[110] Wells, "Country," 17.

In the 1904 version of "Country," Wells offers a rarely-seen and noteworthy glimpse into a patient's thoughts and feelings while awaiting a cure that will potentially relieve him of their abnormality. The narrator explains:

> For a week before the surgery that was to raise him from his servitude and inferiority to the level of a blind citizen Nunez knew nothing of sleep…he sat brooding or wandered aimlessly, trying to bring his mind to bear on his dilemma. He had given his answer, he had given his consent, and still he was not sure…his last day of vision began for him... 'To-morrow,' he said [to Medina-saroté], 'I shall see no more.'[111]

This view into the tortured mind of one about to (intentionally) lose his sight is devastating and invites empathy for Nunez that was lacking before. Until this moment, he exhibits several unfavorable traits, such as when the narrator observes that "the women and girls he [Nunez] was pleased to note, had some of them quite sweet faces, for all that their eyes were shut and sunken."[112] Superficial physical appearances, in short, hold much importance for Nunez and to undergo this surgery means to lose not only his sight but his own assumed pleasing appearance. In contrast to this unflattering view of Nunez in both of the published versions, Wells, in the above excerpt from the 1904 version, offers a more personal, more humanistic side of Nunez as he faces voluntary blindness for the woman he loves, allowing the reader to empathize with, or perhaps pity, the unimaginable anxiety of a disabled patient that society deems in need of a cure.

In contrast to Wells's empathetic portrayal of Nunez's dilemma and his foreshadowing of the medical model's emphasis on a cure for disability, Wells employs the doctor-figure who represents a flaw (according to current disability scholars) in the medical model: the medical professional who seeks only to cure or treat an impairment. This figure in "Country" is described as "a great doctor among these people, their medicine man, and he had a very philosophical and

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[111] Wells, "Country," 344.
[112] Wells, "Country," 331.

inventive mind, and the idea of curing Nunez of his peculiarities appealed to him."[113] In retrospect, however, none of these qualities actually qualify this man to perform surgery, leading to two important questions: first, although he is "very philosophical and inventive," how skilled is he with scalpels and clamps? And, more importantly, can a blind man perform surgery? Wells does not address these questions, relying here, as so often in his fiction, on the reader's willing suspension of disbelief.

These questions also anticipate another grievance in disability studies against the medical model: the disabled are often used to advance the knowledge and reputation of their physician. This utilization of patients for the sake of professional advancement results from the power suddenly bestowed on physician with the professionalization of the medical field happening in the late-nineteenth century. Mary Wilson Carpenter, in her discussion of Foucault's work, states that "[t]he producers of this new medical knowledge—medical students, and even more so the titled professors of medicine—rose to a new power and authority in this system, but the patients were reduced to examples of disease."[114] This shift in power that begins in the early nineteenth century only accelerates, continuing even into contemporary times. In fact, Carpenter continues: "practitioners of medicine began to focus on the patient's body as a material object to be examined while living and dissected when dead."[115] It is this desire to obtain medical knowledge and his own personal satisfaction that drives the doctor to help Nunez, not compassion for Nunez's impairment itself. Wells's portrayal of Nunez and the choice he must make concerning his eyes exemplifies how Wells anticipates the contemporary friction between disability activists and the medical profession that is at the heart of the issues in disability studies. This anticipation,

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[113] Wells, "Country," 32-33.

[114] Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 2

[115] Carpenter, *Health,* 2.

however, does not make Wells a perfect advocate for disability; issues remain concerning the normative gaze Wells unintentionally uses when approaching blindness that raises questions on whether Wells does indeed always take a progressive stance on disability.

One of these questions lies in the insistence by Wells that there must be a cause for this "strange disease" resulting in blindness.[116] This reaction is not necessarily unusual; however, Wells makes his cause more ambiguous and less medical than Kipling's Blind Woman and Miss Finch, who was blinded as a result of cataracts.[117] Wells's narrator observes: "[i]n those days, in such cases, men did not think of germs and infections but of sins; and it seemed to him [the man who left the village to seek a cure] that the reason of this affliction must lie in the negligence of these priestless immigrants to set up a shrine so soon as they entered the valley."[118] This man that seeks to save the village from its blindness falls back on a common theory to explain illness and health: punishment for some unknown sin. Wells gestures here toward what Wheatley describes as the religious model for a possible explanation for this blindness: "the conception of [illness] as punishment for sin, which is a pathological condition in Christian teaching."[119] In order to counteract this perceived punishment, the village pools together their valuables and the man descends to find a "handsome, cheap, effectual shrine…he wanted relics and suchlike potent things of faith, blessed objects and mysterious medals and prayers."[120] The word "cheap" cast satirical doubt that Wells had little patience for these cures.

Furthermore, at the same time Wells presents the conflicting theories of illness at the time, he remains skeptical in regards to the "punishment for a sin" cause for illness and he most

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[116] Wells, "Country," 10.

[117] Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, 38.

[118] Wells, "Country," 10.

[119] Wheatley, "Medieval Constructions," 64. Hector Avalos adds, "In Deut 28, illness is the inevitable result of a violation of the covenant, and health is the inevitable reward for keeping the covenant." Avalos, "Sensory Criticism," 57.

[120] Wells, "Country," 10.

certainly does not believe in the cure. Near the end of the 1904 version, Nunez turns back to look at the valley and the narrator tells us: "It seemed to [Nunez] that before this splendour he, and this blind world in the valley, and his love, and all, were no more than a pit of sin."[121] Wells, in this version, allows the village to survive but without resolving the initial cause of their affliction: sin. The reason for this incertitude rests in the 1939 preface, in which Wells admits: "[i]n 1904, the stress is upon the spiritual isolation [i.e. sin] of those who see more keenly than their fellows and the tragedy of their incommunicable appreciation for life. The visionary dies, a worthless outcast, finding no other escape from his gift but death, and the blind world goes on, invincibly self-satisfied and secure."[122] Wells's visionary is cast out and left for dead, even as the blind villagers continue with their lives. In the 1939 version, however, the villagers themselves recognize the connection Wells's narrator establishes between sin and their blindness. This significant change problematizes Wells's progressive approach to the medical model because the villagers now seek a treatment for what they previously recognized only as their normality and, by default, Nunez's abnormality at being able to "see." They do not distinguish this before Nunez's arrival; naturally, he must be the cause of their newly-perceived disability. And they must seek a cure.

As they chase Nunez out of the village for the last time, immediately before the mountain falling, they scream, "[c]ast him [Nunez] forth! Cast him forth. Let him take our sins upon him and go!"[123] In no other section of the story does Wells indicate a reason for the villagers' belief that they have sin; their daily practices are not filled with debauchery or overt instances of transgression. In fact, earlier Wells's narrator notes that "[t]hey led a simple, laborious life, these

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[121] Wells, "Country," 345.
[122] Wells, "Country," 8.
[123] Wells, "Country," 40.

people, with all the elements of virtue and happiness."[124] The single factor that "marred their happiness" is their blindness—i.e. their sin.[125] The villagers seem to hope that when Nunez leaves the village, the "plague of blindness" might disappear as well (which, ironically, it does when Medina-saroté has four *sighted* children). In short, Wells chooses words like "plague," "sin," and "marred" that hint towards Wells's own views on the disadvantages of being blind and, potentially, the need to cure blindness. This potentially negative view of the villagers initially worries the progressive stance that I posit Wells usually offers; however, the villagers, by casting out Nunez, are firmly declaring they have no need for a cure or a treatment. Their firm resistance to treatment bolsters my claim that Wells explodes the normal/abnormal binary: not every disabled person need fit nicely in the hard and fast rules of normality and not every disabled person needs treated or cured. The villagers' ability to adjust their environment to their specific requirements, along with the enhancement of their other senses, cures them of the need for treatment.

While for the most part the enhancement of the blind villagers' senses in "Country" can be considered positive, for Nunez, these enhanced senses are both troubling and repulsive at times. For example, when first interacting with the blind villagers, they "startled him by a simultaneous movement towards him, each with a hand outstretched. He [Nunez] stepped back from the advances of these spread fingers." The villagers, finding his eyes, continually poke them, considering them "a queer thing in him."[126] Nunez struggles under their prodding but offers little resistance at this point—possibly because his mind is humming "[i]n the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King."[127] However, as the story progresses and Nunez realizes

[124] Wells, "Country," 23.
[125] Wells, "Country," 10.
[126] Wells, "Country," 18.
[127] Wells, "Country," 17.

that the One-Eyed Man is *not* King, his tolerance of their prodding decreases sharply. This intolerance culminates in the garden, when Nunez tries, once again, to escape: "I'll hit them if they touch me…by Heaven, I will. I'll hit."[128] The villagers' touch becomes unbearable to Nunez—not because they are some unknown life-form with tentacles as hands, but because he cannot conquer them. His repulsion is based on *his* inability, not theirs. In fact, Wells makes clear how important the other senses are to the villagers, both when dealing with outsiders and with each other:

> Their senses had become marvellously acute; they could hear and judge the slightest gesture of a man a dozen paces away—could hear the very beating of his heart. Intonation had long since replaced expression with them, and touches gesture, and their work with hoe and spade and fork was as free and confident as garden work can be. Their sense of smell was extraordinarily fine; they could distinguish individual differences as readily as a dog can.[129]

These words indicate Wells's acknowledgement of the changes that occur with the other senses when vision fades. Ironically, Nunez does not take issue with the women of the village with their "quite sweet faces…touching him with soft, sensitive hands, smelling at him, and listening at every word he spoke."[130] It is only when he feels challenged, generally by the men in the village, that Nunez takes issue. This challenging by the Other of the normal is a key concern to modern disability scholars. It is a source of much antagonism between the disabled and the abled that we see in the current fight for equal treatment for the disabled. In Wells's story, we watch this antagonism build when Nunez first arrives in the village and he is mildly amused and tolerant of the villagers as they examine him and try to determine his origins. As the story progresses, however, and Nunez tries to convince the villagers he can indeed see (a word they do not know) by predicting that "In a little while…Pedro will be here," he becomes much less tolerant of the

[128] Wells, "Country," 26.
[129] Wells, "Country," 23-24.
[130] Wells, "Country," 19.

blind villagers as they mock his attempts at proving his superiority.[131] In fact, he feels so threatened that he contemplates picking up a spade and doing bodily harm to the villagers.

This intolerance also appears in contemporary disability during times of increased friction between the abled and disabled for equal treatment, most notably in areas such as sexuality, physician-assisted suicide, and the right to bear children. Disability activist Nancy Mairs puts a finer point on the issue of disability and sexuality in her essay "Carnal Acts": "No more sex, either, if society had its way. The sexuality of the disabled so repulses most people that you can hardly get a doctor, let alone a member of the general population, to consider the issues it raises. Cripples simple aren't supposed to Want It, much less Do It."[132] The able-bodied are content to just have the disabled in the background of their own lives. However, as Simi Linton declares, it is when the disabled "come out, not with brown woolen lap robes over our withered legs or dark glasses over our pale eyes, but in shorts and sandals…straightforward, unmasked, and unapologetic," that the able-bodied feel challenged and the friction elevates.[133] This friction drives the plot in Wells's story too; however, there is little friction in *Poor Miss Finch* or "They" in this regard, which addresses another aspect of where Wells differs—he is blunt and pulls no punches when toppling the binary of normal and abnormal. Conversely, Kipling, especially, offers a demeaning picture of the Blind Woman's inability with this sentence: "'I don't want to seem silly,' her chin quivered like a child's as she spoke—'but *we blindies* have only one skin, I think.'"[134] While this statement clearly evokes empathy for the (nameless) Blind Woman, it does nothing to help disability's representation of blindness in 1904. That being said and despite his

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[131] Wells, "Country," 25.

[132] Nancy Mairs, *Carnal Acts* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 396.

