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Vegetarianism as a Mirror of Human Morality in the Speculative Worlds of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915)

Abstract

By following the narrators travelling to the two fictive societies of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), this paper considers how vegetarianism was perceived by socialist and feminist authors in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this time, fearful concerns about humanity's future prevailed in human thought: the rapid increase in world population sparked fear of competition, starvation, and a decline in hygiene standards, while the relatively new theory of evolution suggested a closer-than-comfortable, even familial relationship to the rest of the material world. Assisted by ecofeminist critique, the paper then discusses how vegetarians have been presented by the two authors. It suggests that food reform serves as a device of defamiliarisation, prompting the 'old world' travellers to question and critique the society from which they depart as well as their own individual viewpoints.

The acuteness of the climate crisis has spurred many discussions about what we can do to change our contemporary lifestyles. The question of adopting a vegan or vegetarian diet, which emits less carbon and methane than a typical Western diet, has become an ever more present discussion in private and public life: in households, workplace canteens, and even across the public sector (Levitt 2020). On its webpage, the Vegetarian Society lists several videos explaining other reasons for a diet based on vegetables, arguing it is kinder to animals, may decrease chances of getting certain cancers, and could lower your cholesterol (Vegetarian Society 2022). In fictional vegetarian societies such as those we encounter in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), the reasoning behind a vegetable

diet and its importance for how societies function are also very different. This paper discusses the occurrence of vegetarianism in Wells' and Gilman's imaginative worlds by analysing the theme of prophecy in the texts and its relation to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century streams of scientific and political thought in Britain and the United States. Assessing the narrators' interactions with vegetarians, I further argue that despite arriving at distinct sociobiological conclusions, Wells and Gilman both use dietary reform as a means of defamiliarisation in their respective works. I draw upon Spiegel's definition of defamiliarisation as "the formal-rhetorical act of making the familiar strange," which can create a cognitive effect not only on characters within the story, but also on the reader. (Spiegel 2008, 376). In Wells' and Gilman's writing, the defamiliarised portrayals of vegetarians prompt reflections on human nature and morality.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, vegetarianism has played a reoccurring role in transatlantic speculative texts and fiction (Gregory 2007, 7; 168; 183). Following its founding in 1847, the British Vegetarian Society increasingly took to the written word to promote the diet (Ibid.: 180). As members kept sending 'literature, pamphlets, and books' to their acquaintances across the Atlantic, the American Vegetarian Society was established only three years later (Shprintzen 2013, 60). Like the vegetarian slogans of today, such as the commonly used catchphrase "the future is vegan,"[1] nineteenth-century vegetarians prophesied a future without meat. Percy Bysshe Shelley, who wrote "A Vindication of Natural Diet" in connection with the utopian poem *Queen Mab* (1813), was called a "prophet" by later nineteenth-century vegetarians such as Henry Salt and George Bernard Shaw (Duthie 2019, 134; 200). In the early 1880s, Howard Williams, a prominent advocate of vegetarianism and eventual member of the London Vegetarian Society, wrote a historical anthology of vegetarianism. He prophesied how "the philosopher of the Future" would see "signs of the dawn of a better day in this last quarter of the nineteenth century" (Williams 1883, vi).

Williams based his understanding of vegetarianism and his vision of the future on political and moral authority as well as on recent evidence from the natural sciences. Where vegetarianism already shared a long history with religious and philosophical practices of asceticism, new evolutionary find-

1 See Animal Outlook 2017; Hullebusch 2019.

ings in the life sciences spurred ethical and social questions regarding human-animal relationships (Richardson 2019, 118-9). In *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* (1863), Thomas Henry Huxley was one of the first to postulate humanity's close kinship with other ape forms in relation to Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). The work's frontispiece shows the close resemblances of different skeletal ape forms, humans included (Huxley 1863). Williams included this knowledge of humanity's shared origins with animals in his *Ethics of Diet* and wrote that the 'principles of Dietary Reform are widely and deeply founded upon the teachings of 1) Comparative Anatomy and Physiology; 2) Humaneness, in the two-fold meaning of Refinement of Living, and of what is commonly called "Humanity;" 3) National Economy; 4) Social Reform; 5) Domestic and Individual Economy; 6) Hygienic Philosophy' (Williams 1883, viii).

