Losing Our Religion? : Empathy and Compassion

in the *Fin de Siècle* Novel

by

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A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
English and Theatre Studies

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

ABSTRACT

 LOSING OUR RELIGION: EMPATHY AND COMPASSION IN THE FIN DE SIÈCLE NOVEL

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Interrogating theories that posit the fin de siècle as a secular age, this dissertation investigates how biblical motifs and religious concepts entered popular literature as shared cultural knowledge. Between orthodox Christianity and atheism, a less explored terrain exists, wherein evolutionary science and non-dogmatic religious concepts enter into conversation with each other. I situate my investigation in this interstitial space, contending that while the church had lost ground as the scientific theory on common ancestry placed humans in the animal kingdom, and new biblical criticism challenged church doctrines on creation and atonement, Victorians continued to draw on a wealth of culturally embedded biblical motifs to address issues of empathy and compassion not adequately addressed by Darwinian science. While arguably this era was more secular than the high Victorian era, religion did not disappear since it was deeply entrenched in British culture. By explicating how biblical motifs and quotations are inverted or conflated with evolutionary science, my project reveals the continued influence of the Bible in promulgating an ethics of care during an age of industrialization and New Imperialism. In Chapter One I illustrate how Darwinian theory, liberal interpretations of scripture, and new spiritualities that focused on humanist virtues, such as empathy, compassion, and ethics, emerged in the fin de siècle novel, often contesting epistemologies around race, class, and gender. In
Chapter Two, I examine H. Rider Haggard’s *She: A History of Adventure* (1888), illustrating how scripture is deployed to critique church orthodoxy. H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895) is the subject of Chapter Three, wherein I investigate how Wells reconfigures and inverts scripture to argue for class equality. Chapter Four deals with Grant Allen’s *The British Barbarians* (1895) wherein I draw attention to how biblical motifs are reframed to argue for purity in relationships that do not view sexuality as sinful, but as a celebration of love. In Chapter Five, I illustrate how Olive Schreiner’s *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897) deploys the Sermon on the Mount to launch a scathing attack on imperial capitalism and the murder of the Mashonas in Southern Africa.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my grandfather, William George Herbert (1886-1969) who taught me the wonder and magic of the written word. The love of reading a multitude of genres during my formative years inspired a desire to become a teacher and lifelong-learner and shaped the path I continue to follow. I owe him an immeasurable debt of gratitude.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Michelle Elleray, my supervisor, and my committee members, Dr. Jennifer Schacker and Dr. Julie Cairnie for their continued support, guidance, and valuable advice. Their constant encouragement, enthusiasm, and belief in this project enabled me to overcome moments of doubt in my ability to complete this dissertation. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Ann Wilson who frequently acted as an unofficial member of my committee and my examiners, Dr. Pablo Ramirez and Dr. Janice Schroeder who provided a wealth of advice on how to extend this project in the future. I also thank Dr. Gregor Campbell who in his capacity as Graduate Coordinator attended every step of my journey.

I would be remiss in not mentioning the faculty members who contributed to my education throughout these past few years. Dr. Mark Fortier’s constant encouragement and interest in my project were appreciated, as was his and Dr. Daniel Fischlin’s supervision during my Secondary Area of Qualification. I also thank Dr. Christine Bold and Dr. Jade Ferguson for their contribution to my educational experiences during the first year of my studies. Olga Petrik’s efficiency and support in administrative matters and her genuine kindness were much appreciated.

I am most grateful for my dear friends and colleagues, Lierin, Alessia, and Mariah who have been an excellent source of support, especially during stressful times when laughter and friendship were the best remedies. Finally, I thank my husband, Fred Beckmann, for his belief in me, his thoughtfulness, and kindness and last but not least my children, Stephen, Michael, and Mary for their patience and assistance through these years of study.
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INTRODUCTION

This project, entitled “Losing Our Religion?: Empathy and Compassion in the \textit{Fin de Siècle} Novel,” contests secularization theories that obscure the ongoing role of biblical and religious motifs that permeate literary texts of this era. Secularization theories emerged in response to evolutionary theory, new German biblical scholarship, and philosophical positions that posited the Death of God, which emerged through the Enlightenment. Proponents of the secularization theory argued that the erosion of religious adherence was confirmed by statistics. Statistical “proof” became a means of tracking church attendance; however, the findings may be viewed with a degree of skepticism since church attendance cannot fully or accurately divulge the extent to which people believed or disbelieved and could not adequately take into account the rise of alternative forms of belief that emerged outside of the church. Furthermore, the theory claims that this was an era of atheism and agnosticism due to interest in scientific materialism; however, it does not fully address how some spiritual groups conflated pseudo-scientific and pseudo-religious thought to form new ways of thinking spiritually.

Proponents of secularization theories, such as Bradley Deane and Patrick Brantlinger focus on masculinity within a New Imperialist context. Although they recognize the biblical and religious resonances in \textit{fin de siècle} fiction, they do not address these religious reverberations. Likewise, Anne McClintock, Sandra Gilbert, and Julia Reid avoid biblical allusions, examining feminist elements that appear in \textit{fin de siècle} literature. These theoretical positions open avenues to examine how the New Woman question intersects with New Imperialism’s racial discourses that endorsed the “superiority” of Anglo-Saxon masculinity; however, they miss the opportunity to examine how quasi-religious allusions and biblical motifs provide an added dimension to their
analysis of the era in which these texts were written.

While I acknowledge that all of these areas of study provide viable lenses for interpreting epistemological changes and anxieties, and that the new scientific, anthropological, and biblical scholarship certainly impacted how Victorians questioned orthodoxy, I argue that the fin de siècle novel illustrates a continued engagement with aspects of religious thought not addressed by scientific theories. Biblical imperatives to feed the hungry and welcome the stranger continue to resonate in novels wherein scripture and science, rather than being antithetical are conflated.

Scholars such as Mark Knight, Emma Mason, Susan Colón, and Jan-Melissa Schramm inform my research and provide a basis for investigating how fin de siècle literature deployed biblical and religious motifs as shared cultural knowledge. These scholars have argued against secularization theories by demonstrating how multiple forms of spiritual thought emerged both inside and outside of the church, frequently drawing on both scripture and Darwinian science to situate all peoples within the human family. Knight succinctly articulates the need to acknowledge the plurality of Christian thought, while gesturing to emerging spiritualities that were essentially new religions. Knight’s assessment in a reciprocity of influence, that is, how religious thought can enter secular works just as sacred works can be viewed in religious terms provided a starting point for my enquiry.

I somewhat depart from Knight, not in opposition to but more as a way of building on his work, in examining scriptural deployment. Knight argues that pointing to scriptural allusions or references that appear in these texts may be interesting but not valuable is a valid argument if that is all that is done. What I am doing is specifically pointing to how scripture emerges and what it does in terms of addressing a context fraught with multiple anxieties. I also attend to the
etymology of words, names, symbols or metaphors, particularly Greek or Hebrew words that carry a multitude of significant meanings easily lost to readers who are not biblically literate. In much the same way as Knight, I seek to show how the novel, rife with Darwinian theory of interconnections, may also be a tool for understanding the breadth of interpretive possibilities offered in sacred writing.

Schramm’s work on how atonement theology lost ground in light of wars, diseases, and poverty, indicates late Victorian disenchantment with orthodoxy and ritual, concepts that repeatedly appear in the texts I examine. Colón’s research on the prevalence of parables opened the texts in innovative ways that demanded further investigation, particularly as parables intersect with the Mosaic law and the Sermon on the Mount. In this way, my work dovetails with Colón’s explication of the parables, which like the Sermon, argue for compassion and empathy. It is my belief that in the interstices between orthodox religion and atheism lies a fertile ground waiting to be explored. Such an exploration will add to the corpus of knowledge around shifts in Victorian culture that sought ways to overcome anxieties regarding death, judgement, and the afterlife in light of Darwinian theory that only promised an afterlife in terms of the propagation of the species. Human agency rather than divine intervention in building a just society becomes a prevalent theme in many of these literary works.

The novels I attend to are H. Rider Haggard’s She: A History of Adventure (1887), H.G Wells’s The Time Machine (1895), Grant Allen’s The British Barbarians (1895), and Olive Schreiner’s Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland (1897). I chose to investigate these novels for many reasons. First, they all draw on similar theological ideologies, such as creation narratives, the Sermon on the Mount, Mosaic law, and apocalypticism. I was particularly struck by how
each author employed a similar structure to apocalyptic literature. Second, there was an interconnection between these texts since in many respects, these authors communicated through their literary creations. Schreiner had read Haggard’s work and was inspired by his tales of Africa, yet her ideas of imperialism, as I will elucidate in subsequent chapters, differed considerably. Each novel also indicated different ways of deploying scripture, since unlike Haggard, Schreiner used similar scriptural references without any supernatural intonations.

Wells’s and Allen’s novels seemed a logical choice since they both involved time travel as a means of contemplating humankind’s future in Darwinian terms. Furthermore, these authors referenced each other in intertextual moments and Allen claimed his novel was in response to Wells’s work.

I also recognized that these novels uniquely dealt with the wider concern of addressing all marginalized peoples; however, each one tended to deal with a specific social problem. Haggard’s novel pointed to ambiguities and ambivalences in imperialism and the treatment of colonized peoples, making racial difference a prime issue. Wells’s concern for the working poor indicated a separate concern that had implications for thinking about an ethical approach to the working poor in England. While Allen’s novel also touched on several social concerns for the colonized and the working poor, the New Woman and the specific issues facing women’s rights in marriage and child custody issues were addressed. Schreiner’s novella specifically indicted imperial capitalism and its devastating effects on the colonized, but also on the poor working-class young men who were drawn to Southern Africa with false promises.

Interpretive methodologies I employed involved investigating how religious readings of secular texts and secular readings of the Bible appeared in these works, illustrating how both
religious and secular interpretations were possible. Close reading, form, and source criticism (in respect to the choices of specific scripture the authors employed) were some methodologies I found useful in providing a wider context for reading the texts. Letters, biographical writing, and reviews, to name a few, indicated the extent to which these authors were educated in shifting currents in both religious and secular thought. Their well-informed theological knowledge served not only to critique aspects of orthodox religion, but also to draw interpretations from scripture that were recognized by readers across a wide spectrum of beliefs. For instance, Schreiner, after reading *The Life of Jesus* by Ernest Renan, was moved by the historical Jesus who she viewed as a prime exemplar of human compassion. This theological knowledge entered literary texts essentially indicating acts of exegesis similar to that of biblical authors and redactors.

The stakes of recognizing how these religious and biblical motifs intersect with scientific thought are significant because they illustrate how traditional beliefs informed the conscience. Since Britain continued to identify itself as a Christian Empire, these novels interrogate hypocrisy, complacency, and adherence to rituals that served no purpose. Instead, these literary works express an urgency to live according to the stringent ethical mandates found in scripture, albeit not necessarily as a practicing believer. The novels implore apostate and believer alike to be guided by principles that view all creation as sacred and interconnected through common ancestry.

But perhaps, one of the most relevant concepts to emerge from my study indicates an emphasis on human agency. Belief in an external deity and the meaning of sanctity are revised as each author places humans and not a divine being at the forefront of effecting social reform. Sacredness is not conferred by God, but rather, it is seen as an integral element that may result
from evolution, although such speculation was not overtly proposed by Charles Darwin. In this sense, these authors place the hope for humanity in the hands of humans who are all connected to each other and all creation and therefore, as noted by George Levine, are literally brothers and sisters as posited by Darwin. This interconnection then demands an ethical approach that will create a new world of justice, thereby eliminating an intervention by an external omnipotent deity.

My research contributes to revised views of the fin de siècle by illustrating the complex relationship between science and religion that was not antithetical. I have attempted to demonstrate, through careful examination of how biblical motifs are conflated with scientific theory, the ways that both subjects argue for a humanitarian approach toward the Other. Such an approach discloses an aspect of Victorian culture not generally examined; that is, its continued albeit revised view of religious ideologies that retained its efficacy in promoting virtues that benefitted all members of society.

It is impossible to read these texts without recognizing its value to feminist and post-colonial theory; however, these theoretical approaches frequently avoid engaging with biblical references or religious allusion that illustrate their continued influences in both the authors and readers of this fiction. For instance, Grant Allen’s framing of Frida Monteith as an emerging New Woman underscores the challenges women faced, but I also see the manner in which Allen draws on reinterpreted and non-literal readings of Genesis that honour the equality of women, a reading not frequently addressed or understood. By understanding that new hermeneutical approaches viewed these scriptures in new ways that rejected imposed meanings, Allen essentially uses the Bible to refute traditional Christian thinking, and this is an important
development that would enrich a feminist reading of these texts. Similarly, post-colonial studies would gain a richer perspective in considering how readings of Genesis’ creation myths find congruence with Darwin. It might be a worthwhile endeavour for post-colonialist to read biblical references with an eye to the original context in which these references were used, for example, racial elements in the Bible are frequently misunderstood because the original meaning is obscured by church interpretation as evident in the Hamite theory as well as the justification for slavery and prohibitions regarding miscegenation.

What is at stake here, is an opportunity to acknowledge how literature was influential in redefining ways of expressing radically ethical responses to imperialism through both scientific and religious languages in a manner that did not foreclose individual spirituality. Anxieties around alterity and degeneration were narrativized in novels as authors attempted to make sense of these social concerns from a position that was neither fully religious nor secular, but from a position that acknowledged a “divinity” in all humans. The novel, pamphlet, and novella provided an inexpensive means of communicating current concerns and elucidating flaws in existing epistemologies, facilitating gradual shifts in response to scientific theories and emergent non-dogmatic spiritualities or religions. It is through these emerging understandings of humanity that the novels I examine gesture to the numerous anxieties regarding human degeneration, regression, and concepts of an afterlife not contingent on God; however, these novels also seek to address concerns by imagining new ways of approaching changing world views.

It would be inaccurate to claim that the church had lost all influence, since it maintained its place within British imperial culture and continues to have influence today; more accurately, accommodations had to have been made in order for the church to maintain a modicum of
influence in an era characterized by scientific thought. These accommodations took the form of liberal reinterpretation of scripture and beliefs in materialist philosophy that did not contradict the rationality of science. It would also be incorrect to assume that Christianity was the only source of ethical and moral teaching since many authors drew on alternative forms of spirituality or secular notions that situated morality as innate qualities in all humans. Schreiner, Allen, and Wells turned to socialism to expound on ethics in response to violence perpetrated on the working poor and the colonized, illustrating commonalities between religious philosophical positions and sociopolitical ideologies that advocated for egalitarianism. The power once wielded by established religion was radically changed as some Victorians left the church and espoused beliefs not endorsed by church doctrine alone. Somewhere between the extremes of religious affiliation and atheism, lies another less explored possibility; a new humanism that was based on re-conceived notions of spirituality not dependent on the institution of the church or on an external deity.

The immense popularity of the novel, and the manner in which authors responded to the interests of the reading public by providing fantastical stories of mysteries, magic, and miracles, attests to the power of the novel in disseminating evolving ideas. Reconfigured Christian motifs continued to provide an ethical framework for debating issues of primary concern. Easily overlooked biblical references and allusions, such as those acknowledged but not examined by Deane and Brantlinger, are rife with connotations regarding humankind’s connection to creation. These motifs are often contradictory and always complex in their engagement with contemporary discourses, offering richer understandings of the complexities facing Victorians who were seeking new ways of addressing complicated concerns.
The first chapter lays the foundation for my arguments as I explicate how Darwinian theory, new German biblical criticism, and the growing field of anthropology challenged literal interpretations of scripture and traditional religious beliefs. These disciplines also contested epistemologies regarding race, class, and gender by asserting a monogenesis that situated all humans within the human family, and frequently, although not always, contested Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinist theories of determinism. I will briefly indicate how concepts of compassion and empathy that appeared to be antithetical to theories of “survival of the fittest” may be better understood by considering how Victorians understood these virtues in terms of maintaining a healthy society as posited by Rob Boddice. In this chapter, I will elucidate the influence of E.B Tylor’s anthropological work on how religious thought developed from “primitivism” to “civilization.” I also investigate the impact of James Frazer’s comparative religious study, particularly in respect to ritual sacrifice associated with the common motif of the dying man-god since these works were influential to the authors in my study.

In Chapter Two, I examine Haggard’s sophisticated use of multiple biblical tropes, from Genesis creation mythology to Mosaic Law and the apocalyptic writings of Ezekiel. I propose reading Ayesha as an antithesis of Moses since her affiliation with Egypt, her longevity, and her encounter with the sacred flame, in opposition to Moses, renders her as an evil despot who has become wholly corrupted by unchecked power. The particularity of the date 339 B.C.E as heralding her first appearance also deserves particular attention since it is indicative of an unstable period in history where imperialism, colonization, and the hybridizing of cultures were viewed as threats to Judaism in both religious and cultural terms, thereby indicating similarities between the 4th century B.C.E and the late Victorian era. While Haggard’s imperialist ideologies
are evident in some areas of the novel, *She*, when read alongside his biographical writings, exhibits his ambivalence towards aspects of New Imperialism. Haggard’s use of biblical motifs and emerging spiritualist beliefs in the afterlife have not been fully explored in current Victorian literary scholarship, yet it is an area ripe for exploration.

Wells’s complicated views of Christianity and all beliefs in an external deity are narrativized in *The Time Machine*. In Chapter Three, I attend to Wells’s use of Darwinian concepts of natural selection, which he inverts to propose an “unnatural selection,” whereby divisions among the classes have the potential to breed a weaker human race. This is evident in the Eloi and Morlocks, the two races he encounters in the year 801, 702, who are descendants of the leisured middle and the working classes respectively. The names of the Eloi and Morlocks have not typically been viewed as biblical, yet through an explication of the names, Wells’s critique of deism emerges. His sophisticated use of scripture simultaneously critiques the church and British Imperial culture’s self-identification as a Christian society. Wells draws on the structure of apocalyptic writing: a frame narrative, an otherworldly journey, and a prophetic figure who returns to his own context to warn his contemporaries of catastrophic events that will occur as a result of human transgression against their own kind. His inversions of scripture, such as notions of sacrifice and substitutionary theology, strike at the foundations of Christian society, as he turns to his socialist ideologies to argue for immediate social reform.

In Chapter Four, I explore Grant Allen’s *The British Barbarians* (1895), a time-travelling novella that was written in response to Wells’s *The Time Machine*. Allen, a proponent of the New Woman movement and a critic of imperial culture that adhered to social Darwinian concepts of determinism, draws on the Genesis creation mythologies, reinterpreting the notion of
purity to posit sexuality as natural and wholesome. Echoing the New Woman notions of traditional marriage as a form of prostitution, Allen critiques social conventions that marginalize working-class women who are victimized by middle-class men’s sexual appetites, but more importantly, his novella draws attention to the injustice of marriage laws that forced mothers to remain in dysfunctional marriages in order to maintain custody of their children. This is particularly relevant, since Allen, an avid supporter of Darwinism, saw women as essential to building a strong race not only through selecting the best partner for procreative purposes but also for raising children to be ethically and morally superior. Through Bertram Inglewood, an anthropologist studying the “barbarity” of Victorian society, Allen launches an excoriating attack on social norms that eschew notions of progressive thinking. Allen’s time traveler expresses radical and progressive ideologies that appeared to be shocking to late-Victorian middle-class society as evident in his caution provided in the novella’s preface and his labelling of the controversial novella under the Hilltop Novel designation. In this chapter, I will briefly discuss how the labelling of the novel also alludes to purity in publishing, a key concern of Allen who viewed literature as a pedagogical tool.

*Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, Olive Schreiner’s “propaganda” novella is the subject of Chapter Five. Written in response to Cecil J. Rhodes’s incursion on the Matabele and Mashona lands, Schreiner overtly expresses her outrage for capitalist imperialism. A free-thinker, atheist, and socialist, Schreiner nevertheless finds value in drawing on biblical tropes to argue for an egalitarian world where women and indigenous peoples would be respected and treated as equals. She unambiguously rejects social Darwinism’s ideologies that placed humans in a hierarchical framework, with Anglo-Saxon males at the pinnacle. Instead, Schreiner turns to
the Sermon on the Mount and creation narratives conflated with a Darwinian theory that espoused common ancestry. Through the Jesus-figure who appears to Peter on the *kopje* Schreiner reaffirms the role of women as at the forefront of instilling virtues such as empathy and compassion in children. The Jesus-figure is feminized, as he resembles Peter’s mother; however, he is also associated with non-Europeans as his racial status as a Palestinian Jew places him on an equal footing with the Matabele and Mashona who were subjugated by European imperial forces in much the same way Jesus’ people were dominated by the powerful Roman Empire. Schreiner reconfigures biblical motifs to critique Christianity as she associates the Jesus- figure with the historical Jesus, denying all allusions to the Christ of the church. In this chapter, I will illustrate how she rejects blood atonement theologies that demand an innocent victim, demonstrating instead how she subverts this notion as she shows Peter’s death not as a sacrifice, but like the historical Jesus, as a consequence of standing against powerful imperial forces. By avoiding Christological allusion with its focus on the supernatural and the miraculous, Schreiner emphasizes human agency as a powerful force capable of effecting change, and since she presents the Jesus-figure as fully human, she views the amelioration of humankind as an attainable goal.

My purpose in these chapters is to draw attention to the exegetical practice of authors who used biblical motifs in innovative ways to argue for a form of humanism that found validation in both science and the Bible. I will unravel both explicit and implicit biblical quotations that appear in the novels, in addition to motifs such as apocalypticism, creationism, and biblical law, attending specifically to how they are inverted or revised. By drawing attention to the way authors engaged in a form of exegesis, my project will expose fresh ways of reading
fin de siècle fiction that appealed to a wide range of readers both inside, outside, and on the periphery of organized religion. I will illustrate how, between religious affiliation and atheism, new understandings of spirituality independent of the church and not contingent on a belief in external deities emerged. Instead of endorsing secularization theories, my research explicates the complexities of the hybridized beliefs that emerged in popular literature of the era. These works reflected and then sought to overcome anxieties regarding concepts of both physical and moral regression and degeneration initially sparked by evolutionary theory. New ways of contemplating the sacred and the profane, based on purely individual philosophical cosmologies, emphasize human interconnectivity through common ancestry, facilitating an urgent appeal for social reform in the metropole and the distant corners of the empire.
Chapter One: Finding Empathy and an Ethics of Care in *Fin de Siècle* Novels

The ennobling belief in God is not universal with man; and the belief in active spiritual agencies naturally follows from his other mental powers. The moral sense perhaps affords the best and highest distinction between man and lower animals; … as I have so lately endeavoured to shew that the social instincts, – with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, naturally lead to the golden rule, “As ye would that man should do to you, do ye to them likewise;” and this lies at the foundation of morality.

- Charles Darwin. *The Descent of Man* (1871)

1.1 Introduction

Charles Darwin’s illuminating insights into the value of the Golden Rule as an ethical directive intended to inspire the most profound virtues in humans attest to the embeddedness of biblical language and Judeo-Christian principles during an age generally classified as secular. A man of science, Darwin was not alone in finding value in scripture that promoted virtues, such as empathy, sympathy, and compassion, not promised through the evolutionary process. The *fin de siècle* was fraught with instabilities and contradictions precipitated by rapid change, which was compounded with the loss of faith experienced by many Victorians. Darwin’s theories situated humankind within the animal kingdom, contesting culturally held religious beliefs in the primacy of humans in the created world, while calling into question the Bible as an authoritative text. Connecting humankind to animals sparked fears of regression and degeneration, compounded by what many Victorians viewed as problematic contact with the racialized Other in “benighted” regions of the empire.

Literary scholars, such as Bradley Deane, Patrick Brantlinger, and George Levine, generally view *fin de siècle* fiction as secular works; however, in accordance with Mark Knight,
Emma Mason, and Susan Colón, I assert that a more nuanced approach, which illustrates how “the religious and secular were overlapping rather than distinct spheres for the Victorians”, needs to be considered (Colón 31). I interrogate the secularization hypothesis in Victorian studies by illustrating how authors drew from seemingly antithetical elements of biblical allusion and Darwinian science to argue for empathy and an ethics of care within a New Imperialist context. The onward march of New Imperialism abroad, the mechanization through growing industrialism, scientific materialism, and the rise of biblical scholarship contributed to eroding reliance on the church institution. Since new biblical scholarship posited that much of scripture was non-historical, metaphoric, and symbolic writings, many Victorians adapted their interpretations and beliefs to encompass a wide range of meanings. It is my contention that because the Bible had traditionally formed the basis of culturally embedded codes of ethics, biblical language and familiar motifs continued to be a valuable means of communicating human virtues for Victorians who had left the church entirely and for those who adopted new expressions of spirituality1 independent of any particular denomination. My research investigates how the fin de siècle novel articulates, and then strives to overcome, the tension between scientific atheism and religious humanism in creative and surprising ways, bridging the chasm between the “rationalism” of science and the “superstition” of religion. The novels I examine, H. Rider Haggard’s She: A History of Adventure (1886-7), H.G. Wells’s The Time Machine (1895), Grant Allen’s The British Barbarians: A Hilltop Novel (1895), and Olive Schreiner’s Trooper

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1 I am using the term “spirituality” broadly to address new expressions of belief that emerged both within and outside of church organizations during this era. Later in this chapter and chapter two, I will briefly touch on “spiritualist” thought that located an evolution of ethics in the afterlife, as asserted by Alfred Russel Wallace.
Peter Halket of Mashonaland (1895), contribute to critical discourse by uniquely employing biblical allusions, Darwinism, and social Darwinism to argue for an ethical approach to the colonized and the British working class.

“The Golden Rule,\(^2\) a precept that is borrowed from the Hebrew Scriptures and attributed to Jesus’ “Law of Love”\(^3\) articulates how biblical language continued to be utilized as a means of affirming human principles of ethics and empathy. As Darwin’s theory of evolution and German biblical criticism challenged the authority of scripture as a literal “truth,” ethical and moral ideologies previously situated in religion became entrenched in “secularized” cultural discourse. Although Darwinian evolutionary theory vaguely alluded to the possibility of an evolution of ethics that may occur as humankind progressed, “survival of the fittest” and “the struggle for existence” appeared to be antithetical to humanist ideals, requiring accommodations as to how these theories may be interpreted from humanist perspectives. Scientific theories were then conflated with ethical discourse found in religious and biblical motifs, which remained a source for thinking ethically. Of the authors I address, Haggard alludes to re-conceptualized spiritual beliefs that embrace science, but deviates considerably from traditional, orthodox Christianity, while Wells, Allen, and Schreiner use scripture as a means of critiquing the church and empire, deploying the “Christian Book” as a weapon against church and imperial hypocrisy. Schreiner specifically employs familiar scriptural references, such as Matthew’s Beatitudes, as

\(^2\) The Golden Rule not only appears in Christian-Judeo ethical thinking but is central to many religions.
\(^3\) Matthew 22:37-40 “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”
emerging cultural expressions of human ethics distinct from religious meaning. Her novella articulates a wholly secular approach to ethics and empathy that critiques the unchecked power of New Imperialism, particularly in respect to the “scramble for Africa.” The novels, examined chronologically, illustrate the important and steady shift from orthodoxy to orthopraxis, as ethics regarding alterity became a concern, particularly since violent encounters with the colonized were increasingly reported in the metropole through travel writing, journals, and serialized novels that appeared in inexpensive, widely distributed periodicals.

This chapter maps out how the fin de siècle novel engages in discourse around Darwinian evolutionary theory, new biblical scholarship, anthropology, and racial science causing Victorians to re-evaluate their spiritual beliefs. Biblical motifs are deployed in unique ways to interrogate social inequalities at home and in the distant corners of the empire. As aggressive New Imperialism spread across the globe, encountering the Other in bloody conflicts, Darwinian theory and new German biblical scholarship enabled late Victorian authors to contemplate humanist ideologies through harmonizing scripture and evolutionary science to assert an ethical stance toward the racialized Other. Meanwhile, “primitive” spirituality became a subject of comparative anthropological study of religion, as investigations of indigenous peoples drew on Darwinian science. Darwin’s On the Origins of the Species by Means of Natural Selection (1859), The Descent of Man (1871), and Julius Wellhausen’s work on biblical authorship will be explored to show how science and scripture found common ground, particularly as it pertained to monogenesis.

4 By “orthopraxis” I am referring to putting faith into action through social reform.
Wellhausen challenged Mosaic authorship, undermining fixed and literal interpretation of biblical law, which traditionally dictated ethics and morality. By illustrating how many biblical authors, over centuries, redacted, edited, and contributed to these codified laws in response to challenges of their own historic context, Wellhausen provided a means for Victorians to reinterpret scripture contextually, recognizing metaphoric and symbolic meanings previously viewed as literal absolutes. Such liberal readings of the creation mythology were not in conflict with new evolutionary science, particularly as monogenesis was emphasized. Darwinian notions of the interconnectivity of all life found expression in biblical metaphors, which expounded on stewardship, or an ethics of care, a concept that united religious and secular notions of ideal humanism derived from virtues such as compassion and empathy. Darwin’s occasional use of biblical language to communicate secular concepts attests to the cultural embeddedness of common biblical motifs, particularly the Golden Rule, the central tenet of major religions and various indigenous spiritualities. Since both Darwinism and biblical scholarship greatly influenced late-Victorian society, to provide a context for my argument, I will provide a brief examination of each later in this chapter.

In subsequent chapters, I will examine each author’s reworking of religious and scientific concepts, which frequently imitate the biblical authors’ redaction and reconfiguration of scripture to suit their respective contexts, providing a fresh approach to reading late Victorian literature as cultural artifacts of a time characterized by change and uncertainty. I will demonstrate how a new “hybridized humanism” conflated biblical and Darwinian evolutionary science to address conflicting and contradictory positions that created multiple anxieties in response to New Imperialism. By investigating the nexus between conservative religious orthodoxy, and an
atheism that fully embraced evolutionary sciences, fresh insights into how the fin de siècle novel negotiated two seemingly disparate disciplines will be gained. This line of inquiry is important because it contributes to an anthropological understanding of how religious expression, frequently viewed as “superstitious” relics of a more “primitive” state becomes a crucial means of providing a language of humanist ethics, and by extension, morality, in an increasing secularized world.

Building on Knight’s, Deane’s, and Brantlinger’s work, I demonstrate how the fin de siècle novel is not necessarily or always secular, since the novel frequently reflects new forms of spirituality concerned with advancing ethics and empathy, both inside and outside of organized religion. I examine how inversions, the strategic placement of scripture, and Darwinism offer new insights into British imperial cultural shifts that negotiated apparent tensions between science and religion to propagate humanist virtues during an age characterized by increasingly technological and materialist cosmologies. George Levine, although perpetuating secularization theories, insightfully posits that Darwin’s theory, like Christianity, “turned our neighbors into literal family”, thereby providing a segue into my discussion on how the two subjects are conflated (4). My project will intersect with Knight’s, Mason’s, and Colón’s repudiation of secularization theories, which falsely construct a line between the sacred and the secular, thereby diminishing the continued cultural significance of scripture in interrogating ethical and moral concerns of the era. Building on their work, I draw specific parallels between nuanced and overt use of scripture attending to how and to what end it is deployed. I further indicate how religious motifs are conflated with evolutionary science in creative ways that affirm, for instance, the meaning of common ancestry in terms of ethical governance, indicating how biblical law found
in the Torah and the Sermon on the Mount both critique a Christian hypocrisy that fails to recognize the Other as a brother or sister. Colón’s work on the use of parables sets the tone for my examination of how the Bible argues for radical humanism towards the vulnerable; however, my focus is on the Torah and the Sermon on the Mount rather than on parables. Deane and Brantlinger comprehensively investigate issues of masculinity and the violence of New Imperialism in relation to unethical behaviours in imperial spaces, frequently agreeing that spirituality sometimes assumed new forms of religious expression. Through a summary of concepts derived from evolutionary theory, one may ascertain the extent to which authors liberally adapted parts of evolutionary science to fit the context in which they wrote. My project will illuminate how these new expressions of spirituality, albeit deviating from church orthodoxy, nonetheless reflect religious ideals as shared cultural knowledge, refuting theories that posit this era as secular.

1.2 Darwinism and an Evolution of Ethics

Haggard, Wells, Allen, and Schreiner unambiguously draw on Darwinian theory to contemplate the interconnectedness of all living creatures, deploying the theory, conflated with biblical motifs, to promote social reform. To illustrate evolutionary theory’s influence on fin de siècle authors, I will briefly sketch some key ideas that emerged from Darwin’s work. In 1859 Darwin published, *On the Origins of the Species By Means of Natural Selection*, causing a myriad of challenges to Victorian epistemologies regarding biblical doctrines of creation, racial theory, and notions of connectivity with all life forms. During the mid-nineteenth century, evangelical missionaries found some common ground with Darwin’s approach to the
interconnectivity of life because it supported ideologies of brotherhood and sisterhood among all races. Common ancestry provided a definitive and effective argument for viewing the racialized Other as fully human. This understanding of Darwinian theory aided in viewing all races as connected through a common ancestor; however, Darwin did not necessarily promulgate notions of equality, since he continued to regard Anglo-Saxons as a superior race. Just as Darwin influenced anthropologists and social Darwinists, such influence involved reciprocity, as intellectuals entered imperial cultural discourse from a myriad of perspectives, ultimately shaping authors, and their wide readership, which included non-intellectuals from many walks of life. If Darwin’s theory had justified the missionary’s argument for common ancestry, then it did little to curb rampant paternalism among missionaries in imperial locales. Despite finding some common ground with anti-slavery lobbyists and some Christian groups, fundamentalist Christians found Darwin’s theories incompatible with a literal interpretation of scripture.

In response to the criticisms leveled against his theories, Darwin argues that the law of gravity, a scientific concept that posits a logical, scientific argument to explain the manner in which the universe functions, was once contested on religious grounds. He claims that “a celebrated author and divine” had written to him, suggesting that, “it is just as noble a conception of the Deity to believe that he created a few original forms capable of self-development into

5 The slogan for abolitionists was first coined by Josiah Wedgwood, “Am I not a man and a brother?” Or, “Am I not a woman and a sister?” This slogan continued to resonate with missionaries who ostensibly believed it their duty to Christianize and civilize the colonized.
6 See work by historians Aileen Fyfe and Bernard Lightman on the relationship between science and religion in the Victorian period.
7 For more on missionary encounters with the colonized see Catherine Hall, Susan Thorne, and Jeffrey Cox.
other and needful forms, as to believe that He required a fresh set of creations to supply the voids caused by the action of His Laws” (*Origins* 304). The assertions of “the author and divine” demonstrate how evolution may be interpreted as intelligent design; however, Darwin does not overtly engage in such religious discourse. He uses terms, like “Creator,” yet, considering his admission to using personification in discussing “Nature,” it seems likely that such religious overtones may be metaphorical rather than pointing to any religious concepts at all. Use of metaphoric language may have been an expedient means of writing about evolution and its mechanisms without overtly offending the faithful (*Origins* 63). By alluding to the Creator, Darwin ambiguously appears to imply that there is no contradiction with a revised biblical view that ultimately credits the Creator with forming some species, while allowing others to evolve over time. He eloquently describes how evolution through natural selection may be interpreted as a belief in intelligent design, employing transcendental signifiers such as “the Creator” and the allusion to a “breath” which animates life, as an effective means of equivocating in order to placate fundamentalist religious groups. Darwin writes:

> Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone circling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved. (*Origins* 429)

This final statement creates an opportunity to accept alternate theories of intelligent design that were less objectionable to natural theology; however, Darwin’s theory continued to be contentious to literal biblical understandings of human origins among Christian fundamentalists. Darwin’s next book, *The Descent of Man* was less appeasing to religious factions as his work
took on a positively secular tone.

As debates continued to reverberate, *The Descent of Man*, unlike his previous work, overtly situated humans in the animal kingdom much to the disapproval of his critics; however, his admirers welcomed his contribution to a growing body of sciences that investigated the origins of humanity. In *Descent*, Darwin views religious belief in a God or gods as a deterrent for unethical behavior; however, he dismisses belief in a higher power as a form of superstition similar to “savage” superstitions by unambiguously avoiding allusions to intelligent design. In a statement that critiques all spiritual beliefs, Darwin claims that belief in a deity could engender feelings of love, gratitude, hope, and devotion; however, he also notes how such beliefs, albeit a result of “high mental faculties,” also have the propensity to lead to superstitions (68). According to Darwin:

> The same high mental faculties which first led man to believe in unseen spiritual agencies, then in fetishism, polytheism, and ultimately in monotheism, would infallibly lead him, as long as his reasoning powers remain poorly developed, to various strange superstitions and customs. Many of these are terrible to think of – such as the sacrifice of human beings to a blood-loving god; the trial of innocent persons by the ordeal of poison or fire; witchcraft, &c. – yet it is well occasionally to reflect on these superstitions, for they shew us what an infinite debt of gratitude we owe to the improvement of our reason, to science and our accumulated knowledge. (*Descent* 68-69)

This statement implicitly maintains Western stereotypical views of indigenous peoples as practicing unspeakable “savage” rituals in obeisance to gods. Darwin viewed the racialized Other as sharing in “high mental faculties” separate from animals that do not have the ability to reason or question how the world works, yet he also ponders how domesticated animals are capable of a modicum of rudimentary thought processes. Such ambiguities create room for assumptions that although Darwin believed in monogenesis, he tended to view other races as inferior and “less evolved” than the Anglo-Saxon race.
If his thoughts on race were ambiguous, his views on religious belief in a supreme Creator were quite clear. All allusions to divine intervention in creation are circumvented in *Descent*, although Darwin credits belief in a deity as a means of invoking a sense of shame that produces remorse. He claims that a sense of shame, derived from fear of judgement by peers, is a strong motivator to correct or prevent behavior that is viewed as deviant (86). Darwin’s assertions are certainly viable, particularly within Victorian society where fear of ostracization worked as a means of social control separate from fears of divine retribution.

For Darwin, human virtues that dictated ethics and morality are no longer attributed to a deity, instead, he claims that such codes of behavior are derived from the development of the ability to feel sympathy. He postulates that as humans evolve, there is a likelihood that notions of ethics and morality will improve, perhaps through inheritance, claiming:

> As the struggle may sometimes be seen going on between the various instincts of lower animals, it is not surprising that there should be a struggle in man between his social instincts, with their derived virtues, and his lower, although momentarily stronger impulses or desires. This . . . is all the less surprising, as man has emerged from a state of barbarism within a comparatively recent period. After having yielded to some temptation we feel a sense of dissatisfaction, shame, repentance or remorse, analogous to the feeling caused by other powerful instincts or desires, when left unsatisfied or baulked. . . Looking to future generations, there is no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow weaker, and we may expect that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance (*Descent Part. I* 104).

Darwin’s position on morality and ethics are ambivalent as he tends to vacillate between notions that higher species demonstrate these traits, yet he almost simultaneously questions this premise based on theories of competition and the struggle for existence that requires a measure of ruthlessness. On one hand, he speculates that ethics and morality may become inherited traits that will develop over time, yet he ponders the likelihood that humans will prevail in the battle
with their own barbarous instincts that lurk beneath the veneer of civility. He conjectures that humans may show more sympathy and empathy to their own social group than to humans beyond the confines of kinship or tribal affiliation, a theory that was posited by the emerging field of anthropology and Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinism (*Descent* 100-101).

Social Darwinism loosely utilized Darwinian science to explain social and economic advancement of some to the detriment of others, a “survival of the fittest” that applied to social formations rather than biological species, thereby placing some members of society in a privileged position over the poor. The theory of natural selection, first proposed by Darwin, became a subject of interest to anthropologists who claimed that so-called savage races, like various species in nature, would inevitably become extirpated or extinct through wars and other forms of barbarity. For Darwin, natural selection in nature ensured that the “fittest” would survive and reproduce, a necessary check to ensure evolutionary progression in all species. Darwin included so-called savage races in this equation, arguing that through acts of barbarity, their numbers would be kept in check, a notion Spencer applied to his social theories. Spencer’s theories are frequently critiqued by authors of popular fiction, as I will disclose in the subsequent chapters; however, notions of sympathy and empathy that lead to ethical treatment of the Other need to be examined from a variety of perspectives, which takes into account how Victorians interpreted these virtues in terms of the society as a whole. The issue of how we view sympathy and compassion may not necessarily coincide with Victorian notions of these virtues creating a modicum of confusion when reading Darwin’s or Spencer’s speculations on fitness.

Rob Boddice examines Darwin’s seemingly ambivalent statements regarding the possibility of an evolution of ethics, providing a context for understanding how concepts of
sympathy and compassion were viewed in the nineteenth century. Boddice cogently argues that as scientific knowledge and technologies shed light on complex questions regarding the health or “fitness” of society, concepts of sympathy took on new dimensions as they addressed larger concerns. What Victorians viewed as sympathy may well astonish our sensibilities, yet according to Boddice, such actions were in fact acts of sympathy in that they ensured the welfare of the entire community (7). For instance, he discusses how forced vaccinations might have been viewed as an assault on individual rights; however, it served a greater purpose in assuring the health of the entire population. He asserts that “if vaccination put an end to smallpox, but parents refused to vaccinate their children, then it was moral to punish them. Their actions risked the suffering or death of the community. Compulsion was an act of sympathy. And if the good of society depended on “fitness,” then was it not an act of sympathy to discourage or prevent the ‘unfit’ from breeding, and to encourage the ‘fit’ to procreate?” (7). Boddice’s assertions provide fresh insights into Darwinian and social Darwinian concepts sympathy and compassion that modern readers may not recognize; however, it also illuminates aspects of Spencer’s social theory that advocated for a “fit” society. While Boddice explicates the meaning of sympathy and compassion in the Victorian sense of the word, scholars such as Patrick Brantlinger point to problems on how extinction discourse and the relegation of some groups as “fitter” nonetheless had serious consequences for the colonized.

Brantlinger, in Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930 (2003), examines the problematic practice of “victim-blaming” that occurred during the end of the century. As indigenous populations were being annihilated by aggressive imperialism, unchecked capitalist enterprises, and the introduction of diseases for which they had no
immunity, Darwinism and social Darwinism provided rationales for violent incursions on colonized spaces. According to Brantlinger, discursive formations around imperialism and racism derived from a variety of fields, creating an extinction discourse that would have disastrous ramifications for the colonized. Sources that contributed to extinction discourse included travel writings of explorers, colonial officials, colonists, and traders. He states:

Often viewed as the main or even sole cause, [of extinction] was savage customs: nomadism, warfare, superstition, infanticide, human sacrifice, cannibalism. Savagery, in short, was frequently treated as self-extinguishing. The fantasy of auto-genocide or racial suicide is an extreme version of blaming the victim, which throughout the last three centuries has helped to rationalize or occlude the genocidal aspects of European conquest and colonization. (2)

Such stereotypes, which predated Darwin, reflect deeply ingrained epistemologies on racial alterity. Darwin was influenced by common discourse on racial superiority and in turn, his theories had implications for other intellectuals and authors who transmitted these ideas through widely disseminated literature.

As the reading public consumed available print material, which supported these common racial epistemologies, erroneous stereotypes continued to have dire consequences for the colonized. If Darwin blamed the colonized for their eradication, albeit by viewing it as natural, and even favourable because it allowed “fitter” races to advance, then he had doubts about the future of those “fitter” races’ ability to continue to thrive due to a lack of natural selection. Darwin argues that in the case of civilized cultures, humane behavior is overly sensitive to the suffering of the Other, thereby circumventing checks to natural selection, and so permitting the poor and infirm to propagate. Through such speculations Darwin tends to confuse the issue of whether or not charitable actions are desirable because he simultaneously presents both ethical humanism and inhumanity as problems.
The notion that humane attitudes prevent natural selection in so-called civilized races creates a rift not only between civilized races, and “savage” races but also between socioeconomic classes (Descent Vol. I 168). The assumption that overpopulation results in pauperism, which in turn controls these undesirable populations from propagating are perceived, in Malthusian terms, as necessary checks. Despite notions of natural checks, there remained contradictory concerns regarding the charitable distribution of sufficient resources to feed and care for the poor, which were weighed against fears that such humane intervention would result in a proliferation of undesirable criminal classes. Natural checks to the proliferation of criminal classes were also attributed to the propensity towards violence that leads to early death. Such ideas tend to suggest that charity encourages these groups to proliferate, but the problem will be somewhat mitigated by the propensity for self-annihilation among these classes. Darwin echoes similar theories that claim the criminal classes generally did not marry nor did they adequately parent offspring (Descent 176). Darwin’s speculations on natural selection among “civilized” society acknowledge that some natural checks are in place, as in the case of the poor, where malnutrition and economic inequities result in a higher mortality rate; however, he also ponders how relief offered to the poor and infirm could perpetuate “degeneration” in the human population.

Despite pondering the lack of natural selection within “civilized” cultures, Darwin suggests that people tend to favour their own class or race, demonstrating a limited capability of feeling sympathy and empathy toward other peoples, particularly among non-European races. His theories perpetuated racial theory that claims indigenous peoples, particularly Africans, were less evolved, and therefore, less capable of humane behavior. Like many thinkers of his era, most
notably Spencer, Darwin believed that Caucasians were more evolved than darker-skinned humans, a theory that influenced E.B Tylor’s development of cultural anthropology, which posited that cultures evolved through stages from savagery to barbarity and then finally to civilization. I will further examine Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871) and its influence on Victorian thinkers, such as James Frazer and Andrew Lang, later in this chapter. For Darwin, as for many evolutionary scientists and anthropologists, Caucasians had already passed through stages of savagery and barbarity before attaining civilization, implying that many races had yet to achieve this level of civilization (154).

Notions that non-European races, especially black peoples of Africa, were unable to achieve civilization without the intervention of European influences, were furthered by racial “sciences” and Spencer’s social anthropological theories that claimed a form of “arrested development,” that is, that some races were predisposed to stay in a state of barbarity, while others were susceptible to extirpation or complete extinction. Darwin’s differentiation between “savage” and “civilized” races demonstrates common Victorian biases that place Anglo-Saxon men at the pinnacle of the racial hierarchical pyramid. *Descent* expresses these anxieties by comparing “savage” or “barbarian” cultures with “civilized” European cultures, forming a basis for, and contributing, to existing erroneous anthropological and racial theories. These theories promoted ideas that Western civility and modernity justified a different place along the teleological continuum from the racialized Other. These theories viewed the racialized Other as limited in attaining civilization, requiring the intervention of the superior Caucasian race, preferably Anglo-Saxons, to ensure civilization. Although Darwin believed that evolution operated through natural selection, racial sciences and the emerging field of anthropology
frequently asserted that degeneration and regression, both physically and morally, were a danger for those exposed to foreign influences in “benighted” regions of the planet. Fear of “going native” and exhibiting degenerative behavior reflected real concerns for the future of Anglo-Saxon, British men, particularly those living abroad, as evidenced in novels such as Haggard’s *She* and Schreiner’s *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*. These novels exhibit typical conflations of biblical motifs with elements of Darwinian theory, illustrating the influence of evolutionary science on popular literary works of the late Victorian era.

Victorian anxieties around physical regression and degeneration, fueled by Darwinian science, also had implications for anxieties regarding ethical and moral degradation, posing concerns for the future of humanity. Caring for the poor at home or abroad was weighed against Malthusian and Darwinian theories that propagated fears of overpopulation or of regression. Charity that extended and allowed growth in certain classes was received with mixed responses, as apparent in Victorian industrial fiction of earlier decades. Brantlinger examines how the London poor and Irish were racialized through the writings of Henry Mayhew and Charles Fotheringham who viewed the “problem” in Malthusian terms (*Taming* 122). Racial theories, which overlapped with discourse on criminal and poorer classes, were in opposition to religious ideologies expressed through biblical concepts like table fellowship, the Golden Rule, and Levitical Law. Since scientific theories did not promote compassion for one’s neighbour, Victorians drew on scripture, sometimes revising its meaning to suit secular ideologies that viewed goodness and charitableness as having its own reward in the current world, and not in an afterlife. Without the church as a moral compass, Victorians found solace in a hybridized humanism that drew on the Darwinian science of interconnectivity and combined it with new,
liberal interpretations of scripture that found commonality with emerging scientific thought on human origins.

Genesis mythology was reinterpreted to emphasize its metaphorical meaning pertaining to common ancestry, and therefore, not in opposition to Darwin who drew on William Paley’s language and methodology “by which the complexity of the world inferred a divine author behind it”, 8 allowing Victorians to contemplate their existence as ethical and moral beings in new ways (Knight and Mason 156). According to Knight and Mason, Paley’s *Natural Theology* had been influential for Darwin who initially followed his methodology but differed in “the conclusion he reached about where this methodology may lead” (157). Knight and Mason assert that “[I]nstead of breaking with this tradition, Darwin continued it: his personal writings reveal the influence of Paley on his early thought” (156). This reconfiguration of scripture into a contextual interpretation that was not contrary to scientific rationality, formed the basis of a new, secular humanism and religious thought not predicated on religious affiliation. According to Levine:

> As scientists struggled for professional (and ethical and intellectual) authority, they, particularly the scientific naturalists, set up arms against established religion. But for most Victorians, religion was the sanction for morality: take religion away and they were threatened by moral anarchy and despair. These wars were faced elsewhere, and the literature is largely characterized by the struggle. (vii)

While it is true that there was a shift in religious belief, *fin de siècle* novels do not necessarily disregard morality found in religion, rather, it becomes a locus for cultural attitudes toward the

8 I am not suggesting that Darwin himself espoused such believe but rather, I suggest that in his early work, he intimates a means of reconciling theories of evolution with natural theology. Knight and Mason also connect Darwin to Paley through his use of the telescope in his discussion of the eye in * Origins* (157).
colonized to be scrutinized through a new lens that combines two seemingly disparate subjects. Colón argues that Levine’s view is limited because he does not negotiate tensions between spiritual and secular elements (34) She contends that “the religious and the secular were overlapping rather than distinct spheres for Victorians, and that the irrelevance of religious faith and practice in the face of modern science and social science had been greatly exaggerated” (32). Building on Colón’s assessment, I argue that the novel bridges the chasm between Darwinian doubts regarding ethical evolution by drawing on positive elements of connectivity and reconciling them with biblical mandates that promulgate humane approaches to all life. While Darwin’s theory somewhat limits virtues of sympathy and empathy to the confines of family and tribal affiliation, the humanism posited in the late Victorian novel extends these virtues to encompass those beyond family, community, and nation. The humanism that emerges from the late Victorian novel addresses the complexities of finding commonality with indigenous peoples of the empire, gesturing to an obligation for the colonizer to treat the colonized humanely.

Levine’s assessment of how the novel entered cultural discourse, proffering new conceptions of ethical treatment of the Other, focuses on realist fiction; however, a case can be made for its relevance in reading fin de siècle fiction in similar terms. Contemplating Darwin’s ambivalence to an evolution of ethics, and implicitly, Herbert Spencer’s reference to progress in Principles of Biology (1863) that permits no consideration for weaker members of society, Levine cogently addresses how the novel advocates for the Other. For Levine, “knowing” the Other demands a position that acknowledges that all lives are worth knowing and understanding, the designation of “Other” includes the British working poor. Levine writes:
Knowing…is virtually always part of a larger ethical project that entailed sympathy, empathy, and the fullest possible encounter with the not-self – the vast tangled bank of otherness that constitutes both the nature Darwin described and the new capitalist, industrial society, moving rapidly, changing ceaselessly, insisting on an individualism that separated each from each and broke down traditional communities. (5)

For Levine, a natural theology that created a chasm between humanity and other species was reimagined by Darwin, who viewed all creation in an interconnected web. For Levine, “Darwin’s theory quite literally connected us all. If Christianity had long insisted that we should love our neighbor, Darwin turned our neighbors into literal family, and thus wound the bonds of connection within diversity yet tighter” (5). Levine’s position is crucial to understanding what was at stake as scientific theory impacted orthodox religious beliefs on human origin, yet more importantly, it elucidates the need to reconcile the disparities in Darwin’s theories of connectivity. Levine’s assertions on “knowing” and “understanding” the Other, whether differentiated by race or class, are clearly articulated in the fin de siècle novels that I examine in future chapters.

1.3 Negotiating a Crisis of Faith

As the post-millennial fervor of the mid-nineteenth century drew to a close, Victorians faced a crisis of faith as many retreated from the comfortable absolutism of church doctrine and its conservative interpretation of scripture. ⁹ New biblical scholarship emerged during the mid to late-nineteenth century that questioned the historicity and authorship of the Torah, or the Books Post-millennialists claimed Christ would not return until all people were converted to Christianity. This eschatological theory waned by the mid-nineteenth century.
of Moses\textsuperscript{10} as they are sometimes called, thereby contesting the validity of traditional literal interpretations. This exegetical practice had implications for how the Law of Torah and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, which each formed the basis for ethical teachings, were reinterpreted to place emphasis on the spirit of the law instead of the letter of the law. Liberal interpretations of scripture placed increasing emphasis on orthopraxis over orthodoxy, as moral rectitude was predicated on ethical actions that effect positive social change rather than on empty religious rituals.

Such interpretive practices need to be situated alongside new interests in evolutionary sciences because these two disciplines were no longer necessarily treated as antithetical. The \textit{fin de siècle} novel reflects these cultural shifts as authors experiment in deploying scripture in innovative ways to critique their context. Deane and Brantlinger claim that late-nineteenth century novels tended to be secular; however, I attend to how the \textit{fin de siècle} novel continued to use biblical motifs in new and complicated ways to argue for contemporary concerns facing a growing empire. Familiar biblical quotations or motifs were frequently inverted, reconfigured or redacted to suit the context of the author, requiring a meticulous examination of the novel alongside the scriptural references invoked. Victorians, regardless of their religious affiliation,

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10 The Torah or The Books of Moses are also known as the Pentateuch or Five Books. I will use the term “Torah” as a means of being inclusive, since the Laws found in the Torah continue to inform ethics and morality within all the Abrahamic religions. I also acknowledge that the fiction I examine correctly illustrates how Christian ethics expressed in the New Testament were originally derived from the Jewish law. I will also refer to the “Old Testament” as the “Hebrew Scriptures,” since “old” tends to privilege the Christian books as having more authority – an erroneous designation that fails to recognize much of the New Testament as an interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. My textual analysis of the novels will demonstrate how late Victorian authors skillfully employed midrash as a means of applying scriptural ethics and morality in an attempt to fill the void left as Victorians gradually turned from organized religion.
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were well-versed in scripture and new biblical scholarship; therefore, recognizing subtle, or sometimes overt, uses of biblical motifs, which were revised to launch a critique against the church or empire, provides insights into how the novel engaged in discursive practice, and circulated new, revised ideologies. Although biblical motifs were reconfigured and utilized by secular authors, such as Schreiner, to promote an ethics of care missing from Darwinian science, it would be remiss to overlook how this reconceptualization of science and scripture expressed a growing spirituality separate from organized religion. In order to fully explore the unique manner in which *fin de siècle* novels drew on two seemingly disparate subjects an examination of how Darwinism and new biblical exegesis converged to inspire new literary trends should be considered.

Mid-nineteenth century evangelical fundamentalism found some commonality with Darwinian theory that proposed monogenesis, yet such an alliance was tenuous because it called into question the “truth” of scripture, creating doubt in believers who were well educated in biblical study. Despite some common ground, evolutionary science failed to address concerns regarding empathy and compassion central to biblical law. “Survival of the fittest” and “competition for existence” were antithetical to humanist thought on common ancestry advocated for in Darwinian science, creating anxieties for those leaving the church. Reinterpretations of scripture assuaged some of these conflicts, allowing some religious adherents to find accommodations within a liberal church environment. To acquire a comprehensive understanding of how and why biblical motifs and evolutionary science needed to be conflated to propose an ethics of care, it is necessary to understand how emerging science and by extension anthropology failed to address larger concerns during a time of bloody
encounters with the colonized and, to some extent, with the British working class.

The term “survival of the fittest” was first coined by Spencer in his 1863 publication of *The Principles of Biology*, a work inspired by Darwin’s evolutionary theory of natural selection. Spencer, like Darwin, asserted that certain organisms would survive through natural selection while others would naturally become extinct. Spencer applied this theory to societies, arguing that survival of the fittest was a natural phenomenon in the plant and animal kingdom, and therefore, could not be viewed in terms of morality. For Spencer, some racial groups were naturally selected to progress, while “savage races” or “weaker” members of the human race would inevitably decline through extinction or extirpation (444). Since Darwinian theory (and Spencer’s social Darwinism), with its emphasis on “survival of the fittest” and “competition” in the “struggle for existence,” did not adequately or definitively address human ethics, an area traditionally informed by religion, late-Victorians were faced with a dilemma that ultimately lead to a re-conceptualization of biblical “truth.” As religious thought evolved and shifted along a steady continuum, Darwinian science and biblical interpretation were reconfigured and harmonized, creating a new approach to ethics and empathy. Instead of a complete rupture with the church, residual and transformed notions of spirituality combined with scientific thought and in some cases pseudo-scientific thought, to establish new expressions of spirituality rooted in contextual interpretations of scripture. Evolutionary science and contextualized, non-literal interpretations of scripture became an integral part of the cultural discourse as both subjects were invoked to critique unethical and inhumane treatment of the colonized. While some authors used scriptural references in “secularized” ways, others reconfigured science and biblical motifs to express a spirituality that evolved independently of the church. The unique use of scripture
appealed to a widely diverse readership both within and outside of the church because the manner in which motifs were deployed frequently allowed readers to draw their own interpretation from the text, thereby mitigating the need to choose the Bible over Darwin. If the novel demonstrated the efficacy of reconfigured scripture to provide a moral compass, its conflation with scientific concepts that proposed common ancestry furthered such arguments.

1.4 Spiritualism, Darwin, and the Fin de Siècle Novel

Brantlinger’s work on imperial Gothic fiction in *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (2009) recognizes the increased interest in spiritualism as evident in the novel. He focuses on how the novel constructed masculine identity in terms of atavistic barbarism, which became a means of assuaging anxieties of degeneration. Building on Brantlinger’s work, I suggest some fertile ground may also be found in how religious allusions were framed to propose an ethics of care, particularly in predominantly homosocial spaces in the far reaches of the empire. Brantlinger provides a clear rationale for the rise of adventure fiction and the decrease in popularity of domestic realism. He expounds on the crucial role imperial adventure fiction had in shaping notions of racial theory and empire building. In *Rule of Darkness* (1988), Brantlinger insightfully examines the emergence of scientific thought and spiritual practices as a crucial aspect of imperial Gothic romance novels, noting how the rationalism of science sometimes entered new, esoteric expressions of faith. Interest in spiritualities practiced by the colonized became a subject of investigation in anthropology, yet many late-Victorians at home were also led to explore new ways of expressing spirituality both inside, outside, and on the periphery of the church. Brantlinger writes:
Imperial Gothic combines the seemingly scientific, progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism with an antithetical interest in the occult. Although the connections between imperialism and other aspects of late-Victorian and Edwardian culture are innumerable, the link of occultism is especially symptomatic of the anxieties that attend the climax of the British Empire. No form of cultural expression reveals more clearly the contradictions within that climax than imperial Gothic. Impelled by scientific materialism, the search for new sources of faith led many late Victorians to telepathy séances, and psychic research. It also led to the far reaches of the Empire, where strange gods and ‘unspeakable rites’ still had their millions of devotees. \(\text{(Rule 227-8)}\)

Brantlinger gestures to a critical moment when spirituality sought validation from scientific study, given that telepathy, psychic phenomenon, and séances were investigated through “scientific” methods. A rupture with orthodoxy permitted experimentation within spiritualist communities that sought to bridge the gap between scientific materialism and mysticism. The technological advancements of the era established a rationale for scientific study of the paranormal, as adherents of Darwinism began to contemplate the existence of the “soul” beyond the biological realm of matter that encompassed the mind and body. Since communication through the telegraph and telephone was invented, notions of communicating with the spirit world became an attraction to those investigating the occult.\(^{11}\) It was through such ponderings that intellectuals, such as Alfred Russel Wallace, began to contemplate an evolution of ethics that continued after death. Wallace, a co-theorist of natural selection, defends spiritual “scientific” investigations against William Lecky’s and E.B. Tylor’s anthropological inquiries into “superstitious” practices of indigenous peoples. Wallace, like Darwin, remained an adherent of monogenesis and natural selection; however, Wallace deviated from evolutionists and anthropologists in a significant way since his theories included ideas of spiritual evolution.

\(^{11}\) See Pamela Thurschwell on Victorian ghost stories and the connections between science and the occult that emerged at the fin de siècle.
Although Darwin and Tylor were not disposed to attribute either ethics or “miracles” to an unseen deity, Wallace believed in spiritual entities that inhabited the earth and communed with humans. While Darwin grudgingly postulated that ethics and morality developed as humans evolved, Wallace attempted to revise Darwin’s theory to propose an “evolution of the soul” beyond physical death. Wallace asserts:

> We thus find that the Darwinian theory, even when carried to its extreme logical conclusion, not only does not oppose, but lends decided support to, a belief in the spiritual nature of man. It shows us how man’s body may have been developed from that lower animal form under the law of natural selection; but it also teaches us that we possess intellectual and moral faculties which could not have been so developed, but must have had another origin; and for this origin we can only find an adequate cause in the unseen universe of Spirit. (478)

Wallace’s interpretation of Darwin’s theory was not accepted within scientific circles, yet his views found a place with adherents of arcane spiritualism,12 which sought to find validation through science, thus indicating the impact science had on Victorians. In his 1875 publication, *On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, Wallace argues that attributing the term “pseudo-science” to the investigation into paranormal activity is biased, since, he affirms, many respected scientists, physicians, and clerical leaders engaged in such experimentation. Wallace argues that the “supernatural” is in fact quite “natural,” an argument found in Haggard’s *She* and *The Days of My Life* (1925).

Echoing Wallace’s speculation Haggard’s protagonist, Holly, a man of science, is confounded by the almost immortal Ayesha’s mystical powers, which she insists are based on science. Ayesha’s assertion that her power derives from science indicates how magic, miracles, 

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12 Here, I refer to spiritualists communities who engaged in occult practices such as séances, telepathy and psychic phenomena outside of the church.
and science were frequently conflated. Her knowledge of medicine and her experimentation with eugenics lend an aura of truth to her claims, yet her knowledge appears more rooted in mysticism and magic than in science. In his autobiography, Haggard expresses similar sentiments in his speculation that unknown and mysterious spiritual elements exist, although, at this point in time (1925), Haggard had adopted a less orthodox version of Anglicanism, rejecting other forms of spiritual expression as dangerous knowledge. While Haggard retained an adherence to church doctrine, Wallace rejected orthodox religion in favour of a belief that humans communed with the spirit world, arguing that an evolution of ethics could be found in the afterlife. For Wallace, whatever virtues or vices one held in this life would be continued after death through the non-corporeal spirit or soul. He argues that any vices that were unresolved would bring suffering to the soul until it achieves sufficient learning to expunge all transgressive dispositions, so attaining a state of peace within the realm of spirits. Wallace did not view the purification of souls in terms of an external deity that rewards and punishes, nor did he believe in the existence of evil spirits, but he believed instead that the spirit world was a place where morality would continue to evolve (106). Wallace’s theories, however, stand in stark contrast to Darwinian science and anthropological investigations that trace a development of spiritual beliefs to primitive humans, and which suggest that, as humans evolved from a lower form, they gradually developed ethics and human virtues, such as empathy.