[133] Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 3.

[134] Kipling, "They," 349. Emphasis mine.

progressive view of blindness in "Country," even Wells cannot keep this friction between Nunez and the villagers at bay; someone must go.

Although he gives his protagonist two different choices in the two versions of the story, to die on the mountain or escape the village as it is being destroyed by a landslide, Wells's overall conception of blindness itself does not change from 1904 to 1939; he still believes it must be eradicated, but his treatment changes—in 1939, society rather than the individual needs the cure. Similarly, today's social model of disability requests a "redefinition of 'able-bodied' and 'disabled' in such a way that society can acknowledge and include the full spectrum of physical types."[135] This redefinition echoes the 1939 explanation by Wells of why he changed the ending:

> But in the later story vision becomes something altogether more tragic, it is no longer a story of disregarded loveliness and release; the visionary sees destruction sweeping down upon the whole blind world he has come to endure and even to love; he sees it plain, and he can do nothing to save them from its fate.[136]

When Nunez (as the visionary—viz. the abled) notices the change in the mountains that will lead to the destruction of the village, he panics, not because he cannot help the villagers, but because they will not listen to him. He has already tried to deceive them by escaping and by resisting the cure being offered to him. Additionally, the villagers are convinced that Nunez is blasphemous against the Wisdom Above when he continues to insist that he can see—a word that is not in their vocabulary. He laments: "[b]ut how could he convince them? What proofs could he give them?"[137] Nunez perceives the real threat posed by the villagers' reaction when he observes, "[t]hey might take him and end the recurrent nuisance of him by putting out his eyes forthwith, and the only result of his intervention would be that he would be nursing his bloody eye sockets

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[135] Wheatley, "Medieval Constructions," 63.
[136] Wells, "Country," 8.
[137] Wells, "Country," 39.

when the disaster fell."[138] In short, the individual (Nunez) sees the harmfulness of a society unwilling to change its views on disability and the effects are devastating.

Turning impairment into disability: Wells and the social model

One final aspect of contemporary disability studies that Wells anticipates requires mention. In order to accommodate this discussion, I would like to return to Wells's omniscient narrator's questionable opinion that blindness "marred their [the villagers'] happiness."[139] Avalos surmises that "some of what are classified as disabilities in our society are related to the senses (e.g., hearing, seeing)." However, it seems clear that the type of information that is valued also affects how disability is conceptualized. Ahijah, the unsighted prophet…was fully capable of receiving all the information he needed through hearing. In such a context, he might not have been regarded as disabled."[140] Avalos's observation may be directed at the village of the blind as well. They appear to be just fine without sight. Similarly, Miss Finch and the Blind Woman also appear to be doing just fine without social interference. However, the statement made by Wells's narrator speaks to another precept of the disability studies movement: the social constructionist model that highlights the difference between impairment and disability. Impairment, according to Alice Hall, is the "a form or functional limitation such as missing a limb"; whereas, disability is "a disadvantage or an exclusion from mainstream social activities caused by the environment in which a person lives."[141] We do not see this social constriction in the valley of the blind until Nunez arrives.

[138] Wells, "Country," 39.
[139] Wells, "Country," 10.
[140] Avalos, "Sensory Criticism," 59.
[141] Alice Hall, *Literature and Disability* (London: Routledge, 2016), 168.

Indeed, when Nunez observes the structure of the village, he admits "it was marvellous with what confidence and precision they went about their ordered world." He continues: "[e]verything… had been made to fit their needs; each of the radiating paths [numbered] of the valley area had a constant angle to the others, and was distinguished by a special notch upon its kerbing; all obstacles and irregularities of path and meadow had long since been cleared away."[142] In this valley, there are no disabilities or, most likely, no impairments. The villagers have not only adapted to the blindness but also have rid themselves of the difficulties society attempts to impose on blindness: crowded, unorganized streets and non-accessible curbs. Even their houses are windowless—they cannot see out them so they have no need for them. Their arrangements only become unusual, yet admirable, when Nunez enters with his imperialistic, normative gaze. Throughout the story, Nunez repeatedly toggles back and forth between respect for the blind villagers and their adaptability and outright dismissal of them as less-than because, with his [Nunez's] normative gaze, he considers them abnormal and in need of fixing. Though this toggling may not be entirely Nunez's fault: according to Lennard Davis, "the very structure on which the (abstract) novel rests tends to be normative, ideologically emphasizing the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her."[143] Given this observation, it is little wonder that this struggle continues yet today as disability scholars approach "Country" in hopes of finding early views on blindness to support theories such as Bolt's declaration that Wells is the model that "employs the strategy of role reversal…[and] issues of prejudice and division."[144] Although this statement rings true to a

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[142] Wells, "Country," 23.

[143] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 41. I believe this statement is especially true with Miss Finch and the Blind Woman. Collins and Kipling clearly use not only blindness but also gender to attempt to get the reader to identify (and sympathize) with the women. Wells, in contrast, makes his protagonist as prickly as possible to encourage his readers to consider both sides of the normal/abnormal binary.

[144] Bolt, *Metanarrative,* 83.

certain extent, there are areas in the text, demonstrated above, that show where Wells definitely loses focus on his prognostication and reverts back to his normative gaze. Nevertheless, the foretelling he does in regards to current disability theory, and particularly the medical model, should not be passed over and should instead be cultivated.

In the last few words of this section, I return to Hall, who posits at the beginning of her book that "[d]isability perspectives can transform understandings of structure, genre, and narrative form. These perspectives can destabilise established theoretical paradigms in literary criticism and provide a fresh, often provocative approach to analysing all literary texts."[145] Two words in Hall's comments emulate what Wells's writing offers the field of disability theory and where his word differs significantly from other authors of his epoch: "destabilise" and "provocative." As we have discovered in this chapter, Wells definitely enjoyed being provocative and destabilizing any and all binaries he could; after all, he was a quibbler. More than that, he was a revolutionary. Wells finds a way through both "Davidson's Eyes" and "Country" to not only challenge his contemporaries' thoughts on imperialism, citizenship, and impairment but also to provide a lasting example of these same societal issues for modern scholars to build canonical texts in areas such as disability. Moreover, not only is Wells's corpus vast, it is, for the most part, unexplored for disability. When Wells wrote these two stories, disability studies did not exist; however, through them, Wells allows both contemporary Wellsian and disability scholars a glimpse into a world where no one is normal or abnormal. Perhaps, this is not such a terrible thing to see.

[145] Hall, *Literature and Disability,* 1.

CHAPTER 2

AN EXCEPTIONAL MIND: WELLS'S DUBIOUS APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH

Having an exceptional mind isn't insanity…or else we should put all our poets and artists in asylums. H.G. Wells, *Christina Alberta's Father,* 265

Thus far, I have examined two of Wells's short stories, "The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes" and "The Country of the Blind," in order to establish Wells as an early proponent of disability rights and situating parts of his vast *oeuvre* as a valuable source to the modern-day field of disability studies and its ever-forming canon. This chapter continues the discussion of Wells's anticipation of some strands of modern disability studies by focusing on mental health and what he termed "the exceptional mind," issues that are at the forefront of his novel *Christina Alberta's Father* (hereafter *CAF*).[146] He first serialized the work as *Sargon, King of Kings* in *Collier's* beginning in February 1925 and then later releases in book form in September 1925.[147] The story provides an initially humorous portrayal of a doddering, elderly gentleman sinking slowly into unreality; however, as the text unfolds, the plot becomes more labyrinthine and contemporary issues of mental health care begin to consume its superficial humor. In spite of this subtle trickery, *CAF* is an important display of Wells at his finest in terms of showing his awareness of disability in a way that varies to some degree from other authors writing about mental health after WWI. By this I mean that Wells offers a comprehensive, yet thoughtful, look at the prickly disputes and polemical changes taking place within the mental health policies and practices at the time of the novel. Wells is not the only author writing in this vein, however. The most notable example is, of course, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which

[146] Although I repurpose the term "exceptional mind" as a tool to describe the fluidity of mental status, this phrase is actually defined by Wells as someone who has "imagination" and "originality" but is not necessarily "a real lunatic." Wells, *Christina Alberta's Father*, 265.

[147] H.G. Wells, *Christina Alberta's Father* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1925). All references will be from this edition. There are minimal changes between the serial version of *CAF* and the novel; however, for the purposes of this current work, I will not be addressing these changes.

was released in the midst of the serial publication of *CAF*. Woolf's novel also addresses the mental health issues but in a distinctly different manner, as we shall see later in the chapter. Clearly, after the Great War, the mental status of the nation (and of the individual) was at the forefront of the exceptional writers at this time.

Wells challenges the perplexing world of mental health care, offering the unique view from the mind of one considered so afflicted (similar to what he does with Nunez in "Country") and adopting an interesting angle in the treatment of mental health as he questions the need to cure this state. In fact, a valid argument may be made that Wells questions the very definition of mental health. Despite this promising departure from the mental health binary, dubious areas of interpretation remain that could potentially negate the sensitivity towards disability issues that Wells is building throughout his *oeuvre*. One such area to be addressed is the seemingly ill-placed humor that leads the reader to question the seriousness of Wells's approach to mental health. This malapropos first translates into disability being used as a plot device rather than showing an increased awareness of the mental health issues of the day on Wells's part that is initially noted in the text. The organization of this current chapter is as follows: first, a brief summary of the text itself, followed by a discussion of the important historical events that lead up to the publication of *CAF* (and *Mrs. Dalloway*). Next, an analysis of several sections of *CAF* that reveals not only Wells's involvement in the mental health controversies of the day but also how these sections compare to and differ from Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Wilfred Owen, perhaps the most well-known interwar British poet who was killed just before the Armistice. Lastly, I demonstrate that, although I argued that "Davidson's Eyes" and "Country" were concerned with a more tolerant and forward-looking approach to blindness, *CAF* shows a different type of progression in Wells's views on disability. This progression is propelled by the

fact that, unlike the stories discussed in my previous chapter that advocate curing (or destroying) those disabled persons, in *CAF*, this desire is replaced by the possibility of not curing, but *accepting*, these exceptional minds and understanding that "[t]he world will never learn anything until it will learn from ridiculous people."[148]

CAF's complexities center on Albert Edward Preemby and his daughter Christina Alberta and address contemporary concerns such as the devastation of his beloved country at the hands of "poor rulers and politicians," the ever-evolving status of feminism, and, most pertinent to this work, the mental health of the returning soldiers and the government's handling of these health concerns.[149] The titular character, Preemby, is an ordinary laundryman who, after his wife's death, sells the laundry, and, along with his daughter, Christina Alberta, moves to a Boarding House. It is in this new environment that Preemby's mental state drastically changes, a change which begins almost immediately:

> It seemed to Mr. Preemby that the first evening he spent in his new quarters in Lonsdale Mews was the most eventful evening in his life. Impressions crowded upon each other. Insomnia was not among his habits, but when at last he lay upon his shake-up bed he was kept awake…trying to get these same impressions sorted out, impressions about his new surroundings, impressions about Christina Alberta, impressions of new and unprecedented personalities, a marmalade of impressions.[150]

Clearly, Preemby is overwhelmed by the influx of "impressions" he experiences this first night. Nonetheless, the overstimulation continues and, after an evening of table-turning (a version of the modern-day séance), Preemby realizes that he is indeed Sargon (a historical figure from ancient Sumeria), "incognito, come back as Lord of the World...[because] things are in a bad way and he wants to save them [his people]."[151] Unfortunately, this proclamation is not well-

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[148] Wells, *CAF*, 279.
[149] Wells, *CAF*, 167.
[150] Wells, *CAF*, 62-63.
[151] Wells, *CAF*, 139.

received by either Preemby's family or the other people he interacts with and Preemby is eventually incarcerated in the local asylum, where he experiences abominable conditions that "deprive him of nearly every right he possessed as a human being."[152] As Preemby contemplates his condition, a fellow inhabitant and ex-serviceman from the Boarding House, Bobby Roothing, who has experienced abominable conditions of a different kind during the Great War, executes an exhilarating rescue of Preemby involving an unreliable motor bicycle and its precarious sidecar. As a result of this life-threatening escape, Preemby develops pneumonia and, consequently, dies. The novel ends in typical late-Wellsian fashion with a didactic, lengthy philosophical discussion about the actions and reactions of the world-in-need-of-saving to their Savior, Sargon, in terms of religion, feminism, and individualism.