These varied domains of interest reveal how food's presence in private and public life made it easy for scientists, politicians, and philosophers to appropriate food reform as a relevant topic of discussion. Perhaps due to the extensive reasons for a vegetable-based diet, many members of the still-young Vegetarian Society in Britain were also active in other liberal organisations, such as the Maternity Society or the Fabian Society, who viewed dietary reform from feminist or socialist standpoints (Gregory 2007, 157-63; Duthie 2019, 207). In fact, the Fabian Society was the political off-shoot of the Fellowship of the New Life, whose objective was to change society through 'clean living' and pacifist, vegetarian, and minimalistic futures (Spencer 1995, 283). Likewise, members of the Vegetarian Society in America were involved in abolition movements, women's rights groups, and medical research on nutrition (Shprintzen 2013, 60-1; 67). Depending on the temperament of the author presenting his or her vision for the future, vegetarianism could become a highly tangible physical manifestation of anything ranging from evolutionary progress or its opposite – degeneration – to a personal or political "higher existence" (Gregory 2007, 180). I will investigate similarities between *The Time Machine, Herland,* and late nineteenth-century advocacy for vegetarianism as exemplified by Howard Williams' *Ethics of Diet*. I will reveal how the diet was entangled with other political notions prevalent during the times that Wells and Gilman wrote. As will be seen, the vegetarians in their fictional worlds represent both hopes and fears associated with contemporary science and socio-political ideologies.

1. *Contextualising Prophecy and Vegetarianism in Wells' and Gilman's Writing*

In Wells' *The Time Machine*, prophecy and social-scientific conjectures are entangled in the author's representation of a far-off future world. An unnamed time traveller leaves the late nineteenth century to arrive in 802,701 AD. Here, he discovers two types of creatures with different diets that are recognisable as related to humans. This world of the vegetarian Eloi and their underground counterparts, the carnivorous Morlocks, is framed through the unreliable narrator: first, the time traveller tells his story to friends and colleagues in his living room. Through the help of a journalist, his story is retold to the reader of the text, adding another layer of narration. This adds ambiguity to the narration's authenticity.

Furthermore, the description of how society and humans have evolved is speculative. The time traveller's conjectures follow the same patterns of writing as some vegetarian propaganda from the latter half of the nineteenth century, which were based on political theories of his age, expectations of progress in society, and scientific discoveries concerning evolution and the theory of natural selection. Despite this 'rational' scientific focus, Wells alludes to the mythical element of prophecy through the first object that the time traveller sees on his expedition, the sphinx statue (Parrinder 1995a, 67; Parrinder 1995b, 15). While the sphinx smiles ominously at him in the rain, he ponders what this future will entail in a type of stream of consciousness that is based on his knowledge of the evolutionary sciences and his expectations of humanity's progress:

> I looked up again at the crouching white shape, and the full temerity of my voyage came suddenly upon me. What might appear when that hazy curtain was altogether withdrawn? What might not have happened to men? What if cruelty had grown into a common passion? What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness, and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful? I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness – a foul creature to be incontinently slain. (Wells 1895, 22)

As will be revealed to him through the meeting with the Eloi and the Morlocks, his concerns about meeting "inhuman" killers are partly in the right regarding the murderous Morlocks, and partly in the wrong regarding the friendly, yet frail, Eloi. However, the scene provides a sense of the dire direction future events may take (Parrinder 1995b, 16). Lastly, at the end of his story, the

time traveller questions whether his entire experience of the future was "only a dream," and the truth of his futuristic story is yet again marked as borderline unreal (Wells 1895, 88). In *Shadows of the Future,* Patrick Parrinder writes that a "futuristic novelist" must "claim some of the authenticity of prophecy while avoiding the penalty for being caught out" (Parrinder 1995b, 8). Fiction about the future involves a tensive balance between plausible social, scientific, and political forecasting and the author's creative imagination. The narrator's contemplation of the future arises from the tension between rational thought and the enigmatic presence of the statue.

The history of the future world is also situated in a realm of uncertainty where speculation and narrative creativity intersect. In a socio-biological manner, the quasi-scientific time traveller hypothesises and revises theories of how the world of the Eloi (and later the Morlocks) came to be (Wells 1895, 30-1; 58). Through the use of philosophical, political, and scientific "teachings" which Howard Williams referred to as "comparative anatomy," "social reform," and "hygienic philosophy," the time traveller first deduces by comparison to "the sanitation and the agriculture" of his day that the diet of the Eloi is a symptom of communism and a "triumph of a united humanity over Nature," whereby "the whole earth ha[s] become a garden," and he considers the prospect of humanity fully "readjust[ing] the balance of animal and vegetable life to suit our human needs" (Ibid.: 30-1). Initially, he hypothesises that the gradual refinement of communism had led to vegetarianism. The diet thus serves as a marker of human progress. Such an easy lifestyle has resulted in an evolutionary drawback, however, making the descendants of the human race look comparatively frail, with "neither social nor economical struggle" (Ibid.: 32). This could appear as a critique of the 'plenty-for-all' and pastoral utopian future that some individuals envisioned for communism to strive towards.