1.5 Anthropology, Race, and Religion

The preeminent concern regarding the development of ethics and empathy indicates a common anxiety of the era, since science, anthropology, religion, and literature each had stakes
in placing ethics at the centre of cultural discourse. Victorian concepts of ethics and morality entered racial discourse as it defined British cultural identity as “racially superior” in order to justify encroachment on indigenous peoples and to validate the class system in the metropole. As organized religion lost ground, and evolutionary science equivocated on the location of human virtues, anthropologists and ethnologists investigated “primitive” practices that provided justification for imperialist intervention, since the colonized were stereotypically perceived as immoral, violent, and lacking in ethics that maintained order within their social milieu. In order to indicate how evolutionary science, anthropology, and comparative religious studies entered discourse on the colonized, particularly in respect to the development of ethics, a brief examination of these fields will yield some relevant insights into how spiritual beliefs ostensibly evolved beyond the structure of the church, eventually culminating in modern religion, which guided concepts of ethics and morality.

The emerging field of anthropology and ethnology during the late nineteenth century sparked considerable interest in the connection between “primitive” cultural practices and modern religion but did little to assuage biases toward the colonized. E.B. Tylor’s anthropological work, and Andrew Lang’s and James Frazer’s studies on mythology and comparative religions, investigated similarities in ancient mythologies that provided etiologies of natural, and what were believed to be supernatural phenomena, positing that vestiges of these accounts continued to emerge in modern religion. Tylor viewed similarities in religious ritual and belief as “survivals” of primitive practices, which evolved over time, culminating in more sophisticated practices that attributed natural occurrences to one omnipotent and omnipresent deity. Tylor states that “[N]o religion in mankind lies in utter isolation from the rest, and the
thoughts and principles of modern Christianity are attached to intellectual clues which run back through far pre-Christian ages to the very origins of human civilization, perhaps even human existence” (*Primitive Culture* Vol. I 421). For Tylor, survivals that resonate from the past may take the form of innocuous superstitions, such as a belief that a May marriage is unlucky, illustrating how “primitive” superstitions continue to reverberate in modern civilizations (70-71).

The “primitive” nature of indigenous spiritualities, in contrast to Christianity, moves into the milieu of racial discourse since “primitive” beliefs were practiced, according to Tylor, by peoples that represent an earlier phase in human development.

Building on Tylor’s ideas that “savage survivals” resonate in modern belief systems, Frazer and Lang examined shifts in religious thought between “primitive” cultures and modern civilizations to illustrate a trajectory from primitivism to civilization. In much the same manner as Tylor, Lang views primitive cultures and their mythologies, which provide etiologies for explaining the cosmos, as an earlier development in human understandings of cause and effect. In *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (1901), Lang seeks to understand the development of cultures through “the anthropological method – the study of the evolution of ideas, from the savage to the barbarous, and thence to the civilised state – in the province of myth, ritual and religion” (81).

Lang et al consider modern religions as having a basis in primitive belief systems; however, in accordance with Frazer, modern religions, specifically Christianity, eschew “primitive superstitions” associated with the ostensibly less developed races.

James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890), a study in comparative religions, was particularly controversial in connecting Jesus’ death and resurrection to pagan beliefs that reflected the cycle of the seasons and fertility rituals evident in so-called primitive cultures.
Frazer drew parallels between myths and primitive worship of a god-king who was sacrificed to ensure a good harvest but would be reborn of the mother goddess, so repeating the cycle. The common motifs found in numerous pagan religions are unambiguously evident in modern religions suggesting a link between the “primitive” and modern concepts of deities. According to Frazer, “[T]hat rudimentary notion represents in all probability the germ out of which the civilized people gradually evolve their own high conceptions of deity; and if we could trace the whole course of religious development, we might find that the chain which links our idea of the Godhead with that of the savage is one and unbroken” (92-3). Through these distinctions, Frazer postulated that “higher savages” believed in supernatural forces and deities; however, despite some similarities to modern notions of deities, their belief system embodied a “primitive” state through which Western civilizations had passed. Like Darwinism, social Darwinism, and anthropology, comparative religion traced humankind’s progress through “primitive” to “civilized states,” arguing that as humans evolved, religious or spiritual practice moved to more sophisticated expressions, as magic became miracles and polytheism, or belief in elemental spirits, became monotheist worship.

Late-nineteenth century novels frequently draw on science and anthropology to maintain common imperialist beliefs in the inferiority or arrested development of the Other; however, when contemplating the origins of ethics, a contextualized or completely secularized interpretation of scripture that agreed with science was employed to argue for an ethics of care. New liberal and non-literal interpretations of the Genesis creation myths engaged readers in innovative ways as common motifs had a broader significance. Instead of focusing on creation as an act of God, the myths emphasized interconnectedness, while the Fall represented
dysfunctional relationships between humans and the non-human world. A range of ideas emerged from the novel that reinterpreted religious concepts of sacrifice in terms of selflessness as opposed to blood atonement. This is evident in Schreiner’s Peter Halket who dies for a principle learned from his encounter with the stranger, a character the reader recognizes as the historical Jesus. Schreiner does not qualify the encounter as either actual, or the result of a feverish mind but articulates Peter’s death as a means of “converting” his comrades who re-evaluate their treatment of the indigenous people they encounter. I will further investigate Schreiner’s use of inverted and reconfigured biblical tropes that argue for ethics and denounce blood atonement in Chapter Five. In much the same way as Schreiner, Wells, and Allen use sacrificial imagery to expound on orthopraxis, or ethical actions that are informed by religion, intended to evoke social change instead of a vicarious substitutionary atonement that is meaningless, a subject I investigate in Chapters Three and Four.

The reworking of religious motifs that find congruence with evolutionary science makes sense when considering the historical context that became conscious of the Other, in terms of class, gender, and most importantly, race. Douglas Lorimer explains how authors, such as Edward Clodd, were influential in disseminating “popularized” scientific ideas on race, which reached a wide readership. Clodd, a proponent of monogenesis, wrote several works that became popular and educational reading material for children. According to Lorimer, Clodd (who had experienced a crisis of faith, partly due to his reading of Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*), contributed to educational texts and forms of education that sought to reconcile biblical and scientific accounts of human origin (222). Lorimer asserts:
In the *Childhood of Religions*, first published in 1875, and according to his publisher reaching eleven thousand copies in its edition of 1889, he instructed his juvenile readers that the account of creation in Genesis was compatible to similar myths in other religions. Furthermore, if it was read not as a literal account but as a metaphor, Clodd maintained, much to the consternation of his religious critics, that Genesis was quite compatible with evolutionary science. (223)

In *Childhood of Religions*, Clodd indicates the problems of a literal reading of Genesis by comparing the accounts of creation with myths derived from Buddhist traditions as well as Babylonian, Greek, and Scandinavian mythology, all of which contain common elements (25-6). Through such an investigation, he challenges literal readings that insist on categorizing biblical accounts of the origins of the cosmos as historical or scientific “truths.” In a chapter entitled, “Creation As Told By Science,” Clodd explains the formation of the solar system and the process by which lands and sea were formed over a vast time span, thereby denying theories that posited the earth as six thousand years old.

His works explained Darwin’s theory of natural selection, touching on subjects of race and ethnology. Amid teachings of Darwinian science, were notions that humans, as they evolved, developed virtues that informed their morality; however, Clodd’s work reiterated racial stereotypes, maintaining the place of the Anglo-Saxon man at the pinnacle of human evolution. Lorimer cogently demonstrates how, without the use of racial typologies, comparative anatomy, or ideologies that espoused polygenesis, Clodd was influential in disseminating the Darwinian theory of natural selection to maintain racial ideologies in binary terms that also explained class difference (224). This is evident in Clodd’s social Darwinist and Darwinian understanding of “survival of the fittest,” in which he maintains that some races are slated for extinction while others are predisposed to survive and propagate. He writes: “The history of mankind is made up of struggles between races in which the weaker have been stamped out or enslaved, but these
people, whose forefathers were by turns conquerors and conquered, are amongst us, many of them free and independent, still worshipping the heavenly bodies and the spirits of their ancestors as did their forefathers thousands of years ago” (65-6). Throughout his writing he confirms his belief in monogenesis, yet ultimately, he claims that Aryans emerged and surpassed other races as they “were far in advance of a savage state,” thereby perpetuating hierarchical and paternalist ideologies (75-6).

According to Lorimer, Professor August Henry Keane, a late-Victorian journalist and ethnographer, also wrote on religion and ethnology, and his work entered homes and schoolrooms, greatly influencing all ages on differences in the religious practices of other races. For Keane, “blacks were ‘non-theistic,’ yellows were ‘polytheistic’ and whites were ‘monotheistic’” (226). In Ethnology (1896), Keane asserts that “despite certain apparent coincidences and analogies due to the fundamental unity and common psychic nature of man – the local arts, and social and religious institutions continue to diverge in proportion as they reach higher planes of culture,” indicating how spiritual practices were categorized according to Victorian notions of levels of civility (345). Lorimer’s examination of how Darwinian science entered Victorian society, influencing and shaping racial epistemologies through popular literature, textbooks, and photographs that fixed the Other in a “savage” and “primitive” state, provides a means of understanding how late-nineteenth century authors engaged with these texts, incorporating ideas in widely read novels. The accessibility of inexpensive literature, which brought the far reaches of the empire back to England, was instrumental in shaping ideologies that both critiqued and supported imperialist agendas. While orthodox religion declined, authors depended on new ways to contemplate humanist ideals, drawing on evolutionary science and
anthropology, but also reinterpreting scripture in ways that focused on humanist ideals within a changing historical context. Lorimer notes that Grant Allen wrote reviews of Keane’s work, providing a clue as to how these subjects entered not only classrooms and Sunday schoolrooms but also the homes of Victorians who read novels by authors such as Allen (227).

While Brantlinger articulates the complexities and multi-faceted aspects of the late-Victorian novel, I suggest that there are unexplored ways of reading the novel in terms of how biblical allusions and motifs were combined with scientific theory to argue for an ethics of care, particularly towards the Other. As Victorians turned from organized religion, they continued to find value in scriptures that informed notions of ethics and conscience, a reason for the strategic use of familiar biblical allusions that critique imperial violence in the novel. As evangelical Christianity was expressed through many denominations, each claiming to impart the “truth,” organized religion lost some ground to growing spiritual practices that were highly individual, and frequently nonpartisan. Instead of assuming a “science versus religion” perspective, a third option, which takes into account the subtle weaving together of anthropology, evolutionary sciences, and biblical allusions, emerges in fin de siècle fiction in new and unexpected ways. Authors drew on current interdisciplinary discourse, integrating their own theological, agnostic, or atheistic beliefs in novels that aimed to address complex issues regarding the location of ethics and empathy as capitalism, mechanization, and imperialism encroached on their social context.

1.6 Shifts in Religious Orthodoxy

As the authority of organized religion waned, many Victorians, influenced by evolutionary science and liberal interpretation of scripture, experimented with alternate spiritual expressions
that negated the need to reject either subject. H. Rider Haggard expresses his foray into alternate spiritualities in his autobiography, *The Days of My Life*, published in 1926, a year after his death. Although Haggard claims never to have left the Anglican Church, his admitted experimentation with arcane spiritualism caused him much anxiety in his later life, when he recommitted to reading the Bible daily and practiced a somewhat non-traditional form of Anglicanism. Haggard states that he greatly admired Catholicism, particularly in the commitment to prayers for the dead and the sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession), as well as the Salvation Army at the other extreme (*Volume 1*, 25) (*Volume 2*, 236). In opposition to both denominations, Haggard professed a belief in an afterlife that continued to impact the living. He asserts that he does not believe in reincarnation but in a return to a state of living that shares some elements of reincarnation, a sentiment expressed in *She* through his character Ayesha’s insistence that there is no such thing as death, only change. I will further examine *She* in the next chapter; however, to illustrate how authors conflated scientific concepts with religious ideals to form new expressions of belief, I will briefly show how Haggard’s experiences emerge in his novel.

Haggard describes his attendance at séance as amusing yet simultaneously disturbing. While his first encounter proved him to be somewhat skeptical, the second was troubling, causing him to evaluate the danger of investigating the unknown. The most intriguing aspect of Haggard’s experience is the consternation the ceremony evoked, which he recreates in descriptions of Ayesha’s strange supernatural rites and its troubling effect on her visitors. Haggard relates his experience during a séance in exacting detail as he writes:

She was draped in a kind of white garment which covered her head, and I asked her to allow me to see her hair. She pushed up the white drapery from her forehead, remarking sweetly that if I would look I should see that she had no hair, and in fact
she appeared to be quite bald. A minute later, however, she had long beautiful hair which flowed all about her.

Afterwards either she or the other apparition remarked that she was tired. Thereon her body seemed to shrink, with the result that, as her head remained where it was, the neck elongated enormously, after the fashion of Alice in Wonderland. Then she fell backwards and vanished all together.

To this day I wonder whether the whole thing was illusion, or, if not, what it can have been. Of one thing I am certain – that spirits, as we understand the term, had nothing to do with the matter. On the other hand I do not believe that it is a case of trickery; rather am I inclined to think that certain forces with which we are at present unacquainted were set loose that produced phenomena which, perhaps, had their real origin in our own minds, but nevertheless were true phenomena. (Days 39)

Haggard’s description of his experience with the supernatural contains Darwinian elements of degeneration and regression since the apparition’s baldness, her shrinking, and dysmorphic changes, whether imagined or not, provide an exemplar for Ayesha’s regression at the end of She. Ayesha’s second entry through the flames, which previously caused her to live an almost immortal existence, now causes her to age at an accelerated rate, first resembling an old woman, then a monkey, and finally she disintegrates into dust, her magnificent hair the only relic that remains of her beauty. Her devolution and loss of hair resembles Haggard’s observations of the apparition who changes, creating a sense of dread in the young impressionable man. The ability to change and transform in the spectral world, postulated by Wallace and apparently observed by Haggard, indicates a fascination and horror that “evolution” may continue beyond the grave, depending on the purity of life lived in the material world. This sentiment is echoed as Ayesha warns her companion Leo to maintain pure thoughts when he enters the sacred flame. She believes that any strong emotions present when entering the flame will be magnified, claiming that the bitterness and rage she felt had been amplified by the flame, resulting in her unscrupulous and evil actions (259).
Haggard’s ponderings are evident in Ayesha’s warning, which echoes Wallace’s claims that beyond death a soul’s progress is mediated by the life lived, and only after an evolution of conscience in the afterlife will it ultimately be rewarded. While Haggard’s novel does not proselytize, it does illuminate anxieties around loss of faith and the afterlife, something that he alludes to in the novel but clearly states in his autobiography. She draws on re-conceptualized notions of religious experience, expressed as an integral part of secular British culture, in ways that fill the void left by the dwindling influence of the church and evolutionary science’s rising popularity. The novel, like those of the other authors I examine in subsequent chapters, incorporates Darwinism and social Darwinism’s anxieties regarding human virtues, but it also expresses personal reflections of spirituality that are derived from human conscience. Despite his former interest in the occult, Haggard firmly claims that “spiritualism should be left to the expert and earnest investigator” because it is “harmful and unwholesome” (41). His rejection of spiritualism outside of the church is unequivocal; however, he espouses a reconfigured spiritual view that progressively interprets scripture contextually, an influence likely gained from his friendship with Bishop Colenso in South Africa.

In addition to agnostic and atheist beliefs, many Victorians, like Haggard, found meaning in revising their own version of Christianity. “Religious” views that rejected organized religion but did not adhere to esoteric spiritualist beliefs also emerged during the late nineteenth century. The non-denominational “spirituality” to which I now refer was not interested in scientific experimentation into paranormal phenomena but instead was predicated on the notion that human virtues of compassion and empathy materialize from an interior space, which is frequently expressed in the novel as “divine.” This innate divinity does not require an external,
authoritative deity to dictate laws, punish or reward; rather, the in-dwelling divine spark informs the conscience and seeks to flourish through humane actions that change the world for the better. Although this belief system shares some commonalities with Wallace’s theories, it is not contingent on a belief in an evolution of ethics in the afterlife. H.G Wells expresses his personal deviations from orthodox religion that nonetheless contains religious elements in his book, *God the Invisible King* (1917). In the preface, Wells states:

This book sets out as forcibly as possible the religious beliefs of the writer. That belief is not orthodox Christianity; it is not, indeed, Christianity at all; its core nevertheless is a profound belief in a personal and intimate God. There is nothing in its statements that need shock or offend anyone who is prepared for the expression of faith different from and perhaps in several particulars opposed to his own. The writer will be found to be sympathetic with all sincere religious feeling. Nevertheless, it is well to prepare the prospective reader for statements that may jar harshly against deeply rooted mental habits. It is well to warn him at the onset that the departure from accepted beliefs is here no vague skepticism, but quite widely revered. (ix)

Wells claims an aversion to Trinitarian theology, a Unitarian concept well-known to Victorians. His warnings indicate the embeddedness of religious ideologies within his culture that may resist his theological stance, yet it also attests to an emergence of transformed beliefs not dependent on the church. The author’s religious convictions in itself provide a rich context from which to find fresh understanding of his works and its interest for contemporary readers.

In *The Time Machine*, Wells deploys biblical allusions from Genesis and Revelation to depict the fall of humans through Darwinian speculations on degeneration. The world of the Eloi resembles Eden, yet the dystopic atmosphere is almost immediately evident to the reader, as the Eloi show a lack of concern for Weena who almost drowns in full view. The degeneration of both groups descended from Victorian upper and working classes warns of humanity’s ultimate demise. The future holds no redemption through a salvific, messianic figure, instead, the Time
Traveler witnesses a teleological end for humanity, a concept that has more in common with science than religion. The future world the Time Traveler sees, is both reminiscent of Revelation’s images of the end of the world, and may be viewed as a next step in human evolution, with the monstrous creatures being the future descendants of humans. Wells’s “religious” views advocate for ethics, although they do not posit an eschatological or “end times” judgement that rewards or punishes. *The War of the Worlds*, published two years later, overtly critiques the corrupt and effete clergy through his excoriating characterization of the Curate whose greed and selfishness characterizes human weaknesses that would lead to extinction. The unnamed narrator, the Curate, and the artilleryman, all exhibit various signs of degeneration, and their underlying violence, which erupts when danger approaches, expresses Victorian anxieties of regression to a bestial state. Ponderings on the role of science and scripture, which speaks to an ethics of care, emerge from the *fin de siècle* novel as evident through characters, author’s footnotes, and interpolations of actual or fictional editors; however, these new spiritualities that combine aspects of both scientific thought and non-dogmatic ideologies are also made known through author’s biographical writings, as in the case of Wells, Allen, and Haggard. For Schreiner, a self-professed atheist, theological and biblical motifs were employed as an integral part of cultural knowledge, which informed humanist ideologies that remained absolutely secular. Her thoughts on religion are articulated in published letters written to family and friends, which will be examined in Chapter Five.

Beyond sensational modes of spiritualism that involved séances, psychic phenomenon, and studies into telepathy, a different type of spiritualism, contingent on human virtues, which do not negate modern science, is also articulated in the novels I examine. Evolutionary theories are
viewed by characters in novels as “miraculous,” and the order and intricate balance as “divine,” despite the underlying secularity of the characters. Such inconsistencies require meticulous readings through secular and religious lenses since ignoring the imaginative ways scripture is redeployed detracts from a recognition that Victorians of this era re-conceptualized ethical approaches to alterity, and creatively employed the language of both disciplines. It is within this context that the fin de siècle novels I investigate emerge, rife with biblical references and allusions that interrogate an era complicated by aggressive New Imperialist violence.

1.7 New Biblical Scholarship’s Influence on the Fin de siècle Novel

During the end of the nineteenth century, German biblical scholarship questioned the historicity of scripture and the authorship of the books of Torah, creating a means of re-conceptualizing traditional beliefs on human existence and agency. Julius Wellhausen’s Documentary Hypothesis\(^\text{13}\) challenged Mosaic authorship, revealing four distinct authors and

\(^{13}\) Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis was not a new understanding of biblical authorship – such speculations dated back centuries; however, the powerful Church foreclosed such investigations, and the authors, threatened with excommunication and charges of heresy. By the nineteenth century, German scholarship was creating a stir in England as Darwinian theory on human origins and Lyell’s geological work debunked Bishop Usher’s claims that the earth was six thousand years old. Wellhausen’s theory proposed the Torah to have been written over a thousand-year span by four authors separated by centuries and geographic space. This premise called into question the historical authenticity of scripture as strands of scripture, previously redacted and edited, exposed the contradictions in various accounts of creation. This “discovery” lead to liberal, non-contextual interpretations that examined meaning, particularly as it pertained to ethics and morality. Notably the development permitted belief in both science and scripture. See Richard Elliott Friedman’s *Who Wrote the Bible* (1987) for details on Wellhausen’s Documentary Hypothesis.
editorial activity in the Book of Moses (Torah). The significance of multiple authors resolved common questions around discrepancies in scripture, for instance, the order of creation, which is contradicted in the two Genesis creation myths. His 1878 publication, *Geschichte Israels*, based on previous theories postulated by other German scholars, endorsed a non-literal interpretation of scripture. Consequently, Darwin’s, Lyell’s, and Huxley’s views on evolution and the age of the earth contradicted those of Bishop Usher, a biblical scholar who dated the earth as six thousand years old. New exegetical practice provided a contextual understanding of scripture that challenged rigid, dogmatic, and doctrinal interpretation, creating a segue into new ontological thought. Ethics, empathy, and sympathy could be viewed in ways that included notions of connectivity derived from Darwinian science, the novel becoming a site for rethinking humanity in the larger, cultural, context of empire.

Nineteenth-century German biblical scholarship facilitated revised understandings of scripture as the final authority on creation among many Christian denominations, permitting symbolic and metaphorical meanings to express sentiments that expounded on humanity’s role as stewards of creation. Although contextualized, scripture retained its pre-eminence in propagating ethics and morality, albeit in non-dogmatic ways. Christopher Rowland asserts that biblical exegesis became a new way of imagining the world with all its contradictions and challenges. No longer bound by strictures of purely religious concepts, exegetical interpretations found expression through the arts in humanist terms that viewed arts and literature as vehicles for liberal exegetical practices. Instead of employing the typical method of line by line interpretation, Rowland proposes that “[as] the history of the arts has made clear, the biblical text is a springboard for other revelations or a creative frame of reference for understanding the
world,” and he suggests that the Apocalypse “is a text to be used and actualized,” instead of merely dissected and interpreted (141). Creative means of reconfiguring apocalyptic language and biblical motifs divest scripture from its orthodox moorings, thus allowing an innovative means of engaging in discursive practice around the question of ethics in an imperial context.

The apocalyptic genre centres on a call to radical inclusivity and ethics as it re-imagines a world of peace and justice; therefore, its meaning offers much latitude in expounding a new vision for humanity. As suggested by Rowland, “[a]n exposition of the Apocalypse that concentrates exclusively on the question, ‘what did this verse mean?’ may miss the distinctive insight offered by later visionaries, who are inspired by the text to new imaginative insights or prophetic pronouncements” (141). Since Victorians were well versed in scripture, novelists exploited key biblical tropes, sometimes reconfiguring or combining them in innovative ways to gesture to a human ethics of care that Darwinian science failed to provide, an assessment that agrees with Rowland’s conceptualization of shifting epistemologies. If scientific explanations of the origins of humans and the age of the earth reconciled discrepancies in literal understandings of scripture, then it is not surprising that Darwin drew on the metaphoric and symbolic language of scripture as common cultural expression to speak of an evolution of ethics and an interconnectivity of all life forms.

Hermeneutical approaches to scripture vary significantly between different denominations, so the manner in which authors insert and reconfigure scripture in various ways reflect a highly individualized interpretive practice. As Rowland suggests, artists frequently draw on sacred texts to interpret a meaning relevant to the current situation. Knight contends that just as scripture may be helpful in explicating rich meaning from literature, the reverse may be true,
that is, literature may be a means of understanding sacred text (2). Such implications have merit when considering the religious tone in earlier literary content that functioned as a means of converting and drawing the apostate back into the fold, yet this assessment may not be unanimously true in all late-nineteenth century fiction, with its interest in science and new modes of expressing spirituality outside of the church. The fin de siècle novel tends to employ scripture in ways that circumvent any one hermeneutical interpretation, sometimes employing biblical interpretations in surprising ways. An example of such reworking is evident in Wells’s The Time Machine. The “Eloi” and “Morlocks” are two groups the Time Traveler encounters in the future; each group represents descendants of the Victorian gentry and working poor respectively. The name “Eloi” derives from the Aramaic word for God and “Morlock” alludes to Moloch, the Canaanite god associated with child-sacrifice; however, despite the superficial appearance of a binary relationship between the races, such an interpretation is disrupted since both races are connected through common ancestry, and both have degenerated and regressed. A reversal of fortune that has seen the Eloi become the victims of the Morlocks would not have been lost on Victorian readers who recognize Wells’s fable as a warning to attend to the needs of the poor. In a profound reinterpretation of eschatological reversal, the formerly affluent Eloi, once called upon to invite the poor and disenfranchised to the “love feast\textsuperscript{14},” become the sacrificial meal that is broken and shared. The childlike innocence of the Eloi stands in stark contrast to the rapacious

\textsuperscript{14} Luke 14:15-24, The Parable of the Great Banquet refers to the eschatological banquet at end times. It was practiced by early Christians as an expression of table fellowship. The invocation of “Eloi” also alludes to Luke 22:7-38 and Matthew 26:17-30, Jesus’ Last Supper, from which the Eucharistic feast derives. Wells’s reversal points to moral degeneration as Christian society has failed to live up to biblical mandates to care for the poor.
Morlocks who are associated with technology, alluding to the mercenary nature of capitalism in a secular world of technology, a motif Wells revisits in *The War of the Worlds*, published two years later. The use of two biblical gods poses interesting insights, as Wells depicts them both as degenerative, thereby launching an assault on deism, and by extension, the church. Wells and his contemporaries avoid biblical allusions that support orthodox interpretations; rather, they creatively combine and sometimes reverse scriptural motifs and Darwinian science to argue for human virtues of empathy and compassion. In Chapter Three, I will explore how concerns regarding interconnectivity among races and all life are contemplated in terms of sacrifice of innocents.

*Fin de siècle* fiction, read through a contemporary, secular lens, would mitigate the complex ways authors creatively employed familiar stories and allusions to address key concerns, their reworking of scripture being an act of exegetical practice in its own right. New biblical scholarship on the historicity and formation of sacred writings, which were overtly referenced by Allen and Schreiner, suggests that Victorians had a sophisticated understanding of how scripture could be used as shared cultural knowledge. Biblical narrative became a vehicle for entering into discourses on what it meant to be authentically human, that is, how humans were intended to act, particularly within a rapidly changing world that disenfranchised the poor and the colonized. The creation mythology of Genesis conveys many contextual meanings that moves beyond questions of human origins. The stories emphasize notions of freewill and agency, proposing a directive for humans to practice stewardship over all life, a religious concept that gradually became more secularized.

*Genesis*, examined in its totality rather than as a line by line interpretive exercise, is
fundamentally about relationships to God, self, each other, and all creation. At the heart of Genesis is a message that affirms humans as inherently flawed yet also capable of redemption. The creation narratives are not stories that should be interpreted to exclude racialized peoples any more than they are mandates that exclude women, or same-sex couples, but rather, when viewed though a humanist perspective, the message endorses ideas of loving partnership that overflows into a world that requires healing through an ethics derived of love. The “Fall” of humanity symbolizes choices made by humans who fail to maintain a “right” relationship with their creator, and this transgression leads to an unraveling of human to human and human to animal relationships. Motifs that extoll vegetarianism in ethical terms are derived from Genesis and evolutionary science that posits all life as interconnected and in relationship to each other. The “Fall” required a codified set of laws and covenants to re-establish an equilibrium; however, the law is insufficient to redeem a fallen race, requiring a cataclysmic apocalypse that will eradicate the evil powers of the world. An apocalyptic event that will inaugurate a kingdom of justice and peace can only be accomplished through the Parousia, the Second Coming of the messiah, that hovers in the indeterminate future. Genesis, as with all scripture, can be interpreted from both religious and non-religious perspectives, its meaning remaining stable in its call to “right relationships” and its insistence on human qualities that are centred in love.

Religious motifs that emerge from literature of this period need to be critically examined

15 See Joel Rosenberg’s commentary in Genesis in The HarperCollins New Revised Standard Bible. Also refer to Walter Brueggermann for commentary on Genesis creation mythology.
16 Human to animal relationships emerge in Genesis as humans are originally vegetarian. It is after the fall that Adam and Eve receive animal skins to cover their nakedness, and consumption of meat does not occur until Noah sacrifices animals in thanksgiving. The harmony between all creation is disrupted by human transgression.
from a variety of perspectives. Inversions, direct quotations, and reconfigurations are interpretive tools addressing key issues facing humanity. Knight emphasizes the crucial part religious allusions play in how literature reflects ways of interpreting the world, cogently arguing that:

To interpret literary texts from a religious perspective is to draw upon a host of theological ideas and to allow these to shape the way one thinks about the worlds that are imagined through literature. . . A religious reading of a text is congruent at some level with virtually every branch of literary criticism and it does not have to restrict itself to subject matter typically seen as sacred; nor does a religious reading of text have to emphasize the realm of morality as so many people seem to presume. (2)

Knight’s assessment of the wide applicability of religious readings opens multiple ways of reading novels from several religious and secular perspectives. Building on his arguments, I would emphasize that a religious reading of late-nineteenth century novels almost universally underscores “the realm of morality” as it exposes humanity’s propensity to fall into “sin,” understood as a state of disconnection from one’s fellow human being. It would seem impossible not to relegate biblical allusions to “the realm of morality” since a large portion of scripture is counter-cultural in its insistence on justice. The fin de siècle novel does not overtly engage in religious discourse but utilizes scriptural allusions stripped of dogma and doctrine to provide a fresh perspective that privileges the “spirit of the law” over the “letter of the law.” Such a position encourages orthopraxis without the necessity for orthodoxy. Knight’s premise that religious reading need not “restrict itself to subject matter typically seen as sacred,” provides a framework from which I examine how the overt blending of scientific and theological discourse addresses key concerns of the late nineteenth century (2).

Since biblical motifs are frequently reconfigured in the novels I examine, it is equally important to attend to how scripture is deployed in non-literal ways that are neither wholly religious, nor in opposition to scientific theory, but perhaps somewhere in between. A non-literal
and non-dogmatic reading reflects a spirit of scripture that informs the conscience and demands a humane stance in a world gone awry: a post-lapsarian world in need of an apocalyptic event to bring about justice and equity. Such a rendering harmonizes two seemingly incongruent subjects to argue for a recognition of spiritualities in late-nineteenth century fiction. The interpretive possibilities for this type of fiction are diverse and limitless yet unambiguously concerned with contemplating what it means to be authentically human in a world characterized by rampant consumerism and imperialism.

Knight asserts that there is a “plurality of Christian thought,” and the word “religion” is not an “empty signifier,” rather, “[r]eligion may mean radically different things to different people but it does not mean whatever one wants it to” (2-3). Building on this assertion, I would add that multiple spiritualities emerged during the late Victorian era that were not necessarily sanctioned by church because they were based on individual beliefs that defied categorization. Knight recognizes the limitations of reading literature through an entirely Christian perspective, particularly since such readings exclude the other major world religions. He insightfully asserts that, even within Christianity, there is a plurality of beliefs (4). Building on Knight’s premise, I argue that finding spiritual meaning in science and new exegetical renderings of scripture was crucial for those who left organized religion, but it also ensured a continuity of spiritual experiences for those who embraced alternate belief systems. It is essential to recognize that these spiritual shifts were viewed as “religion” for many Victorians who preferred alternative approaches to organized religion; therefore, their version of “Christianity” and “religion” may have differed substantially from more conventional ideas of Christianity. The historic context in which these novels were conceived had no historic precedent. The crisis of religious faith, and
for some, the acceptance of evolutionary theory of human origins, radically challenged deeply ingrained epistemologies. Technological advances and New Imperialism had changed how humans were viewed. The poor were frequently seen as cogs in the wheel of commerce, and the racialized Other was regarded as an obstacle to acquiring resources in imperial spaces, requiring a new language of ethics, which affirmed an interconnectedness to emerge.

The methodologies applied by authors in creating stories that contain biblical allusion intended to promulgate notions of ethics and empathy, struck a chord with Victorians who were well-educated in biblical narratives, but not necessarily practicing Christians. Redacting, reconfiguring, and rewording familiar passages to expound on human virtues was an ancient practice found within biblical narrative itself. New Testament writers liberally “borrowed” from the Hebrew Scriptures, for example, to place Jesus within the sacred history of Israel as the fulfillment of the promises made by God to send a redeemer. Careful exegesis demonstrates that almost every page in the gospels contains nuanced or explicit references to the Hebrew Scriptures, sometimes reinterpreted, and sometimes used as a means of connecting Judaism to Christianity. Revelation is a reinterpretation of the apocalyptic Book of Daniel, both books attempting to provide comfort during a time of crisis for the nation of Israel. Sacred writings are a result of numerous authors writing, borrowing, and redacting stories to weave together coherent narratives that address concerns of the era. In biblical texts, the reader is often struck by the myriad of voices that emerge, frequently contradicting or subverting the message being conveyed. These contradictions have resulted from erroneous interpretations of the original Aramaic, Hebrew, or Greek texts, but are also the result of creative redaction and vigourous editing.
In the editorial introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin’s essay, “Discourse in the Novel,” the editor claims that, “the presence of biblical text in a novel adds a distinctive voice to those voices already written within the text. The quotation of, or allusion to biblical narrative rubs shoulders, for example, with the narrator’s voice and the direct speech of characters” (165). In much the same way as biblical narrative, the novel has a complex, stylistic, and artistic structure, or structures, from which multiple, competing voices emerge; however, these voices reverberate with current concerns of the era in which they are conceived when read through a New Historian lens. In Haggard’s *She*, “voices” from the past are “heard” through the paintings on the walls of the caves of Kôr, or from the sherd of Amenartas and through the mummified bodies of a lost civilization. In Wells’s *The Time Machine* the remnants of decaying artifacts in the crumbling museum likewise tell a tale of the fall of great civilizations. Anxieties regarding the impermanence of empires are drawn from apocalyptic narratives, which serve as a secular caution that indicates vulnerability, since these biblical tropes also reflect historic realities.

According to Geoffrey Hartmann, “Scripture can be distinguished from fiction by its frictionality: not only its respect for friction, which exists also in literary texts, but its capacity to leave traces, which incite and even demand interpretation of what it has incorporated” (82). The use of biblical tropes, allusions, and quotations, both implicit and nuanced, rely on these “impressions,” yet contrary to Hartmann, I would argue that the “frictionality” of scripture is evident in literature. I would further add that the *fin de siècle* novel specifically adopts a “frictional” stance to engage with topical issues that were of concern to late Victorians as evidenced in Allen’s “A Hill-top” publications, a designation intended to warn readers of its controversial content. In the novels, scientific and religious contexts grapple with each other.
allowing a hybridized humanism to emerge. Scripture is not only frictional as it nudges against various meanings, it is also abrasive because it deliberately goes against the grain and is almost always open to counter-cultural discourse that critiques powers of empire, despots, and ironically, organized religion. The Hebrew Scripture’s prophetic books are intended to be abrasive as they hold kings, priests, and the nation of Israel accountable for their actions. In the New Testament, the authors of The Gospel According to Matthew and The Gospel According to Luke draw on the Hebrew Scriptures to portray John the Baptist as the last eschatological prophet of Israel, preaching against the powers of empire and religious leaders who fail to understand the law as a call to ethics. Literature of the late nineteenth century employs similar techniques of redacting and reconfiguring biblical narrative in an abrasive manner to critique organized religion, and the authors who critique their own historical context serve as modern day prophets. Similar to biblical authors, the novelists I address employ scripture in new and creative ways that suit the context in which they exist, yet they are not adverse to inverting meanings.

1.8 Secularizing the Biblical Apocalypse

No longer aligned with rigid orthodoxy, authors innovatively explored new ways of combining scientific theory of “connectivity” to “secularized” scriptural interpretations. Biblical tropes that endorsed intrinsically humane virtues were deployed to show an ideal humanism to which society should aspire. Notions of a “new Adam” or “new Eve” frequently appear as apocalyptic motifs imagine an emergent new world that mirrors a prelapsarian Eden. Unambiguously, each novel I examine follows the apocalyptic literary conventions, which usually involve a dream sequence or otherworldly journey, in which the subject envisions the
bleak future of empire or humanity. This results in the subject returning to the present time or world with knowledge or wisdom that they convey through prophetic declaration. Like the biblical prophets, these modern visionaries are rarely effective in proclaiming a message that could save humankind.

The apocalyptic style and structure follow the ancient conventions with slight variation, particularly in the novels I examine. Haggard draws on overtly apocalyptic biblical themes by invoking Ezekiel’s prophesying to the “dry bones” of Israel to rise up and be reconstituted. While Haggard utilizes apocalyptic eschatological (or “end times”) biblical references, following structural conventions with slight modifications, Wells, Allen, and Schreiner emulate the structural elements more closely. Wells’s novel, although generally read in scientific terms rather than biblical, conflates anxieties regarding regression and degeneration with Revelation in his allusions to human extinction at the novels end, yet, although he follows the literary structure, his view of the eschaton or “the end of the world,” does not suggest hope for humanity. Allen’s novel closely follows the literary style and structure of the apocalyptic genre, and like Wells, his time traveler embarks on an otherworldly journey. The prophetic proclamations of the Alien, Bertram Ingledew who offers hope for the future of humanity, contingent on human virtues that instill ethical approaches to all life on earth, are unambiguously tied to Christological concepts. Bertram resembles John the Baptist, the last eschatological prophet of Israel, and Christ who came according to Christian theology, to inaugurate the kingdom of God. Schreiner’s novella follows the apocalyptic framework and incorporates apocalyptic scriptural references; however, the ending of the novel resonates with atheistic meanings yet also provides room for readers to decide the meaning of Trooper Peter Halket’s death. These allusions to end times mark typical
fin de siécle anxieties, yet they also serve as prophetic warnings to embrace an ethical stance toward all humans, regardless of race, class, or gender.

Victorian England faced a myriad of changes as capitalism, technology, the rise of the New Woman, and New Imperialism created instability, and Victorians attempted to make sense of their context by viewing it in apocalyptic terms, not only focusing on an end, but also on hope for the future. Protagonists like the Time Traveler and Peter Halket become objects of ridicule, whereas Allen’s Alien is viewed as an eccentric libertine yet unmistakably a prophetic voice that insists on egalitarianism. In much the same way biblical prophets whose messages called for social reform were rejected, these protagonists are persecuted for their stringent ethical beliefs. Each novel alludes to common themes found in apocalyptic writing where evil "powers" have corrupted the earth causing humanity to degenerate through miscegenation or “sin” as evident in Genesis 6:1-8. The interbreeding of fallen angels and human women that lead to a monstrous breed of warriors, the Nephilim, is echoed in Ayesha’s monstrous race of giants in She. The miscegenated and degenerate race is the cause of a fall into violent chaos, a motif evident in Haggard’s novel where the Amahaggers are the epitome of racial degeneration, in a troubling association of alterity with depravity. Ayesha’s extinct creation of humans bear the marks of the Nephilim as do the monstrous creatures the Time Traveler encounters in the distant future. The corruption of creation creates chaos, as the prayers of the anawim (poor, and faithful believers) ascend to the heavens, and divine intervention intercedes to sweep away the old creation; a new creation emerges, and the world reverts to a prelapsarian state. With minor imaginative adjustments, this structure is evident in the novels I examine because, like the apocalyptic genre of ancient times, the novels draw attention to the current context fraught with instabilities and
violent, bloody, confrontations between both indigenous and European people across the empire. While notions of apocalypticism often tie to “end of the world” theories, I will explore how authors, informed by new biblical exegesis, viewed the apocalypse as a possibility for a “new beginning,” an “unravelling of Genesis” that demanded a cosmic cleanup to inaugurate an Empire of peace and justice; a Pax Britannia.

Drawing on creation narratives, Mosaic law, prophecy, the Sermon on the Mount, and Revelation, the authors I address created innovative means for reinterpreting scripture to address the turbulent context in which they lived. The apocalyptic genre frequently enters discourse on corruption that precipitates a crisis; therefore, by definition, apocalyptic literature is viewed as “crisis literature.” Following the rise of Christianity, various Christian sects expected the Parousia or Second Coming to occur, beginning in the first century C.E, and reoccurring with the end of each subsequent century. The nineteenth century, in light of rapid and dramatic changes, also viewed the era in eschatological terms. Non-religious literary works liberally used apocalyptic imagery to capture the imagination of authors and readers who used the language of religion to discuss new epistemologies that emerged as a result of scientific and technological advances. The apocalyptic genre lends itself to secular works since a deus ex machina need not literally be a divine entity but rather a force that dispenses justice and restores order from chaos. The genre serves as a warning to empires, ancient and modern, that viewed their incursion on foreign soil as a means of spreading civilization, not unlike our own context wherein the U.S invades nations to “spread democracy” while claiming to win “hearts and minds.” Such rhetoric is not new but has been repeated by empires who view their role in apocalyptic terms. The fin de
siècle novel utilizes apocalyptic motifs to appeal to religious and secular tastes, its meaning and function well-understood by Victorian readers.

1.9 Conclusion

The final decades of the nineteenth century were defined by the incursion of aggressive New Imperialism across the globe, precipitating many new concerns regarding Britain’s participation in competing imperialist ventures. An era rife with anxieties regarding race, degeneration, and regression, fin de siècle fiction engages in discourse on these complicated issues as it critiques aspects of imperialism that were obfuscated by divided opinions on the necessity for Britain to maintain her position as a leading European power. Political economy, once tempered to some degree by religious ideas of charity, is not subjected to former notions of ethics, as rampant capitalist ventures in Africa result in bloody confrontations and land annexations. Schreiner succinctly expounds on this subject as she overtly expresses outrage at Cecil J. Rhodes’s Chartered Company in her novella, providing a passionate appeal for the British public to act on behalf of the colonized. Although ethics derived from scripture and theological discourse on stewardship is undermined by growing secular sciences that viewed the Other as slated for extinction, many late-nineteenth century authors drew on Darwinian science and key scriptural motifs to promote an ethics of care not dependent on organized religion. For authors like Haggard, Wells, Allen, and Schreiner, humanist impulses emerge from the human “soul,” a “divine” spark that informs the conscience to act with compassion; however, the soul is not contingent on an external deity but proceeds from an internal moral compass integral to humans.
As organized religion lost its purchase in an increasingly secularized society, some Victorians left the church, rejecting Christianity entirely as irrational superstition; however, there were those who found new ways of drawing on aspects of science and religion to explain an inherent spiritual nature that provided a sense of morality. Spirituality that allowed individual communion with the divine and demanded an ethical stance toward the Other emerged during this era, engaging in discourse regarding the interconnectedness of all creation. The novel interrogates the flaws in traditional religious institutions that fail to respond to emerging scientific theories on human origins, and scientific theories that fail to address ethics and morality. A hybridized humanism, neither atheist, nor dependent on institutional religion, finds common ground with facets of Darwinism and a non-literal interpretation of scripture; it is this nexus that yields some fresh insights into how the novels I address enters into critical discourses during an era of rapid change.

Much investigation has been done on spiritualist movements that sought to investigate the paranormal through scientific methodologies, yet the individual shift from authoritative religion that viewed the divine as a benevolent or fearful parent who punished or rewarded, to the secularized idea of an in-dwelling force that demanded an ethical approach towards all living creatures, remains an area ripe for exploration. The ways in which authors use biblical motifs, references, and quotation, and the way they frequently conflate them with scientific discourse render a myriad of understandings that permit a widely diverse readership the option of ascribing their own unique meanings to the text. A vast array of spiritual and secular positions emerges

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17 See Pamela Thurschwell and Marlene Tromp on ghostly apparitions and spiritualism during the fin de siècle.
from *fin de siècle* fiction, indicating a shift from traditional renderings of scripture to contextualized readings that argued for a new form of humanism grounded in human agency and freewill to act ethically. A thorough examination of *how* and to *what end* scripture was used yields fresh readings of the *fin de siècle* novel.
2 Chapter Two: The Lost World of Kôr

I do not believe anything could be written and so widely read, without being the vehicle to the world of some vital, spiritual truth. Here is a casket of gems. I have found the key to the treasure. Wild and extravagant as the story may seem, it has found its way to more readers than any other book of the period. It seems full of superstition, and yet it has captured an age whose boast it is to have outgrown superstition. High and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, romantic and pedantic, young and old, have all been caught by the marvelous fascination of “She.”

-Leo Michael, She: An Allegory of the Church, 1889

2.1 Introduction

H. Rider Haggard’s “lost world” novel, She: A History of Adventure (1886-7), draws on Levitical and Deuteronomic law, apocalyptic writings of the deuterocanonical era (circa 400 B.C.E to the early-first century C.E) \(^{18}\), and Genesis creation mythology to advocate for an ethics of care consistent with contextualized biblical motifs and the Darwinian theory of interconnectedness.\(^{19}\) The late Victorian period, frequently viewed as an age of agnosticism or atheism, was also an era of evolving spirituality, as new expressions of beliefs emerged both inside and outside the church. Bradley Deane, states that, “Imperialism itself, as an ideology or political faith, functioned as a partial substitute for declining or fallen Christianity and for a declining faith in Britain’s future” (228). I contend, in accordance with Gerald Monsman that the late nineteenth century, although more secular than the mid-century, continued to be influenced by aspects of Christianity and the Bible. I contest theories that view fin de siècle fiction as

\(^{18}\) The “Deuteronomic Period” is the Roman Catholic designation of the period known by Protestants as the “Intertestamental Period.” It covers the early 400s B.C.E to 70 C.E, the time between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.

\(^{19}\) Deuteronomic Law specifically deals with laws concerning kingship and just governance.
completely secular by illustrating how biblical motifs were deployed as shared cultural knowledge to fill the void left by evolutionary science that did not address the origins of ethics. Building on Monsman’s, Mark Knight’s, and Susan Colón’s assertions that secularization theories oversimplify the complexity of an era where new forms of spirituality flourished, I will illustrate how biblical and religious reverberations that are narrativized in the novel remain a fertile area for exploration. Such an investigation elucidates aspects of late Victorian imperial culture that grappled with tensions between science and religion, and orthodox Christianity and new evolving expressions of spirituality that were essentially new religions. These tensions are evident in the way biblical motifs are reconfigured to attend to concepts of personal salvation and the afterlife while simultaneously critiquing the power of the church and the empire. While *She* addresses a host of critical issues, scholarship has generally centred around issues such as the rise of the New Woman, anxieties around masculine degeneration, and New Imperialism’s aggressive incursion in colonial spaces. My investigation ventures into new territory as I explicate the way biblical motifs, such as Mosaic Law and apocalypticism, emerge in the text to comment on ethical approaches to the colonized as New Imperialism swept across the globe.

In this chapter, I illustrate how Haggard’s comprehensive knowledge of modern biblical criticism, and the historical context in which these writings emerged, are narrativized in the novel to draw striking parallels between fallen empires and the British Empire while simultaneously criticizing the institution of the church, an empire in its own right. Through the almost immortal Ayesha, a white queen who rules the Amahaggers, Haggard launches an excoriating criticism of imperial violence. Haggard unequivocally connects Ayesha with Moses and the deuterocanonical era to illustrate both the transience of and propensity for corruption in
powerful empires. Haggard found value in familiar biblical motifs, such as the Golden Rule, that critique unchecked power inflicted on the vulnerable, demonstrating how the Bible remained an authoritative source for contemplating ethics and morality in a growing secularized culture. *She*, Haggard’s second imperial Gothic novel, explores the relationship between science and religion, rationality and superstition, death and the afterlife, as it engages with critical discourses on the consequences of a corrupted power that will inevitably fall. I will attend to how new spiritualist beliefs were conflated with Darwinism, which were not viewed as antithetical, to endorse a stringent moral and ethical code during a period fraught with change.

An overview of the plot and key characters is revealed at the beginning of the novel through a frame narrative and interpolations of a fictitious editor, preparing the reader to anticipate a sharp deviation from the novel’s realist overtones as it gradually transforms into a fantasy tale, replete with historical references and philosophical ponderings of the era. L. Horace Holly, introduced as a misogynistic, simian-like college don, capable of converting skeptics to Darwinian theory based on his appearance, is later described as a “man not unacquainted with the leading scientific facts” and “an utter unbeliever in hocus-pocus that in Europe goes by the name of superstition” (156). He is approached by his dying friend, Leo Vincey Sr. who assigns him guardianship over his young son, Leo. Vincey recounts a fantastic tale of an almost immortal white queen, Ayesha, who murdered his ancestor, Kallikrates, in a fit of passion. Relating how Ayesha has achieved near immortality through entering a sacred flame, he explains that through the ages, his family had sworn to exact revenge in payment for the death of Kallikrates and the grief incurred by his Egyptian wife, Amenartas, who bore their child. Vincey entrusts Holly with a casket containing the Sherd of Amenartas, a relic that leads to Ayesha’s
home. Vincey cautions Holly: “remember that one day I shall ask for the account of your oath, for though I am dead and forgotten, yet I shall live. There is no such thing as death, Holly, only change, and as you may perhaps learn in time to come, I believe that even here that change could under certain circumstances be indefinitely postponed” (45). Biblical reverberations on death, resurrection, and judgement are evident in Vincey’s warning that an “account” of Holly’s actions will be judged since beyond physical death is a reckoning for transgressions committed in life. Instead of God being the judge, the deceased Vincey himself will demand an account, illustrating a new conceptualization of an afterlife that is not predicated on an external deity who rewards or punishes.

Holly’s disbelief, based on his skeptical nature and his devotion to scientific rationality, is challenged years later when Leo comes of age, and as promised, Holly opens the casket and finds the sherd that retells the seemingly implausible tale in the words of Amenartas:

[And they brought us to the Queen of the people who places pots upon the heads of strangers, who is a magician having knowledge of all things, and life and loveliness that does not die. And she cast eyes of love upon thy father, Kallikrates, and would have slain me, and taken him to husband, but he loved me and feared her and would not. Then did she take us, and lead us by horrible ways, by means of dark magic, to where the great pit is, in the mouth of which the old philosopher lay dead, and showed us the rolling Pillar of Fire that dies not, whereof a voice is as a voice of thunder; and she did stand in the flames, and come forth unharmed, and yet more beautiful. (59)

Amenartas describes the brutality of the people who serve this mysterious queen, referring to the practice of placing “pots on the heads of strangers”, an image that gestures to cannibalism since the image invokes the idea that the strangers are being cooked. Ayesha’s lethal beauty does not tempt Kallikrates, who resists her charms, yet he and his wife are shown the terrible magical power Ayesha will later refute, claiming her knowledge is science not yet recognized as such. The account articulates notions of unknown mystical powers attributed to this white queen who
defies death, indicating evolving beliefs around concepts of death and the immortal soul, which emerged as some Victorians deviated from church orthodoxy. The novel draws on biblical allusions to the sacred flame on Mount Sinai that serves as a physical manifestation of the “unseen” God of Israel who communicates through fire and a thunderous voice, overtly referencing the struggle between Israel and the powerful Egyptian Empire. Ayesha exemplifies both imperial power and brutal misrule as she employs terror to control her “savage” subjects, gesturing to the propensity for power to corrupt. Ironically, as I will demonstrate, Ayesha also believes her rule is just and her violence necessary to maintain control, her rationalization therefore echoing the New Imperialist justification for subjugating the colonized. The Amahaggers are victims of violent “imperial” rule, but they are also stereotypical depictions of the colonized who require “civilization” through Western imperial control. As the story progresses, the quintessential message emphasizes the inevitable end of powerful, corrupt institutions that fail to act with empathy and compassion toward the colonized by invoking biblical motifs found in Exodus.

Haggard reconfigures and inverts scriptural motifs, utilizing scripture as shared cultural knowledge. Focused attention on how the novel reframes biblical narrative and allusions to interrogate power, as it reaches a wide audience across a spectrum of religious beliefs, yields a rich new perspective on the continued relevance scripture had in a scientific age. Leo Michael’s late nineteenth-century pamphlet, She: An Allegory of the Church (1889) provides evidence of

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how religious readings of the novel critique the institution of the church, arguing for a hybridized humanism that incorporates Darwinian theory and reconfigured biblical motifs. Michael’s article has been dismissed by Norman Vance who argues that “[w]e need not go as far as the eccentric American commentator Leo Michael who managed to see *She* as an allegory of the church” (164). Michael’s article does not appear to have been examined in key Haggard scholarship, yet his reading offers a rich interpretation of criticisms leveled against the church. Michael argues that the novel narrativizes fundamental issues regarding disillusionment with the church, particularly in its marginalization of other spiritual positions, its rejection of science, and its collusion with imperial violence. More importantly, he contends that *She* rejects blood atonement theologies and the worship of a dead savior, in much the same way Ayesha venerates the corpse of her dead lover, making his pamphlet an insightful contribution to understanding the novel’s reception. *She* may be an allegory of the church, as suggested by Michael, yet it also simultaneously addresses overarching anxieties regarding regression and degeneration. Most notable in Michael’s assessment is the harmonization of Darwinian science and liberal interpretations of scripture that were frequently viewed as antithetical. I will examine Michael’s pamphlet later in this chapter because it articulates commonalities with Haggard’s interest in conflating two seemingly disparate subjects to argue for an ethics of care during a period of shifting religious and secular epistemologies, particularly in respect to the colonized.

In his autobiography, *The Days of My Life: Volume II* (1926), published a year after his death, Haggard endorses a scientific view of creation that agrees with contextualized religious interpretations of Genesis. He objects to orthodox religion’s insistence on *creatio ex nihilo*, which maintains a literal view of creation, adopting instead a liberal view that did not conflict
with evolutionary science. While *She* reflects Haggard’s interest in new spiritualisms that emerged during this era, he later repudiates his previous interest in alternate forms of spiritualism as he recommits to a modified version of Anglicanism. Remarkably, Haggard’s deviation from Anglicanism includes Roman Catholicism’s prayer for the dead, gesturing to Haggard’s fascination with the continued connection between the living and the dead.

Although scholars have noted Haggard’s interest in Darwinism and social Darwinism, beyond such premises is a largely unexplored area that attends to how Haggard employed scriptural allusions to propose an ethics of care not found in scientific theory. Although *She* engages with Hebrew scriptural references that critique imperial power’s unethical stance toward the Other, Haggard claims a commitment to the New Testament. I argue that despite his preference for the New Testament, his overt use of the Hebrew Scriptures is deliberate since he draws on Mosaic Law as a definitive and authoritative commentary on ethical conduct as he presents Ayesha as the antithesis of Moses the Lawgiver. The particularity of the date Ayesha enters history is also suggestive since 339 B.C.E is an era associated with the inception of apocalyptic writing in response to imperialist incursion on the nation of Israel whose religious and cultural identity was threatened by the spread of Hellenism. In each case, these scriptures are

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21 “Creation out of nothing” affirms a belief that God created the universe out of nothing. This doctrinal position is consistent with various interpretations that do not insist on the “seven-day” theory; however, the literal interpretation that God created all land masses, bodies of water and life-forms in seven days was the prevalent belief among many denominations. With the emergence of German scholarship on biblical authorship and Darwinian theory, many Christian churches revised their interpretation.
reconfigured, inverted, and redeployed to show similarities between ancient and modern empires, thereby offering a critique of New Imperialism’s violent confrontation with the colonized.

2.2 Ethics, Biblical Law, and Church Authority

*Fin de siècle* fiction draws on scripture in non-religious ways, since secularized biblical law formed the basis of the ethical philosophy embedded in British imperial culture, particularly in civil, criminal, and common judicial law. To provide a foundation for my arguments, it is crucial to understand how modern Western cultures drew on the spirit rather than the letter of biblical law to engage in ethical and moral ponderings of abstract concepts of “right” and “wrong.” As Jonathan Burnside asserts, “the Bible is said to be the most important book for making sense of Western civilization – and biblical law is one of its foundations. Indeed, biblical law has a claim to historical influence that is unmatched by any other ancient legal system – whether we are thinking of the idea of a shared day of rest, the constraints of political authority, the idea of mercy or employee rights” (128). While Mosaic law was specific to ancient Israel, and much of it is not applicable to the modern world, some laws, such as prohibitions against murder, theft, and laws regarding the ethical treatment of neighbours, continue to resonate in civil law. Mindful of how biblical law is already reconfigured and secularized as a framework for ethical and moral laws, I will elucidate how Haggard similarly utilizes and sometimes reframes biblical motifs that were familiar to Victorians educated in scripture regardless of religious affiliation. As Timothy Larson affirms, “Scriptures were the foundational textbook in schools and the main volume through which people gained basic literacy skills,” indicating its prominence as a widely read authoritative text, which was used in secular education (2). Haggard
draws on common motifs in unique ways, interrogating unethical and amoral exertion of institutional power by inverting and reconfiguring key biblical motifs. Since secularized biblical law entered ethical discourse as shared cultural knowledge, the allusions that emerge from the novel unequivocally critique the concept of justice as promulgated by both the church and the empire.

To expound on ethics and the law, Haggard invokes Moses, the foremost advocate for laws governing Israel and an exemplar of just leadership. Allusions to Moses and the law articulate Haggard’s preoccupation with ethical and moral ponderings not evident in scientific theory. Haggard inverts biblical tropes by presenting the caves of Kôr, Ayesha’s home, as a binary opposite of Mount Sinai (or Horeb), where the law was received, and nationhood conferred on the tribes who formed the nation of Israel. The inversion of the mountain, a sacred place where God bestows the law as a holy covenant, to the caves that house the dead and from which Ayesha dispenses cruel and inhumane laws, illustrates how biblical motifs, innovatively deployed, carry specific meaning in terms of ethics. If Moses symbolizes the dispensing of just law, then Ayesha is unambiguously his antithesis, illustrating the corruption of power more in keeping with Pharaoh and the powerful Egyptian Empire than Moses.

Beyond apparent allusions to Moses and the law, I suggest that Haggard’s specificity in dating Ayesha’s entrance as 339 B.C.E is relevant for several reasons: it references a period of ancient imperialism, cultural hybridity, and a rise in apocalyptic literature. Readers familiar with this historical moment recognize the apocalyptic language and imagery employed by Haggard, which draws attention to the cultural and religious crisis facing the Jews in Palestine whom Ayesha encounters, but it also overtly demonstrates a shift in religious thought as theories of an
afterlife intended to offer hope in times of crisis are redeployed in ways relevant to Haggard’s own era. Concepts of an afterlife and apocalyptic motifs gesture to the law, since an afterlife and the emergence of a new world of justice are predicated on living according to the precepts of biblical law. I will analyze the relevance of the afterlife, the appearances of apocalyptic nuances, and the parallels drawn between ancient and modern imperialism later in the chapter; however, it is important to briefly draw attention to 339 B.C.E. as a time of crisis that inevitably entailed rigid adherence to laws as a means of re-establishing stability.

339 B.C.E. was an era fraught with instability as Jewish cultural and religious identity was threatened by Hellenization. By specifying this time frame for Ayesha’s first appearance, Haggard connects intolerance of new ideas with fear of cultural and religious annihilation during a period of national crisis. This is exemplified in Ayesha’s bitterness toward the Temple priests when she relates her encounter to Holly, claiming that her rejection and mistreatment broke her heart. Ayesha’s hatred of the Temple priests who rejected her esoteric knowledge functions in two ways as it undermines orthodoxy and legalism, while criticizing resistance to new interpretations of scripture or acceptance of scientific theories that seemingly conflicted with scripture. In this respect, Ayesha aligns herself with Jesus who was persecuted for his radical new ideas on biblical law, expressing her disapproval of his crucifixion, which she squarely places on Jewish authorities. Through her alignment with Jesus, her rejection of church

22 Jesus’ reinterpretation of the laws, as evident in the Sermon on the Mount (see next chapter) adopt a position that values the spirit of the law over the letter of the law.
23 Modern biblical scholarship refutes notions that claim the Jewish Great Sanhedrin as “Christ-killers,” an unfortunate theological stance that promulgated anti-Semitism but has since been discredited.
hierarchy may be viewed in almost Christological terms; albeit, unlike the Messiah, Ayesha is flawed. Nonetheless, her position is not without merits, since like the Temple priests, the church remained profoundly suspicious of and resistant to new ways of interpreting scripture outside the church institution, maintaining laws and doctrines that were worthless, as argued by Michael. The church’s propensity to misapply and manipulate scripture provides a basis for underlying criticisms against doctrinal and dogmatic religion that relies on the authority of scripture to maintain power over the faithful. Orthodox interpretations, which suit the church’s agenda to maintain power, frequently justified imperialist ideologies as evident in Ayesha’s convoluted redaction of scripture to rationalize her laws, a topic I will expand on later in this chapter.

While parallels between 339 B.C.E. and the nineteenth century are not overtly explained, readers who were educated in ancient history and biblical apocalypticism would have recognized in the particularity of the time frame as one that precipitated a re-evaluation of Judaism’s position on the interpretation of law as a source for ethical conduct towards the Other. Ayesha’s lack of empathy and compassion suggests the evils of unchecked imperial power as Haggard also attributes to her the predilection to rationalize her laws as just. In stark contrast to biblical laws, Ayesha’s decrees resemble imperial justifications for subjugation. As New Imperialism’s encounter with the colonized was fraught with difficulties that frequently involved violent confrontation, allusions to biblical moments of crisis provide a parallel to and critique of late-Victorian ethics in relation to the colonized.

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New biblical criticism gained support in proposing a non-literal interpretation of scripture, challenging Mosaic authorship by demonstrating the literary activity of multiple authors, from different regions, and different time periods, editing, redacting, and expanding scriptures to suit their various contexts. This exegetical activity evident in the biblical canon was reflected in the fin de siècle novel as authors drew on scripture to address concerns regarding ethical and moral degeneration that emerged as New Imperialism spread across the globe.

Haggard, in his redaction, inversion, and reinterpretation of scripture, employs the method by which biblical authors reconfigured strands of tradition to suit their context, his method resembling Midrash, particularly when drawing on the authority of scripture to expound on ethics.24 Ayesha’s criticism of religious authority’s misuse of sacred texts to maintain power indicates late Victorian re-evaluations of the influence of organized religion, a topic I will expand on later in this chapter when I analyze Ayesha’s rejection of religious authority.