Wells's experiences of and engagement with the Great War

An obvious question when approaching this text is what is taking place in Preemby's world that would lead to his desire to extricate himself from what he sees happening around him. Preemby answers this inquiry during a conversation with Christina Alberta in which he reveals that he is Sargon: "This is a great and crowded world now…but it is in a sad state of disorder…[p]eople are not as happy now…as they were under my rule."[153] Preemby's comment also reverberates in the reality of Wells's world: much has changed between 1904, when "The Country of the Blind" first appeared, and the publication of *CAF*—most notably, World War I. There can be little doubt that the Great War changed England in fundamental ways.[154] In terms

[152] Wells, *CAF*, 241.
[153] Wells, *CAF*, 129.
[154] According to Deborah Cohen, "In the aftermath of the Great War, social peace came, if at all, only slowly. For those who championed democracy, the end of the First World War had appeared the harbinger of a better era. Between 1917 and 1919, four empires crumbled; republics succeeded monarchies. Yet the new states inherited the burdens of the old. More than four years of war left treasuries deeply indebted and political capita sparse." Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley:

of literary representations of the war, one theme that resounds in the literature of the time are the effects of the Great War and how these effects manifest in English society. Granville Hicks notes that "It [the war] killed a number of talented writers…It created some reputations and destroyed others."[155] Wells, of course, was knee-deep in the politics of war, offering his advice and commentary on every aspect of the conflict from the home front to the war front on the Continent. Hicks is quick to point out Wells's involvement in war propaganda, calling him "the most influential of the pamphleteers" and Wells's correspondences are filled with caustic opinions, impatient objections, and sardonic observations of what the government and the general public should do about first, protecting themselves from their enemy and, finally, ending the atrocity of war.[156] In fact, Wells himself experiences the Great War first hand as he travels as a war correspondent in 1916 and relates these experiences in *War and the Future: Italy, France and Britain at War*. He is clear on his reluctance to this enterprise in the first few pages of the book: "[f]or my own part I did not want to go…I travel badly…[and] am an extreme Pacifist. I hate soldiering."[157] His reactions to the war front, however, are difficult to decipher. By this I mean that he seems to relate to the soldiers on a personal level but when he gets too distressed with the conditions they experience, he retreats behind what he calls "stock questions."[158] To consider again the beginning of the book, Wells unapologetically, and rather aggressively for a

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University of California Press, 2001), 2. Interesting, Wells's *Autobiography* describes a similar sentiment: "The efforts of my brain to grasp the possibilities of human violence, feebleness and docility that I had neglected and ignored so long in my eagerness to push forward to the modern State…were, I suppose, paralleled in hundreds of thousands of brains." Wells, *Autobiography*, 572.

[155] Granville Hicks, "Literature and the War," *The English Journal* 28.10 (1939): 785.

[156] Hicks, "Literature," 787. Wells's interest in warfare started long before WWI, as far back in his career as *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The War in the Air* (1908). Two ingenious examples of this continued interest, and of Wells's innovative mind, involve further adapting bicycles to the art of war and the mobilization of a civilian defense that would include "a considerable quantity of bicycles, small cars, and other material," including Boy Scouts. H.G. Wells, *The Correspondences of H.G. Wells*, 4 vol. ed. David C. Smith (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), vol. 1, 372-375 and vol. 2, 371.

[157] Wells, *War and the Future: Italy, France and Britain at War* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1917), 7.

[158] Wells, *War and the Future*, 11.

proclaimed pacifist, announces that he does not "merely want to stop this war" but that he wants to "nail down war in its coffin."[159] Conversely, when confronted by an actual soldier, his stock phrases fail him:

> He was a lad in the early twenties, weather-bit and with bloodshot eyes. He was, he told me, a miner. I asked my stock question in such cases, whether he would go back to the old work after the war. He said he would, and then added—with the events of overnight on his mind: 'If A'hm looky [if I'm lucky].' Followed by a little silence. Then I tried my second stock remark for such cases. One does not talk to soldiers at the front of the war of Glory or the "Empire on which the sun never sets" or "the meteor flag of England" or of King and Country or any of those fine old headline things…we knew that we and our allies are upon a greater, graver, more fundamental business than that sort of thing now.[160]

Reading this passage from *War and the Future,* one detects a certain sense of respect and fear that Wells fosters for the soldiers but, as the war progresses, his patience with the continuing war grows thin. A few pages after the above entry, the pacifist Wells bitterly admits that "this tour of the fronts has made me very sad and weary with a succession of ruins. I can bear no more ruins unless they are the ruins of Dusseldorf, Cologne, Berlin, or suchlike modern German city."[161] The grisly reality of war has begun taking a toll on Wells's own psyche.[162] This response is not Wells's alone: in order to cope with the fundamental changes to post-war ideas of humanity brought on by the war, he and other authors (such as Woolf) must adapt their protagonists to new and emerging ideas about heroism. Wells posits in his *Autobiography* that:

> No intelligent brain that passed through the experience of the Great War emerged without being profoundly changed…To me, as to most people, it was a revelation of the profound instability of the social order. It was also a revelation of the possibilities of fundamental reorganization that were now open to mankind—and of certain extraordinary weaknesses in the collective mentality.[163]

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[159] Wells, *War and the Future*, 11.
[160] Wells, *War and the Future*, 37.
[161] Wells, *War and the Future*, 63-64.
[162] One anecdote Wells discusses in his *Autobiography* is his own war wound: "I was so worried and my nerves were so fatigued that I was presently afflicted with *allopecia areta* [*sic*], well known…as an anxiety disease, in which the hair comes out in patches…It was not much of in the way of a war wound, but in all modesty, I put it on record." Wells, *Autobiography*, 591.
[163] Wells, *Autobiography*, 569.

Within this quote, we see two forces at play that make the literature of the day difficult to gauge: first, the world after the war is radically different than any other world Wells and his contemporaries have ever written in and, second, it was now up to this new world to recognize its weaknesses in order to avoid another war. In other words, the authors have a blank slate on which to reconstruct the devastated world they see after the Great War. Wells's answer to this particular challenge is seen in two different manifestations: first, in the character of Albert Edward Preemby—a.k.a. Sargon, King of Kings, and, second, the idea of "new sorts of people."[164]

As Wells develops the character of Preemby, he explains the need for this type of hero:

> There had been a great war, much devastation; the world was wounded and unable to recover. The poor rulers and politicians of this age had no wisdom, had no instinct for the fundamentally right thing. Once more a leader and a savior was required, one who had the wisdom that counts…and he [Sargon] had come back to heal the swarming world's disorders and reinstate the deep peace of old Sumeria once again.[165]

Notably, as Preemby contemplates his new mission, he muses, "[w]hat should be his opening words to them when the moment of revelation came? 'First; --Let there be Peace!' Better words than that one could not imagine. He muttered to himself; 'Peace and not War among the Nations.'…I, Sargon, have come back after many ages to give Peace to the Whole World."[166] Clearly, peace, both collectively and individually, is top priority for Wells, and other writers, in the post-war years and, because of this need for peace and stability, not only is the perceived-hero different in *CAF* but the more minor characters are also altered. By this I mean that there is an active seeking-out of not only the comradery of survival but also a mutual healing. As (minor character) Bobby Roothing contemplates:

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[164] Wells, *CAF*, 352.
[165] Wells, *CAF*, 167.
[166] Wells, *CAF*, 170.

> Sargon was new, Paul Lambone was new, Devizes new; before the war there could not have been any such people. They had grown out of their own past selves; they were as different from pre-war people as nineteenth-century people had been different from eighteenth-century people.[167]

What Wells is alluding to, in other words, is that these characters could not have existed pre-war: the societal conditions were not present before this time. Notably, these "new people" appear in other works of the day as well. As Virginia Woolf's character Peter Walsh observes: "those five years—1918 to 1923—had been…somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different."[168] This concept of "new people" takes an entirely different form in Wells's novel, however.

A portion of these "new people" are the servicemen trying to absorb the catastrophic results of the war not only on their country but also on their mental states. As a direct result of the Great War, many soldiers returned home physically and emotionally different than they had left. Hicks encapsulates this struggle when he notes that, in contrast to the United States' involvement in WWI, "[i]n England…the war did everything that a war could do to a nation's culture."[169] For example, out of the approximately 9.5 million permanently disabled veterans returning from the war worldwide, more than 750,000 of these veterans claimed England as home.[170] Moreover, these men, and more specifically, those who did not return intact, were not necessarily welcomed home with open arms. Cohen writes: "[e]ach disabled veteran appeared to bring the war's horror home with him. Stark reminders of the war's sacrifices, disabled veterans also endangered the peace. No country was spared mass protests by disgruntled ex-servicemen in

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[167] Wells, *CAF*, 352.

[168] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1981) 71. Karen L. Levenback notes that "[b]y calling attention to [these] five—rather than four—years, Woolf makes clear that what changes there were began with the war itself," which is a key point to mention in terms of "New People." They did not, could not, exist before the War. Karen L. Levenback, *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 53.

[169] Granville Hicks, "Literature and the War," 785.

[170] Cohen, *The War Come Home*, 2, 4.

the immediate postwar years. Insufficient provisions for the disabled provided a rallying cry for veterans' organizations."[171] Cohen also explains that "[b]ecause it defined the British state's obligations to its citizens, the question of employment for badly disabled ex-servicemen became one of the more contentious social issues that the government faced in the immediate postwar years."[172] All of this anxiety culminates close to the publication date of *CAF* (and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*). As Peter Knox-Shaw informs us:

> A storm had broken in Parliament only a fortnight before [before October 14, 1922] over the announcement that, as from October 1, six hundred or so ex-servicemen in asylums were to forego their right to a pension under a now expired Royal Warrant and to be supported wholly under the provision of the Poor Law—on the grounds that their mental derangement was judged to have been due to causes other than the war.[173]

Additionally, in 1922, the War Office publishes their *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into "Shell-Shock,"* which included 59 dictums from various "medical officers and psychologists, debating the nature of and use of the term 'shell shock.'"[174] Undeniably, discussions of what to do about these ex-servicemen are everywhere and it can be safely assumed that, given Wells's proclivity to be involved in any and all controversial issues building in the world around him, he is fully aware of this conundrum. In fact, Knox-Shaw notes that "championship of mentally afflicted ex-servicemen provided a central plank in the Labour

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[171] Cohen, *The War Come Home*, 2.

[172] Cohen, *The War Come Home*, 39.

[173] Peter Knox-Shaw, "The Otherness of Septimus Warren Smith," *The Durham University Journal* 87.1 (1995): 99. Knox-Shaw observes that Woolf created the character of Septimus "on or about the 14 October 1922," thus the importance of the date (99). Knox-Shaw provides a startling statistic, observing that "a sharp rise in the numbers of these certified men over a period of two years—from 2,506 on Jan. 1, 1919 to 6,435 on Oct. 27, 1921 [originally reported in *The Times* on Nov. 9, 1921]—led to searching questions in the House, and subsequent debate dragged the entire legal apparatus relating to mental illness into the open," 102.

