

Horror and reality: the artilleryman's contribution to the novel



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During Book Two, Chapter Seven of *The War of the Worlds*, we are reminded of the artilleryman's eccentric character. In short, his role is as an object of satire: he voices opinions for Wells to criticise. Nonetheless, the artilleryman does more than this; he gives a horrifying image of how humans will evolve, which can be applied to the real world that Wells was actually writing about.

The artilleryman shows one view Wells is against in his manner of thinking. He is very much obsessed with possession, as evidenced by his bold claim, 'this is my country.' This kind of parochial view is exactly what Wells is trying to eliminate through writing this book. Wells uses this phrase to bring colonial thoughts to the reader's mind, but ensures we still view these 'navy-crowded seas' in a negative light through the narrator's disinterested response. He seems unenthusiastic and gives the artilleryman short answers, even though the artilleryman speaks incessantly, sometimes for entire paragraphs. The artilleryman then continues by telling the narrator that 'there is only food for one', which emphasizes his selfishness.

However, as previously mentioned, the artilleryman is more than just an object of satire. He also holds some views which the narrator completely agrees with. One example of this is his contempt for the deeply class-ridden Victorian society. He says 'if you've got any drawing room manners, or dislike eating peas with a knife... you better chuck 'em away. They ain't no further use.' He has made it perfectly clear: classes and drawing-room manners won't be needed in a post-apocalyptic world. This view is one that Wells agrees with because it suggests that these classes, if not needed in *The War of the Worlds*, are not needed in the real world either. Wells goes so far to emphasize the narrator and the artilleryman sharing common ground

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that he even has the artilleryman use the narrator's ant analogy from Book One.

Much of this has probably been put in place to give the reader a good reason for why the narrator accepted the artilleryman's ideas in the first place, and then helped him in the task of building a redundant tunnel. The narrator accepts the artilleryman's insane philosophy at first because they do have so much in common. The artilleryman gives the horrifying image of humans as some sort of cattle for the Martians, living in ' roomy cages' with ' fattening food', except for a strong race of men and women who will live freely beyond Martian rule. The artilleryman includes himself and the narrator in this group, which clearly appeals to the narrator's vanity, and so he decides to help the artilleryman.

It is important to note here that we cannot assume Wells' beliefs are identical to the narrator's. We know in several instances they differ greatly, for example the narrator prays to God believing He will take action to change the world, but Wells' beliefs about God (from *God the Invisible King*) are that ' God does not guide our feet' and He will not do anything to change the natural course of nature. The narrator's selfishness in accepting the artilleryman's views is another example of when Wells' views differ from the narrator's, because, as an egalitarian, Wells would not have believed it right for some people to live as cattle whilst others were living in freedom.

Wells shows his disapproval of this by allowing the narrator to become disillusioned, through the artilleryman's laziness and inability to complete a task. He tells the narrator: ' Oh, one can't always work.' This is the exact

moment that the narrator says he 'saw the man plain', which proves it is the artilleryman's lazy character that gives him away. It gives him away as being insane, which is in no way unknown to the reader. Of course, if the man is thought of as insane, no reader will listen to his ideas because society thinks of insanity as something that makes you think in the wrong way, and is good cause for locking you up away from everyone else. Hence Wells has exposed the artilleryman's views as incorrect.

One final idea the artilleryman contributes to the novel is the criticism he puts forward of human nature. He says the human race deserves their fate under the Martians because people have led their lives in fear rather than freedom, which has made them easy prey; he also raises Darwinian ideas of survival of the fittest. Ultimately, the artilleryman indicates that the ones who survive will be the ones who are prepared to reject society's values. This scenario shows Wells' dislike of society's values in his own time, such as the inequality of the class system. Wells isn't only arguing that the class system is wrong, but that we won't be able to survive unless we eliminate it.