There are also a few remarks by the time traveller that suggest a critique of William Morris' communist utopia in *News from Nowhere* (1890), where a cicerone explains how the communist future has reached a type of balanced equilibrium (Ibid.: 49).[2] Seemingly inconsistent with the narrator's critique in *The Time Machine*, Wells attended the Socialist League's Hammersmith Meetings with Morris while he was a student (Cole 1974, 100; 112). In 1903, he entered the more reform-friendly Fabians, who were against violent upheavals

2 Cf. Parrinder 1995b, 43-4; Cole 1974, 100.

to reach their goal of state socialism, argued for a gradual transition, and promoted achievable political proposals through the strength of their arguments (but whom Wells left in 1908) (Parrinder 1970, 109; Cole 1974, 100-1). The time traveller's naive interpretation of the Eloi future may indicate Wells' changing stance on socialism. At the very least, it is a critique of the romantic utopias of some socialists, which lacked considerations of contemporary science, particularly concerning human biology and evolutionary 'deep time'.

Eventually, the narrator must revise his communist hypothesis as he discovers a different descendant of humans: the carnivorous – and cannibalistic – Morlocks (Wells 1895, 54; 58). He now reasons that the social and economic inequalities spurred by extreme capitalism in his own day caused the human species and its predominantly omnivorous diet to split into two, exposing humankind to the natural laws of competition and adaptation. This is a sociological interpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution, which claims that species evolve through small changes that depend on their specific living conditions (Lee 2010, 250). In the time traveller's old world, he witnessed the working class being pushed to live and work underground. The narrator infers that their descendants eventually became permanent subterranean residents, while the upper class remained aboveground to enjoy their world of abundance. (Wells 1895, 47-8). With light-sensitive eyes and pale complexion, the Morlocks seemingly adapted to life under Earth's surface; the Eloi benefit from the sun and have "flushed face[s]," "bright red" lips, and "little pink hands" (Ibid.: 23-5). The fearful herbivores with their healthy-looking skin are the most appealing to the time traveller. Still, their frail anatomy and general naivety regarding their predators make them the most disadvantaged of the two 'species'. The time traveller considers both degenerate in comparison to his own "ripe prime of the human race" (Ibid.: 58). In the time traveller's socio-biological speculations about the future world, Wells uses vegetarianism as one of several indicators of how humanity has changed. His interpretations, whether radically communist or capitalist, describe a future in which the human species has degenerated from its seemingly civilised state during the nineteenth century.

Although Gilman's utopian novel *Herland* is not explicitly set in the future and lacks direct references to prophecy like Wells' text, it employs tropes commonly found in futuristic fiction, such as scientific expeditions and otherworldly speculation. This serves as a reminder of the close relationship between utopian literature and science fiction, which share stylistic similarities

and an intertwined history.[3] Like Wells, Gilman intentionally blends believable scientific speculation with deceptive storytelling to narrate the story. First, the three travellers describe the journey to the vegetarian women's world as a "scientific expedition," lending their descriptions a credibility akin to the legendary naturalist reports of Georges Forster, Alexander von Humboldt, and Charles Darwin (Gilman 1915, 2). The narrator Van, who describes himself as a sociologist, is deeply engaged in understanding how these women, secluded from the rest of the world in the early twentieth century, make their society function (Ibid.: 2, 46-7). The different academic disciplines of the other two men complement Van's inquisitive methodology: Terry, a hands-on engineer, represents the technical sciences, and Jeff, a biologist with a botanical interest (associated with bourgeois collectors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries),[4] is a Romantic idealist to the core. As representatives of the different sciences of the 'old world', they should be considered authentic protagonists. However, lacking photographic as well as other material evidence, the reader is prompted to question the men's reliability, even when presented as scientists: the narrator states that nobody 'will ever believe' how the inhabitants of the mystical land look (Gilman 1915, 1). Speculation based on 'rational' scientific standards features strongly in the portrayal of the all-female society. At the same time, these characteristics are called into question by the narrator's lack of evidence.