[174] Sandy Hudock, ""Men Must Not Cut Down Trees": Septimus Smith's Madness of Nature," in *The Image of Violence II: in Literature, Media, and Society*, eds. Will Wright and Stephen Kaplan (Pueblo: Colorado State University, 2007), 243.

platform during 1923," a platform to which Wells himself was seeking election.[175] He lost his bid but the Labour platform came into power in 1924 (one year before the publication of *CAF*). It was also in January of 1924 that Wells first contacts Montagu Lomax, an assistant medical officer, with several scenarios to address concerning a new novel—*CAF*—he is about to begin, a correspondence to which we will return shortly.[176]

Another cause of the damaged psyches of returning war veterans, David F. Waterman posits, was the inability of the soldiers to divulge to the home-population the true nature of the war. As Waterman explains:

> People back home are continually being misled, not only by the senior officers and government leaders, but also by combatants writing from the front, soldiers who knew the horror of war firsthand yet chose to write about it in conventional fashion, 'for God and Country'… [however] even soldiers who wanted to write the truth to their families were prevented from doing so by their officers, who censored everything they wrote… [in the form of] the Field Service Post Card, pre-printed with 'allowable' phrases, which the soldier was permitted only to sign and date; if anything else was written, the post card was destroyed.[177]

While the civilian population is keeping the home-fires burning, comfortable in the knowledge that their borders are being protected by their very own loved ones, these same loved ones are experiencing atrocities that they can share with no one—especially not their families. To add to this conundrum, the returning servicemen with unseen wounds are less understood and less accepted as disabled, as Waterman observes:

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[175] Knox-Shaw, "Otherness," 100. Interestingly, Wells's nomination letter to his constituents contains no mention of this championing, which may initially make one wonder exactly how important this issue was to Wells himself; however, as addressed later in the chapter, Wells took up the matter of mental health in another arena: *CAF*.

[176] Wells, *Correspondences*, vol. 3, 169.

[177] David F. Waterman, *Disordered Bodies and Disrupted Borders: Representations of Resistance in Modern British Literature* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.), 5-7. Interestingly, Wells echoes this same censorship in his own efforts to educate the home front: "[b]ut because there was a war Censorship in existence…[and] they seemed to me to be intended [requested alterations] to save rather the prestige of the military authorities than the country, for if people like I were not to chide the military authorities and tell the public about them [issues, in Wells's opinion, of military inefficiency], who would? These soldiers would go on with their bloody muddle. Muddle until disaster was assured," *Autobiography*, 591.

> The lessons of history and literature as they are taught in school, the sermons from the pulpit, and the stories around the fireplace all glorify war as noble, significant action, which praises the warrior who suffers a bodily wound but *condemns as a coward the soldier whose wound is mental.* This judgmental attitude continues, even though World War I represents the first large-scale recognition of 'abnormal' mental states as an effect of combat.[178]

This passage is particularly helpful in understanding the line that is swiftly drawn post-war between a "bodily wound" (i.e. an acceptable wound) and a mental wound, which proves to be more difficult for a public shielded from the barbarities of WWI to understand.[179] There are, however, authors that do manage to write about their own war experiences; most notably, Wilfred Owen, a young British poet who was killed in action one week before the signing of the Armistice.

Owen and Wells actually met in the summer of 1917 through their mutual friend, poet and, then, Second-Lieutenant, Siegfried Sassoon, and it is through Owen (and Sassoon) that Wells likely saw some glimpses of the psychological effects of war on its soldiers.[180] For instance, Owen writes in one of his letters that "Wells talks of coming up here [Craiglockhart] to see him [Sassoon] and his doctor; not about Sassoon's state of health, but about *God, the Invisible King*" [a theological discourse written by Wells declaring his own religion beliefs].[181] Sassoon was admitted to Craiglockhart (a hospital for shell-shocked officers) after making this statement to the House of Commons: "I believe that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest." Immediately after

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[178] Waterman, *Disordered Bodies,* 6-7. Emphasis mine.

[179] This disparity becomes apparent in the distinct line drawn between psychologists (influenced by Freud's four stages of hysteria) and the medical professionals of the day. According to Knox-Shaw, there were two distinct camps in regards to the mentally-affected soldiers: self-healing versus the more physiologic condition of neurological damage. See Knox-Shaw, "Otherness," 103.

[180] *Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters*, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 485.

[181] Owen*, Collected Letters*, 485. Owen and Sassoon met here in the summer of 1917. This timely meeting resulted in Owen then being introduced to notable literary figures such as Wells, Arnold Bennett, Robert Graves, and Robert Ross.

this statement, the Under-Secretary for War, who posited Sassoon was "suffering a nervous breakdown," recommended Sassoon for admission to the hospital.[182] Wells does not seem to have made this trip to Craiglockhart, for no such trip is documented within either Owen's letters or Wells's. Wells does, however, acknowledge the "shell-shocked" war veterans in *CAF* through other sources, one of which is Mrs. Preemby:

> The closing years of the Great War, and still more so the opening year of the Disappointing Peace, were years of very great difficult for the [Preemby's] laundry business…[n]ever had Mrs. Preemby known so many bad debts. Van men came back from the army so shell-shocked and militarized that they embezzled out of pure nervousness and habit. Income tax became a nightmare.[183]

Initially this passage reads as a slightly negative portrayal of the shell-shocked war veteran. However, Wells is surely imitating the insensitivity that some of the English population displayed towards the returning soldiers. Indeed, Wells offers another image of a shell-shocked war veteran, not through Preemby, but through Bobby Roothing, a returning soldier involved in the infamous Siege of Kut Al Amara (discussed below). Bobby, much like Nunez in the previous chapter, reveals his innermost thoughts on the development of "new people" from the affected's side:

> The war had overstrained him, he realized, and left him too tired for a time to see new things. He had been one of the vast multitude of those who had come out of the war in the expectation of a trite and obvious old-fashioned millennium, and who expressed their disappointment by declaring that nothing had happened except devastation and impoverishment. They were too jaded at first to observe anything else.[184]

This short passage above reveals that Wells was very much aware of the shell-shocked veterans and the haze (for lack of a better term) they must emerge from when they face re-entry into the

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[182] Owen, *Collected Letters*, 485. The timing of Sassoon's proclamation and his interment at Craiglockhart might be interpreted as a way for the Under-Secretary for War to discredit Sassoon's controversial interpretations of the war.

[183] Wells, *CAF*, 36-37.

[184] Wells, *CAF*, 354.

civilian world that has significantly changed itself—a reality that may contribute to the conclusion that Hicks reaches in 1939 that "its [the war's] influence was stronger in the second peace decade than in the first."[185] Wells's "new people" are a direct result of this post-war aftermath and could not have existed prior to this time in history: the immediate, outward impact from the war disseminates into Europe's devastated landscapes and economic systems; it takes several years, however, and much civil upheaval and societal unrest for the wounded psyche of an entire nation to reveal itself. This revelation manifests itself in several versions of post-war literature involving what I call "mental fluidity" ranging from the posthumous poems from Wilfred Owen, the stunning suicide of Septimus Warren Smith (discussed below), and, for the purposes of our discussion, the misguided antics of Albert Edward Preemby, who stands out from the destructive narratives appearing in print near the same time as *CAF*.[186]

This section has indeed been inundated with a large amount of background and scene setting; however, this information is crucial in understanding where Wells and the other authors were writing. During Wells's visit to the war-front in1916, he experienced first-hand the devastation that war caused on its soldiers. Once he (and they) returned home, another devastation of sorts revealed itself: their beloved country faced a total upheaval of the previous cultural and societal norms. In other words, the peoples of pre-war Europe no longer existed—they were now "new people." This new race, if you will, encompassed both those who stayed at home and those on the war front, who did not necessarily agree on the overall effects of the Great War, creating a chasm between those who stayed and those who went (and returned). A

[185] Hicks, *Literature,* 785.

[186] Mental fluidity is a term of my own design. As I researched mental health and, more specifically, Wells's disruption of the mental health binary, I struggled to find the appropriate terminology to incorporate the vastness of this spectrum. Mental fluidity, in short, is a term used to describe the flexibility within the assumed rigidness of the sane/insane binary. There are degrees of madness, as Wells points out clearly in *CAF*; hence, mental fluidity.

direct result of this division was the returning soldiers being placed at the heart of the trouble. As mentioned above, not all of the soldiers returned in the same condition as they were when they left—disability and how to manage these wounded soldiers was now at the forefront of many minds. Questions of how one became disabled and whether that disability was an acceptable wound (physical) or an unseen wound (mental) erupted in English society, leading to the segregation and mistreatment of many disabled soldiers. All of this unrest leads to an influx of new (or updated) medical policies and societal controversies that Wells was fully engulfed in. All of this turmoil, in turn, led to a different type of writing, one not possible prior to the Great War because English society had not experienced the cataclysmic results of that war. In other words, instead of dealing with issues of English supremacy and imperialistic pursuits that we see in the first chapter of this work, this second chapter addresses how England struggles to recover after the devastation of the Great War. The literature produced during this time is fundamentally different; it has to be—the world Wells (and other authors) inhabited was different. Understanding this difference is crucial to appreciating why what Wells did with *CAF* is noteworthy and different from the other destructive narratives published during the same time period.

Wells's exception(s) to the destructive narrative

After much thought, it seems to this reader that Wells is, again, using his unique voice to reinterpret or redefine mental health. By this I mean, if we review a few of the texts around Wells, both during and after the war, a majority of these works represent a wholly negative, albeit realistic, outcome for the patient. The most obvious, and startling, example of this outcome is that which befalls Septimus Warren Smith, Virginia Woolf's protagonist in *Mrs. Dalloway*. As

mentioned above, Woolf published *Mrs. Dalloway* within months of Wells's *CAF* but the two novels could not be more different in terms of addressing the mental health issues of the day. *Mrs. Dalloway* tells a parallel story of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, both experiencing mental health disruptions in varying degrees. The book is also written as a stream-of-consciousness novel, in itself a distinction from Wells's more conventional *CAF*. More importantly for my work, however, is the desperation and helplessness that Septimus (as an ex-serviceman rebounding from the atrocities he witnessed on the war-front) feels in the post-WWI England that was not necessarily friendly towards its returning soldiers. This desperation is most clearly seen when Septimus, under duress from both his wife Rezia (inadvertently) and his physician Dr. Holmes (directly), feels that "he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes."[187] Shortly after this revelation, Septimus, who states clearly that he "did not want to die. Life was good," shockingly leaps to his death, rather that face Dr. Holmes and his treatments. Dr. Holmes's, who witnessed Septimus's suicide, reaction is notably: "[t]he coward!"[188] This extreme failure on Dr. Holmes's part to understand the pain and confusion Septimus experiences foregrounds the incredible shirking of responsibility towards returning war veterans that the general public was guilty of, as Woolf's narrative intended to address.[189] A more realistic example of these mental war wounds is found in Owen's poem, "S-I-W" [i.e. Self-Inflicted Wound] and offers an intra-war example of the societal ignorance of the

[187] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 92.

[188] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 149.