2.3 Inversions of Mosaic Motifs and Symbols

Haggard’s use of common symbols, such as the serpent and the flame, is deployed in a variety of ways as these symbols carry different connotations when applied to different contexts. It is not sufficient to recognize the prevalence of biblical allusions and symbols but rather, it is imperative that we attend to how biblical motifs are inverted or reconfigured because such reworkings indicate critical interpretative moments in the text. Haggard effectively depicts

24 Midrash is an interpretation of the Torah; Midrash Aggahah specifically refers to the practice of drawing lessons on ethics from biblical text, while Midrash Halacha attends to law governing religious practice. Since both terms are relevant in She, I use the term “Midrash” to indicate how scripture is interpreted to explicate meanings referring to law and ethics.
Ayesha as an evil despot by contrasting her cruelty with the values of Moses, who epitomizes just leadership. Since Moses is a key figure who embodies biblical law, Haggard’s inversion of his character and the law he dispenses resonates with religious and secular readers who recognize Haggard’s inversion as a device for viewing Ayesha as both “lawless” and amoral, since she does not believe laws are relevant to her. A philosophical approach to biblical law continues to have significance even when stripped of theological connotations, and as I will illustrate, Haggard draws on his knowledge of the Bible to interrogate “Christian” imperialism’s failure to govern justly. At the heart of biblical law is the Golden Rule, a mandate that insists on recognizing the dignity in all humans, which like Darwinian theory encourages a re-evaluation of “neighbour” to extend beyond community or nation to include the colonized (Realism Levine 5).

To illustrate how Haggard presents Ayesha as Moses’ antithesis, I will briefly sketch key characteristics associated with Moses that are inverted in the character of Ayesha. Moses, the Lawgiver conjures up images of a righteous man who leads his people to freedom, yet it should not be forgotten that Moses was a sinner who found redemption but was still denied entry into the Promised Land due to his earlier transgressions. In this respect, Moses’ flaws and his acceptance of consequences gestures to his humanity. Like Ayesha, Moses committed willful murder, resulting in his expulsion into the wilderness where he encounters God in the sacred flame on Mount Sinai or Horeb. The irony of Moses becoming the Lawgiver despite his infraction of the law is not lost on biblically literate readers who grasp the meaning that perfection in humans is not a requirement for, but aspiring to overcome weaknesses is a necessary step towards redemption. Moses, imperfect as he is, leads his people faithfully,
interceding on their behalf despite his exasperation with the “stiff-necked” Hebrew’s disobedience and eventual apostasy. The Exodus motifs function in the novel on many levels as signs, symbols, and meaning register with readers who were well acquainted with the Bible. Ayesha’s flaws are expedient in teaching moral lessons regarding just governance; therefore, an examination of Ayesha, biblical motifs, and well-known symbols, which were intentionally deployed to argue for ethics, yield fresh insights into complex responses to imperial power. Biblical motifs provide an effective means of communicating moral lessons since, apart from being well-known to readers, they may also be utilized in new ways to address current concerns.

Inversions or reconfigurations of familiar and versatile motifs can be interpreted from a religious perspective, but biblical motifs retain its efficacy in espousing an ethics of care even when stripped of religious context. The inversion of mountains to caves is significant since biblically, the mountain is symbolically the place associated with theophany and the dispensing of God’s law, while the caves of Kôr, from which Ayesha dispenses her punishments, are tombs associated with death and decay. Ayesha’s domicile is located beneath the mountains and her people live in caves that house the dead, an inversion of the mountain as a dwelling place of the Divine, sometimes referred to as the “living God.” The binary opposition of mountains and caves as places where justice is administered suggests Ayesha’s laws, unlike those of Moses, are “ungodly.” Haggard’s inversion of the mountain as a sacred locale from which divine law was conferred articulates critiques of imperial laws, which subjugated the colonized, particularly when viewing Ayesha as a metaphoric depiction of imperial power on which the sun will

25 Exodus 32:9
inevitably set.

Vincey tells Holly of the significance of a sacred flame that conferred near immortality on Ayesha, yet again drawing on biblical imagery and symbols associated with Moses. The pillar of flame conjures up images of Moses’ theophany symbolizing a divine power that cannot be contained nor manipulated by humans, as evident in Ayesha’s regression after entering the flame for the second time. While Moses approaches the flame reverently, recognizing that he stands on holy ground, the sherd tells how Ayesha boldly enters the flame for the purpose of prolonging her life. Haggard retains the biblical association of the eternal fire, which in accordance with scripture endows longevity on those who come into its proximity; however, by not directly associating the flame with God he secularizes a familiar symbol to illustrate the misuse of power. Unlike Moses who recognizes the sanctity of the eternal pillar, Ayesha’s use of the flame is an act of arrogance as she usurps its power. Ayesha’s exploitation of the flame for personal gain illustrates her hubris and arrogance as she uses her power to subjugate and punish the Amahaggers. Haggard’s ambivalence toward organized religion and the supernatural, similar to many Victorians who experimented with new expressions of spirituality, manifests itself in the way he alludes to esoteric beliefs in powerful unnamed forces. He draws on the presence of an omnipotent power, which moves and acts through the flame; however, he refrains from asserting that the pillar is the God of Exodus, providing the reader agency in determining how to interpret the entity.

While Haggard affords the reader agency in how they interpret the flame, he unambiguously draws on familiar biblical symbols in complex and multivalent ways. In the Exodus narratives, the serpent is symbolically associated with Egypt and the staff of Moses;
however, the serpent suggests several religious and cultural meanings in both Genesis 2 and the Exodus accounts. Moses’ staff, which he receives during his theophany, serves as a symbol of God’s power from which Moses derives his authority to rule and guide the people of Israel according to God’s laws. Moses, in an act of frustration, transforms his staff into a serpent to prove God’s power to Pharaoh, which is one of his many transgressions since he misuses God’s power for his own vain purposes. Haggard draws on the serpent as a symbol of corrupted power in several ways, in keeping with biblical allusions found throughout the Torah. Ayesha’s serpentine belt, a creative variation on Moses’ staff, is reminiscent of the serpent in the Garden of Eden that encourages the first humans to disobey God’s prohibition regarding the consumption of the fruit, which will endow knowledge of good and evil. Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience precipitated the necessity for the law given to Moses at Sinai, a motif Haggard utilizes as he positions Ayesha as both a “new Eve” who is wholly corrupted and a flawed Moses who misuses God’s power. The serpentine belt wrapped tightly round Ayesha’s waist symbolically alludes to her close connection with the evil force that precipitated the Fall; however, it also gestures to Moses’ staff, which was to be used as an instrument to reinstate order through the law but was instead used frivolously to impress Pharaoh.

Symbolically, the serpent represented royalty, priesthood, and divinity to ancient Egyptians. Its use in the creation narratives, according to biblical scholars, was intended as a polemical statement regarding the inefficaciousness of Egyptian deities who are false gods, in opposition to the “true” God of Israel. Haggard was familiar with modern biblical criticism, enabling him to capitalize on the varied meanings of the serpent to connect Ayesha with corrupt, imperial power, specifically with Egypt insofar as it subjugated and enslaved the Hebrews. The
serpent has many connotations, but in the novel it is associated with breaking God’s law, but also of symbolizing Moses’ power to wield the law. Multiple allusions link Ayesha to Moses, yet ultimately, she is the antithesis of one of the greatest biblical heroes explicitly associated with law, justice, and the subversion of tyranny.

Beyond symbols that implicitly connect Ayesha to Moses, Haggard’s character shares many of Moses’ life experiences, but through her lack of morals she cannot achieve the esteem attributed to Moses who is described and applauded as a humble man (Numbers 12:3). An example of how Haggard draws attention to both similarities and dissimilarities between Ayesha and Moses is evident in how the flame transforms both characters. Although Moses had been granted longevity through his encounter with the sacred flame, his lifespan was incomparable to Ayesha; this is a favourable state, however, since it is her longevity that leads to arrogance, bitterness, and depravity. Deuteronomy 34:7 states: “Moses was one-hundred and twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour was unabated.” At his death, the Israelites mourned for thirty days, and according to scripture, “Never since has there risen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10). By comparison, Vincey tells Holly that Ayesha lived for almost two thousand years, and unlike Moses who was loved, Ayesha’s cruelty characterizes her interactions with all people she encounters. While Moses’ years cannot be interpreted literally, they indicate that he lived to a good age and died with his body still intact, unlike Ayesha, who, at the end of the novel, degenerates as a consequence of near immortality and unchecked power.

A second allusion to the different ways the “face-to-face” encounter affects both Moses and Ayesha is in the visible change of appearance that occurs. After receiving the law, Moses’
face glows, causing much consternation among the people who recognize the power of God imprinted on Moses’ face. To shield the people from the visible signs of God’s glory, Moses, like Ayesha, is veiled. In a perverse inversion of Moses’ glowing visage after passing through the flame Ayesha is endowed with beauty so powerful that it proves dangerous for men to look at her unveiled. In contrast to Moses’ glowing face, which symbolizes assurances of God’s favour, Ayesha’s beauty is a weapon that needs to be covered. Through Ayesha’s beauty, which asserts absolute power over men, Haggard alludes to elevated anxieties regarding the power of women in the wake of the New Woman movement\(^\text{26}\) and gestures to fears of eroded masculinity. By the late nineteenth century, women challenged heteronormative family values and gender roles, asserting a measure of independence, particularly regarding marital rights and child-bearing. Ayesha’s dominance over men and her choice of a suitable mate, in Darwinian terms, celebrates feminine power, since it is the female that “naturally selects” a partner with whom to reproduce, yet her evil application of that power subverts her position, drawing attention instead to her degeneration (Beer 198).

The veiled face is particularly significant since it suggests shielding the Israelites from God’s mysterious power as an act of mercy in the case of Moses; however, with Ayesha, the veil conceals unknown mysteries around arcane knowledge and Ayesha’s antecedence. The veil also alludes to the statue of Truth Holly encounters, as it too is veiled. The notion of “veiling” the face suggests hidden truths since Ayesha’s antecedence and arcane knowledge remain a mystery,

\(^{26}\) Julia Reid’s article, “‘She -who-must-be-obeyed’: Anthology and Matriarchy in H. Rider Haggard’s *She*” and Sandra Gilbert’s “Rider Haggard and the Heart of Darkness” explicate New Woman anxieties that emerge through Ayesha’s matriarchal power. Also see Bradley Deane’s *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*. 

but it also poses philosophical questions regarding the elusiveness of Truth, which is vigourously sought, but rarely found either in religion or science. Religious “truth” that formerly provided certitude was challenged by scientific “truth,” which proposed an alternate explanation of creation, calling into question the source of human ethics and virtues, such as empathy and compassion, that scientific theory did not adequately or definitively address. In the late nineteenth century “truth” was a concept that had lost its ring of certainty as skepticism and rationality were viewed as antithetical to religious ideas of humanity’s role in the world. Much of Ayesha’s power is secret knowledge she acquires throughout her long life, yet unlike Moses who covers his face in humility before God and in deference to the fears his countenance evokes in the Israelites, Ayesha’s beauty is veiled because its power is almost lethal. Moses’ humility is one of his many positive qualities, whereas Ayesha beauty is a source of the vanity and pride that ultimately lead to her destruction.

While Ayesha’s use of her lethal beauty may be examined in terms of shifting gender politics, an equally intriguing way to examine the effects of the sacred flame is through the false façade it presents. Similar to the manner in which the church and empire present their intentions as benevolent, spreading “civilization” through Christianity, She narrativizes imperial power as bringing Western norms of “justice” and order to imperial spaces in an ambivalent manner. Through Ayesha, Haggard’s novel interrogates paternalism and racism inflicted on the colonized as wholly corrupt; however, this critique is not consistent since, like the empire and church, Ayesha justifies her brutality as a means of curbing “savage” practices, such as cannibalism.


27 Although Ayesha is thought to be of Arabian origin, Haggard remains vague on her actual antecedence.
Parallels to Exodus provide a familiar discourse on power and its corruptive force, particularly when associating Ayesha’s power with that of the Egyptian Empire, which like modern Western empires, viewed itself as technologically and culturally superior to the tribes of Israel led by Moses.

Ayesha despises the Amahagger’s “savagery,” which is ostensibly derived from their racial impurity, and Haggard presents their inferiority as manifested through their alleged dullness of wit, cannibalistic practices, and sullen acquiescence to Ayesha’s undisputed rule. Such attributes echo racist epistemologies, which emerged in some anthropological studies that posited the racialized Other as inferior and “less-evolved” than the Anglo-Saxon race. The Amahagger’s miscegenation and unknown lineage appear to be at the forefront of Ayesha’s hatred since she is interested in “pure” ancient civilizations with superior technological and scientific knowledge and rich cultural traditions such as those attributed to the people of the lost city of Kôr. According to Patrick Brantlinger, Haggard particularly admired ancient Egypt; however, he viewed modern Egypt as “less than civilized, petrified in Islamic barbarism” (Taming 160). Reading Ayesha’s admiration for “pure” ancient civilizations through Haggard’s biases provides some valuable insights since Ayesha’s hatred of the Amahaggers is partially grounded in her belief that they lack a culture of their own. Another reading emerges when considering the Amahagger’s association with the lost tribes of Israel because Ayesha’s repugnance for them is analogous to the biblical depiction of the Egyptian Pharaoh’s distaste for nomadic Israelites. Since Ayesha regards the Amahaggers as little more than animals that need to

28 See E. B Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*. 
be disciplined into compliance, she rationalizes her cruel punishment as necessary for eradicating deviant behaviour. Her degenerate immorality is not merely exerted through her cruelty but also through the “magical power” she employs to inflict harm and her “scientific knowledge,” which she exercises to breed servants who are mute and therefore, incapable of betraying her secrets (100).

Ayesha’s eugenic experiments gesture to the notion that modernity is equated with racial superiority, which emerged through social Darwinism’s insistence on racial hierarchies that place some races in privileged positions over so-called less-developed cultures. Her scientific knowledge and her ability to genetically alter her servants illustrates Western European advancements, seemingly placing Ayesha above the people she rules. Since Haggard posits this knowledge as “dangerous knowledge,” as I will discuss later in this chapter, her scientific experimentation on humans is viewed as unethical, immoral, and a testament to her degeneration.

Ayesha’s genetic mutations allude to Victorian interest in eugenics, particularly concerning natural selection and survival of the fittest. Once again, Moses is relevant since his speech impairment required his brother, Aaron, to speak on his behalf. Moses’ speech impairment is not corrected by God but effectively used to indicate how physical disabilities may be overcome as Moses communicates God’s law to Pharaoh and his own people. Such a reading draws attention to ethical positions on treatment of the sick and disabled persons who may not be “scientifically” regarded as subjects worthy of propagation when examined through theories of natural selection. Ironically, despite Moses’ speech impediment, God chooses him to be his spokesperson and intermediary, essentially God’s own voice, positing nuanced critiques on the marginalization of the disabled. Haggard’s use of Mosaic references is not arbitrary since Moses
is associated with ethics that transcend religious significance that are effectively secularized and embedded in European cultural expressions of ethical and moral conduct.

Haggard’s invocation of Mosaic law and the character of Moses as exemplars of righteousness provides a foil for Ayesha who could aspire to greatness yet is corrupted by the power with which she is endowed. The similarities and differences that are evident in Moses and Ayesha provide a discursive framework for thinking about the ambivalence of imperial power and the responsibility of those who dispense justice through this position of power. Once exiled from Egypt, his country through adoption, Moses returns as a champion of his people, with whom he has always been affiliated. Commissioned with the task of freeing the Israelites from the bondage of Egyptian tyranny, Moses aligns himself with the people, not as a king, but as their deliverer. Once an adopted member of Egyptian royalty, Moses becomes a liberator of slaves, a motif that was utilized by British abolitionists of earlier decades in their efforts to emancipate slaves. Paradoxically, notions of liberation also provided justifications for the controversial practice of “liberating” indigenous people from bondage to “superstition” and “savagery,” coercing the colonized to convert to Christianity as a step towards “civilization.” Monsman argues that although the late nineteenth century was more secular than the high Victorian era, the Bible and Christianity continued to be used as a means of furthering European ambitions to seize indigenous lands through conversion (187-89).

Haggard’s employment of the Exodus story is not uncommon since this motif clearly articulates the corruption of power that enslaves and the requirement of the law to maintain justice; however, more to the point, it condemns slavery. Pro-slavery rhetoric often alluded to the practice of slavery being sanctioned in the Bible; however, such justifications were frequently
countered by anti-slavery factions. In 1776, for instance, Granville Sharpe published an article, “The Just Limitations of Slavery in the Laws of God,” in which he argues that the practice of enslaving enemies was limited by Mosaic law. Sharpe argues that these laws concerning slavery were specific to the nation of Israel as they punished other nations, upholding God’s decree; therefore, any reference to slavery in the Hebrew Scriptures should not be construed as a practice sanctioned by God in any context outside of the period in which these laws were codified.

Haggard draws on such debates to argue against the subjugation of indigenous peoples through Ayesha’s mistreatment of the Amahaggers.

Ayesha, in opposition to Moses, rules the Amahaggers as a brutal taskmaster much like Pharaoh, with their slavery to her will accomplished through fear and intimidation. This is an example of imperial amorality that Haggard sometimes claimed to resist in light of his experiences in South Africa while employed as a civil servant. Through references to biblical figures and historic events, Haggard sets the tone for entering into a discourse on foreign rule and the subjugation of indigenous people in imperial spaces. By alluding to Moses, a foreigner who was stripped of his status within the household of Pharaoh following his murder of an Egyptian overseer, Haggard establishes the injustice imperial rule has the propensity to wield. Likewise, Ayesha’s appearance as foreign powers assumed control of an established civilization (Egypt), provides an overt commentary on the power of empires that fail to act justly. The Egyptian Empire, which once subjugated other cultures, is placed by the fourth century B.C.E beneath the yoke of the powerful Greek empire led by Alexander the Great. Haggard’s connection of these two historical moments articulates the transience of power that is destined to fall. Both Moses and Ayesha are exiled and driven into the wilderness, yet each conducts their
affairs with the foreigners they meet in diametrically different ways. Through the Amahaggers who are associated with the lost tribes of Israel, and their despotic rule by a foreign queen Haggard critiques the power of the empire over the colonized, yet the novel also, ironically, perpetuates stereotypical views of arrested development and immorality that enters discourses on racial politics. Despite a degree of ambivalence to imperialism evident in the novel, Ayesha’s inversion of ethical law that was intended to propagate justice, is viewed as tyrannical. Unlike Moses who employs the law to liberate the enslaved Hebrews, Ayesha uses the law to maintain her power over her adopted people who are fixed in a state of “barbarity.” Relating the racialized Other to the Israelite slaves was not new since American slaves, for example, identified with the Exodus story as a means of understanding their own bondage. Haggard deploys the Haggadah to critique unjust treatment of the colonized by aggressive imperialism, particularly in South Africa as evident in Cetywayo and his White Neighbours, wherein Haggard critiques European dominance yet also adds caveats that justify violence when deemed “necessary.”

2.4 Criticisms and Justifications for the Empire in She

She articulates both critiques and justifications for empire and imperial violence through Ayesha’s despotic rule of the Amahaggers. The ambivalence in Haggard’s novel is not surprising since, like many fin de siècle authors, Haggard reflects the complicated and changing ideologies of his era. In Cetywayo and His White Neighbours (1882), Haggard articulates ambivalent positions regarding the escalation of violence enacted on the black population. He vehemently opposed notions that claim, “the white man has the right to the black man’s possessions and land, and that it is his high and holy mission to exterminate the wretched native and take his place”
Haggard’s position asserts, “that in all essential qualities of mind and body they very much resemble white men, with the exception that they are, as a race, quicker-witted, more honest, and braver than the ordinary run of white men” (270). This position appears to oppose a hegemonic imperialism, yet his stance waivers as he places a caveat on such seemingly liberal views when he states “that on only one condition, if at all, have we the right to take the black man’s land; and that is, that we provide them with an equal and just Government, and allow no maltreatment of them, either as individuals or tribes, but, to the contrary, do our best to elevate them, and wean them from savage customs. Otherwise, the practice is surely indefensible” (270). She reflects competing justifications of empire that oscillated between William Gladstone’s paternalistic ideas of Christianizing the colonized over and against Benjamin Disraeli’s New Imperialist stance of subjugating the “inferior” Other in order to appropriate land and resources. Ayesha infantilizes and terrorizes the Amahaggers, illustrating paternalistic views of the colonized as in need of strict governance while affirming a sense of racial superiority. This is evident in her brutal reprisals for the Amahagger’s cannibalism, which she claims, are intended to discipline and curb aberrant behaviour. Her justifications echo Haggard’s belief that such brutality may be necessary to “wean them of savage customs” as stated in Cetywayo (270). Ayesha’s cruelty is critiqued, yet it is also somewhat justified as a means of correcting “savagery” since her undisputed “imperial rule” is contingent on acts of brutality. These violent reprisals are deliberately displayed as horrific spectacles intended to frighten the Amahaggers into obeying her commands. Ayesha informs Holly: “[W]ere I to show mercy to those wolves,  

29 For a summary of Gladstone and Disraeli’s views of imperialism, see Deane’s *Masculinity and the New Imperialism.*
your lives would not be safe among this people for a day... How thinkst thou I rule this people? I have but a regiment of guards to do my bidding, therefore it is not by force. It is by terror. My empire is a moral one. Once in a generation mayhap I do as I am doing now, and slay a score by torture” (170). In many respects, Ayesha’s interpretation of moral and just rule is evident in discourses on New Imperialism, which justified violence for profit, a concept I will expand on in Chapter Five.

Haggard’s ambivalence towards New Imperialism enters She as evident in the depiction of the Amahagger’s brutality and cannibalism, which reflects imperialist stereotypes of the colonized. Norman Etherington argues that Haggard’s politics prior and subsequent to the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 appeared to remain conservative, yet his political affiliation was not always reflected in his writing. Like many authors of this era, Haggard’s political views, which emerge in the novel, are ambiguous. Haggard’s admiration for the Zulus he encountered in South Africa during his sojourn from 1875-1882 reflects the dissonance between viewing the Other as a “neighbour” while harbouring paternalistic perspectives that continued to view Anglo-Saxon men as racially superior, a tension that is evident in She.

The Golden Rule that insists on treating one’s neighbour as an extension of the self is integral to the Law of Moses. The Exodus story, because of its connection with law, ethics, and

30 Etherington (91-2). The Berlin conference of 1884/5 precipitated the “scramble for Africa” as European empires, including the United States, became contenders for lands, resources and indigenous African populations. King Leopold II of Belgium’s “civilizing mission” began a bloody invasion of the Congo, as Imperial powers recognized the wealth of resources as beneficial to European imperial expansion.
just leadership maintains a place within nineteenth-century culture; therefore, even when removed from its religious moorings, the story continues to have relevance during a period of instability and uncertainty. The Torah provides a comprehensive set of rules governing ritual religious practice, purity, and dietary laws, and a vast number of decrees on every conceivable subject not relevant outside of the community of Israel, yet the ethical and moral mandates are not limited to a religious reading any more than they are confined to Israel. Haggard’s employment of Mosaic allusions to critique imperial violence underscores the cultural significance biblical law had in shaping British notions of ethics and morality, explaining Haggard’s explicit and implicit references that posit Ayesha as the antithesis of Moses. The continued dependence of biblical motifs to address human ethics missing from evolutionary science demonstrates not only Haggard’s comprehensive knowledge of the Bible but also the way the text can be used in secular or religious ways as a shared cultural understanding of values deemed to be humane.

According to Mark Knight, Midrash was a powerful interpretive mode of reworking scripture in ways that were easily understood by readers; therefore, both religious and secular Victorians found value in the efficacy of revised biblical commentary to give expression to concerns regarding human virtues. For Knight, “The interpretive possibilities that sacred texts open up can be seen in fictional reworkings of biblical texts, as well as a tradition of religious reading that refuses to see the meaning of sacred text as static or fixed” (An Introduction 68). Victorian fin de siècle authors liberally drew on this understanding that sacred writings were open to constant reinterpretation. The prevalence of allusions to Moses and the law may not be of particular significance to those not familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, yet for those educated
in scripture, it elicits unmistakable associations with ethics and the law.

In his biography, The Days of My Life, Haggard devotes a chapter to his interest in Egyptian culture, which began in childhood and culminated in a visit to Egypt. Mummies and the afterlife permeated his works as evident in several other literary works, such as Cleopatra (1889) and Smith and the Pharaohs (1921) to name two. In She, references to Egypt move beyond the author’s fascination with ancient Egyptian and Jewish culture, as the narrative moves into discourses on power and misrule as evidenced in Ayesha’s dispensing of law from Kôr, which is reminiscent of Moses; however, unlike Moses, Ayesha fails to exercise her power justly. Her despotic rule and enslavement of the Amahaggers resemble the power of Egypt over the Hebrew slaves, positioning her power as wholly corrupt.

While my reading of Ayesha and Kôr attends to how the novel addresses the impermanence of empires based on the prominence of apocalyptic motifs and biblical references to fallen empires, Deane argues that “the Victorians saw the images of both the grandeur and the transience of forgotten empires. Stories of lost worlds develop this theme into a vision of imperial time in which encounters with the past serve less to illustrate theories of progress or decline than to imply a vast, cyclical chronology: empires come and empires go, but empire itself remains constant” (167). Deane’s position underscores the myriad of ways the novel addresses key issues such as the rise and fall of empires as cyclical; however, the biblical allusions tell a story of “ends” rather than “constancy.” Historically, as noted by Deane, empires rise and fall, and in this sense, there appears to be a constancy, yet, I argue, the novel’s vivid imagery of imperial death and decay places a greater emphasis on the transitory nature of imperial power.
2.5 The Deuterocanonical Period in *She*: Fears of Cultural and Religious Hybridity

Haggard’s interest in ancient Greek and Egyptian culture emerges in the novel through his invocation of historical fact and allusions to ancient occult practices, which include “scientific” knowledge. His references to ancient civilization also function as an effective means of comparing the present context to the past, illustrating how the lessons of history fail to be observed. References to ancient cultures provide a caution to the arrogance of imperialism, even as it celebrates the spread and influence of Western culture across the globe. The commentary on the transience of religion and empires that rise and fall alludes to anxieties regarding the British Empire’s control of almost half of the globe as competing European powers and contact with the colonized challenged British Imperial identity as an ostensibly superior civilization.

The historic context Haggard chooses for the emergence of Ayesha coincides with late-nineteenth century interest in archaeological findings from the ancient world, yet it also strongly critiques religious legalism, which was resistant to change, as Darwinism and German biblical criticism opened new avenues for deriving meaning from scripture in non-literal terms. Ayesha is said to have entered the world approximately 339 B.C.E., during the Hellenistic era, a period in which the Ptolemies and Seleucids had much impact in Palestine, and as the Hellenistic influence spread to form the Jewish diaspora and a Hellenized form of Judaism. The particularity of 339 B.C.E has several connotations since it marked the end of native Egyptian rule in Egypt, coinciding with Kallikrates’ escape and marriage to an Egyptian princess of the last dynasty. The fictional editor’s note places Kallikrates’ and Amenartas’ escape and encounter with Ayesha as during the reign of “Nectanebes or Nectanebo II, [the] last Pharaoh of Egypt who fled from Ochus to Ethiopia” in “BC 339” (59). Alexander the Great’s rise to power and the ensuing
imposition of Western cultural and religious norms on the colonized offers a comparison between the emergence of ancient Western power and modern European empires. Hellenization of the ancient world gave rise to apocalyptic writing, as fears regarding the loss of culture and religious observance precipitated a crisis of faith for Jews, which illustrates an unmistakable similarity to Britain’s own incursion in foreign parts as cultural and religious hybridity resulted as a consequence of reciprocal influence. According to Lawrence Boadt:

[T]he free movement in the Hellenistic world also allowed customs and ideas to flow the other way as well, and many Oriental beliefs from Persia and the East began to influence Jewish thought in the late Old Testament period. Apocalyptic language, concepts of heaven and hell, and a more positive view of the afterlife all enter biblical books in this period, probably mostly from the East. It was an age of syncretism, in which peoples took in new ways of thinking from both West and East. (497)

The apocalyptic structure and language evident in writing of the deuterocanonical period are replicated in She, indicating Haggard’s recognition of historical repetition, particularly as it pertained to the institution of the church and New Imperialism. The challenges facing the colonized and the colonizer has precedence in the ancient world; however, by tracing British antecedents to these great, conquering empires, a tendency toward atavism is also revealed. Syncretism, the splintering of Jewish religion, and an introduction of apocalyptic literature that addresses a critical period wherein imperialism was a double-edged sword, connect Haggard’s world to Ayesha’s on multiple levels.

The cultural hybridity that emerges in the novel registers anxieties rife within a British imperial culture that encounters, influences, and is influenced by foreign customs of indigenous peoples of the empire. Through an overt reference to a period that shared some similarities with the nineteenth century, Haggard effectively employs analogy to critically examine his own
context. Ayesha’s criticism of the Jewish authority that rejected her wisdom and drove her out of Jerusalem and into the wilderness reflects anti-Semitic sentiments endemic of the nineteenth century as she refers to them as “fierce-hearted wolves” who are “faction-torn” and concerned only with greed (147). More crucially, it also, draws attention to legalism within Christianity, which rejected alternative expressions of spirituality and scientific theory and adhered instead to traditional biblical interpretations. Her mysterious entrance into history and her banishment from Jerusalem, which forces her into the wilderness, is significant since it indicates intolerance to cultural religious difference or new ideas she attempts to share with the Temple priests, while critiquing both organized religion and empire. 339 B.C.E is also significant because it predates the rise of the Christian era, wherein early Christian communities reinterpreted Mosaic law in new ways that propagated a call for radical social reform, a subject that resonated with Victorians who continued to draw on biblical tropes to arouse a sense of conscience towards the poor and colonized.

Ayesha’s insistence that there is no death, only change, attends to spiritual notions of resurrection or rebirth that emerged during this era, but it simultaneously entered debates on the transience of power structures that rise and fall over time. Ayesha’s presence prior to the Christian era is crucial to understanding her debates with the Temple priests who stirred the masses to stone her to death for her perceived heresy. Historically, the era to which Haggard refers was a time of tumult as Palestine was “colonized” and culturally “hybridized” by the Ptolemies and later by the Seleucids, creating factions within the community of Israel that fought for dominance as their religion and culture were under attack. The rejection of her wisdom is ascribed to Temple Judaism’s anxieties and ostensible intolerance, yet it also alludes to late-
Victorian Christian communities that vehemently resisted both science and new interpretations of scripture. Ayesha relates her experiences with the Temple priests to Holly, exclaiming:

‘Ah, the fierce-hearted wolves . . . the followers of Sense and many gods—greedy of gain and faction-torn. I can see their dark faces yet . . . —they broke my heart, those Jews, and made me look with evil eyes across the world, ay, and drove me to this wilderness, this place of a people that was before them. When I would have taught them wisdom in Jerusalem they stoned me, ay, at the Gate of the Temple those white-bearded hypocrites and Rabbis hounded the people on to stone me!’ (147-8).

The reference to “faction-torn” groups coincides with conflicts that erupted between “Judaizers” who resisted Greek culture and “Hellenizers” who adopted elements of Greek culture even within their religious practice. This reference alludes to Haggard’s own context as scientific understandings of human origins and non-literal interpretations of scripture created a splintering within the church. Through a comparison of ancient syncretism, which created divisions within religious communities, Haggard compares religious discord within his own context, as science questioned orthodoxy. His comparison of the two contexts gestures to the possibility of harmonizing science and religion in a manner that tolerates individual differences among believers. His invocation of this period also reflects his conviction that scripture should be interpreted in a myriad of ways to instill ethics within the current context.

Ayesha’s knowledge of messianic prophecies but lack of knowledge of the beginning of the Christian era places her firmly within a period when the Torah was the definitive authority on laws governing every aspect of Jewish life. It is approximately around this time that the Torah was being interpreted liberally, with an emphasis on what would become known as the Golden Rule. Ayesha’s distaste for the legalism of the Jewish authority is based on the rejection of the wisdom she attempts to share, but it is also a criticism of organized religion’s intolerance to
innovations in biblical interpretation. Ayesha’s embittered altercation with the Rabbis, considering the turbulent times, demonstrates the anxieties of the era as Jewish religious authorities that also wielded political power were averse to trusting new schools of thought perceived to be a threat to their religion and culture. By placing Ayesha within a critical era that is historically significant to imperialism and intense literary activity, Haggard critically examines his own era, rampant with contradictions and complications.

Victorian skepticism or ambivalence is narrativized through Ayesha who does not view any specific religion as having value. She informs Holly that all religions are the same, yet her assessment of human agency in working out salvation gestures to Protestant theology’s insistence on a personal responsibility not dependent on the church. She states:

The religions come and the religions pass, and the civilisations come and pass, and naught endures but the world and human nature. Ah! if man would but see that hope is from within and not from without—that he himself must work out his own salvation! He is there, and within him is the breath of life and a knowledge of good and evil as good and evil is to him. Thereon let him build and stand erect, and not cast himself before the image of some unknown God, modelled like his poor self, but with a bigger brain to think the evil thing, and a longer arm to do it. (183-4)

Her assessment of human nature indicates Darwinian notions of the possibility of an inherent evolution of ethics since, for Ayesha, humans have the potential to improve through their own agency, not through the intervention of an external deity. Her gesture to a notion that humans

31 Haggard may, in fact, be referring to the Temple priests, since Rabbis or Teachers were more associated with the synagogue than the Temple. Pharisaic Rabbis were also more open to interpreting the Law of Torah and by the 1st Century CE, believed in concepts of heaven and hell and resurrection – a common motif that emerges in the novel.
create concepts of an external God, while divinity lies within the individual soul, leans toward an ideology that espouses relativism instead of the universal understandings of good and evil that forms the basis of ethics, which is perhaps the reason for her ambivalence towards any ethical or moral position beyond her own. Through Ayesha, Haggard articulates a skepticism regarding belief in an omnipresent, omnipotent God, suggesting instead that humans have created God in their own imperfect image, a criticism of traditional belief espoused by those who found alternative spiritual positions separate from the church.

Ayesha’s lack of interest in the re-working of old religious belief systems may reflect the skepticism of the age; however, she is keenly interested in the Messiah, albeit in philosophical terms rather than theological. This is evident in her questions posed to Holly: “Oh, tell me of the philosophy of that Hebrew Messiah, who came after me, and who thou sayest doth now rule Rome, and Greece, and Egypt, and the barbarians beyond. It must have been a strange philosophy that He taught, for in my day the peoples would have naught of our philosophies. Revel and lust and drink, blood and cold steel, and the shock of men gathered in the battle—these were the canons of their creeds” (183). The philosophy of Jesus, a humble man who was not recognized as the promised Messiah of Israel, interests Ayesha since, like Jesus, her wisdom too was rejected. Ironically, Jesus’ humble origins and his message of peace and solidarity make him the ruler of the world, unlike Ayesha’s tyranny that controls through violence. Her understanding of Jesus as the “ruler” of past and present great empires also alludes to Britain’s cultural link to Christianity as a “Christian empire” since it is Christian inspired philosophy rather than orthodox theological teachings that continue to reverberate within the increasingly secularized culture. It is through nuanced connections between the empire and the church that
Haggard’s criticisms appear as he draws on the ancient world to condemn contemporary concerns regarding institutional power and corruption. Ayesha’s placement in the deuterocanonical period, wherein apocalyptic expectation became a subject of literary interest and new interpretations of Mosaic law were liberally reinterpreted to articulate a humanism based on ethics, demonstrates a shift from religious orthodoxy to a philosophical understanding of scripture independent of organized religion.

Both canonical and non-canonical sacred texts emerged from the fourth century B.C.E as authors built on previous texts to suit their own moment of crisis, suggesting that exegetical activity was inspired by critical moments in biblical history. Geoffrey Hartman asserts that through one text, multiple other texts “speak,” contributing to a myriad of discourses. According to Hartman, “the authority of the author, as that of the Biblical redactor or redactors, comes from the way the intertextual situation is handled; and in this authors are close to being redactors, even if they do not acknowledge it” (81). Haggard’s inversion and invocation of scripture in completely different contexts illustrate Hartman’s point, as reworking scripture in the novel is an act of exegesis that creates new meaning for ancient sacred texts in a modern context. As scientific theory, new interpretations of scripture, growing concerns regarding the ethics of imperial expansion, and the subsequent treatment of the colonized enter readily available literature, new ideas germinate and flourish in intellectual circles, but also within the household, as readers and authors “communicate” biblically inspired notions of ethics and empathy within their own historical moment.
2.6 Apocalyptic Elements in the Novel

The late nineteenth century was a time of rapid change as industrialization increased the hardships on the working poor at home and New Imperialism’s incursion in foreign spaces caused violent conflicts with other cultures. These injustices created crises for Victorians that had left organized religion completely, but also for those attempting to find solace and alternate spiritualities. The Bible, which had maintained its place in British Imperial culture as a source of ethics, provided a lens through which to make sense of violence and the marginalization of the poor. Apocalyptic writing addressed injustice by positing that a new world of justice and peace is possible through human agency, a message that brought comfort to religious and secular-minded people alike and made the genre an effective literary framework for critiquing injustice while offering hope for a reconstituted world. Haggard’s use of apocalyptic motifs is not unique or surprising since many authors such as Wells, Allen, and Schreiner employ a similar technique as they draw on familiar motifs as warnings against injustice while simultaneously offering hope for the disenfranchised. Since apocalyptic motifs are frequently deployed in the novel, I will examine them through a biblical lens, demonstrating how the Bible continued to serve as a quintessential source for ethical thinking.

Apocalyptic motifs resonate in “secular” literature as powerful political statements that promise hope for a better future where evil powers of the world will be swept away and replaced with a new order. These motifs serve as a sober warning to the wealthy and powerful to be mindful of a time when they will lose their power in favour of those they oppress. The writing on

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the walls of the caves of Kôr provides a voice from the past that relates the downfall of a once powerful civilization through plagues similar to those of the Exodus. The account of Junis, the Priest of Kôr tells of the devastation left by the plagues, as a once great nation is eradicated, leaving only a remnant, possibly the ancestors of Egypt, to escape. The cave-writings state: “No more shall the mighty feast in her halls, no more shall she rule the world, and her navies go out to commerce with the world. Kôr is fallen! and her mighty works and all the cities of Kôr, and all the harbours that she built and the canals that she made, are for the wolf and the owl and the wild swan, and the barbarian who comes after” (173). The caves, like the sherd of Amenartas, are repositories of historical knowledge that provide an ominous warning of the impermanence of great civilizations, offering a caution against the arrogance of imperial powers that fail to recognize their vulnerability. Exilic language that refers to a “remnant” combines with allusions to the plagues of Egypt, all carrying apocalyptic nuances on the destruction of power as a means of reversing the Fall of Genesis and returning the world to a prelapsarian state. Allusions to the fall, the law, and the need for a new world to replace a corrupt one are evident in several places in the novel, but perhaps most notably in the reference to Ezekiel 37.

Holly envisions the dry bones of a fallen civilization that will never regain its power, in contrast to Ezekiel who prophesies to the dry bones of Israel that will resurrect and regain its former glory. The prophet is urged to prophesy to the dry bones in order to reconstitute the tribes

33 Following the Babylonian exile of 586 B.C.E., the Israelites that survived the catastrophic siege to return to Judah were often referred to as the “remnant” of the tribes of Israel. Haggard deploys biblical exilic and Exodus language to underscore the impermanence of imperial powers.
once lost in time. The allusion to resurrection need not necessarily be viewed only in religious terms since it also carries political connotations that comment on the perpetual rise and fall of empires. According to Knight, “the Hebrew Bible makes repeated references to resurrection as a source of hope. One of the most famous biblical accounts of resurrection is chapter 31 of the Book of Ezekiel, a passage that sees Ezekiel glimpsing something ‘impossible’ when he is taken to the valley of dry bones and told to prophesy life. The valley of dry, lifeless bones offers a precursor to the vision of hell” (123). Knight’s explication of the biblical allusion indicates how this prophecy is expedient in invoking both the hope of resurrection while simultaneously offering a warning of destruction. The “vision of hell” presents a sobering image that resonates with anxieties regarding redemption and judgement, two key themes that emerge from She.

Outside orthodox Christianity, which advocated for resurrection and afterlife, more esoteric beliefs existed, such as those espoused by Alfred Russel Wallace who believed in the continued development of the soul after physical death. Haggard also professed to believe in an afterlife not quite in accordance with his Anglican affiliation but something that instead resembled belief in reincarnation. Interest in spiritualism that involved communication with the dead emerges in She, for instance when Job’s premonition of impending death involves communication with his deceased father, suggesting a belief in the continuance of the soul after physical death. Ayesha’s near immortality is deemed unnatural and the cause of her degeneration, yet her insistence that there is no death, only change, continues to reverberate throughout the novel, functioning as a means to ponder not only the afterlife but also the “death” and “rebirth” of imperial powers and religious institutions.

Wallace’s theory is reflected in Vincey’s warning to Holly to honour his promise.
regarding Leo’s care, alluding to the notion that continued life of the soul offers hope for the just, but also accountability for those who failed to act ethically in life. Apocalyptic nuances that posit hope in resurrection are evident in Haggard’s novel; however, the deployment of apocalyptic prophecy also operates on a secular level that registers anxieties regarding the loss of political power or cultural identity. As New Imperialism penetrated further into foreign spaces, encountering seemingly strange and unfamiliar practices, stereotypical biases raised the spectre of miscegenation and syncretism, which fed fears regarding the loss of cultural identity. Use of biblical motifs that were deeply ingrained in British cultural ideologies regarding justice opens up scripture in new ways that address humanism outside organized religion, essentially an act of exegesis not unlike the authors, editors, and redactors of sacred texts.

Knight asserts that secular interpretations of biblical allusions provide a framework for considering “human aspirations,” even though these allusions are not intended to reveal anything about the Divine (76). This is evident in common literary tropes that appear in fin de siècle novels, particularly those that resemble apocalyptic writings. These tropes frequently have several connotations that are not confined to any one interpretation any more than they address only the context in which they were written. Haggard’s emphasis on Moses and the law, which is subverted in Ayesha, is significant to both religious or secular readings of the novel because they deal with the consequences of a human transgression that has the potential to lead to annihilation. Before I discuss how a secularized understanding of apocalypse functions in the novel, I will briefly show it is significance to readers who read the novel through a spiritual lens.

The connection of the law to apocalypticism derives from Christian belief that because the law continues to be compromised, an eschatological event that would inaugurate the kingdom
of God is necessary. The Parousia, or Second Coming of Christ, would eradicate human iniquity, resulting in a new world where the law would be fulfilled by perfect, divine governance. Here, God is in control of human destiny; however, it is contingent on humans to work towards bringing about the return of Christ and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. Similarly, secularized interpretation of both the law and the need for renewal addresses crises in the world where justice is subverted by power, but emphasis is placed on human agency and not on a divine figure. Liberated of its religious connotations, apocalyptic writing stresses human aspirations as longing for an end to tyranny and the emergence of an ideal world, a concept that draws on sacred writings in a completely secular way. These reconfigured motifs address a critical moment in British imperial history, with the end of the century traditionally being a time for contemplating an impending eschatological event. The deployment of apocalyptic language and allusions as shared cultural knowledge can comfortably function in both secular or religious ways, with either position positing notions of hope in a world gone mad. Haggard’s use of apocalyptic motifs may be read through a religious or secular lens, since ultimately he is not proselytizing but focusing on the need for power to be wielded justly and responsibly, an interpretation that works in both religious or secular camps. In the next section, I will illustrate how Haggard creatively reconfigured familiar quotations, sometimes revising their meaning to subvert Ayesha’s tyranny.
2.7 Redacting, Reconfiguring, and Inversions of Familiar Biblical Quotations in *She*

For Haggard, and many of his contemporaries, such as Wells and Wallace, literal interpretations of scripture that formed the basis of doctrine were problematic because they usually involved a manipulation of scripture to lend credence to a church teaching. Haggard draws attention to this by disclosing how scripture may be invoked and reconfigured in an unethical fashion to coerce believers into compliance, which may be effective since the Bible is the final authority for Protestant Christians. Drawing on similar methodologies employed by biblical authors and redactors, Haggard weaves together familiar phrases placed out of context, thereby illustrating how scripture may be manipulated. This is evident in Ayesha’s speech preceding her judgement of the Amahaggers responsible for Mahomed’s death, exemplifying a creative use of scripture that would have resonated with Victorian readers. His reworking of scripture also critiques deeply rooted racial biases that viewed the racialized Other as deserving harsh treatment because Ayesha’s laws, which closely resemble familiar biblical motifs and quotations, are inverted to illustrate the violence of her imperial rule. In order to demonstrate Haggard’s sophisticated deployment of scripture, it is necessary to examine segments of the text beside the biblical quotations it reconfigures. Ayesha’s speech draws on several biblical quotations, which she frequently misquotes or misuses as justifications for her cruelty not unlike religious institutions that misused the Bible to further their own agendas. She accuses the Amahaggers, stating:

> Did I not bid you to hospitably entertain these strangers, whom now ye have striven to slay, and whom, had not they been brave and strong beyond the strength of men, ye would cruelly have murdered? Hath it not been taught to you from childhood that the law of She is an ever fixed law, and that he who breaketh it by so much as one jot or tittle shall perish?
And is not my lightest word a law? Have not your fathers taught you this, I say, whilst as yet ye were but children? Do ye not know that as well might ye bid these caves fall upon ye, or the sun to cease its journeying, as to hope to turn me from my courses, or make my word light or heavy, according to your minds? Well do ye know it, ye Wicked Ones. But ye are all evil—evil to the core—the wickedness bubbles up in you like a fountain in the spring-time. Were it not for me, generations since had ye ceased to be, for of your own evil way had ye destroyed each other. And now, because ye have done this thing, because ye have striven to put these men, my guests, to death, and yet more because ye have dared to disobey my word, this is the doom that I doom you to. That ye be taken to the cave of torture, and given over to the tormentors, and that on the going down of to-morrow’s sun those of you who yet remain alive be slain, even as ye would have slain the servant of this my guest. (emphasis added; 169)

Ayesha’s concern for hospitality is reminiscent of the story of Lot who protects his disguised angelic visitors from the men of Sodom (Genesis 19:1-29). Although Ayesha claims that she intended no harm to come to any of the visitors, her hospitality, the reader discovers, is contingent on race. Furthermore, any benevolence we may attribute to Ayesha’s hospitality to strangers is mitigated by her cruelty towards the people she rules. Her violent reaction against the Amahaggers who harmed Mahomed, Holly’s Muslim servant, inverts the meaning of biblical hospitality, as she turns her violence against her own people. Her cruelty, like that of the men of Sodom, resembles imperial power since the men represent a nation that was inhospitable to strangers, an ironic twist that subverts her concern for hospitality even as she shows no mercy for her servants. Although her order was to spare white visitors, she implies that Mahomed should not have been harmed because of his association with Leo and Holly. Haggard inverts the biblical meaning of hospitality to show how imperial violence perpetrated on the colonized is inconsistent with the spirit of scripture that welcomes and embraces the stranger.

Haggard also draws on Jesus’ law that is grounded in Mosaic law, through the use of direct quotations, citing well-known connections between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. Jesus’ invocation of the law as a final authority states that “not one letter, not one
stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18), but as Andrew M. Stauffer notes, in some translations the italicized section is replaced by “jot and tittle” (169). By the direct use of “jot and tittle,” as cited in Ayesha’s speech above, Haggard overtly calls to mind the Sermon on the Mount from which Ayesha (inadvertently) quotes, but the entire quotation also refers to the eschaton, or “end times,” which will definitively establish the perfect reign of God, making the law obsolete. The incongruence of Ayesha’s use of Jesus’ words derived from the Sermon on the Mount, which is primarily concerned with treating a “neighbour” as an extension of self, hits a discordant note as it is paired with Ayesha’s “imperial” violence, drawing attention to Christian hypocrisy but also the ability to selectively reinterpret scripture for nefarious purposes.³⁴

Haggard connects Ayesha’s wish to expunge the wickedness from the earth by annihilating the Amahaggers, a miscegenated race, to God’s destruction of the earth by flood because humankind was polluted through a form of miscegenation. Biblically, humankind became evil as a result of miscegenation as the Sons of Man, or angels, produced a hybridized race of giants that were “the heroes of old, warriors of renown” (Genesis 6:5). Ayesha’s pronunciation that the Amahaggers are “wicked ones” who are “evil to the core” is similar to Genesis 5:8: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was

³⁴ An example of this type of biblical interpretation may be seen in how scripture was used to justify slavery. Because Ham had been turned black for his sin and forced to serve his brothers, literal interpretations claimed that since Africans were descended from Ham they are destined to a life of slavery. Haggard uses biblical reference in juxtaposition to evil practices to remind readers that these violent acts are contrary to scripture, which forms the basis of ethical thinking religiously and secularly.
sorry that he made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, ‘I will blot it out from the earth the human beings I have created.’” The reference to the Nephilim, a breed of warlike giants, is a recurring motif that posits the miscegenation of the Amahaggers as “unnatural,” immoral, and incapable of thriving without firm governance. Later in the novel, this parallel is furthered as Ayesha’s destruction of a hybrid race she creates is inverted. While God destroys the Nephilim who have brought violence to the world, Ayesha destroys her creation because they were not aesthetically pleasing. This parallel comments on the capriciousness of her unchecked power and dangerous knowledge she employs to both create and destroy. This motif will be further investigated when I discuss ethics in scientific experimentation later in this chapter.

The novel, like the sherd of Amenartas, may be viewed as a cultural relic, yet it goes beyond this to serve as a historical repository of nineteenth-century ideologies that grapple with the question of how to address ethics in an increasingly secular world. Haggard, like many authors of his era, did not necessarily advocate for any religious position, yet his work expresses a reconfigured version of spirituality that prizes the virtues of ethics and empathy in response to the violence occurring within imperial spaces. Through a conflation of two seemingly unlikely disciplines, religion and Darwinian evolutionary science, each arguing for common ancestry, social constructs that set parameters around who could be considered “neighbours” were ostensibly restructured to include the colonized; however, inevitably, deeply ingrained racial and cultural biases conflicted with humanitarian notions of “sameness.” Reconfigured, redacted, and overt use of scripture augments Darwinian science, which lacks a definitive argument for an evolution of ethics, since scripture was an effective means of negotiating an ethics of care for
those who left the church completely, but also for those who expressed new forms of spirituality that deviated from orthodoxy.

The influence of German scholarship in contributing to new, vibrant, and meaningful understandings of scripture cannot be ignored, since innovative ways of reading and interpreting scripture did not preclude accepting Darwinian theory, allowing readers across the spectrum of religious belief to engage in thoughts of what humanism meant within a culture that prided itself on civility. The interconnectivity between humans, derived from both Darwinian theory and non-literal interpretations of scripture, allowed religious, atheist, and agnostic thinkers to find concordance in a range of meanings that emerged from literature, as scripture was deployed in numerous ways. As Knight contends, a plurality of Christian thought emerged during the late nineteenth century; however, beyond ideologies identified as “Christian thought” there existed numerous spiritual and secular notions of humanism separate of any organized religion (4). This assertion is evident in Leo Michael’s pamphlet entitled, *She: An Allegory of the Church* (1889), whereby Michael illustrates the versatility of Haggard’s novel.

### 2.8 Leo Michael’s Allegorical Reading of *She*

Leo Michael’s 1889 publication of *She: An Allegory of the Church* provides concrete evidence that Victorian readers recognized biblical and theological elements in the novel. At stake then, is the misguided insistence that *fin de siècle* literature is secular, since Haggard’s novel, as demonstrated in Michael’s pamphlet, negotiates tensions between science and religion, frequently offering excoriating critiques of the static nature of church doctrines in light of new scientific understandings of, for example, human origins. Susan Colón argues that scholars, such
as Georg Lukács and George Levine who espouse the secularization hypothesis in Victorian studies are, “blind to the religious culture . . . of the period” (31-32.) Since twenty-first-century readers may not be as familiar with scripture as our Victorian counterparts were, significant references that elucidate both religious and cultural shifts need to be carefully explored.

Criticisms of the church as an institution carried political connotations that emerge in fin de siècle literature, as Britain continued to view itself as a “Christian empire.” In many respects, church and empire were inextricably linked, inasmuch as the Church of England maintained its connection with political conservatism. The language employed by the church, which viewed itself as a moral authority, enters political discourses of difference that sometimes justify the “sacrifice” of indigenous lives for the benefit of Britain. This is frequently evident in discourses on bringing the “light of Christ” to distant corners of the “benighted” empire in order to “civilize” the “savage.” Critics of the church argued against its legalism and rejection of alternate beliefs, yet the criticism also entered political discourse on the power of the church as an “imperial power” in its own right. According to Michael, She critiques the church, which has lost ground over time, because of its insistence on dogma that refuses to accept innovative modes of thought that appear to conflict with a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Michael interprets Ayesha as the “Church,” while the other characters are assigned elaborate allegorical meanings. Leo represents “Intuition” and Holly “Science” while Ustane is “Spiritualism,” here rejected by the church for its independence from orthodox practices and beliefs. Through these allegorical associations Michael asserts that just as Holly (Science) 35 Refer to Gerald Monsman’s H. Rider Haggard on the Imperial Frontier: The Political & Literary Contexts of His African Romances.

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35 Refer to Gerald Monsman’s H. Rider Haggard on the Imperial Frontier: The Political & Literary Contexts of His African Romances.
nurtured Leo (Intuition), the son of Conscience (Leo’s Father) and Religious Enthusiasm (Leo’s deceased mother), the harmonization of science and intuition could flourish as a unity of two seemingly disparate concepts. Michael states: “Faith is not yet dead on the earth. Under the heroic constancy and devotion of science to Truth, Intuition has grown from childhood to youth. He has been made acquainted with the splendor and marvelous possibilities of his inheritance. Together with Science, his faithful guardian, he has started on the eventful journey that is to clear up the mystery surrounding it. This is well. Intuition must not despise Science. They must journey together” (29-30). Michael overtly references the many spiritual sects, such as Christian Science, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, and Hermetic Philosophy, which became popular during the late nineteenth century, as disputes between science and religion created a shift in religious thought. Michael asserts that spiritualism and the church, like Ustane and Ayesha, must struggle until Spiritualism is killed since, like Haggard, he does not see certain forms of spiritualism as having much substance or efficacy in redemption (48). Although numerous alternate belief systems had grown out of re-conceptualizations of religious doctrines and dogmas, many communities did not identify themselves as Christian, even as they continued to retain some aspects of Christianity.

According to Michael, the Church’s “truth” is based on an erroneous understanding of Christianity, since the focus on the dead body of Christ, similar to the preserved bodies in Ayesha’s caves, places undue emphasis on the body, instead of the soul. This is evident in Ayesha’s veneration of Kallikrates’ corpse, which brings her no consolation or hope since her immortality denies her repose in an afterlife where she may be reunited with her murdered lover. Despite her ancient knowledge and arcane power she can resurrect Kallikrates’ body not his soul,
causing her untold suffering so that her despairing cries resemble those of a “soul in hell.” In anguish she exclaims, “Of what use is it to recall the semblance of life when I cannot recall the spirit? Even if thou stoodest before me thou would’st not know me, and could’st but do what I bid thee. The life in thee would be my life, and not thy life, Kallikrates” (163). Ayesha’s grief proceeds from her worship of the deceased Kallikrates, who she believes may be reincarnated at an indeterminate point in time. Since she has no more power to bring about his complete restoration than did the priests who embalmed and prepared the elite members of Kôr for a journey through the afterlife in hopes of resurrection, Ayesha haunts her tomb-like home, consumed by grief and bitterness. Ayesha recognizes that the soul is a crucial component inherent in humans, and a site that offers hope for renewal, yet she continues to venerate Kallikrates’ corpse while postponing her own death and possible reunion with her lover in an afterlife.

According to Michael, the shift from the body, which is subject to death and corruption, to a focus on the immortal soul, is narrativized in the novel as a direct attack on the church’s veneration of the body of Christ, a corporeal form that cannot provide hope for social reform on earth or real consolation from despair. For Michael, it is the resurrection of the soul and an afterlife that ensures hope. The resurrected Christ, which for Christians lives in the current moment, provides hope since it is through Christ’s living example that social change can occur. Michael asserts that emphasis on the physical or “way of the sense” is a barrier to recognizing the value of the eternal soul, wherein true hope exists, claiming that “‘The way of the Spirit is the death of sense’ – nail this ‘way of sense’ to the cross of Christ until you say ‘It is finished’” (17).

Michael claims that the emphasis on the body has perpetuated blood-atonement
theologies, which require suffering, while failing to recognize the primacy of resurrection as the central theme of scripture, which offers hope of an afterlife. The church, like Ayesha, has the potential to be a force of good in the world, yet for all its promise and beauty, its intolerance and corrupted power brings carnage instead of peace. He writes:

Behold the Church, lovely as no other power ever was or is. Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome – none of the mighty empires of the past are to be compared to her. All the best among the living, growing nations of the modern world is of the Church: the finest buildings in all our cities; the free gifts of loving hearts; her spires the jewels in every landscape; her charities smoothing the pillows of the sick, comforting with hope the dying, caring for the widow and orphan. Her truth though clouded with error, giving wing to the loftiest flights of genius, pathos to sublimest utterances of oratory, most entrancing harmonies to music, and noblest themes to arts. And yet, passion has debased her love. Cruel death in dungeon, at the stake, in civil strife and awful carnage, are the evils she has done. Watching through the ages for the resurrection of her Lord – his return in glory and triumph – in doubt and denial – has been her sorrow. (25-6)

Michael connects imperial power to the institution of the church, emphasizing the fact that historically, the most powerful empires have lost their way and ended in destruction, even as the church has set its course on a destination that will end in a similar loss. For Michael, liberal biblical interpretation and a harmonization with scientific theories will result in the continuance of the church, albeit as a renewed institution that has jettisoned its corruptive power and intolerance towards alternative religious perspectives at home and in the far reaches of the empire.

In accordance with Haggard, who revised his view of Anglicanism to integrate new understanding of concepts of afterlife and a cautious acknowledgement of science, Michael suggests that the church needs to accept new interpretations of scripture that do not preclude science. He argues that the church must be tolerant of other modes of practicing faith, turning from the brutality of its past violent history. Religious views that gesture to common ancestry,
yet simultaneously continue to relegate some members of the human family to be “aliens” instead of “neighbours,” perpetuate New Imperialist agendas that benefitted from subjugating indigenous peoples and expropriating land. Perhaps most noteworthy in Michael’s allegorical exposition of the novel is his rejection of blood atonement theology, a concept that began to lose ground in light of many wars, armed conflicts, and rampant epidemics that claimed the lives of many. Notions of self-sacrifice emerge in fin de siècle literature in both religious and secular ways, which celebrate virtues of empathy and compassion, devoid of theological concepts of atonement through blood-sacrifice integral to Christianity.

By the end of the century, many Christian and secular beliefs revised doctrines of blood atonement that once had held a place of prominence within British imperial culture. Notions of dying for the empire continued to resonate, particularly among missionaries and the military, yet traditional blood-atonement began to compete with modern theological ideologies and secularized views that saw self-sacrifice as virtues that propose “goodness for goodness sake” instead of for expiation of the sin of the nation. Haggard’s novel engages in discourse on the subject of substitutionary atonement, as evident in Ayesha’s violent miscarriage of justice perpetrated to deter infractions on the part of the Amahaggers. Ayesha’s scapegoating of Amahaggers leads to a criticism of ideologies that propose the punishment of one for the good of the many, compounded by her use of terror to maintain power. While the novel critiques substitution or blood-atonement, Haggard’s reconfiguration and inversion of scriptures seem to be generally critical of literal interpretations instead of commenting specifically on any one theological stance, yet his admiration of self-sacrifice rooted in empathy and compassion resisted theological notions of blood-atonement. By the end of his life, however, Haggard’s theological
position changed as he embraced blood atonement and insisted on a historical reading of the gospels. Jan-Melissa Schramm claims that a shift in soteriological\textsuperscript{36} thought from substitutionary theology that demanded blood-atonement to a theology that centred on Christ as a moral example found meaning within British culture as it began to rethink the idea that, “it is better that one man should die for the sake of the nation” (John 11:50), a belief fraught with political nuances. \textsuperscript{37} For Schramm, competing theologies at the end of the century created a degree of skepticism resulting in a plurality of thought that shifted from Trinitarian theology’s insistence on blood-atonement. Unitarian theology, which had found its way into mid-nineteenth century social-problem fiction, aroused questions about concepts of sin, repentance, and atonement, precipitating a necessity for organized religion to re-evaluate its doctrines on atonement. Schramm writes:

By the end of the decade, liberal theologians were of the opinion that enhanced engagement with Unitarian thought had damaged traditional beliefs in substitutionary atonement beyond repair. For the Unitarians, human nature was not essentially evil: Christ did not die in any ‘substitutionary’ sense for the sins of believers. On one hand, this offered arguably less comfort than Trinitarian Anglicanism – it prioritized the role of human effort in the redemptive process. On the other hand, it freed theology from what many saw as an unsavory paradox – that the central tenet of Trinitarian Christianity is the death of one innocent victim in place of the guilty masses. (5)

The change in theological positions on sacrifice and atonement is evident in the fin de siècle novel, as acts of self-sacrifice are meaningful acts derived from a sense of human love and friendship, rather than substitution for the collective wages of sin.

As literature propagated new ideas on the meaning of atonement, self-sacrificial acts,

\textsuperscript{36} Soteriology is the study of salvation doctrine.
\textsuperscript{37} Peter Abelard’s (1079-1142) atonement theology of moral influence suggested that Jesus’ death provided a moral example of dying for the love of humankind rather than as a blood sacrifice for the expiation of collective sin. See Hans Boersma’s Violence, Hospitality and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition (2004) for traditional atonement theologies.
such as those demonstrated through Holly and Ustane who placed themselves in harm’s way for the sake of friendship or love, are applauded as admirable actions rooted in virtues of compassion and empathy. Popular literature promoted new ways of engaging in ethical thought, with notions of self-sacrifice carrying multiple meanings across a wide range of religious beliefs; however, it also entered “secular” fiction as a way of commenting on inherent human virtues. Revised theological positions and new interpretations of scripture not only found harmony with scientific notions of interconnectivity but also brought about change in Christian beliefs of atonement, an important development during a time of violent encounters that resulted in heavy casualties among soldiers and the colonized in imperial spaces.