In contrast to Wells' fictive world, the Herlanders' vegetarianism is a token of how the highly efficient community thrived following the disappearance of men (Malinkowska 2019, 275). With his background in the social sciences, Van investigates the land's historical records. He finds that with the rapid population increase caused by unrestrained parthenogenesis (asexual reproduction), the Herlanders "could not spare the room" for cattle (Gilman 1915, 47). Therefore, they created a highly efficient agricultural system only producing fruit and vegetables. Basing his Summary on books by Herlandic historiographers, Van's account adds another narrative layer to Gilman's book as a whole, adding ambiguity. Parrinder reminds us that narratives of "future history [...] are structured around a detailed anticipatory chronology; such claims as they make to prophetic status are surrounded by layers of ambiguity" (Parrinder

3 See Williams 1978, 204; 212.

4 See Secord 1994, 269-315.

1995b, 3). Although not alluding to prophecy directly, Gilman's detailed yet ambiguous presentation of Herland's 'alternative' history shares qualities with futuristic writing.

When Van finishes summarising the history of Herland, the detailed chronology finally aligns with what the narrator observes of the lands on the diegetic level. The men conclude that the women's cultivation of fruit-bearing trees outstrips Germany's most well-regulated forests (a nod to the stereotype of Prussian efficiency at the start of the First World War) (Gilman 1915, 67). Instead of competing like the Eloi and Morlocks, "the women grew together [...] by united action" in their sheltered land (Ibid.: 49; 51). Gilman presents a carefully considered vegetarian solution to the Malthusian population trap. This socio-economic hypothesis predicted food supply would be scarce when population growth outpaced agricultural development, resulting in starvation and greater competition for resources (and which contributed significantly to Darwin's theory of evolution).[5]

In the nineteenth century, it was common to advocate for vegetarianism as a socio-economic means to counteract the Malthusian population trap. In America, Reuben Mussey predicted that animals "will be substituted by the food of vegetable productions, on account of its greater cheapness and abundance" (Mussey 1850, as cited in Shprintzen 2013, 61). According to politically motivated societies such as the first-wave feminist Maternity Society in Britain, vegetarianism was further thought to offer women "liberation from the kitchen" (Gregory 2007, 12; 163; 170-1). Gilman, who was part of various feminist associations in America such as the Ebell Society and the State Council of Women, also saw food as one of the focal points in her study of how economic relations within the household influence social evolution (Davis 2010, 145). In *Women and Economics*, she employs Darwinian terms in her descriptions of sociological issues. She writes that just as men hunt, fish, keep cattle, or raise corn, so must women in their unwaged reciprocity "eat game, fish, beef, or corn" as "the female genus homo is economically dependent on the male. He is her food supply" (Gilman 1900, 9; 22). If both "parents are less occupied in getting food and cooking it [...], they may find time to give new thought and new effort to the care of their children," and so the "more we grow away from these basic conditions, the more fully we realize the deeper and higher forms of

5 See Macrae 2019 (last modified 2022).

relation which are the strength and the delight of human life" (Ibid.: 301-2). As Van understands more of Herlandic history, he comes to know that the women "had early decided that trees were the best food plants, requiring far less labor in tilling the soil," and they could devote time to their collective community in other ways and take up any profession. Their work did not need to be domestic as in the world of the three visiting men (Gilman 1915, 52). In Gilman's novel, vegetarianism signifies economic and personal growth as well as female emancipation. In contrast to Wells' nightmare of regression, Gilman's fantasy of abundance serves as a marker of socio-biological reflections on progress.

2. *Defamiliarising Vegetarians*

As stated earlier, Howard Williams suggests in his anthology that vegetarianism is founded upon teachings of the rather abstract notion of "Humaneness," and can be perceived in a two-fold manner as a "refinement of living" (as opposed to 'natural', 'barbaric', or 'uncivilised' behaviour) and showing compassion towards animals (Williams 1883, viii). It can be regarded as self-contradictory that Williams stresses human resemblance to animals through comparative anatomy as a foundation for "humaneness" towards other people and species. Comparative anatomy was a branch of the natural sciences that was important for the development, acknowledgement, and popularisation of the theory of evolution, which also emphasises humanity's shared history with other animals in a more 'naturalised' state.[6] By putting the "refinement of living" next to comparative anatomy, Williams bases his vegetarian teachings on humanity's distinction from and similarity to non-humans. Similarly, the anthropologist Nick Fiddes explains that humans often abstain from meat because they identify with animals. Of all food, meat is