[189] Knox-Shaw points out that Woolf herself writes "I want to criticize the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense." He also, rightly so, posits that "[a]lthough *Mrs. Dalloway* goes to the heart of many issues touching on the institutionalising of the shell-shocked, Virginia Woolf is clearly selective in the way she engages with the public debate. Septimus is not a 'pauper lunatic,' nor is he among the six thousand-odd certified ex-servicemen in lunatic asylums," 100. A logical resistance to this comment in regards to Wells's Preemby is that Preemby is also not an ex-serviceman. However, Wells never declares that he is outright criticizing the social system, as Woolf does. This, I believe, is the distinction between how Woolf approaches her text and how Wells approaches his. In other words, Wells's Preemby encompasses the wider-ranging spectrum of mental health options for all humans but still critiques the mental health care system issues happening in his epoch.

damaged psyche of England's servicemen. The narrator tells the story of a soldier who commits suicide and how his comrades, in order to avoid any unpleasant backlash from the folks back home, bury the gun used in the deed:

> One dawn, our wire patrol
> Carried him. This time, Death had not missed.
> We could do nothing but wipe his bleeding cough.
> Could it be an accident?—Rifles go off…
> Not sniped? No. (Later they found the English ball)…
> With him they buried the muzzle his teeth had kissed,
> And truthfully wrote the Mother, 'Tim died smiling'.[190]

This poem, as with the other poems in Owen's compilation, starkly reveals the unacknowledged and deeply-hidden psychological trauma that the soldiers experienced on the fronts. Owen's poems are even more impactful when remembering that Owen himself experienced not only the war front but also stress to his own mental health as a result of his time on the front.[191] Owen catches the experience of death on the warfront most chillingly in an excerpt from his poem "Mental Cases":

> -These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.
> Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
> Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.
> Wad sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,
> Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.
> Always they must see these things and hear them,

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[190] Wilfred Owen. *The Poems of Wilfred Owen: A New Edition*. Ed. Edmund Blunden (New York: The Viking Press, 1931), 70. It is important to note that although "S.I.W" is written intra-war, the first edition of Owen's poems is not published until 1920, a date very close to the germinal activity of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Another interesting side note in regards to Owen: a few months before he was killed in action, he created a list of persons to receive a copy of his collected poems. Wells was on that list; whether Wells actually read any of Owen's posthumously published poems is unclear. *Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters*. Ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 561, footnote 3.

[191] Waterman casts his own interesting net around the function of suicide in *Mrs. Dalloway*: "[s]uicide, the ultimate act of resistance and control over one's own body, momentarily disturbs part of the system of power, in this case [of Septimus] the doctor [Holmes], who quickly regains composure and control." Waterman, *Disordered Bodies,* 23.

> Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
> Carnage incomparable, and human squander,
> Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.[192]

These are the images that the real Owen and the fictional Septimus lived with and these images translated into a distinct trend being set with this war literature, whether it be during the war or several years later: one of dismal and devastating results for the veterans with mental war wounds.

One resounding exception to what I am calling here destructive narratives is Albert Edward Preemby, the ostensible main character who eventually goes "mad" and believes he is Sargon, King of Kings. The term "destructive narratives" simply encompasses the idea that there are several examples of negative portrayals (with horrific endings) of shell-shocked war veterans at the time Wells is writing *CAF—Mrs. Dalloway* most notably. Because of this shock-value approach, I posit, they are a destructive depiction in the arena of mental health. In any event, in Preemby, Wells creates a character that, on some level, most readers can (then and now) enjoy. One cannot help laughing out loud, for example, when Mr. Preemby quibbles with the pompous Teddy Winterton about rhinoceroses' bones at their first meeting: "[h]orses had rhinoceros [*sic*] bones in those days…[a]nd the rhinoceroses--! They were incredible. If I had one [rhinoceros bone] I shouldn't have anywhere to put it."[193] Entertaining as Preemby is, though, Wells also provides a more somber foil to Preemby's presumed mental health issues in the character of Bobby Roothing.

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[192] Owen, 72. This poem has a particular significance when analyzing Woolf's Septimus, who experienced this type of anguish with the loss of his friend and commanding officer, Evans, who was killed right before the Armistice (very similar to Owen himself).

[193] Wells, *CAF*, 68.

Bobby Roothing: the First Disciple

The lightheartedness of the novel continues when Wells initially presents Bobby Roothing. When Preemby rents a room from the Malmesbury's, Bobby declares, "I've let the second-floor front to a lunatic" and Mrs. Malmesbury's response is "Oh, *Bobby*! and with Susan [the proprietors' young daughter] about!"[194] This blitheness on Wells's part is charming, especially when compared to the disturbing darkness and hidden anguish exhibited by Woolf's Septimus. However, an argument may be made that Bobby—as a traumatized war veteran—is Wells's Septimus, in a lighter, more humorous manner. This decision on Wells's part becomes important when we consider that, with Bobby, Wells had the opportunity to follow the destructive narrative route; however, he instead takes an alternative, and more positive, stance. To support this claim, it is important to note that, unlike all the other characters surrounding Preemby, Bobby is the first, and only, one to accept Preemby for who he says he is. For example, when Preemby (as Sargon) and Bobby first meet, the reader is left with the impression that there is some sort of unspoken communication or understanding exchanged. This understanding is first seen when Bobby asks Preemby for his name and – after hearing Preemby call himself Sargon – Bobby mentions nonchalantly, "Sargon—wasn't that an Assyrian king, or does my memory betray me?" Without a moment's hesitation, Bobby immediately accepts two facts about Preemby: first, that Preemby *is* Sargon and, two, this fact must be kept secret for the time being: "not a word more, sir—I understand."[195] This reaction speaks positively towards Wells's awareness that mental health exists on a spectrum. By this I mean that Bobby immediately recognizes that Preemby is on a different mental plane than society would deem normal and, knowing this discrepancy has the potential to create difficulties for Preemby, Bobby immediately

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[194] Wells, *CAF*, 183.
[195] Wells, *CAF*, 178.

shushes Preemby—protecting him from the backlash of societal misunderstanding. This brief meeting showcases where Wells's approach to the mental health binary is fundamentally different than Woolf's: Wells could have easily made this text into a destructive narrative, as we see with Woolf (and Owen); instead, he chose to create a positive character that accepts Preemby as Sargon without ever suggesting he might be in need of a cure or treatment in the form of incarceration, medication, or therapy. In other words, Wells gives Preemby a Bobby Roothing, a mutual feeling of comradery since Bobby has first-hand knowledge of Sargon's kingdom and, most importantly for the above claim, an embracing of, instead of a curing, of mental fluidity.

In Bobby Roothing, we also see Wells hint at the devastation (both mental and societal) left behind in the aftermath of the Great War. As Bobby explains, "I've been there [Kut] since [circa 3,750 BCE].[196] Quite recently. But the weather wasn't quite as good and I got knocked about by a shell and had a nasty time as a wounded prisoner…But in your time, it was different."[197] The mention of this event likely triggered a visceral reaction from Wells's readers as the incident Bobby refers to is the Siege of Kut al Amara (1914-1916). Wells succinctly describes this episode thus: "[t]o the East, in Mesopotamia, the British, using Indian troops chiefly, made a still remoter flank attack upon the Central Powers…the Turks were heavily reinforced, there was a retreat to Kut, and there the British army, under General Townsend, was surrounded and starved into surrender on April 29th, 1916."[198] The factual event was something that would still be fresh in British minds and, as a result, helps explain Bobby's easy acceptance of Preemby's alter ego. Unlike modern readers of *CAF*, Wells's readers would easily make the connection between Sargon and Bobby's recent experience in Kut and would not require any

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[196] Wells proposes this date in his *Outline of History*, noting that "the date of 3,750 B.C., assigned to Sargon 1 and still accepted by many authorities." H.G Wells, *The New and Revised Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1920), 91.

[197] Wells, *CAF*, 180.

[198] Wells, *The Outline of History*, 478.

further explanation. It may also explain Bobby's reaction later in the novel, after he rescues Preemby from the asylum, and Preemby describes the occurrences that happened to him in the Observation Ward:

> When the keepers and attendants bullied me and ill-treated me I did not behave as a great king should have behaved, and when I saw them doing evil things to other—other patients, I did not interfere. Yet all the time I think I am something different from the Albert Edward Preemby I used to be, something more and something better. But it leaves me confused to think who I am, and I am very tired.[199]

Upon hearing this, Bobby reacts with confusion and, possibly, with regret about his own actions during the Siege of Kut al Amara: "I have seen men ill-treated…and I am not so slight as you are."[200] Through Preemby's experiences in the Observation Ward, Bobby sees his own perceived failures of neglecting to protect those clearly in need of his help and this connection may be viewed as, not a cure or condemnation, but as an acceptance of Preemby's hallucinations—an act of defiance on Wells's part in terms of deconstructing the binary of sanity/insanity. This acceptance of mental fluidity is not seen in Woolf's Septimus but, notably, it is not his fault. By this I mean that Septimus chose suicide over facing the treatment of Dr. Holmes and the daily disappointment from his wife; it was not Septimus's supposed misery that caused him to end his life—it was the societal influences pushing down on him. In both Bobby and Preemby, Wells challenges the sane/insane binary by not only allowing Preemby to find some sense of acceptance but also by clearing the path for the healing of Bobby as well. For example, earlier in the chapter, Bobby reflects on his actions as a prisoner of war where "[h]e had a rankling of a memory of a case of cruelty he had witnessed in the prisoners' camp when he had stood by and done nothing. He would wake up sometimes at three o'clock in the morning and say to himself

[199] Wells, *CAF*, 337.
[200] Wells, *CAF*, 337.

aloud, 'I stood by and I did nothing. Oh God! Oh *God*! Oh God!'"[201] Preemby, acting very similar to Bobby in the previous quote, also "stood by and [did] nothing" in the Observation Ward when the "very dirty old man with a face of extreme misery" was "hit several times with great vigour by Mr. Higgs [the attendant].[202] Both men understand that they should have done more to help, or even prevent, the suffering of others; yet, both stand idly as the cruelty happened. By giving Bobby and Sargon essentially the same experience of refusing to become involved while others are injured, Wells establishes not only a deep, emotional connection between the two men but he also, in Bobby, provides another alternative to (not) curing Preemby's mental fluidity—an alternative without involuntary incarceration, medications, or prescribed therapy. As a result of the deep bond between the men, Bobby *appears to be* the only one interested in rescuing Preemby from the local asylum. As my emphasis indicates, however, not all in Wells's novel is as it seems.

Bobby does indeed rescue Preemby, but the cost is high and the rescue quickly becomes more about Bobby than Preemby. For example, when Preemby leaves the asylum the night of the rescue, his skimpy attire consists of only a dressing-gown and slippers. Additionally, Wells notes that it is November and cold enough that the grass was "heavy with white frost" and a "friendly mist" that "wetted him."[203] Although Preemby (as Sargon) believes himself to be a god incarnate, Preemby is still only a man and, when he walks out of the asylum (conveniently, none of the doors are locked and the guards are asleep), he is vulnerable to all of the more common weaknesses assigned to mere mortals—such as the vulnerability of illness. Preemby can be forgiven for his unsuitable attire in his haste to leave the asylum; Bobby, however, also forgets this human susceptibility and is quite alarmed when he finds the disheveled state that Preemby is

[201] Wells, *CAF*, 301.
[202] Wells, *CAF*, 226-227.
[203] Wells, *CAF*, 319-321.

in after his night on the lam. He chastises himself, remarking to Preemby: "I didn't think you'd have no clothes. Clothes?...Cold? May be cold." Remarkably, this "unavoidable" neglect does not phase Bobby in any sort of proactive way as he hides Preemby in a ditch, "shivering amidst the mud and dead leaves under the dripping trees" and leaves Preemby to his own defenses while he tries to figure out his next step.[204] Luckily, Preemby has his wits about him and finds his own means of keeping warm: "I was so cold…I took these things from the scarecrow."[205] Not surprisingly, the next morning "found Preemby developing an evil cold in his throat and chest. His chest was painful and he was feverish, red-checked, bright-eyed, and short of breath" but "Bobby did not care to consult a doctor. He believed that all doctors constituted a league for the re-incarceration of escaped lunatics," a valid concern at this point in the novel. Instead, he medicates Sargon on the advice of "the chemist."[206] The rescue itself becomes less about Preemby and more about Bobby as he lauds himself as the "cleverest fellow that ever stole a lunatic."[207] In truth, it might be argued that Bobby's rescue of Preemby from the asylum actually instigates Preemby's death. Here, Wells falters slightly in his positive portrayal of a disabled character, reverting back to his normative thinking that the disabled must be cured (or destroyed). Granted, the above event is only about curing a simple cold; however, I posit, the act of exposing Preemby to the fickle environment without proper thought on Bobby's part does, in fact, end with Preemby's permanent cure (i.e. death). Nonetheless, before unpacking this misstep on Wells's part, it is to a discussion of how Wells is clearly progressive in his portrayal of

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[204] Wells, *CAF*, 324.