Michael’s biblical reading of the novel as an allegory of the church may be extended to a reading that allegorizes She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed in terms of empire, which is especially relevant since Michael compares the church to empires (25). Haggard uses analogy to comment on the similarities between ancient and modern imperialism and its problematic relationship to both the “colonizer” and the “colonized,” contradicting racial theories pre-dating Darwin’s theory of evolution that asserted common ancestry. By the end of the nineteenth century, Darwinian science and new interpretations of scripture argued for common ancestry yet politicized racial theories continued to abound, the Bible frequently cited as a means of relegating black races as inferior but still members of the human race. Michael vehemently objects to the erroneous use of scripture as he expresses hope for the emergence of a socially conscious church, which will resist imperial power and embrace an ethical stance derived from concepts of interconnectedness. Michael’s assessment of the novel as an allegory of the church
opens several new avenues through which to read She; however, Michael tends to limit his interpretation to the church, while vaguely alluding to its collusion with imperial violence.

2.9  **Darwinian Fears of Regression, Degeneration, and Racial Science**

_She_ narrativizes late-nineteenth century anxieties that emerged as a secularized cultural shift occurred in response to new evolutionary theory. Although Darwin suggested that humans, like some higher ordered animals, may show empathy for their own kind, he never definitely advocated for an evolution of ethics through the mechanism of natural selection (Descent 100-101). Darwin did not specifically engage in teleological thinking regarding forward progression through evolution and only dealt with notions of regression and degeneration in a perfunctory way. His ponderings, however, influenced social Darwinism’s endorsement of racial hierarchies, which suggested the possibility of degeneration and regression in “lower” classes and races.

While Darwin did not overtly propose an evolution of ethics, Thomas Huxley theorized that as humans evolved and formed societies, antisocial tendencies were curtailed by fear of public opinion among peers. For Huxley, who rejected Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinism, the development of human ethics resulted in an advancement of humanist impulses, such as sympathy, empathy, and compassion, which tended to override the brutality of the struggle for existence. He theorizes: “But it is none the less true that, since law and morals are restraints upon the struggle for existence between men and society, the ethical process is in opposition to the principle of the cosmic process, and tends to the suppression of the qualities best fitted for success in that struggle” (31). Huxley’s dilemma reflects anxieties experienced by those who had left the church since science could not support claims for an evolution of ethics; however, his
revision of evolutionary theory to include an ethical component and his insistence on common ancestry had implications for how racial difference was perceived.

Haggard’s novel complicates these theories since he tends to support notions of a racial hierarchy, attributing immorality dependent first on racial designation and then on variations of skin colour, while simultaneously casting Ayesha, a white queen of possible Arabian descent, as degenerate. The “lost” African people who once occupied Kôr are viewed in atavistic terms since their “purity” renders them “superior” to mixed race peoples and connected to “superior” Anglo-Saxon races through common ancestry. Ayesha’s miscegenated subjects are cast as degenerates; however, the fairer skinned Amahaggers, such as Billali and Ustane are depicted as “more civilized” and closer to Europeans than the others. Even in the case of these characters, Ustane is privileged over Billali due to her distaste for consuming human flesh and her unmitigated compassion and empathy, suggesting that cannibalism is only endemic in “lower” classes or races. Such complications are evident in the depiction of the Amahagger’s brutality and Ayesha’s merciless imposition of justice, which both attest to notions of degenerate behaviour despite racial difference. Furthermore, it could be argued that all Haggard’s characters display forms of regression and degeneracy, which is not solely contingent on race but on class designation, physical, and behavioural traits not entirely associated with British notions of superiority. Interestingly, Haggard not only draws on Victorian racial theory, which emerged from anthropological and ethnological studies, but also from erroneous biblical interpretations, which were frequently employed to justify overt racism.

Names are important since through biblical names and the use of common Hebrew words Haggard divulges cultural biases towards the colonized. The Amahaggers are described in ways
that allude to biblical genealogies of Israel’s patriarchal line, a trope that reoccurs as Ayesha and the extinct “superior” African race buried in the caves of Kôr are thought to be descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. The Amahaggers, conversely, are also descended from the lost tribes; however, their descent is thought to be from peoples not included in the Abrahamic covenant and, therefore, considered “unclean.” The use of Hebrew words and biblical names that were well known to Victorians suggests specific ways to read the novel through a revised and perhaps, secularized approach. Racial hierarchies in scripture were placed within their proper historical context as German biblical scholarship challenged literal interpretations that equated epidermal “blackness” with sinfulness and inferiority. This fresh understanding illustrates etymologies in scripture as sometimes mythological, but more frequently as a polemic against Israel’s enemies. A revised understanding of scriptural racial politics is deployed in contradictory ways, as Haggard sometimes presents the Amahaggers as villains while at other times as victims. Haggard’s use of key names and words gestures to familial ties among the various peoples who appear in the novel, alluding to notions of connectivity postulated in Darwinian theory. *Ama*, translates to “mother” in Hebrew and “hagger” alludes to Hagar, the Egyptian concubine of the first Patriarch, Abraham, and mother of Ishmael. Ishmael, although denied the Patriarchal blessing, is the father of the Arabian nations, a common ancestor of both Ayesha and the

38 Ritual “uncleanliness” was not characterized by “pollution” as noted by Mary Douglas but was more concerned with notions of order and disorder, of holiness and the profane (11). Haggard’s use of scriptural names to relegate the Amahagger as “outsiders” draws on both literal and contextualized understandings of scripture. His use of scripture in this instance is ambivalent since it both endorses and subverts racial stereotyping.
Amahaggers. Ayesha, pronounced as “Asher,” alludes to one of the names of Jacob’s (or Israel’s) sons, with the name meaning “happy.” Asher, born to the concubine Zilpah, was by law the son of the matriarch Leah who at his birth proclaimed, “Happy am I. For women will call me happy” (Genesis 30:13). The inversion of Ayesha’s name is significant since its irony draws attention to her extreme unhappiness and bitterness, which is the result of her violent passion, while creating a modicum of sympathy for her otherwise reprehensible character.

The overt biblical associations with ancient Egypt and the lost tribes of Israel illustrate how race or nationality is drawn from biblical hierarchies. The Egyptians and the descendants of the Abrahamic line that is severed from Israel are, in the Hebrew Scriptures, viewed as inferior, although not due to racial markers such as skin colour, hair texture, or physical features. The Israelites considered the Egyptians and several other nations as inferior due to sinful practices, not racial difference, a justification continued by Victorians who accepted common ancestry yet viewed darker races as degenerative due to “primitivism.” The community of Israel is prohibited from marrying races descended from Ishmael and following the Exodus they are prohibited from returning to Egypt, the land of their captivity. Biblical purity laws extend to the Canaanites (children of Cain, and Hamites, the descendants of Noah’s son, Ham) who are frequently believed to be black, the etiology of their “blackness” supposedly due to their iniquity. The prohibitions against marrying into these tribes are based on laws that have rendered these tribes as “unclean” due to the transgressions of their patriarchs. Procreation with these tribal peoples also weakens ancestral land rights that Israel has acquired through birthright; therefore,

39 Stauffer suggests that Hagar may also have based the name “Amahagger” on the Arabic word “hajar” meaning “stone” (91).
biblically, marriage restrictions were partially intended to keep Israelite lands intact and not to
denigrate other ethnicities based on racial markers such as skin tone (Meyers 19-20).

Haggard’s strategic use of these biblical motifs regarding race and ethnicity was
significant since these allusions were frequently employed in contradictory ways. On one hand,
they argue for interconnectivity, since those cut off from the Abrahamic covenant were closely
related to Israel, yet due to the ostensible iniquity of their ancestors, these distant relatives could
not be received on an equal footing, in much the same way that the Amahaggers could never be
equal to Ayesha. Haggard’s use of biblical text illustrates how the authority of scripture, which
was frequently deployed to subjugate the Other who was deemed “unclean” and in need of
civilization, could also be interpreted in terms of consanguinity or Darwin’s theory of common
ancestry, thus reworking and connecting ancient notions of alterity to his own context.

Haggard’s admiration of Darwin and scientific exploration is evident in the multitude of
references that indicate a keen interest in scientific advances of the era, yet through Ayesha’s
eugenic experiments and medical knowledge, Haggard demonstrates some ambivalence to a
scientific experimentation that infringes on nature. A man of science, Holly is perplexed by
Ayesha’s power over life and death, speculating that her power is derived from supernatural
means. Ayesha insists that her power to heal is not magic but “scientific” knowledge not yet
understood as science, which she acquired over two thousand years. Holly’s conversation with
Ayesha reveals that her “scientific” knowledge transgresses ethical codes as she engages in
experimentation that is immoral, as evident in her servants who are bred to be mute. Ayesha
informs Holly:
They are mutes thou knowest, deaf they are and dumb, and therefore are the safest of servants, save to those who can read their faces and their signs. I bred them so – it hath taken many centuries and much trouble; but at last I have succeeded. Once I succeeded before, but the race was too ugly, so I did away with it; but now, as thou seest, they are otherwise. Once, too, I bred a race of giants, but after a while Nature would no more of it, and it died away. (152)

Ayesha’s revelation alludes to the possibilities for science to use natural selection as a means of artificially breeding species fit to rule, yet through Ayesha, Haggard also critiques the dangers of a science that seeks to circumvent natural development. Her race of ugly mutes is wantonly destroyed by her own hand while her giants become extinct as “Nature” or an evolutionary mechanism, which only allows the fittest to survive, intervenes and corrects her abomination.

The presence of giants, an unnatural race like the pre-diluvian Nephilim of Genesis 6:4, comments on “dangerous” scientific knowledge that may lead to human experimentation, but it also alludes to miscegenation. Questions of hybridity and reproduction entered discourses that originated in ethnology and later, in the emerging field of anthropology, becoming a subject of debate in biological sciences that confirmed racial mixing did not create a “hybrid” race separate from humans. Human experimentation is critiqued in the novel as Ayesha’s actions are viewed as repugnant by Holly, who fears scientific knowledge that usurps God’s creative power, yet such “religious” thoughts are inconsistent with Holly’s admiration for the rationality of science. Holly’s ambivalence indicates the mixed reactions some Victorians experienced as scientific advances caused them to question traditional religious beliefs, resulting in a reinterpretation of scripture, such that it could be harmonized with scientific theories of interconnectivity. Haggard employs familiar biblical allusions to speculate on scientific ethics that infringe on the purview of the divine, a concern he articulates in his biography as he contemplates human arrogance that removes God from the unfolding of human history. While biblical allusions resonated among
those affiliated with organized religion, it also provided a means of thinking about ethics in a secular way for those who left the church.

Haggard uses biblical motifs to indicate the limitations of scientific medicine as Ayesha heals Leo on the third day, the healing closely resembling Jesus’ raising of Lazarus (John 11:38-44). Ayesha, like Jesus, fears that her intervention is too late, yet unlike Lazarus, Leo is not dead but rather near death. Ayesha’s limitations in raising the dead conflict with her ability to prolong life almost indefinitely, expressing cultural anxieties around what occurred to the soul after natural death occurred. For religiously minded readers, death is the natural end of the physical body; however, the soul continues its journey in an afterlife to find peace or torment as a consequence of the life lived on earth. Ayesha’s longevity is unnatural and the source of her degeneration, a concept Haggard articulates as Ayesha’s beautiful body inevitably succumbs to a spectacular death, rife with biblical and Darwinian overtones. The novel conveys a host of anxieties around death and the afterlife; however, it also expresses warnings regarding scientific experimentation on humans. The concern is the propensity of such experiments to bring about disastrous consequences, a theme prevalent in the fiction popularized by H.G Wells in his scientific romance novellas, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *The War of the Worlds* (1897), and *The Invisible Man* (1897).

2.10 Contextualizing the Fall: Regression as a Consequence of Hubris

New biblical exegesis that posited non-literal interpretations of creation mythology viewed the “knowledge of good and evil” gained through consuming the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden as usurping God’s wisdom. Original sin was not the consequence of sexual impropriety so
often promoted through fundamentalist Christian belief, but rather was the usurpation of knowledge by the first humans who were unprepared to utilize this knowledge appropriately. She poses philosophical questions regarding human’s inability to fully grasp the power such knowledge brings, speculating on how humankind, with all its imperfections, may abuse this power as exemplified in Ayesha’s eugenic experimentation. The abuse of knowledge and power is a fatal flaw attributed to Ayesha who is destroyed by her hubris in true Darwinian fashion.

Haggard’s novel teaches a moral lesson on the hubris of science as it expounds on the unnaturalness of immortality and the overindulgence in vanity, yet it also gestures to Ayesha’s dismissal of all religions as a source of her immorality. In a Letter to the Editor of The Spectator 22 January 1887, Haggard responds to reviews that critique Ayesha’s ambiguous and almost sympathetic end. He justifies Ayesha’s evil nature as a result of two thousand years of living among the dead as she grieved Kallikrates’ death due to her violent fit of passion, claiming that “love is her saving grace” even though she is not moved by any religious or spiritual sense of morality. Haggard expresses Ayesha’s indifference to religion and a Deity as a fatal flaw that is a source of her arrogance. Holly, a man who rejects religion yet appears at times to endorse Christian teachings, claims that her dismissal of reprisals lies in an assumption that her power renders her immune to punishment or correction. In the Letter to the Editor, Haggard writes:

To her, all religion is but ‘a subtler form of selfishness and terror for the end.’ In the insolence of her strength and loveliness, she lifts herself up against the Omnipotent. Therefore, at the appointed time she is swept away by It with every circumstance of shame and hideous mockery. Vengeance, more heavy because more long-delayed, strikes her in her proudest part, her beauty; and in her lover’s very presence she is made to learn the thing she really is, and what is the end of earthly wisdom and of the loveliness she prized so highly. (288)
Through Holly, Haggard ponders how relativity is dangerous for one not guided by an ethical and moral sense of responsibility. Holly connects Ayesha’s rejection of all religion and their accompanying mandates to act ethically as a form of arrogance assumed by one who sets herself up as equal to a divine being and, therefore, immune to the consequences of immoral behaviour. If Ayesha denied the power or existence of a deity, then she could continue to act with impunity. Haggard ponders this question in the final chapter of his biography as he contends that fear of, and faith in, God is a motivator to embrace a stringent ethical code.40

Ethical laws that govern virtues, such as empathy and compassion, are intrinsic human traits that, according to Darwin and Huxley, separate us from animals. The concept is complicated because the Darwinian theory of common ancestry places humankind within the animal kingdom. Huxley, refusing to accept the idea that humans have not transcended their animal nature speculates that an “evolution of ethics” is possible, an idea that Haggard addresses in the novel as Holly ponders: “But her talk gave me a fresh thrill of fear; for what may not be possible to a being who, unconstrained by human law, is also absolutely unshackled by a moral sense of right and wrong, which, however partial and conventional it may be, is yet based, as our conscience tells us, upon the great wall of individual responsibility that marks off mankind from the beasts?” (192-193). Holly’s ponderings suggest that the source of morality and ethics is not

40 By this point in time (1925), Haggard had renounced his interest in alternate expressions of spirituality and had returned to an altered yet orthodox practice of Anglicanism. His former deviations from Christianity in favour of the quest for knowledge promised by science he now viewed as satanic temptation. He continues to view Christianity and the teachings of Christ as guides to ethical and moral behaviour; however, in contrast to his ideas expressed in She, his views on the Bible no longer support a secular reading of scripture as beneficial to salvation, since for Haggard such an interpretation without religious conviction is meaningless.
found in Darwinism alone but is derived from religious concepts that continued to have value in defining ethics. For Victorians, Darwinian notions of humanity’s connection with the animal kingdom from which they evolved suggest a risk of degeneration or regression to a primitive form, as evident in Ayesha who is more monstrous than human.

Her degeneration, which Haggard attributed to her years of living among the dead as she bitterly mourned the death of Kallikrates, leads to death as she regresses first to an aged hag, then a monkey state, before disintegrating into ashes or dust, in an allusion to biblical references that posit, “dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19). In evolutionary terms, her entrance into the sacred flame for a second time results in a “devolution” as she regresses to an animal and then mineral or non-organic state. She’s ending carries strong Darwinian overtones on human evolution from lower life forms; however, it is ethical evolution that is given a place of privilege as it enters critical discourse on the treatment of the Other.

Haggard’s reconfiguring of scripture demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible, usually to argue for human virtues; however, Haggard masterfully weaves together a myriad of redacted quotations from several sections of the Bible to demonstrate how biblical authority could be used in manipulative and dangerous ways. Deferring to biblical authority during a period characterized as an era of agnosticism or atheism is not necessarily bound to a strong religious fervour on the part of the author or his readers, but rather, as a means of communicating human virtues of empathy and compassion as principles that were not found in Darwinism. Biblical tropes are frequently divested of all religious connotations to allude to well-established notions of ethics that formed the basis of ethical laws within British imperial culture, yet when pressed, scripture could also be erroneously and deliberately deployed to maintain
deeply rooted racial biases. This is evident in the ambivalent manner in which Haggard depicts
the Amahaggers as both victims of imperialism and perpetrators of great violence that needs to
be obliterated through firm governance.

Racial theories that infantilized and marginalized the Other and Darwinian theories that
claimed all races descended from a common ancestor, while categorically affirming the
“superiority” of Europeans who were fit to rule, posed a set of contradictions endemic to an era
confronted with a crisis of faith. Contextualizing Genesis creation narratives that unambiguously
posited common ancestry alleviated some anxieties around recognizing the colonized as a
“neighbour”; however, a sense of racial superiority manifested through paternalism continued to
be detrimental to indigenous peoples across the globe. Such paternalistic ideologies are reflected
and subverted in She as the novel strives to critique imperial subjugation of the racialized Other.

2.11 Conclusion

She draws on scientific theories, religious motifs, and new emerging ideas on spiritualism, to
contemplate how transgression in this life may impact the afterlife, a subject of much interest to
Haggard and Victorians who engaged in esoteric forms of spiritual practice. From these
interstices, a hybridized humanism rooted in both non-literal interpretations of scripture and
evolutionary sciences emerge, not to convert, or bring the apostate back into the fold, but to
instill ideologies that support a humane treatment of the colonized. Haggard does not suggest
that human virtues, such as compassion and empathy, proceed from a superior intellect, nor from
racial designation, but rather from culturally embedded theological tenets that have their
foundation in scripture and elements of Darwinism that posit an “evolution of ethics,” a notion
that Darwin doubted, even as he proposed evolution as a possible explanation for human virtues.

The manner in which Haggard employs and conflates overt biblical motifs with Darwinian theory to address contemporary ethical concerns suggests some fresh perspectives on the novel as a cultural relic. The emphasis on Darwinian theory and a new understanding of spirituality evident in the novel, is critical to understanding how, as religious institutions lost their influence and science failed to provide definitive evidence for an “evolution of ethics” in humans, a hybridized humanism that combines elements of both science and liberal interpretations of scripture fills the void for Victorians who had left the church. As noted by Michael, the overwhelming reception of Haggard’s “widely read” novel attests to changing views that willingly embraced both science and contextualized scripture as a medium to enter discourses on ethics (8).41

The late nineteenth century is frequently viewed as a secular era, yet the plurality of beliefs outside the church continues to rely on the ethics found in scripture. Mosaic law that mandates rigorous ethical treatment of a “neighbour” and Darwinian theory that claimed common ancestry enters fin de siècle novels in innovative ways demonstrating how scripture had not lost its value as a moral guide. Like Haggard, many authors of fin de siècle fiction, such as Wells and Allen, have written biographical accounts of their own “evolution” of religious thought that hybridized science and other modes of spiritual belief, illustrating epistemological shifts that occurred as a consequence of scientific advancement. Leo Michael’s allegorical reading of She clearly articulates how biblical and religious readings were possible, since, for

41 See Stauffer’s edition of She to view the numerous reviews that were published in newspapers and magazines that attest to the wide readership of the novel.
Michael, Haggard’s novel conflated science and religion to propose reform within the church and the empire.

Agnostics and atheists found meaning in liberal interpretations of scripture that posited the Golden Rule in completely secular ways, thereby permitting reader agency in determining a personal interpretation. The versatility of new interpretations of scripture, proposed through German biblical criticism, combined with notions of interconnectedness among human races derived from science, serves as a means of propagating a humanism that functioned in both religious and secular ways. The fin de siècle novel reflects the discursive power of literature in shaping new ideas of humanism across a wide spectrum of readers during a turbulent time.
Chapter Three: Darwinian Dreams and Nightmares

Throughout the history of the western world, the Scriptures, Jewish and Christian, have been the great instigators of revolt against the worst forms of clerical and political despotism. The Bible has been the Magna Carta of the poor and of the oppressed; down to modern times, no State has had a constitution in which the interests of the people are so largely taken into account, in which the duties, so much more than privileges, of rulers are insisted upon, as that drawn up for Israel in Deuteronomy and in Leviticus; nowhere is the fundamental truth that the welfare of the State, in the long run, depends on the uprightness of the citizen so strongly laid down. Assuredly, the Bible talks trash about the rights of man; but it insists on the equalities of duties, on the liberty to bring about that righteousness which is somewhat different from struggling for “rights”; on the fraternity of taking thought for one’s neighbor as for one’s self


3.1 Introduction

H.G. Wells’s The Time Machine (1895) imagines the repercussions of imposed class specialization in Darwinian terms, suggesting that curtailing interaction between the classes could result in a physical, moral, and ethical degeneration of humankind. Through an “unnatural selection” precipitated by a stringent division between the leisured middle class and the impoverished working class, two distinct races, the Eloi and the Morlocks evolve, presenting a host of commentaries on the meaning of common ancestry in relation to alterity. Through the Time Traveler, Wells exposes middle-class complacency towards social issues as the Time Traveler ruptures and revises common epistemologies that marginalize the poor and colonized.

Recent scholarship generally does not directly engage with Wells’s deployment of key scriptural allusions, and the names of the races are not generally viewed as biblical, as evident in Bernard Bergonzi’s interpretation. On the other hand, Nicholas Ruddick recognizes biblical references to Nebuchadnezzar who is transformed into a beast, but he does not expound on how
Darwinian intonations of regression are conflated with biblical motifs to gesture to human degeneration. Expanding on Bergonzi and Ruddick, I will further explicate these nuances later in this chapter, providing a wider lens through which to read Wells’s novella. My examination of the novella builds on existing scholarship; however, unlike existing scholarship, I examine Wells’s conflation of scientific and religious motifs that are prevalent throughout the novella. Wells strategically deploys familiar biblical apocalyptic motifs underscoring the social justice elements found in apocalyptic writing as warnings against exploiting the poor. Similar to the conventional apocalyptic structure, Wells creates a frame narrative to separate the realist elements of the novella from the fantastic journey of the Time Traveler. In apocalyptic literature, the “prophet” ventures on an “otherworldly” journey, through dream, vision, or angelic assistance to view the bleak future of humanity, returning to his own time to warn of impending divine judgement. Wells’s Time Traveler functions similarly as a secular modern prophet, his journey through time revealing a *telos* for humanity, not as a result of divine retribution, but as a consequence of human transgression against its own kind. The frame narrative reconfigures Christian apocalyptic warnings to address a scientific and technological age that has lost its moral compass, positing evolutionary theory as a mechanism that will bring about the end of the world and humankind.

This chapter outlines how Wells capitalizes on the versatility and familiarity of scripture as he reconfigures the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation and its prophetic warnings of a violent end of the world. By stripping scripture of its religious significance and then combining it with scientific understandings of human extinction, Wells’s novella engages with cultural discourse on the place of ethics and empathy in an increasingly secular world. Biblical allusions from both
the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures are secularized and conflated with Darwinian science to emphasize human interconnectedness overtly interrogating unethical exploitation of vulnerable classes. As with Thomas Huxley’s secular understanding of the Bible as “the Magna Carta of the poor and oppressed,” Wells relies on scripture to posit an ethics not apparent in Darwinism, where “survival of the fittest” and “the struggle for existence” are privileged instead.

The novella envisions the decline of humanity and the death of the planet Earth through both biblical apocalyptic and Darwinian perspectives, yet unlike more religious-minded novelists, Wells does not suggest hope for an afterlife. Instead, Wells reconfigures apocalyptic motifs to propose human responsibility and agency as a hope for the future of humankind that is not contingent on the intervention of a divine figure. The novella does not promise an afterlife granted by an external deity as a reward for ethical practice but emphasizes instead the need for humans to build an egalitarian society as a preventative measure against ethical, moral, and physical degeneration. He does not suggest religious notions of ensoulment since in Darwinian terms, the demise of humankind and the planet Earth is final; however, he does gesture to Darwinian ideas of an “afterlife” with regard to the propagation of the species, a concept I will address later in this chapter when I examine the Time Traveler’s recognition of his relationship to the Eloi and Morlocks.

Similar to self-proclaimed agnostic, Thomas Huxley, Wells rejects dogmatism and superstition, drawing instead on liberal biblical interpretations that encourage orthopraxis rather than blind faith. This critical stance is evident in his 1917 publication, God the Invisible King, in

\[42\] “Ensoulment” is a Christian concept that claims all humans are endowed with an immortal soul, or a “divine spark.”
which he explicates his spiritual position in relation to science and the church. Wells rejects Trinitarian theology and notions of an external, omnipotent God, arguing that God resides within humans and provides internal guidance. According to Wells, “true” religion did not rely on dogma, doctrine, or an authoritative organization that required a confession of faith, but rather on a conscience that serves as a guide to ethical conduct. In this way, Wells reflects prevailing shifts in religious thought; however, he also posits the notion that human virtues, such as ethics and empathy, are integral to human nature, and therefore, have nothing to do with an omnipotent creator God. Although Wells later repudiates this work, it provides a context for reading secularized and reconfigured scriptural motifs that emerge in *The Time Machine* as it articulates Wells’s rejection of revealed religions based on a founder, such as Christ, and on the implementation of a creed, which changed the course of Christianity following the convening of the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E.

This chapter attends to how the names attributed to descendants of the Victorian middle and working-class evoke notions of ritual sacrifice and blood atonement theologies, concepts that were losing ground among some Christian denominations by the mid-nineteenth century. The invocation of the Aramaic word “Eloi,” meaning “God,” is reminiscent of Jesus’ words from the cross, and directly connects the Eloi to sacrifice. The word “Morlock” alludes to the Canaanite god, Moloch, who requires child-sacrifice, connecting the Morlocks to the sacrifice of innocents. The names ascribed to the descendants of Victorian England provide a multitude of critiques as scriptural motifs are deployed as an assault against Christian orthodoxy. The Eucharistic feast, with its intonations of blood atonement, is inverted and invoked replete with cannibalistic intonations to critique rampant capitalism devoid of ethics; however, it also interrogates the
inefficacy of the church in addressing crucial social problems. Wells employs his extensive knowledge of church history, biblical criticism, and Darwinian theory to posit a humanitarian approach to the working poor at home and the colonized of the empire. His inversions and reconfigurations of scripture provide an excoriating criticism of Christian middle-class hypocrisy, which fails to reflect biblical ethical mandates to care for the poor.

The novella permits a host of possible interpretations that range from secular to religious readings, incorporating notions of a hybridized humanism across a diverse spectrum of beliefs. Wells’s socialist ideologies will be examined since they present a deeper understanding of the problems of class struggle and consumerism, as narrativized through the Eloi and Morlocks who exemplify the immorality of a class hierarchy whereby one class is sacrificed for the benefit of the other. In addition to his scientific romance novels, I examine Wells’s letters, articles, reviews, and biographical writing since each discloses his socialist perspectives on class division and the need for humanitarian approaches to the Other at home and in the far reaches of the empire.

### 3.2 Framing the Apocalypse

The novella’s realist frame and narrative structure create a contrast between the seemingly stable present moment and a proleptic view of a turbulent future experienced by the Time Traveler, who assumes the role of a prophetic figure. His otherworldly journey into the future where he witnesses the destruction of the world is told to his dinner guests who appear in the frame; however, as he relates his experiences, the realist frame recedes, permitting the fantasy narrative to take precedence. Wells’s realist frame operates in a manner similar to the traditional
extra-canonical and canonical apocalyptic writings, permitting the Time Traveler to deliver his urgent “prophetic” message to a contemporary audience of his peers. The frame, as with those found in ancient apocalyptic writings, intentionally disrupts complacent attitudes toward endemic social ills as the prophet’s audience receives and comprehends the warning of impending destruction. The Time Traveler functions as a modern-day prophet as he relates his discovery of time travel and his experiences in the year 802, 701 to his companions who represent Victorian, middle-class, professional males of both scientific and non-scientific communities. His fashionable middle-class London home, which occupies the frame, epitomizes the civility of British middle-class society as the Time Traveler’s fantastic story of what occurred in the distant future provides a dire warning of regression and degeneration that could occur on British soil as a consequence of “unnatural selection.” The stability of the middle-class dining room has significant implications for the reader because it serves as a microcosm of middle-class, androcentric Victorian England as common epistemologies are subverted and revised, rupturing complacent attitudes towards issues of race and class. For Wells, regression and degeneration are not contingent on race or class designation, since the novella directly indicts the wealthy middle and upper classes as culpable in initiating humanity’s “fall.” Wells’s frame narrative also foreshadows key elements of the plot as it offers nuanced glimpses of pressing issues expanded upon as the novella progresses. Victorian skepticism of scientific theories emerges through the voices of the assembled guests, illustrating conflicting conceptualizations of

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43 See John J. Collins’s *The Apocalyptic Imagination* and Mitchell G. Reddish’s *Apocalyptic Literature: A Reader* on the structure and function of apocalyptic writings.
new theories that challenged traditional, conventional understandings on mathematics, physical science, and evolution.

During a weekly Thursday dinner gathering, the Time Traveler challenges conventional understandings of scientific theories regarding the fourth dimension, stating: “I shall have to controvert one or two ideas that are almost universally accepted. The geometry, for instance, they taught you at school is founded on a misconception” (59). This statement follows his demonstration of time travel through a miniature time machine, which disappears ostensibly into the future, thereby setting the tone for the characters in the novella to reevaluate established ideas of time and space. More importantly, the demonstration demands open-minded thinking as the scientific time traveling motif assumes a more practical application, which will revise thoughts on racial and class difference and the consequences of unethical exploitation of the poor. The Time Traveler’s speculations on physics and mathematical theories, having fulfilled their function to claim the possibility of time travel, shift to biological evolutionary theory, which is ultimately central to Wells’s concerns regarding common ancestry and its ethical and moral implications. By speculating on the concept of time travel into the distant future, as well as contemplating biological evolution and the mechanisms of natural selection, the time traveling motif provides a vehicle for imagining how the world may appear in the distant future.

The Time Traveler’s guests express varying degrees of skepticism regarding the concept of time travel, and the following week the assembled group is further challenged as the Time Traveler returns from the future to relate a fantastic tale of regression and degeneration. As the guests begin dinner without their host, the disheveled, battered, and starving Time Traveler finally arrives; however, he postpones telling his story until he has changed his clothes and eaten
his meal of mutton. As the Time Traveler leaves his company to change for dinner, the Editor speculates on the state of his host’s clothes and injuries stating, “Does our friend eke out his modest income with a crossing? Or has he Nebuchadnezzar phases?” (72). According to Ruddick: “‘A crossing’ is obscure, but ‘to cross’ is slang for ‘to cheat,’ and suggests devious practices, perhaps those of a part-time confidence trickster or criminal who ambushes his victims. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was abased by God and led a life of a beast for seven years (see Daniel 4:33)” (72). Building on Ruddick’s assertion, I suggest that the reference is most intriguing because it ties biblical motifs to evolutionary sciences and fear of regression. To demonstrate how “crossing” and the “Nebuchadnezzar” reference may have more complex meanings, Daniel 4:33 needs to be examined. It reads: “Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws.” The context of the biblical passage suggests that Nebuchadnezzar, a leader of a conquering imperial force, was reduced to an animal-like state, which, as the Time Traveler’s tale discloses, was the fate of the Victorian middle and working classes. “Crossing” then, may carry more significance as it also refers to “crossing” the boundaries between human and animal, setting the tone for the Time Traveler’s tale of human degeneration and regression to animal-like states. Through this nuanced allusion, the spectre of Darwinian theory, which places humans in the animal kingdom, is invoked. The notion of regression to an animal-state foreshadows the Time Traveler’s account of the “human spiders” and “cattle-like” humans he meets in the future. Most noteworthy, however, is that unlike the biblical reference, regression here is not
precipitated through divine intervention, but instead is the result of human transgression, a subject I will further investigate later in this chapter.

The Time Traveler’s reappearance further alludes to Darwinian theory as he postpones retelling the account of his journey, stating: “I won’t say a word until I get some peptone into my arteries” (73). The demand for mutton underscores the craving for animal flesh, since peptone is a scientific term for a component of protein essential to digestion, to be found in all animals, including humans. Wells’s reference to meat consumption develops further as the carnivorous cravings of the Time Traveler gestures to meat consumption as a form of cannibalism in keeping with Darwinian theories of interconnectedness between the species. The cannibalism trope referenced in the frame is expanded as the novella unfolds and cannibalism is related to ritual sacrifice and blood atonement, concepts Wells rejected as meaningless acts incapable of promoting social reform.

The Time Traveler’s account of the future contradicts excelsior biology (or notions that assume evolution ensures forward progress) endemic in Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinist model, reflecting Darwinist notions of gradual change over time through adaptation to environmental pressures instead. The expressions of doubt and disbelief among the guests indicate Victorian skepticism and so provide a narrow cross-section of middle-class,

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44 Wells uses the term “excelsior biology” as a pejorative term since he sees the propensity for notions of “biological progression” to be associated with Herbert Spencer’s theories of “social progression.” I will investigate this further later in the chapter in relation to Wells’s response to Mr. D.R Davies in a letter to the editor of British Weekly, 26 June 1939.”
45 The Morlocks, descendants of the working classes that frequently worked in underground locales, adapt to the dark underground world as their vision and other sensory apparatus have evolved over generations to accommodate such living conditions.
professional, male, Victorian attitudes toward new ideas. The Time Traveler’s admonition to listen attentively prepares the guests to receive astounding information that could potentially change their worldview. Through the information he imparts, the “absolute” truth of a mathematical and scientific theory once believed to be infallible is challenged. The story, as it progresses, also refutes literal biblical interpretations of human origins, ensoulment, the afterlife, and the religious concept of reward and punishment beyond death. The urgency of the “prophetic” message is evident in the Time Traveler’s insistence on no interruptions to his narrative as he launches into an account of his travels into the distant future without leaving the confines of his London home.

The fixed setting of the Time Traveler’s home is a crucial element in the text because it unsettles and disrupts notions that regression and degeneration may only occur in “savage” locations. The frame unambiguously locates the site of future human regression in England and the degenerated races as “English,” as opposed to “savages” who live “elsewhere” in the empire. Wells underscores the danger of future degradation, which could occur not only “over there,” in the distant corners of the empire, but at home, in England. The scientific romance story is strategically framed by realist elements to create a disturbing contrast between the two settings spatially located in the Time Traveler’s home. According to Bergonzi, realism and romance elicit a disquieting tone as the ordinary gathering of friends, provides “a basis in contemporary life at its most ordinary and pedestrian: this atmosphere makes the completest possible contrast with the tale which is to come, with its account of a wholly imaginative world of dominantly paradisal and demonic imagery lying far outside of the possible experience of the late Victorian bourgeoisie” (43). The future world the Time Traveler describes to his guests appears to be
incompatible with constructed notions of “Englishness,” as the comfortable nineteenth-century setting is transformed into the milieu of unrecognizable descendants who are barely human, a strategy that subverts British stereotypes of class and racial superiority.

The obscuring of the line between “us” and “them” enters ethical discourse on class difference, but it also comments on racial theories that viewed the colonized as less developed yet connected through common ancestry. The allegorized relationship between the futuristic races and Victorian society posits a broad interpretation of who may be considered a “neighbour,” a crucial concept derived from both religious and Darwinian concepts of interconnectedness. I emphasize the contrast between the frame and the Time Traveler’s experiences in the future because the disparity between the present and future England quintessentially provides a discursive framework for critiquing social injustices perpetrated on the poor. The mundane civility of Victorian England is contrasted with the futuristic dystopian world, evincing an effect of heightened anxiety regarding the precarious future of humanity.

3.3 “Eloi” and “Morlocks”

Before I elaborate on the Time Traveler’s response to the two races and its social implications, it is crucial to examine how the biblical names ascribed to the descendants of Victorian society function as a criticism of both “Christian” society and the church. A brief explanation of Wells’s views on orthodox religion provides context for the naming of the races the Time Traveler meets. Wells’s concern for social reform and his criticism of the class system emerges in the novella through the two races, the Eloi and the Morlocks, who have degenerated as a consequence of an “unnatural selection” precipitated through rampant capitalism and
consumerism. To explicate the meaning of the names in relation to the text, I need to divulge information regarding the degeneration of the races and their relationship as “predator” and “prey” before I provide subsequent textual analysis, which appears in the next section of this chapter.

For Wells, organized religion fails to follow its own imperatives, derived of scripture, to care for the poor; however, Wells’s criticisms also oppose Trinitarian doctrines on the nature and substance of God. He argues instead for a divine essence integral to humans that informs our conscience, thereby repudiating the belief in an external God. “Eloi” and “Morlock” are names attributed to biblical gods, gesturing to the rejection of all external deities articulated in God the Invisible King. This rejection of deism is relevant because a superficial reading may focus only on the names as binary opposites: “Eloi” associated with light and “Morlock” with darkness. Through the invocation of dark and light, and good and evil attributed to the races, Wells appears to superficially set the two races up as binaries. This premise is refuted as the Time Traveler methodically discards hypotheses initially formed as evidence through observation leads him to the truth. The false binaries provide an opportunity to draw on scientific methods of forming hypotheses, which inevitably change as new information alters initial impressions, a strategy Wells employs throughout the text.  

46 This strategy also reflects the manner in which Victorians, faced with scientific theories of human origins and new liberal interpretations of scripture that agree with science, reevaluated common epistemologies regarding common ancestry. As new information challenged previous beliefs, Victorians liberally drew on scientific theories on interconnectivity and the Bible to ponder ethics and morality formerly the purview of the church.
The names of the two races are not always read through a biblical perspective, for instance, Bergonzi suggests that “Eloi” may refer to “elfin” in connection with their small stature and delicate facial features, or eloigné, meaning “distant or far-off.” He speculates that the name may also refer to their “elite” status or “there may be a suggestion of *eld*, meaning old age and decrepitude” (48). Superficially, one may view the Eloi in a privileged position over the Morlocks, the name “Eloi” being Aramaic for “God” and “Morlock” tied to the “false” Canaanite god who required child sacrifice. The word “Eloi” may be viewed as “godlike” in binary terms, denoting “good” over the “Morlock” who are connected to a false god, and therefore, “evil”; however, Wells positions both groups as degenerate and regressive, intimating a more complex meaning that moves beyond binaries. Ambiguous as it is, ignoring the biblical reference would detract from the wealth of possibilities Wells presents to his readers.

The Time Traveler describes the Eloi as effete and indolent, designating them as “cattle” that provide food for the Morlocks, a puzzling and seemingly incongruent nature for a race named for the “true” and “powerful” God of Israel. Turning to the biblical framework, I suggest that the use of the word “Eloi” intentionally conjures up images of Christ’s death on the cross as a sacrificial lamb. His words of agony, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani,*” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me’ (Matthew 27:46), are echoed in the helpless Eloi who symbolize the sacrifice of innocents to a mechanized, consumerist, and materialist world. The reversal of fortunes, which is evident as the Eloi are now the victims of the Morlocks, would not have been lost on Victorian readers who recognize a warning to the wealthy who ignore the needs of the working class. The reader, after much hypothesizing, is eventually apprised of the fact that the two races are the result of a devolution precipitated by an unnatural selection. Biological
degeneration and regression were set in motion because unchecked socioeconomic inequality and an imposed spatialization of the classes made interaction between the classes almost impossible. The unethical choices made by wealthy consumers of goods produced in squalid, subterranean factories by the working class, initiate a biological evolution, resulting in two distinct degenerated races. Consumerism and capitalistic greed are critiqued through the two races as the Morlocks who were once treated as cogs in the wheels of “progress,” were forced to work underground to produce goods for the leisured class who benefitted from their misery. Through the Time Traveler, the reader eventually realizes that the consumer has become the consumed, posing some interesting speculations of what it means that the race named for the “true God of Israel” is consumed by the “false” Canaanite god.

Wells’s invocation of “true” and “false” biblical gods critiques the church and all beliefs in an external deity; however, it also draws on social justice elements found in biblical apocalyptic writing. The reversals closely resemble biblical motifs of eschatological reversal, the belief that in the coming Kingdom of God, the poor will be given precedence over the wealthy; but more critically, it interrogates empty blood atonement ritual that has no practical purpose in feeding the poor. Wells, an avid socialist, finds value in common biblical motifs regarding care for the vulnerable; however, he also deploys the imagery of Revelation to ponder an inevitable death of the planet. I will address Wells’s socialist beliefs and his critiques of church and blood atonement theologies in later sections of this chapter, after I have provided an analysis of the Time Travel’s impressions and conclusions of the year 802, 701.
3.4 The Time Traveler’s Observations of the Future

To illustrate how Wells enters discourses on topical Victorian concerns ranging from anxieties regarding degeneration, the inefficacy of the church in propagating social reform, the violence of New Imperialism and, most notably, the injustices of a rigid class system, an examination of the Time Traveler’s observations is necessary. After setting out his impressions of the landscape of the year 802, 701, and his encounters with the two races, I will explicate how these multiple anxieties critique Wells’s social context. Through the dying landscape and the degeneration of the Eloi and Morlocks, the novella provides an ominous warning for those who subjugate the poor and colonized.

The Time Traveler recounts his initial impressions, fears, and miscalculations in minute detail to his guests, his story gradually assuming primacy over the realist frame. His narrative begins by describing the strange sensations of time travel as he witnesses changes to the landscape of his home and the surrounding areas, stressing his movement through time but not space. The static location is quintessential to the plot since the central purpose of the novella is to stress that degeneration and regression can occur in England. An avid disciple of excelsior evolutionary theory, the Time Traveler wonders at the achievements of humankind as he ponders the sophisticated and superior architecture of buildings he sees when he passes forward through time:

What strange developments of humanity, what wonderful advances upon our rudimentary civilization I thought, might not appear when I came to look nearly into the dim elusive world that raced and fluctuated before my eyes! I saw great and splendid architecture rising about me, more massive than any buildings of our own time, and yet, as it seemed, built of glimmer and mist (78).
His perception of the buildings appearing as “glimmer and mist” indicates a sense of foreboding as his doubts foreshadow the awful truth that will be revealed. Ironically, he perceives the absence of winter as he moves forward through time yet his scientific understanding of this change as being a precursor to the future death of the planet does not register at this moment. At the novella’s climax, however, he recognizes the signs of the end of the planet in scientific terms. Instead of pondering climate changes,47 he wonders at the building structures created by humans, which appear superior to his own time, precipitating a hypothesis that superficially supports notions of progression. The elegant buildings bolster his hopes of finding a superior civilization that evolved from his own people; however, the “glimmer and mist” obscures a close inspection.

Preoccupied with his thoughts on human progress, the Time Traveler recalls his former misgivings regarding the dangers of stopping the time machine, fearing that a sudden stop may cause an explosion that could destroy it. As he manipulates the levers his progress slows; however, he continues to move forward in time, which is significant because the time in which he lands has become less sophisticated suggesting that regression has taken place. Bracing himself for the impact of landing, he tumbles from the time machine onto a soft patch of grass in front of a white stone carving of a sphinx. Gazing at the structure, his troubling doubts begin to surface as he ponders:

What might occur when the 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 more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness – a foul creature to be incontinently slain. (80)

47 During the late nineteenth century, scientists already theorized on climate change. See Ruddick *The Time Machine* (32).
The Time Traveler’s concerns that humanity has become “inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful” suggest that fear of regression has entered his thoughts despite his belief in both biological and cultural human progress through evolution. Special attention needs to be afforded the word “powerful” since it resonates with critiques of wealth and imperialism.

The connection the Time Traveler draws between cruelty, inhumanity, and power should be carefully considered since the concept of power as a corruptible force is a common thread that reoccurs in fin de siècle fiction and is a prevalent theme in both The Time Machine and The War of the Worlds. In these nuanced references to power Wells critiques both the power of the wealthy classes and the empire, the latter more pronounced in War of the Worlds that deals directly with powerful Martians invading and “colonizing” the planet Earth than in The Time Machine. His question, “[W]hat if cruelty had grown into a common passion?” appears to be puzzling, since the particularity of “cruelty” tied to “common passion” suggests a value judgement that rates violence performed in a fit of passion as a sign of degeneration because we might question whether it is based on primal reactions and not on reason. Through this choice of diction, one may ponder if common passion is considered differently than, for instance, strategically exercised cruelty imposed on victims with a specific purpose in mind, such as subjugating “rebels” in imperial spaces. Imperial violence intended to oppress the masses could not be viewed as “passion” since it is strategically carried out by sanctioned forces, such as the military. Such a reading recognizes the historical context in which Wells wrote, taking into account imperial violence, which was justified as “necessary” for progress. State-sanctioned violence was seen by some as a lesser evil compared to violence induced through animal
impulses governed by a fit of passion. The Time Traveler’s anxieties prove to be justified as his experiences with the “humans” he meets in 802, 701 reveal the devastating truth regarding regression and degeneration; however, his initial encounter with the Eloi elicits false hope that humankind had advanced.

As he observes the Eloi’s approach he perceives their small, delicate stature, which is quite different from humans of his own time. Despite the beauty of the man who first approaches him, the Time Traveler observes a frail constitution, the flushed complexion, and “hectic beauty” that called to mind people suffering from tuberculosis or “consumption” (81). This initial impression should have alerted the Time Traveler to changes in humanity, yet it is not until one of the men communicates with him that he begins to wonder at the differences he perceives. He postulates:

> The question had come into my mind abruptly: were these creatures fools? You may hardly understand how it took me. You see I had always anticipated that the people of the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand odd would be incredibly in front of us in knowledge, art, everything. Then one of them suddenly asked me a question that showed him to be on the intellectual level of one of our five-year old children – asked me, in fact, if I had come from the sun in a thunderstorm! (83).

The Time Traveler admits to a degree of disappointment as he recognizes that the Eloi are childlike. He observes their carefree lack of fear as they gather flowers; however, he also notes, “I never met people more indolent or more easily fatigued,” wondering at their lack of interest or attention span that renders them childlike (86). The Eloi’s indolence provides an obstacle to communications since their disinterest shortens the Time Traveler’s lessons: “They would come

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48 I am thinking of justifications for the Indian Mutiny and Governor Eyre’s suppression of insurgency in Jamaica, to name a few, of which many notable Victorians, such as Dickens and Spencer, approved.
to me with eager cries of astonishment, like children, but, like children, they would soon stop examining me, and wander away after some other toy” (87). This observation creates doubts as to the possibility of progressive, or excelsior evolution, particularly as the Time Traveler comprehends that the “ruinous splendor” of the beautiful buildings the Eloi inhabit are relics of an earlier age. As a point of fact, the Time Traveler recognizes that there are no edifices that suggest advancement and many of the buildings are in various stages of dilapidation, their architecture reminiscent of ancient structures instead of innovative designs. The vegetarian Eloi do not appear to build, plant, or harvest food, and there is no evidence of animal life. The Time Traveler notes these oddities, which give rise to hypotheses that are constantly altered and dismissed as new information becomes available.

Observing the Eloi, the Time Traveler assumes the position of an amateur anthropologist as he notes their language, clothing, vegetarian diet, and living space, his initial impression leading to an erroneous impression that he has found a new Eden. The study of the Eloi takes place during a meal where the Time Traveler uses his time to examine the Eloi’s culture closely. According to Michael Parrish Lee, the ingesting of food, associated with base bodily functions, was subordinate to the acquisition of knowledge for the Time Traveler; however, he asserts that by the end of the century, the anthropologist’s gaze becomes associated with a devouring knowledge of the Other. Lee reads the vegetarian meal the Time Traveler shares with the Eloi as an opportunity to acquire anthropological knowledge as he “consumes” pertinent information on his hosts, referring to them as “delicious people” (Wells 93). For Parrish, the meal elucidates “the anthropological urge to investigate and draw conclusions about foreign cultures, describing this urge as a desire to ‘master’ and consume the ‘delicious other’” (256). The minute
observations, which frequently lead to The Time Traveler’s erroneous conclusions, imitate scientific and anthropological investigation of other cultures; however, the Time Traveler’s thoughts also articulate common Victorian anxieties with respect to degeneration and regression narrativized through the language of cannibalism, a topic I will address later in this chapter.

The Time Traveler’s impressions of the Eloi’s androgynous features lead him to incorrectly speculate that change has resulted from human refinement. Instead of recognizing signs of degeneration, he turns to evolutionary theory to explain the androgynous traits as signs of a favourable adaptation to the environment, incorrectly speculating that the Eloi’s physical traits are proof of progressive evolution. Based on his interpretation of Darwinian theory, he postulates, that the erosion of definitive feminine and masculine attributes derives from the victory of natural selection, which has eradicated all adversities as humankind has reached its zenith. He observes:

Seeing the ease and security in which these people were living, I felt this close resemblance of the sexes were after all what one would expect; for the strength of the man and the softness of a woman, the institution of the family, and the differentiation of occupations are mere militant necessities of an age of physical force. Where population is balanced and abundant, much child-bearing becomes an evil rather than a blessing to the State: where violence comes but rarely and offspring are secure, there is less necessity – indeed there is no necessity – of an efficient family, and the specialization of the sexes with reference to their children’s needs disappears. (89)

The Time Traveler assumes that the physical appearance, androgynous nature, and indolent behaviour of the Eloi are proof of humanity overcoming the violent impulses that threatened their existence. He erroneously postulates that brute strength, in response to close, protective family bonds, were no longer necessary because primal urges that initiated violence had been eradicated through evolution. Assuming the “age of physical force” has ended, he sees the
alterations as a triumph of human evolution, yet he also gradually recognizes that he is witnessing “humanity upon the wane” (90).

He expands his theory of human evolution as he speculates that the large “over-cultivated” flora he sees in the “weedless garden” appears to suggest that the world of 801, 702 is a new Eden. Natural selection and the triumph over the struggle for existence explain the change in plant life as, over a vast amount of time, cultivation has allowed new species to prosper at the expense of indigenous flora, which has now become extinct. But the changes the Time Traveler sees as improvements are actually indicative of the gradual death of the planet as a result of human manipulation of the natural checks necessary to retain a delicate balance:

The air was free from gnats, the earth from weeds or fungi; everywhere were fruits and sweet and delightful flowers; brilliant butterflies flew hither and thither. The ideal of preventative medicine was attained. Diseases had been stamped out. I saw no evidence of any contagious disease during all my stay. And I shall have to tell you later that even the processes of putrefaction and decay had been profoundly affected by these changes. (90)

Although the description sounds idyllic, and it is evident that the struggle for existence had ended, the implications that some species had survived at the expense of weaker varieties are initially lost on the Time Traveler. The absence of gnats, fungi, and weeds indicates over-cultivation, and the eradication of bacteria necessary for decay is critical since it is through the breakdown of organic materials that soil is replenished and nourished. These implications do not register because the Time Traveler perceives only the beauty of nature that is, in fact, dying.

Observing the communal living space of the Eloi, the Time Traveler eventually concludes, with a measure of optimism, that the end of a struggle for existence likely extended to society. He assumes, based on the lack of borders around property, that this social shift is a positive sign of human progress, which has resulted in communism:
There were no signs of struggle, neither social nor economic struggle. The shop, the advertisement, the traffic, all the commerce which constitutes the body of our world, was gone. It was natural on that golden evening that I should jump at the idea of a social paradise. The difficulty of increasing population had been met, I guessed, and population had ceased to increase. (91)

His initial assessment is cursory as neither biological nor social implications are considered, yet the reader may suspect that the world is dystopian. The “difficulty of increasing population” that had been solved alludes to Malthusian ideas for curtailing population growth that potentially included genocide or extirpation. Overt references to communism politicize the novella, yet it is through allusions to the eradication of social, economic, and population struggles that critiques of empire emerge, since the “garden,” albeit still in London, has essentially been “colonized” by new species and subdued through human interference. Although the garden is located in England, the plant-life indigenous to England has been genetically altered or eradicated either through adaptation, assimilation, or death. Wells’s allusions to the struggle for existence in nature will extend to humankind as the novella overtly engages with an imperial discourse of difference, providing a scathing attack on the subjugation and exploitation of the Other, be it the poor at home or in the distant reaches of the empire. The movement between biology and the political sphere of social groupings is significant because the narrative, albeit alluding to topics such as imperialism and its associated extinction and extirpation discourse, will eventually employ biological theories to overtly criticize Wells’s social context, a subject I will expand on later in this chapter.

The novel assumes an ominous tone when the Time Traveler meets the Morlocks, the subterranean, less appealing counterparts of the Eloi. When his Time Machine disappears, and evidence points to it being dragged into the panels on the sphinx, the Time Traveler frantically
attempts to retrieve the machine with no success. His first impression is that the Eloi have hidden the machine, but he soon realizes that this conclusion is flawed since the Eloi have a dread of the sphinx. He later ascertains that the Morlocks, who have the physical strength, curiosity, and surprisingly, the intelligence to disassemble and reassemble the machine, are the actual culprits. His examination of the area has revealed deep wells from which sounds of machinery are emitted. Since the Eloi lack the intellectual and physical ability to operate machinery, the Time Traveler begins to wonder how they obtained their clothes, and because they do not appear to grow or harvest their own food his thoughts begin to form the correct impression that there are other beings living beneath the ground, and these beings are associated with a mechanized industry.

After catching the odd glimpse of furtive, ghostly figures that appear at night to the horror of the Eloi, the Time Traveler investigates and is soon confronted by hideous, ape-like creatures, which he also refers to as “human spiders,” that inhabit the underworld. The Morlocks, unlike the indolent and beautiful Eloi, have the technological means to provide the Eloi with food and clothing; however, contemplating the Eloi’s terror of the night and the creatures that emerge from the dark, he suspects that the Morlocks are not benevolent creatures:

My impression of it is, of course, imperfect; but I know it was a dull white, and had strange large greyish-green eyes; also that there was flaxen hair on its head and down its back. But as I say, it went too fast for me to see distinctly. I cannot even say whether it ran on all fours, or only with its forearms held very low. . . I lit a match, and, looking down, I saw a small, white moving creature, with large bright eyes which regarded me steadfastly as it retreated, It made me shudder. It was so like a human spider. (107)

The Time Traveler’s language registers his revulsion for the Morlocks who, unlike the Eloi, appear to resemble animals or “human spiders.” He also observes that the Morlocks are neither slow nor indolent but appear to have built a series of deep tunnels as living quarters as well as a
space for production of goods, suggesting their mastery of technology. The puzzling pieces of information gained through observation begin to coalesce as he stumbles onto the terrifying truth of the relationship between the Eloi and Morlocks, who despite their apparent differences, share a common ancestry. Even more horrific is his realization of the kinship between the two degenerated races and himself. He states: “But, gradually, the truth had dawned on me: that man had not remained one species, but had differentiated into two distinct animals: that my graceful children of the Upper World were not the sole descendants of our generation, but this bleached, obscene, nocturnal Thing, which had flashed before me, was also heir to all the ages” (107). The Time Traveler concludes that the Eloi and Morlocks are the descendants of the Victorian middle and working classes who had, over centuries degenerated and regressed to a former primitive state of development. As he connects clues as to the relationship between the races, he correctly concludes that the Morlocks are the result of the “devolution” of the working class, which was forced to adapt to its underground work environment.

The Time Traveler’s revulsion at the Morlocks is intense; however, in a previous episode, he perceived behaviour in the Eloi that also altered his initial estimation of human progress in terms of biological, social, and ethical progression. He witnesses their lack of compassion for their own kind when they respond apathetically towards a helpless victim, Weena, who almost drowns. The Time Traveler ponders their apathy and lack of compassion as signs of degeneration. Later, after encountering the Morlocks, he reluctantly concludes that humankind had devolved to a near beast-like state in which they are driven by primal instincts, such as fear, but are without a sense of remorse, compassion, or empathy. It is necessary to draw attention to the fact that Weena is the only Eloi who is named, perhaps because of her apparent fondness and
the attachment she forms with the Time Traveler after he rescues her from drowning. Her affection and concern set her apart from the curious but indifferent Eloi because although she is not intellectually superior, her concern for the Time Traveler demonstrates remnants of human virtues no longer apparent in the Eloi. Her naming elicits sympathy since it humanizes her in a way that is not afforded the other Eloi, suggesting degrees of Otherness. Ascribing her a name places her above the other Eloi; however, despite the Time Traveler’s affinity for her, he continues to view her as not quite human. Weena is described as “the weakly-crying little thing” and a “poor little mite” who is like a child. Although the Time Traveler speculates that she is a woman, he describes her in ways that objectify and infantilize her, betraying a degree of superiority he feels as he recognizes her Otherness, and relegating her to a position of the not quite human, albeit in a more favourable light than her fellow Eloi (103).

The Eloi’s apathy and indolence directly comment on the Victorian leisured class, the ancestors of the Eloi, whom Wells characterizes as culpable in initiating the division between the two races. Wells’s concern for the “sacrifice” of the poor for the benefit of the wealthy provides an excoriating critique of “Christian” Victorian society, as the sacrificial language deployed in the novella indicts the church as ineffectual in propagating social reform. Before I investigate Wells’s critique of organized religion through his use of biblical sacrificial language, I examine his political ideology and interest in Darwinian theory since it provides a context for his rejection of the church and his criticism of the highly structured class system.
3.5 Darwinism, Socialism, and the Bible as Sources of Ethical Thinking

To elucidate Wells’s dissatisfaction with multiple aspects of Victorian society, I will briefly examine some biographical details that explain the political undertones that permeate his writing. It is also useful to acknowledge the complexities of the historic moment in which Wells wrote since technological advancement furthered the divide among the classes. Rampant consumerism forced the poor industrial worker to supply the growing demands of the wealthy as they endured increasingly deplorable working conditions in order to barely subsist. Wells’s initial lower-middle-class status and poverty aligned him with the working class; however, his aptitude for science permitted him some opportunity for advancement. His class status, scientific education, and political inclinations were eminently influential in shaping his writing, which expressed prevalent concerns regarding the poor that were victimized by a rigid class system. Wells, highly critical of organized religion and a traditional education that he viewed as useless intellectualism, turns to socialism, Darwinism, and scripture to interrogate the lack of ethical and moral treatment of the poor.

By the end of the nineteenth century, as Darwinian theory challenged traditional understandings of human origins, and situated humankind in the animal kingdom, questions regarding the origins of humanist qualities proliferated. Since Darwinian theory did not posit an evolution of ethics, authors drew on concepts of common ancestry and traditional biblical motifs to expound on human virtues, such as ethics, compassion, and empathy, as intrinsic human traits necessary for building a just society. Wells enters prevalent social discourse, through his literary endeavours, as the text “becomes culture in action” (Greenblatt qtd. in Bressler 189-90). The Time Machine unequivocally indicts an unjust class system that “feeds” on the poor and
disenfranchised at home and in imperial spaces; however, the primary concern central to the plot is the plight of the British working poor, who become cogs in the wheel of a technologically driven economy.

Owing to his family’s poverty, Wells briefly entered a trade; however, dissatisfied with the conventional life of a craftsman, he abandoned a career in the trades to pursue a higher education. His aptitude for scientific study, which did not carry the prestige of a classical education, nevertheless provided opportunities that ultimately led to his success as an author of scientific romance novels. Wells gained a reputation as a pioneer in scientific romance with his first attempt at serialized publication, *The Time Machine*, which was a revision of an earlier, unfinished work, *The Chronic Argonauts*. *The Time Machine* was first published in *Science School Journal* from April to June 1888, a periodical that Wells pioneered during his years as a student at the Normal School of Science. His scientific education is relevant since it opened new avenues for exploring the future of humanity in terms of evolution. Bergonzi contends that Wells’s experimentation with the time travel motif was “an imaginative reaction to evolution, not in respect to man’s past but of his possible future development” (36). In accordance with Bergonzi, I view this early preoccupation with time travel as a means of expressing concern for humankind’s evolutionary future, not just biologically, but also in terms of an evolution of ethics. Time travel to the future provided a platform from which to imagine how humankind will develop, and Wells deployed this motif to reflect Victorian anxieties regarding the possibility of regression to a bestial state, a concept derived from evolutionary theory but not postulated by Darwin. Wells draws on notions of degeneration and regression in physical terms; however, he explicitly envisages the possibility that evolution may be extended to ethical and moral aspects
of human development, concepts contemplated by his contemporaries, Alfred Wallace Russel and Thomas Huxley.

A student of Huxley and an avid supporter of Darwinian theory, Wells conflates quasi-scientific and reconfigured religious concepts with socialist ideologies to propose a humanist approach to the working class in England. Before I examine how Wells employs socialist and religious concepts to reach his diverse readership, it is prudent to observe his criticisms of social theory that advanced notions of racial or class superiority. The wide distribution of his work through inexpensive serialization was influential in critiquing social inequalities of the age, as it engaged with discourses on ethics at home and abroad, topics of interest to Wells considering his own social position and political leanings. Wells engages in social discourse on the working poor and the colonized through the Time Traveler’s superficial observations, which are revised as binaries unravel, and are then complicated by more complex explanations of the relationship between the two races he meets in the future. His optimistic belief in progressive evolution is gradually eroded when his hypotheses are proven incorrect as more information is gathered through observation.

Common stereotypical representations of both race and class are critiqued as Wells refutes social Darwinian theories of “progress” to argue instead for ethical treatment of both vulnerable groups. The privileging of the Eloi over the Morlocks illustrates the Time Traveler’s initial affinity with the race he finds similar to his own, a propensity Darwin suggested was common, as empathy and sympathy tended to be more prevalent within the confines of one’s own race (Descent 100-101). Unlike the Morlocks, who immediately repulse the Time Traveler, his ambivalence towards the Eloi develops over time as he observes their lack of empathy or
compassion, traits he views as intrinsic human qualities. Despite his initial fear that future humans would see him as an “old-world savage animal, only more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness — a foul creature to be incontinently slain,” ironically, it is he who is repulsed by both races when he recognizes them as descendants of his own people (80). His antipathy of both races erodes his sense of compassion and empathy, reflecting the middle class’s unsympathetic attitude towards the working poor in England. The Time Traveler’s hostility towards the Eloi and Morlocks also comments critically on responses to racial alterity, since many Victorians harboured stereotypical fears that contact with indigenous peoples of the empire could result in Anglo-Saxon degeneration. Wells counters such discourse by dismissing social Darwinism’s theories of racial and class hierarchies and “inevitable progress,” suggesting instead the idea that regression and degeneration, particularly in respect to ethics and morality, is possible even among the Anglo-Saxon race.