> the most feared and abhorred. The likeliest potential foods to nauseate us today are those recognisably animal – the gristle, the blood vessels, the organs, the eyes – unlike vegetable foods whose identity we rarely dread. (...) [M]eat is by far the most common focus for food avoidance, taboos, and special regulation. (Fiddes 1992, 17-8)

6 See Darwin 1859, 456-8; Haeckel 1868, 537-40.

A recognisable animal "identity" can elicit a moral response and prompt "humane" abstinence from meat. In her article on vegetarians and evolution in late Victorian Britain, Richardson argues that such moral reactions to humanity's kinship with non-human organisms were, for some, a reinforcement of human exceptionalism (2019, 128). In the following, I reveal that the defamiliarised portrayal of Wells' Eloi and Gilman's vegetarian women makes the travellers reflect on their self-contradictory principles of right and wrong. To do so, I use and discuss ecofeminist ideas that highlight the similarities between the treatment of women and nature, particularly animals, by a society that prioritises male perspectives.

In *The Time Machine,* the narrator changes his view of the vegetarian inhabitants as the plot develops. At first, he confuses human/animal, cultural/natural, and masculinity/femininity in his anthropological assessment of the Eloi. He sees the "heads and shoulders of *men* running" towards him (Wells 1895, 22-33, emphasis added); on coming closer, one Eloi looks to be a "very beautiful and graceful *creature*, but indescribably frail" (Ibid.: 23, emphasis added). He notices how the sexes resemble each other with their "*girlish* rotundity of limb" due to the lesser need for a "specialization of the sexes" in a plentiful world (Ibid.: 29-30, emphasis added). It does not take long before he calls their hands "tentacles" and observes how the Eloi are "flinging peel and stalks [from the fruit they eat] into the round openings in the sides of the tables" (Ibid.: 24; 27). He later realises that they feed like farm animals (Ibid.: 67).

The time traveller thus depicts the vegetarian human descendants as hybrid creatures with female and animalistic characteristics (these feminine features are taken to an eroticised extreme in the portrayal of the Eloi character of Weena in George Pal's film rendition of *The Time Machine* from 1960). The only statues the time traveller encounters in this world, the sphinx and the faun, highlight the same qualities (Hume 1990, 243-4). Furthermore, Weena, the only creature of the future who is given a name, in several instances is passive and incapable of saving herself (Wells 1895, 42; 72-3). The time traveller likens the Eloi to Wells' own thoughts on degenerated animals, which is evident in his essay on 'Zoological Retrogression', where he comments that sea squirts (Ascidians) have degenerated into "a passive receptivity" and a domestic "idyll of contentment" from their 'higher descent' related to "imperial man" (Wells 1891, 160-2). The Eloi seem to have weakened as a result of their adaptation to a safe environment. Now, they could only seek away from danger in big houses

and were "mere fatted cattle, which the ant-like Morlocks preserved and preyed upon" (Wells 1895, 33; 62; 80). Whereas the Morlocks remain agentic, the Eloi are distinctly passive (Hume 1990, 240). The narrator's representation of androgynous vegetarians is linked with domesticated animals, uncannily close but not fully human.[7]

Initially, dehumanisation is also present in the three men's portrayal of the Herlanders. Van describes the women as "deficient in what we call 'femininity'" (Gilman 1915, 50). Terry especially blurs words usually divided into male/female and human/animal, saying: "Of course they can't understand a *Man's World*! They *aren't human* – they're just a *pack* of Fe-Fe-Females!" (Ibid.: 68, emphasis added). The modifier 'just' appears to mark his and the other men's superiority over the women. Using a quantifying word commonly associated with animals such as dogs or wolves suggests a shared inferiority between women and animals, which is a common ecofeminist criticism of male behaviour.[8] However, this dehumanisation relates to the fact that the Herlandic women have become much more like men and, as such, are unrecognisable. The Herlanders tasked with educating the men about their world are referred to as "a regiment of old Colonels" by the narrator and the other men. In the men's first encounter with a large Herlandic group, the women are seen "marching steadily, shoulder to shoulder" and with "nondescript clothes," just like male soldiers in the men's world (Gilman 1915, 16-9). This indicates that the men cannot recognise typical values, traits, and gender roles that they would otherwise project onto women:

> We looked for nervousness – there was none.
> For terror, perhaps – there was none.
> For uneasiness, for curiosity, for excitement – and all we saw was what might have been a vigilance committee of women doctors, as cool as cucumbers. (Gilman 1915, 18)

The men are experiencing defamiliarisation. First, the women's capabilities in soldiering and doctoring are evident, which would have presented significant

7 For further reading on Wells' linkage of "emphatic connections to nonhuman animals" with "abnormal sexual appetites" in his *Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) as well as in *The Time Machine*, see Quinn 2021, 64-83.