[205] Wells, *CAF*, 327.

[206] Wells, *CAF*, 335.

[207] Wells, *CAF*, 328. In fact, as Bobby initially plans the rescue of Preemby, he "lapse[s] into a childish day-dream" in which he envisions himself as an "Archangel-Knight-Errant, a great flaming presence of light and winged power, righting wrongs, reproving oppressors, liberating every kind of captive creature," 307.

tangible mental health issues of his day—specifically in the arena of involuntary incarceration and the consequential treatment of the inmates in the asylum—that I would now like to turn.

How a lunatic is made: Wells, involuntary incarceration, and citizenship

There can be no doubt that Wells did his research prior to writing *CAF*. Wells was not only immersed in the political side of lunacy (i.e. as a Labour Party candidate in 1923), he was also actively seeking counsel from experts in the mental health field. For example, in January 1924, Wells composed a letter of inquiry to Montagu Lomax, a particularly controversial assistant medical officer, in regards to the accurate treatment of presumed-lunatics. Lomax's name was well-known in the mental health reform movement, beginning in 1921 with the publication of his *The Experience of an Asylum Doctor*.[208] As a result of this book, Lomax was nearly ostracized from the "psychiatric establishment," but, T.W. Harding argues, Lomax also made "a lasting contribution to the cause of mental health reform."[209] The sense of injustice for the inhabitants of the asylum is clearly seen in the letters Lomax and Wells exchange. For example, in his first letter to Wells, Lomax writes, "[o]bserve, all this [incarceration] has been (quite legally) done, without any trial, without the patient having any say in the matter, [and] without his friends knowing anything about it."[210] Not surprisingly, it is Lomax that Wells turns

[208] T.W. Harding, ""Not Worth Powder and Shot": A Reappraisal of Montagu Lomax's Contribution to Mental Health Reform," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 156 (1990), 180. Incidentally, an assistant medical officer works independently or with limited supervision of a physician. In contemporary vernacular, Lomax might be compared to a physicians' assistant.

[209] Harding, 180. Harding declares that "the book conveyed vividly the hopelessness, the inhumanity, and the regimentation of asylum life…Newspapers seized on the book and solicited interviews and articles from Lomax," which is likely how Wells became familiar with Lomax's name.

[210] Montagu Lomax, letter to Wells, January 24th, 1924. Another example of this heightened sense of injustice on Lomax's part may be seen in the dedication of his book: "To all the insane poor in sympathy with their sufferings and in hope of alleviating their hardships this book is inscribed by the author." Lomax, *The Experiences of an Asylum Doctor: With Suggestions for Asylum and Lunacy Law Reform* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), no pg. #.

to for advice on how to depict "a man (A) who is imaginatively disturbed" when he writes *CAF*.[211]

Wells draws upon Lomax's information in *CAF* when, after creating quite a bit of chaos at the Rubicon Restaurant, Preemby is taken away by a policeman, much to the chagrin of Bobby. Wells goes on to describe how Billy (Bobby's friend and fellow witness to Preemby's anarchy) waits "three full days" before suggesting that Bobby inquire about Preemby at the police station.[212] This action parallels Lomax's revelation that a person can only be retained for three days before they must be released. He explains that "within that three days the constable must report his case to a 'justice having jurisdiction' within that district."[213] Bobby is told that "[w]e took him, in the exercise of our discretion, to the Workhouse Infirmary—for observation as to his mental state. Three clear days they keep them there. Then they're either certified [a lunatic] or let go. Or charged."[214] In the Observation Ward, Preemby is evaluated, per the mandates of the Lunacy Laws, by "two strangers" that:

> [S]poke now as if Sargon were not present or as if he were an inanimate object…and while Sargon was being steered back to bed…the justice and the doctor filled in and signed the forms that were necessary to deprive him of nearly every right he possessed as a human being. For there is not trial by jury and no writ of habeas-corpus in Britain for the unfortunate charged with insanity.[215]

Within this quote, we also see Wells addressing citizenship issues, much like he did in "Davidson's Eyes" and "Country." That being said, however, the doctrines of citizenship in *CAF* are not quite the same as they were in the other two stories. In the previous chapter, Wells addressed citizenship in the more literal sense of the concept in that national citizenship was being critiqued in terms of imperialism; this chapter, however, considers citizenship by focusing

[211] Wells, *Correspondences*, 215.
[212] Wells, *Correspondences*, vol. 3, 215.
[213] Wells, *Correspondences*, vol. 3, 215.
[214] Wells, *Correspondences*, vol. 3, 216.
[215] Wells, *CAF*, 240-241.

on a less formal aspect of citizenship—the basic rights and responsibilities of the peoples of a particular location or population. To help explain this looser interpretation of citizenship, it is useful to recall Marcia Rioux's observations from the previous chapter that indicate "[t]here is no universally agreed-upon notion of citizenship, although the many definitions share commonalties."[216] She continues, explaining that there is a "dynamic relationship along three complementary dimensions: rights and responsibilities, access and belonging."[217] For this discussion, I repurpose Rioux's definition in the specific case of Preemby and his involuntary incarceration into the asylum, what he experiences during this incarceration, and how these events translate into a violation of not necessarily citizenship but of a violation of his civil rights and social citizenship. Again, this area is another aspect of disability where Wells's progressive stance emerges—Woolf, for example, does not necessarily address this issue directly in *Mrs. Dalloway*—and, if my overarching argument that Wells's approach to disability is indeed unique and progressive, his recognition of potential civil rights and social citizenship violations is a defining example of where Wells excels at showing his deep consideration of disability as a social construct. In any event, Rioux provides two definitions that are crucial to understanding Preemby's experiences with incarceration, one of civil rights and one of social citizenship. Civil rights are defined as "freedom of speech, mobility, religion and association; the right to enter contracts; and *the right to due process of law*."[218] As evidenced above, two complete strangers are clearly violating Preemby's civil rights when he undergoes the committal evaluation:

> There is not trial by jury and no writ of habeas-corpus in Britain for the unfortunate charged with insanity. He may not plead in public and there is no one to who he may appeal. He may write complaints but they will be neglected; his

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[216] Marcia Rioux, "Disability, Citizenship and Rights in a Changing World," in *Disability Studies Today*, eds. Colin Barnes, Mike Oliver and Len Barto (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2002), 216.

[217] Rioux, "Disability," 216.

[218] Rioux, "Disability, 216. Emphasis mine.

> most urgent expostulations will be disregarded in favor of any dull attendant's asseverations.[219]

These comments, although expressed through an entirely fictional character, mirror the uneasiness and fear of the involuntary committal process during the time Wells is writing (which, it should be noted, continues yet today). In fact, Sarah Wise reports that even as early as the 1820-1830s "British Home Secretaries…had a languidly dismissive way with those who wrote to complain about the English lunacy laws. Scrawled on to the back of these letters and petitions were instructions…on how to deal with such a communication: 'No answer, he is half crazy himself.'"[220] This short passage highlights how Wells had his finger on the pulse of contemporary mental health system problems and he surely attempts to address these wrongs through Preemby's involuntary committal process.

There is a second aspect of this softer definition of citizenship that Wells also addresses in *CAF*: social citizenship. To draw again upon Rioux, social citizenship is characterized by "a status that recognized the individual's rights to be included in the institutions of society, *to have basic needs met, to be cared for when needed,* to develop capacities and to make contributions to society."[221] Wells undertakes this aspect of citizenship, particularly the section about having basic needs met and to be cared for, in his depiction of Preemby's first night in the Observation Ward. With these simple words, Wells creates an image that surely pierced even the hardest opponent of mental health reform's armor: "He [Preemby] had lost all count of time; his watch had been taken from him. Somewhen in the small hours he was praying. And at times he wept a little." The description goes on but the point is made—this Ward (and its attendants) are not meeting Preemby's basic needs in the slightest. Wells does not stop there, though. He carries his

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[219] Wells, *CAF*, 241.

[220] Sarah Wise, "The Art of Medicine: A Tale of Whistle-Blowing and the English Lunacy Laws," in *The Lancet* vol. 384, 226.

[221] Rioux, "Disability," 216-217. Emphasis mine.

readers further into the night, portraying a disturbingly realistic likeness of not only an Observation Ward but also what inmates most likely experienced during their incarceration. He writes:

> So, with no possibility of redress, the poor half-lunatic will be roughly handled, badly fed, and coarsely clothed, and night and day he will have no other familiar company than the insane…They have no privacy; no escape from those others; no peace. Our world herds these discards together out of sight, walls them up, spends so little upon them that they are neither properly fed nor properly looked after, and does its brave hopeful best to forget all about them.[222]

Inexplicably, Wells does not go into great detail about Preemby's time in the asylum, saying only that "he [Preemby] will be sent to a still bleaker and more desolate and hopeless confinement…It would be insufferable to tell with any fulness his daily tale of discomfort and indignity."[223] Regardless, from the above quote, the reader catches a glimpse of the harsh realities of involuntary committals and an example of the social citizenship violations occurring within the mental health system during the time Wells is writing. In contrast, Woolf has her representation of mental fluidity, Septimus, jump rather than fight which, admittedly, speaks volumes in terms of the limited options available to those who are on the "abnormal" side of the mental health binary, but adds very little to the more positive expansion of the mental health spectrum current disability scholars seek. This observation is not to say that *Mrs. Dalloway* was ineffective at addressing the contemporary troubles of the mental health system—Woolf created a memorable, sympathetic character that most readers would (and did) react strongly to. However, Wells actively researched and presented his disabled characters (especially Preemby and Nunez) in a much more intimate, and tangible, form—one that not only highlights the different approaches to disability in his own time but also one that contributes to the forthcoming

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[222] Wells, *CAF*, 242.
[223] Wells, *CAF*, 242.

debates of citizenship in the current disability movement.[224] Ideally, if Wells were the perfect candidate inclusion in a list of canonical literary texts for disability studies, this thesis would end here. As I offer in the next section, however, his tendency to revert back to a normative gaze once again troubles his *unchallenged* acceptance into this canon.

Wells's returning normative gaze and how Preemby fares

Despite all of Wells's work above in challenging the mental health binary of sanity/insanity by offering an alternative (non) treatment of perceived mental instability and his concerns about citizenship rights violations, he also continues to depict his disabled characters as dispensable, as either curable or disposable if they fail to comply with the mandates of society. Mitchell and Snyder expand on this tendency in their seminal text *Narrative Prosthesis*: "while literature often relies on disability's transgressive potential, disabled people have been sequestered, excluded, exploited, and obliterated on the very basis of which their literary representation so often rests."[225] Recall that we saw this type of obliteration of perceived disabled characters in the sequestering of, and consequential curing of, Davidson in his respective story, as well as at the end of the 1939 version of "The Country of the Blind" when all of the blind villagers (except Medina-saroté) are destroyed by the rockslide. Additionally, the location of the village of the blind is undoubtedly sequestered and, after the "landslips and "swift thawings," is decidedly divorced "from the exploring feet of men" (excluded), and then, finally,

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[224] Rioux also observes that "[t]he incorporation of social rights within the parameters of human rights in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, enacted by the United Nations in 1948, was a significant development…The declaration provided a starting point for recognizing the globalization of social rights—the rights of every individual to a basic minimum standard of living commensurate with human dignity and a sense of inclusion in the community," Rioux, 223. The mention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights here is especially important when discussing Wells's future work within not only human rights but also rights of those who are not necessarily able to defend their own rights—his work *The Rights of Man; or, What are We Fighting For?* (1940) is said to have an immeasurable impact on the introduction of the Universal Declaration of Rights.