The novella politicizes Darwinian theory, unambiguously suggesting that ethical and moral degeneration or regression is possible in Britain as humanist ideologies are eroded by the elite who prey on the vulnerable. Although Wells unequivocally concurred with Darwinian concepts of common ancestry, evolution through natural selection, and extinction theories, he deviates from Darwin in his teleological ponderings, as he contemplates regression, degeneration, and the possibility of an devolution of ethics in humankind. Wells’s rejection of excelsior theory unequivocally dismisses social Darwinism’s claims of inevitable progress of the strong through the suppression of the weak. Wells states his rejection of excelsior theory through an excoriating reply to Mr. D.R. Davies in a letter to the editor of British Weekly, 26 June 1939, wherein he defends his position, asserting:
[Mr. D.R. Davies] may, as he says, have read me in the past, but he seems to have been taught to read very badly if he can accuse me of believing in Herbert Spencer’s inevitable progress. What my books have been from The Time Machine to World Brain (and my Fate of Homo Sapiens now in the press) but the clearest insistence on the insecurity of progress and the possibility of human degeneration and extinction? I think the odds are against man but that it is still worthwhile in spite of the odds. (244)

Wells’s insistence on the potential for regression or degeneration in humans is narrativized through the physical, intellectual, and inherent amorality of the races he meets in 802, 701. This is evident in The Time Traveler’s initial conclusions regarding human advancement, which is quickly negated as he discovers that beneath the Eloi’s external beauty, intellectual and cultural degradation has taken place. Likewise, he concludes that the hideous appearance and lack of humanity in the Morlocks occurred through adaptation and “unnatural selection,” which were initiated by forcing the poor to labour in underground factories. The Time Traveler’s story, replete with pseudo-scientific allusions, unequivocally refutes social Darwinian theories that view social position as a natural order derived of “survival of the fittest” 49 and “the struggle for existence,” concepts that Spencer used to develop theories of social progress. Through his criticism of social Darwinism, Wells lays the foundation for promoting socialism as an ideal.

Wells’s critique of Herbert Spencer’s theory of “progress” denies a place of privilege for the wealthy as he relates his experience in the future as an indictment of capitalism’s unrelenting oppression of the poor. The Time Traveler suggests that, “At first, proceeding from the problem of our own age, it seemed clear as daylight to me that the gradual widening of the present merely

49 Although Darwin used the term “survival of the fittest” to explain natural selection, he borrowed this term from Spencer who used the term to explain social theories that postulated that some groups in society will advance while others would inevitably be slated for extinction or extirpation.
temporary and social difference between the Capitalist and the Labourer, was key to the whole position” (110). The explanation of how the working class came to inhabit the underworld has its roots in late-Victorian England, as capitalism exploited the working class, forcing them to work in environments frequently located underground:

There is a tendency to utilize underground space for the less ornamental purposes of civilization; there is the Metropolitan Railway in London, for instance, there are new electric railways, there are subways, there are underground workrooms and restaurants. . . I mean that it had gone deeper and deeper into larger underground and ever larger underground factories, spending a still-increasing amount of its time therein, till, in the end - ! Even now, does not the East-end worker live in such artificial conditions as practicably to be cut off from the natural surface of the earth. (110)

Wells’s socialist inclinations are evident in his depiction of the subterranean world of the Morlocks wherein the working class are dehumanized and treated as “machines.” The text reverberates with Marxist ideologies on the subjugation and dehumanization of the working class as evident in Karl Marx’s and Frederick Engels’s *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) wherein Marx and Engels assert:

Owing to the extensive use of machinery, and to the division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character . . . He becomes an appendage of the machine. . . Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. (18)

Marx’s and Engels’s influence is detected in the Time Traveler’s comparison of the world of the Morlocks and the underground factories in which the poor were forced to earn an insubstantial living. Through the Morlocks, the dehumanization of the working class, as stated by Marx and
Engels, is narrativized in much the same way Wells describes the working conditions of the poor.

Conversely, the bourgeoisie, avoiding physical labour in favour of leisure, degenerates through over-refinement, culminating in feebleness of mind and body. Wells’s assessment of class degeneration is influenced by Darwin who claims, “No doubt wealth, when very great, tends to convert men into useless drones, but their number is never large; and some degree of elimination here occurs, as we daily see rich men, who happen to be fools or profligate, squandering away all their wealth” (Descent 163). The Time Traveler connects the excessive indulgence in leisure activities to the erosion of physical faculties required for work, espousing hyperbolized Darwinian ideas through the fragile physical constitution of the Eloi and the superior strength of the Morlocks. Darwinian theories that propose organs and appendages, when not used, will eventually atrophy becoming mere vestigial structures are hinted at in The Time Machine and is explicitly stated in War of the Worlds and other earlier works.

For Wells, education that nurtured aestheticism and over-refinement offered no value to the betterment of the human race other than propagating a superficial appreciation of beauty to the detriment of recognizing the pressing needs of the poor. According to the Time Traveler, who frequently reflects Wells’s own socialist ideologies, expensive higher education further divides the classes, affording little hope of upward mobility for the poor:

Again, the exclusive tendency of richer people – due, no doubt, to the increasing refinement of their education, and the widening gulf between them and the rude violence of the poor – is already leading to the closing, in their interest, of considerable portions of the surface of land. About London, for instance, perhaps half the prettier country is shut in against intrusion. And this same widening gulf – which is due to the length and expense of the higher educational process and the increased facilities for and temptations toward refined habits on the part of the rich – will make that exchange between the class and class, that
promotion by intermarriage which at present retards the splitting of our species along lines of social stratification, less and less frequent. (110)

Through the Time Traveler, Wells critiques the spatialization of class difference since it made interactions between the two groups unlikely to occur insofar as it continued to maintain class boundaries that were almost impossible to transgress. Along the same lines, geographical boundaries between the spacious properties owned by the wealthy and the cramped, squalid living conditions of the working poor in England, are raised in the novella to illustrate the physical boundaries between the two groups. The physical and social boundaries, according to Wells, are maintained by infrastructure, such as educational institutions, which provide education that has no useful application other than maintaining a rigid class system. In contrast to his practical, scientific education, Wells views education that instills refinement as an indulgent luxury enjoyed by those who do not need to earn living, and for Wells, idleness leads to degeneration.

Wells’s earlier “scientific” stories and articles demonstrate his creative deployment of Darwinian theory in relation to degeneration of the wealthy classes through idleness. These ideas, first conceived during his years as a student, continued to reverberate in his scientific romance novels, which drew on earlier, undeveloped work. Many of these works added technological and scientific advances as causes of human degeneration, as human activity is replaced by mechanization. Wells’s article, “The Man of the Year Million: A Scientific Forecast” (1893), published during Wells’s foray into scientific journalism, demonstrates his critique of an elitist education that served no practical function. The article reflects the satiric tone of his later scientific romance novels, as it speculates on the evolutionary development of humankind initiated through physical and environmental pressures imposed by science and
technology. Such changes include atrophy of limbs and reduced function of organs required for the digestive processes since technological advances enable nutrient consumption via dermal absorption to be accomplished by submersion in nutrient-dense baths. Wells expands on the concept in The War of the Worlds, where the Martians unambiguously resemble the beings alluded to in his earlier article. He overtly draws attention to his intertextual connection by adding:

It is worthy to remark that a certain speculative writer of quasi-scientific repute, writing long before the Martian invasion, did forecast for man a final structure not unlike the actual Martian condition. His prophecy, I remembered, appeared in November or December, 1883, in a long defunct publication, the Pall Mall Budget, and I recall a caricature of it in a pre-Martian periodical called Punch. (Wells qtd. in Bergonzi 127)

War of the Worlds and The Time Machine expand on the ideas presented in “The Man of the Year Million” as human development is affected by the lifestyle to which humans are exposed. The Martians exemplify Wells’s preoccupation with notions of regression as their bodies have atrophied, while their brain has become their primary organ, wholly dependent on technology for mobility. Their lack of an immune system, due to a process of “unnatural selection” that destroyed all pathogens on their planet, leads to self-annihilation when encountering bacteria necessary for the decomposition of corpses. The destruction of humans becomes the mechanism of their own demise, as natural selection was eradicated through the Martian’s interference with natural processes, leaving them vulnerable to the bacteria that proliferates as corpses decompose.

Wells draws on evolutionary theory to contemplate physical degeneration, yet he places considerable emphasis on how unethical and amoral policies, which marginalize some social groups in favour of others, detract from our humanity. Such ponderings had much in common with biblical mandates to care for the poor and disenfranchised as brothers and sisters, or
neighbours, based on common ancestry. The Time Traveler, in much the same way as a biblical prophet, provides a dissenting voice to challenge the fixity of class, which maintains the status quo through the oppression of the working poor. Wells’s forward-thinking social criticism is evident in the ways he breaks with conventional, narrow views of progress associated with wealth and rank, challenging prevalent classist attitudes. According to Linda Dryden, the Protestant work ethic of earlier decades was revised as the acquisition of wealth and power became the benchmark for success and was celebrated over humanitarianism. Wells’s “new kind of fiction” overtly engaged with controversial issues of the era that suggested wealth and indolence were a cause of degeneration rather than signs of progress (3-4). Wells’s reference to his “prophecy” in the article permits the Time Traveler to be read as a modern-day prophet delivering a prediction that will meet with resistance, if not ridicule.

Wells was not aligned with orthodox Christianity and was deeply critical of organized religion, yet his use of scriptural motifs indicates the continued relevance the Bible had in expounding on ethical and moral issues. While Wells uses the Bible, the authoritative text of Christianity, as a weapon against orthodox religion, he also employs familiar tropes consistent with his socialist ideologies as I will show in the next section. During the mid to late nineteenth century, as many Victorians faced a crisis of faith, subsequently leaving the church, many who chose to remain reevaluated scripture, drawing on a non-literal interpretation that endorsed socialist ideologies, which were growing in popularity, particularly among intellectuals. Emphasis on Jesus’ teachings on charity and love of one’s neighbour appealed to those who found meaning in the social gospel, a reading of scripture that emphasized active participation in social reform as a means of bringing about the Kingdom of God. Mark Knight points to a shift,
which occurred by the end of the nineteenth century, as Christian socialists embraced the social
gospel’s call to orthopraxis. Knight asserts that those who were nonaligned with revolutionary
ideologies associated with the earlier Chartist movement “were. . . not alone in their desire to
alleviate poverty and address social problems (as the history of Evangelicalism makes clear)”
(164). Knight’s assessment opens fresh ways of approaching Wells’s non-revolutionary
socialism, which opposed privileging one social group over another. While I would not suggest
that Wells aligned himself with Christian socialists, I would contend that his adherence to
political and economic socialist ideology found common ground with those who focused on
orthopraxis instead of orthodoxy. According to Knight, “Proponents of the social Gospel
construed the good news of the Christian message primarily in terms of its response to
contemporary social problems and equality,” a development that would have resonated with
those who left organized religion but were still concerned with humanist ideologies found in
religion (164). Although Wells rejected Christianity, Knight’s assessment of Victorian responses
to the rise of the social gospel is evident in Wells’s secularized understanding of biblical
imperatives to feed the hungry and clothe the poor. This is apparent in the way he draws on non-
literal interpretations of scripture that emphasizes the need for social reform, and which proceed
from an informed social conscience.

*The Time Machine* narrativizes the consequences of ignoring human responsibility to
tend to the needs of the poor as the Time Traveler’s story takes an ominous turn when he reveals
that the Morlocks, having run out of food, now consume the Eloi, their “brothers and sisters”
through common ancestry. Deploying the cannibalism trope, he not only critiques capitalism’s
“consumption” of the vulnerable members of society, but also launches an attack on the church
and its adherence to doctrines of blood atonement practiced through the sacrament of the Eucharist. To illustrate how Wells implicates the church in failing to adequately address social inequality, I read the discovery of the Morlock’s cannibalism through his excoriating indictment of Christian notions of sacrifice as laid out in *God the Invisible King*.

### 3.6 Sacrifice, Blood Atonement, and the Church

Returning briefly to the frame narrative, we recall the Time Traveler’s demand for mutton on his return. Since the story has not yet been told, the Time Traveler’s craving seems innocuous; however, it is significant because it foreshadows a story of cannibalism yet to unfold. Since Darwinian overtones on common ancestry are prevalent throughout the novella, meat consumption gestures to a form of cannibalism in its most literal form but also alludes to other pressing concerns. The Time Traveler’s “cannibalism” is puzzling since his experiences in 802, 701 have not appeared to alter his perception of the interconnectedness of all lifeforms, while his consumption of meat also gestures to the ambivalence of the middle class toward the Other. The banal reference to mutton consumption is also associated with empty ritual sacrifice since the meal has no meaning beyond satisfying the Time Traveler’s craving for meat.

The biblical names of the races, the Eloi and Morlocks, are associated with ritual sacrifice because both gods require an innocent victim. A commentary on blood atonement theology emerges through Wells’s views of sacraments that he sees as empty ritual, which does not ensure orthopraxis, but adherence to meaningless religious ritual. The consumption of the Eloi critiques theological and social ideologies that relegate some to the position of a “victim” who suffers for the benefit of society, while in Darwinian terms, emphasizing their connection through “blood”
or common ancestry. Turning to the Time Traveler’s discovery of the Morlocks’ cannibalism, several insights into Wells’s criticisms of the church are articulated as concepts of eschatological reversal, the notion that in the coming kingdom the poor will be given precedence over the wealthy who once oppressed them. Wells inverts Christian symbols of table fellowship, a concept that views biblical imperatives to feed the poor as quintessentially Christian, to show how orthodox religion continued to perform rites that had no practical application.

The Time Traveler’s pondering on the absence of cattle in the future is answered as he descends into the hellish underworld of the Morlocks and concludes that the Eloi have become prey. In a profound reinterpretation of eschatological reversal, the formerly affluent Eloi who were once called upon to invite the poor and disenfranchised to the love feast, have become the meal that is broken and shared since the gruesome discovery of the Morlock’s cannibalism resembles aspects of sacrificial ritual. Since Wells was well versed in early church history, the image is reminiscent of the catacombs where the Followers of the Way congregated to “re-member” deceased martyrs of the faith who, according to Christian tradition, have joined the communion of saints as they shared in a meal of fellowship; however, in The Time Machine the altar and the lurking presence of the Morlocks are the antithesis of the gathering of saints.

Consider how sacramental language is inverted to depict a grotesque inversion of the Eucharist:

[T]he faint halitus of freshly-shed blood was in the air. Some way down the central vista was a little table of white metal, laid with what seemed a meal. The Morlocks at any rate were carnivorous! Even at the time, I remember wondering what large animal could have

50 Luke 14:15-24, The Parable of the Great Banquet refers to the eschatological banquet at the end times. It was practiced by early Christians as an expression of table fellowship. The invocation of “Eloi” also alludes to Luke 22:7-38 and Matthew 26:17-30, Jesus’ Last Supper from which the Eucharistic feast derives. Wells’s reversal points to moral degeneration as Christian society has failed to live up to biblical mandates to care for the poor.
survived to furnish the red joint I saw. It was very indistinct: the heavy smell, the big unmeaning shapes, the obscene figures lurking in the shadows, only waiting for the darkness to come again. (116)

The “little white table” set with a meal and the odour of blood conjures up visions of a profane sacrificial feast, as the metal table, a symbol of modernity, resembles the altar from which the Eucharist is blessed and then broken and shared for the sins of humankind. The “breaking” of bread as a sign of table-fellowship is reversed, since the bloody joint of meat, the remains of a slain Eloi, draws on substitutionary theology that demands a victim to ensure God’s favour, a theological concept that, according to Jan-Melissa Schramm, was re-evaluated during the mid-nineteenth century (5). The “faint halitus of freshly-shed blood” and the butchered body of the victim replace the sacramental symbolism of the sweet-smelling incense, bread, and wine, in a perverse inversion of the love feast. The social significance of this revelation critiques ways in which the poor were sacrificed to Mammon as the price of “progress,” yet it also comments on the idea of blood atonement that required a suffering victim to expiate the sins of the many as ineffective since it served no practical purpose in propagating positive social change.

The “altar” does not evoke notions of atonement for the Time Traveler but rather “literalizes” the Body of Christ in a gruesome depiction of the sacrament replete with cannibalistic intonations. The “cannibalistic” nuances of the sacrament are inverted to indicate cannibalism as proof of human degeneration and regression since the innocent Eloi’s substitutional suffering for the sins of their ancestors alludes to the prelapsarian first humans in Genesis 2, who are initially vegetarian but become carnivorous after the fall. Adam and Eve receive animal skins to cover their nakedness after their transgression, the harmonious relationship between humans and animals shattered by their fall from grace. The Eloi, like the
first humans, are a “fallen” race slated for, in Darwinian terms, extinction, their vegetarian diet alluding to their “cattle-like” characteristics. The carnivorous Morlocks consume their fellow “human,” invoking the cannibalism trope prevalent in the discourse of difference regarding the colonized; however, the trope is revised to critique both capitalism and New Imperialism’s treatment of the Other at home and abroad. Wells uses both biblical motifs and Darwinism to ponder the manner in which humans are sacrificed in the name of “progress.”

According to Jan-Melissa Schramm, by the mid-nineteenth century, a move from Christian theological concepts of salvation changed as Darwinian theory created doubt in the efficacy of traditional understandings of atonement. Schramm affirms that Darwinian and Lyellian theories influenced Christian thought as the question, “‘What should I do?’” and “‘Where am I?’” (as voiced by characters in mid-century novels) changes to, “‘Who am I?’” – an immortal soul deemed worthy of discipline through adversity before reward in heaven in the traditional Christian eschatology, or a suffering animal, of no value as an individual insofar as one’s offspring may contribute in turn to the survival of the species?” (4). The Time Machine does not expound on orthodox Christian precepts on the immortality of the soul, and offers no hope of personal reward beyond death, yet it does not necessarily assert that individual worth is only measured in a prolific capacity but rather that worth is evaluated in terms of one’s moral treatment of the Other. The response to “Who am I?” is cogently settled in the novella as the Time Traveler acknowledges the disturbing fact that the Eloi and Morlocks are his own “brothers” and “sisters.” Schramm’s assessment provides an analysis of epistemological shifts that began in the mid-nineteenth century, which opens avenues for mapping how both the Bible and Darwinian theory argue for human responses that include compassion and empathy in ways
that resonate with religious and secular readers. I turn now to Wells’s *God the Invisible King* (1917) to show how and why he rejects Trinitarian theology and its preoccupation with substitution theology, which demands blood sacrifice.

In *God the Invisible King* Wells demonstrates his comprehensive knowledge of church history, biblical criticism, and the development of church doctrine, on which he expounds in order to interrogate orthodox Christianity’s belief in an external God. The manner in which names of biblical gods are used and how they function in the text suggests a host of criticisms Wells had regarding church orthodoxy. He uses this vast knowledge to debunk orthodoxy, which he considers inefficacious in implementing social change. His criticisms of church doctrine emerge in the narrative as he complicates and redeploys scripture, essentially using the “Christian book” to argue against complacency and religiosity devoid of real ethics. For Wells, ethics is the source from which empathy and compassion proceed.

For Wells, God is not external, but an integral, and indwelling part of our humanity, a source of goodness that informs our consciences to act for the common good of the human race. He argues that biology had diminished the place of the individual in favour of the species, suggesting, in agreement with Huxley, that the common good requires a mastery over baser instincts. He writes that “In whatever measure ill-controlled individuals may yield to personal impulses or attractions, the aim of the race must be a collective aim. I do not mean an austere demand of self-sacrifice from the individual, but an adjustment — as genial and generous as possible — of individual variations for common good” (80). Wells’s critique of substitution theology emerges in his novella through the overt omission of concepts of an afterlife, but also in the horrific tableaux of the altar of sacrifice that has no efficacy in bringing justice to the poor
and oppressed at home and in the far reaches of the empire. Wells’s belief in an internal deity is essential to understanding the complex discourse that emerges from his work since he places responsibility for the continuance of humankind in human hands, not on an external deity.

Wells believed that religion did not rely on a founder, such as Christ, nor on dogma, doctrine, or an authoritative organization that required a confession of faith. For Wells, a conscience that guides ethical conduct emerges from an internal divinity integral to humans. He states: “Organisation is an excellent thing for the material needs of men, for the draining of towns, the marshalling of traffic. . . But all organisations must be watched, for whatever is organized can be ‘captured’ and ‘misused’” (164-5). The church, Wells asserts, has emphasized erroneous doctrines that emerged as Christianity became an official religion, particularly in respect to sacrificial rituals associated with priesthood. Wells writes that “The church with its sacraments and its sacerdotalism is the disease of Christianity. Save for a few doubtful interpolations there is no evidence that Christ tolerated either blood sacrifices or the mysteries of priesthood. All these antique grossnesses were superadded after his martyrdom. He preached not a cult but a gospel; he sent out not medicine men but apostles” (163). The word “gospel,” derived of the Old English word, godspel, meaning “good news,” involves, in part, offering consolation to the poor and oppressed, by working towards the inauguration of a just world. Wells views the Church as inadequate because instead of emulating these imperatives to live the gospel it places emphasis instead on ritual and doctrine. For Wells, living the gospel entailed having compassion and empathy for the poor but, more importantly, it demanded justice through actively alleviating suffering. The Eucharist, unlike the first Christian celebrations that fed the poor, became a ritual commemorating Christ’s sacrificial death and a symbolic representation of
the eschatological banquet at the end of time. For Wells, this development served no practical purpose in encouraging actual aid for the most vulnerable members of society. Such ideologies, which formed the social gospel, had much in common with Wells’s conception of socialist reform. Wells rejects cult-like nuances that were derived of erroneous, literal gospel interpretation that encouraged legalism rather than orthopraxis. *God the Invisible King* articulates Wells’s rejection of the Council of Nicaea, where doctrine on the nature and substance of God was ratified as orthodox beliefs confessed by the church through a set creed proclaiming Jesus as God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. For Wells, Nicaea was a turning point for the church because it changed early Christian practices, implementing instead rituals that had no practical application, as in the case of the Eucharist.

Through the naming of the races for so-called true and false biblical gods Wells articulates his rejection of all theistic religion. Wells was aware of early church conflict that led to doctrinal confessions on the substance and nature of God as theologians, such as Athanasius, sought to connect Jesus to God. More to the point, the implementation of creeds was politically motivated by the Council of Nicaea to placate Constantine who wished to ensure peace among the various factions within a divided Christendom. Practices or beliefs that deviated from the creed were deemed heretical as the church assumed a rigid stand on what constituted orthodoxy. This was a point of contention for Wells who viewed the council as a problematic development for the church as it now adhered to politically motivated confessions over and against the spirit of the gospel that demanded social responsibility (8-11).

Wells was familiar with E.B. Tylor’s and James Frazer’s anthropological work on common mythological motifs of the dying man-god in “primitive” religion, which bore a
startling resemblance to New Testament death and resurrection narratives. The similarities suggested syncretism as pagan concepts of the dying man-god entered Christianity as historical truth instead of mythology intended to explain the cyclical nature of seasons. This familiar motif was Christianized and reworked as “proof” of Jesus’ divinity, finding its way into the Athanasian Creed, which proclaimed Jesus as the indisputable incarnation of God. For Wells, the superstitious aura invoked around the person of Jesus provided ample reason to question the literal and historical truth of a Christianity’s foundational tenets. Wells was critical of literal interpretations of scripture, which opposed scientific understandings of human origin; however, more pressing, is his antagonism towards the church that fails to propagate social change. This criticism is evident in renditions of The Chronic Argonauts (1888), an early version of The Time Machine. One version of The Chronic Argonauts depicts the Eloi as an elite priestly caste who controlled the Morlocks through hypnotism, exploiting their technological skills until the Morlocks are wakened from their trance to overthrow their oppressors (Time Arata 95). Wells’s contentious views of the priesthood or sacerdotalism also emerge in a later version of the serialized novel, which implicates over-zealous Christianity’s conflict with science, as the villagers lead a witch-hunt against the time-traveling scientist (Time Arata 83). Unlike its predecessor, The Time Machine does not directly offer controversial or polemical statements against organized religion, though these appear in God the Invisible King and The War of the Worlds. In The War of the Worlds Wells positions the Curate as degenerate since he is incapable of acting ethically in a crisis. The Curate is placed beside the Artilleryman, as both men turn to different forms of violence to survive rather than considering the welfare of humanity whereby decisions need to be based on the common good. By connecting the Curate to the Artilleryman,
Wells gestures to the lack of ethics the church embodies as it fails to emulate virtues set out in scripture to care for the vulnerable. Instead, *The Time Machine* employs biblical motifs that are creatively reconfigured or inverted to address common late Victorian anxieties around regression and degeneration, particularly as New Imperialism spread across the globe.

### 3.7 Discourses of Difference and New Imperialism

_The Time Machine_ does not directly attack New Imperialism or colonization but rather launches criticisms of racial discourses of difference in more nuanced ways, by tying race to class. In _The War of the Worlds_, the Martians aggressive landing and their unrelenting extermination of humans overtly gesture to Britain’s expansion into imperial space, presenting a “what if this happened here?” scenario. _The Time Machine_, which focuses mainly on class difference and its impact on the working poor, touches on Otherness through oblique references to so-called “social hierarchy” in terms of evolution. Wells’s critique of imperial notions of racial and class superiority is predicated on the problem of “us” and “them,” since the decadent milieu of the year 802, 701 is London, and the Eloi and Morlocks are descendants of Victorian society. Victorians such as Wells and Huxley, who advocated for common ancestry, rejected these hierarchies by dismissing social Darwinism’s privileging of some groups to the detriment of others. To illustrate how the poor at home are aligned with the racialized Other, I examine how the Time Traveler’s notion of racial superiority subtly emerges as he distances himself from both the Eloi and Morlocks.

The Time Traveler is set up to characterize stereotypical notions of Western industry as he embodies cultural constructs of the West that celebrate the progress of modernity in a
mechanized world. Such cultural discourse is ruptured as the Time Traveler, recognizing the threat the Morlocks present, needs to acquire adequate protection in the form of weapons; however, he is forced to acknowledge that the advanced technology of his era has corroded and now lies waste in a desolate museum. In the end, once sophisticated weaponry becomes obsolete as it succumbs to the ravages of time, and the Time Traveler must rely on the primitive, improvised club and a few matches as his only defense against the Morlocks. The reversion to fire and club as primitive weapons will, by the end of the novella, demonstrate the Time Traveler’s own regression to barbarity as he struggles for survival by viciously clubbing the Morlocks and then creating a hellish conflagration that consumes them and, presumably, the Eloi.

To establish how the Time Traveler reflects notions of British racial superiority, I need to retrace my steps to the moment when he recognizes that the time machine had been taken and hidden inside the sphinx. The Eloi, unconcerned with the Time Traveler’s plight and fearful of the structure, do not come to his aid, much to his annoyance. He makes a value judgement by stating: “But I was too restless to watch long; I am too Occidental for a long vigil. I could work at a problem for years, but to wait inactive for twenty-four hours – that is another matter” (98). The implication that occidentalism is associated with agency, innovation, and industry in opposition to orientalism, which tends towards stasis and lack of innovative initiative, is articulated through the Time Traveler’s biased, stereotypical view of non-Western peoples. Despite his recognition of the Eloi as his own descendants, because they are fragile and unintelligent, he racializes them to disassociate himself from their degenerative state. According to Edward Said, stereotypes that associate the East with “cultural backwardness” and the West
with progress and “cultural superiority” are social constructs that feed discourse of difference in order to uphold imperialist ideologies that privilege Western culture over the East (12-15). Despite the fact that both the groups are descendants of Victorian England, and are both described as white, each group is racialized through British Imperialist stereotypical language to suggest degeneration to a less civilized state, albeit in different ways. The Eloi are feminized through the descriptions of their delicate constitution, their blunt-cut dark hair, colourful exotic garb, and their Dresden China appearance gesturing to stereotypical Victorian assessments of “foreignness” that relegates them to a position of Other. Their indolence and lack of intelligence also allude to stereotypes of Eastern peoples as being exotic and aesthetically pleasing, but nonetheless inferior. Feminization of the racialized other frequently entered a discourse of difference in response to fears of masculine degeneration among white men, however, although Wells alludes to such anxieties, he tends to focus on a much a broader problem of regression, which includes a breakdown of ethics and morality.

The Morlocks, unlike Eloi, have technological knowledge and physical strength; however, if the Eloi were apathetic and lacking in empathy or compassion, the Morlocks represent a bloodthirsty rapaciousness that aligned them more with the animal world than with humans. For instance, the Eloi are initially described as resembling Dresden China dolls whereas the Morlocks are described as “ape-like,” resembling “human spiders” or “human rats,” thereby suggesting that the Morlocks have regressed to a hybridized state. The Time Traveler finds more affinity with the Eloi who he perceives as more closely resembling his own people; however, he

51 See Bradley Deane on Victorian anxieties regarding masculine degeneration.
eventually refers to them as “creatures,” denying their humanity despite their human appearance. What is troubling for the Time Traveler is the Morlocks’ intelligence, which is manifested through their ability to disassemble and reassemble the time machine. Such attributes complicate simple binaries because intelligence is associated with humans while instincts, as evident in the Eloi’s lack of higher cognitive functions, are associated with animals. The allusion to their animalistic traits gestures to Victorian racial “science” that either denied common ancestry or erroneously posited racist theories that claimed some races were less evolved than others, and therefore closer to animals than humans. While each group is presented as degenerate, the common thread that connects them is their British ancestry but also their lack of humanity, which comments on the belief that degeneration and regression can take place on British soil and not only in imperial spaces among indigenous peoples.

Said’s assertion that the West constructs the East as “backward” is evident in the subtle references to the Eloi as living among crumbling vestiges of a once great and advanced civilization, which intimates that they are incapable of building structures of their own. The Morlocks, conversely, live underground, having built a ventilation system and machinery to manufacture goods required for the Eloi’s needs; however, their subterranean world does not indicate cultural advancement but instead suggests regression to an early state of human cave-dwelling. Once again, binaries collapse as technical advancement does not equate with cultural or ethical progress, suggesting a host of criticisms toward contemporary thought on class and racial difference. Wells’s positioning of the Eloi and the Morlocks disputes common epistemologies by demonstrating ambivalence instead of fixity. The nuanced racializing of the two groups exposes British imperialist ideologies that view East and West in binary terms;
however, since the Time Traveler has not left England, and the Morlocks do not resemble the “Orientalized” Eloi, the novella suggests more complex meanings that move beyond binaries. The Eloi’s “foreign” appearance and the animal-like attributes of the Morlocks overtly comment on Victorian racial stereotypes that emerged through quasi-Darwinian notions, where degrees of Otherness maintained racist and classist hierarchies.

Degrees of alterity are evident through the Morlocks who now raise their former “masters” for food. The cannibalism trope, as noted earlier, is deployed in multiple ways; however, it was commonly deployed in Victorian discourses of difference to “prove” the “savagery” of other races despite the fact that it was rarely practiced among the colonized. Wells uses cannibalism to critique the “consumption” of the poor and the sacrament of the Eucharist, which has no function in feeding the poor; however, he also draws on the trope to expound on Darwinian concepts of interconnectedness. Cannibalism, and by extension “savagery,” is not viewed as something that happens in the distant corners of the empire, but instead occurs at home through meat consumption. The Time Traveler’s demand for meat in the frame story is viewed, in Darwinian terms, as a form of cannibalism. His failure to recognize the irony of his meat consumption gestures to the ambivalence of Victorians who fail to consider their place within a Darwinian web of interconnected relationships. The Morlock’s cannibalism shifts the focus away from peoples of so-called “savage” lands, to implicate British subjects as equally degenerate. Michael Parish Lee states:

With the rise of Darwinism, cannibalism could no longer be strictly consigned to the “outside” realm of the savage other. Now Victorian culture faced the idea that the line between humans and animals might not be one of division but of lineage. For many, this idea triggered the possibility that those animals consumed as meat were not essentially different from the “we” who ate them. Discourses of vegetarianism increasingly described
meat eating as a degenerate practice, pushing civilized culture down the slippery slope to cannibalistic savagery. (251)

Lee’s assessment of how meat consumption pushed “civilized culture down the slippery slope to cannibalism” opens fresh ways to read Wells’s Darwinian understanding of the connection between all humans regardless of race and class. If consumption of animal flesh raised the spectre of degeneration, then the Time Traveler and his guests who hear the horrific tale are all implicated in degenerate behaviour. Wells implies that meat consumption is unethical and so discloses flaws in a racial theory that separates human from animal and, by extension, human from human. Through the Time Traveler’s underlying racial and cultural biases, Wells also expounds on Darwinian theory’s suggestion that there is a tendency to be more receptive to people who closely resemble one’s own race. The Time Traveler responds with varying degrees of revulsion to the two groups illustrating affinity based on perceived “levels” of alterity.

Wells illustrates Darwin’s theory through the Time Traveler’s varying responses to the Eloi and Morlocks. The Time Traveler’s initial response to the Morlocks is that of instant revulsion based on their animal-like appearance, which is contrasted by his original affinity with the Eloi who are beautiful and humanoid, albeit smaller and more “foreign” in appearance than British Victorians. While his initial aversion to the Morlocks is based solely on superficial observations, his assessment of the Eloi gradually, and perhaps grudgingly, changes as he observes nuanced but significant differences that indicate their apparent inhumanity. Employing anthropological methodologies of observing cultural markers, the Time Traveler turns to customs and behaviours to provide clues that point to degeneration and regression. For instance, he recognizes the Eloi’s lack of cultural markers associated with death, such as rituals of remembrance, funerary rites or any sacred practices that suggest a belief in the afterlife.
Although the Eloi fear nightfall and the inevitable loss of one of their own, they demonstrate no grief or mourning for the victims who are taken in the night. The Time Traveler notes that the Eloi exhibit a primal fear of the dark, which they associate with the lurking presence of the Morlocks, yet they employ no strategy to defend their own kind. Instead of launching a defense, their instinct is to avoid capture through a “herding” behaviour more consistent with cattle. These observations eventually lead the Time Traveler to conclude that the Eloi, like the Morlocks, have regressed to a near bestial state yet; despite that knowledge, he continues to show less antipathy for the Eloi who outwardly resemble his own people. This is evident in his frequent references to the Eloi as “creatures” and “poor little things,” echoing paternalistic attitudes toward the Other; however, such designations also serve to dehumanize them in order to distance himself from their degeneration. This is particularly evident when the Time Traveler witnesses Weena’s near drowning. The Eloi’s apathy towards a helpless victim and their lack of response stirs anger in the Time Traveler who begins to disassociate himself from the Eloi as he ponders their lack of humanity. Ironically, his own violent reaction causes him to re-evaluate his ability to overcome difference as his rough handling of the Eloi elicits a measure of shame. Later, this insight into his own aversion toward the Other is exemplified through feelings of remorse as he recognizes his inability to feel empathy or compassion for the Morlocks. His violence toward them becomes a source of anxiety as he asserts, “I could feel the succulent giving of flesh and bone under my blows,” a sensation that initially brings a “strange exultation” that nevertheless evokes shame in his recognition of a barbarous nature lying beneath his veneer

52 See Bradley Deane’s *Masculinity and the New Imperialism* on a rugged masculinity devoid of ethics.
of civility (137). The Time Traveler’s violent outbursts arouse self-reproach as he reluctantly accepts that the Morlocks and Eloi, despite differences in appearance and behaviour, are his “brothers” and “sisters.”

The Time Traveler acknowledges his relationship to the Eloi and Morlocks, yet he cannot avoid betraying a sense of superiority indicative of Victorian discourses of difference that viewed the Other as less human. This is evident in his paternalistic attitude towards Weena who shows overt affection for him as she follows him and lovingly places flowers into his pockets. Her affection elicits a response from the Time Traveler, as he expresses a fondness for her that arouses feelings of protectiveness, and he enjoys her company; however, he does not treat her as an equal since he frequently refers to her lack of intelligence and short attention span. The Time Traveler, despite Weena’s loving nature, does not appear to view her as fully human. In response to Weena’s death he claims: “It was plain that they had left her poor little body in the forest. I cannot describe how it relieved me to think that it had escaped that awful fate to which it was destined” (emphasis added; 139). A lifeless body may not carry the essence of personhood, yet the Time Traveler’s response is nonetheless surprising because it indicates an ambivalence towards Weena. When he refers to her body as “it,” he betrays an inability to recognize the traces of humanity in her loving nature that sets her apart from the other Eloi. Although the Time Traveler regrets her death, he does not grieve her loss as a fellow human, but rather his reaction resembles the sadness experienced at the loss of a favourite pet. His relief that she did not meet her “destiny” as a victim of the Morlock’s cannibalism tacitly acknowledges his acceptance of her cattle-like state, which relegates her to the position of a sacrificial victim who pays the price for her ancestor’s transgression.
Anxieties regarding innate animal impulses residing within humans are underscored as the Time Traveler ponders his own propensity for brutality towards the Morlocks, asserting that “I was almost moved to begin a massacre of the abominations about me, but I contained myself” (139). Through his recognition and curtailing of violence, ultimately the Time Traveler’s warning to his guests is not necessarily fatalistic since he suggests that ethical and moral degeneration may be circumvented by recognizing the interconnections between class or race. He does not propose that such an endeavour is easily accomplished, as evidenced in his own visceral responses to the Eloi’s apathy and Morlocks’ brutality. The breakdown of binaries that posit one race as “good” and the other as “evil” gestures to the imperative to view the Other in terms of kinship. Instead of viewing the future as devoid of hope, the Time Traveler theorizes that humans have the power to effect change through a recognition of the Other as a neighbour who should be treated ethically, a concept common to scientific evolutionary theory and the Genesis creation myths.

Wells agrees with Huxley who questions the incongruity of positing an evolution of ethics predicated on natural selection, when the latter requires competition in the struggle for existence. He recognizes that scientific theory does not adequately address concerns of moral and ethical degeneration that had previously been the milieu of religion. Huxley’s 1888 publication in *The Nineteenth Century*, entitled, “The Struggle for Existence: A Programme,” explicates the problem of the struggle for existence in the animal kingdom, which is neither moral nor immoral. Huxley illustrates a human proclivity to feel compassion for the poor, gentle victim, using the wolf-deer analogy to describe how the wolf is vilified because it kills deer for survival. Huxley claims that humans need to suppress urges to annihilate the weaker in order for the strongest and
most able to survive, yet despite the morality imposed on civilized humans through social norms that negate unrestrained violence, there remains a primitive impulse that must be controlled. This struggle between the “civilized-self” and the “primitive-self,” to use Huxley’s terms, is evident in the Time Traveler’s internal battle for restraint, as he resists the urge to massacre the Morlocks. For Huxley, human ethics demand that “freedom of action” be curtailed in an effort to prevent harm to one’s fellow human since the exercise of a restraint guided by morality and ethics ensure the common good, “which is a negation of the struggle for existence” (167).

Huxley asserts:

He [humankind] tries to escape from his place in the animal kingdom, founded on the free development of the principle of non-moral evolution. For society not only has a moral end, but in perfection, social life, is embodied morality.

But the effort of ethical man to work towards a moral end by no means abolished, perhaps has hardly modified, the deep-seated organic impulses which impel the natural man to follow his non-moral course. One of the most essential conditions, if not the chief cause, of the struggle for existence, is the tendency to multiply without limit, which man shares with all living things. It is notable that ‘increase and multiply’ is a commandment traditionally much older than the ten, and that it is, perhaps, the only one which has been spontaneously and ex animo obeyed by the great majority of the human race. But, in society, the inevitable result of such obedience is the re-establishment, in all its intensity, of that struggle for existence – the war of each against all – the mitigation or abolition of which was the chief end of social organization. (167)

Since competition and the struggle for existence require a measure of ruthlessness, as noted by Huxley, they are antithetical to an ethics of care propagated through Genesis creation mythology, illustrating the continued currency of scripture in entering discourses on ethics and morality.

Wells, like Huxley, secularizes scripture to address social inequality since evolutionary theory fails to definitively offer assurances for an evolution of ethics that leads to virtues, such as empathy or compassion beyond the self-interest fundamental to the struggle for existence.

Huxley’s influence is articulated as Wells narrativizes the struggle for humans to act ethically,
demonstrating how human nature gravitates towards self-interest and self-preservation, which causes a reversion to animal impulses in the struggle for existence. The wolf-deer analogy, which may be applied to the Morlocks (the predator that is vilified), and the Eloi (the gentle prey who earns our sympathy), emerges in the Time Traveler’s discriminatory preference for the Eloi who appear more human than the Morlocks, a preference that unambiguously comments on the need for conscious effort to view the Other as a “neighbour” despite cultural and racial markers that point to superficial difference. The Genesis creation myths and their insistence on interconnection are conflated with elements of evolutionary science to propagate an ethics of care, which may be contrary to the primitive, inherent nature of humankind, yet as argued by Huxley and narrativized by Wells, is nonetheless essential to civilized society.

Darwinian theory that posits interconnectivity disintegrates racial and class boundaries; meanwhile the Time Traveler’s own lapses into barbarity collapse notions of the civility and superiority of British imperial culture. The Time Traveler’s slippages illustrate the animal that resides within humans, the barbarity in his fight for survival no less troubling than the violence of the Morlocks whom he refers to as “human rats” (137). While the Time Traveler might have subscribed to theories that posit forward progression both physically and ethically, ultimately, he discovers that humankind is capable of degeneration and regression through their own actions and not through the punitive actions of an omnipotent deity.

3.8 Imagining the End

Wells appropriates apocalyptic imagery from Revelation to imagine an inevitable end of the world that is final; however, he secularizes the text by eliminating a divine figure or
promised hope for the emergence of a literal “new heaven and new Earth” (Revelation: 21).\textsuperscript{53} Instead, Wells uses apocalyptic imagery in ways that do not necessarily imply a pessimistic future for humankind, but rather, it imagines a new world, created through human agency, free of social inequality. The sophisticated manner in which Wells deploys scriptural allusions emerges in nuanced references to the Dead Sea, which resembles the location from which the Time Traveler observes the final moments of the planet. By alluding to the Dead Sea, which is located in the Holy Lands, Wells invokes biblical motifs regarding a New Jerusalem that will be built following the apocalypse but, for Wells, the New Jerusalem will be located in England. Since Wells does not believe in an afterlife, the allusion serves to promise a secular understanding that a new, just world can emerge as a result of human intervention. This allusion further specifies England as a potential New Jerusalem through Wells’s subtle reference to “green and pleasant [land]”, echoing Blake’s poem “Jerusalem,” which reverberates with apocalyptic expectation (124). Although the Time Traveler’s London garden in 802, 701 is deceptively “green and pleasant” it is actually showing signs of decay as natural selection has been circumvented through over-cultivation. The reference to Blake’s poem needs to be viewed in a broader sense, focusing on the “green and pleasant [land]” as specifically tied to England, a potential “new” Jerusalem. By positing England as a metaphorical New Jerusalem following a necessary

\textsuperscript{53} It should be noted that in the \textit{Sunday Review} 78 (10 November 1894), Wells’s article, “The Cyclic Delusion,” refutes a belief in cyclical occurrences: “[W]e discover that these apparent cycles seem cyclic only through the limitations of our observation” (148). He argues that with each generation there are subtle changes, which are not repeated, but slightly adapted and changed. He depicts the end of the Earth, in Darwinian terms, as final, but his use of imagery from Revelation provides the reader agency in imagining the end.
“apocalyptic clean-up,” Wells suggests the possibility of an emergence of a new and better world; which could be established in England, a topic of much interest to Wells who published a controversial article, “New World Order” in 1940. 54

Wells reworks the apocalyptic genre to resonate with readers across a wide spectrum of religious and secular beliefs since it supported Darwinian theory but also permitted non-literal readings of an eschatological end that offers hope. In God the Invisible King, Wells suggests that hope of an “afterlife” is predicated on moral and ethical practice in this life that will ensure an improved future for the species. The omission of an afterlife in the novella is not surprising since Wells did not adhere to orthodox concepts of resurrection but viewed the amelioration of society as a form of “overcoming death,” and “sin” as a failure to treat all humans as “neighbours.”:

It is the conquest of death; first the overcoming of death in the individual by the incorporation of the motives of his life into an undying purpose, and then the defeat of that death that seems to threaten our species upon a cooling planet beneath a cooling sun. God fights against death in every form, against the great death of the race, against the petty death of indolence, insufficiency, baseness, misconception, and perversion. He it is and no other who can deliver us "from the body of this death." This is the battle that grows plainer; this is the purpose to which he calls us out of the animal's round of eating, drinking, lusting, quarrelling and laughing and weeping, fearing and failing, and presently of wearying and dying, which is the whole life that living without God can give us. And from these great propositions there follow many very definite maxims and rules of life for those who serve God. (99)

As evident in God the Invisible King, Wells did not place faith in an external deity, but in an indwelling divinity integral to humankind that guided the conscience to act ethically. Revelation,

54 In “The New World Order,” Well’s proposes a new social structure under the dominion of scientists who would replace elite, wealthy politicians in order to establish a classless, egalitarian world. While this article was controversial, and perhaps not completely reflective of Wells’s ideologies in 1895, it does suggest “secular” apocalyptic hope of a new establishment created not by God, but by humans who are fit to rule by virtue of their ethics.
rich in imagery and metaphor, was well-known for its critique of corrupted power and its demand for radical justice for the poor and disenfranchised. Since Revelation serves as both wisdom teaching and prophecy, its message, whether religious or secular, demands a reevaluation of ethics and morality in respect to relieving the vulnerable of their burdens. Wells reconfigures and inverts scriptural verses, merging horrific images of destruction with scientific speculation on the eventual death of the planet; however, a divine figure is conspicuously missing. It is worth noting that the word “God” appears only twice in the novella, each time in connection with the Time Traveler calling out to God for help; however, his cries do not resemble prayers, but are merely frantic utterances that do not appear to attach any faith in, or expectation of, a divine response. Wells’s version of the decline of humanity is consistent with apocalyptic notions of humankind’s fall as a result of transgression against its own kind, as the novella draws on biblical motifs from Genesis to Revelation.

To illustrate how Wells drew on apocalyptic imagery it is necessary to compare the biblical text to the Time Traveler’s observations of the death of the planet by attending to inversions and deletions, which in themselves offer new perspectives on the novel’s engagement with critical issues. The imagery of Revelations 6:13 resonates at the end of the novella as the sea turns blood-red and the sun scorches the Earth causing a devastating conflagration before it dies. Unlike the Revelation account, however, there are no angels perpetrating the disaster at the bidding of a divine presence, and humans are not burnt because, according to science (and the Time Traveler’s account), humans were already extinct since the planet became increasingly

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55 See Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement on apocalyptic literature as crisis literature intended to offer hope for the marginalized.
inhospitable. The imagery of Revelation and scientific prognostications are not in conflict as evident in Wells’s reworking of scripture. An examination of the following biblical verses illustrates the commonalities between scriptural imagery and the Time Traveler’s scientific observation of the end; however, they also indicate Wells rejection of divine intervention and the end of the world as a divine retribution. Revelation 6:12 and 8:1 respectively reads: “When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood,” and “When the lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven.” This is echoed in the Time Traveler’s account as he hears the final breath of life, followed by silence. In Revelation 21:23, the final dispensation is promised as the author, John of Patmos, envisions “a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sun was no more,” an allusion that closely resembles the Time Traveler’s observation:

The darkness grew apace, a cold wind began to grow in freshening gusts from the east and the showering white flakes increased in number. From the edge of the sea came a ripple and a whisper. Beyond these lifeless sounds, the world was silent. Silent? It would be hard to convey the stillness of it . . . As the darkness thickened, the eddying flakes grew more abundant, dancing before my eyes; and the cold of the air of the air more intense . . . The breeze rose to a moaning wind. I saw the black central shadow of the eclipse sweeping towards me. In another moment the pale stars alone were visible. All else was rayless obscurity. The sky was absolutely black.

The horror of this great darkness came on me. . . . Then like a red-hot bow in the sky appeared the edge of the sun. (emphasis added; 148)

56 The final or seventh dispensation is a Christian eschatological concept that claims the final age or “dispensation” will be the inauguration of God’s Kingdom on Earth. While some churches view this as a literal truth, many denominations accept the Book of Revelation as symbolic and metaphoric writings about humankind’s internal struggle with notions of good and evil.
While Revelation offers hope for a rewinding of time to a prelapsarian state, Wells’s novella promises no new heaven and earth in the literal sense; however, as evident in the entire narrative Wells’s new world is predicated on a social justice for the poor and vulnerable members of the human race that urgently needs to be addressed in the current context. The rewinding of time connects Genesis to Revelation, which in religious terms, promises a resetting of creation; however, since Wells rejects beliefs in cyclical occurrences, the connection should be read in metaphorical terms that posit no new creation other than a better world that humans are capable of creating in historical rather than in eschatological time.57

As the Time Traveler witnesses the natural and inevitable end of the Earth, the language of Genesis creation is reversed. In Genesis 1:2, the Holy Spirit “swept over the face of the deep” as a wind, and transformed the “formless void,” or a primordial chaos into an ordered creation. In keeping with its Hebrew origin, the word “wind” or “to blow” should be read as “hovered over” or “brooded,” which suggests the creative activity of God as tending the new creation in much the way a hen tends her eggs. According to Michael Anthony Corey, “the Spirit of God brooded over his creation during its initial stages, and it was this brooding that caused the universe to develop in the desired biocentric manner. This is consistent with Genesis 1:2 from the original Hebrew, which translates the word ‘moved’ as ‘stirred’” (32-3). Wells draws on Genesis imagery and language, reversing the order of creation, as the sun, moon, and stars disappear, and the earth reverts to a primordial state. The Time Traveler witnesses the return to

57 By “eschatological time,” I mean the religious belief in a new future world inaugurated and ruled by God.
chaos as he becomes aware that the earth is inhospitable and unable to sustain life as oxygen is gradually depleted. As he contemplates the death of the planet, he states:

At last a steady twilight brooded over the earth, a twilight only broken now and then when a comet glared across the darkling sky. The band of light that had indicated the sun had ceased to set – it simply rose and disappeared in the west, and grew ever broader and more red. All trace of the moon had vanished. The circling of the stars, growing slower and slower, had given place to creeping points of light. (144; emphasis added)

The Time Traveler’s observation of the end illustrates the unravelling of creation as Wells alludes to Genesis 1 and 2 through his inverted placement of the word “brooding,” which he connects to Earth’s final sign of life told of in Revelation. Wells underscores the fact that there is no omnipotent figure orchestrating the end, or on a new beginning, since it is not God but the “last steady twilight [that] broods over the earth” as it plunges into eternal darkness (144).

Wells does not posit a literal emergence of a new creation nor does he address religious concepts of ensoulment or an afterlife, because the prime purpose of the novella is to argue for an ethics which defines humanity in his current historical context. The novella proposes an inauguration of an immediate reign of justice to correct human transgression against their fellow being. The Cain and Abel division between humans, like racial and class divisions, cannot wait for an afterlife but must be addressed in the present moment. Huxley’s affirmation that the Bible “is the Magna Carta of the poor and oppressed” is expressed through Wells’s use of scripture to draw attention to ethics and empathy as inherent human traits that have been eroded through greed and corruption. Wells’s ethics were grounded in his socialist ideologies but also through a non-literal, secular interpretation of scripture that propagated concepts of “neighbour” in as broad a way as Darwinian notions of common ancestry. His socialist position may inform his
notions of egalitarianism, yet it is his knowledge of scripture that resonates with both secular and religious readers as an effective vehicle through which he delivers

3.9 Conclusion

Wells’s Time Traveler reflects Victorian epistemologies rooted in social Darwinian racial and class hierarchies, yet through his revisions of these ideologies, based on observation, he also ruptures and amends erroneous notions, which disenfranchise some groups for the benefit of others. In much the same way that Victorians failed to recognize hypocrisy regarding their treatment of the Other, the Time Traveler is susceptible to slippage. This is evident in his cravings for meat and his inability to feel empathy or compassion for the Morlocks, his brothers and sisters through common ancestry. These ambiguities and ambivalences endemic to the era are critiqued by Wells as the novella reflects and then strives to overturn complacency by appealing to Darwinian theories of common ancestry. The Bible, a continued source for contemplating humanist ideologies, is conflated with scientific concepts to argue for radical egalitarianism; however, the fate of humankind is wrested from God and unambiguously placed in human hands.

The Time Traveler’s return to the ordinariness of the frame setting juxtaposes his nightmarish journey, serving as a warning to the complacent leisureed classes that fail to recognize the dangers of perpetuating an unjust social structure that benefits the few at the expense of the many. The demographic composition of assembled guests is relevant since they are not from the leisureed, landed gentry, but from the burgeoning professional middle class that carried significant power in effecting social change. The Time Traveler’s account of the future should serve as a prophetic warning to the men since their class is implicated in the catastrophe
that resulted in the regression and degeneration of future humankind. As in the case of biblical prophets, the Time Traveler is not believed by all present, yet his story, if not inspiring hope of a glorious future for humanity, nevertheless advocates for human agency in preserving humankind through social change.

Wells’s novella, read through a religious or secular lens, places hope in the hands of humanity, since human responsibility toward one’s neighbour involved orthopraxis expressed through acts of stewardship. This concept that was re-conceptualized during the late nineteenth century as those who left the church continued to find value in biblical teachings that advocated for social responsibility. Concepts of sacrifice and atonement are stripped of their religious context and contemplated in new ways that reject blood atonement theology of previous decades, critiquing beliefs that claim, “it is better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (John 11:50). The sacrifice of the poor and disenfranchised who become cogs in the wheel of capitalism and “progress” are shown to have consequences, although not in a religious way; rather, transgression precipitates a nightmarish degeneration and regression in Darwinian terms, which has a devastating effect on humanity in the distant future. During an age of rampant capitalism, industrialization, and imperialism, Wells’s novella enters into critical social discourses that advocate for humane responses to poverty at home and the end of violence inflicted on the colonized in imperial spaces. The Time Traveler exposes middle-class complacency toward social issues; however, he also amends and overturns common epistemologies that marginalize the poor and colonized.

It is in the final words of the novella that Wells’s hope for humanity is best expressed. The fictional narrator, while contemplating the Time Traveler’s fantastic story of time travel,
recalls the strange white flowers that Weena lovingly placed in the Time Traveler’s pockets as a gesture of her friendship. These flowers are the only concrete evidence of the strange tale of time travel, yet they carry considerable significance as they gesture to a hope that humanity, through acts of love and kindness, will transcend their animality. The narrator states: “And I have by me, for my comfort, two strange flowers – shriveled now, and brown and flat and brittle – to witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man” (156). Wells’s novella does not promise an afterlife, nor the perpetuation of humankind, but rather it simply states, through the symbolism of the white flowers, a possibility for humans to draw on the intrinsic “divinity” that lies within the hearts of all humans as a basis for building a just new world.
4 Chapter Four: Survivals of the Past

One great element of religion, that moral element which among the higher nations form its most vital part, is indeed little represented in the religion of the lower races. It is not that these races have no moral sense or no moral standard, for both are strongly marked by them, if not in formal precept, at least in that traditional consensus of society which we call public opinion, according to which certain actions are held to be good or bad, right or wrong.

-E.B. Tylor (1871).

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

4.1 Introduction

Grant Allen’s The British Barbarians (1895) challenges conventional ideologies regarding the concept of “purity” in human relationships by re-inscribing its meaning to contest social epistemologies that marginalize women, the poor, and the colonized. Drawing on biblical allusions, evolutionary science, and anthropological debates, the novel engages with critical discourses on middle-class hypocrisy, ethics, and morality, which were largely influenced by the church. Specifically, Allen refutes socio-religious notions of sexual purity, marriage, and infidelity, positing natural love and attraction in Darwinian terms of sexual selection. Gillian Beer’s examination on how Darwin’s theory of sexual selection and Mary Douglas’s understanding of purity, in religious terms, provides a discursive framework from which to read the novel. Building on their premises, I will examine Allen’s varied use of scripture, providing a detailed and fresh perspective of Allen’s disillusionment with church sanctioned notions of purity. Published under the “A Hilltop Novel” designation, a label intended to warn readers of controversial material that may offend readers, Allen prioritizes ethical aims over the
commercial success of the novel, promising to raise a “protest in favour of purity” on several different fronts (vii). For Allen, purity is not contingent on religious piety as espoused by the church but stems from ethical and moral practices grounded in human virtues, such as love and respect. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the novel overtly connects organized religion with the subjugation of women and the colonized, making it an important and controversial literary work of the fin de siècle.

While Allen, like many intellectuals of his era, rejected organized religions as relics of the past, his subtle and complex use of scriptural allusions continued to resonate with Victorians who remained within the church but also those who identified with agnosticism or atheism. More importantly, I will draw attention to the manner in which Allen deploys scripture, the foundation of theological thought, to subvert the legalism of the church, reinterpreting key motifs to argue for purity in human relationships. Through an examination of The British Barbarians in relation to his other works, The Great Taboo (1890) and The Evolution of the Idea of God (1897), I will elucidate how The British Barbarians critiques church-sanctioned politicized social norms, which Allen regards as taboos and fetishes that regulate behaviour, not unlike those of so-called primitive cultures. Allen’s use of “taboo” and “fetish,” however, frequently reflects Western notions of cultural practice attributed to other races, sometimes reinforcing British imperial stereotypes of more complex practices that have been obscured through Westernization of the word. Allen’s use of scriptural allusion, which he unambiguously secularizes, illustrates the cultural value of the Bible as a basis for engaging in humanist, ethical thought.

The British Barbarians interrogates Victorian social norms through a visitor from the future, Bertram Ingledew who engages in an anthropological study of Victorian religious and
social practices. A learned man who advocates for free love (or freedom in the choice of partner) and the breakdown of social barriers that impede natural selection in humans, Bertram falls in love with a married woman and mother of two children, Frida Monteith. Through their frank, and for Frida, frequently uncomfortable conversations, Frida becomes aware of the hypocrisy of her social circle, particularly in respect to restrictions surrounding marriage and family but also in the cruelty imposed on the poor and colonized. Marriage is connected to ownership and prostitution, which according to Bertram, is contrary to liberal interpretations of Genesis and Darwinian theory that state sexual attraction and love as natural, pure states of being. For Bertram, pure loving relationships should not be fettered by conventions that commodify women forced to marry for financial stability and social position, and echoes in this the New Woman ideologies of the era. Bertram inverts social Darwinian notions of class and racial hierarchies by positing nineteenth-century Britain as a barbaric empire that has much in common with other so-called savage cultures, calling into question notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. Bertram teaches Frida the meaning of natural and pure love based on a freedom and mutual respect that contravenes social propriety, resulting in a tragic ending due to the intractability of social norms that punish those who deviate from established practices. Before I examine the text, it would be remiss to overlook the preface since Allen’s views on “purity” are extended to publication of controversial works that he considered crucial to providing a discursive framework through which to scrutinize social ills.
4.2 The Hill-top Prophet

In the preface to *The British Barbarians* Allen stakes his claim as a hill-top prophet to proclaim a message that calls for a return to purity. Although Allen’s novel vehemently opposes religious theologies, particularly in response to marriage and sexuality, he reconfigures scriptures that expound on purity, innocence, and selflessness to critique social norms endorsed by the church. Allen’s contentious view of publishers who reject controversial reading materials to avoid censure from Catholics and Wesleyan Methodists, to name a few, is ostensibly intended to prepare the reader for debateable topics that emerge from the novel (viii). His deployment of the word “purity,” which is used in several contexts and particularly in reference to Frida Monteith’s and Bertram Ingledew’s ill-fated relationship, sets the tone for a scathing critique of established institutions. To illustrate how Allen’s “prophetic” voice advocates for a return to purity, I will briefly examine his notions of “purity” in relation to the distribution of his provocative novel because his preface lays the foundation of his thoughts around ideal relationships, making it an essential part of the narrative which follows. I will then analyse how Allen complicates biblical tropes of purity, which emerge from the creation narratives, employing them liberally to advocate for women, the colonized, and the poor.

To challenge Victorian social norms, which he found distasteful, Allen employs a complicated technique that critiques multiple social ills simultaneously, thereby connecting diverse, and sometimes seemingly incongruent ideas together as a means of probing the depths of corruption in middle-class society. Connections between hypocritical mourning rituals and courting conventions appear to be scattered and unrelated ideas; however, by drawing together several seeming disparate concerns, Allen effectively presents his readers with a host of social
ills attributed to “respectable society.” Beginning with an amusing satirical tone, the novella becomes more ominous as it progresses, culminating in a dark and tragic ending as perverted notions of purity infiltrate multiple aspects of life, creating irreversible harm to the more vulnerable members of society. According to Peter Morton, Allen was an “idealistic social reformer half-willing to immolate his own career for the sake of having his radical say,” yet Allen’s criticism of social conventions, although radical, are not uncommon subjects to emerge in *fin de siècle* fiction since authors, such as Wells and Schreiner engaged in similar critical discourse (4). In regard to publication, Allen connects “purity” with “truth” as he states his intention to challenge social conventions through the novel, indicting the church, middle-class society, and editorial censorship as complicit in maintaining inequities in society.

For Allen, “purity” in publishing has eroded as, “it is almost impossible to get a novel printed in an English journal unless it is warranted to contain nothing at all to which anybody, however narrow, could possibly object, on any grounds whatever, religious, political, social, moral, or aesthetic” (ix). The novel’s preface implores readers to engage with the controversial subjects his novel explores as a means of receiving instruction on how to negotiate one’s path in a world that has been polluted by hypocritical ideas sanctioned by the church. For Allen, the novel serves a greater function than entertaining its readership because it has a potential to shape

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58 According to William Greenslade and Terence Rogers, unlike triple-decker novels that circulated through Mudie’s Circulating Library, Allen’s Hill-top novels were denied this more lucrative means of publication. Since circulating libraries decided on the “suitability” of reading materials works that were controversial or overly critical of Victorian norms were excluded (115). Also see Patrick Brantlinger.
new epistemologies, ethics, and humanist tendencies formerly the milieu of religious institutions. According to Allen, the market has been “flooded by stories of evil tendencies,” rather than subjects that propagate notions of purity (vii). The “hill-top prophet” uses the novel to reach boys and women in order “to arouse them to such living interest while they are still young and plastic, before they have crystallised and hardened into the conventional marionettes of polite society” (xv). Allen defends his novels as having an educational and instructive function, which challenges established social norms as a means of confronting corrupted notions of purity in human relationships, as is evident in the didactic tone adopted by Bertram Ingledew.