8 See Adams 2010, 180; Warren 1997, 8-13.

challenges for them to pursue as professions in the men's world.[9] Secondly, their equal confidence and young-but-mature look are uncanny for the men, making the women difficult to single out. Van's comparison of this Herlandic group to cows and cucumbers shares traits with how non-zoologically interested people cannot decipher individual animals within a species (Gilman 1915, 18-9). Like the Eloi and Morlocks, the unfamiliarity of the Herlanders is marked by their fungibility (cf. Malinkowska 2019, 267-8; 272-4). The inhabitants of Wells' and Gilman's speculative worlds blur notions of what is human and what is not, prompting questions on humanity's singularity.

3. *Vegetarian Mirrors of 'Humaneness'*

Eventually, the time traveller's view of the Eloi is changed. They are granted some sympathy after the time traveller discovers that they are the victims of flesh-eating. Their vegetarianism distinguishes the Eloi not only from the "inhuman sons of men" of the future (the Morlocks) but equally from humanity's "cannibal ancestors of three or four thousand years ago" (Wells 1895, 62). Instead of attacking the time traveller like the Morlocks do, they warm-heartedly welcome him to their group by sharing their vegetable feast. Physically, he eats with them, and linguistically, he learns how to say "to eat" in the Eloi language (Ibid.: 28). Rudimentary language about eating is reminiscent of an idea proposed by the first "evolutionary linguist," August Schleicher. In 1863, he wrote that the evolution of species and languages are under similar influences, arguing that human speech was rooted in utterances found in other animals.[10] These ideas helped shape Darwin's reflections on human language in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Although human speech had "justly been considered as one of the chief distinctions between man and the lower animals" because of its complexity, now it was evidence for the fact that man "developed

9 In North America, the first female doctors already obtained their degrees in the 1850s. However, it was still an unusual profession for women at Gilman's time. Two years after Gilman's novel, in 1917, the first woman officially enlisted in the US Army. See Boyd 2013; Myers 2017.

10 Cf. Schleicher 1863. Darwin read the later English version, i.e. Schleicher 1869. On the development of the human brain in relation to language as well as Schleicher's Lamarckian stance on the progressive hierarchy of languages, see Richards 2008, 259-65.

from some lower form" (Darwin 1871, 53-62). To Darwin, human languages were found on the large spectrum of sounds in organisms, and the distinction between humans and other animals was merely the "power of connecting definite sounds with definite ideas," which depended on "the development of the mental faculties" (Darwin 1871, 54). In his essay "Human Evolution, an Artifical Process," Wells considered human speech "the one reality of civilisation" (Wells 1896, as cited in Parrinder 1970, 9). In his future society, linguistic capabilities seem to go hand in hand with intellectual capabilities: the Eloi have lost some of their abilities to talk, and they are considered by the time traveller to be degenerate with their "soft cooing notes" and asking questions that show an "intellectual level of one of our five-year-old children" (Wells 1895, 76). The Morlocks, though still capable of handling machines and planning to trap the time traveller, have uncanny ways of "whispering odd sounds" and making "queer laughing noise[s]" (Ibid.: 55). Seen in connection with their welcoming vegetable feast, however, the Eloi's linguistic abilities might be the most evident manifestation of "humaneness" in 802,701 AD.