[225] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependence of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 8.

obliterated by a rockslide at the end of the story.[226] To put a finer point on this argument, the odds of survival for Wells's disabled characters are generally poor. In her discussion about "surviving" the mental health system, Margaret Price, not only a disability studies scholar but one who "make[s] regular use of the psychiatric system," admits that "[w]hen I first encountered the term *survivor*, I felt hesitant. It seemed to have unsettling similarities to 'cure': a survivor…implicitly had *had* a traumatic experience and come out the other side."[227] We can, I believe, apply this same sense of re-emerging—i.e. surviving – to Preemby's situation. He is cured of his madness by tonics but his physical body succumbs to pneumonia. Sargon, his alter ego, however, emerges, "comes out on the other side," to use Price's phrasing, of madness. Put another way, even though Wells's character, Bobby, accepts Preemby's madness, Wells, at this point in the novel, wavers slightly when deciding Preemby's fate. This is not to say that Wells, *overall*, does not leans towards a more accepting depiction of mental fluidity; in this particular instance, however, Wells, once again, demonstrates his proclivity towards a cure (or destruction) for his disabled characters. We also see this penchant nearer to the end of novel, after Preemby's death. Wells chooses this moment to employ a sort of Everyman-ism to Preemby's life:

> In every human being, he [Lambone] declared, the little laundryman battled with the King of Kings…When the late Mr. Albert Edward Preemby poured out all his little being into the personality of Sargon, King of Kings, he was only doing over again what the saints and mystics, the religious teachers and fanatics, have done throughout the ages. He was just the Master under the Bo Tree translated into the cockney of Woodford Wells.[228]

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[226] H.G. Wells, "The Country of the Blind," *The Country of the Blind and other Science-Fiction Stories.* ed. by Martin Gardner (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997), 1. Incidentally, the fate of the villagers might be applied to the lunatics in the asylum in *CAF*.

[227] Price, "Defining Mental Disability," 299. Emphasis in original.

[228] Wells, *CAF*, 384. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the "Bo Tree" Wells refers to is the Bodhi tree under which Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) was sitting when he achieved Enlightenment (Bodhi). By making this comparison between Preemby (as Sargon) and the Buddha, Wells highlights the tendency by some authors to elevate and misinterpret the exceptional mind (or disability in general), similar to how both Kipling and Collins (in the previous chapter) elevated their disabled characters to above earthly standards of normality (the extreme opposite end of the normal/abnormal binary).

With this insertion, the exceptional mind becomes a plot device, a way for Wells to perform his own commentary about the postwar state England finds itself in, at the expense of the sensitivity towards disability issues that he has shown thus far. While Wells's overall message of the exceptional mind and how madness varies much more fluidly than other authors believed at this time is valuable, I question the fact that Preemby (as the disabled character) must fade away in order for this deconstruction of the binary to happen. In the above passage, Wells essentially negates the good he has highlighted about exceptional minds by indicating that there is nothing unique or special about Preemby—that we all have a Sargon lurking within us. As inspirational as this might sound, this sentiment becomes problematic when Wells neglects to take into account that, beneath Sargon's regal exterior, lives Preemby—a real live man struggling to resurface under the weight of his hallucinations. In other words, there exists beneath Sargon a person who is distinctly scared and ashamed at the appalling situations, such as being arrested and spending the night in the Observation Ward, that he finds himself in.

Another aspect of this problematic portrayal comes in the form of Preemby's death. Early in the novel, Wells makes clear the fact that *CAF* is "a story about Mr. Preemby in the later years, the widower years, of his life," a point he reiterates several times throughout the novel. However, Preemby soon becomes a secondary character in his own story.[229] Other story lines come to the foreground as Preemby is left to his own devices in terms of navigating the "underneath" of madness. For example, Christina Alberta "continue[s] to intrude" in the novel because "intrusion was in her nature."[230] When she meets Devizes, her never-declared biological father, even the title of the book itself becomes ambiguous: which father does the title refer to, Preemby or Devizes? For the already-disappearing Preemby, this title ambiguity is troubling in

[229] Wells, *CAF*, 28. For further examples of these repeated references to this (*CAF*) being a story about Preemby, see also pgs. 59, 113, and 163.

[230] Wells, *CAF*, 28.

relation to the presence of Preemby in his own story. In fact, during the last days of Preemby's life, it appears from the text that he is only attended by "weak, complaining" nurse.[231] There is no mention of Christina Alberta, only that "he [Preemby] was quite alone when he died."[232] Bobby, who had "been told nothing of Sargon being worse or his misbehaviour," heard of his death "with great astonishment."[233] Even at Preemby's funeral, Bobby fails to remember Preemby, focusing only on the loss of Sargon:

> Bobby's thoughts converged upon that still thing within the coffin. The little face would be wearing a waxen unaccustomed dignity; the round, preposterously innocent blue eyes would be closed and a little sunken. Where were those thoughts and hopes, now that Bobby had listened to a few weeks since? *Sargon* had talked of flying, of visiting India and China, of doing noble work in the world.[234]

Preemby, even in death, does not re-emerge in his own story. The "still thing within the coffin" is Sargon, *not* Albert Edward Preemby and, as the most overt disabled character in *CAF*, represents Wells's recurrent theme that the death (i.e. "cure") of the disabled individual for the sake of the author's commentary is an acceptable loss. Once again, Preemby fades to black.

While this ridding of Preemby may not seem problematic initially, there is one particular reason that I, as the reader, resist a positive spin on this technique. I continue to see Preemby as two separate entities; in other words, I see Preemby and I see Sargon. I do not see Preemby-Sargon and I assert that most of the characters, and potentially Wells himself, do not either. Near the end of the novel, we are privy to a philosophical discussion that essentially raises Preemby to the status of a god, of a Buddha, despite the loquacious protests of Christina Alberta and, to a lesser extent, Bobby. For example, Paul Lambone asserts:

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[231] Wells, *CAF*, 364.
[232] Wells, *CAF*, 365.
[233] Wells, *CAF*, 365.
[234] Wells, *CAF*, 366.

> It is exactly six months ago to-night that *Sargon* [not Preemby] died…*Is* he dead?... The more I think over *Sargon* the less dead he seems to me, and the more important he becomes…I don't find anything futile in his life. I think he was—symbolically—perfect.[235]

Lambone resuscitates the concept that is Sargon, not remembering that the shell that held that concept is also dead. These ruminations indicate that Lambone also sees only Sargon; Preemby does not enter into his equation at all. Additionally, it is only in the last few pages that we see Christina Alberta bring her father back into the novel. She asserts:

> What I want to say is that you are wrong about *my Daddy*, you are quite wrong about him. That I do know. Mr. Lambone has dressed him up to suit his own philosophy. He had that philosophy long before he knew him. And you talked my Daddy over and put Mr. Lambone's ideas into him when he was beaten and broken because they suited his case. They weren't there before. I know him and exactly how he thought. I was brought up on him. He talked to me more than to anyone.[236]

This passage is Christina Alberta's saving grace. By this I mean that through essentially the entire novel, she has neglected her "daddy." I acknowledge this charge seems harsh but, as we re-examine her actions throughout the novel, I stand firmly behind this allegation. However, I also acquiesce that these actions are Wells's, not Christina Alberta's. Most damning to both Wells and Christina Alberta is the undeniable fact that both drop Preemby at the first hint of another parental option (Devizes, who is conveniently rich, well-connected, and, best of all, sane). This response is Wells's *deus ex machina*—his guarantee that Christina Alberta gets her happy ending. Unfortunately, again, the cost is Preemby, not Sargon, indicating that Christina Alberta only saw Preemby, not Sargon. In fact, Christina Alberta is the only character that remembers Preemby and his sacrifice for Wells's message. It is through these last few chapters and ruminations that Wells most obviously reverts back to a normative gaze as he considers his

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[235] Wells, *CAF*, 381-382. Emphasis mine.
[236] Wells, *CAF*, 388. Emphasis mine.

options of what to do with Christina Alberta.[237] Conversely, this return of the normative gaze, when considered collectively with the other progressive, thoughtful work Wells does with the mental health binary, and disability in general, should not be ignored; there is purpose in evaluating both sides of the Wells binary, if you will, when determining where he fits within modern disability and the ever-developing canon.

Challenging the very definition of mental health: ending at the beginning

The epigraph to this chapter, and my continued mentioning of the exceptional mind, indicates my belief that a valid argument may be made that, within the pages of this novel at least, that Wells questions the very definition of mental health. Are the symptoms Preemby presents truly madness? The question seems superfluous initially; however, the answer is crucial to understand not only Wells's purpose in writing *CAF* but also in considering my argument that Wells continually offers a progressive and more lenient view on the portrayal of disability, especially when compared to other authors of the same epoch. Wells presents the intriguing idea that:

> All exceptional people were in danger of being misunderstood, but such a type as Preemby, original and yet incapable of abstract expression or philosophical method, which sought fantastic expression for its feelings and impulses, was particularly liable to give offence, awaken suspicion and dread and hostility.[238]

The speaker here is Wilford Devizes, Wells's choice for a contemporary version of a mental health activist.[239] Devizes compares these "exceptional people" to a "basketful of fruit,"

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[237] Wells's attention to Christina Alberta is not incidental. He writes in a correspondence in the Spring of 1925 that "Christina Alberta is the 1924 equivalent of Ann Veronica [the character, not the novel]." Wells, *Correspondences*, vol. 3, 192.

[238] Wells, *CAF*, 388.

[239] Wilfred Devizes presents an interesting caveat to Wells's exasperation with the psychiatric system: he is described multiple times with characteristics very close to a mental health activist. For example, Devizes "knows more about mental cases and lunacy law than any other man in London," and "[a]lready Devizes had had several brushes with lunacy organization; he was considered a troublesome but dangerous man for a medical superintendent

explicating that: “the basketful of fruit isn’t rotten, is scarcely speckled with decay, but it is disordered and overturned. A mind is a delicate thing to knock about. It will rot very easily.”[240] Wells, through Devizes’s ruminations, introduces a new concept in terms of madness: the exceptional mind. If, as the epigraph indicates, an exceptional mind equals insanity, then our poets and artists are in danger of being involuntarily committed to the local mental health institution, which is a clear disparity to what Woolf is trying to accomplish with Septimus.

This idea of a connection between art and madness is not a new one, by any means. Thomas Szasz explains this connection as such: “[b]ecause art is much older than psychiatry, the artist has had a big jump on insanity…As soon as psychiatry appeared on the scene of history, psychiatrists returned the compliment by showing a keen interest in art. Before long, it became a truism that there is a close—albeit mysterious—connection between madness and art.”[241] In *CAF*, there is one undeniable example of this amalgam, as demonstrated after the Great Escape from Cummerdown Hill (the asylum). Bobby takes Preemby to a boarding house that Bobby is familiar with; however, when the matron of the house questions Preemby’s physical state, Bobby “realize[s] that their foothold at this pleasant, restful, firelit apartment was precarious.”[242] Despite his fanciful lies, Mrs. Plumer remains skeptical and it is not until Bobby perjures himself again by offering that “He’s [Preemby] a poet…besides playing on the violin,” that Mrs. Plumer is “satisfied completely.”[243] Mrs. Plumer initially resists Bobby’s explanation that Preemby’s clothes were absconded by highwaymen (admittedly, a difficult tale to believe) but, the instant

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to be up against. That might arouse either hostile obstruction or the propitiatory spirit. They must go carefully,” Wells, *CAF*, 248, 270.

[240] Wells, *CAF*, 269.

[241] Thomas Szasz, “Intentionality and Insanity: Some Lessons from Reflections on Art,” *Literature and Medicine* 4 (1985): 1.