The use of the word “purity” is further developed as the purity of the countryside stands in contrast to the corruption of London, with its music halls, slums, and brothels, yet purity in human relationships becomes the more critical theme, which reverberates throughout the novel. Allen employs well-known biblical motifs that exemplify purity; however, he does not proselytize but rather attempts to set ideal standards for human conduct through a familiar medium. While the Genesis creation myths and Christological attributes of Jesus, the Son of Man, may be viewed in religious terms, I suggest that these familiar tropes, which define notions of purity in relationships, advocate for morality and “right relationships” with fellow humans in ways that move beyond religious understanding. The purity of the dying Christ, his selfless act of sacrifice, and his resurrection are easily recognized in archetypal terms by religious readers across the spectrum of beliefs, but more importantly, these motifs, rich in symbolism and metaphor, are understood as exemplars for ethics and morality within a completely secular reading. The Bible, stripped of its religious context, remains central to understanding human love as an ideal attainable through self-sacrifice, devoid of blood atonement, a concept I will expound
on later in this chapter.

Allen, the hill-top prophet, speaks his “truth,” which calls us to ponder human love in its purest and most selfless form through Bertram and Frida, whose pure love exemplifies Adam and Eve prior to the fall from grace. Since Frida is a married woman with two young children, the novel resists a reading that suggests romantic idealizations of love, engaging instead in political discourses that contravene social conventions as new evaluations of domestic ideology emerge. Bertram and Frida are set up as a new Adam and Eve, as Allen imagines humans as innocent but sexually knowledgeable. Read through a revised biblical lens, Allen posits their Paradise as already corrupted by a deceptive “serpent,” which takes the form of “public opinion” and “respectability.” I read imposed norms of “respectability” and “public opinion” in relation to the serpent in Genesis because Allen frequently alludes to and inverts elements of the creation narratives to indicate Christian hypocrisy. For instance, he emphasizes the duplicity of a “polite society” that appears to endorse sexual purity but actually solicits impurity by tacitly tolerating male sexual misconduct. The deceptive nature of these social constructs that do not encourage ethical behavior but rather promote hypocrisy and subterfuge to hide decadence behind a veneer of respectability and civility, alludes to the serpent’s power to pervert that which is natural. The meaning of “respectability” is subverted as it becomes a fetish that fails to maintain relationships that are natural and pure. Allen interrogates and exposes its superficiality by comparing British understandings of what is right and respectable with foreign customs frequently ridiculed by British imperial culture as barbaric or superstitious. His knowledge of Darwinian science and anthropology is liberally deployed to draw attention to superstition and adherence to ritual practices as cultural markers, which illustrate British society as not so much different from, as an
elaboration of, cultures they viewed as more primitive.

Allen attacks Christianity on anthropological grounds by positing belief in gods as primitive explanations for cosmic events, such as the change of seasons, by using the “Christian Book” as a weapon in his arsenal against superstition and hypocrisy. His publication, *The Evolution of the Idea of God* (1897), investigates the development of religion from its most primitive form. Drawing on the work of James Frazer, E.B. Tylor, and Andrew Lang, Allen’s contribution to the field of anthropology permeates plotlines in *The Great Taboo* and *The British Barbarians*, illustrating the efficacy of the novel to engage in critical discourses of the era. Allen’s avid admiration of Darwinism, his understanding of biblical criticism, which questioned traditional beliefs, and his anthropological studies provided him with a rational approach to illuminating the flaws in dogmatic religion. Morton claims that Allen believed “his book on religion, by exposing its folk-myth origins, will help to consign Christianity and all other revealed religions to the scrap heap. And for him that is a goal worth pursuing” (3). An investigation of Allen’s extensive understanding of scripture emerges in his book on the origins of religion, where he examines the historicity of accounts of Jesus’ death, comparing them to other mythologies of dying man-gods. A brief examination of Allen’s vast knowledge of the formation of the gospels and the mythological elements that emerge from scripture elucidates his rejection of the Bible as a historical document, particularly in relation to Jesus.

In *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, Allen begins by mapping out the history of Christianity from its inception, clearly articulating how the oral tradition gradually developed
into a written form of the New Testament. He cogently establishes how the formation of the gospels, derived from Pauline writings, oral tradition, and various Christian writings that were circulated during the early years of the church, became the source of church doctrine. For Allen, the development of Christianity was predicated on “four or five documents of doubtful age and uncertain authenticity” (Evolution 3). For Allen, Jesus’ virgin birth, death, resurrection, and later deification closely resembled key figures in other religions. His extensive knowledge of scripture is evident in his interrogation of doctrines that emerged from the scant historical documents that later became the source material for the gospels. In particular, he notes close similarities found in other non-Christian sources that call into question the historicity of scripture. Allen states:

The women who prepare spices and ointments for the body recall the Adonis rites; Pilate washing his hands of the guilt of condemnation recalls the frequent episode of the slaughterers of the god laying the blame upon others, or casting it on a knife, or crying out, “we bought you with a price; we are guiltless.” Whoever will read carefully through the Gospel accounts, side by side with Mr. Frazer’s well-chosen collection of mock-king narratives, will see for himself that endless other minor traits crop up in the story which may be equated with numerous similar incidents in the death and resurrection of the man-god elsewhere. (270)

Furthermore, Allen carefully examines the key themes of bread and wine that permeate parables, particularly those associated with Jesus’ role as the Second Person of the Trinity (270). The sophisticated way he examines scripture in relation to the Hebrew Scriptures and other traditions is no less thorough than modern biblical scholars, such as John Dominic Crossan, who also recognizes a flaw in claiming the Bible as a historical document.

Despite his contention with organized religion’s literal interpretation of scripture, Allen

59 See O. Wesley Allen’s Reading the Synoptic Gospels and John Dominic Crossan’s Who Killed Jesus? regarding historicity and mythological themes.
clearly relied on scripture as a means of contemplating ideal humanism. He does so by reinterpreting and inverting traditional Christian doctrine and practice, frequently referencing familiar biblical tropes in surprising ways and by challenging the power of the church’s influence on society as he launches an assault on the foundation of Christianity in Christianity’s own camp. In agreement with Tylor’s notions of Christian practice as “survivals” of earlier religious rituals and ideologies, Allen undermines religion by juxtaposing Christianity with “primitive” superstitions, rituals, and beliefs. Through Bertram Ingledew who visits from the twenty fifth century in order to engaged in “nomological,” or anthropological study of Victorian culture, Allen designates Christianity and all religions as relics of the past, passed down through our primitive antecedents. It should be noted that Bertram Ingledew’s knowledge of anthropology is frequently flawed as it reflects common Victorian misconceptions of concepts, such as taboos and fetishes. Allen draws on these loanwords from other cultures through a late nineteenth-century anthropological framework that tended to uphold an imperial hierarchy. The Victorian understanding of taboos and fetishes frequently obscure the original connotations of these words that have non-derogatory meaning within their respective contexts. It is also significant to observe that at times, through Bertram, Allen strategically compares “primitive” customs to British customs to point to hypocrisy; however, in doing so, he inadvertently gestures to imperialist justifications for incursions into foreign land.

Bertram’s compelling observations of Victorian social practices as fetishes and taboos challenge readers to recognize in Christianity traces of superstitions firmly ensconced in

60 Tapu is the original word that derives from the South Pacific.
primitive cultures, and to evaluate the customs which define “polite society” within a Christian context as superficial and of no value. Customs such as mourning rituals, marriage, and “proper” courting practices become associated with constructed notions of decency and respectability, the novel drawing attention to these frivolous conventions as hypocritical and having much in common with so-called primitive cultures. Religious-minded conservative Victorians acquainted with Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* and Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* were highly critical of “savage superstition” and ritual practice, while failing to recognize in Christianity and their own social milieu the remnants of beliefs and similar peculiar conventions found in other “less-developed” societies. Allen draws on Tylor’s and Frazer’s comparative anthropological methodology in *The Evolution of the Idea of God* to engage in anthropological discourse on the origins of religions, which in turn enters his novels as the means of ridiculing notions that govern polite society.

### 4.3 Rewriting Genesis

Allen liberally draws on Genesis to assert his notions of purity, alluding to a prelapsarian innocence that was shattered by the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). Through Frida and Bertram as the new Adam and Eve, Allen inverts scripture by suggesting that, contrary to social norms, sexual desire and love are natural and, therefore, not sinful. For Allen, it is society’s imposition of “morality” on human relationships that causes corruption. While his allusions to Genesis emerge initially in nuanced ways, eventually he overtly references specific

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61 I am referring to those Victorians that continued to accept orthodoxy contingent on literal biblical interpretations and a belief in the historicity of biblical peoples and events.
verses to interrogate polite society.

Brackenhurst, an aristocratic community set amid fields of heather and pure, wholesome fresh air since it is distanced from the pollution of London, sets the stage for a satirical investigation of Victorian England’s aristocratic and middle-class social customs. The novel’s setting reflects Allen’s home in the countryside, which like Brackenhurst, is described as on a hilltop covered in heather, surrounded by “unsullied nature,” away from London where the city “heaves and festers” and where “the crowded town stagnates and ferments, polluted with the diseases and vices of centuries” (xvii-xviii). The utopian description of the fresh hill-tops, like the Genesis creation myths, contains a “serpent,” making this Eden a dystopia par excellence. The ostensible purity of the setting is undermined by the uncharitable, and in some instances, wicked actions of its people, as Bertram’s anthropological study will disclose. Bertram’s study of the London slums gradually turns its critical gaze on Brackenhurst, a place inhabited by people who contribute to the misery of the poorer classes, particularly young women who turn to prostitution as a consequence of poverty, class difference, and the sexual appetites of unethical, immoral middle-class men.

Allen’s polemical response to social conventions that exacerbate the suffering of young women who turn to prostitution narrativizes socio-political discourses prevalent at the fin de siècle. To situate Allen’s novel within a larger discursive framework, I will briefly turn to the historical context that saw morality as tied to nationalism. Moral reform during the late-nineteenth century was highly politicized as it continued to impose laws on prostitutes, or those suspected of prostitution, by means of the Contagious Diseases Act through which women could be forcible examined, treated, and imprisoned. This act was repealed in 1886, and according to
Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, “the social purity campaigns, which had set out to challenge the idea of the male sexual urge as a biological fact now began to privilege nature over nurture, arguing that men were essentially sexually reckless while (unfallen) women were innately moral and the nation’s best chance of ‘race regeneration’” (8). The concept of “social purity,” which Allen rejected on the grounds that it marginalized women at the expense of men, was vehemently endorsed by Evangelicalism as social purity was tied to national identity. Richardson and Willis state: “Evangelicals chose to interpret political crisis along moral and religious lines, privileging virtue and respectability and striving to find in the new economic power of the middle classes a moral and cultural authority” (10). The socio-political climate of the fin de siècle illuminates Allen’s dissatisfaction with established religion, social norms, and political power as imposed through legislation that treated women as chattel, illustrating his alignment with the New Woman movement.

Apart from the immorality and degradation inflicted on poor women who turn to prostitution, Bertram’s study encompasses Victorian notions of marriage as a form of servitude, where women are “tabooed” by husbands who claim them as property. In the novel, landownership and marriage are interrogated in a similar fashion, drawing on Genesis creation narrative to illustrate how proprietary attitudes marginalize some in favour of others. For Bertram, who is aligned with the ideologies of the New Woman movement, marriage for anything other than mutual love, respect, and equality between two consenting parties is considered a form of prostitution, which renders women as property managed by controlling husbands. For Allen, marital relationships should not be defined by proprietary notions that privilege men but through a mutual attraction that reaches beyond the superficial desire to marry.
a beautiful young woman in order to gain wealth or social position.

External beauty, while powerful in eliciting desire, is subverted by biblical allusions of “knowing,” which refers to a transcendent human attraction that finds beauty not only perceived by the eyes but beauty that resides within. This is evident when examining scriptural verses in the original context, which requires an investigation of biblical language deployed in the original, Hebraic form. Revised readings from Genesis provide fresh approaches to understanding Allen’s reframing of ideas regarding sexual purity and morality. While purity is generally associated with innocence, Allen reconfigures and re-contextualizes scripture to value “sexual knowledge” that is derived from the sharing of self on an intimate level. In Genesis 2 the Hebrew word *yadah*, meaning “to know,” is used to describe the sexual union of Adam and Eve. When used in terms of relationships, “knowledge of” or “to know” one’s spouse is significant because a wholesome sexual union is not contingent on mere physical attraction but rather on knowing the whole person, rendering the union “holy.” It should be noted that in Genesis 6:4, a verse Allen overtly invokes, the sons of God “went into” human women, rather than “knew” women (as in the case of Adam and Eve), alluding to their sexual union as unwholesome (emphasis added). To argue for wholesome love in relationships, Allen obfuscates a biblical trope associated with God’s purifying humanity through the flood, and then reconfigures and reverses the meaning to interrogate coerced unions.

Allen reconfigures Genesis 6:4 as he describes the first encounter between Bertram and Frida. Bertram is struck by Frida’s “beauty in face and form that only declares itself as character

62 See Jeff A. Benner’s *The Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible*.
63 The word “holy” derives from Old English, which means “whole.”
develops” (33). His attraction is described in biblical terms as he notes: “As once the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and straightway coveted them, even so Bertram Ingledew looked on Frida Monteith, and saw at the first glance she was a woman to be desired, a soul high-throned, very calm and beautiful” (emphasis added; 33). This redeployment of Genesis 6:4: “The Nephilim were on earth in those days . . . when the sons of God went into the daughters of men, who bore children to them (emphasis added). Those were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown,” is overtly invoked; however, the meaning is revised as allusions to rape through the words, “went into” is excluded. While the prediluvian sons of God are, like Bertram, strongly attracted to the women, unlike Bertram, their sexual attraction results in what amounts to rape of mortal women. Allen’s borrowing of the phrase may superficially appear to be problematic because it suggests temptation and degradation ending in extinction since the following verse reads: “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” The corruption and violence brought to the world through the sons of God who created the Nephilim, or “giant” warriors, precipitates God’s purifying the earth and its inhabitants through the flood. Allen reconfigures the motif to critique relationships he considers “impure,” and later in the novel, he expounds on the violence of war, a topic already alluded to in this verse.

This biblical motif is not uncommon since as we saw in chapter two, Genesis 6:4-5 prominently emerges in Haggard’s She to expound on racial impurity, yet Allen reconfigures and inverts its meaning to indicate a different type of “impurity.” Since biblical criticism suggested a revision of interpretation that posited sexual activity as sinful, Allen, well versed in finer points
of biblical interpretation, reconfigures the scripture to place a focus on power dynamics.\textsuperscript{64} The sons of God, generally interpreted as angels (or sometimes as “fallen” angels or “Watchers” in extracanonical books), are attracted by mortal women’s beauty, culminating in sexual relations that were impure due to the unnatural union of immortal beings with humans. It is essential to recognize how Allen rejects traditional renderings of Genesis 1 and 2, stressing instead a radically liberal interpretation, which clearly states that sexuality is \textit{good}. A contextual examination of Genesis 1:27-28 illustrates the sanctity of sexual reproduction reads:

So God created mankind in his own image,

\begin{quote}
In the image of God he created them;  
Male and female he created them.  
God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” (Gen 1:27-28)
\end{quote}

Genesis 2:23-24, a version of the creation myth that predates Genesis 1, states that humans, united as partners, become “one flesh,” further affirming that they “were naked, and they felt no shame,” with the usual formula applied to the creation of humans, as with all creation that, “it was \textit{very} good.”\textsuperscript{65} While these scriptural references have been used by the church to endorse heteronormative marriage, Allen interprets the scripture as simply advocating for loving relationships, which are freely reciprocated since humankind and sexuality was sanctified by God at the time of creation.

According to Mark Knight, reworking of sacred text in fictional writing is a common

\textsuperscript{64} As evident in \textit{The Evolution of the Idea of God}, Allen’s knowledge of Biblical interpretation and Church doctrine was exemplary.  
\textsuperscript{65} All creation is “good” but the creations of humans is “\textit{very} good.”
means of interpreting scripture for its religious value; however, he also claims that it is commonly used in non-religious ways to define concepts of morality (68, 4). Building on this assessment, I suggest that Allen’s use of scripture is almost exclusively a reinterpretation that has been secularized; however, his revisions also tend to expose common inaccurate interpretations which traditionally focused on sexuality as sinful. In this instance, the scriptural reference is deployed as an analogous device, contrasting the evil that proceeds from impure relationships between mortals and immortals with Adam’s and Eve’s purity and innocence before the fall from grace. The analogy between Adam’s and Eve’s relationship, and the sons of God’s and human’s, is striking because it highlights the difference between reciprocal love and coerced marriage, which typifies unequal power dynamics. Through Bertram’s distaste for Robert’s “ownership” of his wife and children, which reflects dysfunctional family relationships, Allen critically expounds on what constituted “suitable” marriages. Allen further subverts literal and traditional scriptural interpretations to argue instead for the purity of the heart that recognizes in another an undeniable attraction that requires fulfillment. The prediluvian sons of God are attracted by the external beauty of women with no regard for character or inner beauty, the allusion strongly suggesting rape by powerful, supernatural beings who satisfy their lust through an unwholesome union with mortal women who are unable to resist their overtures. Allen’s rejection of coerced marriage not grounded in love is evident in Bertram’s attraction, which recognizes in Frida a kindred soul, her beauty given expression through her calmness and grace, in opposition to the sons of God who sexually desire women for their external “fairness.” This verse is invoked in several ways to endorse physical and emotional attraction between humans that is natural and good as evident in Bertram’s attraction to Frida and her reciprocation of those pure sentiments of
the heart. Bertram’s “coveting” is not viewed as sinful since it is based on a pure, natural attraction to the whole person of Frida, or in Darwinian terms, on natural selection, a concept I will analyze later in this chapter.

The significance of how Allen employs scripture is crucial to understanding his engagement with readers across the spectrum of religious belief. Since Victorians were well-versed in scripture, regardless of religious confession, biblical motifs functioned as a means of interrogating ethics that formed morality and conscience. While Allen’s atheism is well documented, his use of scripture confirms the multi-faceted way scripture could be used to frame arguments around humanism. The emphasis on human lust and evil in the verse invoked, connected with Bertram’s instant attraction, is an expedient way to contemplate “pure” and “impure” relationships within the context of *The British Barbarians*. Allen’s invocation of Genesis, which is rife with commentary on “right relationships,” questions the purity of marriages for convenience, financial gain, or social position, concepts that will be further developed as the novel progresses. The redeployment of the verse also indicates a deeper understanding of the focal point of the scripture, which resonates with critiques of powerful men gaining sexual advantage over women who have no power to resist. Such complicated use of scripture is not surprising, since Peter Morton asserts, “like several Victorian atheists, Grant Allen acquired knowledge of the Bible that would have shamed many a divine, and its rhythms and allusions are evident everywhere in his writing” (17). The biblical reference unambiguously points to purity in human relationships as the main focus of the novel; however, Allen strongly critiques orthodox interpretations that regulate social conventions to the detriment of women who are disempowered by unhappy and unfulfilling marriage bonds.
Frida’s attraction to Bertram develops initially from his charm, gentility, and seeming naiveté about Victorian social customs; however, her conventional views of social mores evolve as Bertram’s critiques of her social context begin to challenge ideas imposed on her by her middle-class respectability. Bertram’s observation of “fetishes,” such as clothes worn for specific occasions, and “taboos” of land, women, and children provide a source of amusement for Frida. She responds to Bertram’s assessment that, “respectability seems to be a very great object of worship in your village. . . Is it a local cult, or is it general in England?,” by facetiously replying that respectability is a “disease” in her social circle and particularly evident in her brother, Philip Christy (37). Frida’s assessment, although spoken in jest, gestures to the superficiality of Brackenhurst’s inhabitants who follow conventions for the sake of appearance. Bertram’s anthropological assessment of Brackenhurst begins to strike a dissonant chord as his comparison of modern British religious and social practice demonstrates, in agreement with Tylor and Frazer, the evolution of “savage” religious and social practice into modern versions of the same. Philip is irritated by Bertram’s use of the word “fetich” in response to observations of British customs, which appear to resemble those of “savages” in distant corners of the empire. Bertram ponders:

The only thing that puzzled him was how Philip Christy, an Englishman born, and evidently a most devout observer of the manifold taboos and juggernauts of his country, should actually deny their very existence. It was one more proof to him of the extreme caution necessary in all anthropological investigations before accepting the evidence even of well-meaning natives on points of religious or social usage, which they are often quite childishly incapable of describing in rational terms to outside inquirers. They take their own manners and customs for granted, and they cannot see them in their true relations or compare them with the similar manners and customs of other nationalities. (50)

Bertram’s anthropological observations reflect late nineteenth century stereotypes, which view “primitive” societies as static and incapable of becoming a civilization on equal footing with
Western European societies, due to their inability to recognize the irrationality of commonplace conventions. By comparing British adherence to religious and social conventions with Victorian stereotypical notions of so-called primitive peoples, Allen suggests a degree of primitivism in his own social class. For Allen, a more pressing concern is the barbaric practices of Victorian England’s adherence to conventions he found distasteful because they promoted social injustices.

Through Bertram, Allen addresses notions of property rights, such as trespass notices, which when transgressed could lead to the incarceration of the poor who have turned to poaching as a means of sustaining themselves and their families. This criticism of property rights sets a tone for a sombre exposition of interpersonal relationships, which frequently carry connotations of ownership. Through Bertram’s amusing encounter with Sir Lionel, “a most respectable and respected landed proprietor who preserved more pheasants and owned more ruinous cottages than anybody else (except the duke) round Brackenhurst,” Allen demonstrates his own socialist ideologies regarding property as a prelude to his excoriating views of proprietary “rights” in marriage (81). While Genesis is overtly invoked in proposing wholesome relationship between all humans, I contend that it also alludes to notions of property rights since, according to scripture, the earth and all its bounty is endowed to all humankind. For Allen, humans cannot be viewed as personal property, any more than game that naturally inhabits land should be owned by wealthy landowners. By extension, humans cannot be owned, since according to Genesis, they have been granted freewill.66

66 In Genesis 2, Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden tree as an act of freewill. God could have prevented them from consuming the fruit by guarding the tree (as he later does); however, although the fruit is forbidden, there is no attempt to restrain them from carrying out their desires.
According to Morton, criticism of land ownership may have been influenced by Allen’s own knowledge of his family’s wealth gained through landownership and development. Morton claims that “men like his grandfather had been able to acquire tracts of unowned Canadian wilderness, [and] his family could, forever afterwards, require the farmers who extracted their own arduous living from Grant land to pay rent sufficient to keep the entire large brood of the Allens and the Grants in idleness” (17). Morton’s assertion provides a context for Allen’s vehement criticisms of landownership; however, his careless use of “unowned Canadian wilderness” reflects imperialist attitudes that viewed imperial space as “empty.” Such an assessment is fraught since Allen, who was critical of landownership, would have recognized the injustices of benefitting from land that was acquired through dispossessing indigenous peoples, as evident in his repetition of this theme throughout the novel. Through Bertram, Allen emphatically explicates his position regarding the injustice of trespass notices served on the poor. Bertram attempts to educate Philip and Frida on the injustice of Sir Lionel’s claim to pheasants who are “sitting” on his land arguing that the birds cannot be claimed by a landowner as his own property: “Bertram cried, with a greatly amused face. "You may taboo the land—I understand that's done—but surely you can't taboo a wild bird that can fly as it likes from one piece of ground away into another” (65). Allen’s use of “taboo” does not strictly reflect the indigenous use of the word since in various regions of the South Pacific tapu might operate precisely in this way; however, his reinterpretation of the word fits in with erroneous Western understandings of cultural practices deemed “primitive.” His claim regarding ownership of land reverberates with Christian notions of creation derived from Genesis, as soil, water, animals, and all necessities of
life are endowed to all humans. Genesis 1:29-31 resonates throughout Bertram’s emphatic argument that the land and its fruits are intended for all humanity. It reads:

   God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Gen 1:29-30)

The subtle intonations of the earth and its resources belonging to all humanity, as stated in these verses, are alluded to throughout the novel as Allen widens the scope of his criticism to include incursion on distant locales in the empire. Although Genesis is not overtly invoked in respect to land ownership, nuances are evident in the notion of illicit ownership, which ultimately erodes relationships between humans but also between humans and the land.

Critiques of landownership reflect Allen’s socialist ideals, but these criticisms also gesture to hypocrisy in a Christian middle-class society that re-inscribes the natural laws of God through the unethical, albeit legal means of marginalizing the poor. According to William Greenslade and Terence Rogers, Allen was “an avowed socialist,” albeit not of the Marxist “revolutionary strand.” Greenslade and Rogers suggest that, “like many humanitarian intellectuals in Britain, Allen seems to have been politicized in the early 1880s,” as evident in an article entitled ‘Individualism and Socialism,’ which “combined an individualist anti-statism with a socialist critique of private-property” (12). The overtly socio-political tone of The British Barbarians unambiguously opposes the hypocrisy of the wealthy, who “taboo” their land through a legalized system that maintains laws which exclude the poor. This is evident through Bertram who states:
But how is it that you all allow these chiefs—landlords, don't you call them?—to taboo the soil and prevent you all from even walking over it? Don't you see that if you chose to combine in a body and insist upon the recognition of your natural rights, if you determined to make the landlords give up their taboo, and cease from injustice, they'd have to yield to you, and then you could exercise your native right of going where you pleased, and cultivate the land in common for the public benefit, instead of leaving it, as now, to be cultivated anyhow, or turned into waste for the benefit of the tabooers? (66).

Allen views aspects of ownership and land inheritance as an unnatural and unethical practice, which perpetuates state-sanctioned wrongs committed by landowners who have no moral claim to the animals that inhabit their property. Allen invokes “taboo,” which was understood by Victorians to be a primitive religious concept, and applies it to middle-class British society’s insistence on maintaining boundaries, so criticizing state and church for supporting unjust property laws. Bertram tells Frida that “savage chiefs,” would frequently taboo foods, “though to be sure, even there, nobody ever went quite so far as to taboo the very soil of earth itself” (63). His claim that tilling and hunting in primitive cultures were not constrained by laws since “it’s only in Europe, where evolution goes furthest, that taboo has reached that last silly pitch of injustice and absurdity,” unequivocally suggests that despite a “more evolved culture,” British laws continue to carry cultural markers which may be considered barbaric (63). The emphasis on the merit of owning wild birds is further developed as Allen shifts his focus to humans. Through Bertram’s knowledge of anthropology, Allen unfavorably suggests that contemporary cultural practices, which demonstrate residual, primitive, customs of “tabooing,” is extended to include women and children.

67 See reference to foot-binding on p. 21.
4.4 Criticisms of the Church

If Allen questions the unethical practice in ownership of land, his examination of human relationships unequivocally confronts notions of “ownership” of women and children by the paternal figure. Robert Monteith, a cold and severe man, wields absolute control over his wife and children; however, he does not appear to harbor any warmth for them, viewing them instead in proprietary terms. Bertram’s natural, pure admiration of Maimie brings joy to Frida who is charmed by Bertram’s affection for her daughter. Conversely, Robert orders the child to be removed, clearly disapproving of Bertram’s praise. Unlike Frida who enjoys the admiration shown to her child, Robert’s disapproval puzzles Bertram who assumes that his disapproval is based on superstitious ideas that he understands to be common among “primitive races.”

Drawing a comparison between Christian notions of parenthood that tend toward severity, and some African cultural beliefs that claim praising children could anger the gods, Allen overtly criticizes not only Robert but all forms of stern parenting that involve withholding warmth and love from children. Through Bertram, Allen places the burden of the blame on rigid Christian doctrine associated with Robert Monteith’s Calvinist, Scottish heritage:

In Scotland, which he knew by report to be a country exceptionally given over to terrible superstitions, the people still thought their sanguinary Calvinistic deity, fashioned by a race of stern John Knoxes in their own image, would do some harm to an over-praised child, “to wean them from it.” He was glad to see, however, that Frida at least did not share this degrading and hateful belief, handed down from the most fiendish of savage conceptions. On the contrary, she seemed delighted that Bertram should pat little Maimie on the head, and praise her sunny smile and her lovely hair "just like her mother's. (54)

Allen’s vehement dislike of organized religion is particularly centred on Calvinist doctrines that interpret scripture in ways that posit a deity as severe, cruel, capricious, and susceptible to jealousy. For Allen, notions that imagine a jealous God who punishes children for the sake of his
or her own vanity, are inconceivable, but perhaps more remarkable is his allusion to a propensity for humans to create a deity in their own image. Robert Monteith’s religious affiliation is unambiguously associated with his stringent ideas of family relationships, which Bertram views as dysfunctional, particularly as they pertain to power.

Robert’s objection to Bertram’s affectionate treatment of his daughter is compounded by his offense at Bertram’s admiration of his wife whom he views as his property through marriage. Robert’s disapproval of Bertram’s familiarity with his wife and daughter are not motivated by superstitious beliefs, and there are no indications that support Bertram’s theory. Instead, Robert’s dislike appears to be based on Bertram’s overly liberal philosophical ideas that allegedly threaten middle-class stability. His anthropological comparison of British culture to the ostensible barbaric customs of so-called primitive cultures are received with distaste and his ideas evaluated as dangerous knowledge, particularly in respect to marriage. Bertram’s suggestion that superstition lies at the foundation of Robert’s behavior is proven to be erroneous, since it is gradually revealed that his possessiveness of his family is based on the power he believes he has over the lives of his wife and children. For Bertram, Robert’s possessive control is presumably based on superstition, not unlike tribal chiefs who taboo their wives and children, a practice that Bertram sees as incongruent with purity of love in relationships, which is freely given and received.

The “education” Bertram imparts to Frida on matters of purity may well have shocked Victorians, since Bertram appears to hold no regard for social protocols regarding courtship, love, and marriage, especially in relationships grounded in mutual love and respect. According to Bertram, his society allows men and women “free expression of their individuality, in this the
most sacred and personal matter of human intercourse,” claiming “it’s nobody’s business to interfere” (90-91). His anthropological knowledge of other cultures and their practices informs his comparisons with Victorian social conventions as he states: “I remember having met lots of taboos among other barbarians in much the same way, to preserve the mere material purity of their women – a thing we at home wouldn’t dream of even questioning” (91). Drawing on Frazer’s and Tylor’s anthropological methodology in comparative studies of cultural practice, Allen, through Bertram, seeks to educate his contemporaries on the similarities of their courting rituals with those of “barbaric” civilizations. These interpellations disrupt the story as it enters topical discourse on cultural hierarchies, functioning as a means to critique social practices viewed by Victorians as benchmarks of respectability and civility. Since women and mothers were the bastions of propagating a “superior” race of Britons, for the sake of the nation the sexual purity of women had to be maintained by a stringent set of rules, a practice Allen denounces as barbaric. For instance, Bertram asserted that the schooling and restrictions on young women are similar to foreign practices of caging young women as constraints and restrictions are imposed for the purpose of making an ideal, advantageous marriage, always “in the interest of a purely hypocritical husband” (93). Bertram compares Chinese women’s foot-binding and cramped feet to the “cramped minds” of young, English women who are deprived of books that educate and encourage critical thought contrary to social conventions and church teachings, which restrict women’s choice in matrimonial matters and intellectual growth. While the metaphor might have struck a chord with readers, it should be noted that Bertram’s

68 See Anna Davin’s article, “Imperialism and Motherhood” and Vron Ware’s article “White Woman’s Burden” on the role of women in the empire.
invocation of foot-binding is problematic because such practices frequently provided a justification for imperialist intervention in foreign locales.

For Allen, ethics, which form the basis of morality, should be a subject that is openly discussed and debated, particularly in respect to young women who fall prey to sexual exploitation. In an intertextual moment in the novel, Allen references Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) and Mrs. Humphrey Ward’s *Robert Elsmere* (1888) as he ponders the importance of literature’s role in drawing attention to ethics and morality: ……

Why, I met a girl . . . who told me she wasn't allowed to read a book called *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, that I’d read myself, and that seemed to me one of which every young girl and married woman in England ought to be given a copy. It was the one true book I had seen in your country. And another girl wasn’t allowed to read another book, which I've since looked at, called *Robert Elsmere* — an ephemeral thing enough in its way, I don’t doubt, but proscribed in her case for no other reason on earth than because it expressed some mild disbelief as to the exact literary accuracy of those Lower Syrian pamphlets to which your priests attach such immense importance. (94-95)

Allen strategically invokes two controversial novels, which deal with different subject matter, to critique society and the church for failing to provide crucial guidance for young women and the poor. While Hardy’s novel, like Allen’s, confronts sexuality and sexual exploitation of innocent women uneducated in worldly matters, Ward’s novel challenges the literal interpretation of scripture, which focuses on orthodox readings instead of drawing on the more profound message that insists on values such as compassion, empathy, and forgiveness.

Ward’s novel positions revised readings of scripture, which support the “social gospel,” as a significant development with the potential to address social justice matters in both secular and religious ways. According to Knight and Mason, the rise of the social gospel during the latter part of the nineteenth century “construed the good news of the Christian message primarily in terms of its response to social problems and inequality” instead of abstract theological positions.
of transcendence (164). Citing new discoveries around the historicity and inerrancy of scripture, which were resisted by the church, Ward gestures to the cultural value of scripture in propagating humanism. As Darwinian science and German biblical scholarship instigated shifts in scriptural interpretation, concepts such as original sin, as mentioned earlier, were no longer seen as pertaining to sexual behavior. Fresh interpretations of Genesis viewed original sin as the usurping of God’s power through gaining knowledge, not sexuality as a sinful state. Although Hardy’s and Ward’s novels seemingly deal with different subject matters, the invocation of Ward’s novel beside Hardy’s subtly gestures to the instructional value of novels in disseminating ideas on new biblical interpretations. Tess unambiguously posits sexual unions as pure and natural instead of sinful and Robert Elsmere attends to church legalism, which impeded social reform, thereby connecting debates on liberal biblical interpretation that emerge in both novels to The British Barbarians. The prominence of new modes of biblical interpretation reflected in all the novels is critical since it articulates evolving ideas of morality. Since Allen frequently reinterprets scripture in much the same way the eponymous Elsmere does, Allen’s reference

69 “Inerrancy” may mean that there are no errors in scripture or conversely, that while there are errors in names, places, and timeframes, the message drawn from scripture is without error. These interpretive theories between various denominations are referred to as “inspiration theories” because they suggest that the authors were inspired either through “divine dictation” (God dictates and the author writes word for word), “positive assistance” (the Holy Spirit works through human Biblical authors, using their experiences, talents and understanding of God’s will), or “negative assistance” (The Holy Spirit edits out all errors made by the author). German scholarship demonstrated that the Bible was written over a thousand-year span, by different authors, in different lands, and for different contexts, accounting for discrepancy in various accounts of the same story. The reference to the inaccuracies in the “Syrian pamphlets” refers to questions around discrepancy found in the Gospel accounts, which became of much interest by German scholars, such as Julius Wellhausen. Furthermore, scholarship on which texts were accepted or rejected from the biblical canon created doubt as to any one, definitive literal “truth” in scripture, a subject that is expounded on in Robert Elsmere.
challenges “polite society” to enter into liberal critical discourse on sexual morality for the purpose of educating women. Part of the education involves turning a critical gaze on the church that uses scripture to chastise “fallen women” rather than placing the blame on men who are responsible for women’s degradation.\textsuperscript{70} Traditional interpretations that position women as sinful daughters of Eve are revised to focus on redemption, which is the overarching message of Genesis. The author’s plea expresses changing \textit{fin de siècle} attitudes towards topics such as sexuality, marriage, and “class-mixing,” his disclaimer setting the tone for the excoriating criticism of church and society in respect to female sexuality.

Drawing on his own anthropological study of other cultures, Allen compares Victorian restrictive rules around maintaining purity with those of “primitive cultures.” Through Bertram, Allen criticizes constrictive courting norms, which are endemic within wealthier classes. Bertram observes a parallel between the “Ot Damons of Borneo” and British culture, as he informs Frida that most tabooing in foreign lands occurs among the “chiefs and great people” (98). His connection between class status and customary courtship rules articulates the division between the behaviours of the middle- and working-classes. This is evident in Bertram’s claim that “in all such matters, your poorer classes are relatively pure and simple and natural. It is your richer and worse and more selfish classes among whom sex-taboos are strongest and most unnatural” (99). The comparison of British and primitive norms offends Frida as she complains: “Do you know,

\textsuperscript{70} Allen’s use of Genesis to posit Bertram’s and Frida’s love as “pure,” like Adam and Eve, refuses traditional readings that place the burden of the fall from grace on the woman. New, non-literal interpretations of scripture viewed Genesis as mythological, redirecting the focus of the story on human fraility in need of grace. A secular reading of this story focuses attention on “right relationships” between men and women, and humans, and the non-human world, placing an emphasis on ethics and morality not on sexuality.
Mr. Ingledew, ’ . . . I’m sure you don’t mean it for intentional rudeness, but it sounds to us very like it, when you speak of our taboos and compare us openly to these dreadful savages. I’m a woman, I know; but—I don’t like to hear you speak so about my England” (99). Frida’s response puzzles Bertram since he cannot comprehend how “provincialism” is viewed in patriotic terms. In this exchange, several key ideas emerge since it directly illustrates British imperial notions of racial and cultural superiority; however, it also betrays Allen’s own ambivalence because his parallels tend to endorse notions of inferiority in other cultures. His diatribe against religious ritual in various cultures does not exonerate “savage” customs but rather employs them as benchmarks of uncivilized behavior, which to a lesser extent, is a hallmark of British imperial culture. I would suggest that criticisms of courting and marriage conventions as social ills indirectly gesture to the church’s position on the institution of marriage, which influences and upholds social norms that do not place value on mutual love and respect. The church is perceived as complicit with middle-class social conventions in encouraging “suitable” marriage arrangements that maintain repressive notions of purity, but superstitions connected with the church are not confined to marriage alone. Allen’s excoriating criticisms of his own social milieu were not confined to his two Hilltop novels, but also appear in his earlier novel, The Great Taboo, which also draws on comparative anthropology to illustrate social norms that restrict women. The marooned English couple experience indigenous cultural restrictions on the island of Boupari that are not unlike those boundaries drawn around courting rituals in England. The irony of their dilemma becomes evident as Muriel and Felix observe how carefully they are observed and protected from transgressing the laws of sexual propriety:
The strange institution of taboo protected them more efficiently in their wattle huts than the whole police force of London could have done in a Belgravia mansion. There thieves break through and steal, in spite of bolts and bars, and the metropolitan constables; but at Boupari no native, however daring or however wicked, would ever venture to transgress the narrow line of white coral sand which protected the castaways like an intangible wall from all outer interference. (77)

The imposition of “taboo” on the island is not viewed as surprising since Felix was acquainted with “primitive practice”; however, the implication that such practice occurred in England, a civilized nation, is amusing but devoid of the vehemence evident in The British Barbarians.\textsuperscript{71} On arriving home from a harrowing and life-threatening experience on the island, Muriel’s Aunt Mary expresses concern that they were unmarried and unchaperoned. Muriel assures her aunt that they were never in danger of breaking courtship taboos (Allen’s term), since according to Muriel, “[T]aboo, after all, are much the same in England as in Boupari” (280). Allen’s comparisons of “savage” customs in Boupari are tempered with witticism as the island chief’s superstitions bring about his fall, yet the comparison to British cultural practice around fetishes and taboos is clearly evident, albeit in a mildly mocking way that would not elicit any offense in its readers. The British Barbarians, however, crosses the line between mild criticism and overt attacks on social practices viewed as almost sacred to middle-class Victorians.

\section*{4.5 Public Performance of Purity}

While purity in human relationships is quintessential to the novel and a subject that Allen constantly revisits, the liberally dispersed criticism of mundane social idiosyncrasies, which appear to be mild mockery, is of equal importance since these frivolities are frequently shown to

\textsuperscript{71} Allen’s understanding of “taboo” tends to suggest a superstitious (i.e unfounded) restriction and therefore devalues Pacific understandings of what is sacred, restricted or prohibited (i.e tapu).
have consequences for women or the poor. As the novel progresses, the comic imagery gradually transitions to a more somber note as Allen’s characters begin to contemplate more serious issues than dress codes and traditions around the Sabbath. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Allen employs a technique of combining several disparate topics worthy of critique, sometimes strategically expanding his central argument regarding pure relationships from the individual, to the family, community, nation, and the empire. I would draw attention to one such employment of this technique as Frida and Bertram discuss the hypocrisy around death rituals, which becomes a topic that ranges from socioeconomic imposition on the poor who have to maintain customs of mourning dress, to the restrictions placed on relatives whose normal activities are curtailed. Frida informs Bertram that due to the death of her sister-in-law in India, whom she neither knows well nor particularly cares for, she is not able to wear her new clothes but needs to be outfitted with appropriate mourning dress. Frida recognizes the hypocrisy of demonstrating outward signs of grief, particularly when no such emotion exists, but for Bertram, practical complications are more pressing, since these customs impose on those who could least afford to maintain the standard set for them through social pressures. Bertram tells Frida:

I think there are more horrible and cruel devices in the way of death-taboos and death-customs than anything else I’ve met in my researches. Indeed, most of our nomologists at home believe that all taboos originally arose out of ancestral ghost-worship, and sprang from the craven fear of dead kings or dead relatives. They think fetiches and gods and other imaginary supernatural beings were all in the last resort developed out of ghosts, hostile or friendly; and from what I see abroad, I incline to agree with them. But this mourning superstition, now—surely it must do a great deal of harm in poor households in England. People who can very ill afford to throw away good dresses must have to give them up, and get new black ones, and that often at the very moment when they’re just deprived of the aid of their only support and breadwinner I wonder it doesn’t occur to them that this is absolutely wrong, and that they oughtn't to prefer the meaningless fetich to their clear moral duty. (85-86)
This excerpt reveals several criticisms of death rituals as superstitious practice; however, it also
indicts capitalist enterprises that benefit from stringent codes of mourning attire.\textsuperscript{72} His criticism
of fetishes endorsed by religious ideologies is tied to the increase of hardship on the poor who do
not have the financial means to conform to “respectable” dress during the mourning period.
Through connecting funerary customs with church superstition, Allen effectively associates the
church’s endorsement of mourning the dead with financial constraints on the poor.

Although the novel frequently digresses from the subject of purity in marriage and sexual
unions, the central theme of purity is not completely severed since Allen’s examination of
“Victorian fetishes” around mourning, such as dress and social activity, illuminate the pervasive
manner in which hypocrisy governs society. These brief diversions may at times provide a
degree of satirical entertainment; however, these trivial “fetishes” and “taboos” are gradually
connected to notions of “purity” in an innovative way, since hypocrisy and the importance
attached to external appearances of civility fail to elevate British imperial culture to a position
completely separated from their understandings of barbarity. Allen presents stringent rules
around mourning as having a basis in primitive beliefs, as he unambiguously interpellates his
own anthropological understandings of ancestor ghost worship as the foundation of death ritual
to interrogate pious practices of mourning based on superstition.\textsuperscript{73} The discussion of religion in
anthropological terms, combined with socioeconomic concerns, circles back to his original
argument regarding prohibitions placed on young, unmarried women who require constant

\textsuperscript{72} Periodicals, such as \textit{The Graphic}, illustrate the market for mourning clothes through a myriad
of advertisements for businesses dedicated to providing “off-the-rack” garments for mourners.
\textsuperscript{73} Although Allen was influenced by James Frazer, in respect to ancestor worship being the basis
of religious belief, he and Frazer disagree.
supervision of a chaperone, thereby illustrating his literary technique of coalescing seemingly unrelated subjects to the larger issue of purity in terms of all human interaction.

Due to her sister-in-law’s death, Frida cannot chaperone her two young nieces to Exeter, meaning that the excursion will be canceled. Bertram innocently offers to escort the young women but recalls that such an arrangement would be improper since young unmarried women are “tabooed” in order to maintain their purity. Allen highlights hypocrisy when grief, an internal emotional state, becomes performative through social practices that require specific dress codes and avoidance of recreational activities. The public performance of mourning is connected to the public display of respectability as young women had to be seen with a suitable chaperone in order to maintain their purity. Allen integrates the public display of mourning and chaperoned travel through Frida’s dilemma, illustrating a diverse set of rules associated with maintaining the outward semblance of purity and respectability. The notion of “purity” is invoked in several ways, since disingenuous mourning, financial gain through customs that demand the bereaved invest in proper attire, and the restriction of activities for enjoyment are viewed by Bertram as behaviors which contradict true understandings of purity grounded in the virtues of honesty, empathy, and heartfelt compassion. The critique of banal social and religious customs around death indicates a shift in Frida’s “education” as Bertram’s observations regarding a myriad of social ills challenge her ideas of purity in terms of marriage and sexuality.

4.6 The Church, Marriage, Darwinism, and The New Woman

For Allen, the church’s view of gender politics perpetuates double standards, which oppress women, while simultaneously turning a blind-eye to male sexuality that impinges on
women of the poorer classes. Allen’s anthropological argument against social and religious taboos functions as a rational way to expose customs that have no efficacy in fostering morality. While he critiques society for sexual taboos, which repress women, ultimately, much of the blame is placed on the church as an institution firmly ensconced in setting rules that govern the most personal aspects of human existence, specifically sexuality. Mary Douglas’s examination of repressive taboos and notions of purity provides some insights, by way of anthropological theories, on the power of “tabooing” people or places within a society. Douglas asserts:

The taboo-maintained rules will be as repressive as the leading members of the society want them to be. If the makers of opinion want to prevent freemen from marrying slaves, or want to maintain a complex chain of inter-generational dynastic marriages. . . – the taboo system that supports their wishes will endure. Criticism will be suppressed, whole areas of life become unspeakable and, in consequence, unthinkable. (xiii)

Public opinion, controlled by the affluent members of society and the church, are imposed on the masses regardless of the inapplicability or practicality of rules that ultimately fail to engender ethics or morality. Purity in young women is predicated on virginity, and as noted by Allen, this stringent rule results in the degradation of women rather than a fostering of purity across the classes. Allen’s antagonistic view of the church has much to do with his understanding of biblical interpretation as well as church history, as evident in his comparison of “primitive” religious taboos (Allen’s word) to modern Christianity. His views on religion tend to be directed at a legalism that emerged as the church grew more powerful and reinterpreted scripture to suit its own agendas.

Allen’s opposition to conventional notions of sexual purity subtly takes aim at established religious doctrines that viewed extramarital sex as immoral. Douglas’s investigation of the focus on abstinence opens new avenues for reading Allen’s ambivalence to society’s and the church’s
insistence on maintaining sexual purity in women. Douglas suggests that Pauline writings
originally set the standard for Christian doctrines around marriage and purity during a period of
persecution and crisis. It should be noted, however, that Paul viewed chastity and abstinence
both inside and outside of the bonds of marriage as the benchmark for ideal purity, acceding to
marriage as a means of avoiding the sin of adultery. For Douglas, the fledgling church,
followed by the destruction of the temple by the Romans, needed to “establish a new set of
values” that reflected Christological symbolism around the imperfect body capable of
redemption through a return to purity (195). Douglas states Christian marriage, for Paul, was
symbolic of a return to prelapsarian purity, the body becoming a temple. She writes:

The idea that virginity had a special positive value was bound to fall on good soil in a small
persecuted minority group. For we have seen that these social conditions lend themselves
to beliefs which symbolise the body as an imperfect container which will only be perfect
if it can be made impermeable. Further, the idea of the high value of virginity would be
well chosen for the project of changing the role of the sexes in marriage and in society at
large. The idea of woman as the Old Eve, together with fears of sex pollution, belongs with
a certain specific type of social organisation. If this social order has to be changed, the
Second Eve, a virgin source of redemption crushing evil underfoot, is a potent new symbol
to present. (195)

Douglas’s investigation of how virginity became a central tenet within Christianity provides a
context for understanding how Allen, a man well acquainted with the sophisticated intricacies of
scripture, viewed the church’s interpretations as repressive for women and a source of
degeneration in men. Building on Douglas’s claims, I would further contend that the focus on
virginity in Christianity evolved between Paul’s first-century writings and culminated in the

74 See Brad H. Young and Neil Elliot on Paul’s teachings to the Corinthians on the topic of
sexual restraint and celibacy. Pauline scholars may not fully agree with Douglas’s assessment
since Paul stressed celibacy as an ideal.
fourth- and fifth-century development of church doctrines around Mary and the virgin birth of Jesus, which had an impact on epistemologies regarding marriage and sexuality. The prevalent focus on purity in Marian terms was distinctly Christian as it set the standard for Christian notions of marriage and purity. It should be noted that beyond purity attributed to Jesus’ obedience to God’s will and his exemplary compassion and empathy for vulnerable members of society, he has also been associated with sexual abstinence. Mary and Christ are quintessentially unobtainable exemplars of purity since Christian theology insists on a virgin birth, and Jesus as a celibate man-god who remained unnaturally celibate in opposition to his religious affiliation with Judaism, a religion that celebrates fruitfulness.

The metaphorical meaning of virginity became overshadowed by a narrow literal interpretation as scripture set the parameters of morality, placing emphasis on women as fallen Eves. I am not suggesting that sexual purity was unimportant to Judaism and early Christianity since in many cultures, virginity and sexual restraint maintained certainty regarding paternity. I would argue, however, that stringent Victorian prohibitions tended to indict sexual transgression as an indecency that could pollute society, frequently associating it with disease as evident in this

\[\text{\textsuperscript{75}}\text{In Roman Catholicism, the doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity ignores Matthew’s account that claimed Mary had children following Jesus’ birth (Matthew1:24-25), a tension that is derived from conflicting accounts in the infancy narratives.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{76}}\text{Matthew’s gospel (1:18-25) uses the word “almah,” meaning, “unmarried, young woman, which derives from Isaiah 7:14 in the Hebrew Bible or Masoretic Text. Isaiah’s prophecy regarding a child born to an “almah” who would save the nation, was an analogy which connected the Hebrew Scriptures to the New Testament in order to claim Jesus as the Messiah. The Septuagint, a Greek translation used by Roman Catholics and Protestants (prior to the Reformation), uses the word, “parthenos,” the Greek word for virgin. The literal virginity of Mary becomes central to Christian theology; however, those educated in biblical criticism and the different translations of the text would likely see the discrepancy. Also see Raymond E. Brown S.S The Birth of the Messiah (1999).}\]
novel. Sexual impropriety, particularly in women, threatened boundaries that maintained stability in Victorian culture, making it, unlike Bertram’s social milieu in the future, everybody’s business. Sexually independent women posed a danger to society because they subverted heteronormative values, which placed the woman in the private domestic sphere under the watchful gaze of her husband and her neighbours. The novel overtly attacks the hypocrisy surrounding a male sexual desire that requires satisfaction at the expense of women who prostitute themselves, while simultaneously arguing that coercive marriage is a form of prostitution in which both church and society are complicit. The New Women movement viewed marriage for financial stability and social position as coerced and therefore a form of prostitution, particularly among middle and upper-class women who were not trained in a profession. Allen’s liberal understanding of scripture in non-literal terms rejects interpretations that impinge on personal freedom in sexual and marital matters. Instead, he re-inscribes the meaning of purity to correspond to ethics and morality that engender respect for a chosen partner. Through his reinterpretation of scripture around sexuality and his Darwinian views regarding natural selection through females, Allen advocates for New Women ideologies that rejected social conventions regarding courtship and marriage in favour of individual choice, which we see in Bertram’s criticisms of society and the church.

Bertram connects religious imperatives that demand sexual abstinence before marriage with prostitution and the degradation of working-class young women. Forced abstinence, according to Allen, is a social and religious taboo that runs contrary to nature. He poses an argument that middle-class men who were expected to marry later in life, were unable to restrain their natural sexual drive, resulting in sexual exploitation of working-class women. Bertram
holds “polite society” culpable for working-class women’s degradation, which frequently led to prostitution, citing societal and religious sanctions that prohibit natural sexual behavior as the cause of promiscuity in men. Bertram considers how imposing celibacy on men is unnatural, pondering: “how completely taboo had overlaid in these people’s minds every ethical idea, how wholly it had obscured the prime necessities of healthy, vigorous, and moral manhood” (112). Allen does not overtly argue that celibacy in women is unnatural but implies such a reading through Frida’s sexual awakening, which is regarded by Bertram as natural and pure despite her marital status.

A further hindrance to “pure” relationships, according to Bertram, is the limitation of marrying within one’s own class designation. When he suggests that Martha, the pretty young servant of the Monteith’s, would make a good match for Philip, his proposal is viewed as scandalous, even by Martha “who knew her place” (112). According to Bertram, young working-class women of marriageable age were limited in choice of partners due to class restrictions; however, although they were not considered suitable matches for middle-class or aristocratic men, they were nonetheless vulnerable to sexual exploitation, which resulted in prostitution or ruin, as in the case of Hardy’s Tess. Bertram states:

O Frida, you can't imagine what things —for I know they hide them from you: cruelties of lust and neglect and shame such as you couldn't even dream of; women dying of foul disease, in want and dirt deliberately forced upon them by the will of your society; destined beforehand for death, a hateful lingering death—a death more disgusting than aught you can conceive —in order that the rest of you may be safely tabooed, each a maid intact, for the man who weds her. It’s the hatefullest taboo of all the hateful taboos I've ever seen on my wanderings, the unworthiest of a pure or moral community. (173)

Exposing the corruption that lies beneath the façade of Victorian respectability, Allen interrogates the conventional meaning of purity to propose an alternate understanding that
establishes love and mutual respect as a basis of a healthy relationship. Marriage sanctioned by the church does not ensure purity in marriage, since marrying a sexually inexperienced or “pure” woman usually was at the expense of lower-class women who were sexually compromised by “respectable” men. In maintaining class boundaries through suitable marriage, Allen contemplates the effect on poor working-class women who, despite their potential to propagate strong, healthy offspring, are denied upward mobility because of rigid class barriers.

By the end of the nineteenth century, following Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* (1871), sexuality and procreation began to be viewed in Darwinian terms. As evident in Allen’s novel, sexual union between compatible partners entered discourse on marriage; however, Allen’s use of “purity,” in terms of marriage, did not refer to sexual purity or fidelity in a conventional way but rather emphasized natural love and attraction in terms of sexual selection. According to Beer, “Darwin brought humankind openly into the evolutionary debate and emphasised – that is, unwilled – selection, but also *sexual selection*. Both the individual will and the internalised values of the community play their part in the processes of sexual selection” (196). For Darwin, proper selection of partners in the animal kingdom, which included humans, was crucial to the propagation of a strong species; therefore, producing healthy offspring was not merely of individual concern, but was crucial to the future of humankind. Beer asserts: “It is this brooding on generation and extinction beyond the lot of the individual which freights such topics with new weight and new resistances. The transfer from ontogeny to phylogeny, the paralleling of individual development to species-development, proves again to be an imaginative resource extraordinarily rich in tragic potential” (199). Darwin’s theory, to a large extent, negated boundaries imposed by society on what constituted “suitable marriage.” For Darwin, social
boundaries around marriage, which were restrictive since they were based on socioeconomic factors and were male dominated, did not ensure the continuance of a strong human race. Acknowledging Allen’s Darwinian position Beer asserts that “sexual selection according to oppressive criteria of current society will set us, in Grant Allen’s own words, ‘on the high-road to extinction’” (200). Allen’s shift from biblical allusions that posit sexual unions as natural is reinforced by the rationality of scientific study, conflating two disparate subject areas to argue for a revision of socially restrictive interference in courtship, marriage, and sexuality.

Robert’s and Frida’s marriage might have been financially and socially advantageous and was sanctioned by society and the church; however, Bertram’s insistence that the marriage is not viable due to the lack of compatibility relies on Darwinian concepts of sexual selection, which place a female in the position of choosing a sexual partner with whom to procreate. Darwinian influence is evident in Allen’s view of women’s role in choosing a sexual partner, since according to Darwin, certain laws govern procreation among all animals that place the female in the dominant role for choosing the partner more suitable for procreation (Descent Part II 273). As noted by Douglas, early Christian communities viewed the purity of women as a means of understanding how living the ideal could symbolise the new Christian community as redeemed Adams and Eves, which is in keeping with Allen’s Darwinian notions as expressed through Bertram, regarding sexual selection unencumbered by class or society dictates that excluded women who were sexually experienced. While virginity was an important factor in early Christian marriage, purity of heart was also crucial. Class and socioeconomic factors did not determine suitability, just as sexually experienced widows were not excluded from full Christian
participation within the community.\footnote{Sexual purity and virginity may have been important to early Christian communities yet Jesus’ genealogy in Matthew lists only four women, all of whom were sexually experienced, as his esteemed ancestors. Tamar pretended to be a prostitute to trick Judah into marriage, Rahab was the “harlot of Jericho,” Ruth the Moabite was a widow who placed Boaz in a compromising position in order to ensure marriage, and Mary, Jesus’ mother, was an unmarried woman who, in scripture, continued to carry the scandal of having a child out of wedlock. See Raymond Brown’s \textit{The Birth of the Messiah} (1999) and Edwin D. Freed’s \textit{The Stories of Jesus’ Birth} (2001) on the inclusion of these women in Matthew’s genealogy.} Allen draws on secularized views of human relationships, which have commonalities with religious concepts, that elevate marriage and family as sacred institutions founded on mutual love and respect.

As the New Woman movement gained momentum, views on marriage and motherhood ranged across a spectrum of beliefs. While some New Women rejected marriage and the encumbrance of motherhood, others advocated for a revision of power within the marriage, viewing child-bearing as an essential biological function. Legal rights in marriage and the right to choose a suitable spouse with whom to procreate were central to the woman question. Allen’s insistence on Darwinian imperatives, which contest Victorian ideals around choosing a suitable spouse, rejects socioeconomic position and class as mitigating factors. His liberal use of scripture regarding marriage and his adherence to principles of sexual selection disputes common practices that he viewed as detrimental to the well-being of society in his present context as well as for future generations. Beer expounds on how, for Allen, choice in partners that differed between genders observed socially constructed notions of what is considered to be uniquely “suitable” to men and women. She articulates Allen’s preoccupation with the dangers of subverting sexual selection in favour of superficial factors that failed to ensure “purity” in terms
of fostering mutually satisfying relationships. Beer attends to Darwin’s thoughts on sexual
selection in the following excerpt from *Descent*:

Civilised men are largely attracted by the mental charms of women, by their wealth, and especially by their social position; for men rarely marry into a much lower rank. . . With respect to the opposite form of selection, namely of the more attractive men by the women, although in civilised nations women have free or almost free choice, which is not the case with barbarous races, yet their choice is largely influenced by the social position and wealth of the men; and the success of the latter depends much on the intellectual powers and energy, or the fruits of these same powers in their forefathers. (197) (*Part II* 356)

While successful men may carry genetic or inherited predispositions to intellectual superiority and a degree of physical prowess that define them as a suitable match, Beer stresses Darwin’s insistence on how narrowly defined parameters around what may be considered suitable socially may not be an ideal match in terms of propagating a strong human race. She further notes that despite his views on sexual selection in humankind, he ultimately asserted that men maintain the upper hand in selecting a spouse based on aesthetics (197). Frida and Robert exemplify this because Frida is selected for her gentility and social position as well as her charming, graceful manner; however, Robert’s attraction is his wealth and social position, which proves to be inadequate once Frida considers the meaning of a marriage of convenience over and against a marriage for love. Frida’s attraction to Bertram is not based on social position or wealth but on compatibility, feelings of genuine affection, and appreciation of his unconventional yet superior ethics, morality, and virtues, which begin to mitigate her adherence to the social pressures imposed by her milieu.
4.7 Redefining “Purity” in Marriage

The “education” Frida receives from Bertram, although eliciting a degree of discomfort initially, prompts her to evaluate her marriage in a new light. Frida begins to see Bertram as a “new Adam,” pure and innocent as the biblical Adam before the fall (100). Her newly acquired notions of a true marriage contract being contingent on love, compatibility, and respect causes her to re-evaluate her marriage to Robert, which she now sees as inadequate. The ever-present spectre of public opinion and respectability rightly creates fear in Frida since she is aware of how ostracization from her community for the sin of adultery would separate her from her children. Divorced women who wished to retain custody of their children remained vulnerable under the law because the courts retained the power to decide on such matters (Richardson and Willis 7). Frida’s trepidation is well-conceived; however, her fears are overcome by the naturalness of the attraction she shares with Bertram and his (ill-advised) reassurance that she will not be parted from her children:

There was a robust frankness about his love-making that seemed to rob it of all the taint or tinge of evil. Then he caught her in his arms like a man who has never associated the purest and noblest of human passions with any lower thought, any baser personality. He had not taken his first lesson in the art of love from the wearied lips of joyless courtesans whom his own kind had debased and unsexed and degraded out of any semblance of womanhood. He bent over the woman of his choice and kissed her with chaste warmth. . . At each kiss, from which she somehow did not shrink, as if recognising its purity, Frida felt a strange thrill course through and through her. She quivered from head to foot. The scales fell from her eyes. The taboos of her race grew null and void within her. (159)

In this moment, Allen presents Frida, not as a fallen woman, but as a woman who for the first time has experienced the purest form of love that could exist between two people committed to a loving relationship. Her transformation is registered as an orgasmic awakening, as she “quivered from head to foot,” her new awareness culminating in sexual ecstasy not unlike spiritual
awakenings, which have been described in similar fashion. Frida’s transformation is complete as she experiences a true marriage of souls, which she believes could liberate her from a legal marriage based on superficial and artificial notions of social rectitude. Her innocence and purity are matched by Bertram who had never succumbed to sexual assignations with prostitutes.

Considering Allen’s invocation of Genesis creation myths, I read the “taboos” and “fetishes” of Frida’s class to be as deceptive as the serpent in the garden of Eden that changes the relationship between the first humans, corrupting the meaning of a marriage that should be grounded in mutual love and respect (Genesis 3:16). Ironically, the biblical account, when read contextually, agrees with Allen’s assessment of purity in marriage, since as discussed earlier, liberal readings of the creation narratives may be read as advocating for purity and equality in marriage. The hypocrisy of church sanctioned marriage is subverted as Frida recognizes how it encourages subterfuge rather than truth, particularly in light of the sexual corruption that is hidden and never spoken of in “polite society.”

The use of scripture as a means of engaging with discourse on ethics and morality, as I have demonstrated, is not uncommon in fin de siècle fiction; however, what is at stake in recognizing its prominence, is the manner in which familiar verses are framed to provide an argument against its traditional use. Quoting from St. Paul’s conversion experience on the road to Damascus, whereby “the scales fell from his eyes” (Acts 9:8), allowing him to profoundly

78 Readings of Genesis have frequently been interpreted as paternalistic, yet a contextual reading, keeping in mind the host of translations that vary, does advocate for partnership. Adam could find no suitable helpmate among the beasts, so God fashioned a woman from his own body. This is [mis]interpreted to suggest Adam is superior yet new biblical scholarship allows a reading, which advocated for equality since Eve essentially “completes” Adam as the perfect partner.
encounter the resurrected Christ, Allen employs the motif to exemplify the secular "metanoia". Frida traverses as her eyes are opened to a new “truth” regarding purity in human relationships. Just as Paul’s theophany is accompanied by a spiritual ecstasy, Frida’s awakening is charged with sexual connotations, which posit the sanctity of natural unions unencumbered by social constraints. What I suggest here is that the sacredness of her revelation is not inspired by an external deity but proceeds from the human condition that is capable of transcending the banality of human “creatureliness,” to find a higher calling that expresses human love in its purist, most natural, and profound form.