The time traveller's relationship with Weena is the only meaningful connection in the future world. Her "friendliness" affects the time traveller "exactly as a child's might have done" (Ibid.: 42). However "great [the Eloi's] intellectual degradation," the affection of Weena is too human "not to claim [his] sympathy" (Ibid.: 62). This is further underlined by the time traveller's journalist friend in the epilogue. He sees the white flowers given to the time traveller by Weena and is comforted that "gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man" (Ibid.: 91). Here, we see the ambiguity of the Eloi: they resemble animals but show compassionate 'human' behaviour. This is echoed in the time traveller's killing of a Morlock, which has been influenced by his sympathy towards the Eloi:

> Very *inhuman*, you may think, to want to go killing one's own descendants! But it was impossible, somehow, *to feel any humanity in the things*. Only my disinclination to leave Weena, and a persuasion that if I began to slake my thirst for murder my Time Machine might suffer, restrained me. (Ibid.: 67, emphasis added)

Having to protect Weena by killing another human descendant, the time traveller is prompted to reflect on his old sense of humanity. Recalling his speculation at the statue of the sphinx, the time traveller has become precisely what he dreaded: "I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful

and disgusting for our common likeness – a foul creature to be incontinently slain" (Ibid.: 22). The vegetarianism of the Eloi prompts a reflection of the less "humane" side of the time traveller's existence and actions. Wells thus inverts the conclusion in his "Zoological Retrogression," where he asserts that the "Coming Beast must certainly be reckoned in any anticipatory calculation regarding the Coming Man" (Wells 1891, 168). The "inhuman" aggression of slaying other organisms is as present in the visitor from the late nineteenth century as in the people of the future – despite considering himself the most civilised. Upon his arrival back in the past, the time traveller must first change his "disordered" look to be presentable to his guests; after that, he insists that he will not speak about his journey to the future until he gets "some peptone into [his] arteries," exclaiming "[w]hat a treat it is to stick a fork into meat again!" (Wells 1895, 14-5). This reveals the superficiality of what Victorians considered civilised standards.

Like the part-humanisation of Weena and the rest of the Eloi, the three men's view of the Herland women changes for the better. This is also dependent on the men "learn[ing] the language" of the women (Gilman 1915, 24). It "was not hard to speak, smooth, and pleasant to the ear" and had "an absolutely phonetic system, the whole thing was as scientific as Esperanto yet bore all the marks of an old and rich civilization" (Ibid.: 7). The softness of the Herlandic language sparks the same type of sympathy as the Eloi language. However, its richness also signifies the women's 'higher' degree of civilisation (the "refinement of living" characteristic of "humaneness" in Howard Williams' vegetarian anthology). Eventually, Van admits that

> they certainly presented a higher level of active intelligence, and of behaviour, then [sic] we had so far really grasped. [...] We were more and more impressed that all this gentle breeding [of the women] was breeding; that they were born to it, reared in it, that it was as natural and universal with them as the gentleness of doves or the alleged wisdom of serpents (Ibid.: 66-7).

The two animals mentioned in these lines bear Christian connotations: the dove is associated with "gentleness and harmlessness," and the serpent represents knowledge and guile (OED Online 2022). The women thus seem to transcend the dichotomies of passive/active, human/animal, and masculine/feminine (Malinkowska 2019, 274). Their "humaneness" is refined to the highest degree. In contrast to the Eloi, who have become frail, these 'ultra-women' have almost wholly mastered Nature through the selective breeding of plants, animals, and even themselves (Gilman 1915, 49, 66-8). This again refers to the

solution proposed by the women to overcome the Malthusian population trap, which involved disposing of the 'inefficient' elements in Nature. Indeed, upon seeing the carefully cultivated forests of Herland – free of dead branches or parasites – the males exclaim: "Call this a forest? It's a truck farm!" (Ibid.: 11).

This way of breeding economically and morally valuable organic life reflects notions of scientific, social, and technological progress common to Gilman's day and age, and it presents a vision of a higher existence that excludes the "lowest types" of life from the men's world (Ibid.: 70). Such words carry connotations of eugenics, which is a topic that is even more pronounced in *Herland's* sequel, *With Her in Ourland* (1916).[11] Ecofeminist critics such as Amanda Graham have compared domination over Nature to chauvinist behaviour, i.e. upholding systems of oppression (Graham 1998, 122-3). Gilman promotes egalitarian values associated with the progress of species, a common feature in much literature before the First World War and in feminist *fin-de-siècle* literature (Rose 1997, 8-9). Gilman's writing supports Richardson's claim that a vegetarian lifestyle can sometimes be seen to strengthen the idea of human exceptionalism, despite the female characters in the story sharing similarities with animals and being subject to the same processes of "breeding" as non-humans (cf. Richardson 2019, 128).