[242] Wells, *CAF*, 332.

[243] Wells, *CAF*, 334. The fact that Bobby chooses Preemby’s art-of-choice to be poetry is especially ironic given the experience Preemby has in the Observation Ward with the “disordered poet” who harangued him on his first night, 230.

she discovers that art plays a role in Preemby's scattered discombobulation, she becomes more tolerant towards him. With this display of toleration, we circle back around the question at hand: are the symptoms Wells assigns to Preemby truly madness?

I posit that this distinction is important for two reasons: first, this variation of madness provides another example of what Wells is doing differently than other writers (most notably, Woolf) in regards to the state of the mental health platform. For example, Woolf's Septimus presents to Dr. Holmes with the symptoms of "headaches, sleeplessness, fears, dreams," to which Dr. Holmes, in turn, declares the diagnosis of "nerve symptoms and nothing more." He promptly advises Septimus to "[t]hrow yourself into outside interests; take up some hobby."[244] When that therapy does not work, Sir William Bradford (a consulting doctor) suggests "[I]t was merely a question of rest…of rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed. There was a delightful home down in the country where her husband would be perfectly looked after."[245] This last prescription was Septimus's undoing and he took matters into his own hands, rather than face Bradford's rest cure. If we recall what Knox-Shaw reports about Woolf's selective eye when addressing the mental health platform, we see that this treatment is not a realistic cure (if a cure at all) to a majority of the ex-servicemen and other folks displaying slightly different levels of mentality than society is comfortable with. Septimus is not in any immediate danger of being pulling off the street and involuntarily incarcerated—one, because he has Rezia, and two, he is not a "pauper lunatic." In other words, Woolf's portrayal of the mental health system is not necessarily wrong, but it is misleading and inaccurate in terms of which population was feeling the true complications of diverse mental health. Wells, with both Preemby and Bobby, offers a variation to the very definition of madness:

[244] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 91.
[245] Woolf, 96.

> In his [Bobby's] own case he had thought this habitual discontent with the daily round, this urgency towards something strange and grandiose, was due to the dislocation of all his expectations of life by the great war; that it was a *subjective aspect* of nervous instability; but in the case of this little laundryman it could not have been the war that had sent him out, a sort of emigrant from himself, to find a fantastic universal kingdom. It must be something more fundamental than the war accident. It must be *a normal disposition in men* towards detachment from safety and comfort.[246]

In Wells's definition of mental health, he provides two situations of mental fluidity. First, when Bobby describes his own "case," his assumed mental status happens as a direct result of the Great War; however, this status is relegated to being a "subjective aspect of nervous instability"—i.e. a personal (not social) experience. The second situation involves Preemby directly, where Bobby distinguishes that Preemby's presumed-madness could not have been caused by the war but was, instead, a "normal disposition" of man. These two situations surely distinguish Wells as not only unique in his own time but also in troubling current tenets of disability, especially those within the rigidness of the normal/abnormal binary. The second reason for the importance of the Wells' own definition is that this determination leads us into a discussion about Wells's treatment—i.e. cure, for the exceptional mind. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Wells does not subject either of his disabled characters treatment in the form of incarceration, medication, or prescribed therapy. He offers them each other. Yes, it still ends in Preemby's death; however, this treatment is radically different than the other writers discussed in this chapter. With Preemby, Wells advocates for letting the harmless be harmless—an undeniable draw for the disability scholars in current day studies when looking for positive portrayals of disability in literature.

[246] Wells, *CAF*, 339. Emphasis mine.

Letting Wells be Wells

This chapter has been steeped in history, law, literature, and disability. *CAF* is, as I say at the beginning, a complex and convoluted text and to attempt a thorough analysis of such a rich text is challenging. The discussed concerns above should not take away from the important work Wells does by subverting any, and all, disability binaries. In fact, after the layers are peeled away, the reader sees hope, loyalty, and humor in Wells's novel—especially when compared to other authors. Mitchell and Snyder argue that "[T]ruly, literary and historical texts have rarely appeared to offer disabled characters in developed, 'positive' portraits."[247] Both Woolf and Owen (rightly so) portray madness as a wholly negative experience that must eventually end in the destruction of their protagonists "depicting disability as an isolated and individual affair… [and] artificially extract[ing] the experience of disability from its necessary social contexts."[248] Much to Wells's credit, he does *not* separate disability from "its necessary social contexts" and, for this reason, I posit that *CAF* is indeed a positive portrayal of mental health.[249] Wells's radical idea of not curing, but *accepting*, these exceptional minds brings an understanding that "[t]he world *will* never learn anything until it will learn from ridiculous people."[250]

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[247] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 19.

[248] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 19.

[249] It might be tempting here to protest my assertion that Woolf does not see mental disability in "its necessary social context," but I would answer with an observation from Peter Knox-Shaw that "[a]lthough *Mrs. Dalloway* goes to the heart of many of the issues touching on the institutionalising of the shell-shocked, Virginia Woolf is clearly selective in the way she engages with the public debate," Knox-Shaw, "Otherness," 100. Knox-Shaw continues to explain the various ways that Septimus' condition "no matter how vivid and identifiable to the reader, retains a curious anonymity," 100.

[250] Wells, *CAF*, 279. Emphasis mine.

CONCLUSION

This historical material 'frozen in time.'
White House Website on Disability

As a way of concluding, I wish to create a connection between my thesis and our current political climate. Despite the great strides disability has made since the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the people within disability are more worried and more fearful than they have *ever* been. Mental health, indeed disability in general, has come under extreme fire since November 8th, 2016. Tellingly, on November 9th, nationwide support groups for dealing with the results of one of the most bizarre and surreal Presidential elections ever surfaced everywhere. As seen in the epigraph above, the White House has "frozen" its disability site, stating that "the website is no longer updated."[251] Not surprisingly, when this lifeline between the White House (our presumed protector) and people with disabilities is shattered, the backlash is incredible. But the trouble began long before November 8th.

While on the campaign trail, Trump openly mocked *New York Times* journalist Serge Kovaleski during a speech in South Carolina.[252] When this offense hit the headlines Trump, of course, denied committing any type of discriminatory or mocking action of a person with a disability, instead explaining that he was merely talking "very, very expressively."[253] He continued, saying, "I would never mock a person that has difficulty, I would never do that (repeated four times)…people that have disability…people that have that difficulty, I cherish them. These are incredible people and I just want to put that to rest."[254] While there are several issues with the above comments, what Trump said next was even more damning: "The problem

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[251] White House Website, accessed March 6, 2017, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/disabilities.

[252] Kovaleski was born with arthrogryposis, a congenital trait that causes muscle shortening and contractures to the affected limbs.

[253] "Donald Trump Fires Back," YouTube video, 2:19, posted by CBS, Nov. 28, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCi0rv89hnw.

[254] "Trump Fires Back."

is he's [Kovaleski] using *what he's got* to such a horrible degree, I think it's disgraceful…frankly, [they--*The New York Times*] should give *me* an apology."[255] To reiterate, first Trump mocks a person of disability, then defends this act by stating he was only talking "very, very expressively." After this, he not only essentializes the disabled population as a whole but he also then expects an apology from the *New York Times* for *their* behavior. As seen above, Trump was not yet done with his assault on "people that have that difficulty": after taking office, one of the first actions he initiated was to freeze the White House Website on Disability.[256]

This entire conversation seems to belong in the realm of psychoanalysis. This type of hate-perpetuating language is questionable from anyone but even more alarming when it comes from the President of the United States. As a result of Trump's unorthodox activities, there recently has been an intense speculation that the President himself may be experiencing some sense of mental disparity, so much so that one democratic representative is "considering proposing legislation that would require a White House psychiatrist."[257] In fact, 35 psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers banded together as recently as February, declaring that "[w]e fear that too much is at stake to be silent any longer."[258] Their diagnosis states:

> Mr. Trump's speech and actions demonstrate an inability to tolerate views different than his own, leading to rage reactions. His words and behavior suggest a profound inability to empathize. Individuals with these traits distort reality to suit their psychological state, attacking facts and those who convey them (journalists, scientists)."[259]

Of course, there are those who resist this type of approach. Allen Frances states:

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[255] Trump, "Trump Fights Back." Emphasis mine.

[256] It is not my intention to ignore or gloss over the Others that have also been affected by the loss of this website; for the purposes of this paper, I limit my comments to the disability portion.

[257] Friedman, Richard A., "Is it time to Call Trump Mentally Ill?," *The New York Times*, Feb. 17, 2017.

[258] Lance Dodes and Joseph Schachter, "Mental Health Professionals Warn About Trump," *The New York Times,* Feb. 13, 2017. According to *The New York Times*, both Dodes and Schachter have extensive experience in psychiatry.

[259] Dodes and Schachter, "Mental Health Professionals," no page number.

> "[b]ad behavior is rarely a sign of mental illness, and the mentally ill behave badly only rarely. Psychiatric name-calling is a misguided way of countering Mr. Trump's attack on democracy. He can, and should, be appropriately denounced for his ignorance, incompetence, impulsivity and pursuit of dictatorial powers…The antidote to a dystopic Trumpean dark age is political, not psychological."[260]

Both sides of the psychiatric argument pose valid concerns and this debate, likely, will continue throughout Trump's entire term. In the meantime, the White House disability website remains frozen and disabled folks remain fearful of their uncertain futures.

At first glance, this current culture of hate seems to have little to do with H.G. Wells and his progressive stance on disability but this assumption could not be further from the truth. As we have seen throughout this thesis, Wells was a quibbler, a revolutionary, a very vocal, and a not-easily-suppressed advocate on many topics. As Wells himself states in the 1933 preface to his scientific romances: "[m]y early, profound and lifelong admiration for [Jonathan] Swift, appears again and again in this collection, and it is particularly evident in a predisposition to make the stories reflect upon contemporary political and social discussions."[261] When Wells had questions about WWI, he went to the warfront; whenever he had concerns or questions about *any* contentious issue, he wrote letters, he ran (albeit, unsuccessfully) for political office, he wrote novels that reflected his concerns, and he used propaganda to not only express his discontent but also offer (mostly) well-thought-out solutions. The point is, Wells was an advocate for a better world, a more tolerating world. Yes, Wells was also a pot-stirrer and a poker-of-bears, if you will; but, if anyone could take on Donald Trump, it was Wells.

We see this continued stubborn resistance to the abled hegemony in current disability activists as well. When Simi Linton metaphorically threw off her lap-blanket and Nancy Mairs

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[260]Allen Frances, "An Eminent Psychiatrist Demurs on Trump's Mental State," *The New York Times*, Feb. 14, 2017. Frances is listed as "writer, professor emeritus of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University Medical College."

[261] H.G. Wells, *The Scientific Romances of H.G. Wells* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), viii-ix.

declared that disabled folks do crave and indulge in sexual activities, we are reminded of Wells's work with Nunez and the deconstruction of the normal/abnormal binary that he does in all of the above texts. In this current climate of intolerance, it is people with Wells's tenacity and persistent hope of a more utopian society (in sharp contrast to the "dystopic Trumpean dark age" mentioned above), where the binary of normal and abnormal is either more fluid or does not exist at all. Literature like Wells's *CAF*, "Davidson's Eyes," and "Country" that challenges us to question the stupidity of a strict binary of good/bad, male/female, gay/straight, and, more importantly for my purposes, abled/disabled, is what this nation needs now more than ever. All of this commentary is to say that, despite the opening epigraph that highlights Wells's more human moments of despair, his capacity to recognize the social constructions and restrictions within his disabled characters incontrovertibly places his texts and his advocacy for a more accepting, more positive view on disability well within the realm of authors to be considered for the modern study of disability's canonical pursuits. It is my sincere hope that this thesis not only supports this endeavor but also creates its own portal into Wells's anticipation of a binary-free world.

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