

War of the Worlds A (Bk. I Chs.1-7): Presentation: Graham Law

1) IDEAS—“Social Darwinism”

Chapter 1:

And we men, the creatures who inhabit this earth, must be to them at least as alien and lowly as are the monkeys and lemurs to us. The intellectual side of man already admits that life is an incessant struggle for existence, and it would seem that this too is the belief of the minds upon Mars. . . .

And before we judge of them too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its inferior races. . . .

Charles Darwin (1809-82)

On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection (1859)

The Descent of Man (1871)

universal struggle for existence / survival of the fittest
from biology to sociology/philosophy

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903):

“Whether it be in the development of the Earth, in the development of Life upon its surface, in the development of Society, of Government, of Manufactures, of Commerce, of Language, Literature, Science, Art, this same evolution of the simple into the complex, through a process of continuous differentiation, holds throughout. From the earliest traceable cosmical changes down to the latest results of civilization, we shall find that the transformation of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous, is that in which Progress essentially consists.”

“Progress: Its Law and Cause”, *Westminster Review* 67:132 (April 1857) pp. 445-85

T.H. Huxley (1825-95)

“But the effort of ethical man to work toward a moral end by no means abolished, perhaps has hardly modified, the deep-seated organic impulses which impel the natural man to follow his nonmoral 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 civilized 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. . . .”

“The Struggle for Existence”, *Nineteenth Century* 23:132 (February 1888) pp. 161- 80.

* Social Darwinist theories dominant at time of fierce imperial competition at turn of the C20th

* Wells specializing in Biology and Zoology

* Wells taught by T.H. Huxley at the Normal School of Science, South Kensington (now Imperial College, University of London)

For further key Social Darwinist texts, go to:

<<http://www.f.waseda.jp/glaw/LOCAL/READINGS/ASD.pdf>>

2) SETTING—The “Home Counties”

Chapter 2:

I was at home at that hour and writing in my study; and although my French windows face towards Ottershaw and the blind was up (for I loved in those days to look up at the night sky), I saw nothing of it. Yet this strangest of all things that ever came to earth from outer space must have fallen while I was sitting there, visible to me had I only looked up as it passed. Some of those who saw its flight say it travelled with a hissing sound. I myself heard nothing of that. Many people in Berkshire, Surrey, and Middlesex must have seen the fall of it . . .

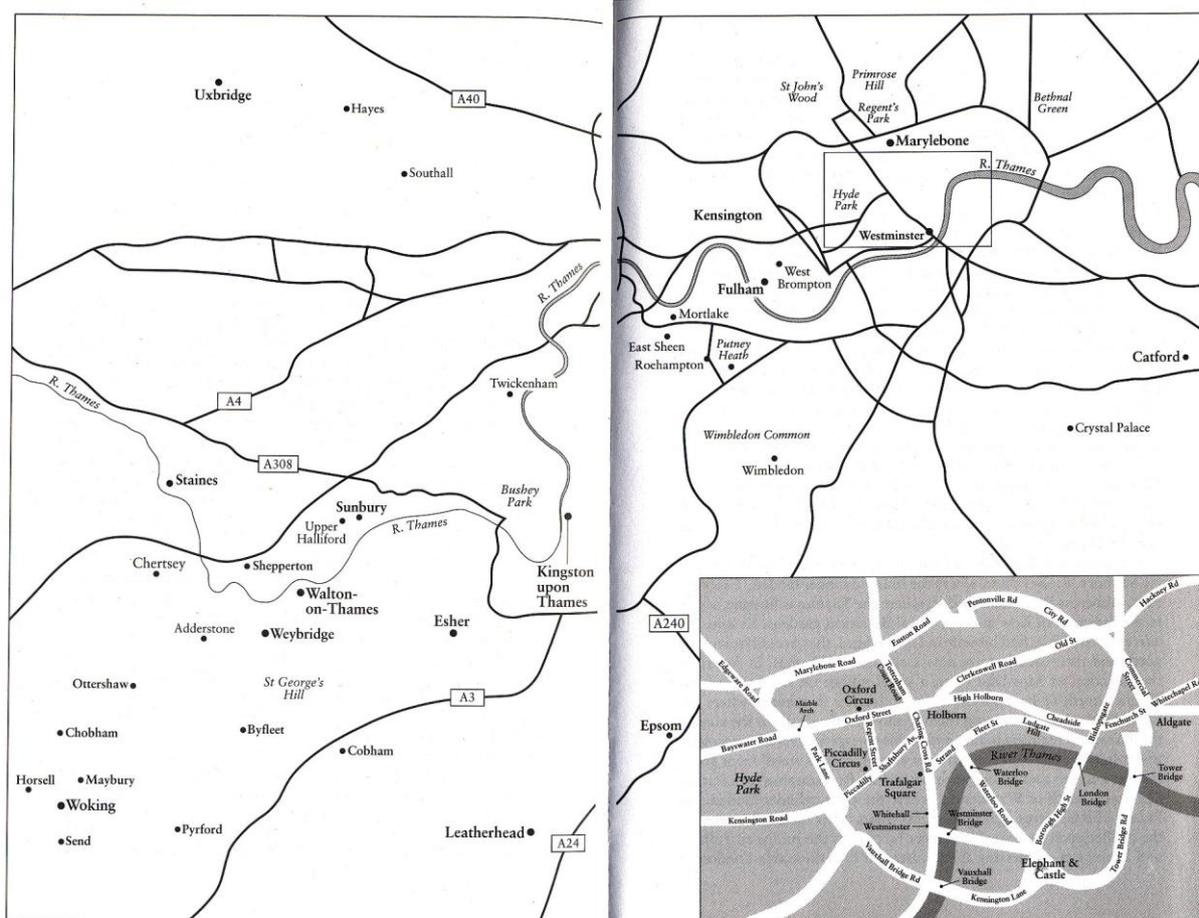
* the Thames Valley to the southwest of London

* the “Home Counties” = the counties around London (Middlesex, Surrey, Kent & Essex)

* LOCAL: Wells born and raised in Bromley, Kent; resident near Woking, Surrey when writing *War of the Worlds*:

“I wheeled about the district marking down suitable places and people for destruction by my Martians” (*Experiment in Autobiography*, 1934, II p. 543)

* GLOBAL: London in late nineteenth century still the most powerful metropolis in the world, the centre of the largest military and commercial empire (despite growing competition from Germany, USA, Japan, . . .)



Andy Sawyer “Note on Places in the Novel”, *War of the Worlds* (Penguin Classics edition, 2005) pp. 181-5

3) MEDIA—Different versions of Wells’ narrative

a) Illustrated magazine serial (*Pearson’s Magazine*, April-December, 1899)

b) Radio dramatisation (Mercury Theatre/CBS, 30 October 1938)

c) Technicolor Movie (Paramount, August 1953)