In many instances, the women's similarity to animals prompts contemplations on empathy and "humaneness" which align with the ideas presented in Williams' vegetarian anthology. In a dialogue between Van and his Herlandic mentors, the responses of the vegetarian women to the practices of milk production serve as an indirect critique of the men's perspective on what constitutes ethical behaviour:

'The farmer milks the cow,' I said, and sketched a milk pail, the stool, and in pantomime showed the man milking. 'Then it is carried to the city and distributed by milkmen – everybody has it at the door in the morning.'
'Has the cow no child?' asked Somel earnestly.
'Oh, yes, a calf, that is.'
'Is there milk for the calf and you, too?'
It took some time to make clear to those three sweet-faced women the process which robs the cow of her calf, and the calf of its true food; and the talk led us into a further discussion of the meat business. They heard it out, looking very white, and presently begged to be excused. (Giman 1915, 41)

11 See Gilman 1916, 160-1. Cf. Malinowska 2019, 273-5; Weinbaum 2001, 295.

The passage offers a satirical commentary on commonplace agricultural practices. Van, a sociologist educated in America and therefore representative of 'old-world' societal norms, plays the role of a farmer milking a cow in pantomime. Upon being questioned by the women, the farmer is exposed as a 'robber' of cow children. The scene highlights the absurdity of the milking situation and draws attention to the inhumane treatment of cows. (A cow's reproductive rights continue to play a role in vegan rhetoric today).[12] The women's rejection of milk consumption, which stems from their empathetic identification with the cow's maternal role, reveals the shared normative attitudes towards animal and human mothers alike. This is especially the case where "a sort of Maternal Pantheism" dictates morals, highlighting the sanctity of motherhood across species (Gilman 1915, 51). The Herlander's disgust for animal cruelty makes the travellers confront the values of their patriarchal world.

The fact that the men's love interests Ellador, Celis, and Alima 'match' their various temperaments suggests that the men are confronted with people who, in keeping with the utopian style of Gilman's work, are their betters. All three women work as caretakers of the Herland garden, and the men's initial jobs mirror the women's work (Ibid.: 106). The women teach the men to work as part of the Herland culture, with careful cultivation of Nature to meet the needs of the population. Mirroring their female counterparts, the men embody Gilman's feminist ideals of work, sustenance, and social structure that were unfamiliar to them before.

Terry, the most chauvinistic of the men and the least willing to adapt himself to Herland (not liking the lifestyle nor capable of much self-reflection), becomes just as dehumanised as he had perceived the Herland women to be. When Van tries to make sense of how the Herlandic women would feel entering into marriage, taking time to consider the fact that all they had ever known was the society in which they were never bound to the obligations or affections of just one person, he compares it to a male human trying to set up a household with a lady angel "accustomed to fulfilling divine missions all over interstellar space" (Ibid.: 105). Terry declares his preference for women not to hold a superior role to men (Ibid.: 106). Disgruntled and disappointed with his marriage to Alima, who has her own ideas of what marriage would entail for them, he finally employs "sheer *brute* force, in all the pride and passion of his

12 See Francione 2016; Butler 2021.

intense masculinity, [...] to master this woman" (Ibid.: 113, emphasis added). Terry becomes dehumanised in the same bestial manner as the Morlocks in *The Time Machine*. Like a wild animal, he is "tied hand and foot," anaesthetised, subjected to a trial before the local Over Mother, and thereafter kept "under guard [...] all the time, known as unsafe" (Ibid.: 113-4). This is exactly what he had promised would not happen upon his first encounter with his Herlandic mentors. Saying that he preferred not to fight the women, he argued to remain independent: "I'm not going to be – herded in – as if *we were in a cattle chute*" (Ibid.: 19, emphasis added). Terry's descent into unwilling subjugation is ironic, as he had perceived the Herlandic women as anything but human. For his bestial act of violence, he is seen as a disgrace not only in the eyes of the Herland women but also the other men.

Herland and *The Time Machine* thus come to portray two different societies that conform to the vegetarian diet because of their authors' interpretations of scientific and political streams of thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The vegetarian movement propagated itself through philosophical, scientific, and sociological considerations of human ethics and human relations to the rest of the organic world. These ideas are reflected in the fictional narratives, which combine social-scientific speculation with prophetic qualities. Ultimately, Gilman and Wells employ vegetarianism as a tool to question fundamental notions of human identity and humane behaviour. The discourses of the natural sciences during this time made the dichotomies between humans and animals appear less and less distinct. 'Old world' behaviour is confronted with vegetarian "humaneness" towards humans and animals in the speculative worlds. As exemplified by the time traveller and the three visiting men in *Herland,* vegetarians can make people question their conventional sense of humanity.

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