For Allen, and many of his contemporaries, such as Wells and Huxley, human transcendence over animal instincts that lie beneath the surface, is “sacred” since it engenders virtues required in the formation of an ethical society. Sanctity is not conferred on humanity through a Creator God but instead, for many late-Victorians, through the evolutionary process that propels humans toward an ethics of care not evident in the animal kingdom to which they belong. Since Darwinian theory had no language to posit such an understanding, and in fact, had no definitive proof of an evolution of ethics, intellectuals of the era nonetheless found reason to fill the void left by the crisis of faith brought about partially through new biblical interpretation and the overwhelming evidence that humans evolved from lower life forms. The Pauline allusion to Frida’s “conversion experience” functions in two distinct ways. First, it draws attention to her new understanding of human love, which is transformative, and second, it posits a new understanding of religious and social conventions that pervert freely given love between humans.

79 The Greek word Paul uses to describe his “transformation” or “change of heart.”
which is, in itself, “holy.” Instead of receiving a Christological vision of “truth” as in the case of
the self-proclaimed apostle, Paul, Frida’s transformation entails a denial of church and social
conventions, which constrict the best of human impulses, such as love. Allen quintessentially
deploys scriptural allusions, subverting and reconfiguring the meaning as he uses the “Christian
Book” to argue against Christian dogmatism. On the surface, the use of Paul’s conversion and
transformation is applicable to Frida’s new awareness, yet, as argued by Douglas, the Acts of the
Apostles as attributed to Paul also expounds on marriage and purity in both literal and
metaphoric ways. The sublimity of human experience, for Allen, is achieved through right
relationships, which precipitate social reform at home and in the far-reaches of the empire.

4.8 Criticisms of Imperialism

The novel negotiates its way through controversial subjects such as sexuality and woman’s
rights, exposing Allen’s socialist and reformist views, which become increasingly vehement as
his animosity towards the church shifts focus to a wider concern. His criticism of a church-
sanctioned New Imperialism is evident in his characterization of the London visitor, Dean
Chalmers, a “popular preacher” who is to deliver a sermon on behalf of “The Society for
Superseding the Existing Superstitions of China and Japan by the Dying Ones of Europe” (101).
Chalmers interrogates Bertram who has no desire to engage in theological wrangling with a
clergyman as to his people’s liberal views of religion. The Dean is offended by Bertram’s
response that his people “acknowledge and investigate every reality they can find in the
universe—and admit no phantoms. They believe in everything that can be shown or proved to be
natural and true; but in nothing supernatural, that is to say, imaginary or non-existent. They accept plain facts: they reject pure phantasies” (109). Since Dean Chalmers does not equate elements of Christianity with Eastern beliefs in phantoms, Bertram’s response is received with antagonism. The Dean, perceiving Bertram’s ideas as dangerous, agrees with General Claviger that Bertram would be better off engaged in military service killing his fellow humans in remote corners of the empire. The narrator interpellates an evaluation of the Dean’s assessment:

‘He’d be better engaged so,’ the Dean murmured reflectively, ‘than in diffusing these horrid revolutionary and atheistical doctrines.’ For the Church was as usual in accord with the sword, theoretically all peace, practically all bloodshed and rapine and aggression: and anything that was not his own opinion envisaged itself always to the Dean's crystallised mind as revolutionary and atheistic (emphasis added; 118).

Instead of articulating the church’s complicity in the violence of New Imperialism through Bertram, the narrator disrupts the narrative by setting down his own views of New Imperialism’s incursion in foreign lands. His assertion of the church’s collaboration with “the sword” is an overt accusation leveled against both the church and empire, as imperial violence is illustrated as an assault on purity of a different kind, as wholesale murder for profit. This is evident in General Claviger’s mercenary activities in Africa and Afghanistan, which are tied to New Imperialism’s violent incursions across the globe. This interpellation widens the scope of Allen’s critical position, the tenor moving from satire to undiluted indictment of the pillars of Victorian culture.

Allen’s distaste for military intervention in colonial spaces is palpable through Bertram’s judgement of the General as he compares violent British military campaigns to human sacrifice,

80 Bertram views Christian belief and practice as tantamount to belief in phantoms, calling into question the lack of rationality. The Dean is offended that Bertram equates such beliefs with Christianity that did not endorse beliefs in phantoms.
yet again drawing on comparative anthropological methodology to deliver an excoriating critique of Britain’s engagement in the “scramble for Africa.” The General’s pride in his many campaigns fails to impress Bertram as he “yawned through that technical talk; he was a man of peace, and schemes of organized blood-shed interested him no more than the details of a projected human sacrifice, given by a Central African chief with native gusto, would interest an average European gentleman” (102). Allen strategically moves from the focus on purity in personal relationships, the primary focus of the text, to incorporate a wider context. He does so to indicate how dysfunctional relationships within the imperial family of nations, which was wracked with violence and coercion, denied the colonized human rights and a voice to register their discontent. Greenslade and Rogers contend:

As a socialist, Allen was publicly critical of the monarchy, witheringly contemptuous of the aristocracy and the House of Lords, and a vocal advocate of meritocracy. . . This was coupled with an anti-militarism and a skepticism towards the new imperialism of the 1880s and 1890s which stayed with him up until his death in October 1899, as the troops were being dispatched to the South African war. (14)

Allen’s political ideologies are articulated in the novel; however, these radical views on the church and empire are intricately connected to domestic concerns, such as marriage, sexuality, and poverty in Britain. The frequent movement from Bertram’s and Frida’s pure relationship to larger issues strategically connects all social problems, beginning with the domestic sphere and culminating in a critique of the church and the empire as institutions complicit in corruption, thereby requiring radical social reform. The movement from individual, to family, and then to the empire creates a web of interrelationships, the effect being to invite the reader to contemplate all life on the planet as interconnected. Since Darwinian science and scripture endorsed monogenesis, Allen draws on both subjects to elucidate “evil tendencies” that have far-reaching
effects (British vii). Dysfunction in the foundation of society, the family, is reflected in the wider context, as the relationship between empire and the colonized may be viewed in terms of problematic family dynamics, either through the metaphor of parent and child, which was common, but also through a symbolic “marriage” that was based on paternalism and coercion.

Allen’s expansion from the two central characters to the empire provides an opportunity to contemplate human relationships in a wider context; however, this strategy also articulates how church and society are complicit in perpetuating “evil tendencies” on a grand scale. Allen demonstrates how personal relationships could be reformed through character development, as in the case of Bertram and Frida, and then expands that motif to encompass the realm of large-scale institutions. The shift from the individual to the larger sphere signals a change in tone as the narrative moves from light-hearted satire to expound on the tragic consequences of British imperial incursion abroad. The novel encompasses the tragic mistreatment of the racialized Other and the domestic mistreatment of women as a means of illustrating, to different degrees, the evils of subjugating some members of the human race in favour of others. The frequent shifts in focus fulfill Allen’s desire to educate though the novel. Anthropology, Darwinian science, and new biblical interpretation are applied to pressing concerns to provide readers with an opportunity to think critically about their own context, as they are invited to engage in intellectual discourses across a wide range of concerns, encompassing both the foreign and domestic milieu.

Returning the focus of the novel to Frida’s and Bertram’s relationship, religious and conventional thoughts on marriage are subverted by Allen’s reinterpretation of purity, adultery, and marriage bonds. Frida’s new sense of liberation from an unfulfilling marriage is given full expression in the pure relationship she shares with Bertram. Her reservations regarding adultery
are circumvented by Bertram’s insistence that her legal marriage, which we may infer was coerced through stringent social pressures to “marry well,” is little more than prostitution. Following their declarations of love, Frida’s conversion is complete as she states, “I don’t know what you’ve done to me, but I feel quite different – as if I’d eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (160). Instead of invoking Genesis 3:6, where Eve disobeys God’s command by eating the fruit as evil, Allen reverses the meaning to extol the virtues of having her eyes opened, a theme that permeates the novel in its inducement to embrace knowledge brought about through science and the growing field of anthropology. Knowledge of good and evil places humans at an elevated status, as evident in Darwin’s evolutionary science since unlike the animals from which they evolved humans are endowed with rationality and the ability to discern the difference between right and wrong, or moral and immoral. For Allen, the first sin is a blessing, since it initiated human intellectual growth, as posited by Victorian anthropologists and evolutionary scientists who argue that the human brain evolved in response to environmental pressures that increasingly required more complex thought processes. These alterations in the brain initiated a move from instinctual responses to rational deliberation (Descent 28).

The increasingly somber tenor of the novel culminates in tragedy, as Bertram’s and Frida’s short-lived romance ends. Bertram’s allusions to ritual sacrifice in African nations and blood atonement theologies become a prelude to this, as blood atonement is subverted by gesturing to ideologies that resist substitution theology in favour of sacrifice of self for the betterment of others. On the pure hilltops of Brackenhurst, Bertram, a messianic figure from the future, delivers prophetic instruction to Frida in a manner that reflects Christological reverberations of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew: 5-7), particularly in the beatitude:
“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God,” (Matt. 5:8). The veiled reference to the beatitude articulates the disconnect between the spirit of Christianity and its legalistic practice, which neither encourages pureness in heart nor recognizes the meaning of the beatitude in relation to humility. Both Bertram and Frida understand what it means to be pure in heart, a state that is not predicated on wealth or social position but on a return to the original innocence of humankind. Their partnership is reminiscent of the prelapsarian Adam and Eve; however, for the reader, well aware of the presence of the serpent in the garden, the New Eden is an impossible ideal. Robert’s intrusion does not offer temptation, as does the serpent in Genesis but rather initiates a series of circumstances that spiral to a tragic conclusion for Frida.

Robert Monteith represents the serpent in several ways since he embodies the hypocrisy and lies behind the veneer of respectability. His confrontation, although not unexpected, prompts Bertram’s challenge to the meaning of adultery. While it cannot be denied that Frida’s relationship with Bertram is adulterous, Allen’s reversal of biblical and church views of adultery re-inscribes the meaning in ways that interpret marriage for the wrong reasons as the true adultery. Through these inversions and reversals, Allen challenges the church and society by reinterpreting notions of purity based on non-legalistic, fresh approaches to creation mythology.

Purity is not conferred on the pair through legal and religious conceptualizations of marriage but rather relies on the prelapsarian state of humans as the exemplar to which we must return. Bertram counters Robert’s accusations of adultery by arguing:

Adultery it was indeed, and untruth to her own higher and purer nature, for this lady to spend one night of her life under your roof with you; what she has taken now in exchange is holy marriage, the only real and sacred marriage, the marriage of true souls, to which even the wiser of yourselves, the poets of your nation, would not admit impediment. If you
dare to apply such base language as this to my lady’s actions, you must answer for it to me, her natural protector, for I will not permit it. (189)

The allusion to Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116 is unmistakable, as he insists that the holiness of marriage demands a loving and respectful commitment that comes from the soul. By citing revered poetry by a quintessentially English author, Allen makes a nationalistic appeal, presenting his views as timeless since they were endorsed by Shakespeare centuries earlier. The invocation of Shakespeare is intended to add plausibility to his contention that marriage can endure no impediments, such as meaningless dictates that corrupt ideal human interactions. The deployment of religious words, such as “holy” and “sacred,” redefine the Christian meaning to coincide with Darwinian theories of natural selection since a “holy” union is predicated on natural sexual attraction that will result in the propagation of a strong race. For proponents of Darwinian theory, who harbored hopes for an evolution of ethics, a generation born of ethical and moral parentage, in addition to physically superior constitutions, was necessary.

On an English hilltop, where ancient chiefs were interred with the wives they murdered, Robert exacts his revenge on Bertram and Frida. The location associated with cruel taboos requiring the death of wives is unambiguously tied to Britain’s ancient history and this is compounded by biblical imagery of sacrifice and resurrection. The time Frida spends with Bertram draws on Christological imagery, as at the end of the three days Bertram “dies,” his body disappearing in a blue flame as the perfume of violets, like incense, rises in the air:

Gradually, as they gazed, the pale blue flame, rising higher and higher, gathered force and volume, and the perfume as of violets became distinct on the air, like the savour of a purer life than this century wots of. Bit by bit, the wan blue light, flickering thicker and thicker, shaped itself into the form and features of a man, even the outward semblance of Bertram Ingledew. Shadowy, but with an ineffable glory, it hovered for a minute or two above the spot on the moor where the corpse had lain; for now they were aware that as the flame-
shape formed, the body that lay dead upon the ground beneath dissolved by degrees and melted into it (194).

Bertram’s departure from the nineteenth century resembles an apotheosis reminiscent of Christ’s transfiguration in Matthew:16, and his appearance after the resurrection on the third day; however, unlike Christ’s assertion that he ascends to heaven, Bertram’s last words inform Frida of his return to the twenty fifth century, subverting Christian beliefs in resurrection of the dead. Bertram tells Frida that she is able to follow him, although how this may occur remains a mystery. His bloodless sacrifice is the cost of Frida’s freedom from a joyless marriage; however, the enigmatic ending is not hopeful since Frida’s release is contingent on her death and ultimate separation from her children. The Christ-like resurrection assumes Darwinian undercurrents since Bertram’s body does not ascend to heaven but into the future, drawing on evolutionary theory’s position that the afterlife does not involve a supernatural continuance beyond death but rather the continued perpetuation of the species. The bloodless sacrifice inverts Christ’s death and resurrection during a time when blood atonement theologies were questioned, thereby critiquing theologies which called for a victim. Bertram’s death does not redeem Frida but draws attention to the inefficacy of blood atonement and the decay that lies at the heart of middle-class society. Bertram, like Christ, is the innocent victim of a culture that demands recompense in blood for the transgressions of the collective, and like Christ, his martyrdom does not end corruption but nevertheless draws attention to the possibility of purity through the emulation of the man-god.

Allen’s inversion of biblical motifs is compounded since, besides Christological allusions, he also invokes Cain’s murder of Abel. Invoking the first murder that occurs in Genesis is significant because it further gestures to the degeneration of humankind. Unlike
Abel’s blood that proclaims Cain’s guilt, Bertram’s bloodless death leaves no trace of Robert’s sinful actions, and without the body or blood, no accusation against Robert can be made: “Not a trace was left on the heath of Robert Monteith’s crime: not a dapple of blood, not a clot of gore: only a pale blue flame and a persistent image represented the body that was once Bertram Ingledew’s” (194). Robert’s “honour” was challenged by his wife’s adultery, causing him to resort to violence that ultimately ends in murder, as he draws on his animal nature, which overcomes his humanity. If the shameful way Robert kills the unarmed Bertram indicates regression to a savage state, then the cowardice of his lack of remorse and his relief at the lack of evidence clearly articulates Allen critique that evil lurks behind “respectable” society. Robert’s determination to force Frida to return to their home was viewed as lawful since case law established in 1891 reaffirmed a husband’s right to restrain his wife “if he saw her in the act of going to meet a paramour” (Richardson and Willis 8). Furthermore, husbands who forced sexual intercourse on their wives were not considered rapists under the law and the 1884 Matrimonial Causes Act “decreed that refusal to comply with a decree of restitution of conjugal rights would simply render the refuser guilty of desertion” (7). Frida’s refusal to comply with Robert’s demands to return home and resume their marriage rendered her powerless as a mother, since Robert was entitled to maintain custody of their children under the law. In the same way he denounces the sexual impropriety of men who prey on vulnerable women, Allen indicts a society that covers criminal behavior while maintaining a façade of civility. For Allen, the novel provided a forum from which to challenge hypocrisy in Victorian society, particularly in respect to interpersonal relationships between men and women but also between classes and other racial groups. The novel’s ending is jarring, since Frida’s only recourse is to be bound to an
unsatisfactory marriage where her sexuality would be violated by Robert’s legal rights, or to die in order to be reunited with Bertram. This dilemma is fraught with contradiction as she chooses to abandon her children to the care of an unfeeling and murderous father, which runs counter to Darwinian notions of ideal womanhood tied to motherhood. In this respect, Allen does not provide a satisfactory ending; however, this unresolved conclusion strategically points to the impossibility of justice for women in the present context, which echoed key concerns of the New Woman Movement in regard to marriage, divorce, and child custody.

4.9 Conclusion

As the New Woman’s movement gained momentum at the fin de siècle, marriage and motherhood became an integral part of scientific discourse. Allen’s views reflected tensions evident in an era coming to terms with evolutionary theory, which saw women as essential to the propagation of a strong future generation, however, he resists engaging in racist aspects associated with ideologies that placed Anglo-Saxons above other races. According to Vron Ware:

During the late Victorian period when theories of race and eugenics were used to bolster the concept of the innate superiority of the white race above all others, English women were seen as the ‘conduits of the essence of the race’. They not only symbolized the guardians of the race in their reproductive capacity, but they also provided – as long as they were of the right class and breeding – a guarantee that British morals and principles were adhered to in the settler community, as well as being transmitted to the next generation.

Ware’s assessment is relevant to colonial spaces; however, ideas of “the right class and breeding” were a prominent issue in Britain, as evident in Allen’s critique of marrying along class lines. A myriad of changing epistemologies emerged at the fin de siècle as evolutionary
science and shifting understandings of scripture caused intellectuals to confront topical subjects in ways never permitted before. The decline of church power and the recognition of religious complicity in perpetuating social ills provided fertile ground for authors to educate readers on alternative ways of thinking ontologically. Humankind’s connection with the animal kingdom and women’s role in perpetuating the species through suitable natural selection forced a re-evaluation of centuries of thinking about humanity’s place in the cosmos. *The British Barbarians* reflect these tensions, as evolutionary views on women’s prominent role in human history posit a host of problems for restrictive laws and social conventions that marginalized half of the population. Since motherhood was seen as a sacred function necessary to building a strong, ethical society, denying children their mother’s nurture seemed unnatural biologically as well as ethically and morally unjust.

The novel, however, falls short of maintaining this position since Bertram’s inability to predict the consequences of his actions inadvertently deprives Frida’s children of her influential presence at a crucial time in their young lives. Allen may have intended this ironic twist to further indict both the church and society for imposing unjust rules that perpetrate tragic consequences, which are narrativized through Frida’s suicide. The somber ending demands a critique of “polite society’s” untenable adherence to practices that detract from Christian values that have been eroded over time.

*Fin de siècle* fiction frequently relies on familiar biblical tropes to articulate human virtues, which lead to ethics, filling the void left by a disenchantment with organized religion. Authors such as Grant Allen continued to capitalize on biblical motifs that addressed questions of ethics and morality not evident in evolutionary science; however, it is my contention that how
these tropes were reconfigured, reversed, and sometimes conflated with scientific theory offers fresh ways of reading late nineteenth-century fiction. Allen finds it expedient to use biblical notions of purity to illustrate what constitutes concepts of “right relationship.” For Allen, conformity to limited social and religious understandings of purity perpetuates marginalization of members of society based on class, race, and gender. His inversion of these motifs frequently undermines traditional renderings; however, it also demonstrates the versatility of scripture in propounding radical social reform.

While public opinion and notions of respectability claim allegiance with Christian principles, Allen offers liberal interpretations that indict religion and obsequious adherence to norms that have no value in promoting true purity. The novel frequently meanders through a myriad of topical issues from useless mourning rituals, the chaperoning and education of young women, and women’s sexual freedom, drawing parallels to so-called primitive cultural practices considered to be barbaric in Britain. Through criticisms of accepted conventions, he successfully illustrates the barbarism around Victorian social norms, sanctioned by the church, which not only resemble the superstitious and harmful practices of “savages,” but according to contemporary anthropologists, are residual effects of previous religious beliefs that have evolved over time.

Allen’s knowledge of new biblical scholarship and church traditions, which he expounds on in *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, allows him to interrogate social practices, approved by the church that has perpetuated “impure” behaviors rather than combating them. Drawing on scripture, anthropological studies of the foundations of religion, and Darwinian theory he argues for a return to purity, which he posits in prelapsarian terms. The central focus of the novel contests social norms around marriage, courtship, and adultery while simultaneously expanding
the plot to critique larger issues such as prostitution, poverty, and the violence of New Imperialism. Allen strategically gestures to the interconnectedness of humanity as endorsed by both Genesis and Darwinian theory. By moving from interrelationships between men and women, to the family as the building block of society, Allen effectively illustrates how domestic discord and dysfunction have larger implications for society and the empire. *The British Barbarians*, despite its initial satiric and comedic tone, is an important work of the *fin de siècle* that deserves further investigation since it interrogates foundational problems of the era that need to be addressed in order to build a just society that does not marginalize women, the poor, or the colonized.
5 Chapter Five: A Sermon on the *Kopje*: Peter Simon’s Conversion

I would have it that the name of South Africa should stand first among all earth’s nations for justice and generosity to small and wronged nations. I have this lofty ambition for my people; and, if so be that, in our years of anguish and darkness we have learnt this lesson, we shall not have wept and bled in vain. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy; no, more than this: Blessed are the merciful, for theirs is the infinite beatitude of extending mercy. The future is ours. Let us, the women of South Africa, keep our eyes steadily fixed on it, and labour for it. Though ten thousand shall fall on my right hand and ten thousand at my left, yet I will not be afraid.

-Olive Schreiner’s *Speech [in the form of a letter] on the Boer War at the Somerset East Women’s Meeting, 12 October, 1900.*

To a Great Good Man, Sir George Grey, once Governor of the Cape Colony, who during his rule in South Africa, bound himself to the Dutchmen, Englishmen, and the Natives he governed, by an incorruptible justice and broad humanity; and who is remembered among us to-day as representing the noblest attributes of an Imperial Rule.

-From Olive Schreiner’s dedication in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*

5.1 Introduction

Olive Schreiner’s *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), employs secularized interpretations of gospel parables and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), specifically invoking the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11) and the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), as a heartfelt appeal to resist the violence occurring in Southern Africa. The novella directly implicates Cecil B. Rhodes and his Chartered British South African Company for the slaughter of the Mashona in Southern Africa. Schreiner, an atheist, socialist, free-thinker, and feminist admits to writing the novella in reaction to his violence. In light of her atheism, Schreiner’s invocation of scripture may superficially appear to be perplexing; however, as I will illustrate, the religious intonations function as a critique of Christian complacency and hypocrisy rather than demonstrating the residual influence of evangelical Christianity. Schreiner’s Jesus is not God Incarnate but a man who exemplifies attainable humanitarian virtues of empathy and compassion.
While the novella had been well-received by readers, it was also criticized for its polemical view of imperial capitalism and dismissed as the work of propaganda. G.W Cross’s review in the March publication of the Grahamstown *Eastern Province Magazine* illustrates a Christian reading of the novella as he states: “The triumph of the book is the imaginative realization of the Christ. . . [Christ] is not really the Christ of our Conventions. Be that as it may, only the simplest and firmest faith could have created him’” (Chrisman 154). While some read the biblical undertones as inherently Christian, others were offended by the unconventional use of Jesus as a spokesman against capitalist imperialism. The novella was, in some circles, viewed as an exaggeration, although Schreiner claimed to have received accurate information from those close to the tragic events unfolding in Mashonaland (Stanley 73).

It would be prudent to consider the historical context that prompted Schreiner’s novella since Rhodes’s actions had catastrophic consequences for the Mashona, Matebele, Boers, and the British settlers who were all impacted. The novella was written two years after Leander Starr Jameson, in collusion with Rhodes and his confederates, led a failed raid intended to cause an insurrection by British workers living in the Boer South African Republic (Transvaal) governed by Paul Kruger. The raid was intended to fulfill Rhodes’s ambition to bring the two Boer states under British control; however, his plan for imperial expansion also involved gaining unrestricted access to mineral rich lands. Taking advantage of the mayhem that rendered Matabeleland vulnerable to attack, the Ndebele joined forces with the Mashona in March of 1896 in the First Chimurenga (war of liberation). The rising conflict between the Boers initiated the Second Boer War (1899-1902). A few years before the raid, Rhodes was instrumental in underhandedly gaining land from Lobengula, the leader of the Matabele nation, so acquiring
Matabeleland and Mashonaland. These events created the two nations that would become South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). It is this historical context, steeped in the blood of indigenous Southern African peoples, Boers, and British that sets the scene for Schreiner’s novella.

The novella follows the moral development of a young working-class man from rural England who has been seduced by promises of wealth gained from employment by Rhodes’s Chartered Company. Lost in the expansive Southern African terrain, Peter encounters a mysterious stranger whom the reader recognizes as Jesus and is “converted” by the lessons imparted to him on the kopje or hill. The Jesus-figure draws his lessons from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, providing a composite sermon that argues for egalitarianism and compassion for the poor and the colonized, as he commissions Peter to spread the news of atrocities occurring in Southern Africa. Peter’s attempt to elicit compassion from his captain is not successful, and his death is the inevitable result of his protest; however, in a small but significant way, Peter spreads a message of compassion, a subject I will examine later in this chapter. The appearance of the stranger may be viewed as a theophany or the imaginings of an unsettled mind; however, when considering how scripture is inverted and reconfigured, the absence of narrative realism is outweighed by the powerful criticisms the encounter levels against the church, empire, and capitalism. Peter’s inevitable death unmistakably resembles the death of Jesus of Nazareth without the Christological allusions imposed by orthodox Christianity. This functions to underscore Jesus’ humanity, indicating his exemplary human virtues as influential in Peter’s conversion. Peter is connected to Jesus’ humanity through his persecution and death; however, his death refuses blood atonement theologies or religious
martyrdom as a means of overtly criticizing orthodox Christianity. Peter’s death is inevitable, since, like Jesus who confronted the evils of a powerful empire, his message would not be received without violent retaliation. Also like the historical Jesus, Peter’s death impacts the few men who witness his death, as seeds of ethics and morality are implanted in the conscience of the Colonial man and Englishman in Peter’s troop.

As with other fin de siècle authors examined in previous chapters, Schreiner reworks the Sermon on the Mount, which is quintessentially concerned with justice, at times conflating it with Darwinian theory to launch an excoriating indictment of the incursion of both Rhodes and the British empire on the Southern African landscape and its peoples. Schreiner does so by demythologizing and feminizing the character readers recognize as Jesus, who does not appear as the Second Person of the Trinity, but rather as a mysterious Jewish peasant who commissions Peter to defend the oppressed and deliver a message intended to elicit sympathy and empathy from the British people. Through the Jesus-figure’s (re)interpretation of scripture, the text overtly interrogates Christian triumphalism’s imposition of Western secular and religious beliefs on non-Christian nations, as it claimed religious, racial, and cultural superiority, resulting in both cultural and actual genocide among the colonized. My aim here, and in other chapters, is not merely to draw attention to the overt presence of scripture but to demonstrate how authors, such as Schreiner, use scripture, and to what end common biblical tropes are employed to launch a scathing attack on late-Victorian ideologies that failed to address key social problems of the era.

This chapter will attend to how Peter Simon, the inversion of the Apostle Simon Peter, undergoes an ethical “conversion,” as the words of the unnamed “friend” imprint on his conscience, which has been temporarily suspended in the Southern African bush. In order to
underscore Peter’s conversion on the *kopje*, Schreiner turns to biblical text specifically associated with Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Matthew’s Beatitudes surprisingly invert conventional meanings of popular wisdom, where, for instance, it is “blessed” to mourn or to be persecuted. Biblical exegetes frequently redacted, reconfigured, and altered the original text to suit their own context and *fin de siècle* authors, familiar with new biblical criticism, liberally imitate this technique by using the Bible as a way to posit what constitutes ethical behaviour, which had come to be associated with Christianity. By invoking and reframing biblical text, the author draws attention to the incongruency of organized religion’s propensity for endorsing aspects of New Imperialism while continuing to confess the gospel. The Sermon on the Mount sets the tone for Schreiner’s reversals and inversions of conventional religious precepts deployed within a capitalist socio-political discursive framework to argue for radical social reform in response to the “scramble for Africa.” I will investigate Jesus’ question, “What is a Christian?”, and the final statement of the Englishman who claims, “there is no God in Mashonaland” as unequivocal critiques of Rhodes, insofar as the particularity of Mashonaland, a god-forsaken location for the British, gestures to Schreiner’s position on rampant capitalism and its ensuing violence. Schreiner’s creative inversions of key scriptural verses illustrate her rejection of concepts of sin and divine punishment as she associates Peter, an admitted murderer and rapist, with Jesus and the Apostle, Simon Peter, thereby making a case for the possibility of redemption through an ethical humanist practice not predicated on religious adherence.

Schreiner’s letters, speeches, and the novella indicate how her free-thinking found ethical value in key biblical tropes, which denounced powerbrokers and New Imperialists, such as Rhodes, as perpetrators of unspeakable violence for profit. Her use of scripture draws attention to
the hypocrisy of a “Christian” empire that fails to practice ethical demands to treat one’s fellow human with compassion, empathy, and respect. Her conflation of evolutionary concepts of common ancestry cogently emerges as a plea for the British empire to undergo a “conversion” as does her main character. Schreiner’s novella cuts to the heart of her disillusionment with Rhodes, orthodox Christianity, and the empire. The novella challenges the reader to follow Peter’s path to conversion, as he attempts to answer the commission given to him by the stranger to proclaim to the British public the evils perpetrated on the colonized and the Boers by Rhodes and his confederates. Schreiner passionately implores her readers to adopt the spirit of scripture and its call to radical reform.

Joyce Avrech Berkman, Liz Stanley, and Laura Chrisman attend to the presence of “Christ” in the novella, acknowledging his role in converting Peter who will reclaim his sense of morality. Building on their work, I argue that Schreiner avoids Christological allusions by unambiguously presenting the stranger as the fully human Jesus of history (not the Christ of the church) who resembles Peter’s mother in his gentle demeanour, his compassion, empathy, and stringently ethical approach to all humanity. Berkman argues that Schreiner’s depiction of Jesus resembles a “revolutionary” form of Christianity, “the kind of religious idealism that has historically spurred radical social and political transformations. Recognizing the nominal affiliation, at least, of most Britons, Schreiner was perfectly willing to deploy Jesus when necessary for propaganda purposes” (62). Berkman’s position opens avenues for further exploration, particularly in her assertion that Schreiner recognized the value of religious idealism in propagating social reform. Expanding on Berkman’s assessment, my study will specifically explicate how Schreiner’s complex deployment of scripture advances her political protests.
Schreiner’s humanist position encompassed a wide range of late-Victorian concerns as evidenced in the range of her literary works. A champion of the New Woman movement, a socialist, and a critic of New Imperialism, her novel, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and her foray into social theory in *Women and Labour* (1911) both reflect her radical feminist views, particularly in respect to marriage, which she viewed, in some cases, as a form of prostitution. Although highly critical of New Imperialism, Schreiner supported a paternalistic form of imperialism as noted in her dedication of the novella to Sir John Grey. Her concern for women, marriage, labour, colonization, and the colonized permeates her works illustrating how her humanist ideologies drew on Darwinism and altered, secularized interpretations of scripture. While scholars such as Berkman have grappled with her use of scripture, pondering her rejection or possible residual feelings toward the evangelical Christianity of her early youth, I contend that by deconstructing her overt biblical motifs, reconfigurations, and inversions of scripture, a fresh approach to her work emerges.

5.2 “Blessed are the meek”: Feminizing Empathy and Compassion

A disillusioned daughter of a Christian missionary, Schreiner rejects the imposition of Western religious ideologies on the colonized. Instead she defends indigenous cultural and religious practices, which were frequently denigrated by the church and Christian society. She effectively uses the “Christian Book” as a means of pointing to Christian hypocrisy, critiquing unchecked European incursion in Southern Africa. The Sermon on the Mount, which forms the core of
Christian catechetical teaching, is tied to Mosaic Law as Jesus reinterprets the Torah\textsuperscript{81} to emphasize a law grounded in the love of neighbour that is inclusive of all humans, regardless of race, class designation, or gender, an ideal Schreiner valued despite her rejection of the church.

The central message of the sermon is a call to a conversion of the heart, which ultimately should lead to Christian charity being extended to all humans. Drawing on Matthew’s rendition of the sermon, which posits Jesus as a new Moses, she conflates the sermon with prophetic verses from the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the passion, death, and resurrection narratives that emerge in the gospels. The use of Matthew’s Beatitudes is significant because Schreiner, a freethinker, rejected orthodox notions of sin and punishment, avoiding the “woes” that appear in Luke’s Beatitudes in favour of Matthew’s version, because the “woes” are added as a warning of impending punishment to those who transgress Jesus’ law of love.

The first hint that Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount will form a central theme of the novella is evident in the first pages, as Trooper Peter Halket is separated from his group and spends a night alone on a kopje. Peter’s imposed fasting and the cold isolation of his hilltop location provide an opportunity for reflection on his experiences working for Rhodes’s Chartered Company. In the cold and silent Southern African landscape, Peter places the hat his mother knitted on his head as his thoughts wander to his mother and their home in rural England. The hat, a reminder of his mother’s gentle and compassionate nature, leads to his recollections of his childhood experiences at school, recalling “the prints on the schoolhouse wall on which the afternoon sun used to shine when he was kept in – Jesus of Judea blessing the children, and with

\textsuperscript{81} Matthew presents Jesus as a “new Moses” in order to connect him to Judaism and Mosaic law. See Donald Senior’s \textit{What Are They Saying About Matthew?} (1996).
his arms stretched out and the blood dropping at his feet” (7). Peter’s thoughts of his mother and the picture of the crucified Jesus are significant since they provide a foreshadowing of his own death, but more importantly, they provide an implicit connection between Jesus and his mother who both embody love, kindness, and forgiveness. Schreiner employs this connection as she demythologizes Christian concepts of the Christ, pointing instead to his humanity, which exemplified radical notions of ethical and moral practice. The invocation of the historical, fully human Jesus, in relation to Peter’s mother, offers hope for a reevaluation and adoption of ethics attainable for all humans since Jesus and Peter’s mother are exemplars par excellence of radical humanism. Schreiner’s message challenges her readers to imitate these two characters by embracing stringent ethical conduct towards the poor and oppressed.

At this point, my focus is to establish how biblical tropes are employed. Later in the chapter I will examine Peter’s encounter with the stranger, to illustrate how, alone with his conflicting recollections of his simple life at home and the present violence he encounters in Southern Africa, he is transformed by the words of the man whose gentle demeanour and compassion resemble his mother. The conversation that transpires between the stranger and Peter is drawn from several biblical references in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, which serve as a discursive framework for critiquing both capitalism and imperialism. The Sermon on the Mount is often viewed as a subversive text believed to contain some politically charged words and sentiments attributed to the historical Jesus. The Beatitudes and The Lord’s Prayer, which form prominent sections of the sermon, reject the trappings of worldly power by advocating instead, that it is blessed to be meek, poor in spirit, and a peacemaker even when
being persecuted for practicing one’s beliefs. The invitation of the Lord’s Prayer to offer simple, unostentatious acts of devotion and the reversals in the Beatitudes that proffer blessings for the humble peacemakers, provide Schreiner license to draw on biblical authority to denounce the wealthy and powerful members of society, such as Rhodes, who are consumed with wielding worldly power at the expense of the disenfranchised. Schreiner’s choice of scripture is particularly revealing since it was not only a core Christian teaching well known to Christians, but also a topic of interest for Victorian biblical scholars who wrote prolifically on the political aspects of selected scripture believed to be attributed to the historical Jesus. I will discuss Schreiner’s interest in biblical scholarship later in this chapter as I expound on her use of scripture to subvert powerful institutions of her era.

Reading the novella through a biblical lens yields a rich understanding of how Schreiner frames her radical ideas, particularly with respect to biblical law concerned with the practice of ethics. The kopje, set in the desolate Southern African bush, calls to mind Jesus’ temptation and forty-day fast in the wilderness. Biblically, a place of sin and temptation, the wilderness (or in the case of the novella, the bush) location is inverted to become a place of reflection, followed by redemption, as Peter encounters Jesus and is taught the law of love enshrined in gospel parables.

82 Modern biblical scholars, some part of the Jesus Seminar, an ecumenical body of scholars who have attempted to discern which words in scripture may be attributed to the historical Jesus, reject almost all of the New Testament as a development from an oral tradition about Jesus. It is the contention of New Testament scholars that, although much of the N.T. is based on early church teaching developed over time, some of the Beatitudes are likely to be derived from Jesus of Nazareth. Beatitudes which promise blessings for those who mourn or those who hunger are thought to be Jesus’ own words. Criteria take into account multiple attestation or dissimilarity, sometimes referred to as “embarrassment” as markers of authenticity. In other words, if a piece of scripture appears in several places, or it seems contrary to other Jewish teachings, then it could plausibly be derived from Jesus.
and the Beatitudes. Mountains and hills in the Bible are traditionally associated with the imparting of law as Jesus’ sermon reinterprets Mosaic law, through the Beatitudes, which means “blessings,” to those who adhere to its demand for justice and mercy. For Peter, the place of temptation is inverted to become instead a place of ethical awakening. Isolated from his fellow troopers, his thoughts and later his conversation with the stranger, brings about a conversion experience that changes the course of his life. The “stranger” or “friend” the reader recognizes as Jesus, at times shares some similarities with Peter, particularly in respect to proclaiming a message that will inevitably be ill-received; however, Peter is also unambiguously portrayed as the antithesis of the Apostle, Simon Peter, who despite his lack of faith and denial of Jesus, is redeemed and honored as the rock on which the church is built.

Peter’s isolation on the mountain has some commonality with Jesus’ forty-day fasting in the wilderness, where he rejects Satan’s temptations to provide food to sustain the body, worldly power, and power over the divine to preserve his life (Matthew 4:1-11). Although Peter is not literally tempted by a satanic biblical figure, he had been tempted from his home by the Chartered Company with empty promises of wealth, status, and worldly power, which ultimately result in his present circumstances of being stranded on the kopje. Rhodes’s company, like Satan, tempts Peter from his simple life to participate in horrors for the sake of gain. A further

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84 The name “Peter” is derived from the Greek word for “rock,” while “Simon” originates from the Hebrew name “Shim’on,” which means, “He hears.” The naming of Peter Halket is significant in its connection to the Apostle but also because he is a new foundation on which a secular humanism is built, since he “hears” the message of the stranger and then follows through to spread it among his compatriots.
reconfigured connection between Jesus’ and Peter’s experiences in an isolated location occurs when examining the stages of enlightenment Peter passes through before he finds redemption, not from sin in the religious sense, but in terms of a reevaluation and reform of ethical and moral practice. Jesus’ temptation occurs after his baptism in the Jordan, which serves as his inauguration as a messianic agent to spread “the good news.” The allusion, to biblically literate readers, is evident in Peter’s later acceptance of a mission to spread the news of what is occurring in Southern Africa, which is far from “good news,” but necessary information required to precipitate hope of social change. In this way he is made a secular “apostle” in his own right. In the warmth of the fire on the kopje, Peter receives a “baptism by fire” and a “baptism by will” as he encounters Jesus, the New Moses, from whom the law of love is imparted. I read the encounter in sacramental terms because, as the story unfolds, the allusions to commissioning through baptism aligns Peter with Jesus, but it also places a focus on orthopraxis as a condition of baptism. Peter’s “baptism” is a moment of rebirth as he gradually recognizes his transgressions and takes up the mantle of change, emulating the historical Jesus’ mission, albeit in a much smaller way.

85 Luke 4:18 “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captors and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” See Marcus Borg’s Jesus: A New Vision Spirit, Culture and the Life of Discipleship.

86 Matthew 3:11 “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matthew:11). A “baptism by desire” occurs when a person, who has not formally received the sacrament, desires to be baptized. Under these circumstances, should the person die, they may be considered to have received the sacrament through their own will.
The miraculous resurrection and the figure of Jesus commonly aligned with the church’s Christological orthodoxy is avoided through a demythologized Jesus, providing a hermeneutical stance in accordance with freethinkers who reinterpreted scripture for its shared cultural knowledge rather than its focus on the supernatural. For Schreiner, Jesus’ humanity is privileged over the Christ of faith, his teachings superseding any supernatural elements that were attributed to him almost a century after his death. Through a demythologized Jesus, Peter’s conversion is not predicated on a recognition or acceptance of the Second Person of the Trinity as the incarnation of God, nor on any supernatural display of power, rather, his conscience is informed by the humility of the young Jewish man’s persuasive words and gentle demeanour, which he connects to his own mother.

The connection between Jesus and Peter’s mother is crucial to understanding Peter’s loss of ethics and morality since it is through the absence of his mother that Peter loses his civility, succumbing to the moral degeneration of his fellow workers. Through the stranger, who reminds him of his mother, Peter is once again reconnected to the moral and ethical upbringing of his childhood. Distanced from the civility of his home and mother, Peter easily justifies the accumulation of wealth as a means to alleviate his mother’s labour, ensuring a more comfortable life for both of them. Peter’s thoughts on how, with millions, he could receive a knighthood and

87 The gospels were formed in Palestine and the diaspora from circa 65 C.E., at the earliest for the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), to circa 100 C.E., for John’s Gospel, at the latest.
marry a woman of the upper class, while ensuring his mother’s wealth and comfort, fails to recognize the inhumanity of land expropriation and forced labour. He ponders:

   All men made money when they came to South Africa, - Barney Barnato, Rhodes, - they all made money out of the country – eight millions, twelve millions, twenty-six-millions, forty millions, - why should he not . . . When he had served his time as a volunteer he would have a large piece of land given him, and the Mashonas and Matabeles would have all their land taken away from them in time, and the Chartered Company would pass a law that they had to work for the white man; and he, Peter Halket, would make them work for him. He would make money . . . Then he should have to start a syndicate, called the Peter Halket Gold, or the Peter Halket Iron Mining, or some such name, Syndicate. (9-10)

While Peter has no clear idea how such an enterprise would be put into motion, his mind wanders to his mother’s farm, remembering her gentle treatment of the “fat ducks” she kindly tends, while collecting only their eggs and feathers. His thoughts turn to the contrasting violence in Southern Africa, where rape and murder are justified by beliefs that killing Africans to further capitalist enterprises is acceptable. Rajendra Chetty and Matthew Curr assert, “[T]he picture of Halket’s mother and her humble life, the ‘fat ducklings’ and domesticity of the little English village are in dramatic contrast to the high ambitions of great wealth from the colonies, gained by exploiting, abusing, maiming and killing the legal owners” (10). Without his mother’s influence in providing a moral compass, Peter finds it increasingly difficult to justify his actions, yet he attempts to do so by mimicking the rhetoric of white, Anglo-Saxon males who view the violence inflicted on the Mashona and Matabele as the price of success.

Peter contemplates how his mother, a woman guided by the purest principles of ethical and moral rectitude, may respond to the violent acts of murder and rape in which he actively participated, concluding, “a black woman was not white! His mother didn’t understand these things; it was different in England from South Africa. You couldn’t be expected to do the same
sorts of things here as there. He had an unpleasant feeling that he was justifying himself to his mother, and that he didn’t know how to do” (16). His lapsed conscience cannot discern the injustice and the ensuing violence associated with capitalist endeavours in Southern Africa and other parts of the empire as acts contrary to notions of civility he learned at home. While his mother was the source of his moral education, his estrangement from her and his pastoral home in England results in moral degeneration, in keeping with the other men employed by Rhodes’s Chartered Company.

Peter’s mother’s compassion is contrasted with immoral and unethical capitalists, such as Rhodes, who fail to act with Christian compassion towards the Other. Unlike Peter, who gradually wrestles with his conscience, Rhodes’s agenda allows no room for such ethical examination since his aim was to accrue wealth at all costs. Chetty and Curr suggest that the voices of Peter’s mother and the Jesus-figure were intended to evoke in Rhodes a feminine voice of compassion since Schreiner’s novella was a direct appeal to Rhodes for compassion. They write:

Had Rhodes listened to her voice and allowed his own feminine voice of compassion for fellow human beings, black or Boer, to be heard within his conscience, many horrors committed in the name of Western Christianity and Britain could have been avoided in Southern Africa. Schreiner’s parable of Peter Halket aimed to strike at the heart of Rhodes’s ambitions to take over vast areas of central Africa unilaterally. (10)

Schreiner’s parable does “strike at the heart of Rhodes’s ambitions:” however, Chetty’s and Curr’s assessment of how Western Christianity and the empire colluded in marginalizing and dehumanizing the peoples of Southern Africa provides some insights that deserve further

\[\text{\textsuperscript{88}} \text{ See Bradley Deane’s } \textit{Masculinity and the New Imperialism} \text{ regarding Gladstone’s and Disraeli’s divergent approaches to imperialism.} \]
attention. I suggest that by evoking a Jesus-figure, which embodies feminine ideals such as those found in Peter’s mother, Schreiner launches an attack on the inefficacy of the church and the “Christian” British empire to uphold precepts of civility that counter the violence occurring in the far-reaches of the empire. Since the church is frequently alluded to as the mother who nurtures faith in believers, and the empire is personified by a female armour-clad Britannia, Schreiner draws on these feminine attributes of church and empire to address imperial women. The emphasis on women’s role in educating and guiding the future generations has a precedent in scripture since Mary, the mother of Jesus, chastises her son for his thoughtless act of disappearing to converse with the Temple priests, and it is Mary who insists that Jesus performs his first miracle at the wedding of Cana.\footnote{89 Also see Adele Reinhartz’s \textit{Befriending the Beloved Disciple} regarding the prominent role of women.} In this respect, Mary and Peter’s mother are quintessential guardians and educators, commissioned with the task of instilling virtues in their young charges. In early Christian creedal formulations, Mary is designated as the mother of God (\textit{Theotokus}) and as such is viewed in Roman Catholicism and some Protestant communities as the “mother” of the Church. Britannia’s women were traditionally positioned at the vanguard of British civilization, from which they have the power to instill virtues of empathy and compassion in the young; therefore, Schreiner’s femininization of the Jesus-figure represents the nurturing role the empire and church \textit{should} assume among all believers, including the colonized. While such a reading may be problematic since it presumes British superiority over the colonized who ostensibly need to be “civilized” for their own benefit, the salient point here is that Schreiner’s deployment functions in a way that critiques Britain’s failure to act according to its own

\footnote{89 Also see Adele Reinhartz’s \textit{Befriending the Beloved Disciple} regarding the prominent role of women.}
standards rather than upholding such paternalistic ideologies. In other words, I suggest she uses common imperialist rhetoric to discredit any notions that the empire acts according to its own ideologies.

Beyond Jesus’ feminization, Schreiner demythologizes him in order to reassert his racial status as a Palestinian Jew, emphasizing his “Otherness” through the description of his darker skin and hair. Jesus’ “subordinate” racial status aligns him with the Mashona, underscoring the incompatibility of racist views perpetuated in Christianity, which continue to privilege white-Anglo-Saxon men over the racialized Other. By focusing on Jesus’ humanity, Schreiner not only avoids the raceless nature of the church’s vision of Christ but also illustrates her rejection of organized religion’s insistence on Trinitarian theology, which as a freethinker, she denied. Schreiner’s Jesus is racialized and imbued with feminine attributes of compassion, mercy, and empathy, which moves Peter to see, in the stranger, his mother’s loving nature. Schreiner “genders” and “racializes” Jesus as a means of empowering and imploring white Christian women to actively renounce the masculine brutality inflicted on the colonized in imperial spaces, utilizing familiar scripture to launch an appeal for a Christian orthopraxis frequently lost among the legalism and hypocrisy of an empire that associates itself with selective Christian values.

5.3 The Encounter: Peter, Jesus, and Empire

Schreiner takes aim at imperial violence by challenging racist and capitalist ideologies that defined “progress” as the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the colonized. According to Berkman, Schreiner rejected social Darwinist concepts of progress that “served to rationalize Britain's imperial aggrandizement and militarism, its racism, its socioeconomic class
stratification, and its patriarchal patterns” (74). According to Berkman, Schreiner’s view of progress was measured according to a constructed standard that encompassed compassion and empathy for all humans regardless of race, class, or gender. Berkman writes:

Her measure of progress was the degree to which patterns of domination had diminished. Phrased in broad, sometimes platitudinous terms, her concept of progress was of global unity, "not in the extermination of earth’s varied races, or in the dominance of anyone over all, ... but in a free and equal federation of all." In Schreiner’s view, the great moral and intellectual expansion humanity must undergo involved the submerging of superficial differences of sex and class "in the greater personality of the human creature" and the extending of the social instincts of each individual beyond family, nation, and race to all of humanity. She envisioned a world in which "intellectual power and strength of will combined with an infinite tenderness and wide human sympathy" would characterize the personality of both men and women. (74)

Berkman’s estimation of Schreiner’s idea of global unity is insightful, yet I would not interpret them as “platitudinous” since her criticisms of New Imperialism were well-conceived, particularly since she lived and worked among indigenous people and the Boers who she regarded as part of the human family in its most fundamental way. Schreiner’s revised ideology of progress is narrativized in the novella as Peter’s perceptions of wealth and power are redefined by his encounter with the stranger, which causes a reevaluation of his actions while in the employment of the Chartered Company. Peter’s thoughts return to his mother who instilled a set of values contrary to what he encounters in Mashonaland, and this precipitates a reawakening of his conscience. I will examine Peter’s encounter with the Jesus-figure to elucidate Schreiner’s view of progress that rejects New Imperialist ideologies in favour of secularized biblical notions of humanism that place value on virtues of empathy and compassion. I draw particular attention to the way Schreiner resists supernatural elements since, as I will disclose later in this chapter, her focus on Jesus’ humanity is critical to how she posits human transcendence as an attainable goal.
As Peter contemplates the violence in which he participated and ponders how his mother may react to his immoral acts, he hears the footfall of an approaching person. The rustling sounds which precede the appearance of the man assuage any notions that the man is a supernatural being. At first alarmed by the sudden appearance of a stranger who identifies himself as “a friend,” Peter is soon comforted by the presence of a companion the reader recognizes as Jesus. The Jesus-figure, although carrying the stigma of his crucifixion, does not resemble Christian notions of the resurrected Christ clothed in glowing glory but rather, he is a man, simply dressed in the garb of his era, displaying the bloody wounds that were inflicted on him by the powerful Roman empire that oppressed first-century Judeans. Schreiner unambiguously invokes gospel images of Jesus as a young Jewish man by, for example, describing him as clothed in “one loose, linen garment, reaching below his knee” (18). The overt mention of the garment not only identifies the stranger as Jesus, a Palestinian peasant, but also provides a connection between the violence inflicted on the historical Jesus and the slaughter of black men who fight to retain their lands. This is accomplished through the veiled reference to Jesus’ trial, as soldiers watched on, gambling for his woven linen garment (Matthew 27:35 & John 19:23) that resembles the one the stranger wears on the kopje. The connection between the Roman soldiers and Rhodes’s mercenary troopers provides a segue into Schreiner’s critique of both Rhodes and the empire. Like the Roman soldiers who brutalize the people of Judea and then carelessly gamble around the fire, distributing the spoils of their victims, Rhodes’s men, unmoved by their brutality, commiserate at their encampment, awaiting orders to recommence their attack on the people of Mashonaland.

According to Laura Chrisman, since Rhodes identified himself with Roman Imperial
power, the figure of the Christ represents the anti-imperial voice that speaks over discourses of imperial power. Chrisman suggests that Schreiner, in other literary works, “uses the impersonal figure of God senior . . . [A]t times representing him as a trope for oppressive patriarchy, at times for the benign cosmos itself, Trooper Peter is the only text in which she invokes the figure of Christ” (153). In respect to assertions regarding the connection between Rhodes and empire I concur since it makes sense to connect Jesus to imperial violence since he and his people were victims of Roman imperial power. Her speculation based on the premise that “[O]nly Christ can pose as altruistic ideal counterpart to Rhodes’s choice of selfish materialism. The contrast and similarity between the two figures is made explicit by Rhodes himself, when he delivers his imaginary response to Peter’s hypothetical speech: ‘You want me to be Jesus Christ, I suppose? How can I be myself and another man?’”; needs to be further examined (Chrisman 155). I suggest that the use of the “Christ-figure” carries significance beyond Chrisman’s analysis. Building on Chrisman, I argue that Schreiner’s depiction of the stranger who we recognize as the historical Jesus, is subtly differentiated from the Christ of faith, who is associated with Christian doctrinal confession, carrying intonations of blood atonement through his vicarious suffering for the redemption of humankind. Schreiner’s racialized Jesus appears to be fully human, the stigma of torture signifying violence perpetrated on the body by a powerful imperial force, and indeed there are no suggestions that the stranger is anything other than a man. What I am

\[90\] Schreiner’s critique of blood atonement theologies is evident in The Story of an African Farm as the young Waldo attempts to offer a lamb chop up as a sacrificial offering. He comes to believe that God has rejected his sacrifice in much the same way Cain’s sacrifice was not favoured. This precipitates a crisis in faith. Believing God hates him Waldo begins to question religion and the “truth” of scripture.
suggesting here is that Schreiner deliberately presents the stranger in human terms rather than as a supernatural, post-resurrection, “glorified Christ.” Instead, the stranger is human, and his gentle demeanor bears a striking resemblance to Peter’s own mother. The allusion to the seeming omniscience of the man is not necessarily attributed to any supernatural force, but rather Peter accepts the man’s claims that he witnessed the death of three black men and the rape of the woman as fact. While the man appears, to the reader, to have knowledge beyond what may seem natural, Schreiner does not overtly suggest that he should be read as a supernatural figure but, rather as a teacher of wisdom who reminds Peter of the humanity he left behind in the rural home of his mother. The timelessness of the stranger’s wisdom will later be connected to Darwinian theory and notions of an evolution of ethics, which like Thomas Huxley, Schreiner appears to endorse, an area that I will investigate later in this chapter.

The stark contrast between Peter’s moral upbringing and his adoption of brutality mirrors the two locales presented in the novella. The rural home Peter shares with his mother is reflective of poverty among the working class as his mother’s work as a laundress illustrates their dependence on employment to supplement the resources gained from their own cultivation of land. Despite the poverty in which they were forced to live, Peter is lovingly nurtured, his home, a place of cultivation and wholesomeness, an idealized vision of working-class living conditions. In the Southern African landscape, where wealth was within the reach of those who were willing to compromise their humanity, Peter is lost in dreams of grandeur, while forgetting the lessons of his humble childhood. The two locales provide a discursive framework for critiquing the subjugation of the British working poor and the colonized, since, although not overtly evident to Peter, his compliance with the Chartered Company’s violent policies furthers the greed of
wealthy capitalists, such as Rhodes, without a promise of benefit to the working-class men of the Company. Chrisman insightfully draws attention to the significance of Peter’s working-class status as she asserts:

Peter is among the British poor that British imperialists were anxious to export as a way of preventing potential socialist militancy and class conflict at home. It is especially significant that Schreiner gives Peter a rural not urban background. She is thereby able to link his domestic British practices of land cultivation directly with his Rhodesian experience of the opposite, crop destruction, and through this attack the ideology of colonial pastoralism. (135)

While Peter, lost in dreams of gaining a fortune at the expense of the Matabele and Mashona people, fails to recognize his own marginal status, through his conversation with the Jesus-figure he gradually undergoes a conversion of conscience and a recognition that his allegiance to the Company is misplaced.

Peter, curious about the stranger’s affiliations, speculates that he may be one of “the Soudanese Rhodes brought with him from the north” to which the stranger replies, “No, Rhodes had nothing to do with my coming here,” which is significant because in a sense the violence imposed on the lands and its peoples is precisely the reason for the presence of the man who will guide Peter back to the morality he was taught as a child (19). Ironically, even as Peter relates his story to the stranger, his hidden doubts as to the impediment of his class status in relation to gaining wealth rises to the surface as he states: “it’s not the men who work up here who make the money; it’s the big-wigs who get the concessions!” (23). Peter tells the attentive but silent stranger of his life in Southern Africa, the huts he procured, and the women he bartered for and bought. He claims: “It wasn’t a bad life though. I only wish I was back there again. I had two huts to myself, and a couple of nigger girls. It’s better fun,” said Peter, after a while, ‘having these black women, than whites. The whites you’ve got to support, but the niggers support you!
And when you’ve done with them you can just get rid of them. I’m all for the nigger gals’” (23).

The callousness of Peter’s story is contrasted as the stranger addresses Peter’s query into his own ownership of women by replying “I love all women” (23). The discrepancy in the phrasing of the response counters Peter’s “ownership” of women to the stranger’s “love” of all women, regardless of race. After attentively listening to Peter’s story, the stranger instructs Peter in a mode following the Socratic method whereby Peter is led to recognize his complicity in the evil actions of the Chartered Company. The interrogation that ensues draws from a variety of Hebrew Scriptural and gospel references as the Jesus-figure intersperses brief, seemingly unrelated wisdom teachings into the lesson which ensues, ultimately leading to Peter’s conversion experience.

The strong Christian reverberations, particularly allusions to conversion, need to be carefully investigated since inversions and reworkings of scripture tell a story of their own. Peter’s conversion of conscience not only rejects orthodox notions of what constitutes a “Christian,” but it also overtly criticizes Christian hypocrisy. The appearance of the Jesus-figure and his seemingly uncanny knowledge of all events taking place vaguely gestures to the possibility of supernatural knowledge; however, these allusions are undermined by the absolute humanity of the Jewish stranger with bloody feet who reminds Peter of his mother. Schreiner’s novella, unlike her successful novel, *The Story of An African Farm*, did not enjoy universal acceptance by readers and critics, which, according to Liz Stanley, was partly due to its overtly Christian overtones. Stanley writes:

Trooper Peter now tends to be seen as an artistic failure because of its textual interruptions by propagandist and verbose speeches and its seemingly Christian message, an approach which sees Schreiner wanting to write a conventional Christian moral story but failing.
However, the book's temporal interruptions and disjunctures purposefully 'do things' to what kind of moral message it inscribes, and in fact it savagely attacks Christian hypocrisy. (73)

Stanley’s assessment that the “temporal interruptions and disjunctures purposely ‘do things’” to the moral lessons imparted by the stranger is insightful; however, by approaching the problem from a slightly different perspective, one may recognize that the integration of Christian ideologies with popular anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist propaganda provides an effective and strategic way to underscore scripture as shared cultural knowledge. Schreiner’s reworking of scripture overtly criticizes a Christian hypocrisy that fails to act according to scripture, but she also illustrates the value of biblical text in promoting Western secular views of moral and ethical rectitude. The “Christian message” becomes a more universal message that touches the hearts of religious and secular readers alike, demonstrating how adherence to biblical precepts were not contingent on membership in a faith community. In other words, believing in the “spirit” of the Bible is more efficacious than accepting the literalized meanings, rife with supernatural elements that do not necessarily ensure orthopraxis.

Stanley cogently argues that Jesus becomes “a questioner or interlocutor, leading Peter to think about how his story relates to his and British professed beliefs,” asserting that Peter’s “three disavowals” eventually cause him to recognize the true identity of the stranger (73). Building on Stanley’s assessment, Peter’s “three disavowals” whereby he claims to be unfit to deliver a message to the powerbrokers of the empire needs to be examined by attending to how Schreiner reconfigures and reverses biblical motifs and quotations. Through her revision of scripture, she uses the “Christian Book” and the “Christian” God to critique the British Empire that continued to identify as a “Christian” empire. I draw attention to the reversal of the Apostle
Simon Peter in relation to Peter Simon, since both characters are flawed men who find redemption; however, unlike the Apostle who is credited with being the rock on which the Church was built, Peter Simon is a less aggrandized version who initiates a small reaction in his compatriots, which has the potential to build a new movement not predicated on religion, but on a secularized humanism that encourages change.

Peter Simon is a simple young man who has lost his moral compass, yet he possesses an innate but as yet unknown power to effect change, becoming a new rock on which a secular movement, grounded in humanism, could emerge to end the atrocities perpetrated on the colonized. The Apostle, portrayed in scripture as a frequently weak and faithless disciple, provides a traditional religious lesson on Christian discipleship that does not require perfection but rather a willingness to grow through faith and trust in God. Conversely, Schreiner’s character does not make any confessions of newly acquired faith in God but gradually, with the help of the stranger, comes to understand that his protests, even if unheeded at first, may inaugurate a new, ethical way of viewing the Other. Peter is not the perfect Christian disciple, yet he exemplifies the raw material required for moulding an ethical, compassionate man, capable, in a small but significant way, of bringing about radical change. As Peter converses with the stranger, the comparisons between him and the Apostle gradually emerge, disclosing Peter’s good character that has been eclipsed by the violence in which he has participated. An example of Peter’s favourable traits in relation to Simon Peter is evident in his determination to keep watch even as he is overcome by fatigue. While the Apostle fails in his promise to keep vigil, during Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46), succumbing to human frailty as he falls asleep, Peter Simon offers to allow the stranger to rest as he keeps vigil and true to his
word, remains awake to hear the lessons the stranger will impart, thus demonstrating a strength of character that promises to develop. Both Simon Peter and Peter Simon recognize the importance of Jesus’ message; however, unlike the Apostle who views Jesus as a miracle worker and Messiah, Peter only recognizes the humanity and compassion he found in his own mother.

Building on Stanley’s reference to Peter’s three disavowals, I would draw attention to the doubling of this motif. Early in the conversation, rather than “denying” Jesus as does the Apostle who when questioned by authorities and witnesses claimed not to know Jesus (Luke 22:54-62; Mark 14:66-72), Peter who only knew Jesus through the schoolhouse picture and a vicarious belief gained from his mother’s faith, finds something oddly familiar about the strangely dressed Jewish man. He tells the stranger:

Do you know, he said, I’ve been wondering ever since you came who it was you reminded me of. It’s my mother! You’re not like her in the face, but when your eyes look at me it seems to me as if she was looking at me. Curious, isn’t it? I don’t know you from Adam, and you’ve hardly spoken a word since you came: and yet I seem as if I’d known you all my life. . . I was awfully afraid of you when you first came. . . . But the minute the fire shone on your face I said, ‘It’s alright.’ Curious isn’t it? . . . I don’t know you from Adam, but if you were to take up a gun and point it at me, I wouldn’t move! I’d lie down here and go to sleep with my head at your feet; curious, isn’t it, when I don’t know you from Adam. (32-33)

The idiomatic phrase, “I don’t know you from Adam,” assumes a more profound meaning when read through Christological theology associated with salvation since it resonates with biblical motifs that posit Jesus as the “New Adam.” The stranger is implicitly connected to the “New Adam” who according to Christian theology will reverse the moral degeneration of the first humans, redeem humanity, and renew all creation, thereby reversing the effects of the sins of the first Adam: “just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification of all” (Romans 5:18). Despite the Christological inferences,
it is not specifically the stranger (or the Christ of the church) who will effect change, but rather, the stranger’s words will instigate a change in Peter who in turn will offer his fellow mercenaries an opportunity to reevaluate their participation in the atrocities occurring in Mashonaland. Later in the novella, the three disavowals are reiterated as Peter doubts his suitability to deliver a message of change to the empire and the Chartered Company, echoing the words of Jesus’ opponents and various reluctant prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. I will examine the second occurrence of the disavowals later in this chapter since the reoccurring references are equally relevant to understanding Schreiner’s reversals as a means of repositioning power from Rhodes and his kind to Peter, a young man of humble origin who speaks to imperial and capitalist power, despite the knowledge that his words will fall on deaf ears. Schreiner subverts notions of power as Peter’s words profess a different type of power not associated with wealth, social position, or political strength, but rather the power to change the minds and hearts of Britons who may be moved to act ethically.

The Apostle Simon Peter’s three denials are countered by Peter Simon’s three affirmations of recognition, which is significant because it demonstrates how Peter Simon’s recognition is not contingent on a belief in the Second Person of the Trinity, but instead on a recognition of ideal humanism. While the Apostle identifies Jesus in messianic terms and is well acquainted with his supernatural powers over the elements, Peter sees no mystical capabilities in the stranger, recognizing instead a purity of soul that is exemplified by his humility and compassion. The stranger’s exemplary egalitarian ideologies, which are contingent on compassion and empathy, sets the standard of Schreiner’s views of what constitutes authentically human traits required for reform in society, the church, and the empire. Contrary to men like
Rhodes who wield worldly power over wealth and the progress of British imperial expansionist interests, the authority of the stranger’s words carries force to effect real social change with the potential to create a new, egalitarian world that emulates the Kingdom of God but in a purely secular way. The emphasis is not on the divinity and perfection of Christ, which is unattainable, but on the praxis that emerges from following Christian precepts grounded in attainable human virtues, as evident in Peter’s mother. Peter’s “recognition” and trust in the stranger’s goodness are not predicated on a belief in a supernatural being but rather emerge from a philosophical stance that values elements found in aspects of the social gospel over and against orthodox interpretations that promise divine reward or punishment but do not adequately address the violence and inequalities of the world.

In response to Peter’s accounts of the Company’s murder and rape of innocent people, the stranger claims to have witnessed the violence as he attempted to help a wounded man to the river. Peter does not question the seeming omniscience and omnipresence of the stranger, responding that, had the captain known of the stranger’s interference, trouble would have ensued. Seemingly ignoring Peter’s comments, the stranger strings together a series of quotations and allusions, which appear, superficially, nonsensical; however, by reading these references through a secular lens, as biblical metaphor, a critique of imperial power surfaces in unexpected ways. The stranger responds to Peter’s warning by stating, “The young ravens have meat given to them…and the lions go down to the streams to drink,” the first part of the quotation appearing in Job 38:41, “Who provides for the ravens its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?” and again in Matthew 6:26, “Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not more
valuable than they?” (34). These quotations are then joined to Psalms 104: 21-23, which reads: “The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens. The people go out to their work and to their labor until the evening. Oh Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” From a purely religious, literal perspective, all these quotations emphasize God’s provision for all his creatures, yet Schreiner connects the verses on hunting prey to the slaughtering of people. At this point, the weight of its meaning changes to signify common ancestry, since God had created all animals and humans, ravens and lions, black and white alike. Schreiner succinctly uses the Bible as a means to interrogate imperial violence as the comparison of the value between animal life and human life emphatically claims that all creation is connected, yet it also stresses that all humans are privileged over animals (Matthew 6:26). The invocation of the lion in Schreiner’s quotation may allude to the British soldiers who lie about their camp waiting to ensnare the people who go out to work, while the following verse, which extolls the wonder of God’s creation, launches an overt assault on the Company men who do not recognize the Mashona and the Matabele as brothers and sisters who are created by God (Psalms 104:24). The mixed verse subverts notions of the British being “in charge” since biblically, the verses stress that God is “in charge,” and all creation falls under his domain.

Schreiner’s rejection of Christianity did not detract from her metaphoric use of the “Christian Book” to unequivocally expose hypocrisy in British epistemologies, which continued to ignore biblical readings that demand accepting the Other as a brother or sister created in the image of the “Christian God” of the British Empire. Rather, she capitalized on her biblical knowledge by inverting and reconfiguring common tropes to reach a wide range of readers from
conservative Christians to atheists. Such use of the Bible was not unusual to late Victorians, as noted by Timothy Larsen who argues that renowned atheists, such as Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, “had an education steeped in Scripture and both had a lifelong obsession with the Bible” (67). Larsen asserts that “Besant, although she denounced the Bible as ‘this indictable book’, nevertheless habitually employed scriptural language when she wanted to articulate her own thoughts and experiences” (67). The familiarity with the complexities of scriptural interpretation that was dynamic rather than static provided authors such as Schreiner, a fertile ground for expounding ethical tenets that could easily be extricated from the religious foundations and utilized in more secular contexts.

Mike Kissack and Michael Titlestad claim that Schreiner read and was much influenced by German scholar, D.F Strauss’s *The Life of Jesus* (1835) and French scholar, Ernest Renan’s work of the same name published in 1863. Kissack and Titlestad assert that although these works portrayed Jesus in very different ways, each challenged orthodox Christological interpretations that tended to obscure Jesus’ humanity. They argue that these new ways of reading Jesus, separated from supernatural elements, permitted the moral and ethical message to be stressed as a blueprint for correct Christian praxis, a development in biblical interpretations that found its way into Southern Africa, where it influenced authors, such as Schreiner (35-6). In a letter to Ellis Havelock (1884), Schreiner states:

I have read Strauss’s *Old Faiths and New*, but that was lately. I supposed you have read his life of Jesus? It had rather a strange effect upon me; it made me love Jesus so much. I never cried over the crucifixion till I read Strauss’s cold dispassionate criticism of that poor loving human soul that had been so tender to others, left there to face death alone. I am glad those women went after him. I believe Mary Magdalene stood close to the cross where the blood of his feet dropped down on her. (15)
The secular view of Jesus’ humanity, devoid of blood atonement, resonates throughout the novella as the Jesus-figure, and later Peter, exemplify a “poor loving human soul that had been so tender to others,” (emphasis added) unequivocally placing emphasis on the value of what the life of loving care means in the present context and not on supernatural concepts of future resurrection. Schreiner was not interested in the meaning of the Christ in Christian terms, but rather in the human Jesus as an exemplar of true, authentic humanism who professed justice and mercy as ideal qualities to be emulated. Her love of Jesus, which emerges in the narrative, is not based on a religious love of God but on love of her fellow human, regardless of race, class, or gender.

Schreiner’s knowledge of biblical criticism and the historical context of the first-century of the Common Era expounded upon by scholars such as Strauss and Renan, provides an authoritative understanding that the Roman Empire reserved crucifixion for political prisoners, not mere thieves. She implicitly alludes to Jesus and the two crucified “thieves” of the gospels to the hanging deaths of three men who were viewed as agitators rather than freedom-fighters, underscoring the political implications of public hangings and acts of torture intended as a deterrent for so-called rebels (34-35).91 The connection between the context of the historical Jesus and late-nineteenth century Southern Africa provides a framework for holding the

91 See Laura Chrisman on the frontispiece included in the original publication of the novel that depicts three hanging men in Bulawayo, which is excluded from later publications. The white men stand around the grotesque scene smoking as three black men are hanged is mentioned in the novel. I read this spectacle as an allusion to Jesus’ crucifixion besides three other “thieves” or bandits executed, according to Roman law, for political reasons. See John Dominic Crossan on crucifixion as a preferred mode reserved exclusively for publicly executing so-called political agitators.
“Christian Empire” accountable for the violence imposed on the colonized, demonstrating Christianity’s inability to comprehend its own similarity with the Roman Empire that executed Jesus under Roman law as an agitator. Imperial power is subverted by the Beatitudes, which suggest that it is the meek, the righteous, and persecuted who will receive blessings and not the wealthy and powerful men of the empire who hang the legal owners of the land as dissidents. By invoking and (re)politicizing the Beatitudes as the foundation of Christian ethics, Schreiner overtly critiques the church and empire as powerful institutions that fail to adhere to their own ethical mandates. Schreiner’s Jesus, stripped of Christological aspects, embodies the Beatitudes, which propose humility, meekness, and suffering for the sake of righteousness as true blessings.

Even as Peter justifies the actions of the Chartered Company, he begins, sometimes with the prompting of the Jesus-figure, and at other times through the memory of his upbringing, to gradually undergo a secular conversion of conscience, which can only end in death, not as vicarious suffering, but as the consequences of “truth-telling” to and against unscrupulous power.

Before I continue to illustrate Schreiner’s use of key biblical tropes, particularly the Beatitudes, it is necessary to briefly comment on controversies surrounding how the social gospel, which emerged from Christian Socialism, was read. This is crucial to understanding how Schreiner, a proponent of socialism and a self-proclaimed atheist, revised aspects of what became known as “the social gospel” to suit her own purposes. While Knight and Mason clearly state that “Proponents of the social gospel construed the good news of the Christian message primarily in terms of its response to social problems and inequality,” they also draw attention to problems raised by some modern theologians, such as Douglas Hall. Hall speculates that early Christian Socialists, such as Charles Kingsley and F.D. Maurice, tended to endorse a
conservative view, maintaining the status quo instead of encouraging radical social reform. I draw attention to this idea because as Knight and Mason assert,

> It is easy to see why the best known Christian socialists have been accused of masking a commitment to status quo in their call for social change: their promotion of the virtues encouraged in the Sermon on the Mount (e.g. obedience, sacrifice, and forgiveness) appear to encourage acquiescence to the inequality of the day, while Maurice’s suggestion ‘that Domestic Morality is not only an integral portion of Social Morality, but should be the starting point of all discussions respecting it, seems to fall short of the radical revolutionary rhetoric we find in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. (165)

Knight and Mason contend that despite the seemingly conservative approach to reading the gospel that may have characterized early proponents of Christian Socialism, by the late nineteenth century a more radical interpretation was evident. It is through this lens that I examine Schreiner’s use of the Sermon on the Mount, specifically the Beatitudes, as a critique of conservative views that resist the subversive nature of the Sermon as a whole. At the heart of Peter’s conversion experience is a reinterpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, which may be read through both secular and religious lenses since the central message is primarily about treating your neighbour as an extension of self.

Peter’s story of violence begins to disclose his doubts as he reveals his revulsion for hangings and floggings, repeating the ingrained lessons taught by his mother based on the Golden Rule that states: “So whatever you wish that others will do to you, do also for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). The Golden Rule, a common moral code found in almost all religions, is at the centre of Peter’s mother’s instruction: “Don’t hit a fellow smaller than yourself; don’t hit a fellow weaker than yourself; don’t hit a fellow unless he can hit you back as goose again.’ When you’ve always had that sort of thing drummed into you, you can’t get rid of it somehow” (36). Apart from an ethics of fair play, his mother’s words and
treatment of her son, and even her ducks, exemplify Beatitude values, which do not privilege strength or power, but meekness. As Peter tells of the hanging men, who resemble the “thieves” who are crucified beside Jesus on the hill of Golgotha, the stranger hears the voices of the dying and suffering; however, Peter, like Rhodes, is at this juncture unable to hear the cries of the victims of the Chartered Company. Peter tells the stranger that Rhodes is “death on niggers,” a reiteration of Rhodes’s admission “I prefer land to niggers,” a statement that demonstrates the racist and unprincipled nature of Rhodes who embodies attitudes antithetical to the Beatitudes. While no one could equate Rhodes with Christian charity, humility, or meekness, Peter’s initial defence of Rhodes’s tactics echoes the familiar imperialist and capitalist rhetoric of “progress” through financial success that was frequently justified by those closely aligned with the church. Peter begins to recognize the flaws in his arguments since as member of the working class, he will never attain the measure of wealth and power accrued by men like Rhodes. Peter’s assertion, that “We don’t come out here to work: it’s all very well in England: but we’ve come here to make money, and how are we going to make it, unless you get niggers to work for you, or start a syndicate?” (38), demonstrates the inequality based on both race and class designations.

The stranger responds by challenging Peter’s white supremacist and capitalistic views; however, he does so with a preceding “calling by name” integral to the sacrament of Baptism and Confirmation. The sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation serve as a commissioning of the catechumens to live the Christian message through orthopraxis, the Bishop calling the
catechumen by name according to scripture. The catechumens are then “examined” by the Bishop or officiant who, like the Jesus-figure, poses a set of random questions to determine worthiness to receive the commission. Although not apprised of Peter’s second name, the stranger begins his interrogation by directly addressing Peter by his full name, alluding to Isaiah 43:1-7, “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” The scriptural reference is significant in that it offers divine protection and liberation for an enslaved Israel that God had called by name. The promise to liberate Israel from the Egyptian empire, emphasizing the value of God’s chosen people, alludes to the slave-like conditions imposed on the Mashona and Matabele whom Peter is commissioned to liberate through imparting the truth of the violence occurring in Southern Africa to the “Christian” people of the metropole. The allusions to slavery are particularized to Peter’s context, culminating in a popular biblical query, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?” (Mark 8:36). Compare the biblical reference with the words of the Jesus-figure who states:

Peter Simon Halket, . . . if it should come to pass that you should obtain those lands you have desired, and you should obtain black men to labor on them and make to yourself a great wealth; or should you create that company . . . and fools should buy from you, so that you became the richest man in the land; and if you should take to yourself wide lands, and raise to yourself great palaces, so that princes and great men of earth crept up to you and laid their hands against yours, so that you might slip gold into them – what would it profit you? (39)

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92 A catechumen refers to one being prepared for Baptism, Confirmation, or conversion into the Church. The term is used within Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and several other Christian denominations.
The allusion to Israel’s enslavement is significant because the Southern Africans were forced into labour, enduring slave-like conditions, which would have been exacerbated had Rhodes’s proposed Strop Bill, intended to legalize floggings of forced labourers, been passed (Chetty & Curr 14). Isaiah’s promise for freedom from slavery and the recurring allusion to the Sermon on the Mount, decisively aim a missile at Rhodes and the empire. The Jesus-figure’s speech is as politically charged as many of Jesus’ (ostensible) sayings, particularly those found in the Sermon on the Mount and other gospel parables associated with subverting the power of the empire for the sake of justice. The implicit lesson in this speech overturns worldly ideas of wealth and power, which are transient, aiming a direct attack on men such as Rhodes, whom Schreiner viewed as in peril of losing their souls.

The overtly Christian language evident in the novella is likewise deployed in Schreiner’s personal correspondences with friends and family members to whom she communicates her thoughts on the male-dominated capitalist enterprises, which she views as the cause of moral degeneration in the male employees. According to Chetty and Curr, Schreiner’s letter to Francis Schreiner (1898), in which she criticizes Rhodes, discloses her fear of his loss of soul as a consequence of his unconscionable actions. For Chetty and Curr, Schreiner’s writing of Rhodes “damning his soul” should not be viewed “in an evangelical context” but rather “in a gendered sense” (9). Jesus’ query, “what would it profit you?” addressed to Peter, functions as a question to unscrupulous capitalists who perpetrate violence in their acquisitions of wealth; however, like Chetty and Curr, I view the choice of evangelical language as shared cultural knowledge expedient in interrogating ethics and not as a residual affiliation with the evangelical Christianity to which Schreiner belonged as a child. The gendering of ethics associated with nurturing over
and against masculine violence in colonial spaces is consistent with the gendering of Jesus as resembling Peter’s mother. Schreiner, a woman of the empire with a formidable conscience, attempts to reach out to Rhodes, a man she once admired and considered a friend. Her advice and criticisms fail to be heeded since Rhodes is blinded by his power and ambition, and this causes a permanent rupture in the relationship. The inability to elicit a sympathetic response in Rhodes proved problematic for Schreiner who could not reconcile his behaviour with his potential to effect positive change. Chetty and Curr write:

In this reference to Rhodes’s ethical suicide and spiritual damnation she speaks as a woman of conscience and a conscientised woman unable to witness the degradation of another’s soul without speaking against such a perilous course. The phrase ‘I felt so terribly about him’ shows not so much judgement or any sense of a superior moral stance as it does a genuine anxiety, a loving concern or ‘social mothering’ about his choice of the wrong path and the waste of his rich talents (a biblical injunction). It seemed her insight into his degeneration was almost prophetic. Just two years later Schreiner hardly recognised Rhodes as he drove by, lifting his hat to her: he had ‘such a miserable BLOATED HEAVY face’ (To Frances Schreiner, 1898). (8-9)

Schreiner’s observation of Rhodes’s physical manifestations of degeneration unequivocally reflects and reinforces her thoughts on the hypocrisy of a Christian empire that admires corrupt capitalists despite the violent means employed to accumulate their vast fortunes. Her assessment endorses the maxim that “all that glitters is not gold,” drawing attention to the corruption that lies beneath the surface of success and power. The Jesus-figure’s “sermon” and questioning of Peter draws on the authority of scripture to subvert common ideologies that celebrate financial success, forcing Peter, and the reader, to evaluate what it means to be authentically human in a world that values empty prestige.

As Peter listens to the stranger’s reconfigured and re-contextualized Sermon on the Mount, he is moved by the words imparted. All his notions of success are disrupted by the
Beatitude-like lessons that are clearly articulated to indicate the corruption evident in the company he works for and the men who benefit the most from the bloodshed inflicted on the people they violently displace. The stranger asks: “Peter Simon Halket, who of those great souls you have seen on earth is to you the greatest? . . . which soul is the fairest” . . . Peter Halket, . . . who is the greatest, - he who serves, or he who is served?” (40). These references are derived from Matthew 23:11-12: “The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted,” as Jesus cautions his disciples against succumbing to arrogance associated with perceived power. The Beatitude, “blessed are the meek” (Matthew 5:5) is at the heart of Jesus’ admonition to his newly appointed apostles who form the basis of the early church, and Schreiner simultaneously deploys it to interrogate worldly power associated with capitalists, such as Rhodes. The beatitude also applies to the empire that expropriates land and displaces its people. Schreiner essentially places the church, capitalists, and empire in the same unfavorable category since the power they wield does not exemplify “meekness.”

Peter’s response to the stranger’s criticism of ideologies that justify imperial incursion in foreign spaces mimics the rhetoric of New Imperialist agendas. In response to the queries: “Who gave you your land? . . . Who gave the land to England?”, Peter replies: “Why the Devil! They said it was theirs, and of course it was” (41-2). The stranger moves beyond England’s claim to land rights to question who owns the people of the land, thereby touching on the topical issue of slavery. Schreiner ironically invokes the spectre of slavery, which was abolished within the British Empire in 1833, to illustrate the disingenuous actions of the empire that averts its gaze from the near slave-like conditions of the colonized. The conversation between the Jesus-figure
and Peter becomes more politically charged as Peter’s assessment illuminates the racist and white supremacist notions held by the empire, which were vehemently rejected by Schreiner:

“Yes, of course, she gave us the people [England]; what use would the land have been to us otherwise?”

And who gave her the people, the living flesh and blood, that she may give them away, into the hands of others?” asked the stranger, raising himself.

Peter looked at him half afeared.

“Well, what could she do with a lot of miserable niggers if she didn’t give them to us? A lot of good-for-nothing rebels they are too” (42).

Peter’s growing discomfit is compounded by the question: “What is a rebel?”, which leads to a discussion on the fine line between nationalist freedom-fighters who defend their lands and rebels who subvert the authority of king and country. Ultimately, Peter’s ideas of rebels are challenged when the stranger cites the case of the Armenians, now allied with Britain, against their Turkish conquerors, who view them as rebels. The moral implications of conquest and subjugation are initially lost on Peter since he views Britain as a superior empire, and therefore justifies the actions taken against those who defend their lands. Peter’s thinking about wealth and power is challenged by the stranger’s questions in much the way readers are forced to contemplate the myriad of problematic and conflicting ideas of civility practiced within the empire, which Schreiner brings to the foreground in a novella intended to draw attention to the need for social reform.

The conversation may be viewed as a battle for Peter’s soul as the stranger sets a trap that forces Peter to reevaluate his stance on the Chartered Company and New Imperialism’s imposition on foreign lands. Peter initially thinks in terms of political and economic gain rather than human rights, freedoms, and the right to autonomy; however, the stranger’s unrelenting
assault on common epistemologies and practices begins to yield cracks in Peter’s resolve as his conscience is gradually aroused. The stranger’s questions compel him to recall his mother’s teaching on not harming weaker individuals, derived from the Golden Rule. Although mindful of the lessons he cannot forget, Peter comes to realize how his conscience has been eclipsed by greed, violence, and a quest for power. Through Peter, Schreiner discloses how erroneous racial biases and pride in British “progress” have overshadowed the potential for social change; however, she also articulates the potential for positive reform, which may require a modicum of self-sacrifice for the common good, albeit not through blood atonement. The reinterpretation and deployment of scripture to suit the current circumstances draws on popular wisdom embedded in British culture and derived of scripture, ultimately serving to indict Christian hypocrisy prevalent in those who supported British hegemony in the far reaches of the empire. The overt Christian content may have resonated with practicing Christians; however, more importantly it critiqued legalistic orthodoxy over orthopraxis, appealing to those outside and on the margins of religious affiliation who continued to find value in secularized scripture.

5.4 Schreiner’s Free-thinking: Criticisms of the Church

Schreiner’s connection with evangelical Christianity may have introduced her to ethical thinking; however, her rejection of Christianity in favor of free-thinking illustrates her criticisms of Christianity as failing to act according to its own precepts. Liz Stanley argues that the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament provided Schreiner with an exemplar for Christian practice; however, “her very 'Old Testament' parents were horrified at any such suggestion. As her ideas developed, Schreiner increasingly saw ethical precepts as crucial to guide behaviour in the face
of the unpredictability of life” (21). Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount quintessentially instilled ideals of ethics and morality adopted by free-thinkers who, like Schreiner, rejected orthodoxy but not the spirit of scripture, as they drew on familiar verses as shared cultural knowledge, which shaped their political and social reformist views. Rejecting ideas of blood atonement and sin, Schreiner’s free-thinking deviated from her family’s views of the human frailty and sinfulness addressed in scripture, to find solace instead in the ethical teachings that encouraged human virtues such as empathy and compassion. The Jesus-figure articulates Schreiner’s dissatisfaction with those who claim to be Christian yet demonstrate no understanding of what Christianity entails. For Schreiner, Christians should be guided by stringent humanist principles found in the pages of scripture and not by adherence to confessions of faith devoid of practical application.

Schreiner narrativizes the hypocrisy of those who claim to be Christian through Peter’s unsettling responses to the interrogation, exposing the flaws that lie in vicarious religious affiliation. In response to Peter’s favoring of the Christian Armenians over the Islamic Turks, the Jesus-figure poses a blunt question that exposes Christian hypocrisy as he enquires of Peter, “Are you Christians?” (46). Peter’s rambling response echoes the voices of “Christians” who associate themselves with the institution as a cultural marker but do not fully live the precepts nor fully understand the implications of such a confession of faith. As Peter responds, “Why of course we are . . . We’re all Christians, we English!”?, the stranger poses a more complicated question for the naïve Peter, as he asks Peter to define what it means to be a Christian (46). As expected, Peter’s response is superficial at best, but more to the point it does not suggest orthopraxis or orthodoxy as a condition for belonging to the church, insinuating instead a conflation of faith and nationality. Despite Peter’s growing discomfort, he continues to repeat catechetical formulations
of what a “Christian man” believes, further illustrating his inadequate understanding of Christianity as a commitment to ethical and moral philosophies grounded in a confession of faith. Through the unrelenting questioning of the Jesus-figure a glimmer of understanding emerges as Peter recognizes the similarities between the man and his mother who lives the gospel as evident in the following response:

“A Christian is a man who believes in heaven and hell, and God and the Bible and in Jesus Christ that he’ll save him from going to Hell; and if he believes he’ll be saved, he will be saved.”

“But here in this world, what is a Christian?”

“Why, . . . I’m a Christian – we’re all Christians.”

The stranger looked into the fire; and Peter thought he would change the subject. “It’s curious how like my mother you are; I mean your ways. She was always saying to me: ‘Don’t be too anxious to make money, Peter. Too much wealth is as bad as too much poverty.’ You’re very like her.” (46-47)

This exchange illustrates a litany of what one should believe without specifying how one should practice the beliefs; however, it may also be noted that Peter defines what a “Christian man” believes, excluding women from his definition. Even when pressed by the stranger to explain what these beliefs mean in the current historical context Peter cannot sufficiently find the words to articulate a discipleship that lies at the heart of a Christianity based on gospel values. It is significant that his thoughts return to his mother who resembles the stranger, since as a woman who embodies cultural ideals of the Christian in her refusal of worldly gain in exchange for humility, she exemplifies the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” and “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:3 & 5). The “Christian woman,” excluded from Peter’s definition, does not seek worldly power yet it is she who would gain the kingdom of heaven and inherit the earth.
Schreiner’s reliance on the Sermon on the Mount as a guide to ethical living, with its unmistakable religious overtones, has the potential to arouse critical thought around Christian practice among the religious minded reader, but it also reaches readers along a spectrum of wide beliefs. Kissack and Titlestad view Schreiner’s seeming anxiety around her loss of faith as a tension that arises in the novella, arguing that “[t]his apparently contradictory convergence of ideas and proposals offers a contribution to a distinctive understanding of the nature of modern secular society” (37). While agreeing that her secularized ideas, combined with traditional religious motifs, are evident and effective in articulating an age characterized by growing secularism, Kissack’s and Titlestad’s premises tend to impose the idea that her ethical and moral stance could only be explored through “a Christian medium of expression” (37). They write:

Schreiner found that her concern about the alleviation of suffering in the world, and for an understanding of commendable conduct in one’s immediate circumstances, could not be explored outside of a Christian medium of expression. When faced with the imperatives of ethical action, pursued at either a personal or a collective level, Schreiner presents a synthesis of both secular and religious perspectives. Her synthesis appears as an antinomous amalgam of views that postulates a godless world, as well as a religious imagery and precedent that inspire people to seek a way to combat some of the more alarming and pernicious aspects of a world understood in evolutionary terms. (37)

Schreiner’s use of religious concepts to argue for ethical treatment of the suffering members of society is strategically deployed to indict Christian hypocrisy; therefore, her exploration of needless suffering, explored through a “Christian medium of expression,” makes sense on a practical level, in that it unambiguously addresses those who maintain an affiliation with the church. Her conflation of religious concepts and the interconnections of Darwinian theory, as asserted by Kissack and Titlestad, effectively reaches a reading public that has been grappling with anxieties in an increasingly “godless world;” however, building on these premises, I would draw attention to her political ideologies, from which her sense of ethics is also derived. As a
free-thinker and a socialist, Schreiner’s use of scripture finds a place within her political milieu, which although secular, found value in the social gospel in completely non-religious terms. Instead of arguing that Schreiner could only address ethical concerns for the marginalized through secularized Christian concepts, I suggest that her interpretation of socialism is a relevant perspective from which to examine her writing.

As a socialist who rejected the determinism of Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinian theory, Schreiner found in socialism a platform for expressing her concerns for the marginalized, illustrating how her ethics were not entirely derived from early religious influences, but also from her vast reading and study of social theory. In a letter to Havelock Ellis dated May 2, 1884, she persuasively sets out her ideas on socialism, which do not endorse overthrowing the wealthy class in favor of a new class that will repeat the injustices and corruption of the past. She writes:

My feeling about Socialism is exactly yours. I sympathise with it, but when I see the works and aims of the men who are working for it in London my heart sinks. What will it benefit us to seize away the money from the rich? At the same moment that the greedy hands are seizing it there will pass over with it the disease of which the rich are dying, the selfishness, the hardness of heart, the greed for the material good. What we want is more love, and more sympathy. Does it ever strike you, it often does me, how within the sixteen miles that make London lie all the materials for heaven on earth, if only something could come suddenly and touch our hearts one night; there would be nobody sad and nobody lonely: every aching head with a hand on it, every miserable old maid let out of her drawing room and her old life-blood flowing; every wailing little child hushed in somebody’s arms and making them warm: nobody hungry and nobody untaught, the prisons emptied and the back slums cleaned, everybody looking with loving eyes at the world about them. That would be heaven, and it only wants a little change of heart. I haven’t faith in anything that promises to raise us by purely material means. (17-18)

Her passionate ideas of non-revolutionary socialism, based on sympathy and empathy, find complete concordance with biblical imperatives that demand a radical egalitarianism grounded in humanism. For Schreiner, the Sermon on the Mount and other popular biblical motifs regarding
social justice are not in tension with secular approaches to the problem, but rather, the Bible, a radically political text in its own right, is in complete accord with her notion of socialism. The Jesus-figure’s political claim, “Under this banner is freedom and justice which knows no race or color,” gestures to “Blessed are the peacemakers,” (Matthew 5:9); however, it also is reminiscent of the fabled account of the Emperor Constantine’s dream-vision of winning a decisive battle under the banner of the Chi Rho, which led to uniting religious factions into a unified Christianity. Constantine’s religiopolitical strategy changed the model of early Christianity, characterized by egalitarianism and stringent ethical treatment of the disenfranchised, into an institution endorsed by the powerful Roman empire, a situation that continued to draw criticism in Schreiner’s context.93 This pseudo-historical image connects church and empire in a way that posits such an alliance could mitigate suffering in the world if power was implemented in the interest of the vulnerable members of society rather than for the wealthy, politically powerful classes.94 While her childhood exposure to religion might have sown the seeds of thinking ethically, those ideas grew to fruition and adapted through her own well-defined conscience but also through her adoption of socialism. The problem with attempting to categorize fin de siècle authors into either secular or religious camps inevitably encounters late Victorian anxieties

93 Although now dismissed as propaganda written by the historian Eusebius during the 4th Century C.E, the Emperor Constantine, insisting on unity within the church and empire, claimed that his armies would prevail under the banner bearing the Chi Rho, the first two letters in the Greek word for “Christ.” After the victory, he legalized Christianity, making it the official religion of the Roman Empire, although he did not receive Baptism until his death.
94 Schreiner might have intentionally invoked this image since she had read Christological works, such as those of Strauss who drew on the work of Eusebius; regardless, the imagery invoked illustrates how empire and church should function in mitigating the suffering of the poor and disenfranchised.
derived from leaving the church; however, the “tensions” evident in the writing frequently amalgamate socialist views of reform quite consistent with biblical narrative. Contrary to Kissack and Titlestad, I contend that the ideas expressed in the novella cogently conflate common biblical tropes that are culturally embedded in British imperial culture, to express emerging social ideologies that posit the same demand for humanitarian actions toward the disenfranchised. The use of scripture is not a residual life-raft to which she clings to advance her plea for humanism but rather a deliberate tactic that draws on shared cultural knowledge that reaches readers across a wide spectrum of beliefs, from fundamental Christianity to atheism.

5.5 Darwinism and Social Darwinism

Schreiner, like many Victorian intellectuals, found in both scripture and Darwinian science a basis to argue for equality among the races since both the Bible and Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution expounded on common ancestry. Her knowledge of Darwin’s theories of evolution through natural selection and Spencer’s social Darwinism figure prominently in the novella; however, she critiques notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority endorsed through social Darwinism, rejecting Spencer’s hierarchical racial and social progress theories. Drawing on Thomas Huxley’s hope for an evolution of ethics in humans that will override animal instincts to eliminate the “weaker” or “less favourable” races in order to “advance” the species, Schreiner turns to evolutionary theory to affirm equality among sexes, classes, and races (Huxley 167). According to Berkman, Schreiner challenged assumptions of sexual and racial superiority based on scientific grounds since she claimed that both erroneous racial science and social Darwinism lacked definitive scientific proof. Berkman writes:
Schreiner's critique of Social Darwinism was unqualifiedly corrosive when she treated common assumptions of racial and sexual inferiority, questioning both their scientific and their moral validity. Scientifically, she claimed, no proof existed for the biological inferiority of women and darker peoples or of Jews, Boers, and other of the allegedly less than "fittest." The privileged position certain groups of people commanded during any given period of human evolution was the consequence of shifting environmental influences and not, as social Darwinists contended, a sign of innate superiority. (82)

Berkman asserts that Schreiner’s views tended to endorse Lamarckian theory that posited environmental factors and not racial markers as determinants in how a culture may progress or regress (83). This is apparent in Schreiner’s treatment of the moral regression evident in the soldiers who do not regress as a result of being in contact with “primitive” races in foreign lands, as believed by some Victorian anthropologists, but rather, distanced from home and exposed to violence for profit in the rugged Southern African landscape, become moral degenerates as a result of choices to engage in the violence of capitalist enterprises. Building on Berkman’s assertions, an examination of how biblical tropes and evolutionary theory are conflated needs to be investigated since the blending of two seemingly disparate subjects gestures to a larger development in late-Victorian thinking.

Darwinian evolutionary theory did not posit any proof of ethical and moral evolution, and for many intellectuals of the era the “struggle for existence” and “survival of the fittest” appeared to be antithetical to such a development. *Fin de siècle* authors, such as those examined in previous chapters, like Schreiner, conflated scientific and religious ideas as a means of arguing for an evolution of ethics; however, unlike the aforementioned authors, Schreiner goes further by having the Jesus-figure provide a long, rambling discourse on evolution to endorse an evolutionary aspect to the development of human virtues. This functions in complex ways because the Jesus-figure’s sermon alludes to the fact that religion and evolutionary science need
not be antithetical to each other, but it also gestures to aspects of anthropological discourses, which upheld many of Spencer’s theories on cultural progress.

The Jesus-figure’s assertion that his followers derive from a myriad of cultures and religions sets the stage for Schreiner’s use of evolutionary theory to expound on notions of an evolution of ethics. For Schreiner, hope in human virtues, such as empathy and compassion, and the development of ethics and morality, are contingent on the progression of evolutionary processes that make us “more human.” The Jesus-figure conflates religious concepts of creation with evolutionary theory by presenting an idea that since the beginning of humankind, as physical changes occurred through evolution and adaptation, human impulses such as humane treatment of others also evolved over time. He tells Peter an evolutionary tale of how an evolution of ethics occurred in humankind. According to the Jesus-figure, a change in consciousness of one individual, a “primitive” woman endowed with ethics, compassion, and empathy for her fellow human, initiated a shift in thinking that radically changed humankind. The woman exemplifies Schreiner’s views on women, which emerge in the novella, since like Peter’s mother, the “primitive woman” is endowed with a gentleness and compassion that counters the brutality of masculine violence.

In contrast to imperial romances, such as Haggard’s King Solomon’s Mines and She: A History of Adventure, which celebrate masculine adventure steeped in brutality, Schreiner’s views of ideal masculinity are not predicated on physical strength but rather extoll an ideal humanism found in women and men, like the stranger, who have embraced what Schreiner viewed as “feminine” virtues. The stranger responds to Peter’s inquiry as to how long his company existed by embarking on an evolutionary fable. He invokes the cannibalism trope to
demonstrate how, beginning with one ethical and compassionate woman, the course of human history was altered. He states:

Even here on this earth it began, when these hills were young and these lichens had hardly shown their stains upon the rocks, and man still raised himself upwards with difficulty because the sinews in his thighs were weak. In those days, which men reckon not of now, man, when he hungered, fed on the flesh of his fellow-man and found it sweet. Yet even in those days it came to pass that there was one whose head was higher than her fellows and her thought keener, and, as she picked the flesh from the human skull, she pondered. (70)

The woman’s compassion leads her to free the victim tied to a tree, in much the way Peter later will repeat the action in freeing a Mashona prisoner. The cannibalism practiced by the woman’s people becomes repugnant to her as her evolving ethics and humanitarian ideas cannot regress to the state of her brothers. Like Peter, her actions cannot be condoned by those who view her actions as self-serving as they claim, “She, only she has done this, who has always said, ‘I like not the taste of man-flesh, men are too like me, I cannot eat them’” (71). As a consequence of her humane behavior, she is killed. Her death is not a conventional death in terms of martyrdom or blood atonement but rather an outcome of unmitigated violence by men who had not yet experienced an ethical or moral awakening. Her death, however, is not in vain since the men eventually come to understand her moral dilemma, in much the way Peter is changed by the stranger’s words. The cannibalism trope provides an excoriating critique of New Imperialism and the violence of the Chartered Company, as Schreiner subtly compares the violence occurring to cannibalism, which was frequently evoked to denigrate the racial Other as the “savages.” By invoking the idea of the evolutionary role in humanist impulses, Schreiner offers hope for forward progression in humans while simultaneously illuminating the potential for “white savagery” as a regressive state that occurs in men separated from home and the ethical influence
of women. Like Grant Allen’s *The British Barbarians*, Schreiner’s novella denounces British notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority, insisting on Darwinian theories of common ancestry. In this way, Schreiner frames her arguments to encompass late-Victorian thoughts on the commonalities found in scripture and evolutionary sciences, two subjects which were at the forefront of ethical discourse regarding the treatment of the colonized but also women and the poor. The stranger’s story, which draws on the vast history of the earth that existed before animal life, a time “men reck not of now,” sets the tone for Peter’s change of heart as he is made aware of the interconnection between all life on earth across the ages (72). The story has a profound effect on Peter who comes to realize his place along the continuum of evolution. This dawning comprehension of humanity’s place in the cosmos is presented as a crucial precursor to change; however, it cannot be entirely separated from accepting the secularized, timeless wisdom of the scriptures as a source for thinking ethically.

The stranger’s sermon is rife with Hebrew Scriptural references, which resonate with apocalyptic themes of hope for a new world of justice: “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up its sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (73). This quotation from Isaiah 2:4 expresses Schreiner’s hope for Southern Africa as she communicates the possibilities of building a strong nation based on peace and egalitarianism. Compare the scriptural reference to the following words of the Jesus-figure:

I tell you Peter Simon Halket, that here on the spot where now we stand shall be raised a temple. Man shall not gather in it to worship that which divides; but they shall stand in it shoulder to shoulder, white men with black, and the stranger with the inhabitant of the land; and the place shall be holy; for men shall say, ‘Are we not brethren and sons of the one father’” (74).
For Schreiner, common ancestry demands ethical treatment of the Other. Her criticisms in this quotation are clearly directed at Rhodes’s company as the stranger overtly references the men who kill for gold. The hope for an ethical conversion, even in Mashonaland, is placed in Peter’s willingness to recognize the evils in which he engaged and then to accept the commission offered by the stranger to spread the message to his own people. Peter’s capitulation signals a turning point in the novella as he admits: “I would like to be one of your men, . . . I am tired of belonging to the Chartered Company” (75). This provides a segue for the stranger to acknowledge the challenges of speaking to and against power as he enquires into Peter’s strength to “bear the weight” of such an endeavor (75). Schreiner reconfigures Jesus’ commission to his apostles to spread the “good news” throughout the world, a biblical motif common to all Christian denominations, in ways that bring the gospels into the present historical context, thus encouraging all those familiar with the references to actively participate in bringing justice.

The message Peter is to deliver to England is not an easy message to convey since it subverts both British Imperialist and Christian triumphalism. The stranger’s words, like those of the historical Jesus, are acerbic and unequivocally intended to disrupt Western notions of “progress” understood as synonymous with capitalist gain and imperial expansion. Schreiner’s social consciousness is given full expression as she asserts that powerful institutions have a duty to ameliorate the lives of their own people in the metropole but also in the far-reaches of the empire. Through the stranger, Schreiner chastises those who have misused power for gain; however, she also criticizes those who fail to recognize their lack of empathy for the Other. This is evident in the following quotation:
Simon Peter Halket, take a message to England... go to that great people and cry aloud to it: ‘Where is the sword was given into your hand, that with it you may enforce justice, and deal you mercy? How came you to give it up into the hands of men whose search is gold, whose thirst is wealth, to whom men’s souls and bodies are counters in a game? How came you to give up the folk that were given into your hands, into the hands of a speculator and the gamester, as though they were dumb beasts who might be bought and sold? Take back your sword, Great People, - but wipe it first, lest some of the gold and blood stick to your hand’ – use the sword to set free the oppressed of other climes. (76-77)

In this section of the sermon, the “Great People” are directly implicated in imperial violence since they failed to intervene on behalf of the disenfranchised. While all British subjects are addressed, the stranger’s sermon becomes more targeted as he commences to specifically appeal to the comfortable, middle-class women of England who, as nurturers, have the power to effect change by adding their voice to the protests of those who, like Schreiner, recognize a moral duty to act without reservation on behalf of the suffering. Darwinian reverberations on the role of nurturing future generations and imperialist notions that women were the bearers of morality merge with New Woman ideology as Schreiner posits women of Britain as quintessentially at the forefront of raising an empire committed to empathy and compassion for the Other. Through her appeal, Schreiner empowers the “women of a dominant people” to draw on their nurturing and compassionate natures to circumvent masculine violence in the empire (78). The Jesus-figure echoes these appeals through his “sermon”:

For the womanhood of a dominant people has not accomplished all its labor when it has borne its children and fed them at its breast: there cries to it also from overseas and across continents the voice of the child-peoples – ‘Motherheart, stand for us!’ It would be better for you that your wombs should be barren and your race should die out, than that you listen, and give no answer (78-9).

The stranger’s speech explicitly references Jesus’ words to the women of Jerusalem as he proceeds toward the cross on Golgotha: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep...
for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us’ (Luke 23:28-31). Since Jesus’ apocalyptic warning to the women of Jerusalem is a well-known quotation read at all Good Friday services, Schreiner’s use of this motif as both a warning and an inducement for women to act on behalf of the disenfranchised is particularly effective in reaching a wide range of women across the class divide. The parallels drawn between the current historical context and that of the beginning of the Christian era are unmistakeable, as Christians and Jews were subjugated by the Roman Empire in ways which resemble the oppression of the colonized by empire and New Imperialist capitalist such as Rhodes. Peter’s commission, however, is not only to implore imperial women to respond to the suffering of the colonized, but also to draw attention to domestic problems in respect to the working poor in the metropole.

5.6 The Reluctant Prophet

Similar to the majority of biblical prophets, Peter is a “reluctant prophet” who doubts his ability to efficaciously fulfill the terms of his commission. Peter believes that his socioeconomic status renders him an ineffective bearer of this important message. As noted by Stanley, Peter responds with “three disavowals” that lead to a recognition of his moral duty (73). Rather than characterizing Peter’s expression of doubt as “disavowals,” which suggests a rejection of the commission on his part, it may be more enlightening to attend to how Peter’s doubts express the limitations of someone of a lower class being placed in a prophetic role. The three “disavowals” Stanley cites refer to Peter’s doubts in addressing the working classes in England, the white men
and women of Southern Africa, and Rhodes, who would likely reject his message due to Peter’s humble status as a working-class Englishman (79-84). These “disavowals” or “doubts” should be examined alongside Peter’s three recognitions of Jesus earlier in the novel because unlike the Apostle Peter who lacks faith in Jesus, Peter’s reluctance illustrates a lack of faith in humans to accept the truth from a poor, uneducated young man. The exchange between Peter and the Jesus-figure draws on the biblical account of the inauguration of Jesus’ mission as he preaches the good news of liberation for the poor, sick, blind, and prisoners to the gathered crowd. The on-lookers berate Jesus, calling into question not only his class status but also his legitimacy: “He’s just the carpenter’s son, and we know Mary, his mother, and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas?” (Matthew13:55) and again in Mark’s version: “Isn’t he the carpenter? Isn’t he Mary’s son and the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? (Mark 6:3). 95 The significance of the connections between Jesus’ and Peter’s class status overtly critiques “polite” Christian society that fails to recognize the hypocrisy of dismissing the voices of the marginalized, since the founder of their religion was also dismissed by the powerful members of society in his own era. The Jesus-figure of the first half of the novella is stripped of Christological attributes to connect him with Peter, a working-class man with no power; however, more importantly, the invocation of the historical Jesus is, intended to sound a

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95 In referring to Jesus as “Mary’s son,” his legitimacy is questioned since during this period in Jewish history, sons were always addressed by their patriarchal affiliation. Calling him, “Mary’s son” not only casts doubt on his parentage but also besmirched the reputation of Mary, who was viewed as an adulteress by antagonists of the Followers of the Way. The biblical passage alludes to factions who denied Jesus’ messianic status based not only on his class (the Messiah was to be born of the Davidic bloodline, and therefore, expected from the upper classes of Jewish society) but also on his questionable antecedents.
discordant note as it challenges Christians to recognize the practical message of the social
gospel, which scholars frequently attribute to Jesus.

Stanley views the novel as divided into “dream narrative” followed by part two of the
novella which resembles “realist” narrative (73). Although she asserts that Peter recognizes Jesus
once he accepts his commission, as evident in his addressing the stranger as “Master,” she does
not expound on how or why Schreiner appears to treat Peter’s experience with a degree of
ambivalence. Since Schreiner was a freethinker who rejected orthodox religion, her vast
knowledge of scripture and theology provided a foundation from which she could critique
Christianity’s failure to engage in ethical practice. She does so by deliberately secularizing
scripture, avoiding placing emphasis on any supernatural allusions that would detract from
reading and implementing biblical motifs on ethics as shared cultural knowledge. The vague
allusions to supernatural elements unequivocally align the stranger with Jesus; however,
Schreiner focuses more on the meaning of his mission that has been lost over time than on
elements that form doctrinal confession. Through such an approach, it is irrelevant whether or
not Peter’s conversion experience is a dream, a theophany, or the fevered imagination of a
disturbed mind; rather, the “Christian” message is shown to have purchase among all readers,
including those who have rejected the literal interpretation of scripture.

In the second half of the novella, Peter’s return to his troop signals a change as the young
man’s resolve is made evident by his actions, which demonstrate empathy and compassion for
the prisoner he encounters. His willingness to speak his “truth,” as anticipated by the reader, is
met with anger from the Captain and ridicule from the men of his troop; however, the brutality of
the Company’s actions is not lost on all the men. Three Colonial Englishmen express some
disapproval of the Jameson raid and the escalating violence perpetrated on white or black individuals who opposed Rhodes’s agenda to unite Boer territory under the British Empire. Their criticisms illustrate an awareness and a measure of passive resistance toward evils occurring in Southern Africa as Rhodes amassed a fortune in gold obtained through unscrupulous attempts to cause an insurrection. This discontent is articulated by a trooper who claims:

I only know this. . . I’d teach these fellows a lesson if any one belonging to me had been among the people they left to be murdered here while they went gallivanting to the Transvaal. If my mother or sister had been killed there, I’d have taken a pistol and blown the brains out of the great Panjandrum, and the little ones after him. Fine administration of this country, this, to invite people to come in and live here, and then take every man out of the country on a gold-hunting marauding mission to the Transvaal, and leave us to face the bitter end! I look upon every man and woman who was killed there as murdered by the Chartered Company. (100-101)

Although both Rhodes and Jameson were held accountable for leading a raid under false pretensions that lead to massive casualties of innocent people, not all imperialists criticized the raid. While Peter’s epiphany is the result of his night on the kopje with the stranger, one Colonial man’s conscience is aroused by the violence for profit in which he participated, while the other two men resolve to remain silent in hopes of profiting sometime in the future. As the Colonial man tells the Englishman of Peter’s appeal for clemency to the Captain, on behalf of the prisoner, the ambivalence towards violence emerges, tinged with a modicum of regret. Beneath the amusement of Peter’s “Exeter Hall” speech, lies a recognition of Peter being a “real good fellow” who has done “many a good turn” (118). The Colonial man tells the Englishman that Peter’s punishment for intervening on behalf of the colonized is to execute the bound prisoner the next morning, further troubling the conscience of the Englishman, who doubts that Peter will follow the orders. As the Colonial man tells the Englishman of Peter’s kindness to the “coloured boys” with whom he shares his rations and the acts of mercy shown to the prisoner, the
Englishman is moved by the story as he observes the vultures flying towards the location the Company men had “cleared,” leaving a trail of carnage in their wake (119).

Peter’s compassion, selfless acts of generosity, and his bravery in speaking on behalf of the powerless, despite evoking ridicule, nonetheless initiate some critical thought regarding the practices of the Chartered Company. Although Peter is unable to fully discharge the commission of the Jesus-figure, in a small but significant way, his protests are heard and taken to heart. While some of the men, like Peter prior to his experience on the kopje, continue to parrot the rhetoric of capitalist gain, there is a flaw in their thinking as they are fully aware that like the colonized, they too are exploited by the wealthy and powerful men who own land rich in gold. Unlike Peter who recognizes that he will lose his soul if he continues to participate in the violence, many of the men chose to remain silent; however, it is the Englishman and to a lesser degree, the large Colonial man who come to understand Peter’s ethical dilemma. Ultimately, Peter follows his conscience and sets the prisoner free, resulting in his murder at the hands of the Captain. The Englishman and Colonial man have no doubt as to the Captain’s guilt, yet both feel disempowered to report the incident for fear of reprisals. Peter is unable to fulfill the Jesus-figure’s commission to proclaim to all of Britain the violence occurring in Mashonaland, yet his impassioned plea on behalf of the Mashona prisoner and his subsequent death has an impact on those who witness his actions. While Peter’s death appears to be in vain, the awakening sense of regret in the Colonial man and the despair expressed by the Englishman illustrates the hope and possibility in effecting change even on a small scale.

Peter’s death troubles the Colonial man and Englishman who provide him with a burial beneath the tree where the prisoner was held captive. Their blood mingling in the soil
unambiguously invokes common ancestry since Peter’s blood is indistinguishable from the blood of the black man he freed. Wrapping him in his great coat and placing the knitted hat his mother gave him on his head, the men depart, contemplating the meaning of Peter’s death. The Englishman’s subsequent statements appear to reiterate the conversation between Peter and the stranger regarding Britain as a Christian empire as he questions his belief in God. While Peter initially views Christian affiliation as integral to imperial culture, the Englishman is moved to question the meaning of such affiliation in light of the violence in Mashonaland. He states:

I do not believe in your God; but I believe in something greater than I could understand, which moved this earth, as your soul moves in your body. And I thought this worked such wise, that the law of cause and effect, which holds in the physical world, held also in the moral; so, that the thing we call justice, ruled. I do not believe it anymore. There is no God in Mashonaland. (132-133)

Two critical elements emerging from this quotation that deserve further investigation are the Englishman’s belief in an alternative force “which moved the earth,” and the final statement, “[T]here is no God in Mashonaland.” The Englishman’s belief in a higher power does not necessarily refer to a belief in a deity, but it does not preclude an alternative view of God, which has been eclipsed by church orthodoxy. The particularity of Mashonaland as a godless location is significant because it overtly critiques the evil actions of Rhodes and his kind while implicating the empire that failed to adequately govern the treatment of the land and its people. The Englishman may well reject all concepts of God; however, similar to freethinkers who found value in the social gospel as opposed to orthodoxy, the Englishman expresses the incongruence of a belief in God, as claimed by the empire, and the total inversion of biblical mandates regarding ethical treatment of the Other. Beliefs in “godliness” contingent on ethics and morality cannot exist in Mashonaland, where the murdered victims are consumed by vultures, lands and
food stores burned, and a young man who speaks his “truth” with conviction is murdered by an officer devoid of honour who hides his criminal act. For the Englishman, the God professed by the church does not exist to the extent that his belief in justice and morality are disrupted by all he has witnessed. His final statement reflects disillusionment with belief not only in God but in humanity, yet his cognizance of the senseless death of the Mashona, Matabele, and Peter do offer hope for change since such acknowledgement of human failings have the potential to bring about reform and transformation, as evident in Peter.

The end of the novel does not suggest a hope in resurrection since Peter’s body is left behind in the grave beneath the tree and his death did not offer atonement for the many; however, his death was not meaningless since it exposed the corruption of the Chartered Company and its officers and evoked compassion in the Englishman and the Colonial man. Peter’s death is marked as inevitable in much the same way the historical Jesus’ death was inescapable. Both men spoke in counter-cultural terms and challenged powerful institutions, which resulted in their deaths, yet their deaths initiated critical thought on human virtues required to bring about social reform rooted in justice. Contrary to Kissack and Titlestad, who claim Schreiner grappled with the tension between the sacred and profane in relation to concepts of personal sacrifice in the secular context rife with violence and brutality, it seems more expedient to focus on how she made the profane sacred in an attempt to critique the hypocrisy of the church and empire who claimed to follow Christian precepts. The deliberate ambivalence and the avoidance of supernatural elements elevates and “sanctifies” humans because it is Jesus’ humanity and not his divinity that initiates Peter’s conversion. This emphasis on Jesus’ humanity articulates an understanding of the sacred as an inherent quality resulting from the evolutionary
process, which in religious terms would be viewed as profane, yet Schreiner elevates human virtues of empathy, compassion, and justice as sacred attributes gained throughout human history (42). Kissack’s and Titlestad’s assessment may be expanded upon, but their contention that Schreiner, like many of her contemporaries, found scripture as shared cultural knowledge an expedient means of contemplating humanism during the late-nineteenth century is relevant since it draws attention to new ways of reading the novella. They assert:

She, like many of her modern descendants, continued to explore the problem of morality in terms that reflected its religious provenance, subscribing to an ethic of justice and compassion through a medium that retained a Christian image and parlance while simultaneously rejecting many of the faith's other central tenets. As becomes apparent in her allegory, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, this approach and perspective produces quite a precarious advocacy for a panoply of traditional virtues that originates in a Christian worldview. (43)

Kissack’s and Titlestad’s arguments succinctly illustrate how the value of scripture continued to resonate and inform ethical concerns even as the church lost its place of privilege among Victorians who embraced free-thinking. Their assessment of Schreiner’s use of scripture acknowledges how the “Christian worldview” engaged with secular of imperialism and capitalism in an era of change. In accordance with Kissack and Titlestad, I contend that Schreiner’s free-thinking liberally drew on her knowledge of theology and biblical scholarship, but I would also state that her political beliefs and her own strong sense of justice and egalitarianism emerge in her novella to draw attention to the ills of the era. While it is tempting to suggest that Christianity or any religion is key to the development of humanist impulses, Schreiner’s rejection of Christology posits a notion that human virtues, although in some cases nurtured and informed by religion, ultimately emerge from one’s humanity.

Schreiner’s free-thinking is quintessential to understanding her rejection of legalistic
Christianity. While she uses scripture as a means of arousing the conscience of her readers to act with compassion, she rejects traditional meanings in keeping with the free-thinking stance she claims to have adopted at the age of ten, following the death of her younger sister. In a July 10th, 1884 letter to her friend, Havelock Ellis, she mentions her rejection of orthodoxy in favour of free-thinking and the consequences that ensued as family members distanced themselves from her agnosticism. She writes: “It is the first tenderish letter I received from my brother Theo for so many years. He is twelve years older than I am, and when I was a child I used to worship him and love him so. When I was ten and began to be a freethinker, he drifted away from me. He hasn’t cared for me much since because Christianity makes his whole life” (28). Distanced from the Christianity of her early years, and ostracized by religious family members, Schreiner nonetheless finds the Bible’s insistence on ethics an effective way of disclosing the flaws in religious orthodoxy’s tendency towards legalism, which, for Schreiner, failed to live the spirit of the gospel. Her estrangement from a religious sibling, as noted in her letter, epitomizes Christian legalism and self-righteousness rejected by many fin de siècle authors, including those I have examined in previous chapters. Schreiner’s creative reinterpretation of scripture exemplifies the flaws in Christianity with its preoccupation on sin and stringent demands for Christians to adhere to a narrowly defined interpretation of scripture while simultaneously ignoring the ethical demands to act with compassion. Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland provides an excoriating critique of an inefficacious Christian belief that does not encourage orthopraxis, while her own estrangement from her family indicates the imperfections in an institution that failed to practice love and tolerance for the Other.
5.7 Conclusion

As many Victorians faced a crisis of faith, resulting in a rejection of organized religion for some, anxieties around biblical values continued to resonate in secular works. Overlooking the way scripture is deployed, or dismissing fin de siècle novels as secular, misses the opportunity to fully appreciate the cultural significance the Bible had in discussing ethics during an era of scientific skepticism, particularly as Darwinian theory placed humans in the animal kingdom and therefore provided no definitive promise for an evolution of ethics. Interpretations of key biblical narrative, which insisted on radical egalitarianism, had much in common with socialist views regarding the Other at home or in the distant corners of the empire. Political discourses that emerge from scripture, particularly apparent in the Sermon on the Mount, are unambiguously counter-cultural in their condemnation of the wealthy and powerful who ignore the needs of the vulnerable, providing Schreiner with an authoritative foundation on which to build her case.

Schreiner’s use of scripture as shared cultural knowledge reaches a wide audience as she indicts the leisured wealthy classes, the powerful captains of industry, and political leaders, exposing their hypocritical belief in a white Anglo-Saxon “progress” that ultimately led to violence and bloodshed. Her use of scripture, particularly the invocation of Jesus, offended some reviewers who condemned the novella on these grounds. According to Stanley, “Reviewers frequently responded to it as an evangelical Christian tract and thus either laudable or blasphemous” (73). British imperialism and Christian triumphalism are effectively indicted using the “Christian Book” as an authoritative text to subvert ideologies that celebrate Western notions of progress. She accomplishes this through the Jesus-figure who is a prototype of an ideal,
attainable humanism. Jesus’ divinity is not invoked to posit exemplary virtues, illustrating instead the emphasis on human potential to attain ideal relationships with all humanity, regardless of class, race, or gender. Stripped of its religious connotations, the secularized message of scripture does not lose its power to engage in critical discourses that demand justice for all members of society. Schreiner’s use of scripture to engage in social discourse is not unique; however, her re-arrangement and redactions of well-known scripture offer a fresh reading because her plea for social change is presented as achievable, even for those who have perpetrated horrors on the vulnerable classes. The novella offers hope for humanity in general, and Southern Africa in particular, as Schreiner’s passionate appeal to her readers is intended to induce them, like Peter Halket, to take action on behalf of the Other at home and in the distant corners of the empire.
6 Conclusion

The fin de siècle novel is complex in its engagement with both religious and secular themes, which is why secularization theories tend to limit the interpretive possibilities that emerge from the pages of these works. I have endeavoured to illustrate how multiple readings are possible since religious, quasi-religious, and secular readings are all valid interpretive positions; however, as I have argued, a fresh approach could be gained by investigating how biblical and religious tropes are employed as shared cultural knowledge. Rather than choosing between a secular or religious position, a third option that acknowledges the complexity of the era emerges when considering the cultural embeddedness of Christianity and the Bible. The manner in which biblical and scientific motifs, particularly with respect to monogenesis, appear needs to be considered since the inversions and reconfigurations tell a story of their own. For instance, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, inversions of table fellowship and concepts of sacrifice frequently challenge church doctrine on atonement theologies, critiquing not only the church as an institution but also interrogating Christian hypocrisy and complacency in regards to the care for the poor and the colonized. Criticisms of the church are also frequently levelled at the British Empire that identifies itself as a Christian Empire yet fails to act in accordance with church mandates to protect the vulnerable, be it the poor, women, or the colonized.

Through an investigation of popular novels, I illustrate the complex manner in which key biblical motifs, well-known to Victorians, are deployed as an argument for building an egalitarian world. The creation narratives, Mosaic law, the Sermon on the Mount, and apocalyptic writings are prevalent motifs that appear in the novels I examine; however, each author deploys them in unique ways to perform an exegetical exercise of their own. Readers
from a wide range of religious perspectives may have read these references as purely religious, or conversely, as secular. While organized religion and church orthodoxy lost some of its cultural centrality, it should be noted that new spiritualities emerged independent of the church. These communities contemplated religious ideologies that promoted common ancestry from both biblical and Darwinian perspectives and even attempted to explain religious concepts through the rationality of science. Reconfigured motifs that did not contradict scientific evolutionary theories appealed to the spiritualist communities that arose in response to ideas of scientific materialism or evolutionary science’s placement of humans in the animal kingdom, which cast doubts on the concept of humans being endowed with an immortal soul. Questions on ensoulment, or what occurs beyond the grave, permeate these novels, as notions of a possible evolution of ethics not addressed in Darwinian theory are contemplated in scientific and religious terms. This phenomenon is particularly evident in Haggard’s She, which gestures to a position that affirms magic and miracles as concepts not yet explained by science. Christian beliefs, I argue, cannot be investigated as the only form of religious thinking, since many of these spiritualist communities separated themselves from church orthodoxy, yet their beliefs were nonetheless a form of religious confession.

The fin de siècle, although a more secular age than the early and mid-Victorian era continued to contemplate religious ideologies, albeit in new ways that were informed by the rationality of scientific thought. While the historicity and literal interpretation of scripture had been challenged for centuries, by the nineteenth century it was no longer viewed as heretical. Non-literal biblical interpretations, particularly on creation, provided a discursive framework for thinking about topical social issues such as race and gender in ways that subverted social
Darwinian concepts of a racial hierarchy. It also opened innovative avenues for thinking about notions of sacrifice in terms of blood atonement that served no purpose in mitigating the suffering of the poor.

New biblical scholarship and Darwinian science were contributing factors to the Victorian crisis of faith; however, although I focus on these influences, they are not the only culprits. Concerns regarding social problems and the church’s inability to adequately address the welfare of the poor at home and the colonized abroad were contemplated by the broad reading public insofar as these anxieties were debated in novels such as *The Time Machine* and *The British Barbarians* that provided an alternate interpretation of scripture. Schreiner’s Peter Halket exemplifies working-class ideas of Christianity in that his notions are vicariously imparted by his mother who is now distanced from his current experiences in the rugged Southern African terrain. His eventual reawakening, initiated by the Jesus-figure and memories of his mother, leads him to recognize biblical mandates to treat the Other as another self in keeping with the Golden Rule taught to him as a child. Peter recognizes that orthopraxis is more critical than orthodoxy, which leads him to advocate for the Mashona man who had been sentenced to death. The working poor in the metropole read the Bible in the same manner Peter comes to “read” biblical motifs as relevant to his context, so recognizing the disconnection between the ostensible Word of God and the attitudes of both the church and the upper- and middle-class Christians who benefitted from the disenfranchisement of some for the benefit of others.

A salient point that needs to be emphasized is that the Bible has been written, redacted, and edited through the ages as new meanings are drawn from the pages to address critical concerns. Authors and readers of popular novels, like the biblical exegetes who shaped scripture
in their respective historical contexts, also find solace in and the courage to speak to imperial power through an engagement with scriptures that were viewed by the church as the “living word.” Secularization theories, while sometimes recognizing the prevalence of biblical motifs in *fin de siècle* novels, ultimately miss the opportunity to fully appreciate the array of spiritual and non-spiritual ways literature of this era functions. The cultural significance of the Bible is undermined by ignoring how motifs are deployed, thereby neglecting the intricate way science and religion are articulated to argue for a humanism grounded in reconfigured or non-literal biblical teachings. Common ancestry, a religious and scientific concept, has significant implications for readers who found it expedient to conflate these two seemingly disparate subjects because such a view posited the interrelatedness of all humankind. Recognizing ways in which science and religion overlap in the novel to argue for a hybridized humanism that values virtues such as empathy, sympathy, and compassion over capitalist greed and imperial power opens new interpretive possibilities that do not require choosing between a religious or purely secular approach to literature of this period.
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